Delhi Hits 52.3 Degrees, Highest-Ever Recorded Temperature In India

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New Delhi

India reported its highest-ever temperature at 52.3 degree Celsius today. A temperature monitoring station in Delhi's Mungeshpur reported this figure at 2.30 pm.

Explaining the reason behind the rising temperature, India Meteorological Department (IMD) regional head Kuldeep Srivastava said the city's outskirts are the first areas to be hit by hot winds from Rajasthan.

"Parts of Delhi are particularly susceptible to the early arrival of these hot winds, worsening the already severe weather. Areas like Mungeshpur, Narela and Najafgarh are the first to experience the full force of these hot winds," he told news agency PTI.

The temperature was more than nine degrees higher than expected, the second day of record-breaking heat, and pushed up the mercury by more than degree from the 2002 record of 49.2 degree Celsius.

It also rained in Delhi briefly on Wednesday evening, which is likely to raise the humidity level.

Delhi's primary weather station Safdarjung observatory recorded a maximum temperature of 46.8 degree Celsius, highest in 79 years.

The IMD issued a red alert health notice for Delhi, with an estimated population of more than 30 million people. The alert warns there is a "very high likelihood of developing heat illness and heat stroke in all ages", with "extreme care needed for vulnerable people".

India is no stranger to searing summer temperatures, but years of scientific research have found climate change is causing heatwaves to become longer, more frequent and more intense.

The national capital reported its all-time high power demand of 8,302 megawatts (MW) amid the heatwave as more and more residents turned on power-intensive air-conditioning, electricity department officials said.

Other areas that reported extremely high temperature are both in the desert state Rajasthan - 51 degree Celsius in Phalodi, and 50.8 degree Celsius.

Sirsa in Haryana recorded 50.3 degree Celsius.

A fall of up to 4 degree Celsius over south Rajasthan districts - Barmer, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Sirohi, and Jalore - has been recorded today due to moist wind incursion from the Arabian Sea, indicating the beginning of the heatwave reduction over northwest India.

Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) data, which uses computer models to process current weather observations to forecast future weather, are of the view that this decreasing trend would further extend northwards bringing gradual respite from heatwave conditions from May 30.

Also, incursion of moist winds from the Bay of Bengal from Thursday is likely to cause a gradual fall in maximum temperature over Uttar Pradesh.

Pune car crash: Panel set up to probe conduct of Juvenile Justice Board members

Pune

The Maharashtra government has set up a committee to probe the conduct of the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) members and check if norms were followed while issuing orders in the Pune car crash case, an official said on Wednesday.

The five-member committee was formed last week by the state women and child development department (WCD), he said. It is headed by a deputy commissioner-rank officer from the department and is expected to submit its report by next week, the official said.

Two IT professionals in their 20s were killed as their motorcycle was hit by a speeding Porsche, allegedly driven by a 17-year-old boy, in the early hours of May 19 in Kalyani Nagar area of Pune. According to police, the teenager was drunk at the time. The JJB granted bail to the teenager hours after the incident. It also asked him to write a 300-word essay on road accidents, an order that drew criticism.

WCD commissioner Prashant Narnavare said the JJB comprises a member from the judiciary and two persons appointed by the state government.

"We have formed a committee to probe the overall conduct of the JJB members appointed by the state government, to check whether norms were followed while issuing orders in the car accident case," he said. "I have powers under the Juvenile Justice Act to probe the overall conduct of the members who have been appointed by the state government. We have set up a committee to assess the overall conduct of the JJB members in connection with the order that granted bail to the juvenile after the accident," said Narnavare.

The committee was formed immediately after the (bail) order was issued, he added.

Another three-member committee is also conducting an inquiry into the alleged manipulation of the blood samples of the juvenile driver. On Monday, police claimed the juvenile's blood samples were discarded and replaced with another person's samples which showed no traces of alcohol.

NCP's Jitendra Awhad Apologises After Tearing Ambedkar's Photo During Protest, BJP Hits Back

Mumbai

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday reacted strongly after Jitendra Awhad, leader of the National Congress Party (NCP) led by Sharad Pawar, stirred a major controversy and tore down the poster of Babasaheb Ambedkar during a protest against the inclusion of a verse from Manusmriti in the curriculum. However, after drawing widespread condemnation, Awhad issued an "unconditional apology" to the people of Maharashtra for hurting their sentiments.

"While protesting against Manusmriti in a spirit of emotion, I tore down the poster as the word Manusmriti was written on it. I did not realise Babasaheb's photo was on it. The opposition will play politics on it. I made a mistake. I apologise for being too absorbed!" Awhad said explaining the incident.

BJP, NCP (AJIT PAWAR FACTION) HITS BACK

Condemning Awhad's action, the BJP attacked the Sharad Pawar-led NCP faction and said, "They tore down posters of Babasaheb. This is not just an insult to Ambedkar but to the entire Dalit community."

Meanwhile, the NCP-led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar demanded a criminal case against Jitendra Awhad for tearing the photo Ambedkar, sources reported.

NCP chief spokesperson Umesh Patil demanded that Awhad should be arrested at the earliest and the state government should immediately file a case against him for tearing down Dr BR Ambedkar's portrait and trampling upon it. "In the name of burning the Manusmriti, Bhagendra (Jitendra) Awhad tore down Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue and trampled it," Patil added.

Patil further asked Sharad Pawar to answer Ambedkarites about what action he is going to take against Awhad. He also said that Awhad should be expelled from the party.

NCP announces Shivajirao Nalavade as candidate for MLC elections

Mumbai

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) state president MP Sunil Tatkare, on Tuesday, announced the candidature of Shivajirao Nalavade as the NCP candidate from Mumbai Teachers Constituency for the upcoming biennial legislative council elections slated for June 26.

Nalavade's candidature decision was announced in the parliamentary board meeting held in the presence of NCP leaders including NCP National President and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, National working president MP Praful Patel, State President MP Sunil Tatkare, and Mumbai Divisional President Sameer Bhujbal.

Nalavade is one of the founding members of the NCP and has served as the Mumbai district president for the party and was the former chairman of Mumbai Bank. He is currently working as the director of the bank. His contribution to the cooperative movement is seen as invaluable.

He will be pitted against the Shiv Sena UBT's JM Abhyankar whose candidature was announced by Sena UBT last week.

On Monday, the Raj Thackeray–led Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) announced Marathi film director and MNS functionary Abhijit Panse as its candidate for the Konkan Graduates' constituency in the upcoming biennial legislative council elections. This constituency is currently represented by BJP's Niranjan Davkhare.

Bombay HC issues notice on plea by Sachin Waze seeking bail in bribery case registered by CBI

Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday issued a notice on a plea by dismissed police officer Sachin Waze seeking bail after being incarcerated for over two years in a corruption case involving former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh and others.

Waze claimed that he had spent over two years in prison in a case where no chargesheet had been filed despite having been granted pardon by the special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court.

A vacation bench of Justices Nitin R Borkar and Somasekhar Sundaresan issued a notice to the CBI and the Superintendent of the Taloja Central Prison where Waze is presently in judicial custody, seeking their response during the next hearing.

Senior advocate Aabad Ponda and advocate Rounak Naik representing Waze argued that it was "completely unfair" for a person to be behind bars especially when the person was pardoned as approver.

"It is completely unfair for a person to stay behind bars. There is no chargesheet and I have been behind bars for over 2 years. Meanwhile, the others have been granted bail, so the trial will take at least 20 years. An approver who is never going to go to jail after the trial as he is a witness, is presently in jail. So essentially this is a challenge under Article 21 also," Ponda submitted.

The bench has now posted the matter for hearing on June 14.

Waze was arrested by the CBI in 2022 on allegations that he had collected bribes on behalf of Deshmukh from bar owners in Mumbai.

As per Waze, on June 1, 2022, the CBI, under Section 306 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) had granted consent for him to be made as approver in the case.

On June 1, 2022, special CBI court granted leave to Waze to become an approver on his application under Section 306 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

In his handwritten petition, Waze claimed that he had not been named as an accused in the chargesheet, but a witness. Despite this, his bail pleas were being rejected by the special court while the other accused were let out on bail, the plea argued.

Waze sought direction from High Court to issue a writ of habeas corpus with an order that he be produced in court on the ground of wrongful detention. He also sought to be released under Section 167(2) of the CrPC as no chargesheet had been filed against him as an accused.

Waze also challenged the constitutionality of Section 306(4) of the CrPC. The section deals with granting of pardon to accomplices and sub-section (4) states that the approver may be detained in prison till completion of the trial.

Waze claimed that to impose complete prohibition on release of an approver from custody seemed unreasonable.

"To let a person languish in jail only because he chose to help the State in bringing the other offenders to justice, seems to be unreasonable. Under the guise of imposing complete prohibition against a person being released from custody defies logic and reasons. Possibly one can say, reasonable restrictions can be imposed," the plea claimed.

Recklessly uttering that public servant was 'cheater, corrupt' not abuse but defamation: Bombay HC

Mumbai

Observing that recklessly uttering that public servant was 'cheater, corrupt' can hardly be said to be a form of abuse but instead constitutes defamation, the Bombay High Court recently refused to set aside proceedings against a real estate agent for shouting in presence of few persons that the police officer was 'corrupt and cheater' despite being exonerated by ACB.

The bench noted that defamation proceedings were justified as the accused was aware that Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) had closed an inquiry against the cop on allegations of disproportionate assets.

A single-judge bench of Justice N J Jamadar passed a verdict earlier this month in a plea by the accused Naresh Kanayalal Rajwani challenging December, 2022 order passed by the sessions judge whereby his revision application against the February, 2019 order of Magistrate court to initiate proceedings against him under section 500 (punishment for defamation) of IPC was dismissed. The complainant was working as police official for nearly 30 years till 2009 and when he was posted as Police Sub-Inspector (PSI) at Chembur Police station, he became acquainted with Rajwani who was a real estate agent. In 2011, the retired cop and his family members approached the accused to purchase shops and a dispute arose between them and Rajwani.

As per the complainant cop, Rajwani made false and vexatious allegations and wrote to the superior of the cop and the ACB claiming that he had amassed wealth disproportionate to his known source of income.

He later approached HC in 2016 with a writ petition seeking registration of FIR against the ex-cop, which was dismissed by court in 2017. The ACB conducted an open inquiry against the ex-cop and closed the inquiry in 2018 as it could not find disproportionate assets and informed the businessman about the same.As per the ex-police officer who ran a medical and general store, in May, 2018, Rajwani came to his shop and the presence of few known persons, workers in the shop and customers, he shouted 2-3 times about the ex-cop being corrupt, which prompted the complainant to lodge a defamation case and the magistrate initiated proceedings in the same in 2019.

After the sessions court upheld the magistrate's decision, the aggrieved Rajwani approached the HC last year. Advocates Abhinav Chandrachud and Snehal Chaudhari for the accused claimed that utterances were not made with intent to harm the reputation of the complainant and were at best abusive but not defamatory. "Hurling of abuses without intent to harm the reputation of the person to whom the abuses are hurled does not constitute defamation," he argued.However, Justice Jamadar observed that "the accused knew that the concerned investigating authority found no substance in the allegations, and, yet the accused made the said imputation."

"In the backdrop of the surrounding circumstances, especially the dismissal of the writ petition and the exoneration by the ACB, the imputation can only be said to have, prima facie, been made with intent to harm the reputation of the complainant, thus, satisfying the criteria mentioned in section 499 of IPC. Prima facie, the element of good faith was non-existent. To utter that a public servant was cheater and corrupt, can hardly be said to be a form of abuse.

Instead, if made recklessly and sans good faith, such imputation, prima facie, constitutes defamation," the bench observed and dismissed the plea.

Dombivli reactor blast: Chemical company owner's wife, who is director in firm, held

Mumbai

Sneha Mehta (35), the wife of Amudan Chemical Pvt Ltd owner Malay Mehta (38) and one of the two directors in the firm, was arrested by Thane police crime branch on Tuesday in connection with the May 23 reactor blast in the company in Dombivli MIDC in which 10 people were killed. Sixty eight people were injured in the incident and nine people are still missing. "Sneha, who is director in the Amudan company along with her husband Malay, was questioned and after her role was established in the preliminary probe, she was placed under arrest. She will be produced in court tomorrow," said senior inspector Ashok Koli of Thane crime branch.

The death toll in the incident is likely to increase as charred bodies and body parts recovered from the incident site are beyond recognition. Only three of the deceased have been identified as of now, and nine families are yet to get a "confirmation" about their missing family members. The police are depending on DNA tests to ascertain the identity of the deceased.

Lok Sabha Phase 7: 299 Crorepati Candidates; Harsimrat Kaur Badal Richest

New Delhi

As the 2024 Lok Sabha elections reach their final phase, the spotlight falls on the **distribution of wealth** among the candidates. A total of 904 candidates from 57 parliamentary constituencies across eight states and Union Territories are vying for seats, with the voting scheduled for Saturday, June 1, and the counting of votes to be held on June 4. Notably, **a third** of these candidates have declared assets exceeding ₹ 1 crore, highlighting a significant concentration of wealth among the political hopefuls.

Out of the 904 candidates, 299 have declared assets worth more than ₹ 1 crore. This group includes 111 candidates with assets over ₹ 5 crore, 84 candidates with assets between ₹ 2 crore and ₹ 5 crore, 224 candidates possessing assets between ₹ 50 lakh and ₹ 2 crore, 257 candidates with assets ranging from ₹ 10 lakh to ₹ 50 lakh, and 228 candidates with assets below ₹ 10 lakh. Wealth distribution among the

Phase VII candidates of Lok Sabha 2024 Elections

The infographic shows the wealth distribution among the 904 candidates across 57 constituencies in 8 states.

State-Wise Crorepati Candidates

In terms of crorepati candidates, Punjab leads with the highest number of 'crorepati' candidates, boasting 102 out of 328 contestants. Uttar Pradesh follows with 55 out of 144 candidates. Bihar has 50 'crorepati' candidates out of 134, while West Bengal has 31 out of 124. Himachal Pradesh

presents a higher percentage with 23 out of 37 candidates being 'crorepati'. Chandigarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha have 9, 9, and 20 candidates respectively with assets worth more than ₹ 1 Crore.

Party-Wise Crorepati Candidates

The Bhartiya Janata Party has the highest number of crorepati candidates, with 44 out of 51 candidates falling in this category. The Congress follows with 30 out of 31 candidates. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has 22 crorepati candidates out of 56. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) each have 13 crorepati candidates. Independent candidates also have a significant presence, with 80 out of 375 candidates being crorepatis.

₹ 3 Crore Found In Cash After Searches In Punjab In Illegal Mining Case

New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday carried out searches at 13 locations in the Ropar district of Punjab in the illegal mining case, officials said. The raids are still underway by ED's Jalandhar-based teams, said the agency officials privy to the development. Officials revealed that illegal mining activities were occurring on land previously seized by the ED in connection with the infamous Bhola drug case. The case is currently at a crucial stage of trial before the Special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court. The investigation has identified several individuals and entities involved in the illegal mining operations, including Nasibchand, a known mining mafia figure, and Shree Ram Stone Crushers. So far, the ED has recovered a total of ₹ 3 crore during the searches, officials reported.

Indian Peacekeeper Radhika Sen To Get UN Award For Gender Advocacy

Mumbai

Indian Army Major Radhika Sen has been selected to receive a UN award recognising her advocacy for women and girls while serving as a peacekeeper, Stephane Dujarric, the Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, announced here.

Dujarric said that Guterres will present Radhika Sen with the 2023 Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award on Thursday, which is observed as the International Day of UN Peacekeepers.

The award recognises the efforts of a military peacekeeper in promoting the principles of the 2000 Security Council resolution that calls for protecting women and girls from conflict-related sexual violence and sets gender-related responsibilities for the UN.

Congratulating her, Guterres called her "a true leader and role model. Her service was a true credit to the United Nations as a whole".

Sen served with the Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) where she helped create the Community Alert Networks in North Kivu as a platform that brought in community leaders, young people, and women "to voice their security and humanitarian concerns", according to the UN.

With her MONUSCO colleagues, she worked to address those concerns.

Guterres said that "with humility, compassion and dedication", she earned the trust of "conflict-affected communities, including women and girls" as her troops engaged with them "in an escalating conflict environment in North Kivu".

Sen said, "Gender-sensitive peacekeeping is everybody's business - not just us, women. Peace begins with all of us in our beautiful diversity."

"This award is special to me as it gives a recognition to the hard work put in by all the peacekeepers working in the challenging environment of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and giving their best to bring a positive change in the society," she added.

Hailing from Himachal Pradesh, Ms Sen is a biotech engineer who was studying for a master's degree at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay when she decided to join the Army.

She was assigned to MONUSCO in 2023 as the Engagement Platoon Commander with the Indian Rapid Deployment Battalion, and completed her tenure in April 2024.

Ms Sen is the second Indian peacekeeper to receive the honour after Major Suman Gawani, who served with the UN Mission in South Sudan and received the award in 2019.

Of the 6,063 Indian personnel in UN peacekeeping operations, 1,954 serve with MONUSCO, 32 of them women.

The UN said that Radhika Sen, who led mixed-gender engagement patrols and activities, became a role model for both men and women by fostering "a safe space for men and women to operate together under her command".

She also made sure that peacekeepers under her command operated with sensitivity to gender and sociocultural norms in the eastern DRC "to help build trust and thereby increase her team's chance of success", the UN said.

Among the activities she launched for women were English language classes for children, and health, gender, and vocational training for adults.

"Her efforts directly inspired women's solidarity, providing safe spaces for meetings and open dialogue", the UN said.

Delhi At 52.3, Iran Airport At 66 Degrees Celsius: How Earth Is Becoming "Inferno"

New Delhi

In recent years, the world has witnessed extreme weather events that underscore the growing severity of climate change. India's capital Delhi joined the list of regions that have seen record temperatures - mostly above 50 degrees Celsius. The temperature in Delhi reached 52.3 degrees Celsius, the highest-ever in India. Another alarming development was reported from Iran where the heat index caused the temperature to soar to an unprecedented 66 degrees Celsius in July last year. These examples show the major shift Earth's climate is undergoing, causing concern among environmentalists.

What is heat index?

The heat index, often referred to as the "feels-like" temperature, combines air temperature and relative humidity to estimate the human-perceived temperature. High humidity levels impede the body's ability to cool itself through sweating, making the heat feel much more intense. A heat index of 66 degrees Celsius is life-threatening, exceeding the thresholds that the human body can endure for extended periods.

What about Delhi?

According to Kuldeep Srivastava, regional head of India Meteorological Department (IMD), the already high temperature in Delhi broke record because of hot winds from Rajasthan.

"Parts of Delhi are particularly susceptible to the early arrival of these hot winds, worsening the already severe weather. Areas like Mungeshpur, Narela and Najafgarh are the first to experience the full force of these hot winds," Mr Srivastava said. Mungeshpur in northwest Delhi is the place where 52.3 degrees Celsius was recorded.

Mahesh Palawat from Skymet Weather told news agency PTI that open areas with vacant land experience increased radiation, leading to exceptionally high temperatures due to direct sunlight and lack of shade.

The Iran shocker

The extraordinary temperature at Persian Gulf international airport was termed unsafe for human survival. Weather experts said the temperature reached 40 Degrees Celsius in the region, with a relative humidity of 65 per cent, according to NOAA data. This created an apparent temperature of 66.7 degrees Celsius.

Extreme heat can have devastating impact on humans. According to vaccine alliance GAVI, it leads to dehydration and if a person doesn't drink enough water to replace that lost through sweating and urination, the blood starts to thicken, making it more prone to clotting, which increases the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Exposure to high temperature can also amplify existing health problems, making older people and those with chronic conditions at particularly high risk.

The role of climate change

◯ The extreme heatwave in Iran is symptomatic of broader climatic shifts driven by global warming. Key factors contributing to such extreme weather events include:

◯ Rising global temperatures: The Earth's average temperature has increased by approximately 1.2 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times, primarily due to the accumulation of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere.

◯ Altered weather patterns: Climate change disrupts traditional weather patterns, leading to more frequent and intense heat waves, prolonged droughts, and other extreme weather events.

◯ Simultaneous heatwaves are also suffocating many other parts of the world. China, for example, recorded its highest-ever temperature of 52.2 degrees Celsius in Sanbo township in 2023. Reacting to these developments, Dr Akshay Deoras, from the University of Reading's meteorology department, said that Earth will become an "inferno" if the heatwaves don't spur on governments to tackle global warming.

S&P Global Upgrades India's Outlook From Stable To Positive Amid Robust Growth

New Delhi

Global rating agency S&P Global today revised India's outlook from stable to positive, as the country continues to excel in long-term economic growth amid political stability.

S&P Global said that the "positive outlook reflects our view that continued policy stability, deepening economic reforms, and high infrastructure investment will sustain long-term growth prospects".

"That, along with cautious fiscal and monetary policy that diminishes the government's elevated debt and interest burden while bolstering economic resilience, could lead to a higher rating over the next 24 months," the rating agency said in a statement.

S&P Global expects cautious fiscal and monetary policies to reduce the government's debt and interest burden, thereby strengthening economic resilience.

This could result in a higher rating within the next 24 months.

"We may also raise the ratings if there is a sustained and substantial improvement in the central bank's monetary policy effectiveness and credibility, such that inflation is managed at a durably lower rate over time," S&P Global noted. However, S&P Global said it could revert the outlook to 'stable' if political commitment to sustainable public finances weakens.

The ratings agency also affirmed 'BBB-' long-term and 'A-3' short-term unsolicited foreign and local currency sovereign credit ratings.

"We expect sound economic fundamentals to underpin the growth momentum over the next two to three years," the ratings firm said.

TMC tricked OBCs for 'vote jihad': PM Modi

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday accused the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal of snatching the rights of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and giving these away for "appeasement politics and vote jihad", asking if the ruling party would now let loose its goons on judges "who had exposed its treachery".

The PM was speaking in Barasat and Baruipur in Bengal ahead of the final phase of voting on June 1 in nine parliamentary segments of the state. His reference was to the recent Calcutta High Court judgment declaring as illegal OBC certificates granted to nearly 77 communities, of which, the majority, he said, were Muslims. He claimed the BJP would be the top gainer in Bengal elections this time and the TMC "was fighting for existence".

In 2019, the BJP had won 18 of the state's 42 parliamentary segments. The TMC got 22 seats and the Congress two.

At Barasat, Modi, in a veiled attack on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, castigated her for questioning the HC

order and said, "The court has exposed the treachery of the Trinamool with OBCs. The party snatched the rights of OBC youths to support its appeasement politics and vote jihad."

The PM also questioned Mamata's "we will not accept the court order" remarks and said, "It is quite clear that the TMC doesn't like those who expose its treachery and deceit. I am stunned at how the party is questioning the judiciary. Don't they have any faith in the judiciary and the Constitution? The way they are attacking judges is unprecedented. I would like to know whether the TMC would now let loose its goons on judges as they stand exposed. The entire country is seeing how the TMC is strangulating the judiciary in West Bengal."

He also slammed Mamata for her recent remarks against seers of the Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha saying organisations engaged in spiritual advancement were being threatened by the TMC to appease its vote bank.

Renewing the corruption pitch against opposition INDIA bloc partners, he said the "corrupt will not be spared". The PM later held a roadshow from Kolkata's Shyambazar Five Point Crossing to Simla Street, where the ancestral house of Swami Vivekananda is situated.

Rajkot fire tragedy: Another game zone partner held; one accused died in blaze, say police

Ahmedabad

The Gujarat police have arrested one more partner of the Rajkot-based TRP game zone where a fire last week killed 27 people, while another accused died in the blaze, officials said on Wednesday.

The total number of arrests has gone up to five, according to police.

Kiritsinh Jadeja, a partner in Raceway Enterprises, which operated the game zone, was arrested from Rajkot-Kalavad road on Tuesday night, Rajkot Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Parthrajsinh Gohil told PTI.

Jadeja is among six partners of the TRP game zone named

as accused in the fire incident and booked under various Indian Penal Code provisions, including culpable homicide not amounting to murder.

"We arrested accused Kiritsinh Jadeja near Rajkot last night, taking the total number of arrests made in the case so far to five," Gohil said.

"Out of six persons named in the FIR, one Prakash Hiran has died in the fire. During examination, the DNA sample of one of the deceased matched with that of Hiran's kin, confirming his death," the official said.

The police had earlier arrested Yuvrajsinh Solanki, Rahul Rathod, Dhaval Thakkar, all game zone partners, and its manager

Nitin Jain, as per officials.

The accused have been booked under IPC sections 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 308 (attempt to commit culpable homicide), 337 (causing hurt by an act that endangers the life or personal safety of others), 338 (causing grievous hurt to a person by doing an act that endangers their life or personal safety) and 114 (someone present when offence is committed).

The blaze at the game zone on May 25 claimed 27 lives, with most of the victims charred beyond recognition.

Samples of all the deceased and their kin were collected for DNA analysis and sent for forensic examination to Gandhinagar.

In Phase-6, women take 3% lead over men

New Delhi

The Election Commission on Tuesday revised the absolute voter turnout for the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections to 63.3 per cent from 61.2 per cent. Interestingly, 64.9 per cent women and 61.9 per cent men exercised their right to franchise. In the fifth phase too, at 63 per cent, women voters outnumbered

their male counterparts (61.48 per cent).

The absolute voter turnout for the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections rose by 2.1 percentage points to 63.3 per cent, from the preliminary figure of 61.2 per cent, as per the data released by the Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday.

Polling for the sixth phase was held on 58 seats on May 25 in eight states and UTs — Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal

and Anantnag (J&K). The initial voter turnout on these 58 seats till late hours of May 25 was recorded at 61.2 per cent.

In the sixth phase, the highest turnout has been recorded by West Bengal at 82.7 per cent, followed by Odisha at 74.5 per cent. Uttar Pradesh recorded the lowest turnout among the eight states and UTs which went to polls in the sixth phase, at 54 per cent, while Haryana and Delhi recorded turnouts of 64.8 per cent and 58.6 per cent, respectively. Among the 58 seats which saw polling in the sixth phase, West Bengal's Bishnupur witnessed the highest turnout of 85.9 per cent, while Pratapgarh in UP saw the lowest turnout at 51.4 per cent.

Till date, as per the absolute figures available for all the six phases, the turnout has been 66.14 per cent for the first phase, 66.71 per cent for the second phase, 65.6 per cent for the third phase, 69.16 per cent for the fourth phase, 62.2 per cent for the fifth phase and 63.3 per cent for the sixth phase.

Prajwal Revanna books flight from Munich, likely to reach Bengaluru on Friday midnight

Bengaluru

Suspended JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna, who is facing sexual abuse charges, has booked a return flight ticket to Bengaluru from Munich on May 30, official sources said on Wednesday.

According to sources in the Special Investigation Team, the 33-year-old grandson of JDS supremo HD Deve Gowda is expected to land in Bengaluru in the small hours of May 31.

The SIT is maintaining vigil at the Kempegowda airport here to arrest him as soon as he lands, they said.

The MP, who is seeking re-election as the NDA candidate from Hassan Lok Sabha segment, fled to a foreign country as soon as the news broke out that the Karnataka State Commission for Women requested Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to order an investigation into the huge cache of explicit videos showing several women being sexually assaulted allegedly by him.

So far two cases of sexual assault have been registered against Prajwal.

Two days ago, the Hassan MP released a video message in which he promised to appear before the SIT on May 31 and cooperate with the inquiry.

The MP has twice cancelled the flight ticket from Germany in the past, sources said.

Meanwhile, the SIT conducted searches at Prajwal's residence in the district headquarters town of Hassan on Tuesday which went on till late in the night.

"Some incriminating materials have been seized," they said.

Signal to Pakistan, China to help Congress in polls? BJP blasts Congress over Mani Shankar Aiyar's 'alleged China invasion' take

New Delhi

With just a day left for the 2024 Lok Sabha election campaign to end, the ruling BJP on Wednesday latched on to Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's "China allegedly invaded India in 1962" remarks and asked if this is a signal to China to interfere in the Indian election and help the Congress.

Aiyar had on Tuesday said "China allegedly invaded India in 1962", with Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh in a rare late night retort quickly distancing the party from Aiyar's remarks and saying the 1962 China invasion of India was real.

Ramesh said Aiyar had apologised and that he should be given concession for his age.

But the BJP was unsparing as it fielded national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia to question top Congress leaders for Aiyar's statements.

"Can Aiyar say this without the approval of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi? The serious question is why Rahul and Kharge are allowing people like Mani Shankar Aiyar to break the morale of our brave soldiers. Why are they making anti-India statements during elections? Is it a signal to these nations to interfere and help the Congress because they know the Congress is getting decimated," said Bhatia.

He said 43,000 sq km of Indian land was captured by China during the 1962 war when Jawaharlal Nehru was the prime minister.

"This land is still under China and the issue is alive. How does the Congress call it an alleged invasion? This is a live issue where India still has claim over every inch of the land and Mani Shankar Aiyar gives a clean chit to China," said Bhatia.

Asking why Kharge and Rahul were silent on this, Bhatia said, "During elections within a span of one week Mani Shankar Aiyar has said two worrisome things. We all know the relations between India and China. India has been showing China its place and at such a time these disturbing signals are being given by the Congress and Aiyar. These signals clearly show the anti-India mindset of the Congress. Similar signals were sent to Pakistan when Aiyar a few days ago said even Pakistan is in possession of an atomic bomb and so India should be careful."

Naveen Patnaik will become ex-CM of Odisha after June 4: Amit Shah

New Delhi

Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday claimed that Naveen Patnaik would become the former Chief Minister of Odisha after June 4, the day results of Lok Sabha polls and Assembly elections in the state would be declared.

He expressed confidence about the BJP forming the next government in the state by securing more than 75 seats in the 147-member state Assembly. He made these remarks while addressing an election rally at Chandbali, which falls under the Bhadrak Lok Sabha seat in Odisha. Shah also claimed that the saffron party was set to win 17 of 21 Lok Sabha seats in the eastern state.

"Come June 4, and Naveen Babu will no longer remain the Chief Minister, he will become the former CM of Odisha. The BJP is set to win 17 Lok Sabha seats and 75 Assembly constituencies in the state," he said.

Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are being held simultaneously in Odisha. Shah added that the BJP would ensure that the next Chief Minister is fluent in Odiya and understands the state's language, culture and traditions.

"Should a 'Tamil babu' run the government from behind the scenes? By casting your vote in favour of the lotus symbol, bring a 'jan sevak' to rule the state in place of an officer," Shah said, making an indirect reference to Patnaik's close aide and BJD leader VK Pandian, while addressing rally in Jajpur.

Stating that the youths of Odisha were migrating to other states in search of jobs, the Home Minister said once the BJP forms government in the state, "We will set up industries so that youths don't have to look for jobs elsewhere".

Election Commission recommends suspension of Special Secretary to CM

Bhubaneswar

With three more days to go for the final phase of polling in Odisha on June 1, the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday suspended IPS officer DS Kutey and ordered medical examination of another police service officer Asish Singh, who is on leave.

In a letter to the CEO, Odisha, the EC said 1997 batch IPS officer DS Kutey, who is presently working as the special secretary to the Chief Minister, be placed under suspension on the charge of "interfering" in the conduct of election.

During the suspension period, Kutey's headquarters is fixed at the office of Resident Commissioner, Odisha, New Delhi, where he has to report by 3 pm on Wednesday, the letter said.

In the case of Asish Singh, an IPS officer of 2010 batch, presently working as IG (CM security), being on medical leave since May 4, be present himself for detailed examination by a special medical board constituted by the Director, AIIMS, Bhubaneswar, not later than May 30.

The EC also directed the expeditious investigation under due process of law in the case against BJP's MLA candidate Prashant Jagdev for damaging EVM in a polling booth.

2 killed in road accident involving convoy of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son in UP's Gonda

New Delhi

Two people died and another is critical after being struck by a car in the convoy of BJP candidate Karan Bhushan Singh in Uttar Pradesh's Gonda district.

The injured child has been admitted to hospital, while the driver of the vehicle has been apprehended.

According to the FIR based on the complaint by Chanda Begum, the incident took place around 9 am when her 17-year-old son Rehan and 24-year-old nephew Shahzade, who were riding a motorcycle, were struck by the speeding SUV coming from the opposite direction.

Both died on the spot, while another person who was injured has been admitted to hospital.

The police have impounded the vehicle and apprehended the driver.

However, it is yet to be confirmed whether Karan Bhushan Singh was part of the convoy.

Singh is contesting the Kaiserganj Lok Sabha seat, stepping in for his father and incumbent MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. The car involved in the accident is said to be registered under an entity owned by the former WFI chief's family.

Eyewitnesses say the convoy was en route to Huzurpur on Colonelganj-Huzurpur Road when the tragedy struck near Baikunth Degree College.

There are reports of road blockades by agitated locals, demanding accountability for the incident. Police personnel are present at the scene.

Supreme Court Registry refuses to list Arvind Kejriwal's plea for extension of interim bail

New Delhi

In a setback to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Supreme Court Registry on Wednesday refused to list for hearing his plea seeking extension of his 21-day interim bail by seven days on medical grounds in a money-laundering case linked to the excise 'scam'.

The Registry termed Kejriwal's application "not maintainable" on the grounds that he was given liberty by the top court to move the trial court for regular bail.

It pointed out that a Bench led by Justice Sanjiv Khanna – which on May 10 granted 21-day interim bail to Kejriwal to campaign in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls – has already reserved its judgment on his petition challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate, sources said.

Arrested on March 21 by the ED – the AAP national convener was released on a 21-day interim bail by the top court on May 10 to campaign in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. He was ordered to surrender on June 2.

The Supreme Court had on May 17 reserved its verdict on Kejriwal's petition challenging his arrest by the ED in the case. The top court had, however, said 'without prejudice to his rights and contentions', Kejriwal was free to move the trial court for grant of bail "in accordance with law".

Refusing to urgently list Kejriwal's plea seeking one-week extension of his interim bail in a money-laundering case linked to the excise 'scam' on medical grounds, a Vacation Bench of Justice JK Maheshwari and Justice KV Viswanathan had on Tuesday referred his plea to Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud for taking a call.

Senior counsel Abhishek Manu Singhvi had mentioned Kejriwal's plea before the Vacation Bench for urgent listing, saying the Chief Minister has been advised certain medical tests that would take a week.

However, pointing out that a Bench of Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Dipankar Datta has already reserved its verdict on Kejriwal's petition challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in the case, Justice Maheshwari had said he would refer it to the Chief Justice of India for passing an appropriate order.

In his capacity as the 'Master of Roster', it's the CJI who decides on the composition of Benches to hear cases.

"Why didn't you mention it when Justice Datta was sitting on the Vacation Bench last week? Let the Hon'ble CJI take a decision as it raises the issue of propriety...we will send it to the CJI," the Bench had said.

Citing high ketone and blood glucose levels, sudden unexplained 6-7-kg weight loss and possible life threatening conditions, Kejriwal had on Monday moved the Supreme Court seeking extension of his 21-day interim bail in the money-laundering case by seven days.

Congress asks PM Modi why action against TMC leaders stalled after they joined BJP

New Delhi

The Congress on Wednesday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi why CBI's action against Suvendu Adhikari and ED's action against Tapas Roy got stalled after they left the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and joined the BJP.

On the eve of his Bengal visit on Wednesday, Congress general secretary (in charge of communication) Jairam Ramesh said CBI filed an FIR against the then TMC MP Suvendhu Adhikari in connection with the Narada scam in April 2017. The CBI sought sanction from the Lok Sabha speaker to prosecute him in April 2019. Adhikari joined the BJP in December 2020, and the CBI never received the Lok Sabha speaker's sanction.

Similarly, TMC leader Tapas Roy was raided by the ED in January 2024 in connection with a money laundering case. He had joined the BJP in March 2024. Just

a few months prior to his joining, Adhikari had alleged that Roy was involved in a municipal recruitment scam but this allegation also disappeared once Roy joined the party.

"PM Narendra Modi's 'Bhrashtachar Hatao' slogan is shamelessly plastered all over the country even as his party is busy handing tickets to corrupt politicians. Can the outgoing PM shed any light on why CBI and ED action against these leaders has been stalled? How can the BJP make pretensions to eradicating corruption when

their 'washing machine' is clearly at full spin in West Bengal?" Ramesh said.

The Congress also accused PM Modi of withholding Rs 7,000 crore of ration funds from West Bengal because his face is not "plastered" on ration.

"In an incredibly petty move, the Centre has been withholding National Food Security Act funds from West Bengal for not displaying the outgoing prime minister's face on ration shops. In an attempt to coerce the state government into displaying sign boards and flexes featuring the outgoing prime minister's photos, the Centre has withheld Rs 7,000 crore of paddy procurement funds. This could seriously hinder the state's paddy procurement and the availability of rice for the public distribution system. "Why has the outgoing PM so callously neglected the health and wellbeing of the people of West Bengal? Is his publicity more important

than people's daily food?" Ramesh asked.

Ramesh said, "Modi Sarkar has blocked National Health Mission funding to over 11,000 sub-health centres in West Bengal. These sub-health centres form the first line of defence for India's poor - they are staffed by nurses and provide vaccines for children, tablets and medicines for common fever, malaria, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases. While the sub-centres are supposed to be called Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres, the state government had named them Sushasthya Centres. In a letter dated November 25 2023, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare wrote to states, ordering them to rename sub-centres 'Ayushman Arogya Mandir' and paint them orange. The medical community has criticised this attempt by the BJP to 'saffronise' medical centres, and the state government has refused to implement it.

Iran says Saudi Arabia has expelled 6 state media journalists ahead of hajj after detaining them

Dubai

Iran said Wednesday that Saudi Arabia expelled six members of a crew from its state television broadcaster after they had been detained for nearly a week in the kingdom ahead of the hajj.

Saudi Arabia did not immediately acknowledge the incident, which comes a year after Riyadh and Tehran reached a Chinese-mediated détente. However, there have been tensions for decades between the Sunni and Shiite powerhouses over the holy sites in the kingdom, particularly around the upcoming hajj pilgrimage.

Iranian state TV described the arrests as beginning over a week ago when three crew members were detained while recording a Quranic reading at the Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina. It offered no detail about what sparked their detention, but said the men after "several hours of questioning" ended up held at a police detention centre.

Two days after that, Saudi police detained a journalist from Iran's Arabic-language Al Alam channel and another state TV journalist after they got out of a car to attend a prayer service with Iranian pilgrims, state TV said. Another radio journalist was detained at a hotel in Medina.

It said the six men later were released and expelled to Iran without the opportunity to take part in the hajj, a pilgrimage required of all able-bodied Muslims once in their lives. The expulsion came after efforts by both state TV and Iran's Foreign Ministry to have the men released.

Iranian state TV insisted the men committed no crime and that their detention was unwarranted.

"They were carrying out their normal and routine task when this happened and they were arrested," said Peyman Jebeli, the head of Iran's state broadcaster, known as Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. "We are not aware of the reason they were arrested and sent back to the country."

Saudi officials did not immediately acknowledge the incident and did not respond to a request for comment on Wednesday.

Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are considered "not free" under rankings by the Washington-based organisation Freedom House, with scores of zero in their metric on whether a country has a free and independent press.

Iran, the largest Shiite Muslim country in the world, and Sunni powerhouse Saudi Arabia severed diplomatic ties in 2016 after Saudi Arabia executed prominent Saudi Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr. Angry Iranians protesting the execution stormed two Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran.

Last year, Chinese mediation restored ties despite Saudi Arabia still being locked in a yearslong stalemated war with Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Saudi Arabia had previously severed ties with Iran from 1988 to 1991 over rioting during the hajj in 1987 and Iran's attacks on shipping in the Persian Gulf. That diplomatic freeze saw Iran halt pilgrims from attending the hajj in Saudi Arabia. Iranian pilgrims briefly were stopped from attending hajj over the most-recent round of tensions as well.

Iran has insisted in the past that its pilgrims be allowed to hold large-scale "disavowal of infidels" ceremonies — rallies denouncing Israel and Saudi ally the United States. Saudi Arabia bans such political demonstrations at hajj, which is attended by about 2 million Muslims from around the world.

Pakistan arrests 140 suspects for alleged involvement in attacks on Christians in Punjab province

Lahore

Pakistan's Punjab police on Wednesday claimed to have arrested a total of 140 suspects involved in attacking members of the Christian minority, their properties and police personnel on the issue of alleged desecration of the Quran.

A charged mob led by radical Islamist Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) activists last week attacked the Christian community in Mujahid Colony in the Sargodha district of Punjab, some 200 km from Lahore, that left two Christians and 10 policemen injured.

The mob burned and ransacked the homes and properties of the Christians.

According to Punjab police spokesperson Mubashir Hussain, some 140 suspects involved in the Sargodha incident have been taken into custody so far. "They are arrested in light of video and CCTV footage. It has been ensured that no innocent is rounded up," he said and added many of them have been sent to jail on judicial remand.

Police booked over 450 people under terrorism and other charges.

According to the FIR, a mob surrounded the residence and shoe factory of Nazir Masih alias Lazar Masih (an elderly Christian), accusing him of desecration of the Quran.

The enraged mob set fire to the shoe factory, some shops and a couple of houses. "The mob also brutally torched Masih but the timely arrival of a heavy contingent of police saved the lives of Masih and 10 other members of the Christian community," the FIR said.

It says some pages of the holy Quran were reported to have been found outside the shoe factory of Masih. This instigated the locals. Although the family of Masih denied desecration of the Quran the mob wanted to lynch him.

"The enraged mob pelted stones at police personnel when they resorted to baton charge to disperse it. At least 10 policemen, including officers, have been injured," as per the FIR.

According to the residents' accounts recorded by a team led by Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation (CICF), the blasphemy charges brought up against Lazar Masih were a "consequence of a festering resentment between Lazar's family and the local Muslim community over a drainage issue."

Masih's nephew, Irfan Gill also confirmed that the former's grandsons were often drawn into a fight by the local Muslims over the same issue.

"On May 22, three days prior to the incident of May 25, the provocation was dispensed by Ayub, a neighbour working as a dairyman. Two of Masih's grandsons somehow got involved in a fight with Ayub and ended up going to the local police station to file a complaint against the dairyman," CICF said.

Three days later, the Mujahid Colony's loudspeakers were resounding with charges of blasphemy against Masih.

Last year, at least 24 churches and over 80 houses belonging to Christians in Jaranwala tehsil of Faisalabad district, some 130 km from the provincial capital, were burnt down by a mob enraged over reports that two Christians had desecrated the Quran.

Dozens killed in fresh Israeli attacks on Rafah: Palestinian medics

Cairo

Israel's military denied striking a tent camp west of Rafah on Tuesday after Gaza health authorities said Israeli tank shelling had killed at least 21 people there, in an area Israel has designated a civilian evacuation zone.

Earlier, defying an appeal from the International Court of Justice, Israeli tanks advanced to the heart of Rafah for the first time after a night of heavy bombardment, while Spain, Ireland and Norway officially recognised a Palestinian state, a move that further deepened Israel's international isolation.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, reiterated its opposition to a major Israeli ground offensive in Rafah but said it did not believe such an operation was under way.

Describing the US view of what would constitute a major offensive in Rafah, White House national security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters that it would involve "large numbers of troops in columns and formations in some sort of coordinated maneuver against multiple targets on the ground." "That is a major ground operation," Kirby said. "We have not seen that."

Modi in Punjab

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi addressed three election rallies in Punjab in two days against the backdrop of farmers' protests. His visit to the state came more than two years after the Ferozepur fiasco of January 2022, when a road blockade by protesters had forced him to turn back without addressing a rally in the run-up to the Punjab Assembly elections. The PM has had a troubled relationship with the state's farming community ever since the Centre enacted three contentious farm laws in September 2020. The legislation had triggered a year-long agitation by farmers of Punjab and other states at Delhi's borders, where they braved the elements with remarkable resilience. What peeved the protesters was the apparent indifference and apathy of the powers that be. It was only in November 2021 that the Modi government finally relented and decided to repeal the laws. However, even this historic climbdown

has failed to placate the state's farmers, whose main demand is a legal guarantee for the procurement of all crops at the minimum support price (MSP). The ruthless scuttling of the Dilli Chalo march in February further widened the trust deficit. Talks on the MSP issue have proved inconclusive, even as BJP candidates have been facing stiff opposition in many villages, where the saffron party is being accused of betraying farmers.

Amid such bitter resistance, PM Modi chose to play the Sikh card in Punjab, patting himself on the back for the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib corridor in 2019. He added that had he been the PM in 1971, he would have taken Kartarpur Sahib from Pakistan before releasing their 90,000-odd soldiers in the wake of the Bangladesh war. He also lauded his government for reopening files of cases related to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. But his outreach to Sikhs may cut no ice with the irate farmers, who are in no mood to forgive the BJP for the humiliation and vilification suffered by them, especially during the 2020-21 stir.

// satyasya paramaṁ nidhānam //

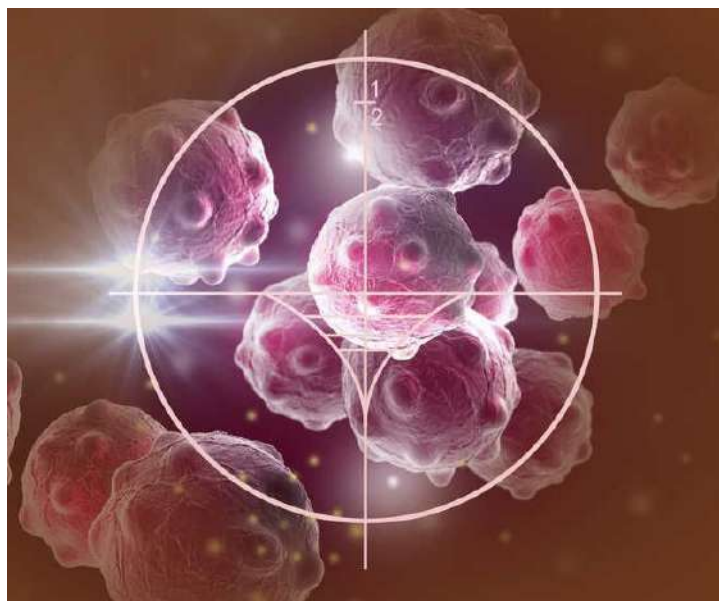We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on editor.acrossstate@gmail.com

Cancer challenge
Vulnerability of younger people worrying

A new study has concluded that cancer is increasingly affecting younger people in India. According to the Cancer Mukt Bharat Foundation, launched by a group of oncologists, 20 per cent of the cancer cases in the country are being detected in men and women below the age of 40; around 60 per cent of these patients are men. The most prevalent cases are of head and neck cancer (26 per cent), followed by gastrointestinal cancer (16 per cent), breast cancer (15 per cent) and blood cancer (9 per cent).

Experts have linked the rising risk of cancer in the younger generation with obesity, a sedentary lifestyle and higher consumption of ultra-processed food, besides tobacco and alcohol. Another worrying factor is the late

detection of cancer in two-thirds of the cases, indicating low levels of awareness about screening.

India, described as 'the cancer capital of the world' in a recent report released by a leading multinational

healthcare group, records more than a million new cases every year. The surge is estimated to surpass the global average by 2025. A focused approach is needed to handle cases of people under 40, who form an

important segment of the working-age population. The case burden can be reduced by lifestyle modification and effective screening strategies that detect cancer in the early stages. India needs to be well prepared for this silent epidemic, which threatens to reverse the economic gains made during its remarkable post-Covid recovery. Affordable and effective cancer care should be prioritised. Cancer research, too, must get the importance it deserves. Findings of various studies, such as the one which says that people with tattoos are at a higher risk of developing blood cancer, need to be widely publicised so as to raise awareness. A multipronged strategy can help India strongly combat the emperor of all maladies.

Muted voices

Young women take a back seat in Haryana polls

WHEN the results of Haryana's 10 Lok Sabha seats that went to the polls on Saturday are out on June 4, they will, sadly, reflect the muffled voices of women voters in the 18-19 age group, drowned out by the louder participation of their male counterparts. For, the data from the Election Commission of India reveals a glaring gender imbalance: only 34 per cent of these first-time voters are women. Of the nearly 4.2 lakh such

voters, a staggering 2.8 lakh are men. This disparity highlights the state's patriarchal character and deep-rooted societal biases, where the registration of young women as voters is often postponed until after marriage. Efforts by officials to encourage voter registration among young women face resistance. Many families prioritise marriage over political engagement, reinforcing a cycle of disenfranchisement.

Making matters worse, women's political agency is further limited as men are often seen dictating their choices. Equally skewed is the representation of women in the electoral fray. Of the 223 candidates in the contest in Haryana in the General Election, just 16 are women — including five from mainstream political parties — even though women constitute nearly 47 per cent of the voters. Major parties, despite their claims of supporting women's rights, have failed to field female nominees proportionately.

However, there is a silver lining in certain pockets of the state. Women are beginning to voice their concerns on issues like water supply, electricity and employment; an increased female participation at public meetings has also been witnessed. But a lot remains to be done to bridge the gender divide and dismantle patriarchal structures. Amplifying women's voices is essential for making India a truly transparent and inclusive democracy.

Rajkot tragedy

Laxity in enforcing fire safety norms inexcusable

THE fire at a Rajkot game zone, which left 27 persons dead, and the death of seven newborn babies in a Delhi hospital on Saturday are stark examples of how cheap life is in India. Just over a week ago, nine lives were lost when a bus caught fire with people sleeping inside near Haryana's Nuh district. The Rajkot disaster was waiting to happen. The summer vacation had just

begun, and the game zone was teeming with families enjoying a weekend outing. According to the police, the place neither had adequate fire-fighting equipment nor had obtained a no-objection certificate from the local fire department. As per the FIR, the owners of the commercial establishment endangered the lives of people despite knowing that a blaze on the premises could cause deaths and injuries. Taking suo motu cognisance of the case, the Gujarat High Court said it was prima facie a 'man-made disaster'. The court observed that such gaming zones and recreational facilities had come up without necessary approvals from competent authorities.

Even as the police have registered a case against six persons operating the game zone, a thorough probe is required to establish criminal negligence that led to the shocking incident. It needs to be ascertained whether any concession or relaxation was given to the owners by local officials. The HC has rightly sought details of the licences and permissions, including the one regarding compliance with fire safety regulations, that were given to various entertainment zones under the territorial jurisdiction of municipal corporations.

It is obvious that fire safety norms are being blatantly given the go-by. Such callous disregard for human life must not go unpunished. Unfortunately, no lessons seem to have been learnt from the Uphaar fire tragedy of 1997. Zero tolerance to violations should be the way forward. A nationwide audit is the need of the hour to rouse the authorities into action across the country.

Cannes acclaim

Talent of Indian filmmakers, financing in focus

INDIA's presence at the 77th Cannes Film Festival marked a significant milestone for its independent filmmakers. This year, India celebrated multiple firsts, showcasing its film industry's immense talent and potential on a global platform. The festival's recognition of Indian films and artistes is cause for national pride, highlighting their artistic excellence and the evolving landscape of cinema.

Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine as Light securing the prestigious Grand Prix, the festival's second-highest honour, is a landmark achievement. This film's nomination in the main category — the first for India in 30 years — represents a noteworthy breakthrough for our cinema. Kapadia's film offers a nuanced perspective that challenges conventional narratives. Anasuya Sengupta becoming the first Indian actor to receive the Best Actress award in the Un Certain Regard segment for her role in The Shameless exemplifies the growing appreciation of Indian talent beyond Bollywood. Chidananda S Naik's

Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know, which won the La Cinef top prize for best short film, underscores the creative prowess of emerging filmmakers. The accolades extended to the technical side, with cinematographer Santosh Sivan receiving the Pierre Angénieux ExcelLens in Cinematography award — the first Asian to receive this honour.

While commercial successes like RRR and Pushpa: The Rise have garnered global attention, the wins at Cannes are a testament to the diversity and depth of

Indian cinema. Notably, the success of these films was made possible through innovative financing strategies, including crowd-funding, international co-production and support from the government in the form of incentives. These funding avenues were instrumental in bringing genre-bending works to life, allowing filmmakers to explore the broader spectrum of Indian culture and creativity. Sustained support and promotion of indie films are essential to expanding India's presence on the world stage.

Two-state advocacy

Three European countries recognise Palestine

A coordinated move by Ireland, Norway and Spain to recognise the Palestinian state may be largely symbolic, but it reflects growing public outrage in Europe over the devastation and civilian death toll in Gaza, as well as Israel's deepening isolation. This decision followed discussions among several European nations, rooted in the belief that a fresh thrust for a two-state solution is essential. The diplomatic move in favour of Palestinian statehood signals a significant shift in Europe against Israel's excesses in Gaza, widely condemned as genocidal. Notably, Norway, a key player in the Oslo Accords of 1993, has emphasised that recognising Palestine is crucial for peace in West Asia, asserting that a two-state solution is in Israel's best interest. Ireland and Spain have echoed this sentiment,

underscoring the need to break the cycle of violence that has worsened since the October 7 attack by Hamas and the subsequent Israeli counter-assaults. Hopefully, it will inspire other Western countries to follow suit and step up international pressure for a ceasefire and meaningful negotiations. Salman Rushdie has also pitched into the already muddied

debate.

India has maintained a consistent policy, advocating for direct negotiations to establish a sovereign, independent Palestine coexisting peacefully with Israel. It has reiterated its long-standing support for a two-state solution, though Prime Minister Modi's tweet condemning the initial Hamas attack was interpreted by some observers as a shift in its stance.

Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants against the Israeli PM and Defence Minister and three Hamas leaders for alleged war crimes. With the International Court of Justice hearing South Africa's appeal to stop Israel's attacks in Rafah, the global clamour for accountability and justice is growing.

Reviewing Agnipath

Tweaks a must to allay fears over the scheme

REPEATEDLY described by the government as a game-changer and a force multiplier for the armed forces, the Agnipath scheme has been under intense scrutiny ever since it was rolled out in June 2022. The retention of only 25 per cent of the inductees after the completion of their four-year tenure has been a contentious point in military and political circles, with the Congress promising in its 2024 Lok Sabha election manifesto that it would scrap the scheme and revert to the old recruitment procedure that had been followed by the Army, Navy and the Air Force.

Weeks after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said that the government was open to bringing about any change in the scheme, 'if required', a leading newspaper has reported that the Army is conducting an internal survey to assess Agnipath's impact on the recruitment process; it is seeking the views of Agniveers, unit commanders and the staff at regimental centres. On the basis of the survey's findings, the Army is

likely to make recommendations to the next government on possible tweaks.

The Centre's reassurance that the future of young individuals inducted as Agniveers would not be adversely affected has failed to allay doubts and apprehensions about the job prospects of 75 per cent of the recruits, whose economic and social security would be at stake after their service period ends. The Congress is tapping into this unhappiness with the scheme and making it a poll issue in Haryana. A thorough review of Agnipath is in order, particularly the retention ratio. There is no quarrel with the objective of creating younger, fitter forces by reducing the average age of defence personnel, but the government must not lose sight of the long-term picture. Considering the widespread unemployment and underemployment in the country, the rehabilitation of tens of thousands of disgruntled, dispirited youth will require unswerving commitment from the public and private sectors.

Deadly turbulence
A wake-up call for the aviation industry

THE 1,800-metre descent of a Singapore Airlines airplane amid severe turbulence, which left a 73-year-old British man dead and 71 injured, is shocking. Marking the airline's first fatality in 24 years, it underscores the growing threat of disturbance in modern air travel. Turbulence, particularly the clear-air variety that is suspected in this incident, is a formidable threat despite advances in meteorological technology. Experts say that it is most hazardous as it often strikes without warning or visibility to pilots near jet streams and other atmospheric boundaries. The unpredictability makes it vital for passengers to heed the seatbelt sign at all times, as unbuckled individuals are at a higher risk of suffering injuries during such sudden episodes, even as turbulence fatalities are very rare.

The emergency landing in Bangkok and the treatment of injured passengers, including six in a critical condition, illustrate the severity of the incident as also the potential for harm by bumpy rides. A

thorough investigation, as promised by Singapore's Prime Minister, should unravel the causes of and circumstances around the deadly drop, thereby helping understand and mitigate such risks. It is believed that climate change is exacerbating turbulence. Scientists at Reading University have noted a significant increase in severe turbulence over the past four decades, attributing the rise to changing wind patterns driven by global warming.

As air travel soars, so does the likelihood of encountering turbulent zones, complicating flight planning and passenger safety. The aviation industry must adapt to these new realities. Enhanced forecasting tools, rigorous training for crew and stricter adherence to safety protocols are essential. Airlines must also prioritise passenger education, ensuring the importance of staying buckled up throughout the flight. As the skies get rougher, concerted efforts are needed to navigate these challenges and ensure safer journeys for all.

Adani Energy to raise up to Rs 12K cr via equity shares

New Delhi

The board of Adani Energy Solutions today approved a proposal to raise up to Rs 12,500 crore through qualified institutional placement of equity shares or other modes. The company will seek the approval of the shareholders at the ensuing annual general meeting, on June 25.

Government cracks down on SMS scammers; blacklists 8 principal entities found spewing fraud messages

New Delhi

In a major crackdown on SMS scammers, the government has blacklisted eight 'principal entities' behind SMS headers that were used for sending over 10,000 fraudulent messages over the past three months, according to an official release.

The Department of Telecom (DoT), in collaboration with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), has taken decisive action to protect citizens from potential SMS fraud through the Sanchar Saathi initiative, it said.

Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under MHA provided information about the misuse of eight SMS headers for sending fraudulent communications for committing cybercrime.

It was noted that more than 10,000 fraudulent messages were sent using these eight headers in the past three months. The eight principal entities which were

the owners of these eight SMS headers have been blacklisted.

"All the 8 PEs along with the 73 SMS Headers and 1522 SMS content templates owned by them have been blacklisted. None of these Principal Entities, SMS Headers or templates can now be used to send SMS by any telecom operator. The DoT has prevented further potential victimization of citizens by blacklisting these entities," the release said.

'Principal entities' in telecom parlance refer to business or legal entities sending out commercial messages to telecom subscribers through SMS. A header means an alphanumeric string assigned to a 'principal entity' to send commercial communications.

The DoT has prevented further potential victimisation of citizens by blacklisting these entities, and reiterated its commitment to safeguarding citizens against cybercrime.

"Citizens can report suspected fraud communications at Chakshu facility on Sanchar Saathi to help DoT in prevention of misuse of telecom resources for cyber-crime and financial frauds," the release said.

It warned that use of mobile numbers for telemarketing activities is not permitted.

If a consumer uses their telephone connection to send promotional messages, their connection will be liable for disconnection on the first complaint, and their name and address may be blacklisted for a period of two years.

Telemarketing calls can be identified by their prefixes: 180, 140, it said asserting that 10-digit numbers are not permitted for telemarketing.

"To report spam, dial 1909 or use the DND (Do Not Disturb) service," the release added.

Government revises wastage, input-output norms for gold, silver jewellery exports; industry 'disappointed'

New Delhi

The government on Monday revised norms related to permissible amount of wastage and standard input output with regard to export of gold and silver jewellery.

An industry official said the wastage norms have been eased and the manufacturers are disappointed with it.

"The wastage permissible and standard input-output norms with regard to export of jewellery have been revised," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade said in a public notice.

The official from the gems and jewellery export council said the industry was not consulted before taking this decision.

According to the public notice, weight of mountings and findings (or parts) of gold

or silver, if imported and used in export products, will not be included for determining net content of gold and silver in export products.

Standard input-output norms (SION) are rules that define the amount of input/inputs required to manufacture a unit of output for export purposes.

Input output norms are applicable for the products such as electronics, engineering, chemical, food products including fish and marine products, handicraft, plastic and leather products.

Government directs telecom operators to block incoming international spoofed calls

New Delhi

The government has directed telecom operators to block all incoming international spoofed calls that display Indian mobile numbers, an official statement said on Sunday.

The Department of Telecom (DoT) said that it has been reported that fraudsters are making international spoofed calls displaying Indian mobile numbers to Indian citizens and committing cyber-crime and financial frauds.

Such calls appear to be originating within India but are being made by cyber-criminals from abroad by manipulating the calling line identity (CLI) and have been misused in recent cases of fake digital arrests, FedEx scams, drugs or narcotics in courier, impersonation as government and police officials, disconnections of mobile numbers by DoT or TRAI officials, etc.

"DoT and Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) have devised a system to identify and block such international spoofed calls

from reaching any Indian telecom subscriber. Now directions have been issued to the TSPs for blocking such incoming international spoofed calls," the statement said.

The incoming international spoofed calls with Indian landline numbers are being already blocked by the TSPs as per the directions issued by DoT.

"Despite best efforts, there may still be some fraudsters who succeed through other means. For such calls, you can help everybody by reporting such suspected fraud communications at the Chakshu facility on Sanchar Saathi," the statement said.

Last week, the DoT issued directives to the telecom operators to carry out immediate re-verification of 6.8 lakh mobile numbers within 60 days that are suspected to have been obtained using invalid, non-existent, or fake documents.

The department has flagged around 6.80 lakh mobile connections as potentially fraudulent after advanced AI-driven analysis.

'Make in India' Range Rover soon

New Delhi

Fifty-four years after it started manufacturing Range Rover in the UK, Tata Motors-owned Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) has decided to drive home the British luxury brand along with Range

important part of it. With local manufacturing, Range Rover will enable the brand to respond to the growing demand across the country," said Geraldine Ingham, Managing Director, Range Rover.

In the last fiscal year, JLR

Rover Sport and produce these locally.

India will be the first country to manufacture the two SUVs exclusively outside the Solihull plant in the UK, the home of Range Rover since 1970. The additional production of the SUVs for the Indian market will supplement the global production of Range Rover.

The prices of the two luxury models, which will produced at JLR's facility in Pune, are expected to come down in the range of 18-22 per cent. Range Rover Velar, Range Rover Evoque, Jaguar F-PACE and Discovery Sport are already locally manufactured in Pune.

"In our 54-year-long history, we are witnessing an increasing demand for Range Rover across the globe. This is an unprecedented success story and India is a very

India reported retail sales of 4,436 units, witnessing a year-on-year growth of 81 per cent and one of the best performances in the market since the company's launch in India in 2009. The sales were the highest in the last five years.

"While Range Rover will now be 'Made in India' for clients in this market, its exemplary British design remains distinctive and will continue to define the aesthetic grace and technological sophistication that is synonymous to the Range Rover brand." said Lennard Hoornik, Chief Commercial Officer, JLR. Also, the move will enable the customer to benefit from shorter wait times for Range Rover's pinnacle vehicles, expanding JLR's ability to offer a modern luxury client journey.

Serum Institute of India ships first batch of malaria vaccine to Africa

New Delhi

Vaccine manufacturer Serum Institute of India (SII) on Monday said it has started exports of malaria vaccine to Africa as part of the global fight against the disease.

In total, 1,63,800 doses of the 'R21/ Matrix-M' malaria vaccine have been specifically allocated for the CAR region, of which first batch of 43,200 doses has been dispatched from SII's facility in Pune.

18 yrs on, IndiGo to introduce biz class

New Delhi

After flying for nearly 18 years, the country's largest airline IndiGo today announced that it will introduce business class in flights this year, as the carrier seeks to provide more options for passengers amid rising economic growth.

The airline will launch a "tailor-made business product", the details of which will be unveiled around August that will also mark the 18th anniversary of the carrier. The latest announcement also comes less than a month after the profitable carrier said it would buy 30 wide-body aircraft.

Currently, the airline only

has economy class. It has a fleet of more than 360 aircraft and operates around 2,000 flights daily.

Profit doubles in q4

The country's largest

airline, IndiGo, on Thursday reported more than doubling of its profit after tax to Rs 1,894.8 crore in the March quarter, fuelled by higher traffic and favourable external environment

Interview to select SBI chief put off till Lok Sabha poll

New Delhi

FSIB — the headhunter for directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions — in an unexpected move has deferred the scheduled interview to select a suitable candidate for the post of SBI chairman.

The last-minute postponement comes hours before the scheduled interview, sources said. The exact reasons for postponement could not be ascertained immediately. However, sources said, the new date for the interview will be decided after the formation of the

new government after June 4.

The Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB) will schedule the interview well in advance to select a replacement for Dinesh Khara, who will be superannuating on August 28, when he turns 63, the upper age limit for the position of SBI chairman.

The chairman is appointed from a pool of serving managing directors of SBI. FSIB will recommend the name and the final decision would be taken by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by PM Narendra Modi.

India rises to 39th rank on global tourism index

New Delhi

India's rank on the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index 2024 has risen to 39th place, with global tourism activities returning to pre-pandemic levels, the annual report showed on Tuesday.

While the US topped the list, India is ranked highest in South Asia and among the lower-middle-income economies, the WEF said.

India was ranked 54th in the previously published index in 2021, though changes made to the index parameters limit its

comparability to earlier years.

After the US, Spain, Japan,

France and Australia figure among the top five in the 2024 list. The index, prepared in collaboration with the University of Surrey, showed India is highly price-

competitive (18th) and boasts competitive air transport (26th) and ground and port (25th) infrastructure.

In particular, India's strong natural (6th), cultural (9th) and non-leisure (9th) resources help drive travel, and the country is only one of three to score in the top 10 for all the resource pillars, the WEF said.

Moreover, despite a decline compared to 2019, the country still scores well for travel and tourism demand sustainability, especially thanks to more sustainable long stays among inbound visitors.

No gains from 38 critical blocks in this decade: Icra

New Delhi

Icra, a prominent credit rating agency, on Wednesday said benefits from the 38 critical mineral blocks that have been put on sale are not likely to accrue in the current decade ending 2030 as the mines are not fully explored.

"The preliminary stage of exploration for most of the domestic blocks that are currently being auctioned suggests that their commercialisation and associated benefits are unlikely to fully accrue in the current decade ending 2030. Therefore, India's downstream manufacturing facilities are likely to remain exposed to potential future supply shocks of critical minerals in the intervening years," Icra said in a statement.

The government is auctioning two lithium blocks in the ongoing auctions. The one in Jammu & Kashmir has clay deposits. While the technology for extracting lithium from hard rock and brine deposits has matured, the same for extracting lithium from clay deposits remains untested globally. Given these challenges, the J&K lithium block received less than three bids, resulting in a re-auction of the block, Girishkumar Kadam, Group Head, Corporate Sector Ratings, Icra said.

On the other hand, the lithium block being auctioned in Katghora, Chhattisgarh is a hard rock deposit. The ore here belongs to a broader class of lithium-bearing minerals named lepidolite. China is a large producer of lithium from lepidolite ores. Therefore, competition to acquire the Katghora mine is likely to be much higher compared to the J&K block.

However, given the inferior grade of explored domestic ores, advancement in mineral beneficiation/ processing technology remains critical for commercialisation of domestic critical mineral resources, Kadam added. Apart from developing domestic critical mineral resources, the government is parallelly looking at acquiring overseas assets from key resource-rich regions like South America, Australia, and Africa as an alternative to ensure mineral security.

RBI approves record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to Centre for FY24

Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India will pay a record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government for the fiscal ended March 31, more than double of what was budgeted expectation, helping shore up revenue ahead of a new government taking office.

The RBI board, at its meeting on Wednesday, approved the transfer of surplus, the central bank said in a statement. The government had budgeted a receipt of Rs 1.02 lakh crore as dividends from the RBI, public sector banks and financial institutions in the interim budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 (April 2024 to March 2025) presented in February this year.

The dividend or surplus transfer by the RBI to the Centre was Rs 87,416 crore for the fiscal 2022-23. The previous high was Rs 1.76 lakh crore in 2018-19. The decision on the dividend payout was taken at the 608th meeting of the Central Board of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India held under the chairmanship of Governor Shaktikanta Das.

"The Board...approved the transfer of Rs 2,10,874 crore as surplus to the Central Government for the accounting year 2023-24," the RBI said in a statement. The central government aims to contain the fiscal deficit or gap between expenditure and revenue to Rs 17.34 lakh crore (5.1 per cent of the GDP) during the current financial year.

Maran to seek Rs 1,323 cr in damages from SpiceJet

New Delhi

KAL Airways and Kalanithi Maran on Monday said they will seek more than Rs 1,323 crore in damages from SpiceJet and its chief Ajay Singh as well as challenge a recent Delhi HC order in the ongoing dispute between the two sides.

On May 17, a division bench of the court set aside a single judge bench order that had upheld an arbitral award asking SpiceJet and its promoter Ajay Singh to refund Rs 579 crore plus interest to Maran.

As part of an agreement, Maran and KAL Airways had claimed to have paid SpiceJet Rs 679 crore for issuing warrants and preference shares. Maran alleged SpiceJet had neither returned the money, nor issued warrants.

Paytm posts Rs 550 crore loss in Q4, hints at job cuts

New Delhi

One 97 Communications Ltd, the parent company of Paytm, clocked a net loss of Rs 550 crore in the January-March period of FY24, a 3.2 times jump compared to the same period in the last fiscal year. Paytm's revenue was down by 20 per cent compared to the previous quarter.

Its quarterly result took a beating after the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) ban on some of the services of Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL). The company posted a 3 per cent decline in its revenue for the fourth quarter of FY24 to Rs 2,267 crore.

This comes as the company plans to achieve significant cost efficiencies through artificial intelligence (AI)-led capabilities. The digital payments major is planning a "leaner organisation structure" and the "pruning of non-core businesses", indicating there may be job redundancies at the company in the near future.

Investors turn bullish with caution amid growing optimism of BJP winning election; here's what F&O data show

Mumbai

As India paces closer to the election results due next week, the D-Street has turned bullish, albeit with a blend of caution, as is seen from short covering and significant long buildup in index futures, coupled with heightened volatility.

The NSE Nifty 50 index has witnessed heavy short covering in the futures space, followed by long additions, said derivatives expert Arun Mantri of Mantri Finmart. "Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net short in mid-May, but have now turned net long," he said, adding that the bias has turned bullish for the short term.

The benchmark indices have shown rapid gains of late, with both Sensex and Nifty hitting new all-time highs above 76,000 and 23,000 in the previous two sessions, as investors have grown more confident about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP-NDA winning a comfortable majority in the ongoing general elections.

While the markets had turned cautious earlier during the month of May, hit by the concerns of low voter turnout and uncertainty over the election results -- Nifty hit a swing low of 21,821 on May 13, the sentiment seems to have reversed as the voting has progressed into the final phases.

Earlier, on May 15, the net long/short ratio of index futures for Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) had dropped to 26.23 percent. It rebounded to 51 percent over the next eight trading sessions, said Sudeep Shah, Head - Technical & Derivative Research Desk - SBICAP Securities. "This indicates that FIIs have covered their short positions," he said.

'Mumbai and Tel Aviv Effect': An Alternative to the 'Bandwagon Effect' of Brussels and Washington in Global AI Regulations

The need for forward-thinking Artificial Intelligence regulatory frameworks has never been more pressing. As nations grapple with the dual imperatives of nurturing innovation and safeguarding public interest, policy deliberations in the democratic world are oscillating between two opposing imperatives: the comprehensive regulation seen in the European Union (EU), described as "innovation-stifling"; and the laissez-faire, innovation-centric approach of the United States (US), largely driven by private sector interests. Meanwhile, the global discourse on AI regulations has long crossed borders and is now a multilateral geopolitical challenge.

This special report ventures away from these two extremes and offers a new approach that would be suitable for countries like India and Israel that are technologically advanced but have been more mindful of putting into place relevant policy to grapple with AI challenges. This approach calls for a regulatory framework that allows for localised innovation, addresses national security needs, and bolsters each country's democratic institutions, while remaining interconnected in the technological mosaic of the global community. The authors call this the 'Mumbai and Tel Aviv Effect'.

To place the Mumbai and Tel Aviv Effect on the spectrum of regulatory approaches, the two poles must be clearly understood, beginning with the EU. The EU's regulatory strategy, reflected in policies such as the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the 2023 Digital Services Act, and the Digital Markets Act of 2022E, is comprehensive in nature. The EU AI Act, enacted in 2024 and regarded as a landmark piece of legislation, adopts a risk-based methodology to regulate AI applications, setting guidelines and obligations for developers and deployers; it completes the EU's 'digital regulation package'. This package positions the EU as a global pioneer in, and exporter of, digital regulation, crafting a framework that influences tech development and deployment both within and beyond its borders, aspiring to become the de-facto worldwide standard in what is termed the 'Brussels Effect', compelling international companies and other governments to comply if they wish to access, or cooperate with, the lucrative European market.

However, while the Brussels Effect champions high regulatory standards, it also sparks debates about its potential impact on technological innovation. Critics and researchers argue that overly prescriptive regulations might stifle creativity and competitiveness, thereby slowing the pace of AI advancements, especially for early-stage ventures.

In contrast to EU's all-encompassing approach, the United States takes a different stance on AI governance, creating a phenomenon that this report calls the 'Washington Effect'. Characterised by a reluctance to impose overarching federal regulations on AI, the US approach leans toward industry-specific guidelines and encourages self-regulation. The underpinning aim is to foster an environment where innovation and market forces drive the development, application, and responsible adoption of AI-enabled digital platforms and technologies.

A prime example of this is Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which, in the words of Jeff Kosseff, cybersecurity law professor at the US Naval Academy, is "The Twenty Six Words that Created the Internet". The Biden administration's October 2023 executive order on AI also illustrates this hands-off regulatory philosophy. While Biden described the order as "bold action", he acknowledged that "we still need Congress to act." The order's scope is limited, emphasising a continued collaborative engagement with the private sector, where industry leaders are relied upon to set their boundary markers for responsible AI usage while maintaining American technological advantage in the global arena.

While this model has undeniably fueled rapid scientific progress and has contributed to making the US a technology leader, the domestic debate continues on finding the optimal balance between fostering innovation and ensuring adequate safeguards in an increasingly AI-driven world. Critics argue that without a coherent national framework, there might be gaps in oversight, leading to inconsistent standards and potential risks to consumer rights, privacy, security, democracy, and the broader society at large.

For instance, the lack of oversight over social media algorithms impacted the 2016 and 2020 US elections, raising concerns about whether less robust democracies could withstand similar challenges. This situation also necessitated legislative actions, such as the proposed requirement for TikTok to be sold to an American company, due to its perceived negative influence on public opinion in the United States. Additionally, in the realm of facial recognition technology, the absence of stringent regulations has permitted unchecked use by law enforcement, leading to issues of racial bias and violations of civil liberties that have contributed in some part to social unrest.

The Washington Effect indirectly influences AI governance as US-based tech giants play a dominant role in the global AI landscape. Moreover, US regulatory choices encourage other nations to adopt a similar laissez-faire approach to foster their AI companies.

The Brussels Effect and the Washington Effect represent two

PART I

paradigms in the realm of AI governance, each with its own strengths and challenges. They highlight a critical question in global technology governance: how to achieve the optimum balance between the need for innovation with the equally critical imperative to protect society from the risks posed by emerging technologies. Yet, this ever-expanding tension between "accelerationists" and "regulationists" demands some alternative proposals. One of them is what this report introduces as the 'Mumbai and Tel Aviv Effect'.

The Need for an Alternative Paradigm

In countries like Israel and India, grassroots innovation is encouraged, yet tech policy is weak. India and Israel both recognise the need to regulate technology providers but choose the path of ethics-based self-regulation—or "soft" regulation. This choice might be due to insufficient motivation among decision-makers, or else, regulatory lethargy. It could also stem, however, from the 'Regulatory Bandwagon Effect' of Brussels and Washington. In both countries, there is an active discussion regarding the need for AI regulation to align with Europe while, at the same time, there is genuine concern of harming innovation as they face pressure from their local technology ecosystem, which causes the de-facto effect of Washington to become dominant. Thus, a sub-optimal situation of AI regulation is created.

India possesses an enormous talent pool for software and AI development, and a booming consumer market. It has also emerged as the world's third largest ecosystem for startups. Its approach to AI regulation is progressively shaping up, and in March 2023nnounced the IndiaAI Mission. The Indian government, through initiatives like the 2018 National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence hashtagged '#AIForAll', has outlined its vision to leverage AI for economic growth and social progress and an ambition to become the 'garage' for emerging and developing technologies. This strategy underscores the importance of collaboration between the government, private sector, and academia to achieve a comprehensive AI ecosystem. NITI Aayog, India's apex public policy think tank, has so far settled for establishing guidelines and promoting 'responsible AI' without regulations in its guide from 2021. India also lacked a comprehensive data protection legislation until the introduction of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act in 2023.

On 1 March this year, India's Ministry for Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) issued an advisory requiring "significant platforms" to seek Government permission before the public release of "untested AI platforms". Following strong reactions from the industry and legal experts expressing apprehensions, the MeitY's Minister Rajeev Chandrashekhar had to issue clarifications seeking to quell the concerns. Two days later, in a public forum, he stated that the government is working on a draft AI regulation framework set for release around July. On 15 March, MeitY issued a fresh advisory superseding the previous one and eliminating the obligation to obtain prior governmental approval. Given the complexity of the subject and its broader implications, this avoidable embarrassment highlights the importance of conducting several rounds of multi-stakeholder reviews of draft regulations before their public release, even when pressed for time.

Israel, for its part, is well-known for its "Startup Nation" innovation atmosphere, and its current AI policy is characterised by its choice to forgo formal AI legislation. The Israeli Ministry of Innovation, Science, and Technology introduced a policy paper in December 2023, which outlines Israel's official stance on AI. This document settles for ethical guidelines (or "soft law") and the creation of a knowledge center and a steering committee, and does not call for regulatory intervention. Israeli digital regulation already lags in certain aspects of privacy, cyber, and social media regulation.

AI externalities—the spectrum of intentional and unintentional consequences that AI may harbour—are wide-ranging. They include threats to information and cybersecurity, the production of inaccurate content (confabulation), and the manipulation of humans through various types of artificial content, such as impersonation, promotion of conspiratorial narratives, obscene content, and toxicity. These technologies also have the capacity for precise prediction and planning, which enables them to create the social modeling necessary for broad social influence.

AI can facilitate the development of weapons, including eased access to chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons, dual-use systems, enhanced situational awareness, and the bypassing of safety mechanisms. Moreover, AI could autonomously expand and distribute itself. Additional concerns include biases, hallucinations, dangerous recommendations, violations of data privacy, compromised information integrity, pervasive surveillance, and challenges in human-AI interactions. The competitive drive among nations and corporations could accelerate AI development, leading to relinquishing control over these systems, particularly if profits are prioritised over safety.

However, the likelihood and impact of such types of risks for individuals and society, vary significantly across different nations, influenced by a myriad of factors, some of which transcend the realm of technological advancement. These factors include the structure of the labour market and the dynamics of technology and high-tech industries. For example, India boasts a robust software market and engineering talent, while Israel is known for its advanced cyber market. Other influential factors are the resilience and integrity of democratic and regulatory institutions. These can have an impact on the stability of financial markets and the integrity of electoral processes.

To Be Contd.

The East Asian opportunity: Prioritising Japan and Korea in India's green hydrogen strategy

Since Henry Cavendish discovered hydrogen in 1766, its potential as an energy carrier has been widely discussed. In fact, as early as 1874, the famous novelist Jules Verne had prophesied that hydrogen would one day become a viable replacement for coal. A century and a half later, hydrogen has become a focal point in discussions about energy transitions, particularly for its potential to decarbonise challenging sectors such as heavy industry and long-haul transport.

Currently, hydrogen accounts for only 2.5 percent of total energy consumption, and nearly all of this—99 percent—is "grey" hydrogen, produced using fossil fuels. In contrast, green hydrogen is made through water electrolysis with power generated from renewable energy sources.

There is now a global push to expand hydrogen with over 40 countries implementing hydrogen strategies. Some exclusively prioritise green hydrogen, while others focus on cleaning up hydrogen production from fossil fuels using carbon capture technologies.

India has also jumped on this bandwagon with the announcement of its National Green Hydrogen Mission. In the first phase, the focus is on creating adequate supply capacity in India through incentives for electrolyser manufacturing and green hydrogen production with an expected financial outlay of INR 17,490 crores up to 2030. The primary goal is to lower the production costs of green hydrogen and bring about cost parity with grey hydrogen.

While supply-side incentives are a good starting point, a clear demand pipeline, even in the initial stages, will be important to direct large-scale investments to this sector and create the economies of scale needed to reduce the costs of green hydrogen.

While supply-side incentives are a good starting point, a clear demand pipeline, even in the initial stages, will be important to direct large-scale investments to this sector and create the economies of scale needed to reduce the costs of green hydrogen.

Domestic demand will, of course, be an important driver. Presently, India's consumption of hydrogen stands at 6.7 million tons, with 80 percent utilised in the fertiliser (ammonia) and refinery sectors. Approximately 90 percent of the hydrogen produced in India is for captive use, largely obtained from steam methane reformation using fossil fuels, resulting in a relatively small merchant market for hydrogen within the country. Considering the cost disparity where green hydrogen costs between US$ 4-6/kg compared to approximately US$ 2/kg for grey hydrogen, it seems improbable that entities with their own generation facilities will commit substantial investment in establishing green hydrogen infrastructure or seek it from the merchant market. There might be some experimentation, but large-scale demand generation is unlikely in the near term.

The other source of demand will be from new sectors such as steel, chemicals, and possibly transport. Yet, the technologies required to integrate hydrogen effectively within these sectors are predominantly in experimental phases, which may impede swift adoption rates in the near term.

Consequently, the export market could become a crucial driver for expanding local production, creating economies of scale, and reducing the costs of green hydrogen.

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Export opportunities in East Asia

Specifically, Japan and South Korea represent significant export opportunities for India in the green hydrogen sector. Several factors contribute to this potential. First, both countries face constraints in expanding renewable energy, which could drive up domestic production costs for green hydrogen. As a result, they will likely depend on imports to satisfy a substantial part of their domestic demand. This demand is expected to grow as heavy industries, particularly the steel sector, shift towards greener fuels. In Japan, hydrogen is also set to play a crucial role in the decarbonisation of transport, whereas Korea is increasingly looking to utilise hydrogen as a source of electricity.

Secondly, both nations have already demonstrated a willingness to encourage the use of green hydrogen, regardless of its origin. For instance, Japan recently enacted the Hydrogen Society Promotion Act, which allocates 3 trillion yen (approximately US$ 1.9 billion) in 15-year subsidies to support clean hydrogen initiatives. While full details are still awaited, initial reports suggest that developers will be able to claim these subsidies on top of any production subsidies in the country of production. This approach is very different from the strategies employed by most other nations with potentially high hydrogen demand. For instance, the Inflation Reduction Act in the United States (US) will provide unprecedented subsidies only for domestically-produced hydrogen.

Japan and Korea have also established a joint supply network for hydrogen and ammonia, marking a unique instance of collaboration between the two countries. Through this network, state-backed financial institutions aim to support companies in obtaining funding for hydrogen projects beyond their borders, with the ultimate goal of facilitating cost-effective imports. While the focus is on their traditional hydrogen markets in the US and the Middle East, there is an opportunity for India to engage more actively with this network and position itself as a competitive supplier of green hydrogen.

Third, given the considerable costs associated with storing and transporting hydrogen, East Asian markets offer a more viable destination for Indian green hydrogen exports compared to the distant markets of Europe and North America. Finally, India's exclusive focus on green hydrogen is a strong differentiator. Many countries continue to focus on various forms of clean hydrogen which involve untested carbon capture technologies. This focus is viewed by many as a means for perpetuating the use of fossil fuels and delaying the growth of renewables. There is now increasing pressure on importing countries to focus only on renewables-based hydrogen. India could benefit from this movement if it can establish itself as the primary provider of green hydrogen.

There is now increasing pressure on importing countries to focus only on renewables-based hydrogen. India could benefit from this movement if it can establish itself as the primary provider of green hydrogen.

The interest from Japan and South Korea in the Indian market is already more than just rhetoric. For example, Japan's IHI Corporation has recently formalised an agreement with India's ACME for the supply of green ammonia from Odisha to Japan. Similarly, Singapore's Sembcorp Industries Ltd has partnered with two Japanese firms to explore exporting green hydrogen to Japan. Additionally, in March of this year, a delegation from India, including representatives from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and major Indian companies, visited South Korea to discuss bilateral ties concerning hydrogen and its derivatives.

Thus, there is a strong case for India to prioritise Japan and South Korea in India's hydrogen strategy. To facilitate this, the Central government should implement a clear set of standards and regulations for green hydrogen trade that aligns with those in other countries of interest. The Green Hydrogen Mission also has a focus on setting up green hydrogen hubs across the country. Given that more than 50 percent of domestic hydrogen demand is concentrated in the Western region, there could be a temptation to set up these hydrogen hubs exclusively in the West. However, there is a need for a more long-term vision which prioritises hubs on the East Coast that can help reduce transport costs to East Asia. The announcement of a green hydrogen hub in Tamil Nadu is a good start. Finally, there is a need to set up an international green hydrogen platform which brings together government and private sector stakeholders. This platform would actively promote green hydrogen opportunities in India and streamline the process for potential foreign investments into the country.

Perspectives on financing urban resilience in India

While the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement are meant to address global common challenges, optimal solutions to these challenges require an understanding of their local nuances. Cities account for more than 70 percent of both global GDP and Greenhouse Gas (GHGs) emissions. A course correction in relation to the development model being pursued will inevitably have to articulate an action plan for sustainable urbanisation and sustainable cities. According to the United Nations estimates (2005), cities constitute 55 percent of the population and are expected to rise to 68 percent by 2050. Urban centres in India accounted for 37.7 crore people in 2011, and this figure is projected to reach 56 crores by 2031. It is only fitting then that the locus of implementation of both Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate action should be planned urbanisation and thriving cities. Urban resilience has many faces. It represents the calibre of an urban ecosystem and its constituents viz. individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems to withstand, survive, persist, thrive, recover, adapt, transition or transform as a response to acute shocks or chronic stresses inflicting them.

Climate change adaptation involves measures that help withstand, survive, persist, thrive, recover or adapt as a response to the current and future consequences of climate change.

Climate change is one of urban life's most urgent and biggest threats. Urban resilience to climate change involves mitigating risks induced by climate change or adaptation to such risks or both. Climate change adaptation involves measures that help withstand, survive, persist, thrive, recover or adapt as a response to the current and future consequences of climate change. Examples of climate change adaptation includes the construction of defences and the establishment of early warning systems for disaster risk reduction, institutional changes including new building codes, new insurance schemes, favourable regulations and policies, and the adoption of environmentally conscious lifestyles and livelihood strategies such as switching to plant-based diets. Climate change mitigation involves curbing or reducing further GHGs emissions which, in turn, reduce the intensity of the negative consequences entailing climate change. Climate change mitigation measures are underpinned by the ability to embrace the green transition and the associated structural transformation. These include installation and generation of renewable energy, adoption of clean transportation, deployment of green technologies, and greening of industrial processes and urbanisation.

The advent of the 4IR is being accompanied by threats to the employment prospects of unskilled/low-skilled workforce that is most likely to get replaced by technology. Urban resilience in this context refers to the ability to transition or transform by upskilling or reskilling for adapting to the skill set requirements of the labour markets. Such resilience is afforded by an educational and skilling system that is 'malleable' enough to provide the bandwidth for such upskilling and/ or reskilling.

The role of ULBs in enhancing urban resilience

The misalignment between the functions and finances of the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in India has been vitiating the institutional resilience of these governing bodies. The functional domain of ULBs is not defined clearly and overlaps significantly with that of the states. The ULBs rely heavily on their Own Source Revenue (OSR), which includes property taxes and user charges

among other things. The lack of buoyant sources of revenue, and stringent control exercised by the state and the centre on the ability of municipal bodies to levy taxes, set rates, and access capital markets have debased their fiscal autonomy and, in turn, deflated their functional capacity.

The ULBs rely heavily on their Own Source Revenue (OSR), which includes property taxes and user charges among other things.

Unplanned urbanisation itself undermines urban resilience. The unplanned nature of urbanisation is mirrored in high levels of urban poverty and income inequality; excessive pressure on existing infrastructure; lack of access to basic amenities like health, education, housing, sanitation and clean drinking water; and a large informal economy characterised by meagre, irregular and uncertain wages, lack of social security and decent working conditions. The untoward consequences of unplanned urbanisation on resilience were demonstrated by the recent episode of the COVID-19 pandemic. It exposed the fragility of urban resilience in terms of social infrastructure and economic resilience by questioning its readiness to cope with unprecedented events.

There is a need to articulate an action plan that is based on a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of various risks confronting cities and their interconnectedness, and that which comprises attempts to strengthen urban resilience across all dimensions. A roadmap for urban resilience cannot be envisioned in isolation from a financing strategy that delineates how resources should be mobilised for and allocated to the implementation of such a roadmap. The first essential steps in this context involve defining clearly the functional space of ULBs and allowing them the requisite financial autonomy—both of which will enable them to devise strategies for improving urban governance. Municipal bodies will be able to map, in a clear-cut manner, each function to a corresponding fiscal source. The ensuing

clarity will empower municipal bodies to devise and implement administrative and governance strategies, and urban plans and projects that are effective and efficient from the perspective of urban resilience. Financial autonomy is critical for municipal authorities to articulate fiscal solutions for boosting their OSR to finance urban resilience efforts.

Furthermore, the ULBs can formulate an action plan for accessing capital markets and developing well-functioning and matured municipal bond markets for mobilising resources for urban resilience. ULBs need to design robust accountability and financial management protocols. Municipal authorities can provide tax incentives that do not compromise the buoyancy of OSR. The Reserve Bank of India can consider allowing investments in municipal bonds to satisfy Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) requirements. ULBs can undertake measures that enhance fiscal transparency (for example, a digital portal that provides up-to-date information that reflects the fiscal health of the concerned ULB) and build investor confidence. An agency dedicated exclusively to the provision of end-to-end technical assistance for municipal bond issuances can also be set up. Institutional investors can be mandated to invest a minimum percentage of their portfolios in municipal bonds.

ULBs need to design robust accountability and financial management protocols. Municipal authorities can provide tax incentives that do not compromise the buoyancy of OSR.

A careful scrutiny of urban resilience goals suggests that they eventually correspond to one or the other of the SDGs. In other words, financing SDGs translates into financing urban resilience. The Green, Social, Sustainability (GSS+) bonds can be leveraged to finance urban resilience. Nevertheless, if urban resilience goals are mapped into the existing SDG targets and indicator frameworks, one will realise while the SDG targets are compatible with a pre-emptive, proactive and predictive approach, the indicators are few and reactive in nature. Once this limitation of the SDG indicator framework is addressed, it can be the basis for monitoring and evaluation of the progress made in terms of urban resilience and of associated impact assessment.

Land-based finance (LBF) has attracted significant attention in the recent past as a fiscal solution for subnational governance. Given its adaptability to institutional and cultural contexts, lower adverse impact

on private investments, and its accrual of social, economic and spatial benefits, LBF can be capitalised for attaining urban resilience goals. However, this will require strengthening the administrative and technical (valuation) capacities of ULBs as well as their coordination with other levels of government. It is critical to ensure that the application and utilisation of LBF do not violate the principles of distributive justice and equity.

The role of PPPs

Private sector participation can be leveraged in the form of blended finance that complements inadequate municipal resources with private sector investments and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), which augments capital, technical and operational efficiencies of projects catering to urban resilience by virtue of private intervention.

A significant part of getting urban resilience right involves addressing the challenges associated with financing climate change adaptation. These challenges are reflected in the significant disparity in adaptation finance needs and the actual financial flows. Financing adaptation projects is undermined by data and reporting challenges, information asymmetries, lack of a common measurement standard for assessing risks and benefits, complex financing mechanisms, and viability and bankability constraints. There is a need to formulate a robust and well-defined methodology for tracking, monitoring and evaluating financial flows as well as their outcomes and impact. Streamlining documentation and making available necessary information about the project such as adaptation potential, objectives, and climate risks tackled can boost investor confidence. A repository of case studies on adaptation projects can aid in mobilising finance by providing a template for the successful implementation of projects. Building the capacity of ULBs to undertake risk assessments and scenario analysis and facilitating exchange between technical experts and policymakers can leverage financial flows more effectively for adaptation purposes. Adaptation projects take time to scale and become commercially viable. Innovative solutions that have financing structures and risk mitigation features that seek to address the above-mentioned challenges can be designed.

According to a World Bank study, urban India is likely to incur significant costs—somewhere between US$ 2.6 billion and US$ 13 billion annually, and 1.2 percent to 6.3 percent of the GDP by 2050—in the absence of proper planning and management of urbanisation and cities. Therefore, India has to acknowledge the urgency of mainstreaming concerns of resilience in the broader vision for sustainable urban development, articulate appropriate interventions that address these concerns and mobilise the requisite financial resources to do so.

Quantum Computing: Current Scenario and Future Prospects

Since its inception in 1900, quantum theory has found its use in most technologies, from transistors to superconductors. The development of microprocessors in the 1970s led to a rapid increase in the processing power of computers, but classical computers remained unequipped to simulate quantum systems. Computing with quantum systems was proposed by Richard Feynman in one of his lectures in 1982. Today, most of the discussion around "emerging technologies" is centred around quantum computing (QC), primarily due to its increased computing speed and the fact that it can break most current encryption protocols. Quantum computers can perform calculations beyond the capabilities of classical computers, and therefore, find applications in various fields. However, despite the availability of early QC capability, there are significant practical and technological hurdles that need to be overcome before utility-scale QC can be achieved.

Quantum computers use systems obeying the laws of quantum mechanics to perform similar functions as classical computers, although there are differences at an operational level. The quantum scale has distinct advantages for computation, especially because quantum computers use quantum bits, or qubits, instead of classical bits. Bits are carriers of information and can take on either a 0 or 1 value, whereas a qubit can take a 0 or 1 or a superposition of both. The "principle of superposition" is a fundamental property of the quantum scale. Because qubits can exist simultaneously as 0 and 1 (mathematically, any linear combination of 0s and 1s), unlike classical bits, they significantly increase information-carrying capacity, thus boosting the speed of quantum computers compared to their classical counterparts.

Several paradigms and hardware implementations have been adopted for quantum computers, although no single approach has emerged superior. Two common approaches are adiabatic quantum computation (AQC) and gate model QC.

AQC and Quantum Annealing

'Adiabatic' means that a system is not permitted to exchange energy with the surrounding environment. The relaxation of this requirement results in quantum annealing (QA). The QA model is already commercially available. Optimisation problems in the real world can be framed as energy-minimisation problems in physics. QA uses quantum physics to solve these problems and arrive at the optimal solution. The first commercial quantum computers, which were produced by D-Wave, were of the QA type. QA computers are currently being used to solve select real-world problems, including optimisation, scheduling, machine learning, and simulations.

Gate Model QC

When discussing quantum computers, it is usually the gate model QC that is being referred to. Similar to classical computers, gate model QC relies on passing qubits through a sequence of logic gates to perform the computation; however, quantum logic gates are significantly more complex than their classical counterparts.

Practical Limitations of Quantum Computers

The primary obstacle that QC must overcome is the problem of "noise" or "decoherence." Quantum systems interact with the external environment via vibrations, temperature fluctuations, and electromagnetic fields, which causes information carried by qubits to decay over time. While the complete isolation of any quantum system is impossible, these interactions can be minimised. The interaction of qubits with the surrounding environment needs to be limited as efficiently as possible in order to allow sufficient time for computation. This can be addressed by quantum error correction, which also allows greater fidelity from quantum computation. According to recent estimates, each functional or "logical" qubit requires more than 1,000 physical qubits to perform state-of-the-art error correction, though this is an area of active research with progress being made on a continual basis.

Another constraint arises from the necessity for qubits to be "entangled", i.e., the state of any qubit must be correlated with that of the others. This comes at the cost of losing some qubits. Both these constraints lead to a loss of qubits. Therefore, building a fully functioning quantum computer will require billions of qubits, since a large percentage of these will be "eaten up" by the system to compensate for entanglement and error correction.

Holevo's theorem states that the amount of data that can be retrieved from n qubits cannot be larger than the amount of data that can be retrieved from n bits. Therefore, most of the data in a collection of qubits cannot be retrieved. Additionally, quantum gates—which are the equivalent of traditional binary logic gates in conventional computing—are very slow and error prone, and they rapidly lose data. This, coupled with the complex measurement process in quantum systems, makes the creation of quantum algorithms tedious and complex.

One solution is noisy intermediate-scale quantum (NISQ) computers, which are gate-based quantum computers with a limited number of decohering or noisy qubits, which may be able to outperform classical computers. However, NISQs are merely a stopgap arrangement until "fully error corrected" quantum computers are realised.

In these contexts, gate model QC holds the greatest promise because it can be applied to solve a variety of problems, whereas other approaches such as AQC can only be used to solve select problems, such as optimisation.

Superconducting Systems and their Physical Implementation

A functional quantum computer requires a physical system that creates qubits and can be manipulated as required. Some ways to achieve this include trapped ions, superconducting qubits, photonic qubits, quantum dots, and topological qubits. Of these, superconducting systems have emerged as one of the most popular. Superconductors are among the few materials that can show macroscopic quantum effects. A unique property of semiconductors, known as the Meissner effect, allows them to become perfect conductors upon reaching a certain "critical temperature", i.e., electrons can flow through them without the dissipation of energy. This property partly addresses the issue of decoherence in quantum processors. Additionally, because a superconductor is an inherently quantum system, it would be ideal for building a quantum computer.

Despite initial hurdles, superconducting quantum computers have come a long way, and the technology continues to evolve. The demonstration of the first functional superconducting qubit came in 1999, in a paper published by a team of Japanese researchers. Consequently, in 2007, the superconducting transmon qubit was invented, which has become the model of choice in the QC industry. However, the critical temperature required to obtain superconducting behaviour poses a hurdle to their practical implementation. This temperature is very close to "absolute zero" (approximately -273oC or 0K). Achieving this condition is physically difficult and the required setup is prohibitive. These problems will only be compounded during commercial production.

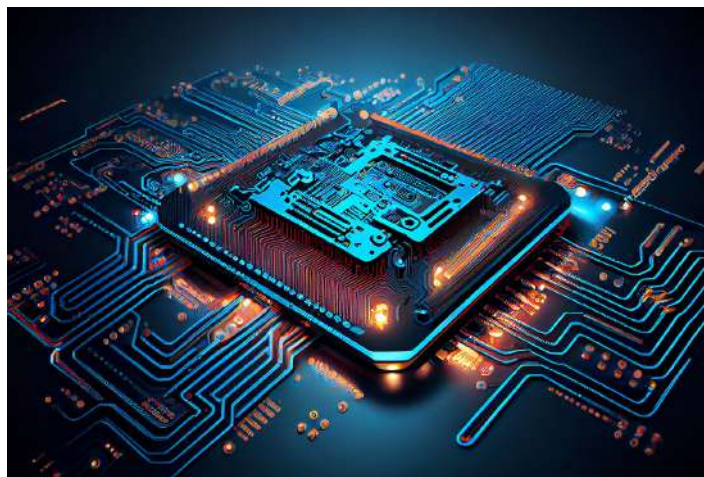These issues have led to a growing interest in developing room-temperature superconductors. In 2023, a team of researchers from South Korea claimed that they had achieved this feat using a material called LK-99, which seemingly behaves like a superconductor at ambient pressure, with a critical temperature of up to 127oC. Subsequent attempts to replicate this behaviour were unsuccessful, and it was later found that the material was likely not superconducting. However, in a January 2024 paper, a group of researchers from institutions in China and Japan claimed to have replicated the experiment. Although the results are unconfirmed, the experiment has already led to increased interest in the field, with the US Office of Naval Research providing US$100,000 in funding for LK-99 research in September 2023 and another US military funded room-temperature superconducting research program reportedly on the way.

Classical vs. Quantum Computers: The Problem with QC Algorithms

In order for quantum computers to outperform classical computers, it needs to be demonstrated that they can perform computations more efficiently than the latter. This requires a quantum algorithm that has a computational advantage over a classical computer for a specific problem. At present, the best understood quantum algorithms are those for quantum chemistry, logistics and finance, binary optimisation, and breaking encryption.

What makes quantum computers faster than classical computers is not the speed of the qubits themselves, which are slower than classical bits, but the different ways in which the qubits can be entangled and correlated with each other. While quantum computers are not faster per operation, they require fewer operations to perform the same task. Therefore, for smaller problems, the classical algorithm will be more efficient since it is faster per operation. However, with increasing complexity, the quantum algorithm becomes the more optimal choice since it would solve the problem in fewer operations. The point at which the quantum algorithm supersedes the classical one is known as the "crossover point".

However, each time a classical computer becomes faster or a more efficient classical algorithm is developed, this point keeps shifting further. This leads to an increase in the number of qubits required for a quantum computer, which may eventually make them impractical and prohibitively expensive. This problem is exacerbated by artificial intelligence, which is making classical algorithms even more efficient. This is one of the central issues that QC has to contend with and makes them less commercially viable. However, irrespective of their advancements, classical computation will remain unable to solve certain complex problem types, and QC will provide the only viable solution.

Kajol, Prabhudeva to reunite for action thriller 'Maharagni - Queen of Queens'

27 years after 'Minsara Kanavu', actors Kajol and Prabhudeva are set to share screen space in action thriller 'Maharagni - Queen of Queens'.

The upcoming film marks the Hindi directorial debut of Telugu filmmaker Charan Tej Uppalapati, a press release said.

Naseeruddin Shah, Samyuktha Menon, Jisshu Sengupta, Aditya Seal, Pramod Pathak and Chhaya Kadam of Cannes Grand Prix winner 'All We Imagine as Light' fame also round out the cast of the pan India film.

The production on the first schedule of 'Maharagni' was recently completed. The makers on Tuesday unveiled the official teaser of the film.

Uppalapati has also written the film, which is produced by Harman Baweja and Venkata Anish Dorigillu under the labels of Baweja Studios and E7 Entertainments.

'Maharagni' has been a labour of love, said the director.

"Collaborating with actors like Kajol, Prabhudeva, Naseer sir, Samyuktha Menon and Jisshu Sengupta has elevated the project to new heights. Their unmatched charisma and acting abilities breathe life into the characters. I can't wait for the audience to witness this on screen," Uppalapati said in a statement.

Baweja said this is a "special project" for Baweja Studios.

"We are excited to collaborate with Eternal 7 and have an extraordinary cast featuring Kajol, Prabhudeva, Naseeruddin Shah and Samyuktha Menon. Kajol's talent and authenticity make her perfect for this role. At Baweja Studios, we believe in telling powerful stories. I am thrilled to bring this project to life with such a stellar team," he said.

"As soon as I came across this story, I knew it carried a powerful message that needed to reach the masses. With Charan Tej Uppalapati's keen eye for direction and the remarkable talent of our stellar cast, we are confident that we will deliver a unique vision that will make this story shine," added Venkata Anish Dorigillu.

'Maharagni' also has on board renowned technicians, including GK Vishnu as director of photography, music director Harshavardhan Rameshwar, editor Navin Nooli, and production designer Saahi Suresh. The screenplay is penned by Niranjan Iyengar and Jessica Khurana.

The film will be released in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

Janhvi Kapoor talks about her 'Zingaat' viral dance with Rihanna

Bollywood's Gen-Z diva Janhvi Kapoor shared details about her viral video dancing to the track 'Zingaat' alongside global pop star Rihanna.

Janhvi appeared on the new episode of 'The Great Indian Kapil Show', along with her 'Mr and Mrs Mahi' co-star Rajkummar Rao.

The show is hosted by comedian Kapil Sharma.

During the conversation, Janhvi opened up about her dance video with Rihanna when the two attended an event in March in Mumbai.

Janhvi shared, "I had an amazing interaction with Rihanna. After her performance, she came down to meet and mingle with all of us. We all excitedly shouted when she came down, 'Rihanna! Rihanna!' and then she pointed at me and started walking towards me. I was scared that I might have done something wrong, but she completely surprised me."

"Rihanna said to me, 'I see your Instagram all the time'. And I was so surprised, I went, 'Me?' She then told me that I am so hot and that she loved the way I did my wave, literally imitating my wave to me... I was like, 'What is happening here?' After that, I was ready to go home because how could anything else that could happen after, possibly top this moment in my life," shared Janhvi.

The actress further shared how the viral video of them dancing to 'Zingaat' came to be.

"My friends insisted that I should at least get a picture, and just as I was asking for a selfie, 'Zingaat' started playing, and I told her, 'This is my song!' She then said, 'Then dance!' and that's how we danced together and the video was created," concluded Janhvi.

'Zingaat', sung by Ajay Gogavale and Atul Gogavale, is from Janhvi's debut film 'Dhadak'.

The episode will also see her and Rajkummar sharing stories of fake auditions to boyfriend teasing.

'The Great Indian Kapil Show' airs on Netflix at 8 pm.

Jennifer Lopez calls AI 'scary', says her face is manipulated in commercials for 'selling skincare'

Singer-actor Jennifer Lopez, who stars as a data analyst in her latest film "Atlas", says she has experienced the "scary" side of artificial intelligence (AI) with skincare advertisements using manipulated photos of her face.

Lopez further said there are two sides to technological advancements and her Netflix movie does a good job at depicting them.

"Selling skincare that I know nothing about" using manipulated photos of her face covered in "wrinkles", she told Variety at the Los Angeles premiere of "Atlas".

"It's really scary. Right away we had them stealing our faces. So, yes, (AI) is really scary... I think you should be respectful of AI… We have to be open to all possibilities. These movies that are talking about AI — especially this one — do a really good job of showing both sides," she added.

In the movie, Lopez plays Atlas Shepherd, a brilliant but misanthropic data analyst with a deep distrust of AI, who joins a mission to capture a renegade robot (played by Simu Liu) with whom she shares a mysterious past.

"But when plans go awry, her only hope of saving the future of humanity from AI is to trust it," read the streamer's official plotline.

Directed by Brad Peyton and written by Leo Sardarian and Aron Eli Coleite, "Atlas" also stars Lana Parrilla and Mark Strong.

Mahima Chaudhary, who was in Ludhiana to take part in a breast cancer awareness programme, says the trick is not to give up hope

Mahima Chaudhary cares! And she shows it through her initiative called Ribbon of Care which aims at creating awareness about breast cancer. Mahima, who recently visited Ludhiana to attend an event called The Balancing Act, organised by the Ludhiana chapter of FICCI Flo, talked about how she battled the dreaded disease and came out stronger. Mahima was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2022. She recalled how she went into depression after doctors revealed the nature of her ailment. "I was in the hospital during one of the chemotherapy sessions and I got a call from Anupam Kher. He was offering me a role in a film but I sounded low. When he asked me, I told him about my disease. Initially, he did not take me seriously. But when I sounded serious, he told me to go for the role even if I had lost my hair. He was so supportive. He is a real friend." Remembering how tough it was for her when people used to troll her for not looking her glamorous self, she says she was grateful to those real friends who would think nothing of her baldness or looks. "We need that kind of a support system while battling this dreaded disease," she said. The trick, she said, was to not give up hope. "We all struggle at some point. When the storm is over, we surprise ourselves thinking how did we manage?" Mahima, who had a successful stint in modelling before she entered Bollywood and delivered hits like Pardes, Daag, Dil Kya

Best year yet for Indian filmmakers with three wins at Cannes Film Festival 2024

It was a triple feat for Indian talent at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival with Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light", "Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know" by FTII student Chidananda S Naik, and Anasuya Sengupta of "The Shameless" fame winning major awards in each of the three competitive sections of the prestigious gala.

The 77th edition of Cannes, which concluded on Saturday, was undoubtedly the best year for the country which found space at the fest through eight Indian, or India-themed, films.

Kapadia, an alumna of the Film & Television Institute of India (FTII), charted history by becoming the first Indian filmmaker to win the Grand Prix award for "All We Imagine as Light".

"It is a great achievement for us that we have given this award to our country after thirty years. I am deeply grateful for your generous appreciation. Your recognition motivates me to work even harder. Thanks a lot," she said in an X post on Sunday.

"All We Imagine As Light", Kapadia's feature directorial debut, is the first Indian film in 30 years and first ever by an Indian female director to be showcased in main competition, last being Shaji N Karun's "Swaham" (1994).

"Thank you, Cannes Film Festival for having our film here. Please don't wait 30 years to have another Indian film," she had said in her speech.

The movie earned the honour, the second-most prestigious prize of the gala after the Palme d'Or, which went to American director Sean Baker for "Anora".

"All We Imagine as Light", a Malayalam-Hindi feature starring Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha and Chhaya Kadam, revolves around three women in Mumbai who go on a road trip to a beach town.

That the film will win an award became almost certain when it received glowing reviews following its premiere,

with some international critics describing it as a "portrait of urban connection" and "poetic meditation" as well as comparing Kapadia's work to that of masters like Satyajit Ray and Wong Kar Wai.

Though the second most prestigious prize at Cannes, Grand Prix has a storied history with prominent titles including this year's Oscar winner "The Zone of Interest" and Park Chan-wook's revenge drama "Oldboy" as part of the list.

"All We Imagine as Light" has already found distributors for its North America release, but it's unclear when the film will be screened in India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India is "proud" of Kapadia for her historic feat.

"An alumnus of FTII, her remarkable talent continues to shine on the global stage, giving a glimpse of the rich creativity in India. This prestigious accolade not only honours her exceptional skills but also inspires a new generation of Indian filmmakers," he said in a post on X.

These women have scripted history and inspired the Indian film fraternity, said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi about

Kapadia and Sengupta.

"Indian stars shining bright at the 77th Cannes Film Festival!" Gandhi said on X.

Writer-lyricist Varun Grover said it was an "unbelievable day" for Indian cinema.

"Dissent, in art and in life, is a tough path to choose. But sometimes it does create magic," he wrote on X.

Kapadia, who led a student protest against the appointment of actor-politician Gajendra Chauhan as FTII chairman, had

won the Oeil d'or (Golden Eye) award at Cannes for acclaimed documentary "A Night of Knowing Nothing" which premiered under Director's Fortnight section in 2021.

Her 2017 short film "Afternoon Clouds" opened at Cannes under Cinefondation category, dedicated to supporting the next generation of talented filmmakers.

That's not all.

Production designer Sengupta, who starred in a key featuring role in Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's "The Shameless", became the first Indian to win the best actress prize in Un Certain Regard.

"The Shameless" explores a dark world of exploitation and misery in which two sex

workers forge a bond.

Sengupta dedicated her win "to the queer community and other marginalised communities".

"You don't have to be queer to fight for equality, you don't have to be colonised to know that colonising is pathetic — we just need to be decent human beings," she said.

Neeraj Ghaywan's "Masaan" previously won two awards—FIPRESCI, International Jury of Film Critics prize and Promising Future prize in the section.

Naik's "Sunflowers…", which won the La Cinef first prize (film school fiction or animated films), was another feather in FTII's cap.

Based on a Kannada folktale, the movie follows an old woman who steals a rooster following which the sun stops rising in the village.

Previously, Indian films to be selected for the Cannes Competition segment include Mrinal Sen's "Kharij" (1983), M S Sathyu's "Garm Hava" (1974), Satyajit Ray's "Parash Pathar" (1958), Raj Kapoor's "Awaara" (1953), V Shantaram's "Amar Bhoopali" (1952) and Chetan Anand's "Neecha Nagar" (1946).

This year, India's presence at Cannes also saw the restored version of Shyam Benegal's 1976 crowdfunded film "Manthan" in Cannes Classics. Karan Kandhari's "Sister Midnight" appeared in Directors' Fortnight and Maisam Ali's "In Retreat" was picked for ACID Cannes. "Maya: The Birth of a Superhero", a virtual reality title with an India connect, was also selected.

In 2013, Indian cinema sent five films to various sections – "Monsoon Shootout" (Midnight Screening), "Bombay Talkies" (a Special Screening to mark 100 years since Dada Saheb Phalke's "Raja Harishchandra"), "Ugly" (Directors' Fortnight), "The Lunchbox" (Critics' Week) and "Charulata" (Cannes Classics).

Work has begun on 'Panchayat 4', plan to make season five too, says director Deepak Mishra

"Panchayat" director Deepak Kumar Mishra says there are at least two more seasons in the pipeline for the popular comedy drama series and the team has already started work on the fourth installment.

Mishra's comments come days before the season three premiere of the Prime Video show, starring Jitendra Kumar, Neena Gupta, Raghubir Yadav, Faisal Malik, Chandan Roy, and Sanvikaa.

"Panchayat" became an instant hit with the viewers when it premiered in 2020 and its second season also garnered overwhelming response upon its 2022

premiere.

"We have started writing season four. For us, generally there's no break between two seasons. The third season is over and we have written three to four episodes (of season four) of the show.

"So far, we have thought about making season four and five. For season four, we have a clear idea, and there is a broader idea for season five," Mishra told PTI here.

"Panchayat" revolves around Abhishek Tripathi (Kumar), an engineering graduate, who for lack of a better job option, takes up the post of a secretary of a
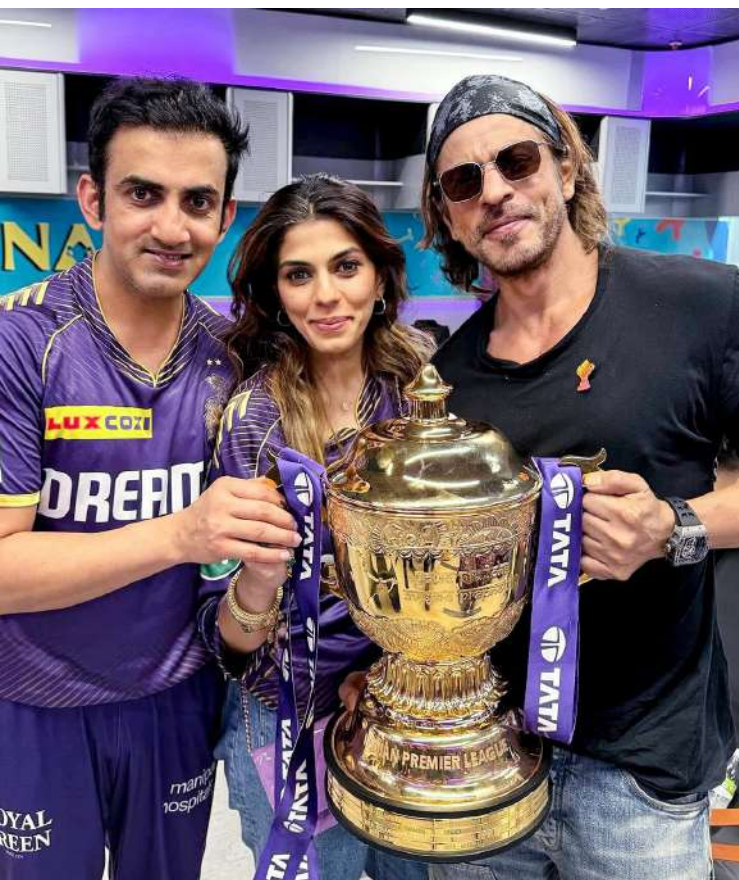
panchayat office in Phulera, a fictional remote village in Uttar Pradesh.

When the team began working on "Panchayat" season three, the director said they were "careful to not get swayed by the popularity" of the previous two chapters.

"We made sure that we made the right content and retained the core soul of the show. We wanted to take the story forward organically. However, we have to make sure that the new season is more entertaining and emotional," he added.

Coach application for Indian Cricket team: Deadline ends, no foreign names, Laxman not interested, will Gambhir replace Dravid

New Delhi

The deadline for applying for the post of Indian men's cricket team chief coach ended on Monday but both the BCCI and the top name in its wishlist, Gautam Gambhir chose to keep mum on the development.

After guiding Kolkata Knight Riders to their third IPL trophy on Sunday, it is but natural that Gambhir's name is getting more momentum.

While both interested parties haven't said anything on record, the BCCI, it seems, doesn't have too many quality options available at the moment.

It is understood that no notable foreign name has applied for the post, especially after BCCI secretary Jay Shah made it clear that the Board is looking at someone who has risen through the ranks and knows the domestic structure.

It could be safely said that the BCCI's primary target was VVS Laxman, the National Cricket Academy head, but the stylish Hyderabadi seems not interested in a full time position which requires him to available for 10 months a year.

"The deadline is fine, but the BCCI brass wouldn't mind taking some more time before reaching a decision. Right now, the team will be busy with World T20 for the better part of the month of June. After that seniors will be rested from tours of Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe where any of the NCA-based senior coaches can accompany the team. So what's the hurry," a BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Also, KKR principal owner Shah Rukh Khan shares a deep bond with Gambhir and it is not easy to leave an IPL team, which has been a part of identity for the former India opener.

There's another aspect that needs to be look into seriously -- what senior India players, currently in New York, feel on whether Gambhir can indeed be Rahul Dravid's replacement.

Athletics Federation of India clueless as suspended athletes participate in world event

New Delhi

In a startling revelation, two Indian athletes who were put on provisional suspension by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) participated in an international tournament.

Cross country runners Hemraj Gujjar and Anjali Kumari were issued provisional suspensions on March 7 and 8 under Article 2.1 & 2.2 of the anti-doping rules after their samples showed presence of a prohibited substance or its metabolites or markers. A provisional suspension bars athletes from participating in national or international championships till the conclusion of the hearings.

However, the duo despite being under suspension took part in the World Cross Country Race that was held in Belgrade on March 30.

The development has greatly embarrassed the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), which has promptly issued a show cause notice to both the runners to explain why severe action should not be taken against them.

AFI president Adille Sumariwalla told The Tribune that they were caught unawares as the two athletes were directly in touch with the NADA officials while the federation were not informed about the results.

"The athletes were directly in touch with the NADA officials. The AFI was not informed about their suspension at all. The AFI was not aware of their suspension at the time (of sending the entries)," Sumariwalla said. The AFI came to know of the situation on April 12 when the NADA updated its list of suspended athletes. The president hinted that this was a deliberate attempt by the athletes to hide their suspensions

FINAL ADIEU?: In what could be his swansong, Rafael Nadal goes down fighting against Zverev in earliest French Open exit

PARIS

Rafa Nadal crashed to his earliest exit at the French Open today after a 6-3 7-6(5) 6-3 first-round defeat by fourth seed Alexander Zverev, with fans wondering if the 14-time champion will return to the Grand Slam he has ruled for two decades.

Rafael Nadal's camp and fans wear a dejected look. REUTERS

The 22-time Major champion, who won the Musketeers' Cup for the first time in 2005 and last raised the trophy in 2022, had previously said this year could be his final one on the tour. Having returned to the tournament that he skipped in 2023 and refusing to confirm any farewells ahead of his opener, Nadal showed flashes of top form again on Court Philippe Chatrier but the 37-year-old ultimately went down fighting.

"I'm not 100% sure if it's the last time but I enjoyed it, the crowd were amazing during the whole week of preparation and today," Nadal said as the crowd rose to their feet. "The feelings today are difficult to describe with words but it's special to feel the love in the place I love the most. I enjoy playing a lot and travelling with the family. The body is feeling better than two months ago. Maybe in two months I say it's enough. But it's something I don't feel yet."

Victory meant Zverev became only the third man to beat Nadal at Roland Garros, after Novak Djokovic and Robin Soderling, with the German also banishing memories of his retirement due to an ankle injury when the duo last met in the 2022 semifinals. "I

don't know what to say... thank you Rafa from all of the tennis world, it's such a great honour," Zverev said. "I've watched Rafa play all my childhood and I was lucky enough to play him twice on this beautiful court."

In a jungle

Nadal likened his struggles with injury in the last 18 months to being in a jungle as the Spaniard hoped to return to Roland Garros for the Olympics. Never far from physical issues in his glittering career, the 37-year-old missed almost all of 2023 with a hip problem and his comeback earlier this year was stalled by a muscle tear, before small niggles affected his preparation for the claycourt Major.

Nadal said he could not predict how his battered body would respond to the demands of the Games in July and August. "My body has been a jungle for two years. You don't know what to expect. I wake up one day and I find a snake biting me. Another day a tiger," Nadal said.

"I've been fighting with all the things that I went through. But the dynamic is positive the last few weeks. I felt ready. I think tomorrow I'll be ready to play again if I have to. But I will not have to. So that's the thing. Now, I need to prepare myself, I need to clear my ideas and see what's the new calendar to try to be ready for Olympics. I can't say anything today, but my main goal now is to play the Olympics."

Nadal will be eyeing his third gold medal after triumphing in singles in the 2008 Beijing Games and doubles eight years later in Rio.

Former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh sends notices to real estate firms for infringement of privacy, delayed home possession

New Delhi

Former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh has sent two separate legal notices to two Delhi-based real estate firms invoking arbitration clauses over alleged violation of his privacy rights in promotion of construction projects and for delayed delivery of possession of a dwelling unit to him in the National Capital.

One of the legal notices, sent by Delhi-based law firm Rizwan Law Associates on behalf of the cricketer, has sought "adequate damages in terms of delay caused in completion of the Project and issuance of the Letter of Possession in the absence of any reasonable cause or extension in timeline."

It has also sought "delivery of proper quality, standard, class and grade of the Apartment to My Client who was promised a premium quality Apartment and has been offered an extremely inferior quality Apartment."

According to the notice, the cricketer had booked a dwelling unit in 2020 at Hauz Khas, New Delhi in one of the projects of a real estate firm.

M/s Brilliant Etoile Private Limited and M/s Uppal Housing Private Limited are the noticees in one of the legal notices pertaining to the delayed possession of the dwelling units.

The second notice of the cricketer was issued to Brilliant Etoile Private Limited only and it pertained to infringement of his privacy rights.

"That this dispute principally concerns with the violation of Intellectual Property Rights with respect to the Personality Rights and misuse of Brand Value of the Celebrity i.e., My Client in contravention to the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding dated 24.11.2020, however, My Client reserves the right to add the detailed instances and elaborate in further specificity in the Statement of Claim," the second notice said.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the cricketer was to promote and endorse the project and the MoU expired on November 23, 2023. He is aggrieved by the alleged continued commercial use of the services provided by him, including the use of his photographs on billboards, project site, social media posts, and articles despite the expiry of the MoU, the notice said.

The former India all-rounder said the alleged continued use of his image and others was in complete violation of his copyright, personality rights, and right to publicity enshrined under the laws and protected as his intellectual property rights.

Indian gymnast Dipa Karmakar makes history

Tashkent

Top gymnast Dipa Karmakar today became the first Indian to win a gold medal in the Asian Senior Championships as she clinched the yellow metal in the women's vault event here. The 30-year-old Dipa secured an average of 13.566 in the vault final on the last day of competitions.

Dipa, who had finished fourth in the vault final at the 2016 Rio Olympics, had won a bronze medal in the same event in the 2015 edition. Ashish Kumar had won a bronze medal in individual floor exercise in the 2015 edition. Pranati Nayak had also bagged bronze medals in the vault event in the 2019 and 2022 editions.

However, Dipa, who returned to action last year after a 21-month suspension for a doping offence, is out of contention for the Paris Olympics. She finished 16th in the all-round category with a score of 46.166. The Asian Championship was the final Olympics qualifier.

India vice-captain Hardik Pandya absent from team's T20 World Cup departure amid divorce rumours

Mumbai

Amid divorce rumours, India vice-captain Hardik Pandya was absent from the team's first batch for T20 World Cup, which left for the tournament on Saturday night. The first batch, comprising skipper Rohit Sharma and head coach Rahul Dravid, left for New York from Mumbai to participate in the 2024 Men's T20 World Cup starting from June 1.

In the pictures shared by the BCCI on X, several players including Ravindra Jadeja, Jasprit Bumrah, Rishabh Pant and Suryakumar Yadav were spotted, but the MI skipper was nowhere to be seen.

"The wait is over. We are back! Let's show your support for #TeamIndia", BCCI posted on X.

Arshdeep Singh, Shivam Dube, Mohammed Siraj, Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel along with reserves Shubman Gill and Khaleel Ahmed were also spotted. According to reports, the BCCI decided to send the first batch of players, who were not involved in the IPL 2024 now and according to that Hardik, technically, should have been a part of the group. However, some reports suggested that Hardik is in London and could link up with Rohit and Co from there, with Virat Kohli also joining the team later.

Indian shuttler PV Sindhu ends runner-up at Malaysia Masters after leading 11-3 in decider

Kuala Lumpur

Star Indian shuttler PV Sindhu blew away a massive 11-3 lead in the deciding game of the Malaysia Masters final against Wang Zhi Yi, missing out on a great opportunity to end her title drought here on Sunday.

The trophy was well within her reach but world number 15 Sindhu suffered a shocking meltdown after the final change of ends to go down 21-16 5-21 16-21 against the Chinese world number seven in 79 minutes.

Fifth seed Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, last won the Singapore Open and Commonwealth Games gold in 2022 and finished runner-up at the Madrid Spain Masters in 2023.

The title would have been the icing on the cake but her impressive run to the final will still give her a lot of confidence as Sindhu looks to put the finishing touches ahead of the Paris Olympics.

It was her first final appearance on the BWF World Tour after more than a year.

"Overall, I can say that it's been a very good match. It's a bit disappointing, but a lot of positives to take from this match and the whole tournament as well," said Sindhu ranked 15th in the world.

"I am happy that I at least came to the finals, I played well. These matches will definitely give me a lot of confidence, but I could have won that. It's just not one of those days."

Sindhu used a combination of poise and power to dominate the proceedings against the reigning Asian champion Wang for most part of the match but all fell apart after the break in the decider as the trophy slipped out of her hands.

A silver and bronze medallist in the last two editions of the Olympics, Sindhu had lost to Wang at the Arctic Open last year but has defeated the Chinese twice in three meetings.

Interestingly, it was Wang against whom Sindhu had won the finals during her last BWF title at the Singapore Open.

Sindhu was leading 11-3 at the interval in the third game but she fell into a pool of errors after the change of sides as Wang won 18 of the next 23 points to seal the trophy in her name.