

# Across State

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## India witnesses 3,016 fresh Covid cases, highest in nearly six months

**New Delhi**

India saw a single-day rise of 3,016 fresh coronavirus cases, the highest in nearly six months, while the active cases increased to 13,509, according to the Union health ministry data updated on Thursday.

A total of 3,375 cases were recorded on October 2 last year.

The country's Covid death toll has increased to 5,30,862 with 14 latest fatalities -- three reported by Maharashtra, two from Delhi and one reported by Himachal Pradesh in a span of 24 hours and eight reconciled by Kerala.

According to the ministry data updated at 8 am, the daily positivity was recorded at 2.73 per cent, while

the weekly positivity was pegged at 1.71 per cent.

The infection tally stands at 4.47 crore (4,47,12,692).

The active cases now comprise 0.03 per cent of the total infections, while the national Covid recovery rate has been recorded at 98.78 per cent, according to the health ministry website.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 4,41,68,321, while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.19 per cent.

According to the ministry's website, 220.65 crore doses of Covid vaccine have been administered in the country so far under the nationwide Covid vaccination drive.



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## During Cong-led UPA regime, CBI was 'putting pressure' on me to 'frame' Modi, says Amit Shah

**New Delhi**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said the CBI was "putting pressure" on him to "frame" Prime Minister Narendra Modi in an alleged fake encounter case in Gujarat when he was being questioned by the probe agency during the Congress-led UPA government. Shah said this at the 'News 18 Rising India' programme in New Delhi in response to a question on Opposition's charge that the Narendra Modi government is "misusing" central agencies to target them.

The CBI "was putting pressure" on me to "frame Modi ji" (when he was Gujarat CM) in an alleged fake encounter case during the Congress government," he said, adding that the BJP never raised a ruckus despite this.

On Rahul Gandhi's conviction in a criminal defamation case by a court in Surat, the home minister said the Congress leader was not the only politician who was convicted by a court and lost membership of the legislature.

Instead of moving to a higher court,



Rahul has been trying to create hue and cry and blaming Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his fate, he said.

Shah said Rahul Gandhi should go to a higher court to fight his case, instead of trying to put the blame on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said the Congress is spreading misconception; conviction can't be stayed. "The sentence can be stayed if the court decides," he said.

"He has not appealed to take stay on his conviction. What kind of arrogance is this? You want a favour. You want to continue to be MP and will also not go before the Court," Shah said.

Where does such arrogance gets generated, he said. Shah said 17 prominent leaders, including Lalu

Prasad, J Jayalalitha and Raashid Alvi, had lost their membership because of a 2013 Supreme Court order during the UPA government, which said an elected representative would lose his seat immediately after conviction. Still, no one protested wearing black clothes because it is the "law of the land", he said. "Listen to the full speech of Rahul Gandhi, he has not only spoken abusive words for Modi ji. He has spoken abusive words for the entire Modi community and OBC society," he said. "The law of the land is clear. There is no question of vendetta politics. It is the judgment of the Supreme Court of India, which had come during their government," Shah said.

Asked about the notice to vacate his bungalow, Shah asked why should there be "special favour" when the Supreme Court had said to act as soon as the conviction comes into effect.

"It was a deliberate statement by Rahul Gandhi. If Rahul Gandhi did not want to apologise, then he should not have applied for bail. Let him not apologise," Shah said.

## Pune MP Girish Bapat passes away: PM Modi, Maharashtra leaders remember 'humble, hardworking leader'

**Pune**

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the tributes after Pune MP Girish Bapat's demise, remembering the "humble and hardworking leader" who "worked extensively for the development of Maharashtra".

Union ministers Rajnath Singh, Kiren Rijiju and S Jaishankar called him a "grassroot leader" who was at the "forefront of several community service efforts".

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and former CM Uddhav Thackeray spoke in one voice to remember Bapat's "people-oriented leadership" who worked tirelessly for workers and farmers.

Bapat's demise is a big loss for Bharatiya Janata Party, Maharashtra unit



president Chandrashekhar Bawankule said. Meanwhile, NCP chief Sharad Pawar said the news of Bapat's death was extremely saddening.

Senior BJP leader and Maharashtra cabinet minister Chandrakant Patil said Bapat was like a guru and a father figure. "It is a big loss for the BJP as Bapat has left us forever. We used to learn a lot from him and his style of politics," Bawankule said.

Patil said Bapat was

like a guru for many BJP workers and his colleagues. "It is like losing a father figure from your life. His friendship across the party lines and contacts with people and party workers were unparalleled. He was dedicated to the party and its growth. His demise is a huge loss to the party," Patil said.

Leader of Opposition Ajit Pawar said Pune district has lost a leader who believed in taking everyone along. "In Bapat's death, a cultured face of politics has lost," he said in a statement.

Bapat, who was ailing for the last one-and-a-half-years, passed away at Deenanath Mangeshkar Hospital in Pune at 72 on Wednesday. He had served as the MLA five times from the Kasba Peth constituency in Pune city. He was elected to Lok Sabha from the Pune constituency in 2019.

## Dr. Bhagwat Karad inaugurates the first G-20 Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) Meeting

**Mumbai**

The first Trade and Investment Working Group (TIWG) meeting was inaugurated by the Union Minister of State for Finance Dr. Bhagwat Karad in Mumbai today. Around 100 delegates from G-20 member countries, invitee countries, regional groupings and international organizations have participated in the G20 TIWG inaugural event.

The priorities related to global trade and investment, which the Indian Presidency is pursuing, was taken up for discussion today (March 29, 2023), and will also be done tomorrow (March 30, 2023), in four technical closed-door sessions. The deliberations today focussed on making trade work for growth and prosperity, and way forward for building resilient Global Value Chains (GVCs). Tomorrow, the TIWG priorities on integrating Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in global trade, and building efficient logistics for trade will be discussed across two working sessions. Theme-based experience zones on spices, millet, tea and coffee have been set up at the venue, and an exhibition on textiles is also on display.

Addressing the meeting, MoS (Finance), Dr. Karad highlighted the widening gap between developing and developed countries, which further gets exacerbated during pandemics and geopolitical crises. Emphasizing on the need for efficient and resilient global supply chains, he



expressed that the G-20 member countries must collaborate in designing interventions that will diversify GVCs in critical sectors, such as food, fertilizers, energy and pharmaceuticals. He also mentioned that the women-owned MSMEs are disproportionately affected by the credit constraints and various other gender-based barriers. To address and rectify this disproportionate burden of trade cost on MSMEs, Shri Karad proposed for collective action by the international trade community.

The Secretary, Department of Commerce and Chair for the TIWG Meeting Shri Sunil Barthwal reiterated that under Indian Presidency, the aim of the G-20 member countries is to achieve shared outcomes for making growth inclusive and resilient, increasing the participation of developing countries and the Global South in GVCs, and building resilient GVCs to withstand future shocks. He added that the Presidency aims to develop inclusive trade policies that support global prosperity,

guided by the principle of "One Earth, One Family and One Future", where cooperation and collaboration amongst nations will be the key drivers for promoting growth, and reducing poverty and inequality.

The Presidency aims to carry forward the work done by past G-20 Presidencies to better integrate MSMEs into global trade, considering their primacy in sustaining livelihoods in both the developed and developing countries. The means for developing robust logistics infrastructure that could reduce transaction costs both across borders and in the hinterlands will also be deliberated by the G20 delegates.

Under India's Presidency, the aim is to build a shared understanding of the challenges being faced in accelerating global trade and investment, and how existing opportunities can be harnessed for the benefit of humanity following the motto of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, where finding common solutions will be pivotal.

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## Metro 7 to get 14 FOBs to facilitate commuters

### MUMBAI

To facilitate east-west connectivity and make it easier for commuters to reach stations on the newly inaugurated Metro Line 7 (Dahisar East to Andheri East), passing alongside the Western Express Highway, the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority will construct 14 foot overbridges (FOBs).

Officials said that the 14 FOBs will come up in phases. In Phase 1, two FOBs will come up at Gundavali station at a cost of Rs 39 crore. Similarly, two FOBs will come up at Goregaon station, estimated to cost Rs 20.9 crore.

In Phase 2, FOBs will come up at Aarey station, Rashtriya Udyan station and Overipada station. While Rashtriya Udyan and Ovarpada FOBs are set to cost Rs 11.12 crore together, cost of Aarey station FOB is yet to be finalised. Two more FOBs will also come up at Poisar and

Dindoshi stations, estimated to cost Rs 15.78 crore.

In Phase 3, two FOBs will be constructed at Akurli 1 and 2 stations, estimated to cost Rs 6.6 crore and Rs 28.6 crore, respectively. Three other FOBs will come up at Goregaon, Poisar North and Goregaon-Nesco



stations. While the Goregaon station FOB connecting the nearby Ram Mandir railway station is estimated to cost Rs 57.93 crore, the Poisar station FOB is set to cost Rs 30.95 crore.

Metro 2A and 7, with an average daily ridership of 1.47 lakh, cover 30 stations with 22 rakes. During peak time, trains are available at an 8-minute interval and during non-peak hours, at a 9-10 minute gap.

## Mumbai-Pune Expressway toll set to increase from April 1

### Mumbai

Toll for vehicles on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway will increase by 18 percent from April 1.

A senior MSRDC official told PTI that though the toll increases by six percent annually, it is implemented cumulatively at 18 percent after every three years, as laid down in a government notification of August 9, 2004. Toll would remain the same till 2030 as there would not be any revision after three years in 2026.

The six-lane Mumbai-



Pune Expressway was fully operationalised in 2002 and is India's first access-controlled road. Toll is collected at five toll plazas along the 95-kilometre-

long expressway, of which ones at Khalapur and Talegaon are the main ones. Around 1.5 lakh vehicles use the Expressway everyday.

## Real estate body urges state govt to cut stamp duty rates

### Mumbai

Emphasising that it will be a win-win situation for consumers, the real estate industry, and the state government, CREDAI-Pune Metro on Wednesday urged the Maharashtra government to reduce the stamp duty rates. Stating that in many areas, ready reckoner rates are higher than transaction market rates, Credai has also urged the government to review it. The real estate body said it has been constantly taking up the issue with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. The ready reckoner rate refers to the minimum rate based on which the

government charges the registration fee. "Presently, the stamp duty rate is 7 per cent, which is unaffordable to the middle-class home buyers constituting 60 per cent of the population. We request the Maharashtra government to reduce the stamp duty rate, which will benefit consumers at large. The reduction in stamp duty rate will reduce the overall price of the unit and thus consumers will have to pay lesser EMI. It could help in reducing the term of the loan," said CREDAI-Pune Metro president Anil Pharande in a letter to Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, and other officials concerned.

## Across State अक्रॉस मुंबई



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# India mother of democracy; home to idea of elected leaders much before rest of world: PM Modi

## New Delhi

Describing India as the mother of democracy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the country has become the fastest-growing major economy despite many global challenges and this proves that the democracy can deliver.

In a virtual address to the Summit for Democracy, 2023, Modi also said every initiative of his government is powered by collective efforts of the citizens of India.

"India, despite the many global challenges, is the fastest growing major economy today. This itself is the best advertisement for the democracy and the world. This itself says that



democracy can deliver," he said.

Modi was speaking at the second Summit for Democracy, co-hosted by US President Joe Biden, Costa Rica President Rodrigo Chaves Robles, Zambia President Hakainde Hichilema, the Netherlands Prime Minister

Mark Rutte and South Korea President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Speaking during the 'Leader-level Plenary on Democracy Delivering Economic Growth and Shared Prosperity' session hosted by President Yoon, he said the idea of elected leaders was a

common feature in ancient India long before the rest of the world.

"Our epic Mahabharata describes the first duty of citizens as choosing their own leader. Our sacred vedas speak of political power being exercised by broad-based consultative bodies. There are also many historical evidences of republic states in ancient India where rulers were not hereditary," Modi said.

"India indeed is the mother of democracy. Democracy is not just a structure, it is also a spirit. It is based on the belief that the needs and aspirations of every human being are equally important. That is why in India, our guiding philosophy is 'Sabka saath, sabka vikas', meaning striving together

for inclusive growth," he said.

"Whether it is our effort to fight climate change through lifestyle changes, to conserve water through distributed storage or provide clean cooking fuel to everyone, every initiative is powered by collective efforts of citizens of India. During COVID-19, India's response was people-driven," the prime minister added.

It is they who made it possible to administer over 2 billion doses of Made in India vaccines.

Modi said the country's 'vaccine maitri' initiative was also guided by the mantra of 'vasudeva kutumbakam', meaning 'one earth, one family and one future'.

## Powerful blast creates crater in ground near India-Pakistan border in J-K's Kathua



## Jammu

A powerful blast has occurred at a hamlet near the India-Pakistan border in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, creating a huge crater in the ground and triggering fear among the locals, officials said on Thursday.

Sources said it appears to be an IED blast. It is suspected that the IED might have been carried by a drone and dropped at the wrong site close to the border, they said.

Information about the explosion was received around 9.30 pm on Wednesday, Kathua SSP Shivdeep Singh Jamwal told PTI.

"We have also launched a search operation on Thursday morning. The bomb squad has collected the samples from the site and sent them for tests," the SSP said.

Block Development Committee (BDC) chairman Ram Lal Kaliya, a resident of Saniyal village which is just 300 metres from the border post, said, "Around 9.30 pm on Wednesday we heard an explosion. I informed the post incharge who also confirmed the sound of the blast." The blast site was located after one-and-half hours, he said, adding that a big crater was found in an agriculture field.

## SCO members mustn't seek military superiority in adjacent areas: Doval



## New Delhi

At a meeting attended by all members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), including China and Pakistan, here on Wednesday, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval called on the grouping to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity and seek no unilateral military superiority in adjacent areas. China is a founding member of the SCO and Doval's observations indicated its massive build up on the border with China.

India, he said, was ready to cooperate on investing and building connectivity in the region, but it was important to ensure that such initiatives were consultative, transparent and participatory. India was

also committed to including Iran's Chabahar port within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), he said. The St Petersburg-Mumbai route was also discussed in Moscow between Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov.

The NSA said global security was faced with several challenges on account of developments in recent years. "The SCO region is also affected by the impact of these challenges. In my view, however, the goals and vision of the SCO as enshrined in its charter can show us the path forward," he said.

Pakistan and China

participated in the meeting via a video link. China had a high-level participant in Wang Xiaohong, State Councillor and Minister of Public Security, while Pakistan, in the absence of a regular NSA, was represented by Amir Hassan, Secretary, National Security Division.

Virtual representation by both the countries, who are at odds with India over security and strategic issues, would mean that their Defence Ministers may not turn up for the SCO Ministerial to be held here. It also casts a shadow on the SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting planned in Goa.

Doval later bilaterally met several of his counterparts, including Russian NSA Nikolai Patrushev.

# 'Everything is fine', says Sanjay Raut after meeting Sonia, Rahul Gandhi over Savarkar remark

New Delhi

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday met former Congress presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi and said "everything is fine", signalling an end to the row over V D Savarkar.

The Thackeray faction of the Shiv Sena was upset over Rahul Gandhi's strident attack of Savarkar, a revolutionary leader revered in Maharashtra, leading to friction in the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi coalition with the Congress and the NCP in the state.

NCP supremo Sharad Pawar had asked Rahul Gandhi to tone down the criticism of Savarkar and reminded the Congress leader that the real fight of the Opposition parties was with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP.

"Met Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. Many important issues were discussed. Everything is fine. There is nothing to worry," Raut said on Twitter.



Raut had spoken with Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday after the intervention by Pawar.

"The Opposition is united in Maharashtra as well as in the country," Raut said to questions about Opposition unity in Maharashtra.

On Tuesday, Raut said he had raised the Savarkar issue in his talks with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi and MVA partners are on the same page on this matter.

"The MVA alliance is intact. If anyone thinks the MVA will break

apart, they are wrong," Raut said.

Gandhi is learnt to have assured Raut that he would avoid any critical reference to Savarkar.

Pawar raised the issue during a meeting of opposition leaders convened by Kharge on Monday and made it clear that targeting Savarkar would not help the MVA.

As the BJP stepped up attack on Rahul Gandhi and sought his apology for "maligning" India on his recent visit to the UK, the former Lok Sabha member from Wayanad said at a press conference on Saturday that he was not Savarkar and would not apologise.

Former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray had slammed Gandhi for his attack on Savarkar and said his outfit will not tolerate any insult of the freedom fighter.

The Thackeray faction had skipped the meeting convened by Kharge as a mark of protest against Gandhi's remarks targeting Savarkar.

# AFSPA to be extended in 8 Assam districts



Guwahati

The Assam government will extend the 'disturbed area' tag under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) for another six months in eight districts of the state from April 1.

It will be extended for Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, according to a notification issued by the state home and political department.

The tag, however, would be lifted from Lakhimpur sub-

division of Cachar district from April 1, following a review of the law and order scenario in the state.

The Centre had earlier announced removal of AFSPA from April 1, 2022 from the entire state of Assam barring nine districts and a sub-division of Cachar district.

The state was declared a 'disturbed area' under AFSPA during the intervening night of November 27-28, 1990, and this has been extended every six months since then.

# 'Bhrashtachari bhagao abhiyan': Kharge hits back at PM Modi over his corruption jibe at Opposition

New Delhi

Hitting back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his corruption jibe at the Opposition, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday accused him of running a "bhrashtachari bhagao abhiyan" (make the corrupt flee campaign), and said that he must stop his image makeover by posing as an anti-corruption crusader.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating an extension of the BJP headquarters here on Tuesday, Modi linked the coming together of Opposition parties against the BJP to his government's campaign against corruption and said "anti-India" forces are attacking constitutional institutions—the strong foundation of a rising India—to stall the country's growth.

Reacting to the remarks, Kharge in a tweet in Hindi said, "Narendra Modi ji, whose Rs 20,000 crore is invested in Adani shell companies?"

"Are Lalit Modi, Nirav Modi, Mehul



Choksi, Vijay Mallya, Jatin Mehta etc. members of your 'bhrashtachari bhagao abhiyan'? Are you the convenor of this alliance? Stop your image makeover by calling yourself an anti-corruption crusader!" the Congress chief said, hitting out at the prime minister.

Kharge said Modi must look within, and asked why the BJP Government in Karnataka was accused of taking 40 per cent commission.

"Why are you part of the No. 1 corrupt government in Meghalaya? Are BJP leaders not involved in Sanjivani Cooperative scam in Rajasthan, Poshan scam in Madhya Pradesh or NAN scam in Chhattisgarh?" he asked.

Kharge said the Enforcement Directorate is put after 95 per cent of Opposition leaders while those joining the BJP are cleaned up in a "washing machine".

"If you have a 56-inch chest, set up a JPC (joint parliamentary committee into Adani issue) and hold an open press conference for the first time in nine years," the Congress chief said.

"Answer those who do not ask that — 'How do you eat mango' or 'why you don't get tired'," Kharge said.

Asked about the prime minister's remarks, Kharge alleged that Modi was not taking action against fugitives who have run away with the money of banks and not ready for any inquiry or JPC.

"So, is he corrupt, standing with corrupt people, or us," Kharge asked.

"He (PM) is supporting corrupt people so it is like the pot calling the kettle black. We are asking him why he is not talking about Adani and in turn accusing us of corruption. You are defending those responsible for big theft and calling others thieves, this is not done," the Congress president told reporters before leaving for Parliament in the morning.

The Prime Minister should speak the truth, but Modi only believes in insulting others, Kharge said.

In his remarks at the event, Modi had said that the crackdown on the corrupt and corruption would continue without being hindered by "false allegations".

Never before in the history of independent India, such a big campaign against corruption has taken place and it has rattled the corrupt, he had said.

"All those involved in corruption have come onto one platform," Modi added.



# Karnataka battle: What makes politics in the state so interesting

## Bengaluru

Key states like Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana will go to the polls this year.

However, Karnataka is the most anticipated one, thanks perhaps to the colourful Karnataka politics and prevailing issues.

The Election Commission on Wednesday said the polls to the 224-member Karnataka Assembly will be held on May 10.

The counting of votes will take place on May 13.

The ruling BJP and opposition Congress and JD(S) are the three main players in the state apart from regional parties. While winning the state is critical for all the three it is more so for the Congress and the JD(S) in order to stay relevant in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

So what makes the politics in Karnataka so interesting, perhaps the fact that it is the BJP's first bastion in South India which has so far remained elusive to the mighty election juggernaut of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

Karnataka is the first and the only BJP-ruled state in South India.

The party won the state before the emergence of Modi and Shah on the national election scene.

The saffron party emerged a key player in Karnataka in 2004.

Lingayat strongman BS Yediyurappa became its first Chief Minister.

With four terms—2007, 2008, 2018 and 2019—to his credit, he is the only one in the history of Karnataka to have the honour.

## Over 14 Lakh Children "Severely Malnourished" In India: Centre To Rajya Sabha

### New Delhi

There are over 14 lakh severely malnourished children in the country as per the government's Poshan Tracker, the Women and Child Development Ministry said on Wednesday.

Children who are severely malnourished have very low weight for their height, and are nine times more likely to die in case of diseases due to their weakened immune system.

Responding to a question in Rajya Sabha, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani said under Poshan



### Congress

For the Congress, winning these elections is a matter of survival and remaining relevant.

These polls are also a prestige battle for the new Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge who hails from Kalaburagi district.

The party has a strong state leadership with KPCC cheif DK Shivakumar, a Vokkaliga, and former CM Siddaramaiah, a Kuruba with strong backing of 'Alpasankhyataru' or minorities, 'Hindulidavaru' or backward classes and Dalits.

The elevation of Kharge can also help consolidate Dalit votes the Congress hopes to build a campaign against alleged corruption and "40 per cent commission charges" against the Bommai government.

However, while the Congress hopes to snatch the state back from the BJP and make up for the humiliation it suffered when it was unceremoniously thrown out in July 2019, ground reports suggest the grand old party is struggling to get its act together due to internal party politics.

There seems to be a perceptible



lack of cohesiveness among top state leaders, especially Shivakumar and Siddaramaiah.

Both want to be named as the CM face.

However, Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar are equally important for the Congress, a reason perhaps the central leadership is apprehensive about naming either of them as the face.

Siddaramaiah is a crowd puller and a good organiser and Shivakumar too is known for his financial and crisis management skills.

Some other senior leaders like G Parameshwara are said to be sulking over being "sidelined".

Observers say rather than working in tandem, Congress leaders are working against each other.

Speculations are also rife that Shivakumar has struck a deal with JD(S) supremo HD Kumaraswamy for supporting his candidature in case the Congress falls short.

Though Kumaraswamy told media that both the Congress and the BJP have given him "offers".

### BJP

So far as the BJP is concerned,

it appears more organised especially after Lingayat strongman Yediyurappa was publicly "assuaged".

A large section of the Lingayat community was said to be upset over the removal of Yediyurappa as CM.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also among the USPs.

However, apart from the anti-incumbency factor and the alleged corruption charges, members of communities like Banjara, Bhovi, Koracha and Korama are up in the arms over BJP government's announcing internal reservation in the 17 percent Scheduled Castes quota for around 101 castes.

BJP's Basavaraj Bommai who is heading Karnataka today claimed the BJP will "definitely win".

"The election season is here and there is no doubt about BJP single-handedly forming the government in the state," he was quoted as saying.

Amit Shah has already predicted a "complete majority" for the BJP in the 224-member Karnataka Assembly.

BJP sources claim the party will be able to breach the halfway mark "easily".

In 2018 the BJP won 104 seats, eight short of the halfway mark of 112.

This resulted in a coalition of Janata Dal (Secular) and Congress forming the government with Kumaraswamy as the CM.

However, the coalition government collapsed in July 2019 following resignations by several Congress and JD(S)

lawmakers.

The BJP formed the government with Yediyurappa.

In July 2021, Yediyurappa resigned after crossing the 75-years of age mark, paving the way for Basavaraj Bommai.

### Mandya angle

The BJP is working on the Mandya district, considered the bastion of the JD (S).

Former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda is considered the patriarch of Vokkaligas, who dominate the region.

A full majority of its own has been elusive for the BJP in Karnataka, though it managed to cobble governments in 2008 and 2019.

One of the main reasons has been lack of leadership/support from Vokkaligas.

The path to the Karnataka Assembly is through the two dominant communities—Vokkaliga and Lingayat—and the all powerful caste-based spiritual 'mutts'.

Vokkaliga, Lingayat and BJP

While the BJP is strong in the northern districts where the Lingayat community prevails, the situation is different in southern districts dominated by Vokkaligas.

Another challenge for the BJP is to keep all its factions in good humour ahead of the upcoming elections.

Observers say Vokkaliga leaders in BJP do not have the stature like those from the JD(S).

The community constitutes around 15 per cent of the population in the state.

## Telecom Companies Recorded ₹ 4.17 Lakh Crore Debt In 2021-22: Centre

### New Delhi

Six telecom companies -- including Airtel, Reliance Jio and Vodafone Idea -- had a total debt of ₹ 4.17 lakh crore in fiscal 2021-22, Parliament was informed on Wednesday.

Data submitted by Minister of State for Telecom Devusinh Chauhan in the Lok Sabha shows Vodafone Idea had a debt of ₹ 1,91,073.9 crore,



Airtel (Rs 1,03,408.1 crore), Reliance Jio (Rs 42,486 crore), BSNL (Rs 40,400.13 crore), Tata Teleservices (Rs 20,162.04 crore) and Tata Teleservices

(Maharashtra) Limited (Rs 19,703.84 crore) in the financial year 2021-22.

"The Government has approved various structural and procedural reforms in the telecom sector to promote healthy competition, protect interests of consumers,

infuse liquidity, encourage investment and reduce the regulatory burden on Telecom Service Providers (TSPs)," Chauhan said.

Tracker, the ICT application for monitoring service delivery under Mission Poshan 2.0, out of



approximately 5.6 crore children measured in the month of February 2023, the percentage of severely malnourished children is 2.6 per cent. The number comes to be 14,56,000.

# Fugitive Amritpal Singh Posts Video While On The Run From Cops

New Delhi

Radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh, who has managed to evade a massive manhunt by the police for 12 days, on Wednesday released a video, confirming that he remains at large.

The video has been sourced through a foreign country, said sources, adding it appears to be two days old. UK handles have distributed Amritpal's video, said sources.



The video emerged as sources in the police claimed Amritpal Singh has returned to Punjab and plans to surrender.

The self-styled preacher, who supports a call for a separate homeland for Sikhs and is wanted for an armed raid on a police station last month, was said to be travelling to Amritsar through the villages of Hoshiarpur when the Punjab Police was tipped off about his presence in the area, sources said.

On Tuesday night, the police launched a massive door-to-door search operation in Hoshiarpur and neighbouring villages to catch him and his associates, who are accused in several criminal cases.

However, Amritpal Singh appeared to have escaped, ditching an Innova car at a gurdwara in the Maraiyan village of Hoshiarpur and fleeing into the fields. The police later recovered the car.

A cordon and search operation was launched in and around the village, while checkpoints and barricades were raised on the roads to catch the suspects.

Sources said that Amritpal

Singh was planning to give an interview to an international news agency before surrendering, but changed his mind after realising that he had no chance of escaping.

The Punjab Police have been under immense pressure to arrest him and his supporters after they revived memories of the 1980s Punjab insurgency, in which thousands died.

He went missing following a police crackdown against him and members of his pro-Khalistan 'Waris Punjab De' outfit on March 18, about three weeks after he and his supporters stormed the Ajnala police station near Amritsar to secure the release of an arrested man.

The preacher escaped the police dragnet in Jalandhar district, switching vehicles and changing appearances.

On Tuesday, a new video of Amritpal Singh with his key aide Papalpreet Singh surfaced on social media, showing the preacher without a turban and wearing a mask.

The undated CCTV footage, said to be from a market in Delhi, showed the fugitive walking down a street wearing dark glasses. Behind him, Papalpreet Singh could be seen walking with a bag.

The Punjab Police have not commented on the footage yet. A senior Delhi Police official said they are probing whether the persons seen in the video are Amritpal Singh and his aide.

# Election Commission 'not in a hurry' to declare Wayanad bypoll

New Delhi

The Election Commission on Wednesday said there is no hurry to declare by-election to the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat as the trial court has given Rahul Gandhi, who was disqualified as member, a month to file an appeal.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said the poll panel had taken decisions on vacancies that had occurred till February.

Addressing a press conference here, the CEC said the trial court in Surat had given Rahul Gandhi 30 days to seek a judicial remedy in the matter.

"There is no hurry, we will wait. There is no hurry to do it before exhausting that particular



remedy which the trial court has accorded. We will take a call after that," Kumar said.

He said the vacancy in the Wayanad parliamentary party was notified on March 23 this year and as per the law, a bypoll has to be conducted within six months.

Kumar said the law also states that if the remainder of the term is less than one year, then the election will not be held.

The CEC said that in case of Wayanad, the remainder of the term is more than a year.

# Rahul Gandhi believes it's his birth right to rule country: BJP

New Delhi

The BJP claimed on Wednesday that Rahul Gandhi believes it is his "birth right" to rule the country because he was born in a particular family.

Keeping up the heat on the Congress leader, whose disqualification from Lok Sabha has become a rallying point for the Opposition, the BJP cited several instances of "attack" on institutions during the Congress rule to counter-attack rival parties over their similar charges.

Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told reporters that the former Congress president thinks all institutions are beneath him and that is why he is

upset with the court order convicting him and his subsequent disqualification.

"He thinks it is his birth right to rule because he was a born in a family. He does politics of entitlement and considers himself above the Constitution, court and Parliament," Vaishnaw said.

The minister cited the incident of Gandhi tearing an ordinance passed by the Union Cabinet when the Congress-led UPA was in power and the presence of a "parallel PMO" in Sonia Gandhi-headed National

Advisory Council to hit back at the opposition party over its charge of "weakening of institutions" under the current dispensation.



# Bad weather, snowfall hampering preparations for Char Dham Yatra, say officials

Rudraprayag

Inclement weather coupled with fresh intermittent snowfall over the past few days is hampering the ongoing preparations for the Char Dham yatra with the trek route to Kedarnath blocked by snow, officials said on Wednesday. With less than a month to go for the opening of portals of Kedarnath on April 25, it is causing concern among authorities, they said. Snow has once again accumulated along the trek route to the Himalayan temple near Kuber and Bhainro blocking it, officials said.



Rudraprayag District Magistrate Mayur Dikshit has asked officials to complete all preparations latest by April 15. The road had been cleared of

snow but the bad weather over the past few days and fresh intermittent snowfall has blocked it once again, DDMA engineer Surendra Rawat said. Labourers are trying hard to restore the route but continuing bad weather is hampering the efforts, he said. However, efforts are being made against all odds to ensure that the road is cleared of snow at the earliest, Rawat said. A damaged railing along the trek route to Kedarnath and the water pipelines, drinking water stand posts, hand pumps are also being repaired on a war footing, he said.



# "Mixing Politics With Religion Dangerous": Supreme Court On Hate Speeches

New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday took serious exception to hate speeches saying these will end the moment politics and religions are separated and politicians stop using religion in politics.

Terming hate speeches a "vicious circle", the top court said these utterings are being made by fringe elements and people should restrain themselves from doing so.

A bench of justices KM Joseph and BV Nagarathna referred to speeches of former Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, saying people from remote areas and every nook and corner used to gather to hear them.

"Major problem arises when politicians are mixing politics with religion. The moment politics and religion are segregated, this will end. When politicians stop using religion, all this will stop. We have said in our recent verdict also that mixing politics with religion is dangerous for democracy," Justice Joseph said.

Wondering as to how many people can courts initiate contempt action, the bench said why cannot the people of India take a pledge to not vilify other citizens or communities.

"Everyday fringe elements are making speeches to vilify others including on TV and



public forums," the bench said while hearing a contempt petition against various state authorities including Maharashtra for failing to register FIRs against those making such speeches.

When Solicitor General Tushar Mehta pointed out a derogatory speech made in Kerala by a man against a particular community and questioned that petitioner Shaheen Abdullah has selectively pointed out the incidents of hate speeches in the country, this triggered sharp exchanges between the court and Mehta.

He also pointed out a statement made by a DMK party leader and said why has the petitioner's counsel not made him and those states party in the contempt petition.

The bench referred to those speeches and said "every action has equal reaction" and emphasised, "We are following

the Constitution and orders in every case are bricks in the structure of rule of law.

We are hearing the contempt petition because states are not taking action in time. This is because the state has become impotent, powerless and does not act in time. Why should we have a state at all if it is silent?"

Mehta then said, "Can't say that about any state but Centre is not. Centre has banned PFI. Please issue notice to state of Kerala so that they can respond to this." As the court asked Mehta to continue with his submissions, he said, "Please do not do this. This will have wider ramification. Why are we shying away from looking at the clip? Why can't the court allow me to play the video clip of the speeches? Why Kerala can't be issued notice and made a party to the petition. Let us not be selective. I am trying to show the clip which is in public

domain. This court could have taken suo motu cognisance of these speeches."

The bench replied, "Let us not make this a drama. This is legal proceedings" and added, "There is a method to see the video clip. This applies to all equally. If you (Mehta) want, you can include it in your submission." The hearing of the contempt petition saw some strong observations from the court in which it said, "Hate speeches are like a vicious circle. One person will make it and then another will make it. When our constitution was founded, there were no such speeches. Now there are cracks coming up in the idea of fraternity. There has to be some restraint. Some sought of mechanism needs to be developed by the state so that we can curb this kind of statements." Justice Nagarathna said,

"We need to look where we as a country are going? There were orators like Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the midnight speech. People from remote areas and every nook and corner used to come hear these leaders. Now fringe elements from all sides are making these statements and we are now asked to take contempt action against these people." She said that how can a court curtail "intellectual deprivation" which comes from lack of knowledge and education.

"How many contempt after contempt we can take against

these people. That's why I asked the other day, how the court will deal with this. Why do you (petitioner) start with the apex court? Should not there be some restraint on speeches else we will not become the India we desire for. Why cannot the citizens of this country take a pledge to not vilify others and what kind of pleasures we are deriving by making these speeches," she said.

The top court, which allowed an intervention application, filed by an organisation "Hindu Samaj", which had held rallies in Maharashtra told its counsel, "Statements are being made by some people, which the vast majority of the community do not subscribe to. They are saying things which are denigrating and demolishing the dignity of others on a regular basis. Statements are made like 'Go to Pakistan'. People of other communities chose this country. They are like your brothers and sisters. We are trying to say that don't go to that level."

The bench chiding the counsel for speeches in such rallies said, "Do you have the right to break the law of land? If you break the rule of law of the land it will befall on your head like a tumble of bricks. If you want real development of the country and want it to become a superpower, then we need to have respect for rule of law and then only we can make our country a better place to live in."

## Watch: Mamata Banerjee's Laundry Day With "BJP Washing Machine"

Kolkata

At Mamata Banerjee's protest today in Kolkata, an outsized washing machine took centre stage. As Trinamool Congress leaders shouted slogans, the Bengal Chief Minister put in black cloth, which symbolically "turned white".

"Washing machine, BJP!" shouted Trinamool workers as Mamata Banerjee performed the act of "laundering" with a flourish.

The washing machine labelled "BJP" was the prop for an allegation often voiced by Mamata Banerjee - that corrupt leaders are exonerated and spared when they join the BJP.

"BJP has become a washing machine. Give me a list of all thieves and robbers - they are all sitting there (with BJP). I have to listen to their sermons about the

constitution?" Mamata Banerjee said as she launched a two-day protest sit-in against the BJP-led central government.



"I have every right to hold a dharna. If required, I can sit on a dharna at the PM's house too," she said.

The Trinamool is protesting against the

Centre and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not disbursing funds to West Bengal. The protests have escalated ahead of the local body elections in the state and the 2024 general election.

The Trinamool chief, who has been fiercely critical of the Congress, had earlier spoken in support of its leader Rahul Gandhi, who has been disqualified as an MP after his two-year jail sentence in a defamation case over his "Modi surname" comments.

"In PM Modi's New India, opposition leaders have become the prime target of the BJP. While BJP leaders with criminal antecedents are inducted into the cabinet, opposition leaders are disqualified for their speeches. Today, we have witnessed a new low for our constitutional democracy," Ms

Banerjee said.

The Chief Minister's nephew and Trinamool MP Abhishek Banerjee also addressed the rally and took on PM Modi over Rahul Gandhi's disqualification.

"While making a political statement he said something and for that he was given a two-year sentence and his Lok Sabha membership was snatched. What did Rahul Gandhi say? He said Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi and Narendra Modi. I don't support what he said and I don't want to hurt anyone's sentiments. But through the media I want to question Bengal. Just because he said something about the Modi surname his membership was cancelled, then should the PM of India's membership not be cancelled for insulting women by catcalling the CM with Didi O Didi?" Abhishek Banerjee questioned.



# 11 people killed while collecting free flour in Pakistan's Punjab province



## Lahore

At least 11 people, including women, have died while trying to get free flour from government distribution outlets in Pakistan's Punjab province in recent days, authorities said.

The deaths were reported after several people flocked to the government distribution points after the cash-strapped Pakistani government introduced a free flour scheme for the poor, especially in Punjab province, to beat the skyrocketing inflation.

The scheme aims to counter the rising popularity of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan.

Two elderly women and a man died on Tuesday, while 60 others suffered injuries in stampedes at free flour centres in four districts—Sahiwal, Bahawalpur, Muzaffargarh and Okara—of south Punjab.

The other districts where deaths were reported are Faisalabad, Jehanian and Multan.

Police have been blamed for causing mayhem at the centres by manhandling and baton-charging the citizens waiting in long queues to get free flour.

Security forces also resorted to a heavy-handed approach following the looting of free flour trucks in the Muzaffargarh and Rahim Yar Khan cities.

Punjab Caretaker Chief Minister Mohsin Naqvi announced on Wednesday the opening of free flour centres at

6 am throughout the province to reduce overcrowding and inconvenience for citizens.

In a meeting held at the Chief Minister's Office on Wednesday, it was decided that provincial ministers and secretaries would perform duties in assigned districts for the next three days, visit flour centres and assess the situation themselves.

Expressing his dismay at the disorder and deaths at flour centres in different cities of Punjab, the chief minister directed officials to better guide and manage citizens for their convenience.

Former Prime Minister Khan has condemned the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz government for its mismanagement at the free flour centres and held Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Punjab caretaker chief minister Naqvi responsible for the deaths of innocent people.

Khan said that the "government of thieves" has made people's lives so miserable that they are dying to collect a bag of flour.

Seeing the gross mismanagement at the free flour distribution points, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif started visiting the centres to ensure a smooth distribution.

The latest death comes days after the premier told officials concerned to extend the maximum assistance to the elderly, special persons, and women at the distribution centres.

# Taiwan President Tsai defiant after China threatens retaliation for US trip

## Taoyuan

External pressure will not stop Taiwan engaging with the world, President Tsai Ing-wen said on Wednesday as she left for the United States, hitting a defiant note after China threatened retaliation if she met US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

China, which claims democratically-ruled Taiwan as its own territory, has repeatedly warned US officials not to meet Tsai, viewing it as support for the island's desire to be seen as a separate country.

China staged war games around Taiwan last August when then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei, and Taiwan's armed forces have said they are keeping watch for any Chinese moves when Tsai is abroad.

Tsai is going to Guatemala and Belize, transiting through New York first and Los Angeles on the way back. While not officially confirmed, she is expected to meet McCarthy while in California.

"External pressure will not hinder our determination to go to



the world," she said at Taiwan's main international airport at Taoyuan, in a veiled reference to China.

"We are calm and confident, will neither yield nor provoke.

Taiwan will firmly walk on the road of freedom and democracy and go into the world. Although this road is rough, Taiwan is not alone."

Speaking in Beijing shortly before Tsai left, Zhu Fenglian, spokesperson of China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said Tsai's "transits" of the United States were not just her waiting at the airport or hotel, but for her to meet

U.S. officials and lawmakers.

"If she has contact with U.S. House Speaker McCarthy, it will be another provocation that seriously violates the one-China principle, harms China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and destroys peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait," she said.

"We firmly oppose this and will definitely take measures to resolutely fight back," Zhu added, without giving details.

Tsai's transits will come at a time when US relations with China are at what some analysts see as their worst level since Washington normalised ties with Beijing in 1979 and switched diplomatic recognition from Taipei.

Taiwan is China's most sensitive territorial issue and a major bone of contention with Washington, which, like most countries, maintains only unofficial ties with Taipei. However, the United States government is required by U.S. law to provide the island with the means to defend itself.

# Myanmar junta dissolves Suu Kyi's party, much of Opposition

## Bangkok

Myanmar's military government took another major step in its ongoing campaign to cripple its political opponents on Wednesday, dissolving dozens of opposition parties including that of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi for failing to meet a registration deadline ahead of elections.

Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, or NLD, was one of 40 parties ordered dissolved in an official announcement by the election commission published on Wednesday in the state-controlled press.

The NLD governed Myanmar with overwhelming majorities in Parliament from 2015 to 2021 before being overthrown by the military.

The NLD had already announced that it would not register, denouncing the promised polls as a sham.

The party, and other critics, say the still-unscheduled polls will be neither free nor fair in a military-ruled country that has shut free media and arrested most of the leaders of Suu Kyi's party.

The NLD won a landslide victory in the November 2020 election, but in February 2021, the army blocked all elected lawmakers from taking their seats in Parliament and seized power, detaining top members of Suu Kyi's government and party.

The army takeover was met with widespread popular opposition. After peaceful demonstrations were put down with lethal force, many opponents of military rule took up arms, and large parts of the country are embroiled in conflict.

Suu Kyi, 77, is serving prison sentences totalling 33 years after being convicted in a series of politically tainted prosecutions brought by the



military.

Her supporters say the charges were contrived to prevent her from participating in politics.

Kyaw Htwe, a member of the NLD's Central Working Committee, told The Associated Press on Tuesday night that the party's existence does not depend on what the military decides, and it "will exist as long as the people support it."

# Misuse of probe agencies

A PLEA by 14 Opposition parties alleging arbitrary arrests and misuse of Central probe agencies against political opponents has been listed for hearing by the Supreme Court on April 5. In asking for framing of pre-arrest and post-arrest bail guidelines, the petition claims that there is a clear pattern of investigative agencies being used to target political rivals and dissenting citizens. It is alleged that cases are registered in quick succession to ensure that the accused stays in custody for a prolonged period. Instances have also been cited of slowing down of probe proceedings or a clean chit being given to politicians who have crossed over to the ruling party at the Centre.

The plea contends that 95 per cent of the cases filed by probe agencies such as the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate in the recent past were against leaders of Opposition parties. This cannot be a coincidence.

It amplifies the allegation that the fight against corruption is increasingly being used as an instrument of vendetta politics.



The BJP's counter of zero tolerance for graft is well taken, but the party does not emerge as too different from those it had lambasted when it was in the Opposition for eroding the autonomy of investigative agencies.

The rare convergence of non-BJP parties has some similarity to their coming together in 2019 to demand the random verification of at least 50 per cent electronic voting machines (EVMs) using the voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) in every Assembly segment of a parliamentary constituency. The Supreme Court had then directed the Election Commission to raise the VVPAT-EVM verification from one EVM to five in each Assembly segment. With several states going to the polls later this year, followed by the 2024 General Election, the outcome of the current case can have a bearing on the Opposition's fortunes.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

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

*Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans.*  
-John Lennon

## Right to Health

### Rajasthan's landmark Bill faces challenges

THE stiff resistance put up by the Indian Medical Association and various doctors' groups gives an indication of the challenges that lie ahead for Rajasthan's landmark Right to Health legislation. The Bill introduced by the Ashok Gehlot government may have been passed with an eye on the ensuing Assembly elections, but it does mark a big step forward in the quest for equitable and improved healthcare services. By seeking to become the first state to make access to healthcare a legal entitlement for every resident, Rajasthan has set the bar high for itself as well as others. Free services and quality healthcare are guaranteed at all public and select private facilities, especially those allotted land at concessionary costs.

A contentious point in the Bill is that no medical facility, whether government or private, can deny emergency care. There is, however, ambiguity



on what constitutes an emergency condition and how the cost of treatment is to be reimbursed to private hospitals. A patient also has the right to choose where to procure medicines from or get a test done. There is a

provision for an independent authority to address logistical grievances and ensure the implementation of the treatment protocol. The private sector contends

that the Bill encourages bureaucratic control, renders doctors vulnerable to harassment and puts extra burden, saying free services are already being provided under government schemes. The private sector,

according to the official data, caters to 48 per cent of the state's population. An overhaul of the public health sector is envisioned, but the patient-centric proposals would require more than new rules and regulations to effect change. Even a drastic hike in budgetary provisions and upgradation of rural services will fall short in the absence of a spirit of convergence with healthcare providers, both private and public. Any step that strengthens the rights of patients is welcome. Rajasthan has been pushing the envelope in its public health obligations. The state's cause would be better served by actively engaging with the medical fraternity to end the unrest and dispel the perception that it is at the receiving end.

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## NPS review welcome

### Centre must be equally mindful of pvt sector employees

UNION Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while moving the Finance Bill 2023 in the Lok Sabha on Friday, said the Centre would form a committee to review the National Pension System (NPS) for government employees. It comes as a welcome acknowledgment of an issue that has gained currency recently. It's time to take the issue head-



on and address the employees' concerns. Over the past few years, parties such as the Congress and AAP have wooed voters by promising the restoration of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS), though without a clear plan regarding its execution. With one non-BJP-ruled state after another switching back to the old scheme, the clamour for OPS has grown across the country. Guaranteeing an amount equivalent to 50 per cent of the last pay drawn, linked to dearness allowance (DA) and paid entirely by the government, the OPS offers higher

monetary benefits as compared to the NPS's pension that is linked to contributions made by employees during their service period along with matching funds by the government.

Contributory pension — funded by employees and their employers — is the norm in many countries across the world, including the UK, the US and the Netherlands, and India should not be an exception. Also, governments cannot weigh down the younger population with the pension burden just to support one section of society. Fiscal prudence and the state's inability to sustain the OPS cannot be overlooked. The existing structure of the OPS, the RBI has warned, entails future fiscal distress for the states. The Central panel would have the challenging task of balancing the imperatives. The Centre would do well to also address the financial woes of the private sector's retired employees, who comprise a far larger pie of the working class and have remained generally ignored. They have been getting a pittance as pension after devoting decades to their jobs and paying taxes on a par with their government counterparts. There is no clarity yet on the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation-linked higher pension scheme for subscribers of the Employees' Pension Scheme. Efforts to implement it must be expedited for the sake of the retirees' future.

INDIAN women's boxing has for long been synonymous with MC Mary Kom, who won eight World Championship medals (including six gold) and a bronze at the 2012 London Olympics. Her stellar performances have been inspiring other female pugilists to battle all odds. The just-concluded World Championship in New Delhi saw four Indian boxers grabbing the yellow metal — Nikhat Zareen, Lovlina Borgohain, Nitu Ghanghas and Saweety Boora. Nikhat defeated Vietnam's two-time Asian champion Nguyen Thi Tam to emulate Mary Kom's feat of winning the world title twice. Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Lovlina defeated Australia's Caitlin Parker to clinch her maiden world title. India's female boxers equalled their best-ever show in terms of gold medals; they had also won four in the 2006 edition of the World Championship.

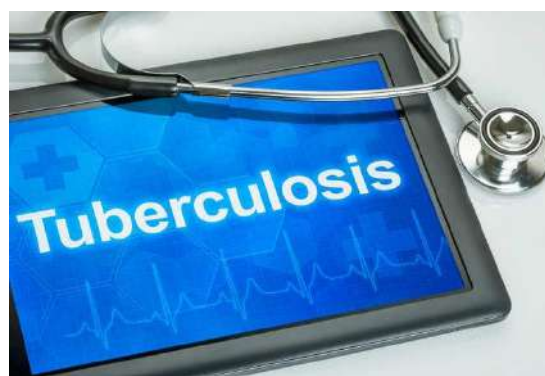
Nikhat and Lovlina will be the favourites in the Asian Games to be held

in Hangzhou (China) in September-October this year, while Nitu and Saweety need to change their respective weight categories so as to enter the fray. The Asian event will double as a qualifier for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. The dominance of these boxers has raised hopes that India will finally win an

## Victory for TB patients

### India rejects Johnson & Johnson's bid for patent extension

THERE was good news for India on the eve of World Tuberculosis Day. Putting a stop to pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson's monopoly over a key tuberculosis drug, bedaquiline, whose patent J&J holds till July this year, the India Patent Office (IPO) on Thursday rejected the company's application for an extension of the patent's period. Not only is this decision patient-friendly, it



also sends a strong message to the pharma firms to desist from resorting to the legally inadmissible practice of 'evergreening', whereby they endeavour to extend the patent beyond the primary stipulated period with an eye on minting more money.

Notably, J&J's evergreening bid was challenged by two TB survivors and Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders). The IPO decision paves the way for drug-resistant TB patients to have easier access to this lifesaving

medicine at much cheaper rates. As generic drug manufacturers get the nod to produce bedaquiline, its price could go down by more than 50 per cent. The tablets' present cost — \$400 per six-month treatment course — is too steep for a large majority of Indian TB patients who have developed resistance to drugs over the years. This is evident from a 2019 survey which shows that while over 55,000 TB patients could have benefited from access to bedaquiline, only around 10,000 of them could access the drug. Freeing the drug from the patent would also make it more accessible to the patients as patented drugs can be procured only by government agencies, which distribute them further for use under state-run programmes.

The wider reach of WHO-recommended bedaquiline for TB treatment would also go a long way in helping India meet its goal of eradicating TB by 2025. However, given that India figures prominently on the WHO list of high-burden countries for TB, this aim is challenging, despite PM Modi's claim on Friday that India is on course to win the battle against TB. On a positive note, the access to the safer, oral and efficacious bedaquiline would spell the end of the side effects of toxic injected drugs that patients have been enduring.

## Packing a punch

### Four Indian women crowned boxing world champions



Olympic gold in this sport next year.

It's heartening that boxing and wrestling have become sought-after sports among girls in India. Cricket, however, continues to rule the roost, with the inaugural Women's Premier

League proving to be a resounding success. India's womanpower came to the fore here too as Harmanpreet Kaur led Mumbai Indians to the title triumph.

Harmanpreet, also the Team India skipper, played a useful knock in the final against Delhi Capitals, even as her overseas teammates Nat Sciver-Brunt and Hayley Matthews were the star performers throughout the tournament. Clearly, there is no dearth of sporting opportunities for the country's daughters, with the likes of Mary Kom and Sania Mirza being

enduring role models. The unstinting support of parents and coaches, along with the backing of Central and state governments, is making a huge difference. This augurs well for Indian sports as well as for gender equality.

# Defamation penalty

## Rahul's sentence disproportionate to his offence

The conviction and sentencing of Rahul Gandhi by a Surat court has turned the spotlight on the controversial defamation law. The Congress leader, now disqualified from the Lok Sabha, has been found guilty of defaming the entire 'Modi community' on a complaint lodged by former Gujarat minister and BJP MLA Purnesh Modi. The court has handed out the harshest punishment under Section 500 of the IPC — two-year imprisonment with a fine — even as the sentence has been suspended for 30 days to enable Rahul to challenge the verdict in a higher court. Questions are being asked about whether the trial court followed the due process while proceeding against an accused outside its territorial jurisdiction.

Name-calling and mudslinging are par for the course during



electioneering in India. Most politicians have no qualms about making below-the-belt remarks against their opponents. In his speech at an election rally in Karnataka in April 2019, Rahul insinuated that every Modi was

a thief. The comment deserves to be condemned in the strongest terms, but the punishment is disproportionate to his offence. A written apology would have served the cause of justice. The trial court should have taken a cue

from Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's apology spree of 2018, when he had expressed regret for his statements against rival politicians such as Nitin Gadkari, Kapil Sibal and Bikram Singh Majithia.

The defamation law is widely

perceived to be anti-democratic in letter and spirit, even as the Supreme Court had asserted in May 2016 that the right to freedom of expression was not an absolute one. There is no doubt that defamation laws are being misused in India and abroad to stifle free speech and settle scores. UNESCO had observed last year that 'the global campaign to decriminalise defamation, which was gaining traction a decade ago, was now facing a setback'. The UN body had also red-flagged a rise in abusive practices such as 'forum shopping', wherein litigants file cases in courts from which the most favourable outcome is expected. The ulterior motives of such petitioners make it imperative to revisit the defamation law and curb its use as a weapon of vendetta.

## Living with Covid

### Get the basics right; no need for drastic steps

THE resurgence of Covid-19 in several states of India shows that the novel coronavirus is not yet a thing of the past in the country. The daily caseload has reached 1,300 — the highest in over four months. A high-level review meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister on Wednesday, which happened to be the third anniversary of 'Janata Curfew' — the precursor to the stringent nationwide lockdown of 2020. The PM has stressed the need to enhance genome sequencing and maintain Covid-appropriate behaviour, even as the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has asked all states and UTs to ensure the availability of drugs for influenza and Covid. The ministry has also stated that mock drills will soon be held across the country to assess Covid preparedness.

According to health experts, the fresh spike in cases is not a harbinger of a new wave. They have asserted that there is no need to panic as the fatality rate and the number of hospitalisations are not increasing significantly. This reassurance should suffice to rule out any drastic step to curb the movement of people. The key takeaway from the Covid-induced restrictions imposed in



the past three years is that they have merely delayed the inevitable. The lockdown of 2020 proved disastrous for the Indian economy, with millions of people losing their jobs. The country witnessed a devastating Covid wave in April-May 2021, but the situation has been under control after that, thanks to the country's commendable vaccination programme. The havoc wreaked by the zero-Covid policy, which China had to withdraw after nationwide protests, gives India another reason to not make any self-defeating move.

The current surge is being attributed to Omicron XBB sub-variants. A recent US study says that vaccines and boosters are effective against these highly transmissible strains. The five-fold strategy — test-track-treat-vaccination-Covid-appropriate behaviour — should be continued in earnest as it has proved to be a success. An area of concern is the booster dose coverage, which has remained below par. The authorities need to revitalise the immunisation campaign and urge people to shed vaccine hesitancy. Covid is far from over, but if we get the basics right, things should be fine.

## IMF bailout for Sri Lanka

### Debt-ridden island nation faces tough road ahead

Nearly a year in the making, a \$3-billion rescue loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a lifeline for Sri Lanka. Economic mismanagement, coupled with the impact of the pandemic, led to the debt-ridden island nation facing its worst financial crisis since its independence. It ran out of cash for even the most essential imports, causing massive social and political unrest. This is the 17th IMF bailout for Sri Lanka. Its total external debt at the end of 2022, including to both bilateral and private creditors, was \$82 billion, of which \$2 billion has to be serviced by June. The IMF package is hardly sufficient to tide over the crisis, but will help the country restore its credibility with international private creditors and rein in its debt to sustainable levels. It is also expected to catalyse additional support from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other lenders.

On receiving the first tranche, President Wickremesinghe promised better fiscal discipline and improved governance. The government plans

to raise funds by restructuring state-owned enterprises, but a massive strike by trade unions highlights the difficulties in enforcing painful economic and tax reforms. Last month, the inflation rate was 50.6 per cent. Tackling widespread shortages and a soaring cost of living is a huge challenge for Sri Lanka.

An assurance from bilateral donors to restructure loans was a precondition to unlock the arrangement with the IMF. India was among the first to extend support, but China, Sri Lanka's largest bilateral creditor, played hard to get before the Chinese Exim Bank relented. Hopefully, realisation has dawned on Sri Lanka about the risks associated with Chinese debts. For Pakistan, the crisis is far deeper as it owes around \$30 billion to China, or 30 per cent of its external debts. Bangladesh, which too has approached the IMF as a precautionary measure, owes nearly \$5 billion to China. It should think twice before falling for Beijing's debt-trap diplomacy.



## Average increments to drop to 9.1 per cent in 2023 across sectors: Study

### Mumbai

Average increments are likely to drop to 9.1 per cent this year in almost all sectors following inflation, higher interest rates and a slowdown in the economy, according to a study.

The average increment in 2022 was 9.4 per cent, Deloitte India Talent Outlook 2023 stated on Wednesday.

The study found that in 2023 increments are expected to be lower across almost all sectors, compared to 2022 actual increments.

While the Life Sciences sector is expected to witness the highest increments in 2023, the IT sector will likely witness a major drop in increments as compared to last year, the study said.

Additionally, attrition in India reached 19.7 per cent in 2022, up from 19.4 per cent in 2021, it stated.

"The significant attrition



levels across industries in late 2021 continued until early 2022. We saw Indian organisations budgeting the highest increment in 2022 over the last four years. What they also did was hire aggressively. This led to employee costs rising faster than revenue growth over the last 3-4 years in almost every other company.

"Stubborn inflation, higher interest rates, and a slowing

economy are likely to make organisations more cautious this year. We expect increments and attrition to witness lower trends in 2023," Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP (Deloitte India) Partner Anandorup Ghose said.

The Deloitte India Talent Outlook 2023 study is based on a survey in January 2023, done among 300 organisations across seven sectors and 25 sub-sectors.

## SEBI probing dealings in shares of 58 firms: MoS

### New Delhi

The Ministry of Finance today informed the Rajya Sabha that as on February 28, 2023, markets regulator SEBI was investigating the dealings in the shares of 58 companies for violation of rules.

In a written reply to a question asked by Shiv Sena (Uddhav Thackeray) member Priyanka Chaturvedi seeking to know the data on companies currently being investigated by the SEBI for market manipulation and their market shareholding, Union Minister of State (MoS) for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said, "As on February 28, 2023, SEBI is investigating the dealings in the shares of 58 companies for violation of SEBI (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices relating to Securities Market) Regulations, 2003 which includes market manipulation and attendant unfair trade practices."

To another question, the minister said the SEBI has informed the Ministry that it "does not identify shell companies". However, earlier this month while replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, the MoS (Finance) had said the SEBI was investigating



allegations against Adani Group, whose nine listed companies saw

a 60% decline in their market capitalisation between January 24 and March 1, triggering a politic.

Choudhary had then said, the SEBI is mandated to put in place regulatory frameworks for effecting stable operations and development of the securities including protection of investors.

## 11 firms bag 39,600 MW solar mfg capacity under PLI scheme

### New Delhi

As many as 11 companies, including Indosol, Reliance and First Solar, have bagged solar photovoltaic manufacturing projects of a total 39,600 MW capacity under the second tranche of the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme of the government. The government has allocated a total capacity of 39,600 MW of domestic Solar PV module manufacturing capacity to 11 companies, with a total outlay of Rs 14,007 crore under the PLI Scheme for High-Efficiency Solar PV Modules (Tranche-



II), a Power Ministry statement said.

The ministry said manufacturing capacity totalling 7,400 MW is expected to become

## EPFO hikes interest rate on PF deposits to 8.15% for FY23

### New Delhi

The Central Board of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) headed by Union Labour Minister Bhupender Yadav on Tuesday



marginally raised interest rate on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits to 8.15% for 2022-23 for its over six crore subscribers. It is an improvement of 0.05% over 8.1% interest rate for fiscal 2021-22, which was the lowest since 1977-78.

The interest will be credited into the accounts of subscribers after it is officially notified in the Government gazette following its approval by the Finance Ministry. During 2022-23, the RBI had made six revisions to the baseline interest rate, hiking it by a cumulative 2.25% (225 basis points).

The ministry said the Board's recommendation involves distribution of more than Rs 90,000 crore in the members' account on total principal amount

of Rs 11 lakh crore which was Rs 77,424.84 crore (interest) and Rs 9.56 lakh crore (principal) respectively in 2021-22.

With reports that EPFO holding is overleveraged in two Adani Group companies, the Labour Ministry sought to assure that it has followed "a blend of conservative yet progressive approach of investment followed by EPFO has made it a wise option for EPF members."

Over the years, EPFO has distributed higher income to its members, through a "prudent and balanced approach" towards investment, putting the "highest emphasis on safety and preservation of principal with an approach of caution and growth," said the statement.

"The total income recommended for being distributed is the highest to date. The growth in income and the principal amount is respectively more than 16% and 15% as compared to the financial year 2021-22," it added. Separately, provisional payroll data showed an addition of 14.86 lakh net members in January. Among the newly joined members, the highest enrolment is registered in the age group of 18-25 years which constitutes 55.52% of the total of new members. As many as 3.54 lakh members exited the fold of EPFO, the lowest exit in the last four months.

expected to bring in an investment of Rs 93,041 crore. It will also generate a total of 1,01,487 jobs with 35,010 getting direct employment and 66,477 being indirectly employed.

Speaking on the success of the PLI scheme, Union Minister for Power RK Singh said India is well on its way to climbing up the value chain in the production of the high technology solar PV modules and this capacity addition is a major step towards making India Aatmanirbhar in the solar manufacturing sector.

operational by October 2024, 16,800 MW capacity by April 2025 and the balance 15,400 MW capacity by April 2026.

The Tranche-II is



# 877 foreign companies ceased Indian operations between 2014 and 2021: Govt

## New Delhi

As many as 877 foreign companies have ceased operations in India since 2014 until 2021, Rao Inderjit Singh, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for the Ministry of Programme Implementation, informed the Rajya Sabha today.

Answering a question by Congress MP Pramod Tiwari and CPM's Elamaram Kareem, Singh said, "Information about 'ceasing of operations' is not maintained by this Ministry. Foreign companies are required to register their 'place of business' in India as also ceasing of their 'place of business' in India with Registrar of Companies (RoC), Delhi under the provision of Section 380 of the Companies Act, 2013. Accordingly, as intimated by RoC, Delhi, 877 foreign companies have ceased their

'place of business' in India between 2014 to November 2021."

To a specific query about



whether major firms Ford and Harley Davidson have also ceased Indian operations, Singh said, "Ford and Harley Davidson have not closed their place of business in India."

The closure of operations of a foreign company is a business

decision peculiar to each company which may include factors such as cessation of operation of branch office, expiration of validity of permission/licence etc. granted by the Reserve Bank of India, not starting its operation due to change of business policy of the parent company, foreign company establishing a private limited company in India, closure of Parent Company, management's decision, closure of liaison office or branch office in India on completion of a project of the parent Company.

The minister said quality control does not fall within the purview of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA). However a user-friendly portal (MCA 21) has been created for easy and efficient filing of returns by Indian and foreign companies.

# S&P retains India's growth forecast at 6% in FY 2023-24



## New Delhi

S&P Global Ratings on Monday kept its forecast for India's economic growth unchanged at 6% in the fiscal year starting April 1, before rising to 6.9% in the following year. In the quarterly economic update for Asia-Pacific, S&P saw inflation rate easing to 5% in 2023-24 fiscal, from 6.8% in the current financial year.

It saw India's gross domestic product (GDP) likely growing by 7% in the current financial year ending March 31 (2022-23), before slowing to 6% in the next 2023-24 fiscal. "India leads, with average growth of 7% in 2024-

2026," the update said.

GDP is projected to rise to 6.9% in the following two financial years — 2024-25 and 2025-26 and rising to 7.1% in 2026-27.

"In India, domestic demand has traditionally led the economy. But it has become more sensitive to the global cycle lately, in part due to rising commodity exports; and its year-on-year GDP growth slowed to 4.4% in the fourth quarter (October-December 2022)," the rating agency said.

Pronounced core inflation in India suggests little slack in these economies, it said.

# First Citizens acquires Silicon Valley Bank



## New York

North Carolina-based First Citizens will buy Silicon Valley Bank, the financial institution that collapsed earlier this month, rattling the banking industry and sending shock waves around the world.

The deal could reassure investors at a time of shaken confidence in banks, though the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. and other regulators had already taken extraordinary steps to head off a wider banking crisis by guaranteeing that depositors in SVB and another failed US bank would be able to access all of their money.

## New Delhi

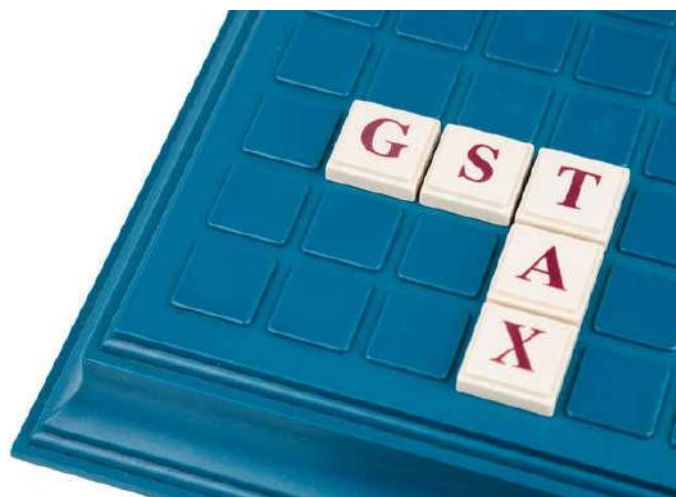
The government has capped the maximum rate of GST compensation cess that would be levied on pan masala, cigarettes and other forms of tobacco and linked the highest rate to their retail sale price.

The capping of the cess rate was brought in as part of the amendments to the Finance Bill, 2023, which was passed by the Lok Sabha last Friday.

As per the amendment, the maximum GST compensation cess rate for pan masala will be 51 per cent of the retail sale price per unit. In the current regime, the cess is charged at 135 per cent ad valorem.

The rate for tobacco has been fixed at Rs 4,170 per thousand sticks plus 290 per cent ad valorem or 100 per cent of the retail sale price per unit.

# Govt caps maximum GST cess rate on pan masala, tobacco; links rate to retail sale price



So far, the highest rate was Rs 4,170 per thousand sticks plus 290 per cent ad valorem.

The cess is levied over and above the highest Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate of 28 per cent.

Changes in schedule-I of GST compensation cess Act, brought in via amendment in Finance Bill, has capped the maximum cess that can be charged on Pan masala and

tobacco products.

Tax experts, however, said to ascertain the exact compensation cess applicable following this change, the GST council will need to issue a notification. AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said the latest amendment in the GST Compensation cess law is an enabler that will permit the GST council to introduce

applicable tax rates through a notification. "This change marks a significant shift in taxation policy for pan masala and tobacco-supplying companies. Though this policy will arrest tax evasion to a great extent in this sector, it still may prove to be a regressive plan from an economic standpoint," Mohan said. In February, the GST Council chaired by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state counterparts, had approved the report of a panel of state finance ministers on plugging tax evasion in pan masala and gutkha businesses.

The GoM had recommended that the mechanism for levy of compensation cess on pan masala and chewing tobacco be changed from ad valorem to a specific rate-based levy to boost the first stage collection of the revenue.



# Identify stress points, FM tells PSBs

**New Delhi**

Amid the current global financial scenario emanating from the failure of some international banks in the US and European Union, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has told public sector banks (PSBs) to look at their business models closely to identify stress points, including concentration risks and adverse exposures.

She said this during a meeting here to review the performance of PSBs on various financial health parameters and the resilience of PSBs in light of global financial scenario arising out of the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank along with issues leading to the crisis in Credit



Suisse.

The meeting was also attended by Union Minister of State for

Finance Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad; Vivek Joshi, Secretary, Department of Financial Services

(DFS); and MDs and CEOs of public sector banks. The MD and CEOs of the PSBs informed the Finance Minister that they are vigilant of developments in the global banking sector and are taking all possible steps to safeguard themselves from any potential financial shock. All the major financial parameters indicate stable and resilient PSBs with robust financial health.

The PSBs also informed Sitharaman about their corporate governance practices, adherence to regulatory norms, ensuring of prudent liquidity management and continuation of focus on having robust asset-liability and risk management. Sitharaman said PSBs should also use this

opportunity to frame detailed crisis management and communication strategies. She reviewed the exposure of PSBs to this developing and immediate external global financial stress from both the short and long-term perspectives.

After detailed deliberations, the Finance Minister advised PSBs to remain vigilant about interest rate risks and regularly undertake stress tests. Sitharaman also highlighted that PSBs must leverage the full potential of branches opened in international financial services centres in GIFT City Gujarat to identify international opportunities, including prospects related to persons of Indian origin (PIOs).

## Trading in F&O contracts to be dearer

**New Delhi**

The government on Friday proposed hiking the securities transaction tax (STT) on Futures & Options (F&O) contracts, a move that will increase the trading costs in the derivatives segment and help in curbing excessive trades.

In the Finance Bill 2023, passed by the Lok Sabha on Friday, the STT on options is proposed to be increased to 0.0625% from 0.05% and on futures contracts to 0.0125% from 0.01%.

Analysts said higher STT will shore up the government's revenue to some extent and also discourage excessive trading since a large number of retail traders are losing money in the segment.

After the Lok Sabha cleared the Finance Bill, which has 64 official amendments, the Finance Ministry issued a statement saying there was a typographical error in the amendments with respect to the change in STT on option trading.

## Govt to raise Rs 2,800 cr by selling stake in HAL

**New Delhi**

The Finance Ministry on Thursday decided to exercise the green shoe option as the offer-for-sale of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) has received a good response, with the issue subscribing 4.5 times on day one.

"Offer for Sale (OFS) of government shares in HAL got great response on day one. Issue subscribed 4.5 times of base

size at a clearing price above the floor price by non-retail investors. Govt has decided to exercise the green shoe option. Retail investors will get a chance to bid tomorrow," DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said in a tweet.

The OFS comprised base issue size of 1.75% or 58.51 lakh shares, with an option to retain oversubscription of an

equal quantum.

The government on Wednesday proposed to sell up to a 3.5% stake in HAL at a floor price of Rs 2,450 a share, if fully subscribed, the OFS would fetch about Rs 2,800 crore to the exchequer. On the first day of OFS, shares of HAL closed 4.87% down at Rs 2,497.40 each on the BSE. The floor price is at a

discount of around 6.7% over the closing share price of HAL on the BSE.

The government currently holds 75.15% of HAL, which is a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) under the Defence Ministry.

The proceeds from HAL OFS would add up to the government's disinvestment kitty for the current fiscal.

## IIT-Madras-led innovation can detect adulteration in milk in 30 seconds

**New Delhi**

Researchers have developed a three-dimensional (3D) paper-based portable device that can detect adulteration in milk within 30 seconds.

The test, which could be performed at home, can detect multiple commonly-used adulterating agents including urea, detergents, soap, starch, hydrogen peroxide, sodium-hydrogen-carbonate and salt, among others, they said.

Requiring only a millilitre of a liquid as a sample for the test, the researchers said that the test can be used to detect adulteration in other liquids as well such as water, fresh juices and milkshakes.

The research, led by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras, is published in the journal Nature.



"The 3D paper-based microfluidic device is made up of a top and bottom cover and a sandwich structure middle layer and works well for transporting denser liquids at a consistent speed.

"The paper is treated with reagents and is let to dry."

"Both paper layers are adhered to both

sides of the support after drying, and the covers adhere with double-sided tape.

"Whatman filter paper grade 4 is used in this design, which aids liquid flow and allows for the storage of more reagents," said Pallab Sinha Mahapatra, associate professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, and lead researcher of the study.

This new technology, say the researchers, is affordable, unlike conventional lab-based tests, which are expensive and time-consuming.

The adulteration of milk is a growing menace, especially in developing countries like India, Pakistan, China, and Brazil.

Consumption of adulterated milk could cause medical complications such as kidney problems, infant death, gastrointestinal complications, diarrhoea, and even cancer.

# US-China ties in deep freeze

Ties between China and the US seem to be in a free fall. Reports had earlier suggested that President Joe Biden had sought a call with Xi Jinping to alleviate tensions arising out of the balloon incident and the recent announcement on AUKUS. He had expected that the conversation could take place after Xi had been re-elected President by the National People's Congress which concluded on March 13. But the Chinese are yet to respond. The delay fits a pattern. Efforts by US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin to speak to his Chinese counterpart after the US shot down the spy balloon have not been fruitful. That incident had also led to the cancellation of the visit of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Beijing.

The Blinken visit was aimed at restoring some normality into their high-level discourse following the Biden-Xi meeting at the sidelines of the G20 meet in Bali last November.

A hallmark of rising tension are Xi's recent remarks that have, unusually, named the US. 'Western countries led by the United States have contained and suppressed us in an all-round way, which has brought unprecedented severe challenges to our development,' he has said. China has been reeling from the impact of a slowing economy that resulted in just 3 per cent growth in 2022, the second worst annual growth rate in nearly half a century. The US remains China's single largest trading partner but China's exports to the US were down 15 per cent, though its imports increased about 3 per cent.

Many in the US believe that China is preparing for an invasion of Taiwan. If so, the consequences for both countries could be severe. It is not clear whether China has the military capacity to overwhelm the island. It certainly lacks the amphibious and airlift capability for bringing and supporting half a million or more troops needed to subdue the island in short order. For that reason, many suspect that its strategy could be different, focusing on partially blockading the island, cutting off its Internet links and invading it as a last resort. But this risks a counter blockade by the US.

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Such blockades would lead to the US being denied key imports, especially Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) used to make medicines, especially antibiotics. But the Chinese would themselves be affected as they import 20 per cent of their antibiotics from the US. The American consumer electronics sector, too, would have a major problem and China is also a crucial supplier for such components as lithium-ion batteries for cell phones and electric vehicles. There would be an impact, too, in areas like apparel, furniture, machinery, automobiles, telecom equipment.

But the consequences for China could be nothing short of catastrophic. First, China remains reliant on importing oil and natural gas, and second, it needs to import vast quantities of food. Some of the oil and gas vulnerability is reduced by the pipelines between China and suppliers in Russia and Central Asia. But even then, some 80 per cent of China's imported oil transits through the Indian Ocean.

But its real vulnerability is in the area of food. As author Edward Luttwak has pointed out, it is the world's largest importer of chicken, mutton, beef and dairy products, as well as animal feed in the form of soyabean, maize, wheat and sorghum. Despite tensions, it is today

the US's largest agricultural export market.

In 2020, China imported over 2 million tonnes of beef, mainly from Brazil and Argentina; it imported 20 million tonnes of corn mainly from the US and Ukraine; 4.5 million tonnes of pork from various sources, including the US; 8 million tonnes of wheat mainly from the US, Canada and France; in addition some 100 million tonnes of soyabean as feed; and it also imports over 8 million tonnes of edible oil. As China's population ages and it urbanises, this vulnerability will only increase. Luttwak also raises the issue of the PLA's ability to take casualties, given China's one-child norm.

The Chinese may have the capacity of keeping the US at a distance from the mainland and Taiwan, but they are nowhere near having a navy that can operate under war-like conditions in the rest of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The US navy remains the most formidable power in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

At a strategic level, China has been promoting the notion of self-reliance and supply chain resilience for two decades and more. The rest of the world has only caught up following the Covid experience. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute,

China now leads the world in critical technologies relating to defence, space, robotics, energy, environment, biotechnology, advanced materials and manufacturing, as well as AI and quantum technology.

The Chinese may have the capacity of keeping the US at a distance from the mainland and Taiwan, but they are nowhere near having a navy that can operate under war-like conditions in the rest of the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

China is hoping that it will be able to overcome its external and internal challenges by the development of its science and technology with an emphasis on self-reliance. It has rolled out the concept of 'dual circulation' which aims at promoting domestic consumption and reducing its reliance on global supply chains. But there is little it can do in the area of agriculture.

In any case, all the self-reliance is for the future. Any war over Taiwan in the next five years would unfold in a different way. For the present, China remains hugely inter-dependent on the rest of the world. Whether it will decide on war is something no one can foretell. The problem, as history has shown us, is that leaders often miscalculate the risks associated with launching a war.



# India and Israel can be pivots in reglobalising Asia

Though the relationship between India and Israel has, on occasions, been referred to as a “marriage made in heaven,” they have traversed from being estranged partners due to political-ideological reasons to becoming strategically inseparable partners in recent times due to a combination of economic, political, ideological, and security factors.

This holds promise because, at the macro level, both countries are strategic players in their own right in a rapidly deglobalising landscape. At the micro level, they are part of the evolving Asian and West Asian regions, which are in the throes of tectonic changes. A combination of economic consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and a series of reconciliation moves among traditional rivals in the region has revived interest in energy-rich West Asia.

In the economic domain, the International Monetary Fund’s World Economic Outlook forecasts a 3.2-percent GDP growth for 2023 and 3.7 percent for 2024 for the West Asia and North Africa region. Emerging and developing Asia is tipped to grow to 5.3 percent and 5.2 percent, respectively. This, in comparison to the advanced economies that are pegged at 1.2 percent and 1.4 percent, is miles ahead.

The world’s eyes are glued on India not just because of what it is at present, but for the potential it bears for the future.

Situating the two Is (India and Israel) in this context—6.1 percent and 6.8 percent; and 3 percent and 3.1 percent, respectively—creates the potential for bountiful synergies, especially since the volume of India-Israel trade has remained below potential. The world’s eyes are glued on India not just because of what it is at present, but for the potential it bears for the future. In this context, an important way to boost bilateral trade is by moving swiftly on the India-Israel Free Trade Agreement talks. The India-United Arab Emirates (UAE) Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which includes the services sector and was signed in less than 90 days after negotiations began, could serve as a useful template.

The United States (US)-China rivalry and its evolving manifestation in West Asia and the Indo-Pacific region has highlighted India’s role, which could potentially tip the balance between the two superpowers. In recent years, India has become more active in the region, increasing its regional influence and strengthening its cooperation with the US in various forms. This includes the I2U2 minilateral grouping with Israel and UAE. Designated by some as the ‘partnership of the future,’ I2U2 aims to energise economic cooperation among its members in various domains, such as food security, technology, new energy, infrastructure, health, space, and innovation, to further regional stability.

## Out-of-the-box approach

While improvements in India-Israel bilateral relations are incremental, a touch of dynamism could be added by adopting a regional and minilateral approach to the relationship. Taking an out-of-the-box approach and building on the India-UAE and Israel-UAE economic partnership agreements, an India-Israel-UAE trilateral trade agreement could be signed. Such steps could free existing bottlenecks caused by overburdening regulations, substantially expanding the trade volumes between and among the three countries. A combination of UAE capital, Israeli technology and the Indian market in various sectors could yield win-win-win results.

It is in this spirit that the International Federation of Indo-Israel Chambers of Commerce initiated a partnership in 2021 wherein an Israeli company – Eccopia – produced innovative water-free robotic solar cleaning technology in India for a project in the UAE. Confident in replicating such partnerships in other sectors, the three countries



estimate the innovation and international business potential of their cooperation at US\$110 billion by 2030.

The UAE hosted the ‘UAE and Israel Uniting with Africa’ event in 2020, which India could easily join in a trilateral format given its trusted and influential role in Africa. Another example of such a trilateral partnership is an India-Israel-UAE joint venture MoU signed in 2022. This facilitates Israel’s Tower Semiconductor and UAE’s Next Orbit Ventures to invest US\$3 billion to establish India’s first semiconductor manufacturing facility in the state of Karnataka. Further, the UAE hosted the ‘UAE and Israel Uniting with Africa’ event in 2020, which India could easily join in a trilateral format given its trusted and influential role in Africa.

One more innovative minilateral cooperative mechanism worth exploring is the possibility of expanding the I2U2 to include other like-minded partners, such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, among others. Efforts are already underway at the Track 2 levels to tap this space. The fact that Japan and South Korea have broken new diplomatic ground a few weeks ago makes such collaboration possible, thus helping the India-Israel cause.

Among a few promising ideas that could drive such new minilateral arrangements is the establishment of an India-Israel-led ‘Blue Economy Fund’, which could include other partners. Blue economy is an emerging concept for ocean governance that harnesses the economic potential of oceans in environmentally sustainable ways. It could positively impact global issues like carbon neutrality, green energy, and energy security, using AI solutions, all issues that gel well with India’s SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) that was first proposed in 2015. Such collaboration brings to the fore the role of middle powers in a fragmented world. In the current scenario, countries like India and Israel are more focused on promoting five economy-oriented Cs – capital, connectivity, commerce, collaboration, and climate – rather than just harping on politics and security issues.

## Innovation and technology

As superpower rivalries continue to escalate in the pursuit of advanced technologies, India and Israel have much to gain from increased cooperation in this domain. Both nations are leaders in technology and innovation, and the potential for collaboration in the high-tech sector is substantial. India’s expertise and its large and growing economy complement Israel’s R&D and innovation capabilities, providing an excellent opportunity for joint advancement in R&D and innovation.

India has already launched its indigenous 5G technology, while a test bed for 6G was launched in March 2023. Working together across areas ranging from artificial intelligence, big data and semiconductors to renewable energies, healthcare, and agriculture could substantially benefit both countries, placing them at the forefront of these fields.

India’s expertise and its large and growing economy complement Israel’s R&D and innovation capabilities, providing an excellent opportunity for joint advancement in R&D and innovation. Such collaboration could create additional opportunities for the two countries to extend their partnership to other countries in the region, with a particular focus on water management, counterterrorism, and emerging technologies.

Expanding engagement between the two countries’ tech start-up ecosystems should also be a priority. India has seen the establishment of 46 unicorns in 2021 alone, with over US\$42 billion raised by its startups. Similarly, Israel has seen the rise of 33 unicorns with US\$25 billion flowing in to support them. By joining forces, both start-up ecosystems can make significant gains. Adding the UAE to the mix could create a plethora of opportunities.

In an age of hi-tech concentration, it is crucial to remember that there is great value in low-tech innovation. India and Israel could collaborate in this sphere to provide solutions to many problems in the Global South, which is India’s focus during its G20 presidency. India’s cheap digital payment system, for example, could be replicated and scaled up rather easily in other developing countries.

India and Israel could collaborate in this sphere to provide solutions to many problems in the Global South which is India’s focus during its G20 presidency.

India’s Adani Group’s acquisition of Haifa port in 2022 has paved the way for increased cooperation between the two countries on both regional and local infrastructure projects, in addition to I2U2’s integrated food parks and renewable energy projects worth US\$2.3-billion in India. Another infrastructure project that has attracted India and Israel is the ‘India-Arabian-Mediterranean Corridor’ to Europe, which links ports in India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Greece. Such projects could provide further opportunities for exploring new synergies both bilaterally and beyond.

## Strategic Value Addition

Politically, while many ascribe domestic-ideological reasons for the recent growth in India-Israel relations, the relationship has now reached a state of maturity in which foreign policy continuity, irrespective of the political orientation of the governments in power, is one of the mainstays of both countries.

This is evident on several fronts. One, successive Indian governments from different political mainstreams have forged ahead with their Israel policy and one of the chief foreign policy successes of the current government, ironically, is in West Asia. Two, the same is evident in Israel’s India policy which enjoys wide bipartisan support. Another indication of this formulation is that Israel’s Abraham Accords with Arab neighbours has so far won the active support of at least four governments.

While the recent resumption of Saudi-Iran diplomatic ties will test Israel’s foreign policy further, it is interesting that India-Israel ties have remained dehyphenated from both the Palestinian and Iran issues. This is testimony to the respect each of them has for the other’s strategic autonomy, which combines well with their pragmatic foreign policies.

Looking ahead, defence and security ties will remain important in the face of growing regional uncertainty and global instability. In a rapidly changing global landscape, which is evident in the superpowers’ actions and perceptions in West Asia, building trust and long-lasting relationships is essential. India and Israel, with other partners, must explore and develop robust cooperation in multiple areas not only to help shape the developments in West Asia but also to facilitate shaping the future of an increasingly reglobalising, multipolar and multi-networked world.



# The Truth About Our Failure to Curb Carbon Emissions

We all know what needs to be done: reduce carbon emissions. But so far, we members of global humanity just haven't been able to turn the tide. The latest IPCC report documents that carbon emissions are still increasing, despite all the promises and efforts of the past few decades. The report tells us there's only a narrow (and rapidly shrinking) pathway to averting climate catastrophe. That path requires us to cut emissions 50 percent by 2030, and to reach net zero emissions by 2050. So far, we're going in the opposite direction.

Why is this so hard? Because it would require sacrifice. Why would it require sacrifice? Let's walk through the logic:

1. Lowering emissions requires reducing our extraction and burning of fossil fuels. But right now, 85 percent of our energy comes from fossil fuels, and energy is what makes the economy go and grow.

2. Replacing fossil fuels with low-emissions energy sources like solar and wind would still give us energy, but right now it takes fossil energy to build solar panels, wind turbines, batteries, and all the other electrical infrastructure we would need to replace the fuel-based infrastructure we now have.

3. Renewable energy sources require energy investment up front for construction; they pay for themselves energetically over a period of years. Therefore, a fast transition requires increased energy usage over the short term. And, in the early stages at least, most of that energy will have to come from fossil fuels, because those are the energy sources we currently have.

4. Again, the only way to reliably reduce emissions is to cut fossil fuel extraction and combustion directly and immediately. As we have seen over the past decades, just waiting for renewables to replace fossil fuels is too slow. Global emissions increased last year despite a record nearly 10 percent growth in renewables.

5. So, if more fossil energy will be needed for the energy transition, but we need to extract less coal, oil, and gas overall, that means that, at least over the next couple of decades, much less fuel will be available for non-transition purposes—i.e., for



transport, manufacturing, and food production, which are the mainstays of the economy.

That's why we can't just do it. That's why, when governments get to

favor of more fossil energy extraction.

(By the way: mainstream reporting on Biden's recent approval of the Willow oil project has missed the fact that the approval probably had a lot



decision points like having to approve or deny permits to drill for oil in Alaska, the decision often goes in

to do with declining amounts of oil flowing through the Alyeska pipeline that delivers oil to the West Coast

states; if the amount of flow declines much more due to the depletion of older oilfields, the pipeline could freeze up in the winter and become useless, depriving those blue states of a half million barrels a day of crude, which would be hard to replace.)

Our collective impasse in addressing climate change is the fault not just of greedy oil executives. Policy makers want to avoid any decision that would result in economic hardship. So, they punt in favor of business as usual, and as a result the pathway to averting climate doom narrows that much more.

At the same time, our fossil fuel supplies deplete further, giving us less of an energy cushion for building an energy system to replace the current one that relies on coal, oil, and gas.

The best answer is a managed reduction in fossil fuel extraction accompanied by a rationing system that preferentially directs declining fossil fuel supplies toward energy transition projects while distributing remaining fuel supplies to industry and households for only the most essential purposes. Programs would also be needed to offset the impacts of scarce energy on lower income households and countries.

Policymakers may find this unthinkable, because they have built their careers on the assumption that the economy must always grow, and that people must always be promised the opportunity to consume more. Yet until public discussion turns in the direction of managed energy descent and rationing, nothing will happen to avert climate hell.

Which is a shame for two reasons. First, of course, it condemns present and future generations to weather extremes and all the suffering associated with hotter and less stable conditions. Second, it forecloses the possibility of an energy descent in which hardships are fairly shared, along with opportunities for learning to live better with less. And such opportunities could be plentiful if only we were to look for them.

We're at a crisis point. A sacrifice is needed. Only a sacred cow will do. Economic growth is our society's most sacred of cows. And guess what? The cow is sick anyway.



# Hundreds Of Thousands Of Workers' Mega Transport Strike Halts Germany

A mega transport strike, unseen over decades, halted Germany. With the largest strike over decades, Airports, train stations and bus stations across Germany were at a standstill on Monday. The strike is the result of demands for wage hikes issued by several major trade unions.

As Europe's biggest economy reels from inflation, Germany has been brought to a standstill by the "mega strike", as two powerful unions — public sector union Verdi, which represents 2.5 million workers, and transport union EVG, which represents around 230,000 employees at Deutsche Bahn and some other bus companies, — joined forces to cripple the country's transport infrastructure.

Media reports said:

Airports, bus stops, and train stations were at a standstill across Germany on Monday, as more than 400,000 public transportation employees took part in a 24-hour strike. The workers are demanding pay rises to compensate for inflation, which has soared in Germany since last year.

The strike began at midnight and is set to end at midnight on Tuesday.

Eight major German airports were affected, with the German Airports Association estimating that around 380,000 travelers were left stranded. Munich Airport shut down entirely from Sunday onwards, with all flights canceled and its terminal deserted.

Deutsche Bahn said on Monday that all long-distance services were canceled, while regional services were only restarting in some areas by Monday evening.

Trams, buses, and metro lines were also affected throughout the country.

Freight trains were halted too, as was shipping traffic in and out of Hamburg, Germany's largest port and Europe's third-busiest.

Verdi seeks a pay rise of 10.5%, but no less than €500. EVG, demands a 12% wage increase but no less than €650.

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser told Reuters on Monday that an agreement between the government and the unions will likely be reached this week.

Roughly 400,000 workers took part in the strike, Verdi chief Frank Werneke told German media. Newspapers in Germany described the walkout as a "mega strike," calling it the largest such disruption in decades.

Werneke told the German newspaper Bild that securing a pay rise is "a matter of survival for many thousands of employees" struggling to cope with the rising cost of living.

Once Europe's economic powerhouse,



Germany has seen its industrial output shrink and inflation rise to 8.7% in February, up from a steady rate of 0-2% between the mid-1990s and the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine last year.

Germany was heavily dependent on Russian gas and oil imports before the conflict, which all but ceased following the EU's imposition of sanctions and the allegedly U.S.-orchestrated destruction of the Nord Stream gas pipelines. Although the German government announced in January that the country would narrowly avoid a recession this year, credit ratings agency Fitch predicted earlier this month that the German economy will enter recession by late 2023.

Other media reports said:

German airports and train stations resembled ghost towns on Monday as workers downed their tools in a 24-hour strike.

In one of the largest strikes in years, flights, train services and buses were cancelled across the country.

The aim is "to make it unmistakably clear to employers that workers are behind our demands", said Verdi boss Frank Werneke ahead of negotiations with the government this week.

State rail company Deutsche Bahn criticized the action, describing it as "excessive and overblown".

Frankfurt Airport, Germany's largest air hub, confirmed that over a thousand flights had been cancelled.

Traffic jams were not as severe as expected at rush hour as many workers appear to have taken the chance to work from home.

Local councils have warned that the unions' demands will bite into the public purse at a time when money is tight.

Municipalities "will be forced to raise taxes for rubbish collection, entrance fees for swimming pools or property tax", said

Gerd Landsberg, head of the association of local government, to Bild newspaper.

The strike caused disruption for millions at the start of the working week during one of the largest walkouts in decades

The 24-hour "warning" strike were the latest in months of industrial action which has hit major European economies as higher food and energy prices dent living standards. They kicked off three days of wage talks which could lead to further strikes if they fail to yield a compromise. Employers have offered 5% more wages over a period of 27 months and a one-off payment of 2,500 euros — proposals unions, which are calling for double digit hikes, call unacceptable amid soaring inflation which reached 9.3% in February.

Germany, particularly hard hit by higher prices as it scrambled for new energy sources, and inflation rates exceeding the euro-area average in recent months.

Worsening chronic labor shortages give unions a strong negotiating hand, economists say.

The Airports Association ADV estimated that 380,000 air passengers were affected by flight suspensions including at two of Germany's largest airports in Munich and Frankfurt. In Frankfurt alone, almost 1,200 flights for 160,000 passengers were cancelled and stranded travelers slept on benches.

Rail services were also cancelled by railway operator Deutsche Bahn. Striking workers wearing yellow or red high-visibility jackets blew horns, sirens and whistles, held up banners and waved flags during protests.

In Cologne, the lack of city trains prompted a dash for taxis.

"Millions of passengers who depend on buses and trains are suffering from this excessive, exaggerated strike," a Deutsche Bahn spokesperson said on Monday.

Persistent cost pressures have pushed central banks to a series of interest rate

increases, with policymakers urging Germany to avoid a destabilizing price-wage spiral.

The interior ministry said the demands were equivalent to extra costs of 1.4 billion euros per year — and if that wage agreement were extended to other public sector workers as well as retired civil servants, judges and soldiers, it would equal 4.7 billion euros in total.

A government spokesperson on Monday said politics should stay out of the wage talks, while Interior Minister Nancy Faeser expressed confidence that a solution would be found this week.

EVG chairman Martin Burkert warned further strikes were possible, including over the Easter holiday period.

"We have been dragged along here for too long. The big ones benefit and the small ones, who keep everything running, get nothing," said striking worker Christoph Gerschner. "People have second or third jobs to make ends meet."

If independent mediation also yielded no result, "then the situation will get very dark in Germany", warned Ulrich Silberbach, head of the German Civil Service Association (DBB). "Then we will have to launch an indefinite, nationwide industrial action."

The union strife still pales in comparison with protests against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reforms in neighboring France which have sparked the worst street violence in years.

Commerzbank Chief Economist Joerg Kraemer said the economic impact of Monday's strike on Germany's 181-million-euro (\$194-million)-a-day transport sector was limited so far but this could change if the strikes persisted over a longer time.

"The losses are likely to be limited to the transportation industry because factories will continue to operate and many employees will be working from home."

The head of the Bundesbank, Joachim Nagel, said last week Germany needed to avoid a destabilizing price-wage spiral, which he had not so far observed.

"To be clear: Preventing inflation to become persistent via the labor market requires that employees accept sensible wage gains and that firms accept sensible profit margins," he said.

It all marks the latest in months of industrial action throughout major European economies, as higher food and energy prices dent living standards.

In Spain, air traffic controllers have walked out on several days throughout March, while Italy is also preparing for major strikes.



## 'Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar' worldwide box office score breaches Rs 200 crore mark



Ranbir Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor-starrer romantic-comedy "Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar" has crossed Rs 200 crore mark at the global box office, the makers said on Friday. In a post on Twitter, Luv Films said the Luv Ranjan-directed movie has raised a total Rs 201 crore worldwide since its release on March 8. "#TuJhoothiMainMakkaar crosses a love worth more than 200 Crore! Thank you

for your immense support," the studio tweeted. In a press note, the makers said the film's nett domestic collection stood at Rs 161 crore. "Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar" is produced by Luv Films and Ankur Garg and presented by Gulshan Kumar and Bhushan Kumar of T-Series. The movie also features Dimple Kapadia, Boney Kapoor and stand-up artist Anubhav Singh Bassi.

## Jennifer Aniston wears a Manish Malhotra lehenga in Murder Mystery 2



The internet went into frenzy when Hollywood actress Jennifer Aniston wore an Indian traditional lehenga for a wedding sequence in her upcoming movie Murder Mystery 2. It was designed by celebrity designer Manish Malhotra.

Aniston, who has a huge fan base in India, reacted to her look and called the attire beautiful. The chikankari lehenga was handpicked by renowned Hollywood costume designer

Debra McGuire.

Aniston said, "It was a beautiful, beautiful dress. It was extremely heavy and I wasn't expecting that. So much respect for all the beautiful women of India who wear it."

Murder Mystery 2 is a sequel to the 2019 film Murder Mystery featuring Jennifer Aniston and Adam Sandler as Nick and Audrey. The second part of the movie is available to stream on Netflix from March 31.

## Netflix gets notice for offensive remarks on Madhuri Dixit in The Big Bang Theory



OTT giant Netflix has been served a legal notice from political analyst Mithun Vijay Kumar. Vijay has claimed that show The Big Bang Theory has used inappropriate language for actress Madhuri Dixit.

In India, Netflix has the streaming rights of the show, therefore Vijay has moved

forward his notice against the platform.

In the first episode of the second season of The Big Bang Theory, character Raj Koothrapalli, played by Kunal Nayyar, says some derogatory words for Madhuri Dixit.

In a statement, Vijay said, "It is important to

hold companies like Netflix accountable for their actions and ensure that they are sensitive to the cultural values and sentiments of the communities they serve. I strongly believe that streaming service providers have a responsibility to carefully curate the content that they offer on their platforms. It is their duty to ensure that the material they present does not include derogatory, offensive, or defamatory content. I was deeply troubled by the use of a derogatory term in one of the shows on Netflix - Big Bang Theory. This term was used in reference to the acclaimed actress Madhuri Dixit, and it was not only offensive and deeply hurtful but also showed a lack of regard for her dignity."

## Kapil Sharma opens up about his battle with depression



Kapil Sharma recently appeared in the second episode of Kareena Kapoor Khan's chat show What Women Want and openly discussed his mental health issues. He talked at length about how people in his hometown were still unaware of the concept of mental health and depression.

Kapil revealed that when he finally spoke about his fight with depression, many people reached out to him on social media and offered help. In a candid conversation with Kareena, Kapil also shared that it was only after coming out of depression that he realised he had been depressed in childhood as well. He said, "But parents didn't think of it as depression."

Kapil also shared pictures from the sets and wrote, "Thank you for having me on your beautiful show @kareenakapoorkhan and team @mirchiplus love and best wishes for #whatwomenwant."



## The concept of bahu has changed, says Sneha Jain



While saas-bahu shows worked well with the audience earlier, actress Sneha Jain feels the trend is changing. The actress believes that now women are shown in much progressive and multi-dimensional roles, which are also received well by the audience.

She says, "At first, it was a typical saas-bahu scenario, where the husband used to go for work and the wife handled household chores. But now, there are lots of shows where women are independent and handling work along with the home. Even in my show, I was a housewife and a lawyer. We are now seeing

shows where women pursue a career after marriage, like Diya Aur Baati Hum, where the husband supports his wife. Even Anupamaa showcases a strong lead character. I feel proud to be part of this industry where these characters are doing so well now."

## Ajay Devgn's 'Maidaan' teaser has a 'Bholaa' connect

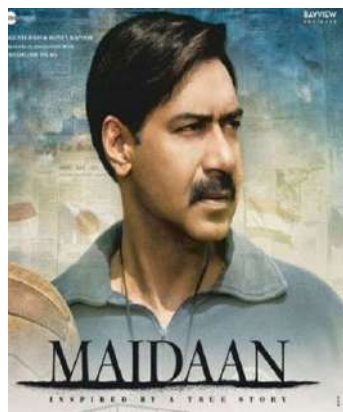
Ajay Devgn on Tuesday surprised his fans with a new poster of 'Maidaan' and its teaser release date. The teaser of his next will be released on the same day as the release of his action film 'Bholaa'.

The teaser of 'Maidaan' is set to release with 'Bholaa' on March 30.

Along with the poster, Ajay wrote, "One Man. One Belief. One Spirit. Based on a true story. #Maidaan mein utrega saara India. Teaser out on 30th March."

Based on a true story, Maidaan is helmed by Amit Ravindernath Sharma and co-produced by Boney Kapoor and Zee Studios.

The sports drama, dedicated to the golden years of Indian



football, also stars Priyamani Gajraj Rao and Boman Irani.

Ajay will be seen essaying the role of the legendary coach Syed Abdul Rahim, who is widely known as the founding father of Indian football. The screenplay and dialogues of the movie are

Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez, who recently was feted with at the Annual Los Angeles Festival of Film, Fashion, and Art for her international film, 'Tell It Like a Woman', has wrapped up the first schedule of her next film 'Fateh'.

Jacqueline was shooting for her part in Amritsar and seemed to have a great time with the film's team in the city. As she was shooting in Amritsar, the actress brought some glimpses of her amazing time in the city for her fans.

She took to her Instagram to share her memories from the north Indian city as she shared many things from



receiving a sketch of herself from a fan, enjoying the lassi to eating delicious Punjabi

food.

She wrote in the caption, "Thank you Amritsar #fateh @sonu\_sood @zeestudiosofficial @vaibhavmisra23 @fateh4bharat @ilcondor @shaanmu @marcepedrozo @sam\_debroy @gopikagulwadi"

Jacqueline had the best of her time while shooting for 'Fateh' which also stars Sonu Sood. The actress also visited the Golden Temple with Sonu.

Apart from 'Fateh' alongside Sonu Sood, Jacqueline also has 'Crack' alongside Vidyut Jammwal and Arjun Rampal in the pipeline.

## Allu Arjun 'feels blessed' as he completes 20 years in film industry, writes gratitude note



Actor Allu Arjun, on Tuesday, penned down a heartfelt note on social media as he completed 20 years in the entertainment industry.

Taking to Instagram, Allu wrote, "Today, I complete 20 years in the film industry. I am extremely blessed & have been showered with love. I am grateful to all my people from the industry. I am what I am because of the love of the audience, admirers and fans. Gratitude forever." Allu marked his acting debut with the Telugu romantic drama film 'Gangotri' which also starred Aditi Aggarwal and Prakash Raj in pivotal roles. Post that, the actor delivered some outstanding performances in films like 'Arya 2', 'Vedam', 'Julayi', 'Sarrainodu', 'Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo', 'Pushpa: The Rise' and many more.

Soon after the actor dropped the post, fans flooded the comment section with red hearts and fire emoticons. Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu wrote, "there's going to be fireworks soon!!" Rakul Preet Singh wrote, "Fav fav fav." Singer Shreya Ghoshal wrote, "Congratulations to you! What a journey." Cricketer David Warner wrote, "Well done mate." Armaan Malik commented, "Congrats anna more power to you! Thaggede." Meanwhile, Allu Arjun will be next seen in 'Pushpa: The Rule' along with actor Rashmika Mandanna. 'Pushpa: The Rise', an action entertainer directed by Sukumar, was released in theatres on December 17, 2021. The film, which stars Allu Arjun in the lead role, was widely praised. Fahadh Faasil was part of the film. The film was declared a blockbuster hit at the box office, and now Allu's fans are eagerly waiting for the film's second instalment 'Pushpa: The Rule'. The official release date of the film is still awaited. Apart from that, he also has director Sandeep Reddy Vanga's next film in his kitty.

## Shah Rukh Khan gifts himself a swanky SUV worth Rs 10 crore



Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, who has been garnering a lot of audience appreciation for his blockbuster 'Pathaan', has bought a mean machine. The actor is known for his love for cars and owns an impressive fleet of cars like Audi, BMW, Mercedes-Benz.

The latest car to join the fleet is Rolls-Royce Cullinan Black Badge SUV that costs over Rs 10 crore with personalised customisations. A video of SRK's new car has been doing round on social media.

The King of Bollywood was recently spotted driving his new car on the streets of Mumbai at night. SRK's new car comes in an Arctic White paint while the interiors are matched to a white leather. It also has the signature '0555' number plate.



# India beat Kyrgyz Republic 2-0 to clinch Tri-Nation title

## Imphal (Manipur, India)

The Indian football team won the Tri-Nation International Football Tournament 2023 after a 2-0 victory over the Kyrgyz Republic at the Khuman Lampak Stadium in Imphal, Manipur, on Tuesday.

As the capacity crowd of 30,000 cheered and applauded Sunil Chhetri and his men right from the word go, the Blue Tigers played some inspiring football against the higher-ranked Kyrgyz Republic to snatch a 2-0 victory and bag the Tri-National International Tournament Trophy with an all-win record under their belt and without conceding a goal.

Played during the FIFA window between March 22 and 28, 2023, Croatian coach Igor Stimac and his wards made the best out of it by winning both matches in the competition. They began their campaign with a 1-0 win over Myanmar and a rather emphatic scoreline against the Kyrgyz Republic on Tuesday put them in the enviable position of finishing the tournament with six points from two encounters.



Against the Kyrgyz Republic, the opening goal came from a rather unexpected quarter - centre-back Sandesh Jhingan found the target in the 34th minute. As Brandon Fernandes put the ball in style in front of the rival goalmouth off a free-kick, Jhingan pounced on it like a panther to find the back of the net. If the Kyrgyz Republic goalkeeper Tokotaev Erzhan had an inkling that the tall Indian defender would go for a header, then he was terribly

wrong as Jhingan waited for the ball to land and then swung it with a deft touch to give India the lead. It wasn't for nothing that the crowd turned the merriment into a rather wild one that lasted for a few minutes.

Indian coach Igor Stimac, on the eve of the match, spoke about going for all-out attacks despite the fact that a draw would have been enough to keep the trophy home. He certainly kept his word as India

launched a series of raids on the opposition goal whenever they had the opportunity. One such attack in the 84th minute saw the Kyrgyz Republic defence crumble under pressure as Naorem Mahesh Singh was brought down inside the penalty box by Davydov Nikolai.

The award of the spot-kick certainly came as a matter of double delight for the home fans. It wasn't only the second goal for India, but also the 85th international strike in his career for the Indian captain Sunil Chhetri. As the legend of Indian football stepped up to take the kick and then strike it to the corner of the net, the joy of the spectators knew no bounds. While Chhetri coolly walked back to his position after doing something that he has been doing regularly for the Blue Tigers since 2006, Stimac was spotted having a broad smile on his face and hugging his assistant coach Mahesh Gawli, who once was Chhetri's teammate in the National Team.

Overall, India were the deserving winners, their fifth

straight win on home turf. Stimac made six changes from the team that started against Myanmar, but it didn't at all break their rhythm. In fact, India could have won by a bigger margin -- the Kyrgyz Republic goal had a few close shaves as a couple of attempts from Chhetri and Chhangte missed the target by a whisker. If preparation for the AFC Asian Cup in January next was the chief purpose of hosting the tournament, then it was definitely a success as the Indians clearly displayed that they were growing in confidence before they take up the all-important continental challenge.

India XI: Gurpreet Singh Sandhu (GK), Sandesh Jhingan, Akash Mishra (Mehtab Singh 79') Anwar Ali (Naorem Roshan Singh 79'), Pritam Kotal, Anirudh Thapa (Rohit Kumar 67'), Suresh Singh Wangjam, Jeakson Singh Thounaojam (Sahal Abdul Samad 67'), Brandon Fernandes (Naorem Mahesh Singh 57'), Lallianzuala Chhangte, Sunil Chhetri (C).

## Lionel Messi scores hat-trick, surpasses 100 career goals for Argentina

### Santiago Del Estero

Lionel Messi scored a hat-trick and surpassed 100 career goals for Argentina with three in the first half of Tuesday's international friendly against Curacao.



The World Cup winners beat the Caribbean side 7-0 in their second match since clinching the trophy in December.

The 35-year-old Messi opened the scoring against Curacao in the 20th minute with a right-foot shot from the edge of

the box to reach the 100-goal milestone. Nico Gonzalez added another three minutes later with a header from close range.

Messi then scored his 101st for Argentina in the 33rd minute with a crossed shot to the right of the goalkeeper and his 102nd in the 37th after an easy run to score. Two minutes earlier, he had assisted Enzo Fernandez' blast from the edge of the box.

The Argentine captain trails only two players on the list of most goals scored for national teams in official matches; Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, with 122, and Iran's Ali Daei, with 109.

## Canadian teenager McIntosh sets 400m freestyle world record



Summer McIntosh set a world record in the 400m freestyle on the opening night of the Canadian swimming trials on Tuesday, the 16-year-old shaving 0.32 seconds off the mark set by Australia's Ariarne Titmus last year.

McIntosh finished in a time of 3:56.08 at the Toronto

Pan Am Sports Centre to beat Titmus's time of 3:56.40.

"I'm not a crier but this world record, I didn't think this was possible tonight," McIntosh told CBC Sports.

"It's absolutely incredible. I'm not an emotional person. But I was hit with so much emotion. Pure euphoria right

now.

"Over the past few years I've put my life into this. To be the best I can be. To achieve something like this, it was very unexpected. It was never in my dreams to do this tonight or even a few years ago. This just blows my mind." McIntosh's head coach Brent Arkey said the Toronto native was "one of the best racers I've ever seen".

"I'm not really sure what to say right now. I'm trying to hold it all in. But celebrating her. This is a special thing," he told CBC Sports.

Earlier this month, McIntosh ended American Katie Ledecky's nine-year home pool winning streak when she touched first in the 200m freestyle at a Pro Series swim meet in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.



## Indian Grand Prix 2: Tajinderpal Singh Toor wins shot put gold



### Thiruvananthapuram

Tajinderpal Singh Toor dominated the men's shot put in the AFI Indian Grand Prix 2 here today.

Toor won gold with a best effort of 19.76 metres. Toor is still looking for his first 20m effort of the year. Karanveer Singh won the silver medal with a throw of 19.17m.

Tamil Nadu's Archana

Suseendran defeated Hima Das in the 100m final and made the most of the Assam sprinter's disqualification in the 200m to claim a double gold. Archana won the 100m in 11.52 seconds, 0.22 ahead of Hima, and the 200m in 23.21 seconds.

Sanjeet Singh (Haryana) edged out Amiya Kumar Mallick (Odisha) by a hundredth of a second in the men's 100m.

## Arjun Tendulkar To Debut For Mumbai Indians In IPL 2023? Rohit Sharma Gives One-Word Reply

### Mumbai

Arjun Tendulkar has been a part of the Mumbai Indians franchise for the past two years, but he has not made his debut yet in the Indian Premier League. In 2021, he suffered an injury and in 2022, he was not given a chance despite MI finishing last in the points table. Arjun, who is the son of legendary cricketer Sachin Tendulkar, has been practicing with the side ahead of the IPL 2023 and when asked about his possible debut, skipper Rohit Sharma gave an answer that will not disappoint the young cricketer.

"Good question. Hopefully," Rohit said at the pre-tournament press conference.

Head coach Mark Boucher was also present at the event, and he told reporters that Arjun has impressed many with his bowling and if he is ready, he

will surely be considered for selection.

"Arjun is just coming off from an injury. He is going to be playing tonight. Hopefully we can see what he can do. I think he has been playing very good cricket, especially in terms of bowling, in the last 6 months. So yes, if we can have him available for selection, it will be pretty good for us," Boucher added.

Boucher also opened up about the possibility of resting Rohit for a few games in the course of the tournament as India will be playing the ODI World Cup later in the year.

"In regards to resting Rohit, he is the captain. Hopefully he gets into some sort of form and hopefully does not want to rest, but we will be adapt to whatever the situation is," Boucher told the media.

## Pakistan May Not Play Its 2023 ODI World Cup Games In India

### Mumbai

With the confusion over where Indian cricket team and Pakistan cricket team over where the two sides might play in the Asia Cup, ESPN Cricinfo has reported a fresh development on the World Cup front. The ODI ICC World Cup is being held in India in October-November. According to the report, Pakistan could play its matches in Bangladesh. "The idea has been discussed at the ICC level," the report claimed. This reported development comes as a hybrid model is coming up as an option for host venue of the Asia Cup.

Also, Wasim Khan, former CEO of the Pakistan Cricket Board and the current General Manager of Cricket for the International Cricket Council (ICC) in an interview with ARY News claimed that Pakistan might also play their World Cup matches at a neutral venue.

"I don't know if it would take place in a different country but a neutral venue is highly likely," said Wasim on a question regarding the likely neutral venue for India's Asia Cup fixtures.

"I don't think that Pakistan will play their matches in India. I think their matches will also be held at a neutral venue just like India's Asia Cup matches," Wasim added.

Pakistan were initially announced as the Asia Cup hosts. However, in October, 2022, the Pakistan Cricket Board was caught off guard by BCCI secretary Jay Shah, who stated that India would not travel to



Pakistan for the 2023 Asia Cup and that it would be held in a "neutral" venue. The PCB, under the then chairman Ramiz Raja, promptly responded and said that any such development might impact their plans to travelling to India for the World Cup.

Since then a stalemate has been there regarding the Asia Cup. According to report by news agency ANI, the Asia Cup 2023 is likely to be held in Pakistan, but India will play their games at a neutral venue. After a brief stalemate, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) are working quickly to broker a compromise that could result in both teams playing their tournament matches against one another outside of Pakistan. India are likely to play their Asia Cup 2023 matches in either England, Oman, Sri Lanka or UAE.

"A meeting between the

boards had been done a few days back and the tournament will be allowed to be held in Pakistan. India will play their matches at a neutral venue and will not travel to Pakistan, the venues where India could play their matches are likely to be Oman, UAE, England, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Though the decision will be decided later," a source told ANI.

The foreign location is still to be determined, although the UAE, Oman, Sri Lanka, and possibly England are viable candidates to host India's matches, including at least two matches between India and Pakistan. The neutral venue is not confirmed but the UAE, Oman, Sri Lanka and even England are potential contenders. If India book their place in the Asia Cup final, the summit clash will take place at a neutral venue.

## Nikhat Zareen second Indian to win world title twice; Lovlina becomes world champion

### New Delhi

'Two-time reigning world champion' — this tag has a nice ring to it, and Nikhat Zareen certainly loves it. After coming through against a tough opponent in Vietnam's Nguyen Thi Tam in the 50kg final on Sunday, the Hyderabad girl was relieved and happy for two reasons.

One, this was the second successive year that she has been crowned the world champion,

emulating MC Mary Kom, who had been the only Indian to achieve this feat. Two, her latest win came in an Olympics weight category, where she had to come through tough bouts to reign supreme.

The final could have gone either way as both the boxers had their moments in the ring. Nikhat clearly won the first round after she came out flying, but she was pegged back by the Vietnamese

in the next two. Tam won the second round 3-2 as she was able to breach Nikhat's defences on a number of occasions.





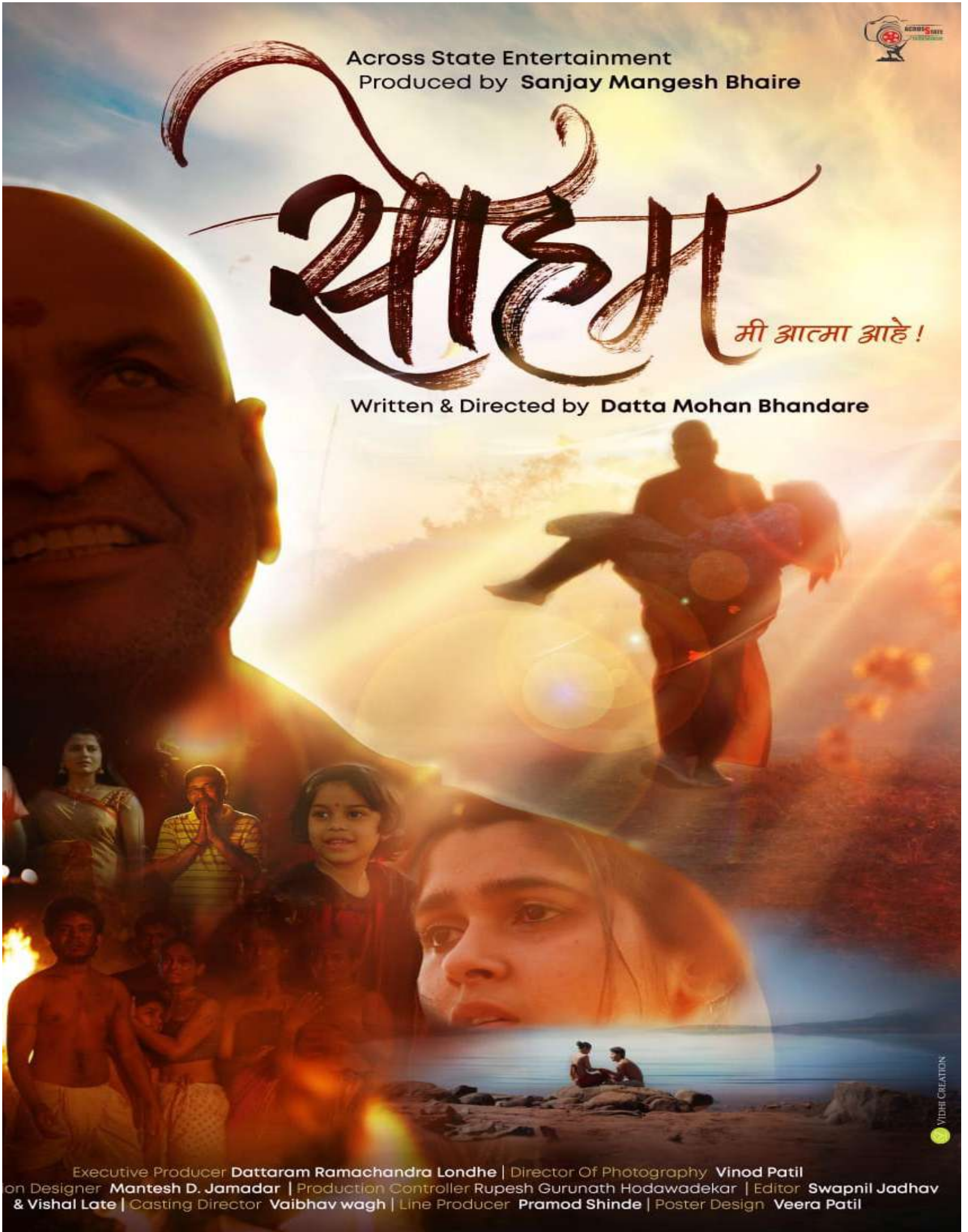


Across State Entertainment  
Produced by Sanjay Mangesh Bhaire

# साहम

मी आत्मा आहे !

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 & **Vishal Late** | Casting Director **Vaibhav wagh** | Line Producer **Pramod Shinde** | Poster Design **Veera Patil**