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England Scotland Ireland Wales London (13D) 335000 - 350000
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TOP OF THE WORLD



Ranil Wickremesinghe

SRI LANKA Opp declines Ranil invite to attend IMF review meeting

Colombo: The Opposition in Sri Lanka on Sunday declined the invitation by President Ranil Wickremesinghe to attend a review meeting of the IMF bailout programme scheduled for Monday to help the cash-strapped nation to overcome the financial crisis it has been facing since 2022. The IMF on Thursday last began its two-week-long second review of the March 2023 bailout of USD 2.9 billion spanning over 4 years. Two tranches of USD 330 million each were released in March and December. Wickremesinghe, who is also the finance minister, is the steer of the programme. **PTI**

UNITED KINGDOM Man held after after car hits palace gate

London: British police said on Sunday a man had been arrested after a car crashed into the gates of Buckingham Palace in central London. Grainy images on social media showed a car at the front gates of the palace. British media quoted a witness as saying they had heard "a loud bang". Police said the incident had occurred in the early hours of Saturday morning. Buckingham Palace said no member of the family was resident at the time of the incident and repairs to the palace gates were underway. **REUTERS**

PAKISTAN 2 killed in blast while moving explosives

Peshawar: At least two persons were killed and one injured in a blast while they were transferring explosives on a motorbike in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday, said officials. The incident occurred in Board Bazar, Nasir Bagh Road Peshawar. Earlier the police officials said that the incident was a suicide blast, however, later Superintendent of Police Operations Kashif Aftab Abbasi confirmed that the explosion took place when the three were transferring explosives on a bike from one place to another. **PTI**

NEPAL PM expands cabinet, adds 2 new ministers

Kathmandu: Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Sunday expanded his Cabinet for a second time by inducting two new members, days after dumping the Nepali Congress and forging a new alliance with the CPN-UML. Prachanda inducted senior Madhesi leader and chairman of the Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) Upendra Yadav as the minister for population and health and Koshor Shah, also from JSP, as minister for forest. With this, the number of ministers, has reached 22. **PTI**

REITERATES SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL'S PURSUIT OF HAMAS Netanyahu's approach to civilian deaths hurting Israel, says Biden

'Rafah invasion a red line, but won't cut off weapons'

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WILMINGTON, MARCH 10

PRESIDENT JOE Biden said Saturday that he believes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is "hurting Israel more than helping" in how he is approaching its war against Hamas in Gaza.

The US leader expressed support for Israel's right to pursue Hamas but said of Netanyahu that "he must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost as a consequence of the actions taken." Biden has for months warned that Israel risks losing international support over mounting civilian casualties in Gaza, and the latest remarks in an interview with MSNBC's Jonathan Capehart pointed to the increasingly strained relationship between the two leaders.

Biden said of the death toll in Gaza, "it's contrary to what Israel stands for. And I think it's a big mistake." Biden said a potential invasion of Rafah, where more than 1.3 million Palestinians are sheltering, is "a red line" for him, but said he would not cut off weapons like the Iron Dome missile interceptors which protect Israel from rocket attacks in the region.

Biden said he was willing to make his case directly to the Knesset, Israeli parliament, including by making another trip to the country.



The site of an Israeli air strike on a building in south Gaza's Rafah, Saturday. Reuters

Ship leaves US with material to set up aid port in Gaza

REUTERS
CAIRO, MARCH 10

THE US Army has dispatched a ship to send humanitarian aid to Gaza, Central Command (CENTCOM) said on Sunday, days after President Joe Biden vowed to build a temporary pier to supply the besieged enclave.

The General Frank S. Besson left Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Virginia "less than 36 hours after President Biden announced the U.S. would provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza by sea," CENTCOM said in a statement.

The logistics support vessel

is "carrying the first equipment to establish a temporary pier to deliver vital humanitarian supplies," it said.

Gaza has no port infrastructure. The U.S. initially plans to use Cyprus, which is offering a process for screening cargoes that will include Israeli officials, removing the need for security checks in Gaza. Most of Gaza's people are now internally displaced, with severe bottlenecks in aid deliveries at land border checkpoints. Gaza has been under an Israeli navy blockade since 2007, when Hamas took control of the enclave. There have been few direct sea arrivals since then.

ISRAELI PRESIDENT OPENS AMSTERDAM HOLOCAUST MUSEUM AMID PROTESTS

Amsterdam: Israeli President Isaac Herzog is attending the opening of the National Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam on Sunday amid protests demanding an immediate ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza.

Protesters were chanting "Never again is now" and "Ceasefire now" at a square close to the museum, while holding Palestinian flags and signs that said "Jews against genocide".

A spokesperson for the president declined comment. **REUTERS**

Maldives buys surveillance drones from Turkey to patrol maritime area

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MALE, MARCH 10

MALDIVES HAS for the first time acquired surveillance drones from Turkey for patrolling its vast exclusive economic zone, according to media reports on Sunday.

Efforts have begun by the state to establish a drone base in Noonu atoll Maafaru to operate drones brought from Turkey to conduct monitoring of the ocean territories, *Editor.mv* portal reported.

Turkey was the first foreign country visited by Mohamed Muizzu after he was sworn in as president in November.

The Maldives government has not disclosed the details of the agreement so far. The surveillance drones from the Turkish company Baykar TB2 drones were delivered on March 3, reports said.

President Muizzu, upon his return from China in January, had indicated that the government was looking to acquire surveillance drones. On March 4, Muizzu said that his country is working to establish a 24/7 monitoring system for the Maldivian waters this month to ensure control of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

POSTS PHOTO WITH THREE CHILDREN PRINCESS KATE ISSUES 1ST MESSAGE SINCE SURGERY

Kate, Princess of Wales, thanked the public on Sunday for their support in her first public message since undergoing abdominal surgery in January, posting a picture of herself with her three children. Her statement may answer the rumours and wild speculation on social media that have arisen in recent weeks about the health of the princess, who has been absent from public life since Christmas. **REUTERS**



Killing by immigrant turns poll flashpoint: Biden clarifies remark, Trump seeks apology

President on defensive as Trump targets immigration policy

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ATLANTA, MARCH 10

PRESIDENT JOE Biden said Saturday that he regretted using the term "illegal" during his State of the Union address to describe the suspected killer of Laken Riley, as his all-but-certain 2024 GOP rival, Donald Trump, blasted the Democrat's immigration policies and blamed them for her death at a rally in Georgia.

Biden expressed remorse after facing frustration from some in his party for the use of the term to describe people who arrived or are living in the U.S. illegally.

"I shouldn't have used illegal, it's undocumented," he said in an interview with MSNBC's Jonathan Capehart taped in Atlanta, where the president was meeting with small business owners and holding a campaign rally.

Trump, campaigning in Rome, Georgia, at the same time, assailed Biden for the comments.



A Laken Riley poster at a Trump rally in Georgia. AP

"Joe Biden went on television and apologized for calling Laken's murderer an illegal," he said to loud jeers and boos. "Biden should be apologizing for apologizing to this killer."

The back-and-forth underscored how Riley's murder has become a flashpoint in the 2024 campaign. A Venezuelan immigrant who entered the US illegally has been charged with her murder.

Trump was joined at his rally by Riley's parents, her sister and friends and met with them before



Zardari sworn in as Pakistan President



Asif Ali Zardari (left) takes oath in Islamabad on Sunday. AP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 10

ASIF ALI Zardari on Sunday took oath as Pakistan's 14th President, a day after the veteran politician was overwhelmingly elected as the next head of state.

Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa administered the oath to the 68-year-old Zardari at Aiwan-e-Sadr, the Presidential Palace. Zardari will replace Dr Arif Alvi, who stayed in office for five more months despite completing his five-year term in September 2023.

The swearing-in ceremony

was attended by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, all three service chiefs, senior officials and diplomats. Zardari, who was the joint candidate of the ruling alliance defeated PTI-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) candidate Mahmood Khan Achakzai by a huge margin.

Chinese President Xi Jinping Sunday congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on his election as the President, saying that the "iron-clad" friendship between the two countries is a "choice of history" and the strategic significance of their ties has become more prominent considering the current changes in the world.

US military airlifts embassy personnel, tightens security as Haiti violence surges

REUTERS
WASHINGTON, MARCH 10

THE US military said on Sunday it has carried out an operation in Haiti to airlift non-essential embassy personnel from the country and added US forces bolster embassy security, as Caribbean nation reels under a state of emergency.

The operation was the latest sign of Haiti's troubles as gang vi-

olence threatens to bring down the government and has led thousands to flee their homes.

"This airlift of personnel into and out of the embassy is consistent with our standard practice for embassy security augmentation worldwide, and no Haitians were on board the military aircraft," the US military's Southern Command said in a statement.

Haiti entered a state of emergency last Sunday after fighting escalated while PM Ariel Henry

EXPLAINED Latest hurdle for Biden

RILEY'S MURDER has become a rallying cry for Republicans who have seized on frustrations over the Biden administration's handling of the US-Mexico border amid a record surge of migrants entering the country. Biden is trying to flip the script on them by urging Congress to again take up an immigration overhaul Bill. The Bill — which proposed to toughen asylum criteria — was killed by the GOP, which withdrew from a bipartisan deal owing to opposition from Trump.

he took the stage. They were welcomed with a standing ovation and large signs handed out by the campaign that featured Riley's photograph and the words "SAY HER NAME!" "REMEMBER OUR ANGELS," they read on the back.

Trump, in a speech that lasted two hours, hammered Biden on the border and for mispronouncing Riley's name during his State of the Union address this past week.

Ukraine should negotiate an end to war with Russia: Pope



Pope Francis said Kyiv should have the courage of the white flag. File

REUTERS
ROME, MARCH 10

POPE FRANCIS has said in an interview that Ukraine should have what he called the courage of the "white flag" and negotiate an end to the war with Russia that followed Moscow's full-scale invasion two years ago and that has killed tens of thousands.

Francis made his comments in an interview recorded last month with Swiss broadcaster RSI. "I think that the strongest one is the one who looks at the situation, thinks about the people and has the courage of the white flag, and negotiates," Francis said, adding that talks should take place with the help of international powers.

FLOODS, LANDSLIDES KILL 19 IN INDONESIA

Houses damaged in a village affected by flash floods in West Sumatra on Sunday. Torrential rain brought floods and landslides in West Sumatra province, forcing evacuation of over 70,000 people, while killing at least 19, with 7 missing, authorities said. AP

Portuguese vote in early, tight elections

REUTERS
LISBON, MARCH 10

PORTUGUESE VOTERS headed to the polls on Sunday, facing a choice between switching to a centre-right government or keeping the centre-left in power.

The far-right Chega party has been growing in clout and could play a kingmaker role in post-election talks. Issues dominating the campaign in western



A polling station in Lisbon on Sunday. Reuters

Europe's poorest country include a housing crisis, low wages, sagging healthcare and corruption.

The polls triggered by Socialist Premier Antonio Costa's resignation amid a graft probe four months ago, pits against each other the two centrist parties — the Socialist Party (PS) and the Social Democratic Party — that have alternated in power since the end of a fascist dictatorship five decades ago.

THOUSANDS OF POLICE PERSONNEL DEPLOYED NEAR AL-AQSA MOSQUE COMPOUND, ONE OF HOLIEST SITES IN ISLAM

Palestinians prepare for Ramadan in the shadow of Gaza war

REUTERS
RAFAH, MARCH 10

PALESTINIANS PREPARED for Ramadan in a sombre mood with heightened security measures by Israeli police and the spectre of war and hunger in Gaza overshadowing the normally festive Muslim holy month as talks to secure a ceasefire stalled.

Thousands of police have been deployed around the narrow streets of the Old City in Jerusalem, where tens of thousands of worshippers are expected every day at the Al Aqsa mosque compound, one of the holiest sites in Islam.

The area, considered the most sacred place by Jews who know it

as Temple Mount, has been a long-standing flashpoint for trouble and was one of the starting points of the last war in 2021 between Israel and Hamas, the Islamist movement that controls Gaza.

Israel's relentless campaign in Gaza has drawn increasing alarm across the world as the growing risk of famine threatens to add to a death toll that has already passed 31,000. After some confusion last month when hard-right Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said he wanted restrictions on worshippers at Al Aqsa, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the numbers admitted would be similar to last year.

"This is our mosque and we must take care of it," said Azzam



Depending on lunar observations, Ramadan will begin on Monday or Tuesday of this week. Reuters file

Al-Khatib, director general of the Jerusalem Waqf, the religious foundation that oversees Al Aqsa. "We must protect the presence of Muslims at this mosque, who should be able to enter in big numbers peacefully and safely."

Depending on lunar observations, Ramadan will begin on Monday or Tuesday of this week.

The usual decorations around the Old City have not been put up and there was a similar tone in towns across occupied West Bank, where around 400 Palestinians have been killed in clashes with security forces, or Jewish settlers since start of the war.

"We decided this year that the Old City of Jerusalem won't be decorated out of respect for the

blood of our children and the elders and the martyrs," said Ammar Sider, a community leader in the Old City.

Police said they were working to ensure a peaceful Ramadan and had taken extra measures to crack down on what they described as provocative and distorted information on social media networks and had arrested 20 people suspected of incitement to terrorism.

Last year, clashes that erupted when police entered the mosque compound, drew condemnation from the Arab League as well as Saudi Arabia, with which Israel had been seeking to normalise diplomatic ties, extending its push to build ties with regional powers including the UAE. Hopes for a

ceasefire, which would have allowed Ramadan to pass peacefully and enabled the return of at least some of the 134 Israeli hostages held in Gaza appear to have been disappointed, with talks in Cairo apparently stalled.

In the ruins of Gaza itself, many living under plastic tents and facing a severe shortage of food, the mood was correspondingly sombre. "We made no preparations to welcome Ramadan because we have been fasting for five months now," said Maha, a mother of five.

"There is no food, we only have some canned food and rice, most of the food items are being sold for imaginary high prices," she said via chat app from Rafah.

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PM: Azamgarh's vikas has Opp sleepless, Modi doosri mitti ka insaan hai

MAULSHREE SETH
LUCKNOW, MARCH 10



PM Narendra Modi with CM Yogi Adityanath in Azamgarh on Sunday. PTI

STEPPING UP his attack on the Opposition INDIA bloc, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was in Azamgarh Sunday to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of as many as 782 projects worth Rs 34,700 crore in Uttar Pradesh and other parts of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

WILL EASE PRODUCT, SERVICE TARIFFS: GOYAL \$100 bn, 10 lakh jobs in 15 yrs: India seals trade pact with Europe group

Agreement signed by Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland



Union Minister Piyush Goyal at the signing of the India-EFTA Trade & Economic Partnership Agreement in New Delhi. PTI

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

INDIA AND the four-nation European Free Trade Association (EFTA), an intergovernmental grouping of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, signed a trade pact Sunday that will see the EFTA countries committing to invest \$100 billion in India and aiming

to generate 10 lakh jobs over a 15-year period in exchange for tariff concessions for their pharma, chemical products and minerals, among other items.

The India-EFTA deal has gone through a decade after negotiations were abandoned in 2013 due to differences between the two partners after as many as 13 rounds of talks. However, major geo-political shifts and a common

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Why it marks a shift, could be a template for bigger deals

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

THE PROGRESS of the India-EFTA trade deal, which has been inked just in time before the elections dates are set to be announced, largely hinged on the \$100 billion investment commitment over a 15-year period pledged by the



four western European nations. This deal also involved a greater degree of complementarities between the two sides, and a lower level of complexity when compared to the other deals under negotiations — the one with the UK and another with the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Mamata goes solo, sinks INDIA hopes, sharpens attack on BJP

ATRI MITRA & RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
KOLKATA, MARCH 10



Mamata Banerjee in Kolkata on Sunday. Partha Paul

ENDING SPECULATION about a possible tie-up with Congress as part of the larger Opposition bloc INDIA to take on the BJP, Chief Minister and TMC leader Mamata Banerjee Sunday fielded party candidates in all 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal.

Announcing the list of TMC candidates at a mega rally at

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Adhir: She can't be trusted, fielded Yusuf to help BJP

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

THE INDIA bloc in West Bengal formally collapsed Sunday with the Trinamool Congress announcing its candidates for all 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state, and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Day after, Opp asks: Did EC Goel quit over differences, will he contest elections?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

A DAY after Election Commissioner Arun Goel resigned from his post, just days ahead of the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections, the Opposition Sunday targeted the government, asking whether his surprise stepping down was because of "differences" with it or with Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar. West Bengal Chief

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



External Affairs Minister Jaishankar at Adda today



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister S Jaishankar has been the face of India's diplomacy in a fast-changing world in the last five years. The first Foreign Secretary to become the country's Foreign



Minister, he played a crucial role in shaping the foreign policy

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



IDEA EXCHANGE WITH DELHI FINANCE MINISTER ATISHI P 22

Strong resolve for clean and green energy for Delhi

Dilli Gramodaya Abhiyan

Inauguration of

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— Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

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- **Parks**, playgrounds & community facilities • Village libraries, Street lights, **CCTV Cameras**
- **Charagah** for fodder • **Afforestation** alongside roads/ public spaces, etc.
- **Rs. 383 crores** sanctioned in just 3 months for urbanized villages.

Chief Guest

Shri Amit Shah

Hon'ble Union Minister of Home Affairs & Cooperation

Guest of Honour

Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena

Hon'ble Lt. Governor, Delhi

11th March 2024 | Yashobhoomi, Dwarka, New Delhi | 04:00 PM

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WEB EXCLUSIVE

MARSHALL MOTIF II ANC REVIEW: SOUNDS CLASSY

The Marshall Motif II ANC lives up to the brand's legacy with a luxurious design and impressive sound quality. The textured leather case and metallic earbuds exude quality, while the sound profile leans towards a neutral balance

LIFESTYLE

'I AM FULL OF EMOTION'

Krystyna Pyszkova from Czech Republic has been crowned the 71st Miss World

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EXPRESS AUDIO

Game Time: R Ashwin completes a Test century

Last week, after recently achieving his 500th test wicket, R Ashwin became only the 14th Indian to feature in 100 Test matches. This week on Game Time, hosts Mihir Vasavda and Amit Kamath are joined by Venkata Krishna B to trace his journey

Jharkhand CPI says it will go solo in LS polls; JMM asks can state unit take this call

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
RANCHI, MARCH 10

THE COMMUNIST Party of India (CPI) on Sunday parted ways with the opposition INDIA bloc in Jharkhand, announcing that it will contest in eight of the state's 14 Lok Sabha seats in the upcoming elections.

The CPI has no representation in the Lower House of Parliament from Jharkhand.

"We have decided to contest the Lok Sabha polls on our own," CPI state secretary Mahendra Pathak told PTI.

"The BJP has announced its candidates, but the Congress and the Mahagathbandhan have not yet held any talks on seat-sharing. So, we have decided to go solo," he said. The decision was taken at the party's state executive committee meeting here, he said.

The CPI will field its candi-

dates in Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Koderma, Chatra, Palamu, Giridih, Dumka and Jamshepur Lok Sabha constituencies. Names of the candidates will be announced after March 16, Pathak said.

Reacting to the development, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), which leads the ruling coalition in Jharkhand, said such a decision by the CPI state unit raises questions over discipline within the party. "It is beyond my understanding... if the state unit can take such decisions. Discussions on seat-sharing are already underway at the national level," JMM spokesperson Manoj Pandey said.

Of the 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state, the BJP has 11, AJSU party one, JMM one and the Congress has one. Congress MP Geeta Kora recently shifted to the BJP.

Within the ruling alliance, the JMM has 29 MLAs, the Congress has 17 and the RJD has one.

FROM PAGE ONE FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

\$100 bn, 10 lakh jobs in 15 yrs: India seals trade pact with Europe group

goal to divert the economies away from their dependence on China helped India seal its first trade agreement with European countries.

The India-Oman trade deal, where discussions are at an advanced stage, is set to follow soon.

"It's for the first time that we are inking a free trade agreement with a binding commitment to invest \$100 billion in India from EFTA countries on the back of a solid foundation that has been laid in India. There are big opportunities in businesses in the pharma sector, medical devices, food, research and development which can offer... This partnership will create 10 lakh jobs in India," Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said at the India-EFTA press briefing. The official text in the "investment promotion and cooperation" chapter reads that the pact "shall aim to increase foreign direct investment" from investors of the EFTA states into India by \$50 billion within 10 years from the entry into force of this agreement and an additional \$50 billion in the

next five years.

The agreement also said that the EFTA states "shall aim to facilitate the generation of 1 million jobs within 15 years in India from the entry into force of this agreement, resulting from inflows of foreign direct investment from investors of the EFTA States into India".

A government official clarified that the investment will come from the private sector in EFTA, and not from the pension funds in the EFTA region (as was earlier expected and being negotiated from India's side), and that mechanisms are in place to facilitate the investment within the deal. However, the official indicated that India can "withdraw tariff concessions" if expected investment commitments don't come in.

"The legal obligation on the EFTA countries is the promotion and target. If the investments don't come in, there is a way to rebalance concessions which means we can suspend concessions. Moreover, India has taken a longer duration in elimination of

tariffs in sectors where we have a PLI (production linked incentive scheme) in place," the official added.

On the investment commitment, think tank Global Trade Research Initiative's (GTRI) founder Ajay Srivastava said that the operative word here is "aim". But this is logical as governments cannot force private firms to invest in a country or project and they can only nudge," Srivastava said.

On the much anticipated gains in the services sector, another government official said that India's annual services exports are worth \$5 billion to EFTA, which is over 4 times the goods exports.

"About 85 per cent of our services exports goes to Switzerland and about 15 per cent to Norway. EFTA is providing commitment in market access in audio visual services. In terms of treatment, they have committed that they will not discriminate against Indian services providers with EFTA services providers," another official said.

"In visas, EFTA has given us

three categories. One is intra-corporate transferee, second is independent professionals and contractual service provider. In all these categories, they have provided us with a commitment that our service providers can provide their services. There is no quota as such but in their constitution they can decide a numerical quota," the second official further said.

Meanwhile, the EFTA countries are set to see steep reduction in tariffs in India after the deal comes into effect. According to the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (or TEPA, as the deal is being called) signed on Sunday, the agreement will lead to elimination of duties on most industrial goods "currently exported to India by EFTA companies", such as for example pharmaceutical products, machinery, watches, fertilizers, medicines, chemical products, minerals, as well as fish.

While most agricultural items were kept out of the deal, the agreement provides for "meaningful tariff concessions on both basic and processed agricultural

products."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the signing of the deal, said that the global leadership of EFTA countries will boost innovation and research and development (R&D) across diverse spheres such as digital trade, banking and financial services, transport and logistics, industrial machinery, bio technology, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, food processing and clean energy, and will open up new doors for collaborations.

"The culmination of efforts to finalize an innovative, well-balanced trade deal that reflects our respective developmental aspirations is commendable. One of the most pioneering free trade agreements ever concluded between our countries, the Economic Participation Agreement (TEPA) emphasizes our steadfast commitment to shared prosperity..." Modi said in a statement.

The EFTA-India TEPA was signed by Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce & Industry; Guy Parmelin, Swiss Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal

Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research; Bjarni Benediktsson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Iceland; Dominque Hasler, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Liechtenstein; and Jan Christian Vestre, Minister of Trade and Industry, Norway.

"EFTA countries gain market access to a major growth market. Our companies strive to diversify their supply chains while rendering them more resilient. India, in return, will attract more foreign investment from EFTA, which will ultimately translate into an increase in good jobs... All in all, the TEPA will allow us to make better use of our economic potential and create additional opportunities for both India and the EFTA States," said Parmelin, speaking on behalf of the EFTA.

India-EFTA two-way trade was \$18.65 billion in 2022-23 compared to \$27.23 billion in 2021-22. The trade deficit for India was \$14.8 billion in the last fiscal. Switzerland is the largest trading partner of India, followed by Norway in the bloc.

Why India-EFTA deal marks a shift

broad 27-nation European Union.

With the EFTA being the first set of European countries to sign a deal with the investment commitment, the pact could serve as a template when dealing with developed nations who will have greater market access in a high tariff country like India and have investments to offer.

A number of multilateral trade deals such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and bilateral deals such as the FTA with the EU, the UK and Australia were negotiated for years, but were abandoned as Indian industry resisted competition and sought a greater level of protection rendering the economy uncompetitive. The EFTA deal was also picked up after extended rounds of negotiations.

India had planned to sign a trade deal with Gulf Cooperation

Council (GCC) countries comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. But more members brings more complexity and with geo-political tensions on the rise in West Asia, there is uncertainty over the deal's course. While there are concerns on how the legal agreement between the two sides will spur private investment, India has been able to signal greater openness for business and investment that has been missing for the better part of the last decade.

That said, the investment commitment in the EFTA deal excludes crucial pension and wealth funds that could have given greater confidence to investors. "For greater certainty, parties recognise that sovereign wealth funds are excluded from the promotion obligations undertaken by the EFTA states," the EFTA agreement said.

Mamata goes solo, sinks INDIA hopes of pact, sharpens attack on BJP

Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata, Banerjee said. "Our party will contest outside West Bengal as well. We will field candidates in Meghalaya and Uttar Pradesh also."

The TMC has fielded former cricketer Yusuf Pathan from Baharampur, known to be a bastion of Congress leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who has been critical of the state government. It has also fielded Mahua Moitra from her Krishnanagar seat, signaling that she has retained the faith of the TMC leadership despite her expulsion from the Lok Sabha over the cash-for-query allegations in December last year.

Sharpening the attack on the BJP, Banerjee highlighted two recent incidents — one in her state and the other in Delhi — to accuse its leaders of stereotyping people and spreading communal hatred.

Referring to the incident on February 20 in which a Sikh IPS of-

ficer who stopped BJP leaders from marching to Sandeshkhali was called a "Khalistani", the Chief Minister said. "Those who wear turbans, BJP leaders call them Khalistanis while Muslims are called Pakistanis."

"Two or three days ago, our Muslim brothers offering prayers were kicked by a Delhi Police officer," she said, referring to the March 8 incident in north Delhi in which a Sub-Inspector was purportedly caught on tape kicking and pushing some men offering Friday prayers outside a mosque apparently to remove them from the area. He was later suspended.

Banerjee also targeted the BJP government at the Centre, reiterating that her party will not let it implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). "Before election they said CAA would be implemented but we will not let them implement the CAA or NRC," she said.

"They have plans to send you to the other side of the border but we will give you shelter. We will not let them do it here in Bengal," she said.

Accusing the Centre of "step-motherly attitude" towards Bengal, she accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of lying during his recent election campaign in Bengal. "The Prime Minister should check the facts before saying anything in Bengal," she said.

"After winning 18 seats in the last Lok Sabha election... the BJP began their atrocities on the people of Bengal. They go to Delhi and ask to stop funds for the people of Bengal," she alleged.

Targeting former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who recently resigned to join the BJP, she said, "The judiciary should not sit in the BJP's chair and deliver verdicts. Though I have huge respect for the judiciary, this is not done. Now

you can see the mask and the face. How he is bowing down."

Although she did not mention the Sandeshkhali row, in which her party's local leaders have been accused of sexual harassment, the Chief Minister raised the Manipur unrest issue. "When women were paraded naked on the streets of Manipur, what did the BJP do to stop it? How many teams were sent to Manipur?"

Incidentally, the TMC has dropped actor Nusrat Jahan, its MP from Basirhat constituency, under which Sandeshkhali falls, and nominated former MP Haji Nurul Islam in her place.

The party has dropped five sitting MPs, including Nusrat Jahan, actor Mimi Chakraborty and party strongman and Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh, who returned from the BJP last year.

Among those retained are actor-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha from Asansol and Sougata Roy from Dum Dum.

Opp: Did EC quit over differences?

Minister and TMC leader Mamata Banerjee thanked Goel for "not succumbing to pressure from Delhi leaders" regarding deployment of security forces in the state.

Sources said a meeting of the Prime Minister-led panel to pick Election Commissioners is likely to be held on March 14 or 15. The government has informed Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, the Opposition member in the panel, about the meeting on March 15 but has also asked his office about his availability on March 14, signaling that it could advance the meeting by a day. Sources said Chowdhury was sounded out before Goel's resignation.

A day after the resignation, which caught even the top EC officials off-guard, it was business as usual at Nirvachan Sadan. With the announcement on the Lok Sabha election dates likely in days, CEC Rajiv Kumar was in office Sunday, according to sources. The preparations for the announcement of polls had not been affected by the resignation, they said.

back, resign to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls on a BJP ticket?" Congress communication head Jairam Ramesh asked.

Asked about Goel's resignation, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said one has to wait to see what he does in the coming days. "I was thinking about the High Court judge who resigned and joined the BJP... and started abusing the TMC. It shows that the BJP has appointed people with such a mindset. Now the Election Commissioner has resigned, let us wait for some time to see what he does," he said.

Delhi minister and AAP leader Atishi said Goel was the same Election Commissioner who was appointed by the BJP government in a "hurry". "When his appointment came up for challenge in the Supreme Court, the court also asked 'what was the tearing hurry' that the file was cleared and he was appointed within 24 hours."

"So such an Election Commissioner who was appointed by the BJP government, who was their person... whose appointment the government defended in the Supreme Court... if such an Election Commissioner has resigned... the entire country is today asking one question — what did the BJP-led government tell Arun Goel to do... what irregularities in elections he was asked to commit... that their own person could not do it and thought it is better to resign," Atishi told a press conference.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav asked whether the Election Commission was working under pressure. "Just before the elections, whose pressure is on the Election Commission which is a constitutional body. The resignation raises questions about whose pressure is there on the Election Commission," the former UP chief minister said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut alleged the Election Commission has become an "extended branch of BJP". It is not the same Election Commission that it was during T N Seshan's time, which functioned as a watchdog for the elections and remained impartial, he claimed. "In the last 10 years, the Election Commission has been privatised. It has become a branch of the BJP," he alleged.

The CPM said the resignation of Goel on the eve of Lok Sabha elections "creates an atmosphere of uncertainty". "With the new law on appointment of ECs, the composition of the Election Commission is under the complete control of the government," the CPM said.

PM in Azamgarh

country, said his campaign on "this unending journey of development" is giving "sleepless nights" to those who practised the "politics of caste, dynasty and vote bank" all these years, especially in Purvanchal.

"Aaj desh dekh raha hai. Modi doosri mitti ka insaan hai (The country is watching, Modi is a man of mettle). No one should look at the foundation stones being laid in 2024 through the prism of elections. It is part of my campaign on this unending journey of development. I am running at great speed, making the country run at great speed to realise the dream of a Viksit Bharat by 2047," Modi said.

He said Azamgarh has in the past been witness to the dangers of "mafia raj" (mafia rule) and "kattarpanth" (extremism) but is now witnessing the "rule of law".

Referring to projects involving the airport, railways and university being undertaken in the region, he said Azamgarh has "Modi ki Guarantee" to become "Ajanam vilas ka garh" (forever a bastion of development).

In the past, he said, projects were announced in Parliament but neither the foundation stones nor the leaders who laid the stones were to be seen later. But the projects for which he laid the foundation stones in 2019 have been implemented on the ground, he said.

Azamgarh and Purvanchal, he said, saw politics of caste and appeasement for decades, but the politics of development gathered pace in the last decade of NDA rule at the Centre, especially in the 7 years that UP has had Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister.

"Banking on politics of caste, dynasty and vote bank, the INDI Alliance is having sleepless nights." He picked on the SP which once considered Azamgarh its stronghold — it has been represented in the past by Mulyam Singh Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav.

Modi said a family which considered Azamgarh as its bastion lost it to a youth like Dinesh Lal in the last election. He sought Azamgarh's cooperation to make it a "clean sweep" for the NDA in UP in the coming elections.

He said there was a time when projects for cities like Azamgarh were inaugurated from other districts or states, but today's development projects, including railroads and airports, for the state and different parts of the country were being inaugurated or their foundation stone was being laid from Azamgarh. "Aaj Azamgarh ka sitara chamak raha hai (Azamgarh's star is shining)," he said, saying the "double engine government" has changed both the "tasveer" (perception) and "taqdeer" (destiny) of Azamgarh.

He inaugurated and laid foundation stones of 782 development projects worth Rs 34,700 crore. These included the inauguration of new terminals at Azamgarh, Shrawasti, Moradabad, Chitrakoot and Aligarh airports, Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport in Lucknow; new terminal buildings at Jabalpur, Gwalior, Pune, Kolhapur, Delhi and Adampur airports; inauguration of Maharaja Suhel Dev State University, Azamgarh; 12 railway projects worth Rs 8,176 crore; inauguration of 1,040 flats in Lucknow under four Light House Projects.

Adhir: She can't be trusted, fielded Yusuf to help BJP

the Congress hit out at TMC leader and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee saying she has proved that she is a politician who cannot be relied upon.

The Congress said the TMC should have aligned with the INDIA bloc if it was serious about fighting "communal forces" in West Bengal.

The option before the Congress now is to try and stitch an alliance with the Left parties in West Bengal. But an alliance with the Left, if that happens, will be interesting given the fact that the two forces are ranged against each other in Kerala. And not just that. Leaders of the CPI, especially its general secretary D Raja, have been critical of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for contesting from Wayanad again, saying a leader of his stature should choose a seat where he can directly take on the BJP.

Speaking to The Indian Express, West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said he had anticipated Banerjee's move though his party was hoping that she would have a change of heart.

"I had anticipated it. I had already told all of you. However, my party was in a different mode. They were under the impression that today or tomorrow she will be convinced. If she is serious about fighting against communal forces, she should have forged an alliance with the INDIA bloc. She has ditched the INDIA bloc. Remember, she was one of the proponents of the alliance. She has

abundantly proved that she is such a politician who cannot be relied upon. She is unreliable and cannot be trusted," Chowdhury said. The TMC has fielded cricketer Yusuf Pathan from Baharampur, a seat where the Muslim community's vote is crucial, against Chowdhury. In 2019, the TMC fielded former Congress MLA Apurba Sarkar who lost to Chowdhury by a margin of around 79,000 votes.

"I do not have any problem with anyone... Yusuf Pathan or anyone else... contesting against me. But I think she is trying to divide the minority to give a long rope to the BJP. That is my understanding. She is trying to divide the Muslim vote... and give a long rope to the BJP."

He said if the TMC wanted to honour Pathan and make him an MP, it should have sent him to Rajya Sabha in the recent elections. "If Mamata Banerjee had good intentions about Yusuf Pathan, she could have asked for a seat for him from the INDIA alliance in Gujarat. But he has been fielded to ensure that there is polarisation to help the BJP and the Congress is defeated," he said.

Chowdhury said Banerjee is scared of taking on Modi and she has sent a message to the Prime Minister by deciding to fight alone. "If she joins the INDIA bloc... she thinks the Central government would send ED, CBI... after the TMC... So, she chose to stay out of the alliance and send a message to the PMO that she is not part of the alliance... and that she is not

Jaishankar

amid challenges that upended the world order — from the Covid-19 pandemic to an assertive China, Russia-Ukraine war to Israel-Hamas conflict.

As one of the most articulate voices on the Modi government's foreign policy, Jaishankar has crafted the intellectual underpinnings of India's place on the global stage with his two books — *The India Way*, and *Why Bharat Matters*. A scholar-diplomat with a deep insight, he is best placed to talk about Indian diplomacy in the last decade, vis-a-vis the past looking to the future.

Jaishankar will be the guest at the Express Adda in New Delhi on Monday and will be in conversation with Anant Goenka, Executive Director, The Indian Express Group, and Dr CRajamohan, Contributing Editor, *The Indian Express*.

This is the second time Jaishankar will be a guest at the Express Adda. The last time was in September 2020, amid the pandemic, in an online mode.

The Express Adda is a series of informal interactions organised by The Indian Express Group and features those at the centre of change. Previous guests include Union Ministers Nirmala Sitharaman, Nitin Gadkari, Hardeep Singh Puri and Ashwini Vaishnav; Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran; filmmakers Karan Johar and Meghna Gulzar; policymaker, economist, and politician N K Singh and Harvard University Professor Michael J Sandel.

fighting the BJP."

The Congress central leadership was more circumspect.

"The Indian National Congress has repeatedly declared its desire to have a respectable seat-sharing agreement with the TMC in West Bengal. The Indian National Congress has always maintained that such an agreement has to be finalised through negotiations and not by unilateral announcements. The Indian National Congress has always wanted the INDIA group to fight the BJP together," Congress communication head Jairam Ramesh said.

He said the Congress had always said that "our doors are open" for seat-sharing negotiations "but there should be no unilateral announcements" on seats. "I don't know what pressures were on the TMC... as far as we are concerned, we want to strengthen the INDIA group in Bengal."

The TMC hit back, pointing out that the Congress had unilaterally announced its candidates in Meghalaya. "If the Congress today says that the TMC has not waited and gone ahead with the announcement of all the 42 candidates in West Bengal, I think they should be reminded of the fact that the Congress is probably not aware of what is on ground zero. There is a complete delink from the ground reality. Is it not a fact that they have gone ahead and announced their candidates in Meghalaya?" senior TMC leader and former Meghalaya Chief Minister Mukul Sangma said.

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भोपाल 11 जून	जयपुर 4 मार्च	लखनऊ 5 जून	जोधपुर 7 मार्च
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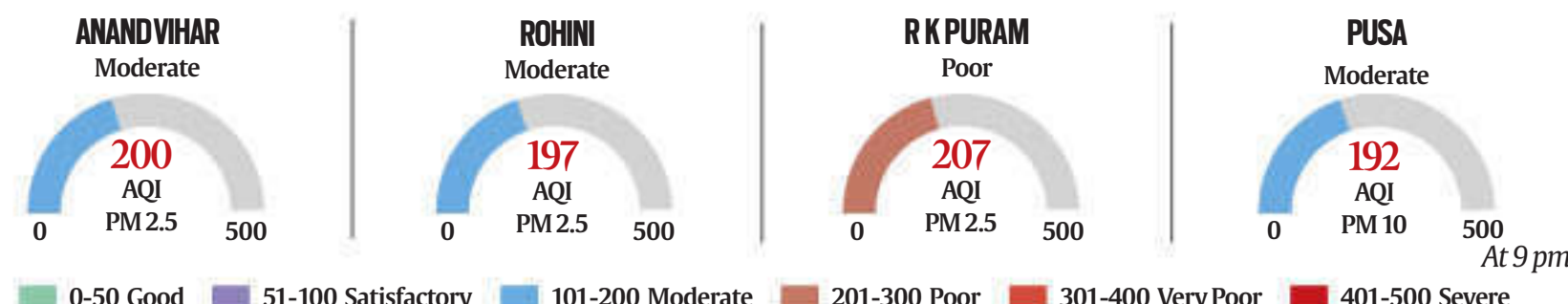
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*This is an indicative map solely prepared to assist students in identifying the test centres.
*The pictorial representation does not purport to be the political map of India

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SKY WATCH
FORECAST: March 11
 Partly cloudy sky
MAX: 29 (0.6° C below normal)
MIN: 12 (2° C below normal)

SEAL ALL ABANDONED BOREWELLS: ATISHI DIRECTS CHIEF SECY

Body of man pulled out from 40-ft DJB borewell after 13-hr operation

ARNABJIT SUR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

IN AN operation that lasted nearly 14 hours, the body of a man who reportedly fell into a 40-foot-deep DJB borewell at a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) in West Delhi's Keshopur was pulled out on Sunday.

According to DCP (West) Vichitra Veer, a security guard at the Keshopur Jal Board office made a PCR call regarding the incident around 2 am. Local police and fire brigade officials reached the spot, following which the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was called in.

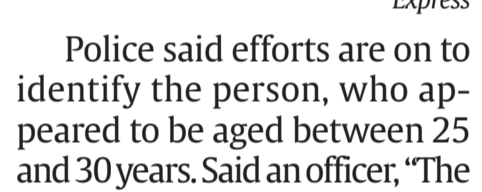
NDRF teams then began rescue efforts. First, two earth-movers were brought in to dig around the borewell while another machine was deployed to dig a parallel pit, two-three feet away. Life detectors and cameras were deployed inside the hole to check if the man was alive.

Hours later, by 1 pm, NDRF personnel had dug 35 feet into the main pit and removed most of the soil. They then dropped a rope with metal hooks attached inside the hole to pull out the body. Said an official who was part of the operation, "We hooked the man's feet and shoulders to the rope and pulled him out."

At 3 pm, the body was wrapped in a plastic bag and sent to DDU Hospital in an ambulance stationed there; he was later declared dead.



NDRF personnel during the operation at Keshopur in West Delhi on Sunday. Abhinav Saha



Police said efforts are on to identify the person, who appeared to be aged between 25 and 30 years. Said an officer, "The

borewell was inside a room and one of its walls was damaged... anyone could get in... we are probing how the structure was broken and why was the borewell left open."

Following the incident, Water Minister Atishi, who visited the area, directed Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to seal all abandoned borewells. In a letter to Kumar, she said: "A deeply unfortunate incident has taken place... where someone has

fallen into an abandoned borewell in the Keshopur STP. While this borewell was on land that had been handed over to Delhi Metro in 2020, nonetheless it is our responsibility to examine if any lapses have taken place on the part of the Delhi Jal Board, and to ensure no such incident takes place in future."

Kumar was directed to ensure all government and private abandoned borewells were welded and sealed, and a compliance report was sent to the minister within 48 hours.

The Delhi Metro, however, said it did not build this borewell. "... nor did we make any use of it. The pump room inside which

the borewell was located belongs to the DJB. The borewell was already installed... when DMRC took over the area around it for construction work," DMRC Principal Executive Director Anuj Dayal.

The Delhi government also maintained that the borewell was in a locked room. "The person who has fallen inside is not a child, but someone who is at least 18 years old, if not more. There is a possibility of foul play since it is not easy for an adult to fall inside a borewell of 12 inches in diameter. So, the victim might have been pushed in," it said.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in a post on X, said the Delhi Police and DJB are looking into the matter. "... Water Minister Atishi took stock of the situation. It was revealed that the borewell was inside a room locked with a lock and key. Delhi Police is investigating the entire incident," read the post.

Hitting out at the DJB, Delhi BJP Chief Virendra Sachdeva blamed it for "laxity".

Meanwhile, several people whose family members had gone missing over the past few months arrived at the spot to check if the body belonged to their loved one. Among them was Anita (35) from Ranholia whose brother, Sanju, had gone missing three months ago. "... we lodged a missing report and his last location was detected at Keshopur... my mother works at the mandi here and she told us of the incident," she said.

EXPRESSWAY AT HALFWAY MARK

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- 34 m** Width
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ESTIMATED COST ₹9,000 crore

- Starts from Shiv Murti on NH-8 & ends near Kherki Daula toll plaza
- It is segmented into four parts, with two in Delhi (10.01 km) and two in Haryana (18.9 km)
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- To avoid disturbance to residents along the Expressway, noise barriers have been provided

19 km Length in Haryana
₹4,100 cr Approx cost

Opening today: 19-km Haryana stretch of Dwarka expressway

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is set to visit Gurgaon Monday for the opening of the 19-km-long Haryana section of the Dwarka Expressway.

An official statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Sunday read: "In order to help improve traffic flow and ease congestion between Delhi and Gurgaon on NH-48, the Prime Minister will inaugurate the Haryana section of the landmark Dwarka Expressway."

"The 19-km-long Haryana section of the eight-lane Dwarka Expressway has been built at a cost of around Rs 4,100 crore, and includes two packages — the 10.2-km-long Delhi-Haryana border to Basai rail-over bridge



Dwarka Expressway ahead of its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in Gurgaon. PTI

(ROB) and 8.7-km-long Basai ROB to Kherki Daula. It will also provide direct connectivity to the IGI Airport in Delhi and the Gurgaon Bypass," it said. The PM would also inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of 112 national highway projects in different states worth nearly Rs 1

lakh crore. "These projects will contribute significantly towards the growth of the NH network as well as help in boosting socio-economic growth, enhance job opportunities, and promote trade and commerce in various regions across the country," the statement said.

2 months on, vehicle owners await expired EV policy's extension

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

FOR THE last two months, beneficiaries have been waiting to avail the Delhi government's subsidy on the purchase of a new e-vehicle, following the expiry of the Electric Vehicle (EV) policy in December 2023.

A senior official of the Delhi Transport Department said: "The policy was supposed to be extended from January itself, but it is still pending due to some reason. The department has plans to get it extended for another six months. The file will be put up for cabinet approval in the coming week."

A key initiative of the AAP-led government in Delhi, the EV policy was launched in August 2020 in a bid to increase the share of EVs in the national capital to 25 per cent by 2024 — to fight high pollution levels by cutting vehicular emissions. In 2023, it completed three years in August and got an extension till December. The government had said that the policy would be extended till March-end 2024 after the cabinet approval, but the file is yet to be put forward for the same.

According to data, around 14,384 e-vehicles have been registered in Delhi between January and March so far.



14,384 e-vehicles registered between January and March so far, shows data. Archive

In 2023, a total of 73,647 e-vehicles were registered. "At present, road tax exemptions are being provided on registration of EVs," said an official.

Under the EV policy, each category of vehicle gets subsidies or incentives based on the battery capacity. For example, Rs 5,000 per kWh or up to Rs 30,000 on purchasing a two-wheeler, Rs 30,000 for e-rickshaws and e-freight vehicles. For four wheelers, there is a purchase incentive of Rs 10,000/kWh of battery capacity per electric four-wheeler (maximum incentive of Rs 1,50,000 per vehicle). The offer was provided to the owners of the first 1,000 e-cars registered in Delhi, as per the policy.

Officials said: "Beneficiaries, who bought new e-vehicles and applied for the subsidy in the last two months, will be given subsidy, once the policy gets cabinet nod..."

Deaths from pulmonary diseases highest in last 7 yrs; 'long-term exposure' to pollution ups risk

ANKITA UPADHYAY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

THE NUMBER of deaths due to Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary disease (COPD) has increased over the last seven-eight years. In 2022-23 alone, deaths due to COPD increased nine times as compared to the last seven years, a reply to an RTI filed by *The Indian Express* showed.

2022-2023 saw the highest number of deaths — 886 — while the numbers in the last seven years did not cross 150. In 2015-2016, there were 181 deaths, which reduced to 98 in 2016-2017. In 2017-2018, it increased to 111 followed by a dip to 55, 98, 62, and 125 in the next four years.

COPD is a common lung disease causing restricted airflow and breathing problems; smoking and air pollution are the most common causes. In such patients, the lungs can get damaged or clogged with phlegm. Symptoms include cough, sometimes with phlegm, difficulty breathing, wheezing, and tiredness. Patients are at higher risk of other health issues. While it is not curable, symptoms can improve if one avoids smoking and exposure to air pollution, and gets vaccines to prevent infections. It can also be treated with medicines, oxygen therapy, and pulmonary rehabilitation.

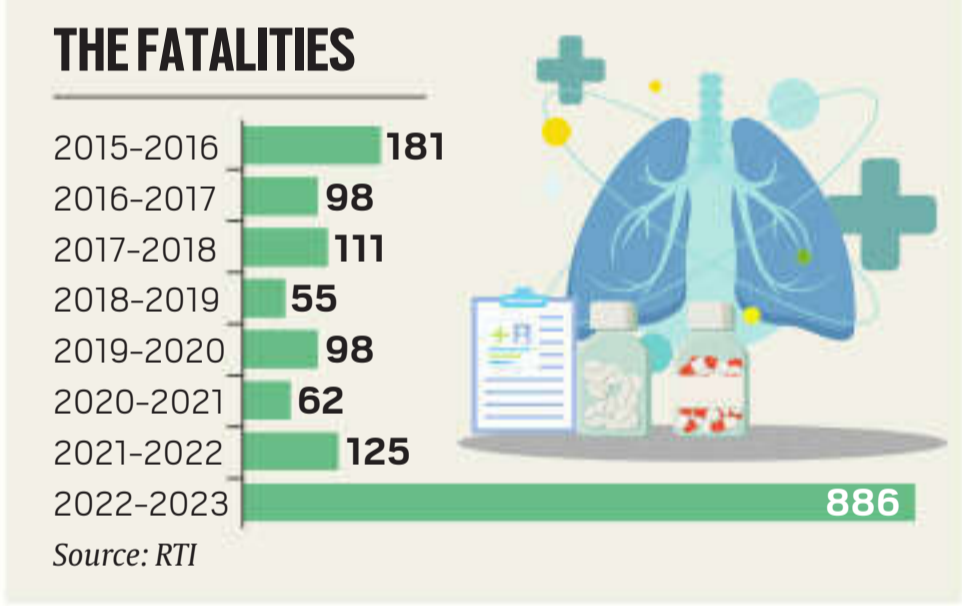
According to an official from the state health department, be-

fore Covid, they were not compiling data on COPD. "When the pandemic struck, there were specific guidelines to maintain data on various respiratory diseases so we do not miss any Covid deaths. Because of this, we managed to maintain data on COPD deaths as well," the official added.

In its reply to the RTI, the Directorate General of Health Services said not all healthcare facilities in Delhi are represented in this data sourced from several private, public, and autonomous healthcare facilities. "The completeness and accuracy of the information depends on the voluntary participation and timely submission of data by the healthcare institutions. Furthermore, variations in data reporting practices among different healthcare institutions may impact the consistency and comparability of the information presented," it said.

The pollution link

The data comes at a time when Delhi recorded the most polluted December in four years in 2023. According to doctors, apart from smoking, there is a clear connection between COPD and long-term exposure to pollution (indoor and outdoor). For years, studies worldwide have shown how air pollution is directly related to increased risk of COPD. A study published in *Jama Network journals* in 2019 said long-term exposure to ambient



air pollutants was significantly associated with increasing emphysema, assessed quantitatively using CT imaging and lung function. Emphysema is one of the diseases that comprise COPD.

Another Lancet study in 2022 said long-term exposure to air pollution was associated with an increased risk of COPD, especially in those with high genetic risk and unfavourable lifestyles.

According to Dr Raj Kumar, director of Vallabhbai Patel Chest Institute: "There is data and published literature that if one is exposed to indoor (pollutants) like biomass and coal (during cooking), women tend to develop COPD even without smoking. About outdoor pollution and COPD, it can happen when there is long-term exposure to toxic elements... People who are genetically inclined to develop bronchial asthma can develop symptoms."

Dr Kumar said people exposed to toxins like PM (particulate matter) 2.5 will show signs of damage to the bronchi and alveoli. "In COPD, there are two elements — chronic bronchitis and emphysema. So now there is evidence that even non-smokers can develop these conditions," he said.

Are children at risk? Dr Kumar said no, but added that they can develop an exacerbation of the respiratory problem: "The symptoms will set in early. They may also be prone to develop bronchial asthma... when they are exposed to the pollution, they develop symptoms..."

At AIIMS Delhi, Dr Anant Mohan, professor and head of the Pulmonology department, said a causal link to prove PM levels are linked to COPD deaths and worsening of symptoms is difficult, but there are indirect connections. "... There have been instances of

high (hospital) admissions on days with high pollution levels, but we can't directly say a person died because of air pollution. The causes of COPD are many."

On the deaths mentioned in the RTI reply, Dr Nikhil Modi, senior consultant in Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals in Delhi, said it could be of chronic patients, those who were not on medication, and those whose exposure to smoking and pollution is non-stop. He said the number of deaths due to COPD could be more and pointed to the pandemic years where there was a lack of clarity on whether the aggravating factor was COPD or Covid among those who died. "We can't rely on this completely."

He stressed on the need for a central registry of such cases: "We haven't got proper data. The central registry needs to be better so we know which disease is a major culprit and act in time."

Dr Modi said if a patient with COPD contracts pneumonia and similar infections, the chances of them progressing towards severe illness and even death are higher.

At his institute's OPD, Dr Kumar sees referral patients, and his observation is that the severity is higher in winter.

Dr Modi, too, said: "In winter, we see more patients when pollution levels are high. The ones who require admission are mostly patients above the age of 40.

BRIEFLY Ghaziabad man arrested for raping woman

Ghaziabad: A woman was allegedly raped in Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad by a man, who had befriended her "using a false identity", said police on Sunday. The man, who has been arrested, allegedly took objectionable photographs and videos of the woman and threatened that he would post them on social media. In the FIR, she alleged that the man called her to a hotel a few months ago, and had raped her.

Over 10,000 traffic challans issued in 1 week

New Delhi: The Delhi traffic police on Sunday said that it has issued 10,902 challans in a week to curb traffic violations in the city, said an official statement. The special drive was conducted between March 1 and 7, they said. Major violations targeted by the traffic police included improper parking with 5,957 challans, riding without a helmet (1,131), e-rickshaw violations (2,476), driving while using phone (289), among others. PTI

MASJID ONCE HOUSED A BAKERY, SCHOOL

How mosque in Daryaganj came to be named after a Mughal princess

VIDHEESHA KUNTAMALLA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

SITUATED A stone's throw away from Delhi's iconic Jama Masjid is an 18th-Century structure that could easily pass off as its replica — albeit a smaller version — at first glance. Built on the Khairati Ghat in Daryaganj, in a time when the Yamuna used to flow past, Zeenat-ul-Masajid (beauty among mosques), or Ghata Masjid (cloud mosque) as it is also known, was turned into a bakery during British rule and even housed a school for a short time.

its namesake, Princess Zeenat-un-Nisa, the second daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb and his wife Dilras Begum.

In its description of the mosque, the National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities website states that the structure is "built on an elevated platform and can be approached by a lofty staircase. It has three bulbous ribbed domes with a pinnacle on top. The main entrance has an inverted lotus design. The gateway has a multi-foiled arch, which is crowned by a battlement parapet and two minarets with an upturned floral pattern and pillar supporting cupola with eaves... There is also a colonnaded verandah with foliated arch openings and majestic tur-

rets with angular designs".

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, author Sohail Hashmi explained how the masjid came to be known by two names. "Princess Zeenat commissioned this mosque and named it Zeenat-ul-Masajid. Her name meant beauty among women and she called this mosque, the beauty among mosques. (The plural of masjid is masajid). It is also known as the Ghata Masjid, a reference to its dome which has alternating bands of black and white like the monsoon clouds."

"In 1857, when the British recaptured Delhi after crushing the rebellion, the mosque was converted into a bakery for British officers..." he added. Hashmi also spoke about his



Princess Zeenat-un-Nisa commissioned the mosque in 1707 and named it Zeenat-ul-Masajid. Tashi Tobgyal

personal connection to the mosque: "There used to be a

school in this masjid... many of these mosques were used as

madrasas... My great-grandfather used to live near Akbarabadi mosque... After it was demolished, his family shifted to Zeenatul Masjid and he used to teach Urdu and Persian to the children of the poor in this mosque. Much later, in the 1960s, a primary school began operating here which later shifted to Humayun's Tomb."

In her book, *Shahjahanabad: The Living City of Old Delhi*, Rana Safvi wrote that Zeenat-un-Nisa, "like her elder sister, princess Zeb-un-Nisa" chose to stay single as no suitable match had been found for her. "The Princess was buried in

the north of the mosque in a tomb built by her in her own lifetime but demolished by the British after the Uprising in 1857..." she wrote.

On its unique structure, she said: "(It) has seven arches, with a large one in the centre... It has seven scalloped arched entrances in which are seven arched doorways facing the east. Over each doorway, except the middle one, are marble slabs — they are empty, but were probably meant for inscriptions..."

The mosque, she added, "occupied a unique location as its two lofty minarets could be seen

from the river and it was the only mosque that came close to Jama Masjid. However, now it's surrounded by buildings and has lost its uniqueness and much of its beauty too."

Her book further stated that "Maulvi Zafar Hasan (assistant superintendent with ASI) calls it Masjid Ghat because of its proximity to Khairati Ghat. It is possible the name got corrupted along with its connotations once the river shifted course... It is built completely of red sandstone and has three marble domes with black stone stripes... According to Sir Sayyid, the black stripes... are meant to ward off the evil eye and the shining golden finials on the domes seem to compete with the brightness of the Sun..."



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INAUGURATED BY PM MODI

With double capacity, Delhi airport unveils expanded T1



UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

INDIRA GANDHI International Airport's expanded Terminal 1 can now handle 40 million passengers annually, double its previous capacity of 17 million passengers per year. The revamped terminal was inaugurated virtually by Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday; he also inaugurated 12 other airports and laid the foundation stones for 4 airports across India.

The Prime Minister attended the inauguration through a live link from Azamgarh. "Today, projects worth about Rs 34,000 crore have been inaugurated and foundation stones laid in many states from Azamgarh. Along with Azamgarh, new terminal buildings have been inaugurated at many airports including Shrawasti, Moradabad, Chitrakoot, Aligarh, Jabalpur, Gwalior, Lucknow, Pune, Kolhapur, Delhi and Adampur... All these efforts will make air travel more comfortable and accessible for the common man of the country," said the Prime Minister.

The inauguration was attended by Delhi L-G VK Saxena and Minister of State for Civil Aviation General VK Singh.

According to Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) sources, with all its three terminals combined, IGIA can now handle over 100 million passengers per year — making it one of the few worldwide with this passenger capacity. Additionally, the expansion extends the area of the airport from 55,740 sqm to a whopping 2,06,950 sqm.

Completed at a cost of Rs 4,600 crore, the expanded terminal will be ready for use in the next two months, said sources.

What passengers can expect

For passengers, the airport has



Completed at a cost of Rs 4,600 crore, the expanded Terminal 1 will be ready for use within the next two months, said sources. *Abhinav Saha*

HERE ARE SOME OF ITS FEATURES

FACILITIES	EARLIER	POST-EXPANSION
Passenger capacity	17 million per year	40 million per year
Total area	55,740 sqm	2,06,950 sqm
Self-baggage drops	0	36
Self-check-in kiosks	12	108
Baggage drop-off counters	4	9
Passenger bridges/airbridges	0	22
Baggage handling capacity	3,240 baggage/hour	6,000 baggage/hour
Baggage reclaim carousels	8 (52 metres each)	10 (70 metres each)

a Facial Recognition System — DigiYatra — at all its 24 entry gates; 20 automated tray retrieval systems; and individual carrier systems. An individual carrier system divides the luggage carousel into cells where baggage can be placed to reduce damage to the luggage and jams at the belt.

The expanded terminal will have 108 common usage self-service kiosks where passengers can check-in without the help of ground staff. Further, there are 100 check-in counters with 36 self-baggage drop kiosks where

one can drop off their baggage without the help of airport staff.

Additionally, the capacity of the baggage handling system at T1 has doubled from 3,240 baggage per hour to around 6,000 per hour. The number of check-in islands has also been increased to five against four earlier.

DIAL has also realigned pickup and drop-off lanes to ease traffic and expanded parking facilities to accommodate the surge in travellers.

Inside the terminal, travellers will have access to a range of

amenities including shopping and dining options, designated prayer area, yoga space, quiet zones, lounges, communal seating areas, charging stations for laptops and mobile devices, facilities for baby care, and smart washrooms

The expansion was part of Delhi Airport's Phase 3A Expansion project which also saw the airport develop a fourth runway along the dual elevated eastern cross taxiway; the refurbishment of its British-era first runway; construction of two flyovers; and modifications at T3.

'IPL matches in Ghaziabad soon': BCCI vice-prez lays foundation stone of international stadium

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GHAZIABAD, MARCH 10

AN INTERNATIONAL cricket stadium is all set to come up in Ghaziabad soon — nearly nine years after the project was conceptualised.

Rajeev Shukla, BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) vice-president and Rajya Sabha MP, who laid the foundation stone of the project — to be developed by Uttar Pradesh Cricket Association (UPCA) — at Morti Rajnagar Extension on Sunday, said the delay in construction of the stadium was due to "high tension electrical wires and poles" in the area.

Blaming the electricity department for its "negligence", Shukla said: "No stadium can be built in such conditions. The BCCI does not approve of this. Two power lines were installed after the land was purchased and registered — a massive negligence by the electricity department. This area falls on the flight path, so, the Indian Air Force also had to approve the plan. The second major hurdle: land use — the sooner it is changed, the easier it will be to build the stadium... I congratulate the people of Western UP. Finally, its (stadium) foundation stone has been laid and construction will be completed soon."

The BCCI V-P, however, did not share details about when the project will be finished.

The stadium, with a project cost of Rs 450-crore, is proposed to come up in an area covering



Rajya Sabha MP and BCCI Vice-President Rajeev Shukla and Ghaziabad MP General VK Singh lay the foundation stone of the International Cricket Stadium at Morti. *PTI*

32 acres, said officials, adding that it would accommodate 55,000 people at a time.

"Everyone has been waiting for this for a long time. Ghaziabad is close to Delhi, which does not have much space for a stadium. If this stadium is built, then matches in Delhi would be held here. Now, IPL matches would also be organised in Ghaziabad... The road at present is in a bad condition, which, too, will get better soon... UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also approved all requirements such as changing land use for the stadium construction," said General V K Singh (retired), Ghaziabad MP and Minister of State for Road Transport & Highways and Civil Aviation.

Singh, who was also present at ceremony, said the first phase of work would cost Rs 400 crore

and the second phase Rs 50 crore. "Tenders for boundary wall construction... have been floated. Construction is likely to be completed in the next two years i.e. by 2026... Considering the need and modernity, the budget for the project has been increased by about 25% in the last nine years. Initially, the project cost was fixed at Rs 350 crore, which has now been increased to Rs 450 crore," Singh added.

UPCA and BCCI had purchased the land after the project was conceived in 2014-15. However, there has been a deadlock since 2018 over the floor area ratio (FAR) component demanded by UPCA from the Ghaziabad Development Authority.

There were obstacles in the construction due to high tension lines and FAR, but it has been resolved, Singh said.

'No antibiotics to be sold without a prescription': Advisory to city pharmacists

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

WITH ANTI-MICROBIAL resistance (AMR) on the rise, pharmacists across Delhi have been urged to stop dispensing AMR drugs without a prescription.

The State Drugs Control Department, following the Union Health Ministry's directions on January 1, issued an advisory to the All Delhi Chemists Association to strictly implement Schedule H & H1 of the Drugs Rules, and stop over-the-counter sale of antibiotics and sell them only against a qualified doctor's prescription, in a bid to tackle rising AMR issues. Sale records of Schedule H1 drugs — which include third and fourth generation anti-microbials — have to be maintained for three years.

An official from the state health department said AMR is a serious, growing threat to public health. "Regulatory systems, both at central and state levels, are aware of the challenges posed by AMR and are continuously taking regulatory steps to curb and control indiscriminate use of antibiotics," said the official. The Delhi government is highly concerned about increasing AMR incidences due to indiscriminate use of anti-microbials by the public, read the advisory. Most anti-microbials are covered in Schedule H & H1 prescription drugs, and can only be sold in accordance with a prescription of a RMP.

Liquor businessman shot dead in Murthal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 10

A 36-YEAR-OLD liquor businessman was shot dead at a dhaba in Murthal in Haryana's Sonapat Sunday morning, after unknown assailants fired at least 27 rounds of bullets at him, police said.

The deceased, Sunder Malik, was a resident of Saragthal village in the district. DCP (Sonapat East) Gaurav Rajpurohit said two-three assailants were involved in the crime.

Sources said Malik reached the dhaba in his Scorpio late on Saturday evening and slept in the car in the dhaba's parking lot. "At 8 am the next day, the assailants got there in a car. Two of them opened fire at Malik... they dragged him out of his car and fired at him again," said a source. The assailants then fled from the spot.

After the incident, police examined CCTV cameras of the dhaba. On the complaint of Malik's cousin, they lodged an FIR against a few people, including two from Saragthal.

DCP Rajpurohit said police had formed seven-eight teams to nab the culprits. "We are trying to trace the vehicle used in the crime," he said.


The DCP said police would also investigate Malik's criminal record. Police said Malik had eight cases against him, including of murder, dacoity and criminal intimidation. No one has been arrested yet.

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Tehri	Timili village near Shivpuri Kuttha Pratap Nagar
Pauri	Barkholu, Rautela Gaon Maason
Champawat	Jhoomadhuri, Lohaghat Karnakarayat near Badasur ka Qila
Pithoragarh	Garuda near Mostamaanu Jeeval, Gangolihat
Bageshwar	Nael Jaulkaande Vinaai (Dooni) Kapkot Jhandidhaar (Jaalekh) Kapkot
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6 GOVT & POLITICS



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



TMC FIELDS CANDIDATES IN ALL 42 LOK SABHA SEATS IN BENGAL

In TMC's Lok Sabha list, Abhishek's imprint, more than half first-timers

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA & ATRI MITRA
KOLKATA, MARCH 10

THE TRINAMOL Congress (TMC) Sunday released its list of candidates for all 42 West Bengal Lok Sabha seats — 25 of whom are contesting polls for the first time. This is TMC's attempt to quell any anti-incumbency.

The Mamata Banerjee-led party unveiled the candidates at its "Jana Garjan Rally" in Kolkata, dealing a blow to the INDIA alliance's hopes of contesting the elections on a united platform. The party sprang a surprise by fielding former cricketer Yusuf Pathan against Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in Baharampur and Bengali television star Rachana Banerjee, who hosts the popular TV show "Didi No 1" that recently had Mamata Banerjee as a guest. Rachana will take on fellow actor and BJP MP Locket Chatterjee from Hooghly. The party has also fielded Krishnanagar MP Mahua Moitra, who was expelled from Parliament last December, from her seat in Nadia district.

The list, among other things, illustrates the impact of TMC number two and Mamata's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, with many leaders believed to be close to him getting a ticket. He himself has been retained from Diamond Harbour.

Apart from Pathan and Rachana, another big name on the list is actor-turned-politician



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with TMC candidates during a rally in Kolkata on Sunday. Partha Paul

Saayoni Ghosh who replaces actor-turned-MP Mimi Chakraborty in Jadavpur.

On Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari's home turf Kanthi, Uttam Barik will take on Suvendu's brother Soumendu.

Abhishek Banerjee read out the list at the rally and several of the candidates, according to party insiders, are close to him. Among them are Debangshu Bhattacharya, Saayoni Ghosh, Shahnawaz Ali Raihan, and Partha Bhowmik who has replaced Arjun Singh in Barrackpore.

"In this list, the impact of

Abhishek Banerjee is clear," said a senior TMC leader. "Almost all new faces, especially those who emerged from the organisation, are Abhishek's choice."

But given it is still Mamata who has the final say several leaders of the old guard such as Sudip Bandyopadhyay (Kolkata Uttar), Saugata Roy (Dum Dum), Kalyan Banerjee (Serampore) and Mala Roy (Kolkata Dakshin) have managed to find space in the list. Since the TMC's victory in the 2021 Assembly elections, there has been tension between the party's old guard and the new faces led by

Abhishek. Recently, both Sudip Banopahyay and Saugata Roy were at the centre of a controversy when a section of the party, including state secretary Kunal Ghosh, and MLA Tapas Roy, took aim at them over their age. Tapas Roy joined the BJP earlier this week.

Among the seven TMC candidates who were once with the BJP are Shatrughan Sinha, who will fight to retain Asansol; former Darbhanga MP Kirti Azad who is in the fray from Bardhaman-Durgapur; Raiganj MLA Krishna Kalyani who is contesting from Raiganj; Ranaghat Dakshin MLA

Mukut Mani Adhikari from Ranaghat; Sujata Mondal who will take on estranged husband and BJP Bishnupur MP Saumitra Khan; former Bongaon Uttar MLA Biswajit Das who will contest from Bongaon Lok Sabha seat; and minister Biplab Mitra who is the MLA from Harirampur and will fight from Balurghat against BJP state chief Sukanta Majumder.

TMC has dropped five MPs: Nusrat Jahan (Basirhat), Mimi Chakraborty (Jadavpur), Arjun Singh (Barrackpore), Aparupa Poddar (Arambagh), Choudhury Mohan Jatua (Mathurapur).

Alliances need compromises: Ramesh on AAP getting Ahmed Patel's old seat

KAMAL SAIYED
SURAT, MARCH 10

COMPROMISES ARE needed to make an alliance work and hence, it was decided to give the Bharuch Lok Sabha seat, which late Congress leader Ahmed Patel had represented, to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), senior leader and Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh said in Tapi on Sunday. He said the Congress will release its second list of candidates for the Lok Sabha election Monday evening.

"Rahul Gandhi wished that the Bharuch seat should be fought by the Congress as it is associated with Ahmed Patel, but it did not work out in the alliance talks. If you are in an alliance you have to make compromises by giving and taking," Ramesh said on the sidelines of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra at Vyara in Tapi district.

AAP candidate and sitting MLA Chaitra Vasava has been announced by the INDIA bloc from Bharuch — a seat that sitting MP Mansukh Vasava has been representing since 1998.

"I feel that Mumtaz and Faisal (Ahmed Patel's children) gave no inappropriate statements. They have shown their sadness and I also feel it. They are in the Congress and they will always remain with the Congress and there is no doubt about it... We are saddened that we are not single-handedly fighting in Bharuch. It is connected to the late Ahmed Patel, but we have not won the seat in the last 40 years," he said.

DIVINE CONNECT

THE MUCH-HYPED Ram Temple inauguration in Ayodhya or the Hindutva plank may not give a big fillip to the BJP in the southern states, especially Kerala, but its candidates are not missing any opportunity to subtly send across a message. On the occasion of Mahashivratri on March 8, BJP's Thiruvananthapuram candidate Rajeev Chandrasekhar visited 18 temples in his constituency, while Pathanamthitta candidate Anil Antony went to seven. In Antony's campaign, Sabarimala shrine takes centre stage as it falls in his constituency. Actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi, who is contesting from Thrissur, makes sure to flaunt his love for both temples and churches as the Christian community makes a sizeable population in his constituency. He has even promised to get a ₹10 lakh crown for Mother Mary in a church in Thrissur.

SPOT THE SCULPTURE

A RECENT beautification drive on the Supreme Court premises saw the iconic mother and child sculpture, installed on its lawns on February 20, 1978, make way for a fountain. The black bronze sculpture made by renowned artist Chintamani Kar portrayed Mother India sheltering the young republic of India. Following demands for its reinstatement, a new location has been prepared in the park, bordering Bhagwan Das Road, outside the high-security perimeter.

RAILWAY RESERVATION

THE UNION Home Ministry recently requested the Indian Railways to allocate seat reservation quota for personnel of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). The ministry made the request on lines of the quota allotted to Army personnel in the railways so that paramilitary personnel too can travel hassle-free to their home and back. The Railways, however, denied the request and told the MHA that it has directed the officials in the field to accommodate the travel requests of CAPF personnel to the best possible extent.

In this Kurukshetra, people of Andhra are Krishna, I'm their Arjun: CM Jagan

SREENIVAS JANYALA
ADDANKI (ANDHRA PRADESH), MARCH 10

TAKING ON the Telugu Desam Party-Jana Sena Party-BJP alliance, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy Sunday likened the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the state to a fight between "dharma" and "adharma". Addressing a packed venue in Addanki in Bapatla district, the Chief Minister took a dig at the N Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP, saying: "All you have to think about is whether you and your family members benefited from my schemes. That is all you need to think before voting."

Jagan, who is seeking a second term in power, said he was fighting the poll battle alone.

A Y-shaped ramp was created for Jagan with his war cry "Why Not 175" — a reference to the number of Assembly seats — written at the centre and the party flag installed at both the arms of Y.

Jagan said he has restored the self-respect of the poor, and asked the people to help him continue the "welfare journey" for another five years.

"Are you ready for the fight?" Jagan asked, and the crowd



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy during his rally on Sunday. ANI

shouted back, "Yes".

"You should give a fitting reply to Babu and his alliance," he said and termed the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in Andhra Pradesh a "Kurukshetra war" between "dharma and adharma".

Jagan lambasted Naidu for several minutes, accusing him of ruining the state, and making alliances to usurp power. "Unable to fight with me alone, he and his adopted son (K Pawan Kalyan) camped in New Delhi and begged another party to join them to try and dislodge me," he said.

"Our strength is the welfare we have done for each and every family in the state. While our MLAs are visiting house to house to discuss the welfare schemes, Naidu is spending time with 'yellow media' and Delhi leaders," he said.

Jagan said development in each family is visible in the state. "The party symbol fan's power comes from the people who are happy with the YSRC rule, from the hearts filled with pride. Naidu's cycle does not have tubes or tyres. His cycle has rusted and he needs others to run his cycle. No one talks or re-

members a scheme he implemented. I don't have star campaigners like Naidu does. It's the people who are my star campaigners?" Jagan said. "In this battle of Kurukshetra, the people of Andhra Pradesh will play the role of Krishna, and I will play Arjun. I am contesting the election alone but I have millions of star campaigners in every household across the state."

Jagan also asked how Naidu intends to get special category status for Andhra Pradesh when he failed to do it between 2014 and 2019 as CM.

3-time MLA, a close associate of Uddhav, joins Shinde Sena



MLA Ravindra Waikar with CM Eknath Shinde on Sunday

VALLABH OZARKAR
MUMBAI, MARCH 10

IN A major setback to Shiv Sena (UBT), its chief Uddhav Thackeray's close associate and three-time MLA from Jogeswhari East Ravindra Waikar Sunday joined the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena.

Waikar, 65, was under the scanner of central investigative agencies with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in October 2023 registering a money laundering case against him in connection with the construction of a luxury hotel, claiming it in violation of his agreement with the Mumbai municipal body.

Waikar got a major reprieve

in February after the Mumbai civic body told the Supreme Court that it was withdrawing its order to revoke permission for Waikar's hotel. The decision set the ground for the collapse of the ED case against him and led to talk of Waikar's defection.

"You can influence policy decisions only when you are in the government," MLA Waikar said while joining the Eknath Sena.

Asked if he switched allegiance due to pressure from central agencies, Waikar said, "I have faced all the agencies. Once you cooperate, the truth emerges."

Shinde said the allegations against Waikar were a thing of the past. "There were some misunderstandings, which have now been cleared," he said.

Every party wants me: Chirag sends a message to BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA, MARCH 10



Paswan has been getting feelers from Bihar Opp

FORMER LOK Janshakti Party president Chirag Paswan Sunday claimed that every party wants him to be on its side, indicating he could tilt towards the one that offered a better bargain.

Paswan, an NDA ally, has been getting feelers from the 'Mahagathbandhan', the opposition coalition in Bihar.

Addressing a rally in the Sahebganj assembly segment, Chirag hinted that he was weighing his options.

"I can see the posse of media persons here who are anxious to know whom Chirag Paswan is aligned with. I wish to tell them that Chirag Paswan is aligned only with the people of Bihar," said the leader, who has often sworn by his loyalty towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi, likening him to Ram and himself to Hanuman.

"Every party, every coalition wants Chirag Paswan to be on its side," he said, claiming that this was because people liked his "Bihar first Bihar first" vision that seeks to pull the state out of chronic backwardness.

In his speech, he made yet another attempt to project himself as true heir to his late father Ram Vilas Paswan, calling himself "sher ka beta". He refrained from mentioning by name bete noires in the NDA, Nitish Kumar, the Bihar chief minister who heads the JD(U), and Union minister, uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras, who split the late leader's party.

The young leader, however, spoke at length about the "conspiracies" he had to face.

BJP moves on from ADMK, opens channels with OPS and Dhinakaran

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MARCH 10

ENDING ITS wait for a positive sign from former ally AIADMK, the BJP has reached out to rebel AIADMK leaders O Panneerselvam and TTV Dhinakaran. The move comes after AIADMK chief and former Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami reiterated on Friday that his party would not reunite with the BJP.

The statement and the BJP's subsequent decision came as a relief for both Panneerselvam, popularly known as OPS, and Dhinakaran — once central to the AIADMK — who were eagerly waiting for the national party's call as it provides them with an opportunity to find a way back from the margins of state politics and revive their political careers.

Reminding his party of its decision to leave the BJP-led NDA last September, Palaniswami on Friday said there was no change in its position. The former CM responded to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's comment in an interview to a Tamil daily in February that the BJP's doors were still open for the AIADMK, saying, "We can't help if they keep their doors open. I can only speak for my party."

After this outright rejection, the BJP leadership decided to end its outreach to the AIADMK, conducted through different individuals, sources said. "The party now firmly aims to strengthen the NDA alliance in Tamil Nadu without the AIADMK. The BJP has reached out to OPS and TTV, acknowledging their interest in joining us," said an RSS leader, adding that fresh talks had been initiated on Friday afternoon.



O Panneerselvam (left); TTV Dhinakaran



For the past several days, OPS has been in his hometown Theni. Sources close to the former Deputy CM said he had become politically active again after it became apparent that the AIADMK would not return to the NDA. "He was disheartened by the BJP's hesitation in making him an offer while making repeated attempts at negotiating a deal

with the AIADMK, now his arch enemy. He spent the last few days at home, often in prayers, visiting temples and seeking solace at the shrine of his family deity," said the source.

The source said the message from the BJP hinted at an offer for OPS and Dhinakaran to appear on stage with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his next

EXPLAINED What's next for the AIADMK?

FOR AIADMK, even if the rumoured alliance with the late Vijayakanth's DMDK comes through, it can't match the heft of the ruling DMK's alliance. That makes the decision of the last unaffiliated party, the S Ramadoss led-PMK, crucial. Promised seven seats by the AIADMK, the north Tamil Nadu party has not concluded talks on resource sharing. There are also reports that the PMK has held talks with the BJP, aiming for a Cabinet portfolio in the NDA alliance.

Tamil Nadu visit, tentatively scheduled for March 22.

Since his rise in early 2017, the political journey of Dhinakaran, the nephew of former CM Jayalalithaa's aide V K Sasikala, has been marked by turmoil and setbacks, including challenges from the central agencies. While it was the BJP that destroyed the political

prospects of Sasikala's family, an entry into the NDA offers Dhinakaran an opening to rebuild his political career, especially given that his aunt is hesitant to make a comeback since her release from prison in a disproportionate assets case in 2021. Despite trying to lie low, Sasikala has been hounded by legal challenges from the Centre,

including cases, hefty sums as fines, and the seizure of her multi-crore property opposite Jayalalithaa's Poes Garden residence in Chennai.

While Dhinakaran's followers expect Sasikala to play an important, if indirect, role in the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP, which has realigned its strategy, sees the AIADMK rebels as crucial NDA members to tap into their local influence. Both leaders are believed to retain some support, especially in Sivaganga, Theni, pockets of Ramanathapuram, and the Thanjavur delta region, even if it has dwindled over the past couple of years.

With the NDA seat-sharing talks about to begin, OPS and Dhinakaran hope to secure a total of four to five seats. Reliable sources within the Sasikala family said Dhinakaran would push to contest from Theni, while OPS's son P Ravindranath, the sitting

MP from Theni, would look to get the ticket from Ramanathapuram or Sivaganga, leveraging his OBC Thevar community support. OPS and the Sasikala family once dominated Thevar votes in southern Tamil Nadu.

Meanwhile, the S Ramadoss led-PMK is trying to drive a hard bargain with both the BJP and the AIADMK, it also knows that with a current vote share of 4%, it will struggle to make a mark outside an alliance, having faced setbacks in the 2009, 2011, 2014, and 2016 elections. Its fall from 20 MLAs in 2001 to three in 2011 highlights its decline. The PMK's performance has worsened since then. It lost all seats in the 2016 Assembly polls, even though it managed a comeback in 2021 with five MLAs but only in alliance with the AIADMK. Its Lok Sabha results mirror this decline, with zero MPs in 2009, one in 2014, and none again five years ago.

Gehlot minister to Pilot's former aide: Congress hit by exodus in Rajasthan

HAMZA KHAN
JAIPUR, MARCH 10

ON SUNDAY, over two dozen leaders in Rajasthan, chiefly from the Congress, joined the BJP, giving a jolt to the grand old party ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. The new members were inducted into the BJP in Jaipur in the presence of Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and state BJP chief CP Joshi, among others.

Among those joining are several former ministers and MLAs. Since the Congress's defeat in the Assembly polls last year, several high-profile leaders have migrated over to the ruling BJP. Already, the BJP's first list of 15 candidates for Rajasthan includes two former Congress leaders who joined the BJP recently — tribal leader and former state Cabinet minister Mahendra Singh Malviya and former Lok Sabha MP Jyoti Miridha.

Officially, the BJP said 1,370 people took its membership on Sunday. Here are the notable names among the Congress exits, along with Janta Sena chief Randhir Singh Bhindar, who merged his outfit with the BJP:

LALCHAND KATARIA

A former Union minister, Kataria was also in the previous Ashok Gehlot government Cabinet as the minister for agriculture. A long-time Congress worker,



Former Union minister Lalchand Kataria, ex-MoS Rajendra Yadav and others with Rajasthan CM Bhajan Lal Sharma and BJP state chief CP Joshi in Jaipur on Sunday. Rohit Jain Paras

Kataria started out as an Indian Youth Congress leader in rural Jaipur. He was first elected as an MLA in 2003 from Amber. He lost the 2008 Assembly election from Jhotwara but managed to win the Lok Sabha poll in 2009, when he defeated BJP's Rao Rajendra Singh from Jaipur Rural. In 2012, he was made MoS for rural development in Manmohan Singh Cabinet.

He won his next election only in 2018, when he defeated the BJP's Rajpal Singh Shekhawat in the Jhotwara Assembly seat. In May 2019, Kataria had reportedly submitted his resignation following the party's Lok Sabha loss.

RAJENDRA SINGH YADAV

In last year's Assembly polls, as a sitting MLA and minister, Yadav lost out to the BJP candidate by 321 votes. An OBC leader, Yadav was among a handful of

Congress candidates who won amid a BJP wave in the 2013 Assembly polls for his first stint as the Kotputli MLA. He retained the seat in 2018 and was made a MoS for disaster management and social justice. Following the November 2021 reshuffle, he was made the MoS for home affairs.

However, over 2022 and 2023, he was raided by the I-T department and the ED in connection to an alleged mid-day meal scam during the Covid-19 pandemic. Reportedly, firms run by Yadav's sons had supplied raw materials for the programme. At the time, Yadav had said the scam did not concern the firms run by his children and that he was being "troubled unnecessarily".

KHILADI LAL BAIRWA

A former Lok Sabha MP, Bairwa was denied a Congress ticket in

2023 from Baseri from where he was a sitting MLA. He then contested as an Independent but got a paltry 1,366 votes in a seat the Congress ended up winning.

Bairwa, among the most outspoken MLAs in the Sachin Pilot camp, was replaced with Sanjay Kumar Jatav in 2023. In the previous Gehlot government, Bairwa was the chairman of the Scheduled Caste Commission. Bairwa's lone Lok Sabha win came in 2009 from Karauli-Dholpur.

While he may barely have any political capital left, the 60-year-old had been associated with the Congress for decades and had held various posts since the 1990s.

RICHPAL & VIJAYPAL MIRDHA

Multiple members of the Mirdha family, belonging to the Jat community in the Nagaur region, have now left the Congress for the BJP. On Sunday, it was former MLAs Richpal and his son Vijaypal.

Ahead of the Assembly polls last year, former Congress MP Jyoti Mirdha had joined the BJP. Jyoti's grandfather Nathuram was a member of the first Rajasthan Assembly in 1952. Richpal is Nathuram's nephew.

A four-term MLA from Nagaur, Richpal was first elected from Degana in 1990 on a Janata Dal ticket, then in 1993 on a Congress ticket, in 1998 as an Independent, and in 2003 on a Congress ticket. However, he lost the 2008 elections. Degana returned to the fam-

ily fold in 2018, when Vijaypal won the seat, though he lost in 2023.

ALOK BENIWAL

The former MLA is the son of Congress veteran Kamla Beniwal, who was the governor of Tripura, Gujarat and Mizoram.

In 2018, he was denied ticket by the Congress from Shahpura but he contested as an Independent and won. However, he later extended support to the Gehlot government. In 2023, he was again denied a ticket. He contested as an Independent but lost to Congress's Manish Yadav.

RANDHIR SINGH BHINDAR & DEEPENDRA KUNWAR

Janta Sena chief Randhir Singh Bhindar and his wife Deependra Kunwar joined BJP, with Bhindar merging his party with BJP. A former BJP MLA, Bhindar said his 11-year-long "vanvaas" ended as he returned to the party fold.

Bhindar was the BJP general secretary of Udaipur Rural between 1994 and 1997. He contested as a BJP candidate from the Vallabh Nagar Assembly seat in 1993 and 1998 but was defeated both times by Congress's Gulab Singh. He then defeated Singh in 2003 but lost to Gajendra Singh Shaktawat of Congress in 2008.

He was denied a ticket by the BJP in 2013 and contested as an Independent, defeating Shaktawat, who again defeated Bhindar in 2018.



Hisar MP Brijendra Singh with Cong's Mallikarjun Kharge and Ajay Maken in New Delhi, Sunday. Tashi Tobgyal

BJP Hisar MP joins Cong, father likely to follow him

SUKHBIR SIWACH
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 10

THE BJP'S Hisar MP Brijendra Singh resigned as MP and joined the Congress on Sunday citing "compelling political reasons".

"I had to take this decision due to discomfort following some political reasons and ideological differences on issues including farmers, Agniveer (scheme) and (agitating) wrestlers," he said after joining the Congress.

Brijendra is the son of veteran BJP leader Chaudhary Birender Singh who, according to Congress leader Ajay Maken, will soon follow in the footsteps of his son and join the grand old party at a public meeting.

In the past, the father-son duo often defied the BJP's stand on several issues. In 2020, they sided with the protesting farmers to demand the withdrawal of the now-repealed farm laws. They also expressed solidarity with wrestlers who protested against former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh over allegations of sexual harassment.

The Hisar MP said the BJP's decision to ally with the Dushyant Chautala-led Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) was also one of the reasons for his exit from the party. Last October, at a rally in Jind, Birender warned the BJP that he would leave the party if it allied with the JJP for the Lok Sabha polls. Brijendra defeated Chautala by more than two lakh votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls when the BJP

swept the state, winning all 10 seats. However, a few months later in the Assembly elections, the JJP chief defeated Brijendra's mother Prem Lata by more than 40,000 votes from Uchana Kalan.

Following the elections, the BJP allied with the JJP, a move that did not go down well with the Singhs as the contenders for the Hisar seat began to grow, especially with the induction of former Hisar MP Kuldeep Bishnoi into the BJP in 2023.

A JJP leader, however, said Brijendra's family was only giving another ultimatum like in the past. "His resignation came a day after Chautala reminded him about his threat of leaving BJP over our alliance. He should take calls based on politics and not worry about JJP," the leader said.

On the other hand, Brijendra's entry into the Congress seems to have provided the party with a strong contender in Hisar. With Birender, who is the maternal grandson of farmer leader Sir Chhotu Ram and the son of Chaudhary Neeki Ram, waiting in the ranks, Congress leaders are upbeat about the party's prospects.

Party insiders said Brijendra would not only boost the party's chances in Haryana but also in neighbouring UP and Rajasthan, which have a sizable Jat population. "When a sitting BJP MP leaves, it is a sign that Congress is coming back to power," said Haryana Congress communications in-charge Chandvir Singh Hooda. Senior Congress leader Kumari Selja welcomed Brijendra into the party.

Dushyant stakes claim on Hisar Lok Sabha seat

VARINDER BHATIA
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 10

THE DAY when BJP suffered a blow with its incumbent MP from Hisar, Brijendra Singh, quitting the party and joining the Congress, Haryana Deputy CM and Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) leader Dushyant Chautala has staked claim on Hisar Lok Sabha seat. The senior JJP leader also hinted at going into the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls as part of the NDA, even if the BJP shares two of the 10 seats of Haryana — Hisar and Bhiwani-Mahendragarh.

In Haryana Vidhan Sabha, Dushyant represents Uchana assembly constituency that forms part of the Hisar Lok Sabha seat.

Currently, BJP represents all 10 Lok Sabha seats of Haryana. "Our preference is to contest on two Lok Sabha seats, Hisar and Bhiwani-Mahendragarh. Rest, it all depends on the NDA. JJP is all set to contest all 10 Lok Sabha seats on its own. We have already covered six Lok Sabha constituencies by way of holding major rallies, the seventh one is scheduled in Hisar on March 13," Dushyant said.

JJP held its coordination committee meeting on Sunday in Sirsa, which was chaired by Dushyant's father and JJP's national president Ajay Singh Chautala.

Cong panel wants Gandhi family member from Amethi, Raebareli

MAULSHREE SETH
LUCKNOW, MARCH 10

THE NEWLY formed state election committee of the UP unit of Congress Sunday "unanimously recommended" that members of the Gandhi family should contest from Amethi and Raebareli Lok Sabha constituencies.

While former Congress president Sonia Gandhi was elected from Raebareli constituency in

the last Lok Sabha elections, her son Rahul was defeated by BJP's Smriti Irani in neighbouring Amethi. Sonia was recently elected to Rajya Sabha, and the Congress has renominated Rahul from Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in its first list of 39 candidates.

At the first meeting in Lucknow on Sunday, the state election committee, led by AICC general secretary Avinash Pande, discussed the names for the 17 seats that the party is set to contest in UP

as part of the INDIA alliance.

"A detailed discussion took place on Raebareli and Amethi Lok Sabha seats. Raebareli and Amethi have always been associated with the Gandhi family and these Lok Sabha seats have been close to them. Therefore, based on the sentiments of workers as well as office-bearers in Amethi and Raebareli, we have unanimously passed a proposal to request the party's national president that whatever names are decided

there, they should be from the Gandhi family. The final decision would be taken by them," said Pande after the meeting.

During the two-hour-long meeting, the committee also discussed possible candidates for the other 15 seats. Sources said there were at least three other seats for which only one name was to be considered. They included state unit president Ajay Rai from Varanasi, former MLA Imran Masood from Saharanpur,

and Tanuj Punia from Barabanki.

"On 11 Lok Sabha seats, the committee... shortlisted one name that has been proposed to the central leadership. These seats include Jhansi from where the name of former MP Pradeep Jain Aditya has been suggested. Former MP Raj Babbar has been shortlisted for Fatehpur Sikri, sitting MLA Virendra Chaudhary for Maharajganj, former MP Kamal Kishore Commando from Bansgaon," said a party leader.



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India's rising glory in the world

Mera Bharat, Mera Parivar

'People have left no space for Opp... I construe it as directive to keep mum'



THE EXPRESS INTERVIEW
WITH **PARESH DHANANI**
SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER AND FORMER LEADER OF OPPOSITION

AS RAHUL Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra traverses through Gujarat, the Congress has seen a string of leaders leave. **PARESH DHANANI**, a senior party leader and a former Leader of Opposition, tells **GOPAL KATESHIYA** that the Congress is not losing sleep over the leaders who are leaving, and argues why there is a positive side to it.

Congress has seen more leaders leave for BJP, including former state chief Arjun Modhwadia and ex-MLA Ambarish Der.

We had got Ambarishbhai on loan (hinting at his party-hopping). We are happy we have repaid the loan. Arjunbhai turning against the party is painful. However, it is not the first such instance, nor is it likely to be the last... I believe the BJP has welcomed 82 Congress leaders of MLA and MP ranks over the past 20 years. If one were to ask the common man, he would be able to recognise only eight of those 82... and only two-five names are relevant today. I believe the BJP is unable to seek votes on the basis of its work and therefore, by hook or by crook, it is crushing faces who raise their voice against its regime. The coming elections will see new polarisation... It will be a contest of netas versus people. I am confident the results will be shocking.

Modhwadia was part of the meetings for Nyay Yatra till a day before he defected to BJP.

The BJP appears to be holding bharti melas (recruitment fairs) to get Opposition workers, and to keep its own grass-root workers in check... We are happy that the people may be electing a kamal (BJP) government, but the ruling netas are all (originally) of the Congress.

There is some speculation that you are also in talks with the BJP.

Some mediapersons who run paid

jective is to unite people... lift them out of divisions of caste, creed and religion.

BJP and AAP have declared candidates for LS polls. Why not Congress?

Screening committees have been constituted. Simultaneously, the party organisation has been preparing for the elections for quite a while. I believe only the finishing touches are left (to the list)...

Modhwadia cited Congress's decision to stay away from Ram Temple ceremony as reason for leaving the party.

The BJP's Hindutva is limited to the slogan of 'Jai Shri Ram' and a temple in Ayodhya... It is hence hollow. I am proud to be a worker of the party under which the locks of the temple of Ram Lalla at Ayodhya were opened, allowing people darshan... It was late PM Rajiv Gandhi who provided that opportunity... Had he been elected again, he would have (allowed) construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya... The Congress respects all religions... The Shankaracharya asserted publicly that it was wrong to do pran pratishtha (consecration) in an incomplete temple. Hence, respecting the culture of this country, the Congress kept its distance.

Is Nyay Yatra as a success in Gujarat?

I believe the ideologies of the Congress and the Constitution are two sides of the same coin. Hence, those supporting both are eager to extend their support to the Yatra. Rahul Gandhi, who is India's future, is coming to (Mahatma) Gandhi's and Sardar's (Patel) Gujarat... to protect the Constitution and the rights it gives.

Has the Opposition been able to do its duty to hold the govt to account?

I agree that a strong Opposition is needed to save democracy. But the people of Gujarat have unfortunately left no space for the Opposition... I construe this as Gujarat people's directive to the Opposition to keep mum.

BJP has set a target of winning 370 LS seats and all 26 seats in Gujarat.

Has the Congress set any targets?

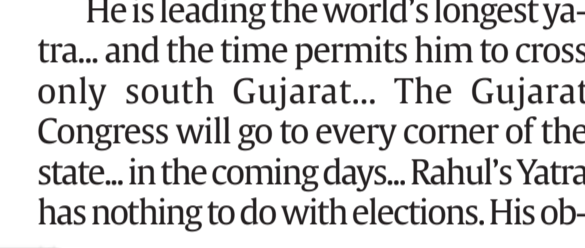
The Congress's target is to get *doosri azadi* (second Independence). I assert that we are headed for a repeat of 2004... the fact remains people have thoroughly understood BJP's reign and its leaders.

news campaigns are out to assassinate the characters of Opposition politicians... These rumours are just meant to sow doubts and harm the Congress.

Why is Yatra skirting Saurashtra, which includes 7 Lok Sabha seats?

He is leading the world's longest yatra... and the time permits him to cross only south Gujarat... The Gujarat Congress will go to every corner of the state... in the coming days... Rahul's Yatra has nothing to do with elections. His ob-

Residents in Akbar Nagar area after stone pelting incidents during an anti-encroachment drive, in Lucknow on Sunday.



Residents in Akbar Nagar area after stone pelting incidents during an anti-encroachment drive, in Lucknow on Sunday. PTI

Stones hurled at police during demolition drive in Lucknow

official. On March 6, the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court stayed the demolition drive in Akbar Nagar and directed the state government to ensure that all the people being rehabilitated from there (slums) and applying for EWS houses be provided accommodations and the entire process of shifting be completed by March 31. The eviction drive is part of the administration's plans to beautify and develop Akbar Nagar which is located on the banks of the Kukrail nullah. The demolition order was passed by the Authority citing illegal constructions on the Kukrail's riverbed and banks. Indramani Tripathi, vice-chairperson of the Lucknow Development Authority, clarified that the plan was to demolish three commercial establishments, as the petitions of their owners against demolition were dismissed by the HC. "When the third commercial building was being demolished, false rumours circulated, prompting the residents to protest. The situation was resolved only after convincing them that there was no plan to demolish any residential buildings," said Tripathi.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE LUCKNOW, MARCH 10

PROTESTING RESIDENTS pelted employees of the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) and police personnel accompanying them with stones when a team of officials started pulling down three commercial buildings as part of a demolition drive in the city's Akbar Nagar area. Two government vehicles were damaged in the stone-pelting "mild force" was used to bring the situation under control, police said. The situation escalated when rumours spread that some persons were killed during the demolition of one of the buildings. A large number of people gathered there and started pelting stones at the LDA team and police. The matter was resolved only when additional police teams arrived and pacified the protesters. However, no injuries were reported in the stand-off. "There was a rumour that the Authority would be demolishing residential houses, prompting the people to protest," stated a government

Purvanchal Vidut Vitaran Nigam Limited Vidut Nagar, P.O.- DLW, Varanasi - 221004 E-Tender Notice

E-Tender is invited for the following works. The tender will be accepted up to at 15:00 hrs. on 08.04.2024 and will be opened on 09.04.2024 15:00 hrs. Please visit www.etender.up.nic.in for details/ download and for any other corrections/ amendments/modifications/ extensions till the date of submission of bids, will be upload on website www.etender.up.nic.in www.puvvn.nic.in. SI. No.: 1. **Tender No.:** EAV-191/2023-24, **Material:** LED Street Light 70 Watt **Qty.:** 1350 Nos. **Material:** LED Street Light 120 Watt, **Qty.:** 10700 Nos. **Earnest Money (Rs.):** 4,78,500.00 **Tender Fee (Rs.):** 5000.00 + GST@18%, **SI. No.:** 2. **Tender No.:** EAV-192/2023-24, **Material:** LED Street Light 150W 160 Watt **Qty.:** 33300 Nos. **Earnest Money (Rs.):** 21,97,000.00 **Tender Fee (Rs.):** 10000.00 + GST@18%, **SI. No.:** 3. **Tender No.:** EAV-193/2023-24, **Material:** LED Flood Light 245W-250 Watt **Qty.:** 5860 Nos. **Material:** LED Flood Light Narrow Beam Light 300 Watt, **Qty.:** 200 Nos. **Earnest Money (Rs.):** 6,81,000.00 **Tender Fee (Rs.):** 5000.00 + GST@18%, **SI. No.:** 4. **Tender No.:** EAV-194/2023-24, **Material:** DG Set 58.5 KVA **Qty.:** 50 Nos. **Earnest Money (Rs.):** 6,59,000.00 **Tender Fee (Rs.):** 5000.00 + GST@18%, **SI. No.:** 5. **Tender No.:** EAV-195/2023-24, **Material:** DG Set 125 KVA **Qty.:** 35 Nos. **Earnest Money (Rs.):** 7,77,500.00 **Tender Fee (Rs.):** 5000.00 + GST@18%, **Last Date & Time for online submission of tender document:** 08.04.2024, **Date & time for online opening of tender paper-1:** 09.04.2024. **Sd/- SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER (MM-II) "Save Electricity in the interest of Nation"** पत्रांक: 297/ दिनांक: 09.03.2024

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS), PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT, ASSAM, GUWAHATI-03

No. CE/DEV/TB/707/2023-24/34

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER (RE-BID)

The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites Re-Bids on behalf of Governor of Assam for Construction of Roads including Routine Maintenance for 4 (four) years under **Mukhya Mantrir Pakipath Nirman Achan (MMPPNA) for the year 2023-24 in Cachar District** of Assam amounting to **Rs. 1.59 Crores** (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam. Details along with packages under each district may be seen from **11.03.2024** at website www.assamtenders.gov.in. Amendment /Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website www.assamtenders.gov.in. Schemes are not yet sanctioned by the competent authority. In the event of non-sanction of the schemes, the bids may be cancelled and no claim what so ever on this account shall be entertained from the bidders.

Note: NIT Value is inclusive of GST (12%), Labour Cess (1%), etc.

Sd/- **Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3.**

Janasanyog/CF/644123/11-Mar-24

Rural Works Department Office of the Engineer-in-Chief, Rural Works Department, Bihar Vishweshwaraiya Bhawan, 5 th Floor, Rural Works Department, Bailey Road, Patna, Bihar -800015 (मुख्यमंत्री ग्रामीण पथ अनुसंधान नीति, 2018)												
Notice Inviting Tender for Rural Roads Maintenance based on Output and performance based Contract through e-procurement mode on Model Bidding Document (MBD).												
(Notice Inviting Tender No. - MR-3054-114/2023-24)												
1.	Designation and Address of the Advertiser		: Office of Engineer-in-chief, Rural Works Department, Bihar, Patna									
2.	Date of Issue of Notice Inviting Tender		: 07.03.2024									
3.	Period for downloading of Tender documents		: From 01.04.2024 (9:00) to 15.04.2024 up to 15:00 hrs. From website- http://pmsgytenderbih.gov.in									
4.	Date, Time & Place of Pre-Bid Meeting		: Date 03.04.2024 time 15:00 hrs. Place O/o Concerned Superintending Engineer									
5.	Last Date & Time for uploading tender Document by bidder		: Date 15.04.2024 up to 15:00 hrs. http://pmsgytenderbih.gov.in									
6.	Date, time for online opening of Technical bid		: Date 15.04.2024 up to Time: 15:30 hrs.									
7.	Last date, time and place for submission of Original Instrument of EMD, Cost of BOQ, Bank credit facility certificate and an Affidavit regarding correctness of Information provided with bid document		: Till 15:00 hrs on 15.04.2024 : Place- O/o-concerned (i) Executive Engineer Or (ii) Superintending Engineer Or (iii) Chief Engineer									
8.	The Engineer in chief, Rural Works Department on behalf of Governor of Bihar invites bids from the eligible bidders for the works detailed below.											
9.	Details of Works:-											
SL No	Package No.	District	Division	Block	Name of Road	Length (in KM)	Cost of Initial Rectification with Surface Renewal (in Lakhs)	Cost of 5-years Maintenance (in Lakhs)	Total Estimated Cost (in Lakhs)	Cost of BOQ (in Rs)	Bid Security (in Lakhs)	Amount Payable to Works Division
1	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur West/14	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur West	Paru	Mangurahiya-Baya Jagdishpur PMSGY Road Se Kurmi Tola Bajitpur Tak	0.850	50.73	5.82	56.55	10000	8.30	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur West
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur West	Paru	Chhagra Aash Jagshala Chowk to Chhagra Aash Baitha Tola	1.455	65.68	13.61	79.29			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur West	Paru	Paroo Hospital Gate To Kasba Tola	1.500	64.79	13.93	78.72			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur West	Paru	Jagdishpur Dharamwara pool to Hariharpur	0.780	24.2	9.38	33.58			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur West	Paru	Lakhnauri Azajul Khan Ke Ghar TO Mohabatpur Pitch road TO House of Mahendra paswan	2.050	107.19	16.17	123.36			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur West	Paru	Paru Hospital Gate to Miyan Ke Ghar Hote huye Paru High School Tak	1.070	31.13	12.18	43.31			
		Total for the Group				7.705	343.720	71.090	414.810			
2	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur West/15	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur West	Sahebganj	PWD Path to gram Lakhna PMSGY Sarak via High School	2.300	101.14	24.17	125.31	10000	8.15	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur West
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur West	Sahebganj	Bangra Jhaphi Devi Asthan se Sadhu Ray Tola Hote Huye to Jita Chhagra	6.000	215.3	67.05	282.35			
		Total for the Group				8.300	316.440	91.220	407.660			
3	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur East-1/15	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Kudhani	Sonbarsa Kerma Path to Phulwaria	2.880	137.575	22.034	159.609	10000	7.28	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur East-1
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Kudhani	L066-T02 SH Chitraul to Maksudpur (VR17)	3.950	174.021	30.207	204.228			
		Total for the Group				6.830	311.596	52.241	363.837			
4	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur East-1/16	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Kudhani	N.H.-77 to Kurhani via Devgan Village	3.300	146.704	28.721	175.425	10000	8.63	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur East-1
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Kudhani	Repair of road from N.H.-77 to Teliya	3.300	124.303	28.74	153.043			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Kudhani	T04 NH 77 to Ladora	1.970	85.69	17.12	102.81			
		Total for the Group				8.570	356.697	74.581	431.278			
5	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur East-1/17	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Kudhani	L071-T03 Jagarbatpur to Bangra Hardas (VR25)	2.030	80.865	17.87	98.735	10000	4.38	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur East-1
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Kudhani	L072 - T02 SH to Bhawanipur (VR16)	1.800	62.9	16.79	79.69			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Musahari	ALKAPURI ROAD NO. 2 INDRAVEJ SINGH KE GHAR to SUDHAKAR THAKUR ALKAPURI	0.514	37.728	2.76	40.488			
		Total for the Group				4.344	181.493	37.420	218.913			
6	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur East-1/18	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Sakra	MIDDLE SCHOOL MAJHULIYA to SATPURA MURAU PRAKHAND SIMAN TAK	2.500	107.290	21.530	128.82	10000	7.84	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur East-1
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Sakra	Bhartipur PMSGY sadak to Bhartipur Dakshin Tola Hote huye Lakhta Bhartipur	1.590	67.020	13.850	80.87			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Sakra	Panchayat Bhawan sakra to Ramirampur	2.541	91.981	22.437	114.418			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Sakra	Repair of road from N.H.-28 Rupanpatti to Gobardhanpur (Tulsi Mohanpur Chauk) via Thatiya Tola	1.500	53.75	14.16	67.905			
		Total for the Group				8.131	320.039	71.974	392.013			
7	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur East-1/19	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Saraiya	Rewa road to Gachhi Batroulia	0.620	40.317	4.607	44.924	10000	8.31	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur East-1
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Saraiya	L059 Khaira PWD Road to Gahilo	2.013	110.32	18.4	128.72			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Saraiya	L055-Berua to Pagahia	1.700	80.717	14.458	95.175			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Saraiya	NH to BERUA	2.688	124.145	22.57	146.715			
		Total for the Group				7.021	355.499	60.035	415.534			
8	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur East-1/20	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Saraiya	Jaitpur-Khaira R.E.O. Road To Mishrawaliya Tola Rampur Bali	2.620	102.03	23.73	125.76	10000	9.77	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur East-1
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Saraiya	R.E.O. road Kubewa to Sahilapatti road	6.250	195.87	60.67	256.54			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-1	Saraiya	Chakia PMSGY road to Bardaha Village	2.730	79.76	26.275	106.035			
		Total for the Group				11.600	377.660	110.675	488.335			
9	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur East-2/11	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-2	Aurai	Ramapur PWD Road To Sambhuta	3.675	213.240	33.820	247.06	10000	8.80	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur East-2
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-2	Aurai	Bairiyaurai Jale Road to Panapur Yadav Tola bhaya	1.550	73.07	13.45	86.52			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-2	Aurai	MAHUA CHAWK to BALIA	2.000	89.28	16.9	106.18			
		Total for the Group				7.225	375.590	64.170	439.760			
10	MR-N/23-24 Muzaffarpur East-2/12	Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-2	Aurai	SAHILA ARAJI to PRIMARY SCHOOL	1.040	46.156	9.455	55.611	10000	9.52	EE,RWD Works Division, Muzaffarpur East-2
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-2	Aurai	Ganguli- Madhopur Road- To Madhuban Besi	1.170	50.330	9.617	59.947			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-2	Aurai	MADHUBAN BARHAMDEV SINGH HOUSE TO RAM NAGRA	1.600	67.42	15.27	82.69			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-2	Aurai	PARAMJEEVAR BHADOPUR PATH PAR AADAMPUR AWAL to DIH TOLA	1.200	50.182	11.037	61.219			
		Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur East-2	Aurai	Bhairo Asthan to Panapur	4.300	179.27	37.44	216.71			
		Total for the Group				9.310	393.358	82.819	476.177			
11	MR-N/23-24 Narkatiaganj/07	West Champaran	Narkatiaganj	Chanpatia	Chanpatia Dakhia Railway Gumti to Karnpatti PWD Kaitwahaliya	1.700	85.21	15.15	100.36	10000	9.89	EE,RWD Works Division, Narkatiaganj
		West Champaran	Narkatiaganj	Chanpatia	T06 to Tikachapar	2.400	117.29	20.17	137.46			
		West Champaran	Narkatiaganj	Chanpatia	Tikulya to Gidhdha	2.270	109.35	20.57	129.92			
		West Champaran	Narkatiaganj	Chanpatia	KATHWALIA LORIA Road to BHIKHAMPUR	2.250	107.09	19.58	126.67			
		Total for the Group				8.620	418.940	75.470	494.410			

Those who want to join my personal paid group, then they can join our group by contribution. You will get all those newspapers in the morning at the appointed time 4:00 A.M. which you have been getting till now.

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Another Kuno cheetah gives birth to 5 cubs; total 13 newborns this year

ANAND MOHAN J
BHOPAL, MARCH 10

ONE OF the cheetahs brought to Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park from South Africa, Gami, gave birth to a litter of five cubs on Sunday, officials said.

Twenty cheetahs were brought from South Africa and Namibia to Kuno in September 2022 as part of the government's Project Cheetah. While seven of those have died since March 2023, officials have been encouraged by the birth of 13 cubs since January this year. Currently, the total number of cheetahs in Kuno National Park is 26.

Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change Bhubendra Yadav announced the birth of the litter in a post on X. "This is the fourth cheetah litter on Indian soil and the first litter of cheetahs brought from South Africa. Congratulations to all, especially the team of forest officers, vets, and field staff who have ensured a stress-free environment for cheetahs, which has led to successful mating and birth of the cubs," he said.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Aseem Shrivastava said the birth



Gami with its newborn cubs at Kuno National Park. X/@byadavbjp

shows that the cheetahs are adapting to Indian conditions.

"Gami had a mating encounter with the cheetah Pavak around three months ago. The cheetahs would have been unable to breed if they were in a stressful condition. This shows that they are adapting to Indian conditions despite the fact that they tend to be sensitive," he said.

The 13 cubs in Kuno include the five given birth to by Gami on Sunday, four born to the Namibian cheetah named Jwala

and three to the one named Aasha - both in January.

Shrivastava said the litter born to Aasha were spotted walking with their mother - a positive sign. "The cheetah cubs of the second litter have not yet been spotted walking. But all the cubs are alive, which is a very good sign," he said.

Jwala had given birth to four cubs in March last year too. While three died due to extreme heat, the surviving one was abandoned by its mother after

being taken for medical treatment. Shrivastava said that cub would soon be rewilded. "We are on an expert consultation stage in this. The orphan cheetah will have to be rewilded after it completes one year. The orphan cub is healthy," he said.

Wildlife officials are currently focussed on ensuring that the cheetah mothers and cubs housed within larger enclosures have a predator-free environment in order to supplement their population.

UGC sets framework for private universities' off-campus centres

R RADHIKA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

IN LINE with the "future academic vision" instead of "commercial interests", the UGC has notified modalities on March 6 for state private universities to set up off-campus centres within their respective states.

Off-campus centres can be started under the UGC's (Establishment of and Maintenance of Standards in Private Universities) Regulation, 2003. However, to "standardise the application process and improve transparency", the commission on February 13, 2024, approved the modalities for private universities to start off-campus centres.

As per UGC notice, private universities can open off-campus centres provided that the relevant State University Act, under which the university has been established, contains a provision to do so. However, a private university set up less than five years ago cannot set up such centres. The university will have to maintain the quality of infrastructure, faculty, and programmes at par with the main campus.

According to UGC records, there are 471 private universities but the UGC has not approved any off-campus centre for any



UGC Chairperson
M Jagadesh Kumar

private university. However, several privately owned deemed-to-be universities have been allowed to start off-campus centres with UGC approval.

The latest modalities also allow private universities to "take over any affiliated college" run by the same sponsoring trust or company. The university can progressively close the affiliated college with a no objection certificate from the affiliating university, it states, a departure from UGC's earlier notice in 2018 according to which private universities cannot affiliate an institution or a college.

Further, the state private university must have an approval or issuance of a Letter of Intent from the relevant statutory or regulatory body to start a specific programme in the off-campus

centre. Expansion in terms of programmes or departments and increase in seats can be done only with the approval of statutory authority and the academic council or executive council of the university. The approvals will have to be displayed on the university website, the UGC notice states.

The notice states that state private universities have to send proposals to a standing committee to start off-campus centres, which will be subjected to quarterly inspections by UGC, and in case of violation, the commission can shut the centre and shift the students to the main campus. The state private university will have to own the land or at least lease the land for 30 years to start the centre, the notice said, adding that for establishing the centre, UGC will charge Rs 10 lakh as processing fee.

UGC Chairperson M Jagadesh Kumar said, "This development marks a notable step, introducing a structured framework for evaluating and considering applications for off-campus centres by state private universities. The move aligns with the evolving educational landscape outlined in the NEP 2020, aiming to enhance regulatory facilitation and support the expansion of higher education."

Telangana: Four leaders from BRS, one from Congress join BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

Four Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders, including two former MPs, and a Congress leader from Telangana joined the BJP Sunday.

Those who joined the BJP are Godam Nagesh and Sitaram Nayak, both former MPs, former BRS MLAs Saidey Reddy and Jalagam Venkat Rao, and Srinivas Gomase from the Congress. The leaders praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

BJP leader and party parliamentary board member K Laxman welcomed them and said while the leaders of other parties are working for the future for their sons and daughters, Modi is working for the country.

BJP general secretary Tarun Chugh said people are fed-up with "dynastic and corrupt" parties and praised these leaders for their work in different capacities.

The BRS is now "triple B party", Chugh said, describing them as "baba, beta and baby", a reference to its president K Chandrasekhar Rao, his son and daughter. These three ran a "corrupt" government in the state, he said.

FOCUS ON FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE

CRPF DG asks state unit heads to identify personnel engaged in online gaming

MAHENDER SINGH
MANRAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

ALL THE unit in-charges in the CRPF have been assigned a new task by the force's Director General to identify personnel who take part in online gaming. The move is part of the CRPF's measures to stop its personnel from losing money and facing financial distress.

In a meeting on February 12, it was decided by DG, CRPF, Anish Dayal Singh to assess the impact of online gaming and other "risky transactions" being carried out by CRPF personnel and to take effective preventive action. "All the unit in-charges in all the states have been asked to collect details of the number of personnel engaged in online gaming such as Dream-11, My-11 circle, Teen Patti, Jungle Rummy, Rummy Circle, etc, crypto trading, equity trading, loan taker other than banks, personal loan from banks," a senior officer said, citing the DG's directions.

In the meeting, which lasted around two hours, Singh also

asked for suggestions on preventive measures to stop such "risky transactions". He asked the unit in-charges to submit their response to his office. "After receiving the order, we have started finding out about all the personnel when we meet in chaupal. Also, we ask all the personnel to find out about online gaming habits of their colleagues," an officer said.

Earlier, the Director General of Border Security Force had ordered collation of the details of its personnel with loans from banks or insurance companies, particularly the habitual bad hats, so as to keep a close watch on them and take strict action if they defaulted on repayments.

This decision to increase financial discipline among BSF personnel was taken after a jawan allegedly faked his death to avoid paying his loan installments. The constable, Amit Rana (32), was arrested in June last year. The BSF DG wrote to the headquarters heads that Rana's case was taken "very seriously" as such incidents not only brought a bad name to the force but also had a bearing on its administration.

Uttarakhand CM Dhama launches projects worth over Rs 8,000 crore

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
DEHRADUN, MARCH 10

UTTARAKHAND CHIEF Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama virtually launched 122 projects worth Rs 8,275.51 crore on Sunday.

Among these, Rs 1048.15 crore's worth of projects from 11 departments were inaugurated, while foundation stones were laid for Rs 7227.36 crore's worth of schemes from 15 departments. At the event, Dhama also marked the introduction of prepaid meters by the energy department and distributed tool kits to registered workers under the Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board.

He distributed allotment letters for solar energy projects among entrepreneurs and beneficiaries of the Mukhyamantri Solar Swarozgar Yojana. Dhama also highlighted the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code, which said was aimed at ensuring gender equality and social justice. He said that Muslim women had thanked his government over the initiative and that the government was committed to providing inclusive governance.

Asserting the paramountcy of law and order, Dhama pronounced a zero-tolerance approach towards unrest and criminal activities. He said that swift and decisive actions were taken by law en-



Uttarakhand CM Dhama

forcement agencies to maintain peace and security in the state.

Dhama underscored the principle of "resolution without options" as the cornerstone of his government's developmental agenda, citing foundation stones laid for projects worth Rs 18,000 crore, spanning infrastructure, healthcare, water resources, agriculture, housing, and rural development. He talked about the transformative impact of these investments on the state's socio-economic landscape.

In pursuit of enhancing Uttarakhand's economic prowess, Dhama outlined plans to double the gross state domestic product (GSDP) within five years. Additionally, he articulated strategies to foster innovation and best practices at the district level by 2025. Dhama reaffirmed his administration's resolve to position Uttarakhand as a model state through sustained efforts and progressive policies.

Magnetic Maharashtra

- Maharashtra leads in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In the financial year 2022-23, a total of Rs. 1,18,422 crore FDI was attracted, whereas, in a period of 9 months, i.e. from April 2023 to December 2023, a sum of Rs. 1,00,112 crore of investment was attracted in Maharashtra which will contribute to 30% of the Nation's FDI.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to the tune of Rs. 3.73 lakh crore was signed at Davos in 2024 for investment in the sectors of Steel, IT, Green Energy, agriculture, logistics and electronics in the state. This will generate employment opportunities for 2 lakh persons.
- 12,326 loan cases were approved in the year 2022-23 through the Chief Minister Employment Generation Program. Whereas loans of Rs. 342 crore were approved for 14822 Entrepreneurs in the year 2023-24. Millions of youths have been provided with employment opportunities with these moves.
- The cabinet Sub-committee approved projects worth Rs. 1,27,675 crores in the state. This will further generate 1,62,500 employment opportunities.
- A Memorandum of Understanding is sign with 7 companies for producing Green Hydrogen. Rs. 2,76,300 crore of investment in this program will generate 64,000 employment opportunities.
- Export Policy of Maharashtra - 2023 and integrated sustainable Textile policy for the state is announced.
- New Information Technology Enabled Services Policy approved. This will attract Rs. 95,000 crore of investment.
- Maharashtra Industry, Trade and Investment Facilitation Cell (MAITRI), will enable 119 facilities for industries providing ease of access and faster services.
- 6 Logistic Parks will be installed in Maharashtra.
- Maharashtra is leading in defence manufacturing. Maharashtra is the first-ever state in the country to create a defence and aerospace policy. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) worth Rs. 1358 crore in the defence manufacturing sector was signed at the Defence Expo.

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The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Standing up for the voter



UPENDRA BAXI

In Electoral Bonds case, by protecting individual's right to information SC has done what was expected of it

CHANGE & CONTINUITY

India has benefited from Trump and Biden administrations. But it shouldn't be indifferent to critical differences between the two

AMONG THE WORLD'S major powers, India is arguably the least apprehensive about the presidential rematch in the US between incumbent Joe Biden and his predecessor, Donald Trump. Unlike most US allies, India has benefited from productive relationships with the administrations of both. The bipartisan commitment — between the Democrats and Republicans — for a solid partnership with India has expanded since President Bill Clinton's visit to India 24 years ago this month. The expansive scope and intensity of India's relations with the US today stand in contrast to mutual indifference in the Cold War years and serious tensions in the 1990s over the issues of nuclear non-proliferation and Kashmir. In the 21st century, the US has emerged as India's most valuable strategic partner, with growing engagement in trade, technology, investments, regional security, and global governance. Undergirding the new dynamic is unprecedented political comfort between India's current leadership and the US establishment. Indian officialdom has built a working relationship with both Republican and Democratic policymakers.

Yet, Delhi would be unwise to take the relationship for granted and underestimate the importance of the impending presidential election in the US that could accelerate the rearrangement of the global economic and political order. The last eight years under Trump and Biden have already heralded unprecedented change. If Trump reversed the four-decade-old US policy of befriending China, Biden has persisted with his predecessor's determination to confront Beijing's expansionism in Asia and the quest to rewrite global rules. This shared understanding of China between Trump and Biden has boosted the India-US partnership amidst Beijing's aggressive policies towards Delhi. India, however, has yet to come to terms with the changed US policy towards global trade under Trump and Biden. The two leaders agree that the mantra of globalisation, which the US has preached for decades, has not worked for the American working people. They also insist that global trade rules, defined by the World Trade Organisation, must be rewritten. India's trade policy has struggled to deal with this new reality. While the Biden administration had not made trade policy a matter of confrontation with India, Trump will adopt a different tone and direction. Trump promises to impose a 10 per cent tariff on all imports into the US, demand greater access to partners' markets and refuse to subordinate commercial interests to geopolitical considerations. The time is now for Delhi to develop a domestic reform agenda to effectively deal with the inevitable changes in the global economic order driven by Washington.

Biden and Trump, however, have significant differences in the nature of US alliances in Europe and Asia. Trump will demand that the allies pick up a more significant share of the security burden. Their views on multilateralism are radically different. Trump is bound to walk out of climate commitments made by the US and demand greater accountability from the UN and its agencies. Whoever wins this election, the US role in the global order is about to change significantly. As a rising power, India has an opportunity to think creatively about this change and seize the possibility of elevating its own position in the global hierarchy.

LET THEM SPEAK

SC's direction to educate police on freedom of speech is reminder that legitimate dissent is central to vibrant democracy

THAT THE RIGHT to dissent is the first principle of a vibrant democracy is a truth frequently undermined in recent years. But the Supreme Court's (SC) reminder that every criticism of the state, especially when within legitimate bounds, does not amount to offence, reinforces constitutional values at a time when debate and dissent are routinely stifled, citing hurt sentiments, national security or impediments to communal harmony. The Court's direction to "enlighten and educate our police machinery on the concept of freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution" underscores another crucial point: The enforcement agency's conflation of lawful exercise of dissent with incitement cannot infringe on individual liberty. The bench was hearing a case against a professor in Kolhapur booked for his WhatsApp status criticising the abrogation of Article 370 and for wishing Pakistan on its independence day.

The apex court's observation is of a piece with its earlier deliberations on the limits of free speech. Last year, in *Kaushal Kishore v State Of Uttar Pradesh*, while advising public officials to exercise restraint in their speech, a five-judge Constitution Bench had held that freedom of speech cannot be curtailed for any reason except those specified under Article 19(2) of the Constitution. In a separate judgment in the same case, Justice BV Nagarathna had held, "It is only when there is dissent that different ideas would emerge which may... assist the government to improve or innovate upon its policies..." In the present judgment, quashing the charges against the professor, the Court observed that the "test to be applied" is "not the effect of the words on some individuals with weak minds or those who see a danger in every hostile point of view. The test is of the general impact of the utterances on reasonable people who are significant in numbers."

While the SC's observation pertains to the police in particular, the need for sensitisation is felt across stakeholders, including in lower courts and among civil society. The bogey of hurt sentiments seems to hold sway everywhere, from cricket stadiums over support for rival teams, amid protests against screening of particular films in colleges or universities, to complaints against *azan* over loudspeakers. They threaten to shrink the formal inclusivity and equality of diverse viewpoints enshrined in the Constitution to a majoritarian understanding of freedom of expression. While exposure to landmark judgments and discussions with legal experts will certainly aid the police, a resurrection of the argumentative Indian — with faith in rational debate and in both sides being heard — will also help.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



THE UNANIMOUS DECISION by the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, written by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud (with Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra), is a landmark decision for Indian democracy.

The outcome renders unconstitutional the Electoral Bond Scheme (EBS) introduced by the Finance Act, 2017, which removed the cap on donations to political parties, enabled donations through anonymous promissory notes issued by recognised banks, and released corporate donors from any duties to disclose the donations in their balance sheets. The verdict underscores the need for disclosure in corporate election funding by recognising the rights enshrined in and flowing from Article 14 (right to equality) and Article 19 (1)(a) (right to information). Further, under the EBS, political parties were released from any obligation to maintain a record of contributions thus received, thereby accentuating the asymmetry of information and facilitating the deeper penetration of big money into electoral politics.

The issue of whether the Speaker of the Lok Sabha may characterise just any Bill as a "money bill", thus disempowering the Rajya Sabha from voting, is still to be decided. But considerable guidance now flows from the EBS decision's insistence that not every legislative determination becomes a "financial" or "economic development" decision, thereby attracting the presumption of constitutionality and a relaxed constitutional judicial review. The individual voter's right to equality of information and influence repels the astonishing argument of the learned Attorney General, who insisted that democratic citizens have no right to know how parties are funded.

As per the verdict, the issuance of electoral bonds is discontinued with immediate effect and the interim order passed on April 12, 2019, shall be in full force since that date. Further, all agencies — political parties, the State Bank of India, the Reserve Bank of India and the Election Commission of India — were directed to follow disclosure of information

The SBI moved the Court to extend the deadline for the disclosure from March 6 till the end of June, citing various difficulties in data collection. This is despite the Court reiterating that its remedies for the violation of fundamental rights begin from the day it passed the interim orders. The petitioners have now moved a contempt petition against the SBI. The Court has not asked for any complex details, merely directing that the SBI must disclose the date of purchase of each electoral bond, name of the purchaser and denomination of the electoral bond purchased, as well as details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties, date of encashment, and denomination of the bonds.

since that date. The SBI has moved the Court to extend the deadline for the disclosure from March 6 till the end of June, citing various difficulties in data collection. This is despite the Court reiterating that its remedies for the violation of fundamental rights begin from the day it passed the interim orders. The petitioners have now moved a contempt petition against the SBI. The Court has not asked for any complex details, merely directing that the SBI must disclose the date of purchase of each electoral bond, name of the purchaser and denomination of the electoral bond purchased, as well as details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties, date of encashment, and denomination of the bonds. It remains to be seen whether the Court will resile from the proposition that the judgment is a self-contained law, declaring as null the non-disclosure of all relevant information about corporate funding of elections.

The power of imposing reasonable restrictions is well analysed under the new-fangled doctrine of proportionality. The doctrine evolves from case to case, but its principal function is to impose self-discipline on constitutional judicial review as a prelude to constitutional discipline binding all other institutions of governance. A clear distinction exists between "manifest" arbitrariness and a "reasonable" use of power; it has long been recognised that the power to "restrict" a right does not extend to the power to altogether abrogate the right. Further, it has been held that the law should have some reasonable "nexus" with its stated objectives. What is "reasonable" is now adjudged by the proportionality test ascertaining that the measure taken to restrict a fundamental right (a) has a legitimate goal, (b) is a suitable means of reaching that goal, (c) creates the least amount of restriction possible on the fundamental right, and (d) does not have "a disproportionate impact on the right holder." According to the Court, curbing black money was not a specific ground in Article 19(2). The beauty of this is that even if the Article is amended to include restriction on the grounds of black money, the restriction on

voting equality fails when tested on other proportionality criteria.

Merely having a constitutionally legitimate goal is not enough; and the state should make the showing that out of a range of alternatives, measures that are least restrictive to constitutional rights have been adopted. The Justices suggested some other less restrictive measures to achieve the legislative goals, such as setting up an electoral trust, or putting a cap on funding of elections by corporate power, but did not develop alternative policies, thus fully respecting the autonomy and the power of the executive and legislative branches of the government.

The Court went further to speak of the double proportionality test, which signifies a conflict between two equal rights — in this case, the donor's right to privacy and the voter's right to equality of information and influence. It required the Court to conduct a second proportionality test. On this score, the Court (per CJ Chandrachud) clearly observed that to not grant the "umbrella of informational privacy to political contributions only because a portion of the contributions is made for other reasons would be impermissible. The Constitution does not turn a blind eye merely because of the possibilities of misuse". However, what the Court found equally impermissible, as not being "least restrictive", was the "blanket non-disclosure" involved here. The scheme further suffered from the constitutional vice of being "manifestly arbitrary" because the "claim of donor privacy ends when that of equal right of information and influence begins".

CJ Chandrachud also recalls that as early as 1958, Chief Justice M C Chagla cautioned against the influential role of "big business" and "money bags" in choking democracy and urged the Courts to prevent any "improper" or "corrupt" influence. Critics of the decision should ask themselves: Could the Supreme Court of India have done any less now?

The writer is professor of law, University of Warwick, and former vice chancellor of Universities of South Gujarat and Delhi



DAVID CAMERON

THE COMMONWEALTH FAMILY

It's time to build on this reliable source of support and go further

ON MARCH 11, some 2.5 billion of us will come together to celebrate the Commonwealth family. Seventy-five years after the London Declaration, I will join this family's many nations, faiths and communities at a service at Westminster Abbey.

I was the UK's Prime Minister when the Commonwealth agreed to a new Charter, a milestone in our family's history. For the first time, we had a single document setting out our core values and shared goals.

Today, as the UK's Foreign Secretary, I want our family of nations working in partnership to uphold these values and fulfill these goals. I am proud of the work Commonwealth members do in partnership in areas ranging from the rule of law to protecting the environment.

We are bound together by our many connections and inspired by our incredible diversity. This makes us a strong and respected voice in the world, capable of addressing global challenges. It means all our citizens can benefit from belonging to this family in their daily lives.

Thanks to our strong ties, the cost of trade between Commonwealth members is more than 20 per cent lower than the costs of trading with non-Commonwealth members.

We have made enormous strides in recent years in empowering women and girls, backing 4,000 businesses owned by women across the Commonwealth to become more competitive. And we are working hard together to promote our values. The

Commonwealth came together to stand by Guyana when it was threatened. And Commonwealth missions have observed dozens of elections since we agreed to our new Charter.

The bonds our family shares matter all the more as we face great global challenges. I believe this is especially true for our small island members. Our Charter recognised their particular needs in building their resilience, especially in the face of climate change. This global challenge impacts these states relatively more given their geography.

It is to our families that we turn when we are most in need. I want these states to know they can turn to their Commonwealth family today.

We have a major opportunity this year. The Commonwealth heads of government will be meeting in a Pacific island country, Samoa, for the first time this October. This gathering takes place a few months after the once-in-a-decade UN Small Island Developing States conference in Antigua and Barbuda this May.

These states are already harnessing the power of nature to tackle the causes and impacts of climate change. Just look at Papua New Guinea, protecting some of the world's most important forests, on which we all depend. Or take the 16 Commonwealth small island states working as part of the global coalition committed to protecting at least 30 per cent of the world's ocean by 2030.

We can offer much more support to these efforts. Britain is doubling its provision of international climate finance. And last autumn, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak made our biggest-ever contribution to the Green Climate Fund, the largest global fund to support developing countries in responding to climate change.

This will help. But the biggest challenge these states face is accessing international funding. Despite being low emitters uniquely exposed to the threat of climate change, they receive a minuscule proportion of such funding.

So many of these states said to me at the COP — "we keep hearing announcements about green finance, but it seems so hard to get hold of the money and get projects financed." That is what I want to fix.

A dedicated Commonwealth hub has helped to mobilise more than \$310 million of climate finance for our small island members since 2016. This year, as members of the same Commonwealth family, let's build on this and go much further.

This year, in Samoa, we have a chance to show them and our other small island members just what the Commonwealth means. An effective association. A unique network. A reliable source of support. In short, a family.

The writer is secretary of state for foreign, Commonwealth and development affairs and former prime minister, the UK



MARCH 11, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIA AND NEIGHBOURS

MRS INDIRA GANDHI'S government has summoned its heads of mission in South Asia for a three-day conference opening in New Delhi on March 19. The exercise is aimed at enabling the government to make a detailed review of relations with neighbours. New Delhi has largely followed the principle of bilateralism; the envoys' conference will focus on the ups and downs of relations with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.

DY SPEAKER TARGETTED

THE HARYANA POLICE have spread a wide

dragnet to catch persons who had attacked deputy speaker Ved Pal killing his driver and injuring his gunman seriously. Though there is no conclusive proof about the identity of the assailants as yet, they are believed to be extremists who wanted to pick up any Haryana VIP for their terrorist action. The massive manhunt had started half an hour after the attack on the deputy speaker's car.

PAKISTAN RECEIVES F16s

PAKISTAN RECEIVED THE second batch of six F-16s and a reaffirmation from the Reagan Administration to "bolster" its mil-

itary might. The second batch of the "flying falcons" was handed over to Pakistan air force in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, according to reports in Islamabad. The third instalment of four F-16s is expected to be delivered to Pakistan in June.

I S JOHAR DEAD

NOTED FILM MAKER, writer and comedian Inder Sen Johar died in a hospital in Bombay following a cardiac arrest. He was 64 and is survived by a son and a daughter. Johar was admitted to the hospital three days ago when he complained of uneasiness.

11 THE IDEAS PAGE

A dialogue among healers

Modern medicine and AYUSH systems could work in unison. But transparency and regulatory frameworks hold the key



ANAND KRISHNAN

MODERN MEDICINE PRACTITIONERS are being urged to be more open to working with the traditional or alternative systems of medicine, and to move towards an integrated medicine for the larger good of the patients. While it is appealing in principle, it would be good to examine the practical issues involved. Depending on the level of integration, we can think of three scenarios of existence for these two systems of therapy. While recognising the possibilities of hybrid scenarios, for the sake of simplicity I shall call them competitive, coexistent and cooperative.

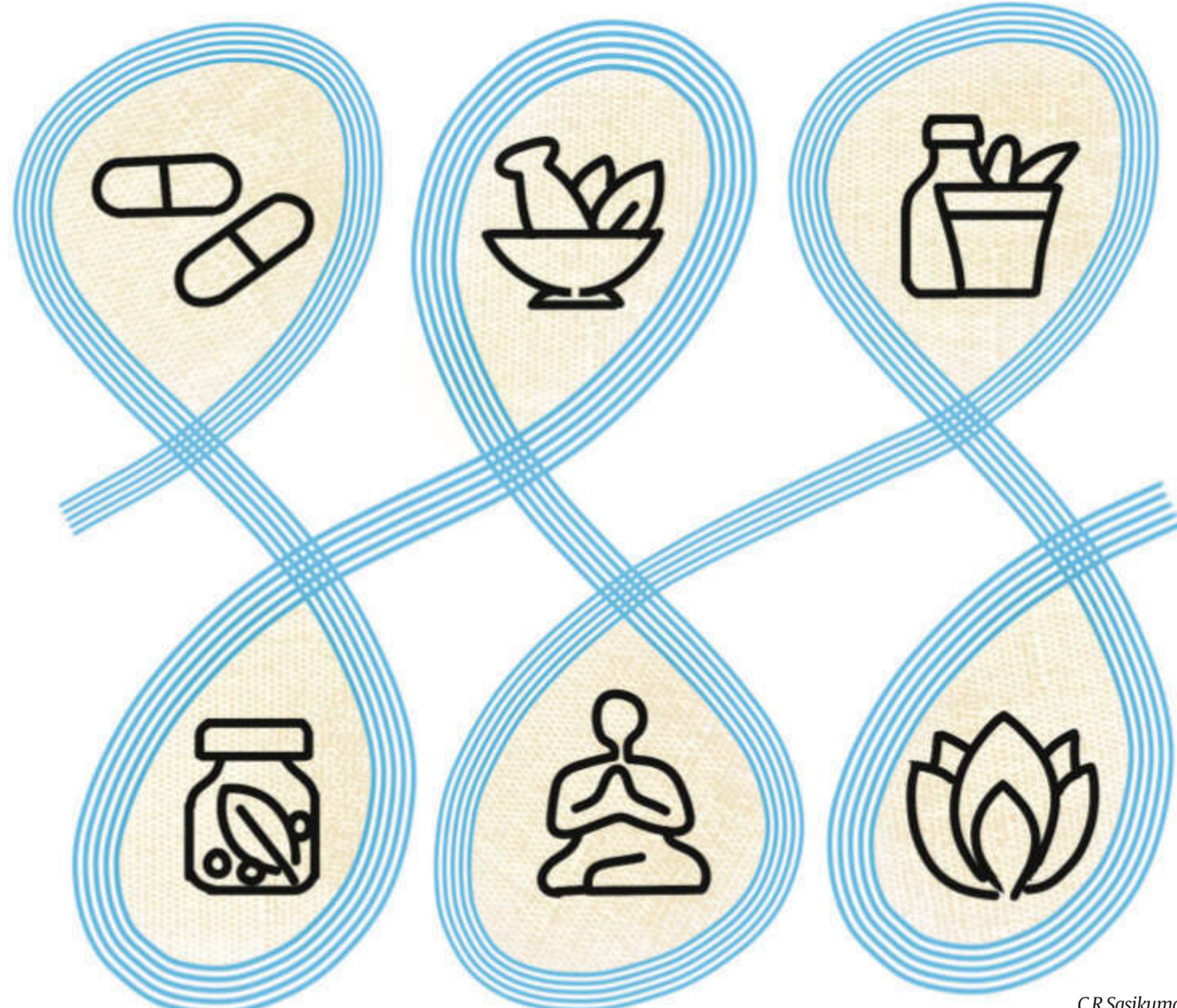
In a competitive model, the two systems of medicine exhibit rivalry. While individual practitioners can always do as they please, in this scenario, name-calling will also occur at the systems or professional association level. Professional associations/councils will take a stand against each other and initiate litigation. Both systems will compete to get the patients to their system by pointing out their strengths and other systems' weaknesses. These could be related to effectiveness, side-effects of their products and extraneous factors like nationalism or commercialism. In short, "all is fair in a war".

In the "coexistence" model, each recognises the legitimacy of the other systems and opts for clear boundaries to ensure that they coexist without encroaching on others' domain or realm. Most modern practitioners would let patients decide whether they want to take AYUSH treatment. They would advise the patients to continue the medicines or accept responsibility for their discontinuation. If AYUSH is effective, then the medicine dose will automatically be reduced. Ayurveda and homoeopathy practitioners usually ask that the patients stop their modern medicines if they want to initiate their therapy. In this model, these practitioners could be co-located at a facility, with each therapy having a separate system. However, there is no mutual referral. In short, the principle is "live and let live".

The "cooperation" model is the ideal integrative medicine model where the two streams acknowledge what is good in the other system and work jointly as a team to deliver the best possible care to the patient. This has the potential to improve the preventive and promotive component in modern medicine which is much too medicine-focused.

I see four sets of challenges before this. The first is the trust deficit between the two groups. There have been many instances of patients who were well or ill-controlled on one therapy, switched to the alternative treatment, and end up worsening or improving their disease. Most of these are anecdotal evidence and can be quoted to justify whatever point of view one holds. This is worsened by claims of effective cure for diabetes or cancer by AYUSH proponents without adequate evidence to support it.

The technical challenge is that AYUSH is a heterogeneous group and each of these therapeutic disciplines must be dealt with separately and would need a different decision. Increasing evidence available on the effectiveness of yoga for the management and prevention of different health conditions has resulted in its growing acceptance among modern medicine practitioners. For non-



C.R. Sasikumar

pharmacological aspects, it might be easy to integrate once the evidence is generated. It is the prescription of medicines (ayurveda/homoeopathy) which will remain a bone of contention. Can a 'dosha'-based management, proposed by ayurveda, work with the standard management protocols that are being pushed in modern medicine?

In terms of operational challenges, for a team-based approach to work, the team members must know their own limitations and acknowledge others' strengths in that area. Modern medicine practitioners have no idea of the AYUSH streams and cannot make an informed decision in this regard. They will have to accept at face value what AYUSH practitioners are saying, which is difficult given the trust deficit. Patients themselves are not informed enough to take these decisions and leaving it to them to decide is not appropriate.

However, the most challenging aspect of this integration would be its regulation. Many modern practitioners prescribe some ayurvedic pills without understanding their method of action. This is not acceptable and in conformity, AYUSH practitioners also should not practise modern medicine. While this appears reasonable, its enforcement is currently very weak. These areas fall under the jurisdiction of respective professional councils. Unfortunately, councils have failed to inspire confidence in seeking professional accountability. If something goes wrong with the patient, who will be held accountable?

So how do we move forward? The first step is to get better evidence for AYUSH treatments. Only this can bridge the trust deficit. Also, use this opportunity to weed out ineffective treatments in AYUSH. If evidence is available, it might be possible to build composite standard treatment guidelines that combine the best of the two streams. However, the evidence benchmark applica-

The technical challenge is that AYUSH is a heterogeneous group and each of these therapeutic disciplines must be dealt with separately and would need a different decision. Increasing evidence available on the effectiveness of yoga for the management and prevention of different health conditions has resulted in its growing acceptance among modern medicine practitioners. For non-pharmacological aspects, it might be easy to integrate once the evidence is generated. It is the prescription of medicines (ayurveda/homoeopathy) which will remain a bone of contention. Can a 'dosha'-based management, proposed by ayurveda, work with the standard management protocols that are being pushed in modern medicine?

ble to modern medicine must apply equally to AYUSH therapies. This has been one of the major fault lines in this debate. I believe that if we look at the evidence without being influenced by extraneous considerations, we could arrive at a consensus for certain chronic conditions. These could be a good starting point for a larger discourse.

Will it help if we teach these subjects to the other streams? Ayurveda courses teach some modern medicine concepts. Should MBBS students also be taught all AYUSH subjects? The MBBS curriculum as such is quite heavy with never-ending pressure to put greater emphasis on certain subjects. Adding AYUSH subjects to MBBS will worsen the situation. One way is to not have exams in these subjects or make them optional. However, there is a good possibility that they will not be read at all, and the objective would not be served. I do not recommend this course.

A good regulatory framework that establishes rules/guidelines for collaboration, communication, and referral between practitioners of different modalities, ensuring coordinated and safe care for patients with clear articulation of accountability is much needed. It would need to define acceptable interventions and modality of its determination. Other regulatory issues would be related to insurance payouts, compensations, quality of medicinal products and medicines. This could be within the health technology assessment framework already available in India. The bottom line is that our approach must be evidence-based. While some of the issues can be addressed and evaluated in pilot projects, it will not work without a strong regulatory framework.

The writer is professor of community medicine at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"For 14 million Palestinians, this might just be the worst Ramadan they will have ever witnessed. For the sake of so many innocent, helpless, and unfortunate lives, we sincerely hope Israel will discover some humanity in itself, and a miracle will take place in the form of a ceasefire." — THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

The numbers don't add up

Contrary to GDP headline growth data, momentum in economy isn't robust, requires new drivers of growth



ISHAN BAKSHI

THE RECENT GDP data seems to have reinforced the cheerful prognosis of the country's economic prospects. After all, the economy has grown at an average of 8.2 per cent in the first three quarters of the financial year. But strip away product taxes and subsidies from the headline numbers and the underlying momentum in the economy does not seem as robust. Value added by all the sectors in the economy has slumped from 8.2 per cent in the first quarter to 6.5 per cent in the third quarter, and may well slow down further to 5.4 per cent in the fourth quarter. The drivers of growth are not as strong as many believe.

Let's take a step back. In recent years, there have been three distinct drivers of the country's growth momentum. First, during the pandemic-induced lockdowns, household savings in parts of the developed world, especially the US, had surged. These accumulated savings, supplemented by government transfers and loose monetary policies, helped stimulate the household demand for goods. As a consequence, global trade picked up pace. India's goods exports rose to a staggering \$422 billion in 2021-22, after averaging around \$300 billion for many years prior to the pandemic.

Second, India's services exports also began to accelerate during this period. Exports grew at 23.5 per cent in 2021-22 and 27.8 per cent in 2022-23, touching a record high of around \$325 billion. This spurt wasn't just driven by traditional IT services. Demand, especially from the US, increased for a wide gamut of services like professional and management consulting. The country also became a centre for global capability centres — these are primarily service delivery hubs for multinationals.

Third, these years also saw a wave of funding to startups. As per a report by PWC, Indian startups raised around \$35 billion in 2021 and \$24 billion in 2022. While there was a great deal of enthusiasm about the growth potential of these new-age tech companies, and the prospects of the Indian startup ecosystem, this funding boom was driven in part by the loose monetary policies pursued in developed economies, especially the US Federal Reserve.

This dramatic growth in exports and the country's technology sector had knock-on effects on job creation and household income and as a consequence on consumption and investment in the economy. The Indian IT sector went on a hiring spree. Just the five major IT firms — TCS, Infosys, Wipro, HCL and Tech Mahindra — saw their employee headcount rise from 1.15 million in March 2020 to almost 1.6 million in March 2023.

A rapid increase in employment opportunities among the highly skilled led to a tightening of the labour market, causing wages to rise significantly in this segment.

This, in turn, triggered a boom in investment (residential real estate) and consumption segments (passenger vehicles and other high-end goods and services) across cities that are more linked to the technology sector. It also led to a healthy growth in the government's tax collections.

Now, each of these drivers of growth is closely intertwined with the US economy. Not only were goods exports more dependent on US households, but one could also argue that large parts of the Indian tech sector, the ones driving the formal economy, have, in a manner of speaking, detached themselves from the Indian economy and have joined the US economy, its labour market. After all, the services they export are majorly to US clients. And even for parts of the technology sector whose markets are located in India, for instance, the new-age startups, their funding, in large part, flows from US-based funds. So, the ups and downs of the US economy, its labour and consumer markets, and the stance of the Federal Reserve, deeply impact these segments.

As a consequence, changes in the US economy such as the drawing down of household savings and the tightening of monetary policy have impacted these drivers of growth. India's goods exports have slowed down sharply, growing by just 6.9 per cent in 2022-23, and are actually 5 per cent lower this year (April 2023 to January 2024) when compared to last year. Services exports have grown at just around 6 per cent this year. Indian startups have been facing a funding winter with fresh flows declining to a mere \$7 billion in 2023 according to reports. This weakness is reflecting in the broader economy.

In December 2023, the headcount of the five major IT firms was down to 1.53 million. There are reports of IT companies slowing down hiring. Reports also point towards the difficulties that engineering colleges and management schools are facing in student placements. As employment prospects get hit, so will household income and consumption. There may already be some indications. The average growth in home prices in 10 major cities has slowed down from 4.9 per cent in the first half of last year (January-June) to 3.7 per cent in the second half (July-December). Similarly, average growth in passenger vehicles was lower in the second half of the year as compared to the first half. Tighter domestic monetary policy could have also played a role.

As the economy searches for new drivers of growth, the government is caught in its own rhetoric. The contradictions are hard to ignore. If the underlying economic momentum is really as robust as is believed, if high growth is generating gainful employment opportunities for the millions entering the labour force, then why must the government provide free food to 800 million people? Why must it continue to drive the investment momentum in the economy? Why is private investment, both domestic and foreign, still tepid? And why is private consumption growing at just 3 per cent?

ishan.bakshi@expressindia.com
The writer would like to thank Josh Felman for his valuable inputs

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ALL ARE WELCOME

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'NDA, then & now' (IE, March 8). With the BJP dominating, coalition politics is no longer a compulsion for the party. It's the partners of the saffron party in the present NDA — looking at the headwinds BJP is enjoying going into the general elections of 2024 — who want to end up on the winning side. The BJP, in pursuit of its target of 400+ seats does not mind allying with even small political players, so long as it calls the shots. It wants to make its presence felt in areas where it has not been able to make much of a dent. So, all are welcome.

Vijai Pant, Hempur

ROSY PICTURE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A speech, a question' (IE, March 9). If PM Narendra Modi's claims of Kashmir touching new heights of progress and prosperity and locals being 'able to breathe free' post abrogation of Article 370 are true, why is the government delaying the restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir? The claim that over a lakh people attended the PM's meeting in Srinagar has been contradicted by former CMs. Is the picture really as rosy as projected?

SS Paul, Nadia

INDIA AND THE RIGHT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'In pursuit of conservatism' (IE, March 9). The BJP-RSS has argued that India's ancient civilisational democracy predated the Western concept of democracy and governance. Contrary to their project of decolonising Indian minds, historical precedents from Western conservatism are used to justify its adoption by the Indian Right. While juxtaposing fascist Hitler and Mussolini with leaders like Lenin, he obfuscated the role of communists and sacrifices they made to stop Hitler. Ironically, the RSS ideologue Guru Golwalkar held Hitler in high esteem.

L.R. Murmu, Delhi

A TRAILBLAZER

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Sudha Murthy picked for Rajya Sabha' (IE, March 9). Sudha Murthy has been nominated to the Upper House of Parliament. She has a multifaceted personality: A philanthropist, a writer and the proverbial woman behind the hugely successful entrepreneur Narayana Murthy whom she helped co-found Infosys Technologies. She has more than one first to her credit: She is the first female student to graduate from BVB Engineering College, Hubli; first woman computer engineer at TELCO. She is an exemplar of a woman who can successfully straddle the line between home and professional life. She is sure to inspire many.

Narendra Dani, Lucknow

When attention is affection

From 'sunte ho' to 'bakbak', the long history of shushing women



SUMANA ROY

"SUNTE HO?", "SHUNCHHO?" We hear the history of women in these words every day; but even the whistle of the pressure cooker sounds more consequential than a woman saying "Are you listening?" The history of women has been a history of not being heard, one that has come to solidify into a mark of showing respect: The wife not calling her man by his name, a noun, but with a verb instead. "Suniye na?" Listen to me, please, is the opposite of the call of "Hazir ho" in a court of law; it is a history of pleading for attention (Attention is affection — substituting a few letters in the first word results in the other, that is not an accident).

But attention is not an accident. Rarely is attention available, even rarer is a response, so that the woman needs to ask about the quality of her cooking during a meal since no acknowledgement is forthcoming. This seeking of attention, the need to be heard — "sunte ho?" — makes her repeat everything she says, for she's not sure whether he's heard her. Hence, the easy characterisation of the woman as a nag: Repetition, which can easily transform into the rhythm-endowing character of the refrain in a poem or song, sounds like nagging when it emerges

from a concerned woman. That the woman asking for the listener's attention is the norm is emphasised by the corpus of Hindi film songs of the "suniye-kahiye" genre where it is usually the man singing for the woman's attention — it is such a deviation from our domestic experience that the moment has to be embalmed into a quasi-Petrarchan romantic trope. Once past that stage of wooing, women can speak but they need not be heard or heeded — institutions, because they are usually constructed according to a male architecture of emotions, are like recording studios that block out certain kinds of sounds. In that, most institutions are like Julius Caesar to his wife Calpurnia on the Ides of March.

Mary Beard, in her extraordinary essay 'The Public Voice of Women', writes, "I want to start very near the beginning of the tradition of Western literature, and its first recorded example of a man telling a woman to 'shut up'; telling her that her voice was not to be heard in public. I'm thinking of a moment immortalised at the start of the *Odyssey*... The process starts in the first book with Penelope coming down from her private quarters into the great hall, to find a bard performing to

throng of her suitors; he's singing about the difficulties the Greek heroes are having in reaching home. She isn't amused, and in front of everyone, she asks him to choose another, happier number. At which point young Telemachus intervenes: 'Mother,' he says, 'go back up into your quarters, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff... speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.' And off she goes, back upstairs." Beard traces a history of nearly 2,000 years of the public silencing of women.

I'm thinking of the domestic, the private, even the intimate — less silencing and more of ignoring and neglecting the sonic that characterises both the subject and form of women's speech. It is not just the infrasound and ultrasound character of the female sonic that men seem unable to hear. Some of these seem unbearable to the tonal tolerance threshold of men and their institutions, which are ordered to male needs, demands, and instructions. Take the kind of sound called "hysterical", for instance — the word hysteria, of course, derives from the Greek "hystera", meaning "uterus"; it's a kind of pitch and tone that scares and disgusts the patriarchal ear. It's

not just the sounds that escape her mouth, summarised in the onomatopoeia of "bakbak", "kichkich", "kaikai"; there's also the sound made by her hands — noisy pots and pans signify an "alakkhi", a noisy woman who brings bad luck to the family.

There are only a few kinds of sonic registers that the male ear can record: Moaning and mourning, the first of sexual pleasure, as if grading the partner's performance, the second a sound of public grieving; crooning and cursing, the first that has, as Virginia Woolf tells us in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), given us our oral literature of lullabies, the second the sound of Draupadi.

My mother, now unable to walk without assistance, spends hours popping plastic bubble wrap. But there are more conversation-less hours in her day than there are bubbles to burst. She now waits nervously to do this when people aren't around — she's been told that the sound of the bubbles popping "disturbs" the house.

And yet we call it the mother tongue?

Roy, a poet and writer, is associate professor of creative writing, Ashoka University. Views are personal

12 EXPRESS NETWORK

BJP asks Karnataka MP Hegde to explain 'Constitution has to be amended' remark

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, NEW DELHI,
MARCH 10



BJP MP from Karnataka Anant Kumar Hegde

BJP MP FROM Karnataka Anant Kumar Hegde kicked up a storm Sunday by suggesting the BJP would amend the Constitution once it secured two-third majority in the Rajya Sabha. The amendments, according to the former Union Minister, would undo the "unnecessary" laws introduced by the Congress to "subjugate Hindu community" in the country.

The BJP distanced itself from Hegde's comments saying it was his personal view and also sought a clarification from him. Speaking at an event Saturday in Siddapur, Uttara Kannada district, Hegde said, "Constitution has to be amended as Congress people have fundamentally altered it by introduc-

ing some unnecessary things. Especially laws that subjugate the Hindu community. If all this has to change, it cannot be done without a two-third majority," he said going on to explain the numbers required to amend the preamble of the Constitution.

The party would also need to come to power in more than 20 states for this, the six-time Lok Sabha MP from Karnataka said.

"Modi said — *Ab ki baar 400 paar* (This time it will be above 400 seats) — Why above 400?...We have two-third majority in Lok Sabha, (but) in Rajya Sabha we don't have two-third majority. We have a small majority. In state governments, we

don't have an adequate majority," Hegde said. He said NDA winning more than 400 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls would eventually help in mustering a similar majority in the Rajya Sabha, and coming to power in two-thirds of the states.

BJP leader Gaurav Bhatia said it is imperative that Hegde's remarks reflect his personal views and not the party's. "The BJP has taken cognizance of the statement made by Mr Hegde and has also asked for clarification from him. It must be reiterated that every step that is taken by the BJP, every decision that is taken by the BJP, is always in the interest of our country and in consonance with the spirit of the Constitution," he said.

Distancing itself from the MP's remarks, the Karnataka BJP posted on X, "The MP Shri Anant Kumar Hegde's remarks on the Constitution are his per-

sonal views and do not reflect the party's stance. @BJP4India reaffirms our unwavering commitment to uphold the nation's Constitution and will ask for an explanation from Shri Hegde regarding his comments."

The Congress was prompted to hit out at Hegde and the BJP with senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi saying that his remarks were a public declaration of the "hidden intentions" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Sangh Parivar.

"The ultimate goal of Modi and the BJP is to destroy Babasaheb's Constitution. They hate justice, equality, civil rights and democracy. They want to turn India's democracy into a narrow dictatorship by eliminating the Opposition through dividing society, enslaving the media, crippling independent institutions and shackling freedom of expression," Rahul said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said Hegde exposed "Modi-RSS's devious agenda to impose dictatorship." "The Modi government, BJP, and RSS secretly desire imposition of dictatorship, whereby they will impose their Manuwadi mindset and snatch away rights of SCs, STs and OBCs... there will be no elections, or at the most, just sham elections, independence of institutions shall be curtailed, freedom of expression bulldozed and the RSS and the BJP will destroy our secular fabric and unity in diversity," he said.

"Such repeated calls by the BJP-RSS, from time to time, are a direct assault on the unquestionable ethos of sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic espoused by our Constitution makers, Justice, equality, and liberty are strong pillars of the Constitution and any change would be an insult to the India envisioned by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar," he said.

TROUBLES PERSIST FOR CONG GOVT IN STATE

Cong forms panel to prevent rerun of Himachal crisis

SAURABH PARASHAR
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 10

IN THE aftermath of the political crisis that engulfed the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh during last month's Rajya Sabha elections, the party's high command on Sunday formed a six-member coordination committee to ensure such an episode is not repeated.

The panel comprises Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, state Congress chief Pratibha Singh, Deputy CM Mukesh Agnihotri, Health Minister Dhani Ram Shandil, former minister Kaul Singh Thakur, and MLA Ram Lal Thakur. The committee's role will be to facilitate communication between the state government and the party, something Pratibha and others had alleged was missing.

"Congress president has approved the proposal to constitute a coordination committee for better coordination between the government and organisation in Himachal Pradesh, with immediate effect," states the notice.

Last month, the BJP pulled off an upset by defeating the Congress's Abhishek Manu Singhvi in the election for the state's lone Rajya Sabha seat because of cross-voting by six of its party's MLAs. The Congress failed to get Singhvi elected even though it had 40 MLAs in the 68-member House while the BJP had 25 MLAs. The Congress also banked on the support of three independent legislators but they too ended up voting for the BJP's Harsh Mahajan.

The BJP then called on the Sukhu government to step down,

saying it had "lost the mandate and trust". But the CM remained in office and managed to pass the state Budget shortly after despite the party's reduced strength in the Assembly. The six rebel MLAs were disqualified from the House and 15 BJP MLAs were suspended during the Budget Session.

As the crisis deepened, Cabinet Minister Vikramaditya Singh, Pratibha's son, resigned from his post on February 28 expressing dissatisfaction with Sukhu. But the Congress leadership managed to rein in Vikramaditya and the government was saved.

Sources in the state unit said the high command, with its picks for the committee, sought to placate the two factions in the Himachal, one led by Sukhu and the other by Vikramaditya and Pratibha Singh, the wife of six-time late CM Virbhadra Singh.

Sources said Shandil, the Solan MLA, is close to Sukhu while Deputy CM Agnihotri is in the Pratibha-Vikramaditya camp. MLAs Kaul Singh and Ram Lal, who were once close to Virbhadra, have since moved to Sukhu's side amid changing political conditions in the state.

"Kaul Singh Thakur is an eight-time MLA who lost the 2022 Assembly elections to BJP candidate Purn Chand in Darang. His daughter Champa Thakur, too, lost the Assembly election. Ram Lal Thakur, a former MLA from Naina Devi, who lost to BJP candidate Randhir Sharma in 2022, was once close to the Virbhadra group but later formed his own group. Both of these politicians are eyeing Lok Sabha poll tickets," said a Congress insider.

Independent MLA, father of Cong rebel booked over 'poll offences'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SHIMLA, MARCH 10

AMID A political crisis in Himachal Pradesh, police on Sunday registered a case against an Independent MLA and the father of a Congress rebel and others over "electoral offences" related to the recent Rajya Sabha polls in which six party rebels voted for the BJP candidate.

The case against Hamirpur's Independent MLA Ashish Sharma and Gagret's now disqualified MLA Chetanya Sharma's father and others was registered on the basis of a complaint by Congress MLAs Sanjay Avasthi and Bhuvneshwar Gaur. Ashish and Chetanya are among the six Congress rebels who along with three independents had voted in favour of BJP nominee Harsh Mahajan in the recently held Rajya Sabha polls.

The complainants alleged the role of Chetanya's father Rakesh Sharma, a retired bureaucrat, in reportedly arranging the transportation for these MLAs. A case of criminal conspiracy, corruption practices and undue influence on election has been registered, police said.

Adding a new dimension to the current political crisis in the state, Congress MLAs Avasthi and Gaur filed the complaint seeking investigation into "electoral offences", bribery and criminal conspiracy in the whole sequence of events since the Rajya Sabha polls held on February 27. They alleged "horse trading and misuse of money to influence the elections".

Chhattisgarh govt gives security to 43 BJP leaders after murder of 2 workers

Nine party leaders have been killed in the state since last year by Maoists

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
RAIPUR, MARCH 10

IN THE wake of two consecutive murders of BJP leaders in Maoist-hit Bastar region in the neighbouring Mohala Manpur district. Last year, some leaders were even abducted and threatened to quit the party, which some of them did out of fear of getting killed and chose not to approach the local police with a complaint.

Unlike last year when the BJP-run Central government provided security, this time, the BJP government in the state provided the security, which has been categorised as X, Y, and Y+ depending on the threat perception.

The leaders given security are from Sukma, Bijapur, Kanker, Bastar, Dantewada, and Narayanpur and most of them hold the posts of treasurer, district chief, deputy chief, head of farmers wing, and other crucial roles in organising BJP events.

state, seven BJP leaders and workers were either shot or hacked to death by Maoists in the Bastar region and the neighbouring Mohala Manpur district. Last year, some leaders were even abducted and threatened to quit the party, which some of them did out of fear of getting killed and chose not to approach the local police with a complaint.

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FROM TRACTORS TO TRACKS

Farmers during their 'rail roko' protest on the outskirts of Amritsar, Sunday. Rana Simranjit Singh

■ Farmers held a four-hour rail roko at 117 places across the country — 85 in Punjab, 20 in Tamil Nadu, five in Haryana, three each in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, and one in Puducherry — from 12 noon to 4 pm on Sunday

■ In all, 49 trains, including nine that were cancelled, were affected in Punjab alone. Kisan Mazdoor Morcha coordinator Sarwan Singh Pandher said, "We don't feel happy about it but it's the only way to make ourselves heard."

■ Meanwhile, the ongoing dharna at the Shambhu border continued as usual, while many protesters from nearby villages went to the Shambhu railway station and squatted on the railway tracks for four hours

SC to hear Cong rebels' plea tomorrow

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

THE SUPREME Court is scheduled to hear on Tuesday a plea by six rebel Congress MLAs, who had cross-voted in the recent Rajya Sabha polls in Himachal Pradesh, against their disqualification.

The Speaker of Himachal Pradesh Assembly, Kuldeep Singh Pathania, had disqualified the six on the Congress' plea for "defying" the party whip that re-

quired them to be present in the House and vote for the budget. A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna, Dipankar Datta and Prashant Kumar Mishra will hear on March 12 the plea against the February 29 decision of the Speaker.

The rebel lawmakers in their plea before the top court have made Pathania as well as state Parliamentary Affairs Minister Harshvardhan Chauhan a party. These Congress rebels, who had voted in favour of BJP nom-

inee Harsh Mahajan in the Rajya Sabha polls on February 27, later "abstained" from voting on the Budget.

Senior advocate Satya Pal Jain, who appeared for the rebel Congress MLAs, had argued that they were only given the show-cause notice and neither the copy of the petition nor the annexure was supplied.

Jain had said seven days were mandatorily allowed for replying to the notice but no time was given to them.

Kerala student's death: Anti-ragging panel says attack motive 'obscure'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
MARCH 10

THE COLLEGE anti-ragging committee that looked into the death of a veterinary student in Kerala's Wayanad district said in its report that while he had been subjected to physical assault by several students before he was found hanging in the hostel, the reasons for the assault and "actual cause of death" are "still obscure".

JS Sidharthan, a second-year student at the College of

Veterinary and Animal Sciences in Wayanad's Pookode was found dead in the college hostel on February 18 in what was suspected to be suicide. So far, 20 students, including four office-bearers of the SFI, the student wing of the CPI(M), have been arrested in connection with the case.

In the days before his death, Sidharthan was allegedly tortured, assaulted, and put on public trial by the accused students. On Saturday, the state government decided to hand over the probe to the CBI in the wake of mounting protests from the Opposition and

demand from Sidharthan's family.

While it has been reported that he was assaulted by a group of students over an alleged incident involving a woman student, the college anti-ragging committee said "the motive of the crime and the actual cause of death are still obscure". His family and close friends have expressed their suspicion that this was fabricated after his death.

The report was made public on Saturday. It said the majority of the students who appeared before the committee were reluctant to reveal the facts in full.

Noida airport in mind, UP plans city near Agra

DHEERAJ MISHRA
NOIDA, MARCH 10

THE UTTAR Pradesh government is planning to develop a city, New Agra Urban Centre, near Agra off Yamuna Expressway. Officials said it will be spread over 10,500 hectares, around half the size of Noida.

The proposal has been initiated keeping in mind the upcoming Noida International Airport at Jewar as one of the key driving forces of the region.

Officials said the new city will encourage tourism, allow new industries which will generate

employment, along with residential complexes.

Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) Thursday issued a tender to select the consultant for the preparation of Master Plan 2031 for the New Agra Urban Centre.

"Determine the carrying capacity of the YEIDA region, considering proposed Jewar International Airport, as one of the key driving forces of the region, and should be based on assumptions of a decent and adequate quality of life, based on the acceptable/appropriate infrastructure, amenities and the

available natural resources," reads the tender document in terms of scope of work.

The consultant will assess the potential industrial development, including projection of future employment. It will also produce a comprehensive report that will analyse the status, suitability, and sufficiency of various infrastructural facilities, utilities, and natural resources available and planned for the area.

The authority said the consultant will provide a roadmap avoiding potential adverse implications on the existing environmental resources, including rich agricultural hinterland with

many canals and rivers, heritage precincts, water bodies, and others in compliance with other legislations of the government of India.

YEIDA was constituted for planned industrial development of the area along the Yamuna Expressway. However, its major work has been concentrated in Gautam Buddha Nagar district only. The new plan for a city near Agra would be one of the major schemes of the authority to spread its development works. A total 1,149 villages of Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Mathura, Hathras, and Agra have been notified under YEIDA.

Prof, 8-yr-old daughter found dead in Hisar

Chandigarh: A professor and his eight-year-old daughter were found dead in his office inside the university campus in Haryana's Hisar district on Sunday evening, police said.

Sandeep Goyal (35) and his family were staying at the Lala Lajpat Rai University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences.

The throats of the two were found to have been slit and their bodies were recovered from Goyal's office, police said. A police official said Goyal was being treated for depression. PTI

Summer still away, north Karnataka parched: Water once in 15-20 days

AKRAM M
BENGALURU, MARCH 10

WAITING SEVEN to eight days for water supply during summer months is not unusual for Siddesh Angadi, 52, a shopkeeper. This year however, the resident of Karnataka's Gadag seems worried.

"Water supply is generally bad during the summer, but we always get water every seven to eight days. The situation seems grim this year due to the drought. While many houses have some form of storage, it is a major headache in areas where people are not well off," says Angadi.

Karnataka is facing one of its worst droughts in recent years. While Bengaluru's water shortage has attracted national attention, the situation in other parts, especially north Karnataka, is particularly acute. A failed mon-

soon, dotted by sporadic spells of heavy rain last year, has resulted in a major crisis, especially in the arid regions of north Karnataka.

In cities like Haveri and Gadag where water sources begin to dry up from March, residents say they are being forced to wait for 15 days — 30 in some cases — for local bodies' water supply. Gadag Deputy Commissioner M L Vyshali told *The Indian Express* that it was very difficult to manage water supply for the city and nearby villages in Gadag district during the summer months.

Haveri City Municipal Council Commissioner Parashuram Chalavadi said the city was dependent on borewells for water supply that due to water scarcity in rivers. "We are recharging borewells by filling tanks in and around the city," he said. From Heggere Kere — a large water body near the city — water is being dumped to smaller tanks so

that borewells can be recharged.

From utensils to buckets, every container at the homes of people in the affected regions have been deployed to store water till the supply is replenished. The situation has left them further anxious about the peak summer months of April and May.

While all districts in north Karnataka are suffering, the situation is worse for regions dependent on the Tungbhadra dam. The water level in the dam in the first week of March last year was 24.56 thousand million cubic (TMC) feet. The dam has just about 1.7 TMC of water at present.

Local administrations of districts dependent on the dam, including Haveri, Gadag and Koppal, are preparing for a major crisis in summer months.

Data from the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC) showed a deficit of over 60 per



A queue at Gangimadi Nagar in Karnataka's Gadag, where residents say water is supplied only once a month. Akram M

cent in rainfall between July 30 and August 26. Seasonal data shows odd spells of heavy rain in the later parts of the monsoon, reducing the deficit to 25 per cent at the end of monsoon. However, in the Malnad region — the key

catchment area for Cauvery and Tungbhadra rivers — rainfall shortage was 40 per cent.

The situation led to Agriculture Minister N Chaluvaraya Swamy remarking recently that agriculture was set to fall by over 50 per cent.



Govt. of Haryana

“केंद्र और राज्य में डबल इंजन सरकार की ताकत हरियाणा को तेज़ी से आगे बढ़ा रही है। कोई भी सेक्टर हो, जैसे ही उसमें सामूहिक शक्ति जुटती है, सबका प्रयास नजर आने लगता है, तो परिवर्तन की गति भी बढ़ जाती है।”

- नरेन्द्र मोदी



Viksit Bharat, Viksit Haryana

Prime Minister

Sh. Narendra Modi

Will

Lay the Foundation Stone of

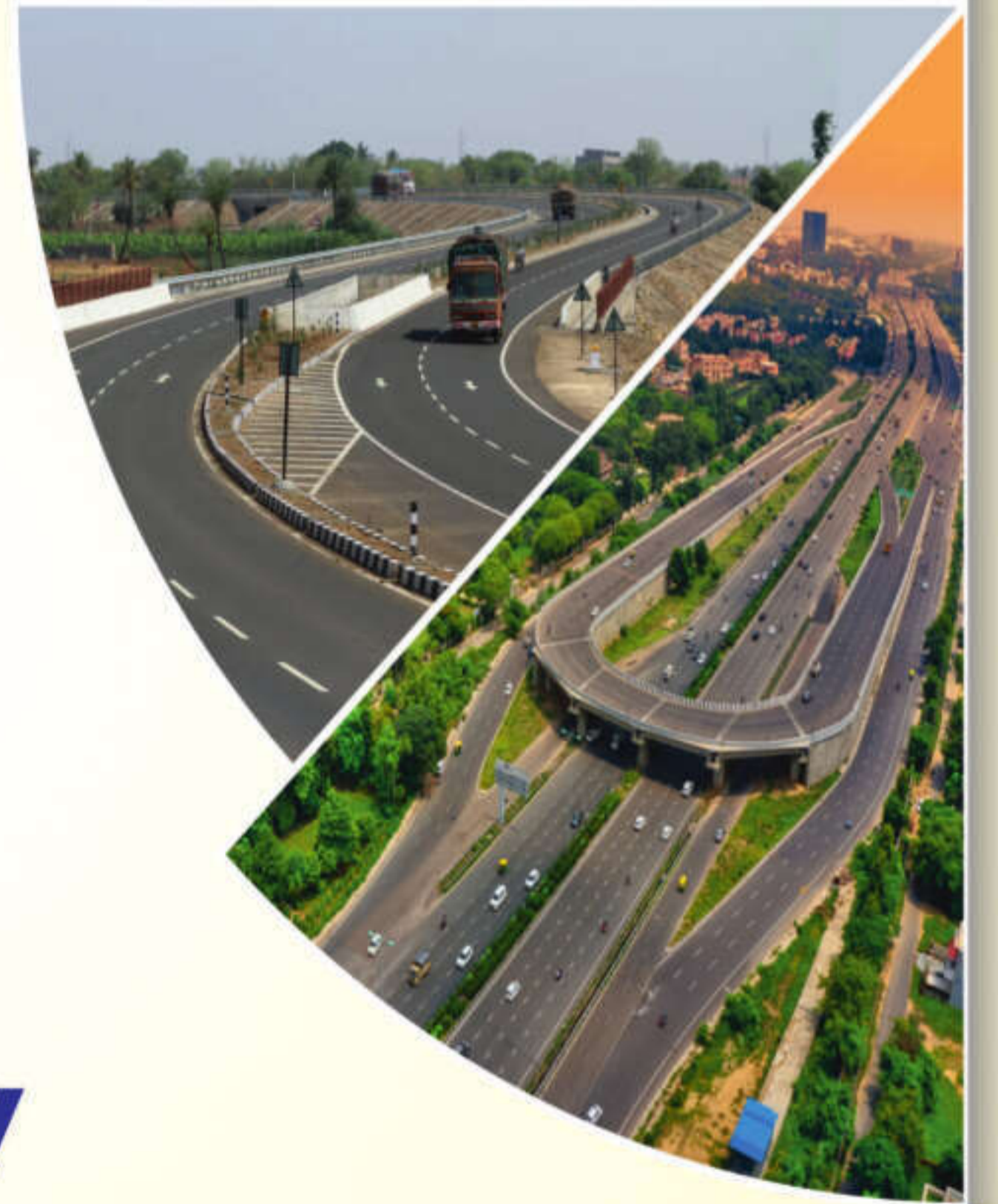
Shamli- Ambala National Highway
(Length- 121 Kms Cost- Rs. 4890 crore)

Bhiwani- Hansi National Highway
(Length- 43 Kms Cost- Rs. 1330 crore)

And

Inaugurate
Dwarka Expressway

(Length- 19 kms, Haryana Section, Total Cost About Rs. 10,000 crore)



March 11, 2024 | 11:00 AM | Gurugram

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(From right) Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in conversation with P Vaidyanathan Iyer, Executive Editor, *The Indian Express*, and Anant Goenka, Executive Director, The Indian Express Group

‘There can’t be a temptation now to experiment with a coalition govt. It’s a critical time for India’

At the Adda held in Bengaluru on February 28, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman spoke on the next set of reforms, probe agencies going after black money and the Lok Sabha elections

On what worries her

There may be issues domestically but what worries me is how things would change externally. Is it the war, not one, two? Is it the uncertainty, Red Sea? Or is it just going to end? Or is it going to fester? The crude oil price today, tomorrow, natural gas price today, tomorrow, fertiliser price today, tomorrow. Those are the worries.

On navigating the Russia and Ukraine conflict

I think the underlying point there is (that we have navigated this) without compromising on national interest and without in any way hurting the Indian economy. If sound arguments have been placed with each of them, whether it's the Western Bloc nations, those expressions of Bloc no longer hold good after the Cold War, but still I'm saying whether it is developing countries, the Global South or the developed countries, or specifically whether it is the US, Russia or Japan. I think (it's) the personal kind of relationship... One may say in diplomacy, there's no personal relationship yet chemistry works, right? If the leadership has such chemistry with their counterparts, you're able to reason out in favour of your country. And that's where I think, truly, our Prime Minister has strenuously built up relationships with each of the leaders that at any point he is able to seek time, take the phone, talk to them, explain why he wants a certain thing done in our country's interest and certainly not to hurt anybody else's interest.

When that argument gets put effectively and that argument comes from an elected leader with mass support, who is building a stable economy with predictable policies, it shows results.

On the next set of reforms on agenda

I think you can be rest assured about the way in which Prime Minister Modi has handled the economy — as a Chief Minister in Gujarat and as a Prime Minister now for 10 full years.

You have consistently seen that he takes an approach of the government as a whole. It doesn't work in silos. So if you brought in a policy, it actually gets on ground because all concerned are working towards the same goal. There is no pulling and pushing or people moving in different directions.

With that kind of a work culture, the one emphasis is on system reforms — whether you throw out unnecessary laws, whether you remove those rules which are bothering you, which are becoming an instrument in the hands of rent seekers. Everything is done looking at the opportunities.

Remember, even during the COVID lockdown, when we were announcing five mini budgets within a year, the emphasis was still on reforms. Even as we announced a package, we were undertaking two or three major system reforms. So the next generation reforms will certainly be on track.

On the upcoming Lok Sabha elections

India deserves better, our future generations deserve better. We missed the bus several times before, but we can't now. Good strength in the Houses, both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, will help India. There cannot be a temptation now to experiment with 'Can it be a coalition government?', 'Can it be a lesser numbers government?'. No. It is such a critical time for India. It cannot be playing around with the numbers. We need

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Founder and Chairman, Qess Corp Limited



RAMAKRISHNAN SUBRAMANIAM
Co founder & CTO, Elever Fintech



KAMAL BALI
President and Managing Director, Volvo Group India



RAVINDRA KP INDAR
Chief Executive Officer, APIT Agri Process Innovations & Technologies LLP

strength in the House.

On consensus building

Everything is not in the court of the Union government. There are issues which are very peculiar to some states. I don't want to pick up on an example. There are a number of them. Many things are happening in the states, and many states are doing it at such speed. It's going to set the track for many others to follow. So it need not always be the Centre who does it. The consensus can come through the states.

On states in the South alleging the Centre was unfair to them

There are positives and points of achievement for all states in the South. There are issues because of the weightage that the Finance Commission gives for each one of these factors — have you got forest cover? What kind of population stabilisa-

tion has happened? So each one has a certain weightage.

Now when southern states sit with the Finance Commission, they'll have to highlight it. If each of the southern states put the arguments well and convincingly with data in their hand, the Finance Commission is going to come up with a formulation. The Central government has no role to play in this except for obeying the Finance Commission. It tells me, you give this much per month and I have to do it.

There's no way in which any Finance Minister, leave alone me, can tweak it in favour of one or the other. Even the wickedest Finance Minister can't do it because it's all there. It's now getting into this very dangerous threshold of 'southern states together'. You had a responsible Member of Parliament, brother of Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka, say, 'We'll have a separate southern state'. It cannot go to that ex-



(Left to right) Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with Ajit Isaac, Founder and Chairman, Qess Corp Limited; Vishwaprasad Alva, Founder and Managing Director, Skanray Technologies; Kamal Bali, President and Managing Director, Volvo Group India; Jitendra Virwani, Chairman and Managing Director, Embassy Group; Aditya Virwani, Chief Operating Officer, Embassy Group; Aravind Maiya, CEO, Embassy REIT

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JITENDRA VIRWANI
Chairman and Managing Director, Embassy Group

IT'S A MATTER which the Council will have to take a call on. I assure you, I'll take it up. I'll take it up with the Council.

THE PLI (PRODUCTION LINKED INCENTIVE) SCHEME LINKED TO R&D WILL BRING ATMA NIRBHAR, BUT PLI LINKED TO JUST PRODUCTION HAS GOT DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS.

LEAVE THE PLI. You've got one lakh crore given as seed money for R&D in the private sector in this budget. We are forming a SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) and giving them 50-year interest-free money, one lakh crore, which they can in turn give to private R&D at any cost they choose. So when we are giving an interest free for 50 years, they naturally will give it to you at a minimum charge to promote



VISHWAPRASAD ALVA
Founder, Managing Director, Skanray Technologies

R&D. So we don't just have the same PLI route, we have come up with something new.



Nirmala Sitharaman with Dr Rashmi Saluja, Executive Chairperson, Religare



(Left) S Devarajan, Senior Vice President, TVS Motor Company Ltd



C Rajshekar, Senior Divisional Manager, Bangalore Division 2, LIC India, with (left) PN Jha, Senior Divisional Manager, Bangalore Division 1, LIC India



Anant Goenka (right) with Deepak Shenoy, Founder & CEO, Capitalmind



KAUSHIK NARAYAN
Managing Director, PSN Group



VIKAS BHANDARI
Director Finance, APTI Agri Process Innovations & Technologies LLP



SARITHA RAI
Asia AI reporter, Bloomberg



DEEPA FERNANDES
Senior Consultant, MedAnter

QUICK QUESTIONS

Jobs, monopolies, privatisation, rural consumption, private investment. Which of these domestic issues are you most concerned about?
Private investments.

Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine or China-Taiwan? Which of these three global issues are you most concerned about?
All three.

Pranab Mukherjee, P Chidambaram, Manmohan Singh, Yashwant Sinha. The one Opposition FM's budget that you have studied closely.
I've read all of them closely.

Your one line of advice to the startup entrepreneur in Bengaluru today who wants to be a unicorn.
If you had a grandchild and she came up to you with her first paycheck and asked you for your advice on what she should do with that paycheck, what would you say?
Save it.

They're doing fine and they will reach the level of a unicorn. They don't need my advice.

The one lesson you've learned from China's faltering economy in the last 10 years.
Be India. Be Indian.

Finance or Defence — engaging with Beijing is more challenging for which of these two ministries?
Well, after Covid, I have not had any opportunity to engage with China, so I can't compare.



SANTOSH PANPALIYA
Senior VP and Head HR — Global Delivery, Infosys



UTPAL TATU
Professor & Chairman, Department of Biochemistry, Indian Institute of Science



LAKSHMI KAMATH
CFO, Skanray Technologies



PRASENJIT DAS
Vice President, Engineering, Nirral Networks



VIREN PRASAD SHETTY
Executive Vice Chairman, Narayana Health



Kala Seetharam Sridhar, Professor, Institute for Social and Economic Change, with (right) Varadharajan Sridhar, Professor, International Institute for Information Technology



KEDAR UPADHYE
Chief Financial Officer, Biocon Biologics Ltd



TINU CHERIAN ABRAHAM
Director and Global Head — PR and Media Relations, UST



SAI RATNAKAR BEZAWADA
Marketing Director, Balaji Warehousing Company (BWC) Private Limited



NEELA TATU
Managing Director, Equine Biotech Pvt Ltd

tent... I cannot for a moment stand next to anybody who says, 'We in the southern states', then demand.

On how Bengaluru's business community is different from that in Mumbai and Delhi

They're quiet. I mean (they're like) it's all right if Delhi listens to us but we can't be bothered about going to Delhi. But because we are all very tech savvy, we'll go about tweeting, 'Hey, Central government, you're not doing this, you don't take care of Bengaluru. We are the next California'. Second time they don't get a response (they say), 'We are taxpayers, honest taxpayers, we give so much, why are you not listening to us? Can't do this.'

So Delhi businesses think they're very close to Delhi. They can come from Noida, they can come from Gurgaon, but Bengaluru doesn't budge from beautiful Bengaluru, cool Bengaluru. Who wants to come to Delhi? Cold winters, polluted Delhi, hot summers and sweaty summers. But my God, they have the power of social media to thrash the government. Decent guys, but very powerful guys.

On if Bengaluru is up to taking the Artificial Intelligence challenge

They're brilliant. The way in which Bengaluru and its immediate surroundings have given space to all kinds of startups to work, they may be focusing on agriculture, innovation on fintech, medical treatments, bio mix and also on the various kinds of technology which can be used in AI. The tools that you get out of AI, innovation on drones or aerospace, Bengaluru has done brilliantly on these startups. There's no way you can bring another one to compete with Bengaluru. Hyderabad and Noida have seen the virtues of getting the startups. They're also doing well. But Bengaluru has to be careful now. It's like a race. You reach the top. That is one struggle. But to stay at the top is another struggle. And any small thing, sentimental or other things, can disturb that peace. We need to be extra cautious.

On corporate governance and top startups being in a spot

Incidentally, I've also had some representation coming to me. Only a couple of days ago, I had an interaction with startups, particularly the fintech ones. It was a fantastic conversation. They were very pointed, and voiced their concerns. It was more on regular support that they may need from the regulators, clarifications which are periodically required because their core business is not governance and compliance-related issues. They are fellows going about innovating in their respective areas but for keeping the compliance business going, they need to have a team which is looking after it, and that team needs the support. Otherwise, it stresses out those who are innovating. So it really cannot be otherwise.

The government is very much with these startups. We want to be sure that you will be given all the assistance because you intend to carry on with innovation. The compliances will have to be simplified and will have to be made user friendly.

On retrospective tax in online gaming

No, it's been from the day when we had the first meeting in the GST Council about it. Strictly speaking, it is not retrospective. It is very clear, the notices have gone very clearly on what is the extent for that period. So there's no obligation.

The Prime Minister is very clear that we don't want to have any retrospective taxation, particularly in the gaming and other casinos and other things.

People who brought in the retrospective have been thrown out by the people of India. And the people who protested retrospective even being in the Opposition after coming to power, the first thing they did was to remove the retrospective and through the parliamentary process. So why have that lingering in your mind now? Our government was the first one to remove it. We have consistently been speaking against this when we were in the Opposition as well.

So retrospective and us don't go together at all. If some other party was sitting in power today, you may ask them that question, not us. I think it's a front.

On private investment

There is a lot of investment moving and happening in new sectors, like renewable. Look at the kind of investment which has gone for green ammonia. Look at the kind of money which is going for research in batteries and storage for power. Look at the way in which people are looking at semiconductors. Look at the investment in Rajasthan and Gujarat, for instance, on green hydrogen and in Gujarat, particularly in the Kutch area, for solar. These are not small investments, they're huge. Therefore, I would think when we are looking at private investments, we should look at the sunrise sector. Also take them on the count. Look

at the number of integrated steel plants which are expanding in capacity. Look at the advertisements which are coming from Odisha. You think that's without money investment?

We should do a bit more rigorous understanding, work to understand what is actually happening. By the time observers or economic experts come up with the data, we have indications everywhere that things are happening.

On corruption and the role of investigative agencies

We are not corrupt. Tell me, otherwise would the media have left us free for 10 years? Prime Minister Modi's garment is absolutely clean and I'm proud of it. But, equally, if they (investigative agencies) are going only to Opposition-led leaders' places, tell me one place from where they've come empty-handed?

Agencies should not work? They will go after every fellow who has got black money... I don't mind if they are doing it with white money. Let them get it (houses) anywhere. South Pole. Moon. Please buy it with tax-paid money. But if you go with other kinds of money, of course I'll be after you. If we don't, India will be put on the grey list of FATF (Financial Action Task Force). Once you're on the grey list, your investments are not going to happen. Nobody is going to come with money in your country.



(From left to right) Deepak Shenoy, Founder & CEO, Capitalmind; Viren Prasad Shetty, Executive Vice Chairman, Narayana Health; Vidhi Sheth; Siddharth Sheth, Executive Director, G. Corp Properties; Rakesh Asthana, Former Police Commissioner of Delhi; Dr Rashmi Saluja, Executive Chairperson, Religare; Subramanian Krishnamani, Partner, Deloitte; Vishwaprasad Alva, Founder and Managing Director, Skanray; Jitendra Virwani, Chairman and Managing Director, Embassy Group; S Devarajan, Senior Vice President, TVS Motor Company Ltd

PSG HELD 2-2 AT HOME

Paris: Ligue 1 leaders Paris St Germain were held to a 2-2 home draw by Reims on Sunday after PSG boss Luis Enrique benched top scorer Kylian Mbappe, who played only the last 20 minutes. **REUTERS**

Bazball needs course-correction

England's lack of robust defensive technique was thoroughly exposed in the series loss to India, and their bowling lacked bite as well

SANDIP G
MARCH 10

IT'S A break Bazball would have craved for. The most repeated word in cricket over the last two years, even inked in the dictionary, would slip into the edge of memory for the next four months, as white-ball cricket would take over; Brendon McCullum, Ben Stokes, and their Bazballers would now reunite only in July.

"Nothing would change (during the break)," Stokes would insist. Or would they? It was the question, framed and phrased differently, posed repeatedly at Stokes after the defeat in Dharamsala. The England captain was defiant and idealistic, producing an album of quotations wherein he sounded Buddha, Bollywood bad boy and management guru rolled into one. Sample this: "Failure is a great teacher to sports teams. You either let failure and disappointment eat you up and shoot you down, and you never seem to find a way back up." Or taking the series, "as a fuel to perform." Or the warning filed without an evil smirk: "Write this team off, write me off, at your own peril."

Whether Baz and Stokes would dilute the bravado approach is indefinite, but the defeat in India should offer them lessons that their approach needs refinement, layers and gears, and that it has jarring imperfections. It held a mirror to their flaws and cracks. At times, they lived in a floating world of delusions. Unabashed aggression can be exciting, it could win you games, it could dislodge adversaries, it could panic and confuse them. It gloriously paid off in Hyderabad - the win, irrespective of the outcome of the series, would be one of their finest victories.

But it's when they began to self-gloat, when they began to underestimate the skill and depth of India's bowlers, the wiles of their spin-trio, the lethality of Jasprit Bumrah and the shortcomings of their own methods, that things began to go pear-shaped.

In the end, it was the triumph of a vastly superior bowling team. It's often the case —



Against as multi-skilled a bowling firm as India, England's batsmen required more dimensions to their game. **Reuters**

bowlers are destiny's men in Tests.

Rahul Dravid, the India coach, would re-assert this: "Their experience was in the batting and they had the ascendancy with bat in hand at that point of time and we needed to respond. Our experience was in bowling and we won those contests."

Against as multi-skilled a bowling firm as this, England's batsmen required more dimensions to their game than wantonly attacking them. These are battle-hardened bowlers with nearly 1,000 wickets among them, masters of their conditions. They couldn't be repeatedly disrupted by batsmen constantly charging towards them or fre-

quently reverse-sweeping. The confusion they wreak, if at all, would be temporary.

But Stokes staunchly defended their stroke-making, using the example of Ben Duckett. "He ran down the wicket and tried to push pressure back on Ashwin. I said to Ducky after, 'think how annoyed you would be to get out to Ashwin just propping forward,'" he said.

"It's knowing that sometimes taking risks brings your downfall, but when there's a reason behind taking these risks that don't quite work out, that is fine," he added. One of their key principles is not to criticise a teammate in public.

No Plan B

But embracing risks to gloss over a weak defensive game, as has been the case with Duckett and Ollie Pope, is cause for concern. Zak Crawley has a sounder technique, but he seemed to be obsessed with the idea of being a martyr for Bazball. Every overseas batsman who has prospered in India possessed a robust defensive technique against spinners. Kevin Pietersen had, Alastair Cook, Andrew Strauss and Ian Bell had too. They could have taken a lesson from Joe Root, who shunned Bazballing after the reverse-scoop intertempore in Rajkot and scored a classical hundred in Ranchi. The lost-cause knock

BRIEFLY

DC win humdinger to go on top of table

New Delhi: Richa Ghosh hit two monstrous sixes but paid the price for her poor fitness as Delhi Capitals found her short of crease to win a cliffhanger against Royal Challengers by a solitary run in the Women's Premier League on Sunday. Needing 17 off last over to reach a target of 182, Richa, who blasted 51 off 29 balls, smote left-arm spinner Jess Jonassen for a 78 metre straight six and another maximum off the penultimate delivery to bring the equation down to two runs off the final delivery. However Richa, not exactly known for being the fittest among Indian cricketers despite brute power in her strokes, wasn't fast enough to beat Jonassen, who whipped the balls off in a flash to restrict RCB to 180 for 7. **PTI**
BRIEF SCORES: Delhi Capitals 181-5 in 20 overs (J Rodrigues 58, A Capey 48; S Patil 4-26) bt RCB 180-7 in 20 overs (R Ghosh 51, E Perry 49) by 1 run

Aus-NZ second Test set for thrilling finish

Christchurch: Australia needed 202 runs and New Zealand six wickets to win the second cricket test in what should be a thrilling finish after both teams had highs and lows on the third day Sunday. Rachin Ravindra made 82, Tom Latham 73 and Daryl Mitchell 58 before New Zealand was out for 372 in its second innings after trailing by 94 on the first. That left Australia needing 279 to win the match and complete a 2-0 sweep of the series. The target, if achieved, will be the 14th-highest successful fourth-innings run chase in test history. At stumps, Australia was 77-4 with Mitch Marsh 27 not out and Travis Head 17. Head and Marsh batted through the last 10 overs of the day to save Australia from further loss. **AP**
BRIEF SCORES: New Zealand 162 & (o/n 134-2) 372 all out in 108.2 overs (Latham 73, R Ravindra 82, Mitchell 58, S Kuggelejin 44; P Cummins 4-62, N Lyon 3-49) vs Australia 256 & 77-4 in 24 overs (Marsh 27*; B Sears 2-22, M Henry 2-37)

Mohun Bagan crush East Bengal 3-1

Kolkata: Mohun Bagan produced one of their finest displays of the season to crush arch-rivals 3-1 in their Indian Super League return leg clash at the Salt Lake Stadium here on Sunday. Cleiton Silva missed from the spot in the 14th minute but since then it was a one-way traffic for Mohun Bagan who scored the goals through Jason Cummings (27th minute), Liston Colaco (36th) and Dimitri Petratos (penalty - 45+3') to cruise to 3-0 lead at the half time break. Saul Crespo (53rd) struck his maiden goal of the Indian Super League to pull one back for East Bengal but Mohun Bagan were back at their dominant best and ensured that there was no more blip to hold on to the 3-1 scoreline. The win took Mohun Bagan past Mumbai City in the lead spot of the standings on goal difference and to the playoff spot. Both sides now have 36 points each but Mohun Bagan have one match in hand and remain firm favourites for the Shield. **PTI**

SANDEEP DWIVEDI

LACK OF intensity on the field, was one observation that the pundits made after India, under captain Rohit Sharma, lost the first Test of this England series in Hyderabad. They would connect it to the absence of Virat Kohli, world cricket's mega star known to wind up rivals and coax the crowd to cheer the team when chips are down. That was in the the last week of January.

Over the next five weeks, during the course of the next 4 Tests, the Indian team's chatter, recorded diligently by stump microphones, would go viral on social media. Those who have closely followed the intensely-fought series now see Rohit as a highly communicative leader and say that the buzz he creates on the field is the reason for India's stunning comeback in the series.

In cricket, a sport with a format that goes on for five days, captains and communication is an interesting study. Though, the length or frequency of conversation a captain has with his players doesn't decide his leadership caliber. Do talkers make better leaders than non-talkers? Long team meetings or short individual interactions? There are no straight absolute answers to these questions. Whatever works - is the only mantra that captains can follow.

There's the famous Virender Sehwag story from his stint as the Delhi Daredevils captain. During a tight game, before the final over, his main pacer Umesh Yadav asked his skipper where he should bowl. "Bowler tu hai ya main?" Sehwag said with a smile. That day Umesh grew as a bowler.

In contrast, captains like MS Dhoni and Rohit are known to micro-manage all on-field operations. Dhoni famously would guide spinners before every ball. "Jaddu, leg pe daal sakta hai", "Rokega aankh band karke", "Dhire daal le" - from behind the stumps, there would be a constant smattering of instructions.

In this series, Rohit has had to be in the ears of his younger batting partners constantly. Several times Yashasvi Jaiswal, the series' highest run-getter and his opening partner, would play a risky shot - an ambitious sweep or slog towards the corner. This would be followed by Rohit walking down the track fuming. He would blow his top, use words suited to a Sunday street game to convey his disapproval.

Once in an interview, Mumbai Indians player Ishan Kishan spoke about his early days while playing under Rohit. Not aware that the team was trying to maintain the ball so that one side remained shiny and the other dry and rough, Kishan threw the ball at one-bounce. Rohit would give him a tongue lashing. But after the game, Rohit would convey to the new-



The buzz Rohit creates on the field is the reason for India's stunning comeback in the series. **PTI**

comer that things are said on the field in the heat of the moment and what happens on the field, stays there. This was an approach that worked. Mumbai Indians would win 5 IPL titles under Rohit.

The great Imran Khan too was known for his colourful on-field and dressing room "hair-dryer" treatment. On the field, he would use choicest words to both pull up a player or motivate him to have a go at the rivals. But till date, his team mates see him as a larger than life figure who groomed them and made them bet-

Rohit's viral chatter shows him as an established leader, who isn't insecure. It also shows that he has time for his juniors, ears for the seniors in the team and has a sense of humour.

ter players. The world knows Imran for the talented prodigies around him but less is spoken about the seniors who were his sounding boards. There was Javed Miandad who Imran would constantly consult when the team was in trouble. Before the Test, he would take inputs from Mudassar Nazar on how the pitch would play. They would be his key ministers, they would be his brain bank. Imran kept them in conversations, valued their point of view.

Before the Dharamsala Test, Rohit, touched upon the conversations he had with two of his senior spinners - Ravindra Jadeja and R Ashwin - when things got tough on the field. There is also the thinking mind of Jasprit Bumrah to tap into. "Suddenly sometimes you have to change on the field looking at how things are moving, I am glad that I got a lot of these guys who understand," he said.

Among Rohit's popular on-field conversa-

in the second innings in Dharamsala too was scored in a similar way. But his reawakening came too late.

The less fiery audience could wonder how England would have benefitted from someone with the doggedness of Cook or Strauss. The England of 2012 struck the perfect balance, a heady blend of Cook's obduracy and Pietersen's enterprise. As history would teach them, an age of extremes is transient. At some point, a synthesis is arrived upon. Bazball, in its current avatar, could win you a sprint, but not a marathon. Test series in India requires the endurance of a marathoner.

For England to succeed, they perhaps need to discover a middle path. Not perhaps as their default mode, not necessarily a compromise, but to show the world that they are not inflexible hardliners, that they could hum Madonna as much as they could rattle out Megadeth. But if they are to reclaim the Ashes in Australia or be successful long-term, they need to find the balance as well as discover a few more firebrands. The bowling resources are bereft of depth. Apart from Mark Wood, they are deficient in pace. Jofra Archer seems a lost dream; Ollie Robinson is more Paul Collingwood these days; the spinners are still raw; James Anderson is in the autumn of his career. Their aggression has not matched that of their batsmen.

Nonetheless, they have the capacity to thrill. No team has tested India at home in the last six years as the Bazballers. Apart from the Dharamsala Test, ascendancy exchanged hands in almost every session. In the end, India grabbed the decisive moments and hours, the tactics of the hosts were less extreme, their tunes had different tenors, and they were not blinded or bound by a specific playing style, imprisoned in their own golden cage.

Now England have to come out of it and breathe some fresh air. Bazball would return, but how it returns, whether it is a bolder or toned-down version, would determine its longevity and ultimate success. The break could not have come sooner, for both the concept and the word itself.

Rohit's captaincy: Talk, listen, never lose sense of humour

tions on social media is one about umpire Virender Sharma during the T20 series against Afghanistan. It showed the confidence of a proven leader who isn't insecure. That T20 game was after Rohit was dismissed for a duck in the earlier two matches. At the start of the innings in the third game, a ball after deviation went past fine leg. To Rohit's surprise, the umpire signalled leg-by. "Arey Viru, thigh-pad diya kya pehla four? Bat laga tha! (Hey Viru, did you signal for the thigh pad on the first four? I hit that with my bat!)," he said. He was ready to laugh about his zeroes and even about his plea to the umpire.

It brings to mind a famous conversation cricket's sharpest brain, the great Mike Brearley, had with his trump card Ian Botham. In the forward of his famous book - Art of captaincy - former England player Ed Smith mentions the episode and also interprets it.

Smith writes: "Passing Ian Botham at the nets, Mike famously joked. 'Want to get your confidence up, Ian?' - the implication being that Mike's batting would make Botham's bowling look good. Only an established leader would find it so easy to play himself down.

There is a larger message in Rohit's viral chatter. It shows him as an established leader, who isn't insecure. It also shows that he has time for his juniors, ears for the seniors in the team and has a sense of humour.

RANJI TROPHY FINAL

With brisk 75 and early breakthrough, Shardul plays star act for Mumbai

MIHIR VASAVDA
MUMBAI, MARCH 10

SHARDUL THAKUR slashed so violently that he resembled a sabre fencer thrusting his sword more than a 'tailender' bailing his team out in a Ranji Trophy final.

It was a length ball outside off, the kind that most other batsmen would have shouldered arms to. Not Shardul, who began his innings by dancing down the track and hitting a boundary. This wasn't as clean a hit as his first. Playing away from his body, the ball hit the edge and flew just over Dhruv Shorey at gully.

Thakur stepped back, and took a deep breath. Identical delivery two balls later, identical response from Shardul - driving the ball without much footwork - and an identical outcome: the ball again catching the edge and zooming past Shorey, this time he gets closer than on the earlier occasion.

Another step back by Shardul, another deep breath. The very next ball, he tries to hit it through midwicket but gets a leading edge. The ball floats in the air, Harsh Dubey at mid-on runs backwards and lunges desperately to take a one-handed diving catch. But the ball eludes him.

"One was a really good ball. The next two balls, it was my mistake, error of judgment," Shardul said later. "They say luck favours the brave. Luck went my way at that point of time."

The pluck-master ensured it didn't go to waste. In the 40s when he survived the three attempts, Shardul went on to score nearly one-third of Mumbai's runs as his knock of 75 (69b, 8x4, 3x6) saved his team the embarrassment of getting bowled out for a paltry score. Mumbai were eventually dismissed for 224 and by the time the first day ended, it looked like a par score as Vidarba were reeling at 31/3.

Shardul, who else, provided the first breakthrough but, as was the case in the semifinals where he scored his maiden first-class century, it was his contribution with the bat that's of greater significance. It's a joke how good Mumbai's tail, marshalled by Shardul, has been this season. A measure of it is the fact that when Mohit Avasthi was ruled out at the last minute - due to a niggle, thus giving the sparsely-used Dhaval Kulkarni a chance to play his farewell match for Mumbai - the talk centred more around whether it'll affect the balance of the lower order rather than if it'd rob captain Ajinkya Rahane of a handy bowling option.

It was also a commentary on the form of Mumbai's batsmen and when their middle order collapsed once again, those concerns seemed genuine.



Mumbai's Shardul Thakur plays a shot against Vidarba on Sunday. **Pradip Das**

Green mirage

Like the rest of Mumbai, the Wankhede has been a construction site for what feels like ages. Stands covered, almost entirely, in dust and, partly, with unsightly brown or green cloth.

One area was left untouched - the 22 yards in the middle that had enough green cover to command the attention of envi-

ronmentalists. It looked for a while that the lively dense grass deceived Vidarba, until a frantic 34-minute period rocked Mumbai. During those crazy few minutes, the ball swung and spun and the batsmen edged and missed the line as Mumbai lost their entire top order.

While Mumbai's change of personnel seemed steeped in sentiment, Vidarba's

Shardul walked in at that critical stage when Mumbai were six down and completely on the back foot. They hadn't scored a boundary for 108 balls.

tweak was more strategic, replacing offie Akshay Wakhare with left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey given the right-hander-heavy Mumbai batting. Like a workhorse, Dubey held one end up and kept a tight leash on the Mumbai batsmen, who were off to a brisk start with Prithvi Shaw and Bhupen Lalwani scoring at an ODI pace. Dubey dismissed Shaw, who went for a needless slog-sweep after playing well for his 46, before delivering a double blow by getting rid of Musheer Khan and Rahane.

From the other end, the pacers - Yash Thakur, Umesh Yadav and Aditya Thakare - were doing just enough to extract all they could from a surface that had something in it for them. They kept probing the fourth-stump channel and frequently beat the edge, especially in the first hour. Their disciplined bowling bore rewards as Mumbai lost their first four wickets just before lunch while another two were gone within five minutes of each other soon after the match restarted.

Shardul walked in at that critical stage when Mumbai were six down and completely on the back foot. They hadn't scored a boundary for 108 balls. It was a situation not too dissimilar from the semifinal against Tamil Nadu. And just like he systematically dismantled the TN bowling attack, it was Shardul's uncluttered, counter-attacking innings that seized the momentum. A minor tweak, he said, has been key to his batting revival. Recently, after a match at the BKC ground, Shardul met former first-class cricketer Vilas Godbole. "He told me to keep my knees flexed and hit the ball," Shardul said. "That's the fine-tuning I did in the last two games." Shardul makes it sound easy. At the crease, he made it look easy as well as he plundered the Vidarba bowlers.

He eventually ran out of lives while trying to go big in an attempt to shield Kulkarni, something he might not have done with Avasthi at the other end. But by the time the teams walked back to the pavilion at the end of the day, it didn't matter. Shardul had triggered a mini-collapse, ably supported by Kulkarni, that left Mumbai in control of the final.

BRIEF SCORES: Mumbai 224 all out (Shardul Thakur 75, Prithvi Shaw 46; Yash Thakur 3/54, Harsh Dubey 3/62) vs Vidarba 31/3 (Atharva Taide 21*; Dhawal Kulkarni 2/9).

Liverpool and Man City play out 1-1 thriller

LORIEWING
LIVERPOOL, MARCH 10

ALEXIS MAC Allister fired home a second-half penalty as Liverpool salvaged a point against Manchester City in a breathless 1-1 Premier League blockbuster at Anfield on Sunday that left Arsenal top of the table.

Liverpool are second but level on 64 points with the Gunners, with 10 games remaining of a thrilling three-way title race.

Holders City, who are unbeaten in 21 games across all competitions, are third on 63. Arsenal climbed top with their 2-1 win against Brentford on Saturday.

City looked poised to hand manager Pep Guardiola his second victory in nine trips to the cauldron of Anfield when John Stones lost his marker to tap in Kevin De Bruyne's corner from close range in the 23rd minute.

Stones leapt onto the barrier in front of the visitors' fans and shook both fists in celebration.

The cheers were deafening when Mac Allister slotted home from the penalty spot past Ederson in the 50th minute after the keeper had sent Darwin Nunez flying through the air with a rash challenge in the box.

Buoyed by the goal, Liverpool kept pressing and had numerous near-misses. City's Jeremy Doku hit the post against the run of play, as both sides had to settle for the second draw this season between the two titans. **REUTERS**



Alexis Mac Allister celebrates after scoring the equaliser. AP

Next-Gen steps up

Tokyo medallists Bajrang, Dahiya upset in Olympic qualifier trials

NIHAL KOSHIE
SONIPAT, MARCH 10

THREE TIMES Rohit bent down and touched Bajrang Punia's feet after he had defeated the knackered-out Olympic bronze medalist 9-3. Rohit, a former national champion in the 65 kg category, did not gloat over the big win. The Bajrang he fought during the national trials on Sunday wasn't the force he once was, Rohit voiced.

"The last time I competed against him, Bajrang was strong and fast. Today was different," Rohit said after his first win over Bajrang.

Sunday was a day of upsets at the wrestling national trials at SAI Sonipat. Bajrang's loss to go with Tokyo Olympics silver medalist Ravi Dahiya's and the next generation stepping up to represent India in Asian and World Olympic qualifiers was also the storyline of the trials.

Rohit will remember the day as being bitter-sweet. His loss in the final to the current national champion Sujeet Kalkal, the under 23 Asian champion, was a setback.

There was also a passing of the baton between two Chhatrasal trainees in the 57 kg. Aman Sehrawat, a star-in-the-making, beat Dahiya for the first time. The 57 kg trials were conducted in the Nordic format and Sehrawat and Dahiya were in the same group. The anticipated clash between an established star and a future one lived up to its billing. Dahiya, despite training only for a couple of months before the trials after an ACL injury and surgery gave it his all but lost by the narrowest of margins - first to Sehrawat and then Under-20 Asian Champion Udit.

Despite a late fightback from Dahiya, Aman edged out the senior wrestler 14-13. Dahiya almost turned the tables from 13-4 with an eight-point surge. Dahiya then lost 8-10 to Udit which ended his chance of entering the semi-finals. Udit too, like Rohit did when he beat Bajrang, touched Dahiya's feet at the end of the bout. Dahiya had made last-ditch video referrals in both bouts but the judge's decision didn't go his way.

A little later, Bajrang too lost the semifinal



Bajrang Punia (L), one of the prominent faces of the protest against former WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, lost his semifinal on Sunday. Gajendra Yadav

to make it a day to forget for the struggling Olympic medalist. Bajrang took a few moments to soak in what happened and then walked out of the wrestling hall and into a waiting car.

Neither did Bajrang, or his opponent Vishal Kaliraman turn up for the third-fourth place playoff bout. Bajrang looked rusty when he just about managed to beat Ravinder in his first bout, which ended 3-3 but was awarded to the senior wrestler on criteria.

Both Olympic medallists have had setbacks over the past year. Bajrang, one of the prominent faces of the protest against former Wrestling Federation of India president, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh lost out on training time last year. He was exempted from the Asian Games trials but returned empty-handed from Hangzhou. In preparation for the trials, Bajrang trained in Dagestan, a wrestling hub but the 30-year-old looked like a shadow of himself.

Dahiya is back on the mat after recovering from an ACL injury that required surgery. Though he won a bronze in January at a Grand Prix in Nice it was in the 61 kg category. Aman, now sharper and quicker, and with his first win over the senior wrestler seems to be ready to

take over the reins in the 57kg category.

Like Aman, the other young wrestler to watch out for is Sujeet from Dadri. Before the Asian Games he had challenged the exemptions from trials for Bajrang. He has emerged as the one to beat after becoming national champion in February and winning the trials a month later. Both Aman and Sujeet used the fitley (leg-lace) move to stun their respective opponents in the final.

"Today I got an opportunity to showcase my talent and skill and I gave it my best," Sujeet said. "The 57kg and 65kg are two categories in which India is strong at the Olympics. It is a big responsibility now that I am going for the Olympic trials. It gives me joy, but at the same time I know it will be tough," Sujeet said.

He will step into the big shoes of a four-time world championship medalist and an Olympic medalist. Even if he wins a quota place for the Olympics, Sujeet will have to beat the winner of the trials at the end of May to guarantee his Paris trip. On the walls of the Sushil Kumar-Yogeshwar Dutt Wrestling hall were life-size posters of giants of the sport with medals in their hands. Sujeet, like Aman, has a high bar to cross.

Aman takes sweet revenge on Dahiya

NIHAL KOSHIE
SONIPAT, MARCH 10

WRESTLER AMAN Sehrawat did one thing as a routine since losing the 2022 Commonwealth Games trials to Olympic silver medalist Ravi Dahiya.

He watched the video of the bout in which he was soundly thrashed. Again and again, everyday, he says. The 10-0 result had ranked 20-year-old Aman, six years Dahiya's junior.

"It was not easy, not a single day has passed since the Commonwealth Games till this morning when I did not watch that video.

"It was not easy to beat him today. There was pressure but it feels good to have my first win over him," Sehrawat said.

On Sunday, Sehrawat's 8-4 lead became 13-9 before Dahiya closed the gap to 14-11 and then 14-13. Sehrawat said he started to defend like his life depended on it when Dahiya launched his comeback. "Today, maybe after injury he wasn't fully back in shape," Sehrawat added.

The takeaway for Sehrawat from watching the Commonwealth Games trial video on loop was how he was overawed because he was fighting an Olympic medalist.

"Looking back, while watching the video, I felt that I was in awe of an Olympic medalist. I went by the reputation of the

wrestler. I did not fight the way I should have. I let him (Dahiya) get to me," Sehrawat said.

He does not want to comment if Sunday's win is the changing of the guard in the 57kg category, but is confident that he can fill the big shoes. Dahiya lost to Sehrawat and Udit at the trials.

Both Dahiya and Sehrawat are from the famed Chhatrasal akhara.

They trained in the same hall ahead of the national trials but on different mats and with different sparring partners. "I do keep a close eye on his technique and try to learn from him."

Sehrawat said his focus would now shift to the Asian Olympic qualifiers.

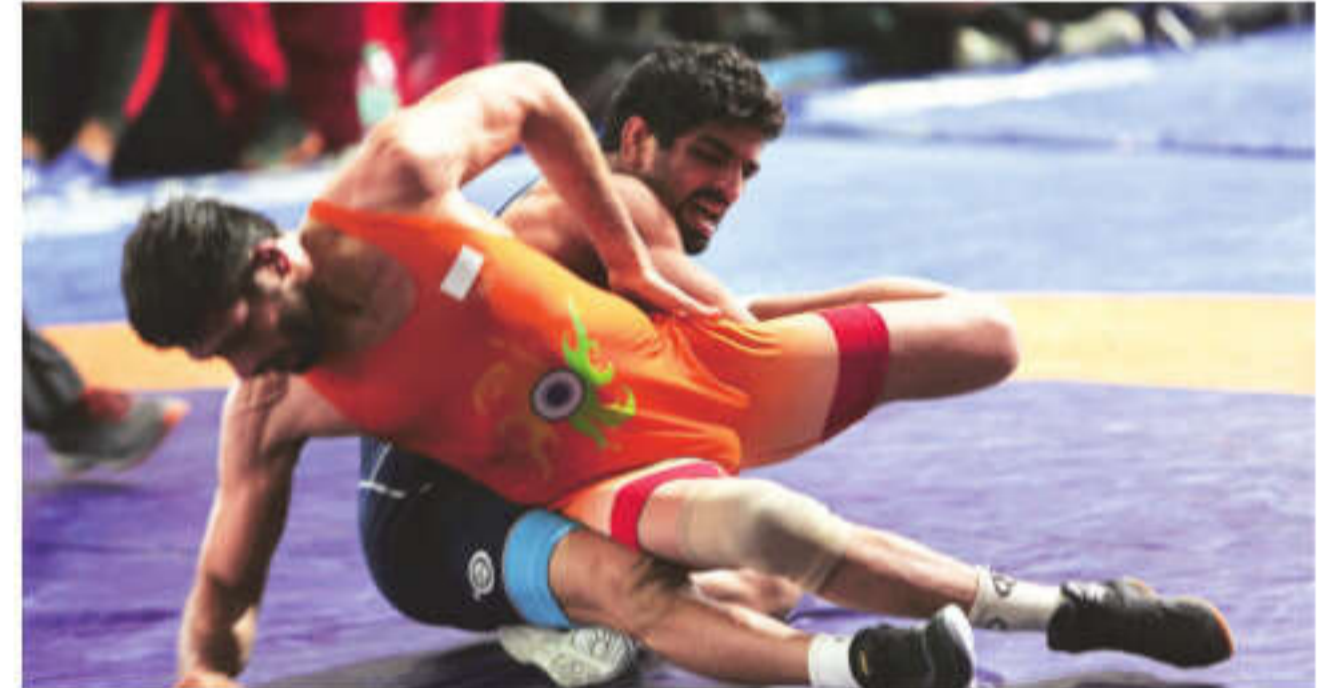
"I have to study the best wrestlers from Asia. I feel that I can win an Olympic gold but first I need to book my place in the Indian team," he said.

In his first bout of the day against Udit, Sehrawat conceded four points early before winning 12-4.

He faced the same opponent in the final and used the leg lace to outclass Udit 10-0 in less than a minute.

"After my first bout, the coaches pointed out that I was very sluggish at the start. They said why give an opportunity to someone else to represent India at the Olympics trials.

"I decided I would go all out in the final and it worked out well for me."



Aman Sehrawat (R) took down Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Ravi Dahiya at the trials on Sunday. Gajendra Yadav

How Satwik-Chirag employed a variety of attacks to win French Open title

SHIVANI NAIK
MARCH 10

THERE ARE fewer things more entertaining in sport than compulsively winning. Badminton's Boe-ball that Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty dish out routinely, puts a lot of store on winning every point, turning every shot into a dart aiming for bullseye.

Their bravado and the bashfulness, the derring-do and the defense, the no-holds-barred smash, and the tightly concealed deception are all geared towards this unsatiated pursuit of winningness.

Three finals might be lost on the trot, in the process. And an Olympic gold might get won on a canter someday. But in the here and the now and today of this moment, Satwik-Chirag, shepherded by coach Mathias Boe, have won once again. The French Open was pocketed without dropping a set, and the final opponents happened to be Taiwanese Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan, who were tamed 21-11, 21-17.

"Feels good. But next week there's another tournament," Chirag Shetty would casually tell the BWF after picking their second French crown, a Super 750 at the Olympic venue. Birmingham - the said next tournament - tends to make Indians a little jumpy, a tad sentimental because it's the All England.

But for Satwik-Chirag, it might be as simply zoomed and zoned in as the next tournament to be won. Or at least Boe-ball would steer them into thinking that way.

This week in Paris has seen Satwik-Chirag in a slightly different mode. They won Korea last season on fast courts, playing all-out aggressive attack - the conventional zipping down smashes.

In Paris, the conditions wavered from one day to the next. But the Indians merely attacked in different ways, even if the shuttle wasn't raining down on the Taiwanese from altitude.

First, there were the attacking openings, that Boe calls 'the service situation'. Historically a defensive shot in badminton, though doubles players always loved to give it a zing, Satwik-Chirag have in their repertoire some dozen variations of the serve.

Chirag barely swivels, yet both him and Satwik caught Yang-Lee unawares so many times on the return, that the Taiwanese were actually pressured into trying funny things when serving and crumbling into many service errors themselves just to keep up.

Boe insists on aggressive first three shots of an exchange, and the Indians kept the pressure up, even as they ran away with



Satwiksairaj Rankireddy (L) and Chirag Shetty beat Taiwanese pair Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan to win the French Open title on Sunday. Badminton Photo/BAI

a 14-6 lead in the opener. Yang-Lee hit hard, and Satwik later chuckled about how he wondered how opponents felt "when facing Chirag-Satwik."

But the Indian defense stayed sturdy. Chirag has even perfected a high, heavy lift from a deeply defensive position which bought Indians time as well as points, because it threw the opponents out of position, with some cute harakiri incited along the backline.

Then there's the aggressive Chirag push which he first played at 6-4. The power and speed make it an attacking weapon, but it's the deception that really sets up the winner. His arm is poised to turn the shuttle right, but his wrist twirls it to the left, and Satwik would finish with a kill into the open space.

Perhaps the sharpest attacks of the day, from Satwik, Chirag and Yang as well were the slantways low altitude smashes. Yang for most part, and Lee once in the second when the Taiwanese led 9-8, pulled the mid-length shuttles from the sides and directed it at angles, coming sharply into opponents.

Mostly, the target was bringing it across into Satwik's body and testing his awkward angle defense. They succeeded too. But mostly, it was the two Indians with criss-cross attack, and sharp flatter smashes at high speed that got the Indians a bunch of points including at 21-11.

Chirag's other gems were his fluid maneuvering from below the tape and the speed of his reflexes truly boggled Yang-Lee.

Satwik meanwhile served deftly, wasn't shabby at the low defense, and was lightning quick at the net.

There was a classic S-C 1-2, first Satwik smashed right down the middle, then Chirag got a whistling word in, leaping right behind him at 8-7.

And to spice things up, the chair umpire declared one return a double hit, which riled Boe, and uncoiled Chirag mightily, after which the slantways attacks never stopped pricking like a pierced voodoo doll.

From leading 11-10 to 14-14, amidst l'affaire 'double hit', both Lee and Yang had multiple service errors - into the net, and the flick serve ballooning long.

At 15-14, the Indian attack decided to turn ruthless. And the Taiwanese hopes were stubbed into the ash tray. At 17-14, Satwik had had enough of the polite edge-wise attack.

So he buried a smash right down the middle.

No one is losing sight of the Olympics gold, which Satwik-Chirag realistically can nail down. But Boe-ball dictates that a few more titles are also won with five months to go before Paris.

"We thought we won't think much. Just be happy and have fun and let them earn the points and the match," Satwik said. He had no intentions of letting them anywhere near a win though.

Some athletes like winning to be a habit. Some like Satwik-Chirag make it a complete habitat of their existence. Fun is had along the way.

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(through Video Conferencing)

On 11th March, 2024 at 11.30am at Gurugram, Haryana

Inauguration

Delhi	Urban Extension Road – II (1 Pkg)	Andhra Pradesh	Anandapuram – Pendurthi - Anakapalli Section, NH-16 Gundugolanu - Kalaparru Section, NH-16 (1 Pkg) Vijayanagaram Town Bypass on NH-26 Gurajanapalli – Avanigadda section, NH-216 (3 Pkg) Link road between Murukambattu – Cherlopalle, NH 69 in Andhra Pradesh Devarapalli to Jeelugumilli, NH 516D (1 Pkg)	Jharkhand	Reconstruction of Murgathal – Dhanbad, NH – 218 Reconstruction of Sunderpahari – Dharampur NH-333A Reconstruction of Rupnarayanpur – Jamtara, NH-419 Reconstruction of Gumala - Kolebera, NH-23 Reconstruction of Sultana - Birhu, NH-100 Ranchi Bypass, NH-33 (1 Pkg)
Karnataka	Dobaspet - Hoskote (2 Pkg) Aurad – Bidar section, NH-161A	Maharashtra	Wadpale - Bhogaon Khurd, NH-66 Kashedi Ghat-Parshuram Ghat section, NH-66 Wadigodri – Dhangripimpri, NH-753H Ahmednagar bypass – Kharwandi, NH-61 Rahuri - Sonai - Shani Singnapur, NH-160C	Bihar	Sitamarhi-Jaynagar Section, NH-227 Chapwa to Betiya, NH-727 Construction of RoB in Araria & Thakurganj, NH-327E ROB in Mania and Prampur, NH-81 Parsoli - Rampur, NH-28B Narenpur - Purnea Section of NH-131A
Kerala	Thalassery - Mahe bypass section, NH-66 Mukkola Junction – Kerala / Tamil Nadu Border, NH-66	Tamil Nadu	Strengthening near Coimbatore, NH-181 Bridge at Villupuram – Puducherry, NH-45A Flyover at Periyanaickenpalayam Junction - Coimbatore Outskirt	Rajasthan	Sangariya - Bikaner (2 Pkg)
West Bengal	Berhampore – Farakka Section, NH-12 Emergency Landing Facility on Balasore - Kharagpur section, NH-16				
Himachal Pradesh	Kiratpur - Nerchowk section of NH-21 (2 Pkg)				
Uttar Pradesh	Lucknow Ring Road (3 Pkg) Elevated Highway Between Samrala Chowk - Ludhiana Municipal Limit Malout – Abohar-Sadhuwali section, NH-62 & 7 Malout – Mandi- Dabwali of NH-9 Construction of RoB and Bridge on Satluj River, NH 503 Construction of two ROBs Moga - Makhu & Harike - Khalra, NH-703B				

Foundation Stone Laying

Andhra Pradesh	Bengaluru - Kadappa - Vijayawada Economic Corridor (14 Pkg) Tadipatri to Muddanur, NH-67 B.Kothapalli Junction - Gorantla, NH 716G Somayajulapalli – Dhone Road, NH – 340B Seetharamapuram - Duttaluru Section, NH-167BG Kurnool / Kadapa Border-Jammalamadugu section NH-167K Vodarevu - Chilakaluripet, NH-167A (1 Pkg) Mudireddypalli – CS Puram via Kadapa / Nellore Border, NH-167B (2 Pkg) Mydukur to Badvel Section, NH-67 Kurnool- Mandlem - Atmakur Section, NH-340C (2 Pkg) Chennai-Tirupati (1 Pkg) Puttaparthi-Koduru Section, NH-342	Tamilnadu	Thoppur Ghat section in Dharmapuri - Salem section, NH-44 Tiruvallur to Tamil Nadu / Andhra Pradesh border, NH716 Widening of 11 stretches from Karur – Coimbatore NH 81 Strengthening of 9 stretches from Cuddalore - Virudhachalam, NH 532 Achampathu - Viratipathu, NH-85	Punjab	Ambala Chandigarh with spur to Lalru, NH-205A Beas-Mehta-Batala-Dera Baba Nanak, NH-503D (1 Pkg) Moga - Bagha Purana – Bajakhana, NH-105B Jalandhar Bypass Amritsar-Bathinda (1 Pkg) Ludhiana-Bathinda, NH-754AD (1 Pkg) Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway, NE-05 (1 Pkg)
Karnataka	Belgaum-Hungund-Raichur, NH-748A (6 Pkg)	Haryana	Shamli Ambala, NH-344GM (3 Pkg) Bhiwani – Hansi, NH-148B	Gujarat	Gavadka- Bagasara, NH 351 (1 Pkg) Vav Chokdi- Satlasana - Vrundavan Chokdi, Kheralu NH-58 Narol Junction - Sarkhej junction, NH 47
Uttar Pradesh	Kanpur Ring Road (2 Pkg)	Himachal Pradesh	Hamirpur Bypass Sihuni to Rajol section, NH-154 (1 Pkg) Thanpuri to Parour Section, NH-154 (1 Pkg)	West Bengal	5.2 km Raniganj Bypass, NH 16
		Bihar	Mahanar to Bachhwara, NH-122B Chapra-Manjhi Bypass connecting NH-19 and NH-85	Jharkhand	Pokharia More – Govindpur, NH-419 Giridih town, NH-114A
				Uttarakhand	Rudrapur Bypass

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- Bengaluru Vijayawada Economic Corridor will promote industrial development
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- Easy market access to produce of local businessmen and farmers

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Building a Nation, Not Just Roads

19 ECONOMY

MARKET WATCH 7 OF TOP-10 COS CLIMB

New Delhi: The combined market valuation of seven of the top-10 most valued firms climbed Rs 71,301.34 crore last week, with Bharti Airtel emerging as the lead gainer. **PTI**

WE HAVE A SMALL MARKET BUT HAVE SOME OF THE LARGEST COS: OFFICIAL 'India has the openness to make free trade deals it lacked 10-15 years ago'

BUSINESSES IN Switzerland saw India's trade deal with Australia and the UAE as a sign of openness, which was not visible in a decade ago, Swiss state secretary for economic affairs, HELENE BUDLIGER ARTIEDA, said in an interview with RAVI DUTTA MISHRA. The "ambitious" nature of the investment commitment is a reflection of the confidence in India's growth prospects, she added. *Edited excerpts:*



How crucial is the timing of the deal amid UK & EU talks with India?
We wanted to get the deal done before the elections. Swiss companies see it as an advantage over some of their direct competitors in Europe. This is a process which I inherited... The negotiations had first started 14-15 years ago. When India signed a deal with Australia and UAE, we got the sense that maybe this is the window of opportunity and we need to get it done before (India's) elections.

How will 'investment commitment' work when sovereign funds are kept out?
We have agreed on a starting point. The EFTA investment in 2022 stood at \$10.7 billion. It will run for 15 years. We will have a monitoring mechanism. We gave ourselves a threshold of \$50 billion after 10 years and

then the rest in five years...

It will be monitored. And we also have a rebalance or recalibration clause, should you, in your part of the world or in my part of the world, have a major security crisis breakout or should we have another pandemic or any force majeure that would not allow for Swiss companies or EFTA companies to come to India in such massive numbers, then we could have a conversation and recalibrate the objectives...

If it goes very well, then we can also recalibrate the other way around. We'll do that after 15 years. The conversation will start at subcommittee level. After 15 years, a five year grace period is when these conversa-

tions will happen. Once the grace period is over and if we could not agree, India would have unilaterally the possibility to partially or temporarily reduce market access.

Current EFTA investment in India is around \$10.7 billion. In 15 years, the investment commitment seems like a natural progression. How is there a balance?

No, I think it's not a natural progression. If you look how long it took us to get to \$10.7 billion. It means that we will have to do some massive promotional work and also guide our investors into the Indian market. But this has, of course, to do with how India is eco-

nomically developing in the last few years. You have amazing economic growth. And you have that openness, which you didn't have 10 or 15 years ago to do free trade agreements. So \$100 billion is massively ambitious

Where will this investment actually happen?

Our trade relationship is rather diverse. So it is difficult to say where this investment will eventually happen. There is of course, the partnership model. That's really up to the private sector to decide. Because we've also discussed it should be fixed, you know, sub objectives per sector. And then we said no, because we have such a diverse relationship. And 15 years ago, did you talk about green hydrogen? I mean, I've never even heard the word. So who knows in 15 years what sort of new sectors we will have, what sort of new products or services we're going to see. So we didn't want to go into detailed sectoral structure because we considered 15 years to be quite a long time and things evolve rapidly.

Switzerland is completely private sector driven. And so, Swiss companies, it's within their DNA wherever they go, they start these apprenticeship models within their companies. It's a completely normal thing to train your employees and staff within your company

because of the apprenticeship model.

The deal will be effective when mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) happen and non tariff barriers (NTBs) go down. What is the roadmap for it?

It is not part of the Trade and Economic Participation Agreement (TEPA). But commerce minister Piyush Goyal has told me that he has an interest to look into MRAs. We are certainly interested.

I have asked, if minister Goyal, could look into whether Invest India can open an office in Switzerland and if Invest India can have a designated EFTA desk in India so that we can deal with red tape issues.

Do you see China as a geo-political risk?

Switzerland is the only European country that has had a free trade agreement with China for some time. China is our third largest trading partner. Swiss companies have invested in China when we concluded this free trade agreement. And now hopefully India is catching up.

Switzerland is really a bottom up country. My job is to provide the best framework. Our companies have been globalized for a long time. We have a small home market but we have some of the largest companies in existence.

MNRE to discuss specialised cylinders for hydrogen storage with stakeholders

AGGAM WALIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

THE MINISTRY OF New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) plans to convene a meeting with relevant stakeholders to discuss the development of specialised cylinders for green hydrogen storage. The decision was made after manufacturers of commercial vehicles, including heavy duty and long haul trucks, flagged challenges related to high-pressure storage cylinders in the adoption of green hydrogen as a sustainable fuel in the transport sector.

Commercial vehicle manufacturers identified the higher cost of green hydrogen fuel cells as another challenge in a meeting with MNRE on January 25. The proposed meeting is likely to include manufacturers of specialised cylinders for compressed and liquefied natural gas, some of whom have already commenced research and development on cylinders for hydrogen, which is stored at a much higher pressure.

Gas cylinders are typically categorised into four types, depending upon the materials used. Type 1 and Type 2 are suitable for storage, while Type 3 is preferred for storage and transportation, and Type 4 is recommended for on-board storage. Unlike compressed natural gas (CNG), which is stored at a pressure of around 3,600 psi, the pressure at which hydrogen is stored ranges between 5,000-10,000 psi. The MNRE has indicated a meeting with industry stakeholders for the development of Type 3 and Type 4 cylinders to address challenges related to high-pressure hydrogen cylinders, according to the minutes of the meeting on January 25 obtained by *The Indian Express* through Right to Information (RTI).

A vehicle can be powered by hydrogen in two ways—burning it in an internal combustion engine or using a fuel cell to convert it into electricity to charge on-board batteries. While both Type 3 and Type 4 cylinders are reinforced with carbon fibre, which makes them light and ideal for use in vehicles, Type 4 cylinders are even lighter as they are lined with a polymer as opposed to the aluminium lining in Type 3 cylinders.

Currently, most cylinders manufactured in the country are designed to carry CNG, and because hydrogen is stored at a



Gas cylinders are typically categorised into four types, depending upon the materials used. **Reuters**

much higher pressure, CNG cylinders cannot carry hydrogen without technical modifications. Even then, hydrogen will have to be blended with CNG in specific proportions. For cylinders to carry a high mass of hydrogen, the carbon fibre needs to be stronger than that used in CNG cylinders and involves a slightly more complex manufacturing process. At present, these factors add to the overall cost of producing high-pressure Type 4 hydrogen cylinders, a key barrier to the adoption of hydrogen as a transport fuel as identified by stakeholders.

However, with fiscal incentives and a rise in demand for hydrogen-powered vehicles, the cost of producing hydrogen cylinders may come down in future. Domestic companies involved in the manufacturing of CNG cylinders have also set their eyes on the hydrogen market. Confidence Petroleum India Limited, a leading company in the supply of gas cylinders, announced plans to manufacture and launch Type 4 cylinders for hydrogen storage last month. Others like Time Technoplast Limited, INOX India Limited, and Indoruss Synergy Private Limited are among a growing club of cylinder makers who have allocated capex to develop technologies and produce Type 4 cylinders for green hydrogen. Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), a large central public sector undertaking (CPSU), is working on setting up a Centre of Excellence in Karkhiyaon, Varanasi for hydrogen storage cylinders, cylinder testing facilities, and electrolyzers necessary for hydrogen production, in collaboration with the Ministry of

Heavy Industries. Alongside research on hydrogen storage, BHEL has also been developing hydrogen fuel cell technologies. During the ministry meeting on January 25, representatives from original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) interested in hydrogen-powered large commercial vehicles like Volvo Eicher, Ashok Leyland, and Tata Motors, also

flagged the high cost of hydrogen fuel cells. A representative from Bosch, which started volume production of fuel cell modules in 2023, was also

present in the meeting. Bosch has also developed its own hydrogen combustion engines that can be used to retrofit diesel buses and trucks. Just last month, Reliance Industries, a representative of whom attended the ministry meeting, announced plans to retrofit 5,000 trucks with hydrogen combustion engines in the coming few months.

The meeting was held to discuss pilot projects for the use of green hydrogen in the transport sector, scheme guidelines for which were published on February 14. Like battery electric vehicles (BEVs), hydrogen-powered vehicles have zero tailpipe emissions, making hydrogen a suitable fuel for the clean energy transition, provided it is produced with renewable energy. Unlike EV batteries, however, hydrogen ICE or hydrogen fuel cells are comparatively lighter. This factor makes hydrogen-powered vehicles an attractive alternative to BEVs, especially for heavy duty trucks as they have lesser weight and provide higher payload capacity.

FULL REPORT ON
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FPI inflows pick up in March, investors inject ₹11,800 crore in equities so far

ENSE ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MARCH 10

AFTER KEEPING away from the Indian markets in February, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) are back in the month of March. FPIs are turning steady buyers in India with net buying of equity worth Rs 11,823 crore up to March 8.

FPIs were big sellers in January (Rs 25,744 crore outflows) and very modest buyers in February (inflows of Rs 1,539 crore).

"There are mainly three reasons for this renewed interest in India. The Indian market is showing great resilience and every dip is getting bought. FPIs have been forced to buy the same shares which they sold at higher prices, which is a losing game," said K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services. The benchmark Sensex hit a record high of 74,085.99 and closed the week at 74,119.39 on Friday. Further, US bond yields have been steadily declining. The 10-year yield has declined from above 4.3 per cent to 4.08 per cent now, halting the switch from equity to bonds.

The FPI strategy of selling eq-

uity in emerging markets to buy US bonds has stopped, he said.

The Indian economy is growing at better-than-expected rates and this will have a positive impact on corporate earnings and consequently on the stock market. FY24 GDP growth is likely to be around 7.6 per cent, far ahead of other large economies

These positive developments and the sustained flow of funds into the market—both directly and through institutions—can keep the market resilient. However, high valuations are a matter of concern. Valuations in the mid and small cap segments are excessive and unjustifiable. Correction in this segment is only a matter of time, he said.

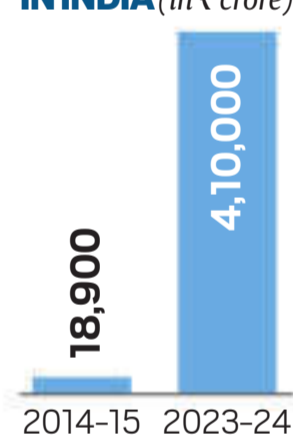
Another factor that has boosted the markets is inflows into equity mutual fund schemes which increased by 23 per cent to Rs 26,865.78 crore on a net basis in February, with thematic funds receiving the highest flows, data released by the Association of Mutual Funds (AMFI) showed.

The contribution from the systematic investment plan (SIP) rose to an all-time high of Rs 19,186.58 crore in February 2024 as against Rs 18,838.33 crore in January.

Mobile phone manufacturing jumps 21 times in 10 yrs: ICEA

Driven by export growth, mobile phones have now become India's 5th largest export as an individual commodity

MOBILE PHONE PRODUCTION IN INDIA (in ₹ crore)



MOBILE PHONE EXPORTS:

2014-15: ₹1,556 cr

2023-24: ₹1,20,000 cr

■ India now produces 97% of its total mobile phone demand locally

■ 30% of the total production in financial year 2024 is meant for export

■ Apple and Samsung, have played a crucial role in boosting mobile phone exports from the country.

■ India manufactured devices are being exported in large volumes to the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Austria, and Italy besides Middle East, North Africa and South American markets.

Source: ICEA/PTI

CBDT alerts assessees of FY24 tax mismatches via email, SMS

ENSE ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

TO FLAG the mismatches in payment of taxes in financial year 2023-24 (assessment year 2024-25) and the financial transactions made by persons/entities, the Income Tax Department has started sending emails and messages through SMSs to assessees.

The tax department on Sunday urged assessees, who have not paid taxes commensurate with financial transactions, to compute their advance tax liability correctly and deposit the due advance tax on or before March 15. The department is undertak-



This is another initiative of the department towards easing compliance for taxpayers, said CBDT. File

ing an e-campaign that aims to inform such persons/entities of "significant financial transactions", through email (marked as Advance Tax e-Campaign-

Significant Transactions for AY 2024-25) and SMS.

"The Income Tax Department has received certain information on specific financial transactions undertaken by persons/entities during Financial Year 2023-24. On the basis of analysis of the taxes paid so far during the current financial year, the Department has identified such persons/entities where payment of taxes for FY 2023-24 (AY 2024-25) is not commensurate with the financial transactions made by the persons/entities concerned, during the said period," a statement issued by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), Ministry of Finance said.

The Income Tax Department said it receives information of specified financial transactions of taxpayers from various sources. "To increase transparency and to promote voluntary tax compliance, this information is reflected in the Annual Information Statement (AIS) module and is available to the persons/entities for viewing. The value of 'Significant Transactions' in the AIS has been used for carrying out this analysis," it said.

This is another initiative of the department towards easing compliance for taxpayers and reinforcing its commitment towards enhancing taxpayer services, it added.

To view the details of significant transactions, the persons/entities can log in to their e-filing account and go to the compliance portal. On this portal, the e-campaign tab can be accessed to view significant transactions. Persons/entities, who are not registered on the e-filing website, have to first register themselves on the e-filing website.

Before this, on March 4, the Income Tax Department had flagged mismatch between tax paid and "high value" financial transactions for financial year 2020-21 (AY 2021-22) and asked assessees to file updated tax returns by March 31.

Centre mulls ₹1 trn scheme for private sector to boost deep tech

PRASANTA SAHU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

THE CENTRE IS considering a comprehensive scheme to provide concessional capital support of Rs 1 trillion to the private sector to encourage adoption of indigenous deep tech and cutting-edge technologies in defence, energy and electronics.

The scheme, to be run for an initial period of five years, may be operated by state-run agencies like National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) and National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), a senior official told *FE*. Consultations are under way among the government departments concerned and scientific departments and institutions, the official added. "The idea is to encourage Indian technology in emerging areas, and cut reliance on imported technology."

Indian research institutions come up with various technologies with their research and development (R&D). Some of these technologies may already be available abroad. Normally, Indian firms use tested foreign technology as they don't explore untested local technology with the same enthusiasm, the official said.

With the concessional window of financing, companies can adopt the Indian technology for product development with less risk, because they could get long-term loans at low or nil rates of interest with a moratorium. **FE**

India not to tailor policy for Tesla: Goyal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

INDIA WILL not tailor its policies to suit US electric vehicle (EV) maker Tesla, and its laws and tariff rules will be formulated to attract all-EV manufacturers from across the world to set up a base in the world's fastest-growing economy, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

Tesla has been seeking an initial tariff concession that would allow it to offset 70 per cent customs duty for cars priced less than \$40,000, and 100 per cent for cars of higher value.

In an interview with *PTI*, Goyal said the government recognises the need for a vibrant EV ecosystem as greater use of battery-run vehicles will

cut carbon emissions as well as the staggering oil import bill.

But for this, it will not tailor policies that suit any one company and would rather frame ones that will encourage all-electric vehicle manufacturers from across the world to set up shop in India, he said.

"We are working on several initiatives where we are having inter-ministerial (consultations) and a dialogue with the stakeholders, with potential investors from across the world from Europe, from the United States, from the Far East, from Japan, from Korea," he said.

Tesla made the concession demand a precondition to build a plant in India. High tariffs on motor vehicles, meant to boost local production, have been a lingering issue for foreign carmakers too.

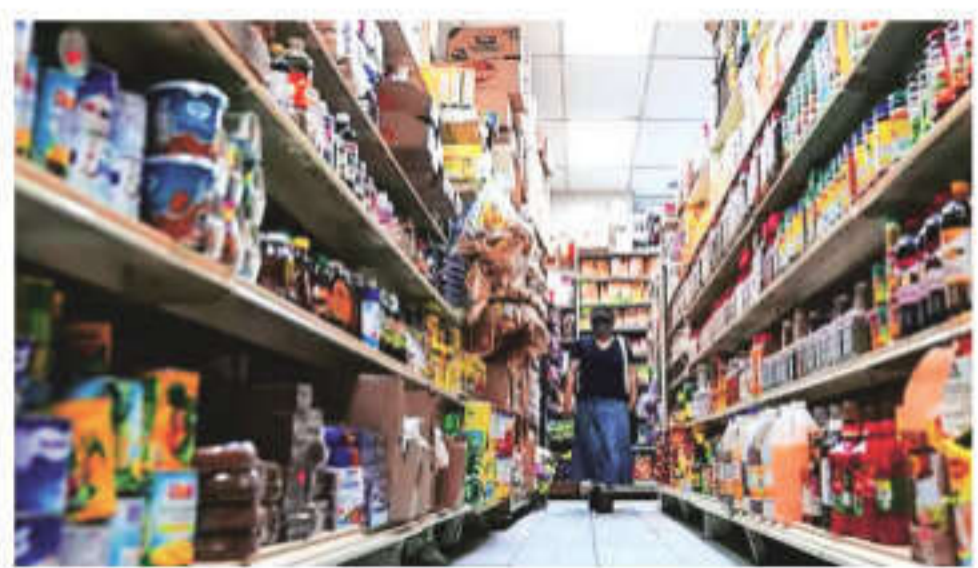
FMCG firms may test pricing power in FY25

VIVEAT SUSAN PINTO
MUMBAI, MARCH 10

FAST-MOVING consumer goods (FMCG) companies may hike prices by 2-3 per cent by the second half of 2024-25, led by volatile commodity prices, notably of food and crude oil, and wage inflation. Small, calibrated price hikes may also boost price-led growth, which has been flat to negative for most firms through FY24.

"As we are in the process of preparing our budgets for FY25, we find that there is likely to be some amount of inflation in the next financial year. Some amount of price increases therefore will come back, to the tune of 2-3 per cent. So, even as the emphasis is on volume growth within FMCG, small price hikes will be there," Mohit Malhotra, chief executive officer at Dabur India, said.

Harsh Agarwal, vice-chairman & managing director at Kolkata-based Emami, said there could be



FMCG market likely to grow by 4.5-6.5% in 2024. **File**

price hikes of 1.5-3 per cent next year in the personal care and healthcare categories. "Price hikes could happen in the second half of FY25 as the FMCG market may stabilise by then from a demand perspective. There could be nominal price hikes after factoring in the input price and demand scenario in different categories," he said.

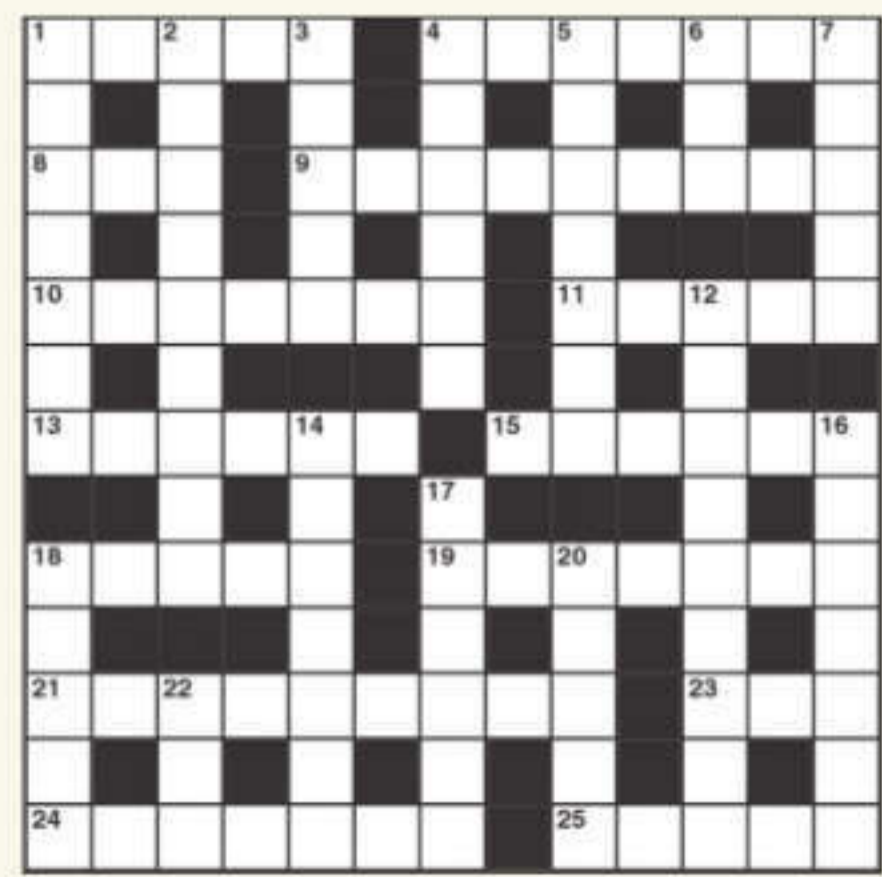
While FY24 saw largely be-

nign commodity costs, Malhotra said some products such as spices, cereals and honey have seen double-digit inflation during the year. Dabur operates in the spices and honey categories with the Badshah and Dabur Honey brands, respectively.

It also operates in hair oils, shampoos, oral care and healthcare, among other segments.

"The skew of inflation is shift-

CROSSWORD 5309



- ACROSS**
- Groups of agents in prison (5)
 - Imagine having to dine and sit together (7)
 - Big spenders always include a tip (3)
 - Burly but showing a very soft heart in a row (9)
 - They may lift or bring down (7)
 - Hesitantly stated a colour and was wrong (5)
 - They usually lead to the quarry (6)
 - Attack a fool and suffer afterwards (6)
 - Expenses legally incurred (5)
 - Immature timber from which palings may be made (7)
 - Using such a pencil is (9)
 - It may help a team to win by a point (3)
 - Strongly affect by leaving one's mark? (7)
 - Only one of them can be right (5)
- DOWN**
- Makes a secret assignment (7)
 - Ridiculous, ridiculous, ridiculous. I quit (9)
 - Cordage used when sails are furled (5)
 - Point up in pressure (6)
 - They may be black or white pelts (7)
 - Sash 50 percent too big (3)
 - Went round or moved sideways (5)
 - Enjoy what people have written in retirement? (4,2,3)
 - A political favour? (7)
 - Tugboats? (7)
 - Naturally they have a shaky reputation as writers (6)
 - Island where the goat goes without corn (5)
 - Sort of steps taken to get vermin (5)
 - The little devil's simply without cunning (3)

Solutions Crossword 5308 Across: 1 Vociferous, 8 Tiffs, 9 Lissome, 10 Archers, 11 Rumba, 12 Stripe, 14 Geneva, 17 Enemy, 19 Trample, 21 Cursing, 22 Early, 23 Resistance
Down: 2 Officer, 3 Issue, 4 Enlist, 5 Observe, 6 Storm, 7 Separately, 8 Transience, 13 Physics, 15 Empiric, 16 Stages, 18 Error, 20 Arena

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

A great does not make a any more than a dictionary is a piece of literature. - John Henry Newman (6,.,4)

DEEOR **AAEZDM**

OSINY **AADEMM**

SOLUTION: ERFIDE, NOISY, AMAZED, MADAME
Answer: A great memory does not make a mind.

SUDOKU 5498

Difficulty Level 2s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

	4				7			
		3	4					
5	3			8	9			
1	9	6	8	2	7			
		8	9	3	1			
6	2	1	5	9	4			
9	4			5	2			
			5	6				
	6				9			

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5497

9	5	8	4	1	3	7	6	2
1	6	3	8	7	2	4	9	5
7	4	2	9	6	5	3	8	1
6	3	9	1	8	4	5	2	7
8	2	4	5	9	7	1	3	6
5	1	7	3	2	6	8	4	9
4	9	6	7	5	8	2	1	3
2	8	5	6	3	1	9	7	4
3	7	1	2	4	9	6	5	8

Classifieds

PERSONAL

- I, Md Yusuf, S/o MD Younus R/o A-486, Gali No.7, Gadda Colony, Jaitpur Extn., Part-2, Badarpur, New Delhi-110044, have changed my name Mohd Yusuf permanently all future purposes.** 0040719054-1
- I, Kamni W/o Sh. Harbhajan Ram, R/o-Flat NO.209, Pocket-1 & 2, DDA Flats, Sector-3, Dwarka, Delhi-110075, Delhi, have changed my name from Kamni to Kamni Devi for all future purposes.** 0040719054-2
- I, Srijna W/o Rohit Kumar Jha R/o A5-2503, Cleo County, Sector-121, Noida(U.P) have changed my name to Srijna Jha for all purposes.** 0040718986-1
- I, Sanjay S/o Amrit Lal, R/o House No 4/532, Chah Hathi Khana, Dariahi Kalan, Chandni Chowk, Delhi-110006, have changed my son's name from Nikhli to Nikhli Verma for all, future purposes.** 0040719054-3
- I, Rohan S/o Ashok Kumar Village-Ghoshgarh, PO-Jamalpur, District- Gurugram (Haryana), declare that in my service record my mother's name wrongly written as SAROJ instead of SAROJ DEVI. The actual name of my mother is SAROJ DEVI, which may be amended accordingly.** 0040719054-4
- I, Ram Avtar S/o Laxmi Narayan R/o A-524, Shastri Nagar, Delhi-110052 have changed my name to Ram Avtar Gupta** 0070893341-1
- I, NEM SHRI JAIN W/O SUNIL JAIN R/O 108, ANAND NAGAR, INDERLOK, SARAI ROHILLA, DELHI-110035 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO NEMSHRI JAIN FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSES.** 0070893311-1
- I, Md. Aman S/O, S.M. Makhadm Ali R/o B 756-757 J.J.colony Hastal Road Uttam Nagar Delhi -110059 have changed my name to Mohammad Aman for all purposes.** 0040718983-3

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PUBLIC NOTICE

The general public is hereby informed that my client, Smt. Santosh W/O Late Shri Satpal R/O D-39, Vijay Vihar, Phase-2, Sector-4, Rohini, Delhi-110085 have severed/discontinued all their relations/connections with her Son, Sonu and Daughter Suchita Priya due to his bad habituated behaviour. My clients have disowned/dishherited and debarred from all her movable and immovable properties/Assets etc. whichever/wherever situated. Anyone/whoever dealing with Sonu and Suchita alias Priya will do so at his/her own risk and responsibility and my clients will not be held responsible/liable for any actions/deeds. SK GUPTA (Advocate) En. No. D-104808

GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA Public Works Division Nanded

E-TENDER NOTICE NO. (73) FOR 2023-2024

E-tenders for 10 Works in B-1 form are invited by the Executive Engineer P.W.Division Nanded (Phone No.02462-253711) from the registered contractors in appropriate class of Public Works department of Govt. of Maharashtra for the improvement in Dist. Nanded.

- The tender costs of the above works are more than Rs.1.00 crores.
- All information related to this tender is made available on the following website. Also, all the changes will be made available on this website. www.mahapwd.com <https://mahatenders.gov.in>

Sd/-
Executive Engineer
Public Works Division Nanded
dgjpr/2023-24/9580

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North Eastern Railway

Open Tender Notice No. ETender-GSU-TRD-L14-23-24 Date 08.03.2024
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/GS, North Eastern Railway, Varanasi for and on behalf of President of India, invites sealed "OPEN" E-Tender for the following work:
S.N. : 01. Name of work : 25 KV Electrical work in connection to removal of infringement due to construction of P.P. shelter at GCT Station under Amrit Bharat Yojna in BSB division of N.E. Railway. Tender Reference No. : ETender-GSU-TRD-L14-23-24, Approx. Cost (in Rs.) : ₹ 1,17,55,335.40, Earnest money (in Rs.) : ₹ 2,08,800/-, Cost of tender documents (in Rs.) : Nil, E-Tender Closing Date and Time : 01.04.2024 up to 14:45 Hrs., Completion Period: 6 Months.
* E-Tender Online will be submitted up to 14:45 Hrs. on date 01.04.2024. * For full details and submission of bid kindly visit the official website of Indian Railway i.e. www.ireps.gov.in.
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/GS CPRO/Elect-299 North Eastern Railway, Varanasi
Do not travel with inflammable article in train

GOVT. OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD (ROADS), ASSAM, CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-3.

No. CE/STBR/11/32/2023-24/9

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Chief Engineer, PWD (Roads), Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3, invites Bid on behalf of the Governor of Assam from eligible contractors registered with Assam PWD (Roads) or registered in Central Govt./any State Government/ Semi Govt. Organization / Central or State Public Sector Undertakings for the work "Construction of ROB at LC Gate No. ST-5 at Km-8/2-3 on R.K. Choudhury M.G. Road under Construction of ROB on 50:50 Cost Sharing Basis" for a total amount of Rs. 6693.45 Lakh (Approx.).

Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in>. Amendment/Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWD, Assam website <http://assamtenders.gov.in>.

Sd./-
Chief Engineer, WD (Roads)
Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3.

JANASANYOG/CF/6433/23/11-Mar-24

EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender Notice No. SG-664-23-SIG-2023-24
E-Tender is invited on behalf of the President of India for the under mentioned work.
1. Name of the work: Reliability improvement of signalling gears in 19 mid section interlocked gate in DHN div.
2. Approx. Cost of the work: Rs. 79,82,060.89 (Approx) 3. Earnest Money: Rs. 1,59,700.00 4. Date & time for closing of tender: 27.03.2024 at 12:30 Hrs.
5. Any E-Tenders which is sent by Post / Courier / FAX or self, Manual proposals although the letter is on firms letter pad or received in time will not be accepted. The above E-Tenders, E-Tendering document alongwith full information is available on website i.e. <http://www.ireps.gov.in>
Note:- Tenderers are requested to visit the website <http://www.ireps.gov.in> atleast 10 days before last date of closing for latest corrigendum / corrections etc. in response to this E-Tender.
For Sr. D. S.T. E. East Central Railway, Dhanbad. PR/02498/DHN/S&T/723-24/36

PUBLIC NOTICE

GOVERNMENT OF HIMACHAL PRADESH DEPARTMENT OF STATE TAXES AND EXCISE

NOTICE FOR ALLOTMENT OF RETAIL LIQUOR LICENSES IN FORM L-2, L-14, L-14A & L-20B THROUGH AUCTION-CUM-TENDER PROCESS FOR THE YEAR 2024-25 IN THE STATE OF HIMACHAL PRADESH.

In continuation to the Public Notice No. 7-232/2024-EXN-5428-5455 dated 02-03-2024 published on 03-03-2024, even No. 5493-5520 dated 03-03-2024 published on 04-03-2024 and 5933-961 dated 06-03-2024 published on 07-03-2024, it further notified for the information of general public that sealed tender applications for allotment of retail Units in Form L-2, L-14, L-14A and L-20B for the unsold retail sale licensed outlets of Country Liquor (L-14/L-14A), retail sale licensed outlets of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (L-2) and retail sale of Country Fermented Liquor (L-20B) in following Districts of State of Himachal Pradesh is fixed as under :-

- The date of receiving applications and opening of tender alongwith venue is also given in the schedule below :-

Name of District	Venue	Date and Time for submission of tender applications (10:00 AM to 5:00 PM)	Date of bidding-cum-opening of tender
Kangra	Lions Club, Dharamshala, District Kangra	11-03-2024	12-03-2024 at 11:00 AM onwards

- Note: The tender application forms can be received and tenders can also be filed on the day of opening of tenders as per the time allowed by the Chairman of the Allotment Committee of the District.
- The Auction-cum-Tender process will be subject to approval by the Commissioner of State Taxes & Excise, Himachal Pradesh who reserves the right to reject the same without assigning any reason.
 - Other terms and conditions shall remain same as mentioned in the Public Notice dated 02-03-2024.
 - The Announcements for the allotment of Retail Excise Vends by Auction-cum-Tender for the financial year 2024-25 is also available on the official website of the department i.e. www.hptax.gov.in.

Sd/-
Dr. Yunus (IAS)
Commissioner of State Taxes & Excise
Himachal Pradesh
1407/HP

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
The first priority is to look ahead to the end of the week. You see, Venus is emerging from its relative seclusion into the full glare of public attention, encouraged by its relationship with optimistic, jovial Jupiter. When it does, your secrets will at last be made public.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
Mercury and the Sun are set firmly on a collision course, each with its own priorities, a sure sign that misunderstandings will be rife. Amusingly enough, you may be the unwitting source of misconceptions, mistakes and any rumours that are doing the rounds.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
No one can deny that you have kept your emotions in check, but to be so restrained may not be in your best interests. On the other hand, with Mercury, your personal ruler, still in such an awkward mood, there seems to be little you can realistically do to explain yourself.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
There is no need to dread Monday. The fact that the Moon begins the week in a helpful position, gets you off to a flying start. A sudden obstacle should not put you off, as long as you are prepared. Self-control and self-discipline, in other words, are the keys to success.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
Not all is as it should be. Or is it? The fact is that, for as long as the Moon holds its current position, the facts are likely to be concealed by a veil of watery emotion and raw sensitivity. Actually, it's good to temper your self-centred goals with a dose of selfless compassion.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
There is everything to be gained from indulging in sociable activities, especially if you are taking an organisational role. In fact, if you don't look after the practical details, other people may be left completely and utterly helpless. You see, someone is relying on you.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
A magnificent relationship between the Sun and several other planets is excellent for all of you in the property market, just as long as you keep your cool. Domestic spending of all shades and hues is recommended.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
I know there have been times when you've had a rough ride. If there's one thing you are entitled to now, it's a fair hearing and, with the Sun so intriguingly aligned with Uranus, that's just what you can hope for. In fact, I'd say that the results could confound your expectations.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
I am pleased to report that after months of decidedly wobbly financial indications your stars are now moving in a definitively prosperous direction. If last week's lunar patterns didn't demonstrate this much, this week's fascinating Solar relationships will.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
Sometimes you can rely on partners to stand by you. Sometimes you can't. Both at home and at work rivals are changing tack and the opposition is beginning to crumble. However, today you will have to use all your wiles if you are to get everything that you want out of close colleagues.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
Battle-lines have been drawn, though not very clearly. In fact, the goal posts seem to be moving and I doubt very much whether either you or anyone else will be able to bring differences of opinion to a successful conclusion. You know, it may be okay to disagree.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
Social and creative possibilities are bright indeed, although I think you will be drawn to people who can offer you a sense of security. Older people may foot the bill, and friends from the past will be prepared to step in and help out. In the end you'll have an increasing sense that you are genuinely needed.

GOVERNMENT OF MAHARASHTRA
Public Works Division, Dharashiv
E-Tender Notice No. 31/2023-24
Online Tenders invited by the Executive Engineer, Public Works Division, Dharashiv (Phone No. 02472-222882/83) B-1 from eligible contractors.
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dgjpr/2023-24/9577

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Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3.
Janasanyog/CF/6439/23/11-Mar-24

Those who want to join my personal paid group, then they can join our group by contribution. You will get all those newspapers in the morning at the appointed time 4:00 A.M. which you have been getting till now.

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Magazines (International)

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Money & Business

Forbes, Harvard Business Review, Business India, ET Wealth, Moneyweek, Fortune, Business Today, Outlook Money, Smart Investment, Dalal Street Investment Journal

Science, History & Environment

National Geographic, New Scientist, Scientific American, Popular Science, Net Geo History, Science, Philosophy Now, BBC Earth, BBC Wildlife, BBC Science Focus, BBC History, Reader's Digest, Pratiyogita Darpan

Tech

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National Geographic Traveler, Outlook Traveller

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The Economist

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

Why safari parks may be a double-edged sword for big cats

JAY MAZOOMDAAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

ON MARCH 6, the Supreme Court said it was "inclined to approve the establishment of the Tiger Safari at Pakhrau" in the buffer area of Corbett tiger reserve. However, safari parks are meant only for "injured, conflicted, or orphaned" local tigers, and not those sourced from zoos, the court said, and constituted a committee to frame guidelines for such facilities within three months.

What does a 'tiger safari' really mean?

Tiger safari is not defined under The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which says "no construction of commercial tourist lodges, hotels, zoos and safari parks shall be undertaken inside a sanctuary except with the prior approval of the National Board" [for Wild Life] constituted under the Act.

The concept of a tiger safari in the wild was first envisaged in the Guidelines for Tourism issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in 2012, which provided for such establishments in

the buffer areas of tiger reserves "which experience immense tourist influx in the core/critical tiger habitat for viewing tigers".

Four years later, the NTCA issued guidelines to establish "Tiger Safaris" in the buffer and fringe areas of tiger reserves for injured, conflicted, or orphaned tigers, while underlining that no tiger shall be obtained from a zoo.

In 2019, however, the NTCA allowed animals to be brought from zoos for tiger safari parks, and gave the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) the power to select such animals.

Housing zoo tigers or other captive animals in a tiger habitat is obviously a bad idea, which would put wild tigers and other wildlife at risk of disease. Fittingly, the top court held that the NTCA's understanding that tiger safaris are merely zoos built inside tiger reserves, "would be totally contrary to the purpose of the Tiger Conservation".

But why build a tiger safari in a forest?

The 2012 NTCA guidelines justified safari parks as a means to lessen the tourism load inside tiger reserves that causes stress on wildlife. Second, many are against packing off animals that are unfit for the wild — they may be injured, orphaned, or given to conflict — to faraway zoos. Safari parks, they argue, help hold such animals captive in their natural surroundings.

Third, some stakeholders argue that buffer areas were designated to allow activities that support the livelihood and development needs of local communities — and safari parks generate money and, in turn, local goodwill for the tiger.

And what is the counter-argument?

Records show that efforts to distribute demand seldom work in tiger reserves. Instead of bringing down the number of vehicles crowding around the tiger, opening new safari routes has ended up inviting more tourists.

Also, the very idea of displaying "rescued" tigers in safari parks is a departure from the practice of keeping such distressed animals in non-display facilities. Even the 2016 guidelines were hesitant to make this policy shift, and made it mandatory for NTCA to assess every "recovered/ treated animal" before putting them on display in safari parks.

Third, housing local "rescued" wildlife in their natural environment is an idea driven



Lion safari in Nahargarh Biological Park in Rajasthan's Nahargarh sanctuary. Jaipur Zoo/Rajasthan Forest Dept

by concerns for animal welfare. But conservationists say a captive animal will be captive anywhere. They argue that building safari parks for "rescued" tigers inside tiger reserves prioritises the welfare of individual tigers over the interest of the species, since such establishments are bound to cause disturbance in wild habitats.

What is the ground reality in Corbett and elsewhere?

The site selected for the Pakhrau Safari Park is on the southwestern fringe of Corbett Tiger Reserve, bordering farmlands in Uttar Pradesh. Uttarakhand forest department officers argue that the dispersal of tigers and other wildlife to the west towards Rajaji tiger reserve happens mostly to the north of the proposed safari park, which can be accessed by an existing forest road, and will not require the cutting of trees.

Some local stakeholders say that the Rannagar area on the eastern side of the reserve has hogged all the benefits of Corbett's tiger tourism so far — and the Pakhrau Safari Park carries the promise of livelihood and development on the other side.

However, a similar experiment has led to wasteful expenses in Rajasthan's Ranthambhore. In 2015-16, a safari park for rescued tigers was envisaged there with the intention of lessening the tourism load and aiding local livelihoods. The project has so far seen multiple attempts at constructing peripheral walls, which have, however, collapsed repeatedly, necessitating fresh work orders every time.

Before the SC drew the line on zoo animals this week, a number of safari parks inside protected forests stocked a range of zoo collec-

tions. For example, the Nahargarh Biological Park, a part of Nahargarh sanctuary on the Jaipur-Delhi highway, which was inaugurated in 2016, has Asiatic lions, Royal Bengal tigers, panthers, hyenas, wolves, deer, crocodiles, sloth bears, Himalayan black bears, etc.

However, introducing animals in permanent facilities built in the wild invariably creates stress for territorial species — and the resident leopards in Nahargarh often reacted aggressively to the captive ones housed in the safari park.

So what is the road ahead for safari parks in tiger reserves?

The guidelines for tiger safari parks are awaited from the SC-appointed expert committee. However, a one-size-fits-all formula is unlikely to be helpful, senior state forest officials cautioned. The more prudent approach would be to lay down guiding principles for local authorities to find site-specific solutions, they said.

It is also important to avoid the temptation of making tiger safari parks a routine feature of tiger reserves, experts said. The 2016 guidelines had said that a tiger safari can be proposed only by tiger reserves that have already utilised 100% of their tourist carrying capacity.

EXPLAINED TECH

WHAT IS PI, THE 'KIND' CHATBOT THAT RECENTLY GOT AN UPGRADE

BIJIN JOSE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

LAST WEEK, Inflection AI launched its latest Large Language Model (LLM), Inflection 2.5, an upgrade on its 'friendly' chatbot personal assistant Pi.

Based in Palo Alto, California, Inflection AI was founded by Mustafa Suleyman, Reid Hoffman, and Karen Simonyan in 2022. Suleyman was the co-founder and former head of applied AI at DeepMind, while Hoffman is the co-founder of LinkedIn.

Pi, designed to be "empathetic, helpful, and safe", was first launched in May 2023, and an update, Inflection 2, came out in November 2023. At that time, the company claimed it was the best LLM in the world.

What is Inflection 2.5?

According to the makers, Inflection-2.5 is an "upgraded in-house model that is competitive with all the world's leading LLMs like GPT-4 and Gemini." The company claims that the new LLM comes with its signature personality and uniquely empathetic fine-tuning. The company claims that its latest model achieved GPT-4's performance with only 40 per cent of the OpenAI model's computation power for training.

With the upgrade, Pi has now been endowed with world-class real-time web search capabilities to ensure that users get access to high-quality and up-to-date information in real-time.

How is Pi different from other chatbots?

Pi was launched at a time when the world was marvelling at OpenAI's sensational ChatGPT. While ChatGPT offers human-like and functional responses, Pi has more personality. If ChatGPT and Gemini are like personal assistants that are useful at work, Pi is more like a companion



Pi, designed to be 'empathetic, helpful, and safe', was first launched in May 2023. Inflection AI

to humans and is free to use. It comes with a choice of six distinct voices.

The company has described Pi (which stands for personal intelligence) as a new type of computer program specifically designed to be "kind and helpful".

On the technical side, for training purposes, the chatbot has been shown billions of lines of text on the open web. This, according to the company, allows Pi to have conversations with users and answer a wide variety of questions.

Upon its launch, Pi was powered by Inflection's proprietary LLM Inflection-1, which was trained on thousands of NVIDIA H100 GPUs on a very large data set. Based on the evaluations, Inflection-1 was ranked the best model in its compute class, outdoing the likes of GPT-3.5, LLaMA, and PaLM-540B on a wide range of benchmarks.

What is new in Inflection-2.5?

With Inflection-2.5, the company has enhanced the emotional quotient of the Pi chatbot. The company claims that with the new LLM, users can talk to Pi about a wider range of topics, such as discussing current events, getting local restaurant recommendations, studying for an exam, drafting business plans, coding, and even hold fun discussions on hobbies.

In essence, Inflection-2.5 retains the Pi chatbot's unique persona along with maintaining extraordinary safety standards.



HARISH DAMODARAN

FROM A distance, it looks like any CNG (compressed natural gas) outlet. But the one on the Deesa-Tharad highway in Gujarat's Banaskantha district, catering to 90-100 vehicles daily, is India's first and only gas-filling station based on dung from cattle and buffaloes. The 'BioCNG' outlet in Dama village of Deesa taluka, belonging to the Banaskantha District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union, sells 550-600 kg of gas per day generated from 40 tonnes of dung at an adjoining four-acre plant.

Dung facts

An average adult bovine animal discharges 15-20 kg of fresh dung daily, while calves give out 5-10 kg. Fresh dung contains 80-85% water; one kg weighs hardly 200 grams on drying.

A biogas plant requires fresh dung, which contains methane along with water. The methane is produced by bovines inside their rumen (first of four stomach compartments), where the plant material they eat gets fermented or broken down by microorganisms before further digestion. Carbohydrate fermentation leads to production of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and hydrogen. These are used by archaea (bacteria-like microbes in the rumen) to produce methane, which the animal expels either as gas or in the dung.

The dung left to dry in the open releases both water and methane. To realise its fuel value, the dung has to, therefore, be collected and delivered in fresh form at the biogas plant. "We purchase about 40,000 kg daily from 2,700-2,800 animals of 140-150 farmers. The farmers are from five villages within 10 km of our plant," said Priyank Mehta, Senior Executive (BioCNG) at the Banaskantha Union.

The union — India's largest dairy concern, which procured an average 72.03 lakh kg per day (LKPD) of milk in 2022-23, including 5.74 LKPD from outside Gujarat — is paying farmers Rs 1/kg and bearing the cost of transporting the dung by five tractor-trolleys doing two trips a day.

Gujarat's dairy cooperatives are showing the way in supplementing their farmers' income from milk by procuring dung and converting it into Bio CNG and fertiliser.



The BioCNG outlet of Banaskantha District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union at Dama village in Gujarat. Harish Damodaran

Fuel plus fertiliser

The raw dung unloaded at the BioCNG plant is mixed with an equal quantity of water. The resultant slurry is then pumped into an anaerobic digester.

Anaerobic digestion is a process by which the complex organic matter in dung is broken down in the absence of oxygen to produce biogas. The digestion, taking place in a 3,000 cubic-meter sealed vessel reactor, involves four successive stages: hydrolysis (break-down of organic matter into simple molecules), acidogenesis (their conversion into volatile fatty acids), acetogenesis (production of acetic acid, CO₂ and hydrogen) and methanogenesis (biogas generation).

"The slurry, formed by mixing the dung with water for 2-3 hours, ensures proper hydrolysis in the digester over 35 days. From 40 tonnes of dung, we get 2,000 cubic meters of raw biogas containing 55-60% methane, 35-45% CO₂, and 1-2% hydrogen sulphide (H₂S) and moisture," explained Mehta.

The raw gas is purified for removing CO₂ (through vacuum pressure adsorption or VPSA process), H₂S (using activated carbon filter) and moisture (with air dryer separator). The end-product, purified (to 96-97% methane, 2-3% CO₂ and below 0.1% H₂S and moisture) and compressed, is stored in cascades. This compressed biogas (CBG), conveyed through pipelines to the dispensers at

the fuel station, is what's being sold as BioCNG at Rs 72/kg.

But it isn't just fuel.

The slurry, from mixing 40,000 litres of water with 40,000 kg of dung, is a source of bio-fertiliser. This residue of 75,000-78,000 kg, coming out after anaerobic digestion and biogas production, undergoes dewatering in a solid-liquid separator. The separated solid (6,000-8,000 kg) is decomposed in aerobic condition (presence of oxygen) for sale as PROM (phosphate-rich organic manure, incorporating rock phosphate and phosphate solubilising bacteria) or compost (after adding neem and castor cake, sugarcane press mud and microbial consortia). Out of the liquid part, 30,000-35,000 litres is re-used for mixing in the digester and the balance sold as liquid fermented organic manure.

The Banaskantha Union is currently marketing 8,000-10,000 kg of bio-fertiliser daily, with PROM (also called BioDAP, as a substitute for di-ammonium phosphate) fetching Rs 15-16/kg and compost Rs 8-10/kg. At an average realisation of Rs 12/kg, the Union's revenues from bio-fertiliser sales are actually higher than from the 550-600 kg of BioCNG at Rs 72/kg.

The 40 tonnes-per-day dung-based BioCNG plant, functional since August 2020, cost Rs 8 crore. The Banaskantha Union plans to commission four more, with 100 tonnes ca-

capacity each, by 2025. The Rs 230 crore investment in the four plants is to come from Suzuki Motor Corporation (India's leading car maker), with the Banaskantha Union providing the land and the National Dairy Development Board handling project execution.

"The BioCNG model is replicable and scalable, because all our district member unions can procure the required dung from their farmers, just as they do with milk," Jayen Mehta, managing director of the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation, pointed out. Banaskantha district alone had 15.02 lakh buffaloes and 13.90 cattle, as per the 2019 Livestock Census. Simply put, there's no dearth of substrate to feed the plants.

An alternative model

At Mujkuva village in Anand district's Anklav taluka, Jagrutiben Padhiyar has 9 cows, 4 buffaloes and 7 heifers/calves, with 5 of the first and 2 of the second now giving milk. She grosses roughly Rs 3,500 daily by selling 80-odd litres to the village society affiliated to the Kaira District Co-operative Milk Producers' Union.

But Jagrutiben has an additional revenue source, courtesy of a 2 cubic-meter Flexi Biogas plant outside her home. The sealed digester tank in the plant consumes 50 kg of dung and 50 litres of water daily. The biogas produced is delivered through a pipeline to her kitchen stove/burner, with a booster pump helping to maintain pressure.

"I stopped using LPG cylinders five years ago and don't feel the need for Ujjwala (the Centre's subsidised cooking gas connection scheme)," claimed Jagrutiben. Besides not spending on LPG cylinders, she makes money by selling 100 kg per day of slurry from the biogas plant at Rs 1/kg. The slurry is procured by a women's bio-fertiliser cooperative in the village, Mujkuva Sakhi Khad Sahakari Mandli.

The Kaira Union has installed 750 Flexi Biogas plants in its milk shed area — 150 in Mujkuva alone — and is targeting a total of 10,000. A Flexi Biogas plant, manufactured by the Hyderabad-based SP Eco Fuel Enterprises, costs around Rs 30,000, inclusive of the pipeline, booster and burner. With a Rs 25,000 government subsidy, the payback time for the farmer is further reduced.

Whether it is the Banaskantha BioCNG plant or the Kaira Union's less capital-intensive decentralised model, the good news is that the scope for additional income to dairy farmers from sale of dung is expanding.

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India's indigenous fifth-gen fighter jet AMCA: features, why it is important

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 10

THE CABINET Committee on Security (CCS) last week cleared a Rs 15,000 crore project to design and develop the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), India's fifth-generation fighter multirole fighter jet.

The Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) under the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will be the nodal agency for executing the programme and designing the aircraft. It will be manufactured by state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).

The aircraft will put India in a select group of nations that have their own fifth-generation fighter aircraft.

Features of AMCA

STEALTH: The 25-tonne twin-engine aircraft, bigger than other fighters in the Indian Air Force inventory, will have advanced stealth features to avoid detection by enemy radar. Dr Krishna Rajendra Neeli, project director of AMCA at ADA, said the aircraft would be on par or even superior to other fifth-generation stealth fighter aircraft in use globally.

FUEL & WEAPONS: The aircraft will have a large, concealed internal fuel tank of 6.5-tonne capacity, and an internal weapons bay for a range of weapons, including indigenous weapons, to be buried in its belly.

ENGINE: The AMCA Mk1 variant will have the US-built GE414 engine of the 90 kilonewton (kN) class, while the more advanced AMCA Mk2 will fly on the more powerful 110kN engine, which will be developed by DRDO's Gas Turbine Research

Establishment (GTRE) in collaboration with a foreign defence major.

Why AMCA is special

Discussions for developing the AMCA started in 2007. The initial plan was to jointly develop the aircraft with Russia under a Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) programme. However, India withdrew from the FGFA project in 2018.

The indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas is a 4.5-generation single-engine multirole aircraft. The AMCA will be India's indigenous fifth-generation fighter aircraft.

What will set this fifth-generation aircraft apart is primarily its stealth features. The aircraft will have a low electro-magnetic signature, which will make it difficult for enemy radar to detect it. At the same

time, it will have powerful sensors and new weapons, so it is able to register the signature of enemy aircraft and take them out.

"A fourth-generation aircraft is typically not designed or configured to have these stealth features, even though some features may be added later. But even that will not make it a fully fifth-generation aircraft," former AMCA project director at ADA Dr A K Ghosh said.

Stealth features such as an internal weapons bay and a bigger internal fuel tank are part of fifth-generation aircraft like AMCA. External fuel tanks and externally-attached weapons leave a huge signature and are easy to detect for radar. The special material that will be used on the aircraft surface will divert the radar signature instead of reflecting it back.

Another important aspect would be to

ensure a higher utilisation time and smaller serviceability or maintenance periods for the aircraft. This will be aided by the inclusion of a comprehensive Integrated Vehicle Health Management (IVHM) system to keep track of multiple structural components, and to assess the condition of the aircraft in real time.

Development timeline

The ADA hopes to have the first flight of the aircraft in 4.5 to 5 years. The full development of the aircraft is expected to take around 10 years from now. Five prototypes will be built before HAL begins manufacturing the aircraft. Private industry is also expected to be involved in the manufacturing of the aircraft.

Other fifth-generation fighters

Only a few countries have built a fifth-

generation stealth fighter aircraft, such as the F-22 Raptor and F-35A Lightning II of the US, the Chinese J-20 Mighty Dragon, and the Russian Sukhoi Su-57.

IAF's dwindling numbers

The IAF currently has around 30 fighter squadrons against the sanctioned strength of 42. This number is expected to go down further as squadrons of MiG-21s, MiG-29s, Jaguars, and Mirage 2000s are scheduled to be phased out by the middle of the next decade.

The IAF has indicated that it requires seven squadrons of the AMCA to begin with. Considering the IAF's requirements, the planned inductions of additional squadrons of LCAs and AMCA will not add up to the sanctioned squadron strength in a decade.

LONGER VERSION

indianexpress.com/explained

22 IDEA EXCHANGE NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

The lives of people in Delhi have changed in the last 10 years and people feel it. That is why despite the fact that we are in constant tussle with the Central government... people of Delhi staunchly stand behind Arvind Kejriwal



WHY ATISHI

The sole woman member of Delhi government's cabinet of ministers, Atishi not only has over a dozen portfolios, but also presented her first budget on the heels of AAP's 10 years in Delhi. Considered 'No 2' in the government and a founding member of AAP which is marching into the Lok Sabha elections alongside the Congress as



Today, both ED and CBI, and other agencies are being used to persecute the Opposition... The crisis that the country is facing today is that all the democratic institutions are being obliterated one by one

Mallica Joshi: You just presented your first budget and it has the Rs 1,000 guarantee for women above the age of 18. How do you see this subsidy in terms of the financial burden?

While the AAP government has been questioned about free electricity, water, free bus rides for women, the entire healthcare system running without any cost to the patients, including all surgeries and medicines, the fact of the matter is that despite giving all of these so-called freebies, AAP is the only government across the country which has a fiscal surplus. It is the only government that has seen a 2.5x increase in its budget size in the last 10 years. It is the only government that does not take loans to cover its expenditure. If we can provide these facilities to the citizens while running a fiscally responsible government, why not? Almost 50 per cent of the population of Delhi is saving thousands of rupees every month because of a zero electricity and water bill. People of Delhi have money in their pockets and spending power.

All our policies have been oriented towards how a household is run, and trying to resolve the day-to-day issues. In an average household, it is the woman who has to run the expenses. If you were to look in terms of access to education, if a family had some money, they would send their son to a private school and their daughter to a government school. When you improve government schools and improve the quality of education, girls benefit. Women, on a day-to-day basis, do not access healthcare because of its cost in the private sector. And for women, small health issues become major health problems by the time they get to middle age. Eighty per cent patients who went to Mohalla Clinics were actually women. So you already have a pro-women policy framework. The reality of our society still is that every woman, to make even the smallest expenditure, has to ask some man or the other in her life. And so what this 1,000 rupees a month really looks to do is to put money in her pocket that is hers. So whether that's a college-going girl who might want extra books, or whether it's just a homemaker who wants to go out and watch a movie without having to ask anyone. It's a very different kind of empowerment. The money that is put into women's pockets is going to circulate in the economy.

Jatin Anand: What impact of the subsidies do you see on the larger economy of Delhi over the years?

The revenue has not gone down because the budget size has increased. That we virtually get no assistance from the Centre basically means that our revenues have gone up, right? Can we do better on our revenue collection? Of course, and one of the advantages of GST is that it is looking to connect the entire tax network. So you can have data analytics-based detection of tax evasion and that is something that we have been working towards. We have been funding all of our policies, capital infrastructure, and revenue expenses from the revenue collected. So our revenue base has increased and Delhi's trend has shown that revenues will continue to increase. If you were to look at the budget just before ours, that is 2014-15, the size was approximately 30,500 crore. Today the budget size, despite GST compensation coming to an end, is 76,000 crore. I don't think there is any state that would have seen this kind of growth in its budget size without taking any loans. We are probably one of the most fiscally responsible governments across the country, however we may be labelled.

Mallica Joshi: Power subsidy is a major plank for you. So why this decision to make it voluntary?

There has been a lot of discussion after the pink ticket, where a lot of women said that we don't want to travel for free and we can afford to pay for our bus ride. So that is how this conversation started. Those who do not want to access the subsidy, should be able to say no.

Jatin Anand: Why hasn't this subsidy been extended to the metro, where the fares have constantly increased? Is it an issue of administrative implementation since you're a 50-50 partner with the Centre.

Most of our subsidies are targeted towards the lower segments; not by saying that you have to have a BPL card. When you put those benchmarks, then people have to stand in long lines in front of SDM offices, show their IDs, and show that they are actually poor. But if you were to see the design of our subsidies, almost all of them are designed for the lower economic strata. Two hundred units of electricity will only be used by those who do not have any large appliances. Our subsidies are targeted to support those who need it the most without making them lose their dignity.

'Is it not election rigging if you are finishing off the Opposition by using the ED?'

Delhi Finance Minister Atishi, who recently presented her maiden budget, on state subsidies including an honorarium of Rs 1,000 for women above the age of 18, election rigging and how central agencies are being used to obliterate the Opposition. The conversation was moderated by *The Indian Express* City Editor Mallica Joshi and Assistant Editor Jatin Anand



Delhi Finance Minister Atishi (extreme right) was in conversation with *The Indian Express* City Editor Mallica Joshi and Assistant Editor Jatin Anand. *Abhinav Saha*

Mallica Joshi: With several attempts by various officers to stop these schemes, how do you intend to make your voters understand that you are not being able to work?

I think the people of Delhi understand. I have lived in Delhi all my life where power cuts were a way of life. Even after the summer of 2014, there were eight-hour-long power cuts. Electricity was so expensive that for a lower middle-class family, there was a point of time when you had to almost reduce other expenditures to pay your power bills. Water tankers and fights over them were a way of life for at least one-third of the city. And who would pay the price? Women and girls, who would, from early morning, start queuing up outside their slums. So the lives of people in Delhi have changed in the last 10 years and people feel it. That is why despite the fact that we are in constant tussle with the Central government and many of our policies not being able to reach their fruition, people of Delhi staunchly stand behind Arvind Kejriwal.

Mallica Joshi: Have you found a way to deal with this tussle over important policy decisions?

The legal battle between the Delhi government and the Central government went on for eight years. The Supreme Court has, in all its rulings, clearly said that apart from land, law and order and police, all powers lie with the Delhi government. Control over offices, entire services, lies with the Delhi government. Now, after eight years, when a Constitution Bench gives an order, the Central government brings an ordinance within eight days to try and overturn it. An ordinance that is blatantly unconstitutional. It is also the responsibility of the Supreme Court to hear us out and give a final verdict. We are accountable to the people, but we do not have the power for it. In the May order Justice Chandrachud talked about the triple chain of accountability. The legislature is accountable to the people who have voted for it. The cabinet is accountable to the legislature, the council of ministers. And the officers have to be accountable to the council of ministers because it is through this triple chain of accountability that the bureaucracy is accountable to the people. So it is not a question of bureaucracy not answering to us. It effectively means that the bureaucracy is not fulfilling people's wishes.

Jatin Anand: You've accused the BJP of plotting to do away with the Delhi Assembly. How much of it, do you think, is on their agenda?

It's very clear that the BJP realises that they're not going to win in Delhi. So election after election, they have tried every

trick in the book but have not won. In the MCD elections, they again tried every trick, including amending the MCD Act, trying to sort of gerrymander the municipal wards, delaying the election, having it at exactly the same time as the Gujarat election, and again did not win. So all of their attempts, be it to stop the work, be it to threaten the officers, suspend officers who are working in close tandem with the government, start vigilance inquiries, are basically an attempt to make the Kejriwal government less popular. Let us hope that the constitutionality of this country is upheld.

Rahul Sabharwal: How has the absence of Manish Sisodia, Satyendra Jain and Sanjay Singh been felt in the party? Also, every two weeks, AAP lays the allegation that the CM is going to be arrested. What is it based on?

One is of course the emotional and psychological dimension. For all of us they are very close colleagues. AAP is also different from other political parties because we are still a very small group of people. It's almost like the start-up where everyone has worked together day and night to bring the party to where it is today. You have Manish Sisodia's wife who is extremely unwell and her health is deteriorating everyday. And we can see that while in so many cases and even in the so-called excise policy case, people are getting bail for much smaller conditions and reasons, he is not getting bail. We see that Satyendra Jain, whose health over one year that he was in Tihar, saw such incredible deterioration that he could barely stand by the time he got his medical bail. But it is also a matter of pride for us that despite this kind of intense persecution, AAP leaders are not broken, who despite the most intense political persecution have been able to stand up to the BJP.

As for AAP saying every few weeks that

Arvind Kejriwal is being arrested, you've got the sequence wrong. First BJP says that Arvind Kejriwal is going to be arrested. As soon as they do their press conferences, ED miraculously sends summons the next day. Today, both ED, CBI and all other agencies are just being used to persecute the Opposition. How do we get to know that he might get arrested? We also have well-wishers. They have raided all the AAP leaders. They have not been able to recover one rupee of proceeds of crime. Everybody knows what is going on.

MANOJ CG: When AAP was formed in 2012, it was sort of a corrective force in Indian politics. From then to now joining an opposition force whose leaders you once called corrupt, how did this transition happen and what is the message that you are sending to a young and educated person, who may want to join politics?

AAP is the best possible option for young, idealistic people to join politics. Because at the end of the day, what is the biggest faultline in Indian politics? It is the question of who is it that the government represents? The people who vote for it, or the people who are funding that political party in its elections? And I think that is really what makes AAP different. As for the INDIA alliance and the fact that there are many parties in it whom we may have called corrupt — yes, that is absolutely true. But the political scenario of the country 10 years back and today has changed dramatically. Even if you have to fight corruption, you do require a constitutional framework under which that fight can happen. The crisis that the country is facing today is that all democratic institutions are being obliterated one by one. You have the government that brings in a bill which removes the Chief Justice of India and brings a government

minister. What do you think is going to happen to the neutrality of the Election Commission? You have the CBI and the ED that are being misused only for the purpose of persecuting the Opposition. You have bank accounts of the Opposition parties being frozen a month before the election. You are arresting leaders of all political parties. What remains of this democracy?

Today election rigging is happening by using the ED. How is it not anything but election rigging if you are finishing off all Opposition parties by using this one agency? If you want to make a list of raids that the ED has carried out against the Opposition parties and against ruling party leaders, it would probably be 100 to 0, just within the last six months. The Chandigarh mayor elections just happened to be caught on CCTV camera but otherwise what is this horse trading? I remember when the Karnataka elections happened, on one TV channel, Ram Madhav was present. He was saying, we'll make the government. An anchor said, but you're short of the majority mark. To which he responded, 'humare paas Amit Shah hai'. Why are all these MLAs coming from one party to the other? It is because of the ED and the money offered.

Vikas Pathak: If Kejriwal did well and people, as rational agents, took their choice, would you say that the same happened at the national level. Did the same voters become gullible?

There are multiple factors when people go out to vote. There is, of course, how the government has performed. Another factor is that they want to back the winning horse. They don't want to vote for someone whom they think is going to lose. What was different in 2015 was that people of Delhi thought that AAP was a viable alternative. In Lok Sabha elections, when people voted for the BJP in 2014, it was not just a vote for Modi, it was a vote against the Congress and people wanted a change. Another factor in the BJP's victory is, 'what is the choice'.

Liz Mathew: What do you think about the life of the Opposition Alliance, especially after June 2024?

The building of this alliance has been a very unique experience for us also because our party had so far gone solo. Unfortunately, things in the alliance have moved slower than what we would have wanted and what we would have expected. Currently, we hope for the best.

Aakash Joshi: There is a reluctance, perhaps, to ideologically take on the ruling party on the issue of religion and politics or majoritarianism. Is it strategic silence or what used to be

called soft Hindutva?

India is a religious country and religion is a very important part of everyone's day-to-day lives. For anyone who has ever tried to suppress the religious identity of any community, it is a mistake. The problem is not that people have a religious identity and they should be allowed to express it. The dangerous thing about the BJP's politics has been that this becomes the basis on which they are asking for votes, which means that they are asking for votes of one religious community and not of another. Interestingly, it's not just Muslims who have been the targets of the BJP. When the farmer protests happened, did you see the speed with which the farmers were labelled as terrorists, Khalistanis, etc? AAP has never asked for votes on the basis of religion.

Deeptiman Tiwari: How much help did you or your government provide to Muslims living in Jahangirpuri when bulldozers rolled out in the area in April 2022? You'd made a statement labelling the residents as Rohingyas and Bangladeshi — illegal immigrants — almost taking the BJP trope and people call the BJP a communal party because of that. Wouldn't the same people call you a communal party?

Not just Jahangirpuri, but everywhere across the city, wherever demolitions have happened, when help is not possible officially through the government, we have had our party, MLAs, councillors always there on the ground in terms of support. I also believe that statement was misinterpreted because the BJP always levels allegations that they are running bulldozers because XYZ may be from Bangladesh, maybe Rohingyas, etc. The question to the BJP then was that if they are illegal immigrants, who is responsible? It is the BJP. If people are infiltrating your country, who may be from Bangladesh or Myanmar, reaching Delhi and getting Aadhaar cards made, then it is definitely the BJP who has to answer for it.

Jatin Anand: Was there any discussion within the party regarding allegations around the Chief Minister's residence?

The way the issue was portrayed was as if Arvind Kejriwal was getting his own house built. It's the official residence of the CM, a building that was about 48 years old and falling apart. So when the residence of a CM gets built, there is an entire official establishment that comes with it comprising his camp office that would have at least 50 staff who are functioning there, attending to public grievances. Obviously, it will have to be built as per whatever norms exist for the government. It is not Kejriwal's personal residence.



The dangerous thing about BJP's politics has been that religious identity becomes the basis on which they are asking for votes... AAP has never asked for votes on the basis of religion