

Across State

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You have to vote for the resolution of Developed India- **PM Modi in Ramtek**

Ramtek

Commending the efforts of those involved in the de-addiction campaign spearheaded by Baba Jumdev Ji through the 'Paramatma Ek Sevak Mandal', PM Modi highlighted the significance of such initiatives in fostering societal well-being.

Addressing the enthusiastic crowd, PM Modi remarked, "Evening is setting in, but looking at your enthusiasm, it seems the day has just begun." Encouraging the audience to participate actively, he urged them to use their mobile phones to send blessings to the stage, symbolizing unity and collective support.

"Nowadays, these TV and media people are continuously showing surveys regarding the elections. Every survey indicates a clear victory for the NDA. These media people also spend a lot of money on these surveys. I want to share a formula today to save money. When criticism against Modi intensifies, then understand the trend, then it's the Modi government once again. When these people start insulting my late father or mother, understand the trend, then it's the Modi government once again. When questions arise about EVMs, understand the trend, then it's Modi government once again," he added.

Reflecting on the upcoming elections, PM Modi emphasized the pivotal role of the electorate in shaping the future of the nation. He stated, "On April 19th, you are not just choosing a Member of Parliament. You are voting to strengthen the foundation of India for the next thousand years."

Asserting the importance of unity and solidarity, PM Modi condemned divisive politics propagated by certain factions. He urged the people of Maharashtra to vote for the country's unity and progress, cautioning against the divisive agenda of opportunistic alliances.

PM Modi said, "These INDI Alliance people are fully engaged in dividing the country's people. They know that if the people of the country unite, the politics of the INDI Alliance people will end. Therefore, I urge the people of Maharashtra, I urge the people of the country, vote for the country by uniting. If these INDI Alliance people become powerful, they will divide the country into pieces. Even today, they leave no



stone unturned in pitting one community against another. Even today, they do not miss any opportunity to target Indian culture. Ramtek is that place where the feet of Bhagwan Ram himself have stepped."

Highlighting the government's commitment to social justice and empowerment, PM Modi outlined various initiatives aimed at uplifting marginalized communities, including the SC-ST-OBC society. "Since independence, Congress has kept the SC-ST-OBC society behind in every way under a conspiracy. Congress ended Baba Saheb Ambedkar's politics. Congress kept Baba Saheb deprived of Bharat Ratna. When the BJP-supported government was formed at the Centre, Baba Saheb was awarded the Bharat Ratna. When the NDA government was formed in 2014, the son of a Dalit mother became the President of India. When the NDA government was formed again in 2019, the daughter of a tribal mother became the first citizen of the country, the President," said the Prime Minister.

PM Modi underscored the government's efforts to ensure inclusive development and provide equal opportunities to all sections of society and said, "In the NDA government, we have appointed a record number of ministers from the OBC community. This NDA government is the one that gave constitutional status to the OBC Commission. This NDA government is the one that ensured reservation for OBCs in medical education. It was the NDA government that established a separate Ministry for Tribal Affairs. In the past 10 years, the budget for tribal welfare has been increased fivefold. It is due to the policies of the NDA government that the enrollment of SC/ST/OBC youth in schools and colleges has significantly increased."

Addressing the audience, PM Modi reaffirmed his government's dedication to

promoting the principles of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' and fostering an environment of inclusive growth. "Modi worked to provide facilities to the poor, to reduce their worries. Today, when Modi guarantees 100% beneficiaries, 100% benefits of schemes, this is true social justice. This is true secularism. Guaranteeing a home for the poor, guaranteeing free ration, free treatment, guaranteeing toilets, electricity-water-gas connections, these guarantees of Modi benefit the SC-ST-OBC families the most," said PM Modi.

Touching upon critical policy decisions, PM Modi emphasized the significance of constitutional reforms, including the abrogation of Article 370 and the enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), aimed at ensuring justice and equality for all citizens. "When Modi removed Article 370, the Congress president asked what benefit the country got from it? This is also evidence of Congress's anti-Dalit, tribal, and women policies, and vote bank politics. Removing Article 370 has given constitutional rights to all these sections in Jammu and Kashmir for the first time. Congress and the INDI Alliance are not liking this. Congress is also opposing the CAA, which provides citizenship because the biggest beneficiaries of this are the Dalits and Buddhists."

In his address, PM Modi lauded the transformative development initiatives undertaken in Maharashtra, particularly in the Nagpur and Vidarbha regions. He highlighted the establishment of premier educational institutions, infrastructure projects, and economic initiatives aimed at bolstering regional growth and prosperity. "Such development can only be achieved by an honest, strong, and stable NDA government," the Prime Minister stated.

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MVA finalises seat deal, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena to contest 21, Congress 17, Sharad Pawar group 10



Mumbai

After days of intense discussions, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance on Tuesday managed to seal a seat-sharing deal in Maharashtra just 10 days before the first phase of the Lok Sabha poll, with Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) bagging the lion's share of 21 seats, followed by 17 for the Congress and 10 for the Sharad Pawar

group's NCP (SP).

For the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra, the elections will be held in five phases, beginning April 19 and ending on May 20. After Uttar Pradesh, which has the highest number of 80 seats, Maharashtra comes second with 48 and holds the key to the fortunes of both the BJP-led NDA and the INDIA bloc in the

elections.

The MVA reached the seat deal after it abandoned talks with Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), which had initially demanded five seats and later eight. An early indication of the MVA-VBA talks having failed was seen after the Congress fielded its candidate against Ambedkar from Akola.

In the 2019 Lok

Sabha elections, the VBA had managed to garner 6 per cent vote share after it had entered into a pact with Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM and eaten into the Congress-NCP's vote, leading to the alliance's defeat in at least 10 seats.

The seat-sharing arrangement was announced in a joint press conference in Mumbai on Tuesday morning, where Uddhav, Sharad, state Congress chief Nana Patole and senior Congress leader Prithviraj Chavan as well as Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut were present.

The contentious seats of Bhiwandi and Sangli, on which all three MVA partners had been staking claim, finally went to the NCP (SP) and Sena (UBT), respectively.

Asserting that the issue had been "resolved", Patole said party workers would work to ensure victories of the MVA candidates from these seats.

'BJP scared, unproductive and corrupt': Uddhav's attack after PM Modi's 'fake party' barb at Shiv Sena (UBT)

Mumbai

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed the Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray as a fake party, the former Maharashtra chief minister said on Tuesday that the BJP had become the party of bhekad (scared), bhakad (unproductive) and bhrashta (corrupt).

"Yesterday's speech was not one of India's PM. It was the speech of one of the leaders of the corrupt and scared BJP. From today onwards, our answer to him should not be treated as being given to the PM but to one of the leaders of the BJP. The BJP has become the party of bhekad (scared) and bhakad (unproductive) and bhrashta (corrupt)," Thackeray said while speaking at a joint press conference of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi.

"It is bhekad because it is using agencies to target the Opposition with raids and arrests. It is bhakad because it has failed to create a leader and it is bhrashta because all the corrupt leaders in the country are joining the BJP," he said. "This BJP

is a party of extortionists. This has been proved by the electoral bond scheme. This leader (Modi) belongs to this party of extortionists."

Modi made the remarks about the Shiv Sena (UBT) while campaigning in Chandrapur.

Taking a further dig at the BJP, Thackeray said that on Monday the world experienced three things—a solar eclipse, no-moon day and the BJP's rally at Chandrapur.

"I just want him (PM Modi) to remember that his party's then president, Amit Shah, had come to bow down in front of Balasaheb Thackeray's photo in 2019 and I was there. You might have forgotten this, but people have not... If he is happy with the Chinese goods (apparently referring to Chief Minister Eknath Shinde) with him then I wish him luck," he said.

Asked about Modi's criticism of his Nationalist Congress Party, Sharad Pawar said, "[The office of] the prime minister is an institution and we respect it. But no PM other than Narendra Modi has disrespected it so much."

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Maharashtra Congress chief Patole escapes unhurt after truck hits his car in Bhandara

Mumbai

Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole escaped unhurt after a truck hit his car in Maharashtra's Bhandara district, a party leader said on Wednesday.

The incident took place on Tuesday night and there is room for doubt if it was an attempt on his life, state Congress

spokesperson Atul Londhe claimed.

In a post on X, Londhe said the accident occurred near Karda village in Bhandara district. He claimed that a truck hit Patole's car and tried to crush it.

"This is a serious incident and there is room for doubt if it was an

attempt on his life. Does the BJP want to win elections by finishing off opposition leaders?" he asked.

Londhe said Patole escaped unhurt and was fine due to the blessings of people.

The Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra will be held in five phases from April 19 to May 20.

Raj Thackeray extends support to ruling alliance

Mumbai

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray on Tuesday said that his party has extended unconditional support to the ruling alliance to ensure Narendra Modi becomes the prime minister for the third term. He was speaking at the party's annual public rally here held on the occasion of Gudhi Padwa.

"The country today needs strong leadership. When I met Devendra Fadnavis and Eknath Shinde, I told them that I am not interested in seat adjustment or Rajya Sabha or council. I told them that I have decided to extend unconditional support to the BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP only to make Narendra Modi the prime minister for another term," Thackeray said. He asked his party workers to start preparing for the upcoming polls.

Thackeray's speech clears the air that the MNS will not be contesting the Lok Sabha elections but will only support the candidates of the ruling alliance. Ever since his meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi, speculations were rife that the MNS will become part of the BJP-led alliance and contest the general elections.

"India is a country of youngsters, who need opportunities. I expect Narendra Modi to concentrate on youngsters. They are the future. Every country has its time. Our time should not go waste. This election will decide the future of this country," he said.

He said that for the last one and half year, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis had been

asking him to come together. "I wanted to know what exactly they mean. That's why I called Amit Shah and went to meet him," he said.

"Let me be clear. The last seat-sharing talk I attended was in 1995. Never after that. That's not my temperament... then somebody said to fight on a different symbol. That's not going to happen. There will be no compromise. The only symbol I will fight on, is of MNS," Thackeray added.

He said that he always had cordial relations with the leaders of BJP, from Gopinath Munde and Pramod Mahajan to Modi.

"My opposition to Modi in 2019 was not personal. Unlike Uddhav Thackeray and Sanjay Raut, I did not want to become chief minister. I opposed him on issues. You are doing it



(opposing Modi) now because your party is split, for your selfish gains," he said.

He took a dig at media for making speculations about his meeting with Shah and over reports that he will become the chief of Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena. "Had I wanted to become

the chief, I would have become long back. When I left Shiv Sena, there were 32 MLAs, 6/7 MPs at my house. I told them that I will not work under anyone except Balasaheb Thackeray. Do not believe in such reports. I will remain the president only of MNS," he said.

PIL against artificial lights on trees: Bombay High Court seeks reply from Maharashtra govt, civic bodies

Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday directed the Maharashtra government, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and municipal corporations of Thane and Mira Bhayander to file an affidavit in reply to a public interest litigation (PIL) against putting up artificial lights on trees.

A division bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Arif S Doctor was hearing a PIL by activist Rohit Manohar Joshi against the state government, municipal corporations and their tree authorities. The PIL mentioned the ill effects of putting artificial lights on trees and nocturnal organisms during festivities and other occasions.

Advocate Ronita Bhattacharya, for the petitioner, referred to a July 2019 circular issued by the Delhi government's forest department.

Through the circular, certain measures have been taken to check the damage caused to the trunks of the trees and roots by signboards advertisements (signages), electric wires, high-tension cables and other damaging elements on the trees. She said such a circular was issued based on an order from the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

To support the plea, the petitioner added that Section 2 (C) of the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act, 1975, defines the phrase 'to fell a tree' as including burning, cutting, or in any way damaging a tree. Moreover, as per Section 8 of the said Act, restrictions are imposed on tree felling, which is subject to permission being granted by a tree officer/authority of the civic body.

In light of the said two provisions, the petitioner submitted that putting up artificial lighting and

other kinds of electric wires causes damage to trees, and, therefore, such wires cannot be put up on trees without permission granted under Section 8 of the 1975 law.

"Such unregulated practices are detrimental to the health and growth of the trees in question and are disruptive to insects, mammals and birds at the time of their nest building, roosting and other activities," the plea claimed, adding that directions be issued against inaction by civic bodies in this regard.

The PIL sought various directions from the authorities, including effective steps to remove such wires and other impermissible materials wrapped around trees under their area, raise public awareness about the issue, and ensure that such high-tension cables are not henceforth illegally installed on trees, particularly during festive seasons.

New BMC chief conducts his first pre-monsoon preparedness survey

Mumbai

With less than two months left until the arrival of monsoon in Mumbai, commissioner in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and state appointed administrator, Bhushan Gagrani took stock of the civic body's overall pre-monsoon preparedness on Tuesday.

This was Gagrani's first pre-monsoon survey since he took over as the civic chief on March 20.

As part of this visit, Gagrani visited low lying areas of Chembur, Ghatkopar, Bhandup and Nahur in the eastern suburbs. The pre-monsoon desilting work in Mumbai has started from April 1.

The process of desilting refers to the removal of silt, muck and sediments which

gets deposited in the beds of nullahs, canals and rivers in Mumbai. These sediments slow down the force of water flowing through the water



bodies which in turn results in overflowing during heavy rain that leads to water-logging in the city.

Civic officials said that so far 54.57 metric tonnes (MT) of silt has been removed from the Mithi River so far. In total, the BMC aims to remove 13.1 crore MT of sludge from all the drains, canals and rivers in Mumbai.

Patanjali advertising case: Supreme Court raps Ramdev again, declines to accept apology

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it declines to accept the affidavits filed by yoga guru Ramdev and managing director of Patanjali Ayurved Ltd Acharya Balkrishna tendering an unconditional apology in the misleading advertisements case.

"We don't want to be so generous in this case," a bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah said during the hearing.

The apex court also came down heavily on the Uttarakhand State Licensing Authority for not taking action against Patanjali Ayurved.

The hearing in the matter is underway.

Ramdev and Balkrishna have tendered an "unconditional and unqualified apology" before the apex court over advertisements issued by the firm making



tall claims about the medicinal efficacy of its products.

In two separate affidavits filed in the court, Ramdev and Balkrishna have

tendered an unqualified apology for the "breach of the statement" recorded in the November 21 last year order of the apex court.

In the November 21, 2023 order, the top court had noted that counsel representing Patanjali Ayurved had assured it that "henceforth there shall not be any violation of any law(s), especially relating to advertising or branding of products manufactured and marketed by it and, further, that no casual statements claiming medicinal efficacy or against any system of medicine will be released to the media in any form".

The top court had said Patanjali Ayurved Ltd is "bound down to such assurance".

The non-observance of the specific assurance and the subsequent media statements irked the apex court, which later issued notice to them to show cause as to why contempt proceedings be not initiated against them.

Constitution Won't Be Changed, Will Resign If That Happens: Union Minister



Gondia

Union Minister of State for Social Justice Ramdas Athawale has dismissed the Congress' allegation that the Narendra Modi-led NDA government is planning to change the Constitution.

Mr Athawale, a prominent Dalit leader from Maharashtra and Bharatiya Janata Party's ally, on Tuesday said he would resign if there is any attempt to change the Constitution.

The minister, who heads the Republican Party of India (Athawale), was here to campaign for Sunil Mendhe, candidate of the ruling alliance from Bhandara-Gondia Lok Sabha seat.

With no issues against the present Modi-led NDA government, the Congress along with other opposition parties is trying to mislead people alleging

that if this government wins 400 plus seats, it would change the Constitution. Their accusation is completely baseless.... if government makes any such attempt, I will resign from the cabinet and withdraw support to the BJP," he said.

PM Modi is a "man with vision" and working for the progress of the country, Mr Athawale added.

Notably, BJPM P Anant Kumar Hegde recently said his party needed a two-third majority in both Houses of Parliament to amend the Constitution and "set right the distortions and unnecessary additions made to it by the Congress".

The BJP subsequently moved to defuse the row sparked by Hegde's remarks as it dubbed it as his "personal opinion" and sought a clarification from him.

After Vistara, Trouble Brews For Air India As Technicians Plan Strike

New Delhi

Trouble for Air India Ltd. is mounting with aircraft technicians planning a strike later this month after its pilots voiced concerns last week about being overworked and underpaid.

Technicians at AI Engineering Services Ltd. - a state-run maintenance, repair and overhaul firm and an erstwhile Air India unit - will strike on April 23 due to various issues affecting their "well-being" and "professional growth," All India Aircraft Maintenance Engineering Union wrote in a letter dated April 8 to the chief executive officer.

A representative for Air India said the situation is being monitored closely.

The unrest among aviation workers risks thwarting India's air travel boom. Pilots and aircraft engineers are crucial to support the country's rapid fleet expansion after IndiGo, Air India and Akasa placed orders for more than 1,100 aircraft combined.

The strike will further roil India's aviation industry that saw hundreds of flight cancellations last week after some pilots at Vistara, jointly owned by Air India's owner Tata Group and Singapore Airlines Ltd., called in



sick en masse due to fatigue and pay cuts. The airline is cutting back 25 to 30 flights a day to create a buffer in its rosters to prevent more cancellations.

AI Engineering's biggest client is Air India.

Its staff are upset over lack of career advancement opportunities because they haven't been promoted in the past seven years, according to the letter. The management promised a revised pay structure for technicians who have worked for at least two years with the firm but hasn't followed through. The contractual employees, who form 75% of the company's workforce, feel discriminated because they have to serve longer notice periods and aren't given as many benefits as the permanent staff, the letter said.

A representative for AI Engineering said the management has initiated discussions with the union to resolve the issue. AI Engineering has revised salaries of all staff except technicians as a court case is pending, it said. The company is planning to revise the pay of technicians after the union withdraws a court case, wherein it requested equal pay for contractual employees and permanent ones.

Meanwhile, Air India pilots have echoed Vistara staff's concerns, saying the issues of being underpaid and overworked are "systemic" across Tata's aviation empire.

Aircraft technicians have urged the management to resolve issues to avoid potential disruptions from the strike, the letter said.

Calcutta High Court Orders CBI Probe Into Sandeshkhali Rape, Land Grab Allegations

Kolkata

The CBI will investigate allegations of extortion, land grab, and sexual assault that surfaced from Bengal's Sandeshkhali ahead of the Lok Sabha election, the Calcutta High Court said Wednesday. The probe by the central agency - which is also investigating the January 5 attack on Enforcement Directorate officials that triggered this controversy - will be monitored by the court, it said. "Considering the complexity of matters in Sandeshkhali, there is no doubt an impartial investigation should be done. We are of the opinion the State has to give proper support to (whichever) agency is (placed) in charge..." the High Court, which last week rapped the ruling Trinamool Congress, said.

The court last week heard a clutch of petitions asking for external agencies to investigate the many disturbing allegations from the island of Sandeshkhali, which has been shrouded in fury and controversy after accusations against suspended Trinamool leader Sheikh Shahjahan.



The Bengal government received a stern reprimand by a bench led by Chief Justice TS Sivagnanam, who said, "Even if one affidavit is correct... if one per cent is true... it is absolutely shameful." The row broke in January after a mob of Shahjahan's supporters attacked an Enforcement Directorate team en route to raid premises linked to him. Several officers were injured. Shahjahan went on the run almost immediately and as the allegations against him and his aides broke. The Trinamool then came under heavy fire after it was seen as shielding their man, who remained at large for nearly two months till the court's direct order to the police to arrest him.

This was after contentious comments by Trinamool MP

Abhishek Banerjee, who claimed the state was unable to arrest the accused Sheikh Shahkhana because the court had "tied (police's) hands". Ahead of the election Sandeshkhali has become the opposition BJP's focal point of attack of the Trinamool. The ruling party has also had to field barbs from the Congress, which is, on paper, an ally. The BJP has accused Ms Banerjee of shielding Sheikh Shahjahan, and has moved to field one of the women who have alleged sexual assault - Rekha Patra - from the Basirhat seat, which includes the island of Sandeshkhali. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Ms Patra on the telephone last month and labelled her "Shakti Swaroopa". "He has blessed us... like Lord Ram..." she told media.

BJP Roasts Tejashwi Yadav Over Fish Meal Video During Navratri, He Hits Back

Patna

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav today defended his video that showed him eating fish in a helicopter after several users claimed the Bihar leader was consuming non-vegetarian food during Navratri.

Navratri began yesterday, marking a 10-day festival during which devotees follow a strict vegetarian diet. Pointing this out, several internet users slammed the former deputy chief minister for trying to provoke the Hindus.

Mr Yadav shot back today, pointing out that his post mentioned the video was from April 8, a day before Navratri began.

"We had uploaded this video to test the IQ of the BJP and Godi media followers and we were proved right in our thinking. The tweet says 'Dinank' i.e. Date, but what do the poor blind followers know? At the end, Sahni ji has also mentioned about getting chilli," said Mr Yadav.

The trolling began after the RJD leader last night shared a video of him and former minister Mukesh Sahni having a meal together in a helicopter. "Food in helicopter amidst the hustle and bustle of election! Date- 08/04/2024," the post read.

Mr Yadav described in the video how they got only 10-15 minutes to have lunch amid an hectic election campaigning. He also showed the food he was having, which included fish and roti, sparking a debate over eating non-veg food during Navratri.

Even BJP MP Giriraj Singh chipped in, slamming Mr Yadav as a "seasonal Sanatani" while speaking to reporters this morning.

"Tejashwi Yadav is a 'Seasonal Sanatani' who nurtures appeasement. Many people, be it Rohingyas or Bangladeshi infiltrators, came here when his father (Lalu Yadav) was in power. They do politics of appeasement wearing the mask of Sanatan," said the firebrand BJP leader.

Across State अक्रॉस मुंबई



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डिजिटल मिडीया संपादक संघटना



We've transformed N-E: PM takes dig at Congress for neglecting region

New Delhi

Days after China released the fourth list of new names of various places along the Line of Actual Control in Arunachal Pradesh in another bid to exercise territorial claims, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the “northeastern state was, is and will remain an integral part of Bharat”.

“Today the development works are reaching Arunachal and the North-East like the first rays of the sun, faster than ever before. Successive Congress governments meted out step-motherly treatment to the region due to its low electoral gains. From an ‘abandoned region’, the North-East has become an ‘abundant region’ after years of neglect,” the PM said speaking to a northeastern daily today.

The remarks come on the eve of the first phase voting on April 19 when 15 of the 25 Lok Sabha constituencies in the North-East will go to the polls. These include five in Assam, two each in Arunachal, Manipur and Meghalaya, and one each in Sikkim, Tripura, Mizoram and Nagaland.

Of 25 seats in eight northeastern states, the highest — 14 — fall in Assam with the BJP-led NDA allies



winning 19 in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll as against the Congress and allies' haul of four (three in Assam, one Meghalaya) while the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and an Independent won one each.

Commenting on challenges in the area, the PM said the region had seen a long history of insurgencies, infiltration and institutional neglect. “But we have significantly controlled insurgency. Eleven peace agreements

have been signed in 10 years; 9,500 insurgents have surrendered; compared to 2014, insurgency incidents have dropped by 71%, security force casualties by 60% and civilian deaths by 82%. Because of the improved security situation, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act has been withdrawn from most parts of the North-East,” the PM said.

On the violence that engulfed Manipur for the better part of 2023,

the PM said it was everyone's collective responsibility to deal with the situation sensitively.

“We have dedicated our best resources and administrative machinery to resolve the conflict. Because of the timely intervention of the Government of India and efforts made by the Manipur Government, there has been a marked improvement in the situation in the state. The process of relief and rehabilitation is underway. Remedial measures undertaken include a financial package for the relief and rehabilitation of the people living in shelter camps in the state,” he said.

On future vision for the NE, PM Modi said a major goal was to boost the connectivity due to the region's strategic location.

“Our aim is to develop the North-East as a base for India's growing economic links. The region is witnessing improved infrastructure, with even the remotest corners having 5G connectivity,” said the PM.

He added that new road projects for 125 villages and infrastructure projects for another 150 will also commence soon.

Congress moves EC over PM's 'Muslim League' jab

New Delhi

The Congress on Monday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against PM Narendra Modi for comparing the party's manifesto with that of the Muslim League.

“My colleagues @salman7khurshid, @MukulWasnik, @Pawankhera and @gurdeepsappal have just met with the Election Commission and presented and argued six complaints, including two against the PM. This is the time for the Election Commission to demonstrate its independence by ensuring a level playing field for all parties,” Congress leader Jairam Ramesh wrote on X.

“We live in the hope that the commission will uphold its constitutional mandate. For our part, we will continue to pursue all avenues, political and legal,

to expose this regime,” Ramesh said.

Addressing an election rally in Rajasthan's Ajmer on April 6, Prime Minister Modi called the Congress manifesto “a bundle of



lies” and that every page of the document “reeks of an attempt to break India into pieces”.

“The Leftists have taken over whatever was left of this manifesto bearing the stamp of the Muslim League. Today, the Congress is left with neither principles nor policies,” he said.

The Congress retorted, saying Modi was scared over the prospect of the BJP struggling to cross the 180-seat mark in the Lok Sabha polls and had once again fallen back to the “same clichéd Hindu-Muslim script”.

Party president Mallikarjun Kharge slammed the BJP, alleging that their “ideological ancestors” supported the British and the Muslim League against Indians in the Independence struggle.

In a post on X, Kharge said, “Modi-Shah's political and ideological ancestors supported the British and the Muslim League against the Indians in the freedom struggle.”

“Even today, they are invoking the Muslim League against the Congress Nyay Patra, guided and shaped according to the aspirations, needs and demands of common Indians,” Kharge said.

Climate change affects citizens' right to life: SC



New Delhi

Noting that climate change impacts the constitutional guarantee of the right to health and right to equality, the Supreme Court has asked an expert panel to find a balance between conservation of critically-endangered Great Indian Bustard and renewable energy infrastructure in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

The committee's work would also traverse the area of the setting up of transmission lines to facilitate solar power generation,

it said. Acting on a petition by wildlife activist MK Ranjitsinh and others, the top court had on April 21, 2021, issued an order for “undergrounding” of overhead transmission lines across an area of over 80,000 sq km in the two states. However, recalling its April 21, 2021 order, a three-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on March 21 said such a blanket direction for “undergrounding” high voltage and low voltage power lines needed recalibration. The March 21 order that was uploaded on the top court's website on Sunday is being seen as the first-ever judicial recognition of the perils of climate change in India as it said, “It is imperative for states like India, to uphold their obligations under international law, including their responsibilities to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to climate impacts, and protect the fundamental rights of all individuals to live in a healthy and sustainable environment.”

Randeep Surjewala put on EC notice over Hema Malini remark; Mallikarjun Kharge asked to list steps taken

New Delhi

The Election Commission on Tuesday issued a show-cause notice to Congress leader Randeep Surjewala over his alleged controversial remarks against BJP MP from Mathura and actress Hema Malini and sought his response on the matter by evening of April 11.

Calling the remarks as “undignified, vulgar and uncivilised”, the EC in a separate letter to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has asked him to inform by April 12 as to what measures the party had taken to ensure strict compliance of its advisories relating to honour and dignity of women during public discourse.

The letter to Kharge also



had reference to Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate’s alleged objectionable comments on BJP’s Mandi Lok Sabha seat candidate and Hindi film actress Kangana Ranaut.

The show-cause notice to Surjewala was sent by the EC



on the basis of a complaint it had received on April 5, where it was alleged he had made “sexist, vulgar and unethical public utterances against the dignity of BJP MP Hema Malini, while campaigning in Haryana, which are violative of the provisions of

the model code.... the comments have not only caused great insult to Hema Malini and disrespect to her position as MP but also heaped insult on all women legislators and women in public life or otherwise.”

The EC asked Surjewala as to why action should not be taken against him, while seeking his reply by 5 pm on April 11.

In a separate missive to Kharge, the EC said having strongly censured Shrinate earlier for her comments made reportedly against Ranaut, he should have issued a specific advisory to party functionaries involved in election campaign and in interaction in public domain, directing them not to commit such violations.

However with Surjewala

making “undignified utterances”, “it is unfortunate that despite the commission bringing it to the notice of the party at your level, the campaigners of the Congress are still indulging in utterances that are repugnant to the honour and dignity of women”.

In this light, the EC directed Kharge to inform it by April 12 the measures taken by the party to ensure strict compliance of its advisories relating to honour and dignity of women during public discourse.

“At this stage the EC wishes to reiterate and you will agree that election campaign cannot be allowed to become a platform for any kind of dishonour to women,” the EC said in its letter to the Congress president.

Centre accords Z-category VIP security cover to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar



New Delhi

The Union government has provided Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar with a Z-category VIP security cover of armed commandos in view of potential threats, official sources said on Tuesday.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has entrusted the Central Reserve Police Force with providing a contingent of about 40-45 personnel for the task, the sources said.

A threat perception report prepared by central security

agencies had recommended a strong cover for Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kumar. The move comes amid preparations for the seven-phase general elections that begin on April 19.

The armed commandos will accompany the CEC during his travels across the country, the sources said.

Kumar is a retired IAS officer of the 1984 batch. He took charge as the 25th CEC on May 15, 2022.

He had been appointed as an election commissioner in the poll body on September 1, 2020.

Nobody will lose citizenship due to CAA: Rajnath

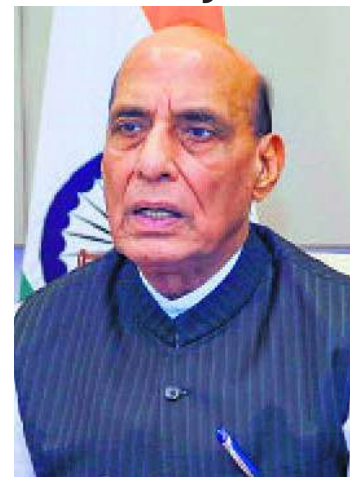
New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday allayed fears around the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and clarified that no Indian, irrespective of their faith, would lose citizenship with the implementation of the CAA.

He charged the opposition Congress and DMK with “creating confusion” over the issue.

Rajnath was speaking after taking out a roadshow here in support of the party’s Namakkal candidate for the April 19 Lok Sabha elections, KP Ramalingam.

The BJP always implemented what it promised and the construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370 and the CAA were such assurances, he said.



Lingayat seer to contest against Union minister Joshi

New Delhi

Days after speaking against Union minister Pralhad Joshi, Gadag’s Lingayat seer Dingaleshwar Swami today declared that he would contest as an Independent candidate from the Dharwad Lok Sabha seat in Karnataka. Defeating Joshi was his main aim, he said.

“I am not speaking for myself, but on behalf of the people who are deeply pained by Pralhad Joshi’s candidature. Even senior Lingayat leaders like Jagadish Shettar were ill-treated. In oppressing other community leaders, he (Joshi) is a hero, but in terms of development works, he is zero,” Swami said.

Joshi, however, said he did

not want to comment on the issue. “The people will vote after analysing the performance of the Modi government over the past



10 years. And whatever Swamiji said about me, I’m considering it as a blessing,” he said.

In March, Veerashaiva-Lingayat seers met the BJP central leadership and demanded that Joshi be shifted from Dharwad to some other parliamentary

constituency. They alleged ill-treatment at the hands of the minister. Swami had said that Joshi had no respect for religious heads. He said Joshi insulted him over the phone three years ago. “I had called him up for some social work. He insulted me. Even his brother spoke rudely,” Swami said.

Dharwad has 5.5 lakh Lingayats, 3.5 lakh Muslims, 2.7 lakh SCs and 2 lakh Kuruba voters. If Swami contests the election, the Congress is expected to benefit from the dent the seer would inflict to Joshi. While the Congress has fielded Vinod Asooty, who belongs to the Kuruba community, the BJP has fielded Joshi, a Brahmin.

Verify Chandrasekhar's affidavit: EC to CBDT after Congress complaint

New Delhi

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday asked the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) to verify if there is any mismatch in the affidavit details submitted by Union Minister and BJP candidate from Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha seat Rajeev Chandrasekhar, official sources said.

The action by the Election Commission came after the Congress had flagged the poll panel, pointing out at a mismatch in actual and declared assets in the affidavit filed by Chandrasekhar, who is in the fray against Congress MP Shashi Tharoor. According to rules, any mismatch and falsification of affidavit is dealt with under Section 125 A of the Representation of the People Act 1951, sources said.

As per the law, concealing

any information in nomination papers or affidavit is punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to six months, or with a fine, or both.

The ECI's directive to the CBDT came after the Congress had filed a complaint claiming that the Union Minister had misrepresented information about assets and income streams.

A controversy broke out after Chandrasekhar's poll affidavit showed his taxable income for 2021-22 as just Rs 680. The Union Minister's poll affidavit also showed his taxable income for the year 2022-23 as Rs 5,59,200. He has also stated that he has non-agricultural land in Koramangala, Bengaluru and an Indian Scout motorcycle.

Tharoor has declared assets of Rs 55 crore.

China can't dare to take an inch of our land today: Shah in Assam

New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said China could not transgress into even an inch of Indian territory today due to the firm policies of PM Narendra Modi-led NDA dispensation.

Addressing a poll rally in Assam's Lakhimpur, which is one of the five segments of the state that will vote in the first phase on April 19, Shah said the choice in the elections was clear.

"On one side is Rahul Gandhi-led INDI Alliance and on the other is PM Modi-led NDA. You have to make Modi the PM for the next five years and for the NDA to win over 400 seats," said Shah.

He attacked Rahul for pledging to save Assam culture, saying, "During the time of Rahul's grandmother (late PM Indira Gandhi) injustice was done to Assam. Several youths



took the path of anarchy and many were killed, all because of the sins of the Congress. We on the other hand have signed 10

peace agreements in Assam and ensured the surrender of over 9,000 insurgents," the Home Minister said.

Delhi excise policy scam: CBI questions BRS leader K Kavitha in Tihar Jail

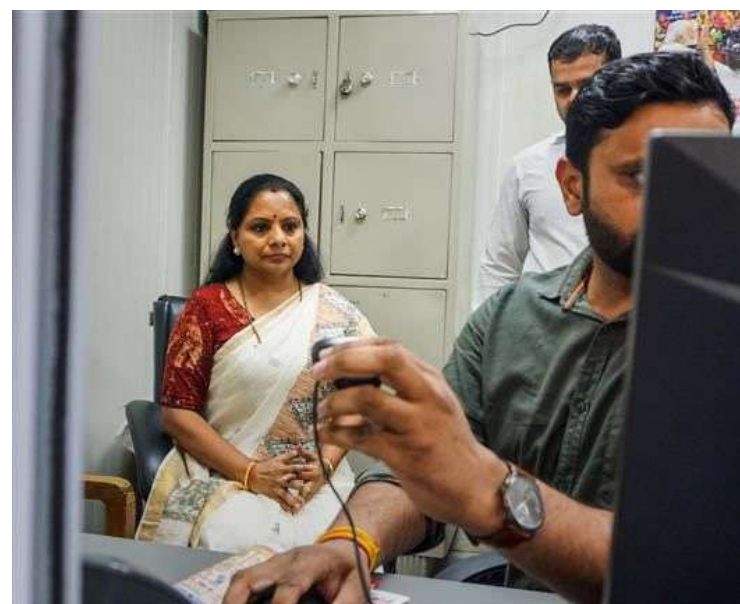
New Delhi

The CBI has questioned BRS leader K Kavitha in connection with a Delhi excise policy-linked alleged corruption case in Tihar Jail where she is lodged after her arrest by the Enforcement Directorate, officials said Tuesday.

The agency was given permission by the special court to question her on the WhatsApp chats recovered from co-accused Buchi Babu's phone and documents related to a land deal after which Rs 100 crore was allegedly paid to the Aam Aadmi Party in kickbacks to swing excise policy in favour of a liquor lobby.

The agency officials had gone to Tihar Jail on Saturday where she was questioned on these aspects of the case, sources said.

The court's permission was mandatory to question her in Tihar Jail because she was in judicial custody.



Kavitha, daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, has been accused of being a key member of the "South Group", which allegedly paid the ruling AAP in Delhi kickbacks of Rs 100 crore in return for a big share of liquor licences in the National Capital. She

was sent to 14-day judicial custody last Tuesday.

The ED had arrested Kavitha, 46, from her Banjara Hills residence in Hyderabad on March 15. The special court on Tuesday extended her custody till April 23 after she was produced before the court on the expiry of her judicial remand granted earlier.

BJP intensifies Lok Sabha campaign with new song sung in 12 Indian languages



New Delhi

The BJP on Wednesday released a new song to intensify its Lok Sabha poll campaign and showcase national unity.

The song seeks to convey a sense of fulfilment of the electorate and is called "sapney nahi haqiqat buntay... tabhi to sab Modi ko chuntay."

"From every corner of the nation, people from diverse backgrounds, speaking in every language are saying one thing in unison - our collective dreams have taken flight," the BJP said.

The song has been sung in 12 different languages and showcases the people coming together on their diversity in unity.

The song ends with a mass of people coming together to form a giant collage representing PM Modi whom the campaign representation signifies as the unifying force.

Saudi crown prince meets Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz, mentions Kashmir as he stresses on India-Pak dialogue

Islamabad

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said dialogue was needed to resolve heightened friction between arch-rivals Pakistan and India during a meeting in Riyadh with visiting Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Sharif was making his first overseas visit since winning power in elections in February. He met with bin Salman on Sunday.

"The two sides stressed the importance of dialogue between Pakistan and India to resolve the outstanding issues between the two countries, especially the Jammu and Kashmir dispute to ensure peace and stability in the region," a joint statement released by Pakistan's foreign office and the Saudi government said.

Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday that India would enter



Pakistan to kill anyone who escapes over the border after trying to carry out militant activities in the country.

The minister was speaking a day after

Britain's Guardian newspaper published a report stating the Indian government had killed about 20 people in Pakistan since 2020 as part of a broader plan to eliminate

militants residing on foreign soil.

India has longstanding friendly relations with Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, which have strengthened under Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is widely expected to win a third term in office in elections starting April 19.

Sharif and bin Salman had also discussed expediting a planned \$5 billion investment package, which cash-strapped Pakistan desperately needs to shore up its current account deficit and signal to the International Monetary Fund that it can continue to meet requirements for foreign financing that has been a key demand in previous bailout packages.

Pakistan said in January it had credible evidence linking Indian agents to the killing of two of its citizens on its soil.

India said it was "false and malicious" propaganda.

Humanitarian crisis in Gaza unacceptable: India at UN

United Nations

India termed the UN Security Council resolution that demanded immediate ceasefire in Gaza for the month of Ramadan a "positive step," asserting that the humanitarian

Israel and Hamas has led to a large-scale loss of civilian lives, especially women and children.

"The resulting humanitarian crisis is simply unacceptable," she said, adding that Delhi has strongly condemned the deaths of civilians in the conflict and it is imperative to avoid the loss of civilian lives in any conflict situation.

The UNSC resolution, adopted last month, demanded an

"immediate ceasefire for the month of Ramadan respected by all parties leading to a lasting sustainable ceasefire." It also demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as the humanitarian access to address their medical and other humanitarian needs.

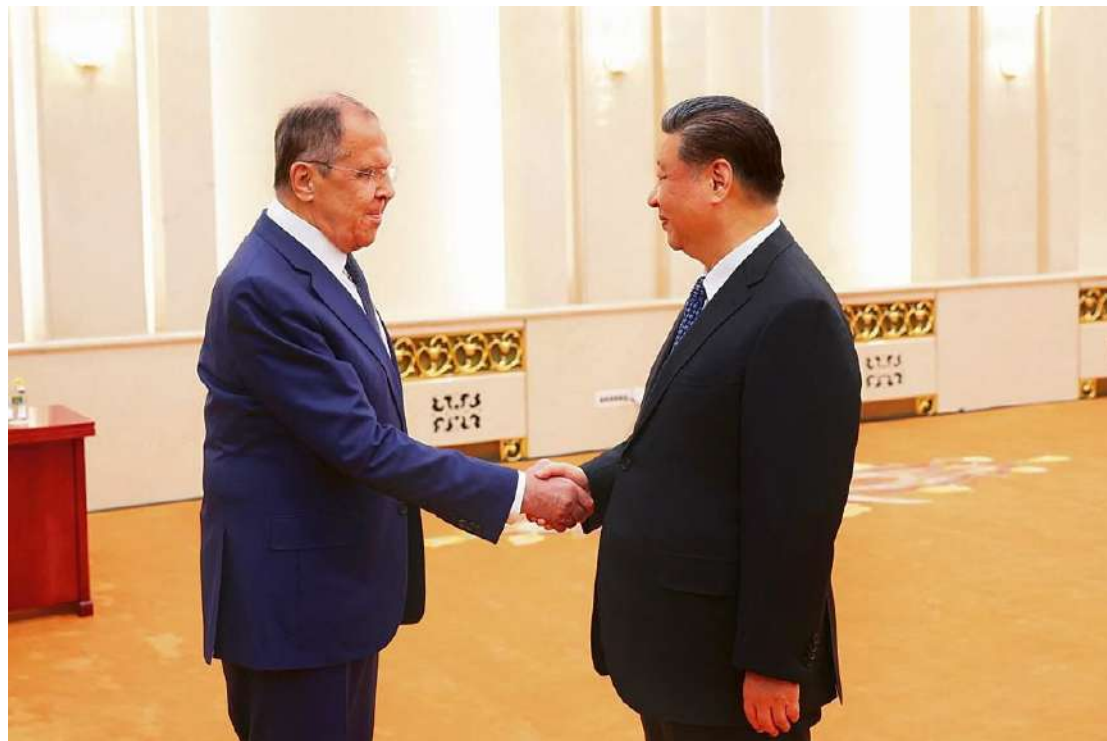
Kamboj underlined that there can be no justification for terror attacks or hostage taking and stressed that the terror attacks on Israel on October 7 last year were shocking and deserve "our unequivocal condemnation."



crisis resulting from the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict is "simply unacceptable." "We are deeply troubled by the ongoing conflict in Gaza. The humanitarian crisis has deepened and instability has been increasing in the region and beyond," India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, told a UN General Assembly meeting here Monday.

She said India views the adoption of a resolution on March 25 by the UN Security Council "as a positive step." Kamboj said the ongoing conflict between

Xi Jinping, Sergey Lavrov lay ground for Vladimir Putin's Beijing visit



Beijing

Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov Tuesday in a sign of mutual support and shared opposition to Western democracies amid Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The development came ahead of the Kremlin's announcement that Russian

President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi plan to have contacts but it gave no time frame for a possible Putin visit to Beijing.

Asked about a possible Putin visit to China, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's visit to Beijing could be

seen as preparation for "upcoming contacts at the highest level" Meanwhile, Lavrov told Xi: "We are sincerely pleased with your successes, since these are the successes of friends, although not everyone in the world shares this attitude and are trying in every possible way to restrain China."

Tough stand on terror

HOURS after National Security Adviser Ajit Doval met a representative of Iran's Supreme National Security Council in Kazakhstan on Tuesday, Jaish al-Adl militants attacked Iranian Revolutionary Guards' premises in Rask and Chabahar and killed 11 security personnel. Jaish al-Adl is an extremist Sunni Muslim militant group that operates in southeastern Iran and the western Pakistani province of Balochistan. The terror strikes have reignited tensions between Iran and Pakistan after a lull. In January, Iran had targeted two bases of the Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan with missiles, prompting a retaliation from Islamabad.

The developments are of immense significance for India, which has been combating cross-border terrorism for decades. In his address at the meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Astana (Kazakhstan), Doval stressed the need to shun double standards and hold sponsors, financiers and facilitators

of terrorism accountable. He asserted that the perpetrators of terrorism should be effectively and expeditiously dealt with.



It is worrisome that Pakistan-based terrorists are causing trouble across the neighbourhood, be it in India, Iran or Afghanistan. Even as New Delhi has reiterated its tough stand on terror, The Guardian has reported that Indian spy

agency R&AW was involved in killings in Pakistan as part of a larger strategy to eliminate wanted terrorists living on foreign soil. The Ministry of External Affairs has dismissed the allegations as 'false and malicious anti-India propaganda'. The report, which quotes some 'intelligence operatives of India and Pakistan', is in line with the ploy of some Western countries to cast aspersions on India's counter-terror measures. When national security is at stake, New Delhi knows how to tackle the situation without crossing any red line. The US-led West, whose war on terror came a cropper in Afghanistan and Iraq, should review its campaigns abroad before pointing fingers at a nation that has been bleeding from a thousand cuts made by its neighbour.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on editor.acrossstate@gmail.com

Tell me and I forget.

Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.

-Benjamin Franklin

China's LAC moves

India must pay greater attention to border villages

THE Line of Actual Control (LAC) is set to become more contentious, with China announcing plans to set up 175 border villages besides the 628 Xiaokang (prosperous villages) it has already raised along the LAC. These villages have the twin purposes of enhancing China's military readiness for a potential battle with India as well as to bolster its territorial claims. More villages have come up on the Chinese side of the LAC along Arunachal Pradesh. But villages sprouting up in areas along the Ladakh region need a more concerted intervention from the troops and the locals. The Indian response



has been decidedly quick after it concluded that the Xiaokang could enable the Chinese to assert that being populated areas, these should be excluded from border negotiations as per the 2005 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement. By raising villages even in illegally occupied areas

opposite Ladakh, the Chinese are signalling that the region is irrevocably theirs. But the Indian riposte in the form of the Vibrant Villages Programme to turn summer border settlements into round-the-year modern tourist attractions is still a work in progress. To ensure that these

areas don't become ghost villages, the best option is to settle the Ladakhi people there. After all, it is their land that is being coveted by China. They are also well-placed to brave the harsh heights. However, the Centre needs to address the ferment in Ladakh to make the residents willing participants. By calling off the march to the LAC, Ladakhi activist Sonam Wangchuk has refrained from embarrassing the Centre. His reasonableness needs to be complemented by fulfilling the aspirations of the people, who can be a vital cog in the defence of the LAC.

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Safety protocol lax

Paragliding remains a risky affair at Bir Billing

THE death of Ritu Chopra, a seasoned paragliding pilot, at Bir Billing on Sunday underscores a grave concern — the lack of stringent enforcement of international safety norms in paragliding activities. It serves as a stark reminder of the risks associated with this adventure sport when precautions are not strictly adhered to. Bir Billing, nestled amidst

weather conditions exacerbate the risks associated with paragliding. The presence of inexperienced pilots, coupled with the absence of proper regulation of paragliding schools, compromises the safety of tourists. The tendency of local agencies to absolve themselves of responsibility through liability waivers discourages them from prioritising safety

over profit margins. Compounding the problem is the absence of facilities for prompt rescue operations, including standby helicopters equipped with winches. The inordinate delay in saving lives highlights the need for improved logistics. Illegal constructions along the landing site also endanger paragliders and tourists, disrupting

wind currents and increasing accident risks.

It is imperative to strictly enforce international standard operating procedures for paragliding, which mandate stringent checks on pilots' experience, equipment and adherence to guidelines. The authorities concerned must ensure that Bir Billing becomes a paradise for adventure seekers, not a hub of accidents and tragedies.

the picturesque Dhauladhar range in Himachal Pradesh, has gained international recognition as a prime destination for paragliding. However, its soaring popularity has not been matched by adequate safety measures. Three paragliders had lost their lives in seven days in October last year.

The lack of awareness about the challenging topography of the Dhauladhar hills and the unpredictable

THE Congress has unveiled its manifesto ('Nyay Patra') for the General Election, with the focus on ensuring comprehensive justice by addressing pressing issues such as unemployment, poverty, healthcare, farmers' welfare and social inequality.

To tackle the scourge of unemployment, the party has promised several measures — the creation of jobs, the provision of relief for students burdened by educational loans and filling nearly 30 lakh vacancies in Central Government departments. The party's proposal to provide one-year apprenticeship to every diploma holder or graduate below the age of 25 reflects its commitment to creating opportunities for the youth and fostering skill development. It has also announced a plan to provide a legal guarantee for procurement at the minimum support price, aiming to safeguard the interests of farmers. Among the other promises are the restoration of Jammu and

Kashmir's statehood, the scrapping of the Agnipath scheme and the adoption of the Rajasthan model of cashless insurance for universal healthcare. The pledge to provide a national minimum wage of Rs 400 per day highlights the party's emphasis on inclusive growth and social justice. The proposed Mahalakshmi scheme, which would offer Rs 1 lakh per year to every poor family, marks a significant step towards poverty alleviation.

However, the grand old party needs

Battleground Bengal

Onus on ECI to tighten security

THE attack on officials of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) at Bhupatinagar in West Bengal's East Midnapore district on April 6 has aggravated the conflict between the Centre and the state government. The officials were targeted when they were on their way back after arresting two local leaders of the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in connection with a blast that had claimed three lives in December 2022. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has

Sandeshkhali during a search at the house of TMC strongman Shahjahan Sheikh. At that time, one of Shahjahan's employees had accused the ED of entering the party leader's residence without a search warrant. The attacks on officials must be probed thoroughly, even as the TMC has approached the Election Commission of India (ECI) against the alleged misuse of Central agencies in Bengal.

With the stakes high for both the TMC

and its biggest rival in the state, the BJP, the next few weeks are expected to witness the hardening of battlelines. The saffron party, which had made major inroads in Bengal in the 2019

General Election — winning 18 seats out of 42 — is going all out to again give a tough fight to the TMC. The Lok Sabha election in Bengal is scheduled to take place in all seven phases (from April 19 to June 1), which makes it incumbent upon the ECI to tighten security and prevent clashes. Leaders of both parties must be taken to task if they incite their cadres to violence and try to derail the democratic process.

accused the NIA sleuths of provoking local residents and harassing women. The police have filed a counter-FIR against the Central agency's sleuths under Section 354 (outraging a woman's modesty) of the IPC on the complaint of family members of one of the arrested leaders.

The incident is reminiscent of what happened on January 5, when a team of the Enforcement Directorate faced mob violence in North 24 Parganas district's

from allies within the INDIA bloc, the Congress has its work cut out. Even as the road ahead is challenging for the party, a strong leadership can help

Congress manifesto

Party must strive to regain credibility



to go all out to retain its support base and regain credibility. Facing competition

other Opposition parties finetune their manifestos.

Quake resilience

Strict building code helps Taiwan minimise losses

ON Wednesday, Taiwan was shaken by its most powerful earthquake — measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale — in 25 years, a grim reminder of the seismic risks faced by nations situated along the Pacific ‘Ring of Fire’. Yet, amidst the devastation wrought by the tremors, Taiwan’s response stands as a beacon of resilience, underscoring a crucial message: earthquakes don’t kill, buildings do. The country’s location makes it vulnerable to seismic disturbances, and it has invested well in disaster preparedness. In many other countries, buildings fail to withstand tremors because of constructional flaws, exacting a heavy toll on human life.

The island nation’s stringent building code, a robust seismological network, swift



emergency responses and extensive public education campaigns on earthquake safety have proven invaluable. The rollout of administrative reforms following the devastating quake of 1999 that claimed over 2,500

lives highlights the country’s commitment to bolstering its resilience against seismic events. Despite the magnitude of the latest tremor, major losses were averted and Taipei emerged relatively unscathed. It resulted in the

loss of 10 lives and damage to infrastructure.

Sadly, in contrast, India continues to grapple with the tragic consequences of poor construction practices and ineffective disaster management. The quakes in Latur (1993) and Bhuj (2001) had claimed thousands of lives. India has much to learn from Taiwan regarding the importance of prioritising building resilience over disaster response. Meanwhile, the tragedy underscores the need for united rescue efforts, transcending the geopolitical divide. Taiwan’s strategic semiconductor industry, vital to the global supply chain, faces potential disruptions, amplifying concerns amid its strained relations with China.

Progressive guidelines

Catholic body attempts to break down barriers

CITING ‘emerging challenges due to the current socio-cultural, religious and political situation’ in the country, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India (CBCI) has issued a set of guidelines for all educational institutions under its jurisdiction. These include recitation of the Preamble to the Constitution by students during the daily morning assembly, showing respect for all faiths and traditions, not forcing Christian traditions on students of other religions, and setting up an inter-religious prayer room on the campus. The CBCI, the apex decision-making body of the Catholic community in India, has about 14,000 schools, 650 colleges, seven universities, five medical colleges and 450 technical and vocational institutions under its aegis. It is commendable that this influential association has taken the initiative to promote religious and cultural sensitivity and encourage respect for diversity among students as well as staff members.

The Preamble, which is regarded as the soul of the Constitution, showcases the core constitutional values of

justice, equality, liberty and fraternity. Displaying it at the entrance to the school building and making students recite it in the assembly will go a long way in inculcating these values in them.

Giving utmost importance to the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation can help the children grow into mature and responsible citizens with a secular outlook. This is imperative in view of the all-pervasive polarisation in the country. The CBCI guidelines can serve as a model to be emulated by all educational institutions with religious affiliations. The Supreme Court had shown the way in January this year by observing that the right of minorities to establish and administer any educational institution under Article 30(1) of the Constitution was not meant to ghettoise any community. A welcoming and harmonious environment on every campus would be an apt tribute to the framers of the Constitution and a key step towards building a truly developed India.

Kidney racket

Organ trafficking continues despite ban

THE Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994, prohibits commercial dealing in organs; it permits donation only between relatives or with regulatory approval under exceptional circumstances. But despite these regulations, the nefarious trade in human organs continues, as evidenced by recent incidents in Haryana and Rajasthan. An inter-state kidney transplant racket was busted in Gurugram on Thursday. The mastermind, Jharkhand resident Mohammed Murtaza Ansari, is accused of luring donors and recipients, primarily from Bangladesh. Ansari took to social media to put out advertisements promising financial gains for donors. They received around Rs 2 lakh, while he pocketed Rs 8 lakh per transaction. He allegedly facilitated kidney transplants at a premier hospital in Jaipur. Last year, a website soliciting kidney sellers was exposed when the reputed hospital whose name it was misusing complained to the Gurugram police.

The recurrence of such malpractices demonstrates the audacity of organ traffickers and the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies. Criminal syndicates exploit regulatory gaps and utilise digital platforms to evade detection. In 2020, a Panchkula court had sentenced Dr Amit Kumar to seven-year jail for threatening witnesses in a kidney transplant scam. However, such convictions often focus on individuals rather than the organised networks that keep the illegal trade running.

There is an urgent need for stringent measures to combat organ trafficking. The police and other agencies must collaborate closely to dismantle the networks, while stiff penalties must be imposed to deter potential offenders. Addressing the root causes of the menace, such as poverty and the lack of access to affordable healthcare, is paramount. Collective efforts are required from various stakeholders — the authorities, healthcare providers and civil society — to curb the rampant sale of organs.

Pegatron in talks with Tata to sell its India iPhone plant



BENGALURU

Pegatron is in advanced talks to hand over control of its only iPhone manufacturing facility in India to the Tata Group, said two sources with direct knowledge, marking the Taiwanese firm's latest scale back of its Apple partnership.

Under the deal, which has received the backing of Apple, Tata plans to hold at least a 65% stake in a joint venture that will operate the Pegatron plant near Chennai city in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, with the Taiwanese firm providing technical support and holding the rest, one of the sources said. Tata, one of the largest conglomerates in India, will operate the joint venture through its Tata Electronics unit, the second source said.

The Pegatron India factory has around 10,000 employees and makes 5 million iPhones annually.

Over 98 per cent pilots have signed new contract, says Vistara chief Vinod Kannan



New Delhi

Vistara CEO Vinod Kannan on Saturday said the airline hopes to stabilise operations for this month by this weekend and that more than 98 per cent of pilots have signed the new contract.

The full service carrier faced significant disruption in operations earlier this week due to the non-availability of crew and many flights were cancelled.

In a statement, Kannan said the situation has already improved

with its on-time performance improving for the last three days.

"We hope to stabilise our operations for the rest of April 2024 by this weekend," he said.

Referring to the new contract for pilots, he said some pilots have some concerns and queries regarding the contract.

The airline is engaging with them to clarify and resolve the concerns, Kannan said and added that "over 98 per cent of pilots have signed the new contract".

Sensex breaches historic 75,000-mark for first time ever; Nifty climbs to new record peak

Mumbai

Benchmark equity indices continued their record-breaking rally on Tuesday, with the BSE Sensex breaching the historic 75,000-mark for the first time ever in early trade and the Nifty climbing to its fresh new record peak.

Buying in IT stocks contributed the most to the markets rally in early trade.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 381.78 points to reach its all-time peak of 75,124.28. The NSE Nifty advanced 99 points to hit its record peak of 22,765.30.

From the Sensex basket, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies, Tata Motors, Wipro, ICICI Bank and Nestle were the major gainers.

JSW Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Reliance Industries and Larsen & Toubro were among the laggards.



In Asian markets, Tokyo and Hong Kong were trading in the positive territory while Seoul and Shanghai quoted lower.

Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 684.68 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.19 per cent to USD 90.55 a barrel.

"The new records set by the market yesterday confirm the

bullish market undertone. A healthy and desirable trend in the market movement yesterday was the outperformance of the largecaps. This trend is likely to continue," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

The BSE benchmark jumped 494.28 points or 0.67 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 74,742.50 on Monday. The NSE Nifty climbed 152.60 points or 0.68 per cent to 22,666.30.

Combined stock market cap crosses Rs 400L cr for first time

New Delhi

In a rare concurrence, the Sensex as well as the prices of gold and silver touched new heights on Monday. The increase in share prices led to the combined market capitalisation of all BSE-listed companies crossing the Rs 400 lakh crore mark for the first time.

Of the two benchmark stock market indices, the broader Nifty closed at a record 22,666.30 points and the 30-company Sensex also reached an all-time high of 74,869.30 points during intra-day trading. Gold price maintained its upward trajectory and was quoted at Rs. 71,700 per 10 grams in Delhi, up by Rs 350 since its close last week. Gold has risen by Rs. 7,700 per 10 grams since the beginning of the year alone. Silver prices also rose by Rs 800 to an all-time high of Rs 84,000 per kg, up by Rs 800 since last week.

With war clouds hovering

all over the world, gold is in demand as a safe haven currency but in the case of silver, the rise is also because of its use in green energy as it is finding increasing use in solar installations.

On Monday, Nifty gained 152.60 points and Sensex 494.28 points. Analysts Motilal Oswal attributed the bull run in the stock market to favourable economic data releases such as GDP figures, employment reports, and manufacturing data, besides upward trajectory of global economic recovery. The rise in the precious metals pack was due to some or the other black swan event that has hit the markets since 2020. "We have continuously seen year after year, geopolitical tensions have continuously built in risk premium in the market. The pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict has led to support to safe haven assets," it noted.

RBI flags inflation risks, keeps repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent



Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India on Friday decided to keep policy rate unchanged for the seventh time in a row and said that it remains vigilant towards upside risks to food inflation.

The rate increase cycle was paused in April last year after six consecutive rate hikes aggregating to 250 basis points since May 2022.

Announcing the first bi-monthly monetary policy for the current financial year, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has decided to keep the

repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent.

He said MPC will remain watchful of food inflation.

The six-member rate-setting panel by a majority vote of 5:1 favoured the status quo on interest rate, while maintaining focus on withdrawal of accommodative stance.

In February, the Consumer Price-based Inflation (CPI) stood at 5.1 per cent.

The government has mandated RBI to ensure CPI inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side.

GE Aerospace to pump Rs 240 cr into Pune plant



New Delhi

General Electric (GE) Aerospace has announced an investment of over Rs 240 crore to upgrade its manufacturing facility in Pune.

GE engines are used in the Tejas fighter jet. The GE and the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited have a tie-up for making a more powerful engine for the next version of the Tejas. The GE said the investment would allow the facility to add new projects and manufacturing processes by acquiring machines, equipment and specialised tools.

X users begin to lose followers as Musk cracks down on bots, trolls

New Delhi

X users on Friday started losing followers as Elon Musk-run social media platform kicked off the exercise to remove bots.

The action came as spam and porn bots swarmed the platform in the past few months, leaving users flummoxed.

"I lost 48 followers after Elon's bot and troll purge - that was less than 0.002 per cent," posted an X user.

"I lost like 6 followers today. Are bot accounts actually being purged?" another wrote.

Musk had announced that a system purge of bots and trolls was underway.

"Please reply to me or @XEng if legitimate accounts are suspended," said the billionaire.

"X Corp will be tracing the people responsible and bringing the full force of the law to bear upon them," he added.

A user commented: "To the hundreds of bots leaving me



today, I will not miss you."

X safety account also posted that they have kicked off a "significant, proactive initiative to eliminate accounts that violate our Rules against platform manipulation and spam".

"As a result, you may observe

changes in follower counts".

X has not shared about how many bots are currently there on the platform.

In 2022, the Tesla and SpaceX CEO had said that "we will defeat the spam bots or die trying".

Rate cut in Q3 likely if monsoon, crude prices stable, say experts

New Delhi

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the RBI maintained repo rate at 6.5 per cent, which was on the expected lines of the industry. According to experts, the MPC is focusing on reducing inflation towards its 4 per cent target, comforted by high GDP growth. The move towards maintaining stability in lending rates bodes well for the sectors, which have been consistently growing. "While there was some anticipation of rate cuts by the end of 2024, the RBI seems inclined to adopt a wait-and-see approach before initiating a rate cut cycle," said Rajesh Sharma, MD, Capri Global Capital Limited.

Even though the RBI's focus is on reducing inflation to 4%, price uncertainties continue to weigh on the inflation trajectory going forward

RBI has said the tight demand-supply situation in pulses and key vegetables warrants close monitoring, given the forecast of above normal temperatures



during summer. According to Shishir Bajjal, chairman and MD, Knight Frank India, this move provides added support to consumers, ensuring economic growth remains robust. With the government's revised GDP growth projection for FY 24 at 7.6 per cent, manufacturing PMI hitting a 14-year high, strong services PMI, and high Forex reserves, sentiment is further uplifted, promising sustained long-term growth for the domestic economy.

Experts are of the view that while there is expectation of

normal monsoon, food price uncertainties along with rising oil prices will determine the timing of rate cuts. Vijay Kuppa, CEO, InCred Money said, "Till inflation is around 4 per cent on a durable basis, MPC is unlikely to cut rates. So we can expect rate revisions mostly in third quarter of FY25." However, Kishore Lodha, CFO, U Gro Capital Ltd, is of the view that the monsoon is expected to remain good, but crude prices are inching up, which again may push up inflation. Thus, food and fuel remain two areas of concern.

Hero MotoCorp gets Rs 605 cr demand notice from I-T Dept

New Delhi

The country's largest two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp on Thursday said it had received demand notices from the Income Tax department for around Rs 605 crore, including interest, for six assessment years.

On April 3, 2024, the company received assessment orders or demand notices dated March 30, 2024, pertaining to six assessment years from the Income Tax Department, the company said in a regulatory filing. The two-wheeler major is examining the orders/ notices received and shall take appropriate steps, including the filing of appeals and rectification applications, it added.

The notice pertains to six assessment years, amounting to a tax demand of Rs 308.65 crore and interest thereon of Rs 296.22



crore, Hero MotoCorp said.

This is on account of certain disallowances, for the assessment years 2013-14 to 2017-18 and 2019-20, it added. "In the opinion of the management, the demand raised is unsustainable in nature, and is

unlikely to have material impact on financials, operations or other activities of the company," the two-wheeler major stated. Shares of the company on Thursday ended 0.75 per cent lower at Rs 4,522.30 apiece on the BSE.

Inflation, wars creating risks not seen since WWII: JPMorgan CEO

New York

The United States' most influential banker, JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, told investors on Monday that he continues to expect

the US economy to be resilient and grow this year. But he worries geopolitical events including the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war, as well as US political polarisation, might be creating an environment that "may very well be creating risks that could eclipse anything since World War II".

The comments came in an annual shareholder letter from Dimon, who often uses the letter to weigh in broad



topics like politics, regulation and global events and what it might mean to JPMorgan Chase, as well as the broader economy.

"America's global leadership role is being challenged outside by other nations and inside by our polarised electorate," Dimon said. "We need to find ways to put aside our differences and work in partnership with other Western nations in the name of democracy. During this time of great crises, uniting to protect our essential freedoms, including free enterprise, is paramount."

Mukesh Ambani breaks into top 10, ranked at 9th in Forbes global rich list

New Delhi

Oil-to-telecom conglomerate Reliance Industries Ltd head Mukesh Ambani continues to be the richest Indian and has now broken into the world's top 10 wealthiest persons in the latest Forbes 2024 Billionaire List.

Ambani, 66, is ranked ninth on the list with a wealth of USD 116 billion, up from USD 83.4 billion in the 2023 ranking, according to Forbes.

Gautam Adani is the second richest Indian and is ranked at No. 17 on the global list. He is worth USD 84 billion, up from USD 47.2 billion in 2023 when his apples-to-airport conglomerate was rocked by a damning report by US short-seller Hindenburg Research. The Adani group has denied all allegations in the report.

Adani, 61, was worth USD 90 billion in the 2022 ranking.

The Forbes 2024 Billionaires List features 2,781 individuals, an increase of 141 names from last year's list. The



billionaires, according to the list, are richer than ever, worth USD 14.2 trillion in aggregate, up by USD 2 trillion from 2023 and USD 1.1 trillion above the previous record, also set in 2021.

Two-thirds of the list's members are worth more than a year ago; only one-fourth are poorer.

Fashion and cosmetics giant LVMH's Bernard Arnault is at

the top of the list with USD 233 billion wealth, followed by Elon Musk with USD 195 billion and Amazon's Jeff Bezos with USD 194 billion.

Facebook founder Mark

Zuckerberg comes next in the list with a net worth of USD 177 billion.

The US has a record 813 billionaires followed by China with 473 billionaires. India added 31 billionaires to the list compared to last year with the number now reaching 200.

"To calculate net worths, we used stock prices and exchange rates from March 8, 2024," Forbes said.

Other Indians on the list include IT pioneer and HCL co-founder Shiv Nadar at No. 39 with USD 36.9 billion wealth, Jindal group's Savitri Jindal and family at No. 46 with USD 33.5 billion, Sun Pharma's Dilip Shanghvi at No. 69 with USD 26.7 billion, vaccine maker Cyrus Poonawalla at No 90 with USD 21.3 billion, property baron Kushal Pal Singh at No 92 with USD 20.9 billion, and commodities king Kumar Bila at No 98 with USD 19.7 billion.

The Growing Gaps in Global Humanitarian Challenges

Apart from institutional donors, other sources of funding for humanitarian aid have always included rich individual benefactors, companies, and foundations. Some of these are becoming increasingly influential in the humanitarian sector, considering their funding capacity. For instance, the Gates Foundation alone spent over US\$7 billion in 2022. This trend could accentuate in the coming years, although it is difficult to foresee in a more exact manner.

The sustainable funding of the humanitarian sector in the coming decade seems uncertain and, with increased demand, it is likely to be affected by major upheavals. Unless a seismic shift happens: "Needs are on track to outpace resources, leaving an inundated humanitarian system struggling to meet a fraction of needs," according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Could technological developments trigger such seismic shift?

Tech-improved Humanitarian Aid

Restrained funding is already driving efforts to reduce humanitarian costs by improving its efficiency and maximising its reach. Technological developments are undoubtedly playing an important part in these efforts and can be expected to do so in the foreseeable future.

Like any other sectors, the humanitarian one is being reshaped by relevant technologies. There are many current examples, for instance involving the use of drones to deliver critical food or medical supplies to remote areas that would otherwise be impossible or far more costly to reach. A technology already largely adopted by most humanitarian actors is the distribution of cash, notably through mobile phones, allowing people in need to receive aid swiftly and in a dignified way, without having to queue for hours to receive a package that may not be suited to their individual needs. These two examples illustrate cases where the humanitarian sector adopted and adjusted technologies that have been developed for other uses.

In other cases, efforts are made to invent new technological solutions to distinctive humanitarian problems, for instance as a way of tracking real-time monitoring of evacuation status in cases of catastrophes. In Japan, for example, humanitarian actors have developed an app to monitor the flow of people evacuated in cases such as tsunamis, through anonymised data on their successive locations, collected from the use of their smartphones, with their consent obtained through a specific application.

Likewise, the possibilities related to AI are promising for the humanitarian sector. While AI is expected to disrupt 40 percent of all jobs, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the opportunities will also impact the humanitarian sector. But while AI has much lifesaving potential, it is not a silver bullet and also contains risks. Indeed, even if it could facilitate the prompt and effective delivery of aid, this must be done in a responsible manner, guaranteeing at all times the rights and interests of those receiving this aid. Critical potential opportunities

lie in harnessing faster and improved data quality and analyses to enhance predictive capacities and also the quality and rapidity of the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Promising opportunities include real-time damage assessment. When a disaster occurs, planning and delivering an effective humanitarian operation requires knowing as soon as possible how many people are affected, where they are and where they are going, how they are affected, and what their needs are. Automating such assessments improve them dramatically. Efforts are being made to develop automated damage assessment tools as deep-learning models which identify, for instance, damaged buildings in satellite images after a disaster has happened. Decreasing the time needed to assess the needs, from a few days to hours, allows for a quick delivery of the information

PART I

on the ground, and may make a huge difference in terms of the speed of response, thereby saving many more lives.

There are glimmers of hope that tech developments, including AI, may improve our collective capacity to better forecast, including extreme weather events, and therefore drastically improve early warning. In an idealised future, everyone will be forewarned of floods, droughts, or tsunamis. However, technological solutions have limits and will need to be accompanied by other humanitarian and political solutions, to ensure that people can effectively use that knowledge to protect themselves, because they will effectively have the means to reach a safe place.

Improved forecasting may also generate alternative funding for humanitarian efforts, notably through so-called 'forecast-based financing': enabling funding for humanitarian aid for early action based on in-depth forecast information and risk analysis. The Red Cross Movement, which has been exploring such opportunities, reveals: "A key element of forecast-based financing is that the allocation of financial resources is agreed in advance, together with the specific forecast threshold that triggers the release of those resources for the implementation of early actions. The roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in implementing these actions are defined in the Early Action Protocol (EAP). This ensures the full commitment of implementation among the involved stakeholders." Ultimately, the promises of this new form of humanitarian funding would be to anticipate disasters, prevent their impact as much as possible, and reduce human suffering and losses.

In all these areas, innovation and developments are largely driven by companies and individuals, again underlining the role that the private sector can play, and is increasingly playing, in supporting the humanitarian sector.

To be sure, however, these potential

improvements are not a given. The threats are many, as the trends described above of increasing frequency and gravity of catastrophes, compounded by other risks such as those of wars, which could themselves be fueled by and conducted with support of AI systems.

Aid Localisation

In such increasingly demanding humanitarian context, a trend likely to continue and even further increase is the so-called 'localisation' of aid. Localisation could contribute to transforming humanitarian aid, making it possibly more efficient and less costly, and as such help transform it to confront increased demands.

Humanitarian aid is too often conflated with foreign or international assistance when, clearly, in response to any crisis, the first responders are usually local actors and organisations, already present on the field and helping their own people and neighbours. Not only are local humanitarians able to respond faster, especially in the initial hours that are always crucial in emergency operations—they are also able to communicate in the local languages and have greater sensitivity to cultural contexts. They are intimately familiar with the situation on the ground and the genuine needs of the population. These all make them particularly effective, and eliminate numerous costs like international travel and translation services, thus allowing more resources to be allocated to providing assistance and saving lives.

The Istanbul World Humanitarian Summit of 2016 helped highlight the importance of local humanitarian actors and of the localisation of aid, as underlined by the UN Secretary-General who declared that aid is to be "as local as possible, as international as necessary."

This trend can be expected to continue, as the often-lower financial cost of local humanitarian organisations, compared to their 'international' counterparts, gives them a comparative advantage that is likely to persist. Moreover, it matches the general push towards asserting national sovereignty and the recognition that States have the primary responsibility in protecting their people and providing them with at least basic services at all times, including and especially in crises.

Ultimately, given the increasingly fragile and fragmented international systems, global and regional, humanitarian and other actors will have to gradually become more willing to contemplate not only reforms but also collaborations. Suggestions for improvements or transformations should not be perceived as threats, but this is challenging in an environment where there is fear of opening a Pandora's box, undermining status quo, or questioning established practices.

The aim should be to not allow the humanitarian space to become a zero-sum game, especially when assessed in light of its ultimate objectives: to save lives and restore people's dignity. As observed by a commentary from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore: "Rather than

seeing the humanitarian space as a by-product of another time, it should be viewed as an avenue for cooperation and change. It is in the area of disaster response that countries and sectors come together to provide humanitarian assistance to those most in need. It is therefore an avenue where bold changes should be made to meet the challenges of today and to demonstrate possibilities of cooperation in action."

A Principled Humanitarian Approach and Respect for International Humanitarian Law?

Perhaps the most crucial global humanitarian challenge expected to persist beyond 2030 is to secure access to all those in need in conflict situations. The capacity of humanitarian actors to reach all is underpinned by their neutrality, impartiality, and independence. These principles must be recognised and accepted by all, especially by all parties in contexts of conflicts. Yet, whether in Ukraine or Gaza, Sudan or Yemen, they are fundamentally challenged. This is related to the risks of further erosion of international humanitarian law—the body of laws that limit the conduct of warfare and require that civilians and objects such as hospitals, schools and services crucial for people's lives be protected at all times in conflicts.

This bedrock of humanitarian aid has been shaken to the core by what the world is witnessing in recent conflicts. The targeting of civilians and their properties, displacement of civilians, even attacks on schools, healthcare personnel and facilities, have become all too common. Endless images of human suffering risk numbing public opinion to their own humanitarian needs and the rules that protect all of us. While the world is rapidly changing, some deep concerns and ethical considerations have to remain the same. International humanitarian law encapsulates key concepts common to most, if not all cultures and religions, and ultimately to the whole of humanity. We must promptly return to full respect for international humanitarian law.

Conclusion

While predictions are methodologically fraught, it can be safely assumed that global humanitarian challenges will become increasingly complex in the coming years and decades and thereby necessitate critical adjustments on the part of all humanitarian actors, whether international or regional organisations, governments, or civil society actors.

As the humanitarian sector adjusts to an environment that requires more nimble solutions, it will increasingly be able to rely on digital and other emerging technical tools, while confronting the massive challenge of delivering far more to meet growing demands with far less predictable financial resources. Yet, saving lives and restoring people's dignity in times of crises remains a basic legal and moral obligation, and is arguably the very purpose of political governance, nationally, regionally, and internationally.

The Siachen Story: The Inadvertent Role of Two German Explorers in Starting the Race to the World's Highest Battlefield

Before 1984, few people in India or Pakistan had heard about the Siachen Glacier as it was never a fact in issue between the two countries and rarely figured in any security discourse or interaction between the sides. Even three bloody wars between the two neighbours and several mountaineering expeditions in the region had failed to disturb the peace in the area. However, this changed when Pakistan's formal claim to the entire region—contrary to its admitted position that it was disputed and yet to be demarcated—triggered a pre-emptive Indian reaction on 13 April 1984. On this day, the Indian armed forces launched Operation Meghdoot and moved onto Salto Heights, taking effective control of the entire Siachen Glacier region.

Notably, Siachen caught the attention of the Indian military planners only around 1978, when details of all the mountaineering expeditions taking place in the region were dug out and analysed. In fact, most of the published work on military activities in the region and Pakistan's arguments conceived in hindsight to justify its claim over the area emerged only after India took control of the Salto Heights in 1984.

While much has been written about the September 1978 Indian expedition to Teram Kangri led by Col. Narinder 'Bull' Kumar, little is known about the Pakistani activities in the region, especially the German Bilafond-Siachen-Kondus expedition that took place in the same year. This expedition was conceived by two German explorers, physicist Jaroslav Poncar and mathematician Volker Stallbohm, who, along with Wolfgang Kohl and Major Asad Raza, reached the Siachen Glacier in the summer of 1978 from the Pakistani side. Incidentally, Poncar and Stallbohm were also instrumental in triggering Kumar's interest in East Karakoram. But how did they meet him in the first place? How did they end up on Siachen from the Pakistani side, and, more importantly, what drew Kumar's and India's attention to the glacier?

This report presents Poncar's and Stallbohm's accounts of events over 45 years after the expedition, collated through in-person and online interviews and self-published works. While Kumar and Lt. Gen. M.L. Chibber's works detailing the Indian interest in Siachen are well known, Poncar and Stallbohm's version closes the loop and gives fresh insights into their own interest in Siachen, their interactions with Kumar and the map they gave him, which piqued his curiosity and started the race to Siachen.

I came to India for the first time in July 1974 when travel restrictions to Ladakh were lifted. From Delhi, I landed in Srinagar and then took the bus to Leh after purchasing the ticket with great difficulty,

as no one believed that the restrictions had been lifted just a week ago. During this trip, I saw the spectacular landscapes of Lamayuru and was mesmerised by the descent from the Kangoo Loops to the Indus Valley. During the rest of the drive to Leh, while travelling along the Indus, I began thinking of a possible boat trip on the river till Khalsi. Back home in Germany, I checked and found that it had not been done before and started planning for it. I returned to India in the summer of 1975, accompanied by my friend Volker Stallbohm, and we brought along an inflatable boat for the expedition. The Indus Valley beyond Leh was open to foreigners only up to Upshi, about 40 kilometres further east while we intended to navigate the Indus from Demchok where it enters India as Senghe Chu, almost 300 kilometres beyond Upshi. The Ministry of Home Affairs was not inclined to give us the inner line permit for riding a boat in a strategically important region. So,



on the advice of Magdalene Duckwitz, the Cultural Counsellor at the German Embassy in Delhi, we decided to meet, the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah, and seek his help.

We reached Srinagar and sought an appointment; he agreed to meet us the following day. I had taken a picture of Sheikh Sahab at Hazratbal in 1974 when he was released from house arrest and was carrying it in my luggage. So, dressed in simple jeans, we stood before Sheikh Abdullah and presented him with the picture. He was very pleased and asked what he could do for us. When we informed him about the expedition, he asked his secretary to connect us with Kumar and then took us to a cultural programme he had arranged for the wife of the president of Guyana. The next day, Kumar came to see us at the Tourist Reception Centre where we were staying. At that time, he looked after the High Altitude Warfare School in Gulmarg. Though a famous mountaineer, he had just completed a rafting trip on the river Teesta. When we met him and told him about the Indus expedition, he was very excited and wanted to join us. He mentioned that we

will have a chance of setting foot beyond Upshi only if he is a part of the team and officially the expedition's leader. We agreed immediately, as having him with us meant that all our permissions and logistics were sorted out. And so, the Indo-German Indus rafting expedition of 1975 was born. Kumar too was very happy with the publicity he got from this new adventure, and news about it was in the newspapers the very next day. Kumar then put us in touch with GSO 1 (General Staff Officer) Leh Lt. Col K.S. Kohli for making further arrangements. Later, Kohli too joined the expedition along with Abdul Aziz Wani from the Department of Tourism, Srinagar. We were set to sail on 1 August 1975, but Kumar reached Leh only on 30 July and that too without the inner line permit. At that stage, I said I will cancel the expedition if we cannot start further up the Indus Valley. It was only after Kohli's intervention that we were allowed to start in Chumathang,

some 120 kilometres east of Leh. Barring a few incidents, the trip went off well. We also got a lot of publicity in the newspapers and enjoyed the full support of Sheikh Abdullah. Though we had a long friendship with Kohli, and I was in touch with him till he passed away recently, our relationship with Kumar was strictly professional, and we were never close.

After the completion of the Indus expedition, we were in Leh in August 1975 when Mahmood Rahman, the District Commissioner (DC) of Leh, proposed that we should make use of the opportunity and paddle down the river Nubra since we had come all the way from Germany with an inflatable boat. The Nubra flows from the Siachen Glacier and meets river Shyok before flowing into the Indus. Since the Nubra Valley is in a totally restricted area, there was no question of paddling on it at such a short notice. But the DC's idea had drawn our attention towards Karakoram, which had far-reaching consequences for us and the entire region. Back in Germany, I got hold of specialised literature on the discovery and exploration of the Western Himalayas and Karakoram and read about British explorer Tom Longstaff's visit to the Siachen Glacier in 1909. I found that the glacier had also been explored by the Workman Expedition, which had come in from the West, and later in 1930 by Italian explorer Giotto Dainelli who came in from the Nubra Valley. Since we had a good relationship with Sheikh Abdullah and had just completed a successful rafting expedition, the idea of going to this glacier from the Nubra Valley started taking shape in my mind.

Next year, in the later part of the summer of 1976, Volker and I were in Zaskar as we wanted to explore the region before the completion of the road from Kargil to Padum, a section of which had already been built. We went by jeep to Panikhar at the foot of the Nun Kun and explored Rangdum Gompa, Pensi La, Stod, Kushul, Padum, Yulchung, Nerak, Gyal Po, and other places before returning to Leh. Volker had to go back but I stayed in Leh to attend the Dalai Lama's sermon. Siachen was still on my mind. Though I wanted to explore Siachen, the big problem with the Nubra Valley, Siachen, and the mountains in East Karakoram was the requirement of the inner line permit. I felt that if Kumar were to accompany us, then this issue would be sorted out and, therefore, I decided to meet him again. I think we met in Srinagar (but I do not recall the exact date or venue) and I proposed to him that we can go together to the longest glacier in the world. However, surprisingly, the publicity addict was not interested as he had just returned from some expedition and was already talking about going to Kanchenjunga next year. His response was "there is no adventure in walking on long glaciers" and the matter was left at that.

Back home after two trips to the Western Himalayas, Volker was infected with real mountain fever. He went climbing in the Eifel to Niddegen and also became a member of the German Alpine Club. Since the Zaskar trip had been particularly exciting, we decided to look for new adventure in the same region, and while doing so our eyes fell on Siachen. Volker started looking at some of the unclimbed 7000 metre peaks rising above Siachen. One of these mountains, the Mamostong, seemed to be easily accessible from the Nubra Valley, and we decided to make an attempt to climb it. I purchased some maps of the region from the Gleumes Geobuchhandlung, a Geographic Bookstore in Cologne (it no longer exists). These were standard maps compiled by the US Army Map Service in 1953 and were based on old Survey of India maps. The Leh, Shyok, and Chulung sheets were freely available in the stores and Volker used them to prepare a general route description to Mamostong Kangri and Saser Kangri. These maps did not show any ceasefire line, control line, or separation between India and Pakistan. Since both our earlier plans to the Nubra Valley for rafting and Siachen had not materialised, this time we decided to follow the steps we took for the Indus expedition. We decided that Volker would fly to India with the intention of once again meeting Sheikh Abdullah and Kumar and seek their support for a trip to Nubra Valley and the Mamostong Kangri as accessing it from Ladakh was the easiest way to get there.

India as a gas-based economy: Six years to go

In 2016, the Government of India (GOI) announced that India would increase the share of natural gas in its primary energy basket from 6.14 percent in 2016 to 15 percent by 2030 and become a "gas-based economy". Since the announcement, the share of natural gas in India's primary energy basket (commercial energy, not including energy derived from unprocessed biomass) increased marginally to 6.83 percent in 2020 but has since fallen to 5.7 percent in 2022. The share of natural gas in India's primary energy basket was 9.43 percent in 2010 when domestic gas production substantially increased. If the current trend continues, the probability of India becoming a gas-based economy by 2030 is low.

Trends in Production and Consumption

India's natural gas consumption in 2022-23 was about 164.3 million metric standard cubic meters per day (mmscmd). To increase consumption to 600 mmscmd by 2030, the annual growth rate in consumption has to be more than 10.5 percent, which is not an impossible target. In the period 2008-2018, natural gas consumption in China grew by over 13 percent. Behind this double-digit growth rate for natural gas consumption in China was an annual average economic growth rate of over 8 percent, regulatory reform for transparency and flexibility along with focused policy mandates. India has implemented progressive policies in the gas sector, but production and consumption trends in the last decade are not very encouraging.

To increase consumption to 600 mmscmd by 2030, the annual growth rate in consumption has to be more than 10.5 percent, which is not an impossible target.

In India, net domestic production of natural gas declined from 108.94 mmscmd to 92.23 mmscmd, demonstrating an annual average decline of about 1.6 percent in 2012-13 to 2022-23. Import of LNG (liquefied petroleum gas) increased from 39.24 mmscmd in 2012-13 to 72.07 mmscmd in 2022-23, representing an annual average growth of about 6.2 percent. In the same period, consumption of natural gas increased from 148.18 mmscmd to 164.30 mmscmd, showing an annual average growth of about 1.3 percent. Peak domestic production of 143.61 mmscmd was in 2010-11 while peak consumption of 175.74 mmscmd as well as peak LNG import of 92.84 mmscmd were in 2019-20 prior to the pandemic.

Sector-wise growth trends

In the '70s and '80s, natural gas consumption grew at double-digit rates annually, typical of a new consumption segment, starting from a small base. In the 1990s and 2000s growth in consumption of natural gas slowed down to an annual average of 6-7 percent. In the 2010s and 20s, consumption growth fell to an annual average of around 1 percent. In the decade ending in March 2023, natural gas consumption by the power sector fell by an annual average



of 3.7 percent from 30.92 mmscmd in 2012-13 to 22 mmscmd in 2022-23. Consumption of compressed natural gas (CNG) supplied to domestic and transportation segments made up for the decline in consumption by the power sector, recording an annualised growth of 8.2 percent in the same period. While consumption growth in the industrial and sponge iron segments remained robust at 12 percent and 16 percent respectively, consumption in the refining segment grew only by an annual average of just 0.1 percent in the decade ending in March 2023 and consumption growth in the petrochemical segment fell by an annualised rate of 1.9 percent in the same period.

Consumption of compressed natural gas (CNG) supplied to domestic and transportation segments made up for the decline in consumption by the power sector, recording an annualised growth of 8.2 percent in the same period.

In 2013-14, the power sector accounted for 23 percent of natural gas consumption, but by 2022-23, its share had fallen to about 13 percent. If natural gas is promoted as a fuel for providing power at short notice with costs reflected in tariffs, the offtake of gas for power generation may increase. However, a decline in the cost of battery storage solutions that can also provide power at short notice to make up for intermittency in renewable power generation is likely to reduce the attractiveness of gas as fuel for power generation. The share of the fertiliser segment in natural gas consumption increased marginally from 32 percent in 201-14 to 33 percent in 2022-23. India plans to stop the import of urea by 2025 which means demand will shift to natural gas (feedstock for urea production). This could potentially increase the consumption of imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) by the fertiliser segment.

The share of CNG in natural gas consumption increased from just over 16 percent in 2013-14 to 33 percent in 2022-23. CNG consumption has potential for growth in the future but it is dependent on the availability of

domestic gas at regulated prices and investment in infrastructure. The unified tariff (UFT) policy introduced by the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) in April 2023 could facilitate growth in CNG consumption as it aims to create a single, consistent and fair tariff structure for natural gas transport across the country. The UFT policy will apply to a network of 21 pipelines, representing around 90 percent of pipelines in operation or under construction. The unified tariff is a fixed charge determined by the PNGRB and based on the levelized cost of service of the entire pipeline network, and is revised periodically to reflect the changes in pipeline costs and utilisation. The zonal factor is variable and depends on the tariff zone. There are three tariff zones: the first up to 300 kilometres (km) from the gas entry point, the second between 300 km and 1,200 km and the third beyond 1,200 km. The zonal factors for the three zones are 0.25, 0.5 and 1.0 respectively. The zonal tariff, corresponding to the fee paid by the shipper to the pipeline operator for the transport of gas, is calculated by multiplying the unified tariff by the zonal factor. A stable, competitive and transparent pricing regime enabled by UTF will benefit domestic production and demand and in addition attract investment in gas infrastructure. The suggestion from the Energy Transition Advisory Committee (ETAC) to develop strategic gas storage could also strengthen the country's energy supply security and reduce price volatility both of which could potentially boost demand for natural gas. The government is reported to be studying the prospect of developing gas storage with a capacity of 3-4 bcm (billion cubic meters). The share of petrochemicals and refining segments in natural gas consumption in 2022-23 was lower than that in 2013-14. The sector is dependent

on imported LNG and high volatility in the price of imported LNG contributed to the decline in natural gas by these sectors. The availability of substitutes at more certain price prospects also contributed to the reduction in natural gas consumption by the refining and petrochemicals segments.

Takeaways

Notwithstanding the attractiveness of natural gas as a bridge fuel for India, gas faces stiff competition from coal in terms of affordability and energy security (availability of domestic coal) and from solar and wind in terms of environmental acceptability. In the context of emissions, it is well established that natural gas scores over coal and oil. Coal-to-gas switching is generally seen as the means to rapid reduction in CO₂ emissions. Typically, natural gas emits 50-60 percent less CO₂ when combusted in an efficient power plant compared to emissions from a typical coal plant. Considering only tail-pipe emissions, natural gas used as fuel for transportation emits 15-20 percent less emissions than petrol when burned in a modern vehicle.

The fact that LNG supply chains produce more emissions per unit of gas than pipeline gas because of the additional energy required for liquefaction is used to strengthen the case against gas.

But there is the environmentalist argument that gas is not necessarily carbon-free and investment in gas supply chains would lock in emissions and create new path dependencies that would only extend the life of fossil fuels. The conclusion is that facilitating natural gas use is inconsistent with the goal of decarbonisation and it would potentially create stranded assets. The fact that LNG supply chains produce more emissions per unit of gas than pipeline gas because of the additional energy required for liquefaction is used to strengthen the case against gas.

Despite these shortcomings, gas has contributed to emission reduction. Prior to the pandemic, natural gas contributed to a 1.7 percent fall in global emissions on account of coal to gas switching in the United States and Europe. In the US, coal to gas switching was driven by the price competitiveness of gas over coal and in Europe coal to gas switching was driven by high carbon prices. In India, coal's cost competitiveness is not likely to be eroded by natural gas, especially when most of it is imported. Carbon prices, even if implemented are not likely to be high, as India already imposes excessive taxes on fossil fuel consumption. It appears that India will need more than six months to become a gas-based economy.

Making profit a public good: Creating shared values between business and society

What justifies the existence of the private corporation? According to Milton Friedman, it is maximising economic profit. For businesses, pursuance of any other social objective apart from profit would be “pure and unadulterated socialism”. The Friedman doctrine can therefore be interpreted as the doctrine of “shareholder primacy”, hailed as the ultimate goal of private corporations. Even acts of corporate charity, when seen through this lens, are touted as strategies to polish the company's image and charm consumers. Such a stance resonated strongly in an era where financial scarcity overshadowed concerns about the depletion of human, natural, and social resources. But was this shareholder-centric view always the norm?

While cases like the 1919 Dodge v Ford Motor Co. underscored the profit-for-stockholders ethos, the mid-20th century started narrating a different story. During the 1940s to 1970s, a period of remarkable prosperity and American corporate dominance, a new narrative emerged. As corporations cemented their economic stronghold and entire communities grew dependent on them, the notion that businesses existed solely for shareholder gain started waning. The era witnessed a shift towards a more inclusive perspective, advocating for corporations to serve a broader constellation of stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the wider public. Icons of management and economic thought, like Peter Drucker and Carl Kaysen, championed this expanded view. They argued that corporations should prioritise a range of interests beyond just those of the shareholders, emphasising a duty to the company as an institution. This period reflected a significant evolution in the understanding of a corporation's purpose, moving away from strict shareholder wealth maximisation towards a vision of corporations as entities with responsibilities to multiple groups in society.

The era witnessed a shift towards a more inclusive perspective, advocating for corporations to serve a broader constellation of stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the wider public.

With the evolution of the global landscape, we today confront a world starkly different from the assumptions of the Friedmanian doctrine. The current generation remains a firsthand witness to the accelerating impacts of climate change, rampant air pollution, and the increasing conflicts arising from the indiscriminate depletion of our natural resources. Rather, businesses' pursuit of a narrow conception of profits is now often thought of as a major cause of social, environmental and climatic problems



that plague humankind. Companies are widely perceived as rent-seeking units that meet their bottom-line requirements at the cost of natural resources and the environment—broadly at the cost of the natural ecosystem that provides ecosystem services to the human community. This myopic pursuit of profit makes businesses oblivious to the externality costs they impose on society. Further, this impedes the ability of businesses to address evolving climate risks and transition towards environmental sustainability.

Indeed, at the heart of numerous global environmental crises lies the inability of free markets to adequately consider the social costs of economic activities. This hangover from classical economic thinking, which erroneously assumes the cost of environmental resources to be negligible, overlooks the stark reality of our modern era. Today, we inhabit a world where the scarcity of available natural capital stands as one of the foremost constraints on sustainable growth.

Shared value creation

In the modern era, where it is alleged by Porter and Kramer that the “... Capitalist system is under siege” due to the myopic vision of businesses—the definition of profit needs to change. No longer can profit remain a private good but should be associated with creating shared values that focus on identifying and expanding the connections between private returns and societal progress. Therefore, companies need to bring in climate and environmental goals in the framework of their central strategy and profiteering activities. This necessitates a broader delineation of “profit” by inculcating the dimension of public goods into it.

To be sure, the case for making profit a public good is not an altruistic one. Friedman and others have built their arguments against incorporating a social aspect into business on the premise that pursuing objectives beyond economic profits undermines the interests of both shareholders and employees within the company. Essentially, they argue that corporate executives who prioritize

social objectives might be taxing their internal stakeholders for broader societal welfare—an area traditionally governed by the state.

Friedman and others have built their arguments against incorporating a social aspect into business on the premise that pursuing objectives beyond economic profits undermines the interests of both shareholders and employees within the company.

However, this argument holds less water today given that profit and societal good are more strongly correlated than one might imagine. A 2022 study reveals that companies with the highest investment in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reveal higher financial returns in terms of both value and profitability. Therefore, business practices that are embedded in the sustainability principles ensure profitability thereby establishing the basis for creating shared value between its shareholders and society at large.

Myopic businesses, indoctrinated with the vision of “shareholder primacy” through profit maximising practices, fail to recognize two crucial elements: a) their role in today's global environmental crises, and b) their susceptibility to becoming casualties of these crises. Businesses that do not adequately quantify and address the impact of climate change on their future profitability are less likely to be able to sustain themselves in the long run.

Creating shared values between business and society will not happen on its own. There is a need for a new international framework that will develop a new set of business objectives prioritising profits as a means to create public goods. Let us take the case of Nestle in this context. Their Creating Shared Value and Sustainability Report 2023 mentions the various pillars of this initiative that entail: a) supporting tasty and balanced diets; b) delivering food safety and quality; c) progressing to net zero; d) promoting sustainable agriculture through sustainable sourcing and procurement principles; and e) promoting circularity in packaging and marketing. This shows that Nestle's intervention is impacting the

entire value chain beginning from the most fundamental resource where its origin lies, i.e. land or natural capital to the terminal point of the value chain, i.e., consumers. It is by enhancing land productivity through sustainable agricultural practices thereby bringing about the well-being of the farm community, interventions helping sustainable procurements, ensuring circular economy, and increasing the well-being or surplus for the end consumers, that Nestle ensures sustainable bottom lines. In the process, Nestle's profit emerges as a public good: even if not perfect (to the extent of being non-excludable and non-rival in consumption), but definitely with characteristics of touching upon various nodes of the value-chain and various components of its corporate ecosystem.

The bigger concern here is that it is only the bigger firms that realise that a long-term vision of the corporate bottom lines cannot only ensure the creation of social value but also the co-creation of value by the firm and its broader ecosystem. This is not true for the smaller firms of the Global South. What is more important here is the acknowledgement that a longer planning horizon for a firm brings a different dimension to the justification of its existence: moving from a short-term economic rate of return to a long-term social rate of return. This social rate of return, due to its scalability at a societal level, turns out to be way higher than the economic rate of return viewed through the lens of profit of the firm. This casts a serious question on the Friedmanian “shareholder primacy” doctrine.

While Friedmanian doctrine is driven by market forces, the inherent problem here is that firms' myopic vision of profit converted markets as myopic institutions. If only markets emerge as visionary institutions exhibiting the clairvoyance of foreseeing the future, the shared value creation will emerge as a market-driven norm. Given that this is not the case, it is important that governmental interventions whether at the levels of the multilateral forums like G20 or BRICS or at national and sub-national levels find their way into this game. Governments will have to work with private corporations to provide them with a framework for making profit a public good through a long-run vision of shared value creation. Economic incentives as well as regulatory nudges will have to play their roles here. Yet, any new international framework must take into account the unique socio-economic challenges that businesses in the Global South continue to struggle with. This will necessitate a dialogue between the businesses of the Global North and South to bring about an understanding of the common goals while acknowledging the divergences in pathways.

Akshay Kumar, Tiger Shroff pray at Abu Dhabi BAPS Hindu Mandir before 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' release

Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff, who are currently in Abu Dhabi to promote their upcoming action entertainer 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan', have sought blessings at the Bochasanwasi Akshar

paired with black trousers. Tiger is sporting a green kurta and beige coloured pants.

The duo is seen joining hands and touching the feet of the temple's priest. The actors are having an interaction with the priest and taking a round of the temple.

Akshay and Tiger are also seen doing aarti inside the temple.

The post is captioned as, 'Got the opportunity to visit the BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, it was an absolutely divine experience.'

Akshay also extended warm greetings for Navratri, Gudi Padwa and Ugadi.

'May these auspicious occasions bring joy, prosperity, and new beginnings to you and your loved ones,' he added.

Presented by Vashu Bhagnani and Pooja Entertainment in association with AAZ

films, 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan', also stars Sonakshi Sinha, Manushi Chhillar and Alaya F, is written and directed by Ali Abbas Zafar.

It is produced by Vashu Bhagnani, Deepshikha Deshmukh, Jacky Bhagnani, Himanshu Kishan Mehra and Ali Abbas Zafar.

Jr NTR, Sunny Deol, Suniel Shetty, Preity Zinta send out Ugadi, Gudi Padwa, Navreh wishes

A string of Indian film personalities, including names such as Jr NTR, Sunny Deol, Sai Pallavi, Suniel Shetty and Preity Zinta, among many others, sent out their good wishes on the occasion of Ugadi, Gudi Padwa and Navreh on Tuesday.

Ugadi, considered the beginning of the Hindu New Year, is celebrated in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Gudi Padwa in Maharashtra, Yugad in Karnataka, and Navreh in Kashmir.

Celebrities took to social media to extend their wishes to their fans and well-wishers.

Jr NTR wrote on X, 'Wishing everyone a Happy Ugadi, Gudi Padwa and Chaitra Sukhladi.'

Actor Sunny Deol wished everyone luck, success, and happiness.

He wrote, 'Wishing everyone a very happy and prosperous Gudi Padwa, Baisakhi, Navratri, Ugaadi, Navreh and Cheti Chand. May this new year bring luck, success and happiness for us all. #Ugadi #HinduNavVarsh.'

Star Nani simply wrote, 'Wish you all a very happy Ugadi. #HappyUgadi.'

Actor Sudheer Babu said, 'Happy Ugadi! Wishing you all a year filled with new opportunities, new adventures, and new beginnings!'

Actor Suniel Shetty wished everyone 'joy, prosperity, and countless blessings'.

He wrote, 'Happy Gudi Padwa to all! Wishing for joy, prosperity, and countless



blessings on this auspicious day. Let's embrace new beginnings with optimism and spread positivity everywhere we go. #GudiPadwa.'

Actress Sai Pallavi said, 'Mee Andariki Ugadi Subhakankshalu, I wish everyone positivity and love.'

Actor Randeeep Hooda urged everyone to be positive and kind.

He said, 'As you all hoist the Gudi today, let's also raise our spirits high and fill the world with positivity and kindness. Wishing everyone a very happy #GudiPadwa. Also, warm greetings on Chaitra Navratri, Ugadi, Cheti Chand and Navreh. May the #HinduNavVarsh be full of hope, energy, health and

prosperity for all.'

Actress Preity Zinta said, 'May the auspicious occasion of Gudi Padwa bring you happiness, prosperity, and success. Wishing you and your family a joyous and prosperous New Year! Happy Gudi Padwa! #GudiPadwa #NewYear #Ting.'

The actress then wished everyone Happy Ugadi as she wrote, 'Wishing you a year filled with new beginnings, joy, and prosperity. Happy Ugadi to you and your loved ones! #Ugadi #NewYear #Ting.'

Actress Esha Deol said, 'Happy Gudi Padwa.'

Filmmaker Gopichand Malineni said, 'Wishing you all #HappyUgadi.'

Amitabh Bachchan hosts celebration for wife Jaya's 76th birthday

As his 'better half', Jaya Bachchan, turned 76 on Tuesday, megastar Amitabh Bachchan penned a note expressing his love and gratitude for her.

The actor also shared that it was a 'quiet family bring in' at midnight.

Taking to the blog, Big B shared, 'It is in the morn of another family birth... of which that has required no explanation...

the better half celebrates her birthday TODAY, and all the greetings for her are recognised and shown gratitude, as always.'

'A quiet family 'bring in' for the 9th on the midnight hour... and the love of immediate family presence,' he added.

In June 1973, Big B and Jaya Bachchan got married. The two have a daughter, Shweta, and a

son, Abhishek Bachchan.

The two have worked together in films like 'Sholay', 'Abhimaan', 'Zanjeer', 'Chupke Chupke', 'Mili', and 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham', among others.

They were last seen together on screen in R Balki's 2016 film 'Ki & Ka' in a special cameo.



'Not joining any party or contesting elections', Sanjay Dutt puts rumours to rest

Bollywood actor Sanjay Dutt, who will be seen in the upcoming Kannada film 'KD - The Devil', has cleared the air about reports of him joining politics.

The actor took to X on Monday to share that as of now, he has no intention of stepping into the arena of politics. He also



requested his followers not to believe in such rumours, saying that if there's any political development in his career, he will be the first to announce it.

"I would like to put all the rumours about me joining politics to rest. I am not joining any party or contesting elections. If I do decide to step into the political arena, I will be the first one to announce it. Please refrain from believing what is being

circulated in the news about me as of now," Dutt tweeted.

On the work front, the actor also has a tentpole in the form of 'Welcome to Jungle' in the pipeline. The film features an ensemble cast and is a standalone sequel to 'Welcome' and 'Welcome Back'.

At an event in Dehradun recently, actress Gul Panag talked about how women can empower each other

At an event in Dehradun recently, actress Gul Panag talked about women empowerment. "Women empowerment starts with uniting women. When I am with women, I feel that I have my own empowerment. Because I believe that one woman can inspire and encourage another woman. And I consider myself very fortunate that I am here. I was invited, and I was given a chance to speak. The challenges that women are facing are universal. They should be talked about. I believe it will make these challenges easy," she said.

She added, "In the environment and society where we are conditioned to put everybody before us, we typically put ourselves last. Now what that does is compromise our ability to do the very job that's been thrust on our shoulders. Take care of the family; take care of the home. And whatever it



may be — whether you're a stay-at-home mother or a working mother — whatever you do, you have a disproportionate share of responsibility on your shoulders.

Birthday boy Allu Arjun shares stunning visuals from Pushpa 2: The Rule teaser

The teaser of the upcoming sequel Pushpa 2: The Rule was unveiled on Monday on the occasion of Telugu superstar Allu Arjun's birthday.

It features the Jaathara sequence from the film. Jaathara is a festival to honour the Hindu tribal goddesses, celebrated in the state of Telangana. Each year more than 10 million devotees visit this four-day festival.

The teaser shows Allu dressed as a goddess at the Jaathara with heavy make-up on. There's one particular shot where Allu lifts the pallu of the saree with his foot and wraps it around himself.

The teaser also has a fight sequence where Allu's character beats up the guys at the Jaathara, and walks away with the signature tilt of his



character. Allu also took to his X and shared the teaser as he thanked his followers for their love. He wrote, "I thank each and everyone of you for the birthday wishes! My heart is full of gratitude. Please take this teaser as my way of saying thank you."

The film also stars Rashmika Mandanna and Fahadh Fasil in the lead roles. The music of the film is composed by Devi Sri Prasad. The background score in the teaser also stands out as it deploys unique sounds which are mainly software-generated. The high-speed shots add up

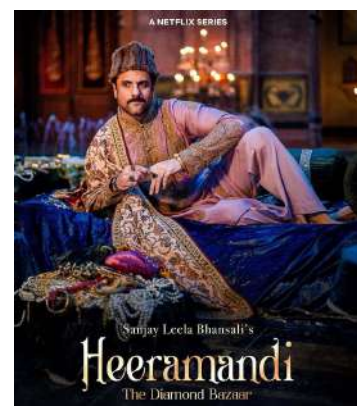
to the anticipation for the film.

Produced by Mythri Movie Makers and directed by Sukumar, Pushpa 2: The Rule is slated to release in theatres worldwide on August 15.

Netflix unveils first look of Fardeen Khan from Sanjay Leela Bhansali's OTT series 'Heeramandi'

Streaming service Netflix on Saturday shared the first look of actor Fardeen Khan from "Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar", the upcoming period drama series that marks filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali's OTT debut. The streamer also unveiled the character posters of senior actor Shekhar Suman and his son Adhyayan Suman as well as Taha Shah from the show, set during the freedom struggle movement in India. With "Heeramandi", Khan is making a return to acting after a gap of nearly 15 years. He was last seen in 2010's "Dulha Mil Gaya".

The 50-year-old actor, known for movies such as "Jungle", "Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya", "Bhoot", "Dev" and "No Entry", plays the character of Wali Mohammed in the show. "Caught in a whirlwind struggle of love and duty, Wali Mohammed attempts to reconcile his heart's desire with his royal responsibilities. Fardeen Khan makes his spectacular return to the screen as Wali Mohammed," Netflix India posted on its social



media handles along with Khan's character poster.

Billed as an epic saga of love, power, revenge and freedom, the series explores the cultural reality of 'Heeramandi', a dazzling district, through the stories of courtesans and their patrons set against the tumultuous backdrop of the Indian freedom struggle of the 1940s.

Set to be released on the streamer's platform on May 1, "Heeramandi" stars Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Richa Chadha, Sharmin Segal, Aditi Rao Hydari, and Sanjeeda Shaikh in the lead roles.

'Old but gold': For Djokovic and Bopanna, dedication, experience is mantra for success

Monte Carlo

For Rohan Bopanna, experience counts a lot while unflinching dedication towards the game is paramount for Serbian great Novak Djokovic to be successful on the challenging ATP Tour as the two oldest world number ones in singles and doubles formats engaged in a fun chat at Monte Carlo Masters.

Bopanna, at the age 44, was already oldest player to hold number one rank in the world in the doubles and 36-year-old Djokovic surpassed Roger Federer to become the oldest number one in the latest singles rankings chart.

The ATP Tour brought the world number ones for a short conversation as they prepared for the prestigious tournament.

"Tennis teaches us so many wonderful things. Experience wins and that is where I have got it," Bopanna told Djokovic in a video posted by ATP.

The Serbian responded by saying it is not just all about experience.

"I would say experience but also still being dedicated and devoted to the game every single day.



"I see him (Bopanna) in the gym for countless hours and also more hours with the physio, bit more than before (laughs) but it is amazing to share the tour with you for so many years.

"What an incredible moment to be oldest number in singles and doubles. It is great for Serbian and Indian tennis," said Djokovic, who has won a record 24 men's major titles.

Djokovic has not played in India since featuring in the now defunct International Tennis Premier League (ITPL) which was held from 2014 to 2016.

"Hopefully we can do something in India soon, we can play there, have not been to India for many years. It is a huge and amazing country.

"To have tennis at high level of popularity in India is extremely important for our sport and you are contributing to that along with Sania Mirza, (Mahesh) Bhupathi and (Leander) Paes paved the way," he said to Bopanna, who won the Miami Masters title last month.

"We are old but gold," said Djokovic and ended the conversation with a 'Namaste'.

Akshay Bhatia's dramatic win lands him Masters spot



San Antonio

Indian-American golfer Akshay Bhatia prevailed in a playoff to script a dramatic win at the Valero Texas Open and earn a spot at next week's Augusta Masters, which will be his first appearance in a Major.

It was virtually the last spot left at the Augusta Masters and Bhatia claimed it after staving off a serious challenge from Denny McCarthy, who birdied eight of the last nine holes at the TPC San Antonio here. The win gets Bhatia into the Masters, a wish and promise he had made to his mother years ago.

"Man, what a crazy, crazy day. This is awesome," Bhatia said. "It's hard to win out there as it showed today. My mom's birthday was April 1 and her wish was to go to the Masters."

The 22-year-old Bhatia (67), who started the day four shots ahead, went six clear before a stunning back-nine rally by McCarthy saw the two players tied at 20-under after 72 holes. Bhatia then produced a 12-foot birdie to force a playoff and made birdie on the first extra hole to register an impressive wire-to-wire victory.

Indian Olympic Association chief PT Usha says Executive Council members trying to sideline her

New Delhi

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President PT Usha on Monday said that the revolting Executive Council members were trying to sideline her by their acts of defiance, including issuing termination letters to an official appointed by her.

On Friday, nine Executive Council members had pasted a signed notice at the IOA office premises here, asking 'unauthorised persons' not to enter its headquarters. The notice, which Usha termed as "arbitrary", was directed at two recently appointed officials.

A majority of Executive Council members had earlier claimed that they had signed a suspension order declaring Raghuram Iyer's appointment as IOA CEO in January as null and void. The members also claimed that they had "terminated" Ajay Narang from the post of executive assistant to IOA president.

Usha acknowledged the receipt of the termination letter served to Narang by the Executive Council members but rejected it as "absolute nullity".

"It is disheartening to see that we are



still not able to work as a team. Each of your acts is an attempt to sideline me," Usha said in her response sent to the revolting Executive Council members.

"I am left with no option but to remind you all that the day-to-day administrative functions including hiring and firing of staff is not the job of the Executive Council. As the Executive Council, we should be using our powers and right for much more important aspects of taking the IOA to heights," she said.

"It is directed to the IOA staff to remove any copies of the notice posted

within the IOA Bhawan. Further, the IOA staff is instructed to follow guidance and directives from my office via my executive assistant."

The internal feud in the IOA, which came out in public in January, is still continuing even as three months are left for the Paris Olympics to begin.

Usha said the continuation or termination of Narang, who was appointed on June 7, 2023, would only be based on her recommendation and not on the "whims and fancies of anybody else".

"The termination documents are an absolute nullity. The appointment of the executive assistant to the president is not within the jurisdiction of the Executive Council and thus the termination is non est and bad in law.

"I am satisfied with the work done by Captain Ajay Kumar Narang (Retd) and do not find any reason to terminate his services," said the legendary track athlete who is also a sitting Rajya Sabha member.

She requested all the Executive Council members "to not act in excess of the powers and responsibilities granted by

the IOA constitution and in direct violation of the provisions therein".

"I yet again implore you to start working as a team for the betterment of the athletes and the Olympic Movement in India," she said.

Just a few days after Iyer was made CEO on January 6, 12 out of 15 Executive Council members alleged that Usha "exerted pressure" on them to pave the way for his appointment, a charge the legendary athlete described as "shameful".

However, Iyer and Narang had been discharging their official duties since being brought on board by Usha, who asserted that she has full confidence in the newly-appointed CEO and there was no going back on the decision to hire him.

The salary of the CEO, which is Rs 20 lakh per month plus allowances (total CTC of around Rs 3 crore per annum), is learnt to be at the centre of the feud between Usha and a majority of the Executive Council members, who have claimed that the IOA president "unilaterally" decided on the matter.

India skipper Rohit Sharma jokes about two teammates he would not share room with



New Delhi

India skipper Rohit Sharma jokingly said he would never share a room with two of his teammates, Shikhar Dhawan and Rishabh Pant.

Rohit has shared the locker room with Pant and Dhawan in his illustrious career.

While making an appearance on The Great Indian Kapil Show with Shreyas Iyer, Rohit joked that he wouldn't share a room with Dhawan and Pant because they are messy and they don't get their rooms cleaned for three to four days.

"Everyone gets a single room nowadays. But if I get a chance to share a single room, there are two people with whom I wouldn't want to share rooms - Shikhar Dhawan and Rishabh Pant. Bade gande hai (They are very messy). After practice, they just toss their clothes on the bed," Rohit said in an episode of the show.

"Their room is always on DND because they sleep till 1 PM. The housekeeping staff comes in the morning to clean their rooms, so it's important for them to put their rooms on DND. Otherwise, they will barge in. That's why their rooms often stay messy for three to four days. It becomes a problem for the people staying around them. So, I don't think I will be able to stay with them," he added.

Rohit is currently a part of the five-time champion Mumbai Indians in the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 season.

Notably, Rohit was included in the playing XI for MI's clash against the Rishabh Pant-led Delhi Capitals on Sunday. The veteran batter mesmerised the fans at Wankhede Stadium with his remarkable stroke play, which left the DC bowlers dazed.

Mohammedan Sporting on verge of I-League title

Shillong

Mohammedan Sporting need just a draw against Shillong Lajong FC in their penultimate match here tomorrow to win their maiden I-League title and get a promotion to the Indian Super League. The Kolkata side's task was made easier after NEROCA FC held Sreenidi Deccan FC to a 1-1 draw on Thursday.



Djokovic wants last dance with Nadal at Roland Garros

Rafa Nadal's withdrawal from the Monte Carlo Masters has cast doubt over the 22-time Grand Slam champion's participation at the French Open, but Novak Djokovic said he is still hoping for a final chapter in their storied rivalry.

The 37-year-old Spaniard, who has said he expected to retire after the 2024 season, returned to competition in Brisbane in January, after almost a year sidelined with a hip flexor injury, but has not played an ATP event since.

"As a tennis fan I want him to play at least one more tournament before he retires ...," world number one Djokovic told Eurosport in an interview published on Saturday.

"We all know what he's done on clay in his career, particularly Roland Garros.

"That's his goal, we all know that, he's been saying it. For the sake of all tennis and Roland Garros in particular, we hope that he can play there. It would be great to have another great encounter." Djokovic will begin



his quest for a third title in Monte Carlo on Tuesday without coach Goran Ivanisevic in his box, after ending his highly successful partnership with the Croatian last month.

The Serbian has been working with former doubles world number one Nenad Zimonjic in recent weeks.

"We have known each other really well for more than 20 years. He's been always like an older brother to me. A mentor, a friend, who always tried to help me as a person and as a player,"

Djokovic said.

"When I stopped with Goran, I was starting my clay-court preparation in Belgrade and he was there. He came to the court, and we really enjoyed our collaboration and I asked him to come here for a few weeks.

"We are trying to make the most of it. He's been giving me really useful advice to find the proper position when I'm approaching the net, and it's something I'm not best at because I don't play as many doubles matches."

India eye cohesive effort to keep 5-Test hockey series alive against Australia

Perth

The Indian men's hockey team would aim for a cohesive effort to avoid a hat-trick of losses when it takes on a formidable Australia in the third Test of the five-match series here on Wednesday.

The Indians were drubbed 1-5 and 2-4 by Australia in the first two matches of the series, which is a part of preparations for this year's Paris Olympics for both the sides.

The tour is of huge significance for India as it will provide valuable inputs about the areas to improve to chief coach Craig Fulton.

And the first two matches have already done that as the Indian defence was put under continuous pressure by quick turnovers by the Kookaburras.

The Indian defence, led by skipper Harmanpreet Singh, did not have the best days in the first two games as it wilted when put under pressure and conceded both penalty corners and soft field goals.

The lack of ideas from the forwards inside the opposition circle is another area the Indians would need to address.

The likes of Mandeep Singh, Abhishek, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Gurjant Singh and Sukhjeet need to make use of the chances they get if they are to outplay a strong side like Australia.

The Indian mid-field, however, has been decent so far.

Vice-captain Hardik Singh has been the backbone of the mid-field, which combined well with the strikers, to create plenty

of opportunities.

India coach Fulton was expected to try different strategies during the tour and he already started that which was evident in the last two games.

From short and brisk passing hockey using the flanks to counter-attacking moves, all these gameplans were on full display from the Indians in the two games.

The Indians also used long aerial lobbs from the deep to build attacks but failed to breach a resolute Australian defence.

With a world renowned drag-flicker in skipper Harmanpreet, Jugraj Singh, Sanjay and Amit Rohidas in the rank, India boast of a potent force in penalty corners and all their three goals in the tour came from set pieces.

अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते
संजय मंगेश भैरे
सुचिता संजय भैरे