

Across State

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Only 3% ED cases against politicians, honest have nothing to fear: PM Modi

New Delhi

Amid the arrest of a number of Opposition leaders, including Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, by the ED in the run up to the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday claimed only 3 per cent of the cases filed by the agency were against political leaders.

In an interview, PM Modi refuted the accusation of misuse of probe agencies to harass rivals and declared that those involved in corruption would have "paap ka dar" (fear of sin). He also said honest persons had nothing to fear.

The PM's remark came amid criticism over Kejriwal's arrest last month in connection with the alleged excise policy scam. Strongly refuting the allegations levelled by the Opposition that the current political scenario was heavily tilted in favour of the BJP due to changes in the law regarding the selection of Election Commissioners, PM Modi said the legislation ensured the participation of a representative of the Opposition as well.

"In fact, we have made improvements. Today, when the Election Commission is formed, the Opposition is also in it." The PM was referring to the law mandating the Leader of the Opposition as the third member in a three-member selection panel. The other two are the PM and a Union Minister.

Reacting to the Supreme Court's decision to scrap the electoral bonds scheme, the PM said, "Everyone will regret it when there is an honest reflection." He said the electoral bonds scheme launched by his government was meant to fight the use of black money, referring to unaccounted cash or funds from criminal activities, in election



campaigns, and that he had "never claimed this was an absolute way" to achieve that goal.

He also attacked the Opposition for spreading "lies" about the scheme and said his government had introduced it to curb the use of "black money" during the elections. He countered criticism that the BJP was the largest beneficiary of the scheme with thousands of crores of rupees donated to it. "There has been a discussion in our country for a long time that black money allows for dangerous games to be played during elections. That money is spent in elections... no one denies. My party also spends... all

parties and all candidates spend, and this money is taken from the people. I wanted to try something. How can our elections be free from this black money? How can there be transparency for people giving donations? This was a pure thought in my mind," the PM said.

"We were looking for a way. We found a small way (but) never claimed this was absolute," he said, building on comments from earlier this month when he told a TV news channel that "no system is perfect... shortcomings can be improved". He, however, pointed out that 63 per cent of the amount received from 16 companies which bought electoral bonds after facing money laundering cases went to parties other than the BJP.

"This is the success story of electoral bonds... You are getting a (money) trail of which company gave, how much, where. Whether what happened was good or bad can be an issue of debate..." he explained.

Attacking the Congress' manifesto, which he had earlier referred to as an imprint of the Muslim League, PM Modi said, "This manifesto completely fails the economy. In a way, the manifesto of the Opposition destroys the aspiration of the first-time voters of the country. The biggest loss (from the Congress' manifesto) is to the people who are less than 25 years old. This manifesto will destroy their future."

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'Surya Tilak' illuminates Ram Lalla idol's forehead

Ayodhya

'Surya Tilak' (Sun's rays) illuminated Lord Ram Lalla idol's forehead at Ayodhya Temple on the occasion of Ram Navami on Wednesday, April 17. The 'Surya tilak' of the deity was made possible by an elaborate mechanism involving mirrors and lenses. The system was tested by the scientists on Tuesday.

This was the first Ram Navami since the consecration of the Ram idol

at the Ayodhya temple, inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 22.

According to a senior scientist of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), Roorkee, the planned tilak size was 58 mm. The exact period of tilak on the forehead centre was about three to three-and-a-half minutes, with two minutes of full illumination, he said.



Following Bombay HC notice, BMC begins to remove decorative lights from trees

Mumbai

Within a week of the Bombay High Court issuing notices to the Maharashtra government and the municipal corporations of Mumbai, Thane and Mira Bhayandar, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has trained its eyes on removing the decorative lights wrapped around the barks and branches of the city's trees.

Following directives from senior civic officials, even as no official orders have been issued, several wards of the city have now taken up the cudgels to remove the decorative lights, which had been installed as a part of its beautification drive.

The decorative lights were being installed as a part of the chief minister's Mumbai Beautification Project, which has been taken up since December

2022.

While the exact figures on the total money spent on the lighting is not known, data procured from the



BMC shows that upto Rs 766 crore has been spent on the beautification project, which, besides the illumination works, included works like beautification of divider, footpaths, beautification of bridges, and painting of walls.

Wrapped on trees, the lights had drawn the ire of the environmentalists and residents who had raised concerns over its impact on the trees and the nocturnal animals.

Also Read | Mumbai

lost over 21,000 trees in 6 years to make way for Metro, road projects

Besides this, the beautification project had also drawn flak for the high costs incurred in the installation and maintenance of the lights.

In light of the HC rap, senior officials have directed the ward offices across the city to remove the decorative lights from the trees. However, senior civic officers maintained that no official circulars have been issued directing the wards to do the same.

With the civic directives, some of the 24 wards across the city have started removing the lights, albeit in a hush and artificial, they will start absorbing any light throughout day and night," explained Shenai, adding that this will impact their rhythm and productivity.

Maharashtra CM Shinde visits Salman's house; asks police to increase security for actor, kin

Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Tuesday visited actor Salman Khan's residence in Bandra and assured him of protection after two persons were arrested in connection with firing at his house.

Talking to reporters, Shinde said stringent action will be taken against those involved in the firing.

Shinde also said he has instructed the Mumbai police commissioner to beef up security cover for Khan and his family members.

"I have assured Salman Khan that the government stands behind him and his safety is the government's responsibility. The government will ensure that no one dares do such an act in Mumbai,"



Shinde said.

Two accused, Vicky Gupta (24) and Sagar Pal (21), who were on the run after firing at Khan's house on Sunday, were nabbed late Monday night from a temple premises in Gujarat's Kutch district.

One of them, who was riding pillion on a motorcycle, fired five rounds, one of which hit the wall and another the gallery of Khan's residence, according to

police.

"Police are investigating and the truth will come out. Police will find out who is behind the incident. Strict action will be taken against them," Shinde said.

Former MLA Baba Siddiqui, his son and Congress legislator Zeeshan Siddiqui, and Shiv Sena leader Rahul Kanai were also present at Khan's residence during Shinde's visit.

Two arrested for firing at Salman Khan's house

Mumbai/Bhuj

In a case of firing at Bollywood actor Salman Khan's residence in Mumbai, two persons have been arrested from Gujarat, the police said on Tuesday.

Vicky Gupta (24) and Sagar Pal (21), both residents of Bihar, were nabbed late Monday night from Mata No Madh village in Kutch district. Based on technical surveillance, joint teams of the Kutch-West and Mumbai police nabbed the duo.

A preliminary probe suggested that both Pal and Gupta were hired by the gang of incarcerated gangster Lawrence Bishnoi to open fire at Khan's house, he said. While Pal fired the shots, Gupta was in touch



with the gang members, Bagadiya said.

At around 5 am on Sunday, two motorcycle-borne persons fired four rounds outside 58-year-old Khan's house at the Galaxy Apartment in Bandra area of Mumbai and fled the spot.

They had rented a house for a month in Navi Mumbai's Panvel, where the actor has a farmhouse,

an official said.

The police on Monday questioned three persons from Navi Mumbai, including the house owner, the previous owner of the two-wheeler used in the crime, the agent who facilitated the sale, and several others as part of the probe into the firing incident. The motorbike was abandoned near Mount Mary Church in Mumbai.

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Western Railway to run 439 summer special trains this year



Mumbai

Western Railway (WR), Mumbai has announced a 20% increase in the number of summer special trains this year compared to last year. The additional services, totalling 439 summer special trains, are aimed at accommodating the surge in passengers travelling to their native places during the annual summer holidays.

This increase is particularly beneficial, given the extended school break and the need for travel related to family functions and festivals.

A senior officer from Western Railway highlighted that the completion of the dedicated freight corridor tracks from Rewari in Haryana to Sanjan

in Gujarat has facilitated the diversion of freight traffic, thereby decongesting existing tracks.

This has created space for more passenger trains to operate efficiently. The official also noted that the dedicated freight corridor is operational only in December and January.

The Western Dedicated Freight Corridor, spanning 1,506 kilometres and connecting the JNPT port in Mumbai to Dadri, passes through Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. As of April 2024, 92.7% of the corridor is commissioned, with the remaining stretch between Vaitarna and JNPT expected to be ready by December 2024.

BJP did no work and is seeking votes in name of Lord Ram -Uddhav Thackeray

Mumbai

Shiv Sena UBT chief Uddhav Thackeray Tuesday alleged that the BJP is asking votes in the name of Lord Ram because they have not done any work.

"Lord Ram has a great power. Right now votes are being sought in the name of Ram because they (BJP) know that despite using Prime Minister Narendra Modi's name, they will not be getting votes. They have not done any work and hence they are using Lord Ram's name. Now Ram will teach them (BJP) a lesson," Uddhav said.

The Sena UBT chief was addressing a press conference after releasing a song to promote the party's poll symbol "Mashaal" a flaming torch.

Thackeray said that joint manifesto of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) parties, comprising the Sena (UBT), NCP (SP) and Congress, will be released soon.

Uddhav said the Congress has already released its manifesto and aspects related to Maharashtra will be incorporated in the MVA's joint manifesto.

Uddhav also took a swipe at



the BJP over the arrest of men who allegedly opened fire outside actor Salman Khan's residence and fled to Gujarat.

"Why all such people are being caught from Gujarat only? The traitors (rebel Sena MLAs) also fled to Gujarat. The drugs consignment is also coming to Gujarat. Now there people are fired here and went to Gujarat. So why all such people are going to Gujarat only? I am not blaming people of Gujarat. But people of Gujarat should realise that these way the state's name is being defamed," he said.

Uddhav further said that the BJP has been exposed over the electoral bond issue and termed

it the "biggest scam in the world".

"All this has come to light because of the intervention of the Supreme Court. It is the biggest scam in the world. Had the SC not intervened, we would not have known who gave thousands of crores to the BJP and the work of 'chanda do and dhanda lo' (give money, do business) would have continued," Uddhav said.

The Sena UBT chief also termed the upcoming Lok Sabha elections a battle between democracy and dictatorship. "The MVA will win 48 seats in Maharashtra. And the BJP may win just 45+ seats not in Maharashtra, but in the entire country."

CM Eknath Shinde announces Rs 3,500 crore project to prevent flooding in Kolhapur

Kolhapur

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Monday declared that the state government has approved an allocation of Rs 3,500 crore for the comprehensive development of Kolhapur, which has been grappling with persistent flooding. "This allocation aims to address the longstanding flooding issue in Kolhapur, ensuring its permanent resolution. We are committed to resolving all concerns raised by the people of Kolhapur," he said.

During an election rally, CM Shinde addressed the crowd before the nomination papers of Mahayuti candidate Sanjay Mandlik for Kolhapur and Dhairyasheel Mane for the Hatkanangale constituency were submitted.

Shinde said, "The people of Kolhapur are rallying behind both Mahayuti candidates. The results of this election will not only shape the destiny of individuals

economy but also elevated its global ranking from 11th to 5th. To propel India to the third position, it is imperative that we stand behind Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

Shinde also criticised the Opposition, alleging that their sentiments towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi were driven solely by animosity.

"Just as in 2014 and 2019, the opposition's bluff will be exposed in the 2024 elections. Despite being in power for 60 years, Congress never thought of celebrating Constitution Day. Prime Minister Narendra Modi started Constitution Day in 2015. The Prime Minister has announced that the Constitution will never change as long as the sun and moon exist," he said.

or constituencies but will also impact the political landscape of our nation."

Shinde has urged Mahayuti workers to unite for the nation's progress. He said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not only bolstered the Indian



NDA is not against Muslims, BJP never asked us to keep secularism aside: Sunil Tatkare

Mumbai

In a bid to retain minority votes, Nationalist Congress Party's (NCP) Maharashtra president and Lok Sabha candidate from Raigad Sunil Tatkare said on Saturday that it is a misconception that the BJP-led NDA is against the Muslim community and that it asked his party to keep secularism aside while joining the alliance.

"These are misconceptions that the NDA is against the Muslim community. The government has implemented several schemes for minority communities. Moreover, for 40 years, I have had a secular ideology. While joining the NDA, we have moved forward with the thoughts and ideals of Shiv-Shahu-Phule-Ambedkar," said

Tatkare while addressing a meeting of the minority cell at Mandangad in Raigad on Saturday.

In a similar rally in Dapoli, Tatkare said, "The BJP has never asked us to put aside secularism... but citizens should beware of those promoting secularism during the election season but have hated one religion all their lives."

Tatkare expressed confidence that his minority community's vote count will be higher than in the 2019 elections. "Today, casteist forces are pretending to be secular; but we are working in a truly secular manner. Have these forces ever wished you on Eid?" asked Tatkare, without taking names.

Those terming Sanatan 'dengue, malaria' don't deserve even single seat: PM Modi

New Delhi

Launching an attack on the INDIA bloc, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the Congress and its partners are resorting to lies in the name of the Constitution. He said 80-90 per cent members of the Constituent Assembly were sanatanis.

Speaking at a rally in Bihar's Gaya district, Modi said, "The NDA respects the Constitution. Dr Rajendra Prasad was key in the formation of the Constitution. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar drafted it... Those who abuse Sanatan should listen carefully that 80-90% of the people in the Constituent Assembly that made the Constitution of India were Sanatanis and those Sanatanis supported Ambedkar in making such a great Constitution."

The remarks came a day after RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav said the BJP was aiming at changing the Constitution, citing utterances by many leaders of the BJP recently.



Modi also accused the opposition leaders, including those of the RJD and the Congress, of playing politics with the Constitution.

Calling RJD a symbol of 'jungle raj and corruption', Modi said, "This election is only to punish arrogant alliance leaders. It is to punish those who are against the Constitution and opposing the Centre's initiatives to make India a 'Viksit Bharat'."

The PM alleged that the Opposition calls Santana dharma "dengue and malaria". "They don't deserve even a single seat... they must be punished. The RJD and the Congress only play politics in the name of social justice," Modi alleged.

Addressing the gathering Bihar's Purnea district the PM said that if NDA is voted back to power, there will be a crackdown on illegal

immigration in Seemanchal region which flourished under the RJD-Congress regime.

Purnea shares its borders with Nepal and Bangladesh. "Vote bank politics has allowed illegal immigration to go unchecked in the Seemanchal region, leading to grave security risks and to the detriment of the poor, including Dalits, living in the region. Many times they have been attacked and their houses have been set on fire," said Modi.

He added that those who are opposing the CAA should know that "Modi is not going to be stopped or be scared".

Gaya, a reserved seat from where former Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi is trying his luck as the NDA candidate, goes to polls in the first phase. Santosh Kumar Kushwaha, a JD(U) candidate is contesting from Purnea. Kushwaha is an incumbent MP from Purnea.

Navy warship seizes 940 kg drugs in combined operation



New Delhi

INS Talwar, operating in support of the Canada-led Combined Task Force (CTF) 150, conducted its first interdiction of illicit narcotics as a member of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and seized 940 kg of drugs in the Arabian Sea.

The Navy ship seized 453 kg of methamphetamine, 416 kg of hash and 71 kg of heroin from a dhow as part of focused 'Operation Crimson Barracuda'. The Indian Navy joined the CMF in November.

Royal Canadian Navy's

Capt Colin Matthews, who is the commander of the CTF, said, "This seizure, the fourth under this operation, demonstrates the effectiveness and professionalism of the CMF and of the Indian Navy in deterring and disrupting criminal and terror activities in sea." 'Operation Crimson Barracuda', which concluded on April 15, focused on countering terrorist and criminal organisations' use of the high seas in conducting smuggling operations in western Indian Ocean.

'First we need to win polls,' says Congress chief Kharge on INDIA bloc's PM choice

Bengaluru

Accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of seeking to divide the country on the lines of caste, religion, creed, Congress president M Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday called him the "real Sultan of tukde tukde gang".

Modi was already charting programmes for next five years calling all secretaries, he alleged, claiming that "this kind of over-confidence and arrogance is not good for the country and democracy".

"First we need to win the elections", Kharge said, as he asserted that who will be INDIA bloc's prime ministerial face is a matter to be settled only after the results of the Lok Sabha polls are declared.

"The real Sultan of the tukde tukde gang is Modi. He is dividing a country on the lines of caste, religion, creed. We strongly believe that every region and part is India, be it Kashmir, north-east. We have fought for these regions. We have fought for the

freedom of this country. What has BJP done?" Kharge said in an interview.

Stating that in a coalition, consensus is drawn through discussions and deliberations,



Kharge said the INDIA alliance will discuss as to who is the suitable person to lead it once the results are out.

"...who will be the prime minister, that will be a matter to be settled only after the results. First we need to win the elections and then depending on what the alliance partner says there (will be) discussions. Congress party has never been shy about (it),

first, we need to win elections," he added.

Regarding Congress candidates for Nehru-Gandhi family bastions of Amethi and Raebareli, he said elections there will be held in the later stages and "so still there is time".

"Let us see what will happen. We will tell at an appropriate time. It is not good to open my cards. In politics, it is important to have some surprises. We will discuss, we will deliberate and we will take feedback. There is a democratic process in the Congress party and in the due course we will take a call. It is not like BPP where Modi has the final say for everything," he said.

Expressing confidence about defeating BJP by stating that whatever number needed to defeat BJP, the Congress and its alliance partners will get, Kharge said after the party won Assembly elections in Karnataka, Telangana and Himachal Pradesh, things are looking "positive and good".

In Naxal-hit Bastar, Election Commission ferries poll staff in copters

Bijapur/Sukma

With tight security in place, the authorities on Tuesday kicked off an exercise to ferry polling personnel in helicopters in Chhattisgarh's Naxalite-hit Bastar constituency, where voting will take place in the first phase of the elections on April 19.

The authorities have started dispatching electronic voting machines (EVMs) and polling parties to booths in sensitive areas of Bijapur and Sukma districts, a senior official said.

Located in the southern part of the Bastar Lok Sabha constituency, Bijapur and Sukma districts have reported multiple incidents of Naxalite attacks on security personnel during elections in the past.

A total of 245 polling booths have been set up for general

elections in Bijapur, of which 99 booths in the interior areas have been relocated (to safer places), Bijapur collector Anurag Pandey said.

Around 76 polling parties will be ferried to their destinations in helicopters, and the exercise began on Tuesday from the



Bijapur district headquarters, three days before the polling, he said. The teams that reach their destinations ahead of the polling day will stay in the nearest camp of security forces, he said. At least 27 polling teams and EVMs will be transported in choppers on Tuesday from Sukma district headquarters, he said.

Three days before poll, top Naxalite among 29 killed in Bastar gunfight



An injured security man being treated in Kanker district.

New Delhi

At least 29 Naxalites, including their top leader Shankar Rao, were killed during an encounter with security forces in Kanker district of Chhattisgarh on Tuesday. Three security personnel sustained injuries in the fierce gunfight that took place just three days ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

A large quantity of weapons was seized from the spot. Rao

carried a reward of Rs 25 lakh on his head. The fierce encounter took place at 2 pm in Hapatola forest between Binagunda and Koronar villages under Chhotebethiya police station limits when a joint team of the BSF and state police's District Reserve Guard was patrolling the area, police officials said.

"After the encounter, the area was searched and a huge cache

of weapons, including AK-47, SLR, Insas and .303 rifles, was recovered," the state police said. This was one of the biggest anti-Naxal operations in the area, said Bastar IGP Sundarraj. Polling in the Naxalite-hit Bastar LS seat will take place in the first phase on April 19, while Kanker, also in the region, will vote in the second phase on April 26.

Across State अक्रॉस मुंबई



युनायटेड महाराष्ट्रीय
साऊथ इंडियन फाऊंडेशन



संजय मंगेश भैरे
संपादक

मुंबई अध्यक्ष
डिजिटल मिडीया संपादक संघटना



India's population estimated at 144 crore, 24 per cent in 0-14 age bracket: UNFPA report

New Delhi

India's population is estimated to have reached 144 crore, with 24 per cent in the 0-14 age bracket, according to a recent report by the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) State of World Population - 2024 report.

The UNFPA report— 'Interwoven Lives, Threads of Hope: Ending Inequalities in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights'—revealed that India's population is estimated to double in 77 years.

India leads globally with an estimated population of 144.17 crore, followed by China at 142.5 crore, according to the report.

India's population was recorded at 121 crore during the last census, conducted in 2011.

The report further detailed that an estimated 24 per cent of India's population is aged 0-14 while 17 per cent is within the 10-19 age range.

The segment aged 10-24 is estimated to constitute 26 per cent, with the 15-64 age group making up 68 per cent. Additionally, 7 per cent of India's population is aged 65 years and above, with men having a life expectancy of 71 years and women 74 years.

The report has found that 30 years of progress in sexual and reproductive health has mostly ignored the most marginalised communities worldwide.

According to the report, the child

marriage percentage in India was at 23 between 2006-2023.

The report noted that maternal deaths in India have fallen considerably, accounting for 8 per cent of all such fatalities worldwide.

"India's success is often attributed to improved access to affordable, quality maternal health services as well as



efforts to address the impact of gender discrimination on health outcomes," the report said.

However, the report noted that India continues to see dramatic inequities in maternal death risk.

Quoting a report on 'Estimates and Correlates of District-Level Maternal Mortality Ratio in India' by PLOS Global Public Health, the UNFPA said recent research into India's 640 districts revealed that while nearly a third achieved the sustainable development goal of reducing

maternal mortality ratio below 70 per 1,00,000 live births, 114 districts still have ratios of 210 or more.

"The highest—1,671 per 1,00,000 births—is seen in Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh, a rural area with a high proportion of indigenous peoples. While disaggregating these figures by socioeconomic group, ethnicity, caste or religion is challenging, these factors clearly play a role in health outcomes," it said.

The report noted that women with disabilities are up to 10 times more likely to experience gender-based violence than their peers without disabilities.

Improvements in healthcare access have primarily benefited wealthier women and those who belong to ethnic groups that already had better access to health care.

"Women and girls with disabilities, migrants and refugees, ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ people, people living with HIV and disadvantaged castes all face greater sexual and reproductive health risks and also unequal access to sexual and reproductive health care," the report said.

Their vulnerability is further compounded by powerful forces such as climate change, humanitarian crises and mass migration, which often have a disproportionate impact on women at the margins of society, it said.

In India, the report said, Dalit activists

have argued for legal protection for women facing caste-based discrimination in workplaces and education.

"Many will otherwise remain too poor to support their families and give their children a dignified life, contributing to a cycle that perpetuates poor sexual and reproductive health. Almost half of Dalit women, for instance, receive no antenatal care, and high rates of gender-based violence are considered a means of oppression and control," it said.

The report said millions of women and girls remain far behind, and progress is slowing or stalled on key measures -- 800 women die every day giving birth, unchanged since 2016; a quarter of women cannot say no to sex with their partner and nearly one in 10 women cannot make their own decisions about contraception.

In 40 per cent of countries with data, the report said women's bodily autonomy is diminishing.

"In the space of a generation, we have reduced the unintended pregnancy rate by nearly one-fifth, lowered the maternal death rate by one-third, and secured laws against domestic violence in more than 160 countries," said UNFPA Executive Director Dr Natalia Kanem.

"Despite this progress, inequalities within our societies and health systems are widening, and we have not adequately prioritised reaching those furthest behind. Our work is incomplete but not impossible with sustained investment and global solidarity," she added.

India looks to buy 6 mid-air refuellers

New Delhi

India is eyeing to get six mid-air refuellers for the Indian Air Force (IAF) from a global supplier. Details of Ministry of Defence's requirements have been shared with the industry. Mid-air refuellers are specialised planes that can refuel fighter jets and helicopters while flying, saving the time they would otherwise take in landing, refuelling it and taking off again.

At present, the Indian Air Force uses the Soviet parentage IL 78 planes to refuel its fleet. These planes are more than 30 years old. The IAF is now looking at American and European options.

The details shared by the IAF with the industry include the vital fact that deal will be under 'Buy Global' category — meaning the refuellers will be sourced from global suppliers. Most of these mid-air refuellers are derivatives of commercial planes produced by Boeing and Airbus.

Boeing's KC-46 Pegasus mid-air refueller for military planes is modelled on its 767 commercial jet. The Airbus Multi Role Tanker Transport is



based on its commercial A 330 series plane.

In 2022, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited entered inked a memorandum of understanding with Israel Aerospace Industries to convert civil passenger aircraft into Multi-Mission Tanker Transport aircraft in India.

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited planned to convert pre-owned civil aircraft into mid-air refuelling aircraft with cargo and transport capabilities. On February 16, the Defence Acquisition Council, the apex decision-making body of the Ministry of Defence, cleared the procurement of such planes.

India's oldest combat pilot Squadron Leader Dalip Singh Majithia (retd) dies at 103

New Delhi

Squadron Leader Dalip Singh Majithia (retd), India's oldest combat pilot, died at Rudrapur in Uttarakhand today. He was 103.

Born on July 27, 1920, in Shimla, Squadron Leader Majithia was commissioned on August 1, 1940, and retired from the Indian Air Force (IAF) in August 1947.

The IAF said he was commissioned into the erstwhile Royal Indian Air Force in 1940, joining No.1 Flight (Coastal Defence) based at Madras, now Chennai. He had participated actively in the Burma campaign during World War II. Squadron Leader Majithia was flight



commander of the No. 4 Squadron — "The Fighting Oorials" — from 1942 to 1943 at Burma. Affectionately called 'Maji' by his friends, he earned the 'Best Pilot Trophy' during his training at the Initial Training School in Walton, Lahore.

The IAF bid farewell to Squadron Leader Majithia (retd) on his "final flight".

Ayodhya is in incomparable bliss: PM Modi in Ram Navami greetings



New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted people on the occasion of Ram Navami on Wednesday and said Ayodhya is in incomparable bliss as this is the first time the festival will be celebrated there after the consecration of the Ram temple.

This is the fruit of the hard work and sacrifices made by the people of the country for so many years, he said in a series of posts on X.

Ram Navami celebrates the birth of Lord Ram and a temple was recently consecrated at the place where he is believed to have been born in Ayodhya.

Modi said he feels overwhelmed and grateful on this occasion as he along with a huge

number of people in the country witnessed the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya.

He said the memories of that moment continue to pulsate within him with the same energy.

Lord Ram is deeply embedded in the hearts of Indians. Ram Navami is also a time to remember and respect those saints and devotees who dedicated their lives to the construction of the temple in Ayodhya, Modi said.

"I am confident that Maryada Purushottam Bhagwan Ram's life and ideals will become a strong basis for constructing 'Viksit Bharat'. His blessings will provide new energy to the resolve of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'," the prime minister said.

Within our right to regulate industrial alcohol: Govt to Supreme Court

New Delhi

Asserting its right to regulate industrial alcohol, the Union Government told the Supreme Court on Tuesday that framers of the Constitution intended to give the Centre complete control over any industry through enactment of Industrial (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951 in "public interest".

Solicitor General Tushar

Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told a Bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud that as per the Act, the development and regulation of a number of important industries, the activities of which affected the country as a whole, were required to be brought under central control.

Citing the example of Covid, the law officer said the government could utilise its

regulatory power in national interest as it did during the outbreak by issuing orders to ensure availability of ethanol at a notified price for manufacturing sanitisers. "Suppose the Centre then required that entire quantity of industrial alcohol for use in making sanitisers, the government can utilise its regulatory power," Mehta said.

Randeep Surjewala faces 48-hour ban over Hema Malini remark

New Delhi

The Election Commission on Tuesday barred Congress leader Randeep Surjewala from participating in any election-related activity, political rally, roadshow or procession and even from giving any interview to print or electronic media for 48 hours after finding him guilty of violating provisions of the model code of conduct.

The ban will be effective from 6 pm April 16. The decision was taken by the poll body after examining a purported video from a rally which Surjewala addressed in Kaithal. At the event, the Congress leader allegedly made objectionable remarks on BJP MP and veteran film actress Hema Malini.

On receiving a complaint against Surjewala, the Election Commission had issued him a show-cause notice on April 9, to which he had replied on April 11, claiming that the "video had been doctored".

However, the Election Commission, after verifying the video, was of the view that the

Congress leader had indeed made the remarks and, therefore, took the decision of barring him from all election-related activities for 48 hours till the evening of April 18.

The EC had last Tuesday issued a show-cause notice to Surjewala for his alleged "undignified, uncivilised and vulgar remarks against Hema. The EC rejected his claim and said the district returning officer of Kaithal had noted that the Congress leader had made the remarks on March 31 at Faral village under the

Pundri Assembly segment and the entire speech was videographed by the video surveillance team.

"The commission without prejudice to any order/notice issued or to be issued subsequently to him in the matter relating to model code of conduct violations, hereby, strongly condemns the impugned statement made by him during the election campaign held in Haryana and reprimands Randeep Surjewala for the misconduct," the Election Commission order said.



ED arrests four more persons in money laundering case against Hemant Soren

Ranchi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has made four fresh arrests in connection with the alleged illegal land grab-linked money laundering case against former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and others, official sources said on Wednesday.

Those taken into custody under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) have been identified as Antu Tirkey, Priya Ranjan Sahay, Bipin Singh and Irshad, they said.

The ED had on Tuesday conducted searches at the premises of Tirkey and some others here.

With these arrests, the total number of people taken into custody in this case has risen to eight.

Soren, 48, was arrested by the ED in January shortly after he resigned as the chief minister. He is currently lodged in Birsa Munda jail at Hotwar here under judicial

custody. Prime accused and former revenue department sub-inspector Bhanu Pratap Prasad, Mohammed Saddam Hussian and Afshar Ali have also been arrested.

The probe against Soren pertains to an 8.86-acre plot of land in Ranchi that the ED has alleged was illegally acquired by him.

The agency had filed a charge sheet against Soren, Prasad and Soren's alleged "frontmen" -- Raj Kumar Pahan and Hilariyas Kachhap -- and alleged associate of the former CM Binod Singh before a special PMLA court here on March 30.

The ED has also attached the Ranchi land and

requested the court for confiscation of the plot.

The money laundering investigation stems from multiple FIRs registered by Jharkhand Police in land "scam" cases against several people, including state government officials.

The prime accused in the case is Prasad, who was the custodian of government records. He is alleged to have "misused" his official position by providing assistance to several people, including Soren, in their activities linked to illegal occupation, acquisition and possession of proceeds of crime in the form of landed properties, the ED had said in a statement.



Will abide by party decision: Rahul Gandhi on contesting Lok Sabha polls from Amethi

Ghaziabad

Amid intense speculation over whether he would contest the Lok Sabha polls from Uttar Pradesh's Amethi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said he would abide by his party's decision on it.

Gandhi made the remarks at a joint press conference here with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav.

Asked whether he would contest from Amethi besides Wayanad, Gandhi said, "On Amethi, the party will decide. Whatever order I get, I will abide by that." "In our party, these decisions are taken in the CEC (Central Election Committee) meeting," he stressed.

Both Amethi and Wayanad will go to polls on April 26.

There is speculation that besides his declared seat of Wayanad in Kerala, Gandhi might also contest the Lok Sabha polls from Amethi, a seat he represented



for three straight terms earlier, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from Rae Bareilly, a seat that was previously held by her mother, Sonia Gandhi.

Both seats are considered bastions of the Gandhi family and the local units of the Congress have demanded that the two scions of the family contest from there.

The Congress has forged an alliance with the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh and is contesting 17 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

The Lok Sabha polls are scheduled to be held in seven phases starting April 19. The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

PM Modi is champion of corruption: Rahul Gandhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday alleged the electoral bonds scheme was the biggest "extortion scheme" in the world and that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the "champion of corruption".

Addressing a joint press conference with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav here, Gandhi said there is a strong undercurrent in favour of the opposition INDIA bloc in the Lok Sabha elections and the BJP will be limited to 150 seats.

Yadav said the winds of change will start blowing from Ghaziabad in western Uttar Pradesh to Ghazipur and the BJP will be given a grand farewell in the Lok Sabha elections.

"We have to ensure that not a single vote is divided in the Lok Sabha polls," Yadav said.

Criticising the now-scrapped electoral bonds, Gandhi said the prime minister claims that the scheme was brought to bring transparency in poll funding but then why was it struck down by the Supreme Court.

"The electoral bonds scheme is the biggest extortion scheme in the world. India's businessmen

know it very well. No matter how much the prime minister clarifies, it will have no impact because the entire nation knows that the prime minister is the champion of corruption," Gandhi said.

On Modi's criticism of his remarks that the Congress will end poverty in no time, Gandhi said no one said that poverty will end in one go but we can make strong efforts for it.

To questions on contesting the Lok Sabha elections from Uttar Pradesh's Amethi, the former Congress chief said he will abide by his party's decision on this.

Such decisions are taken by the Central Election Committee of the party, he said.

The SP and the Congress are fighting the Lok Sabha polls in alliance in Uttar Pradesh. The Congress is fighting on 17 seats while the SP and some other allies are contesting the remaining 63 seats in the politically crucial Uttar Pradesh, which sends 80 members to the Lok Sabha.

The seven-phase Lok Sabha polls will begin on April 19 and the counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

Extrajudicial confession weak evidence, says Supreme Court

New Delhi

Extrajudicial confession by its very nature is a "weak piece" of evidence and it may be used as a corroborative piece of evidence in tandem with substantive evidence, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while acquitting

a man who was convicted in a 1998 murder case.

The apex court allowed an appeal filed by the man challenging the verdict of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which had affirmed the trial court's May 1999 order

convicting and sentencing him to life imprisonment.

The prosecution alleged that the appellant had in June 1998 murdered a man at a cinema hall in Bhiwani as he bore a suspicion that the victim was involved in illicit relations with his wife.

Mumbai woman in Pakistan refuses to leave without her kids; claims their 'lives are in danger'



Islamabad

Farzana Begum, an Indian national hailing from Mumbai, is currently in Pakistan fighting for the custody of her children, has refused to return to her native country, stating that her children's lives are in danger.

Farzana Begum married a Pakistani citizen, Mirza Mubin Elahi, in Abu Dhabi in 2015.

Later, the couple came to Pakistan in 2018 and have two sons aged seven and six.

Farzana's case gained public limelight after she allegedly tortured her husband over a dispute regarding the custody of her sons and some properties in the name of her sons.

Farzana rejects her husband's claims that he had divorced her, stating: "If he has divorced me, then there must be a certificate."

"Me and my children's lives are in danger in Pakistan over a property dispute. I am confined to my house in Rehman Gardens, Lahore, and my children are enduring hunger," she said.

Farzana called on the government of Pakistan to provide her with protection until the case was resolved, refusing to leave to her native country without her sons.

"There are some properties in Lahore which are in the name of my sons. My husband has possession of mine and my children's passports," she added.

Farzana is the second wife of Mubin Elahi.

Elahi already has a Pakistani wife and children, who Farzana alleges are plotting to bully and intimidate her to return to India and snatch control of properties, which she says belong to her two sons.

Advocate Mohsin Abbas, lawyer of Farzana, said: "Mubin Elahi is spreading false rumours that Farzana's visa had expired even though her passport was in his possession."

The case has become the talk of the town, as Farzana is unclear about the status of her visa, and is adamant that she will not leave without her sons.

"I would never return to India without my sons," Farzana said.

While Farzana has been vocal about the case and her stance, Elahi has been quiet and has not clarified his position on the matter.

Farzana also rejects the accusation of her husband that she tortured him, stating that Elahi is making false allegations to get away from the core issue of the custody of her sons and possession of their properties in Pakistan.

"I know that Elahi is delaying the process to make sure my visa gets expired and I am forced to leave Pakistan. But I will not leave without my sons," Farzana asserted.

India 'reduced' dependence on Russian arms

Washington

India in 2023 showcased itself as a global leader as it demonstrated a greater willingness to counter China's activity throughout the Indo-Pacific region and took steps to modernise its military and reduce its dependency on Russian origin-equipment, the top US intelligence official has told Congress.

The remarks by Lt Gen Jeffrey Kruse, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency came during a Congressional hearing on defence intelligence countering China.

"During the past year, India has showcased itself as a global leader by hosting the Group of 20 economic summit and demonstrated a greater willingness to counter PRC's (People's Republic of China) activity throughout the Indo-Pacific region," Kruse told members of the House Armed Services Committee — the



subcommittee on intelligence and special operations.

"In 2023, India took steps to modernise its military to compete with China and reduce its dependency on Russian-origin equipment. India conducted sea trials for its first domestically produced aircraft carrier and also has negotiated with several Western countries on the transfer of key defence technologies," Kruse said.

US intel: Pak sustained Nuclear programme

- Pakistan sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts last year, despite its economic turmoil as its contentious ties with India, continue to drive its defence policy, Lt Gen Jeffrey Kruse, Director of the Defence Intelligence Agency, has told Congress
- Islamabad is improving the security of its nuclear materials and command and control, he said

Justin Trudeau's government raises taxes on wealthiest Canadians in federal budget

Ottawa

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government announced Tuesday it is imposing higher taxes on the wealthiest Canadians as part of the federal budget.

The budget proposes to increase the capital gains inclusion rate, which refers to the taxable share of profit made on the sale of assets.

The taxable portion of capital gains above \$250,000 Canadian (US\$181,000) would rise from half to two-thirds, which the federal government says will only affect 0.1% of Canadians and raise nearly \$20 billion Canadian (US\$14.5 billion) in revenue over five years.

"I know there will be many voices raised in protest. No one likes paying more tax, even — or perhaps particularly — those who can afford it the most," Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said.

"But before they complain too bitterly, I would like Canada's one per cent — Canada's 0.1 per cent — to consider this: What kind of Canada do you want to live in?" Freeland presented the



federal budget, which pledges \$53 billion Canadian (US\$38 billion) in new spending that she says is focused on economic justice for younger generations.

Freeland denied that her latest budget is mainly a political exercise — but nonetheless acknowledged that for anyone under 40 in Canada, it's "just harder to establish yourself" than it was for the generations that came before.

Freeland delivered a budget that she said capped the federal deficit at \$40 billion Canadian (US\$29 billion).

Trudeau's Liberal government is trailing badly in the polls amid concerns over the cost of living in Canada.

"This budget will do very little to improve Liberal prospects. They will be going down to defeat, and they know it," said Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto. "Their only hope is if Justin Trudeau steps aside and a new Liberal leader is selected. And, even then, it would be difficult for them to prevail."

Death toll from 4 days of rains rises to 63 in Pakistan with more rain on the forecast



Peshawar

Lightning and heavy rains led to 14 deaths in Pakistan, officials said on Wednesday, bringing the death toll from four days of extreme weather to at least 63.

Most of the deaths were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, in Pakistan's northwest. Collapsing buildings have killed 32 people, including 15 children and five women, said Khursheed Anwar, a spokesman for the Disaster Management Authority. Dozens more were also injured in the northwest, where 1,370 houses were damaged, Anwar said. The eastern province of Punjab has reported 21 lightning- and collapse-related deaths, while Baluchistan, in the country's southwest, reported 10 dead as authorities declared a state of emergency following flash floods. On Wednesday, Baluchistan was bracing for

more rains amid ongoing rescue and relief operations. Pakistan is seeing heavier rain in April due to climate change, said Zaheer Ahmed Babar, a senior official at the Pakistan Meteorological Department. "So far there has been 256 per cent above normal rainfall in Baluchistan," Babar told The Associated Press. "Overall, there has been 61 per cent above normal rainfall this month across Pakistan, and it shows climate change has already happened in our country." In 2022, downpours swelled rivers and at one point flooded a third of Pakistan, killing 1,739 people. The floods also caused USD 30 billion in damages, from which Pakistan is still trying to rebuild.

Neighbouring Afghanistan also witnessed heavy rains this month. So far, 33 people have died in rain-related incidents there.

Washington, Beijing discuss security issues

New Delhi

US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin spoke with his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun via video conference today. The US Department of Defence said both sides would resume telephone conversations between theatre commanders as was announced when US President Joe Biden met his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in November 2023. A US statement said, "The Secretary (Austin) reiterated that the US will continue to fly, sail and operate — safely and responsibly — wherever the international law allows." This was a reference to the South China Sea. "Austin underscored the importance of respect for freedom of navigation in high seas as guaranteed under the international law, especially in the South China Sea," the statement said. The two officials discussed US-China defence relations and regional and global security issues. "The Secretary emphasised the importance of continuing to open lines of military-to-military communication," the statement said. The US said it would continue to engage in discussions with China about future engagements between defence and military officials at multiple levels.

SANKALP PATRA

SANKALP Patra, the BJP's election manifesto that was released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior party leaders on Sunday, is being dissected not just for its inclusions but also the exclusions. According to the PM, the document — also titled Modi ki Guarantee — is 'more than just a collection of promises. It outlines the collective aspirations and goals of our nation.' Reiterating its commitment to rolling out 'one nation, one election' and a pan-India Uniform Civil Code — two issues mentioned in its 2019 manifesto as well — the BJP has highlighted development and public welfare as its top priorities.

The manifesto comes days after the Lokniti-CSDS survey's findings red-flagged unemployment and rising prices as primary concerns of the voters surveyed. The recently released India Employment Report also painted a

grim picture of the job scenario in the country. Looking to retain its hold on the middle class — its time-tested vote bank — the ruling party has promised



'ample employment opportunities, quality housing and healthcare, and access to quality education' for this section of the population. The pledge to extend the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, under which free ration is being provided to over 80 crore citizens, for another five years is aimed at mobilising the support of the

poor.

Eyeing a third successive term, the BJP has largely desisted from announcing sops to woo voters. It has also avoided any mention of the National Register of Citizens, a controversial initiative which had been promised in the 2019 manifesto. In the agriculture sector, the party has patted itself on the back for the 'unprecedented' increase in the minimum support price (MSP) for major crops, but has stopped short of addressing the main demand of farm unions — legal guarantee of procurement at the MSP. All in all, the manifesto walks a tightrope while spelling out a roadmap for making India a developed nation by 2047.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

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

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched — they must be felt with the heart.

-Helen Keller

PM's J&K outreach Assurance on statehood, Assembly poll welcome

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assurance on the restoration of statehood of Jammu and Kashmir and the conduct of Assembly elections has raised the hopes of the people of the union territory. The government's commitment to restoring normalcy is underscored by the PM's pledge during a poll rally in Udhampur to hold the Lok Sabha elections in the UT without fear of violence. However, these promises require timely implementation, along with upholding of democratic values and principles in the region. Further delay in restoring statehood and holding Assembly polls will undermine India's

democratic framework.

the need for democratic

and timeframe for these milestones and address the aspirations of the people.

Even as the government's development initiatives related to infrastructure, healthcare and connectivity are laudable and there has been a decline in terror-related incidents, significant challenges persist. It is essential to prioritise inclusive dialogue and engagement with all stakeholders, including regional political parties and civil society. The restoration of statehood and the conduct of free and fair elections will empower the people and pave the way for prosperity and political stability in J&K.



The prolonged absence of an elected government in the UT and the lack of representation in the Rajya Sabha are stumbling blocks to the region's progress.

The Supreme Court's order to conduct the Vidhan Sabha elections by September reinforces

representation and governance in J&K. The resumption of the electoral process is not only a constitutional obligation but also a crucial step towards rebuilding trust among the people. Going beyond rhetoric, the government needs to outline a roadmap

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Iran vs Israel

World must act to avert another war in West Asia

IRAN launched a missile and drone attack on Israel on Saturday night, turning into reality the greatest fears that had gripped the world after the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas, a close ally of Iran. Tehran's attack comes less than two weeks after Israel's April 1 bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus — which killed a top General of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and several military advisers — and one day after Iran seized an Israel-affiliated cargo



vessel, which has 17 Indian nationals among its 25-member crew. Tel Aviv has claimed that Iran's attack has been 'foiled', with hundreds of missiles and drones being intercepted with the help of the US and other allies. It also said that the bombardment caused injuries to over 10 persons, including a seven-year-old girl, and 'minor damage' to an airbase.

After the April 1 bombing, the Iranian leadership had vowed revenge,

with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declaring that Israel would be 'punished' for it. On Sunday, having demonstrated that it had the capability to hit deep inside the Israeli territory, Iran declared through its Permanent Representative to the UN that its retaliation had 'concluded', and warned Israel not to respond. Apart from the US, several Israel allies — including the UK and France — have reaffirmed their commitment to safeguarding Tel Aviv. More importantly, they must join forces to persuade Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu not to strike Iran, for that could plunge West Asia into a full-blown war. India, which has good relations with both countries, has been urging restraint; its immediate goal must be to rescue its nationals — including the ship crew and the labourers who migrated recently — from the region that may soon turn into a bigger war zone.

The events since the October 7 attack, with Israel using disproportionate force that has caused thousands of civilian deaths and a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, have placed West Asia on a powder keg. Escalation may benefit the war industry of Europe, US and China, but the right-thinking people there and the rest of the world must do their utmost to bring peace to the region.

SWITZERLAND has announced that it will host an international conference in June to provide a platform for a high-level dialogue on ways to reach a 'comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine, based on international law and the UN Charter'. Leaders of major Global South countries, including India, and Western nations have been invited. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will attend the summit, even as his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin has spoken disdainfully of the scheduled round of peace talks. He has warned that Moscow will not accept any enforced plans that ignore its interests. Claiming that Russia has not even been invited, Putin has retorted: 'They think there is nothing for us to do there, but at the same time they say it's impossible to decide anything without us.' In the same vein, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has dismissed the meet as a Western ruse to rally broader international support for Kyiv.

It is obvious that no viable peace

plan can take shape without Russia's participation and consent. Putin has already dismissed Zelenskyy's formula requiring Moscow to pull back its troops, pay compensation to Ukraine and face an international tribunal for its alleged crimes. The US-led West's ploy to seize the initiative through the Swiss talks can prove counterproductive and further prolong the war, which is in its third year and has caused global upheaval in terms of supply chain disruptions.

The onus is on the host country, which

School bus mishap

A wake-up call to ensure students' safety

THE heartbreaking loss of six young lives in a school bus accident in Haryana's Mahendragarh has laid bare grave negligence and blatant disregard for fundamental safety protocols. Distressingly, the bus, which belonged to a local private school, was operating on a day that had been declared a holiday on account of Eid.



The recklessness displayed by the driver, reportedly under the influence of alcohol, caused the tragedy. The culpability extends beyond the driver; the school principal and an official have been arrested for their role in this incident.

This case not only emphasises the need for accountability but also a comprehensive review of the safety measures governing school transportation. Despite guidelines

laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997, it is evident that enforcement mechanisms have fallen short, allowing such tragedies to occur across the country with alarming frequency. The SC instructions, mandating experienced drivers, adherence to speed limits and stringent disciplinary action for traffic violations, must be rigorously enforced. The authorities in all states must uphold these standards to ensure the wellbeing of every child. A dedicated regulatory body should be formed to oversee school transportation. Such an entity would be responsible for monitoring compliance, conducting regular inspections and implementing corrective measures to minimise risks.

It's incumbent upon policymakers, educators and law enforcement agencies to heed this wake-up call and take concrete steps to prevent such mishaps from recurring. The Mahendragarh case must serve as a catalyst for meaningful change, ushering in an era where the safety of children is non-negotiable. Anything less would be a disservice to the memory of innocent lives lost and a betrayal of our collective responsibility to protect vulnerable citizens.

imperative to have an influential player like China on board. India, which is seen as a potential mediator because of its good ties with both warring nations, needs to play a proactive role to prevent the June summit from coming a cropper and being reduced to a Western show of strength.

has affirmed that 'peace is at the heart of the Swiss spirit', to go all out to bring Russia to the negotiating table. It's also



Ukraine peace talks

Imperative to bring Russia on board

Climate change

Courts affirm protection from impact as human right

THE verdict of the European Court of Human Rights in a case filed by older Swiss women who have challenged government inaction on climate change marks a pivotal moment in climate litigation. The landmark order asserts that the protection from climate impact is a fundamental human right, setting a precedent for cases across Europe. It underscores the urgency of addressing the climate crisis. While the ruling's effectiveness hinges on governments' willingness to implement robust climate policies, the importance of public pressure and activism to hold the European governments accountable cannot be overstated.

The European court's assertion resonates globally, especially in the light of a recent judgment by India's Supreme Court. The SC emphasised that climate change directly impacts



the right to life. It observed that India should prioritise clean energy initiatives, highlighting citizens' right to be shielded from the detrimental

effects of the climate crisis. Legal victories are also reshaping climate policies in the Netherlands and the US.

The rulings showcase the

interconnectedness of climate change and human rights. They highlight how environmental degradation disproportionately affects marginalised communities and exacerbates inequalities. From indigenous tribes in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to neglected communities facing food and water shortages, the ramifications of climate change are far-reaching. Transitioning to renewable energy emerges as a pivotal solution in mitigating its adverse effects. It not only reduces reliance on fossil fuels, but also promotes social equity by ensuring access to clean and affordable energy for all segments of society. These judgments signal a paradigm shift in climate litigation. This should compel nations to take action to combat climate change and safeguard the rights of the present and future generations.

Righting a grave wrong

SC rules in favour of Delhi Metro corporation

SETTING aside its own 2021 judgment, the Supreme Court has ruled that the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) is not obliged to pay Rs 8,000 crore to the Delhi Airport Metro Express Private Ltd (DAMEPL), a Reliance Infrastructure firm, in pursuance of a 2017 arbitral award. The court observed that its previous verdict had caused 'grave miscarriage of justice' to a public utility, which was saddled with an exorbitant liability. Stating that the award had 'suffered from the vice of perversity and patent illegality', the court has ordered that the amount already paid, if any, by the petitioner (DMRC) as a result of coercive action should be returned to it. Commendably, the apex court has admitted that it had erred in interfering with the 2019 decision of a Division Bench of the Delhi High Court. The case has had its fair share of twists and turns. The arbitral award had been upheld by a single-judge Bench of the HC in 2018, only to be struck down by the Division Bench.

The Anil Ambani-owned Reliance Infrastructure then approached the SC against the Division Bench's order. A two-judge Bench of the top court restored the award. The DMRC's plea seeking a review of the 2021 judgment was dismissed, forcing it to file a curative petition. In 2008, the DAMEPL had entered into a contract with the DMRC for running the airport Metro line till 2038. However, the private entity stopped operating the Metro on the airport line, presumably over safety concerns; it invoked an arbitration clause, alleging violation of the contract, and sought the termination fee. The DMRC bore the brunt of the DAMEPL's 'illegal' decision to terminate the concessionaire agreement. The apex court has finally righted a huge wrong and also demonstrated its ability to do self-correction. This augurs well for India's justice delivery system. The judiciary at all levels should treat this judgment as a benchmark, especially in commercial matters where corporates browbeat public utilities.

Safeguard students

Tight security on campus a must to curb abuse

THE incidents of sexual abuse at two educational institutions in Punjab underscore the need for measures to safeguard the students on the campuses. The gangrape of a student at Government Ripudaman College, Nabha, was reported earlier this week; in early January, several minor girls had accused a teacher of sexual harassment in a Majitha school. These crimes serve as a stark reminder of the vulnerability of students, particularly girls, in an environment where they should feel secure and comfortable. It is unacceptable that institutions which should serve as temples of learning and knowledge have become hunting grounds for criminal elements due to rank negligence and apathy. The revelation that the perpetrators of the Nabha college incident were outsiders who frequented the campus exposes a glaring security lapse. The absence of stringent checks and the outsourcing of security duties highlight systemic failure.

The reluctance of traumatised victims to report these crimes is a major cause for concern. Students must be encouraged to speak up and seek justice without fear of retribution or stigma. In the light of the distressing reality, it is imperative that the authorities take swift and decisive action. The district administration should reach out to colleges and schools to stop outsiders from entering their premises and to ensure the safety and wellbeing of every student. Regular safety audits and counselling sessions can help empower students. A zero-tolerance approach to crimes on the campus must be adopted.

Proactive measures must be taken to sensitise both teachers and students to the importance of campus security. Training programmes should be conducted to spur the staff to respond promptly whenever any complaint is received. The future of our society hinges on the nurturing of our youth. We cannot afford to fail them.

Markets slump for third day on fears of escalating tensions in Middle East

Mumbai

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty continued to slump on Tuesday dragged down by heavy selling in IT stocks amid weak global trends and fears of escalating tensions in the Middle East.

Outflow of foreign fund also dented investors' sentiment.

Continuing its downtrend for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 456.10 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,943.68. During the day, it slumped 714.75 points or 0.97 per cent to 72,685.03.

The NSE Nifty declined 124.60 points or 0.56 per cent to finish at 22,147.90.

From the Sensex basket, Infosys, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Larsen & Toubro were the major laggards.

Titan Company, Hindustan Unilever, HDFC Bank, Maruti, ITC, Power Grid and Reliance Industries were the gainers.



In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Monday.

Israel's military chief said on Monday that his country will respond to Iran's weekend attack, but he did not elaborate on when and how as world leaders urged against retaliation, trying to avoid a spiral of violence in the Middle East.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.26 per cent to USD 89.87 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors offloaded equities worth Rs 3,268 crore, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark tanked 845.12 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 73,399.78. The NSE Nifty declined 246.90 points or 1.10 per cent to finish at 22,272.50.

Reliance MET City registers 60% growth in financial year 2023-24



New Delhi

Model Economic Township Limited (MET City), a 100 per cent subsidiary of Reliance Industries Limited, witnessed a strong growth of 60% in the just-concluded financial year 2023-24.

The total number of plots booked in the financial year was 1,079 across all segments, resulting in achieving a total booking value of Rs 1,913 crore for the financial year, which is almost 60% higher than the previous financial year, according to a release by the Indian conglomerate.

The industrial segment saw growth in plot bookings by 93%, reaching a booking value of Rs 896 crore in 2023-24, compared to Rs 468 crore in 2022-23.

Prices also saw an increase of 24 per cent compared to last year.

The residential segment plots witnessed remarkable growth with a 70% increase reaching a booking value of Rs 1,004 crore in 2023-24, compared to Rs 620 crore in 2022-23.

Prices have gone higher by 70% compared to last year.

MET City also witnessed the groundbreaking of India's first cent percent FDI in defence manufacturing by SAAB of Sweden. The facility will

manufacture a world-class Carl Gustaf Weapon system for the Indian Armed Forces. Apart from signing SAAB, company also signed up key players like Sanko Gosei (Japan), Svam Toyal (Japan), NeoPearl (Switzerland), Shilla C&T (Korea) and Jway (Korea), Indiamo (Belgium), ERDA, Mark Exhaust and Dhoot Transmission (India), as per the release.

Additionally, Reliance MET City has secured agreements for the establishment of a hospital and a school.

MET City added Beumer from Germany as a new company bringing the total number of companies to more than 540 from 10 different countries.

"...MET City has emerged as a premier business destination of India attracting investments from diverse sectors. It is a pioneering project in sustainable development with over Rs 8,000 crore investment already committed," said SV Goyal, CEO and WTD of MET City.

"With its fundamentals strong and an excellent cross-functional team in place, MET City is seeing tremendous growth year on year and the momentum is likely to continue with more ambitious projects and numbers coming in future," Goyal added.

Wholesale inflation increases to 3-month high of 0.53% in March

New Delhi

Wholesale inflation in the country rose marginally to three-month high of 0.53 per cent in March compared to 0.20 per cent in the preceding month due to increase in prices of vegetables, potato, onion and crude oil. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation was in the negative zone from April to October and had turned positive in November at 0.26 per cent. The inflation in March 2023 was 1.41 per cent.

"The annual rate of inflation based on all-India Wholesale Price Index (WPI) number is 0.53 per cent (provisional) for the month of March, 2024 (over March, 2023)," the commerce and industry ministry said in a



statement on Monday.

Food inflation moved up marginally to 6.88 per cent in March from 5.42 per cent in the same month a year ago, data showed. Inflation in vegetables was 19.52 per cent, up from (- 2.39) per cent in the same month a year ago.

WPI for potato witnessed a jump of 52.96 per cent against a deflation of 25.59 per cent, while for onion 56.99 per cent as compared to (-) 36.83 per cent in March 2023. The food inflation also shot up to a three-month high of 4.6 per cent in March 2024.

Goods exports decline 3.11% to \$437 billion in FY24



New Delhi

India's merchandise exports dipped marginally in March to \$41.69 billion, and by 3.11 per cent during the last fiscal year to \$437.06 billion mainly due to continued geopolitical turmoil, and depressed global trade.

Imports, too, declined in March as well during the entire 2023-24. Trade deficit, or the gap between imports and exports, narrowed 17.74 per cent in March to \$15.6 billion and came down

9.33 per cent to \$240.17 billion in FY24.

Gold imports, which surged 30 per cent during the fiscal year to \$45.54 billion, was one of the major contributors to trade deficit.

On escalation of the crisis in the Middle East, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said diversification of India's exports helps in mitigating impact of conflicts.

Automobile exports from India dip 5.5 per cent in FY'24

New Delhi

Automobile exports from India declined 5.5 per cent in FY2'4 due to the monetary crisis in various overseas markets, according to the latest data shared by industry body SIAM.

Overall exports stood at 45,00,492 units in the last fiscal compared to 47,61,299 units in FY'23.

Commenting on the drop in overseas shipments last fiscal, SIAM President Vinod Aggarwal said the situation remains volatile in various overseas markets.

"Some of the countries, where we are very strong with commercial vehicle and two-wheeler exports, have been facing foreign exchange-related issues," he noted.

The last fiscal saw a

sizeable drop in commercial vehicle, two-wheeler and three-wheeler shipments, although passenger vehicles grew marginally.

However, in the January-March quarter this year, we have seen good recovery, especially for two-wheelers, indicating better potential for the rest of the year, he said.

"We are very hopeful that going forward, the situation will improve," Aggarwal added.

In the passenger vehicle segment, exports increased 1.4 per cent to 6,72,105 units in FY24 from 6,62,703 units in FY'23.

Maruti Suzuki led the segment with the shipment of 2,80,712 units against 2,55,439 units in 2022-23.

Hyundai Motor India exported 1,63,155 units

last fiscal. It had shipped 1,53,019 units in FY23. Kia Motors exported 52,105 units, while Volkswagen India shipped out 44,180 units last fiscal.

Nissan Motor India and Honda Cars chipped in with shipments of 42,989 and 37,589 units, respectively, in the 2023-24 fiscal.

Two-wheeler exports witnessed a dip of 5.3 per cent last fiscal at 34,58,416 units compared to 36,52,122 units in 2022-23.

Similarly, commercial vehicle shipments dropped 16 per cent to 65,816 units against 78,645 units in FY23.

Three-wheeler exports declined 18 per cent to 2,99,977 units last fiscal compared to 3,65,549 units in the 2022-23 financial year.

Byju's India CEO Arjun Mohan quits, founder Raveendran to take over firm's daily operations

New Delhi

Arjun Mohan, CEO of India operations of Think and Learn, which owns Byju's brand, has resigned from the beleaguered firm, which on Monday also announced a business rejig consolidating its operations into three verticals.

Mohan had joined Byju's in July last year as the CEO for international business after quitting rival UpGrad in February as CEO.

Later, he was given charge of India operations in September after Byju's then CEO Mrinal Mohit resigned. After taking over the charge, Mohan undertook restructuring of the organisation which led to layoffs of around 4,000 employees at Byju's.

Byju's Founder Byju Raveendran will now handle the firm's day-to-day operations following the resignation of Mohan, the statement said.

The company has also announced a major rejig of its business, consolidating it into three focused divisions -The Learning App, Online classes and



Tuition centres, and Test-prep.

"The changes follow an extensive seven-month operational review and cost optimisation exercise led by outgoing Byju's India CEO Arjun Mohan. This new phase will also see Byju Raveendran taking a more hands-on approach in spearheading the daily operations of the company," the company said.

Mohan will now transition to an external advisory role, lending his deep edtech expertise to the company and its founders during this transformation phase, it added.

Byju's expects the new structure will enable each vertical to be nimbler, cost-efficient, and better equipped to capitalise on market opportunities.

Each of the new verticals will have separate leaders who will independently run the businesses sustainably to ensure profitability.

Over the past four years, Raveendran had focused primarily on strategic aspects such as raising capital and driving global expansion.

"With this new organisational structure and with the return of Byju Raveendran as the operational leader, BYJU'S is now well-positioned to begin its next chapter of innovation-led growth by launching at scale its new suite of AI-first products that have already received an overwhelmingly positive feedback in the pilot phase," the statement said.

Mohan's exit is the latest in a series of top level departures from the embattled edtech firm,

which had once commanded a peak valuation of USD 22 billion.

Earlier, apart from Mrinal Mohit, company CFO Ajay Goel had resigned in October last year within six months of joining the firm. Amid various disputes with creditors and investors, cash-strapped Byju's has been facing challenges in paying salaries of employees.

The company raised USD 200 million at 99 per cent lower valuation compared to its peak valuation of USD 22 billion attained in March 2021.

However, it is unable to use the fund as a group of four investors has approached company law tribunal NCLT, Bengaluru bench which has put the fund utilisation on hold.

The group of four investors—Prosus, General Atlantic, Sofina, and Peak XV—along with support from other shareholders, including Tiger and Owl Ventures, had approached the NCLT against the company management and the rights issue.

Byju's held an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on March 29 to increase authorised share capital to absorb the USD 200 million fund. The company said that its EGM resolution has been approved by 55 per cent shareholders.

NCLT in an interim order instructed Byju's to hold the funds received from the rights issue in an escrow account for now. The next hearing on the matter is scheduled for April 23.

Will the Iran-Israel conflict affect crude prices in the world and India?

New Delhi

Except for the period between January-February 2022 and June-July 2022 when the crude oil crossed the \$100 per barrel mark, prices have largely remained in two digits amid persisting geopolitical situations—Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Gaza conflicts—in the world and some shipping companies opting for a longer route due to the Red Sea turmoil.

According to reports, “oil prices fell on Monday as market participants dialled back risk premiums” in the wake of Iran’s attack on Israel. On April 12, Brent crude futures settled at \$90.45 per barrel, at around 1 % higher due to tensions between Iran and Israel.

Brent was trading at \$89.35, down by 1.22 %, on Monday, as per the Oil Price.com,

Iran’s drone and missile attack on Israel has raised concerns that it may turn into a bigger regional conflict, affecting oil traffic through the Middle East, experts say. Israeli Minister Benny Gantz was also quoted as saying on Sunday that Israel would choose the appropriate time and method to retaliate and “exact the price from Iran”.

According to the US Energy Information Administration, most of the crude oil reserves in the world are located in regions



that have been prone to political upheaval or in regions that have had oil production disruptions because of political events.

“Several major oil price shocks have occurred at the same time that political events caused supply disruptions, most notably in recent years, conflicts and political events in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, Libya, and Venezuela have contributed to world oil supply disruptions that have resulted in higher oil prices,” it adds.

Will it affect India?

Fuel prices are the biggest drivers of inflation and prices of essential commodities. Though experts believe that the latest conflict could set the global crude on fire, India may remain unscathed till June due to the upcoming General Election.

“Tension in supply or transit

zones can precipitate an increase in the cost of transport and insurance but Indian domestic retail prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas are likely to remain unchanged till election results are announced,” they add.

Being a net importer of crude oil, India is particularly sensitive to global oil prices.

Nearly 85% of its petrol and diesel requirements are met through imports.

“The quality of crude oil imported by India from the Persian Gulf is called Indian Basket crude. It is weighted average of Dubai and Oman (sour) and Brent Crude (sweet) crude prices,” they explain.

Indian officials say rising crude oil prices are always a matter of concern.

OPEC dominance

In the past few years, the US

has emerged as a major player in the oil market despite the OPEC dominance. Analysts say its role as a key exporter is shaping the future of global energy markets amid the prevailing geopolitical and economic concerns.

According to the EIA, crude oil prices are driven by global supply and demand. Economic growth is one of the biggest factors affecting petroleum products and their demands.

“The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) can significantly influence oil prices by setting production targets for its members. OPEC includes countries with some of the world’s largest oil reserves. At the beginning of 2021, OPEC members controlled about 72% of total world proved crude oil reserves (plus lease condensate), and they accounted for 37% of total world crude oil production in 2021,” it adds.

US competition

However, US crude oil exports established a record in 2023, averaging 4.1 million barrels per day (b/d), 13% (482,000 b/d) more than the previous annual record set in 2022.

“Except for 2021, US crude oil exports have increased every year since 2015, when the US ban on most crude oil exports

was lifted. The resulting total net petroleum imports (imports minus exports) were about -1.64 million b/d, which means that the United States was a net petroleum exporter,” as per the EIA.

The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) collects, analyses and disseminates independent and impartial energy information to promote sound policymaking, efficient markets, and public understanding of energy and its interaction with the economy and the environment.

Despite being a net importer of crude oil, the US exported small amounts of crude oil for over 100 years.

There was a crude oil export ban but some exports were allowed, primarily to Canada.

However, the situation changed as the shale oil boom rapidly expanded US oil production. In the past decade or so.

“The net impact of continued US export growth has been a steady decline in net crude oil imports. The journey from minimal exports to becoming a prominent player in the global market changed the dynamics of the market controlled by OPEC,” say experts, adding that the US exports will continue to shape the markets, keeping it competitive.

Telecom department to seek Trai’s view on satcom spectrum allocation, licensing process

New Delhi

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is expected to approach Trai this month to seek the regulator’s views on method and pricing for allocation of spectrum and scope of licences to be issued for satcom services, according to sources.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) had floated a consultation paper on “Assignment of Spectrum for Space-based Communication Services” on April 6, 2023 but returned the reference back to DoT after announcement of new Telecommunication Act.

“DoT will seek views of Trai on pricing and methodology to allocate spectrum for space based communication services. It may also look to fine-tune existing licences to bring in full clarity on the kind of

services that satcom companies with administratively allocated spectrum can provide,” a source, who did not wish to be named, told PTI.

Satcom or satellite communication technology enables service providers to ensure internet connectivity in remote areas or difficult terrain.

Bharti Group-backed OneWeb and Reliance Group Jio Satcom have been issued GMPCS (satellite telephony) and VSAT licence for the services.

Elon Musk-owned Starlink has also applied for the permit to start satcom services in India.

With constellation of 4,000 low earth orbit (LEO) satellites, Starlink dominates satcom space. OneWeb has over 600 LEO satellites.

According to the source, VSAT licence has

norms that are not in sync with the provisions of new Telecommunication Act and therefore need to be fine-tuned.

Under the Telecommunications Act 2023, satellite communication companies can get spectrum without auction for point-to-point communications.

However, there are provisions that allow a VSAT service operator to provide internet services to multiple independent subscribers, which may be interpreted differently than envisioned in the Telecommunication Act 2023.

“Hence, there is a need felt to fine-tune licences for satcom services. A decision will be taken based on Trai’s recommendation on the permits that should be issued to satcom service providers,” the source said.

Aligned but Autonomous: India-US Relations in the Modi Era

In June 2023, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined an elite league of leaders, such as Winston Churchill and Nelson Mandela, who have been invited to address the United States (US) Congress twice. In his first address to the joint meeting of the US Congress in 2016, relatively newly minted as prime minister, Modi celebrated how India and the US had overcome “the hesitations of history” and called upon the two nations to “work together to convert shared ideals into practical cooperation” (1). In 2023, this time basking in the prestige of India serving as president of the G20, he described the partnership between India and the US as the “defining partnership of this century”. He said: “Through the long and winding road that we [India and the US] have travelled, we have met the test of friendship” (2).

It has been a long and winding road indeed, not only for India and the US, but for Modi himself. For a leader who was shunned by the US for years, the June 2023 speech was momentous in the crafting of a more robust trajectory for India-US bilateral ties. For many who had assumed that the civil nuclear pact, signed in 2005, was the high water mark of bilateral engagement, Modi's push for greater synergy between New Delhi and Washington by burying shibboleths of the past has been a revelation. His leadership has been critical in ensuring that long-pending foundational agreements were finalised and new vistas were identified, including in the domains of technology and defence. Working with three US presidents of disparate temperaments over the last 10 years, Modi has succeeded in forging a personal bond with each one, keeping the focus squarely on the wider aim of strategic convergence.

This is not to say that there have been no differences; the relationship has continued to grow despite those differences. As US Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jonathan Finer has suggested, there are several “difficult issues” that remain in the relationship “right up to the present day” (3). At the same time, he underlined that there is a bipartisan view in the US that both countries must seize the important opportunities that the world is presenting to the two sides, both geopolitically and economically.

This moment in the India-US relationship is, therefore, a unique and important one. In the words of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, “there is structural soundness in the India-US relationship”, and it is “certainly proofed against political check” (4). The world's two major democracies are becoming more adept at overcoming the obstacles in their relationship, driven as they are by a singular strategic logic. It is now a strategic imperative for the two to work closely together to maintain a favourable balance of power that advances their key interests and sustains their values. This is particularly true in this age of the Indo-Pacific, with the rise of China paving the way for new challenges to emerge.

The US has understood that while a sustained focus on the Indo-Pacific is needed, it will have to be buttressed by strengthening old partnerships and building new ones. The ‘hubs and spokes’ alliance framework of the Cold War era is no longer tenable. Even as it may work with traditional allies like Japan, Australia, and South Korea—and reassure them of the US's long-term regional commitment—it will be

put to the test with newer partners like India, which may never enter into formal alliances. Informal, ad-hoc coalitions will have to be built to ensure that convergences can be exploited and divergences are managed. This will also require shedding older inhibitions about sharing critical technologies, given their centrality in shaping the 21st-century balance of power.

Yet this change and its acceptance across both sides of the political spectrum could only happen because India, too, has evolved in the last decade. Throughout the Cold War, New Delhi understood non-alignment as an instrument to achieve strategic autonomy by eschewing close partnerships. That understanding is being turned on its head, as Indian policymakers today deem strong partnerships as imperative means to enhance



the country's strategic autonomy. Issue-based coalitions are now the norm in India's external engagements. India is no longer non-aligned but rather is willing to align according to particular issues. Such alignments will not mean formal alliances, but they represent a significant shift in Indian foreign policy discourse and practice.

This reconfiguration in India-US relations could not have happened without Modi's stewardship of Indian foreign policy. In 2016, following his address before the US Congress, India and the US agreed to sign the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), a long-pending foundational defence agreement first proposed in 2006. It took approximately a decade for India to sign the agreement, mostly because New Delhi remained hesitant about entering into a close defence partnership with the US. The hesitancy was, in turn, attributable, at least in part, to the ideological legacy of the adversarial Cold War-era relationship, underpinned by India's preference for ‘non-alignment’, and in part, too, to a leadership that was short on authority, if not conviction.

Since the end of the Cold War, successive Indian governments have signalled a commitment to a robust partnership with the US. However, it required Modi's steadfast leadership to usher in a fundamental transformation in the India-US relationship. From resolving the vexatious issue of civil nuclear energy cooperation to significantly upgrading defence and technology cooperation, from arriving at a common understanding on a range of international issues to building a truly global partnership, India-US relations seem to have reached a place where every challenge can be transformed into an opportunity.

As the political reality of the 2014 elections indicated a clear shift in power

in New Delhi, the Obama administration at the time moved swiftly to restore normalcy in its relations with Modi. For Washington, the message was simple: Modi's historic mandate could bring new vigour to the relationship that appeared to be drifting. Modi was equally pragmatic, losing no time in reaching out to the US and agreeing to a bilateral summit meeting with President Barack Obama in Washington in September 2014. These early indications suggested that amid the divergence in India-US relations that grew under the second UPA government, Modi, as prime minister, was determined to get the bilateral relationship back on track.

From the outset, Modi's foreign policy practice displayed a conviction that if India-US relations were to progress, the impediments would have to be removed, resulting in a qualitative shift. Even though most prime ministers before Modi attempted to build a strong partnership with the US, the tone and tenor of Modi's outreach to the country has been markedly different. It is no longer ambivalent, and unhindered by the ideological baggage of non-alignment. Furthermore, Modi's personalised diplomacy has added a new flavour to the bilateral relationship. He managed to establish a personal relationship with all three US presidents who have ruled during his term. Unlike his predecessors, Modi has also been a problem-solver: the alacrity with which the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Defence have responded to the many challenges facing them, such as the civil nuclear liability and defence cooperation agreements, stands in contrast to the apathy of the previous government.

One reason behind this growing strategic embrace lies in individual conviction. The US remains essential to Modi's vision of India's radical transformation. The success of his many ambitious plans for India's economic transformation, from ‘Make in India’ to ‘Digital India’, hinges upon greater cooperation with the US. As he wrote in an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal published in September 2014, “India and the US have a fundamental stake in each other's success” (5), and New Delhi's stake is even higher, given India's quest for rapid transformation into a developed economy. His government's open commitment to the India-US relationship is one of the most dramatic changes in that bilateral relationship.

It heralds a new foreign policy dynamic in which hardy India-US ties are viewed as an important component of enhanced strategic autonomy for India. This is in contrast to the traditional view of non-alignment, which regarded a close relationship with the US as a constraint to Indian foreign policymaking.

This volume examines the trends in India-US ties under the Modi government over the last decade. It starts with the big picture of three Ds—diaspora, democracy, and diplomacy. Dhruva Jaishankar suggests that India's large diaspora in the US and a shared sense of democracy between the two continue to deepen India-US relations, despite differences. He argues that both nations “will have to assiduously work towards better understanding each other if these factors are to support—rather than detract from—diplomatic cooperation.”

Arun Kumar, who served as the US's Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Global Markets, surveys Modi's outreach to the Obama administration and finds that it set the course for re-energising bilateral activities between the two governments, specifically in areas such as trade, defence, and counterterrorism. A relationship that had seemed moribund was brought back to life by Modi's energetic diplomatic engagements, setting the course for a ‘defining partnership’.

Many nations may have found the transition from Obama to President Donald Trump difficult to navigate. But as S. Paul Kapur highlights in his essay, not only did the US-India relationship flourish during the Trump era, but general strategic predictability in the US-India partnership led to particular, unexpected achievements, and India under Modi made full use of the resultant opportunities.

Sameer Patil and Vivek Mishra examine the Biden era, arguing that while new policies under the Biden administration have ensured that the bilateral relationship gathers new momentum, the US has found a complementary and enabling partner in the Modi government, resulting in a relationship with India that is “stronger, closer and more dynamic than at any other time in history.” Biden is the third US president that Modi has engaged with; in his engagements with all three, Modi has imparted an assuredness to the relationship through deft political management. Trisha Ray's essay focuses on India's burgeoning technology partnership with the US. Having now emerged as the centrepiece of India-US bilateral engagement, this partnership on emerging technologies has made headway over the last few years. The progress is seen both bilaterally and under the aegis of the Quad, especially as India's deteriorating strategic relations with China and the US's trade restrictions targeting China have prompted efforts to reduce dependence on China.

The other main driver in the India-US relationship is their defence ties. Vikram J. Singh examines their evolution, with regular exercises, better and more interoperable capabilities via defence trade, and new arrangements to facilitate cooperation, including the sharing of sensitive intelligence, becoming the norm over the past decade as opposed to being the exception in the past. Despite challenges and naysayers on both sides, Singh asserts that not only has there been a “substantial acceleration in the decade since Prime Minister Modi took office” but “the expectations of the two sides have been realistic and quite well matched.”

With the centre of gravity of global politics and economics shifting to the Indo-Pacific, India-US partnership in this key strategic geography has been characterised as “a combination of parallelism, alignment, and convergence,” as noted by Satu Limaye and Lei Nishiawatoko. Taking a cue from Modi's articulation of the shared vision of an open, stable, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region being a pillar of India-US partnership, “the Indo-Pacific is set to be an enduring and sustainable facet of India-US bilateral ties into the foreseeable future.”

India Employment Outlook 2030: Navigating Sectoral Trends and Competencies

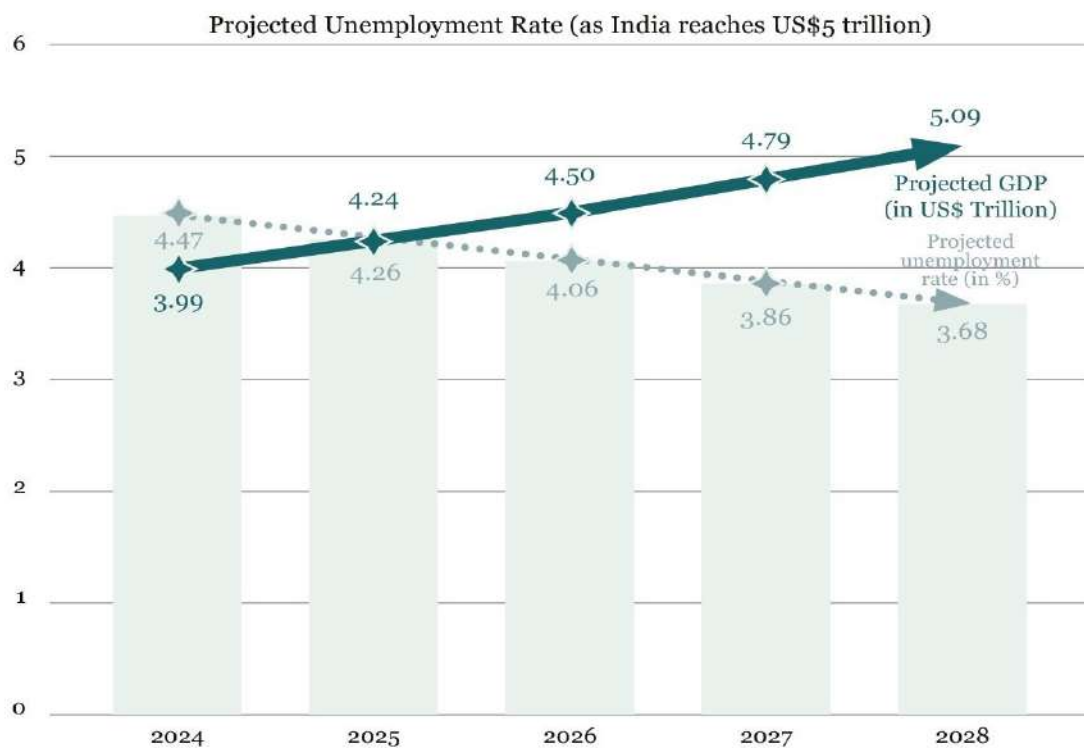
India's job market is experiencing a transformation as the country has become the world's fastest growing large economy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The country's young population, whose median age is 28.4 years, holds a key to fuelling economic expansion. With a GDP growth rate of 7.8 percent, India could potentially achieve its target of becoming a US\$5-trillion economy by 2026-27, with such growth being underpinned by strong private consumption and public investment.

These goals are set against the ongoing shifts in the global landscape and dynamics of manufacturing, brought about by the pandemic, geopolitical tensions, and supply disruptions. Notably, the import demand of the United States (US) has pivoted away from China towards India due to the latter's competitive cost structure, abundant labour resources, and burgeoning domestic market. In India, manufacturing is a vital sector that has consistently contributed 17-19 percent to the Gross Value Added (GVA). The Indian government has prioritised manufacturing through initiatives such as Make in India, Production Linked Incentive Schemes, and SAMARTH Udyog. The service sector also contributes a significant share to the GVA, exhibiting potential for generating employment and boosting economic growth.

Despite its contributions to the economy, employment in the manufacturing sector has stagnated and even declined, especially in the urban sector, over the last decade. Technological advancements have led to a declining capital-to-output ratio and an increasing capital-to-labour ratio, which raise questions about the manufacturing sector's capacity to continue absorbing India's expanding workforce. The employment outlook for India's manufacturing sector suggests that overall employment in the sector will continue to decline.

Which job markets should India's youth look to in the next decade?

With the highest employment elasticity to economic growth,



India's service sector presents a promising outlook. This report illuminates ten opportunity sub-sectors within the service sector that have the greatest potential for growth and employment generation for the Indian economy by 2030. These opportunity sectors are:

and the startup ecosystem. Together, these sectors have the potential to create more than 100 million new jobs by 2030.

This report undertakes an estimation exercise to calculate India's employment elasticity. Sectoral employment elasticities are computed over

recommendations are made:

Policymakers should collaborate with educational institutions, private sector employers, and civil society organisations to identify employability gaps. Curriculum adjustments and programme designs should align with evolving



digital services (Fourth Industrial Revolution or 4IR, content economy); financial services (banking and insurance); health services; hospitality services; consumer retail services; global capability centres; renewable energy; e-commerce; MSMEs;

short- and long-run periods and are segregated by region and gender. The authors then explore the policy implications of the inferences from the estimates.

To support India's expanding employment outlook over the next decade, the following key

labour market needs to enhance the youth's employability and productivity.

Skill sets must be diversified, and cutting-edge technology skills and technology-proof job skills should be nurtured. Formal mentorship programs

and bridge courses are required for continuous human capital development.

Governments and other key stakeholders across economic sectors must facilitate natural transitions in employment sectors, emphasising domains with high employment elasticity, such as tourism, hospitality, financial services, and healthcare. Growth in these service industries must be prioritised to absorb the surplus labour released due to technological advancements in Indian manufacturing.

It is crucial to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship to stimulate job creation and support the expansion of the startup ecosystem to encourage innovation and promote youth participation. This can also empower female workforce participation through the provision of small-business support and by fostering gender-sensitive workplace environments.

Public-private collaboration is critical for developing job-ready, semi-skilled, and skilled workforces and establishing or strengthening R&D departments within businesses to grow innovation and create employment opportunities.

Public policies and initiatives such as Digital India, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Startup India, Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes, and PM Vishwakarma Yojana must be leveraged to stimulate employment. The government must negotiate mutually beneficial trade agreements, particularly for labour-intensive export sectors, to attract investments and create jobs in these sectors.

India's employment outlook for 2030 presents a landscape of both challenges and opportunities; harnessing these opportunities necessitates coordinated and targeted action by relevant stakeholders, including individuals, the private sector, civil society, and the government. The aim is to make India's vision of a digitally empowered, skilled, innovative, and self-reliant economy a reality.

India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: Towards a New Discourse in Global Connectivity

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) was announced in September 2023 following a meeting in New Delhi between the leaders of India, the US, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Italy, France, Germany, and the European Commission on the sidelines of the G20 Summit. The Israeli port of Haifa is integral to the proposed corridor, but the growing fallout of the unprecedented terror attacks carried out by Hamas in Israel on 7 October 2023 has temporarily cast a shadow over the ambitious plan. Enthusiasm for the plan, however, can be seen from the statement of US President Joe Biden, who described the signing of the memorandum of understanding to establish the corridor as a “real big deal,” one that would include transport, data, renewable electricity grids, and clean hydrogen pipelines.[1]

Geopolitical and geoeconomic considerations underpin the rationale for the IMEC. The proposal emerged from the womb of the 2020 Abraham Accords and the I2U2 grouping, which added India to the US-Israel-UAE grouping in October 2021. The first virtual summit of the I2U2 in July 2022 suggested that its focus areas would include strategic transport links. Saudi Arabia was crucial for the project, and it was brought into the equation just as the US-led efforts to drive a possible establishment of diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Tel Aviv were gathering momentum. These elements were at play when the National Security Advisors of India, the US, UAE, and Saudi Arabia met in Riyadh in May 2023. Israel was an early and enthusiastic advocate of the project, with one former Israeli minister describing the transport link as a “peace train” that would foster peace and prosperity in the region.

However, most of this optimism was predicated on the assumption that the conflict-resolution process among the major countries in West Asia witnessed in recent years would continue or, at the very least, the countries could manage their differences more effectively. These positive trends were evident in the way the Arab quartet of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain buried the hatchet with Qatar; the normalisation of Türkiye's ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE; the flowering of relations between Israel and the UAE; and the restoration of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The chain reaction following the 7 October 2023 attacks has temporarily derailed this process, and some old fissures are again coming to the fore. Israel's massive retaliatory

attacks on Gaza are widely seen as excessive and disproportionate and have triggered a wave of anger in the Arab world. The incendiary rhetoric emerging from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a range of Israeli politicians and the manifest unwillingness or inability of the Biden administration to push for an early ceasefire have also led to increasingly sharp criticism from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. Amid rising anti-US sentiment in the region, there is now a genuine concern that the war could drag on and even widen into a regional conflict with accompanying collateral damage on the political front.

A regional dimension of the conflict has already emerged due to the attacks being launched by Houthi militias in Yemen on shipping with presumed Israeli links as it traverses the narrow Bab al Mandab Strait that connects the Arabian Sea to the Red Sea and onwards with the Suez Canal. The Red Sea is one of the major arteries of global trade, accounting for an estimated 30 percent of container volumes and 12 percent of international trade.[2] Its criticality for global supply chains had already become apparent in March 2021 when just one stranded ship led to a week-long closure of the Suez Canal. The situation caused by repeated missile, drone, helicopter, and boat-mounted attacks by Houthi forces since 21 November 2023 has made the situation much worse than the temporary blockage in 2021. The world's five largest shipping companies have declared the passage too risky for operations and are re-routing container ships and tankers bound from Asia to Europe and the US via the Cape of Good Hope. The lengthy detour adds about 3,500 nautical miles (6,482 km) to the journeys, which now takes an additional week or longer and typically adds US\$1 million in fuel costs for a round trip from Shanghai (China) to Rotterdam (Netherlands).[3] Apart from a significant increase in insurance premiums, the longer journey time curtails global shipping capacity by 20 percent, leading to higher prices and supply chain disruptions. According to one report, it will impact the shipment of about 24 percent of chemicals, 22 percent of flat-rolled steels used in the automotive industry, and 22 percent of insulated wires and batteries for automobiles.[4]

This matters for India because virtually all its exports to its two largest markets, Europe and the US, pass through this single channel. India's integration into global value chains is set to increase as improved infrastructure brings down the cost of logistics, and manufacturing gets a boost from the production-linked incentives (PLI) programmes. The

European Union (EU) is India's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade touching an estimated US\$136 billion in 2022-23.[5] It is also India's second-largest export market, with exports crossing US\$61 billion. The US is India's second-largest trading partner but the largest destination of exports at US\$78.5 billion in 2022-23.[6] As India's trade with Europe and the US grows, it would be in India's strategic interest to promote the IMEC as an alternate corridor that lends a degree of redundancy to the existing trade route.

Notably, from a geopolitical perspective, the prevailing situation is not conducive to the kind of active cooperation between Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE envisaged in the IMEC. It also plays into geoeconomic concerns in Cairo and Ankara that the proposed corridor is bypassing them. Egypt sees it as an unnecessary competitor for its lucrative Suez Canal monopoly, while Türkiye believes that a rail corridor from Basra through Iraq is not only more viable but also reinforces its position as a bridge between Asia and Europe.

Key features of the IMEC

According to initial reports, the IMEC will have an eastern leg that would take container traffic from India to the UAE on the well-established shipping routes from India's west coast, joining the corridor's land route. The goods would move by rail from the UAE to Israel's Haifa port on the Mediterranean coast after transiting through Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

The western leg of the corridor would put the containers back on ships in Haifa and take them to European ports across the European Union, France, Italy, and Germany for onward transmission by European rail networks to their final destinations. The attraction of the two-way transport link lies in reducing the dependence on the Suez Canal and creating a route that could be 40 percent faster because high-speed freight trains would travel at 120 kmph, which is about four times faster than the pace of ships.[7]

Some commentators have compared the corridor to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but there is a crucial difference.[8] As an economic corridor, the IMEC is not limited to trade in goods alone. Given the growing imperative of cyber security, a secure, high-speed data pipeline that could potentially facilitate the export of India's IT services to Europe and West Asia is also proposed.

The inclusion of electricity grids in the corridor framework is also particularly significant from an Indian

perspective. As part of its leadership of the International Solar Alliance, India has already promoted the ‘One Sun, One World, One Grid’ initiative, an ambitious attempt to connect the world's vital regional grids into a common green grid that can transfer renewable energy from one region to another. It would leverage different time zones to maximise the use of solar power and reduce the need for expensive energy storage systems.

Equally forward-looking is the plan to incorporate clean hydrogen pipelines into the corridor. There is a strong belief that clean hydrogen could be the most effective long-term alternative to fossil fuels, and the Indian government has already allocated US\$2.5 billion to promote the country's emergence as a green hydrogen hub. Several of India's most prominent business groups, including Reliance Industries, the Adani Group, Larsen & Toubro Limited, and ReNew Energy Global, have announced multibillion-dollar investments to develop their own green hydrogen projects, as have corridor members like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Prices of electrolyzers are expected to lower significantly as production ramps up, and green hydrogen using renewable energy may well follow the same price curve as for solar and wind energy. However, scepticism also remains over the viability of hydrogen as an alternative mass fuel and the available technologies to transport it safely and economically worldwide.[9]

Political Will and Geoeconomic Gains

These plans may appear futuristic, but the first steps to develop intercontinental green transit corridors linking Asia and Europe are underway. A sense of urgency was also reflected in the announcement in New Delhi that a high-level meeting would be convened within 60 days to commit the participating countries “to develop and commit to an action plan with relevant timetables.”

The political will and resolve of participating countries will be tested as they start coordinating to meet the array of challenges. Each vertical integral to the corridor will pose a distinct and separate set of hurdles. A starting point will be addressing the issues of technology, finance, and commercial viability for the physical infrastructure in terms of railway links, clean hydrogen pipelines, and electricity and data cables. At the same time, problems of soft infrastructure related to harmonising standards for ports, railways, and customs will also need to be addressed.

A diversified portfolio of India's economic diplomacy

India's economic diplomacy has now taken a new turn. For years, it relied on development partnerships through the route of Official Development Assistance (ODA). Although the West views India as an emerging donor, New Delhi has been extending cooperation to its neighbourhood and beyond, way before it achieved independence. India's stance towards ODA has been 'demand-driven' in nature where it prioritised sharing its developmental experience with other fellow economies from the Global South. Gradually, India's development interventions have been shaped to gain goodwill and create a sweet diplomatic spot amongst other developing countries. While over the last two decades, economic diplomacy has been equated with development partnerships, the Indian model of economic diplomacy is now seriously considering Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and the creation of transport and eventually economic corridors as important drivers of its economic diplomacy. This position is antithetical to the dominant narrative that was prevalent after India withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2020, which propagated India as a conservative insulated economy that adheres to protectionism for its domestic industry.

While over the last two decades, economic diplomacy has been equated with development partnerships, the Indian model of economic diplomacy is now seriously considering Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and the creation of transport and eventually economic corridors as important drivers of its economic diplomacy.

Interestingly, after exit from the RCEP negotiations, India signed a few trade agreements, which include India-Mauritius Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement (CECPA) in 2021, India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), and the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (CECTA), the latter two being in 2022. The signing of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between India and the Governments of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) States in 2024 is the latest addition to this list. In between, India's participation in the India-Middle East-European Economic Corridor (IMEEC) on the sidelines of the G20 New Delhi Summit reinforces the Indian intention of redefining its economic diplomacy in a departure from its previous avatar of development partnerships. Such trade agreements and the creation of economic corridors help in eliminating tariffs on trade on goods in case of an FTA, deepen regional integration and connectivity, increase flows of foreign investments in goods and services, and reduce the transaction costs of doing business among the participating nations of an economic corridor.

Despite having credible advantages of reducing trade barriers, easing tariffs and putting in place stronger intellectual property protection, inking these agreements is never an easy task. For instance, the India-EU Broad-based Trade and Investment (BTIA) has been in a stalemate for the past decade with over 15 rounds of negotiations. The same is the case with the India-UK FTA talks which entered its 14th round of negotiations but without any likely breakthrough. So, why do trade negotiations take so long? In multilateral trade agreements, economists opine that more is not merrier- i.e., as the negotiations involve more countries, the harder it is to reach an agreement. Though it may appear to hammer out bilateral agreements at a faster pace comparatively,



they are still subject to long-term delays and accompanying political motivations.

The India-EU Broad-based Trade and Investment (BTIA) has been in a stalemate for the past decade with over 15 rounds of negotiations.

Further even, FTAs and RTAs are two-level games. It does not merely entail negotiations at the international level but also needs to take into consideration the domestic stakeholders because of the impacts that such trade pacts can exert on them. During RCEP negotiations, there were significant sections in India who were against India moving into the trade pact. However, the perceptible impact of trade agreements and economic corridors on India's geopolitical relations also needs to be noted. This is especially recognizable in the context of India's relations with the Gulf countries.

Strategic gameplay of FTAs, FDI & ODA

The Indian position is therefore interestingly poised between the theoretical constructs and practical considerations when it comes to playing this interesting game of economic diplomacy that swings between development partnerships through ODAs and comprehensive economic cooperation through FTAs and economic corridors. From an economic perspective, the two instruments (ODAs and FTAs) have completely different utilities. Geopolitically, however, they

both help in enhancing the quality of relationships between the participating nations. With an FTA or the creation of a free trade area or an economic corridor, the transaction costs of participating in an otherwise less accessible market are substantially lowered thereby creating an enabling environment for a better return on investments (RoI) for the private sector. The emerging story of the IMEEC is a prime example in this context. On one hand, it showcases India's skilful navigation through international economic waters, while on the other hand, it also showcases its strategic moves on the global stage, leveraging trade as a powerful tool in the intricate dance of geopolitics. Despite facing criticism for stepping away from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), India

the private sector's role in providing developmental grants is classified largely as philanthropy than anything else. The mounting sustainability challenges of the vulnerable regions of the global south have development providers to think of official development assistance (ODA) and grants play an important role here for the beneficiaries, as often a business case for SDGs is not perceptible.

Again, studies suggest a causal relationship between FDI and ODA which, if tapped, can help in maximising gains and minimising costs for the beneficiaries. Apart from easing the transfer of technological and business know-how to developing economies, FDI enables linking the country's economy to global value chains and facilitating economic upgrading. Yet, not all types of ODA can infuse the promotion of investment, growth and economic progress. OECD countries (Japan, the UK, Germany, France, and the US) highlight how a development provider's loan(s) given as ODA has been instrumental in promoting their respective FDI in the recipient country. Further, it also revealed that these specific loans offered for particular projects, such as economic infrastructure, telecommunications, energy and finance had a positive impact towards attracting FDI in the recipient country. However, it is a given that these positive benefits of FDI do not flow without a conducive policy, legal and institutional environment.

Apart from easing the transfer of technological and business know-how to developing economies, FDI enables linking the country's economy to global value chains and facilitating economic upgrading.

India, as such, is not a big player in the global domain of development financing through ODAs when compared with the United States, United Kingdom, and China. However, its "demand-driven" model is unique and stands as a replicable model for south-south cooperation. On the other hand, the framework on which India's economic diplomacy through FTAs and economic corridors stand is based on the economy's inherent strength rendered by an extensive human capital (with a population of around 1.42 billion whose more than 55 percent is less than 30 years of age) and an increasing purchasing power as exhibited by a high rate of economic growth of above 6.5 percent. This helps create an extensive factor market and a buoyant product market thereby making India a sought-after participant or partner in this FTA scheme. This has also yielded diplomatic dividends with nations that would otherwise not have been in such warm geopolitical relations earlier. No doubt this diversification of the Indian economic diplomacy portfolio has lent more depth and breadth to India's vision of the world and its geopolitical and geoeconomic standing.

has been on a roll, forging pivotal trade deals with powerhouses like the UAE and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) since 2021 as stated earlier. These moves aren't just about trade; they're about positioning India within the global value chain (GVC) more effectively. Currently, India's participation in the GVC lags behind the worldwide average. Yet, the winds of change brought by the global pandemic and the Ukraine crisis have stirred the waters, creating a flux in commodity value chains. This turmoil opens doors for countries, including India, to dive into these shifting currents, seize new opportunities, and claim a larger slice of the international market pie. Investment opportunities under any type of trade agreement unlock avenues for increased Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

With an FTA or the creation of a free trade area or an economic corridor, the transaction costs of participating in an otherwise less accessible market are substantially lowered thereby creating an enabling environment for a better return on investments (RoI) for the private sector.

On the other hand, ODAs, when based on grants, can hardly entail any economic rate of return (though there are high social and geopolitical rates of return) while the government can earn such RoI for loans and Lines of Credit. ODAs entail governmental interventions rather than private-sector interventions. Of course,

Amitabh Bachchan, AR Rahman to be conferred Mangeshkar family awards



Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan shall be conferred the 'Lata Deenanath Mangeshkar Puraskar' at a function scheduled here on April 24, while music maestro A R Rahman shall be bestowed the 'Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Award,' next week, the organisers said.

The award is given by the Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Smruti Pratisthan in Pune, nurtured by the eminent Mangeshkar family, and shall be given away to Bachchan on his 82nd death anniversary, along with a musical tribute.

Earlier, the inaugural award was given to Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2022), followed by veteran singer Asha Bhosale (2023), for their path-breaking, spectacular and exemplary contributions to the country, its people and society.

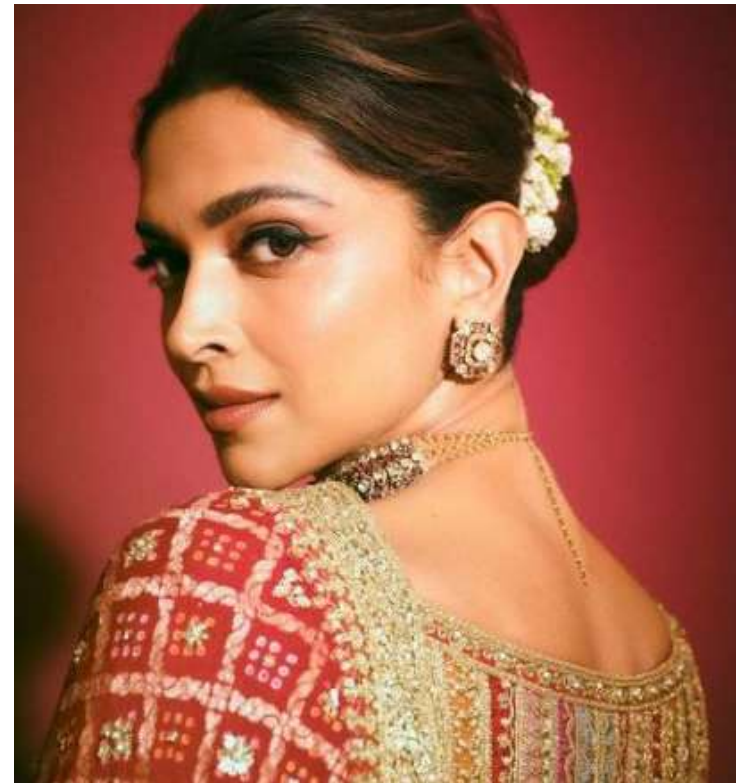
Besides Bachchan and Rahman, the other prominent awardees in different categories are: 'Ghalib' as Best Marathi Play of the Year, NGO Deepstambh Foundation Manobal of Jalgaon, litterateur Manjiri Phadke, comedian Ashok Saraf, actress Padmini

Kolhapure, singer Roopkumar Rathod, journalist S B Torsekar, actor Atul Parchure, producer and actor Randeep Hooda.

The awardees' list was announced by siblings Hridaynath Mangeshkar and Usha Mangeshkar. The honours shall be done at the hands of Asha Bhosle on April 24.

Prominent singer Vibhavari Apte-Joshi and her team will pay a musical tribute to Lata Mangeshkar that evening, being organised by the Pratisthan and Hridayesh Arts.

Deepika Padukone seems to enjoy her new hobby, shares picture of embroidery work in progress



Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone has a new hobby. While the actress awaits the arrival of her baby with her husband Ranveer Singh, she is enjoying the process of embroidery.

The actress took to her social media and shared a picture of her artwork. However, she also dropped hints that she may not be consistent with it and complete the artwork owing to her schedule.

The picture shows a less-than-

half-done piece of embroidery. She wrote in the caption, 'Hopefully I'll be able to share the completed version'.

Meanwhile, on the work front, the actress has a slew of projects lined up for the release. She will be next seen in the Amitabh Bachchan, Prabhas and Kamal Haasan-starrer film 'Kalki 2898 AD'. The film, which is mounted on a huge scale, is said to be a fusion of Indian mythology and sci-fi.

Jennifer Lopez stuns in white as she catches Broadway revival of Cabaret



Actor and singer Jennifer Lopez visited the spectacular new Broadway production of John Kander and Fred Ebb's legendary musical with her longtime manager, Benny Medina. JLo visited the Kit Kat Club for the Broadway Revival of Cabaret.

Cabaret is a musical with the notes by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb, and a book by Joe Masteroff. It is based on the 1951 play I Am a Camera by John Van Druten. Her visit coincides with reports that the actress is working on her own Kander and Ebb musical, a cinematic adaptation of Kiss of the Spider Woman. Lopez

will appear in the film with Andor's Diego Luna and Promised Land's Tonatiuh.

Richa Chadha drew inspiration from Meena Kumari's Pakeezah for her role in Heeramandi

Richa Chadha, who is gearing up for the release of her upcoming streaming series Heeramandi — The Diamond Bazaar, has revealed that she referred to the iconic performance of legendary actress Meena Kumari to craft her character in the series.

In the series, Richa essays the role of Lajjo, a courtesan with a captivating persona. She shared that she found inspiration in Meena Kumari's portrayal of Shahibjaan in the timeless classic Pakeezah. She studied Meena Kumari's character, drawing parallels between Sahibjaan and Lajjo.

Talking about her preparations for the character, Richa said, "Carefully observing, learning from and taking lessons from Meena Kumari ji's character in



Pakeezah was a truly enriching and deeply transforming experience for me ahead of shooting for Heeramandi. In Pakeezah, Meena Kumari's character has a certain tragic depth and complexity that resonated with Lajjo, the character that I play in the show. I worked on the voice and diction, while studying Meena ji's work, to the point of imitation sometimes." "I felt like I was walking in the footsteps of a cinematic legend, and it was an honour to pay tribute to Meena Kumari ji through my portrayal of Lajjo," she added.

Heeramandi — The Diamond Bazaar marks the webseries debut of auteur Sanjay Leela Bhansali, and delves into the world of courtesans.

The series will Drop on Netflix on May 1.

Akshay Kumar to make Telugu cinema debut with 'Kannappa'

Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar has boarded the cast of the Vishnu Manchu-starrer 'Kannappa', the makers announced on Tuesday.

While details about Kumar's role are unknown, the film marks the actor's Telugu cinema debut.

Manchu, who plays the titular role in 'Kannappa', shared the news of Kumar's casting on his official X page.

"The #Kannappa journey just got more thrilling as we welcome the Superstar Mr. Akshay Kumar to the Telugu Film Industry. Thrilled to announce his debut in Telugu cinema with Kannappa. Get ready for an unforgettable adventure!" the actor captioned

his post.

Based on a true story, the upcoming movie will follow the journey of Kannappa, an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva.

'Kannappa' is directed by Mukesh Kumar Singh and produced by Manchu's banners AVA Entertainment and 24 Frames Factory.

The film also stars Preity Mukhundhan, Mohanlal, Prabhas, Mohan Babu, R Sarathkumar, Brahmanandam, Madhoo, and Mukesh Rishi. It will be released in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi and English.

Kumar's latest release is action film 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan'.

Aamir Khan lodges FIR against Congress for alleged deep fake video used in poll advertisement

Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan is taking action against a fake advertisement by a political party.

The actor has filed an FIR with Mumbai Police against a fake Congress advertisement. The said advertisement has a deep fake video of the Bollywood superstar created by Artificial Intelligence (AI), and it targets the ruling BJP over their promise of Rs 15 lakh in the account of every citizen.

It is an alleged AI-generated deep fake video that uses a clip from an episode of the Aamir Khan-hosted TV show 'Satyamev Jayate', which was telecast 10 years ago.

The official spokesperson



of Aamir Khan has issued a statement saying that the actor has initiated legal action and has reported the matter to the authorities.

The spokesperson said, "We want to clarify that Aamir Khan has never endorsed any political

party throughout his 35-year career. He has dedicated his efforts to raising public awareness through Election Commission public awareness campaigns for many past elections. We are alarmed by the recent viral video alleging that Khan is promoting a particular political party."

The spokesperson further mentioned, "He would like to clarify that this is a fake video and totally untrue. He has reported the matter to various authorities related to this issue, including filing an FIR with the Cyber Crime Cell of the Mumbai Police. Khan would like to urge all Indians to come out and vote and be an active part of our electoral process."

Imtiaz Ali got Anjum Batra a professional dholak tutor for his role in 'Amar Singh Chamkila'

Actor Anjum Batra, who portrays the role of dholak player Kesar Singh Tikki in Imtiaz Ali directorial 'Amar Singh Chamkila' shared how the filmmaker appointed renowned dholak player K. C. Vaishnav, to make him learn to play the instrument. Imtiaz has brought forth the story of the legendary Punjabi singer, late Amar Singh Chamkila with his biopic of the same name. The film stars Diljit Dosanjh in the titular role.

The film is about a musician and A. R. Rahman headed the composing.

To get the nuances and authenticity right, Imtiaz hired



a professional dholak tutor for Anjum. Remembering the exciting experience, Anjum said: "Since I play a dholak player in the film, I knew it had to look believable on screen. So, I expressed my desire to

learn to play dholak to Imtiaz sir for my character Kesar." "He appointed the dholak player KC Vaishnav from Chandigarh who used to teach me how to hold a dholak and eventually play it convincingly," he shared.

The 'Maamla Legal Hai' fame actor added: "I religiously learnt playing dholak for four to five hours daily for more than three months, till the pre-production work was done. I had observed Kesar Singh closely, including the way he used to sit and play dholak and tried to imbibe his style in my character. I even grew my hair, gained 11 kgs and learnt to play dholak for it."

Don't empower someone who doesn't have same feelings for you: Karan Johar on self worth

Filmmaker Karan Johar shared some words of wisdom on self-worth, advising not to 'empower someone who doesn't have the same feeling for you'.

Karan took to Instagram and shared an animated video depicting a girl unable to express her feelings to a boy who doesn't reciprocate her.

"This is so true to so many... And heartbreaking in equal measure! Don't empower someone who doesn't have the same feeling for you... Self-worth always wins!" he captioned the clip.

Karan, who is known for his films revolving around love, romance, heartbreak, and family, last directed 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani' starring Alia Bhatt and Ranveer Singh.



Vidya Balan shares 'mantra' for successful marriage

Vidya Balan, who is gearing up for her upcoming film Do Aur Do Pyaar with Pratik Gandhi, recently revealed the mantra to her successful marriage. The Parineeta actress spoke about the importance of open communication in relationships.

"I believe every couple has their own unique mantra, but in my opinion, if we openly communicate with each other about everything, it can be very

helpful," the actress said.

Discussing her relationship with her husband Siddharth Roy

Kapur, Vidya Balan shared, "Siddharth and I discuss everything, if someone feels bad or gets angry, or if there's love, we express it honestly to each other, which is very important. Sharing everything is crucial for a couple. And spending a lot of time together, especially enjoying biryani together, is very important."



Tom Cruise gifted 'War of the Worlds' co-star Dakota Fanning her first cellphone on 11th birthday

Actress Dakota Fanning says she got her first mobile phone as a gift from her War of the Worlds co-star Tom Cruise when she turned 11.

In a recent interview, Fanning and Andrew Scott, her co-star on Netflix's series Ripley, played a quiz and one of the questions was "Who gave Dakota her first cellphone?" In his response, Scott said, "Okay, well it's going to be some Hollywood icon... Tom Cruise." Fanning confirmed Cruise



gifted her a Motorola Razr for her 11th birthday while they were filming 2005's War of the Worlds.

"Oh, my God, I was so excited. I didn't have anybody to call or text at that time. You know, I was 11. But I loved having it. I loved it. I felt so cool," she recalled. Fanning added the Mission: Impossible star has sent her a gift every year since 2005.

"Tom sends me a birthday gift every year, and has since that birthday," she said.

Maxed out? Takes indefinite break



Bengaluru

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has decided to take an indefinite "mental and physical" break from the IPL, blaming his wretched batting form for the decision.

Maxwell's absence from RCB's match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Monday was initially attributed to a finger injury he suffered during the previous match against Mumbai Indians, but he later admitted to dropping himself from the squad.

"It was a pretty easy decision. I went to Faf (Faf du Plessis) and the coaches after the last game (vs Mumbai Indians) and said it was probably time we tried someone else (in his place)," Maxwell said in the post-match press meet.

"It's actually a good time to give myself a bit of a mental and physical break, get my body right. If I'm required to get in during the tournament, I can, hopefully, get back into a solid mental and physical space where I can make an impact," he added.

This is the second time in his career that Maxwell has opted out of competitive cricket in order to keep it together.

He had taken a similar break

in October 2019, stating that he felt mentally and physically ruined at that time. The 35-year-old made his comeback a couple of months later.

In the ongoing IPL, Maxwell has been quite underwhelming with the bat in the six matches he has played this season, contributing just 32 runs at an average of 5.33 and a strike-rate of 94.

Twenty eight of those 32 runs came against Kolkata Knight Riders alone, assisted by two dropped catches.

"I have been in this situation in the past where you can keep playing and get yourself deeper into a hole," the Australian said.

New Delhi

In Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting's Indian team for the upcoming T20 World Cup, Rishabh Pant will feature "every day of the week" despite some established keeper-batters staking claim with their exploits in the ongoing IPL.

Ponting was not sure whether Pant would be able to play again after the horrific car accident in December, 2022.

But having seen the manner in which Pant has been making an impact since returning

RR in the pink of health



Kolkata

Jos Buttler swung his bat merrily on way to a 60-ball 107 and single-handedly lifted Rajasthan Royals to a sensational two-wicket victory over Kolkata Knight Riders, pulling off the IPL's biggest run chase here today.

Asked to bat first, Sunil Narine's 109 off 56 balls powered hosts KKR to a formidable 223/6 in front of a packed Eden Gardens.

But Buttler had other ideas as he dragged RR, from a precarious 121/6 in the 13th over to the target of 224 off the last ball after the visitors needed 46 runs in the last three overs and 28 in 12 balls.

Batting first on a fresh pitch, Narine blazed away to a 49-ball 100 to lead KKR's charge in a top-of-the-table clash. Trent Bolt eventually got the better of Narine, but not before the opener had bludgeoned 13 fours and six sixes, displaying supreme confidence and skill against one of the best attacks of the IPL.

It was a one-man show as Narine batted till

the 18th over, first stitching an 85-run stand with Angkrish Raghuvanshi (30) and then adding 51 runs with Andre Russell (13).

However, Buttler had the last laugh as Narine's



maiden T20 hundred went in vain.

The England white-ball captain, who missed the previous match due to a niggle, anchored the chase with utmost precision, hitting nine fours and six sixes overall. Wickets kept falling at the other end and RR were reduced to 186/8 in the 18th over, but Buttler showed little nerves. Needing 28 from the last two overs, Buttler had to be calculative and he did just that.

I would have Rishabh Pant in Indian team every day of week: Ricky Ponting

to action on the back of his remarkable resilience, the DC head coach is left with no doubt about who should board the plane to New York at the end of the IPL.

"Do I believe whether Rishabh should be there in the World Cup squad? Absolutely I do. He deserves to be in that WT20 squad by the end of the IPL," Ponting told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"I think we have seen Rishabh play the way we have seen him play in last five or six years in IPL, and now back playing for India,"

added the Australian batting great.

While he acknowledged that there are lots of options for Indian selectors as far as choosing a keeper-batter goes, Pant remains the No.1 choice for him.

"One thing we certainly know that there is lot of depth around Indian cricket. With keeper-batters, I feel some guys are in really good form at the moment. (Ishan) Kishan is playing well, (Sanju) Samson is playing well and KL Rahul is playing well.

Sports Ministry sets different standards for NSF functioning

New Delhi

It seems that the Sports Ministry has set different parameters for different National Sports Federations (NSFs) when it comes to good governance principles. In two similar cases regarding the election process in the NSFs, the Ministry officials have submitted two different affidavits in the Delhi High Court.

When asked by the Delhi High Court to provide a roadmap for bringing the constitution of the Volleyball Federation of India (VFI) in line with the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011, the Ministry requested that it needed a three-month extension to file the report as the Model Code of Conduct is in effect.

"...Policy decisions in the Ministry are approved at the level of the Minister. In the current scenario, when the General Elections of Lok Sabha have been announced, and the Model Code of Conduct has come into effect, providing a roadmap is not feasible," under-secretary Sudhir Gupta said in his reply on March 28.

"Since sports have a wide impact on youth and sports fans across different age groups, any policy decision of this magnitude may affect the level playing field in the upcoming General Election to Lok Sabha and may also be in violation of the Model Code of Conduct as it has to be approved by the Minister. Therefore, a minimum of three months time is being

sought by Applicant/ Respondent NO.1 for submitting the affidavit along with the roadmap," he added.

However, in the case of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), the Ministry has taken a different stance. In the affidavit filed in the Delhi High Court on Tuesday, MYAS director Anant Kumar has said that the government has not taken back its suspension decision even after the Indian Olympic Association restoring full rights to the WFI.

Hearing on Bajrang Punia's plea that was seeking an appointment of an administrator, the court had asked the Ministry and the IOA to explain whether the suspension of the WFI continued to

subsist, the circumstances which impelled the ad hoc body to be dissolved and who was in charge of the affairs of the WFI after the dissolution of the ad hoc body.

"...As regards query (i), it is submitted that the suspension of recognition of the WFI vide the letter dated 24.12.2023 continues to subsist alongwith order dated 07.01.2024, intimating WFI and its State/UT affiliates that any national championships or competitions organized by the current elected executive committee of WFI will be treated as unsanctioned and unrecognized competitions. The Ministry will neither recognise nor provide any support to any activity of WFI," Kumar said.

Mumbai stunned, Mohun Bagan win League Shield

Asian Championships: Anju, Harshita win silver, Sarita Mor loses in quarters

Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan)

The gold medal continued to elude Indian wrestlers at the Asian Championships with Anju and Harshita settling for silver medals even as Sarita Mor was eliminated after a shock defeat in her opening round here today.

Competing in a highly-competitive 53kg weight category, Anju, who had outclassed Vinesh Phogat in the selection trials, logged back-to-back wins by technical superiority against Philippines' Aliah Rose Gavalez and Sri Lanka's Nethmi Ahinsa Fernando. She faced some resistance from China's Chun Lei before prevailing 9-6 in the semifinal.

In the final, Anju could not score even a single point and lost the match by technical superiority to North Korea's Ji Hyang Kim.

Harshita conceded just three points en route the final, outclassing Uzbekistan's Ozoda Zaripboeva by technical superiority (13-3) and beating

Kazakhstan's Anastassiya Panassovich 5-0. However, she could not find a way to go past China's Qian Jiang, losing the 72kg title clash 2-5.

However, World Championships medallist Sarita lost her quarterfinal bout 4-8 to Mongolia's Gantuya Enkhbat. The 28-year-old was a medal favourite.

Manisha Bhanwala (62kg) and Antim Kundu (65kg) won bronze medals.



Kolkata

A dominant Mohun Bagan Super Giant defeated Mumbai City FC 2-1 to win their maiden ISL League Shield here today.

Liston Colaco (28th), Jason Cummings (80th) struck for Mohun Bagan, while Lallianzuala Chhangte struck for Mumbai City FC against the run of play in the 89th minute when he converted a freekick from Yoell Van Nieff.

This was Mohun Bagan's first victory over the two-time shield winners across four seasons as the Mumbai heavyweights were also unbeaten over them in previous eight matches, winning six of them.

The win also sealed their berth in the AFC Champions League 2 for the first time.

The competition now moves to playoffs of six teams that begin from April

19.

The win also capped a double delight for Mohun Bagan who began the season winning the Durand Cup.

Battle-hardened Barca ready for PSG

Barcelona: Barcelona are ready for a battle against Paris St Germain in the return leg of their Champions League quarterfinal, manager Xavi Hernandez said today, adding that his players are willing to suffer in order to advance. Barca beat PSG 3-2 in the first leg in Paris last week but Xavi said his side will need to be flawless to reach the semis for the first time in five years. "It's going to be a war," Xavi said. "We are not a team that speculates, we will want to take the ball away from PSG and win the game. They're going to demand a lot from us."

'Aaj gaadi tera bhai chalayega'

Rohit Sharma turns Mumbai Indians team bus driver

Mumbai Indians (MI) former captain Rohit Sharma turned to be the team's bus driver ahead of their match against the defending champions Chennai Super Kings in the IPL 2024 outside the Wankhede Stadium.

It happened when the Mumbai Indians team were returning back to their hotel after an evening practice session. The atmosphere was electric as fans cheered wildly, capturing the moment on their phones. Even Rohit's teammates couldn't contain their laughter, joining in the



fun and clicking pictures themselves.

The video went viral across social media platforms. One

user commented, 'Hahaha this is sooo cutee'. Another fan said, 'This Man Is Complete Vibe'.

अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते
संजय मंगेश भैरे
सुचिता संजय भैरे

सोहम

दिग्दर्शक पुंडलिक यशोदा लक्ष्मण धुमाळ

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