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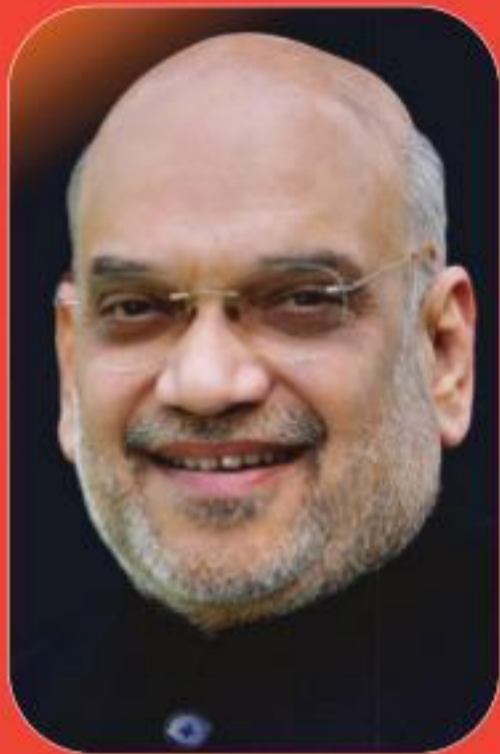


NEWS 18



## LEADING THE WAY FOR GLOBAL GOOD

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY  
**PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI**



**Amit Shah**  
Minister of Home Affairs



**Nitin Gadkari**  
Minister of Road Transport & Highways



**Dr S Jaishankar**  
Minister of External Affairs



**Smriti Zubin Irani**  
Minister of Women & Child Development & Minority Affairs



**Ashwini Vaishnaw**  
Minister of Railways, Communications, Electronics & IT



**Anurag Thakur**  
Minister of I&B, Youth Affairs & Sports



**Michael R Pompeo**  
70th Secretary of State, USA



**John Mearsheimer**  
Political Scientist



**Amitabh Kant**  
G20 Sherpa



**Madhabi Puri Buch**  
Chairperson, SEBI



**Ameenah Gurib-Fakim**  
Former President, Mauritius



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Former Environment Minister, Norway



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**Ryan McInerney**  
CEO, VISA Inc



**Jayen Mehta**  
MD, GOMIMF



**Salvatore Babones**  
Sociologist



**K Annamalai**  
State President - TN BJP



**AB de Villiers**  
Former South African Cricketer



**Brett Lee**  
Former Australian Cricketer



**Shankar Mahadevan**  
Singer & Composer



**V Selvaganesh**  
Percussionist



**Ganesh Rajagopalan**  
Violinist



**Rakesh Chaurasia**  
Flautist



**Sidharth Malhotra**  
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MARCH 19-20, 2024

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# THE WORLD

## TOP OF THE WORLD



Nicolas Maduro. AP

### VENEZUELA

#### Maduro declared party candidate in July election

Caracas: Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro Saturday became his party's official nominee for July's presidential election, which would allow him to stroll into a third consecutive term with no real competition on the horizon. Not unusual to Venezuela, the election has been plagued with controversy since Maduro's main opponent, María Corina Machado — who swept an opposition coalition's primary election with more than 90% of votes — was disqualified by Venezuelan authorities to hold public office for 15 years. Maduro accepted the nomination as the ruling United Socialist Party's candidate for the July 28 presidential election during a party gathering in Caracas, saying he has "the support of the people." AP

### PAKISTAN

#### Will retaliate terror: Zardari at soldiers' funeral

Islamabad: Pakistan would retaliate against every force that enters its border to commit terror and make it accountable for the blood of each fallen soldier, President Asif Ali Zardari said on Sunday. Zardari's comment came after he attended the funeral prayer of two officers who were among the seven Pakistan Army personnel killed in a terrorist attack on Saturday in the country's restive North Waziristan region. A Lt Colonel and a Captain were killed along with five soldiers. PTI

### MALDIVES

#### Poll boxes to be placed in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia

Male: The ballot boxes for Maldives' upcoming parliament elections will be placed in India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia, after over 11,000 Maldivians submitted re-registration requests to relocate their polling stations, the poll body declared Sunday. The window for people to relocate their voting stations for the April 21 parliamentary polls expired Saturday, reports said citing an official notification. The top polls body received 11,169 applications requesting re-registration at different voting stations during this period. PTI

### NIGER

#### Junta says it revoked military accord with US

Niamey: Niger's ruling junta has revoked with immediate effect a military accord that allows military personnel and civilian staff from the US Department of Defense on its soil, junta spokesperson said Saturday. The decision follows a visit by US officials this week. A US official said senior officials had "frank discussions" in Niamey earlier this week about the trajectory of Niger's ruling military council. — known as the CNSP. Since seizing power in July last year, the Niger junta have kicked out French and other European forces, and turned to Russia for support. REUTERS

## Ukraine launches far-ranging drone attacks on final day of Russia polls

Putin says people will respond to assaults with even greater cohesion

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
MOSCOW, MARCH 17

UKRAINE LAUNCHED a massive new wave of drone attacks on Russia Sunday as Russians cast ballots on the final day of a presidential vote set to extend President Vladimir Putin's rule for another six years.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported downing 35 Ukrainian drones overnight, including four in the Moscow region.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said a fifth drone, close to the capital's Domodedovo airport, was downed on Sunday morning. No casualties or damage were reported. According to the Defense Ministry, two drones were shot down over the Kaluga region, just south of the Russian capital, and four in the Yaroslavl region, northeast of Moscow.

The attacks on the Yaroslavl region, which is located about 800 kilometers from the Ukrainian border, were some of the farthest launched by Ukraine so far.

Officials said a drone fell on a refinery in Krasnodar, sparking a blaze. Refineries and oil terminals have been key targets of Ukrainian drone attacks. Putin described these as attempts by Ukraine to derail Russia's presidential poll.

"Those enemy strikes haven't been and won't be left unpunished," Putin vowed during Friday meeting of his Security Council. "I'm sure that... the people of Russia, will respond to that with even greater cohesion."



Yulia Navalnaya, the wife of Alexei Navalny, with supporters during a protest against Putin outside the Russian Embassy in Berlin on Sunday. Reuters

## Opponents hold anti-Putin 'noon protests' across Russia

Moscow: Thousands of people turned up at polling stations across Russia on Sunday to take part in what the anti-Kremlin opposition said was a peaceful but symbolic political protest against the re-election of President Vladimir Putin.

In an action called "Noon against Putin", Russians who oppose the veteran Kremlin leader went to their local polling station at midday to either spoil their ballot paper in protest or to vote for one of the three candidates stand-

ing against Putin, who is widely expected to win by a landslide. Navalny's allies broadcast videos on YouTube of lines of people queuing up at different polling stations across Russia. Yulia Navalnaya, wife of Alexei Navalny, took part in a protest in Berlin.

Navalny had endorsed the "Noon against Putin" plan in a message on social media facilitated by his lawyers before he died. The *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper called the action "Navalny's political testament". REUTERS

## Economy: Putin's grip on power

THE ECONOMY'S resilience in the face of bruising Western sanctions is a big factor behind Putin's grip on power in Russia, a major player in the global energy sector. The economy is expected to grow 2.6% this year, according to the International Monetary Fund, compared with the 0.9% expansion predicted in Europe. Inflation is forecast at more than 7% but unemployment remains low.

## UNDER CLASSIFIED \$1.8 BN CONTRACT WITH NRO

### SPACEX BUILDING US SPY-SATELLITE NETWORK: SOURCES

SPACEX IS building a network of hundreds of spy satellites under a classified contract with a US intelligence agency, five sources familiar with the program said, signalling deepening ties between Elon Musk's space company and national security agencies. The network is being built under a \$1.8 billion contract signed in 2021 with the National Reconnaissance Office, an intelligence agency that manages spy satellites, sources said. REUTERS

## UN AGENCY SAYS HUNGER CRISIS WORSENING

# With truce talks set to resume, Netanyahu raises Rafah ops pitch

Mossad chief likely to mediate with US, Egypt, Qatar

REUTERS  
CAIRO, MARCH 17

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed international pressure on Sunday and said he would keep on with the military campaign against Hamas in Gaza, where aid agencies say famine is looming, while ceasefire talks were set to resume.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting, Netanyahu said Israel would push into Rafah, the last relatively safe place in the tiny, crowded Gaza enclave after more than five months of war.

"We will operate in Rafah. This will take several weeks, and it will happen," he said, without clarifying if he meant the assault would last for weeks or would begin in weeks.

A source familiar with the truce talks in Qatar told Reuters the head of Israel's Mossad agency would join the delegation attending the negotiations with Qatari, Egyptian and US mediators. Hamas presented a new ceasefire proposal last week. Israel's security cabinet is to meet to discuss it before the delegation leaves.

Netanyahu hit out at the pressure from allies, saying: "Are you so quick to deny Israel the



Palestinians after an aid airdrop in Gaza city, Sunday. AP

right to defend itself against the Hamas monsters?"

"The mediators felt positive about Hamas' new proposal. Some in Israel felt the group made some improvement on its previous position and it is now in the hands of Netanyahu alone to say whether an agreement is imminent," said the official, who asked not to be named.

Meanwhile, The UN aid agency said Saturday that acute malnutrition was accelerating in north Gaza. Trucks of flour have reached north Gaza to areas that have had no aid in four months.

## E.U. TO BOLSTER EGYPT TIES WITH FUNDING

Cairo: The European Union announced a 7.4 billion euro (\$8.06 billion) funding package and an upgraded relationship with Egypt, part of a push to stem migrant flows to Europe. The agreement, which lifts the EU's relationship with Egypt to a "strategic partnership", was announced as a delegation visited Cairo. REUTERS

## Biden mocks Trump: One of the candidates is too old and mentally unfit, the other is me

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, MARCH 17

THE BIG news this week, President Joe Biden said at a weekend Washington roast, was "that two candidates had clinched their party's nomination for president. But one was too old, too mentally unfit for the job."

"The other's me," Biden quipped. The digs against Republican Donald Trump kept coming from the president at the annual Gridiron Club and Foundation Dinner, as Biden deflected ongoing criticism that his memory is hazy and he appears confused, instead highlighting moments when the 77-year-old Trump has slipped up, too.

"Don't tell him, he thinks he's running against Barack Obama, that's what he said," said Biden, 81, who also quipped that he was staying up way past his bedtime.

It was the first time Biden has attended the dinner during his presidency, and comes as the 2024 election looms and the rematch between Biden and Trump heats up.

The annual bacchanalia, now



Joe Biden; Donald Trump

in its 139th year, traces its history to 1885 — that was the year President Grover Cleveland refused to attend. Every president since has come to at least one Gridiron.

The dinner has a reputation as a night of bipartisan mirth, and was jam-packed with politicians and who's-who of Washington, including Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband Doug Emhoff, at least

eight other Cabinet members, at least five members of Congress, five governors and at least five ambassadors.

Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, who's in town for St. Patrick's Day, also attended.

Also speaking at the dinner were Harris, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, and Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, a Republican.



## ICELAND VOLCANO SPEWS LAVA AGAIN

People watch plumes of smoke from volcanic activity near Mt Hagafell in Iceland on Saturday. A volcano erupted on Saturday for the fourth time since December, the country's Meteorological Office said. The eruption began around 8.20p GMT and the fissure was estimated to be about 2.9-km-long, the Met Office said in a statement. AP

## Sunak's leadership in turmoil amid infighting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LONDON, MARCH 17

A UK minister came out strongly in defence of his party leader Rishi Sunak on Sunday as the increasingly beleaguered prime minister attempts to ride out infighting within the ranks, with sections to the right of the governing Conservative Party call-



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

ing for a leadership change ahead of a general election expected later in the year.

Sunak has ruled out the prospect of an early election in

May and with possibly months before the polls, the murmurings of rebellion within the Tory ranks fearful of losing their seats seem to be growing at a steady pace.

Transport Secretary Mark Harper was asked during a TV interview if he thinks Sunak will lead the Party at the general election.

"Yes he will, and... he'll set out very clearly that we're a government with a plan," Harper told Sky News.

According to *The Daily Telegraph*, a meeting has taken place this weekend between leading figures on the right wing and prominent supporters of Penny Mordaunt from when she previously ran for the Tory leadership after the exit of Boris Johnson.

The pressure on Sunak is likely to intensify after the local council and mayoral elections, when the Tories are expected to suffer losses.

## OVER HALF OF PORT-AU-PRINCE HOSPITALS ARE CLOSED OR ONLY PARTIALLY FUNCTIONAL DUE TO VIOLENCE, ROBBERY

# Haiti's crisis-hit hospitals face new challenge: Looting by gangs

DAVID ADAMS & FRANCES ROBLES  
FLORIDA, MARCH 17

TAÏNA CENATUS, a 29-year-old culinary student in Haiti, lost her balance at school one day this month and toppled over, but it was not until she hit the ground that she realized she had been hit in the face by a stray bullet.

It left a small hole in her cheek, just missing her jawbone and teeth.

Unlike many Haitians wounded by gunfire in the middle of a vicious gang takeover of the capital, Port-au-Prince, Ms. Cenatus was actually lucky that day — she made it to a clinic. But she is still in pain, her wound

swelling, and she cannot get any relief, with more and more hospitals and clinics abandoned by staff or looted by gangs.

"My teeth hurt," she said. "I can feel something is wrong." A gang assault on Haiti's capital has left an already weak health care system in tatters.

More than half of the medical facilities in Port-au-Prince and a large rural region called Artibonite are closed or not operating at full capacity, experts said, because they are too dangerous to reach or their medicine and other supplies have been stolen.

In a country where the United Nations estimates that up to one million people are facing the threat of famine, the unwar-



People displaced due to gang violence at a mobile medical clinic inside a Port-au-Prince school. AP File

eling of the medical infrastructure threatens to put thousands more lives at risk.

Gang members have stripped many medical facilities bare, taking most anything of value, including beds and vehicles. "The bandits looted, vandalized and turned everything upside down," said Theodule Domond, the director general of St. Francis de Sales Hospital, one of Port-au-Prince's largest and oldest hospitals with the only oncology unit in southern Haiti.

With violence rising, the staff evacuated all of the patients to private hospitals in recent days, just before armed gang members overran nearby streets, ransacking and setting fire to several government buildings.

Even in periods of less upheaval, the public health system was already in shambles, but now hospitals run by humanitarian groups and churches that many Haitians depend on are closing one by one.

The State University Hospital, the country's largest public hospital, is closed. Blood supplies are running low, fuel to run generators is hard to come by and, because of the street violence, clinics that remain open cannot transfer patients needing more sophisticated treatment. Doctors also predict a sharp rise in maternal and infant deaths, as thousands of women will be compelled to give birth at home in the coming weeks.

Haiti's public health system

has responded in recent years to repeated emergencies, from a devastating earthquake in 2010, to hurricanes to Covid-19 to cholera and Zika. The strain has long been fraying the system's foundation.

Poor patients cannot afford to pay for services, further crippling chronically underfunded hospitals, making it difficult to purchase needed items.

Before gangs took control of Port-au-Prince, hospitals still closed their doors from time to time because doctors would go on strike to protest rampant kidnappings targeting medical professionals. Several officials with Haiti's Ministry of Health did not respond to requests for comment. NYT

## SC HEARS SBI TODAY ON REVEALING UNIQUE BOND NUMBERS

# Fresh data out: Payments before 2019 polls; DMK, ADMK, JD(S), NCP among 10 who name donors

BJP tells EC not bound by law to keep donor records; Cong says it has told SBI to share with EC

RITU SARIN & RITIKA CHOPRA  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

A DAY before the Supreme Court hears the State Bank of India's response regarding its failure to disclose the unique alphanumeric code for each electoral bond purchased and redeemed, the Election Commission of India (ECI) released a fresh set of data on Sunday that further bolsters the demand for matching electoral bond donors to political parties, with as many as 10 regional parties voluntarily disclosing the names of their contributors.

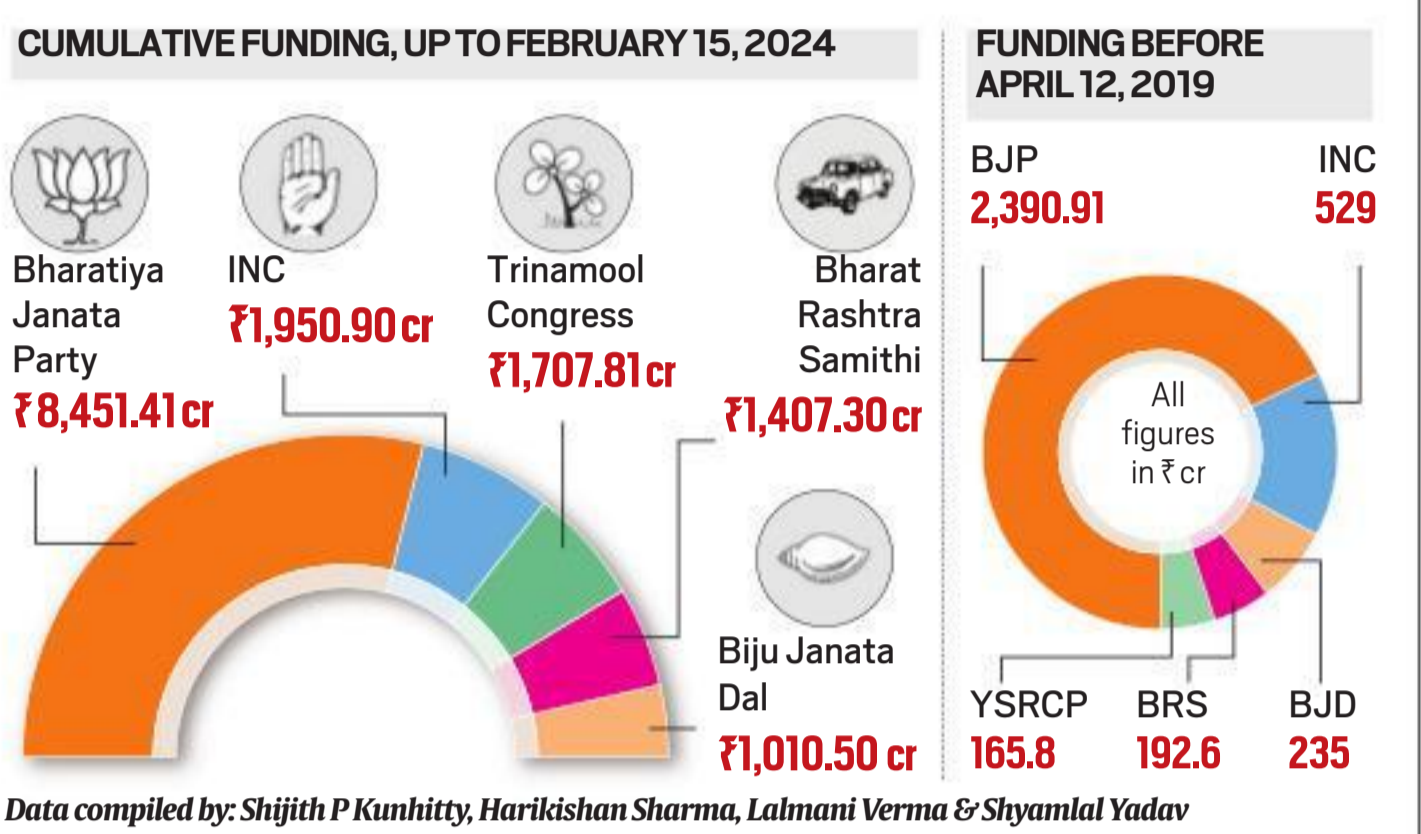
The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK); All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK); Janata Dal (Secular); Nationalist Congress Party (NCP); Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC); Janata Dal United (JDU); Aam Aadmi Party (AAP); Samajwadi Front; Sikkim Democratic Front; and a Goa party, the Maharashtra Gomantak Party, have revealed names of donors who contributed via electoral bonds between March 2018 and April 2019.

Although this isn't unprecedented — Jharkhand Mukti Morcha had voluntarily disclosed Rs 1 crore donation from Hindalco Industries Limited through an electoral bond in 2019-20 — the second instalment of information pertaining to electoral bonds revealed by ECI is crucial as it is the biggest disclosure of details (although partial) to date on which donor exactly donated to which party.

For example, Future Gaming and Hotel Services Pvt Ltd, run by Santiago Martin, the largest contributor through electoral bonds, allocated nearly 40% of its total purchases — exceeding Rs 1,300 crore — from 2019 to 2024 to the DMK, the reigning party in Tamil Nadu.

Similarly, Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL), the second-largest purchaser of bonds of almost Rs 1,000 crore,

### WHAT THE PARTIES RECEIVED (TOP 5)



### EXPLAINED Case to reveal gets stronger

IT MAY not be clear how the regional parties know the IDs of their donors but the fact that 10 of them have voluntarily revealed their names strengthens the case for SBI to disclose the bond numbers so that the donor can be matched with the party.

### INSIDE

#### 10 REGIONAL PARTIES ENCASHED ₹900-CR EBs TILL APR 12, 2019

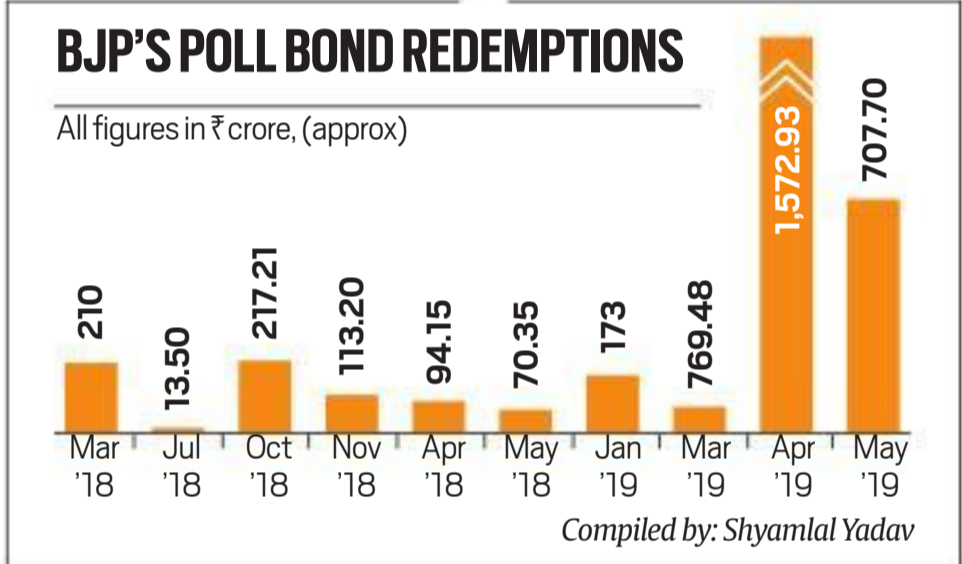
#### AROUND 2019 POLLS, CSK WAS AIADMK'S DONOR NO.1

gave away Rs 50 crore to the JD(S) in Karnataka. Narayana Murthy-led Infosys donated Rs 1 crore to JD(S) two months before the 2018 Karnataka elections.

JKNC received Rs 50 lakh from Sunil Mittal-promoted Bharti Airtel in 2019. The Bajaj Group donated Rs 3 crore to the Aam Aadmi Party, becoming its biggest donor via electoral bonds, days before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Bharti Airtel Ltd

### MUMBAI, KOLKATA, DELHI TOP LIST

## Months before '19 polls, BJP got over ₹3K crore, 77% of its year's count



SHYAMLAL YADAV  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

THAT the BJP is the No. 1 recipient of poll bonds is a trend that was established since the inception of the scheme.

Indeed, the ruling BJP redeemed over Rs 3,941.57 crore between March 2018 to May 22, 2019, according to a fresh set of data released by the Election Commission today. And 77.4% of this (Rs 3,050.11 crore) flowed into the party's coffers in March, April and May 2019, the three months in the run-up to Lok Sabha polls.

The Lok Sabha polls 2019

were announced on March 10 that year and counting of votes was done on May 23.

In all, the BJP has redeemed at least Rs 8,451.41 crore since launch of the scheme.

Along with Lok Sabha polls, there were Assembly polls for Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha as well.

The geography of the branches from where these bonds were issued, shows that BJP got money from across the country with major contributions from Mumbai (Rs 1,493.21 crore), Kolkata (Rs 1,068.91 crore) and New Delhi (666.08 crore).

In November-December

## Future Gaming, Bond Buyer No. 1, was DMK's top donor at ₹509 cr

ARUN JANARDHANAN & DEEPTIMAN TIWARY  
CHENNAI, NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

THE BIGGEST purchaser of electoral bonds, lottery company Future Gaming and Hotel Services Pvt Ltd, which bought bonds worth over Rs 1,300 crore between 2019 and 2024, donated almost 40% of its total purchases to the DMK.

The DMK, currently the ruling party in Tamil Nadu, was among the parties which named its poll bond donors, according

DMK'S TOP DONORS (IN ₹ CRORE)		AMAR RAJ GROUPS (IN ₹ CRORE)	
Donor	Amount	Donor	Amount
Future Gaming and Hotel Services	509	Amar Raj Groups	2
Mega Infrastructure	105	Shahi Exports	1.5
India Cements	14	Infosys Technologies	1
Sun TV Network Ltd	10	Aditya Birla Group	0.5
Triveni	8	Health Care Global Enterprises	0.25
		BICON Ltd	2.5

Compiled by: Shijith P Kunhitty

to the latest data put out by the Election Commission on Sunday.

According to the data, the party received a total of Rs 656.5 crore via poll bonds from April

19, 2019 till November 14, 2023. This included Rs 509 crore from Future Gaming, run by Santiago Martin, between April 2019 and

## AAP names its donors till May 2019, Bajaj Group top of list

MALLICA JOSHI  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

BETWEEN APRIL 2018 and May 2019, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) got Rs 5.75 crore through electoral bonds — from five companies and two individuals.

Of this, the Bajaj Group accounted for Rs 3 crore, credited on April 10, 2019, becoming the party's biggest poll bond donor ahead of the Lok Sabha elections that year.

The AAP was among the parties which disclosed the names of donors in the latest data released by the Election Commission (EC) on Sunday.

According to the data, the AAP got Rs 69.06 crore through electoral bonds between April 2018 and July 2023. The party, however, disclosed the names of donors only for the period till May 2019.

In this period, the second highest electoral bond donor was Gujarat-based Torrent Pharmaceuticals Limited and Pune-based BC Shirke Construction Technology Private Limited, both of which donated Rs 1 crore each through single

JD(S)'S TOP DONORS (IN ₹ CRORE)		AMAR RAJ GROUPS (IN ₹ CRORE)	
Donor	Amount	Donor	Amount
Megha Engineering & Constructions	50	Amar Raj Groups	2
Embassy Group	22	Shahi Exports	1.5
JSW Steel	5	Infosys Technologies	1
Shankaranarayana Constructions	5	Aditya Birla Group	0.5
BICON Ltd	2.5	Health Care Global Enterprises	0.25

Compiled by: Shijith P Kunhitty

JANATA DAL (Secular), which was among the parties to have disclosed the identity of their electoral bond donors, received more than half of its total Rs 89.75-crore donations from Hyderabad-based



PM Narendra Modi, TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu and JanaSena Party chief Pawan Kalyan on Sunday. P11

## PM, Naidu hold show of strength in Andhra: 'NDA will cross 400'

SREENIVAS JANYALA  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 17

NEARLY A decade after they first shared the stage on April 30, 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief N Chandrababu Naidu and JanaSena Party (JSP) chief K Pawan Kalyan came together for a public meeting at Chilakaluripeta, in Palnadu district of Andhra Pradesh, on Sunday.

The NDA rally, "Prajagalam",

turned into a massive show of strength by the three parties, which joined forces earlier this month for the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh.

Addressing the crowd in Hindi, with Andhra BJP chief Daggubati Purandeshwari translating his speech into Telugu, Modi said: "The NDA keeps regional aspirations as well as national progress in mind. Naidu and Pawan Kalyan are working



At the INDIA bloc rally in Mumbai on Sunday. Amit Chakravarty

## Opp raises poll bonds, EVMs to target PM as Rahul yatra ends

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI, MARCH 17

FROM UPLIFT of backward classes to increased vigilance in the use of EVMs, leaders of the Opposition INDIA bloc set the agenda as they sounded the bugle for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections at Mumbai's Shivaji Park ground Sunday. The show of strength, during which the Opposition leaders targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi

and his government, also marked the culmination of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

Addressing the mega rally, Gandhi termed the electoral bond scheme as the national version of road side "hafta vasooli", or extortion.

"Today Narendra Modi has a monopoly over corruption. Electoral bond is nothing but national hafta vasooli. They give contract and take percentage.

## Mob targets Gujarat Univ's foreign students during namaz, 5 injured

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
AHMEDABAD, MARCH 17

FIVE FOREIGN students of Gujarat University were injured, including two who had to be hospitalised, when a group of 20-25 people barged into their

hostel and assaulted them for offering namaz during Ramzan in the hostel building Saturday night. Two of the assailants were arrested Sunday, police said, adding that an FIR has been lodged and investigations were on to identify the rest.

According to the police, the

two foreign students who had to be hospitalised are from Sri Lanka and Turkmenistan. While one of them is still in hospital, the other has been discharged, they said. Of the other students who sustained injuries, two are from African nations and one from Afghanistan.

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Fresh data out: Payments before 2019 polls; DMK, AIADMK, JD(S), NCP among 10 who name donors

and Serum Institute's Cyrus Poonawala donated to NCP during 2018-19.

Meanwhile, some of the largest political parties, such as the BJP, Congress, and TMC, among others, have refrained from disclosing any information about their donors.

Notably, the BJP, in its submission to the ECI on November 15, 2023, stated that it is not obligated by law to maintain records of the names and particulars of electoral bond donors, and therefore, did

not possess such details. Congress, on the other hand, told ECI that it has requested SBI to share the identity of its bond donors directly with the Commission as it didn't have these details.

At least three parties, namely the Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, informed the Commission that they had chosen to not accept any donations via electoral bonds.

Although it's not clear how the 10 regional parties figured details of electoral bond donors given that the bond doesn't carry their names in order to protect their identity, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharya had told this newspaper in April 2021 that his party found out about the donor only when Hindalco reached out seeking a receipt for the contribution.

According to Prashant Bhushan, who is arguing his case on behalf of the petitioner

Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) in Supreme Court, Sunday's disclosure by the ECI only strengthens the argument for the State Bank of India to share the unique alphanumeric code for each bond purchased and redeemed.

When contacted, Bhushan told The Indian Express: "It's evident now that parties know the identity of donors. The fact that some parties haven't revealed the details only strengthens our argument that the State Bank of India

must disclose the electoral bond numbers, enabling the public to match the donor with the political party." The first tranche of data made public by the ECI Thursday last week had two parts. First, the name of bond purchasers, the denomination and the date of purchase. Second, details of political parties, the denomination of bonds redeemed and when. All this was for bonds purchased and redeemed under the scheme from April 1, 2019 to February 15, 2024. The total amount donated

under the scheme during this period was Rs 12,156 crore, of which almost half came from the top 20 donors alone.

This disclosure was forced by the Supreme Court which struck down the electoral bonds scheme introduced by the first Narendra Modi government in 2018. The Electoral Bond scheme, notified in January 2018, allowed individuals and companies to make donations to political parties. Essentially in the nature of a bearer instrument, it provided

anonymity to its holders, and was hence challenged in the SC.

On February 15 this year, the top court termed it "unconstitutional" and scrapped the scheme with immediate effect. It also directed SBI, the sole issuing authority, to provide all details of bond purchasers and their redemption to the ECI, which has been made public Thursday.

Cumulatively, with the first and second instalment of information shared by ECI on Thursday and Sunday, the ruling Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre has received the maximum funds through these bonds nearly Rs 8,500 crore since they were introduced in 2018, followed by Congress Party which received 1,950 crore and West Bengal's ruling party Trinamool Congress at roughly Rs 1,700 crore.

Bharat Rashtira Samithi was the fourth-largest recipient at approximately Rs 1,400 and Odisha ruling party Biju Janata Dal (BJD) was the fifth-largest recipient at Rs 1,010 crore.

Months before 2019 Lok Sabha polls, BJP got more than ₹3,000 crore, 77% of its year's count

2018, there were Assembly polls in Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Mizoram. BJP had lost MP, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan and returned to the government in Bhopal after a defection in Congress.

Bonds redeemed during months of October and November 2018 showed that BJP received Rs 330.41 crore in total. The next tranche was opened in January 2019 and the party redeemed bonds worth

Rs 173 crore.

It was the Lok Sabha polls that opened the tap.

The window opened in early March in 2019, just before Lok Sabha polls were announced and in March that year, BJP redeemed bonds valued at Rs 769.48 crore.

In April, when polling began, the BJP's redemption surged to Rs 1572.93 crore and in May that year, the party redeemed bonds for Rs 707.70 crore.

Data also shows that

Kolkata accounted for 27 per cent of the BJP's total collections during the period March 2018 to May 2019, showing how this was emerging as its new battleground - it won an unprecedented 18 of the state's 42 seats.

Over 38 percent of the BJP's redemptions were of bonds from Mumbai and the party redeemed Rs 666.08 crore (17% in New Delhi. From Hyderabad, where BJP has little presence, it redeemed Rs 106.26 crore.

Future Gaming, Bond Buyer No. 1, was DMK's top donor at ₹509 cr

April 2023. The DMK received its first tranche of electoral bonds (worth Rs 60 crore) from Future Gaming in 2020-21. In 2021-22, the amount increased to Rs 249 crore.

The Tamil Nadu Assembly elections were held in April 2021, when the DMK ousted the then AIADMK government.

In 2022-23, the DMK received another Rs 160 crore via poll bonds from Future Gaming. The remaining amount was donated on April 1, 2023.

According to the overall year-wise data, the DMK received contributions totalling Rs 45.50 crore in 2019-2020, coinciding with the May 2019 general elections. The major donors included India Cements at Rs 10 crore, Lakshmi Machine Works (LMW) at Rs 1.50 crore, RAMCO Cements at Rs 5 crore, Mega Infrastructure at Rs 20 crore,

Apollo at Rs 1 crore, Triveni at Rs 5 crore, Birla at Rs 1 crore, and IRB at Rs 2 crore.

In 2020-2021, the DMK saw contributions totalling Rs 80 crore. Future Gaming donated Rs 60 crore, while Mega chipped in with Rs 20 crore.

While the State Assembly elections were held in early 2021, the 2021-2022 financial year saw a big jump in the poll bond contributions received by the DMK, adding up to Rs 302 crore. Future Gaming alone contributed Rs 249 crore, with Mega giving Rs 40 crore, Sun TV Network Rs 10 crore, India Cements Rs 4 crore, and Triveni Rs 3 crore.

The local body polls held in February 2022 were no less significant. The flow of funds via poll bonds during this period, notably from entities like Future Gaming, sustained the momen-

tum. Among the major donors, Future Gaming has been closely associated with the DMK for many years. Its owner, Santiago Martin, was targeted by late Chief Minister J Jayalalitha in 2011 for his close ties with the DMK's first family.

Martin's son-in-law, Aadhav Arjuna, used to be a close aide of Chief Minister M K Stalin's son-in-law, Sabareesan, and was seen as an "insider" of DMK's political and strategic operations in the 2021 Assembly polls, a period when Future Gaming contributed Rs 249 crore to the party.

Arjuna, a basketball player-cum-gym trainer, would take part in the seat-sharing talks with the DMK's smaller allies. However, he failed to get a DMK ticket in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, and joined the VCK, a DMK ally, last month.

Triveni, another DMK donor, is engaged in infrastructure and engineering projects, with origins in Salem, and also has stakes in mining operations in Odisha. LMW, also based in Tamil Nadu, is engaged in machine tools manufacturing.

In 2022-2023, the poll bond contributions to the DMK added up to Rs 185 crore, including Rs 160 crore from Future Gaming, and Rs 25 crore from Mega. Future Gaming contributed an additional Rs 40 crore in 2023.

Future Gaming has been flagged by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and several central agencies as a company engaging in fraudulent lottery business. It has been under the scanner of the MHA since 2015.

As reported by The Indian Express on Saturday, in

September 2023, the MHA wrote to eight lottery-running states about the alleged "frauds" and "irregularities" linked to Martin's companies and told them to stay away. The letter noted that it had received complaints with "serious allegations" against Martin and his lottery firms.

Following this, Future Gaming went on an electoral bond buying spree, purchasing Rs 190 crore worth of bonds the very next month.

In early 2019, the ED began a money laundering probe against Future Gaming. By July that year, it had attached assets worth over Rs 250 crore. On April 2, 2022, the ED attached movable assets worth Rs 409.92 crore in the case. On April 7, five days after the attachment of these assets, Future Gaming bought Rs 100 crore in electoral bonds.

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**JD(S)'s bond donations**

Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL).

According to the details submitted to the Election Commission of India by H D Deve Gowda, national president of the JD(S), electoral bond donations from MEIL amounted to Rs 50 crore - nearly 56 per cent of total received by the party.

Run by Krishna Reddy, MEIL is involved in marquee projects of the Telangana government such as the Kaleswaram Dam project. In total, the company and its subsidiaries have spent more than Rs 1,200 crore on electoral bonds between April 2019 and November 2023, as per data released by the Election Commission. This makes it the second-largest purchaser of electoral bonds.

In October 2019, the Income Tax department raided the offices of the company. Following this, a probe was also initiated by the Enforcement Directorate. On April 12 that year alone, MEIL had purchased bonds worth Rs 50 crore. In March 2019, it had donated bonds worth Rs 10 crore to JD(S); it also donated Rs 40 crore via poll bonds to the JD(S) in 2023.

While MEIL was the biggest donor to the JD(S), which has aligned with the BJP in Karnataka to fight the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, the second-largest donor to the party was the Embassy Group of Companies, which donated Rs 22 crore. All the bonds from the Embassy Group were received by the JD(S) in 2018 - Rs 3 crore in March, Rs 7 crore in April and Rs 10 crore in May, two days after the announcement of the 2018 election results that led to a hung Assembly.

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Opp raises poll bonds, EVMs to target PM as Rahul yatra ends

Second, they threaten. Third, they use shell companies and, fourth, contract in terms of money. Mumbai airport is an example of it. CBI probe was initiated and then Adani was given the airport," the Congress MP said.

"Everybody thinks that we are fighting against a political party or against an individual called Narendra Modi. No it is not. He is just a face. We are fighting against a particular power. That power which is in EVMs and in institutions... which is robbing you of your money and Narendra Modi's job is to distract your attention from that," Gandhi said.

"From media to business houses, would you find a member of the backward class, Dalit or a poor from general background? Farmers are denied their due compensation by companies... in my 4,000 km of travel (during his yatra), I didn't find a single youth who supported the Agniveer scheme. Narendra Modi's job is to divert your attention from these

issues. There will be China or Pakistan. He will tell you to light the diya, switch on mobile or will cry saying he is being insulted," he said.

The rally was attended by leaders Shiv Sena (UBT), Nationalist Congress Party (SP), RJD, DMK, JMM, Samajwadi Party, AAP, CPI (ML), Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi, NC and PDP among others. Prior to the rally, Gandhi along with Uddhav Thackeray paid floral tributes to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and at the memorial of Shiv Sena founder late Bal Thackeray.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge termed Prime Minister Modi as a leader of liars. "Is it wrong? He promised jobs, money, double income for farmers. Are these promises fulfilled? If not, then who is he? Am I wrong in calling him leader of liars (jhothon ka sardar)," said Kharge. He claimed Modi's return would mean no elections in future as it will lead to dictatorship.

He also took a dig at the electoral bond scheme. "Bonds gave him thousands of crores and not few thousands. So it is not pick-pocketing. It is much bigger than that," he said.

Both Gandhi and Kharge sounded caution on EVMs with Kharge saying the only way to tackle the threat of EVM manipulation will be to come out in large numbers.

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar said it was Mumbai from where Mahatma Gandhi gave the call to the British to Quit India, and the Opposition has gathered today to call for the defeat of the present regime.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Thackeray said he has coined a slogan against the BJP's claim of crossing 400 seats this time. "Our slogan is Ab Ki Baar, BJP Tadipar. We shall use it from hereafter," he said.

Earlier, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin said: "There is no bigger threat to India than

the BJP. The real victory of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra stands in defeating BJP and capturing Delhi."

Former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav said, "We are here not only to defeat Modi but to defeat the divisive ideology. We have no personal enmity against Modi or (Amit) Shah but our main opposition is unemployment and poverty."

Former J&K Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah cautioned voters over the EVMs. "Your vote is for those who spilled blood for the country. The vote is for India. But remember the machine is a thief. Do check the paper after casting the vote. I am sure the INDIA government will cancel the EVM for good and the ECI will be freed from government control," he said.

AAP's Saurabh Bhardwaj said, "The only common thing in the leaders of INDIA front is that none of us is scared of going to jail. It is important to fight, only then can

we win. We have to counter the EVM game this time by ensuring that more and more people come out and vote."

Although Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav did not attend the rally, he congratulated Rahul Gandhi for his "strong determination" on the conclusion of his yatra.

In a letter to Gandhi on Sunday, Yadav said, "Rare are those people, who can take out such yatra. Heartiest congratulations to you for your strong determination."

"You started this yatra from Manipur, which is burning due to the failure of the BJP government. You gave a strong message against the dictator government from the Northeast. During the course of the entire yatra, you met all sections of society, including farmers, youngsters, women, elderly and you got acquainted with their problems very closely."

WITH INPUTS FROM ENNS, NEW DELHI

PM, Naidu show of strength

hard here to bring in a double-engine growth government which will hasten development in the state. With TDP joining the NDA, we have become more stronger."

"We are going into this election with two objectives - to bring the NDA back in power in New Delhi, and to bring down the state government here. YSRCP leaders are competing with each other in corruption," he said. The YSRCP and Congress are working together to help each other, Modi said. "In NDA, we carry all along; but the Congress has only one agenda - to use and throw its allies. Today, Congress may have formed the INDI alliance, but its thinking remains the same."

He urged people to vote for the NDA, at the Centre and State, to facilitate implementation of the Centre's schemes in the state. "All NDA MPs and MLAs will work for you, this is Modi's guarantee," he said.

Switching to Telugu, Modi said: "Nalugu vandalu datali,

NDA ki vote veyalli (NDA should cross 400, so vote for NDA)."

"Results are on June 4 which means the NDA will cross 400," he said. "There is this extraordinary coincidence. This time, the election results are going to be declared on June 4... and the whole country is saying '400 paar'. So '400 paar' for developed India, '400 paar' for Andhra Pradesh," he said.

"From this 'prajagalam' meeting, we are launching the campaign to drive away the YSRCP and its dirty politics. The PM has come here to support the wishes of the 5 crore people of Andhra Pradesh to see the NDA in power in the state. The BJP-TDP-JSP alliance has brought happiness to the 5 crore people of Andhra Pradesh," Naidu said.

The three parties finalised their seat-sharing formula for Lok Sabha and state polls on March 11. Of the 25 Lok Sabha seats, the BJP will contest six, TDP 17, and JSP 2; of the total 175 Assembly seats, the BJP will contest 10, TDP 144, and JSP 21.

Mob targets Gujarat Univ's foreign students

Police have registered a case under IPC provisions relating to unlawful assembly, rioting, voluntarily causing hurt and criminal trespass. The two arrested persons have been identified as Hitesh Mevada and Bharat Patel, both residents of Ahmedabad.

As videos of the incident started circulating on social media, showing some people vandalising the hostel rooms and damaging vehicles, Ahmedabad Police Commissioner G S Malik and Gujarat University Vice Chancellor Neeraj Gupta reached the hostel Sunday morning.

Malik told reporters that around 10.30 pm Saturday, when some foreign students were offering namaz, 20-25 people entered the university's Block A hostel building and asked why they were offering prayers there and told them to do so at a mosque. This led to a scuffle followed by stone pelting and vandalism.

"Somebody informed the police control room at 10.51 pm and a PCR van reached the spot at 10.56 pm," Malik said. "We have taken serious note of the incident and strict action will be taken."

The five students who were injured are pursuing different courses under Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) scholarships. ICCR Gujarat in-charge Surendra Kumar told The Indian Express, "The police and state government are looking into the incident. As soon as we get an update from the university authorities we will inform our headquarters."

There are around 300 foreign students under ICCR scholarship in Gujarat University and around 1,100 students across the state.

A student from Afghanistan who was among those injured said: "I was in my room when I heard slogans of Jai Sri Ram from outside around 10.30 pm. When I came out I saw some three-four persons, one of them wearing an orange scarf, stopping the students from praying."

"A verbal spat led to slapping

... that's when the security personnel intervened and took them away. Soon, those who attacked called others and in no time a mob had reached the hostel. They attacked the students and started pelting stones at the rooms," the student said.

Around 75 foreign students stay in the Block A hostel, the ground plus two-storey building with 50 rooms. Eyewitnesses said the mob chased the foreign students to their rooms. "One of the students was attacked with a knife while another injured his leg when a stone broke the window glass and hit him. The attackers were shouting and looking for two boys who clashed with them outside," said a hostel inmate.

"Out of fear, some students jumped from the first floor and ran, while many left the hostel and stayed in a hotel last night," said another student.

Vice Chancellor Gupta told The Indian Express: "We have removed the coordinator of Study Abroad Programme and within three days not only foreign students but others too will be moved to new hostels for better security and facilities. A Foreign Student Advisory Committee has been constituted."

Following the violence, the university Sunday allocated G-9 block to local students and the NRI hostel with 90 rooms to the foreign students. Briefing reporters earlier in the day, the Vice Chancellor said there was already some tension between the foreign students and those who attacked them. "As per the information available with me, this (namaz) is not the main issue. The issue cannot take such a major form in one day and from one incident." She said that the university will arrange cultural orientation for foreign students. "They are foreign students and when they go to foreign countries there is a need to be culturally sensitive. From this incident it has emerged that there is still a need for cultural orientation. We will sit with them (foreign students) and try to understand

what they feel and how to strengthen their security."

While Prof Neelam J Panchal has replaced Rakesh Raval as the new SAP coordinator, Parth Panchal has been appointed as the assistant. Ashokbhai Chavda has been appointed as the NRI hostel warden and Kapil Kumar as the coordinator. On the change of guard, Vice Chancellor Gupta later told The Indian Express: "I was informed that there were already some representations from local students submitted to the SAP staff but there was no action. These were primarily on the cultural issues and also objections against some religious leaders visiting the hostel premises. There should be no public display of religious activities. There are not only Muslims but Christians, Buddhists and students from other religions too who are staying in the hostel."

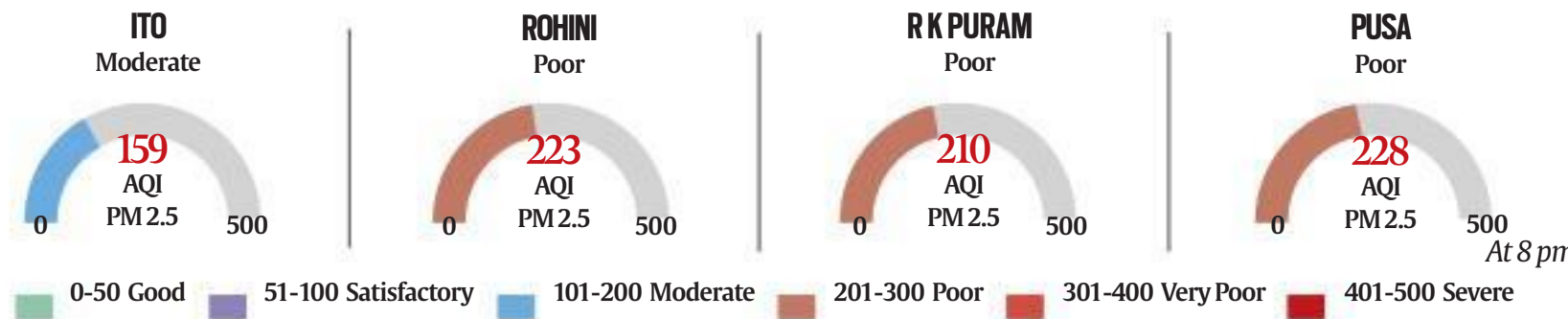
Even as videos of the incident went viral, the Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement Sunday evening. "An incidence of violence took place at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad yesterday. State government is taking strict action against the perpetrators. Two foreign students were injured in the clash. One of them has been discharged from hospital after receiving medical attention. MEA is in touch with Gujarat government," official MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

Ahmedabad Crime Branch meanwhile arrested two accused and handed them over to Gujarat University Police Station. Deputy Commissioner of Police Tarun Duggal said, "Nine teams were formed to arrest those accused. Two of them have been arrested. Investigations are on to arrest the other accused."

Asked about the background of the two held, Duggal said, "Their interrogation is on. We can speak about their background, their intention, and how they did it after the interrogation is over."

WITH INPUTS FROM ENNS, NEW DELHI

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**CALLED BY PROBE AGENCY TODAY & ON MARCH 21**

## Double ED summons for CM in excise policy and DJB water meter cases

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

A DAY after he was granted bail by a Delhi court for non-compliance of Enforcement Directorate (ED) summonses, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal got not one, but two summonses from the investigating agency: one in the Delhi excise policy case — the ninth such — and the other in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) meter case.

While he has been asked to join investigation in the excise policy case on March 21, the agency has called him for questioning in the DJB case Monday. In February, the ED had conducted raids at various locations



On Saturday, the CM was granted bail by a Delhi court for non-compliance of ED summonses. *Archive*

in Delhi, Varanasi and Chandigarh in connection with the DJB case, including premises linked to Kejriwal's personal as-

sistant Bibhav Kumar and AAP Rajya Sabha MP N D Gupta. The agency has also arrested retired DJB chief engineer Jagdish

Kumar Arora and contractor Anil Kumar Aggarwal in connection with the case. The ED's case is based on an FIR registered by the CBI for offences related to alleged corruption and bribery in the DJB. It alleged that a contract to install electromagnetic flow meters was given to a company at "inflated" rates.

"The FIR alleged that Jagdish Kumar Arora, the then Chief Engineer of the DJB, awarded a certain contract to M/s NKG Infrastructure Ltd for a total cost of Rs 38 crore despite the fact that the company did not meet the technical eligibility criteria," a spokesperson of the ED said.

The CBI registered the case against DJB and NBCC officials in July 2022. The contract was

awarded to the firm in December 2017.

The ED also alleged that bribes were given to people linked to AAP and were also passed on to the party as "election funds".

"The ED investigation further revealed that the contract of the DJB was awarded at highly inflated rates so that the bribes could be collected from the contractors from the inflated cost of the contract. As against the contract value of Rs 38 crore, only about Rs 17 crore was spent towards the contract and the remaining amounts were siphoned off in guise of various fake expenses. Such fake expenses were booked for bribes and election funds," the ED spokesperson said.

## 'Poor construction quality': PWD to raze complex for judicial officers in Dwarka

Work began in 2014, stopped twice; vigilance inquiry ordered

**GAYATHRI MANI**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

A NEW residential complex in Dwarka Sector 19 for judicial officers is set to be razed — even before its 70 quarters could be allotted — after the Public Works Department (PWD) found several flaws in its execution, including poor quality of construction and cracks in buildings, said officials.

The Delhi government initiated a vigilance inquiry against the engineers involved in the project while the contractors concerned have been blacklisted. According to officials, the complex has 11 blocks and 7 buildings. Out of the 70 quarters, 38 were Type V (stilt plus 7 floors) and 32 were Type VI quarters (ground plus 8 floors). Work was awarded in 2014 and the target was to complete it by February 2017. But the first contract was rescinded in 2018; an amount of Rs 30 crore as against the total cost of Rs 48 crore had been spent on the work, they said. Subsequently, as the building lay incomplete, the department re-tendered the work; Rs 2.5 crore (approximately) was paid to the second contractor. However, the second contractor too left the building incomplete and informed the department that the structure was seemingly "unstable" and developing "cracks", said officials.

"Post this, engineers responsible for the project also abandoned work and left the site unattended... seeking time to consult various institutions without arriving at a concrete solution to the problem," said a senior official. "Three different institutions were consulted in the last three years — CBRI, Roorkee (2021),



The 70 quarters were yet to be allotted. *Express*

CPWD (2022), and IIT-Delhi (2023) — which submitted reports to the department last November. After considering recommendations from all three reports, the PWD found that the condition of the buildings deteriorated due to lack of basic maintenance such as plastering and painting of external RCC members for protection against corrosion..." said the official.

"Lack of timely action by the project engineers concerned was one of the main reasons behind the deterioration. Timely action could have reduced the damage and the building could have been re-developed and allotted for public use... The department has no option left but to demolish it," said a senior official.

Earlier this year, the PWD special secretary also visited the complex and directed the Chief Engineer concerned to blacklist and immediately register an FIR against the contractor who executed the work for "negligence" and "causing harm to life and public property by using sub-standard building material". Further, officials said, show-cause notices were also issued to the superintendent engineer, ex-

ecutive engineer, assistant engineer and junior engineer who executed the "sub-standard work and paid the contractor". Disciplinary action against these officers was suggested.

It was also directed to conduct an inquiry on why the quality was not checked during execution of the project and how the asset was handled by the Project Division without affixing any responsibility. Meanwhile, another senior PWD official said the department has floated tenders for the demolition. "It will be done mechanically... The agency will deploy at least two high-reach machines with a height of 25 mts or more... the contractor will have to carry out the work without creating any hindrance to nearby buildings and residents... they will also have to clear the debris," said officials.

The government, in a response, told *The Indian Express*, "It (buildings) was empty. Even before it was completed, there had been (issues of) very poor-quality construction and... flaws. A vigilance inquiry has been initiated against engineers involved and the contractor blacklisted."

**BRIEFLY**

### Head constable booked for hitting vehicle with his car

*New Delhi:* A head constable of the Delhi Police Special Cell allegedly hit a vehicle with his car in Central Delhi's Daryaganj-Ito stretch. Police said the officer, Mohit, has been booked under Section 185 of the Motor Vehicles Act. The incident took place on Sunday at 2 am when Mohit allegedly hit a cab driver, who was going towards ITO, with his Baleno (a non-service vehicle) from the rear. While the cab sustained minor damage, police said the driver did not want to lodge a police complaint. An officer said a police uniform and diary was recovered from the head constable's car. "We are checking CCTV footage of the area to see if he hit any other vehicle," said an officer.

### Repairs on Mathura Road, police issue traffic advisory

*New Delhi:* The Delhi Traffic Police has issued an advisory for commuters travelling from Ashram to Badarpur due to the repair work being conducted by the PWD on Mathura Road. Heavy traffic was seen on Mathura Road over the weekend, especially on the stretch from Ashram to Badarpur near Okhla tank, due to ongoing repairs by the PWD, officials said. According to the advisory, commuters travelling from Badarpur to Faridabad have been asked to steer clear of Mathura Road. Commuters have been urged to consider alternative routes such as MB Road and Maa Anand Mai Marg. **ENS**

## ED, CBI acting like PM's goons: Atishi

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

FOLLOWING THE Enforcement Directorate's two summonses to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, one each in connection with the now-scraped excise policy and DJB money laundering cases, AAP leader and minister Atishi accused the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of plotting to put Kejriwal in jail before the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Calling the ED and CBI a *gunda* (goon) of the BJP and PM, Atishi said in a press conference, "CM Kejriwal physically appeared in court yesterday and the court granted him bail following the ED's complaints that he was



Delhi minister Atishi alleged BJP is using ED & CBI to stop the CM from campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls. *PTI*

not complying with its summons in the liquor policy case. Now, as the matter is in court, the investigation will take place on whether the ED's allegations are right or false. However, the ED is

not satisfied. It issued two new summonses to the CM today."

She was referring to the Rouse Avenue court granting Kejriwal regular bail following the ED's complaints that he was not complying with its summonses in the excise case.

She alleged that the BJP is using the ED and CBI to stop Kejriwal from campaigning for the upcoming polls through these summonses: "... Because Modi ji and BJP do not care about the court, judicial process, and justice. They just care about the polls and how to stop the Opposition from taking part in it."

"What kind of *gundagardi* (hooliganism) is this? Today, the ED and CBI are acting like *Modi ji ke gunde*," she alleged.

"Now with the electoral bonds made public, it clearly shows that Modi's goons were running an extortion racket together through the ED, CBI, and I-T department. First, companies were summoned by them, and then, just like goons demand money weekly, the same way, money was demanded from those companies through electoral bonds," she alleged.

Atishi said that's why the CM was sent another summons.

Responding to the claims, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said: "The behavior and language of Aam Aadmi Party leaders is like that of thugs and looters, and their language is a testament to their character."

## Metro for Kondli, saving Constitution: AAP East Delhi pick Kuldeep's promises

**UPASIKA SINGHAL**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

KULDEEP KUMAR'S office is abuzz with activity — the kitchen churns out endless cups of tea for people trickling in and out to get their forms signed by the Aam Aadmi Party MLA from Kondli, ask for jobs, and complain about civic issues.

The 30-year-old Dalit leader and former MCD councillor has been on the rise within the party's ranks. Now declared the AAP's Lok Sabha pick for the East Delhi constituency, the fact that he is an SC candidate being fielded from a general category seat does not faze Kumar.

In fact, he wears his identity on his sleeve, with Ambedkar's portraits and Buddha statues in every room of his office. He also proudly declares that he is the son of a sanitation worker, writing on social media, "I am proud of my father. He has always been a source of inspiration for me. He has always worked hard all his life as a sanitation worker and served society selflessly and has brought us here by getting us educated. Taking inspiration from him, I too am serving the public selflessly day and night. My father is my real hero."

He also believes that one's background does not matter if



AAP MLA Kuldeep Kumar kicked off his campaign earlier this month. *Express*

one works on the ground and supports people who come to them for help. "But, yes, to field a reserved candidate from an unreserved seat is an achievement in itself," admitted Kumar.

Facing off against BJP's pick, former mayor of the erstwhile East MCD Harsh Malhotra, Kumar has already begun his campaign in earnest. In the week following the candidate announcement, he conducted a series of meetings with party workers and post-holders in Patparganj, Okhla, Jangpura, Laxmi Nagar, Shahdara, Gandhi Nagar, Krishna Nagar and Vishwas Nagar assembly constituencies.

His current focus is on consolidating party workers and conducting an extensive door-to-door campaign to connect with voters as much as possible. Interestingly, he has started conducting morning walks where he can meet voters in parks and talk to them.

The MLA is confident that the AAP will win the East Delhi seat and that the BJP stands no chance. "They (BJP) have betrayed the people of East Delhi twice. First, it was Maheish Girri who came here in 2014, then Gautam Gambhir in 2019. Both of them did not do any work, did not meet the people, and share their happiness and sorrow. We intend that we give them a son

of the soil who will win," said Kumar.

In the 2019 polls, the AAP had fielded Atishi, currently Education Minister, from East Delhi against the BJP's Gautam Gambhir, the cricketer-turned-politician, who defeated her. The AAP had polled 17% votes from the constituency. Its INDIA bloc ally, Congress, had got 24% of the vote share while the BJP's was at 55%.

Kumar also raised doubts on whether Delhi's voters will choose the BJP to get a "quasi-double engine" government. Citing the case of the Vishwas Nagar assembly constituency, Kumar said, "There are some areas of Delhi that have a triple-engine government, where the MP, MLA and councillor are from the BJP and yet haven't done any work there... we have not let any task slide in the last eight years, but, yes, we've fought tooth and nail to get them done... and the voters will appreciate us for it."

For now, Kumar hopes to get better Metro connectivity in the Kondli area. "East Delhi was never made to connect with Central Delhi... if I become the MP, I can say with surety that I would try my best to get Metro connectivity to Kondli," he said.

On the national level, he would like to "save Babasaheb's Constitution".

### 100 POLLING STATIONS TO BE SET UP IN HIGH-RISES

## GB Nagar, Ghaziabad: All eyes on 2 NCR seats as they vote in April

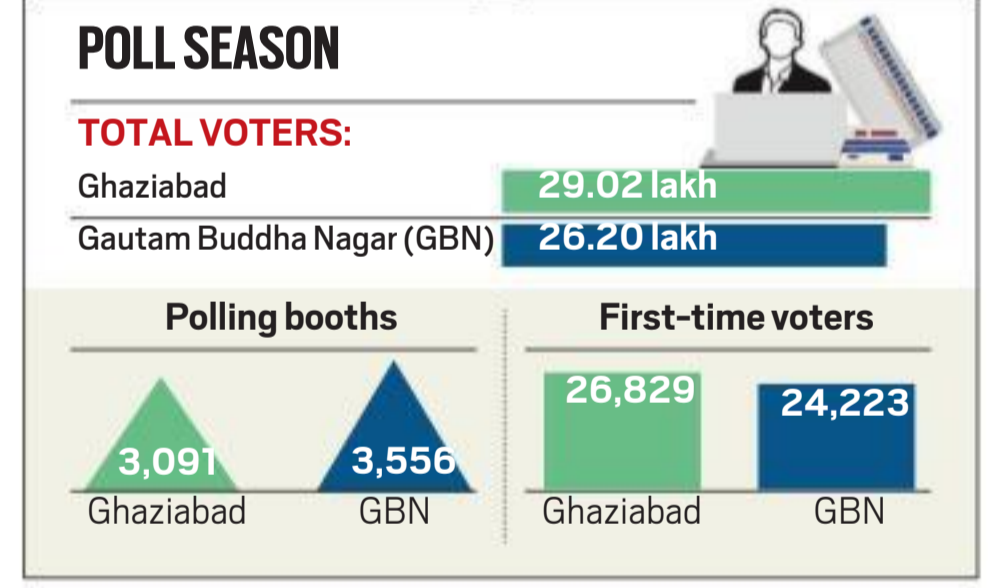
**DHEERAJ MISHRA**  
NOIDA, MARCH 17

AS THE state gears up for the Lok Sabha election next month, all eyes will be on two constituencies of NCR: Gautam Buddha Nagar (GBN) and Ghaziabad, which comprise 10 Vidhan Sabhas of Uttar Pradesh. Heading to vote in the second phase of seven-phased Lok Sabha polls on April 26, the constituencies are significant for two reasons: They are the economic drivers of the state and also strategically important due to their proximity to the national capital.

Manish Kumar Verma, returning officer and GBN District Magistrate, said a total of 641 polling centres and 1,826 polling booths have been created in the district. A total of 100 polling booths will be set up in the high-rises of the district, he added.

As per data released by the district administration, there are a total of 26.20 lakh registered voters in Gautam Buddha Nagar constituency, which comprises Noida, Dabri, Jewar, Sikandrabad (Bulandshahr) and Khurja (Bulandshahr) Vidhan Sabha.

Similarly, there are 29.02 lakh registered voters in Ghaziabad



constituency, which comprises Loni, Muradnagar, Sahibabad, Ghaziabad and Dhaulana (Hapur) Vidhan Sabha. In total, more than 55 lakh people in these two constituencies are expected to vote. *(see box)*

"A candidate can spend a maximum Rs 95 lakh on rallies, office vehicles, personnel, building rent, electricity, publicity material etc... During the election, the candidate has to maintain three registers (A, B & C) to record the expenditure," said the DM, while addressing the representatives of political parties.

"If political parties are to be criticised, it will be limited to their policies and programmes, past records and work. No ap-

peal will be made on the basis of caste and sect sentiments. Mosques, churches, temples and other places of worship will not be used as platforms for election campaigns," said Verma, also the district election officer.

As per data, there are a total of 10.08 lakh men and 8.22 lakh women voters and 102 persons of the third gender in GBN district. In Ghaziabad, there are 15.54 lakh male voters, 12.60 lakh female voters and 186 of the third gender. A total of 3,197 polling stations have been created in Ghaziabad constituency.

Officials said there are 589 vulnerable and critical polling stations in Ghaziabad and 342 in Gautam Buddha Nagar.

### HOUSES THE TOMB OF EMPEROR AKBAR'S FOSTER BROTHER

## Son's tribute to father, 'piece of Gujarat in Delhi': Story of Chausath Khamba

**VIDHEESHA KUNTAMALLA**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

AS ONE makes their way to the Nizamuddin dargah, the 14th-century shrine built to commemorate Sufi saint Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, a striking structure comes into view towards the right. Marked by marble pillars and exquisite lattice work, this is Chausath Khamba: literally translated to 64 pillars.

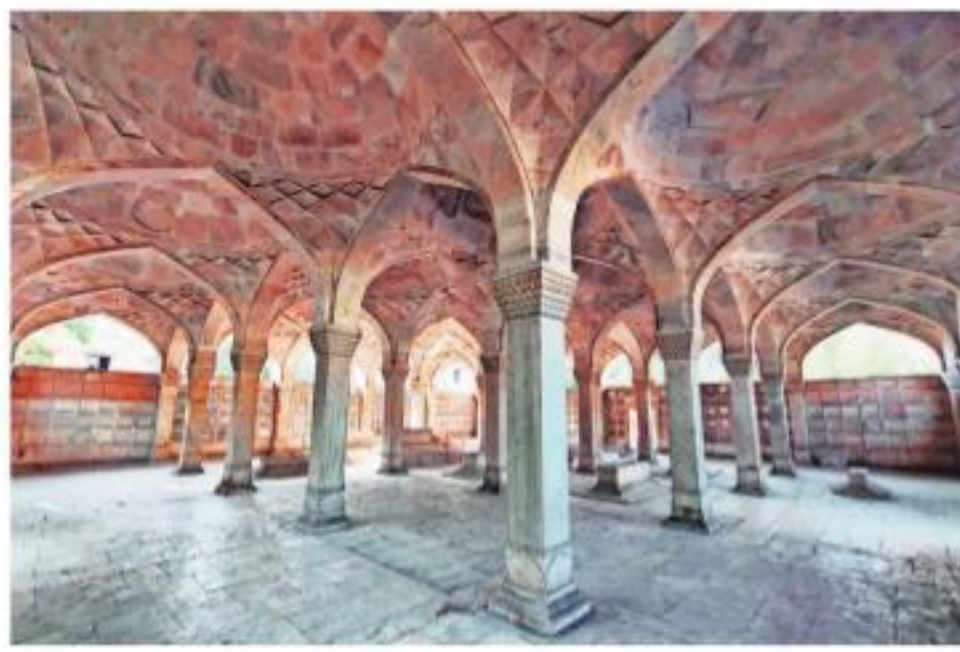
Built in 1623-24 AD, the structure houses the tomb of Mirza Aziz Koka, foster brother of Mughal Emperor Akbar.

As per the official conservation document by Aga Khan Trust for Culture: "The tomb enclosure is entered through a lofty arched gateway and has a large sunken forecourt. The mausoleum is unique on account of it being built entirely of marble, with 25 marble domes supporting the flat roof of the structure. The plan for Chausath Khamba could have been inspired from the wooden garden pavilions from Persia — such as the Chihil Sutun, and in turn, the Chausath Khamba seems to have inspired the architectural design for Emperor Shahjahan's Diwan-i-Aam, Hall of Audience."

It further states: "Each facade of the square structure has five marble arches inset with marble *jalis* or lattice screens, and a doorway in the central arch providing access to the tomb. The column capitals are intricately carved with simple yet striking pendentives bridging the square floor plan to the circular dome above."

Notably, in 2011-2014, the Aga Khan Trust for Culture along with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) undertook the conservation of Chausath Khamba. The project was co-funded by the Federal Republic of Germany.

According to author and historian Sam Dalrymple, the struc-



The structure is near the Nizamuddin dargah. *Abhinav Saha*

ture is a piece of Gujarat in Delhi. In a post on Instagram, he wrote: "It is basically a piece of Ahmedabad in the heart of Delhi... the Urs Mahal, where festivals would be held during the anniversary of Nizamuddin's death. Once again, it is in a purely Gujarati style... Compare the tomb to Ahmedabad's Sarkhej Roza, and you'll see what I mean."

Dalrymple said it was fascinating how regional architecture travelled across India centuries ago. "We often think of globalisation as a modern thing but nothing could be further from the truth," he said in the post.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, historian Sohail Hashmi said, "The corner pillars of the structure... the four pillars together all on the outside are double (joined together) which is why this structure becomes 64 pillars... Pre-Independence, the ASI carried out repairs. Those days, cement

was used and that caused damage to the entire structure... all the stones of the domes were dismantled and many attempts were made to restore the structure... This particular monument was in a bad condition before the Aga Khan Trust took up its conservation."

The structure also finds mention in Sir Gordon Risdley Hearn's book *The Seven Cities of Delhi*. "The mausoleum was erected by his (Mirza Aziz Koka's) son, Mirza Aziz Kokaltash, governor of several provinces under Akbar... Chausath Khamba... said to be as old as the shrine itself..." it read.



# COMPLAINT IN REWARI EXPLOSION '2 blasts in the past, firm didn't do routine checks'

AISWARYA RAJ  
GURGAON, MARCH 17

A DAY after the explosion at a factory that manufactured vehicle parts in Rewari's Dharuhera left 40 injured, an FIR was lodged Sunday in connection with the incident based on a complaint, stating that the dust collector had exploded twice before but the company authorities failed to conduct routine checks.

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Saini has directed SDM, Rewari to conduct a magisterial inquiry into the matter and submit a report.

The FIR was lodged based on the complaint of Rajkumar, a labourer in the Lifelong India company, who hails from UP's Gonda, and at present resides in Dharuhera. "On Saturday, 60-70 people were working in the company, and around 5.45 pm, the dust collector exploded. This was the third occurrence of the boiler dust collector exploding. However, there was no damage on the previous occasions. Despite informing the company's authorities and contractor to rectify the issue, they neglected it, resulting in a major accident this time," the complaint stated.

"Due to the explosion, a circuit fault occurred, causing a fire in the company. The company's emergency gate was large and remained closed, trapping 35-45 people working inside and of them, 25-35 suffered severe injuries and the rest sustained minor injuries," the complaint



Relatives gathered outside a hospital where injured workers were admitted after a blast occurred in the boiler of a spare parts manufacturing facility, in Rewari district, Saturday. Around 40 workers suffered burn injuries, according to police. PTI

stated.

Chaos descended inside the factory with around 30-40 people getting injured while trying to escape. They were taken to hospitals for treatment, the complaint stated. "The negligence of the company's owners and contractors led to this incident, and appropriate action should be taken against them," the complaint said.

The FIR stated that the police have found 30 injured persons admitted at trauma centre in Rewari. Most of the labourers hail from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The FIR recorded the medicolegal cases of 30 patients. A total of 19 were sent to PGIMS Rohtak.

"Around 3-4 of these patients have burns above 70 per cent," IO Vijender Singh said, adding

that the labour department is looking into the matter and possible violations.

Assistant Labour Commissioner, Akash Mittal, who is part of the probe committee helmed by the SDM, said the members visited the site Sunday. "We will decide on the compensation for labourers depending on their injuries. We have sought information from the hospitals," Mittal added. Another committee member said lapses were found in the working of the company. "We are conducting a probe into the matter and we inspected the site twice. Though the company has licences and NOCs, a blast as big as this was a result of lapses," he added.

The Indian Express reached out to Lifelong India officials but they did not comment.

# YouTuber Elvish Yadav arrested in snake venom case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NOIDA, MARCH 17

NOIDA POLICE on Sunday arrested YouTuber and Bigg Boss OTT 2 winner Elvish Yadav in the "snake venom case", in which he, along with five Delhi residents, were accused of selling snake venom at rave parties in the National Capital Region.

Officials said during investigation, evidence was found regarding the use of snake venom at parties.

Stating that a report in this regard has been received from the Forensic Science Laboratory (PSL), police said Yadav was allegedly involved in running the "group" that sold the venom.

"On the basis of evidence, accused Elvish Yadav was called for questioning. Today, after sufficient evidence has been found, the accused Elvish has been presented before the Court. Along with this, sections of the NDPS Act (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act) have been added



Yadav has been sent to 14-day judicial custody. PTI

in the said case," said Vidya Sagar Mishra, DCP Noida.

Police have also added IPC sections 284 (Negligent conduct with respect to poisonous substance) and 289 (Negligent conduct with respect to animals) in the case. Officials said the court has sent him to judicial custody for 14 days.

Following a tip-off from People for Animals, an NGO run by BJP MP Maneka Gandhi, police nabbed five people from a banquet hall in Noida in November 2023. While Yadav was named as one of the accused in the FIR, he was not arrested at the time.

The FIR, which was registered on the complaint of Gaurav Gupta, the NGO's animal welfare officer, reads, "We received information that...Elvish Yadav shoots videos with snake venom and live snakes in farmhouses...along with other gang members/YouTubers and organisers rave parties illegally."

The other five accused — Rahul, Teetunath, Jaikaran, Narayan, and Ravinath, all residents of Delhi's Badarpur, who were arrested at the time of the raid — are now out on bail.

# SIMs registered in labourers' names sent to Vietnam; 4 held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

FOUR PERSONS have been arrested for allegedly sending hundreds of international SIM cards every month to Vietnam, concealed in a cavity inside a diary, to be used by people for gaming applications and "social media profiteering".

Police said the accused — Mukul Kumar (22), Hemant (26), Kanhaiya Gupta (29) and Anil Kumar (20) — were part of a syndicate that used to get SIM cards issued in the name of labourers, by enticing them with a minimal amount of money, and sold them to people in Vietnam at higher rates. They received payment through a cryptocurrency app banned in India, said officers.

The case came to light when the IGI unit of Delhi Police re-

ceived a complaint from the Manager of Operations of FedEx courier, at the airport's cargo terminal, who said a shipment intended for Vietnam containing a bulk quantity of SIM cards was found during physical checks. These SIMs were covered in carbon paper and kept inside a diary, the complaint said.

"A total of 500 SIM cards were found in three separate packages," said DCP (IGI) Usha Rangnani.

A police team was formed to solve the case; it picked up 60 SIM cards at random whose ownership was verified by service providers. It was found that most owners were in Loha Mandi in UP's Agra and the SIMs were issued from point-of-sales centres in nearby areas.

Subsequently, following raids at Loha Mandi, the SIM card owners, mostly factory workers, said a man named Mukul fooled them -

he gave them Rs 200 each for getting a SIM registered in their names, saying it was to meet the monthly target of POS centres. Mukul then sold these SIMs to Kanhaiya and Hemant for Rs 300 per person and to Anil for Rs 500.

The DCP said, "Anil then used to deliver these SIM cards to a Vietnam address... (to a person) he met on Telegram. He used to get payments in his bank account through Binance, a Chinese cryptocurrency app... The SIM cards, the accused claimed, were being used in gaming apps in Vietnam."



Lt N Parthiban, KC  
Maj Mukund Varaderrajan, AC  
Capt Upmanyu Singh, SM  
Lt Col Gaurav Sawhney

On the occasion of 18th year of commissioning SS81/WS27 course recalls the unflinching association with all fellow compatriots and humbly remember the ones who sacrificed their all in the line of duty. Humble tributes to all who left us early in this journey, and obeisance to their families. Remembering, Mukund, Parthiban, Upmanyu, Manish Gusain, Arun Singh, Amol Nilange, Gaurav Sawhney.

# Days set to get warmer in Delhi, max temperature to peak at 33 degrees this week



Sun sets behind workers working on Delhi-Saharanpur-Dehradun Expressway, near Akshardham, in New Delhi, on Sunday. Abhinav Saha

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

AFTER A long winter, Delhi is all set to witness rising temperatures in the coming week, starting Monday, when maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to be around 31 and 13 degrees Celsius respectively.

According to the latest forecast by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), maximum temperatures can be expected to soar up to 33 degrees Celsius, surpassing the normal temperatures for this time of year by 1.7 degrees.

While Monday will witness a maximum temperature of 31 degrees, Tuesday is expected to see a slight increase at 32°C, followed by Wednesday reaching 33°C. Thursday will remain warm with a maximum temperature of 32°C, followed by Friday and Saturday when it is forecasted to peak again at 33°C.

On the other hand, the minimum temperatures are expected to dip below the normal range of 16.5°C for this season, ranging between 13 and 15°C. While no rainfall is predicted for the Yamuna plains this week, Thursday and Saturday may see a partly cloudy sky, with the remainder of the week expected to remain clear, according to IMD's weather forecast.

On Sunday, Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 30.8 degrees Celsius, one notch below the season's average, according to the IMD.

The humidity level was 28%, according to data recorded by the IMD at 5.30 pm.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) of the national capital was recorded in the "moderate" category with a reading of 188 at 10pm, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). (With PTI inputs)

**NOTICE FOR VENDOR REGISTRATION FOR SUPPLY OF DENTAL MATERIALS IN MILITARY DENTAL CENTRE, AGRA FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024-25**

Vendors interested in supplying Expendable Dental Materials are hereby informed that vendor registration application forms are available in Military Dental Centre, Agra on all working days, 08:30 AM to 01:00 PM. Completed forms along with required documents/certificates are to be placed in a sealed envelope marked as 'VENDOR REGISTRATION APPLICATION' and deposited back latest by 1200 hrs on 28th March 2024.

Sd/-  
Officer Commanding  
Military Dental Centre, Agra

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Interested candidates to download the Application Form from school website and submit hard copy of the same, duly filled, to Army Public School Ridge Road, Dhaula Kuan along with self-attested copy of all relevant certificates/ testimonials by hand / by post so as to reach the school latest by 06 Apr 2024 (02:00 PM) alongwith Demand Draft for Rs.100/- in favour of Army Public School, Dhaula Kuan. No application will be accepted/entertained thereafter. Application(s) received through email will also not be entertained.

Only shortlisted candidates will be called for interview through email. Tentative date of interview : last week of April 2024 onwards

The school reserve the right to cancel candidature of one / all candidates without any notice.

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**SIKKA PORTS & TERMINALS LIMITED**  
CIN: U45102GJ1997PLC031906

Registered Office: Admin Building, MTF Area, Village Sikka, Taluka & District Jamnagar - 361 140, Gujarat, India.  
Website: [www.sptl.co.in](http://www.sptl.co.in) E-mail: [company.secretary@sptl.co.in](mailto:company.secretary@sptl.co.in)  
Tel.: 022-3555 7100 • Fax: 022-3555 5560

**NOTICE TO THE DEBENTUREHOLDERS**  
**Record Dates and Due Dates for Payment of Interest during the Financial Year April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025**

Notice is hereby given that the Company has fixed 'Record Date' for the Secured Redeemable Non-Convertible Debentures for determining the names of the debentureholders eligible to receive interest payment during the financial year April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025. The debentureholders whose names appear (a) as Beneficial Owners on the Record Date as per the list furnished by the Depositories in respect of the debentures held in electronic form, and (b) as debentureholders in the Register of Debentureholders on the Record Date, would be entitled to the said payments, as per details given hereunder:

ISIN	Debenture Series	% of interest (p.a.)	Purpose	Record Date	Due Date for Payment
INE941D07208	Debentures - PPD 12	6.75%	Payment of Interest	5-April-24*	22-April-24
INE941D07158	Debentures - PPD 6	7.95%	Payment of Interest	11-October-24**	28-October-24
INE941D07166	Debentures - PPD 7	7.90%	Payment of Interest	31-October-24*	18-November-24

\*Record Date i.e. April 7, 2024 falls on a Sunday, a non-business day and a day prior i.e. Saturday, April 6, 2024 is also a non-business day. Hence Friday, April 5, 2024 is considered as Record Date as per the terms of issue of Debentures PPD 12.  
\*\*Record Date i.e. October 13, 2024 falls on a Sunday, a non-business day and a day prior i.e. Saturday, October 12, 2024 is also a non-business day. Hence Friday, October 11, 2024 is considered as Record Date as per the terms of issue of Debentures PPD 6.  
\*Record Date i.e. November 3, 2024 falls on a Sunday, a non-business day and the preceding 2(w) days i.e. Saturday, November 2, 2024 and Friday, November 1, 2024 are non-business days. Hence, Thursday, October 31, 2024 is considered as Record Date as per the terms of issue of Debentures PPD 7.  
Debenture holders are requested to keep their PAN and bank account details updated with their respective Depository Participants (DPs) with whom they are maintaining their demat accounts.

For SIKKA PORTS & TERMINALS LIMITED  
Sd/-  
Sanjeev Dandekar  
Director  
(DIN: 00022797)

Place : Mumbai  
Dated : March 15, 2024

**JAMNAGAR UTILITIES & POWER PRIVATE LIMITED**  
CIN: U40100GJ1991PTC051130

Registered Office: CPP Control Room, Village Padana, Taluka Lalpur, District Jamnagar - 361 280, Gujarat  
Website: [www.jupl.co.in](http://www.jupl.co.in) E-mail: [company.secretary@jupl.co.in](mailto:company.secretary@jupl.co.in)  
Tel.: 022-3555 7100 • Fax: 022-3555 5560

**NOTICE TO THE DEBENTUREHOLDERS**  
**Record Dates and Due Dates for Payment of Interest and Redemption Proceeds during the Financial Year April 1, 2024 To March 31, 2025**

Notice is hereby given that the Company has fixed 'Record Date' for the Secured Redeemable Non-Convertible Debentures for determining the names of the debentureholders eligible to receive interest / redemption proceeds during the financial year April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2025. The debentureholders whose names appear (a) as Beneficial Owners on the Record Date as per the list furnished by the Depositories in respect of the debentures held in electronic form, and (b) as debentureholders in the Register of Debentureholders on the Record Date, would be entitled to the said payments, as per details given hereunder:

ISIN	Debenture Series	% of interest (p.a.)	Purpose	Record Date	Due Date for Payment
INE936D07075	PPD 4	9.75%	Payment of Interest/ Redemption	July 18, 2024	August 2, 2024
INE936D07182	PPD 7	7.90%	Payment of Interest	July 26, 2024*	August 12, 2024**
INE936D07174	PPD 6	6.40%	Payment of Interest	September 13, 2024*	September 30, 2024**

\*Record Date i.e. July 28, 2024 falls on a Sunday, a non-business day and a day prior i.e. Saturday, July 27, 2024 is also a non-business day. Hence, Friday, July 26, 2024 is considered as Record Date as per the terms of issue of Debentures PPD 7.  
\*\*Coupon Payment Date i.e. August 10, 2024 falls on a Saturday, a non-business day and a day succeeding i.e. Sunday, August 11, 2024 is also a non-business day. Hence, as per the terms of issue of Debentures PPD 7, interest will be payable on the immediately succeeding Business Day which will be the Coupon Payment Date i.e. Monday, August 12, 2024.  
\*Record Date i.e. September 15, 2024 falls on a Sunday, a non-business day and a day prior i.e. Saturday, September 14, 2024 is also a non-business day. Hence, Friday, September 13, 2024 is considered as Record Date as per the terms of issue of Debentures PPD 6.  
\*\* Coupon Payment Date i.e. September 29, 2024 falls on a Sunday, a non-business day. Hence, as per the terms of issue of Debentures PPD 6, interest will be payable on the immediately succeeding Business Day which will be the Coupon Payment Date i.e. Monday, September 30, 2024.  
Debenture holders are requested to keep their PAN and bank account details updated with their respective Depository Participants (DPs) with whom they are maintaining their demat accounts.

For JAMNAGAR UTILITIES & POWER PRIVATE LIMITED  
Sd/-  
Satish Parikh  
Director  
(DIN: 00094560)

Place : Mumbai  
Dated : March 15, 2024

# 6 DECISION 2024



SEVERAL FOUND SAFETY IN STAYING IN MIDDLE WHILE LEANING MORE TOWARDS BJP

## Beyond BJP and Congress, this is the lay of the land for regional parties

A dominant DMK, a nervous Trinamool, a confident BJD, test on hand for RJD, JD(U), SP, TDP: Where they stand

VIKAS PATHAK  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

ACROSS THE country, regional parties, or those parties having a presence in just one or two states, have had to make a choice between either tying up with the BJP, or if ideologically opposed to it, choosing the Congress corner. Several, though, have found safety in staying in the middle, while leaning more towards the dominant BJP at the Centre.

A look at how these parties are placed as LS polls approach:

### DMK: Will its left carry Cong along in TN again?

While the BJP has been trying to make inroads into Tamil Nadu ever since illness faded Jayalithaa's clout and allowed the party to pull the AIADMK to its side, the DMK that came to power in 2021 has held on in the state. However, with K Annamalai in command, the BJP has managed to stay in the narrative. The DMK's self-goals in the form of statements by its leaders calling for "eradication" of Sanatan Dharma and warning against a strong Centre, have been played up by the BJP.

### TMC: Can Mamata hold off BJP?

The Mamata Banerjee-led TMC has been a powerful player in West Bengal for over a decade now, but the BJP has made significant inroads. In 2019, it stunned the TMC by winning 18 LS seats. What might hurt the TMC is the damaging Sandeshkhali episode.

The Modi government delivered the party another googly by finally implementing the CAA.

**BJD: Naveen No. 1, what after?**  
With BJD's Naveen Patnaik aging and no successor in sight, the BJP has cleverly positioned itself as the alternative. Right now, the BJP is doing this by projecting itself as the BJD's best friend in Delhi but BJD insiders know it may not take long for the BJP to turn the tables.

### RJD: The base holds, but is that good enough?

In Bihar, the RJD has held on to its core base of Yadavs and Muslims and still has steam left for a fight, at least come the 2025 Assembly polls. However, with Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) back in NDA, the Mahagathbandhan led by the RJD and including the Congress is facing an uphill task. In 2019, the BJP-JD(U)-and Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP won 39 of 40 seats in Bihar.

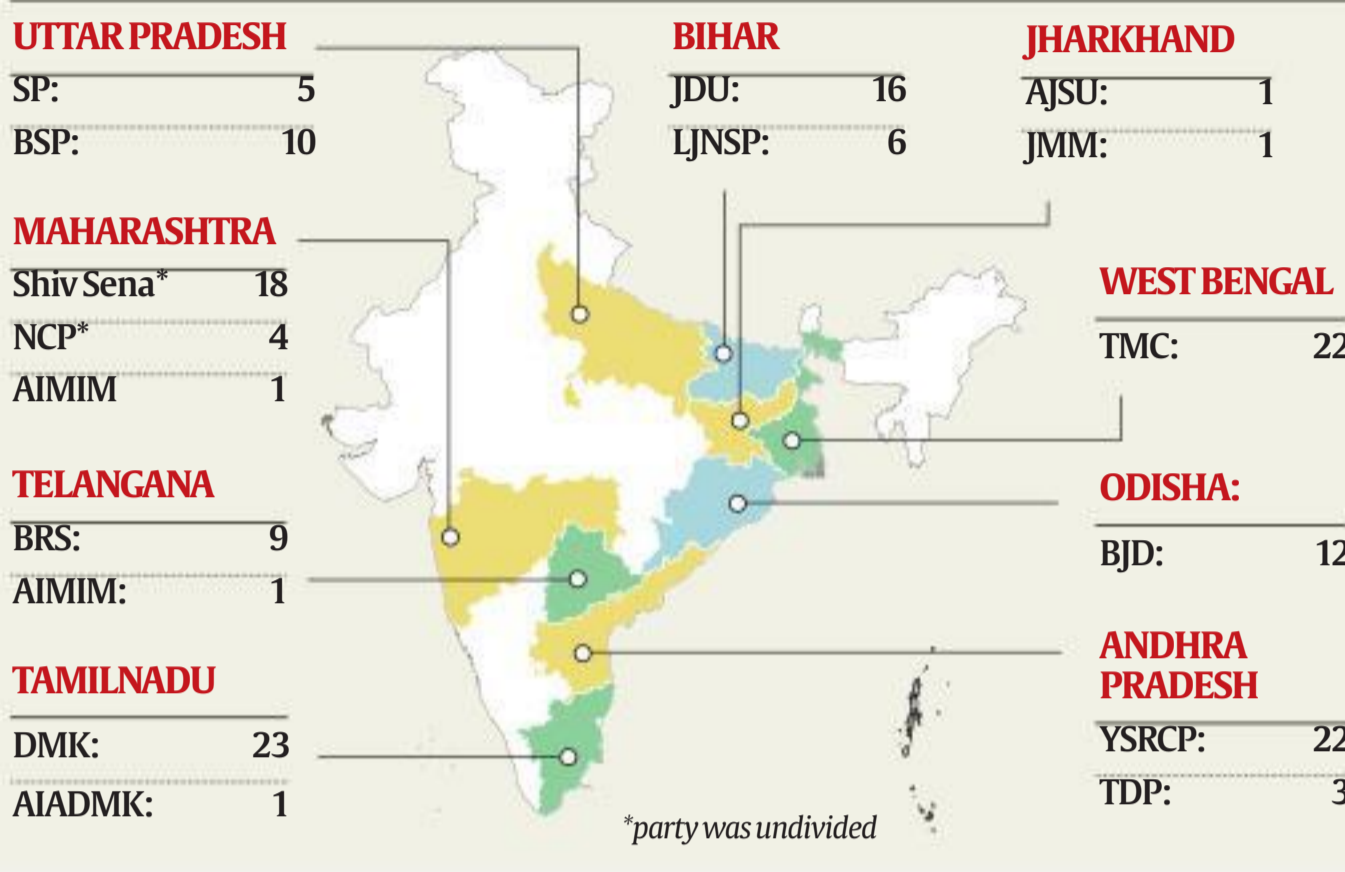
### SP: UP-hill or onwards?

With exactly the same base as RJD in Bihar, the SP of Akhilesh Yadav is staying afloat but clearly as a distant second to BJP. In 2019, the SP won 5 seats – in an alliance with the BSP and RLD – with the BJP taking 62. This time, the SP does not have either the BSP as an ally, or the RLD, while its 2022 partner SBSP is with the NDA too.

### JD(U): Will Nitish's survival instinct be enough?

The one politician who has

### REGIONAL FORCES 2019 PERFORMANCE



seamlessly traversed the "secular"-Hindutva binary, Nitish Kumar is seen as back on the winning side after re-alliance with the BJP. In 2019, his alliance with BJP ensured an NDA sweep in Bihar. The BJP is now clearly the senior partner in the alliance. Nitish hence will have a task repeating 2019.

### BSP: Is it really in the fight?

Mayawati's BSP has been declining since 2014. Its performances in 2017 and 2022 UP Assembly polls were poor. In 2019, the BSP won 10 seats, the most after the BJP in UP, but it was largely due to an alliance with the SP and RLD. This time, the party is con-

testing alone, if contesting at all.

### TDP, YSRCP: Will BJP entry change the picture?

The last 5 years have not been good for TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu, since his loss to YSRCP in 2019 Assembly polls. After being released from jail on medical grounds, Naidu pursued the BJP till the party finally agreed to a tie-up, along with TDP partner JanaSena Party. In 2019, the YSRCP won 22 seats and TDP just 3.

### BRS: Can it turn around fortunes?

The raison d'etre of the BRS, led by K Chandrashekar Rao, was the

creation of the state of Telangana. This led to its back-to-back Assembly wins till it lost power in November 2023 elections. The last polls saw BJP make inroads, with 4 seats, ahead of the Congress's 3. Meanwhile, BRS leader K Kavitha was arrested on Friday in the Delhi liquor policy case.

### JMM: Can it put Hemant Soren's arrest behind?

The JMM formed the government in the Assembly elections held towards end-2019, in alliance with the Congress and RJD. That alliance has held, even as CM Hemant Soren is now in jail over corruption allegations. With

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'REMOVE MODI'S IMAGES FROM PUBLIC PLACES AHEAD OF POLLS': ACTIVISTS SEND NOTICE TO ECI

## Now, Left Front in Bengal getting 'tired of waiting' for Cong

ATRI MITRA  
KOLKATA, MARCH 17

WITH POLL dates for Lok Sabha elections in, the TMC and BJP are off the ground in West Bengal, having announced candidates for all 42 seats and 20 constituencies, respectively. However, presumptive allies Congress, Left Front and Indian Secular Front (ISF) are yet to untangle their seat-sharing puzzle in Bengal.

Last week, the Left Front unilaterally announced 16 candidates, 14 of them fresh faces. Talks between the ISF and Left at least seemed to pick up pace after TMC chief Mamata Banerjee announced candidates for all seats.

Sources said the ISF initially demanded 14 seats as part of the alliance with the Left, dialling down reportedly to 8. The Left does not want to part with more than 6. "They (ISF) are seeking Jadavpur and Murshidabad, but we cannot part with these as we have already announced a candidate for Jadavpur and finalised a name for Murshidabad," a senior CPI(M) leader said.

The Congress reportedly wants 12 seats, but the Left is try-



Left Front announced 16 candidates last week. File

ing to bring that down to 10. Sources said while the Left Front is ready to leave Purulia and Raiganj for the Congress, it expects the grand old party to leave Murshidabad for it. However, Congress is likely to find it difficult to part with Murshidabad as it is the backyard of its West Bengal president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

With no response from the Congress still on seat sharing talks, Left Front leaders are preparing to announce a final list. "Their central leadership is still fumbling... We can wait for them but not indefinitely," a senior CPI(M) leader said. The Congress is justifying the delay saying it is "a big party." "We will put forward our points when we get a chance," Chowdhury told *The Indian Express*.

## Counting for Arunachal, Sikkim polls on June 2: EC

**AVANEESH MISHRA**  
DEHRADUN, MARCH 17

DEALING A blow to the Congress and joining the list of senior party leaders deserting it ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, sitting Badrinath MLA Rajendra Singh Bhandari on Sunday joined the BJP.

"I have shown my faith in the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He is taking the country forward. I will walk in his footsteps and ensure the victory of BJP candidates. I am joining the BJP as I am inspired by his leadership," he said after joining the BJP in the presence of senior party leaders in Delhi.

Bhandari's exit comes a day after the daughter-in-law of senior Congress leader Harak Singh Rawat, who is under the Enforcement Directorate scanner, Anukriti Gusain, quit the party and is reportedly set to join the BJP. Earlier this month, Manish Khanduri, son of BJP stalwart and former Uttarakhand Chief Minister B C Khanduri, also parted ways with the grand old party to join the BJP.

Bhandari, a three-time MLA and former state minister, in a

## Uttarakhand Cong exodus goes on, Badrinath MLA joins BJP

**ASAD REHMAN**  
LUCKNOW, MARCH 17

THE SAMAJWADI Party's (SP's) decision to field three "outsiders" in its latest list for the Lok Sabha polls has caused discontent within party ranks, with many hoping for tickets being left out.

On Friday, the SP in its third list sprung a surprise by fielding Advocate Bhanu Pratap Singh from the Meerut seat and retired Additional District Judge (Bijnor) Manoj Kumar from Nagina in the Bijnor district. The party also allotted the Bhadohi seat to the TMC, its other ally as part of the INDIA bloc alongside Congress.

The TMC is likely to pick former Congress MLA Lalitesh Pati Tripathi, grandson of former UP CM Kamalapati Tripathi, for the seat. The SP's MLA from Sardhana, Atul Pradhan, was seeking a ticket from Meerut.

After the announcement of the list, Pradhan said on X, "The people of Meerut prayed for me to struggle. I apologise to you all for not getting a chance."

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Pradhan claimed that the SP has put Pratap Singh's candidature "on hold" and that the party top leadership "is hold-



Badrinath MLA Rajendra Singh Bhandari joins BJP in the presence of Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami, Union Minister Piyush Goyal and BJP MP Anil Baluni in New Delhi on Sunday. Praveen Khanna

letter addressed to state Congress chief Karan Mahara, resigned from the primary membership of the party.

In the 2022 Assembly polls, Bhandari had defeated state BJP chief Mahendra Bhatt by a narrow margin of over 2,000 votes. He had lost the Badrinath seat to Bhatt in 2017 by over 5,500 votes while in 2012 he defeated the BJP's Prem Ballabh Pant. Prior to the delimitation in 2007, Bhandari had defeated Bhatt from the Nandprayag seat by a slim margin.

Interestingly, the Badrinath Assembly constituency is the lone seat held by the Congress among the 14 segments falling under the Garhwal Lok Sabha seat, from where the BJP has nominated chief spokesperson Anil Baluni for the upcoming polls.

Uttarakhand Congress vice-president (organisation) Mathura Dutt Joshi said Mahara has sent a letter to Speaker Ritu Khanduri Bhushan urging her to disqualify Bhandari as an MLA under the anti-defection law.

## SP sees anger within ranks over space to Cong, TMC, 'outsiders'

**JAYPRAKASH S NAIDU**  
RAIPUR, MARCH 17

KEEPING IN mind the Maoist threat and the ongoing annual tactical counter-offensive campaign (TCOC), the EC has decided to shift 289 polling booths in LW-ehit Bastar region in south Chhattisgarh. Of these booths, 138 are being shifted again after Assembly elections in November last year.

The *Indian Express* had reported during the Assembly polls how a total of 126 new polling booths had helped around 54,000 people to vote in their villages. These 126 polling booths included around 80 booths which were set up for the first time since Independence, while the remaining booths had to be relocated to nearby villages due to incidents of Maoist interference during elections in the last two decades.

Most of 126 booths (32 each) were in Kanker and Kondagaon districts. "Most of these 126 polling booths are part of 138 polling booths which are being reshuffled due to Maoist threat perception. Violence was witnessed in last year's Assembly polls. Two polling staff also suffered splinter injuries in IED blast where a BSF jawan had died," said an EC official.



SP chief Akhilesh Yadav during an INDIA bloc meeting. File

ing deliberations" and "reconsidering its choice to field the lawyer". Sources in the SP dismissed the claims.

The ticket to Kumar in Nagina has also caused some resentment within the party. Nagina MLA Manoj Kumar Paras was seeking a ticket from the seat for his wife Neelam Paras.

SP leader Hakim Lal Bind was eyeing the Bhadohi ticket for his wife Asha Devi, while Mahendra Bind, who joined the SP from the BSP, was also hopeful of a ticket.

"The party is ignoring loyal workers. People from outside are being brought in. This demoralises the party's actual workers," said a leader in Bhadohi.

Another leader in Bijnor said,

### ENTERTAINER

## Mann's friend on AAP Punjab list, 'outsider' party learns insider ways

**RAAKHI JAGGA & KAMALDEEP SINGH BRAR**  
LUDHIANA, AMRITSAR, MARCH 17

AN HOUR to go for the AAP announcing names of its Punjab candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, CM Bhagwant Mann told noted Punjabi actor, comedian and singer Karamjit Anmol that the party wanted him to contest from the Faridkot reserved seat.

Anmol, a close friend of Mann who hails from Gandua village of Sangrur district, admits his first choice was Sangrur. "But the CM told me an artist should be ready to represent the whole of Punjab. So I agreed to contest from Faridkot," Anmol said.

Facing his first electoral contest, Anmol has hit the ground running, holding meetings with AAP workers and all its MLAs representing Assembly segments under the

Faridkot LS seat on Saturday, and touring the constituency Sunday. Kotkapura MLA and Assembly Speaker Kular Singh Sandhwan said, "We are happy the party has chosen Anmol."

However, not many are as pleased, at the AAP's choices, with the party that came to power representing itself the "outsider" making choices quite like its counterparts in its LS list. The choice of Anmol is among the most striking, with Mann's friend making his political debut straight with a Lok Sabha ticket.

The nephew of legendary folk singer Kuldeep Manak, Anmol (52) began life as an entertainer, doing comedy with Mann, before moving on to acting. He has acted in popular Punjabi-language hits like Carry on Jatta 2, Ardaas and Sardar Sahib, and also appeared in the Bollywood film Dev D.

Before the announcement of his ticket, Anmol had been promoting his new song Mirza on his social media handles. On Friday, he updated these posts by thanking the AAP for making him a part of its 'Mission Rangla Punjab' (Mission Prosperous Punjab).

A soft-spoken Anmol is aware of the objections to his candidature by many AAP workers. "Though I had never thought of joining politics, but people in my village always used to tell me one day, I would. I want to understand the burning issues of the area and highlight them in Parliament," Anmol said, adding he believes in doing positive politics "rather than continuously criticising others".

Anmol also wants to continue his acting career, "as it is my bread and butter". "I will try to strike a balance," he adds. "You can call me kalakar (artist) or a



Karamjit Anmol (first from left) with Kotkapura MLA Kular Sandhwan (centre) in his constituency, Saturday. Express

leader... Now, I'm both."

Faridkot is known a prestigious seat, having elected former CM Parkash Singh Badal as its first MP in 1977. His son Sukhbir Singh Badal's political journey also started from this seat, when he became its MP in 1996. However, in 1999, Sukhbir had suffered a

shock defeat from the seat, to the Congress. In 2004, Sukhbir had wrested Faridkot back.

After the seat was designated reserved in 2009, the Akali Dal's Paramjit Kaur Gulshan won from here. In 2014, when the AAP made its debut in Punjab, Gulshan lost to an AAP first-

timer. In 2019, the Congress's Mohammed Sadique won Faridkot. Sadique is also a popular Punjabi folk artist, and remains a top contender for the Congress ticket from Faridkot, apart from Charanjit Singh Channi.

However, the AAP is confident of winning back Faridkot as, of the nine Assembly segments under the LS seat, only Gidderbaha had not been won by the party in the 2022 Assembly polls. Punjab Congress chief Amarinder Singh Raja Warring had won from Gidderbaha. With no other party declaring their candidates for Faridkot yet, Anmol also believes he has first mover's advantage.

### AAP pick of candidates

The first off the blocks in announcing candidates for the Lok Sabha, the party that once attacked other parties for not being loyal to any ideology, seems

to have realised the value of keeping a little flexibility.

Unlike 2022, when the party fielded many new faces, for example, its Lok Sabha list has several known names, including five sitting ministers – Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal (Amritsar); Laljit Singh Bhullar (Khadoor Sahib); Balbir Sidhu (Patiala); Gurmeet Singh Khudian (Bathinda); Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer (Sangrur).

The fact that the AAP has had to fall back on its known winners is seen as proof that, quite like other parties, it has not cultivated many leaders – falling back for all practical purposes on the duo of CM Mann and Kejriwal.

Of those fielded, only Sidhu and Meet Hayer can be called true blue AAP products, with Dhaliwal, Bhullar and Khudian starting their political careers with the Congress or Akali Dal. Two other candidates who have

got tickets, Sushil Kumar Rinku (Jalandhar) and Gurpreet Singh G P (Fatehpur Sahib), also joined the party from the Congress.

Besides Anmol from Faridkot, the reserved seat of Fatehpur Sahib has gone to Congress import Gurpreet Singh, while Hoshiarpur is expected to go to Congress sitting MLA Raj Kumar Chhabawal, who joined the AAP on Friday.

Many AAP leaders point to the incongruity of the party, that with much fanfare celebrated B R Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh as its main icons after coming to power, not picking Dalit candidates from own ranks. An AAP MLA argues the party had to put winnability first. "The party is evolving. Sometimes circumstances also have to be considered. The country is moving towards dictatorship and we need to ensure that we put our best foot forward in every seat."

# DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



CEC Rajiv Kumar (centre) with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar (right) and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu. File

## CLARITY ON SENIORITY

THE UNION government appointed two former bureaucrats from the 1988 batch last week — Gyanesh Kumar and S S Sandhu — as election commissioners. Normally, the government fills one vacancy at a time, making it easier to define seniority and the line of succession to the position of Chief Election Commissioner. However, with the recent simultaneous appointments and both officers belonging to the same IAS batch, it was initially unclear who would succeed Rajiv Kumar as the CEC. It is now apparent that Gyanesh Kumar will be the next CEC after Kumar's retirement in 2025.

## RIGHT CHOICE

BJP MAY be upbeat about its prospects for a hat-trick in the Lok Sabha elections, but in Haryana, where it recently replaced Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini as the CM, the party seems to be struggling to find the right candidates for all 10 Lok Sabha segments. In Rohtak, considered a stronghold of Congress's Bhupinder Singh Hooda and his family, BJP candidate Arvind Kumar Sharma, who had switched from the Congress in 2019, is apparently keen on fighting election from Sonapat to overcome anti-incumbency. Sources said the BJP has been trying to rope in actor Randeep Hooda for the seat but has not succeeded yet. Now that Saini has become the CM, the party needs his replacement for Kurukshetra. Sources said the party's attempts to convince a former Congress MP or his wife to contest from Kurukshetra are still on.

## PM asks ministers to draft roadmap for first 100 days, next 5 years of new govt

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Sunday told ministers to draft a roadmap for the first 100 days and next five years for new government, sources said. Chairing a Cabinet meeting here this morning, the PM also asked them to meet secretaries and other officials of their respective ministries to discuss how the agenda for the first 100 days and the next five years can be better implemented. The meeting took place a day after the Election Commission announced schedule for the Lok Sabha polls 2024. The Cabinet also initiated the process of notifying the dates of the seven-phase parliamentary elections by sending the Election Commission's recommendation to President Droupadi Murmu. The first notification will be issued on March 20 for the first phase of polls on April 19 on 102 seats. The nomination process begins for a particular phase with the issuance of the notification. Prime Minister Modi and his Council of Ministers had on March 3 had brainstormed over the vision document for "Viksit Bharat: 2047" and a detailed action plan for the next five years. A 100-day agenda for immediate steps to be taken after a new government is formed in June was deliberated upon during the daylong meeting of the Council. Sources had then said that the roadmap for "Viksit Bharat" was a result of more than two years of intensive preparation and entailed a "whole-of-government" approach involving all ministries and wide-ranging consultations with state governments, academia, industry bodies, civil society, scientific organisations and mobilisation of youths for inputs. "More than 2,700 meetings, workshops and seminars were held at various levels. Suggestions of more than 20 lakh youths were received," an official had said.

## 2 yrs after Moosewala killing, his parents welcome baby boy

KANCHAN VASDEV CHANDIGARH, MARCH 17  
ALMOST TWO years after gunmen shot dead popular Punjabi singer Shubhdeep Singh alias Sidhu Moosewala in Mansa district of Punjab, his parents Sunday welcomed a baby boy into the family. Moosewala's father Balkaur Singh, 60, made the announcement in a post on Facebook. "With the blessings of lakhs and crores of people who love Shubhdeep, the Almighty has blessed us with Shubh's little brother," Balkaur said in his post. "The family is healthy and I am grateful for the immense love of all well-wishers." He also posted a picture of him holding the baby and a welcome cake with Moosewala's photo in the background. The baby was delivered at Jindal Hospital in Bathinda. Balkaur also shared an emotional video of his wife Charan Kaur, 58, from the hospital. He broke down as he said that he felt like Moosewala had returned as junior Shubhdeep. Sources said Balkaur and his wife opted for IVF technique and had gone abroad for treatment last year. The family had



Balkaur Singh, father of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala, with the newborn on Sunday. PTI

at the time requested for privacy until the procedure was successful. After the news of the birth went viral Sunday, Moosewala's fans rushed to his house in Moosa village and played Holi to mark the celebrations. Political leaders, especially from the Congress, also congratulated the parents. PPCC chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring visited Balkaur to congratulate him. The singer, who had unsuccessfully contested the Punjab Assembly polls on a Congress ticket from Mansa in 2022, was shot dead on May 29 that year.

# Arunachal 'inherent part of China's territory', claims Chinese military

Ministry's website on Friday. India has repeatedly rejected China's territorial claims over Arunachal Pradesh, asserting that the state is an integral part of the country. On March 9, Prime Minister Modi dedicated to the nation the Sela Tunnel built at an altitude of 13,000 feet in Arunachal Pradesh that will provide all-weather connectivity to strategically located Tawang and is expected to ensure better movement of troops along the frontier region. The Rs 825 crore tunnel, constructed on the road connecting Assam's Tezpur to West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, is being billed as the longest bi-lane road tunnel in the world at such an altitude. "The Indian side's actions contradict the efforts made by both sides to ease border situations and are not conducive to maintaining peace and tranquility in the border areas," Xiaogang said.

THE CHINESE military has reiterated its claim over Arunachal Pradesh, calling the area an "inherent part of China's territory", days after India rejected Beijing's objection to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state. The Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang said that the southern part of Xizang (the Chinese name for Tibet) is an inherent part of China's territory, and Beijing "never acknowledges and firmly opposes" the "so-called Arunachal Pradesh illegally established by India", official media here reported. Zhang made the remarks in response to India's enhancement of its military readiness through the Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, according to a report posted on the Chinese Defence

## New Delhi, Male review withdrawal of military personnel from Maldives

operating three aviation platforms in the Maldives and New Delhi is now deploying civilian personnel to operate them. Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu had set March 10 as the deadline for the withdrawal of the first group of Indian military personnel from his country. "During the meeting, both sides reviewed the ongoing deployment of Indian technical personnel to enable continued operation of Indian aviation platforms that provide humanitarian and medvac (medical evacuation) services to the people of Maldives," the MEA said in a statement.

INDIA AND the Maldives on Sunday reviewed the ongoing process of replacing Indian military personnel from the island nation with Male saying the second group will leave by April 10. The two sides held the third meeting of the bilateral high-level core group in Male, days after India withdrew the first team of military personnel that was operating a light helicopter in the Indian Ocean archipelago. The military team has been replaced by civilian technical experts. The Indian personnel are

## Azad: Will insulate interests of J&K residents with law if voted to power

ARUN SHARMA JAMMU, MARCH 17

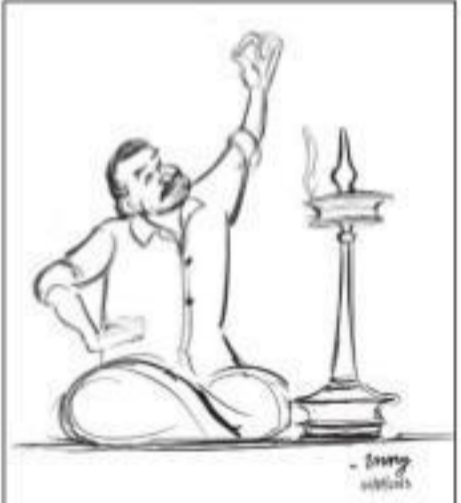


DEMOCRATIC PROGRESSIVE Azad Party (DPAP) chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad here on Sunday hinted at enacting a law restraining outsiders from purchasing land and applying for jobs in the Union Territory, if his party comes to power in Jammu and Kashmir. Addressing his first public rally in Jammu city after the announcement of Lok Sabha election schedule, Azad said legislation is needed to protect the interests of Jammu and Kashmir. "Our land and jobs were protected by Article 35A (of the Constitution) but after its abrogation with Article 370 (in August 2019), Jammu has become vulnerable as anyone coming from outside will prefer the city rather than going to the hilly districts of Jammu or Kashmir," he said. Azad sought the people's support in forming the next government in J&K. He also asked people to vote wisely in the parliamentary polls so that the elected candidates become their voice and highlight their issues in Parliament. Referring to local people's dependence on government jobs in the absence of big industries, Azad said: "Our biggest factory is the government jobs and for

this, if our brethren from across the country come, whether Hindus or Muslims, then where will our children go?" He said more than 80 per cent of the area of J&K has mountains or forests and if the usable land "is also purchased by outsiders then our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren will have to beg". In his speech, he also appreciated PM Modi for giving AIIMS, IITs and IIMs to both Jammu and Kashmir, and also Lt Governor Manoj Sinha for initiating development works. The DPAP leader justified the Election Commission's decision of not holding simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in J&K. Azad, however, urged the poll panel to hold the state polls in J&K within a couple of months after the Lok Sabha elections.

## T M Krishna gets Sangita Kalanidhi award

SUANSHU KHURANA NEW DELHI, MARCH 17



CARNATIC CLASSICAL vocalist Thodur Madabusi Krishna, the musician at the forefront of challenging the conventional ideas about caste and gender politics in Carnatic music besides highlighting the institutional issues and non-inclusivity of the famed December Music Season, has been conferred the Sangita Kalanidhi award — the most prestigious recognition in Carnatic music — by the Madras Music Academy. According to a statement issued by N Murali, President of the Madras Music Academy, the distinguished recognition for Krishna is for "his powerful voice", "adherence to tradition when it comes to the art", "focusing on its exploratory as opposed to tightly de-

tempt to "push out caste elitism from the existing Carnatic music system" and unite various art forms. Grandnephew of former Indian finance minister TT Krishnamachari, also one of the founders of the Madras Music Academy, Krishna was 12 when he presented his debut concert at the Academy. In other awards announced by the Academy, while the Nritya Kalanidhi has been awarded to Mohiniyattam exponent Neena Prasad who runs music academies in Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram, the two Sangeet Acharya awards were given to mridangam guru Professor Parasalla Ravi and Carnatic vocalist Geetha Raja who learned under the aegis of T Brinda, one of the foremost representatives of the Veena Dhanammal school of Carnatic Music.

# Mahadev app FIR: Baghel named accused, calls it political vendetta

JAYPRAKASH S NAIDU RAIPUR, MARCH 17



FORMER CHHATTISGARH chief minister Bhuvesh Baghel has been named as an accused in an FIR registered this month by the state police on a complaint by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with its investigation into the Mahadev app online betting platform. Addressing the issue in a press conference in Raipur on Sunday, Baghel said, "My name was not there in the FIR copy. They added it after being pressured. The FIR was registered on March 4, but why was it not published on the website? The name was added later. This simply means they fear losing the Rajnandgaon seat from where I am contesting and know that me contesting in Lok Sabha elections will have a positive impact on other seats as well."

As per the ED complaint, Mahadev Online Book provides online platforms for illegal betting on various events, including live sport and elections in India. The promoters of the venture, based out of UAE as per ED sources, have allegedly amassed around Rs 5,000 crore through the platform. On January 1 this year, the agency filed a supplementary Prosecution Complaint (PC) in a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Raipur in connection with the case. The PC, which is equivalent to a chargesheet, was filed against five people including Subham Soni, one of the promoters of Mahadev Online Book, and a driver named Asim Das. As per the PC, Das, in his statement to the ED after his arrest on December 3 last year, said he was tasked by Soni to deliver a Rs 5.39 crore in cash to Bhuvesh Baghel, an allegation rubbished by the Congress leader who has accused the BJP of a political conspiracy. The hefty amount was allegedly part of the "protection money" given by the Mahadev app accused to avoid getting arrested. In Sunday's press conference, Baghel targeted the BJP. "This is political retribution. I will neither fear nor move back... If you see the details mentioned in the FIR where roles of other accused have been made clear, neither have they mentioned my role nor name. Why have they not arrested Shubham Soni or other accused till now. I believe BJP has taken protection money from them," he alleged. Taunting PM Modi and Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Baghel said, "The Mahadev app is still operational. Is this Modi's guarantee or Sai ki Sushashan (Sai's good governance)?" The Congress leader also brought up the Electoral Bonds issue. "At least 14 companies, after raids by ED and I-T, gave money to the ruling party. They received over Rs 1,300 crore from Future gaming and hotel services after raids."

## 'Allegations not true': Police close sexual assault case against Sajjan Jindal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE MUMBAI, MARCH 17  
POLICE HAVE closed the investigation into the rape and criminal intimidation case against Sajjan Jindal, chairman and managing director of JSW Group, on the complaint of a 30-year-old woman, saying the allegations in the complaint were not found to be true. The Bandra Kurla Complex police, which probed the matter, filed a B-Summary (closure) report before the Bandra metropolitan magistrate court on March 16. According to sources, the closure report states that the complainant filed the complaint long time after the incident, failed to submit evidence and failed to appear before the court for recording her statement under 164 CrPc procedure. "The complainant has stated that on December 24, 2021, the accused visited her at Taj Land End and tried to molest her. But on the day of the incident, the accused did not go to the said place. This was ascertained from the correspondence with the said hotel. The said conclusion was also drawn from the testimony of the witnesses there," police said in the closure report. From the testimony given by the witnesses, it has been concluded that there was no wrongdoing with the woman as mentioned in the FIR, police said.

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## The Indian EXPRESS

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

### LOK IN LOK SABHA

Close to a billion voters, a million moving parts — no one narrative explains 2024. That's the reminder as the polls begin

THE INCREDIBLE INDIAN election has begun. And no amount of cynicism or world-weariness, laments about the sharpening polarisation in general or the supposed predictability of this contest in particular, can take away from the excitement of the mammoth and magnificent exercise. In seven phases, from April 19 to June 1, close to a billion voters will be addressed and wooed by parties and candidates and they will have the opportunity to express themselves as only voters in democracies can — which is also why the proposed one-nation-one-election is a constricting idea. To be sure, there is a danger in overly romanticising the tryst with the EVM, especially in a polity with weakly institutionalised accountability, and the special polling stations to be set up in Manipur's relief camps will present a sobering image — free and fair elections are only one part of the democratic promise, not the whole of it. It is also true that the polarisation is set to sharpen as the battle lines are more tightly drawn. But this is also the first election after, on the Supreme Court's prodding, data on electoral bonds has been placed in the public domain. There is room for more disclosures and the dots will continue to be connected in days to come. But there could not be better news for the voter's right to know.

The June 4 outcome will be revelatory for the obvious and not-so-obvious reasons. It will decide who forms the new government at the Centre, whether Brand Narendra Modi will win the BJP a third successive term and whether, and to what extent, the Rahul Gandhi-led Congress, the Congress-led Opposition or any other Opposition formulation, is able to rise to its challenge. But the numbers on the scoreboard can also be decoded for what they say about some of the larger forces that are reshaping the polity. One in five voters is under the age of 30, women voters outnumber men voters in 12 states — these are not just statements of fact, but critical signposts of change. The polity is shifting and moving beneath the feet of political parties and they will need agility and balance to keep step with it. Women may not be a self-conscious or self-assured voting bloc, and they may be as divided as men by caste, class, religion and region. But it is possible that the political agenda of the future will be compelled to pay more than lip service to their concerns, which are the same as, but also different from, that of the men. The young could also be remaking the politics of this country, and parties can ill afford to ignore their sensitivities and needs — education and jobs and freedom and access to opportunity — while taking into account that the young citizen is, more and more, a netizen.

But above all, the election is a reminder of the inadequacy of any one narrative, including the one of polarisation, as an explanation of the electoral process or the outcome. In a country so large and diverse, there are just too many moving parts, and cross-cutting cleavages. Each vote will be counted — and will count.

### AN INTELLIGENT BALANCE

EU's AI Act could guide framing of similar laws elsewhere. For India, challenge is to address risks without stifling innovation

LAST WEEK, LAWMAKERS in the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Artificial Intelligence Act, putting the landmark legislation on track to take effect by the end of the year. While governments across the world are moving to put up guardrails, including Japan, Brazil and the US, where on October 30, President Joe Biden signed an executive order on AI safety — the European Union's new law is the first comprehensive framework for governing a technology that has seen explosive growth in recent years, dominating headlines and stoking both excitement and fear about the future.

Taking a horizontal, risk-based approach that will apply across sectors of AI development, the EU AI Act classifies the technology into four categories: Prohibited, high-risk, limited-risk and minimal-risk. Systems that violate or threaten human rights through, for example, social scoring — creating "risk" profiles of people based on "desirable" or "undesirable" behaviour — or mass surveillance are banned outright. High-risk systems, which have a significant impact on people's lives and rights, such as those used for biometric identification or in education, health and law enforcement, will have to meet strict requirements, including human oversight and security and conformity assessment, before they can be put on the market. Systems involving user interaction, like chatbots and image-generation programmes, are classified as limited-risk and are required to inform users that they are interacting with AI and allow them to opt out. The most widely used systems, which pose no or negligible risk, such as spam filters and smart appliances, are categorised as minimal-risk. They will be exempt from regulation, but will need to comply with existing laws.

Like the 2016 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) law, which influenced data privacy regulation around the world, the impact of the EU's AI Act is expected to be felt globally. However, the history of EU technology legislation, including GDPR, which has been criticised for being regulation-heavy and stifling innovation, urges caution. For India, where the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has been working on a framework for responsible AI, the challenge would be to acknowledge and address the risks posed by the emerging technology, such as the proliferation of deep fakes, without hobbling its potential for improving lives or enhancing the promise of India's start-up ecosystem. In this regard, the ministry's replacement last week of its March 1 advisory, which required generative AI companies to seek government permission for deploying "untested" systems, with a new one that drops this condition, is welcome. Going forward, the task for the government would be to safeguard citizens' rights, while continuing to make room for the transformative possibilities of AI.

### FREEZE FRAME

### EP UNNY



# Only if states agree

By the way it is being pushed through now, 'one nation, one election' forces regional parties into a corner



ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

WOULD THE RAM Nath Kovind panel's One Nation, One Election recommendations, if implemented, promote national unity or weaken it? While this is not the only issue the panel's recommendations generate, it is undoubtedly among the most significant.

Let us first look at what the panel says about national and state elections. It recommends that they should be held simultaneously and such synchronisation could, in principle, happen as early as 2029. The life of those state assemblies, which are to have elections between 2024 and 2029, must be cut short. More generally, if any elected government in the future falls before its five-year term is over, elections should be held only for the remainder of the term. The Kovind panel believes India has too many elections every year, which undermines governance and development. Synchronicity will create a balance between democracy, governance and development.

We have four states — Andhra, Arunachal, Odisha and Sikkim — if we consider those that will have elections along with the Lok Sabha elections this year. If we cover all of 2024, three more — Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand — will be added. In short, 21 out of 28 states are, in different degrees, out of the parliamentary cycle of elections. Their elected lives will be substantially shortened, though only once. Then, says the Kovind panel, simultaneous elections will allow five-year terms, both for national and state governments.

These ideas signal a desire for greater centralisation and a more ordered democratic process. But do order and centralisation also mean greater national unity? The answer depends on how one views the relationship between federalism and Indian nationhood. Our understanding will be immensely aided by historical and comparative perspectives.

When leaders of India's freedom movement thought about independence from the British, the dominant European intellectual currents of the time believed in "one language, one nation". John Stuart Mill, a leading political philosopher of the time, thought linguistic diversity was a "special, virtually insuperable, hindrance to nation-making".

This thinking penetrated the highest levels of decision-making of the British govern-

ment. In a famous passage, John Strachey, a top British administrator in India, argued in 1888: "There is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India possessing, according to any European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious", and "that men of the Punjab, Bengal, the Northwestern Provinces and Madras, should ever feel that they belong to one Indian nation, is impossible. You might wish as much reason and probability look forward to a time when a single nation will have taken the place of the various nations of Europe."

Strachey essentially claimed that like Europe, India was a civilisation, defined as a cultural unit. It was not a nation, which is normally viewed as a political unit. Ernest Gellner famously defined nationhood as building a political roof over one's cultural head. A nation is not simply a cultural concept; it is both cultural and political. Strachey also meant that India could not become a nation. Like Europe, it would continue to be a civilisation.

Mahatma Gandhi challenged this idea. His claim that religion and nationhood are two different things and Hindus and Muslims, though religiously distinct, were inalienable parts of the same Indian nation, is well known. What is less known is his position on language and nationhood. As early as 1920, Gandhi was instrumental in conceptualising the Congress party as a federation of linguistic units. He did not follow the British administrative divisions — the Bombay and Madras Presidencies, the Central Provinces, etc. Rather, the Congress was organised as 21 linguistically homogeneous "provincial units". Madras Presidency had Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam speaking peoples, but under Gandhi's scheme, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra, "Tamil Nad" came to have their separate Congress units, an idea and a practice that endured.

Gandhi's basic argument was that Indian identity was what would be called a hyphenated identity today. Indians were Tamil Indians, Bengali Indians, Malayali Indians, Gujarati Indians, etc. There was no contradiction between being a Tamil and being an Indian, being a Kannadiga and being an Indian, so on and so forth. It was the job of the freedom movement to turn a civilisational iden-

tity into a political identity. Europe might be a civilisation, consisting of a shared culture but many political nations, but India would be both a civilisation and a nation. A civilisation would be turned into a nation not by an erasure of diversity but by letting the two identities — the Indian and the regional — coexist.

In the latest version of federalism theory, as developed by Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, this Gandhian idea — Tamil Indians, Telugu Indians, Malayali Indians as Indians — has been developed into a new concept: That of the "state-nation". A state-nation is different from a "nation-state". The former has territorially concentrated diversities, and it promotes two simultaneous identities — the national and the regional — without imagining a contradiction between them. In contrast, a nation-state seeks to suppress diversity.

Here then is the key question. What kind of nation is India? A nation-state or a state-nation? Gandhi viewed it as the latter. The post-1956 linguistic reorganisation of the Indian federation was a return to Gandhi's concept. Before the reorganisation, Nehru did get cold feet. Like the Kovind panel, he thought economic development was primary. But correcting himself later, he viewed linguistic federation as expressing popular aspirations more authentically without endangering Indian unity. "One nation, one election" gravitates too closely to the 19th-century European conception of nationhood — that of a nation state. Moreover, the argument about the primacy of economic development is basically an uncorrected Nehru.

There is nothing wrong with having synchronised elections so long as the states agree. However, except for the regional parties allied with the BJP, most disagree with the idea. If the BJP passed a "one nation, one election" law in the next Parliament, it would push regional parties into a corner. A fundamental rearrangement of the polity should be based on a larger consensus, not on a brute majority.

The writer is Sol Goldman Professor of International Studies and the Social Sciences at Brown University, where he also directs the Saxena Center for Contemporary South Asia at the Watson Institute

### NOT BY ROTE

Open book testing requires innovative assessment, novel teaching methods



AMEETA MULLA WATTAL

TODAY, MILLIONS OF students in India are trying to cram as much information as possible with the board examinations going on. They are reading off flash cards, memorising key events and formulae that might crop up during the exams. But what if none of this was necessary?

The National Education Policy 2020 has recommended implementing various modes of exams for the benefit of students. This has created a renewed interest in open book examinations among policymakers, national and state boards. The CBSE has decided to conduct a comprehensive study as a pilot for students from classes 9 to 12 to assess the viability of implementing OBE in the context of the Indian educational framework. This experiment will be conducted in select CBSE schools.

From the time that NEP was released, various initiatives have been carried out to assess different aspects of student learning to transform the culture of assessment. The highlights include a focus on core concepts, high-order and foundational skills, self and peer assessment and case-based questions.

With the emphasis on 21st-century skills of critical and creative thinking, some educational experts suggest open-book exams, which will assess how students apply their knowledge to real-life problems instead of what they have memorised. Currently, the secondary and board exams are using up valuable time for learning with excessive coaching and preparation. This forces students to learn a narrow band of content in a single

stream. To encourage holistic development, discouraging coaching culture and rote learning for exam preparation is essential. Whether it is a board examination made easier or an open book exam, it should primarily test the core capacities and competencies of students rather than content memorisation.

To create child-centric evaluation systems, open book exams require national boards and teachers to be creative not only in designing innovative assessments, but also in using novel methods in classroom transactions. OBE helps to assess learner readiness, apply course content to given scenarios, analyse case studies and connect content with real-world situations. They allow questions where skills determine the appropriate application. The ability to apply knowledge is overlooked in the current system. OBEs are often harder than regular exams. Students need to understand the material, apply themselves, analyse and synthesise information in a given timeline.

This method of demonstrating knowledge is far more challenging than putting down memorised facts. Its success depends essentially on the quality of teaching. These exams are hard to design, and the making of guidelines is less predictable because they assess a more open range of answers.

Teachers require the necessary skills to design and implement student-centred learning activities in the classroom along with keeping pace with new pedagogies that move from rote to experiential learning. This examination will succeed if the

mindset of school education along with teacher training is transformed from foundational years upwards. A top-down approach to questioning without setting a learning context from childhood will be a challenge. In order to bring in OBE, teachers need to be open to new ideas, sift information from relevant data, be technologically enabled, flexible and enrich learners through experiences which are life-ready. The reality is that exams today are at odds with the focus on problem-solving and critical and creative thinking. The best exam would probably be that where a student is given information and the opportunity to develop planning, organisation and collaborative skills.

Education and schools stand at a crossroads. In many pockets, the promises of fairness, equity and social mobility have not been kept. With the coming in of the NEP, we can engage everyone in a system which will combine value and equity. Teachers should be encouraged to create innovative platforms that discover value-creating ideas through digital transformation, design and deliver competency-based learning and foster reflective discourse in classrooms. Assessments, guidance and measurement strategies need to be applied to effectively monitor and guide students throughout their school journey. Perhaps, then OBE may become a reality.

The writer is chairperson and executive director education, innovations and training, DLF schools and scholarship programmes



### MARCH 18, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

#### JUSTICE KHATRI'S CASE

JUSTICE SN Khatri at the Bombay High Court ruled that he had the jurisdiction to try the cases of bribery and corruption against former Maharashtra chief minister A R Antulay, which have been transferred to his court by the Supreme Court. Justice Khatri also rejected the contention of the accused that he (Justice Khatri) would have no jurisdiction to try the cases.

#### MATHURA REFINERY FIRE

PRODUCTION CAME TO a halt at the Mathura refinery when one of its units was damaged in

a fire. Three employees were injured and some vital equipment was damaged which brought production to a standstill. The fire was reportedly caused by a "leakage" in the cooking gas unit. Fire tenders from Agra had to be summoned to put out the blaze.

#### ALI KHAMENEI'S LETTER

IN AN OBLIQUE rebuff to Mrs Indira Gandhi, President Ali Khamenei of Iran has wondered why she had shown concern only over the Iraqi bombardment of the Iranian civilian areas, and not "over the Iraqi deployment or chemical and bacteriological weapons in the war" as well. In his letter, President Khamenei

says that Mrs Gandhi's "care about the issue as head of a friendly government... was a source of gratitude", but he wondered as to why "such concern was shown after three years."

#### CURBING FREEDOM

A RECENT ENFORCEMENT Directorate order has interpreted the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act such that it seeks to censor authors and journalists whose works are published abroad. The order penalising Arun Bose, a DU teacher, for not taking the government's permission before getting his books published in England, has created concern among the literary and journalistic community.

## Diversify the basket

Punjab and Haryana need to move beyond wheat and paddy, embrace a demand-driven high-value agricultural system. This would require shedding the mindset of MSP-based cropping system



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH  
BY ASHOK GULATI AND BIDISHA CHANDA

LET US START with a simple question: Which state do you think is most productive in terms of value creation in agriculture on a per hectare (ha) basis? If Punjab comes to mind, you are very off the mark. Punjab, known for its high physical productivity of rice and wheat, falls at number 13 amongst Indian states when it comes to agri-value created — agri-GDP on a per ha basis. There could be at least two ways to estimate it. First, divide state agri-GDP by Net Sown Area (NSA); and second, divide agri-GDP by Gross Cropped Area (GCA), which encompasses the effect of cropping intensity. Here we use both indicators for the year 2021-22, for which the latest information is available.

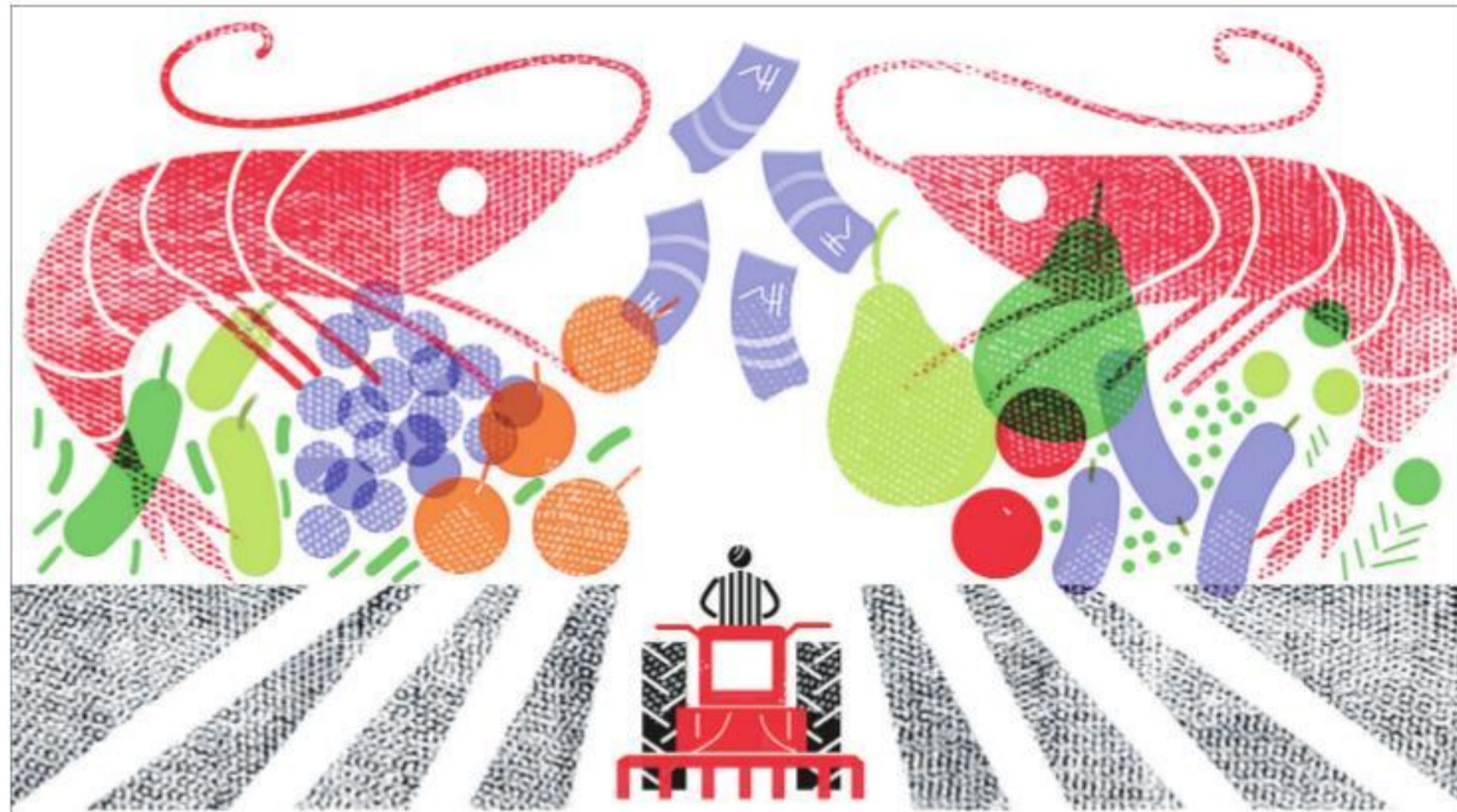
When we look at agri-GDP/ha through the NSA, Andhra Pradesh (AP) leads the pack with Rs 6.43 lakh/ha, followed closely by West Bengal (WB) with Rs 5.19 lakh/ha, Tamil Nadu (TN) with Rs 5.14 lakh/ha, and so on. Punjab ranks 13th with Rs 3.71 lakh/ha, with Jharkhand trailing at Rs 4.41 lakh/ha. And if that wasn't enough of a reality check, the disparity becomes starker when we consider agri-GDP/ha of GCA. In this regard, Bihar with Rs 2.18 lakh/ha, Odisha with Rs 2.57/ha, and Assam with Rs 2.34/ha outpace Punjab with Rs 1.92 lakh/ha (see infographic).

What sets these states ahead of Punjab in terms of value added in agriculture is that they have chosen a diversified production basket geared towards high-value products, largely staying away from heavy reliance on the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system.

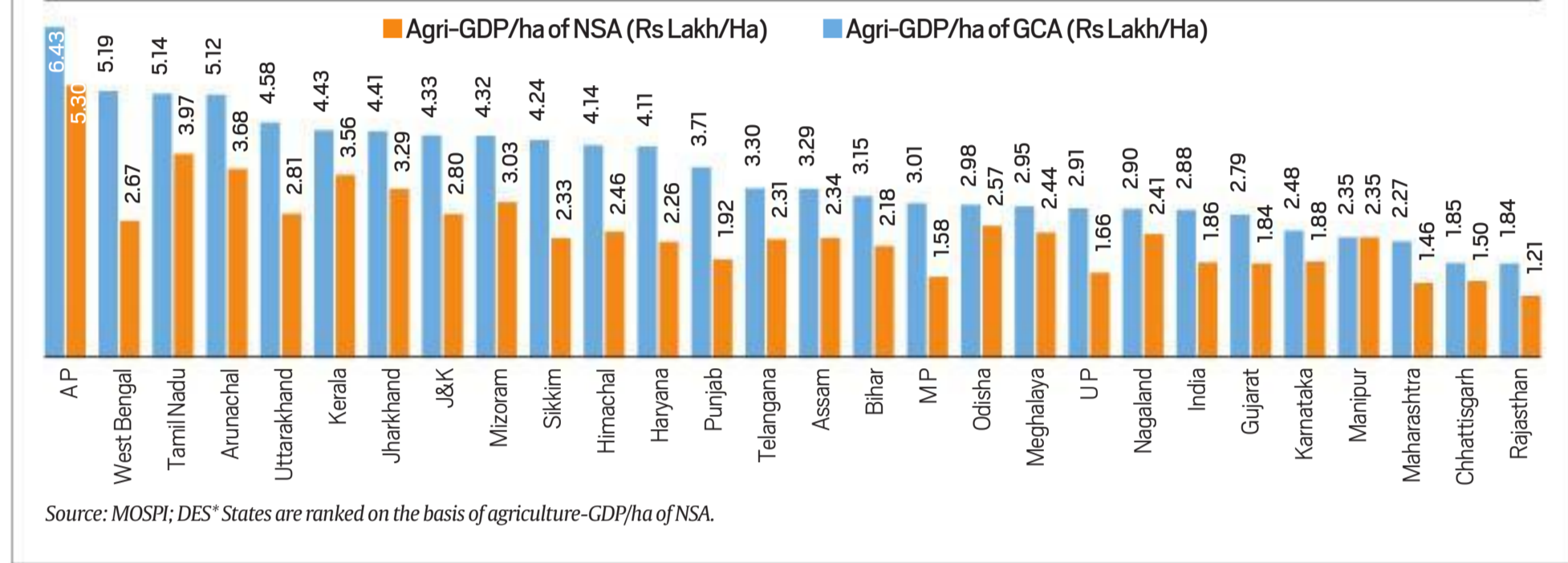
Punjab, caught up in a rice-wheat system induced by the MSP regime and open-ended procurement, along with free power and highly subsidised fertilisers, failed to diversify to high-value agriculture. This is despite repeated reminders by the Jharkhand Committee report in 1986, and again in 2002. Today, 84 per cent of Punjab's GCA is under wheat and rice, leading to 76 per cent of its blocks being over-exploited in terms of groundwater.

It is late, but never too late, to switch gears. Punjab and Haryana desperately need a new deal to move away from rice cultivation. Just to save Punjab and Haryana from ecological disaster, a minimum of 1.5 million hectares (Mha) of rice area (out of about 4.5 Mha) needs to be shifted to pulses, oilseeds, and even maize for poultry and ethanol, and fruits and vegetables. For this to happen, crop-neutral incentive structures need to be created. What this means is that the growers of these alternative crops must be rewarded by about Rs 25,000/ha when they switch from paddy to these crops, as that is the minimum savings from power and fertiliser subsidies. This package towards sustainable cropping patterns needs to be devised by the Centre and states together on a 50:50 basis.

But if farmers' incomes have to be augmented substantially, Punjab and Haryana have plenty of lessons to learn from states that have already diversified into high-value agriculture. In this context, it is interesting to note that the Andhra farmer creates 74 per cent more value in agriculture than his Punjab counterpart on per ha of NSA. How did that happen? The answer lies in high-



AGRI-GDP/HA OF NSA AND GCA (RS LAKH/HA) IN INDIAN STATES, 2021-22



Source: MOSPI; DES\* States are ranked on the basis of agriculture-GDP/ha of NSA.

CR Sasikumar

value inland fisheries. With 24 per cent of its agriculture value added (AGVA) attributed to fisheries, AP leads the nation in fish production, contributing 30 per cent to its national output. It is this proficiency in cultivating high-value shrimp that boosts their profitability. This success story of AP serves as a compelling example for Punjab and Haryana if they want to switch from rice-wheat rotation.

Tamil Nadu sets a high bar for fruit cultivation, with mangoes and bananas comprising over 80 per cent of its fruit production in 2020-21. This success translates into a 39 per cent higher value creation in agriculture compared to their counterparts in Punjab. It is a clear signpost for Punjabi farmers' higher income aspirations. But it is not just about diversifying into horticulture; it is also about embracing innovative agricultural practices. For example, TN farmers practise Ultra High-Density Plantation (UHDP) for mangoes. This method allows 674 mango trees per acre compared to the traditional method of 40 only. This translates to a significant increase in yield and profits. This technique, being promoted by Jain Irrigation, leads to significant water savings (up to 50 per cent) and fertiliser savings (up to 30 per cent), further enhancing profitability.

West Bengal, a state with only 2 per cent agriculture power consumption in 2021-22, creates 40 per cent more value than Punjab, which gets free power for agriculture. WB cultivates vegetables on 15 per cent (1.5 Mha) of its GCA of 10.2 Mha. The central government's recognition of this success is evident

If farmers' incomes have to be augmented substantially, Punjab and Haryana have plenty of lessons to learn from states that have already diversified into high-value agriculture. In this context, it is interesting to note that the Andhra farmer creates 74 per cent more value in agriculture than his Punjab counterpart on per ha of NSA. How did that happen? The answer lies in high-value inland fisheries.

in the establishment of an Agri-Export Zone (AEZ) dedicated to vegetables in WB, encompassing three key districts: Nadia, Murshidabad, and North 24 Parganas. Year-round production of a variety of vegetables makes cropping intensity so high (199 per cent) in WB. The state has successfully transitioned from a "production-oriented" model to a more strategic "market-driven" system. This focus on market demands is reflected in their impressive production figures for vegetables like brinjal (2.9 MMT), cabbage (2.3 MMT), cauliflower (1.9 MMT), and potato (15.1 MMT) in 2020-21 (Horticulture Statistics). Emulating West Bengal's model necessitates identifying Punjab's own AEZs for horticulture.

Punjab's dairy sector, contributing 28 per cent to its Gross Value Agri-Output (GVO) in 2019-20, highlights its growth potential. This presents a golden opportunity for Punjab to capitalise on its existing dairy strength by venturing into value-added processing, from cheese to chocolates, for Indian and export markets.

The path towards revitalising Indian agriculture and boosting farmers' incomes requires moving beyond traditional staples. Punjab and Haryana need to embrace a demand-driven high-value agricultural system, if they truly want their farmers to be prosperous. This would require shedding the mindset of an MSP-based cropping system.

Gulati is Distinguished Professor and Chanda a Research Assistant at ICRIER. Views are personal

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It is time for a no-arrest policy for fishermen and to have a department... ensuring translators for prisoners, nationality verification, legal aid, consular access, speedy trials, etc. Lastly, Pak-India ties must thaw at least to a point where their helpless citizens are not denied the right to rely on political treaties." — DAWN, PAKISTAN

## Myths about simultaneous polls

One nation one election and single voter list offer a way out of the problems created by a recurring election cycle



P P CHAUDHARY

WHEN INFLATION IS high, it is wiser to be a miser. Similarly, it is wiser to run a country by cutting frivolous expenses and using the savings for its welfare. Indians' hard-earned money can be saved by conducting simultaneous elections.

The elections to constitute the 17th Lok Sabha took place from April 2019 to May 2019 in seven phases. Elections to four state assemblies, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim, were also held during this period. These were followed by Maharashtra and Haryana elections in October and Jharkhand polls in December. In 2020, elections to NCT of Delhi were held in February, followed by Bihar in October-November. Within 16 months of the general elections, five state assembly elections were conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI). This is not counting local body elections.

Such frequent elections require the constant engagement of resources by both the state machinery and the ECI, negatively impacting the governance, development, and welfare activities in poll-bound regions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has suggested a way out of this cycle by restoring simultaneous elections — "One Nation One Election". Addressing the concluding session of the 80th All India Presiding Officers Conference, PM Modi urged for simplification of laws to enable "One Nation, One Election" and the creation of a single voters' list. In July 2019, I had introduced a Private Members' Bill (PMB) seeking the insertion of a new Article 324A, to direct the ECI to conduct elections to the House of the People and legislative assemblies of all states simultaneously.

The idea of conducting simultaneous elections is not new to India. The first general election of the Lok Sabha and various state assembly elections were held simultaneously in 1951-52. This continued in three subsequent elections held in 1957, 1962, and 1967.

In 2015, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, in its 79th report, analysed the feasibility of holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. An election is the ultimate expression of the faith of people in a democracy. Poll outcomes represent people's will and decide the fate of a country. Conducting elections is a daunting process as citizens' money and time are at stake.

The cost of conducting the 2009 Lok Sabha elections was about Rs 1,115 crore. For 2014, this cost more than tripled to about Rs 3,870 crore. Data for the 2019 elections is still awaited.

Due to asynchronous Lok Sabha and legislative assembly elections including by-poll results, there is prolonged enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). This creates roadblocks in the public service and developmental activities, at least twice or thrice every year in one part or another of the country.

Elections also involve a huge investment of human resources. CRPF and police personnel are deployed so that the electoral process can be conducted safely. Various people employed by government departments and schools are taken off their normal duties and assigned to work for the ECI or state election commissions. Precious time and money is spent on the formulation of the voter list from the draft list prepared by the Election Commission.

In its report on Demands for Grants (2016-17) of the Law Ministry, the Standing Committee had pointed out that the ECI and state ECs have separate electoral rolls. "They carry out registration of voters and update electoral rolls separately. The numbers of voters in their electoral rolls usually vary," it had said. Why should the two lists vary when every Indian citizen above 18 is a valid voter for all elections?

Several myths have been spread about the ONOE. The first is that simultaneous elections will make local issues irrelevant. Those holding this view argue that elections for state assemblies and Lok Sabha are fought on different issues where regional parties target local issues while national parties target national issues. So, there is a possibility that regional parties will not be able to raise the local issues strongly.

However, comparing the vote share percentage of the BJP (a national party), in general elections and the simultaneously conducted four state assembly elections in 2019, shows that this argument is misleading. The BJP's vote share for the state assembly polls is lower than what it got during the general election 2019. This means that those who voted for the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls didn't vote for the BJP when choosing the state government. This could be seen in all four state elections that year and in 2014 also.

The second myth is that conducting simultaneous elections will be a blow to federal democracy. To those people who advance the claim that ONOE would be against democratic federalism and who make the charge that conducting simultaneous elections is a step towards presidential form of election, I humbly ask: Were the architects of the modern Indian nation and members of the Constituent Assembly anti-democratic and anti-federalism? Wasn't India a federal democracy during the elections of the first three Lok Sabhas?

Many feasibility studies and reports are appreciating the proposed solution of ONOE. The ECI, Law Commission, and Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Personnel Ministries have, in principle, supported the idea of simultaneous elections and a single voter list.

In 2017, the Niti Aayog published a discussion paper authored by Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, analysing the "what", "why" and "how" of simultaneous elections. It offers an in-depth analysis and charts out the plan to synchronise the assembly elections with general elections in two-phases, as was in the Standing Committee report. It also explains how to avoid the disruptions of simultaneous elections once they are synchronised. We need more informed conversations in the public domain. One Nation One Election and a single voter list offer a "one-stop solution" to mitigate the stress caused by the recurring election cycle.

The writer is a senior advocate and BJP Lok Sabha MP

## The Jamnagar jamboree

Ambani celebrations made everyone feel they've been taken along for the ride



LEHER KALA

RECENTLY, I ATTENDED a party where a guy stood at the entrance with a placard that said, "No pictures, please! Enjoy the party! Our photographer is in charge and will send you some." The overzealous host's explanation was that nobody lives in the moment anymore, and this business of capturing everything for posterity is highly overrated. While there's some truth to that, rich people, aspiring to elegance and discernment, also feel compelled to do things differently. One inventive strategy, currently, is to hover above the fray of social media because, if projecting an image is the price of belonging, doesn't denouncing Instagram become the ultimate status symbol? Something akin to the defining fashion trend of 2023, quiet luxury, or old-money aesthetic where design speaks through timeless cuts, not logo mania.

Contrast all these painstaking attempts at reverse snobbery with the splashy three-day, pre-nuptial extravaganza witnessed in Jamnagar. Far from employing covert tactics of stealth wealth or subtlety, the Ambanis transformed themselves into living legends by triumphantly occupying centre stage, revelling, in the heady gaze of mass adulation.

The fathomlessly rich in India, at least the ones who fancy themselves as sophisticated these days, prefer to shroud the details of their celebrations in secrecy. There are good reasons for this, namely, a certain, fiery, government department that has driven conspicuous consumption underground. Contrarily, the Ambanis invited every Indian to partake in their joy via many livestreams of the parties and relentless analyses on YouTube, dissecting everything from Mark Zuckerberg's sequined tigers kurta to Mrs Ambani's double-bricked emerald necklace (it can't, in all seriousness, be dismissed as a mere precious stone). The dazzling 72-hour spectacle combined the pomp and splendour of erstwhile royals with a thoroughly modern approach to publicity; have it, flaunt it, own it, no holds barred. So, Jamnagar became an enchanted realm where stars and myth collided; after all, where else would Salman Khan, Rihanna and Akon unwind with an impromptu jig to the energetic beats of a dholak?

There are few people on earth and none in India who have the social capital to command the guest list the Ambanis did for the Jamnagar jamboree. The sole exception being, perhaps, Prime Minister Narendra

Modi. However, that invite would be more like a summons a guest wouldn't dare refuse. And indeed, while the PM may have a fearsome list of attributes to his credit, throwing a rocking party isn't one of them. The Ambanis have operated within an exclusive though conservative sphere for decades, but recasting themselves as icons who know how to have fun has been the brainchild of Nita Ambani, clearly, the most formidable daughter-in-law in India.

It is worth noting that in an Indian context, traditional industrialists' wives tend to fade into the background. They don't register in the public imagination. Nobody even remembers the names of the Mrs Birlas or Mrs Adanis because the limelight is always on the husband. The wives too are content to be the invisible half who get the occasional spread in Hello! magazine, where their homes and designer wardrobes are displayed. It's even rarer to find that gem of the public imagination. Nobody even remembers the names of the Mrs Birlas or Mrs Adanis because the limelight is always on the husband. The wives too are content to be the invisible half who get the occasional spread in Hello! magazine, where their homes and designer wardrobes are displayed. It's even rarer to find that gem of the public imagination. Nobody even remembers the names of the Mrs Birlas or Mrs Adanis because the limelight is always on the husband. 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# Amid Nepal's political turmoil, task for India

Prachanda must stabilise the economy, undertake reforms, crack down on corruption, and build infrastructure. India must step up cooperation in all these areas



SHUBHAJIT ROY

NEPAL'S PRIME Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda won a vote of confidence in the 275-member lower house of Parliament last week, securing the support of 157 of the 268 MPs who were present.

The trust vote, the third won by Prachanda in a little over a year, took place after the Prime Minister broke his party's alliance with the Nepali Congress led by Sher Bahadur Deuba, and forged a new alliance with K P Sharma Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist).

Under Nepal's constitution, the Prime Minister must seek a vote of confidence after an ally withdraws support to the ruling coalition. The Nepali Congress, with 89 MPs, is the largest party in Parliament, followed by Oli's CPN-UML (79) and Prachanda's CPN-MC (30).

## Politics of convenience

Prachanda, 69, took oath for the third time on December 26, 2022 (he had been Prime Minister earlier in 2008-09 and 2016-17), and won 268 votes in the floor test of January 10, 2023 after receiving support from almost all parties, including both the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML.

However, he had to seek a second vote on March 20, 2023 after CPN-UML and the monarchist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party withdrew support over Prachanda's backing for Ramchandra Paudel of the Nepali Congress to be President. Deuba supported Prachanda in the second trust vote, and the Nepali Congress joined the government.

On March 4 this year, Prachanda dumped Deuba and went back to Oli, which triggered the vote in Parliament.

Prachanda, who led Nepal's Maoist insurgency that caused 17,000 deaths between 1996 and 2006, has proven himself to be a consummate survivor in the years after he joined the mainstream. Even though support for him in Parliament has declined from 268 in January 2023 to 172 two months later to 157 now with only 32 votes from his own party, he has clung on to power — demonstrating a political flexibility that provoked Deuba to denounce him as "dhokhebaaz (betrayer)".

Over the last decade, Prachanda, Deuba, and Oli have been the leading political actors

in Nepal, which has had 13 governments since 2008, the year in which the country's 239-year-old monarchy was abolished and a republic was proclaimed.

## View from New Delhi

The extraordinary political instability in Nepal is of concern to India, where Prachanda's moves are being watched with a mix of caution and admiration. However, while Prachanda retains significant goodwill in New Delhi, his now partner in government, Oli, does not.

The actions and statements by Oli in 2015 during the drafting of the Nepalese constitution, which led to protests and the infamous border blockade, had caused a fair bit of bitterness in South Bloc. Oli, who was Prime Minister then, portrayed India as the neighbourhood bully in his country.

Politicians in Nepal have often described the country as being "India-locked", meaning it needs India for access to ports — a fact of geography that Indian diplomats prefer to frame as being "India-open". New Delhi has sought to project itself as a benevolent "elder brother" to Nepal, as the former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj put it, rather than a controlling and hectoring "big brother".

The Indian foreign policy establishment points out that India is Nepal's largest trade partner, with bilateral trade crossing \$7 billion in FY 2019-20, and that India provides transit for almost all of Nepal's third country trade. Indian exports to Nepal have grown more than eight times over the past decade, while exports from Nepal have almost doubled. During the Covid-19 pandemic, India provided assistance of more than \$7 million to Nepal, which included the supply of more than 23 tonnes of medicines and medical equipment, more than 9.5 million doses of vaccines, and a medical oxygen plant.

About 8 million Nepalese citizens live and work in India, and some 6 lakh Indians live in Nepal. Indians are about 30% of foreign tourists in Nepal. The bilateral remittance flow is estimated at \$3 billion from Nepal to India, and \$1 billion in the opposite direction. Cooperation in power, water, and infrastructure has been a major element of India's diplomatic toolkit with regard to Nepal.

## India vs China, in Nepal

Nepal is sandwiched between the two Asian giants, and the Nepalese political leadership, including the country's former monarchs, has long sought to play the China card

to manage the relationship with India. China has been pouring aid and investment in infrastructure to wean Kathmandu away from New Delhi. Nepalese imports from China almost tripled from (Indian) Rs 49.5 billion in 2013-14 to Rs 138.75 billion (\$1.67 billion) in 2022-23.

With Oli, who has clear China leanings, back in government in Kathmandu, New Delhi would be keenly watching the expected efforts by Beijing to play a more active and influential role in Nepal's domestic affairs.

Some analysts in Nepal view India under the BJP as trying to nudge Nepal in the direction of a "Hindu state" — which has triggered some pushback in that country. In an editorial published last month, *The Kathmandu Post* wrote: "The competition (in Nepal) now seems to be for who can make a solid case for 'Hindu Rashtra', even while trying hard not to sound too regressive. One such party that is touching on the idea of restoring Hindu Rashtra is the Nepali Congress... Second- and third-tier leaders are making a case for restoring Hindu Rashtra. That 'fringe' was at least 30 per cent in the last Congress Mahasamiti meeting in 2018. This time, around two dozen influential leaders... raised this issue at the central working committee."

According to the editorial, developments in India such as the "consecration of the Ram Lalla temple in Ayodhya... has emboldened

some Nepali leaders to ride on the rising popularity of the idea". However, the editorial said, "the political ideology of Hindutva, based on the idea of nativism and monoculturalism... has no place in a democracy".

The political instability in Nepal has impacted the country's economy. Thousands of young Nepalis are heading abroad, mainly to the Middle East, South Korea, and Malaysia, in search of work. In 2022-23, about 7.7 lakh people got permits to go to foreign job destinations, and remittances sent by Nepalese expatriates has been a major source of both sustenance for many Nepalese families, and of foreign exchange for the country.

As he works with new partners in government, Prime Minister Prachanda has his task cut out: he must stabilise Nepal's economy, undertake reforms, crack down on corruption, and build infrastructure in the country. India needs to step up cooperation with Nepal in all these areas, and India's development and economic aid must remain open.

New Delhi's position on the politics and future of Nepal must remain nuanced and flexible, with the people of Nepal at its centre — it must ensure that China or its proxies do not get an opportunity to ride on suspicion or prejudice against India. More than an "elder brother", India should seek to be an equal partner for Nepal.

## EXPLAINED AI

### What is SIMA, Google DeepMind's new AI that can play video games

BIJIN JOSE  
 NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

GOOGLE DEEPMIND has revealed a new AI gaming "agent" called SIMA or Scalable Instructable Multiworld Agent, which can follow natural language instructions to perform tasks across video game environments. Simply put, it can play video games with human players.

SIMA is also a step closer to AI that can intelligently collaborate with humans in doing tasks, potentially in real-world environments.

## What is SIMA?

Google DeepMind describes SIMA as an AI Agent, which is different from AI models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT. AI models are trained on vast datasets but are limited when it comes to working on their own. An AI Agent, however, can process data and act by itself.

SIMA can be called a generalist AI Agent that can perform a variety of tasks. It is a super-smart computer programme that can be thought of as a digital explorer, with the ability to understand user needs and help create things in the virtual world.

## How does SIMA work?

SIMA "understands" commands, such as building a castle or finding a treasure chest, as it can process human language.

It is also capable of learning and adapting through the interactions it has with the user. The more one interacts with SIMA, the smarter it gets by learning from its experiences. This makes it better at un-



SIMA showcasing human-like play in one of the games it was tested on. Google DeepMind

derstanding and fulfilling user requests.

At the current stage of AI development, it is a major feat for an AI system to be able to play even one game. But SIMA can follow instructions in multiple game settings.

Google is hoping that SIMA and other AI agents will be able to use video games as sandboxes to understand how AI systems can be more helpful to humans in accomplishing tasks.

## How was SIMA trained?

Google DeepMind collaborated with eight game studios to test SIMA on nine video games. With every game, SIMA's portfolio opened a new interactive world along with a range of skills for it to learn, such as navigation, menu use, mining resources, etc. It also used four research environments, including one built with the cross-platform game engine Unity.

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ALIND CHAUHAN  
 NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

US ARMY SHIPS have sailed from Virginia with equipment to build a floating pier on the Gaza coast to deliver humanitarian aid to the enclave, Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Maj Gen Pat Ryder said on March 12.

"We expect the pier to be fully operational in approximately 60 days which will be able to facilitate the delivery of about 2 million meals per day," Ryder said.

## The JLOTS project

The project to build the floating pier — the American solution to deal with hunger and an impending famine in Gaza as Israel continues to pummel the Palestinian enclave while blocking overland access to almost all aid — is officially known as Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS).

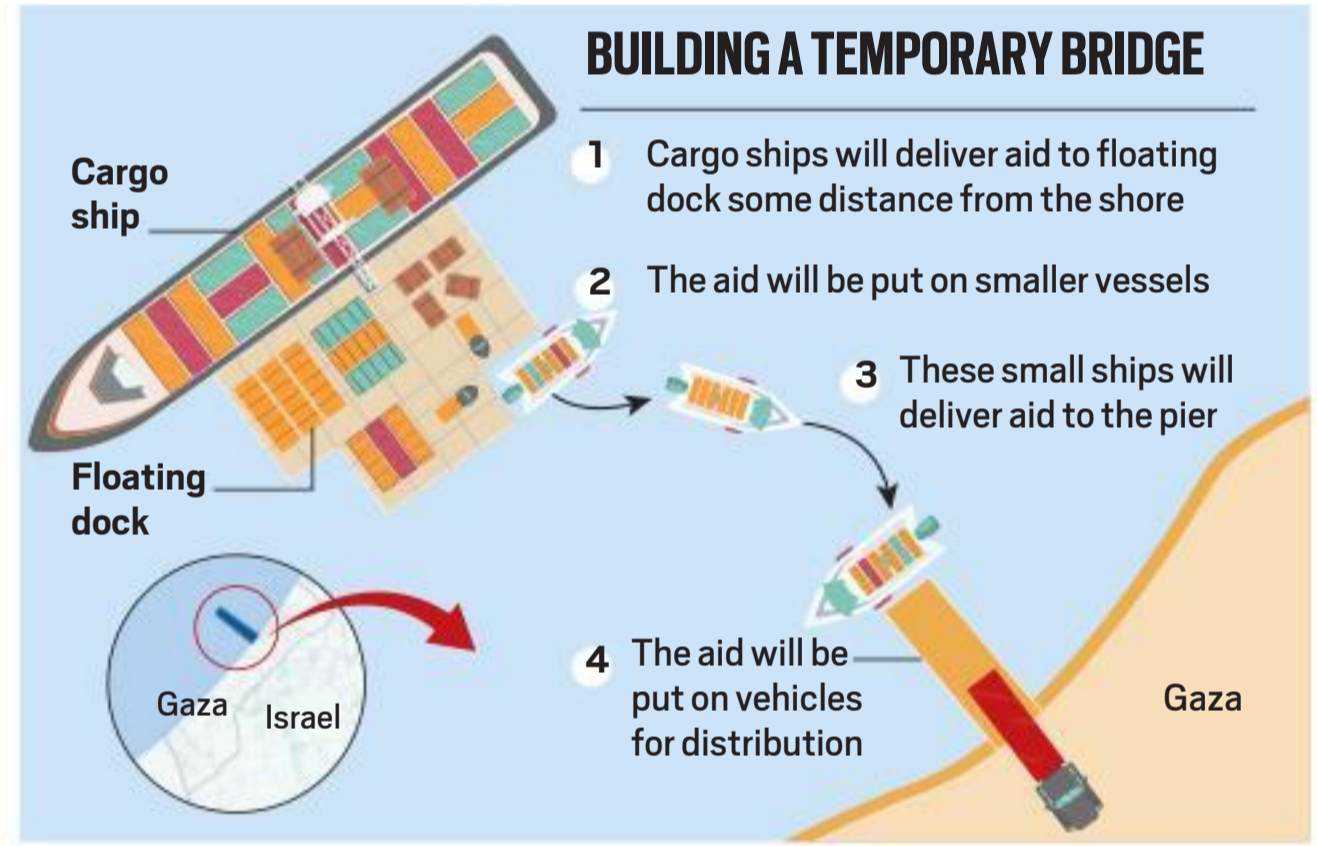
Former Indian Navy officer Cmde Srikanth Kesnur (Retd) told *The Indian Express* that JLOTS capabilities are used to transport cargo by sea when one or more ports cannot be operated or are not available for loading or unloading.

"Usually, JLOTS is part of a military campaign or exercise — either you want to fight in another country or you want to deliver aid and don't have an operational port to embark or disembark. In most cases, it is assumed that loading (of cargo) would be well executed, but the unloading will happen over the shore," Cmde Kesnur said.

Such operations usually involve joint operations by the forces — while the navy transports the goods and provides protection, the army or other agencies are involved in building the "last mile" bridge, delivery, etc.

The floating pier in Gaza will be built with no "US boots on the ground". The US will take the help of the private company Fogbow, which is run by former military and intelligence officials, according to a report by the BBC.

The project will consist of two main components, a floating dock and an approximately 548-metre-long pier with a causeway, the US Department of Defense has said.



## The floating dock

The floating dock will be a platform built with pieces of steel, which will be delivered to the spot by a roll on, roll off ship — which is essentially a cargo ship with a platform to load and unload heavy cargo.

While the pier will be attached to the shore, the dock could be located up to a kilometre from the coast. The dock is required so that ships carrying aid don't have to come close to the shore where they may possibly get stuck in shallow water, Maj Gen A V Krishna (Retd), a former officer of the Indian Army, told *The Indian Express*.

"They (the US) will send a ship (to supply the aid) that is (of) 40,000 tonnes. Anything smaller will be a costly business. Such a ship, depending upon the load, will require a depth of more than 4-5 metres, called minimum draft requirement. If it is less, the ship's keel will get stuck, and it's very difficult to pull out a ship that is embedded in sand," Maj Gen Krishna said.

## Pier and causeway

Once the ship unloads the aid on the dock, smaller Logistics Support Vessels (LSVs) will

be used to transfer the cargo from the dock to the pier or jetty, which will be a floating structure linking to the shore. A pier can be built in three ways, Maj Gen Krishna said.

One, by using a "ribbon floating" bridge. "Such bridges are used for crossing rivers during wartime. They are strong and can be built within weeks. Each section of the bridge is about 6 metres by 6 metres, and the bridge is folded with the help of torsion bars in the form of a 'W'. Once the roll on, roll off ship reaches the location, the bridge segments can be pushed into the water and connected end-to-end simultaneously, pushing the bridge towards the shore," he said. Once the bridge touches the shore, anchors will be dropped on either side of each section to ensure the structure's stability.

A second way is to use a different type of floating bridge, manufactured by the UK-based company Mabey, Maj Gen Krishna said. The Mabey floating bridge is constructed over a number of pontoons, which are small, flat-bottomed boats with anchors at each end.

On reaching the spot, the roll on, roll off ship will begin to push out the pontoons at right angles to the line of the bridge at the place where the pier is required.

"Say the ship is 500 metres from the shore. You will push out the first pontoon to a distance of 5-10 metres; then the second pontoon to another 5-10 metres. Over these two pontoons, a panel of the bridge will be made. Subsequently, a third pontoon will be pushed out and the previous two will be pushed further towards the shore," Maj Gen Krishna said.

The process is repeated until the pontoons reach the shore. The bridge on the pontoons is typically a Bailey bridge, a truss bridge that is commonly used in mountainous areas.

The third way is to use a foam floating bridge made of elastomeric materials that are like rubber, but offer better material properties, Maj Gen Krishna said. Such bridges are commonly used in resorts. The US has heavy-duty versions of these bridges, but they are somewhat shaky, he said.

The pier will also have a causeway that will act as its extension. The causeway will ensure that vehicles carrying the aid from the pier to the coast don't get stuck in boggy sand. Fogbow, the private firm, will move the aid from the shore to distribution points further inland by trucks, the BBC report said.

## Why bridges float

All floating bridges can take heavy weights such as tanks and cargo. They stay afloat because of buoyancy and density.

The principle of buoyancy states that any fully or partially submerged object experiences an upward force — known as buoyant force — equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by the object.

Objects that are less dense than water stay afloat. That's because they displace less water and therefore, the buoyant force is more than the gravitational force. Objects that are denser than water sink.

Notably, the ribbon floating bridge is made of steel, which is denser than water. To ensure that it remains afloat, the segments of the bridge are hollow, and contain an adequate quantity of air that makes them less dense than water. The floating dock will also have hollow steel segments.

Permitted synthetic colours include red from Ponceau 4R, Carmoisine, and Erythrosine; yellow from Tartrazine and Sunset Yellow FCF, blue from Indigo Carmine and Brilliant Blue FCF, and green from Fast Green FCF.

Even permissible colours, however, are not allowed in all foods. Items that can use these colours include ice cream, biscuits, cakes, confectionary, fruit syrups and crushes, custard powder, jelly crystals, and carbonated/noncarbonated beverages, Arora said.

# Why Karnataka has banned food colouring used in cotton candy

ANONNA DUTT  
 NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

THE KARNATAKA government recently "banned" the use of a popular colouring agent used in the preparation of *gobhi manchurian* and cotton candy, with a violation attracting imprisonment of up to 7 years and fine up to Rs 10 lakh.

"Consumption of snacks containing these artificial colours may pose long-term health risks, including cancer. Therefore, the health department has taken this necessary action," Karnataka Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said.

Artificial colouring was found in 107 of the 171 *gobhi manchurian* samples tested by the state government, and in 15 of the 25 cotton candy samples tested. "Based on these findings, an order has been issued banning the use of prohibited artificial colours, including Rhodamine-B, in Gobi Manchurian and cotton candy," the

Minister said.

## What is Rhodamine B?

Rhodamine B, the colouring agent that the Minister mentioned, is in any case not fit for human consumption. It is not one of permitted food colouring agents under India's food safety regulation — which means it is already technically banned.

Rhodamine B, which gives red and pink colours to clothes, paper, leather, plastics, etc. may lead to acute toxicity if ingested. Exposure to the chemical may also damage the eye, and cause irritation in the respiratory tract. While the International Agency for Research on Cancer — the World Health Organisation body that maintains a list of cancer causing agents — says it cannot be classified as carcinogenic to humans, some studies have shown carcinogenic effects on rats.

## Is Rhodamine B frequently added to



Rhodamine B is sometimes used to colour the popular children's treat. Archive

## food products in India?

Not frequently. A food safety officer told *The Indian Express*: "[Use of] Rhodamine B is usually reported from small roadside vendors in small cities. This is because of a

lack of understanding about dyes that are permissible in food items. Small vendors are not aware that this dye can be harmful, as effects might not always be felt immediately. They might just go to a shop

and ask for a red colour, not knowing what is given to him."

The officer said the dye is usually "illegally" added to preparations such as *gobhi manchurian*, potato wedges, butter chicken, pomegranate juice, cotton candy, and ice cream produced in small factories — food items that have a bright red colour.

"This is usually not seen in the bigger cities. Although no colouring is allowed in cooked food, in the bigger cities edible food colours are usually used to give the red colour to butter chicken and *tandoori* chicken," the officer said.

## What food colours are allowed by the food safety Act?

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the country's apex food safety regulator, allows the use of very few natural and synthetic colours in food items. There is also a restriction on which colours can be used in what type of foods.

"Rhodamine B is a common red dye; it is

**Nihal Koshie: BCCI told top cricketers that skipping domestic cricket when not on national duty would have its implications. The BCCI felt some cricketers were prioritising IPL over red-ball/domestic cricket. But when cricketers play all three formats and also take mental-health breaks, should the BCCI insist on that?**

Sometimes when an organisation takes a stand, it might not suit everyone, it might not work in favour of everyone, it might be detrimental to a few people. What we must understand here is the message being conveyed by the organisational body. It said we are prioritising Test cricket, IPL is not everything as far as we are concerned. They are saying Test cricket is of paramount importance and we are going to promote it. In my view, they are making all the right noises. At the same time, whether a cricketer wants to do all the 12 months, or only wants to do the two months or whether they want to be relevant playing T20 cricket and one-day cricket and do not want to be playing Test cricket, is their choice.

**Sandeep Dwivedi: Is there a trend among the younger generation of cricketers to market themselves on social media in a certain way? Like posting videos before selection day, wishing happy birthday to a certain group etc.**

It's very hard to make a complete assessment. In some cases, players don't really handle their own social media handles. I like talking about cricket, which is why you see me on YouTube. I was always very instinctive, very upright, and somebody who loved the game to bits. And if I spoke about cricket to X, Y or Z, I realised far later in my life that they see it as overthinking.

I would come back to my street and talk to friends about the same thing. That's the culture I've been brought up in. So when I stepped out of Madras, I didn't know what India was about. I give my opinion, but if I didn't change my views or opinions, I wouldn't be who I am today. Agreeing to disagree is the greatest quality one can have.

I didn't even bother about when selections are happening. But now things have changed. There is a cricket Twitter war going on, on who should be there in the squad, what are the reasons somebody is selected. At the end of the day, we need to understand that there is a selection committee and things will have to happen according to what the team requires.

Whichever cricketer I sit around with, I tell them the same thing. PR and marketing will get you to a certain place. They might have value, but it's only one percent.

**Mihir Vasavda: How was it in the dressing room when you came and how is it now, especially when it comes to communication in Hindi?**

It's a cultural shock. My first shock came when I went for an Under-17 India team camp. All I'd had in my life was curd rice at night. The next time I found curd rice was 45 days later. You can't even explain that to somebody. I actually studied in Hindi but my Hindi fluency or vocabulary wasn't good enough to speak.

It wasn't anyone's fault. I'm a very proud Tamilian. But the first thing I would do to any child that comes to my academy is to say that along with cricket, they should learn a bit of Hindi. Because the moment the child goes to an Under-14 or Under-16 NCA camp, the last thing you want the child to do is silently wonder what these guys are saying in Hindi behind his back. I would actually seriously recommend for people to understand that this (diversity) is the way of life and this is a beautiful country. We must embrace it.

**Sriram Veera: M Vijay once said that he could never be himself in the dressing room because his sense of humour was in Tamil. How did you handle that?**

I can empathise. He's a very spirited soul but in my case, the fault was with me because you need to know which players to deal with and how. I've also made the effort to say 'boss, this is who I am. I'm comfortable in my skin'. They will come around because they will also understand you. It has happened inside the Indian dressing room massively. It's a question of maturing together. You play cricket for so many years; now Virat (Kohli) knows who I am and what sort of fun I enjoy. It's got to a situation where he sends me jokes or links knowing exactly what I might know or enjoy. It's the same thing with Rohit (Sharma).

**Sandip G: We've heard that you are into chess these days. What are the other sports you follow?**

I have been into a bit of online chess. I'm actually a big sports buff though looking at me physically, a lot of people think I can't do much. I was pretty good at tennis. Not maybe the quickest around, but really, really good with my long-levers. I was pretty good at table tennis, and played a bit in the zonal sides, in ball badminton. I'm pretty good at

**RASHWIN**  
INDIAN CRICKETER

## ‘I started weeping, locked myself in my room, wanted to quit cricket... Then I sought external help’

R Ashwin speaks on mental-health issues and how the perceptions of him being an ‘over-thinker’ affected his leadership chances. This session was moderated by Senior Assistant Editor Venkata Krishna B



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

It's not like I change my action and if I am leading a side, I will tell Jadeja to change his action... People just assumed that's how it could be. They thought he would not fit the bill as a leader and that's an unfair assessment

Indian victories were paramount, but I never knew Indian bowlers would never be paramount... Kumble is the least celebrated legend of the game in this country. Zaheer Khan was a legend but we didn't celebrate him

racket sports. I can't say I'm very good at chess. I'm okay for an amateur.

I watch chess a bit too, when (Rameshbabu) Praggnanandhaa, Magnus Carlsen play. I watch a lot of Bobby Fischer games from the past. I follow a lot of Viswanathan Anand, his legendary duels with Gary Kasparov. I love the intricacies involved in the game.

**Mihir Vasavda: Talking of intricacies, when Rohit retired out in the Super Over like you had done in the IPL, Rahul Dravid mentioned that was 'Ashwin-level thinking'. How often do the players come to you to know about these complex situations?**

All these things happen not because it's discussed. It happens because of the execution. Somebody at the end of the day needs to have the courage to say, 'okay, I am the guy who will receive the flak'. I still remember that day when Kings were playing Rajasthan in Jaipur. The moment that (mankading) happened, there was a huge buzz, a sort of a silence, and sort of a confusion amongst my own team. I called them into the huddle and said, 'I know this will receive a lot of attention and flak, but I will handle it. Now, you guys get on with it and make sure we convert this into a victory.' It shouldn't disturb anybody else. And it turned out that we won the game. And yet again, it's proved to me that when you put people in an uncomfortable spot, which they don't like, they will perennially crumble. Because Rajasthan were cruising even without Jos (Buttler).

I have discussed tactical timeouts with so many captains, management, etc. they say, 'yeah that's a great idea' but



### WHY RASHWIN

**I**N the recently concluded series against England, R Ashwin, India's leading spinner, crossed the landmarks of 100 Tests and 500 wickets. He played a big role in India beating England 4-1. He countered England's aggressive brand of cricket, known as Bazball, to be the leading wicket-taker in the series. Ashwin is known for his strategic planning and he often outthinks batsmen with his guile. An articulate cricketer, he speaks his mind and has a strong opinion on cricketing matters.

they'll never do it. People talk about change, even these experts on social media who have so much advice to offer, do they get down and actually do it? Do they get their hands dirty? No, they don't. If you do not have the courage to get yourself dirty, you will never be a part of change.

**Devendra Pandey: From figuring out that Kumar Sangakkara doesn't get LBW to off-spinners to watching videos of Kane Williamson, Steve Smith, understanding the degree of turn on offer on different days of the Test... you have done it all. Could you explain your homework methods?**

One day I was talking to Muttiah

is respecting him. Giving that space is something I always avoided.

My preparation is whether I can disturb the tempo of a batter. Whether Steve Smith would go to off-stump after 10 balls or 12 balls. Whether Marnus Labuschagne will try to sweep or reverse me first. Or Joe Root, when you go round the stumps in the first eight balls, he would reverse you once. There are two ways of skinning it, do I want to stop Joe Root from reversing or do I want Root to reverse or get him out. That will depend on where Joe Root is in his career, how confident he is. Has he got a hundred in the first two Tests? Is he in confident space, is he coming from Sri Lanka after making mountains of runs? So I will try and make a plan because I want that early blood.

**Sriram Veera: You had once said that the 'over-thinker' label has stuck on you to work against you.**

I didn't understand. Everybody has unique methods. A method that's worked for me, will not work for (Ravindra) Jadeja. The cricket community likes to keep it really simple. Unless it's completely broken, they wouldn't try to mend it. But I come from a school where even before it's broken, I want to make sure I stitch it up and don't get to a point where it's broken. Why is it happening? That's the question that people fail to recognise. I am addressing something before they believe I should address it, because their journey is different and mine is different. They might get five opportunities but I will get only two. And I made peace with the fact that I will only get two.

It's not like I change my action and tomorrow if I am leading a side, I would go to Jadeja and tell him that he should change his action. I'm not that dumb. In a way, people just assumed that that's how it could be. They just thought he would not fit the bill as a leader and that's quite an unfair assessment.

**Sriram Veera: You had said that if it was up to you, you would pick being a batsman instead of a bowler. Were you just emotional when you said that?**

I don't say anything just because I'm emotional. If I had a son or have daughters now who want to play cricket, I'd still make them bat, there's no two ways about it. I'll ask them to bowl so that they understand what a bowler thinks. Australia is the most successful cricketing country in the world. They've got some great batters. But consistently, they have been built by superstar bowlers for decades. They look after them. Pat Cummins was 19 or 20 when he had a stress fracture. He was looked after, was put in cotton wool, and paid his match fee for every single match he missed during that stint. He was treated like somebody who was extremely special, and Cummins has delivered results as a captain and player over the last three years. They know bowlers can win you championships. India is far from it. We do talk a lot about pitches. But batsmen have a lot more good days in India than bowlers do and even when they do have good days, they are not celebrated to the point where you inspire a youngster to say, 'I want to bowl. I want to pick up a new ball and go'.

**Sriram Veera: That general perspective is fine, but are you happy you became a bowler?**

It's destiny. Sometimes we have so much vanity that we don't admit that destiny plays a role. Right people, right place, right advice. That's what makes you who you are.

Forget me as being a bowler or a batter, why did I want to play cricket? I wanted to wear the Indian jersey and people to cheer for me. So that India celebrates India's victories and they celebrate you. Indian victories were paramount, but I never knew Indian bowlers would never be paramount. I'm glad over the last decade you've got players like (Jasprit) Bumrah, you've got players like me or Kuldeep (Yadav), who are celebrated far more than a player like Anil Kumble. I feel Kumble is the least celebrated legend of the game in this country. Zaheer Khan was a legend of this game but we didn't celebrate him.

**Venkata Krishna B: In a recent column for us, your wife Preethi had mentioned how in 2017 you went through counselling sessions. What made you seek outside help and could you talk about dealing with the pressure of playing at the highest level?**

There are layers of mental health. Some people can succumb to pressure. Some are on the road all the time and can get jaded. Sometimes you are in a very dark place in your life that you want to talk to someone, and I think more often than not, people find themselves in the situation of a victim. Which is a very dangerous situation in my book.

Even though I have my family rooting for me and I can come back to my family, I cannot say a lot of things. I would say cricket, in many ways, is a corporate affair with a little bit of governmental organisational activities and attributes. Though if I come and talk with my dad about corporate stuff, he has only one line to say: it's all politics. And that's a very large line. And even fans end up doing the same thing. Occasionally, when I find myself in a dark spot, I have also done that a little. But it's a very wrong thing to do because you feel somebody's success is coming very easily. It's not.

My wife is a wonderful listener, but she had a very young family and I was not giving her enough time. One day, we were having a conversation. My dad said something. And some internal affair of the house had broken down. And I said something to my dad. My dad and I fight a lot. And he eventually threw a statement, "You know what? You are too uptight and honest. That's why you are getting screwed." He made that statement and left. I am not someone who is emotive. I would like to think I am pretty strong but I just locked myself away. And then I started weeping. I was crying for a long time. I didn't expect my dad to say that. I don't think he even realised what he did.

I thought I am putting people in my house through a lot. I used to lock myself in the room. I never watched cricket. My room used to be dark all the time.

I decided to quit cricket. I was asking myself what would I do? And I said whatever I do in life, I would try to achieve excellence and be as good as I can be in that profession. I would probably try to do an MBA and be in marketing. I gave myself so many options and then thought before I make any decision, I must get crystal-clear clarity. Probably get an outsider's view into my life and see who I am, where I am. That's when I sought some external help and it changed my life for the better.

# 13 ECONOMY

MARKET WATCH

M-CAP OF 5 OF TOP 10 FIRMS TANKS

New Delhi: Five of the top 10 valued firms faced a combined erosion of Rs 2,23,660 crore from their market valuation last week, with Reliance Industries and Life Insurance Corporation of India taking the steepest hit amid an overall bearish trend in equities. **PTI**

INDIA'S OIL IMPORT DEPENDENCY WAS 87.7% IN THE 11 MONTHS TO FEBRUARY

## Reliance on oil imports up in Apr-Feb, may hit fresh full-year high in FY24

SUKALP SHARMA

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

GROWING DEMAND for fuel and other petroleum products amid stagnant domestic crude oil output resulted in India's reliance on imported crude increasing to nearly 88 per cent in April-February, indicating that oil import dependency for the full financial year 2023-24 (FY24) could breach the all-time-high FY23 levels.

As per latest data released by the oil ministry's Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell (PPAC), the country's oil import dependency was 87.7 per cent in the 11 months to February, up from 87.2 per cent in the corresponding period FY23.

For full FY23, reliance on imported oil was 87.4 per cent. According to industry insiders, like in the last financial year, import dependency in crude oil for the entire FY24 could be a tad higher than the April-February level.

Given India's rapidly growing energy demand, reliance on oil imports has been rising continuously over the past few years, except for FY21, when demand was suppressed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Reliance on imported crude to meet domestic demand stood at 85.5 per cent in FY22, 84.4 per



Total production of petroleum products from domestic crude oil was 26.1 million tonnes in April-February. *File*

RISING OIL IMPORT DEPENDENCY (%)

Apr-Mar 2018-19 (FY19)	83.8
Apr-Mar 2019-20 (FY20)	85
Apr-Mar 2020-21 (FY21)	84.4
Apr-Mar 2021-22 (FY22)	85.5
Apr-Mar 2022-23 (FY23)	87.4
Apr-Feb 2022-23	87.2
Apr-Feb 2023-24	87.7

Source: PPAC

cent in FY21, 85 per cent in FY20, and 83.8 per cent in FY19.

The government wants to reduce India's extreme reliance on imported crude oil but sluggish

domestic oil output in the face of incessantly growing demand for petroleum products has been the biggest roadblock. In 2015, the government had set a

target to reduce reliance on oil imports to 67 per cent by 2022 from 77 per cent in FY14, but the dependency has only grown since. Heavy reliance on imported crude oil makes the Indian economy vulnerable to global oil price volatility, apart from having a bearing on the country's foreign trade deficit, foreign exchange reserves, rupee's exchange rate, and inflation.

Cutting costly oil imports is also a fundamental objective of the government's push for electric mobility, biofuels, and other alternative fuels for transportation as well as industries. Over the past few years, the government has also intensified efforts to raise domestic crude oil output by making exploration and production contracts more lucrative and opening vast acreages for hydrocarbon exploration. While there has been a pick-up in electric mobility adoption and blending of biofuels with conventional fuels, it is not enough to offset petroleum demand growth.

The calculation of the extent of import reliance is based on the domestic consumption of petroleum products and excludes petroleum product exports as those volumes do not represent India's demand.

With a refining capacity of a little over 250 million tonnes per

annum, India—the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and also one of its top importers—is a net exporter of petroleum products.

India's domestic consumption of petroleum products in April-February rose over 5 per cent year-on-year to 212.2 million tonnes, underscoring robust demand, particularly for transportation fuels petrol and diesel. However, domestic crude oil production for the year was nearly flat at 26.9 million tonnes. Crude oil imports in the first 11 months of FY24 rose 0.4 per cent year-on-year to 212.6 million tonnes. Additionally, petroleum product imports increased to 43.8 million tonnes from 40.2 million tonnes a year ago. Petroleum product exports in April-February rose 4.2 per cent to 57.3 million tonnes.

Total production of petroleum products from domestic crude oil was 26.1 million tonnes in April-February, which means that the extent of India's self-sufficiency in crude oil was just 12.3 per cent, down from 12.8 per cent in the corresponding period of the last financial year.

In FY23, consumption of petroleum products sourced from indigenous crude oil was 25.8 million tonnes, while total domestic consumption was 201.8 million tonnes.

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU

MUMBAI, MARCH 17

FOREIGN PORTFOLIO investors (FPIs) pumped Rs 50,471 crore into the Indian stock and debt markets in March so far despite the high volatility in the stock markets.

According to National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) data, FPIs bought stocks worth Rs 40,710 crore during the month and invested Rs 10,383 crore in the debt market. They pulled out Rs 857 crore from the debt-VRR category and invested Rs 235 crore in hybrid. However, as the FPI stock investment includes the British American Tobacco's (BAT) decision to sell stocks worth over Rs 16,000 crore which were bought by FPIs, the net investment figure is not a true indicator of the FPI activity.

FPIs were big sellers in January and modest buyers in February. "But in March they have turned big buyers. But this figure includes some bulk deals executed through the stock exchanges and, therefore, is not a true indicator of FPI activity. However, the rising trend of FPI investment continues," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

An important feature of FPI investment for many months now has been its erratic nature. FPIs have been changing their strategy in response to the changes in the bond yields in



FPIs have been changing their strategy in response to the changes in the bond yields in the United States. *File*

the United States (US). "Therefore, now that US bond yields have again spiked up in response to stubborn inflation, FPIs may again turn sellers in some of the days, going forward," he said.

An important trend in the market in March is the weakness in the mid and small caps and the resilience in large caps. This persuaded FPIs to reduce selling in large caps and even buying in limited quantities in sectors like banking, telecom and automobiles, analysts said. Small and mid-cap stocks fell last week following the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI's) caution against excessive speculation in these stocks.

Meanwhile, SEBI has exempted certain FPIs from the additional disclosure framework.

The SEBI Board on Friday approved a proposal to exempt additional disclosure requirements for FPIs having more than 50 per cent of their India equity assets under management (AUM) in a single corporate group, in case the concentrated holdings of the FPIs are in a listed company with no identified promoter, if the certain conditions are met.

In a circular in August 2023, SEBI had asked select FPIs to provide granular details regarding their beneficial ownerships, economic interest and control up to the level of all natural persons. These were FPIs, who held more than 50 per cent of their Indian equity AUM in a single Indian corporate group and those that individually or along with an investor group held more than Rs 25,000 crore of equity AUM in Indian markets.

## Tractor sales data: Mismatch between wholesale & retail

SWARAJ BAGGONKAR

MUMBAI, MARCH 17

TRACTOR DISPATCHES from the manufacturing companies to their dealers in the current financial year are showing a decline, whereas retail numbers for the same period show an increase, highlighting the mismatch in the display of the market trend.

Domestic wholesale (from company to dealers) tractor volumes from April to February fell by 7 per cent year on year (y-o-y) to 803,266 units, as per data shared by the Tractor and Mechanisation Association (TMA). However, going by the retail (dealer to customer) data, domestic tractor volumes grew by nearly 9 per cent y-o-y to 813,808 units, as per detail shared by the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA). FADA collates the data in collaboration with the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, gathered from 1,358 out of 1,445 regional transport of-

fices (RTO). Data from Telangana and Lakshadweep are not included in this. "February (tractor) volumes have grown by 11 per cent and between April to January, the volumes have grown by 8 per cent. I can't comprehend why is everybody writing about fall in tractor sales," Manish Raj Singhania, president, FADA, said in an interaction with **FE**.

Tractor makers say that the absence of the Madhya Pradesh market in the FY23 data is the cause of the data mismatch. There is also a lag period in the retail data, because it takes a period of 10-14 days for the registration numbers to reflect on the portal, tractor makers said further.

Neeraj Mehra, chief officer - Agri Business, Escorts Kubota said, "The FADA data for April to February, which is almost 750,000, might not be the correct data. Escorts wholesales and retail match to a large extent." While January recorded the second highest y-o-y growth at 21 per cent, June clocked the highest

volume at 98,660 and the highest growth at 41 per cent.

"January is traditionally low because the first 15 days are inauspicious and also because the cold weather conditions make farm activities difficult," Mehra

Mehra did point out that the stock levels within the industry are on the higher side. "Escorts Kubota's current inventory level is 36-37 days. From where the level of industry stock is, we are relatively better placed than other manufacturers. The norm is 30-35 days," he added.

Tractors typically have a life cycle of six-eight years and replacement demand accounts for 60-65 per cent of volume. Tractor volume saw a healthy growth between fiscal 2016 and 2018, which can translate into replacement volume next fiscal. Demand will also continue to be supported by infrastructure and construction activity, with sustained government emphasis on infrastructure spend in the interim budget, said a note from CRISIL Ratings. **FE**

## India's smartphone exports to US jump in Apr-Dec FY24

During the nine-month period of this fiscal, the share of China and Vietnam declined, as per Commerce ministry data



**APRIL-DECEMBER PERIOD**  
**\$3.53 billion:** FY24  
**\$998 million:** FY23

**SMARTPHONE EXPORTS TO THE US:**

- CHINA:** \$35.1 billion worth of smartphones sent to the US market
- Vietnam:** Shipments of phones declined to \$5.47 billion
- SOUTH KOREA:** Exports increased to \$858 million
- HONG KONG:** Sales are down to \$112 million

- Increasing exports have made India the third-biggest smartphone exporter to the US
- An increase in overall smartphone production has helped in pushing exports
- During the nine-month period of this fiscal, the share of China and Vietnam declined
- With the continued momentum, exports have touched \$10.5 billion in April-December 2023-24

Source: Ministry of Commerce/PTI

## Adani plans to invest over ₹1.2 lk cr in FY25

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

ADANI GROUP plans to invest more than Rs 1.2 lakh crore (about \$14 billion) across its portfolio companies that range from ports to energy, airports, commodities, cement and media in fiscal year starting April 1, as it doubles down on its \$100 billion investment guidance over the next 7-10 years to grow businesses, sources said.

The projected capital expenditure or capex for 2024-25 (April 2024 to March 2025) fiscal is 40 per cent higher than what the portfolio is estimated to have incurred in FY24.

According to analysts, the portfolio is estimated to have incurred a capex of around \$10 billion in FY24 that ends on March 31. Sources said these investments will set the stage for exponential profit growth. The group had previously guided a \$100 billion capex over the next 7-10

years. Most of this investment is going to go into group fast growing businesses -- renewable, green hydrogen and airports.

As much as 70 per cent of the planned capex will go into its green portfolio -- primarily renewable power, green hydrogen, green evacuation. Of the remaining 30 per cent, the majority will be spent towards airports and ports businesses, they said.

In calendar year 2023, the portfolio delivered a \$9.5 billion EBITDA (up 34.4 per cent year-on-year), while its net debt has reduced by 4 per cent from March 2023 to September 2023 (balance sheet figures are only declared half yearly).

In the December quarter, Adani's portfolio reported record EBITDA growth of 63.6 per cent, taking its 12-month EBITDA to an all-time high of \$9.5 billion (Rs 78,823 crore) in 2023. Increasing cash flows from fast growing profits have set the stage for mega-scale investments, sources said.

BRIEFLY

### Decathlon to accelerate investments in India

New Delhi: French sports retailer Decathlon is accelerating its investments to ramp up production and enhance its retail presence further in India, one of its "most important" global markets, its Global CEO Barbara Martin Coppola has said. Decathlon expects to continue its "high growth rate" from the Indian market, which is also emerging as an important manufacturing hub for the retailer, from where it currently exports around 65 per cent of production to global markets, she added. **PTI**

### Mother Dairy to invest ₹750 cr to set up plants

New Delhi: Mother Dairy will invest Rs 650 crore to set up two new plants for processing of milk as well as fruits and vegetables to expand its business amid rising consumer demand. The company will also invest another Rs 100 crore to expand capacities of its existing plants. **PTI**

MORE COMPANIES AND SECTORS ACROSS THE WORLD ARE INCREASINGLY RELYING ON GENERATIVE AI

## Analysing datasets: How predictive AI models are gaining traction

SOMUYARENDRA BARIK & ANIL SASI

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

A VOLCANO in Iceland erupted on Saturday for the fourth time since December, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said, spewing smoke and molten lava into the air. One question that arose immediately was: Will it impact air travel? A 2010 eruption in Iceland had halted around 100,000 flights in Europe as ash clouds and haze enveloped the skies around the Arctic Circle, a key international flight path.

That's where data analysis for pattern searches using Artificial Intelligence comes in. Beyond commercial applications, Moscow-based Yandex has introduced a service capable of monitoring volcanic ash movement and mitigating its impact on communities and ecosystems. Given that volcanic ash presents a significant hazard, affecting regions across the globe with far-reaching consequences, Yandex, using advanced mathematical models and neural networks, has developed an interactive map that allows the real-time monitoring of ash clouds after eruptions. The idea is to empower authorities and communities to respond swiftly to ashfall and safeguard



AI algorithms are being programmed to seek solutions for a variety of desired outcomes. *File*

public safety and infrastructure. According to Anna Lemyakina, Director of Strategic Projects at Yandex Cloud: "In projects such as forecasting volcanic ash dispersion, seamless and swift access to services for hypothesis testing and model training is crucial. Our project is readily scalable to monitor volcanoes worldwide, addressing the urgent issue of volcanic eruptions and their aftermath."

Even as text-based generative AI platforms such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini have caught the fancy of people,

companies and researchers around the world -- including oil and gas majors, pharmaceutical companies, and manufacturing entities -- are increasingly relying on generative AI for all kinds of purposes, including oil exploration, drug discovery and worker safety, among others.

For companies, the advantage is the trove of their own historical data which can become useful fodder for generative AI tools for predicting things. For instance, an oil drilling company with wells around the world has the historical geological data on the regions

where all oil drilling has led to successful finds, and an AI system trained on this historical data could predict where a new oil well could be located.

Although, given the hype around generative AI, the term has also become a marketing buzzword. For instance, a number of digital wearables' companies have repackaged some of their personalisation options as AI-first features. While the personalisation basis of a user's typical habits is still a function of AI, it is nowhere near the sophistication -- both in hardware and software -- that generative AI platforms need.

**Oil and gas exploration**

A majority of the top 20 global oil and gas producers are learnt to be working on an AI strategy for their upstream (exploration) and midstream (pipeline and logistics) businesses. A recent EY survey indicated that more than 92 per cent of oil and gas companies around the world are "either currently investing in AI or plan to in the next two years."

AI algorithms are being programmed to seek solutions for a variety of desired outcomes, especially for data-led interventions to sift through the large amount of data generated by past surveys

and explorations to identify patterns and correlations that may escape other forms of analysis. AI for oil and gas can leverage the data produced by active wells during extraction to make predictions about probable reserves, provide predictions about the best ways to access known reserves, and extrapolate the lifetime yield of current wells.

Take for instance oil major Shell. Last year it forged a partnership with the AI software service company SparkCognition to develop a proprietary generative AI tool which can generate subsurface images for potential oil exploration opportunities.

As per the company, the traditional approach to subsurface imaging and data analysis is time-intensive and costly, relying on terabytes of data, high-performance computing, and complex physics-based algorithms to analyse and identify exploration opportunities.

However, the generative AI solution being developed by Shell and SparkCognition uses deep learning to generate reliable subsurface images using far fewer seismic shots -- as little as 1 per cent in completed field trials -- than traditionally necessary

while preserving subsurface image quality. The company says this will allow it to explore resources at a much lower cost.

Earlier this month, Saudi Aramco, the world's largest oil producer, showcased its metabrain generative AI. According to Amin H Nasser, the company's president and CEO, metabrain is helping Aramco to analyse drilling plans and geological data as well as historical drilling times versus costs and recommend well options. The model will also have the capability to provide precise forecasts for refined products, including pricing trends, market dynamics, and geopolitical insights.

**Medicine research**

Then there is the field of applying deep neural networks in drug discovery, which happens to be one of the most promising areas of research currently. "Predictive models are central to our work," according to Friedrich Rippmann, Director, Computational Chemistry & Biology at Merck. "These are statistical models that predict whether a compound idea -- a not-yet-synthesised molecule -- will produce a desired activity."

"The technologies we're using mostly relate to machine learning. In particular, we're using var-

ious types of deep neural networks. But we've also explored other more classical statistical techniques, with funny names like random forests and support vector machines."

So far, in terms of practical benefit, the research carried out by Friedrich Rippmann's team and Merck's partners has made available almost 300 new models for assessing the properties of a compound, which can help predict their ability to bind to a specific disease-relevant target. "These models are already being used by our chemists to judge their compound ideas before deciding on whether to synthesise them," according to Rippmann.

AI analysis is only as good as the quality of the datasets in use. For this reason, the pharmaceutical industry is increasingly seeking to collaborate by pooling data. A recent initiative to facilitate, the "MELODDY Project," involves the EU Innovative Medicines Initiative and around ten pharmaceutical companies in a project aimed at improving predictive models through so-called "federated learning," by using a novel blockchain system to store data on a secure ledger while protecting the trade secrets of individual companies.



# Iyer declared fit to play for KKR, but with a rider

DEVENDRA PANDEY  
MARCH 17

SHREYAS Iyer, who had missed out the last two days of Mumbai's Ranji Trophy finals citing back issues, has been declared fit to play the IPL but with a rider. The Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) captain, who joined the IPL franchise, has been advised that he can't lunge too much while playing the forward defense as this could aggravate his injury.

The *Indian Express* understands that Iyer visited a spine specialist in Mumbai after consultation with the National Cricket Academy (NCA) Bangalore and the doctor has declared him fit to play with the precaution that he needs to be cautious while stretching his leg.

"He is fit to play, a specialist spine doctor was consulted in Mumbai who has advised him not to stretch his leg too forward while defending the ball. He has joined IPL franchise KKR and he can play," a source in the Indian board informed.

Iyer has been in the news for his fitness issues in the last few weeks. Despite him stating that he is facing back pain after playing a certain number of balls, the BCCI medical team wasn't convinced with his claims.

He was snubbed and scrubbed from BCCI's annual retainer contract too after he bypassed selectors' diktat of playing Ranji Trophy.

Iyer had missed Ranji Trophy quarter-finals but he played semis and final for Mumbai recently. He slammed 95 in the second innings in the final but didn't turn up for fielding after he experienced back pain again. The MCA medical team decided to get an MRI done and his report was sent to NCA for further updates.

Iyer had complained of back pain after the second Test match between India vs England. However, NCA had declared him fit, even after his stating he was undergoing pain. Iyer was dropped from Test games thereafter and was asked to play Ranji Trophy. He missed Mumbai's quarter-finals and it was then that BCCI secretary Jay Shah issued a letter to all contracted players stating domestic cricket remains a "critical yardstick for selection" to the national team.

The reason for the communication, according to the letter, was "the concerning trend of players prioritising the IPL over domestic red-ball cricket". "There is a recent trend that has started to emerge and is a cause for concern. Some players have begun prioritising the IPL over domestic cricket, a shift that was not anticipated. Domestic cricket has always been the foundation upon which Indian cricket stands, and it has never been undervalued in our vision for the sport," Shah said in the letter.

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Shreyas Iyer with KKR coach Chandrakant Pandit at the Eden Gardens on Sunday. PTI

We have been through ups and downs but they have stuck at it... For RCB as a franchise to win, it is really, really special

SMRITI MANDHANA, RCB CAPTAIN

# RCB's women trailblazers

Smriti Mandhana's team beat DC to win WPL title and end Bangalore fans' 16-year wait for a trophy

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 23

WHEN THE powerplay of Delhi Capitals innings was done, the scoreboard read 61/0. It was a whirlwind. The competition's best partnership – Meg Lanning and Shafali Verma – were off to a flier. Especially the Indian youngster, who was once again showing off her ball-striking ability, stable base with all the focus down the ground. The ball was flying off her bat. She had reached 42 off 21 balls, Lanning was doing her part, playing the second fiddle as she tends to.

Then came Sophie Molineux's 8th over at the end of which 64/0 became 65/3. In the space of four balls – that aptly read out W-0-W-W – the Aussie left-arm spinner dismissed Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues and Alice Capsey. Three of DC's most destructive batters, all gone in a hurry. It was the over that changed the direction of the match decisively.

Royal Challengers Bangalore spun their way to a win, ending a long wait for a fanbase that has made their voice heard loud and clear from south to north, DC could just manage 113 batting first, RCB took their time but eventually got there with three balls to spare, with Richa Ghosh hitting the winning runs, and fittingly, Ellyse Perry remaining unbeaten on 35.

With Lanning and Marizanne Kapp still around, DC hoped for a fighting total. Given that 130-odd was defended a couple of nights ago at the venue, DC could hope. Shreyanka Patil, then, stepped up to the plate. In her second over, for the second consecutive match against Delhi, the RCB spinner got rid of Lanning. It was a blow from which DC never recovered.

## Easy chase

The chase of 114 always felt like a matter of when and not if, and that was because RCB's spinners brought their A-Game once again. When RCB pulled off a heist against Mumbai Indians in the semifinal, it was Shreyanka Patil, Sophie Molineux and Asha Sobhana who bowled the three crunch overs in the end. Those three would go on to share 9 wickets between them in a match-winning display of slow bowling.

Molineux, player of the final, felt like a shrewd addition to the franchise during the auction as she plugged a problem area for the team from last year: a wicket-taking spin bowler. This was despite Molineux not having been in action for Australia in international white-ball cricket since 2021.

But Shreyanka recalled a chat with Ellyse Perry during India's home season against Australia. "When I played against Australia, Pez came up and told me that 'Soph is going to be amazing. You're going to learn a lot of stuff from her'. When I saw her, it was just amazing to watch her bowl in the nets. And then when she turned out, big match player, amazing to watch her," Shreyanka said on Sunday.

The left-arm spinner's first breakthrough was to have Shafali caught out at deep midwicket. Then Rodrigues and Capsey were bowled playing variants of the sweep shot. Molineux wouldn't stop there, as she came up with a direct hit later to run Radha Yadav out.

Shreyanka's four-wicket haul started off with Lanning's LBW, this time with a classical offspinner's dismissal, and ended with cleaning up the tail. Asha too chipped in with two big wickets in the middle overs as DC tried in vain to break the shackles. The job was nearly done.

RCB's season turned out to be a roller-



RCB players celebrate their eight-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in the final of the WPL in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

Then came Sophie Molineux's 8th over at the end of which 64/0 became 65/3. In the space of four balls – that aptly read out W-0-W-W – the Aussie left-arm spinner dismissed Shafali, Jemimah and Alice.

# Poor start, hairline fracture but Shreyanka shines like a diamond

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

THE FIRST thing that strikes you about Shreyanka Patil, beyond her excellent skills as a bowler, is the confidence with which she carries herself. It made Ellyse Perry, the greatest allrounder the game has seen, gush about her during the first season of Women's Premier League.

"To see her come out and bat the way that she does, but then obviously her bowling talent..." Perry gushed. "She's a real special star for the future. I haven't seen someone like that of her age around the world for a long time, with that kind of skill and just attitude. So, that's really cool."

Fast forward a year, and Shreyanka has finished the second season with the Purple Cap as Royal Challengers Bangalore were crowned champions of WPL 2024 on Sunday at the Arun Jaitley Stadium. With figures of 4/12 in the final against Delhi Capitals, Shreyanka shot to the top of the leaderboard of the wicket-takers' list. The journey there, though, wasn't straightforward.

It seemed she was coming down with the case of a Second-Season Syndrome at the start of the tournament last month. 2023 was a whirlwind year for her – going from a breakthrough WPL to impressing in the Caribbean Premier League, then earning her India debut during the season. But, starting off WPL 2024 at her home stadium in Bengaluru, Shreyanka seemed to be off the



RCB's Shreyanka Patil took four wickets in the final and was also the Purple Cap winner. PTI

pace. Four matches, just two wickets – and in the match against Mumbai Indians, a hairline fracture on her non-bowling hand.

"She herself would admit that she didn't start the tournament as well as she would have liked," RCB assistant coach Malolan Rangarajan said in a press conference.

"But she was the first one to come up and say, 'I am not bowling well. What can I do?' She came up with the solutions too. Yes, we chipped in here and there, but that's her character. When you see people like that, you know that when there are crunch moments, these characters will stand up and deliver."

Shreyanka missed two matches due to the injury, which apparently she didn't want to, but put the work in during the enforced

## SCORECARD

DELHI CAPITALS vs RCB  
ARUN JAITLEY STADIUM, NEW DELHI  
Toss: Delhi Capitals won, chose to bat  
Result: RCB won by 8 wickets

DELHI CAPITALS	
M Lanning lbw b Patil	23 (23b, 3x4)
S Verma c Wareham b Molineux	44 (27b, 2x4, 3x6)
J Rodrigues b Molineux	0 (2b)
A Capsey b Molineux	0 (1b)
M Kapp c Devine b Sobhana	8 (16b)
J Jonassen c Mandhana b Sobhana	3 (11b)
R Yadav run out (Molineux)	12 (9b, 2x4)
M Mani lbw b Patil	5 (3b, 1x4)
A Reddy b Patil	10 (13b)
S Pandey not out	5 (5b)
T Bhatia c Ghosh b Patil	0 (1b)
Extras (w 3)	3
■ Total (all out; 18.3 overs)	113
■ FoW: 1-64 (Shafali Verma, 7.1 ov), 2-64 (Jemimah Rodrigues, 7.3 ov), 3-64 (Alice Capsey, 7.4 ov), 4-74 (Meg Lanning, 10.4 ov), 5-80 (Marizanne Kapp, 13.1 ov), 6-81 (Jess Jonassen, 13.3 ov), 7-87 (Minnu Mani, 14.1 ov), 8-101 (Radha Yadav, 16.2 ov), 9-113 (Arundhati Reddy, 18.2 ov), 10-113 (Taniya Bhatia, 18.3 ov)	
■ Bowling: R Singh 2-0-28-0, S Molineux 4-0-20-3, E Perry 2-0-14-0, S Devine 1-0-9-0, Wareham 3-0-16-0, S Patil 3.3-0-12-4, A Sobhana 3-0-14-2	

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE	
(TARGET: 114 RUNS)	
S Mandhana c Reddy b Mani	31 (39b, 3x4)
S Devine lbw b Pandey	32 (27b, 5x4, 1x6)
E Perry not out	35 (37b, 4x4)
R Ghosh not out	17 (14b, 2x4)
■ Extras	0
■ Total (2 wickets; 19.3 overs)	115
■ FoW: 1-49 (Sophie Devine, 8.1 ov), 2-82 (Smriti Mandhana, 14.6 ov)	
■ Bowling: M Kapp 4-0-20-0, A Capsey 3-0-13-0, S Pandey 4-0-11-1, R Yadav 1-0-18-0, A Reddy 3.3-0-26-0, J Jonassen 2-0-15-0, M Mani 2-0-12-1	

## BEYOND THE NUMBERS

# Al-Hilal's record-breaking streak does not make them hall of famers

SANDIP G  
MARCH 18

Whatever the future of the Saudi Pro League be, Al-Hilal has achieved a slice of history. When they beat Al-Ittihad last week, they grabbed the record for the longest winning streak in the game's record books.

The record would be widely contested and criticized, but it was just the sort of positive publicity the league needed at a time when it was slipping out of football consciousness after the million-dollar storm it had whipped up since the acquisition of Cristiano Ronaldo last year and the subsequent exodus of Europe's elite players.

Winning 28 games (29 wins by Saturday night) on the spin to break a record is a monumental feat anywhere in the world. But it comes with caveats, as records often tend to. Broadly speaking, there are two factors to weigh in. A) Is it truly the record?

There of course would be claimants. For instance, FK Akradag, a club founded by former president of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov, who himself designed the logo, last year went on a 33-game winning streak. In fact, they have won every game they have played. But the obscurity of the league, the uncertainty of its quality and the doubts over its integrity, as the ruler of

the country is Berdimukhamedov's son Serdar, were enough for the Guinness Book of Records (it's not FIFA that approves the records) to cast aspersions on the nature and level of competitions.

In the post World War Two Era, Hungarian club Ujpest reportedly won 30 games in a row, but information of games in that era is sketchy. Diligent recording of data in football began late, a reason several records are subject to debates.

For instance, Pele's goal tally of 1,279 strikes in 1,363 games, was fervently disputed, as many of the goals had arrived in celebratory games after retirement. He played 550 unofficial games, some of them against U-23 national teams (among them Saudi's too), combined squads, regional teams and even in some military events while he served in the Brazilian army. In total, it's believed that more than 500 of Pele's goals came in unofficial matches. "Who did you score them against?" Maradona once asked in an interview with Pele in a television program years ago. "Your nephews in the backyard?"

The second caveat dribbles in. Is the number really glittering, given the standard of the league?

## No comparison with Ajax

The previous record, after all, was held by



Al-Hilal extended their winning streak to 29 after they beat Damac 2-1. Reuters

a little-known club on the Wales-England border The New Saints of Oswestry Town & Llansantffraid Football Club. They had beaten the record of surpassing Ajax's 26 consecutive wins in the early 1970s when Johan

Cruyff was their figurehead. In terms of quality and competitiveness of the league, Ajax's achievement is considered the benchmark. And for the number to add glitter, the feat has to be achieved in the

top five leagues of Europe. It would be an inhuman feat considering the ultra-cutthroatness of the leagues.

The closest any team has come to matching Ajax is Ajax itself, in 1994-95, the sparkling batch of Clarence Seedorf, Edgar Davids, Edwin van der Sar and Marc Overmars, an imperious batch won both the league and Champions League, dethroning AC Milan. Bayern Munich, Real Madrid and Manchester City all came close in recent years, but fell short, demonstrating the difficulty of sustaining a winning streak in Europe.

Not that what Al Hilal achieved is trivial but it lacks the grandeur of the Ajax sides. It becomes a mere statistical embellishment, and not a sign of greatness. There are similar numbers and accomplishments that remain as mere figures.

The name Erwin Helmchen might not ring a bell. But the German, who played in the 1930s, is the highest goal-scorer ever in league football. According to RSSSF statistics, the most authoritative stats engine for football records, he has scored 947 goals. But he is not talked about as one of the greatest-ever strikers, because the era he lived and played the game was different.

Between Peter Shilton and Cristiano Ronaldo in the list of most appearances for clubs are Brazil's Fabio (1311) and England's

Paul Bastock (1286), both goalkeepers aged 43 and 53 still plying in the lower leagues of their country. Neither strike a chord.

Every record and number thus needs contextualising. What can be gathered from Al-Hilal's streak is that they enjoy a disturbing monopoly.

Since its inception in 1974, they have been crowned champions 18 times, a 19th is on the way, as the sit 12 points adrift of Al Nassr, the club of Cristiano Ronaldo fame, have been Asian champions four times, a record. They have won five of the past seven titles, and seem destined to bag their sixth in eight seasons. They are Saudi's best ever. No doubt. But the record doesn't make them hall of famers.

Teams around them can learn. This season, they were the merriest spenders – shelling out 376.10 million pounds, 90 million spent on Neymar alone – but they were also the sharpest ones because they invested on players who have not yet slipped into their autumn.

Neymar (who missed most of the season) is just 32, Milinkovic-Savic 29, Neves and Malcolm 27. All of them were aggressively chased by the giants of Europe, but could not match the Saudi giants in spending powers. They have played with clarity and intensity. They have set the standards, but unless the clubs around lift themselves, the impressive numbers they have been racking would remain of mere academic use. A trivia at best.



# Becoming fighting fit

## Not seen replays of my 90.2m throw: 19-year-old Dehning

Sen has a better yo-yo score than Virat Kohli; that is just half his comeback story

**SHIVANI NAIK**  
MUMBAI, MARCH 17

LAKSHYASEN was returning from the US Open last April, but was so beat up and knackered from two weeks of tournament play, that he struggled to lug his own kitbag through the airport on his slouching, hurting shoulders. His close team of coaches, trainers and family knew he was a terribly broken piece.

Almost a year on, Sen has made semifinals in back-to-back weeks at Paris and the All England and almost secured the Olympics quota. He hardly had any taping around his knee or shoulders, just some protective tape on the back. He's flying like before in defense, but more importantly landing stably and has a jump and hit that's fairly effective late in the third set.

In May of 2023, a month after the slumping trudge from the airport, he started on 'shock training.'

The 'shock' is just 6 jumps, twice a week — only what's needed for his sport, and he was initiated into them after he was at an advanced stage of strength conditioning. First employed by the legendary biomechanist trainer Dr Michael Yessis, who passed away at 90 last year, these were made famous by American world champ shot putters who weighed 130 kg, preferring 'shock' to squats in their plyometric training. They are intense on the knees, in that the impact is more neural than muscular. Such is the impact on the brain (head), that in 10 days of training on shock jumps, Sen's jaw tightened. But it's how he could counter Lee Zii Jia in the quarters in the third set smash-brawl. Zii Jia smashes at 390 kph with barely any recoil, Sen staggered him with a bunch of jumping 320 kphs, but timed for the clutch.

There are other impressive numbers — Sen clocks 22.4 on the yo-yo test; Virat Kohli, with lesser demands in his sport and much older, is usually on 17.2. It shows Sen's progress in lactic endurance — he can jump and hit when he wants, with strength and stamina in the third set.

On a treadmill, he can go for an hour, with 5 repetitions of 30 second spurts of Level 16 or 17, that's trained him for a thumping heart rate. He climbs double ropes for shoulder strengthening. There's bicep curls for arm power, because he isn't naturally a hard-hitter like the Indonesians or Malaysians. And he's put in work into calf strengthening for relentless attacks in the third set. He played 7 in the last two



Lakshya Sen clocks 22.4 on the yo-yo test; Virat Kohli, with lesser demands in his sport and much older, is usually on 17.2. *File*

weeks, and won 6.

Viren Rasquinha, head of Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ), who helped put together Sen's team with the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy sports science centre, recalls Sen not being in great shape when going through a tough phase last year. Even after his injuries healed and the lab numbers were good, it took Sen another three months for results to show. "The drop in form with first round exits was perplexing because there was no injury and he was in the best shape. He was ticking all boxes on dedication, sleep and recovery. But we knew Lakshya was too good to not come good finally," he recalls.

Getting 3 wins at the Badminton Asia Team Championships gave him confidence after losing to big names — meeting them early after his ranking slacked. But that was after his team had to convene to sort out his issues. "The group got together, and we had quarterly reviews of everything. None of us were confident of his qualifying then," Rasquinha recalls.

### Padukone demands excellence

It's when Padukone demanded excellence in strength-stamina parameters on sports science test results, backed by daily data. "Lakshya's peak power is now beyond elite levels," Rasquinha says.

He would also train in 3-point shooting on basketball courts and a spot of kick boxing, but just for fun. Sen is not known to lift insane weights in the gym, and the treadmill is his go-to. And the major difference since last April is how the explosive jump is supplementing endurance. Vimal Kumar's famous yells of "pace injection" in rallies now looks more seamless and stable on court, rather than the wild diving defensive retrieves all the time. Now he flies when needed, but can arch, rotate, flex and extend without breaking down with injury. His speed and reflexes are as good as ever, despite the power injections.

Sen would pivot back to Vimal Kumar as coach, moving from Anup Sridhar. "You cannot fault Anup for commitment. It was his bad luck that Lakshya couldn't get results then. Maybe it's Anup's hard work back then that's showing results now," Rasquinha says. "For someone of Lakshya's calibre, we left the decision to him."

He tends to struggle to find good sparring though at the PPBA, with other elite shuttlers Kiran George and Mithun Manjunath having their own schedule to take care of. "We are thinking of sending some academy boys abroad with him when he plays because it gets tough for Vimal sir. But we have to look at costs, arranging visas, etc," he says.

**NIHAL KOSHIE**  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

BROUGHT UP in Hermannsburg, a village in Germany, 19-year-old javelin thrower Max Dehning became the youngest-ever to cross 90 metres at the Winter Throwing Competition in February when he registered a throw of 90.20 metres. In an interview with *The Indian Express*, the young German says he felt like a 'small star' after the special throw and how he is astonished with Olympic and World champion Neeraj Chopra's flexibility. **Excerpts:**

### How did you start off with handball?

I am from a sporting family and handball was always a main sport. My sister Marie is also active in athletics and successful in combined events.

### What made you shift to athletics?

My sister went to the kids athletics programme and I joined her. I tried almost all disciplines, but throwing was always one of my favorites. I was very good as a kid in throwing the ball and when I became older, I chose the javelin.

### At what age did you start focussing fully on javelin throw?

When I won my first title at the Under-16 German Championships. When I was 17, I decided to concentrate fully on the javelin throw.

### How do you look back at your 90 metre-plus throw and what were the reactions back home?

It was a throw for the history journals, I guess. The press here covered it like it was a sensational throw. Also a week after throwing 90 metres-plus, I started to feel like a 'small star'. There were a lot of media requests (for interviews). The attention was a little too much but I think it helped promote the sport. Therefore I have no problems with this extra 'stress' along with my daily training program. Over the last few days, I have put my phone on silent mode as I started receiving messages and calls almost every second. I have not seen the video replays of my throw as I don't want to rest on my laurels.

### You had not crossed 80 metres before the Winter Throwing competition. Could you list out what helped you



German javelin thrower Max Dehning, 19, who became the youngest to cross the 90-metre mark. *Afro-Sport*

### throw 90 metres?

I believe training, training and more training is what got me here. I was training very hard last winter as I was focused on improving my throws. Now, I have shown everybody that nothing is impossible... that at 19 years you can achieve such a result and success. My coach, Matthias Rau Coach at German Athletic Club, TSV Bayer 04 Leverkusen, is the one who helped me improve so much.

### Germany has great throwers who have crossed 90 metres many times. For a young German thrower, how important is it to cross 90 metres?

To cross the magic 90m mark was something very special for me. In all, 23 throwers have crossed 90 metres. So to join this special list makes me proud. I always wanted to throw 90 metres, but I never expected that I would achieve it so early.

### How is your throwing style? What percentage is power?

I believe I have to improve a lot in my technique. I think currently my throwing is about 60 percent to 70 percent power and 40 percent to 30 percent technique.

### What are your plans in the run up to the Paris Olympics? As you have thrown 90 metres, there will be focus

### on you...

I will try not to feel the pressure. I just want to enjoy the competition and hope I can repeat such a performance. The fans will watch me closer than ever before, but I will try not to get too influenced. I will follow the same routine.

### Do you have a role model?

I don't have a role model but I think there is a lot to learn about technique from Jan Zelezny (the world record holder).

### Have you watched Olympic and World Champion Neeraj Chopra in action and what do you make of his throwing style?

Neeraj has an impressive technique which I follow carefully. I follow his throws in competitions all over and I am astonished with his flexibility.

### Are you financially supported by the government or the sports ministry?

I am sponsored by my club, TSV Bayer 04 Leverkusen and also by Deutsche Sporthilfe.

### How do you relax when you are not training or competing?

I am a very keen motorcyclist. When I ride my bike I feel free and my mind is at ease.

**MARUTI SUZUKI**

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