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INSIDE



Shah launches poll campaign in Rajasthan

JAIPUR
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday launched the Bharatiya Janata Party's campaign for the Lok Sabha election in Rajasthan with a massive roadshow in Sikar, one of the 12 seats in the State that will go to the polls in the first phase on April 19. » **PAGE 2**



Five killed as wall collapses in Puducherry

PUDUCHERRY
Five workers were killed in a wall collapse in Puducherry on Sunday morning. According to sources, the five were part of a team of 16 workers engaged in canal desilting work. Lt. Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan said a probe will be conducted into the incident. » **PAGE 4**

Russia keeps up attacks on Kyiv's energy facilities

KYIV
With Russia escalating its attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure, a cruise missile strike on in Ukraine's western Lviv region killed one man, while another man died in an attack in the northeast officials said on Sunday. » **PAGE 14**

'Sri Lanka held fair probe into Easter bombings'

COLOMBO
Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Sunday that the government has allowed a free and fair investigation for the independent execution of justice in the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. » **PAGE 14**

Democracy is in danger, warns Opposition

INDIA bloc holds rally in solidarity with Delhi CM Kejriwal and former Jharkhand CM Soren

Leaders urge poll body to ensure level playing field, flag 'coercive action' by Central agencies

Participants at the rally, including Trinamool Congress, recommit themselves to the alliance

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Under the banner of "Loktantra Bachao" or "Save Democracy", leaders of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) stood united at the Ramlila Maidan on Sunday in solidarity with Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who were arrested in separate cases by the Enforcement Directorate. The bloc also laid down their 2024 Lok Sabha election pitch, calling it a "fight to save the Constitution".



Call for change: Leaders of INDIA bloc attend the Loktantra Bachao rally at Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi on Sunday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

In speech after speech, the Opposition leaders lamented the lack of a level playing field for them in the election, citing "coercive action" by Central agencies against them and income tax notices financially crippling them. This was in effect the first public meeting of the 10-month-old INDIA bloc, which has been hit by desertions and conflicts over seat-sharing arrangements. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi asserted that without EVM manipulation and other

intimidatory tactics, the BJP and its allies cannot cross 180 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha election. "When pressure is put on umpires and captains, players are bought off and the match is won in cricket, it is called match-fixing. We have the Lok Sabha election before us. Who selected the umpires? Before the match started, two players were arrested... Narendra Modi is trying to do match-fixing in the election," Mr. Gandhi said. Mr. Gandhi sought to re-

mind the crowd of remarks from a BJP MP, who he did not name, that the BJP will change the Constitution when it gets over 400 seats. Sounding an alarm, Mr. Gandhi said, "If the Constitution is finished, this country will be finished" and "the country will be torn apart into different States". Wives of both incarcerated leaders - Mr. Kejriwal and Mr. Soren - spoke at the event. Sunita Kejriwal read out a message from the jailed Chief Minister, in which he promised five

guarantees - 24x7 power supply, free electricity for the poor, government schools and mohalla clinics in every village, a multi-specialty government hospital in every district, and minimum support price for all crops in adherence to the Swaminathan report. "Time to choose" Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge likened the BJP and RSS to "poison". "You have to decide if you want democracy or dictatorship... Those who sup-

port dictatorship need to be kicked out of the country. The BJP and RSS are like poison. You will die even if you taste poison," Mr. Kharge said. The Congress president also spoke to his allies, asking them to overcome their differences. The rally also served as an opportunity for many INDIA bloc participants to recommit themselves to the anti-BJP alliance. Trinamool Congress, which had refused to concede any seat to Congress in West Bengal, asserted that it "was, is, and will be part of

the INDIA bloc". RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav regaled the crowd with a parody of "Tum Toh Dhokhebaaz Ho", a song from actor Govinda's blockbuster Hindi film Saajan Chale Sasural. The actor had recently joined the Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde), which is part of the BJP-led NDA. The song mocked the Modi government's alleged failed promises. He said that the BJP's campaign tagline "Abki baar, 400 paar" (This time, over 400 seats) indicates that they have already fixed the EVMS. Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav commented that Uttar Pradesh knows how to warmly welcome people and bid them farewell. Taking a dig at the BJP, he asked why the ruling party which is confident of winning 400 seats is scared of Mr. Kejriwal and other Opposition leaders. But amidst the uniformity in the message, there were also underlying contradictions. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury in his speech underlining the importance of the venue said, "It was here, 47 years back, that a historic meeting was held where Jai

Prakash Narayan raised the slogan 'Freedom or servitude' and in the election that year, 'freedom' won. Today again we are demanding freedom for our secular democratic nation from certain forces," he said. The irony that the venue in 2011 hosted the Anna Hazare movement - that led to the rise of AAP and the fall of the Congress governments in the Centre and Delhi - was also not lost on the assembled crowd. At the conclusion of the rally, on behalf of the INDIA bloc, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra read out the five-part demands. The Opposition parties demanded that the Election Commission ensure a level playing field for them and stop "coercive action" against them by Central agencies. They also demanded the immediate release of Mr. Soren and Mr. Kejriwal. The parties also urged the Supreme Court to set up a Special Investigation Team to probe the allegations of quid pro quo, extortion and money laundering by the BJP using the electoral bonds. **RELATED REPORTS** » **PAGE 6**

Rekindling spirit



A midnight special prayer being held at the Holy Rosary Church in Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu on the occasion of Easter. L. BALACHANDAR

Non-residents will have a say in Kerala's voting pattern

Aabha Raveendran
KOZHIKODE
With the latest available statistics from the Election Commission showing 88,000 expatriate voters from Kerala, several candidates or their poll managers from constituencies in northern parts of the State are embarking on foreign visits with the intention of renewing support, both in terms of votes and funds, ahead of the Lok Sabha election. **FULL REPORT** » **PAGE 3**

Israeli strike on hospital camp in central Gaza kills 4

Associated Press
DEIR AL-BALAH
An Israeli air strike hit a tent camp in the courtyard of a crowded hospital in central Gaza on Sunday, killing four Palestinians and wounding another 17, including journalists working nearby. The incident happened at the al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, where thousands of people have sheltered after fleeing their homes elsewhere in the war-ravaged territory. The Israeli military said it struck a command centre of the Islamic Jihad militant group and claimed the hospital's functioning was not affected. Tens of thousands of people have sought shelter in Gaza's hospitals since the start of the war nearly six months ago, viewing them as relatively safe from air

strikes. Israel accuses Hamas and other militants of operating in and around medical facilities, and troops have raided a number of hospitals. Israeli strikes killed 77 Palestinians in Gaza in the past 24 hours, as Egypt hosted an Israeli delegation for a new round of talks in a bid to secure a truce with Gaza's Hamas rulers. Hamas would not be present at the talks in Cairo, an official said on Sunday, as it waited to hear from mediators on whether a new Israeli offer was on the table. The head of the World Food Program, Cindy McCain, told CBS on Sunday that WFP was able to get just nine trucks into Gaza on Saturday. "That's nothing. We just cannot continue this way," she said, calling for unrestricted access.



Scattered remains: Palestinians check the damage at a makeshift camp in front of al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital on Sunday. AFP

Congress 'callously' gave away Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka: PM

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI/COIMBATORE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday came down heavily on the Congress over the ceding of Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka in 1974 by the then-Indira Gandhi government, an issue that has gained prominence during the Lok Sabha election. He cited a news report and posted on X: "Eye-opening and startling! New facts reveal how Congress callously gave away Katchatheevu..." He added that "weakening India's unity, integrity, and interests has been Congress's way of

working for 75 years and counting". The news report was based on replies received under a Right to Information (RTI) query filed by BJP Tamil Nadu chief K. Annamalai, on the ceding of the island situated in the Palk Strait to Sri Lanka by India in 1974. The RTI replies give details over the conflicting claims on the island, with Sri Lanka (then-Ceylon) pressing its claims soon after Independence, as detailed in the news report, with the Opposition even during Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's time questioning the Government of India for being in-



Pilgrims from Sri Lanka and India leave Katchatheevu island after the festival of St. Anthony's Church on in March 2023. L. BALACHANDAR

clined to cede the territory. After agreeing to cede the island to Sri Lanka in 1974, Indira Gandhi informed then-Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and late Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader M. Karunanidhi. The Congress and the DMK are in alliance in Tamil Na-

du for the election. The narrative around the island is not new, with Mr. Modi raising the issue in August last year during a debate on a no-trust motion brought against his government in the Lok Sabha. At that time too, Mr. Modi had pointed out that "those attacking" his government on various issues needed to be questioned on Katchatheevu island and the circumstances under which it had been ceded. The remarks by the Prime Minister on Sunday underscored his attack on the Congress on the question of the integrity of India's sovereign claims, as well as his electoral push towards South India, especially Tamil Nadu. **'Retrieve island'** Speaking near Palladam, Mr. Annamalai said the Tamil Nadu BJP was determined to retrieve Katchatheevu from Sri Lanka. He said it was the only way to have a permanent solution to the problems faced by fishermen in the State. He said the Tamil Nadu BJP had submitted this demand to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar about a year ago. **CONGRESS HITS BACK** » **PAGE 4**

ELECTIONS 2024

Those who looted country will repent: PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lashed out at the Opposition for allegedly being soft on corruption and national security. Launching the election campaign of the National Democratic Alliance from Meerut, he said, "Those who have looted the country's money will have to repent. I will ensure that those who

have grabbed your money will have to return it." He alleged that the corrupt were making the rounds of courts during his tenure. "They are targeting me but I am not afraid," Mr. Modi added. The 2024 election, he said, would be between those who want to save the corrupt and those who want to hold the dishonest to account. "It is not just the election to form a government but it is going to be a vote for a developed nation and third largest economy," he said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing a public rally in Meerut on Sunday. PTI

Cong. discusses names for Odisha, Bihar

The Central Election Committee of the Congress met on Sunday to discuss names of Lok Sabha candidates for Bihar and Odisha. There was no official statement after the meeting, but sources said the party will field senior leader Tariq Anwar from Katihar and will repeat

MP Mohammad Jawed from Kishanganj. As part of the grand alliance with the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Left parties, the Congress will contest nine Lok Sabha seats. In Odisha, names for 18 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats are said to have been discussed. Sources said Srikanth Kumar Jena, who rejoined the Congress recently, is likely to be fielded from Balasore. Koraput MP Saptagiri Ulaka is also likely to be repeated. So far, it has announced the names of 211 candidates.



The BJP has given the slogan of 'ab ki baar 400 paar' but it has not been able to find its own party members who can be fielded from Punjab
SUKHINDER RANDHAWA
Punjab Congress leader

Former Bihar Cong. chief Anil Sharma quits

In a setback to the Congress in Bihar ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, former State president Anil Sharma on Sunday quit the party, claiming that it was stuck in a "disastrous" partnership with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). He also played the recent induction of controversial former MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav. PTI



The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is saying '400 paar' [cross 400 seats in Lok Sabha election]. I challenge them to cross the 200-seat mark first
MAMATA BANERJEE
West Bengal Chief Minister

Biggest challenge yet for the great Indian election

The 2024 election is no longer about victory and defeat, but about whether the poll process itself is free and fair. Selective law enforcement by state agencies under the control of the incumbent regime and questions about the autonomy of the Election Commission have cast a cloud on the democratic exercise, writes **Varghese K. George**

OVERVIEW

Democracies survive as long as those who lose elections do not question the fairness of the process. When the losers think, rightly or wrongly, that they have been short-changed by the process, democracy is undermined. India appears to be at a crossroads precisely for this reason. The central question about 2024 is no longer about victory and defeat, but about whether the process of election itself is free and fair.

What casts a cloud on the integrity of the process on the eve of the election is the selective law enforcement by state agencies under the control of the incumbent BJP that target Opposition parties and leaders. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo and Delhi Chief Minister is in the custody of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), accused in an alleged corruption case. The principal Opposition party Congress finds its funds frozen by the Income Tax Department that is purportedly investigating discrepancies in filings by the party from several years ago.

The Election Commission (EC) is facing questions regarding its independence, after one of its members resigned abruptly and without explanation, which was followed by the hurried appointment of two new members by the BJP government. Earlier, the government had given itself the authority to appoint the members of the EC, overlooking suggestions by the Supreme Court and the Opposition, for a more consultative mechanism. The political executive has complete power to appoint the Election Commissioners. Questions about electronic voting machines, and the paper trail of voting, have lingered. The EVMs are tamper-proof, but that is not enough for public trust. Trust has to be based on the ability to verify. The EC has refused to engage with the Opposition on this issue.

The I-T Department restrictions on the accounts of the Congress closely followed the Supreme Court's directive on the electoral bonds scheme. As it turns out, the opaque scheme had worked to the advantage of the BJP. For these reasons, the Opposition says that the playing field is rigged in favour of the ruling BJP. Incumbent parties may have tried to tilt the scale in their favour occasionally in the past too; and the EC has failed to be non-partisan and effective often enough. Occasionally, Opposition leaders have questioned the integrity of the elections. But no time in the history of Indian democracy has all Opposition parties and leaders shared a common feeling that the election process does not give them a fair chance. This alone makes the 2024 election remarkable in the evolution of Indian democracy.

Re-election bid

When a regime seeks re-election, it ends up accountable to the voters. The BJP has managed to change this classic dynamic of incumbency by the sheer audacity of hype. The hype is less about its performance of the past 10 years, but the coming future – not merely the next five-year term, but of decades and centuries to come.

All politics is based on some understanding of time periods. The BJP campaign focuses on the past follies of the Opposition; the party has rescued the country, but the best is yet to come, it says. The entire Opposition



ILLUSTRATION: SOUMYADIP SINHA

The Opposition campaign against the Modi government hinges on the related themes of authoritarianism and corruption. But whether these issues are striking a chord with the public remains to be seen

most parts of the country. Today, all these attributes are self-promoted by politicians who want to quickly climb the popularity ladder. In some instances, leaders have dramatically turned themselves into projecting such personas. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is a case in point. When he was a Congress leader, he was accused of being a Muslim appeaser. Today, he leaves no opportunity to be at the other extreme of the spectrum.

The Congress has been caught between the masses that have moved right and its own installed intellectual capacity that is revolted by the new unfamiliar grammar of politics. It had thrived on ideological ambiguity but the brazen clarity of the BJP on Hindutva has unsettled it. The Congress today is also the only available, viable option for those opposing the BJP from the right and the left, but the party is struggling to fit into this role of expanding as a *parivar* (family), like the Sangh

Parivar. There are more people thronging the Congress – including parties and thinkers who were once fiercely opposed to it. They assess the inevitability of the Congress as an opposing pole to the BJP. A case in point is activist and scholar Yogendra Yadav who was a staunch critic of the party and subscribed to the slogan of "Congress-mukt Bharat." But most parties are also not comfortable with the idea of the Congress returning as hegemon – that is yet another fear of the known past. That partly explains the troubles within the anti-BJP camp.

An unintended consequence of this role of the Congress as the antithesis of Hindutva. A recent incident of the selection, and subsequent withdrawal of a party candidate, for his right-wing leanings is a case in point. The Congress party has been home for holders of various opinions including those who pander to religious sentiments, historically. Its veteran Pranab Mukherjee concluded his political career by attending a landmark event of the RSS; Meenakshi Natarajan, a key functionary in the party today, and self-identified Gandhian, had in the early 2000s coined a slogan against the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee – *Gau Hamari Mata Hei, Vajpayee Usko Khata Hei*, – Cow is our mother, Vajpayee eats it! Such has been the Congress – for all its good and bad.

The BJP has chosen to be ideologically rigid as a platform; the Congress is unsure of its own role in the light of the expectations that various shades of the Opposition to the BJP has projected on it. 2024 could bring a lot of clarity, including and most important, on the question of the integrity of election itself. And the course of Indian democracy.

can be cornered through this framework. All of them have skeletons in their cupboards, and nearly all of them are run by families. The old social coalitions that controlled power before 2014 lost out partly because of their loss of legitimacy, misgovernance and corruption. The BJP thrives on the fear among sufficient number of voters about the return of the old regime. In other words, anti-incumbency, in BJP's telling, should be against the Opposition. The BJP combines this with a promise of the future of abstract glory and achievements. This combination of fear and seduction works only to the extent of the trust that the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have, and the trust deficiency for the Opposition and its leaders. As long as the current leaders of the Opposition who were part of the power structure earlier are the challengers to Mr. Modi, the incumbent has an advantage.

But this perception itself is considerably a construct. There is a genuine opinion that each actor has; and then each actor has an idea of what the average opinion is on the issue, which is different from the average of the genuine opinions of all actors. This thought experiment by J.M. Keynes could work well for the political field as well as the stock market. The public opinion about the reality is more consequential than the reality itself. That is where hype works. The Opposition campaign

The BJP campaign focuses on the past follies of the Opposition; the party has rescued the country, but the best is yet to come, it says

against the Modi government hinges on the related themes of authoritarianism and corruption. The Opposition points out the erosion of institutional governance, the rule of law, and instance of favouritism bestowed upon the friends of the ruling establishment. The revelations around the electoral bonds scheme have provided the Opposition campaign enough arsenal on both counts. But whether these issues are striking a chord with the public remains to be seen. Only a decade ago, Indian public was outraged by the theory of notional loss to the exchequer but today anything even remotely comparable as public responses to governance or political issues is missing. What could be the reasons? People possibly think authoritarianism is the cure for corruption. Arvind Kejriwal, who is today facing the wrath of the BJP government, rose to prominence by promising exactly that. In a Pew study last year, 85% of respondents in India said that military rule or rule by an authoritarian leader would be good for the country – the highest share among the 24 countries surveyed. Not only

that, India had the third-lowest share of respondents who thought it was important for the Opposition parties to operate freely. What socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai terms "democracy fatigue" is pronounced in India, with a discredited old elite still holding ground, shrunken as it is.

So assuming that people do care about corruption, what follows? They might have to consider whether rule by a strongman is better. They would have to consider whose charges are more credible – of the BJP and Mr. Modi that the Opposition is a cabal of corrupt leaders serving only the interests of their families or that of the Opposition against the regime that it is using the mascot of nationalism for endless power and perfidy. This battle of nerves is also fought on an uneven field. The Supreme Court recently stalled the Centre's move to fact-check and label information published on public platforms, but the ruling party's capacity to control the narrative remains strong.

On authoritarianism question

On the question of authoritarianism, the Opposition is in a fix – accusing Mr. Modi of being authoritarian could actually work in his favour. Therein lies a fundamental shift in the framework in which democratic politics operates in India. A decade ago, being seen as anti-minority, authoritarian or promoting crony capitalism would be electorally costly for a politician in

Russia's invasion impaired scientists' ability to collect climate data

Scientists collecting data in the Arctic already face an uphill battle, with the unforgiving weather and scavenging polar bears. The bears sometimes accidentally destroy instruments. The lack of data because of the conflict is an additional, and exacerbating, variable. Without data results are irretrievably skewed and distorted

Rohini Subrahmanyam

Human activities have caused the earth to slowly heat up, and now it looks like war - another very human phenomenon - is preventing scientists from accurately measuring how rapidly our climate is changing.

Global temperatures are rising, but temperatures in the Arctic region are rising even faster. Studies suggest a grim reality: that the Arctic is warming nearly four-times faster than the rest of the world. The consequences of this go way beyond just the Arctic. The melting permafrost and rising sea-levels can have devastating effects on local ecosystems as well as the climate.

Collaborations have collapsed

Many research stations in the Arctic are part of the International Network for Terrestrial Research and Monitoring in the Arctic (INTERACT). They continuously monitor environmental conditions in the different countries in the region. One country that makes up almost half of it is Russia, but since it invaded Ukraine, foreign scientists haven't had access to data from Russian field stations. Global collaborations with Russia have collapsed since the invasion, and scientists from outside Russia who were earlier able to travel to field sites in the country to collect data can't do so anymore. Climate projects that run on European funding also don't allow them to officially collaborate with Russian partners for now.

"We have to deal with this invisible wall, where there is no flow of data from the Russian side to our side. It is kind of like a blind spot," said Efrén López-Blanco, an Arctic researcher at Aarhus University in Denmark. "And I want to believe that it is a temporary blind spot."

Dr. López-Blanco and his colleagues recently reported that excluding data from Russia has heavily biased climate data. "When there is an increase in bias, there is a decrease in our ability to either describe or track Arctic changes," he said.

A hidden difference

The researchers used multiple earth-system models (ESMs) to understand ecosystem conditions across the Arctic region. They focused on eight "essential variables" of the Arctic ecosystem, including temperature, vegetation, precipitation, and snow depth. ESMs are fully coupled climate, land, and ocean computational models that can be used to generate data for the entire planet. Those used in the study



More than 1,000 billion tonnes of ice have been lost in the past four decades and not been accounted for, one study found. The INTERACT research stations in the Arctic are key to keeping track of such trends. OLIVIER MORIN/AFP

were the same ones the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change uses to assess the world's changing climate.

First, the researchers wanted to use the models to find out if INTERACT stations in the Arctic, including the Russian ones, are able to potentially collect data representative of the pan-Arctic region. They examined 60 of the 94 INTERACT stations, including only those above 59 degrees N latitude. "Monitoring across the Arctic is not standardised," Dr. López-Blanco said. So he and his colleagues primarily used model-generated data.

When they compared all the INTERACT stations' data with the pan-Arctic data on the eight ecosystem variables, they realised there was already a difference in what INTERACT sites could estimate about the changes in the pan-Arctic region. These differences lead to a bias in the representation of ecosystem conditions in the Arctic.

Problem with excluding Russia

If so happens that INTERACT sites are located in warmer and wetter parts of the Arctic and regions with less biomass and soil carbon, which could be contributing to this bias.

Once the 17 Russian stations in Siberia were excluded, they found the differences - and thus the biases - increased further, and the ability to accurately describe changes in the Arctic decreased further.

Specifically, when the researchers used the ESMs to predict the state of ecosystem variables in 2100, they found current biases in the estimation of ecosystem



The Arctic is warming four-times faster than the rest of the world. The consequences of this go beyond just the Arctic. Melting permafrost and rising sea-levels can have devastating effects on ecosystems and the climate

variables after excluding Russian data showed a change similar to what is expected after 80 years of climate change.

Countering the bias

The result, Dr. López-Blanco said, is a decline in "our ability to inform management and conservation strategies and... our chances to properly mitigate the negative consequences of climate change."

With Russian data continuing to stay out of reach, Dr. López-Blanco suggested looking for other regions in the Arctic with similar environments to Siberia, such as parts of northern Scandinavia and Canada, and collecting data from there to partially counter the bias, "at least in the short term until the war is over."

"In the climate change research field, there is already a very good tendency to share data, as we are working together on something that affects us all," according to Dr. López-Blanco. "We still need more coordination between the stations, standardisation in terms of using similar sensors and methods, and more open-source data sharing. These elements

are key to gaining a better understanding of current Arctic conditions and preparing effectively for future changes."

'Already an uphill battle'

Hrishikesh Chandanpurkar, a fellow at the Centre for Sustainability, Environment, and Climate Change at FLAME University, Pune, and a World Bank consultant, said research stations should be as well distributed across a region as possible. Bearing in mind the spatial variability of the data and not just the logistical ease of setting up and maintaining the stations will help mitigate biases.

"Don't stop sharing critical scientific data" is also something that could be worked into the protocols of activities that are permitted to go on even during a war," Dr. Chandanpurkar said. "Each country is co-dependent on other countries because of the causes and the impacts of climate change. So it makes sense to have a system in place where we are safeguarding a continuous observation network and its sharing."

Scientists collecting data in the Arctic already face an uphill battle with the unforgiving weather and polar bears that sometimes accidentally destroy instruments. But lack of data because of war is an additional, and exacerbating, variable. "We people of science care about collecting our data, filling knowledge gaps, and understanding the ecosystem processes that we are interested in," Dr. López-Blanco said. What they quantified in the paper is "the collateral damage of something that is happening elsewhere".

(Rohini Subrahmanyam is a freelance journalist.)

THE GIST

Research stations in the Arctic are part of an Arctic monitoring network. One country that makes up almost half of it is Russia, but since it invaded Ukraine, foreign scientists haven't had access to data from Russian field stations. Global collaborations with Russia have collapsed

Lack of data from the Russian creates a 'blind spot'. Excluding data from Russia heavily biases climate data which 'decreases ability to either describe or track Arctic changes'

Current biases in the estimation of ecosystem variables after excluding Russian data showed a change similar to what is expected after 80 years of climate change

BIG SHOT



Iraq is part of the 'Fertile Crescent', a swath of arable land sweeping from the Mediterranean to the Gulf that has been farmed for thousands of years. Today it has been devastated by dams on the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, lower rainfall, and decades of armed conflict, forcing farmers like Ismail Ibrahim (above) to plant *sidr* trees that require much less irrigation. REUTERS

WHAT IS IT?

Punnett square: a genetics puzzle

Arkatapa Basu

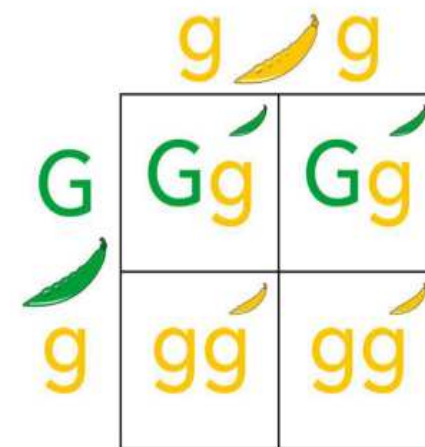
The little four-square grid we drew in school while learning about genetic crossing has a name: the Punnett Square. These squares are a way to predict the possible genetic outcomes of the offspring when two individuals with known genotypes are crossed.

The Punnett Square is named after British geneticist Reginald Punnett. Drawing these squares is simple. Imagine a grid, usually with four squares. Along the top and side of the grid, you list the possible genetic traits of one parent on one side and the other parent on the other side. Then, you fill in the squares by combining the traits from each parent.

Each square effectively represents a possible combination of traits that their offspring could inherit. It's a simple way to visualise the probabilities of different traits showing up in the offspring.

Punnett Squares are commonly used in biology to understand inheritance patterns, like when you learn about dominant and recessive genes in school.

A Punnett Square is a useful tool that helps predict the variations and probabilities resulting from cross-breeding. It is often used to study the outcomes of cross-breeding but it can also be used to understand the genetic



In this Punnett square, the colour green in unripe pods is determined by the dominant allele 'G' and the colour yellow in unripe pods is determined by a recessive allele 'g'. PBRKS

traits in the offspring of animals, including humans. Researchers typically use them together with Mendelian inheritance, a fundamental concept in genetics discovered by Gregor Mendel.

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Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

People facing hunger due to drought in South Africa

20 million. An estimated nine million people, half of them children, need help in Malawi. More than six million in Zambia, three million of them children, are impacted by the drought, UNICEF said. AP

Gas price for natural gas produced from difficult areas

9.87 in \$. The government on Sunday cut the price of natural gas produced from difficult areas to \$9.87 per million British thermal units in line with the softening of gas prices. PTI

Increase in Ivory Coast's cocoa farm gate price

50 in percent. Ivory Coast will increase the official cocoa farm gate price to 1,500 CFA francs (\$2.47) per kg from the current 1,000 CFA. Cocoa prices have more than tripled over the past year. REUTERS

Number of infra projects hit by cost overruns

443 As many as 443 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of ₹150 crore or above, were hit by a cost overrun of more than ₹4.92 lakh crore in February 2024. PTI

Amount of tax demand in new I-T notice for Congress

1,745 in ₹ crore. With this latest notice, the Income Tax department has raised a total demand of ₹3,567 crore from the Congress. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Kejriwal's arrest: allegations and defence

What allegations does the Enforcement Directorate (ED) level against Arvind Kejriwal in the money laundering case related to the Delhi Excise Policy case? What potential legal implications does the ED's claim of vicarious liability hold for the Aam Aadmi Party and its assets?

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

Delhi Court, on March 28, extended the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) custody of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal till April 1 in a money laundering case registered in connection with the Delhi Excise Policy case. Mr. Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 after his plea for interim protection from arrest was rejected by the Delhi High Court, marking the first instance of a sitting Chief Minister being jailed. A plea challenging his arrest was withdrawn from the Supreme Court on March 22. On March 27, the Delhi High Court denied interim relief and granted the agency time till April 2 to respond to Mr. Kejriwal's plea and posted the matter for further consideration on April 3.

What are the ED allegations against the Chief Minister?

The case arose from a report submitted by Delhi Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to Lieutenant Governor (L-G) Vinai Kumar Saxena in July 2022 alleging that there were procedural lapses in the formulation of the Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22, which came into force in November 2021 but was later scrapped in July 2022.

The Chief Secretary alleged that kickbacks received by the Aam Admi Party (AAP) leaders from operators of alcohol businesses for preferential treatment were used to "influence" the 2022 Assembly elections in Punjab and Goa. Subsequently, the ED claimed that the scam involved giving wholesale liquor businesses to private entities with a fixed margin of 12% for a 6% kickback.

Contending that Mr. Kejriwal was the "kingpin and key conspirator" of the scam, the agency in its remand application said that the excise policy was drafted "considering the favours to be granted to the South Group", a group of influential persons from South India who purportedly secured undue favours to establish wholesale businesses and paid the political party ₹100 crore in return. On March 15, K. Kavitha, Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader was arrested for allegedly being part of this group. After her arrest, the ED for the first time alleged that Mr. Kejriwal was also a conspirator in the case.

Others accused in the case include Raghav Magunta, Ongole MP Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy's son, and P. Sarath Chandra Reddy, the son of P.V. Ramprasad Reddy and co-founder of Hyderabad-based Aurobindo Pharma. Both later turned approvers in the case.

"AAP is a beneficiary which exists as a company. Every person responsible for the conduct of the company is responsible... apart from being liable as an individual, the CM is also vicariously liable (as the national convenor of the party)," appearing for the ED, Additional Solicitor General (ASG) S.V. Raju argued. It was further alleged that proceeds of about ₹45 crore received from the South group were used by AAP for election campaigning in Goa.

What is Kejriwal's defence?

During the proceedings before the High Court, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Mr. Kejriwal, contended that his arrest was solely based on the statements made by accused persons who later turned approvers in the case. He further underscored that the ED had failed to rely on any independent evidence to corroborate these statements, as required by law.

Comparing such approvers to a "Trojan horse," Mr. Singhvi pointed out that the accused persons succeeded in



On watch: The court granted ED time till April 2 to respond to Arvind Kejriwal's plea. AP

securing bail only after turning approvers.

Pointing out the context in which statements were extracted out of Sarath Chandra Reddy as an approver, the senior counsel remarked, "There are two statements which are not against me. Now comes the statement after arrest. He continues to maintain his stance (which is) not against me in nine statements. These nine statements are not out in six of the prosecution complaints. It is suppressed and they are making a mockery of the procedure. He then starts singing.. eighteen months later. Then nine days after the statement against me, he gets bail on medical grounds and twenty days later he gets pardoned."

Similarly, it was alleged that Raghav Magunta was granted bail only after his father gave statements to the ED incriminating the Chief Minister.

Notably, Mr. Kejriwal while personally arguing his case before Delhi's Rouse Avenue court on March 27, alleged that the ED was running an extortion racket in the name of investigation.

"Sarath Reddy [director of Aurobindo Pharma] has donated ₹55 crore to the BJP. I have proof that it's an extortion racket," he said. Data divulged by the Election Commission revealed that Aurobindo Pharma Limited, which has Mr. Reddy as one of its directors, donated ₹5 crore to the BJP in 2022 through the now invalidated electoral bonds scheme, just five days after he was taken into custody. Another ₹25 crore was donated to the BJP after Mr. Reddy turned approver in the case.

Can the ED implead AAP as an accused?

The ED's claim that Mr. Kejriwal is "vicariously liable" for the offence of money laundering could result in AAP being subsequently impleaded as an accused in the case. In such a scenario, the ED could have the political party's assets attached or confiscated as per the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA). Vicarious liability is a legal principle that holds a person or entity responsible for the actions of others. It is based on the concept of agency which presumes that a person or entity has been authorised to act on behalf of another person or entity.

ASG's argument stems from Mr. Kejriwal's role as the Chief Minister in the formulation of the liquor excise policy that purportedly generated "tainted funds" as proceeds of the crime. Further, his role as the convenor of AAP has been cited to explain his knowing participation in the alleged use of this laundered money in the Punjab and Goa Assembly elections. Similar arguments were raised during the bail hearings of former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia who is an accused in the case and is currently under judicial custody.

Section 70 of the PMLA which is often invoked to investigate companies

stipulates that when an offence of money laundering is committed by a company, each individual who at the time of the crime was in charge or responsible, being a part of the entity conducting business, "shall be deemed guilty of the contravention and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly." However, a person will not be prosecuted if they can prove that the contravention took place without their knowledge or that they had exercised all due diligence to prevent such contravention. Further, Explanation 2 of the provision clarifies that a company is a separate legal entity and can be prosecuted independently of its members or those who operate it.

Notably, the provision contains a crucial explanation that could bring a "political party" under the ambit of the anti-money laundering law by deeming it to be a "company" incorporated under the Companies Act, 2013. Explanation 1 defines "company" to mean "any body corporate and includes a firm or other association of individuals." Since Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, refers to a political party as "any association or body of individual citizens of India" – the phrase "association of individuals" under Section 70 of the PMLA could include within its ambit a political party. If AAP is named as an accused in the case, it will be the first instance of a political party being brought under the ambit of the PMLA.

What is the evidentiary value of an approver's testimony?

An approver is an accomplice who is directly or indirectly involved in the commission of an offence and has been granted a pardon by the court under Section 306 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, (CrPC) with a view to securing his testimony against other persons guilty of the offence. Once an accomplice turns into an approver, he acquires the status of a prosecution witness.

But an approver who deposes falsely can be tried again for the offence for which a pardon was granted as per Section 308 of the CrPC.

Courts over time have however warned that the testimony of an approver must be relied upon with utmost caution since it is *prima facie* of a tainted character. Additionally, illustration (b) of Section 114 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872, stipulates that the court will presume that the testimony of an accomplice is unworthy of credit unless it is corroborated by material particulars.

In *Mrinal Das and Ors. v. State of Tripura* (2011), the Supreme Court ruled that it would be risky to base the conviction of an accused solely on the uncorroborated testimony of an approver. Thus, to ensure that he is a reliable witness, an approver's testimony must be

accompanied by independent corroborative evidence.

Elucidating further on the threshold of corroborative evidence required in such cases, the top court relied on *Sheshamma Bhumanna Yadav v. State of Maharashtra* (1970) wherein it was held, "Corroboration must connect or tend to connect the accused with the crime. When it is said that the corroborative evidence must implicate the accused in material particulars it means that it is not enough that a piece of evidence tends to confirm the truth of a part of the testimony to be corroborated. That evidence must confirm that part of the testimony which suggests that the crime was committed by the accused. If a witness says that the accused and he stole the sheep and he put the skins in a certain place, the discovery of the skins in that place would not corroborate the evidence of the witness as against the accused. But if the skins were found in the accused's house, this would corroborate because it would tend to confirm the statement that the accused had some hand in the theft."

Can money laundering be a standalone offence?

While seeking Mr. Kejriwal's remand, ASG argued before a Delhi Court on March 22 that "one need not be an accused in the predicate offence to be an accused under PMLA."

The essence of such an argument is that even if the Chief Minister has not been arrayed as an accused in the primary case, i.e. the Delhi excise policy case, he can be booked for the offence of money laundering with respect to the "proceeds of crime" derived from the case. This brings to the fore the debate of whether money laundering is a standalone offence or if it is extrinsically linked to a larger predicate offence.

The PMLA contains a list of scheduled offences which are also called predicate offences.

In this case, the predicate offence that Mr. Kejriwal is to be tied to would be under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. However, last year the Supreme Court clarified in *Pavana Dibbur v. Enforcement Directorate* that an accused in a PMLA case, who becomes involved after the commission of the scheduled offence by assisting in the concealment or use of proceeds of crime, need not be an accused in the scheduled offence.

The only requirement is that the the proceeds of crime that the accused has allegedly concealed or possessed must simply be linked to the scheduled offence.

In this case, only after the conclusion of the trial in the excise scam can it be determined if Mr. Kejriwal has laundered the money that forms the proceeds of the crime.

Is non-cooperation with ED summons a ground for arrest?

Before being taken into custody, Mr. Kejriwal had ignored nine summons issued by the ED claiming that they were illegal. His counsel however argued that non-cooperation cannot be a ground for arrest since it will be hit by the fundamental right against self-incrimination.

Last year, a Supreme Court bench of Justices A.S. Bopanna and P.V. Sanjay Kumar in *Pankaj Bansal v. Union of India* underscored that a person could not be arrested by the ED for mere non-cooperation in response to summons issued under Section 50 of the PMLA. Addressing contentions of the ED that the responses given by the accused were "evasive" in nature, the Court pointed out, "In any event, it is not open to the ED to expect an admission of guilt from the person summoned for interrogation and assert that anything short of such admission would be an 'evasive reply.'"

THE GIST

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was arrested in connection with a money laundering case related to the Delhi Excise Policy issue.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) alleged that Mr. Kejriwal was the key conspirator in a scam involving kickbacks from alcohol businesses, influencing elections in Punjab and Goa.

Mr. Kejriwal's defence highlighted a lack of independent evidence and questioned the reliability of approver testimonies.

The ED's claim of vicarious liability could implicate AAP, potentially leading to asset confiscation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

Concerns were raised about the reliability of approver testimonies and the need for corroborative evidence.

NH works stop as netas hit campaign trail



Poll pause: The govt. may end FY24 with the construction of only 94% of the targeted 13,814 km NHs. THE HINDU

Rishi Ranjan Kala

Despite a brisk pace of road construction during fiscal year 2023-24, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is likely to miss its target. It may end FY24 with the construction of only 94% of the targeted 13,814 km of national highways (NH).

Moreover, awarding of NH projects also slid year-on-year during April to February in FY24 due to delayed approval of the revised proposal for phase I of the Bharatmala Pariyojana (BMP) road development scheme.

The Ministry's target includes award of about 10,000 km of NH projects and construction of 12,000-13,000 km of highways in FY24. However, market watchers point out that construction and awarding will be subded until at least July this year, and may pick up after the culmination of the Lok Sabha elections.

Vinay Kumar G., Vice-President and Sector Head Corporate Ratings of ICRA, says the Ministry's execution improved by 13% y-o-y to 9,088 km in 11 months of FY24, backed by higher spending. Overall execution for FY24 is expected to increase by 11-16% to 11,500-12,000 km. Its awarding of NH projects during 11 months of FY24 declined by about 35% y-o-y to 4,872 km.

"ICRA expects the awards to decline to 6,000-6,500 km in FY24, compared to 12,375 km in FY23, due to delay in the approval of revised cost estimates for BMP and the muted awarding in Q4 FY24 with the model code of conduct in place ahead of the general elections," he says. (The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

Creating topical marketing campaigns that leverage some special moments

Moment marketing works so well because it leverages a subject which is already on top of the consumer's mind; when a brand brings a novel perspective to the very same subject — sometimes witty or humorous, at other times a gracious tribute — people love it; it is also cost effective

COMMENT

Harish Bhat

My favourite marketing moment of the recently concluded Tata Women's Premier League (WPL) came when Ellyse Perry, playing for team RCB, hit a huge shot that broke the window glass of the Tata Punch.ev car displayed near the boundary of the stadium. By doing this, she shattered yet another glass ceiling, in the midst of a tournament which is proving to be an inflection point for women's sports in India.

The Tata Punch.ev team promptly capitalised on this totally unplanned moment. They immortalised the event by taking the same broken window glass, adding a bolt to it to represent the electric spirit of the game, and gifting the framed broken glass to Ms. Perry. Below the frame, they added, "#Perry Powerful Punch".

This was a smart marketing move that took the Internet by storm. In fact, it got this EV the kind of positive attention that no paid advertising campaign could have delivered.

Bananas and Butter

This reminded me of an interesting tactical marketing campaign food-deliv-



Adding punch: Ellyse Perry during the eliminator match of the Women's Premier League 2024 between Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bangalore. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ery platform Zomato had implemented four years ago. Actor Rahul Bose, who was staying at a five-star hotel, had ordered a couple of bananas to eat. The hotel provided him two bananas, and charged ₹442 for the humble fruits. He promptly wrote about his experience on Twitter.

Zomato's marketing team seized this moment to quickly run their campaign. One of the tongue-in-cheek posts said — "You could get a banana milkshake and banana split (on Zomato) in less than the amount the 52-year old actor paid for his bananas".

The big daddy of moment marketing in India is Amul. Amul's topical hoardings are legendary,



If the campaign catches the imagination, there is the possibility of users generating their own related content which can amplify the core campaign

and have played a key role in creating the cool, fun image of this milk and butter brand. They cover subjects from sports to politics to moon landings, and they often appear within a few hours of the event having occurred. Amul has been brilliantly capitalising on moments of national interest for over 50 years

now, ever since the first hoarding showcasing the Amul girl appeared in 1967. The examples bring into focus the power of moment marketing. Moment marketing works so well because it leverages a subject which is already on top of the consumer's mind.

When a brand brings a novel perspective to this very same subject — sometimes witty or humorous, at other times a gracious tribute — people love it.

Greater connect

When a brand leverages a trending event in refreshing new ways, there is a significantly higher probability that its communication will break through the clutter and connect with view-

ers. In addition, if this communication integrates key elements of the core value proposition of the brand, then there is a positive rub-off on the brand's appeal.

Cost effective

In today's era of social media, moment marketing is perhaps also one of the most cost-effective methods of mass marketing. This is because a social media campaign that capitalises on a trending topic in a very interesting manner can spread like wildfire at no cost. In fact, if it catches the imagination, there is the possibility of users generating their own related content which can amplify the core campaign.

Getting prepared

Moment marketing is often a spontaneous response to an unanticipated occurrence. At other times, it could leverage a festival or an event that is pre-planned.

Either way, if marketing teams wish to make moment marketing a way of life, then some preparation would be important.

Ears to ground

First, the team has to keep its ears close to the ground, to quickly identify moments which can be seized by the brand. It would be useful for the team to proactively list out the kind of opportunities which are a best fit for their particu-

lar brand, so that their listening can then focus on specific channels.

Second, teams may wish to brainstorm possible wild-card scenarios, and what their brand's response would be, in each such situation.

While these scenarios may never actually come about, the brainstorming exercise is likely to sensitise team members to the possibilities and the range of responses.

Third, moment marketing requires brands to empower frontline social media teams and communication agencies, particularly because such campaigns have to be executed very quickly before the moment goes stale.

Such an empowered approach also requires a proper set of guardrails to be defined, to ensure that sensitive topics are handled appropriately.

Finally, successful moment marketing requires a constant stream of new, interesting and appealing topical ideas.

A marketing team (including partner agencies) with a high creative quotient and a penchant for offbeat ideas is the most important ingredient in making this happen.

(Harish Bhat is an avid marketer and bestselling author. He was formerly Brand Custodian at Tata Sons. These are his personal views.)

From gaming to games



Can't bet on future: A worker waits for an elevator at the Tropicana Las Vegas in Las Vegas, Nevada. The hotel-casino opened in 1957 and will close on April 2 to make way for a planned \$1.5 billion, 33,000-seat domed stadium for Major League Baseball's Oakland Athletics and a related resort development by Bally's and Gaming and Leisure Properties Inc. MLB owners approved the team's relocation to Nevada in November and the A's hope to move into the ballpark, which will occupy nine acre of the 35-acre site, in 2028. GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

Irish linen brand Burgoyne threads its way into the Indian retail market

V. Sajeev Kumar

Bought a Ralph Lauren linen shirt? Or, one from Tommy Hilfiger? Chances are the linen would have been made in Kerala by an Irish linen company WFB Baird and Co.

The firm that dates back to 1912 is one of the world's oldest linen makers in the world and has been manufacturing in India since 2005 as an export oriented unit. Its three factories spread across Kochi and Erode supply to global brands and retailers. But now, the largely B2B player is upping its local focus with its brand — Burgoyne.

William James Burgoyne Baird, the fourth-generation scion of the founder of



Huge potential: The global linen market, estimated at \$806.7 mn in 2022, is likely to touch \$1,525.3 mn by 2028. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the premium Irish linen brand, and current chairman was recently in Kochi.

"We came to India in 2005 only to set up 100% EoU. Seeing India as a huge market for linen, we entered the domestic market around 10 years back and

have been growing. We are now in the process of introducing an affordable fabric blended with linen and plan to sell the brand through e-commerce route. To increase the product visibility, the company will soon have its physi-

cal presence in all the metro cities," he said.

Suchitra Menon, Director and CEO, said Burgoyne is now present in at least 3,000 stores across India. In B2B business, the firm supplies linen fabric globally to premium retailers like Ralph Lauren, Polo, Banana Republic, Levis, Tommy Hilfiger and Marks & Spencer.

In India, it supplies to players like Madura, Arvind Brands, Blackberry, Reliance and Myntra. The global linen market size was estimated to be worth \$806.7 million in 2022 and likely to touch \$1,525.3 million by 2028, as per industry reports.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

The 'magic formula' developed by celebrity-owned brands

Meenakshi Verma Ambwani
NEWDELHI

Guess who is hitting the jackpot on India's start-ups? Their films might be a hit or miss, but Bollywood celebrities are finding huge success with the brands they are co-creating.

Take Katrina Kaif, who teamed up with beauty and lifestyle retailer, Nykaa, to unveil Kay Beauty in 2019. Almost 1.5 million consumers have bought the products of this brand so far. Earlier this month, Falguni Nayar, Executive Chairperson, Founder and CEO of Nykaa, pointed out Kay Beauty was the "third-most searched" direct-to-consumer brand on the platform and also among "the top three brands at

Nykaa's stores. Kay Beauty is expected to grow at the rate of 62% after a robust year of expansion into new doors (retail stores)."

Ms. Nayar said the brand was created by Katrina Kaif and Nykaa, to "bridge the gap between high glamour and care." With a 1.4 million-strong Instagram community, the brand's lip oils were sold out in one day demonstrating its prowess in bringing international trends to the forefront, she added.

Winning partnerships

Equally sweet has been the brand outing of Kareena Kapoor Khan. Last year, she formed a strategic partnership with SUGAR Cosmetics founders Vineeta Singh & Kaushik Mukherjee to introduce a premium



Banking on glamour: Vineeta Singh with Kaushik Mukherjee and Kareena Kapoor Khan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Korean skincare brand, Quench Botanics. Kaushik Mukherjee, Director, Quench Botanics

told *brandline*, "When the superstar and beauty icon Kareena Kapoor Khan loved the Quench pro-

ducts, she came on board as a co-owner and investor, affirming faith in the brand. Sales have more than doubled since last quarter. A substantial increase in the follower base was also observed on our Instagram platform. Associating with her has helped step up the brand's awareness and reach significantly amongst consumers."

Mr. Mukherjee pointed out that Quench Botanics' proposition of accessible Korean skincare tailored for Indian skin and weather conditions resonated well with consumers.

According to Sukhleen Aneja, CEO, Good Brands Co., Good Glamm Group, celeb-led brands are thriving in today's beauty market and gaining instant recognition and recall. "We

partnered Manish Malhotra in 2018 to create and launch Manish Malhotra Beauty by MyGlamm, which has become one of the largest luxury make-up brands of India. These kinds of partnerships enable us to tap into diverse consumer segments and engage with them in innovative ways gaining access to their loyal fan bases," she says.

Besides co-creating a brand, the beauty major has also come up with celeb-anchored limited-edition collections and exclusive launches. "Our most recent launch of the MyGlamm POUT collection in partnership with Karan Johar in December 2023 was a huge success and has gone on to be the No 1 best-selling lipstick for My-

Glamm on platforms like Amazon," she added.

For film stars, it's natural to segue into the booming beauty industry and the associations with new age start-ups is paying off.

Ms. Nayar said as India's per capita income rises from \$2,500 today to \$5,500 by 2030, it is projected the BPC (beauty and personal care) per capita spend will rise from \$15 now to \$50 by 2030.

Business acumen

The projects are raking in the moolah, backed by large communities of loyal fans. In fact, some of these ventures are backed by VCs and angel investors. Take for instance, Deepika Padukone's "self-care" brand 82°E, which raised \$7.5 million in seed funding in ear-

ly 2022. DSG Consumer Partners and IDEO Ventures along with other angel investors participated in the round. And just last month, the brand — which has a presence in the body care and women skincare segment — expanded into men's skincare category.

Globally celebrities have had a great track record of creating winning brands thanks to their OG influencer status. Actor Ryan Reynolds, who owns a stake in the Alpine F1 team, successfully sold a stake in Aviation American Gin and few other brands to Diageo at over \$600 million valuation. It wouldn't be a surprise if we see a celeb-owned brand emerging as a unicorn soon in India. (The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

ANKARA

Turkiye holds local elections in test of President Erdogan's popularity



Turkiye held local elections on Sunday that will decide who gets to control Istanbul and other key cities. The vote is also a barometer of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's popularity. The main battlegrounds are the country's economic hub, Istanbul, and the capital, Ankara, both of which Mr. Erdogan lost in 2019. AP

BEIRUT

Eight dead, 20 injured in car bomb blast at market in northern Syria



A bomb exploded in a shopping area in a northern Syrian city held by pro-Turkish forces early on Sunday, killing eight persons and wounding more than 20 others, the U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. It said that a "car bomb exploded in the middle of a popular market" in Aleppo province's Azaz. AFP

PARIS

France to send old armoured vehicles, new missiles to Ukraine



France will deliver hundreds of old armoured vehicles and new missiles to Ukraine in its war against Russia, Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu said on Sunday. He said that French President Emmanuel Macron, following talks with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy, had asked him to prepare a new aid package. REUTERS

SOFIA

Bulgaria and Romania take first steps into Europe's visa-free zone



Bulgaria and Romania joined Europe's vast Schengen area of free movement on Sunday, opening up travel by air and sea without border checks after a 13-year wait. A veto by Austria however means the new status will not apply to land routes, after Vienna expressed concerns over a potential influx of asylum seekers. AFP

Israelis take out their largest protest since start of war

Tens of thousands rally outside parliament as part of anti-government demonstration; they urge Netanyahu administration to reach truce deal to free dozens of hostages held by Hamas in Gaza

Associated Press
JERUSALEM

Tens of thousands of Israelis gathered outside the parliament building in Jerusalem on Sunday in the largest anti-government demonstration since the country went to war in October. They urged the government to reach a ceasefire deal to free dozens of hostages held by the Hamas militant group in Gaza and to hold early elections.

Israeli society was broadly united immediately after October 7, when Hamas killed some 1,200 people during a cross-border attack and took 250 others hostage. Nearly six



Seething rage: Protesters launch a prolonged demonstration in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem on Sunday. REUTERS

months of conflict have renewed divisions, though the country remains largely in favour of the war.

"After six months, it seems like the government understands that Bibi Ne-

tanyahu is an obstacle," said demonstrator Einav Moses, whose father-in-law, Gadi Moses, is held hostage. "Like he does not really want to bring them back, that they have failed

in this mission."

The crowd stretched for blocks around the Knesset, or parliament building, and organisers vowed to continue the demonstration for several days. They urged the government to hold new elections nearly two years ahead of schedule. Thousands also demonstrated in Tel Aviv.

Netanyahu, in a nationally televised speech before undergoing hernia surgery later Sunday, said he understood families' pain. But he said calling new elections – in what he described as a moment before victory – would paralyse Israel for six to eight months and would paralyse the hostage talks.

Russia keeps up attack on Kyiv's energy infrastructure

Associated Press
KYIV

A Russian cruise missile strike on infrastructure in Ukraine's western Lviv region killed one man, while another man died in an attack in the northeast officials said on Sunday.

The attack in Lviv destroyed a building and sparked a fire, Governor Maksym Kozitskyi wrote on social media app Telegram.

In the Kharkiv region, Governor Oleh Synchronov said that an air attack killed a 19-year-old man on Sunday after a projectile hit a gas station.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands in Ukraine's Odesa region were left without power on Sunday after debris from a downed Russian drone caused a



Outdoor lesson: Children being evacuated from Russia's Belgorod region on Sunday due to Ukrainian artillery and drone strikes. AP

blaze at an energy facility. Some 1,700,000 homes suffered power outages as a result of the attack, said Ukraine's largest private electricity operator, DTEK.

The Ukrainian air force said that it shot down nine of the 11 Shahed-type drones launched by Russia overnight, as well as nine out of 14 cruise missiles.

Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure in recent days.

Meanwhile, 5,000 children have been evacuated from Russia's Belgorod region bordering Ukraine following weeks of deadly bombardment by Kyiv, the region's governor said on Saturday.

Russia arrests three in anti-terror operation

Agence France-Presse
MOSCOW

Russian authorities on Sunday arrested three persons in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan on charges of planning terrorist attacks, following a deadly attack on a concert hall near Moscow.

The arrests were made during an operation in Dagestan's capital Makhachkala and in the town of Kaspivsk, around 10 km to the south. "Three criminals planning to commit a series of terrorist crimes have been arrested," an official statement said.

The announcement comes more than a week after an attack on the Crocus City Hall in Moscow's outskirts killed at least 144 people and injured 551.

Philippines leader orders boost to maritime security as China tension rises

Reuters
MANILA

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered his government to strengthen its coordination on maritime security to confront "a range of serious challenges" to territorial integrity and peace, as a dispute with China escalates.

The order, signed on Monday and made public on Sunday, does not mention China but follows a series of bilateral maritime confrontations and mutual accusations over a disputed area of the South China Sea.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not respond to a Reuters request for comment on Sunday.

Beijing claims almost all of the South China Sea, a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce. China's claims overlap those of the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 said China's claims had no legal basis.

Latest flare-up

The latest flare-up occurred last weekend, when China used water cannon to disrupt a Philippine resupply mission to the Second Thomas Shoal for soldiers guarding a warship intentionally grounded on a reef 25 years ago.

"Despite efforts to promote stability and security in our maritime domain, the Philippines continues to confront a range of serious challenges that threa-

The order comes in the wake of a series of confrontations and accusations over a disputed area of the South China Sea

ten territorial integrity, but also the peaceful existence of Filipinos," Mr. Marcos said in the order.

The President vowed on Thursday to implement countermeasures against "illegal, coercive, aggressive and dangerous attacks" by China's coastguard.

Expanding team

His order expands and reorganises the government's maritime council, adding the national security adviser, solicitor general, National Intelligence Coordinating Agency chief and the South China Sea task force. The order appears to expand the role of the military by naming the Armed Forces of the Philippines, not just the navy, among the agencies supporting the council.

The renamed National Maritime Council will be the central body to formulate strategies to ensure a "unified, coordinated and effective" framework for the Philippines' maritime security and domain awareness.

Mr. Marcos increased the number of agencies supporting the council to 13 from nine, including the space agency and the University of the Philippines' Institute for Maritime Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

Easter on the streets



Sawdust rugs decorate a street in the historic city of Ouro Preto in Minas Gerais State in Brazil on Sunday. The streets are decorated by locals and tourists who use about 60 tonnes of coloured sawdust for a Easter procession representing the resurrection of Christ. AFP

Islamabad willing to work with U.S. for peace, says Shehbaz

Press Trust of India
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan attaches high importance to its relations with the U.S., Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday assured President Joe Biden and emphasised that Islamabad wants to work with Washington to achieve the common goal of global peace and prosperity of the region.

Mr. Sharif's message to Biden came after the U.S. President wrote to the new Pakistani Prime Minister, assuring that Washington would continue to stand with Pakistan to tackle "the most pressing global and regional challenges".



Shehbaz Sharif

In his first communication with the new administration in Islamabad, the U.S. President noted that the "enduring partnership between our nations remains critical to ensuring the security of our people – and people around the world".

Pakistan PM bans red carpets at official events to save funds

Press Trust of India
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has banned the use of red carpets at government events, reserving them exclusively for diplomatic receptions, as part of austerity measures to cut down unnecessary expenditures in the cash-strapped nation.

Mr. Sharif expressed annoyance over the use of red carpets during the visits of federal Ministers and senior authorities at government functions.

According to a notification issued by the Cabinet division, the Prime Minister has instructed that the

red carpet will not be used for federal Ministers and government figures at official events in the future. However, it could be used as a protocol only for foreign diplomats, *The Express Tribune* newspaper reported.

The decision to ban red carpets is more than just a symbolic gesture. It represents a tangible effort to curb unnecessary expenditures and redirect resources to more critical areas of governance. Last week, Mr. and members of the Cabinet decided to voluntarily forego their salaries and perks as part of the government's efforts to promote austerity.

Sri Lanka allowed free and fair probe into 2019 Easter bombings, says Ranil

Press Trust of India
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe said that the government has allowed a free and fair investigation for the independent execution of justice in the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, as Christians across the country held the Easter Sunday services in a calm atmosphere but under tight security.

The churches across Sri Lanka were placed under a security blanket on Sunday, the police said.

Police spokesman Nihal Thalduwa said 6,522 police officers, over 300 police special task force officers and 2,746 military personnel have been deployed to provide security at 1,873 churches.

Over 270 killed

In 2019, over 270 people, including 11 Indians, were killed when suicide bombers belonging to the local Islamist extremist group National Thawheed Jamaat (NTJ) linked to ISIS carried out a series of blasts that tore through three churches and as many luxury hotels in Sri Lanka on the Easter Sunday.

Although thousands of suspects have been held since then no one has been tried in court to date.

The catholic church in the Buddhist-majority country remains unhappy over the investigations which they have branded as a political cover-up to protect the powerful who could have masterminded the attack.

President Wickremesinghe, the then-Prime Mi-



Ranil Wickremesinghe

nister, in his Easter Sunday message, stressed that the government had allowed free and fair investigation for the independent execution of justice.

"That dark memory would never be erased off our minds," Mr. Wickremesinghe said.

The then government headed by President Maithripala Sirisena was accused of negligence of pre-intelligence received on the attacks.

Mr. Sirisena was found guilty of negligence by the panel appointed by him to probe the attacks.

Later, Mr. Sirisena was ordered to pay Sri Lankan rupee 100 million to the relatives of the victims of the attack as compensation. He has so far paid only a part of it.

New turn

The investigations in the case took a new turn last week when Mr. Sirisena revealed that he was aware of the masterminds behind the attacks.

The police recorded his statement while the magistrate court asked him to appear before it on April 4 to make a court statement over his public comment.



Kenya has been a major tourist destination, attracting visitors from all over the globe to its wildlife parks. AFP

Tourist revenue in Kenya climbs above pre-pandemic level

Agence France-Presse
NAIROBI

Revenue from tourism in Kenya jumped nearly a third in 2023 over the previous year beating the pre-pandemic numbers, according to the Tourism Ministry.

Kenya has been a major tourist destination in East Africa, traditionally attracting visitors from across the world to its wildlife parks and Indian Ocean beaches.

A ministry report seen by AFP on Sunday said revenue rose 31.5% last year to hit 352.5 billion shillings (nearly \$2.7 billion). But per capita spending in dollar terms by the 1.95 million visitors fell.

"Despite the increase in the number of visitors in 2023 as compared to 2022, the average per capita expenditure in U.S. dollars decreased significantly," the report said. "This is partly attributed to the sustained depreciation of the Kenya shilling against the major currencies."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism brought in about \$2.24 billion in 2019 from two million visitors, or about 10% of GDP. Americans accounted for the largest number of 2023 arrivals at 2,65,310, followed by Ugandans (2,01,623), Tanzanians (1,57,818) and 1,56,700 from the United Kingdom.

The ministry hopes to welcome 2.4 million tourists this year.

In January, Kenya's immigration services said the first batch of foreign tourists had arrived under a simplified "visa-free" entry system it hoped would encourage more visitors.

Lebanon's sectarian balance on the line as Hezbollah-Israeli conflict drags on

With Hezbollah militant group and Israel engaged in a parallel confrontation amid the war in Gaza, Christians in southern Lebanon are angry and fearful their homes could be caught in the cross-fire and their families forced to flee from their ancestral villages near the Lebanon-Israel border

Reuters
BEIRUT

As the Lebanese Christian village of Rmeish marks its first Easter since the Gaza war erupted, residents say a parallel confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel is dragging them into a conflict they did not choose.

Like many Christians elsewhere in southern Lebanon, residents are angry and fearful their homes could be caught in the cross-fire and their families forced to flee – permanently – from their ancestral villages near the Lebanon-Israel border.

Earlier this week, a Rmeish resident confronted a group of armed men trying to launch rockets at Israel from within the village. Some villagers rang church bells to sound the alarm, and the armed men moved off to fire rockets from another neighbourhood, according to Mayor Milad al-Alam and Rmeish residents. "What we have been saying for the last six months is: among our own homes, keep us neutral. Any strike in return would have brought huge losses," Mr. Alam said.

Hezbollah began launching rockets from hilltops and villages in southern Lebanon at Israel on October 8 in support of its Palestinian ally Hamas, which carried out a cross-border attack into Israel



Variables in play: Hezbollah began launching rockets at Israel from hilltops and villages in Lebanon in support of its ally Hamas after their cross-border attack triggered a fierce Israeli offensive in Gaza. AP

the previous day that triggered a fierce Israeli land, air and sea offensive on the Gaza Strip.

Christian criticism

The villagers' resentment reflects criticism from Christian clerics and politicians opposed to Hezbollah, who have long accused the group of undermining the state through its possession of a controversial arsenal that outguns the national Army, and of monopolising decisions of war and peace.

"We have nothing to do with this war. Do they (Hezbollah) want to displace us?" said a 40-year-old resident of Rmeish who asked not to be identified, fearing that criticising Hezbollah could bring reprisals. Iran-backed Hezbollah, which holds sway

over much of the Lebanese state, denied its fighters had tried to launch rockets from Rmeish.

More than a dozen sects coexist in a precarious balancing act in tiny Lebanon, reflected in a power-sharing system that reserves government posts by religion. The presidency and central bank governor – two top posts reserved for Maronite Christians – have been vacant since October 2022 and July 2023 respectively due to divisions over choosing successors.

Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese have been displaced both internally and to foreign countries by conflict and hardship over the last century, with the 15-year civil war seeing killings and kidnappings according to sect. Some

90,000 people have been displaced from southern Lebanon since the conflict broke out in October.

Christian lawmaker Ghada Ayoub, who represents a constituency in the south and hails from the anti-Hezbollah Lebanese Forces party, said that Christians were standing up to Hezbollah "because it is encroaching on their presence," and that the war was deepening fissures in Lebanese politics.

"The question is now: are there even any shared points left that we can carry on with – that we can build a state with?" she said.

The area most impacted by the shelling is the border strip, home to about a dozen Christian villages including Rmeish. They are nestled in rolling hills of

olive groves, pine trees and tobacco fields – now too dangerous to plant or harvest due to shelling.

"The areas around us were really affected – there have been strikes 500, 600 metres away. Our harvests have been ruined," said Joseph Salameh, a local official in the town of Klayaa, about 4 km from Lebanon's southern border.

'Imminent exodus'

Lebanon was already hit hard by a financial meltdown that began in 2019. With tourists staying away due to bombing, shops closed and schools shuttered or began sheltering thousands displaced by the fighting, villages across the predominantly Shia Muslim south have been dealt another severe economic blow, prompting fears among locals of a Christian exodus. "Now the war has added to it and is encouraging our children to leave... Christians are no longer able to take on more than others because the problems of this country have become too many," Mr. Salameh said.

Lebanon's top Christian clerics have also sounded the alarm in weekly sermons. Maronite Patriarch Boutros al-Rai called early on in the Gaza war for Lebanon to stay on the sidelines and more recently said war had been "imposed" on Christians.

Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Beirut Elias Audi

asked earlier this month if it was fair for "one faction of Lebanese to decide on behalf of everyone, and take unilateral decisions that not all Lebanese agree on". With outcry mounting, Hezbollah's main Christian ally the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) has even ramped up criticism, saying its nearly two-decade alliance with Hezbollah had been "shaken".

"The main problem that arose recently was crossing the limits of defending Lebanon and getting involved in a conflict in which we cannot make decisions," FPM head Gebran Bassil said.

Their alliance had provided Hezbollah with supporters from a religious community outside its traditional base, but the pair have split over several issues in the last two years – including who should be Lebanon's next President.

Michael Young at the Carnegie Middle East Center said Mr. Bassil's comments were an attempt to gain some leverage over Hezbollah by signalling a rift – but also reflected Christian unease with the *status quo*.

"The mood among the Christian community is almost a psychological divorce from the system. They don't feel that they have a say in the system and in a way it's true – Hezbollah is in control of much of the system," Mr. Young said.

Baltimore victims make a case for U.S. migrants

Agence France-Presse
LOS ANGELES

The death of six Latino workers who were fixing potholes when a Baltimore bridge collapsed highlights the crucial role immigrants play in keeping America running, say advocates.

And it stands in stark contrast to the rhetoric of populists like Donald Trump, who cast them as criminal invaders ruining the country. "Migrants come and do the jobs that Americans don't want to do," said Luis Vega, an activist and former construction worker.

A team of eight men were doing road maintenance overnight on Monday into Tuesday on the Francis Scott Key Bridge when a huge container ship smashed into a support pillar, sending almost the entire span crashing into the Patapsco River. Two were pulled alive from the water, but six, hailing from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, died.

The tragedy comes at a time many Latinos feel they are under assault from sections of the political class, as the U.S. prepares for a bitter presidential election in November between Mr. Trump and incumbent Joe Biden. Mr. Trump's stridently anti-immigrant campaign includes suggestions that, if elected, he will embark on a mass expulsion of people he blames for crime and drug addiction he says are wracking America. "The former President doesn't see how much damage he does with his poison," said Mr. Vega. "Terrorists don't sneak over the U.S.-Mexico border; they fly in on a visa," he added.

Bridge of sand



Across the seas: Sand dust has been blowing from the Sahara desert in North Africa since March 27 and giving the sky a yellowish appearance above the European Riviera city of Nice in southern France on Saturday. AFP

World's most powerful laser points to uncharted arenas

Agence France-Presse
MAGURELE

In the control room of a research centre in Romania, part of the European Union's Infrastructure ELI project, engineer Antonia Toma activates the world's most powerful laser, which promises revolutionary advances in everything from the health sector to space.

The laser at the centre, near the Romanian capital Bucharest, is operated by French company Thales, using Nobel prize-winning inventions.

France's Gerard Mourou and Donna Strickland of Canada won the 2018 Nobel Physics Prize for harnessing the power of lasers for advanced precision instruments. "The sharp beams of laser light have given us new opportunities for deepening our know-



Precision game: Partial view of the special mirrors systems used to activate laser at the ELI project in Romania. AFP

ledge about the world and shaping it," the Nobel Academy's citation said.

Mr. Mourou confessed he was "very moved" by his "incredible odyssey" – from the U.S. where he spent 30 years, to bringing this project to fruition in Europe.

"We start from a small luminous seed with very, very little energy, which will be amplified millions and millions of times," said

Mr. Mourou, 79, trying to give a sense of the "huge step taken", the "phenomenal powers" achieved.

Possible applications include treating nuclear waste by reducing the duration of its radioactivity, or cleaning up the debris accumulating out in space, he added. For Mr. Mourou, just as the last century was that of the electron, the 21st century will be that of the laser.

Once thought to be an April Fool's prank by Google, Gmail marks 20 years

Associated Press
SAN FRANCISCO

Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin loved pulling pranks, so much so they began rolling outlandish ideas every April Fool's Day not long after starting their company more than a quarter century ago. One year, Google posted a job opening for a Copernicus research centre on the moon. Another year, the company said it planned to roll out a "scratch and sniff" feature on its search engine.

The jokes were so consistently over-the-top that people learned to laugh them off. And that's why Mr. Page and Mr. Brin de-

decided to unveil something no one would believe was possible 20 years ago on April Fool's Day.

'Too good to be true'

It was Gmail, a free service boasting 1 gigabyte of storage per account, an amount that sounds almost pedestrian in an age of one-terabyte iPhones. But it sounded like a preposterous amount back then, enough to store about 13,500 e-mails before running out of space compared to just 30 to 60 e-mails in the then-leading webmail services run by Yahoo and Microsoft.

Gmail also came equipped with Google's search technology so users could quickly retrieve a tid-



Trick done right: Google co-founders Sergey Brin, left, and Larry Page at company headquarters in California in 2004. FILE PHOTO

bit from an old e-mail

"The original pitch we put together was all about the three 'S's' – storage, search and speed," said former Google executive Marissa Mayer.

It was such a mind-bending concept that shortly after *The Associat-*

ed Press published a story about Gmail, readers began calling and emailing to inform the news agency it had been duped by Google's pranksters.

"That was part of the charm, making a product that people won't believe is real. It kind of changed pe-

ople's perceptions about the kinds of applications that were possible within a web browser," former Google engineer Paul Buchheit said.

The AP knew Google was not joking about Gmail because a reporter had been abruptly asked to come down from San Francisco to the company's Mountain View, California, headquarters to see something that would make the trip worthwhile.

After arriving at a still-developing corporate campus in California that would turn into what became known as the "Googleplex," the reporter was ushered into a small office to meet Mr. Page who was wearing an impish grin.

Mr. Page, then just 31 years old, proceeded to demonstrate how quickly Gmail operated within Microsoft's now-retired Explorer web browser.

He pointed out there was no delete button featured in the main control window because it would not be necessary, given Gmail had so much storage. "I think people are really going to like this," Mr. Page predicted.

Accurate prediction

Mr. Page was right. Gmail now has an estimated 1.8 billion active accounts – each one now offering 15 gigabytes of free storage bundled with Google Photos and Google Drive. Even though that's 15 times

more storage than Gmail initially offered, it's still not enough for many users.

The digital hoarding of e-mail, photos and other content is why Google, Apple and other companies now make money from selling additional storage capacity in their data centres. Gmail's existence is also why other free e-mail services and the internal e-mail accounts that employees use on their jobs offer far more storage than was fathomed 20 years ago.

Gmail was a game changer in several other ways while becoming the first building block in the expansion of Google's empire beyond its still-dominant search engine.

IN BRIEF



Bopanna and Ebden duo claims Miami Masters title

Top seeds Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden beat second seeds Ivan Dodig and Austin Krajicek 6-7(3), 6-3, [10-6] in the final of the \$10,404,205 ATP Masters tennis tournament in Miami, USA. It was the second title of the season for the Indo-Aussie pair after the Australian Open.

Other results (finals): \$10,404,205 ATP Masters, Miami: Danielle Collins bt Elena Rybakina 7-5, 6-3.
Women: Danielle Collins bt Elena Rybakina 7-5, 6-3.
\$82,000 Challenger, San Luis Potosi, Mexico:
Doubles: Rithvik Bollipalli & Niki Poonacha bt Antoine Bellier & Marc-Andrea Huesler (Sui) 6-3, 6-2.



Sri Lanka slams 531 with none of its batters scoring a ton

Sri Lanka made a record 531 runs in its first innings of the second Test against Bangladesh in Chittagong on Sunday but Kamindu Mendis narrowly missed scoring a third century in consecutive Test innings. Lanka's total on the second day was the highest scored in Tests without any batter reaching a century, eclipsing India's 524/9 against New Zealand at Kanpur in 1976. Bangladesh reached 55-1 at stumps.

The scores: Sri Lanka 531 in 159 overs (Madushka 57, Karunaratne 86, Kusal Mendis 93, Chandimal 59, D. de Silva 70, Kamindu Mendis 92 n.o., Shakib 3/110) vs Bangladesh 55/1 in 15 overs.



Gilchrist beats Sitwala in the quarterfinals

Former World champion Peter Gilchrist, *in pic.*, defeated National champion Dhruv Sitwala 585-539 in the quarterfinals of the all-India CCI billiards classic in Mumbai on Sunday. Englishman David Causier beat S. Shrikrishna 805-623.

The results, quarterfinals: David Causier (Eng) bt S. Shrikrishna 805-623; Dhvaj Haria bt Raayan Razmi 692-463; Peter Gilchrist (Sin) bt Dhruv Sitwala 585-539; Pankaj Advani bt Peter Sheehan (Eng) 1097-692.

AIFF EC member granted bail by Goa police

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Deepak Sharma, the AIFF Executive Committee member, who was accused of physical assault on women footballers while drunk, was granted bail by Goa police on Sunday.

"He was released on a bond of ₹40,000. All sections under which he was charged were bailable offences," Ajay Dhuri, sub-inspector of police, Mapusa, told *Sportstar*.

After the victims filed an FIR on Saturday, the accused was arrested under sections 354A, 323 and 341. But he walked out on bail the next day. "We have suspended Mr. Deepak Sharma from all kinds of footballing activities in India until and unless the probe is complete. The wrongdoer will be punished, whoever it is," Valanka Alemao, chairperson, AIFF's Women's Committee, said.

City-Arsenal stalemate hands Liverpool the advantage

Agence France-Presse
LIVERPOOL

Manchester City failed to break down Arsenal as a highly-anticipated clash at the top of the Premier League failed to live up to the hype in a 0-0 draw at the Etihad on Sunday.

Liverpool was the big winner of the day in the title race as it beat Brighton 2-1 to go top, two points ahead of Arsenal and three clear of City with nine games to play.

Borussia Dortmund defeated Bayern Munich 2-0 away in "der Klassiker" on Saturday to leave Bayer Leverkusen just three wins away from winning the Bundesliga for the first time.

Bayern, the 11-time defending champion, is now 13 points behind Leverkusen with seven rounds remaining.

The results: Premier League: Liverpool 2 (Diaz 27, Salah 65) bt

The 'New Delhi Express' deserves to be groomed and kept on the right track

Super Giants' Mayank Yadav, who consistently bowls above 145 kmph, has a fascination for speed and idolises South African legend Steyn



Letting it rip! Super Giants' Mayank cranked it up against the Kings to come up with an awesome display of fast bowling. AFP

IPL-17

P.K. Ajith Kumar
LUCKNOW

There is nothing quite like fast bowling. Fast bowling, literally, that is – not medium pace.

A bowler who is capable of clocking 150 kpmh and who consistently bowls above 145 kmph belongs to the rarest of species in world cricket. So when India discovered one here on Saturday night, the excitement – among cricketers present and past as well as fans – that has followed is understandable.

Mayank Yadav was sensational on his debut. The 21-year-old from Delhi, who took three for 27 to help Lucknow Super Giants defeat Punjab Kings by 21 runs, bowled the fas-



For the past couple of years, the only thing I have been visualising is my first ball at the IPL. I didn't feel nervous, I felt I belong here

test ball of this IPL (155.8 kmph). In IPL history, only Shaun Tait, Lockie Ferguson, Umran Malik and Anrich Nortje have bowled faster.

He won not just the Player-of-the-Match award but also hearts – Dale Steyn, Brett Lee and Stuart Broad among them.

When Mayank was asked at the press conference about the fast bowler he idolised growing up in Delhi, the only name he took was of Steyn.

He also talked about his fascination for speed, not

just in cricket. "I have always loved speed, from my childhood," said the 'New Delhi Express'. "I love anything that is about speed – be it planes, super-bikes or rockets."

About his exceptional skills in sending down rockets at the batters, Mayank said he was aware that his strength was speed. "I have bowled at 155 kmph before but this was the first time I was (nearing) 156 kmph," he said. "For the past couple of years, the only thing I have been visualising is my first ball at the IPL. I didn't feel nervous, I felt I belong here."

He surely looks. India needs to take proper care of him. As Sanjay Manjrekar suggested, he could be considered for fast-tracking. Something Pakistan always does, and often gets rewarded.

Nakajima triumphs; final-hole eagle gives Ahlawat tied second spot

INDIAN OPEN

Rakesh Rao
GURUGRAM

Just minutes before the coronation of Keita Nakajima as the new \$2.25-million Hero Indian Open winner, Veer Ahlawat finished one-under 71 with a stunning final-hole eagle to gate-crash into the tied second spot on his home course here.

Soon, the "nervous" Japanese signed off with an unusual bogey-bogey-bogey finish for a one-over 73 – his worst card of the week – that was good enough to give him a four-shot victory at the DLF Golf and Country Club here.

For the record, Nakajima's record winning-score of 17-under 271 was worth \$382,500. The trio of Ahlawat, Sweden's Sebastian Soderberg and USA's Johannes Veerman tallied 275 and received \$167,250 each.

After leading the field by a whopping nine shots at



Champion: Japan's Nakajima proudly holds the Hero Indian Open Trophy. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

times on Sunday and assuming the title was his for the asking, Nakajima played aggressively on the back-nine. He made a few pars but went on to double-bogey the 14th hole – a par-4 where he dropped a shot in three previous rounds – and birdied the next before the bogey-spre.

For Nakajima, the maiden DP World Tour title came on the 11th appearance in his 'rookie' season

on the Tour. Before turning professional in 2022, Nakajima was the World's top amateur for 87 weeks during which he surpassed Jon Rahm's record of 60 weeks.

Any hope of a close finish evaporated soon on Sunday. Armed with a four-shot cushion, Nakajima birdied the first, fourth and sixth holes to move to -21. Concurrently, Nakajima's playing partners Gavin Green and Romain Langas-

que lost their way.

But Soderberg and Veerman, placed 15th and 16th after three rounds, made a charge. Soderberg shot six birdies during the bogey-free 17 holes before finishing with a bogey to end at 67.

Veerman, two shots behind Soderman before reaching the 18th tee, birdied the final hole and gained from the bogey from Soderberg to be joint-second before Ahlawat joined them.

The leading scores: 271: Keita Nakajima (Jpn) (65, 65, 68, 73); **275:** Veer Ahlawat (69, 66, 69, 71), Sebastian Soderberg (Swe) (71, 67, 70, 67), Johannes Veerman (USA) (70, 65, 73, 67); **276:** Gavin Green (Mal) (72, 66, 64, 74), Romain Lagasque (Fra) (66, 66, 70, 74), Matteo Manassero (Ita) (65, 68, 70, 73), Ko Jeong Weon (Fra) (67, 67, 69, 73).

Other Indians: 279: Manu Gandas (73, 65, 70, 71); **280:** Karandeep Kochhar (68, 70, 73, 69); **284:** Shubhankar Sharma (70, 70, 72, 72); **288:** Aman Raj (68, 68, 74, 78); **291:** Jaiiraj Singh Sandhu (72, 70, 78, 71), Gaganjeet Singh Bhullar (70, 69, 80, 72); **292:** Rashid Khan (71, 69, 74, 78).



Goalscorers: Yadwad, Murray and Edwards celebrate after Chennaiyin's win over Bagan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Chennaiyin upstages Mohun Bagan

ISL-10

Amitabha Das Sharma
KOLKATA

Chennaiyin FC came up with a spectacular second half performance to stun home favourite Mohun Bagan SG 3-2 in match-week-20 fixture of the ISL-10 here on Sunday.

Joni Kauko gave Mohun Bagan the lead in the first half, but Chennaiyin turned the match on its head after the break. Jordan Murray and Ryan Edwards found the net in a span of eight minutes.

Mohun Bagan neutralised Chennaiyin's lead off a

penalty by Dimitri Petratos three minutes into injury-time. Substitute Irfan Yadwad ensured that Chennaiyin bagged full points by producing the winner off a counter-attack towards the end of injury time.

The win took Chennaiyin to 21 points from 19 matches and ninth in the standings. Mohun Bagan's league shield hopes suffered a big blow as it missed the chance to go top and remained in second behind Mumbai FC.

The result:

Mohun Bagan SG 2 (Kauko 29, Petratos 90+3 pen) lost to Chennaiyin FC 3 (Murray 72, Edwards 80, Yadwad 90+7).

Hardik Singh and Salima Tete named Hockey India Players of the Year for 2023

Uthra Ganesan
NEW DELHI

Hardik Singh and Salima Tete were named the Player of the Year for 2023 among men and women respectively at the sixth annual Hockey India (HI) awards here on Sunday even as the federation announced the revival of Hockey India League (HIL) in January 2025.

With a total prize pool of ₹7.56 crores, the awards saw teams and individuals felicitated for their achievements in the past year. Interestingly, even the 2016 Junior World Cup-winning men's team was honoured at the event, eight years since the triumph.

The HIL, last held in 2017, will be a five-week competition with eight men's and six women's teams, with auctions for the same likely to be held after the Paris Olympics.

HI secretary general Bhola Nath Singh confirmed the window and



Best in the country: Hardik and Salima receiving the Balbir Singh Sr. Award from Zafar Iqbal and Harbinder Singh. X@THEHOCKEYINDIA

said there will be no overlapping of franchise ownership across the genders with 14 owners finalised.

Hardik, who was also the FIH Player of the Year, was presented the Balbir Singh Sr. Trophy and a cash prize of ₹25 lakhs.

"There is increased responsibility when you get such individual awards and recognition but I feel that when this happens to

anyone, he should also know and realise that the team trusts him so much more. No pressure, no diamonds. It is our profession and we sacrifice a lot and work 300 days in camps and tournaments for only this," Hardik said.

"I thank my teammates, coaches and the support staff for showcasing their faith in me. This award will further motivate me to



continue to be better each day," Salima, who impressed at the recent Asian Champions Trophy, said.

The Indian teams that won the Junior Asia Cups and the men's and women's Asian Champions Trophy were also rewarded along with the men's Asian Games-winning side.

The main winners: ₹30 lakhs: Ashok Kumar (Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime

Achievement Award). ₹25 lakhs each: Salima Tete (Player of the Year, Women); Hardik Singh (Player of the Year, Men).

₹10 lakhs each: Deepika Soreng (Women's U-21 Player of the Year); Arajjeet Singh Hundal (Men's U-21 Player of the Year).

₹5 lakhs each: P.R. Sreejesh (Goalkeeper of the Year); Harmanpreet Singh (Defender of the Year); Hardik Singh (Midfielder of the Year); Abhishek (Forward of the Year).



I feel as young as 25, always consider myself a player keen to improve

The winner of 27 World titles says he would like to see himself as a versatile cueist; eager to carry on playing, the 38-year-old feels a cue sports league in India will go a long way in boosting the sport and producing the champions of the future

INTERVIEW

Pankaj Advani

G. Viswanath

Pankaj Advani, India's supreme master of the green baize sport has completed 25 years in competitions. The 38-year-old has demonstrated unwavering resolve to pursue excellence in a sport that has a fantastic legacy in India. He has won 27 World crowns (19 in billiards and 8 in snooker), something that is nonpareil in the country's sporting history.

Advani has loved billiards and snooker equally though he has more achievements in the former. According to him, billiards is more creative while snooker is all about that one shot.

In a freewheeling interview on the sidelines of the Cricket Club of India (CCI) Billiards Classic 2024, the Indian sporting icon spoke about this journey, professional dreams and the way forward for the sport in the country.

Q. From the Pot Shot tournament win in 1999 to the present one at the CCI in 2024, it is a good 25 years in competitions. Probably, you may carry on for another 30 years...

A. Thirty years! I don't know. But I wouldn't change much in my career. I mean, spanning over the last 25 years and, hopefully, a lot more. But 1999 was a special year for me as I won my first National junior billiards title in Bangalore. And around that time, I think I won the Pot Shot All India snooker championship.

There is a funny story because there were two categories of the Pot Shot events. One was the non-medallist, and the other was the medallist. So I went for the non-medallist first. I was about to lose to a good friend of mine (Naveen from Karnataka State Billiards Association).

He was quite seasoned and I was about to fall to him in the quarterfinals. Somehow he slipped towards the end and I won the match 3-2. Thereafter, I went on to win the non-medallist championship.

I remember I was in the ninth

standard then. I had Maths and Hindi tuitions as well as exams. Since I won the non-medallist event, the players told me 'why don't you spend your energy in the medallist tournament and give it a shot.' I was going to compete with better players like Rafath Habib, K. Ranjan, Antim Singhi, and all the top players from Tamil Nadu as well as Karnataka.

I was very tempted. I was on a high also. But I also had my academics to take care of. So I asked my mother to let me play in the medallist, saying that upon losing I would take the next bus or train and come home. I gave the entry, hit a purple patch and everything started.

As a youngster, when you are fearless, you have nothing to lose. And I went on to beat Antim Singhi, managed to win 5-4 against Rafath while eating chocolates and sipping on Coke. And finally I went on to win the tournament beating the then State champion, Ranjan.

I think this win marked my arrival on the National scene and the seniors had to take me seriously, not just as a junior or as a non-medallist player. So those were very special moments for me in my career. And that boosted my confidence immensely to graduate to the senior level at a very young age.

Has it sunk in that 25 lovely years have gone by?

I feel as young as 25, honestly. I always consider myself a young player keen to learn and improve. It has not sunk in. If somebody told me that I have played for 25 years here, although I am much older than that.

That is the beauty of the journey that comprises all those moments wherein I have played some tough matches, endured tense moments and experienced some great triumphs, heart-breaking losses and struggles in terms of support. I lost my father at a very early age. I have seen it all. I think it has been a wonderful journey and I feel like I am far from done.

So in 25 years 27 World titles with 19 in billiards and 8 in snooker. Did the thought occur anytime to drop either one of them?

When I grew up, I idolised players like

Geet Sethi, Yasin Merchant, Michael Ferreira and, of course, my coach, Arvind Savur for whom I have immense respect. When I won my first World title in 2003 in China, I was a novice in the game. I beat Pakistan's Saleem Mohammed.

When it sank in that I had won the World championship and given the magnitude of the achievement, I told my coach that I wanted to excel in billiards.

Arvind uncle laughed and brushed it aside saying, 'listen, don't be silly, don't be a hero, just concentrate on snooker, you are doing well.' He asked me to go to England, something that I was keen to do also.

My technique was very unconventional, it still is. It was unorthodox, nothing that the textbooks would recommend for a cueist. So, let alone specialising in two sports, even the fact that I did not have a proper textbook technique made me feel like I was not going to be able to do it.

It was discouraging for a while, but then I made up my mind and said, 'No, I want to redefine the world specialisation. Why should specialisation be restricted only to one cue sport?' Every player in the country, and I can say this with authority now, being at that stage in my career, has only specialised either in billiards or snooker. Their achievements have been lopsided, although they have tried playing both.

But I said why couldn't I specialise in both? I came up with a unique technique, one for billiards and a completely different one for snooker. I realised that snooker was a game that required you to play more of the centre ball and bottom, and that billiards needed you to play higher.

Here I am today because I believed that I could excel in both. Not that I knew I had the talent, but I had this belief in my mind that I wanted to do something different.

Why do we have to restrict ourselves? I mean the scientists, athletes and experts said that

the mile could not be completed in under four minutes until Roger Bannister did it because he believed in it. And that's how I would like to see myself – a versatile cueist.

Did you have a role model?

When we talk about billiards, Geet Sethi was the biggest name; in snooker, it was Yasin Merchant. Then there were Alok Kumar, Devendra Joshi and Ashok Shandilya. All of them were my idols. I learnt something from each of them.

Would you agree that the four – Wilson Jones, Michael Ferreira, Sethi and you – are the billiards titans of India?

Every era has somebody who tries to push the boundaries and limits. I am glad that I am in that category. Jones, Ferreira and Sethi paved the way for us. I am sure the young players – S. Shrikrishna, Dhawaj Haria, Ishpreet Singh Chadha and Sparsh Pherwani – will come up with something different from what we have done.

Yasin, Aditya Mehta and then you spent time in professional snooker. Ishpreet is having a go at it now. How do you see it?

Some amazing players are super consistent in professional snooker. I think there is no dearth of talent in India, but it is just the culture in the UK; it's in their blood. The circuit is so vibrant because you have so much to look forward to.

If you become a professional, and if you do well, it's not easy. But if you start doing well, you are making decent money. Of course, if you are in the top-16, you are settled and established, but not everybody has the capability or the skill to reach that level.

If you see the snooker circuit in the UK over the last 30 to 40 years, you will have maybe one Ding (Junhui), one James Wattana,

one Marco Fu, throw in an odd Chinese, a Neil Robertson, and then I almost lost for a sixth name from outside the UK. So it is heavily dominated by the UK and, of course, they have great players.

A professional league in India in cue sports is long overdue, is it not?

Somebody has to do that because there is so much talent. I have been saying this for the past 5-7 years.

A league is the need of the hour. Televising it, pay the players reasonably well, and put it out there because the sport is not out there and it can only be made more visible through platforms like television where it's consumed by people outside our fraternity and by those who do not fully understand the sport. Tweak the rules a bit like kabaddi did... I am sure something can be worked out in billiards and snooker too.

Can the league be player driven?

I think this is a question the federation has to answer. I am not equipped to. There is talent in both formats. It (a player-driven league) can be done, but again it requires everybody to come together.

There are so many priorities and it becomes difficult to join hands and resources. All of us are from different cities as well, so I don't see how that's going to happen soon.

But coming back to the league, we have to move with the times. I do not want to make a controversial statement, but I do feel that the policies are heavily in favour of the Asian Games and the Olympics.

While I understand why those are very important in the context of Indian sports, I do not think they should be the only yardstick to measure sporting success and excellence.

Cue sport will return at the Doha Asian Games in 2030 after missing four editions from 2014 to 2026. Should the long gap be seen as a setback?

It should be. It is not that I rate the Asian Games any lesser than a World championship or a major tournament. But at the same time, it comes only once in four years.

From this point of view, not getting support from the government, corporates, or maybe even for the game's visibility is a big setback. Not being in the Asian Games from 2014 until now is not good.

We are going to be back in the mix after 20 years. A lot of effort was made to get it at the 2026 Asian Games in Nagoya (Japan). Many people from the fraternity got together and made a strong case and lobbied, but it didn't happen.

India's preparation has to start now for 2030. It all depends on how the federation makes a representation to the ministry.

The funding needs to be received now in order to send our players abroad, train them, equip them, prepare them, and eventually get them into competitive shape.

