Prime Minister Narendra Modi – honoured with Russia's highest state decoration, Order of St Andrew the Apostle on April 12, for promoting partnership and friendly relations between the two countries.

- The information was shared by the Russian Embassy in India.
- This is the second international award the PM received this month after Zayed Medal, the United Arab Emirates' highest civilian award.
- With the Russian award, PM Narendra Modi has now been conferred with around seven top global awards.
- The Order of 'St Andrew the Apostle' is the highest order and the oldest state order of Russia, first established in 1698.
- It was abolished under the Soviet Union but re-established in 1998.
- In 2017, Chinese president Xi Jinping was awarded the Order of St Andrew the Apostle.
- The other heads of state to receive the prestigious award include Nursultan Nazarbayev, former President of Kazakhstan and Heydar Aliyev, late President of Azerbaijan.
INTERNATIONAL

US President Donald Trump’s ban on transgender Americans in the military - came into force on April 12, 2019
- Trump’s administration has insisted that there is a great risk to military effectiveness and lethality to allow transgender people to serve
- The move reverses a policy enacted under his predecessor Barack Obama
- The policy has undergone various changes since Trump first announced it on Twitter in July 2017
- The US Supreme Court ultimately ruled in January that the policy could take effect pending the outcome of ongoing litigation

Sudan’s long-time president Omar al-Bashir - has been removed from office and arrested following months of civilian protests

- In a television address, Defense Minister Ahmed Awad Ibn Awf said the 75-year-old leader has been arrested and put in a safe place
- On 30 June 1989, Colonel Omar al-Bashir led a bloodless military coup, suspended political parties and introduced an Islamic legal code on the national level.
- On 16 October 1993, al-Bashir appointed himself President and disbanded the Revolutionary Command Council.
- Sudan became a one-party state under the National Congress Party (NCP) in 1996
- The United States subsequently listed Sudan as a state sponsor of terrorism
The Australia-born WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange - arrested by British police at Ecuador’s embassy in London, his home since June 2012, after it withdrew his asylum status

- At the time, he was famous as the face of WikiLeaks, as the whistleblowing website exposed government secrets worldwide, especially the release of 5,00,000 US documents on the Iraq and Afghan wars
- He is likely to be extradited to US and face indictment for conspiracy to commit computer intrusion along with former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning in 2010, revealing classified war crimes information
- Assange created WikiLeaks in 2006 with a group of likeminded activists and information technology experts, to provide a secure way for whistleblowers to leak information
The Israeli spacecraft - called Beresheet, the first privately funded mission to the Moon - has crashed on the lunar surface after the apparent failure of its main engine.

- During the soft touch-down descent on the Moon’s surface, it suffered technical problems and crashed.
- The aim of the mission was to take pictures and conduct experiments to study Moon’s magnetism on the lunar surface.
- The project has cost about $100m (£76m) and has paved the way for future low-cost lunar exploration.
- Beresheet, which is Hebrew for "in the beginning", was a joint project between SpaceIL, a privately funded Israeli non-profit organisation, and Israel Aerospace Industries.
- SpaceIL’s origins lie in the Google Lunar XPrize, an international challenge offering $20m for the first privately developed spacecraft to land on the Moon.
- The Beresheet mission was launched on 22 February from Cape Canaveral in Florida off on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket.
- The average distance to the Moon is 380,000km (240,000 miles).
- Only government space agencies from the former Soviet Union, the US and China have achieved soft lunar landings.
- The former Soviet Union achieved the first soft landing with its spacecraft Luna 9 in 1966.
- Nasa followed this by getting the first humans to the Moon in 1969.
- Then, China’s Change-4 spacecraft touched down on the far-side of the Moon earlier this year.

Scientists - have discovered a new human species ‘Homo luzonensis’ in Philippines.

- It is classified a separate species on the ground of 13 bones and teeth from two adults and one child found in a cave on the island of Luzon in the Philippines.
- These remains were aged between 67,000 years to 50,000 years old.
- Unlike Homo sapiens, whose premolar teeth generally have a single root, Homo luzonensis' premolars had two or three roots.
- They are similar to more primitive species such as Homo erectus, which lived in Africa and Asia between about 1.89 million and 143,000 years ago.
**APPOINTMENTS**

- **Benjamin Netanyahu** – to become the Prime Minister of Israel for a straight fifth term

- **Professor Najma Akhtar** – appointed as the vice-chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia – for a period of five years
  - Thus, she becomes the first woman VC of the central university in Delhi, 99 years after its inception
  - Professor Najma Akhtar is an academician from the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
  - She has been a Commonwealth Fellow for University Administration Course at University of Warwick and Nottingham.

- She is also trained at the International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP), UNESCO, Paris.
- The Vice Chancellor's post at Jamia had been lying vacant after Talat Ahmad resigned last year to join as head of Kashmir University.
- JMI was founded on October 29, 1920, by the Ali brothers, Moulana Mohammad Ali Jouhar and Moulana Shoukat Ali during the British rule in Aligarh
- Dr. Zakir Hussain was the first Vice-Chancellor of JMI
- It became a central university by an act of the Indian Parliament in 1988
- Manipur Governor Najma Heptulla is the chancellor of the varsity

**Justice Vikram Nath, the senior most judge of Allahabad High Court - was appointed as the first Chief Justice of the newly-constituted Andhra Pradesh High Court**

- His name was recommended by the collegium of Supreme Court, comprising of Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi besides Judges S A Bobde and N V Ramana
- The new Andhra Pradesh High court was established on January 1, 2019 following the division of a combined high court of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

**AWARDS**

- **Two schemes of West Bengal Government - ‘Utkarsh Bangla’ (skill training of youth) and ‘Sabooj Sathi’ (cycles for students) won the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) awards of UN**
  
  - Utkarsh Bangla got the topmost award in the ‘Capacity Building category’ and the Sabooj Sathi was ranked in the first five as a champion project under ‘ICT application: E-Government category’
  - Utkarsh Bangla Scheme is aimed at providing vocational training to school dropouts
  - Sabooj Sathi is a scheme for distribution of bicycles to the students of class IX to XII studying in Govt. run and Govt. aided schools and Madrasas
Alice G. Vaidyan, Chairman and Managing Director of the General Insurance Corporation (GIC) of India - has been awarded the Freedom of the City of London in recognition of her work to promote insurance ties between India and the UK.

- Alice G. Vaidyan was the first lady officer to assume the post of Chairman-cum-Managing Director of General Insurance Corporation of India.
- She was also the first lady chairman-cum-managing director in the public-sector insurance industry (non-life) under the Ministry of Finance in India.
- She has been trained at Harvard Business School, Boston, USA and a Fellow of the Insurance Institute of India.
- Freedom of the City is an honour bestowed by a City of London Corporation upon a valued member of the community.

SPORTS

Silver medallist at the Rio Paralympics, Deepa Malik - was named recipient of the New Zealand Prime Minister’s Sir Edmund Hillary Fellowship for 2019 in recognition of her two big “inspiring achievements” - courage and a can-do attitude.

- The 48-year-old Deepa will work to promote sporting, cultural and people-to-people relationship between India and New Zealand.
- Deepa Malik had won the silver medal in shot put event in Rio in 2016.
- Sir Edmund Percival Hillary was a New Zealand mountaineer, explorer and Philanthropist.
- He served as New Zealand’s High Commissioner to India and Bangladesh and concurrently as Ambassador to Nepal from 1985 to 1988.
- Hillary and Nepalese Sherpa mountaineer Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers confirmed to have reached the summit of Mount Everest on 29 May 1953.
- They were part of the ninth British expedition to Everest, led by John Hunt.
INTERNATIONAL DAY

The International Day of Human Space Flight – April 12

- The day marks the anniversary of the first ever human space flight undertaken by Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet Union citizen then, in 1961
- In 2011, the United Nations declared April 12 the ‘International Day of Human Space Flight’
- The day is also observed as ‘Cosmonautics Day’ in Russia and some other countries
- Thirty-five years ago, on April 3, 1984, the first Indian astronaut, Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma, entered space aboard the Soviet rocket Soyuz T-11
- In October 1957, the Soviet Union sent the ever man-made object, Sputnik, into outer space
- Only three nations have been able to put a man in outer space so far: the USA, Russia, and China
- Now, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is all set to execute its first ever human space flight programme, Gaganyaan by 2022.
- Many private players are also attempting human space endeavours including Virgin Galactic led by Richard Branson, Blue Origins led by Jeff Bezos, and SpaceX led by Elon Musk.

Firsts In The Space

- **April 12, 1961:** Yuri Gagarin became the first human to orbit the Earth.
- **June 16, 1963:** Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman to orbit the Earth.
- **March 18, 1965:** Alexei Leonov became the first person to conduct a spacewalk
- **March 31, 1966:** Luna 10 was launched and was the first spacecraft to be placed in Moon orbit.
- **July 20, 1969:** Neil Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the
surface of the Moon.

- **March 2, 1972**: Pioneer 10 probe was launched. It was the first spacecraft to explore the Asteroid Belt, fly by Jupiter and leave the Solar System.
- **July 17, 1975**: Docking of Apollo and Soyuz spacecraft in space was the first international human mission to space.
- **July 20, 1976**: The unmanned space probe ‘Viking 1’ transmitted the first pictures from the surface of Mars.
- **1984**: Rakesh Sharma, the former Indian Air Force pilot, became the first person of Indian origin to travel in space. He flew in the space aboard Soyuz t-11, which was launched on April 2, 1984. He flew as part of the Intercosmos programme.
- **1997**: Kalpana Chawla, an Indian American astronaut, became the first woman of Indian origin to be in space.

**US space flight company SpaceX - carried out its first commercial launch with its Falcon Heavy rocket by placing a Saudi satellite in orbit on April 11, 2019 in Cape Canaveral, Florida**

- The 13,000-pound Saudi Arabian telecommunication satellite is operated by Arabsat
- It is expected to provide television, internet and mobile phone service to the Middle East, Africa and Europe.
- Falcon Heavy rocket is capable of generating more than 5 million pounds (2.3 million kg) of thrust at liftoff
- Falcon Heavy was initially designed with an aim to restore the possibility of sending humans to the Moon or Mars, but now it is being considered mainly as a potential equipment carrier for deep space destinations
HOW WE GOT THE FIRST EVER IMAGE OF A BLACK HOLE ON APRIL 10 – A REPORT

On Wednesday, in a major scientific breakthrough, the first image of a black hole was released. Black holes are mysterious cosmic objects from which neither light nor matter can escape. A look at the international project that made the previously unseeable objects visible.

How far light travelled to reach our telescopes
(Distance from Earth in light years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earth</th>
<th>Alpha Centauri (nearest star)</th>
<th>Large Magellanic Cloud (one of the closest galaxies to Milky Way)</th>
<th>Messier 87 galaxy (home of the supermassive black hole)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>50 million</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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A global network of telescopes made it possible

- SMT: Submillimeter Telescope, Arizona
- JCMT AND SMA: James Clerk Maxwell Telescope and the Submillimeter Array, Hawaii
- LMT: Large Millimeter Telescope, Mexico
- APEX AND ALMA: Atacama Pathfinder Experiment and Atacama Large Millimeter/Submillimeter Array, Chile
- SPT: South Pole Telescope, Antarctica

The result: A photograph that’s made history

**RESOLUTION**

This image of the supermassive black hole at the heart of the galaxy Messier 87 was taken by the Event Horizon Telescope on April 6, 2017.

**SIMULATION**

An interpretation of the blurred image on the left shows a bright ring around the black hole’s event horizon, the line beyond which light cannot escape.

Source: NYT, AFP
LOK SABHA ELECTIONS 2019 KICKS OFF – A REPORT

The first phase of general elections - was held on April 11 - in 91 constituencies spread across 20 states and Union territories in India.