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Shah launches poll campaign in Rajasthan

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

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

nder the banner of "Loktantra chao" 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".

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 arrange-

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi asserted that without EVM manipulation and other



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

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 elec-

tion," Mr. Gandhi said. Mr. Gandhi sought to remind 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 multispecialty government hospital in every district, and minimum support price for all crops in adherence to the Swaminathan re-

'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

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 Yaday 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

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.

Prakash Narayan raised the

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

"was, is, and will be part of

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

FULL REPORT » PAGE 3

Israeli strike on hospital camp in central Gaza kills 4

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: "Eyeopening 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-

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 elec-

du for the election. The

India, especially Tamil Na-

toral push towards South

'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

CBI questions kin of J&K man duped into fighting for Russia

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has recorded the statements of the family members of Azad Yousuf Kumar, a Kashmiri man who was allegedly unwittingly thrust into the Russia-Ukraine conflict after being deceived. The agency recorded their statements recently after filing an FIR against 19 people and visa consultancy firms linked to the exploitation of Indian youth. Mr. Azad's elder brother Sajad Ahmed Kumar said the CBI questioned him about his brother's situation and wanted his presence at their New Delhi office. However, he was unable to comply due to current financial circumstances. Mr. Sajad also said the families of 12 other affected Indian men have been contacted by the CBI. PTI

10-year-old dies after eating cake, shop owner booked

A 10-year-old girl died of suspected food poisoning after eating her birthday cake in Punjab's Patiala, following which a case was registered against the owner of the cake shop, the police said on Sunday. According to a complaint lodged by the girl's mother, the cake was ordered online on March 24 to celebrate her birthday. Soon after eating it, all family members, including the girl, started vomiting. She died the next day but the condition of other family members improved, the complaint stated. A case under Sections 273 (sale of noxious drink or food) and 304-A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered against the shop owner, the police said, adding that viscera samples have been sent to a laboratory to ascertain the cause of the death. PTI

Shah launches BJP poll campaign in Rajastĥan with roadshow in Sikar

Union Home Minister campaigns for Swami Sumedhanand, two-time MP and the party candidate from Jat-dominated seat, who is pitted against INDIA bloc nominee and CPI(M) leader Amra Ram

The Hindu Bureau JAIPUR

nion Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday launched the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) campaign for the Lok Sabha election in Rajasthan with a massive roadshow in Sikar. Mr. Shah, who arrived in Jaipur on a two-day visit, earlier held a meeting of party leaders and cluster incharges of the five Lok Sabha constituencies in Jaipur.

He was accompanied by Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and the BJP candidate for the Sikar seat and two-time MP, Swami Sumedhanand.

Campaigning for Mr. Sumedhanand, the Union Minister took out the roadshow in an open jeep, while many decked up vehicles, carrying tableaux and pictures of senior party leaders, followed it.

The roadshow began from the Shri Kalyan temple and passed through New Dujod Gate, Ghantaghar, and Jat Bazaar, and



Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma in Jaipur on Sunday. ANI

culminated at Tapriya Bagichi, covering a distance of about 2 km in over an hour.

Mr. Sumedhanand is pitted against INDIA bloc candidate and CPI(M) leader Amra Ram in the Jat-dominated seat.

The Opposition Congress, which holds five of the eight Assembly constituencies in Sikar, has entered into an alliance with the CPI(M) for the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

Sikar is among the 12 seats that will go to the polls in the first phase on April 19. It is also the homeOf the 8 Assembly segments under the Sikar Lok Sabha constituency, five are held by the Congress

town of State Congress president Govind Singh Dotasra, who represents the Lachhmangah Assembly segment in the district.

All candidates declared The BJP on Sunday also declared its Rajasthan unit general secretary Damodar Agarwal as the candidate

for the Bhilwara seat, thereby announcing its candidates for all 25 Lok Sabha seats in the State. He has replaced the sitting MP, Subhash Baheria, who had defeated his Congress rival with the biggest margin of six lakh votes in 2019.

Mr. Agarwal told journalists that the contest would be interesting as Bhilwara was his hometown, and he had served the people in the region as a social activist and worker of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the BJP for several years.

Bhilwara is among the 13 seats that will go to the polls in the second phase on April 26. The Congress has fielded former Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi from the seat, replacing its earlier candidate, Damodar Gurjar, who has been shifted to Rajsamand.

Mr. Agarwal has been active in politics for the last four decades, though he has not contested in any election. He has served twice as the BJP's district unit president.

In Puducherry rally, Udhayanidhi bats for Cong. nominee

Press Trust of India PUDUCHERRY

Tamil Nadu Youth Welfare and Sports Minister and DMK leader Udhayanidhi Stalin on Sunday appealed to the Puducherry electorate to ensure that the Congress candidate is re-elected in the upcoming Lok Sabha poll with a huge margin.

The Congress, DMK's alliance partner, has renominated sitting MP V. Vaithilingam as their candidate for the 2024 poll.

Addressing a large gathering during his roadshow in neighbouring Villianoor, Mr. Udhayanidhi said that the INDIA bloc's victory in the upcoming poll would pave the way for the protection of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry's rights. Mr. Vaithilingam accompanied him during the rally.

Stating that the 10-year rule of the NDA government at the Centre had been marked by corruption, Mr. Udhayanidhi claimed that people were let down on several counts. He assured of the INDIA bloc's commitment to ensuring rights of the States.

The DMK youth wing leader said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had never visited Puducherry



INDIA bloc is committed to procuring full Statehood for Puducherry. PTI

on any occasion except during elections. He exuded confidence in DMK and its alliance partners winning all 40 seats in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

"Several progressive schemes now implemented in Tamil Nadu would be enforced in Puducherry to improve education, health and other basic amenities," he added.

Mr. Udhayanidhi said that the INDIA bloc is committed to procuring full Statehood for Puducherry, preventing the intrusion of private players in distribution of power, reopening all ration shops and opening up all defunct PSUs in the Union territory. He also promised to ensure waiver of Puducherry govern-

ment's loans to the Centre.

HC permits convict to wear regular shirt, full pants while arguing case via video call

<u> Mohamed Imranullah S.</u>

The Madras High Court permitted a convict, undergoing a 20-year jail sentence for an economic offence, to argue a case before it through videoconference from the Puzhal central prison in Chennai in civilian clothes instead of those meant for convicted prisoners. "The appellant, who is appearing party-in-person, will be permitted to appear through videoconference on April 3, 2024 in regular shirt and full pants," a Division Bench of Justices R. Subramanian and R. Sakthivel said, following a complaint made by him. The convict, R. Subramanian, founder of the once-popular retail chain. Subhiksha.

had complained that the prison authorities were not allowing him to wear civilian clothes during virtual hearings. Although he had also made a request to permit him to appear in court in person to argue his case, fearing that he may not be able to put forth his submissions effectively through video call, the Bench turned down the request.

The convict had filed two original side appeals challenging the orders passed by Justice Krishnan Ramasamy on April 21, 2023, for winding up Viswapriya India Limited (VIL) and initiating liquidation proceedings after rejecting a request to transfer all its properties to a trust to be created for the benefit of debenture holders

Tension in M.P. town as violence breaks out between 2 groups; police fire tear gas

Press Trust of India

Tension prevailed in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar city as violence broke out between two groups following a dispute, the police said on Sunday.

Several persons were injured in the incident which took place on Saturday night in Sadar area under

Cantonment Police Station limits, they said, adding that tear gas shells were used to disperse the crowd.

Superintendent of Police Abhishek Tiwari said information about the dispute between the two groups was received on Saturday night. Regarding claims that the dispute stemmed from playing of a religious song

which two-three persons were attacked by a large number of people, Mr. Tiwari said the incident is being probed on the basis of statements of the injured persons, CCTV footage and eyewitness accounts. Strict action will be taken in the matter, he added.

The police registered three FIRs and efforts were on to identify those in-

volved in the incident, Cantonment Police Station incharge Ravindra Singh Chouhan said. "There was an immediate reason behind the incident. A person, who was driving an autorickshaw, was beaten up by a crowd following a dispute. Later, persons from another group also gathered which led to a stonenelting incident," he said

Rising Sun vs Two Leaves: the decade that saw two Dravidian majors becoming principal players in Tamil Nadu's political landscape

T. Ramakrishnan **CHENNAI**

The decade starting from 1967 marked a pivotal period for Tamil Nadu, as it witnessed the rise of two significant Dravidian parties: the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the 'All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).

Since 1977, the two parties have remained dominant in the State's political landscape, solidifying their positions as the primary players in the political arena.

In the 1967 Lok Sabha election held in the State along with the Assembly poll, the DMK-led United Front (UF), consisting of Swatantra, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Muslim League, took on the then ruling Congress. Interestingly, DMK founder C.N. Annadurai, who tasted defeat in Kancheepuram in the 1962 Assembly election, preferred to contest from the South Madras Lok Sabha constituency five years later, despite being the head of the DMK and the front. Even though he won, he quit the MP post to become the first non-Congress Chief Minister of the State, post-Independence.

In the Lok Sabha election, the UF bagged 35 Rise of Dravidian majors

The elections of 1967, 1971 and 1977 showed the dominance of the Dravidian parties as principal political players in Tamil Nadu. A rundown of the seats contested and the vote share in these years

	1967			1971		1977			
	Seats contested	Seats won	Votes polled and vote share (%)	Seats contested	Seats won	Votes polled and vote share (%)	Seats contested	Seats won	Votes polled and vote share (%)
Congress	39	3	64,36,710 (41.69%)	9	9	19,95,567 (12.51%)	15	14	39,77.306 (22.27%)
Congress(O)/ Janata+	-	-	-	29	1	48,53,534 (30.43%)	18	3	31,56,116 (17.67%)
DMK	25	25	55,24,514 (35.78%)	24	23	56,22,758 (35.25%)	19	2	33,23,320 (18.61%)
AIADMK	-	-	-				20	17	53,65,076 (30.04%)
СРІ	7	0	2,99,841 (1.94%)	4	4	8,66,399 (5.43%)	3	3	8,22,233 (4.60%)
CPI-M	5	4	10,57,542 (6.85%)	6	0	2,60,833 (1.64%)	2	0	2,79,081 (1.56%)
Swatantra	8	6	14,14,208 (9.16%)	9	0	14,79,693 (9.28%)	-	_	-
Independents	36	1	6,29,040	27	1*	5,16,448 (3.24%)	117	0	9,32,966 (5.22%)
Forward Bloc	-	-	-	1	1	2,08,431 (1.31%)			

*Muslim League contested and won in Periyakulam as part of the DMK-led front

+ Candidates of the Janata party contested on the symbol of the Congress (Organisation) | In 1971, the Samyukta Socialist Party, a recognised national party then, contested in Pollachi as an ally of the Congress (O)-Swatantra combine and lost.

seats, of which the DMK secured 25, Swatantra six and the CPI(M) four. The Congress could get only three – Nagapattinam, Tenkasi and Nagercoil (now called Kanniyakumari) – with most of its prominent faces, C. Subramaniam and R. Venkataraman (Thanjavur) biting the

Even though the Con-

gress, at the all-India level, scraped through in 1967 and formed a government with a slender majority, it experienced a huge split two years later. The party had witnessed a vertical split – the Congress (Requisitionists or Ruling) and the Congress (Organisation). Former Chief Minister K. Kamaraj, who was one of those responsible for Indi-

ra Gandhi becoming Prime Minister in 1966 and 1967, found himself with her critics. With this development, the alignments changed in the State, too. The DMK became a friend of the Congress (R). Meanwhile, in 1969, M. Karunanidhi became Chief Minis-

ter following the death of

Annadurai. In March 1971,

the country faced snap

While the DMK won in 23 constituencies in the State, its major partner, Congress (R), captured nine, and another partner, the CPI, secured four. The Forward Bloc and the Muslim League netted one each. An interesting feature was the narrow margin of difference in the erstwhile Tiruchendur Lok

Between the DMK and AIADMK, the State has seen several alliances with regional and national parties come and go; yet, the two parties continue to hold their ground

Sabha constituency with which M.S. Sivasamy of the DMK was declared elected, defeating M. Mathias of Swatantra by 26 votes.

The election also saw two long-standing rivals in Tamil Nadu politics - Kamaraj and C. Rajagopalachari or Rajaji - coming together. Their parties, Congress (O) and Swatantra, faced the election along with the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP). Kamaraj was the solitary winner of the Opposition, and he was elected from Nagercoil.

The following years saw many events in the State, including the dramatic split in the DMK. In October 1972, the DMK's treasurer and seasoned film actor, Ramachandran, broke away from the party to establish the AIADMK. Both Rajaji (1972) and Kamaraj (1975) passed away, turning the political field into a direct battleground between Karunanidhi and

MGR. Even when Kamaraj

was alive, the AIADMK had

registered electoral success in the Dindigul Lok Sabha bypoll in May 1973. The Emergency years witnessed the DMK turning a bitter critic of the Congress. In January 1976, the Karunanidhi-led DMK Ministry was dismissed and the State Assembly dissolved. The following month, a faction in the Congress (O), led by G.K. Moopanar, merged with the Congress, led by Indira Gandhi. Naturally, the AIADMK

and the Congress became allies in the 1977 Lok Sabha election. The Janata Party, an amalgam of many Opposition parties including the Congress (O), Bharatiya Lok Dal, Jan Sangh and the Socialists, came into being for all practical purposes ahead of the poll, but its nominees were fielded on the symbol of the Congress (O) in Tamil Nadu. The AIADMK-Congress combine, along with the CPI, swept the State with 35 seats. Both C. Subramaniam and R. Venkataraman emerged victorious this time from Pollachi and South Madras. The remaining four seats were shared by the Congress (O) and its ally, the DMK, with the former bagging three and the latter one. The CPI(M), which had aligned itself

with the Congress (O) and

the DMK, drew a blank.

U.K. man held for assaulting police inside Jagannath temple in Puri

Press Trust of India BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Police detained a British national for entering the renowned Jagannath Temple in Puri and assaulting police personnel deployed inside the shrine, an officer said on Sunday.

According to the police, the foreign tourist, identified as Thomas Craig Sheldon from Wandsworth in south London, had entered the 12th-century shrine on Saturday in an unauthorised way.

When police personnel stopped him and asked him to leave the temple premises as non-Hindus are not allowed entry into the temple, Mr. Sheldon allegedly assaulted them, the officer said.

"We have detained the foreign tourist and further investigation is going on," said Prasant Kumar Sahu, City DSP, Puri.

The incident occurred just a week after a woman from Poland was detained and later released for entering the temple on March

Prior to that, a group of Bangladeshi nationals had been caught entering the temple on March 3.

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KCR's trusted hand Kadiyam Srihari and daughter join Cong.

R. Ravikanth Reddy HYDERABAD

On the day former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao began touring districts, his trusted lieutenant and BRS MLA Kadiyam Srihari joined the Congress, along with his daughter Kavya.

He joined the party in the presence of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and AICC in-charge Deepa Dasmunshi.

Mr. Srihari, a seasoned politician who has worked as a Minister in the TDP government in the combined State and also as a Deputy _Chief Minister in the BRS government in Telangana, was approached by the Congress a few days ago.

Though rumours of his entry into the Congress were doing the rounds for over two weeks, things became clearer when his daughter opted out of the poll fray. The BRS leadership had earlier announced her candidature from the Warangal Lok



Kadiyam Srihari, his daughter Kavya with A. Revanth Reddy.

Sabha seat. She claimed that none of the Warangal BRS leaders were supporting her.

Earlier, Mr. Srihari met his followers and told them that he took the decision in of interest constituency

Speaking to The Hindu a couple of days ago, Mr. Srihari found fault with Mr. Rao's "attitude and aloofness", and said that these kept the cadre away.

"When the party was facing problems and desertions, Mr. KCR was sitting in his farmhouse without trying to infuse confi-

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

Despite the hike in airfares, a large expatriate population from West Asian countries are likely to be in the State; candidates or their poll managers too visit these countries to garner NRKs' support

Aabha Raveendran KOZHIKODE

head of the Lok election, Sabha several candidates or their poll managers from constituencies in northern Kerala are embarking on visits to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, especially the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Some have already paid their visit and returned. Their aim is to renew support from expatriates, both in terms of votes and funds, as the clout wielded by the community can sway the outcome, a fact that political parties are keenly aware of.

"Expatriates' could be a determining factor in polls in at least five constituencies - Malappuram, Kasaragod, Kollam, Vadakara, and Thrissur," said Attakoya Pallikkandy, chairman of the Pravasi Development, Rehabilita-



tion and Welfare Centre based in Kozhikode.

The Malayali diaspora from Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, and Ernakulam districts are mostly settled in the U.S., Canada, Australia, or the U.K. and rarely return to their homeland. On the other hand, those working in the GCC are closer to their roots.

The latest available statistics from the Election Commission show that there are around 88,000 expatriate voters from Kerala. 82,000 are men while

around 6,000 are women. However, it is a concern that majority of the eligible voters out of the 35 lakh Non-Resident Keralites (NRKs), including 25 lakh in GCC, have not applied for the suffrage rights. "It is not just the voting rights, but their influence on their families. Every NRK has at least four people back home whom he or she can influence," said K.V. Shamsudheen, chairman of UAE-based Pravasi Bandhu Welfare Trust.

Past two elections

Mr. Pallikandy claims that the expatriate population was instrumental in turning the tide in favour of the United Democratic Front in the 2019 Lok Sabha election, while it was clearly in favour of the Left Democratic Front in the Assembly election in 2021. Of the overseas voters, about 35,000 belong to Kozhikode district, followed by Malappuram district with 15,000. "About 30% of voters in Kozhikode district are either working in the GCC countries or their dependents are, or they are Gulf-returnees," he said.

Incidentally, the lackadaisical approach of the Centre in making arrangements for them to exercise their franchise from the respective embassies or consulates has irked the expatriates in the GCC.

M.P. Minister's son booked for assault; 4 officials suspended

Press Trust of India BHOPAL

The son of a Madhya Pradesh Minister was booked for allegedly assaulting a restaurant owner and his wife, an official said on Sunday.

In a related matter, four police officials were suspended after the accused, Abhigyan Patel, alleged that he was "manhandled" by them.

Mr. Patel is the son of Madhya Pradesh Minister of State for Health, Narendra Shivaji Patel. According to the police,

the accused, who was in a four-wheeler, had an argument with a journalist riding a two-wheeler at Trilanga crossing in the city around 8 p.m. on Saturday. He allegedly assaulted the journalist, prompting the owner of a nearby restaurant and his wife to intervene. The accused allegedly thrashed them too, police said. When the victims reached Shahpura police station, Mr. Patel and his friends arrived there, and allegedly misbehaved with the police when they were sending the couple and journalist for a medical examination, the official added.

Police registered an FIR against the accused under Sections 34 (common intention), 294 (abusing), 324 (voluntarily causing hurt by dangerous weapon or means) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code, said Bhopal City Zone-1 DCP Priyanka Shukla.

Acting on a counter-



complaint by Mr. Patel, police have pressed similar charges against the restaurant owner and another person, Ms. Shukla said, adding that an inquiry has been ordered into the conduct of the policemen who allegedly manhandled Mr. Patel.

When asked why the police did not take down the complaint of the journalist who was assaulted, Ms. Shukla said, "It was a sequence of events. That is why a single FIR was registered."

The incident took a political turn on Sunday, with Congress State chief Jitu Patwari demanding that an attempt-to-murder case be registered against the accused. He also slammed the police for not registering a separate case against Mr. Patel on the journalist's complaint. "We will provide a lawyer to the journalist to help him file a private complaint against the Minister's son in court," he said, adding that he had brought the matter to Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's notice.

Meanwhile, efforts to contact the Minister did not succeed.

S Naidu writes to Chief Secretary, CEO over disbursal of pensions

The Hindu Bureau VIJAYAWADA

TDP president N. Chandrababu Naidu has written letters to the Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) and the State's Chief Secretary, requesting them

to make arrangements for distribution of social security pensions by employees other than the ward and village volunteers.

In the letters addressed to the officials on Sunday, Mr. Naidu said that the EC permitted other government employees to carry out pension distribution, for which a large number of employees of the Grama/Ward Sachivalayams could be immediately engaged to ensure disbursement of pensions without any delay.

Kumaraswamy meets Sumalatha to seek cooperation in Mandya

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU

JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy, who is contesting from the Mandya Lok Sabha constituency as part of a seat-sharing agree-

ment with the BJP, on Sunday met Independent MP Sumalatha Ambareesh and sought her cooperation in the election.

While Ms. Ambareesh said on Saturday that her future political move would be made known in Mandya on April 3, Mr. Kumaraswamy is filing his nomination on April 4.

Ms. Ambareesh had defeated Nikhil Kumaraswamy, son of the former Chief Minister, in a closely fought high-decibel battle in the 2019 Lok Sabha election.

Karnataka Minister criticises Kerala govt. for offer to IT firms

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU

The water crisis in Bengaluru has triggered a row between Karnataka and Kerala. Following Kerala Industries Minister P. Rajeeve's overtures to Information Technology (IT) firms in the city to relocate to his State against the backdrop of the water crisis, M.B. Patil, Minister for Commerce and Industries, and Infrastructure Development, hit out at the Kerala government saying, "attempts to take undue advantage of the water scarcity situation is detrimental to the federal structure of the country."

reeling under water scarcity due to drought and severe summer. In such a situation, the offer extended by the Kerala Industries Minister for the Bengalurubased companies to shift their workspaces to that State does not depict the healthy competitive spirit," Mr. Patil said.

Mr. Rajeeve had recently said the government of Kerala had written to IT firms in the city offering them all facilities and wa-

"Though there has been water shortage, it is not precarious in regions where IT companies are lo-

"Many parts of India, in- cated in Bengaluru. Morecluding Kerala, have been over, the Minister should companies here have provided jobs to thousands of people hailing from his native Kerala. As a State, Kerala has all the liberty to make efforts to attract investments. However, it should not resort to petty politics," Mr. Patil said.

> He also emphasised that the State government had been working on facilitating a dedicated system to provide river-sourced water from nearby places for industrial areas and had held several meetings about facilitating Cauvery water for industrial areas in Bengaluru.

stays Centre's order on ferocious dogs

The Hindu Bureau

Kerala HC

The Kerala High Court has stayed the implementation of a circular issued by the Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry, and Dairying banning the breeding and licensing of 23 ferocious dog breeds.

The court, however, did not stay the prohibition on import and selling of the dogs contained in the circular dated March 12. It passed the order recently on a writ petition filed by three persons who claim to be dog lovers and owners of the banned breeds.

The circular had directed the States to ban the sale and breeding of 23 breeds of ferocious dogs, including pit bull terrier, American bulldog, rott-weiler, and mastiffs. The department has asked local bodies and State-level animal husbandry departments not to issue any licence or permit for the sale and breeding of the banned dog breeds. It also stipulated that dogs which had already been kept as a pet shall be sterilised so that further breeding did not take place.

The court noted that the petitioners had relied on the interim orders issued by the High Courts of Karnataka and Calcutta, wherein similar issues were considered and orders of stay have been granted regarding operation of the order of the Centre. "In such circumstances, there will be a direction staying the operation of notification dated 12.03.2024, except with regard to prohibition on import and selling of the dogs of the breeds specified therein," the court said.

Cool aid



Summer is here: Vendors selling earthen pots in Vijayawada on Sunday. The pots, used to store cool water, are in great demand during the summer months. This year, each pot costs between ₹300 and ₹400 in the city. G.N. RAO

Maulavi murder case: Kerala to challenge acquittal of 3 persons

The Hindu Bureau THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government has decided to file an appeal against the Kasaragod Principal Session Court's acquittal of three persons in the case pertaining to the murder of madrasa teacher Mohammed Riyas Maulavi inside a mosque in

Law Minister P. Rajeeve told mediapersons here on Sunday that the court's decision to acquit the accused was unusual.

"It is doubtful whether the court's findings are sufficient to acquit the accused. The Director-General of Prosecution and the Home department are taking steps to file an appeal. The police carried out a flawless investigation into the murder and nabbed all the accused in a very short time. The investigation team filed the chargesheet within 90 days and produced circumstantial and scientific evidence that in normal circumstances would have led to conviction. It is no small matter that the accused had to spend seven years in jail," said Mr. Rajeeve.

'Prosecution lauded'

He said the victim's family as well as the action council members had lauded the prosecution's efforts in the case. However, action council members who attended the trial daily had said that there were things in the judgment that even the defence did not claim.

Genetic profiling of captive jumbos of Kerala to begin soon

K.S. Sudhi

The genetic profiling of the 400-odd captive elephants of the State will begin shortly. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII), which is carrying out the profiling to add the details of the elephants to a national database, has provided the forensic kits to the Kerala Forest department. The department has en-

trusted assistant conservators (social forestry) in the districts with the responsibility of collecting blood and dung samples of the animals in their respective areas. An online training programme has also been planned for the forest officials on April 5 and 6 on sample collection, and updating the reports. The sample collection is ex-



The Kerala Forest department has asked officials to collect blood and dung samples of the animals in their areas. K.K. MUSTAFAH

pected to begin during the second week of April.

Festival season Incidentally, the sample

collection comes during the peak of the temple festival season of Kerala, when the captive elephants will be taken to different temples in the State for parading.

With around 25 elephant deaths taking place in Kerala annually, the number of captive elephants in the State has reached an all-time low of 407. Kerala was once considered the home to the largest population of captive elephants.

The profiling of the captive elephants has been completed in a few States. It is estimated that there are around 3,000 captive elephants in the country.

Cardamom crops in Idukki begin to wilt in severe drought

The Hindu Bureau

The ongoing drought situation in the cardamom-producing centres of Idukki poses a threat to cardamom farmers. Farmers say this is the first time in recent history that droughtlike conditions have occurred in the cardamom sector in Idukki.

Due to the severe drought, a large number of cardamom plantations were damaged in Vandanmedu, Pathumury, Santhanpara, Nedumkandam, Kattappana, Anavilasom, and Chakkupallam.

Shaji, a cardamom farmer near Kattappana, said if the drought persists for another two weeks, most of the plants on his land

are likely to be destroyed. "Most farmers continue irrigation expecting the arrival of summer rain. But the stored water has nearly run out, and rainfall has not yet occurred," he said.

Thomas Mathai, another farmer in Kumily, said that cardamom farmers in the region faced a drought in 1982. "That year, summer rainfall arrived only on April 17. Cardamom plants of nearly all farmers perished that year. Farmers suffered a lot after that year's drought," said Mr. Mathai.

Shine Varghese, general secretary of the Vandanmedu Cardamom Growers Association, said that the soaring heat will adversely affect cardamom production next year.

Salvage operation: Rescue workers at the site of the wall collapse in Puducherry on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Five workers killed as wall collapses in Puducherry

The Hindu Bureau

Five workers from Tamil Nadu were killed in a wall collapse at Mudaliarpet in Puducherry on Sunday morning.

The victims were identified as Bakyaraj, 38, Anthony, 65, Kamalagasan and Rajesh Kannan (age not immediately confirmed) from Ariyalur region, and Balamurugan, 38, from Srimushnam, Chidambaram,

According to sources, the five were part of a team of 16 workers engaged in canal desilting work behind the Marappalam power sub-station.

While they were desilting the canal and dumping the debris on an embankment, a portion of the wall collapsed on them. Hearing their cries for help, residents in the neighbourhood rushed to the spot and alerted the authorities.

A fire and rescue services unit reached the spot and managed to pull the workers out of the debris. However, Bakyaraj died before he could be saved, while four others died in hospital. At least three workers are undergoing treatment. The Mudaliarpet police are investigating the incident.

Lt. Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan expressed his condolences to the bereaved. In a press note, he said that a proper investigation will be conducted into the incident. He also directed the authorities to ensure that necessary precautions are taken at work-

What about incursions by China, Congress asks Modi

Leaders defend ceding of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka in 1974 and call it a friendly gesture, similar to the Land Boundary Agreement signed between India and Bangladesh during Modi's first term

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

he Congress on Sunday questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the "incursions" into Indian territory by China and the increased "belligerence" of "otherwise friendly neighbours like Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives" under his leadership. The party was responding to Mr. Modi's attack on the Katchatheevu

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge posted a statement on X, saying that while India and the Congress had a history of leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi. Iawaharlal Nehru, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel sacrificing their lives for the integrity of the nation, "You, PM Modi, gave a CLEAN CHIT to China, after 20 bravehearts made the supreme sacrifice in Galwan Valley". "You have suddenly woken up to the issues of territorial integrity and national security in your 10th year of misrule. Perhaps, elections are the trigger. Your desperation is palpable," he added.

Party communications



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge addresses the Opposition's rally at the Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

chief Jairam Ramesh also posted on X that the "real threat" to India's integrity had been coming from China in the form of encroachments into Indian territory over the past few years.

'Friendly gesture'

Mr. Kharge said Katchatheevu had been ceded to Sri Lanka based on a "friendly gesture", similar to the Land Boundary Agreement executed between India and Bangladesh during Mr. Modi's first term as Prime Minister.

"On the eve of elections in Tamil Nadu, you are raising this sensitive issue, but your own Govt's Attorney General, Shri Mukul Rohtagi, in 2014 told the following to the Supreme Court, 'Katchatheevu went to Sri Lanka by an agreement in 1974... How can it be taken back today? If you want Katchatheevu back, you will have to go to war to get it back', Pradhan Mantri ji, you should tell, did your Govt take ANY steps to take back Katch-

atheevu?" he asked. Defending the ceding of the island to Sri Lanka under the circumstances of the time, Mr. Ramesh said: "In 1974, the same year that Katchatheevu became part of Sri Lanka, the Sirima Bandaranaike-Indira Gandhi Pact allowed the repatriation of 6,00,000 Tamil people from Sri Lanka to India. In a single move, PM Indira Gandhi secured human rights and dignity for six lakh hitherto stateless people." Similarly, when Mr. Mo-

di's government brought the Bill for the LBA, the Congress had recognised the humanitarian need for it despite India losing out on over 10,000 acres in the deal, he said. "Rather than make juvenile allegations on the Prime Minister, the Congress supported the Bill in both Houses of Parliament," he said. Mr. Ramesh also took a

dig at the way a "diversionary issue" was created in Tamil Nadu, saying: "The president of BJP's Tamil Nadu unit files an RTI query to create a diversionary issue in Tamil Nadu. While lakhs of RTI queries on pressing public issues are ignored or rejected, this one gets VVIP treatment and gets answered rapidly. The BJP's Tamil Nadu president very conveniently 'places' the reply to his query in some friendly sections of the media. The Prime Minister immediately amplifies the issue. Talk of match-fixing!"

'BJP govt. is arresting leaders of INDIA bloc out of desperation'

The Hindu Bureau CHENNAI

DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Sunday alleged that the Narendra Modi-led BJP government at the Centre had arrested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal because the BJP was well aware that his electoral campaign would be well-received in the Lok Sabha election.

"However, more than the awareness that would have been created through Arvind Kejriwal's campaign, his arrest has sparked greater political awareness among the public," he said, in a message read out by DMK MP Tiruchi Siva at a demonstration by the INDIA bloc at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan against the "unlawful arrest" of Mr. Kejriwal.

Mr. Stalin said that until a few months ago, the BJP was arrogant, believing it would win the elections somehow. "However, each day, they are moving closer to defeat. They have resorted to unleashing their agenda, such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, Uniform Civil Code, and Ram temple, one by one, hoping to save their sinking ship. But none of their attempts is helping. Hence,



they have resorted to arresting leaders of the IN-DIA bloc. This reflects the BJP's growing desperation in the face of imminent defeat," he said.

'Source of inspiration'

Mr. Stalin said that the dwindling support for PM Modi had been further worsened by the arrest of Mr. Kejriwal.

"My friend Kejriwal is not only leading his State from prison; he is also serving as a source of inspiration for all of us in the IN-DIA bloc. Mr. Modi will be disappointed if he thinks he can undermine our unity by arresting Mr. Kejriwal," he added.

Warning that the democratic and constitutional characteristics of India would be uprooted if Mr. Modi was elected to power, he said, "Let us not forget that we can defeat Modi only through our unity."

BJP faces protests over Gujarat candidate selection

The Hindu Bureau AHMEDABAD

Even as Kshatriya communities continued their protests against BJP candidate Parshottam Rupala over his controversial remarks about former princely families, the BJP was faced with another hurdle as party workers of two different groups clashed over the candidate in Amreli.

The severe infighting in mreli - after the party dropped

Kachchdiya – surfaced as supporters of the outgoing MP and those of Bharat Sutariya, the party nominee in the Lok Sabha seat, clashed late on Saturday

After the clashes, several members were taken to the local hospital; later, Mr. Kachchdiya was also taken

So far, Mr. Kachchdiya has not made any statement but people close to him have said that he was

This is the first time the ruling party is witnessing such a crisis after declaring its candidates

ty's decision to replace him despite his performance. He has been MP since 2009.

The clashes between the members of the two groups occurred after the meeting with the cluster disappointed by the par- in-charge and former Minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasama, who has said that Mr. Sutariya will remain the party candidate.

Mr. Sutariya was the president of Amreli district panchayat. This is the first time that

the ruling party is witnessing such a crisis after it declared its candidates in the State. Earlier, the party had to announce new candidates for Vadodara and Sabarkantha after the nominees opted out from the electoral race following protests from the local cadre. Though the party did not make any official statement regarding the clashes in Amreli, insiders said that the protests continued despite the high command's efforts to sort out differences.

In Sabarkantha, even after the party nominated a new candidate, the local cadre were upset about that it was Shobhana Baraiya, wife of former Congress legislator Mehandra

'Letter by advocates to CJI an attempt to misguide people'

The Hindu Bureau

The recent letter by a group of lawyers, including senior Supreme Court advocates Harish Salve and Adish Agarwala, to Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud is a direct fallout of the exposure of corruption in the top court's verdict on electoral bonds and an attempt to misguide the people with a false narrative, the Left-leaning All India Lawyers Union (AILU)

AILU leaders, including senior lawyer and Rajya Sabha MP Bikas Ranjan Bhattacharya and senior lawver P.V. Surendranath. said the letter was only a canard against responsible lawyers and lawyers' forums, who were consistently fighting for the pro-

tection of the independence of the judiciary and to safeguard the basic __ structure of the Constitution. They said that people holding responsible posts had attacked "judicial review" and the "basic structure" in the name of supremacy of Parliament, and had demanded the determining of a role for the executive in the selection of

***Walkovers in Arunachal give NDA a** gpsychological edge in the Northeast

NEWS ANALYSIS

Rahul Karmakar **GUWAHATI**

The uncontested victory for 10 BIP candidates in 'Arunachal Pradesh appears to have given a psychological edge to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) across the Northeast ahead of the first phase of polling on April 19. Apart from 16 Lok Sabha constituencies in eight States, elections will be held for the remaining 50 Assembly seats in Arunachal Pradesh and 32 Assembly seats in Sikkim on April 19.

The Northeast has a total of 25 Lok Sabha seats, 14 of them in Assam. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura have two seats each while Nagaland, Mizoram, and Sikkim have one seat each.

Soon after winning the Mukto Assembly seat unopposed, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the BJP was confident of bagging the 50 seats where its strongest "opponent" is believed to be the National People's Party (NPP), an NDA constituent. The NPP is contesting 20 seats, one more than traditional rival

His Assam counterpart,



allies hardly have any competition. The contest will be among our own candidates to win by the highest margin HIMANTA BISWA SARMA

The BJP and its

Himanta Biswa Sarma, was equally confident about the NDA bagging 22 Lok Sabha seats in the region. "The BJP and its allies hardly have any competition. The contest will be among our own candidates to win by the highest margin," he said at a party event in Udalguri on

Kamala Kanta Kalita, general secretary of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), said the Opposition parties were in such disarray that the NDA constituents could lend them their leaders or candidates to contest elections in the

The AGP and the United People's Party Liberal are minor partners in the BJPled government in Assam.

The NDA bagged 19 of the 25 parliamentary constituencies in the Northeast in 2019 although the BJP and its allies had a seatsharing arrangement only in Assam and Nagaland. The NDA displayed better coordination this time in more States.

Sticking to 'tradition'

The NPP decided not to contest the Arunachal East and Arunachal West Lok Sabha seats but, sticking to "tradition", did not maintain the alliance with the BIP in the Assembly elections. The BJP returned the favour by deciding to support the NPP in the two Lok Sabha seats in Meghalaya – Shillong and Tura.

The BJP also decided to support the Naga People's Front in the Outer Manipur Lok Sabha seat.

The friendship between the NDA allies has, however, been paused in Mizoram and Sikkim. The BJP is pitted against the Mizo National Front and the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) in Mizoram and Sikkim, respectively.

The aberrations aside, the NDA has projected itself as a more cohesive conglomeration than the INDIA bloc, which managed to field consensus candidates only in Manipur and Tripura. The Congress is contesting both Lok Sabha seats in Manipur and the Tripura West constituency. Ally CPI(M) is contesting the Tripura East seat reserved for the Scheduled Tribes.

In Assam, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has fielded candidates from Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur parliamentary seats. The Opposition alliance in the State, of which the AAP is a member, had decided to let the Assam Jatiya Parishad contest the Dibrugarh seat and Congress the Lakhimpur

The constituents of both the NDA and INDIA blocs have ostensibly kept their alliances on hold for the Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh Sikkim.

A total of 133 candidates remain in the fray for the 50 seats in Arunachal Pradesh for the April 19 elections. The BJP is contesting all

50, the NPP 20, Congress 19, the Nationalist Congress Party 14, the People's Party of Arunachal 11, the Arunachal Democratic Party four, and the Lok Jan Shakti Party one. The rest are Independents.

A total of 147 candidates will vie for the 32 Assembly seats in Sikkim.

President Murmu confers Bharat Ratna on L.K. Advani

Press Trust of India NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu conferred Bharat Ratna on BJP stalwart and former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani at his residence in Delhi on Sunday.

The ceremony was attended by Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and the family members of Mr. Advani, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a post on X.

Mr. Modi sat next to Mr. Advani as the President honoured the veteran leader with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award. In a post on X, Mr. Modi said that it was special to witness the conferring of the Bharat Ratna on Mr. Advani and this honour is a recognition of his enduring contributions to the nation's progress.

"His dedication to public service and his pivotal role in shaping modern India have left an indelible mark on our history. I am proud to have got the opportunity to work with him very closely over the last several decades," Prime Minister said.

The Rashtrapati Bhavan described Mr. Advani as a doyen of Indian politics and said that he has served the nation with unwaver-



President Droupadi Murmu confers Bharat Ratna on L.K. Advani, in the presence of PM Narendra Modi, in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

ing dedication and distinction for over seven decades.

Whether as Home Minister or as Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Advani always prioritised national interest above all, earning him respect and admiration across party lines, it said in a series of posts on X. "His long and tireless struggle for India's cultural regeneration culminated in the reconstruction of Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya in 2024," it said.

Among the handful of post-Independence political leaders who succeeded in reshaping the national agenda and placing it on the path of development, Mr. Advani's accomplishments provide the best articulation of the genius of India and its inclusive traditions, it said.

It said that with his vision of cultural nationalism, Mr. Advani toiled hard for decades, across the length and breadth of the country and brought about a transformation in the so-

cio-political landscape. "When Emergency put India's democracy at risk, the indefatigable crusader in him helped guard it against authoritarian tendencies," it said. A high point in Mr. Advani's political life came

when he spearheaded the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in the late 1980s and laid the foundation for the revival of cultural nationalism. "His struggle culminated in the reconstruction of the magnificent Ram temple in Ayodhya in 2024, thus fulfilling the decades-old aspirations of countless Indians," it said.

PM Modi disrespected President: Opposition

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Sunday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had disrespected President Droupadi Murmu by not standing up when she presented the Bharat Ratna to L.K. Advani. The Congress said it showed the BJP was "antiwomen and anti-Dalit".

The Congress said in a statement that the President of the country was standing and PM Modi was sitting. "Once again PM Modi has deliberately insulted the tribal woman President. This is not the first time – when the new Parliament was inaugurated, she was not invited and the President was not seen even in the Pran Pratistha programme of Ram Temple," the party said.

Ashok Malik, former press secretary to former President Ram Nath Kovind, said on X that Rashtrapati Bhavan protocol has the President and recipient both standing, while other guests, - including the Vice-President and the Prime Minister, as seated. If the recipient is elderly or indisposed, he or she may stay seated. This event did not take place in Rashtrapati Bhavan, but obviously the usual protocol was followed," he said.

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 Tarig Anwar from Katihar and will repeat

MP Mohammad Jawed from Kishanganj. As part of the grand alliance with the Rashtriva 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 Srikant 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.





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 guit the party, claiming that it was stuck in a "disastrous" partnership with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). He also flayed the recent induction of controversial former MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav. PTI



🌠 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

emocracies 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 shortchanged 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 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

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 the BJP is an expectation of ideological clarity and stridency on the question 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.



Four persons killed as sudden storm hits Jalpaiguri in Bengal

Four persons died and over 100 were injured as a storm lasting for a few minutes wreaked havoc in parts of Jalpaiguri and other districts of north Bengal on Sunday. The deaths were reported in Jalpaiguri town due to the storm, which was accompanied by hailstorm and heavy rainfall. "Sad to know that sudden heavy rainfall and stormy winds brought disasters today afternoon in some Jalpaiguri-Mainaguri areas, with loss of human lives, injuries, house damages, etc. District and block administration, police, DMG and QRT teams swung into disaster management operations and provided relief," Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said.

'Banned Meitei terror group delaying surrender of cadre'

The United National Liberation Front (P), a banned terror group, has failed to surrender weapons or provide a list of its members despite signing a ceasefire agreement with the Centre four months ago, officials said on Sunday, amid concerns by security agencies that its cadre were still involved in violence in Manipur. Even after three rounds of talks with State authorities, the UNLF(P), the first Meitei terror outfit to agree to a ceasefire, has not complied with the terms since the agreement was inked last year. Concerns have been raised by security agencies over the ongoing violence in Manipur attributed to UNLF(P) members despite the ceasefire. PTI

Opposition rally in Delhi failed to make a mark: BJP

Union Minister Anurag Thakur says rally showed the INDIA bloc did not have a leader or a policy; Delhi BJP unit president Virendra Sachdeva says AAP has failed to its enthuse its own supporters

Satvika Mahajan NEW DELHI

he Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday criticised the INDIA bloc's mega rally in Delhi, with Union Minister Anurag Thakur saying that "thieves and their cousins together pleaded at the Ramlila Maidan".

"During the Anna [Hazare] movement at Ramlila Maidan, [Delhi Chief Minister] Arvind Kejriwal used to say that he was fighting a war against corruption and would not enter politics. But he came into politics and today has landed in a quagmire of corruption. Earlier, he used to say that there is something about this [Chief Minister's] chair that makes its occupants indulge in corruption. Today, he has proved his own point," Mr. Thakur added.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva hit out at the rally, claiming that the Opposition alliance failed to make a mark in its first show of strength in the national capital, with the residents of Delhi rejecting calls of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress to attend the rally.

"Media reports have



Full force: Supporters of the INDIA bloc parties shout slogans during the 'Save Democracy' mega rally held at the Ramlila Maidan in New Delhi on Sunday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

shown that it was a disjointed rally, witnessing only a motley crowd of a few thousand, most of them brought from Punjab and Haryana," he added.

Leaders of both the Delhi Congress and the AAP who were making tall claims about the rally for the past one week at media briefings could not enthuse even their own party workers, leave alone the people of Delhi, he said, adding that the lack of unity between the AAP and the Congress was apparent as a video showed the Congress workers removing a picture of Mr. Kejriwal put up near the podium by the AAP leaders.

Flawed intentions

Taking a dig at Sunita Kejriwal, wife of the Chief Minister, who announced six guarantees by the AAP supremo currently under ED custody, Mr. Thakur said: "What kind of alliance is this where there is no discussion, no mutual understanding? They have neither a leader nor a policy, and their intentions are flawed. Today again they

have declared guarantees for discussion. Do other leaders of the alliance with guarantees?"

Mr. Sachdeva said that the "failure of Sunday's rally" had marked the "beginning of the end" of the AAP in Delhi.

BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi cited corruption cases against a host of leaders, including those from the Congress, the DMK and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, to assert that all these charges dated back to the pre-2014 period.

Thousands gather at Ramlila ground to cheer INDIA leaders

<u>Samridhi Tewari</u> Satvika Mahajan NEW DELHI

Thousands of people attended the mega rally of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) at the Ramlila Maidan in Delhi on Sunday.

Braving the heat, people different backgrounds reached the venue on foot and on buses, trucks, and auto-rickshaws in support of the Opposition bloc's rally against the BJP-led Union government's alleged attack on democracy, and the "misuse" of Central probe agencies against Opposition leaders.

Speeches of top leaders elicited a range of emotions from the crowd. The loudest reactions came when the Opposition leaders targeted the BJP, such as Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's comment on "whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi can even make chai (tea) or has been lying to us about this as well".

Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav drew similar reactions when he said: "Mr. Modi has time to meet Priyanka Chopra but not the farmers protesting for



Opposition leaders at the Ramlila Maidan in Delhi on Sunday, SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAF

their rights." Sunita Kejriwal, wife of Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal; Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's Kalpana Soren, and Congress's Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi also evoked emotions from the people present at the venue.

The rally started with songs protest stretched on as leaders on the dais called for the defeat of the BIP.

A sea of yellow, the AAP's adopted colour, was interspersed equally with the Congress's flags. A Congress supporter atop a loudspeaker, dressed in a kurta bearing Rahul's face, hoisted the party flag. An AAP supporter had painted himself in the Tricolour sporting the slogan 'Main Bhi Kejriwal' across his

Now, GST probe into big corporates, major MNCs needs 'written approval'

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Department of Revenue has asked the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) officials to seek a prior written nod of zonal Chief Commissioners before initiating any investigation in cases relating to major multinational corporations (MNCs), as well as "sensitive matters or matters with national implica-

tions". The directive is part of a set of instructions issued on Saturday, titled "Guidelines for CGST field formations in maintaining ease of doing business while engaging in investigation with regular taxpayers", which state that each investigation must be initiated only after the approval of the Principal Commissioner.

The guidelines that were issued further specify

The CGST field formations should collect details on the prevalent trade practices, the directive says

situations where the "prior written approval of the zoer shall be required if investigation is to be initiated and action to be taken in a case falling under" four categories.

Apart from large corporates and major MNCs, a written nod is also mandated for matters that are already before the GST Council and "of interpretation seeking to levy tax or duty" on any sector, commodity, or service for the first time, whether in Central Excise or GST.

Tax experts were not yet clear about how a "big industrial house" and major MNC would be defined under these norms.

In all these categories of cases, including "sensitive matters or matters with national implications", the CGST field formation concerned should also collect details on the prevalent trade practices and nature of transactions carried out,

"The implications/impact of such matter should be studied so as to have adequate justification for initiating investigation and taking action," the guide-

Uniform procedure

The framework was conveyed to officials after the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) discussed the need for CGST officials to follow a uniform procedure in undertaking enforcement activities, involving "regular taxpayers, which incorporates aspects related to the ease of doing business".

'Verify existing probes' For all investigations, tax officials have been asked to ascertain if any inquiry has already been initiated on the same subject matter or with respect to the same taxpayer or GST Identificaanother investigating office or tax administration.

"The position must be placed before the authority who is to approve initiation of investigation," the guidelines said.

The directive will address industry concerns, consulting said KPMG's national head for indirect tax Abhishek Jain, while stressing that implementation will be key. "If followed, the new directive could contribute towards tax certainty and stability in our country's business landscape," he said.

A record 60 traditional products from across India granted GI tag

Sangeetha Kandavel CHENNAI

Over 60 products from across India, including Banaras Thandai, have been given the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

This is the first time that such a large number of products have been given the GI tag at one go nior official from the Geographical Indications Registry said, adding that more States were coming forward and filing applications to get a GI tag for their traditional products.

Six traditional crafts from Assam – Asharikandi terracotta craft, Pani Meteka craft, Sarthebari metal craft, Jaapi (bamboo headgear), Mishing handloom products, and Bihu dhol have bagged the GI tag.

Thirteen other products from Assam have been given the tag, including the Bodo Dokhona, the tradi-



The Bihu dhol has been given the GI tag. THE HINDU

tional attire of Bodo women; and Bodo Eri silk, referred to as the fabric of peace or ahimsa (non-violence), which comes from the silkworm Samia ricini that feeds mostly on the leaves of the castor plant (Ricinus communis), and cassava. Bodo Jwmgra (a traditional scarf), Bodo Gamsa (traditional dress of Bodo men), Bodo Thorkha (a musical instrument), and Bodo Sifung (a long flute) are also on the list.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in a post on X, said it was a big win for Assam's heritage. "These products, deeply rooted in history, support nearly one lakh people directly," he said.

The famous Banaras Thandai, a drink made by blending milk with a mix of nuts, seeds and spices, also got the tag. Details in the GI filing mentioned that on any given evening, in the heart of the city, in areas

Lahurabir, and the old lane of Pakka Mahal, traditional Banaras Thandai shops attract large crowds. The drink was first introduced centuries ago as an offering to the Shri Kashi Vishwanath deity on the occasion of Mahashivaratri, Rangbhari Ekadasi, and Holi. The Banaras Tabla Banaras Shehnai, Banaras Lal Bharwamirch, and Banaras Lal Peda are among the products that walked away with GI tags in this region.

The Tripura region secured two tags - one for the Pachra-Rignai, which is a traditional dress worn on special occasions, and the other for the Matabari Peda, a sweet preparation.

Meghalaya Garo Textile weaving, which is linked to socio-cultural and religious rituals, Meghalaya Lyrnai Pottery, and Meghalaya Chubitchi also secured the

TH CROSSWORD+ 14137

11 Winsome move? - No, it is a bad situation (6,4) 12 Cut of meat from wild animal, swapping internally (4)

To solve this puzzle online.

get across to our crossword site. @ https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn

Criticize maliciously in damaging whisper (8)

15 Times forgotten in light conversation during drink (6) 16 Absent-minded Tom settles in filthy dwelling (6)

18 Private party with setter at branch shortly (8)

20 Opposing content of share (4) 21 Flight attendant wets a dress in turbulence (10)

23 Naughty Romeos at restaurants (3.5)

24 Warrior from bustling Oman takes over banks of Zambia (6)

25 Inspirational song by worker near border (6) 26 Rifles in bag worn by persons of ordinary grade (8)

2 Desperate retainer leaves Norway for African state (7)

3 Reach gallery main gate on return (3,2)

4 Enduring oppressive tax (5-4)

Cast doubt on Indian lawmaker on every atrocity, criminal happening basically (7)

Husband leaves boxers' groups (5)

7 Forfeits plane crashing on foreign site (9) Nurse works in our specialty hospital mainly (7)

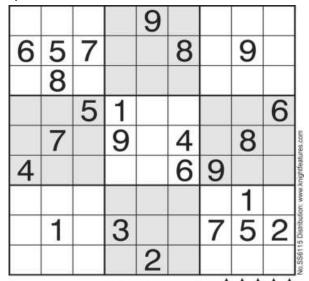
Head of the family felt sumptuous about a recipe (9) **15** What did you say about egomaniac? (4,5)

Punish rook at hideout stashing money (7) Maid's cabinet (7)

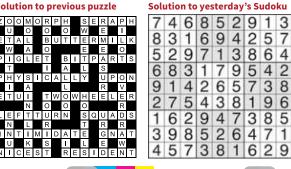
19 Hot merchandise on the shelves (2,5) Sort out matters first to attack suddenly (5)

Theatrical entertainment rewound from handycam ardently (5)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING:



Lord Krishna's assurance

The eleventh mantra in Apratiratha Sukta uses the word Vritrahan. Commentator Sayanacharya explained Vritrahan as referring to Indra, who killed Vritrasura. But the Vedas use the word Vritra in a broader sense. If one goes into the details seen in the Vedas, then it becomes clear that this eleventh mantra is a prayer to Vishnu, said V.S. Karunakarachariar in a discourse.

Taittiriya Samhita describes Indra's battle with Vritrasura. Here it is said that Indra worshipped Vishnu, who stood in three places during the battle with Vritrasura. Indra takes Vritrasura's possessions in three instalments, and offers them to Vishnu. Vritrasura then enters Indra's body and takes the form of hunger.

Vritrasura can be vanquished by the weapon known as Vajra. The vajra that vanquishes hunger is the power of yagas. That is why it is said: vajrovai yajnah. So Vritrasura is a symbolic representation of hunger, with which we are born and which stays with us till the end. Vritrasura is also portrayed as the embodiment of sins. When yagas are performed, there is a prayer for the destruction of Vritrasura. This is a prayer for the destruction of our sins. Lord Krishna is the One capable of doing this.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says sarva papebhyoh mokshayishyami. So, here He guarantees the destruction of all the sins of those who surrender at His feet. He also assures His devotees that He will grant them moksha, the only condition being that they wholeheartedly resort to Saranagati.

Across

1 Chinese system of iron housing development, excludes parsonage essentially (4,4)

10 Training at hill station in Kerala to review every year (3,5)

Inactive? Nail in charge! (6)

Without initial experience, nun gets around musical instruments

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 confilict is an additional, and exacerbating, variable. Without data results are irretrievably skewed and distorted

Rohini Subrahmanyam

uman 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

"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

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

It 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

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

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 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

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

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

are key to gaining a better understanding

effectively for future changes."

'Already an uphill battle'

of current Arctic conditions and preparing

Hrishikesh Chandanpurkar, a fellow at the

Centre for Sustainability, Environment,

and Climate Change at FLAME University,

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

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.)

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

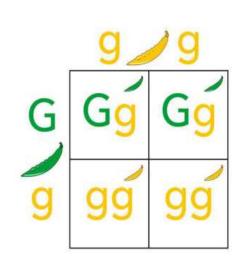
The little four-square grid we drew in school while learning about genetic crossing has a name: the Punnett Square. These squares are a way to predict the possible genetic outcomes of the offspring when two individuals with known genotypes are crossed.

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.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

Malefactors, misgivings

Congress reliance on old Mandal politics has thrown up irritants for INDIA

t is now well understood that Indian politics is undergoing a phase that is termed the "Bharatiya Janata Party-dominated political party system", with the ruling party, the BJP, having the ability to effectively compete across most States unlike others. The other large national party, the Congress, has a nation-wide presence but is handicapped by severe weaknesses in quite a few States, which it seeks to overcome through State-wise alliances. These alliances benefit the regional parties that are also finding it increasingly difficult to tackle the BJP on their own. The IN-DIA bloc (Congress, regional parties and the Left) remains a selective State-wise alliance that is determined by the need for unity against the BJP. This is particularly so in some States in western India (Maharashtra for example) and the Hindi heartland (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) whose polities include long-time regional forces besides the Congress, and where the BJP had a close to 90% success rate in seat winning terms in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In Bihar, the INDIA bloc should fancy a fighting performance – the RJD is the single largest party in the Assembly in seat and vote share terms and the Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) of the RJD, the Congress and the Left came very close to upending the BJP-Janata Dal (United) ruling alliance in the 2020 Assembly elections. While Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's never-ending pursuit of alliance-switching has meant that the alliance will lose out relatively on the support base that the JD(U) enjoys among non-Yadav Other and Extremely Backward Classes, the RJD has shown the ability to remain resilient even as the Congress and the Left add to an ideologically coherent anti-BJP voice. The Congress has grown closer to the Mandal parties by emphasising the need for a caste census while the Left remains a small but viable political entity in Bihar because of its base among the poor.

As with other alliances in States such as Tamil Nadu, the ideological coherence and the compatibility of social bases have served as the glue for the INDIA bloc in Bihar but the nature of the constituent parties and their recent histories have thrown up irritants in seat sharing. The Congress's welcoming of controversial former Member of Parliament, Pappu Yadav, who has faced criminal cases, and his party into its fold, ill-behoves the party's messaging against the criminalisation of politics. The relative decline of the Mandal parties and the rise of the BJP have made it imperative for the former to reinvent their positions to move beyond their reliance on strongmen and narrow identity politics. While the Congress has done well to reorient its focus on social justice, bringing itself closer to the RJD, it should avoid the temptation to emulate these aspects of old Mandal politics that prioritised casteist identities as the basis for political mobilisation.

Compounding crises

water delicit worsens other adverse

events for the poor

here is only enough water to fill 23% of the holding capacity in all of South India's reservoirs, The Hindu reported last week based on an analysis of Central Water Commission data. This, according to the analysis, is nine percentage points lower than the rolling decadal average, speaking to the certainty and the magnitude of the impending crisis. The last time South India faced a summertime water crisis was in 2017. The crisis in the same region this year is poised to be different, and worse, for a few reasons. First, the monsoons are influenced by various factors; of these, El Niño events render them more erratic, even if isolating their influence thus is a simplification. There was an El Niño event in 2014-16 whereas this time there is an ongoing event and among the five strongest such events in recorded history. Second, after meteorologists recorded 2023 to be the warmest year on record, they also said they expected 2024 to be worse. A team led by the U.K. Meteorological Office also predicted a 93% chance that every year until 2026 will be a record-breaker. Third, millions in India will be spending some additional time outdoors this summer to cast their votes in the general election. Fourth, this crisis has happened before; yet, while (some) policies and forecasting have improved, preparedness and implementation of these policies on the ground have not. Other factors, including unplanned urban growth, over-extraction of groundwater, low water reuse efficiency, insufficient community involvement, and encroachment and/or degradation of catchment areas, persist.

Climate change will impose a deadlier cost on low- and middle-income countries such as India by creating simultaneous crises. While the phenomenon changes the way weather events coevolve, it also affects the frequency of their occurrence such that two events may develop a greater chance of transpiring together than they did before – such as a drought and a disease outbreak, which in turn will worsen socio-economic conditions among marginalised groups. Any water crisis must be seen against this backdrop, where it is both a crisis in itself and a factor that compounds the effects of another. That a region's water situation becomes precarious after one year of deficient rain is a sign governments are not learning their lessons or are ignoring them, even if the deficit was considerable. No more information or context is necessary to understand this fact than what already exists. But governments and policymakers seem to need reminding that this and future crises will neither be just about the water nor the fault of climate change.

The ART of India's HIV/AIDS response

oday, April 1, marks a very important day in the history of response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in India. Twenty years ago, on April 1, 2004, the Indian government had launched Free Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), for Persons living with HIV (PLHIV), a decision which has proven one of the successful and a key intervention in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

At the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s, the disease was considered a death sentence and was met with a lot of fear, stigma and discrimination. Though the first antiretroviral drug, AZT (zidovudine), was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) in March 1987, three more drugs were approved soon after in 1988 and a new class of antiretroviral drugs, protease inhibitors were introduced in 1995. But access to these medicines remained limited for most of the world's population except in some high-income countries.

The evolution to free ART

Recognising this challenge, in 2000, at the UN General Assembly's Millennium Summit, world leaders set a specific goal and issued the declaration to stop and reverse the spread of HIV. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was created in 2002 which advocated universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services. In 2004, the number of PLHIV in India was estimated to be 5.1 million, with a population prevalence of 0.4%. Very few of them were on antiretroviral therapy. Even by the end of 2004, only 7,000 PLHIV were on ART.

The key barrier to ART was high cost and unaffordability for individuals, and geographical access to treatment. In fact, the so-called "cocktail therapy" or HAART (highly active antiretroviral therapy), a combination of three or more anti-retroviral drugs, had become available starting in 1996, but costs were prohibitively high (\$10,000 a year). People infected with HIV were stigmatised and lost their lives while health-care providers felt helpless due to non-availability/non affordability of ARTs.

Therefore, the decision to make free ART for any adult living with HIV was a path-breaking one. From November 2006, the free ART was made available for children as well. In two decades of free ART initiative, the facilities offering ART have expanded from less than 10 to around 700 ART centres – 1,264 Link ART centres have provided, and are providing, free ART drugs to approximately 1.8 million PLHIV on treatment.

ART is not merely about starting a person living with HIV on treatment. It is equally important to keep the viral load down and suppressed to ensure that the transmission of diseases is also halted. The impact has been that in 2023, the prevalence of HIV in 15-49 years has come down to 0.20 (confidence interval 0.17%-0.25%) and the burden of disease in terms of estimated PLHIV has been coming down to 2.4 million. India's share in PLHIV globally had come



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It has been 20 years since the pathbreaking

Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) initiative began in India, and it has lessons for other public health programmes

down to 6.3% (from around 10% two decades ago). As of the end of 2023, of all PLHIV, an estimated 82% knew their HIV status, 72% were on ART and 68% were virally suppressed. The annual new HIV infections in India have declined by 48% against the global average of 31% (the baseline year of 2010). The annual AIDS-related mortalities have declined by 82% against the global average of 47% (the baseline year of 2010). These are significant achievements considering that many of the other government-run public health programmes in India have failed to achieve or sustain good coverage.

Patient-centric approach to services

It will be unfair to credit free ART alone for the success. There were many complementary initiatives which have contributed to halting the HIV epidemic. These include the provision of free diagnostic facilities; attention on prevention of parent to child transmission of HIV (PPTCT) services; prevention, diagnosis and management of opportunistic infections including management of co-infections such as tuberculosis

The programme has shown agility and dynamic modifications. Early initiation of ART and Treat all policy evolved over the years where the ART eligibility criteria were relaxed - from those having a CD4 count less than 200 cells/mm3 (in 2004), to that less than 350 cells/mm3 (in 2011), and then to less than 500 cells/mm3 (in 2016). And, finally, there was the 'Treat All' approach from 2017, which ensures that ART is initiated, irrespective of CD4 count. This has been a true universalisation and has contributed to reduced virus transmission, both at the individual and the community levels. This is supplemented by free of cost viral load testing for all PLHIV on treatment. The programme also adopted a patient-centric approach by providing two to three months of medicines to stable PLHIV which minimises the number of patient visits to the ART centres, reducing travel time and costs for the patients.

This approach also increases adherence to treatment besides decongesting ART centres by reducing the average daily OPD, giving health-care workers more time to attend to other patients. India continued to add newer and more potent drugs to the programme, as and when those became available. For example, Dolutegravir (DTG), a new drug with superior virological efficacy and minimal adverse effects was introduced in 2020. In 2021, India adopted a policy of rapid ART initiation in which a person was started on ART within seven days of HIV diagnosis, and in some cases, even the same day.

However, the fight against HIV/AIDS is far from over. The ongoing and fifth phase of India's National AIDS Control programme aims to (by 2025) reduce the annual new HIV infections by 80%, reduce AIDS-related mortalities by 80% and eliminate vertical transmission of HIV and

To achieve this, the National AIDS Control

Programme (NACP) phase 5 calls for the attainment of ambitious targets of 95-95-95 by 2025, where 95% of all people living with HIV know their HIV status; 95% of all people diagnosed with HIV infection receive sustained antiretroviral therapy (ART), and 95% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy achieve viral suppression by 2025. These targets are aligned with global targets agreed by the UNAIDS.

tackled. First, the delayed enrolment to the ART

facilities is the biggest challenge to the national

programme. In India, patients presenting with

Crossing the hurdles There are a number of challenges yet to be

CD4 count <200 to ART centres constitute almost a third of total foot fall. Second, after starting on ART and continuing, the patient starts feeling well. But the moment this happens, they start missing doses and miss medicines for months or completely drop out. This results in the development of resistance as well. This 'loss to follow up' needs to be addressed. Third, the sustained supply and availability of ART needs to be ensured by the national programme, in every geography of the country and more so for tough terrain, hilly and remote areas. Fourth, there is a need to focus on the private sector engagement in care of PLHIV. Fifth, there is a need for constant training and capacity building of staff as science keeps evolving and should be focused more on hands-on training. Sixth, there is a need to focus on strengthening integration with other programmes such as hepatitis, non-communicable diseases (diabetes and hypertension) and mental health as PLHIV are living normal but have other health conditions that need to be addressed. Seventh, a focused approach needs to be adopted to reduce preventable mortality that includes systematic

diagnostics. The free ART initiative in India succeeded, inter alia, due to the political will and constant support of successive governments; sustained and sufficient funding, regular programme reviews and field-based monitoring, a series of complementary initiatives; community and stakeholder engagements and participation; people-centric modifications in the service delivery; bridging the policy intentions to implementation gaps, and continuous expansion of services to cover more people living with HIV.

death reviews and availability of advanced

The free ART initiative arguably paved the path for bending the HIV/AIDS epidemic curve in India. It is a testament to the point that if there is a will, the government-run public health programme can deliver quality health services free, and available and accessible to everyone. The 20 years of free ART and subsequent steps under the NACP have the potential to guide other public health programmes in the country. As an example, the learnings can and should be used to launch a nationwide free hepatitis C treatment initiative in India and accelerate progress towards hepatitis C elimination.

The Finance Commission and public finance in Kerala

ublic debt management is getting wider attention in Centre-State financial relations, against the backdrop of recently constituted Sixteenth Union Finance Commission. One of the States in India, Kerala, had filed a suit in the Supreme Court of India against the Centre's decision on the net borrowing ceiling of States. These recent developments relate to a clarion call for "asymmetric fiscal rules" relating to deficits and debts in India.

This issue requires wider discussion and debate as debt- deficit dynamics is the single most significant issue now in Centre-State financial relations.

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic fiscal strategy, the fiscal deficit to GDP is envisaged as 3.5% for States, with 0.5% tied to power sector reforms and the general government public debt to GDP at 60% and central government debt at 40%. The outstanding liabilities of Kerala are 36.9 percentage of GSDP as per 2024-25 (BE). However, the roll-over risk is not there as around 16% debt of Kerala has a maturity period within 2025. As of now, Telangana has a long-term debt maturity profile, with refinancing of debt of about 39.9% to be done only by 2063 as compared to 14.7% for Kerala.

Revenue stability is indeed the basis of public expenditure design. In Kerala, own tax revenue constitutes 48% of total revenue and own non-tax revenue (including lotteries) at about 12%. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) recently published data on the fiscal projections and the actuals realised according to November 2023 figures. The fiscal marksmanship (percentage of Actuals by Budget Estimates) ratio is only 57.23% for tax revenue in Kerala, as in November 2023. However, the fiscal



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Asymmetric fiscal rules require wider discussion and debate, as Kerala has highlighted

marksmanship of Goods and Services Tax (GST) this fiscal year (56.30%) is higher than the corresponding period in the previous year (54.21%), as in the CAG report.

Volatility as a matter of concern The Kerala government has cited the volatility in

intergovernmental fiscal transfers as a matter of concern. Over the years, the share of Union Finance Commission tax transfers has declined for a few States, including Kerala. If we look at the numbers, the *inter se* State share of Kerala in the Finance Commission transfers (which was 2.341% in the Thirteenth Finance Commission, and which increased to 2.5% in the Fourteenth Finance Commission) declined to 1.925% in the Fifteenth Finance Commission.

The Fifteenth Finance Commission has designed the tax transfer formula based on population (15%), area (15%), income distance (45%), demographic transition (12.5%), forest and ecology (10%) and tax effort (2.5%). The weightage given to the distance of per capita income in the Finance Commission tax transfer formula adversely affects growing States, including Kerala. This leads to the debate on equity versus efficiency principles of intergovernmental fiscal transfers. If economic convergence (poor States catching up with the rich States) is a prime concern of Union Finance Commissions, giving weightage to the distance criterion is valued.

Against these concerns, increasing the tax effort by strengthening the digital infrastructure in public finance is paramount. Higher public debt has to be continuously linked to higher gross capital formation in physical, digital and social infrastructure.

Continuity of food security measures is

significant in times of war and crisis when food inflation is mounting due to supply chain disruptions and energy price volatility. Fiscal policy is important to contain inflation. The Kerala government announced support to tackle inflation in the last Budget as well.

Looking ahead

Investing in a green resilient and knowledge-based economy is crucial for sustainable economic development of the State. A "State adaptation communication" is required by the State with appropriate Budget allocations. Judicious bargaining with the Finance Commission relating to magnitude and criteria (with weightage decisions) is key to ensuring the progressivity of fiscal transfers to the State. There needs to be a negotiation with the Sixteenth Finance Commission for specific-purpose transfers to tackle State-specific issues such as demographic transition, inward and outward migration and climate change crisis.

Fiscal transfer based on the advancement of gender budgeting (including the care economy infrastructure) in the State is critical to redress gender inequalities. This is significant to increase economic growth through increased labour force participation of women. Gender budgeting and gender inequalities are inversely related, and the State has a positive role to play in gender-aware human capital formation. Budget credibility is all that is crucial before the election cycle.

Adequate emphasis on fiscal marksmanship is important to maintain the trust of voters. Fiscal austerity measures through expenditure compression are not an option right now before the State as austerity measures can affect the human capital formation and sustained economic growth recovery.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CAA applications

The government, one feels, should go about the task of certifying Indian citizens slowly and cautiously (Page 1, "CAA Rules silent on fate of rejected applications", March 31). It is imperative that it gives the benefit of doubt to people and never leave them in the lurch. One should not be oblivious to the fact that India's gross

domestic product (GDP) has been rising in recent years not only because of Indian citizens but also due to normal residents, whose centre of economic interest lies in the country. Moreover, it must be remembered that India believes in the philosophical canon, 'the world is family'. The Citizenship (Amendment)

Act should have this as the base and proceed further. S. Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

Heed the warnings As most parts of the country

brace for a scorching summer, the India Meteorological Department has warned of above-normal temperatures and looming heatwaves. It

is crucial for States to heed these warnings, prepare for heatwaves, and address long-term climate change

Corrections & Clarifications

In the story titled "The dissident vocalist" ('Profiles' page, March 31, 2024) the reference to T.M. Krishna getting a hand up from his grand uncle T.T. Krishnamachari, industrialist and former Finance Minister, should be amended to say that he got a hand up from his uncle T.T. Vasu. industrialist (son of the former Finance Minister T.T. Krishnamachari).

impacts. Sustainable

solutions such as improved

water management and

increased green cover are

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essential. Additionally, awareness about heatwave preparedness and access to cooling shelters must be prioritised, especially for vulnerable populations. Beyond discomfort, heatwaves pose significant risks to public health, agriculture, and the

economy. Dr. Vijaykumar H.K., Raichur, Karnataka

Workers, not tech, should be state's priority

he Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS) has been accorded sufficient attention, mostly on account of the myriad issues plaguing it. This begs critical attention because the state, through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), is legally mandated to offer up to 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Additionally, there has been a notable increase this year in the budgetary allocation to MGNREGS to nearly ₹86,000 crore. Numerous commentators have pointed out challenges in the project of linking rural employment guarantees to digitised individual identification systems. These include Internet connectivity, fingerprint recognition issues, difficulties faced by the disabled, unrecorded working days, name duplication, lack of awareness, errors in linking, authentication, elimination of names, discrepancy in name spellings, and issues in seeding - mostly where the workers are little at fault. Research shows that there are more than 26 crore workers registered with MGNREGS. Of them, as many as 5.2 crore workers were deleted from the database in 2022-23. An article in *The Hindu* noted that 34.8% of job card holders remain ineligible for ABPS. Other commentators have laid bare how,

Sidelining the beneficiaries At the foundation of these drawbacks is the fact that workers have been placed at the mercy of technology, contrary to the idealised notion of them being its beneficiaries. As much as it urgently calls for attention to dimensions of technological infrastructure, we must introspect how the state conceives of and

for those who are enrolled, there

are just too many faulty moving

parts to the payment system.



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The objective of MGNREGS is not to offer a playing field for technological interventions, but to provide deprived households a sense of work security, facilitated by digital technology

understands technology and the worker. Clearly, technology has taken precedence. Employment security seems less a priority and the worker seems even further down the scale.

The manner in which the ABPS has been designed, structured, and deployed has ended up in an outcome where the worker appears to sit as one part of the state-supported technological programme, instead of the technology being an enabler for the worker in the state-supported livelihood guarantee scheme. The rural employment guarantee system has ended up packing too much technology into the worker's life, wherein the notorious legacy of sluggishness and overcomplexity in government-managed development processes is not a relic of the past but still alive and functioning, albeit now within a digital setting. This brings forth the question of whether the state wants an empowering, modern, transparent, and efficient digital economy, or whether it seeks technology for technology's sake. Have we put too much spotlight on techno-solutionism, often sidelining the actual beneficiary? The objective of these

employment guarantee schemes is not to offer a playing field for technological interventions, but to provide socio-economically deprived households a sense of work security, facilitated by digital technology. Schemes such as MGNREGS are rooted in ideals such as inclusion in the development process and mitigation of inequality and socioeconomic distress, which have even been internationally recognised (such as by the United Nations Development Programme) as contributing to a productive, equitable, and connected society. When the state is guided by techno-solutionism in the management of such schemes, it runs the risk of being counterproductive to its own ideals. A scholarly study in World Development has shown how these

schemes lead to higher nutritional intake in the households that participate in them, empower women and pay them on a par with men, serve as insurance substitutes, offer pronounced benefits to marginalised communities including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and to households with disabled workers, and contribute to ensuring political transparency. These principles must not be eclipsed by enthusiasm in technological intervention. Lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the counterproductive nature of technological interventions for deprived communities are still in living memory.

Potential of technology Technological interventions have, globally and historically, demonstrated the potential to serve progressive principles. Technology sits at the heart of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the rural employment guarantee schemes in India have proven themselves as effective pathways to serving several of the SDGs, directly and indirectly. The substantial budgetary allocation to MGNREGS must be channeled through a system free of technological maladies, for which technological and non-technological rectifications have been analysed, but for which some fundamental techno-developmental imaginaries also need a re-look. The state's conception of the worker as an active participant in these goals and in the country-specific development concerns must not be overshadowed by its overzealous technological imaginary.

In an era of increasing socioeconomic inequality, intensifying precarity in work, diminishing social security, and rural distress, technology can play a vital role, but it cannot be the state's favoured child. The priority has to always remain the workers and their livelihood security.

A dozen mutinies in Karnataka

There is internal churning in both BJP and Congress over ticket distribution

STATE OF PLAY

Sharath S. Srivatsa sharath.srivatsa@thehindu.co.in

ll the political parties in Karnataka have completed the process of ticket distribution for the 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The announcement of candidates has led to internal churning in both the ruling Congress and the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), although the problems are more pronounced in the BJP.

The BJP, which has 25 MPs and prides itself on the discipline of its cadre, is trying to quell dissidence in more than half a dozen constituencies. The Congress, which has just one MP from Karnataka, is busy dealing with discord in Kolar and Bagalkot.

In the most recent instance, the BJP's choice of candidate for the Chitradurga constituency in central Karnataka has become a problem. The party nominated former Minister Govind Karjol, a trusted aide of party veteran and former Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, to contest the seat. Mr. Karjol, who was defeated in the last Assembly election, is seen as an "outsider" since he hails from Bagalkot district in north Karnataka. His candidature has upset the party's Holalkere legislator, M. Chandrappa, and his son, Raghunandan, who was hoping for a ticket.

In Shivamogga in the hilly Malnad region, BJP veteran leader K.S. Eshwarappa announced his candidature as an independent. This is where Mr. Yediyurappa's son and incumbent MP B.Y. Raghavendra is contesting. Mr. Eshwarappa took this decision after the party refused nomination for his son K.E. Kantesh from the



Haveri Lok Sabha seat for which he has blamed Mr. Yediyurappa.

After denying six-time MP Ananth Kumar Hegde re-nomination, the BJP has been struggling to convince him to support former Speaker and Minister Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri, who has been named as the candidate from Uttara Kannada in the coastal belt.

In Dharwad in north Karnataka, a Veerashaiva-Lingayat dominated constituency, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi is facing a different problem. Several seers from the community have demanded that the BJP replace him, alleging that Mr. Joshi harbours "anti-Veerashaiva/Lingayat" sentiments. The powerful Akhila Bharatha Veerashaiva Mahasabha has also backed their demand and threatened to field a popular seer as an independent who could cut into the BJP's votes.

Local party workers have also posted on social media criticising the candidature of former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar from Belagavi and former Minister V. Somanna from Tumakuru. Both these leaders could face non-cooperation from local leaders.

Local leaders have also resisted the party's decision to field Gayatri Siddeshwara, wife of incumbent MP G.M. Siddeshwara, from Davangere; former Minister K. Sudhakar from Chikkaballapur;

and Union Minister Bhagwanth Khuba from Bidar.

The BIP's alliance with the Janata Dal (Secular) has left the incumbent BJP-backed independent Sumalatha Ambareesh high and dry as the saffron party has let the JD(S) contest the Mandya seat in Old Mysore region. She is expected to spell out her next move next week, which could have an impact on the electoral outcome in the Vokkaliga heartland.

The Congress is facing difficulty in Bagalkot, where aspirant Veena Kashappanavar is threatening to revolt after the seat went to Samyukta Patil, daughter of Sugar Minister Shivanand Patil. Similarly, the party was in a bind in Kolar, which witnessed an intense turf war between the lobbies led by Food and Civil Supplies Minister K.H. Muniyappa and former Minister K.R. Ramesh Kumar. When at least five Congress lawmakers from Kolar threatened to resign if Mr. Muniyappa's son-in-law was given the ticket, the party nominated K.V. Gowtham, believed to be a neutral candidate.

At least 15 candidates fielded by the Congress are from the families of party leaders. The party has nominated the children of seven Cabinet ministers, the siblings of two Cabinet ministers, and the wife of a Cabinet minister, many of whom could face problems internally from their adversaries, though there is no open rebellion.

These cases of dissidence are expected to die down as the election campaigns progress. Party insiders say the public posturing, meant to extract some concessions from the party, will be addressed. But some of the issues that persist can also do considerable damage in seats that will witness close contests.

Tamil Nadu accounts for 30% of India's electronics exports

In the last two fiscal years, close to 40% of India's smartphones were sent from just one district — Kancheepuram

DATA POINT

Rebecca Rose Varghese

🖥 amil Nadu, India's largest exporter of electronic goods in FY23, accounted for 30% of all electronic goods exports from India in FY24. The State is in fact a late bloomer in this sector, with Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka dominating electronic goods exports until FY22. However, in recent years, among the top exporters of electronics, only Tamil Nadu's numbers have consistently risen, while the figures of other States have either dropped or become stagnant.

The share of the electronic goods sector in India's overall exports has more than doubled mostly due to the rise in Tamil Nadu's contribution - in recent years. At the core of this rise is the surge in exports of smartphones, which currently forms close to 40% of India's electronics exports. In the last two fiscal years, close to 40% of smartphones in India were sent out from just one district, Kancheepuram, located in the north-eastern part of Tamil Nadu. Most of these electronic goods, mostly dominated by mobile phones, were exported to the United States, followed by the United Arab Emirates, and the Nether-

Chart 1 shows the electronic goods exported from Tamil Nadu in \$ billion, year-wise. Between April 2023 and January 2024, Tamil Nadu exported electronic goods worth more than \$7.4 billion, close to four times its volume

State-wise data

Chart 2 shows the exports of electronic goods of the top five States in India in \$ billion, year-wise. Tamil Nadu's exports in FY24 were higher than the combined exports of Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka (\$6.7 billion) in the period. These

two States were the second and third biggest exporters of electronic goods, respectively. As can be seen from the chart, Tamil Nadu has considerably widened its gap with the other States. Exports of electronic goods from Gujarat and Maharashtra, the other States in the top five list, have stagnated in recent years.

Chart 3 shows the commoditywise share in total exports from India for FY24 (till February) in \$ billion. In this period, India's exports were dominated by engineering goods (\$98 billion), followed by petroleum products (\$78 billion), gems and jewellery (\$30 billion), and electronics goods (\$25 billion). In FY18, however, exports of electronic goods were not even in the top 10 most exported commodities and had an export value of just \$0.8 billion.

Biggest markets

The U.S. and the UAE are the biggest markets for India's electronic goods exports. In FY24 (till February), the U.S. imported close to 35% of India's electronic goods exports worth \$8.7 billion, followed by the UAE at \$3 billion (12%). The share of the Netherlands and the U.K. stood at about 5% each. **Chart** 4 shows year-wise the top 10 importers of electronics from India in

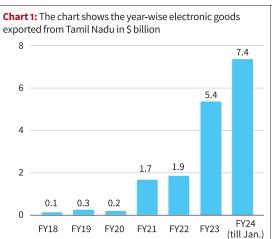
Since FY21, the U.S. has remained the primary destination for India's electronics exports. Its share in India's electronics exports has surged in recent years. From just around 15-20% between FY18 and FY22, the U.S.'s share surged to 24-34% in the latest two financial years.

If all the data are read together, it can be inferred that in the latest two financial years (FY23 and FY24), the smartphones that were exported from Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu played a major part in boosting India's exports of electronic goods, most of which went to the U.S. Notably, the U.S. is also the biggest importer of smartphones across the world.

On the cutting edge

The data for the charts were sourced from the National Import-Export Record for Yearly Analysis of Trade, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry





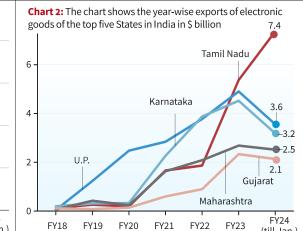


Chart 3: The chart shows the commodity-wise share in total exports from India for FY24 (till February) in \$ billion

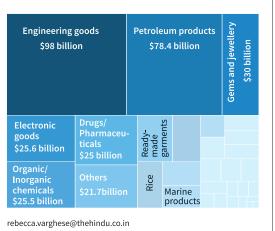
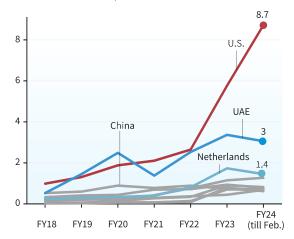


Chart 4: The chart shows the year-wise top 10 importers of electronics from India in \$ billion





FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 1, 1974

Power shortage in 10 States up to June

New Delhi, March 31: According to a study made on the power supply position up to June 1974 by the Union Ministry of Irrigation and Power, only three States will have surplus, while at least ten States will experience energy shortages. In six States, the power supply position would be "comfortable."

The States with surplus capacity are Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Orissa. Himachal will have a surplus of 18 to 24 mw. of capacity. Surplus energy from this State is already being supplied to Puniab and this arrangement will continue. Surplus power to the extent of 158 mw. of capacity is expected to be available up to June 1974 in Kerala. The State has already agreed to supply all the surplus energy to Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. So far as Orissa is concerned, surplus power has been available since the commissioning of the Balimela hydel station recently. As the transmission line associated with this station on the Orissa side has not been completed this surplus power is being made available to Andhra Pradesh and this arrangement is expected to continue. Andhra Pradesh has agreed to release part of its share of Machkund power to Orissa in lieu of part of the power that Orissa would be supplying from Balimela.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 1, 1924

Elections in France, Germany

London, March 31: Interest here is deepening in the forthcoming elections in Germany and France. The latter have been fixed for May 11th, a week later than Germany. It is stated that date has been deliberately chosen as it is expected that reactionary successes in Germany will influence French electors in M. Poincare's favour. In this connection it is significant that the programme of the German People's Party drawn up at its meeting at Hanover presided over by Dr. Stressemann declares that the party will fight under old black white and red colours and hopes for the restoration of German power and greatness under a democratic monarchy. It is noteworthy that, while Dr. Stressemann has been announcing his support of the monarchial programme, Chancellor Marx, speaking at Hanovar, has declared that the victory of the Chauvinistic Nationalist movement at the elections will ruin Germany.

Text&Context

THEMOHINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

People facing hunger due to drought in South Africa

in 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

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

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

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

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

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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 ckbacks 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

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

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

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 Sheshanna 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

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

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

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

Text&Context

How neuroscience reshapes marketing strategies in India

Neuroscience is increasingly applied in India to solve business challenges, such as understanding consumer behaviour; ethical considerations arise particularly concerning informed consent and transparency

M. Kalyanraman

lon Musk's N1 implant, introduced to facilitate operating devices by just intending it in the brain, has jolted many into realising how far seemingly exotic neuroscience has been put to practical, commercial use. While the implant may be the outlier in neuroscience, what's common and par for the course today is mapping the brain to understand and predict human responses with data and real insight. This is being used in India to solve business problems from why life insurance buyers typically stop paying premiums after the first two years to whether an online ad can be made to ensure the consumer hits the "buy" button.

Neuroscientific techniques provide a scientific or objective understanding of the brain-behaviour relationship, says Tanusree Dutta, faculty at IIM Ranchi. "Advertisements, product design, aesthetics, store layout, use of music, colour to attract attention, nudges and so on can all be tested with the use of neuroscientific tools to ensure their effectiveness before being launched," she

Anil Pillai, CEO of Tarragni Consulting that specialises in neuroscience, says that questionnaire-based surveys have limitations since the responses are filtered and affected by cognitive biases. Neuromarketing says impressions and therefore decisions are made at the emotional, instinctive and unconscious levels of the human mind.

The Implicit Association Test would be a simple demonstration of plumbing the unconscious mind for deeply held beliefs and biases that may be filtered out by participants in a questionnaire-based survey. The rapid-fire type tests give little time for considered responses that can otherwise filter out biases.

Neuroscience-based market research can give reliable hard data, says Mr. Pillai. Instead of questionnaires, neuroscience employs a range of instruments to directly get information on how the brain is being impacted and what decisions it will take.

Neuroscience had a breakthrough more than 15 years ago in the U.S. when Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) showed that ads evoking 9/11 attacks triggered fear among voters but the brain activity was different among Republican versus Democratic voters Neuromarketing experts say that opinion polls in India can be more accurate and probe voter minds better in today's highly polarised, ideological politics by using the FACS (Facial Action Coding System). The fMRI would be prohibitively expensive in India, says Mr. Pillai.

Enabling devices

An enabler of neuroscience in India and across the world is the rapid strides in bio instruments, making some of them cheaper and easier to use. Today wearable watches can deliver much health information. The eyeball tracker, the classic neuroscience tool, is available on Amazon today, says Puneet Garg, co-founder, Story Prediction.

The typical neuromarketing tool is an adaptation of an instrument originally intended for medical diagnostics. They can be broadly divided into those that measure the electrical impulses of the brain and those that generate heat maps through other means. The former set



includes Electro Encephalo Gram (EEG), Quantitative Electro Encephalo Graphy (QEEG) and so on.

An eye tracking device helps to measure attention, attention span, and shift in attention. What catches the attention in the mind gets processed further. Eye trackers generate heat maps depending on where the eyeballs are focusing. Heatmaps for webpages, for instance, are otherwise generated by mouse movements. Mouse movements can, however, be also used for scrolling and not everyone paying attention to what interests them clicks there. Therefore such heatmaps can be inaccurate. With a jewellery video ad with a timestamp, eye trackers can tell precisely where the interest is going - the product, the model, the discount, or the Purchase button. With this feedback, the vendor can tweak the ad to ensure consumers are drawn towards hitting the purchase button more.

A thermal imaging camera helps to capture temperature changes when a person is interacting with any situation or stimulus. EEGs were intended to measure health parameters such as detecting brain tumour and whether the medicine to treat them is working or not. Wearable EEG senses 21 points in the brain such as pleasure point, fear point, pain point and so on. It measures brain waves, typically beta waves while filtering alpha, gamma

The reptile brain is the seat of pleasure, fear and other emotions. Arousal here can be tracked by the EEG. If the EEG detects that the ad a person is watching has touched his or her pleasure point, the neuro marketers conclude that the ad has impacted the subconscious mind favourable to the product. Neuroscience tells us that such impacts influence decision making on buying a product.

Skin conductance measurement devices originally used in myography applications in physical therapy and sports training are applied in marketing to detect emotional arousal by gauging skin

Skin conductance devices are probably the least expensive but also the least efficient. Eveball trackers are more efficient whereas EEGs can have efficiencies of up to 75%. The more sophisticated an instrument is, the more expensive it is. Experts can come up with optimum choices and sample sizes so that the confidence level of the results is above 95%. Sometimes a combination of devices is used.

The neuroscience scene in India features progressive digital companies including multinationals that use these tools for their business decisions, market research consultants who specialise in the subject, and institutions such as the IITs and IIMs that provide research support. It's still a "rarefied" world featuring forward thinking businesses but with a bright future, says Mr. Pillai.

While neuromarketing may push the boundaries, cost is an issue. Devi Prasanna, AVP digital marketing at Loan Tap, says big companies that are large consumers of TV spots use neuromarketing in advertising. For others, there are a range of tools that offer similar or higher returns and are cheaper too. In the digital space, for instance, insights on ad effectiveness can be tracked by tools such as YouTube's brand lift surveys. While neuromarketing is a predictive model, today there are ads on Connected TVs that place QR codes with UTM to track who took an action, he

The immediate application of neuroscience in India was in advertising and marketing although the problem there was that the application was after the fact and provided feedback for the future, says Mr. Garg. His company is developing an AI-based product that uses large language model (LLM) to predict whether an ad or even a film can be a hit by assessing the script for its power and potential to sustain emotional engagement with the viewer.

Mr. Pillai does acknowledge the cost factor. But he adds that the application of neuroscience is far wider than just advertising and marketing. It can help to solve tough business problems that require hard, highly reliable data and where the returns are substantial.

Indian consumer behaviour

While neuromarketing is several decades old in the west, in India, the activity has picked up in the last ten years, says Ms. Dutta. And in this time, neuroscience has revealed many facets of Indian consumer behaviour at their visceral level.

A study by the consultancy Final Mile that specialises in behavioural science showed that most fatalities of trespassers crossing railway tracks in Mumbai were that of young men, not old people or even women. Further, the fatalities were high in between stations, not at stations, and happened mostly during the day. The study concluded that this was a case of male bravado and that honking by train drivers didn't help. Further, the human mind typically estimates the speed of incoming large objects to be 40% less so the trespassers underestimated the dangers. The solution that Final Mile implemented with success included

posting photographs of the bodies of actual men who had died trespassing to push trespassers' fear buttons. The second part of the solution was that the honking by train drivers didn't consist of one long blast but two staccato sounds since the brain's awareness is known to be heightened during the silence between two musical notes. The third part was to put yellow paint on the ties of the tracks so that they would disappear quickly in the case of an incoming train and the brain would rapidly correct the error in gauging the speed of the train.

Ms. Dutta talks about how Indian consumers respond more to typically Indian themes in ads. Neuroscience has shown that an ad that shows the protagonist achieving something through jugaad resonates in India, for instance, she adds.

Mr. Pillai cites a business problem that his firm helped solve for a life insurance provider. It is now received wisdom that the Indian market is price sensitive, so the cheapest product will succeed if it's good enough. The average Indian consumer should then be a cold computer driven by money alone. But, Pillai says neuroscience surveys have shown that "friction" is often the driving factor in

Living in India is marked by procedures and systems that is needing much effort to understand and act upon. And at the end of it the intended outcome is not guaranteed.

Anyone who has attempted to navigate through the government provident fund system would testify to it.

Mr. Pillai talks about functional friction that matters more to the semi-urban and rural population due to higher ego depletion. Functional friction is the frictional barrier that prevents one from achieving the base objective they had embarked upon. In this particular case, the base objective is choosing an optimal insurance product, paying for it and acquiring it.

Customers looking for insurance with no external pressure to buy require higher sensitivity and empathy from insurance providers due to the heightened physical, cognitive, and time friction they face. "There is an emerging, young and aspirational segment in Tier 2/3 that has Tier 1 as their benchmark. These customers seek similar levels of service and sophistication from insurance providers, necessitating tailored solutions to meet their expectations. What's often the case in India is that family members, co-beneficiaries, and particularly women of the house play a significant role in decision-making within Tier 2/3," Mr. Pillai says, adding that all these insights come from high component of neuroscience based non-conscious validated by other methods like depth conversations and data.

Ethical concerns

Meanwhile, Mr. Musk's Neuralink has indeed drawn up scary scenarios on concerns about the possible misuse of Neuralink data to manipulate consumer responses. Some wonder if the implants would make the implanted susceptible to suggestions from outside. Less exotic, more mundane applications of neuroscience have raised some concerns too. Besides these, the surveys are under the scanner. The Neuromarketing Science and Business Association (NMSBA) has introduced the first neuromarketing code of ethics. It covers areas such as privacy, consent and transparency. The Advertising Standards Council of India, replying to an email, said they have issued no guidelines on neuromarketing. The key issue is informed consent of survey participants - whether they are aware of all the implications of their participation and whether they are being exploited. Using young people below 18 years as survey participants adds another layer of concern. The informed consent of their parent or guardian would be needed, notes NMSBA.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Please send in your answers to

A Geographical Indication (GI) tag is a sign used on products that have a specific geographic origin. Here is a quiz on products from across the country that have the tag

V. V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

Which was the first product to get the GI tag?

OUESTION 2

It is said that the Mughals were visiting a region in present day Madhya Pradesh when they wanted vermicelli. The local Bhils made them out of gran flour and this savoury was given the tag in 2014. Name this edible item.

Products like Apatani, Monpa, Adi, Galo, and Tai Khamti received GI tags in January 2024. From which State do they originate?

QUESTION 4

Many varieties of mango have GI tags. If Alphonso is from Maharashtra and Banganapalle is from Andhra Pradesh, from which State do the Appemidi and Jardalu come?

Which State cultivates the unique saline-tolerant rice variety known as Pokkali?



Visual Ouestion:

Which famous GI handicrafted product is the former President Pranab Mukherjee being presented with?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This 2011 road-action thriller is based on a real-life incident that

happened in Chennai. The movie which was remade in Tamil and Hindi pertains to heart transplant. Ans: Traffic 2. This film starring Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer and

Janelle Monáe is on three African-american women mathematicians at NASA. Their behind-the-scenes work is responsible for the launch of which astronaut? Ans: John Glenn 3. Air hostess, hijack situation, Ashok Chakra, and Shabana Azmi are all key elements of this popular Hindi-language movie. Ans:

4. Identify the non-fiction book based on which the 2016 film Lion was made. Ans: A Long Way Home

5. This Sandra Bullock starrer about the transformation of a homeless kid into a star athlete is said to be based on the life of Michael Oher. Ans: The Blind Side

Visual: This humorous movie revolves around a young man who experiences retrograde amnesia after a cricket incident two days before his wedding. Ans: Naduvula Konjam Pakkatha

EARLY BIRDS: Prashant Nain | Jose Benny | K.N. Viswanathan | Lekshmy Harikumar | Adya Upasana Routray | Sadhan Panda



This company will run me ragged

The work will be very demanding, and tedious. As a result, you will feel exhausted most of the time

S. Upendran

"I hear that you're seriously thinking of quitting your job. Is it true?"

"Yes, I'm planning to join Surana and Sons. The salary is better. I'll be making five thousand more than what I'm doing now. The benefits are also ... "

"You might make more money, but I don't think you'll have the time to spend it. Surana and Sons has the reputation of

running their employees ragged." "Running their employees what?" "R...a...g...g...e...d. The first syllable is

pronounced like the word 'rag' and the following 'id' sounds like the 'id' in 'hid', 'bid' and 'mid'. The word is pronounced 'RAG-id' with the stress on the first syllable."

"I see. But what does the word mean?" "It has several different meanings. But in this context, it means exhausted."

"I see. When you say that the company will run me ragged, what you're suggesting is that they will be giving me a lot of work, and it..." "The work will be very demanding,

and very tedious. As a result, you will feel exhausted most of the time. Here's an example. My cousin's kids have been with us for nearly three days. They've been running us ragged."

"I don't mind being run ragged as long as the work I'm doing is interesting."

"That's a good example. Sujatha's mother arrives next week. So, Sujatha is running ragged trying to get the house in

"Wasn't her visit supposed to have been a surprise?' "No one here told Sujatha about her

mother's visit. I think it was her dad who gave her a heads up."

"A heads up?"

"The expression 'heads up' is frequently used in informal contexts. When you give someone a 'heads up', what you're doing is giving them an advance notice or warning that something is about to happen."

"So, by giving a heads up to Sujatha, the father was giving her time to prepare for her mother's visit." "That's right!"

"An hour before I was scheduled to leave for the airport, I got a heads up from the airlines saying the flight had been delayed."

"That's a very good example. Here's another. This note is to give you a heads up that tomorrow's staff meeting is likely to go beyond 5:00." 'I wonder why we have so many

meetings!' "It's probably because our boss is

definitely losing his marbles."

"Losing his marbles? Does it mean to go crazy?" "Very good! When you say that

someone has lost his marbles, what you're suggesting is that the individual is unable to think clearly." "He probably behaves strangely and

has very strange ideas." "That's right! The old man's behaviour

at the party made it obvious that he was losing his marbles." "When Raj started shouting at me, I

knew he'd lost his marbles.' "My grandmother is 92, but she still

has all her marbles." "Meaning she behaves normally."

"That's right!"

Word of the day

Penury:

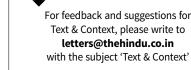
A state of extreme poverty or destitution

Synonyms: need, beggary, misery Usage: He couldn't face another year of

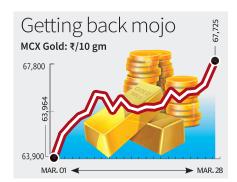
Pronunciation: bit.ly/penurypro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /penjəri/



MONBYWSE



Gold, silver regain sheen in March

B. Krishnakumar

After a few months of inaction, precious metals regained their sheen

COMEX gold price soared to new, all-time highs and silver, too, managed to log handsome gains in March. Expectations of an interest rate cut by the U.S. Federal Reserve played a key role in bolstering the sentiment towards precious metals.

Biggest monthly gain

COMEX gold posted its biggest monthly gain since November 2022. The yellow metal gained 9.8% in March to settle at \$2,254.8 an ounce. A similar trend was seen in COMEX silver as well. The white metal closed 9.7% higher to settle at \$25.1 an ounce.

Mirroring the trend in the global markets, MCX gold closed 7.57% higher in March and closed at ₹67,725 per 10-gram. MCX silver closed 5.3% higher at ₹75,044 per kilogram.

Decisive breakout

COMEX gold managed to stage a decisive breakout from the \$2,000-2,100 range that it was confined to, in the past few months. As anticipated, the breakout resulted in a sharp move to the upside and pushed the gold price way beyond the then projected target zone of \$2,150-\$2,160 zone.

The short-term outlook for gold is positive and COMEX gold could head to the next target zone at \$2,295-2,320 zone. The positive outlook would be invalidated if the price were to decline

Unlike gold, COMEX silver is yet to breakout of the \$21.9-\$26.4 range that the price has been confined to for several months now.

Range-bound, volatile

As observed last month, only a breakout from this range would trigger the next big move.

Until then expect silver price to remain range-bound and volatile. A move past \$26.5 would impart momentum to the upside and could help the price of silver spike to the \$28.5-29 zone.

Mirroring the global trend, MCX gold too completed a breakout of the prior price range. The breakout imparted momentum to the upside and the price moved well beyond the then-mentioned target zone of ₹65,500-66,000.

Short-term outlook

The short-term outlook is positive and gold price could head to the next target of ₹69,200-69,800.

A fall below ₹65,500 would invalidate this positive outlook.

MCX silver price, too, completed its breakout and the price hit the target zone of ₹76,500-₹77,500 mentioned last month. The short-term trend is positive and MCX silver could head to the next target zone at ₹78,200-78,600. The positive view would be under threat if the price drops below ₹70,500.

Positive outlook

To summarise, the short-term outlook for both gold and silver is positive and would remain so until the levels mentioned above are not breached.

While COMEX gold managed to register a range breakout, COMEX silver is yet to do so.

A breakout above the upper end of the range would trigger momentum to the upside in silver.

(The author is a Chennai-based analyst / trader. The views and opinion featured in this column is based on the analysis of short-term price movement in gold and silver futures at COMEX & Multi Commodity Exchange of India. This is not meant to be a trading or investment advice)



Way out: We can avert the emotion of loss aversion by linking our investments with financial goals. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

How to preclude the emotion of loss aversion

Anything that happens against expectations causes pain; therefore, notional gain, which is as per our expectations, gives less happiness than notional loss which is against expectations

EMOTIONAL BIAS



his is one of the emotional bias we all face with investments. It is important to note no one ever reacts rationally to investments. In fact, none of us ever permanently react rationally to most of the situations. We all react emotionally. This is because we all are human beings. We have emotions and these emotions keep changing from time to time.

The important thing to note is we all react irrationally. Opposite of rational, when it comes to human emotions, it is not irrational, it is emotional.

Let us try to understand the emotion of loss aversion with an example. Raieev Iver invested ₹50.000 in stock A at ₹50 per share.

Next day, when he checked, the price had risen to ₹55. He felt good. Mind you, this was only a notional gain. Mr. Iyer had not sold the stock to convert into a real gain.

Now, assume, instead of ₹5 gain, if the price had dropped by ₹5 to ₹45 per share. In all probability, the pain of notional loss would have been more. As a practicing financial planner, I have heard so many times a statement from investors that "prices of stock that I invest always fall after I purchase them"

Sometimes, I jokingly tell them, "your mind is so powerful that it can move the price of a stock." Conti-



We all invest to make money grow; when there is loss in our investment, the situation is opposite of expectations and hence, there is pain

nuing the joke, I further tell them, "please keep me informed of your purchases in future. I will make it a point to purchase the same stock few days after your purchase, so that I get the stock at a lower price."

My elderly uncle and aunt at my home town of Ahmedabad always tell me, "we don't have luck when it comes to investing in stock market and hence, now we always invest for short term." Initially, I use to tell them, "stock market investing is not for short term, it is for long term, but now I have stopped telling them."

Pain of loss

Why is it that pain is more at loss and happiness less at gain, even though both are notional? The fact is we all have expectations from investments. Expectations of gain. This is logical. We all invest to make money grow. In a scenario, where there is loss in our investment, the situation is opposite of expectations and hence, there is pain. This is true in all walks of life.

Anything that happens against expectations causes pain. Therefore, notional gain, which is as per our expectations, gives less

Investing based on financial goal will relieve us of temporary pain or gain and the roller coaster ride of mind attached to it

happiness than notional which is against expectations.

The easier way to deal with this emotion is to link investments to financial goals. For example, if we are investing for a financial goal, say higher education of daughter or son, which, as per our thought process, will come up after 7/8 years, then prudent investment should be in equity as an asset class.

Equity MFs

It is not necessary to invest in stock market directly. An investor can also invest in equity as an asset class through equity-based mutual fund (MF) as well.

Investing based on financial goal will relieve us of temporary pain or gain and the roller coaster ride of mind attached to it. If we have invested for a financial goal which is likely to occur after 7/8 years then any notional fall immediately after investment will not impact us.

It is like boarding a train from Mumbai to go to Indore. Once we have boarded the train, we do not keep checking the speed and other parameters of train movement at an immediate frequency. At the

Interest Rates (%)

most, we just keep checking whether the train is running on time or not and even if it is a little delayed, we do not get disturbed overwhelmingly. We also do not get impacted by passengers boarding or getting down in between.

Another very important thing to be kept in mind is, do not keep checking the prices on daily, weekly or even monthly basis.

Most investors check price movement of the latest investment at a very high frequency. Over a period of time, the euphoria settles down. In the next phase, they do not even check the details of performance for months and sometimes for years. This is very detrimental to our investment, which has been made with our hardearned money.

As a financial planner, I have always recommended that a couple spends about 2/3 hours every quarter, that is about 8/10 hours a year on the status of investments. Mind you, every time a review is underta-

ken though not necessary To modify our overall financial health, I have coined a term, which I use very frequently. A couple must go on 'financial date.' This will keep love and wealth in good shape.

Try it out and write to me about how the experience was. We all can avert the emotion of loss aversion by linking our investments with our financial goals and going on 'financial date.'

(The writer is a financial planner and the author of Yogic Wealth)

Home Loan Interest Rates

Upto 30 lakh Above 30 lakh & Above 75 lakh

Investments that provide emotional satisfaction

THINKINVESTOR

You get more emotional satisfaction holding physical assets than financial assets. This is because physical assets are touch-and-feel assets that carry a narrative

Venkatesh Bangaruswamy

Buying assets is not always about monetary returns, although we need the returns to fulfil our life goals. In this article, we discuss assets that also provide emotional satisfaction.

There are two kinds of assets you will buy during your investing life with your savings – financial assets and physical assets. You get more emotional satisfaction holding physical assets than financial assets. This is because physical assets are touch-and-feel assets that carry a narrative. These assets include land and property, physical gold, and passion assets. Note that self-occupied house gives more emotional satisfaction that any other asset you may own. But it does not count as investment, as you do not buy the asset for monetary returns. Take passion assets. This includes antiques, arts and paintings and other rare collectibles. If you were to acquire these assets from an auction, you have a narrative to share with like-minded friends. A camphor wood chest may be a great piece of furniture. But a 19th century campaign chest offers great emotional satisfaction, given that is certified antique. The added benefit of passion assets is that they can become investment assets later when you are willing to part with them. A self-occupied house is similar. It is a consumption asset till you use it, but can become an investment asset when you are ready to sell it and monetise your home equity. But parting with physical assets is not easy. What about financial assets? You can get emotional satisfaction from your trading portfolio when you time the market-buying just before a stock

Conclusion

Your goal-based investments are about monetary returns because of the characteristics of the assets you carry in these portfolios – equity funds and bank deposits. With equity funds, you outsource the emotional satisfaction arising from market timing to a professional money manager. With bank deposits, monetary returns is all that matters, unless the stable returns from the deposits provide you emotional satisfaction. Investing in private equity and hedge funds can provide emotional satisfaction for two reasons. One, they are investments not all individuals may be willing to make because such assets are illiquid. And two, they qualify as value expressive investments given the required investment size.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage *their personal investments)*

Bank Fixed Deposit Rates

		Inte	rest	Rate	s (%)
Bank Name	Highest Slab	1-year Tenure			5-year Tenure
Small Fin	ance B	anks			
AU Small Finance Bank	8.	00 6.	75	7.50	7.25
Equitas Small Finance Bank	8.	50 8.	20	8.00	7.25
ESAF Small Finance Bank	8.	25 6.	.00	6.75	6.25
Fincare Small Finance Bank	8.	61 7.	.65	8.11	8.00
Jana Small Finance Bank	8.	50 8.	.50	7.25	7.25
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	8.	65 6.	.85	8.60	8.25
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	8.	50 8.	25	7.20	7.20
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	8.	50 8.	.00	8.50	7.50
Private S	ector B	anks			
Axis Bank	7.	20 6.	.70	7.10	7.00
Bandhan Bank	7.	85 7.	.25	7.25	5.85
City Union Bank	7.	00 6.	.75	6.50	6.25
CSB Bank	7.	75 5.	.00	5.75	5.75
DBS Bank	7.	50 7.	.00	6.50	6.50
DCB Bank	8.	00 7.	.15	7.60	7.40
Federal Bank	7.	50 6.	.80	7.00	6.60
HDFC Bank	7.	25 6.	.60	7.00	7.00
ICICI Bank	7.	20 6.	.70	7.00	7.00
IDFC First Bank	8.	00 6.	.50	7.25	7.00

7.75 7.75 7.25 7.25

7.10 7.10 6.50 6.50

IndusInd Bank

Jammu & Kashmir Bank

Bank Name	Highest	1-year	3-vear	5-vear				
	Slab	Tenure	Tenure					
Karur Vysya Bank	7.5	50 7.00	7.00	7.00				
Kotak Mahindra Bank	7.4	0 7.10	7.00	6.20				
Nainital Bank	7.0	5 6.70	6.25	5.75				
RBL Bank	8.1	.0 7.50	7.50	7.10				
SBM Bank India	8.2	25 7.05	7.30	7.75				
South Indian Bank	7.4	0 6.70	6.70	6.00				
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.7	7.00	6.50	6.50				
Yes Bank	7.7	75 7.25	7.25	7.25				
Public Se	Public Sector Banks							
Bank of Baroda	7.2	25 6.85	7.25	6.50				
Bank of India	7.2	25 6.50	6.50	6.00				
Bank of Maharashtra	6.5	6.50	5.75	5.75				
Canara Bank	7.2	5 6.85	6.80	6.70				
Central Bank of India	7.2	5 6.75	6.50	6.25				
Indian Bank	7.2	25 6.10	6.25	6.25				
Indian Overseas Bank	7.3	80 6.90	6.50	6.50				
Punjab National Bank	7.2	5 6.75	7.00	6.50				
Punjab & Sind Bank	7.4	0 6.20	6.00	6.00				
State Bank of India	7.1	.0 6.80	6.75	6.50				
Union Bank of India	7.2	25 6.75	6.50	6.50				
Foreig	gn Bank	s						
Deutsche Bank	8.0	00 7.00	8.00	7.50				

Public Sector Banks State Bank of India 8.40-10.15 8.40-10.05 8.40-10.05 Bank of Baroda 8.40-10.65 8.40-10.65 8.40-10.90 8.35-10.75 Punjab National Bank 8.45-10.25 8.40-10.15 8.30-10.75 Bank of India 8.30-10.75 8.30-10.75 8.50-11.25 8.45-11.25 8.40-11.15 Canara Bank **UCO Bank** 8.45-10.30 8.45-10.30 8 45-10 30 8.35-11.15 8.35-11.15 Punjab and Sind Bank 8.50-10.00 8.50-10.00 Indian Overseas Bank 8.40-10.60 8.40-10.60 8.40-10.60 8.45-9.80 Central Bank of India 8.45-9.80

Private Sector Banks								
8.70*	8.70*	8.70*						
8.75*	8.75*	8.75*						
8.75-13.30	8.75-13.30	8.75-9.65						
8.45*	8.45*	8.45						
9.84-11.24	9.84-11.04	9.84-11.69						
9.00-11.05	9.00-11.05	9.00-11.05						
	8.70* 8.75* 8.75-13.30 8.45* 9.84-11.24	8.70* 8.70* 8.75* 8.75* 8.75-13.30 8.75-13.30 8.45* 8.45* 9.84-11.24 9.84-11.04						

Name of Landan	Loan Amount (Rs.)					
Name of Lender	Upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh			
			(In %)			
Karnataka Bank	8.60-10.60	8.60-10.60	8.60-10.60			
Federal Bank	8.80*	8.80*	8.80*			
Dhanlaxmi Bank	9.35-10.50	9.35-10.50	9.35-10.50			
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	8.60-9.95	8.60-9.95	8.60-9.95			
Bandhan Bank	9.16-15.00	9.16-13.33	9.16-13.33			
RBL Bank	8.90*	8.90*	8.90*			
CSB Bank	10.69-12.5	4 10.69-12.54	10.69-12.54			
HDFC Bank	8.70*	8.70*	8.70*			
City Union Bank	8.25-9.50	8.50-10.00	8.75-10.50			
Housing Fin	ance Com	panies (HFC	:s)			
LIC Housing Finance	8.35-10.35	8.35-10.55	8.35-10.75			
Raiai Housing Finance	8 50*	8 50*	8 50*			

City Offior Bank	0.25-5.50	0.50-10.00	0.13-10.30				
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)							
LIC Housing Finance	8.35-10.35	8.35-10.55	8.35-10.75				
Bajaj Housing Finance	8.50*	8.50*	8.50*				
Tata Capital	8.70*	8.70*	8.70*				
PNB Housing Finance	8.50-14.50	8.50-14.50	8.50-11.45				
GIC Housing Finance	8.80*	8.80*	8.80*				
SMFG India Home Finance	10.00*	10.00*	10.00*				
Aditya Birla Capital	8.60-12.35	8.60-12.35	8.60-12.35				
ICICI Home Finance	9.20*	9.20*	9.20*				
Godrej Housing Finance	8.55*	8.55*	8.55*				
*Onwards Rates as on March 27		Source:Paisa	bazaar.com				

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

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 1 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 subdued 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 abound 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

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-



Mumbai Indians and Royal Challengers Bangalore. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ery platform Zomato had implemented four years ago. Actor Rahul Bose, who was staying at a fivestar 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 tonguein-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 ruboff 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 preplanned.

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 particular 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 meteams 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

lacktriangle 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 e-commerce through route. To increase the product visibility, the compa-

ny will soon have its physi-

cal presence in all the Suchitra Menon, Direc-

tor 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 <u>Ambwani</u> NEWDELHI

Guess who is hitting the jackpot on India's startups? 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 "thirdmost searched" direct-toconsumer 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.

told brandline, "When the superstar and beauty icon Kaushik Mukherjee, Di-Kareena Kapoor Khan rector, Quench Botanics loved the Quench products, 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 My-Glamm 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 celebowned 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 Sebastien 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

ens 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 immediatelv 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 Netanyahu is an obstacle," said demonstrator Einav Moses, whose father-inlaw, Gadi Moses, is held

hostage. "Like he does not

really want to bring them

back, that they have failed

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 nation-

ally 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

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 destroved a building and sparked a fire, Governor Maksym Kozytskyi wrote on social media app Tele-

In the Kharkiv region, Governor Oleh Syniehubov 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 1,70,000 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.

Press Trust of India

Sri Lankan President Ranil

Wickremesinghe said that

the government has al-

lowed a free and fair investigation for the indepen-

dent execution of justice in

the 2019 Easter Sunday

bombings, as Christians

across the country held the

Easter Sunday services in a

calm atmosphere but un-

The churches across Sri

Lanka were placed under a

security blanket on Sun-

Police spokesman Nihal

Thalduwa said 6,522 police

officers, over 300 police

special task force officers

and 2,746 military person-

nel have been deployed to

provide security at 1,873

In 2019, over 270 people,

including 11 Indians, were

killed when suicide bom-

bers belonging to the local

Islamist extremist group

National Thawheed Jamaat

(NTJ) linked to ISIS carried

out a series of blasts that

tore through three church-

es and as many luxury ho-

tels in Sri Lanka on the

Although thousands of

suspects have been held

since then no one has been

tried in court to date.

churches.

Over 270 killed

der tight security.

day, the police said.

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka allowed

into 2019 Easter

free and fair probe

Russia arrests three in anti-terror operation

Agence France-Presse

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 Kaspiysk, 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

MANILA

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered his government to

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

reign Affairs did not respond to a Reuters request for comment on Sunday.

of the South China Sea, a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual shipborne commerce.

those of the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei.

China's claims had no legal

Latest flare-up

curred 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-

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 Ioe Biden and emphasised that Islamabad wants to work Washington 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 cashstrapped 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.

the attack. President Wickremes-

Easter Sunday.

The catholic church in **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

inghe, the then-Prime Mi-



Ranil Wickramasinghe

nister, in his Easter Sunday message, stressed that the government had allowed free and fair investigation for the independent execu-

tion of justice. "That dark memory would never be erased off our minds," Mr. Wickre-

mesinghe 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

New turn

part of it.

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.

Reuters

escalates.

strengthen its coordination on maritime security to confront "a range of serious challenges" to territorial integrity and peace, as a dispute with China The order, signed on Monday and made public

China's Ministry of Fo-

Beijing claims almost all

China's claims overlap

The Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 said

The latest flare-up oc-

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 at-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 and security 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



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

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

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 visi-

"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

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

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 crossborder 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-yearold 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 powersharing 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.

lawmaker Christian 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

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 melt-

down 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 twodecade 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

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

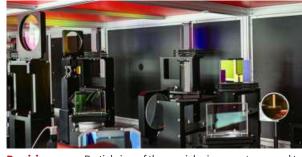
World's most powerful laser points to uncharted arenas

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

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

Google co-founders Larry

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-

out a "scratch and sniff"

feature on its search

engine.

cided 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 storper 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 emails 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.

bending concept that

shortly after The Associat-

It was such a mind-

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 people'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 stilldeveloping 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 email 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.

GOOD OL' TIMES

Fans treated to a vintage Dhoni innings after a gap of 307 days



Chennai Super Kings' M.S. Dhoni came out to bat in professional cricket after 307 days. Much to the delight of his fans, he scored a guickfire 37 off 16 balls, including three sixes and four fours. Earlier in the game against Delhi Capitals, the talismanic star became the first wicketkeeper to effect 300 dismissals in T20 cricket.

FALLING SHORT

'Titans bowlers did well, but we couldn't capitalise on conditions'



SRH spin-bowling coach Muttiah Muralitharan felt that the team was 10 to 15 runs short. "The GT bowlers did well but we couldn't capitalise (on the conditions) while defending. The wicket was slow and low with a bit of spin. We were in the game till the 15th over, and we had to take that gamble (with Markande) but it didn't work."

STRATEGY

The idea was to take the game deep, says Sai Sudharsan



GT's Sai Sudharsan said the strategy to take the game deep paid dividends. "The idea was take the game deep and have wickets in hand, to rotate the strike and collect the odd boundary. The wicket got a bit easier when the lights came on and we also tried to shift the momentum when the required rate was going up."

PRIORITY

'We are ignoring the fans' reaction and focusing on our cricket'



MI leg-spinner Piyush Chawla said that the team was trying its best to ignore captain Hardik Pandya being heckled from the stands. "We are ignoring that and focusing on our cricket. When they (fans) are against us, or whatever they are doing, the things which are not really good to look at, you just have to ignore them," he said.

A capital performance sees Delhi trump the Super Kings

The home team's Shaw, Warner, and Pant make merry with the bat before the Khaleel-led bowling attack has the defending champion floundering while chasing a competitive target; Ruturaj's men suffer first reverse

S. Dipak Ragav VISAKHAPATNAM

alf-centuries from David Warner (52, 35b, 5x4, 3x6) and Rishabh Pant (51, 32b, 4x4, 3x6), followed by Khaleel Ahmed's brilliant first spell (3-1-9-2) helped Delhi Capitals beat Chennai Super Kings by 20 runs for its first win of the season at the ACA-VDCA Stadium here

Electing to bat, Capitals posted 191 for five as openers Warner and Prithvi Shaw laid the foundation with a 93-run partnership before Pant gave the final flourish.

In reply, CSK's chase went off the rails immediately when left-arm pacer Khaleel (two for 21) removed openers Ruturaj Gaikwad and Rachin Ravindra in his first two overs and only 32 came in the

Revival

Ajinkya Rahane (45) and Daryl Mitchell (34) added 68 for the third wicket to keep Super Kings' hopes alive. But just as they looked to get a move on, Axar Patel had Mitchell caught and bowled.

Once Mukesh Kumar struck twice in as many balls to remove Rahane and Sameer Rizvi, it was nearly over for the Super

The sell-out crowd was decked in yellow, and CSK's fans, though, found some solace when M.S. Dhoni re-wound the clock and brought the roof down with a blistering cameo,





Going, and gone! Pant flew high despite losing his willow once, while Khaleel derailed Super Kings' chase with two early strikes. K.R. DEEPAK

smashing an unbeaten 37 (16b, 4x4, 3x6) that includsome clean down the ground. However, it came a bit too late for

the Men in Yellow. Earlier, Warner loose in the fifth over with a pick-up shot over midwicket for a six, followed by two fours through the off-side off Deepak Chahar.

In the next over, Shaw slammed Mustafizur Rahman for a hat-trick of boundaries, as Delhi raced to 62 for no loss in six overs.

Pathirana's beauties

From 103 for one, Delhi slumped to 134 for four as Matheesha pulled things back for CSK, delivering two inch-perfect reverse-swinging yorkers to knock over Mitchell

SCOREBOARD

Prithvi Shaw c Dhoni b Jadeja 43 (27b, 4x4, 2x6), David Warner c Pathirana b Mustafizur 52 (35b, 5x4, 3x6), Rishabh Pant c Ruturaj b Pathirana 51 (32b. 4x4. 3x6). Mitchell Marsh b Pathirana 18 (12b, 2x4, 1x6), Tristan Stubbs b Pathirana 0 (2b), Axar Patel (not out) 7 (8b), Abishek Porel (not out) 9 (6b, 1x4); Extras (b-2, lb-2, nb-2, w-5): 11; Total (for five wkts in 20 overs): 191.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-93 (Warner, 9.3 overs), 2-103 (Shaw, 10.4), 3-134 (Marsh, 14.4), 4-134 (Stubbs, 14.6), 5-178 (Pant,

SUPER KINGS BOWLING Deepak Chahar 4-0-42-0, Deshpande 4-0-24-0, Mustafizur

Marsh and Tristan Stubbs in the space of three balls. But Pant ensured Delhi did not squander its start as he

Pathirana 4-0-31-3.

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS Ruturaj Gaikwad c Pant b Khaleel 1 (2b), Rachin Ravindra c Stubbs b Khaleel 2 (12b), Ajinkya Rahane c Warner b Mukesh 45 (30b. 5x4. 2x6), Daryl Mitchell c & b Axar 34 (26b, 1x4, 2x6), Shivam Dube (Impact Player in place of Pathirana) c Stubbs b Mukesh

18 (17b, 1x4), Sameer Rizvi c Khaleel b Mukesh 0 (1b). Ravindra Jadeja (not out) 21 (17b, 2x4), M.S. Dhoni (not out) 37 (16b, 4x4, 3x6); Extras (lb-4, nb-1, w-8): 13; Total (for six wkts. in 20 overs): 171

FALL OF WICKETS 1-3 (Ruturaj, 0.6), 2-7 (Ravindra, 2.5), 3-75 (Mitchell, 10.2), 4-102

smashed the Sri Lankan pacer for a six and two fours in one over to get to his half-century. The final 6-120 (Dube, 16.1).

CAPITALS BOWLING

Khaleel 4-1-21-2, Ishant 3-0-23-0, Nortje 4-0-43-0, Axar 3-0-20-1, Salam (Impact Player in place of Shaw) 2-0-25-0, Marsh 1-0-14-0. Mukesh 3-0-21-3

Toss: Capitals.

PoM: Khaleel. DC won by 20 runs.

Next assignment DC: April 3 vs KKR Visakhapatnam, 7.30 p.m. CSK: April 5 vs SRH Hyderabad, 7.30 p.m

flourish from the Delhi skipper meant his side had enough to hand Chennai its first defeat.

Meticulous Titans clear the Sunrisers test in flying colours





Stellar display: Mohit's spell set it up for Titans before Miller & Co. completed the task. VIJAY SONEJI

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

Mayank Agarwal c Nalkande b

Abhishek Sharma c Gill b Mohit

29 (20b, 2x4, 2x6), Aiden Markram

(13b, 1x4, 2x6), Shahbaz Ahmed c

Sundar (Impact Player in place

of Mayank Agarwal) c Rashid b

Mohit 0 (1b), Pat Cummins (not

out) 2 (2b): Extras (lb-2, w-2): 4:

Total (for eight wkts. in 20 overs):

FALL OF WICKETS

1-34 (Mayank, 4.2 overs), 2-58

4-108 (Klaasen, 13.4), 5-114

8-162 (Samad, 19.6).

Omarzai 3-0-24-1, Umesh

4-0-32-1, Mohit 4-0-25-3,

Nalkande 2-0-18-0.

(Head, 6.4), 3-74 (Abhishek, 9.6),

(Markram, 14.4), 6-159 (Shahbaz,

TITANS BOWLING

3-0-28-1, Rashid 4-0-33-1, Noor

19.2), 7-159 (Washington, 19.3),

Omarzai 16 (17b. 2x4). Travis

Head b Noor 19 (14b, 3x4),

c Rashid b Umesh 17 (19b),

Heinrich Klaasen b Rashid 24

Tewatia b Mohit 22 (20b. 1x4.

1x6). Abdul Samad run out 29

(14b, 3x4, 1x6), Washington

SCOREBOARD

N. Sudarshan AHMEDABAD

One of Gujarat Titans' hallseasons has been its ability to successfully play the long game. On Sunday at the Narendra Modi Stadium, this facet shone again as GT beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by seven wickets.

Chasing 163, the host accumulated runs in meticulous fashion. Wriddhiman Saha was his usual brisk self (25, 13b, 1x4, 2x6) while Shubman Gill played the steadier hand (36, 28b, 2x4, 1x6).

It was not until the 16th over that GT made the play, and when it did, it landed the killer blow. With 49 needed from 30 balls, Pat Cummins gambled with Mayank Markande only for David Miller (44 n.o., 27b, 4x4, 2x6) and B. Sai Sudharsan (45, 36b, 4x4, 1x6) to smash the leggie for two fours and two

In the next over, Miller sent Cummins thudding into the boundary twice, rolling his wrists to long-leg first and then creaming one through cover. Vijay Shankar collected two fours off Jaydev Unadkat before Miller sent him soaring over long-off to close the game.

Earlier, after choosing to bat, SRH scored in spurts. Travis Head stroked freely (19, 14b, 3x4) but saw very little strike as Mayank Agarwal ate 17 deliveries for 16

Abhishek Sharma bludgeoned his way through (29, 20b, 2x4, 2x6), with the back-to-back sixes off Rashid Khan - over square-leg and over longoff - helping lift the Power-Play score to 56. But Aiden Markram was below-par (17, 19b) as Rashid, Noor Ahmad – who replaced

114 for five. Spencer Johnson – and the

Shahbaz Ahmed (20,

Wriddhiman Saha c Cummins b Shahbaz 25 (13b, 1x4, 2x6), Shubman Gill c Samad b Markande 36 (28b, 2x4, 1x6), B. Sai Sudharsan (Impact Player in place of Mohit) c Abhishek b Cummins 45 (36b, 4x4, 1x6), David Miller (not out) 44 (27b) 4x4, 2x6), Vijay Shankar (not out) 14 (11b, 2x4); Extras (w-4): 4; Total (for three wkts. in 19.1

overs): 168. **FALL OF WICKETS** 1-36 (Saha, 4.1), 2-74 (Gill, 9.1),

3-138 (Sai Sudharsan, 16.1). SUNRISERS BOWLING Bhuvneshwar 4-0-27-0, Shahbaz 2-0-20-1, Unadkat 3.1-0-33-0, Washington 3-0-27-0, Markande 3-0-33-1, Cummins 4-0-28-1.

Toss: SRH: PoM: Mohit. GT won by seven wickets with five balls to spare.

Next assignment

GT: April 4 vs PBKS Ahmedabad, 7.30 p.m. SRH: April 5 vs CSK Hyderabad, 7.30 p.m.

Struggling MI would hope for a quick turnaround

Amol Karhadkar MUMBAI

All along in Mumbai Indians' illustrious IPL journey, MI Paltan - its fan army, especially at home games - has played the 12th man role to perfec-

Fan army's role

Come Monday and the role of the fan army at the Wankhede Stadium could well be decisive for Mumbai Indians' fate for the season and Hardik Pandya's new avatar as the team's captain.

As if facing an on-song batting unit and a welloiled bowling machine of Rajasthan Royals is not challenging enough, whether the Paltan continues to repose its faith in





Played: 27 MI 1 | RR 1

PREVIOUS MEETING MI won by six wickets, 2023 LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 (SD & HD) & JIO CINEMA

upheaval over leadership change will be worth pondering over.

Social media backlash

the home team despite the

If social media backlash was just an indication, the manner in which Hardik has been booed during MI's away games (in Ahme-



Game-changer: MI will look for runs from Rohit. EMMANUAL YOGINI

dabad or Hyderabad) has indicated the fans' wrath. The new MI skipper – who

was missing from Sunday's training along with pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah

– will be hoping for the fans to welcome him after representing Gujarat Titans for the last two edi-Besides being wary

about the reception, Hardik along with the thinktank will be hoping for a quick turnaround for its bowling unit which conceded the most runs in IPL history in its last encounter against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

And none of the MI bowlers would have forgotten the hundred that Yashasvi Jaiswal scored when the teams squared off against each other at the Big W last April.

The boys in pink will be hoping for Jaiswal - who has had a dream run across formats since IPL 2023 - to repeat last year's heroics.

GUJARAT TITANS

Points table

	М	w	L	PTS	NRR
Kolkata Knight Riders	2	2	0	4	1.047
Chennai Super Kings	3	2	1	4	0.976
Rajasthan Royals	2	2	0	4	0.800
Gujarat Titans	3	2	1	4	-0.738
Sunrisers Hyderabad	3	1	2	2	0.204
Lucknow Super Giants	2	1	1	2	0.025
Delhi Capitals	3	1	2	2	-0.016
Punjab Kings		1	2	2	-0.337
Royal Challengers		1	2	2	-0.711
Mumbai Indians	2	0	2	0	-0.925

excellent Mohit Sharma (4-0-25-3) choked the run flow. The in-form Heinrich Klaasen (24, 13b, 1x4, 2x4) clubbed Noor for two sixes on the leg-side in the 13th over to try and shift momentum. That attempt fell flat too as Rashid cleaned up Klaasen while Markram couldn't keep an on-drive down, and SRH was soon

combined for 45 runs. But from overs 16 to 20, GT bowlers allowed just two sixes and a four, and tied up the clean-hitting Samad at the non-striker's end for seven consecutive deliveries across the last two overs. The strong tailwind SRH needed never materialised, resulting in its downfall.

22b, 1x4, 1x6) and Abdul

Samad (29, 14b, 3x4, 1x6)



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: 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



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

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.

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

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



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

P.K. Ajith Kumar LUCKNOW

here 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 bowlers he idolised growing up in Delhi, the only name he took was of Stevn.

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, superbikes 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

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 bogev-bogev-bogey finish for a one-over 73 - his worst card of the week – that was good enough to give him a fourshot 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

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 bogey-spree.

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, Nakaiima was the World's ton amateur for 87 weeks during which he surpassed Jon Rahm's record of 60

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

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

Veerman, two shots behind Soderman before reaching the 18th tee, birdied the final hole and gained from the bogey from Soderberg to be jointsecond 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 Rai (68, 68, 74, 78); 291: Jairaj 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

Amitabha Das Sharma

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

Joni Kauko gave Mohun Bagan the lead in the first half, but Chennaivin 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 injurytime. 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 City FC.

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

AIFF EC member granted bail by Goa police

Sports Bureau CHENNAI

Deepak Sharma, the AIFF Committee Executive 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

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 Brighton 1 (Welbeck 2); Manchester City 0 drew with

LaLiga: Celta Vigo 0 drew with Rayo Vallecano 0; Girona 3 (Dovbyk 36-pen, 65, Stuani 90+2) bt Real Betis 2 (Jose 45+4, 76): Alaves 0 lost to Real Sociedad 1 (Pacheco 59)

Bundesliga: Stuttgart 3 (Guirassy 41, Stiller 53, Undav 90+8) drew with Heidenheim 3 (Nuebel 62-og, Kleindienst 84, 85); Augsburg 1 (Maier 18) drew with FC Koln 1 (Davie Selke 33).

On Saturday: Premier League: Brentford 1 (Ajer 90+9) drew with Manchester United 1 (Mount 90+6). LaLiga: Almeria 0 lost to Osasuna 3 (Arnaiz 2, Budimir 9, Munoz 61): Valencia 0 drew with Mallorca 0; Barcelona 1

Bundesliga: Bayern Munich 0 lost to Borussia Dortmund 2 (Adeyemi 10, Ryerson 83).

Serie A: Fiorentina 1 (Duncan 50) lost to AC Milan 2 (Loftus-Cheek 47, Leao 53); Genoa 1 (Gudmundsson 30-pen) drew with Frosinone 1 (Reinier 36): Lazio 1 (Marusic 90+3) bt Juventus 0; Torino 1 (Sanabria 69-pen) bt Monza 0.

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 their felicitated for achievements in the past vear. Interestingly, even the 2016 Junior World Cupwinning 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.

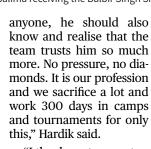
HI secretary general Bhola Nath Singh confirmed the window and



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



"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,

(Women's U-21 Player of the Year); Araijeet Singh Hundal (Men's U-21 Player of the Year). ₹5 lakhs each: P.R. Sreejesh

₹10 lakhs each: Deepika Soreng

(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

G. Viswanath

ankaj 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. Excerpts:

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, I would say I probably lived 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 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 was discouraging for a while, but then I made up my mind and said, 'No, I want to redefine the word 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, Dhwaj 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. Televise 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

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.