PM Modi, Xi endorse patrolling pact; instruct resumption of Special Representatives' talks

Kazan

In their first structured bilateral talks in nearly five years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday agreed that India and China can have a "peaceful and stable" relationship by displaying maturity and mutual respect, and endorsed the pact on the resolution of the dragging eastern Ladakh border row.

In the meeting, Modi underscored the importance of properly handling differences and disputes and not allowing them to disturb peace and tranquility.

In a post on 'X', Modi said, "India-China relations are important for the people of our countries, and for regional and global peace and stability."

"Mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual sensitivity will guide bilateral relations," he said.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said at a media briefing that the two leaders noted that the special representatives on the India-China boundary question have a critical role to play in the resolution of the issue and for the maintenance of peace and

tranquillity in border areas.

Modi and Xi instructed the special representatives to meet at an early date and continue their efforts, he said.

"We hope to schedule the next meeting of Special Representatives at an appropriate date," he said.

The foreign secretary said Modi and Xi reviewed the state of bilateral relations from a strategic and long-term perspective and they were of the view that stable ties between the two countries will have a positive impact on regional and global peace and prosperity.

Both Modi and Xi stressed that

with maturity and wisdom, and by showing mutual respect, India and China can have a peaceful and stable relationship, Misri said.

He said restoration of peace and tranquility in border areas will create space for returning towards the path of normalisation of ties.

Officials will now take the next steps to discuss enhancing strategic communication and stabilising bilateral relations by utilising official dialogue mechanisms, he said.

"Welcoming the recent agreement for complete disengagement and resolution of issues that arose in 2020 in the India-China border areas, Prime Minister Modi underscored the importance of properly handling differences and disputes and not allowing them to disturb peace and tranquility," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.

It said the two leaders affirmed that stable, predictable, and amicable bilateral relations between India and China, as two neighbours and the two largest nations on earth, will have a positive impact on regional and global peace and prosperity.

Maha Polls: MVA -85-85-85

Mumbai

A press conference of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) was held in the presence of MPs Sanjay Raut, Balasaheb Thorat, Nana Patole, Jayant Patil, Vijay Wadettiwar, Anil Deshmukh, and Anil Desai. During this event, Sanjay Raut addressed questions regarding the seat-sharing within the MVA. He mentioned that a meeting of the alliance was held with Sharad Pawar, who instructed that the seat distribution be announced. Raut stated that the seat-sharing has been finalized smoothly, and it will include the Samajwadi Party and Shetkari Kamgar Paksha (Shetak). A list has been prepared for 270 seats with a division of 85-85-85, while discussions with other allied parties for the remaining seats are ongoing. The MVA will contest all 288 seats with full strength, Raut added.

Sanjay Raut emphasized that the issue of 288 seats has been resolved

responsibly, and discussions are continuing with allied parties. Even though the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Congress are included in their list, negotiations are still ongoing, indicating that the MVA is united in its discussions.

Nana Patole also mentioned that a meeting of the three political parties was held in the presence of Sharad Pawar, and they reached a consensus on 270 seats with a division of 85-85-85. Discussions are in progress regarding the remaining 18 seats with Shetak, the Communist Party, and the Samajwadi Party, and clarity is expected tomorrow.

Patole expressed confidence that the MVA will fight the elections as a united front and form the next government in Maharashtra.

Following the meeting with Sharad Pawar, MVA leaders announced the seat-sharing arrangements at a press conference. All eyes are now on who will be allocated the 18 remaining seats. From Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena, 65 candidates have been announced in the first list, but Sanjay Raut indicated that changes might occur in these names.

In the first phase, the three MVA parties have each taken 85 seats, but contentious seats have been left aside for now. The MVA has set aside 18 seats for allied parties. In Mumbai, Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena has declared Varun Sardesai as the candidate for Bandra East. However, candidates for the disputed seats of Byculla and Versova have not yet been announced.

Inside...

MNS leader Raj Thackeray›s son Amit Thackeray to make electoral debut from Mahim

Shinde to contest from Kopri-Panchpakhadi

Why Wayanad for Priyanka Gandhi: Numbers tell the story

Vladimir Putin hosts Global South, seeks to counterbalance West's clout

Maharashtra polls: Shinde Sena's first list out, 37 key loyalists among 45 candidates

Mumbai

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena has released its first list of 45 candidates for the upcoming assembly polls, which includes 37 sitting MLAs — key loyalists who defected with Shinde when he broke away from the party last year.

Shinde will contest the assembly elections from the Kopri-Pachpakhadi constituency.

As the leader of the Mahayuti alliance that also has the BJP, he has prioritised loyalty over any other criterion in his first list, according to a report in News18.

While Shinde is confident in his loyalists, there are concerns about how other MLAs in his faction will react to the candidate selection. Over the past year, his camp has grown to over 50 MLAs, many of whom switched allegiance from Uddhav Thackeray's faction following the rebellion.

Despite this uncertainty, the Sena is optimistic that none of its MLAs will return to the Thackeray camp, even if some are left out of the candidate list this election.

The political dynamics in Maharashtra remain fluid, with seat-sharing negotiations between Sena and BJP ongoing. But, the decision to prioritise these 37 MLAs reflects the critical importance of rewarding loyalty within the Shinde camp, the News18 report said.

Maharashtra Elections: MNS leader Raj Thackeray's son Amit Thackeray to make electoral debut from Mahim

Mumbai

Amit Thackeray, the son of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) president Raj Thackeray, will make his electoral debut from the Mahim assembly seat in central Mumbai, the party announced on October 22.

MNS released its first list of 45 candidates for the November 20 Maharashtra assembly elections.

It fielded MNS spokesperson and former corporator Sandeep Deshpande from Worli in south-central Mumbai where he is likely to take on Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray.

Pramod Patil, the only MNS MLA in the outgoing assembly, was renominated from Kalyan rural seat in neighbouring Thane district.

The MNS had announced earlier this month that it will fight the Maharashtra assembly elections on its own, without any alliance, said party chief Raj Thackeray on Wednesday.

"We will be contesting the polls with full vigour. After the polls, the MNS will be in government. MNS will contest the highest number of seats among all political parties," the firebrand leader had said.

Of the 288 assembly constituencies in the state, MNS had won one seat each in the 2014 and 2019 elections.

Maharashtra will go to polls in a single phase on November 20 and votes will be counted on November 23.

It will largely be a fight between the ruling Mahayuti coalition of BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP, and the opposition bloc Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVS) comprising the Congress, Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP).

Bombay HC stays state govt decision to take back 116 acres of Kandivali industrial land

Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday stayed a Government Resolution (GR) dated October 8 issued by the Maharashtra Revenue and Forest Department to take back over 116 acres of prime land parcel in Charkop area in Kandivali (West) allotted for industrial purposes. It passed an ad-interim order on plea by Kandivali Co-op. Industrial Estate Ltd, in whose favour the concerned land with 116 acres and 20 gunthas was allotted. The court issued notices to the respondent authorities and stayed the effect of the GR and subsequent letters in that regard till further hearing on December 3. Senior advocate Aspi Chinoy for petitioner on October 22 submitted before a bench of Justices Atul S Chandurkar and Rajesh S Patil that the initial allotment was made based on the GR of December 6, 2002, and the same could not have been revoked arbitrarily without granting opportunity to the petitioners to raise their grievances. Chinoy submitted that based on October 8 GR, the Mumbai suburban collector on October 10 took over possession of the said lands even though the members of petitioner society have their operational industrial units on the same and same was arbitrary. The petitioner cooperative society was directed to return the possession of over 116 acres of government land to the Collector within seven days from the date of GR, failing which the Collector was empowered to take unilateral possession of the said land. The impugned GR cancelled the decisions of December 2002 and April 2003, regarding the transfer of Kandivali Industrial Estate (KIE) to the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) and rendered subsequent decisions implementing the transfer as ineffective. The petitioner society argued that the land and the KIE are valuable immovable properties of its members and the government cannot deprive them of the same and ought to have heard them before the impugned actions were taken.

Centre gives nod to appoint 5 lawyers as additional judges of Bombay High Court

Mumbai

The Central Government on Wednesday issued notification for the appointment of five advocates as additional judges of the Bombay High Court.

The names include Nivedita Prakash Mehta, Prafulla Surendrakumar Khubalkar, Ashwin Damodar Bhobe, Rohit Wasudeo Joshi and Advait Mahendra Sethna.

Last month, Supreme Court collegium of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Bhushan R Gavai recommended the elevation of the five lawyers.

"In exercise of the power conferred by the Constitution of India, the President of India, after consultation with Chief Justice of India, is pleased to appoint the following advocates as additional judges of the Bombay High Court," the Minister of State (MoS),

Law and Justice (Independent Charge) Arjun Ram Meghwal posted on X on Wednesday.

Mehta has practised for 31 years in civil, constitutional, service, municipal, labour and criminal laws and also represented the Maharashtra government for 11 years before the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court.

Khubalkar has over 27 years of experience as an advocate dealing with civil, constitutional, service and arbitration matters, largely before the Nagpur bench of the High Court. The collegium had noted that as he belonged to OBC category, his elevation will provide greater representation to the said classes in the higher judiciary.

Bhobe has practised as an advocate for over 26 years, mainly before the Goa bench of the HC, district courts and tribunals in the state of Goa.

Shinde to contest from Kopri-Panchpakhadi

Mumbai

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena on Tuesday released its first list of 45 candidates for the upcoming Maharashtra Assembly polls, giving tickets to all 41 sitting MLAs and to those who had joined Shinde in his rebellion, except to those who went on to become MPs in the recently held Lok Sabha polls.

According to the list, Eknath Shinde will contest again from Kopri-Panchpakhadi assembly constituency. Most of the Sena ministers also would be contesting, except for Sandipan Bhumre who was elected as an MP from Aurangabad Lok Sabha constituency. From Paithan constituency, the party has declared Vilas Bhumare, son of Sandipan Bhumre, who was a minister in the Shinde-led cabinet and became an MP.

From Jogeshwari east, the party has declared Manisha

Ravindra Waikar, wife of Ravindra Waikar who was elected as MP from Mumbai North West recently. The party also declared

Kiran Ravindra Samant, brother of Minister Uday Samant, from Rajapur assembly constituency.

Other prominent new candidates are Abhijit Adsul, son of former MP Anand Adsul from Daryapur, Kiran Samant from Rajapur, Arjun Khotkar from Jalna and Manjulatai Gavit from Sakri, who is sitting independent MLA.

The party has also announced Yamini Jadhav from Byculla, Dilip Lande from Chandivali,

Manisha Ravindra Waikar from Jogeshwari East, Pratap Sarnaik from Majiwada, Yogesh Kadam from Dapoli, minister Uday

Samant from Ratnagiri, minister Abdul Sattar from Sillod, Prakash Surve from Magathane, minister Dipak Kesarkar from Sawantwadi and minister Sanjay Rathod from Digras.

With the announcement of incumbent Sada Sarvankar from Mahim Assembly seat, Sena has paved way for a fight for the seat against Raj Thackeray's son Amit Thackeray, ending speculations that Shinde will ally with MNS chief Raj Thackeray.

Bombay HC grants bail to gangster Chhota Rajan in 2001 Jaya Shetty murder case, suspends life sentence

Mumbai

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday granted bail to gangster Chhota Rajan, suspending the sentence by special court in the Jaya Shetty murder case where the owner of the Golden Crown hotel in south Mumbai was shot dead by two unidentified people on May 4, 2001.

The HC directed Rajan, who is currently lodged at Tihar jail in Delhi, to furnish personal bond of Rs 1 lakh along with sureties of the same amount.

The Jaya Shetty murder case was among the 71 cases that were handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation after Rajan was deported to India from Indonesia in 2015.

In May, the special court under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crimes Act (MCOCA) convicted Rajan and awarded life imprisonment to him in the case. This is Rajan's second life sentence as he is serving a life sentence for journalist Jyotirmoy Dey murder case and he has not got bail in the same.

It is alleged that Shetty was killed for refusing to pay ransom amount. He had been provided with security cover by the Mumbai police, but it was withdrawn two months before his murder.

The manager of the hotel and another employee had managed to run behind the shooters and catch one of them.

Special Judge A M Patil had held Rajan guilty of offences punishable under section 302 (murder) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code along with offences under the MCOCA and the Arms Act.

Thereafter, Rajan moved the Bombay High Court with an appeal challenging the conviction. On Wednesday, a division bench of Justices Revati Mohite-Dere and Prithviraj K Chavan passed a verdict and suspended the sentence and granted bail to Rajan pending his appeal in HC.

"Execution of sentences allowed by the special court in MCOCA case stands suspended pending the appeal," the bench noted while granting bail to him pending his appeal.

The special court had already convicted co-accused Ajay Mohite, Pramod Dhonde and Rahul Pansare in the Shetty murder case.

Minutes after the murder, Rajan's close aide Hemant Pujari, allegedly threatened the family to pay the ransom amount. He remains a wanted suspect.

Posters with Yogi Adityanath and 'batenge to katenge' slogan come up in Mumbai ahead of polls

Mumbai

Ahead of the Maharashtra Assembly elections, posters featuring Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the slogan "batenge to katenge", implying that a division of votes may have a disastrous impact in the polls, have come up in several parts of Mumbai.

The posters, which carry messages written in red colour against a saffron and yellow background, also bear the name of Vishwabandhu Rai, who has put them up. He claims to be associated with the BJP and says his motive is to prevent a division of pro-BJP votes in the November 20 election.

"The Opposition is indulging in political manoeuvres and we are responding to it through our campaign. North Indians in the state believe in Yogi Adityanath and his slogan of 'batenge to katenge'. So we have started responding to the Opposition's tactics. We have witnessed

how people in Haryana were united to support the BJP. In a similar manner, we are going to apply this in the state," he told reporters.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has removed the posters from Andheri, Bandra and Western Express Highway (WEH), ahead of Maharashtra Assembly elections 2024.

Mumbai BJP chief Ashish Shelar, however, said the ruling party has not put up the posters and that Rai does not hold any post in the party. But he added that a sizeable population feels the society will suffer if there is a division of votes.

In August, speaking in Agra, Adityanath asserted the importance of national unity, while referring to the unrest in Bangladesh. "Batenge to katenge... Ek rahenge to nek rahenge (Divided we fall... United we stand)."

NCP releases 1st list of 38 candidates; Ajit Pawar to contest from Baramati

Mumbai

The Nationalist Congress Party on Wednesday released its first list of 38 candidates for the November 20 Maharashtra assembly polls with Deputy Chief Minister and party head Ajit Pawar being nominated from Baramati seat in Pune district.

Apart from renominating 26 sitting MLAs, including ministers who sided with Ajit Pawar when he joined the ruling camp, the NCP has also fielded sitting legislators Sulbha Khodke (Amravati) and Hiraman Khoskar (Igatpuri) who switched over from the Congress recently.

Bharat Gavit, son of Congress veteran late Manikrao Gavit, has been fielded from Navapur.

Deputy Speaker of state assembly Narhari Zirwal has been fielded from Dindori and state cabinet minister Chhagan Bhujbal from Yeola.

Former minister Rajkumar Badole, who was earlier with the BJP, has been given the ticket from Arjuni-Morgaon.

Mumbai police make 11th arrest in Baba Siddique murder case from Haryana

Mumbai

The Mumbai police on Wednesday nabbed one more accused in connection with NCP leader Baba Siddique's murder case, taking the number of persons in custody so far to 11, officials said.

The accused, identified as Amit Hisamsing Kumar (29), was nabbed from Haryana after his role in the crime came to the fore during the interrogation of other accused.

Siddique was shot dead outside his MLA son Zeeshan Siddique's office in Bandra area of Mumbai on October 12.

Investigators have not yet established the motive behind the murder. They are probing the crime from different angles, including contract killing, business rivalry or threats over a slum rehabilitation project in Mumbai. Police have so far arrested ten persons, including two suspected shooters while the main shooter and two conspirators are on the run.

States can regulate and tax 'industrial alcohol', rules SC

New Delhi

Holding that the expression 'industrial alcohol' is covered under 'intoxicating liquor' mentioned in Entry 8 of the State List (of the Seventh Schedule) of the Constitution, the Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that states can regulate and tax it.

By a 8: 1 verdict, a nine-judge Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud overruled the top court's 1990 judgment in Synthetics & Chemicals Ltd vs State of Uttar Pradesh which had ruled states cannot tax industrial alcohol as "intoxicating liquor" referred only to potable alcohol.

While Justice Hrishikesh Roy, Abhay S Oka, Justice BV Nagarathna, Justice JB Pardiwala, Justice Manoj Misra, Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Augustine George Masih went with the CJI, Justice Nagarathna delivered a dissenting verdict.

The meaning of intoxicating liquor under Entry 8 of the State List (List-II) was beyond the narrow definition of alcoholic beverages or potable alcohol and included all kinds of alcohol which could adversely affect public health, the top court said, adding, "The public interest purpose is evident..."

The term "intoxicating" could be understood as poisonous and liquor not colloquially or traditionally considered as alcohol may also be covered as "intoxicating liquor" within the meaning of Entry 8 of List 2, the majority said.

Alcoholic liquor and intoxicating liquor are used for consumption but the entry of intoxicating liquor stretches to its manufacturing etc. Alcoholic liquor is defined by the ingredient and 'intoxicating' is defined by effect. Thus, alcoholic liquor can be covered by the latter if it causes intoxication," it said.

However, Justice Nagarathna ruled that 'industrial alcohol' meant alcohol not fit for human consumption and that an artificial interpretation could not be adopted to give a different meaning to the term 'intoxicating liquor' as it would be contrary to the intention of the framers of the Constitution.

Didn't reveal Parliamentary committee proceedings on Waqf Bill: Jagdambika

New Delhi

Jagdambika Pal, who heads the Parliamentary committee on Waqf Bill, on Wednesday rejected the Opposition's allegations that he had violated norms by going public about TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee smashing a glass bottle and hurling it at the chair during a meeting of the panel. "I have not revealed any proceedings or deliberations of the committee. I have only made statement about an incident of violence during the committee meeting by a member and his subsequent suspension," Pal said.

DMK member A Raja and AAP member Sanjay Singh had alleged that Pal had violated rules of procedure for conduct of Parliamentary committee meetings, which were conducted in-camera.

"I have always adhered to the rules of parliamentary procedure and upheld the dignity of the House," Pal said. He said as the chairman of the joint committee on Waqf (Amendment) Bill, he made a statement on the incident of violence during the meeting of the panel on Tuesday involving a member and the subsequent action against him.

The panel's meeting hit the headlines after Banerjee smashed a glass bottle and threw it allegedly towards the chair following a heated argument with BJP member Abhijit Gangopadhyay. Banerjee ended up cutting his own fingers and was administered first aid.

The panel decided to suspend the Trinamool member for a day from the committee proceedings.

ED raids ex-Tamil Nadu minister Vaithiyalingam, some others

Chennai

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday conducted searches against former AIADMK minister Vaithiyalingam and some others as part of a money laundering case investigation, official sources said.

The raids are being undertaken in four cities in Tamil Nadu, including Chennai, under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The ED investigation is related to alleged quid pro quo in giving sanctions for Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority works during Vaithiyalingam's stint as the Tamil Nadu housing development minister.

It is alleged that "tainted" funds were received as unsecured loans in the bank accounts of some companies allegedly linked to him.

Vaithiyalingam, a close aide of O Panneerselvam (OPS), was expelled along with the former CM from the AIADMK in 2022 during the leadership issue involving OPS and incumbent party chief Edappadi K Palaniswami.

Why Wayanad for Priyanka Gandhi: Numbers tell the story

THE WAYANAD parliamentary constituency, from where Priyanka Gandhi is making her electoral debut, has been won by the Congress continuously since it was created after delimitation in 2008, with the Left its primary rival.

The first MP from Wayanad, after winning the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, was veteran Congress leader M I Shanavas. A former Kerala Students' Union leader, he climbed the ladder via the Congress's youth wing and was the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee vice-president at the time of his death in 2018.

Shanavas, a Muslim face in a constituency with a significant population of the community at 41% (as per the 2011 Census), had previously contested and lost three Assembly poll races and two Lok Sabha fights until his win in 2009, when he secured a 49.86% vote share to defeat his

CPI rival by over 1.5 lakh votes. He went on to retain the seat in 2014, albeit with a reduced vote share and victory margin over the CPI. The 2014 polls saw the closest contest till date between the Congress and Left, but still nearly 21,000 votes separated them.

After Shanavas's death in 2018, Rahul Gandhi took over as the Congress candidate from Wayanad. It was considered one of the safest seats for the party at a time when Gandhi faced a formidable challenge from BJP leader Smriti Irani on the family turf of Amethi. Eventually Wayanad proved priceless, helping Gandhi save face at a time that he lost from Amethi. He won by a massive 64.8% of the vote share, defeating the CPI runner-up by 4.32 lakh votes. Gandhi's massive win also powered the party's sweep of the Lok Sabha seats in Kerala.

In this year's Lok Sabha polls, Gandhi retained Wayanad, but both his vote share and winning margin fell – to 59.69% and 3.64 lakh votes, respectively. This was in contrast to other candidates of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF), who saw their winning margins increase sharply compared to 2019.

This is one reason the Congress turned up in strength for nomination filing by Priyanka Wednesday.

Seven Assembly seats constitute the Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency. In 2011, the Congress secured a combined vote share of 31.1%, this rose to 26.9% in 2016 and 34.5% in 2021. Except in 2016, the Congress outdid its primary rivals in the Left across the Assembly segments in Wayanad; the Left managed vote share of 29.5% in 2011, 30.3% in 2016, and 25.6% in 2021. In 2011, the Congress and its allies won all the seven segments in Wayanad, but fell to three in 2016 before climbing to four in 2021.

From 1977 to 2004, before Wayanad was created by way of delimitation, the Lok Sabha seat was split across three constituencies – Calicut, Cannanore and Manjeri. In the nine elections held in that period, the Congress won Calicut and Cannanore six times each, but never won Manjeri. The Left parties won Calicut and Manjeri just once, and Cannanore three times. The IUML won Manjeri in every other poll

ISRO targets December launch for historic space docking experiment

New Delhi

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has set December-end as the target for the launch of its first space docking experiment, which, if successful, would pave the way for future inter-planetary missions and propel it into a select global league of three such operators.

A key spin off of this technology would be extending the operational life of existing satellites. "Space assets like geo-stationary

satellites are very expensive but have a life of 8 to 10 years when their propulsion units run out of fuel even though their other onboard systems and sensors are fully functional. Space docking technology would enable replacing propulsion units repeatedly, enabling them to remain effective for several more years," Dr KV Sriram, director of ISRO's laboratory for Electro-Optics Systems (LEOS) told The Tribune during his visit to Chandigarh on Wednesday.

"Two satellites designated simply as 'Chaser' and 'Target' that have been developed by a private firm have been received and would be launched onboard a single PSLV-class vehicle, which would couple at an altitude of about 700 km," he said. Each satellite weighs about 400 kg.

Besides validating the docking technology, the mission christened Space Docking Experiment (SPADEX), would also carry several payloads for undertaking scientific studies, he added. A host of critical simulations and end-stage special reviews by scientists at ISRO establishments are currently in progress.

Space docking is the process of two individual manned or unmanned spacecraft locating each other and physically connecting in space and thereafter operating as a single unit for various purposes such as replenishment, repair and crew exchange, till they are separated by command. So far, the United States, Russia and China have developed this technology.

Dr Sriram said that a single spacecraft cannot out complex missions such as inter-planetary exploration, sample collection from space bodies, manned space flights or operating space stations, and require more than one vehicle such as an ascender and descender. For these to operate, docking and berthing technology is crucial.

ISRO's experiment is critical for mastering docking techniques required for the planned Chandrayaan-4 lunar mission for collecting lunar samples and the proposed Bharatiya Antariksh Space Station that envisions a 52-tonne platform orbiting 400 km above the Earth with a manned crew.

Wayanad will have two members in Parliament, says Rahul Gandhi

Wayanad

Wayanad is the only constituency in the country that will have two members in Parliament, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Wednesday, as he asked the people of the hill region to take care of his sister, Priyanka Gandhi, just as they had protected and looked after him when he needed it most.

The former Wayanad MP, while addressing a public meeting at Kalpetta here after the massive roadshow held by Priyanka ahead of filing her nomination for the Wayanad Lok Sabha bypoll, said the Rakhi he was wearing was made by his sister and it was a symbol of a brother's protection to her.

"I think all of you understand very well the relationship I have with the people of Wayanad. In her speech, Priyanka said that you protected me, looked after me when I needed it most.

"The Rakhi I am wearing was made by my sister. I don't take it off till it breaks. This is a symbol of a brother's protection to his sister. That is why I request the people of Wayand to look after my sister and protect her. She will put her entire energy into the problems of Wayanad and to protect you," said Rahul who represented the Wayanad seat in Lok Sabha from 2019 to 2024.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said Priyanka would be the official MP from Wayanad, while he would be the unofficial MP.

One is the official member of the Parliament and the other is the unofficial member of the Parliament and both will work together to protect the people of Wayanad," he said, while addressing a public meeting at Kalpetta here after the massive roadshow held by his sister ahead of filing her nomination for the bypoll.

Rahul further said that being the "unofficial MP" from Wayanad, he will come here and "interfere" in the problems people are facing.

Addressing the massive gathering in the presence of leaders including his mother and Congress Parliamentary Party leader Sonia Gandhi and AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul further said that he can describe his sister in one or two sentences.

IndiaAI Mission: IT ministry launches hackathon to combat cyber crime with AI

New Delhi

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), as part of its Rs 10,738-crore IndiaAI initiative, along with the Ministry of Home Affairs, is looking for artificial intelligence solutions that can help combat cyber crime.

The Centre is specifically looking for natural language processing (NLP) models that can help citizens in filing cybercrime reports on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP), and models that will help categorise victim complaints based on type of fraud and other relevant parameters.

This is part of a hackathon that IndiaAI launched last week with the aim of leveraging AI to improve cybersecurity and address cyber fraud and crimes.

"With approximately 6,000 cases reported daily through the NCRP, this initiative seeks to develop robust AI-driven solutions capable of managing and mitigating these threats," the ministry

said. "The hackathon provides a platform for participants to design and implement sophisticated AI models that can enhance the effectiveness of cybersecurity measures and combat the growing sophistication of cybercrime."

The government is inviting applications from institutions such as IITs, NITs and other establishments for the event.

In the first stage of the competition, participants, either as individuals or teams, will work on developing the NLP models. The development will take place virtually over a 20-day period. In the second stage, top 20 teams will be selected for an in-person event in New Delhi. They will further refine their models using datasets from the NCRP to assist citizens in filing

accurate cybercrime reports. The best three teams will advance to the final stage. In the final stage, the finalists will pilot their solutions in a real-world environment. The winning team will be awarded Rs 25 lakh, along with a contract to deploy their solution for the Centre for four years.

The hackathon kicked off on October 17 with online submissions closing on November 7. The second round will be held on December 18, and the winner will be announced in January 2025.

Earlier, under the IndiaAI Mission, the ministry also launched a competition to look for artificial intelligence (AI) solutions in the areas of healthcare, agriculture, climate change, and for persons with specific learning disabilities.

The ministry invited applications from interested candidates, and the selected entity will receive a contract to deploy their solution for use by Centre and associated entities for a period of four years and will also be given up to Rs 1 crore.

Inequality is better bridged nowadays in India than ever before: FM Sitharaman

New Delhi

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman emphasised the significant strides India has made in reducing inequality over the last decade. The minister, while addressing an audience at Columbia University, noted that India's policies have been pivotal in bridging inequality across various segments of society, with a comprehensive approach to financial inclusion, poverty alleviation, and infrastructure development.

"Inequality is better bridged nowadays than ever before," Sitharaman said on Tuesday, crediting several government-led initiatives that have made tangible differences in people's lives. She highlighted schemes such as collateral-free lending, interest subvention, affordable housing, and access to basic necessities like gas cylinders and sanitation facilities. "These measures have targeted different aspects of poverty, not just on paper, but through real-world impact," she added.

One of the key drivers of reduced inequality, according to the Finance Minister, has been the government's focus on

financial inclusion. The number of adults with bank accounts in India has more than doubled since 2011, allowing previously underserved populations access to savings and credit facilities. "Digital financial inclusion has brought millions into the fold, creating a larger pool of savers and investors, which in turn strengthens the overall financial system," she explained.

Sitharaman also touched on the importance of infrastructure and digital development in ensuring equitable growth. Mega projects like Bharatmala and Sagarmala, aimed at improving connectivity across India, have driven investments in key industries. "Our banking system has remained robust with low

non-performing assets and high capital adequacy ratios, enabling it to provide the necessary credit to fuel investment," she said.

Additionally, the Finance Minister also underscored the role of social security programs like Ayushman Bharat, which have provided health insurance to millions of poor families, ensuring access to quality healthcare and reducing financial disparities.

Our comprehensive approach to life has ensured that inequality is being bridged on multiple fronts," Sitharaman reiterated, adding that the groundwork laid in the past decade positions India strongly for continued economic growth and prosperity, while reducing inequality.

Trying to restore trust, reassure each other: Army Chief on patrolling pact with China

New Delhi

India will look at disengagement and de-escalation of the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh after the restoration of the status quo of April 2020, Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi said on Tuesday, a day after New Delhi announced a striking agreement with Beijing to end the over four-year border row in the region.

In his first comments on the pact regarding patrolling along the contested frontier, Gen Dwivedi stated that the Indian military is working to restore "trust," and both sides will need to "reassure each other" to achieve this objective. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri announced on Monday that India and China reached an agreement on patrolling along the LAC in eastern Ladakh, marking a major breakthrough in ending the military standoff.

The announcement came ahead of a likely meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in the Russian city of Kazan on

Wednesday, on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. "As far as we are concerned, we want to go back to the status quo of April 2020. Thereafter, we will be looking at disengagement, de-escalation, and normal management of the LAC," he said at an interactive session. "And, this normal management of the LAC will not just stop there. There are phases in that also," he added.

In almost all negotiations with China regarding the border row, India has insisted on the restoration of the status quo ante that existed before the border standoff erupted in early May 2020. "This has been our stance since then, and even today it remains the same. So, as of now, we are trying to restore trust," the Army Chief said. "How trust will be restored? It will get restored once we are able to see each other, and we are able to convince each other, look at the buffer zones which have been created; we are not creeping," he said. "Both will have to reassure each other," he added.

Chandrababu Naidu announces plans to make Andhra Pradesh India's drone capital

Amaravati

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu attended the Amaravati Drone Summit 2024, where he outlined plans to position Andhra Pradesh as India's drone capital. The event, which included innovators, drone manufacturers, and experts, focused on advancing drone technology in the state.

Naidu announced the allocation of 300 acres of land in Orvakallu, Kurnool District, for the development of a drone hub. He emphasized the aim to make Amaravati a global center for drone manufacturing and innovation.

Additionally, Naidu revealed plans to train 35,000 drone pilots in Andhra Pradesh to meet the growing demand for skilled professionals in the industry. He indicated that the state government would release a comprehensive drone policy within 15 days to facilitate a business-friendly environment for drone manufacturers.

During his address, Naidu discussed the use of drones in recent disaster response efforts, such as delivering food and water during the Vijayawada floods. He stated that drones could also address urban traffic issues and improve agricultural processes.

Naidu expressed confidence in India's potential to become the third-largest global economy by 2047 and praised the initiatives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in promoting India on the international stage.

He stated the importance of data in driving innovation, stating that 400 million terabytes of data are generated daily. He called for the creation of a robust ecosystem for knowledge-based industries in Andhra Pradesh, focusing on the integration of artificial intelligence and cloud technologies.

In closing, Naidu highlighted the role of emerging technologies like drones and AI in advancing the knowledge economy in the state and the country.

'I'm the grandson of Kalaignar, won't apologise...': Udhayanidhi Stalin on Sanatan Dharma remark

Chennai

Tamil Nadu deputy chief minister Udhayanidhi Stalin said that he will not apologise for his comments on 'Sanatan Dharma', which created a massive controversy last year. He was addressing a gathering in Dindigul district.

Udhayanidhi defended his controversial statement, explaining that his comments were taken out of context. He clarified that his intent was to highlight issues faced by women and the allegedly repressive practices towards them in Sanatan Dharma.

Bengal govt forms task force to ensure safety of doctors, other health workers

Kolkata

The West Bengal government on Tuesday constituted a state-level task force to ensure safety and security of healthcare professionals in the state and improve the quality of services, a notification said.

The task force was set up after Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had promised junior doctors of such a measure during a meeting.

Chief Secretary Manoj Pant will be the chairperson of the task force, while Home Secretary Nandini Chakraborty, Director General of Police (DGP) Rajeev Kumar, Health Secretary NS Nigam and Kolkata Police Commissioner Manoj Verma will be part of it.

"In pursuance of the Government of West Bengal's commitment to enhancing the quality of healthcare services across the state, and in the view of the safety, security, and grievances of healthcare professionals, the state government hereby constitutes a state-level task force," an order signed by Pant stated.

It mentioned that there would be two representatives from senior and junior resident doctors, one female nominee from students, and one from the state-level grievance redressal committee.

"The state-level task force shall strengthen healthcare infrastructure, including the ongoing work related to 'on-duty rooms, washrooms, drinking water facilities, and CCTV surveillance systems," the order said.

It would also monitor the deployment of police and security personnel, including mobile police surveillance teams at state-run hospitals.

The task force will also oversee the implementation of a centralised helpline and panic button system, a centralised referral and a real-time bed availability information systems.

The panel would also oversee the functioning of various committees, related to security audits, internal complaints and others.

"It will also collaborate and coordinate with all stakeholders for providing high-quality healthcare to the citizens of West Bengal as possible," it said.

The members of the task force should meet at least once a month as far as possible, the order mentioned.

JMM releases 1st list of 35 candidates for Jharkhand polls, Hemant Soren fielded from Barhait

Ranchi

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha released its first list of 35 candidates for the upcoming assembly polls on Wednesday, fielding Chief Minister Hemant Soren from Barhait and Kalpana Soren from Gandey segments.

The assembly polls will be held in two phases — on November 13 and 20 — while the results will be declared on November 23.

Hemant Soren is the sitting MLA from Barhait (ST) constituency in Sahibganj district. He won the seat by 25,740 votes over his nearest BJP rival Simon Malto in the 2019 assembly elections.

His wife Kalpana Soren had won the Gandey bypoll by 27,149 votes over her nearest BJP rival Dilip Kumar Verma. The seat had fallen vacant following the resignation of JMM MLA Sarfaraz Ahmad.

Of the 35 JMM nominees, Basant Soren, the incumbent chief minister's brother, will contest from

Dumka, Jharkhand Assembly Speaker Rabindranath Mahto from Nala, Minister Mithilesh Thakur from Garhwa, Sonu Sudivya from Giridih and Bebi Devi from Dumri.

Basant defeated former BJP minister Lois Marandi by over 6,842 votes in party stronghold Dumka, the constituency vacated by his elder brother Hemant Soren after he won Dumka and Barahit in the December 2019 assembly elections and decided to retain the latter.

Assembly Speaker Mahto won Nala in Jamtara by a margin of 3,520 votes, defeating Satyanand Jha of the BJP in the last elections. Mahto had won the seat in 2005 and 2014 also.

The other candidates announced by the JMM include Dipak Birua from Chaibasa and Kedar Hazara, a three-term sitting MLA of BJP who joined the party recently, from Jamua.

Modi, Xi to hold 1st bilateral meet in 5 years as India, China end border stand-off

Kazan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to hold a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping -- their first since the 2020 Galwan clash -- on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Russia's Kazan on Wednesday.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Tuesday said: "I can confirm that there will be a bilateral meeting held between PM Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping tomorrow on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit..."

The development comes days after the two neighbouring countries reached an agreement on patrolling along the nearly 3,500-km Line of Actual Control (LAC) to end the four-year-long border confrontation that led to a fatal clash in the Galwan Valley.

Earlier in the day, China confirmed the agreement that has been reached between New Delhi and Beijing on the patrolling arrangements along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China border areas.

"Over the past few weeks, China and

India have been in close communication through diplomatic and military channels on issues related to the China-India border. Now, the two sides have reached a resolution on the relevant matters which

China speaks highly of. Going forward, China will work with India to implement these resolutions," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told reporters during a daily media briefing in

Beijing on Tuesday.

On Monday, Foreign Secretary Misri reflected on the longstanding issue, with a nearly identical statement.

"I can share with you that over the last several weeks, Indian and Chinese diplomatic and military negotiators have been in close contact with each other in a variety of forums. And as a result of these discussions, agreement has been arrived at on patrolling arrangements along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China border areas, leading to disengagement and a resolution of the issues that had arisen in these areas in 2020. And we will be taking the next steps on this," Misri had told reporters in New Delhi.

Since the Galwan clash, the two leaders have only one formal meeting which was held on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in South Africa's Johannesburg in August 2023. There has also been a brief informal interaction during the G20 summit in Indonesia's Bali.

Vladimir Putin hosts Global South, seeks to counterbalance West's clout

Kazan

China's Xi Jinping, Modi and other global leaders arrived Tuesday in the Russian city of Kazan for a summit of the BRICS bloc of developing economies that the Kremlin hopes to turn into a rallying point for defying the Western liberal order.

For Russian President Vladimir Putin, the three-day meeting also offers a powerful

way to demonstrate the failure of US-led efforts to isolate Russia over its action in Ukraine. Kremlin foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov touted the summit as "the largest foreign policy event ever held" by Russia, with 36 countries attending and more than 20 of them represented by heads of state.

Observers see the BRICS summit as part of the Kremlin's

efforts to showcase support from the Global South amid spiralling tensions with the West and help expand economic and financial ties.

Proposed projects include the creation of a new payment system that would offer an alternative to the global bank messaging network SWIFT and allow Moscow to dodge Western sanctions and trade with partners.

Chinese President Xi Jinping told Putin that the international situation was gripped by chaos but that Beijing's strategic partnership with Moscow was a force for stability amid the most significant changes seen in a century.

Russia and China, pushing back against perceived humiliations of the 1991 Soviet collapse and centuries of European colonial dominance of China, have sought to portray the West as decadent and in decline.

Ahead of BRICS, PM again tells Putin to resolve Ukraine conflict peacefully

Kazan

The Russia-Ukraine conflict should be resolved in a peaceful manner and India is ready to provide support in achieving it, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday during his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Modi, who is visiting Russia for the second time in three months, made these remarks during a bilateral meeting with Putin on the sidelines of the BRICS summit at Kazan.

At the meeting, Modi said, "We have been in touch in the past and India believes that all issues should be resolved peacefully... India supports immediate need for restoration of peace and stability. And is ready to lend any support in this direction."

Briefing the media at Kazan, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said Modi

and Putin shared their perspectives on the conflict. "The PM reiterated that dialogue and diplomacy were the way forward," he said, adding that Modi also briefed Putin about his meetings with Ukrainian leadership in August. After visiting Moscow in July, Modi had later gone to Ukraine and spoken about the need for peaceful resolution of the conflict through talks.

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had visited Russia in September and met Putin to brief him about Modi's meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. At the meeting today, Modi said, "This is my second visit within three months that reflects the deep friendship and understanding we have." Misri said both the leaders had an extensive agenda, including trade, economic ties.

Canadian govt officials leaked 'sensitive information' involving India to US newspaper: Report

New Delhi

Top officials in Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's administration handed over sensitive intelligence about India to US-based newspaper The Washington Post, just days before the Canadian police publicly linked Indian government agents to the killing of Khalistani extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a report has claimed

Sources told The Globe and Mail, a Canadian newspaper, that Nathalie Drouin, Trudeau's national security and intelligence adviser and David Morrison, deputy minister at Global Affairs, told the US publication about India's alleged interference operations in Canada a week before Thanksgiving.

The Post was told that the report should not be published until the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Commissioner Mike Duheme holds a press conference, which took place on Thanksgiving Day.

Notably, The Washington Post reported on the same day that Canada has linked India for the murder of Sukhdool Singh Gill (aka Sukha Duneke), a former gangster with links to terrorism. The report cited "Canadian officials" as the source of the information. The report named linked top government officials, claiming that they authorised such acts in Canada.

Gill's murder had taken place just two days after Trudeau had first accused India of being behind Nijjar's murder in Surrey, British Columbia.

India has vehemently denied all the charges of intereference by Canada as well as New Delhi's alleged role in the murder plot. In a hard-hitting statement, the ministry of external affairs has called out PM Trudeau for using these allegations to advance his own domestic political agenda.

It has also ripped into the Trudeau administration for levelling baseless charges without presenting even a shred of evidence. During the press conference on October 14, the Canadian police alleged that Indian officials were behind crimes in Canada but did not give any details. "Commissioner Duheme never acknowledged that Mr. Gill's killing in Winnipeg was connected to India nor did the RCMP reveal other sensitive information reported by The Post," The Globe and Mail report said.

Dan Stanton, a former senior executive at CSIS, told the Canadian newspaper that information about Gill's murder and the alleged Indian links would be considered classified since it was not in the public domain till reported by The Washington Post.

"If it is evidence or intelligence it would certainly be classified. If it doesn't exist in open source and The Washington Post is quoting Canadian government officials then it sounds like something that would have been classified unless there is some special regime where they can release stuff to certain designated persons," Stanton said, hinting at a leak of classified information by the Trudeau administration.

A spokesperson for both Drouin and Morris said that no classified information was shared with anybody.

The Washington Post was one of the earliest publications to release the name of the Indian government official who was said to be the alleged mastermind in the attempted murder of US-based Sikh separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Pannun is another India designated terrorist.

Ties between India and Canada hit rock bottom after Canada linked New Delhi's envoy to Ottawa Sanjay Kumar Verma and some other Indian diplomats to the Nijjar case.

India strongly rejected the charges and said that it will recall Verma and five other diplomats from Ottawa. It also expelled six Canadian diplomats from India. On its part, Canada said it expelled the Indian envoy and five other diplomats.

India, Pakistan extend agreement on Sri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor for 5 years

New Delhi

India and Pakistan has extended the validity of the agreement on Sri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor, site of the holy Gurdwara in Pakistan, for a further period of five years, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar announced on October 22.

PM Modi-led government "will continue to facilitate our Sikh community's access to their holy sites," he said in a post on X.

"It has been agreed between India and Pakistan through diplomatic channels to extend the validity of the Agreement on Sri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor for a further period of five years," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a separate statement. "The Agreement, signed on 24 October 2019 to facilitate the visit of pilgrims from India to Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, Narowal, Pakistan through the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor, was valid for a period of five years."

The latest extension of the agreement's validity will ensure uninterrupted operation of the corridor for use by the pilgrims from India to visit the holy Gurdwara in Pakistan, the ministry said.

"In view of the continued requests of pilgrims regarding the removal of $20 service charge levied by Pakistan per pilgrim per visit, India has once again urged Pakistan to not levy any fee or charges on the pilgrims," the ministry said.

Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasreen thanks Amit Shah after MHA extends her residency permit

New Delhi

Bangladeshi author and activist Taslima Nasreen expressed her gratitude to Union home minsiter Amit Shah on October 22 after the ministry of home affairs (MHA) extended her India residency permit.

Taking to X, formerly Twitter, Nasreen wrote, "A world of thanks" and tagged the home minister.

She had made a public appeal to Amit Shah on October 21 requesting him to extend her residence permit, which was pending since July 22. Just a day after her request, the ministry extended her residence permit.

The exiled Bangladeshi author, whose novel 'Lajja' has been banned in Bangladesh, fled to India two decades ago. "Dear Amit Shah ji Namaskar. I live in India because I love this great country. It has been my second home for the last 20 years. But the Ministry of Home Affairs has not been extending my residence permit since July 22," Taslima Nasreen wrote on X on Monday.

"I'm so worried. I would be so grateful to you if you let me stay. Warm regards," she added.

Nasreen termed the Yunus government in Bangladesh 'illegal'. "Sheikh Hasina did not resign from her prime minister post and she is still alive. Therefore, Yunus govt is illegal," she wrote on X.

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus took oath as the head of Bangladesh interim government in August 2024 after Sheikh Hasina resigned as the Prime Minister and fled the country. Hasina, who had been in power for 15 years, quit on August 5 and left Dhaka following weeks of deadly protests that initially began against government job quotas but surged into a movement demanding her resignation.

Wait and watch

IT is no coincidence that India and China have reached an agreement on patrolling along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh on the eve of the BRICS summit in Russia, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to hold a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The 'major breakthrough' has set the stage for a cordial encounter between the two leaders, who have been reluctant to talk to each other after the Galwan clash of June 2020. They finally have something positive to show to the world amid a four-year-old standoff that has kept armies of the two nations in a state of round-the-clock readiness. What's more, the perception that Modi and Xi can act as mediators in the Ukraine war hinges on their ability to resolve their own differences.

However, it is too early to expect that the situation on the ground will become normal anytime soon. New Delhi knows very well that Beijing has a knack for

disregarding border agreements; the latest one could meet a similar fate. Unilateral alteration of the status quo by Chinese troops is at the core of the present dispute. And it is largely due to Chinese intransigence that disengagement from the

friction points of Depsang and Demchok got delayed despite a series of military and diplomatic talks.

China's massive infrastructure buildup along the LAC is a telltale sign that it wants India to stay busy catching up. The Indian Government and the defence forces would be well advised to keep a close eye on Chinese movements along the border. Attempts to mislead the nation with half-truths and falsehoods must be avoided. The PM set a wrong precedent when he claimed during a post-Galwan all-party meeting that 'neither is anyone inside our territory nor is any of our post captured'. Greater vigil and transparency can help India push China harder to walk the talk.

// satyasya paramaṁ nidhānam //

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

Hoax threat calls
Hold the perpetrators accountable

THE dramatic surge in hoax bomb threats targeting Indian airlines is testing the robustness of the civil aviation sector. In the past few days, scores of flights — domestic and international — have received threats that later turned out to be hoax calls. Diversions and delays have resulted in widespread disruption in flight schedules as well as significant losses for the airlines. With the use of virtual private networks complicating the tracking process, the Central agencies have a task at hand to get to the perpetrators. Some threatening posts, it is suspected, originated from the UK and Germany. Recently, the Mumbai Police detained a teenager from Chhattisgarh in connection with threats to three flights. Reassurances of safety

of passengers and flight protocols being in place cannot sidestep the issue of holding the hoax callers accountable. They must not go unpunished.

The recurring nature of such threats is a matter of grave concern. It's not just airlines; in recent months,

several hospitals, malls and educational institutions have received threats. The unprecedented rise in these mischievous and unlawful actions in the aviation sector warrants a concerted counter-strategy. The implementation of stricter regulations is being

planned. These include placing perpetrators on the no-fly list for five years and incorporating a legal regime with stricter bail provisions and stern punishment. More precise security checks are being considered so that not all threat messages lead to an immediate landing.

Instilling fear and uncertainty, hoax threats are often linked to malicious intent, as an attention-seeking device, mental health issues or a prank. Even fliers have proved to be culprits. There is ambiguity over whether the threats come from an individual, a group, or are copycat acts. Dedicated teams trained to deal with hoax calls and exemplary punishment can be an effective deterrent.

Hooch disaster

It reflects a failure of Bihar's liquor ban

THE latest hooch tragedy in Bihar, claiming over 35 lives (unofficial reports put the figure at around 65) in Siwan, Saran and Gopalganj districts, exposes the stark inefficacy of the state's prohibition policy. Imposed in 2016, the liquor ban

aimed to curb alcohol-related harm, but it has, instead, fuelled the rise of a thriving black market for illicit liquor, costing countless lives and leading to significant revenue loss. This tragedy is not an isolated incident. Bihar has repeatedly faced such fatal outcomes, with over 350 deaths linked to spurious liquor since prohibition began. The recurring nature of these incidents highlights the flawed implementation of the policy, where black-market operations exploit vulnerable communities, often targeting the poorest sections of society.

While law enforcement agencies have responded with arrests and raids, seizing large quantities of illegal alcohol, the ground reality reveals a persistent availability of illicit liquor. The parallel economy that runs on this trade reportedly results in a revenue loss of Rs 20,000 crore to the state. Yet, there appears to be no significant impact on reducing the access or consumption of dangerous brews.

The state administration, despite its efforts, has failed to offer a sustainable solution. The dichotomy between the wealthy, who have access to safe alcohol despite the ban, and the poor, who fall prey to toxic alternatives, further reflects the socio-economic divide that prohibition has exacerbated. The Bihar Government must re-evaluate its approach. Either the liquor ban must be strictly enforced with a strengthened regulatory framework or a regulated market could offer a safer alternative. Until then, the lives lost in these tragedies will continue to be a tragic reminder of failed policy.

Ganderbal shocker

Central, UT govts must go all out to restore peace

THE euphoria over the peaceful conduct of the Assembly elections and the installation of an elected government in Jammu and Kashmir has unfortunately proved to be short-lived. The Ganderbal terror attack, which claimed the lives of a doctor and six labourers at a tunnel construction site, leaves no room for doubt that Pakistan will persist with its nefarious

policy of bleeding India — and J&K in particular — with a thousand cuts. It's no less worrisome that this attack took place just days after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had an informal interaction with his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Islamabad.

New Delhi has repeatedly made it clear that talks cannot be resumed unless Islamabad/Rawalpindi turns off the terror tap. But it is no coincidence that the terror attack has taken place in Ganderbal, the constituency of J&K's new Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. Clearly, Pakistan-backed terror groups are sending the unmistakable message — after targeting the Jammu region in recent months — that the remarkably peaceful polls in the UT could not have taken place without the Pakistan military establishment's tacit agreement. The terror groups are now turning the spotlight back on Kashmir. The attempt to disrupt an infrastructure project is aimed not just at stalling development in the Valley and scaring away migrant labourers and tourists who have a crucial role in boosting J&K's economy, it is also to demonstrate that no one in Kashmir is fully safe. That's why Central and UT governments need to work in tandem to restore peace and normalcy.

Clearly, Pakistan's army chief, Gen Asim Munir, has a second message to his own government, in response to former PM Nawaz Sharif telling visiting Indian journalists last week, "We have lost the last 75 years and it is important we don't lose the next 75." Which is, that hosting an Indian foreign minister on Pakistani soil is all very well, but the Army cannot be kept out of any conversation with India.

Kiwis fly high

Cricket team humbles mighty India on home turf

THE New Zealand men's cricket team, often described as perennial underachievers, punched above its weight to outclass India in Bengaluru, recording its first Test win on Indian soil in 36 long years. Beating India at home is no mean feat — over the past decade or so, Indian cricketers have become nearly invincible in their backyard in all formats of the game. Commendably, the Kiwis have overcome a big barrier by getting the better of the Rohit Sharma-led squad, with batter Rachin Ravindra and pacer Matt Henry being the star performers.

Team India was on the back foot right from the outset as the New Zealand bowlers bundled it out for a shockingly low total of 46 in the first innings. Though India put up a gallant fightback in the second innings, thanks to power-packed knocks by Sarfaraz Khan and Rishabh Pant, it was not enough to stop the Kiwis from romping home. The New Zealanders have been a thorn in India's side in recent years — they knocked their rivals out of

the 2019 ODI World Cup and clinched the inaugural ICC World Test Championship two years later. Gone are the days when the Kiwis were regarded as 'softies' in the cricket arena; they are now as tough as nails and give no quarter even to the most formidable teams. The sterling performance of its women's cricket squad in the T20 World Cup in the UAE has given the island nation another reason to

feel proud of its gutsy players.

The Bengaluru defeat is a wake-up call for Indian cricketers. They need to hit back strongly and show the Kiwis their mettle. The loss to Australia in the 2023

ODI World Cup final in front of a partisan crowd in Ahmedabad had left the team battered and bruised. However, seven months later, they were crowned the T20 world champions. Similar resilience and determination would be needed to turn the tables on the never-say-die Kiwis.

Priyanka's debut

Wayanad marks a new chapter for Congress

PRIYANKA Gandhi Vadra's candidacy from Wayanad marks a significant development for the Congress party. Entering the electoral fray five years after her active political engagement began, Priyanka's nomination to contest the bypoll on November 13 is a step toward consolidating the Gandhi family's influence within Parliament.

Priyanka's journey in the Congress has evolved from behind-the-scenes support to frontline leadership, showcasing her strategic acumen and ability to connect with the masses. She initially focused on strengthening the party's organisational base, especially in regions where it had weakened, such as Uttar Pradesh. Her successful campaigns in Himachal Pradesh and role in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, where the Congress improved its seat tally, have cemented her reputation as a key figure. Her Wayanad campaign leverages this approach, focusing on regional issues while presenting her as a familiar Gandhi figure. Posters declaring her as "Wayanadinte Priyankari" (Wayanad's beloved) reflect growing local support. She has promised to continue Rahul's work in the constituency. Though the Congress adopted a "one-family-one-ticket" rule at its Udaipur Chintan Shivir in 2022, Priyanka's candidacy underscores the rule's flexibility for seasoned family members who meet the five-year party commitment criterion. This exception, also applied to Rahul, reflects the Congress's continued reliance on the Gandhis' influence.

The bypoll is significant beyond Wayanad as it tests the Congress's new direction with Priyanka at the helm. If she wins, her role could shift from family figure to influential political leader, strengthening the Congress's position to contest BJP policies. Her opponents in Wayanad include the BJP, which is aiming to expand its base in Kerala, and the CPI(M), which has a deep-rooted base in the Left-leaning state. Priyanka is poised to navigate these ideological challenges in her bid to redefine her role in politics and come out of the coat-tails of Rahul and Sonia.

Yadav's removal

Five Eyes allies watch as US pushes India

THE removal of Indian official Vikash Yadav, allegedly under US pressure, has ignited fresh concerns about India's international standing and its security operations abroad. Yadav, now charged by the US Department of Justice, is accused of plotting the assassination of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a US-based Sikh separatist leader tied to the Khalistan movement. This case has escalated diplomatic tensions between India and the US, with the broader Five Eyes alliance watching closely. The US indictment of Yadav underscores Washington's strict stance against foreign interference on its soil. With Pannun designated a terrorist by India, the government's security agencies have considered him a serious threat. However, allegations of an extrajudicial assassination plot targeting Pannun on US soil have sent shockwaves through diplomatic channels. The US decision to publicise these charges suggests mounting pressure on India to ensure that its security measures align with international law.

The situation has been further complicated by India's ongoing diplomatic spat with Canada, following its Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's accusations linking Indian agents to the killing of another Khalistan sympathiser, Hardeep Singh Nijjar. This allegation has drawn in the Five Eyes intelligence alliance — it comprises the English-speaking countries of the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In particular, the UK has called for India's cooperation in investigations, signalling that these nations are scrutinising India's handling of separatist movements abroad.

Yadav's removal from government service appears to be a direct consequence of US diplomatic pressure, reflecting a broader international concern over India's counterterrorism practices. New Delhi must carefully navigate this situation to avoid deeper strains in its relationships. At the same time, it must address growing concerns about its approach to Khalistani dissidents, particularly abroad. India faces the challenge of recalibrating its foreign and security policies to protect its interests.

Saini is back

CM gets chance to chart new course

THE BJP is well within its right to view the decisive mandate for a third term in Haryana as a vote of confidence in its governance model. What Nayab Singh Saini must guard against is letting a rush of over-confidence dictate his government's functioning. The consequences of such an approach by the Congress in the just concluded Assembly elections are fresh in memory. The dynamics of electoral politics are such that the seat tally often hides the subtext. A party like the BJP is expected to objectively assess the fine print. The Saini-led party won against all odds, but it would do well to recognise that anti-incumbency alone cannot explain the appetite for change in the run-up to the elections.

As Saini takes charge in his second stint as Chief Minister, the primary objective must be to tackle the perception of a gap between promise and delivery. Saini was considered an odd choice when he took over from his mentor Manohar Lal Khattar in March. The remarkable victory, that too when many did not give him even an outside chance, lends Saini a new stature. The central leadership of the party may still call the shots on matters of importance, but he has finally got an opportunity to step out of Khattar's shadow and chart a new course. His Cabinet, with a delicate balance of caste and regional considerations, includes first-time MLAs. Saini has a task on his hands to take along the seniors in the party and guide the juniors.

In voting so many of the veterans out, Haryana's message is clear — welcome back, Nayab Singh Saini, but be mindful. The list of grievances across the state is long and the mandate is for better governance, not more of the same.

India's growth rate among shiniest in world: Banga

New Delhi

India's growth rate was among the shiniest parts in the world economy, World Bank president Ajay Banga said on Thursday, noting that a lot of this was driven by the domestic market.

"There is no doubt that India's growth rate is among the shiniest parts in the world economy. I think being able to grow at six, seven per cent and more in this kind of environment shows you that they've done a number of things to get there," Banga told reporters ahead of next week's annual meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

"A lot of that growth is driven by the domestic market as well, which actually is a healthy sign, in some ways. What India needs to work on as the Prime Minister laid out is things on quality of life, like air and the quality of water and the likes," he said. "We are actively engaged with them on a number of topics on these lines," Banga said in response to a question.

NSDL reaches Rs 500L cr demat assets milestone

Mumbai

National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL), one of the largest securities depositories globally announced on Friday that it has reached a historic milestone of Rs 500 lakh crore i.e., US $ 6 Trillion in value of assets held in custody.

This achievement marks a rapid increase in NSDL's asset base.

It took 18 years to reach Rs 100 lakh crore in June 2014, another 6 years to reach Rs 200 lakh crore in November 2020 and within a short span of 4 years to reach Rs 500 lakh crore in September 2024.

On achieving this landmark, S. Gopalan, Interim MD of NSDL said, " We are very happy and proud to have reached this significant milestone of reaching US $ 6 Trillion in value of assets held in custody. We thank investors, market participants, regulators and other stakeholders on this historic occasion."

The market share of NSDL in value of demat assets is 86%. NSDL demat accounts are located in more than 99.3 per cent of pin codes in the country with 63,000+ Service centres - covering every state & union territory. NSDL has played a key role in transforming the Indian securities market by facilitating holding and transfer of securities in dematerialised form.

Term life, senior citizen health insurance premiums may be exempted from GST

New Delhi

Term life insurance policies, and senior citizens' health insurance premium are likely to be exempted from GST as most members of a state ministerial panel favoured cutting taxes to benefit the common man, an official said on Saturday.

The Group of Ministers (GoM) to decide on GST on health and life insurance premiums in its meeting on Saturday decided to exempt GST on premiums paid by individuals, other than senior citizens, for health insurance with coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh. However, 18 per cent GST will continue to be levied for health insurance cover of over Rs 5 lakh.

Separately, the GoM on GST rate rationalisation, too, met on Saturday and suggested that the GST Council rejig tax rates on a host of goods, including packaged drinking water, bicycles, exercise notebooks, luxury wrist watches, and shoes.

A final decision on GST on health and life insurance premiums, as well as rate rationalisation, is likely to be taken by the GST Council, chaired by Union Finance Minister and comprising state counterparts, in its meeting scheduled to take place next month.

"The rate rejig exercise will help the states and Centre to realise revenue gain of Rs 22,000 crore, which will help cover the revenue loss from reduction in GST rates for insurance premiums," the official added.

The GoM on rate rationalisation proposed reducing GST on packaged drinking water of 20 litre and above to 5 per cent from 18 per cent. If the GoM's

recommendation is accepted by the GST council, GST on bicycles costing less than Rs 10,000 will be reduced to 5 per cent from 12 per cent.

Also, GST on exercise notebooks will be reduced to 5 per cent from 12 per cent. The GoM also proposed hiking GST on shoes above Rs 15,000/pair from 18 per cent to 28 per cent. It also proposed hiking GST on wrist watches above Rs 25,000 from 18 per cent to 28 per cent.

Talking to reporters after the GoM meetings, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, who is the convenor of the health and life insurance GoM, said "every GoM member wants to give relief to people. Special focus will be on senior citizens. We will submit a report to the Council. A final decision will be taken by the Council."

Chaudhary, who is also a convenor of the GoM on rate rationalisation, said the panel will meet again before submitting its report to the Council. This was the first meeting of the 13-member GoM health and life insurance premiums, which was set up to last month to suggest tax rates.

The panel, which includes ministers from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Meghalaya, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana, has been mandated to submit its report to the GST Council by October- end.

In 2023-24, the Centre and states collected Rs 8,262.94 crore through GST on health insurance premium, while Rs 1,484.36 crore was collected on account of GST on health reinsurance premium.

The six-member GoM on GST rate rationalisation includes Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna, Rajasthan Health Services Minister Gajendra Singh, Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda, West Bengal Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya, and Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal.

To make good the revenue loss that will be incurred on account of lowering the tax rate on goods used by the common man, the GoM also discussed the possibility of raising tax rates on some items, including aerated water and beverages.

Currently, GST is a four-tier tax structure with slabs at 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent.

Under GST, essential items are either exempted or taxed at the lowest slab, while luxury and demerit items attract the highest slab. Luxury and sin goods attract cess on top of the highest 28 per cent slab.

The average GST rate has fallen below the revenue neutral rate of 15.3 per cent, prompting the need to start discussions on GST rate rationalisation.

When scammers cloned billionaire Sunil Mittal's voice to con his executive

New Delhi

Scammers often use AI voice clones to con commoners to transfer money or disclose financial information, but it's rare when they try to impersonate a billionaire. This is exactly what scammers tried to do by cloning telecom czar Sunil Bharti Mittal's voice to scam his executive in Dubai to transfer money.

Fortunately, the executive was smart enough to realise Mittal won't ask for such a huge money transfer and the scam was stopped in its tracks.

On Monday, speaking at the NDTV World Summit, Mittal cited the incident to caution people about the risks posed by misuse of emerging technologies like AI.

Mittal recounted how the said executive stationed in Dubai received a fraudulent call that seemed to mimic his voice and tone and directed that a large fund transfer be done.

The official who was vigilant

SUNIL BHARTI MITTAL CHAIRMAN, ONEWEB

and "sensible" immediately realised it was a scam, Mittal said admitting that when he heard the voice recording himself he was completely "stunned" as "it was perfectly articulated just as I would speak".

"And anyone who would not have been vigilant may have done something about it," Mittal said and warned that in future misuse

of technology would enable fraudsters to go a step ahead and misuse digital signatures, even replicate faces on zoom calls to perpetrate such acts.

"We'll have to protect our societies from the evils of AI, and yet we have to use the goodness of AI, because those companies, and nations that will not adopt AI will be left behind. So, this is

a conundrum for every time you get a new technology into place, there are pluses and minuses. I remain very optimistic about the benefit of AI that the human race will achieve and be able to do jobs which are otherwise very difficult to perform," Mittal said.

It is pertinent to mention here that advent of tech era, powered by AI and digital tools, has armed economies and businesses with transformative powers. That said, it is also being misused blatantly by online scammers and fraudsters to dupe unsuspecting public.

There are umpteen instances of fraudsters nudging victims to click on malicious links, or using deepfakes and voice cloning for scams.

The sophisticated web of AI-powered deceit makes it harder to spot online scams, and fraudsters have been known to clone and mimic a person's voice from even short audio clips nicked from video a person may have

uploaded online.

Scammers then leverage the AI-cloned voice to pose as the person and demand money from friends and family.

At the same time, scammers are also using 'digital arrest' modus operandi, where they place audio or video calls, falsely pose as law enforcement officers, and use online intimidation to confine victims to their homes for extortion.

These elaborate and sophisticated scams involve cybercriminals using fake documents, replicating virtual courtroom or police stations as a backdrop, to place victims under 'digital arrest'.

Recently, SP Oswal, chairman and managing director of Vardhman Group was defrauded of Rs 7 crore by a gang which posed as officials from various government agencies.

Karan Johar's company sells 50% stake to Poonawalla

Mumbai

Vaccine maker Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla-led Serene Productions on Monday said it will pick 50 per cent stake in Karan Johar's Dharma Productions and Dharmatic Entertainment for Rs 1,000 crore.

Serene Productions has entered into a binding agreement to invest Rs 1,000 crore in production house Dharma Productions and Dharmatic Entertainment (Dharma), the company said in a statement.

Subsequently, Serene Productions will hold a 50 per cent stake in Dharma, with Johar retaining the remaining 50 per cent ownership, it added.

"Poonawalla's investment values Dharma at Rs 2,000

crore," the statement said.

This alliance signifies a step toward elevating the Indian entertainment industry on the global stage, in an era where the relationship between audiences and entertainment platforms is more dynamic and interactive than ever before, the company said.

IMF: India's GDP to grow at 7% in current fiscal, 6.5% in FY26

Mumbai

India's GDP growth is likely to moderate from 8.2 per cent in FY24 to 7 per cent in FY25 and 6.5 per cent in FY26 because the pent-up demand accumulated during Covid has exhausted, as the economy reconnects with its potential, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Tuesday.

About the global economy, the IMF said the battle against inflation has largely been won, even though price pressures persist in some countries.

After peaking at 9.4 per cent year over year in the third quarter of 2022, headline inflation rates are now projected to reach 3.5 per cent by the end of 2025, below the average level of 3.6 per cent between 2000 and 2019, it said.

The annual World Economic Outlook released here projected global economic growth to stay steady at 3.2 per cent in 2024

and 2025, even though a few countries, especially low-income developing countries, have seen sizable downside growth revisions.

"In India, the outlook is for GDP growth to moderate from 8.2 per cent in 2023 to 7 per cent in 2024 and 6.5 per cent in 2025, because pent-up demand accumulated during the

pandemic has been exhausted, as the economy reconnects with its potential," the IMF said in the World Economic Outlook.

According to the latest Economic Survey, the GDP growth in FY25 is expected to moderate to 6.5 to 7 per cent from 8.2 per cent in FY24.

Bajaj Finance Q2 FY25: Higher credit cost pulls down profit

Mumbai

Bajaj Finance Ltd posted a muted performance in Q2FY25. While asset growth was strong, net profit increased 13 percent year on year (YoY) in the quarter – at a pace lower than the usual 25-28 percent.

Net profit was dragged down by credit cost/provisions that saw an increase on the back of asset quality stress building up across all retail and SME (small and medium enterprise) lines of businesses.

The management has revised the credit cost guidance for the current fiscal. The lender had earlier indicated that the credit cost for the full year (FY25) to be in the range of 1.75- 1.85 percent, which has now been revised upwards to 2 percent-2.05 percent.

The company also shared that the leverage analysis on the basis of the June'24 bureau data, which indicated that customers having three or more live unsecured loans are showing a higher default propensity and lower collection efficiencies.

While the company is further tightening its underwriting norms for such customers and pruning exposure, BFL, being the largest consumer-lending NBFC (non-banking finance company), cannot escape unscathed from the asset quality stress in unsecured retail segments.

Despite some stress in retail lending, the management is confident of maintaining an asset growth of 26-28 percent YoY and expects margin to remain stable as the cost of funds has peaked out.

QUARTERLY SNAPSHOT

Rs crore	Q2 FY25	Q2 FY24	YoY	Q1 FY25	QoQ
Net interest income	8,838	7,196	23%	8,365	6%
Fee income	1,960	1,578	24%	1,950	1%
Other income	148	71	108%	103	44%
Operating expense	3,639	3,010	21%	3,471	5%
Pre-provisioning profit	7,307	5,835	25%	6,947	5%
Loan losses & provision	1,909	1,077	77%	1,685	13%
Profit before tax	5,398	4,758	13%	5,262	3%
Profit after tax	4,014	3,551	13%	3,912	3%

While a potential interest rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in the second half of the current fiscal would lower the cost of funds, the change in asset mix, in favour of relatively low-yielding secured loans, will keep margins under pressure.

We advised investors to sell BFL despite the robust FY24 earnings, alluding that the FY24 performance, in all likelihood, is the peak for Bajaj Finance. The lender's performance in H1FY25 validates our stance in many ways.

BFL's stock has fallen 13 percent in the past three years. There has been a lot of skepticism on two fronts; first, on the company's ability to maintain the asset growth rate on a huge base, and, second, on the sustainability of profitability in the long term.

These concerns, along with a premium valuation, have weighed on the stock's performance in the past three years.

Consumer financing, especially on the rural side, is showing some signs of fatigue. Also, concerns around asset growth have risen, especially after the RBI's measures to check the runaway growth seen in unsecured lending.

To maintain the high asset growth, BFL has entered into multiple new product categories (microfinance, new car loans, gold loans etc.). While the new lines of business can help maintain the company's AUM growth, it will certainly hit profitability.

While diversification will lead to a gradual shift in product mix in favour of secured lending and reduce the riskiness of loan book, the capital allocation in relatively low-yielding segments may adversely impact future earnings growth and RoA (return on assets).

Strong loan growth but is it sustainable?

With an AUM of almost Rs 374,000 crore, as at end Septeber'24, BFL is the largest non-banking lender, with a market-leading share in the unsecured consumer-lending business.

All business segments contributed to the AUM growth of 29 percent YoY, at end-September, even as the moderation in rural lending continued. The asset growth in Rural B2C (excluding gold loan) has fallen from 26 percent YoY in March 2023 to 10 percent YoY in September 2024, due to the rise in asset quality stress in the segment.

The company has been focusing on growing secured products like mortgages, which now constitutes 31 percent of the AUM. BFL's loan book is growing at a faster pace of over 30 percent while consumer financing, especially rural consumer financing, is showing some signs of moderation.

The management is confident of maintaining the asset growth of 26-28 percent YoY. However, we remain skeptical on the company's ability to maintain asset growth rate (above 26 percent YoY) on a huge AUM base of Rs 3.74 lakh crore, especially after RBI imposing stringent measures in Dec'23 to check the runaway growth seen in unsecured lending.

Credit bureau numbers show why RBI sounded alarm on non-bank microfinance lenders

Mumbai

Stressed loans in microfinance jumped in the April-June quarter across states and lender groups, even as non-bank finance companies grew their microfinance portfolio rapidly, a sign that some lenders have abandoned caution and chased returns. Delinquencies with payment overdue beyond a month rose to 2.7 percent as of end June from 2.1 percent end-March.

During the April-June quarter, NBFCs grew their portfolio by 2.7 percent sequentially, a contrasting performance from banks and other lenders that showed a sequential fall in their portfolio. For the microfinance industry as a whole, the gross loan portfolio declined 2.3 percent sequentially. On a year-on-year basis, NBFC-MFIs showed a doubling of their portfolio while other segments showed modest growth rates.

In terms of originations, during the first quarter, banks' microfinance loans grew by 11.2 percent year on year while that of NBFCs grew by a bigger 23.9 percent. Others such as microfinance institutions and small finance banks showed a contraction.

Credit bureau data also showed that the average ticket size of loans has increased, indicating greater indebtedness among borrowers. Much of the new loans originated were in the Rs 30,000-50,000 segment but ticket size of above Rs 80,000 saw the highest year-on-year growth. This is also a sign of weakening of the credit profile of borrowers. Again, the push of higher ticket sizes has been more from NBFCs.

This clearly shows that NBFC-MFIs have been chasing returns and courting riskier credit even though warning signs have been flashing for quite some time. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das had warned that select NBFCs are indulging in usurious and unfair practices, charging high rates to borrowers along with poor assessment of household incomes. Further, NBFCs are also evergreening loans by lending to weak borrowers in order to help them tide over existing loans that are overdue.

The central bank's concern is evident from bureau data on delinquencies as well. Note that the strong growth in loan portfolio comes simultaneously as delinquencies showed a rise. Loans that have payment overdue beyond 30 days and upto 180 days increased sharply for all lender categories. Small finance banks showed the largest increase in this pile and NBFCs followed with a rise to 2.5 percent from 2.1 percent a year ago.

That is not all. More new loans that are being sourced are also showing weaker quality, the bureau report said. Further, there was an increase of 17.2 percent in the number of borrowers that have five or more loans. The portfolio of borrowers with five or more lender associations grew by 19 percent. The upshot is that indebtedness is on the rise among microfinance borrowers.

It is likely that the RBI saw the same signs continue in the second quarter as well. Therefore, the central bank has taken action against select NBFCs by banning them from giving out loans as also giving a warning to the rest of the industry.

The regulator's measures are warranted as a persistent surge in delinquencies would put the industry at risk. Recall that Andhra Pradesh took draconian measures in the past to restrict microfinance lenders from forcibly recovering dues from indebted borrowers. That crisis led to a sharp contraction of the microfinance industry.

Micro loan borrowers are a vulnerable lot and high interest rates make them more vulnerable to default. Lenders must price in risk appropriately and resist from indulging in market share grabbing and growth at any cost.

Strategic stability in Southern Asia and the role of non-strategic nuclear weapons

The world is in a geopolitical transition marked by great power competition, which has divided the world into two blocs. As the power equations shift and strategic competition intensifies, major powers are revisiting their nuclear doctrines and capabilities.

As Russia makes significant territorial gains, there is a strong demand from Ukraine to escalate the war deep into Russia. In response, Russia has conveyed that any strategically adverse situation so created may not remain conventional, resulting in the use of Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (NSNW), along with their attendant consequences.

The shifting global power equations, increasing confrontationist posturing, and ongoing attritional proxy conflicts are creating an environment of great strategic instability, with an increasing probability of using nuclear weapons.

Similarly, in the Indo-Pacific, belligerent China's increasing intervention in the South China Sea, Taiwan, Indian Ocean Region (IOR), and South Asia, especially India, with negligible escalation control protocols, raises the probability of great power conflagration.

The shifting global power equations, increasing confrontationist posturing, and ongoing attritional proxy conflicts are creating an environment of great strategic instability, with an increasing probability of using nuclear weapons. This multi-domain military brinkmanship, which could lead to the use of NSNWs, poses "real and existential danger", heralding the unpredictable dimension of nuclear counter-strikes.

Role of NSNWs

Strategic weapons are ultimate weapons aimed at the degrading and destruction of an opponent's war-waging potential and undermining its will to wage war. NSNWs, on the other hand, are low-yield weapons to be deployed at operational levels, aimed at contributing to the accomplishment of military missions in the eventuality of conventional deterrence failure. These weapons can be defined by multiple means in terms of range, yield, and destruction (precision strike low-yield warheads).

NSNWs in the South Asian context

In the India–China–Pakistan triad, while both India and China are stated to be No-First-Use (NFU) states, Pakistan has advocated for the use of nuclear weapons for warfighting as part of its "full spectrum" deterrence. Pakistan's outlook on strategic stability is largely driven by its perception of a "fair and just outcome of disputes" against the backdrop of increasing power asymmetry with India.

India-China nuclear equations, on the other hand, are defined by the declared NFU policy, adherence to credible minimal deterrence, and the firm demarcation between controller and custodian of nuclear weapons, backed by rigid centralisation of command authority.

These doctrinal similarities need to be seen from the perspective of the close Sino-Pak nuclear equation, which provides China duality in their combined nuclear posture. China has not only supported but

is currently actively engaged in development and modernising Pakistan's nuclear programme.

Accepting the NFU declaratory doctrines of both India and China at face value implies that nuclear weapons, as tools of deterrence, are outside the equation of any conventional conflict.

Second, accepting the NFU declaratory doctrines of both India and China at face value implies that nuclear weapons, as tools of deterrence, are outside the equation of any conventional conflict. This puts India at a serious disadvantage, given China's overwhelming conventional military superiority, backed by its advanced space-based C4ISR systems.

Importantly, China could employ its conventional Theatre-Range Ballistic Missiles (TBMs), along with Anti-Ship Ballistic and Cruise Missiles, together with the cyber and information attacks, to degrade India's conventional forces, command-and-control systems and launch vectors without technically crossing the nuclear threshold. This issue is often overlooked in India's strategic discourse and planning.

The next consideration is the functional effectiveness of Indian deterrence vis-à-vis China. If "counter-value" targeting strategies are at the heart of nuclear response, India is clearly at a disadvantage. The Indian heartland of Central and Eastern India, comprising the most populous states and strategic assets, falls within the range of Chinese MRBMs and even SRBMs.

China's strategic coastal belt and heartland, on the other hand, can only be reached by India's long- and medium-range vectors such as Agni 5, K-5, and K-6. This differential, in effect, undermines the Indian doctrine of punitive and massive retaliation.

All strategic targets in India are within range of Chinese conventional missiles, providing China a major advantage.

Another important aspect is China's dual-use missile force (conventional and nuclear). This essentially means that all strategic targets in India are within range of Chinese conventional missiles, providing China a major advantage. India, too, needs to develop a similar strategic missile capability for engaging targets, both at operational and strategic levels, that can target Chinese strategic and economic hubs within a 1500–2500 km radius (Pearl River and portions of Yangtse River deltas). A similar capability is required at sea to engage PLAN strike forces entering the Indian Ocean Region.

NSNWs in an India–China escalation calculus

Against the backdrop of the prevailing and increasing power asymmetry, India needs to contextualise future conflict scenarios with China, taking the realities of obtaining an operational environment into consideration.

The focused infrastructure, logistics and military build-up in Tibet provides China with the capability and capacity to launch major offensives across a broad front in a single season, further enhanced by the current forward posture since 2020.

Two possible Chinese offensive contingencies are postulated:

A crisis created by the death of the current Dalai Lama and the anointment of an eight-year-old reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, a Mongolian Rinpoche, in India. An outraged China, imagining an Indian conspiracy, refuses to accept the new Dalai Lama, resulting in widespread disturbances and

rioting in Tibet. China holds India responsible and initiates hostilities.

In a second scenario, given the trip-wire situation which prevails in Ladakh, a "Galwan Plus" occurs, resulting in a major firefight involving the full weight of weaponry, resulting in large casualties on both sides. PLA retaliates with a major attack against India. A more dangerous subset is using 'Doklam' as an excuse, China launches an offensive threatening to cut off the strategically important Chumbi Valley, the narrow corridor separating India from its Northeast.

Plausible responses in a conventional adverse scenario

This brings us to the stage of plausible Indian responses. Before analysing India's options, the authors briefly outline Western discourses emerging from high-end conventional warfare scenarios and their intersection with nuclear options.

The Centre for a New American Security, a US think tank, examined the correlation between high-intensity conventional conflict and the use of NSNWs in a hypothetical Taiwan situation. Broad conclusions that emerged point to multi-domain operations marked by precision and speed to quickly cripple an adversary, resulting in the triggering of a nuclear option. This has been described as the "crossfade" domain, implying a point in the decision matrix wherein risks associated with conventional and nuclear options become unclear. The crossfade is an expanded region of a highly intense and unstable operational environment under seeming strategic stability.

The Centre for a New American Security, a US think tank, examined the correlation between high-intensity conventional conflict and the use of NSNWs in a hypothetical Taiwan situation.

India-China conflict, too, will be conducted in a highly intense intelligence-information-dominated environment, wherein the technologies and approaches of advanced conventional warfare will be applied to devastating effects. This creates a crossfade decision dilemma of whether to pursue conventional operations in an increasingly adverse situation or signal crossing of 'redlines' resulting in contemplation of the use of low-yield NSNWs as an act of extreme self-defence.

The next issue is at what stage India will be forced to contemplate the use of NSNWs. In prevailing asymmetry, a situation of serious operational adversity could rapidly emerge, impinging upon both war-waging potential and national morale. Having suffered a setback in 1962, such a scenario will be devastating, both on national self-esteem and international standing.

Escalation dynamics

The critical issue is to define the redlines (and, if needed, nuance them), clearly indicating escalation beyond which will cross India's ultimate thresholds of tolerance. The stark operational consideration at this juncture will be whether to continue operations and suffer further losses or to signal conventional deterrence breakdown.

Two issues arise: first, what is intended to be gained from such use, and second, its subsequent impact on escalation dynamics. How will China react? Two options are conceivable:

Flowing from its doctrine of immediate and predictable response, China launches a riposte in terms of a major counterstrike (counterforce or value). The dilemma here will be the nature of Indian retaliation and its impact along the escalation ladder. Tit for tat, uncontrolled escalation will certainly lead the two countries hurtling towards a MAD outcome. This is not easy to predict and requires political forbearance to unequivocally understand the consequences before embarking on the next escalatory steps.

Second, to avoid a Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) kind of escalation, China can retaliate by graduated tit-for-tat response, implying a willingness to terminate hostilities without any further escalation.

There are political consequences for both options. The entire process is a game of brinkmanship, which will require strong political resolve and national consensus through extensive gaming and repeated iterations.

Despite China's historical behaviour of ignoring nuclear signalling, credible signalling by a near-peer competitor is something that China cannot easily disregard and thus remains an important tool to convey our political resolve against an unacceptable territorial push. Given the relative capabilities to inflict damage, escalation is likely to be controlled as no side would want a full-fledged nuclear conflagration.

Both China and India have never engaged in nuclear brinkmanship despite decades of provocation at the borders. In the case of nuclear signalling, the initiative, in our opinion, would lie with India (initiator), as it would have indicated its thresholds (redlines) under extremely dire circumstances. The international response, too, is likely to be favourable as it will see India's actions under extreme compulsion as an act of self-defence, standing up to China's extraordinary coercion.

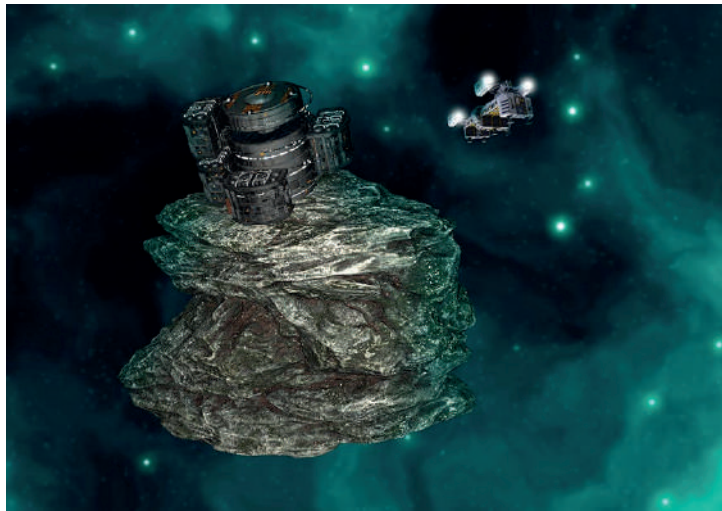# Asteroid Mining: Should India be paying attention?

On 20 August 2024, California-based Asteroid mining startup AstroForge announced its intention to dock its Vestri probe with a metallic near-Earth asteroid in 2025. The company intends to extract minerals from asteroids, primarily focusing on metals. Although this may seem like an ambitious endeavour, AstroForge is not alone in its attempt to mine asteroids. Other startups and organisations, including NASA, are planning to execute similar missions in the near future. What seemed like a prospect for the distant future may soon become a reality, thanks to the rapid advancements in technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI). The burning question, then, is whether asteroid mining is economically and technically viable at present and if it would be beneficial for developing economies like India to take notice.

Why mine asteroids?

Asteroids are small, rocky objects orbiting the Sun, the majority of which lie along the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. Their size can range from as small as 10 metres in diameter to the largest asteroid, Vesta, which is about 530 kilometres. Asteroids can be broadly divided into three classes based on their composition: C-type (Chondrite) which consists of clay or silicate rocks and forms the most common type; S-type ("stony") is composed of silicate and nickel-iron; M-type (metallic) comprises of nickel-iron.

Besides nickel and iron, asteroids possess a host of other precious minerals like cobalt, platinum, gold, and silver.

The primary reason for mining asteroids is to obtain critical minerals. Besides nickel and iron, asteroids possess a host of other precious minerals like cobalt, platinum, gold, and silver. Asterank, a database of over 600,000 asteroids, estimates the costs and rewards of mining them based on data from the Minor Planet Center and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). It estimates that the net profits from mining the top 10 most cost-effective asteroids are about US$1.4 trillion, while those from the most valuable are all over US$100 trillion, though these are located much further away. As a representative example, NASA's Psyche mission, landing on the asteroid 16 Psyche in 2026, is estimated to possess quadrillions of dollars worth of gold.

Benefits of asteroid mining

With the rapid increase in electronics, semiconductors, electric vehicles, and solar power, the demand for critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel and platinum, has increased dramatically, particularly due to their widespread usage in producing batteries (lithium-ion, for instance). The Democratic Republic of Congo accounts for about 70 percent of global cobalt production as of 2023, where there have been reports of gross human rights violations such as child and forced labour at mining sites. There have been similar reports from other nations mining critical minerals as well. The growing demand is also bound to lead to a substantial increase in prices, which is a significant concern, particularly for developing nations. Alternatives such as deep-sea mining could be promising but pose environmental risks and may harm aquatic ecosystems.

In this context, asteroid mining may provide a way out since it sidesteps all the aforementioned issues. Additionally, robotic asteroid mining can also alleviate the human cost involved in mining in general, which is an intrinsically dangerous task to begin with. The recent surge in the development of AI and the rise of autonomous systems will also serve as a boon in this regard. The traditional methods of mining, many of which end up releasing toxic chemicals like lead and arsenic into the soil and waterways, could also be avoided. Although the initial investment in asteroid mining may seem exorbitant, they will be more than compensated by the returns, not to mention by diminishing the human costs involved in traditional mining.

With the rapid increase in electronics, semiconductors, electric vehicles, and solar power, the demand for critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel and platinum, has increased dramatically, particularly due to their widespread usage in producing batteries (lithium-ion, for instance).

Traditional methods of mining may need to be modified due to the lack of gravity. The most likely method would be to scrap off the desired material from the asteroid and tunnel into veins of specific substances. Scraping or strip mining would pull out the valuable ore floating off the asteroid. The absence of gravity may also offer an advantage since moving the mined ore around will not require much power.

Global initiatives and progress

Although NASA has not initiated any mission to mine asteroids specifically, it has executed several of them to explore their viability and collect samples. NASA's Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) spacecraft was the first in history to land on the surface of an asteroid, 433 Eros, in February 2001. NASA's OSIRIS-Rex, launched in 2016, was the first US mission to collect a sample from an asteroid. It dropped off a capsule with material from asteroid Bennu on 24 September 2023. It was subsequently renamed OSIRIS-APEX and sent on a new mission to explore asteroid Apophis in 2029. NASA also launched the Psyche mission on 13 October 2023, which is its first spacecraft designed to study a metallic asteroid, 16 Psyche, mentioned earlier.

The Hayabusa mission launched in 2003 by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) marked the first instance of samples being taken from an asteroid and was also the first mission to successfully land and take off from an asteroid. It brought samples from asteroid 25143 Itokawa to Earth in 2010. In 2018, Japan set up a US$940 million fund to support space startups. It is also sponsoring research in robotics, such as the Space Capable Asteroid Robotic Explorer (Scar-E), a first-of-its-kind climbing robot with potential asteroid mining applications developed through a partnership between Japan's Tohoku University and the Asteroid Mining Corporation.

The Hayabusa mission launched in 2003 by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) marked the first instance of samples being taken from an asteroid and was also the first mission to successfully land and take off from an asteroid.

The first attempt to mine asteroids was made by a Seattle-based company called Planet Resources in 2012, closely followed by another company called Deep Space Industries, both of which claimed that they would do so by the 2020s. However, they were unable to meet the high development costs and were acquired by other businesses by 2019. After these setbacks, asteroid mining is gaining traction once again thanks to startups like the previously mentioned AstroForge, which has managed to raise a total of US$55 million in investments to date. Other companies like Trans Astronautica Corporation and Karmen+ are also in the process of testing their tech in space before moving on to mine asteroids.

Conclusion

Despite the enormous possibilities presented by the prospect of asteroid mining, there is no doubt that it is a long-term endeavour requiring massive investments, at least initially. This would, however, be more than compensated for by the returns. Additionally, with recent advances in technology, such as reusable rockets developed by SpaceX and other companies, the costs for payloads have gone down by a factor of 20 per kilogram, and they will likely go down further in the future. The potential methods for mining asteroids are also evolving, with a new one having been proposed recently.

In India's context, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has stated that it has no plans to mine asteroids at the moment due to technical challenges. Moreover, while Indian space startups have made significant strides lately, asteroid mining does not seem to figure much in their plans. With the increasing demand for critical minerals and the fact that China processes about 80 percent of the world's rare earth metals, this approach seems quite shortsighted. Asteroid mining requires a long-term plan and significant investment. If India plans to reduce its dependence on China for critical minerals, it would be prudent to become more ambitious and begin laying the foundation for it now, taking a leaf from Japan's book. Establishing a government-sponsored fund to support space startups, particularly focused on asteroid mining, might be the push that is required because it is extremely challenging for small experimental companies to take on this massive and cost-intensive task. Given its vast experience and expertise, ISRO can also offer its support in this initiative.

A Plague on the Horizon: Concerns on the Proliferation of Drone Swarms

In a July 2020 report, New America identified 38 states with armed drone programmes, 11 of which had used armed drones in combat. Twenty-eight more states have programmes in development. Global exports enable the rapid proliferation of drones, as states share drone technology with others. The US, Israel, and China have been the largest exporters. Iran has also helped non-state allies—Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthi rebels—acquire drones. The expanding, broad commercial drone industry and simple do-it-yourself ingenuity have also helped the Islamic State and various lone-wolf actors acquire and use them.

Single drones are increasingly being integrated into collaborative drone swarms. Precisely defined, drone swarms are "multiple unmanned systems capable of coordinating their actions to accomplish shared objectives." These are proliferating quickly as well. Armenia, China, France, India, Israel, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, and the US all have drone swarm programmes under development. In May 2021, Israel became the first state to use a drone swarm in combat, collecting and relaying information on Hamas militant locations for follow-up attacks. In most cases, the drone swarm consists of homogeneous, aerial drones, such as the 103 Perdix drone that the US Strategic Capabilities office launched out of three F/A-18 Super Hornets in January 2017. Others, such as Elbit System's Torch-X, integrate diverse ground and aerial vehicles.

Although global proliferation may be likely, drone swarm proliferation should not be expected to be even or immediate. Some states may be capable of rapidly developing massive, armed drone swarms; for others, this is a farther possibility. Over time, the holdouts may change their views as they come to recognise the military value of drone swarms. Motivated states can also put their finger on the scale, implementing national export controls to limit transfers of drone swarms to states without them. Groups of states might work together to expand the scope of those restrictions, and encourage larger international norms around drone swarm development, use, and transfer.

Issues Around Drone Swarm Proliferation

Drone swarms are a technological innovation. Any military innovation requires the financial resources to buy or build the technology and organisational capacity to incorporate changes into recruiting, training, and operations. Incorporating drone swarms into larger operations requires identifying and assessing the most effective use cases to know where the technology is of the most value, and incorporating those uses into doctrine.

Success depends on leadership delegations of authority, effective control over training, and independent doctrinal assessment mechanisms. For drone swarms, the unique organisational challenges are likely to revolve around sustaining drone mass over time in an area of operation, requiring integrated production, logistics, and sustainment systems. States may differ in how they do that and how well. For example, in the US, doctrine frequently drives technology, while in China, it would be the reverse.

Drone swarms are a sub-type of drones, so the proliferation dynamics of drones apply. For example, hobbyist, mid-size military and commercial, large military-specific, and stealth combat drones will all differ in how quickly and broadly they proliferate. Although hobbyist drones are broadly and easily available for only a few thousand dollars, the US appears to be the only operator of stealth drones., Organisational and laboratory resources place constraints on state and non-state actor's ability to create drones. Adding swarming must necessarily increase the constraints: a state developing a swarm of stealth combat drones has all the constraints of building the stealth combat drone, and the additional challenge of integrating them into a swarm. However, that increase will depend on the system in question. MIT engineering students designed the Perdix drone swarm, suggesting a simple drone swarm requires relatively limited capability. However, a swarm of MQ-9 Reaper drones would require not only the capability and resources to build an MQ-9, but the capability to build, deploy, and test the software and hardware needed to integrate them. Some factors that have encouraged drone proliferation, such as reduced risk to human operators, will similarly apply to drone swarms. Drone swarms probably reduce the immediate operator risk even more because their use necessarily implies larger adoption of drones.

The Demand for Drone Swarms

Demand drives the proliferation of drone swarms. States must perceive that they gain some meaningful economic, political, tactical, strategic, or other benefit from the use of drone swarms. The advantages of drone swarms include cheap mass, limited operator requirements, distributed complexity, and applicability to various military missions. Additionally, those gains must be greater than any economic, political, tactical, or strategic risks and requirements. In the case of drone swarms, those include fears of remote warfare, questions over their reliability, countermeasures from adversaries, and building and integrating necessary infrastructure and support systems.

Drivers and Advantages

Cheap mass: Drone swarms allow militaries to generate and manage large numbers of drones. In a 2012 master's thesis at the Naval Postgraduate School, Loc Pham and co-authors found that eight drones were enough to overwhelm naval destroyer vessels. Typically, four drones would hit the ship. Cheap mass is useful not only for overwhelming defences but also for depleting munitions over time and fixing platforms in undesirable locations. In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia has employed cheap Shahed-131 and 136 drones extensively in attacks against Ukrainian critical infrastructure. Although the drones were shot down at high rates, the attacks still forced Ukraine to deploy air defences to protect infrastructure instead of forward-deployed units waging the war. If defenders employ expensive surface-to-air missiles to shoot down cheap drones, missile stocks will not be available for use against more valuable targets like manned aircraft.

Limited operator requirements: As drone swarms scale in size, they must necessarily be autonomous. General John Murray of the US Army Futures Command once said, "When you have little drones operating in different patterns and formations, all talking to each other and staying in sync with one another... imagine that with the ability to create lethal effects on the battlefield. There is no human who will be able to keep up with that." That may mean no personnel needed to operate and manage the swarm. Instead, humans may be relegated to the task of oversight, including high-level command and control, supporting logistics and launch, and providing maintenance or support activities.

Distributed complexity: Drone swarms can integrate multiple capabilities and spread over a broad area. Combined arms effectiveness can be baked into the DNA of a drone swarm. A single drone swarm may contain multiple payloads operating together: sophisticated sensors to identify and track targets, electronic warfare equipment for jamming, and bombs and missiles for carrying out strikes. A couple of drones might suppress the target with electronic warfare, while other drones coordinate kinetic attacks from multiple axes simultaneously. Drone-to-drone communication allows drones to distribute widely to coordinate intelligence gathering and searches, providing situational awareness for follow-on attacks.

Broad military applications: Drone swarms can be used in a broad range of missions, from undersea warfare to countering anti-access/area-denial and amphibious warfare. Drones could be distributed throughout the ocean, identifying and tracking adversary submarines, bringing greater transparency to the ocean. That could create stability concerns by reducing the viability of ocean-based second-strike deterrence measures. The US also sees great value in drone swarms for defeating Chinese anti-access area-denial measures, using mass drones to exhaust missile defence magazines, suppress or destroy defensive sites, and protect more valuable manned assets. Although the value of drone swarms to any mission will depend on the state and their conflict environment, the broad range of applications means drone swarms can help many states tackle their security challenges.

Challenges and Risks

Fears of remote warfare: Some states hesitate to use armed drones out of fear that countries could more readily engage in violence and war because the costs of loss are lower. Others note that the combination of decreased risk to soldiers and physical distance from the battlefield makes discrimination between combatants and non-combatants more difficult—this issue is critical in the laws of war. For example, Germany only allowed military forces to deploy unarmed drones until April 2022, when the war between Russia and Ukraine nearby spurred a rethinking along with a broader defence bump. If states are unwilling to use armed drones, they certainly would be unwilling to use numerous drones networked together, especially if drone swarms exacerbate the ethical concerns. German concerns were associated with drone use during the War on Terror, where drone strikes were relatively narrow against pre-identified targets. Thousands of drones deployed against thousands of targets would exacerbate concerns about remote warfare thousands of times.

Reliability questions: As drone swarms scale in size, the swarm may become ever more unpredictable and unreliable in practice. In a truly massive drone swarm, a human operator could not plausibly maintain direct operational control over the swarm. This creates at least three reliability concerns. First, autonomous target selection and engagement using current artificial intelligence is unlikely to be reliable. A single pixel change is enough to convince a machine-learning system that a stealth bomber is a dog. Although such a radical error was only possible in a specific circumstance, battlefields are complex and dynamic, and those errors may arise unexpectedly. Second, because drones within a swarm communicate by definition, a mistake in one drone may cascade to the drone swarm as a whole. For example, if one drone attacks a school bus after mistaking it for an enemy tank, other drones may attack, too, because they are following the lead of the first.

Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and Warfare

Towards the end of the 1999 cult classic film, The Matrix, Neo, after transforming into the all-powerful The One, says, "I can see everything clearly now." The camera then shifts to Neo's point of view, displaying a cascade of ones and zeros against a green screen. The filmmaker wants the viewer to see that Neo can now access the duality behind the Matrix—a simulation created by machines to keep humans in a state of stupor while their bodies are used as bio-electric fuel for the machine civilisation. The simulation immerses human beings into the world as it was in 1999, and life inside the Matrix is designed to be as normal as possible to create a sense of presence for the users while precluding them from ever thinking of the greater reality beyond the simulation.

The aim of virtual reality (VR)-based applications and hardware is to create such user immersion inside a synthetic environment, though for purely benign and educative purposes. However, the current peculiarities of the hardware, software, and user requirements have created a number of devices and programmes that combine elements of both physical and virtual reality. This mixed reality (MR) can be thought of as forming part of a reality–virtuality continuum with the physical and virtual environments (VE) acting as extreme bounds. Two intermediate states of augmented reality (AR), which comprises the use of certain equipment and data to accentuate the user's perception of the physical world, and augmented virtuality (AV), which is the augmentation of VE with real or unmodelled imaging data, fall between the two bounds.

VR and AR have increased relevance for warfighting, as VR models worlds and conditions that are impossible to create in a laboratory or on training grounds for safety reasons, and adds to a quantitative and systematised approach towards training. AR, meanwhile, adds a layer of additional information (audio, visual, haptic) between the soldier and their physical world and heightens certain sensory performances required for the battlefield. Whether these are cost-effective and adequately ruggedised needs to be studied carefully.

War as a Game

In the 1977 Bollywood movie, Shatranj ke Khiladi, war is depicted as a fusion of war and a chess game between two kings. Unlike in a game, however, there are no rebirths or second chances in a war. Soldiers or 'players' cannot respawn at a given location to continue the fight. Unlike a video game player, a soldier does not have omniscience on the battlefield, nor is the call for airstrikes or additional resources delivered in quick time. There are additional challenges of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), informing the next of kin (NoK) of soldiers killed in action, and treatment of prisoners of war. All these are missing in games. Does that mean that games have no connection with war?

Ironically, games play an important and rather critical role in warfighting, but not in the way one would typically imagine. Gamification is the use of game-style incentives, such as rewarding users for achievements, earning badges, and 'levelling-up', which are used to motivate individuals to carry their game-based learning to real life. Johan Huizinga said in 1938 that humankind's most important activity belonged to the realm of fantasy and that play was the structuring element of all cultures, the function by which man created subjectivity. The use of quantifiable indicators to earn points, improve performance, and perform 'what-if' thought experiments—i.e., using games for analysing and manipulating human behaviour—takes inspiration from the quantitative movement in institutes such as the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton and the RAND Corporation in California.

Game theory was created in the United States (US) keeping in mind the 'rational' human being, one who looked after only his own interests and maximised his rewards. Based on these 'games', the entire strategic canon of the Cold War was devised, containing terms such as 'brinksmanship', 'deterrence', and 'compellence'. Simulations were run on the effect of nuclear weapons on cities and forces, and based on these calculations, targeting strategies were modified and doctrines designed and redesigned. Games have therefore played a major part in the US strategic posture, at least since the Second World War.

Another area where simulations have played a huge part, and continue to do, is theoretical physics and cosmology, where even the notion of proving hypotheses regarding the origin of the universe or observing the nuclear reactions within stars is not possible directly. The word 'gamification' itself entered the contemporary lexicon in 1978 when Richard Bartle coined it in the context of a game called Multi User Dungeon (MUD). Several games were designed in the early 1980s to enhance learning using three core features of games: goals, competition, and narrative.

VR and the Military

The mainstreaming of VR began with the entertainment industry in the US with the intention of immersing the user within a movie using all of their five senses. Morton Heilig, a professional cinematographer, developed the "Sensorama" in 1962 as a rudimentary VR device. Ivan Sutherland wrote about the 'ultimate display' in 1965 that would include interactive graphics, force-feedback devices, audio, smell, and taste. Jaron Lanier, a computer scientist and founder of VPL Research, coined the term 'virtual reality' in 1987.

In terms of the military, the introduction of VR was in the form of flight simulators for training pilots. From thereon, the utility of VR has involved the increasing use of VE, i.e., digitally created worlds either mediated through real-world inputs or totally insulated from it. VR as a military utility has grown to encompass computer simulations, computer games, flight simulators, networked simulators for small teams, formation simulators, joint simulators, and even multi-domain simulators for combat tasks. Another area where VR is being used, at least in US, is in military medicine to treat PTSD in soldiers returning from deployment. Complex and invasive surgical procedures are also being simulated in VR, and the same is imparted to military doctors through transfer of training. This is because the use of VR accords certain advantages to military personnel. The basic set-up of VR in any industry is an input device (including haptic gloves, microphones, joystick, and motion sensors), a processor, and output devices. Before diving into the findings of the studies, however, it is important to define certain terms specific to the AR and VR fields.

(a) Immersion: Refers to the tracking and display that a VR/AR system delivers to the user. This can be measured objectively. As per Mel Slater, the more a system delivers displays and tracking that preserves fidelity to their equivalent real-world sensory modalities, the more immersive it is.

(b) Presence: Presence, which cannot be measured yet, is the subjective experience of the user inside a VR world. In other words, presence is a human reaction to the immersion. Given the same levels of immersion, different humans can experience different levels of presence. One of the primary reasons to achieve presence through a VR system is to elicit human physiological responses that would be commensurate with that of the real world. There are two ways to achieve presence. One is to mirror reality within the VR to such fidelity that there is no distinction between the virtual and physical worlds. The second is to extract the relevant sensory stimuli through knowledge of the perceptual system, i.e., to find out what is important in a human's representation of reality and deliver presence without a high level of immersion.

(c) Tracking: The tracking sensors and devices are the main components of the VR system. They interact with the system's processing unit and relay the user's orientation to the system. These include electromagnetic, acoustic, mechanical, and optical tracking systems.

(d) Registration: This is a term used for AR systems and can be defined as a process that merges virtual objects generated by a computer with real-world images caught by a camera to create an accurate alignment of the two. Without accurate registration, the issue of the virtual object 'dangling' in the overlaid graphic without context cannot be ruled out, defeating the purpose of using AR.

The subsequent sections detail the findings and conclusions of various studies on the military aspects of VR.

A game-based learning environment was created to improve the training and results of rifle firing for 160 high school students in Taiwan, all with prior gaming experience. The results of the study showed that a combination of real-world training and rifle simulator and 3D VR training led to a significant improvement in the shooting scores of the students. These 'games' in which storytelling is applied outside the context of entertainment are known as 'serious games'. Their aim is to educate and facilitate transfer of training from the virtual to the physical world. This has both its supporters and detractors. Academics writing in the early 1990s—at a time when image, audio, and haptic processing had not reached the immersive level of today—were dismissive of the value of VR-based training and any transfer of skills back to the physical world. The challenge today, however, is different. How can one transfer military knowledge and experience gained by soldiers in combat during their tours of duty to 18-year-olds? Is the immersive environment the answer?

A 2022 study by Boyce et al. shows that increasing the fidelity of the terrain representation or the 'immersivity' of the simulation does not increase the overall understanding of the terrain in a simulated mission planning environment. One must remember that, for a majority of the youth undergoing these simulations for the first time, most of the basic skills acquired during combat by their predecessors—fire and move, hand-to-hand combat, taking cover during artillery barrages—will be new to them and will necessitate a lot of trial and error with no guarantees that the correct skills will be learnt. There might be need for a knowledge representation system within VR that quantifies, measures, and then faithfully reproduces the stimuli required to respond to combat situations while providing detailed feedback on the actions of the trainees. One critique of the current process of military training using VR is that it serves as a practice platform rather than a training device. In other words, there is a presumption of the presence of certain skills that need to be honed rather than starting from scratch. As a result, these VR and simulation-based scenarios are minimally guided and not designed as per the cognitive capabilities of the trainees.

Sonam Kapoor announced as new brand ambassador of Dior

French luxury fashion house Dior has named Bollywood star Sonam Kapoor as its latest ambassador, the company announced on Tuesday.

Kapoor, an actor, producer, and a prominent fashion figure, will represent the brand's collections designed by creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri, Dior said in a press release.

The 39-year-old actor, known for films such as 'Neerja', 'Khoobsurat', and 'Raanjhanaa', said she is honoured to be a part of Dior's story as they continue to push the boundaries and redefine creativity and elegance in the world of fashion.

"Each of their collections present a truly unique vision with intricate craftsmanship, celebrating heritage in a way that deeply resonates with my own sense of style.

"This partnership is another step in the beautiful cultural synergy that has connected Dior and India over the years, and I'm excited to see where we take it next," Kapoor said in a statement.

Jigra controversy: Director Vasan Bala deactivates X account

Acclaimed filmmaker Vasan Bala, whose recent release Jigra, starring Alia Bhatt turned into a box-office debacle, has deactivated his X, formerly Twitter, account. This comes in the light of the dirty standoff between the producer of Jigra Karan Johar and actress-director Divya Khossla, and, of course, the underwhelming performance of Jigra at the box-office. However, the filmmaker is quite active on Instagram.

Earlier, a war of words ensued between Divya and KJo as the former accused KJo's prodigy Alia Bhatt of buying the tickets of Jigra.

While Karan took to the Stories section of his Instagram, and wrote, 'Silence is the best speech you will ever give to fools', Divya replied by sharing a quote on her Instagram Stories, 'Truth will always offend fools opposed to it'. When she felt that she hadn't made her point, and her voice wasn't heard enough, she uploaded another story. She wrote, "When you are shamelessly accustomed to stealing what rightfully belongs to others, you will always seek

shelter in silence. You will have no voice no spine".

Divya felt that the collections of the film were inflated at the behest of the production house, which is considered one of the premier film studios in Hindi cinema. Interestingly, Divya's Savi is said to follow the same basic premise of a jail break story as that of Alia's Jigra (the difference being in Savi, the titular character played by Divya carries out prison break of her husband, and in Jigra, Alia takes her brother out of the prison).

While Savi managed to make only Rs. 7.83 crore in two weeks of its theatrical run before it was ousted from cinemas for a more lucrative and financially rewarding Chandu Champion, Alia's Jigra earned Rs. 4.5 crore on its opening day.

Australia named 'Country of Focus' for 55th International Film Festival of India

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on Wednesday announced that Australia has been nominated as the "Country of Focus" at the 55th edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI).

The "Country of Focus" segment at IFFI will feature a curated selection of seven Australian films, showcasing the country's rich storytelling traditions as well as indigenous and contemporary narratives.

The announcement follows the recent signing of an Audio Visual Co-Production Treaty between the two nations, which aims to boost co-productions by offering incentives to filmmakers from both countries.

"This collaboration will not only promote cultural exchange but also open new avenues for filmmakers in India and Australia to work together on innovative cinematic projects," the ministry said in a statement.

The 55th edition of the IFFI will be held in Goa from November 20 to 28, 2024.

Additionally, Australia will participate in the Film Bazaar, the market event held alongside IFFI. A delegation, including representatives from Screen Australia, State Screen Commissions, and Ausfilm, will showcase opportunities for collaboration, with a special focus on promoting Australia as a filming destination.

Up to six Australian producers will attend Film Bazaar, supported by funding from their government, to explore co-production opportunities.

The event will also host an 'Australian Co-production Day' to facilitate networking between filmmakers from both countries.

One of the highlights of the 2024 Film Bazaar will be the Australian project "Home Before Night" that has been selected as an official entry in the Co-Production Market.

A dedicated panel discussion on co-production opportunities between India and Australia is also part of the knowledge series at the event.

Besides, Academy Award-winning Australian cinematographer John Seale, renowned for his work on 'Mad Max: Fury Road' and 'The English Patient', will conduct a masterclass on cinematography where he will talk about his artistic journey and share valuable insights to aspiring filmmakers.

Kajol serves boss lady energy in embroidered pantsuit in Jaipur

Bollywood star Kajol, who is currently in Jaipur to promote her upcoming film 'Do Patti', served major boss lady vibes in an embroidered pantsuit, which she described as a 'thing of beauty'.

Kajol took Instagram, where she shared a string of pictures. The first two had the actress posing in bed as she dressed to the nines in an ivory shaded floral pantsuit. She completed her look with a ponytail and retro sunglasses. Another picture had the actress smiling as she held onto some Lilies. The last image had the actress posing in front of the window of the hotel room she is staying in. Earlier this month, during the trailer launch of "Do Patti", Kajol revealed her take on who the real 'Singham' is. Asked who the real "Singham" is, Kajol playfully pointed to herself and said: "Maine ye bahut baar kaha hai ki asli Singham... (I have said it many times at the event that I am the one and only'real Singham' in life." Talking about 'Do Patti', which also stars Kriti Sanon and Shaheer Sheikh, the actress will be seen playing a police officer. Directed by Shashanka Chaturvedi, 'Do Patti' marks Kriti Sanon's debut as a producer. The film is set to arrive on Netflix on October 25. On October 20, the actress celebrated 29 years of her cult-classic movie 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge' starring Shah Rukh Khan.

Sender of threat message seeking Rs 5 crore from Salman Khan now apologises

The Mumbai traffic police have received an apology from a mobile phone number which was earlier used to send a threat message demanding Rs 5 crore from Bollywood actor Salman Khan, officials said on Tuesday.

The apology message was received on the WhatsApp helpline of the traffic police on Monday, an official said without elaborating.

During the probe, it was confirmed that the apology was sent from the same mobile number which had been used for sending the threat message, he said.

The city's traffic control room on Thursday received the Rs 5 crore threat message on its WhatsApp helpline, police earlier said. The sender had also said the threat should not be taken lightly, they said.

A case was subsequently registered at Worli police station under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for threat and extortion.

The superstar had earlier received death threats from the Lawrence Bishnoi gang.

Bishnoi gang members also opened fire outside the actor's Bandra home in April this year, as per police. A few months back, the Navi Mumbai police uncovered a plot by the Bishnoi gang to kill Khan.

Legal trouble

Producer Ekta Kapoor and her mother Shobha Kapoor have landed in legal trouble.

A case has been filed against them under the POCSO Act for allegedly showing inappropriate scenes involving minor girls in an episode of the ALT Balaji's web series Gandi Baat.

The case is related to Season 6 of the web series Gandi Baat on the OTT platform Alt Balaji.

According to the Mumbai Police, a case has been registered against Balaji Telefilm Limited, Ekta Kapoor and her mother Shobha Kapoor at MHB police station in Mumbai under Section 295-A of IPC, IT Act and sections 13 and 15 of POCSO Act.

It is written in the complaint that this series, which streamed on Alt Balaji between February 2021 and April 2021, showed obscene scenes of minor girls. However, this controversial episode is not currently streaming on this app.

'Citadel: Honey Bunny' will push Indian cinema forward, says Varun Dhawan

Bollywood star Varun Dhawan says he feels good about his maiden OTT series, 'Citadel: Honey Bunny', the India-set companion piece to the globetrotting spy franchise 'Citadel', and believes the show will push the boundaries of Indian cinema.

Directed by filmmaker duo Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK, the series is part of the expansive global spy universe that began with the mothership show starring Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Richard Madden.

'Honey Bunny' is the third installment in the franchise, following 'Citadel' and the recently released Italian chapter 'Citadel: Diana', starring Matilda de Angelis.

"For 'Honey Bunny', we've put in a lot of work, from getting it done to executing it and seeing it come to fruition. It's amazing. I'm already happy with it because of the quality and the way it looks. Eventually, it is up to the audience. Everyone has put their best foot forward. I'm hoping this will push Indian cinema forward. I know this is going to do well, and I'm feeling good about this," Varun told PTI in an interview.

The Prime Video series, also starring Samantha Ruth Prabhu, is billed as a riveting narrative that fuses elements of a gritty spy action thriller with the heartwarming allure of a love story.

"When stuntman Bunny (Dhawan) recruits struggling actress Honey (Prabhu) for a side gig, they are hurled into a high-stakes world of action, espionage, and betrayal. Years later, as their dangerous past catches up, the estranged Honey and Bunny must reunite and fight to protect their young daughter, Nadia," reads the official plotline.

The show, written by Sita R Menon along with Raj & DK, is executive produced by Hollywood filmmakers Anthony and Joe Russo. It will premiere on November 7.

For Dhawan, known for films such as 'Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania', 'Badlapur', 'October', 'Jugjugg Jeeyo', and 'Bhediya', 'Honey Bunny' was a rare project for many reasons.

"Right from the love story between two spies and these two damaged people meeting, everything was great. Then Raj & DK executed it, Sita wrote it, and Sam played Honey. So, that was a big thing for me...Having Amazon back it and having the Russos on board, these things happen once in a while," the 37-year-old actor said.

Dhawan revealed that he received many offers for his series debut but was instantly drawn to the idea of 'Citadel: Honey Bunny'.

"There have been a lot of offers from OTT platforms, some even in the action space. For this, if I had wished for something else, then that would've happened as well, like The Rock (Dwayne Johnson) being in it. It was just that everything was happening one after the other on this show," he said.

The actor also said that when he heard the narration of the show, Prabhu's name immediately came to his mind for the female lead.

"When we spoke about this, the first person who came to my mind was Samantha, without them even saying. I thought, 'If Sam does it, it will become huge, and we will bounce off each other very well.' We've got a unique kind of chemistry. I think that's the only thing Raj & DK were listening to, nothing else."

Besides 'Citadel: Honey Bunny', Dhawan is equally excited about his upcoming releases: 'Baby John', an action drama backed by 'Jawan' director Atlee; Karan Johar's home production 'Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari'; and the family entertainer 'Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai', with his filmmaker-father David Dhawan.

He will also be seen in the Sunny Deol-led 'Border 2' and the sequel to 'No Entry', alongside Arjun Kapoor and Diljit Dosanjh.

"I've got too much on my plate now, and it is time to come out. It's very good. I'm not complaining at all; I'm very happy."

The collaboration with his father is particularly special as it marks their reunion after 'Main Tera Hero' and the reboot version of 'Coolie No. 1'. "He is the only director who shouts at me. He also lectures me on all the other stuff that I'm putting out right now. He is excited about 'Honey Bunny'; he loved the trailer," he added.

The actor believes there's a dearth of well-made comedy films in Bollywood, adding that even though critics may pan such films as "not logical", audiences enjoy watching them.

"We've made good comedies, and they have been successful too. If a comedy is generally good and makes you laugh, then it becomes critic-proof because there is word-of-mouth, and people are laughing in theatres. It doesn't matter what people say about it not being logical. As long as people are entertained in theatres, that word of mouth spreads.

Women's T20 WC: Harman only Indian in team of tournament

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur made it to the Women's T20 World Cup 2024 team of the tournament dominated by players from finalists New Zealand and South Africa on the back of her strong batting show.

New Zealand won their maiden Women's T20 World Cup title after beating South Africa by 32 runs in the summit clash on Sunday.

In an otherwise disappointing campaign for India, who failed to make it to the semifinals, skipper Kaur was the standout performer for the Women in Blue.

She finished as India's top scorer and the fourth-highest overall in the tournament, amassing 150 runs in four innings.

With two fifties to her name, she boasted an incredible average of 150. Her strike rate of 133.92 was the fifth-best in the tournament. Kaur's quick-fire 52 off 27 balls against Sri Lanka was crucial in keeping India's hopes alive for a semifinal spot.

Champions New Zealand have three members in the world team announced by the ICC on Monday, including 12th player Eden Carson, while runners-up South Africa also have three.

Women's T20 World Cup 2024 team: Laura Wolvaardt (South Africa, captain), Tazmin Brits (South Africa), Danni Wyatt-Hodge (England), Melie Kerr (New Zealand), Harmanpreet Kaur (India), Deandra Dottin (West Indies), Nigar Sultana Joty (Bangladesh, wk), Afy Fletcher (West Indies), Rosemary Mair (New Zealand), Nonkululeko Mlaba (South Africa), Megan Schutt (Australia).

12th: Eden Carson (New Zealand).

Pain-free, will play domestic cricket before Oz tour: Shami

Gurugram

Seasoned India pacer Mohammed Shami on Monday declared himself pain-free but insisted on proving his fitness in domestic cricket by playing at least "one or two" games to make a strong case for selection for the marquee tour of Australia starting next month.

Shami, who has not played since the ODI World Cup final last November, bowled full tilt in the nets after India's opening Test against New Zealand in Bengaluru on Sunday. This was a few days after skipper Rohit Sharma revealed that he had swelling in his knees which has affected his rehabilitation from an ankle injury sustained last year. "I am very happy with how I bowled yesterday. I was bowling from half run-up before that because I didn't want to take too much load. But yesterday, I decided to go full tilt, and I bowled at a 100 per cent," the 34-year-old said.

Rishabh Pant overtakes Kohli in Test rankings

Rishabh Pant on Wednesday overtook his superstar India teammate Virat Kohli to reach the sixth spot in the ICC Test rankings for batters.

Fresh from a counter-attacking 99 in the second innings of the opening Test against New Zealand, Pant gained three spots in the rankings while Kohli, who made a fluent 70 in Bengaluru, dropped a place to be eighth.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal remains India's highest ranked batter at four. India captain Rohit Sharma dropped two places to be joint 15th alongside Sri Lanka's Dimuth Karunaratne.

England star Joe Root maintains a healthy lead at the top of the charts.

New Zealand duo of Rachin Ravindra (up 36 places to 18th) and Devon Conway (up 12 spots to 36th) also made good ground on the latest list for Test batters, while teammate Matt Henry (up two rungs to ninth with a new career-high rating) was the big winner in bowlers' category.

Henry picked up eight wickets during the Black Caps' drought-breaking eight-wicket victory over India in Bengaluru, while teammate Will O'Rourke (up two spots to 39th) was also rewarded for his seven scalps from the same match.

Pakistan spinner Noman Ali was re-instated at 17th on the rankings following his 11 wickets across two innings against England, while teammate Sajid Khan gained 22 places to move to 50th after he was adjudged Player of the Match in the same contest.

India's pace spearhead remains at the top of the bowlers' rankings followed by teammate R Ashwin. Retaining the seventh sport, Ravindra Jadeja is another Indian in the top-10.

Gambhir backs under-fire KL Rahul, says social media does not matter one bit

India head coach Gautam Gambhir on Wednesday threw his weight behind under-fire batter KL Rahul, saying it's the team management's opinion that matters and not the criticism that he is facing on social media.

Rahul was dismissed for a duck in the first innings of the opening Test against New Zealand in Bengaluru and made 12 in the second essay as the hosts lost the game by eight wickets.

But it appears Gambhir is ready to give him a long rope.

"Social media does not matter one bit. What the team management and leadership group thinks is very important. He is batting really well, had a decent knock in Kanpur (against Bangladesh on a difficult wicket," Gambhir told reporters on the eve of the second Test when asked about Rahul's place in the team.

Rahul had managed a 68-run knock in the first innings of the Kanpur Test against Bangladesh.

I am sure he would be knowing that he has to score big runs and he has capability of scoring runs. That's why he has been backed by the team... Ultimately, everyone is judged. International cricket is all about being judged," Gambhir added.

Nevertheless, Sarfaraz Khan's maiden hundred in the first Test has made the job more difficult for Rahul, and the Karnataka man will look to get his act right in the second match should he play. New Zealand lead the three-match series following their eight-wicket victory in Bengaluru.

It was a humbling experience for the mighty hosts who entered the series after completing a 2-0 sweep of Bangladesh including winning the Kanpur Test after a majority of the game was affected by rain.

"Cricket, sports are a big leveller. If we have enjoyed days like Kanpur we had to endure what happened in Bengaluru. We didn't show any intention to bat out the remainder of the two and a half days," Gambhir said of the defeat in Bengaluru where India were shot for 46 in the first innings, their lowest-ever total at home.

LeBron and Bronny James make history as NBA's first father-son duo to play together

LeBron James and Bronny James became the first father and son to play in the NBA together on Tuesday night during the Los Angeles Lakers' season opener.

LeBron and Bronny checked into the game together with four minutes left in the second quarter, prompting a big ovation from a home crowd aware of the enormity of the milestone. The 39-year-old LeBron had already started the game and played 13 minutes before he teamed up with his 20-year-old son to make history.

LeBron James is the top scorer in NBA history, while LeBron James Jr. was a second-round pick by the Lakers last summer. They are the first father and son to play in the world's top basketball league at the same time, let alone on the same team.

"Y'all ready? You see the intensity, right? Just play carefree, though," father told son on the bench before they checked in, an exchange captured by the TNT cameras and microphones. "Don't worry about mistakes. Just go out and play hard."

LeBron and Bronny played 2 1/2 minutes on court together, and LeBron missed two perimeter shots before making a dunk. Bronny had an early rebound and missed a tip-in.

Bronny's first NBA jump shot was a 3-pointer that came up just short. He checked out with 1:19 left in the second quarter, getting another ovation.

Bronny didn't play again in the Lakers' 110-103 victory over Minnesota. LeBron, who scored 16 points, did an on-court interview with Bronny before they headed to the Lakers' locker room together — but not before stopping in the tunnel to hug Savannah James, LeBron's wife and Bronny's mother.

Ken Griffey Sr. and Ken Griffey Jr. were courtside at the Lakers' downtown arena to witness the same history they made in Major League Baseball. The two sluggers played 51 games together for the Seattle Mariners in 1990 and 1991 as baseball's first father-son duo.

The Jameses and the Griffeys met up during pregame warmups for some photos and a warm chat between two remarkable family lines.

LeBron, a four-time NBA champion and a 20-time All-Star, first spoke about his dream to play alongside Bronny a few years ago, while his oldest son was still in high school. The dream became real after Bronny entered the draft as a teenager following one collegiate season, and the Lakers grabbed him with the 55th overall pick.

"It's been a treat," LeBron said at Tuesday's morning shootaround.

"In preseason, the practices, just every day ... bringing him up to speed of what this professional life is all about, and how to prepare every day as a professional."

LeBron and Bronny joined a small club of father-son professional athletes who played together. The Griffeys made history 34 years ago, and they even homered in the same game on Sept. 14, 1990.

Baseball Hall of Famer Tim Raines and his namesake son also accomplished the feat with the Baltimore Orioles in 2001.

In hockey, Gordie Howe played alongside his two sons, Mark and Marty, with the WHA's Houston Aeros and Team Canada before one NHL season together on the Hartford Whalers in 1979-80, when Gordie was 51.

While the other family pairings on this list happened late in the fathers' careers, LeBron shows no signs of slowing down or regressing as he begins his NBA record-tying 22nd season.

LeBron averaged more than 25 points per game last year for his 20th consecutive season, and he remains the most important player on the Lakers alongside Anthony Davis as they attempt to recapture the form that won a championship in 2020 and got them to the Western Conference finals in 2023.

Bronny survived cardiac arrest and open heart surgery in the summer of 2023, and he went on to play a truncated freshman season at the University of Southern California. He declared for the draft anyway, and the Lakers eagerly used the fourth-to-last pick in the draft on the 6-foot-2 guard.

LeBron spent the summer in Europe with the gold medal-winning US team at the Paris Olympics, while Bronny played for the Lakers in summer league. They started practicing together with the Lakers before training camp.

The duo first played together in the preseason, logging four minutes during a game against Phoenix just outside Palm Springs earlier this month.

The Lakers were fully aware of the history they would make with this pairing, and coach JJ Redick spoke with the Jameses recently about a plan to make it happen early in the regular season.

The presence of the Griffeys likely made it an inevitability for opening night, even though Redick said the Lakers still wanted it "to happen naturally, in the flow of the game."

The Lakers have declined to speculate on how long Bronny will stay on their NBA roster. Los Angeles also has point guards D'Angelo Russell, Gabe Vincent and Jalen Hood-Schifino, which likely makes minutes scarce for Bronny, who likely needs regular playing time to raise his game to a consistent NBA standard.

We're here to make amends: Australian skipper Cummins ahead of Test series against India

Australian skipper Pat Cummins is determined to "make amends" against India in the upcoming five-match Test series, as he aims to reclaim the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time in over a decade.

The two teams will face off in a five-match series starting November 22 in Perth. India will come into the contest with the Border-Gavaskar Trophy firmly in their grasp, having held it for nearly a decade and winning two consecutive series in Australia.

"We've had a bit of a break, so I'm excited for the five match Test series. Excited to get into it," the 31-year-old said in Star Sports' Press Room.

"We haven't had a lot of luck against India over the last few Test series, but we always pride ourselves on playing well here in Australia."

India had won the last Border-Gavaskar series in Australia 2-1 in 2020-21. Rishabh Pant's second innings heroics of unbeaten 89 in the final Test saw India chase down 328 to seal a historic three-wicket win at the Gabba.

It came after enduring a humiliating collapse in the first Test in Adelaide, where they were shot out for 36 -- their lowest-ever Test score.

"The last two series were a long time ago, so I think we've gotten over it. But we have really high expectations when we play Test cricket in Australia," Cummins said.

"I think that's from the fans and the media as well. So anytime we don't win down here, of course, you look at those series a bit more closely.

"The last series, in particular, was a really tough one. It went right down to that last session at the Gabba, and unfortunately, we couldn't pull it off. A lot of the guys in the team are the same as those who played in that series, and we're here to make amends," he added.

Cummins identified Rishabh Pant as India's "X-factor," but stressed that his team is focused on rectifying the setbacks from four consecutive series defeats to India. "Rishabh had a great series here in Australia last time. He's always a bit of that X-factor in the middle order," he said.

You never quite know what you're going to get, which is exciting, even as the opposition. And he's always got something to say behind the stumps -- he's very funny, makes me laugh."

Asked how the Australian bowling lineup rates talented youngsters like Shubman Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal, Cummins said: "I've played a little bit against Shubman. Haven't seen a lot of Jaiswal, just a bit in the IPL.

"But they both look like young guys who've scored a fair few runs in different formats. We'll get down here and have a good look at them. But yeah, we're still a little while away from the series, so I can't say I've been planning too closely for them yet."

Cummins also rued about missing key all-rounder Cameron Green who has been ruled out for six months after choosing to undergo surgery for a stress fracture in his lower back.

Sonam Kapoor buys Mumbai's iconic music store Rhythm House for $5.7 million

Mumbai

Bhaane Group, owned by celebrity Sonam Kapoor and her husband Anand Ahuja, is buying Rhythm House, an iconic music store in India's financial capital Mumbai for Rs 47.84 crore ($5.7 million).

The 3,600-square foot Rhythm House had been shuttered in 2018 after Nirav Modi, the owner of Firestar Diamond International Pvt that ran the music store, defaulted on billions of dollars of bank loans. A resolution professional appointed by the Indian bankruptcy court oversaw the sale of the store confirmed the value of the deal to Bloomberg News in a telephone interview.

"The stakeholder committee has approved the sale of Rhythm House for 478.4 million rupees," said Shantanu T Ray, the official liquidator overseeing the sale of Firestar's assets.

A spokesperson for Bhaane, which manufactures various clothes under its own label, confirmed the purchase, but declined to share the value of the deal. The company is an arm of Shahi Exports Pvt, owned by Anand's father Harish Ahuja and is one of the largest apparel makers in India which supplies international brands including Uniqlo, Decathlon and H&M.

"We have completed our due diligence and plan to expand our retail presence in the city. As private companies, we are unable to comment on any financial information regarding the bid," a spokesperson for the Bhaane said in an email statement. Bhaane's retail unit operates the chain of Nike and Converse stores in India.

The deal signals the end of an era for a generation of music lovers who grew up listening to their favorite artistes on vinyls, cassettes and compact discs.

Established in the 1940s, Rhythm House had once hosted legendary musicians like classical artist Pandit Ravi Shankar, Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson and a bevy of Bollywood stars. But beginning in the late 90s, a rising wave of music piracy first and later the advent of digital streaming steadily made the landmark store irrelevant for music aficionados.

Sports fraternity shocked after medal-yielding events excluded

New Delhi

India's leading sportspersons and administrators expressed surprise and helplessness after the country's medal prospects took a hit with the exclusion of hockey, shooting, cricket, badminton and wrestling from the roster of a heavily scaled-down 2026 Glasgow Commonwealth Games.

Relocated to the Scottish capital after Victoria's withdrawal as host due to an increase in projected costs, the Games will feature just 10 events, which is nine less than the previous edition held in 2022 in Birmingham.

Table tennis, squash and archery are also not part of what will be a massively pruned down Games. The organisers have said having lesser events at just four venues will ensure that the showpiece is able to manage the financial and operational risks involved.

But the roster has stunned the Indian sports fraternity.

"It's a shocking news and very disappointing but it's not in our hands," said Harmanpreet Singh, under whose captaincy the Indian men's hockey team won a bronze medal at the Paris Olympics in August.

Table tennis great Sharath Kamal, who has won innumerable medals at Commonwealth Games over the last two decades, understood the impact the games organisers' decision could have on the country's overall tally.

"It is a pity that table tennis has been taken off the CWG programme but the organisers have informed they had very short notice as it moved from Melbourne to Glasgow.

One of the country's finest squash players, Dipika Pallikal expressed her disappointment when reached out for a reaction.