

# Across State

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## MVA bleeds as Sena (UBT) list snubs Congress demands Prakash Ambedkar parts ways



### Mumbai

After protracted talks, seat-sharing among Maha Vikas Aghadi coalition partners broke into open rift on Wednesday, as the Shiv Sena (UBT) went ahead and announced 17 candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, including for seats coveted by the Congress.

Congress Legislative Party leader Balasaheb Thorat said the Sena (UBT) should have avoided declaring candidates for Sangli and seats in Mumbai where discussions, he said, were still on. Mumbai Congress chief Varsha Gaikwad, said to be one of the ticket aspirants, said she had conveyed her unhappiness to the party leadership. Former Congress MP Sanjay Nirupam said he will “wait only for one week” to hear what the party leadership has to say. “I have all options open,” said Nirupam, who wants to contest from Mumbai North West, from where as well the Sena (UBT) has declared a candidate.

In another setback for the MVA, but particularly the Congress that was pushing for a tie-up with it, Prakash Ambedkar's Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) announced it was ending its talks with the coalition and would go it alone. Ambedkar claimed to have spoken to Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange Patil and got his support. In its list declared Wednesday, the Sena (UBT) named former wrestler Chandraraj Patil as its candidate from Sangli in western Maharashtra, Uddhav Thackeray's

close aide Anil Desai from Mumbai South Central, and Amol Kirtikar from Mumbai North West. The united Sena had won 18 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra in the 2019 polls, and the Sena (UBT) has been pushing to contest the same as part of the MVA. Its list on Wednesday did not include the Kalyan Lok Sabha seat, from where it is expected to contest. Sangli is a traditional seat of the Congress, which won it continuously right from Independence till 2014. It hopes to field from here Vishal Patil, the grandson of the late chief minister Vasantdada Patil, who belonged to Sangli. During the talks, the Congress talked about the Sena's organisational absence in Sangli to argue its case. As Congress leaders hit out at the Sena (UBT) Wednesday, its leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut pointed out that the Congress had earlier announced a candidate for the reserved Ramtek seat, which has been won four times by the united Shiv Sena. “We did not say anything,” Raut said, adding that there was no dispute and that “the issue of Sangli has already been resolved”.

In 2019, Vishal Patil had contested from Sangli on the ticket of farmer leader Raju Shetti's Swabhimani Party and lost. One factor is believed to have been the over 3 lakh votes polled by the VBA in the seat. The state Congress thinks the party leadership did not aggressively push for the contested seats, having left the matter to the high command after

failing to get the Sena (UBT) to agree at their level. From the Sena (UBT)'s point of view, contesting Sangli is significant to keep a foot in western Maharashtra, with the Kolhapur constituency earlier allotted to the Congress's Shahu Maharaj Chhatrapati, and the sitting MP from Hatkanangale now with the Shinde Sena. Sources said efforts are on to convince the Sena (UBT) to try its chances in Hatkanangale, and withdraw from Sangli. Among the Mumbai seats, Mumbai South Central was won by the united Sena's Rahul Shewale in 2019, who is now with the Shinde Sena. Uddhav has picked his trusted aide and former Rajya Sabha MP Anil Desai for the seat. Congress Mumbai chief Varsha Gaikwad, also its Dharavi MLA, has been eyeing the seat, one of the grounds being that her late father Eknath Gaikwad represented it in 2009. As for Mumbai North West, the Sena (UBT) announced sitting MP Gajanan Kirtikar's son Amol as its candidate last month itself. That had provoked a reaction from Congress leader Nirupam then too, who questioned the “unilateral” announcement. The Sena (UBT) has also announced the names of Arvind Sawant for Mumbai South and Sanjay Patil for Mumbai North East. That leaves only two Mumbai seats for which candidates are yet to be declared by MVA partners – Mumbai North Central and Mumbai North – which are expected to go to the Congress.

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# Maharashtra ATS chief Sadanand Vasant Date appointed Director General of National Investigation Agency

New Delhi

Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad chief Sadanand Vasant Date has been appointed the Director General of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), according to a Personnel Ministry order.

Date is a 1990-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of the Maharashtra cadre. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has approved the appointment of Date as the Director General (DG) of the NIA for a tenure up to his superannuation on December 31, 2026, stated the order dated March 26.

He will succeed Dinkar Gupta, who is due to superannuate on March 31.

The ACC also appointed Rajeev Kumar Sharma, a 1990-batch IPS officer



of Rajasthan cadre, as the Director General of the Bureau of Police Research & Development. He will have a tenure up to his superannuation on June 30, 2026, the order said.

Sharma will succeed Balaji Srivastava, who completes his tenure at March end.

Piyush Anand will be the new chief of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).

A 1991-batch IPS

officer of Uttar Pradesh cadre, Anand is currently the Special DG of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF). He has been appointed the DG of the NDRF for two years, the order said. Anand will replace Atul Karwal, retiring on March 31.

The ACC also appointed S Suresh, a 1995-batch IPS officer of Kerala cadre, as the Additional Director General of the Special Protection Group.

## 2 Ex Union Ministers In Uddhav Camp's First List Of Candidates For Lok Sabha Polls

Mumbai

The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Wednesday released its first list of 16 candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, nominating former Union ministers Anant Geete and Arvind Sawant from Raigad and South Mumbai constituencies respectively.

The party also fielded Rajan Vichare from Thane, Amol Kirtikar from Mumbai North-West, and Sanjay Patil from Mumbai North-East.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led party is a constituent of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in the state.



Another MVA constituent, NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) is yet to officially declare its candidates in the state for the April-May Lok Sabha polls. On the other hand, the Congress, which is also a part of the state-level grouping of the opposition

parties, has declared its candidates on some seats where there is no tussle with its alliance partners.

Maharashtra, which has 48 Lok Sabha seats, the second highest after Uttar Pradesh (80), will vote in five phases starting from April 19.

## Munawar Faruqui Detained During Raid At Mumbai Hookah Bar, Released Later

Mumbai

Stand-up comedian and reality TV star Munawar Faruqui was among 14 people detained during a raid at a hookah parlour in Mumbai, police said on Wednesday.

The Big Boss 17 winner was later released, news agency ANI said quoting a Mumbai police official.

According to police, the hookah parlour in the city's Fort area was being run illegally and ₹ 4,400 in cash and nine hookah pots worth ₹ 13,500 were seized during the raid on Tuesday.

The raid began around 10.30 pm on Tuesday and continued till 5 am of Wednesday, an official said.

A case has been registered under sections of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act. The police are still conducting a search at the location.

"During the raid, the police found stand-up comedian Munawar Faruqui and others smoking hookahs at the joint. We also have a video of their act. We detained Faruqui and others, but they were later allowed to go as the sections slapped against them were bailable," a senior police official told news agency PTI.

Faruqui and other were served notices and allowed to leave, he added.

The 32-year-old reality TV star became popular as a stand-up comedian and rapper on YouTube a few years ago.

He first made headlines in 2021 when he spent a month in jail after complaints were filed against him for hurting religious sentiments after he made remarks on Hindu deities during a stand-up show.

Following the outrage, the comedian announced he would quit comedy after 12 of his shows were cancelled within two months due to threats from right-wing groups.

In 2022, Mr Faruqui made a comeback through reality TV show "Lock Upp", where participants lived in a "jail" and performed tasks to earn money as "inmates". He won the show's first season.



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# ED summons Amol Kirtikar in 'khichdi' scam as Shiv Sena (UBT) gives him ticket to contest Lok Sabha elections 2024

## Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) summoned Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Amol Kirtikar on Wednesday to probe his alleged involvement in the 'khichdi' scam. Interestingly, the party, on the same day, announced him as its candidate from the Mumbai North-West constituency in Lok Sabha elections 2024. An ED source confirmed the development and said Kirtikar was summoned to appear before the agency on Wednesday.

The 'khichdi' scam pertains to irregularities in awarding contracts to distribute 'khichdi' to migrant workers during the Covid-19 period.

On Wednesday, Shiv Sena (UBT) released its first list of 16 candidates for the Lok Sabha polls. Amol Kirtikar's father Gajanan Kirtikar, who is now with the Eknath Shinde faction, is the incumbent MP from the Mumbai North-West constituency. He reportedly wants to contest the election from the same seat again. Meanwhile, the BJP is also reportedly eyeing the seat.

Mumbai police Economic Offences Wing (EOW) registered an FIR in September 2023 against Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut's close aide Sujit Patkar, Sunil alias Bala Kadam, Sahyadri Refreshment's Rajeev Salunkhe, Force One Multi Service's partners and employees, Sneha Caterer's partners, the then assistant municipal commissioner (planning), and other unidentified



BMC officers over the alleged Rs 6.37 crore scam.

As Kirtikar's name surfaced in the probe, he was questioned for six hours in the case by EOW officials in September 2023.

Following this, the ED registered a money laundering case in October 2023 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and arrested Suraj Chavan, a close aide of Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aditya Thackeray. A chargesheet has also been filed against Chavan.

The ED provisionally attached Suraj Chavan's immovable properties worth Rs 88.51 lakh, including a residential flat in Mumbai and a parcel of agricultural land in Ratnagiri.

According to the ED, Chavan played a role in obtaining work orders in favour of M/s Force One Multi Services, circumventing eligibility

criteria laid down by BMC/MCGM, against which he received tainted funds amounting to Rs. 1.35 Crore out of generated proceeds of crime, acquired by defrauding BMC/MCGM and by supplying Khichdi packets of lesser quantity.

The said proceeds of Rs 1.35 crore were acquired by Suraj Chavan in the guise of salary and loan from Force One Multi Services and were diverted to his personal name to acquire the attached immovable properties in Mumbai and Ratnagiri.

## Drug factory busted in Sangli dist; 122 kg mephedrone seized, 6 held

### Mumbai

The Mumbai crime branch Sunday busted a drug factory in Sangli district and seized 122 kg of high quality mephedrone, cash, gold ornaments, Skoda car, totalling worth Rs 253 crore.

A total of six persons were arrested in the case.

The police said the six accused were involved in manufacturing and supplying mephedrone to Mumbai city. Apart from that, the police also seized laboratory equipment, dryers, heaters, and various chemicals used in the manufacturing process of the drug.

Police said the accused has been running the factory for seven months. Earlier, the police had arrested four people and seized 4 kg MD from them in February. The case was registered under NDPS Act and unit 7 started probing the case. During interrogation, the police got several leads that few people have been manufacturing MD in Sangli.

## Maharashtra sees 33% drop in all-cause deaths in 2023 compared to 2021

### Mumbai

Maharashtra has seen a 33 per cent decline in the all-cause deaths (total deaths recorded in a period due to any reason) in 2023 compared to the pandemic year 2021 — when the state had reported over 2 lakh additional deaths than that recorded in 2020.

Data shows that the state's all-cause death numbers now stand close to what were registered during the pre pandemic years.

For 2023, Maharashtra reported 6.76 lakh deaths which was a fall of 13 per cent over 2022 when it registered 7.80 lakh deaths. This is a substantial decline compared to the pandemic years when the state reported 8.08 lakh deaths in 2020 and 10.09 lakh deaths in 2021.

An analysis of the data showed in 2017, Maharashtra witnessed 6,48,256 all-cause

deaths which climbed to 6,85,689 in 2018 — 37,433 additional deaths marking a rise of 5.7 per cent.

In 2019, it slightly increased further to 6,93,800 deaths with a mere 8,111 additional deaths or 1.18 per cent rise.

However, when the state got hit by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the all-cause deaths jumped to 8,08,783.

In 2021, this further increased as the state witnessed its all-time high deaths 10,09,114—with 200,331 or 24.75 per cent rise in additional deaths which were also referred to as "excess deaths" globally.

Excess deaths measures the additional deaths recorded in a certain time of period compared to the previous years and is not dependent on the Covid-19 deaths tally.

## ED raids premises of Mumbai-based shipping companies for FEMA violation, finds cash hidden in washing machine

### Mumbai

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has conducted searches at various premises of Mumbai-based Capricornian Shipping & Logistics Pvt Ltd and its directors Vijay Kumar Shukla and Sanjay Goswami and their associate entities in five cities while probing an alleged FEMA violation case. The suspected companies are involved in sending foreign exchange outside India on a largescale and made suspicious outward remittances amounting to Rs 1,800 crore, the ED said on Tuesday.

During the search, the agency seized Rs 2.54 crore cash hidden in

various places including a washing machine, suspected to be at a company's director's place.

Various incriminating documents and digital devices have also been seized and 47 bank accounts of the entities involved have been frozen.

According to the agency, besides raiding premises of Capricornian Shipping & Logistics Pvt Ltd and its directors, it also searched the premises linked to their associates, Laxmiton Maritime, Hindustan International, Rajnandini Metals Limited, Stawart Alloys India Pvt Ltd, Bhagyanagar Limited,

Vinayak Steels Limited, Vashishta

Constructions Pvt Ltd, and their directors/partners Sandeep Garg, Vinod Kedia and others.

The raids took place at various locations in Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Kurukshetra and Kolkata.

ED has stated that the suspect entities are involved in sending foreign exchange outside India on largescale and made suspicious outward remittances amounting to Rs 1,800 crore to Galaxy Shipping & Logistics Pvt Ltd., Singapore and Horizon Shipping & Logistics Pvt Ltd., Singapore. Both these overseas entities are managed by one Anthony De Silva.

### PUBLIC NOTICE

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2. Original agreement in the names of Moolchand Lakhamshi Nagda and Hemchand Lakhamshi Nagda.
3. Original Agreement in the name of Kiran Chandulal Patel.

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# Centre To Consider Revoking AFSPA, Pull Back Troops From J&K: Amit Shah

## New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said the central government will consider revoking the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Jammu and Kashmir.

In an interview with the JK Media Group, Mr Shah also said the government has plans to pull back troops in the Union Territory (UT) and leave law and order to the Jammu and Kashmir Police alone.

"We have plans to pull back troops and leave law and order to the Jammu and Kashmir Police alone. Earlier, the Jammu and Kashmir police was not trusted but today they are leading the operations," he said.

On the controversial AFSPA, the home minister said, "We will also think of revoking AFSPA."

The AFSPA gives the armed forces personnel, operating in the disturbed areas, sweeping powers to search, arrest and to open fire if they deem it necessary for "the maintenance of public order".

An area or district is notified as disturbed under the AFSPA to facilitate the operations of the armed forces.

Mr Shah had earlier said the AFSPA has been removed in 70 per cent areas in the northeastern states even though it is in force in J-K.

There have been demands from various organisations and individuals in J-K and the northeastern states to revoke the AFSPA.

Mr Shah said the assembly elections will be held in J-K before September.

"Enshrining democracy in Jammu and Kashmir is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise and it will be fulfilled. However, this democracy will not be confined to three families alone and will be a people's democracy," he said.

The Supreme Court had directed to conduct the assembly polls in the UT before September.

On the issues that have emerged around the reservation of SCs, STs and OBCs, Mr Shah said for the first time, the OBCs of J-K have been given reservation by the Modi government and women have been given one-third reservation.

"OBC reservations have been made in the panchayat and the urban local bodies. We have made space for the



SCs and the STs. Without reducing the share of the Gujjar and Bakarwals, the Pahadis have been given 10 per cent reservation. And special provisions have been made to accommodate the displaced people from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir," he said.

The Centre is determined to ensure that these benefits percolate to the grassroots level, he said.

Mr Shah claimed that National Conference (NC) leader Farooq Abdullah and PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti tried their best to create acrimony on these reservations but the people have understood their intentions now.

He asked why the NC did not give reservation to these people in the last over 75 years.

The home minister claimed Abdullah had left for England when terrorism was at its peak. Both

Abdullah and Mehbooba have no right to speak about on the issue, he added.

"The number of fake encounters that took place during their time has never been matched by any other regime," he said.

Mr Shah said in the last five years, not a single fake encounter has taken place. Rather the FIRs have been lodged against the people involved in fake encounters, he added.

"We will have a dialogue with the youths of Kashmir and not with the organisations that have roots in Pakistan. They are responsible for the deaths of 40,000 youths," he said.

He said the Modi government has banned 12 organisations for their involvement in terror activities, designated 36 individuals as terrorists, registered more than 22 cases to stop terror finance and seized properties worth ₹ 150 crore.

As many as 90 properties were also attached and 134 bank accounts have been frozen, he said.

"We have enshrined peace, and peace cannot be bought. Whoever wants to have a dialogue has to do so within the ambit of the Constitution," he said.

Mr Shah said the Hurriyat Conference has no place in the process of dialogue. He also made it clear that the BJP and the entire Parliament believe that the POK is an integral part of India.

"The Muslim brothers are also Indians and the Hindu brothers living in POK are also Indians and the land which has been illegally occupied by Pakistan also belongs to India. It is the goal of every Indian, every Kashmiri to get it back," he said.

The home minister said in 2010, there were 2564 incidents of stone-pelting which now is zero.

From 2004 to 2014, there were 7217 terror incidents. That has reduced to 2227 from 2014 to 2023, and this is almost a 70 per cent reduction, he said.

Mr Shah said the total

number of deaths from 2004 to 2014 was 2829 and it has come down to 915 during 2014-23, which is a 68 per cent decrease.

The deaths of civilians was 1770 and has decreased to 341, which is an 81 per cent drop. The deaths of security forces decreased from 1060 to 574, which is a 46 per cent decrease, he said.

The senior BJP leader said without the support of the people, such a comprehensive change can never take place.

"The people who talk about Islam should know that 85 per cent of the deceased were our Muslim brothers and sisters," he said.

Mr Shah also asked the youths of J-K to stay away from the conspiracies of Pakistan.

"Today Pakistan is shrouded by the scourge of hunger and poverty and even people there see Kashmir as heaven. I want to tell everyone that if anyone can save Kashmir, he is Prime Minister Modi," he said.

The home minister said the Modi government is boosting the morale of the security forces by giving jobs to the family members of the martyrs.

## PM Modi Congratulates Belgian Counterpart On Nuclear Energy Summit Success

## New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephone conversation with Belgian PM Alexander De Croo and congratulated him for the successful hosting of the First Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels.

The two leaders also reviewed relations between the two nations and discussed strengthening ties and advancing India-EU Partnership under the Belgian Presidency.

"Spoke to Belgium PM @alexanderdecroo. Congratulated him on the success of the First Nuclear Energy Summit in Brussels. Exchanged views on strengthening bilateral ties; advancing

India-EU Partnership under Belgian Presidency; and cooperation on regional and global issues," PM Modi posted on X.

Belgian PM De Croo said that the two leaders discussed growing commercial relations between New Delhi and Brussels including in sectors of semiconductors, pharmaceuticals and green hydrogen.

He also said that Belgium will send a royal trade mission to India.

"Called Prime Minister @narendramodito discuss the conflicts in #Ukraine & #Gaza and protecting shipping lanes in the Red Sea. We also talked about our growing commercial relations

#semiconductors #pharmaceuticals #greenhydrogen and the upcoming royal trade mission to India," the Belgian PM posted on X.

Both leaders reviewed the excellent relations between India and Belgium. They discussed ways to further strengthen the bilateral partnership in diverse sectors, including trade, investment, clean technologies, semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, green hydrogen, IT, defence, and ports, among others, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a release.

The two leaders affirmed their

commitment to further bolster the India - EU Strategic Partnership under the ongoing Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.





# Makeshift Tent, Boat Ride: How Poll Panel Ensures No Voter Is Left Behind

## New Delhi

Travelling through jungles and snow-capped mountains, wading through rivers, carrying EVMs on horse and elephant backs, setting up polling stations in tents, shipping containers and booths in hamlets with lone voters - the EC has to literally move mountains to conduct polls at the remotest and inaccessible places.

From Gir forest, the last surviving natural habitat of Asiatic lions, to world's highest polling station at a height of over 15,000 feet above sea level, riverine polling station in a village on India-Bangladesh border reachable after a one-hour boat ride to a polling station set up in a shipping container in an islet in Gujarat, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has many feats to its credit when it comes to holding elections.

According to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, the polling parties carry EVMs traversing the farthest and toughest terrain crossing makeshift bridges to ensure "No voter is left behind".

"We will walk the extra mile so that the voters don't have to. We will go in the snowed mountains and jungles. We will go through horses and helicopters and on the bridges and even ride on elephants and mules just to ensure everyone is able to vote," he said while announcing the schedule for 18th Lok Sabha polls this month.

In the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, a total of 94 special polling booths will be set up for internally-displaced persons of Manipur to vote at the relief camps. Ethnic clashes between the Meitei and tribal Kuki

communities in Manipur since May last year have resulted in the loss of over 200 lives.

Over 50,000 displaced people will be eligible to vote at these booths which will be set up in or near relief camps.

According to Election Commission records, Tashigang



in Himachal Pradesh's Lahaul and Spiti has the world's highest polling station located at the height of 15,256 feet above the sea level.

"All 52 electors of the village turned up to exercise their franchise on November 12, 2022, notwithstanding the freezing cold. Himachal Pradesh had 65 polling stations at the height between 10,000 to 12,000 feet and 20 polling stations above the height of 12,000 feet from sea level," said an EC report.

Polling personnel had to wear life jackets and were accompanied by divers to a riverine polling station in Kamsing village in West Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya.

"The village, which survives on betel nut farming and solar electricity, has the farthest and non-motorable polling station of Meghalaya. Situated 69 km from district headquarters in Jowai, and 44 km from sub-

district headquarter (tehsildar's office) Amlarem, the village is approachable only by small countrymade boats," reads an anecdote shared by EC.

"It takes an hour long cruise to reach the village along Indo-Bangladesh border. A polling station was set up in the village

for its 35 voters, 20 male and 15 female, drawn from 23 families that inhabit the village. The polling personnel had to wear life jackets, and were accompanied by a few divers," it added.

According to "Leap of Faith" a book on polls published by the EC, since 2007, a special polling station has been set up in Banej, tucked deep in the forests of Gir, for just one voter - Mahant Haridasji Udasin. He is a priest at a Shiva temple located in the area.

A booth is set up in the forest office near the temple. A dedicated polling team is appointed to set up the booth and make necessary arrangements for the lone voter to exercise his right.

"The Baneshwar Mahadev Temple is located deep inside Gir Forest, the last surviving natural habitat of Asiatic lions. Political parties do not canvass in the area for fear of wild animals. The polling team comprising 10

persons travelled 25 kms to set up a booth for a single voter.

"Haridas Udaseen is the successor of Mahant Bharatdas Darshandas, who was the sole voter in the polling station for nearly two decades, before he passed away in November, 2019," the book reads.

In another hamlet with lone voter in Arunachal Pradesh's Malogam, election workers travelled 300 miles over four days across winding mountain roads and river valleys for the single voter in 2019. Malogam is a remote hamlet in forested mountains in Arunachal Pradesh, close to the border with China.

Polling stations have also been set up for the Siddis, descendants of East Africans who came to India between the 14th and 17th centuries, in the Talala area of Gir Somnath district. There are over 3,500 such voters in the area, as per the official data.

"Siddis attained prominence in history in the 17th century as rulers of Janjira, an island off Murud, a coastal town in Raigarh district of Maharashtra, Janjira, including Jafrabad, in Kathiawar region of Gujarat, was a princely state in British India, ruled by Siddis," the EC archives said.

"Siddis predominate in Jambur, a village in Gir Somnath district, previously a part of princely state of Junagarh. For the first time in electoral history, during the 2022 Gujarat elections, a special polling station was set up in Jambura-Madhupur. Siddis even fielded an independent candidate. Voting in Jambura was held in the first phase of the elections," the book added.

Far off the country's east coast, on the remote Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the EC

teams braved crocodile swamps for nine voters in 2019.

Gujarat has 1600 km of coastline, longest for any Indian state. The seascape is dotted with islets, a number of which are inhabited.

"EC facilitated voting for the first time in the islets in 2022, obviating the need for electors to travel to mainland. At Aliabet, in Bharuch district, a polling station was set up in a shipping container. With minimum facilities assured for 217 electors, they were spared travelling for more than 80 km to vote in the nearest polling station in Bharuch.

"Similarly, five polling stations were set in Siyalbet, an island village under Rajula AC, in Amreli district. This spared 4757 voters of the village of trekking 15 kms to the nearest town Jafrabad," it said.

The Election Commission had in 2022 decided to double the honorarium of polling officials, who have to proceed for election duty over three days in advance to reach the polling stations located in remote and difficult areas.

Previously their honorarium was on par with others.

The decision came in the aftermath of CEC Kumar's visit to Dumak and Kalgoth villages in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand.

"He trekked 8 kilometres in 3 days to reach the polling stations part of Badrinath constituency, which went to polls in 2022. While recognising the courage and determination of polling officials, he stressed on the necessity of having updated route maps indicating the safest and shortest course," an EC official said.

## "Won't Tolerate You Are Killing Lions Every Day": Gujarat High Court Tells Railways

### Ahmedabad

The Gujarat High Court on Tuesday said the railway authority and the forest department should work out a standard operating procedure to curb incidents of Asiatic lions being run over by trains, stating it won't tolerate everyday killing of big cats due to apathy of Railways.

Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal observed that many lions have been killed as they are run over by trains in Gujarat due to the apathy of Railways and that the number of such occurrences should be brought down to zero.

"We are not going to tolerate that you

are killing them every day," CJ Agarwal told the lawyer representing the Indian Railway.

The HC has taken suo motu cognisance of the death of lions on railway tracks.

Expressing displeasure over the reply by the Railway on two lions being run over by a train in January this year, the HC said the railway authority and forest officials will have to "act in coordination and be in sync as to how to save the lions, which are the pride of the country."

The HC stated in its order that the amicus curiae in its report brought to the court's notice that Rail Vikas Nigam

Limited, a subsidiary of the Indian Railway, has repeatedly attempted to convert the meter gauge line into broad gauge on different routes in and around Gir Sanctuary, the abode of Asiatic lions.

"It is stated that the forest department had written to the Railways to not go ahead with the project without the National Board for Wildlife's (NBWL) nod. It is further stated that there is a kind of understanding with officials of Railway that a nod of the state board for wildlife and NBWL is not needed when there is no land acquisition for the project," the HC stated.

# Jaguar fighters getting new generation missiles; IAF approaches industry to modify two planes as pilot project

**New Delhi**

Less than a decade after the IAF began re-equipping its Jaguar deep penetration strike aircraft with new navigation and attack avionics, the fleet is in for another upgrade, with the Air Force equipping these aircraft with new generation close combat missiles.

The missiles, which would be integrated with the aircraft's new Display Attack Ranging Inertial Navigation-III (DARIN-III) avionics and helmet mounted display, will enable pilots to engage targets from 500 meters to over 25 kms, depending upon the flight configuration, target orientation and altitude.

The IAF has approached the industry to initially modify and re-equip two aircraft with the new generation missiles, identified in some reports as European firm MBDA's Advance Short Range Air-to-Air Missile, to match different types of radar systems.

The new missiles will have infrared guidance, giving them 'fire-and-forget' capability and enable Jaguars to successfully engage various types of combat aircraft, transport platforms as well as cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, sources added.

The project will involve studying the Jaguar's existing DARIN-III avionics, developing technical specifications, modification of the existing software, airframe and wing pylons, ground and flight trials and final certification.

At present, the IAF operates around 120 twin-engine Jaguars, equipping six squadrons – No 5, 6, 14, 16, 27 and 224, based at Ambala, Jamnagar and Gorakhpur, forming a crucial element of its strike capability and tactical reconnaissance. Some Jaguars have also been modified for the maritime role with anti-ship missiles.

In 1979, 40 aircraft were imported from the UK followed by licence manufacture of 150 aircraft by state-run Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, with aircraft rolling off the assembly lines as late as 2007. India is the sole remaining Jaguar operator, with other users — France, UK, Oman, Nigeria and



Ecuador — having retired them.

The Jaguars were initially armed with the Matra R-550 Magic short range air-to-air missile, with the employed in an unconventional position on over-the-wing pylons as a means of self-defence during strike missions.

A few years ago, India procured 31 decommissioned Jaguar airframes from France and two each from the UK and Oman, along with several thousand aero-spares to replace some aircraft lost due to attrition and ensure serviceability of the existing fleet.

Jaguars have conducted reconnaissance missions during Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka. During the 1999 Kargil conflict, Jaguars carried out photo-recce sorties along the Line of Control and were also used to bomb enemy positions with guided munitions as well as unguided bombs. These have also participated in several multi-national exercises in India as well as overseas.

Jaguars have undergone three upgrade programmes with the incorporation of different versions of the DARIN. The latest upgrade, DARIN-III, which commenced recently, includes a new cockpit layout with dual multi-function display, new synthetic aperture radar with a range of 250 kms for surface targets and 150 kms for aerial targets, enhanced electronic countermeasures, new fire control radar, inertial navigation system with terrain mapping and geodetic height correction system and an engine and flight instrument system.

# "Woman Card": BJP's Dilip Ghosh Amid Row Over Remarks On Mamata Banerjee

**Kolkata**

Amid the row over his offensive remark against Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, BJP MP Dilip Ghosh today launched a counterstrike on Ms Banerjee's nephew Abhishek and questioned his comments on BJP's Suvendu Adhikari and his family.

"Just because Suvendu Adhikari is a man, he and his father [former MP and Union Minister Sisir Adhikari] don't have any respect? A woman card is being used frequently," he told the media.

Mr Ghosh has come under fire for his remarks on Ms Banerjee on the campaign trail for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. "Didi goes to Goa and says, 'I am Goa's daughter', then goes to Tripura and says, 'I am Tripura's daughter'. Decide who your father is. It is not good to be just anybody's daughter," he said.

The Trinamool came out strongly against the video and said Mr Ghosh's remarks show he has "zero respect" for women. Party leaders also said his remarks reflect frustration over being moved from the Medinipur seat, which he currently represents, to Bardhaman Durgapur.

The comments left the BJP red-faced and provided fodder to the Opposition at a time when the BJP was trying to corner the Congress over offensive social media posts from the profile of its spokesperson Supriya Shrinete.

Ms Shrinete has said the derogatory posts on BJP candidate and actor Kangana Ranaut were made without her knowledge.

Hours after Trinamool launched an attack on the BJP over Mr Ghosh's remarks, the party leadership demanded an explanation from him.

Mr Ghosh has said he will respond to the party's questions. "This is not the first time a controversy has erupted over my remarks. I have no personal enmity with the Chief Minister. I have only questioned the political remarks she has made to mislead people. A lot of people have problems with my language and usage of words. My party has also pointed it out. Many have said it is unparliamentary. If that is the case, I regret it."

"But I have a question. A leader from her party, her family, has said worse things about the leader of BJP's legislative party (Suvendu Adhikari) and his father. Don't they have any respect? His father is a senior politician in Bengal. The Trinamool did not protest then. Why didn't they issue a statement? I have made a political statement," he said, without naming Abhishek Banerjee, Trinamool's national general secretary.

Mr Banerjee has, in the past, launched scathing attacks on Suvendu Adhikari, calling him a "traitor" after he left the Trinamool and joined the BJP.

# "No Tensions Between Us": Tejashwi Yadav On Seat Sharing With Congress

**New Delhi**

Dismissing claims of tensions between his party and the Congress, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Tuesday said an understanding over seat sharing for the Lok Sabha polls in Bihar has been reached and an announcement in this regard will be made in Patna soon.

Mr Yadav attended an INDIA bloc meeting regarding Bihar's seat-sharing formula at Congress leader Mukul Wasnik's residence here and later said his party, the Congress and the Left will fight the Lok Sabha polls together in Bihar.

He said the INDIA bloc partners

have agreed orally on the seat-sharing arrangement and all the constituents are getting a respectable deal.

The former Bihar deputy chief minister said a formal announcement on seat sharing will be made in Patna in a day or so.

"The Congress-RJD alliance is the oldest alliance. We have been together in all situations and have contested elections together. There have never been any tensions between us. We have both always understood each other," said Mr Yadav, who was flanked by Bihar Congress president Akhilesh Prasad Singh and

AICC in-charge of state Mohan Prakash.

"Our collective agenda is to stop the BJP. I can say that Bihar will present a shocking result. And we have a strategy for that," the RJD leader said.

Mr Yadav said that the media was not talking about the "discord" and "dissatisfaction" among NDA constituents in Bihar while highlighting tensions in the INDIA bloc "when there were none".

His remarks come amid reports of disquiet in the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance in Bihar over seat sharing.





## Supreme Court: Restraining people from political activities can't be bail condition



### New Delhi

Holding that bail conditions restraining an accused from participating in political activities violate his/her fundamental rights, the Supreme Court has quashed such a bail condition imposed on a man by the Orissa High Court.

The order came on a petition filed by Berhampur Municipal Corporation mayor and BJP leader Siba Shankar Das challenging the January 18, 2024, HC order rejecting his plea for withdrawal of the bail condition imposed on him on August 11, 2022.

"The appellant shall not create any untoward situation in public and shall not be involved in any political activities, directly or indirectly," the high court had ordered, while granting

him bail. However, the top court disapproved of such a bail condition.

"We find that the imposition of such a condition would breach the fundamental rights of the appellant and no such conditions could have been imposed. We, therefore, quash and set aside the condition imposed by the HC, to the extent the same is extracted above," a Bench led by Justice BR Gavai said, allowing the appeal filed by Das.

His counsel had argued that the appellant, being a political person, be permitted to take part in political activities in view of the ensuing General Election. But the State of Orissa counsel had opposed it, saying after being released on bail, a murderous attempt was made on him.

## Rahul Gandhi On Tourist Visa, I Have A Permanent One: BJP's Wayanad Pick

### Wayanad

Insisting that the people of Wayanad are ready to repeat what their counterparts in Amethi did in 2019, the BJP's pick as the candidate for the constituency, K Surendran, has said that voters are "fed up" with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as their MP.

In an exclusive interview with NDTV on Tuesday, the Kerala BJP chief also took a dig at Mr Gandhi and said that while the Congress leader travels across the country and even abroad and is in Wayanad on a "tourist visa", he is a local resident and has a "permanent visa".

To a question on why the BJP thinks it has hope in Wayanad this time despite Rahul Gandhi cornering over 64% of the vote in 2019 and winning by a margin of over 4 lakh votes, Mr Surendran said, "In 2109, people wholeheartedly welcomed Rahul ji and supported him (on a) large scale. But, unfortunately, nothing has happened. Rahul ji did not do anything for Wayanad. I am not saying he cheated Wayanad but people in the constituency are totally disappointed, fed up with Rahul Gandhi."

## Talks with Akalis fail, BJP to fight all 13 LS seats in Punjab

### New Delhi

After days of parleys with the Shiromani Akali Dal, the BJP on Tuesday announced its decision to go it alone in the June 1 Punjab Lok Sabha elections.

This marks the end of the road for the BJP-SAD combine that has contested all parliamentary polls since 1998 together. In 1998, they had swept Punjab with 11 of the state's 13 seats. In 2019, the performance had been dismal — two seats each for the BJP and the Akali Dal.

Last week, the BJD-BJP pre-poll talks in Odisha also failed over lack of consensus on sharing of seats for the Assembly elections.

Hours after BJP Punjab president Sunil Jakhar today announced the party's decision to contest all 13 Punjab seats independently, three-term Congress MP from the state Ravneet Singh Bittu joined the saffron party in New Delhi, in a massive boost to the saffron ranks and a setback for the Congress.

Bittu (48), grandson of late Punjab Chief Minister and Congress veteran Beant Singh, is likely to contest from Ludhiana, which he represents in the outgoing Lok Sabha.

Bittu was first elected to the LS from Anandpur Sahib in 2009 and from Ludhiana in 2014 and 2019.

"I had been in talks with the BJP for long. Even as a Congress MP when I raised Punjab issues with top BJP leaders, they never said no. I have joined the BJP to serve as a bridge between the Centre and the state, and bring development to Punjab, which has fallen way behind other states. The next government at the Centre will also be that of PM Narendra Modi," Bittu said, adding that the BJP alone was in a position to guarantee a safe, secure and developed Punjab.

The former Congress leader joined in the presence of BJP general secretary



Vinod Tawde with The Tribune learning that more prominent Congress leaders could follow Bittu to the BJP.

Earlier, Jakhar, explaining the party's position on alliance talks with the Akali Dal, said, "We took this decision after wide consultations with people, party leaders and workers. The decision is aimed at a bright future for Punjab's youth, farmers, traders and the Backward Classes. The works done

for Punjab under PM Modi's leadership are evident. In the past 10 years, every grain produced by Punjab farmers has been procured on fair MSP, which has been sent directly to the bank accounts of farmers within a week."

He said the centuries-old unrealised dream of Sikhs to visit the Kartarpur shrine across the border became possible with the opening of the Kartarpur corridor under PM Modi's leadership.

"The decision to go it alone has been taken in the interests of a safe and secure border state of Punjab. We are sure people will support the BJP in the June 1 elections," said Jakhar.

The Tribune has learnt that the alliance talks primarily failed due to disagreement on the number of seats the BJP and the SAD would contest.

The BJP demanded

not less than six of the 13 seats. The Akali Dal was comfortable giving four, and was also insistent on the Bandi Singh issue which, the BJP felt, already stood resolved.

The BJP has traditionally contested Amritsar, Hoshiarpur and Gurdaspur in alliance with the SAD and was seeking three additional seats — Patiala, Anandpur Sahib and Ludhiana. Akalis, however, offered seats where the BJP had never even contested an Assembly segment, a source said.

"Caustic public statements by some Akali leaders did not help either," said a senior BJP leader, adding that the BJP was ready for a long haul in Punjab, just as it was in West Bengal where it rose from two Lok Sabha seats in 2014 to 18 in 2019.

The saffron organisation has been concerned about its consistently declining poll performance in the state where it remained in alliance with the SAD from 1997 to 2020 when Akalis quit the ruling NDA dispensation protesting the three farm laws which were later withdrawn. The BJP and the SAD fought the 2022 state poll alone and suffered badly.

Prior to 2022, the BJP, in alliance with the SAD, contested 23 of the state's 117 seats. Of late, its performance has left much to be desired.



## Given political will, aerospace power can be effectively used beyond enemy lines:

IAF chief VR Chaudhari



New Delhi

the destiny of many nations and decided the outcome of many wars, the chief of the Indian Air Force (IAF) said.

"As we navigate these uncharted skies, air power being a key component of national power, would undoubtedly play a pivotal role and also serve as a symbol of national strength, a tool for peace and cooperation," he said.

The IAF chief said, "We all need to acknowledge that wars of the future will be fought differently."

Future conflicts will be characterised by a blend of simultaneous application of kinetic and non-kinetic forces, high-levels of battle space transparency, multi-domain operations, a high-degree of precision, enhanced lethality, a compressed sensor-to-shooter cycle, and of course, all under intense media scrutiny, he said.

The air chief marshal also said, "Balakot-like operations have shown that given the political will, aerospace power can be effectively carried out beyond enemy lines, in a no-war, no-peace scenario, under a nuclear overhang without escalating into a full-blown conflict."

IAF chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari on Wednesday said "Balakot-like operations" have shown that given political will, aerospace power can be effectively used beyond enemy lines.

In his address at a seminar on 'Aerospace Power in Future Conflicts', he said that as nations increasingly rely on space-based assets for building strategic advantage, "militarisation and weaponisation of space has become an inevitable reality".

"Through the annals of human history, the skies have often been regarded as realms of wonder and exploration, where dreams take flight and boundaries dissolve into the vast blue expanse," he said.

Yet, beneath this calmness lies a domain "fraught with competition where contest for aerial superiority" has shaped

## 6 Naxalites killed in encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur



Bijapur

Six Naxalites, including a woman cadre, were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's

Bijapur district on Wednesday, a police official said.

The gunfight took place in the jungles of Chikurbhatti and Pusbaka villages under Basaguda

police station area, when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P told PTI.

Personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and its elite unit CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) were involved in the operation, he said.

"After the exchange of fire stopped, bodies of six Naxalites, including a woman, were recovered from the spot," he said.

The search operation is still under way in the area, he added.

Bijapur district is in Bastar Lok Sabha constituency which will go to polls in the first phase of general election April 19.

## Karnataka BJP faces rebellion on eight seats

New Delhi

Several BJP leaders are disgruntled over the choice of candidates on eight Karnataka seats — Chikkaballapur, Koppal, Shivamogga, Haveri, Tumkuru, Bidar, Raichur and Chitradurga.

In a recent development, posters of "Go Back Sudhakar" were put up by supporters of BJP MLA SR Vishwanath after the party fielded former Karnataka health minister K Sudhakar from the Chikkaballapur constituency.

Sudhakar faced defeat in the last Assembly elections. After Chikkaballapur MP BN Bache Gowda announced his retirement from electoral politics, Sudhakar was fielded. Vishwanath wanted the ticket for his son Alok Vishwanath from the seat. Sudhakar is considered close to ex-CM Bommai.



## 'Has clean image': Adhir invites Varun to join Congress

New Delhi

Congress leader in the outgoing Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Tuesday invited BJP leader Varun Gandhi to join the Congress. The latter was denied the ticket by the BJP from his Pilibhit constituency. "He is a dabang neta and a very educated man. He has a clean image. Varun has a connection with the Gandhi family. This is why the BJP denied him the ticket (for Lok Sabha polls). I think he should come (join the Congress), we will be very happy," Chowdhury said.

Varun has been substituted with former Congress member Jitin Prasada to run for the Pilibhit seat in Uttar Pradesh. However, the BJP has re-nominated his mother Maneka Gandhi from Sultanpur.

Relationship between Varun (44) and the BJP turned frosty as the Pilibhit MP had attacked his own government at the Centre multiple times. Even as suspense over ticket to him grew, the Samajwadi Party has sent feelers with Akhilesh Yadav hinting that the party's doors are open for him. Varun, son of late Sanjay Gandhi, had first entered the Lok Sabha in 2009 from Pilibhit. In 2014, he successfully contested from Sultanpur while his mother Maneka was fielded from Pilibhit. Last year, Rahul Gandhi, when asked whether his cousin Varun would return to the Congress, said their ideologies didn't match. "He (Varun Gandhi) may have accepted BJP's ideology and made it his own. I can never do that," he had said.





## "As A Result...": Biden's Shout-Out For SOS By Indian Crew On Ship



### New Delhi

US President Joe Biden praised local authorities for their prompt action during the accident at Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, one of the nation's busiest arteries that collapsed hours on Tuesday after being struck by a massive freight ship. He also made a special mention to the crew of the ship, all of whom were Indians.

"Personnel on board the ship were able to alert the Maryland Department of Transportation that they had lost control of their vessel, as you all know and have reported. As a result, local authorities were able to close the bridge to traffic before the bridge was struck, which undoubtedly saved lives," Biden said in his address.

"We're incredibly grateful for the brave rescuers who immediately rushed to the scene," the US President added.

On Tuesday, the Singapore-flagged container ship Dali, departing Baltimore with a full cargo en route to Sri Lanka, crashed into a concrete pier supporting the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore.

Within seconds almost the entire bridge collapsed and plunged into what officials said was roughly 50 feet of frigid water below.

Moments before, the ship issued a Mayday call warning that it had lost power -- prompting authorities to scramble to shut down traffic to the bridge, potentially saving lives.

CCTV footage shows the ship going dark twice in the minutes before the crash. A puff of smoke can also be seen before the collision.

While all 22 crew were unharmed and accounted for, six repairmen on the bridge have been missing. They were part

of a construction crew working on repairing potholes on the bridge when it collapsed around midnight.

Biden also announced that the federal government will pay the full cost to rebuild the bridge.

Asked why the federal government should pick the tab if the ship and its operator were potentially to blame, he said, "That could be but we're not going to wait for that to happen. We're going to pay for it to get the bridge rebuilt and opened."

Authorities have closed the port "until further notice" and traffic is being diverted away from the bridge as the rescue effort continues.

The collapse is expected to have a severe impact on the region. Traffic around Baltimore will be affected by the loss of the bridge, while shipping could also see long delays thanks to the debris now choking the waterway.

## 'India firmly supports Philippines': EAM S Jaishankar takes swipe at China amid sea disputes



### New Delhi

Days after Chinese ships launched a dangerous water cannon attack that heavily damaged a Philippine vessel and injured at least three of its navy personnel, Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar today expressed support for the country in upholding its sovereignty in areas within its territory in the disputed South China Sea. The small boat was carrying food and other supplies to a Philippines outpost in the South China Sea.

At joint press briefing, Jaishankar, who is in Philippine capital Manila for a meeting with his counterpart Enrique Manalo, said: "I take this opportunity to firmly reiterate India's support to the Philippines for upholding its sovereignty. We are also convinced that the progress and prosperity of this region is best served by staunch adherence to a rules-based order (UNCLOS)."

The UNCLOS stands for United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and is regarded as the global constitution for the seas signed by 162 nations, including Philippines, India and China. "All

parties must adhere to it in its entirety," he said.

Without mentioning it, Jaishankar's reference to the UNCLOS was for China, which has refused to accept a UN verdict on demarcation of maritime boundaries in the South China Sea. Manila has renamed parts of the South China Sea that fall within its territory as West Philippine Sea.

"As the world changes, it is essential that countries like India and the Philippines cooperate more closely to shape the emerging order," said Jaishankar, stressing that India was "preparing to step up its engagement with the Philippines".

Jaishankar was scheduled to call on Philippines Defence Secretary Gilbert Teodoro too. India has agreed to sell its hypersonic missile BrahMos to Manila. The Philippines, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei have been engaged in one-upmanship in the South China Sea, something that is feared as Asia's next potential flashpoint for a major armed conflict.

## YouTube removes over 2.2 million videos in India over community norm violation in October-December

### New Delhi

YouTube removed over 2.25 million videos in India between October and December 2023 for the violation of its community guidelines, with the country topping the list of video takedowns ahead of nations like the US and Russia.

Singapore with 12,43,871 video takedowns ranked second on that list and the United States (7,88,354) was placed third, according to YouTube's data on video removals by the country/region of upload.

Indonesia ranked fourth (7,70,157), while for Russia the number of video takedowns stood at 5,16,629, as per YouTube's Community Guidelines Enforcement report

that provides global data on the flags YouTube receives and how the Google-owned platform enforces policies.

Globally, YouTube removed over 9 million videos for falling foul of its community norms. More than 96 per cent of these videos were first flagged by machines rather than humans.

The videos were removed for violating community norms on parameters like harmful or dangerous content, child safety, violent or graphic content, nudity and sexual content, misinformation and others.

The latest report showed that over 2.25 million videos (22,54,902) were removed in India for violating YouTube's community guidelines. India topped the list

of 30 countries in video removals. Globally, 20.5 million (2,05,92,341) channels were removed by YouTube for violating its community guidelines.

The report explained that when a channel is terminated, all of its videos are removed. The number of such videos removed during this time period due to a channel-level termination stood at 95.5 million (9,55,34,236).

"A YouTube channel is terminated if it accrues three community guidelines strikes in 90 days, has a single case of severe abuse (such as predatory behaviour), or is determined to be wholly dedicated to violating our guidelines (as is often the case with spam accounts)," YouTube said.

# PM's Bhutan visit

BARELY 24 hours after putting off his trip to Bhutan due to heavy rain in the neighbouring country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi availed a spell of good weather to visit Thimphu. India's efforts to ensure that the bilateral ties did not enter a state of limbo were reciprocated by Bhutan, which conferred its highest civilian honour on PM Modi. As was expected, Bhutan PM Tshering Tobgay received his counterpart at the airport. In another indication that PM Modi's quick visit was a win-win proposition for both sides, both Tobgay and the Bhutan King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, were present to see him off.

These courtesies reflect the two countries' willingness to be receptive to each other's aspirations in a rapidly altering geopolitical landscape. Bhutan's expectation of more aid from India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, was met when

PM Modi doubled the assistance for Bhutan's next Five-Year Plan.



India will also shoulder the financial burden of the Gyalsung Initiative, an integrated training programme for Bhutan's youth. New Delhi is readily backing King Jigme's Gelephu Special Administrative Region Project by financing a railway line that will be connected to the plains of Assam.

However, India's steadfast commitment to Thimphu is inseparable from its security interests vis-à-vis China, as the Doklam standoff of 2017 had demonstrated. New Delhi has shown respect for Bhutan's sovereignty by revising the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty to enable Thimphu to decide its own foreign policy. Understandably, Bhutan cannot keep itself away from greater diplomatic engagement. India had facilitated Bhutan's emergence from isolation by sponsoring its membership of the UN and the World Bank. The bonhomie among the leaders at Paro airport suggests that both sides will continue to synchronise their geopolitical moves.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

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

*If life were predictable it would cease to be life, and be without flavor.*

-Eleanor Roosevelt

## Kejriwal's arrest Onus on ED to substantiate allegations

A day after the Supreme Court pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for making arrests at the pre-trial stage without even completing the investigation, the premier probe agency arrested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in an excise policy-linked money laundering case on Thursday night. With regard to a Jharkhand case, the court had observed that keeping an accused in custody without trial was akin to detention that hampered the liberty of an individual. However, it seems that this reprimand failed to deter the ED from taking coercive

action against Kejriwal.

The ED has alleged that the CM was a key conspirator in the Delhi excise policy scam



case along with other ministers and AAP leaders. According to the agency, Kejriwal received several crores of rupees as kickbacks from the 'South Group' while formulating and

implementing the excise policy for 2021-22 and misused his position as the CM to facilitate money laundering by his party. The onus, of course, is on the ED to substantiate its allegations and establish the money trail. It's no less important for the agency to complete the

investigation in a time-bound manner. It has already been a year since Kejriwal's former deputy Manish Sisodia was arrested in this case.

With the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections

less than a month away, the arrest has given AAP and other Opposition parties ample fodder to accuse the BJP of misusing Central agencies to settle political scores. Earlier this week, the apex court had denied regular bail to senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain in a money laundering case, saying that there was sufficient material collected by the ED to show that he and his associates were prima facie guilty of the offence. With its credibility at stake, the all-important question is whether the ED — which has often come under fire for alleged overreach in Opposition-ruled states — has incontrovertible evidence to justify Kejriwal's arrest and remand.

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## Liquor tragedy

### Combating underground trade a challenge

THE 21 deaths attributed to the consumption of poisonous liquor in Punjab's Sangrur district are a tragic reminder of the enormity of the illicit liquor trade. The setting up of a special investigation team and the registration of a case under Section 302 (murder) of the IPC are steps in the right direction; these must be backed by unswerving commitment to uncovering the network behind this criminal activity. The

Commission and the National Human Rights Commission in the case should spur concerted action.

Over the years, Punjab has witnessed several such incidents. There was a spate of illicit liquor trade-related deaths in Tarn Taran, Amritsar and Batala in 2020 — the toll crossed 110 — leading to a clamour for holding the authorities accountable. Two years later, the Supreme Court expressed dissatisfaction over the progress of the probe into the case and pulled up the state government for treating the issue with 'kid gloves'. In February 2023, the Punjab and Haryana High Court said it was a known fact that the illegal liquor trade was a serious problem in Punjab.

The recurrence of such tragedies shows that the challenges persist despite a campaign to crack down on bootleggers. Sustained

action is needed, including stringent law enforcement to curb the illegal, parallel sale of liquor and meting out exemplary punishment to the culprits. Also, efforts must be made to raise consumer awareness about the hazards posed by the consumption of liquor purchased from unauthorised shops or persons.

potential influence of such activities on the electoral process, as indicated by the police statement about a link to the Lok Sabha elections, is a disturbing prospect. This underscores the need for heightened vigil and measures to prevent the enticement of gullible voters for political gains. The intervention of the Election

INDIA'S impressive march as the world's fastest-growing major economy is facing a big stumbling block — inequality. The wealth share of the top

1 per cent of the population was as high as 40.1 per cent in 2022-23, according to a working paper titled 'Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj'. The paper has been authored by four economists working for the World Inequality Lab, a global research centre, and other institutions. According to the authors, India's top

1 per cent population's income share 'appears to be among the highest in the world'.

The paper says that the rise of 'top-end inequality' has been particularly pronounced between 2014-15 and 2022-23 in terms of wealth concentration. In short, India's rich are getting richer, and that too at an increasingly fast rate. This raises questions about the government's much-touted slogan on all-round

development and leaving no one behind — Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas. The authors have rightly suggested that a restructuring of the tax system to account for both income and wealth, and broad-based public investments in health, education and nutrition are needed to enable the average Indian to meaningfully benefit from globalisation.

The creation of adequate remunerative jobs holds the key to reducing poverty and inequality. To this end, India needs to grow at 8 per cent on a sustained basis,

## Congress 'crippled'

### Access to funds crucial to level electoral field

THE controversy over the freezing of the Congress' bank accounts raises concerns about the democratic credentials of Indian polity. Accusations of manipulation levelled by former party chief Sonia Gandhi against the government point towards a bid to financially cripple the principal Opposition party ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. The Income Tax

the democratic process itself. The I-T Department's action paints a troubling picture of pre-poll harassment.

This disconcerting development comes amid the disclosure of details of electoral bonds by the SBI following a Supreme Court order. Apprehensions about the integrity of political funding have been exacerbated by the glaring disparity: the



(I-T) Department's move — under which three-decade-old 'tax lapses' of the Congress have also been raked up — undermines the notion of a level electoral playing field. Denying the Congress access to its funds at this time can disrupt the party's ability to undertake electoral campaigns, thereby jeopardising

share of money from the bonds received by the BJP amounts to over 50 per cent. It is clear that the BJP, which received 38 per cent of the vote share in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, enjoys a significant edge in electoral funding. The Congress, whose vote share was around 20 per cent, has been particularly impacted.

## Inequality in India

### Job creation, tax reforms vital to arrest the slide

development and leaving no one behind — Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas. The authors have rightly suggested that a restructuring of the tax system to account for both income and wealth, and broad-based public investments in health, education and nutrition are needed to enable the average Indian to meaningfully benefit from globalisation.

The creation of adequate remunerative jobs holds the key to reducing poverty and inequality. To this end, India needs to grow at 8 per cent on a sustained basis,

cent in the October-December quarter of 2023 — the fastest pace in a year and a half. Even as the NITI Aayog has claimed that 25 crore Indian citizens were lifted out of multidimensional poverty in nine



as per Krishnamurthy Subramanian, executive director (India), International Monetary Fund. The country's economy grew by a better-than-expected 8.4 per

years (2013-14 to 2022-23), a lot needs to be done to make India a less unequal country.



# Misleading ads

## Strengthen law to deter Patanjali, others

THE Supreme Court has directed yoga guru Ramdev and Patanjali Ayurved Managing Director Acharya Balkrishna to appear before it after they failed to respond to a show-cause notice regarding contempt proceedings in a case about advertisements of the firm's products and their purported medicinal efficacy. The court is hearing a petition filed by the Indian Medical Association (IMA), which has sought action against Patanjali for violation of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954. The Act prohibits advertisements of products for the treatment of specified diseases and disorders, including diabetes, heart ailments, high or low blood pressure and obesity. The IMA, which has over 3.5 lakh doctors as its members, has also pleaded that guidelines be



framed for prohibiting the publication and broadcast of advertisements that disparage modern systems of medicine.

Patanjali had earlier assured the apex court that it would neither make statements claiming that its products could cure diseases nor run down any

system of medicine. However, the company has allegedly violated this undertaking. No matter whether it is allopathy, ayurveda or homoeopathy, the claims of efficacy should be backed by verifiable and irrefutable evidence. Various stakeholders — doctors, patients, pharmacists

and pharma companies — should rely on scientific data to dispel misinformation and hearsay fuelled by social media.

It is also imperative to review the 70-year-old Act. Under the law, imprisonment may extend up to six months for the first conviction; in case of a subsequent conviction, the maximum prison term is one year. This penalty is not enough to deter unscrupulous elements who play with the health of unsuspecting people. The law must be made stringent both in terms of imprisonment and quantum of fine. In 2020, the Health Ministry had proposed amendments to the Act in order to expand its ambit. The process to firm up the legislation and align it with contemporary requirements should not be delayed further.

## Clash on Durand Line

### Pak reaps what it has sown in the region

JUST before dawn on Monday, Pakistan's fighter jets struck at two provinces in Afghanistan, a country that it once fondly believed would provide strategic depth in its existential war against India. The Pakistan military justified its infringement of airspace controlled by an erstwhile ally by claiming that its patience was

Ashraf Ghani.

In a twist of irony, Pakistani jets struck areas that were once the ISI's favourite breeding grounds in Afghanistan for exporting terror to Kashmir and other places. Now, the ISI says anti-Pakistan militants are using this rugged terrain as safe havens. India has been accusing Pakistan of using calibrated terrorism by infiltrating militants as and when violence was to be stepped up.

For a country that has bet on one horse — terrorism — to push its foreign policy goals, it must be galling to be given a taste of its own medicine. Pakistan has blamed India for goading Afghanistan-based militants into attacking its vital installations and soldiers. This charge, though, has only further irked the Taliban, who say they are trying their best to rein in militants. It all sounds familiar to Indian ears. Unless it turns over a new leaf, Pakistan will continue to suffer the misery its military establishment has inflicted on others in the past.



stretched thin by a spate of terror attacks plotted in Afghanistan. The boot, it seems, is firmly on the other foot. For over three decades, exactly the same charges have been levelled against the ISI and the Pakistan army by India, Iran and the Afghan governments led by Hamid Karzai and

## Poor air quality

### India must take urgent mitigation measures

THE latest World Air Quality Report paints a stark picture: India faces the ignominy of being the third most polluted country globally, with New Delhi retaining its unenviable position as the capital city with the poorest air quality. Begusarai in Bihar has emerged as the globe's 'most polluted metropolitan area'. In 2023, Delhi's PM2.5 (particulate matter) levels surged to 92.7 micrograms per cubic metre, signalling an urgent need for intervention. The crisis is widespread as a staggering 96 per cent of the Indians are breathing air whose quality doesn't meet the WHO's safety standards.

While initiatives such as banning older vehicles have seen some success, more concerted efforts are needed to curb crop residue burning and industrial as well as vehicular emissions. Air pollution is not merely an environmental concern; it is also a public health emergency. Exposure to PM2.5 and other pollutants leads to respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases and even premature death. The economic impact is staggering, with healthcare costs soaring and productivity declining.

The political blame game over the

findings is not only counterproductive but also detracts from the urgency in addressing the crisis. The Central and state governments must formulate comprehensive policies aimed at reducing emissions. This necessitates investment in cleaner technologies, stringent enforcement of regulations and public awareness campaigns. Collaborative efforts at the international level can facilitate the exchange of best practices, technology transfer and financial support for developing nations struggling to tackle the menace. People can do their bit by using public transportation and reducing energy consumption. The harmful effects of air pollution must be mitigated to pave the way for a sustainable future.





## Boeing CEO to step down this year, board chairman to exit, head of commercial airplanes retires



### Washington

Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun will step down from the embattled plane maker at the end of the year after a series of mishaps at one of America's most storied manufacturers.

Board Chair Larry Kellner has also told the company he doesn't plan to stand for re-election.

Boeing also said Monday that Stan Deal, president and CEO of its commercial airplanes unit, will retire from the company. Stephanie Pope will now lead the division.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has put the company under intense scrutiny and recently ordered an audit of assembly lines at a Boeing factory near Seattle, where the company builds planes like the Alaska Airlines 737 Max that suffered a door-panel blowout on January 5. Investigators say bolts that help keep the panel in place were missing after repair work at the Boeing factory. The incident has raised scrutiny of Boeing to its highest level since two crashes of Boeing 737 Max jets in 2018 and 2019 that killed 346 people.



## Mumbai surpassed Beijing to become Asia's billionaire capital: In world's top 3

### New Delhi

The Hurun Global Rich List for 2024, released on Tuesday, revealed shifts in the wealth landscape, with Indian tycoons Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani making headlines for their remarkable gains.

Mukesh Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries, retained his title as Asia's richest person, while Gautam Adani, founder of the Adani Group, saw a staggering surge in wealth, propelling him to the 15th spot in the global rankings.

With a net worth of US\$ 115 billion, Mukesh Ambani, aged 66, maintained his status as India's wealthiest individual. Despite 40 per cent increase in his wealth, Ambani slipped one place to secure the 10th spot globally.

Mukesh Ambani fortune received widespread attention earlier this month due to the extravagant pre-wedding celebrations of his youngest son, Anant Ambani.

Gautam Adani, aged 61, leading the Adani Group energy conglomerate, witnessed a surge in wealth, amounting to US\$ 33 billion this year.

With a net worth of US\$ 86 billion, Adani climbed the global

rankings to the 15th position.

The surge in Adani's wealth is attributed to a rally in his companies' shares following a

with 814 billionaires.

Elon Musk, the visionary behind Tesla, reclaimed his title as the world's richest person for the third time in four years, with a staggering net worth of US\$ 231 billion, driven by a surge in Tesla shares.

Jeff Bezos of Amazon rose two places to second place, amassing a wealth increase of 57 percent to reach US\$ 185 billion. Bernard Arnault, last year's number one, slipped to third place, with a decrease in wealth to US\$ 175 billion.

India witnessed a significant rise

in its billionaire population, ranking third globally with 271 billionaires, marking an addition of 84 individuals, the second-highest rise after the United States.

Mumbai surpassed Beijing to become Asia's billionaire capital for the first time, breaking into the world's top three.

The release of the Hurun Global Rich List 2024 underscores the dynamic nature of global wealth distribution, with Indian business magnates Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani emerging as key players on the international stage.



Supreme Court verdict related to issues raised in the Hindenburg report.

The Hurun Global Rich List 2024 showcases robust growth in billionaire numbers worldwide, with a total of 167 new billionaires added, bringing the global tally to 3,279 individuals.

Notably, over half of all new wealth generated is attributed to advancements in artificial intelligence (AI).

The United States added 109 billionaires, maintaining its lead with a total of 800 billionaires, while China, despite a decline of 155 billionaires, retained its position as the world's leader

## EPFO adds 16.02 lakh members in January; 8.08 lakh enrol for 1st time

### New Delhi

Retirement fund body EPFO added a net 16.02 lakh subscribers in January 2024, according to payroll data released on Sunday.

Around 8.08 lakh members were enrolled for the first time in January 2024, a labour ministry statement said on Sunday.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organization's (EPFO) provisional payroll highlighted that the EPFO has added 16.02 lakh members on a net basis in January 2024, the ministry said.

A noticeable aspect of the data is the dominance of the 18-25 age group, constituting a significant 56.41 per cent of the total new members added in

January 2024 indicating the majority of individuals joining the organized workforce are youth, primarily first-time job seekers.

The payroll data highlighted that approximately 12.17 lakh members exited and subsequently rejoined EPFO.

These members switched their jobs and re-joined the establishments covered under the ambit of EPFO and opted to transfer their accumulations instead of applying for final settlement thus, safeguarding long-term financial well-being and extending their social security protection, it stated.

Gender-wise analysis of payroll data unveiled that out of 8.08 lakh new members, around 2.05 lakh are new

female members. Also, the net female member addition during the month stood at around 3.03 lakh.

The female member addition is indicative of a broader shift towards a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

Month-on-month comparison of industry-wise data displays growth in the members working in establishments engaged in the industries viz. Financing establishment, Establishment engaged in manufacture & marketing servicing & usage of computers, hospitals etc.

Of the total net membership, around 40.71 per cent is from expert services (consisting of manpower suppliers, normal contractors, security services, miscellaneous activities etc).

The payroll data is provisional since the data generation is a continuous exercise, as updating employee records is a continuous process.

The previous data hence gets updated every month.

From the month of April 2018, EPFO has been releasing payroll data covering the period from September 2017 onwards.

In monthly payroll data, the count of members joining the EPFO for the first time through a validated Universal Account Number (UAN), existing members exiting from coverage of EPFO and those who exited but re-joining as members, is taken to arrive at net monthly payroll.

## Public sector banks' dividend payout may exceed Rs 15,000 crore in FY'24

**New Delhi**

Public sector banks (PSBs) are likely to pay a dividend in excess of Rs 15,000 crore for the financial year ending March 2024 on the back of improved profitability, according to sources.

In the first three quarters of the current financial year, all 12 PSBs earned a total profit of Rs 98,000 crore, only Rs 7,000 crore less than the entire FY23.

PSBs earned the highest-ever aggregate net profit of Rs 1.05 lakh crore during FY23 compared to Rs 66,539.98 crore earned in 2021-22.

As a result, the government earned a dividend of Rs 13,804 crore, 58 per cent higher than the Rs 8,718 crore paid out in the previous financial year.

Since the profit in the current financial year would be much higher than the previous year, so will be the dividend payout to the government, sources said.

Going by the past record, the dividend payout for FY24 should be in excess of Rs 15,000 crore, they added.

Earlier in January, the Reserve Bank, in its draft

guidelines, proposed to allow banks having net non-performing assets (NPAs) ratio of less than 6 per cent to declare dividends.

As per the prevailing norms last updated in 2005, banks need to have an NNPA ratio of up to 7 per cent to become eligible for declaration of dividends.



The central bank has proposed that the new guidelines should come into effect from FY25 onwards.

The draft lays down directions that need to be followed by banks' boards while considering proposals of dividend payouts, which include consideration on divergence in classification and provisioning for NPAs as well.

A commercial bank should have a minimum total capital adequacy of 11.5 per cent to be eligible for declaring dividends, the circular said.

## Maruti recalls 16K units of WagonR, Baleno to fix defect

**New Delhi**

Maruti Suzuki India on Friday said it is recalling over 16,000 units of Baleno and WagonR to fix a possible defect in a part of the fuel pump motor.

The company is recalling 11,851 units of Baleno and 4,190 units of WagonR manufactured between July 30, 2019 and November 1, 2019, the country's largest carmaker said in a regulatory filing.

It is suspected that there is a defect in a part of the fuel pump motor, which in a rare case may lead to engine stalling or engine starting issue, it added. Affected vehicle owners will be contacted by authorised dealer workshops for replacement of the part, free of cost.



## Central Government extends ban on onion exports till further orders

**New Delhi**

The government has extended the export ban on onion till further orders to increase domestic availability and keep its prices under check.

Earlier, it was prohibited till March 31 this year.

"Export prohibition on export of onions valid till 31st March 2024, is extended until further orders," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a notification dated March 22.

DGFT is an arm of the ministry which deals with exports and imports-related issues.

On December 8, 2023, the government banned export of onions.

In the 2023 rabi season, onion production was estimated to be at 22.7 million tonnes.

The export of onions to friendly countries is allowed on a case-to-case basis after approval from the inter-ministerial group.

The government has permitted exports of 64,400 tonnes of onion



to the UAE and Bangladesh through the National Cooperative Exports Ltd (NCEL).

Earlier, the Centre, in October 2023, had decided to step up the sale of buffer onion stock at a subsidised rate of Rs 25 per kg in retail markets in order to provide relief to consumers.

To control prices, the government has earlier taken

several steps. It had imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 800 per tonne on onion exports on October 28 till December 31, 2023.

In August, India had imposed a 40 per cent export duty on onions up to December 31, 2023.

Onion is a politically sensitive commodity.

## Gold hits record high of Rs 67,450

**New Delhi**

Gold prices surged by Rs 1,130 to hit an all-time high of Rs 67,450 per 10 grams in the local market here following strong global trends, according to HDFC Securities.



"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 67,450 per 10 grams, up by Rs 1,130 from the previous close," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said.

Comex spot gold prices were supported by geopolitical risks and buying by central banks, Parmar added. Gold rallied to an all-time high, supported by a sell-off in the dollar after the US Federal Reserve's decision on rate cuts.

## All public sector banks see dip in NPAs over last 6 months: Survey

**New Delhi**

All public sector banks in India showed a reduction in non-performing asset levels over the last six months while only 67 per cent of private sector banks reported a decline during the period, said a FICCI-IBA Bankers' survey released on Thursday.

The survey revealed that 77 per cent of the respondent banks reported a decrease in the NPA levels in the last six months, with public sector banks reporting better asset quality as compared to their private sector counterparts.

The 18th round of the FICCI-IBA Bankers' survey was carried out for the period July to December 2023. A total of 23 banks, including public sector, private sector and foreign banks, participated in the survey. These banks together represent about 77 per cent of the banking industry, as

classified by asset size.

Over half of the banks covered in the FICCI-IBA Bankers' unveiled on Thursday believe that gross non-performing assets would be in the range of 3-3.5 per cent over the next six months.

"All responding public sector banks (PSBs) have cited a reduction in NPA levels while amongst participating private sector banks, 67 per cent of banks have cited a decrease. None of the respondent PSBs and foreign banks have stated an increase in NPA levels over the last six months while 22 per cent of private banks reported an increase," the survey highlighted. Amongst the sectors that continue to show a high level of NPAs, most of the participating bankers identified sectors such as food processing and infrastructure.



# Amid global slowdown, India's outlook positive, says FinMin

**New Delhi**

The Finance Ministry on Friday said with an uptick in private investment and inflation trending down, India's outlook for the next financial year looks positive.

The Monthly Economic Review also said inclusion of Indian bonds in Bloomberg bond index from January 2025 should bolster inflows. It said robust investment activity is driving growth amid a steady rise in consumption. "The continued focus on public investment seems to have crowded in private investment," said the February edition of the review by Department of Economic Affairs.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) has

revised upwards the GDP growth estimate for current fiscal to 7.6 per cent from 7.3 per cent.

India grew above 8 per cent for three consecutive quarters, reaffirming its position as a standout performer amid sluggish global growth trends.

Various agencies echo a similar sentiment revising the FY24 growth estimates of India closer to 8 per cent, the ministry said.

"On the whole, India looks positively towards the dawn of FY25," the review said. It said increased demand for residential properties in

tier-2 and tier-3 cities augurs well for furthering construction activity. Non-farm employment has revived, improving the capacity to absorb the labour leaving agriculture.



## M&M, Adani Total join hands to set up EV charging infra

**New Delhi**

Mahindra & Mahindra on Thursday said it has tied up with a unit of Adani Total Gas to establish electric vehicle charging infrastructure across the country.

The MoU sets a roadmap for the creation of an expansive EV

charging infrastructure across the country, it added. It will also entail rolling out e-mobility solutions to provide seamless access to the charging network for the customers covering discovery, availability, navigation, and transactions.



## Around 37% of women population employed; Hyderabad, Pune, top chart in women employment: Report

**Mumbai**

The women workforce demographics in India suggests that of the total population of about 69.2 crore women, around 37 per cent are actively working or employed, says a report.

According to talent solutions provider CareerNet's 'The State of Women's Employment in India' report, cities like Hyderabad, Pune and Chennai top the chart in women employment.

In 2023, women's representation in the workforce experienced a significant rise

of 2 to 5 per cent compared to the previous year, in junior professional roles and executive boards, it stated. The report revealed 40 per cent of the fresh talent from colleges placed in 2023 were women.

Women candidates having 0 to 3 years and 3 to 7 years of experience constitute 20 to 25 per cent of the total hires in their respective bands, it added.

The report further revealed that there has been a slight overall increase in the hiring ratio of women in most cities, except for Delhi and

the National Capital Region (NCR), which showed a decline.

Hyderabad leads with a 34 per cent hiring rate, followed by Pune at 33 per cent, and Chennai at 29 per cent. While, Delhi-NCR has witnessed a decline at 20 per cent, reflecting a 2 per cent decrease from the 2022 figure, it added.

The report has been prepared with an analysis of 25,000 job placements collated from internal sources, employer career portals, and month-on-month hiring trends in 2023.

## Sebi for IPO details in audiovisual format

**Mumbai**

Financial market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has proposed that companies desirous of raising capital through public issues may be required to file disclosures made in the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) in an audiovisual format. The disclosures are made for investors so that they can make informed decisions while investing in the company's public issue.

DRHP is a document that consists of the

company's financial details, future prospects, and other key aspects regarding the business and is being filed to the regulator to raise money essentially via public offerings of its shares.

In its draft put up on its website on Tuesday, the regulator proposed that the audio visual on the public issues will be in bilingual version — English and Hindi and made available in the public domain. SEBI said it is expected that

the audiovisual will provide ease in understanding the salient features and also provide reference to various disclosures of the public issue.



## Kia India to hike vehicle prices up to 3% from April 1

**Chandigarh**

Kia India has announced that it will increase prices of its range of vehicles by up to 3 per cent starting April 1. The decision is attributed to the escalation in commodity prices and supply chain-related inputs. It marks the first price adjustment by the company this year. The automaker sells models like Seltos, Sonet and Carens.

Kia has sold almost 1.16 million units in India and overseas to date. Tata Motors also hiked prices by an average of 0.7 per cent from February 1.



# Redeliberating IWRM at the scale of a river basin

The theme of World Water Day 2024 is 'Water for Peace', highlighting water's significant role in bringing about global stability and prosperity. Physical scarcity of freshwater, water pollution, iniquitous access and the upstream-downstream dimension of water as a flowing resource have often made water a subject of conflict at various levels. The unbridled race for control over water, beginning from the global to the local levels, has pitched stakeholders at various scales against each other in a battle for dominance over this precious resource. This struggle often escalates into heated conflicts over the right to use or own water, particularly when it crosses boundaries. Transboundary water disputes are not just international—they occur within countries, between states, and even among local communities, stretching down to the smallest societal units. Moreover, definitionally "transboundary" extends beyond geographical to sectoral boundaries, illustrating the complex web of water-related challenges. The most recent form of transboundary water conflict is acknowledged to be between human economic use and natural ecosystem needs. The challenges are getting even more complex with global warming and climate change causing substantial changes in hydrological flow regimes of major river basins of the world, thereby, affecting various ecosystem services provided by water including the food and drinking water provisioning and supporting and regulating services. Given the way water has been the subject of intense conflicts, the theme of World Water Day 2024 pitching water as an instrument of peace seems apt—this will require coordinated efforts and changes in the paradigmatic thinking of water governance.

## Water scarcity and conflicts

The word "scarcity" is nearly synonymous with water disputes, stemming from both the limited quantity of potable water and its uneven distribution across the globe. This brings in the "zero-sum" dimension in the entire water game. The distributional disparity is perceptible with regions flush with water and others parched for it. Adding to this are the nuances of "temporal scarcity," where water scarcity fluctuates with seasonal changes and grows with population and economic expansion, exacerbating the scarcity as demand soars amidst booming urbanisation and industrialisation. In the realm of transboundary waters, the inherently mobile resource complicates the establishment of clear property rights. In many cases, the upstream-downstream water conflicts have been symptomatic of conflicts over definitions of property rights over water.

From an upstream-downstream perspective, the three extreme principles of defining property rights entail the doctrines of history, Harmon and Hobbes. The Harmon doctrine, rooted in the belief that "If water falls on my roof, it belongs to me," favours those at the water's origin, benefiting upstream users. Similarly, history echoes the "prior appropriation" principle, granting water rights to those who first utilise the resource, regardless of their geographical position. Meanwhile, the Hobbesian doctrine recognises rights established through negotiations among neighbouring water users or riparian states.

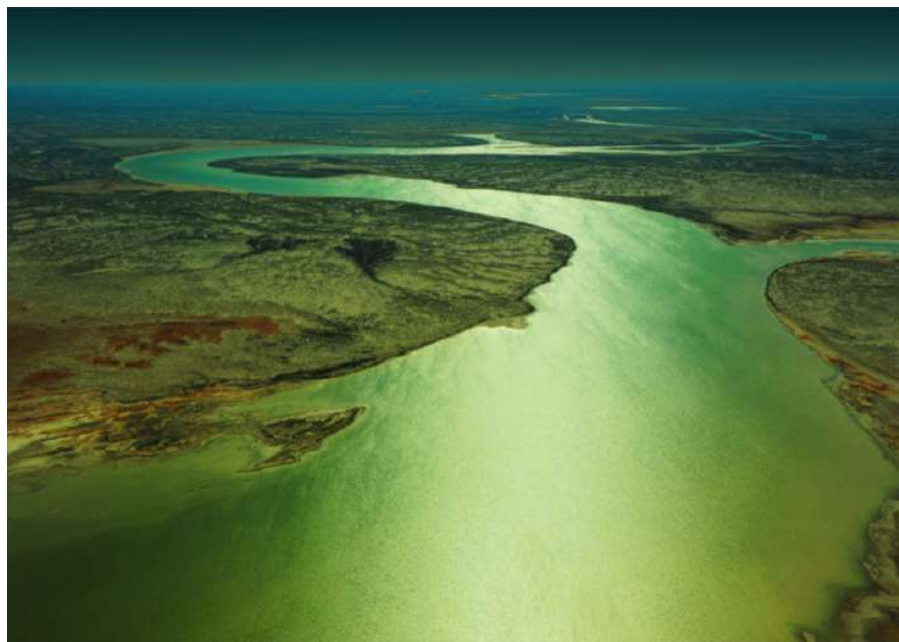
The persistent socio-political and economic pressures from water scarcity leading to conflicts at various levels have driven professionals and researchers to rethink water

governance paradigms.

The persistent socio-political and economic pressures from water scarcity leading to conflicts at various levels have driven professionals and researchers to rethink water governance paradigms.

This has ignited a global debate, signalling a pivotal shift from conventional water resource development to innovative, sustainable approaches.

## From an old to a new paradigm of



## water governance

The neo-Malthusian creed of "scarcity induces conflicts" is based on a paradigm that looks at water from the perspective of a physically quantified resource that can be stocked and used as per human need. This is what embodies the traditional paradigm of water governance often delineated as arithmetic hydrology, which is inherently reductionist (as it reduces the very complex water paradigm to a numerical figure). Stressors are emerging from the natural ecosystem that can lead to conflicts within human societies, putting environmental security at risk due to disputes between humans and their surroundings—the scarcity of natural resources to meet burgeoning human needs is well-acknowledged. However, what is less acknowledged are the adverse outcomes from human actions that modify natural resource cycles for short-term economic gains, in the name of "development". Alterations to natural water cycles by humans typically bring long-term negative consequences despite immediate economic benefits, illustrating the complex nature of these interactions. Such actions have detrimentally impacted livelihoods downstream by affecting ecosystem services.

Simon Dalby has pointed out the lack of social-scientific evidence supporting the Malthusian view that environmental scarcity leads to conflict. This Malthusian perspective has also faced criticism from the comprehensive research on "securitisation" by the Copenhagen School. Evidence of conflict over resources can also be seen in the flooding disputes over the Ganges in Bihar in India, or the paradoxical situation of "ample water, ample poverty" regarding the Brahmaputra river in Assam in India. Therefore, the very traditional paradigm that equates addressing water scarcity to water governance is hardly applicable given the

changing natures of the challenges. This has led water professionals and researchers to think of newer modes of water governance on the ground that a holistic paradigm needs to replace the fragmented approach to managing water, thereby challenging the reductionist paradigm.

This led to the steady emergence of a new paradigm often paraphrased as Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) that looks at water as an integral component of the global eco-hydrological cycle, thereby posing water

governance in integration to its interactive dynamics with the human society and the broader basin ecosystem.

## IWRM at the basin scale

There is now a widespread acknowledgement globally that human action on one end of a water body can have serious impacts on the broader basin ecosystem. This led to a spurt in dam decommissioning in large parts of the United States (US) and European Union (EU), once their deleterious impacts were realised. Even institutional mechanisms and market-based instruments started being used in different parts of the world to keep water instream. In Australia, the establishment of water markets across the Murray-Darling Basin, governed by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, exemplifies an innovative approach to augmenting water efficiency among agricultural practitioners, thereby fostering principles of sustainable water stewardship. In a pioneering move towards mitigating the uncertainties surrounding water availability in California, December 2019 witnessed water derivatives trading on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

This initiative marks a strategic pivot towards demand-side water management, counterbalancing the historical precedence of infrastructural adjustments that have significantly reshaped the hydrological dynamics of the region.

The importance lies in the centrality of acknowledging the basin ecosystem as the unit of governance, where IWRM needs to be the guiding principle. This is leading to the emergence of the governance paradigm of Integrated River Basin Governance (IRBG). As such, the canons of IRBG or IWRM at the basin scale are still emerging, but the following points provide a summary

of the broad contours of the emerging paradigm.

Water must be reconceptualised as an essential element within the eco-hydrological cycle, emphasising its role as a cyclical flow integral to ecosystem functionality, rather than a finite commodity exploited for human use and convenience.

In the economic realm, water's intrinsic value transcends its diverse applications, necessitating its recognition as a vital economic resource within an expansive ecological-economic framework. This encompasses the valuation of ecosystem services pertinent to water flow and distribution patterns, thereby embedding water within a broader ecological economic context. Importantly, this economic valuation does not override the imperatives of equitable access and affordability from a social justice perspective.

The governance of water resources should be organised around river basins, advocating for a paradigm shift away from the unsustainable premise that economic growth and food security are contingent upon the perpetual increase of water supplies. Instead, the focus should pivot to the adoption of water-saving technologies and innovations.

A holistic evaluation of water development initiatives is imperative, demanding an integrated consideration of the hydrological cycle.

This approach necessitates the cultivation of a transparent, interdisciplinary knowledge base, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of water's multifaceted roles—socially, ecologically, and economically.

The management and conceptualisation of droughts and floods should be expanded to encompass the broader ecological processes they are part of, urging a systemic understanding of these phenomena within their ecological context.

Advocacy for an integrated policymaking framework is crucial, promoting collaborative decision-making and cost-sharing across diverse sectors within the river basin—including but not limited to industry, agriculture, urban development, and navigation, without compromising the integrity of the basin ecosystem.

This integrated approach should also align with the Sustainable Development Goals (poverty alleviation and ecosystem restoration), through fostering of holistic basin management ethos.

The establishment of a robust, multidisciplinary knowledge repository on river basins is imperative, encapsulating the complex interplay between natural processes and socio-economic dynamics.

Integrating gender perspectives is essential, recognising and empowering women's critical roles in water management, as underscored in the Dublin Statement.

The above pointers present a scaffold for creating a more modern and state-of-the-art IRBM paradigm. While it is clear that the traditional reductionism in the human thinking of water governance has led to water conflicts, the theme of World Water Day 2024, i.e., 'Water for Peace' can be achieved by recalibration of IWRM at a basin scale.



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

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

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

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

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

India’s Approach to Digital Public Infrastructure

Digital Public Infrastructures are

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

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

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

The sheer scale of Aadhaar meant it became the base layer that enabled the integration of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI)—a real-time payments system that enables users to link multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application. Today, over 68 percent of transactions in India are conducted using UPI, with 10.6 billion transactions taking place in August 2023 alone. UPI is facilitated by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). That UPI is built upon the Aadhaar and other layers of the open-source Stack, overall transaction costs in the economy are significantly reduced. This not only benefits businesses by making transactions more cost-effective for consumers, but also encourages the shift from cash-based transactions, leading to greater

transparency and accountability in the financial ecosystem.

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

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

Prior to the India Stack and DPI, there was no central digital identification system in the country. The fragmented, paper-based identification systems that did exist have been described as “systematically tainted” and excluded the most vulnerable who could not afford to pay bribes, among other fraudulent activities. Alongside the lack of digital ID, in 2016 Prime Minister Narendra Modi demonetised 500 and 1,000-rupee notes, taking more than 86 percent of cash out of circulation. At the time, the prime minister was heavily criticised for demonetising an economy where 90 percent of the population, especially women and the poor, relied on cash payments. In an article for the Harvard Business Review, Bhaskar Chakravorti described it as “Modi’s war on cash” and asked whether the forced digitisation of India would work; fast forward to 2024 and the answer is yes, it did.

The Global Opportunity for the India Stack

The India Stack, and particularly the UPI, have not only transformed India’s financial system but also hold immense potential for influencing the global economy. As the landscape of global finance is undergoing a paradigm shift, with technological innovations reshaping traditional systems, the India Stack has enabled the country to leapfrog legacy financial and payments systems of developed countries. Furthermore, the Indian diaspora is the world’s largest, and is therefore driving demand for international access to UPI for easier trade,

tourism, international entrepreneurship, and cross-border remittances. International markets including Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and France[xxviii] have all either adopted or are looking to adopt UPI technology.

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

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

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

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

# Leveraging the Rice Export Ban for Crop Substitution in India

Rice, scientifically called *Oryza sativa*, is usually associated with humid and wet climates, although not restricted to tropical zones. While some posit that rice is a descendant of wild grass from the eastern Himalayan regions, another school of thought is that rice originated in southern India, finding its way to northern India and subsequently to China, Korea, the Philippines, Japan, and Indonesia around 1000 BCE. Paddy, the Malay word for "rice plant," is interchangeably used with rice, specifically to describe the fields used for growing rice. Despite taking centuries to spread around the world, rice is now a primary agricultural and economic product. Besides being a staple food crop, rice is used to make ready-to-eat products like puffed rice. Rice husk, straw, and bran serve as animal and poultry feed, while rice bran oil is used in the soap industry. Given the crop's influence over diets, cultures, and economic lifestyles worldwide, the United Nations (UN) designated 2004 as the 'International Year of Rice'. Rice comprises the bulk of the diet for almost 3.5 billion people, with Asia having the longest continued reliance on rice for its average daily calorie intake. Although the grain is grown in over 100 countries, 90 percent of the production occurs in Asia. As the global population grows, the demand for rice will rise, pressuring the global agricultural chain for increased production. The disruption of factor markets and suppressed global supply in the aftermath of COVID-19 and the Ukraine-Russia crisis, amid other geopolitical strife, has put excess pressure on the rice market. However, global rice production is expected to improve by 1.3 percent in FY 2023-24 due to higher producer prices, softening fertiliser costs, and continued government subsidies.

Rice is vital in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While about 900 million economically weak people depend on rice as either consumers or producers in the global value chain, around 400 million are directly involved in rice production. Increased productivity and lower prices benefit economically weaker consumers and play a significant role in economic growth via growth linkages. As the source of 70 percent of the calorie consumption for the most marginalised populations in Asia, rice is a crucial component in mitigating global hunger by providing greater food security and increased nutritional benefits. Besides directly contributing to SDG-1 (ending poverty) and SDG-2 (zero hunger), rice and its production process have implicit effects on

SDG-5 (gender equality), SDG-6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG-8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG-12 (responsible consumption and production), SDG-13 (climate action), and SDG-15 (life on land). For instance, despite playing a significant role in the farming, processing, and marketing processes of rice, women still face significant barriers in access to resources such as information, technology, and primary inputs. Irrigated rice fields receive almost 35 percent of the global irrigated water, highlighting the need for water-saving management technologies and sustainable cropping mechanisms in its production process. As water becomes scarce and temperatures rise, this also raises questions about the sustainability of the rice sector.



As such, sustainable consumption and production practices must be incorporated into the industry. International cooperation is needed to realign the rice value chain into a more sustainable practice, mainly focusing on innovations and practical research in the field (invoking SDG-17—strengthening the means of implementation and revitalising the global partnership for sustainable development).

India's rice economy is estimated to be worth US\$51.58 billion as of 2024. India is also the second-largest producer and the largest exporter of rice globally, contributing to 40 percent of the global trade in rice. This paper focuses on the Indian rice market and delves into its structure—its processes, agents, and institutions. Further, it assesses the ban imposed on the exports of non-basmati rice (economic quality rice used for daily consumption) in July 2023, a measure by the Indian government to ensure

domestic price stability. It delves into the harmful effects of the export ban on the basmati (premium quality of rice) and non-basmati income divide. It presents a demand-supply theoretical framework to analyse the ban's effects on Indian consumers and producers. Here, the water-intensive nature of basmati is highlighted to foreground the need for crop-substitution policies that can attenuate India's looming water crisis. A second theoretical model attempts to address the issue of the high environmental cost of rice production by promoting drier crops and leveraging the export ban. The paper also recommends promoting drier, climate-resilient millets to ensure nutritional security at a lower social price.

## India's Rice Value Chain

India is the world's second-largest rice producer (after China) and has a rich biodiversity encompassing ancient rice varieties. As such, rice cultivation in the country is multifaceted, tied to climatic patterns, and follows a meticulous process that transforms paddy into consumable rice through various milling stages. Still, India's rice industry (and indeed its agricultural sector) faces critical productivity constraints. For instance, significant economic disparities exist between basmati and non-basmati rice producers, highlighting the challenges and opportunities within the rice value chain. Analysing government policies, procurement systems, and market dynamics can offer an understanding of the complexities characterising India's rice sector.

## Processes

India has the largest area under paddy cultivation and is the second-largest producer of rice. While the Indica variety of rice is believed to

have been domesticated in Northeast India, the Japonica variety was possibly domesticated from wild rice in southern China and subsequently found its way to India. The cultural significance of rice has been stated in the Vedas and is still observed abundantly in households where it signifies prosperity and fertility. However, the production process of rice has undergone enormous restructuring over the centuries.

Rice is grown primarily in three seasons, classified based on harvesting season—autumn, winter, and summer. The autumn, or pre-kharif, rice is sown from May to August and contributes to almost 7 percent of the total crop production. However, the main rice growing season, comprising around 84 percent of the total rice production, is the winter, or kharif crop, harvested in November-December. Harvested during March-June, the summer, or rabi, crop contributes about 9 percent of the annual rice production. However, the paddy crop procured during the harvest is unsuitable for human consumption. To make polished rice, rice must be milled to remove the hulls and bran. This milling process involves pre-cleaning, de-stoning, parboiling, husking, husk aspiration, paddy separation, whitening, polishing, length grading, blending, weighing, and bagging.

Consider the distribution structure of basmati and non-basmati farmers. Basmati farmers are relatively large-scale producers concentrated in Punjab, Haryana, and West Bengal, while non-basmati farmers are small-scale producers distributed across the remaining rice-producing states. An increase in scale means not only greater rents accruing to these producers but also better access to the networks of the rice value chain. This gives them greater bargaining power and access to more attractive prices than non-basmati farmers. This is a critical issue in the context of this paper and will be addressed in detail in the later sections.

## Productivity and Problems

India has 11.2 percent of the world's arable land and is the third largest cereal producer after the US and China. India is a world leader in terms of agricultural production and performs exceptionally well in the context of commercial crops and livestock. However, while India has the highest area under cultivation for rice—almost 50 percent higher than China—it is the second largest producer of rice. This stems from the shockingly low yield in India, at 2809 kilograms per hectare



# The role of migration in India's urban growth story

Migration is the movement of people from their usual place of residence to another. It may be within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently. In 2020, IOM (International Organization for Migration) estimated that there are 281 million international migrants in the world, or about 3.6 percent of the global population. This is 128 million more than in 1990, and three times the estimated number in 1970. Besides international migration, individuals and families move from one area of a country to another.

Migration could be voluntary or forced. Voluntary migration is usually for better opportunities, mostly economic opportunities. India witnesses the movement of students for education or of young men and women for jobs. Women and parents may move to join their husbands and children working in a faraway town. Others want to move to cities for a better quality of life. On the other hand, forced migration or distressed migration happens when people migrate to overcome some difficulties in life.

In such cases, people move to safer places due to war or political upheaval, famine, collapse of economy or other forms of strife.

This article analyses the impact of migration on urban development. Urban demographic growth happens on account of four factors. The first is internal reproduction or the natural multiplication of the existing population living in that city. The second is the geographical expansion of a city's boundaries by merging with peri-urban or rural areas. The third factor is reclassification, where rural settlements are classified as urban by administratively converting a village into a municipality. This is done mainly because of urban characteristics—larger demography, greater density, a higher percentage of non-agricultural economic activity, and an increase in internal revenue capability in an erstwhile village.

The fourth method is migration, which occurs when people move from a country's villages to a city or a town, or from one town to another town/city and from one country into towns/cities of another country. However, there could also be people who leave a specific town and go to other places.

Hence the growth through migration is calculated by using 'net migration'. This means the total number of people coming in from outside minus the number of people going out from inside.

Migration makes multiple positive contributions to cities and urban development. Firstly, it adds to the process of urbanisation and thereby to the economic development of the cities and the country. An indirect consequence for the rural areas is that outmigration from villages lightens the employment load on agriculture, estimated to be 42.86 percent in India in 2022. It thus aids higher agricultural productivity. Cities

that are starved for labour find migrants filling up that requirement. For instance, in the last decade, migrants made up 47 percent of the increase in the workforce in the United States (US) and 70 percent in Europe, learning new skills and trades and handsomely contributing to the process of economic diversification and growth.

In countries with ageing populations, migrants boost the working age numbers. They also help redress labour market

(-)7.6 million. In contrast, the US received (+) 53.6 million migrants between 1950 and 2020.

Regarding internal factors, over the last three decades in India, natural increase has been the largest cause of urbanisation—a little more than half. Reclassification, mergers and other causes have totalled about a fourth of all additions. Migration has accounted for about a fifth of the urban addition. As per the National Statistical Office of

the strength to emerge as the most vital component of urban growth. However, even this has not been happening at the pace the country would want.

More importantly, the quality of contribution by migrants can be further enhanced partly by international migrants into key knowledge sectors and industries and partly through a reversal of migration of professional Indians who leave for careers abroad. For example, the Indian diaspora has been among



imbalances in a city. The professional migrants bring in knowledge and special skills that the city lacked and add to the quality and variety of production in cities. They are also a source of innovation, increasingly becoming the mainstay of modern economies. A recent study on innovation in the US found that highly skilled immigrants drove American innovation. As a mass of people, migrants help the city economy not merely as producers but also as consumers. At the same time, they provide human resources to recipient states and support the donor states through remittances. Socially, they contribute to the diversity of people and cultures in their place of new residence, making cities socially and culturally more vibrant.

In India, international migration into its cities has been minimal and cannot be considered a meaningful factor towards urban growth. The data provided by IMO for India shows a larger outflow than inflow. Since 1950 up to 2020, international migration out of India minus international migration into India has been

the Government of India, the search for employment and marriage have been the two leading causes of migration.

Contrary to popular perception, India's urbanisation over several decades has not shown the speed that the country would like. Since the 1950s, there has been no decade in which the decennial census has recorded urban growth higher than 3.88 percent (Census 2011). On the other hand, it recorded a decadal growth as low as 0.68 percent between 1951 and 1961. This trend suggests that natural increase or reclassification will not accelerate urbanisation. Since fertility rates in India are declining, it would be fair to expect that urbanisation through natural increase may show a downward trend. In any event, it is unlikely to make a significant breach with its current levels. Urbanisation through net reclassification and mergers of rural areas into towns and cities is not capable of generating a great pace for urbanisation, as is evidenced by past data.

On the other hand, migration has the potential to speed up urbanisation and, if appropriately incentivised, has

the most productive groups in the US, outperforming others in terms of economic productivity and playing a stellar role in the sectors of medicine, space, information technology, education and politics, to name only a few.

The ability to attract talent from abroad, partially reverse quality outmigration from India, and hasten the pace of skilled/unskilled labour coming into Indian cities from rural areas would require two critical areas to be attended to with urgency. To draw quality migration in, our cities must deliver a better quality of life and become highly liveable cities. This requires massive building of infrastructure—physical, social and recreational. For speedier rural-urban migration, employment opportunities in many more Indian cities have to be created by efforts at dispersed economic investment and decentralised urbanisation. India's sluggish urban development needs to be re-invigorated and accelerated.



## Shiamak Davar remembers how Yash Chopra, SRK brought him to Bollywood

Choreographer Shiamak Davar, who is known for his work on 'Dil To Pagal Hai', 'Taal' and others, has credited Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan and the late director Yash Chopra for bringing him to the world of films.



Shiamak shared that SRK forced him to work on the film, which catapulted him to unfathomable heights.

The choreographer recently appeared on the show 'Kiska Brand Bajega' hosted by Aditya Bhat, and spoke about his foray in cinema.

Shiamak said: "It was actually because of Shah Rukh forcing me and Yash uncle's mad love for me. And then I started 'Le Gayi Le Gayi' then 'Chak Dhoom Dhoom' then 'Are Re Are' then that jugalbandi with Karisma and

Madhuri." Shiamak has worked on numerous successful films, including the 'Bunty aur Babli', 'Dhoom 2', 'Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi' and others.

## Akshay, Tiger wield toy guns at launch of action-loaded 'BMCM' trailer

Akshay Kumar and Tiger Shroff, who have released the trailer of their upcoming action drama 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' (BMCM) on Tuesday, were spotted posing with toy guns ahead of the launch.

The visuals show Akshay wearing a black biker jacket and matching trousers. He has rounded off the look with black boots, and aviator sunglasses.

Tiger on the other hand is sporting a sleeveless black coat, and matching pants.

The duo is posing for the lenses while they hold toy guns in their hands.

Actor Prithviraj Sukumaran, who plays an antagonist Kabir in the Ali Abbas Zafar directorial, was spotted wearing an all black outfit -- shirt, shimmer jacket and pants. The look was completed with black boots and sunglasses.

Producers Jackky Bhagnani, and his sister Deepshikha Deshmukh were also present at the trailer launch.

The brother-sister duo exuded grace and elegance in black outfits.

Presented by Vashu Bhagnani and Pooja Entertainment in association with AAZ films, 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' is written and directed by Ali Abbas Zafar, and produced by Vashu Bhagnani,



Deepshikha Deshmukh, Jackky Bhagnani, Himanshu Kishan Mehra, and Ali Abbas Zafar.

Shot across stunning locations including Mumbai, London, Abu Dhabi, Scotland, and Jordan, the film promises an unforgettable cinematic experience reminiscent of Hollywood blockbusters.

The film features Prithviraj in an intriguing villainous role, along with Sonakshi Sinha, Manushi Chhillar, and Alaya F in pivotal roles.

The film is set to release in theatres on Eid in April.

## Shakira's new album punches back after personal rollercoaster

Colombian singer Shakira has released her long-awaited new album called Women Don't Cry Anymore, a declaration of resilience after a public separation from long-time partner and a tax dispute in Spain.

The title quotes one of her top hits, included in the album and recorded with Argentine producer Bizarrap, a pun-filled lampoon directed at her ex-partner, Spanish former soccer player Gerard Pique, in which she sang "women don't cry anymore; they cash in."

The track, Shakira: Bzrp Music Sessions, Vol. 53, earned



the 47-year-old pop star and the 25-year-old producer two Latin Grammys last year. It hit the No 1 spot on the Billboard charts while smashing four Guinness World Records for views on YouTube and streams on Spotify. The two worked together on a more techno dance track, The Strong One, in the 17-song album which includes mixes with fellow Colombians Karol G and Manuel Turizo as well as Mexican and Puerto Rican musicians, and track with US rapper Cardi B.

The 14-time Latin Grammy

winner, whose full name is Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll, shared moments from a launch party on social media late on Thursday. On Instagram she said the album represents her "struggles, but also triumphs," and that even in life's hardest moments you can "transform pain into resilience, and strength and power."

Following her breakup with Pique, the father of her two children, the Barranquilla-born Shakira faced a second Spanish tax probe after reaching a \$15 million settlement in November to avoid a trial in a prior case.

## Cameron welcomes 2<sup>nd</sup> child



Cameron Diaz and Benji Madden have become proud parents to their second child. The couple, who married in January 2015, announced the birth of their son Cardinal in an Instagram post. Diaz and Madden are also parents to daughter Raddix, who was born on December 30, 2019.

## SRK-starrer Baazigar all set to re-release in theatres



Superstar Shah Rukh Khan, Kajol and Shilpa Shetty-starrer cult classic film Baazigar is all set for re-release in cinemas. King Khan shared this exciting news with his fans.

"Flashback to a time when magic unfolded on the silver screen! Inviting you to relive those moments at our Retro Film Festival with the iconic Bollywood classic Baazigar. I'm thrilled to join you in this nostalgic journey," King Khan announced in an Instagram post.



## Indian-American actress Avantika Vandanapu wants to work with SRK, Deepika and Alia



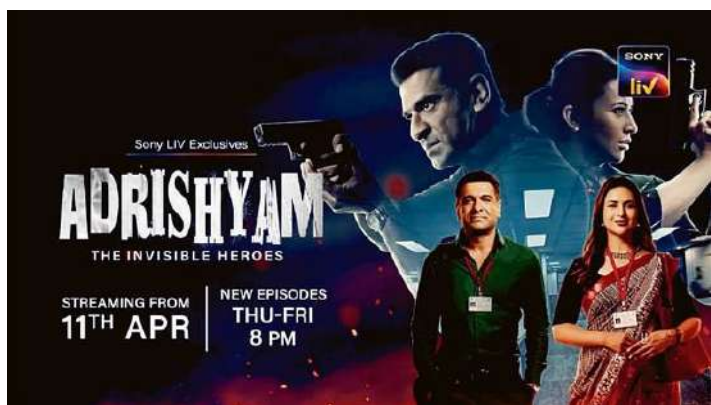
Indian-American actress Avantika Vandanapu, who is known for her role in Mean Girls, said she would love to be part of Indian cinema as she has grown up watching films such as Shah Rukh Khan-starrer Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ) and Veer Zaara.

Avantika, who will be seen in the Hindi series Big Girls Don't Cry, shared: "It's truly surreal to come full circle and return to India, from my roots as a child actor to now leading a Hindi series like Big Girls Don't Cry. This homecoming feels like a dream come true."

"Since my childhood I have been watching Yash Chopra films like Chandni, Veer Zaara, DDLJ, Darr, among many others... and developed a desire to work in Bollywood films. I love the colour, emotions and cheerful Indian movies, and cannot wait to be a part of them." Avantika, who was born to an Indian, Telugu-speaking family, made her mark in several Hollywood projects, including Mean Girls, Spin, and Senior Years, among others. She said that she

would love to work with Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone. The actress said: "I have grown up admiring SRK, Deepika, Alia and so many actors, and would love to work with them."

## Get set for Adrishyam



Adrishyam, Sony LIV's much-awaited thriller featuring Divyanka Tripathi Dahiya and Eijaz Khan, is set to stream from April 11. The show will take the audience on a captivating journey through the life and challenges of a spy, providing a fresh perspective to the spy-thriller genre.

Divyanka, known for her compelling performances, brings a mix of depth and authenticity to the character of inspector Parvati Sehgal, while Eijaz Khan shines

in the role of Ravi Verma.

Eijaz shared, "Adrishyam brings me a very exciting opportunity to play a character whose love for his country stands above everything else. Ravi Verma embodies strength, determination, and commitment to protect his nation and brings the story of unseen heroes, who work the people 24x7, to the screen. It is an absolute pleasure to portray a character who speaks volumes about patriotism."

## Rashami Desai to be a part of the film Jahangir National University



Actress Rashami Desai will reportedly be seen in the upcoming movie Jahangir National University (JNU), where she will be seen playing a character based on the life of writer and professor Nivedita Menon. The actress said: "First of all, a huge thanks to all my fans and supporters for waiting so patiently to see me on screen. It was a conscious decision to take a bit of a break in order to do the kind of things I wanted to do. I have truly put my blood, sweat and all my efforts to get into the skin of my character and do complete justice to it."

"A lot of people's faith and belief is associated with me and the project, and it's my moral responsibility to take care of all of it. As an actor, right from the research and preparation stage to doing everything that's needed to get deep into the character, I have done it all," she said.

## Tanvi Malhara talks about her role in Savdhaan India Apni Khaki

Tanvi Malhara, the former Miss India Multinational, is captivating audiences on Star Bharat's Savdhaan India Apni Khaki with her portrayal of Pragati Deshmukh, a determined and fierce sub-inspector.

Tanvi shared, "When I auditioned for the role, portraying a tough, no-nonsense cop seemed like a far from my expectations. However, my passion for acting outweighed any doubts." Embracing Pragati's strength meant confronting her own vulnerabilities. "There were moments when I struggled to embody Pragati's unwavering resolve. I found myself tearing up during intense scenes. But with perseverance, I stepped into her shoes," she added.

Tanvi underscored the



importance of pursuing dreams relentlessly. "I've always aspired to be an actor, despite the obstacles. Similarly, Pragati never shies away from challenges, and that resilience resonates with me. I used to rely on others, particularly men, to make decisions for me.

But now, I understand the power of making my own choices and facing the consequences head-on. It's liberating and empowering to take control of your life and chase your dreams without regrets," she said.

## Priyanka Chopra, Nick Jonas offer prayers at Ram Mandir with daughter Malti

Priyanka Chopra, who is currently in India, offered prayers at Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya with her husband, singer Nick Jonas and daughter Malti Marie.

In the videos captured by the paparazzi, Priyanka

was seen inside the temple premises with her family.

The ace actor can be seen wearing a yellow sari. Nick, too, opted for the ethnic outfit.

Meanwhile, on the work front, Priyanka will be seen

in Heads of State, alongside John Cena and Idris Elba. She is also set to lend her voice to Disney's upcoming film Tiger. She will also be seen in Farhan Akhtar directorial Jee Le Zaraa.



# My name these days is attached to just promoting T20 cricket but I've still got it: Virat Kohli

## Bengaluru

Not just a marketable name to promote T20 cricket, he's still got the game. This was the subtle message Virat Kohli sent out amid unfounded chatter surrounding his place in the side ahead of the World Cup's debut appearance in the United States.

Kohli, who is back after a two-month paternity break, scored a match-winning 77 off 49 balls for Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday night against Punjab Kings and deservedly walked away with the player of the match honours.

"I know my name is nowadays quite attached to just promoting the game in many parts of the world when it comes to T20 cricket. But, I've still got it, I guess," said the 35-year-old father of two in the post-match presentation.

His comments came in the backdrop of never-ending media speculation surrounding the team's composition for the big event to be jointly hosted by the USA and the West Indies starting June 1.

Former players like Kevin Pietersen have asked whether Kohli would make the Indian squad purely on merit or for being a megastar who will pull in fans. Kohli averages over 50 in the format and has a strike rate of 138.15.

On Monday night, hallmark of Kohli's classy knock was the way he stepped out to dispatch the fast bowlers over the extra cover boundary.

The former India captain has nothing left to prove but he realises the need for constant evolution in T20 format.

"Well I mean you have to (make additions to your game)," he said when asked about going aerial against the pacers



on the off-side.

"People know I play the cover drive pretty well so they're not going to allow me to hit gaps and with guys like KG (Kagiso Rabada) and Arshdeep (Singh) as well, he's tall. So, I mean, if they're hitting length, you have to create some momentum in the ball.

"And once you're closer to the ball, you kind of negate the bounce that's going to happen. You meet it earlier. So, I mean, you have to come up with a game plan here and there and try to keep improving your game," he explained at the post-match presentation.

It was surreal not to be recognised for two months

Kohli had missed the five-match Test series against England as he was overseas for the birth of his second child. The long

break allowed him to spend much needed quality time with his family and not being recognised on the streets was something that he enjoyed the most.

"We were not in the country. We were at a place where people were not recognising us. Just time together as a family, just to feel normal for two months. For me, for us as a family, it was a surreal experience.

"Of course, having two kids, things become totally different from a family perspective. So just the ability to be together, the connections that you make with your older child, it's amazing.

"I mean, I couldn't have been more grateful to God for the opportunity that I got to spend time with my family."

For Kohli, not being mobbed is a luxury and he loved every bit of his time

away from the limelight.

"And yeah, just the place that we were in, I was telling the guys (RCB teammates) that when we came back, the voices back home felt that much louder.

"I couldn't look up because I was just not used to being called my name for two months. And then immediately you hear these loud noises and then you're back in it all again.

"But it was beautiful. It's an amazing experience to just be another person on the road and not be recognised and just carry on about life that normally people would on a daily basis," he said.

Kohli is also forever grateful to the loyal and passionate RCB fans who keep backing the team that is yet to win the IPL.

"It's been going on for years and you know, people talk about a lot of other things when you play sport. The achievements, the stats, the numbers. Look at the end of the day when you look back you're not going to think of the numbers and the stats.

"It's the memories that you create. Famously, Rahul bhai (India head coach) in the change room nowadays says exactly the same to us. When you play, you play your heart out because you're going to miss these times when you're with your friends in the change room playing in front of fans.

"So the relationship that's happened organically over so many years it's something that I can never ever forget. Just the love and the appreciation and the backing I've received for so many years that's been amazing," Kohli added.

## Border-Gavaskar Trophy between India and Australia extended to 5 Tests

## New Delhi

The latest edition of the marquee Border-Gavaskar Trophy was on Monday extended by a match with India and Australia set to play five Tests later this year for the first time since the 1991-92 season, announced the Cricket Australia (CA).

The full schedule for the 2024-25 series is set to be released in the coming days.

"For the first time since 1991-92, Australia and India will compete across a five-Test series this summer. The extended series for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy will

be a headline of the 2024-25 home summer schedule set to be released in the coming days," CA posted on X, formerly Twitter. The BCCI and CA jointly announced the development. "The BCCI remains steadfast in its dedication to preserving the rich heritage of Test Cricket, a format we hold in the highest esteem," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said in a CA media release. "Our ongoing collaboration with Cricket Australia in extending the Border-Gavaskar Trophy to five Tests underscores our collective commitment to nurturing



and elevating Test cricket's significance. "This extension echoes our shared vision to amplify the essence of Test cricket and uphold its legacy,"

he added.

In the past four series between the two teams, India have won on all four occasions, including back-to-back away

Test series wins in 2018-19 and 2020-21. However, Pat Cummins and Co, defeated India in the World Test Championship final in London last year. Perth is set to host the opening Test of the five-match series this year. CA is yet to come out with the final schedule but the series is likely to start in late November this year. "We are absolutely delighted the Border-Gavaskar Trophy has been extended to five Tests given the intense rivalry between our two great cricketing nations and the excitement this creates," CA Chairman Mike Baird said.



## Harendra Singh set to return as women's team coach



### New Delhi

Harendra Singh's forced exile from Indian hockey is set to end very soon as he is all set to be named as the head coach of the women's team. A proposal to appoint him has been cleared in principle by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the file has been sent to Sports Minister Anurag Thakur for a final clearance. Barring any last-minute hitch, Singh's appointment is all but a formality.

Singh's succession as Janneke Schopman's replacement hit a roadblock over salary demands. As per the rule, the Ministry's cap for Indian coaches is Rs 3 lakh per month and Singh's remuneration demands were over the sanctioned limit as per the proposal sent to the SAI by Hockey India (HI).

Singh is expected to be paid between Rs 4-6 lakh and as per the agreement between the SAI and HI, the balance will be paid by the hockey body. "It is all but decided that Harendra will become the women's coach. The file is with the Minister. Expect a formal announcement

from Hockey India very soon," a source privy to the development told The Tribune.

Shopman had resigned last month after the women's team failed to qualify for the Olympics. The Dutchwoman was already under pressure since the Asian Games as a section of the HI hierarchy led by secretary general Bhola Nath Singh wanted her to be sacked. However, with India losing its chance to qualify for Paris with a fourth place finish at the qualifiers and her complaining about the difficult working environment in India, Shopman's continuity was untenable and she was asked to resign.

Singh, who was sacked as the head coach of India's men's team in January 2019, has been coaching the US men's team since 2021. Under him, India failed to win the 2018 Asian Games gold and lost in the quarterfinals of the 2018 World Cup. He was also interested in replacing Graham Reid, who has been succeeded by Craig Fulton. In the past, Singh led the junior men's team to the 2016 Junior World Cup title.

## IPL 2024 full schedule out; Chennai to host final on May 26, Ahmedabad gets play-offs

### Mumbai

Chennai was on Monday named venue of this year's IPL final on May 26 and was also awarded hosting rights of the second qualifier on May 24 as the BCCI unveiled the tournament's complete schedule, factoring in the polling dates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Chennai has been awarded the final by virtue of Chennai Super Kings being the defending champions. The title-holders get to host the opening and the final game of the tournament as per established convention.

The event got under way on March 22 after the BCCI announced the schedule for just the first two weeks (21 matches).

The other two marquee play-off matches will be hosted by Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium on May 21 and 22 respectively. PTI had reported the venues of the final four games of the tournament on Friday.

"The remainder of the schedule has been drawn up, factoring in the polling dates and venues for the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections across the country," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said in a media release.

"After a break on May 20th, the spotlight will shift to Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium as the world's biggest cricket stadium hosts an electrifying Qualifier 1 clash featuring two top-ranked sides on Tuesday, May 21st, followed by the exciting Eliminator on Wednesday, May 22nd.

"...the Qualifier 2 and the



grand final will take place in Chennai, the home turf of reigning champions Chennai Super Kings. The Qualifier 2, to be played between the loser of Qualifier 1 and the winner of the Eliminator, will take place on Friday, May 24th, followed by the summit clash on Sunday, May 26th," he added.

The iconic Chepauk will host the IPL finale long after voting in Tamil Nadu is completed on April 19 for its 39 Lok Sabha seats in the first phase of elections.

Delhi Capitals, who will play their first two home games in Visakhapatnam on March 31 and April 3, will have five games at their actual base. These matches are scheduled for April 20, 24, 27, May 7 and 14.

The polling for Delhi's seven Lok Sabha seats will take place on May 25.

Should CSK go the distance in the tournament, the marquee games at Chepauk will be perfect opportunity for Mahendra Singh Dhoni to end his IPL career in

front of home fans, as is being widely speculated after he handed over the team's captaincy to Ruturaj Gaikwad on the eve of the league-opener.

"Punjab Kings, who commenced their season at the PCA New International Cricket Stadium in Mullanpur, will culminate their home campaign in Dharamsala. Punjab will be hosting two matches in Dharamsala on May 5 and 9 against CSK and RCB, respectively," the BCCI release stated.

Rajasthan Royals will also play a couple of matches at their second home base Guwahati.

"Rajasthan Royals too have opted for a second venue in Guwahati and will play their final two home matches in Assam. They will first host Punjab Kings on May 15 and later play Kolkata Knight Riders on May 19, which will also mark the conclusion of the league stage of the 17th season of IPL," the release further stated.

## Late slip costs Shubhankar Sharma title, finishes tied-7th

### Singapore

Shubhankar Sharma briefly shared the lead on the back-nine of the final day but dropped two shots to finish tied-seventh at the Singapore Classic here today.

Sharma, who has two wins on the DP World Tour, shot rounds of 68-66-68-71 for a 12-under total and ended five behind the eventual winner, Jesper Svensson, who

beat Kiradech Aphibarnrat on the third playoff hole. Svensson and Kiradech were tied at 17-under as the former birdied his two closing holes and the latter eagled the 18th after running up three birdies in a row from 14th to 16th.

For Sharma, who now travels home for next week's Indian Open, it was his first top-10 of the year.





अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते  
संजय मंगेश भैरे  
सुचिता संजय भैरे