

# Across State

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## PM Narendra Modi to address first poll campaign in Maharashtra on April 10

Mumbai

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address his first campaign rally in Maharashtra at Kanhan in Nagpur district of Vidarbha region on April 10.

"As per the schedule received, the PM's first rally in Maharashtra will be on April 10. It will take place at Kanhan in Nagpur district," BJP spokesperson Vishwas Pathak said on Tuesday.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is also scheduled to address a rally on April 6 at Gondia, also in Vidarbha region.

The elections for five seats in eastern Vidarbha region will take place on April 19. The constituencies are Nagpur, Ramtek, Bhandara-Gondia, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli-Chimur. The elections in the state will take place in five phases between April 19 and May 20.

Union minister Nitin Gadkari is the BJP candidate for Nagpur Lok Sabha seat. In what is poised to be a direct fight, the Congress has fielded Nagpur West MLA Vikas Thakre from the seat. Gadkari won from Nagpur twice in 2014 and 2019.

On Tuesday, Gadkari accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis campaigned in Nagpur South West constituency. Fadnavis represents Nagpur South West in the Assembly.

Thakre has also started his public outreach campaign in the second



capital of Maharashtra.

In Chandrapur seat, state BJP minister Sudhir Mungantiwar is pitted against Congress candidate Pratibha Dhanorkar. In 2019 polls, Chandrapur was the lone seat won by Congress candidate Suresh Dhanorkar. In May 2023, however, Suresh Dhanorkar passed away at age 47. The Congress has fielded his wife as the party candidate from the seat this time.

Out of the five seats going to polls in the first phase, the BJP is contesting in four — Nagpur, Chandrapur, Bhandara-Gondia and Gadchiroli-Chimur, while the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is contesting from Ramtek.

At Bhandara-Gondia, BJP's sitting MP Sunil Mendhe is pitted against

Congress candidate Prashant Padole. Whereas, Gadchiroli-Chimur will see a fight between BJP's two-term sitting MP Ashok Nete and Congress' Namdeo Kirsan. In Ramtek, the contest is between Sena's Raju Parve and Congress' Shyamrao Barve. Initially, the Congress had fielded Rashmi Barve. But her nomination was rejected over caste validity. As a result, her husband Shyamrao Barve, who had also filed nomination, became the official party candidate. Another candidate Kishore Gajbiye has decided to contest as an independent. In 2019, Gajbiye was the official Congress candidate from Ramtek against then undivided Shiv Sena candidate Krupal Tumane, who won the seat.

## Shiv Sena (UBT) second list of Lok Sabha candidates out; Vaishali Darekar vs Shrikant Shinde in Kalyan

Mumbai

Shiv Sena UBT president Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday announced his party's second list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, for four seats in Maharashtra.

While Vaishali Darekar is the candidate in the high-profile Kalyan constituency, Satyajeet (Aaba) Patil is fielded in Hatkanangale,



Bharti Kamdi in Palghar and Karan Pawar in Jalgaon. Darekar will take on sitting MP Shrikant Shinde, son of Chief Minister Eknath

Shinde.

Uddhav said he was offering the Mumbai North Central and Mumbai North seats to the Congress and requested the party to announce candidates for both constituencies so that Sena (UBT) workers can start campaigning work.

"We have asked our ally to contest the Mumbai North seat. If they do not wish to,

we will field our candidate," Uddhav said, adding that the Sena had already announced candidates for four out of the six seats in Mumbai as per the seat-sharing pacts between the alliance partners.

"We want our ally to contest the Mumbai North Central and Mumbai seats. Our workers will work hard to ensure their victory," Uddhav said.

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# VBA declares support for NCP (SP) in Baramati, won't field its candidate against Supriya Sule

## Mumbai

Vanchit Bahujaan Aghadi (VBA) president Prakash Ambedkar on Wednesday pledged support to Supriya Sule, the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) candidate in Baramati for the April-May Lok Sabha elections.

In Baramati, the stage is thus set for a straight fight between Supriya Sule, the daughter of NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar and the working president of the party, and Sunetra Pawar of the NCP led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. Sunetra Pawar is the wife of Sule's cousin Ajit Pawar.

Prakash Ambedkar said, "We no longer have any alliance with the Maha Vikas Aghadi. They are still caught up in an ugly fight amongst themselves. The VBA has decided to contest alone. But in a select few seats, we will support the Congress and NCP (SP)".

The VBA's decision to support Sule has come as a surprise to many within mainstream parties. A political expert, who has kept an eye on Ambedkar's politics, said, "Prakash Ambedkar does politics without weighing loss and gain. He pursues his own individual path."



Interestingly, Ambedkar had also offered to support Congress candidates in seven key Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra. But Congress's top leadership did not respond to his proposal.

Three-term MP Supriya Sule has for the first time found herself contesting the elections against her family member. What has compounded the crisis is the battle between two NCP factions in the family turf of Baramati which has been the identity and emotional connection for the entire Pawar parivar.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the VBA fielded Navnath Padalkar as

its candidate who polled 44,134 (3.38 per cent) votes. While Sule, who won the Baramati seat, got 6.86 lakh votes (52.63 per cent), her nearest rival the BJP's Kanchan Kul won 5.30 lakh votes (40.69 per cent).

In the 2014 general election, the BJP did not field any candidate against Sule. The contest was between undivided NCP leader Sule versus Rashtriya Samaj Party chief Mahadev Jankar. To everybody's surprise, Jankar polled 4.51 lakh (42.35 per cent) votes. Sule with 5.21 lakh (48.88 per cent) votes won the seat with a reduced margin.

In 2009, the fight was between Supriya Sule and the Bharatiya Janata Party's Kanta Nalawade when the BJP knew it was going to be a cakewalk for Sule. With a 4.87 lakh (66.46 per cent) vote share, Sule emerged victorious defeating Nalawade who was restricted to 1.50 lakh votes (20.57 per cent). The Bahujaan Samaj Party's Vivek Patil got 29,864 votes (4.67 per cent).

Voting for the Baramati Lok Sabha Seat will take place on May 13 in Phase 4. The votes will be counted on June 4 along with all Lok Sabha seats across the country.

## Mahayuti gets Dhangar community leader Mahadev Jankar to file nomination from Parbhani

### Mumbai

Rashtriya Samaj Party (RSP) president Mahadev Jankar on Monday filed his nomination as a Mahayuti alliance candidate from Parbhani Lok Sabha constituency for the 2024 polls. Deputy Chief Ministers Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar were also present at the nomination filing and later, Jankar addressed a public rally to show his political might in the Marathwada region of Parbhani.

"I take upon my self the responsibility to aggressively campaign in all 48 constituencies across the state. Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi at the Centre and that of CM Eknath Shinde, Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar in the state, we will get huge projects and funds to transform the face of Parbhani constituency," he said.

In an ardent appeal to leaders across political parties in ruling coalition, Fadnavis said, "Jankar is a simple person who is wholeheartedly serving the people round the clock. He does not understand the complex politics. Therefore, it is everybody's responsibility to plan, manage his campaign and provide full support."

A week ago, Jankar, after meeting Fadnavis, had reiterated his party's decision to continue the pre-poll partnership with the BJP. The RSP was part of the NDA in 2019. But over the last few years, Jankar's relations with the BJP soured. After a series of meetings, Fadnavis succeeded in getting Jankar's support, albeit with the promise that the RSP leader will get to contest the Lok Sabha polls from Parbhani.

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## 7 die of suffocation after fire at tailoring shop in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar

### Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar

Seven persons, including two children, died of suffocation after a fire broke out in a tailoring shop in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar city early Wednesday morning, a senior police official said.

The blaze erupted at around 4 am in the shop located at Dana Bazar in Cantonment area.

The tailoring shop and other commercial establishments were located on the ground floor of a building while people were residing on the upper floor, the official said.

"The shop suddenly caught fire at around 4 am. The police came to know about the incident at 4.15 am. Following the fire, smoke entered the first floor where a family was residing above the shop. Seven casualties have occurred due to suffocation," Police Commissioner

Manoj Lohiya told reporters.

The deceased included three women, two men and two children, he said.

The exact cause of the fire would be



known after an inquiry, he added.

The deceased have been identified as Asim Shaikh (3), Pari Shaikh (2), Wasim Shaikh (30), Tanveer Shaikh (23), Hamida Begum (50), Shaikh Sohail (35) and Reshma Shaikh (22), another official said.



# Heatwave conditions grip Maharashtra

## 23 heatstroke cases in just 28 days

### Mumbai

With temperatures soaring, the state has seen 23 cases of heatstroke so far, though no fatalities have been confirmed. In view of this, health experts emphasised the urgent need to implement the government's heatwave action plan, particularly in rural regions where cases and deaths occur frequently.

Since March, Maharashtra has been grappling with heatwave conditions across various districts, resulting in a worrisome tally of 23 heatstroke cases within just 28 days — 10 of which have been recorded in the last 10 days alone. The worst-hit has been Amravati, with three cases reported, and two cases each in Raigad, Pune, Beed, Buldhana and Kolhapur. Additionally, Thane, Ahmednagar, Akola, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Dhule, Gadchiroli, Jalgaon, Nanded, and Satara have each reported one case.

No confirmed deaths have been reported in the state. However, there is one suspected death in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, where a 30-year-old man reportedly succumbed to heatstroke.

A heatwave is a prolonged period of excessively hot weather, typically accompanied by high humidity, posing health risks such as heatstroke and dehydration. Heatstroke symptoms need urgent attention: moving the person to a cooler area, offering cold water and applying damp cloth to lower body



temperature. Intravenous saline may be needed to restore fluids and electrolytes.

With temperatures hitting 39 degrees Celsius in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, hospitals are seeing a rise in patients showing symptoms of heatstroke daily. Sambhajnagar's health centres and private hospitals have admitted a total of 100 patients, with dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and headache.

Day by day, Mumbai's nights are growing warmer, with higher humidity levels than during the day, resulting in nighttime sweating. Meteorologists warned Mumbaikars to brace for scorching daytime temperatures coupled with nighttime humidity.

Tuesday night recorded a humidity

level of 76 per cent, in contrast to 62 per cent during the day. Meteorologist Rajesh Kapadia attributes this phenomenon to daytime heat causing humidity to dissipate, only to surge significantly at night, causing discomfort and excessive sweating.

Meanwhile, health activists said it was time to implement the heatwave action plan and training the doctors in treating patients.

Last year, as per the heatwave action plan, it was suggested that employees and labourers aged 50 and above with comorbidities such as high blood pressure and diabetes, and whose work necessitates exposure to sunlight (such as bus drivers and police constables) or heat or fire in factories, should be allocated suitable

duty hours, preferably during the cooler morning or evening periods. Likewise, gardens should remain accessible throughout the day, providing shelter, along with water kiosks, for those seeking relief from the heat.

"Despite these directives, the actual implementation remains severely lacking. Visiting MGNREGA workplaces reveals a distressing reality: labourers, including pregnant women, are compelled to toil under the blazing afternoon sun without access to basic amenities like drinking water," said Bandu Sane, from NGO Khoj that works in Amravati.

The action plan also mandates creation of makeshift ponds for animals, water pots for birds and stray animals.

During a review meeting on March 15, the Commissioner of Health Services, Maharashtra, emphasised the importance of proactive preventive measures to address heat-related illnesses in hospitals and communities.

Doctors have urged people to stay hydrated and avoid stepping out during peak hours. "As the temperatures rise, it's crucial to prioritise preventive measures to combat the looming heatwave in India. Simple precautions like staying hydrated, seeking shade, and avoiding outdoor activities during peak hours can significantly reduce the risk of heat-related illnesses," said a senior health officer.

## Sindhudurg-Ratnagiri will remain with BJP, will contest if party asks me to, says Union Minister Narayan Rane

### Mumbai

Union Minister Narayan Rane Tuesday said that the Sindhudurg-Ratnagiri constituency will have a BJP candidate and he will contest from the seat if the party asks him to do so.

"The Sindhudurg-Ratnagiri constituency will remain with BJP. It is for the BJP leaders to decide the candidate. If they ask me to contest, I will do," Rane said in a press conference in Mumbai.

Sindhudurg-Ratnagiri seat has become a bone of contention for the Mahayuti alliance with the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde also demanding the seat for state Minister Uday



Samant's brother Kiran Samant.

However, Rane justified BJP's claim arguing, "Sitting MP Vinayak Raut belongs to Sena (UBT). On what basis is Shinde Sena asserting its right over the seat?"

In terms of organisational base, BJP is stronger compared to alliance partner Shinde Sena, he added. Rane also commented on INDIA bloc rally in New

Delhi, which was also addressed by by Sena UBT chief Uddhav Thackeray.

"Thackeray did not go to Mantralay when he was the chief minister of Maharashtra. But now he is going all the way to Delhi to address the public rally. Has he become so great to speak against PM Narendra Modi who is lauded by world leaders?" said Rane adding that with five MPs and 16 MLAs for his party, Thackeray is "behaving like a big leader".

Further slamming the Sena UBT chief, Rane added, "I know how Uddhav Thackeray was taking money for giving tickets to candidates. I had myself complained about it."

## BMC property tax collection sees drop this year, lowest since 2012

### Mumbai

With the financial year 2023-24 coming to an end, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has collected a total of Rs 3,195 crore in property tax as of March 31, which is only 71% of its estimated target of property tax collection for FY 2023-24 which was Rs 4500 crore.

This has been the lowest recovery of property tax during any fiscal year in the past decade. The BMC in 2019-20 collected a total property tax of Rs 3,735 crore, before that in 2011-12 total property tax worth Rs 3223 crore was recovered. Meanwhile, in 2022-23, the actual collection stood at Rs 4994 crore. Civic officials said that in a bid to

boost the collection, the BMC has extended the deadline for property tax payment till May 25.

Meanwhile, the civic body's data show that out of the Rs 3,195 crore property tax collected this year, Rs 336.45 crore was collected from H/East ward which covers the Bandra East, Kalanagar, Khar East and Santacruz areas, followed by Rs 317.48 crore collected from K/East (Andheri East, Jogeshwari) ward, and Rs 257.11 crore collected from G/South (Worli, Prabhadevi) ward.

Meanwhile, the lowest collection of Rs 22.33 crore was recovered from B (Dongri, Sandhurst Road) ward, followed by Rs 41.93 crore recovered from C (Pydhonie, Bhuleshwar) areas.

# Election Commission transfers 2 IGs, 8 DMs, 12 SPs in 5 states

## New Delhi

The Election Commission on Tuesday issued transfer orders for two inspectors general of police, eight district magistrates and 12 superintendents of police in five states as part of its "regular review" for the Lok Sabha election.

The decision was taken by the commission during a meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar along with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, the poll panel said.

The elections were announced by the commission on March 16 and will be held in seven phases between April 18 and June 1. Counting of votes is scheduled for June 4.

The Election Commission

(EC) said all transferred officials had been asked to hand over their charge to their immediate junior officers. Those shunted out will not be assigned any election duty till the completion of the Lok Sabha polls, it said.

The respective state governments have been directed to send a panel of names of Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service officers to the commission and those short-listed will be appointed in the place of those transferred.

Among those transferred are the inspectors general of police Guntur Range, Andhra Pradesh, and Central Range, Odisha.

The other officers are the district magistrate (DM) of Udalgiri in Assam; the DM and the superintendent of police

(SP) of Bhojpur district, and the DM and the SP of Nawada district in Bihar.

The SP of Deoghar in Jharkhand, the DMs of Cuttack and Jagatsinghpur, the SPs of Angul, Behrampur, Khurda, Rourkela and the DCP (Cuttack) in Odisha have also been transferred.

In Andhra Pradesh, the DMs of Krishna, Ananthpuramu and Tirupati districts and the SPs of Prakasham, Palnadu, Chittoor, Ananthpuramu and Nellore districts have been shunted out.

Separately, the EC has asked the Jharkhand chief secretary to fill up vacant posts of SP (Rural) Ranchi, deputy inspector general of police (Palamu) and IGP (Dumka) by sending a panel of names of officials to it.

# 13 Maoists Killed In Major Security Operation Ahead Of Lok Sabha Polls

## Bhopal

At least 13 Maoists were killed by security forces in a major operation ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in Chhattisgarh. Police said the gunfight took place in a remote forest in Bijapur district on Tuesday. The exchange of fire, lasting for about eight hours, left the area fraught with tension and marked by the aftermath of battle.

Inspector General of Police, P Sundarraaj, said officers have seized a large cache of rifles, machine guns, and ammunition.

"The identity of the Maoist dead bodies is yet to be established," Mr Sundarraaj said, adding that three of those killed were women.

Another police official said that prima facie, it appears that the insurgents killed

"The identity of the dead Naxalites was yet to be ascertained but prima facie, it appears that they belonged to the PLGA (People's Liberation Guerrilla Army) company no. 2 of Maoists," the official said.

The operation, spearheaded by Bijapur District Reserve Guard, in collaboration with CRPF, STF, and CoBRA teams, was a concerted effort to eliminate the threat posed by the Maoists in the area. Intelligence had indicated the presence of the notorious Maoist leader, Papa Rao, prompting the security forces to launch the operation.

During the search of the encounter site, security forces recovered a substantial cache of arms and ammunition, including one LMG, one .303 bore rifle, and one 12 bore rifle, along with a significant quantity of BGL shells and launchers.

## Lok Sabha polls: Election Commission launches 'Myth vs Reality Register' to combat misinformation

## New Delhi

In a bid to check the spread of misinformation during the Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission on Tuesday launched a 'Myth vs Reality Register' that will be updated regularly to include the latest fake news busted.

With the proliferation of misinformation and false narratives, this proactive initiative seeks to ensure that voters have access to accurate and verified information throughout the electoral process, the poll panel said.

The microsite was launched by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu.

The register will be continuously updated to include the latest busted fake information and fresh frequently-asked questions, the EC said.

# 3 Rajiv Gandhi Case Convicts, Including Nalini's Husband, Leave India

## Chennai

Three men who had been convicted for their role in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi left for Colombo Wednesday morning. Murugan, Robert Payas, and Jayakumar were among six freed in November 2022 by the Supreme Court, which had said they showed "satisfactory behaviour" while in jail and also noted the Tamil Nadu government had recommended their release.

All three men were escorted from a special camp in Tiruchirappalli - where they had been held after their release from jail - to Chennai International Airport by a team of police officers early this morning. The men, all Sri Lankan nationals, were recently granted passports by the island nation.

One of the six - Murugan - is married to Nalini, an Indian citizen who was among the six released

Three decades ago, an intervention by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, the late Prime

United Kingdom.

The death sentences of the others was commuted by the top court, citing an inordinate delay by the President in disposing off their mercy pleas.

Nalini is attempting to secure a visa for the reunion with her daughter. Her brother, Packianathan, told NDTV, "... we hope Murugan will also get it from Colombo. They just want the family reunion."

Another of the six released two years ago - Santhan - died in a Chennai hospital. He had been receiving treatment for a liver condition. He too was a Sri Lankan

national. The first of the convicts released was Perarivalan, also an Indian citizen. He was released in May 2022.



in 2022 on the Supreme Court's orders. Nalini accompanied her husband to the airport; visuals showed her sitting with him for a few moments before he was taken into the terminal.

Minister's widow, spared Nalini's life - she, and the others, had been sentenced to death - after it emerged she had been pregnant during the sentencing. Her daughter is now a doctor in the



# Curtains on ex-PM Manmohan Singh's parliamentary stint after over 3 decades

New Delhi

It is finally curtains on the eventful parliamentary career of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who retires from the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday after six terms and a stint of 33 years that witnessed his phenomenal rise to the position of India's Prime Minister.

Singh (92) was first elected to the House of Elders in October 1991 soon after he assumed charge as Union Finance Minister in June that year. A prime example of lateral entry into the government when such switches were few and far between, leading economist Singh's first engagement with the Union Government was as economic adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Trade between 1971 and 1972.

There was no looking back for the Gah-born economist who broke barriers to chart an exceptional career, surprising colleagues and critics alike. Soon after his maiden assignment with the government in 1971, Singh found himself elevated



as chief economic adviser to the Ministry of Finance until 1976, steadily rising up the ladder through the subsequent years to become—Director, RBI (1976-1980); Secretary, Ministry of Finance (1976 to 1980); RBI Governor (1982 to 1985); Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission (1985 to 1987) and Adviser to the PM on economic affairs (1990-1991).

Singh's political break came on June 21, 1991, when then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao handpicked him to serve as Union Finance Minister when

India was struggling with the balance of payment crisis. Just before elevation as the Finance Minister, Singh was serving as the UGC Chairman in 1991. It was after this appointment that Singh was first elected to the Rajya Sabha in October 1991. He remained a RS MP from Assam and later Rajasthan.

Widely credited with economic liberalisation that unleashed India's growth potential, Singh continued to transition from a suave economist to a deft politician, gaining the confidence of Sonia Gandhi, who assumed charge as Congress president in 1998. She tasked Singh with the role of Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha from 1998 to 2004 and when it came to vacating her claim over prime minister-ship in May 2004, she handpicked Singh to become India's Prime Minister, a post in which he served from May 22, 2004, to May 26, 2014, when the Narendra Modi-led BJP dislodged the Congress-led UPA from power.

# India firmly rejects 'senseless attempts' by China to rename places in Arunachal Pradesh

New Delhi

India on Tuesday outright rejected as "senseless" China renaming some places in Arunachal Pradesh, and asserted that assigning "invented" names does not alter the reality that the state "is, has been and will always be" an integral part of India.

India's reaction came in response to Beijing announcing Chinese names for 30 more places in Arunachal Pradesh which the neighbouring country claims as southern part of Tibet.

"China has persisted with its senseless attempts to rename places in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. We firmly reject such attempts," external affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"Assigning invented names will not alter the reality that Arunachal Pradesh is, has been and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India," he said in

response to media queries on the matter.

The Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs released the fourth list of standardised geographical names in Zangnan, the Chinese name for Arunachal Pradesh which Beijing claims as part of south Tibet, state-run Global Times reported on Sunday.

In April last year too, India had reacted sharply when Beijing released the third list of standardised names of 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh.

The first batch of the standardised names of six places in Arunachal Pradesh was released in 2017 while the second batch of 15 places was issued in 2021. On March 28, India said Beijing may "repeat its baseless claims" over Arunachal Pradesh as many times as it wants but that is not going to change New Delhi's position that the state "was, is and will always remain" an integral and inalienable part of the country.

Across State अक्रॉस मुंबई

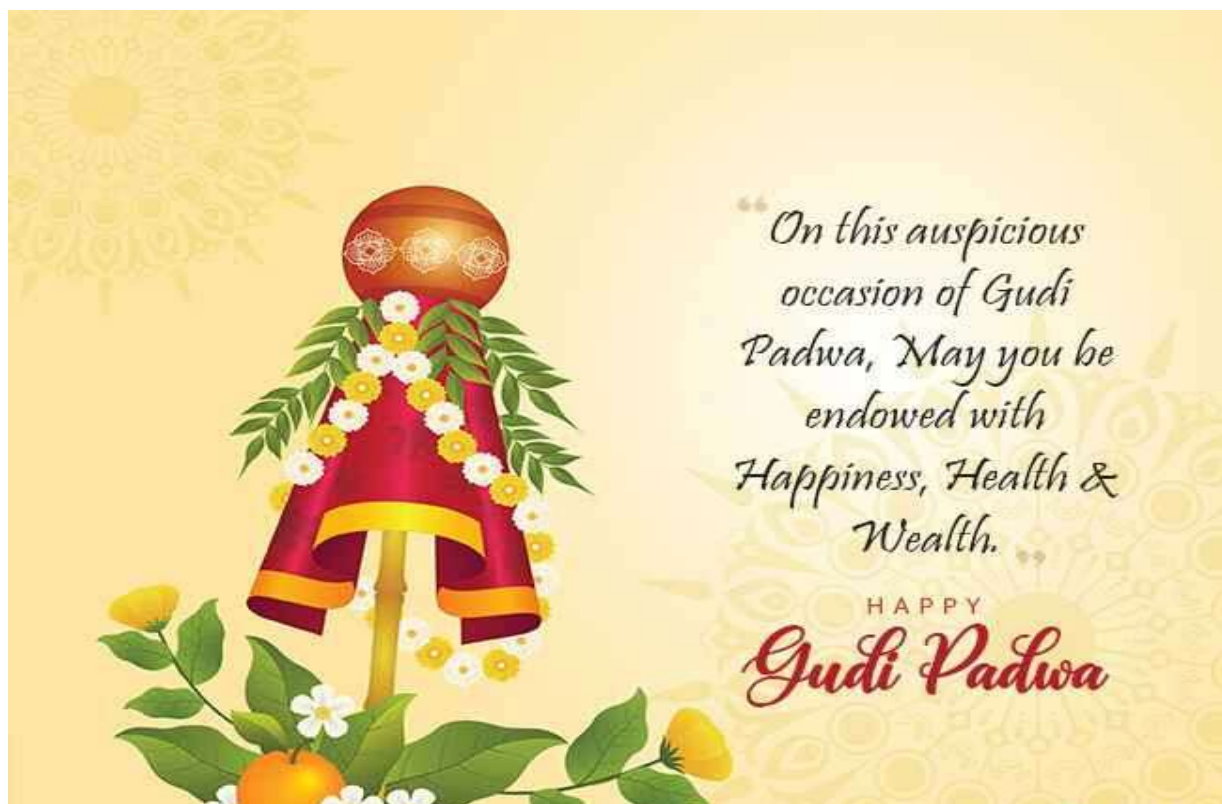


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## PM launches Uttarakhand, Rajasthan campaign with call to 'wipe out Congress'

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday launched the BJP campaign in Uttarakhand and Rajasthan with a call

to "wipe out Congress from the national electoral landscape as a punishment for its anti-democracy stance", a promise to "strike harder on corruption and take unprecedented decisions in his upcoming third term".

Speaking to a mammoth gathering in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur and later Rajasthan's Kotputli

(in Jaipur), the PM hit out at former Congress President Rahul Gandhi for remarks that BJP's re-election "would set the country on fire".

"After staying out of power for just 10 years, the Congress has begun talking about igniting fire in India. Will you punish such people?" the PM asked the assembly, declaring that his fight against corruption would continue with renewed vigour upon his re-election.

In a broadside on the Congress, BJP's principal rival in Uttarakhand, the PM said to the people, "Congress ko is Lok Sabha chunaav mein chun

chun kar ke saaf kar dena chahiye, karenge naa? (Congress must be erased from the LS landscape; will you wipe it out?" You have to go out of your homes on voting day with the pledge to destroy the Congress party's divisive intentions with your votes."

Coming down heavily on the Opposition on the issue of corruption, Modi said the corrupt

individuals not only threaten, but also abuse him.

"I say — eradicate corruption. They say — save the corrupt. But Modi is not afraid of their abuses and threats. Action will continue against every corrupt person. There will be a swift strike against corruption in the third term. And I will not let anyone steal the rights of the poor or the middle class. This is Modi's guarantee," PM said.



## EC says clearance is mandatory for political ads a day before poll

New Delhi

Election Commission has said no advertisements of political nature can be published in print media a day ahead polls or on polling day without the contents getting pre-certified by the Media Certification and Monitoring Committees (MC&MC) set up at the District and State level.

The EC today said, in the past, advertisements offending and misleading in nature, get published in print media just a day ahead of polls. "[Such advertisements in the last stage of the election vitiate the entire election process. The affected candidates and parties will not have any opportunity of providing clarification and rebuttal in such cases," The EC said in its order.

The EC order said: "In order to ensure that such instances are not repeated, and no untoward incident takes place, the EC directed that no political party or candidate or any other organization or person shall publish any advertisement in the print media on poll day and one day prior to poll day".

The Commission, has exercised powers under Article 324 of the Constitution to issue these orders.

The MCMC at State and district level have been alerted and activated in order to examine and pre-certify all such advertisements received from the political parties and candidates and others.

## Disengagement, de-escalation way forward at LAC: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh

New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh today said "disengagement and de-escalation" was the way forward for resolving the ongoing India-China military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

He was addressing the Army Commanders Conference here. Referring to the series of talks between military commanders of both countries, he said, "The ongoing talks for peaceful resolution will continue." He expressed "full confidence" that the troops were standing firm along the LAC, the de facto boundary between the two countries.

Since April 2020, India and China are locked in a military "standoff" along the LAC. The words used by the minister "disengagement and de-escalation" are part of three-



stage process to defuse tension at the LAC.

India has already suggested to China that a graded three-step process is needed to ease the standoff. The first is disengagement of troops within

close proximity of each other in grey zones along the LAC and getting back to positions as on April 2020.

The next two steps, de-escalation and de-induction, would entail pulling back

troops and equipment to the pre-April 2020 levels. Till that is agreed upon and complied with, it cannot be assumed to be business as usual and the Indian troops intend to remain at the LAC.

Meanwhile, Rajnath Singh complimented the Indian Army's approach on the infusion and absorption of cutting-edge technology. He suggested that "unconventional and asymmetric warfare, including hybrid war, will be part of the future conventional wars".

"Cyber skills, information, communication, trade and finance have all become an inseparable part of future conflicts," he said.

Referring to the situation along the Western border, he complimented the Army for its response in cases of cross-border terrorism. "The proxy

war by the adversary (Pakistan) continues," Rajnath Singh added.

The synergised operations of the Army and Central paramilitary forces in Jammu and Kashmir were contributing to increased stability in the region and the same should continue, the Defence Minister said.

During the conference, Army leadership deliberated upon all aspects of existing security scenarios, situation along the borders, in the hinterland and challenges for the present security apparatus.

The commanders also discussed induction of niche technologies and assessment of the impact of various existing global situations. A "technological infusion and absorption road map for the Indian Army" was also shown to the minister.



# Ramayana-fame Arun Govil enters political arena from Meerut



## Kairana

Veteran actor Arun Govil, known for his iconic character of Lord Ram in Ramanand Sagar's TV serial 'Ramayan', on Wednesday embarked on a political journey by filing his nomination as BJP candidate for Meerut Lok Sabha seat.

The BJP's decision to field Govil by replacing its three terms MP Rajendra Agarwal, strategically coincides with the fervour surrounding the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, tapping into the sentiments of the electorate. Govil's nationwide popularity, garnered through his portrayal of

Lord Ram, adds a unique dynamic to the political landscape.

UP deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya accompanied Govil during the nomination process. Govil will be facing Samajwadi Party's Atul Pradhan, sitting MLA from Sardhana assembly constituency and Dvrit Tyagi of the BSP. SP had earlier field Bhanu Pratap Singh from Meerut seat, which will vote in the second phase of polling on April 26. However, Govil's entry has forced the SP to change its candidate, as the party has now fielded its Sardhana MLA Atul Pradhan, replacing Bhanu Pratap Singh, a Dalit.

# Goa Police file chargesheet against start-up CEO Suchana Seth accused of son's murder

## Panaji

The Goa Police have filed a chargesheet in a court here against Suchana Seth, the CEO of an AI start-up, accused of killing her four-year-old son at an apartment in the coastal state, a senior official said.

Seth (39) was arrested from Chitradurga in neighbouring Karnataka on January 7 while she was travelling in a taxi with her son's body stuffed in a bag.

She left Goa on January 6 night after allegedly killing her child at an apartment in Candolim area of the state.

The Calangute police earlier this week filed a 642-page chargesheet against Seth in the Goa Children's Court, the official said on Tuesday.

The chargesheet mentioned

that the child died as a result of shock and respiratory asphyxia caused by strangulation.



Seth has been booked under Sections 302 (murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence of offence) of the Indian Penal Code and Section 8 of the Goa Children's Act, according to the chargesheet.

## Rajkot

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday expressed optimism about India's eventual permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), saying it is inevitable but emphasised the need for heightened efforts in this regard. Addressing intellectuals in Gujarat's Rajkot city, the External Affairs Minister stressed that diligent work was essential to secure this coveted position.

Acknowledging the current dominance of five nations — China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US — as the UN's original permanent members, the minister, however, said the international momentum was now favouring India's bid for a permanent seat. The United Nations was formed around 80 years ago, and these five nations decided among themselves to become permanent members of its security council, Jaishankar said.

He highlighted the historical context of the UNSC's formation, where five nations secured permanent membership, underscoring the evolving

# Permanent UNSC seat inevitable, need for heightened efforts: EAM



global landscape with around 193 countries today.

"But these five nations have kept their control, and it is strange that you have to ask them to give us their consent for a change. A few agree, a few others put forward their position with honesty, while others do something from behind," he said. Jaishankar spoke about the collaborative proposals involving India, Japan, Germany, and Egypt which have been submitted to the UN, signalling progress.

"But now, there is a feeling across the world that this should change, and India should get a permanent seat.

I see this feeling increasing every year," he said, adding "we will definitely get it. But nothing big is ever achieved without hard work...we will have to work hard, and this time we will have to work even harder".

He stressed the importance of mounting pressure, citing recent stalemates over conflicts like the Ukraine war and Gaza. Jaishankar linked the UN's perceived weakening to increased opportunities for India's bid for permanent membership saying, "...there is a feeling in the world that the UN has weakened."

# ED files money laundering case against TMC leader Mahua Moitra

## New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a money laundering case against TMC leader Mahua Moitra and businessman Darshan Hiranandani in connection with an alleged cash-for-queries scam case, official sources said on Tuesday.



The federal agency filed the enforcement case information report, the ED equivalent of a police FIR, against the two, taking cognisance of a CBI complaint, the sources said. The ED case was registered two-three days ago. It has been probing the two under the civil sections of the Foreign Exchange Management Act and has called Moitra and Dubai-based businessman Hiranandani in this case for questioning, but they have not disposed till now, citing official engagements.

The CBI had last month conducted searches, after filing its FIR, at the premises of Moitra, a former TMC MP from the Krishnanagar seat in West Bengal. She has been renominated by the Trinamool Congress to contest in the General Election. The CBI registered an FIR against her and Hiranandani on the directives of Lokpal which has instructed the agency to file its report within six months. The Lok Sabha had expelled Moitra last December for "unethical conduct".



## Kejriwal lost 4.5 kg since arrest, BJP putting his health at risk by keeping him in jail: Atishi

New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been rapidly losing weight since his arrest on March 21, senior AAP leader Atishi claimed on Wednesday and accused the BJP of putting his health at risk by keeping him in jail.

However, the administration of Tihar jail, where Kejriwal is lodged till April 15, has denied the claims. A senior Tihar jail official said Kejriwal's vitals are normal.

Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in an excise policy-linked money laundering case. He has been sent to judicial custody till April 15.



"Arvind Kejriwal ji is a severe diabetic. Despite health issues, he remained engaged

24 hours a day in the service of the country. Since his arrest, Kejriwal's weight has decreased by 4.5 kg. This is very worrying. The BJP is putting his health at risk by putting him in jail," she alleged in a post on X in Hindi.

If something happens to Arvind Kejriwal, not just the whole country, even God will not forgive them, she added.

The Delhi chief minister has been allowed to have home-cooked food in Tihar jail. On Tuesday morning, Kejriwal's sugar level was low. He was under the watch of Tihar jail doctors as his sugar level kept fluctuating, officials have said.

## Tamil Nadu CM Stalin slams BJP for 'somersault' on Katchatheevu, dubs RTI disclosure 'wrong information'

Vellore (Tamil Nadu)

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has said that the BJP has done a "somersault" on the Katchatheevu issue since the Lok Sabha polls are round the corner.

Stalin claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not have the guts to neither condemn Sri Lanka over fishermen arrests nor oppose China on its claims over Arunachal Pradesh. When that is the case, how can he talk about Katchatheevu, he said.

In an election rally here on Tuesday, the president of the ruling DMK hit out at Modi for staging a "drama" and coming up with "stories" on the Katchatheevu issue and dubbed the disclosures by the Centre on the matter under the RTI Act as "wrong information."

He asked how the government had given "wrong information" concerning the nation's security under the RTI Act to an individual belonging to the BJP (Tamil Nadu state chief K Annamalai).

The BJP government had earlier failed to provide answers on Katchatheevu by stating that the subject was subjudice as the matter was pending before the Supreme Court. The BJP regime



in 2015 said that Katchatheevu had never been a part of India. That information was provided by S Jaishankar, the then foreign secretary, Stalin claimed.

"Since the elections are round the corner, they have changed the information as per their wish. Why this somersault?

Has PM Modi, during his 10-year tenure, who is now talking on Katchatheevu, ever condemned Sri Lanka over the arrest of fishermen and the instances of firing against them? Why did he not do that," Stalin said, during his speech at the rally.

The DMK chief also questioned why Modi has not spoken on China, which is claiming that Arunachal Pradesh is its territory. "There is no courage to censure Sri Lanka. There is no courage to oppose

China. How can you talk about Katchatheevu," he said.

The BJP, which came to power in 2014, submitted in the Supreme Court that war with Sri Lanka was the only option to have Katchatheevu back, Stalin said.

He demanded to know if PM Modi, during his visit to Sri Lanka, had sought the return of Katchatheevu and if he conveyed to the neighbouring country that the island belonged to India. Modi did not remember Katchatheevu during his foreign visit, Stalin alleged.

Stalin also said that on May 26, 2022, during the Prime Minister's visit to Chennai for an event, he had sought retrieval of Katchatheevu to uphold the traditional fishing rights of fishermen.

"Do you remember that," he said, slamming Modi for staging a drama and cooking up stories on the Katchatheevu issue.

Stalin wondered how the Centre furnished information on such an important matter to the petitioner in "four working days" from the receipt of application under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

## 'No money recovered': Supreme Court grants bail to AAP leader Sanjay Singh

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to AAP leader Sanjay Singh, who has been in jail since October last year in connection with a money

in mind that if we are with him, we are required to record in terms of section 45 (of PMLA) that he has prima facie not committed an offence. That could have its own ramifications in trial," the Bench



laundering case related to the Delhi excise policy scam, after the Enforcement Directorate said it had no objection to his release.

"We direct that Sanjay Singh be released on bail on terms and conditions fixed by the trial court," a three-judge Bench led by Justice Sanjiv Khanna said, noting that the accused AAP leader has been behind bars for six months. However, the Bench, which also included Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice PB Varale, clarified that the concession given to Singh will not be treated as a precedent.

Singh is the first AAP leader who has been granted bail in a case related to Delhi excise policy scam. The ED alleged that an employee of businessman Dinesh Arora delivered Rs 2 crore to Singh's house on two occasions. Singh was arrested by the ED on October 4, 2023, following allegations made by Arora, who has turned approver in both the ED and the CBI cases related to excise scam.

The Bench, however, observed that no money had been recovered from Singh and there were nine exculpatory statements given in his respect by Arora. "You (ED) have kept him (Singh) in custody for six months. Dinesh Arora has not initially implicated him. Later on, in a statement, he does. No money has been recovered; the trace of money is not there because it was long back. Fact of the matter is that money has not been recovered. Please keep

cautioned Additional Solicitor General SV Raju.

The order came after Raju told the Bench that the ED had no objection if Singh was released on bail during the pendency of proceedings. Raju's submission was in response to the court's query if the ED needed Singh's further custody. The Bench said if there were no instructions from the probe agency, the ASG could argue on merits and the matter could be decided accordingly.

Though the ED had an arguable case, it was ready to concede and thus Singh may be released on bail, ASG Raju told the Bench. "Without going into merits, I will make a concession in the bail matter in the peculiar facts," Raju submitted.

The development came a day after a special court here sent Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal to 14-day judicial custody in a money laundering case related to the excise scam. Two other AAP leaders—former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and former Health Minister Satyendar Jain—continue to be in jail in separate money laundering cases.

Earlier, senior counsel AM Singhvi questioned the basis and necessity of Singh's attest, contending that the ED's probe was nothing but a vendetta against the AAP MP after he held a press conference to call out the error of putting his name in supplementary chargesheet in place of someone else.



# Taiwan hit by strongest earthquake in 25 years

## Taipei

A 7.2-magnitude earthquake rocked Taiwan on Wednesday, the strongest tremor to hit the island in at least 25 years, killing four people, injuring dozens and sparking a tsunami warning for southern Japan and the Philippines that was later lifted.

Taiwan's government said four people had died in the mountainous, sparsely populated eastern county of Hualien where the epicentre was, with more than 50 injured.

At least 26 buildings have collapsed, more than half in Hualien, with about 20 people trapped and rescue work on-going, it said.

Taiwan television stations showed footage of buildings at precarious angles in Hualien, where the quake struck just offshore around 8am (0000GMT) as people were going to work and school.

The quake had a depth of 15.5 km (9.6 miles), according to Taiwan's Central Weather Administration.

"It was very strong. It felt as if the house was going to topple," said 60-year-old Taipei hospital worker Chang Yu-Lin.

Japan's weather agency said several small tsunami waves reached parts of the southern prefecture of Okinawa, and later downgraded the earlier tsunami warning to an advisory. It put the earthquake's magnitude at 7.7.

The Philippines Seismology Agency



also issued a warning for residents in coastal areas of several provinces, urging them to evacuate to higher ground.

Taiwan also issued a tsunami warning, but reported no damage from that, and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii later said the risk of damaging tsunami waves had passed.

Aftershocks could still be felt in Taipei, a Reuters witness said, with more than 25 aftershocks registered, according to Taiwan's central weather administration.

Chinese state media said the quake was felt in China's Fujian province, while

a Reuters witness said it was also felt in Shanghai.

The Taipei city government said it had not received any reports of major damage and the city's MRT was up and running soon after the tremor.

Electricity operator Taipower said more than 87,000 households in Taiwan were still without power, adding that the country's two nuclear power stations were not affected by the temblor.

Taiwan's high speed rail operator said no damage or injuries were reported on its trains, but noted trains will be delayed

while it carries out inspections.

Semiconductor giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co said it had evacuated some fabrication plants and its safety systems were operating normally.

"To ensure the safety of personnel, some fabs were evacuated according to company procedure. We are currently confirming the details of the impact," according to the company.

It later added that those evacuated were beginning to return to their workplaces.

Shares of TSMC were down 1.4% in early trade, while Apple supplier Foxconn's stock fell more than 2% and shares of flat panel maker Au Optronics dropped 1.7%.

Taiwan's official central news agency said the quake was the biggest to hit the island since 1999 when a 7.6 magnitude tremor killed around 2,400 people and destroyed or damaged 50,000 buildings in one of Taiwan's worst-recorded quakes.

Taiwan's Central Weather Administration said the earthquake registered the second-highest intensity of an "Upper 6" in Hualien county, on the 1-7 intensity scale.

In an Upper 6 earthquake, most unreinforced concrete-block walls collapse and people find it impossible to remain standing or move without crawling, the Japan Meteorological Agency says.

## Israeli strike kills 7 aid workers; Netanyahu says 'unintentional'

### Jerusalem

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday an Israeli airstrike that killed seven people working for celebrity chef Jose Andres' World Central Kitchen charity in Gaza was unintended and "tragic", and the military pledged an independent inquiry.

The Israeli military confirmed the deadly strike on a WCK convoy that killed citizens of Australia, Britain and Poland as well as Palestinians and a dual citizen of the United States and Canada. WCK said they were travelling in two armoured cars emblazoned with the charity's logo and another vehicle. The military expressed "sincere sorrow" and promised an independent investigation



into the incident, which drew widespread condemnation and ratcheted up pressure for steps to ease the disastrous humanitarian situation in Gaza.

"Unfortunately in the past day there was a tragic event in which our forces unintentionally harmed non-combatants in the Gaza Strip," Netanyahu said.

"This happens in war. We are conducting a thorough inquiry and are in contact with the governments. We will do everything to prevent a recurrence."

## Trump calls migrants 'animals', intensifying focus on illegal immigration

### Green Bay, Wisconsin

Donald Trump called immigrants illegally in the United States "animals" and "not human" in a speech in Michigan on Tuesday, resorting to the degrading rhetoric he has employed time and again on the campaign trail.

The Republican presidential candidate, appearing with several law enforcement officers, described in detail several criminal cases involving suspects in the country illegally and warned that violence and chaos would consume America if he did not win the Nov. 5 election.

In a later speech in Green Bay, Wisconsin, he struck a similarly foreboding tone, describing the 2024 election as the nation's "final battle."

While speaking of Laken Riley - a 22-year-old nursing student from Georgia allegedly



murdered by a Venezuelan immigrant in the country illegally - Trump said some immigrants were sub-human.

"The Democrats say, 'Please don't call them animals. They're humans.' I said, 'No, they're not humans, they're not humans, they're animals,'" said Trump, president from 2017 to 2021.

In Grand Rapids, Michigan, Trump described meeting the family of Ruby Garcia, a local 25-year-old murdered last month by a suspect in the country illegally, according to police.

Garcia's sister denied the

former president spoke with the family, according to local media reports.

In stump speeches, Trump frequently claims that immigrants crossing the border with Mexico illegally have escaped from prisons and asylums in their home countries and are fueling violent crime in the United States.

While available data on criminals' immigration status is sparse, researchers say people living in the US illegally do not commit violent crimes at a higher rate than native-born citizens.

Democratic President Joe Biden, Trump's rival in the November presidential election, accuses Trump of encouraging Republicans in Congress not to pass legislation this year that would have beefed up security at the southern border and introduced measures aimed at reducing illegal immigration.

# China's name game

WEEKS after Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated the strategically important Sela tunnel to the nation, China has released a list of 30 'standardised' names of places in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. This is the fourth such list issued by the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs in the past seven years. Beijing claims that Zangnan — the Chinese name for Arunachal — is part of south Tibet. India has repeatedly rejected the assertions, with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar saying that these were ludicrous to begin with and remain ludicrous today.

China had reacted sharply to the opening of the tunnel, which will provide all-weather connectivity to Arunachal's Tawang and is expected to facilitate faster movement of troops in the frontier region. Lodging a diplomatic protest, Beijing had

said that India's move would 'only complicate' the boundary issue. The Dragon was also left fuming when the US reaffirmed Arunachal as Indian



territory and opposed any 'unilateral attempts' by China to advance its territorial claims across the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Ironically, the latest provocation comes on the heels of the 29th

meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs. Both sides had stated that there was an in-depth exchange of views on how to achieve 'complete disengagement' and resolve the remaining issues along the LAC. It's obvious that China is keeping up the façade of dialogue and communication while maintaining its intransigent position. While it is imperative for both nations to remain in regular contact through diplomatic and military channels, India cannot afford to let its guard down in view of the Chinese duplicity. New Delhi needs to be more vigilant to safeguard peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on [editor.acrossstate@gmail.com](mailto:editor.acrossstate@gmail.com)

*The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.*

-Eleanor Roosevelt

## Congress gets tax relief

### Imperative to ensure a level playing field

THE Centre has given an undertaking to the Supreme Court that it would refrain from initiating coercive steps to recover the Congress' tax dues of more than Rs 3,500 crore till July. This development comes weeks before the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls. While offering a respite to the Congress, it raises pertinent questions about the politicisation of tax matters. The party's allegations of 'tax terrorism' by the ruling BJP underscore the broader issue of using the state apparatus for political advantage. The timing of the freeze on Congress funds and repeated income tax penalties are inseparable from the elections. The promise of no coercive

action until after the polls may ease immediate financial pressures on the Congress, but it doesn't address the underlying concerns of fairness and transparency in

the 'Save Democracy' rally organised by the INDIA bloc on Sunday highlights various challenges facing our democratic institutions. The allegations of tax

Hemant Soren. Despite the recent discord within the Opposition ranks, the arrests have served as a rallying point, galvanising support for a united front. The bloc's demands to the Election Commission, including the cessation of actions by investigative agencies and a Supreme Court-monitored probe into alleged electoral malpractices, emphasise the need for institutional integrity and fairness in the poll process.

The public's trust in the democratic framework hinges on ensuring a level playing field for all political parties. Any perception of undue influence or manipulation undermines its foundation.



tax law enforcement. The judiciary's role in adjudicating these matters impartially is pivotal to upholding the rule of law.

In this tumultuous political landscape,

harassment and the criticism of the BJP's alleged attempts to stifle dissent have gone hand in hand with the clamour for the release of arrested Opposition leaders Arvind Kejriwal and

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## Illegal mining

### NGT exposes gaps in Haryana's rule

THE recent directive by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to the Haryana Government, laying bare flaws in its approach to tackling illegal mining, underscores a worrisome disregard for environmental protection. The NGT's scrutiny of Rule 104 of the Haryana Minor Mineral Concession, Stocking and Transportation of Minerals and

of the problem but also weakens the deterrent effect that strict enforcement measures could have.

The NGT's criticism of the state's SOP is particularly damning as it exposes a glaring gap between stated intentions and actual implementation, highlighting a systemic failure in enforcing environmental regulations.

The absence of concrete measures to address illegal mining in the Aravallis, coupled with the neglect of the joint committee's mandate to ensure compliance with established guidelines and directives, is unpardonable.

It is, thus, essential for the Haryana Government to undertake

a comprehensive review of its SOP and regulatory framework concerning illegal mining. Immediate steps must be taken to address the NGT's concerns and rectify the shortcomings in the government's approach to environmental protection. Enhanced coordination and collaboration among the stakeholders could help combat the menace and preserve natural resources. Concerted efforts and a commitment to safeguarding the ecology are imperative to ensure a sustainable future for all.



Prevention of Illegal Mining Rules, 2012, has revealed a significant oversight in the state's standard operating procedure (SOP) regarding the imposition and recovery of environmental damage compensation. At the heart of the issue lies the provision of Rule 104 to exempt the first two offences of illegal mining from the registration of FIRs, raising questions about its compliance with constitutional provisions and directives from higher judicial authorities. This leniency not only undermines the gravity

ROUSED by the worsening famine and starvation among Palestinians in Gaza, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Thursday ordered Israel to take immediate measures to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. The ICJ's directive mandates Israel to open additional land crossings to facilitate the unimpeded entry of essentials into Gaza. This is critical in view of the shocking reports that 31 persons, including 27 children, have succumbed to malnutrition and dehydration. In January, the international court had instructed Israel to refrain from acts potentially contravening the Genocide Convention. Earlier this month, the WHO warned that over a million Gazans could face catastrophic hunger as they struggle to procure food. Aid agencies have been striving to deliver essential supplies, but their efforts are often hampered by restrictions. The EU has accused Israel of using starvation as a weapon of war, while the UN human rights office has raised concerns that aid curbs may constitute

a war crime. However, the ICJ lacks an enforcement mechanism, underscoring the need for Israel's voluntary compliance and cooperation with the UN to ensure the timely delivery of food, water, fuel and medical supplies. Meanwhile, there is no let-up in the hostilities, with Israel's military assault exacerbating the suffering of Palestinians. The war, which began last October, has claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced a significant portion of Gaza's population. It is imperative for the international community to exert

## Ukraine beckons

### Peace summit can be a useful starting point

Last week's visit to India by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was no customary attempt to keep a bilateral relationship going. This was Kuleba's maiden trip to the country since hostilities broke out between Ukraine and India's

to open up new vistas of cooperation with New Delhi will be time-consuming, more so because of the upcoming General Election in India. Of immediate interest to Kyiv is ensuring a high-level Indian participation in the peace summit to be organised by

Switzerland. India can be a potential mediator due to its stand of not blaming any side and consistently insisting on dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward to resolve the conflict.

The peace meeting, however, is littered with obstacles and contradictions. The most glaring one is the exclusion of Russia, a key protagonist. Zelenskyy's peace



close strategic partner Russia over two years ago. His tour was green-lighted by PM Narendra Modi and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during their telephonic conversation last month. Modi, understandably, spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin the same day, signifying the strengthening of ties since India began buying Russian goods that the West had spurned after the Ukraine war began.

The strategic proximity between Russia and India suggests that Ukraine's efforts

plan, which makes it incumbent upon Russia to vacate all captured territory, will be unacceptable to Moscow. The agenda, however, seems to be evolving as no date has been fixed and the level of representation is undecided. There is no indication on whether other Global South majors will attend the summit. Nevertheless, India's participation seems to be certain in what could be a promising starting point to draw the curtain on the protracted war.

## Famine in Gaza

### World must push Israel to obey ICJ order

pressure on Tel Aviv to adhere to its legal obligations. Israel's staunchest ally, the US,

must do more than express frustration; it should provide military aid to Israel only on the condition of sparing civilians and prioritising the facilitation of aid. The world cannot afford to remain a bystander while Gaza tragically sinks deeper into the mire.





# Food wastage

## Crisis particularly grave in India

IN a world where 78.3 crore people grapple with chronic hunger, the revelation that 19 per cent of the food goes to waste demands urgent attention. The latest UN report underscores a stark reality: despite ample resources, the inability to manage food distribution effectively is not only morally reprehensible but also environmentally unsustainable. This crisis is particularly pronounced in India, where food wastage poses a significant challenge alongside persistent food insecurity. According to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, one-third of all food in India is wasted or spoiled before consumption. Household food waste alone is estimated to be around 50 kg per person annually. Another UN report had shed light on a disconcerting nutritional trend in India, where a staggering 74.1 per cent of the



population cannot afford a healthy diet.

The environmental implications of food waste are equally alarming. Like many other countries, India faces

the adverse effects of greenhouse gas emissions associated with food production and waste. Methane emissions from decomposing food

waste in landfills contribute to climate change.

The UN's findings should propel the world toward overhauling food systems and prioritising equitable distribution. In India, where millions struggle for adequate nutrition, addressing food wastage is a moral obligation. It requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates policy measures, public awareness campaigns and community-driven initiatives. Government interventions, such as implementing regulations to minimise waste and incentivising sustainable practices, are essential. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, NGOs and private enterprises can facilitate efficient redistribution of surplus food to underprivileged communities. Individual action can help combat food waste through practices like meal planning, utilising leftovers and supporting food banks.

## Hope for J&K

### Troop pullback, AFSPA revocation worth a try

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah has said that the Central Government will consider revoking the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Jammu and Kashmir. He has also mentioned the government's plans to pull back troops from the state-turned-UT and leave law and order duties solely to the J&K Police. The announcements leave no room for doubt that there has been a significant improvement in the security situation in J&K in recent years. The frequency of terror incidents and encounters has gone down; the annual death toll of civilians as well as security personnel has also dropped. Stone-pelting incidents, which had once become commonplace, are now a thing of the past.

Troop pullback and AFSPA revocation are a must for the government to achieve its objective of winning the hearts and minds of the UT residents. Recurring allegations of the misuse of the law — which gives the armed forces sweeping powers and immunity against prosecution in

disturbed areas — have aggravated the trust deficit between the security forces and the citizens. The dreaded law should no longer be allowed to impede the restoration of normalcy in J&K. The authorities can take a cue from the phased withdrawal of AFSPA from one state after another in the North East, where development has gained momentum after decades of insurgency.

With the Supreme Court validating the constitutionality of the decision to abrogate Article 370, the Centre needs to promptly set into motion a series of confidence-building measures. Shah has stated that the J&K Assembly elections — last held in 2014 — would be conducted before September, as directed by the apex court. It is imperative to resume the electoral exercise so that regional political parties and voters can again become active constituents of a democratic polity. A timeframe for the restoration of statehood, which is at the core of the people's aspirations, should also be spelt out.

## Bail & electioneering

### SC upholds right to political engagement

THE Supreme Court ruling striking down bail conditions that restrain individuals from participating in political activities is a significant reaffirmation of the fundamental rights of citizens. The court's decision underscores the principle that the democratic exercise of political engagement cannot be curtailed through the imposition of restrictive conditions, especially as a prerequisite for bail. In the case of BJP leader Siba Shankar Das, the Orissa High Court's imposition of a bail rider barring him from political activities was deemed a violation of his right to engage in political discourse, which is sacrosanct and must be safeguarded.

Several politicians have taken part in campaigning while being out on bail over the years. Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Lalu Prasad Yadav campaigned extensively during various elections while he was on bail in connection with a slew of corruption cases. Sonia Gandhi was granted bail in the National

Herald case in 2015 and she continued to address rallies and mobilise support for the Congress; likewise, Mayawati was involved in campaigning for the Bahujan Samaj Party when she was on bail. In 2010, Amit Shah was granted bail in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh encounter case, and he played a key role in the BJP's poll campaigns in Gujarat and other states.

Their presence at the hustings highlighted the significance of active participation in the democratic process.

Pertinently, the Supreme Court has noted that the current bail system is marred by complexities

and shortcomings that lead to bail decisions often being subject to the discretion of individual judges. Calling upon the government to come up with a special legislation on bail, it has emphasised the importance of codifying of clear and uniform guidelines for granting bail, ensuring consistency, transparency and fairness in the administration of justice.





# At Rs 1.78L cr, GST collection in March second-highest ever

**New Delhi**

Gross Good and Services Tax (GST) revenue for March witnessed the second-highest ever collection at Rs. 1.78 lakh crore, a 11.5 per cent year-on-year growth. The highest-ever GST collection was recorded at Rs 1.87 lakh crore in April 2023.

"This surge was driven by a significant rise in GST collection from domestic transactions at 17.6 per cent. GST revenue net of refunds for March is Rs 1.65 lakh crore, a growth of 18.4 per cent over the same period last year.

**Total Rs 20.14L cr intake in last financial year**

The total gross GST collection in FY23-24 stands at Rs 20.14 lakh crore, an increase of 11.7% over the previous year

The average monthly collection for the last fiscal is Rs 1.68 lakh crore, surpassing the previous year's average of Rs 1.5 lakh crore

"Strong consistent performance in 2023-24 marks a milestone with the total gross GST collection of Rs. 20.14 lakh crore exceeding Rs. 20 lakh crore, a 11.7 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

The average monthly



collection for this fiscal year stands at Rs 1.68 lakh crore, surpassing the previous year's average of Rs. 1.5 lakh crore. GST revenue net of refunds as of March for the current fiscal year is Rs. 18.01 lakh crore, which is a growth of 13.4 per cent over the same period last year.

Of the total revenue collected in March, Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) accounted for Rs 34,532 crore, State Goods and Services Tax (SGST) Rs 43,746 crore, Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) Rs 87,947 crore, including Rs 40,322 crore collected on imported

goods; Cess Rs 12,259 crore, including Rs 996 crore collected on imported goods.

Similar positive trends are observed in the entire 2023-24 fiscal collections, with CGST Rs 3,75,710 crore, SGST Rs 4,71,195 crore, IGST Rs 10,26,790 crore, Cess Rs 1,44,554 crore.

In March, the Central Government settled Rs. 43,264 crore to CGST and Rs 37,704 crore to SGST from the IGST collected. This translates to a total revenue of Rs. 77,796 crore for CGST and Rs. 81,450 crore for SGST for March, after regular settlement.

## Marginal cut in ATF price, commercial LPG rate reduced by Rs 30.5

**New Delhi**

Jet fuel or ATF price on Monday was cut by a marginal 0.5 per cent while rates of commercial LPG used by establishments such as hotels and restaurants were slashed by Rs 31 per cylinder in line with international prices.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was cut by Rs 502.91 per kilolitre or 0.49 per cent, to Rs 100,893.63 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

Rates in Mumbai have been cut to Rs 94,466.41 per kl from Rs 94,809.22.

Prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes.



Alongside, oil firms also cut the price of commercial LPG by Rs 30.5 to Rs 1,764.50 per 19-kg cylinder.

Rates of the cooking gas used in domestic households however remained unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder. This is the first reduction in commercial LPG prices since January. Rates had gone up Rs 14 per cylinder on February 1 and Rs 25.5 on March 1.

Also, the price of the 5 kg FTL (Free Trade LPG or market priced cooking gas) cylinder has been lowered by Rs 7.50. State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) revise prices of ATF and cooking gas on 1st of every month based on the average price of benchmark international fuel and foreign exchange rate.

# HAL, BEL revenue increases in FY24

**New Delhi**

The Ministry of Defence-owned companies Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) have, in separate statements, said they had recorded better revenue for the fiscal ended March 31, 2024.

HAL said revenue from operations was Rs 29,810 crore, registering a double-digit growth of around 11 per cent. The revenue for the previous year was at Rs 26,928 crore. BEL said it achieved a turnover of Rs 19,700 crore during the financial year 2023-24, against the previous year's turnover of Rs 17,333 crore registering a growth of 13.65 per cent.

## Carmakers post double-digit growth in March



**New Delhi**

Strong growth in SUV sales and rising popularity of emission-friendly powertrains propelled passenger vehicle sales in March. Major original equipment manufacturers such as Maruti Suzuki, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra and Toyota Kirloskar Motor posted double digit in March 2024 as compared to March 2023.

Maruti Suzuki, registered domestic sales of 1,52,718 passenger vehicles in March, witnessing a YoY growth of 15 per cent, as compared to 1,32,763 units in March last year. For Maruti Suzuki, the mini and compact segment, which consists of Alto, S-Presso, Baleno, Celerio, Dzire, Ignis, Swift, Tour S, and WagonR registered sales of 81,673 units in March against 83,414 units sold in the same month last year a YoY decline of 2 per cent. During the same period, 58,436 SUVs were sold, a YoY increase of 57.7 per cent.

Tata Motors' total domestic passenger vehicle (PV) sales

rose 14 per cent to 50,110 units in March as against 44,044 units sold in March 2023. In March 2024, the company crossed sales of 50,000 units for the third consecutive month, led by new launches in CNG and EVs and continued strong response being received for the new Nexon, Harrier and Safari, launched in earlier quarters. Shailesh Chandra, MD, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd and Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd, said, "Passenger vehicle sales in India are projected to set a record in FY24 with over 4.2 million units."

Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd (M&M) sold 40,631 utility vehicles in the domestic market, a growth of 13 per cent. Toyota Kirloskar Motor maintained its sales momentum as it recorded a 25% growth by selling 27,180 units compared to 21,783 units in March 2023. Domestic sales accounted for 25,119 units while exports totalled 2,061 units during the same month.



# Explainer: Gold hits all-time high, reasons why yellow metal is shining bright

## Mumbai

In a country like India, gold is not just an investment or a commodity but a possession with sentimental and emotional attachment passed on from generation to generation as family heirlooms.

Indians buy gold for marriages and ceremonies in the family and occasions like 'Akshaya Tritiya' and 'Dhanteras' as part of the religious process.

However, it seems the world is in a race to acquire the precious metal, a reason why gold prices touched a record high on Monday.

According to agency reports, domestic gold futures rose to Rs 69,487 per 10 grams, up nearly 10 per cent so far in 2024.

In global markets the spot gold was up 1.2 per cent at \$2,258.53 per ounce after hitting an all-time high of \$2,262.19 earlier in the session.

## What is driving the prices?

In India, 10 grams of 24 k gold was selling at a whopping Rs 70,800 on Monday.

The precious metal recorded its highest monthly rise in March on the back of anticipated US Federal interest rate-cutting, buying by the central bank, hedge fund bets and geopolitical tensions.

"Traders are pricing in a 69% probability that the Fed would begin cutting rates in June," according to agency reports. Experts are also predicting a bullish run for silver and copper as well.

## Gold—a solid asset

As an asset, gold is solid with features of a possessable commodity, currency as well as safe investment. While the main driving force for the recent increase seems to be the speculation surrounding Fed rate and the upcoming US elections, there seem to be other reasons as well, especially



Central banks across the world are accumulating gold amid persisting geopolitical tensions, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, sanctions and Russia's warnings against US military involvement in Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflict.

Experts say after acquiring 1081.0 tonnes in 2022, central banks added 1037.40 tonnes in 2023.

"People in India love gold and even those with limited means try to acquire it, even if it is only a few grams. But now central banks across the world are in the race to accumulate more of the precious

metal," say experts.

## Main shoppers

Interestingly, the main shoppers include emerging markets like China and India. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) purchased 8.7 tonnes in January, making it the largest acquisition since July 2022.

According to reports quoting the World Gold Council, RBI's gold reserves increased to 812.3 tonnes in January, up from 803.58 tonnes in December 2023. Other countries with high gold buying include Singapore, Turkey and Russia.

The top 10 countries with maximum gold

reserves are the United States, Germany, Italy, France, Russia, China, Switzerland, Japan, India and the Netherlands in that order.

## Gold versus Fiat

Gold reserves are important for the economic stability of a country.

Gold reserves are limited and precious metal comes with a reliable value that can be traded especially in the times of financial uncertainties, making it a good buy not just for individual households but countries as well.

Experts say that India is buying more

gold as a tool of diversification of portfolio and as a cushion against value changes in the rupee vis-a-vis the US dollar.

There was a time when countries backed the value of their paper money with gold by establishing a fixed exchange rate between the currency and a specific amount of the metal. However, in the modern world Fiat money started ruling global trade. Examples of Fiat money include US dollar, euro, British pound and Japanese yen. "Fiat money is backed by a country's government rather than a physical commodity or financial instrument like gold. Amid geopolitical tensions and US sanctions, attempts are being made by countries, including China, Russia and India to break the dollar hegemony. It may not happen immediately but accumulation of gold amid geopolitical uncertainty shows that central banks are using it to build the creditworthiness and economic standing of respective countries.

"In Indian homes, gold is always considered a safe and profitable investment to tide over financial hard times. However, world over now the precious metal is being used as a hedge against factors like inflation, currency and volatility," analysts say.

Experts say small investors should aim to increase their exposure and allocate a percentage of their savings to it whenever possible to tide over uncertain times, wars, pandemic, economic slowdown, etc.

# No new change in income tax regime from April 1: Finance Ministry

## New Delhi

The Finance Ministry on Monday said there is no change in the new income tax regime for individuals for the current fiscal year and individual taxpayers can opt out of the regime at the time of filing their ITR.

Clarifying on social media posts claiming certain changes in the new tax regime effective April 1, the ministry said, "There is no new change which is coming in from 01.04.2024."

A modified new income tax regime was rolled out from the financial year beginning April 1, 2023, for individuals under which the tax rates are "significantly lower".

However, the benefit of various exemptions and deductions (other than standard deduction of Rs 50,000 from salary and Rs 15,000 from family pension) is not available, as in the old regime.

"New tax regime is the default tax regime. However, tax payers can choose the tax regime (old or new) that they think is beneficial to them... Option for opting out



from the new tax regime is available till filing of return for the AY 2024-25," the ministry said.

Under the new I-T regime, income of up to Rs 3 lakh is exempt from tax. A 5 per cent tax is levied on income between Rs 3-6 lakh, 10 per cent for income between Rs 6-9 lakh.

Income between Rs 9-12 lakh and Rs 12-15 lakh is subject to 15 per cent and 20 per cent tax, respectively. A 30 per cent I-T would be applicable on income above Rs 15 lakh.

The new tax regime was set as "a default regime" from 2023-24 and the Assessment Year corresponding to this is AY 2024-25. This can be changed by the taxpayer at the time of filing Income Tax Returns (ITR) by an individual.

Eligible persons without any business income will have the option to choose the regime for each financial year.

So, they can choose new tax regime in one financial year and old tax regime in another year and vice-versa, the ministry said in a statement.

The old tax regime which is still in force and offers a host of deductions and exemptions, exempts income up to Rs 2.5 lakh from taxes.

Income from Rs 2.5-5 lakh attracts 5 per cent tax, and 20 per cent for income between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh. A 30 per cent tax is levied on income above Rs 10 lakh.



## Market valuation of 7 most-valued firms climbs Rs 67,259.99 crore; Reliance top gainer

### New Delhi

The combined market valuation of seven of the 10 most valued firms climbed Rs 67,259.99 crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest gainer, amid an overall optimistic trend in equities.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 819.41 points or 1.12 per cent.

Markets saw just three trading sessions last week, as they were closed on Monday for Holi and Good Friday on March 29.

The valuation of Reliance Industries jumped Rs 45,262.59 crore to reach Rs 20,14,010.63 crore.

State Bank of India added Rs 5,533.26 crore, taking its market

valuation to Rs 6,71,666.29 crore.

The valuation of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) climbed Rs 5,218.12 crore

Hindustan Unilever climbed Rs 2,819.51 crore to Rs 5,32,946.04 crore.

ITC added Rs 264.15 crore, taking its mcap to Rs 5,35,032.74 crore.

However, the mcap of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) declined by Rs 10,691.45 crore to Rs 14,05,102.38 crore, and that of Infosys went lower by Rs 4,163.13 crore to Rs 6,22,117.38 crore.

Bharti Airtel's valuation dipped by Rs 3,817.18 crore to Rs 6,95,038.48 crore.

Reliance Industries continued to rule the chart of the most valued firms, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Infosys, LIC, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.



to Rs 5,78,484.29 crore, and that of ICICI Bank advanced Rs 4,132.67 crore to Rs 7,69,542.65 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank went up by Rs 4,029.69 crore to Rs 11,00,184.60 crore, and that of

## Tata Motors unit, HPCL to boost EV charging infra

### New Delhi

In a boost to electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in the country, Tata Passenger Electric Mobility (TPEM) on Wednesday said it has tied up with Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) to set up 5,000 public charging stations by the year-end.

Earlier, TPEM signed MoU with Bharat Petroleum to install 7,000 EV charging points across India by 2024.

Besides facilitating EV owners, the tie-up aims to explore synergies between the two companies to encourage more people to adopt EVs.

"As the adoption of EVs increases, the availability of widespread and dependable charging infrastructure will play a crucial role in making EVs mainstream in India. This collaboration is essential for facilitating infrastructure development to support the expanding EV customer base," said Balaje Rajan, Chief Strategy Officer, Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd and Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd.

Similarly, other electric vehicle makers also signed

MoU with fuel retailers, private players to strengthen charging infrastructure.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas is currently in the process of setting up 22,000 EV charging stations at oil companies fuel outlets by December, 2024. Fuel retailers have also tied up with carmakers, fleet owners and power companies to build and operate charging infrastructure.

India currently has 80,000 plus retail petrol pumps of oil marketing companies, including Indian Oil, Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum. Indian Oil, the largest fuel retailer in the country, has 8,760 filling stations with EV chargers, or nearly a quarter of the total 32,000 pumps it operates. HPCL's 3,050 pumps and BPCL's 2,640 pumps have EV chargers.

As per inputs from the Ministry of Power, preliminary studies carried out for nine cities having 4 million plus population, namely Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Surat, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata indicate a requirement of 18,000 public EV charging stations by 2030.

## Fallen crypto mogul sent to 25 yrs in jail for fraud



### New York

Crypto entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced on Thursday to 25 years in prison for a massive fraud that unravelled with the collapse of FTX, once one of the world's most popular platforms for exchanging digital currency.

Bankman-Fried, 32, was convicted in November of fraud and conspiracy — a dramatic fall from a crest of success that included a Super Bowl advertisement and celebrity endorsements from stars like quarterback Tom Brady and comedian Larry David.

US District Judge Lewis A Kaplan imposed the sentence in the same Manhattan courtroom where, four months ago, Bankman-Fried testified that his intention had been to revolutionize the cryptocurrency market with his innovative ideas, not to steal.

## Fiscal deficit at Rs 15L cr, 86.5% of annual target

### New Delhi

The government's fiscal deficit at Rs 15 lakh crore at February-end touched 86.5 per cent of the revised annual target, according to official data released on Thursday.

In the corresponding period last year, the fiscal deficit — or gap between the expenditure and revenue — was 82.8 per cent of Revised Estimates (RE) of the Union Budget 2022-23.

For 2023-24, the government's fiscal deficit is estimated at Rs 17.35 lakh crore or 5.8 per cent of the GDP.

The Central Government received Rs 22.45 lakh crore (81.5 per cent of RE 2023-24 of total receipts) up to February comprising Rs 18.49 lakh crore

tax revenue (net), Rs 3.6 lakh crore of non-tax revenue and Rs 36,140 crore of non-debt capital receipts, showed data



released by Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

Non-debt capital receipts consists of recovery of loans Rs 23,480 crore and miscellaneous capital receipts of Rs 12,660 crore. The CGA data on monthly account of the Union Government of India said that Rs 10.33,433 crore has been

transferred to state governments as devolution of share of taxes by the Government of India up to February 2024, which is Rs 2,25,345 crore higher than the previous year.

The total expenditure incurred by the Centre was Rs 37.47 lakh crore (83.4 per cent of corresponding RE 2023-24), out of which Rs 29.41 lakh crore was on revenue account and Rs 8.06 lakh crore on capital account. Out of the total revenue expenditure, Rs 8.8 lakh crore was on account of interest payments and Rs 3.6 lakh crore on account of major subsidies.

The Centre plans to raise Rs 7.5 lakh crore through market borrowing in the April-September period of 2024-25 to fund the revenue gap.

### Govt's gross liabilities rise to Rs 160.69L crore

- Total gross liabilities of the government increased to Rs 160.69 lakh crore at the end of December from Rs 157.84 lakh crore at September-end, the Finance Ministry has said
- This represented a quarter-on-quarter increase of 1.8 per cent in the September quarter of 2023-24

# The Growing Gaps in Global Humanitarian Challenges

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has more than doubled over the last five years, and in 2022 alone, it grew by a third to an estimated 406.6 million people. All the indicators point to exponentially growing humanitarian needs in the coming years.

They are driven globally by a cascade of new, continuing, recurring and often overlapping crises and shockwaves. Humanitarian emergencies are usually classified in two broad categories: those resulting from armed conflicts and other situations of political, terrorist or criminal violence, and those caused by disasters, encompassing events related to extreme weather, food or health crises.

Concerning the first category, while it is difficult to judge whether there will be an increase or decrease in the number of conflicts in the coming decades, there are serious risks of both inter-state conflicts, in several regions of the world, as well as of internal armed conflicts, involving for instance terrorists, separatists, rebellions or organised criminal groups (notably in Latin and Central America). The years 2022 and 2023 have been identified as the most conflictual years in the world since the end of the Cold War, according to 'The Uppsala Conflict Data Program', which has been tracking conflicts globally since 1945.

The impact of conflicts on civilian populations is multifaceted, with children often paying a particularly heavy price. A recent UNICEF report noted: "Globally, children account for two thirds of all of the civilians killed and maimed by explosive remnants of war—with the lasting consequences including physical disabilities and mental health issues. Urban conflict also destroys the infrastructure necessary for children's well-being and, often, their survival. Homes, schools and play spaces are destroyed or damaged, as are water and energy supplies, markets, health care facilities and other vital infrastructure. Indeed, far more children are victims of indirect harm caused by conflict than of conflict itself."

Compounding the current challenges is the massive investment in, and rapid development of, new weapons and forms of warfare—for instance the intensification of the use of drones and complex automated weapons, cyber warfare, combined with the likely proliferation of small arms and light weapons due to the increased use of 3D printing and craft manufacturing. Once geographically contained battlefields are increasingly giving way to a limitless 'battlespace', as demonstrated by the broad impact of cyberattacks across multiple countries, and the increasing likelihood of conflicts being also waged, directly and indirectly, in outer space. The humanitarian impact of future conflicts could cause even more harm to more civilians. Yet, not all is doom and gloom: Some of these

technological developments, if properly controlled, and regulated, could possibly lead to greater adherence with international humanitarian law, which sets limits to protect, in particular, civilians by facilitating more precise identification of military targets and lessen collateral casualties. One can also hope that international law may be swiftly developed to regulate the use of new types of weapons, as well as the extension of conflicts in new domains.

Other humanitarian emergencies encompass disasters, including health emergencies, food crises, and, increasingly, climate change-induced events, as well as other environment-related disasters. All of these, including droughts, floods, and wildfires, are projected to occur more frequently in the coming years and threatening

## PART I

to cause graver consequences. The growing concerns stem notably from the climate crisis and stresses resulting from a degraded environment, for instance in terms of water scarcity and undermined biodiversity, negatively impacting food systems, in turn causing soaring rates of malnutrition particularly for infants and children. As extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and intense, they are also multiplying the humanitarian needs of an increasingly large number of people and communities, some newly affected and others who have had prior humanitarian needs—for example, those who live in a conflict zone.

The costs of so-called 'natural disasters' are rising at a frightening speed, causing US\$313 billion in economic losses globally in 2022 alone. The year 2023 was labelled the hottest year on record, with people experiencing overlapping environmental disasters and protracted crises around the world.

Scholars and practitioners have been arguing for almost 30 years that lifesaving emergency humanitarian assistance can, and should, complement and support longer-term development efforts, and vice-versa. The term 'double humanitarian-development nexus' has been coined to qualify this interaction between emergency humanitarian, and development aid. It was promptly supplemented by the so-called 'triple nexus', characterising an approach that combines the expertise of the sustainable development, peacebuilding and conflict mitigation, and humanitarian aid sectors in overcoming collective challenges and ensuring the protection and well-being of affected populations. The humanitarian-development-peace nexus, meanwhile, is about providing immediate life-saving assistance while also strengthening infrastructure, such as water and sanitation, and

social security systems, including healthcare and education, to ultimately support longer-term development and consolidate peace.

All these point to the overlapping and interrelated layers of needs which are mutually reinforcing. These demand more complex, nuanced, multifaceted and intersectoral humanitarian responses. Multiple challenges are sometimes deemed to form a 'polycrisis', when disparate crises occur simultaneously and interact, with their overall impact exceeding the sum of their parts; or a 'permacrisis', referring to a prolonged relentless period marked by several overlapping crises. In such complex contexts, emphasis has been placed on building resilience to equip individuals, communities, peoples and countries to cope with crises, especially when they recur frequently or overlap, for example because a flood occurs in an area where there is a conflict.

Indeed, as the expectation is that increasingly frequent and grave climate and environment-related disasters will occur, there will be little time and opportunity for people and communities to recover between one shock and the next. This poses the fundamental question of how to ensure that the humanitarian response to one crisis does not only respond to that particular crisis but also provides durable solutions and builds necessary resilience to cope with the next or overlapping crisis. Faster and more effective responses lessen the recovery time and can help build resilience for future events. Delivering such responses which build resilience and durable solutions will remain a key challenge for the foreseeable future.

Is it realistic, however, to expect humanitarians to do more, while political and geostrategic challenges are already frustrating their efforts to effectively respond to the most immediate needs of people facing death, starvation or disease? The New Humanitarian has questioned the assumption that humanitarians should and indeed could pivot to do more to build resilience and support frontline communities to adapt: "Maybe, but to do climate adaptation well would mean a complete transformation of humanitarian organisations—different skills, different staff, different partnerships. And if that transformation were to take place in time to avert the worst climate disasters, it would need to be under way already, and it isn't. In a world on fire, with humanitarian responders focused on delivering on core mandate mega-crises in places like Gaza, Sudan, and Ukraine, is it really realistic to expect them to also be developing advanced resilience-building capacities?"

The United Nations (UN) and other humanitarian actors have for years been underscoring that the international humanitarian system faces an exponential

rise in humanitarian needs, with the countries and people with limited coping capacities suffering the most, especially children, women, marginalised groups and communities and those affected by humanitarian emergencies such as armed conflicts. The World Bank has estimated that by 2030, two-thirds of the extremely poor people in the world will live in countries affected by fragility, conflicts, and violence. We can expect humanitarian needs to continue growing at an alarming rate in the coming decade, while the governance and operational systems currently in place will probably be increasingly questioned.

**Shrinking or Reshaped Funding?**

Will there be sufficient funding to match these growing humanitarian needs?

Even now, the humanitarian funding gap is dramatic. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated in November 2023 that the gap between the financial requirements for its 'Global Humanitarian Overview' and resources stood at US\$41 billion.

Moreover, current resources for some of the key areas highlighted at the SDG Summit for transitioning towards transformative results also remain too limited. It is critical to shore up investments in the six areas highlighted during the SDG Summit as transformative entry points for creating systematic impact across the SDGs and generate renewed momentum on the 2030 Agenda. These include food systems, energy access and affordability, digital connectivity, education, jobs and social protection, and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Traditional institutional donors, including the largest ones, have been reconsidering their budgetary priorities and allocations. The States and international or regional organisations which have traditionally funded emergency humanitarian aid do not seem prepared to dramatically increase international aid budgets, especially as they are also asked to allocate more funds for other crucial global initiatives, for instance related to climate change. The 'Loss and Damage Fund' established by the COP28, lauded as a significant advance, led to pledges of some US\$700 million. While this is impressive, it was estimated to cover less than 0.2 percent of the needs, with an estimated US\$400 billion in losses in developing countries each year. While some States that were not among the traditional humanitarian donors, for instance the UAE and Saudi Arabia, have in recent years boosted their contributions to humanitarian aid, it is unclear whether they will expand such funding. In any case, it is unlikely that they would do so to the point where resources are able to fill the needs.

**TO BE CONTD.**



# The India Stack as a Potential Gateway to Global Economic Integration

From a small shop tucked away somewhere in the western part of Delhi, Jasmeen Kaur skyrocketed to internet stardom with her “Just looking like a wow!” Instagram reels. The endearing videos of Jasmeen showcasing her latest sarees and suits to potential clients even caught the attention of Bollywood stars and their hundreds of millions of followers. As a woman entrepreneur in India, Jasmeen was riding the wave of India’s economic growth and using the tools at her disposal to beat the competition. Yet, for women like her, it is not just the power of digital marketing that is reshaping their business potential, but India’s revolutionary approach to Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) known as the ‘India Stack’.

The India Stack is a set of digital public infrastructure components that comprise three pillars: digital identification; payments; and data management. India’s approach to digitalisation has fundamentally changed lives, giving biometric identification to those previously not identifiable, banking the unbanked, and giving people control and privacy in managing their own data. For women like Jasmeen, the ubiquity of the Stack means she can receive payments from consumers, share legal documents with her bank or lawyer, pay her suppliers, receive loans or investments, and coordinate delivery payments through the fast, easy, and cheap technology.

Given how Indian society and economy is now structured around DPI, and with its enormous diaspora across the globe, there is significant opportunity to unlock the country’s economic potential to international markets. This article argues that as countries pursue economic diversification and grapple with the digitisation of the global economy, they should look to the India Stack for learnings in how to effectively unlock economic potential in their bilateral relationships and for their own digital public infrastructure. As developed countries seek to reform legacy financial systems or developing countries build new ones, India has a world-leading solution that can revolutionise how global economies engage with India and with each other. Integrating India’s DPI means international markets can go from “just looking” at the India opportunity, to building deep integration with its economic system.

The first section describes India’s approach to DPI and its key components, with a focus on its digital identification and payments systems. The article then outlines the international opportunity as exemplified by the case of Singapore and India’s DPI cooperation. The third section includes key lessons that other countries and markets can learn from India’s DPI experience. The essay concludes by offering a key takeaway: that India has revolutionised DPI with the India Stack, and global economies can benefit from integration.

India’s Approach to Digital Public Infrastructure  
Digital Public Infrastructures are the railways of digital technology. For India, its approach to DPI is based on the foundation of open-source, interoperable, and scalable technology along with transparent, accountable, and participatory governance frameworks.<sup>[iii]</sup> A layered ‘stack’ of open-source Applications Programming Interfaces (APIs) are owned and maintained by different government agencies, and developers can build software using these APIs to deliver cheap products to the market. This technology has laid the foundation for a robust digital services infrastructure, and it fosters innovation and entrepreneurship leading to the development of a wide range of applications and services across sectors, including finance, healthcare, and education, contributing to economic growth and technological advancement.

By design, India’s DPI was built to be universally accessible for adoption, reuse, and replication by countries worldwide. India’s example demonstrates that collaborative digital solutions are a way to deliver vital services to the population in a way that is scalable. This type of DPI not only propels innovation, competition, and inclusivity but is also underpinned by regulatory frameworks that facilitate its operation. It is further supported by a robust technological layer, a well-defined governance framework, and a diverse multistakeholder ecosystem.

As the foundational layer to the India Stack, the Aadhaar programme is a biometrically secured

digital system that has since brought over 1.3 billion people online.<sup>[vii]</sup> Aadhaar has enabled electronic Know Your Customer (eKYC) with simultaneous identification, which means that citizens can open bank accounts in minutes instead of the two to four weeks it would take previously.<sup>[viii]</sup> This is coupled with the Indian government’s financial inclusion programme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (Jan Dhan), which has brought over 500 million people—the majority of whom are women—into the banking system. In the 10 years between 2011 and 2021, India’s bank account ownership doubled to 71 percent of the population, with a gender gap of effectively zero.

The sheer scale of Aadhaar meant it became the base layer that enabled the integration of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI)—a real-time payments system that enables users to link multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application. Today, over 68 percent of transactions in India are conducted using UPI, with 10.6 billion transactions taking place in August 2023 alone. UPI is facilitated by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).<sup>[xii]</sup>



That UPI is built upon the Aadhaar and other layers of the open-source Stack, overall transaction costs in the economy are significantly reduced. This not only benefits businesses by making transactions more cost-effective for consumers, but also encourages the shift from cash-based transactions, leading to greater transparency and accountability in the financial ecosystem.

In addition to the Aadhaar and UPI, a third layer to the India Stack is the Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA)—a regulated framework introduced by the RBI and the NPCI that empowers users to share their data through a Consent Manager.<sup>[xiii]</sup> DEPA accords individuals control over their personal data and facilitates the seamless and secure sharing of this data with third-party service providers. DEPA is designed to enable the portability of user data between different service providers while ensuring privacy and security as data cannot be stored, and is instead transferred by ‘go-betweens’ or ‘fiduciaries’.<sup>[xiv]</sup> The architecture involves the creation of consent-based data-sharing mechanisms, allowing individuals to selectively share their data with authorised entities. This is a very different model to data governance seen in other countries, where data aggregators tend to offer services in exchange for data which is then sold.

These key layers of the India Stack have brought economic and social impact at an unmatched scale anywhere else in the world.<sup>[xvi]</sup> The India Stack has contributed to financial inclusion by providing a secure and accessible platform for digital transactions. This has enabled millions of Indians, including those in rural areas who make up 64 percent of the population,<sup>[xvii]</sup> to participate in the formal economy.

Prior to the India Stack and DPI, there was no central digital identification system in the country. The fragmented, paper-based identification systems that did exist have been described as “systematically

tainted”<sup>[xviii]</sup> and excluded the most vulnerable who could not afford to pay bribes, among other fraudulent activities.<sup>[xix]</sup> Alongside the lack of digital ID, in 2016 Prime Minister Narendra Modi demonetised 500 and 1,000-rupee notes, taking more than 86 percent of cash out of circulation. At the time, the prime minister was heavily criticised for demonetising an economy where 90 percent of the population, especially women and the poor, relied on cash payments. In an article for the Harvard Business Review, Bhaskar Chakravorti described it as “Modi’s war on cash” and asked whether the forced digitisation of India would work; fast forward to 2024 and the answer is yes, it did.<sup>[xxi]</sup>

The Global Opportunity for the India Stack

The India Stack, and particularly the UPI, have not only transformed India’s financial system but also hold immense potential for influencing the global economy. As the landscape of global finance is undergoing a paradigm shift, with technological innovations reshaping traditional systems, the India Stack has enabled the country to leapfrog legacy financial and payments systems of developed countries. Furthermore, the Indian diaspora is the world’s largest,<sup>[xxii]</sup> and is therefore driving demand for international access to UPI for easier trade, tourism, international entrepreneurship, and cross-border remittances.<sup>[xxiii]</sup> International markets including Singapore,<sup>[xxiv]</sup> the United Arab Emirates,<sup>[xxv]</sup> Bhutan,<sup>[xxvi]</sup> Sri Lanka,<sup>[xxvii]</sup> and France<sup>[xxviii]</sup> have all either adopted or are looking to adopt UPI technology.

Indeed, the economic and strategic case for greater integration with India makes sense. India is the world’s fifth largest economy, with a nominal GDP of US\$3.3 trillion.<sup>[xxix]</sup> The population of 1.4 billion, which is the largest of any country, are young and have considerable potential. The economy is also growing at a very fast rate of around 6-8 percent annually and will soon be the world’s fastest growing large economy. The consumer and aspirational classes are also growing, and they have increased demands for goods, services and education. The macroeconomic story of India is remarkable, and the result of smart policy decisions from economic liberalisation starting in the 1980s. This has lifted tens of millions of people out of poverty, and infant mortality and life expectancy have improved.<sup>[xxx]</sup> India’s diaspora is spread across the world with significant populations in West Asia, Southeast Asia, North America, Africa, and Australia. They make an enormous contribution to the global economy, whether they are sending home remittances from the Gulf or running multinational companies in the United States.<sup>[xxxi]</sup>

This is all against a backdrop of increasing global strategic competition and a push for greater economic diversification and reduced trade reliance on China. It is no wonder, then, that countries around the world are starting to look to greater integration with the India Stack.

The Singapore example is one that developed countries can consider for experience in bringing the UPI into global markets. Singapore is a developed and advanced economy with a large Indian migrant population and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). Both countries were seeking ways to build digital infrastructure that could deliver faster, cheaper, cross-border payments that could accommodate future volumes of remittance traffic.<sup>[xxxii]</sup> Doing this required an extensive partnership between the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), the RBI, and both countries’ payment system operators, payment scheme owners, and participating banks and non-bank financial institutions.<sup>[xxxiii]</sup>

In February 2023 the MAS and RBI signed a Memorandum of Understanding where, unlike at similar such events typically characterised by political formalities, the prime ministers of the two countries transferred money to each other in real-time from their respective locations. This could be achieved through bilateral cooperation between both private sector and government actors and demonstrates how developed countries can integrate their payment systems with the India Stack. As UPI integration scales in Singapore, there remains enormous potential for non-Indian diaspora to access the Indian financial system through the UPI where there is both political will and innovation.

Recommendations for International Adoption of the India Stack

To unlock the potential of economic integration and trade with India, international markets need to make structural changes in how they approach international payments with the country. International transfers to India, as with other countries, can be slow and bureaucratic; in contrast, domestic payments in India are fast, efficient, and low-cost. The India Stack and UPI has accelerated India’s economy and has opened the banking system for over a billion people—it is this scale that can benefit both developed and developing countries the world over. There are a number of lessons that global markets and governments can learn from India’s DPI experience:

1. Integrating the India Stack requires political ambition. The India Stack required ambitious political leadership to implement, and a coalition of willing participants to support this vision. While the foundations of DPI started under the previous administration, it was carried through and improved under Prime Minister Modi. There were clear points when the prime minister made consequential—and contentious—decisions such as demonetisation, that brought such a large population online rapidly. Political will to bring together the key stakeholders such as central banks, payments authorities, and the private sector is needed to drive integration into existing payments systems. Cooperation can also lead to strengthened digital payments systems that reduce potential for fraudulent transactions.<sup>[xxxiv]</sup>

2. A bottom-up approach can help build comprehensive digital public infrastructure ecosystems. While integration of elements of the India Stack is possible, as seen in the Singapore example, a bottom-up approach can facilitate widespread, comprehensive adoption of DPIs while fostering innovation and competition in financial services. Where digital identification can underpin payments and the future of data privacy and consent, scaling the integration of UPI is possible.

3. UPI integration is critical for unlocking the India economic opportunity. Integrating into the payments systems that is used by 1.4 billion Indians and businesses all over the country, will enable better flow of money—and people—across borders as is already seen in Singapore. Whether this is through e-commerce, trade, entrepreneurship, remittances, education, or tourism, adapting to how the Indian economy functions will have positive flow-on effects to international markets. Any country with a significant Indian diaspora should be considering how its central bank can cooperate with India to provide the framework for UPI integration.

4. Interoperability and standardisation are fundamental to unlocking digital public infrastructure. Maximising the potential of digital public infrastructure requires interoperability and standardisation. One of the key successes of the India Stack is its public railways of digital approach, where open-source technology means there is an even playing field for innovators to create software that is competitive. Interoperability and standardisation will streamline global trade and cross-border payments with India.

Conclusion

The India Stack may seem like an overnight success story yet was one that took ten years to build. Any observer of or participant in India’s economy over the last decade would have witnessed a transformation not seen anywhere else globally. Today, the world’s largest country by population is structured around the India Stack, and particularly its UPI. This has led to widespread financial inclusion across the country, which is an essential element of the India growth story.

While countries look to India for economic diversification and with the huge Indian diaspora across the globe, there is both a demand and a need for integration into the Indian economic payments systems. This is significant, because there is no other similar comprehensive structural transformation in a developing country that developed countries are looking to adopt. India has jumped ahead of traditional payments models in advanced economies through its bottom-up approach to digital public infrastructure. To respond to this transformation, other countries and markets will need to adapt to India—and not the other way around—if they truly want to move beyond “just looking like a wow”, when looking at the India economic opportunity.



# Rethinking ballistic missile defence

The first recorded use of a ballistic rocket as a weapon was in 1232 when the Chinese and the Mongols were at war. What was used at the time was a simple solid-fuelled device with gunpowder as a propellant. The weapon has since evolved and has taken on many forms. It gained widespread use during World War II in the form of the V2 rocket which was used extensively by the Germans. Though destructive and at the time, impossible to intercept, due to the limited numbers produced as well as technical limitations pertaining to accuracy, it did not produce the strategic impact desired. With the invention of nuclear weapons coupled with the accentuation of hostilities between the Soviet Block and the West, the rocket acquired a new role, this time as a strategic weapon for carrying a weapon of mass destruction. Given the importance of this task, considerable effort was made to enhance its range, accuracy, and reliability.

As strategic nuclear missiles acquired greater capabilities, research on defences against them also started to gather steam. However, given the complexities and associated costs involved in hitting small targets of this nature moving at exceptionally high speeds, both the belligerent parties of the Cold War decided to ensure strategic stability by placing mutually acceptable constraints on their development—an approach that was soon institutionalised through the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty in 1972.

However, as the technological disparity between the United States (US) and the erstwhile Soviet Union grew over the next few decades, some influential US decision-makers believed that the ABM treaty was biased against them. This school of thought was based on the assumption that while the US had the capacity and capability to field Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) systems of increasing sophistication, the USSR did not. This approach was mainstreamed during the Reagan administration through the launch of the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) which through some creative interpretation of the ABM treaty articulated that the proposals under the initiative were consistent with the US obligations under the framework of the treaty. This veneer was shed in 2001 under the Bush administration through the unilateral withdrawal from the treaty.

Over the years, several BMD systems have been developed by the US, the best-known ones being the US Army-operated Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) and Patriot systems, the US Air Force-fielded Ground Based Interceptor (GBI) and the US Navy-operated Aegis BMD system. Such capabilities have proliferated to other countries as well, either through the acquisition of

US-designed and produced systems or through domestic Research and Development (R&D) to produce similar weapons. Several countries have followed an evolutionary approach in this respect, wherein the capabilities of existing Air Defence Systems have been substantially enhanced to meet the ballistic missile threat.

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system.

The degree of difficulty involved in hitting a small, high speed and at times manoeuvring ballistic warhead is enormous. Typically, a BMD system uses powerful phased array radars for detection as well as tracking. It thereafter launches an interceptor that has sufficient propellant to take it to the desired range and height of impact. Interceptors often have to use thrusters as the rarefied air at high altitudes makes control surfaces ineffective. Guidance systems must cater for closing velocities that, more often than not, are in double-digit Mach numbers. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that BMD systems are enormously expensive. As an example, the reported cost of a Raytheon-manufactured Standard SM-3, Block 1B missile is US\$36.387 million. However, given the fact that such weapons were designed to bring down strategic nuclear weapons with enormous destructive potential, the expense of doing so was considered well justified.

There have, however, been fresh developments over the last decade. Costs sunk in the development of rockets designed to carry strategic nuclear warheads are now increasingly being recouped through their use as vehicles for conventional weapons.

While there are some gold-plated high-end programmes for doing so such as the US-funded Conventional Prompt Strike programme that is designed to deliver ordinance in any part of the globe with a time-late of less than 60 minutes, many low-end ballistic missiles of increasing capability have either already been fielded or are in different stages of development in different countries. A family of weapons in this respect pioneered by China is the Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBM). The engineering complexity related to mounting an effective seeker on a Ballistic warhead with the associated control system that allows it to detect, possibly identify,

and manoeuvre itself to hit a moving target at sea appears to have been resolved. Further, reports that such weapons are now being even made by countries such as Iran and fielded by relatively untrained militant groups such as the Houthis portends an era of democratisation of the ballistic missile as a weapon of choice.

China's growing prowess in this field has been demonstrated by the production and deployment of an increasing number of ASBMs of the DF-21D and DF-26 classes. The DF-26 has an assessed range of 4000 km which puts facilities at Guam within range. It lies at the top of the food chain of their Anti-Access Area-Denial (A2AD) architecture that puts at risk any platform that comes within striking distance from their coastline. Chinese literature itself has often referred to this weapon as Shashoujian or Assassin's Mace, which essentially underscores its potential game-changing nature.

The increased adoption of sophisticated commercially available technologies as well as the economics of scale will bring down the costs of ballistic missiles even further. On the anvil also lies the increasing proficiency of reusable rockets as demonstrated by SpaceX in the first

stage of the commercial Falcon 9 rocket as well as its boosters. Weaponisation of such a capability which will allow a rocket to be used repeatedly to launch conventional warheads on ballistic trajectories thereby bringing down the cost of fielding such weapons by several orders.

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The current approach to combat the growing threat posed by conventional ballistic missiles has primarily been based on the use of existing BMD interceptors. Missiles such as the Standard SM 6 used by the Aegis system have been designed, to an extent, to intercept ballistic missiles as part of the US BMD architecture. They are, therefore, well capable of meeting the threat posed by more rudimentary ballistic weapons in the arsenal of countries such as Iran or North Korea. Acceptance of this one-size-fits-all approach has been exemplified by the remarks made by Admiral Aquilino, Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, who while testifying to Congress on 20 July 2024 stated that "I don't care what tracks it, I don't care what shoots it, we just got to hit it."

The above approach while good in theory, is not sustainable. Given the enormous and growing asymmetry in cost between ballistic missiles and interceptors, one can only expect that in conflicts ahead, such weapons will be used in growing numbers. Using highly sophisticated interceptors to engage low-cost conventional warheads launched in increasing numbers is a losing proposition in terms of cost as well as on one's ability to regenerate and reequip platforms with have expended such defensive munitions. At the very least, it will require defending platforms to be pulled out of the theatre and travel to possibly distant bases for rearming.

Given the enormous and growing asymmetry in cost between ballistic missiles and interceptors, one can only expect that in conflicts ahead, such weapons will be used in growing numbers.

There is, therefore, a crying necessity to have a fresh look at BMD and design solutions to counter the growing issue of cost asymmetry. Threat mitigation measures will therefore need to be redesigned so that while they continue to be effective, they are also easily regeneratable and most importantly, inexpensive. This can only happen if Commanders in the field shed their disdain for the more mundane matters pertaining to the economics of war and place a strong demand on force providers for solutions that are robust and persistent enough to meet the soon-to-be-all-pervasive threat of the conventional ballistic missile.



# Digital affordability and access: Starlink in India

Elon Musk's satellite-operated internet service, Starlink, is expected to launch soon in India, with the US-based company having cleared the regulatory hurdles. Starlink applied for a Global Mobile Personal Communication by Satellite Services licence in 2022 and with the final approval, will become the third company after Jio and OneWeb to receive such license. Starlink's entry into the Indian market is one step closer to addressing the existing digital divide in the country but its success will depend on its ability to be competitive in the 5G landscape. The influence of the Internet, particularly in emerging economies, is significant. However, accessibility is often determined by affordability, which varies depending on the specific circumstances of each nation.

Starlink's entry into the Indian market is one step closer to addressing the existing digital divide in the country but its success will depend on its ability to be competitive in the 5G landscape.

Examining Starlink's viability in India

Starlink is already operational in multiple countries across all regions, including Nigeria, Peru, Mexico, Portugal, the Philippines, and Australia. Starlink's main advantage comes from its use of Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites, which provide lower latency and have higher-speed internet connections. Installation and deployment are also quicker compared to Middle Earth Orbit (MEO) satellites used by Jio, however, MEOs provide better coverage.

While Starlink has an advantage in internet speed, India's existing internet infrastructure is robust, with the median mobile internet connection speed via cellular networks being 18.26 megabytes per second (Mbps) and the median fixed internet connection speed is 49.09 Mbps. This means that a major determining factor that will impact the success of satellite internet, specifically Starlink, in India is affordability. Currently, the rates offered by Starlink are too expensive to be functional in India, especially in rural and lower-income households. In Zambia, where its costs are the lowest, the hardware costs are about US\$ 500, and the monthly subscription fee is US\$ 36. In a country like India, where good alternatives exist, Starlink's inability to make its prices competitive will harm its success in the Indian Market.

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## Digital connectivity in India

There were 895.83 million internet users in India in June 2023. With a population of 1.4 billion by February 2024, this means that 35 percent of the population does not have access to the Internet, which has implications for the country's progress and development. As societies increasingly rely on digital technologies for education, employment,

and civic engagement, those without adequate access are left at a disadvantage, hindering their ability to participate fully in the modern world. This digital divide perpetuates socio-economic disparities, limiting opportunities for individuals in marginalised communities. Moreover, such a divide may widen disparities in healthcare, as access to telemedicine and health information becomes crucial. Additionally, the lack of digital literacy in underserved populations could lead to misinformation, further deepening the knowledge gap and exacerbating societal polarisation. Therefore, bridging the digital divide is crucial for fostering

bridging the digital divide. To increase internet connectivity in remote areas, there are initiatives such as Project Taara, a joint effort by Google's parent company Alphabet and Airtel to bring affordable internet to villages using machines whose beams "provide fibre-optic internet without cables". Another alternative exists in the form of Open Radio Access Networks (ORAN). They play a crucial role in a mobile network infrastructure by employing cellular radio connections to establish links between individual devices and other components of the network. They aim to disaggregate and standardise these networks, promoting interoperability

must be adaptive and conducive to fair competition.

## Conclusion

India is positioning itself as a responsible global player by advocating for fair trade practices and contributing to the development of international norms. Its continued prominence in the global technology landscape necessitates a focus on domestic innovation. By addressing the digital divide within its borders and actively participating in shaping global standards, India can not only lead the charge in the technological race but also contribute meaningfully to a more inclusive and equitable digital



inclusivity and ensuring that advancements in technology contribute to societal progress rather than exacerbate existing inequalities.

While Starlink's goal to provide connectivity to rural and unconnected parts of India is an important step to bridging the digital divide that persists, the company needs to rethink its approach to the Indian market as compared to other developing nations. The government's Digital India initiative looks to transform India into a leading technology market. To achieve this, the Ministry of Education has focused on rural, tribal, and remote areas to offer education programmes to increase digital inclusion. In 2020, the Department of Telecommunications' proposal to increase and strengthen digital communications infrastructure was approved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) "envisages provision of Broadband through Public Wi-Fi Hotspot providers". The private sector is also working towards

and innovation by allowing operators to mix and match hardware and software from different vendors.

India's commitment to technological progress demands a comprehensive strategy that addresses multifaceted challenges. To bridge the digital divide at home, the government should focus on enhancing digital literacy and accessibility in rural and underserved areas.

India's commitment to technological progress demands a comprehensive strategy that addresses multifaceted challenges. To bridge the digital divide at home, the government should focus on enhancing digital literacy and accessibility in rural and underserved areas. Implementing inclusive policies that encourage private sector involvement in these regions is crucial, as it not only aids economic development but also promotes equitable access to technological advancements. While licensing and privatisation are effective tools in optimising communication and internet access, regulatory frameworks

future for all. Musk's ambitious venture, while technologically advantageous with its LEO satellites, faces the challenge of competing in a market already served by well-established providers. While competition in the communications industry is heavy, Starlink should be a successful player because of its upper hand in latency and internet speed. The success of Starlink in India hinges on its ability to address the crucial factor of affordability, especially in comparison to other established alternatives. Beyond the market dynamics, the broader issue of the digital divide in India necessitates a holistic approach, combining innovative technologies like Starlink with initiatives such as Project Taara and ORANs. Musk's vision aligns with India's Digital India initiative, and success will require adaptability to local challenges and an understanding of the nation's unique digital landscape within the broader global context.



## Saiyami Kher calls for cycling-friendly infra in Mumbai



Actress and an avid cyclist Saiyami Kher has voiced her concerns regarding the safety of cyclists in Mumbai amid the city's ongoing infrastructure development. The actress highlighted the challenges posed by the narrowing of roads due to the construction of metro tracks, flyovers, and coastal roads, leaving little space to ride safely. Saiyami said, "There's been an increasing number of cyclists facing accidents and unsafe environments. The entire city is dug up, every major and smaller connecting road, making it difficult for cyclists to navigate."

"This has not only been an inconvenience and should be addressed, but the fact that it has also led to people's death is really shocking," she said.

The actress said that every "city should have infrastructure for open air fitness options of which cycling is a major option for many, and to know that this can be hazardous is

really sad."

"The authorities need to do better, the current conditions aren't conducive for anyone to take health and fitness in open spaces in Mumbai given the current scenario," she added. Saiyami emphasises on the importance of wearing safety gear.

## Amitabh Bachchan takes under-sea tunnel in Mumbai, calls it a 'marvel'



Megastar Amitabh Bachchan seems stunned by the 'tunnel' as he called it a "marvel".

Amitabh took to social media and shared a video.

In the clip, he is seated in the backseat of a car driving through the tunnel, showing the route.

A surprised cine icon, then captioned the video, 'Went first time in the TUNNEL - Enter before Haji Ali and out Half way to Marine Drive .. a Marvel !!'

The thespian did not reveal the location to where he was going or for what he was traveling. An ardent user of social media, Big B will soon be seen in 'Kalki 2898 AD', which also stars Kamal Haasan, Prabhas and Deepika Padukone.

## Priyanka Chopra had 'fun' exploring jungles through the film 'Tiger'

Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who is narrating the story of the planet's most charismatic animal— 'Tiger', said she had fun lending her vocals to the story and exploring the jungles through the film.

'Tiger', which according to Priyanka is a tale of 'love, conflict, hunger and survival' will launch on Disney+ Hotstar on Earth Day.

Talking about the film, Priyanka wrote on X, "Tiger"... a story that captures the wild and brings out everything that happens within it - tales of love, conflict, hunger, survival and so much more."

"In the bustling jungles of India, where creatures big and small, timid and majestic roam, there's Amba - a tiger with a timeless legacy. She cares for her cubs



with so much love that the beautiful bond between mother and child shines through so magnificently,' she added.

The actress shared an anecdote and wrote, 'This film was shot over eight years following this beautiful family.'

Every bit of working on the project was fun for Priyanka.

'I had so much fun lending my voice to this incredible story and exploring the jungles through this film. I can't wait for y'all to enjoy the jungle with us!'

Directed by Mark Linfield, co-directed by Vanessa Berlowitz and Rob Sullivan, and produced by

Linfield, Berlowitz and Roy Conli, 'Tiger' is the groundbreaking culmination of 1,500 days of filming.

## Shraddha Kapoor croons Karan Aujla's 'Jee Ni Lagda', asks fans for night drive songs

Actress Shraddha Kapoor wants to update her playlist for night drives and requested her fans to share songs with her on social media.

Shraddha took to Instagram stories, where she was seen crooning to the Punjabi sensation Karan Aujla's 'Jee Ni Lagda', while she is seen on a drive and sitting in the passenger's seat.

The actress wrote, 'Night drive ke liye... Aur aise gaane batao (For night drives... tell me more songs like this).'

She did not reveal who she was on a drive with.

On the work front, Shraddha will next be seen in 'Stree 2'.





# 'Box Office matters more than awards, says three time National Award-winning actor Rajat Kapoor

As an actor he rarely falters. Rajat Kapoor, the three-time National Award winning director and actor, has wowed us more than once. So, it comes as no surprise as he delivers another noteworthy performance in *Lootere*, streaming on Disney+Hotstar. Yet, in his vast filmography which includes movies like *Drishyam*, *Mulk*, *Kapoor & Sons*, *Dil Chahta Hai* and *Bheja Fry*, he considers the part of the captain of the ship in *Lootere* as an exception.

Seen in nearly 50 films, a meaty role that allows him to 'truly sink his teeth and get the juice out of it' is not an everyday norm. He is not a fan of pirate dramas for, "There is hardly any such genre and only few films internationally fall in this category." He thinks *Lootere* is essentially a gangster thriller. As the series has received much appreciation, he lauds its young director Jay Mehta. He can't say whether Jay, son of celebrated director Hansal Mehta, is his father's son but pats him on the back not just for his technical brilliance but passion and perseverance.

A filmmaker himself, however, the director in Rajat takes a backseat when the directorial reins are in others' hands. He avers, "It doesn't matter whether the director is young or old, first-timer or veteran, I am a very submissive actor. Even though I might offer a suggestion or two, ultimately I do become part of the larger goal of director's vision."

While the world might be going gaga over how OTT has transformed the landscape of entertainment, he is not sure whether streamers have in anyway changed audiences' tastes in India. "Sure, people are watching documentaries. But that number is still small. Anyway, there were always people who were into different kind of cinema."

Take him, with a film-buff father, at the age of 16, he was



part of a film society in Delhi. Introduction to world cinema, the likes of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Ingmar Bergman, had already happened when he entered the Film Training Institute of India, Pune.

However, acting was never by conscious design. While his nuanced role of an abusive uncle in Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) would be forever etched on our minds, at that point he was not looking at a career in acting. Today, he might agree that OTT has done wonders for actors, but on a platform where a star is born every other day, he is not looking for that one part which will define him. "I don't think there is one such role which will prove your mettle. Ultimately you want to be remembered for your entire body of work," he says.

And his impressive oeuvre includes much-lauded directorial endeavours like *Ankhon Dekhi*. He specialised in film direction at his alma mater and remembers how much the guidance of stalwarts Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani enriched him. With three

National Awards under his belt, he is honest enough to admit that beyond honours and laurels, 'box office matters more'. But he also insists, "Ultimately one works neither for awards nor for money, but whether one has done something that will outlive you."

His drive to achieve that goal reflects in his film *Everybody Loves Sohrab Handa*, which was screened at MAMI Film Festival. For the actor in him, besides Amazon series *Khauf*, there is the next season of *Tanaav*, which he promises would be 'better than the first'. On unflattering comparisons with the original *Fauda*, which was a rage in India, he would not comment simply for he has not seen the Israeli series. Actually, OTT where the space for indie cinema is dwindling does not figure in his viewing experience; at least web dramas don't. But he would want viewers to catch up with *Lootere*, which among other things he says is 'fun'. His reflections on life and his journey may not come across as fun or funny, but candid, calm and collected he sure is.

# Shruti Haasan starts shooting for Chennai Story



Shruti Haasan, who has been receiving a lot of positive response to her recently released song *Inimel* with director Lokesh Kanagaraj, has started shooting for her next project. Her next project is an international film, titled *Chennai Story*. It will be helmed by BAFTA-nominated director Philip John.

On Monday, Shruti took to Instagram and shared glimpses from the sets of the film and the mahurat shot. The actress also shared a video of herself enroute to the set in her car. Shruti shared the video with the caption: "New day. New movie. New energy. Thankful."

*Chennai Story* marks Shruti's third international outing after *Treadstone* and *The Eye*.

The movie, adapted from Timeri N. Murari's bestseller *The Arrangements of Love*, is set against the backdrop of Chennai. It is a coming-of-age romantic and Shruti plays the pivotal role of Anu, a spunky private detective.

# Tiger Shroff pranks Akshay Kumar with overflowing soft drink bottle on All Fools' Day



On April Fools' Day, actor Tiger Shroff did not leave any chance to play a prank on his co-star Akshay Kumar. Tiger on Monday shared a video on Instagram.

The clip begins with Tiger shaking a big bottle of soft drink and then runs to play in the garden. Akshay comes in to join the game but the Baaghi star asks him to first bring in the bottle. Tiger then makes Akshay open the bottle, which fizzes out and the drink inside gets spilled all over the Airlift star. The 34-year-old actor, who is the son of veteran star Jackie Shroff, captioned the clip, "April (flower emoji) bade miyan."

Tiger and Akshay are set to appear together on the big screen in the film *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*.



## Hardik Pandya booed again after dropping difficult catch; pitch invader hugs Rohit Sharma

## We never give up, we'll keep fighting, asserts Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya

### Mumbai

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya on Tuesday asserted that the former champions will not give up and will continue to fight in the ongoing IPL despite slumping to a hat-trick of defeats.

"If there's one thing you should know about this team, we never give up. We'll keep fighting, we'll keep going," Hardik posted on X.

Hardik has been facing the ire of fans since replacing Rohit Sharma as MI captain. The all-rounder was booed in the team's opening two matches and the crowd hostility was at its peak in MI's first home game of the season on Monday.

To add to the woes, under his captaincy MI's campaign at the 2024 IPL got off to a disastrous start as they sit at the bottom of the table following



three losses on the trot.

However, MI are known to be perennial slow starters. In 2015, they lost the first four games before going on to win the title.

Hardik's poor captaincy calls have also been questioned -- whether it was not giving Bumrah the new ball or sending Tim David ahead of himself

against Gujarat Titans.

The change in captaincy has not sit well with the legions of MI supporters. On Monday, chants of 'Rohit Rohit' filled the Wankhede with the Indian captain himself asking the crowd not to jeer Hardik.

Mumbai Indians will next face Delhi Capitals at home on Sunday.

### Mumbai

Boos rang out in the Wankhede Stadium once again as Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya failed to latch on to a difficult chance against Rajasthan Royals in match 14 of Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024.

Jos Buttler drove uppish to full-length delivery by Jasprit Bumrah and Pandya dived to his left, got his hand to the balls but couldn't hold on as it popped out. It was a screamer of a shot and Pandya made a superb effort to grab it. His brilliant but futile attempt received boos from a section of the crowd.

While the crowd was booing Pandya while watching replays of his effort on the big screen, a fan ran into the field from the third-man region and ran to Rohit Sharma who was fielding in the slips. As the man reached him, Rohit was first startled and then hugged him as the pitch invader stood in front of him. The invader was eventually escorted out of the stadium by security personnel.

This was the fifth time that Hardik Pandya was heckled by the crowd at the Wankhede on Monday. He was first heckled by some of the spectators during the press-match practice.

Boos rang out again when Hardik was introduced

by commentator Sanjay Manjrekar for the toss. Manjrekar asked the crowd to behave. But the crowd jeered him once again when he started to speak to the broadcaster after the toss.

Pandya maintained his cool and continued to talk even as the booing continued. Though he maintained a poker face, it was clear that the Mumbai Indians captain was not happy with the way he was being treated by the fans for a decision taken by the franchise.

The spectators reacted with jeers once again when Pandya walked to the crease to bat. But they turned in his favour as Pandya hammered a few pleasing shots as he and Tilak Varma raised 56 runs for the fifth wicket.

Hardik, who was appointed Mumbai Indians skipper in an abrupt decision by the franchise in place of fan-favourite Rohit Sharma who has led the franchise to multiple IPL titles, was booed by fans at Ahmedabad in their tournament opener against Gujarat Titans. It was expected as Hardik had sensationally moved from Titans to Mumbai Indians just ahead of IPL 2024 and left the team after leading them to the title in 2022 and runner-up place in the last edition.

## Mirabai Chanu ends third in World Cup, books Paris berth

### Phuket

Tokyo Olympics silver medallist Mirabai Chanu qualified for the 2024 Paris Games after finishing third in the women's 49kg category Group B event of the IWF World Cup here.

Returning from a six-month injury layoff, Chanu lifted a total of 184kg (81kg+103kg) at the tournament, which is the final, and mandatory, qualifier for the Paris Olympics.

With the completion of her event, Chanu has fulfilled the criteria for Paris, which is participating in two compulsory events and three other qualifiers.

"It feels incredible to come back after an injury. Almost every lift I made today felt clean, clear, and powerful, and I'm leaving this competition feeling strong and confident," Chanu said. "The rehabilitation was tough and demanding, but with the support of everyone involved in my rehab and recovery, I pushed through all the complications."

The 2017 world champion is currently ranked second in the women's 49kg Olympics



qualification ranking (OQR) behind China's Jian HuiHua.

The official announcement for the qualification will come after the conclusion of the World Cup when the OQR will be updated. The top 10 lifters from each weight class will qualify for the Paris Olympics.

Chanu, who last competed at the Asian Games in September and suffered a hip tendonitis injury, was not at her best but was able to make five clean lifts.

Her final clean and jerk attempt of 106kg was deemed a no-lift on technicality. Her lifts in the snatch, and clean and jerk sections were nowhere close to her personal best efforts. Given

that she is coming off an injury and rehab, Chanu still has time to peak in July and her progress looks good. She will have a lot of ground to cover as her opponents had total efforts of up to 221kg in the A category today.

"Today's event was to assess how Mira's body is progressing given she is returning after six months of injury and rehabilitation. And more importantly to get her confidence back," chief coach Vijay Sharma said. "We were not bothered about the qualification, she has already qualified. Now we will focus on peaking at the right time in Paris," he added.



# Riyan Parag reminds me of young Suryakumar at MI: Rajasthan Royals assistant coach Shane Bond

Rajasthan Royals assistant coach Shane Bond has described in-form Riyan Parag as a player of "extreme talent" and likened him to a young Suryakumar Yadav who joined Mumbai Indians several years ago and went on to become one of the most explosive T20 batters in the world.

The 22-year-old Parag has brought his rich form from domestic cricket into the IPL, striking two high quality fifties to help Rajasthan notch up wins in all three games so far.

Parag's latest effort came against Mumbai Indians in his side's six-wicket win on Monday. He dropped anchor to spearhead Royals' chase of 126, scoring 54 not out off 39 balls with the help of five fours and three sixes.

"He (Parag) sort of reminds me a little bit of Surya (Suryakumar Yadav), who came to Mumbai a few years ago. He looks like that - he has got extreme talent. He has just matured as a cricketer, even though he is only 22," Bond, who is also the RR bowling coach, said at the post-match press conference.

Bond played a crucial role in developing bowling talents at MI in his nine-year stint with the Mumbai-based franchise from 2015 onwards, before shifting base to Jaipur this year.

"He (Parag) has had an outstanding domestic season, obviously, batting up the order. The trade we made with Devdutt (Padikkal), bringing Avesh (Khan) in, that was to put Riyan up into a position which was probably better suited," the former New Zealand fast bowler added.

Suryakumar, the world's number one T20 batter, joined MI in 2011 and spent four years at Kolkata Knight Riders from 2014-17 before he was brought back to the Mumbai side in 2018. He is recovering from a recent surgery.

Bond said Parag has had to play the role of a finisher in the IPL at a young age whereas other teams have experienced international players in that



role.

"Riyan started so young, you forget that he was 17 or something, playing in one of the toughest spots in a batting line-up of No 6. You look at the characters who finish games around the IPL, they are generally pretty experienced guys," he said.

"(The) Tim Davids, (the) Dave Millers... these are high quality players who play international cricket. Riyan has been tasked with that for a number of years. He is still a very young man, but he has got this wealth of experience behind him now.

"We are getting the best of him. The investment that RR have made of him, it's starting to reap the rewards. It is pretty exciting what he could offer for the rest of the season for us."

Bond also felt "selfless" Yuzvendra Chahal, who produced a measly spell of 4-0-11-3 to set up Rajasthan's win on Monday, could be back in India reckoning if he continues to deliver.

"The competition is pretty tough, so one of the real challenges for any bowler coming into this tournament is to forget that there is a World Cup, and you start bowling to get into a World Cup team," he said.

"If your team is successful, you are in a winning team,

selections and rewards come from that. That has more of been our focus, to forget about all that other noise from the outside and just work really hard for each other.

"If we do that, I have got no doubt people are going to start talking like you are now about Chahal and whether he will feature in a World Cup or not. He is bowling beautifully, and if he keeps doing that, then we have got a massive chance in this tournament," he added.

Bond said having knowledge about opposition players also helps in making strategies for his current team.

"When you have obviously spent so much time with certain players, watched them every day and talked to them about their game and the way that they see the game, that definitely helps," he said.

"It was quite fun being on the other side of the team. A couple of dismissals, you get a lot of satisfaction from that."

MI pacer Akash Madhwal said a fresh pitch at the Wankhede Stadium assisted bowlers in the first game but maintaining tight lines was equally crucial.

"We had to get our basics right and had to bowl in the line of the stumps. The pitch had some help for the fast bowlers," said Madhwal, who returned 3/20.

# Candidates glory a distant dream for Indian trio: Viswanathan Anand



New Delhi

Giving prominence to experience over youthful exuberance, five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand feels the three Indian participants will not be among the top contenders for the Candidates chess title, saying they "should first settle into the tournament."

The tournament, which will determine the challenger for the next World Championship, will be held in Toronto on April 3-22. The winner will qualify to challenge Ding Liren of China. The immensely talented R Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh and Vidit Gujrathi are the three Indians competing in the open category. All three will make their debuts at the tournament.

"The Indians are a long shot. If they can keep the tournament

going that's good enough," Anand said. "If a late opportunity presents itself, they can grab it. They should first settle into the tournament and try to play good games. Let the big decisions come later," he added. Anand felt that Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura of the United States are the clear favourites, while terming Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia and Alireza Firouzja of France as the unpredictable players of the tournament. According to Grandmaster N Srinath, one of the country's top trainers, Praggnanandhaa has the best chance among the Indians but picked Caruana as the clear favourite for the title. Grandmasters Koneru Humpy and R Vaishali are the two Indians participating in the women's section.

# Pakistan Cricket Board wants to bring Babar Azam back as captain

Lahore

PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has offered Babar Azam captaincy in the white ball formats but the star player has not yet made his decision, sources have claimed. It has been learnt that Babar has set down conditions for accepting the captaincy, including having a say in appointment of coaches. Babar has conveyed that he should given the reins of the side in all three formats. The national selection committee, though is divided on the issue. A former Punjab caretaker minister, who apparently has no cricket background, is not in favour giving back absolute power to Babar. "Some members of the selection committee now feel the best thing is to let Shaheen Shah Afridi continue as captain for the home T20 series against New Zealand in April and give him a chance to prove his credentials," one well-informed source said.



अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

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संजय मंगेश भैरे  
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