



Power of cinema
 Actor Tamannaah Bhatia believes that films are meant to evoke intense emotions in audience

LEISURE | P2



Landmark step
 Thailand approves a marriage equality Bill that would make it the first country in Southeast Asia to legalise equal rights for marriage partners of any gender

INTERNATIONAL | P10



CAD narrows
 India's current account deficit (CAD) narrows down to \$10.5 billion or 1.2 per cent of GDP in the October-December quarter

BUSINESS | P11



Delhi take on Royals
 Rishabh Pant looks to shake off rustiness when Delhi Capitals vie for their maiden victory of the 2024 IPL season against Rajasthan Royals

SPORTS | P12

Youth dies in Joda police custody

POST NEWS NETWORK

Joda, March 27: Tension prevailed in this area of Keonjhar district Wednesday after a youth in the custody of Joda police died under mysterious circumstances, Tuesday.

The deceased, identified as Dinesh Naik, 23, of Birikala village, was arrested on charge of raping a minor girl.

Sources said Joda police picked up Dinesh from his house Sunday and held him in custody at the police station. However, he tried to commit suicide in the police station Tuesday following which police personnel rushed him to Tata Steel Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead.

Apprehending law and order situation, a posse of police force has been deployed near the police station as well as on the hospital premises.

Police registered a case of unnatural death and sent the body for post-mortem. When contacted, Barbil SDPO Priya Ranjan Chhotray said that the reason behind Naik taking the extreme step is yet unclear.

However, on the direction of the SP, a probe has been launched to look into various aspects of the case, Chhotray added.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



How can utter such a vile, venomous statement? And you're not even from the ruling party!

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VAIATION
SENSEX	72996.31 ↑ 526.01
NIFTY	22123.65 ↑ 118.95
DOLLAR	83.35 ↑ ₹0.04
EURO	90.28 ↓ ₹0.15
GOLD	₹66,310 ↑ ₹196
SILVER	₹74,474 ↓ ₹44

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	36.1°C	36.5°C
Min Temp	24.2°C	24.0°C
Humidity	85%	78%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST
 MAINLY CLEAR SKY



PERILOUS JOURNEY: Baltimore's 2.6 km-long Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed after a container ship manned entirely by an Indian crew collided with one of its supports early Tuesday morning AP/PTI

6 feared dead as ship hits Baltimore bridge

AGENCIES

Washington, March 27: Baltimore's 2.6 km-long Francis Scott Key Bridge, built in 1977, collapsed after a container ship manned entirely by an Indian crew collided with one of its supports Tuesday early morning, possibly killing six people and bringing one of the most important ports in the northeast US to a grinding halt. This reminds of the March 23, 2021 incident when the Suez Canal was blocked for six days by 'Ever Given' - a container ship with all-Indian crew aboard - ran aground in the canal. Egyptian authorities had then said that "technical or human errors" might have been involved.

In Baltimore incident, officials said the Singapore-flagged ship 'Dali' suffered a "power issue" and issued a distress call moments before it crashed with the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

According to an American Pilots Association officer, the ship suffered a total blackout before the collision with the bridge, CNN reported.

Meanwhile, a team of US investigators have boarded the container ship and recovered its data recorder, a top official said Wednesday as authorities probed the cause of the dramatic accident. At least eight people went into the water. Six others are presumed dead after the collision, said sources.

No relief for Kejriwal

There is no immediate relief for Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was arrested March 21 and subsequently remanded to the custody of Enforcement Directorate in connection with a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam', as the Delhi High Court Wednesday refused to interfere with his arrest and asked the probe agency to file its response before April 2. The court categorically said that it is duty-bound to hear both sides fairly keeping in mind the principles of natural justice. All eyes are now on April 3 judgement of the court.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: The Delhi High Court Wednesday refused to interfere with the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam'. Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma issued notice on the AAP leader's petition challenging his arrest and the subsequent remand to ED's custody, and asked the agency to file its response to it as well as his plea for interim relief of release before April 2.

The judge, in the order, clarified the matter would be taken



up for final disposal April 3 and no adjournment shall be granted.

"This Court deems it appropriate to issue notice of the main writ petition as well as application for grant of interim relief, returnable on 03.04.2024," the court said.

"The Directorate of Enforcement will ensure that replies are filed to the main petition as well as the application for interim release of the petitioner by 02.04.2024 and copies of the same are provided in digitised form as well as hard copy to the learned counsel for the petitioner," ordered the court.

Kejriwal, who was arrested March 21 and subsequently remanded to the ED's custody till March 28 by a Delhi court, sought his immediate release on the ground that the arrest was illegal. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Kejriwal, contended the arrest of a sitting chief minister on the cusp of elections was against the basic structure of the Constitution.

"Object of the arrest was not to find material but to disable me

India summons US diplomat

NEW DELHI: India Wednesday summoned a senior US diplomat and lodged a strong protest against a US state department official's remarks on the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Ministry of External Affairs officials summoned the Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Gloria Berbera at its office in South Block here. The meeting lasted for more than 30 minutes. Reports had it that a US state department official had said that Washington "encouraged a fair, transparent and timely legal process for chief minister Kejriwal".

and my party. My prayer is, release me now," he argued.

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, said the "bulky" petition was served upon them only Tuesday, and time should be given to bring their stand on record.

For interim relief as well, appropriate time should be given to respond, he said. On Friday, the trial court had remanded Kejriwal to the ED's custody till March 28 "for his detailed and sustained interrogation". The ED arrested Kejriwal hours after the High Court refused to grant him protection.

P9

Holi mishaps: 12 meet watery grave

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Holi, the festival of colours, love and spring, has brought tragedies for several families in Odisha with at least 12 persons meeting watery grave in six districts while taking bath in various water bodies. While eight persons drowned in Cuttack, Balasore, Jagatsinghpur, Ganjam and Sambalpur districts, Tuesday, four more persons met similar fate in four districts, Wednesday.

While three students drowned in Cuttack, two persons died in Balasore and one each in Jagatsinghpur, Ganjam and Sambalpur districts, sources said. The incidents took place following Holi celebrations since Tuesday morning in various villages of these districts, a police officer said. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem, he said.

On Wednesday, as many as four persons drowned and one went missing in separate incidents in Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Balasore, and Sambalpur districts.

Meanwhile, some people were injured after two groups reportedly clashed at Bhogada village in Cuttack district while they were celebrating Holi, officials said. Though the exact reason for the clash was not immediately known, it appears to be a result of previous enmity, they said.

Security has been bolstered in the area.

BJD names 15 LS, 72 Assembly candidates

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik Wednesday declared the names of 15 candidates for Lok Sabha and 72 nominees for Assembly elections.

Patnaik himself will contest from Hinjili Assembly segment in Ganjam district.

BJD's second list of six candidates for the Lok Sabha seats came barely two hours after Patnaik through a video message, announced the first list of nine Lok Sabha and 72 Assembly candidates.

In the second list, former Mumbai Police Commissioner Arup Patnaik has been fielded from Puri Lok Sabha seat against BJP's Sambit Patra, while Santrupt Mishra will contest from Cuttack LS seat.

Patnaik re-nominated three sitting MPs - Sarmistha Sethi (Jajpur), Rajashree Mallick (Jagatsinghpur) and Achyuta Samanta (Kandhamal). Abinash Samal has been named as the BJD's candidate for Dhenkanal LS constituency.

In the first list, Patnaik had named nine candidates - Lambodar Nial (Kalahandi), Pranab Prakash Das



(Sambalpur), Dilip Tirkey (Sundargarh), minister Sudam Marndi (Mayurbhanj), Anshuman Mohanty (Kendrapara), Pradeep Kumar Majhi (Nabarangpur), Manmath Routray (Bhubaneswar), Kausalya Hikaka (Koraput) and Ranjita Sahu (Aska).

The BJD has dropped six sitting MPs. They are: Pinaki Mishra (Puri), Mahesh Sahu (Dhenkanal), Bharturhari Mahtab, who recently resigned from BJD, (Cuttack), Anubhav Mohanty (Kendrapara), Ramesh Majhi (Nabarangpur) and Pramila Bisoyi (Aska).

Of the 15 LS candidates, four are women. Of the 72 Assembly candidates, 13 are new faces and 12 are women candidates. The BJD president has re-nominated most of the ministers and Speaker Pramila Mallik.

P3

State agrees to join hands with Centre for PM SHRI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: Odisha government has agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Centre for implementing PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) scheme, the Ministry of Education said Wednesday.

With the coastal state agreeing to implement the scheme, West Bengal, Kerala and Delhi are the only states which have not signed an MoU with the Union Ministry of Education to have such schools.

"The Odisha government has taken a far-reaching decision to sign an MoU with the Ministry

of Education, Government of India, to implement the PM SHRI scheme. PM SHRI schools are NEP 2020 exemplar schools," the Ministry of Education wrote on X. The MoU will be signed by the state before the beginning of the 2024-25 academic year. This partnership between the Odisha government and the Ministry of Education signifies stronger Centre-state relations, it said.

PM SHRI scheme targets to upgrade 14,500 schools and is expected to benefit 1.8 million students. It also aims to ensure these schools serve as model institutes and encapsulate the spirit of National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.

Saudi Arabia to debut in Miss Universe pageant

AGENCIES

Riyadh, March 27: Marking a significant stride in Saudi Arabia's modernisation efforts, the Islamic country will participate in the Miss Universe pageant for the first time. Rummy Alqahtani, a beauty pageant veteran and an influencer, has announced this news on her Instagram handle that she will be representing the kingdom in one of the most popular pageants in the world.

Alqahtani shared glamorous pictures of herself. In the picture, model can be seen wearing a strapless sequined gown.

Along with the photos, she wrote, "I am honoured to



Saudi Arabia's Rummy Alqahtani has joined several global pageants, with the latest one being Miss and Mrs Global Asian in Malaysia a few weeks ago

participate in the Miss Universe 2024 competition. This is the first participation of Saudi Arabia in the Miss Universe competition," she wrote in Arabic on Instagram.

According to Khaleej Times, born in Riyadh, Alqahtani is no stranger to the spotlight. She has joined numerous global pageants, with the latest one being Miss and Mrs Global Asian in

Malaysia a few weeks ago. Last year, Miss Nicaragua Sheynnis Palacios was crowned Miss Universe 2023. For the first time, a contestant from Nicaragua became the winner of the contest while Antonia Porsild from Thailand and Moraya Wilson from Australia secured the second and third positions respectively.

The organisers of the event had announced last year that the next edition will be held in Mexico. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia made global headlines in 2018 when it lifted the decades-old ban on women driving, marking a significant milestone in the kingdom's efforts towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

leisure



KATIE PRICE WARNS YOUNG WOMEN TO AVOID BOTOX

British model Katie Price has warned young women to avoid filler and Botox. She's also insisted they should think carefully if they are considering cosmetic surgery because it can damage their bodies.

CHRISTINA APPEGATE REGRETS LYING ABOUT HER BREAST CANCER BATTLE

Hollywood actress Christina Applegate has admitted she regrets lying about how she felt during her battle with breast cancer - admitting she put on a brave face but was really crying herself to sleep. The 52-year-old was diagnosed with the disease back in 2008 and underwent a double mastectomy.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES

You will be the focus of everyone's attention today - for your visual appeal or for your abilities. Ganesha suggests that you should make the best of the opportunity and recharge yourself. You can accomplish quite a lot with the energy you gain.

TAURUS

This day could be full of surprises, mostly unpleasant, fears Ganesha. Nothing is likely to turn out as planned and expected. There will be sharp and sudden twist and turns, unexpected shocks and setbacks all day long. You will, however, with the grace and blessings of the Almighty, manage to stay steady and unruffled, and move ahead.

GEMINI

You will be able to express your thoughts and opinions to the people you come in contact with today. They will also reciprocate and echo your feelings and emotions. This will give you validation and satisfaction. The day should be filled with fun and entertainment overall, says Ganesha.

CANCER

Your career will reach a decisive moment. You can expect a transfer, promotion or pay hike. Alongside your responsibilities will also increase. A chance of new job is also indicated. You can reject a tempting job offer.

LEO

You will spend an enjoyable day with your favourite relatives and friends. In the office also, you will be afforded rare cooperation from all your colleagues. Financial gains are indicated. It is a good time for lovers, who will experience an intimate bond with their partners, says Ganesha.

VIRGO

Business and pleasure will be well balanced. Ganesha says you will enjoy the party which will seem endless today. Your monetary outflow will be in direct proportion to the time you spend just lazing around. However, Ganesha advises you to spend sensibly and not to worry about it.

LIBRA

Ganesha says those of you in the field of business will find this to be a good time for them. In any work that you undertake your vision and ability will be showcased. You will have to spend more time at your workplace. Ganesha says you should try and maintain a balance between your work and your family.

SCORPIO

You go on a shopping spree and that too with your beloved. This may be quite therapeutic for your relationship. You may be just happy to use your bargaining skills to the optimum. Spending lavishly, first on shopping and then on sumptuous dinner to treat your taste buds. What more one wants in life!

SAGITTARIUS

A tiring day is in store for you today. Find yourself labouring worse than Hercules. The positive outcome would be that you would lose a few extra calories. But late in the day, a nice quiet time with family and friends would relieve you of all the stress.

CAPRICORN

Everything you do today will be driven by the desire to meet the expectations of your family members, says Ganesha. For those of you pursuing studies, pending projects will finally get completed, and you will look forward to taking up new assignments. Giving free rein to your imagination will help you excel in areas of your interest, but don't go overboard or else you may lose touch with reality.

AQUARIUS

You will receive some good news today. Whatever has been in the pipe line may come out in the open and you'll see the desired output, feels Ganesha. Courageous and patient, you can deal with the toughest of challenges with an ease and Ganesha gives a pat on your back for that.

PISCES

You will work hard to organize your day to day routine but due to the ill alignment of the planets you will not be able to sort things out successfully today. Ganesha advises you to be patient and let things be as they are but also to hold on to the sentiments of change.

Fatima: Don't let the world dim your light

Mumbai: Actress Fatima Sana Shaikh recently started a healthy interactive session with her followers on epilepsy awareness, with an aim to share her experiences along with offering encouragement, and delving into the insights on maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Through an interactive *Ask-Me-Anything* session on Instagram, the *Dangal* actress engaged in a candid conversation with her followers, encouraging them to open up about their concerns and queries regarding epilepsy. During the session, Fatima inspired the audience to approach the disorder with resilience and a positive mindset. When someone asked about dealing with epilepsy and her advice on it, Fatima shared, "Don't let the world dim your light. It can be a tough and scary journey but you are not alone. Join support groups. Talk about your condition. Don't be ashamed of something you have no control over. You aren't lacking in any way. And eventually everything will be alright. Just be kind to yourself."

Apart from this, the actress also advised one of the fans to pack all the travel must-haves including prescribed meds before taking off on the trip.

In yet another post, the actress was seen offering support to a teenager who is afraid to open up about her epilepsy to her professor. Many of Fatima's fans also showcased their love and shared 'more power to you' messages dedicating to the actress.

AGENCIES



Aditi, Siddharth get hitched in temple!

Mumbai: Actors Aditi Rao Hydari and Siddharth have reportedly tied the knot secretly in a temple in Wanaparthy, Telangana.

According to reports, the two got married in a quiet ceremony but have not made any official announcement yet.

The event took place Wednesday morning at the Sri Ranganayakaswamy Temple.

Many regional news portals have carried reports confirming the news.

The actors began dating after working on the 2021 film *Maha Samudram*. However, the two always kept their relationship away from the public eye.

It was earlier this year, when

the *Wazir* actress took to social media to confirm their relationship.

Aditi was first reported to be married to Satyadeep Mishra. However, she never confirmed her marital status. It was in 2013 she revealed that the two have gone their separate ways.

Siddharth was seen in films such as *Aayutha Ezhuthu*, *Nuvvostanante Nenoddantana*, *Rang De Basanti*, and *Chashme Baddoor* to name a few.

IAN5



A FILE PHOTO

'Maybe we're living in a bubble of our own'

Mumbai: Tamannaah Bhatia, who has worked in multiple film industries, believes that a film be-

comes a success story only if it is able to generate reactions from the audience. She says, "Cinema is largely meant to make you feel something intensely. Films are all about intensity because, after all, that's what connects with the

audience - it can be intense joy, horror or pain. If a show or a film makes you feel something intensely, then it is likely to become successful. Eventually, these films are doing the numbers. Maybe we are living in a bubble of our own, or maybe we are not looking at things from a global perspective."

Pointing to filmmaker Martin Scorsese's *Killers Of The Flower Moon*, she says, "When Martin Scorsese makes a film like this where they are talking about a certain land and character, Leonardo DiCaprio's role cannot be burdened by what the audience will think (from a moral perspective)."

She concludes by saying, "Films are a large source of entertainment in our country. As Indians, we have reached somewhere with our films. We really made our country proud. I am trying to actually push the envelope and make (be a part of) films where filmmakers have a voice and they are voicing it (through their films)."



AGENCIES

Celebs' herbal Holi in City



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar: With the celebration of Holi resulting in large-scale pollution of air, soil and water, more people are now opting to observe it in an eco-friendly manner.

Celebrities of the City have also joined in the campaign with actress Swapna Pati leading it from the front.

In fact, her organisation, Swapnapati Foundation, started the trend of celebrating herbal Holi about 13 years ago. She launched the drive first in Bhubaneswar and gradually took it to other states, claimed Pati.

To popularise the practice, the foundation celebrated eco-friendly Holi this year in the presence of Hindi film actors like Sanjay Mishra and Deepraj

Rana. Actors from the Odia film industry, such as Divya Mohanty, Suryamaye Mohapatra and Rajesh Deo and Bollywood singer Shahzad Ali and DJ Saheba also came on-board.

The event is organised every year with the objective of making Holi chemical-free, said Pati.

More than a thousand people were part of the festival this year, according to a report.

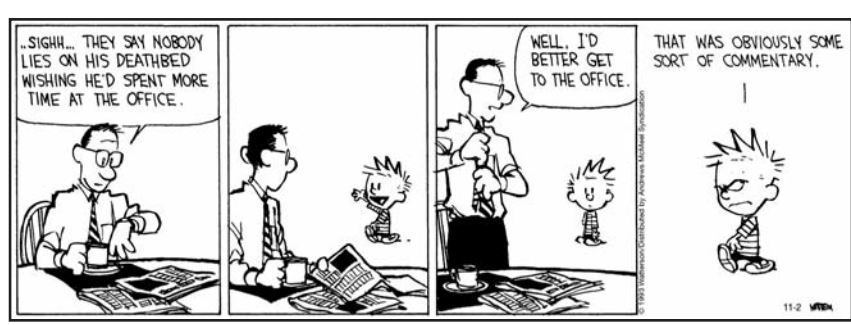
Several other Odia film personalities also celebrated the festival organically, and they included Prakruti Mishra, her father Manmath Mishra, Ananya Mishra, Supriya Nayak, Dipanwita Dashmohapatra, and stand-up comic Satyabrat Mohapatra.

Among others, Tamanna, Poonam Mishra, Jhilik Bhattacharjee, Bhoomika Das and others also celebrated the festival with their dear ones.

PEANUTS



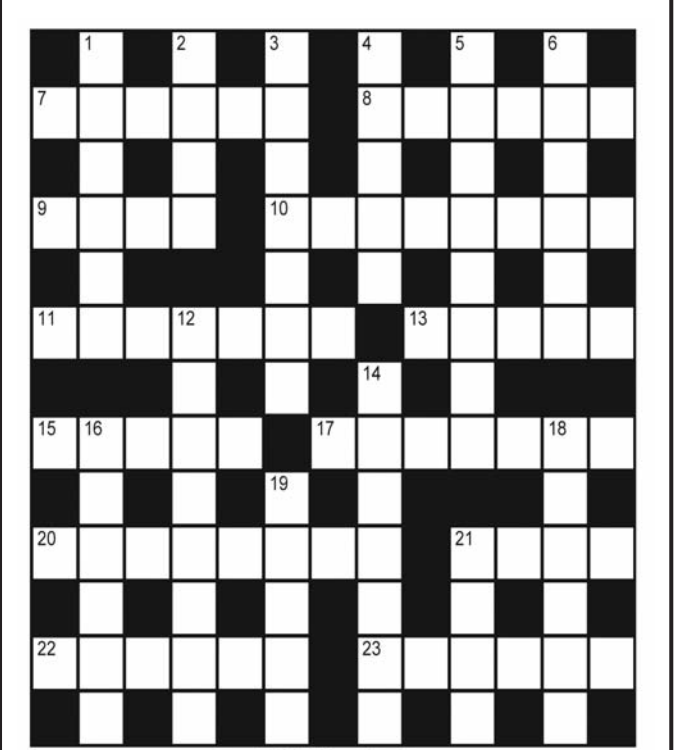
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



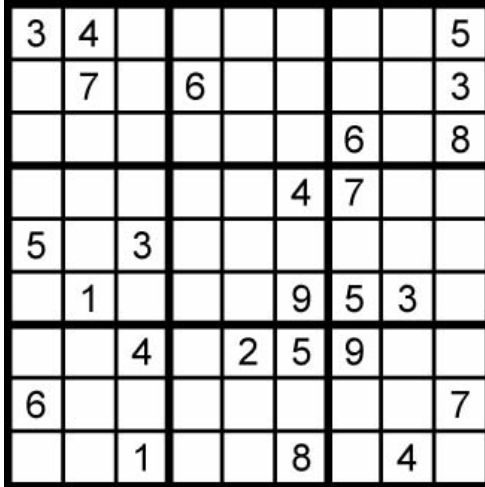
FUN post CROSSWORD



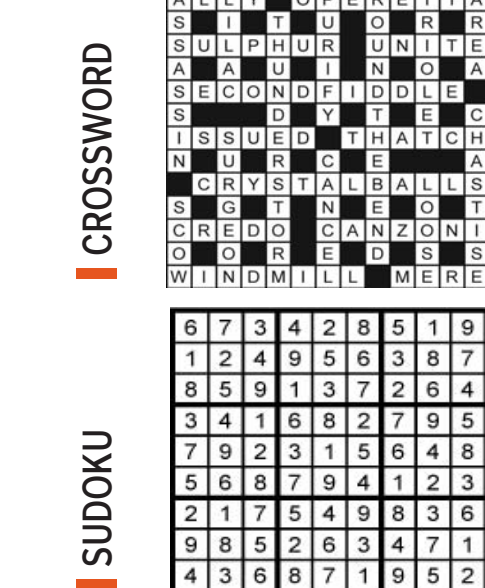
- Across
- 7 Field of activity
 - 8 Bloody Mary garnish
 - 9 Cloak
 - 10 Cyberspace
 - 11 Escape
 - 13 Combine
 - 15 Mooring
 - 17 Speech
 - 20 Not an island
 - 21 Detest
 - 22 Breed of cattle
 - 23 Casket
- Down
- 1 Narcotic
 - 2 DNA segment
 - 3 Water bird
 - 4 Intense
 - 5 Single-reed woodwind
 - 6 Pressing
 - 12 Amaze
 - 14 Forecast
 - 16 Mistake fixer
 - 18 Secure
 - 19 Forest god
 - 21 Blow hard and loudly

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

downtown

IN SYNC

Artistes perform a play 'Tarpani' at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar on the occasion of World Theatre Day, Wednesday



COOLING OFF: Puri beach witnesses a huge footfall of tourists, Wednesday

PIC: YAGNESWAR MOHANTY

BJD'S 15 LS, 72 ASSEMBLY CANDIDATES

BJD president Naveen Patnaik Wednesday declared the names of 15 candidates for the Lok Sabha and 72 for the Assembly elections. Of the 15 Lok Sabha candidates, four are women. Of the 72 Assembly candidates, 13 are new faces and 12 are women candidates. The party has dropped six sitting MPs. Patnaik himself will contest from the Hinjili Assembly segment in Ganjam. Odisha has 21 Lok Sabha seats and 147 Assembly constituencies for which the elections will be held simultaneously in four phases starting May 13.

SR NO	LOK SABHA CONSTITUENCY	CANDIDATE
1	Sambalpur	Pranab Prakash Das
2	Puri	Arup Patnaik
3	Cuttack	Santrupt Mishra
4	Jajpur	Sarmistha Sethi
5	Jagatsinghpur	Rajashree Mallick
6	Kandhamal	Achyuta Samanta
7	Dhenkanal	Abinash Samal
8	Kalahandi	Lambodar Nial
9	Sundargarh	Dilip Tirkey
10	Mayurbhanj	Sudam Marndi
11	Kendrapara	Ansuman Mohanty
12	Nabarangpur	Pradip Kumar Majhi
13	Bhubaneswar	Manmath Routray
14	Koraput	Kausalya Hikaka
15	Aska	Ranjita Sahu

SR NO	ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY	BJD CANDIDATE	SR NO	ASSEMBLY CONSTITUENCY	BJD CANDIDATE
1	Bisam Cuttack	Jagannath Saraka	37	Bhawanipatna	Latika Nayak
2	Gunupur	Raghunath Gamango	38	G Udyagiri	Saluga Pradhan
3	Rayagada	Anusaya Majhi	39	Kantamal	Mahidhar Rana
4	Bargarh	Debesh Acharya	40	Boudh	Pradip Amat
5	Bijepur	Rita Sahu	41	Baramba	Debi Prasad Mishra
6	Atabira	Snehangini Churia	42	Banki	Debi Ranjan Tripathy
7	Bhatli	Susant Singh	43	Athagarh	Ranendra P Swain
8	Jaleswar	Aswini Patra	44	Cuttack Choudwar	Sauvik Biswal
9	Basta	Subasini Jena	45	Niali	Pramod Kumar Mallik
10	Bhandaripokhari	Sanjeeb Mallik	46	Cuttack Sadar	Candra Sarathi Behera
11	Bhadrak	Prafulla Samal	47	Patkura	Arabinda Mohapatra
12	Basudevpur	Bishnubrata Routray	48	Aul	Pratap Deb
13	Dhamnagar	Sanjay Das	49	Rajnagar	Dhruba Sahu
14	Chandabali	Byomokesh Ray	50	Mahakalpada	Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak
15	Binjharpur	Pramila Mallik	51	Puri	Sunil Mohanty
16	Dharmashala	Pranab Balabantray	52	Brahmagiri	Uma Samantray
17	Jajpur	Sujata Sahu	53	Satyabadi	Sanjay Das Burma
18	Sukinda	Preetiranjana Gharai	54	Pipli	Rudra Maharathy
19	Dhenkanal	Sudhir Kumar Samal	55	Jatni	Bibhuti Balabantray
20	Kamakhyanager	Prafulla Mallik	56	Ranpur	Satya Pradhan
21	Parjang	Nrusingha Sahu	57	Daspalla	Ramesh Behera
22	Pallahara	Mukesh Pal	58	Nayagarh	Arun Kumar Sahoo
23	Chendipada	Susant Kumar Behera	59	Bhanjanagar	Bikram Keshari Arukha
24	Sonepur	Niranjan Pujari	60	Polsara	Srikant Sahu
25	Loisingha	Nihar Behera	61	Kabisuryanagar	Latika Pradhan
26	Patnagarh	Saroj Meher	62	Chhatrapur	Subash Behera
27	Bolangir	Kalikes Singh Deo	63	Soroda	Sanghamitra Swain
28	Titlagarh	Tukuni Sahu	64	Hinjili	Naveen Patnaik
29	Nuapada	Rajendra Dholkia	65	Gopalpur	Bikram Panda
30	Umerkote	Nabina Nayak	66	Digapahandi	Biplab Patro
31	Jharigam	Ramesh Majhi	67	Chikiti	Chinmayananda Srirup Deb
32	Nabarangpur	Kaushalya Pradhani	68	Kotpad	Chandrasekhar Majhi
33	Dabugam	Manohar Randhari	69	Koraput	Raghuram Podal
34	Lanjigarh	Pradeep Dishari	70	Malkangiri	Manas Madkani
35	Junagarh	Diby Shankar Mishra	71	Ghasipura	Badri Narayan Patra
36	Dharmagarh	Pushpendra Singhdeo	72	Patana	Jagannath Nayak

5 get life term for double murder

DEBADURLAV HARICHANDAN, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 27: A local court here Wednesday awarded life imprisonment to five persons after holding them guilty of killing a septuagenarian couple in Sailashree Vihar area of the City in 2015.

ADJ (II) Bandana Kar convicted Kishore Chandra Behera, Md Kamal Khan, Fulasari Behera, Jaban Nayak and Subhadra Jena under Section 396 of the IPC for killing Prafulla Mishra, 72, and his wife Sushama Mishra, 70, in order to rob them November 15, 2015.

The court also slapped a penalty of Rs 20,000 on each of



ADJ (II) Bandana Kar convicted Kishore Chandra Behera, Md Kamal Khan, Fulasari Behera, Jaban Nayak and Subhadra Jena under Section 396 of IPC for killing Prafulla Mishra, 72, and his wife Sushama Mishra, 70, in order to rob them November 15, 2015

The incident came to light after the couple's second son, Subhadarshi Mishra, who owns a software firm at Infocity, called up his mother to wish her on her birthday. When she did not take the call, Subhadarshi rang up his younger brother, Satyadarshi Mishra, who stayed nearby. Satyadarshi reached their Sailashree Vihar residence and found his parents lying dead on the ground floor of the two-storey building.

Later, Chandrasekharpur police launched a probe and eventually arrested the five. The incident had raised concern over the safety of the senior citizens in the City.

the convicts. Failure to pay the penalty would entail additional six months of jail term, the court ordered after examining 23 witnesses.

According to the prosecution, Subhadra, who worked as a maid at the couple's house, hatched a

plan with four others to loot the house and kill the elderly Mishras in order to destroy evidence.

"As per the plans, they strangled the couple to death and searched for valuables," prosecution lawyer Ajit Patnaik said.

CM CONDOLES DEATH OF SWAMI SMARANANANDA

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday condoled the demise of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission president Swami Smaranananda.

Taking to X, Patnaik said, "Deeply saddened to learn about the passing away of Srimat Swami Smaranananda Ji, revered President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission."

"Swamiji devoted his entire life spreading spiritualism across the world. His profound teachings and messages to promote social wellbeing will continue to guide us... Om Shanti," the chief minister added.



Swami Smaranananda passed away at Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan hospital at 8:14pm Tuesday. He was 94 and the 16th president of the order.

He was not keeping well for the last few months. On January 18, he was admitted to Peerless Hospital in Calcutta with fever and other complications. Subsequently, he was shifted to the Seva Pratishthan January 29.

He was elected as the president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at a meeting of the board of trustees of the math and the governing body of the mission at Belur Math July 17, 2017.

As the news spread, condolences kept pouring in from all over the country and beyond.

Supporters elated as Naveen to contest from Hinjili again

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: BJD supporters in Ganjam district were overwhelmed by the party's decision to field Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik from his home turf Hinjili Assembly seat for the sixth time in a row.

During the day, the ruling party released the first list of 72 candidates for the ensuing state Assembly polls and also announced 15 Lok Sabha nominees.

"We are very glad that he would contest from Hinjili once again in the state Assembly elections," former BJD zilla parishad member Sameer Pradhan said. Ajaya Moharana, a supporter of BJD in Hinjili, said that Patnaik will win with a higher margin this time than the previous elections.

His victory margin has continued to increase since 2000, except for the last time.



Patnaik was elected to the state Assembly for the first time in 2000 from Hinjili with a winning margin of 29,826 votes.

The margin had increased to 76,586 in the 2014 Assembly elections, but it dropped to 60,160 five years ago.

In the last Assembly election, the BJD president contested from Hinjili along with Bijepur, a western Odisha constituency,

and won both seats. He, however, retained Hinjili.

"Not only Hinjili people, but the entire Ganjam district is happy, as Naveen would seek re-election from his home turf," BJD's state women wing zonal president Mamata Bisoi said.

His presence will boost the rank and file of the party across the Ganjam district, Berhampur MP Chandra Sekhar Sahu said.

Neither the BJP nor the Congress announced their candidates for Hinjili Assembly constituency.

Assembly and Lok Sabha elections will be held simultaneously in Odisha in four phases between May 13 and June 1.

Patnaik made his debut in the electoral battle in 1997 and won the byelection to the Aska Lok Sabha seat as a nominee of the erstwhile Janata Dal.

The seat had fallen vacant following the death of his father Biju Patnaik.

2 GUNRUNNERS HELD; 5 PISTOLS SEIZED

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The special unit of the twin-city Commissionerate Police arrested two persons after seizing five semi-automatic pistols with ammunition from their possession here, a senior officer said Wednesday.

Acting on a tip-off, the special crime unit of Commissionerate Police conducted raids at three different locations in and around the City Tuesday and seized a 9mm pis-

tol and four 7.65mm pistols along with 24 rounds of live ammunition from the possession of the accused persons, the police officer said.

"We have arrested two persons-- Suraj Parida, 25, and Tapudhara Nayak, 31, and seized five semi-automatic pistols along with 24 rounds

of live bullets, one vehicle and a mobile phone from them," Police Commissioner Sanjeeb Panda told media persons here.

Subrat Khuntia, the main accused in procuring firearms is still absconding, Panda said, adding three weapons have been seized from his house.

The procurement of these firearms is suspected to have links with Munger of Bihar and the special crime unit is working on information in this regard, the top cop said.

Polling officials to trek 39 km for lone voter in Arunachal village

It is not always numbers but to ensure that every citizen gets his or her voice heard. Sokela Tayang's vote is a testament to our commitment to inclusivity and equality

PAWAN KUMAR SAIN | CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Itanagar, March 27: A day before April 19, when polling for Assembly and Lok Sabha elections will take place in Arunachal Pradesh, a team of polling officials will trek 39 km to reach remote Malogam village in Anjaw district so that the lone voter, 44-year-old woman Sokela Tayang, gets to exercise her franchise.

For Tayang, a temporary polling booth will be set up in the picturesque village close to the China border.

According to election officials,

very few families reside in Malogam and all but Tayang are registered voters in other polling booths but she is not willing to shift to any other polling booth.

For Tayang to cast her vote, a polling team, including officials, security personnel and porters, will embark on the arduous journey through treacherous terrain amid unpredictable weather from Hayuliang, officials said.

Tayang is a voter of the Hayuliang Assembly seat and Arunachal East Lok Sabha constituency.

"The journey from Hayuliang to Malogam takes a full day on



In the 2014 elections, the polling booth at Malogam had two voters, with the other being Tayang's estranged husband Janelum Tayang, who, however, transferred his name to another booth in the constituency

foot," Joint Chief Electoral Officer Liken Koyu told PTI.

Everyone has the right to cast his or her vote no matter how remote the location is, Koyu said.

"The polling team might have to be in the booth from 7am to 5pm on the voting day as we don't know when Tayang

would come to cast her vote," Koyu said.

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Pawan Kumar Sain said, "It is not always numbers but to ensure that every citizen gets his or her voice heard. Sokela Tayang's vote is a testament to our commitment to inclusivity and equality."

Her connection to Malogam, however, remains tethered. Her daughter and son study in colleges elsewhere.

"I hardly stay in my village... Usually I come here for some work or during elections. I usually stay at Wakro in Lohit district, where I have farmlands," she said.

In the 2014 elections, the polling booth at Malogam had two voters, with the other being Tayang's estranged husband Janelum

Tayang, who, however, transferred his name to another booth in the constituency.

"We have been separated for the last 15 years. I don't know where he lives at present," she said.

Tayang said she would reach her home by April 18 evening to cast her vote.

Of the total 2,226 polling stations in the state, 228 could be reached only by foot. Of these, 61 would require two-day trekking, while seven would need three-day trekking.

Nominations will be scrutinised March 28 and the last date for withdrawal of nominations is March 30.

Counting of votes for assembly polls would be held June 2, while votes polled for Lok Sabha would be counted June 4.

IMD predicts rain for next two days



Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph is very likely to occur at one or two places

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) regional centre here forecasted thunderstorm with lightning at one or two places over some districts of the state during the next two days. It also predicted gusty wind reaching 30-40 kmph during the period.

In its mid-day bulletin, the IMD mentioned, "Maximum temperatures observed appreciable rise at one or two places over the districts of South Interior Odisha and no large change at elsewhere over the districts of Odisha. They were below normal at one or two places over the districts of Interior Odisha and normal at elsewhere over the districts of Odisha."

Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Dhenkanal, Angul, Jharsuguda, and dry weather is very likely to prevail over the rest districts of Odisha.

Minimum temperatures observed marked rise at one or two places over the districts of North Odisha, appreciable rise at a few places over the districts of North Interior Odisha and at one or two places over the districts of North Coastal Odisha

and South Interior Odisha and no large change at elsewhere over the districts of Odisha. They were markedly below normal at one or two places over the districts of Interior Odisha, appreciable above normal at one or two places over the districts of Interior Odisha, above normal at one or two places over the districts of Interior Odisha and normal at elsewhere over the districts of Odisha."

Thunderstorm with lightning and gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Bargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Dhenkanal, Angul, Jharsuguda, and dry weather is very likely to prevail over the rest districts of Odisha.

CUO holds nat'l seminar on 'Viksit Bharat at 2047'



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 27: The Central University of Odisha (CUO) organised a two-day national seminar on 'Viksit Bharat @2047: Economic and Management Challenges', Wednesday.

The seminar, aimed at delving into crucial aspects of India's economic landscape, was inaugurated by the CUO VC Chakradhar Tripathi in the presence of Sambalpur University VC Bidhu Bhusan Mishra and CUO Registrar NC Panda.

Several renowned academic and industry experts including Sanjeev Kumar, retired Executive Director (Corporate Services) of MECON Limited, Ranchi, Pabitra Kumar Mishra from Central University of Punjab, Irala Lokananda Reddy from University of Hyderabad and Manoranjan Biswas, Executive Director (IR and Safety) of MECON, Jagadalpur were present on the occasion.

Tripathi highlighted the essential role of peace and prosperity in shaping a developed India, stressing the significance of indigenous business management principles over western ideologies. He urged the students to explore the underlying factors contributing to the resilience of tribal communities, who, despite of economic hardship, lead lives of contentment and peace.

Mishra, in his address as the chief speaker, provided insights into India's current economic state and emphasised on democratic development and the necessity for sustainable growth over GDP figures.



ENCHANTING MOVES: Child artistes pose during a cultural programme by Sarpeswar Sikshya Vikas Trust at Kala Vikash Kendra Auditorium in Cuttack, Wednesday

KIIT hosts 'Regional Choose France Tour'

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 27: KIIT University here hosted a programme 'Regional Choose France Tour 2024' for students aspiring to pursue higher education in France, Wednesday. The series of educational fairs, an initiative by the French government, provides information on various academic offerings and scholarships available at prestigious institutions in France.

Representatives from leading universities such as Grandes Ecoles and private institutes provided first-hand information about the wide range of courses available in various fields such



as management, engineering, hospitality, humanities, arts, architecture and design. This tour also serves as a platform for both Indian and French academicians to explore potential collaborations and partnerships.

Organised by Institut Français

India (French Institute in India), in collaboration with Campus France, a French government agency dedicated to assisting international students seeking higher education in France, the tour offers free counseling sessions to students, guidance on scholarships, visa procedures and student life in France.

With over 3,500 public and private institutions for higher learning, offering a diverse range of programmes across various disciplines, France stands out as a premier destination for international education. Approximately 12 per cent of its 2.5 million students being international, France warmly wel-

come students around the globe, including a significant number from India.

Renowned for its cultural richness, academic excellence and scientific innovation, around 1,700 higher studies programmes are entirely taught in English, further enhancing accessibility for international students.

Beyond academics, Indian students in France can immerse themselves in a rich cultural tapestry, with access to thousands of monuments, UNESCO World Heritage sites, museums, festivals, and culinary delights. France offers a vibrant lifestyle coupled with opportunities for personal and professional growth.

ECoR registers 250-MT freight loading in 2024

Bhubaneswar: East Coast Railway (ECoR) has surpassed all records in freight loading for the financial year 2023-24. ECOR has loaded 250 million tonnes of freight, shattering the earlier record of highest freight loading in FY 2022-23. Total contribution from its three divisions, ECOR has also become the first zone to cross the milestone of 200 million tonnes of loading for fifth time in a row. Khurda Road Division of ECOR has contributed 156.17 million tonne followed by 74.66 million tonne by Waltair Division and 19.20 million tonne by Sambalpur division. All the three divisions have performed better compared to previous year and surpassed their last year figure. The coalfields of MCL at Talcher, five ports in ECOR jurisdiction, i.e. Paradeep, Dhamara, Vizag, Gangavaram and Gopalpur; iron ore mines in Bailadila in Chhattisgarh, Major Steel & Aluminium Companies, iron ore mines in Keonjhar district are the major contributors in this achievements. This remarkable loading has been achieved despite various challenges by remarkable performance of ECOR with proper planning and coordination with government sectors and industries.

874 year-old inscription found near Vizianagaram

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Kalinga Epigraphical Research Group (KERG) rediscovered an inscribed stone panel belonging to the ruling period of Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva near Champabati River, Vizianagaram district, Andhra Pradesh.

"This particular inscription mentions about the gifting of land and a perceptual lamp to the temple of Chodagangeswara at Dharmapura. During our survey, we found a village named 'Dharmapuri' still exists near Vizianagaram and remnants of an old Shiva Temple were found scattered which indicates presence of Shiva Temple at Dharmapuri which was probably built by Chodaganga Deva



and was addressed as Chodagangeswar Temple," Deepak Nayak said.

Deepak Kumar Nayak and Bikram Kumar Nayak from KERG were assisted by local heritage enthusiasts D Santosh and Bijaya Kumar in the exploration. Deepak Kumar Nayak, a heritage researcher is currently

listing and documenting the Kalingan heritage sites and archaeological remains scattered around different parts of South India. His documentation will soon be published in a book form.

Sharing more details on this finding, Deepak Nayak said, "The vast region of ancient

Kalinga kingdom was not confined to present day political border of Odisha. From different mythological and historic accounts it is known that Kalinga's southern region was spanned up to Godavari River. We are currently listing and documenting the archaeological and cultural sites having connection with Kalinga."

The sheer negligence of these archeological sites makes it an important task to list and document before they are completely lost. Decades ago, Late Padmashri Satyanarayana Rajaguru had shared details about these inscriptions in his book 'Inscriptions of Orissa, Volume-3'. The inscription inscribed in Telugu script and Language was assigned to a date Shaka year 1072 that equals year 1150 CE.

Organs sent out of state from SUMUM

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 27: For the second time in nine months, multiple organs retrieved from a brain-dead patient at the SUM Ultimate Medicare (SUMUM) here, were flown to out of state for transplantation.

The liver and heart of a 48-year-old patient Krushna Chandra Mahabhoi, a CRPF jawan, who was pronounced brain-dead on the night of March 23, were retrieved. The patient also had kidney failure and was on dialysis.

The family members of the patient decided to donate his organs and informed the hospital authorities. The hospital quickly got in touch with the State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (SOTTO) following which the information reached the Regional Organ and



Tissue Transplant Organisation (ROTO) and National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO).

The liver was taken to Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital and Research Centre at Mumbai while the heart was flown to Kolkata at the Medica Super Speciality Hospital.

SUMUM CEO Swetapadma Dash mentioned, "It was the second time that multiple organs were harvested from a brain-dead patient in the hospital for transplantation elsewhere. Last year June 24 the liver, lungs and kidneys of a brain-dead patient were harvested and taken to three different places."

Conserving nature, biodiversity to prevent next pandemic

INTERNATIONAL TEAM OF RESEARCHERS HAS OUTLINED ITS 'EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH' IN THE STUDY PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL NATURE COMMUNICATIONS WITH RESEARCH ON HOW HORSES AND HUMANS BECOME INFECTED WITH THE FATAL HENDRA VIRUS

Pandemic prevention plans should centre around conserving nature and biodiversity which would secure the food and shelter needs of animals, limiting contact and the transfer of pathogens to humans, researchers have advocated in a new study.

Pandemics, or zoonotic diseases, are considered to begin with a 'spillover' event, involving the transfer of disease-causing pathogens circulating among wild animals to humans, livestock or other animals in close proximity.

The international team of researchers has outlined its "evidence-based approach" in the study published in the journal Nature Communications and based it on case studies, including research on how horses and humans become infected with the

fatal Hendra virus in Australia.

A "rare emerging zoonosis", Hendra virus infection causes severe, often fatal, disease in both infected horses and humans. It was identified in the first recorded outbreak of 1994 in Brisbane that affected 21 stabled racehorses and two humans. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), "As of July 2016, 53 disease incidents involving over 70 horses have been reported."

Referring to the previous studies, Alison Peel, a wildlife disease ecologist from Australia's Griffith University said the results showed that the Hendra virus was "most likely to pass from bats to horses in places where habitat destruction has left bats without reliable natural food sources", further worsened by climate cycles causing abrupt food



shortages for the bats. These changes bring about closer contact of the bats with horses and people, and more

stress, thereby increasing the viral load that the bats shed, Peel said. The effect was, however, found to have reversed when ad-

equate food was available in native forests, the wildlife disease ecologist said.

"This shows how we can prevent new spillovers if we protect where bats eat, protect where bats roost, and reduce land-use changes that increase contact with bats," Peel added.

The team, which included researchers from the Kerala Agricultural University and the Institute of Public Health, Bengaluru, also looked at a 2019 study describing the evidence of antibodies generated in humans and bats in northeast India in response to filoviruses, another family of animal viruses.

The results implying a local zoonotic spillover were published in the journal PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases.

"The world is focused on how can we detect and then contain

a novel pathogen once it is circulating in humans, rather than how can we prevent that pathogen from entering the human population in the first place," said Raina Plowright, a professor in the Department of Public and Ecosystem Health at Cornell University and the study's first author.

"For communities who come in contact with animals, it is important to ensure people have the protection that they need to avoid pathogen exposure," Plowright added.

The authors of the study also emphasised the need for an international agency or panel to assess and generate data on "pandemic prevention, preparedness and response", along with collecting "metrics on intactness of landscapes, ecological integrity and biodiversity".

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Mining firm razes forest to make way for minerals



raided the spot March 15, Friday and found the mining firm transporting minerals on the newly constructed road on the forest land.

He directed the Forest officials to dig up a trench and stopped mineral transportation by the mining firm on the newly constructed road on the forest land.

Jena said that acting on a tip-off, Forest officials raided the place and found the charges to be true. The mining firm has manipulated construction of the road at Baitarani reserve forest at Gurubeda without informing the Forest department, Jena said.

Action will be taken as this road has been constructed illegally by felling trees on the forest land, Jena said. Questions are being raised how the Mining department could give permission despite being aware that the minerals are being transported on the forest land.

Deputy Director of Mines, Joda, Dinesh Kumar Agarwal rejected the charges stating that permission has not been given for transportation of minerals on the forest land but rather on the old road which was being used by the mining firm. He, however, assured to take further action in this regard after discussing with his departmental authorities.

Meanwhile, DFO HD Dhanraj has directed the Champua forest ranger to conduct further probe and take necessary actions in this regard.

On receipt of the complaints, Keonjhar DFO HD Dhanraj directed Joda forester Trinath Jena to conduct a probe and initiate action in this regard. Jena

ment has imposed a penalty of ₹116 crore on Inganijharan BC Dev mines on charge of illegal mining. The Orissa High Court has directed the Inganijharan BC Dev mines to sell off the mineral and deposit the penalty amount by April 2024.

As per the direction, the Inganijharan BC Dev mines received the mineral transportation order from the Mining department to sell off the mineral deposits in its mines. Later, it chopped off trees on the forest land March 14, Thursday and constructed a road to transport the minerals.

The mining firm was noticed transporting minerals on the newly constructed road following which complaints were lodged before the divisional forest officer (DFO) of Keonjhar.

On receipt of the complaints, Keonjhar DFO HD Dhanraj directed Joda forester Trinath Jena to conduct a probe and initiate action in this regard. Jena

POST NEWS NETWORK

Joda, March 27: A mining firm has allegedly denuded a forest land of its green cover to facilitate transportation of minerals from Inganijharan BC Dev mines under Joda mining division in Keonjhar district.

On being informed, the Forest department conducted a probe and stopped the transportation of minerals on the patch of land under Baitarani reserve forest at Gurubeda. The construction of the road assumes significance as Baitarani reserve forest is home to a large number of elephants. Regular plying of heavy vehicles is likely to endanger the pachyderms and disturb their peaceful existence in the forest.

Meanwhile, the Forest department has launched a high-level probe to ascertain the irregularities and the persons involved in the fraud.

Sources said the state gov-



MATTER OF FAITH: Devotees perform 'Dhuli Danda' as part of rituals during the 21-day long Danda Nacha festival in Chhatrapur area of Ganjam district which kicked off Monday

6 Naxals killed in Chh'garh encounter

PNN & AGENCIES

Malkangiri/Bijapur, March 27: Six Naxalites, including deputy commander Punem Nagesh, his wife, and another female cadre, were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district bordering Malkangiri district Wednesday, a police officer said.

Many other Naxalites were believed to have been injured in the gunfight and a search operation was underway in the area, he said, adding that no security personnel was injured.

The six slain Naxalites collectively carried a bounty of ₹14 lakh on them, the officer said. The slain deputy commander of Maoists' PLGA platoon no. 10 Punem Nagesh was instrumental in carrying out several deadly attacks on security forces in the past.

The gunfight took place at around 8am in jungles along the Talperu river near Chipurbhatti village under Basaguda police station area, when a joint team of security personnel was con-



REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO

ducting an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said.

The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of cadres belonging to Maoists PLGA platoons no. 9 and 10, who were involved in the murder of three civilians near Basaguda during the Holi festival celebrated Monday, he said.

The personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Central Reserve Police Force's 229th and 168th battalions and 205th and 210th battalion of CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action-an elite unit

of CRPF) were involved in the operation, the police officer said.

The patrolling team came under fire near the Talperu river, he said, adding that the exchange of fire continued for about an hour after which bodies of six Naxalites were recovered from the spot.

Security personnel found arms and ammunition from the spot of the encounter.

A carbine gun, factory-made 9mm pistol, country-made 9mm pistol, 12 bore gun, muzzle-loading gun, 10 live cartridges of SLR, two tiffin bombs, gelatin sticks, safety fuses, Maoist bags, medicines and other items of

daily use were also seized from the spot, the IGP said.

Sundarraj further said security personnel have gunned down 37 Naxalites so far in separate encounters in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, since December 2023.

The killed Naxalites were identified as Punem Nagesh, his wife Vetti Soni (30), Aaytu Punem (28), Sukka Oyam (40), Nuppo Moka (30), and Kovasi Gangi (27), said Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Kumar Yadav.

Many other Naxalites were reported to be injured in the gunfight and the search operation was still underway in the area, according to Yadav.

Naxalites generally observe the Tactical Counter Offensive Campaign (TCOC) between March and June in summer and step up their activities. A large number of attacks on security forces have taken place in the Bastar region during this period.

However, Wednesday's encounter seems to have dealt a massive blow to Naxalites who lost key cadres.



FLAG MARCH: Police personnel take out a flag march in view of the upcoming polls in Lanjigarh area of Kalahandi district, Wednesday

Man killed in wall collapse

Balasure: A 25-year-old man died and his father and mother were seriously injured when a brick wall collapsed on them in Balasure district Monday, police said. According to the police, three members of the family were working near their relative's house in Pachimabada village when a mud-brick wall suddenly collapsed and all three were trapped under debris. Villagers rescued and rushed all of them to JK Bhattar Hospital where doctors declared Sheikh Arif (25) dead. Arif's father Sheikh Samiruddin and mother Asuni Bibi were shifted to Balasure district headquarters hospital for further treatment.

Youth held in Sambalpur bombing case

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, March 27: Sambalpur police Wednesday cracked the bomb hurling incident at Peerbaba Chhak here and arrested a youth along with seizure of bomb making equipment, Tuesday.

The accused youth identified as Abhilas Mishra (19) of Sunaripada, Badbazar under Khetrajpur PS told the police that he carried out the bombing to take revenge of his father's insult, to mislead the police and create suspicion on the 'Sambalpur Mafia Gang'.

Sambalpur SP Mukesh Kumar Bhamoo and Northern Range IG Himansu Kumar Lal gave the information together in a press



conference held at the police headquarters here Wednesday evening.

They said that the cause of the said incident was not communal but purely personal enmity. Considering the seriousness of the bombing incident Tuesday, the police started an

investigation. On the basis of the complaint of the injured duo, the police registered a case in the Town PS and arrested the accused with the help of CCTV footage.

According to the confession of the accused, a member named Sushil Paik on an Instagram site called 'Sambalpur Mafia Gang' attacked his father Dilip Mishra for some reason. Seeing this, from that day he was looking for an opportunity to avenge his father's insult. While he was an ITI student, he knew how to make bombs. He wanted to create a big incident in a sensitive area of the city to mislead the police and chose the target audience to raise suspicion on the gang.

Speeding OSRTC bus mows down 2 youths

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, March 27: In a tragic mishap, two bike-borne youths were crushed to death after a speeding OSRTC bus ran over them near Bhadrappali Chhak on Bolangir-Sonepur road (NH-57) in Bolangir district Wednesday morning.

The deceased bikers were identified as Himanshu Shekhar Mohapatra, 23, a resident of Subalaya village and Naresh Sahu, 23, a resident of Gambharipali village in Sonepur district. Both the deceased were



working at Vedanta factory at Lanjigarh in Kalahandi district.

As per reports, the bus belonged to Odisha State Road Transport Corporation (OSRTC). The bus was plying on the Phulbani-Bolangir route when

it hit the bike near Bhadrappali and ran over the two youths who were heading towards Lanjigarh resulting in their death on the spot.

Police, on getting information, reached the spot and started a probe. The bodies were sent to Bhima Bhoi Medical College and Hospital, Bolangir for post-mortem. On the other hand after committing the crime, the driver along with the bus fled the spot and surrendered at Tarabha police station. A case has been registered and investigation is underway.

260gm brown sugar seized; one arrested

PNN & AGENCIES

Jaleswar, March 27: Police here seized 260 gm brown sugar worth ₹26 lakh and arrested a peddler in this connection at



Malgodam Chhak under Jaleswar police limits in Balasure district Tuesday evening.

This was stated by Jaleswar

33 held over illegal sale of cough syrup

Sambalpur: Police Monday arrested 33 people from Sambalpur in connection with illegal sale of cough syrup, officials said. Police also seized 16,000 cough syrup bottles during raids in the district, they said. A total of 10,800 bottles of cough syrup were recovered from a truck in Sambalpur town and 26 people were arrested, SP Mukesh Kumar Bhamoo said. He said the bottles were brought to Sambalpur from Hooghly district of West Bengal for consumption during Holi and elections, he said.

In another case, police seized 5,500 cough syrup bottles in the district and arrested seven persons, including a woman, SDPO (Sambalpur Sadar), Tophan Bag, said.

there to sell the contraband. Police seized 260 gm brown sugar along with a mobile phone and cash worth ₹1,420 from his possession. The accused youth is a resident of Sekhbard area in Jaleswar town, said the police.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
E-Tender Notice No. ST-SBP-TENDER-2024-05, Dtd. 22.03.2024

Name of the work: SIGNAL ZONAL WORK FOR SAMBALPUR-JHARPADA SECTION UNDER SENIOR SECTION ENGINEER/SIG./RAIRAKHOL IN SAMBALPUR DIVISION FOR ONE YEAR.

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Tender closing Date & Time: At 1100 hrs. on 15.04.2024.

No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/ Fax or in person shall be accepted against the e-tenders.

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Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to visit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigendum issued for this tender.

Div. Signal & Telecom Engineer (Sig) PR-1204/023-24 Sambalpur

'Ek Khoya Hua Admi' is all about loss of humanity

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, March 27: 'Ek Khoya Hua Admi', which literally translates into 'a lost human being', is not about a person who has vanished into thin air. Rather, it is about a person who doesn't remain human anymore.

The play is about someone who has lost out to a materialistic world where wealth gets precedence over humanity. It is a world where materialistic possession is valued more than social relations and where love is a burden and deceit is a virtue. The entire

one-and-half-hour play staged on the fourth day of 17th Theatre Festival of Sampark concentrated on these very delicate issues.

The 90-minute rendition kept the audience glued to the seat with excellent script work, dialogues, stage craft and music. Scripted and directed by Saheb Nitish of KITE from Mumbai, the play carried splendid music of Samar Mehendi. The stage craft, which was impressionistic, reflected the deft touch of a local artist Pralay Satpathy.

Overall, the play did not give the audience any chance to get bored or to complain about anything on



the fourth day. Bhaskar Mohapatra of Sampark, organiser of the theatre festival, promised earlier that the choice of plays and groups has been done very astutely and the audience would not get a chance to complain about anything. So far the best thing about the entire four-day journey of the theatre festival has been the stage management. The stage is not large enough to accommodate a theatrical presentation where the characters will not be constrained by scarcity of space. But, so far, all the plays have managed to overcome this issue and given their best.

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FOCUS NATION

INTERNAL COLLAPSE



The biggest questions today are not how good the economy is, not who will win the elections, but questions on how does the nation stand up against forces that may well kill the spirit of India right from inside its most hallowed spaces and offices

Nehru told us: "A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance." Today, that line might read: "A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step back from the new and sink into the dark ages, and when the soul of a nation, that at last found utterance, is once again suppressed. We know not how this soul, tortured, tormented, crushed, will hold out for a day when India may bloom again and regain the values and the spirit of the constitution, which however fine a document, eventually depends on the integrity of the people who are meant to safeguard it."

State are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics. Who can say how the people of India and their parties will behave?"

The next day, 26 November 1949, Dr Rajendra Prasad echoed those sentiments: "If the people who are elected are capable and men of character and integrity, they would be able to make the best even of a defective constitution. If they are lacking in these, the constitution cannot help the country. After all, a constitution, like a machine, is a lifeless thing. It acquires life because of the men who control it and operate it, and India needs nothing more than a set of honest men who will have the interest of the country before them ... It requires men of strong character, men of vision, men who will not sacrifice the interests of the country ... who will rise over prejudices."

Today, policy and its execution itself is about exercising prejudices. Some institutions are standing up, as in the case of the remarkable Supreme Court verdict by the five-judge Constitution Bench that struck down the electoral bonds scheme

of 2018 and ordered that the details of who bought the bonds and who got the money be divulged. Yet, the desperation to stop this was so much that the largest nationalised bank of India, the State Bank of India, had the gall to file a junior officer's affidavit to ask the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court to amend its order - asking for three months, no less, to release the data that was, as it turned out, readily available. It was naturally seen as a blatant attempt to keep the dirty secrets of the money trail and extortion of the ruling apparatus via the bonds from coming out before the elections. The affidavit was as good as false, because the data was eventually released by the deadline set by the SC. How does a bank lie to the SC in an affidavit on one of the most significant judgements of our time? How does the Income Tax Department initiate action and freeze funds of the Congress, one of the most significant political parties? How does a judge of the High Court take early retirement and immediately thereafter get a BJP ticket for the elections? How is it that a Governor has to be told by the Supreme Court to follow the Constitution and not stop an elected government from functioning?

The historian Arnold Toynbee who studied civilisational collapse told us that collapse comes not from invading forces, not from the outside but from a form of suicide. Societies in disintegration suffer from a "schism of the soul." We have an internal collapse. The biggest questions today are not how good the economy is, not who will win the elections, but questions on how does the nation stand up against forces that may well kill the spirit of India right from inside its most hallowed spaces and offices.

The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal.

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"When the world sleeps," Jawaharlal Nehru said, "India will awake to light and freedom." More than 75 years from that momentous occasion on 15 August, 1947, when we should be celebrating how that light and freedom nourished us and made us proud citizens of a nation that stands tall on the values we may cherish, India has slipped into a very different phase. It is painful and it may not be inappropriate to say at this stage that a darkness descends as freedom is being robbed, democracy is being crushed and India is sleepwalking into a collapse.

The collapse is not sudden; it has been coming for some time now in the face of a creeping capture of institutions, key individuals and agencies who have all in one way or another been forced to bow to one thinking, one party, one ideology. The hunt is on for more spaces to capture, powered by one large and well-fed propaganda machine manufactured by the one party that wishes every opposition out of sight and out of mind. This has all the marks of an invasion.

The arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, the highest elected official of the Delhi government, it bears repeating, by an agency that has zero credibility and works more like the handmaiden of the government in power and is in all probability sold on the ruling party's political agenda, is only one telling example of just how much of pressure is being mounted to keep that one party in power and discredit all others. It is difficult to see how a fair election might be fought in 2024. The national mood was well summed up by the cartoon that showed all others in the race locked up, with just the incumbent in the field, and then the question, half in jest: 'Who is winning?'. At this stage, all bets are off and we are in icy waters. We may yet reach ashore safely but the risk of hypothermia is particularly high.



Jagdish Rattanani

SOCIETIES IN DISINTEGRATION SUFFER FROM A 'SCHISM OF THE SOUL'



Soňa Muzikárová

A negative narrative about migrants has helped leaders such as Orbán and Fico consolidate electoral support by playing on voters' fears of otherness, economic anxiety, and desire for stability in an unsettled world

Hungary has little choice. With a rapidly aging population, severe labour shortages in the coming years would hamper the government's ambition to become an electric-vehicle (EV) manufacturing hub and defense industrial base. In 2022, China's CATL announced that it would build a €7.3 billion (\$7.9 billion) EV battery plant in Hungary, the largest such investment in Europe to date. In 2023, China's BYD shared its plans to open an EV factory in the country - its first in Europe. The German defense contractor Rheinmetall recently opened a new factory in the Hungarian city of Zalaegerszeg, while armored tactical vehicles are to be produced in the city of Győr. All of these ventures will require sufficient human capital.

The Czech Republic has also sought to attract third-country nationals, including in September 2022, when it simplified the recruitment process for "critically needed" workers and improved oversight of working conditions for foreigners. Last summer, the country aligned its laws with the EU Blue Card Directive, which governs entry and residence conditions for highly qualified workers from third countries. Meanwhile, in 2019, Poland made it easier for holders of temporary residence and work permits who are pursuing a profession deemed desirable for the Polish economy to acquire permanent residence.

Likewise, the number of foreign workers in Slovakia increased sevenfold between 2013 and 2022, with some manufacturers, such as the British carmaker Jaguar Land Rover, relying heavily on labour from abroad. And more of these workers are coming from farther away - from, say, India or Kazakhstan, rather than Serbia or Ukraine. But there are still more than 80,000 long-term, unfilled vacancies, especially in the mechanical engineering, automotive, transport, health-care, and IT sectors.

The labour shortage is likely to worsen: demand for skills in the industries of the future is only increasing, at the same time as fertility rates are declining, and young people are leaving the region to pursue better opportunities elsewhere. To plug these competency gaps, CEE countries must continue to reform their immigration policies. Failure to do so could result in widespread economic pain, as they may miss out on new investments that could generate GDP growth and raise tax revenue.

The question is not whether immigration is good or bad, but how it can yield benefits for both destination countries and third-country workers. Policymakers' primary goal should be to maximise the gains from immigration, which will require consulting with the private sector to continue identifying the skills that are needed. Existing tools, such as the EU Blue Card, have been somewhat successful in addressing labor shortages but would benefit from streamlining procedures and harmonizing criteria across the bloc's member states. Moreover, introducing new global skills schemes - especially with non-EU countries - that address current and future labour-market needs could facilitate economic migration while reducing brain drain at home.

CEE governments' performative hostility toward migrants cannot disguise their desperate need for foreign workers. Political leaders must now make a positive case for immigration - publicly and repeatedly - to convince their voters that all will gain from the economic benefits newcomers generate.

The writer, a political economist focused on Central and Eastern Europe, is a former diplomat at the OECD.

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WISDOM CORNER

A myth is far truer than a history, for a history only gives a story of the shadows, whereas a myth gives a story of the substances that cast the shadows.

ANNIE BESANT

A friend who is far away is sometimes much nearer than one who is at hand. Is not the mountain far more awe-inspiring and more clearly visible to one passing through the valley than to those who inhabit the mountain?

KAHLIL GIBRAN

We will be more successful in all our endeavors if we can let go of the habit of running all the time, and take little pauses to relax and re-center ourselves. And we'll also have a lot more joy in living.

THICH NHAT HANH

IN JEST THIS

Finland tops World Happiness Report again



Melvin Durai

IN CASE YOU'RE WONDERING, THE HAPPIEST PEOPLE IN FINLAND ARE THERAPISTS

The 2024 World Happiness Report was released recently and once again Finland is No. 1. Yes, for the seventh consecutive year, the people of Finland are the happiest people in the world. And in case you're wondering, the happiest people in Finland are therapists. They have no clients and can watch Netflix 24 hours a day. (I'm exaggerating of course. They watch Amazon Prime too.)

What this means, of course, is that members of the Finnish-American community are finding it extremely hard to persuade any of their friends and relatives in Finland to immigrate to America. Just ask Markus Alvari, president of the Finnish-American Preservation Society (FAPS). He recently hired marketing consultant Robbie Virdalino and his intern Johnny Virdalino (no relation), to create a campaign to get more Finns to move to America.

Robbie: "We need to start with a good slogan. What can we tell Finnish people about America that will make them want to come here?"

Johnny: "I know! I know! Immigrate to America and you'll be able to own a gun!"

Robbie (shakes his head): "I thought you did some research on Finland. Gun ownership is common in Finland. Every fourth person owns a gun."

Johnny (thinking hard): "I know! I know! Immigrate to America and you'll be able to own 10 guns! You can even own an automatic weapon."

Robbie: "Stop! Why are you obsessed with guns? Guns don't make people happy. People make people happy. Finnish people are happy because they take care of each other. They have a strong sense of community. They also have great work-life balance. On average, employees in Finland are entitled to five full weeks of paid vacation per year!"

Johnny: "Five full weeks?"

Robbie: "Yes, they just have to work one year and they're eligible for five full weeks of paid vacation. Can you think of a good slogan?"

Johnny: "Yes, here's a good one: 'Stay in Finland, you lucky bastards!'"

While Finland remained at

No. 1 in the World Happiness Report, Afghanistan remained at the bottom of the overall rankings (No. 143), earning the distinction of "world's unhappiest nation." This is not a big surprise, especially since Afghanistan is ruled by the Taliban, whose official slogan is "Happiness is overrated."

The Taliban forbids girls from getting an education beyond sixth grade, making Afghanistan the only country in the world that places limits on female education. As the Associated Press reported, the Taliban's education ministry recently held a ceremony to mark the start of the new academic year. They invited the media to the ceremony, but the invitation included this line: "Due to the lack of a suitable place for the sisters, we apologize to female reporters."

Lack of a suitable place - that's how you create unhappiness! The Taliban's education ministry must be particularly proud that Afghanistan is No. 1 in the World Unhappiness Report.

Of course, there are many factors that determine happiness. The UN's Sustainable

Development Solutions Network lists six factors: social support, GDP per capita, a healthy life expectancy, perception of corruption, generosity, and wealthy relatives.

Actually, the sixth factor is freedom to make life choices.

Wealthy relatives may make you happy, but wealth is relative. Some rich people feel poor, some poor people feel rich.

In case you are wondering, India ranked 126th among 143 countries. The ranking may not make you happy, but you should know that the gap between India and Afghanistan is considerable. While there's a full six points (on a 0 to 10 scale) between Finland at the top and Afghanistan at the bottom, there's 2.3 points between India and Afghanistan. Add that difference to India's score and India would jump past Italy into the Top 40.

It's also worth noting that the population of Finland is only 5.5 million, which means that if you just counted all the parents of doctors in India, you'd have more happy Indians than happy Finns.

Soaring temperature

Sir, Rising heat may be familiar news, but looking at it in a broad sense is like turning away from the larger threats that lie ahead. The World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) most recent data show that the earth's temperature has been above average during the last decade. The temperature is anticipated to rise further in 2024. This will have an impact on the entire earth's weather cycle as well as the life cycle of humans throughout time, turning everything upside down. As a result, some areas may get unseasonal rain, while others may experience extreme heat. The way the world is exploiting resources in the name of development, it is predicted that the global temperature will rise by one and a half degree Celsius by 2050. Following this, the world's temperature may rise by two to four degrees Celsius during the following fifty years. The most concerning aspect is that, while the environment is changing, we humans are unable to modify our behaviour and attitudes as quickly. Perhaps we humans are incapable of understanding that the weather does not respect the boundaries we set for it. Weather warnings apply to the entire planet, including everything that lives, grows, and thrives on it, both moving and immovable.

Abhijit Roy, JAMSHEDPUR

Young judges

Sir, Traditionally, top lawyers were less attracted to judgeship because the two professions are poles apart in terms of income and nature of work. But, over the years, young lawyers are recruited as district judges, and many of them have graced their respective High Courts. Twenty one year old Mayank Pratap Singh of Jaipur was in the news for becoming the youngest ever judge in India's judicial history some five years ago. Now, after an amendment to the Karnataka Judicial Services Rules, 2004, two youngsters, aged 24 and 25 respectively, were directly recruited as civil judges in Karnataka. An encouraging sign is the good percentage of successful women candidates there. High Courts across the country have robust training processes in place for young inductees. The young judges should know that impartiality, aloofness and studiousness are imperative.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

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Why is Akhilesh losing friends ahead of polls?



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, March 27: On the eve of the 2022 Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav was a much-envied politician. He had created a rainbow alliance of OBC-centric parties which seemed to have come with a success formula. However, as the result came in and the alliance failed to work the magic, Akhilesh began losing friends faster than he had made them.

The next to move out was the Mahaan Dal and its President Keshav Dev Maurya who leveled a similar charge against Akhilesh. "Though we were in alliance, but he never ever discussed issues with us. He never found time to meet us, and took decisions arbitrarily and alliances cannot work in this manner. He behaved like a dictator," Maurya told IANS Wednesday.

After this, the biggest jolt came from the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) which opted for an alliance with BJP just before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. According to RLD sources, their relationship became strained when Akhilesh insisted that of the eight seats he had promised them, SP candidates would contest on five. "This is a new formula that Akhilesh has developed which says - 'your symbol, my candidate'. Which party will agree to such conditions? In politics you cannot expect a commander to lead another man's army. The BJP naturally took advantage of the situation and announced Bharat Ratna for late Chaudhary

Charan Singh and we could not just look away," said a RLD leader. The Apna Dal (K) is also facing similar problems with SP. Apna Dal (K) leader Pallavi Patel was elected on a SP symbol in the assembly polls but she has made her displeasure very clear over selection of Rajya Sabha candidates and then the Lok Sabha candidates.

The Apna Dal (K) has said that they would join the NDA if they got an offer. This Kurmi-centric party is biding its time but relations between them and SP have deteriorated beyond control. The Janvadi Party (Socialist) has also severed ties with the Samajwadi Party. Janvadi Party (Socialist) President Sanjay Chauhan said, "There was a dispute between our party and the SP over the distribution of seats. Akhilesh is not willing to accommodate his allies. An alliance cannot survive in such a situation."

Sanjay Chauhan's party had contested the elections in 2022 in alliance with the Samajwadi Party but could not win a single seat. The Janvadi Socialist Party had also contested elections with the support of the BJP in 2007 and 2012, but could not win a seat in the state. A Samajwadi Party leader, meanwhile, said, "Parties that have moved out of the alliance are the ones that have no base. They are not in a position to win even a single seat. For us, in the upcoming election, every seat matters. Their presence in the alliance did not benefit us and their absence will not damage us either."



Tourists pose for photos with umbrellas as they visit the Taj Mahal on a hot day in Agra, Uttar Pradesh

PTI

LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

Turncoats strike rich in UP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, March 27: Turncoats, at one time, were looked down upon in politics but today, they seem to be reaping a rich harvest in Uttar Pradesh.

The first Congress list for Uttar Pradesh included the names of Imram Masood from Saharanpur and Sadal Prasad from Bangaon. Imram Masood has travelled from Samajwadi Party (SP) to Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and then the Congress. Sadal Prasad has come in Congress from the BSP. Danish Ali, who has been fielded from



Amroha, quit the BSP two months ago and joined the Congress a fortnight ago. The first Samajwadi Party's list

included the name of Afzal Ansari, who had been elected to the Lok Sabha in 2019 on a BSP ticket. Afzal Ansari is the brother of the jailed gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, and will be contesting the Ghazipur seat. Ram Prasad Chaudhary, who is seeking election from Basti, is also from the BSP while Rajaram Pal the SP, candidate from Akbarpur, has also come in from BSP with a brief stopover in the Congress. Annu Tandon from Unnao and RK Chaudhary from Mohanlalganj, both moved from

SP to the Congress. The BJP list also has its share of turncoats - from Jitin Prasad, who is contesting Pilibhit and has come from the Congress, to Jagdambika Pal, sitting MP from Domariyaganj - who have quit the Congress years ago and has been with the BJP. A senior political analyst R K Singh said, "The tendency to give preference to turncoats over dedicated party workers is weakening the cadres of parties. Those who work for the parties are conveniently sidelined in favour of turncoats for whom changing parties is a political business."

Modi, Shah, Rajnath, Nadda among BJP's 40 star campaigners

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun, March 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh are among the 40 star campaigners of the BJP for the Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh, according to a list released by the party Wednesday. The list also includes the names of BJP president JP Nadda, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Union Minister Smriti Irani and Mathura MP Hema Malini. Uttarakhnd Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, state BJP president Mahendra Bhatt and former chief ministers Trivendra Singh Rawat and Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank are also among the party's star campaigners.



Bhatt, Godiyal file nomination

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun, March 27: BJP candidate for Nainital-Udhm Singh Nagar seat Ajay Bhatt submitted his papers at the collectorate office in Rudrapur on the last day for filing nominations for the Lok Sabha polls Wednesday. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bahuguna and MLAs Shiv Arora, Sarita Arya and Ram Singh Kaira accompanied Bhatt, who is the Union Minister of State for Defence and Tourism.

Bhatt is the sitting MP from Nainital-Udhm Singh Nagar Lok Sabha seat. He won the seat in 2019 by defeating former chief minister Harish Rawat. Dhami also addressed a public meeting at the Gandhi Maidan, Rudrapur in support of Bhatt, saying the enthusiasm and excitement of the public is an indication that they will once again give their blessings to the BJP. "We are getting overwhelming support from people in every constituency. Their enthusiasm and excitement are indications that they will bless our candidates once again and give Narendra

Modi a consecutive third term as the Prime Minister."

"I can assure you in his third term, he will take even bigger decisions and India will emerge as a major world power," Dhami said. Bhatt will take on Congress' Prakash Joshi this time. The Union minister is the last

BJP candidate to file his nominations. Ajay Tamta (Almora), Trivendra Singh Rawat (Haridwar), Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah (Tehri Garhwal) and Anil Baluni (Pauri Garhwal) had filed their nominations earlier. Meanwhile, Congress candidate from the Pauri Garhwal seat Ganesh Godiyal also filed his nomination Wednesday.

He staged a roadshow from Chhatra Dhar to Ramleela ground where he addressed a public meeting. Godiyal is a former MLA and a Uttarakhnd Congress president who is pitted against Baluni in Pauri Garhwal. By 3.30 pm Wednesday more than 60 people from different political parties and independents had filed their nominations for the five Lok Sabha seats of Uttarakhnd which go to polls in the first phase April 19.

More than 12K challans issued in Noida on Holi

Challans were also issued in 82 cases of using mobile phones while driving or riding, 402 cases of violation of no-parking rules, 633 cases of driving in wrong lanes, 337 cases for defective number plates and 441 cases of jumping red lights

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Noida, March 27: Over 12,200 motorists were penalised for violation of road traffic rules on the day of Holi across Noida and Greater Noida, police said.

Of the challans issued, 8,110 cases (or over 66 per cent) were for riding without a helmet on two-wheelers and 372 cases were for not wearing seat belts. Another 906 challans were issued for those found triple-riding on two-wheelers, they said. Challans were also issued in 82 cases of using mobile phones while driving or riding, 402 cases of violation of no-parking rules, 633 cases of driving in wrong lanes, 337 cases for defective number plates and 441 cases of jumping red lights, according to a statement. The police said a special road safety campaign was run under the supervision of Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Anil Kumar Yadav on the day of Holi. "As part of the campaign,



checking was done at 44 locations in Noida and Greater Noida. During the inspection, action was taken against 67 people who were found driving or riding under the influence of alcohol. The action ensured includes e-challans, seizure of vehicles, etc.," the police said. Another 172 motorists were caught driving without a licence, 306 people were found speeding while owners of 79

vehicles were penalised for noise pollution, 32 for air pollution and 412 in the 'others' category, the statement said. Gautam Buddha Nagar, which comprises Noida and Greater Noida cities, witnessed 1,176 road crashes in 2023 that resulted in the death of 470 people and injuries to 858 people. The district had recorded 437 such deaths and injuries to 856 people in 2022, according to official data.

Varanasi surpasses solar energy targets

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Varanasi (UP), March 27: Varanasi is leading in energy and environmental conservation initiatives in Uttar Pradesh (UP).

The government's efforts to transform Varanasi into a solar city are gaining momentum and promising significant savings in both, electricity and finances, while prioritising environmental protection. According to a government spokesman, under the 'Har Ghar Solar Yojana', over 28,000 registrations for solar rooftop grid systems have been done in just 2.5 months, surpassing the targeted 25,000 connections. Chief Development Officer, Himanshu Nagpal, said the scheme initially aimed for 25,000 solar rooftop grid systems in the city, but has now been expanded to nearly 72,000 connections under the 'PM Surya Ghar Yojana'.

About 1,045 households have already begun benefiting from solar energy, collectively saving over 4,702,500 units of electricity, translating to savings of Rs 31.35 lakh so far. Further, under the scheme, the UP government offers subsidies ranging from Rs 45,000 to Rs 1,08,000 for installing solar panels ranging from 1KW to 10KW. Efforts are underway to achieve the next target within three to four months, ensuring wider accessibility to solar energy and promoting sustainable development across UP.



Expert teams to assess 5 high-risk glacial lakes of U'khand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun, March 27: The Uttarakhnd government has formed two teams of experts to conduct a risk assessment and survey of five glacial lakes in the state that are highly vulnerable to "outburst floods", an official said. It has been proposed that the teams will start their work on these lakes in May-June this year, Secretary Disaster Management, Uttarakhnd, Ranjit Sinha said. Of the 188 glacial lakes in Himalayan states, 13 are located in Uttarakhnd, he said and added that these have been categorised according to their vulnerability to the threat of "outburst flood". Uttarakhnd in February 2021 saw a glacial lake outburst in

Chamoli district that washed away a small hydel project on the Rishiganga and caused flash floods, killing many people.

Glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) is a flood resulting from the sudden and rapid release of water from a glacial lake, often caused by the breaking of a moraine dam or ice dam. The 13 glacial lakes of Uttarakhnd have been categorised as 'A', 'B' and 'C', with 'A' being highly sensitive, said Sinha, who Tuesday participated in an on-



UTTARAKHAND IN FEBRUARY 2021 SAW A GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST IN CHAMOLI DISTRICT THAT WASHED AWAY A SMALL HYDEL PROJECT ON THE RISHIGANGA AND CAUSED FLASH FLOODS, KILLING MANY PEOPLE. GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST FLOOD (GLOF) IS A FLOOD RESULTING FROM THE SUDDEN AND RAPID RELEASE OF WATER FROM A GLACIAL LAKE, OFTEN CAUSED BY THE BREAKING OF A MORAIN DAM OR ICE DAM.

line meeting with the Disaster Management Division of the Union home ministry on glacial lakes. Chief secretaries and of-

ficials of Himalayan states, including Uttarakhnd, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Arunachal

Pradesh, also attended the meet. Sinha said that five of the 13 glacial lakes in Uttarakhnd fall in category 'A', four in category 'B'-sensitive - and four in category 'C' - relatively less sensitive.

Out of the five highly sensitive lakes, four are in Pithoragarh district and one in Chamoli, and of the four sensitive lakes, two are in Pithoragarh and one each in Chamoli and Tehri, he said. Two separate teams have been formed to conduct the risk assessment of the five highly vulnerable glacial lakes in the first phase, Sinha said and added that the risk assessment work of these lakes is proposed to begin in May-June this year. The first team consisting of experts from the National Institute of Hydrology, Roorkee; the Geological Survey of India, Lucknow; the Indian Institute

of Remote Sensing, Dehradun; the Uttarakhnd State Disaster Management Authority; and the Uttarakhnd Landslide Mitigation and Management Centre will assess the sensitivity of two glacial lakes.

The work of the first phase will entail satellite data study and data collection, bathymetry and area survey, Sinha said. The second team headed by C-DAC, Pune, as the lead technical agency and consisting of the Dehradun-based Indian Institute of Remote Sensing; the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology; the Uttarakhnd State Disaster Management Authority; and the Uttarakhnd Landslide Mitigation and Management Centre will study and survey the other three glacial lakes falling in the 'A' category, he said.

Ruling BJD on the lookout for fresh face in Anandapur



Abhimanyu, Sabitri frontrunners as aspirants keep their fingers crossed

POST NEWS NETWORK

Hatadihi, March 27: With aspirants lining up for ticket to the Anandapur Assembly segment in Keonjhar district, the ruling BJD is searching for a new face to field from this constituency.

Aspirants here are keeping their fingers crossed as the party Wednesday announced the list of candidates for 72 Assembly constituencies and 15 Lok Sabha segments. However, the names of the aspirants Sabitri Sethi and Abhimanyu Sethi have started doing the rounds with the two being frontrunners for the party ticket from this constituency.

Meanwhile, the ruling party has re-nominated sitting MLA Badri Narayan Patra for

Ghashipura Assembly seat and sitting MLA Jagannath Naik for the Patana Assembly seat.

On the other hand, the ruling party is yet to announce candidates for four Assembly seats including Anandapur under Keonjhar Lok Sabha seat.

However, the declaration of the list of candidates has left a pulsating feeling among the aspirants in Anandapur Assembly seat as they wait with baited breath for the party authorities to announce the remaining candidates.

Anandapur Assembly seat consists of 31 panchayats of Hatadihi block, 18 panchayats of Anandapur block and 16 wards of Anandapur Municipality. The Assembly constituency was previously a citadel of Congress. However, ruling BJD has been winning from this seat after trouncing the Congress party in 2009.

The ruling party's position is quite strong in this constituency

but alleged neglect and misbehaviour with party workers has left them fuming. They have been demanding to get rid of old faces and instead field fresh, new and talented candidates for this constituency.

Senior BJD workers Bimal Jena, Sanjay Rout, Barada Prasanna Nayak, Rabindra Nayak and several others said the ruling party should field a new and talented face as the candidate from this constituency. However, the ruling party is spoilt for choice with more than 10 aspirants lobbying for the party ticket.

Among the aspirants, Sabitri Sethi and Abhimanyu Sethi are the frontrunners for the party ticket. These two aspirants have built up their careers from panchayat level and participated in every programme, agitation, gathering and meeting of the party starting from the panchayat level to the state level. Their organisational skills and public relations have turned them into known faces in their area.

Sabitri has worked in the past as the sarpanch of Inchol panchayat, twice as chairperson of Hatadihi block and also as the president of party's women's wing in Hatadihi block.

Similarly, Abhimanyu has worked as the secretary of BJD's block unit and as its president in the panchayat. Their supporters are waiting to see which of the two aspirants will the party repose its faith on.



PARTY HOPPING: Several BJD workers join BJP at its state party headquarters in Bhubaneswar in the presence of its party leaders, Wednesday



GUARANTEE CARD: Congress aspirant Krushna Kuldeep (3rd from left) releasing the party's guarantee card at a press meet held at the Press Club of Koraput, Wednesday

Suresh Routray's son Manmath joins BJD



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Six-time Congress MLA Suresh Routray's son Manmath Routray joined the ruling BJD in Odisha Wednesday.

Manmath, a former commercial pilot, went to the BJD headquarters, Sankha Bhawan, with his supporters in a procession. He was inducted into the party by its MPs Manas Mangaraj and Sasmit Patra.

"I will work for the ideology of my father and also Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. Both leaders have an agenda in life and that is development. I will work for the development of Odisha," he said.

Suresh Routray had Tuesday said that he wanted his son to contest elections as a Congress candidate.

"I accept Manmath's decision of joining the BJD as he is ma-

ture enough to make decisions on his political career," said Routray, the MLA of Jatani.

Manmath said he has his father's blessings. "My father wanted me to join the Congress, but I decided to start my political journey under Naveen Patnaik's leadership," he said.

Sura quits party posts

Soon after his younger son Manmath joined the ruling BJD and was named as its candidate for the Bhubaneswar LS constituency, six-time Congress MLA Suresh Routray Wednesday resigned from all committees of his party. Routray, the MLA from Jatani, sent a letter to OPCC president Sarat Pattanayak mentioning that since his son has joined the BJD, he would like to quit the party's election committee and the campaign committee. The 80-year-old leader, however, said that he would not campaign for Manmath.

Pradhan returns to fray after 15 yrs

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: A day after the BJD announced its candidates for 18 of Odisha's 21 Lok Sabha seats, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who has been named as the BJD candidate from Sambalpur, visited Jagannath temple in Puri Monday and sought blessings from the sibling deities, marking his return to the electoral fray after a gap of 15 years. He was accompanied by BJD national spokesperson Sambit Patra who has been re-nominated from Puri.

Taking to 'X', Pradhan posted, "Lord Jagannath is an integral part of our social and cultural identity. His blessings have always been upon us. After becoming a candidate for the Lok Sabha from Sambalpur, the holy land of Mother Samlai, it was a great privilege for me to first take the blessings of Lord Jagannath in the temple."

"I believe that the blessings of the Lord will give me more strength to serve the public. I will always strive to utilise my skills and abilities fully in the service of people," he added.

Pradhan asserted that with blessings of Lord Jagannath, the BJD will form the government in Odisha and retain power at the Centre. The wave of change is clearly visible in Odisha, he said.

Pradhan, who is a minister in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, returned to contesting elections after a gap of 15



years after he was nominated from Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat, which is the epicentre of western Odisha. He had last contested elections in 2009, when the alliance between the BJD and the BJD ended.

Pradhan was elected to the Odisha Assembly in 2000 and to the Lok Sabha from Deogarh seat in 2004. However, he lost the Assembly elections in 2009.

'BJD NOT IMPLEMENTING OUR WELFARE SCHEMES IN ODISHA'

Bhubaneswar: Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan Monday accused the ruling BJD of not implementing the Centre's welfare schemes in the state. "The state government has not been implementing the Centre's welfare schemes. We have urged the BJD several times to implement the programmes in Odisha, and have even sent delegations over this," Pradhan told PTI video here. "The people of Odisha are keen on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership in the state," the Education Minister said, asserting that Odisha is the "number one state" in terms of PM Modi's popularity and acceptability. Pradhan said Modi is committed to the development of Odisha, with the Central government allocating Rs 18 lakh crore to the state during the past 10 years. He also hit out at the BJD over "worsening" health infrastructure and non-availability of clean drinking water. He said Odisha will celebrate the 100th year of statehood in 2036 and the major election issues would be how the dreams of the youth are fulfilled, the role of women and farmers, and empowerment of the poor as the state reaches its centenary year.

Former BJD MLA Purna Chandra Sethy joins BJP

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: Former BJD MLA Purna Chandra Sethy, who resigned from the primary membership of the party, has joined the BJP. Sethy, a two-time BJD MLA from the Khallikote Assembly seat, resigned from both the primary membership of the party and the state council last Monday.

Hours after resigning from the BJD, Sethy joined the BJP in the presence of the party's state president Manmohan Samal and other senior party leaders.

Sethy was elected to the state Assembly on a BJD ticket for the Khallikote Assembly seat twice, in 2009 and 2014. However, he was denied a party ticket in the 2019 Assembly elections but was assured that his candidature would be considered in the 2024 Assembly elections.

Upon realising that the BJD was not willing to field him in the Assembly elections this time, he sent his resignation letter to party President Naveen Patnaik.

Soon after joining the BJP, the former BJD MLA heavily criticised the BJD government in the state, alleging that a shadow government is being run by non-Odias.



Sethy stated that he joined the BJP because it is the only alternative capable of bringing all-round development to the state. He further emphasised that the people of the state have placed their faith in the Modi government and the guarantees provided by Modi, which will be reflected in the upcoming elections in the state.

Recently, senior BJD leader and six-time Lok Sabha MP from Cuttack Bhartruhari Mahtab also resigned from the primary membership of the party, expressing strong displeasure over the party's affairs in the state.

AAP's lone MP Rinku, Punjab MLA join BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: The Aam Aadmi Party's MP and lone Lok Sabha member Sushil Kumar Rinku joined the BJP Wednesday along with party MLA Sheetal Angural, dealing a blow to the party already facing a crisis following the arrest of its leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Rinku, the MP from Jalandhar in Punjab, and Angural, who was elected to the state Assembly from Jalandhar West, joined the BJP in the presence of Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and its national general secretary Vinod Tawde.

The MP said he was joining the BJP for the development of Punjab, especially Jalandhar, and accused the state's AAP government of not helping him in development works.

He said he was impressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah and lauded the Union government for its development ini-



tatives. The parliamentarian had quit the Congress to join AAP last year to fight the bypoll in the Jalandhar Lok Sabha seat. He had been vocal in criticising the BJD in the Lok Sabha. Rinku was even suspended from the House for his unruly protests.

The BJP is likely to field him

in the Lok Sabha polls as the party inducts a number of influential leaders of different parties in Punjab to emerge as a strong force in the state with 13 constituencies.

Three-term Congress MP Ravneet Singh Bittu from Punjab joined the BJP Tuesday and as-

serted that people have made up their minds to elect Prime Minister Modi to power again.

Bittu is the grandson of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh, a hero of the anti-terrorism campaign in the state who was assassinated in a terror attack while still in office.

BJP's Kharabela Swain to contest Balasore LS seat as independent

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 27: A day after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) declared its list of 18 candidates for the Lok Sabha elections for Odisha, senior party leader Kharabela Swain turned rebel and announced that he will contest Balasore as an independent candidate.

The BJP Sunday evening renominated its former minister and veteran leader Pratap Chandra Sarangi for the Balasore constituency. Swain, who had been aspiring for the seat, made the announcement after he was denied the ticket.

Speaking at a press meet at Balasore Monday, Swain alleged that his name was expunged from the list of candidates just a few hours before the formal announcement at the behest of some vested interest groups.



Swain contested the last general elections in 2019 on a BJP ticket from Kandhamal constituency. However, he refused to stand from the same constituency this time. Swain asserted that he has the backing of RSS members.

"I have decided to contest from Balasore constituency as an independent candidate and

will join the BJP if I win. I contested from Kandhamal in the last general election following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's directions. However, I had earlier informed the party leadership that I will not contest from Kandhamal again. I have urged the party to allow me to contest from Balasore this time," Swain said.

"I will not resign from BJP but the party can expel me. Party was supposed to give me the ticket but they didn't. I wasn't given the ticket due to some vested interest groups and I will expose the names after elections," asserts Swain. Swain said that he will not say anything negative against the party during the election campaign.

Notably, Swain had won thrice from the Balasore Parliamentary constituency on the BJP ticket in 1998, 1999, 2004.

national

of the day quote

We waited for the VBA till the last moment and are still waiting. We had offered the VBA five seats including Akola

SANJAY RAUT | SHIV SENA (UBT) LEADER

We have to take votes and support from all sections of the society

MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI | BJP LEADER

It's a relatively common thing that in India, much more than in the West, a father expects his son to follow his profession, and so it tends to go. So it's not at all surprising that there is a certain level of 'parivar vaad' in all parties

SHASHI THAROOR | CONGRESS LEADER

SHORT TAKES

5 Cong legislators threaten to quit

Bangalore: Five Congress legislators Wednesday threatened to resign over the issue of Lok Sabha ticket to senior party leader and Minister K H Muniyappa's son-in-law Chikka Peddanna to contest from Kolar in the coming Lok Sabha elections, bringing into open the divisions in the outfit.

Professor arrested for raping student

Shimla: A professor at the Central University of Himachal Pradesh in Kangra was Wednesday arrested for allegedly raping a student, police said. According to the police, Chemistry Professor Rajender Kumar (44) asked for sexual favours from the student to change her research topic.

ED summons AAP's Goa chief

New Delhi: The ED has summoned Amit Palekar, the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Goa unit chief, and some other party leaders from the coastal state for questioning in a money-laundering case linked to the Delhi excise policy March 28, official sources said Wednesday. The AAP leaders have been asked to appear at the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) office in Goa's Panjim Thursday, the sources said.

Fire in empty coach of train

Patna/Ara: A fire broke in an empty coach of a train in Bihar's Bhojpur district in the early hours of Wednesday, officials said. The blaze was spotted in a coach of the Danapur-Mumbai LTT Superfast moments after it left Karisath railway station in Ara around 12.15 am, they said.



After Kejriwal's arrest, the level of public sympathy has gone up for us. There is just one sentiment that the BJP has gone one step too far. So, I would feel it has benefitted us electorally

ATISHI MARLENA | DELHI EDUCATION MINISTER

My husband will reveal truth March 28: Sunita Kejriwal

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate March 21 in the Delhi excise policy-linked money laundering case and subsequently remanded in the agency's custody till March 28

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: Stressing that no money was found in multiple Enforcement Directorate raids, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita said that her husband would do a "big expose" on the alleged excise policy scam in court Thursday.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener was arrested by the ED March 21 in an excise policy-linked money laundering case and subsequently remanded to the agency's custody till March 28.

Sunita Kejriwal, in a digital briefing Wednesday, said her husband will reveal the details of the alleged liquor scam in court March 28 and also present evidence.

She said that when she met the Delhi CM in the ED custody, Kejriwal told her that the central agency has conducted more than 250 raids in connection with the "so-called liquor scam" in the last two years but "not a single paisa" has been found in any of the raids so far.

The ED raided Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and Satyendar Jain's places but no money was found. They raided our (CM residence) place and found just Rs 73,000, she said and asked where the money was from the "so-called liquor scam."

Former deputy chief minister Sisodia and AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Singh were arrested last year in relation to the Excise Policy case, while former minister Jain was arrested in a case related to money laundering.

"Arvind has said he will do a big expose on this before the court March 28. He will reveal the truth of this so-called liquor scam and also present evidence," Sunita said. She said Arvind Kejriwal was a brave, patriotic and genuine person and his resolve was strong



Delhi govt will not be run from jail: LG

New Delhi: The Delhi government will not be run from jail, Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena said Wednesday in the backdrop of statements by AAP leaders that Arvind Kejriwal will continue as Chief Minister even if he is behind bars. Replying to a query at the Times Now Summit, the Delhi LG said, "I can assure the people of Delhi that the government will not be run from jail." Kejriwal issued his second work order from ED's custody Tuesday instructing Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj to ensure that medicines and tests are available to people at all government hospitals and Mohalla Clinics.

Kejriwal's health deteriorated: AAP

New Delhi: The blood sugar level of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is diabetic, is fluctuating and his health has deteriorated in Enforcement Directorate custody, AAP sources claimed Wednesday. Arvind Kejriwal's blood sugar level dropped to 46 Mg at one point of time and according to doctors, such a drop is "very dangerous", they claimed.

despite him being a diabetic. "My husband issued directions to Water Minister Atishi from the ED custody. The Centre had issues with it. Do they want to ruin Delhi?" Sunita Kejriwal asked, adding that her husband was upset over the issue. She appealed to the people to pray for the Delhi CM's health and success.

Sanjiv Bhatt convicted in drug seizure case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Palanpur, March 27: A sessions court in Palanpur town of Gujarat's Banaskantha district Wednesday convicted jailed former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt in a drug seizure case dating back to 1996.

The court is expected to pronounce the quantum of punishment Thursday afternoon. This was the second conviction of Bhatt in a criminal matter -- the first one was in 2019 when he was found guilty in a custodial death case by a Jamnagar court. Additional district and sessions judge J N Thakkar held Bhatt guilty of falsely implicating a Rajasthan-based lawyer by claiming that in 1996, police had seized drugs from a hotel room in Palanpur where the lawyer was staying.

Bhatt, who was sacked from the Indian Police Service in 2015, was then serving as the superintendent of police of



Banaskantha district. The former police officer's wife Shweta expressed disappointment over the verdict and termed it as a "miscarriage of justice".

The district police under Bhatt had arrested Rajasthan lawyer Sumersingh Rajpurohit under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act) in 1996, claiming they had seized drugs from a hotel room in Palanpur where he was staying.

TEMPERATURES CROSS 40°C MARK

Temperatures crossed the 40-degree-Celsius mark in parts of Karnataka, Gujarat and Rajasthan Wednesday, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warning of heatwave conditions over these places for the next two days



IndiGo aircraft brushes wings of AI Express plane at Kolkata airport



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 27: An IndiGo aircraft grazed the wings of an Air India Express plane at the Kolkata airport Wednesday, leaving the wings of both aircraft damaged, officials said.

The IndiGo flight was headed to Darbhanga, while the Air India Express plane was scheduled to leave for Chennai.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has launched a probe and de-rostered two IndiGo pilots involved in the incident, a senior DGCA official said.

The IndiGo flight had 131 adults plus four infants on board, while there were 163 passengers inside the Air India Express aircraft. Besides passengers, both aircraft had pilots and crew members on board, but no injuries to anyone have been reported. Air India in a statement said the aircraft has returned to the bay and further investigations are underway.

"The wingtip of a taxiing aircraft of another airline grazed one of our aircraft, which was stationary and awaiting clearance to enter the runway at

Kolkata for a scheduled operation to Chennai," an Air India Express spokesperson said in a statement. The aircraft has since returned to the bay and further investigation is underway, "for which we are coordinating with the regulator and airport authorities," the airline said.

The incident took place on the taxiway near the runway around 11 am, sources at the airport said. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) said in a statement that the wingtip vortices of both planes were badly damaged.

"A minor graze between a taxiing IndiGo aircraft and that of another carrier was reported from Kolkata Airport. The aircraft returned to bay for inspection and necessary action, as per protocol," IndiGo said in a statement.

Consequently, IndiGo flight 6E-6152 between Kolkata and Darbhanga has been delayed, it said, adding that an alternate aircraft has been arranged to minimise delay and inconvenience to passengers.

IndiGo also said that "an incident report will be submitted to DGCA in due course, as per protocol".

THE DGCA HAS LAUNCHED A PROBE AND DE-ROSTERED TWO INDIGO PILOTS INVOLVED IN THE INCIDENT

TIDBITS

ED summons Mahua Moitra, bizman Darshan Hiranandani today

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate has issued fresh summons to TMC leader Mahua Moitra and Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani for questioning in a Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) contravention case March 28, official sources said Wednesday. The 49-year-old Trinamool Congress leader was called for questioning twice earlier by the central agency but she did not depose citing official work and sought deferment of the notice. Moitra and Hiranandani have been asked to appear for questioning at the ED office here Thursday, the sources said. Hiranandani was also summoned by the agency in a separate FEMA case against his Mumbai-based realty group. Earlier, his father Niranjana Hiranandani had deposed before the ED in Mumbai. In the current case, the sources said, an advocate allegedly linked to Moitra was examined by the ED Wednesday at its office here.

Lokayukta raids 13 officials at over 60 places in K'taka

Bangalore: Anti-corruption agency Lokayukta Wednesday raided more than 60 places linked to 13 state government officials across Karnataka and found ₹35.83 crore worth unaccounted assets, officials said. Massive search operations were conducted across the state in connection with 13 disproportionate asset cases registered against 13 government officers in Lokayukta police stations of Bengaluru City, Udipi, Karwar, Mandya, Mysuru, Kodagu, Dharwad, Bidar, Kolar, Vijayapura, Chikkaballapura and Belagavi, they said. Simultaneously, searches at the residences, offices and residences of the relatives of the concerned accused government officers were conducted at more than 62 places, officials said.

Activist Sonam Wangchuk announces 'border march'

Leh: Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk Wednesday announced the agitation to demand statehood for Ladakh will be intensified and a 'border march' will be held April 7 in the eastern part of the Union territory to highlight ground realities, including alleged encroachments by China. Wangchuk, who is part of the Leh-based Apex body that comprises social, religious and political organisations, said they are adopting the Gandhian approach in their agitation. "We are demanding the fulfilment of the promises made to us by this (BJP) government through its manifestos which led its candidates to win parliamentary polls (in 2019) and hill council polls in Leh (2020)," he told a gathering here. The activist ended his 21-day-long hunger strike in support of the demand for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution Tuesday evening.

EC show-cause notices to Dilip Ghosh, Supriya Shrinete

New Delhi: The Election Commission Wednesday slapped show-cause notices on BJP leader Dilip Ghosh and Congress leader Supriya Shrinete for their offensive remarks against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Kangana Ranaut respectively. Ranaut has been fielded by the BJP from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi Lok Sabha seat for the parliamentary elections. Their remarks were "undignified and in bad taste", the Election Commission (EC) said. The poll panel said that prima facie, the two remarks were violative of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and its advisory to political parties to maintain dignity during electioneering. The MCC came into force March 16 with the commission announcing the schedule for the Lok Sabha elections.

ED files case against Kerala CM's daughter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, March 27: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a money-laundering case against Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter Veena Vijayan and her IT firm for receiving "illegal payments" from a Kochi-based private firm, official sources said Wednesday.

The federal agency has registered the case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and is expected to summon the alleged beneficiaries of these funds and others involved, sources said.



Sources also said the ED will probe all the alleged illegal payments made by the private company to "influential and politically-linked persons".

The ED booked Veena Vijayan and her company after taking cognisance of a complaint filed by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), an investigative arm of the Union corporate affairs ministry they added.

Meanwhile, the opposition Congress, which has been alleging a secret pact between the saffron party and CPI(M) in the state, however, reacted cautiously and raised suspicions that it was an "election stunt" ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, while BJP justified the move, saying corrupt people should have to face the consequences too.

The case came to light after the income-tax department found that Cochin Minerals And Rutile Limited (CMRL) made an alleged "illegal payments" of ₹1.72 crore to Veena Vijayan's company -- Exalogic Solutions -- in 2018 and 2019, even though the information technology (IT) firm had not provided any service to the private company.



A battalion group of the Indian Army, comprising more than 700 personnel, is taking part in the ongoing bilateral tri-service exercise -- 'Tiger Triumph-24' -- between India and the US, being held on the Eastern Seaboard

Must address dipping fertility rates in India: Experts

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, March 27: The decline in fertility rates in India is a matter of concern and must be addressed properly by taking into account factors like urbanisation, education, and women's empowerment, said health experts Wednesday.

According to a recent study published in The Lancet, India's total fertility rate saw a significant decline from 6.18 in 1950 to 1.91 in 2021.

The study predicted that it may further drop to 1.3 by 2050 and 1.04 by 2100.

"Numerous factors such as education, religious beliefs, and the contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR), influence the total fertility rates of a country. In ad-

dition, delay in marriage and childbirth and change in social norms favouring smaller family size, financial independence, more and more women pursuing careers over motherhood, also result in a reduced fertility rate," Dr. Rachita Munjal, Senior Consultant, Birla Fertility & IVF, Gurugram, told IANS.

Other reasons that lead to infertility include rising levels of obesity, stress, smoking, pollution, and unhealthy lifestyles, said the doctor.

Infertility can affect the total fertility rate (TFR) by delaying childbearing age and reducing conception probability.



TFR can be defined as the average number of children born to a woman in her lifetime.

"The psychological impact of infertility and related complications prompts couples to re-

consider family plans, potentially leading to fewer children. The societal stigma surrounding infertility and fertility treatment further restricts couples from seeking medical help, contributing to a lower TFR by limiting access to treatment," Dr. Rachita said.

Dr Nisha Bhatnagar, Medical Director at Infinite Fertility, told IANS that the declining fertility levels can have manifold ramifications for public health policy and society.

However, reproductive technology developments like egg freezing can provide personalised answers to infertility problems, the doctor said.

"Egg freezing has become a recognised technique for maintaining fertility, especially for

those who choose to delay having children for personal or professional reasons," Dr Nisha said in a statement.

However, these are not a cure-all for the general trends in population, the expert said, emphasising the need for more comprehensive public health policies that take into account "socioeconomic factors such as urbanisation, education, and women's empowerment."

"Increased awareness to empower informed family planning, supportive maternity and paternity policies like paid leave and childcare support, and financial incentives such as childcare benefits are also a few measures that can help improve fertility rates in the country," added Dr Rachita.

ACCORDING TO A RECENT STUDY PUBLISHED IN THE LANCET, INDIA'S TOTAL FERTILITY RATE SAW A SIGNIFICANT DECLINE FROM 6.18 IN 1950 TO 1.91 IN 2021

international



Sino-US relations are one of the most important bilateral relations in the world. Whether China and the United States cooperate or confront each other has a bearing on the well-being of the two peoples and the future and destiny of mankind
XI JINPING | PRESIDENT, CHINA

1 IN 6 KIDS ARE CYBERBULLIED: WHO
Some 16 percent of children aged 11 to 15 were cyberbullied in 2022, up from 13 percent four years ago, a WHO Europe report covering 44 countries said. "This report is a wake-up call for all of us to address bullying and violence, whenever and wherever it happens," WHO regional director for Europe Hans Kluge said



of the day quote

The violence and instability in Haiti have consequences far beyond the risk of the violence itself. The situation is creating a child health and nutrition crisis that could cost the lives of countless of children

CATHERINE RUSSELL | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNICEF

We want to convince those who have already deforested that they need to contribute in an important way to countries that still have their forests to keep them standing

LUIZ INACIO LULA DA SILVA | PRESIDENT, BRAZIL

This is the most existential, consequential and important election of our lifetime

KAMALA HARRIS | VICE PRESIDENT, US

SHORT TAKES

Judge issues gag order on Trump

New York: A New York judge Tuesday issued a gag order barring Donald Trump from making public statements about witnesses, prosecutors, court staff and jurors in his upcoming hush-money criminal trial. Judge Juan M Merchan cited Trump's previous comments about him and others involved in the case, as well as a looming April 15 trial date in granting the prosecution's request for a gag order. "It is without question that the imminence of the risk of harm is now paramount," Merchan wrote. Prosecutors had asked for the gag order citing what they called his "long history of making public and inflammatory remarks" about people involved in his legal cases.

Concert shooting: Death toll rises

Moscow: The death toll from last week's Moscow concert hall attack rose to 140 Wednesday after another victim died in a hospital, Russian officials said. That person was one of five still hospitalised in "extremely grave condition," and the doctors "did everything they could" to save them, Russia's Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said. A total of 80 people injured in the attack remain hospitalised, the official added, and 205 others have sought outpatient medical assistance.

Pak data breach

Islamabad: In a serious data breach, the personal information of as many as 2.7 million Pakistanis was compromised from the national database authority from 2019 to 2023, the Interior Ministry was informed Wednesday. A joint investigation team (JIT), headed by a senior officer of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and comprising representatives from various intelligence agencies, unearthed the breach after completing its probe on the data leak from the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), Geo News reported.

Xi meets Dutch PM

Beijing: Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte Wednesday downplayed conflict between the Netherlands and China over restrictions on the export of equipment made by Dutch firm ASML, following a meeting with President Xi Jinping in Beijing. Earlier this year, the Dutch government began denying licences for ASML to export advanced "DUV" tool lines to China, joining a US effort to curb chip exports to the world's second-biggest economy.

SE Asia human trafficking a global crisis: Interpol

About \$2tn to \$3tn in illicit proceeds are channeled through the global financial system annually by organised crime rings

REUTERS

Singapore, March 27: Organised crime rings who fuelled an "explosion" of human trafficking and cyber scam centres during the pandemic have expanded from Southeast Asia into a global network making up to \$3 trillion a year, the head of Interpol said Wednesday. "Driven by online anonymity, inspired by new business models and accelerated by Covid,



these organised crime groups are now working at a scale that was unimaginable a decade ago," Interpol secretary-general Jurgen Stock told a briefing at the global police coordination body's Singapore office.

The new cyber-scam centres, often staffed by unwilling staff trafficked with the promise of legitimate jobs, had helped organised crime groups diversify their revenue from drug trafficking, Stock said. Drug trafficking businesses still contributed 40% to 70% of criminal groups' income, he said. "But we see groups clearly diversifying their criminal businesses using drug trafficking routes also for trafficking of human beings, trafficking of arms, intellectual property, stolen products, car theft," Stock added. About \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion in illicit proceeds are channeled through the global financial system

What began as a regional crime threat in Southeast Asia has become a global human trafficking crisis, with millions of victims, both in the cyber scam centres and as targets

JURGEN STOCK | SECRETARY-GENERAL, INTERPOL

tem annually, he said, adding that an organised crime group can make \$50 billion a year. The United Nations said last year that more than 100,000 people had been trafficked into on-line scam centres in Cambodia. In November Myanmar handed over thousands of fugitive Chinese telecom fraud suspects to China.

China to develop strategic deep sea port, airport in SL



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Colombo, March 27: Sri Lanka's prime minister said Wednesday that China has pledged to develop the island nation's strategic deep sea port and the capital's airport after talks with his counterpart in Beijing. Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena said China -- the island's biggest bilateral creditor -- would "assist" Sri Lanka's restructuring of external debt, a key condition to maintaining a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout.

Beijing's position on debt restructuring has not been made public, but Sri Lankan officials have said China was reluctant to take a haircut on its loans but could extend the tenure and adjust interest rates. Sri Lanka in 2022 ran out of foreign exchange to finance essential imports and declared a sovereign default on its \$46 billion foreign debt.

Months of protests forced then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa out of office. Gunawardena's office said Premier Li Qiang had promised China would "assist Sri Lanka's debt restructuring process continuously and help Sri Lanka to develop its economy".

Gunawardena said Beijing had offered "assistance to develop" Colombo International Airport and Hambantota port, the statement added, without giving further details.

India and the United States are both concerned that a Chinese foothold at Hambantota, on the island's southern coast, could boost its naval advantage in the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lanka has insisted its ports will not be used for any military purposes, but New Delhi has objected to Chinese research vessels calling at Hambantota fearing that they could be used for espionage.

Six Pak HC judges allege ISI intrusion in judicial matters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, March 27: In an unprecedented move, six judges of the Islamabad High Court sought intervention by the Supreme Judicial Council against the alleged interference in the working of the judiciary by Pakistan's powerful intelligence agencies.

A letter signed by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges demanded the SJC headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa initiate a judicial convention against such interference in judicial affairs.

The six judges who signed the March 25 dated letter include Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz.

The letter also advocated adopting a stance to ensure the judiciary's independence through the convention.

The SJC is the highest body authorised to take action against judges of high and supreme courts.

"We are writing to seek guidance from the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) with regard to the duty of a judge to report and respond to actions on part of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, that seek to interfere with discharge of his/her official functions and qualify as intimidation, as well as the duty to report any such actions that come to his/her attention in relation to colleagues and/or members of the courts that the High Court supervises," the letter stated.

It goes on to highlight the interference of the executive and agencies in judicial matters, including the kidnapping and torture of the brother-in-law of a high court judge to put pressure on the judge regarding a case.

"We will also note that the code of conduct for judges prescribed by SJC provides no guidance on how judges must react to and report incidents that are tantamount to intimidation and interfere with judicial independence," it said.

'Gaza will never again be a threat'

ISRAEL, HAMAS DIG IN AS INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE BUILDS FOR CEASE-FIRE IN GAZA

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jerusalem, March 27: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Tuesday blasted a UN Security Council resolution calling for a Gaza cease-fire that his country's top ally, the United States, chose not to block. He said the resolution had emboldened Hamas and he vowed to press ahead with the war.

As the war grinds through a sixth month, both Israel and Hamas have rejected cease-fire efforts, each insisting its version of victory is within reach. The passage of the UN resolution has also escalated tensions between the US and Israel over the conduct of the war.

Netanyahu said Israel can only achieve its aims of dismantling Hamas and returning scores of hostages if it expands its ground offensive to the southern city of Rafah, where over half of Gaza's population has sought refuge, many in crowded tent camps. The US has said a major assault on Rafah would be a mistake. Hamas says it will hold onto



the hostages until Israel agrees to a more permanent cease-fire, withdraws its forces from Gaza and releases hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, including top militants.

It said late Monday that it rejected a recent proposal that fell short of those demands -- which, if fulfilled, would allow it to claim an extremely costly victory. Netanyahu said in a statement that the announcement "proved clearly that Hamas is not interested in continuing negotiations toward a deal and served as unfortunate testimony to the damage of the Security Council decision."

"Israel will not surrender to Hamas' delusional demands and will continue to act to achieve all the goals of the war: releasing all the hostages, destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities and ensuring that Gaza will never again be a threat to Israel." Israel has killed over 32,000 Palestinians, around two-thirds of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its tally. The fighting has left much of the Gaza Strip in ruins, displaced most its residents and driven a third of its population of 2.3 million to the brink of famine. In the face of Hamas' demands for a more permanent cease-fire, Netanyahu has vowed to resume Israel's offensive after any hostage release and keep fighting until the militant group is destroyed. But he has provided few details about what would follow any such victory and has largely rejected a postwar vision outlined by the US.

That approach has brought him into increasingly open conflict with President Joe Biden's administration, which has expressed mounting concern over civilian casualties -- though it has continued to supply Israel with crucial military aid and back Israel's aim of destroying Hamas. **Netanyahu cancels US visit** The passage of Monday's res-

olution by the UN Security Council resolution further deepened the divisions. The resolution called for the release of all hostages held in Gaza but did not condition the cease-fire on it. The Biden administration, which vetoed previous UN resolutions calling for a cease-fire, abstained in Monday's vote, allowing it to pass.

In response, Netanyahu cancelled a planned visit by Israeli officials to Washington during which the US side was set to propose alternatives to a ground assault in Rafah.

The move raised criticism in Israeli media that Netanyahu was straining Israel's most important alliance in order to placate hard-liners in his governing coalition. "He is prepared to sacrifice Israel's relations with the United States for a short-lived political-media coup. He has completely lost it," Ben Caspit, a prominent columnist in the Israeli newspaper Maariv, wrote.

He said Netanyahu has been trying US patience by dragging his feet on ensuring more humanitarian aid gets into Gaza and on drawing up post-war plans. "Now, instead of doing everything to placate them, he is flailing about like a baby throwing a tantrum."

UK migrant crossings at new peak

REUTERS

London, March 27: More than 4,600 asylum seekers have arrived in Britain on small boats so far in 2024, a record total for the first three months of the year and giving Prime Minister Rishi Sunak a fresh political headache.

Provisional data from the Home Office, or interior ministry, showed Wednesday that 4,644 people had been detected arriving across the Channel on small boats such as inflatable dinghies up to March 26 this year.

That compares with 3,770 for the same period last year and 4,162 for 2022, the previous record high.

Sunak is hoping his flagship scheme to deport those arriving in Britain without permission to Rwanda will deter people

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Rishi Sunak keeps on telling the British people that small boat arrivals are coming down and his promise to stop the boats remains on track

STEPHEN KINNOCK | IMMIGRATION SPOKESPERSON, LABOUR PARTY

from making the dangerous cross-Channel crossings. Legislation which aims to get that plan up and running after a series of legal setbacks is due back in parliament next month.

Overall annual numbers fell 36% last year from 2022's record total, which led to Sunak claiming the government was beginning to have success in "stopping the boats", one of his key priorities ahead of an election expected later this year.

\$3.7bn to fence India-Myanmar border

REUTERS

New Delhi, March 27: India plans to spend nearly \$3.7 billion to fence its 1,610-km (1,000-mile) porous border with Myanmar within about a decade, said a source with direct knowledge of the matter, to prevent smuggling and other illegal activities.

New Delhi said earlier this year it would fence the border and end a decades-old visa-free movement policy with coup-hit Myanmar for border citizens for reasons of national security and to maintain the demographic structure of its northeastern region.

A government committee earlier this month approved the cost for the fencing, which needs to be approved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet, said the source who declined to be named



as they were not authorised to talk to the media.

The prime minister's office and the ministries of home, finance, foreign affairs and information and broadcasting did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment. Myanmar has so far not commented on India's fencing plans.

Since a military coup in Myanmar in 2021, thousands of civilians and hundreds of troops

have fled from there to Indian states where people on both sides share ethnic and familial ties. This has worried New Delhi because of risk of communal tensions spreading to India.

Some members of the Indian government have also blamed the porous border for abetting the tense situation in the restive northeastern Indian state of Manipur, abutting Myanmar. For nearly a year, Manipur has been engulfed by a civil war-like situation between two ethnic groups, one of which shares lineage with Myanmar's Chin tribe.

The committee of senior Indian officials also agreed to build parallel roads along the fence and 1,700 km (1,050 miles) of feeder roads connecting military bases to the border, the source said.

LANDMARK BILL

REUTERS

Bangkok, March 27: Thailand's parliament overwhelmingly approved a marriage equality bill Wednesday, a landmark step that moves one of Asia's most liberal countries closer to becoming its third territory to legalise same-sex unions.

The bill had the support of all of Thailand's major parties and was more than a decade in the making. It still requires approval from the Senate and endorsement from the king before it becomes law and would take effect 120 days later.

The legislation was passed by 400 of the 415 lawmakers present, with only 10 voting against it and could see Thailand join Taiwan and Nepal in allowing same-sex unions.

Thai moves closer to legalising same-sex unions

The bill's passage marks a significant step towards cementing Thailand's position as one of Asia's most liberal countries on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, with openness and progressive attitudes coexisting in society alongside traditional, conservative Buddhist values.

Thailand has long been a draw for same-sex couples, with a vibrant and visible LGBT social scene for locals and expatriates, and targeted campaigns to attract LGBT travellers.

EQUAL RIGHTS GUARANTEED But rights activists have long maintained its laws and institutions do not reflect changing social attitudes and still discriminate against LGBT people and same-sex couples.

The legislation passed Wednesday is the consolidation



Thailand could join Taiwan, Nepal in legalising same-sex unions
Bill recognises marriage between 2 people regardless of gender
Only 10 lawmakers voted against bill

We did this for all Thai people to reduce disparity in society and start creating equality. I want to invite you all to make history

DANUPHORN PUNNAKANTA | CHAIRMAN OF THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON THE DRAFT BILL

two people regardless of gender, rather than a husband and wife as previously defined.

It grants a couple full rights of a married couple under the country's civil and commercial code, including those concerning inheritance and adopting children.

The Constitutional Court had in 2021 ruled Thailand's current marriage law, which only recognises heterosexual couples, was constitutional, recommending legislation be expanded to en-

sure rights of other genders. Nada Chaiyakit, an LGBT advocate and a law lecturer at Mae Fah Luang University, said the passing of the bill was a positive step but there were some unresolved issues.

LGBT advocates who were on the parliamentary committee had during Wednesday's debate pushed unsuccessfully for the terms "father" and "mother" to be changed to the gender-neutral "parent" in references to the family unit, to avoid complications in issues such as adoption. "I'm happy indeed but this isn't a full marriage equality, it is only same-sex marriage," Nada said. "The right to marriage has been granted but not the full right to family establishment. It is a shame that we didn't go the full way."

of the day quote

The CCI is conducting enquiries into some entities in the fintech sector. We are looking into how technology is being leveraged by fintech players and whether they are impacting competition (in the market). The enquiries are going on

An airline with double of today's size, global reach and footprint by the year 2030 that is the ambitious target

I guarantee you, the quicker we do this (decarbonising), the more job opportunities there will be. India will do it first and foremost, for herself

SHORT TAKES

Largest settlement ever in US history

New York: Visa and Mastercard reached an estimated \$30 billion settlement to limit credit and debit card fees for merchants, with some savings likely to be passed on to consumers through lower prices. The antitrust settlement announced Tuesday is one of the largest in US history, and if it receives court approval would resolve most claims in nationwide litigation that began in 2005. Some critics believe it may not go far enough, saying the savings would be temporary and fees would remain high.

Tata, HPCL ink pact for EV charging

New Delhi: Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Wednesday said it has tied up with Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd to set up 5,000 public charging stations across the country by the end of the year. The collaboration will leverage Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd's (HPCL) fuel station network and company's insights from over 1.2 lakh Tata EVs on Indian roads, to set up chargers at locations frequently visited by Tata EV owners, Tata Passenger Electric Mobility (TPEM), a unit of Tata Motors, said. Both entities have inked a MoU in this regard, it added. The companies are also exploring the introduction of a convenient payment system through a co-branded RFID card, which will make the charging experience hassle-free.

RBI tweaks circular on AIF investments by RE

Mumbai, March 27: The Reserve Bank Wednesday modified its circular on regulated entities' (RE) investments in alternative investment funds (AIFs), dialling down on some of the requirements after a feedback. The central bank said the revisions have been made with a view to ensure "uniformity in implementation among the REs, and to address the concerns flagged in various representations received from stakeholders". The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had in December 2023 come out with the circular governing investments by banks, non-bank lenders and other REs to the AIF sector, following concerns of the route being used for evergreening of loans. As per the initial concerns, Res' investments in AIFs were

CAD shrinks to 1.2% of GDP

FOR THE FIRST NINE MONTHS OF THE FISCAL, CURRENT ACCOUNT DEFICIT HAS MODERATED TO 1.2% OF GDP FROM 2.6% YOY ON THE BACK OF A LOWER MERCHANDISE TRADE DEFICIT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 27: India's current account deficit narrowed to \$10.5 billion or 1.2 per cent of GDP in the October-December quarter as against \$11.4 billion or 1.3 per cent in the preceding three months ending September; the Reserve Bank said Tuesday.

When compared to the year-ago period, the narrowing in the CAD was much sharper when compared to \$16.8 billion or 2 per cent for the October-December 2022 period, the Reserve Bank said in the data on balance of payments.

For the first nine months of the fiscal, CAD has moderated to 1.2 per cent of GDP from 2.6 per cent of GDP in the corresponding period a year ago on the back of a lower merchandise trade deficit, the RBI said.

Current account balances are the sum total of the entire inflow and outflow of foreign funds in the economy, and are generally taken as a key indicator of a country's external strength. A widening in the deficit in the past had led to rupee depreciation and also actions by rating agencies on the sovereign rating.



Analysts at foreign brokerage Barclays said the CAD narrowed in the December quarter despite a wider merchandise trade deficit, cushioned by a record high services trade surplus and secondary income. The CAD will narrow further to 1 per cent of GDP for FY24 and the country's inclusion in global bond indices will improve the number in FY25, they added.

The merchandise trade deficit at \$71.6 billion for the December

Today, the economy is open. In the next 2-3 decades, we can sustain a very rapid growth

ARVIND PANAGARIYA
CHAIRMAN OF THE 16TH FINANCE COMMISSION

India's current account deficit stands at \$10.5bn

quarter was marginally higher than \$71.3 billion in the year-ago period, the RBI said.

Services exports grew by 5.2 per cent on a year-on-year basis on the back of rising exports of software, business and travel services, the RBI said, adding that net services receipts increased to \$45 billion from \$38.7 billion in the year-ago period to help cushion the current account deficit.

Private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances

GROK ENABLED FOR PREMIUM X SUBS

Elon Musk said Tuesday artificial intelligence startup xAI's chatbot, Grok, will be enabled for all premium subscribers of social media platform X, formerly Twitter. He announced it in a post on X, without revealing any more details. Previously, the chatbot was available only to Premium+ subscribers



Govt plans to borrow ₹7.5L-cr from market

Gross market borrowing for 2024-25 is estimated at ₹14.13L-cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: The Centre is planning to raise Rs 7.5 lakh crore through market borrowing in the April-September period of 2024-25 to fund the revenue gap to push economic growth, the finance ministry said Wednesday.

Out of gross market borrowing of ₹14.13 lakh crore estimated for 2024-25, ₹7.5 lakh crore, or 53 per cent, is planned to be borrowed in the first half (H1), an official statement said.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in interim Budget proposed to borrow ₹14.13 lakh crore by issuing dated securities to meet revenue shortfall in the next financial year.

This is lower than last year's gross borrowing estimate of ₹15.43 lakh crore, which was the highest ever.

"The gross and net market borrowings through dated securities during 2024-25 are estimated at ₹14.13 lakh crore and ₹11.75 lakh crore, respectively.



Both will be less than that in 2023-24. Now that private investments are happening at scale, the lower borrowings by the central government will facilitate larger availability of credit for the private sector," she had said. The fundraise would be done through dated securities, including Rs 12,000 crore through issuance of sovereign green bonds (SGBs).

Based on market feedback and in line with global market practices, it has been decided to introduce a new dated security of 15-year tenor, it said.

There are signs of private investment picking up in the steel and cement sector due to massive capital expenditure by the government.

Against the estimate of ₹10 lakh crore for 2023-24, the government has earmarked ₹11.11 lakh crore during the next year.

Adani Ports acquires 95% in Gopalpur Port at ₹3,350cr

Gopalpur Port handles primarily dry bulk cargo, including iron ore, coal, limestone, ilmenite, and alumina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 27: India's largest port operator Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) has expanded its presence on India's coastline after buying 95 per cent in Odisha's Gopalpur Port Ltd (GPL) at an enterprise value of Rs 3,080 crore.

"Its (Gopalpur Port) location will allow us unprecedented access to the mining hubs of Odisha and neighbouring states and allow us to expand our hinterland logistics footprint. GPL will add to the Adani group's pan-India port network, significantly enhance overall cargo volume, and strengthen APSEZ's integrated logistics approach," said Karan Adani, chief executive officer, Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone Ltd.

The Adani group company, which already owns ports like Dhamra and Gangavaram on the eastern coast, will acquire the stake in brownfield GPL by purchasing 56 per cent from the Shapoorji Pallonji (SP) Group and 39 per cent from Odisha Stevedores Ltd, which will continue as the JV partner post the acquisition.

The deal is expected to be completed in the first quarter of



2024-25 (FY25). In addition to the enterprise value of Rs 3,080 crore, there is a contingent consideration of Rs 270 crore estimated to be payable after 5.5 years, taking the total to Rs 3,350 crore.

The sale of GPL is the second port investment in the past few months from the SP group, a diversified construction and infrastructure, real estate and energy conglomerate. It had earlier divested its Dharamtar Port in Maharashtra to JSW Infrastructure for an enterprise value of Rs 710 crore.

"These divestments are key milestones in our road map to reduce group debt and set the stage for growth, taking advantage of the macro trends for demand in our core businesses, both in India and overseas," said a SP group spokesperson.

In FY24, GPL is estimated to handle about 11.3 million tonne cargo (up 52 per cent Y-o-Y) and earn a revenue of Rs 520 crore (up 39 per cent) and achieve earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation of Rs 232 cr (up 65 per cent).

Positive macro data boosts indices

SENSEX RISES 526 PTS, NIFTY ENDS ABOVE 22,100 ON BUYING IN BANKING, AUTO SHARES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 27: Benchmark Sensex climbed 526 points while Nifty closed above the 22,100 level Wednesday following buying in banking, auto and oil shares after positive macro data.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 526.01 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 72,996.31 with 18 of its stocks advancing and 12 closing lower. During the day, it jumped 668.43 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,138.73.

The broader Nifty of NSE rebounded by 118.95 points or 0.54 per cent to close at 22,123.65. As many as 22 Nifty shares gained while 27 declined and one closed unchanged.

Auto, banking and energy shares supported the recovery while FMCG and IT shares declined due to profit taking.

Among Sensex shares, Reliance Industries rose the most by 3.6 per cent, adding more than 312 points to the upside. Maruti, Bajaj Finance, Titan, Kotak Mahindra Bank, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro were among the major gainers.

Wipro, HCL Technologies, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services and Tata Motors were among the laggards.



In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.70 per cent and midcap index went up by 0.01 per cent. Among the indices, services jumped 1.01 per cent, capital goods climbed 1 per cent, consumer durables (0.98 per cent), industrials (0.97 per cent) and realty (0.93 per cent). Commodities, IT, utilities, metal and tech were the laggards.

The rupee declined by 4 paise to close at 83.33 against the US dollar Wednesday, tracking a strong American currency

against major rivals overseas and weak Asian peers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned net buyers Tuesday as they bought equities worth Rs 10.13 crore, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.96 per cent to USD 85.42 a barrel.

On Tuesday, the BSE benchmark declined by 361.64 points or 0.50 per cent to settle at 72,470.30. The NSE Nifty dropped 92.05 points or 0.42 per cent to 22,004.70.

T+0 trade settlement cycle to start today

Stock exchanges BSE and NSE are all set to introduce the beta version of the T+0 or same-day trade settlement, on an optional basis, for select stocks from Thursday. This will be in addition to the existing T+1 settlement cycle in the equity cash market. To begin with, the option of T+0 trade settlement will be available for a limited set of 25 scrips and with a limited number of brokers. T+0 means settlements on the same day and the move will bring cost and time efficiency, transparency in charges to investors and strengthen risk management at clearing corporations and the overall securities market ecosystem. In a circular, BSE came out with the list of 25 scrips wherein the option of T+0 settlement cycle would be available. The scrips included Bajaj Auto, Vedanta, Hindalco Industries, State Bank of India (SBI), Trent, Tata Communications, Nestle India, Cipla, MRF, JSW Steel, BPCL, ONGC, NMDC and Ambuja Cements.

US bridge collapse likely to hurt Indian importers

INDIA'S RELIANCE ON IMPORTED COAL IS SIGNIFICANT, AND ANY DISRUPTIONS IN THE GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN CAN HAVE FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 27: The collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore in the US has reverberated across the Indian coal and petcoke markets, sparking concerns about potential supply chain disruptions and price impacts.

According to S&P Global Commodity Insights, the incident, triggered by a vessel collision with a supporting pylon, has led to the suspension of navigation through Baltimore Harbor, a critical hub for coal ex-



ports. India, a major importer of US thermal coal, is bracing for challenges in its supply chain following the bridge collapse.

According to a US-based trader, the incident is expected to restrict shipments from Arch Coal and create logistical hurdles for Indian importers.

A broker told S&P, "The incident will restrict NAPP shipments from Arch Coal and create numerous problems in the

supply chain for India. Possible effect on thermal coal to Europe. The bigger impact is India. Watch the petcoke prices jump!"

The trader warned of potential price jumps in petcoke, a byproduct of the coal refining process, which could further strain India's energy markets.

However, opinions within the Indian market are mixed regarding the extent of the pricing impacts.

An India-based trader expressed skepticism about significant disruptions, pointing out that major suppliers like Consol and Arch had not declared force majeure.

Nevertheless, concerns persist about the potential delays in coal shipments and the consequent strain on India's energy sector.

India's reliance on imported coal is significant, and any disruptions in the global supply chain can have far-reaching consequences.

The Indian trader said, "The authorities will take 6-7 days to assess how much debris is there from the incident and how much draft is available because if the draft is low then it could be a problem. The authorities may take 10-15 days to clear out the debris, so it means no ship movement during this period."

gation through Baltimore Harbor, alternative routes and logistical arrangements will need to be explored to ensure a steady supply of coal to India.

While some market participants anticipate short-term price fluctuations in response to the incident, others believe that the overall impact on coal prices may be limited if the waterway is cleared within a reasonable timeframe.

Nevertheless, the situation remains fluid, and Indian stakeholders are closely monitoring developments to assess the potential implications for energy markets.

As authorities work to assess and clear the debris from the collapsed bridge, Indian coal and petcoke importers are bracing for potential disruptions in their supply chains.

With India's energy security at stake, attention is focused on finding alternative solutions to mitigate the impact of the Baltimore bridge collapse on the country's energy sector.

Sunrisers too hot for MI

RECORDS TUMBLE AS SRH OUTMUSCLE MUMBAI INDIANS IN SIX-HITTING FESTIVAL IN IPL 2024

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, March 27: Records tumbled as Sunrisers Hyderabad went on a rampage to post the highest ever IPL total of 277/3 against Mumbai Indians before sealing a 31-run victory in a power-hitting contest that left bowlers on both sides befuddled.

SRH opener Travis Head (62, 24b, 9x4, 3x6) and No.3 Abhishek Sharma (63, 23b, 3x4, 7x6) came up with a sensational display of power-hitting that saw the latter snatching the franchise record for the fastest fifty from the Australian within minutes.

Heinrich Klaasen (80 n.o., 34b, 4x4, 7x6) provided the fireworks in the end to help SRH break an 11-year-old record. The previous highest total in IPL was 263/5 achieved by Royal Challengers Bangalore back in 2013. It was also the highest total recorded in a T20 league.

Mumbai bowlers were left shell-shocked by SRH's six-hitting spree but their batters came out with a purpose and made a match out of what looked like a one way traffic at the innings break. Eventually, they ended at 246/5. A record 38 sixes were plundered in the game and it was the first time 500 runs were scored in a T20 match.

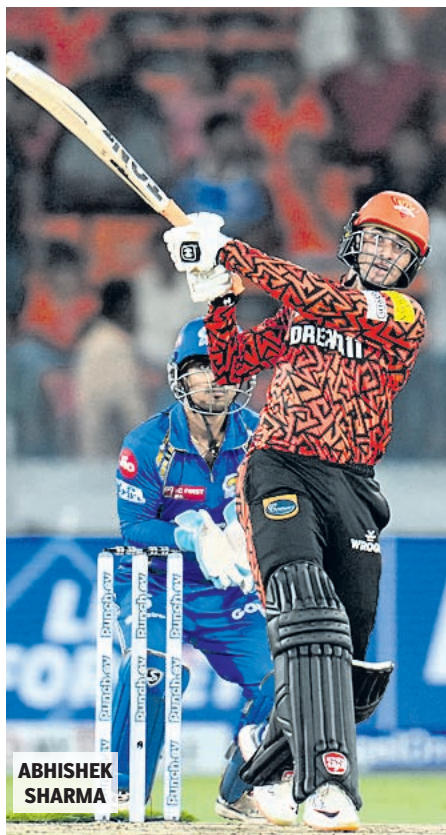
Chasing a mammoth 278, Rohit Sharma (26, 12b, 1x4, 3x6), in his 200th game for the franchise, played some sublime strokes and was well complemented by Ishan Kishan (34, 13b, 2x4, 4x6) who got some much needed runs.

Tilak Varma (64, 34b, 2x4, 6x6) took the game deep with a high-quality knock. At 182/3 in 14 overs and seven wickets in hand, Mumbai were on course for something special before succumbing to constant scoreboard pressure. Tim David (42 n.o., 22b, 2x4, 3x6) tried his best towards the end but it was not enough.

Earlier, it was raining fours and sixes as Head and Sharma toyed with the Mumbai Indians attack after being put in to bat. Head, who was surprisingly left out of the playing eleven for the opening



TRAVIS HEAD



ABHISHEK SHARMA



HEINRICH KLAASEN

Team total of 277/3 by SRH became the highest in IPL history surpassing the previous best of 263/5 by RCB against Pune Warriors in 2013. It is also the 4th highest total in men's T20s after 314/3 by Nepal (vs Mongolia, 2023), 278/3 by Afghanistan (vs Ireland, 2019) and Czech Republic's 278/4

Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma became the first pair of batters to complete fifty in less than 20 balls for the same team in an IPL match

The match witnessed 38 sixes, most in an IPL game, surpassing the previous best of 33 by RCB against CSK in 2018 and also by RR against CSK in 2020-21

The match aggregate of 523 runs became the highest in T20 history surpassing the previous best of 517 in the match between South Africa and West Indies in 2023

game, reinforced his status as one of the most dangerous batters in the game with a whirlwind effort. He broke David Warner's record of the fastest fifty by a SRH batter with a 18-ball half century before Sharma surpassed Head's feat 20 balls later by reaching the milestone in 16 balls.

Head, who was dropped by compatriot David at the start of his innings, opened his front leg and hit boundaries at will. The southpaw completed his fifty with an inside out four wide of

BRIEF SCORES

SRH 277/3

(Heinrich Klaasen 80 n.o., Abhishek Sharma 63, Travis Head 62, Aiden Markram 42)

beat MI 246/5

(Tilak Varma 64, Tim David 42 n.o., Ishan Kishan 34; Pat Cummins 2/35, Jaydev Unadkat 2/47)

by 31 runs.

mid-off before dispatching a bouncer from Gerald Coetzee for a six over deep midwicket.

When Head departed, Sharma went hammer and tongs, mostly targeting the cow corner region. It was a nightmarish start to the IPL for the 17-year-old South Africa pacer Kwena Maphaka (0/66), who made the Mumbai squad at the back of his exploits in the U-19 World Cup. The left-arm pacer could not recover from Head's onslaught in his second over in

“THE WICKET WAS GOOD BUT 277, NO MATTER HOW GOOD OR BAD YOU BOWL, IF THE OPPOSITION GET 277 THAT MEANS THEY BATTED VERY WELL. IT WAS TOUGH OUT THERE FOR BOWLERS”

HARDIK PANDYA

which he conceded 22 runs.

With the majority of the Mumbai bowlers taken to the cleaners, it was surprising that Mumbai skipper Hardik Pandya waited till the 13th over to give Jasprit Bumrah his second over.

Following Sharma's dismissal, the in-form Klaasen ensured there was no stopping to the SRH's six hitting spree. Klaasen had almost taken SRH over the line with his breathtaking knock against KKR at the Eden Gardens. Former skipper Aiden Markram chipped in 42 (28b, 2x4, 1x6).

Pant aims to shake off rustiness as DC face RR



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MATCHDAY

Indian Premier League

RR vs DC

Time: 07:30 pm

Telecast: Star Sports Network

Stream: Jio Cinema

Jaipur, March 27: Skipper Rishabh Pant will look to overcome his rustiness as Delhi Capitals aim for an improved batting display in their bid for a first win of the IPL season when they take on Rajasthan Royals here Thursday.

Pant's much-anticipated return to action 453 days after he suffered grievous injuries in a horrific car accident, lasted just 13 balls (18 runs) with Punjab Kings winning by four wickets at their new home ground in Mullanpur.

Pant, though, displayed his usual lively demeanour behind the stumps and also effected the stumping of Jitesh Sharma. Having overcome the early jitters and nervousness in his first game, Pant would be eager to regain his mojo quickly as his match-up against the likes of Trent Boult, Ravichandran Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal would be the highlight of the contest.

DC head coach Ricky Ponting chose David Warner and Mitchell Marsh to open the innings in the hope that the duo would score enough runs to take the pressure off Pant lower down the order. But the two failed to capitalise on good starts and the pressure soon came on Pant.

Wicketkeeper-batter Abhishek Porel's unbeaten 32-run cameo was the only bright spot in DC's batting. Porel was used as the 'Impact player' as Delhi were a bowler short. The problem was worsened further after Ishant Sharma twisted his ankle. The

lanky pacer could miss a few matches as well.

Delhi's spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel will have a bigger role to play after what was witnessed on a dry surface at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium the other day when Rajasthan Royals' opening duo of Jos Buttler and Yashasvi Jaiswal faced some early hiccups against Lucknow Super Giants.

However, Sanju Samson struck an unbeaten 82 as the Royals won by 20 runs. By scoring a fifty in his team's first match of the season for the fifth successive time, Samson has become an early contender for the hotly-contested spot for the wicket-keeper-batter's slot in the upcoming T20 World Cup.

With Riyan Parag also among the runs, the Royals top-four will pose questions to the Delhi bowling line-up, and here's where Kuldeep and Axar's overs will be crucial in the middle.

The Royals' bowling has also hit the right notes with Trent Boult leading the charge with the new ball. Sandeep Sharma has also been superb in the death overs. The rookie Indian dismissed KL Rahul at 58 in the 17th over and also stymied Nicholas Pooran in the penultimate over as RR restricted Lucknow Super Giants to 173/6.

Stimac ouster cry grows after shock India defeat



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the same team, same players, so what happened suddenly?" he asked.

"Even though I have been part of the Indian changing room there must be something missing somewhere. We're not privy to what's happening there. I'm unsure about the players' relationship with Stimac."

The All India Football Federation under Kalyan Chaubey has also made headlines for wrong reasons in the recent past since the sacking of its secretary general Shaji Prabhakaran for "breach of trust" in November last year.

This has coincided with India's Asian Games fiasco and a disastrous show in the Asian Cup. India struggled to make a team for the Hangzhou showpiece and reached just hours before the continental showpiece.

And, at the Asian Cup early this year, India failed to score a single goal from three outings, and extended their goalless run to six successive matches till Chhetri ended the drought in his 150th International appearance Tuesday.

'Get house in order'

Gourmangi further urged the stakeholders to get the "house in order". "I don't want to take names but the AIFF's recent incidents may have had an impact on the field too. It's like if the parents are quarrelling then the effect will be seen on the kids. You need to get the house in order. If the players don't progress and continue playing the same, then of course, we can point fingers," said the FC Goa assistant coach.

'Flawed selection'
Demanding immediate ouster of Stimac, Biswas said: "The coach should not be spared after such a show. If he takes the credit for the win, he should be equally responsible for the defeat. The likes of PK Banerjee, Nayeemuddin too were sacked after poor results then why not Stimac?"

Former India defender Subrata Bhattacharya also echoed the same views. "Foreign coach never brought any laurels to Indian team. Be it Amal Dutta or PK Banerjee, it's the Indian coach who took India to greater heights."

Medvedev, Alcaraz in Miami Open quarters

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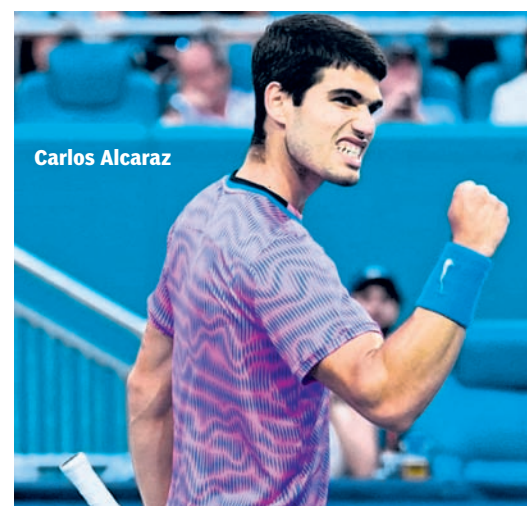
Miami Gardens (Florida), March 27: Defending Miami Open champion Daniil Medvedev won his 350th career match to move into the quarterfinals for a fourth straight year, beating Dominik Koepfer 7-6(7-5), 6-0 Tuesday.

Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz also advanced with ease in a 6-3, 6-3 win over No.23 seed Lorenzo Musetti. Alcaraz, who beat Musetti in less than 90 minutes and looked comfortable as ever on the court, said he's "probably" playing his best tennis since last summer. That ankle injury from last month is no longer a concern, he said.

"I don't know if this is the best game that I'm playing, but without a doubt it's the best feeling," the Wimbledon champion said. "I'm feeling great on the court. I'm moving great. I'm not thinking about the ankle anymore on the court."

Alcaraz will face No.11 seed Grigor Dimitrov on Thursday in the quarterfinals. Dimitrov beat No.8 seed Hubert Hurkacz 3-6, 6-3, 7-6(7-3) after a tie-breaker in which Hurkacz was penalized for touching the net with his foot.

Tied at 2-2 in the tie-breaker, the match referee said Hurkacz's



Carlos Alcaraz



Daniil Medvedev

foot touched the net as he charged forward on a return. It cost him a point. Hurkacz slammed his racket in protest.

No.3 seed Medvedev, after a tight opening set, pulled away to win his ninth straight match in south Florida and continue his run at back-to-back titles. Medvedev trailed 4-0 in the tiebreaker before rallying to take the set. He said he used that momentum to get out to a fast start and finish his milestone victory.

Medvedev goes for victory No.351 Wednesday against Nicolas Jarry, the No.22 seed

who ousted No.7 seed Casper Ruud 7-6(7-3), 6-3.

Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner, seeded No.2, improved to 19-1 in matches this year with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over Christopher O'Connell to reach the quarterfinals.

In the middle of the match, commentators said a spectator had fainted in the 82 degree temperatures and play was stopped. Sinner came to the sideline and passed up drinks and towels to the person.

Also advancing was Tomas Machac, who reached the quar-

terfinals to face Sinner with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Matteo Arnaldi.

On the women's side, No.4 seed Elena Rybakina outlasted No.8 seed Maria Sakkari 7-5, 6-7(4-7), 6-4 in a grueling match that lasted 2 hours and 48 minutes to earn a spot in the semifinals.

Two-time Grand Slam champion Victoria Azarenka defeated Yulia Putintseva 7-6(7-4), 1-6, 6-3 to also make the semifinals. It was the second time that Azarenka, 34, has made it to the semifinals this season after going that far just once in 2023. She has won the Miami Open three times.

Sindhu reaches Rd 2 of Madrid Spain Masters badminton

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Madrid, March 27: Double Olympic medalist PV Sindhu progressed to the second round of the Madrid Spain Masters with a straight-game win over Canada's Wen Yu Zhang here Wednesday.

Sindhu, who finished as runner-up in the last edition, saw off World No.49 Zhang 21-16, 21-12 in a lop-sided contest. Sindhu, a former world champion, will meet Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu-Hsun next.

The half an hour clash had some exciting moments as the two players fought hard for supremacy with Sindhu conceding a 4-2 lead to Zhang, who could only manage a one-point advantage at the break. After resumption, the Indian pulled away from 14-14 to seal the opening game.

The second game was an easy affair as Sindhu jumped to 11-6 after 4-4 at one stage. The Indian kept moving ahead as Zhang's game crumbled under pressure.

FIH MAKES PITCH FOR EVOLUTIONARY DRY TURFS IN INDIA

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New Delhi, March 27: Keen to move past water-guzzling synthetic pitches, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) is set to mandate dry turfs at all major events after the Paris Olympics and the world body made a stop-over in India Wednesday to extol the virtues of the innovation that has not yet been embraced by the country.

At the 'Dry Turf Seminar', which was attended by its Facilities and Quality Programme Manager Alastair Cox, the FIH made a pitch for the turfs to make their India debut after being installed in Bloemfontein, South Africa earlier this month.

The turfs made their competition debut in January when they were used during the Hockey5s World Cup in Oman.



The FIH is promoting them as a sustainable option against the currently-in-use artificial turfs that require 6,000 litres of water daily for maintenance, as per available estimates.

"This is just an evolution. We think manufacturers will change the coatings on the sticks to

lower friction. In the long term, I don't think we will see major differences," Cox said when asked whether the players are ready for the change.

So far, by FIH's own admission, the experiment has yielded mixed results. In its assessment after the Hockey5s World Cup, the

FIH stated that the "new prototype performed better than any existing turf but there is still improvement to be made."

"Based on player feedback it is clear that areas need to be improved," it said without specifying the exact nature of improvements needed.

Ever since synthetic turfs, made up of fibers which look like natural grass, were introduced in the late 1970s to replace grass pitches, players have preferred to compete on them when they are wet. The dry turfs, in contrast, are made of bio-based sugarcane, which do not require watering at all.

With several parts of the world facing an acute shortage of water, the world body has been compelled to explore sustainable options. "I think the players and some of the techniques have to

evolve. So, yeah I don't think it will make a major transition. The difference will be significantly less if we remove the natural grass to synthetic turf, what we did 50 years ago was radical," Cox reasoned.

Hockey India was not represented at Wednesday's event and when reached out, a source said, while HI doesn't disagree with the idea, it would like to have more structured guidelines to make a move.

Currently, FIH's Preferred Turf Suppliers, Polytan and Greenfields, are launching dry turf products in the global hockey market. In India, Odisha is the spiritual home of hockey with top-notch infrastructure that has hosted World Cup level events and it won't be a surprise if the introduction of dry turfs could also start from the state.