



'It Must Remain Free'
 PM Modi said the gaming industry does not require any regulation and will boom **BOTTOM LINE >> 3**

magazine

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Pure Politics, Bottom Line & Around the World



COMMERCE MINISTRY DIRECTS ECOMM PLATFORMS TO SCRAP SEGMENT

Bournvita, Other Brands to Lose 'Health Drink' Status

An NCPCR inquiry reveals there's no such category defined under FSS Act, 2006

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The government has told e-commerce websites that Bournvita and other beverages should not be called health drinks because the category isn't defined in the country's food laws.

"All e-commerce companies/portals are hereby advised to remove drink/beverages including Bournvita from the category of 'health drinks' from their sites/portals," the commerce and industry ministry said in a notification. Cadbury Bournvita, the count-

Health Call

Last year, Mondelez, maker of Bournvita, had landed in controversy over an influencer's claims of high sugar content in the drink

Earlier in April, FSSAI had asked ecomm sites not to label dairy-based or malt-based beverages as health drinks

Influencer had to remove video following a legal notice from co

But later NCPCR told the brand to withdraw all misleading packaging, advertising, and labels

₹2.5 Lcr Estimated size of packaged health and wellness F&B mkt in India by 2026, says a report

ry's most popular malted drink, had found itself in a controversy last year after a social media influencer alleged that the drink has high sugar content.

Mondelez India, which owns Bournvita, sent a legal notice to the influencer, forcing him to take

down the video. But the issue snowballed into a controversy, and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) asked the brand to withdraw all misleading packaging, advertising, and labels. Earlier this month, the Food Sa-

fety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) instructed e-commerce portals against labelling dairy-based or malt-based beverages as 'health drinks'.

The latest directive from the commerce and industry ministry has come after an inquiry by NCPCR — a statutory body constituted under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005. It "concluded that there is no 'health drink' defined under FSS Act 2006, rules and regulations as submitted by FSSAI and Mondelez India Food Pvt Ltd", as per the notification dated April 10.

"This might be the effect of the (Baba) Ramdev judgment where Patanjali was named by the court for misleading consumers," said Santosh Desai, managing director of brand consulting firm Futurebrands Consulting.

'Eye on Misleading Practices' >> 7

8-12% YOY GROWTH IN JAN-MARCH

Smartphone, AC Sales Spring Back in Q4

Discretionary products log high growth in over 2 years as demand picks up across markets

Writankar. Mukherjee @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: Primary sales of discretionary products like smartphones, laptops, air-conditioners and refrigerators grew 8-12% year-on-year in the January-March period, marking one of the highest paces of growth in a non-festive quarter in over two years, market researchers and industry executives said. Primary sale is from the manufacturers and brands to retailers and trade, which is an indicator of ultimate consumer demand since retailers nowadays only increase inventory when there is demand at present or in

the immediate future. "Demand has improved across categories including the entry products and rural markets like UP, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar after a long time," said Haier India president Satish NS. "These markets were earlier struggling to meet sales targets but now easily achieving them."

As per preliminary estimates by smart-phone industry market tracker Counterpoint Research, the smartphone market grew by about 8% in the last quarter — one of the highest quarterly growths in recent times. In January-March 2023, the market had declined by 19% year-on-year.

To be sure, the smartphone market growth rate in preceding October-December period was higher

at 25% year-on-year but that was due to festive season shifting by a month and therefore a weak base period. But overall smartphone shipments in India had remained flat in calendar 2023. Industry executives said sales

of cooling products like ACs and refrigerators grew in double digits in the category's crucial January to March period after two years, compared to 6% last year.

First-time Buyers Make a Return >> 7

Spending Wheels Turn Faster

Household appliance sales grew at 3% in April-Dec, but brisk demand in Jan to March improved growth rate to 7-8% in 2023-24

IMPROVED PROJECTIONS

- Counterpoint Research estimates the Indian smartphone market will grow by 5% in 2024 as compared to flat sales in 2023
- Canalys estimates the Indian PC market will grow by 14% in 2024 as compared to a 11% decline in 2023

INDIA WARMS UP AS THE HEAT IS ON

All Gas-fired Power Plants to Operate in May-June

Sec 11 of Electricity Act, 2003, has so far been invoked only for plants using imported coal

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The government on Saturday directed all gas-based power plants to operate in May and June amid an anticipated increase in demand during the summer months, invoking a key provision in the Electricity Act.

This is the first time that the government is using Section 11 of the Electricity Act, 2003 for gas-based plants. The provision, which allows the government in extraordinary circumstances to ask a power generation company to operate and maintain production in accordance with its directions, has so far been invoked only for power plants using imported coal as fuel.

India's power demand is rising and is expected to peak in the coming months with the India Meteorological Department predicting above-normal maximum temperatures over most parts of the country till June. This is also the time when India will be holding elections.

During non-solar hours, when renewable electricity generation falls, peak demand is majorly met by power plants running on coal and lignite. A significant portion of the gas-based power capacity is unutilised due to commercial reasons.

Tariffs to be Based on Energy Rates >> 7

States Directed to Protect Workers from Hot Weather

Labour min suggests health checkups, drinking water facility, longer resting period at work sites

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The Ministry of Labour and Employment has issued an advisory to all states and union territories to put in place measures to help protect workers at factories, mines, construction sites and brick kilns from extreme hot weather conditions.

In a letter sent to state chief secretaries and UT administrators on Friday, labour secretary Sumita Dawra cited the India Meteorological Department's forecast for above-normal maximum temperatures in many parts of the country this summer season. "Therefore, effective steps need to be taken for management and mitigation of adverse effects of extreme hot weather through a multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional administrative approach," she wrote.

On Friday, ET reported about the ministry's plan to issue such an advisory. India has more than 380 million unorganised workers who are often exposed to harsh weather conditions, resulting in ill-health and even death in some cases, as well as significant loss in labour hours. The advisory follows a home ministry directive after it met with stakeholder ministries last week on the matter.

PM also Took Stock of Situation >> 7



People walk under umbrella on a hot summer afternoon, at Vijay Chowk, in New Delhi on Saturday

ET WEALTH ON MONDAY

Where is GOLD headed?

PURE POLITICS PAGE >> 2

Iran Seizes Israel-Linked Ship with 17 Indians

Iran's Revolutionary Guards seized an Israeli-linked cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz bound for India with Indian crew on board Saturday, days after Tehran warned it could close the area to sea traffic. India is monitoring the situation, reports Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury.

Congress Faces New Alliance Blues in Rajasthan

The Congress in Rajasthan is struggling to strike a balance between following coalition dharma and keeping its flock together, making its first attempt to ally with regional parties for the Lok Sabha elections a tightrope walk. Nidhi Sharma reports.

Electric Motorbikes On Course to Take Charge of EV Space

Many startups and traditional players are set to launch vehicles that match ICE models in terms of performance, range and price

Hitting the Road

Electric motorcycles made by startups

TOP SPEED 140 kmph

PRICE ₹1.3-5 L

RANGE 140-180 km/charge

Source: Ostara Advisors

ICE two-wheeler market

Valued at \$16b in 2022

Projected to reach \$26.6b by 2028, growing at a CAGR of 9.8%

Motorcycles account for around 65% of segment

Source: TechSci Research

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Mumbai: Motorcycles are set to power electric vehicle adoption in India in the coming months as traditional manufacturers vie with startups to roll out battery powered versions that match their petrol-driven counterparts in performance and range.

The breakthrough in performance could propel e-motorcycle penetration to over 30% of the overall motorcycle market by 2030, up from less than 1% today, Bain India said in a recent report.

Several startups including Revolt

Motors, Matter Electric Motorcycles, Orxa Energies, Oben Electric, Ultraviolette, Komaki, Tork Motors, and Kabira Mobility, and some of the traditional motorcycle majors including Royal Enfield are firming up new electric motorcycle launches over the next few months.

"We are at the cusp of an exciting era of electrification in the motorcycle segment that presents breakout investment opportunities in the Indian market," said Vasudha Madhavan, founder and CEO of Ostara Advisors, an EV-focused investment bank. "We expect to see an EV startup unicorn emerge in the electric motorcycle space in the

next 3-5 years," she added. Till now, e-scooters were riding the EV wave in the two-wheeler space. That is likely to change with several high performance, zero-emission e-motorcycles set to hit the Indian roads at prices comparable to those run on petrol.

In the next 12-18 months, electric motorbikes will become mainstream, said Mohal Lalbhai, founder and CEO of Matter Electric Motorcycles. "While there is a huge pent-up demand, the choices were limited," he said.

Advanced Technology in Play >> 7

JIO, AIRTEL IN REVENUE CONVERSION MATCH

IPL Firms up Telcos' Data Cover Drive... Who'll Score More?

Uptick likely from Voice calls/SMS due to polls; Jio flaunts wider base but Airtel may win ARPU game

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Mumbai: Telecom companies are likely to see 8-10% rise in data traffic consumption as cricket fans glue eyeballs to the Indian Premier League (IPL) being streamed for free. Meanwhile, SMS/voice call activity may also record a 15-20% growth this April-June quarter as political parties take to the traditional telecom channels for election campaigning.

Data usage per subscriber per month which stood at 21GB in December 2023, is likely to go up to 25-27GB in April-June, also factoring in previous months growth, an analyst estimated.

But when it comes to revenue conversion, India's number two telco Bharti Airtel is likely to pip rivals Reliance Jio and Vodafone Idea to record 2-3% growth, he added.

"If you observe last year's IPL season, Airtel was the only player to show a meaningful uptick in average revenue per user (ARPU), despite Jio recording larger data consumption," said Rohan Dhamija, head, India and the Middle East, Analysys

IPL streaming could push data consumption by 8%

Average data usage per user may reach 25-27GB/month

LAST YEAR'S DATA SHOWED AIRTEL RECORDED HIGHER ARPU GROWTH BY OFFERING LOWER-VALUE PACKS

DATA USAGE PER SUB PER MONTH

Bharti Airtel

Mar-23 21.6 GB

Jun-23 22.2 GB

Reliance Jio (incl. FTTH)

Mar-23 25.5 GB

Jun-23 27.3 GB

ARPU

Bharti Airtel

Mar-23 ₹193.3

Jun-23 ₹199.8

Reliance Jio (incl. FTTH)

Mar-23 ₹178.8

Jun-23 ₹180.5

Elections may also boost SMS/voice usage by 15-20% this quarter

Overall revenue conversion may be in 2-3% range

Lower Value Data Packs >> 7



FUNDRAISING IMPROVES SEQUENTIALLY FOR STARTUPS

Q4 Fintech Funding Dips 50% YoY

Indian fintech startups raised \$551 million in the first three months of 2024, less than half compared with a year ago but almost 60% more than the last quarter, shows a report. >> 3

CLEANUP EXPRESS SET TO BE ON TRACK

Your Next Train Ride may Come as a Breath of Fresh Air

Odour of Business

- Higher-capacity water pumps
- Standardised watering systems
- NEWER CHEMICALS TO CLEAN WASHROOMS
- IoT-enabled technology to monitor smell



Railways plans slew of measures to tackle chronic issue of smelly trains, stations

Twesh.Mishra @timesgroup.com

New Delhi: The Indian Railways is considering Internet of Things, new chemicals and standardised watering systems among tools to address a chronic complaint of passengers: smelly trains and station premises.

A recent meeting of senior railway officials associated with maintenance and upkeep of trains discussed this issue, after the Railway Board flagged the large number of complaints that the national transporter has been getting on its platform for grievance redressal, a top government official said. "To address the high volume

of complaints regarding foul smell figuring in the Rail Madad app, the Railway Board has recommended testing new IoT-based technology for foul smell detectors," the official told ET.

Technology developed by Viliso Technologies, a Mumbai-based startup specialising in odour monitoring, has been shortlisted for this, he said. This will be used in some coaches of the Linke Hofmann Busch and Integral Coach Factory variants to study efficacy and monitor the working of on-board housekeeping service systems.

The railways is already trying to address this issue for the new premium Vande Bharat (VB) sleeper variant trains. "The BEML-make sleeper VB trains have an ergonomically designed odour-free toilet system," a second official said. These trains will also feature a shower with hot water in the first AC category cars.

Enroute Coach Watering >> 7

AMID ESCALATING TENSIONS WITH ISRAEL

Airlines to Avoid Iranian Airspace

Several Indian airlines have cancelled flights to Iran and restricted use of Israeli and Iranian airspace amid rapidly escalating tensions in West Asia. Arindam Majumder reports. >> 3



THIRD EYE



Force of Habit

Politicians frequently jumping from one party to another is causing a lot of confusion, not just for voters but even for those who are campaigning for them. Recently in a joint campaign event in Pune, Shiv Sena (Shinde group) leader Neelem Gorhe asked people to vote for Shirur Lok Sabha candidate Shivajirao Adharao Patil and said that his symbol was a bow and arrow of the Shiv Sena. The only problem was that Patil had just quit the Shiv Sena to join the NCP (Ajit camp) whose symbol is the clock. Gorhe's gaffe created a lot of dilemma in the audience and she too laughed it away saying that it was just "force of habit".



Nowhere to Go

While Surendranagar Lok Sabha seat has been embroiled in caste controversy with Talpada Kolis protesting against the BJP fielding a Chuvialia Koli candidate, the perennial turncoat Soma Ganda threw his hat in the ring to obtain a ticket from the Congress. However, with the Congress fielding Rutvij Makwana, Ganda "resigned" from the party. But the only problem being, he was suspended from the Congress back in 2020 and never allowed back in. He was not affiliated with any party when he resigned.



Peace First, Elections Later

With Manipur reeling under several months long ethnic strife, the state is awaiting political visitors in wake of Lok Sabha elections. There are hardly any political rallies and meetings associated with elections. The hotels are waiting for big orders to take care of the political functionaries. Even though the room occupancy in hotels is somewhat decent as officials from various departments are still there, but the big national leaders are yet to campaign in the state. However, the political mood of the state has not picked up as people feel that peace should come first and elections later.

Iran Seizes Israel-Linked Ship with 17 Indians Onboard

India says constantly monitoring the situation, in touch with Iranian authorities

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New Delhi: Iran's Revolutionary Guard Saturday seized an Israeli-linked cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz bound for India with 17 Indian nationals on board, days after Tehran warned it could close the area to sea traffic.

India is constantly monitoring the situation and is in touch with relevant authorities. Sources said, "We are aware that a cargo ship 'MSC Aries' has been taken under control by Iran. We have learnt that there are 17 Indian nationals onboard. We

are in touch with the Iranian authorities through diplomatic channels, both in Tehran and in Delhi, to ensure security, welfare and early release of Indian nationals."

The development comes amid possible Iranian strikes against Israel following the Israeli attack on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus.

A Guards helicopter had boarded and taken into Iranian waters the Portuguese flagged MSC Aries.

The Aries is leased by international shipping line MSC from Grotal Shipping, an affiliate of Zodiac Maritime, Zodiac said in a statement. Zodiac is partly owned by Israeli businessman Eyal Ofer. On Tuesday, the naval he-



An official slides down a rope during a helicopter raid on MSC Aries ship at sea - REUTERS

ad of the Revolutionary Guards, Alireza Tangsiri, threatened to close the Straits of Hormuz.

Since the start of Israel's campaign in Gaza in October, Israel and the United States have clashed repeatedly with Iranian-aligned groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi group has disrupted global trade with attacks on shipping in the Red Sea for months.

Sources here told ET that Israel-Iranian tension amid the Gaza crisis has cast a major shadow on Indian energy and economic interests in the region. The Gulf also hosts nearly 10 million Indian diaspora.

FROM DOMESTIC TO INT'L

Maldives Signs Deal With China for Redeveloping Airport

Move comes within days of outreach to India for ensuring essential supplies

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New Delhi: The Maldives has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China for redeveloping an airport, days after it reached out to India for ensuring daily supplies.

The Maldives government signed the MoU with China CAMC Engineering Co Ltd on Thursday for the redevelopment of Maldives Kadhdhoo Airport.

The redevelopment of Kadhdhoo domestic airport into an international airport entails a 2.45-km runway with a terminal capable of handling 300 passengers during peak hours, according to a press release by the Maldives President's Office.

Interestingly, Maldivian foreign minister Moosa Zameer had on April 6 said that India's gesture to renew the quota to allow the export of certain quantities of essential commodities for his na-



KADHDHOO AIRPORT

The project entails a 2.45-km runway with a terminal capable of handling 300 passengers during peak hours

tion signifies the long-standing bilateral friendship and the commitment to further expand trade and commerce. A major tourism body in the island nation has also

announced that it will hold roadshows across Indian cities to woo back Indian tourists.

Chinese presence in the Maldives has been expanding within days of

President Mohamed Muizzu entering office in the last quarter of 2023, much to India's discomfort.

This March, China signed a defence cooperation agreement with the Maldives. As part of the deal, China would provide the Maldives with free military assistance to foster "stronger" bilateral ties. China has also gifted 12 eco-friendly ambulances and 10 civil vehicles to the Maldives.

The Maldives also recently signed an MoU with China Tianying Inc to collaborate on environmental protection efforts. On March 27, it was reported that Maldives Housing Development Corporation has contracted China Machinery Engineering Corporation with major projects in Hulhumale' phase 3 under an agreement.

There are also reports that China will develop roads in the capital Male' for free.

Earlier this year, China and the Maldives also signed an FTA, which can further increase the island nation's debt to China.

ALL THINGS POLITICAL

Congress fields Vikramaditya against BJP's Kangana Ranaut

New Delhi: The Congress on Saturday announced a list of 16 more candidates for the Lok Sabha polls and fielded former Union minister Manish Tewari from the Chandigarh parliamentary constituency. The party also pitted Himachal Pradesh Minister Vikramaditya Singh against BJP candidate Kangana Ranaut in the state's Mandi Lok Sabha seat. Vikramaditya Singh is the son of the Congress' Himachal Pradesh unit chief Pratibha Singh. The candidates were announced during a meeting of the party's Central Election Committee here on Saturday. The CEC meeting was attended by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, and AICC general secretary K C Venugopal. — PTI

Raj Thackeray Lauds PM Modi for Ram Temple

Mumbai: Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray, who recently announced his party's support to the BJP-led alliance said that he didn't want the country to be run on the basis of religion, adding that the party welcomed the Ram Mandir temple that was built and lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's role in it. "If Modi was not there, then the Ram temple would not have been built in Ayodhya, even though the decision came from the Supreme Court it happened due to Modi. We need a stronger leadership and hence we felt that we should again give him an opportunity to lead the country." said Raj on Saturday. — OPB

With Kamaraj Vans, BJP Stakes Claim to Another Cong Icon

Kamaraj food vans were named after K Kamaraj who was former Tamil Nadu chief minister and a staunch Congressman

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New Delhi: Tamil Nadu BJP president Annamalai on Saturday released a manifesto for Coimbatore Lok Sabha constituency from where he is contesting the elections.

Among several other things, Annamalai promised round the clock mobile food vans called 'Kamaraj food vans' named after the former state chief minister and a stalwart,

K Kamaraj, who was a staunch Congress man who became chief minister of the state for three terms and is remembered as the king maker who helped install Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister of the country. The BJP has been in constant search for national icons whom the party can co-opt in its nationalist agenda and use it as a weapon to attack the dynastic politics of Congress and other regional parties. Kamaraj fits the bill in the same man-



Annamalai releasing manifesto for Coimbatore - PTI

ner as Vallabh Bhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose, Lal Bahadur Shastri and PV Narsimha Rao.

It is not the first time the BJP has staked its claim to K Kamaraj legacy in a state where Dravidian politics is at power play and who better than Kamaraj to counter it.

In 2015, then union minister Venkaiah Naidu on the birth anniversary of Kamaraj had tried to draw parallels between Kamaraj and PM Modi. During the 2021 assembly elections, huge cut outs of Kama-

raj and MGR were installed at Modi's rally venue in Coimbatore.

"Like Kamaraj, PM Modi's governance has been defined by compassion and integrity. It is natural and appropriate that the BJP TN President has announced the food vans in the name of Kamaraj," BJP national spokesperson CR Kesavan told ET. "PM Modi has paid tributes to Kamaraj for his emphasis on social empowerment and poverty alleviation, stating that it was a guiding force to all."

Closure of Textile Units, Lack of Jobs at Play in Tiruppur

BJP seems to have found some footing with the locals in the region this election season, selling the hope of better times

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Tiruppur: In India's "knitwear capital" Tiruppur, the AIADMK and the CPI are likely to see a strong adversary in the BJP, which is trying to make inroads into this important Tamil Nadu constituency with promises of pulling its bleeding garment units out of trouble with inclusive development.

The issues facing Tiruppur's textile and apparel industries have taken centre-stage, as rising raw material costs threaten to wipe out the once thriving micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that dotted this region. While some units have already been forced to shut down, the onestottering fear the crisis will engulf them soon.

The CPI has retained its parliamentary K Subbarayan, while the AIADMK, which is hoping to wrest back power from the CPI-DMK arrangement, has fielded its Erode Suburban East District MGR Youth Wing secretary P Arunachalam. BJP's AP Muruganan-

dam is a fresh face in the constituency. The CPI had replaced the AIADMK in 2019 with K Subbarayan winning 45.44% vote share and MSM Anandan of the AIADMK coming in second with 37.10% vote share. In 2014, it was V Sathyabama of the AIADMK who had won with a 42.16% vote share.

This time round, Subbarayan is promising that industry will benefit if the INDIA bloc comes to power. However, the industry does not appear convinced. "Unlike Coimbatore, which also has engineering, medical and other industries apart from textiles, Tiruppur is a 100% textile town," MP Muthurath-

2019 LS POLLS

CPI had replaced AIADMK in 2019 polls, winning 45.44% vote share

Tiruppur Lok Sabha Results

VOTE SHARE (%) (TOP 2 PARTIES)



hinam, president of the Tiruppur Exporters And Manufacturers Association, told ET. "We have seen that nearly 50% of our members have shut down their businesses because of various issues affecting our sector. The only way that this will sort out is to have an MP from the same party as the one at Centre."

The concerns in Tiruppur are squarely surrounding the health of the textile units and the complete absence of jobs because of the closure of several garment units.

The BJP seems to have found some footing in the region, selling the

hope of better times. "Work has been slow for the last two-three years because other countries are offering very cheap rates," 37-year-old M. Jyothimurugan, who works at a textile factory, said.

However, it isn't just hope. The BJP has managed to wean people like 35-year-old K Anbarasu—an HR executive who also has his own business—away from the Dravidian parties by providing him with access to credit easier.

"I will vote for the BJP for the first time because Modi ji has given access to credit for regular people

and businesses," he said. "Even for me, I was able to get a ₹40-lakh loan with no collateral for my MSME that I run on the side. If I had gone during the Congress period, even for ₹5 lakh, I would have had to give collateral and gone through a lot of trouble to get that amount."

Then there are some like 56-year-old snack-stall owner D Kumar who are clear that while it was good to have the BJP at the Centre, he wants the AIADMK to be in power locally.

"I will vote for Edappadi," he said. "There have been lot of problems in the last three years, not just for me but a lot of others—work and employment is not good. It is almost impossible to do business in Tiruppur because everything is running in losses."

But not everyone is buying into the 'Modi magic.' There are those like 34-year-old Devi S, a factory worker for whom loyalty and following the family tradition are more important.

She said she would vote for the AIADMK as her family has always voted for the party for generations. And while others like 52-year-old K Balakrishnan seem to agree, his family does not seem to care much for party loyalty. "I will vote for Stalin because I am a member of the party," he said. "They have done good work for our area. They have provided us with water and laid good roads. But everyone else in my house is voting for the BJP though."



STRUGGLING TO KEEP ITS FLOCK TOGETHER

New Alliance Blues for Cong in Rajasthan

In 25 Lok Sabha seats being contested, Congress has fielded candidates in 22

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Jaipur: The Congress in Rajasthan is struggling to strike a balance between following coalition dharma and keeping its flock together, making its first attempt to ally with regional parties for the Lok Sabha elections a tightrope walk.

The western state, which saw a change in regime with the BJP's victory in the November 2023 Assembly polls, is posing a problem for the INDIA bloc, of which the Congress is a part.

In the 25 seats being contested, Congress has fielded candidates in 22, and has an understanding with INDIA bloc ally CPI (M) in Sikar; Hanuman Beniwal's Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) in Nagaur; and the newly-formed Bharatiya Adivasi Party (BAP) in tribal-dominated Banswara constituency.

While the alliance partners are working seamlessly in Nagaur and Sikar, Congress is facing rebellion from within in Banswara Lok Sabha constituency. Congress had not reached an understanding with BAP till first week of April and alloted the party symbol to Arvind Dator from Banswara Lok Sabha seat and to Kapoor Singh for Bagidora by-election. An understanding was reached after the BAP candidate from Banswara, Rajkumar Roat, appealed for support. However, the two candidates refused to withdraw their nomination despite a directive from the state Congress committee. In fact, the two did not show up on April 8, the last day of withdrawal of nomination. **With less than a week remaining for polling for the first phase to begin (April 19), the Congress is facing a dilemma—how to make the two candidates support BAP without antagonising them.**

The party has not taken any disciplinary action against the two rebel-

ling leaders. Rajasthan Congress president Govind Singh Dotasra told ET, "We have not suspended or expelled the two leaders. We are hoping that we can work out the differences without any disciplinary action and they can have a friendly contest or say in a public meeting that they support BAP."

Dotasra explained that the central leadership was undertaking alliance talks and the state unit was not involved. "Closer to the election, the central alliance committee told us to work out an understanding with BAP. But by then we had given the party symbol and our candidates had filed nominations. They should have withdrawn when asked. But we will work out something," said Dotasra. The two rebellious leaders will now contest as Congress candidates despite the party having entered into an alliance with BAP. This

BANSWARA REBELLION

While alliance partners are working seamlessly in Nagaur and Sikar, Cong is facing rebellion in Banswara

is because they have the party symbol and did not withdraw from the race. "We are with BAP, it is very clear. This message needs to go to the grassroots," said Dotasra.

In Sikar and Nagaur, the Congress is working closely with its alliance partners. "We are getting requests from our alliance partners for star campaigners and even to push promotional material. We are actively doing this," said a senior Congress politician who is leading the war room in Jaipur. Dotasra, who represents Lachhmangarh constituency in Sikar Lok Sabha constituency in Rajasthan Assembly, said, "I am also campaigning in Sikar. I was there for a public meeting for Amra Ram (CPM candidate) on April 9. There is no problem. In fact, we are holding joint meetings with CPI (M). I agree we need to work out something in Banswara."

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURE

Indian Carriers to Avoid Iranian Airspace

Flight time expected to increase by 30 minutes but favourable winds likely to negate that, say sources

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New Delhi: Several leading airlines have cancelled flights to Iran and restricted use of Israeli and Iranian airspace amid rapidly escalating tensions in West Asia.

Planes of Indian airlines like Air India, Vistara and IndiGo have begun avoiding Iranian airspace while Lufthansa has extended a suspension on flights to and from Tehran.

The development comes as Israel prepares for a potential attack from Iran after Tehran blamed Tel Aviv for a strike in Syria this month that killed two Iranian generals, and threatened reprisals.

"Due to the current situation affecting parts of the Middle East, we are making changes to flight



File photo of an Iranian missile during the unveiling ceremony in Tehran on February 17, 2024

paths of some of our flights," a Vistara spokesperson said. "Contingency routes, which are kept available to ensure operational continuity during such eventualities, are being used instead. This may result in longer flight times on certain routes and associated delays. The situation is being monitored closely and further changes will be made if required."

Development comes as Israel prepares for a potential attack from Iran after Tehran blamed Tel Aviv for a strike on its consulate in Syria

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and towards Azerbaijan instead of flying through the usual Pakistan-Iran-Turkiye route. The routing may in-

crease flight time by 20-30 minutes but favourable winds may help to negate that, people aware of the matter said.

An Air India spokesperson didn't comment on the issue.

IndiGo has also stopped flying over Iran for its flights to Istanbul.

People cited above said though there has been no official communication issued by the regulator like a Notice to Airmen (Notam), the airlines are avoiding Iranian airspace as a precaution.

Many foreign airlines have also started avoiding Iran. Australia's Qantas Airways has temporarily rerouted its services to avoid airspace in the Middle East. The QF9 flight from Perth to London, which is one of the longest direct flights in the world, will now fly via Singapore for a fuel stop for the next few days as the company monitors the situation.

Fintech Funding in Q4 Down Over 50% YoY, But Up 59% from Q3

Our Bureau

Mumbai: Indian fintech startups raised \$551 million in funds in the first three months of 2024, less than half compared with a year earlier but almost 60% more than the previous quarter, shows a report released on Saturday.

In the January-March quarter of 2023, they had raised \$1.3 billion, according to data intelligence platform Tracxn's Fintech India report.

Funding fell year-on-year across stages during the January-March quarter. While it fell 77% to \$9.9 million for seed-stage fintechs and 42% to \$147 million for early-stage companies, late-stage startups raised \$394 million, a 60% drop from a year earlier.

On a sequential basis, funding improved. Alternative lending, regulatory technology and banking tech emerged as top performers in terms of fund-raising in the first quarter of 2024, it said.

Some of the large funding rounds in fintechs were reported in lending company Avane, B2B banking SaaS entity Perfos, regulatory tech startup IDfy and payments startup Mspire.

The report comes at a time when the Indian fintech ecosystem is facing increased scrutiny and regulatory changes. This has made venture investors wary of investing in highly disruptive startups, rather preferring to go with those which operate in the business-to-business space or are regulated.

60%
DROPPED SEEN IN FUND RAISING FROM LATE-STAGE STARTUPS

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Increments Likely to be Super Healthy for BFSI Employees

Average pay hike is likely to be 10%; high performers may get up to 20%, shows study

Rica Bhattacharyya
@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: Macroeconomic headwinds notwithstanding, the banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector is expected to give out an average double-digit salary increase, said senior industry executives. Top performers in high-demand functions such as risk, compliance, technology and front-line roles are likely to take home handsome pay-outs, as companies want to retain key talent at a time when attrition continues to be high.

The average annual increment after the performance appraisals for fiscal 2024 is likely to be 10%, according to a study conducted for ET by Ciel HR Services. For high performers, it could be 12-20%.

Most companies are expected to announce the hikes in the next 2-3 weeks.

About 34% of the companies covered for the study reported likely increment rates of 15% or higher, while another 34% expect the hikes to be between 10% and 15%. About 18% said the increment will hover in the range of 5-10%, while for 14%, it could be below 5%.

The study covered 170 companies, including major banks, non-bank finance companies, insurers as well as asset management and fintech firms. "Attrition in the BFSI sector continues to remain high and companies are focussing on talent retention," Ciel HR chief executive Aditya Narayan Mishra said.

While elevated interest rates, geopolitical tensions, high oil prices and challenges to raise capital are concerns, the focus will



intensify on retaining existing talent as banks continue to expand branches, ramp up retail and SME books and expand digital offering, experts said.

"The domestic economy is doing well and credit demand is strong. There is a high push among banks to gather deposits. There is a focus on ramping up retail while continuing with digital offerings. Banks are looking at branch expansion in a big way as part of a long-term focus. There is also a lot of push on SME books," said Abheek Barua, chief economist at HDFC Bank. "As a result, it is crucial for companies to retain talent, especially as attrition is still fairly high even if it has lowered from last year's peak levels."

"People in compliance, risk, AI,

Gen AI, and frontline sales staff are crucial talents for the future and they may be adequately rewarded," he added.

"Private banks' profits have been going up in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of last FY and Q4 too is expected to be robust. Salary hikes to staff will also be commensurate," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Bank of Baroda. Niche areas like wealth management and fund management are witnessing potentially higher appraisal rates, reflecting evolving talent demand within the stock market and mutual fund industry. Salary hikes in the insurance and banking sectors are expected to remain the same as last year with slightly higher increments for tech-specific roles.

The average annual attrition in the BFSI industry — especially in the frontline sales roles — is around 30-40%, according to industry estimates. Attrition is as high as 60-70% in insurance and 35-40% in retail banking, while in broking, it

is about 25%, as companies continue to lose out manpower to peers in the BFSI sector or to other industries, said industry insiders.

While one section of companies is witnessing higher attrition, for some, it is showing signs of stabilising or lowering, executives said.

"On the macro side, concerns loom around household savings not keeping pace with credit growth, uncertain private investment scenario and strong global headwinds including (US) Fed rates, geopolitical tensions, strain on raising capital, and banks will keep a close watch on these factors," said Barua.

"Appraisals will remain in line with last year while we continue to acquire talent in areas such as digital, compliance and risk, among others," said the HR head of one of the largest private sector banks, who did not wish to be named. "We are expanding our branch network where we will need to ramp up manpower, even as banks are sweating it out due to the global headwinds," the person added.



Rules of the Game

Prime Minister Narendra Modi plays a game with top Indian online gamers in New Delhi on Saturday. In a free-wheeling interaction with gamers, the prime minister (when asked about any need for regulations for the sector) said regulate wouldn't be the right word, because it is the govt's nature to intervene. "Esports and gaming do not require any regulation. It must remain free, only then it will boom," he told the gamers.

Migsun Group to Invest ₹426 cr on Mix-use Project in Lucknow

Faizan Haidar@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: NCR-based real estate developer Migsun Group said it plans to launch a mix-use project at an investment of ₹426 crore on a 5-acre land parcel in Lucknow that it bought from Medanta Group recently. The investment includes the cost of land.

The builder said it will develop about 800,000 sq ft of a mix of retail and serviced apartments on the land parcel.

"This is our second commercial project in Lucknow," said Yash Miglani, managing director of Migsun Group. "Our first project, Migsun Janpath, is also successful, and the prices have apprecia-

ted almost two-fold. We hope to repeat this performance again with Migsun Central."

The project has received approval of the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA).

Migsun Central is located at Shalimar Bagh in Lucknow, next to Medanta Hospital. It is spread over approximately 20,239 square metres.

The company will fund the construction through internal accrual as well as customer advances.

The group is also executing a retail project in Delhi's Rohini, where Avenue Supermarts, the operator of retail chain D-Mart, recently bought 47,000 sq ft for ₹108 crore, as part of its store expansion strategy.

COS HIRING PEOPLE WITH AUTISM, DYSLEXIA AND ADHD

India Inc Gearing Up to Get Neurodiverse at Workplace

Neurodivergent people being hired in key roles will also bring unique perspectives and skillsets

Sreeradha D Basu & Brinda Sarkar

Bengaluru: Corporate India is increasingly embracing neurodiversity at the workplace, hiring people with autism, dyslexia and ADHD.

Companies including SAP, EY, and Publicis Sapient are backing better neurodiversity inclusion through tailored programmes as well as targeted hiring efforts via tieups with NGOs, special schools and specialised hiring platforms. Accenture and Wells Fargo, among others, are driving awareness and sensitisation through employee resource groups (ERGs), neuro-inclusion training modules, manager training, etc, these firms said.

Neurodivergent people are being hired in roles like software development, quality assurance and testing, data analysis and analytics, system administration, information development, UX design, and cybersecurity.

And it's not about being socially responsible or promoting diversity and a culture of inclusion at the workplace, but these individuals bring unique perspectives and skillsets to organisations.

"Neurodivergent employees bring in a different perspective. They are stable, low on attrition, and very dedicated. They make us more grounded," said Burgess Sam Cooper, cybersecurity consulting partner at EY India.

The professional services major has been hiring neurodiverse candidates through a structured process, where they are taken in as freshers, trained and groomed to take up roles in areas such as data leakage prevention. EY GDS, too, has hired them for centres in Bengaluru and Thiruvananthapuram. The organisation trains managers to support them while employees regularly go through certifications to upgrade skillsets.

Cooper champions the initiatives of EY's Neuro-Diverse Centre of Excellence (NCoE) in India.

Organisations such as EnAble India, a non-profit focused on empowering persons with disability (PwD), and inclusive livelihood platform Atypical Advantage work with companies to help neurodivergent individuals find jobs.

Vineet Saraiwala, founder of Atypical Advantage, told ET that Amazon, Marico, Nestle, L'Oréal and CAI among others have hired neurodiverse employees, either for full-time or internship roles, through them.

Over the last two years, the professional services company has run pilots in India to hire people with autism spectrum disorder through an internship programme. Its medical insurance programme covers costs of prolonged speech therapy, motor skills development, and other therapies key to the emotional, behavioural, and professional development of neurodivergent people and neurodivergent dependents of employees. "Our ERGs — one for our neurodivergent people and another for people who are caregivers to their neurodivergent dependents — help our people voice their experiences, lean on each other, find solutions to shared challenges, and build camaraderie," Lakshmi said.

"Our goal is simple: create a workplace where everyone feels valued, supported, and empowered to do their best work," said Vieshaka Dutta, senior director, DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) for India and APAC at Publicis Sapient. "Because when we embrace diversity, everyone wins."

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gent individuals' unique talents and abilities with roles that align with their interests and strengths," said Shweta Mohanty, vice-president and head — HR at SAP India. "Our commitment goes beyond recruitment; it's about creating pathways for these individuals to flourish. By prioritising skills over traditional metrics, we're paving the way for them to thrive irrespective of their educational background," she said.

Publicis Sapient has developed programmes specifically geared towards supporting neurodivergent individuals and people with intellectual disability. It has amplified efforts around supporting them by engaging all its geo circles (where it connects remote people in different cities to build local communities and encourage collaboration) in disability confidence panel discussions.

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REMEMBRANCE



H.J. KAMAL PASSI

(25TH OCT, 1948 – 14TH APR, 2015)


FOUNDER CHAIRMAN & MANAGING DIRECTOR, LOTUS HERBALS PVT. LTD.

A visionary with a brilliant mind, an innovative spirit and a positive outlook, he was and continues to be an inspiration for many. A thorough gentleman and a loving family man with a heart of gold, he will be unceasingly missed.

Deeply missed by:

Shubh Passi
Roshni – Nitin Passi
Sheela – Dipin Kamal Passi
Leishha, Aadvwaya, Saessha, Vedang

Mridu - Shiv Shakti Passi
Renu - Avinash Dhir
Reeta - Balvir Hastir
Neelam - Ashok Munjal
Neelam - Anil Bhatia



Management, staff and workers of:

Lotus Herbals Pvt. Ltd. • Lotus Foundation • Lotus Holdings
Lotus Herbals Color Cosmetics • Kanidi Biotech LLP • Vedicare Ayurveda Pvt. Ltd.

FOR FULL REPORT, GO TO www.economictimes.com

The Roving Indian

The Paris Olympics and the T20 World Cup are not enough for India's luxury sports tourists who seek unique experiences alongside the sporting events

Lijee Philip

Skydiving in Dubai is passé, so is watching the sun go down at St Tropez. The new Indian is increasingly turning to the international sports circuit for that elusive high in global adventure and travel. Well, it's not about watching a football match in Brazil or catching up with the F1 machines in Monaco. It's all about upping the game beyond your wildest imagination. Sample this: a luxury vintage train ride aboard the Belmond British Pullman after a Wimbledon match; staying in a hobbit house in Normandy or sailing in the Unesco World Heritage Mont-Saint-Michel Bay during the French Open; or experiencing the adrenaline rush of Switzerland's heli-skiing while travelling to witness an ATP match. Or, how about lounging with sports icons such as Michael Clarke and Brett Lee on a private yacht, getting personalised coaching sessions from legends like Sourav Ganguly, or having exclusive access to Manchester United players?

Luxury sports tourism is a nascent industry that's growing at 200%, say the leading players. Sports tourism now constitutes almost 12% of all outbound travel made by Indians.

UP, CLOSE

With the Paris Olympics just three months away, and both the ICC T20 Men's World Cup (US and West Indies) and UEFA Euro Cup (Germany) slated to take place in June, 2024 would be the year the Indian luxury sports tourist will come of age.

And as with all things Indian, it is becoming a family affair. Mumbai-based Usha Agrawal (60) and her son Nishit (30) who is based in the US, are flying to the West Indies, where they will watch India in the round of eight. While the sports management company concerned is helping the mother plan a tour with her son, "it's bonding time for both of us over sports," she says.

For the Paris Olympics, an eight-member family, including grandparents and two grandchildren, will be attending the opening ceremony and seven days of events. With the whole trip centred on sports, and watching at least two-three sessions daily, "we are ensuring that we bond over sports because we all love sports and want to cheer for India," says a senior member of the family, who didn't want to be named.

Among those who will be attending the Olympics is Delhi-based Satish Kaul, Kaul, who is celebrating his 50th



Sport tourists with former Australian cricketer Michael Clarke on his private yacht

wedding anniversary, says: "I wanted to do something special for my wife Reena. So, I am taking her for the opening ceremony, because Paris is the city of love."

CRICKET FROM GANGULY, JAVELIN FROM CHOPRA

A pre-match event in Manhattan for the much-touted India-Pakistan T20 match in New York in June will see at least 300 sports tourists meet cricket legends Sourav Ganguly and Wasim Akram. A panel discussion with the legends, welcome gifts such as signed bats, a session for autographed merchandise and a personalised welcome at the stadium are among the attractions on offer. In partnership with India's javelin ace Neeraj Chopra, leading sports management company DreamSetGo has lined up an exclusive meet-and-greet opportunity for sports enthusiasts, during the Olympic Games in Paris.

Elegant dining and uber-rich hospitality are given. Sports tourists are increasingly

We see travellers increasingly prioritising experiences over material ownership. This is reflected in the uptick of luxury sports travel experiences"
RAGHAV GUPTA
MD, Fanatic Sports

looking at personalisation, premium bespoke packages and unique experiences as they watch the games live and explore the destination.

In 2023, DreamSetGo organised a board meeting centred on sports travel for a leading Mumbai-based company, which travelled for the Super Bowl in 2023. Before the matches, the company also got the group tickets to watch a U2 show at the Sphere in Las Vegas.

Jeet and Malvika Banerjee are heading to Paris for the Olympics. While the sports lovers have watched football and cricket World Cups and even Wimbledon, they have never seen the Olympics. This year offers the opportunity to tour Paris, too.

"The trip dates have been planned around the days India's athletes, hockey team or Neeraj Chopra will be playing," says Jeet.

CEO of Gameplan Sport. It costs the Banerjees ₹10-12 lakh, excluding airfare and hotel accommodation.

For the T20 World Cup, 100 diehard supporters of the Men in Blue are travelling for the India-Pakistan game. "They are part of the entire meet-and-greet programme with Ganguly. For them too, it's a great time support the country while networking with each other," says Mohanish Shah, founder and chief business officer of DreamSetGo.

To increase sports accessibility of Indians, sports management companies work with several international sports rights holders to provide fans with world-class experiences.

Countries hosting the events are stepping up efforts. France is leaving no stone unturned to showcase its hospitality, innovation and creativity in hosting the Olympic Games this year. "The main commitments include twice as many

After the pandemic, sports tourism has emerged as the first sector within tourism to recover. Sports travellers constitute 10-12% of outbound travel market from 5-7% five years ago. We anticipate a 200% growth in premium sports travel segment in 2024, led by T20 World Cup and Paris Olympics"
MOHNISH SHAH, founder, DreamSetGo

vegetables in meals (for less CO2) which is great news for Indian visitors! Visitors will also have a chance to explore the city," says Sheetal Munshaw, director, Atout France India, the French tourism development agency.

An appetite for experiencing live sporting events is evident from India's presence at some of the global events. For the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Australia in 2022, Indians emerged as the single largest ticket buyers outside the host nation. Nearly 60,000 Indians attended the FIFA World Cup in 2022, second only to Saudi Arabia, the host nation.

UPTICK IN SPORTS TOURISTS

"We see travellers increasingly prioritising

T20 World Cup in the US and the West Indies is witnessing a strong demand from both our leisure and corporate MICE segments. Similarly, we are seeing high interest for Wimbledon, summer Olympics in Paris as well as Formula 1 races in Abu Dhabi, Singapore and Bahrain"

RAJEEV KALE, president and country head, holidays, MICE, visa, Thomas Cook (India)

experiences over material ownership. This is reflected in the growth of luxury sports travel experiences," says Raghav Gupta, MD of Fanatic Sports, a sports ticketing, hospitality and experiential travel company. The typical age of a sports traveller is 30-50 years, and this demographic prefers personalisation of travel with a focus on experiential travel, says Gupta. Daimani India, a subsidiary of Fanatic Sports, is an official licensed partner for stickers and collectibles of UEFA Euro 2024.

Thomas Cook is also witnessing a 25-30% uptick for key global sporting events this year. "The T20 World Cup in the US and West Indies is witnessing a strong demand from both our leisure and corporate MICE segments. Similarly, we are seeing high interest for Wimbledon, Olympics in Paris and Formula 1 races in Abu Dhabi, Singapore and Bahrain," says Rajeev Kale, president and country head, holidays, MICE, visa, Thomas Cook (India).

After the pandemic, sports tourism has emerged as the first sector within tourism to recover. Sports travellers now constitute 10-12% of the entire outbound travel market, from 5-7% five years ago. Based on the current consumer sentiment, "we anticipate a 200% growth in the premium sports travel segment in 2024, led by mega sporting events such as the T20 World Cup and the Paris Olympics," says Shah of DreamSetGo.

With an above-average recovery post-pandemic, India generates the highest outbound travel volume in Asia, with foreign trips exceeding those of China, South Korea and Japan. Furthermore, millennials, who form nearly a third of India's population, are at their peak buying years. This cohort has experienced a generational shift in mindset in a relatively short period from 2020. As per Redseer Strategy Consultants' report, travel, financial services, recreation and insurance experienced the maximum acceleration in the "prosperity-driven categories". Leisure and sports travel are integral to this mix.

SPIKE IN CORPORATE INTEREST

Historically, demand for sports tourism has come from head honchos of India Inc and high net worth individuals in the age group of 30-45 years. That seems to be changing, according to Thomas Cook's Kale. There is strong demand from younger people who are keen to tick off their bucket lists, with bragging rights on social media propelling demand, says Kale.

"We have managed several small to mid-sized MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) programmes around both cricket and F I F A with

Major Sporting Events of 2024

Formula One World Championship
Feb 29-December 8
ICC Men's Cricket T20 World Cup
(US & West Indies) June 1-29
Olympics (Paris) July 26-August 11
UEFA (Germany) Jun 14-July 14
Wimbledon (UK) July 1-14

Sporting Spirit

Spending in Indian Tourism Market
2022 \$9,400 mn
2032 \$37,600 mn (E)

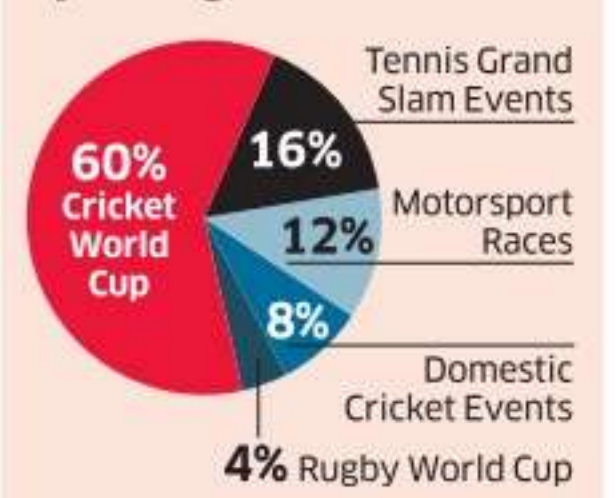
Number of Sports Tourists, Globally
2022 37 mn
2032 213 mn (E)

Estimated Global Growth (2022-32)
Inbound Travel Market 9.4%
Outbound Travel Market 17.4%

Share of Sports Travellers in Outbound Travel Market Globally
2022: 10-12%
2018: 5-7%

Global Sports Tourism Market in 2030:
\$2.14 trillion (E)
Source: Future Market Insights

Top In-Demand Sporting Events of 2023



Source: DreamSetGo, depending on packages booked on it

Most Booked Sports Destinations in 2023

UK • Paris • Abu Dhabi • Singapore

Sports Destinations Set to be Popular in 2024

US • Caribbean • Australia
Source: DreamSetGo

exceptional experiences both on and off-stadium. These are premium programmes with corporates willing to invest to keep their top performers engaged," says Kale, who recently took a corporate MICE group of over 120 guests for F1 at Italy's prestigious Monza circuit.

People like Kale, DreamSetGo's Shah and Fanatic Sports' Gupta are now looking for the next holy grail: once-in-a-lifetime experience. The industry has noticed a very palpable trend of corporates looking to reward high performers with unique incentive travel experiences, such as MICE with a sports element. There is also an increasing trend of companies combining board meetings with sports experiences.

Meanwhile, a mother-daughter duo, after watching tennis at Roland Garros, will have a private dinner at the residence of the iconic fashion designer Coco Chanel. And a father and his teenage son are getting ready for a fireside chat with football legends like Michael Owen and Gary Lineker after UEFA matches.

UHNIs are willing to pay over \$10,000 for a VIP experience at Wimbledon and get seats next to the royal box on a big match day, says Gupta of Fanatic.

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Hello Bot, I am Feeling Lonely. Help?

There is a heightened sense of loneliness in the post-pandemic world, but can startups solve the problem with companion bots and call-in services?

Apoorva Mittal

Atharva Kharbade, a 23-year-old college dropout from Bengaluru, went for a comprehensive personality assessment test to understand the roots of his clinical depression. The test, prescribed by his psychiatrist, cost ₹20,000. The evaluation, lasting four hours over two days, probed into his childhood experiences and interactions with family and peers. He got the results five days later. The diagnosis—chronic loneliness. Kharbade, who has weekly check-ins with his psychologist, says, "The main challenge with chronic loneliness is that it can persist even in the company of others, like family and friends." Two years after the diagnosis, he is channeling his experience into founding a mental health startup, which is now in stealth mode, in Bengaluru.

In the post-Covid world, a sense of loneliness has become both acute and prevalent. Google searches for "loneliness" reached its highest point worldwide in June 2023, according to Google Trends, since tracking started in 2004. A few months later, in November 2023, the World Health Organisation declared loneliness as a "pressing health threat" and announced a commission to promote social connections and accelerate the scaling up of solutions.

Loneliness comes in several shades. "Loneliness, particularly transient feelings of loneliness, is not uncommon or abnormal in itself," says Dr Seema Mehrotra, a clinical psychology professor at NIMHANS, Bengaluru. "But it can sometimes occur with mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety," she

says. Agrees Dr Jyoti Sangle, a Mumbai-based psychiatrist: "Loneliness needs intervention when it gets overwhelming, when it interferes with the activities of daily life and psychosocial functions and disrupts sleep and self-care."

FRIEND ZONE

In India, a loneliness economy is coming up. Companies offering tech solutions like listening as a service, social apps for finding friends and AI-powered companion bots are trying to solve the social loneliness problem. Experts, however, caution that the efficacy of such interventions is not proven. There are also non-tech solutions that involve in-person interactions.

Loneliness needs intervention when it gets overwhelming, when it interferes with the activities of daily life and psychosocial functions"
DR JYOTI SANGLE,
psychiatrist, Mumbai

Clarity app calls itself an "online emotional support platform". Users can call in and will be connected to people who have encountered similar experiences, such as the loss of loved ones, break-ups, or career challenges. A call costs ₹8 a minute. Launched in 2021, the company secured a seed round from IndiaQuotient and Titan Capital, backed by Kunal Bahl. Says co-founder Ishan Gupta, "We provide a platform where whenever you are

feeling low or lonely you can quickly get on a call with someone who can make you feel better, with whom you can probably discuss your feelings. We are not trying to cure chronic diseases; we are trying to validate your feelings," says Gupta. Listening services like Clarity steer clear of the term "counselling" and do not have trained professionals on their roster of "listeners".

When I logged on to the Clarity app, there was a list of listeners. I chose one and asked the listener how to overcome loneliness. The listener enquired if I had "any friends or a boyfriend because spending time with them can cure loneliness". When I asked whether counselling could help, the listener responded, "I don't think so", adding that they have overcome depression and loneliness by keeping themselves busy with friends. "Until your mindset changes, no one can help you."

Gupta acknowledges that maintaining the quality and effectiveness of conversations will be a challenge as the company scales. Since the service is not solution-oriented, the founders gauge the success of the product based on user ratings and frequency of repeat customers.

Tanmay Goswami, creator of mental health storytelling platform Sanity, says many tech solutions, including apps, have yet to prove their clinical efficacy. "In the West, a number of platforms have been exposed as making dangerous and misleading marketing claims and abusing the sensitive personal data of users. In the Global South, poor technology awareness, lack of mental health lit-



Nov 2023: WHO declares loneliness as a "pressing health threat"

Clarity App (2021)
Listening service for those feeling low or lonely
Founders: Ishan Gupta (right) & Pradumn Davey
Funds raised: >\$1 mn

GenWise (2023)
Online club for older people
Founders: Nehul Malhotra, Rajat Jain, Geetanshu Singla (Below, in pic)
Funds raised: \$3.5 mn
Highlight: 900,000 installs in 10 months



Alyke (2023)
App to find friends
Founder: Jyotiraditya Vajpayee
Funds raised: \$500,000
Highlight: 200,000 monthly active users in Indian metros



eracy and weak regulatory oversight amplify these risks," he says. "The escalating hype around AI-based 'therapy' presents another

can of worms. Throwing code or venture capital at this crisis without systemic and structural reforms is a recipe for failure."

Jyotiraditya Vajpayee, a 23-year-old college dropout from Delhi, has developed a friendship app called Alyke for those new to a city or who have drifted apart from childhood friends. Vajpayee felt the need for such an app when he moved to London for a summer course and found it impossible to make friends. Alyke, which helps one find friends based on shared interests, has attracted 200,000 monthly active users since its launch in July 2023. Vajpayee, who is now in the US, raising funds for a Series A round of \$5-10 million, says, "This will not cure loneliness. Meeting

HEAL, TECH

So, can technology solve loneliness? Says Mehrotra: "Technology can keep us connected with loved ones, bridging physical gaps and offering access to numerous groups and communities. However, when tech use becomes excessive, replacing meaningful social interactions, it can harm our well-being." She says the limitations of digital solutions in addressing loneliness need to be studied. "Potential adverse impact and limitations of some of these interventions need to be closely examined. Technology can be an enabler, provided it is used judiciously to facilitate and strengthen the quality of real-world connections and support."

Meanwhile, realising the limitations of technology, some are focusing on enabling offline interactions. In Bengaluru, Sanjeev Shenoy, 45, has founded Two Tables Club, where 12 strangers come together for conversations and connections over a curated meal. Says Shenoy: "Many individuals started working remotely and experienced displacement due to Covid-19. A preliminary survey revealed that people above 30 years struggle more with forming new friendships." Participants are carefully chosen for the meal, which costs ₹1,500-3,500.

Ragini Das, cofounder of leap.club, a networking platform for women, says loneliness economy has "become a real thing post-pandemic". The community, which has over 25,000 members, now hosts offline experiences and has features like "Radius" to help members in a neighbourhood connect with each other.

Puneet Manuja, cofounder of YourDOST, an emotional wellness service for businesses, cautions that these offerings could be superficial if they don't focus on fostering habitual changes that lead to tighter community bonds. He says, "Finding common interests through geography-based meet-ups and groups is beneficial. However, without a deliberate effort to deepen connections with people, align with personal goals and engage consistently with habits and interests, the issue will persist."

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Indulekha Aravind

When asked to cast her mind back over the last 10 years, Asma Firdous, a 19-year-old in Budgam, Kashmir, says a lot has changed. "There are more facilities, there's more development and people's outlook also seems to have changed," says the student of nursing over a phone call. Two thousand kilometres away, Swathi Devari, a native of Telangana, is disturbed by the growing income disparities around her. "I feel only a few have become rich. Class inequality is a teenager from a poor family thinking she can't go to a prestigious college. And this will only get worse," says the BA student, whose father runs a borewell shop and mother used to do tailoring. For Mohnish S, who will soon write an entrance exam for a BCom course, what he remembers most in the last decade is demonetisation. "A lot of criminals were caught because of it," says the 18-year-old, who is also a state-level cricketer from Bengaluru. His cricketing schedule, he says, leaves him with little time for social media. "But I am on Instagram and get updates on my feed."

The three have diverse views and opinions on what's right and wrong with the country but what unites them is the fact that they are all first-time voters, part of the 1.8 crore 18- and 19-year-old new voters on the electoral rolls. What sets them apart from previous first-time voters is that they have all come of age in Narendra Modi's reign. They have mostly known his Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in the last 10 years—a period of both transformation and tumult.

One of the biggest shifts in this period would be the leap in technology and internet access, and its impact. In 2014, the year Modi took oath as prime minister, the number of active internet users in India was around 213 million. By 2023, this ballooned to 820 million. In 2013-14, the unemployment rate for 18-29-year-olds was 12.9%, rising to 28% for those with a graduate degree, according to government data. In 2021-22, youth unemployment was at a similar level, 12.5%, but for graduates below 25 years, it had grown to 42%, according to a report by Azim Premji University.

The per capita income in the same period has doubled but the unemployment rate for graduates continues to be a challenge. For many youngsters, there is a gulf between the world they see on the mobile phone screen and the reality they live outside of it.

Does all of this mean that the "Modi generation", as one observer calls them, is very different from the young voters of earlier elections? Are they hopeful as the India story unfolds? Or do they feel left out of it?

There might be personal disappointment and frustration over not being able to find a job. But the youth appreciate their Indian identity. They differentiate between the empowering of India and the empowering of Indians"

SUDHANSHU KAUSHIK, founder, Young India Foundation

YOUNG & RESTLESS

Asim Siddiqui, an assistant professor at Azim Premji University in Bengaluru, where he teaches a course on Youth, Democracy and Development, has been working with youngsters for the last 15 years, trying to get them to think about constitutional values, democracy, participation and youth leadership. "When I started my work, around 2008-09, smartphones were not very prevalent. But today's youngsters are digital natives. There's a lot more confusion, precarity and vulnerability, at not being able to figure things out through the information overload," he says. There is a lot of angst, too, he says, and while that's being expressed, it's not being channel-

Kanika Saxena

As he enters a concept store and café in Greater Kailash, Delhi, his casual black T-shirt barely gives any hint of the extraordinary world he belongs to. Like most teenagers, he settles down at the table with an air of quiet confidence and a shy smile. After the initial greetings, the R-word crops up and one can't miss the shine in his eye.

"Batman is my favourite," whispers Keyan Bhatia, a 16-year-old watch collector, as he lovingly gazes on the Rolex GMT-Master II on his wrist. It is not just its blue-and-black bezels that bear testimony to his passion for watches. He can narrate stories and facts about Rolex that one would only hear from someone who knows the luxury watch market inside out.

For many teenagers, a wristwatch might be a clunky relic, but for Bhatia, the allure of Rolex and other luxury watches goes far beyond telling time.

Rolex, however, wasn't love at first sight for Bhatia.

"Before Covid-19, I thought watches were useless. My phone could tell the time, and the best watch, in my opinion, was an Apple Watch," he says. However, the lockdown brought about a change in Bhatia's life. With newly found free time, he delved into the world of horology, impressed by the intricate mechanics and rich history of timepieces. This passion coincided with a booming luxury watch market, fuelling his interest.

The Rolex "Batman" GMT-Master II caught his eye, becoming his

The Rolex Boy

When his peers are hooked on smartwatches, 16-year-old Keyan Bhatia is a Rolex collector

ultimate quest. Nicknamed for its black-and-blue bezel, which was reminiscent of Batman's suit, the model was hard to find.

From 2019 to 2021, the market was hot, with Rolex watches like the Batman commanding hefty premiums and a long waiting list. The wait period for this watch can be five years or more.

The money to sustain his passion comes from his businessman father, but young Bhatia wasn't interested in the grey market with its inflated prices. "It doesn't make sense. This watch, which you can get from a boutique, is selling for two-and-a-half times

the price in the secondary market," he says. A Batman is priced around ₹10 lakh in retail, while it is listed in the secondary market for ₹12-15 lakh. "That's what sparked my fascination with the people who make these watches and Rolex itself—to find an answer to this enigma," says Bhatia.

His father's business partner in Geneva had a "valuable connection" with the official Rolex boutique in the city. Through this family friend, Bhatia secured a spot on the waitlist for his dream watch. "Waiting for that call [from Rolex]

felt like an eternity," he recalls. "I counted down the days, then eventually forgot about it altogether." Then, one morning, a call came along. The boutique had his Rolex.

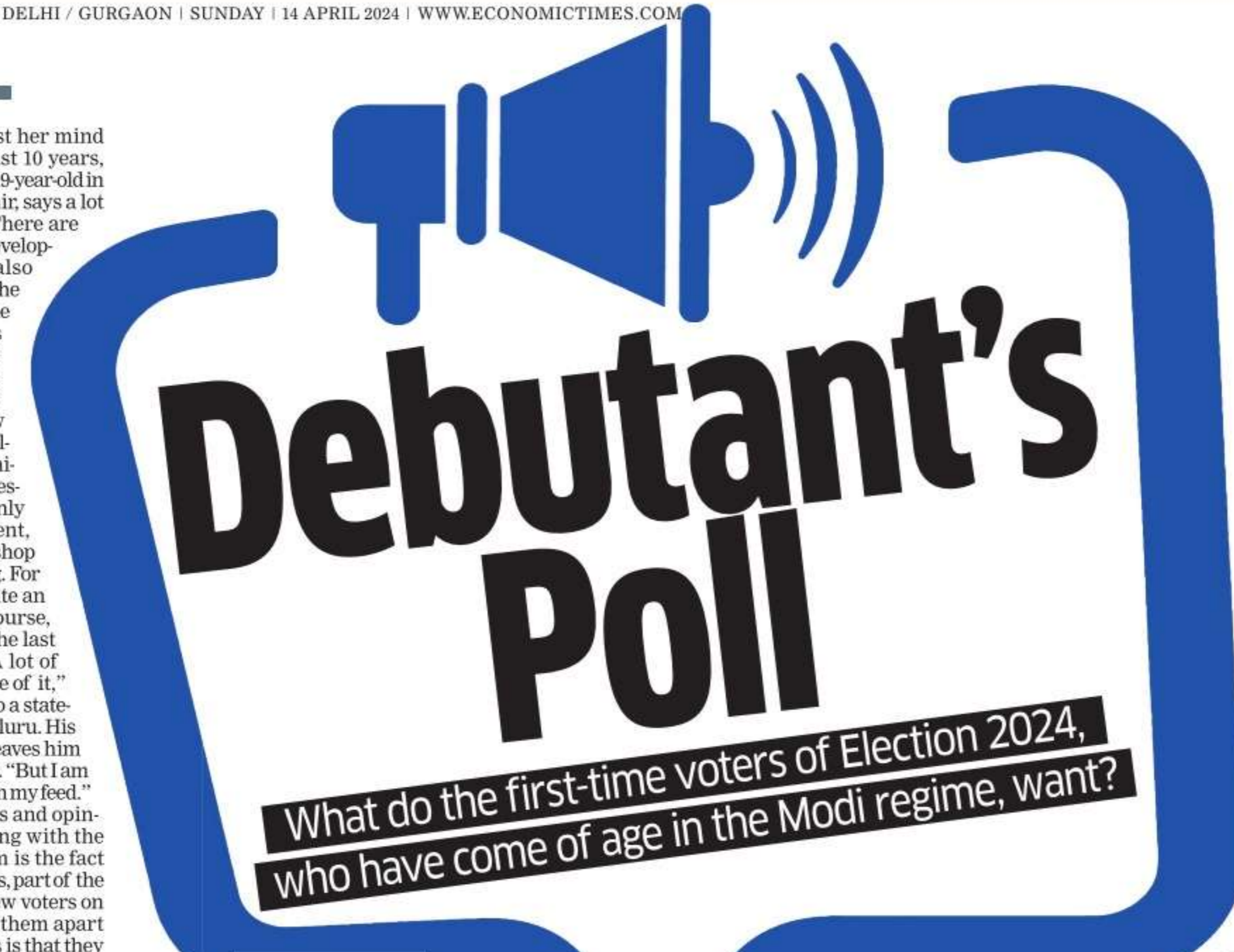
Today, his collection boasts watches like Rolex, Omega, Breitling, Audemars Piguet, Cartier, Vacheron Constantin, Casio and Patek Philippe.

When he is not spending his free hours watching watch videos on YouTube, he is studying in an International Baccalaureate school. He loves computer science and wants to make his mark in the world of STEM.

But why Rolex? "It's a very safe place to park your money," he says. The brand value of the watch, he says, has only moved upwards in the past few years, although with a few hiccups. Last year, the brand was valued at \$10.7 billion, up from \$8.3 billion in 2022.



SUDHANSHU KAUSHIK, founder, Young India Foundation

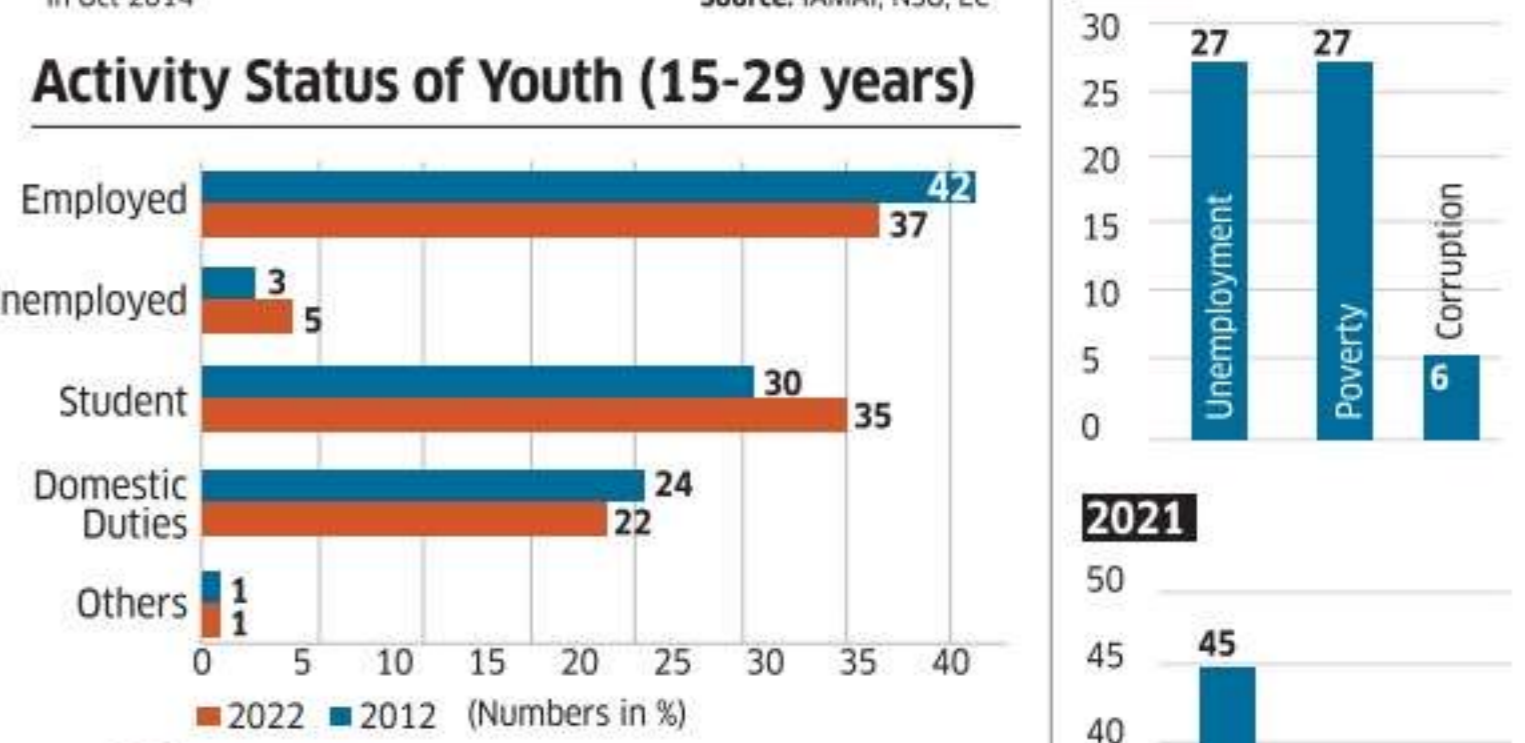


What do the first-time voters of Election 2024, who have come of age in the Modi regime, want?



	2014	2024
No. of First-Time Voters	2.3 cr	1.8 cr
Per Capita Income	₹86,647	₹1,72,000
Active Internet Users	213 mn*	820 mn

*In Oct 2014 Source: IAMAI, NSO, EC



India's Biggest Problems, According to Youth

Year	Unemployment (%)	Poverty (%)	Inflation (%)
2007	27	27	9
2021	45	14	7

Source: "Indian Youth in a Transforming World", published by Sage & "Indian Youth Aspirations and Vision for the Future" by CSDS, Lokniti, KAS

In 2014, I think everything was less expensive. These days, you don't get anything for ₹5-10... I know the value of my vote so I'll definitely be voting"

MEGHNA DIXIT, 19, New Delhi

We don't see any distinct differences in first-time voters. In voting patterns, they are more tilted to BJP and Narendra Modi than other age groups and they are slightly more concerned about unemployment"

SANJAY KUMAR, professor, CSDS

lised. "Many are struggling to find a value framework."

Others who have been working with and studying India's youth speak of a struggle with a lack of identity and attendant anxiety among Gen Z voters. "A lot of young people derive their identity from their upbringing. When they go to college or start working, those aspects take over. But if over a third of youth are untrained, illiterate, or not working, they don't craft an identity of their own—they have to rely on what's given to them, such as caste or religion," says Sudhanshu Kaushik, founder of Young India Foundation (YIF), a youth advocacy group, and author of *The Future is Ours: The Political Promise of India's Youth*.

One consequence of this would be changes in attitudes to religion, caste and marriage, or the lack thereof. In the latest round of its survey of Indian youth published in 2021, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies found that a majority of Indian youth (18-34 years) not only engaged in routine religious activities such as praying and visiting places of worship but also that "a sizeable proportion of them are also spending time on activities such as watching religious programmes on TV". They were "nearly as likely to be engaged in certain religious activities today, as they were five years ago," it said. One difference, though, has been the increased acceptance of intercaste marriages—60% youth were in favour in 2021, while acceptance was over 50% in 2016 and close to 30% in 2007. This, however, does not extend to interfaith marriages, which only 45% of surveyed youth supported. The report notes that this could also be due to structural barriers such as laws to regulate interfaith marriages that some states have passed in recent years.

TRACKING A GENERATION

After the 2019 general elections, photographer Prarthna Singh and journalist and writer Snigdha Poonam set out to meet and document India's young citizens to decipher what it means to be young. Over a period of five years, the two met, spoke to, photographed and recorded more than 100 Indians between the ages of 18 and 25 years, resulting in a multimedia exhibition titled *2024: Notes from a Generation*, currently on display at Mumbai's Targallery.

A common thread they observed was a strong desire to create a personal brand online. "They could be at any level of finding work or being engaged in any kind of work, whether they are trying to be influencers

themselves or studying to be a doctor—they would create a YouTube channel. It doesn't matter that they might not be posting every day," says Poonam. The urge to create a personal brand also speaks to the general anxiety among Gen Z about the precariousness of the job market, she adds, and the fact that getting ahead even in your chosen field might depend on the kind of engagement you attract online.

Meghna Dixit, an 18-year-old studying for a diploma in early childhood education in Delhi, may fit into this mould. Dixit hopes to become a civil servant one day and says she prefers reading a book to scrolling her social media feed. But she does plan to make reels. "I love performing, so I see a lot of potential in making reels," she says.

Thinking back to when she was around the age of those she documented, photographer Singh says a big difference is in the relationship with technology. "They speak about the followers they have, the income they earn... I often think about whether, if I had access to similar technology at their age, I could have used it in the manner they are able to."

JOBS & VOTES

In the 2021 CSDS survey, "Indian Youth: Aspirations and Vision for the Future", almost half (45%) the youngsters surveyed mentioned "unemployment" as the biggest issue facing India. This is a jump from 27% who cited unemployment as a major issue in the first round of the survey in 2007. But the link between this and voting choice appears tenuous. "Yes, unemployment is a big issue. But it's not a voting consideration for a very large number of people who feel it's an issue," says Sanjay Kumar, professor at CSDS and co-author of the reports.

First-year engineering students Ramya BM and Revathi VS, 18 and 19, respectively, do not mention unemployment when asked about what they felt were the challenges India faces. "If we do well in our studies, we will find jobs, so we are focusing on learning coding," says Ramya, whose father is a farmer on the

I have decided whom to vote for based on who has done good work, helped people, fixed roads... After my degree, I'll do my master's and then try for a government job"

REVATHI VS, 19, Bengaluru

outskirts of Bengaluru. Her friend Revathi is targeting a government job.

YIF's Kaushik says while there is personal disappointment about the struggle to find a job, there is appreciation among the youth about their Indian identity. "They are differentiating between the two—the empowering of India and the empowering of Indians." For some, the answer to their frustration is to go abroad. He cites the example of a village in Haryana, the state his family is from. "In 600 households, there's not a single person between the ages of 16 and 35 years. They've all gone abroad."

First-year BA English literature student Josme Josekutty has no plans to go abroad but her friends do. "They feel there are more opportunities abroad. I think that's also why they are not very interested in politics—they are mainly focused on getting a good education and a good job," says the 18-year-old from Kanjirappally, Kerala.

Other young voters complain about the absence of good candidates in elections. "When we talk about the coming elections, many of my friends say they will choose NOTA (none of the above)," says Hanushya S, 18, a native of Tiruchirappalli in Tamil Nadu, who is studying in Mangaluru. APU's Siddiqui says there is a sense of disenchantment with electoral politics. "They are drawn to climate justice and social justice issues but find electoral politics less appealing."

POLITICAL DISENGAGEMENT

A recent analysis by the *Times of India* found that while there are 1.8 crore new young voters, they represent less than 40% of those eligible to vote in this age group. Even among young voters who are keen to exercise their franchise, there is confusion about how to go about it logistically, says Shevika M, founder and director of Kuviraa, a Mumbai-based nonprofit that works with young girls to increase their knowledge of and engagement in politics. Shevika adds that with politics getting so polarised, youngsters feel the lack of a safe space to discuss it openly.

In 2014, when Modi swept into power, pollsters said one reason was the support of first-time voters. The vote-share of BJP among young voters was 34.4%, three percentage points higher than the party's average vote share, CSDS found. "We don't see too many distinctions in the voting patterns of first-time voters except that they are more tilted to BJP and Modi than other groups," says Sanjay Kumar. Whether this will continue to hold true will be revealed on June 4.

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Keyan Bhatia and his favourite watch, Rolex GMT-Master II aka Batman

The brand also offers immediate value gain on a few models the moment one walks out of a boutique. For example, the retail price of a Rolex Submariner "Hulk" is ₹9,43,500, but it offers an immediate return of 63%, selling on the secondary market for ₹15,40,745.

Is it just the value gain that counts? "For some, yes. For others, no. I am not too fond of the secondary market buying-and-selling

attitude, but everyone has their preferences," says Bhatia. ET Prime spoke to a few Rolex buyers—a mix of collectors who own the watch for different reasons. Some are legacy-minded and prefer to pass the watch to the next generation. Others hold on to the watch until it appreciates to the desired value.

A strong reason behind the flourishing grey market is the impatient buyer who doesn't want to wait for too long to get her hand on the watch.

Bhatia is working on a website to help Indian watch collectors who want to buy or sell a luxury watch at grey-market prices.

WATCH HISTORY

Founded in 1905, Rolex has a long and distinguished history in watchmaking. "They were pioneers in waterproof watches, automatic date changes and self-winding mechanisms. Rolex was truly ahead of its time," says the young connoisseur.

Rolex was the first to create a waterproof wristwatch (Oyster) in 1926. It introduced the world's first self-winding and waterproof chronometer wristwatch with a date display (day-date) in 1956, and played a role in timekeeping during deep-sea exploration.

"While they are undeniably luxury watches today, it wasn't always that way. Originally, they were known for their functionality—tools for professionals like sailors and pilots. The Submariner, for example, was a breakthrough diving watch, and features like multiple time zones in GMT-Master were designed for practical use. In that sense, they were truly everyday watches for those who needed a reliable and robust timepiece," says Bhatia.

Some iconic models like the Daytona (designed for motorsports professionals with tachymeter bezel to measure speed) and the Submariner (water-resistant diving watch with unidirectional rotating bezel for tracking dive time) have remained unchanged for decades, bearing a classic and recognisable aesthetic.

"You might think the luxury watch market is vast, but Rolex alone holds a near-monopoly due to its strictly controlled supply," says Bhatia. "Despite that, I love the brand—their heritage is incredible."

Bhatia is a frequent visitor to Rolex boutiques across the country. He is familiar with the staff, the watches, the supply and the waitlists.

Taking a sip of his cappuccino, he talks about an experience he had at the Lulu mall in Kochi, Kerala. "For the first time I saw a Rolex boutique's shelf laden with watches." But all the watches on display were sold out. Nonetheless, in an attempt to find a connection that could help him source a Rolex watch in steel, he got to know about a fisherman who acts as a lynchpin in the secondary market for luxury watches.

TIME STANDS STILL

What are his top picks? Omega X Speedmaster is the everyday watch for Bhatia. But when it comes to prized luxury watches, it is Rolex all the way: GMT-Master II "Batman", Daytona white ceramic, platinum Daytona, a blue Sky-Dweller in steel and a Platinum Day-Date.

These are followed by watches from other brands—Audemars Piguet Oak Perpetual Calendar Openworked, Jaeger-LeCoultre Reverso, Cartier Santos, Patek Philippe Perpetual Calendar Chronograph, Richard Mille Skull Tourbillon, Vacheron Constantin Overseas Chronograph blue dial, Patek Philippe Nautilus Travel Time and IWC Portuguese.

As the café staff announces it is time to close, the conversation moves to the street. "Remember that every watch has a story, and every story has a time," he says with a smile, and disappears into the night.

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WHETHER VISITING STONEHENGE OR EASTER ISLAND, EVERYBODY MUST GET STONED

The prehistoric structure in Britain and the monolithic human figures on the Chilean island in Polynesia hold mysteries that have (silently) stood the test of time

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN



MICHEL BAAS

Visiting Stonehenge, that prehistoric megalithic structure on Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire, England, I had not expected to be accompanied by the exuberant beat of Bob Marley. Yet, with delirious passion, the reggae icon's voice could be heard ricocheting off these ancient stones, singing 'The stone that the builder refuse/ Will always be the head cornerstone (Sing it brother)', from his 1970 track, Corner Stone.

A ribbon of caravans and ramshackle vehicles snaked around the site of Stonehenge as if the circus had come to town. A barbecue was well underway, a burlesque bunch of jugglers

were practising their tricks, and a person dressed up like a panda bear appeared to be coordinating matters—a baroque ensemble defying imagination. A guard with a long beard and a commanding belly informed me that equinox was tomorrow, as if firmly hoping for rain, perhaps a biting wind tossed in for good measure.

It felt oddly fitting, an ancient site, the source of ongoing speculation, the green fields surrounding it, a highway crossing through with a never-ending sludge of traffic seemingly oblivious to the sanctity of the place, intoxicating vapours drifting over like puffs of clouds that the English countryside is so indelibly known for.

Contemplating these stones, I was reminded of a meme suggesting that they are basically the toes of Rapa Nui, also known as Easter Island, located in the southeastern Pacific Ocean and special territory of Chile. Known for their giant stone heads, these statues, or moai, can be up to 4 m/13 ft tall—though most hide their bodies underneath the ground, never having made it to their destination.

A few years ago, with a guide roaming around the slope of one of the island's long-extinguished volcanoes, the quarry site where the statues had been cut, we had gone over the vari-



TO LOOK ON AT THE REMAINS OF OUR ANCESTORS ROCKS

ous theories of how they may have been transported across the island. Eventually, being mounted on a ceremonial altar, the most compelling one was that these statues had 'walked' to their destination. With ropes attached to both sides, the islanders had them wobble to

At Stonehenge, I remembered a meme suggesting that the stones are the toes of the Rapa Nui stone heads

their designated places. The stones at Stonehenge hail from different parts of Britain and evoke similar questions. As with the pyramids, countless experiments have been conducted to recreate their construction. With the definitive answer elusive, an entire infrastructure that ferries you from the car park via visitors has been erected, all to prevent you from seeing the stones from outside.

The archaeological park of Easter Island is no different, though. Instead of a neat day trip from London, you will be required to take a 3.5-hr flight from Santiago, Chile's bustling capital and the country that claims ownership of the island since the time it annexed it in 1888.

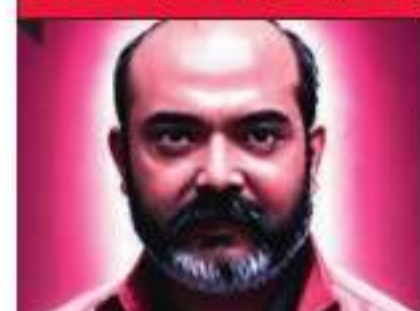
Besides the some 900 moais that can be seen on the island, the British Museum is also home to two. I was reminded of this while Bob Marley's voice found me as if coasting along the bitingly cold breeze from the east. 'You're a builder, baby / Here I am, a stone, he keeps emphasising. 'Don't you think and refuse me / Cause

the things people refuse/ Are the things they should use.'

At Easter Island, I had asked my guide what use one more moai could have to Rapa Nui. But to him, this was not the point at all. It represented a forefather who should be allowed to return home, a statue that belonged to the island. 'Have you seen the rocks on the island? Do you really think these statues walked anywhere?' I had to admit that the whole idea felt preposterous, though it explained why so many had not reached their destinations, their heads the only thing visible now.

At Stonehenge, the dark clouds congregating promised rain soon, the first drops hinting of more. Their toes perpetually wet, I wondered how these statues would find their way home, making their way across a slippery bathroom floor, scuffing along as if bound by the ropes that had once guided them down the hill. Maybe, one day, they would live to tell the tale, their commanding faces, and positions revealing (to) all.

MEMORY STICK



SIDDHARTH CHOWDHURY

The Hunger Artist, When Writing's a Per Diem Exercise

Steve Jobs was on to something with his bon mot, 'Stay hungry. Stay foolish'

How much should a writer consume? Very little, if one goes by the average remuneration he receives for an essay, a poem, or a short story, at least in this country. A writer who wants to carry on his trade for a long time needs to be fit, both mentally and physically, and so this frugal income goes a long way in keeping him flab-free and warrior-spare.

Ernest Hemingway once said that he liked to look at Cezanne's paintings when he was ravenously hungry. In his 1964 memoir of his Paris apprenticeship days, *The Moveable Feast*, Hemingway writes: 'I learned to understand Cezanne much better and to see truly how he made landscapes when I was hungry. I used to wonder if he were hungry too when he painted; but I thought possibly it was only that he had forgotten to eat. It was one of those unsound but illuminating thoughts you have when you have been sleepless or hungry.'

Hunger sharpens one's critical faculties. It also sharpens one's ability to feel and seek out injustice. And then, I looked at myself in the mirror. No way could someone ever mistake me for a writer. There was nothing frugal about my frame. I looked like a well-fed bulldog just awakened from his siesta.

In India, a person who spends an average of ₹27 in rural areas and ₹33 in urban areas each day is considered living below the poverty line. While there is no verifiable data, a conservative estimate puts 100 mn people in the BPL category. That is almost on par with the combined populations of Britain and Canada. So, it's not as if I lack company. There are many around who are worse off than me.

While ₹33 seemed like too drastic a haircut, I decided I would try and survive on ₹100 a day. As Rama Bijapurkar calls in her new book, *Lilliput Land: How Small is Driving India's Mega Consumption Story*, I would become a 'Lilliput' consumer. Apparently, there are a lot of us Lilliputians in India lying in wait for the next economic Gulliver to wash ashore and to overpower us.

India's mega consumption story, Bijapurkar writes, has 'lots and lots of small consumers earning and spending just a little bit individually that adds up to an enormous amount.' So, I went downstairs and bought six eggs, half a loaf of white bread, and five bananas from the housing society's grocery store. If I had bought one more banana, I would have gone over budget.

For breakfast, I boiled one egg and had two slices of toasted bread liberally lashed with butter. My wife pointed out that I had neither paid for the butter nor salt and pepper. I nodded sheepishly and added those costs to my per diem. I had gone over budget.

Reluctantly, I paid ₹10 to my wife. For lunch, I broke two eggs, made myself a succulent omelette, and consumed it with four slices of toasted bread. I gave up butter this time. But sadly, I still had to pay my wife ₹10 for salt and Saffola. I had three bananas for dinner, and went to bed feeling virtuous and proud. This BPL business was making me feel fit.

At 1 am, I woke up ravenously hungry—like Hemingway. But where were my Cezanne apples? As the world slumbered around me, I opened the fridge. As I tucked into the bowl of cold pasta with my fingers, I remembered the brilliant, but mostly penurious, Henry Miller, who, while prone to finding elderdowns and mulberry leaves in the most unlikely of places, believed that writing was primarily a criminal activity, to be done when no one could see you, like picking pockets.

And as to how much should a writer consume? Well, as much as he could bloody well commandeer to assuage his personal hunger index.

The writer is author of *The Patna Manual of Style*

STELLA. A LIFE. DISQUIETING, BUT KOSHER

The counter to demonisation of communities in movies isn't whitewashing, but normalised depictions shorn of caricature

FILM FATALE



ANNA MM VETTICAD

I relentlessly seek out cinema on Nazism during World War 2 for the same reason that Jonathan Glazer made the 2023 Holocaust drama, *The Zone of Interest*—'not to say, 'look what we did then', rather 'look what we do now,' as he explained in his Oscar acceptance speech for Best International Feature (it's a British movie mostly in German) last month.

Having watched a zillion films on Hitler's hate for Jews, I thought I'd seen the theme examined from every imaginable angle—till I chanced upon the 2023 *Stella*. Ein Leben. (*Stella*, A Life.) at the just-concluded Red Lorry Film Festival (RLFF) in Mumbai. Unlike most Holocaust sagas, *Stella*, A Life, by Kilian Riedhof is not about Nazis, their Jewish targets, or non-Jews who saved lives. This is a biopic of a German Jew called Stella Goldschlag who was captured and tortured by the Gestapo, and became an informer to save her own skin.

Goldschlag allegedly betrayed hundreds of fellow Jews to escape being transported to a concentration camp herself along with her parents. The primary question raised by *Stella*. A

Life, is this: Was Goldschlag a victim, a traitor, or both?

Riedhof's interviews indicate that he was conscious of the sensitivities involved when turning a lens of scrutiny on a member of an oppressed community. This would be a concern for any considerate artist whose goal is purely to study psychology and history. The fear is not only that one might be misunderstood, cause offence and hurt, but also that irrespective of the chronicler's intentions, such stories could be misused by hate-mongers to further demonise an already beleaguered people.

Similar concerns are evident in the conversation around the 2023 film *Amal*, which, too, was showcased at RLFF. *Amal*'s eponymous protagonist, a progressive Muslim schoolteacher in Belgium, grapples with the radicalisation of her Muslim students. As a critic, I, too, have wrestled with these questions, especially in the past decade as anti-minority sentiment surged in India, and Hindi cinema embraced Islamophobia.

In fact, in these circumstances, it was unsurprising to read social media chatter by well-meaning individuals accusing Jasmeet K Reen's *Darlings* (2022) and Zoya Akhtar's *Gully Boy* (2019)—unfairly, in my view—of contributing to the vilification of Indian Muslims. Yet, *Darlings* and *Gully Boy* did not fixate on the Muslimness of their leads—they just happened to be Muslim in realistic settings dominated by Muslims, where the good, the bad and the ugly were all Muslim, and any injustice by a Muslim was also fought off by Muslims.

This is in contrast with, say, *Padma-*

vat (2018), *Kesari* (2019) and the spate of low-brow propaganda vehicles released in the past two years that have obsessively underlined the religious identity of over-the-top, stereotypically Muslim antagonists and distorted facts, or outrightly lied to villainise Muslims.

The counter to demonisation is not deification, or whitewashing. The counter is normalisation and unprejudiced truth-telling. This is the purpose served by the likes of *Darlings* and *Gully Boy* within a Hindi film universe where Muslims are now rarely portrayed as regular souls with regular weaknesses and strengths that are found among regular folks in all communities.

Stella, A Life., on the other hand, comes from a Europe that has, for decades, told tales of Jewish and non-Jewish heroes in Hitler's era. A hesitation to also depict flawed individuals in this or any other oppressed minority community, is self-defeating, and in its own way, a form of othering. To sidestep the likes of Goldschlag or, for that matter, *Amal*'s fictional students, would be a disservice to the truth and to their victims.

In this regard, even a progressive Hindi filmmaker is likely to be viewed with suspicion by liberals in the audience because, among India's largest film industries, the Hindi industry has, for decades, had arguably the worst track record in the representation of religious minorities. The challenge must be met nevertheless, if we are to have any hope of improving the present dismal discourse on minorities in Hindi cinema.

The writer is author of *The Adventures of an Intrepid Film Critic*

Stella reportedly betrayed Jews. The key question posed in the film: was she a victim, a traitor, or both?



WHEN YOU'RE NOT ON SCHINDLER'S LIST

When What You See Is Ulta of What You Get

Best intentions aren't always good enough - interpreting them can go terribly awry

RED HERRING



INDRAJIT HAZRA

Last Wednesday, my second favourite newspaper carried a bigger-than-half front-page ad. The creative showcased an almost tangible, smelly heap of pakoras topped with a luscious, Eid moon-shaped, single piece of green chilli.

As I ogled the very 3-D pile of fritters with my first cup of coffee, peripheral vision allowed me to soak in more information about the ad. It was a cooking oil promo. Below the photo of the deep-fried beauties— that tellingly left conspicuous signs of oil-soaked newsprint and semivisible news stories underneath—was the message: 'Salad on World Health Day, Back to Roadside Junk Today?' In smaller print, it went on to elaborate the virtues of consuming healthy cooking oil—'One day of health talk is not enough...' But I never went a line farther. My eyes went back to the pakora pile.

By early evening, I was hogging a full, large packet—ironically, made of old newspaper—of deep-fried pakoras. Welcome to the creative world of the theory of unintended consequences in practice.

The well-intended cooking oil ad isn't the only thing in mass media where the intention is something, and the consequence is quite the opposite. In 1987-88, Doordarshan ran a series, *Subah*. Based on a novel by Tamil writer-activist Sivasankari, it was a drama set in a college that depicted the dangers of drugs.

The problem—if it can be called a problem—was that for many of us in Class 9-10 at that time, the character of Bharat, an addict,

played by the gloriously broody, heavy-lidded Salim Ghose, was far more irresistible than any 'Look what happens, beta, if you do drugs' messaging. Around the same time, Remo Fernandes' anti-drug synth-drenched song, 'Pack That Smack', faced the same unintended consequences of making heroin, at least in theory, 'cool'.

So, how does 'negative messaging' work—or rather, *not* work and totally ricochet? Take Stanley Kubrick's 1987 classic anti-war movie, *Full Metal Jacket*.

The movie depicts the brutal realities of war—in this case, America's against Vietnam—detailing the hazing and bullying culture of army training centres across the world. While watching the film you know, cerebrally, that Kubrick is showing the process of regular young men being turned into killing machines, which is 'bad'. And yet...

...And yet, because of the film working simultaneously as an anti-war satire as well as a psychological war thriller (in the literal sense), it's ultra-violence and hyper-masculinity can be—and has been—seen as celebratory, hiding behind the more mechanical statutory warning sticker of 'anti-war'. As in the case of *Full Metal Jacket*, mass media depictions of war, detailed news reports on heinous crimes ranging from murder and rape to riots and lynch mobs, are cautionary and titillating at the same time.

Matthew J Hefti, in his 2016 review of Roy Scranton's novel 'War Porn', defines that term as the 'colloquial phrase well-known in military circles that encompasses forms of media depicting the most provocative and extreme depictions of violence, gore, and brutality wrought by combat, which—according to the novel's jacket copy—are 'viewed voyeuristically or for emotional gratification'. And yet, it provides the luxury of being viewed with a moralistic assurance that we are consuming (bad) violence with adequate (good) moral outrage.

There are plain, stupid misreadings too, of course. While Bruce Springsteen's 1984 hit 'Born in the USA' remains a patriotic anthem for many Americans—it's regularly played in rodeos, sports arenas and MAGA rallies—the song is a diatribe against hypernationalism. 'Got in a little hometown jam/ So they put a rifle in my hands/ Send me off to a foreign land/ To go and kill the yellow man/ Born in the U.S.A.' The Boss' ironic wood is missed for the 'U-S-A! U-S-A!' trees.

So advertisers, be careful of how you choose to depict your message. The very reason why some people find a product—or, an electoral candidate or political issue—abhorrent can be the same reason why another lot are besotted with it. I suspect that the healthy cooking oil ad that made me stuff my face with pakoras was actually surrogate advertising for an antacid manufacturer.

indrajit.hazra@timesgroup.com



BENT OUT OF TUNE



NO OFFENCE

Morparia

FIGHTING FOR VEGETARIANISM...
THE WRONG WAY: MARENGA!
THE RIGHT WAY: MORINGA!
A cartoon depicting a man fighting for vegetarianism. He is shown holding a drumstick and a stick, with a speech bubble saying 'MARENGA!' (a pun on 'Marenga' and 'Maringa'). The cartoon is signed 'Morparia'.

Nice! How much are we talking about?

A total of \$2.4 million has been allocated for the prize pool, with each gold medalist receiving \$50,000. This initiative marks a significant shift in how athletes' contributions are recognised and rewarded at the Olympics. This will be extended to silver and bronze medalists in Los Angeles 2028 games. World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said that the move is meant 'to recognise that the revenue share that we receive is in large part because our athletes are the stars of the show.'

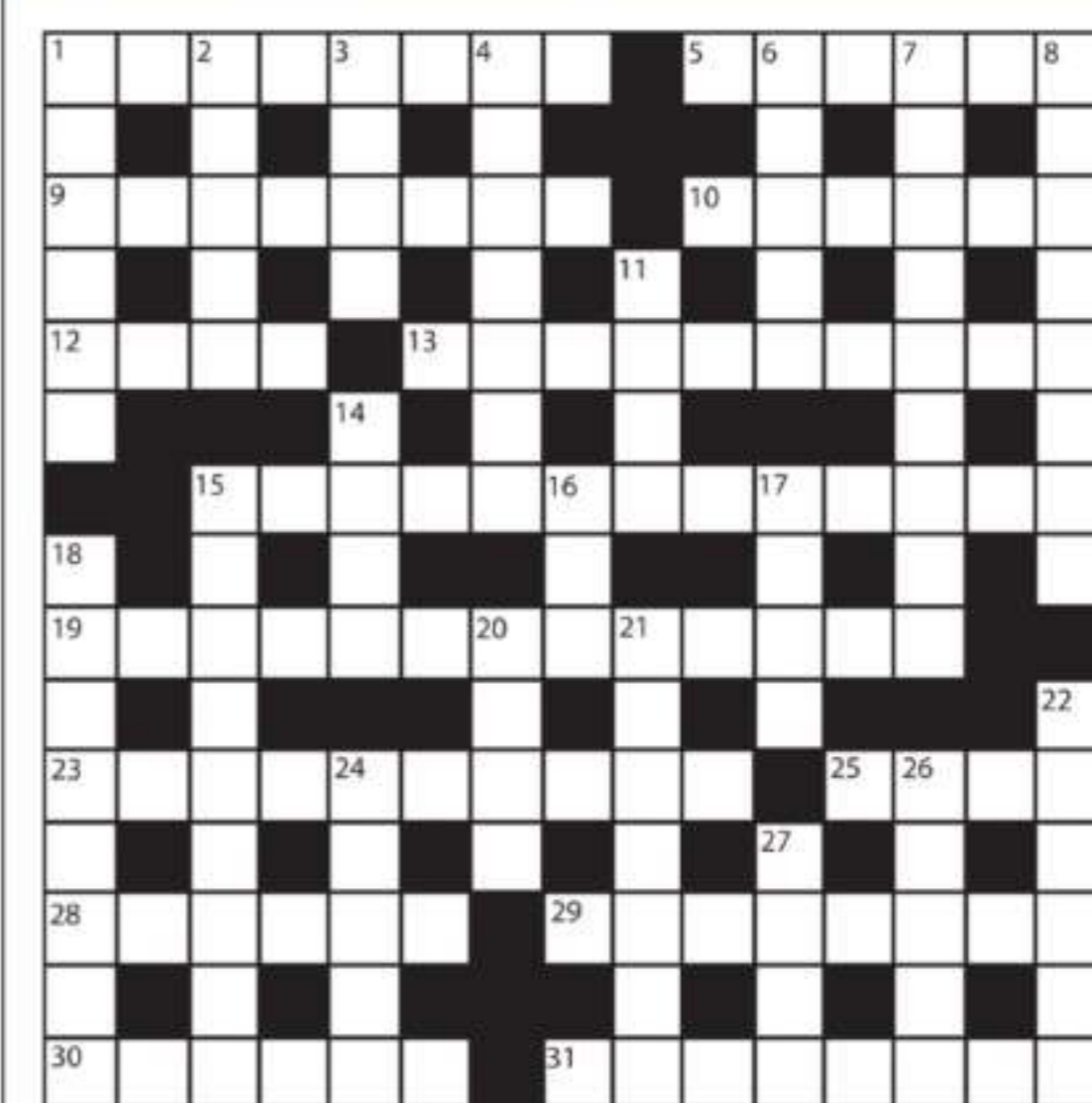
Why has the International Olympic Committee (IOC) refrained from offering prize money in the past?

IOC has historically refrained from offering prize money, IOC maintaining that the intrinsic value of competing in the Olympics was the honour of participation itself. However, despite the absence of prize money, IOC has generated substantial revenue—\$7.6 billion between 2017 and 2021—from the Games, which it claims to redistribute to support athletes and sports organisations globally.

Text: Apoorva Mittal

ET Sunday Crossword

0059



- Like remote communities sleeping on both sides of river (6)
- Bygone era's first adhesive (5)
- Uninspiring extract from testament (4)
- Drinks English and Chinese tonic (7)
- It controls pupils' hearts and national identity (5)
- Eire faces phoney truce (9)
- Renown of controversial priest, say, on the rise (8)
- East European leaves in distress without any euros (4)
- Deflated ball used in odd places (4)
- Some reported China's leading judge's last words (7, 2)
- Propeller, or a version of it (3)
- Restrain, but without skills in, retrospect (4)
- Choosing the best Celtic dance in the city (8)
- A hot liquid that's taken in court (4)
- Like mules, trendy in a function (7)
- New owners don't get better (6)
- Drunk doesn't start game (5)
- Sam's worried about priest's burst of activity (5)
- Gather up bucket (4)

- ACROSS**
- One MEP got agitated after I entered complaint (8)
 - This minor setback with a chum spoils Machu Picchu (6)
 - Wild beast corners people in underground room (8)
 - Make bigger fruit by injecting one litre (6)
 - Garden in Scandinavian country, not southwest (4)
 - You and I meet the A-list—crazy top millionaires (10)
 - Autonomous 4 lover managed to hug female (4-9)
 - Remove comma—it's out of place describing headstone (13)
 - Lottie's excited eating pork—this'll stop her choking (10)
 - It's for those initiating a serious bullying offence (4)
 - Tonight's not about underwear (9)
 - Teams cross road from right to left, say (8)
 - Would you believe it, clothes fit jailer! (6)
 - Cox, muscular bloke, owns old railway company (8)
- DOWN**
- 21 Spasm, ZZ Titem
 - 22 Worn, 24 Lotto
 - 23 Spine, 22 Worn, 24 Lotto
 - 17 Rem, 18 Clutch, 20 Oath, 15 Summing up, 16 Oat
 - 8 Pressing, 11 Blue, 14 Blue, 8 Pressing, 11 Blue, 14 Blue
 - 19 DINO, 11 ANNO, 12 ANNO, 13 ANNO, 14 ANNO, 15 ANNO, 16 ANNO, 17 ANNO, 18 ANNO, 19 ANNO, 20 ANNO, 21 ANNO, 22 ANNO, 23 ANNO, 24 ANNO
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Trump Hush Money Criminal Trial Starts in NY Tomorrow



Donald Trump becomes the first US ex-president to go on criminal trial Monday — pushing the nation's legal and electoral systems to the limit less than seven months before Americans decide whether to return the scandal-plagued Republican to the White House.

Trump is accused of falsifying business records in a scheme to cover up an alleged sexual encounter with porn star Stormy Daniels so as not to doom his 2016 election campaign.

The so-called hush money affair is only one of four criminal cases hanging over Trump and it is arguably the least serious.

But the real prospect of Trump becoming a convicted felon — and potentially facing jail time — throws an astonishing wild card into an already unprecedented election in which the right-wing populist is running on dark vows of "vengeance" against Democratic President Joe Biden, who beat him in 2020. **AFP**

Biden Expects Iran to Attack Israel Soon, Warns: 'Don't'

Says US will support Israel and help the country defend itself; Iran would not succeed

Washington: US President Joe Biden on Friday said he expected Iran to attack Israel "sooner, rather than later" and warned Tehran not to proceed.

Asked by reporters about his message to Iran, Biden said simply, "Don't", and he underscored Washington's commitment to defend Israel.

"We are devoted to the defence of Israel. We will support Israel. We will help defend Israel and Iran will not succeed," he said.

Israel braced on Friday for an attack by Iran or its proxies as warnings grew of retaliation for an attack on Iran's embassy compound last week in Damascus that killed a senior commander in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' overseas Quds Force and six other officers.

Israel did not claim responsibility for the airstrike on April 1. But Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said Israel "must be punished and shall be" for an operation he said was equivalent to an attack on Iranian soil.

Biden said he would not divulge secure information, but said his expectation was that an attack by Iran could come "sooner, rather than later." He spoke to reporters at the White House after a virtual speech to a civil rights conference.

The US rushed warships into position to protect Israel and American forces in the region, hoping to head off a direct attack from Iran on Israel that could come as soon as Friday or Saturday, the Wall Street Journal reported on Friday.

Countries including India, France, Poland and Russia have warned their citizens against travel to the region, already on edge over the war in Gaza, now in its seventh month. Germany on Friday called on its citizens to leave Iran.

Earlier, White House spokesperson John Kirby said the reportedly imminent attack by Iran on Israel was a real and viable threat, but gave no details about any possible timing. **Reuters**



US Troops Head to Region as Fears Grow of Gaza War's Spread

Troop reinforcements from Israel's ally the United States headed to the region on Saturday, with fears of wider war growing more than six months into Israel's battle against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

After pulling forces from the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis a week ago, Israel's military said Saturday it was continuing to operate against militants in central Gaza. In central Gaza's main city of Deir al-Balah, fire burned in the rubble of a destroyed mosque. **AFP**

The theory, first put forward publicly by former Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, is that naming the date would put British politics firmly in campaign mode and reinforce the idea in Tory minds that changing leader again — Sunak is the third premier since the country last went to the polls in 2019 — would stoke more chaos and likely alienate voters even further.

Setting out a timeline would "forestall any leadership contest" and put Sunak "back in charge of events," Osborne, who has retained close links to the administration, said on his Political Currency podcast last month.

However, Sunak's closest advisers are so far reluctant to take the advice. He will not announce the date earlier than necessary because the element of surprise is a key advantage over the opposition, one ally said.

A general election must be held by the end of January and Sunak has said his "working assumption" is it will be in the second half of 2024.

His advisers have been working around October, November or December as the likeliest options. Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt has suggested it could be in October.

December 12, which would be exactly five years on from the previous Tory election win, has long been floated, people familiar with the matter said. That would give the economy more time to recover and for the Bank of England to cut interest rates. A clash with the US

parties lose and the California news industry is left worse off, we urge lawmakers to take a different approach.

Zaidi also said the company would halt planned investments in news in the state "until there's clarity on California's regulatory environment."

Governments around the globe have taken steps aimed at compelling tech giants to pay for news. Last year, Alphabet said it would remove links to news from Canadian publishers on Google after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government passed a law requiring digital platforms to compensate local news outlets.

Meta Platforms Inc., meanwhile, has opted to wind down its news feature in Canada, along with the US and Australia. **Bloomberg**

Alphabet Inc.'s Google will temporarily remove links to California news sites for an unspecified number of users in the state as it studies the impact of proposed legislation that would force the company to pay for serving up such content.

Jaffer Zaidi, Google's vice president of global news partnerships, said in a blog post Friday that the company would conduct "a short-term test for a small percentage of California users" to explore how the proposed legislation would affect the company's products.

A Google spokesperson declined to specify how long the test would last, how many users would be affected and which news organizations would be included.

The bill, known as the California Journalism Preservation Act, "would create a level of business uncertainty that no company could accept," Zaidi said. "To avoid an outcome where all

IMF Chief Georgieva Wins 2nd Term Ahead of Spring Meetings

Kristalina Georgieva won a second five-year term as the head of the International Monetary Fund, allowing her to continue leading the crisis lender as it confronts challenges including lower global growth prospects, climate change and distressed debt in developing nations.

The decision came after several discussions between Georgieva, who was the sole candidate for the job, and the IMF executive board, the fund said in a statement Friday afternoon. The board commended Georgieva's "strong and agile leadership" and said that it looks forward to continuing to work with her.

The announcement was made just before IMF and World Bank spring meetings in Washington next week, which are expected to draw thousands of delegates, observers and journalists from the fund's 190 member countries.

Now that it's known Georgieva will stay on as the IMF's managing director, visitors can focus on economic issues rather than the IMF's internal workings.

A Bulgarian economist whose current term started in 2019 and runs through the end of September, Georgieva received the backing of European Union finance ministers last month, including France and Germany.

The leader of the Washington-based fund has always been a European chosen by European nations, a post-World War II understanding with the US, which in turn chooses the president of the World Bank. Georgieva was the World Bank's chief executive officer before becoming the chief of the IMF. **Bloomberg**

'Eye on Misleading Practices'

From Page 1
"There could be an effort to widen the net and try and take action against anything that the government thinks misleading," he said.

In the latter half of the past decade there has been a clear shift towards natural, chemical free food in the market, according to a report by Wazir Advisors.

"Consumers, owing to their demanding lifestyles have also gravitated towards functional foods to supplement their normal nutrition intake," the report said. As a result, the packaged health and wellness food and beverage market in India is expected to touch Rs 2,50,000 crore by 2026, it added.

The demand for these products, which was earlier largely concentrated in the metros and big cities, is expected to penetrate down deeper into tier II cities as well, the report said.

First-time Buyers Making a Return

From Page 1
Volume sales, or number of units sold, grew by 11-12% this year with brisk demand due to high temperatures since March in south led by Bengaluru and east, and retailers buying large stocks with various weather projections indicating a hotter summer this year.

Godrej Appliances business head Kamal Nandi said first-time buyers are making a return after almost four years since the pandemic began due to the extreme weather projections, which is improving sales of mass segment products aided by consumer finance. "North market is yet to pick up, but we expect it will now as temperatures start rising. We are pretty bullish of a fantastic summer sale this year after a very long time," he said.

Counterpoint's research director Tarun Pathak said since the festive quarter was good, there was lean inventory in the trade. "Hence, primaries went up. While consumer sentiment remains cautious and there were not many new launches, March has been better and so has April till now. We expect demand to improve in the April-June quarter with some consumer offers like back to school and a large section of salaried people receiving their annual increments and bonus," he said.

Tata-owned Voltas sold an industry record two million units of ACs in 2023-24, led by brisk sales in January-March period, analysts said. BNP Paribas India, in a report this week, said there is a channel-wide expectation for a strong summer, leading to a higher inventory build-up in the January-March quarter, translating into good primary sales. It has projected a strong 19% year-on-year revenue growth in this period for the industry.

Researcher Canalys has in a recent report said the Indian PC market (including desktops, notebooks and tablets) will grow by 14% in 2024 as compared to an 11% decline in shipments in 2023.

PM also Took Stock of Situation

From Page 1
The IMD had earlier this month forecast the possibility of above-normal heatwave days during the April-June period in many parts of southern peninsula, adjoining northwest central India, parts of east India and plains of northwest India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday reviewed preparedness to deal with heatwave conditions, and stressed that all arms of the government at central, state and district levels and various ministries must work in synergy.

He also emphasised on creating awareness about the situation, along with adequate preparation in hospitals.

The suggestions that the labour ministry has made include rescheduling of work hours, regulating piece rate and requirement for undertaking physical work during summers, adequate drinking water at worksites, providing for emergency ice packs and heat illness prevention material and regular health check-up of workers.

For mine workers, it has additionally advised rescheduling of rest time to avoid work during extremely high temperatures and assigning a two-person crew to perform work during extremely hot temperatures.

Lower Value Data Packs

From Page 1
Most prepaid packs available today come with 1.5-2GB daily allowance, sufficient to stream a cricket match on mobile for the most part. Statistics showed that Jio Cinema, the exclusive streaming platform for IPL, recorded 59 crore video views on IPL 2024's opening day, generating 660 crore minutes of watch time.

Airtel is best positioned in both consumer wireless and business segments to capitalise on growing SMS/voice call usage for elections as well as data streaming for IPL, say analysts.

On the consumer side, Airtel is likely to record 3-4% of ARPU growth by targeting the lower value data-only packs priced at Rs 39 and Rs 79.

Last year's data from Kotak Institutional Equities showed that though Jio saw larger data usage growth (~2GB per sub) during IPL (March to June 2023 quarters), Airtel succeeded in monetisation with a larger ARPU increase at 3.3%. Airtel's ARPU went up from Rs 193.3 to Rs 199.8. Meanwhile, per capita data consumption growth on-quarter remained flat for Jio.

On the enterprise side, Airtel is the strongest CPaaS (communication-as-a-service) player among telcos to benefit from election campaigns expected to boost enterprise messaging volumes by 15-20%, industry players said.

Airtel is the only telco operator which has a dedicated CPaaS offering for direct connectivity with enterprise customers without the need of an aggregator or telemarketer. It also has the Airtel IQ Reach platform for campaign management across multiple channels, customized messaging and real-time reporting.

"So, we see a consumer preference for higher end electric motorcycles, an equivalent to 400-500 cc ICE bikes," said Narayan Subramaniam, cofounder and chief executive of Ultraviolette Automotive, which currently retails one model at around Rs 3.8 lakh, only out of Bangalore. The company plans to increase dealerships to 15 cities this year.

Electric motorcycles are getting increasingly advanced in terms of instant torque, ride-by-wire technology, and over-the-air software updates, which will see an increasing uptick in sales, industry executives said.

"Consumers are not going to move to electric unless you give a product equal in performance to their ICE counterpart," said Ranjita Ravi, cofounder of Orxa Energies. "This is now possible as we are able to pack enough power at 80% less cost, thanks to the falling lithium prices."

Tariffs to be Based on Energy Rates

From Page 1
"The order under Section 11, which is on similar lines as done for imported coal-based power plants, aims to optimise the availability of power from gas-based generating stations during the ensuing high demand period," the power ministry said.

"It is necessary to ensure the operational capacity of gas-based stations is utilised during the crunch period to optimise the availability of power during the ensuing high demand period," the government's order said.

Tariffs for electricity from the gas-based stations with power purchase agreements will be based on the energy rates to be determined by regulatory commissions, the ministry said.

Power plants that do not have purchase agreements will have to offer a rate based on the benchmark energy charge rate given by a committee comprising the chairperson of the Central Electricity Authority as well as a joint secretary at the power ministry and executive director of gas transporter GAIL (India), among others.

Power from such plants can be offered on the exchanges or for dispatch by Grid India.

The government also asked power plants running on imported coal to operate at full capacity till October 15, under the same section. The mandate was to end in June this year.

Google to Stop Linking to News Sites in California for Some Users

Alphabet Inc.'s Google will temporarily remove links to California news sites for an unspecified number of users in the state as it studies the impact of proposed legislation that would force the company to pay for serving up such content.

Jaffer Zaidi, Google's vice president of global news partnerships, said in a blog post Friday that the company would conduct "a short-term test for a small percentage of California users" to explore how the proposed legislation would affect the company's products.

A Google spokesperson declined to specify how long the test would last, how many users would be affected and which news organizations would be included.

The bill, known as the California Journalism Preservation Act, "would create a level of business uncertainty that no company could accept," Zaidi said. "To avoid an outcome where all

parties lose and the California news industry is left worse off, we urge lawmakers to take a different approach.

Zaidi also said the company would halt planned investments in news in the state "until there's clarity on California's regulatory environment."

Governments around the globe have taken steps aimed at compelling tech giants to pay for news. Last year, Alphabet said it would remove links to news from Canadian publishers on Google after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government passed a law requiring digital platforms to compensate local news outlets.

Meta Platforms Inc., meanwhile, has opted to wind down its news feature in Canada, along with the US and Australia. **Bloomberg**

Enroute Coach Watering

From Page 1
While new technologies and ergonomic designs are being adopted, conventional methods such as the use of cleaning chemicals are also seeing some innovation. In a recent letter to its officers, the Railway Board has recommended examining Conon concentrate for cleaning toilets in trains, platforms and offices.

This after Pune-headquartered Dimple Chemicals & Services, a manufacturer of the product, made a proposal to the Railway Board, claiming that it kills odour-releasing bacteria.

The Indian Railways is also considering an overhaul of the watering system in trains. The objective of enroute coach watering is to minimise inconvenience to passengers while using toilets and washbasins.

A report of the Centre for Advanced Maintenance Technology (CAMTECH)

on standardisation of Enroute Coach Watering System has highlighted a lack of proper infrastructure for movement of workers along the tracks during the water-filling process. This issue had been highlighted in earlier reports endorsed by the Railway Board as well.

"Despite these recommendations, many zonal railways are yet to implement such measures. Implementing a designated pathway for water-filling staff will not only improve operational efficiency but also enhance safety standards across the railway network," Gwalior-based CAMTECH's report said, while noting that water consumption on trains is going up with more passenger footfall.

CAMTECH has recommended that the water filling time for one rake be increased to 15 minutes from 10. It has also suggested that a detailed trial be conducted to understand the manpower and time required for this.

Sunak Resists Call to Set Poll Date Amid Leadership Threat

Allies say doing so would help fend off a leadership challenge; but UK premier's team wants to maintain element of surprise

Rishi Sunak is resisting advice from allies to set the date for the UK general election, which they say would help him to head off a threatened leadership challenge by Conservative Party rebels next month.

Tory ministers and advisers fear the prime minister will face a concerted effort to oust him if the Conservatives, who trail the Labour Party by about 20 points in opinion polls, suffer a bad result in local and mayoral elections on May 2. The best way to safeguard his position, some argue privately, is to get ahead of the expected fallout by setting the date for the national vote beforehand.

The theory, first put forward publicly by former Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne, is that naming the date would put British politics firmly in campaign mode and reinforce the idea in Tory minds that changing leader again — Sunak is the third premier since the country last went to the polls in 2019 — would stoke more chaos and likely alienate voters even further.

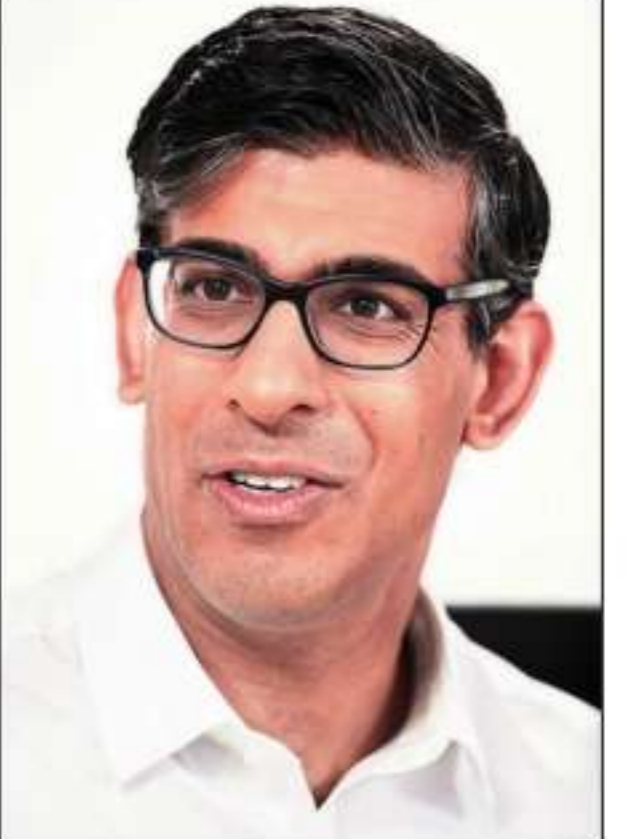
Setting out a timeline would "forestall any leadership contest" and put Sunak "back in charge of events," Osborne, who has retained close links to the administration, said on his Political Currency podcast last month.

However, Sunak's closest advisers are so far reluctant to take the advice. He will not announce the date earlier than necessary because the element of surprise is a key advantage over the opposition, one ally said.

A general election must be held by the end of January and Sunak has said his "working assumption" is it will be in the second half of 2024.

His advisers have been working around October, November or December as the likeliest options. Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt has suggested it could be in October.

December 12, which would be exactly five years on from the previous Tory election win, has long been floated, people familiar with the matter said. That would give the economy more time to recover and for the Bank of England to cut interest rates. A clash with the US



presidential election in election would be avoided, along with any unpredictable spillover on the UK campaigns.

It would also get Sunak past the two-year mark in office, unlike a mid-October vote that would see him fall short of that milestone. Sunak's preference has always been to go long, people familiar with his thinking said.

The fatalism settling over Downing Street and the expectation the Tories have only months left in office was illustrated by Sunak's need to issue vigorous denials he had been discussing possible post-election roles with Blackstone Inc.'s Steve Schwarzman.

Two senior Tories told Bloomberg the two men were considering working together on a possible artificial intelligence project.

Sunak's spokesman, Dave Pares, told reporters Monday the suggestion Sunak was in talks to run an AI fund was "not true." Blackstone's London office called claims that Schwarzman had discussed roles with Sunak "categorically false," adding that none of the firm's leaders have had "this kind of discussion" with government officials. **Bloomberg**

Six Stabbed to Death in Sydney Shopping Centre

Sydney: A man stabbed six people to death at a busy Sydney shopping centre Saturday before he was fatally shot, police said. Eight people, including a 9-month-old, were injured in the attack.

The 40-year-old suspect began stabbing people at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction, which is in the city's eastern suburbs, before a police inspector shot him after he turned and raised a knife. New South Wales Assistant Police Commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters.

Six of the victims — five women and a man — and the suspect died. Commissioner Karen Webb said the eight injured people were being treated at hospitals. The baby was in surgery but it was too early to know the condition, she said.

"We are confident that there is no ongoing risk, and we are dealing with one person who is now deceased," Webb said in a later briefing. She added: "It's not a terrorism incident." She said police would not identify the man yet and were still working to determine his motivation. **AP**

Traditional German, Swiss Chocolate Makers Feel the Cocoa Crunch

Bean shortage may spur more consolidation in candy's heartland

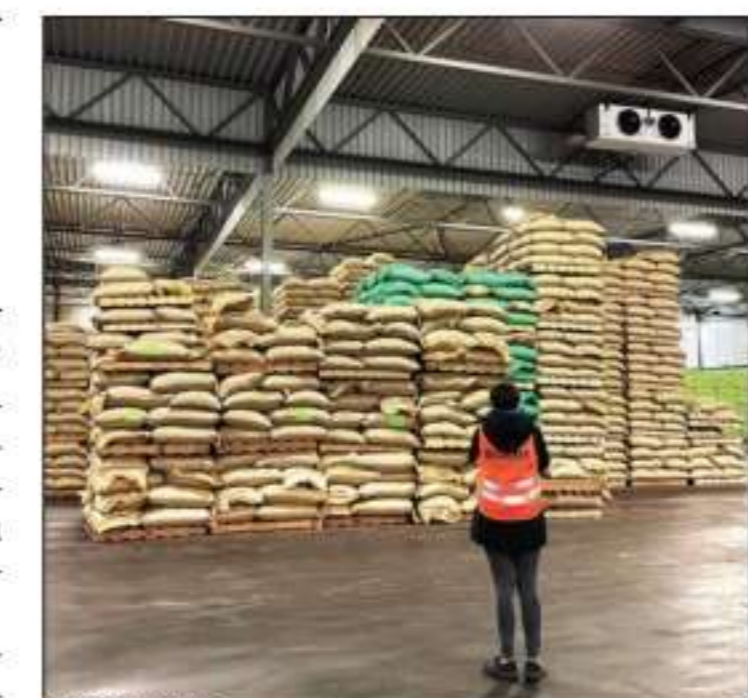
Chocolate sommelier Karin Steinhoff went to an Amsterdam warehouse recently to buy cocoa beans for her boutique German producer. But when she walked inside the cavernous building with her trader, they were struck by how unusually empty it was.

Meager harvests in West Africa are significantly cutting into the crop's availability, catapulting futures above a record \$10,000 a metric ton and squeezing bottom lines for suppliers and manufacturers. Steinhoff ended up spending at least 40% more per kilogram than the firm did last July.

Severe weather, plant diseases and years of low pay in cocoa-farming hubs have strained producers to the point where global output is expected to contract by 11% this season. That's especially bad news in chocolate heartlands Germany and Switzerland, nations famed for making top-quality bars and for eating more of them per capita than anywhere else.

"This is a wake-up call for many in the industry because things obviously cannot continue as usual," said Steinhoff, who works for the company Georgia Ramon. "Going forward, chocolate is simply going to be more like a little luxury."

Cocoa's relentless price rally is driving food inflation, but there's also fear it may push some makers into insolvency, furthering a consolidation sparked by the pandemic. Earlier this year, German confectioner Husele GmbH filed for bankruptcy again because of surging costs for raw materials and labor.



The Austrian maker of Mozartkugeln sweets went broke in 2021 and was later acquired.

"The concentration of the confectionery industry will be further accelerated by this cocoa price increase because not everyone will be able to pass on the price rise," said Hermann Buhlbecker, owner of Aachener Printen- und Schokoladenfabrik Henry Lambertz GmbH & Co. KG.

Across the European Union and Switzerland, the chocolate, biscuit and confectionery industry employed more than 250,000 people in 2020 and created about 14 billion (\$15 billion) worth of exports, according to the Caobisco trade group representing more than 13,000 companies.

About 99% of those members are small- and medium-sized enterprises that lack the scale and clout of corporations able to absorb wild commodity price swings.

Advanced Technology in Play

From Page 1
Now the electric motorcycle majors are able to achieve price and range parity with the ICE counterparts, thanks to falling battery prices.

If a 300-cc ICE (internal combustion engine) motorcycle retails at Rs 3.5-4 lakh, its equivalent electric counterpart will be priced around Rs 3.8 lakh, e-motorcycle makers said. In the case of range, the electric bike on a single charge can run 307 km while its ICE counterpart can run 250 km on a full tank of petrol, they said.

Within the ICE motorcycle segment, the mid and premium segment is growing faster than entry level bikes, and the same trend is expected for e-motorcycles.

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Hack, Line and Sink

India is witnessing an unprecedented surge in cyber attacks. The huge skills gap in the cyber security workforce and advancements in AI are making Indian companies more vulnerable. But while AI is a threat, it is also an opportunity. Synergy between AI and human expertise may be key to safeguarding the country's expanding digital ecosystem, writes **Annapurna Roy**

AIs replacing hands in stock dealing rooms, bank treasuries and assembly lines. Why should cyber security be any different?

AI is fast becoming a digital watchdog. However, it comes in as collaboration — not competition — to human intelligence as companies seek to secure the virtual world. So, unlike several other branches of technology, cyber security professionals aren't facing job cuts. Rather, the demand for them is set to boom as India grapples with a rise in cyber attacks, with a 30 per cent supply gap telling on the industry. Meanwhile, companies are weaving in AI to sharpen cyber security efforts in an increasingly digital world — and bridge the skills gap. "Considering the rapid pace of change in the cyber security industry, businesses must prepare their workforce for an AI+ security norm," Pradeep Vasudevan, country head, security software, IBM India, told ET.

He added that it will be key for security analysts to be equipped with the skills set required to utilise AI solutions effectively.

"Industry suggests that one million [cyber security] professionals will be required by 2025," said Krishna Vij, business head - IT staffing, TeamLease Digital.

India's cyber security workforce stood at around 0.3 million in 2023, up from 0.21 million in 2022, and 0.1 million in 2021, Vij said, with about 8,500 cyber security positions currently open. India's 30 per cent gap is proportionally slightly higher than the global average, she added.

"While we're looking at about 30 to 40 per cent growth in this role, this will only go up. It will grow 40-50 per cent year-on-year," Vij said, adding that expertise in threat intelligence, incident response, and penetration testing will be in high demand in 2024.

The most sought-after cyber security skills in 2023 included cloud security, threat intelligence, incident response and management, application security, ethical hacking, security operations centre analysts, identity and access management and data security and encryption.

"Considering the rapid pace of change in the cyber security industry, businesses must prepare their workforce for an AI+ security norm... We are starting to see gen AI help scale cyber crime — a top concern for defenders who are already outnumbered and under pressure"

— Pradeep Vasudevan, country head, security software, IBM India

"There are many ways to bridge the skill gaps in cyber security, and it's important for organisations to continuously assess their needs, invest in training and development, and adjust their strategies to keep up with the ever-changing cyber security landscape"

— Kunal Purohit, chief digital services officer, Tech Mahindra

HOT SKILLS

This year, businesses are looking for niche skills including AI/ML security and gen AI security, said Anand Tiwari, partner, risk advisory, Deloitte India. Other in-demand areas include cloud security, IoT (internet of things) security, threat hunting, devsecops (development, security, and operations) and privacy.

He added that companies' cyber security spending has increased due to their digital transformation journeys, increased scrutiny by regulators and increase in organised cyber crime. Yet, a recent Data Security Council of India (DSCI) report indicates the country faces a shortage of about 7,90,000 cyber security professionals.

Kunal Purohit, chief digital services officer, Tech Mahindra, said, "It is certain that demand for cyber security professionals is booming, and while automation is becoming more prevalent in all industries, there will always

and e-commerce face heightened vulnerability and an urgent requirement for adept professionals, Balasubramanian said.

INDUSTRY READINESS?

Experts said that cyber security training in academia is not keeping pace with the evolving threat landscape businesses face and that it takes substantial effort for a firm to convert a campus hire into a cyber security professional.

"Freshers do not have an easy entry into cyber security roles... They [companies] typically look for minimum three years experience," Vij said.

To address the cyber security skills gap, companies are expanding their search beyond domestic talent, tapping into diverse markets like Singapore, US, Switzerland, Israel, etc., Vij added.

"Recognising the dynamic nature of cyber threats, India is investing in skilling initiatives through partnerships with

educational institutions, industry certifications and internal training. The surge in cyber security certification programs, with over 400 institutions involved, reflects a concerted effort to skill local talent and meet

the growing demand for qualified cyber security professionals."

While the shortage affects all sectors, knowledge-based industries such as IT, ITes, BFSI, and pharma are feeling the sting, Tiwari said. Further, Global Capability Centres (GCCs) in the process of establishment will also feel the impact of the prevailing skills gap.

As per a DSCI report, India's cyber security market grew at a CAGR of over 30 per cent during 2019-2023 to reach \$6.06 billion in 2023, Tiwari added. Mean-while, cyber security firm Cyfirma reported that India is the most

targeted country in terms of cyber attacks and that cyber attacks on government agencies went up by 460 per cent over the past three years while those on startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) increased by 508 per cent.

Especially now, AI has transformed the cyber threat landscape — attacks that once required seasoned professionals have become 'child's play', experts said, and the technology has made attacks more sophisticated and ferocious.

Pawan Prabhat, co-founder and president at generative AI and data engineering solutions firm Shorthills AI, said, "AI is not just a buzz-

word; it's becoming a vital skill set in cyber security roles."

He added that today, AI is enabling targeted phishing with voice and video and increasingly intricate malware and that companies can strategically integrate the technology for effective defence.

"We are starting to see gen AI help scale cyber crime — a top concern for defenders who are already outnumbered and under pressure," said Vasudevan.

Cyber security professionals upskilling in AI/ML and gen AI may be a matter of their own long-term viability as well as a matter

of insulation and future-readiness for companies, experts said.

"Companies may need to make significant investments in upskilling their cyber security teams in AI and gen AI skills,"

Future Tense

- By 2025, it is expected that the cyber security sector will have an estimated 1.5 million job vacancies and 42 per cent talent shortage, even before considering the projected 32 per cent growth in cyber security jobs over the next six years.

- 47 per cent of corporates say that cyber security professionals constitute less than five per cent of their company's overall workforce, indicating that this role is relatively scarce in the workforce at present.

- However, 47 per cent also said that it is their goal to increase numbers of these professionals in next five years by more than 30 per cent.

- Cyber security risk analyst, cyber security analyst and penetration tester are the most prevalent job roles at present, as identified by more than 50 per cent of respondents.

- In the next five years, job roles that are expected to surge include DevSecOps engineer, IoT engineer, IoT security analyst and operations technology analyst.

- Skills and competencies that will be given high prominence in the next five years: Artificial Intelligence (56 per cent as compared to zero at present); data forensics (44 per cent as compared to 17 per cent at present); hacking wireless networks (28 per cent as compared to zero at present); followed by cloud security, compliance and regulatory knowledge and security auditing.

- The report recommends a few additional things: To meet future demands, there is a need for multi-stakeholder collaboration to map industry-relevant skills, design and deliver skilling programmes as per industry standards, promote corporate driven training initiatives and ensuring validation of content to avoid disparity.

SOURCE: BRIDGING THE GAP: IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES IN CYBERSECURITY SKILLING AND BRIDGING THE DIVIDE, 2023 REPORT BY DATA SECURITY COUNCIL OF INDIA

Tiwari said. He added that IT, ITes and BFSI companies are making such investments.

NEED FOR AI

According to Prabhat, SOC (security operations centre) analysts who perform threat hunting and intelligence analysis should be trained in AI. Further, leveraging AI in ASI (attack surface intelligence) enhances cyber threat identification and enables predictive analysis based on historical patterns.

AI-driven log analysis across various security systems streamlines the identification processes by providing valuable insights to security analysts, Prabhat said.

"To address the cyber security skills gap, companies are expanding their search beyond domestic talent, tapping into diverse markets like Singapore, US, Switzerland, Israel, etc"

— Krishna Vij, business head, IT staffing, TeamLease Digital

For IBM's Vasudevan, the full potential of AI in cyber security lies in the combination of existing mature AI innovations and future gen AI applications, coupled with automation. "We have already begun to see the adoption of large language models in the cyber security market, serving as a security assistant of sorts to security analysts through a chatbot format," Vasudevan said.

"CISOs must carefully evaluate how gen AI innovations can help improve detection efficacy and introduce predictive capabilities to security solutions, largely due to the size and variety of data these models are trained on, and their capacity for self-supervised learning," he added.

Yet, many firms hesitate to incorporate AI in their cyber security efforts due to fears around data privacy and security, as Vij pointed out.

Mitigating the cyber security skills gap requires cooperation between government, industry and academia, greater awareness regarding cyber security career opportunities as well as incentives for businesses so they can meet the costs of strong cyber security infrastructure, she said.

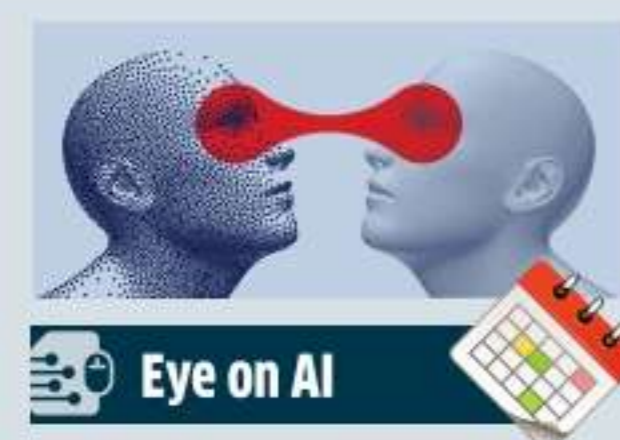
Meanwhile, skilled professionals are attracting premium salaries. Vij said that while entry-level roles like IT auditor, information security analyst, network/IT security engineer/specialist, and security testing/penetration tester offer a base pay of ₹3-6 lakh per annum for under three years' experience, senior and mid-level professionals, with over 12 years of experience, have the potential to earn an annual salary of ₹50-80 lakh.



IMAGING: ATUL BANDEKAR

OPENAI USED A MILLION HOURS OF YOUTUBE DATA TO TRAIN AI: REPORT

ChatGPT-maker OpenAI used over one million hours of content from video platform YouTube to train its GPT-4 large language model, *The New York Times* reported. The startup, now the face of AI, reportedly used its AI transcription software Whisper to transcribe the videos. YouTube CEO Neal Mohan said that transcribing videos from their platform to train AI models would amount to a 'clear violation' of policies, which do not allow for downloading or scraping of content without permission from the company.



Eye on AI
personal device startup. The information reported. Potential funders include OpenAI investor Thrive Capital and Emerson Collective, a venture capital firm founded by Laurene Powell Jobs, the wife of Apple founder Steve Jobs. The duo has also been in talks with Softbank for funding.

A HOST OF AI ANNOUNCEMENTS AT GOOGLE CLOUD NEXT 2024

Google launched Google Vids, an AI-powered video creation app for work — "your video, writing, production and editing assistant, all in one". The company is wooing enterprises with Gemini for Workspace — an AI agent built into Gmail, Docs, Sheets, etc — and Gemini in Threat Intelligence, with enterprise-grade security and privacy. Gemini 1.5 Pro, its most advanced model, was made available for public preview on Vertex AI, with a first-ever native audio understanding capability.



The model will also power Google Code Assist, while Vertex AI Agent Builder helps developers create AI agents. And finally, the Nvidia Blackwell platform will be coming to Google Cloud by early 2025, to enable "the most demanding" AI workloads.

SPOTIFY ANNOUNCES A NEW AI PLAYLIST FEATURE

Music streaming platform Spotify rolled out its new AI-powered feature in beta mode, beginning with Android and iOS devices. It will be available to premium users in Australia and the UK. Creative concepts can be turned into personalised playlists, using prompts like "an indie folk playlist to give my brain a big warm hug" or "a playlist that makes me feel like the main character".

— Compiled by Annapurna Roy

SAM ALTMAN, JONY IVE EYE \$1-BILLION FUNDING FOR DEVICE STARTUP

Sam Altman, OpenAI founder and CEO, and Jony Ive, the former Apple design executive, are looking to raise as much as \$1 billion in funding for a new, unnamed AI



PICS: NYT, GETTY IMAGES

TOP TECH FIRMS ROLLED OUT ADVANCED CHIPS FOR AI EFFICIENCY

Google unveiled a new version of its tensor processing unit AI chip, said to be one of the few viable alternatives to Nvidia's advanced chips. It will also offer the Arm-based central processing unit Axion via Google Cloud. Meanwhile, Meta debuted a new generation of the Meta Training and Inference Accelerator (MTIA), its family of custom-made chips designed for AI workloads in its products Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. And Intel unveiled the Gaudi 3 processor, expected to improve AI performance four times compared to its predecessor, which could give Nvidia's H100 chips a run for their money.

Casting an Eye on India's Web3 Landscape across Crypto, Gaming

Himanshi Lohchab

India has emerged as the fastest-growing adopters of cryptocurrency investments in 2024, as on-chain value received by Indians reached \$270 billion in 2024, up 60 per cent year-on-year. This compares to 10 per cent for the US, eight per cent for the UK and 18 per cent for Vietnam, a new study by venture capital firm Hashed Emergent has revealed. However, India still accounts for only four per cent of the global crypto investor population pie. ET collates data on India's evolving web3 landscape across cryptocurrency adoption, developer ecosystem, gaming, startup funding, etc.



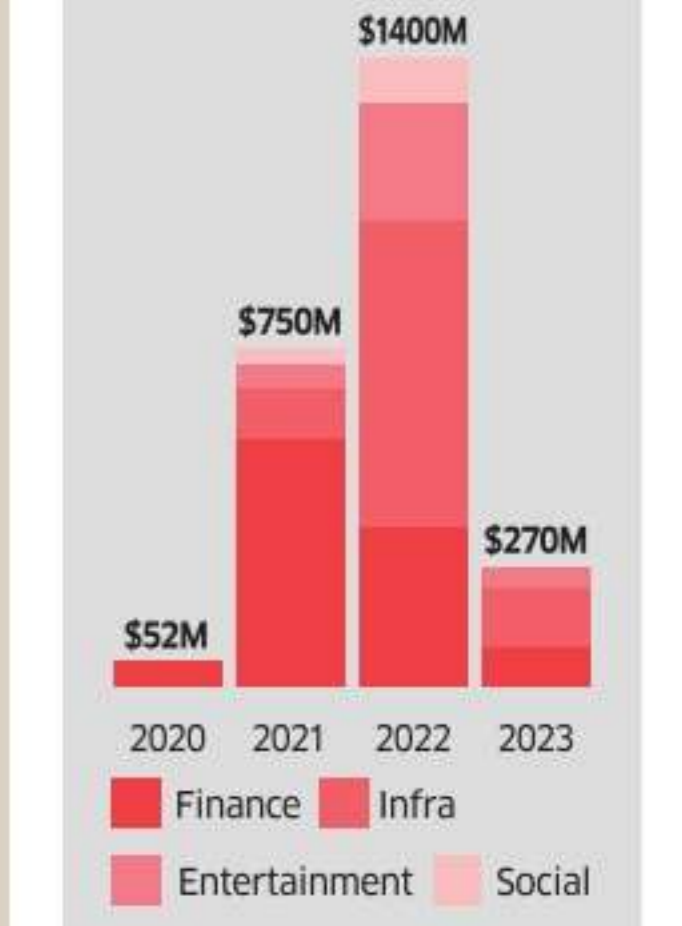
Startups

India has over 1,000 web3 startups

These startups have collectively secured funding exceeding \$2.5 billion.

In 2023, web3 startups cumulatively raised \$270 million, an 81 per cent decline from the \$1.4 billion raised in 2022

Annual funding for web3 startups



Cryptocurrency

As of 2024, India's top two centralised exchanges had more than 35 million users

Interestingly, meme coins like Doge and Shiba Inu collectively make up 15-18 per cent of the investments

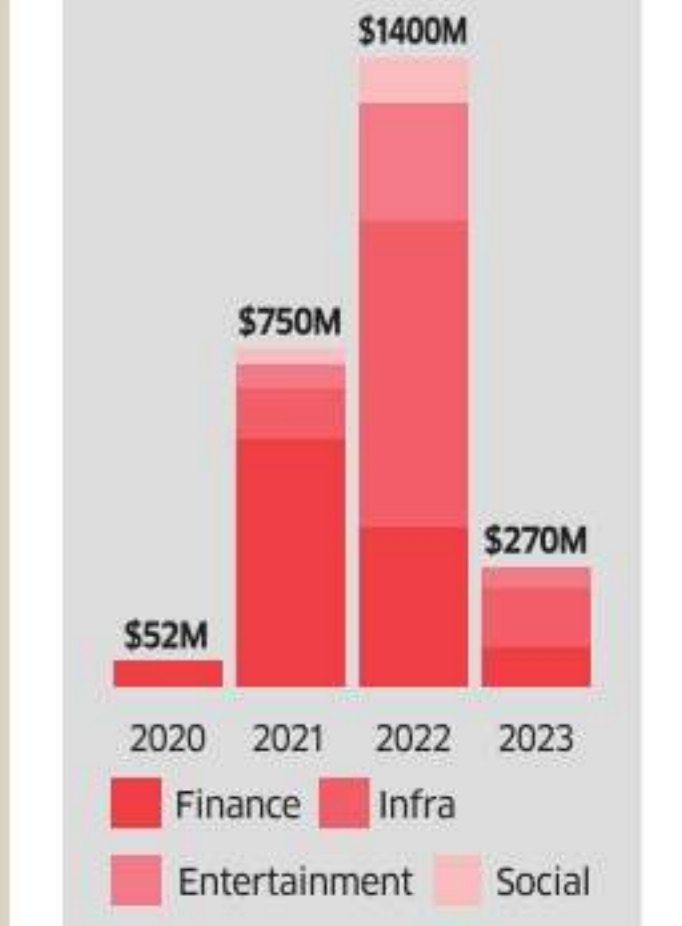
India still accounts for only four per cent of the world's crypto investor population

India's P2P exchange ranking jumped from 72 in 2021 to five in 2023 due to restrictions on on/off ramping from centralised exchanges

Gaming

Over 29 per cent gamers surveyed spend more than ₹1,000 on web3 games, compared to 10 per cent among web2 gamers

This inclination stems from a higher expectation of return through quests, NFTs or future airdrops



An Exhibit That Looks At The Emotional Days After Ali's Death



Photos and a 3D display celebrating Ali's fights



Media clippings and photographs



Shorts worn by Ali and tickets to a fight, circa 1966

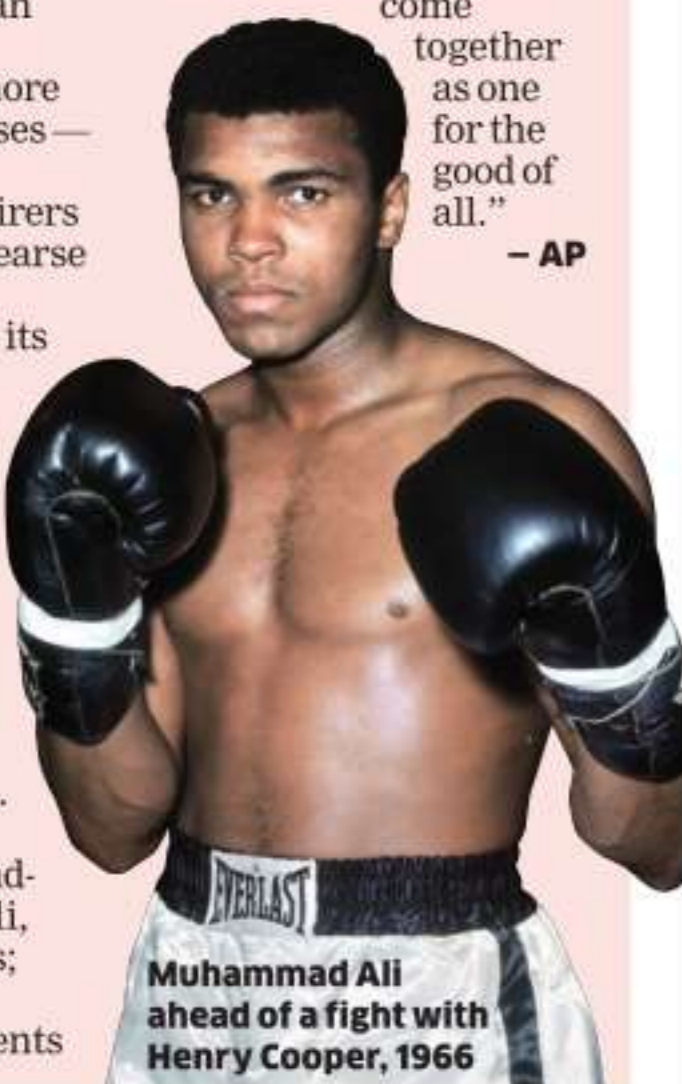
Like his lightning-quick jabs, word of Muhammad Ali's death spread swiftly around the globe. An outpouring of emotions flowed to his beloved Kentucky hometown. For one remarkable week in June 2016, Louisville was the focus of ceremonies honouring the boxing legend. Eight years later, an exhibition at the Muhammad Ali Center chronicles those heart-pounding days, including photos, a 3D display and a video documenting the events and emotions. Putting it together was bittersweet, said curator Bess Goldy. "We haven't acknowledged Muhammad's passing in our exhibits yet, and we felt that was a really vital story to tell as a part of his story and legacy," she said before the opening.

that he would like to be remembered as a "man who never looked down on those who looked up to him"; photos capturing the enormity of crowds that paid their respects. Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg remembers the celebration of Ali's life as "one of the most powerful, impactful and culturally significant events" to ever take place in the city. "Those who took part in the celebration will remember it forever," he said. Ali's wife Lonnie, also a Louisville native, said she hopes the exhibit shows people how the outpouring of affection "brought not just this city together, but the world". "This is a way to continue to share that week of love, remembrance, unity and say thank you," she said. "It's also an opportunity to show everyone that we can come together as one for the good of all."

An estimated 1,00,000 people lined the streets of Louisville, as Muhammad Ali's funeral procession passed by in June 2016, with chants of "Ali, Ali" ringing out

MEMORIES ABOUND

Visitors will see an acrylic panel surrounded by more than 1,000 silk roses — symbolising the flowers that admirers tossed onto the hearse as Ali's funeral procession made its way to the cemetery. An inscription reads that those days "sent ripples across continents, transcending borders and cultural divides". There's a striking black-and-white photo of Ali, taken in the 1990s; Ali's own words, including comments



The gang that preyed on America's small museums avoided arrest for 19 years. But it was far from being a world-savvy, techno-literate crew

Heist Drama

The New York Times

The first burglary was in 1999 at Keystone College in Pennsylvania, US. One gang member, authorities said, sneaked onto the campus, smashed some glass display cases and walked off with memorabilia, including a baseball jersey once worn by legendary pitcher Christy Mathewson. The Everhart Museum in Scranton was next, six years later. An Andy Warhol silk-screen print and a painting attributed to Jackson Pollock were taken. Then the pace picked up. The Space Farms: Zoo & Museum, The Lackawanna Historical Society, Ringwood Manor, The Sterling Hill Mining Museum, The United States Golf Association Museum and Library. Over almost two decades, the crew showed up at 12 small, low-profile museums that lacked elaborate security systems, stripping them of cherished items. Just a partial list includes the 1903 Belmont Stakes trophy, taken from the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame; middleweight Tony Zale's 1941 and 1948 championship belts from the International Boxing Hall of Fame; from the Yogi Berra Museum & Learning Center,



seven of Berra's championship rings, his 1954 and 1955 MVP plaques, and nine of his 10 World Series rings. The only Berra World Series ring not stolen was the one he wore on his finger. "These kinds of artefacts tell people the story of who we are, and they connect us to the past in a way that really nothing else can," said Eve Schaenen, executive director of the Berra museum. "And now they're gone."

MORE 7-ELEVEN THAN OCEAN'S ELEVEN

Later this year, four men charged with taking some part in the burglaries are scheduled to go on trial in Pennsylvania, where they live. Another five people have pleaded guilty. All nine, authorities say, avoided arrest for some portion of 19 years as museum directors across five states kept waking up to find smashed glass and things missing. With so many heists going unsolved for so many years, one might imagine the thieves as a world-savvy, blueprint-studying, tech-literate

crew. But in court records and interviews, they come across as more 7-Eleven than Ocean's Eleven. Prepared? Yes. Sophisticated? No. Sometimes they just hit houses. One favourite burglary tool was an axe. They once drove cross-country to rob the Roger Maris Museum in North Dakota, rather than take a plane.

MELTING DOWN BERRA'S RINGS

Most upsetting to many people is how little care was shown for the objects that were taken. A Jasper Cropsey painting from 1871 was torched. The crew did not even try to sell some of the high-profile sports memorabilia. Instead, gold and silver items — such as Berra's rings, Maris' MVP plaque and the Belmont Stakes trophy — were melted and jacked as raw metal, according to court papers. One of those arrested is accused of using some of the stolen gems to make himself a sceptre.

that included more than 30 golf and horse-racing trophies. Prosecutors valued the lot at \$4 million. Most of the objects have not been recovered.

'A VIOLATION OF TRUST'

Michael Wisneski of the Everhart Museum remembers the morning in 2005 when he woke up and turned on the local television news. To his surprise, the reporters were in the parking lot of his museum, talking about a break-in. When he arrived at the building, he found the back door smashed in, the Warhol and Pollock gone. "It felt like somebody broke into your house," he said. "It was a violation of trust or of security."

According to authorities, Thomas Trotta, 48, of Moscow, Pennsylvania, had used a ladder to smash the door of the museum. Of the nine arrested, Trotta was the one relied on to venture into the museums to take things, according to court papers. But he was helped in meaningful ways, authorities say, by Nicholas Dombek, 53, who has known Trotta since they were teenagers. After Trotta was arrested, he accused Dombek of being the



Yogi Berra with his nine World Series rings

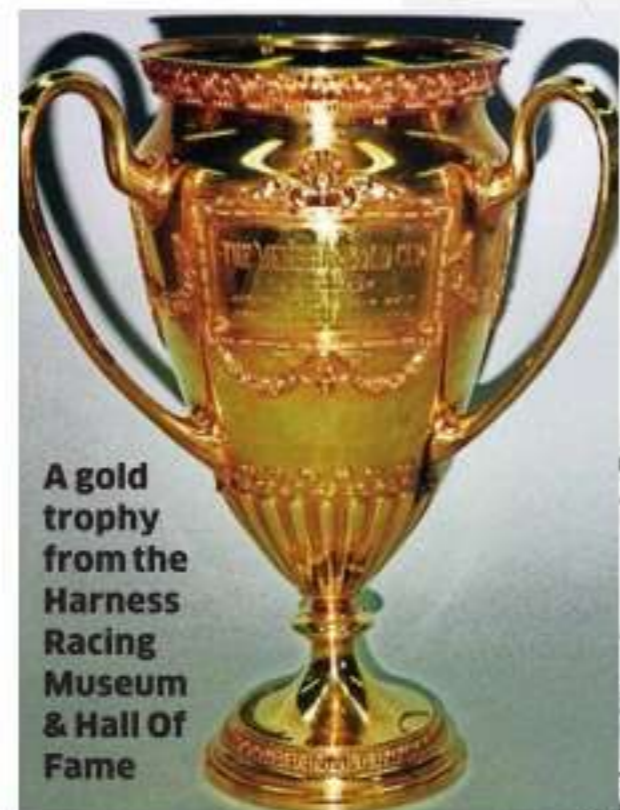
ring-leader. But Dombek's lawyer, Ernest Preate Jr., said in an interview that Trotta was the ringleader, and he described his client as a handyman, not a mastermind, who did not even operate a computer. Each museum was studied before a break-in to determine access, security measures and what looked good to steal.

During one scouting trip, Dombek tested the thickness of a display case at the golf museum in New Jersey by scratching the glass with a coin, the papers said. Trotta would sometimes wear a disguise, dressing as a firefighter when they stole from the Roger Maris museum, and as a Hasidic Jew when they went to break in to the Harvard

Mineralogical & Geological Museum, the indictment said. The other accomplices are accused of playing a variety of roles: Sometimes as getaway drivers, sometimes as transporters of stolen materials after the burglary. At the Berra museum, the thieves cut the glass to gain entry, and they were able to elude security cameras during one of the larger hauls, according to museum staff. "They knew exactly where to break in," Schaenen said. "They had a method to it."



Roger Maris's Hickok Belt



A gold trophy from the Harness Racing Museum & Hall of Fame



Tony Zale's championship belt

Should You Eat Your Vegetables Before Your Carbs?

The New York Times

It's a popular internet health hack: Eat foods in the 'right' order — vegetables first, proteins and fats second, carbohydrates last — and you will significantly reduce your resulting spike in blood sugar, which can therefore reduce cravings, fatigue and health risks like Type 2 diabetes, proponents say. Past research on the topic, sometimes referred to as nutrient or meal sequencing, has concluded that it can indeed benefit blood sugar, especially for those with Type 2 diabetes or pre-diabetes. For everyone else, it's not as cut-and-dried, said Dr Alpna Shukla, a physician and researcher at Weill Cornell Medicine in New York City, US, who has studied food order.



Since proteins, fats and vegetables take longer to digest than carbohydrates, saving carbs for last can help people feel fuller for longer

Though there are some reasons to consider giving it a try, she said.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SUGGEST?

Existing studies on the benefits of meal sequencing are small, but the results are consistent, experts say. In one 2023 review of 11 studies, for instance, researchers concluded that people who saved carbohydrate-rich foods for the end of a meal, after vegetables and proteins, had significantly lower blood sugar levels than when they consumed them first.

In one 2019 study of 15 people with pre-diabetes, Shukla and her colleagues asked the participants to eat a meal of skinless grilled chicken, salad and ciabatta (Italian white bread) in three different orders on three

different days: Ciabatta first, followed 10 minutes later by the chicken and salad; chicken and salad first, followed by the ciabatta; and salad first, followed by the chicken and ciabatta.

Researchers measured blood sugar levels before they ate, and every 30 minutes for three hours after each meal. They found that when the chicken and salad were eaten before the bread, blood sugar spikes were about 46 per cent lower than when they ate the bread first.

Researchers aren't sure why this might be. One theory is that eating fats, fibre and proteins first delays stomach emptying, which could slow the absorption of sugars from the carbohydrates into the bloodstream, Shukla said.

SHOULD YOU EAT LIKE THIS?

Research has also shown that eating carbohydrates last in a meal can reduce blood sugar spikes in people who don't have diabetes. But the experts said that healthy people usually don't need to micromanage their blood sugar in this way.

A properly functioning body will bring blood sugar levels back down to normal within hours of eating a meal, said Dr Vijaya Surampudi, an endocrinologist at UCLA Health, US.

But since proteins, fats and vegetables take longer to digest than carbohydrates, saving carbs for last can help people feel fuller for longer, said Dr Domenico Tricò, an assistant professor of internal medicine at the University of Pisa, Italy.

Chocolates and the Problems of the Commodity Cycle

FOOD FABLES



VIKRAM DOCTOR

Chocolate lovers can relax. Headlines about cocoa prices soaring 140 per cent since the start of the year have caused speculations that chocolate might vanish due to climate change or other crises. But we have been here before. Back in November 2014, I wrote in *ET* about chocolate companies predicting potential shortfalls of a million tonnes of cocoa by 2020. And four years before, in 2010, Anthony Ward, a UK-based commodity trader brief-

ly cornered the market by acquiring 240,000 tonnes of cocoa, driving up prices to a 33-year high. It got him dubbed 'Chocfinger', after the *James Bond* villain Goldfinger who tried to corner gold. Chocolate's real problem is that it is particularly vulnerable to market manipulation. Cocoa beans only grow in a narrow band along the equator. The main producers, like Ivory Coast and Ghana, have had to deal with climate change and diseases, but the biggest issue is that the production is done by thousands of small farmers who lack leverage over the market. Price rises barely benefit them. This is why production of cocoa has struggled to take off in India. In 1957, *The Times of India* reported that cacao imports cost the country seven lakh per annum. "Consequently a few enterprising planters are experimenting on introducing the plant to India." In the 1960s, a leading chocolate company helped bring plants to India and advised farmers on growing them, with

the implicit understanding that it would buy their beans. But by the 1970s, the international market had a glut and the company found it cheaper to buy beans abroad. Growers, mostly in Kerala, found little local demand. Some Indian companies tried making chocolate, but the process is complex, involving fermentation and a specialised type of grinding called conching that evenly distributes the fat in chocolate to give it that essential melt-in-the-mouth texture. It doesn't help that our palates are capable of picking up minute differences in chocolate texture, which is why so much chocolate from that era felt gritty compared to what was available from international sources. Most Kerala growers angrily dumped cacao and shifted to other crops. Farmers in West Africa didn't have this option, being essentially forced into growing cacao, but it has never made them happy about the crop. It is one reason why cacao trees were left to grow old and vulnerable to



diseases. This inevitably led to a shortfall in supply — one reason Ward was able to pull off his cacao coup was the information network he built across the region which warned him about the coming crisis — and prices soared, setting off the cycle again. Chocolate's turmoils are a reminder that the most important influence on what we eat aren't chefs, food writers or even most food companies, but the commodity traders, like Ward, who really control the



global food chain. In *The World for Sale*, Javier Blas and Jack Farchy's book that explains the power of this notoriously secretive group, they explain why agricultural commodities, even more than metal and oil, allow such profits. The latter are controlled by large producers, who limit the power of traders, but the fragmented farming networks that produce commodities like cacao allow traders to amass the data that allows them to place the speculative bets that bring them millions. Traders shrug off this criticism, pointing out that they keep markets moving and, eventually, supplies take place. National governments should defend farmers, which finally is happening in Ghana, which has mandated higher returns for farmers and more value-added cacao processing at home. But what will happen to the new generation of Indian cacao farmers, mostly in Andhra now, who are reading stories of soaring prices on their phones and hoping for higher profits? If the inevitable price fall leaves them stranded, it will be another example of how cacao's commodity cycles are failing to ensure that the benefit of the beans really accrues to all.



How Snakes Utilise Their Sense of Smell

The New York Times

Say the words 'animal self-recognition', and many scientists will think of chimpanzees, crows and elephants.

For the first time, researchers — employing an innovative twist on the mirror test — have found evidence that garter snakes can distinguish themselves from others, using not sight, but scent. "Reptiles are massively understudied," said Noam Miller, a comparative psychologist at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada, and an author of the paper published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. "There's a bias out there that they're these boring, not very cognitive animals, and that's completely wrong. That's one of the reasons why we got very interested in studying them and showing the complex cognitive things they can do."

SELF-RECOGNITION TEST

One traditional sign of animal cognition has generally been the mirror test, Miller said, or whether an animal can learn to recognise itself in a reflective surface, a trait thought to be a proxy for sophisticated intelligence. But it is geared toward animals that are primarily visual. Many species — such as snakes — rely primarily on their sense of smell, Miller said. Two species of snakes were tested in the new study. Firstly, North American eastern garter snakes, predators of insects and fish with a complex social life. And the other, African ball pythons, a largely solitary, sedentary snake that ambushes rodents.

It seems like if others smell weird, they don't care. If they smell weird, that's something they need to investigate. — NOAM MILLER, author of a new paper

GAUGING INTEREST

Snakes, like humans, have oils in their skin that leave a scent trail. The team rubbed makeup removal pads along the undersides of both snakes to collect scent samples, some of which they doctored with olive oil. They placed the pads at either ends of long, narrow boxes and offered the snakes several choices: Between their own odour and straight olive oil; their own odour modified with olive oil; and the modified or unmodified odours of other snakes of the same species. The team measured the snakes' interest by gauging how long they flicked their tongues to taste the air — longer indicated sustained interest. The garter snakes zeroed in on their own tampered smell and ignored others. "It seems like if others smell weird, they don't care," Miller said. "If they smell weird, that's something they need to investigate."

VITALS

BILLIE JEAN KING CUP

India Lose to New Zealand, Miss Out on Historic Play-offs Berth
Ankita Raina could not win the crucial second singles and later lost the decisive doubles match with partner Prarthana Thombare as a historic play-offs place slipped out of India's grasp after a 1-2 defeat to New Zealand in the Billie Jean King Cup on Saturday. India remained in Asia/Oceania Group 1 by finishing third in the tournament. Rutuja Bhosale put India ahead with her 6-2 7-6(5) win over Monique Barry in the opening singles. Raina needed to win the next match against world number 169 Lulu Sun but was outgunned 2-6 0-6. A victory in that match would have earned India a place in the play-offs for the first time. India had another chance in the doubles match but the combo of Raina and Thombare lost the contest 1-6 5-7 to Paige Hourigan and Erin Routliffe. **PTI**

HOCKEY

India Suffer 0-5

Whitewash in Australia
The Indian men's hockey team failed to avoid a 0-5 series whitewash after going down 2-3 in the fifth Test against Australia, completing a nightmare of a tour on Saturday. The Indians entered the final game of the series after losing their previous four matches 1-5, 2-4, 1-2 and 1-3. The rubber was significant as far as preparation is concerned ahead of the upcoming Paris Olympics. Skipper Harmanpreet Singh (4th) and Bobby Singh Dhami (53rd) were the goal scorers for India, while Australia sounded the board through Jeremy Hayward (20th), Ky Willott (38th) and Tim Brand (39th). **PTI**

Nepal's Airee Becomes Third Man to Hit 6 Sixes in an Over in T20Is



Nepal's hard-hitting Dipendra Singh Airee became the third batter to smash six sixes in an over in 20 international matches here on Saturday. Airee achieved the feat against hosts Qatar during the ongoing ACC Men's Premier Cup T20 International fixture in Al Amerat, Qatar, on Saturday. Airee joined an elite company of Yuvraj Singh (vs Stuart Broad at T20 World Cup 2007) and Kieron Pollard (vs Sri Lanka's Akila Dananjaya in 2021) as batters with six maximums in one over. **PTI**

Panghal Returns for Last Boxing Olympic Qualifiers

World Championships silver medalist Amit Panghal has returned to the Indian squad, which saw wholesale changes for the final Olympic qualifying event, set to be held in Bangkok from May 25 to June 2. After Indian boxers' horrid run at the Olympic qualifiers in Italy last month, when not even one boxer could secure a quota, as many as five pugilists have lost their spot in the team for the second World Qualification Tournament. The dismal show also led India's High Performance Director Bernard Dunne to step down from his post. No male boxers from India has won a quota till now. India has secured four 2024 Olympic quota places so far with Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), Parveen Hooda (57kg) and Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) clinching their places at the Asian Games last year. **PTI**

SQUAD
Men: Amit Panghal (51kg), Sachin Siwach Jr. (57kg), Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg), Nishant Dev (71kg), Abhimanyu Loura (80kg), Sanjeet (92kg), Narender Berwal (+92kg)
Women: Ankushita Boro (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (66kg)

Change is Coming, and People (Mostly) Like It

Bayer Leverkusen can win their first Bundesliga title tonight. For their rivals, the real joy comes in seeing Bayern Munich lose it



Rory Smith and Christopher F. Schuetze

Executives at Bayer Leverkusen, the long-standing but habitually middleweight German football team, have been fielding the messages since at least February. Some were delivered in person, a quiet blessing after yet another victory. Others came via WhatsApp, unsolicited and unexpected notes from peers and acquaintances and, to their occasional surprise, traditional foes.

Football, after all, is fiercely tribal. Rivals don't easily offer one another encouragement or congratulations. But as the German league season gathered pace, plenty wanted to laud Leverkusen's impending achievement. It was getting closer and closer to being crowned national champion for the first time. And, that meant — just as importantly — that Bayern Munich was not.

Leverkusen will, on Sunday, surge over the line and end a run of Bayern championships that stretches back more than a decade. At least it should: All Leverkusen requires to seal the title is a single victory, which could come as soon as its game against Werder Bremen on Sunday, or for Bayern to lose.

The triumph has been a long time coming, in one sense; the club was founded 120 years ago, in 1904, before the city of Leverkusen technically existed. But in another sense it has arrived more swiftly than anyone anticipated.

Six months ago, the team's charismatic coach, Xabi Alonso, 42, said he would countenance the idea that his side might win the championship only if it was still in contention in April. As it is, it might claim the title so early that it cannot celebrate it properly: The season is still in full swing, and Leverkusen has at least two more trophies to chase.

Whenever the title comes, the club will hold a low-key postgame party for the players and their families at its stadium, the BayArena. But it will not hold the traditional parade — at which its fans will have the chance to salute the players — until May 26, the day after

the country's other major domestic competition, the German cup, concludes. (Leverkusen is favoured to win that one, too.)

Organising that celebration has been a challenge: Leverkusen, a small city between Cologne and Düsseldorf, does not have a civic building with a ceremonial balcony big enough to allow the team to greet its fans. (The club has said it has options in mind, though nothing has been decided.)

It is not a problem the club — or city authorities — has had to face before. Bayer Leverkusen, founded over a century ago as a sporting outlet for workers at the nearby Bayer chemical plant, has won only two major honours. The most recent was in 1993.

Instead, Leverkusen has become almost synonymous with agonizing defeat. In 2002, the club picked up the Anglicized nickname "Neverkusen" after missing out on the league title, the German cup and the Champions League at the last hurdle. That reputation is so deeply scoured into the club's soul that Bayer Leverkusen has trademarked the German equivalent, Vizekusen.

Alonso's team will, over the next few weeks, exorcise those ghosts in fairly spectacular fashion. His team has yet to lose a game this season, and it can still end

Xabi Alonso has turned down approaches from both Liverpool and Bayern to remain as coach next year, and the team expects to retain its star player, Florian Wirtz



the campaign with more major honors (three) than it has in its entire history. That achievement carries a significance that will extend some way beyond its hometown.

The ritual dominance in recent years of Bayern Munich, the country's biggest and by far richest club, had become a source of considerable concern —

Leverkusen will, on Sunday, surge over the line and end a run of Bayern championships that stretches back more than a decade

both to German fans and the league itself — as the annual chase to win the league, the Bundesliga, has begun to seem stale and predictable.

As the many messages that have poured in to Bayer Leverkusen attest, there is no little relief within German football at the prospect of a changing of the guard, even if it proves temporary.

"I can say absolutely that it is great for the Bundesliga," said Peer Naubert, the chief marketing officer for Bundesliga International, the organization that promotes German football abroad. "Having the same champion for 11 years in a row did not have a negative impact, but it did not have a positive one, either."

Bayer Leverkusen's success has allowed the Bundesliga to tell a different story to its international audience. Part of that can be attributed to Alonso himself. It is striking, for example, how much of Leverkusen's social media output features its coach, a beloved former player for Liverpool, Real Madrid and Bayern, three of the world's most popular clubs.

The reaction among fans has been nuanced. It would be stretching it to suggest that Germany is rapturous at the prospect of Leverkusen's winning the championship. Fans are too loyal to their own clubs, and German soccer too regionalized, for that. The club also lacks the wide diaspora

that rivals like Bayern or Borussia Dortmund have, and so does not intrude on the national consciousness quite so much as others.

Leverkusen also occupies a somewhat uneasy position within German football's firmament. As an offshoot of the corporate behemoth Bayer, it is one of a handful of exceptions to the cherished German model: the so-called 50+1 rule, in which fans are required to be the majority owners of their clubs. It is a long-standing exception, but it is still an exception.

That status means Leverkusen is "kind of the original sin," said Dario Minden, a spokesperson for Unsere Kurve, a group representing Germany's organized fans. That corporate backing, he said, has helped the club weather the financial impact of the pandemic better than other teams.

But Leverkusen's prominence is not a balm for the financial imbalance that has allowed Bayern to win the championship every year since 2012, he said. Even the fact that Leverkusen is confident it can build on its success — Alonso has turned down approaches from both Liverpool and Bayern to remain as coach next year, and the team expects to retain its star player, Florian Wirtz — is not evidence of a new, more equitable dawn for rivals along the league.

As an Eintracht Frankfurt fan, Minden admitted, he takes joy in any team other than his own winning the championship. "Although maybe that is because I am a bad person," he said. Still, one aspect of the championship has provided him some solace. "We have this nice word," he said. "Schadenfreude."

The New York Times

WATCHOUT! Tonight

ISL: Goa v Chennaiyin 7:30pm (Sports18)
PREMIER LEAGUE: Liverpool v Crystal Palace 6:30pm
Arsenal v Aston Villa 9pm (Star Sports)
BUNDESLIGA: Bayer Leverkusen v Werder Bremen 9pm (Sony Ten)

A Cut Above The Rest

THE MASTERS Woods defies conditions to battle out a 2nd round 72 to make cut for a record 24th consecutive time



Anand Datla

If there were a museum for Tiger Woods, there would never be enough room to house all his accomplishments in golf. The embattled legend refuses to bow to Father Time, defying rationale, fused limbs, and a bruised body.

On Friday in what many thought was their toughest test yet at the Masters, Woods battled out an even 72, prevailing from what felt like a constant exchange of heavyweight punches.

Remarkably, Woods has never missed a cut at the Masters as a professional. In reaching the weekend for a record 24th consecutive time, Woods surpassed Gary Player and Fred Couples to take sole possession of another monumental record.

Just for context, the weather on Friday at Augusta felt like an evening along a rumbling coast waiting to deliver a massive storm.

Even as the golfers stood over their ball, looking to steady their club and gaze, their pants flailed violently behind their ankles. Over on the greens, the flagsticks were swinging like wild criers in the swirling 30-mile-an-hour gusts.

Justin Thomas stood over the 15th tee box even with the course, looking set for a solid round. And then he collapsed like a pack of cards, bleeding himself ugly while tumbling to 7-over in just four holes. The reigning US Open and Open Champions, Wyndham Clark and Brian Harman fell by the wayside too. The conditions turned the course into a monstrous test, failing past champions like they were underprepared school children — Bubba Watson, Jordan Spieth, Sergio Garcia, and Dustin Johnson were all cut to size. Jon Rahm barely managed to escape, finding the resolve for a pair of late birdies.

Woods was locked with the course in a raging battle. His round felt like a bruising fight in the middle of a boxing square in Madison Garden. Playing just his third professional round of golf in 2024, Woods tried to gain an early edge. At the 350-yard par-4 third hole, he dialed a pin high approach, from 90 yards out in the middle of the fairway. Woods drained a nine-footer for birdie to gain the advantage. But he missed a short putt for par on the fourth hole. The par-4 fifth is among the three hardest holes this week.

Woods sailed into the fairway sand on the fifth. After laying up, the pitching wedge left Woods 28 feet on the green, forcing a second bogey. Even though there was relative calm when he played off the sixth tee, Woods landed in the greenside bunker at the 190-yard par-3 called Juniper. Woods loves to chip his way out of trouble, and he did just that to a thunderous outpouring of love from the patrons as the ball rolled nicely into the cup. The tee shot at the seventh was nearly perfect. But the green is protected all around by five bunkers, and from the middle of the fairway, somehow Woods sailed it short and into the sand. Another bogey on the card.

MOST CONSECUTIVE CUTS AT THE MASTERS

PLAYER	CUTS	YEARS
Tiger Woods	24*	1997-2024
Fred Couples	23	1983-2007
Gary Player	23	1959-1982
Tom Watson	21	1975-1995



Tigers Woods

Woods recovered a stroke on the par-5 eighth hole before bearing down on the course with all his grit and experience to navigate safely past the Amen Corner without a scar. The eleventh and eighteenth are the toughest this week, even more so under the gusting conditions. Woods managed to stay clean on both of those holes, underlining his resolve on Saturday.

As he walked through the back nine on even terms, his mighty gait and rock-like composure were reminiscent of his calculated assault in 2019, when he chose wisdom over wild attack. You might recall how Woods marched to victory amid the ruins around him — even as

Brooks Koepka, Francesco Molinari, and Tony Finau dissolved into wet adventures around the innocuous looking devil called Golden Bell.

In his typical fashion, despite emerging from a feisty round of golf at 1-over through 36 holes, Woods was bleeding wild ambition. Asked what it meant to make a 24th consecutive cut, Woods said, "It means I have a chance going into the weekend. I'm here. I have a chance to win the golf tournament."

"I don't know if they're all going to finish today, but I'm done. I got my two rounds in. Just need some food and some caffeine, and I'll be good to go."

The response was a window into the mind and heart of a champion, who reorganised the sport with his mind-numbing pursuit of excellence. In the process, he has demanded and succeeded in transforming the DNA of golf. If Arnold Palmer was the original piper of golf, Woods was the multiplier, turning the sport into the multi-billion dollar industry it is today. And this mindset of grinding out the last ounce of supple energy from his body and mind, even when limbs were falling out, has been the hallmark of his journey. No wonder, the 24th cut was no more than just a small needle to poke his good friend Fred Couples. Even though Woods chose to undermine his achievement, this feat has to stand besides his record of 142 tournaments without missing the cut, and 683 weeks as the world No. 1 in golf.

IPL 2024

KKR Seek Home Comfort Against LSG

Kolkata Knight Riders will seek home comfort in their bid to return to winning ways when they face Lucknow Super Giants today. The match will be KKR's first of the five consecutive matches at home and the two-time champions will be fully aware this can prove decisive to in their efforts to find a play-off spot after two years. While KKR will be overwhelming favourites at Eden, LSG with their unassuming approach will not give up easily, even as they will miss their pace sensation Mayank Yadav for a second successive match. **PTI**

KKR vs LSG	
VENUE: EDEN GARDENS	
TIME: 3:30PM	
(STAR SPORTS / JIO CINEMA)	
FORM	
L W W W L W W W	L W W W
HEAD-TO-HEAD	
00	03
LAST 3 MATCHES	
LSG won by 1 run	2023
LSG won by 2 runs	2022
LSG won by 75 runs	2022

CSK and MI Resume Rivalry in New Era

The legendary MS Dhoni will be in the spotlight in what could be his final game at the iconic Wankhede Stadium when defending champions Chennai Super Kings take on Mumbai Indians tonight. Dhoni returns to the hallowed turf of Wankhede for the first time as a non-captain of the CSK, potentially in his last IPL season. Even at 42, Dhoni's glove-work remains impeccable and so does his assessment of the game like always. But CSK will hope that his tactical acumen also helps them improve a dismal away record this season, having suffered two defeats on the road. **PTI**

MI vs CSK	
VENUE: WANKHEDE, MUMBAI	
TIME: 7:30PM	
(STAR SPORTS / JIO CINEMA)	
FORM	
W W L L L W L L W W	L W L L W
HEAD-TO-HEAD	
20	16
LAST 3 MATCHES	
CSK won by 6 wickets	2023
CSK won by 7 wickets	2023
MI won by 5 wickets	2022



Boria Majumdar

1962, Rahim and Indian Football's Greatest Triumph Largely Forgotten

"The brilliant Jakarta sun shone fiercely on the arena in the Senajan stadium here this afternoon but it could not dim India's great moment of triumph in the Asian Games football championship with India's ascending football star long in eclipse after the success in New Delhi in 1951 reaching its zenith with a victory over Korea that was as surprising as it was welcome. And to think that the footballers were almost offloaded as expendable cargo from the contingent to Jakarta." That's how 'The Times of India' reported on the 1962 Asian Games football final.

The architect of this triumph was Syed Abdul Rahim, a figure now largely forgotten in the history of Indian sport. In that context, the newly released biopic 'Maidaan', featuring Ajay Devgn's stellar portrayal of beloved coach and

mentor Rahim saab, is a poignant tribute to his legacy.

To understand Rahim's story, one needs to go back to the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, where India suffered a humiliating 1-10 defeat against Yugoslavia. It was the lowest moment in India's football history and Rahim attributed this to India's insistence on playing bare feet, putting them at a big disadvantage against opponents playing in modern boots.

Determined to completely revamp Indian football, Rahim urged the All India Football Federation (AIFF) to mandate boots for players and went on to put together a team with himself acting as scout. To Rahim's advantage there was serious talent available with PK Banerjee, Chuni Goswami, Tulsidas Balam and others emerging on the scene at the time.

The AIFF, acting on Rahim's sugges-



Indian football team celebrates after beating South Korea in the 1962 Asian Games final

tion, enforced the use of boots, which yielded immediate dividends. India had their best-ever result in the next Olympics at Melbourne in 1956 and became the first Asian nation to reach the semi-finals, and eventually finished fourth. A standout moment was the 4-2 victory over Australia, thanks to a Neville D'Souza hat-trick, propelling India to new heights. (D'Souza finished as the joint highest-scorer of the tournament with four goals in three games.)

But as has often been the case in Indian sport, Rahim fell out of favour with the AIFF, leading to a decline in India's fortunes. However, he was reinstated just before the 1962 Asian Games in Jakarta and that marked a turning

point in India's football history. However, the context of this victory can't be fully understood without looking into the geopolitics of the times.

The Asian Games is organised under the larger umbrella of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). They are Asia's mini-Olympics and as in the story of the Olympics itself, the Asian Games is the playground of international power play and diplomatic one-upmanship.

If the 1951 Delhi Asian Games was about India staking a claim to Asian leadership, the fourth Asian Games at Jakarta in 1962 were about Indonesia laying claim to that legacy.

India was central to this fascinating interlude in the global Olympic movement. When Indonesia refused to allow Taiwanese and Israeli athletes to participate, it was India who led the efforts that culminated in Indonesia's expulsion from the IOC.

On the morning of 3 September 1962, an irate mob 'stormed' the Indian embassy in Jakarta, forcing most of the members of the Indian delegation to leave the country. The day after this attack, India were

playing in the football finals. Anti-India passions were so high that the Indian team was treated virtually like an enemy nation. As the official Indian report put it, "Unfortunately, it was worse than the worst for when we... looked like winning, a very large

section of the crowd of a hundred thousand persistently booed the team. Not satisfied, it continued to boo when the victory ceremony to present the gold medals to our team was performed. The national anthem was drowned in the booring".

Rahim was instrumental in keeping the team focussed, despite battling with cancer. The disease tragically claimed his life just nine months later. Winning the gold against all odds by beating South Korea was proof of his tactical nous and acumen.

Ironically, India's greatest success in international football was eclipsed by a diplomatic crisis and overshadowed Rahim's contribution. The 1962 triumph could have been the 1983 moment for Indian football, but it got relegated to the dusty shelves of archives only to be resuscitated by the recent biopic.

← Syed Abdul Rahim
Indian Football History/Twitter