



## DISHA SCHOOLED

Actor Disha Patani gets brutally trolled for allegedly disrespecting Indian culture at the opening of NMACC

LEISURE P2



## BOMB KILLS WAR BLOGGER

Russia blames Ukraine for orchestrating a bombing at a St. Petersburg cafe that killed a Russian military blogger

INTERNATIONAL P10



## DC FACE GT TODAY

Delhi Capitals have a tough job in hand when they lock horns with a formidable Gujarat Titans unit

SPORTS P12



FASCINATING FABRIC: G20 delegates during a visit to Sualkuchi village, which is the centre of Assam's textile production, in Kamrup district, Monday

PTI PHOTO

## EYEING INVESTMENTS

# Naveen sets out on 7-day tour to Japan

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 3: Continuing the state government's effort to bring in foreign direct investment (FDI) to the state, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday left Bhubaneswar for a seven-day official tour to Japan to promote investment opportunities in Odisha.

The Chief Minister is leading a high-level delegation that includes Minister of Industries, MSME, and Energy, Pratat Keshari Deb, Chief Secretary PK Jena, Secretary to CM(5T) VK Pandian along with a few senior officials and industrialists who will accompany the Chief Minister during the Japan tour. Patnaik will reach Japan April 4, 2023.

The business delegation from Odisha comprises select industries in the steel, aluminium, textiles, food and sea food processing, green hydrogen and green ammonia sectors. They will accompany the state delegation to explore opportunities for collaboration with Japanese business houses, the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said. During their visit, the high-level



CM Naveen at Singapore Airport

delegation will conduct one-to-one meetings with potential investors, host the Odisha Business Meet Tokyo-2023, besides holding an interactive meeting with the Odia diaspora in Japan, it said.

The delegation will also make a visit to the Kimitsu steel works and the R&D Center of Nippon Steel Corporation. Further, they will explore avenues of collaboration in the areas of skill development and high-tech start-ups.

The CM-led team will also hold a roundtable discussion in Kyoto on opportunities for collaboration between Japan and Odisha in the tourism sector, focusing on Buddhist and Eco-tourism related sites in Odisha.

Contd...P4

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



The PM has praised us so much that I feel like raiding one more opposition leader

# Relief for Rahul

RAHUL GANDHI GETS BAIL IN DEFAMATION CASE FROM SURAT SESSIONS COURT; HEARING ON CONVICTION STAY APRIL 13

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Surat, April 3: A sessions court in Gujarat's Surat city Monday granted bail to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi after he filed an appeal against his conviction in a criminal defamation case over his 2019 'Modi surname' remark in which he has been sentenced to two years in jail, a lawyer said.

The court of Additional Sessions Judge RP Mogera said it will hear his plea for suspension of conviction April 13 after issuing a notice to complainant Purnesh Modi, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA and former Gujarat cabinet minister. The sessions court asked the respondent Purnesh Modi to file his reply by April 10.

"We had filed an application for Rahul Gandhi's bail and suspension of sentence along with his appeal against conviction by a lower court. The court heard the matter and granted him bail. The court kept the matter for hearing on the stay of his conviction for April 13," a member of his legal team told reporters.

Rahul Gandhi, who arrived in Surat earlier in the day, will not be required to appear in the court



during the hearing of the case, he said.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other party leaders were present in the courtroom when the matter came up for hearing at around 3pm. Rahul Gandhi reached the sessions court premises in a luxury bus along with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other senior leaders. Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and several other party leaders were present in Surat.

The case was filed against Rahul Gandhi on a complaint by Purnesh Modi for the 52-year-old Congress

According to legal experts, a stay on Gandhi's conviction in the case would be sufficient to restore his Lok Sabha membership. Otherwise, however, he could be disqualified from contesting elections for the next 8 years

leader's remark, "How come all thieves have Modi as the common surname?" equating Prime Minister Narendra Modi with fugitives like Lalit Modi and Nirav Modi. The disqualified member of Parliament made the comment on 'Modi surname' while addressing a rally at Kolar in Karnataka April 13, 2019, during campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections.

Contd...P4

# Miscreant kills six stray dogs in City

In 2021, the owner of a tiffin stall had reportedly killed 20 stray dogs by offering poison-laced food in Choudwar area of Cuttack

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, April 3: In a brazen act of gruesome cruelty against animals reported in the Capital, an unknown miscreant poisoned six stray dogs to death near a slum under Maitri Vihar police limits here, late Sunday night.

The police have launched an investigation into the unfortunate incident by registering a case (96/23) on the basis of a complaint lodged by People For Animals, animal welfare organisation.

"Monday morning, some locals informed our team that as many as six to seven dogs were lying dead while another dog was slithering in pain near the slum in Chandrasekharpur area. We immediately rushed to the spot for investigation. We sent the dog which was still alive in an ambulance to the veterinary hospital at Sahid Nagar for treatment. The bodies of six other dogs were sent to the hospital for post mortem," told an official of People For Animals.

He also revealed that the accused has given the stray dogs poison along with poultry food items Sunday night. The dogs started vomiting a few hours after eating the poison-laced food.

"Killing of dogs is illegal under section 428/429 (mischief of killing



and maiming animal) which is punishable and amounting to both imprisonment and fine. It is also violation of section-11(L) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960. Also violation of Articles 51(A) of the Constitution of India," the animal welfare body claimed.

"We have preserved the viscera of the dead animals to ascertain the food consumed by the dead animals and awaiting for the autopsy report for further probe. We are questioning the locals and trying to collect CCTV footage, if any. We will take stringent action against the culprit as per the law," told Priyadarshini Nanda, IIC of Maitri Vihar police station.

Notably, the owner of a tiffin stall had reportedly killed 20 stray dogs by offering poison-laced food in Choudwar area of Cuttack district in 2021.

# 3 killed as man sets passenger ablaze on train

AGENCIES

Thiruvananthapuram/Kozhikode, April 3: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan Monday ordered to set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) after three persons, including a one-year-old child and a woman, were found dead on the tracks near the Elathur railway station here, hours after a man allegedly set fire to a co-passenger and injured nine others on board an express train.

A senior police official from the district told PTI that the bodies of a woman, a child and a man were recovered from the tracks late Sunday night. The three were missing from the train after the fire incident Sunday, he added.

The accused man who set fire to the people inside one of the compartments of the Alappuzha-Kannur Executive Express Sunday night is yet to be identified and no arrest has been made so far in the case.

However, police suspect that the accused is a north Indian and that the incident was pre-planned as he was carrying petrol in a bottle in his bag. A Railway Police officer said that besides them some other agencies were also looking into the matter to ascertain whether it has any terror links. No other details can be shared presently, he said.



# Naked anger as French minister poses for Playboy

PRIME MINISTER ELISABETH BORNE, ONLY THE SECOND WOMAN TO OCCUPY THE POSITION IN FRANCE, REPORTEDLY CALLED SCHIAPPA TO TELL HER THAT IT WAS NOT AT ALL APPROPRIATE, ESPECIALLY IN THE CURRENT PERIOD

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Paris, April 3: Can posing for Playboy be a feminist statement? A French government minister thinks so and has defended her decision to appear - clothed - on the front cover of the notorious magazine.

Marlene Schiappa, a 40-year-old feminist author who was plucked from obscurity by President Emmanuel Macron in 2017, is no stranger to controversy and has repeatedly angered rightwingers.

But even the prime minister and leftwing critics feel the minister for the social economy and associations has made a mistake with her latest stunt posing for Playboy to accompany a 12-page interview on women's and

gay rights as well as abortion.

"Defending the right of women to do what they want with their bodies everywhere and all the time," Schiappa wrote on Twitter Saturday. "In France, women are free. Whether it annoys the retrogrades and hypocrites or not."

The decision has irritated some colleagues in the government which has been battling strikes and increasingly violent demonstrations against plans to raise the retirement age by two years.

The sight of Schiappa wearing designer dresses for a glamour magazine was viewed by some as sending the wrong message, with one person quoted as saying they thought it was an April's Fool joke



The sight of the lawmaker wearing designer dresses for a glamour magazine was viewed by some as sending the wrong message; with one person quoted as saying they thought it was an April's Fool joke when they first heard about it

the position, called Schiappa to tell her that it was not at all appropriate, especially in the current period, an aide told AFP Saturday.

Greens MP and fellow women's rights activist Sandrine Rousseau, an outspoken critic of the centrist government, said, "Where is the respect for the French people? People who are going to have to work for two years more, who are demon-

strating, who are losing days of salary, who aren't managing to eat because of inflation," she told the BFM channel Saturday. "Women's bodies should be able to be exposed anywhere, I don't have a problem with that, but there's a social context," she added.

"Not soft porn" Playboy has defended the spread which will appear in its French-language edition.

Schiappa was the most 'Playboy compatible' of government ministers because she is attached to the rights of women and she has understood that it's not a magazine for old machos but could be an instrument for the feminist cause, editor Jean-Christophe Florentin told AFP.

Contd...P4

# NCERT removes chapters on 'Mughal Empire' from book

AGENCIES

i.e. 2023-2024.

New Delhi, April 3: National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has revised its books, including the Class-XII History book by removing the chapters on Mughal empire. The change will be applicable for all the schools that follow NCERT across the country.

From Class-XII, chapters related to 'Kings and Chronicles; the Mughal Courts (C. 16th and 17th centuries)' have been removed from the History book 'Themes of Indian History-Part 2'. Similarly, NCERT will remove some poems and paragraphs from the Hindi textbooks too.

As per NCERT, all the changes made will be implemented from the current academic session,

Along with History and Hindi textbooks, Class-XII Civics book has also been revised. Two chapters titled 'American Hegemony in World Politics' and 'The Cold War Era' have been removed from the book.

Continuing with the changes, two chapters namely, 'Rise of Popular Movements' and 'Era of One Party Dominance' from the Class-XII textbook 'Indian Politics after Independence' have also been removed.

Changes have been made in Class X and XI textbooks as well, such as chapters on 'Democracy and Diversity', 'Popular Struggles and Movements', and 'Challenges of Democracy' have been removed from Class X book 'Democratic Politics-2'.



**HEMSWORTH THINKING OF SLOWING DOWN**

Hollywood star Chris Hemsworth is said to be slowing down after learning that he's at a 'high risk' of Alzheimer's as he ages. The *Thor* actor, 39, discovered that he could be vulnerable in later life to the degenerative disease while he filmed his National Geographic and Disney+ docuseries *Limitless*.

**SARAH FERGUSON WANTS TO DATE LIAM NEESON**

Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, 63, who married Prince Andrew in 1986 before they separated in 1992 said she was keen to get herself a new man. She revealed her crush on 70-year-old *Schindler's List* actor Liam Neeson to Rylan Clark on his *BBC Radio 2* show.



**FORTUNE FORECAST**

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**ARIES**  
You will delight in romantic pursuits today. You would like to spend the whole day with your friends and loved ones, indulging in activities that appeal to you. But Ganesha says your peers may not approve, as they may think you are trying to shirk work.

**TAURUS**  
You will be in a mood to dominate and boss over your subordinates and assistants as soon as you land at your work place. Ganesha urges you to get rid of this idea instantly. Otherwise you are likely to lose a lot of money in store for you. You are likely to feel bored and listless later in the day.

**GEMINI**  
You will feel the need to break free from the shackles of your daily routine. You will try to complete all your work in one go and this will give rise to mental stress and worry. You will be able to concentrate on your personal matters only later on in the day, busy as you will be with work related matters in the afternoon.

**CANCER**  
Ganesha predicts that your life is going to take a new turn owing to some sudden events. Make the most of this period, and instead of getting intimidated, take this as a learning and stepping stone. You may end up travelling a lot for work today.

**LEO**  
It is the right time to take up new projects and sign new contracts. Your business capability will also increase now. You will have to labour under the burden of increased expectations, however, it is natural for others to have such expectations from those who are blazing a path to success for themselves.

**VIRGO**  
Ganesha says that Lady Luck will shine on you today. You will receive good news from distant places, maybe even from overseas. There are chances that you will take the lead in initiating an affair of the heart. There will be a lot of clarity in your perceptions today.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesha says there is all possibility of a trip for business or pleasure today. This journey will leave a long term impact on your memory and your life. You will win every ones heart by your powerful speech. You may forget your duty towards your family as you will show more inclination in trade and business.

**SCORPIO**  
Today, you may not be in a mood to work as you may lose focus every now and then. This may create problems in meeting deadlines in future. Evening will be full of romantic conversations as you spend some quality time with your beloved, predicts Ganesha.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Your optimistic attitude, logic and reasoning will solve half of your problems today, foresees Ganesha. Stress and tension may take a toll on your health. But also have a reason to rejoice as you near and dear ones cheer you up, when your spirits are low.

**CAPRICORN**  
The work pressure is mounting and you find it extremely difficult to bear the burden. Deadlines are closing in and there is still a lot to be done. But, none can dampen your spirit and break you down. Not only you'll fight with full force, but also will choose the right path to move forward, says Ganesha.

**AQUARIUS**  
You will be very unpredictable, today. Your opponents will not be able to anticipate your moves, and when the competition is tough such unpredictability will give you an upper hand, foresees Ganesha. Your honesty and efforts will be appreciated and rewarded at work.

**PISCES**  
You will begin your day on a self confident note but as the day goes by things will fall into place, just like they always do. The routine might lull you a bit and as you take decisions you might be to doubt how appropriate they are.

**Disha schooled for her modern twist to saree**

**Mumbai:** It was quite a star-studded affair at the opening of Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) here. Though the global celebs like Zendaya, Gigi Hadid and Penelope Cruz were welcomed by the netizens, tails



were wagged over the blue shimmering saree worn by Disha Patani. The *Malang* actress draped her pallu off the shoulder creating a trail of sorts at the back and flaunted her size zero figure. She opted for a tube blouse that boasted her voluminous assets and one could also see her toned midriff in the attire.

While her modern twist to the traditional attire was enjoyed by the guests, netizens took offence and slammed her for allegedly disrespecting the Indian culture. Many even asked her to rather take inspiration from Zendaya and Gigi Hadid who gracefully stuck to Indian roots. A user commented, "She wears the saree like a bikini."

Another wrote, "None looked more vulgar than her" "She thinks less clothes will make people more attracted but Disha please change this style," a user reacted.

A viewer commented, "Why there is a need to wear saree like this?? Disgusting. She should learn from Gigi and Zendaya."

"Why does she always feel the need to dress inappropriately? The outfit is gorgeous and she looks fabulous but nobody else is exposing that much. Keep it classy, girl!" another wrote.

AGENCIES

**Holland admires Manas' sand art**

**Bhubaneswar:** In one of his career's most memorable moments, Odisha's internationally acclaimed sand artist and animator Manas Sahoo was admired by none other than Hollywood heart-throb Tom Holland.



Odisha's internationally acclaimed sand artist and animator Manas Kumar Sahoo with *Spiderman* actor Tom Holland in Mumbai

Mumbai where my sand animation presentation on Odisha's culture and heritage reached heights of appreciation by one & all."

Holland also carved his autobiography on the sand animation. Sahoo depicted a consolidated animation of the evolution of Odisha's Pattachitra at the four-day exhibition at NMACC. The centre, inaugurated March 31, attracted many actors, businessmen, and sports persons from India and abroad. The celebs who witnessed Sahoo's work could not resist praising him for his art.

PNN

**Zendaya, Gigi, Penelope, Tom, Nick mark global presence at NMACC**



**Mumbai:** The who's who of the arts and entertainment world gathered for the grand inauguration of the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) at the Jio World Gardens, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Mumbai. Global celebrities, including Nick Jonas, Tom Holland, Zendaya, Gigi Hadid and Penelope Cruz, marked their impressive presence at the event.

On the second day of the glittering event, American singer-songwriter Nick Jonas along with Priyanka Chopra Jonas and daughter Malti Marie attended the pink carpet. Tom and Zendaya made their eye-catching entrance. Zendaya was seen wearing a contemporary-style saree with a bejeweled blouse for the starry night. Meanwhile, Tom was seen wearing a formal tuxedo for the event. The duo's outing at the fashion gala made it their first public appearance in India. The American model and television personality, Gigi Hadid, addressed a fashionable statement, dressed in a floral-print three-piece set, and

graciously posed for the paparazzi gathered outside the venue. Penelope Cruz wore a pink satin dress that matched the carpet.

Nita Ambani's dream project, the cultural centre, aims to serve as a tool to preserve and promote Indian arts.

AGENCIES

**'Wasn't keen to have stadium named after me in Odisha'**



**Mumbai:** Rahul Bose who is known for films like *Jhankar Beats*, *Mr & Mrs Iyer*, *Chameli* and *Pyaar Ke Side Effects*, also happens to be the President of Indian Rugby Football Union. To honour his contribution, a stadium was named after him and it was inaugurated a few days ago by the actor.

On the very same day Chief Minister of Odisha Naveen Patnaik had inaugurated six different centers named after legends like Viswanathan Anand, Abhinav Bindra, Dilip Tirker and Dutee Chand.

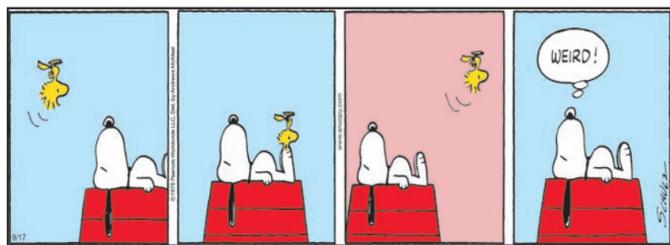
Now talking about it to a portal, Bose stated that all the other names are absolute legends and he's not even a patch on them. Recalling the conversation when he was informed about the stadium being named after him, he asked the authorities to not do it but they persisted.

Explaining the reasons behind his reluctance to have a stadium named after him, Bose stated that he grew up in an atmosphere where he was encouraged to do what "you love and not look for rewards."

He also added that he had never done films to get an award or fame, if that was the case his career would have shaped out differently and been more mainstream.

AGENCIES

**PEANUTS**



**CALVIN AND HOBBS**

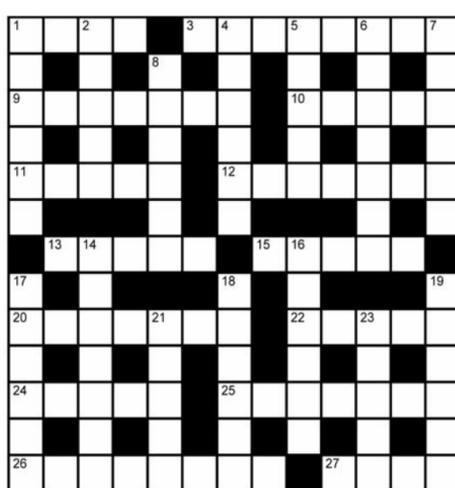


**BREVITY**



**FUN post**

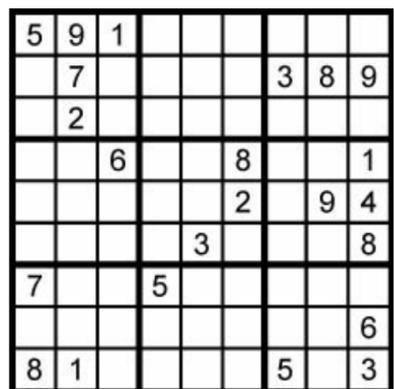
**CROSSWORD**



- Across**
- 1 Shopping trolley
  - 3 Bastille, e.g.
  - 9 Onslaught
  - 10 Roof part
  - 11 Sepulchre
  - 12 Sprat
  - 13 Yarn maker
  - 15 Fairy tale fiends
  - 20 Brisk musical composition
  - 22 Zoo attraction
  - 24 Damp
  - 25 Restrained
  - 26 Like Humpty Dumpty (4-4)
  - 27 Fringe
- Down**
- 1 Possibility
  - 2 Out of practice
  - 4 Dense
  - 5 Large cat of Asia
  - 6 Ocean motion (3,4)
  - 7 Upsala locale
  - 8 Linksman's tool
  - 14 Bad blood (3,4)
  - 16 Garden structure
  - 17 It can have a claw
  - 18 Crumb
  - 19 Equestrian gear
  - 21 Words to a sleepy-head (3,2)
  - 23 Trussed up

**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**

**CROSSWORD**



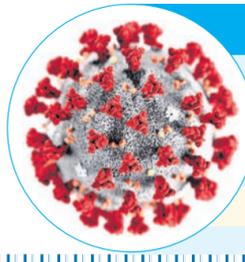
**SUDOKU**



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



**IGNOU CONVOCATION**  
36th Convocation of Indira Gandhi National Open University was held at Utkal University's MKCG Auditorium in Bhubaneswar, Monday



COVID-19 TRACKER			
	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	68,41,04,579	65,70,70,487	68,32,414
India	4,47,18,781	4,41,71,551	5,30,876
Odisha	13,36,304	13,26,915	9,204

# ₹10,266cr electricity dues pending against consumers



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** Electricity dues to the tune of ₹10,266.73 crore are pending against consumers, including domestic and commercial, in all the four distribution company (discom) areas of Odisha. This was revealed by Energy Minister Pratap Keshari Deb in a written reply to the Assembly during recently concluded Budget Session. Deb said the consumers in Tata Power Western Odisha Distribution Ltd (TPWODL) have the highest pending electricity dues at ₹4,578.93 crore while dues of ₹3,115.17 crore are pending in Tata Power Central Odisha Distribution Limited (TPCODL). Similarly, electricity dues worth ₹1,782.57 crore in Tata Power North Odisha Distribution Limited (TPNODL) and ₹750.06 crore in the Tata Power South Odisha Distribution Limited (TPSODL) remain unsettled. As per the statement of Deb,

₹7,872.95 crore electricity bills were pending against the domestic consumers in the four discom areas, of which ₹3,650.14 crore is pending in TPWODL area, ₹2,231.44 crore in TPCODL area, ₹1,298.35 crore in TPNODL area and ₹693.02 crore in TPSODL area. Similarly, a total electricity duty of ₹386.04 crore against industries and ₹996.98 crore against different commercial establishments stay unpaid. In another reply to the House, the minister said that a total of ₹739.92 crore electricity dues are pending against closed industrial houses including those who were having captive power plants. A total of ₹112.52 crore electricity dues are yet to be paid by the closed down captive power plants having a capacity of more than 1 megawatt while ₹627.40 crore pending against 14,053 industries unit, which are in default stage, he added. Among the closed industrial units, electricity dues of ₹44 crore

Consumers in Tata Power Western Odisha Distribution Ltd (TPWODL) have the highest pending electricity dues at ₹4,578.93 crore while dues of ₹3,115.17 crore are pending in Tata Power Central Odisha Distribution Limited (TPCODL)

Electricity dues worth ₹1,782.57 crore in Tata Power North Odisha Distribution Limited (TPNODL) and ₹750.06 crore in the Tata Power South Odisha Distribution Limited (TPSODL) remain unsettled

are pending against Action Ispat & Power Pvt Ltd, Jharsuguda, followed by ₹26.99 crore against Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd, and ₹22.60 crore against OCL Iron & Steel Ltd.

As per an information provided by Government of India in Parliament, the four power distribution companies (before Tata Power took over) or power distribution utilities have incurred a loss of ₹5,899 crore in a period of six years (from 2014-15 to 2019-20). The four discoms—CESU, NESCO, SOUTHCO and WESCO – have reported losses to the tune of ₹882 crore in the year 2014-15, ₹931 crore in 2015-16, ₹913 crore in 2015-16, ₹792 crore in 2016-17, ₹1,539 crore in 2017-18 and ₹842 crore in 2018-19. In terms of the company, CESU suffered a heavy loss of ₹2,323 crore during the six years, followed by WESCO which reported a loss of ₹1,464 crore, SOUTHCO (₹1,284 crore) and NESCO (₹827 crore). Now, Tata Power has taken over all the discoms in Odisha.



**ON WARPATH:** Hundreds of contractual teachers of government high schools staged a dharna at Lower PMG in Bhubaneswar, Monday, demanding regularisation of their services

# Cybercriminals siphon off ₹2.20cr in March

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** Cyber fraudsters have siphoned off more than ₹2.20 crore from victims in the Capital city in March this year, Commissionerate Police revealed in a press note on cybercrime related offences. Police sources claimed that a total of 405 people contacted the cybercrime help desk at its cybercrime and economic offences police station in March this year. Out of this, as many as 217 persons com-



plained about getting cheated of their money through various UPI related frauds. The Commissionerate Police has registered 14 cases in this re-

gard, it informed. Meanwhile, the cyber criminals duped 83 people on the pretext of offering credit and debit card services. At least 70 of them were cheated through social media. The victims lost ₹1,54,58,129 to fraudsters through online trading. The rest of ₹65,59,740 were lost through inadvertent sharing of OTPs, KYC details and clicking of suspicious links.

The denizens lost ₹2, 10, 17,869 to cyber fraud in March this year. While the victims lost ₹1, 54, 58, 129 to fraudsters through online trading, the rest of ₹65, 59, 740 were lost through inadvertent sharing of OTP, KYC details and through suspicious links. The police managed to block money to the tune of ₹30, 55, 281 withdrawn by cyber fraudsters in the month. The police retrieved ₹2, 94, 996 out of the ₹30.55 lakh and returned the money to the victims.

## KOTIA DISPUTE

# Centre, Andhra yet to file response on Odisha's suit

POST NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi, April 3:** The Union government and Andhra Pradesh are yet to submit their response to the Supreme Court on an original suit filed by Odisha on the ongoing dispute regarding Kotia group of villages. The Registrar's court February 28 had issued notice to Andhra Pradesh and the Union Home Ministry directing them to enter appearance in the apex court registry within 28 days and appear in the court through advocate-on-record during the hearing of the case along with the documents and witnesses in support of their case. Odisha government's counsel advocate Sibo Sankar Mishra said that since the Centre and Andhra Pradesh government failed to file their responses within stipulated time, the natural consequence as per the rule is to get the matter listed before the single-judge in the chamber noting the defaults. Earlier in March 2022, the apex court had held that it will first decide the original suit filed by Odisha. The state of Odisha filed the original suit in SC over the border dispute with Andhra in January 2022. The state pleaded the SC to declare that Odisha has absolute right to administer and possess Kotia group of villages and also pleaded to strike down or read down the Article 131 of the Constitution. "Indeed the proviso to Article 131 of the Constitution of India misconstructed to render Odisha remediless. There the proviso to the Article 131 is liable to be struck down or read down in the manner by which judicial remedy is provided to the plaintiff for adjudication of the disputed uncompensated," Odisha submitted in the fresh original suit. Odisha contended that the cause of action arose within the jurisdiction of Supreme Court only to try the present suit under Article 131 of Constitution of India after

The Registrar's court February 28 had issued notice to Andhra Pradesh and the Union Home Ministry directing them to enter appearance in the apex court registry within 28 days. Odisha government's counsel advocate Sibo Sankar Mishra said that since the Centre and Andhra Pradesh government failed to file their responses within stipulated time, the natural consequence as per the rule is to get the matter listed before the single-judge in the chamber noting the defaults. either declaring the proviso to the said article unconstitutional or reading down. The state had filed first original suit in SC in 1968 over Kotia dispute but the apex court had dismissed the suit in 2006 saying that it is not maintainable under Article 131 in view of the bar contained in proviso of the article inserted 1956. Significantly, Article 131 deals with original jurisdiction of the SC in any dispute between Union and state or between two or more states. But there is a proviso which reads as, "The jurisdiction shall not extend to a dispute arising out of any treaty, agreement, covenant, engagement, sanad or any other similar instrument which, having been entered into or executed before the commencement of this Constitution". In February 2021, Odisha knocked the doors of the apex court by filing a contempt petition against Andhra Pradesh for holding elections in three villages of the Kotiya panchayat in Koraput district. In the contempt petition, Odisha had submitted that AP wilfully and deliberately violated the Supreme Court order dated December 2, 1968 and the judgement dated March 30, 2006 by transgressing into Odisha's territory. The apex court in its order of 1968 and 2006 judgement had asked both the states to maintain status quo on the boundary dispute with regard to Kotia group of villages with the consent of both states.



**MESMERISING SHOW:** An 'Aghori' saint performs at Markandeswar Sahi Jata in Puri, Monday, as onlookers stay stunned

## Poonam takes over as new FLO chairperson

**Bhubaneswar:** The Bhubaneswar chapter of FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO) has announced the appointment of Poonam Mohapatra as its new chairperson for financial year 2023-24. Poonam is the director of companies including MGM Agritech & Research Institute Pvt Ltd, Rach Skillhive LLP and Enwheel Technologies. Speaking on her vision for FY 2023-24, Poonam said, "FLO has been closely working with national initiatives and has immensely contributed to sectors like industry & startups, education & skilling, digital & financial literacy, village holistic developments."

## 57kg ganja seized; two arrested

**Barang:** Excise department sleuths seized a car illegally transporting 57kg ganja worth ₹5.7 lakh at Trisulia Square in Cuttack Monday morning and arrested two persons in this connection. The accused, identified as Sunil Kumar Dora, 38 of Berhampur in Ganjam and Jitu Nayak, 29 of Rajpur, Badasahi, were transporting the contraband from Ganjam to Cuttack in a Maruti car (OD-02-R-2928). Acting on a tip-off, Cuttack Excise department laid a trap at Trishulia Square in the wee hours of Monday, intercepted the car and apprehended them.

## Centre seeks supporting reports on ST proposals

**New Delhi, April 3:** The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs Monday said that it has "preliminarily examined" the 169 proposals sent by Odisha government for inclusion in the state's ST list and that further supporting reports are required with respect to 120 proposals. Union Minister of State (MoS) for Tribal Affairs Bishweswar Tudu informed the Lok Sabha that in respect of 120 proposals, relevant information/supporting reports

need to be made available by the state government. He added that the status has been conveyed to the state government. The minister's response came on an unstarred question asked by senior Biju Janata Dal MP Pinaki Misra regarding the inclusion of several communities in the state's ST list. Misra had asked the Union minister about the reasons for non-inclusion of these communities in the ST list. Significantly, the BJD MPs have been raising the demand in the

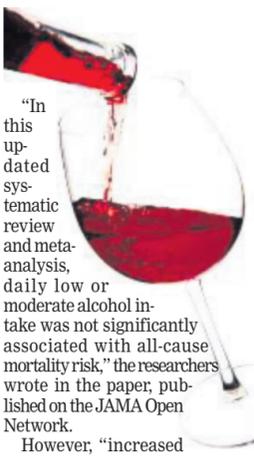
Parliament for inclusion of several communities in the state's ST list. It has been stated that among these communities some are new entries while some others are sub-tribes, synonyms and phonetic variations of the existing ST communities residing in different parts of the state. They are being deprived of the benefits being available by other ST communities, though they have the same tribal characteristics as their respective notified STs, the party MPs had said.

# A glass of wine daily may not kill you: Study

**LIGHT AND MODERATE DRINKERS ARE SYSTEMATICALLY HEALTHIER THAN CURRENT ABSTAINERS ON A RANGE OF HEALTH INDICATORS UNLIKELY TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL USE**

**W**hile overindulgence could dig you an early grave, a daily alcoholic drink may neither be harmful nor offer any health benefits, according to a new study of 4.8 million people. The benefits and drawbacks of alcohol have been much debated. While some studies claim that even a small portion can lead to death, others say it has health benefits. Researchers from the universi-

ties of Victoria and Portsmouth in Canada and UK respectively, conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 107 studies published between 1980 and 2021. The findings showed that low and moderate drinkers have similar mortality rates to those who abstain entirely. On the other hand, women who enjoy more than one standard drink per day are at least 20 per cent likely to die prematurely.



**T**HE FINDINGS SHOWED THAT LOW AND MODERATE DRINKERS HAVE SIMILAR MORTALITY RATES TO THOSE WHO ABSTAIN ENTIRELY. **O**N THE OTHER HAND, WOMEN WHO ENJOY MORE THAN ONE STANDARD DRINK PER DAY ARE AT LEAST 20 PER CENT LIKELY TO DIE PREMATURELY. However, "increased

drinking (moderate drinking) with all-cause mortality. But it showed an increased risk of all-cause mortality for drinkers who drank 25 g or more and a significantly increased risk when drinking 45 g or more per day. When they looked at previous studies that suggest people who drink a little are less likely to die early or from heart disease than people who don't drink at all, they found the evidence was skewed by systematic bias. "For example, light and moderate drinkers are systematically healthier than current abstainers on a range of health indicators unlikely to be associated with alcohol use, (like) dental hygiene, exercise routines, diet, weight (and) income," they wrote.



# EOW busts job fraud racket; arrests two

The arrest was made against a case registered on the allegation of one of the victims Kumudini Sahoo of Bhubaneswar



Raj Kishore Pattanayak



Arun Mohanty

PNN/AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Odisha police cracked another job fraud racket in which at least 200 job seekers of the state were duped by the scammers, police officials said Monday.

The EOW found that these fraudsters have duped hundreds of job aspirants from the state showing them fabricated government letters, joining letters and seals of Lok Seva Bhawan and Secretariat along with hundreds of resumes, bio-data, mark sheets, application forms and fake appointment letters of candidates for different posts like peon, clerk, fire man and security persons in different government offices.

one Sushant Kumar Muduli for the post of school peon, ₹4.50 lakh from one Deepak Kumar Nayak for the post of peon in the Khurda Collectorate and ₹2 lakh from another job seeker Dipu Biswal for the job of peon in Raj Bhawan, Bhubaneswar.

The EOW found that these fraudsters have duped hundreds of job aspirants from the state showing them fabricated government letters, joining letters and seals of Lok Seva Bhawan and Secretariat along with hundreds of resumes, bio-data, mark sheets, application forms and fake appointment letters of candidates for different posts like peon, clerk, fire man and security persons in different government offices.

During searches of houses of both the scammers, the officials seized hundreds of incriminating forged documents, including government appointment letters, joining letters and seals of Lok Seva Bhawan and Secretariat along with hundreds of resumes, bio-data, mark sheets, application forms and fake appointment letters of candidates for different posts like peon, clerk, fire man and security persons in different government offices.

The EOW is continuing its investigation to trace out the other persons involved in the case. Earlier, the agency had cracked down on an inter-state job fraud racket which was operating in 17 states, including Odisha.

## Man dies in cracker explosion in City

**Bhubaneswar:** A 38-year-old man died after a live firecracker went off at Gobjabayani Basti in VSS Nagar area under Saheed Nagar police limits here Monday evening. The deceased identified as Sivananda Tada hailed from Khurda. He was staying at the slum along with his family for the last several years. Sources claimed that Sivananda used to earn his livelihood by making and selling firecrackers for occasions like Deepavali, marriage and functions. On the fateful evening of Monday, he was reportedly checking the firecrackers when one of the crackers suddenly exploded leaving him seriously injured. The locals who reached the spot immediately rushed him to a private medical college. He was declared brought dead by the doctors upon arrival. Informed, Saheed Nagar police reached the spot and sent the body to Capital hospital for post-mortem. Police sources claimed that Sivananda had no license for making firecrackers.

## 'Jan Bhagidari' events to be organised by SOA



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** A meeting to kick-start the month-long series of events in Odisha to celebrate India's G20 Presidency was organised recently at Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (SOA) coinciding with 'Utkal Divas'.

The programs have been designed to make 'Jan Bhagidari' a strong element of India's G20 Presidency ahead of the third Education Working Group meeting to be held in Bhubaneswar from April 27 to 29 to be attended by delegates from G20 countries.

SOA has been assigned to organize the programmes in the districts of Bolangir, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj. The institute will hold 'Jan Bhagidari' events including quiz contests, essay competitions, debate competitions, seminars and webinars, sports activities, mock G20, swachhata campaign, food festivals and Yuva Samvad programme.

Students from schools, ITIs, polytechnics, colleges, including engineering colleges, and beneficiaries from Jan Shikshan Sansthan would be participating in the events.

Addressing the gathering, SOA Vice-Chancellor Pradipta Kumar Nanda expressed happiness over the organization of the events while assuring the university's support to the activities. He also greeted all faculty members, staff and students of the university on the occasion of 'Utkal Divas.'

"The university's uniqueness should be explored and promoted while thrust needs to be given on interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research," Nanda, who took over as Vice-Chancellor of SOA, said.

Jyoti Ranjan Das, Dean (Students' Welfare) outlined the 'Jan Bhagidari' programmes while Santosh Kumar Rout, Additional Dean of the Institute of Agricultural Sciences, SOA's faculty of agricultural sciences, proposed the vote of thanks.



RAISING VOICE: Members of All Odisha Covid-19 Paramedics' Association staged a demonstration at Lower PMG in Bhubaneswar, Monday, to press for their two-point charter of demands including permanent jobs

## City AIIMS introduces millet-in-diet initiative

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** AIIMS, Bhubaneswar has introduced millets in the diets of patients admitted in it and students to provide healthy and nutritious food to the students and indoor patients. The initiative was introduced on the occasion of 'Utkal Divas' and G20 Jan Bhagidari campaign, said the institute's executive director Ashutosh Biswas.

"We are really enthusiastic to introduce millets in the diet of our patients and students. We believe that it will provide patients the essential fibres they need to recover quickly. We are committed to provide the best care to our patients and this is one of the many steps we are taking in that direction," Biswas said.



The students will get rich nutrients and minerals from millets, an ancient food which is locally available, and will take care of their weight problems and immunity, he added.

AIIMS Bhubaneswar has planned a series of programmes for the month in line with Prime Minister's call for 'Jan Bhagidari', a strong element in the country's G20 presidency, the institute's reg-

istrar BB Mishra said.

A meeting was organised at the institute to create awareness about the health benefits of millets and spread the message to the public. A handbook on millets was distributed among the people.

The initiative is expected to inspire people to include millet in their daily diet and promote the consumption of traditional foods that are both healthy and delicious, AIIMS, Bhubaneswar, dietician Soumya Sucharita Prusty said.

Those present in the programme were Dean (Academic) PR Mohapatra, Dean (Exam) Soubhagya Jena, Dean (Research) Satyajit Mishra, Medical Superintendent, Dillip Kumar Parida, DDA (I/c) Rasmii Ranjan Sethy and student representatives.

## AACCI Odisha chapter to be launched by April end

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The Odisha chapter of Asian-African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AACCI) will be launched in the state by the end of this month. A programme in this regard was organized at a City hotel in Bhubaneswar recently.

Lita Mohapatra, will launch the Odisha chapter of the international chamber as the state president to help support, economic growth, business association and develop new avenues of growth opportunities in Asian-African countries and in the state of Odisha.



To translate that vision into reality, the founding members of AACCI set to create transnational corporations, which would have presence in all associated member countries and whose capital would be built by nationals of all 102 prospective member countries. AACCI is now developed as a transnational chamber working in conjunction and affiliation with other National Regional Chamber

partners dedicated to spreading the support for trade, business and investment. AACCI Odisha chapter core team has Rajendra Parida as VP, CS Sunita Mohanty as Associate VP, Gaurav Chawla as Secretary, Sushmita Verma Mohanty as Joint secretary & Rima Didee as treasurer. AACCI Odisha chapter will have 60 verticals, with currently 52 chairpersons and vice chairpersons on board.

## ODM honours Odia talents on Utkal Divas

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** On Utkal Divas, ODM Public School, Patia, felicitated gifted people from the state who have gained fame in domains of literature, science and culture in a programme titled "Utkal Prativa Samman-2023".

While the founder of ODM group of educational institutions and Chairman Satyabrata Minaketan presided over the programme, Padma Shri Debi Prasanna Pattanayak joined as the chief guest. Among the talents honoured were Kadambini founder Iti Samanta, Padma Shri Shyamamani Devi, Odissi Guru Ratikant Mohapatra and FRSC (UK) senior scientist Bikas Kumar Jena.

School's director of adminis-



tration and finance Indumati Roy and executive officer Swayan Satyendu felicitated the guests with the "Utkal Prativa Samman-2023". At the programme, the guests released the quarterly magazine of the school "Utkal Prativa."

As the chief guest, Pattanayak appreciated such a unique programme by ODM and thanked all the members of the institutions. All the other guests present expressed their unanimous opinion that the efforts made by ODM in honouring the talented people from Odisha literature, science and culture will surely encourage the youth of the society to pursue excellence in future.

On this occasion, Chairman Minaketan thanked the guests for making time out of their busy schedule for the event. A colourful cultural programme was held after the felicitation ceremony. Many teachers, parents, and students of the ODM group of educational institutions were present during the event.

## Odia film 'Delivery Boy' declared tax-free

**Bhubaneswar:** The state government announced an exemption from entertainment tax for Odia movie 'Delivery Boy'. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday approved the proposal for exempting the entertainment tax for the film. Directed by Ashwini Tripathy, the movie is based on the life of a delivery boy and his struggle. The movie shows how a delivery boy suffers a road accident and how with the help of co-workers he gets justice. The movie also talks about road safety and tells an impactful story. In the movie Shailendra Samantary, Suryamayee, Buddhadiya Mohanty and Sushant Das Mohapatra played key roles.

## CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit before Executive Magistrate, Cuttack, I Ahalya Tarai, W/o-Kailash Tarai, At-Jemadepur, PO- Dalijoda Brahmaipur, PS- Choudwar, Dist- Cuttack, do hereby state that, in LIC Policy my name has been mentioned as Ali Tarai. Hence Ahalya Tarai and Ali Tarai is same and one person for all purposes.

## CONTINUATION FROM P1

### Naked anger...

Playboy is not a soft porn magazine but a 300-page quarterly 'mook' (a mix of a book and a magazine) that is intellectual and on trend, Florentin added, while admitting there were still a few undressed women but they're not the majority of the pages.

Other criticism of Schiappa has focused on the broader issue of the centrist government's communication strategy.

Macron, who rarely gives interviews to the French press, offered his thoughts on political power and pensions in a long interview published in children's magazine Pif, le mag last week. Schiappa, a regular on French TV talk shows, brought in legislation outlawing catcalling and street harassment while serving as equalities minister in 2018.

The mother-of-two was a prolific author and blogger before her career in politics, writing about the challenges of moth-

erhood, women's health and pregnancy.

She also penned a 2010 book that offered sex tips for the overweight which some critics saw as propagating stereotypes.

### Relief for...

The Congress leader, who was elected to the Lok Sabha from Wayanad in Kerala in 2019, was convicted March 23 by the court of Chief Judicial Magistrate HH Varma and sentenced to two years in jail.

The magistrate's court had granted him bail the same day and suspended the sentence for 30 days to allow him to appeal in a higher court. A day after his conviction and sentence, he was disqualified as a member of the Lok Sabha under a rule that bars convicted MPs from holding Lok Sabha membership.

However, he also faces another deadline to vacate his official residence in New Delhi, which

was allotted to him as an MP, by April 22. If the conviction is not overturned, he could be disqualified from contesting elections for the next eight years.

### Naveen sets...

Moreover, in view of the significant strides made by Odisha in development of the sports ecosystem, it is also planned to explore possible collaboration in training and development of sports talent in Odisha, they said.

The visit of the Chief Minister to Japan reinforces the commitment of the state government to promote Odisha as a favourable investment destination and strengthen the emerging economic and cultural ties with Japan.

During the Make in Odisha Conclave-2022, Japan was a country partner and the Ambassador to Japan in India participated in the plenary session and had invited the Chief Minister to visit Japan.

## Evil of child-marriage still exists in Odisha

POST NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi, April 3:** Despite schemes like Beti Bachao - Beti Padhao and other campaigns for empowering women, a rising trend in cases of child marriage in the country as well as the state in a five year period from 2017 to 2021 indicates that the social evil continues to exist.

The data released by the Union ministry of Women and Child Development in the Lok Sabha, in response to a question previously asked by BJD MP Chandrani Murmu, revealed an upward trend in the cases of child marriage in Odisha and in the country from 2017 to 2021. From 17 cases of child marriage in 2017 to 64 in 2021, the coastal state witnessed over three-fold increase in the five year period. At the national level, the cases increased from 395 in 2017 to 1050 in 2021. The Union ministry, how-

ever, said the higher reporting of cases does not necessarily reflect an increase in the number of cases of child marriage, but it may be because of increased awareness among citizens to report such incidents due to initiatives by the union government and better enforcement of law by the state governments.

The ministry further informed the Lok Sabha that since enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the prevalence of child marriage has reduced by half from 47 per cent in 2006 to 23.3 per cent during 2019-21 according to the fifth round of National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5). However, a few States such as Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Telangana, Tripura and West Bengal have higher prevalence of child marriage than the national average as per NFHS-5, the ministry said.

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2008 NAYAGARH MAOIST ATTACKS

# 16 accused acquitted as CB fails to provide proof



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nayagarh, April 3:** The state Crime Branch's probe into the Maoist attack on Nayagarh police station and hosts of other security establishments in this district in 2008 has come under flak. This is due to the fact that 16 of the 19 accused in the various cases have been acquitted due to lack of evidence. Two of the alleged Maoists, Subhankar and Rabi Dulari died during their tenure in prison. While Subhankar passed away in 2009, Rabi breathed his last in 2021. Officials said that the alleged kingpin behind the attack is top Maoist leader Sabyasachi Panda. However, out of the nine cases filed against him, Sabyasachi has been acquitted in five due to lack of evidence, sources pointed out Monday. The acquittal of 16 of the 19 accused has sparked off debate as to who were behind the attacks on

took 50,000 bullets, more than 3,000 grenades, 36 high explosive bombs and a number of AK-47 rifles. They had brought with them a bus and a mini-truck on which they loaded the arms and ammunitions and left the spot.

Since then a number of changes have been carried out for protection of the police personnel. The police training school has been fortified; the armoury has been shifted close to the SP's office while new buildings have come up for the police station and the outpost.

Advocate Amiya Pattnaik said that the Crime Branch completed the probe in a haphazard manner without gathering sufficient evidence. He pointed out that the Crime Branch failed to prove the presence of the accused at the places where the attacks had been carried out.

Another advocate, Ranjit Dash said that 16 of the accused have gone free simply because the Crime Branch officials failed to take the case to a logical end. Dash also stated that in most of the cases, people failed to identify the accused. He informed that a huge amount of the Odisha government's money has gone down the drain because of the failure of the Crime Branch sleuths to present the cases in a proper manner. A local resident on condition of anonymity said that the Crime Branch has failed to apprehend the real culprits involved in the attack. As a result of which, the judges were not convinced after hearing the cases.

February 15, 2008. People are questioning the way the probe has been conducted by the Crime Branch.

Locals still shudder when they talk about the murderous attack by the red rebels on the police station. In that attack, 15 policemen and a local resident were killed. The impunity with which the raid was conducted completely stunned the district administration and the Odisha government.

The Maoists also ransacked the reserve police office, the police training school (PTS) in this town, the Mahipur police outpost and Nuagaon police station in the district. Later, they attacked the Daspalla police station, hijacked a coconut-laden truck and torched the house of the IIC.

During the attack, the rebels raided the armoury at the reserve police office and police training school and decamped with huge amount of arms and ammunitions. As per reports then, the Maoists



**MAINTAINING TRADITION:** Members of a 'Danda Nrutya' troupe move on a road in Sambalpur for a performance, Monday. The 'Danda Nrutya', a unique traditional dance is held in the month of 'Chaitra' where the performers observe austerity and penance to appease the deity. OP PHOTO

## NTPC, Darlipali bags 'Kalinga CSR Award'

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, April 3:** The NTPC unit at Darlipali in Sundargarh district has been conferred with the 'Kalinga CSR Award 2022' for its remarkable contribution to community development activities.

The unit of NTPC bagged the award at the 'VIIIth National Seminar on Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative - 2023' organised Friday by the Institute of Quality and Environment Management Services in collaboration with Institute of Public Enterprise, Hyderabad.

CGM (NTPC, Darlipali) Ajai Kumar Tandon received the award from Odisha's Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Pradip Kumar Amat.

The award has been bestowed upon NTPC Darlipali for its exceptional contribution to overall development of the community and enhancement of the living standard of people in its project-affected areas.

## 69 shops gutted in Keonjhar

PROPERTIES WORTH CRORES DESTROYED IN THE EARLY MORNING BLAZE

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Keonjhar, April 3:** Properties worth several crores of rupees were destroyed as a major fire broke out in the daily market at Ras Mandir Bazaar in this town in the wee hours of Monday. Officials said that 69 shops had been completely gutted. Luckily however, there were no casualties.

Sources said that the fire may have resulted due to an electrical short circuit. However, the lack of fire safety measures was one of the main reasons why the blaze spread quickly, they alleged.

The result was that many shopkeepers lost their entire belongings as their shops were completely reduced to ashes. Many said that they have no hope of survival if the government does not step in as they have lost all their belongings.

Locals spotted the blaze after a few minutes and informed the fire services. Two fire tenders from here and four from Jhumpura, Banshapal and Patana



were pressed into service to douse the fire. Later, two more were brought in to control the blaze. After about four hours, the blaze was finally brought under control, Keonjhar fire officer Manoranjan Mohanta informed. Eye-witnesses said that the fire first broke out in a utensil shop and quickly spread to other areas. Shop owners also blamed the fire department for their losses. They pointed out that initially only one fire tender had been pressed into action. "Had more fire engines been used, the damage could have

been minimised," they said. On being informed, Keonjhar District Collector Ashish Thakare, district planning board chairman Jagannath Nayak, Keonjhar Municipal chairman Niku Sahu and other officials visited the market and reviewed the situation. They assured all help to the distraught shop owners who had lost all their belongings. On being directed by the collector, the Revenue department has constituted a five-member team to make an assessment of the losses suffered by the traders

## Bizman robbed of ₹17L in Phulbani

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Phulbani, April 3:** A businessman was robbed Monday of ₹17.50 lakh in cash in Kandhamal district when he was on the way to a bank to deposit the amount, police informed.

Sankar Patra, a well-known businessman was on his way to the bank with accountant Ramesh Pradhan. Suddenly two men started chasing them on a motorcycle, and snatched the bag with the cash and fled, said Ashok Giri, the IIC of Phulbani Town police station. Pradhan was injured in a tussle



with the accused as he refused to let go of the bag, the IIC informed. CCTV footage of the area is being examined to identify those behind the crime, the officer said.

United Citizen's Forum convenor Ashok Parida alleged that seven cases of snatching have happened here in the last six months, but police have failed to make any arrests.

## Doctors give new lease of life to injured teen

**SURGEONS REMOVE IRON ROD WHICH HAD PIERCED THE BOY'S RECTUM CAUSING GRIEVOUS INJURY TO ORGANS**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, April 3:** A team of doctors at the state-run MKCG Medical College and Hospital here have successfully removed an iron rod which got stuck inside the rectum of a 17-year-old boy of Kandhamal district. The rod had pierced the rectum after the boy fell from an asbestos roof of a building at Subarnagiri village, Saturday. The surgery was done Sunday.

About 60cm of the 150cm-long rod, with a radius of around three centimetres got stuck inside the rectum of the teenager, identified as Shakti Pataguru. Both the rectum and sigmoid colon suffered abrasion and cuts as the rod pierced those organs, said one of the doctors, who was part of the surgical team.

The team of five surgeons took around five hours to remove the rod by conducting a critical operation on the patient, said Dr Siba Prasad Das, head of the

Department of General Surgery. "The surgery had to be precise to remove the iron rod in a manner so that other organs were not harmed," associate professor at the institute, Dr I Gopal, who led the team of surgeons, said. The rod had broken a portion of the pelvic bone and had entered into the retroperitoneal space of the boy, Dr Gopal added. "The patient is in good condition. He will remain in hospital for some days for treatment and observation," Dr Gopal informed.

The incident took place when Shakti was removing damaged asbestos sheets from the roof of a school building. He slipped and fell on the rod which was being held as a support by another labourer. An injured Shakti was immediately rushed to the sub-divisional hospital, Baliguda and later referred to the MKCG Medical College and Hospital here.

Meanwhile Rabindra Kumar Mishra, a human rights activist, filed a plea Monday with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) seeking disciplinary action against the company which had engaged Shakti in such hazardous work. He also urged the commission to direct the authorities concerned for providing monetary compensation to the victim and also to provide him with suitable work.

## MDM IMBROGLIO IN MAYURBHANJ

# Irked students stage innovative protest

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Baripada, April 3:** Serving of meagre amount of curry in mid-day meals (MDM) sparked resentment Monday among the students of Binodray Government Upper Primary School under Rasagovindpur block in Mayurbhanj district. The irked students walked with plates containing rice only to the office of the block development officer (BDO), Lalatendu Kumar Singh, about 400 metres away from their school building and staged a demonstration.

The agitating students relented after Singh, BEO Satish Chandra Mohapatra, CDPO Parbati Soren and headmistress Dhanamani Tudu met them and assured action within a fortnight after conducting a probe. The school has 261 students



studying from Classes VI to VIII. A local women's self-help group (SHG) has been entrusted with the task preparing mid-day meals

for the students. The students alleged that there is shortage of curry everyday when their meals are served. They blamed

the members of the SHG for their predicament.

The students also alleged that earlier the school management committee had informed the BDO on this issue. However, nothing happened and the students had to do with whatever amount of curry was offered to them. At times, they had to eat plain rice and dal only as there was no curry on offer.

Finally, the students and their guardians lost their cool Monday and staged a protest.

Locals have alleged that the SHG is responsible for such a situation and said that a portion of the raw materials are regularly taken away by its members. The guardians and the locals have warned of agitation if the matter is not solved immediately and proper action is initiated.

# Andhra govt slams Pradhan over Kotia visit

PNN & AGENCIES

**Pottangi, April 3:** The Andhra Pradesh government has deplored Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's visit Saturday to the disputed Kotia region. It said that as per the Supreme Court directive for maintaining status quo in the region, Pradhan's visit was uncalled for.

Andhra Deputy Chief Minister P Rajanna Dora found fault with Pradhan's visit to the disputed region and his statement that Kotia cluster of villages is an integral part of Odisha. Dora reminded Pradhan that the latter represents the entire country and should refrain from making such statements. "We need to obey the apex court's order to maintain status quo till the issue is resolved," Dora told the media in Saluru in Parvatipuram-Manyam district late Sunday evening.

At the time of formation of the Parvatipuram-Manyam district last year, the government had shown 21 villages in the Kotia re-



gion on the map of Andhra Pradesh.

A day after Pradhan's visit to the disputed area along with five BJP MLAs from Odisha, Parvatipuram-Manyam District Collector Nishant Kumar and SP Vidya Sagar Naidu were closely monitoring the situation in the Kotia region. Naidu later said that community policing was being accorded top priority in the region.

The Andhra Pradesh government is likely to depute a team of officials to the region to undertake more welfare activities in the

villages, Andhra government sources said.

During his visit to Kotia gram panchayat Saturday on the occasion of 'Utkal Divas', Pradhan had taken exception to the presence of Andhra Pradesh officials and had asked them to leave. Expressing his annoyance over the presence of AP police officials, the Union Minister asked them to leave as their presence within Odisha borders 'is not solicited'.

"Why are you all here? The Kotia panchayat belongs to Odisha. Please

go back. Go back to Andhra," Pradhan told the Andhra Pradesh officials. He then raised the 'Bande Utkal Janani' slogan as locals gathered to take it to a feverish pitch forcing the Andhra officials and cops to beat a quick retreat.

Pradhan's action has evoked sharp reaction from the leaders of various political parties in Andhra Pradesh.

Lok Satta Party state president B Babji demanded the dismissal of Pradhan from the Union Cabinet as his visit to the village was in violation of the apex court ruling.

A total of 21 tribal hamlets located in the area known as Kotia cluster of villages have been a bone of contention between Odisha and Andhra Pradesh since 1956. Pradhan had last visited Kotia in 2018 and had written to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in September 2021 to resolve the border dispute through talks with his counterpart in Odisha. This was followed by a meeting of the two Chief Ministers in January last year.

# Woman killed in road mishap, another critical

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Baripada, April 3:** A woman was killed Monday while another riding pillion with her on a scooter sustained critical injuries after the two-wheeler was hit by a passenger bus at Krishna Chandra Golai on Baripada-Udala road in Mayurbhanj district. The deceased has been identified as Rashmita Behera, an em-



ployee of the Postal department. The injured woman, identified as Kantiprabha Mohapatra is under-

going treatment at the PRM Medical College and Hospital here. Both were residents of Badashola village under Kaptipada police limits.

Immediately after the accident, police arrived at the spot and took both the women to the hospital. However, doctors pronounced Rashmita dead on arrival. Town police have registered a case and launched an investigation.

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER P.H.DIVISION, KORAPUT**  
**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA "e" Procurement Notice**  
**e-Procurement Notice for 2022-23**  
**Bid Identification No.EE.P.H..KPT-23 of 2022-23, Dt.27.03.2023**  
**Tel/Fax:06852-250740, e-mail:eepkpr@gmail.com**  
**No.C-2:Name of work: Procurement of DI Pipes. Total No. of Works: 1 (One Work). Estimated Cost: Rs.24.61 Lakh (Approx.) Class of Contractor: Manufacturer. Period of Completion: 60 days.**

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	No. of Works	Availability of Tender online for Bidding		Date & Time of Opening of Bid
			From	To	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Executive Engineer, P.H. Division, Koraput	EE P.H. KPT-23 of 2022-23 Dt.27.03.2023	1 (One)	11.00 A.M. 05.04.2023	05.00 P.M. 17.04.2023	11.00 A.M. 18.04.2023

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal "https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in".  
**Sd./- (Er. Chiranjibi Mahali)**  
**Executive Engineer, P.H. Division, Koraput**  
**OIPR-13008/11/0001/2324**

When Reason died, then Wisdom was born.

SRI AUROBINDO



## Leave No One Behind

We are at the halfway point for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (from 2015 to 2030), but we are not halfway to achieving them. In fact, in many critical areas – from poverty to food security – progress has been reversed in recent years, owing to severe and compounding crises. In this difficult environment, governments worldwide must urgently recommit to the SDGs, including their underlying promise to leave no one behind.

The challenge is formidable. Consider SDG1, which aims to eliminate poverty in all its forms. According to the World Bank's Partnership for Economic Inclusion, government-led poverty-alleviation programmes surged in 2021. But to reach those furthest behind, such programmes must recognise and account for the web of overlapping constraints that effectively "trap" people in poverty.

As the global Multidimensional Poverty Index highlights, poverty encompasses deprivation and exclusion in multiple areas, such as nutrition, sanitation, health care, and education. Factors like gender, disability, and displacement also play an important role in keeping people in poverty. Recent research, based on experience in rural Bangladesh, shows that below a certain income/asset threshold, households' ability to access resources that could increase their income is severely limited. It also shows that large transfers of resources and/or support that create better jobs for the poor are an effective means of enabling people to escape the poverty trap over the long term.

An understanding of the various constraints and barriers that people in extreme poverty face within each unique context is thus vital to enable governments to devise and target optimal interventions.

This is easier said than done. People facing extreme poverty often live in isolation and thus may not be included in social registries or identified via other government mechanisms for determining eligibility for and ensuring enrollment in support programmes. They may lack adequate documentation or even the basic knowledge or ability to claim benefits (owing to factors such as limited mobility or literacy). As a result, the people who need the most help often end up either excluded from government programs altogether, or unable to access benefits for which they qualify. A June 2020 report found that 79 per cent of the poorest quintile of the population in low-income countries receive no social assistance.

But there are steps governments can take to improve programme targeting and reach. For starters, they can make greater use of registries linked to existing poverty-focused programmes. Tunisia's government is already doing this. Using registries from its national cash-transfer programme, the authorities identify households at the intersection of climate and socioeconomic vulnerability. Factors like monthly income, productive labour capacity, access to water, and land degradation are considered, as is whether the household is headed by a woman.

Combining information from other government registries or databases with existing social registries can also be effective. Colombia's government combined data in the Unified Registry of Victims with a social registry used for an existing cash-transfer programme to identify victims of conflict who were already receiving cash transfers. The government was then able to urge the recipients to invest the transfers in ways that boosted well-being and resilience.

The information in social registries can also be verified, updated, and enhanced through household surveys or local "vulnerability assessments," which can help to identify the specific set of risks and deprivations faced by particular groups of people living in extreme poverty. Governments can also expand social registries, using mechanisms such as participatory community consultations that identify households that are unregistered or misrepresented in official databases.

In the Indian state of Bihar, Satat Jeevikoparjan Yojana (SJJY) is a programme focused on boosting "the human capital of the poorest and most excluded households through support of consumption and livelihoods, savings, and training." The complex and time-consuming targeting method used during the pilot period was streamlined significantly to enable the programme to be scaled up. The simplified approach – including transect walks and wealth-mapping based on input from village organisations – proved highly effective. To date, SJJY has reached more than 136,000 households living in extreme poverty across all 38 of Bihar's districts.

Kenya's Social and Economic Inclusion Project – another multidimensional initiative – promotes the delivery of essential services to the poor and vulnerable. To facilitate this effort, Kenya's government worked to enhance the existing social registry by adding readily available data on marginalised people living in poverty. Kenya's government also incorporated a participant-targeting tool, designed and maintained by partners, that collects information related to multidimensional poverty, including housing conditions, water and sanitation, energy access, productive assets, food security, and access to social programmes.

Targeting does not end with registration, selection, and enrollment; it is most effective when viewed as an ongoing process, with regular assessments and feedback systems built into every programme to support the continual updating, enhancement, and integration of registries, which in turn will facilitate better targeting. At the same time, governments and their partners can ensure that all participants in poverty-alleviation programmes are also connected to other public services and systems.

Reaching those who are the furthest behind will never be easy. But if governments make the most of existing data and systems, carry out multi-dimensional local assessments, and continuously strive to improve targeting methods, progress is possible. And if we are going to achieve the SDGs, it is essential.

The writer is Director of Monitoring, Evidence, and Learning at the BRAC Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative.

©PROJECT SYNDICATE

### WISDOM CORNER

The fragrance of flowers spreads only in the direction of the wind. But the goodness of a person spreads in all directions. CHANAKYA

It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop. CONFUCIUS

Human behavior flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge. PLATO

### WORDSWORTH

#### Gurning

This British term – much better known in Britain and Commonwealth countries than in the US – refers to the pulling of grotesque faces and has often been applied to that action as a competitive activity. A surviving example is from the Lake District, where the Egremont Crab-Apple Fair has an annual contest, which they call the World Championship Gurning Competition and which they say dates back to 1266. There is also an Australian national competition that I know of, and there may be others, too. At one time, such face-pulling contests were a common entertainment at fairs and gatherings around Britain. The rules at Egremont are simple: competitors put their heads through a horse collar and then have a set time in which to contort their faces into the most gruesome, scary or daft expressions possible.

# ADDRESSING MSME WOES

FOCUS ECONOMY

The importance of small and medium enterprises for the economy cannot be overemphasised. In the industrial sector, these enterprises contribute to roughly half the output, employment and even exports. There are approximately 64 million such enterprises, not just in industry and manufacturing, but in services including single person services such as cobblers, paan shops or hair cutting salons. In manufacturing alone there are an estimated 1.2 million units. These economic units are collectively referred to as MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises). There is also an MSME Ministry at the Centre which was established in 2007. One year before that, the Parliament passed the MSME Act. The purpose of the Act was promotion and development of MSMEs and also enhancement of their competitiveness. They have been given special preference when it comes to procurement of goods and services by Central, state and local governments. There are special provisions to ensure that they get formal credit from banks and non-banks. The loans to MSMEs are counted toward the bank's obligation to fulfil priority sector lending.



Ajit Ranade

GIVING SUPPORT TO MSMEs AND ENSURING THAT THEY SURVIVE AND THRIVE IS IN THE SPIRIT OF INCLUSIVE GROWTH



One of the most pressing issues that the MSMEs face collectively is that of delayed payments. Since they face a large customer, with great clout, they have limited bargaining powers

talent. Giving support to MSMEs and ensuring that they survive and thrive is in the spirit of inclusive growth. That is because they provide a livelihood to millions of households, and also their success gives them the confidence and dignity of participating in the economy on their own steam.

One of the most pressing issues that the MSMEs face collectively is that of delayed payments. Since they face a large customer, with great clout, they have limited bargaining powers. Often the last part of the payment of the present order is clubbed with the next repeat order. So it is possible that the customer always holds back 10 or 20 per cent of the payment that is due. This is like a portion of the working capital of the MSMEs that is permanently locked and lying with the customer. Most MSMEs have only one large buyer. So they cannot afford to name and shame that customer. Nor can they drag that customer to court or to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy process for want of a payment delayed beyond six months. Because if the small vendor does that to his big client, then that vendor will get permanently blacklisted and lose all business. Incidentally this applies

to large companies both from the public or private sector. The Railways for example probably has a million small vendors, and for each of them they have only one customer. Even though the 2006 Act explicitly prohibits any delay beyond 45 days, this Act is observed more in the breach. A Dun and Bradstreet report says that estimated delayed payments across all MSMEs are about Rs 10 lakh crore. The annual interest cost alone on this staggering amount is Rs 1 lakh crore. If the delayed payments are cleared as per the provision of the 2006 Act it would be like releasing a subsidy of Rs 1 lakh crore to the MSMEs.

In the recently passed Union Budget there is an amendment to the Income Tax Act Section 43 B. In short the amendment says that if a company does not pay their MSME vendor within 45 days, then that expense will not be allowed as tax deductible, and will be counted as income to be taxed. The amendment is well intended. But the effect of this will regrettably be perverse. Firstly, some large companies will simply drop MSME purchases, fearing penal action from income tax authorities. Since non-MSME purchases do not attract this penalty that is a safe

route. It is somewhat like the unintended impact of the maternity leave law of 2016 which was supposed to help women, but unfortunately ended up reducing their employment chances! A second more serious problem with amendment to 43 B is that it needs an auditor to certify by March 31 of the financial year. So if a buyer delays payment until the very last day, say till March 30, and then pays off, no penalty will apply. So this is a loophole. Or else if there is delayed payment and the prospect of not getting tax deduction this year, the large buyer will simply postpone payment to the next year and claim a full tax deduction next year. This effectively nullifies any penalty effect, since what you lose this year you gain in the next year. Even the journal of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India has pointed out this unintended consequence of the amendment.

However, a truly effective measure would be to cut off the oxygen of GST filing to the large buyer. Since every purchase is logged into the GST network, and an MSME is identified by the Udyam registration number, the large buyer company should not be allowed to file their GST returns for the next month (or beyond the 45 day cycle) unless it has cleared all MSME payments. This confirmation that the MSME payment has been made is done by the large buyer posting the transaction on the Trade Receivables portal of the Reserve Bank of India. All this being systems driven removes any discretionary delays or informal extortionary behaviour. It also will not put the MSMEs in mortal fear of displeasing their "maai baap" client and customer. This would go a long way in improving the ease of doing business for the MSMEs. The government must push this reform even though large corporations will resist it, for this step forces them to clear their dues within 45 days.

The writer is a noted economist. ©THE BILLION PRESS

### SPECTRUM NATION

## Negative politics is the new normal

With political bosses and their underlings busy engaging in slanderous politics, people are wondering at the ugly turn of events. They have two options: To get swayed by the hyperbole of politicians, or to confront them with everyday issues that matter. Whether it is inflation or unemployment, or issues concerning health, education and national security, people are looking for solutions to the plethora of problems they are confronted with, but the political class seems to be far removed from reality.

For politicians, it is all about getting power and enjoying benefits. It is said that all is fair in love and war. Politics must now be added to love and war, for it has transgressed all limits of fair play. Every politician seems to be baying for his opponent's blood in a bid to stay ahead. Negative politics is the new weapon for political fighters. Unleashing campaigns to target and demonise the opponent has become the basic mantra for every party and leader.

The Congress has so many epithets for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP has a plethora of adjectives for Rahul Gandhi, and so does it for Arvind Kejriwal, Akhilesh Yadav, Mamata Banerjee, and all others and their juniors or seniors or ordinary workers. It is

a free for all. By using the worst lines and expressions against each other, the belief is that it will proportionally pull down the opponent and elevate the source. The social media storms give a massive impetus to the thought behind the unleashing of negative campaigns. Slaying opponents with a barrage of words is the fashion, but equally disturbing is being upfront about it and wearing the negativity as a kind of badge.

When Rahul Gandhi was convicted by a Surat Court, it should have been a moment of redemption for him and all the other politicians. But, has it been so? The question is wide open. The political scene has become very aggressive with all parties adopting a cut-throat stance against each other. Rahul Gandhi is going on a 'revenge rally' in Kolar, the place in Karnataka where he made the 'Modi surname' comment in 2019 that got him disqualified from the Lok Sabha.

"Rahul Gandhi lost his Lok Sabha membership after the court sentenced him to two-year jail for his speech. Hence, the party has decided to launch its fight to save the Constitution from Kolar," party's state working president, Saleem Ahmed, said. And the date for the event, named 'Satyameva Jayate', has now been postponed from April

5 to April 9 to coincide with the PM's programme.

All parties, ruling or Opposition, are leaving no stone unturned in attacking each other. The current Parliament session reflects this. With not a single day of working, this session is surely going to be the most disastrous one. The treasury benches also behaved aggressively demanding Rahul's apology over his UK statement even as the Opposition is steadfast on demand for a JPC probe into the Adani issue.

For the Congress and its supportive like-minded parties, the Adani case is a big issue. In a recently-held press conference at the party headquarters in Delhi, Rahul had said, "I have been disqualified from the Lok Sabha because Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scared of my next speech on Adani." He also said his disqualification would help the party as it has given the Congress a new weapon. And, adding to the fire are reactions emanating from some foreign governments – the US and Germany – on Rahul's disqualification, and Congress leaders thanking them.

The BJP slammed Rahul over this and has launched a scathing attack against the Congress for inviting foreign powers to interfere in India's internal matters. The Congress has been trying to

rally other Opposition parties behind it, while the BJP is aggressive on issues of corruption and nationalism.

As the elections to the states and the 2024 Lok Sabha polls near, the nation is going to witness a tumultuous period. Campaigns, counter campaigns, narratives and wares will be unleashed to sway the masses. Religion, caste, region, language, freebies, will occupy the top slot, and real issues will take the backseat.

For a common woman, every day is a struggle with rising prices of all essential commodities. Milk prices have been increased multiple times in the past year. Vegetables, fruits, other eatables, are also seeing a hike in rates. And so are other expenses – clothes, medicines, education, transport, housing and everything else. Various crimes have also increased and so has the general sense of insecurity. The job market is shrinking and layoffs are becoming the norm. But these are not the issues which are attracting the attention of any political party. These are people's problems for which only they have to find their own solutions. The politicians are fighting bigger battles!

The year is going to be tough and challenging and will subside only with the ending of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

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### Antarctica in danger

Sir, The deep ocean circulation that occurs around Antarctica is in danger of disintegrating, according to scientists. If this kind of ocean circulation were to drastically decrease, it would have far-reaching consequences for climate and marine ecosystems, according to Nature magazine. If this deep ocean movement were to stop, the waters below 4,000 metres in depth would become stagnant. "This would trap nutrients in the deep ocean, reducing the nutrients available to support marine life near the ocean surface," explains Prof England. Model simulations reveal a slowdown of the overturning, which subsequently leads to fast warming of the deep ocean, according to co-author Dr Steve Rintoul of CSIRO and the Australian Antarctic Program Partnership. Direct observations, as Dr Rintoul puts it, show that deep ocean warming is already happening. The research discovered that the Antarctic overturning circulation is slowed because melting ice makes the surrounding ocean waters less thick. The melt of the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets is predicted to continue to intensify as the Earth warms. Significant negative effects on the seas will last for millennia if the overturning of heat, freshwater, oxygen, carbon, and nutrients is drastically altered.

Asit Mohanty, JAJPUR

### Playground heartthrob

Sir, Salim Durani, the first Afghan-born Test cricketer, has died. Durani, who became the playground heartthrob of the 1960s, was, in a nutshell, the era's superstar. His colourful life is immortalised in the annals of Indian cricket. Durani was known as an aggressive batsman who hit 18 sixes in 50 Test innings, which was unusual in that era. When the crowd demanded a six, he is said to have gone on a rampage on the pitch. However, this batting style is not reflected in his entire career: 1202 runs at an average of only 25.04 in Tests is not a very good example today. His first-class record, however, is 8545 runs and 484. It is said that during the MCC tour of India in 1963/64, Salim Durani, who did not appear in all five Tests, took leave from the office and later applied for leave on the pretext of illness. Durani, who received the first Arjuna Award as a cricketer, also appeared in the film 'Charitra' with actress Parvin Babi.

Abhijit Roy, JAMSHEDPUR

## 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

OrissaPOST

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of the day quote

We have noticed citizens expressing disappointment over some people consistently insulting Savarkar. An insult of Savarkar is the insult of every Indian. I openly condemn people like Rahul Gandhi for his tirade against Savarkar. I dare anyone to live a day in the Cellular Jail the way Savarkar was jailed

EKNATH SHINDE | MAHARASHTRA CM

People of Assam are very good. They welcome their guests. Himanta Biswa Sarma should learn from them

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CM

The maximum number of raids in the country were conducted in Chhattisgarh in the last one month. Since the Congress' plenary session was held in Raipur, more than 50 locations were searched by the central agency. But there is no information about the amount recovered during these actions. The agency did not disclose how much (money) it recovered from businessmen or industrialists (covered in the raids)

BHUPESH BAGHEL | CHHATTISGARH CM

SHORT TAKES

Man kills elder brother in Bihar

Patna: A man killed his elder brother over a property dispute in Bihar's Kishanganj district, an official said Monday. The incident took place at Rahmat Pada under Kochadhaman police station on Sunday evening. The deceased has been identified as Nashim Alam (42). The police said that the accused, Naushad Alam, had a property dispute with his elder brother Nashim Alam over a two-inch land. They were involved in a quarrel on Sunday morning.

2 criminals held

New Delhi: The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has arrested two criminals involved in eight cases registered across the national capital, and recovered one country-made pistol along with five bullets, an official said Monday. The accused were identified as Sultan alias Sher Khan (35), a resident of Swarn Jyanti Vihar, Tikri Khurd, and Sanjay (46), a resident of Trilokpuri.

Girl electrocuted

Muzaffarnagar: A minor girl in Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district was electrocuted to death while her younger sister sustained serious injuries after coming in contact with a high-tension wire, police said. The incident took place in Kasiara village in Charthawal on Sunday when the sisters had gone to collect grass from a field.

Oppn calls for unity at DMK meet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 3: Top Opposition leaders, including Chief Ministers of three states, Monday strongly pitched for a caste census at a DMK-convened conference on social justice which also saw fervent calls for forging unity to take on the BJP, setting aside egos, in the run-up to the 2024 general election.

The conference was seen by many as a show of strength by the Opposition with Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, his Jharkhand counterpart Hemant Soren and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav joining in to raise their voice against oppression of backward classes.

The Opposition parties attacking the BJP-led government from one platform assumes significance as it comes at a time of renewed unity among them in the wake of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha after being convicted in a 2019 defamation case.

The meeting saw a chorus from Opposition leaders demanding a caste census, with RJD leader Yadav making a



strong case for caste census, citing that the 'Mahagathbandhan' government in Bihar has already announced a caste-based survey which has begun.

He said it was a concern that when governments in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand want to provide more reservation for OBCs, the governors stalled it. "This is done at the behest of whom, everyone knows," Yadav said.

He urged the Opposition parties to come together setting aside their egos and said the best way to beat the BJP's politics of 'polarisation' was through social justice-based politics. Manoj Jha, also of

the RJD, went to the extent of calling for a boycott of the census, if there is no caste census. "We should give a call - no census, if no caste census," he said.

In his remarks, Gehlot pitched for social security for all and said he has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking social security for families according to their needs. He said like-minded parties should come forward to push for the caste-based census and urged CMs of Opposition-ruled states to put pressure on the Centre for it.

Former Union minister and senior Congress leader M Veerappa

Moily asserted that the Congress was with other parties in the movement for social justice. The Opposition parties came together for the hybrid-mode first conference of the All India Federation for Social Justice, a brainchild of Stalin, on the theme "Taking Forward the Struggle for Social Justice and Joint National Programme for Social Justice Movement".

Asserting that parties must not shy away from accepting that such platforms are political, Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien said there are still some parties that do not want to fight the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and asserted that it is not the time to remain in the grey, but it is time to be either white or black.

Aam Aadmi Party MP Sanjay Singh also called for a caste census and alleged that the BJP is running away from it because it's ideological mentor RSS wants the 'varna system' to continue. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said while reservation for the backward classes is a significant step to open windows of opportunity for them, it has to be accompanied by economic development.

Man held for killing 9-yr-old daughter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, April 3: Police have arrested a man for allegedly suffocating his nine-year-old daughter to death and then slitting her throat in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, officials said Monday.

"Mohammad Iqbal Khatana was arrested last week for the March 29 killing of his minor daughter," a senior police officer said in Kupwara, about 100 kilometres from here. Narrating the sequence of events, he said Khatana's relations with his wife, Nageena Begum, were strained for the last one year and they would often quarrel.

"On the day of the crime, Khatana, a taxi driver by profession, had a heated argument with his wife in the morning. After returning from work in the evening, he took a kitchen knife with the intention of 'committing suicide,'" the officer said.

While the accused was leaving the house on the pretext of getting a punctured tyre fixed, his daughter Uzma asked him for Rs 5. Khatana gave her a Rs 10 currency note. His wife followed him up to the courtyard. However, Uzma



followed her father up to the main road," the officer said.

The other members of the family, including the girl's mother, presumed that Uzma had gone with her father. Khatana took Uzma in his vehicle and drove around for more than an hour, waiting for the roads to get deserted so that he can kill himself. "As people left for Taraweeh, he drove his vehicle to Her-Khurhama, near a transformer, where he halted the vehicle. There, out of mental anguish due to domestic issues with his wife, he suffocated Uzma for around two to three minutes, as a result of which the girl died on the spot," the officer said.

Be vigilant against new Covid strain: Official

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 3: The new COVID variant poses less risk and is unlikely to result in increase in hospitalisations but people need to remain vigilant, according to a top Union Health Ministry official.

"New strains keep coming after mutation. This is a new variant which has come. This would not lead to increase in hospitalisations so there is low risk associated with it," the top official said Monday.

The strain has been isolated in the laboratory and a study has also been done on it, he added. "But even then there is a need to remain vigilant," the official said.

Further, he noted that the current surge in the COVID cases could be attributed to the spread of the XBB 1.16 variant in the country. India recorded a single-day jump of 3,641 fresh COVID-19 cases as the active caseload rose to 20,219, according to Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The toll has risen to 5,30,892 with 11 deaths - three from Maharashtra and one each in Delhi, Kerala,

Karnataka and Rajasthan - recorded in a 24-hour span.

The toll also includes four deaths reconciled by Kerala, the data stated. The daily positivity rate was recorded at 6.12 while the weekly positivity was pegged at 2.45 per cent. The total tally of COVID cases stood at 4.47 crore (4,47,26,246).

The strain has been isolated in the laboratory and a study has also been done on it. But even then there is a need to remain vigilant, the official said



Blacksmith activists shout slogans during a demonstration demanding reservation in Patna

Telangana launches cool roof policy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, April 3: The Telangana government Monday launched "Telangana Cool Roof Policy 2023-2028" aimed at reducing heat island impact and heat stress.

Unveiling the policy, Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development K T Rama Rao said it has long-term objectives which will be of use to future generations. "Telangana being the third most urbanised state in the country with almost 50 per cent of the population residing in the urban areas, there is a serious need to introduce cost-effective and climate-friendly cooling solutions to counter the urban heat island effect," he said in a press release.

"By 2030, 200 sq km in Hyderabad and 100 sq km in the rest of the state will be brought under cool roofing," he said adding the target set by New York was to cover 10 lakh square feet or 0.1 square kilometers.

Further, he said that the area under Outer Ring Road here was over 1,000 sq km and that about 20 per cent of the area inside ORR will be brought under cool roofing. The minister added that the State government's ambition was to implement it in government housing schemes, government offices, roads, pavements, and cycling tracks. "Telangana is the first state in the country to launch a cool roof policy and it is a right step in the direction to address future climate challenges."



Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development K T Rama Rao

28 wanted gangsters hiding in 14 nations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 3: The Centre has prepared a list of 28 most wanted gangsters operating from 14 foreign countries, with nine of them hiding in Canada and five in the United States, sources said Monday.

Cases of murder, extortion and kidnapping have been slapped against these gangsters, including Satinderjit Singh alias Goldy Brar and Lawrence Bishnoi, suspected of being the mastermind behind the killing of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala last year.

Another wanted gangster, alias Gagna Hathur.

The five gangsters staying in the US are - Satinderjit Singh alias Goldy Brar, Anmol Bishnoi, Harjot Singh Gill, Darmanjit Singh alias Darman Khalon and Amrit Bal.

The gangsters operating from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are - Vikramjeet Singh Brar alias Vikki and Kuldeep Singh alias Nawanshaharia. While Rohit Godara is living in Europe, Gaurav Patyal alias Lucky Patyal is in Armenia. Sachin Thapan alias Sachin Bishnoi in Azerbaijan, Jagjeet Singh alias Gandhi and Jackpal Singh alias Lali Dhaliwal are in Malaysia.

Anmol Bishnoi alias Bhanu, is believed to have taken shelter in the US.

He is accused of carrying out terror attacks and targeted killings of prominent personalities from the film and business worlds, the sources said.

The nine accused staying in Canada are - Sukhdool Singh alias Sukha Duneke, Gurbinder Singh alias Baba Dala, Satveer Singh Warring alias Sam, Snover Dhillon, Lakhbir Singh alias Landa, Arshdeep Singh alias Arsh Dala, Charanjeet Singh alias Rinku Bihla, Ramandeep Singh alias Raman Judge and Gagandeep Singh

Plants under stress found to emit sounds characteristic to the stress

The recordings collected were analysed using specially developed machine learning algorithms, a kind of artificial intelligence, which learned how to distinguish between different plants and different types of sounds

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 3: Researchers recording and analysing sounds emitted by plants under stress have found that they are emitted at a volume similar to human speech, but at high frequencies, beyond the hearing range of the human ear.

The scientists at Tel Aviv University, Israel, found that each type of stress was associated with a specific identifiable sound. "While imperceptible to the human ear, the sounds emitted by plants can probably be heard by various animals, such as bats, mice, and insects," they said in a study published in the journal Cell.

"From previous studies we know that vibrometers attached to plants record vibrations. But do these vibrations also become airborne soundwaves - namely sounds that can be recorded from a distance?" said lead researcher Lilach Hadany.

The first stage of the study, focussing mainly on tomato and tobacco plants, involved the researchers placing plants in an acoustic box in a quiet, isolated basement with no background noise. Ultrasonic microphones recording sounds at frequencies of 20-250 kilohertz (humans cannot



hear beyond 16 kilohertz) were set up at a distance of about 10 centimetres from each plant.

"Before placing the plants in the acoustic box we subjected them to various treatments: some plants

had not been watered for five days, in some the stem had been cut, and some were untouched." Our intention was to test whether the plants emit sounds, and whether these sounds are affected in any

way by the plant's condition." Our recordings indicated that the plants in our experiment emitted sounds at frequencies of 40-80 kilohertz. Unstressed plants emitted less than one sound per hour, on average, while the stressed plants - both dehydrated and injured - emitted dozens of sounds every hour," said Hadany.

The recordings collected were analysed using specially developed machine learning algorithms, a kind of artificial intelligence, which learned how to distinguish between different plants and different types of sounds. These algorithms were ultimately able to identify the plant and determine the type and level of stress from the recordings.

Further, the algorithms identified and classified plant sounds even when the plants were placed in a greenhouse with a great deal of background noise, where the

plants had been subjected to dehydration over time. Here, the researchers found that the quantity of sounds they emitted increased up to a certain peak, and then diminished.

"Our findings suggest that the world around us is full of plant sounds, and that these sounds contain information - for example about water scarcity or injury." We assume that in nature the sounds emitted by plants are detected by creatures nearby, such as bats, rodents, various insects, and possibly also other plants - that can hear the high frequencies and derive relevant information. "We believe that humans can also utilize this information, given the right tools - such as sensors that tell growers when plants need watering. Apparently, an idyllic field of flowers can be a rather noisy place. It's just that we can't hear the sounds!" said Hadany.

# Mamata appeals for peace

THE WEST BENGAL CM CLAIMED THERE WAS A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO 'INCITE VIOLENCE AND CREATE TENSION'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Khejuri/Rishra/Kolkata, April 3: Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Monday appealed for peace and asked "Hindu brothers" to ensure that minorities are protected as prohibitory orders remained in force after post-Ram Navami violence in two towns of the densely populated Hooghly district.

Banerjee who was speaking at a rally at Khejuri in East Medinipur, questioned why processions were being staged days after the festival of Ram Navami, dedicated to Lord Ram had ended, and claimed there was a deliberate attempt to "incite violence and create tension".

"Why will the processions continue for five days after Ram Navami? Do it on the day of the festival. We have never had objections... But they cannot do rallies with guns and bombs, or without necessary permissions from the police," the firebrand chief minister asserted.

"They are deliberately entering minority areas to incite violence and create tension," she claimed without naming anyone. "They (goons) are setting fire to food carts of poor vendors and dancing with guns... April 6 (Hanuman Jayanti), they are planning to do another round of violence. I have asked the DMs and the police to be alert. Not just Bengal, they have created this scenario throughout the country," the chief minister claimed.

She added that she was "appealing to my Hindu brothers to make sure that no violence takes place against minorities... No one wants these cases of atrocities and violence." The situation in violence-hit towns of Hooghly district remained peaceful and under control, though prohibitory orders and suspension of internet services in some areas continued on Monday and a delegation led by BJP state president was stopped from entering the industrial suburb of Rishra, police said.

Police said the situation in Rishra and Serampore areas in Hooghly district, would be watched and orders relaxed as the situation improved. BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar was barred from visiting Rishra by the police citing prohibitory orders in force in the area, drawing strong protests by the right-wing party.

"I am not being allowed to meet my injured party workers. The police are citing the prohibitory orders. The police can at least allow Mahato and me to enter. The police do not want to allow me as they want to hide the truth," Majumdar told reporters.

The BJP leader, who was accompanied by party MP Jyotirmoy Singh Mahto, demanding immediate deployment of central forces, and claimed the "state police has completely failed to control the situation". A Chandannagore Police Commissionerate official said a dozen people were arrested for the clashes Sunday.

"Things are under control and peaceful. Prohibitory orders are in force and there is heavy police deployment. Security forces conducted route marches at some places of the affected area. There was tension in some areas in the morning. We dispersed the crowds and boosted security," he told PTI.

Marks were allowed to open for some time and police were keeping tabs on the movement of vehicles, he said. "Hopefully, the situation will further improve... A decision on revoking prohibitory orders and resumption of internet services will be taken after evaluation," the official added.

Two Ram Navami processions were organised in Rishra police station area and the second one came under attack near Wellington Jute Mill More on GT Road around 6.15 pm Sunday. The prohibitory orders were imposed in Rishra wards 1-5 and Serampore's ward 24 and internet services suspended in some parts of the district till 10 pm Monday, the police said.

The state government has pointed out that the processions were organised two days after the actual festival and did not have requisite permissions.

Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari (BJP) has however blamed TMC for engineering the attack on the Ram Navami rally organised by the BJP.

Some BJP workers were seen holding a sit-in near the affected area in Rishra and protesting against the stopping of the party's convoy Monday.

Adhikari, who met BJP MLA Biman Ghosh who was injured in Sunday's violent clash at the hospital, told reporters that he wanted to visit the trouble-torn pocket immediately but was not allowed to by the state administration which clamped the prohibitory order to prevent him from meeting the affected families.

"I wonder why Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee and other TMC leaders are allowed free access to the area, while opposition leaders are prevented from meeting the terrified local people and BJP party workers," he said.



# Delhi's source of drugs, Himachal now faces a surge in addiction

The state known for widespread illegal cultivation of cannabis and its derivatives -- hashish, charas and the very popular Malana Cream -- is now being flooded by 'chitta' and pharmaceutical drugs, quite like neighbouring Punjab

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Shimla, April 3: Himachal Pradesh, the picturesque state nestled in the Himalayas, is known for its natural beauty and tranquility. However, in recent years, the state has been grappling with a rising drug problem that is threatening to tarnish its reputation. It has become a major cause for concern, particularly among the youth.

The state which is also known for widespread illegal cultivation of cannabis and its derivatives -- hashish, charas and the very popular Malana Cream -- is now being flooded by 'chitta' and pharmaceutical drugs, quite like its neighbouring state, Punjab.

The Himachal Pradesh police data analysis of 'Register 29' maintained in all police stations to keep a track of drug peddlers reveals that about 60 per cent of those active in the state have taken to 'chitta'. It has added a new dimension to the drug menace in the state.

According to an official who spoke on condition of anonymity, Himachal currently houses 3,000 jail inmates, with 40.8 per cent of them incarcerated for drug-related offences. Of these inmates, 68 per cent are undertrials. The official revealed that the state's correctional department has requested the government to expand prison capacity to 5,000 in response to the escalating drug problem. Furthermore, there are over 8,000 ongoing NDPS cases in different courts, with approximately 7,000 awaiting trial.

Once upon a time, the state's drug headache was limited to illegal cannabis plantations in the Kullu Valley. According to sources, the demand is still high and the illegal business of the drug cartel is still booming. Himachal's ancient Aryan village of Malana is known all over the world as a haven for those looking for a high in the hills. An oily and aromatic strain of hashish called Malana Cream is considered to be the purest form of hashish and is derived by the locals from the cannabis grown illegally in the surrounding Parvati Valley. The international popularity of the drug still brings thousands of tourists to the village. The economy of the area has boomed following the explosion in the demand for Malana Cream.

Malana Cream is not limited to Himachal Pradesh because it is trafficked to other states across the country. According to reports, Himachal has also become a transit hub for drug trafficking due to its proximity to the Golden Crescent. The drug mafia are using innovative methods to smuggle drugs into the state, such as hiding drugs in vehicles or using drones to transport them. The situation has become so grave that the state government has declared a war against drugs, and several measures have been taken to curb this illegal activity.

"One of the reasons for the rise in drug addiction in Himachal is the lack of awareness among the people. Many youngsters are unaware of the dangers of drug abuse and the consequences it can have on their health and future. The government has initiated several awareness programmes to educate people about the dangers of drugs and the need to stay away from them," said Gurdeep Singh, who works on spreading awareness about drugs in the state and is a resident of Kullu.



# Himachal to get 2 more doppler radar stations

AGENCIES

Shimla, April 3: The Himachal Pradesh government is planning to set up two doppler radar stations in Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts to enhance weather monitoring capabilities, a spokesperson said here Monday.

This step will enhance the alert system to predict future weather trends, and alert meteorologists about upcoming precipitation, storms or severe weather, which will help to adopt the safety measures much in advance, a statement issued



Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said that the matter regarding the need of setting up these stations in the state has been raised with the Union government. He said that the state government is committed to leveraging cutting-edge technology for the benefit of the people.

The Doppler Radar Technology will enable the meteorologists to accurately forecast the arrival of precipitation with location, intensity and severity of the bad weather and to highlight whether there's a high or low probability of danger to life and property, the statement said.

The frequent occurrence of heavy rains, thunderstorms and hailstorms in Himachal, makes it even more pertinent to have these radar stations, it said. These stations will enhance the weather monitoring capabilities, enabling the administration to make early arrangements to mitigate damages caused by disasters and to ensure the safety of life.

Apart from this, the state government is also focusing on establishing high-tech seismic observatory-cum-data analysis centres in Kangra and Hamirpur districts with the help of the Union government, the spokesperson said.

The observatory and data analysis centres will aid in the early detection and warning of earthquakes, which can potentially save lives and minimise damages.

# HIMACHAL TO PROMOTE LAVENDER CULTIVATION



AGENCIES

Shimla, April 3: The Himachal Pradesh government is all set to collaborate with the Union government on the 'Aroma Mission', a lavender cultivation initiative that has proven to be a boon for farmers in Jammu and Kashmir.

With the climatic conditions of several regions in Himachal, including Chamba, being similar to those of Jammu and Kashmir, the state government aims to replicate the success of this initiative in Himachal in a big way.

CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu had a discussion with Union Minister of State for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences Jitendra Singh and the latter assured the state of providing technical support to farmers for the project. The CM said that the initiative has the potential to transform the lives of farmers and with the collaboration of the state and Union government, the 'Aroma Mission' could prove to be a game-changer for the farming sector in the region.

Chief Secretary Prabodh Saxena has been directed to take up this matter with the concerned Ministry and expedite the process of implementing the project on the ground. The state government is planning to adopt modern scientific methods of farming by replacing traditional practices. To accomplish this, the state government is seeking technical support from the Union government.

Under the 'Aroma Mission', lavender cultivation has already been proved to be a boon for farmers in Jammu and Kashmir.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kalimpong, April 3: Dhan Bahadur Tamang got up midway from his lunch and briskly walked down the hills towards his fields as he heard the familiar jarring sound of peacock calls.

The 54-year-old man carried a catapult and some pebbles, hoping to shoo away a muster of peafowls who have descended on his farm, to protect his 'dalle khursani' (pepper chilli variety grown in the hills) crop, from destruction.

The acreage under red hot pepper chilli which is one of the spiciest chillis is as a consequence may start shrinking, warned locals. The chilli, a favourite of many chefs, earned a geographical indicator tag two years back for the Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim hills.

The 'dalle' which has a range of 1,00,000 to 3,50,000 Scoville Heat Units (which measures spiciness of a chilli) as many locals call it fetch around ₹500 a kg and hence is a favourite with farmers.

# BENGAL TOPS IN COASTAL EROSION

COMPARED TO OTHER STATES, BENGAL DOES NOT HAVE A LARGE COASTLINE, BUT FACES MAXIMUM COASTAL EROSION DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE-INDUCED RISING SEA LEVELS

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, April 3: West Bengal, compared to other states, does not have a large coastline, as it spans just 210 km in the districts of East Midnapore and South 24 Parganas but faces the major problem of maximum coastal erosion due to climate change-induced rising sea levels.

This issue is cited by Dr Anjal Prakash, the research director with the Bharti Institute of Public Policy, Indian School of Business and one of the authors of the 6th assessment report of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Based on his observations and analysis about the findings of the same report, he feels that this issue of coastal erosion could have significant implications for communities living along the coast and



hence, impact the infrastructure and the economy of the region.

In fact, Prakash's apprehensions about coastal erosion in West Bengal was first highlighted in a report of the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR), under the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences, which claimed that West Bengal recorded maximum coastline erosion among all coastal Indian states between 1990 and 2016 at 63 per cent, followed by Puducherry at 57 per cent, Kerala at 45 per cent, and Tamil Nadu at 41 per cent.

In terms of land loss on this count during the same period, the quantum was 99 square km of land, as against land accretion of just 16 square km during the same period. Based on the observations highlighted in the 6th assessment report of the IPCC, the head of the energy economic programme of the Asian Institute of Technology and one of the authors of the same report, Joyashree Roy feels that the climatic hazards in the coastal belts and the resultant loss and damage are likely to aggravate further with every additional warming.

Experts are also of the opinion that the people who are mainly responsible for this coastal crisis in West Bengal are less affected than those who suffer without contributing to that crisis. According to them, apart from natural factors like sea level rise and storms which these coastal regions are prone to, there are several human-made factors which are often led-

ing to such coastal erosions.

The arbitrary real estate development (tourism-related constructions), flouting all norms, had been a major contributing factor adding to the crisis of coastal erosion. The fact that rampant and arbitrary tourism related real estate activities had been hampering the natural ecological ambience in the coastal areas of West Bengal was observed in a recent judgement by the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which ordered the immediate demolition of a private resort at Dulki village under Gosaba, one of the main deltaic islands in the Sundarbans region in South 24 Parganas.

While passing that order, the NGT observed that the said resort built in the critically vulnerable coastal area was constructed clearly violating the prescribed norms under coastal regulation zone notification on this count. Environment activists like SM Ghosh feel that this Dulki incident is not a one-off case and throughout the coastal belts of West Bengal, especially places having a tourist appeal, such violations are quite rampant.

According to experts, the coastal regions in West Bengal, especially those in the Sundarbans region, had always been facing an existential crisis for quite some time because of a number of climatic factors.

# Kalimpong's famed pepper chilli under threat from peacocks

HUNDREDS OF FARMERS IN RURAL AREAS OF KALIMPONG NEED TO PROTECT THEIR CROPS AND YET NOT HARM THE NATIONAL BIRD, WHICH IS PROTECTED BY LAW

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kalimpong, April 3: Dhan Bahadur Tamang got up midway from his lunch and briskly walked down the hills towards his fields as he heard the familiar jarring sound of peacock calls.

The 54-year-old man carried a catapult and some pebbles, hoping to shoo away a muster of peafowls who have descended on his farm, to protect his 'dalle khursani' (pepper chilli variety grown in the hills) crop, from destruction.

The acreage under red hot pepper chilli which is one of the spiciest chillis is as a consequence may start shrinking, warned locals. The chilli, a favourite of many chefs, earned a geographical indicator tag two years back for the Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim hills.

The 'dalle' which has a range of 1,00,000 to 3,50,000 Scoville Heat Units (which measures spiciness of a chilli) as many locals call it fetch around ₹500 a kg and hence is a favourite with farmers.



more. Peacocks would place their beaks angularly and pull out the stalks of planted crops, eating some and throwing the rest on the ground," Tamang said, after successfully shooing away the birds.

The peacocks generally live on big trees in the forests and adjoining fields and venture into the farmlands mostly during the March to June period, Maya Yonzon, another farmer and Tamang's neighbour in Rangul village, said.

"The terror of peacocks is such that many people have stopped growing pulses and 'dalle khursani', the bird's favourite crops," she said. However, like Tamang and Yonzon, most farmers do not use any lethal force on the marauding birds.

"Many of us are Buddhists. We do not kill innocent animals. Plus, it is our national bird. It is illegal to kill it," she said.

Superstition also acts as a deterrent against violence towards the bird. "A man in our area had once killed a peacock. After that, he was paralysed and lived a miserable life. We believe killing a peacock would

bring us back luck," Yonzon said. A senior forest official also corroborated the fact that peacocks are usually not harmed in this part of the country.

Kalimpong DFO Chittrak Bhattacharya said, "People in these parts generally do not kill peacocks. Still, we carry out awareness campaigns, urging people not to indulge in retaliatory killings."

The forest official said the department provides compensation for losses caused by big animals such as elephants, leopards and bison, but not those caused by birds. No census has as yet been conducted so far to ascertain the number of peacocks in the district, he said.

Kingshuk Mondal, an ornithologist, said more research is needed on the issue to find out a solution, which cannot be black-and-white.

"The matter needs to be studied thoroughly by the administration to find a holistic solution. It's not possible to erect fences to prevent the ingress of peacocks. Yet these crops need protection," Mondal, the founder-director of Bonding with Animals and Nature Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation, said.



of the day quote

Mr. Modi, You have taken 'supari' to pick pockets of the people MALLIKARJUN KHARGE | CONGRESS PRESIDENT

Haryana, which was a frontrunner in many fields when the Congress was in power in the state, has fallen behind in many developmental parameters BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA | CONGRESS LEADER

Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi used to say cleanliness is next to godliness. Just like when the heart is not pure, one cannot gain god's blessings, in the same way, if our body is not clean, we cannot gain god's blessings. How can one's body be clean when one is staying in an unclean place? RAM NATH KOVIND | FORMER PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

Man arrested

Gurugram: A 30-year-old man was arrested Monday for allegedly masquerading as a relative of a Prime Minister's Office (PMO) official and making indecent remarks and threatening a station house officer (SHO), police said. The arrested accused was identified as Satyaprakash Arya alias Siddharth, who was arrested from Sector-58 Gurugram. According to the police, SHO of Sector-65 police station Gurugram, Sudhir Kumar received a phone call on his official mobile number on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, and the caller introduced himself as a relative of a higher official of PMO and asked him to get a free entry in a Byob (Agha) located in Police Station Sector-65 jurisdiction.

3 killed, 4 injured

Chhatrapur (MP): Three persons were killed and four injured when their car collided with an SUV and fell into a gorge in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatrapur district Monday, police said. The accident took place on Sagar-Kanpur Highway, some 25 km from the district headquarters, around 9.30 am, an official said. The car collided with an SUV and fell into a gorge, killing three occupants, Gadhvi Malehra police station in-charge Tekram Kurmi said.

Biker arrested

Mumbai: Mumbai Police have arrested a 24-year-old man after his video of performing a dangerous stunt on a motorcycle with two girls went viral on social media, an official said. The accused is a history-sheeter with cases registered against him at Antop Hill and Wadala TT police stations, he said. "Recently, a video of the accused performing a dangerous stunt on his bike with two girls went viral on social media. The incident had occurred in the Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) area of the city. After the video surfaced, a case was registered against him and a team was formed to nab him," the official said.

Two held

New Delhi: A woman was shot at by her neighbor in Delhi's Siraspur area, a senior police official said Monday, adding that two persons have been arrested in connection. The victim identified as 30-year-old Ranju is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital, said the official. At around 12.15 a.m. on Monday, the Samaypur Badli police station received a PCR call regarding a woman was shot following which a police team rushed to the spot. By the time police reached the spot, the woman was already shifted to the Max Hospital in Shalimar Bagh.

Court orders 'waging war' charges against Bhatkal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 3: A Delhi court has ordered framing of charges against banned terrorist organisation Indian Mujahideen's (IM) co-founder Yasin Bhatkal and several of its operatives in a case of conspiring to wage war against India in 2012, noting that he was planning to plant a nuclear bomb in Surat town.

Additional Sessions Judge Shailender Malik observed that the digital data extracted from the devices seized from Bhatkal showed several video clips of jihadi literature including writings, justifying killing of non-Muslims in the name of jihad.

The court said there was enough evidence to put the accused on trial. In an order on March 31, the court said prima facie the accused, who were members of the IM, entered into criminal conspiracy to wage war against India. The judge said that the chats by Bhatkal revealed and reflected planning nuclear attack in Surat after evacuating Muslims.

"A chat between accused reflect IM planning for planting nuclear bomb in Surat town and evacuating Muslims from Surat town before executing such terrorist act... On minute analysis of the chat running into many pages would clearly show that Bhatkal was not only involved with other accused for carrying out earlier terrorist activities but also involved in conspiracy of future terrorist activities with the assistance of

Maoist in Nepal to collect arms, ammunition etc," the court observed. The court noted that Bhatkal was not only involved in larger conspiracy but was also instrumental in designing and preparing IEDs (improvised explosive devices). It noted that in furtherance of a criminal conspiracy, functionaries of the IM undertook large-scale recruitment of new members for commission of terrorist activities in various parts of India, with active aid and support from Pakistan-based associates as well as sleeper cells within the country to commit terrorist acts by bomb blasts at prominent places in India, especially Delhi.

Indian Mujahideen operatives and its front organisations had been receiving regular funds from abroad through hawala channels for their terrorist activities, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) told the court. It said the accused used to raise the issue of Babri Masjid, Gujarat riots and other alleged atrocities on Muslims to radicalise the minds of the Muslim youth in their effort to recruit them for terror activities.

The court framed charges against Bhatkal, Mohammad Danish Ansari, Mohd Aftab Alam, Imran Khan, Syed, Obaid Ur Rehman, Asaudullah Akhtar, Ujjair Ahmad, Mohd Tehsin Akhtar, Haider Ali and Zia Ur Rehman. The judge discharged Manzar Imam, Ariz Khan and Abdul Wahid Siddiqi, saying the prosecution failed to provide prima facie evidence against them.

ADDITIONAL SESSIONS JUDGE SHAILENDER MALIK OBSERVED THAT THE DIGITAL DATA EXTRACTED FROM THE DEVICES SEIZED FROM BHATKAL SHOWED SEVERAL VIDEO CLIPS OF JIHADI LITERATURE INCLUDING WRITINGS, JUSTIFYING KILLING OF NON-MUSLIMS IN THE NAME OF JIHAD. THE COURT NOTED THAT BHATKAL WAS NOT ONLY INVOLVED IN LARGER CONSPIRACY BUT WAS ALSO INSTRUMENTAL IN DESIGNING AND PREPARING IEDS (IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES)



LS ADJOURNED TILL APRIL 5

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 3: Lok Sabha proceedings were adjourned for the day on Monday after opposition parties staged a protest over the Adani issue.

The House will reconvene on Wednesday, with Tuesday being a holiday on account of Mahavir Jayanti. Earlier, the House was adjourned till 2 pm after obituary references to incumbent MP Girish Bapat and former MP Innocent, who passed away recently.

Bapat, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP from Pune, died on March 29, while Innocent, a former independent MP from the Chalakudy con-



stituency in Kerala's Thrissur, passed away on March 26. The Lok Sabha now adjourns for a few hours as a mark of respect for a sitting member who has passed away.

Earlier, the House used to adjourn for the day after paying obituary to the member. When the House reconvened at 2 pm, the opposition members kept sloganeering against the government, demanding a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe into allegations involving industrialist Gautam Adani's business group.

The Chair adjourned the House amidst the din.



Having been deceived repeatedly, people have now realised that it is not difficult but impossible for the SP to defeat the BJP. To defeat the BJP, BSP is necessary MAYAWATI | BSP CHIEF

BHUTAN KING ARRIVES

Bhutan king Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck Monday arrived in India for a two-day visit. He was welcomed by Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar, who received him at the airport



Tourists visit the Taj Mahal in Agra, Monday

PTI PHOTO

CBI must free India of corruption: PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 3: There is no dearth of political will today to act against corruption and officers should take action against the corrupt, however powerful, without any hesitation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Monday.

Addressing a gathering at the diamond jubilee celebrations of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the prime minister said the agency's key responsibility is to free India from corruption, which is the biggest roadblock to democracy and justice, and added it should not be distracted by those trying to tarnish its image. It is the desire of the people of the country that no corrupt should be spared, he said.

He said those who benefitted from corruption for decades have created an ecosystem which attacks probe agencies. But the agencies should not be deterred by stories about the power of the corrupt and their ecosystem to tarnish them.

"These people will keep distracting you, but you have to focus on your work. No corrupt person should be spared. There should be no laxity in our efforts. This is the wish of the country, this is the wish of the people of the country. The country, law and constitution are



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being presented a memento by CBI Director Subodh Kumar Jaiswal during the inauguration of diamond jubilee celebrations of CBI in New Delhi

PTI PHOTO

"CBI's name is on everyone's lips. It is like a brand for truth and justice. Even at the panchayat level, if some major crime happens, people want it to be referred to the CBI

NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER

with you," the prime minister said. "Today there is no dearth of political will to take action against corruption in the country," Modi said and asked officers to take action against the corrupt, however powerful, without any hesitation.

Referring to international transactions and the movement of people, goods and services on a large scale, even outside geographical boundaries, and its economic power is growing while those who create obstacles are also rising.

He warned that attacks on India's social fabric, its unity and brotherhood, and its economic interests and institutions would also increase. "Corruption money will be spent on this," he said as he stressed the need to understand and study the multinational nature of crime and corruption.

DELHI EXCISE SCAM

Court extends Sisodia's judicial custody

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, April 3: A special court Monday extended the judicial custody of former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia till April 17 in a corruption case related to the alleged Delhi excise scam.

Special Judge M K Nagpal, who had dismissed Sisodia's bail application on Friday saying he was "prima facie the architect" and played the "most important and vital role" in the alleged scam, extended his custody after he was produced before the court. Sisodia's

judicial custody was to expire on Monday.

The judge passed the order on an application by the CBI claiming the investigation was at a crucial stage in the corruption case linked to the "scam". Sisodia was arrested for alleged corruption in the formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped liquor policy for 2021-22.

The court is scheduled to hear on April 5 the arguments on Sisodia's bail application in the money laundering case, also linked to the alleged scam. The court had



On March 31 dismissed Sisodia's bail application, saying he was "prima facie the architect" in the

criminal conspiracy behind alleged payment of advance kickbacks of around Rs 90-100 crore, meant for him and his colleagues in the Delhi government.

The court had observed the release of the senior AAP leader, who is in custody since February 26, at the moment will "adversely affect the ongoing investigation". The CBI had arrested Sisodia for alleged corruption in the formulation and execution of the now-scrapped Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22 on February 26 after several rounds of questioning.

Figures are desirable but facts are stubborn

The annual budget proposals of the Gujarat government presented in the State Assembly is a dream document that mirrors its sacred resolve to better the lives of its people but it is the annual report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) which provides an insight into its governance ethos.

The CAG in its State Finance Audit Report presented in the House last week has pointed out that funds of Rs 10,747 crores were lying locked in 176 incomplete projects in the state. Interestingly, the bulk of these incomplete projects-159 and 17- belong to two departments, Roads and Buildings and the Narmada Water Resources and Kalpasar. "Blocking the funds

in incomplete projects impinges negatively on the quality of expenditure and deprives state of intended benefits for prolonged periods", it states.

Though the report does not delineate on details, it has pointed out that some of these projects go back almost a decade though the highest number of pending projects belong to 2019-20 where 57 projects worth Rs 4129 crores were still incomplete. Of the total outlay of Rs 10,747 crores, around Rs 7,477 crores had already been spent by March 31, 2022, it noted.

The CAG has also recommended a review of all the loss making state Public Sector Undertakings (SPSUs) with clear cut advice to either revive or wind them up. It



Gujarat files RK MISRA

was perhaps this that was playing on official minds when the Gujarat government made known in its budget proposals for 2023-24, its intent of disinvestment of PSUs to raise funds.

In the CAG report for 2021-22 presented in the State Assembly last week, it has been pointed out that during the period under review there was neither disin-

vestment of SPSUs nor was any of them privatized. The governance watchdog audited the performance of 100 of them including 64 government companies (GC), four statutory corporations and 32 government controlled other companies (GCOOC). Of the 67 government companies and statutory corporations, 43 earned profit, 16 reported losses and eight had neither profit nor losses.

The CAG has also red flagged the decline in the contribution of the SPSUs to the state GDP from 8.75 per cent in 2019-20 to 8.35 per cent in 2021-22 though there was a corresponding increase in turnover by 13.85 per cent over the same period.

The CAG has once again stressed on the need for creating a frame-

work to ensure long-term sustainability of debt and enhancement of capital expenditure to spur economic growth. The report cites that the total outstanding liabilities of the state has grown from Rs 2.56 lakh crores in 2017-18 to Rs 3.80 lakh crores in 2021-22-an increase of 6.40 per cent over the previous year- though the total outstanding liabilities to GSDP had decreased from 19.29 per cent in 2017-18 to 18.44 per cent in 2021-22.

The CAG red flagging of concern on Conservation and Management of coastal Ecosystems has mention of the fact that 9 of the 13 coastal projects cleared by the Gujarat Coastal Zone Management Authority had not been screened properly and had yet been cleared.



Ranchi, April 3: Five Maoists, including a commander carrying a reward of Rs 25 lakh, were killed in an encounter in the Lawalong police station area in Jharkhand's Chatra district on Monday.

The slain Maoist commander has been identified as Gautam Paswan. Police are conducting extensive search operations in the area after recovering a large cache of arms and ammunition, including several AK-47 and INSAS rifles.

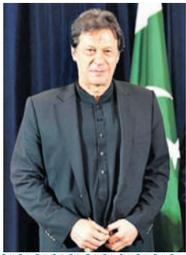
Confirming the incident, SP Rakesh Ranjan said that the number of Maoists killed could be more and complete information will be revealed after the search operation concludes.

According to sources, Chatra district police and paramilitary troops were conducting a search operation in the forests of the area adjoining Palamu district when the Maoists ambushed the security forces.

The security forces retaliated and the ceasefire continued for at least three hours. While five deaths have been confirmed, some Maoists managed to escape. Locals identified the eliminated extremists as Ajit Oraon aka Charles, Amar Ganju aka Dhuru, Ajay Yadav aka Nandu, Sanjit Bhuiyan aka Sagar and Gautam Paswan.

Squads of CRPF CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) and police from Palamu and Chatra were involved in the operation.

# international



Today, we stand at a turning point in our Constitutional history where we can be like Turkiye or become another Myanmar. Everyone must choose whether they stand, as PTI does, with Constitution, rule of law and democracy; or with a corrupt mafia, law of the jungle, and fascism

## PARIS TO BAN E-SCOOTERS

Parisians have overwhelmingly voted to banish the French capital's ubiquitous four-wheeled electric scooters from their streets. The 15,000 opinion-dividing mini-machines are now expected to vanish from central Paris at the end of August when the city's contracts with the three operators expire



### of the day quote

France must improve the availability of palliative care and there would be a draft bill by the end of the summer on whether some form of assisted dying should be allowed

The internal argument in Israel doesn't harm and won't harm our determination or intensity or our capabilities to act against our enemies on all fronts, in any place and at any time necessary

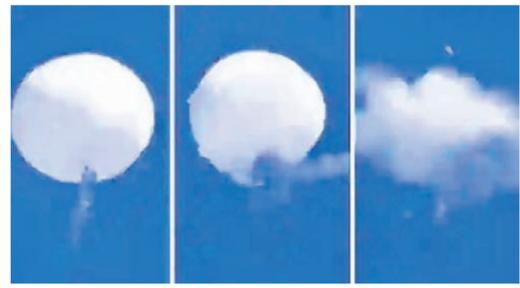
Germany will have to do a better job at clamping down on "irregular migration" and deporting those who don't legally reside in the country

## Chinese spy balloon gathered info from US military sites: Report

The intelligence China collected was mostly from electronic signals, which can be picked up from weapons systems or include communications from base personnel

Washington, April 3: A Chinese spy balloon that flew across the US was able to gather intelligence from several sensitive American military sites and transmit it back to Beijing in real-time, despite the Biden administration's efforts to block it, a media report said Monday. A suspected Chinese spy balloon said to be the size of three buses, was spotted over the airspace of the United States in late January. China was able to control the balloon so it could make multiple passes over some of the sites (at times flying figure-eight forma-

tions) and transmit the information it collected back to Beijing in real time, NBC News reported, quoting three unnamed officials. The intelligence China collected was mostly from electronic signals, which can be picked up from weapons systems or include communications from base personnel, rather than images, the officials were quoted as saying in the report. The three officials said China could have gathered much more intelligence from sensitive sites if not for the Biden administration's efforts to move around potential targets and obscure the balloon's ability to pick up their electronic signals by stopping them from



broadcasting signals, the report said. The balloon first entered US airspace from Alaska on January 28, according to the Biden ad-

ministration. Over the next four days, it was flying over the Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana, where the US has some of its nuclear assets. The development further strained the already tense bilateral ties between the US and China, with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken abruptly postponing his key visit to Beijing in February this year. The US National Security Council has referred NBC News to the Defence Department for comment. In its response, Beijing maintained that the balloon was a Chinese "civilian airship" which had deviated from its planned route. "The airship is from China. It is a civilian airship used for research, mainly meteorological purposes," the spokesperson of

the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement posted on the Chinese foreign ministry's website. On February 4, the US shot down the balloon off the coast of South Carolina. "This afternoon, at the direction of President Biden, US fighter aircraft assigned to US Northern Command successfully brought down the high altitude surveillance balloon launched by and belonging to the People's Republic of China over the water off the coast of South Carolina in US airspace," Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin had said. US officials said they tried to reconstruct the balloon from the debris recovered.

## Russia blames Ukraine for blowing up war blogger

AGENCIES

Moscow, April 3: Russian authorities blamed Ukrainian intelligence agencies Monday for orchestrating a bombing at a St. Petersburg cafe that killed a Russian military blogger who fervently supported Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and arrested a suspect accused of involvement in the attack. Ukrainian authorities did not directly respond to the accusation, but President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he doesn't think about events in Russia and a senior official earlier described the bombing as part of Russia's internal turmoil. Over 30 people were wounded, and 10 of them remain in grave condition from the blast, according to the authorities. Investigators have said they believe that the bomb was hidden in a bust of the blogger that was given to him just before the explosion. A video showed Tatarsky making jokes about the bust and putting it on the table next to him. Russian authorities Monday announced the arrest of Darya Trepova, a 26-year-old St. Petersburg resident who has been seen on video presenting Tatarsky with the bust. Last year, Trepova was detained by police for taking part in antiwar rallies. The Interior Ministry released a brief video showing Trepova telling a police officer that she brought the statuette that exploded to the cafe. When asked who gave it to her, she said she would explain it later. According to Russian media reports, Trepova told investigators that she was asked to deliver the bust, but didn't know that it was hidden in it. The National Anti-Terrorist Committee, which coordinates counterterrorism operations, said that the bombing was "planned by Ukrainian special services" and noted that Trepova was an "active supporter" of jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. Navalny, the Kremlin's fiercest foe who had exposed official corruption and organized massive antigovernment protests, is serving a nine-year fraud sentence that he has denounced as a political



People lay flowers near the side of an explosion at the "Street Bar" cafe with the St. Isaac's Cathedral in the background in St. Petersburg, Russia

WOMAN SHOWN IN POLICE VIDEO ADMITTING TO DELIVERING BOMB  
ARRESTED WOMAN OPPOSED RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE  
BOMB WAS HIDDEN IN FIGURINE SHE GIFTED THE BLOGGER  
KYIV'S INTELLIGENCE SERVICES ORGANISED THE HIT - MOSCOW  
UKRAINE DENIES INVOLVEMENT, CITES 'DOMESTIC TERRORISM'

what it describes as "the special military operation" in Ukraine. Moscow has offered a series of explanations for the invasion, denounced by Ukraine and the West as an unprovoked act of aggression, while providing little if any evidence for the charges. "Russia has faced the Kyiv regime, which has supported terrorist activities," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "That is why the special military operation is being conducted." Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Russian millionaire owner of the Wagner Group military contractor spearheading Moscow's offensive in eastern Ukraine, said he owned the cafe and allowed patriotic groups to use it for meetings. He said he doubts the Ukrainian authorities' involvement in the bombing, saying the attack was likely launched by a "group of radicals" unrelated to the government in Kyiv. Zelenskyy brushed off questions about the bombing Monday. "I don't think about what is happening in St. Petersburg or Moscow. Russia should think about this. I am thinking about our country," Zelenskyy told journalists. While not claiming responsibility for various explosions, bombings and other attacks within Russia since the Feb. 24, 2022, invasion, Ukrainian authorities have often greeted them jubilantly and insisted on Ukraine's right to launch such assaults.

### SHORT TAKES

#### UK teachers reject govt's pay offer

London: Teachers in England rejected the government's latest pay offer Monday, raising the spectre of more strikes and further disruptions for parents and children as double-digit inflation sparks labour unrest across the country. News that teachers had voted to reject the offer came as UK Passport workers kicked off a five-week strike that threatens to cause headaches for travellers ahead of the summer holiday season.

#### Lanka welcomes over 1.25L tourists in March

Colombo: Sri Lanka welcomed over 1.25 lakh tourists in March this year, with Russians and Indians accounting for the bulk of the arrivals, the country's tourism department said Monday. The tourism sector is the main source of foreign exchange earnings for Sri Lanka. However, the onset of the pandemic in 2020 severely crippled this sector. It was one of the major reasons for Sri Lanka's economic travails.

#### Teacher shot by student files lawsuit

Richmond (US): A first-grade Virginia teacher who was shot and seriously wounded by her 6-year-old student filed a lawsuit Monday seeking \$40 million in damages from school officials, accusing them of gross negligence for allegedly ignoring multiple warnings on the day of the shooting that the boy had a gun and was in a "violent mood." Abby Zwerner, a 25-year-old teacher at Richneck Elementary School in Newport News, Virginia was shot in the hand and chest January 6 as she sat at a reading table in her classroom. She spent nearly two weeks in the hospital and had four surgeries since the shooting.

#### Marin suffers defeat in Finland election

Helsinki: Incumbent Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin has conceded defeat after the opposition National Coalition Party won the parliamentary elections. According to the preliminary results reported by Finnish national broadcaster Yle, the National Coalition Party won 48 seats in parliament, an increase of 10 from four years ago, followed by the Finns Party with 46 seats, an increase of seven. Marin's Social Democratic Party won 43 seats, an increase of three, reports Xinhua news agency. Voter turnout Sunday was 71.9 per cent, slightly less than in 2019. Shortly after National Coalition Party leader Petteri Orpo claimed victory, Marin conceded the election.

#### Philippines names 4 new camps for US forces amid China fury

Manila: The Philippine government Monday identified four new military camps, including some across the sea from Taiwan, where rotating batches of American forces will be allowed to be stationed indefinitely despite strong objections from China. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s administration announced in February his approval of an expansion of the US military presence to four additional Philippine military bases from the five existing sites under the 2014 Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement between the longtime treaty allies. It dovetails with the Biden administration's efforts to strengthen an arc of military alliances in the Indo-Pacific to better counter China, including in any future confrontation over Taiwan. The new sites identified by Marcos' office include a Philippine navy base in Santa Ana and an international airport in Lal-lo, both in northern Cagayan province.

## CHILD MARRIAGE IS NO ESCAPE FROM POVERTY

Marrying before the age of 18 is a violation of human rights. Even though there are laws in place to prevent it, this damaging practice continues in many countries

AGENCIES

Bandung (Indonesia), April 3: Child marriage has been going on for generations but is harmful. One of the main drivers is to escape poverty but that rarely is the case for victims. Child marriage has the potential to cause immense long-term suffering. Young brides have a lower chance of continuing their education and are at a higher risk of domestic violence. Teenage girls are also at a greater risk of death due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth

than women in their 20s. Their offspring are more likely to be stillborn or die during the first month of life. UNICEF said "over the next decade, up to 110 million more girls will be at risk of becoming child brides as a result of the pandemic." Child marriage endures globally: The problem persists due to cultural and social norms, poverty, lack of education, and gender inequality. In some societies, child marriage is seen as a way to secure a girl's future and protect her from poverty or sexual promiscuity. In other cases, it may be viewed as a way to preserve traditions or customs. These cultural and social habits can be very difficult to change, as they are deeply ingrained in the community. Poverty is also a major contributing factor, as families may see child marriage as a way to alleviate financial burdens or gain economic benefits, such as dowries or financial support from the groom's family.



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGES

Covid-19 made it worse The pandemic worsened child marriage globally by many factors. Economic impact: The pandemic caused a significant economic downturn, leading to increased poverty and unemployment, making it difficult for families to meet their basic needs. Families saw marrying off their daughters as a way to alleviate financial burdens because of significant economic downturn. School closures: Because of the

economic impact, many parents could no longer afford to support their daughters' education. Marrying them off helps alleviate their financial burden. Death of a parent: The death of a parent because of Covid can also increase the likelihood that a female orphan will be married off, since family members may find it hard to support her. Who can help prevent it? Religious leaders can use their moral authority to promote change

## China 'renames' 11 places in Arunachal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, April 3: China has released a third set of names in Chinese, Tibetan and pinyin characters for Arunachal Pradesh, as part of its efforts to reemphasise its claim over the Indian state. The official names of the 11 places were released Sunday by the ministry, which also gave precise coordinates, including two land areas, two residential areas, five mountain peaks and two rivers and listed the category of places' names and their subordinate administrative districts, state-run

Global Times reported Monday. This is the third batch of standardised geographical names for Arunachal Pradesh issued by China's civil affairs ministry. The first batch of the standardised names of six places in Arunachal was released in 2017, and the second batch of 15 places was issued in 2021. India has previously dismissed the Chinese move of renaming some places in Arunachal Pradesh, asserting that the state has "always been" and will "always be" an integral part of India and that assigning "invented" names does not alter this fact. "Arunachal Pradesh has al-

ways been, and will always be an integral part of India. Assigning invented names to places in Arunachal Pradesh does not alter this fact," he had said. The Global Times, which is part of the ruling Communist Party's mouthpiece People's Daily group of publications, quoted Chinese experts as saying that the announcement of names is a legitimate move and China's sovereign right to standardise the geographical names. The first set of names was announced by China in 2017 days after the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh. They can advocate to prevent early marriage and promote alternative rites of passage that celebrate girls' coming of age without requiring marriage. Together with community leaders, they can help to identify and intervene in cases of child marriage and advocate for the provision of services and support to prevent it. Parents and other adult relatives can take the lead to give young girls more options in their life so marriage is not always the solution to the adults' problem. Marrying off girls young costs trillions of dollars, according to the World Bank. Addressing child marriage requires several approaches. Those underlying factors and works can change social norms and attitudes towards girls and women. Providing girls with access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities along with strengthening child protection systems and enforcing laws that prohibit child marriage are essential.



**The residential market remained resilient in the face of rising interest rates and prices as sales level sustained in the first quarter of the year**  
SHISHIR BAJAJ | CHAIRMAN & MD, KNIGHT FRANK INDIA

**JIOCINEMA CLOCKS RECORD VIEWS**

The broadcasting joint venture of Indian conglomerate Reliance Industries said Monday its JioCinema app saw a record 1.47 billion digital video views on the opening weekend of the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket tournament, as well as 50 million mobile app downloads



**of the day quote**

The claims of investors in the matter are being dealt with and settled by NSE as per its bye-laws. As on March 20, 2023, an amount of ₹414.24 crore has been paid to 34,497 clients from Investor Protection Fund of NSE

**PANKAJ CHAUDHARY** | MINISTER OF STATE FOR FINANCE

Going forward, the key risk factors to watch out for, which may have an impact on the credit ratings of local companies, will be the slowdown in global demand and monetary tightening in the global markets

**GURPREET CHHTWAL** | MD, CRISIL RATINGS

I look forward to building Avis India as the best mobility company in India through innovation and collaboration

**AMAN NAAGAR** | MD, AVIS INDIA

**Tax kitty swells 20% YoY**

FOR 2023-24 FISCAL, WHICH BEGAN APRIL 1, THE DIRECT TAX MOP-UP TARGET IS ₹18.23L-CR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, April 3:** Gross direct tax collection in 2022-23 rose by around 20 per cent to ₹19.68 lakh crore, exceeding the government's revised collection target.

Buoyed by personal income tax collection, the gross collection has exceeded the revised estimates (RE), set February 1, by ₹2.41 lakh crore or by 16.97 per cent.

After adjusting for refunds, the net income tax paid by individuals and corporates, showed an increase of 18 per cent to ₹16.61 lakh crore during the fiscal, which ended March 31, 2023.

The net direct tax collections have exceeded the BE by 16.97 per cent and RE by 0.69 per cent, the ministry added.

The government had set a budget target of ₹14.20 lakh crore for direct tax collection, which was revised upwards to ₹16.50 lakh crore in the RE.

For 2023-24 fiscal, which began April 1, the direct tax mop-up target is ₹18.23 lakh crore.

"The Gross collection (provisional) of Direct Taxes (before



- GROSS DIRECT TAX COLLECTION ROSE BY AROUND 20% TO ₹19.68TRN
- NET DIRECT TAX COLLECTIONS GROW 18% TO ₹16.61TRN, EXCEEDING RE
- IT HAS EXCEEDED THE BE BY 16.97% AND RE BY 0.69%
- REFUNDS WORTH OVER ₹3.07 LAKH CRORE WERE ISSUED

adjusting for refunds) for the FY 2022-23 stands at ₹19.68 lakh crore showing a growth of 20.33 per cent over the gross collection of ₹16.36 lakh crore in FY 2021-22," the finance ministry said in a

statement. Refunds worth over ₹3.07 lakh crore were issued during the fiscal, an increase of over 37 per cent over the 2021-22 fiscal. During 2022-23 fiscal, gross cor-

**Direct tax collection reflects the improving business performance leveraging on the economic reforms and rebound from the pandemic**  
**GOKUL CHAUDHRI** | PARTNER, DELOITTE INDIA

porate tax collection grew 16.91 per cent at over ₹10.04 lakh crore. Gross personal I-T collection jumped 24.23 per cent to over ₹9.60 lakh crore.

Deloitte India President Tax Gokul Chaudhri said direct tax collection reflects the improving business performance leveraging on the economic reforms and rebound from the pandemic.

Tax Connect Advisory, Partner Vivek Jalan said Income Tax Act and Portal have also seen a substantial revamping in the last few years.

Expansion of TDS/TCS provisions helps track the transactions from the source and up the value stream. These led to substantial gains in terms of collection, Jalan added.

**BIGGEST SPIKE IN A YEAR**

**Oil rockets as OPEC+ surprise output cuts rattle crude markets**

*This spurt will reverse the softening in rates witnessed in the basket of crude oil that India imports*

AGENCIES

**London, April 3:** Oil prices surged Monday, posting the biggest daily rise in nearly a year, after a surprise announcement by OPEC+ to cut more production jolted markets.

Brent crude was trading at \$84.22 a barrel, up \$4.33, or 5.4%, after touching the highest in a month at \$86.44 earlier in the session. US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$79.84 a barrel, up \$4.17, or 5.5%, after earlier hitting the highest level since late January.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and their allies including Russia shook markets by announcing further production cuts of about 1.16 million barrels per day (bpd) Sunday.

The group, known as OPEC+, had been expected to maintain its earlier decision to cut output by 2 million bpd until December at its monthly meeting Monday. The pledges bring the total volume of cuts by OPEC+ to 3.66 million bpd according to Reuters calculations, equal to 3.7% of global demand.

As a result, Goldman Sachs lowered its end-2023 production forecast for OPEC+ by 1.1 million bpd and raised its Brent price forecasts to \$95 and \$100 a barrel for 2023 and 2024, respectively, it said in a note.

The Indian basket was hovering in the range of \$73-74 per barrel for most of the second half of last month and had brightened prospects of a cut in petrol and diesel prices. Prices were last changed May 22 when the government cut excise duty to give relief to consumers from a spike in retail rates that followed a surge in international oil prices.

The Biden administration said the



move announced by the producers was unadvisable and some analysts questioned OPEC+'s rationale for the extra production cut.

The decision may mean OPEC+ still sees economic storm clouds on the horizon, Jorge Leon, senior vice president at consultancy Rystad Energy said. "These cuts may be signaling that OPEC+ believes that there are enough recessionary indicators in the market... (and) will further tighten the oil market for the rest of the year and could push prices above \$100 per barrel".

Brent fell last month towards \$70 a barrel, the lowest in 15 months, on concerns that a global banking crisis and rising interest rates would hit demand despite lower OPEC oil output in March due to a halt in some of Iraq's exports.

Given the turmoil in the market, some Chinese refiners are starting to mull spot purchases from suppliers including Latin America, the US and West Africa to make up for a shortfall should OSPs from Saudi Aramco and other producers become too expensive, according to sources.

It comes at a complicated juncture in the market, with concerns about weaker consumption in the US and Europe gathering pace should a recession coincide with a wave of demand-sapping refinery strikes in France and, on the upside, expectations that consumption in China will pick up.

**SHORT TAKES**

**Unclaimed deposits**

**New Delhi:** About ₹35,000 crore unclaimed deposits as of February 2023 were transferred to the Reserve Bank by public sector banks (PSBs) in respect of deposits which have not been operated for 10 years or more, Parliament was informed Monday. These unclaimed deposits belong to 10.24 crore accounts transferred to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as of the end of February 2023. State Bank of India (SBI) tops the chart of unclaimed deposits worth ₹8,086 crore followed by Punjab National Bank ₹5,340 crore, Canara Bank ₹4,558 crore and Bank of Baroda ₹3,904 crore.

**SAIL sees record crude steel output**

**New Delhi:** State-owned SAIL has produced a record 18.28 million tonne (MT) of crude steel during financial year 2022-23, registering a year-on-year rise of 5.3 per cent. The production of hot metal also rose by 3.6 per cent to 19.40 MT during the financial year ended March 31. In a statement, the Steel Authority of India (SAIL) said it has achieved the best-ever annual production during FY23.

**SpiceJet hives off cargo, logistics biz**

**Mumbai:** SpiceJet Ltd Monday said it has hived off its cargo and logistics business SpiceXpress into a separate entity - SpiceXpress and Logistics Pvt Ltd, from April 1. The move results in a one-time gain of ₹2,555.77 crore for SpiceJet, substantially reducing its negative net worth, the company said. It also paves the way for SpiceXpress to raise funds independently, SpiceJet said. The decision to hive off SpiceXpress is in sync with the company's long-term business plan and will unlock significant valuation of the logistic business, SpiceJet Ltd Chairman Ajay Singh said.

**IOC posts stellar show in FY23**

**New Delhi:** State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) Monday said its fuel market share climbed to 43 per cent in the fiscal year that ended March 31 during which all its divisions posted stellar performance. IOC, the nation's top oil firm, added almost 1,800 petrol pumps, clocked highest ever throughput at its refineries, posted a 14 per cent jump in fuel sales and registered the highest-ever pipeline expansion during 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023), the firm said in a statement. The company owns about a third of India's oil refining capacity and about half of the nation's fuel retailing infrastructure.

**Govt mulls merging hydro power units to create single firm**

REUTERS

**New Delhi, April 3:** The Indian government is considering selling state-owned NTPC Ltd's two hydro power firms to NHPC Ltd to create a single hydro power company that would improve efficiency and cut costs, power minister RK Singh told Reuters.

One large hydro power company would help meet high demand at night when solar projects do not run, he said. Solar power projects meet nearly a-fifth of India's peak-hour energy demand during the day.

"We have a number of hydro PSUs (Public Sector Undertakings). We are thinking whether these hydro companies can come together as a hydro large PSU. Then it becomes a specialised hydro company," Power and Renewable Energy Minister Singh said in an interview Monday.

NTPC, the country's largest power producer, acquired the two hydro companies - THDC India Ltd (THDCIL) and NEEPCO - three years ago for about \$1.34 billion under a consolidation plan by the Indian government.

The power ministry's proposal to create a single company is aimed at better management and expertise, besides reducing costs and managing related challenges.

Hydropower plants in India take decades to come on stream as they face opposition from environment and religious groups.

Hydro power's share of India's energy has fallen to 11% from 49% 15 years ago due in part to protests by different groups and land clearances.

**AMID DEMAND RESILIENCE**

**Factory activity at 3-month high**

*The survey supports views that Asia's third-largest economy is better placed than many to weather the impact of a potential global downturn*

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, April 3:** Manufacturing activities in India touched a three-month high in March boosted by faster expansions in new orders and output amid demand resilience and easing of cost pressures, according to a monthly survey. The seasonally adjusted S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 55.3 in February to 56.4 in March, signalling the strongest improvement in operating conditions in 2023 so far.

The March PMI data pointed to an improvement in overall operating conditions for the 21st straight month. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 indicates contraction.

"Underlying demand for Indian goods remained strong in March, underscored by the quickest upturn in factory orders for three months. Hence, production continued to expand at a robust clip and firms stepped up their stock building efforts," said Pollyanna De Lima, Economics Associate Director at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

While input cost inflation retreated to its second-lowest mark



- ▶ Output grew at the strongest pace since December
- ▶ Hiring contracts for the first time in 13 months
- ▶ Optimism about future output slipped to an eight-month low
- ▶ Indian economy forecast to grow 6.9% this fiscal year and 6.0% next

in 2-1/2 years, firms did pass on some of the pressures of greater labour and raw material costs to customers. The output prices sub index rose to 52.0 from 51.8.

Subsequently, goods producers concentrated on rebuilding their stocks. Robust increases in buying levels in recent months supported a near-record accumulation of input inventories in March.

On the prices front, close to 96 per cent firms signalled no change in cost burdens since February.

"Although selling prices increased further at the end of the last fiscal quarter, the rate of inflation was moderate and broadly

similar to February. Several panellists reportedly left their fees unchanged amid efforts to boost sales," Lima said. The Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation was 6.52 per cent in January and 6.44 per cent in February.

The new orders sub-index, which tracks overall demand, rose last month and foreign demand expanded at a quicker rate from February. Output grew at the strongest pace since December.

However, that improvement did not translate to increased hiring as job market conditions darkened, slipping back into contraction for the first time in 13 months although the pace of job shedding was minimal.

"Companies reported abundant capacity among themselves and their suppliers. Pending workloads expanded only marginally in March, hindering job creation," Lima said.

Optimism about future output slipped to an eight-month low due to concerns surrounding competitiveness and general inflation.

**From fast food to autos, India's digitally connected users lure investors**

*With the cheapest mobile data rates in the world, thanks to intense competition among telecom providers, and the explosive growth of social media and personal entertainment, Indian consumers are going digital at a breakneck pace*

REUTERS

**Mumbai, April 3:** Mumbai resident Shivam Vahia cannot remember the last time he left home for shop. He spends about ₹30,000 (\$364) a month buying necessities like groceries, clothes and gadgets, all by tapping a few buttons on his mobile phone.

"My only offline spends are bars and restaurants, when I go to meet friends," said the 24-year-old engineering graduate.

Vahia is one among India's young and aspirational 1.4 billion population, whose propensity for online spending has attracted global companies and digital platforms. And as private consumption underpins economic growth in India,

financial investors are targeting new ways to tap into it.

China saw a jump in consumption from 2006 when, as per World Bank data, its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) crossed \$2,000. India crossed that threshold in 2021, according to the bank's latest available data, which could put it on a similar growth trajectory even though weak job growth and income inequalities in the country pose a risk to this outcome.

India has nearly 700 million smartphone users, who, rating agency ICRA estimates, consume an average of almost 17 GB in mobile data per day, higher than the 13 GB in China and the 15 GB in North America.



**PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL**

For investors, not only new-age Indian tech companies but also traditional consumer firms that are adding digital capabilities offer a route to tap the consumption theme.

Opportunities for gaining exposure poured in for them when platforms that cater to online commerce, including food delivery specialist Zomato, FSN E-Commerce Ventures, which runs beauty and

fashion sales platform Nykaa, SoftBank-backed logistics firm Delhivery, and payment firm Paytm, listed recently in the Indian markets.

Traditional businesses currently suffering from poor penetration and low per capita usage offer an-

**India's online shopping market hit \$50 billion in 2022, with an online shopper base of 180-190 million - the third largest in the world after China and the US**

other promising avenue for investors. India's per capita consumption of food was at \$314 in 2020 compared to \$884 for China, while that of clothing stood at \$53.9 versus \$212.9 for China, data from CLSA showed. Per capita spending on health related items in India was \$56.8 in 2020 and \$389.3 for China, the data showed.

**FOREIGN INVESTORS JUMP IN**

With private consumption accounting for 60% of India's \$3.5 trillion GDP, foreign portfolio investors have been quick to latch on.

They pumped in a net \$2.7 billion in four key consumption sectors - automobiles, consumer durables, consumer services and FMCG, in the first 11 months of the financial year 2022-23 (April-March), according to data from India's National Securities Depository Ltd.

In contrast, the broader Indian equity markets saw an outflow of \$5.9 billion.

To be sure, it has not been all smooth sailing for investors as they chased India's consumption boom. Shares of the new-age technology companies have tumbled since their listings, and while they now trade at more reasonable valuations, they are still pricey compared to the industry median. And most traditional consumer-focused companies also trade at valuations above the benchmark index.

**Investors can play the online and digital consumption boom in India directly via the tech companies enabling this space, or indirectly via supported industries such as logistics or fintech**  
**KUNJAL GALA** | HEAD, GLOBAL EMERGING MARKETS, FEDERATED HERMES

HAPPY HOMECOMING FOR CSK Titans test awaits Delhi



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, April 3: Ruturaj Gaikwad (57, 31b, 3x4, 4x6), Devon Conway (47, 29b, 5x4, 2x6) and Moeen Ali (4/26) starred for Chennai Super Kings to help the team post a 12-run win over Lucknow Super Giants at their fortress - the MA Chidambaram stadium - in their opening home match of the ongoing IPL here Monday.

Gaikwad slammed his second successive fifty and shared 110 runs for the opening wicket with Conway as CSK posted a commanding 217/7 after being sent into bat. Gaikwad, after his 92 in the opening game, smashed another half century. Conway gave him good support. And then Moeen Ali returned with fine figures to help CSK restrict LSG to 205/7. Late hitting by Nicholas Pooran (32, 18b, 2x4, 3x6) and a furious opening assault by his fellow West Indian Kyle Mayers (53, 22b, 8x4, 2x6) went in vain for LSG. CSK captain MS Dhoni, back on home turf, made judicious use of the slow bowlers to ensure the team's first win in this year's IPL. Ali accounted for the wickets of Mayers, LSG skipper KL Rahul, Krunal Pandya and Marcus Stoinis (21) to derail LSG's chase. Pace bowlers Deepak Chahar (0/55) and Tushar Deshpande (2/45), who came in for Ambati Rayudu as Impact Player, bowled three wides and two no-balls in his opening

over, in which he conceded 18 runs, disappointed. The flamboyant Mayers and Rahul raised the team 50 in the fourth over. Poor bowling by Chahar, Deshpande and Ben Stokes didn't help CSK's cause as they leaked runs in the powerplay as LSG batters posted a strong riposte in pursuit of 218. Mayers hit a second consecutive fifty to provide LSG a flying start even as Rahul played second fiddle. Having reached 79 in just 5.2 overs, Mayers fell against the run of play attempting a big hit off Moeen Ali only to be caught in the deep by Conway. LSG lost Deepak Hooda (2) and Rahul (20), both going for big shots, quickly to slip to 82/3 as Ali and Mitchell Santner got into the act. Earlier, Dhoni smacked a 89-metre six and another to send the adoring Chepauk crowd into raptures. A delirious crowd had their glimpse of 'Thala' (Dhoni) as he carted two big sixes before being dismissed going for a third off Mark Wood's bowling for 12 off 3 balls. The iconic CSK captain completed 5,000 runs in the IPL during his brief knock. After the initial blitz by Gaikwad and Conway, there were valuable contributions from Shivam Dube (27) and Ali (19). Ambati Rayudu hit two sixes and an equal number of fours in his 14-ball 27. Wood, who picked up five wickets in LSG's demolition of Delhi Capitals on Sunday, was not as ef-

fective and finished with 3 for 49 from his 4 overs. LSG managed to put the brakes on the free-scoring CSK batters, thanks to a splendid spell by leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi (3/28) in the middle overs. Sent in to bat, Gaikwad and Conway created 79 runs in the first six overs taking full advantage of the fielding restrictions. The stylish Gaikwad continued his form from the season opener and in the New Zealand left-hander's company brought up the team's 100 in the eighth over. Gaikwad made batting look so



MOEEN ALI

easy as he effortlessly lofted three sixes in Krishnappa Gowtham's opening over (5th of the innings). He continued to pile on the runs and a flick for a six off Wood underlined the supreme form he is in. The CSK openers were on a roll and brought up the 100 in the eighth over as LSG bowlers appeared clueless. BRIEF SCORES CSK 217/7 (Ruturaj Gaikwad 57, Devon Conway 47; Ravi Bishnoi 3/28, Mark Wood 3/49) beat LSG 205/7 (Kyle Mayers 53, Nicholas Pooran 32; Moeen Ali 4/26, Tushar Deshpande 2/45) by 12 runs.

New Delhi, April 3: Delhi Capitals' Indian pace unit will have to punch above its weight against a formidable Gujarat Titans unit, which will start as overwhelming favourites in their first away match of the season, here Tuesday. The defending champions have all their bases covered despite Kane Williamson being ruled out of the tournament after a serious knee injury. The hosts, on the other hand, are looking like an outfit that is bereft of a Plan B as it became apparent in their 50-run thrashing at the hands of Lucknow Super Giants.

The primary worry is the composition of Indian pace attack, which mildly put is below par when Anrich Nortje isn't there to spearhead the attack. Chetan Sakariya and Mukesh Kumar are sincere cricketers but both lack the pace and variation required to trouble international quality batters consistently. They could well be lambs for slaughter against a Shubman Gill, who is in rampaging form or skipper Hardik Pandya, who would feast on friendly medium pacers day in and day out.

Khaleel Ahmed had a decent first game but his fielding has been an issue for years and those who have seen him at fielding sessions



now know that he drops more aerial catches than he takes. The drop of Kyle Mayers had the most damaging effect in opening game for Delhi.

The only other notable pacer in the ranks is Ishant Sharma and even DC management knows well that picking him at his base price was more of showing respect to a 100-Test veteran rather than thinking of him as an asset. Sharma can only be used as an 'impact player' but those who have watched DC training this season would vouch that he has lost pace and the skiddy effect is no longer there.

However, the good news is that both Nortje and his South African compatriot Lungi Ngidi have arrived here and are available for selection Tuesday. DC head coach Ricky Ponting will have to rejig the combination a bit.

May be drop Sakariya and get Mustafizur Rahman, an experienced international campaigner in the bowling unit. In that case, Rilee Rossouw will have to sit out. In the batting department, skipper David Warner would like to see the Indian youngsters like Prithvi Shaw and Sarfaraz Khan

handle raw pace better than they did while encountering Mark Wood. Both looked uncomfortable and short of ideas as one didn't have his bat come down in time while the other just managed to avoid a head injury while getting into a tangle, playing the ramp shot.

Sarfaraz nor being picked for Test squad has been questioned by many but it is widely believed, even at the top level in the BCCI, that the Mumbaikar has serious technical issues against the short-pitched deliveries above 138 to 140 clicks. The duo will have to do much better if DC don't want to lose early momentum. Against DC, Mohammed Shami and Pandya will pose a different challenge. With Alzarri Joseph, Yash Dayal and ever consistent Rashid Khan for company, it will be a challenge for DC batters. DC's main problem is Indian bench strength and perhaps not having good enough ones to be substituted as 'impact players'. The likes of Ripal Patel, Lalit Yadav and Aman Hakim Khan are decent domestic players but without X factor. It will all depend on how well the foreign recruits shape up for Capitals.



Teletcast: Star Sports channels

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Medvedev aces Miami heat



MUCH-NEEDED SMILE: Daniil Medvedev (R) and Jannik Sinner had something to smile for during the Miami Open prize distribution ceremony, Sunday

Miami Gardens, April 3: Daniil Medvedev won his fourth ATP title of the year, beating Jannik Sinner 7-5, 6-3 in the Miami Open to move to 6-0 in their career matchup. Medvedev is now the most sizzling player on the men's tour, winning 24 of his last 25 matches after the 1-hour, 34-minute triumph. His only loss has come against top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz in the Indian Wells final. He's made five straight Finals and he compared this run to 2019 when he advanced to the championship round in six straight events. Sinner ran out of magic, with his three-hour win late Friday night over Alcaraz in the semifinals — when he had mild cramping in the second set — taking a toll on the 21-year-old Italian. Sinner was visited by an ATP trainer midway through the first set Sunday. During the changeover at 4-3, Sinner received a packet of

one before Sinner started to feel his way back into the match to post the match's first break. Sinner rallied to break Medvedev, needing five break points to pull it off. Medvedev showed his mettle by breaking Sinner right back to even the first set at 3-3. On break point, Medvedev won a 20-stroke rally as Sinner's forehand clipped the netcord and bounced in the doubles alley. Then Medvedev broke Sinner at 6-5 and twice broke Sinner's serve in the second set. According to Tennis Channel's stats, Sinner made 36 unforced errors. Medvedev has proven to be the master of the hardcourt but the tour turns to the European clay-court season. At the ceremony, Sinner congratulated Medvedev, then quipped, "Now the clay starts; let's see how you do there." In a glamour women's double final, Coco Gauff and Jessica Pegula beat Leylah Fernandez and Taylor Townsend, 7-6, 6-2.

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Benzema nets 7-minute hat-trick in Real win

Madrid, April 3: It was a quick hat trick for Karim Benzema, and a big win for Real Madrid ahead of the last "clasico" of the season. Benzema scored his three goals in a seven-minute span as Madrid crushed Valladolid 6-0 in the Spanish league Sunday, boosting the team's morale before it faces Barcelona in the semifinals of the Copa del Rey. Madrid will travel to Barcelona needing to reverse Wednesday a 0-1 first-leg loss from the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium. Rodrygo, Marco Asensio and Lucas Vázquez also scored for second-place Madrid, who now trail leaders Barcelona by 12 points in the league after the Catalan club won at last-place Elche Saturday. Madrid maintained their gap to



SPLENDID SHOW: Karim Benzema reacts after scoring against Valladolid

the 36th. Benzema was replaced by Eden Hazard to get some rest in the 65th, earning a loud ovation from fans at the Bernabéu. Rodrygo had opened the scoring for Real with a low shot from inside the area in the 22nd after a buildup that started with Eduardo Camavinga. Asensio scored the fifth goal with a left-footed shot from inside the box in the 73rd and Vázquez — in his 300th match with Real — got the sixth in stoppage time after a pass by Hazard. Ángel Correa scored in the 86th as Atletico beat Real Betis 1-0 at home to strengthen its hold on third place. The result extended Atletico's unbeaten streak to 11 matches. It is six points ahead of fourth-place Real Sociedad and nine points in front of fifth-place Betis.

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PSG LOSE TO LYON

PARIS: French league leaders PSG gave their rivals a glimmer of hope in the title race after losing 0-1 to Lyon for a second straight home defeat. PSG are six points ahead of second-placed Lens and Marseille. PSG lost their previous home game 0-2 against Rennes. An 18-year-old Sael Kumbedi volleyed a pass across the area and the 20-year-old Bradley Barcola slid the ball past Gianluigi Donnarumma for the winner.

MILAN ROUT NAPOLI

ROME: In the first of three matchups between Milan and Napoli this month, the defending Serie A champions routed this season's runaway leaders 4-0 Sunday ahead of two more clashes in the Champions League quarterfinals. Rafael Leao scored twice and Ibrahim Diaz set up one goal and scored another to hand Napoli their heaviest defeat of what otherwise has been an extraordinary season. Alexis Saelemaekers completed the rout.

Man Utd stumble at Newcastle



Man United players looks disappointed after conceding a goal, Sunday

London, April 3: It wasn't long ago that Manchester United was being talked up, somewhat optimistically, as a potential outsider for the Premier League title. Now, even a top-four finish is looking far from assured for a club up for sale and seeking Champions League qualification as another

attraction for potential buyers. United's 0-2 loss at Newcastle Sunday further intensified the race for the two likely spots behind Arsenal and Manchester City, the Premier League's runaway top two, in Europe's top competition next season. Second-half goals by Joe Willock and Callum Wilson gave Newcastle partial revenge for their loss to

United in the English League Cup final Feb. 26 and lifted the Saudi-controlled north-east team into third place, above United on goal difference. Willock nodded in from point-blank range to make it 1-0 in the 65th minute after Allan Saint-Maximin headed back across goal, before Wilson — just on as a substitute — headed in Kieran Trippier's free-kick in the 88th.

POTTER SACKED

LONDON: Chelsea ran out of patience with Graham Potter, firing the English manager with the club languishing in the middle of the Premier League standings despite a spending spree on new players totaling USD 630 million across the last two transfer windows. The team announced Potter's departure a day after a 0-2 loss to Aston Villa, which left Chelsea in 11th place, and nearly seven months after taking a gamble on him as the replacement for the fired Thomas Tuchel.