



THURSDAY
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WEATHER

Partly cloudy. Nearby storms may bring lightning, gusty winds. Maximum and minimum temperatures likely to be around 36°C and 27°C respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL

RELATIVE HUMIDITY
Max. 72% Min. 55%

TEMPERATURE
Max: 36.5°C Min: 27.8°C

SUN RISES 05:27 hrs
SUN SETS 17:52 hrs

MOON RISES 09:08 hrs
MOON SETS 23:26 hrs

Full Moon on 13 April

THUMBNAILS



Women offer prayers while performing Chaiti Chhath rituals, in Patna, on Wednesday. ■ ANI

Pakistan Army violated ceasefire in Poonch sector, says Indian Army: The Pakistan Army violated the ceasefire agreement by opening unprovoked firing in the Poonch sector of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, a statement by the Indian Army said. It is learnt that the Pakistan Army and other agencies were trying to push heavily armed terrorists into the Indian territory by giving them a cover of firing.

Amit Shah defends Waqf Bill, accuses Opp of misinformation

Fierce debate in Lok Sabha over controversial legislation

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Strongly defending the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, Union Home Minister Amit Shah rejected the Opposition's charge that the government wants to interfere in the religious affairs of Muslims through the legislation and said its provisions are aimed at better management of the Waqf properties.

Intervening in the debate on the Bill in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, the home minister said the legislation would not be implemented with retrospective effect. He accused the Opposition of trying to mislead the people and create fear among members of the Muslim community.

Extending his support to the Bill, Mr Shah said there are misconceptions among several members, either genuinely or politically over the Bill.

Mr Shah categorically said there is no provision for the appointment of non-Muslims in the processes related to religion in the Bill.



Stating that no non-Muslim would come into the Waqf, Mr Shah said there is no such provision to include any non-Muslim among those who manage the religious institutions.

The minister further said that they would only look after the administration of property donated by someone under the Waqf Law.

He also said that a person can donate only the property that belongs to him, not the property that belongs to the government or any other individual.

His comments came as MPs of a united Opposition assailed the Waqf (Amend-

ment) Bill as an attempt to interfere in the affairs of a religion and violative of the Constitution of India in an hours-long debate in the Lok Sabha.

Initiating the debate on the Bill in the Lok Sabha, Deputy Leader of the Congress Gaurav Gogoi expressed concern over the intentions of the government for bringing the Bill.

"Today, they have their eyes on the land of a particular community; tomorrow, they will target the land of other minorities in society," he said.

While acknowledging the need for amendments in the law, he emphasised that such changes should strengthen the Act rather than exacerbate problems and disputes, which, he argued, would result from the proposed amendments.

Mr Gogoi accused the government of attempting to create chaos by enabling cases to be filed across the country, thereby disrupting the "atmosphere of brotherhood".

"Our Constitution says every citizen must receive political, social, and economic justice... freedom of expression and religion... This Bill is an attack on the fundamental structure of the Constitution. This government aims to dilute the constitution through this Bill. Second, they want to defame the minority community. Third, they want to divide Indian society," he alleged.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said whenever the BJP brings up a new Bill, it hides its failure. Participating in the debate on the Bill, Mr Yadav alleged that the BJP is talking about identifying the land of Muslim brothers so that the issue of identifying the Hindus who have died or

Maoists call for peace talks ahead of Amit Shah's Chhattisgarh visit

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
RAIPUR, 2 APRIL



Just days before Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Chhattisgarh, the outlawed CPI (Maoist) has issued a press statement proposing peace talks, urging the government to halt security operations in Maoist-affected regions. The rebel outfit claims that intensified anti-Maoist operations, particularly under 'Operation Kagar,' have led to large-scale violence against tribal communities.

The press note, issued by CPI (Maoist) Central Committee spokesperson Abhay, calls for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of security forces from conflict zones as a precondition for dialogue.

The statement says that over 400 Maoist cadres and civilians have been killed in counter-insurgency operations, with reports of mass detentions and human rights violations surfacing from affected regions. The group also claims that women Maoist members have faced sexual violence and extrajudicial executions.

The Maoists have outlined a set of preconditions for the peace talks, including an immediate cessation of

hostilities, a halt to anti-insurgency operations, and the withdrawal of security personnel from conflict zones. The CPI (Maoist) called on intellectuals, human rights organizations, journalists, students, and environmental activists to support their demand for negotiations and pressurise the government into engaging in dialogue.

Chhattisgarh Home Minister Vijay Sharma responded to the Maoist proposal, stating that while the government is open to discussions, talks cannot proceed under preconditions set by the rebel group. "The government is committed to bring lasting peace to Bastar and other affected regions, but negotiations cannot be dictated by extremist forces. If Maoists are serious about peace, they should surrender and take advantage of the state's rehabilitation policy," Mr Sharma said.

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Firecracker blast: Arrested owner attended safety session last week

Firecracker unit owners and traders surprised how the accused stored illegal material

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 2 APRIL

Chandrakanta Banik, prime accused in the series of firecracker blasts at his residential premises at Dakshin Raipur under Dholahat police station in South 24-Parganas district, had attended a training programme on crackers safety awareness at Batanagar on 24 March.

Chandrakanta was produced before the court in Kakkwip today while his brother Tushar has been absconding so far till this evening.

The accused attended the training hardly a week before the incident occurred on 31 March night that claimed eight lives, including four babies, all belonging to his family.

According to sources in



the district administration, senior officials of the state directorate of factories had attended the event organised by the All Bengal Trinamul Green Firecrackers Manufacturing Workers Union.

Around 500 firecrackers manufacturers and traders had undergone an orientation session on how to manufacture and store crackers following safety and security

measures.

Some members of the union have raised their eyebrows saying: "How did Chandrakanta, who attended the awareness programme one week ago, store raw materials, including explosive items. The Monday night incident showed he used to run the business illegally."

"Chandrakanta didn't follow rules and used to man-

ufacture firecrackers illegally. Our stand is not to stand beside those manufacturers, who do business violating government rules and regulations," said Sukdeb Naskar, president of the Maheshala Firecrackers Association.

Several manufacturers alleged that the small scale illegal firecracker units are on the rise because of irrational attitude of the state government because it only ensures land but not adequate fund for infrastructure for setting up of a unit. It requires Rs 4-5 lakh for setting up of a manufacturing unit, they said requesting anonymity.

Sukdeb Naskar, president Maheshala firecrackers association, chandrakanta didn't follow rules. We won't stand beside those who illegally manufacture and store firecrackers. Police investigating Chandrakanta and his brother

Tushar in connection with the incident found their negligence in handling combustible and explosive materials. Cases have also been registered for storing such raw materials endangering life and safety and culpable homicide not amounting to murder under BNS and West Bengal Fire Services Act.

All the deceased and injured people belong to the Baniks, who have run the manufacturing business of firecrackers for the past 10 years.

Two of the deceased babies are below one year while two others are toddlers. Three others sustaining severe burn injuries are undergoing treatment at Diamond Harbour Medical College Hospital.

The Baniks have 11 members, including an 80-year-old Prabhoboti Banik, Chandranath's grandmother.

Bengal illegal firecracker factory blast: Role of panchayat under scanner

AGENCIES
KOLKATA, 2 APRIL

After eight people died in a blast at an illegal firecracker factory at Patharpratima in West Bengal's South 24-Parganas district, the role of the local panchayat has come under the scanner of investigating officials.

The blast took place on Monday night. District administration sources said that it had been revealed that the Banik family, at whose residence the illegal firecracker was being run, had secured an ordinary trade license from the local panchayat, which did not come with the permission to run a firecracker manufacturing unit.

Now, questions are being raised about how even that ordinary trade license was granted by the local panchayat, especially in the backdrop of criminal antecedents of one of the two arrested accused in connection with the blast, Chandrakanta Banik.

As per police records, Banik was arrested in 2022 for his involvement in the trading of illegal firecrackers and at that time, around 67 kilograms of illegal firecrackers were recovered from his possession.

Now, questions are being raised as to whether the local rural civic body granted that trade licence without background verification of the license application from the local police.

At the same time, questions are also being raised on how the local police did not have the knowledge that an illegal firecracker factory was being run at the residence by virtue of that ordinary trade licence that did not carry permission to run a firecracker manufacturing unit.

Local people have already claimed that the cops had ignored repeated alerts of a possible mishap because of the illegal firecracker factory being run from the Banik residence.

Tushar Banik, the brother

of Chandrakanta Banik, the joint owner of the residence where the illegal firecracker factory was being run, is still absconding.

Police have registered a case against the Banik brothers under Section 287 (negligent conduct concerning fire or combustible matter endangering human life or causing harm), Section 288 (negligent conduct concerning explosive substances potentially endangering human life or causing injury), Section 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), Section 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide), Section 125 (endangering human lives) and Section 61 (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Additionally, they have been booked under Sections 24 and 25 of the West Bengal Fire Services Act, 1950. The last two sections are related to running of firecracker manufacturing business without a proper licence for the same.

Burdwan dietician runs practice as MBBS, health dept begins probe

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BURDWAN, 2 APRIL

One RDA (recommended dietary allowances) practitioner has been issuing prescriptions, using a fake MBBS degree and a 'Dr' prefix before his name since over 30 years, which the villagers have opposed these days and a complaint against whom was registered today with the district health administration.

After the complaint was registered, Dr Joyram Hembram, chief medical officer, East Burdwan, said: "We've primarily observed that the person was conducting medical practice illegally. We've taken cognisance about his unauthorised act and an inquiry has been suggested."

An RDA practitioner refers to someone who uses recommended dietary allowances, the average daily nutrient intake.

Tanmoy Sidhhanta of Singerkone village in Kalna, over the three decades has been practicing as a 'doctor' serving at least 10 localities over the years. He uses his

name as 'Dr Tanmoy Sidhhanta, MD (alternative medicine)' written both in his chamber's board and also in the prescription. On 9 March, some villagers had challenged his degree asking for his Medical Council of India registration number, which he'd declined to provide raising further suspicion of the locals. They then complained about Sidhhanta to the Kalna Superspecialty Hospital superintendent, Dr Goutam Biswas that was forwarded to Dr Soren, the CMOH today and an investigation was ordered.

On 11 March, Dr Biswas, the medical superintendent of Kalna Hospital had received a complaint against one Laboni Bhowmik that she'd been practicing as an eye surgeon mentioning in her prescription that she's attached with that hospital, which was scrapped by Dr Biswas. Dr Biswas said: "I'm the medical superintendent here since 2018, and I've also examined the previous records, but no such eye surgeon was ever registered with this government hospital."

Bengal Police unnecessarily creating panic over Ram Navami: BJP



AGENCIES
KOLKATA, 2 APRIL

A senior leader of the BJP from West Bengal, on Wednesday, accused the West Bengal Police of creating unnecessary panic among common people over the forthcoming Ram Navami festival.

BJP's former national vice-president and former party Lok Sabha member Dilip Ghosh said that the decision of the police authorities to cancel the leaves of all cops, except for emergency reasons, from 2-9 April was unnecessary.

"Such panic-driven decisions are prompted only during Hindu festivals. The police should take care of those who create trouble. Hindus are well organised and they perform their religious rituals peacefully. Lakhs of people participate in Durga Puja, and no tension is created. It has become a habit of the ruling party to create tension and panic," Ghosh said. He also said that the chances of untoward incidents over the Ram Navami processions will not be there if the police strictly handle those who want to create tension on the occasion.

Last week, two senior officials of West Bengal Police told media persons that they have got specific intelligence inputs on some vested interests trying to instigate violence in the coming days, especially targeting the forthcoming Ram Navami

festival.

"There are plans to instigate people through different posters or posts. The police are on alert. There might be attempts to instigate tension among people from different communities, especially focusing on the occasion of Ram Navami. We requested people not to get instigated. There is no need to worry. But at the same time, we also request people to alert the local police in case they notice any suspicious activities in their respective areas," said Additional Director General (South Bengal) Supratim Sarkar on 29 March.

Recently, there were reports of communal clashes from Mothabari in Malda district.

Recently, the Leader of the Opposition in West Bengal, Svenduh Adhikari, said at least 2,000 rallies, big and small combined, will be brought out on the occasion of Ram Navami this year. He also said that participants at the rallies on Ram Navami this year will be double compared to last year.

"Ram Navami will be celebrated this year in a major way. I will be there on the streets on that day. Last year, around 50 lakh Hindus were on the streets to participate in rallies on the occasion of Ram Navami. Last year, there were 1,000 rallies. This year there will be 2,000 rallies and around one crore Hindus will participate in those rallies this year," he claimed.

With trees felled, civics body erects shades at traffic junctions

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BOLANGIR, 2 APRIL:

The Bolangir Municipality has erected shades at various locations across the town, particularly at traffic junctions.

These overhead shades provide much-needed relief to commuters waiting at traffic signals, reducing their exposure to the scorching sun and minimizing the risk of sunstroke.

"For the first time, the administration has identified a major public inconvenience and taken a meaningful step to address it" remarked Madhusudan Sahu, a local resident.

It is worth noting that a

decade ago, before the road-widening project commenced, Bolangir town was lined with thousands of trees on both sides of the roads.

However, in the name of development, the forest department permitted felling of trees without any effort to recreate a tree cover in the town.

Frustrated by administrative apathy and large-scale corruption under the guise of plantation initiatives, a group of tree lovers formed a social network group named "Sabuja Bolangir" before the last monsoon.

They took it upon themselves to restore the town's greenery, planting thousands of saplings. Their commit-

ment did not stop at planting; they also fenced the saplings and watered them regularly.

Later, Municipality joined the movement, engaging municipal staff in tree plantation and fencing efforts, particularly from Cocheri Chowk to Santipada.

However, in a distressing turn of events, unidentified miscreants recently destroyed at least 50 trees, along with their protective fencing, on the newly built ring road from Sambalpur Road (NH-26) to Chiminibhati.

Members of Sabuja Bolangir have since lodged a formal complaint at the police station, seeking action against the unidentified culprits.

Tata Steel's FAMD gets award for water management

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 2 APRIL:

Tata Steel's Ferro Alloys and Minerals Division (FAMD), emerged as the winner in the "Best Integrated Water Management Project" category at the Water Digest World Water Awards 2024-25 organised in Delhi recently.

Minister of State, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Raj Bhushan Choudhary, presented the award to Tata Steel followed by the felicitation. Natasha Jha, Head, Projects, Technology and Improvement (FAMD), Tata Steel received the award on behalf of the company.

Acknowledging Tata Steel (FAMD)'s cutting-edge digital technologies to optimise water management processes and drive sustainability in

its operations, the coveted award was presented to the steel major at the event organised by a water magazine.

Pankaj Satija, Executive-In-Charge (FAMD), Tata Steel said, "India is a water stressed country and various sectors including agriculture, community and industry are competing for this scarce resource. We are doing our bit to minimise the water consumption in our processes. We are happy to be recognised for our commitment and efforts in adopting innovative digital solutions in our journey towards water stewardship."

FAMD exemplifies this commitment with initiatives like the Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) at Kamarda and Saruabil mines and the Effluent Treatment

Plant (ETP) and Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) at Sukinda mines in Jajpur district of Odisha, which treat and reuse wastewater.

At the Ferro Alloy Plant (FAP) in Joda in Keonjhar district of Odisha, innovative measures have been implemented to significantly reduce water consumption. By utilizing treated water from the ETP and scrubber pond water, the plant has decreased its dependency on fresh surface water, achieving over 40% reduction in water usage. Similarly, FAMD has leveraged IoT-based smart water management systems to enhance water use efficiency at FAP Athagarh - located in Odisha's Cuttack district - resulting in significant reduction in total water intake and raw water consumption in slag cooling.

TMC worker shot dead in Belgharia

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, 2 APRIL

Tension flared up in Belgharia after a Trinamul Congress (TMC) worker was shot dead at point-blank range late on Tuesday night. Police said that the deceased, identified as Rehan Khan (aged between 30 and 35). The victim was reportedly a close aide of local TMC councillor Debjani Mukherjee. The incident took place in front of the party office in ward 35, triggering unrest in the area.

According to local sources, miscreants targeted Rehan late at night, leaving him grievously injured. Shockingly, his body remained at the spot throughout the night. On Wednesday morning, he was rushed to Sagar Dutta Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. The murder has sent shockwaves through political circles. The Barrackpore Police Commissionerate has launched a manhunt for the attackers. Police are probing whether the killing was linked to business disputes, personal enmity, or

Rehan was attacked late at night and left grievously injured, with his body remaining at the spot until morning.

political rivalry. Eyewitnesses described a disturbing scene. "In the morning, we saw his body being taken away in a toto to the hospital. There was a visible hole at the back of his head. It seemed like a gunshot wound," said a local resident. A police officer involved in the investigation stated: "He was sitting at the place talking. We even found a liquor bottle at the spot, suggesting he might have been drinking. His family informed us that they spoke to him between 11.30 p.m. and midnight. His body was recovered around 5.30 a.m. We are trying to identify who was present at the time and who might be responsible."

As political and security concerns escalate in Belgharia, police continue their probe into the brutal killing.

Centurion university hosts AIU national women student parliament

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
PARALAKHEMUNDI, 2 APRIL:

The AIU National Women Student Parliament was inaugurated by his Governor Dr Kumbhampati Haribabu at Centurion University here.

The event saw the participation of over 30 universities and more than 200 female student leaders from across the country.

Prof. Sangram Keshari Swain, Convener of AIU, delivered the welcome address and set the tone for the engaging event. This was followed by an address from Dr Supriya Pattanayak, Vice-Chancellor of Centurion University, who emphasized the significance of empowering young women through leadership and dialogue. Empowering women is not about protest but about the future of women's voice and power.

"Equality, empowerment and emancipation are not just ideas, but realities for every woman in India, we



must also acknowledge the pioneering women who contributed to the drafting of the Indian constitution. In today's India, women are leading corporations, serving in senior governance roles, driving innovation, arguing before the various courts of law and revolutionizing social change. The rise of women in business, sports, law, policy, making and arts is a testament to the changing

landscape of our country" said the Governor.

Dr. Mamata Rani Agarwal, the Additional Secretary of AIU, Former Air Force Pilot, New Delhi, highlighted the role of such platforms in shaping future women leaders and said such events focus on women's voice is crucial.

Dr. G. S. N. Raju, Chancellor of Centurion University, shared his vision of promoting gender inclusivity in educa-

tion and leadership. Dr Gitanjali Dash, The Vice-Chancellor of Berhampur University, Dr. Amiya Kumar Rath, Vice-Chancellor of Biju Patnaik University of Technology also addressed the gathering.

The event was also graced by Dr. Mukhtikanta Mishra, President of Centurion University, and Prof. D. N. Rao, Vice President of Centurion University, adding to the distinguished panel of dignitaries.

The inaugural session concluded with an introduction of the team managers. In the afternoon, the event moved forward with its preliminary rounds, where student leaders engaged in thought-provoking discussions and debates on various socio-political issues.

The event will feature multiple sessions over the next few days, culminating in meaningful resolutions aimed at empowering future women leaders.

THUMBNAILS

Indo-U.S HADR amphibious exercise Tiger Triumph begins: The 4th edition of the bilateral joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) amphibious exercise between India and the United States of America - Tiger Triumph 2025 - started today with the opening ceremony conducted onboard the Indian Navy's INS Jalashwa (L41). Showcasing the deepening convergence of U.S.-India strategic maritime interests and the countries' defense partnership, the joint exercise aims to further enhance the interoperability and combined joint all-domain operations during large-scale HADR operations. A joint statement issued by the Indian Navy's spokesperson stated that the harbour phase of the exercise, underway at Visakhapatnam, involves a planning process for the execution of various training events at sea, as well as further refinement of procedures established in previous iterations of Tiger Triumph. In addition, the harbor phase will include training and Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) events on a range of professional subjects, such as special operations, emergency medical response procedures, and operations across the air, maritime, cyber and space domains.

Environment Ministry intervenes in HCU row

The ministry directed the Forest Department to take legal action in the case

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE HYDERABAD, 2 APRIL

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forest has intervened in the clearing of the 400 acres of forest land in Kancha Gachibowli for auction, demanding a factual report on the matter from the Telangana government.

The ministry directing the Forest Department to take legal action in the case under the provisions of the various forest Acts.

Meanwhile, the Telangana Police resorted to a lathi charge on students and faculty of the Hyderabad Central University (HCU) protesting against the government's decision to auction 400 acres of land at Kancha Gachibowli.

A letter to the additional secretary (Forests) of Telangana government from the assistant inspector general of forest, government of India, was shared by G Kishan Reddy, the Union minister for mines and the state BJP president.

Stating that the ministry came to know about the "illegal felling and removal of vegetation in Kancha Gachibowli Village, Ranga Reddy district of Telangana by the Telangana State Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (TSIIC)," the letter sought a factual report and directed the Forest Department to take legal action under the provisions of Indian Forest Act, Wildlife Protection Act and Van Adhiniyam.



University of Hyderabad gate

The BJP MPs had submitted a memorandum to the Union Minister of Environment and Forest Bhupendra Yadav as well as Education minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Meanwhile, a large contingent of police personnel has been deployed near the east campus of the university, along with barricades, as earthmovers engaged in clearing the vegetation to level the ground. The faculty organised a protest rally today from Ambedkar Auditorium joined by the students raising slogans. As they attempted to breach the barricades, the police resorted to a lathi

charge to disperse them. The students have been boycotting classes to organise protests against the state government.

Meanwhile, the University of Hyderabad Students' Union called for an indefinite strike at the university's administrative building. The students are upset with the university authorities for facilitating the presence of police personnel and clearing off the land. Meanwhile, the "Save HCU biodiversity" campaign on social media gained momentum. An online petition to save the rich biodiversity of Kancha Gachibowli has been initiated, which will be filed before the National Green Tribunal. It stated, "Famed for its ecodiversity, Kancha Gachibowli is not just a forest, but a green lung, a natural sink, making significant contributions to the overall air quality and ameliorating climate change impacts... We strongly request the concerned authorities to roll back the proposed auction of Kancha Gachibowli forest land by TSIIC."

Citizens have been protesting against the government's decision to auction the land offline and online.

Muslims in Bihar miffed at Nitish for supporting Waqf Bill



IMRAN MOJIB PATNA, 2 APRIL

Muslims in Bihar are miffed at Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for his decision to support the contentious Waqf Amendment Bill 2025, which was tabled in the parliament on Wednesday. They said that the Bill is not just aimed at usurping Waqf properties in the country but is also aimed at sowing the seeds of discord between various sects of the community.

So far, the community members were under the impression that, if passed, the new law will allow the government to control the Waqf properties by appointing a non-Muslim CEO and giving unlimited power to District Magistrates to decide about any property whether it is Waqf or not.

But the detailed structure of the Waqf Board under the

new law, as mentioned by Union Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Kiren Rijiju in the parliament, shows that this bill has become even more dangerous for the community.

The minister announced in the parliament that now Shia, Sunni, Bohra, backward Muslims, women, and expert Non-Muslims will also be there in the Waqf Board.

It is simply a prescription for chaos in society. There is so much religious divide between Shia, Sunni and Bohra communities that they rarely agree on any particular point. That is why there are separate Waqf Boards for Sunni, Shia and Bohra communities.

Making any arrangement to appoint representatives from every sect of Muslim community on the Board is bound to make every Waqf property controversial, which

will pave the way for the government to interfere and make a decision as per their whims and fancies.

Abdul Bari Siddiqui, a strong leader of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), warned against the catastrophic consequences.

He said that the Waqf Amendment Bill is against the Constitution. Muslims are being targeted through the Bill. This community will die but will not let go of its rights, he said.

The RJD leader further said that if the Bill was for the betterment of Muslim community, the government should have discussed it with Muslim community leaders. Their suggestions should have been included, but this was not done.

Prashant Kishore, the founder of Jan Suraj Party, said that if the Waqf Bill is passed by the Parliament, then Nitish Kumar and Janata Dal (United) will be responsible for it. Muslims had a big contribution in making Nitish Kumar the Chief Minister in 2015; today Nitish Kumar is breaking the promise with them. Amending the Waqf Bill without the consent of the Muslim community will be a violation of the promise made by the founding fathers of the Constitution to protect their rights, he said.

Court stops bike taxi services in Bengaluru



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

In several cities, motorcycle and scooter taxis run by aggregators like Uber, Ola, and Rapido provide commuters with a cheaper option, albeit slightly risky in terms of safety.

But in Bengaluru, they must cease operations within six weeks unless the government comes out with a specific

wheeler taxis came on a petition filed by taxi services aggregator Rapido, pleading for the registration of two-wheelers as transport vehicles and the issuance of necessary permits under the Motor Vehicles Act.

In its order, the court also asked the government to frame rules and regulations for bike taxi services within three months. The government maintained that two-wheeler taxis were illegal and could not operate commercially.

Justice BM Shyam Prasad said the transport department cannot be compelled to register motorcycles as transport vehicles or issue contract carriage permits for bike taxis without a proper regulatory framework.

Which is why the aggregator petitioner has been asked to immediately cease operations. There needs to be regulatory clarity before allowing the services to resume, the court said.

set of guidelines on the safety and security aspects of two-wheeler taxi services.

The Karnataka High Court on Wednesday ordered the suspension of bike taxi services within six weeks, saying that they cannot operate without guidelines that the government must frame. It has directed the government to ensure compliance with the court order.

The orders relating to two-

Probe Committee finds no evidence against previous BJP regime

LAKSHMANA VENKAT KUCHI BENGALURU, 2 APRIL

The BJP in Karnataka has got a partial relief with the Justice Nagamohan Das Committee probing the alleged 40 per cent Commission finding no evidence in the allegations made by the Contractors association, though it said that the malaise of corruption was prevalent during the BJP regime that it examined.

Although, the one-man judicial commission that probed the charges of corruption against the previous government, said that corruption was deep-rooted in the system but it found no evidence of the charges of 40 per cent commission being the norm for securing government contracts and passing of bills as alleged

by the contractors association before the previous Assembly elections.

In fact, the then opposition, Congress made corruption the central plank of its campaign and ran a very catchy and successful PayCM campaign and 40 per cent Sarkara against the BJP government and the campaign seemingly worked. It added to the overall push for the Congress to oust the BJP government and corruption became one of the crucial issues that played out in the elections in 2023.

The BJP as a party, and the then chief minister Basavaraj Bommai, had flatly denied the Congress charges then, but during the campaign, the charges stuck to them.

CM Revanth criticises PM for ignoring Telangana's BC Bills

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE HYDERABAD, 2 APRIL

Lashing out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for ignoring the Bills to enhance reservation for backward classes (BCs), Telangana chief minister A Revanth Reddy today warned that their protests will spread like wildfire throughout the country. The BC Poru Garjana was held today at Jantar Mantar in Delhi, demanding the Centre's consent for the two Bills that were passed by the Telangana Assembly recently.

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister criticized the Prime Minister, wondering why the BC reservation bill of Telangana enhancing their reservation to 42 per cent was being ignored. "We said we will increase BC reservation in our state. We did not ask

you (Modi) to increase it in his state... BC groups met BJP leaders demanding an increase in reservation according to the Assembly's resolution. But there was no response," said the chief minister, explaining why the rally was being held in New Delhi. Dubbing it to be a righteous war (dharma yuddha), he warned that the BJP will face a tough time if it does not give consent to the Bills passed by the Assembly. He said: "Don't try to dominate us. You have seen what happened to the Nizam rulers. You have seen what happened to the Andhra rulers."

The chief minister also took a dig at Union minister for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar. He said "Bandi Sanjay said he will give his life for BCs. We do not want your life just increase the reservation for BCs." He

also said that if BC reservations were allowed to be increased in Telangana, then "we will hold a meeting with ten lakh people and felicitate Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

The Telangana Assembly has passed two Bills to increase BC reservations in local bodies, employment and education and the Congress demanded that the central government should approve the two Bills immediately. The BC leaders also demanded immediate nationwide caste census and 33 per cent sub quota for BC women in legislatures. Key leaders from other Opposition parties, including AIMIM president and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi, RJD MP Manoj Jha, and DMK MP Kanimozi, expressed solidarity with the BC protests.

Katchatheevu continues to haunt DMK, TN House passes resolution for its retrieval



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE CHENNAI, 2 APRIL

More than half a century after the tiny rocky islet Katchatheevu in the Palk Strait was ceded to Sri Lanka, the Tamil Nadu Assembly passed a unanimous resolution demanding the Union government to retrieve it so as to protect the livelihood and traditional rights of Indian fishermen and secure the release of fishers still incarcerated in the island nation.

The resolution moved by Chief Minister MK Stalin received the support of all parties, including the BJP. Floor leaders of all parties spoke on retrieving the islet to protect the fishermen from being harassed and arrested by the island nation's Navy, which also impounded their boats.

The 285-acre barren uninhabited islet, which has a shrine to St Antony in the strategic Palk Strait, was ceded to Sri Lanka in 1974 in exchange for the marine

and hydrocarbon-rich Wadge Bank down Kanyakumari. The issue continues to haunt the ruling DMK, as the party was in power under M Karunanidhi at the time.

According to the resolution, the retrieval of the islet alone could provide a lasting solution to safeguard the traditional fishing rights of the fishermen of Tamil Nadu's southern coast. However, observers and the Lankan side maintain that the arrest of Indian fishermen by the Lankan Navy happens off Katchatheevu as the marine wealth on

the Indian side has been depleted due to bottom trawling. Referring to Prime Minister Modi's upcoming visit to Sri Lanka on 4 and 5 April, the resolution urged him to hold talks with Colombo to secure the release of all incarcerated fishermen along with their boats on a goodwill basis. Besides demanding that the Union government mitigate the sufferings of the fishermen, it emphasised the need to review the 1974 and 1976 pacts with Colombo and take steps to retrieve the islet.

While moving the reso-

lution, Stalin said that despite the political change in Sri Lanka, there is no end in sight to the attacks on fishermen and accused New Delhi of forgetting that Tamil fishermen are also Indian fishermen and the state government had to repeatedly remind it. On the continued attacks on the fishermen, he said, "I have written 74 letters seeking intervention to prevent the attacks on our fishermen," and asked whether fishermen from other states were arrested like this would their governments remain silent? Referring to Modi's

remarks in the run-up to the 2014 Lok Sabha polls that if the BJP formed the government, there would not be arrest of even a single fisherman, he said sadly, the attacks are continuing. A total of 530 fishermen were arrested by Lankan authorities and awarded jail term and enhanced penalty, he added.

Incidentally, a case filed by the late Chief Minister Jayalalithaa in the Supreme Court, seeking to annul the 1974 and 1976 pacts and retrieve Katchatheevu, is expected to come up for hearing shortly.

Classified

<p>CHANGE OF NAME</p> <p>WE, DEBASHIS Roy and Gargi Banerjee, R/o. 58F, Kankulia Road, P.S.: Gariahat, Kolkata-700029, have changed our daughter's name from Roopkatha Baroi to Roopkatha Roy vide Notary Public dated: 07.03.2025 at Alipore Court. Roopkatha Baroi and Roopkatha Roy is the same and one identical person.</p>	<p>CHANGE OF NAME</p> <p>I, SHAJRE Alam on behalf of my minor daughter Tashmiah Khan alias Tashmiah Fatema residing at 1/5J, J.K. Ghosh Road, P.O.: Belgachia, Kol-37, have changed her name and shall henceforth be known as Tasmiya Fatima as declared before the First Class District vide affidavit No. 708, dated 11th July, 2023. Tashmiah Khan alias Tashmiah Fatema and Tasmiya Fatima both are same and identical person.</p>	<p>PUBLIC NOTICE</p> <p>Notice to hereby given to all concerned that my client Smt. Chandrawali Upadhaya, who Sri Arjun Upadhaya has purchased a land measuring about 21 Decimals at Mouza: Ganeygangadhar, J.L. No 28, L.R. Dag No 646, L.R. Khatian No 221 & 936, under P.S. Maheshitala, District South 24 Parganas from Sri Gopinath Naskar, S/o Pulin Chandra Naskar as constitute Attorney of Smt Mira Mondal, Smt. Jamuna Naskar, Sri Bidyut Naskar and Sri Binod Naskar on 19/05/2010 which was duly registered at ARA-1 Kolkata. Deed No 5004/2010. Power of Attorney Deed No 351/2009, 397/2009 & 401/2009 all are duly registered at ADSP Bahala. That my clients has applied for Mutation of the aforesaid land before the B.L. & L.R.O Office at T.M Block, Kolkata 700006.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jagadish Mondal Advocate, 7980945703</p>	<p>TENDER</p> <p>WBTBCL-202504-0001 - West Bengal Text Book Corporation Ltd invites sealed offer through e-tender to ascertain the rate per pc for Plastic Jacket. For details please visit website: wbtenders.gov.in</p>
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Fair Delimitation: Stalin to lead delegation of MPs, seeks appointment with Modi

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE CHENNAI, 2 APRIL

Within a fortnight of hosting the Joint Action Committee (JAC) of non-BJP-ruled states facing the threat of population-based delimitation, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK president MK Stalin on Wednesday sought an early appointment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to meet him along with a delegation of MPs. To present a memorandum on the concerns surrounding the proposed delimitation, the Chief Minister had requested a meeting with the Prime Minister at an early date. "I write to request an audience with you, along with



select Members of Parliament from various political affiliations, to present a memorandum on delimitation that emerged from our recent deliberations," says Stalin's letter to Modi, posted on his 'X' handle. Though shared on Wednesday,

the letter was written on 27 March. This followed the March 22 Joint Action Committee (JAC) meeting hosted by Tamil Nadu in Chennai in which Chief Ministers Pinarayi Vijayan (Kerala), Revanth Reddy (Telangana), Bhagwant Mann (Punjab), DK Shiva Kumar, Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka, former Odisha Chief Minister, and Biju Janata Dal chief Naveen Patnaik as well as leaders from the Congress, CPI, RSP, Kerala Congress, Jana Sena of Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister, and actor Pawan Kalyan participated. The JAC demanded a freeze on the delimitation exercise for another 25 years. It has also appealed to the Prime Minister to declare

this on the floor of Parliament. Prior to this, Stalin had convened an all-party meeting in Tamil Nadu, which was attended by nearly 50 registered political parties, barring the BJP.

"The voices emerging from our deliberations transcend political boundaries, embodying the concerns of citizens from diverse regions who seek fair representation in our parliamentary democracy. As this issue holds significant importance to our states and citizens, I kindly request a meeting with you to formally submit the Memorandum on behalf of the Joint Action Committee," the letter read, expecting a positive response at the earliest.

The Statesman

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Powerful signal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) headquarters in Nagpur is more than just a routine event - it is a powerful political signal. As the ideological fountainhead of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, the RSS wields considerable influence over the party's direction, policies, and electoral strategies. Mr Modi's visit, therefore, is not just symbolic but a reaffirmation of the deep-rooted ties between the government and the Sangh. This meeting with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat comes at a crucial juncture, when the nation is on the cusp of another election cycle and the BJP faces both opportunities and challenges. The party has maintained a strong electoral presence, but with opposition forces regrouping and public discourse around governance and policy intensifying, Mr Modi's presence at the RSS headquarters could be seen as an attempt to consolidate ideological and organisational support ahead of the political battles to come.

The RSS has long been the backbone of the BJP's grassroots mobilisation efforts, ensuring electoral victories through disciplined cadre work and ideological propagation. It is no secret that many senior BJP leaders, including Mr Modi himself, have deep RSS roots. While the Prime Minister has, at times, sought to carve out a distinct image of governance focused on development and national security, the RSS remains an indispensable part of the broader political ecosystem that sustains the BJP. His visit signals that despite any apparent divergences, the government and the RSS remain aligned in their larger vision for the country. One must also consider the internal dynamics at play. Mr Modi's relationship with the RSS has seen phases of both synergy and strategic distance. While his government has championed policies that align with the Sangh's nationalist vision, it has also, at times, taken a pragmatic approach that diverges from traditional RSS positions. Economic reforms, foreign policy manoeuvres, and governance priorities have not always been in lockstep with the RSS worldview. This visit could be an effort to smooth over any differences, ensuring continued cooperation as the party and its parent prepare for future challenges.

For Mr Bhagwat and the RSS leadership, Mr Modi's visit serves as an acknowledgment of the Sangh's enduring relevance. While the RSS does not directly participate in electoral politics, its influence is undeniable. By hosting the Prime Minister, Mr Bhagwat reiterates that the organisation remains central to shaping the ideological and strategic discourse of the ruling dispensation. Ultimately, the visit to Nagpur is a reminder that in Indian politics, ideological anchoring is as important as electoral arithmetic. Mr Modi's visit to the RSS headquarters underscores the symbiotic relationship between the party and its ideological mentor. Whether this is a show of strength or a necessity dictated by the political moment, one thing is clear - the RSS continues to hold significant sway over the country's political trajectory.

French turmoil

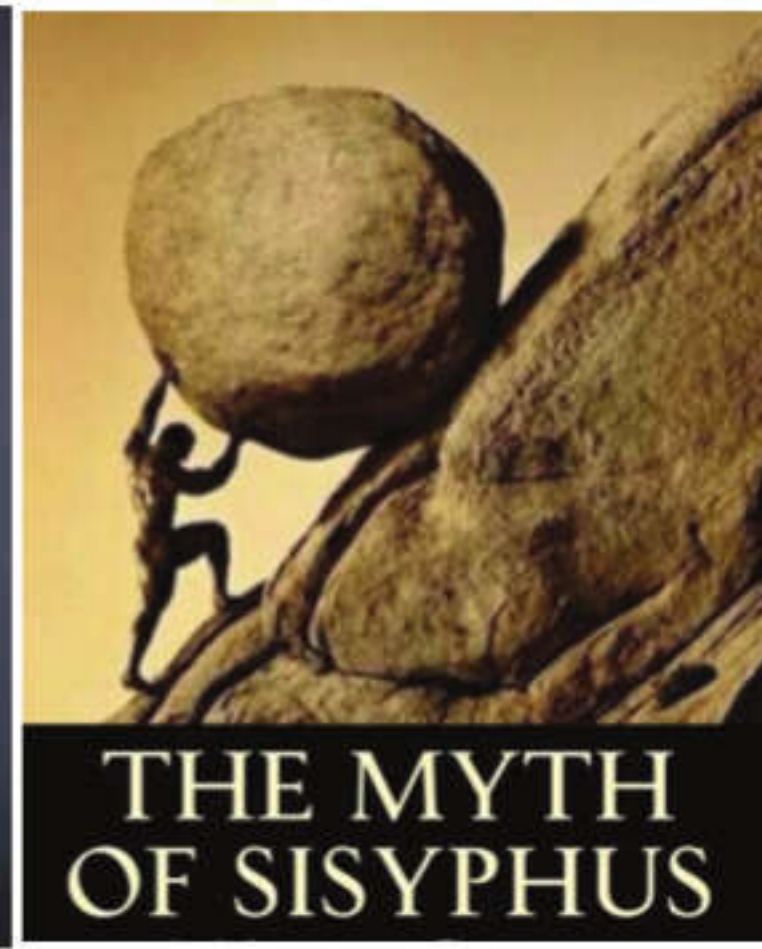
The decision to bar Marine Le Pen from running for public office for five years is nothing short of seismic for French politics. With her far-right National Rally (RN) gaining ground over recent years, Ms Le Pen's absence from the 2027 presidential race reshapes the political landscape in ways that are both predictable and unpredictable. While legal consequences must apply to all politicians equally, the broader implications of this ruling raise pressing questions about democracy, political strategy, and the future of France's right-wing populism. Ms Le Pen's conviction for misappropriating European funds and her subsequent sentencing, including a prison term and financial penalties, reinforce the principle that no politician is above the law. At the heart of the case was a system of using European Parliament funds to pay staff who worked primarily for RN, an act deemed as fraud by the courts.

The ruling sends a strong message about accountability, particularly in an era when public trust in institutions is fragile. However, the immediacy of her disqualification - despite the possibility of appeal - introduces concerns about judicial influence over political processes, especially since past cases involving French politicians allowed more time before a ban took effect. The most immediate consequence of this ruling is the leadership vacuum within RN. Ms Le Pen was widely seen as the far-right's strongest candidate for 2027, with polls suggesting she could have mounted a formidable challenge to centrist governance. Now, her party must either rally behind a successor, most likely Jordan Bardella, or risk losing momentum. Mr Bardella, as RN's president, has positioned himself as a charismatic and competent figure, but whether he can command the same level of personal loyalty and electoral success remains uncertain. The ruling may force RN to accelerate its transition into a broader populist movement rather than relying on the Le Pen family brand.

But this decision doesn't only affect the far right. French democracy itself now faces an intense debate on whether judicial rulings should have the power to reshape elections. Figures from both the left and the right, including Mr Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Mr Laurent Wauquiez, have expressed unease about a judge's decision effectively removing a popular politician from electoral contention. Their concerns tap into a larger question: should the electorate alone have the power to remove leaders, or is judicial oversight necessary to safeguard democracy from corruption? Ms Le Pen and her supporters will undoubtedly frame this as a political persecution, fuelling anti-establishment sentiment. When populist rhetoric thrives on narratives of victimhood and elite suppression, this ruling could backfire. Rather than diminishing RN's influence, it might galvanise its base, reinforcing the belief that the system is rigged against them. If the party can effectively channel this grievance into electoral gains in the legislative elections, the French political establishment may find itself facing an even stronger far-right movement.

Life and Death ~ II

Because ultimately we live for others, just as much as we live for ourselves - through our work and lives - in our professions and at home. We are constantly spending every bit of our lives, our time and energies thinking about others' well-being. And therefore, our lives can never be entirely ours - our presence, our existence is so intertwined with those of our near ones, and theirs in ours, and that our lives can never be thought of in isolation. And therefore it cannot be our decision to end it either



Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel laureate in Economics, died by assisted suicide (according to Wikipedia, "Assisted suicide, also known as physician-assisted suicide (PAS), is the process by which a person, with the help of others, takes drugs to end their life) on 27 March 2024, three weeks after his 90th birthday, in Switzerland (a country where PAS is legal). In fact he went to Switzerland... to die.

He had earlier written an email where he said: "I have believed since I was a teenager that the miseries and indignities of the last years of life are superfluous, and I am acting on that belief. I am still active, enjoying many things in life (except the daily news) and will die a happy man. But my kidneys are on their last legs, the frequency of mental lapses is increasing, and I am ninety years old. It is time to go."

Who are we to decide when it's time to go? Because, after all, our lives are not entirely ours. Had Kahneman's children hugged him closely and made him feel loved and wanted in spite of his ailments, would he still wish to go? Would he still have gone?

Because ultimately we live for others, just as much as we live for ourselves - through our work and lives - in our professions and at home. We are constantly spending every bit of our lives, our time and energies thinking about others' well-being. Poet Sunil Bhandari writes, "Because the fact is that our breath, our life, is also a collective. We are made of the efforts, the hope springs, the heart carvings, the soul bindings, the body cravings, the thought mouldings of all who love and care for us. We start being someone and then are slowly changed and created out of what others see us as. What might start as an opinion, an illusion, starts getting recreated. We then are what we make of ourselves, but are also deeply vented and grooved by what our world thinks of us."

And therefore, our lives can never be entirely ours - our presence, our existence is so intertwined with those of our near ones, and theirs in ours, and that our lives can never be thought of in isolation. And therefore it cannot be our decision to end it either. In the same vein, Bhan-

dari, once again, writes, "If our presence makes a difference to the lives of someone else, we are not only our own. If our mere breath gives solace to someone else, we are not our own. If mere presence, without words, without effort, makes someone's life feel complete, then our life is not merely ours."

And we have also seen instances of how hard ending one's life could be. One is reminded of Somerset Maugham's famous short story, *The Lotus Eaters* (a reference to the Lotus eaters of Greek Mythology, who led a life of indolence), where the protagonist gives up his job in London to spend his life in a small cottage on the island of Capri.

He arranged his finances in a way that he would be able to support himself for a fixed number of years (till he is sixty years old), with the assumption that he would either die naturally by then, or commit suicide.

It turned out that he did not die naturally, and after having sold his assets was still unable to make ends meet, and so decided to end his life. He shut himself up in his cottage and lit a charcoal fire to fill the room with carbon monoxide. But somehow with ample leakages, his suicide attempt seemed halfhearted and it failed. He survived but with grave brain damage and lived out the remainder years of his life in a deplorable state. Maugham therefore wanted to show that it wasn't easy to end one's life.

The other day there was an article in *The Statesman* that said Finland is named the happiest country in the world for the eighth year in a row, according to the World Happiness Report 2025. Other Nordic countries are once again at the top of the happiness rankings. Finland, Denmark, Iceland and Sweden remain the top four and in the same order.

Country rankings were based on answers people give when asked to rate their own lives. The study was done in partnership with the analytics firm

Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. "Happiness isn't just about wealth or growth - it's about trust, connection and knowing people have your back," said Jon Clifton, the CEO of Gallup. "If we want stronger communities and economies, we must invest in what truly matters: each other."

"Researchers say that beyond health and wealth, some factors that influence happiness sound deceptively simple - sharing meals with others, having somebody to count on for social support, and household size. In Mexico and Europe, for example, a household size of four to five people predicts the highest levels of happiness, the study said.

Believing in the kindness of others is also much more closely tied to happiness than previously thought, according to the latest findings. As an example, the report suggests that people who believe that others are willing to return their lost wallet is a strong predictor of the overall happiness of a population.

So one must find the light at the end of the tunnel - would families survive if their friends and relatives reached out to them, if they reached out to their friends and relatives? In earlier days with joint families, and societies being much more closely knit, much more supportive of one's kin and neighbours, it would be hard to imagine circumstances where entire families could choose to end their lives.

The growing importance of virtual friendships and relationships no doubt add fuel to the flames of isolation and loneliness. Solitude and depression become a commonplace circumstance instead of being of rare occurrence. Virtual existences, instead of binding and bringing people closer in warm bonds of camaraderie, in physical proximity to each other and in forging genuine relationships, fan the frosty breeze of separation and solitariness.

But Camus urges us to

think positively. In the preface to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he writes, "The fundamental subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is this: it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face. The answer, underlying and appearing through the paradoxes which cover it, is this: even if one does not believe in God, suicide is not legitimate. Written fifteen years ago, in 1940, amid the French and European disaster, this book declares that even within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism. In all the books I have written since, I have attempted to pursue this direction. Although *The Myth of Sisyphus* poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert."

And hence, concluding in words of Camus again:

"I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile.

"Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart.

"One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

So life may be a desert, but it is up to us to create forests in it, we may be given a huge stone to roll up a mountain knowing very well that it will roll back, but it is we who will have to accomplish the feat, it's we who will have to arrange to have meals together, and look out for each other, it's we who will have to return lost wallets and show kindness to others, it's we who will have to feel the breeze and the sun on our skin and start living, start wanting to live like the toad and all living beings, it's we who will have to stop being lotus eaters and start seeking like meaningfully, not just spending it like a burden. It is up to us to be happy Sisyphuses.

(Concluded)



Soumyanetra Munshi

The writer is Associate Professor, Economic Research Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Insulate the campus

SIR, The article "Crisis on campus" (23 March) by Amrita Banerjee expresses serious concern over increasing radicalisation at Jadavpur University campus and calls for concrete action to check its detrimental impact on academic life, institutional integrity and societal advancement.

Ideally, university education serves as a beacon of intellectual freedom, critical thought and cul-



ture of debate and discussion that inculcates a sense of dissent, tolerance and mutual respect. It prepares students to solve crucial problems of society and work for the progress and development of mankind in an increasingly competitive world. The recent incidents of student violence and insecurity at one of the premier institutions of higher learning in the country are symptomatic of the growing academic malaise on campuses across the country.

Apart from growing materialism, deterioration in moral and religious values, aggressive behaviour generated by social and mainstream media, and devaluation of liberal arts, social sciences and humanities, Indian uni-

versities today suffer from disproportionate political interference and polarisation. The politically-affiliated students promote party agendas rather than individual development. Instead of progressive student activism as witnessed before and after Independence, they indulge in physical clashes, disgraceful rowdiness, damage public property, and disrupt public life, raising concerns about safety and well-being of students, faculty, staff and visitors. This vicious culture of violence severely impacts academic autonomy and diversity of thought, stunts the intellectual, psychological and emotional growth of students, erodes teachers' respect, weakens the university's self-governance ability, undermines its reputation when it fails to create the best of human resources

DEADLY

SIR, A contractor allegedly employed a 16-year-old boy to clean a water tank at a housing society in Thane. The boy died from an electric shock while doing the job on March 20.

This incident laid bare two deadly menaces - namely the prevalence of child labour and the deadly working conditions. Often, workers are forced to work without adequate safety equipment. As a result, deaths after falling from scaffolding or while cleaning a tank or in a tunnel happen frequently in India.

Lack of teeth in labour laws and a callous attitude towards the implementation of even the existing ones make the lives of workers most vulnerable.

Yours, etc., Sujit De, Kolkata, 30 March.

including quality educators, doctors, engineers and researchers, and makes the higher education system inefficient.

The universities should be insulated from partisan politics to provide them greater autonomy in academic, administrative,

and financial matters, and make them a bastion of free speech, academic freedom, and the marketplace of ideas which are essential for a vibrant democracy and sustainable future.

Yours, etc., D S Kang, Hoshiarpur, 28 March.

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ASIAN VOICES

A model of innovation for cities

Xiong'an New Area, established as a national-level district, following the example of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone and Shanghai Pudong New Area, is a key initiative of national significance. Its development is a major strategic decision made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China with General Secretary Xi Jinping at its core, to advance the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei province.

Xiong'an is designed to play the role of an important engine for the region's development by absorbing Beijing's non-capital functions and promoting innovation. With a forward-thinking vision, Xiong'an adheres to international standards and the new development philosophy, laying the foundation for high-standard, modern urban construction in the new era. Xiong'an New Area's innovation-driven development strategy is focused on institutional reforms, technological breakthroughs and systemic optimization. It strives to unleash its potential through institutional improvements, and focus on technological development which is at the heart of its future growth.

Xiong'an has implemented bold and pioneering reforms, es-

CHINADAILY

established a streamlined, efficient management structure, introduced a unified administrative and political office system, and adopted a flat management mechanism. These measures are aimed at improving governance efficiency and ensuring smoother operations. The area is also exploring innovative personnel management practices, such as establishing institutions without administrative levels or staffing restrictions, which provide flexibility for key areas of work.

The new area is focusing on nurturing high-tech industries by attracting quality research and innovation resources from Beijing. With the establishment of research platforms such as the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Xiong'an Institute of Innovation and China Telecom's Xiong'an Smart City Industrial Park, the area has attracted top-tier talents and innovation projects, creating a dynamic ecosystem for technological advancement. Throughout its development, Xiong'an has integrated cutting-edge digital technology and smart infrastructure to build a smart city. For instance, the Beijing-Xiong'an inter-city railway employs BIM (building information modeling) for 3D digital management, and big data and cloud computing to ensure intelligent operations.

The city has achieved full 5G network coverage and built smart systems like the "City Brain", greatly enhancing urban governance and integrating technological innovation into every aspect of its construction and management. A key mission of Xiong'an is to absorb Beijing's non-capital functions, such as universities, research institutions, high-end medical facilities, corporate headquarters and financial institutions.

IN MEMORIAM

BANERJEE NAMITA — Remembering you silently in tears. — Son Amales, Daughter-in-law Alpna, granddaughter Sreya.

Of women's rights and global chauvinism

VITIT MUNTARBHORN

How is the situation of women's rights and their role as bridge-builders today, connecting between the multilateral and local settings? A recent seminar at the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), hosted by its International Studies Center, elaborated upon the situation in a world witnessing tumultuous changes.

Notably, there has never been a woman UN Secretary General, nor, for Thailand, a woman Minister of Foreign Affairs. Less than 20 per cent of key politicians at the national and local levels in this country are women. Yet, there has been some progress due to welcome changes of laws, policies and practices, such as the country's Gender Equality Act. Of course, the country's Prime Minister is a woman, but the fate of her aunt, also a PM, overturned by a coup d'etat, should not be overlooked.

The fickleness of international and national politics interplays with the fate of women's rights, especially their implementation. Currently, the post-World War II multilateral framework is being compromised, if not dismantled, by rampant nationalism-cum-transactionalism, with an introspective vibe at the apex of the superpower level. There is an ideological undercurrent which seeks to stifle a more liberal interpretation of women's rights and to upstage the gains which have been enjoyed by all, including the impetus from the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Beware of the rambunctious chauvinism emanating from key international players, whether in peace or in war!

The global community and friends of women's rights need to be more strategic in these fluctuating

times. The most prominent instrument safeguarding women's rights is the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The CEDAW Committee which supervises the treaty's implementation has been broadminded to interpret women's rights to cover sexual orientation and gender identity, shaping welcome space also for lesbians and transgender communities. A couple of years ago, it ruled in a seminal case concerning a South Asian country that an old colonial law prohibiting same sex relations between women was in breach of the CEDAW's anti-discrimination provisions. This is complemented well by Thailand's most recent reform with a marriage equality law enabling same sex marriages.

That openness to change needs to be well protected. If there are cracks in the nodes of multilateralism today, the advocacy to sustain and strengthen advances on the part of humanity needs to be astutely supported. The CEDAW remains important. The SDGs, especially their targets to eradicate gender-based violence and discrimination, are value added for global and national programmes propelling gender-transformative change.

To this should be added the need to realign global partnerships and alliances so that beyond the superpower realm, countries of the middle to higher power spectrum must cooperate more resolutely to overcome the assistance-cum-protection vacuum.

Interlinking between the multilateral and the local, there was the visit to Thailand by the UN's Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls at the end of 2024 whose advice needs to be better disseminated. This Group is one of the

Special Procedures under the UN Human Rights Council emerging from the UN Charter, rather than from a human rights treaty such as the CEDAW.

What has this Working Group recommended to Thailand? Among a myriad number of findings, some are particularly significant. In the field of civil and political rights, it called upon the Thai authorities to address more the issue of gender-based violence and harassment against women politicians and other members of the public, together with more women's gateways to the top of the power stratum.

It expressed concern as regards Strategic Litigation against Public Participation (SLAPP) against women human rights defenders (WHRD), especially "the charges brought against at least 470 WHRDs for participating in pro-democracy activities since July 2020 and (it) urges the Government to refrain from suppressing their freedom of expression and assembly and to ensure their protection in accordance with international human rights standards."

On the economic front, the Group called for more participation of women at the top of the employment ladder, supporting action to share the multiple loads of women in housework, child care, and workplace, with an assurance of equal wages. While recognizing a high proportion of women in education, it encouraged more space for women in the science and technology field.

On family and social matters, it underlined discrepancies in the Thai nationality law and the challenge of early marriage among girls in parts of the country, coupled with polygamy in Southern Thailand. It can be added that there are no women religious judges and there remains the



blockage from a male-dominated religious hierarchy. With regard to the new marriage equality law, it advised that if a person has reached the age of 18, permission from the parents to marry should not be needed.

The advent of climate change and environmental degradation takes its toll among women and the Group advised a gender-responsive approach to climate-related mitigation and adaptation. It then singled out the issue of intersectionality whereby women and girls are affected multiply via a variety of statuses and situations, including disabilities, security in Thailand's Southern Provinces, women in detention, refugee, migrant and displaced women, ethnic minority and indigenous women, gender diverse and older women.

Finally, it called for adjustments to ensure that the existing domestic violence law and the gender equality law comply with international standards. The weakness of the

former is that it is based on too much mediation without accountability, while the loophole of the latter is that it is constrained by national security and religious grounds. The country also needs a comprehensive anti-discrimination law.

Those propositions will doubtlessly be re-visited when the country next appears before the CEDAW Committee, tentatively in 2025. Ostensibly, women's rights and roles as bridge-builders of peace, human rights, democracy and sustainable development, connecting between multilateral/international standards and local wisdom, are at the heart of every society, without exception. And navigating the uncharted course of the future will invite not only dexterity and creativity but also empathy for all.

(The writer is Professor Emeritus at Chulalongkorn University and a UN Special Rapporteur under the UN Human Rights Council who wrote Thailand's first report for the CEDAW.)

100 YEARS AGO OCCASIONAL NOTE

A JARRING note in the chorus of congratulations which has hailed the achievement of Sir Sefton Brancker, and the selection of Karachi as the main air depot for India, is struck by Commander Burney, M.P., the originator of the Empire airship mail and passenger service scheme, and also the inventor of the plan for carrying passengers inside instead of outside the giant envelope of the airship. "Personally," he declared to an Australian newspaper representative the other day, "I disagree with the Air Ministry's plans for an airship service calling at Egypt, Karachi, Bombay, Calcutta, Rangoon, and Singapore." The Commander would prefer an arrangement with stops only at Baghdad, Colombo, Fremantle, and Wellington. This plan would enable Fremantle to be reached in six and a half days, and Wellington in nine days from London. He would not, however, leave India entirely in the cold—metaphorically speaking. Night flying aeroplanes would carry the mails to distant parts of India and Australia; but so far as Commander Burney is concerned, Karachi might whistle for such a thing as passengers by airship.

NEWS ITEMS

PACT OF THE FIVE POWERS FRANCE & ENTRY OF GERMANY

(TIMES' SPECIAL SERVICE.)
LONDON, APRIL 1.

THE Italian attitude towards the Security problem would seem to coincide with that of the British, declares the Rome correspondent of The Times. The Government strongly favours a five-power pact between Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, and Germany.

This, it is believed, would be best accomplished by the four first-named states agreeing among themselves on the main lines governing the Pact, and thereafter inviting Germany to subscribe to the agreement.

The French Government's view, states The Times Paris correspondent, is that the opening of security negotiations with the idea of the inclusion of Germany, should be conditional upon the receipt of satisfactory information regarding the following points:

- Germany must define her new attitude towards the League of Nations.
- If she is admitted at Geneva, is she prepared to assume all obligations connected therewith?
- Is she still bent on securing an Austrian reunion?

Germany must also state her real intentions with regard to her eastern frontiers. France cannot tolerate any tinkering with the Polish frontier, which cannot be altered without Poland's free consent.

ELECTIONS LULL GERMAN PARTIES FAIL TO COMPROMISE

(TIMES' SPECIAL SERVICE.)
LONDON, APRIL 2.

THE nomination of Herr Marx remains, so far, the only definite move in the German elections.

No progress has been made with the suggestion that the Centre party should join the Right element in support of a common candidate, and thus defeat the Socialists. The Press of the Centre party opposes the plan, and the Right Section appears divided, not only on this particular issue, but on the campaign generally.

EX-OFFICER'S TRIAL DESERTION CHARGE AGAINST FRENCH COMMUNIST

PARIS, MAR. 31.

THE trial opened to-day at Orleans, before a court-martial, of ex-Captain Sadoul, an erstwhile French Communist, who was sentenced to death in 1919 for communicating intelligence to the enemy, but who is now a naturalized Russian. On the application of the prosecution, all charges against him, except that of desertion, were withdrawn.

Sadoul, who is an ex-barrister, conducted his own defence. He emphasized his services to France whilst in Russia and described himself as one of the pioneers of the Franco-Russian rapprochement. The hearing was adjourned.

It is expected that the trial will last a week. The Police are adopting stringent measures to prevent any disturbances.

COMMONS BY RADIO PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE PROPOSAL DROPPED

THE political correspondent of The Times understands that Mr. Baldwin has dropped the proposal to appoint a Parliamentary committee on the subject of broadcasting Parliamentary affairs. The matter will probably be discussed later in the year when the whole position of broadcasting comes up for review.

Culture wars that reshape societies

LEE BYUNG-JONG

Anyone who grew up watching Disney's classic animated film Snow White might find its recent live-action remake jarring. The fair-skinned Snow White of the original has been replaced by Rachel Zegler, a Latina actress with a darker complexion. The princess is no longer a passive damsel awaiting rescue by a prince but an assertive heroine who fights the Evil Queen and forges her own destiny. These changes have sparked a heated debate in the US. Some praise the remake for promoting racial diversity and challenging gender stereotypes, while others argue it strays too far from the original, embracing political correctness to an extreme.

This controversy highlights the growing cultural polarization in the US, exacerbated by President Trump's opposition to progressive ideals. Preaching traditional family values, Trump has waged a culture war against so-called "wokeness," which promotes diversity, equity and inclusion. Since taking office, he has issued a series of executive orders aimed at reversing progressive policies of the past. For instance, he has threatened to defund universities that allow transgender women to compete in women's sports. Trump has also pushed to revoke birthright citizenship for children of undocumented immigrants, despite constitutional protections.

To some extent, Trump's actions resonate with those who feel political

correctness in the US has gone too far. In Snow White, for example, some critics have labelled the prince's kiss on the sleeping princess as sexual harassment due to a lack of consent — an argument many find excessive. Similarly, transgender athletes competing in women's sports often retain biological advantages, raising concerns about fairness. Additionally, some women engage in "birth tourism," entering the US late in pregnancy to secure citizenship for their children, who sometimes later serve as "anchor babies" for family members seeking green cards.

Despite these issues, Trump's policies challenge the fundamental principles of the US, a nation built by immigrants. The first English settlers were, in fact, undocumented immigrants. Many believe the country's racial and cultural diversity has been a key to its strength and prosperity. They warn Trump's nativist and ethnocentric policies can stifle its dynamism. On a practical level, mass deportations of undocumented immigrants could also harm industries like agriculture and construction, which rely on their cheap labour.

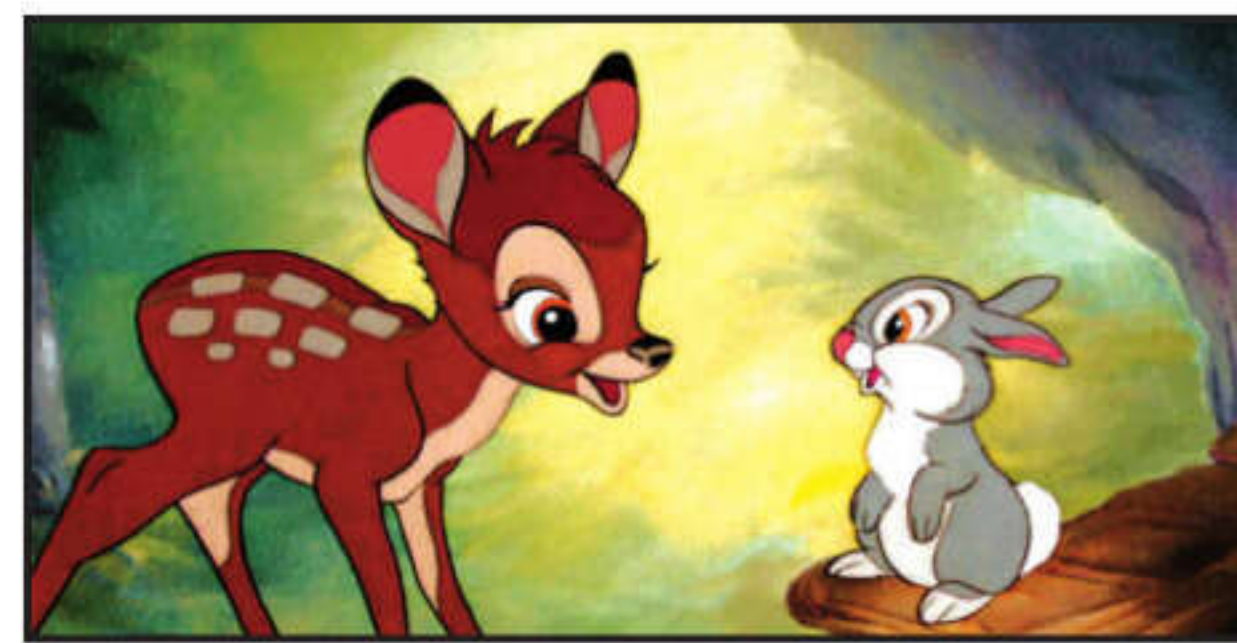
The culture war is not unique to the US. As societies advance, they inevitably become more multicultural, leading to internal tensions and conflicts. South Korea, while still largely homogeneous compared to the US or Europe, is experiencing similar challenges. With an influx of foreign workers and brides, Korean society is becoming increasingly

diverse and multicultural. As birth rates plummet and the population shrinks, Korea faces an urgent need to accept more immigrants.

The number of foreigners in Korea is steadily rising. Last year, they made up a record 4.9 per cent of the total population, up from 3.8 per cent in 2021. That figure is expected to surpass 5 per cent this year, the threshold for multicultural status set by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Analysts predict it will reach 7 per cent by the early 2040s. Immigration could help offset Korea's declining population, which has fallen by 500,000, or about 1 per cent, over the past five years.

Yeongam County in North Gyeongsang Province exemplifies the crisis. Each year, only about 25 babies are born in that county, while around 300 people die. Over the past two decades, the county's population has plummeted by 25 per cent to just 15,000 — the lowest among all Korean counties. In a desperate effort to reverse this trend, local officials recently announced plans to invite about 40 Myanmar refugees currently living in Thai border camps under UN protection. Authorities believe the refugees' Confucian and Buddhist traditions will help them integrate into Korean society.

As Korea grows more multicultural, social tensions are emerging. In the southern city of Daegu, a plan to build an Islamic mosque has faced fierce local opposition, with residents staging a pork barbecue protest and



prominently displaying a pig's head — an overt insult to the Islamic religion. Foreign brides often struggle with language and cultural barriers, and marriages have high rates of domestic violence and divorce. Meanwhile, foreign workers frequently report discrimination at workplaces and poor working conditions.

But Korea's cultural divisions extend beyond race and immigration. Sharp divides based on gender, generation, region and religion have fueled internal conflict. Young women, particularly in their 20s and 30s, overwhelmingly support progressive ideals and the opposition Democratic Party, while young men lean conservative and favour the ruling People Power Party. The longstanding regional rivalry between the liberal southwestern Jeolla provinces and the conservative southeastern Gyeongsang provinces remains strong, often leading to mutual animosity. Religious divides also

contribute to tensions, with Christians generally holding more conservative views than non-Christians.

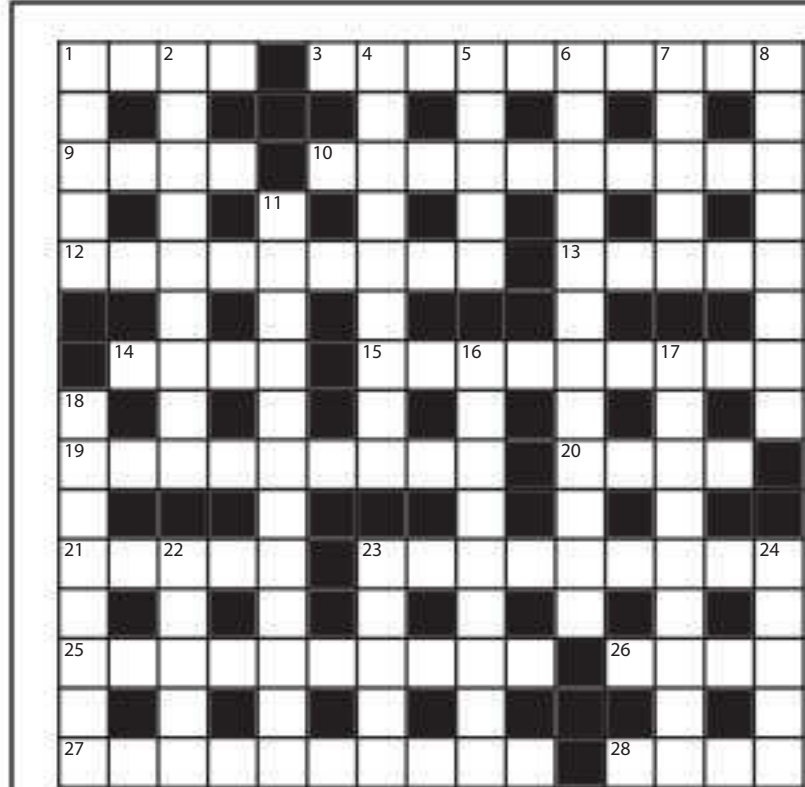
In many ways, Korea is beginning to resemble the US, where political and ideological confrontations deepen cultural rifts. Elections are increasingly decided along gender, generational and ideological lines. Recent protests over President Yoon Suk Yeol's impeachment illustrate this stark divide. Opponents of impeachment include Christians, young men and south-eastern residents, while supporters include a lot of young women and people from the southwest.

Already divided from North Korea, South Korea cannot afford further internal fractures. As the country navigates its evolving identity, finding common ground will be essential to maintaining national unity.

The Korea Herald/ANN.

CROSSWORD

NO-293095



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

SCRUFF WATERLOO
R N I T I O V
P I N C E N E Z S A C H E T
E A A E C A R B
P R O P A G A N D A G L O W N
L E L R O
I C E F I E L D E X O D U S
O O U N
A M B U S H S T A M P E D E
B N I O P
W A R D D I P L O M A T
L E H L C S
C A S I N O I R O N G L A D
N U S G U G
S T A G E S E T Y O R K I E R

- ACROSS**
- Hold out something that looks like a foot (4)
 - I'm now working with board from shifting trees (6,4)
 - Son leaving European capital in expensive coat (4)
 - Minor member of cast often subject to examination (10)
 - Somewhat obscure regarding US singer and curtailed repeat appearance (9)
 - Best fish, entirely presented without tail (5)
 - Power supplied by energy source in sudden intake (4)
 - Band entrances without piano skill, on reflection (9)
 - Somehow it's nicer to receive kiss from a foreign party? (9)
 - Petty restrictions placed around car accessory (4)
 - Was keen about retaining revolutionary live work on program (5)
 - Councillor in type of work involving old, old fashion item (9)
 - Perverse high lunar tide swamping loch (5-7)
 - Supply side finally falling — it's a joke (4)
 - Flower, one left in wind (6,4)
 - Tax: it's absent from laughing matter, perhaps (4)
- DOWN**
- Island native, flightless bird, going between both sides (5)
 - Soprano, working with contralto, engaged in hard work and lyrical expertise (9)
 - Head of college in university repeatedly found in pubs? That's not suspicious (9)
 - Relative a German upset over church (5)
 - Cryptic behaviour? I cite Nimrod's puzzling (12)
 - Old safety mechanism is valuable (2,3)
 - Apply solvent to uninteresting carbon prop (3-5)
 - Agency worker, with hint about richness, taking a chance (8,4)
 - Church in Spain covered in material that's black and red (9)
 - Vileness, putrid, spreading in a day (9)
 - Possible target for repairing telephone problem (8)
 - Advertising expenditure? (5)
 - Ill-bred fellow caught having fling (5)
 - Vacuous compassion I expressed after the writer tumbled over (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

Israel's operations in Gaza expand to seize 'large areas'

Israeli strikes overnight and into Wednesday had killed more than 40 people, nearly a dozen of them children

ASSOCIATED PRESS JERUSALEM, 2 APRIL

Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip is expanding to seize "large areas," the defence minister said, while officials at hospitals inside the Palestinian territory said that Israeli strikes overnight and into Wednesday had killed more than 40 people, nearly a dozen of them children.

greatly expanded since the war began in 2023. Israel says the buffer zone is needed for its security, while Palestinians view it as a land grab that further shrinks the narrow coastal territory, home to around two million people.

Katz didn't specify which areas of Gaza would be seized in the expanded operation, which he said includes the "extensive evacuation" of the population from fighting areas.

His statement came after Israel ordered the full evacuation of the southern city of Rafah and nearby areas. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said Israel aims to maintain an open-ended but unspecified security control of the Gaza Strip once it achieves its aim of crushing Hamas.

The Israeli government has long maintained a buffer zone just inside Gaza along its security fence and has



Gaza residents to "expel Hamas and return all hostages."

The militant group still holds 59 captives, of whom 24 are believed to still be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

"This is the only way to end the war," Katz said. Since the breakdown of the ceasefire last month,

when Israel ordered people to move and expanded their areas of operation, the "no-go" zones in Gaza now constitute more than 60 per cent of the strip, said Olga Cherevko, a spokesperson for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Aid groups are providing assistance as the situation allows, as supplies dwindled

because of Israel's monthlong blockade on Gaza.

"No-go" zones include the military zone in the Netzarim corridor — a zone carved out by Israel separating northern from southern Gaza — and the expanded buffer zone and evacuation areas.

The Hostage Families Forum, which represents most captives' families, said that it was "horrified to wake up this morning to the Defence Minister's announcement about expanding military operations in Gaza."

The group said the Israeli government "has an obligation to free all 59 hostages from Hamas captivity — to pursue every possible channel to advance a deal for their release."

They stressed that every passing day puts their loved ones' lives at greater risk.

Military attacks threaten relief efforts as more Myanmar earthquake survivors are found



AGENCIES BANGKOK, 2 APRIL

Rescuers pulled two men alive from the ruins of a hotel in Myanmar's capital on Wednesday and a third from a guesthouse in another city, five days after a 7.7 magnitude earthquake.

But most teams were finding only bodies, and concerns were growing that continued military attacks on resistance forces could jeopardise relief efforts.

The quake hit midday

Friday, toppling thousands of buildings, collapsing bridges and buckling roads.

The death toll rose to 2,886 Wednesday, with another 4,639 injured, according to state television MRTV. Local reports suggest much higher figures.

The earthquake came amid civil war in Myanmar, making a dire humanitarian crisis even worse. More than three million people had been displaced from their homes and nearly 20 million were in need even before it

hit, according to the United Nations.

Two of the major armed resistance forces fighting the military, which seized power in 2021 from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, have announced ceasefires to facilitate the humanitarian response to the earthquake, but the military hasn't relented in its attacks.

"Once again they are putting regime survival above the interests of people, even at a time of calamity," said Richard Horsey, senior adviser for Myanmar with the Crisis Group.

In the capital, Naypyitaw, a team of Turkish and local rescue workers used an endoscopic camera to locate Naing Lin Tun on a lower floor of the damaged hotel where he worked. They pulled him gingerly through a hole jackhammered through a floor and loaded him on to a gurney nearly 108 hours after he was first trapped.

A wary Europe awaits Rubio with NATO's future on the line

AGENCIES WASHINGTON, 2 APRIL

American Secretary of State Marco Rubio travels this week to a gathering of top diplomats from NATO countries and is sure to find allies that are alarmed, angered and confused by the Trump administration's desire to reestablish ties with Russia and its escalating rhetorical attacks on longtime transatlantic partners.

Allies are deeply concerned by President Donald Trump's readiness to draw closer to Russian leader Vladimir Putin, who sees NATO as a threat, amid an American effort to broker a ceasefire in Ukraine. Recent White House comments and



insults directed at NATO allies Canada and Denmark — as well as the military alliance itself — have only increased the angst, especially as new American tariffs are taking effect against friends and foes alike.

Rubio arrives in Brussels on Thursday for two days of meetings with his NATO counterparts and European

pend all of that when he and other NATO leaders meet for a June summit in the Netherlands.

As Rubio did last month at a meeting of foreign ministers from the Group of 7 industrialised democracies, America's top diplomat, who is regarded by many overseas as a more pragmatic and less dogmatic member of Trump's administration, may be able to salvage a watered-down group consensus on the war in Ukraine.

That's even as Trump said this week that Ukraine "was never going to be a member of NATO" despite leaders declaring at last year's summit that the country was on an "irreversible" path to join.

Wisconsin and Florida elections provide early warning signs to Trump and Republicans

AGENCIES WISCONSIN, 2 APRIL

A trio of elections on Tuesday provided early warning signs to Republicans and President Donald Trump at the beginning of an ambitious term, as Democrats rallied against his efforts to slash the federal government and the outsize role being played by billionaire Elon Musk.

In the marquee race for a Wisconsin Supreme Court seat, the conservative judge endorsed by Trump and backed by Musk and his groups to the tune of \$21 million lost by a significant margin in a state Trump won in November.



Susan Crawford, a Dane County judge who led legal fights to protect union power and abortion rights and to oppose voter ID, defeated Republican and Elon Musk-backed Brad Schimel in a race that broke records for spending, was the highest-turnout Wisconsin Supreme

Court election ever and became a proxy fight for the nation's political battles.

And while Florida Republicans held two of the most pro-Trump House districts in the country, both candidates also underperformed Trump's November margins.

The elections — the first major contests since Trump's return to power — were seen as an early measure of voter sentiment as Trump works with unprecedented speed to dramatically upend the federal government, clashing with the courts and seeking revenge as he tests the bounds of presidential power.

The party that loses the presidency in November typically picks up seats in the next midterm elections, and Tuesday's results provided hope for Democrats — who have faced a barrage of internal and external criticism about their response to Trump — that they can follow that trend.

Cory Booker sets a record with marathon Senate speech

AGENCIES WASHINGTON, 2 APRIL

In a feat of determination, New Jersey Democratic Sen. Cory Booker held the Senate floor with a marathon speech that lasted all night and into Tuesday night, setting a historic mark to show Democrats' resistance to President Donald Trump's sweeping actions.

Booker took to the Senate floor on Monday evening, saying he would remain there as long as he was "physically able."

It wasn't until 25 hours and 5 minutes later that the 55-year-old senator, a former football tight end, finished speaking and limped off the floor. It set the record for the

longest continuous Senate floor speech in the chamber's history. Booker was assisted by fellow Democrats who gave him a break from speaking by asking him questions on the Senate floor.

It was a remarkable show of stamina as Democrats try to show their frustrated supporters that they are doing everything possible to contest Trump's agenda.

Yet Booker also provided a moment of historical solace for a party searching for its way forward: By standing on the Senate floor for more than a night and day and refusing to leave, he had broken a record set 68 years ago by then Sen. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, a segregationist and southern Democrat, to filibuster the advance of the Civil Rights Act in 1957.



"I'm here despite his speech," said Booker, who spoke openly on the Senate floor of his roots as the descendant of both slaves and slave-owners.

He added, "I'm here because as powerful as he was, the people are more powerful."

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, the first Black party leader in Congress, slipped into the Senate chamber to watch Booker on Tuesday afternoon. He called it "an incredibly powerful moment" because

Booker had broken the record of a segregationist and was "fighting to preserve the American way of life and our democracy."

Still, Booker centered his speech on a call for his party to find its resolve, saying, "We all must look in the mirror and say, 'We will do better.'"

"These are not normal times in our nation," Booker said as he began the speech Monday evening.

"And they should not be treated as such in the United States Senate. The threats to the American people and American democracy are grave and urgent, and we all must do more to stand against them."

Val Kilmer, Top Gun and Batman star with an intense approach, dies at 65

AGENCIES LOS ANGELES, 2 APRIL

Val Kilmer, the brooding, versatile actor who played fan favourite Iceman in Top Gun, donned a voluminous cape as Batman in Batman Forever and portrayed Jim Morrison in The Doors, has died. He was 65.

Kilmer died Tuesday night in Los Angeles, surrounded by family and friends, his daughter, Mercedes Kilmer, said in an email to agencies. The New York Times was the first to report his death on Tuesday.

Val Kilmer died from



pneumonia. He had recovered after a 2014 throat cancer diagnosis that required two tracheotomies.

"I have behaved poorly. I have behaved bravely. I have behaved bizarrely to some. I deny none of this and have no regrets because

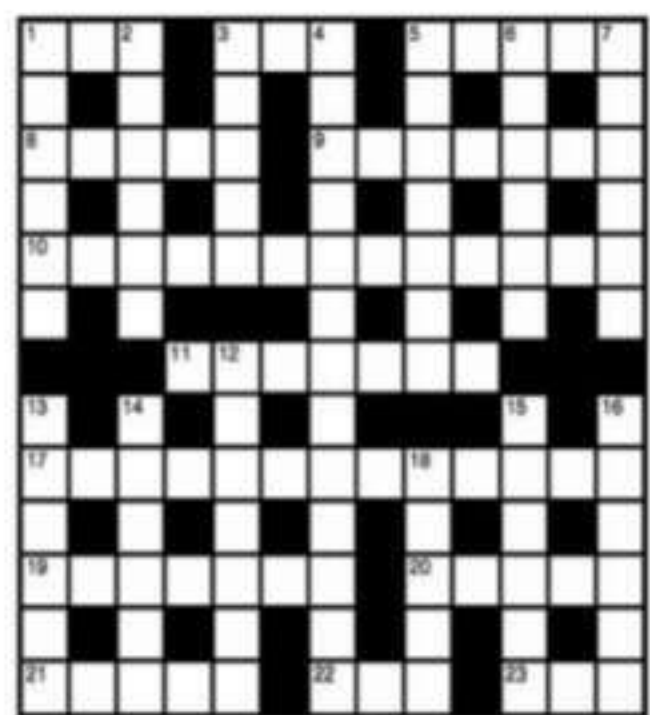
I have lost and found parts of myself that I never knew existed," he says toward the end of Val, the 2021 documentary on his career. "And I am blessed."

Kilmer, the youngest actor ever accepted to the prestigious Juilliard School at the time he attended, experienced the ups and downs of fame more dramatically than most. His break came in 1984's spy spoof Top Secret! followed by the comedy Real Genius in 1985.

Kilmer would later show his comedy chops again in films including MacGruber and Kiss Kiss Bang Bang.

LEISURE

10 MINUTE CROSSWORD



ACROSS: 1 Be nosy (3), 3 Transgression (3), 5 Ship's floors (5), 8 Vestige (5), 9 Newspaper format (7), 10 Camera accessory (9,4), 11 As a whole (2,5), 17 No longer in nappies (6-7), 19 Avian influenza (4,3), 20 Middle-Easterner (5), 21 Carnass support (5), 22 Unit of weight (3), 23 Attempt (3). DOWN: 1 Edible tuber (6), 2 Annual (6), 3 Unduly high (5), 4 Conservation charity (8,5), 5 Doubtful (7), 6 Selected (6), 7 Person who enjoys inflicting pain (6), 12 Necessary (7), 13 Steady (6), 14 Type of cloud (6), 15 Baby (6), 16 Unusual thing (6), 18 Extraterrestrial (5).

SOLUTIONS TO YESTERDAY'S CROSSWORD: ACROSS: 1 Miner, 4 Quay (Minor key), 8 Rag, 9 Aggravate, 10 Container ship, 11 Lean-to, 13 Glider, 16 Parallelogram, 19 Aconcagua, 20 Diner, 21 Hero, 22 Shard. DOWN: 1 Magenta, 2 Nyala, 3 Regretful, 4 Quarrel, 5 Abash, 6 Frisky peep, 7 Tempest, 12 Tally-ho, 14 Derisive, 15 Tennis, 17 Range, 18 Opera.

BEETLE BAILEY/Mort Walker



RED EYE/Bill Yates & Mel Casson



DADDY DAZE/John Kovalski



NEED TO KNOW

Medical Assistance: Capital Hospital 2390688, Municipality Hospital 2591237, ESI, Sahid Nager 2544647. 24-hr Medicine Shops: Kar Clinic: 2516666, Ravindra Medical Hall: 2598090, 2597628. Ambulance: Red Cross 2392005, Capital Hospital 2390688, Municipality Hospital 2590255. Blood Banks: Capital Hospital 2394985, Municipality Hospital 2591206. Electricity: Cesu control room 2390286. Telephone Directory: Directory Enquiry: 1971500, Fault Complaint: 1982198. Railway: Enquiry: 139/2532233/2534042, Central Enquiry (Khurda Road) 2490666. Air Service: Airport Enquiry 2596105, 2596177(IA). Bus Stand: Barmunda bus-stand (OSRTC): 2354695, Private Bus Enquiry: 2354769. Police Control Room: 100. Twin-City Commissioner 0674-2530035, Deputy Commissioner of Police, BBSR: 2540555, District Intelligence Bureau 2540294.

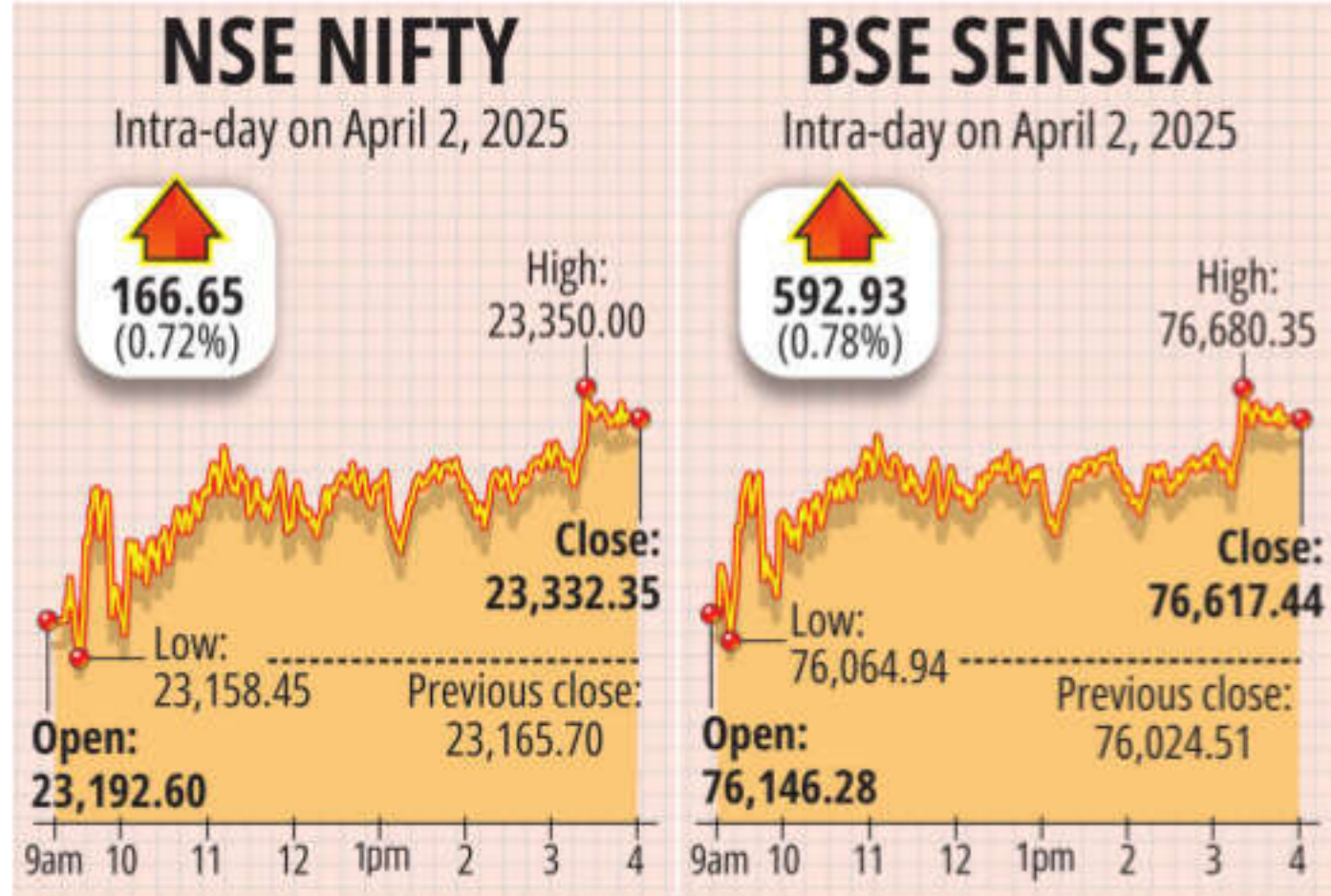
SCRABBLE (BRAND) G R A M M S. PAR SCORE 110-120 by JUDD. Includes a grid of letters and rack information.

SUDOKU Concepts Sudoku By Dave Green. Includes a 9x9 grid and difficulty level information.

THUMBNAIls

Market erases previous losses; Sensex up 593 pts

Almost all indices ended in the green with Nifty Realty emerging as top performer



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Benchmark indices on Wednesday erased previous losses and snapped two-day losing streak...

with Nifty around 23200 and extended the rise as the day progressed, hitting 23350 intraday...

Bank and Nifty FMCG jumped 1 per cent each. Nifty Auto, Nifty Financial Services, Nifty IT, and Nifty Pharma also rose around 0.8 per cent each.

of losses in which it had declined by 4.21 per cent. Tech Mahindra led the gains, rising 2.21 per cent while Infosys and Wipro followed closely...

India's Manufacturing PMI rises to 58.1 in March, highest in 8 months



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

India's Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose to 58.1 in March 2025, up from 56.3 in February...

sales expanding at the fastest pace since July 2024, as a result of strong demand, positive customer interest, and effective marketing...

To prevent stock shortages, manufacturers boosted input purchases to a seven-month high, well above the average.

during the previous month. Although international orders slightly slowed, overall demand momentum remained robust...

Rupee projected to trade in range of 85.5-87.5 per dollar in FY26

AGENCIES NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The performance of Indian rupee in FY25, when compared with other global currencies, was relatively stable...

the rupee is likely to find support from improvement in growth prospects, lower inflation and stable external deficits. Overall, we expect the rupee to trade in the range of 85.5-87.5 per dollar in FY26...

cut expectations, which, in turn, boosted the demand for the dollar. 'The rupee's fortune also varied in turn. Between March to October, it depreciated by just 0.8 per cent...

Need for modernising Central KYC Records Registry, streamlining KYC process: DFS Secretary

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

M. Nagaraju, Secretary, Department of Financial Services (DFS) emphasised the need for the modernisation of the Central KYC Records Registry (CKYCR) and streamlining of KYC process.



and regulated entities. The DFS also shared the measures so far taken by the Government and Financial Sector Regulators and proposed measures for further enhancing efficiency...

ing efficiency, reducing redundancy and improving security relating to KYC process across

financial sectors were discussed at length. During the discussion, many suggestions were received from stakeholders which will be considered for further easing of the KYC process.

Poonam Gupta appointed Deputy Governor of RBI

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

The government appointed Poonam Gupta as the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on 1 April, 2025. She will hold the position for three years...



Gupta will succeed Michael Debaprata Patra about two months after he retires from the position.

She holds a Master's degree and a PhD in Economics from the University of Maryland, USA, and a Master's degree in Economics from Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi.

Gupta taught at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Maryland (USA), and as a visiting faculty at ISI, Delhi. She has also been the RBI Chair Professor at NIPFP and a Professor at ICRIER.

She currently serves on the boards of NIPFP and GDN (Global Development Network). She is a member of the World Bank's advisory groups on 'Poverty & Equity' and the 'World Development Report'...

India surpasses US in terms of locomotive production in FY25; NHAI capex spikes 21 pc

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

India surpasses the total locomotive production of regions such as the United States, Europe, South America, Africa, and Australia, emerged as a global leader in railway locomotive manufacturing.

duction is the highest ever for locomotive manufacturing in the country, reflecting the significant achievements of all units in enhancing railway infrastructure and capacity.

Chittaranjan Locomotive Works manufactured 700 locomotives, Banaras Locomotive Works produced 477, Patiala Locomotive Works contributed 304 locomotives and 100 locomotives each were manufactured at the Madhepura and Marhowrah units.

Curious case of GST on popcorn: A 'namkeen,' packaged & sweet saga

C.A. ARUPA DEY BANIK

Popcorn, the ubiquitous snack of movie nights and casual munching, has found itself embroiled in a surprisingly complex tax tale in India.

be regularised. 'In view of the prevailing genuine doubts regarding the applicability of GST rate on ready to eat popcorn mixed with salt and spices, as recommended by the (GST) Council, issue for past period up to 14.02.2025, is hereby regularised on 'as is where is' basis...

reflecting its classification as 'namkeen.' However, the same popcorn, when pre-packaged and labelled, incurs a 12 per cent GST, due to its status as a packaged food item. Conversely, caramel popcorn, with its sugar content, is deemed a sugar confectionery and attracts the highest rate of 18 per cent.



luxury food items. However, the 55th meeting ushered in a new era of granular classification, driven by packaging, ingredients, and preparation methods.

Before, whether you grabbed a bag of popcorn at the theatre or bought a pre-packaged version from the store, the tax was the same. Now, the 55th GST Council

Meeting has made the following changes: Loose Popcorn (Unpackaged): Remains at 5 per cent, consistent with its classification as a basic snack. Pre-Packaged Popcorn: Now taxed at 12 per cent, reflecting its status as a packaged food item.

as long as supplied independently of the cinema exhibition service. Once bundled with Movie Tickets, there is another layer of complexity and the GST rate for the entire bundle is determined by the movie ticket's GST rate.

of each popcorn type. Ultimately, the popcorn saga reveals more than just tax rates; it's a mirror to the evolving landscape of consumer goods and the ongoing quest for clarity within India's fiscal framework.

ISL: Jamshedpur FC look to overturn poor record against Mohun Bagan

Hosts face tough task against reigning League Shield champions in the first leg of the semifinals at their home ground

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMSHEDPUR, 2 APRIL

Jamshedpur FC are set to host Mohun Bagan Super Giant (MBSG) in the first leg of their Indian Super League (ISL) 2024-25 semifinal fixture on Thursday. This will be the first time that these two sides meet in the playoffs, with MBSG reaching the last-four courtesy of winning the ISL League Shield, whereas the Red Miners defeated NorthEast United FC 2-0 in the one-legged eliminator.

Jamshedpur FC have not secured a victory in their previous six matches against Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the ISL, losing on four occasions. Another failure to win here will make it their longest winless run in front of any opponent in the competition.

Meanwhile, MBSG have been unbeaten on the road in the previous six games, winning thrice and scoring 13 goals at the expense of conceding merely thrice. Avoiding a loss here will not only mark a new club record for their longest such streak away from home in the league but also enable them to enter the second and decisive leg in Kolkata high on confidence.

Jamshedpur FC have the advantage of making a strong start to the semifinal tie, but they have lost both of their last two games here - with their last longer losing streak at the stadium coming between November and December 2022, of three games each.

Jamshedpur FC have seen a purple patch upfront in 2025, scoring the most goals (22) since the start of the cal-



endar year - one more than Mohun Bagan Super Giant (21), who are the highest scorers in the league with 47 strikes.

MBSG have won just one of their last six ISL playoff matches in regulation or extra time (D3 L2), including a 1-3 defeat to Mumbai City FC in last season's final. They will want to set this record straight to clinch the ISL Cup after falling short at the final hurdle last season.

Head coach Jose Molina remains unbeaten in the ISL playoffs (W1 D2) from his tenure with ATK in 2016. If he avails a defeat here, Molina will surpass John Gregory (W2 D1 in 2017-18 for Chennaiyin FC) to become the tactician with the longest unbeaten streak in the playoffs.

Jamshedpur FC's head coach, Khalid Jamil, outlined an optimistic perspective before the fixture. "There are

two legs to play and we are facing a very good team. We are positive since we are playing at home, and we must think of a positive result," he said.

Mohun Bagan Super Giant head coach Jose Molina affirmed his side's commitment to winning the ISL Cup. "We are ready and we want to win the ISL Cup. We are absolutely happy with the season, but we want to win the Cup too," he said.

Jamshedpur FC and Mohun Bagan Super Giant have faced each other 10 times in the ISL, with MBSG winning five times and the Red Miners emerging victorious thrice. Two encounters have produced draws.

Jamshedpur FC's Javi Hernandez is just two goal contributions away from reaching 50 in the ISL (29 goals and 19 assists). If he scores in this game, he will record the second-highest goal tally in a

single season for Jamshedpur FC, behind Greg Stewart (11 goals in 2021-22).

Mohun Bagan Super Giant's Jason Cummings has provided an assist in each of their last two away games. Setting up another goal here will make him the first club player to assist in three consecutive away matches in ISL history. Overall, he has netted four times and directly facilitated six strikes during the current campaign.

Premier League: Elanga strike gives Forest win over Man Utd

AGENCIES
NOTTINGHAM, 2 APRIL

Anthony Elanga's stunning first half goal was enough for Nottingham Forest to claim three Premier League points against Manchester United at the City Ground.

The Forest winger stormed through the United defence with just five minutes played in NG2 to secure the win for Nuno Espirito Santo's Reds.

Fresh from booking their place in the FA Cup semi-finals with a penalty shoot-out victory over Brighton & Hove Albion on Saturday, Nuno Espirito Santo's men took another big step towards qualifying for the UEFA Champions League.

It was a trademark counter-attacking goal that decided the contest, with Elanga running from deep inside his own half before tucking home after only five minutes.

Ruben Amorim's Red Devils applied plenty of pressure thereafter but could not find an equaliser, with Harry Maguire squandering two glorious chances late on.

Elanga dedicated his goal against Manchester United to the Nottingham Forest supporters and teammates, he said, "I wanted to thank the Forest fans because they've supported me so much this season and last season as well."

"It's credit to all the players that started against Brighton and again today. Tomorrow is all about recovery because we have another big game on Saturday against Villa who are doing well as well."

Manchester United remain in 13th spot, while the victory took third-placed Forest eight points clear of Chelsea and nine above Manchester City ahead of their matches later this week.

"We controlled the game, but we already knew this team can score goals out of

nothing. When they scored we changed the game a little bit from what they want. We tried with good opportunities, but in the last third, the last pass, the last assist wasn't there. Then if we don't have that we cannot score goals," said Man United manager Ruben Amorim.

This season continues United's onfield decline since managerial great Alex Ferguson retired in 2013 after winning the club's last league title.

It was his and United's 13th championship of the first 20 years of the Premier League. The club hasn't won another since.

Its lowest finish in the Premier League under Ferguson was third.

Amorim said in January that this might be the worst team in United's history and things have only got worse since then.

Among United's many problems this season have been a lack of goals. The Forest game was the 11th time it has failed to score in the league - prompting a desperate Amorim to play center back Harry Maguire in attack as he went in search of a late equalizer.

Maguire came closer than any of his teammates to scoring when seeing a stoppage time effort cleared off the line.

"We deserved more in this game, that is clear, but it was our fault. We need to be better in the last third," Amorim said.

Rasmus Hojlund, a striker signed from Atalanta for \$82 million last season, has only scored eight goals in his 41 games in all competitions this term.

Strike partner Joshua Zirkzee has scored six in 45 appearances. United has scored 37 in the league all season with a goal difference of minus 4.

Boxing World Cup: Jadumani enters semifinals

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

A resilient display under pressure allowed national champion Jadumani Singh Mandengbam to overcome the formidable Ellis Trowbridge of Britain to reach the semifinals of the men's 50kg category at the World Boxing Cup Brazil 2025.

Trowbridge, the 2024 World Boxing Cup Finals silver medallist, began the bout in his usual aggressive style but the Indian was prepared to absorb the pressure and find ways to land his punches, earning a 3:2 split decision in his favour on Tuesday. He will now face former Asian U-22 champion Asilbek Jalilov of Uzbekistan for a place in the final.

However, India's challenge in the 75kg, 85kg and 90+kg categories came to an end after all the three boxers went down fighting in their respective bouts. Nikhil Dubey lost the 75kg bout 0:5 against local favourite Kaue Belini while Jugnoo was at the wrong



end of a 1:4 split decision against France's Abdoulaye Traore in 85kg. Narender came close to beating Kazakhstan's Daniyal Saparbay, even getting a 30-27 verdict from one one judge but lost the 90+kg bout on a 3:2 split

decision. In the other categories, Manish Rathore (55kg) will take on Paris Olympian Yusulf Chothia of Australia, Hitesh (70kg) will meet Gabriele Guidi Rontani of Italy while Abhinash Jamwal (65kg) has to overcome the

challenge of Denis Bril of Germany. Earlier, Lakshya Chahar had a disappointing start to his campaign, suffering a 0-5 defeat against Brazil's Wanderley Pereira in the opening round of the men's 80 kg division on Day 1.

GEARING UP FOR BATTLE



Kolkata Knight Riders players take a break during a practice session at the iconic Eden Gardens in Kolkata ahead of their Indian Premier League (IPL) against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Thursday. ■ MOUL Mondal

Vandana credits influence of Pillay, Ronaldo, Bolt for iconic hockey career

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 2 APRIL

Indian women's hockey team forward Vandana Katariya, who retired from the international circuit on Tuesday, revealed drawing inspiration from legends like Dhanraj Pillay, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Usain Bolt to keep herself upbeat during her 15-year-long career in the senior side.

Vandana finished as the most-capped player in the history of Indian women's hockey with 320 international appearances and 158 goals. She called it an emotional decision to hang up her boots. "It was a very hard decision to take. We stay with each other more than a family, so leaving them was an emotional decision. To feel and understand this decision is really difficult. Today I felt too emotional and took the decision to announce my retirement," she told a news agency.

Despite achieving multiple accolades over the years, the



2013 Junior World Cup triumph where she finished as the team's top-scorer in Monchengladbach, Germany, and the Tokyo Olympics'

fourth-place finish remain close to Vandana's heart. "There were a lot of highs in my career from winning the bronze medal in Junior

World Cup in 2013 to qualifying for Rio Olympics in 2016 to winning a gold medal in the Asia Cup in 2017 to winning a silver medal in the Asian

Games to missing out on a medal and finishing fourth in the Tokyo Olympics. Among these, the Tokyo Olympics and the 2013 Junior World Cup are the most special moments for me," she asserted.

"After Tokyo, it was difficult to forget that heartbreak, but we thought we would cover it up in Paris, as we learned a lot in that tournament. I missed the Paris Olympics Qualifiers in Rachi due to an injury. The team performed well, but I think luck was not on our side. Had we won the match against Germany, then we would have qualified for the Paris Olympics."

The veteran player added that she has learned to give herself more time in training to bring the best out of herself.

"I feel players must be disciplined in their diet, recovery, and fitness. We all train together with our coaches and support staff, but I feel players who give themselves extra time stand out. I've always played with high energy and

kept myself fit throughout my career," she said.

When asked about her longevity in the sport and her favourite athletes, Vandana credited international stars including Ronaldo and Bolt as playing a role in her career. "I'm a fan of Dhanraj Pillay as he was also a forward and also followed (Cristiano) Ronaldo and Usain Bolt a lot in my life. Players are very disciplined these days and are ready for the high-performance requirement of the Indian team," she revealed.

She further highlighted the impact of the Women's Hockey India League in uplifting the confidence of youngsters for future tournaments.

"The Women's HIL was much-needed as it boosts the personal confidence of players. Even players other than the Indian camp also received an opportunity to prove themselves. We have a strong chance of clinching a medal in next year's World Cup and 2028 Olympics as the team is

doing really well."

"With the rise of hockey over the years, with the help of Khelo India, it is a good career opportunity for upcoming youngsters. The popularity of the game has reached the masses, and there is a good career for them in hockey now," she added.

The 32-year-old is yet to decide on her career ahead, but remains open to taking up a coaching role while confirming her participation in the next HIL as a player.

"I'm completely fit and I'm ready for any opportunity, including coaching (if required) and playing. I've not decided anything yet, nothing's coming to my mind. I will play in the next edition of the HIL. She played for the Shraichi Rarh Bengal Tigers in the inaugural edition earlier this year.

Sharing her initial hardship, Vandana remembered how her journey in hockey started in the fifth standard. "I used to play kho kho in school in the fifth standard.

My sisters used to play hockey, and I also joined them, and that is how my journey started in the sport. Now, the sport has given us a lot to live a healthy life, but I have faced situations when we struggled to manage food two times a day. I have faced a time when we four siblings had only one pair of shoes. "When I moved to Lucknow hostel, I received a kit, shoes, and proper food. My father had to sell his cattle, but he did not tell us. There were many challenges, but everything is fine now," she recalled.

In the end, she is happy that her struggles paid off and got the opportunity to get inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pep talk before and after the Tokyo Olympics. "Players' dreams are never-ending as they push for more, but after meeting him (PM Modi), it was very motivational. He inspires you so much to perform the best for the team," Vandana signed off.

