

## India-bound ship attacked by Iran Cabinet approves policy for PNG, CNG expansion

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, April 22:** One of three commercial vessels fired upon by Iranian forces in the Strait of Hormuz Wednesday was headed for Gujarat, according to initial shipping data.

Revolutionary Guards opened fire on the vessels as they transited the strategic waterway, with two ships later seized and at least one sustaining damage, though no casualties were reported.

Of the vessels targeted in the Strait of Hormuz incident Wednesday, container ship Epaminondas was signalling Mundra port in Gujarat as its destination, according to vessel-tracking data from maritime intelligence firm MarineTraffic.

The ship is sailing under the flag of Liberia and "is currently located in the Oman Gulf", it said in an 18.30 IST update. Also, ves-

### TRUMP EXTENDS CEASEFIRE

**Washington/Islamabad:** US President Donald Trump has indefinitely extended the ceasefire with Iran at the request of mediator Pakistan, saying the move was aimed at giving Tehran's fractured leadership time to come up with a unified proposal to end the seven-week war.

sel-tracking systems rely on AIS (Automatic Identification System) signals, which can be manipulated in some cases. Ships may transmit incomplete, delayed or intentionally altered AIS data to obscure their exact location or intended destination - often referred to as "spoofing" or signal masking.

Another container ship, MSC Francesca, was indicating Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, while a third vessel, Euphoria, was showing Jeddah as its destination, the data showed.



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 22:** The 39th State Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi approved eight proposals from as many departments Wednesday.

In a major move to expand clean energy infrastructure, the Cabinet approved the Odisha City Gas Distribution Policy aimed at accelerating the rollout of PNG and CNG networks across the state, Chief Secretary Anu Garg said while briefing the media. The policy seeks to streamline approvals, remove delays caused by multi-agency clearances and create a unified framework for faster implementation of gas projects. Housing and Urban Development Department will serve as nodal agency, supported by a state-level high-powered committee and district monitoring committees.

The Works Department received the Cabinet approval for construction of a bridge over the Kathajodi River on the upstream side of the existing Subash Chandra Bose Setu, creating a direct link between Cuttack and

Bhubaneswar. The project, awarded to SPS Construction India Pvt. Ltd., will cost 158.88 crore excluding GST and is targeted for completion within 36 months. The bridge is expected to reduce congestion on NH-16.

The Cabinet also approved a proposal of Shree Ambica Cotspin Pvt. Ltd. to establish a yarn manufacturing unit in Bolangir with an investment of 124 crore. The spinning unit is expected to generate direct employment for around 300 people and strengthen Odisha's cotton-to-textile value chain by enabling local value addition.

The Cabinet approved the Odisha State Data Policy 2.0 to strengthen data-driven governance and digital transformation. The policy provides a framework for secure and standardised data management, privacy-compliant data sharing and improved interoperability among government departments.

The Cabinet also approved amendments to the Indian Stamp Act, 1899 through an ordinance route to simplify apartment registrations. Under the new provision, Associations of Allottees will pay

a nominal 50,000 stamp duty for transfer of common areas and facilities, replacing the earlier 5 per cent burden. Buyers will now pay a uniform 5 per cent stamp duty at the time of apartment registration, replacing the earlier slab system of 3, 4 and 5 per cent.

Besides, the Cabinet approved amendments to Odisha Right to Public Services Rules, 2012 to introduce an auto-appeal mechanism. Under the system, appeals or revisions for online service applications delayed beyond the prescribed timeline will be automatically forwarded to appellate or revisional authorities.

The Health and Family Welfare Department's proposal for framing the Odisha State Allied and Healthcare Council Rules, 2026 was also approved under National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Act, 2021. The rules aim to regulate 56 allied and healthcare professions, standardise education and practice, maintain a digital register of professionals and introduce common entrance, counselling and licensing systems.

The Cabinet approved a proposal of Commerce and Transport Department for formulation of fresh service rules for Transport-Traffic and Enforcement cadre. The new rules, titled The Odisha Transport-Traffic and Enforcement (Method of Recruitment and Conditions of Service) Rules, 2026, will replace the 2013 rules and all subsequent amendments.

### IRREGULAR by MANJUL



**We have to win elections else the public will lose trust in CBI, ED, governor, EC and even the Supreme Court**

### Undertrial prisoner escapes from jail

**Bhawanipatna:** An undertrial prisoner escaped from Kalahandi district jail by scaling a 20-foot wall, prison officials said Wednesday. The prisoner has been identified as Jagannath Sabar of Themra village under Bhawanipatna Sadar police station and was in the Bhawanipatna jail for the past two months. He was accused of three theft cases. Jail superintendent Saroj Kumar Biswal said a probe is underway regarding how the under-trial prisoner escaped.

## BUSINESS EMINENCE AWARDS

**SHRI MOHAN CHARAN MAJHI**  
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ODISHA  
**CHIEF GUEST**

**SHRI SAMPAD CHANDRA SWAIN**  
HON'BLE MINISTER  
INDUSTRIES, SKILL DEVELOPMENT  
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## TODAY

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# leisure

## EVA LONGORIA SHARES BIGGEST CHANGE IN LIFE



Actress Eva Longoria shared that she and her husband, Jose Baston, and their seven-year-old son, Santiago, had been splitting their time between Spain and Mexico for years. She said the biggest change has been 'slowing down.'

## CHERYL BACKS CAMPAIGN TO BAN SOC MED FOR UNDER 16s



Cheryl has made a rare return to the spotlight to campaign for the UK government to raise the age of consent for social media users to 16. The 42-year-old singer said: "I back this campaign a million per cent, and I cannot see a reasonable argument for the opposite."

### FORTUNE FORECAST



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**ARIES**  
The stars are up to some mischief – you may get into some kind of trouble. But matters may settle down, and by noon, you may have forgotten all about it. The evening will find you quieter and reflective, sober and wiser. Good thing, says Ganesha.

**TAURUS**  
Today, your natural ability to deal confidently and successfully with problems and issues is likely to let you down. Ganesha sees this be particularly true in money matters. You will be caught up in financial problems without being able to resolve them suitably. Confusion and indecision will prevent you from finding a way out. Later in the day things are likely to change.

**GEMINI**  
A day when you get the opportunity to show what stuff you are made of. By afternoon, you will be in your elements and will feel almost invincible. Your optimism will rub off on your colleagues and the atmosphere at the workplace will be nothing short of electrifying, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**  
Today you are likely to be full of enthusiasm, both at work and home, predicts Ganesha. At work, your convictions will get the better of other people's vindictiveness, and your colleagues will come around to your viewpoints. But don't take any critical decision without prior approval.

**LEO**  
If you are the one who sets the corporate mantra each morning, then know that today, your mantra will be fabulous, and will be chanted by many in your organisation. Being a business magnate might not be the easiest thing, but you are who you are, and you are good at it. Your business-like approach shall come in handy later in the day, as you may launch new products in the market, says Ganesha.

**VIRGO**  
Share thoughts, concepts and ideas with people. You may get new perspectives, says Ganesha. Don't let any opportunity pass to make your loved one feel special. Ganesha predicts you might seek the counsel of friends on professional and ethical issues.

**LIBRA**  
Today seems like a good day to take a break and go on a pleasure trip to revitalise yourself, says Ganesha. Even on the business front, it will do you a world of good to take a break from the usual routine. This evening, you are at your best winning the heart of the opposite sex at social gatherings.

**SCORPIO**  
Today you are likely to remain the unvarying object of emotions and sentiments, predicts Ganesha. Your inkling for performing arts may draw you to take up some lessons in classical music and traditional dance. A romantic, candlelit evening with your sweetheart may be on the cards to wrap up the day.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Simple living and high thinking, says Ganesha, will be your mantra today. Approach your work with innovative thoughts and diplomatic words. Later in the day, family, friends and relatives revel in the attention that you shower on them. Students will excel in their studies and marvel in leisure activities, says Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**  
The day will have a bundle of things to offer today, some good, some not so good. At work, you are likely to overlook the most obvious things, and come across some unexpected ones. But as dawn turns to dusk, a pleasant surprise may get you all pepped up.

**AQUARIUS**  
It always pays to have extra cash, and in that regard, you will be a happy person today! You may carefully update and crosscheck your financial position. Of course, there are people who don't share your happiness and will try to advise you to the contrary. Ignore them, says Ganesha.

**PISCES**  
A good day is in the offing, says Ganesha. You are likely to receive news you will be glad to share and celebrate with your family. A few pending deals are likely to be finalised in the afternoon, and there are indications you will need to go off on a short visit for business purposes later on in the day.

# Malavika's vulnerability

**Chennai:** South sensation Malavika Mohanan, who has steadily carved a niche for herself across film industries, has now disclosed when and why she last shed tears.

The actress, who took to Instagram to have an *Ask Me Anything* session with her fans and followers, was asked when was the last time she had cried.

Responding to the question, Malavika Mohanan said, "I think it was... I was in Chennai last month for work. I was there for a prolonged period. While my team is lovely, I think staying away from home, from family, from loved ones for a very long period of time can start getting very lonely."

She went on to explain, "Just coming back to your hotel room, not having anyone to talk to at the end of the day.... I think it started getting to me at one point. So, it wasn't like dramatic crying but I feel like I went into a very low space."

The actress is currently working on a film titled *Pocket Novel* with Vijay Sethupathi and it's a Tamil-language film directed by Thiagarajan Kumararaja.

Malavika will also be seen in director P S Mithran's spy thriller *Sardar 2* alongside Karthi.

IANS



# Rasha speaks for animals



**Mumbai:** As people celebrated Earth Day Wednesday, newbie actress Rasha Thadani has urged all to focus on protecting our animals as a crucial part of saving the planet.

Rasha stressed that animals play a significant role in ensuring our survival.

The Azaad actress took to social media and dropped a cute video of herself trying to shake hands with a street dog.

Talking about the significance of the survival of all forms of life on earth, Rasha went on to write on her official Instagram handle, "Happy

Earth Day. I hope this year we understand the importance of our forests and our wildlife. Earth Day isn't just about the beaches and mountains that Mother Earth has gifted us, it's about all life on Earth."

"Protecting animals is a key part of protecting the planet. Our survival is directly dependent on them, the sooner we understand that - the better for us," she went on to add.

IANS

**Mumbai:** Actress Parineeti Chopra's latest social media post is all about self-love, and doing that makes you happy from within.

Taking to the Stories section of her official Instagram handle, the Chamkila actress advised all to be kind to themselves and stop stressing over little things.

Parineeti stressed the importance of cherishing the little pleasures of life in the post that read, "Stop stressing over little things. Be kind to your body - move it, nourish it, stop criticizing it. One day you'll wish you had appreciated it. Go outside. Look at the sky. Feel the sun. Just be."

The Kesari actress also said that it is crucial to express themselves and tell their loved ones how they feel.

"Spend less time chasing 'stuff' - more time making memories. Don't skip moments with people you love. Laugh more. Write a note. Tell someone you love them. Complain less. Give more. Helping others brings more joy than anything you can buy. Be present. Put your phone down. Show up - really show up," added Parineeti.

**Pari: Stop stressing over little things**



# Bhubaneswar keeps its reading traditions alive

**Bhubaneswar:** From libraries to independent bookstores, Bhubaneswar's vibrant book culture continues to thrive, nurturing inclusive spaces that keep the love for reading alive and accessible across generations.

At the heart of this culture stands **Modern Book Depot (MBD)**, an iconic bookstore that serves as a reminder of the city's long-standing literary tradition. Established in 1970, it has catered to generations of readers and remains a trusted destination despite evolving reading habits and the growing shift toward digital platforms.

Alongside such legacy institutions, community-driven initiatives like **Bakul Foundation's Bakul Library** movement and **Walking BookFairs**

are helping revitalise reading habits, particularly among younger audiences.

On the occasion of **World Book Day**, book lovers and literary advocates shared with **Orissa POST** their perspectives on the evolving reading culture in the city.

**Sujit Mahapatra** of the **Bakul Foundation** emphasised the urgent need to cultivate new readers in an increasingly technology-driven world. "In an age where AI increasingly shapes our lives, cultivating a reading habit has become more important than ever," he said. Quoting futurist **Michio Kaku**, he added, "The future belongs to those who can do what robots cannot." Mahapatra also highlighted the importance of fiction in nurturing imagination,

### WORLD BOOK DAY TODAY



recalling **Albert Einstein's** belief that fairy tales play a crucial role in shaping scientific minds.

At **Walking BookFairs**, founder **Satabdi Mishra** stressed the need for active par-

ticipation in sustaining reading culture. "We need continued support from people who walk into bookstores, attend events, and engage with reading—not just consume digital content," she said. Announcing a silent reading session on April 23, she added, "On this World Book Day, pick a book, gift a book, read a book. The transformative power of reading can empower, heal, and connect us."

Veteran bookseller **Om Prakash** of **MBD** observed a clear shift in reading patterns. "Reading continues, but it has moved from printed books to screens, bringing new challenges for traditional bookstores," he noted.

Noted author and academician **Devdas Chhotray** invoked **Franz Kafka's** philoso-

phy, stating that books should not merely comfort but challenge readers. **Kafka** believed literature should "wound and stab" the reader—serving as a necessary disruption that transforms thought.

Avid reader **Swikruti Mishra** highlighted the importance of encouraging younger generations to explore the region's history and its sustainable, nature-aligned legacy through books.

As Bhubaneswar marks World Book Day, its enduring literary spaces, both traditional and community-driven, stand as a testament to the City's evolving yet resilient reading culture, where the printed page continues to inspire even in a digital age.

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

### PEANUTS



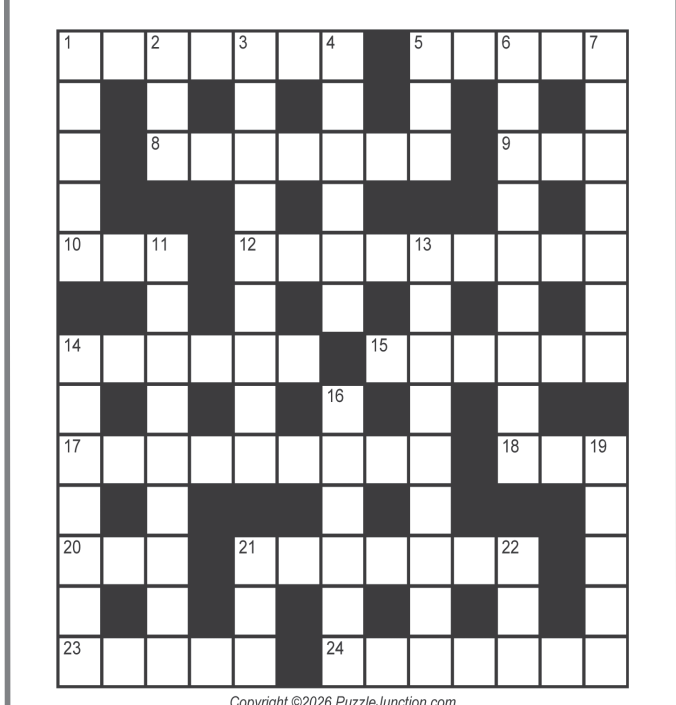
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



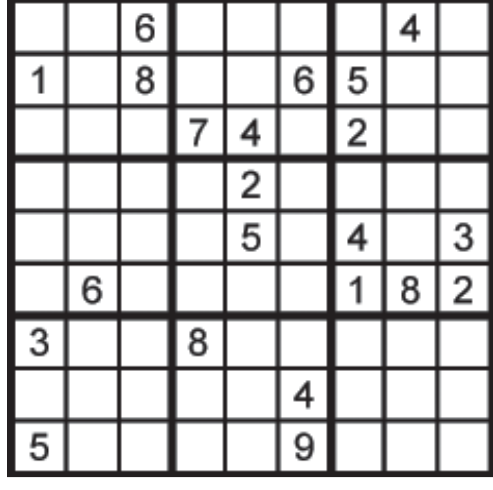
### CROSSWORD



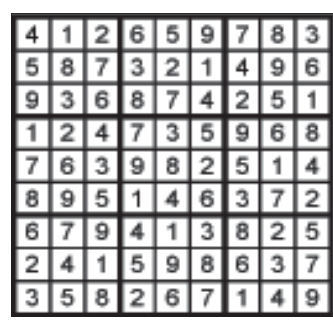
- Across**
- 1 Wardrobe
  - 5 Thicket
  - 8 Hot-air item
  - 9 Court divider
  - 10 Fly catcher
  - 12 Howling
  - 14 Chinese soup ingredient (3,3)
  - 15 Quatrain
  - 17 Squeeze box
  - 18 Dead letters?
  - 20 Kimono tie
  - 21 Bugle display, possibly
  - 23 After the wedding words
  - 24 Bowl over
  - Down**
  - 1 Permit
  - 2 Unruly crowd
  - 3 Irritability (3,6)
  - 4 Mass flight
  - 5 Hoodwink
  - 6 Retiree
  - 7 Baltic Republic
  - 11 Fine porcelain (4,5)
  - 13 Steward
  - 14 Exhaust (4,3)
  - 16 Old maid flower
  - 19 Beseech
  - 21 Portly plus
  - 22 Ratite bird

### 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

## Rupee falls 34 paise

**Mumbai, April 22:** Falling for the third straight session, the rupee declined 34 paise to close at 93.78 against the US dollar on Wednesday as uncertainty over US-Iran peace talks eroded hopes of easing West Asia tensions and set crude oil prices on fire. Intense selling in domestic equity markets and sustained outflow of foreign capital also weighed on the domestic currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 93.69 and touched an intraday low of 93.87 against the greenback during the session. The domestic unit finally ended the session at 93.78 against the dollar, registering a loss of 34 paise from the previous close.

## Women's quota Bill: CM hits out at Oppn



CM Mohan Charan Majhi speaks during the 'Jan Akrosh Mahila Samabesh' in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 22:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Wednesday likened opposition parties, including the Congress, to Kauravas in Mahabharata, alleging that their political future would be destroyed by women's anger over the obstruction of the women's reservation Bill in Parliament. Addressing BJP's mega "Jan Akrosh Mahila Samabesh" here, the CM also referred to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's "terrorist" remark against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said the opposition party would face the fate of Shishupal, who was killed by Lord Krishna in Mahabharata. The event saw participants, including the CM, dressed in black to protest against the Opposition's alleged "backstabbing" of women. The BJP's protest followed the defeat of the Constitution

(131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which sought to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies from 2029 parliamentary elections in the Lower House of Parliament April 17. The Congress and other opposition parties, which did not vote in favour of the Bill, alleged that the BJP was spreading misleading information regarding women's reservation and was not serious about implementing the 33 per cent quota. "The opposition parties, including the Congress, will face the fate of the Kauravas, who lost their future due to the curse of Draupadi. The Kauravas had disrespected a woman, and here the Opposition did the same by defeating the women's reservation Bill," the CM claimed. Stepping up his attack on the Congress and its allies, Majhi said the "fire of women's anger" would spread from villages to

cities and shatter the Opposition's political prospects. "This is not just the defeat of a Bill, but the killing of mother's dreams," he said, alleging that the Congress and its allies had denied women their constitutional rights. Majhi asserted that women continued to have faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi and cited various empowerment schemes implemented during his tenure. "It may be a temporary setback for women, but the Prime Minister is committed to giving them justice," he said, accusing opposition parties of displaying a "narrow political mindset" by voting against the Bill. The CM further alleged that the Congress and other opposition parties were using women as a vote bank, while the Modi government remained committed to their empowerment. He also referred to 'Operation Sindoor', stating it was

launched against terrorists to avenge the suffering of women. "This proves that those who raise their fingers at the honour of Indian women will be punished," he said. Majhi also condemned Kharge for allegedly using "indecent language" against the PM. "The Opposition has already committed 99 sins by making disrespectful statements against the popular PM. The people will teach them a lesson upon completion of 100 such abuses. The Congress will also face the same fate as Shishupal of Mahabharata," he said. The CM was referring to Krishna pardoning Shishupal's 99 sins and killing him after he committed the 100th offence. Calling upon women to sustain their anger and raise their voices at the appropriate time, Majhi said the passage of the Bill would have changed the country's history but was obstructed by the Congress and others.

## 4 Census officials assaulted; 3 held

PNN & AGENCIES

**Kamakhyanagar, April 22:** At least four on-duty Census officials, including two women, were allegedly assaulted in Dhenkanal Wednesday, police said.

According to sources, the incident occurred in the morning when a team comprising three enumerators and a supervisor went to collect data from the house of Nikunja Raman Satpathy in Mahimanagar Sahi of Ward-3 under the Kamakhyanagar Notified Area Council (NAC). The visit was part of the ongoing Census exercise that began April 16. The officials alleged that Nikunja and his sons, Bhanu Prasad Satpathy and Udit Swapna Satpathy, attacked them as soon as they entered the house, despite being shown official identification and informed about the purpose of their visit. "They asked why we had entered their premises. Even after we showed our identity cards and explained the purpose, they attacked us with stones. I suffered injuries to my face, and my two-wheeler was damaged," said supervisor (Circle-II) Madhusmita Behera, who was assaulted along with Raghunath Dixit, Swarnalata Sahu and Satish Biren Behera. Dixit alleged that the family assaulted them without provocation and also verbally abused them. "Our four Census staff members were injured in the attack by three persons — a man and his two sons. Strict action will be taken against the attack-



## Govt move to ensure enumerator safety

**Bhubaneswar:** In the wake of a series of incidents involving Census workers, the R&DM department has directed district Collectors and municipal commissioners to ensure the safety of enumerators engaged in ongoing Census operations and facilitate smooth data collection, an official said Wednesday. In a letter to Collectors and municipal commissioners, R&DM department ACS Arabinda Kumar Padhee said the first phase of Census 2027 is on in the state from April 16. He said several unfortunate incidents have been reported in recent days. "In view of the above, you are requested to make necessary arrangements to address heat-related issues, identify potential risks during Census data collection, and regularly monitor enumerators to ensure their safety and smooth data collection. All enumerators may also be sensitised in this regard," Padhee said.

Kamakhyanagar Sub-Collector Dinamani Nayak said. He reached the spot along with tehsildar Shubhankar Mohanty, SDPO Rajanikant Samal, IIC Jitendra Kumar Mallick and NAC executive officer Pradatta Sahu. Later in the day, based on a complaint filed by Dixit, police registered a case under relevant sections of the BNS and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. Nikunja and his sons were arrested.

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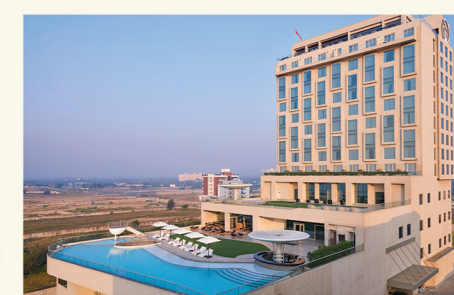
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'THINK INDIA, THINK ODISHA' TAGLINE UNVEILED

# Odisha emerging as premier tourism hub: Dy CM Parida

ALIGNED WITH THE VISION OF 'SAMRUDH ODISHA-2036' AND VIKSIT BHARAT 2047, THE REBRANDING MARKS THE STATE'S SHIFT FROM A HIDDEN GEM TO A CONFIDENT, GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE TOURISM DESTINATION



PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 22:** Odisha is steadily emerging as a high-performance tourism destination, powered by strategic branding, infrastructure push and immersive visitor experiences, Deputy Chief Minister and Tourism Minister Pravatī Parida said Wednesday.

She was speaking at the unveiling of the state's new tourism brand positioning and tagline, 'Think India, Think Odisha.' The launch also coincided with the announcement of the OMC Puri Coastal Marathon (OPCM), a first-of-its-kind international sporting event aimed at boosting the state's presence in sports and experiential tourism.

Adding further, Parida said, "The new tagline reflects a bold and aspirational identity, inviting the world to explore India through Odisha's rich cultural, spiritual and natural offerings."

The event was attended by Satyabadi MLA Om Prakash Mishra, Pipili MLA Ashrit Pattanayak, Puri MLA Sunil Kumar Mohanty, and Tourism Department Commissioner-cum-Secretary Balwant Singh, along with other government officials.

Aligned with the state's long-term vision for building 'Samrudh Odisha-2036' and Vision for Viksit Bharat 2047, the rebranding signals Odisha's transition from being a hidden gem to a confident, globally competitive tourism hub, a statement said.

The event was preceded by a ceremonial run along the Puri sea beach, witnessing enthusiastic participation from fitness enthusiasts and the local community.

A striking sand art installation by renowned sand artist Sudarshan Pattnaik at Blue Flag Beach was used to unveil the official OPCM marathon logo, symbolising the confluence

of Odisha's rich heritage and vibrant coastal identity.

The first edition of OMC Puri Coastal Marathon is scheduled to be held December 13 this year, and with a total prize pool of more than ₹1 crore, it is positioned among the most competitive running events in the country.

Designed to attract elite athletes, amateur runners, and international participants, the marathon offers a unique running experience along Puri's scenic coastline with a starting six km run on golden sand, officials said.

The event will feature multiple race categories, including full marathon (42 km), half marathon (21 km), 10 km, and five km, ensuring inclusive participation.

During the event, the official marathon website was also launched, and registrations are now open. Participants from across India and abroad can register starting April 22 to be part of this landmark international event, officials said.

Renowned globally for the Srimandir, Puri offers a unique blend of spirituality, culture and natural beauty. The marathon logo draws inspiration from iconic elements of the state, including the Patitapaban Bana of the temple, the Konark Chakra, and the waves of the Bay of Bengal, reflecting motion, energy and Odisha's distinctive coastal character.

## US envoy meets Dy CM, explores cooperation

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 22:** In a significant step to boost international cooperation, US Consul General Laura Williams paid a courtesy call on Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo at Lok Seva Bhavan here Wednesday. The meeting focused on key sectors, including renewable energy, semiconductor manufacturing, and the promotion of Odisha's tourism and cultural heritage.

A key focus of the meeting was the transition to sustainable energy, with Singh Deo highlighting Odisha's expand-



ing footprint in renewable energy and pumped storage projects (PSPs). Central to the discussions was the implementation of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), with the Deputy Chief Minister stressing the need to integrate battery storage into all grid systems and solar projects to ensure power availability during peak hours.

The talks also covered the state's technological ambitions, including semiconductor manufacturing—highlighting India's first 3D glass chip initiatives—as well as plans for data centres and underground cabling to modernise Odisha's digital infrastructure.

The Consul General praised the state's resilience, particularly its efficient power distribution and restoration following cyclones. To promote tourism and cultural exchange, the Deputy CM showcased Odisha's national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. In a gesture of goodwill, the Consul General was presented with a book on Odisha's rich cultural heritage.

# Modernising the railway tracks



ASHWINI VAISHNAV

More than 25,000 trains run across India every day. They carry more than 20 million passengers daily and move large quantities of coal, iron ore, grains, steel, cement and other commodities across a network of over 1,37,000 km tracks.

The track is the foundation on which this entire system works. When it is in good shape, trains run safely at higher speeds. When it is not, the results range from speed restrictions and delays to safety risks. A cracked rail, a loose fitting or a clogged ballast bed can all affect how a train moves.

Keeping in view the importance of track, Indian Railways started a wide-ranging modernisation programme over a decade ago. The work covered track renewal using modern machines, testing and inspection through advanced methods, mechanised maintenance, safety fencing etc. Together, these efforts have changed the condition of the network in a visible way.

Since 2014, about 55,000 km of tracks have been renewed thus improving safety, ride quality and reducing the need for frequent repairs. Around 44,000 track km of long rail panels (260 m each) have been laid. Longer panels mean fewer joints, which leads to smoother and safer train movement. Over 80,000 track km of stronger 60-kg rails are now in use, supporting heavier loads and higher speeds.

Laying stronger rail is important, but so is finding problems early. Ultrasonic Flaw Detection (USFD) testing has been carried out across about 36.2 lakh track kilometres and 2.25 crore welds, checking for hidden cracks inside the rail that cannot be seen from the outside. As a result, rail and weld failures have come down by about 90 per cent, a shift from fixing problems after the event to preventing them beforehand.

Other methods now in use include phased-array testing for flash-butt welds, magnetic-particle inspection for new welds, and GPS-enabled Oscillation Monitoring Systems (OMS) that measure ride quality and pinpoint the exact location of rough spots on the track.

The track machine fleet has doubled from 748 in 2014 to 1,785 in 2026. These machines carry out tamping, ballast cleaning and rail grinding better, faster and more evenly than manual work.

Machines have made a notable difference in deep screening of ballast — the layer of crushed stone beneath the track that provides drainage, absorbs vibration, and keeps the track stable. Over time, ballast stones get powdered under the constant weight and vibration of passing trains, clogging the bed and reducing its ability to function. Screening restores the track bed to

proper condition. This work has been carried out across more than 1 lakh track kilometres, mostly by machine.

To remove surface defects and hence to improve riding quality and safety, grinding of rail has been done for more than one lakh km.

With train traffic growing each year, maintenance windows between trains are shrinking. Machines help get more done in less time without disrupting services. But safety also depends on how trains pass through points and crossings. Indian Railways has taken up several supporting measures alongside track renewal.

About 17,500 km of safety fencing has been installed, especially where trains run above 110 kmph, helping prevent trespassing by people and cattle. At points and crossings, 36,000 thick-web switches and 7,500 weldable CMS crossings have been provided — these last longer and allow smoother train movement. Wider, heavier sleepers adopted in 2019 improve stability, particularly during summer heat. H-beam sleepers on girder bridges and long welded rails through yards have further strengthened the network.

One of the clearest results of track modernisation is the increase in speed potential:

Speed (kmph)	2014		2026	
	Running %	Running %	Running %	Running %
130 & above	5,036	6.3	24,173	22.5
110 - 130	26,409	33.3	62,482	58.2
Below 110	47,897	60.4	20,679	19.3
Total	79,342	100	1,07,334	100

Track supporting 130 kmph and above has grown from 6 per cent to nearly 23 per cent. Track fit for 110 kmph and above has risen from about 40 per cent to 80 per cent. This has reduced journey times, improved punctuality, and made it possible to run semi-high-speed services like the Vande Bharat Express.

The combined effect of these modernisation measures is reflected in the safety numbers. Consequential train accidents fell from 135 in 2014-15 to 16 in 2025-26 — a drop of about 89 per cent. The accident rate per million train kilometres improved from 0.11 to 0.01 — a 90 per cent improvement. This has come during a period when traffic has grown: more trains, more passengers, but fewer incidents.

A web-enabled Track Management System (TMS) now brings together data from ultrasonic testing, ride quality readings and track geometry into one platform, making it easier to set priorities and act in time.

Twelve years ago, 60 per cent of India's railway track was limited to below 110 kmph, rail fractures were common and most maintenance was manual. Today, nearly 80 per cent of the network handles 110 kmph or above, rail and weld failures have fallen by 90 per cent and close to 1,800 track machines are at work. For millions of passengers and the businesses that depend on rail freight, these changes are making a real difference — smoother journeys, shorter travel times, and a more dependable network. The work is not finished, but progress shows what steady effort and continued investment can achieve.

*The author is Union Minister for Railways; Information & Broadcasting; Electronics & Information Technology.*

# 8 yrs on, key Mahanadi data still missing

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 22:** Non-submission of crucial data on water availability in Mahanadi River to Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal, despite eight years of proceedings, has raised serious concerns with Mahanadi Bachao Andolan (MBA) terming the situation 'deeply unfortunate'.

The MBA has questioned both Odisha and Chhattisgarh for failing to provide basic hydrological data required to resolve the long-pending interstate water dispute.



risome as such data is vital for settling the dispute between two states.

Activists said Chhattisgarh's reluctance to share data is understandable due to its upstream control over the river, but Odisha's failure to provide its own supporting

data is worrying.

The outfit's convener Sudarshan Das questioned whether the state is effectively 'surrendering' its position under the guise of pursuing an amicable settlement process.

During the hearing, the tribunal expressed strong displea-

sure over both states' failure to comply with earlier directions. It had instructed them April 11 to submit the required data by April 20. However, both sides instead sought additional time, drawing further criticism.

The tribunal has now directed the states to submit the information by May 2, warning that in the absence of satisfactory progress, it will proceed independently without further delay.

The developments have intensified public scrutiny over the tribunal's functioning, which has been ongoing for eight years at considerable public expense. Members of the movement, including Basudev Bhatta, Manoj Jena, Bijay Pradhan, Sachikanta Pradhan, Prasanna Bisoi, Jyoti Mahapatra and Arjun Samantaray, termed the situation alarming and demanded greater accountability from both state governments.

## Govt seeks public opinion on place name correction

**Bhubaneswar:** The Revenue and Disaster Management department has issued a public notice on correcting English spellings of various place names to better reflect their original Odia pronunciation. As part of the exercise, Additional Chief Secretary Arabinda Padhee has written to the state's MPs and MLAs through the Assembly Secretariat, as well as all District Collectors, seeking their feedback on the proposed changes before finalising the revised spellings. According to the department, many officially used English names of districts, headquarters, sub-divisions, tehsils and blocks are distorted versions of their original Odia names. Earlier, the government had invited suggestions from public representatives and citizens to restore correct English transliterations. Following the appeal, the state received numerous proposals and recommendations from elected representatives as well as members of the public for rectifying and standardising these place names. All suggestions were reviewed by a committee headed by noted Odia litterateur and Padma Bhushan awardee Pratibha Ray.

# BLISTERING HEAT Jharsuguda hottest in country at 44.6°C

Capital records 41.2°C, first time this summer mercury crosses 40°C mark

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, April 22:** Industrial town of the state Jharsuguda emerged as the hottest place in the country Wednesday, with temperatures soaring to 44.6°C, the IMD said.

The IMD further said that 25 other places across the state also recorded maximum temperatures at or above 40°C.

According to the evening bulletin issued by the Meteorological Centre here, four places in the state recorded a temperature above 43 degrees Celsius during the day. Those places are—Talcher (43.5 degrees Celsius), Sambalpur (43.3), Hirakud (43.2), and Angul (43.1).

Angul was followed by Titlagarh at 42.5 degrees Celsius, Dhenkanal (42.4), Bolangir (41.9), Sonepur (41.9), Sundargarh (41.8), Nuapada (41.6), Bhawanipatna (41.5), Nayagarh (41.5), and Rourkela (41.3), as per the bulletin.

At 41.2 degrees Celsius, Capital city recorded a temperature above 40 degrees Celsius for the first time during this summer, officials said.



The other places which recorded a day temperature of 40 degrees Celsius or above are—Chandbali, Baripada, Keonjhar, Phulbani, Boudh, Paralakhemundi, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Khurda and Jagatsinghpur, the IMD said. The weather officer said heatwave conditions are expected to prevail in the districts of Bolangir, Jharsuguda and Sambalpur Thursday.

Similarly, hot and humid weather is expected to prevail at isolated places over the districts of Bolangir, Sundargarh, Boudh, Sonepur, Sambalpur, Angul, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack,

Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati districts Thursday, it said.

There will be no large change in the day temperature during the next four days over the districts of Odisha; thereafter, it is expected to fall by 2-3 degrees Celsius, the bulletin said.

In view of the prevailing heatwave conditions, the Bhadrak district administration has directed the classes of schools during morning hours from 6:30am to 9am, while the Subarnapur District Collector has extended the holiday for all educational institutes for another two days, till April 25.

## Truck fire halts NH-16 traffic

MANOJ KUMAR JENA, OP

**Bhubaneswar, April 22:** Vehicular movement on NH-16 came to a standstill from Pahala to Rasulgarh Square after a truck caught fire on the Palasuni bridge here Wednesday, leaving commuters stranded.

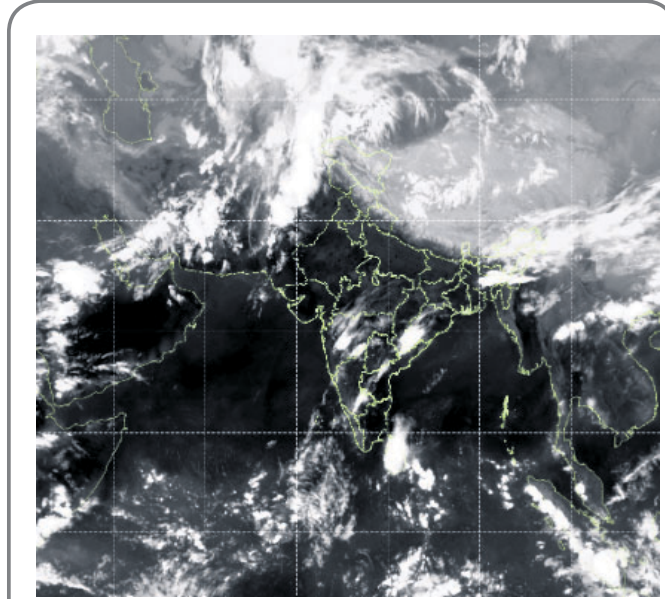
According to reports, the goods truck was en route to Gujarat from Paradip when it caught fire due to engine overheating. Noticing thick smoke billowing from the engine, the driver and helper jumped out of the vehicle to save their lives.

On being informed, fire personnel from Kalpana and Pahala fire stations rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control.

"We received information around 3pm. Teams from Kalpana and Pahala reached immediately and extinguished the fire within 30 minutes," said Assistant Fire Officer Manoranjan Rout.



MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	93.79 ▲ 0.36	SENSEX	78516.49 ▼ 756.84	GOLD	₹152,300 ▲ ₹629
EURO	110.20 ▲ 0.10	NIFTY	24378.10 ▼ 198.50	SILVER	₹248,243 ▲ ₹3,546



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	41.2°	39.8°	Partly cloudy sky with possibility of rain and thunderstorm
Min Temp	26.2°	24.6°	
Humidity	72%	71%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

## CLASSIFIED TO-LET

To-let for office and shop space available 1150 Sq.ft. in front of Bhawani Mall, Plot No. C-41, Saheed Nagar, Bhubaneswar, Contact: 977915245, 9811268396, 9861151831.

Kalahandi MP bats for rail connectivity

Kesinga: Kalahandi MP Malvika Devi met Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in New Delhi Wednesday, pressing a 20-point demand to improve rail connectivity and infrastructure in the region.



Patana steel plant hits land hurdle

VILLAGERS DEMAND ₹30 CRORE PER ACRE, 30% PROFIT SHARE FROM THE PROPOSED PROJECT

POST NEWS NETWORK

Patana, April 22: Land acquisition for the proposed mega steel plant in this block of Keonjhar district has hit major obstacles as the villagers, during a gram sabha held Wednesday, strongly demanded ₹30 crore per acre of land, 30% share of plant profits for local development and land pattas for those losing their properties.



mands openly and clearly. She later hinted at facing pressure but declined to elaborate on camera.

The seventh gram sabha, chaired by sarpanch Hemalata Naik, was held at Chemena High School ground in Patana block. At the meeting, officials sought public opinion on acquiring 28 plots under 13 khatas. The acquisition involves 13.17 acres of private land and 10.64 acres of government land. Emotions ran high when the sarpanch broke down, requesting villagers to state their de-

Villagers led by former sarpanch Uday Nath Naik and others submitted a 44-point charter of demands, including both compensation and basic community needs. The project, backed by JSW and South Korean steel major POSCO, envisages a 5 MTPA capacity steel plant at an investment of

₹40,000 crore, requiring 2,466 acres of land from 12 villages.

Meanwhile, uncertainty clouds the proposal after JSW and POSCO signed a separate ₹35,000 crore deal to build a 6-million-tonne facility in Dhenkanal earlier this week. The development has fuelled doubts among Patana residents about whether their plant will materialise, leaving supporters disheartened.

However, Additional Chief

Secretary Hemant Sharma Tuesday clarified that the Keonjhar part will now be restricted to iron making and the adjacent Dhenkanal district will produce steel.

Past protests in Jamunapasi panchayat against the project have led to arrests of more than two dozen villagers. While Wednesday's gram sabha passed peacefully, the mood in Patana reflects both anticipation of industrial growth and apprehension over displacement and unmet promises.

Senior officials, including Additional Collector Rabindra Kumar Pradhan and land acquisition officers, attended the meeting. Security was tight, with eight platoons of police deployed and Keonjhar Superintendent of Police Kusalkar Nitin Dagudu present to oversee law and order.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Man posing as Census official robs woman

Dhenkanal/ Rasol, April 22: A man posing as a Census official allegedly robbed a woman of her 'mangalsutra' and mobile phone in Giridhar Prasad village under Rasol police limits in Dhenkanal district, police said.

According to a complaint lodged by Aparna Biso, the victim, Tuesday, the accused arrived at her house and asked for Aadhaar cards of family members, claiming that he is a Census official. When the woman went inside to fetch the documents, the man entered the house, threatened her by holding a knife to her child's neck and asked her to undress.

When she refused, the accused snatched her mangalsutra and mobile phone and

fled the scene on a black motorcycle, police said. Rasol police registered a case and launched an investigation, said IIC Biswaranjan Mohanty.

Dhenkanal Superintendent of Police Abhinav Sonkar said police had earlier responded to a similar incident in Kamakhyanager. In that case, Census officials were allegedly attacked despite identifying themselves, and action has been taken against three persons.

Police said a similar complaint has now surfaced in Rasol area, and an investigation is underway by the local police along with the Hindol SDPO.

Kidnapped realtor found dead in Ganjam

PNN & AGENCIES

Berhampur/Gopalpur, April 22: Police Wednesday recovered the decomposed body of a real estate businessman who was allegedly kidnapped about a week ago for ransom, an officer said.

The deceased was identified as Sudhir Patra, 47, of Satyanarayanpur near Gopalpur. He was allegedly abducted by a group of unknown miscreants at about 6:30pm April 15 from Dura, near here, while he was on his way to his village on a motorcycle.

On that night, the miscreants demanded Rs 2 crore as ransom from the family members for his release.

Since then, the family mem-



bers have not received any communication from the deceased or the kidnappers, said the police officer.

Patra's highly decomposed body was found in the forest area near Gajalabadi under Sorada police station limits of the district.

"We have rushed to the spot

along with the family members of the deceased and the scientific team after getting information about the discovery of a decomposed body in the jungle," SDPO of Berhampur Sadar, Subhransu Parida, said. Though the body was decomposed beyond recognition, the family members identified him from his dress, which he wore at the time of kidnapping, Parida said.

The body was so decomposed that it was not possible to bring it to MKCG Medical College here for postmortem. The autopsy was conducted on the spot, and the police handed over the body to his family members to perform his last rites, the SDPO said.

The police suspect that the kidnappers might have killed

him on the night of the kidnapping and dumped the body in the forest area.

Based on a complaint lodged by the deceased's wife Rashmi Rekha Patra, an abduction case was registered earlier, and the police searched for him by forming multiple teams, Parida said.

"Now we have registered a case of kidnapping and murder," said the SD-PO. Investigation is in progress.

Elderly woman killed in elephant attack



POST NEWS NETWORK

Nakatideul, April 22: A 70 year old woman died Wednesday morning after being attacked by an elephant in the forested area of Nakatideul in Sambalpur district, officials said.

The victim, identified as Upasi Behera of Chadchadi village under Chadchadi forest beat, was on her way to collect kendu leaves around 5:30am when she encountered the elephant near a cashew plantation. According to forest officials, the animal, which has been troubling the area for some time, struck her with its trunk and trampled her. She died at the scene.

Family members alerted the Forest department, and news of the incident quickly spread through the village, sparking tension among residents. Villagers demanded the installation of an early warning system to alert them of elephant movement and the deployment of forest guards and trained elephant trackers (Gajasathi's) to drive the animals away.

Assistant Conservator of Forests Ashwini Kumar Behera, Batgaon Forester Manoranjan Pradhan, and Nakatideul police arrived at the site to calm the situation. Authorities assured residents that compensation would be provided to the victim's family in line with government policy.

Police have registered a case and sent the body for post mortem examination at Rairakhol.

Nayagarh: Man falls off train, dies

Nuaگون: A young man died after he fell off a moving train near Achhupada in Nayagarh district Wednesday morning, police said. The incident occurred around 6am as the man was travelling on a Daspalla-Bhubaneswar train. He reportedly fell near Achhupada and died at the spot. Nuaگون police arrived shortly after the accident, followed by Khurda Government Railway Police, who recovered the body. The victim's identity could not be established till the last report came in.

Government of Odisha Department of Water Resources OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER GAJAPATI IRRIGATION DIVISION, PARALAKHEMUNDI e-Procurement Notice No.SE-GID-01/2026-27

QUOTATION OF TWO-THREE-FOUR-WHEELER PARKING CONTRACT AT ROURKELA & TATANAGAR STATION FOR A PERIOD OF 60 DAYS

For & on behalf of the President of India, the Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Chakradharpur Division, South Eastern Railway invites quotation of Two-Three-Four-Wheeler parking contract at Rourkela & Tatanagar Railway station main entry for a period of 60 days through manually.

South Eastern Railway We serve with a smile

Man kills brother in Rayagada

POST NEWS NETWORK

Muniguda, April 22: A man killed his elder brother after a violent quarrel at Goratha village under Munikhola gram panchayat in Rayagada district Wednesday, police said. The victim, identified as Gultra Jakasika, died at the spot

after his younger brother, Adu Jakasika, allegedly struck him with an axe and fled the scene. Senior police officials, including SDPO Santeshini Oram and Muniguda police station officer Keshab Sarangi, reached the spot and sent the body to Muniguda CHC for postmortem. A case (126/26) has been registered.

AXIS BANK Important Announcement We are moving Axis Bank's branch in Katakana will move to new location from the 25th of June 2026.

Axis Bank Ltd. Katakana Branch, Ground floor, Medical Road, Katakana, PS-Kakatpur, Dist- Puri, Odisha - 752108

Axis Bank Ltd. Katakana Branch, Ground floor, Medical Road, Katakana, PS-Kakatpur, Dist- Puri, Landmark - Near Yamaha Showroom, Odisha - 752108

We look forward to welcoming you.

EAST COAST RAILWAY Tender Notice No. ST-OT-PM-VC-KUR-558, Dt. 17.04.2026

EAST COAST RAILWAY (1) Notice No. e-Tender-Elect-G-01-26 Description of work: PROVISION OF AIR CONDITIONERS IN FIELD UNITS OF COMMERCIAL DEPARTMENT OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

EAST COAST RAILWAY (2) Notice No. e-Tender-Elect-G-02-26 Description of work: ELECTRIFICATION IN CONNECTION WITH PROVISION OF A CENTRALIZED AIR COMPRESSOR BUILDING & 2 NOS. OF ROLLING-IN GOOMTY AT C&W DEPOT/PARADEEP.

Chola CHOLAMANDALAM INVESTMENT AND FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED Corporate Office: Chola Crest, C54 & 55, Super B-4, Thiru Vi Ka Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai- 600 032, T. N. E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE (Sale Through e-bidding Only)

Chola CHOLAMANDALAM INVESTMENT AND FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED CORPORATE OFFICE: "CHOLA CREST", C54 & 55, Super B-4, Thiru Vi Ka Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, India



Outer circumstances are merely the reflection of who we inwardly are.

THE MOTHER



## Economic Statecraft

Funds of funds (FoF) are increasingly used to shape how governments practice economic statecraft. When designed well, they pool capital to invest in venture funds rather than directly in individual companies or securities, strengthening innovation ecosystems while steering investment toward strategically important markets, capabilities, and technologies. But when poorly designed—as they often have been—these structures reproduce the all-too-familiar failures of politically captured investment programs.

Over the past three decades, public FoFs have been used primarily as instruments intended to attract private investors into early-stage venture capital markets, particularly in countries with limited domestic capacity. The best-known example is Israel's Yozma programme, launched in 1993, but similar approaches were later adopted by Australia's Innovation Investment Fund, the European Investment Fund, and the Saudi Venture Capital Company (SVC). Each used the FoF model to expand the supply of risk capital.

That era is now coming to an end, as governments increasingly use FoFs to direct capital toward critical national capabilities and strategic (often dual-use) technologies, screen out hostile or high-risk investors, and build innovation capacity at home and in allied countries. The United Kingdom's National Security Strategic Investment Fund and Denmark's 55 North quantum fund are prime examples. At the multilateral level, the European Investment Fund's European Tech Champions Initiative and the NATO Innovation Fund (backed by 24 members) both reflect this shift.

As a result, the question is no longer whether governments should use FoFs to advance economic statecraft, but how to design them so that national-security priorities do not erode market discipline, and commercial logic does not undermine strategic goals. Several design principles, drawn from our experience and research, can help governments strike that balance.

First, effective FoF strategies require a clearly articulated dual mandate, comprising a coherent economic security objective and a credible commercial framework, anchored in enforceable structural constraints.

As part of their security mandate, FoFs should focus on strategically important sectors, such as AI, semiconductors, and autonomous systems, while clarifying whether the technologies are intended for defense, civilian capabilities, or both. They should support only companies that conduct research and development and maintain meaningful manufacturing activity in the target countries, rather than simply being legally domiciled there. For example, the support provided by Denmark's Export and Investment Fund to the 55 North quantum fund highlights the government's technological and security priorities.

On the commercial side, clear return targets for both FoFs and the underlying funds are needed to prevent security priorities from becoming an excuse for weak performance. They should also require minimum levels of private investment to ensure that private investors share risk and gradually take on a larger role as capital markets in priority areas mature.

Governments should also make the trade-offs they are willing to make between economic security goals and financial returns explicit from the outset, rather than allowing them to emerge later as political compromises. Over time, this balance may shift as private capital markets become capable of sustaining ecosystems on their own, or as some sectors strengthen while others emerge, requiring support on economic-security grounds.

Israel's Yozma programme is a prime example, capping the state's share of returns and allowing private investors to buy the government's stake in successful funds. SVC took a different approach, waiving much of its carried interest to support ecosystem development, while the NATO Innovation Fund spreads its investments across multiple markets to strengthen capacity among member countries.

Second, governments must build security safeguards into the investment chain by ensuring that FoFs, underlying funds, and portfolio companies all operate within a framework that protects sensitive technologies and limits adversarial influence. In practice, FoF investment teams should hold appropriate security clearances, and in sensitive sectors, at least one general partner in each underlying venture fund should be vetted so that national-security authorities have a trusted point of contact. Effective security integration also means setting clear limits on adversarial capital, requiring investors to disclose the sources of limited-partner and co-investment funding, and scrutinizing portfolio companies to identify opaque ownership structures and flag potential risks.

Moreover, FoFs can use their position as anchor investors to shape the policies of the venture funds they support. The NATO Innovation Fund, structured as a private investment vehicle but backed by allied governments, requires strong due diligence and transparency from the funds it selects, setting an effective security benchmark for investors across Europe's defence, security, and resilience ecosystem. Such measures should become standard practice rather than special conditions applied only to a few funds.

Lastly, well-designed FoFs can help establish and strengthen alliances. In a global economy defined by international innovators, intertwined supply chains, and cross-border capital flows, security cannot rely solely on national programmes. FoFs are uniquely suited to operationalizing coalition strategies by linking allied economies while disentangling them from adversarial ones.

Multilateral platforms like the European Investment Fund's regional vehicles show how pooled capital can align incentives across borders while spreading the costs of building strategic technological capacity. Similarly, the NATO Innovation Fund, by supporting FoF portfolio companies alongside its direct investments, helps build shared and interoperable defense and security capabilities among allies.

FoF efforts, however well designed, will fail if they focus solely on early-stage innovation. Ukraine's early reliance on Chinese components, which limited its ability to capitalise on its own investments in drone innovation, should serve as a cautionary tale. True leverage lies not only in who invents new technologies but also in who controls large-scale production and critical supply chains.

For this reason, governments should consider expanding the FoF approach to support credible plans for scaling up manufacturing and facilitating investments in underlying supply chain capabilities and technologies. For example, government FoFs can back funds that finance the costly process of scaling up strategic industries, from semiconductor manufacturing to quantum hardware and advanced materials. Crucially, these strategies should align with other government measures, including coordinated public procurement, export controls, and subsidies.

FoFs are more than financial structures; they are a way for governments to connect capital, technology, and geopolitical power. When designed poorly, they risk sacrificing scarce public resources to the illusion that a handful of branded funds can substitute for the hard work of developing industrial capacity and sustaining long-term alliances. But when carefully designed, FoFs can help governments build resilient and strategically aligned innovation ecosystems without sacrificing market discipline.

Lars Frolund is a lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management. Fiona Murray is Professor of Entrepreneurship at the MIT Sloan School of Management and Chair of the NATO Innovation Fund.



Lars Frolund & Fiona Murray

**FoFs are more than financial structures; they are a way for governments to connect capital, technology, and geopolitical power**

## FOCUS SOCIETY

# THE SHARON SIMMONS STORY

The viral DoorDash driver who delivered two bags of McDonald's to President Donald Trump in the White House on 13 April is a Republican woman campaigning against a "tax on tips" in the US. Sharon Simmons from Fayetteville, Arkansas, a 58-year-old grandmother of 10 grandchildren, has been working as a DoorDash driver since 2022 and has made over 14,000 deliveries over the last four years. The grandmother was supposed to look forward to her retirement and spend time with her grandchildren. However, she is making around 10 tedious deliveries per day on average to pay for the treatment of her husband, who is suffering from cancer. This story is not merely the story of Sharon Simmons, but the story of millions of working people in the US, where the capitalist system has pushed people like her to the margins of life. The sad story reveals many important points about failures of capitalist system.

Firstly, it reveals the commitment of working people like Sharon in the US and across the world. Working people are not only committed to their work but also to their families and relationships. Everyday morality defines working people even in worst capitalist conditions. People like Sharon did not choose to be a DoorDash driver in a gig economy where hire-and-fire is the norm in the name of flexibility.

Flexibility here is not a choice but a compulsion. The choice is between work and hunger, poverty, unemploy-



**Capitalism and good health do not easily go together. Truly happy people, whether in their individual or collective terms, become difficult to sustain under such a system**

ment, and illness. Sharon is working to support the expensive cancer treatment of her husband. The privatisation and commercialisation of health systems, and the business of illness, have created conditions that deprive people like Sharon's husband of life-saving cancer treatment. Insurance companies, pharmaceutical corporations, and private medical providers are the beneficiaries of all kinds of illness, whereas working people are denied the right to access public healthcare.

If the US can spend \$16.5 billion by day 12th of an unwanted war on Iran, it can spend the same amount on public health. The US military budget is projected to reach \$1.5 trillion in 2027 fiscal year which is an absolute waste of public money. This budget could be diverted to healthcare for the American people.

Health is a human right. The US preaches about human rights but does not follow them at home or abroad. Americans

regularly die without access to healthcare, while American bombs kill people across the world. The production of crisis is a business strategy of American capitalism, where life is disposable as long as it produces profit.

Secondly, the "tax on tips" reveals the ruthless rent-seeking character of American capitalism. It has failed to deliver health, freedom, and choice to American citizens. Taxing tips reveals the regressive nature of tax system, where ordinary people bear the burden while corporations enjoy significant tax benefits and exemptions. Delivery drivers like Sharon, who may be making around \$50 in tips per day, are paying taxes, while corporations are rewarded with tax exemptions. Trump represents American corporate interests, even if he opposes a "tax on tips." People pay taxes, yet US foreign policy spends that tax revenue not on public health, but on unwanted wars that further benefit American

oil and defence corporations.

Finally, Sharon's story reveals the anti-human character of capitalism, which is fundamentally against human health, happiness, freedom, and individual choice. Under capitalism, profit is the primary objective. Every human tragedy and every crisis becomes an opportunity to dominate people and restrict their freedom, ensuring the continued dominance of capitalism in everyday life.

The individualisation of life under capitalism produces alienation, which lies at the centre of the epidemic of mental health issues across the globe and is particularly rampant in the US. Mental illness can lead to physical illness, and vice versa. Capitalism and good health do not easily go together. Truly happy people, whether in their individual or collective terms, become difficult to sustain under such a system. Capitalism primarily promotes commodity consumption for profit. Sharon Simmons's story is not just an American story, but a reminder of the broader capitalist epidemic affecting human civilisation.

It is difficult to pursue human happiness, freedom, and choice in life within a capitalist society. Sharon Simmons' story is a reflection of working people across the world. The only alternative is to end capitalism in all its forms in order to reclaim human life, health, happiness and freedom.

The writer teaches at the London Metropolitan University.



Bhabani Shankar Nayak

**SHARON SIMMONS' STORY IS A REFLECTION OF WORKING PEOPLE ACROSS THE WORLD**

## SPECTRUM GOVERNANCE

# The case for an Indian Political Service

India designs transformative policy with striking regularity — and then watches it dissolve between the drafting table and the last mile. The causes are structural: fragmented institutions, uneven capacity, broken coordination between political offices and implementing agencies, and incentives that reward announcement over execution. The consequence is not mere inefficiency — it is a democratic deficit. When promised benefits fail to reach citizens, trust in politics and public institutions erodes.

Your writer here proposes a direct institutional response: a statutorily created Indian Political Service (IPSe) — a permanent, non-partisan cadre of trained political advisers and implementation liaisons, recruited on merit, deployed on fixed rotations across ministries and district units. Their mandate: translate political priorities into operational reality, provide real-time feedback, and preserve institutional memory across electoral cycles. The cadre would complement — never replace — the All India Services, occupying the largely vacant space between the political and administrative spheres.

These recurring breakdowns explain why well-designed policies falter or underperform. First, translation loss: high-level objectives arrive at implementing agencies as dense, obfuscating legal text, with no one charged with converting them into procurement plans, staffing

rosters, and monitoring frameworks. Second, broken feedback loops: policymakers learn of failures late, filtered, and sanitised, with no mechanism for real-time course correction. Third, institutional amnesia: electoral cycles, reshuffles, and transfer seasons erase hard-won lessons, forcing each government to reinvent what its predecessor had already refined — or abandoned. This brings development to grinding halt till the new incumbent decides to brace up, work or doesn't.

Several democracies have institutionalised political advisers with instructive results. Britain's Special Advisers operate under a code separating political counsel from the neutral civil service. The US permits wholesale political appointments atop agencies — gaining responsiveness but sacrificing continuity. France's ministerial cabinets integrate strategy tightly with policy coordination, yet concentrate power in a narrow circle. The lesson across models is consistent: embedded advisers accelerate translation and feedback, but legal clarity, transparent selection, and independent oversight are non-negotiable safeguards.

Recruitment would be meritocratic — a competitive examination combined with professional experience, administered by an independent commission. Deployment would follow short, fixed rotations with mandatory cooling-off periods. Accountability would be multilayered: parliamenta-

ry oversight, an independent inspectorate, public performance metrics, and civil-society audits. Officers would be barred from campaigning or holding party office. Training would span public policy, digital governance, political economy, and conflict resolution.

One of the IPSe's most consequential effects could be structural: shrinking the space for political touts (read wheeler-dealers) who exploit regulatory opacity. Citizens navigating permits and welfare entitlements today rely on informal intermediaries — a shadow system breeding corruption and inflating costs. An IPSe officer embedded in a district unit would create a transparent, time-bound channel for policy interpretation and bottleneck escalation, backed by digital dashboards and enforceable standards. When the official channel is visibly faster and fairer, the market for touts shrinks.

Three objections deserve candour. Politicisation is the gravest: a cadre nominally non-partisan but captured by the ruling dispensation would be worse than the status quo. The antidote is structural — statutory independence, fixed tenures, rotation rules, and transparent reporting that makes capture visible. Turf complexities with the IAS is inevitable; the IPSe's mandate must therefore be explicitly complementary: it advises and monitors — it does not direct, approve, or disburse. Duplication and cost are real, but the

translation gap is a design flaw in institutional architecture, not a capacity shortage mere administrators can resolve.

The right approach is not national scale at birth. Select two pilot states — one with high administrative capacity, one with low — and two central ministries. Recruit a small cohort with narrowly defined mandates tied to flagship programmes, subject the pilot to independent evaluation with pre-registered metrics, and publish the results. Success warrants statutory scaling; failure warrants documented iteration. The strongest political argument is electoral: parties that credibly deliver better services win at the ballot box.

India's soft power increasingly rests on its ability to offer practical, scalable governance models — not rhetoric, but replicable institutional design. A functioning IPSe delivering measurable improvement in health, education, and livelihoods would be a powerful exportable innovation. If India can demonstrably narrow the gap between policy and practice, it gains moral and technical authority no diplomatic effort alone can substitute.

India does not lack political will or policy ambition. What it lacks is an institutional bridge between the two. The Indian Political Service could be that bridge — if we build it carefully, defend it from capture, and hold it to account.

The writer is a thinker and technocrat.



Charudutta Panigrahi

**INDIA DOES NOT LACK POLITICAL WILL OR POLICY AMBITION. WHAT IT LACKS IS AN INSTITUTIONAL BRIDGE BETWEEN THE TWO**

## 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

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

## Bibliophiles' delight

Sir, A book can be an exemplary accomplice of a person. But after proliferation of the electronic media and the internet revolution, drawing room of a house wears an orphaned look without books decorating its shelf and cupboards. However, books still occupy a coveted place in an individual's psyche. Friends, books and conscience are considered ideals for a peaceful and friction free life. A mind needs a book like a sword needs a whetstone to keep its edge intact. "Think before you speak, and read before you think," is a saying that perfectly suits the book lovers because reading books is to the mind what exercise is to the body. Book connoisseurs are firm believers of books getting through to a human being and not human beings going through a book. Books can be extraordinary soldiers in warding off loneliness. The World Book and Copyright Day, or International Day of the Book, is observed in approximately 100 countries on 23 April to honour the one, and the only, William Shakespeare. The celebrations of the day are led by UNESCO which describes books as a bridge between generations and across cultures, which is why this day is celebrated worldwide every year.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

## Quit tobacco

Sir, The report titled "Quitting tobacco may boost income of 20.5mn households," Orissa Post, 22 April, is revealing and urgent. Tobacco use drains poor families through daily expenditure, soaring healthcare costs, and lost productivity. If households redirect even modest spending on cigarettes, bidis, and other smokeless tobacco products to nutrition, education, and savings, the multiplier effects would be substantial. The finding also strengthens the case for higher taxes, plain packaging, and sustained cessation support at primary health centres. Behaviour change, however, needs community mobilisation and credible counselling. Government, civil society, and people in general must act together to convert this potential dividend into durable household prosperity.

Sidhartha Kar Mohapatra, BARIPADA

# IAF launches 2-day air exercise on Purvanchal Expressway airstrip

The exercise is being conducted at the Arval-Kiri Karwat airstrip, where fighter aircraft are carrying out 'touch-and-go' operations as part of preparedness to use expressways as alternative runways during emergencies



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Sultanpur (UP), April 22:** A two-day Indian Air Force (IAF) exercise featuring fighter-jet operations began Wednesday on an emergency airstrip along the Purvanchal Expressway in Uttar Pradesh's Sultanpur district, with authorities tightening security and clamping traffic restrictions.

The exercise is being conducted at the Arval-Kiri Karwat airstrip, where fighter aircraft are carrying out "touch-and-go" operations as part of preparedness to use expressways as alternative runways during emergencies, officials said.

They said an air traffic control system has been set up near the expressway to manage aircraft movement during the exercise.

The local administration earlier intensified the security arrangements around the airstrip and appealed to residents to maintain a safe distance and avoid paying heed to rumours. The exercise also generated excitement in the area as people got an opportunity to witness fighter jets up close.

Authorities said traffic on a 12-km stretch of the expressway has been diverted till May 1 as a precautionary measure and will resume from May 2, after the exercise concludes.

The officials noted that similar drills were conducted earlier, including in June 2023 when Sukhoi and Mirage aircraft performed touch-and-go operations

on the 3.2-km airstrip.

The expressway was also used for such manoeuvres during its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November 2021, when fighter jets and a Hercules aircraft landed on the stretch.

Meanwhile, Wednesday (April 22) also marked the first anniversary of the Pahalgam terror attack, in which 26 people lost their lives.

District Magistrate (DM) Indrajit Singh visited the site along with officials and reviewed the security and logistical arrangements. Talking to reporters, he said the primary objective of the exercise is to assess the strategic quality and operational capability of the airstrip.

Singh said the drill is being conducted both during the day and at night this time to ensure that aircraft can land and take off even in low-visibility emergency conditions.

He added that police and security personnel have been deployed across a 4-5-km radius around the airstrip to prevent any unauthorised entry of persons or animals.

The DM said all arrangements have been made with close coordination between the administration and the IAF.

During a rehearsal Tuesday, advanced fighter jets, including Sukhoi-30 MKI, Mirage-2000, Jaguar and Tejas, carried out multiple "touch-and-go" operations, while IAF commandos also demonstrated slithering operations from helicopters.

Authorities have restricted public access near the airstrip for security reasons. The DM appealed to people to remain outside the security perimeter and follow traffic diversions on the expressway while witnessing the exercise.

## 5.2 magnitude quake jolts parts of Manipur

**IMPHAL:** A moderate earthquake measuring 5.2 on the Richter scale shook Manipur's Kamjong district and adjoining areas, as well as neighbouring Myanmar, Tuesday morning, officials said. Disaster Management authorities in Imphal confirmed that there were no immediate reports of loss of life or damage to property following the tremor. According to data from the National Centre for Seismology (NCS), the earthquake struck at a depth of 62 km below the surface, affecting Kamjong and nearby regions. Tremors were also felt in neighbouring Ukhrul district and state capital Imphal, and even in certain parts of Meghalaya, but no casualties or damage have been reported from these areas so far. Tuesday's tremor marks the second earthquake in the mountainous northeastern region within less than a week. Earlier, April 16, a mild earthquake measuring 3.8 on the Richter scale hit Mizoram's Mamit district and adjoining areas. That tremor occurred at a depth of 22 km, with no reported casualties or property damage. A mild quake measuring 2.1 on the Richter scale was recorded in Sikkim's Mamchi district and surrounding areas April 15. The NCS reported that the tremor struck at a depth of 10 km below the surface, again without any loss of life or damage.



A motorcyclist on a hot summer day, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, Wednesday

PTI PHOTO

# Shutdowns by ethnic groups disrupt normal life in Manipur

All five valley districts remained impacted on the fourth day of a five-day shutdown called by a Joint Action Committee (JAC) protesting the April 7 bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district, in which two children were killed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



**Imphal, April 22:** Shutdowns called by different ethnic organisations severely affected normal life in 12 of 16 districts of Manipur Wednesday, officials said.

All five valley districts remained impacted on the fourth day of a five-day shutdown called by a Joint Action Committee (JAC) protesting the April 7 bomb attack at Trong-

laobi in Bishnupur district, in which two children were killed. Road blockades were reported from several areas, including Sagolband and Patsoi in Imphal West district, as part of the agitation, officials said. Normal life in Naga-inhabited areas across six hill districts was also affected on the second day of a three-day total shutdown called by the United

## OVER 58,800 PEOPLE DISPLACED BY ETHNIC VIOLENCE SINCE MAY 2023

A total of 58,821 people have been displaced by the ethnic violence in Manipur since May 3, 2023 till March 30 this year, the state government has said. The figures were furnished by the Home Department Secretariat April 20 in response to an RTI filed by Manipur Congress leader Hareshwar Goshwami. On the number of deaths and injured in connection with the ethnic violence since May 2023, the department said "217 people as per ex-gratia given to NoK (next of the kin)". It said the number of relief camps till March 10, 2026 stood at 174, while 3,000 pre-fabricated houses have been constructed by the Manipur Police Housing Corporation Ltd. The department also said 7,894 permanent houses were destroyed and 2,646 houses were partially destroyed since May 3, 2023. Goshwami, in a social media post, said it took him "seven months of effort" to receive the information on the internally displaced persons (IDPs).

In Churachandpur district, a 13-hour shutdown called by different organisations under the aegis of the Zomi Coordination Committee affected daily life. The protest sought justice for BJP MLA Vungzagin Valte.

Valte had suffered serious injuries in a mob attack at the onset of the ethnic violence in May 2023 and had been undergoing treatment. His condition

later worsened, and he died at a private hospital in Gurugram in February this year.

In the affected districts, schools, banks, markets and most establishments remained closed, while public transport stayed off the roads.

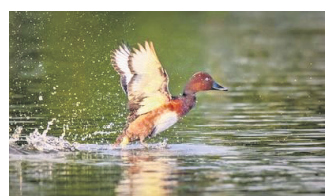
Only pharmacies remained open in many places. Government offices also recorded thin attendance as streets wore a deserted look.

# MANIPUR TO DEVELOP KHARUNGPAT BIRD SANCTUARY

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Imphal, April 22:** The Manipur government has announced plans to develop a bird sanctuary at Kharungpat in Kakching district, in a move aimed at strengthening biodiversity conservation and promoting eco-tourism in the state, officials said.

A senior forest official said the proposed sanctuary will cover around 227 hectares, accounting for about 6.7 per cent of the total wetland area. The site is considered ecologically



significant, particularly for the conservation of waterbirds, including both resident and migratory species.

According to the official, the 2023 bird census recorded around 69 species in the area, of which nearly 40 per cent were migratory birds. However, the

latest census conducted in 2025 has shown a noticeable decline in migratory bird numbers, raising concern within the state government.

The decline has been attributed to factors such as loss of suitable habitat, shrinking roosting sites and increasing local disturbances affecting the wetland ecosystem.

In response, and in line with public demand, the state government has decided to notify the area as the Kharungpat Bird Sanctuary.

The official said the state

Cabinet's decision to declare Kharungpat a bird sanctuary under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, marks a significant step in Manipur's conservation efforts.

The move follows sustained public demand led by local MLA Usham Deben Singh, with support from organisations such as the Keirair United Development Association, Citizens' Association for Rural Development, members of the Wabagai Zila Parishad, and the South Tenthra Youth Development Organisation.

# Ramsar Site tag for Shekha Lake

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lucknow, April 22:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath Wednesday said the state's 12th Ramsar site -- Shekha Lake in Aligarh -- will not only strengthen ecological balance but also provide new energy to livelihoods at the local level.

Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Yadav Wednesday announced that Shekha Jheel in Aligarh has been declared a Ramsar site,

taking India's total to 99 and Uttar Pradesh's to 12.

He said the move will boost biodiversity, livelihoods and climate security, highlighting the wetland's importance for migratory birds and India's growing focus on conservation under PM Narendra Modi.

"In line with the vision of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, 'New Uttar Pradesh' is fully committed to the conservation of the environment and biodiversity," Adityanath said on X, quoting the union minister's post.

# Kinnar 'guru' builds temple using ₹ 85L in 'badhai' earnings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Gorakhpur (UP), April 22:** A 75-year-old head of a 'kinnar' (eunuch) community has constructed a Shiva temple in the Padri Bazar area here at a cost of over Rs 85 lakh, funded entirely through traditional 'badhai' (ceremonial blessings earnings).

People from the surrounding areas have been visiting the site and appreciating the effort by Prema, a kinnar guru, which they said reflected a blend of faith and community welfare.

Prema said the temple will be consecrated April 24, with preparations underway and locals expressing enthusiasm over the initiative.

Prema, who has been residing in the area for nearly six decades, said her objective is to connect people with spiritual values.

"When people worship, they move towards the path of righteousness. Those who follow the right path contribute to building a strong nation," Prema said. "I have used all my life's earnings from badhai, other sources to fund this project which is around Rs 85 lakh so far," Prema added.

Apart from constructing the temple, the kinnar guru has also contributed to social causes, including funding road construction and supporting the marriages of underprivileged girls, according to locals.

Prema sustains herself through agriculture, orchards and traditional 'badhai' collections during weddings and childbirth ceremonies, and has consistently used her earnings for community welfare.

Emphasising harmony, she said all religions deserve equal respect and ultimately lead to one supreme power.

# Lucknow's Bengalis head to WB as fish jumps from plate to politics

THE HIGH-PITCHED CAMPAIGN FOR THE FIRST PHASE OF POLLING CAME TO AN END ON TUESDAY AS ISSUES RANGING FROM FOOD HABITS, CROSS-BORDER INFILTRATION, A UNIFORM CIVIL CODE, TO THE CONTENTIOUSLY REVISED ELECTORAL ROLLS DOMINATED THE DISCOURSE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lucknow/Kolkata, April 22:** Shafiqul, who makes kebabs at a prominent Lucknow eatery, and Tarak Nath Bhattacharya, a local priest, share a common passion 'maach' or fish which they both relish.

The other common between them is Bengal, their home state, where they are registered as voters.

Both have reached West Bengal, where Assembly polls are due in two phases April 23 and April 29, amid an intense "veg vs non-veg" poll narrative playing out across the eastern state.

While the ruling Trinamool Congress is alleging that the BJP would ban eating fish, meat and eggs if it comes to power in Bengal, which is a predominantly non-vegetarian society, the saffron party has got some of its leaders to publicly eat fish and meat to blunt the Trinamool's charge. Adding fuel to the debate,

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Tuesday said that if the prime minister "wants to eat fish, I will cook it for him myself".

"Maach Bhaat-e Bangali", Bhattacharya told PTI, hinting at how fish and rice are a staple in Bengali homes as he gets ready to vote in the Debra Assembly segment in Paschim Medinipur district, which goes to poll in the first phase Thursday.

"I have voted in every Bengal election since turning 18," said Bhattacharya, now 45, who works as a priest at Lucknow's Hari Sabha temple.

While admitting that the Bengal election this time could be closely contested, Bhattacharya seemed surprised at the 'veg vs non-veg' debate raging in his home state.

He recalled how the BJP was branded an 'outsider' in Bengal before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls as well, a party that "didn't understand the state's politics and culture".



"But back then it was limited to stray statements. This time, we have seen politicians moving about with fish in their hand, and eating non-veg food publicly, which is most unusual," said Bhattacharya, who reached Bengal Tuesday to cast his vote in Debra, where the BJP's Rajib Baner-

jee is pitted against Subhashis Om of the Trinamool Congress. Shafiqul, who is registered as a voter in the Chanchal Assembly constituency in Malda district where polling is due Thursday, is also amused by the on-going food debate. "Many non-vegetarian eat-

eries in Lucknow and other parts of Uttar Pradesh have cooks, helpers or waiters from Bengal, and most of them have reached the state as parties are leaving no stone unturned to ensure that voters turn up in large numbers on polling day," Shafiqul said.

This "desperation", according to Shafiqul, is an indication that the polls are going to be closely fought this time.

Though he admitted that he doesn't understand the 'food debate' much, he felt that in a closely-contested election, emotive issues like food habits could well influence the "swing" votes.

"I eat fish and meat as most Bengalis do. But it was never an election issue before, unlike now. There has to be a reason," Shafiqul told PTI over phone from his home town, where Trinamool's Prasun Banerjee is up against Ratan das of the BJP.

"The intensity is much more this time as compared to the 2021 elections. The food debate

is there, just like the SIR (Special Intensive Revision) of electoral rolls," he said.

"My family members too faced problems due to the SIR in Bengal. The same exercise was also carried out in Uttar Pradesh, but unlike in Bengal, it was not this big an issue there," Shafiqul said.

He also said that many of his friends from Bengal who work in Uttar Pradesh have also reached the state to cast their votes.

Subroto Chakraborty, a priest from Rabinrapalli in Lucknow, is listed as a voter in the Nanoor Assembly constituency in Birbhum district.

Nazrul Karim, who works at a restaurant in Lucknow's Lalbagh area, claimed that around 50 people from Malda district work in the city and all of them have reached Bengal to cast their votes.

Among them are Tajimul Haq and Anarul Haq, who too said fish has been a key poll issue in the district this time.

**Elections to the 294-member West Bengal Assembly will be held April 23 and April 29, and the results will be out May 4**



Everyone should unite as a human community. Religion is needed. Man is not born for religion; religions have been created for the welfare of human beings. Unless you understand this, you cannot progress

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE | AICC PRESIDENT

## NORTH INDIA SIZZLES

The mercury in several parts of Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana and West Bengal Wednesday breached the 42-degree Celsius mark, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting heatwave conditions over major parts of northwest, central and eastern India in the next four to five days



## of the day quote

I want to tell Rahul Gandhi that in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, the Congress will not even cross double digits. In West Bengal, you may not even be able to open your account, and in Assam, the Congress will face its biggest defeat ever

AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

Mamata didi has an allergy to the name of Lord Ram and opposed the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Do you want a government that is not in sync with our centuries-old emotional attachment to Bhagwan Ram?

YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CM

Despite having power at all levels, the BJP has failed to bring about any change in Delhi. The BJP does not know how to perform. Only the AAP knows how to work

SAURABH BHARADWAJ | AAP PRESIDENT, DELHI

# One year on, resilience & resolve as Pahalgam picks up the pieces

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Pahalgam/New Delhi, April 22:** It was a day of recall, remembrance and resilience. A year after three Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists opened fire at tourists in Pahalgam's Baisaran meadow, 26 families Wednesday observed the death anniversary of their loved ones and political leaders said in unison that the country would not bow to terror.

At the picturesque grassland of Baisaran, fringed by mountains and dubbed a mini Switzerland, the months of quiet that followed the terror attack have slowly given way to the bells of pony rides and the shutter-click of cameras as tourists begin to return.

While Baisaran remains closed, other areas in and around are open to visitors.

"Remembering the innocent lives lost in the gruesome Pahalgam terror attack on this



BJP leaders Sofi Yousuf, Lateef Ahmad Khan and other party workers hold a "Black Day" march in Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir

day last year. They will never be forgotten... As a nation, we stand united in grief and resolve. India will never bow to any form of terror. The heinous designs of terrorists will never succeed," said Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Such acts of terror cannot deter our unwavering commitment to peace and unity," said President Droupadi Murmu.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said India will neither ever forget the sacrifice of the victims and the anguish of their families nor will it ever forgive the perpetrators of this cowardly act.

Away from the political debates, 26 families from across the country mourned their ir-

reparable loss.

"That day, I lost everything in my life. Even today, I cannot forget that incident. Whenever I close my eyes, the incident comes back to me," said Priyadarshini Satpathy from Odisha's

Balasore district. Her husband Prashant Kumar Satpathy was among those killed.

In Kochi, Arathi R Menon, whose father N Ramachandran, was killed, addressed a memorial meeting to say that she was proud of India's strong response to terrorism.

"While standing here after one year, I feel that Bharath has given a stronger

reply. The world is also aware about it," she told reporters.

In Karnal, Haryana, Rajesh Narwal, the father of 26-year-old naval officer Vinay Narwal whose bullet-riddled body became the abiding image of the tragedy, said the family is still grappling with the tragedy.

Vinay Narwal, just 26 years old, and his wife of six days had gone to Pahalgam for their honeymoon.

As the families of the victims begin to pick up the threads of their lives, in Jammu and Kashmir, the mood was determined. Security was beefed up across the Valley, especially at tourist hotspots. The union territory's economy took a hit with the exodus of tourists and many tourist hubs being closed.

It is slowly beginning to change with places now opening following rigorous security audits. At the newly erected memorial in Pahalgam town, six kilometres from Baisaran, and

nearly selfie points, tourists paused to pay their respects before continuing with their sightseeing. The April 22, 2025 strike led to a wave of anguish and public defiance, the first in the Valley's 30-year history of militancy with thousands of people from all walks of life holding rallies and candle marches to express their outrage.

For Narendra Pari from Mumbai, now on his third trip to Kashmir, the public protests were a powerful message to the rest of the country.

Jayishree Patel from Gujarat, who was on her eighth visit to the Valley, said visiting Pahalgam was a moral decision.

While the foothall of tourists had increased, economic recovery remains an uphill task as many pony owners and local vendors, who previously earned up to ₹1,800 daily, are now struggling to make ₹200 as key sightseeing spots remain restricted, said Waheed.

## Delhi horror: IRS officer's daughter raped, murdered

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 22:** A 22-year-old IIT graduate and daughter of a senior Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer was allegedly raped and murdered at her residence by their former househelp in southeast Delhi's upscale Kailash Hills locality Wednesday morning, hours after he sexually assaulted another woman in Rajasthan's Alwar.

Rahul Meena, the 19-year-old domestic help who had worked with the family for around eight months and was sacked around a month ago, has been arrested for the crime, police said this evening.

The woman, who was preparing for the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examination, was alone in her house at the time of the incident and was found murdered in a room by her family members when they returned from the gym, they said.

Preliminary inquiry suggests the woman was sexually assaulted before being strangled to death using a mobile phone charger cable, the police said, adding they are waiting for the postmortem report for confirmation of sexual assault.

The police also said they have detained two persons -- a car cleaner in the area, and a househelp in the neighbourhood -- for questioning.

A senior police officer said that the victim's parents would

lock the house in the morning and leave the keys outside for their domestic help. Meena was aware of the location of the keys and allegedly used them to enter the house Wednesday. The accused was familiar with the household, including its layout and the daily routine of the family members.

He knew when the victim's parents would step out for their walk or gym sessions.

Meena, a native of Rajasthan, had been removed from his job around a month ago for alleged misappropriation of daily purchase bills, the officer said after preliminary investigation.

An official said that the victim was alone at the residence at the time of the incident, adding that the accused entered the house around 6 am, attacked the woman and sexually assaulted her. She was allegedly hit with a stick, inflicting significant blunt force trauma on her face and head.

Subsequently, the attacker strangled her using a mobile charging cable before fleeing the spot. The sources said the victim put up a strong resistance, following which the accused struck her on the head with a stick to overpower her before strangling her with a charging cable.

The police suspect the crime was committed between 6 am and 7 am, a time likely chosen as two other domestic workers usually arrive later in the day.

## MALEGAON BLAST

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, April 22:** The Bombay High Court Wednesday discharged four men accused in the 2006 Malegaon serial bomb blasts, quashing all the charges against them, including of terror, and leaving unanswered the question of who was responsible for the explosions that killed 31 people.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekar and Justice Shyam Chandak allowed the appeals filed by four accused -- Rajendra Chaudhary, Dhan Singh, Manohar Ram Singh Narwaria, and Lokesh Sharma -- challenging the framing of charges by a special NIA court against them.

A detailed written order was expected to be released later.

The four were charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code for murder and criminal conspiracy, and also under the Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act (UAPA), a stringent anti-terror law.

On September 8, 2006, four bombs exploded in Nashik district's Malegaon town in North Maharashtra, three inside the premises of Hamidia Masjid and Bada Kabrastan just after Friday prayers, and the fourth in Mushawarat Chowk, claiming 31 lives and injuring 312 persons.

The probe in the blasts witnessed several twists and turn with the initial investigating agencies claiming that the conspiracy was hatched by Muslim accused, but the National Investigation Agency (NIA),

# 19 years after 31 deaths, Bombay HC discharges 4



■ The court quashed a special court order framing charges against the accused

■ The accused were charged under the Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)

■ The National Investigation Agency (NIA) had claimed right-wing extremists were behind the blasts

which later probed the case, said right-wing extremists were behind the powerful explosions.

Maharashtra's Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), which initially probed the case, had arrested nine Muslim men in connection with the case.

The ATS, in its chargesheet filed in December 2006, claimed that the conspiracy to trigger blasts was hatched during a meeting held at the wedding of one of the accused in May 2006.

The case was later transferred to the Central Bureau of

Investigation (CBI) in February 2007, which, in its supplementary chargesheet, agreed with the ATS probe and named the nine Muslim men as accused.

However, in April 2011, the NIA, which probes terror cases, took over the case and claimed that the blasts were the handiwork of right-wing extremists and arrested these four accused.

The central agency relied on a statement made by Swami Aseemanand, an accused in the Ajmer Sharif (Rajasthan)

and Mecca Masjid (Hyderabad) blasts case, as per which the Malegaon 2006 blasts were carried out by the men of deceased right-wing activist Sunil Joshi.

While Aseemanand later retracted this statement, the NIA after its probe filed a chargesheet giving a clean chit to the nine arrested Muslim accused and naming these four men.

A special court in 2016 discharged those nine Muslim men which was challenged by the ATS in the HC. The ATS's appeal is pending in the HC and has not been heard since 2019.

In September last year, a special NIA court framed charges against the four accused. They then moved the HC against the special court order.

In January this year, the HC, while admitting the pleas, noted that a prima facie case for interference was made out and stayed further proceedings before the trial court pending the outcome of the matter.

The four accused, in their plea in HC, claimed that the NIA had failed to produce any evidence against them.

The HC in 2019 granted bail to the four men (present appellants), observing that they had been incarcerated for over six years without trial.



Students hold a globe on the occasion of Earth Day, at Cubbon park in Bangalore, Karnataka

# American woman raped in K'taka homestay; two held

AGENCIES

**Kodagu, April 22:** A US national was allegedly raped by a staff member of a homestay in this district, police said Wednesday.

The incident occurred a week ago at a homestay in Kutta village in Kodagu, they said.

The staff member, a native of Jharkhand who worked in the hospitality section of the homestay, has been arrested in connection with the incident.

The owner of the homestay has also been arrested for allegedly failing to inform the police after the woman complained to him about the assault, a senior police officer said.

According to police, the woman alleged that her drink was spiked and she was subsequently 'sexually assaulted' by the staff member at the homestay.

Later, when she approached the homestay owner regarding the incident, he allegedly attempted to suppress the matter and disconnected Wi-Fi services for three days, preventing her from contacting anyone during that period. After regaining access, she allegedly left the premises under the pretext of travelling to



Mysore. She later approached US embassy officials, who facilitated communication with local authorities.

Based on her complaint, a case of sexual assault was registered, and due procedure was followed. The accused have been arrested and remanded to judicial custody, Kodagu Superintendent of Police Bindu Mani R N told PTI.

State Home Minister G Parameshwara said that as soon as the matter came to light, the police arrested the accused and further action would be taken as per law.

"Action must be taken accordingly. Whoever is running such establishments, like homestays, must have proper licensing. We have already issued SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) on the

requirements for operating homestays. If such incidents occur in violation of those norms, legal action must be taken," he told reporters.

The minister said such incidents send a negative message about the state and society. "Especially when foreigners are involved, it affects the image of our society and country. That is why strict action is necessary, and we are taking it. It appears that there were attempts to

cover up the incident after it occurred. However, once the police received information, they acted promptly and secured the accused," he added.

Kodagu district in-charge minister N S Boseraju has directed officials to conduct a prompt investigation and submit a detailed report. Soon after the incident came to light, the minister's office said in a statement that he spoke over the phone with the Kodagu Superintendent of Police and sought details of the case.

The incident occurred a week ago at a homestay in Kutta village in Kodagu

# MeitY announces online gaming rules from May 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 22:** The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) Wednesday notified the much-awaited rules providing the procedural framework to operationalise the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, which will also facilitate the creation of an online gaming authority.

Most online games - if they are not real money games, which are already and explicitly banned under the provisions - will not mandatorily need to be registered or determined, IT Secretary S Krishnan said.

Oversight will be triggered only in certain circumstances. Esports, however, will require mandatory registration as specified in the parent Act.

"...We wanted to, as far as possible, keep this entire thing as regulation-light as possible. Most games, which are not money games, should be able to operate with no obligation to necessarily either be determined or registered. So that entire process is optional," he said.

"We are not obligating anybody to apply to determine whether it is an online money game, or online

social game, or esports."

That said, such 'determination' will be triggered in three situations. The first trigger is where it is done suo moto by the authority, and the second is where it involves esports games. "And third, the central government may notify any specific category of social games, which, as of now, we have not notified anything specifically," Krishnan said.



Parties contest elections, not the government. But here the government is fighting the election. As many as 5,000 people from Gujarat are being taken to West Bengal in special trains. Those who wanted to go home were baton-charged, while a special train was run to take BJP people to Bengal

DELHI TO ROLL OUT REAL-TIME POLLUTION SOURCE STUDY Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa Wednesday directed officials to fast-track the roll-out of a real-time source apportionment study to strengthen the national capital's air quality management, an official statement said

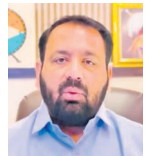


of the day uote

BJP talks about 'Naari Shakti', but we all saw how Amit Shah addressed Mamata Banerjee at a meeting on Tuesday. He was calling her 'Ayeee Didi', just like Modi did in 2021 'Didi O Didi', both in a dismissive, disrespectful manner



The BJP is shedding crocodile tears as they wanted to increase the seats in Parliament to 850 in the garb of women's reservation bill. The INDIA bloc sensed this and the BJP failed to execute its plan



It seems that the Congress people have lost their mental balance and they do not have faith in any constitutional post



POST OF THE DAY

In the past, political parties used to buy votes using alcohol, biryani, RS 100 notes and gangster force. All of these were paid by their own funds. Nowadays, political parties are buying votes directly using the country's money and also promising monthly payments. They'll be using the same money which taxpayers paid by working day and night in 44°C heat for the improvement of this nation. Indian tax-payers are genuinely the most tolerant people. They watch their hard earned money being used to buy votes so that leaders can send their children to international schools while taxpayer themselves can't even afford basic english school.

Court discharges Rohit Pawar in MSCB case

Mumbai: A special court here Wednesday discharged NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar and other accused in a case registered by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with an alleged ₹25,000 crore scam at the Maharashtra State Co-operative Bank (MSCB). A money laundering case cannot survive in the absence of "predicate" offence, said the special judge for MPs/MLAs cases Mahesh Jadhav, adding that a closure report accepted by a competent court in the predicate offence amounts to acquittal.

Three killed as car hits pole

Veeravalli (Andhra Pradesh): Three persons were killed and another was seriously injured when a car returning from Vellore crashed into a roadside pole near here in East Godavari district Wednesday, a police official said. The accident occurred at around 1.30 am when the car carrying four persons was travelling towards Gajjaram village after completing medical treatment in Vellore, the official said. According to the DSP, the accident occurred after the driver allegedly lost control of the vehicle due to rash and negligent driving at high speed and rammed into a roadside pole.

3-yr-old girl raped by 11-yr-old boy

Banda: A three-year-old girl was allegedly raped by an 11-year-old boy in the Jaspura area of Banda district in Uttar Pradesh, police said Wednesday. A case regarding this was registered Tuesday night, Jaspura police SHO Rishidev Singh said.

EC issues Kharge 24-hour deadline

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 22: Finding Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge prima facie violative of the poll code for calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "terrorist", the Election Commission Wednesday issued a show cause to him.

The EC had earlier issued a notice to Kharge saying Union minister Kiren Rijju and TMC leader Derek O'Brien were the complainants.

It later withdrew the notice from its website and issued a fresh one removing O'Brien's name. Officials said the TMC leader's name was added inadvertently.

Kharge has been asked to explain his stand within 24 hours, cautioning that if he fails to respond, it will be presumed that he has nothing to say in the matter and the Election Commission will take appropriate action or decision in the matter without making any further reference to him. The notice comes a day before polling in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Kharge Tuesday accused Prime Minister Modi of "terrorising" political parties by misusing government machinery and central agencies to sti-

TERRORIST JIBE AT PM



EC functioning as attached office of home ministry: Cong

New Delhi: The Congress Wednesday alleged that the Election Commission's "stern notice" to party chief Mallikarjun Kharge for his "terrorist" remark on Prime Minister Narendra Modi is evidence that it is functioning as an attached office of the Union home ministry, and its behaviour is an assault on the Constitution. Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, made the remark after the poll body on Wednesday took "serious note" of Kharge calling Prime Minister Modi a "terrorist" and issued him a "stern notice", asking him to explain his stand within 24 hours. The EC notice came a day before polling in Tamil Nadu, and the first phase of elections in West Bengal. Kharge Tuesday accused Prime Minister Modi of "terrorising" political parties by misusing government machinery and central agencies to stifle the opposition, triggering strong reactions from the BJP, which attacked the opposition leader for calling Modi a "terrorist".

He is terrorising people and political parties. I never said he is a terrorist (in the literal sense). Terrorising this... he is misusing his power and government machinery and abusing, maligning Opposition parties," Kharge said. Rijju had approached the EC on Tuesday alleging that the Congress chief violated provisions of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita (BNS).

In its notice, the EC said Kharge prima facie violated provisions of the poll code. It reminded Kharge of the model code provisions which says that criticism of other parties or their workers based on unverified allegations or distortion shall be avoided.

tionally referred to the Prime Minister as a "terrorist" while criticising the AIADMK's alliance with the BJP. Questioning how the AIADMK, a party rooted in the Dravidian ideologies of Periyar and

le the Opposition, triggering strong reactions from the BJP, which attacked the Opposition leader for calling Modi a "terrorist". Addressing a press conference in Chennai, Kharge ini-

officer, but he has not responded, a senior official said.

"The crime branch has now issued an LOC against main accused Gautam Khattar and alerted the Bureau of Immigration to prevent him from leaving the country. Police teams are camping in different cities across the country to trace him," he said. Gautam Khattar, the founder of Sanatan Mahasangh, kicked up a row with his remarks at an event April 18 in the presence of Swami Brahmeshanand, State Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho and BJP MLAs Sankul Amonkar and Daji (Krishna) Salkar. A viral video of his remarks against Goa's patron saint sparked protests in various parts of the coastal state, drawing widespread condemnation from political leaders,

the Goa Church, and others. The Vasco police have registered an FIR against Khattar for allegedly hurting religious sentiments and trying to create communal discord through his speech against St Francis Xavier, whose relics are preserved at the Basilica of Bom Jesus Church, Old Goa. The crime branch formally took over the investigation into the case from the Vasco police Wednesday. According to the police, Madhav Khattar had accompanied his brother Gautam to the event in Vasco where the alleged objectionable remarks were made. During the probe, it has come on record that the video of the speech was recorded by Madhav and was later circulated on social media platforms by him.

Woman slams Maha minister over BJP protest traffic chaos

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, April 22: A viral video of a woman berating Maharashtra minister Girish Mahajan for the traffic jam caused by a BJP rally over the women's reservation Bill in south Mumbai put the ruling party on the backfoot Wednesday, with the minister stating that her anger was justified though her language was inappropriate. City Mayor Ritu Tawde, who belongs to the BJP, expressed regret for the inconvenience caused to commuters by Tuesday's rally in Worli area as police registered a case against the organisers for alleged violation of norms.

As the video of the woman's outburst went viral, Opposition parties targeted the saffron party, with Shiv Sena (UBT) leader



Priyanka Chaturvedi lauding the woman - who had got stranded in traffic jam while waiting to pick up her child - for 'showing mirror' to the minister. The incident occurred in the upscale Worli area Tuesday when Mahajan was speaking to reporters at a rally organised by the saffron party to target oppo-



sition parties over the defeat of the Constitution Amendment Bill for fast-tracking the implementation of 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. An agitated woman confronted the BJP minister, shouting at him for blocking roads and causing inconvenience to

commuters. "Get out of here. You are causing a traffic jam," she said, asking why the rally could not be held at the nearby open ground. After Mahajan tried to pacify her, she returned and continued her tirade, saying, "Did you not understand? What is wrong with you? There are hundreds of people waiting."

When a police official intervened, she snapped at him, refusing to engage and demanding that no one speak to her.

Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal shared the video on X, and accused the BJP of misleading women for political gains.

Sapkal also alleged on Wednesday that after facing embarrassment, BJP workers threatened the journalists who recorded the viral video.

Mahajan admitted that some commuters did face inconvenience, and added that he had apologised to the woman on the spot and also asked the police not to take any harsh action against her.

The protest, held after obtaining necessary permissions, saw participation of around 15,000 to 20,000 women which made some congestion unavoidable, he said, denying a fault in police's planning or allegations of "VIP culture". Worli Police, meanwhile, registered a case against the organisers of the BJP rally. Necessary permissions had been taken for the event but certain rules were violated, said a police official.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi accused the BJP of being insensitive to the travel woes of Mumbaiers.

2 Pak-flag balloons with "PIA" found in Haryana, HP villages

Chandigarh: A white and blue balloon bearing the inscription "PIA" in English and Urdu and a printed image of the Pakistan national flag was spotted outside a house in a village in Haryana's Sirsa Wednesday, prompting police to launch an investigation. The balloon, resembling an airplane, fell outside a house in Sirsa's Kheri village, Nathusari Chopta police station in-charge Pardeep Kumar told PTI over phone. "The police received information that the balloon fell outside a shed where a villager keeps his animals. After police were alerted, we rushed to the spot and launched an investigation." "No suspicious material was found in the balloon," he said. He said, the village where the balloon was spotted lies close to the Haryana-Rajasthan border. Notably, in another incident Wednesday, a white and blue balloon bearing the inscription "PIA" and a printed image of the Pakistan national flag was spotted in bushes near a village in Himachal Pradesh's Chamba district, police said.

Telangana HC stays action against KCR, others

Hyderabad: In a major relief to BRS chief K Chandrasekhar Rao and three others, the Telangana High Court Wednesday directed that no action be taken against them on the basis of findings of the PC Ghose Commission, which probed the alleged irregularities in the execution of Kaleshwaram irrigation project. Delivering its orders on a batch of petitions filed by KCR, former minister T Harish Rao and others, a division bench of Chief Justice Aparesh Kumar Singh and Justice G M Mohiuddin, however, said the constitution of the Commission is neither arbitrary, illegal nor ultra vires of the Constitution. "...the findings rendered by the Commission as are prejudicial to the conduct and reputation of the petitioners and have been rendered in violation of principles of natural justice and the statutory safeguard provided under section 8B of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 shall be inoperative and no action can be taken on the basis there," the court said. The court had last month adjourned to April 22 its verdict on the petitions.

Bank of India POSSESSION NOTICE. Zonal Office : Star House, 1/D, Jayadev Vihar, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015. Includes details of the secured assets and borrower information.

# international



We should allow time for negotiations and not let the war resume  
EMMANUEL MACRON | PRESIDENT, FRANCE

## CZECH STUDENTS PROTEST MEDIA OVERHAUL

Thousands of high school and university students marched through the Czech capital Wednesday to protest against a government plan to overhaul and reduce funding for public radio and television. "We won't let you take the media," protesters chanted. Smaller protests were organized across the country



### of the day quote

The notion that a flu vaccine must be mandatory for every service member, everywhere, in every circumstance at all times is just overly broad and not rational  
PETE HEGSETH | DEFENCE SECRETARY, US



Israel remains resolute and unwavering in its fight against terrorism in all its forms. Together with India, we will continue to strengthen our cooperation to confront this threat with determination and to advance peace, security, and stability  
GIDEON SA'AR | FOREIGN MINISTER, ISRAEL



It's not a case that the United States dictates the terms. We have a negotiation, we can come to a mutually successful outcome - it will take some time  
MARK CARNEY | PRIME MINISTER, CANADA



# US halts Iraq dollar cash shipment

REUTERS

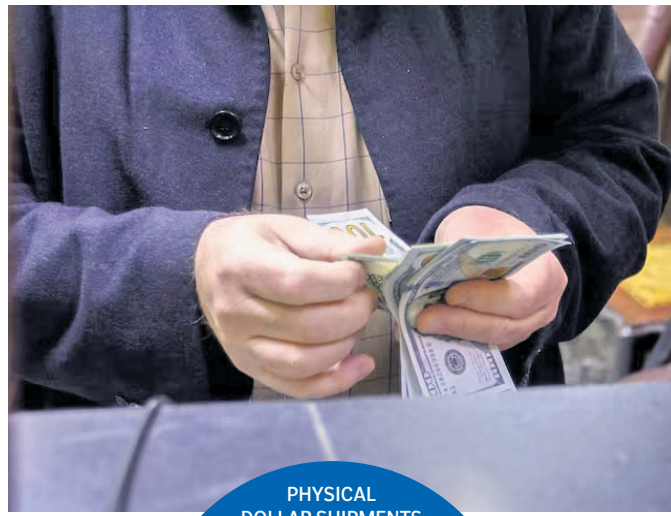
Baghdad/Dubai, April 22: The United States has halted a shipment of about \$500 million in cash bound for Iraq and suspended parts of its security cooperation with Baghdad, in a move aimed at pressuring the Iraqi government over the actions of Iran-backed militias, Iraqi sources told Reuters.

The measures were taken as the fallout from the Iran war increasingly pulls Iraq into the conflict, with Iran-aligned armed groups in Iraq launching repeated drone and rocket attacks on US facilities and neighbouring states in support of Tehran.

The conflict has also been accompanied by US strikes on armed groups in Iraq, adding pressure on Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's government as it tries to balance tensions between Washington and Tehran on Iraqi soil.

Five Iraqi sources said the move was limited to shipments of physical US currency, between \$450 million and \$500 million, that are periodically flown into Baghdad.

The cash is mainly used to meet retail foreign exchange demand, including for travel, medical treatment and overseas study, while electronic



PHYSICAL DOLLAR SHIPMENTS HALTED, AFFECTING CASH FOR TRAVEL, MEDICAL, AND STUDY NEEDS IN IRAQ  
ELECTRONIC DOLLAR TRANSFERS FOR IMPORTS AND TRADE REMAIN UNAFFECTED, ECONOMIC ADVISER TO SUDANI SAYS  
NO FORMAL NOTICE OF CASH HALT RECEIVED, CENTRAL BANK OFFICIAL SAYS

dollar transfers used for imports and trade remain unaffected, an economic adviser to Sudani said. The US Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The move was first reported by the Wall Street Journal.

An Iraqi central bank official said there had been no formal notice of a halt to deliveries.

A shipment expected in April had not arrived, and the status of another expected in May was unclear, the official said. The cash is generated from Iraq's oil revenues and routed through the Federal Reserve Bank of New York to the Central Bank of Iraq, under a complex system in place since the 2003 US-led invasion of the country.

An Iraqi foreign minis-

try source said Washington warned Baghdad through diplomatic channels that it would no longer tolerate the government's failure to rein in Iran-aligned militias, who are represented in parliament and government.

The warning referred to attacks blamed on Iraqi militias against US targets, including repeated strikes on the US embassy in Baghdad and the US consulate in Iraq's Kurdistan region, as well as rocket and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Syria.

The source said Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait lodged formal protests with Iraq this month over attacks launched by militias operating from Iraqi territory.

Earlier this month, Saudi Arabia summoned Iraq's envoy in Riyadh and Bahrain summoned Iraq's charge d'affaires in Manama over attacks they said were launched from Iraqi territory.

"Washington will not support any Iraqi government that is incapable of curbing militias backed by Iran from attacking US interests and its Gulf allies," the foreign ministry source said. "This was a clear message from the United States to Baghdad."

# UK lawmakers approve lifetime smoking ban for today's under-18s



REUTERS

London, April 22: Children in Britain who are 17 or younger, and anyone born in the future, will never be able to legally buy cigarettes after lawmakers approved new stricter restrictions on smoking.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill raises the legal age for buying tobacco by one year, every year, starting with people born on or after January 1, 2009, meaning affected age groups face a lifetime ban.

The law, which is due to receive royal assent next week, also tightens controls on vaping, including banning sales of vaping and nicotine products to under-18s and restricting advertising, displays, free distribution and discounting.

The government says the measures will help reduce smoking and prevent young

people from becoming addicted to nicotine, easing long term pressure on the National Health Service.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting said the approval of the bill was a historic moment for the nation's health.

"Children in the UK will be part of the first smoke-free generation, protected from a lifetime of addiction and harm," he said. "Prevention is better than cure - this reform will save lives, ease pressure on the NHS, and build a healthier Britain."

Smoking causes about 64,000 deaths and 400,000 hospital admissions a year in England, according to official estimates, and costs the NHS around 3 billion pounds (\$4 billion) annually, with wider economic costs exceeding 20 billion pounds.

**TIGHTER RULES ON VAPING**

Vaping has also become a focus for policymakers, especially over concerns about youth uptake and nicotine addiction.

The government banned the sale of single-use or disposable vapes last year over concerns about youth use and environmental damage.

## SHORT TAKES

### Peru defense min steps down

Lima: Peruvian Defense Minister Carlos Diaz resigned from his post Wednesday, amid interim President Jose Balcasar's decision to postpone a purchase of F-16 aircraft from the United States. Balcasar, who leaves office in July, had said the purchase was postponed until the next government takes power. Peru has spent years in negotiations with different firms to modernize its aging fighter jet fleet of Mirage 2000 and MiG-29 aircraft acquired in the 1980s and 1990s. Peru is looking to eventually acquire a total of 24 jets, but a first deal would be for 12. Among the bidders is US firm Lockheed Martin.

### ICC judges reject bid to release Duterte

Amsterdam: Appeals judges ruled Wednesday that the International Criminal Court has jurisdiction over former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, dismissing a bid to throw out his trial over his alleged pivotal role in the murder of thousands of people. Families of the victims who were watching the proceedings from the Philippines erupted in joy when the court verdict was read out. Duterte, who has been held in detention at the ICC in The Hague since his arrest in March 2025, was not in court. The Philippines formally withdrew its ICC membership in 2018, and Duterte's defence had argued that this meant the court had no jurisdiction over the case. But the appeals judges confirmed a lower court ruling that the case could continue and rejected the defence's demands to immediately release the 81-year-old former president.

### Chinese navy brushes past Okinawa islands

Beijing: China said a group of its naval vessels, including a destroyer, passed through a waterway between two islands administered by the Japanese prefecture of Okinawa on Wednesday as it returned home after testing far-seas capabilities. Vessel formation 133 dispatched by the People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theater Command completed its training in the Western Pacific, and has returned through the Yonaguni-Iriomote Waterway, said the command, which is responsible for East China, the East China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. While non-Japanese vessels are allowed to pass through the narrow band of waters in the middle of the Yonaguni-Iriomote Waterway, Japan reserves the right to take action if vessels stray into the country's territorial sea, defined as seas 12 nautical miles (22 km) from its shoreline.

# Nepal Home Minister resigns

Gurung became talk of the town after he jailed former prime minister KP Oli and the then home minister Ramesh Lekhak within 24 hours after assuming his post



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, April 22: Nepal Home Minister Sudan Gurung Wednesday tendered his resignation little over three weeks after taking oath after facing allegations related to his financial conduct while in office.

Gurung became talk of the town after he jailed former prime minister KP Oli and the then home minister Ramesh Lekhak within 24 hours after assuming his post. The resignation by Gurung, who was appointed as Home Minister March 27, comes amid growing criticisms over his alleged business links and shares' transactions with a controversial businessman.

Gurung wrote on his social media site that he has resigned from the post to ensure impartial investigation into matters

relating to his financial conduct and to avoid the conflict of interest while in office.

"For me, ethics is greater than position, and there is no greater force than public trust. The ongoing Gen Z movement in the country, which is demanding good governance, transparency and accountability, has also conveyed this message-that public life must be clean and leadership must be accountable. If anyone questions the government formed on the blood and sacrifice of my 46 brothers and sisters, the answer to that is ethics," Gurung wrote in a Facebook post.

Gurung was active during September 2025's Gen Z movement. Among the many other things, he was also seen distributing bottled water to the protesters in Maitighar Mandala and Naya Baneshwor, the main venue of the protest.

He also played a crucial role in inking a deal between former Kathmandu Mayor and rapper-turned-politician Prime Minister Balendra Shah 'Balen' and Ravi Lamichhane, a TV journalist-turned-politician, who is the president of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP).

According to Prime Minister Shah's secretariat, Gurung has handed over his resignation letter to the prime minister.

PM Shah has kept the home ministry portfolio himself, the secretariat added.



Catholic faithful stand next to a sculpture depicting the late Pope Francis outside the Basilica of Lujan following a Mass held by Monsignor Marcelo Colombo, the Archbishop of Mendoza, in honor of the late Pope on the first anniversary of his death, in Lujan, Argentina

# AIR CHINA RESUMES DELHI-BEIJING NON-STOP FLIGHT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, April 22: Air China has resumed its non-stop Delhi-Beijing flight, reconnecting the flight services between the two capitals.

With the resumption of the Delhi-Beijing flight, air connectivity between sever-

al cities of the two countries, disrupted since 2020 due to COVID-19 and then the military standoff in Eastern Ladakh, has been restored. Air China has resumed non-stop flights connecting Beijing and Delhi Tuesday, the airline said on its Facebook account.

The Beijing-Delhi flights

will operate Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays, using Airbus A330-200/300 aircraft, the announcement said. China Eastern Airlines resumed its direct flight between Kunming, China's southwestern Yunnan Province, and Kolkata, India April 18. It was the carrier's latest expansion of

its China-India route network following the resumption of the Shanghai-Delhi route in November 2025.

China Eastern Airlines said that the route, with six weekly round-trip flights using Boeing 737 aircraft, will add more convenience to travellers between the two countries.

# In Gaza, first local vote in years offers gauge of Hamas popularity

REUTERS

Gaza, April 22: Palestinians in one of the only Gaza cities not overrun by Israeli ground forces during the war will vote this weekend in municipal elections that will feature some pro-Hamas candidates, offering a rare barometer of the militant group's popularity.

The vote in Deir al-Balah is part of Palestinian Authority municipal elections that Palestinians have cast as a display of national unity against a US plan for Gaza that they believe intends to entrench their separation from the occupied West Bank.

It will be Gaza's first vote of any kind since 2006, when Hamas won the PA's legislative elections and later seized control of Gaza following a brief civil war with PA President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party, dominant in the West Bank.

The polls will be the fifth municipal elections in the West Bank since 2005. In January, the PA said it would extend those elections to Gaza "wherever possible", a move analysts see as a symbolic effort to show Gaza remains part of a future Palestinian state.

**'CHANGE THE REALITY IMPOSED ON US'**

For Palestinians in Deir al-Balah, including Adham Al-Bardini, the vote Saturday marks an opportunity for political expression after the Hamas-led attacks of October 7, 2023 that sparked Israel's devastating two-year assault on Gaza.

"For the first time in my life, in 20 years, I will have this feeling. I have been hearing about elections since I was born but because of the circumstances no elections are done," said Al-Bardini, 34.

"We are eager to take (part)



so we can change the reality imposed on us."

In Deir al-Balah, large banners bearing the logos of rival candidate lists decorate the streets. Voting will be held in 12 polling centres including open fields and tents.

Fareed Taamallah, spokesman for the PA Central Elections Commission, said

roughly 70,000 Palestinians were eligible to vote in Deir al-Balah, a city he said was chosen because it suffered less damage than the rest of the largely ruined territory.

Four lists are fielding candidates in the election, including one that has several candidates who residents and analysts regard as pro-Hamas.

PALESTINIANS TO VOTE FOR MUNICIPAL LEADERS IN DEIR AL-BALAH  
VOTE IS PART OF PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS  
HAMAS SITS VOTE OUT BUT ONE LIST FEATURES PRO-HAMAS CANDIDATES  
ANALYSTS SAY THE VOTE IS A SYMBOLIC STEP AMID TRUMP'S GAZA PLAN

candidates' performance to gauge its popularity, said Hani Al-Masri, a West Bank political analyst.

**'A SYMBOLIC STEP'**

The vote comes as US President Donald Trump's so-called "Board of Peace" pushes a plan for Gaza's future that would see the territory rebuilt from scratch under the administration of an apolitical committee of Palestinian technocrats.

The plan calls on Hamas to hand over Gaza governance to the committee as it lays down its weapons and Israeli forces withdraw from the Strip. Hamas has so far rejected disarmament, accusing Israel of failing to abide by the October ceasefire.

The plan notably does not mention the West Bank, which, along with the Gaza Strip, Palestinians have long sought for a future state, and where the PA exercises limited self-rule.



**To reach our larger goal of a net-zero economy by 2070, India must add nearly 10 GW of wind capacity every year for the next decade**  
PRALHAD JOSHI | UNION MINISTER

## TESLA BRINGS IN 2ND MODEL TO INDIA

American electric carmaker Tesla Wednesday announced acceleration of its journey in India, driving in the three-row six-seater SUV Model YL priced at ₹61.99 lakh, its second offering in the country. It is also revving up expansion of charging network across highways connecting major cities



### of the day quote

**If there are stresses at any point in the economy, as a regulator, as an entity responsible for market stabilisation, whatever we need to do, we will do that**

T RABI SANKAR | DEPUTY GOVERNOR, RBI

**Youth, farmers and workers from villages are migrating to Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore and Pune due to lack of employment opportunities there. We should create employment opportunities in villages and tribal areas**

NITIN GADKARI | UNION MINISTER

**Humanoid robots will be big part of our life in the future. I have a commitment when it (time) comes right on the things (as) you have seen in (my) other markets, we want to bring to India. That's the goal**

ISABEL FAN | TESLA CHIEF FOR APAC REGION

### Q4 RESULTS

#### Trent profit rises 32.57% at ₹413 cr

**New Delhi:** Tata group retail firm Trent Ltd Wednesday reported a 32.57 per cent on-year increase in consolidated net profit to ₹413.1 crore for the March quarter of FY26. The company posted a consolidated net profit of ₹311.6 crore in the January-March quarter a year ago, according to a regulatory filing by Trent Ltd, which operates retail stores under the brand names Westside, Zudio and Star. Meanwhile, the board of Trent has approved a bonus issue of 1 equity share for every 2 equity shares held and recommended a dividend of 600 per cent, which is ₹6 per equity share of Re 1 each.

#### Havells net profit up 40% to ₹723.39 cr

**New Delhi:** Consumer electrical goods maker Havells India Wednesday reported a 39.9 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to ₹723.39 crore in the quarter ended March 31. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of ₹517 crore in the January-March quarter a year ago, according to a regulatory filing by Havells India. Its revenue from operations inched up 2.47 per cent to ₹6,705.20 crore in the March quarter. It was ₹6,543.56 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal.

#### Tech Mahindra net profit up 16%

**New Delhi:** IT firm Tech Mahindra Wednesday reported a 16 per cent growth in its consolidated net profit to ₹1,353.8 crore for the January-March quarter of FY26. The company had registered a consolidated net profit of ₹1,166.7 crore in the same period of FY25. Its revenue from operations rose 12.6 per cent to ₹15,076.1 crore in Q4 FY26 compared to ₹13,384 crore in the year-ago period. On a sequential basis, profit and revenue rose 20.7 and 4.7 per cent, respectively.

#### HCLTech shares tank nearly 11%

**New Delhi:** Shares of IT major HCLTech Wednesday tumbled nearly 11 per cent after the company's March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. The stock tanked 10.85 per cent to settle at ₹1,285.20 on the BSE. During the day, it slumped 11 per cent to ₹1,281.55. At the NSE, the stock dropped 10.81 per cent to end at ₹1,285.30.

## RBI talks with global regulators, banks to review Mythos risks



*The central bank may seek direct engagement with Anthropic: Sources*

**Mumbai, April 22:** India's central bank is in talks with global regulators, Indian lenders and government officials to understand the potential risks posed by Anthropic's new artificial intelligence model Mythos, three sources said.

The Reserve Bank of India's preliminary assessment - just like that of global regulators - suggests Mythos could pose cybersecurity risks by accelerating the discovery and exploitation of software vulnerabilities, the sources, all familiar with the central bank's thinking, said.

Regulators in Asia, Europe and the United States have warned banks to review defenses and preparedness. In Japan, the financial watchdog will meet banks this week, while the Australian central bank said it is monitoring Mythos-related developments. RBI officials have over the past fortnight held consultations on Mythos-related risks with counterparts at the US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England in particular, according to one of the sources.

The RBI may seek direct engagement with Anthropic, the sources said.

"Globally, we are discussing with other countries and other regulators on what are the developments and what safeguards need to be taken," one of the sources said.

India's payment authority,

the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is trying to secure early access to Mythos alongside a small number of banks, to identify vulnerabilities and "day-zero" cyber risks ahead of any broader rollout, this source said.

However, such access may not be forthcoming as Anthropic's Mythos systems is hosted on strictly-controlled servers in the US and running tests on local data in foreign jurisdictions could prove challenging, said a fourth source aware of the matter.

Access to Mythos has been limited to a small number of organisations involved in maintaining key digital infrastructure in the US. Anthropic plans to provide Mythos access to European banks soon, Reuters reported earlier this week.

Email requests for comment sent to RBI and NPCI were not immediately answered.

The RBI is preparing broader guidelines for banks entering enterprise partnerships with advanced AI models, including Mythos and Anthropic's Claude family, as part of a longer-term strategy on AI adoption, according to two of the sources.

The discussions are at an early stage but the central bank will insist that all analytics based on data of Indian customers complies with RBI's domestic data localisation, the sources said.

The RBI data localisation rule, issued in 2018, requires all payment system providers in India to store end-to-end transaction data, including user information and payment messages, exclusively on servers located within India.

## Breach of budgeted target likely: BMI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 22:** India's fiscal deficit is likely to breach the budgeted target for current fiscal and hit 4.5 per cent of GDP as the government's policy response to the West Asia conflict could strain public finances, research firm BMI said Wednesday.

The government in 2026-27 Budget had projected a 4.3 per cent fiscal deficit, a tad lower than 4.4 per cent as per revised estimates for 2025-26.

BMI also expects the govern-



ment to introduce policies to redirect critical inputs to key industries, restrain business costs and improve financial support for firms.

BMI said it also expects the government to consider restrictions on exports of scarce

inputs such as helium and sulphur - used for producing semiconductor chips.

It said that since sulphur is also an important ingredient for making fertilisers, the government will strive to minimise disruptions to the agriculture sector, which employs 43 per cent of India's workforce.

The government will seek to restrain cost increases for businesses affected by Strait of Hormuz's closure. To this end, the central government has established a ₹1 lakh crore Economic Stabilisation Fund.

BMI estimates this will contribute 0.1 per cent of GDP to fiscal expenditure in 2026-27.

BMI had previously projected the Centre's fiscal deficit, the gap between revenue and expenditure, hitting 4.5 per cent of GDP.

"We are maintaining this forecast while acknowledging rising upside risks. The government's policy response to the Iran conflict could strain public finances," BMI said, adding it believes the government will continue its pursuit of long-term fiscal consolidation.

## Stock mkts snap 3-day rally

### Sensex tumbles 757 pts dragged by IT shares, jump in oil prices

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, April 22:** Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled nearly 1 per cent Wednesday, snapping a three-day gaining streak due to heavy selling in IT stocks and an uptick in crude oil prices.

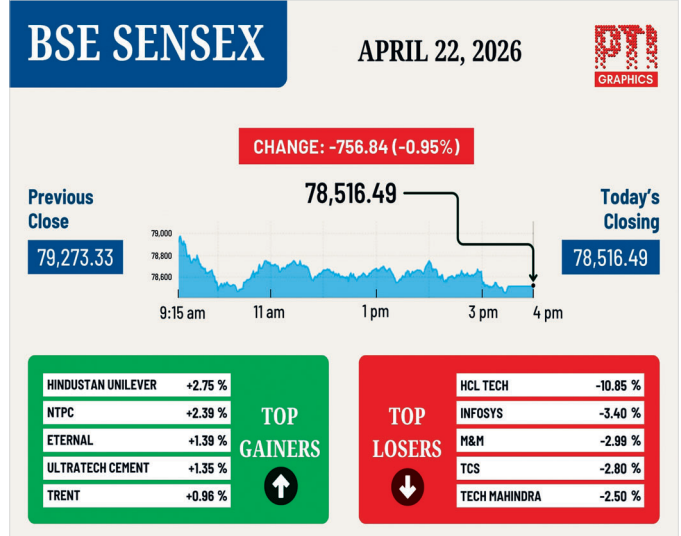
The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 756.84 points or 0.95 per cent to settle at 78,516.49. During the day, it slumped 831.03 points or 1.04 per cent to 78,442.30.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 198.50 points or 0.81 per cent to end at 24,378.10.

Foreign fund outflows and fears of prolonged instability in West Asia also dented market sentiment.

Among 30-Sensex firms, HCL Tech tumbled the most by 10.85 per cent after its March quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. HCL Tech reported a 4.20 per cent on-year rise in consolidated net profit to ₹4,488 crore for the March quarter, even as the management flagged a highly volatile demand environment shadowed by tariffs and softened discretionary spends, giving a FY27 growth guidance of 1-4 per cent.

Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra and ICICI Bank were also among the major laggards. Hindustan Unilever, NTPC, Eternal and Trent were



among the winners.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 1.26 per cent higher at USD 99.72 per barrel.

Indian equity markets traded with a clear negative bias throughout the session, weighed down by persistent geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Despite the ceasefire extension, the continued US blockade and the unresolved situation in the Strait of Hormuz kept energy markets elevated, Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹1,918.99 crore Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The primary trigger behind today's weakness was the resurgence of geopolitical uncertainty. Reports of stalled US-Iran

negotiations have reignited concerns over prolonged instability in West Asia, keeping risk appetite in check. This has also supported elevated crude oil prices, adding pressure on inflation expectations and currency stability, Hari Prasad K, Research Analyst and Founder, Livelong Wealth, said.

The BSE SmallCap Select index climbed 0.76 per cent, while MidCap Select index dipped 0.04 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, IT tanked 3.66 per cent, BSE Focused IT (3.54 per cent), Top 10 Banks (0.85 per cent), Financial Services (0.64 per cent) and Private Banks index (0.64 per cent).

Utilities jumped 2.48 per cent, Power (1.97 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (1.13 per cent), Capital Goods (1.11 per cent) and FMCG (0.98 per cent).

### WEST ASIA CRISIS

#### Govt mulls customs duty cut on induction cooktop components

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 22:** The government is considering cutting the customs duty on critical induction cooktop components to boost domestic manufacturing and address the price hike amid the West Asia crisis, an official said.

The commerce and industry ministry has also recommended reducing the GST on these cooktops from 18 per cent to 5 per cent to improve affordability, the official said.

The crisis has disrupted the movement of ships carrying oil and gas through the Strait of Hormuz, raising concerns over cooking gas supplies and prompting people to rush to buy induction heaters and compatible utensils.

Stakeholder consultations were held by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in coordination with the Department of Commerce and the Ministry of Power to address demand-supply challenges in the induction cooktop sector and assess immediate measures required to stabilise supply and prices.

#### Silver, gold tumble amid uncertainty over US-Iran talks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 22:** Gold prices fell by ₹300 to ₹1.57 lakh per 10 grams while silver plunged by ₹2,700 to ₹2.55 lakh per kg in the national capital Wednesday amid uncertainty over US-Iran peace negotiations.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, gold of 99.9 per cent purity slipped ₹300 to ₹1,57,000 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes).

Gold declined Wednesday after plans for a second round of US-Iran peace negotiations collapsed, despite President Donald Trump extending the ceasefire, Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

The absence of progress kept uncertainty elevated, supporting crude oil prices and the US dollar, while acting as a headwind for precious metals, he added.

Market participants will continue to respond to ongoing developments from both sides, with price movements reflecting a cautious wait-and-see approach until clearer signals emerge.

## BIZ BUZZ

### 'CII IWN NUA Odisha' event lauds women changemakers



**Bhubaneswar:** The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Indian Women Network (IWN), Odisha Chapter organised a programme titled 'CII IWN NUA Odisha' here April 21, bringing together women leaders, entrepreneurs, and grassroots changemakers from across the state. The programme was graced by Anu Garg, IAS, Chief Secretary of Odisha, who highlighted the critical role of women in shaping the state's growth trajectory. She encouraged greater participation of women entrepreneurs and professionals in economic development and emphasised strengthening ecosystems that support women-led enterprises, underscoring that women empowerment is key to inclusive and sustainable growth. Distinguished speakers in the event were Manikanta Naik, Vice Chairman, CII Odisha State Council and Managing Director, Tata Steel SEZ Ltd, Zubina Ali, Chairperson, CII IWN Odisha Chapter, and Snehaprava Das, Co-Chairperson, CII IWN Odisha Chapter. They shared their perspectives on women empowerment, highlighting the importance of collaboration, policy support, and capacity building to enhance women's participation across sectors. Conceptualised as 'Changemakers for NUA Odisha', the programme celebrated the spirit of womanhood and the transformative role of women leaders. The programme witnessed enthusiastic participation from women leaders, entrepreneurs, and grassroots-level social workers, reflecting a strong collective commitment towards advancing women empowerment in Odisha.

### Union Bank of India appoints new leadership in Bhubaneswar

**Bhubaneswar:** Union Bank of India has announced new leadership for its Odisha operations, appointing Sanjeev Ranjan Sahay as zonal head of the Bhubaneswar Zone and Tushara Kanta Kar as regional head



Sanjeev Ranjan Sahay  
Zonal Head



Tushara Kanta Kar  
Regional Head

of the Bhubaneswar Region. Sahay, who previously served as general manager of corporate communications at the bank's Mumbai headquarters, brings over 22 years of experience to the role. His career includes 16 years in field operations and six years in corporate administration across various regions, including Delhi-NCR, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. Sahay now oversees six regional offices and aims to bolster Odisha's economic development through enhanced customer service. Kar joins the Bhubaneswar Region following his tenure as deputy general manager in the Gandhinagar Zone. With 22 years of experience in cities such as Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad, Kar also served as a senior manager in Salem in 2009. In his new role, he plans to prioritise digital banking platforms and growth in the retail, MSME, and self-help group sectors. Together, these appointments are expected to strengthen the bank's operational footprint and digital service delivery throughout the region.

### Radha Gobinda Roy Grandson Jewellers extends offer period

**Cuttack:** Radha Gobinda Roy Grandson Jewellers, Cuttack has extended the duration of the ongoing special Akshaya Tritiya offer until April 30 in view of heavy demand from customers. The offer is valid at Nimchouri and CDA Sector-7 stores of the brand. Under this offer, the brand provides complete business transparency, additional insurance facilities, full value on gold exchange, certified diamonds and confirmed buy-back guarantee. Similarly, HUID-916 BIS hallmarked jewellery is also available at making charges of 8.99% per gram. Various types of necklace designs including Kerala, Turkish, and Antique Lappa are available in the showroom. Other attractive items include Cuban chains, Choko, Indo-choko, Volix, Lotus, and handmade chains. Sourav Roy, showroom proprietor said, "The offer period has been extended seeing the good response and demand from customers." Along with this, Shubhashish Roy, on behalf of the showroom, expressed that providing modern designs with excellent customer service is their primary goal.



## War triggers can crunch: Diet Coke loses its fizz in India

*Cans shortage due to Iran war hitting supply chain, say sources, as Diet Coke is sold only in cans in India*

REUTERS

**New Delhi, April 22:** The Iran war has caused a shortage of Diet Coke in India, where it is sold only in aluminium cans that have run short because of delayed shipments from the Gulf caused by the Iran war.

The Gulf accounts for around 9% of global aluminium production, which has been trapped

since the end of February by Iran's de facto blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

While most soft drinks are sold in India both in plastic bottles and cans, Diet Coke is only sold in cans. Two Coca-Cola distributors told Reuters Wednesday the company had notified them it was rationing supplies or not fulfilling some orders due to a can shortage caused by the war.

"We've been placing orders but have been told there is a shortage due to war," said Sanjay, one of the distributors, who declined to give his last name. Coca-Cola declined to comment.



### RATIONING DIET COKE

The drinks giant counts India as a major growth market.

It reported sales of 50 billion rupees (\$533 million) in 2024-25, its highest since at least

2021. Sugar-free products are a growth category: India's reduced-sugar food and beverage market will be worth \$4.7 billion by 2030, more than double its size from 2023, Grand View Research says.

An industry executive said the Diet Coke shortage was due to some consignments of imported cans being delayed. Production of cans and bottles in India has also become more expensive because of an energy shortage.

"There is some production happening, but it's being rationed as the company can't meet all the demand," the executive said.

In northern Uttar Pradesh state, grocer Ashish Saxena said orders for Diet Coke had been delayed.

"Earlier, orders were delivered within five-six hours. The company is now pushing for Coke Zero which comes in a plastic bottle and is very reasonable if compared with other products," he said.

Some social media users have been posting memes on Instagram to share their disappointment over Diet Coke shortages. One video post by user Devanshu Saran shows a man running to an Indian supermarket and buying more than a dozen cans.

# RR beat LSG by 40 runs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lucknow, April 22:** Lucknow Super Giants batters, led by their mercurial skipper Rishabh Pant, let Mohammed Shami's brilliant bowling effort go down the drain with an embarrassing 40-run defeat at the hands of an equally profligate Rajasthan Royals in an IPL match here Wednesday.

Chasing a target of 160, LSG huffed and puffed before being shot out for 119 in 18 overs after the slide started with their skipper Pant playing the most ugly sweep-cum-hoick to let the momentum slip after Shami, along with Mohsin Khan and Prince Yadav, had set up the platform for the hosts.

The decision to use a player like Himmat Singh as 'Impact Sub' will be questioned for the longest time as the player in nearly a decade of domestic cricket never won a SMAT game for Delhi with a career strike rate of 135 and less than a six per game.

The win took Royals to the second spot with 10 points from seven games despite a shoddy batting effort.

Royals would be indebted to their 'OG' Ravindra Jadeja (43 no off 29 balls and 1/29) whose all-round effort went a long way in securing the win. His partnership with Shubham Dubey got them some kind of a total and then with the ball, he flung the data analysts' match-up card to remove Nicholas Pooran.

While Royals' batting has been inconsistent this season, the bowlers have been on the money as Rishabh Pant was dismissed by Nandre Burger (2/27), and Jofra Archer (3/20)

## INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE



accounted for Aiden Markram with a rising delivery. This was after Ayush Badoni was unfortunately run-out.

Mitchell Marsh (55 off 41 balls) held the innings together even as likes of Nicholas Pooran and Himmat Singh went back playing some irresponsible shots.

It was left to Mukul Choudhary, who still is a work in progress and haven't yet learnt how to tackle bouncers that grip off the surface.

Earlier, Shami delivered a couple of beauties while Mohsin snuffed out teen sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi to restrict

**TODAY'S MATCH**  
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Star Sports channels & JioHotstar

Royals to a meagre 159 for 6 after opting to bowl.

This is the third time in three games that Royals' top order has imploded and things have spiralled southwards for the franchise.

The experience and class of Shami (2/30 in 4 overs) the Test bowler stood apart while the

lanky Mohsin (2/17 in 4 overs) was extremely disciplined, getting the ball to rear up and seam at the same time from awkward lengths.

The duo between them removed the four best batters of Royals -- Shami getting rid of Yashasvi Jaiswal (22) and Dhruv Jurel (0) off successive deliveries and Mohsin removing Sooryavanshi (8 off 11 balls) and Shimron Hetmyer (22 off 18 balls) in two different spells.

The ever-improving Prince Yadav (2/29 in 4 overs) proved to be the ideal third dimension to the attack with his moving deliveries and timely dismissals.

## IPL STANDINGS

TEAMS	P	W	L	NRR	PTS
PBKs	6	5	0	1.420	11
RR	7	5	2	0.790	10
RCB	6	4	2	1.171	8
SRH	7	4	3	0.820	8
DC	6	3	3	0.130	6
GT	6	3	3	-0.821	6
MI	6	2	4	0.067	4
CSK	6	2	4	-0.780	4
LSG	7	2	5	-1.277	4
KKR	7	1	5	-0.879	3

Mayank Yadav (0/56 in 4 overs), returning from a very long rehabilitation, predictably looked the only bowler out of rhythm.

Skipper Riyan Parag, the debatable choice for captaincy based on cricketering merit, with a sequence of scores that reads 14 no, 8, 20, 3, 4, 12, 20, has proved to be more of a liability for Royals.

The most important part was stacking up the dot ball count -- between Shami (15) and Mohsin (11). They cumulatively bowled 26 dot balls. Even Prince had an impressive 13 dot balls in his kitty.

However, the day would be remembered for the artist that Shami has been with both red and white ball in his hand.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
Rajasthan Royals: 159 for 6 in 20 overs (Ravindra Jadeja 43 not out; Mohsin Khan 2/17) beat Lucknow Super Giants: 119 all out in 18 overs (Mitchell Marsh 55; Jofra Archer 3/20) by 40 runs

## ISSF JUNIOR WORLD CUP

# SHOOTERS PICK 3 SILVER, 1 BRONZE



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Cairo, April 22:** India's junior shooters picked up four more medals, including three silver and a bronze, on day two of the ISSF Junior World Cup here Wednesday.

India are currently third on the medal tally as athletes from Kazakhstan and Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN) won four of the five gold on offer on competition day two.

Rohit Kanyan gave India their first silver of the day in the 50m rifle prone men junior event with an effort of 615.8, just 0.5 behind Kazakhstan's gold winning Oleg Noskov.

Sejal Kamble then topped the junior women's 25m pistol qualifiers with a score of 580 and then went on to finish second in the final with 27 hits. AIN's Katsiaryna Ivanova took gold with 31 hits in the eight five-shot series final.

India secured a second double podium in the competition after Shiva Narwal and Chirag Sharma's heroics on day

one, with Raj Chandra shooting 580 and Abhinav Deshwal 578, for silver and bronze respectively in the 25m pistol men junior event.

Kazakhstan took gold again with Kirill Tsukanov shooting 581.

In the junior women's skeet, Risham Guron (24,23,21,23,24) qualified second with a score of 115 and then finished seventh in the final, bowing out with seven hits to her name after the first 12 shots.

Varvara Zaitseva of the Individual Neutral Athletes won gold in the event with a world record score of 33 hits out of 40.

In the junior men's skeet, Ishaan Singh Libra made the final eight with a 118 (25,23,22,24,24) giving him sixth place and then improved by two in the final to just miss out on a medal.

He exited at the 28-shot mark with 24 hits. Briton Denzil Jago Grose (31) bested Italian Marco Coco (30) by one hit to win a first ISSF junior world cup gold in the event.

# Pugilists earn TOPS promotion

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, April 22:** Four Indian boxers, Preeti Pawar, Priya, Arundhati Chaudhary, and Sachin, have been elevated to the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) Core group after their standout performances at the 2026 Asian Boxing Elite Championships. Meanwhile, three others have been added to the Development group. This decision was made during the 172nd Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) meeting Wednesday.

Preeti (54kg), Priya (60kg), and Arundhati (70kg) earned gold medals at the continental meet in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, earlier this month, while Sachin (60kg) took silver. The Mission Olympic Cell, responsible for evaluating athletes' performances under the TOPS framework, made its decision after a thorough review of re-



cent results, world rankings, and performance progress.

Preeti is scheduled to compete in the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the Asian Games in Japan later this year. She will be joined by Jaismine (57kg), Priya (W60kg), Arundhati (W70kg), and Sachin (M60kg).

## India selected for FIFA Women's Development Programme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 22:** India was Wednesday included among 12 countries selected by world football governing body FIFA for its Women's Development Programme. The other countries are Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Scotland, Canada, Mexico, Finland, Ghana, Jordan, Lithuania, and Paraguay.

India's inclusion in the programme was confirmed by FIFA after an initial application by All India Football Federation (AIFF), which was followed by a detailed presentation of the commercial strategy and future plans. The programme will be held online from May to October 2026, the AIFF said. The course itself will be tailored by FIFA for the various stakeholders in women's football across the country.

# Cue-prince Padhy clinches title

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 22:** The State witnessed an exciting finish to the BSAO All Odisha Open 10-Red Snooker Championship 2026 as Asutosh Padhy, fondly called the "Prince of Odisha," clinched the title with a commanding 4-2 victory over Aakash Mohapatra here Wednesday. The final, held at 6 Pockets Club, showcased high-quality cue action, with Padhy demonstrating composure and precision across frames (53-41, 24-35, 57-06, 55-37, 33-34, 56-01).

Padhy walked away with the champion's prize of ₹15,000 and a winner's medal, while Mohapatra secured ₹7,500 as runner-up. The tournament also highlighted strong performances from semifinalists Dr Rakesh Roshan Pradhan and Capt Chetan Anand, who earned ₹5,000 each. A notable achievement came

## 10-RED SNOOKER C'SHIP



from Nishant Biswal, whose 44-point break stood as the highest of the championship, earning him ₹2,500.

The prize distribution ceremony was attended by key officials including BSAO Secretary Sameer Ali, Tournament Director Govind Sharma, and club owner Chetan Anand.

Organising executive Ritwick Mohanty also played a key role in the event's success.

President Tara Ranjan Pattnaik congratulated all participants, while Govind Sharma expressed gratitude to players, supporters, and media for making the championship a grand success.

## LEICESTER DISASTER

# From PL glory to 3rd-tier fall

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, April 22:** Former Premier League champion Leicester will be playing in the third tier of English soccer next season.

Leicester, which sealed the unlikely title win of the Premier League era in 2016 at odds of 5,000-1, needed a victory Tuesday to maintain hope of avoiding relegation but drew 2-2 with Hull.

The midlands club, which also won the FA Cup in 2021 and played in England's top flight last season, is second to last in the second-tier Championship.

In a statement to fans, Leicester chairman Aiyawatt Srivaddhanaprabha, said responsibility sat with him.

"There are no excuses," he said. "We have experienced the highest highs and now the lowest lows, and the pain is shared by all of us. I am truly sorry for the disappointment we have caused."

Relegation comes after Leicester was docked six points in February for breaching the English Football League's financial rules when it earned promotion in the 2023-24 season. Earlier this month, it lost its bid to overturn that punishment, leaving it mired in the relegation zone.

It is a dramatic fall after Leicester's fairy-tale-like title triumph 10 years ago.

It had spent the 2014-15 season battling relegation from the top flight and only an unlikely winning run in the final weeks of that campaign.

What followed was a remarkable title charge that saw it finish 10 points clear of Arsenal at the top of the standings.

In 142 years of existence, Leicester has played just one season in the third tier of English soccer. It won the League One title in 2008-09 and was promoted back to the Championship.

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