



SHOCKING REVELATION

Actor Sushmita Sen says she suffered a heart attack recently and had to get an angioplasty done

LEISURE P2



NO JOINT STATEMENT

No joint communique from G20 Foreign Ministers' meeting due to sharp rift between the West and Russia over the Ukraine war

NATIONAL P7



INDIA STARE AT DEFEAT

Nathan Lyon's 8-wicket haul puts Australia in a position to win the third Test against India at Indore

SPORTS P12



TAKING AIM: Sharpshooters of the CRPF train with new weapons at an undisclosed location in Jammu, Thursday

PTI PHOTO

PM, LoP, CJI panel to choose CEC, ECs

Apex court says persons who are weak-kneed before the powers cannot be appointed to the Election Commission

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 2: In a landmark verdict aimed at insulating the appointment of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) from the executive's interference, the Supreme Court ruled Thursday that their appointments will be done by the President on the advice of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

Opposition parties including the Congress, the Trinamool Congress, AAP and many others hailed the decision of the Supreme Court and termed it as a 'victory for democracy'. A five-judge constitution bench headed by Justice KM Joseph, in a unanimous verdict, held that this norm will continue to hold good till a law on the issue is made by Parliament.

The apex court said if there is no LoP in the Lok Sabha, then the leader of the single largest opposition party will be in the committee to appoint the CEC and elections commissioners.

The bench delivered its verdict on a batch of pleas seeking a Collegium-like system for the appointment of ECs and CEC.

The bench, also comprising Justices Ajay Rastogi, Aniruddha Bose, Hrishikesh Roy and CT Ravikumar, stressed on purity in the election process, and said democracy is intrinsically linked to the will of people.

Justice Rastogi, who concurred with the lead judgement authored by Justice

Joseph, delivered a separate verdict with his reasoning.

The apex court said that election in a democracy should undoubtedly be fair and the buck stops with the Election Commission to ensure that its purity is maintained. The bench said the Election Commission must act within the constitutional framework and within the law and it cannot act in an unfair manner. It said that an Election Commission, which does not ensure free and fair role in the process, guarantees breakdown of rule of law, which is the bedrock of democracy.

The bench referred to Article 324 of the Constitution which deals with the appointment of members of Election Commission. It said that Parliament has not passed

any law in this regard as required by the Constitution. The Supreme Court had reserved its judgement on the issue November 24 last year. During the hearing in the matter, the top court had questioned the 'haste' and 'tearing hurry' with which the Centre had appointed ex-bureaucrat Arun Goel as an Election Commissioner, saying his file travelled at 'lightning speed' within departments in 24 hours.

The apex court had asked how the Union Law Minister shortlisted a panel of four names that was recommended to the Prime Minister for appointment as Election Commissioner when none of them would have completed the stipulated six-year tenure in office.

"The 'Extremely Compromised EC' can now become 'Extremely Competent EC'," TMC MP Derek O'Brien tweeted immediately after the SC announcement. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal termed the verdict 'historic', and said it will help strengthen democracy with an impartial functioning of the poll panel. Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the verdict will not allow BJP to weaken India's democratic values.

The SC also said the Election Commission is duty-bound to act in a fair and legal manner and a person who is weak-kneed before the powers cannot be appointed in it. The court said vitally important decisions have to be taken by those at the helm of the affairs and 'it is the chief election commissioner and the election commissioners at whose table the buck must stop'. **MORE P7**

Supreme Court's landmark order is a democratic victory!
We welcome the decision of the Constitution Bench on the appointment of Election Commissioners and Chief Election Commissioner. Will of the people prevails over the ill-fated attempts of the oppressive forces!
MAMATA BANERJEE



SHORT TAKES

Naveen condoles Pintu Nanda's death

BHUBANESWAR: Popular Odia actor Pintu Nanda passed away late night Wednesday while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Hyderabad. He was 45. Nanda had been suffering from liver cirrhosis for quite some time now. Doctors had advised him to undergo liver transplantation. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik condoled Thursday the sad demise of Nanda. **P2**

Free cycles for urban community workers

BHUBANESWAR: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik distributed 8,000 bicycles Thursday among community partners working in different urban local bodies of the state. The free bicycles were given to sanitation workers, Swachh Sathi, Aahaar Centre workers, Jala Sathis and supervisors. The distribution was done in a joint programme conducted by the Housing and Urban Development and Mission Shakti departments. "Success of the Mission Shakti mothers makes me very happy. Your confidence and enthusiasm have made Mission Shakti the number one successful programme in the state," Patnaik said. **P3**

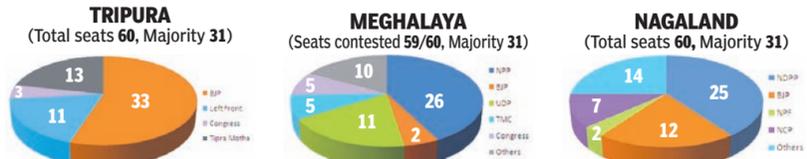
IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Not the elections, we've lost the Election Commission

Despite slight setbacks, BJP retains Tripura, Nagaland

Saffron party has failed to increase its seat share in Nagaland, managed to only win 2 in Meghalaya and has fallen from 36 to 33 in Tripura



AGENCIES

Agartala/Shillong/Kohima March 2: The ruling BJP managed to notch-up a morale-boosting wins Thursday on its 'Mission Northeast' by retaining Tripura emphatically, despite anti-incumbency and newcomer Tripura Motha playing spoilers to its party, while also piggy-backing to power in Nagaland on Neiphiu Rio-led NDFP's shoulder.

In Meghalaya, the BJP was poised to be part of the ruling dispensation again as a junior partner, given that Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's NPP has fallen short of majority while winning the lion's share of 26 seats in the 60-member Assembly.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking after the declaration of results, credited BJP's consistent wins in states, including the northeast, 'to a Triveni' (triumvirate) of work and work culture' of its governments and its workers' commitment to service.

For the BJP, however, the wins as junior partners in the hills of Nagaland and Meghalaya will be good for the op-

SOME SOLACE FOR CONGRESS

New Delhi: The Assembly by-election results Thursday brought some solace for the Congress as it wrested one seat each from the BJP and TMC in Maharashtra and West Bengal respectively and retained a seat in Tamil Nadu with DMK's support. Congress won the Sagardighi constituency in West Bengal, the Kasba Peth Assembly seat in Maharashtra, a saffron party stronghold and the Erode East constituency in Tamil Nadu. The BJP managed to hold on to Chinchwad seat in Pune while its ally ASJU won in Jharkhand. **P10**

tics and for crowing about the demise of the Congress, which was reduced to just five and zero seats respectively in the two states which it ruled not too long ago, but the real 'cream of the crop' was Tripura.

The BJP-IPFT alliance retained the state winning 33 seats in the 60-member Assembly Thursday, 10 less than the figure in 2018, but never-

theless a clear majority which will allow it to rule for five years without seeking help from Tripura Motha, who bagged an enviable 13 seats.

The new party formed two years back by a scion of the state's former princely family ate into the tribal votes of both the Left-Congress alliance, which secured 14 seats, as well as that of the BJP-IPFT alliance.

The saffron party contested in 55 seats and won 32, three less than what it bagged in 2018 while the IPFT was reduced to just one seat, down from eight five years back.

The CPIM which lost power in 2018 after ruling the northeastern state for 25 years won just 11 seats this time round, down from 16 which it secured five years back. Fielding candidates in 13 constituencies, the Congress won three, though it bagged a vote share of 8.56 per cent.

BJP's pointsman in the northeast, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, remained in touch with Sangma for the alliance in Meghalaya. **Contd...P4 MORE P10**

BJP's victory was expected... We were eagerly waiting for it. Our responsibility has increased. We will walk in the direction PM Narendra Modi shows us
MANIK SAHA | TRIPURA CM

Even though we are short of numbers, we are confident of forming the government. We will decide on the way forward later
CONRAD K SANGMA | MEGHALAYA CM

We will pursue with sincerity whatever we have promised to the electorate and fulfil our goals and visions for the people of Nagaland
NEIPHIU RIO | NAGALAND CM

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VAIATION
SENSEX	58909.35 ↓ 501.73
NIFTY	17321.90 ↓ 129.00
DOLLAR	82.67 ↓ ₹0.12
EURO	87.42 ↓ ₹0.50
GOLD	₹55,839 ↑ ₹9
SILVER	₹63,200 ↓ ₹735

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	37.4°C	36.0°C
MIN	20.0°C	20.2°C
Humidity	69%	79%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Dry weather most likely

A million species face extinction, say researchers

MANY SCIENTISTS HAVE BLAMED THE EXPANSION OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AS THE MAIN CAUSE BEHIND DECLINING NUMBER OF ANIMALS

AGENCIES

Melbourne, March 2: There is mounting evidence the world is experiencing its largest loss of life since the dinosaurs. One million plant and animal species are now threatened with extinction among the eight million that exist in this planet in the next couple of decades.

"We've already degraded 75 per cent of the Earth's surface and more than 60 per cent of the marine environment," the UN's bio-diversity chief Elizabeth Maruma Mrema was quoted as saying by the BBC.

Corey Bradshaw, professor of global ecology at Flinders

University, says if the current rate of extinction continues we could lose most species by 2200. The implication for human health and well-being is dire, but not inevitable. Overall most of the researchers across the world have blamed humanity's burgeoning growth as the main reason for putting the world's biodiversity at perilous risk.

Preserving bio-diversity is crucial to keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees, say the architects of the Paris climate agreement. A healthy planet also ensures resilient economies. More than half

of global GDP equal to US\$41.7 trillion is reliant on healthy ecosystems.

Among the preventive measures that must be taken to protect species is to prevent the expansion of agriculture land, according to Quentin Read, data scientist and ecologist at North Carolina State University. "Some species may already be 'walking dead', doomed to extinction because they no longer have a habitat large enough to avoid a population crash," Read has said in a report.

An important part of the solution is



helping consumers better understand how their diets and food waste behaviours influence global bio-diversity. Animal products need large amounts of land to grow, feed and pasture livestock. A smart plant-based diet is a major way to reduce land demand, Read wrote in his report.

Sir Robert Watson, chair of the 'Inter-governmental Science-Policy Platform on Bio-diversity and Ecosystem Services' in the UK is of the opinion that the 'health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever'. **Contd...P4**

Jilted lover slits girl's throat

Ramnaguda/Padmapur, March 2: In a shocking incident, a youth allegedly slit Thursday the throat of a Plus-II girl student when she was waiting at the bus stop at Gumuda main market under Gudari police limits in Rayagada district after appearing for her examinations.

The girl, a student of Droupadi Junior College sustained critical injuries in the attack as locals rescued her and admitted her to the Padmapur hospital. There the doctors administered her primary treatment and shifted her to the MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur as her condition turned critical.

ITI student found dead in Umerkote
UMERKOTE: A 20-year girl student of the government Industrial Training Institute (ITI) here in Nabarangpur district allegedly died by suicide by hanging herself at her hostel premises, Wednesday night. The deceased has been identified as Nageswari Gond, a second year student of the Mechanical department and a resident of Salebhata village.

The accused identified as K Tirumala, 28, of Bissam Cuttack was overpowered by locals and taken to the Gumuda police outpost. He admitted that he attacked the girl because she turned down his advances.

Top court orders SEBI to probe allegations against Adani group

NEW DELHI, March 2: The Supreme Court asked Thursday, SEBI to probe within two months allegations of stock price manipulation by the Adani group and any lapses in regulatory disclosures. It also set up a six-member panel to look into protection of Indian investors after a damning report by a US-based short seller Hindenburg Research wiped out more than USD 140 billion of the conglomerate's market value.

The Justice Sapre panel has been asked to submit its report in a sealed cover within two months, said the bench which comprised Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala.

The committee will be headed by former apex court Judge Justice AM Sapre. The other members of panel are OP Bhat (former chairman of SEBI), Justice JP Devadhar (retired judge of the Bombay HC), KV Kamath (former head of New Development Bank of BRICS and Infosys Limited), Nandan Nilekani (co-founder of IT firm Infosys) and Somasekharan Sundaresan, a lawyer and securities and regulatory expert.

Reacting to the court directions, Adani group chairman Gautam Adani tweeted: "The Adani Group welcomes the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. It will bring finality in a time bound manner. Truth will prevail." **Contd...P4**

leisure



STYLES PAUSES CONCERT TO HELP HIS FEMALE FAN COME OUT

Harry Styles, during his *Love on Tour* in Melbourne, paused his concert to help a fan come out to her parents. In a viral social media video, the pop star could be seen pausing his concert after spotting a fan, named Fauve, with a sign asking for help coming out to her parents.

'I WOULDN'T BE HERE WITHOUT MADONNA!'

Singer Kim Petras doesn't think she would be where she is today without Madonna because of how much the latter has done for LGBT+ rights. Petras made history at last month's Grammy Awards when she became the first openly trans artiste to receive the Best Pop Duo/Group Performance prize for *Unholy* with Sam Smith.



FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com accuracy • reliability • trust FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL \$5181

ARIES

Today you are going to have a great time, but only if you plan out the right things, says Ganesh. At the work place it will be business as usual with its highs and lows. But make some good plan for the evening and you will be surprised. Try something romantic.

TAURUS

This day your reasoning, speculations and conjectures could be letting you down. You may thus feel dejected because things are not working out the way you had planned and anticipated. Be prepared and forearmed. Move away from whatever you are doing and spend as much time as you can with friends and relatives. Joke and laugh away.

GEMINI

A hectic and busy day awaits you. You need to think about how, where and in what proportion to concentrate your energies upon the numerous jobs thrust upon you. You will be able to successfully complete your tasks in the later half of the day, says Ganesh.

CANCER

Your attempt to come out winners after vanquishing your competitors will shock/confound your rivals. The loved ones will realise your affection. You will clear your way through unfavourable terrain. Your positive approach will win over many admirers. Ganesh's total grace is on you.

LEO

You need to tap into your inner resources today. Meetings or important consultations are best concluded before the afternoon. The later half of the day will not be very auspicious for you. A day of mixed results awaits, says Ganesh.

VIRGO

Perhaps, your artistic talents will shine out today, says Ganesh. You will be very happy with your personal belongings, which you have preserved for years. Later in the day, you may beautify your house by adding furniture and artefacts at appropriate places.

LIBRA

Some things are always remembered with fondness. Today may be one of those days when you tend to get wistful and nostalgic. Let this emotion spur you on and later in the day, you may strive hard to reconnect with your near and dear ones. Listen to your heart. You can do nothing wrong today, as your charisma will be overwhelming.

SCORPIO

You are likely to have an urge to lead a more active and healthy lifestyle today. You will focus on improving your eating habits and consider your options for exercise, says Ganesh. On the work front, you will realise that learning to enjoy work is the best way of getting things done. Dashed with this realisation, you will feel complete and content.

SAGITTARIUS

You are likely to pull up your socks today shoulder the responsibilities that come your way. You may fall short of money due to some unexpected expenses. However, nothing can deter you from taking your sweetheart on a date. Have a lovely evening!

CAPRICORN

Nothing in the world can be as comforting as the support of your family members, and you will have that in plenty today, especially if you're setting out to refurbish your house, says Ganesh. With their support, you can win the world and achieve the impossible, but since everything comes with a price tag – even happiness – get ready to pay for a fat bill; the support of your loved ones won't come cheap.

AQUARIUS

Fame and fortune woo you today! And along with recognitions and rewards, you receive encouragement to do even better. Your bosses are pleased, but feel that you haven't really given your 100%. Head on your shoulders and feet on the ground, says Ganesh, is the best policy.

PISCES

Contemplating on the source which triggered problems for you recently will be the order of the day. Identifying the source is half the work done; eliminating it is just a matter of initiative and courage, says Ganesh.

I thought I was not pretty enough: PC

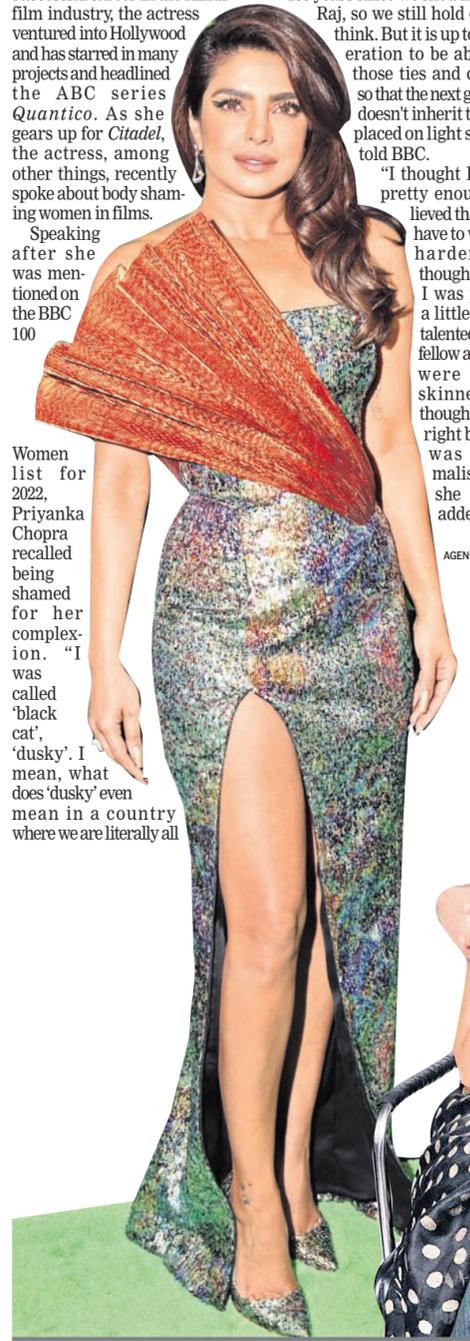
Los Angeles: Priyanka Chopra has risen to global fame. After a successful career in the Hindi film industry, the actress ventured into Hollywood and has starred in many projects and headlined the ABC series *Quantico*. As she gears up for *Citadel*, the actress, among other things, recently spoke about body shaming women in films.

Speaking after she was mentioned on the BBC 100

Women list for 2022, Priyanka Chopra recalled being shamed for her complexion. "I was called 'black cat', 'dusky'. I mean, what does 'dusky' even mean in a country where we are literally all

brown? Of course, that comes from our colonial past, it's not even been 100 years since we shed the British Raj, so we still hold on to it, I think. But it is up to our generation to be able to cut those ties and change it so that the next generation doesn't inherit the equity placed on light skin," she told BBC.

"I thought I was not pretty enough, I believed that I would have to work a lot harder, even though I thought I was probably a little bit more talented than my fellow actors who were lighter skinned. But I thought that was right because it was so normalised," she added.



Industry mourns Pintu's early exit

Bhubaneswar: When several members of Odia film fraternity joined their hands to meet Pintu Nanda's hospital expenses for a liver transplant and expected him to resume work, the actor succumbed to liver cirrhosis leaving his fans and well wishers in a state of shock.

Some of his industry colleagues were short of words to condole the loss while a few others managed to put up a few lines to mourn the unfortunate incident.

Here's what some prominent names had to say about Pintu's early exit.

Top actor **Sidhant Mohapatra** said, "Pintu was suffering for some time now, probably he wasn't careful and more aware about his health that he should have. He was like a younger sibling to me; this loss is absolutely shattering, both personally and for the industry."

Actress **Anu Choudhury**, who had worked with him in *Pahili Raja* said, "I am extremely saddened by the sudden demise of my *Pahili Raja* co-actor. His body of work speaks for itself." Pintu sprinkled life into the moments and lived to its fullest, said producer Pradyumna

Lenka. He was a wonderful, happy person and a gifted artist. He aimed at directing various genres of films and was planning on exploring the new generation artistes as he had an uncanny ability to spot talents, added Lenka.

Actress **Usasi Mishra**, sharing her shock, said that Pintu was the youngest of the batch of actors who came into the industry in early 1990s, so, it was least expected of him to leave us all this soon. "I guess this was over stressing physical work that put strain on his deteriorating health. We have lost a great human, a good friend and a wonderful artiste," she mourned.



What made Nandita cast Kapil, not SRK, in Zwigato

Mumbai: Stand-up comedian and actor Kapil Sharma is gearing up for the release of his upcoming film *Zwigato*, co-starring Shahana Goswami. Kapil plays a delivery agent while Shahana Goswami portrays his wife's role. At the trailer launch, Kapil Sharma talked about the movie, the message it sends out, and how he feels that he has done a good job in the film.

During an interaction, Kapil told the media, "I used to work at Coca-Cola. We all do small jobs here and there when we first come to Mumbai. There were no apps back then. But, when Nandita ma'am came to me and told me what all difficulties delivery guys face, I could relate to that story a lot."

Further talking about Nandita's choice to cast him for the film, Kapil said "I asked her, 'Why me?' I didn't know whether to take her answer as a compliment or an insult. She replied, 'Even if global star Shah Rukh Khan would have agreed to do the film, I'd have not taken him, but chosen you because you have such a common face, it can fit anywhere in a crowd.'"

The movie has been extensively shot in and around Bhubaneswar.

AGENCIES

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

Pintu Nanda became a household name in Odisha after appearing in a music video *E Gaura* along with actress Mithi. So much so that people continued to address him Gaura, the character he played, when went for a shoot to the interior areas.

He also played the iconic character of Ananta in telefilms *Randi Pua Ananta*, an adaptation of Fakir Mohan Senapati's classic short story of the same name. People still recall his flawless performance.

He entered the Odia film industry with *Koili* in 1996 and went on to get a **State Film Award** for his comic portrayal in Odia film *Wrong Number*.

He appeared in a few TV drama shows like *Shankha Sindura* and hosted a reality show *Gruha Laxmi* for Doordarshan.

The actor also played the role of Lord Balaram in Sabyasachi Mohapatra's *Jai Jagannath* which was released in 15 Indian languages bringing him national recognition.

Popular movies that featured him in major roles included *Rama Laxman*, *To Akhi Mo Aaina*, *Bahudibe Mo Jaga Balia*, *Jay Jagannath*, *Swayamsidha*, *Pahili Raja* and many others.



Sushmita suffers heart attack, undergoes angioplasty

Mumbai: Former Miss Universe and actress Sushmita Sen has shared a health update via Instagram with her fans, saying that she suffered a heart attack a few days ago and had to get an angioplasty done.

Sushmita is considered to be one of the fittest actresses. She keeps sharing her workout videos and pictures on social media. But Thursday the actress wrote on Instagram, "I suffered a heart attack a couple of days ago. An angioplasty was done. The stent is in place, and most importantly, my cardiologist confirmed 'I do have a big heart'. There are lots of people to thank for their timely aid and constructive action. I will do so in another post!" She thanked her father, Shubeer Sen, for his wise and encouraging words at a time of dire need. She was thankful to her fans and her loved ones for the care and support. She felt grateful to goddess Durga as she added the hashtags #godisgreat, #duggadugga.

On the work front, the diva took a break from the silver screen and played the role of a fierce and vengeful mafia queen in series *Aarya* premiering in Hotstar OTT platform.

PEANUTS



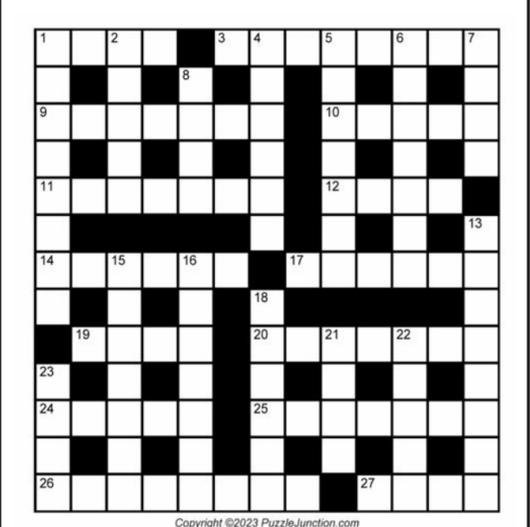
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



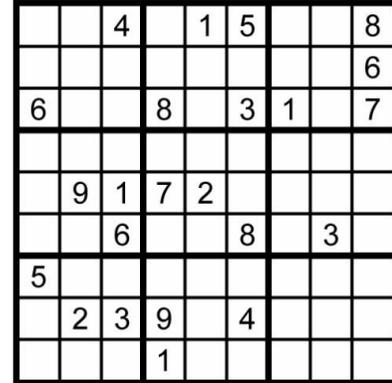
FUN post CROSSWORD



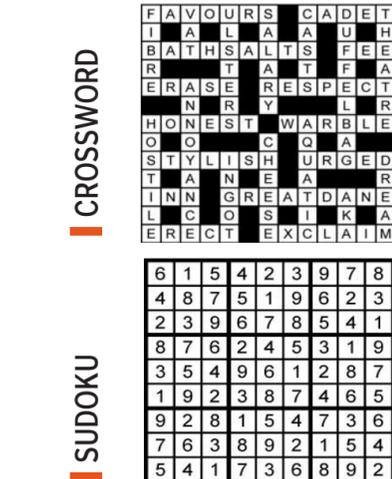
- Across
- 1 Curved structure
 - 3 Termite controller
 - 9 Terminated, as a contract
 - 10 Victoria and Chad, e.g.
 - 11 Headgear
 - 12 Castle feature
 - 14 Revue performer
 - 17 Source of light
 - 19 Capital of W Samoa
 - 20 Words to a sad sack (5,2)
 - 24 Tabuk native
 - 25 Short work of fiction
 - 26 Stimulate
 - 27 Pinnacle
 - 5 Quandary
 - 6 Unwieldy
 - 7 Peck on the cheek
 - 8 French cheese
 - 13 Airliner (3,5)
 - 15 Poseidon's counterpart
 - 16 Skirting
 - 18 Scotch biscuits
 - 21 Jealousy
 - 22 Object of antiquity, at times
 - 1 Telephone numbers (4,4)
 - 2 Coconut meat
 - 4 Passion
 - 23 Wight or Capri, e.g.

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

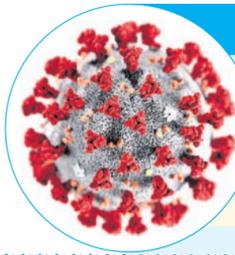


CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



STAGE CRAFT

Artistes perform a play 'Jhi Leuten' at the 31st Nikhila Utkal Natyotsav organised by Arohana at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Thursday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	68,00,57,341	65,29,09,940	68,00,571
India	4,46,86,611	4,41,53,508	5,30,772
Odisha	13,36,304	13,26,915	9,204

Mission Shakti women get free bicycle boost

CM Naveen Patnaik distributes free bicycles among 8,000 sanitation workers, Swachh Sathis, Aahaar Centre workers, Jala Sathis, supervisors and other field level workers



Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik distributing bicycles to Mission Shakti members at Lok Seva Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Thursday

- Free bicycles have been distributed to sanitation workers, Swachh Sathis, Aahaar Centre workers, Jala Sathis, supervisors and other field level workers
- It is a joint initiative by Housing and Urban Development and Mission Shakti departments
- The CM said his government is providing bicycles to Mission Shakti members so that they can discharge their responsibilities smoothly

taken up many responsibilities in community participation programmes in different cities. They are managing Aahaar Centres, solid waste management, sanitation and water supply projects among others.

Stating that everyone is happy with their work, Patnaik said that his government is providing them bicycles so that they can discharge their responsibilities smoothly.

Mission Shakti programme has created a reputation in the entire world for its community participation initiatives. He called upon everyone to work together and enhance the reputation of Odisha.

Participating in the programme, Housing and Urban Development Minister Usha Devi said that Mission Shakti mothers are doing a great job to realize the Chief Minister's dream of building a new Odisha. Having a bicycle can give them a lot of convenience and freedom in the workplace, she said.

Mission Shakti Minister Basanti Hembram said that Mission Shakti has set a new milestone today under the direction of the Chief Minister.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 2: In a bid to boost the mobility of Mission Shakti members and keeping in view the elections next year, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Thursday distributed 8,000 bicycles among community partners working in different urban local bodies (ULBs) of the state.

The free bicycles have been distributed to sanitation workers (Swachh Karmis), Swachh Sathis, Aahaar Centre workers, Jala Sathis, supervisors and other field level workers.

It is a joint programme by the Housing and Urban Development and Mission Shakti departments.

Addressing the bicycle distribution programme, the Chief Minister said that partnership of community workers has made Mission Shakti a successful programme.

Patnaik said that he is going to distributed 8,000 bicycles among community partners working in different urban local bodies (ULBs) of the state.

"Success of the Mission Shakti mothers makes me very happy. Your confidence and enthusiasm have made Mission Shakti a number one successful programme," Patnaik said.

The Chief Minister also said that Mission Shakti members have



FOR A COOLER SUMMER: An artisan at Tinikonia Bagicha in Cuttack prepares an eco-friendly window curtain made of khus khus that keeps the room cool during hot summer days, Thursday

Biometric attendance system in hosps soon

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 2: In an attempt to strengthen public health-care system in Odisha, the state government has decided to take a slew of measures including biometric attendance system for the officials and staffers of the hospitals from this financial year.

Addressing the media here Thursday, Health and Family Welfare secretary Shalini Pandit stated that biometric system will be introduced to ensure regular attendance of doctors, nurses and other staffers. In the first phase, it will be installed in district headquarters hospitals and medical colleges. Later, it will be extended to primary health centres (PHCs) and community health centres in (CHCs).

Further, it was also decided to recruit 5,000 doctors and 9,000 staff nurses and an MBBS doctor in every CHC before the end of the financial year.

The Health secretary also said that in order to reach the patients in emergency within 20 minutes, instead of the present 30 minutes, the government will purchase 236 ambulances with a budgetary allocation of ₹250 crore.

Stating that the government will open 'Ama Hospital' in all the Assembly constituencies, Pandit said those will be operational within nine months. Besides, selected CHCs and sub-divisional hospitals would be upgraded to 'Ama Hospital' and ₹750 crore spent towards their development, she added.



Efforts, customer goodwill key to success: Harshavardhan

Som Auto, an authorised dealer of Hero two-wheelers in Dhenkanal, is known for its distinct service delivery. Its proprietor Harshavardhan Singhdeo transformed his dream of becoming a successful businessman into reality through his consistent efforts for the past 16 years.

Harshavardhan, a member of Dhenkanal's Royal family, initially didn't have any idea of foraying into two-wheeler business. But, he was able to harness the opportunities provided by Hero Company and this ultimately paid off. Harshavardhan finds time to sit with **Orissa POST** and share his experience...



How did you deal with the dip in sales during and after Covid?

The shutdowns imposed during Covid-19 affected the sales as manufacturing had come to a halt. A few employees also lost their jobs. Even after lifting of Covid restrictions, the business could not pick up because of financial ruin. Hero Company supported us a lot during those difficult times. The company lowered its interest rate and provided us with ample stock. Even finance companies extended loans to customers. However, we are yet to see the pre-Covid sales. It will take some more time to get back to normalcy. Rupee has depreciated to ₹83 in 2023 from ₹71 in 2019 which has pushed up the price of imported components of vehicles. This is adversely affecting our sales.

How can the sales/services of vehicles be improved?

First, it is essential to provide facilities and services to customers. Resolution of issues and availability of better and easier loan facilities at the showroom will significantly improve the business. Enabling the sale of vehicles across digital platforms has given a boost to the business. Choosing and purchasing vehicles online has become a popular practice post Covid. We have provided our customers with the option of servicing their vehicles at

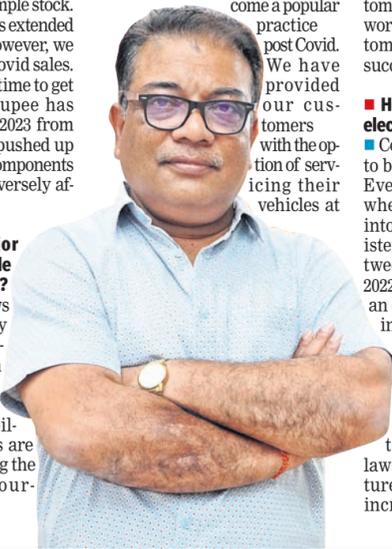
their doorstep. In case of accidents or breakdowns, we are providing on-the-spot instant service, once we are informed.

How has been the journey of Som Auto?

Som Auto started its operations in 2007. In the past 15 years, we have clocked the sales of 40,000 vehicles and provided service to almost twice the number of our customers. The tireless efforts of the workers and the goodwill of customers have made the journey successful.

How optimistic are you about electric vehicle (EV) market?

Commercial vehicles are going to be replaced by EVs in future. Even two-wheelers and three-wheelers will be transformed into electric ones. India has registered sale of 4.5 lakh EVs between April and September of 2022. Hero Company is planning an extensive network of charging stations. The government is providing subsidies and encouraging EVs as these are environment friendly. The government is also expected to come up with stringent laws in this regard in near future. Demand for EVs has now increased by 22 per cent.



What are the major problems of automobile industry in the country?

There are various laws for automobile industry in India. There is liquidity crisis due to high rate of unemployment. Undue hike in petrol prices and unavailability of semiconductors are also adversely affecting the two-wheeler and four-wheeler business.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Criminal Shankar hurt in encounter

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, March 2: Dreaded criminal Shankar was injured and hospitalised following an encounter with Bidanasi police here, Thursday evening.

Acting on a tip-off about an illegal arms trade by Shankar at Bhuasuni Ground under Bidanasi police limits, an independent squad of Cuttack Commissionerate Police along with Bidanasi police reached the spot around 8:30pm and laid a trap to apprehend the miscreant, said sources.



Instead of surrendering, Shankar opened fire at the police. In counter firing the police shot the criminal in his left leg and captured him.

Police seized a pistol and ammunition from Shankar.

Shankar alias Deepak Nayak of Gopala Sahi in Ranihat is a professional hardcore criminal, said the police.

The wounded criminal has been admitted to SCB Medical College and Hospital here.

UP link confirmed in spurious drugs haul

PNN/AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, March 2: Based on the inputs provided by Health and Family Welfare department of the Odisha government, the Uttar Pradesh Special Task Force (STF) raided a godown under Lahartara police station and seized spurious drugs worth ₹7.35 crore from the spot.

Odisha STF sources here Thursday said the UP task force also raided a house under Siga police station March 1 and arrested one Ashok Kumar.

All spurious drug items seized from Bargarh and Jharsuguda districts by Odisha STF were seized from the house of Ashok Kumar, a resident of Bulandshahr under Secunderabad police station.

The raids unearthed what is said to be "one of the biggest spurious drug rackets" in the near past.

The Odisha government constituted an interstate investigating team in mid-February this year and deputed the team to Uttar Pradesh for carrying forward the investigation.

Health and Family Welfare secretary Shalini Pandit requested her counterparts in UP government to cooperate in the matter.

5T Secy visits Mayurbhanj for tourism sites' revamp

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 2: As per the direction of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Secretary to the Chief Minister VK Pandian Thursday visited Devkund, Bhimkund and Maa Khichakeshwari Temple in Mayurbhanj district as part of the redevelopment plans.

Tourism department additional chief secretary Surendra Kumar also accompanied the 5T Secretary. They discussed with the officials and locals regarding development of Devkund as a major tourist attraction. Pandian asked the district administration to consult with all stakeholders and send a proposal to Tourism department for its redevelopment.

The state government is taking up redevelopment of major heritage tourism sites of the state under its 5T initiatives.

Pandian also visited Bhimkund and interacted with the tourists and locals regarding its redevelopment. He asked the Tourism department and district administration to prepare a proposal for improvement of infrastructure and provision of amenities for tourists. He also emphasised on starting various activities for tourists.



He then proceeded to Khiching in Sukruli block and visited Maa Khichakeshwari Temple and interacted with the servitors and other stakeholders to receive suggestions from them on various aspects of transformation of the temple and the museum. As per the discussion, the Tourism department and district administration will prepare a proposal for its redevelopment. He also paid a visit to Jashipur where he took stock of the proposed Khairi-Bhandan irrigation project that is expected to irrigate 9,400 hectare farmland in Jashipur, Sukruli and Raruan blocks.

He then visited Pandit Raghunath Murmu's cemetery tomb at Dandbose in Rairangpur and interacted with the members of Santhal community. He assured them that the site will be developed as per the aspirations of the local people. He also assured them that their other demands will be placed before the state government for positive consideration.

Finally, he visited Bada Bandha in Rairangpur Municipality and took stock of the development works being taken up there. He asked the civic body officials to submit a detailed proposal for further development of the pond. In the evening students from various colleges of Rairangpur and Karanjia subdivisions and peoples' representatives met the 5T Secretary and discussed various issues of their concern.

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AIRING GRIEVANCE: SUCI(C) members protesting against the LPG cylinder price hike in front of Collector's office in Cuttack, Thursday

Man held for killing electrician in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 2: The Commissionerate Police Thursday arrested a person for killing an electrician Wednesday after a heated argument at an under-construction building in Tulasideipur area under Chandaka police limits here. The accused was identified as Subhendu Kumar Das alias Bapi, 38, of Saphipur village in Balikuda police limits of Jagatsinghpur.



Police sources claimed that the accused Bapi worked as a labourer at Souk Farm House in Tulasideipur area under Chandaka police limits. Bapi along with labourers used to reside in an under-construction building on the premises of the Farm House.

in the said building. Deepak worked as an electrician helper at the Farm House.

The accused and deceased were alone in the building as other labourers had gone to their natives for Dola Purnima festivities.

The deceased Deepak Swain who originally belonged to Basanti Colony area in Rourkela also stayed

ment over some unknown issues. Meanwhile, the deceased allegedly verbally abused during the argument and Bapi in a fit of rage tied Deepak with an electric wire. Later, he strangled Deepak to death with a towel.

The accused contacted the contractor and narrated the whole episode. A shocked contractor asked the supervisor to go to the spot and check whether Bapi was telling truth or not.

The supervisor narrated the incident to the contractor who later called the police and informed the family members of the deceased. Police immediately reached the spot and arrested Bapi registering a case (65/23) after he confessed to killing Deepak in a fit of rage.

Bapi was Thursday presented before the court that sent him to judicial custody.

BJD flays LPG price hike



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 2: The ruling BJD in Odisha Thursday came down heavily on the BJP-led central government over the hike in cooking gas price by Rs 50.

The LPG price hike and withdrawal of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) free food programme have dealt a "double blow" to the common man, the regional party said.

Under the PMGKAY, an extra 5 kg of free foodgrains was provided to every ration card holder in addition to the entitlement under the National Food Security Act.

Noting that the price of cooking gas has been raised three times in a span of 89 years, BJD spokespersons S R Patnaik and Sremayee Mishra, told reporters that the state BJP should mount pressure on the Union government for a rollback of LPG price hike instead of doing "cheap politics" in Odisha. Launching an attack on the BJP-

led NDA government at the Centre, BJD MLA from Khandapada S R Patnaik recalled PM Modi's slogan 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' before the BJP came to power in 2014 and the Centre's 'Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana' (PMUY).

Though the BJD all along supported the Centre's decisions for implementation of welfare schemes, the regional party cannot remain silent when the Modi government abruptly hikes LPG price that affects women, middle class and the poor, the BJD MLA said.

The LPG price hike has defeated the very purpose of PMUY, he said. "Now women will be forced to return to traditional fuel like fire wood and subject themselves to smoke and unhygienic condition", the BJD MLA said.

The BJD leaders said: "Our party hopes that the Centre will ensure that people, especially mothers and sisters of Odisha, are not adversely affected by its decisions. We also hope the Odisha BJP to break its silence and speak up on issues that affect 4.5 crore people of the state."

Budget on positive path, say experts

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 2: The size of the state Budget increasing every year and touching Rs 2.3 lakh crore in FY 2023-24 is a positive trend, said Union Fertilisers and Rural Development former secretary Jugal Kishore Mohapatra at a panel discussion organised by the Odisha Budget and Accountability Centre (OBAC) here Thursday.

However, the matter of concern is that a major part of the allocated fund remains unspent, he added while addressing the audience during the discussion titled, "Value for Money: An Analysis of Odisha State Budget 2023-24."



He expressed concern over the fact that in the last five years, funds of Rs 67,000 crore allocated under different heads remained unspent. There has been 10 to 12 per cent gap in the estimated budget and the actual expenditure.

He praised the state for the increasing proportion of capital expenditure. The increasing capital expenditure that is associated with investment and development spending is an indicator of a progressive economy, Mohapatra added.

Economist Pravas Mishra expressed concern that the state Budget-2023-24 has little provision to address crucial issues like poor infrastructure and staff crunch in primary healthcare facilities.

BJP to intensify protest against 'police excess'

THE PARTY WILL FILE COMPLAINT AGAINST DGP, CP AND DCP AT ALL POLICE STATIONS TODAY

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 2: Intensifying its protest against alleged 'police excess' on its youth wing workers, the BJP will lodge complaints in all police stations across the state, Friday.

Speaking to reporters here, state BJP general secretary Prithviraj Harichandan alleged that the BJD government is making attempts to destroy the democracy in the state.

The government has become so egoistic in power that it has restrained the opposition BJP from discharging its duty and responsibility, he said.

The government has not only created a horrific environment but also brutally attacked the BJP activists during the protest. It indicates the dictatorship of the government, alleged Harichandan.

The BJP leader said that his party is going to lodge complaints against the DGP, the Cuttack-Bhubaneswar twin city police commissioner and the Bhubaneswar DCP at all the police stations Friday.

Similarly, the party will stage demonstrations in front of all SP offices across the state March 4. If no case will be registered on the 'police excess', the BJP will knock the doors of court with evidence, he added.



The government has not only created a horrific environment but also brutally attacked the BJP activists during the protest. It indicates the dictatorship of the government, alleged BJP general secretary Prithviraj Harichandan

Meanwhile, a delegation of the BJP led by Leader of Opposition Jayanarayan Mishra visited the special jail Bhubaneswar to meet the arrested Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) leaders and workers.

Mishra alleged that Odisha police is acting like BJD agents and they have attacked their own staff and are trying to defame the BJP. "The DGP is saying it is a pre-planned attack by BJYM workers. If so, will they allow the police to show the eggs they have brought to attack the police?" asked the BJP leader.

Reacting to BJP's agitations, BJD leader Soumya Ranjan

Patnaik said in the name of deteriorating law and order situation, they himself created the law and order situation.

Notably, BJYM activists engaged in a scuffle with police force while they were marching towards the Assembly Tuesday last over alleged deteriorating law and order situation including murder of minister Naba Das.

Following the face-off, 22 BJYM activists including state president Irashish Acharya were arrested. Though the BJP has lodged a complaint before the Capital police station on the same night, police have yet to register a case in this regard.

A million species...

Continued from P1

"We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide. If this continues, in the next few decades many species will cease to exist and in the process, the environmental balance of the world will be severely harmed," Watson has said in a report submitted to the UN.

Many scientists are of the opinion that species of animals and plants can be protected by making cities wildlife and plant friendly.

"Cities can be hostile places for plants and animals," said Sarah Bekessy, sustainability and urban planning teacher at RMIT University here. "But with policy rethink and clever designs, cities could be safe havens for species to thrive and recover. New solutions, like bio-diverse green roofs, habitat boxes and insect hotels can also provide food and shelter for a range of animals in cities," she pointed out.

Despite slight...

Continued from P1

BJP's two seats and the money and influence that New Delhi can help any state government with, is expected to help seal the deal where the old alliance of NPP with United Democratic Party (UDP), which has 11 seats, and the saffron party will be revived, according to political pundits.

Party spokesperson Ampareen Lyngdoh admitted as much. He said there is a 'high possibility' that earlier alliance partners will come together, as the ruling party 'will have to seek the support of others' to return to power for the second time in a row. BJP's Meghalaya chief Ernest Mawrie, too, confirmed that the party would 'submit a letter of support to NPP Thursday night after a meeting of BJP'.

In Nagaland, the real victor was the state's political stalwart and NNDPP supreme Neiphu Rio who is set to assume office as chief minister for a fifth term after registering a convincing win for his party and its ally, the BJP.

The Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) won 21 seats while its alliance partner got 12 seats, the Election Commission. Together, the two parties have secured 33 seats in the 60-member Nagaland Assembly. Last time round the alliance won 30 seats - 18 by the regional party and 12 by the saffron party.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

Before the Notary Public, Malkangiri dated 31.03.2022. I, LALIT PUJARI, S/o Budra Pujari, R/o vill-Saradaput, Post-Kianga, PS-Mathili, Dist-Malkangiri do hereby solemnly state the oath as follows. That I Worked at Central Water Commission - Work sarkar Gr-II where my name mentioned is LALITH POOJARI but, in all my documents the name mentioned is LALIT PUJARI. Certify that Lalith Poojari and Lalit Pujari is one and the same person.

LOST

I, Sri Saswat Swain, S/o Sri Laxmidhar Swain of Nandanvihhar, Bhubaneswar, have lost my original B.Tech. certificate vide SN-BMHJ06013638, Regn : 0601291065 (27.12.2011). If found please contact : 9437663088.

Drama at Ravenshaw over LGBTQIA+ movie



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 2: High drama ensued at Ravenshaw University in Cuttack Thursday after the university administration stopped a film festival on the campus as an LGBTQIA+ movie was scheduled for screening there.

The festival, organised by Film Society of Ravenshaw, was scheduled from March 2 to 4, 2023, at the convention centre of Seven Pillars of Wisdom. The administration had given written permission for

the festival in the auditorium February 27.

A member of the Film Society of Ravenshaw said, "Several film directors were invited to the festival. Padma Shri Pablo Bartholomew and Jadavpur University Film Studies professor Moinak Biswas were already on the campus to give a talk on their journey. But we were denied a place to conduct the screenings or post-screening conversations at the last minute and were driven out of the premises."

Students, who are part of the

Film Society of Ravenshaw, and other volunteers had worked day in and day out for the festival but everything was shut down just because some political parties had issues with the films being screened, the member alleged.

The festival was going to celebrate 100 years of Satyajit Ray by screening his acclaimed 'Apu Trilogy' and other films but the said political elements had some issue with 'Pather Panchali'. The organising team was asked to drop Debalina Majumdar's Gay India Matrimony, which was to be screened in the presence of the director, because it involved the LGBTQIA+ community.

"The guests faced such grave disrespect at the hands of a public university just because a few people with differing point of views had some issue and decided that such movies which hold academic relevance shouldn't be screened at the university," said a protesting student.

After a prolonged protest, the authorities finally allowed the festival to start after dropping of the films 'Gay India Matrimony' and 'Had Anhad' from the schedule.

Top court orders SEBI to probe allegations...

Continued from P1

The top court while directing the setting up of a panel said that it is required for the assessment of the extant regulatory framework to 'protect Indian investors against volatility of the kind which has been witnessed in the recent past'.

The panel will also suggest measures to strengthen investor awareness, the court said. It added that the committee will probe whether there was any regulatory failure in dealing with the alleged contravention of laws pertaining to the securities market in relation to the

Adani group or other companies.

The bench took note of ongoing probe by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and said the market regulator has not expressly referred to an investigation into the alleged violation of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules 1957 which provide for the maintenance of minimum public shareholding in a public limited company.

"Similarly, there may be various other allegations that SEBI must include in its investigation," the apex court said.



FIGHTING FOR RIGHTS: Revenue and Disaster Management minister Pramila Mallick along with Odisha State Commission for Women chairperson Minati Behera light the inaugural lamp at the 30th Foundation Day celebration of OSCW at Jayadev Bhavan in Bhubaneswar, Thursday

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1,600 CASES FILED THIS YEAR

Excise sleuths to undergo arms training from April

Efforts will be made to bring ganja cultivators back to the mainstream by providing them alternative livelihood opportunities



cases have gone up this year than the previous year.

While over 600 cases were filed in 2021-22, 1,600 cases were registered in 2022-23, the Excise Commissioner informed. Moreover, Excise officials often had to face hostile and violent response from the drugs smugglers during raids. Angered over the raids, the contraband smugglers do not hesitate to attack the Excise officials.

The Excise Commissioner said the state government is also laying stress on bringing back people involved in ganja cultivation in remote areas to the mainstream by providing them alternative occupation. A committee has been formed in this regard under the chairmanship of the respective district Collectors to address the issues, he said.

Additional secretary, Excise Mihir Mohanty, additional commissioner Rama Chandra Palta and deputy commissioner Rama Chandra Mishra were present in the meeting.

Berhampur's Excise Intelligence Bureau (EIB) deputy commissioner Dambardhar Khanda, Berhampur excise superintendent Ramendra Narayan Nayak, Gajapati superintendent Prabhakar Kumar Sethi, Ganjam superintendent Devi Prasad Das, Kalahandi superintendent Ranjan Kumar Nayak, Koraput superintendent Arun Kumar Padhi, Malkangiri deputy superintendent Bimbardhar Panda, Nabarangpur superintendent Ganga Paikaray, Nuapada deputy superintendent Sanghamitra Pradhan, Phulbani deputy superintendent Prabir Kumar Samal and Rayagada superintendent attended the meeting.

RAIDS AGAINST GANJA CULTIVATION AND SUBSEQUENT FILING OF CASES HAVE GONE UP THIS YEAR THAN THE PREVIOUS YEAR

WHILE OVER 600 CASES WERE FILED IN 2021-22, 1,600 CASES WERE REGISTERED IN 2022-23

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, March 2: With drugs and contraband smugglers often targeting Excise officials with firearms during raids, the sleuths under 11 Excise districts of southern range here will undergo arms training, a report said Thursday.

Moreover, efforts will be made to dissuade people involved in ganja cultivation and bring them back into the mainstream by providing them alternative livelihood opportunities.

The report said that the rising incidents have brought into focus the need for providing arms training to Excise officials in handling arms during encounters as the dreaded smugglers are well trained and armed with lethal weapons. An intensive training programme has been planned for the officers and men of Excise department which will start from April, this year.

Though most Excise officers have been given pistols and revolvers, these are often kept in safe custody in the office. With interstate

drug mafias intensifying their operations in the state, the officers say that possibility of armed encounters cannot be ruled out.

The matter came to the fore during a review meeting of the 11 Excise districts under southern range here in Ganjam district, Wednesday. Excise Commissioner Ashish Kumar Singh presided over the meeting held at the Circuit House where various aspects relating to the department were discussed thereabout.

Sources said that ganja cultivation is rampant in various districts under the southern range. Excise sleuths are raiding these farms and destroying the cultivation. Raids against ganja cultivation and subsequent filing of



GIVING WINGS: Mission Shakti women pose with bicycles distributed to them at Tapaswini auditorium in Sambalpur, Thursday, as part of an initiative of state Housing and Urban Development and Mission Shakti departments

Murder bid on elderly man over witchcraft

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chikiti, March 2: Villagers tied up an elderly man to a pole and brutally assaulted him over suspected witchcraft and sootery practice at Ambajhola village under K Nuagaon panchayat under this block in Ganjam district, Thursday.

The survivor was identified as Kusha Mallick of Ambajhola village. The matter came to the fore after his son Bhaskar Mallick lodged a complaint at the K Nuagaon police station, Thursday alleging that the villagers tried to kill his father. Police registered a case and launched an investigation, K Nuagaon IIC Mrutyunjaya Swain said.

The incident occurred after some women and children fell sick due to an unknown disease and died in intervals in the village. The death of the women and children sparked among the villagers as they suspected the involvement of Kusha Mallick in their deaths.

The simmering anger among the villagers snowballed Thursday when they called Kusha Mallick outside and tied him to a pole before thrashing him black and blue. The IIC assured that he will conduct a proper inquiry and arrest the wrongdoers.

NHRC seeks report on damages to family of electrocution victim

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

Kendrapara, March 2: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued show cause notice to the state government on payment of compensation to the family members of an electrocution victim.

The notice was issued u/s 18 of the PHR Act, 1993 to the state Chief Secretary as to why the Commission should not recommend a compensation of ₹5 lakh to the family members of Ramesh Chandra Nayak, a victim of electrocution, on a petition filed by Rights Activist Radhakanta Tripathy.

Ramesh Chandra Nayak, a farmer and resident of Bauturalapal village under Katasahi panchayat under Dhamnagar tehsil of Bhadrak district came into contact with a live electric wire lying on the road while returning to his house August 16, 2022.

Alleging that the incident happened due to the inaction, negligence and failure of the electricity department, Tripathy requested intervention of the NHRC to ensure adequate compensation to the victim's family and stern action against



the guilty officials.

According to the notice of the NHRC, an enquiry report of the Additional Secretary, Energy department was submitted before the NHRC.

The EE (Electrical), Bhadrak South Electrical Division, TPN-ODL submitted that the victim came in contact with electricity while running his electric motor pump in his campus for agricultural purposes through hooking arrangement from the nearest LT pole.

However, the villagers and the family members stated that the

victim came in contact with a live electric LT line while he was clearing some creepers with the help of a raw bamboo stick.

The NHRC observed that the victim Ramesh Chandra Nayak died due to electrocution when he came in contact with the live LT overhead AB cable line mounted on a LT PSC pole near the residential premises.

The executive engineer-cum-deputy electrical inspector Bhadrak in its report stated that the 10KVA, 11/.23 KV sub-station from which the LT AB cable line emerged was found to be in a very unsafe condition. No LA drop out fuse or isolator has been provided to the sub-station.

The petitioner stated that there was lack of proper maintenance and vigilance which is the primary responsibility and liability of the electricity department.

This act of negligence of the electricity department has violated the human rights of the deceased victim for which the state government is vicariously liable.

The NHRC has sought a reply from the Chief Secretary within six weeks.

Back-to-back visits of ex-Berhampur MP spark speculations

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, March 2: As elections for Lok Sabha and Assembly seats are scheduled to be held next year, visit of Berhampur's former BJD MP Siddhant Mohapatra to Ganjam district, February 28 has sent the chatters abuzz.

Speculations are rife that he may make a comeback into politics. However, questions are doing the rounds whether the party is going to field him in the upcoming Lok Sabha or Assembly elections. It is learnt that the party leaders are reviewing the report cards of incumbent MLAs as the party is likely to field new candidates in five to six constituencies in the next elections.

Mohapatra, after his arrival, visited the house of Chikiti's senior BJD leader and attended the marriage feast of his newly-wed son. He stayed there for two to three hours. Later, he met some BJD leaders and workers of Chikiti and Digapahandi areas and had discussions on various issues with them.

Chatters went abuzz after some workers present there clicked photos with Mohapatra and later uploaded them on social media. While leaving for Bhubaneswar, he stopped at Karuna dak bungalow at Jagannathpur Square and had discussions with some BJD party workers. Political observers are attaching importance to his visit speculating that he may make a comeback in active politics again.



MOCK DRILL: A fire personnel making a demonstration on fire fighting measures at the Integrated Child Development Services project office at Khariar in Nuapada district, Thursday

Keonjhar's Sunrise Hospital sealed

Keonjhar: The district administration here sealed Sunrise Hospital at Baniapata College Road Thursday after the private hospital was found providing treatment to the patients after keeping their state-sponsored Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) smart health insurance cards on mortgage. The action came after a patient from Joda area lodged a complaint in this regard at a public grievance hearing of the district administration. The district administration conducted verification and cancelled the hospital's registration before sealing it.

Goods trains to roll soon on Budhapank-Baghuapala line

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, March 2: The 92.8-km long broad gauge single electrified railway line section between Budhapank station and Baghuapala station has received authorisation for operation of goods traffic. General Manager Manoj Sharma has congratulated the team of ASRL & RVNL for this accomplishment.

The newly constructed BG railway line under Khurda Road railway division of East Coast Railway (ECoR) Division was inspected February 21 by the Senior Administrative Grade (SAG) Committee nominated by ECoR General Manager and the committee submitted its inspection report February 23.

Earlier, Commissioner Railway Safety (CRS) had inspected Budhapank and Baghuapal station yards and advised for modification of the station yards which have now been complied with all safety angles to run goods trains.

Based on the compliance to SAG inspection report and after



perusal of various documents/certificates, the General Manager under the powers delegated by Railway Board has sanctioned for opening of the newly-built broad gauge (BG) electrified single line section for goods traffic up to a maximum permissible speed of 65 kmph.

Angul-Sukinda Railway Ltd (ASRL), an SPV, was incorporated February 20, 2009 by the Ministry of Railways through Rail Vikas Nigam Ltd (RVNL) for construction and maintenance of BG single railway line between Budhapank station (Angul) and Baghuapala station (Sukinda).

This new rail line provides a di-

rect link between iron-ore rich areas of Odisha (Joda-Barbil) to steel and sponge iron industries in Angul region.

It will also provide a shorter and congestion free alternative route between the coal mining belt of Talcher to the coal based thermal power plant in Kalinganagar industrial areas.

This will also be in close proximity to the steel plants in Angul region, NALCO and a cluster of industries located in Kalinganagar area. Dispatch of finished products of steel plants from Kalinganagar complex to destinations in Mumbai and Delhi via Talcher-Sambalpur-Jharsuguda will also be shorter and cheaper through the new alignment as compared with the route via Kharagpur.

The project is being funded through the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model as envisaged in the Concession Agreement signed between the Ministry of Railways and ASRL on May 14, 2010. The funding pattern for this project was through equity-participation from stake holders and debt raised from the market.

Couple found dead with their throats slit

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balasure, March 2: A couple was found dead with their throats slit at their poultry farm in Sabira village under Soro police limits in Balasure district late Wednesday night.



The deceased have been identified as Raghunath Behera and his wife Prabhati Behera. The husband and wife duo were reportedly at the farm to sleep there during the night.

As per reports, villagers found the bodies of the couple lying in a pool of blood with deep injuries on their necks and alerted the police. Soro police arrived at the spot and launched a probe into the incident.

Though the exact reason behind their deaths is not known, primary investigation indicate that unidentified miscreants might have killed them by slitting their throats.

Jackals becoming a rare sight in Kendrapara

CLIMATE CHANGE, HABITAT LOSS AND FOOD SHORTAGE ARE CONTRIBUTING TO THE DWINDLING NUMBERS OF THE ANIMAL

POST NEWS NETWORK

Mahakalapara, March 2: Jackals, which play an essential part in maintaining ecological balance as nature's scavengers, are slowly disappearing from this coastal area of Kendrapara district. There was a time when the air in Jambu island and the mangrove forests surrounding it used to resonate with the bark of jackals in the evening.

During the 1960s, jungles in these areas were safe havens for wild animals like deer, wild boars, wolves and jackals. However, due to back to back natural calamities and mindless tree felling the forest cover has



subsidised. Climate change, loss of habitat and food shortage are the chief factors impacting the population of jackals.

Sources said that the local population in Jambu island and Sumiti village under this block was severely affected after a cyclonic storm struck the district in 1971. Over 3,000 people lost their lives and thousands of livestock and birds perished. It was then a gala time for the jackals who feasted on the bodies of human beings and other dead animals' carcasses. Their numbers rose rapidly and soon there were more than 2,000-3,000 jackals in the locality.

However, now due to a host of reasons the jackal population has reduced drastically. The dense Kewda (Screw Pine) bushes, which once sheltered the jackals, have dried up

leaving them high and dry due to loss of habitat.

As jackal numbers continue to dwindle, the remaining ones are suffering due to shortage of food. Earlier, they had an abundance of crabs found in the local water bodies to feast on. Illegal fishing has put an end to that and the jackals are often forced to stray into human settlements in search of food.

Environmentalist Samarendra Mahali said that climate change, loss of habitat and food shortage led to a decline in population of jackals. There is a need for creation of more Kewda forests to save the jackals, he added.

PANCHAYAT SAMITI, TALCHER
INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)
IDENTIFICATION No:- TAL-02/2022-23
E-mail address:ori-talcher@nic.in
The Block Development Officer, Talcher on behalf of the Governor of Orissa Invites Percentage rate bid in single cover system for the 7 nos. of Sub Centre works & 2 nos. Day Care Sub-Centre from the Class "B", "C" & "D" contractors accordingly, registered with the State Government and contractors of equivalent grade / Class registered with Central Government/ MES / Railway, to be eventually drawn up in PWD P-1 form, for execution of Building. The proof of registration from the appropriate authority shall be enclosed along with the bid. If successful, the bidder who has not registered under State Government has to register under the State PWD in appropriate class of eligibility before signing the agreement. Bidders may submit bids for any or all the Buildings. The details of the Eligibility criteria, enclosures etc. along with the list of project and date and time of sale, receipt and opening of bid documents can be viewed in the office of the undersigned during office hours & downloaded from the District website i.e. www.angul.nic.in.
Sd./- Block Development Officer, Talcher

When mind is still, then truth gets her chance to be heard in the purity of the silence.
SRI AUROBINDO



New Enlightenment

Enlightenment ideas of scientific rationalism and technological domination have led us to the edge of an abyss. Unless we embrace a new Enlightenment – one that places ecology and care at its core – we will have no way back.

The Enlightenment that took root in eighteenth-century Europe cast aside old norms and held out the promise of a limitless future. Individuals came to believe that they were free to take charge of their destinies and emancipate themselves from the bonds of religion, tradition, and nature. Rationality would liberate them from prejudice and scarcity, ushering in a new world of peaceful abundance, equality, and universal human rights.

The experience of the twentieth century suggests that this vision, while commendable in many respects, was deeply flawed and bears some responsibility for a train of environmental degradation and industrial-scale murder. And the destructive logic of the false dualism of man and nature continues to threaten our civilisation.

The new Enlightenment would overcome this dualistic perspective, by bringing about a deep reconsideration of our moral duties to animals and future generations, and transforming how we inhabit the Earth. Instead of thinking of ourselves as separate from nature, we must recognise that we are embedded in it, and that even our most mundane actions have far-reaching consequences.

Whatever we eat, wherever we live, however we work – we rely on ecosystems and other living beings. The new Enlightenment would produce a new social contract that reflects an understanding of this dependence, such as by emphasising the protection of the biosphere and delivering environmental justice for all people and animals.

An understanding of our earthly condition – the vulnerability that binds us to other living beings and nature – must be central to the new Enlightenment. Rather than focusing exclusively on human freedom, we must recognise the role that corporeality, passivity, and interdependence play in defining the human condition. Simply put, the new Enlightenment must be based on ecology.

Per its Greek etymology, ecology embodies the rationality (logos) of our earthly dwelling (oikos), which is always a cohabitation with others. Ecology can therefore not be reduced only to environmental considerations, like climate change, biodiversity, or pollution. It also has a social dimension, which demands fairness in the distribution of resources and some changes in the modes of production. And it has an existential dimension, as it demands a deep understanding of ourselves and our place in nature.

Ecology is incompatible with both our unbridled exploitation of the natural world and our failure to recognise our vulnerability and finitude. When paired with instrumental rationality, the denial of our mortal and vulnerable condition, together with our obsession with control, turns ordinary practices of life – working, breeding, governing – into forms of warfare. Unless we fully acknowledge our own limits, it will be impossible to constrain our rights so that they are not a license to do whatever we please.

Concretely, the new Enlightenment should lead us to rethink agriculture and the role that ordinary workers play in the creation of a more caring society. Since the Enlightenment, human progress has conventionally been reduced to technological innovation and urbanisation. The ancient Greek philosophers believed political order originated in the city (polis). Karl Marx disparaged the “idiocy” of rural life in his Communist Manifesto: the proletariat herded history, not sheep. For many other Enlightenment thinkers, too, agricultural workers were a backward class.

Today, however, the moral revolution we need may begin in the village or the fields. While many modern farmers are burdened by debt, long hours, and the effects of unsustainable practices, others have broken out of this system and are cultivating new folkways – for example, by replacing monoculture with diversified and ecosystemic agriculture and moving from intensive livestock production to on-farm models. They are organising themselves at the local level, selling healthier food, and bringing cooperative ideals to the marketplace. Their efforts have helped to rejuvenate deprived and abandoned regions.

Care includes everything we do to maintain and cultivate our world – including all activities that transform rural and peripheral land – so that we can flourish in it. By showing deep care for nature and for others, those who practice sustainable farming embody the values that must underpin the new Enlightenment: humility, conviviality, and solidarity. National governments (and the European Union) should support them, instead of providing massive subsidies to industrial farms.

These farmers – and all those who nourish hope for a more caring world – are the quiet labourers and unseen vanguard of the new Enlightenment. We need their creativity if we are to survive what many are calling a global “polycrisis” – climate change, war, debt defaults, and more – and learn to live well in the twenty-first century.

The writer is Professor of Philosophy at the Université Gustave Eiffel. @PROJECT SYNDICATE

WISDOM CORNER

- Happiness is a how; not a what. A talent, not an object. HERMANN HESSE
- If you are lonely when you're alone, you are in bad company. JEAN-PAUL SARTRE
- Find a place inside where there's joy, and the joy will burn out the pain. JOSEPH CAMPBELL

WORDSWORTH

■ Gelotologist

A gelotologist specialises in gelotology, the study of humour, laughter and the exercising of the gelastic muscles, a deeply serious exploration of what happens to our bodies' physical systems, such as respiration and circulation, when we're exposed to humour. The topic is as yet relatively specialised, though the word gelotology can be traced back at least as far as a widely syndicated report in US newspapers around April 1971 about the San Francisco Gelotology Institute. Its director, Dr William F Fry Jr, argued – in total opposition to current thinking – that laughter is actually very bad for you, because it increases the heart rate, interrupts normal breathing, and may contribute to hernias and ulcers. The word comes from Greek gelos, laughter. It's a close relative of the adjective gelastic, either something funny or a remedy that works by making us laugh, no doubt on the principle of laughter being the best medicine (a gelotherapist builds on this idea by specialising in what is sometimes called laughter therapy). However, a gelastic seizure is a form of epilepsy that causes the sufferer to laugh. Geloscopy, an excessively rare word, is divination by means of laughter. An alternative spelling not infrequently seen is gelatologist. You may feel this would better refer to a maker of Italian ice creams, or possibly some arcane culinary specialist in the use of gelatine.

FOCUS BANKING SYSTEM

TOO BIG TO FALL



Bikash Narayan Mishra

BANKS WILL DO WELL TO FOCUS ON RETAIL, AGRICULTURE AND MSME

There have been a series of media reports expressing concern and apprehension about the exposure of Indian banks to the Adani group post the Hindenburg report. The regulator quickly intervened and stated that the size and resilience of the Indian banking system is much larger and stronger to be affected by any individual incident. The regulator issued a statement recently saying that the banking sector remains stable and that the various parameters of banks relating to capital adequacy, asset quality, liquidity, provision coverage and profitability are healthy. The RBI Governor also said that banks lend to a company on the basis of its fundamentals and not on its market capitalisation.

The country's largest lender – the State Bank of India – says its total outstanding exposure to the Adani group is ₹27,000 crore, which is 0.9% of its total loan book size, while Axis Bank's exposure is 0.94% as of December 2022. State-run Punjab National Bank has an exposure of ₹7,000-odd crore. So, the exposure is not significant across all the banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

What is the exposure limit? A bank can lend up to 20% of its net worth or tier-1 capital to an individual entity and 25% to a group. This is in consonance with global norms. Earlier it was a bit higher and for the infrastructure sector there were special norms entitling them a higher limit. The current exposure limits also include connected lending. For instance, if an automaker buys parts from a supplier to the extent of more than half of what the supplier produces, a bank's exposure to the automaker is clubbed with that of the auto parts supplier.

The 250-year-old modern Indian banking system has weathered many storms. The credit portfolio of the banking system is over ₹130 trillion. The exposure of Indian banks to the Adani group is less than even 0.50% and hence insignificant by any standard.



Banks should move away from high-risk infrastructure finance for the simple reason that the assets at their disposal, although huge, are of short to medium term maturity

But the story does not end here. During the last 75 years Indian banks have embarked on a rather tumultuous path. There have been occasions when leading banks have faced liquidity crisis. Banks have failed – Lehman Brothers, asset quality deterioration crisis 7/8 years ago, the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework, huge capitalisation of public sector banks (PSBs) during the last 5/7 years; the memories are fresh in mind.

The last 5/7 years saw some bold policy initiatives on the part of the government: i) The enactment of a strong recovery law – the insolvency and the bankruptcy code (IBC) and setting up of National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), all in 2016. ii) Massive amalgamation of PSBs in 2017-18 and in 2019-20. This has resulted in reducing the number of PSBs from 27 six years back to 12. iii) Policy relating to setting up of the National Assets Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL), the India Debt Resolution Company Limited (IDRCL) and the National Bank for Bold Financing Infrastructure and Development

(NAB-fid). The budget 2021-22 has also envisaged privatisation of a couple of PSBs.

All these measures and a massive recapitalisation in PSBs to the extent of approximately ₹5 trillion during the period of reference have had a positive bearing on the functioning of the banking sector and the PSBs in particular. The pandemic and geopolitical woes notwithstanding the banking sector has been consistently delivering better numbers in each successive quarter/financial year during the last three years. As at the end of December 2022 with net profit of PSBs at ₹95,000 crore (approximately) and net NPA at 1.37% is one of their best performances in three quarters during the last one decade.

Does that mean we need not be concerned about the recent developments in the capital market post Hindenburg? The answer is perhaps No! The fallout of the Harshad Mehta-led crisis in the early 1990s or the Lehman Brothers related issues 15 years back have cost the industry dearly in terms of results and reputation. Banks, in general should move away from high-risk infrastructure finance for

the simple reason that the assets at their disposal, although huge, are of short to medium term maturity. The corporates will do well to mobilise their initial funds requirements through the bond and/or equity route. They may also take recourse to external commercial borrowing. For that we need a developed bond market. The present size of our bond market is ₹40 trillion which is less than one-third of scheduled commercial banks' credit outstanding. The Indian companies' outstanding debt overseas is to the tune of approximately ₹12 trillion at the current exchange rate.

Globally, for infrastructure project the setting up/construction risk is borne by bond market. Banks do extend their helping hands; but at a later stage when there is cash flow; be that in the form of working capital and/or ancillary works. The deterioration of assets quality in 2015 was largely on account of huge exposure Indian banks had in infrastructure and real estate.

Banks will do well to focus on retail, agriculture and MSME. We do need infrastructure – more roads, railways, ports, airports, to become a \$5 trillion and developed economy at the earliest. But our corporates should mobilise their initial requirements more from the bond/equity/external routes. Banks will be there to meet their working capital needs at a later stage.

Some individual banks in India have failed in the past; but the regulator and the government have always come to the rescue of the depositors. We could withstand the partition of banks at the time of partition of the nation, the subprime crisis of the West, the asset quality crisis, the pandemic/geopolitical crises. Banks are gaining traction and becoming increasingly robust and resilient. The saga will continue but we need to be cautious and focus on core sectors.

The writer is senior advisor, Indian Banks' Association. Views are personal.

SPECTRUM SUSTAINABILITY

The risks of playing with nature



Lekha Rattanan

NOVEL VIRUSES ARISING FROM SCIENCE IS ONE PART OF THE DOWNSIDE OF TECHNOLOGY, THE OTHER END IS THE DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATION WITH NATURE

The Director of the United States FBI Christopher Wray has now come out to say that COVID-19 “most likely” started after a leak in a virus research laboratory in Wuhan, China, the place where the pandemic began. To quote Christopher Wray: “The FBI has for quite some time now assessed that the origins of the pandemic are most likely a potential lab incident in Wuhan... here you are talking about a potential leak from a Chinese government-controlled lab.” The position, which came first on Fox News, makes the FBI the second US government agency weighing toward the theory of a lab leak. Earlier, the US Department of Energy had said that the pandemic was triggered by a lab leak but it qualified the position as “low confidence”. We now have the clearest indication so far that the US has concluded that the pandemic was not a case of a virus that organically evolved, but is probably one of an unintended mishap caused by human intervention. In other words, these findings say that human experimentation in a laboratory brought us a staggering death toll of 6.86 million and infection of a total of 758 million, according to the official count offered by the WHO.

Needless to say, the finding (or claim) of a lab leak made by the US

has been disputed by China. In focus is the Wuhan Institute of Virology, which though is a controlled Chinese government facility, has not been operating in isolation. The institute has collaborated with US facilities, researchers and has had global scientists working there as well. For example, a Bloomberg report quoted an Australian researcher Danielle Anderson who worked in the institute around the time COVID began. She said she was impressed with the institute's maximum biocontainment lab. “The concrete, bunker-style building has the highest biosafety designation, and requires air, water and waste to be filtered and sterilised before it leaves the facility. There were strict protocols and requirements aimed at containing the pathogens being studied.” This also indicates that if the Wuhan laboratory caused the “lab incident” then the US was not completely unaware of the kind of work that was going on there.

While the US versus China tug-of-war goes on what must not be missed by humanity is the potential of science and technology to bring death and destruction on a global scale with a mere accident. If we accept the theory that this was a case of an accident, it is not just the technology in the specific ex-

perimentation or bio standards that are implicated here. Along with it is the technology that powers globalisation, the infrastructure that facilitates global deals, the science that reduces distances and makes the story of modernity itself that can be implicated as the cause of the pandemic. The faster we go, the faster the pandemic spreads, reducing response time and increasing death numbers. Novel viruses arising from science is one part of the downside of technology, the other end is the dysfunctional relation with nature.

This brings us to the idea of sustainable living that goes beyond the materiality that is measured and tested by businesses and governments today – one that is becoming an industry by itself. It highlights the fundamental problem that humanity faces with modern-day development. A problem that has brought more violence, disruption, extraction and excavation at a huge human cost. This is often not measured when the cost is paid by the poor or by those who do not have a voice in the system. It challenges the idea of value-free scientific research that breeds a sense of arrogance, a sense of conquest. Scientific research that apparently brings solutions for now but quite obviously causes new problems

for future generations. It tells us that humility is an important value, that limits must not be crossed just because it is possible to cross them. It says that scientific research and endeavour must be grounded with a larger purpose of doing good for humanity, not dangerous experimentation that carries the potential for mass destruction. Needless to say we require science & technology – but not all of it is good for humanity.

What is the way out of this trap – of wanting more solutions but not all kinds of solutions? The answer is best served by understanding what traditional Indian wisdom has taught us – this may well be wisdom that India is losing fast on its own journey to a wannabe modernity. Traditional Indian wisdom teaches us that we are not separate from nature, that all forms of life are connected and inseparable from the rhythm of the planet – the air; the mountains, the forests, the seas and the sun. If this thinking is allowed to take root again, sustainability is already achieved. The measurements of carbon footprints and goals of carbon neutrality, while required, can become insignificant.

The writer is The Managing Editor of The Billion Press. @THEBILLIONPRESS

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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Value education

Sir, We are all aware that education is a lifelong process that enhances personality and prepares children to live in today's fast-paced society with appropriate values and attitude. In recent remarks, President Droupadi Murmu emphasised the importance of teaching moral principles to students and said that to include them in the curriculum is a great way to instill moral values in young people. Scientific studies have shown that value-based education fosters an environment that further improves academic learning and accomplishment while fostering in kids lifelong social and relationship-building skills. Children who acquire values at a young age are more competent, confident, and smart, and they also learn well and behave well as citizens. We must never forget that creating an educational system with values at its core will produce learners who are responsible global citizens. Therefore, value education is vital for the development of the child's entire personality as well as for helping them navigate life and become resilient in the face of hardship.

Iconic tram service

Sir, The completion of 150 years of the iconic tram services in Kolkata on February 24 marks a significant milestone of the city's heritage. Trams are an inherent part of the culture and history of Kolkata, and are nostalgia-inciting elements of the city's landscape. It is not only the last surviving tram network in India, but also the oldest in Asia. For decades, Kolkata has served lakhs of its residents with trams and they remain the most affordable and environmental-friendly mode of transport in the city. Although their numbers have dwindled as times rolled by, they are still far from extinct. A trip to Kolkata is not complete without a tram-car ride across the city.

Price shock

Sir, The hike in cooking gas price by ₹50 and commercial rate by a steep ₹350 must hit consumers hard. The move comes days after polling in three northeastern states concluded with state-owned oil firms easing the freeze on LPG price revision. It has been a usual ploy of the government to hold back fuel prices until the elections end and then surprise consumers with an escalation in price.

Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

of the day quote

I have been repeatedly telling, I spoke about this in yesterday's meeting (his birthday rally) too. Our policy for now is, rather than who should become the Prime Minister, who must not become the PM and which party must not be in power (should be the focus)

M K STALIN | TAMIL NADU CM

Extremely disturbed to see pictures of the mutilated body of Abdul Rashid from Kunan Poshpora. Wasn't allowed to visit the family under the pretext of security. What transpired after the Army picked him up for questioning months ago is anybody's guess

MEHBOOBA MUFTI | PDP PRESIDENT

Legacy waste of last 50 years left behind by erstwhile governments is being cleared now. It was dumped for last 50 years. It was not treated then. Now, to treat it, we are spending minimum Rs 500 crore annually

PRAMOD SAWANT | GOA CHIEF MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Prominent doctor missing in Bihar

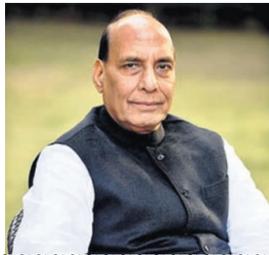
Patna: A prominent doctor in Patna, associated with the Nalanda Medical College and Hospital (NMCH), has gone missing since Wednesday evening though police have managed to locate his car. His family members suspect that he has been kidnapped but no ransom call has been received yet. Dr Sanjay Kumar had informed his wife Prof Saloni Kumari, an English professor in a degree college, that he is going to Muzaffarpur for some work. She had contacted him over the phone at 7.42 p.m. Wednesday and he said that his car was stuck in a traffic jam on the Gandhi Setu. After that call, she tried to contact him several times but he was not picking up his phone.

T'gana govt moves SC against gov

Hyderabad: The Telangana government has approached the Supreme Court seeking direction to Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan to give her approval to the Bills passed by the state Legislature. In a writ petition, the state government has brought to the notice of the Supreme Court that 10 Bills are pending with Raj Bhavan.

DGCA officer, wife commit suicide

New Delhi: A official of India's civil aviation regulator DGCA committed suicide at his residence in south Delhi and his wife followed suit sometime later, a Delhi Police officer said Thursday.



One cannot do politics for long by fooling people, only those who do politics with confidence and maintaining eye contact with the people can be successful

RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

ANOTHER ATIQ AIDE'S HOUSE DEMOLISHED

Authorities Thursday bulldozed the house of an aide of gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmed here amid heavy police presence, the second such action in two days. Three bulldozers and another heavy-duty machine were deployed to demolish the two-storey building under Dhoomanganj police station area owned by Safdar Ali, an alleged arms trader linked to Atiq Ahmed



Oppn welcomes SC ruling on EC

The Supreme Court (SC) Thursday ruled that the appointments of the Chief Election Commissioner and election commissioners will be done by the President on the advise of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 2: Opposition parties Thursday welcomed the Supreme Court's verdict on appointments in the Election Commission, saying the judgment will strengthen democracy and pave the way for free and fair polls, with the Congress seeking that the same mechanism be applied to the Enforcement Directorate.

Termed the verdict as historic, Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said it is significant as steps are required to be taken to stop the misuse of agencies and institutions by the BJP-led government.

TMC MP Derek O'Brien said the ruling will transform the "Extremely Compromised EC" to an "Extremely Competent EC". The CPI(M) also said it is a step in the right direction to ensure the poll body's independence. The Left party said it always advocated for appointments to the Election Commission to be on the lines of



what the Parliament enacted regarding the appointment of the CBI director and the Lokpal, among others, in a transparent and democratic manner.

AAP leader Sanjay Singh also said the apex court's decision on the appointment of election commissioners will help strengthen India's democracy and the Constitution.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi hailed the Supreme Court and called the judgment a "landmark" order. Welcoming the

top court's ruling, DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said on Twitter: "...When 'autonomous bodies' are being robbed, this timely intervention by SC is crucial to protect the independence of ECI whose transparent functioning is indispensable for a vibrant Democracy." Hailing the ruling as a landmark decision, NCP chief spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said the verdict will strengthen democracy as the entire nation looks up to the Election

Commission to conduct free and fair polls. Congress leader Singhvi added that the ruling is an important reminder for the Election Commission about its role in maintaining and sustaining the country's democracy.

His party colleague Anand Sharma said on Twitter, "Welcoming the historic Supreme Court verdict on Election Commission. Insulating EC from Government influence and dependence will secure the integrity of the electoral process. A truly Independent EC alone can fulfill the Constitutional mandate of conducting free and fair elections."

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi hoped that the ruling will bring transparency and that the election commissioner would be more independent.

"For democracy, it is necessary that transparency comes in the Election Commission and he (election commissioner) gets more independence," he said addressing a meeting.

EAM confirms no G20 joint statement



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 2: The G20 foreign ministers' meeting Thursday was unable to come out with a joint communique due to sharp rift between the West and Russia over the Ukraine conflict despite efforts by host India to bridge the differences. The meeting, held under India's presidency, adopted a Chair's Summary and Outcome Document listing various key priorities for the grouping.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said there were differences over the Ukraine conflict because of which the meeting could not agree on the joint communique.

"If we had perfect meetings of minds on all issues and captured it fully, it would have been collective statement but there were issues on which there were divergences," he said replying to a question. He said that there were differences on the Ukraine issue which could not be reconciled.

Several diplomats said there were deep divisions between the US-led West and the Russia-China combine over the Ukraine conflict. Jaishankar said there were "polarised views" on the issue.

The external affairs minister said the Outcome Document and the Chair's Summary reflected the G20's resolve to deal with pressing global challenges.

There were large number of issues where there was agreement,

he said. The Chair's Summary and Outcome Document mentioned two paragraphs on the Ukraine conflict but the footnote said all countries agreed to them except Russia and China. The two paragraphs were taken from G20's Bali declaration.

Jaishankar said the G20 foreign ministers' meeting unequivocally condemned terrorism.

The Chair's Summary and Outcome Document said the meeting was deeply concerned by the challenges to global food security exacerbated by current conflicts and tensions.

The foreign ministers from the world's largest industrialised and developing nations held crucial deliberations on key global challenges that took place in the backdrop of the increasingly bitter rift between the US-led West and the Russia-China combine over the Ukraine conflict.

In a video message at the start of the meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for building consensus on pressing global challenges and not allowing differences on geopolitical tensions to affect overall cooperation in the grouping.

In their remarks, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly and European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell criticized Russia for its invasion of Ukraine while China's Qin Gang referred to the 12-point Chinese peace plan to resolve the conflict.

HATHRAS RAPE-MURDER CASE

Main accused gets life term, 3 others acquitted

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hathras (UP), March 2: A special court here Thursday sentenced the main accused in the 2020 Hathras rape-murder case to life imprisonment while acquitting the three other accused. The rape charge could not be proved against the prime accused, his lawyer Munna Singh Pundir said. The court held Sandeep (20) guilty under section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Indian Penal Code, a lesser charge than section 302 (murder). Ravi (35), Luv Kush (23) and Ramu (26) were acquitted in the case that triggered outrage and put the Yogi Adityanath government in the dock over law and order in the state.

The court also slapped a fine of Rs 50,000 against Sandeep. The charge sheet in the case was filed by CBI in the SC/ST court here against all the four accused for murder and gang rape, and under sections of the SC/ST Act.



Lawyer Seema Kushwaha, who is representing the Dalit woman's family, said they will challenge the verdict in the high court. Sandeep's lawyer claimed that his client is innocent. "We will appeal in the high court against the conviction," he said.

The 19-year-old woman was allegedly gang-raped by four men from her village on September 14, 2020. A fortnight later, she died at a Delhi hospital.



TALKING HEADS: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Prime Minister of Italy Giorgia Meloni before their meeting, at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi. Modi said India was fully prepared to contribute to the peace process to find a solution to the Ukraine conflict, even as his Italian counterpart Giorgia Meloni pitched for a "central role" for New Delhi in cessation of hostilities. Narendra Modi also said India and Italy have decided to elevate their bilateral ties to a strategic partnership, opening a new chapter on defence cooperation

PTI PHOTO

Sena crisis falls within realm of politics: Shinde faction to SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 2: The Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde's faction Thursday told the Supreme Court that constitutional issues arising out of the rift with the Sena's Uddhav Thackeray group fell within the realm of politics and judiciary cannot be asked to adjudicate the crisis.

Political waters take different turns at different points, senior advocate Harish Salve, appearing for Maharashtra Chief Minister Shinde and MLAs of his faction, said, adding that court should not embark on "assumptions".

A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud was hearing pleas re-

lated to the Maharashtra political crisis in June 2022.

"It would be extremely perilous for this court to embark on this journey. Mr Thackeray (Uddhav) resigns. Governor calls for a floor test for a sitting CM. Floor test doesn't happen. How do you know who would have supported whom? What if one of his coalition partners said sorry we don't want to support you? We don't know."

"And it's not for us to decide as lawyers. This is in the realm of politics. How can your lordships be invited to hazard that guess?" Salve told the bench, also comprising Justices MR Shah, Krishna Murari, Hima Kohli and PS Narasimha.

Contending that everything in the petitions before the top court was



"academic", Salve submitted that Thackeray never faced the floor test. "Look at what happened when Shinde came for the floor test in the Assembly: Thirteen of Thackeray's hardcore supporters abstained from voting. These things happen in politics. These fast moving political waters take different turns at different points. We're not to speculate," Salve said. Admitting that the 10th schedule is not fool-

proof and there are many "leaks" which need to be fixed, Salve said in the present case, everything is academic and the courts cannot go beyond a point. Senior advocate Neeraj Kishan Kaul, also appearing for the Shinde faction, argued that there is an artificial distinction sought to be created between the legislative party and the original political party.

The hearing remained inconclusive and will resume on March 14 after Holi vacation.

The top court Wednesday had said Shinde could not have been sworn in as the chief minister of Maharashtra if the assembly speaker was not restrained from deciding the disqualification petitions pending against 39 MLAs.

CJI rebukes SCBA president Vikas Singh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 2: A heated exchange of words was witnessed in the Supreme Court Thursday between Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) president Vikas Singh in a case related to allotment of land for lawyers' chambers with the CJI directing the senior lawyer not to raise his voice and leave the court.



During the mentioning of cases, the SCBA president told a bench of CJI and justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala that he was struggling to get the matter listed for the last six months.

"The Appu Ghar land came to the Supreme Court on a petition by the SCBA and the Bar was given only one block with reluctance. The construction on the land was to begin during ex-CJI N V Ramana's tenure. For the last six months, we are struggling to get the matter listed," Singh said.

The CJI then remarked, "You can't demand land like this. You tell us the day we are sitting idle for the whole day." To this, Singh replied, "I am not saying that you are sitting idle for the whole day. I am only trying to get the matter listed. If it is not done, I will have to escalate and take it to your lordships' residence. I don't want the Bar to be taken like this."

Chandrachud then got agitated and said, "Don't threaten the chief justice. Is this a way to behave? Please sit down. It will not be listed like this. Please leave my court. I will not list like this. I will not be covered down by you."

INDIA STRIKES BACK

Terrorist Mushtaq Zargar freed in Kandahar hijacking faces NIA heat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, March 2: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Thursday attached property of terrorist Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar, who along with two other militants was released in exchange of passengers of the hijacked Indian Airlines plane in 1999, officials said here.

An NIA spokesperson said that Zargar alias 'Latram' was wanted in several terror related cases, including kidnapping of daughter of the then Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed in 1989.

The NIA team pasted the notice of attachment on his house in presence of the sisters of the absconding terrorist. After the NIA and police teams departed, the sisters unsuccessfully attempted to cre-

ate a commotion but returned to their houses after no one joined them.

Zargar, after breaking ranks with banned JKLF terror group in late 1990, had formed Al-Umar Mujahideen terror group that was responsible for several barbaric killings in downtown Srinagar.

Hailing from the downtown city and a coppersmith by profession before joining terror ranks, Zargar was arrested in 1992. His name was found in the list of terrorists to be exchanged for passengers of 1999 IC-814 hijacking of Indian Airlines plane and he was subsequently released and taken by the then External Affairs Minister of BJP-led government Jaswant Singh to Kandahar in Afghanistan December 31, 1999.

Besides Zargar, whose name,



Police personnel and officials leave after putting up a notice of attachment at the residence of Zargar

PTI PHOTO

Terming it as a "major offensive" against terrorists operating from the Pakistani soil, Zargar's two marlas house has been attached under the provisions of stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)

according to security experts, was included by perpetrators sitting in Pakistan only to project the hijacking as an indigenous act of Kashmiri terrorists.

The others released included Masood Azhar, one of the founders

of Harkat-ul-Ansar terror group and now heading banned Jaish-e-Mohammed terror group, and Sheikh Omar, a highly radicalised terrorist who is at present on a death row in Pakistan for killing American journalist Daniel Pearl.

Zargar, after being exchanged at Kandahar airport, shifted his base to Pakistan occupied Kashmir's Muzaffarabad town from where he attempted to revive Al-Umar Mujahideen.

He has also been involved in other heinous crimes, including murders, and has close association with other terror outfits such as Al-Qaeda and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Zargar was designated as a terrorist under the UAPA in April last year, a move which enabled the security agencies to attach his property.

Pak's drug-drones are a curse for Punjab farmers

Farmers are not allowed to work in their fields once a drug-dropping drone is spotted or shot down by BSF as security forces launch search operations in villages near the IB that may continue for days

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Amritsar/Ferozepur, March 2: The menace of Pakistan's ISI-sponsored drone-dropping of drugs in the border villages has become a curse for farmers who have chunks of cultivable land across the barbed fence in Indian territory just a few metres short of the International Border (IB) with Pakistan.

A visit by this correspondent to the forward areas of the India-Pakistan border revealed that these farmers are not allowed to work in their fields once a drug-dropping drone is spotted or shot down by the BSF as the security forces launch search operations in the villages near the IB to nab drug smugglers that may continue for days.

Sarpanch Onkar Singh of Amritsar district's Galluwal village, situated half a kilometre from IB, says after the drone activity, the BSF halts agricultural operations in the fields beyond the barbed fence. The entry gates that otherwise remain open from 10 am to 3 pm in winter and 4 pm in summer, allowing permit-holding farmers to pass through to look after their crops, are kept shut when the search operations are on. This adversely affects crop output, he adds.

Ex-Sarpanch Makhan Singh of Raja Taal village, 300 metres from IB, discloses that his 4 acres of fertile land across the barbed fence get neglected when the entry gates are suddenly closed by the BSF. The farmers are then asked to go back lock-stock and barrel with no intimation when the entry gates will open again. "We cannot irrigate our crops in time due to re-



strictions made effective after drone activity," says Makhan Singh. Raja Taal villagers have 185 acres of land across the fence.

Ex-Sarpanch Baldev Singh of Galluwal flags a problem with the annual compensation of Rs 10,000 per acre given by the Central government to farmers owning land across the barbed fence on IB. "We are not paid for years together, piling up arrears leading to litigation, as farmers move courts," he discloses. The tiresome litigation costs time and money.

The story on the Ferozepur border is no different. Sarpanch Jagir Singh of Hazara Singh Wala village maintains that the BSF stops agricultural activity for days across the fence when a "senior officer" from Jalandhar or Delhi is to visit the forward units of the force.

Mamdot block samiti member Harbans Singh makes a suggestion to help BSF build good relations with farmers. "As a majority of jawans who interact with farmers having land across the fence do

not know Punjabi, misunderstandings crop up. There have been occasions when farmers sat on dharnas due to language problems. At every entry gate, one Punjabi-speaking jawan needs to be posted," he emphasises.

As per practice, the BSF keeps a strict vigil on the farmers who go across the fence. The transit gates are manned by scores of jawans to search and frisk farmers on the way to and way back from their fields. It consumes more than an hour per working day per family team of a farmer.

A senior BSF officer responsible for managing agricultural operations across the fence explains, "We have to be vigilant as some black sheep may get mixed up with the enemy to smuggle in weapons or drugs we are to follow standard operating practices (SOPs) drafted by the Defence Ministry after a prolonged scientific study of behaviour and conduct of the border area cultivators," the officer points out.

Why people go missing in this valley?

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kullu-Manali, March 2: Breathtaking landscapes, tall green cedars and a fascinating riverside surrounded by majestic mountain peaks make the Parvati valley a natural wonder. But it also has a dark side. Several young foreign and Indian tourists go missing in this area, known for its seamy drug culture. The figures are shocking. The latest case in point is that of a 27-year-old tourist from Ghaziabad near Delhi. He went missing December 31 after a New Year eve party. After a 35-day search, his body was recovered, after Director General of Police Sanjay Kundu set-up an SIT.

Like many other tourists, the youth had arrived in Kasol to celebrate the New Year. Thereafter, he lost contact with his family members. The father also announced a reward of Rs 5 lakh for a person who could provide the whereabouts of his son.

And, finally came the real shock as the police found his decomposed body, leaving the family shattered.

Superintendent of Police, Kullu, Sakshi Verma said "The police are still awaiting a post-mortem report and can't assume death being linked to drugs. The family awaits closure and holds a different view on the youth's death."

The official records show as many as 1,078 persons had gone missing in the Parvati valley between 2003 and 2023 of which 21 were foreigners. Only 498 of them could be traced. Mystery continues to shroud deaths and cases of disappearance of persons in the Parvati valley.

With the exception of the Covid-19 period, when only a few persons reportedly went missing, there has been a steady rise in the number of foreign and domestic tourists that have disappeared in the valley.

In 2022, as many as 227 tourists went missing in Parvati Valley, the highest number in recent years after the tourist activities resumed in Kullu-Manali.

"We can't attribute these deaths to drug abuse, or drug overdose. The



VALLEY OF FEAR

■ OFFICIAL RECORDS SHOW AS MANY AS 1,078 PERSONS HAD GONE MISSING IN THE PARVATI VALLEY BETWEEN 2003 AND 2023 OF WHICH 21 WERE FOREIGNERS

■ IN 2022, AS MANY AS 227 TOURISTS WENT MISSING IN THE VALLEY, THE HIGHEST NUMBER IN RECENT YEARS

■ MYSTERY CONTINUES TO SHROUD DEATHS AND CASES OF DISAPPEARANCE OF PERSONS IN THE VALLEY KNOWN FOR ITS SEAMY DRUG CULTURE

area is highly treacherous. The people tend to venture out not adhering to safety guidelines or they avoid taking the local guides. Weather is also a reason sometimes. The information about a person having an accidental fall doesn't reach us in time. Only when their family members or friends search him/her, the police get to know about it," said a former Superintendent of Police, Kullu - now retired and settled in Shimla.

The local youths, who don't have jobs, find trafficking a lucrative venture and most, thereafter also become addicts. The families are finding themselves in a vicious

circle to keep their sons and daughters away from drugs, especially after 'Chitta' (a heroin derivative) has emerged as a new menace.

But growing cannabis and using it for charas as money spinner in Parvati valley and nearby Malana is an accepted reality now. It's also a story of rags to riches for several families, who are investing their ill-gotten money in properties - hotels and homestays or buying luxury cars. 'Malana cream' or magic cream - a high-end product drawn from cannabis is sold at almost Rs 3000-4000 per 10 gm at Malana while its demand in the international market has been very high.

The politicians from Kullu, cutting across party lines are now asking the government to legalise cultivation of cannabis. The government is yet to take a final call.

Kesternov Vladislav - a Russian national went missing from Kasol in May 2011. A few days later his body was found in a gorge between Rasol and Chhalal. In August 1991, Oddette Victoria Ann Houghton, an Australian went missing in Manikaran valley. This was one of the first cases of missing foreigners.

The most shocking case of a missing foreigner was Justin Alexander Shetler, a US citizen and a highly skilled trekker. He went missing from Manikaran valley. The police efforts to trace him proved futile. His mother who had arrived in Manali in search of her son even met then chief minister Virbhadra Singh to seek his help from the state machinery and also mobilised support from the US Embassy in Delhi. She also hired a private chopper for an aerial search but it proved futile.

Punjab budget session to begin amid tussle between Guv and CM



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Mar 2: Amid a tussle between Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, the budget session of the assembly will begin Friday with the opposition trying to corner the AAP government over a host of issues, including law and order, particularly after the Ajnala incident.

The session will begin with the governor's address while a discussion on it will take place March 6.

The governor and the chief minister had been locked in a tussle over summoning the budget session.

The AAP had accused the governor of not responding to the cabinet decision to call the budget session from March 3. The governor indicated last week in a letter to CM Mann that he was in no hurry to summon the session.

The AAP government then moved the Supreme Court against the governor's 'refusal', where Purohit said he has summoned the budget session from March 3.

As the budget session is now set to begin, opposition parties are eyeing an opportunity to corner the government over the law and order situation in the state.

February 23, supporters of radical preacher and Khalistan sympathiser Amritpal Singh stormed a police station in Ajnala on the outskirts of Amritsar brandishing swords and guns to extract an assurance from the police that his aide and kidnapping accused Lovepreet

Cong demands arrest of Amritpal, his supporters

After the Ajnala incident, the Bhagwant Mann-led government and the state police chief have come under fire from the Opposition parties for caving to the radical preacher

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, March 2: Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring has said the Congress will take to streets if no action is taken against radical preacher Amritpal Singh and his supporters in the Ajnala case.

He made the statement in a letter to state police chief. Claiming that the Ajnala incident shook the faith of common Punjabis in the AAP government, Warring said that the irony is that those responsible for the incident were roaming 'scot-free' and 'cocking a snook' at the government and the police.

"The Punjab Congress party is serving an ultimatum that either you arrest Amritpal along with all those guilty of attacking the policemen, or we the Congressmen will be forced to come out on streets," he said.

Warring's letter to DGP Gaurav



Yadav came days after Amritpal and his supporters, some of them brandishing swords and guns, broke through barricades and barged into the Ajnala police station on the outskirts of the Amritsar city, extracting an assurance from the police that kidnapping case accused Lovepreet Singh will be released.

During the incident last week, six policemen, including former Indian hockey player and now SP Jugraj Singh, suffered injuries.

After the Ajnala incident, the Bhagwant Mann-led government and the state police chief have come under fire from the opposition parties for caving to the radical preacher and not taking any action Amritpal and his supporters.

In his communique to the DGP, Warring reminded Gaurav Yadav that he had written to him about four months ago regarding the

"dangerous and nefarious activities" of Amritpal Singh.

"He has been spitting venom and is out there to destroy the hard earned peace of Punjab and its communal harmony. Neither any note of my letter was taken nor was any check maintained on his activities," said Warring.

Warring said Amritpal has now got 'so emboldened' that he had the "audacity to lay siege to a police station in Ajnala, attack the policemen and take away his aide, who is accused of assaulting and kidnapping an individual."

"This was something unprecedented and never heard of. Even during the dark days of terrorism never did such an incident occur. The police never felt so let down and demoralised even when they were facing the worst type of terrorism in the history of the state," he said.

Himachal govt to bring White Paper on economic condition

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

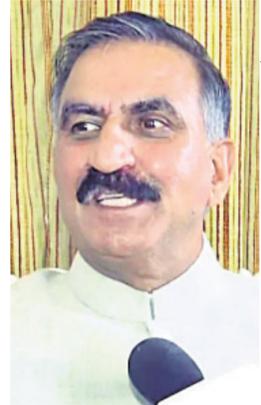
Shimla, March 2: A White Paper would be brought out on the economic condition of Himachal Pradesh in the upcoming Assembly session to help people to better understand the reality of 'unmindful spending' done by the previous BJP government, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu said Thursday.

Highlighting the state's precarious financial health, Sukhu told the media here his government is marching ahead with a positive approach to improve the economy so that the aspirations of the people could be fulfilled.

"The present government has inherited a debt of Rs 75,000 crore and the then BJP government failed to release a sum of Rs 11,000 crore due to government employees as arrears. Additionally, over 900 institutions were opened and upgraded during the last six months of the previous government, which would have resulted in an additional burden of Rs 5,000 crore on the state exchequer," he contended.

He advised Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Thakur to introspect about the last five years of the BJP government before casting any allegations. The Chief Minister said regular monthly interaction between ministers and workers would be held in the party office in Shimla to ensure speedy redressal of their grievances.

This move has been initiated in



consultation with state party President Pratibha Singh, he said, adding this would improve better coordination between the government and workers.

The Chief Minister himself initiated this move by visiting Rajiv Bhawan here and met various delegations, party workers and common people who came from across the state and listened to their grievances. He said the government is fully committed to fulfill all 10 guarantees in their Pratigya Patra, the election manifesto. He said the old pension scheme has been reinstated in the first cabinet meeting, which would benefit more than 1.36 lakh government employees.

He said other guarantees would be fulfilled in a phased manner.

Enjoying every possible liberty in India: Dalai Lama

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Dharamsala, March 2: Looking back at his escape from Tibet in 1959, globetrotting Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama says soon he will be 88. Since then, he has been the longest staying guest of the Indian government, enjoying every possible liberty but the tragedy of Tibet has yet to be resolved.

"Today, I am stateless, unable to return to my country. But we Tibetans have a saying, 'Your homeland is wherever you are happy. And whoever loves you is your parent,'" the Buddhist monk wrote in the TIME weekly news-

magazine in an article titled "The Dalai Lama on the gratitude he feels looking back at his escape from Tibet" published Tuesday.

"India and its people, as well as many across the world, have provided me with constant love and support. When I look at this cover from 1959, I am grateful that I have been able to lead a meaningful life dedicated to helping others."

In 1959, TIME magazine had a cover photo and the accompanying story of a young Dalai Lama escaping Tibet.

Sixty years later in 2019, the Tibetan spiritual leader was on its cover page for the third time. "The tragedy of Tibet has yet to



be resolved. But my becoming a refugee in India brought with it many hidden blessings," he wrote in the article.

"In addition, India has provided me, and those other Tibetans who managed to escape, the freedom to preserve and promote Tibetan identity and our culture of peace and compassion, and to share them with the entire world."

The Dalai Lama, whom Beijing brands a separatist, fled into exile in 1959 and established his government-in-exile in Dharamsala. Expressing gratitude to the Indian government, the Dalai Lama wrote: "Most important, I have enjoyed in exile the freedom to pursue my spiritual development, even as I have tried to take care of Tibetan affairs."

In 2011, TIME magazine listed

the Dalai Lama among the world's top 25 political icons.

"The Dalai Lama's humility has endeared him to presidents and religious leaders of several countries, affording him the opportunity to raise awareness and drum up support for Tibet on a global scale," the magazine had noted.

In 2019 when the spiritual leader was on the magazine cover as the 'Survivor', the then Central Tibetan Administration President Lobsang Sangay said: "Now, we look forward to the day when His Holiness will be on the cover again -- returning home to Tibet. This is the aspiration of six million Tibetans."

international

of the day quote

Antonio Guterres | UN SECRETARY-GENERAL
We recognize that the challenges Iraq is facing did not arise overnight

Olaf Scholz | GERMAN CHANCELLOR
My message to Beijing is clear: use your influence in Moscow to press for the withdrawal of Russian troops, and do not supply weapons to the aggressor Russia

Amina J Mohammed | UN DEPUTY SECY-GENERAL
The time had come to recognise the right to development as a human right -- on a par with other human rights and fundamental freedoms

SHORT TAKES

Prachanda urges to support Paudel

Kathmandu: Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Thursday urged all political parties to back Ram Chandra Paudel for the President's post, asserting that the senior Nepali Congress candidate will play the role of guardian in protecting democracy and the Constitution. Addressing an orientation programme here, Prachanda said protection of the Constitution and democracy was more important to him than the post of Prime Minister.

Thuong elected as Vietnam's new Prez

Hanoi: Vo Van Thuong, a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), was elected as the new President Thursday. The country's top legislature convened a special meeting and elected Thuong as the new president with an approval rate of 98.38 per cent, Xinhua news agency reported. In a statement, Thuong vowed to be absolutely loyal to the nation, the people and the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and to work hard to fulfil the duty assigned by the Communist Party of Vietnam, the state and the people.

British navy seizes Iranian missiles

Dubai: The British navy seized anti-tank missiles and fins for ballistic missile assemblies during a raid on a small boat heading from Iran likely to Yemen, authorities said Thursday, the latest such seizure in the Gulf of Oman. The seizure by the Royal Navy comes after other seizures by French and U.S. forces in the region as Western powers increase their pressure on Iran, as it now enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels. It also comes as regional and international powers try to find an end to the yearslong war gripping Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, and as Iran arms Russia in its war on Ukraine.

Floods hit Malaysia; Over 26K evacuated

Kuala Lumpur: Rescuers in boats retrieved families trapped on rooftops and hauled others to safety as villages and towns in parts of Malaysia were submerged in floodwaters, leading to over 26,000 people being evacuated as of Thursday. One person died when his car was swept away by floodwaters. The southern Johor state, neighboring Singapore, was the worst hit with some 25,000 people moved to relief centers in schools and community halls.



Pakistan is home to at least a dozen terrorist organisations. #CutEveryCent
NIKKI HALEY | INDIAN-AMERICAN REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

23% IN GERMANY ARE IMMIGRANTS

Some 18.9 million people, or 23 per cent of Germany's population, either immigrated to the country since 1950 or are the children of immigrants, Germany's Federal Statistics Office said



'End this war of aggression'

AGENCIES

Moscow/New Delhi, March 2: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he urged his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov to end the war in Ukraine during a brief, unscheduled meeting that was the first since Moscow's invasion.

"I told the foreign minister what I and so many others said last week at the United Nations and what so many G20 foreign ministers said today -- end this war of aggression, engage in meaningful diplomacy that can produce a just and lasting peace," Blinken told reporters after talks in New Delhi.

Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov briefly met Thursday in their first face-to-face encounter since the start of the war in Ukraine in February last year. The exchanges on the sidelines of the G20 foreign ministers' meeting in Delhi lasted for about 10 minutes and Blinken conveyed to Lavrov that the US would continue to support Ukraine.

The short encounter came as ties between the US and Russia nosedived further over the growing friction over the war in Ukraine.

At a media briefing, the US Secretary of State said that he briefly spoke with the Russian Foreign Minister and called upon him to reverse his decision and return to implementing the new START Treaty. "I told the Russian foreign minister that no matter what else is happening in the world and our relationship, the US will always be ready to engage and act on strategic arms control just as



■ BLINKEN, LAVROV SPEAK IN PERSON FOR FIRST TIME SINCE UKRAINE WAR
■ BLINKEN REITERATES SUPPORT TO UKRAINE FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES
■ LAVROV BLAMES WEST FOR GLOBAL POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CRISES

The US and its Western allies are ramping up pressure on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine

the US and the Soviet Union did at the height of the Cold War," he said.

Last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his decision to suspend the New START nuclear arms

treaty with the US. It is the last remaining nuclear arms control treaty between Washington and Moscow that limits the nuclear arsenals of the two countries. Russian spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Blinken asked for the "contact". "Secretary of State Antony Blinken asked for contact with Foreign Minister Lavrov, during the second session of the G20 meet," Zakharova

said. She said they had the "contact but there were no talks or a full-fledged meeting". In his remarks at the G20 meet, Blinken said, "We must continue to call on Russia to end its war of aggression and withdraw from Ukraine for the sake of international peace and economic stability."

The US and its Western allies are ramping up pressure on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine.

Referring to the Ukraine conflict, the Russian foreign ministry on Tuesday accused the US and its allies of pursuing a "destructive policy" that it claimed put the world on the "brink of a disaster." "The destructive policy of the US and its allies has already put the world on the brink of a disaster; provoked a rollback in socio-economic development and seriously aggravated the situation of the poorest countries,"

Pakistan hikes key policy rate by 300 basis points

AGENCIES

Islamabad/Karachi, March 2: Pakistan's central bank Thursday hiked its key policy rate by 300 basis points to a 26-year high at 20 per cent, as the cash-strapped country scrambled to fulfil another demand by the IMF for the release of a USD 1.1 billion tranche to avoid an economic meltdown.

The development comes as the Pakistani rupee was in a freefall mode, sinking by Rs18.98 Thursday compared to the greenback and touching its historic low of 285.09 against one dollar by the end of the day.

The country is taking various steps to get aid from the global lender under a \$7 billion loan facility, which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is refusing unless crucial decisions are made

Pak surrenders to another IMF demand

Islamabad: Desperate to revive the loan programme to stabilise the falling economy, Pakistan gave in to the International Monetary Funds (IMF) demand of imposing a power surcharge on the consumers in the next fiscal year. The Pakistani officials are baffled by IMF's "shifting goalposts" as the country makes hectic efforts to woo the lender which has set new conditions to unlock the \$6.5 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) signed in 2019, Geo News reported.



The Pakistani rupee also sank sharply by Rs 18.98 against the dollar Thursday, with the local currency reaching a historic high of Rs 285.09 at close
A 6.66 per cent drop in the value of the national currency was witnessed in a single day, according to the data of the State Bank of Pakistan

by the government and implemented.

The policy rate hike is 100 basis points higher than the financial market consensus of 200 basis points. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) said in its monetary policy statement that it revised its inflation projection to 27-29 per cent for the current fiscal year against its November 2022 projection of 21-23 per cent for the year.

In its meeting in Karachi, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) noted that the recent fiscal adjustments and exchange rate depreciation led to a significant deterioration in the near-term inflation outlook and a further upward drift in inflation expectations, as reflected in the latest wave of surveys.

SpaceX launches next crew to ISS

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cape Canaveral (US), March 2: SpaceX launched four astronauts to the International Space Station for NASA Thursday, including the first person from the Arab world going up for an extended month-long stay.

The Falcon rocket bolted from Kennedy Space Center shortly after midnight, illuminating the night sky as it headed up the East Coast.

Nearly 80 spectators from the United Arab Emirates watched from the launch site as astronaut Sultan al-Neyadi — only the second Emirati to fly to space — blasted off on his six-month mission.

Half a world away in Dubai and elsewhere across the UAE, schools and offices planned to broadcast the launch live.

Also riding the Dragon capsule that's due at the space station on Friday: NASA's Stephen Bowen, a retired Navy submariner who logged three space shuttle flights, and Warren "Woody" Hoburg, a former research scientist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and space newbie, and Andrei Fedyayev, a space rookie who's retired from the Russian Air Force.

The first attempt to launch them was called off Monday at the last minute because of a clogged filter in the engine ignition system.

The UAE's minister for public education and advanced technology, Sarah al-Amiri, said the long mission "provides us a new venue for science and scientific discovery for the country."



FRANCE'S LONGEST RIVER DRIES UP: A view shows the Anjou-Bretagne bridge with sandbanks of the Loire River in Ancenis-Saint-Gereon, France

PIO engineer at FTX pleads guilty to fraud charges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York, March 2: Nishad Singh, a 27-year-old Indian-origin former top executive of failed cryptocurrency trading platform FTX has pleaded guilty to the charges of alleged billion-dollar fraud at the now collapsed exchange. Singh was the former co-lead engineer of FTX Trading Ltd.

He has pleaded guilty to six conspiracy charges, including wire fraud, conspiracy to commit money laundering and conspiracy to violate federal campaign finances laws. Singh is the third top executive and close confidante of FTX founder Sam Bankman-Fried to plead guilty and

cooperate with prosecutors. Gary Wang, co-founder of FTX, and Caroline Ellison, the former head of FTX's sister hedge fund Alameda Research, both pleaded guilty last year and are cooperating against Bankman-Fried. In December last

year, federal authorities charged Bankman-Fried with orchestrating a scheme to defraud equity investors in FTX. The Securities and Exchange Commission charged Singh Tuesday. In a parallel action, the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) also announced charges against Singh.



Boris skeptical about Sunak's new Brexit deal

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, March 2: Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson Thursday poured cold water on current premier Rishi Sunak's new Brexit deal with the European Union, saying he would "find it hard" to vote for it in Parliament.

Johnson said he hoped Sunak's deal would work, but argued that that it did not amount to "the UK taking back control" — a key Brexit slogan. Johnson left office with an unresolved dispute between the UK and the bloc over trade rules for Northern Ireland, the only part of the UK that shares a border with an EU member nation.

Under Sunak, the two sides struck a deal, which was announced Monday. The "Windsor Framework" agreement will ease customs checks and other hurdles for goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK that were imposed after Brexit to

The government has been bracing for a response from Johnson, a strong backer of Brexit who was ousted from office by ethics scandals in July 2022

Johnson is widely believed to hope for a political comeback, and blames Conservative colleagues including Sunak for bringing him down

maintain an open border between the north and its EU neighbour the Republic of Ireland. The open border is a key pillar of Northern Ireland's peace process. But Northern Ireland's British unionist politicians have yet to give it their blessing.

They worry that accepting any aspect of EU trade rules will undermine Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom. Sunak has also said UK lawmakers will get to vote on the deal, but he has not said when.



Torture chambers in Kherson 'financed by Russian state'

WITNESSES DESCRIBED USE OF ELECTRIC SHOCK TORTURE AND WATERBOARDING BY RUSSIAN FORCES

AGENCIES

The Hague, March 2: A network of at least 20 torture chambers in the recently liberated southern Ukrainian region of Kherson was "planned and directly financed by the Russian State," war crimes investigators said Thursday, citing new evidence.

The Mobile Justice Team, funded by Britain, the EU and the United States, has been working with Ukrainian war crimes prosecutors across Ukraine and in Kherson since the city was reclaimed from Russian forces in November after more than eight months of occupation.

No comment was immediately available from the Kremlin. Reuters reported on the scale of torture chambers in Kherson in January, when Ukrainian authorities said around 200 people had allegedly been tortured at 10 locations. Survivors told Reuters about being tortured, including electric shocks and suffocation techniques.

At the time, the Kremlin and Russia's defence ministry did not respond to Reuters' questions, including about alleged torture and unlawful detentions. Moscow, which has said it is conducting a



Inside a youth detention facility in Kherson that Ukrainian investigators said was used as a 'torture room' by occupying Russian forces

PHOTO CREDIT: ALESSIO MAMO/THE GUARDIAN

"special military operation" in Ukraine, has denied committing war crimes or targeting civilians. The mobile team, backed by in-

ternational experts, is supporting Ukraine's Office of the Prosecutor General as it reviews more than 71,000 reports of war crimes na-

'CROSSBORDER SABOTAGE RAID'

Kyiv: Russian officials accused Ukrainian saboteurs of crossing into western Russia and attacking local villages Thursday, an accusation that Ukraine denied, warning that Moscow could use the claims to justify stepping up its own assaults in the ongoing war. The exact circumstances of the incident reported in the Bryansk region were unclear, including what the strategic purpose of such an attack might be.

tionwide since the February 24, 2022, invasion.

Witnesses described the use of electric shock torture and waterboarding by Russian forces. At least 1,000 torture chamber survivors have submitted evidence to investigators and more than 400 people had been reported as missing from Kherson, it said.

Funding a network of torture facilities was part of a Russian state plan to "subjugate, re-educate or kill Ukrainian civic leaders and ordinary dissenters," the team

said. Torture centres were operated by different Russian security agencies, including the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB), local Kherson FSB and the Russian Prison Service, it said.

Reuters was unable to verify the allegations.

An investigation is also underway by the International Criminal Court, part of a both domestic and international efforts to hold those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide across Ukraine to account.



Supporters of Meghalaya Chief Minister and National People's Party chief Conrad Sangma celebrate his victory in Tura



BJP workers celebrate the party's victory in Tripura and Nagaland Assembly elections in Ranchi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being garlanded during celebrations after the party's good performance in Nagaland, Tripura and Meghalaya Assembly polls at the BJP HQ in New Delhi

BJP maintains winning momentum

The maiden alliance of the Left and the Congress in Tripura and the emergence of TIPRA Motha as a dominant force in tribal seats did not prove enough to topple the BJP from power in the state as the ruling party's development plank and ideological resonance surmounted local factors to deliver it another victory.

Among the three northeastern states that went to assembly polls, Tripura's verdict was the most keenly watched due to the high stakes for three national parties - the BJP, Congress and the Left - and the results underscored the continuity of momentum in the saffron party's favour despite the occasional setbacks it has suffered in state polls.

"If our 2018 victory was an endorsement of our ideological and development agenda, the win now shows its popular acceptance," a BJP leader involved in the Tripura polls said. The party had benefited from popular anger against the Left "misrule" for 25 years in 2018 and it has now received a positive mandate for the Centre and state government's work, he added.

Party sources said the BJP, like in so many other state polls, succeeded in making its overarching ideological and developmental planks and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popular appeal the central theme of its campaign which was also helped by an organisationally weakened opposition unable to match the ruling party either in firepower or in leadership charisma.

The winning momentum is important for the BJP as the crucial state of Karnataka is next headed for assembly polls, expected in May, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram later this year.

Both are largely Christian populated states and its performance will give the BJP a handy weapon to beat back the charge. However, it is the Tripura results which will matter the most to the BJP as its win

The winning momentum is important for the BJP as the crucial state of Karnataka is next headed for Assembly polls, expected in May, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram later this year

It may be a junior partner in Nagaland and remains a minor player in Meghalaya but the results in the two states will be helpful for the party in making ideological points, its leaders noted

Democratic Progressive Party is the senior partner. But its ambition of emerging as a bigger player in Meghalaya was thwarted as it was leading in only three seats against the two it held in the outgoing 60-member assembly. BJP leadership had accused Chief Minister Conrad Sangma-led government of being the country's "most corrupt" state dispensation but the two parties may now agree to do business together again. The BJP was part of his government but parted ways before the polls.

It may be a junior partner in Nagaland and remains a minor player in Meghalaya but the results in the two states will be helpful for the party in making ideological points, its leaders noted. Accused by rivals of being "anti-minority", the BJP has succeeded in improving its vote share to nearly 19 per cent from 15.3 per cent in Nagaland and bagging over nine per cent votes in Meghalaya.

Both are largely Christian populated states and its performance will give the BJP a handy weapon to beat back the charge. However, it is the Tripura results which will matter the most to the BJP as its win

has underlined popular acceptance of the party in this erstwhile Left bastion which it won for the first time in 2018.

Its vote share as well as seat tally have come down but things were worse for the Left-Congress alliance. The BJP appeared headed to win 32 seats in the 60-member assembly, down from 36 in 2018. The combined tally for the opposition alliance was 14

In Tripura, elections so far was a direct fight between two parties. This is for the first time, a triangular fight was witnessed in the state

while the CPI(M) had won 16 seats in 2018 when it had fought on its own. The Congress failed to open its account last time.

A point for concern, however, for the BJP will be the rise of Pradyut Debbarma-led TIPRA Motha and the decline of its tribal ally in IPFT, which could win a lone seat this time. The BJP also suffered the embarrassment of the loss of its own most prominent tribal face and Deputy Chief Minister Jishnu Dev Varma to his TIPRA Motha rival Subodh Deb Barma. Party sources said their



Meghalaya Chief Minister and Nation People's Party (NPP) supremo Conrad Sangma has sought Union Home Minister Amit Shah's blessings to form the next government in the hill state, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said Thursday. Sarma took to Twitter to also say that BJP president JP Nadda has advised the Meghalaya unit of the saffron camp to support the NPP as it forms the next government in the neighbouring state

leadership may explore the probability of an alliance with Pradyut Debbarma, scion of erstwhile

royal, if he gives up on his demand for a separate state of "Greater Tripaland".

NAGALAND scripts history

History was scripted in Nagaland Thursday when the state elected its first women legislators in its 60 years of statehood.

The two women lawmakers - Hekhani Jakhlu and Salhoutuonuo Kruse of the ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) are greenhorns in politics but defeated the sitting MLAs in Western Angami and Dimapur-III seats respectively. By virtue of her constituency being declared earlier in the day, Jakhlu became the first woman MLA in the Nagaland Assembly.

She defeated her nearest rival and sitting MLA Azheto Zhimomi of the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) by 1,536 votes. "The victory is not mine alone, it belongs to my people who trusted me with their hopes and aspirations. I dedicate this victory to God and pledge to serve my constituents with honesty and integrity," Jakhlu tweeted.

A lawyer by education and social entrepreneur

RIO SET TO BE NAGALAND CM

political stalwart and its longest serving Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio is set to assume office as Chief Minister for a fifth consecutive term after a convincing win for his party and its ally, the BJP. Together, the two parties have secured 33 seats in the 60-member Nagaland assembly. Rio personally defeated Congress' Seyielie Sachu, a greenhorn in the political arena, in the Northern Angami II constituency, in the process helping emasculate the grand old party in the state where at one time it was entrenched

featuring the sitting MLA Keneizhakho Nakhro by seven votes.

In the straight fight in Western Angami seat of Kohima district, Kruse, who is the nominee of the ruling Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), polled 7,078 votes while the sitting MLA and Independent candidate Nakhro got just seven votes less.

"It is all God's providence as the margin was very thin and also the support of the people that I got elected," she said. On her priority as the first time woman MLA in the state, Kruse said she will try to help the government by playing an important role in the decision making process for the general welfare of the people.

The victory is not mine alone, it belongs to my people who trusted me with their hopes and aspirations. I dedicate this victory to God and pledge to serve my constituents with honesty and integrity



NDPP leader Hekani Jakhlu becomes the first woman from Nagaland to become an MLA after winning from the Dimapur-III constituency in the Assembly elections

CELEBRATIONS GALORE



Congress candidate Ravindra Dhangekar with supporters celebrates his victory in the Kasba Peth Assembly bypoll in Pune



All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) supporters celebrate the party's victory in Ramgarh Assembly bypoll, in Ramgarh district of Jharkhand



DMK party workers celebrate after the DMK-backed Secular Progressive Alliance candidate EVKS Elangovan won the Erode (East) Assembly seat bypoll, at Anna Arivalayam in Chennai

Congress wins 3; TMC suffers shock defeat

The assembly by-election results Thursday brought some solace for the Congress as it wrested one seat each from the BJP and the TMC in Maharashtra and West Bengal respectively and retained a seat in Tamil Nadu with DMK's support, while the BJP and its ally AJSU bagged one seat each in the western state and Jharkhand.

The ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal suffered a shock defeat in Sagardighi which was won by Congress' Bayron Biswas by 22,986 votes. It is the only seat held by the Congress in the state assembly. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata

BY-ELECTION RESULTS

Banerjee alleged the Congress and the CPI(M) had entered into an understanding with the BJP to defeat the Trinamool Congress with their "immoral" alliance.

The BJP managed to hold on to Chinchwad seat in Maharashtra's Pune but suffered a setback as it failed to win Kasba Peth Assembly seat, its stronghold in the district, as Congress candidate Ravindra Dhangekar defeated the saffron party nominee Hemant Rasane. The BJP held the seat for 28 years.

Govind Bapat, the current BJP MP from Pune, represented the seat five times till 2019. Dhangekar, who was supported by Maha Vikas Aghadi allies Nationalist Congress Party and Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray), polled 73,194 votes while Rasane received 62,244 votes, as per figures on the Election Commission's website after the final round of counting. Ruling DMK-backed Congress nominee EVKS Elangovan won in the Erode East byelection, with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin terming it a public endorsement of the "Dravidian model of governance" of his 22-month-old government.

Himanta: Deal-maker for a saffron sunrise

The man who stitched together the various alliances which saw BJP's sun rising in the Northeast has done it again.

BJP's poster boy from the region, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has emerged as the party's deal maker, flying almost "on a daily basis" to all the three states of the northeast where polls were held in February this year in between running his own state.

First by picking on Neiphiu Rio as the man to bank upon and piggyback to power for a second term in the insurgency ridden state of Nagaland and then by helping Delhi pick up the unassuming Manik Saha as the man who could undo the damage to the saffron party's popularity in the vital border state of Tripura.

Last, but not the least by getting Conrad Sangma who broke off his NPP party's alliance with BJP just

Sarma had earlier captured eyeballs as the BJP's first star campaigner from the region in far away Gujarat and Delhi

Backroom deals were attempted to even win the Tjpra Motha, founded by scion of Tripura's erstwhile princely family by Sarma, though the tougher and possibly more wily negotiators from among former militants sent by Motha proved a tougher nut to crack

before the election to Meghalaya's assembly, back on the negotiating table for a possible tie-up with the right-wing party in case he fell short of the majority mark. Sangma is believed to have had two rounds of meetings with Sarma on the issue and some kind of a rapprochement seems to have been worked out.

"Since people put their faith on us with a bigger mandate than last time, there is a high probability of consolidation of the earlier partners," NPP spokesperson Ampareen Lyngdoh said

when asked if NPP will ally with the BJP.

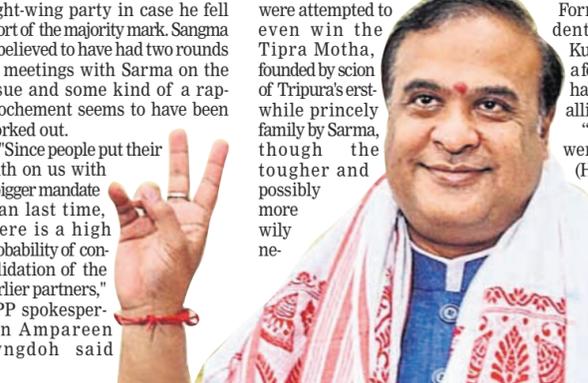
Backroom deals were attempted to even win the Tjpra Motha, founded by scion of Tripura's erstwhile princely family by Sarma, though the tougher and possibly more wily negotiators from among former militants sent by Motha proved a tougher nut to crack.

Former militant-turned president of Tipra Motha, Bijoy Kumar Hrangkhawh, had said a few weeks back, that attempts had been made for a pre-poll alliance, without success.

tending outside support under certain circumstances and subject to caveats.

Sarma had earlier captured eyeballs as the BJP's first star campaigner from the region in far away Gujarat and Delhi. Be it the imposition of Uniform Civil Code (UCC), PFI ban, passing of the Cattle Protection Act, calling for specific policy measures for slowing down minority population growth or bulldozing of "illegal" villages, Sarma has left no stone unturned to push forward assertively the right-wing party's key agenda in his home state and in states where he has campaigned.

However, interestingly, these pet projects of his, which could have made him unpopular in Christian-dominated states like Nagaland and Meghalaya seems to have become non-factors in his political wheeling-dealings in these very states.





I hope that the GDP growth for the current financial year will exceed the projected 7 per cent

V ANANTHA NAGESWARAN
| CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISOR

1ST TRADE IN SL RUPEE BY SBI

State Bank of India said it completed its first non-dollar transaction with Sri Lanka, by paying for exports in Sri Lankan rupee as India looks to bring countries that are short of US dollars into the trade mechanism. The island nation's battered forex reserves stood at \$2.1 billion as of end-January



of the day quote

Jio will be the largest 5G SA (standalone) only network operator in the world in the second half of 2023, ensuring that all advanced services and capabilities are available affordably to the masses

MATHEW OOMMEN | PRESIDENT, RELIANCE JIO

PM GatiShakti national master plan and logistics policy together will help improve competitiveness of businesses and attract investments into India

PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

Tourism in India is out booming and the country will be among the top three globally in terms of outbound travel in the coming years

OMRI MORGENSEHTERN | CEO, AGODA

SHORT TAKES

SBI may cut its Yes Bank stake

Mumbai: State Bank of India may look to lower its stake in Yes Bank after a lock-in period ends March 13, which was put in place by the central bank as a part of the lender's restructuring, two sources said. SBI, India's largest bank, does not want to permanently retain a stake in Yes Bank and would want to trim its holdings, albeit in phases, one of the sources said on condition of anonymity. "The percentage of equity dilution that the bank intends to do will have to be placed before the RBI (Reserve Bank of India) in due course." SBI, which initially acquired 49% of Yes Bank, now holds a 26.14% stake as of December 31. SBI is still the largest single shareholder in the rescued lender. SBI cannot reduce its holding below 26% before completion of three years from the date of infusion of the capital, as per the reconstruction plan.

India supports Banga's nomination

New Delhi: India Thursday extended support to the candidature of Ajay Banga as World Bank President, saying his nomination comes at a time when the multilateral lending agency is considering next-generation reforms. "Congratulations to Mr Ajay Banga on being nominated to lead @WorldBank, India supports Mr Banga's nomination and looks forward to his leadership of the @WorldBank," the finance ministry said in a series of tweets. Last month, the US President Joe Biden announced that the US is nominating Ajay Banga to lead the World Bank, saying the Indian-American business leader is uniquely equipped to lead the global institution at "this critical moment in history."

Global CO2 emissions hit record high in 2022

CO2 emissions from coal grew by 1.6% last year with many countries turning to the more polluting fuel after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a reduction in Russian gas supply to Europe sparked record high gas prices

REUTERS

London, March 2: Global energy-related emissions of carbon dioxide hit a record high last year, although more clean technology such as solar power and electric vehicles helped limit the impact of increased coal and oil use, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said today.

Deep cuts in emissions, mainly from burning fossil fuels, will be needed over the coming years if targets to limit a global rise in temperatures and prevent runaway climate change are to be met,

GLOBAL EMISSIONS FROM ENERGY ROSE BY 0.9% IN 2022 TO RECORD 36.8 BILLION TONNE

CO2 EMISSIONS FROM OIL ROSE BY 2.5% BUT REMAINED BELOW PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS



as Chevron, Exxon Mobil and Shell reported record profits, with BP also rowing back on plans to slash oil and gas output and reduce emissions.

scientists have said. "We still see emissions growing from fossil fuels, hindering efforts to meet the world's climate targets," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a release alongside the report.

The report by the Paris-based watchdog comes just weeks after major fossil fuel producers such

International and national fossil fuel companies are making record revenues and need to take their share of responsibility

FATIH BIROL | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IEA

Global emissions from energy rose by 0.9% in 2022 to a record 36.8 billion tonne, the IEA analysis showed. Carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from oil rose by 2.5% but remained below pre-pandemic levels, the report said.

Around half of the increase in

oil-related emissions was due to a rise in air travel which was rebounding from a low during the pandemic.

Lower output from nuclear power plants and extreme weather events including heatwaves also contributed to the increase in energy related emissions, the IEA said.

Emissions were partly offset, however, by a rise in renewable power sources like wind and solar, energy efficiency measures and electric vehicles. These avoided an additional 550 million tonne of CO2 emissions last year, the IEA said.

LURING INVESTORS

Sebi cracks down on stock manipulation via YouTube

ACTOR ARSHAD WARSII, WIFE AND 44 OTHERS BARRED FROM TRADING FOR SHARE PRICE MANIPULATION VIA YOUTUBE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 2: Sebi Thursday barred 45 entities, including actor Arshad Warsii, his wife Maria Goretti and others, from the securities market in cases related to manipulating the share prices of two companies through uploading misleading videos on YouTube channels.

The cases pertain to uploading misleading videos on YouTube channels and recommending investors to buy the shares of Sadhna Broadcast Ltd and Sharpline Broadcast Ltd.

Apart from the couple, some of the promoters of Sadhna Broadcast have been restrained from the securities market for their involvement. In addition to market ban, the regulator has impounded illegal gains to the tune of Rs 54 crore made by the entities after misleading videos were uploaded on YouTube channels, according to two separate interim orders.

In the case of Sadhna Broadcast, Sebi noted that Arshad Warsii has made a profit of Rs 29.43 lakh and his wife has earned profit of Rs 37.56 lakh. Also, Iqbal Hussain Warsii has gained Rs 9.34 lakh. These three among others have been classified as volume creators by the capital markets regulator.

The two orders came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received certain complaints wherein it was alleged that there was price manipulation and offloading of shares by certain entities in the scrip of television channel Sadhna Broadcast and New Delhi-based Sharpline Broadcast.

The complaints alleged that misleading YouTube videos with false content about the two companies were uploaded to lure investors.

Following this, the regulator



In the case of Sadhna, Sebi said that elaborate modus operandi adopted by the entities noticees including the egregious misuse of patently false and misleading YouTube videos, had led to drastic increase in the number of small shareholders -- from 2,167 to 55,343 shareholders who ended up buying shares from the noticee net sellers and volume creators at inflated price, while small shareholders number shot up from 517 to 20,009 in the case of Sharpline

conducted an examination during April-September 2022 and found that spurt in the price and volume of scrip of the two companies between April and mid-July 2022.

During the second half of July 2022, false and misleading videos about Sadhna were uploaded on two YouTube channels -- The Advisor and Moneywise. Similar videos about Sharpline were also uploaded on two YouTube channels -- Midcap calls and Profit Yatra in the second half of May last year.

These YouTube videos peddled false and misleading news to recommend that investors should buy shares of Sadhna and Sharpline for extraordinary profits, Sebi said in its two separate interim orders.

Subsequent to the release of the misleading YouTube videos, there was an increase in the price and trading volume of the scrip of two firms. The volumes appear to have been contributed by a large number of retail investors likely influenced by the misleading YouTube videos.

One of the misleading videos

SEBI is killing it with these enforcement orders against the pump and dump schemes peddled by selling greed & unrealistic returns through social media & YouTube should serve as a powerful deterrent

NITHIN KAMATH | CEO, ZERODHA

on these YouTube channels was that Sadhna Broadcast Ltd is going to be taken over by Adani group and after the deal, the margins of the company will increase.

In addition, there were other videos like the company is moving from TV production to movie production and a big American corporation has entered into a contract for Rs 1,100 crore to produce four devotional movies where the money will be brought in by the American investor but the rights will remain with Sadhna and in one of the videos, apparently a pic of industrialist Gautam Adani can be seen.

Sebi has classified these entities into categories like -- creator of YouTube channels (Manish Mishra), net sellers/ promoters and profit makers (NSs), volume creators (VCs) and information carriers (ICs).

Sebi noted, prima facie, these entities collectively helped create trading volumes and interest in the scrip, spread false and misleading YouTube videos, and hence induced investors to buy the companies scrips at elevated prices, thereby prima facie violating the provisions of PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) rules. Collectively, NSs and some of the VCs have booked extraordinary profits as a result of this scheme.

Accordingly, the regulator has barred these 45 entities "from buying, selling or dealing in securities either directly or indirectly, in any manner whatsoever until further orders". Some of these entities were involved in both cases.

Also, all the entities have been directed not to dispose of any assets, whether movable or immovable including money lying in bank accounts except with the prior permission of Sebi until the impounded amount is deposited in the escrow account.

BLOCK DEAL

Adani sells stake in 4 cos for ₹15,446cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 2: The embattled Adani Group has sold minority stakes in four of its listed companies to US-based GQG Partners for Rs 15,446 crore as the apple-to-airport conglomerate, recovering from a sell-off triggered by a short-seller report, looks to shore up liquidity ahead of the \$2 billion debt repayment due in the coming months.

It sold shares in flagship incubating firm Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL), port company Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ), electricity transmitting firm Adani Transmission Ltd (AEL) and renewable energy firm Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL).

"GQG is investing in Adani portfolio companies which own and operate the largest airport and port platform in India, largest private sector transmission and distribution platform in India and that will generate about 9 per cent of India's renewable energy capacity by 2030," it said in a statement Thursday.

The deal happened through secondary market block deals.

"The investment has made GQG a key investor in the development and growth of critical Indian infrastructure," it added.

The share sale is part of the Gautam Adani-led group's comeback strategy after a damning report from an American short seller wiped out more than \$140 billion off the conglomerate's market value. The group has a gross debt of Rs 2.21 lakh crore, about 8 per cent of



which is due for repayment by the end of next fiscal year.

In AEL, where the promoters held 72.6 per cent stake prior to the sale, 3.8 crore shares or 3.39 per cent stake was sold for Rs 5,460 crore. In APSEZ, where promoters held 66 per cent stake, 8.8 crore shares or 4.1 per cent shareholding was sold for Rs 5,282 crore. As much as 2.8 crore shares or 2.5 per cent stake in of ATL, where promoters held 73.9 per cent shareholding, was sold for Rs 1,898 crore. In AGEL, where promoters held 60.5 per cent shareholding, 5.5 crore shares or 3.5 per cent stake was sold for Rs 2,806 crore.

India's total electricity generating capacity is more than 390 GW and renewables exceed 100 GW. Last year at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, the Indian government announced that by 2030 India's non-fossil fuel capacity would be 500 GW.

Florida-headquartered GQG had offices in New York, London, Seattle and Sydney. It is listed on the Australian Securities Exchange and managed \$92 billion in client assets as of January 31.

Sensex, Nifty settle nearly 1% lower

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 2: Market benchmarks ended nearly 1 per cent lower Thursday amid weak trend in global equities and continuous foreign fund outflows.

The BSE Sensex tumbled 501.73 points or 0.84 per cent to settle at 58,909.35. During the day, it tanked 544.82 points or 0.91 per cent to 58,866.26. The NSE Nifty declined 129 points or 0.74 per cent to end at 17,321.90.

The rupee depreciated by 11 paise to close at 82.60 against the US currency. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned net buyers

SEE-SAW RIDE

in the capital markets on Thursday as they purchased shares worth Rs 12,770.81 crore.

From the Sensex pack, Maruti, Axis Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Nestle, Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tech Mahindra and Bharti Airtel were the major laggards. Power Grid, Sun Pharma, HCL Technologies, Larsen & Toubro and UltraTech Cement were the gainers.

In the broader market, the small-cap gauge declined 0.22 per cent and midcap dipped 0.13 per cent.

Feb palm oil imports drop to 8-month low

REUTERS

Mumbai, March 2: India's February palm oil imports dropped 30% from January to their lowest in 8 months as refiners preferred to lower their stocks as inventories piled up following excessive imports during October-January, five dealers told Reuters Thursday.

The reduction in palm oil imports by India, the world's biggest importer of vegetable oils, could weigh on Malaysian palm oil prices.

India's palm oil imports fell to 586,000 tonne last month, the lowest since June 2022, according to the average of the estimates from the five dealers.

The country's palm oil imports during October to January were robust, but demand was weak, which forced refiners to curtail buying in February, Rajesh Patel, managing partner at GGN Research, said.

Soyoil imports in February eased 7.3% from January to 340,000 tonne, while those of sunflower oil dropped 67% to 150,000 tonne from record high imports in January, the dealers said.

India buys palm oil mainly from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. It imports soybean and sunflower oil from Argentina, Brazil, Russia and Ukraine.

Palm oil was struggling to compete last month as its discount to soyoil and sunflower oil shrank to around \$200 per tonne from as high as \$500 in the December quarter, a Mumbai-based dealer with a global trade house said.

But India's recent moves to discontinue duty free imports of sunflower oil and soyoil could support palm oil in coming months, said Sandeep Bajoria, chief executive of Sunvin Group, a vegetable oil brokerage and consultancy firm.

India Wednesday decided to scrap a duty-free import quota of 2 million tonne of crude sunflower oil for the next fiscal year starting from April 1.

The move could lead to higher imports of palm oil, which was earlier attracting taxes even as imports of sunflower oil and soyoil were allowed without any taxes under the quota.



WEDDING SEASON

Online gift cards becoming trend: MakeMyTrip

THERE IS A GROWING TREND OF PEOPLE WANTING TO GIFT EXPERIENCES, A SHIFT FROM THE PAST WHEN CASH AND GOLD WERE THE ONLY OPTIONS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 2: Online travel platform MakeMyTrip Thursday said it has witnessed an increasing trend of consumers opting to give online gift cards to their friends, relatives,



and colleagues this wedding season.

MakeMyTrip has seen a 30 per cent increase in sales of travel

'Shagun' card this wedding season (Dec 22-Jan 23) compared to last year (Dec 21-Jan 22), it stated. Rs 10,000-card is the most sold denomination, followed by Rs 5,000, and Rs 1,000. The card allows couples to book holiday packages, hotels, flight tickets, train tickets, bus tickets, and fun activities.

"We have seen a direct correlation between the sale of online gift cards with the marriage season," said Raj Rishi Singh, Chief Business Officer, MakeMyTrip.

"We surveyed to understand the needs of the consumers, and two distinct groups emerged. High-flying executives between 45-55 years, keen to gift something memorable to their friends or relatives. The com-

paratively younger group, between 30-45 years, want to gift something thoughtful and trendy. Travel Shagun in the form of an online wedding gift card fits the bill for both categories," Singh added.

More than 47 per cent of online wedding gift card buyers added Rs 1 to the total as a symbol of Shagun. The pattern prompted MakeMyTrip to start gifting a Shagun of Rs 101 on every purchase.

Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, Chennai, and Pune form the top 5 cities in terms of sales of the online gift cards. However, MakeMyTrip has observed increased traction from cities such as Patna and Jaipur, among the top 10 cities, the company stated.

Foxconn to set up electronics mfg plant

Hyderabad: Electronics major

Foxconn will set up a manufacturing facility in Telangana with employment generation potential for over one lakh people. This was announced after Foxconn Chairman Young Liu met Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababhu Naidu here Thursday. Hon Hai Technology Group (Foxconn) and the Government of Telangana signed an agreement at the Pragati Bhavan, the official residence of the Chief Minister. The historic deal has the potential to generate employment for more than one lakh people over a period of 10 years, said the Chief Minister's Office (CMO). It was not revealed how much the Taiwanese company will invest in this facility. KCR and Liu discussed the importance of diversifying electronics manufacturing for a resilient supply chain and the pivotal role to be played by the state governments. The Chief Minister said that the government has been successful in implementing a new industrial policy which is attracting huge investments in Telangana. The Chief Minister also assured the Foxconn Chairman that the state government will provide all kind of support to the electronics major for its operations in the state. The Foxconn Chairman also expressed happiness over the progress achieved by Telangana in the industrial sector, especially in IT and related electronics sectors, in just eight years, adding that he is optimistic about the investments of his company in the southern state.



AUSTRALIA SNIFF VICTORY IN THE THIRD TEST AFTER THE HOSTS SET UP A PALTRY 76-RUN TARGET

LYON DEVOURS INDIA



A SPELL TO REMEMBER: Nathan Lyon appeals for a wicket during the second day's play in Indore, Thursday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indore, March 2: India were starting at a rare defeat at home despite Cheteshwar Pujara's plucky half century (59, 142b, 5x4, 1x6) as veteran Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon flattened the hosts with his eight-wicket haul (8/64) on day two of the third Test here Thursday.

India did well to end Australia's first innings at 197, conceding a 88-run first innings lead after Steve Smith's side began at 156/4 but negotiating quality spin in favourable conditions remained

a challenge for them.

The hosts were bowled out for 163 in their second innings, which means that Australia need just 76 runs to cherish a rare Test win in India, who have lost only two Tests at home in the last 10 years.

India have lost to only England (February 2021) and Australia (February 2017) in the past decade and both were crushing defeats. Australia had won by a massive 333-run margin in Pune while England had hammered India by 227 runs in Chennai.

Australia bring the best out of Pujara and that was on full dis-

play at the Holkar Stadium but he did not get the support that was needed from the other batters as India came up with another underwhelming batting performance on a rank turner.

India were in the game as long as Pujara was there but a sensational catch from Steve Smith at leg-slip towards close of play put the visitors on cusp of a memorable victory.

Besides being impressive with the ball, the Australians were brilliant in the field, especially with the momentum-changing catches of Pujara and Shreyas Iyer (26, 27b, 3x4, 2x6). The shot selection of Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli left a lot to be desired as Lyon bossed over the home team.

After being reduced to 79/4 at tea, Pujara and Iyer's counter attacking 35-run stand raised hopes of a fighting seconds innings lead but a flying Usman Khawaja took a stunning catch at mid-wicket to send back the latter.

Iyer went for horizontal shots against spinners, especially Kuhnemann, and executed them well until a moment of brilliance from Khawaja got the better of him.

Gill (5), coming into the side in place of KL Rahul, suffered his second failure of the game after getting beaten in the flight by Lyon. He went for an ugly hoick but ended up getting castled.

Lyon also got rid of India skipper Rohit (12), who was trapped in front after misjudging the length of the ball. Kohli's (13) was adjudged LBW after attempting a pull off left-arm spinner Matthew Kuhnemann on a track offering spin and uneven bounce.

Pujara looked the most solid of the Indian batters. He used his feet brilliantly. He mostly played on the front foot but stayed back to put a short ball from Kuhnemann between the mid-on and mid-wicket fielder. Four balls later, he came down the track for a confident straight drive.

He was dropped on 50, a tough chance at cover, before coming up with the shot of the innings. Ishan Kishan came out with a message towards close of play. The content of that message could not be confirmed but what followed was a massive six over mid-wicket as Pujara stepped out to a rampaging Lyon.

In the morning session, the pace-

spin combination of Umesh Yadav (3/12) and R Ashwin (3/44) ran through the Australian batting line-up.

After a rather quiet first hour, when only 30 runs were scored in 16 overs without any wicket, India lost their last six wickets for just 11 runs after starting the day at 156/4. Ashwin and Yadav took three wickets each to script India's fightback after a forgettable opening day.

Ashwin surprisingly had to wait for almost an hour to get his first over of the day and when he did, the wily operator made the ball talk. He got also rid of Alex Carey (3) and Lyon (5) to end with figures of three for 44 in 20.3 overs.

Umesh, who targeted the stumps successfully, trapped Green in front by getting one to straighten slightly off middle-stump in his very first over. He cleaned up the tail by bowling fast and straight from round the wicket, leaving Mitchell Starc (1) and Toddy Murphy clueless (0).

BRIEF SCORES

India 109 & 163 (Cheteshwar Pujara 59, Shreyas Iyer 26; Nathan Lyon 8/64), **Australia 197** (Umesh Yadav 3/12, R Ashwin 3/44). Match to continue.



A RARE SIGHT: Cheteshwar Pujara goes for a maximum during his innings at the Holkar Stadium

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Manchester, March 2: As Arsenal pushed further ahead in the race for the Premier League title, Manchester United moved a step closer to a second trophy this season by advancing to the quarter-finals of the FA Cup.

The biggest celebration of the night, though, was reserved for Grimsby Town's fans after the fourth-division club produced a famous cup upset to beat top-flight Southampton 2-1 Wednesday. Tottenham were also on the receiving end of a cup shock — losing 1-0 to second-tier Sheffield United.

Arsenal's focus is on the league and its 4-0 win over Everton at Emirates Stadium saw the competition leaders move five points clear of second-place Manchester City.

Mikel Arteta's team certainly appear to be over the jitters that threatened to derail its title challenge by avenging the 0-1 loss to Everton that began a three-game winless run last month.

That win was a blow to United's hopes of mounting a challenge at the top — but Erik ten Hag's team remain in contention on four fronts after rallying to beat West Ham 3-1.

QUADRUPLE STILL ON

It felt like old times at Old



IMPRESSIVE OUTING: Gabriel Martinelli reacts after scoring one of his goals against Everton, Wednesday

Trafford as United mounted the type of rousing comeback it was famous for under former manager Alex Ferguson.

Fresh from winning the League Cup Sunday, Ten Hag's team seemed set to crash out of the FA Cup after Said Benrahma put West Ham in front with a curling shot in the 54th minute.

And as the game edged toward the closing stages, United's frustration grew when Casemiro had a would-be equaliser ruled out by

VAR for offside.

But the home fans were soon cheering when Nayef Aguerd headed into his own net in the 77th. Alejandro Garnacho swept United in front in the 90th and substitute Fred added a third in the fifth minute of stoppage time.

FA CUP SHOCKS

Two penalties for Gavan Holohan saw Grimsby stun relegation-threatened Southampton and reach the quarterfinals for the first time since 1939. Duje Caleta-Car pulled

Anything can happen on this wicket: Umesh



Umesh Yadav celebrates after dismissing an Australian batter, Thursday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indore, March 2: Australia need only 76 runs to complete a memorable Test win in India but the wicked nature of the pitch has kept the home team pacer Umesh Yadav hopeful going into day three.

Fourteen wickets fell on the opening day while 16 batters got out Thursday. The pitch is offering plenty of turn and uneven bounce has also made the batters' job harder.

Nathan Lyon ran through the Indian batting on day two to end with an eight-wicket haul and put his team within touching distance of a rare win in India. Umesh acknowledged that his team has not put enough runs on the board but it still has an outside chance.

"In cricket anything can happen. We will try our best and bowl tight lines. It is not an easy wicket, whether it is our batters or theirs. It is not easy to step out and hit. The ball is keeping low as well, so you can't be sure about stepping out."

"The runs are less but we will stick to tight lines and push as much as we can," said Umesh, who did his job with the ball on Thursday morning by providing three wickets.

The 35-year-old, who doesn't get to play regularly at home with India going with only two pacers, bowled his heart out in the first session to help the hosts limit Australia to 197 in their second innings after resuming the day at 156 for four.

Umesh bowled fast and straight with a scrambled seam and let the surface do the rest. He trapped Cameron Green in front with a beauty that held its line after landing on middle stump. Mitchell Starc and Todd Murphy could also do little against a charged up Umesh and saw their stumps being dismantled.

"My plan on this surface was to bowl straight and push for a wicket or two. As a fast bowler, I have to hit the deck hard and bowl in the right areas. I have played most of my cricket in India, my mindset is always to get a wicket."

On the scrambled seam, he added, "There was seam movement that is why I tried the scrambled seam. If it was not swinging, it was seaming. Whatever length I bowled there was seam movement and skidding after pitching."

With the bat, Umesh could not add vital runs for the team as he and Mohammed Siraj both perished while going for the big hits. The pacer said on wickets like these, it makes more sense for a tail-end to attack than defend.

"We didn't get any message (to attack) when I went in to bat. My job was to score runs on this tough wicket. It is difficult to get runs here. I feel, rather than defending and getting out eventually, it is better to go for shots on a wicket like this. Even I would have scored 10-20 runs, that would have pushed the lead to 90. That is more important for me," he added.

MEG LANNING NAMED DELHI CAPITALS CAPTAIN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, March 2: Australia's World Cup-winning skipper Meg Lanning will lead Delhi Capitals (DC) in the inaugural edition of the Women's Premier League (WPL) while India's star batter Jemimah Rodrigues will be her deputy, the franchise announced Thursday.

Lanning, 30, recently captained Australia to their record sixth title win in the T20 Women's World Cup, where they beat hosts South Africa in the title clash.

Lanning is the third Australian cricketer to be named captain by WPL teams with Beth Moseley set to skipper Gujarat Giants and Alyssa Healy taking charge of the UP Warriorz.

"It is a very proud moment for me," said Lanning after being named the Delhi Capitals captain during an event in Mumbai. "First to be involved in a franchise like Delhi Capitals and to be named the captain is a huge honour and it is something that I am very much looking forward to."

Lanning has played 132 T20Is for Australia, making 3405 runs. "Bringing the team together and gelling and get to know everyone is really important. It is about enjoying yourself and getting the best out of yourself," she added.

Lanning arrived in the city Thursday morning ahead of the tournament's start Saturday. Delhi Capitals had their first training session Monday with their coach and players reaching Mumbai — host city of the first WPL — just a

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MEG LANNING

few days ahead of the tournament.

They play their first match Sunday when they take on the Smriti Madhana-led Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) at the Brabourne Stadium. Jemimah played an important part in India's campaign which ended with semi-final defeat against Australia.

Talking about her role as the vice-captain of the Delhi side, the 22-year-old Indian batter said, "I am going to make the most of it. She (Meg) is one of the greatest leaders we have ever seen."

India opener Shafali Verma is also part of the Capitals' squad. Delhi Capitals will be coached by two-time title winner in The Hundred, Jonathan Batty, while former England head coach Lisa Keightley and ex India player and selector Hemlata Kala are assistant coaches. Biju George, who in the past worked with the India Women's team, has been named the fielding coach.



The Delhi Capitals squad, including skipper Meg Lanning (4th from L, sitting), pose for a team photo during a press event in Mumbai, Thursday

Arsenal extend lead in Premier League

ASSOCIATED PRESS

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D Gukesh bags ACF's Player of the Year award

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Abu Dhabi, March 2: Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh has been honoured with Player-of-the-Year award by the Asian Chess Federation (ACF) for clinching the gold medal with a record-breaking score of 9/11 in the 44th Chess Olympiad at Mahabalipuram last year.

In March last year, Gukesh became only the sixth Indian to break the 2700 Elo-rating mark, and the youngest Grandmaster from the country to be rated above 2700.

The All India Chess Federation (AICF) bagged the 'Most Active Federation' award conferred during the ACF annual summit.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has been conferred with Man-of-the-Year award for his effort in the successful hosting of the FIDE Chess Olympiad in August last year within a short notice of four months.

The Indian women's team, comprising of Koneru Humpy, D Harika, R Vaishali, Tania Sachdev and Bhakti Kulkarni, was adjudged the 'Best Women's team of the Year', while GM RB Ramesh bagged the men's Coach-of-the-Year award and GM Abhijit Kunte won the Women's Coach-of-the-Year awards.

GUNMEN LEAVE MESSI A MENACING MESSAGE

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Buenos Aires, March 2: Gunmen left a threatening message Thursday for Argentine soccer superstar Lionel Messi and opened fire at a supermarket owned by his in-laws in Argentina's third-largest city, police said.

Nobody was injured in the early morning attack, and it was unclear why assailants would target Messi or the Unico supermarket in Rosario, owned by the family of his wife, Antonella Rocuzzo.

The city's mayor, Pablo Javkin, lashed out at federal authorities over what he called their failure to curb a surge in drug-related violence in Rosario, located about 190 miles (300 kilometers) northwest of the capital of Buenos Aires.



Police said two men on a motorcycle fired at least a dozen shots into an Unico branch in the early hours, and left a message on a piece of cardboard that read, "Messi, we're waiting for you."

Javkin is also a drug trafficker, so he won't take care of you." Messi has not commented yet. He, currently plays for PSG, spends much of his time overseas, though

he often visits Rosario where he has a home in the suburb of Funes. Javkin, a center-left politician in opposition to the ruling Peronist coalition, appeared to throw sus-

picion of complicity for the attack on both criminal gangs and federal security officials.

"I doubt everyone, even those who are supposed to protect us," Javkin said in an interview with a local radio station. He said the supermarket was in a section of Rosario that has seen frequent crimes, that he has raised the issue in recent meetings with federal and provincial official law enforcement officials, and that no action has been taken.

"Where are the ones who need to take care of us?" Javkin said. "It's clear that those who have the weapons and have the possibility of investigating the criminals aren't doing it, and it's very easy for any gang to carry out something like this."