

The Indian EXPRESS

JOURNALISM OF COURAGE
SINCE 1932

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South East & Far East Asia			Australia NZ America Africa			Europe - Western, Eastern, Northern, Mediterranean			India Nepal Bhutan Sri Lanka Dubai		
Tour Name	Ex-Mumbai	J&L	Tour Name	Ex-Mumbai	J&L	Tour Name	Ex-Mumbai	J&L	Tour Name	Ex-Mumbai	J&L
Singapore Thailand			Australia (9D/14D)	325K-450K	250K-375K	European Explorer (27D)	650K-675K	570K-580K	Leh Ladakh (7D/9D)	67K-90K	42K-62K
Malaysia (10D)	165K-175K	130K-140K	New Zealand (10D/14D)	355K-460K	265K-370K	European Magic (19D)	475K-490K	395K-405K	Kashmir Escape (5D)	59K-65K	38K-45K
Singapore Malaysia Bali (10D)	197K-210K	--	Australia New Zealand (17D)	555K-570K	460K-470K	European Marvels (17D)	415K-430K	340K-350K	Kashmir (6D/7D)	62K-88K	41K-70K
Singapore Thailand (8D)	147K-151K	--	America (15D/21D)	625K-765K	500K	Versailles/Disneyland(15D)	365K-385K	285K-310K	Best of Kashmir Premium (8D)	95K-105K	76K-86K
Singapore Bali (8D)	172K-180K	--	American Dream (19D)	700K-715K	570K-590K	European Jewels with	250K-270K	210K-225K	Luxury Kashmir (9D)	172K-190K	150K-170K
Singapore HKG Macau (8D)	210K-220K	--	American Splendours (17D)	635K-650K	513K-523K	England Scotland Ireland	400K-415K	325K-340K	Shimla Manali (6D/8D)	35K-45K	28K-38K
Singapore Malaysia+CruiSe(9D)	186K-190K	151K-155K	American Magic (13D)	530K-545K	390K-410K	Wales London (15D)	400K-415K	325K-340K	Dharmashala Dalhousie		
Best of Bali (7D)	127K-131K	85K-90K	USA East Coast (7D)	300K-310K	175K-185K	Eastern Europe (17D)	360K-375K	285K-300K	Amritsar (8D)	52K-60K	40K-48K
Best of Singapore (4D)	110K-116K	75K-80K	American Wonders (15D)	575K-590K	435K-450K	Croatia Slovenia Slovakia	285K-300K	210K-225K	Nainital Mussoorie Haridwar		
Thailand (4D/6D/15D)	50K-175K	30K-58K	California Carnival (10D)	400K-415K	260K-275K	Hungary (12D)	285K-300K	210K-225K	Corbett Park (6D/8D/9D)	47K-60K	38K-52K
Bangkok Pattaya			Best of Alaska (9D)	400K-415K	270K-285K	Vienna Prague Budapest	225K-240K	150K-165K	Assam Meghalaya (7D)	76K-85K	59K-68K
Phuket Krabi (8D)	112K-120K	--	Canada (10D/17D)	475K-725K	345K	Bratislava (8D)	225K-240K	150K-165K	Assam Arunachal Meghalaya (12D)	103K-107K	81K-88K
Chiang Mai Chiang Rai			Hawaii Mexico (13D)	775K-790K	--	Uzbekistan Kazakhstan			Sikkim Darjeeling Gangtok		
Phuket Krabi (9D)	156K-160K	--	South America (21D)	1085000	810000	Kyrgyzstan (9D)	200K-225K	--	Pelling (9D)	75K-85K	58K-68K
Vietnam (5D/8D/13D)	100K-220K	--	Antarctica (13D) Dec 8	1325000	1125000	Best of Baku (7D)	135K-150K	100K-115K	Rajasthan (6D/9D)	30K-50K	22K-42K
Philippines Manila (8D)	201000	--	S.Africa Kenya V.Falls (15D)	435K-455K	--	Georgia Armenia (8D)	165K-175K	115K-125K	Gujarat (7D/10D)	30K-55K	24K-50K
Best of Laos (6D)	115000	--	Kenya/S. Africa (8D/9D)	235K-250K	195K-210K	Spain (10D/15D)	250K-365K	180K-295K	Kerala (6D/8D/10D)	30K-60K	24K-54K
Japan Alpine Route (8D/10D)	295K-340K	245K-290K	Mauritius (7D)	145K	105K	Spain Portugal Morocco (8D)	345K-360K	265K-280K	Andaman (7D)	70K-75K	52K-57K
Korea Taiwan (10D)	335K-345K	285K-295K				Egypt Greece Turkey (15D)	375K-390K	--	Dubai Abu Dhabi (5D/7D)	85K-135K	68K-110K
Japan Korea (9D)	325K-345K	275K-290K				Turkey (10D/15D)	225K-325K	155K-255K	Nepal/Sri Lanka (8D/7D)	77K-95K	50K-57K
						Greece (8D/10D/15D)	250K-425K	190K-365K	Bhutan (9D)	86K-95K	65K-71K

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THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



North Korea leader Kim Jong Un. File

North Korea says it tested new missiles

Seoul: North Korea said Friday it test-launched new anti-aircraft missiles, as its military threatened unspecified grave steps against the US and South Korea over their joint military drills that it views as an invasion rehearsal. The official Korean Central News Agency said that leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the tests Thursday. The missile launches, North Korea's sixth weapons testing activity this year, occurred on the same day that the US and South Korean militaries concluded their annual Freedom Shield command post exercise. The 11-day training was the allies' first major joint military exercises since the inauguration of President Trump in January, and the two countries held diverse field training exercises alongside the Freedom Shield drills. **AP**

PAKISTAN 8 lakh 'illegally' residing Afghans repatriated

Islamabad: The process of repatriation of illegally residing Afghan nationals in Pakistan continued unabated as more than 800,000 people were repatriated by March 20, an official said. With only 10 days remaining until the March 31 deadline for illegally residing individuals and Afghan Citizen Card holders to leave Pakistan, the government by March 20 repatriated 874,282 Afghans due to concerns over terrorism, an official said. **AP**

SOUTH AFRICA Over 67,000 interested in US refugee plan

Cape Town: The United States Embassy in South Africa said Thursday it received a list of more than 67,000 people interested in refugee status in the US under President Donald Trump's plan to relocate members of a white minority group he claims are victims of racial discrimination by their Black-led government. The list was given to the embassy by the South African Chamber of Commerce in the US, which said it became a point of contact for white South Africans asking about the program a month. **AP**

Fire shuts down Heathrow Airport, disrupting global flight schedules



People wait at the Paddington railway station, after a fire stopped power at the Heathrow Airport in London on Friday. Reuters

REUTERS LONDON, MARCH 21

BRITAIN'S HEATHROW Airport was shut on Friday after a huge fire at a nearby substation knocked out its power, stranding passengers around the world and angering airlines who questioned how such crucial infrastructure could fail.

Huge orange flames and plumes of black smoke shot into the sky around 2300 GMT on Thursday as a blaze engulfed the substation, cutting the power supply and back-up system for Europe's busiest and the world's fifth-busiest airport.

Police said while there was no indication of foul play they retained an open mind and

counter-terrorism officers would lead the inquiries given the critical nature of the infrastructure, and their capabilities.

Airline experts said the last time European airports experienced disruption on such a large scale was the 2010 Icelandic ash cloud that grounded some 100,000 flights.

The industry is now facing the prospect of a financial hit costing tens of millions of pounds, and a likely fight over who should pay.

"You would think they would have significant back-up power," one top executive from a European airline told Reuters.

The fire brigade said the cause of the fire was not known, but that 25,000 litres of cooling oil in the substation's trans-

former had caught fire. It had brought the blaze under control by the early morning with the transformer doused in white firefighting foam.

Heathrow had been due to handle 1,351 flights on Friday, flying up to 291,000 passengers. The closure forced flights to divert to other airports in Britain and across Europe, while many long-haul flights returned to their point of departure.

Passengers stranded in London and facing the prospect of days of disruptions were scrambling to make alternate travel arrangements.

"When we first came here, (it was) very exciting and hopeful," said Beau Mahr, 21 from the US state of Iowa. "Now that we have to wait, it's kind of stressful."

Industry experts warned that some passengers forced to land in Europe may have to stay in transit lounges if they lack the paperwork to leave the airport.

Global flight schedules will also be affected, as aircraft and crews will now be out of position, forcing carriers to rapidly reconfigure their networks.

Prices at hotels around Heathrow jumped, with booking sites offering rooms for 500 pounds (\$645), roughly five times the normal price levels.

"Passengers are advised not to travel to the airport and should contact their airline for further information," Heathrow said, adding that the airport would be shut until midnight on Friday. "We apologise for the inconvenience."

Musk holds meeting at Pentagon, wants 'leakers' to be prosecuted

REUTERS WASHINGTON, MARCH 21

BILLIONAIRE ELON Musk took his campaign to cut the US federal government into uncharted waters on Friday, holding an unprecedented top-level meeting at the Pentagon and calling for the prosecution of any Defense Department officials leaking "maliciously false information" about his visit.

Musk, whose businesses have a number of Defense Department contracts, met US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth for 80 minutes in his first such talks at the Pentagon, which is responsible for a large chunk of federal government spending. It was unclear whether US generals joined that meeting virtually.

The New York Times reported that Musk would be briefed on secret war plans for



Elon Musk and US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth in Washington on Friday. Reuters

China, something Musk, Trump and others denied. Musk called the report "pure propaganda" and urged legal action against leakers.

"I look forward to the prosecutions of those at the Pentagon who are leaking maliciously false information to NYT. They will be

found," he wrote on X before the Hegseth meeting.

At the White House after the meeting, Trump said that he did not want to show the United States' plans for a potential war with China to anybody and hinted at Musk's potential conflict of interest.

No objection to Awami League's return, says BNP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA DHAKA, MARCH 21

FORMER PRIME minister Khaleda Zia's BNP on Friday said it had no objection to the return of rival Sheikh Hasina's Awami League to politics under a clean leadership, a day after the Bangladesh interim government said it had no plans to ban it.

The Bangladesh Nationalist

Party (BNP) spokesman Ruhul Kabir Rizvi's comments came on the day when two Dhaka University student organisations held separate protests demanding that the Awami League should be banned from contesting polls.

He suggested there should be no bar on Awami League returning to politics if it picks a leader who "is not guilty of any crime, has not killed students, or mis-

appropriated or laundered money abroad."

"We have nothing to say if the people accept Awami League after a quick trial of those involved in crimes committed by their regime," Rizvi, BNP's senior joint secretary general, said.

But he cautioned against the return of an "autocratic rule" in the country. "The democratic process and democratic exercise will fix one's place in politics".

Russian drones hammer Odesa as Czech leader visits Ukraine

Kyiv: Russian drones pummeled the Ukrainian Black Sea port city of Odesa, injuring three people and sparking massive fires, officials said Friday, an attack that underlined Moscow's intention to pursue aerial strikes even as it agreed to temporarily halt strikes on energy facilities.

The head of the Odesa region, Oleh Kiper, said the city suffered "local emergency power outages" in three of its districts, an indication that the energy infrastructure of the city could have been damaged. Reacting to the attack, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that "joint pressure on Russia, strengthening sanctions and defense support for our state... is the way to stop such terror and Russia's prolongation of the war."

"We expect real pressure on Russia from the US, Europe and all our partners," Zelenskyy said. **AP**

IN SUDAN

MILITARY RETAKES KHARTOUM'S PALACE

Sudan's military said on Friday it retook the Republican Palace in Khartoum, the last heavily guarded bastion of rival paramilitary forces in the capital, after nearly two years of fighting. The seizure of the Republican Palace, surrounded by government ministries, represents a major symbolic victory for Sudan's military against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces.

TOP COURT HALTS SHIN BET CHIEF'S DISMISSAL

Pushing Hamas to free hostages, Israel warns it may annex Gaza land

IBRAHIM HAZBOUN & DAVID RISING JERUSALEM, MARCH 21

ISRAEL'S DEFENSE minister said Friday he has ordered ground forces to advance deeper into the Gaza Strip, and vowed to hold more land until Hamas releases the remaining hostages it holds.

"The more Hamas continues its refusal to release the kidnapped, the more territory it will lose to Israel," Defense Minister Israel Katz said in a statement.

After retaking part of the strategic Netzarim corridor that divides Gaza's north from south, Israeli troops moved Thursday toward the northern town of Beit Lahiya and the southern border city of Rafah. The military said it had resumed enforcing a blockade on northern Gaza, including Gaza City.

Earlier on Friday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Cabinet unanimously approved his request to fire the head of the country's Shin Bet internal security service. The decision to sack Ronen Bar deepens a power struggle focused largely over who bears responsibility for the 2023 Hamas attack that sparked the war in Gaza.

It also could set the stage for a crisis over the country's division of powers. Israel's attorney general has ruled that the Cabinet has no legal basis to dismiss Bar.

Critics say the move is a power grab by the prime minister against an independent-minded civil servant, and tens of thousands of Israelis have demonstrated in support of Bar,



People protest against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu near his residence in Jerusalem on Friday. Reuters

including outside Netanyahu's residence on Friday.

A Shin Bet report into Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack that prompted the war acknowledged failures by the security agency. But it also said that policies by Netanyahu's government created the conditions for the attack.

Netanyahu is also upset that the Shin Bet has launched an investigation into connections between some of his close aides and the Gulf state of Qatar. His office said Bar's dismissal would take effect on April 10 or before then if a replacement is found.

Nearly 600 Palestinians have been killed since Israel on Tuesday shattered a truce that had facilitated the release of more than two dozen hostages and brought relative calm since late January.

Israel had already cut off the supply of food, fuel and humanitarian aid to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians, has said it

would escalate military operations until Hamas releases the 59 hostages it holds — 24 of whom are believed alive — and gives up control of the territory.

SC blow to Netanyahu

Israel's top court on Friday ordered a temporary halt to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's dismissal of the country's domestic security chief until his appeal can be heard.

The Supreme Court's decision came hours after Netanyahu's Cabinet unanimously approved his request to fire the head of the Shin Bet internal security service, Ronen Bar.

The court said it was delaying the firing until an appeal could be heard no later than April 8. Netanyahu's office had said Bar's dismissal was effective April 10, but that it could come earlier if a replacement was found.

Israel's attorney general has ruled that the Cabinet has no legal basis to dismiss Bar. **AP**

Hegseth steps up warship presence in West Asia, will send two aircraft carriers

ASSOCIATED PRESS WASHINGTON, MARCH 21

US DEFENCE Secretary Pete Hegseth, in a rare move, is beefing up the Navy warship presence in West Asia, ordering two aircraft carriers to be there next month as the US increases strikes on the Yemen-based Houthi rebels, according to a US official.

It will be the second time in six months that the US has kept two carrier strike groups in that region, with generally only one there. Prior to that it had been years since the US had committed that much warship power to the West Asia.

According to the official, Hegseth signed orders on Thursday to keep the USS Harry S Truman in West Asia for at least an additional month. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing military operations.

The ship has been conducting operations in the Red Sea against the Houthis and was scheduled to begin heading home to Norfolk, Virginia, at the end of

EXPLAINED Houthi threat in the region

AMID THE threat from the Houthis in Yemen, Pal Malik, the presence of so much US naval power in the region not only gives commanders additional ships to patrol and launch strikes, but it also serves as a clear message of deterrence to Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor.

March. Hegseth has ordered the USS Carl Vinson, which has been operating in the Pacific, to begin steaming toward West Asia, which will extend its scheduled deployment by three months.

The Vinson is expected to arrive in the region early next month. It had been conducting exercises with Japanese and South Korean forces near the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan and was slated to head home to port in San Diego in three weeks.

Hamas studying US 'bridge' proposal on Gaza ceasefire

Dubai: Hamas said on Friday it was reviewing a US proposal to restore the Gaza ceasefire as Israel intensified military operations to press the Palestinian militant group to free remaining Israeli hostages. US special envoy Steve Witkoff's "bridge" plan, presented last week, aims to extend the ceasefire into April, beyond Ramadan and Passover.

Three days after Israel effectively abandoned the two-month-old truce, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said the military was intensifying its air, land and sea strikes and would also evacuate civilians to the southern part of Gaza, Katz said Israel would continue its campaign until Hamas released more hostages and was totally defeated.

However, while Israeli airstrikes inflicted serious damage on Hamas this week, killing its Gaza government chief and other top officials, Palestinian and Israeli sources say Hamas has shown it can absorb major losses and still fight and govern.

Hamas said it was still debating Witkoff's proposal and other ideas, with the goal of reaching a deal on prisoner releases, ending the war, and securing a complete Israeli military withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. **AP**

MBORO LEFT FOR GERMANY 50 YEARS AGO TO BRING IT BACK FOR A PROPER BURIAL

Tanzanian man's ongoing quest to reclaim chieftain's head from Germany

CIARÁN FAHEY & FANNY BRODERSEN BERLIN, MARCH 21

MNYAKA SURURU Mboro is still driven by the promise he gave his grandmother when he left Tanzania for Germany almost 50 years ago: to bring back for a proper burial the head of a local chieftain, killed in 1900 by German colonists for opposing their rule in Africa.

Mboro, now 73, is from the same area near Mount Kilimanjaro that was once ruled by Mangi Meli, king of the

Wachaga people. From 1885 to 1919, the region was part of German East Africa, a huge colony almost three times the size of present-day Germany.

Mboro grew up with stories about the king whom the Germans hanged from a tree with 18 other leaders in March 1900. The head is believed to have been cut off by German soldiers and taken to Germany by the colonial administration, though authorities can not confirm that. It was never recovered.

"I am (still) searching for it," Mboro, who now lives in Berlin, said.

Righting past wrongs

After Mboro moved to the city of Heidelberg in 1978 to study civil engineering, he heard about a so-called African Quarter in Berlin, a neighborhood where streets had names associated with Germany's colonial era.

Mboro co-founded Berlin Postkolonial, a group pushing for a reevaluation of Germany's colonial past and removal of surviving colonial structures and racism.

Mboro led the memorial procession as Petersallee was split into two streets. One was named Maji-Maji-Allee to remember



Mnyaka Sururu Mboro during a protest in Berlin. AP

the Maji Maji Rebellion against colonial rule in German East Africa. The other was named after Anna Mungunda, who fought against apartheid in Namibia, another former German colony known as German South West Africa.

Germany's colonial past

Compared to other European powers, Germany was late to colonialism. It controlled huge swaths of Africa from 1884 to 1900, through the colonies of German South West Africa, Cameroon, Togoland, and also German East Africa, in what today is Rwanda,

Burundi and Tanzania.

Germany also established German New Guinea, German Samoa, island protectorates in the Pacific, and leased territory around Jiaozhou Bay in China. All the colonies were lost by 1918, after Germany's defeat in World War I.

Finding the origins

Meli's head may be among many thousands of human remains pilfered and sent to Germany, where even before the Nazis came to power, many of the remains were studied in an attempt to prove pseudoscientific notions of white supremacy.

In 2011, the authority overseeing Berlin's state museums, the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, inherited a collection of some 7,700 human remains from the city's Charité medical history museum. The foundation has been trying to determine their origins in order to return them but it's proving difficult.

Hermann Parzinger, the foundation's president, told the AP that it now has between 5,500 and 6,000 remains from the colonial era.

"Everything has to be given back," he said. **AP**

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Dressed (with skin) Rate	₹ 137 per kg
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INCIDENT OF FIRE AT RESIDENCE OF JUSTICE YASHWANT VARMA

Collegium favours transfer of Delhi HC judge after report of cash at his home

HCJ sends report; Dhankhar says if it's a politician, targeted immediately

ANANTHAKRISHNAN G & ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21



Justice Yashwant Varma

THE SUPREME Court Collegium has proposed the transfer of Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma to the Allahabad High Court, his parent High Court, following a report about cash at his New Delhi residence where a fire broke out on March 14.

In a statement Friday, the Supreme Court Registry said the Collegium's "proposal for the transfer of Mr Justice Yashwant

Varma, who is the second senior most Judge in the Delhi High Court and a member of the Collegium, to his parent High Court i.e. the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad, where he will be ninth in seniority, is independent and separate from the in-house enquiry procedure"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Justice Varma stays away from court, police & fire service silent on incident

SOHINI GHOSH, ALOK SINGH & AJOY SINHA
KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

DELHI HIGH Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma, the subject of an in-house inquiry by the High Court following a report about cash at his New Delhi residence where a fire broke out on March 14, did not attend court Friday.

In oral remarks, Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya said the court was "conscious" when a senior

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



The official residence of Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma in New Delhi on Friday. Praveen Khanna

4 CHARRED TO DEATH IN PUNE MINIBUS FIRE

Accused driver heard saying he would 'ruin them all': police probe

CHANDAN HAYGUNDE
PUNE, MARCH 21



10 people were injured in the minibus fire. File

A PROBE by Pimpri Chinchwad police revealed that a day before the minibus fire at Hinjewadi IT Park — in which four private company staffers died and their colleagues got injured — the driver of the vehicle had allegedly talked about ruining "them all".

Pimpri Chinchwad police have booked the minibus driver identified as Janardan Neelkant Humbarikar (54) on charges of murder and attempt to murder, under Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita (BNS) sections 103 (1) and 109 (1). Police said Humbarikar, a resident of Warje, claimed he was treated badly at the company, due to which he allegedly set the minibus on fire to kill its

employees to "teach them a lesson". Police sub inspector Datta Kale lodged the first information report (FIR) against Humbarikar at Hinjewadi police station around 10.30 pm on Thursday.

As per the FIR, during the probe, Praveen Kapade (32), an employee of Vyoma Graphics Printing Press, told police that Humbarikar had been

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

If India stays on path of 2047 plan, will benefit country, world: Gates

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT the pace of innovation in India was better than he had expected, Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates said India's emergence as a developed nation by 2047 would benefit not just the country but the rest of the world as well.

"If India can stay on the path of the 2047 plan, that will be beneficial not just to India, it will be beneficial for the whole world. The fact that you have 20 per cent of the humanity that runs, may be a semi-chaotic but truly democratic elections... and works out all its priorities — more money for health, more money for education — has created a very good dynamic where you are competing in good governance," Gates said in a conversation with Anant Goenka, Executive Director of The Indian Express Group, at the Express Adda event in Mumbai on Thursday.

"I think it is a great place to be



Bill Gates was the guest at Express Adda in Mumbai Thursday. Amit Chakravarty

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Presenting
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in when the main debate revolves around whether the growth rate will be 5 per cent or 10 per cent. I don't think it will be 10 per cent, but I don't think it will fall below 5 per cent either. It is a great spot to be in. This is a remarkable period, offering significant opportunities. The economic growth will enable the government to allocate more funds toward healthcare and education," he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

'Husband was pinned to ground, shot': 44-yr wait for justice ends

SAMAN HUSAIN
DEHAULI (FIROZABAD),
MARCH 21

A WIZENED Chameli Devi recalls how thirst forced her to drink from the drain she ended up lying next to all night with a broken leg on November 18, 1981. Hours earlier, around 4.30 pm, her farmer husband was pinned to the ground — "a foot on his chest" — in his field by one of the 17 dacoits who had entered Uttar Pradesh's Dehali village and shot dead.

INSIDE



TECHIE MURDERS
3-YEAR-OLD SON
PAGE 3



The front page of The Indian Express from November 1981 shows Indira Gandhi with the massacre survivors

Twenty-three others belonging to Chameli's extended family in the village, including seven women and two minors, were shot dead after her husband.

On March 18 this year, nearly 44 years later, a special dacoity court in Mainpuri sentenced Ram Sevak, Kaptan Singh and Rampal, all in their 60s, to death. "There were 17 accused in the case. Of these, 13 have died and one is still absconding," says prosecutor Rohit Sharma, adding that all charge-sheeted witnesses died during the pendency of the trial.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BEDLAM IN KARNATAKA ASSEMBLY

BJP MLAs seek probe into 'honeytrap' charge, 18 barred for 6 months

AKRAM M
BENGALURU, MARCH 21

A DAY after a Congress minister in Karnataka alleged he was among 48 leaders across party lines who had been the targets of attempts to "honeytrap" them, the Assembly witnessed chaotic scenes on Friday as 18 BJP MLAs were suspended for six months amid pandemonium in the House over their demands for a judicial probe into the allegations

and protests against quota for Muslims in public contracts.

Speaker U T Khader suspended the MLAs, who were subsequently evicted from the House, after they climbed up to his chair and threw papers at him on what was the last day of the Budget Session.

Shortly after the Assembly convened around 8.40 am, BJP MLAs brought up the allegations that Cooperation Minister K N Rajanna raised on the floor of the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Follow local laws: MEA on Srinivasan's exit; US court blocks Suri deportation

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

DAYS AFTER Ranjani Srinivasan, an Indian PhD student in Columbia University, "self-deported" after her US visa was revoked, the government said Friday that Indian nationals in foreign countries must "comply with local laws and regulations". This clearly indicates that Delhi has distanced itself from her activities there.

Srinivasan's visa was revoked on March 5 by the Trump administration for allegedly "advocating for violence and terrorism" by supporting Hamas, and she left the US on March 11.

Responding to questions, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs, said, "When it comes to visa and immigration policy, it is something that lies within the sovereign functions of a country. We, on our side, expect that when we have foreign nationals coming to India, they abide by

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

EXPLAINED Campuses feel the heat

THE TRUMP administration is cracking down on foreign nationals involved in last year's protests on campuses across the US, including Columbia University, against Israel's war in Gaza, equating it with support for Hamas.

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Shri Suman Bery
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Shri Suman Bery
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for invitation, please contact :
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Major forest fire on Sus Gaon hill, no casualties reported



Pune Fire Brigade control room received a call about the fire at 10.15 pm on Thursday. Express

Forest dept is investigating the cause of the fire

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, MARCH 21

Hours after a major forest fire was reported on a hill in Pune's Sus Gaon on Thursday night, officials said on Friday that the blaze had been brought under control following an all-night firefighting operation. No casualties were reported in the inci-

dent. According to the Pune Fire Brigade, its control room received a call regarding a fire on a hill on Sus Road around 10.15 pm. Soon, Pune and Pune Metropolitan Region Development Authority fire brigade teams rushed to the spot. Forest department officials also joined the fire brigade teams.

Fire officials said that as fire tenders and water tankers could not make their way up to the hilltop, personnel used fire bats and water to manually douse the flames.

"The fire had spread over a

huge area and at different spots on the hill. It was not easy to reach some areas and we also had limited manpower but with the help of citizens, activists and the fire brigade, the situation was brought under control manually," Mangesh Tate, Assistant Conservator of Forests, Pune division, said.

The forest department is investigating the cause behind what caused the fire.

In the last two months, 54 incidents of forest and grass fires were reported in Pune in January and 141 cases in February, fire brigade personnel said.

BPO MURDER

NCW fact-finding report reveals grave lapses in safety and POSH compliance at Pune BPO firm

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
PUNE, MARCH 21

AN INVESTIGATION by the National Commission for Women's fact-finding team has revealed significant lapses in grievance redressal and safety protocols at a Pune BPO firm where a female employee was brutally murdered by a male coworker in the company's parking lot on January 7.

The accused was subdued by bystanders and later arrested by the police. The deceased woman, Shubhada Shankar Kodare, 28, who was attacked with a knife, worked as an accountant at the multinational firm in Yerawada.

NCW said in a statement that the company's security protocols, including random bag checks, were found inadequate, raising serious concerns about

FACT-FINDING TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhanced security protocol: Comprehensive surveillance, especially in high-risk zones like parking areas.

Mandatory safety audits: Regular assessments to identify and address vulnerabilities.

Employee awareness programmes: Regular training on workplace safety, conflict resolution,

and POSH compliance. **Strengthened internal committees:** Efficient handling and documentation of disputes, with periodic reporting to senior management.

Third-party mental health counselling: Professional support for employees to address stress and interpersonal issues.



workplace safety and risk management. "Despite the accused having previously reported a financial dispute with the victim to the HR department, the matter was neither documented nor

escalated, resulting in missed warning signals," the fact-finding team has said.

The investigation also exposed deficiencies in the implementation of the Prevention of

Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, 2013. Though a POSH committee existed, the absence of proactive grievance documentation and consistent training on workplace safety and conflict resolution indicated non-compliance with POSH guidelines, it said.

The NCW team has urged the company to implement stringent safety measures, conduct periodic security audits, and collaborate with local authorities for crisis management. The NCW has also recommended the Pune Police expedite the investigation and assess any prior threats or incidents of harassment.

The team also stressed the need for media sensitization to maintain ethical reporting standards, as mandated under Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code. The NCW recommended institutionalizing Bharosa Kendras at all Pune police sta-

tions under the District Collector's leadership to support victims of violence and trauma.

The fact-finding team, comprising Meenakshi Negi, a former member secretary of NCW, B K Sinha, former Haryana DGP, and R Sreelekha, former Kerala DGP, conducted an investigation, including site visits and discussions with the senior management and employees at the BPO.

The team was constituted under Section 10 of the National Commission for Women (NCW) Act, 1990. National Commission for Women Chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar has submitted the team's report to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, with copies to the chief secretary, director general of police, Pune, and the district magistrate.



WORK IN PROGRESS

Construction underway on Ganeshkhind road near Shimla Office chowk for the Pune metro line from Civil court to Megapolis Pune In Hinjewadi. Arul Horizon

Voices of devotion — a Lenten musical journey in Pune, Mumbai and Goa

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, MARCH 21

EDWARD MENDES, an engineer who graduated from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and quit the profession to become a voice trainer pursued his passion for Western music teaching the Bel Canto technique to aspiring singers. As part of the lenten outreach activities, Mendes has been instrumental in showcasing the efforts of the Newman choir by bringing performances to churches in Pune, Mumbai and Goa.

In Pune recently, Mendes, who is president of the Fr J B Fernandes Sacred Music Foundation, said that the Newman Choir was set up some six decades ago. "The foundation's primary aim is to preserve and promote traditional and classical Sacred Music and has showcased the Newman Choir in numerous Sacred Music concerts. We organise an annual lenten outreach and presented a performance, Shadows of the Passion, at St. Patrick's Cathedral recently. Another one is now planned for March 23 at Church of St. Pius X, Mulund," he said.



Mendes is the key singer in the choir that is currently led by Celeste Cordo. Express

Mendes is the key singer in the choir that is currently led by Celeste Cordo — a noted arranger, producer, conductor, accompanist, and violinist. "The choir draws members from across the Archdiocese of Bombay and earlier too there were several from Pune and other cities and extends to individuals from all faiths," he said.

The Newman Choir was founded by Fr. J. B. Fernandes in the wake of the 38th International Eucharistic Congress in Mumbai in 1964, where he conducted a choir of

600 voices. With a legacy spanning nearly six decades, the choir continues to uphold its commitment to musical excellence.

On March 16, 2025, in the inspiring setting of St. Patrick's Cathedral, the Newman Choir presented Shadows of the Passion—a spiritual journey through the "darkness of the seven shadows," symbolising the key events of Good Friday.

Curated by Cordo, the service was accompanied by evocative visuals and powerful messaging designed by Joe Cordo.

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS
PUNE, MARCH 20

OF THE 19,500 varieties of different crops which have applied for registration with the office of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority (PPVFRA), 60-65 percent are from farmers and farmers' bodies. Trilochan Mohapatra, chairperson of PPVFRA while speaking to The Indian Express in Pune on Friday said. 54 percent of around 8,500 registrations have been given directly by farmers

and farmers bodies.

"We have been encouraging farmers and farmers bodies to apply for registration of traditional varieties of crops. Protection of biodiversity is important and this is being done at the grassroot level by farmers," he said. Mohapatra was speaking to the media on the sidelines of Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in Seed organised jointly by PPVFRA, Department of Agriculture, Maharashtra's and the Federation of Seed Industries of India (FSII).

Traditional varieties refer to native varieties of food crops like

rice, wheat, vegetables etc which grow in the wild. Over the years these varieties have become either extinct or endangered as higher yielding or hybrid varieties have taken over. At present these varieties are grown only in some tribal areas. Preservation of native species is important given the part they play in biodiversity of the region.

Mohapatra said both private and government seed manufacturers have also applied for registration of hybrids. "Rice, maize, cotton, and vegetables are the crops for which most of the registration has been ap-

plied for," he said. Registered varieties are protected by the law and illegal branding and sales of them can attract legal actions. Varieties which are not released by the government however don't come under the protection of the body.

Mohapatra said work for climate resilient seed and varieties is ongoing at various state agricultural universities as well as ICAR institutes of Pusa in Haryana. "Heat resistant varieties of wheat have been developed at Karnal Haryana. Similarly research on Basmati rice is also being carried out," he said.

Woman who accused Gore of harassment held for extortion

Satara: A woman who had accused Maharashtra minister Jaykumar Gore of harassment has been arrested for alleged extortion, police said on Friday.

Gore, who represents the Man assembly constituency in western Maharashtra's Satara district, is Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj.

The woman was arrested from Satara, an official said. "She had demanded Rs 3 crore to end everything. She was caught red-handed accepting Rs 1 crore of the total amount. Police are questioning the woman," the official said. PTI

How these less-known non-veg dishes from outside Maharashtra have found a place in Pune

ALISTER AUGUSTINE
PUNE, MARCH 21

PUNE, A city known for its love of food, has always been a melting pot of flavours. While traditional Maharashtra cuisine holds a special place in people's hearts, the city's growing population of students, professionals, and food lovers has created a demand for diverse culinary experiences. In recent years, some lesser-known but authentic non-vegetarian dishes from different parts of India—and even Nepal—have gained immense popularity in Pune.

Champan Mutton: a delicacy from Bihar

Champan Mutton, also known as Ahuna Mutton or Handi Meat, is a slow-cooked dish from Bihar that has found its way into Pune's culinary scene. Cooked in



an earthen pot and sealed with dough, this dish retains its rustic flavours, making it a favourite.

"Champan Mutton hails from the Champan district of Bihar and is deeply rooted in the region's culinary traditions," says Divyansh Tiwari, a staff member at Champan Handi Junction restaurant in Wakad. "The preparation involves marinating mutton with mustard oil, ghee, garlic, onions, ginger, and a blend of spices. It is slow-cooked in an earthen handi over a wood fire, giving it an earthy flavour that



(From left) Champan Mutton; Aloo Biryani and Kukhura-Ko Masu. Express

modern cookware simply cannot replicate," Tiwari adds.

According to him, the dish was introduced in Pune a few years ago by people passionate about authentic Bihari cuisine. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. "At our restaurant, we serve around 100 to 150 orders daily. The popularity remains steady throughout the year, even



during the Lent fasting season," says Tiwari.

A standard plate of Champan Mutton, with three pieces of mutton, rice, two rotis, and salad, is priced at Rs 949, while a more elaborate Mutton Thali is also available for the same price.

Aloo Biryani: Kolkata's signature dish

"When it comes to biryani, most people think of Hyderabad or Lucknow versions. But in recent years, Kolkata-style Aloo Biryani—where golden-fried potatoes are a key ingredient—has won the hearts of people of Pune," says Archna Chatterjee, manager at FoodBengal restaurant in Chinchwad.

"FoodBengal in Chinchwad



started in 2017 with the aim of bringing authentic Bengali flavours to Pune. Initially, we focused on staple Bengali dishes like Kosha Mangsho, Luchi, and Chingri Malai Curry, but soon we realised there was a growing demand for Kolkata-style biryani. That is when we introduced Aloo Biryani with chicken and mutton to our menu, and it quickly be-

came a best-seller," says Chatterjee. A single portion of Aloo Biryani with chicken costs Rs 320, while the Mutton Biryani is Rs 420.

Kukhura-Ko Masu: Nepal's traditional chicken curry

Nepalese cuisine is not widely known in India, but one dish that has found a dedicated fan base in Pune is Kukhura-Ko Masu, a slow-cooked chicken curry with unique Nepalese spices.

Anvesh Sharma, Manager at Kuai Kitchen restaurant in Koregaon Park, says, "Kukhura-Ko Masu is a staple in Nepali households, known for its deep, smoky flavours. Unlike Indian curries, it does not use cream or cashew paste. Instead, it relies on fresh ingredients, roasted spices, and slow cooking to develop its bold taste. The key ingredient is Timur

(Nepalese Sichuan pepper), which gives it a mild numbing heat."

Kuai Kitchen started in 2019 with a focus on Chinese, Thai, and Japanese dishes. But when they introduced a small selection of Nepalese dishes, Kukhura-Ko Masu quickly became a hit. "While we specialised in Chinese, Thai, and Japanese dishes initially, we soon realised that the people of Pune had a growing interest in unique and lesser-known cuisines. That's when we introduced a small selection of Nepalese dishes, and Kukhura-Ko Masu became a favourite," says Sharma.

"Pune has a diverse crowd, including students, professionals, and food lovers who are always eager to explore new flavours," Sharma adds. One plate is priced at Rs 380 and is best enjoyed with rice, Tingmo (Tibetan steamed bread), or Sel Roti (Nepalese rice flour bread).

The Deccan Chamber of Commerce, Industries & Agriculture (DCCIA) Edge: Advancing Business Synergy, Driving Industrial Growth

With a rich legacy of collaboration and advocacy, DCCIA stands as a beacon of industrial and economic growth, fostering the collective vision of industries and businesses for over three decades.

As a nation, we celebrate National Girl Child Day today, a reminder of the transformative power of education and empowerment for girls. India is not just a geographical entity but a 'Saga of Consciousness.' Our ancient culture and traditions bind us together as part of a 'collective consciousness.' As we move forward, the choices we make shape not just individual lives but also the legacy we pass on to future generations.

With a rich legacy of collaboration and advocacy, DCCIA stands as a beacon of industrial and economic growth, fostering the collective vision of industries and businesses for over three decades.

The Deccan Chamber of Commerce, Industries & Agriculture (DCCIA) in Pune stands as a remarkable institution that has played an instrumental role in shaping the industrial landscape of Pune and Maharashtra. From its modest beginnings to becoming one of the most proactive and forward-looking chambers in the country, DCCIA's journey is a testament to its unwavering commitment to industrial growth, community welfare, and ethical business practices.

Foundations of Progress

The origins of DCCIA trace back to 6 June 1994, when a group of industrialists on Pune-Nagar Road convened at Milton Plastics Ltd. with a vision to create a unified platform to address common industry challenges. The overwhelming response to this initiative led to the formation of the Nagar Road Industries Association (NRIA). As the industrial belt expanded, the association evolved into the Nagar Road Chamber of Commerce, Industries & Agriculture (NRICCA) in 2004, before finally assuming the name Deccan Chamber of Commerce, Industries & Agriculture (DCCIA) in 2009.

From its early days, DCCIA demonstrated a forward-thinking approach by fostering cooperation among industries, supporting infrastructure development, and advocating for the collective interests of its members. The chamber became an effective intermediary between industries and the government, ensuring that the voices of businesses were heard at ministerial and departmental levels.

Rathin Sinha: A Visionary Leader Shaping Industrial Growth

Rathin Sinha, a founding pillar of DCCIA, has been instru-



mental in steering the Chamber toward excellence with his visionary leadership and unwavering dedication as its Chairman. With over three decades of experience in diverse industries, Sinha has played a critical role in fostering a business environment that prioritizes ethical governance and economic advancement. An alumnus of IIT Bombay, he began his entrepreneurial journey by establishing manufacturing ventures that have since become key suppliers to major automotive brands. His acumen in business strategy and operational management has enabled him to lead organizations with precision, ensuring sustainable growth and industrial innovation.

Beyond his corporate success, Sinha has been a driving force in shaping policies and frameworks that enhance business opportunities for DCCIA members. His strategic foresight has helped create an ecosystem where industries thrive through collaboration and adaptability. Under his leadership, the Chamber has emerged as a platform that not only supports large multinational corporations but also nurtures young entrepreneurs. His deep-seated commitment to social responsibility is reflected in his extensive involvement in various corporate social initiatives, ranging from skill development programs to industry-academia partnerships. Sinha's relentless pursuit of excellence continues to inspire businesses to embrace innovation while maintaining a strong ethical foundation.

Hari P. Srivastava: Championing Collective Growth and Collaboration

As the Founder Director & Vice Chairman of the Deccan Chamber of Commerce, Industries & Agriculture (DCCIA), Hari P. Srivastava has been instrumental in fostering industrial harmony and collective progress. With over three decades of corporate experience across human resources, business strategy, commercial and legal affairs—both in India and overseas—he has played a pivotal role in strengthening industry-regulatory relations. His early career in the Indian Air Force and banking sector shaped his structured approach to organizational efficiency, which he has successfully integrated into his leadership at DCCIA.

Beyond his contributions to the Chamber, Srivastava holds key positions in the business world. He



The origins of DCCIA trace back to 6 June 1994, when a group of industrialists on Pune-Nagar Road convened at Milton Plastics Ltd. with a vision to create a unified platform to address common industry challenges. The overwhelming response to this initiative led to the formation of the Nagar Road Industries Association (NRIA). As the industrial belt expanded, the association evolved into the Nagar Road Chamber of Commerce, Industries & Agriculture (NRICCA) in 2004, before finally assuming the name Deccan Chamber of Commerce, Industries & Agriculture (DCCIA) in 2009.



is a Director at Trident International Pvt. Ltd., a leading government-recognized "Export House", and advisor to "ErgoTalent HR Solutions Pvt. Ltd.", a leading firm in the field of HR. He is also the Founder and Director of RAH Corporate Advisors, a firm specializing in providing end-to-end business solutions. His policy advocacy is reflected in his active representation in the Permanent Trade Facilitation Committee - Pune Customs and the GST Grievance Redressal Committee - Pune Zone.

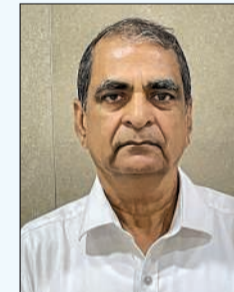
A distinguished academic—he holds an MBA, LLB, and a Diploma in Labour Laws, securing top university rankings. His passion for knowledge-sharing is evident in his decade-long role as a visiting faculty at premier management institutes. While his leadership continues to shape DCCIA as a platform for integrity, growth, and industrial collaboration, Srivastava's contributions have left an indelible mark on the Chamber, reinforcing its commitment to integrity, growth, and shared success.

Dr. Vasudeo Malu: A Strategic Innovator

Dr. Vasudeo Malu, Secretary of DCCIA and Executive Vice President at The Supreme Industries Ltd., leads its Industrial Products Business, valued at Rs. 900 crore annually, along with overseeing injection molding operations worth Rs. 1,000 crore. A graduate of the College of Engineering, Pune, he holds multiple professional qualifications, including a Ph.D. With 44 years of industrial expertise across renowned companies, Dr. Malu is a strategist in business turnarounds and re-engineering. As a key figure in DCCIA, he actively contributes to industry and social initiatives. A certified trainer, speaker, and dedicated Rotarian, he embodies leadership and commitment to progress.



Dr. Prakash Dhoka: A Trailblazer in Metallurgy and Social Impact
Dr. Prakash Dhoka, Treasurer of DCCIA and Managing Director of Industrial Metal Powders (India) Pvt. Ltd., has revolutionized electrolytic iron powder manufacturing, exporting to over 32 countries. A metal-



lurgist with a Ph.D., he spearheads innovative ventures like additive manufacturing. As a former DCCIA Chairman and recipient of multiple awards, including the Lifetime Achievement by DCCIA, his contributions extend to education, healthcare, and rural development. Through CSR initiatives, he has transformed schools, hospitals, and rehabilitation centers, embodying his belief that wealth should serve humanity. His leadership continues to drive industrial excellence and social transformation.

Platform for Collaboration and Advocacy

DCCIA has consistently strived to promote greater cooperation between member industries, creating a robust ecosystem where businesses, both large and small, thrive. The chamber's strength lies in its ability to unite diverse industries under one umbrella, facilitating regular interaction, knowledge-sharing, and collaborative problem-solving. This collaborative spirit has led to the resolution of several pressing issues relating to infrastructure in this Industrial Belt besides resolving various policy and local issues affecting member industries.

Over the years, DCCIA has played a pivotal role in advocating the needs of its members. The chamber's involvement in crucial matters such as the removal of toll nakas, traffic issues, industrial relation issues and addressing taxation grievances etc. has earned it a reputation as a proactive voice for the industry. Its representation in various government bodies, including the GST Grievance Council and Permanent Trade Facilitation Committee, underscores its influence and commitment to protecting the interests of its members.

Membership: Strength in Unity

DCCIA's membership base is a vibrant mix of large multinational corporations, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and startups. Any individual, firm, institution, or company involved in trade, commerce, industry, or agriculture and domiciled in India can become a member of the chamber. This inclusive approach ensures that businesses of all sizes benefit from the chamber's extensive network and resources.

Members enjoy a host of benefits, including business networking opportunities, advisory services, and access to training and development programs. The chamber provides assistance in diverse fields such as human resources, environmental health and safety, foreign trade, GST etc. Additionally, members gain access to international business opportunities through partnerships with foreign chambers of commerce and overseas business delegations.

Honoring Excellence: The Deccan Chamber of Commerce, Industries & Agriculture (DCCIA) Legacy of Recognition

DCCIA has a long-standing tradition of celebrating excellence through its prestigious awards, instituted over two decades ago. These awards are a testament to the Chamber's commitment to recognizing individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to industry and society. By honoring achievements in diverse fields such as social service, public service, industrial growth, human resource practices, and workplace safety, DCCIA continues to set benchmarks for success and inspire future generations of business leaders.

The awards go beyond recognition; these serve as a motivation for industries and professionals to strive for innovation, ethical business practices, and societal impact. Over the years, the Annual Awards Function has evolved into a much-anticipated event, bringing together distinguished personalities, industry leaders, and visionaries who exemplify excellence in their respective domains. Through these honors, DCCIA reinforces its mission of fostering an ecosystem where dedication, integrity, and progress shape the future of industrial development.

The 2024 DCCIA Award Winners

This year's DCCIA Awards celebrated visionary leadership and outstanding contributions to industry and society. Recognizing visionaries who have reshaped their fields, this year's honors reflect a legacy of excellence and commitment.

A Dynamic Leader Transforming Challenges into Triumphs

The DCCIA Lifetime Achievement Award 2024 was conferred upon Mr. Vishal Makar, a leader whose unwavering commitment to excellence has not only trans-



Chief Guest Ashishkumar Chauhan, CMD-NSE, being felicitated by Office bearers of DCCIA



Mr Vishal Makar, MD, Oriental Rubber Industries Ltd, receiving "DCCIA Life Time Achievement Award -2024"

formed Oriental Rubber Industries Pvt. Ltd. but also left an indelible mark on the industry. His journey is a testament to resilience, vision, and the relentless pursuit of growth, taking a struggling company in 1992 and turning it into a global powerhouse.

From his early days at Sydenham College, Mumbai, Mr. Makar exhibited a sharp acumen for business and leadership. When he joined Oriental Rubber Industries Pvt. Ltd. as a Director, the company was a fledgling restart-up, struggling to regain its market position. But where others saw

obstacles, he saw potential. Through strategic expansion and relentless innovation, he rebuilt the company, leading it to become the largest exporter of conveyor belts and specialized rubber products, with a presence in over 50 countries. His vision materialized in the form of two large-scale plants in Pune and a third plant in South Africa, creating thousands of jobs and fostering industrial growth.

Beyond corporate success, his dedication to social welfare is deeply rooted in his values. As a Lifetime Trustee of the Sada Prem

Trust, he has championed initiatives that uplift countless individuals, reinforcing his belief in business as a force for good. Despite his towering achievements, Mr. Makar remains grounded, humble, and deeply engaged—whether navigating the complexities of Marketing, Finance, Legal, or International Marketing or simply enjoying a game of golf at the Pune Golf Club.

A strategist, philanthropist, mentor, and passionate golfer, Mr. Vishal Makar embodies leadership not through authority but by example. His story is not just about building a company—it is about shaping an industry and inspiring generations. DCCIA proudly recognizes his unparalleled contributions with this esteemed Lifetime Achievement Award, celebrating a legacy that will continue to guide and influence the business world for years to come.

The awards also recognized excellence in HR, safety, and digital transformation. ACS Industries India Pvt. Ltd. and Foseco India Ltd. were joint winners in Best HR Practices, while Haier Appliances India Pvt. Ltd. and Wika Instrument India Pvt. Ltd. were lauded for Best Safety Practices. In digital innovation, The Supreme Industries Ltd. and Classic Industries and Exports Ltd. emerged victorious.

Each year, these awards reaffirm the spirit of leadership and innovation that drive the industry forward. By recognizing trailblazers across various sectors, DCCIA continues to foster a culture of excellence, inspiring individuals and organizations to push boundaries. As industries evolve, these honors serve as a guiding light, encouraging future leaders to uphold the values of integrity, innovation, and social responsibility.



Jyotikumar Kulkarni Managing Trustee & Secretary & Umesh Bhosale Trustee- Niramaya, receiving "DCCIA Award for Excellence- Social Service -2024"



Dr Sudhir Mehta, Chairman. Pinnacle Industries Ltd & Eka Mobility Ltd., receiving "DCCIA Award for Excellence- Best Industrialist - 2024"



Nitin Mahajan, Dy Executive Engineer MSSEDCL, receiving "DCCIA Award for Excellence- Public Service -2024"

CM Naidu's pitch: Only Hindus should be employed at Tirumala

SREENIVAS JANYALA HYDERABAD, MARCH 21

ONLY HINDUS should be employed in the Lord Sri Venkateswara temple at Tirumala and employees of other faith would be transferred, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said Friday.



Andhra CM N Chandrababu Naidu at Tirupati temple on Friday. ANI

faiths, if they are still working in the temple, they will be respectfully relocated to other places. If

Christians or Muslims do not wish to continue working in Hindu places, their sentiments would be respected and transferred," he said. The CM also announced he was cancelling the allotment of 35 acres of land in Tirupati to hotel developers of Devalok, MRKR and Mumtaz builders. The allotment was made by the previous YSR Congress Party government. The move, he claimed, was to "protect the sanctity of the temple town".

capital cities of all states, he said. "We will soon write to all the chief ministers in the state for this purpose," the Chief Minister said. Six of the 18 employees transferred out of Tirumala on February 1 were teachers at various TTD educational institutes. The others included a deputy executive officer (Welfare), an assistant executive officer, an assistant technical officer (electrical), a hostel worker, two electricians, and two nurses. The order states that "as dedicated servant of the Lord Venkateswara" all the TTD employees are committed to maintain the sanctity of the temple "by upholding the traditions and values that have been followed for centuries and to uphold the beliefs and sentiments of the devotees".

SC judge may not visit Churachandpur today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

SUPREME COURT Justice N Kotiswar Singh, who is part of the top court delegation visiting Manipur on Saturday, may not travel to the Kuki-dominated Churachandpur district amid objections from a lawyers' body there. Sources said that Justice Singh, who belongs to the Meitei community, does not wish to precipitate any controversy amid the ethnic tensions in the state. They said he has decided to follow the advice of the local administration and accordingly decide whether to go to Churachandpur or not. "Unfortunately some things have happened, but the sentiments are also there. So he is a bit careful," said a source, adding he will visit the other parts of the state. It is also learnt that some Manipur High Court judges from the Meitei community may not visit Churachandpur. The National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) said in a

NAGPUR VIOLENCE 13 FIRs filed so far, more than 100 held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE MUMBAI, MARCH 21

NAGPUR POLICE commissioner Ravindra Singhal on Friday said so far 13 FIRs have been registered in connection with the violence and more than 100 people arrested. Singhal, however, did not give details of the new FIRs. He added that a decision over curfew relaxation will be taken after taking the ground situation into consideration. He said search operations to nab the accused were still underway. Parts of Nagpur city remain under partial lockdown. Police sources said the FIRs filed at the Ganeshpeth police station have now been transferred to DCP Crime (Detection) Rahul Maknikar. The sources added that the investigating officer was also changed in the first FIR filed in the Ganeshpeth police station. Earlier in the day, the Nagpur police tightened security in the violence-hit areas of the city ahead of Friday prayers. Meanwhile, Fahim Khan, a key accused who has been arrested and charged with sedition, has moved the sessions court seeking bail, claiming "poli-



Police personnel in Nagpur on Friday. PTI

tical vendetta" was behind his arrest as he had sought action against VHP activists. Khan, city president of the Minorities Democratic Party (MDP), was arrested on March 19, two days after the incidents of rioting and arson, and remanded in police custody. After his remand ended on Friday, the court sent him to judicial custody in view of his ill-health. The police said it would seek his custody later. Khan also filed a bail application before the Nagpur district sessions court. It is likely to come up for hearing on March 24, his lawyer Ashwin Ingole said.

Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation Ltd Registered Office :- Mafatlal House, 1st floor, H. T. Parekh Marg, 169, Backbay Reclamation, Churchgate, Mumbai - 400 020. Phone: 022-41580928/15 E-Tender Notice MTDC invites E-Tenders for the following various works. 1 Request for Tender for Design, Construction and Delivery of Cruise Boat at Munawale, Tal: Jawali, Dist: Satara. 2 Request for Tender for Design Construction and Delivery of ONE JET PASSENGER BOAT at Munawale, Tal Jawali, Dist Satara. 3 Request for Tender for Design Construction and Delivery of ONE PARASAILING BOAT at Munawale, Tal Jawali, Dist Satara. 4 Request for Tender for Design, Construction and Delivery of Sailing Catamaran Yacht at Munawale, Tal: Jawali, Dist: Satara 5 Request for Proposal for Design, Construction and Delivery of Sailing Excursion Boats in Munawale, Tal: Jawali, Dist: Satara

KANPUR DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY KANPUR Ref No. - DI484/AA-2/KDA/2024-25 Date: 21.03.2025 Invitation for REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) Selection of consultant for Preparation of GIS based Regional Plan for the Kanpur Region Integrated Development Authority (KRIDA) for the Perspective Year-2051

Five Mahayuti leaders take oath as MLCs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE MUMBAI, MARCH 21

FIVE LEADERS from the ruling Mahayuti took oath as Members of the Maharashtra Legislative Council on Friday. Six candidates had applied for the by-election to five seats of the Legislative Council that were to be held on March 27. However, since the independent candidate did not have a letter of support from the MLAs and a notary, his application was rejected. Since no candidates were fielded by the opposition, five candidates of the Mahayuti were

elected unopposed to the Legislative Council on Tuesday. Sandeep Joshi, Sanjay Kenekar and Dadarao Keche of the BJP, Shiv Sena's Chandrakant Raghuvanshi and Sanjay Khodke of the NCP took oath as Members of the Legislative Council on Friday. A total of five Legislative Council seats had fallen vacant after that many sitting members won the Maharashtra Assembly elections last year. Sena's Amasha Padavi, NCP's Rajesh Witekar, and BJP's Pravin Datke, Gopichand Padalkar, and Ramesh Karad were the outgoing members of the council.

LIC HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE Property 1 - Name of Borrower/s:- Mrs. SHUBHANGEE MANGESH PINGALE / MANGESH DNYANESHWAR PINGALE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY- Row House No. 6/6, Type C, Narayan (HUT) Co. Op. Hsg. Soc, Survey No 98/1A, 98/1B, 112/1A/1, 112/1A2, 112/B, 112/2, Location No. 4/48, Mouje Bhosari, Near Cosmos Bank, Spine Rd, Pune, Maharashtra - 411023 (Area: - 1090 Sq.ft.) Full Description of property Date of Demand Notice:- 25.09.2021 Amt Demanded : Rs. 83,21,222.71 with further Interest, Cost and Expenses Date of Possession (P)/(S)- Physical possession- 10.12.2024 Reserve Price -Rs. (73,00,000/-) EMD -Rs. (7,30,000/-) Bid Incremental Value - (10,000/-) Total Amount payable as on date -21.03.2025 -Rs. 1,33,28,291.95 Website of E-Auction: www.auctionbazaar.com

Saraswat Bank MEGA E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE Zonal Office, 8/3, Karve Road, Pune 04 Recovery Department, 433/B/2, Madhav Apartment, 2nd Floor, Near Old Zilla Parishad Building, Somwar Peth, Pune 01 Phone No: (020) 26061955, 26061184, 26061185 (Auction Sale/bidding would be conducted only through website https://sarfaesi.auctiontiger.net) SALE OF IMMOVABLE ASSETS CHARGED TO THE BANK UNDER THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST (SARFAESI) ACT, 2002.

UTTAR PRADESH MODEL OF PROGRESS AND OPPORTUNITY



🔥 In 2016-17, Uttar Pradesh's economy was Rs 12 lakh crore; today, it exceeds Rs 27 lakh crore. Within the next four years, Uttar Pradesh will become a \$1 trillion economy, in line with the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision. Uttar Pradesh's emergence as a leading tourism destination, improved law and order, spiritual heritage and development of expressways, airports, and metro network.

**–Yogi Adityanath
Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh**



🔥 Uttar Pradesh will make an "invaluable" contribution in the creation of a developed India. I have full faith that with the government dedicated to public welfare and the amazing talent and tireless hard work of the people here, our beloved state will make its invaluable contribution in the creation of a developed India.

**–Narendra Modi
Prime Minister**

Under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh has evolved from a BIMARU state into a thriving economic powerhouse. With strategic governance and a clear developmental roadmap, the state is steadily advancing toward its ambitious goal of becoming a One Trillion Dollar Economy. Over the past eight years, Uttar Pradesh has achieved remarkable progress across various sectors, including infrastructure, healthcare, education, and employment.

Of the Rs 40 crore worth proposals received during the Global Investors Summit in 2023 (GIS-23), projects worth Rs 15 crore have materialised on the ground. UP's credit-deposit (CD) ratio, which once stood at 44%, has now exceeded 60%, indicating that its capital is being reinvested within the state.

Dedicated blue print in the State Budget 2025-26 for 10 key sectors to give a boost to the state's economy and to achieve the 1-trillion dollar economy mark, sectors are industrial development, agriculture, social security, urban development, revenue collection, education, health, tourism and the service sector.

EYE ON \$1 TRILLION ECONOMY

(A snapshot of UP Budget 2025-26)

- **Rs. 8.09 Trillion** Budget size is **9.8%** jump over FY25
- Tax Revenue estimated at **Rs. 5.5 Trillion**
- Total receipts exceeds **Rs. 7.79 Trillion**
- **Capex exceeds 20%** of Budget
- Major Infra push with **22%** allocation
- Education gets over **Rs. 1 Trillion, 13% of Budget**
- **Agriculture and allied** sectors get **11%**
- Provision of **Rs. 28,478cr for New Projects**

The Fiscal Health Index has improved significantly from 37.0 in 2014-2019 to 45.9 in 2022-23, making UP a "front-runner state" in fiscal management.

Boosting Entrepreneurship and Employment

Employment & MSME growth

- *Over 1.65 crore people are employed in 96 lakh MSME units, making UP the leading state in small-scale industries.*
- *ODOP initiative drives MSME expansion, creating 90 lakh jobs.*
- *92,919 new government jobs to be filled through direct recruitment.*
- *UP's exports surged from Rs. 86,000 crore to Rs. 2 lakh crore.*
- *Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan aims to support youth in establishing micro industries, with a budget of Rs. 1,000 crore.*
- *Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarojgar Yojana has been allocated Rs. 225 crore to promote self-employment.*

Khadi & Village Industries:

- *Mukhyamantri Gramodyog Rozgar Yojana will generate 16,000 jobs, offering bank loans to 800 beneficiaries.*
- *Rs. 32 crore allocated to the Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Khadi Marketing Development Assistance Scheme.*
- *Uttar Pradesh Mati Kala Board receives Rs. 11.50 crore to promote local pottery and handicrafts.*
- *CM Micro Entrepreneur Accident Insurance Scheme: Rs. 5 lakh financial aid for registered entrepreneurs.*
- *Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan: Loans approved for 16,000 entrepreneurs, with 6,000 disbursed.*
- *Atal Industrial Infrastructure Mission boosts industrial growth.*

Energy & industrial expansion

- *8 new data center parks to be developed.*
- *Ayodhya to be developed as a Solar City.*
- *UPSIDA, NOIDA, Greater Noida, UPEIDA, GIDA, and BIDA drive industrial expansion.*

Handloom & Textile Industry:

- *Rs. 300 crore earmarked for a textile park under the PM Mitra Yojana.*
- *Rs. 150 crore allocated for implementing the Uttar Pradesh Textile and Garmenting Policy, 2022.*
- *Atal Bihari Vajpayee Powerloom Electricity Flat Rate Scheme receives Rs. 400 cr. to support powerloom operations.*



Educational Empowerment (Rs. 1.06 lakh crore, 13%)

Uttar Pradesh remains one of the top states in education investment, with a focus on,



- Under the PM SHRI Yojana, 1,565 schools were fully equipped with hi-tech facilities and 6,481 schools were rebuilt.
- Over 1.91 cr children benefitted from uniforms.
- Smart classes and improved facilities through operation Kayakalp.
- **Scholarships:** Rs. 900 crore allocated for pre-10th and post-10th scholarships for the general category.
- **Meritorious Student Support:** Scooties for female students who excel academically.
- Under the scheme **One Division, One University;** in Saharanpur Aligarh, Azamgarh, Mirzapur, Devipatan and Moradabad, with 3 already operational.
- 71 universities across the state.
- Hostels for working women are being constructed in Varanasi, Meerut, Prayagraj, Gorakhpur, Kanpur, Jhansi, and Agra with an allocated budget of Rs. 170 crore.
- Modern courses in AI, 3D printing, drones and robotics have been introduced in 150 ITIs and 62 new ITIs have been built.

Major Infrastructure & Connectivity Projects

- 4 new expressways are planned to enhance connectivity: **Agra-Lucknow Expressway to Ganga Expressway** (Hardoi) via Farrukhabad (Rs. 900 crore allocated).
- **Vindhya Expressway connecting Ganga Expressway** to Sonbhadra (Rs. 50 crore earmarked).
- **Ganga Expressway Extension** (Meerut-Haridwar connection, Rs. 50 crore provisioned).
- **Bundelkhand-Rewa Expressway** (Rs. 50 crore allocated).
- **17 Smart Cities** developed (10 under Smart Cities Mission, 7 under State Mission).
- Rs 400 crore allocated for the **State Smart City Scheme.**
- Rs 800 crore for **Green Road Infrastructure Development (Urban).**

Defence & Technology Advancements

- Rs. 461 crore for the Defence Industrial Corridor along Bundelkhand Expressway.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) City in Lucknow gets Rs. 5 crore.

MEGA INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS

- Mega industrial parks being developed under PM MITRA Yojana, including:
 - Textile & Apparel Park (Lucknow-Hardoi)
 - Leather Cluster (Hardoi, Kanpur)
 - Plastic Park (Gorakhpur & Auraiya)
 - Perfume Park (Kannauj)
 - Chemical & Pharma Parks (Ghaziabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Gorakhpur, Hapur)
 - Noida & BIDA emerge as industrial cities
 - A new Drug & Pharma Park in Bundelkhand
 - Expressways, airports, and digital connectivity make UP an attractive business hub

Investment-Friendly Policies & Digital Reforms

- 4,674 regulatory compliance burdens reduced, easing business processes
- 12 industrial corridors are being developed along Purvanchal & Bundelkhand Expressways.
- Special incentives introduced to attract Fortune 500 companies
- Investment Mitra portal provides 487+ online services across 43 departments, ensuring 97% issue resolution

Industry-Friendly Reforms & Investments

- 33 sectoral policies and 'Nivesh Mitra' single-window clearance system boost the ease of doing business.
- Top Achiever status award in BRAP for Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) state.
- Global Investors Summit (GIS) & Ground Breaking Ceremonies (GBCs) attracted major industrial projects.
- AI, IT, electronics manufacturing, and industrial clusters accelerate UP's development.

2nd
Rank MSME
Registrations (as of Feb 19, 2025)

2nd
Rank in New
Companies Registration (FY24)

Rs. 50,550 CR FUNDS TO KEEP STATE UPBEAT

Healthcare Revolution: Strengthening Critical Care

- 86 medical colleges operational, including 50 government and 36 private institutions; with 11,800 UG seats & 3,971 PG seats
- Autonomous medical colleges are established in districts like Bijnor, Bulandshahr, Kushinagar, Pilibhit, Sultanpur, and more.
- **Expansion of Medical Facilities**
- ICU units are fully operational in 10 district hospitals, with 1,498 critical patients getting treatment.
- Specialist training is underway for 19 more district hospitals under the CARE-UP



(Critical Care Advancement and Readiness Enhancement) program.

- Training of Medical professionals in Jhansi and KGMU, Lucknow, ensuring efficient handling of ICU equipment and ventilators.
- Funds set aside to start medical colleges in Ballia and Balrampur

- Goal set to complete work of AYUSH University in Gorakhpur
- Govt Ayurvedic College and Govt Homoeopathic Medical College to come up in Ayodhya & Varanasi, respectively

Expansion in Medical Education

- 7,000 new nursing seats added to strengthen the healthcare workforce.
- 1,500 seats to be increased in medical colleges in next F.Y.
- 2,000 additional paramedical seats introduced to enhance medical support.
- 35 ANM training centers reopened, improving access to essential nursing education.

PROBE REPORT ON PARBHANI CUSTODY DEATH BLAMES COPS

Oppn demands suspension, murder charges against police personnel

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

OPPOSITION PARTIES on Friday demanded the suspension and filing of murder charges against the police personnel responsible for the custodial death of Somnath Suryawanshi in Parbhani last year. "Now, even the judicial inquiry has said Suryawanshi's death was caused by police brutality. Will the Fadnavis government finally wake up and file murder charges against the police personnel responsible and dismiss them," asked Maharashtra Congress chief Harshvardhan Sapkal.

Maharashtra Congress' Legislative Party leader Vijay Wadettiwar said the magistrate's report has concluded that Suryawanshi died because of



police assault. "The guilty policemen should be suspended and they must face the law. The government has tried to mislead the people of Maharashtra and has now been exposed," Wadettiwar said.

Suryawanshi, 35, died in hospital on December 15 last year while in judicial custody. He was arrested along with several others following the violence in Parbhani in which a replica of the Constitution was



Devendra Fadnavis in the Assembly on Friday. Ganesh Shirsekar

vandalised. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had visited the family of Suryawanshi in Parbhani.

Opposition NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar too demanded action against the police personnel. Party MLA Jitendra Awhad said the government was trying to protect "someone from the start". "The judicial magistrate report has proved it was not death but murder. I want to assure his mother that I will not rest until she gets justice," he said.

"Who issued the orders for the baton charge in Parbhani? Was it the ministry or the office of the DGP? This must be investigated. As Home minister and chief minister, Fadnavis has completely failed in handling the Parbhani case. Suryawanshi was killed due to police brutality, yet the government is not taking it seriously," Sapkal said.

Probe blames police assault for custodial death of man

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MARCH 21

NEARLY THREE months after Somnath Suryawanshi (35), a labourer picked up by the police following protests in Parbhani, died in judicial custody, a magisterial inquiry has concluded that the police were responsible for his death, according to a report submitted to the Maharashtra State Human Rights Commission (MSHRC). The report dated January 29 states that Suryawanshi was assaulted by the police in custody and has named the police personnel responsible for his death.

An officer from Parbhani police, however, claimed the magisterial inquiry report was submitted without waiting for the final postmortem report, which would have stated the exact cause of death.

The officer said the histopathology and forensic report were still awaited. He claimed Suryawanshi had some heart-related issues in the past, which would be revealed in the histopathology report.

So far, the state government has suspended inspector Ashok Ghorband after the issue was raised in the winter session of the Assembly. A judicial probe by a retired Bombay High Court judge was also ordered.

A copy of the magisterial inquiry report was sent to the MSHRC, which the human rights body reviewed during its hearing on March 20. The commission noted that, upon examining the contents of the report, it was evident the judicial magistrate had concluded Suryawanshi was assaulted at Nava Mondha police station in Parbhani. As per the magistrate's findings, certain police personnel from Parbhani, named in the report, were responsible for the custodial death of Suryawanshi.

The MSHRC has not only sought the state government's response but has also directed the state additional director general of police and superintendent of police (CID Parbhani) to submit updates on the progress of the inquiry. This includes details of the ongoing investigation into the death and subsequent registration of criminal charges.

'Misguided, outrageous': Opp slams Allahabad HC ruling on rape

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

DEPLORING THE observations of an Allahabad High Court judge in a POCSO case judgment, Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi wrote to CJI Sanjiv Khanna Friday calling it "flawed" and seeking the judge's disqualification "for delivering such a misguided verdict".

In an order on March 17, Allahabad HC judge Justice Ram Manohar Narayan Mishra observed that grabbing breasts and breaking the strings of the girl's pyjamas while dragging her under a culvert were not sufficient to hold the charges of rape or attempt to rape. In her letter to the CJI, Chaturvedi said, "I firmly believe this is a flawed judgment... It is alarming that when 51 crimes against women happen every hour in the country, this is the level of commitment to women's safety demonstrated by our judicial system." Calling the observations "outrageous" and "unacceptable", Chairperson of the Congress Social Media and Digital Platforms Supriya Shrinete said, "It courts give such observations, where do children and women go and report about incidents when they are harassed?"

TMC Rajya Sabha member Sagarika Ghose said the observations show the "anti-women mindset in society being pushed by the BJP government".

Shah: Ruthlessly suspended kin and supporters of terrorists in J&K

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

THE CENTRE has taken concrete measures against terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and "ruthlessly" suspended relatives and sympathisers of terrorists from government service to send across a message, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said in Rajya Sabha on Friday.

He said the government has also banned supporters of terrorism from getting passports, government jobs and government contracts.

Shah said that due to the government's zero-tolerance policy against terrorism, the number of terror incidents and related deaths and injuries have dropped in Jammu and Kashmir, North East and Left-wing extremism-affected regions, which saw 92,000 deaths in four decades.

He emphasised that Maoism will end in the country by March



Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Rajya Sabha. PTI

21, 2026. Shah was replying to a debate on the working of the Ministry of Home Affairs. "Article 370 was the root of insurgency. The seeds of separation were sown in this Article. However, the makers of our Constitution were visionary and this was temporary and its solution was built into the same Article. On 5 August, 2019, Article 370 was abrogated and the dream of the Constitution's architects that there cannot be two heads, two constitutions and

two flags in the country was fulfilled," he said. Shah said that earlier terrorists were glorified, and their funerals were attended by thousands, but now they are buried where they were killed. "Their family members were in government jobs, we have ruthlessly suspended relatives of terrorists from government jobs to send a message, their supporters were even in Bar Council and now they are either in jails in Delhi or Srinagar. We have banned terrorists and terrorism supporters from getting passports, government jobs and contracts, and hence people are not associating with them," Shah said.

"Between 2004 and 2014, there were 7,217 terror-related incidents which have reduced to 2,282 between 2014 and 2024. There has been a 70 per cent reduction in deaths due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, a 50 per cent drop in deaths of security forces," he said.

Senior GM of PSU nabbed for accepting ₹2.4 lakh bribe

Jaipur: The CBI on Friday arrested two persons, including a Senior GM of Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (a central Public Sector Undertaking-PSU), and the DGM of a Mumbai-based private company. The official has been identified as Uday Kumar.

The arrests were made after

Kumar, posted in Ajmer, allegedly accepted a ₹2.4 lakh bribe from the private company's DGM in exchange for undue favours in processing and approving bills.

CBI registered a case on March 19 against six, including Kumar, the company, and four representatives. **ENS**

Ban on AAC 'harsh': Mirwaiz in his first Friday sermon after Govt action

NAVEED IQBAL
SRINAGAR, MARCH 21

IN HIS first Friday sermon after the Centre banned the Awami Action Committee (AAC) on March 11, Kashmir's chief priest Mirwaiz Umar Farooq termed the action "harsh and uncalled for" and sought an immediate revocation of the order.

Addressing the gathering after Friday prayers at Jamia Masjid in Srinagar, the Mirwaiz said that "generic allegations made against AAC in the ban order are not only strange but also ironic".

The Hurriyat chairman said that the AAC has always advocated for the politics of outreach, dialogue and resolution. "How can those who advocate dialogue be subversive...? Dialogue

in itself means seeking solutions and resolving disagreements by talking in good faith and peace. When Vajpayee ji or Advani ji or Manmohan Singh ji were talking to us, it was in good faith," he said. Emphasising that he "kept up the good faith" and despite all odds advocated for peaceful engagement, Mirwaiz said that "it is a different thing that the present ruling dispensation in New

Delhi has a different take on the issue, but that does not make AAC an 'unlawful association'."

The AAC was formed as a political, social and religious organisation by the late Mirwaiz.

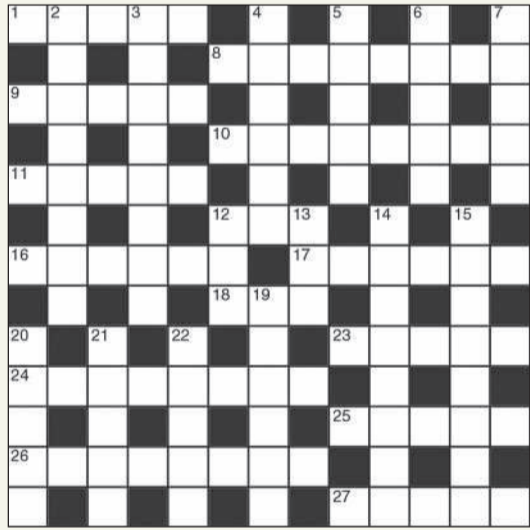
In his sermon, he also expressed gratitude to the people, parties and organisations including from the Kashmiri Pandits and Sikh communities who condemned the ban on the AAC.

J&K Cong to launch 6-day statehood stir

Jammu: Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) will launch a six-day movement, 'Hamari Riyasat - Hamara Haq' from March 24 to press for the early restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

"We will launch the six-day movement in Jammu city from March 24," JKPCC President Tariq Hameed Karra said. **PTI**

CROSSWORD 5630



- ACROSS**
1 Explosive device found on the beach (5)
8 Foressee trouble as vines age (8)
9 Religious debt put in the postscript (5)
10 Material for a cracker (8)
11 Yank shows courage (5)
12 Go wrong, or right after some hesitation (3)
16 Mend or replace so that it's up-to-date (6)
17 A prayer of three short words (6)
18 A divine increase (3)
23 Cares about some land (5)
24 High speed transport (8)
25 Assumed to be back in bed (3,2)
26 Words which carry conviction? (8)
27 Pack some material (5)
- DOWN**
2 Textile manufacturer's bequest to his son? (8)
3 Power-driven craft uncle has designed (8)
4 One stays in bed when working (6)
5 Halts but still makes progress (5)
6 Breakfast food firm breaks an embargo (5)
7 Hazards of drivers and divers (5)
12 Set out from the Senate to see her (3)
13 An angler uses it to catch perch (3)
14 Tell wrongly (8)
15 It won't be found in the pack (4,4)
19 Failing to change sides (6)
20 I'd say it wrongly making a bloomer (5)
21 Eccentric cheerleader at the head of column (5)
22 Somehow raise a sign on high (5)

Solutions Crossword 5629 Across: 1 Press gangs, 6 Opus, 10 Orate, 11 Hair tonic, 12 Sanskrit, 13 Ripen, 15 Pleased, 17 Rhuubarb, 19 Rankles, 21 Centers, 22 Nicor, 24 Armenian, 27 Imprecise, 28 Dodge, 29 Even, 30 Underterred Down: 1 Plot, 2 El Alamein, 3 Steps, 4 Adhered, 5 Glisters, 7 Pin-up, 8 Second-best, 9 Star turn, 14 Apprentice, 16 Salaries, 18 Alexander, 20 Sea lion, 21 Comper, 23 Copse, 25 Nudge, 26 Tend

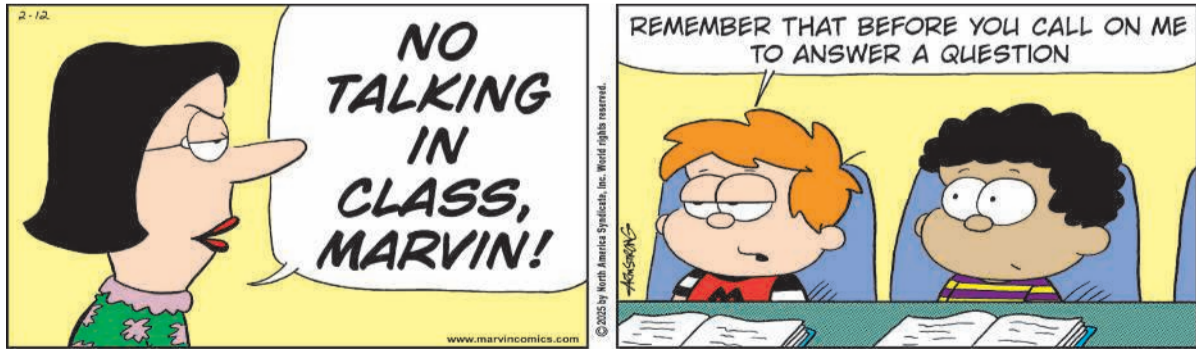
OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson

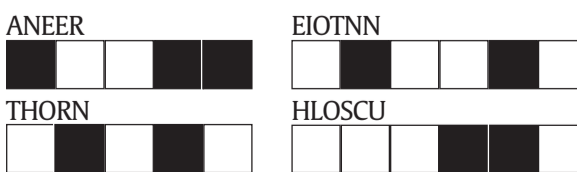


MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip. We may _____ many defeats but we must not be defeated. - Maya Angelou (9)

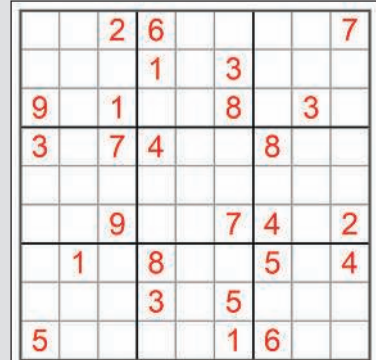


Solution: RANEE, NORTH, INTONE, SLOUCH

SUDOKU 5901

Difficulty Level 4s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 5900



DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
The future will be the present sooner than you think - and it's tomorrow's stars which are important rather than today's. It's your long-term cycle which is significant, emphasising the spirit of adventure and personal liberation.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)
The planets are once again provoking your often neglected, adventurous instincts. It's time to travel, taking in places which are odd, unusual and different. If you can't get away now, make plans for later in the year. Even your romantic feelings could be stirred.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)
Your current planetary alignments are undoubtedly extremely powerful, but are also very confused. You may have no option but to lie low and postpone certain ambitions, no matter how impatient you may feel. Continue to focus on financial discussions, though.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
The planets are starting to crystallise all that is best and most hopeful in your life, setting you up for years to come. Much depends on your ability to handle close partnerships, and to create a sort of extended feel-good factor. But you can want too much.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
Aside from reminding you of the need to give the first priority to dealing with practical chores, I would remind you of the virtues of charitable behaviour, if only out of self-interest. In some strange way you will gain from putting others first for a change.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
Social, political and community involvements should take a leap into the unknown. You will be glad of all your group involvements even if the consequences last week were not exactly what you intended. At least now you can make up for an old muddle.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
The dual prospect is held out of fabulous professional success combined with dramatic moves at home. Take your chances and go for family and domestic changes if that is what concerns you most. Artists, athletes and lovers take strength from today's lunar patterns.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
It's time to be high-minded and high-principled, though not pompous or self-righteous. If you've a list of practical tasks, give a priority to anything with legal or overseas consequences. Long-distance travel and trips could well bring more than you bargained for.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
Have you ever had the feeling that family members are ganging up on you? Well, they probably are. I wouldn't worry, though, because you're much too big a person to be put off by such silly games. Relax and have a laugh, even if the monetary scene is a little complex.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
This is no time to behave like a conventional, conservative Capricorn. Why not open yourself up to new experiences and appreciate all that other people have to offer?

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
The weekend's special planetary alignment enhances all that is most noble in the Aquarian character, your selfless idealism and devotion to others. The only drawback is that you may become much too tied up in your own deep imaginary hopes and fears.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
You'll soon be showing a new, bolder side of your character. Your social skills will come in useful over the next few months, mainly as a result of the current magical Jupiterian pattern. You are gradually overcoming your shyness and lack of confidence. Well done.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE TIGER'S TALE

IE investigation shows enforcement agencies are playing catch-up with poachers. Recent conservation gains must be protected

IN THE EARLY years of this century, tiger poaching went out of control in several protected areas in the country. By 2006, the animal's population had dwindled to less than 1,400. Since then, concerted conservation efforts have led to an appreciable recovery — India today has more than 3,600 tigers. However, in recent years, experts have flagged a significant number of tiger deaths that remain unaccounted for. The needle of suspicion points towards poachers. Now, an investigation by this newspaper — it tracked arrest records and court documents and interviewed former poachers who have become informers — has revealed that illegal traffickers in animal parts have claimed at least 100 tigers in the past three years. Poaching networks today are leaner and more mobile compared to 20 years ago. The poachers are also savvy vis a vis the digital medium and are active on social media. Worryingly, law enforcement agencies are being forced to play catch-up.

After the tiger crisis, the government revamped the country's conservation edifice. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), established in 2007, discarded the approach that focused solely on protecting the animal in individual parks. Recognising the fact that the animals are mobile, it emphasised the need to conserve them as a "meta-population" — inter-breeding tigers in geographically connected reserves. A centralised Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) was established to tackle poaching cases. However, the CBI and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence have continued to pursue animal trafficking cases. These agencies rarely coordinate with each other. Understaffed state forest departments, too, do not keep track of poaching incidents outside their areas of jurisdiction despite the fact that syndicates operate across multiple states. At the same time, there is enough evidence to show that tigers today do not confine themselves to the boundaries of reserves and move out in search of mates and prey. So, unlike 20 years ago, poachers do not necessarily have to enter a protected area to kill tigers. The WCCB is ill-equipped to deal with this exigency. The agency has a sanctioned strength of just 10 wildlife inspectors who can gather intelligence and nearly a fourth of the Bureau's total posts are currently vacant. Moreover, the regular inspectors are usually enlisted in the WCCB on deputation from paramilitary forces. They lack domain expertise. The poachers, in contrast, deftly use the dark web to plan their operations. Though conviction rates have improved post-2007, the lack of specialised staff to pursue investigations means that more than 90 per cent of poachers who are nabbed escape punishment.

China is widely recognised as one of the world's largest markets for trafficked tiger parts from India. This newspaper's analysis shows that the Northeast has become one of the biggest conduits of this illicit trade in the past three years. However, enforcement agencies are yet to establish their presence along the new routes of the illicit trade. They, and the conservation authorities, should get their act together. The momentum generated by the post-2007 recovery in tiger numbers should not be frittered away.

AS SUMMER COMES

Concerns over power shortage call for a careful review of the country's energy mix

COAL PRODUCTION in the country has now crossed a record 1 billion tonnes — this is in line with the action plan of the coal ministry, which had targeted an output of 1,080 million tonnes in 2024-25. Data from the ministry shows that coal production touched 997.83 million tonnes in 2023-24, up 11.7 per cent from 893.19 million tonnes in 2022-23. A substantial part of this is accounted for by Coal India and its subsidiaries. Production by Coal India had increased to 773.81 million tonnes in 2023-24, up from 703.20 million tonnes in 2022-23. Despite this record production, however, those managing the electricity grids are worried as summer approaches.

The problem, in part, stems from how India's energy mix has evolved in the recent past. Thermal power dominates India's baseload power capacity. In recent years, however, additions to thermal capacity have been muted — the installed capacity rose from 230 GW in 2019-20 to just 243 GW in 2023-24. Much of the increase in installed power capacity during these years has occurred in the renewables space — the installed capacity rose from 88.26 GW in 2019-20 to 143.64 GW in 2023-24 (renewables include solar, wind, bio-power and small hydro power). However, despite this, renewables still account for just 13 per cent of all-India energy generation. During the summer months, the problem is acute as solar generation tapers off by the evenings while household demand remains high and storage capacities are limited. In order to fill this gap, baseload capacities are stepped up, but in the absence of an expansion in such capacities, there is a shortfall in supply. As per reports, electricity demand is expected to peak at 273 GW in June 2025 compared to a minimum of 135 GW in December-January. "Shortages are more likely to occur during non-solar hours in May, June, July and August 2025," says a report from the National Load Despatch Centre with the months of May and June identified as "high-risk months for shortages".

The National Electricity Plan (2017-22) had focused more on ramping up renewable capacities in the country. As per its assessment, the expected renewable (solar, wind, biomass and small hydro) capacity addition between 2017 and 2022 was pegged at 117.7 GW. However, the concerns that are being raised call for carrying out a more careful assessment of the country's energy mix — thermal, nuclear and renewables. As the economy continues its forward march, as electricity demand continues to rise — peak electricity demand is expected to touch 298.7 GW by 2026-27 — policy must ensure a steady supply of power.

NOW YOU SEE IT

A scrapped government department's afterlife in Punjab shows that existence is relative

SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT, BOTH alive and dead at the same time, depending on your interpretation of quantum mechanics, is known. Now, a Schrödinger's government department has been discovered in Punjab. It existed for the past few years, headed by a succession of ministers. Except that it only had ministers. No officials, no lunch breaks, not even an office. This state of quantum indeterminacy continued till last month, when somebody decided to bell the (now deceased) cat.

The Department of Administrative Reforms was reformed out of existence in 2012, and replaced by the Department of Governance Reforms. But the former department went on to have a distinguished afterlife, with the then chief minister, Amarinder Singh, choosing to hold the "portfolio" himself when Congress came to power in 2017. Others succeeded him in the Congress and AAP governments, until the latest minister's dogged pursuit of Administrative Reforms Department files led to the realisation that — as a subsequent notification put it, with admirable blandness — the department was "not in existence as on date".

This could have been a fantastic episode of the 1980s British political satire *Yes Minister*. Imagine an increasingly confused but determined Jim Hacker trying in vain to get hold of any files or meet anybody from the new department he's been allocated, or even physically find its offices. Sir Humphrey Appleby, the mandarin par excellence, would at first deploy all means to obstruct the minister's efforts and then eventually wax philosophical, explaining that existence and non-existence are relative. Bernard Woolley would chime in with a few helpful non-sequiturs. In fact, the name of the department in question is almost too on the nose — Hacker's was "administrative affairs". A cynic might say the best reform an "administrative reforms" department can bring about is its own abolition. But what about its replacement, "governance reforms"? As Sir Humphrey would say, "Yes, minister."

All-American deportations

They may not be an aberration. They could be consequences of real aspects of American identity



SANJAY SRIVASTAVA

THE GERMAN POLITICAL philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) — the author of the influential book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* — considered that of all the major world powers, only the United States had never been an imperialist one. This perspective, as has sometimes been pointed out, was linked to Arendt's vision of the US as a key site of anti-totalitarianism. It also blinded Arendt, as has also been suggested, to the politics of race and racism in that country. As a German Jew, she fled Germany to escape the very real dangers to her life posed by anti-Semitism, arriving in the US in early 1941. For Arendt, it was unthinkable that the political and social life of the country that had given her shelter from Nazi Germany could, in any way, be linked to global histories of colonialism and empire. The American context of race relations, she was to suggest, had little to do with the histories of Europe's interactions with Africa. Arendt delinked African-American resistance movements — and America — from global trends.

The Arendt conundrum — thinking globally about totalitarianism but locally about what happens in America — lies at the heart of recent episodes of deportations of those accused of "anti-Semitic" and "pro-terrorist" sympathies under the second Trump presidency. Of the several cases that are in the news, three have gained particular media prominence. Doctoral student Ranjani Srinivasan has had to leave the country, doctor and professor Rasha Alawieh has been deported and Green Card holder Mahmoud Khalil is in detention. Each of them has been accused of sympathising with — what the current American dispensation considers — "terrorist" activities. The equation of any criticism of the state of Israel with anti-Semitism is, of course, an important background to these current events. These, in turn, have become interwoven with ideas of "national security" and "public safety". "National security" and political ideologies are, as we know in India, entangled contexts.

The first aspect of the Arendt conundrum

concerns American identity. If you consider its global footprint, American identity is arguably the most successful of all national identities. No other culture has achieved such transnational impact. If there is something called "global culture", it is American. Financially, militarily or culturally, no other society has such an extraordinary global footprint. One way or another, in different ways, the contemporary human condition is American. And yet, just as strangely, notwithstanding the universality of American culture — and the self-confident identity it is linked to — it derives its meaning from unshakeable provincialism. For many Americans — President Donald Trump may believe the majority — the deportations may not seem problematic since American culture has historically been imagined as entirely self-contained and self-defined.

Expulsions from America are not a Republican phenomenon. They are an American phenomenon. The 18th-century Alien Enemies Act that finds such great favour with the current American president was formulated for use under conditions of war. However, given the historical development of Americanism as a self-contained fortress-culture, it is not surprising that there is no mass opposition to its deployment. Fortresses are invariably imagined as under threat of invasion and siege.

The second Arendt conundrum is the deep self-professed nature of American individualism and its apparent conflictual relationship with centralised forms of power, particularly the state. This relationship finds considerable play in both popular folklore as well as formal legal procedures. The mythology of the "outlaw" has been a key aspect of ideas about American identity. Embodying characteristics of self-reliance, straight-talking and deep suspicion of hierarchies, the outlaw stood (and stands) for a very powerful strand within the cultural imagination of the American self. This was the idea that there must be constant vigil against governments and state power that threatened two "fundamental" aspects of be-

ing American: Individual action and liberty. The outlaw was seen to both define and defend the most sacred of "American values", that of individualism.

Suspensions against state power have also played out from within the state itself. There is, for example, a variety of constitutional provisions that limit the reach of the state in the life of citizens. The Bill of Rights, which includes provisions against state interference in religious activity (the First Amendment) and the right to bear arms (the Second Amendment), are formal expressions of the cultural ideals represented by the outlaw.

And yet, notwithstanding the pervasiveness of the "individual versus the state" dialogue and the implicit elevation of the individual as a heroic figure within American culture, the current deportation episodes are remarkable for how easily Americans allow their state to speak on their behalf. In the case of Alawieh — as well as members of a Venezuelan and Salvadorian gang who were also deported — the American state ignored orders by American judges to delay or halt its actions. There have been, however, no large-scale protests against the arbitrariness of state action in a society whose founding myth so strongly derives from notions of the sanctity of individual liberties and the need to keep state power in check.

The deportations, in this light, may not be as much of an aberration as unsurprising consequences of real, as opposed to imagined, aspects of American identity and culture. The problem, as with Hannah Arendt's view of the American way and life, may lie in treating a culture and society as exceptional and unique. Cultural exceptionalism — the "shock" at what is happening in America at this moment is a good example of this attitude — is at the heart of the problem of how much we allow certain societies to get away with.

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The 18th-century Alien Enemies Act that finds such great favour with the current American president was formulated for use under conditions of war. However, given the historical development of Americanism as a self-contained fortress-culture, it is not surprising that there is no mass opposition to its deployment. Fortresses are invariably imagined as under threat of invasion and siege.

STATES OF DISPARITY

With an overbearing Centre, delimitation can undermine federalism



D RAJA

WHILE DEDICATING THE new Parliament building to the nation in May 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "We also need to consider where people will sit when the number of seats increases and the number of MPs increases in the near future." This assertion, coupled with the freeze on delimitation, being set to lapse in 2026, has brought the debate around delimitation centre stage. The question of the formula to be followed, the BJP-led Union government's chequered record on federalism and the disproportionate population growth between northern and southern states have intensified concerns about fairness and equity. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has called a meeting of major political parties from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha and Punjab. Thus, an understanding of delimitation, why it was frozen and its implications for our political landscape are needed for an informed debate.

Article 82 of the Constitution mandates Parliament to enact a Delimitation Act after every Census to reflect population changes. Article 170 determines the composition of state legislative assemblies based on population data. Article 55 ensures the proportional representation of states in the presidential election. Article 81 specifies the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and provides for their distribution among states based on population. Following the 42nd Amendment in 1976, the process of increasing parliamentary seats was frozen to avoid penalising states that had successfully implemented family planning measures. This was extended by the Vajpayee government until the first census after 2026.

The upcoming delimitation, based on the next census, could severely reduce the repre-

sentation of South Indian states while significantly enhancing that of North Indian states. Currently, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh collectively hold 174 out of 543 seats (32 per cent) in the Lok Sabha. Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka hold 129 seats or 24 per cent. If the total number of seats remains frozen at 543, projections suggest that these North Indian states would gain significantly, holding 205 seats while South Indian states' representation would shrink to 103 seats. If the number is expanded to 888 — the sitting capacity in the Lok Sabha chamber of the new Parliament building — the North Indian states are expected to get 324 seats or 39 per cent of the total, while South Indian states are projected to get 164 seats, down to 19 per cent.

In 1971, Bihar and Tamil Nadu had comparable populations and similar representation in the Lok Sabha. Over the decades, Bihar's population surged more rapidly, and its MPs today represent significantly more people than Tamil Nadu's. Consequently, MPs from northern states now represent substantially larger constituencies. This disparity underscores the challenge that southern states face in the upcoming exercise. The reality is that northern states now hold 50 per cent of India's population, up from 43 per cent according to the 1971 Census, while southern states' share has declined from 25 per cent to 20 per cent.

Southern states have consistently voiced concerns over the post-2026 delimitation process for several reasons. They have excelled in family planning measures, stabilising their populations. Delimitation based solely on population risks penalising them. Politically speaking, the BJP, till now, has failed to make

much headway in South India, barring in Karnataka. Reducing representation can be a way of penalising the southern states for this.

The threat to federalism is another key concern. The BJP has displayed a pattern of centralising power. Examples include the imposition of Hindi on non-Hindi speaking states, the financial discrimination against states like Kerala, imposing the NEP and interference in state-specific welfare policies. These actions have fuelled concerns that delimitation may further undermine federalism.

Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana and Karnataka, among others, contribute disproportionately higher shares to India's GDP and taxation revenues compared to their northern counterparts. Despite this, their political representation is at risk. The potential for diminished representation raises concerns about economic injustice as well. States that have invested in improving healthcare, education and social infrastructure risk being penalised.

To mitigate these concerns, constitutional safeguards are essential. Weightage for population control must be incorporated in the delimitation process. Economic contribution, developmental achievements and governance success should be factored in. Delimitation must ensure equity and respect for the contributions of all regions. A framework that safeguards the interests of all states while ensuring equitable representation will uphold the principles of justice and democracy. India's strength lies in its diversity. A delimitation process that tilts the scales disproportionately risks alienating regions that have played a key part in the country's progress.

The writer is general secretary, CPI

MARCH 22, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

SOVIET OFFICIAL KILLED

VICTOR KHITZICHENKO, A senior engineer in the office of the Counsellor for Economic Affairs in the Soviet embassy, was shot dead at point-blank range by two men on a motorcycle near the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi. The assailants pumped five bullets into Khitichenko's car from a German Zekko semi-automatic pistol of 7.65 mm calibre and sped away on their Mack Yezdi motorcycle. The 48-year-old Soviet died on the spot.

signed to bring international quality equipment to the Indian consumer at international prices, was announced by the government. It is likely to bring to the consumer cheaper entertainment electronics like radio receivers, tape recorders, two-in-ones, amplifiers, record players and changers, electronic toys, video tape-recorders and players, and digital electronic watches.

H M ERSHAD WINS

THE BANGLADESH PRESIDENT, H M Ershad, won 95.19 per cent affirmative votes in the nationwide referendum, as the latest results were released by the National Election

Commission. The victory in the referendum gave the 53-year-old army chief the right to rule the country till free elections are held.

EVACUATING INDIANS

INDIA HAS MADE all arrangements to evacuate about 400 Indians who are stuck in Tehran, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi informed the Rajya Sabha. Making a statement in both Houses of Parliament, Gandhi said that the Indians were all safe. Since the Tehran airport is barred for civilian aircraft, an Air India plane was waiting to pick up the Indians from some nearby airport, Gandhi said.



CHEAPER ELECTRONICS

A NEW INTEGRATED policy on electronics, de-

15 THE IDEAS PAGE

Five Covid lessons

Above all, trust in government is the key to successfully implementing difficult decisions during emergencies



SONALDE DESAI

THIS MARCH MARKS five years since the world stopped. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid a pandemic. On March 24, the Government of India declared a nationwide lockdown, one of the most stringent globally. With five years and much water under the bridge, it is easy to forget the gasping breaths, millions of deaths, and shuttered businesses. That is, until the next disaster strikes. Can we learn from that painful experience to prepare for the next disaster, whether it is a black swan event like the pandemic, a tsunami, or a drought?

There are five lessons from the pandemic that are relevant. First, many problems are global. Closing our borders to keep diseases like HIV/AIDS or Covid at bay is not an option. An earthquake in Indonesia creates a tsunami that reaches Sri Lanka. We need global systems that continually monitor these threats and explore strategies to deal with them. However, the pandemic induced a paranoia that was exacerbated by political winds that have weakened rather than strengthened these global institutions. America's withdrawal from the WHO and shuttering of the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning System Network are simply some examples of these weakening bonds. All is not bleak, however. There are incipient signs of increasing global biomedical collaboration as seen in the launch of the Indian genomic dataset to encourage global collaborations. This is a unique opportunity to create international collaborations in which India could and should take a lead.

Second, the solutions often need to be local and locally relevant. When the whole world is in the throes of a pandemic, the ability of nations to support each other is increasingly limited. Each country seeks to protect its citizens when vaccines are in short supply. India was fortunate to have local vaccine manufacturing capabilities but countries that did not were unable to get timely access to vaccines. Social distancing is workable in sparsely populated areas; in slums like Dharavi, it was difficult to contain disease transmission, and seroprevalence studies by Anup Malani and colleagues found that five months into the pandemic, about 50 per cent of the slum residents had antibodies, compared to 15 per cent of the non-slum residents. Under the circumstances, it would make sense to prioritise areas with higher prevalence for surgical mask distribution and supply of ventilators.

Third, disaster preparedness begins with planning and building systems that can be activated as needed. One of the reasons the pandemic and lockdown did not lead to mass starvation in India was the existence of a public distribution system that could be harnessed to provide extra rations, particularly when transportation difficulties could have led to price gouging. However, when it came



CR Sasikumara

to sending emergency cash, we had to rely on people who were part of various registries, such as PM-KISAN or those who had Jan Dhan accounts. Lockdown offered an opportunity to bend the disease progression curve, but we did not use this time to prepare health systems. Access to oxygen cylinders could have been coordinated if there were a centralised database. Disaster planning at local, state, and central levels is essential if we are to respond effectively to emergencies — both medical and natural.

Fourth, data and information must be part of the DNA of modern governance. When the migrant crisis struck, we could see lines of individuals crossing the Yamuna on foot, but we had no idea how many migrant workers were living in Delhi and how many had left behind families where they could seek shelter. Without a recent census, the situation has not improved. In many countries, the pandemic brought about a desire to kill the messenger, and data systems were either discredited or crippled. This distrust of data has spread globally, with the US government shutting down projects that study vaccine hesitancy. We need a mindset that sees information and data as tools of governance rather than enemies.

Fifth, trust in government is the key to

Closing our borders to keep diseases like HIV/AIDS or Covid at bay is not an option. An earthquake in Indonesia creates a tsunami that reaches Sri Lanka. We need global systems that continually monitor these threats and explore strategies to deal with them.

successfully implementing difficult decisions during emergencies. Every emergency will be different, and policymakers will often have to make decisions under uncertainty. For policy pronouncements to turn into national action, there needs to be a partnership between the state and its citizens. In multi-party democracies, few governments are elected with more than 50 per cent vote share. Nonetheless, emergency actions require trust that during emergencies, the government is acting in the interest of the whole population and not just its supporters. During the pandemic, telephone surveys by the National Council of Applied Economic Research in Delhi-NCR found that 85 per cent of those surveyed supported the lockdown simply because the government deemed it necessary. Even in retrospect, the India Human Development Survey of 2022-24 finds that nearly 80 per cent of respondents nationwide believe it was a good decision. However, global experiences show that this trust is fragile and must be nurtured to ensure the nation is united in future emergencies.

The writer is professor, University of Maryland and National Council of Applied Economic Research. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As geopolitical events have undermined its trade-led business model, the German economy has been undergoing the most prolonged period of stagnation since the second world war." — THE GUARDIAN

Once upon a ruler

Aurangzeb has a troubling legacy. But it does not lie in his tomb



RAM RAJYA
BY RAM MADHAV

HISTORY IS NOT easy to grapple with. When you revisit it, it starts haunting you. After all, as Mahatma Gandhi pointed out, "there have been tyrants and murderers" throughout history. But "history is mostly guessing; the rest is prejudice", warned Will Durant. Hence, every time we revisit history, historical prejudices come back to haunt us.

A recent Bollywood movie, *Chhaava*, depicting the struggle of Sambhaji Raje, son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, in Maharashtra against Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, brought historical memories into the public domain. For those who hadn't heard about the horrible treatment meted out to one of the greatest Maratha warriors at the hands of Aurangzeb, the movie was an eye-opening experience. It graphically depicted the final 40 days of torture that Sambhaji — or *Chhaava* (lion cub) as he is popularly known — was subjected to by the lackeys of Aurangzeb. This was sufficient to ignite passions against the worst ruler of the Mughal dynasty.

Shivaji, a great Maratha king and warrior, died in 1680 after establishing Hindvi Swaraj. Sambhaji ascended the throne a year later and became the second Chhatrapati of the Maratha kingdom. Those were the times when Aurangzeb was camping in the South to capture the Maratha and Deccan kingdoms. Sambhaji's forces ran into the Mughal army and fierce battles ensued for years between the two. Sadly, Sambhaji's army was outnumbered, and the leader was captured due to sabotage on February 1, 1689.

The treatment meted out to Sambhaji, a fellow royal, by Aurangzeb was brutal. American historian Stewart Gordon writes in his authentic account, *The Marathas*, that Aurangzeb saw Sambhaji's refusal to convert to Islam as an ultimate act of defiance and decided to subject him to harsh punishment, before finally beheading him on March 11, 1689, in Koregaon on the banks of the Bhima River.

In *Sambhaji*, Vishwas Patil writes, "Aurangzeb's brutality knew no bounds." But historian Jadunath Sarkar writes that "Aurangzeb hoped to break Sambhaji's spirit but instead created a martyr whose sacrifice would inspire generations". That was exactly what happened after Sambhaji's martyrdom. Enraged Marathas continued their battles with Mughal armies under the leadership of Rajaram, Sambhaji's brother, and Tarabai, Rajaram's widow. Their resistance was so fierce that Aurangzeb could not return to Delhi and died in 1707 at the age of 88 in Bhingra, a small town near Aurangabad.

Even after centuries, Aurangzeb's cam-

paigns continue to raise passions. Recently, there have been calls for the removal of his tomb, located at Khulnabad, a town 15 miles from Aurangabad. It led to unfortunate violence in Nagpur, too. Incidentally, the city of Aurangabad was renamed Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar by the state government in 2023.

Over the 230 years of their rule in India, the Mughals produced 20 emperors. They included known names like Babur, Akbar and Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb is arguably the worst among them, with even many Muslims coming to hate him during his lifetime. Even his apologists among historians couldn't whitewash the fact that Aurangzeb had ascended the throne by killing his pious brother Dara Shikoh and placing his father Shah Jahan under house arrest in Agra Fort. The imperial qazi, who refused to read the *khutba* in Aurangzeb's name, was thrown into prison, and, later, when the Shaikh ul-Islam refused to issue a fatwa in support of his plans to invade the Muslim kingdoms in the Deccan, he too met with the same fate. In his overzealousness to please the *ulema*, Aurangzeb destroyed Hindu temples and brought back the *jizya* tax on Hindus and other non-Muslims. He even imposed restrictions on Sufi practices at their shrines.

This sordid history undoubtedly makes him the most hated among the Mughal rulers. But how to deal with his tomb, which is located in the heart of Maharashtra, is the question we are grappling with. Babur was first buried in Delhi, but his widow later moved the grave to Kabul, as per his desire. His son Humayun's tomb is in Delhi. Akbar's mausoleum is in Sikandra, a suburb of Agra. Shah Jahan desired that his tomb be in the same place as that of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, within the Taj Mahal in Agra. Dara Shikoh was buried in an unmarked grave in the Humayun's Tomb complex. All these places are just of historical and archaeological importance and nothing more. No reverence is attached to them.

Aurangzeb's grave in Khulnabad near Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar is a small and unimpressive structure with no fanfare or paraphernalia. Historians claim that Aurangzeb himself had wanted it that way and no coffin was used to bury him. Aurangzeb's grave may remain as a stark reminder of his dark deeds on the one hand and Maratha valour on the other, or moved to Kabul like Babur's. But we must remember that the course of history doesn't change merely by removing a couple of symbols here and there. Sun Tzu said that "not all battles are worth fighting". What is worth fighting is not the dilapidated grave but the debased legacy of Aurangzeb.

In Gandhi's words, the "tyrants and murderers" in history "for a time, seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it — always." Aurangzeb was no exception.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP. Views are personal



DUSHYANT DAVE

A broken welfare state

Freebies, promised by nearly every political party, show a bankruptcy of ideas

IN HIS 1845 novel *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (the rich and the poor), Benjamin Disraeli writes: "Power has only one duty — to secure the social welfare of the people."

Promises by political parties in the recent Delhi elections saw them try to outdo each other in offering "freebies". Earlier, the BJP's 2024 manifesto declared that there had been 10 years of good governance and "vikas", claiming inclusive growth but highlighting freebie schemes: "80 crore-plus citizens have been receiving free rations since 2020 through the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana"; "citizens got Rs 34 lakh crore directly in their accounts"; "46 crore-plus loans worth Rs 27 lakh crore have been given under the PM Mudra Yojana"; "63 lakh street vendors got easy credit under the PM SVANidhi Scheme", etc.

Are these welfare measures or inducements for votes? Are political parties bankrupt in terms of ideas for development? These are so far-fetched and widespread that instead of contributing to employment generation and real growth, they may prevent both. Will they take Indians from being hard-working and self-reliant to being lazy and dependent?

States are heavily indebted. Maharashtra was recently forced to admit funding issues for the Ladki Bahin scheme. Even "vibrant" Gujarat is unable to fund education properly, with serious shortages of teachers, buildings and classrooms in government schools. Meanwhile, the government claims that "25 crore citizens have come out of poverty" and "17 crore jobs

have been created" in the past 10 years. If so, why the freebies?

Disraeli is also claimed to have said, "There are three kinds of lies: Lies, damned lies, and statistics."

The Constituent Assembly debates reflect the framers' thoughts on the future of India. On November 15, 1948, a motion to declare India a socialist state was debated and rejected. K T Shah, who moved the amendment, argued, "The term 'socialist' is, I know, frightening to several people... By the term 'socialist' I may assure my friends here that what is implied or conveyed by this amendment is a state in which equal justice and equal opportunity for everybody is assured, in which everyone is expected to contribute by his labour, by his intelligence, and by his work all that he can to the maximum capacity, and everyone would be assured of getting all that he needs and all that he wants for maintaining a decent civilised standard of existence."

B R Ambedkar opposed the motion: "The Constitution... is merely a mechanism for the purpose of regulating the work of the various organs of the state. It is not a mechanism whereby particular members or particular parties are installed in office. What should be the policy of the state, and how the society should be organised on its social and economic side, are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether."

Discussing Article 30 (now Article 38),

"State to secure a social order for the promotion of the welfare of the people", Damodar Swarup Seth on November 19, 1948, argued that the draft article, "does not convey any clear indication as to the economic nature of the social order to be established". He said, "We all know that the society in which we now live is of a capitalistic order or character and in this society, we see the exploiter and exploited classes both existing side by side; and the exploiting class is naturally the top dog and the exploited class the under-dog. In such a society we clearly see that the real welfare of the masses, the toiling millions, can neither be secured nor protected, unless the society is made clear of the exploiter class, and that can only be possible when we establish a socialist democratic order..."

Mahboob Ali Baig Sahib Bahadur said, "Inevitably there would be parties in the country which seek election to Parliament and these political parties have different and distinctive ideas, ideals, ideologies, programmes and principles... And when a particular party is returned in a majority and is entitled to form the government, the people and the electorate have got a right to expect the implementation of those programmes and principles."

Ambedkar responded, "While we have established political democracy, it is also the desire that we should lay down as our ideal economic democracy... The Constitution also wishes to lay down an ideal before those who would be forming the government... There are various ways in which people be-

lieve that economic democracy can be brought about; there are those who believe in individualism as the best form of economic democracy."

J B Kripalani, speaking on October 17, 1949, defined democracy thus: "I wish Sir, that the whole country should understand the moral, the spiritual and the mystic implication of the word 'democracy'... Politically, we are a democratic people but economically we are divided into such classes that the barriers cannot be crossed. If we have got to be democratic, we have got to be economically so too."

A welfare state protects and promotes the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens based on the principles of equal opportunities, the equitable distribution of wealth and public responsibility for citizens unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life. With abject poverty, large-scale unemployment, the vast gap between the rich and the poor and failing healthcare, is India a model welfare state?

Sadly, the Supreme Court in *S Subramaniam Balaji v. State of Tamil Nadu* justified freebies.

It might do well to recall E M Forster's words: "So two cheers for democracy. One because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. But two cheers are quite enough. There is no occasion to give three."

India needs to wake up and introspect.

The writer is a senior advocate and former president of the Supreme Court Bar Association

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIA AND FTAS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Global trade disorder' (IE, March 21). Any disruption or disorder is bound to bring opportunities, so does Donald Trump's presidency. India is well-positioned to capitalise on Trump's tariff war and global disorder, as major global nations and multilateral blocs have gone weak, and their over-reliance on the US for everything will continue to weaken their positions further. It is high time India signs Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the US, Canada, Mexico, the EU, the UK, Japan, and Australia to achieve a win-win situation.

Kratika Chauhan, Ujjain

PROTECT ANIMALS

THIS REFERS TO the report, '3 yrs, 100 tigers killed & counting: new-age poaching mafia taps tech, digital payments, hawala networks' (IE, March 21). Kudos to *The Indian Express* investigation team for exposing the massive poaching network, which has used a sophisticated modus operandi of payments across India with links to Nepal and the Myanmar route. The sad part is that this illegal trade has been going on despite stringent laws and constitutional provisions that protect animals. In reality, animals have been let down by the Centre, the states, and their wildlife agencies. This report truly represents the voice of the voiceless, as articulated by President Droupadi Murmu in the article, 'For those without a voice' (IE, March 21).

L R Murmu, New Delhi

SPACE RESEARCH

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Into the light' (IE, March 21). While we lost Kalpana Chawla and other astronauts of the space shuttle Columbia in February 2003, Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore of the Crew-9 mission were fortunate to return safely after completing a mission that took nine months instead of nine days due to technical glitches. Space research programmes must be reviewed minutely and reformed comprehensively. The aims of the missions should be limited to bettering human lives in a practical sense. The time required for a round trip to Neptune in our solar system is 27 years and it's 80,000 years for the adjacent solar system, Alpha Centauri. Therefore, our space research must be kept within reasonable limits in view of technological capabilities. The risk factor in space research must be zero.

Subhash Vaid, New Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Into the light' (IE, March 21). It nicely brings out the determination of astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry 'Butch' Wilmore. Their mission not only depicts human resilience but also the dangers and progress in space travel. Aside from personal accomplishments, such expeditions pose crucial questions regarding the future of space commerce, sustainability, and human existence in the universe. It would be enlightening to consider how these missions influence scientific development and global cooperation.

Varchasvee Mishra, Lucknow

18 BIG PICTURE

HI SALIM! How are you? Winter is coming in Russia, and we are starting to plan a trip to Varkala."

The message notification beeped on Salim Shah's phone on November 3, 2024. It was from an old client, Aleksej, to whom he had been renting out his property in Varkala, a beach in south Kerala, around 40 km from Thiruvananthapuram, for the last eight years. He knew him well.

Turns out, he hardly knew him. On March 11, the Kerala Police, in coordination with the International Police Coordination Unit of the Central Bureau of Investigation (IPCU-CBI), arrested Aleksej Besciokov, a 46-year-old Lithuanian citizen and resident of Russia, from the house that Salim owned near the Varkala beach.

The CBI said Besciokov is wanted by US authorities on a number of charges, including money laundering. He will stand trial before the Eastern District Court of Virginia.

Earlier this year, Besciokov was indicted in the US for allegedly facilitating money laundering by transnational criminal organisations through Garantex, a Russian cryptocurrency exchange.

On March 7, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) announced the unsealing of the indictment against Besciokov. According to the DOJ indictment, Besciokov was Garantex's primary technical administrator, responsible for obtaining and maintaining critical Garantex infrastructure, as well as reviewing and approving transactions.

Around three years ago, on April 5, 2022, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control had sanctioned Garantex for its role in allegedly "facilitating money laundering of funds from ransomware actors and darknet markets".

The DOJ indictment says that between March 2021 and December 2023, "Garantex processed at least approximately \$1.2 million from, and to, three different darknet markets that specialized in drug sales and child sexual abuse material".

Besciokov and Garantex's Russian co-founder, Aleksandr Mira Serda, are accused of processing at least \$96 billion in cryptocurrency transactions since 2019.

Besciokov and Serda allegedly received hundreds of millions in criminal proceeds, which were used to facilitate several crimes, including hacking, ransomware, terrorism, and drug trafficking.

"Winter is coming..." The *Game of Thrones* reference in the message that Besciokov sent may have been accidental, but with his cover blown, the note that now sits on Salim's phone carries a sense of foreboding.

A man in his own world

Varkala, with its jagged cliff beach that stretches on for 3 km, is a mix of spirituality and revelry. The Papanasam beach holds religious significance for Hindus, who come to perform rituals and immerse the ashes of the deceased in the sea.

Over the last decade, it has also drawn revellers from across the country and beyond, even surpassing Kovalam in popularity. Known for its red laterite formations and panoramic views of the Arabian Sea, the Varkala Cliff features cafes, restaurants and shops catering to the many tourists who throng the beach, both domestic and foreign.

It was here, amid the beachgoers and the revellers, that Besciokov, "quiet" and "reserved", found his safe haven, where he effortlessly slipped in, without eliciting attention or prying questions.

So every year, Besciokov would come down to Varkala—often with his wife Yulia, 46, and son Feliks, 10—where he rented Salim's two-storeyed, four-bedroom house. His recent trip to Varkala, which began on February 11, however, lasted only a month.

It was in 2016 that Besciokov first approached Salim seeking his house on rent.

UNDER THE RADAR

THE LITHUANIAN IN A KERALA BEACH TOWN

Few in Varkala knew what Aleksej Besciokov was up to, except that he stayed with his family in a rented house, moved around on a scooter and kept to himself. Until, one day, the police turned up at his door.

NARAYANAN S visits the beach town, where the alleged cyber criminal, wanted in the US for a \$96 billion cryptocurrency racket, spent a few months every year since 2016



Narayanan S

"He came with a Russian friend back then and introduced himself as a computer engineer. He had only one condition: even though he would stay for only three months a year, the house should not be rented to anyone else for the rest of the year. Besides his family, he frequently bought several Russian friends to stay at the house over the years. We never had any reason to distrust him or his friends," says Salim.

This time too, he was with Yulia, their son and the family of his friend Kirill (wife Tatiana and their baby).

Salim said Besciokov usually timed his visits to get away from Russia's winter months. "He liked the weather in Kerala, he liked the beaches and the sun here."

Salim's family, among the first movers in Varkala's thriving tourism industry, has put up two of their properties on rent. "My father was an engineer with the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, and I worked as an accountant in the Gulf. We sort of started the trend of renting properties to foreign tourists in Varkala. Now everyone does it. When Aleksej came here, he mentioned that he had a

drilling ship maintenance and construction business in Russia. That mutual connection to oil fields might have influenced my decision to rent the property to him," says Salim.

Showing a copy of Besciokov's recent Indian tourist e-visa on his phone, Salim says there was nothing suspicious about the documents. The e-visa was issued on February 2, 2024, and is valid for five years, expiring on January 31,

2029. He adds that there had never been an issue with Besciokov's Form C, the mandatory registration form that hosts of foreign guests must submit to the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer (FRRO) within 24 hours of arrival to help authorities track and locate them.

"If the Indian authorities knew he was a criminal, wouldn't they have caught him at the airport?" Salim wonders, adding that Besciokov opened a bank account in India and carried out online transactions.

Besciokov initially paid a rent of Rs 1.75,000 a year, which went up to Rs 5 lakh over the years after considerable persuasion from Salim. "Whenever I asked for a rent hike, he would claim to be a simple man with a modest financial background. I told him this year that I needed Rs 5 lakh since my children's weddings were coming up. Even then, he paid only Rs 4.5 lakh in two instalments. I have provided all the transaction details to the police," he says.

From all accounts, Besciokov and his family led as unobtrusive a life as possible while in Varkala.

"They rarely interacted with local residents and others. They did not eat out much either. They mostly cooked at home and ate fruits, vegetables, and fish, as far as I know. They weren't particularly into Indian cuisine," says Salim, who lives with his family a kilometre away.

Athira, a worker at a nearby grocery shop, recalls that the family usually bought bananas and canned tuna. She says that, unlike many other tourists, they rarely engaged in small talk with anyone. But she remembers "something interesting": Besciokov, his wife and son all had similar closely cropped haircuts, which at different times were dyed blonde, pink or purple.

Salim describes Besciokov as tall and lean, someone who appeared younger than his actual age. "I would see him three or four times during each visit. Whenever I went to the house, he would be working on his laptop. He would often be in shorts and round-neck T-shirts," he says.

Besciokov usually moved around on a second-hand scooter that he bought. Police are currently trying to trace the previous owner of the scooter to find potential associates of Besciokov in Varkala.

Salim says that Besciokov often came across as tight-fisted. "Once, he complained about how hot it was in the house. I suggested that he buy an air conditioner for himself, but he never did. After that, he never mentioned the heat again."

"In fact, he has not bought any furniture except for what was already in the house when I handed it over to him. The only time he made any change was when he painted a wall green to hang pictures and some study material for his son. He painted the wall himself and later reverted to the original colour after some days," says Salim.

Recalling his interactions with Besciokov, neighbour Hashim, a taxi driver, says, "He used to work long hours, as the lights were often left on late into the night. He never exchanged smiles or pleasantries with me, nor

did he ever hire my car."

Another neighbour, who wished to remain anonymous, says Besciokov was different from many other foreign visitors who wandered around late at night. "He usually returned home by 9 pm and seemed to be working on his computer until early morning before going to sleep."

What was he doing in Varkala then? While it's an aspect the police and the agencies are probing, the Kerala Police said he was on a valid tourist visa.

Thiruvananthapuram Rural SP K S Sudarsan said, "His electronic gadgets have been handed over to the CBI. He had a local bank account, but nothing suspicious was found in it. He was probably careful not to indulge in any illegal activities during his stay in India. We have come to know that the US agencies tracked him by monitoring the social media use of his wife."

The arrest

The External Affairs Ministry (EAM), acting on a request from the US under the Extradition Act of 1962, obtained a provisional arrest warrant against Besciokov from Delhi's Patiala House Court on March 10. The CBI received intelligence about his presence in Varkala and passed this on to the local police. Acting on the tip-off, the Varkala police conducted searches of homestays in the area.

On the evening of March 11, civil police officer Jojin Raj was enquiring in the neighbourhood when he spotted Besciokov on the balcony of the house. "I quickly went up. On seeing me, he went inside the house. I started knocking on the door and, after a few minutes, he opened it. He was all dressed up, with his bags packed. I asked for his passport, and the details matched. He then attempted to bribe me with a handful of Rs 500 notes. I told him to wait and called my senior officers. They arrived and took him into custody," Jojin explains, adding that it was only the next day that he realised the extent of Besciokov's criminal activities.

The police seized two laptops, two mobile phones, and some documents from the house. They later reported that while Besciokov's friend Kirill left Varkala on March 6, Besciokov's family, along with Kirill's wife and baby, left for Russia early morning March 11, hours before he was arrested.

Police are investigating Besciokov's financial transactions and potential links to local residents but have not identified any suspects so far. He was later presented before the Patiala House Court in New Delhi, and will later be extradited to the US.

Varkala DySP Gopakumar, one of the senior officers who took Besciokov into custody, stated that the Lithuanian remained in Varkala because he was worried about getting caught at the airport.

Gopakumar says, "He remained very calm even after his arrest. He told the police that he was planning to escape to Goa and had visited other Indian cities like Chennai and Mumbai in the past."

WITH INPUTS FROM SHAJU PHILIP, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



Besciokov was indicted in the US for allegedly facilitating money laundering through Garantex, a Russian cryptocurrency exchange

(Clockwise from top) - the house that Salim Shah rented out; Aleksej Besciokov; Varkala beach near Thiruvananthapuram. It was in this beach town that Besciokov, "quiet" and "reserved", found his safe haven



An Insidious Legal Drama

TUMKO MERI KASAM ★★

Director: Vikram Bhatt
Cast: Anupam Kher, Adah Sharma, Ishwak Singh, Esha Deol, Sushant Singh



ALAKA SAHANI

SOMEWHERE LOST in the meandering and overly long courtroom drama-cum-love story is the tale of a doctor's vision. With a desperate attempt to ramp up the drama, the film tries to incorporate too many elements, plot-twists and frequent flashbacks. The result is a messy, verbose and over-wrought narrative.

Written and directed by Vikram Bhatt, the film fictionalises the story of Ajay Murdia, founder of the nationwide chain of fertility clinics, Indira IVF, while incorporating some real facts of his life and career into the narrative. With the support of his wife Indira (essayed by Adah Sharma), Ajay (his younger character is played by Ishwak Singh and older by Anupam Kher), after quitting his secure government job, opens a clinic in Udaipur that offers treatment for infertility. Subsequently, they scale up their operations and offer IVF facility to those seeking to bear children. Though originally a pathologist, Ajay is considered to be a pioneer in providing low-cost fertility treatment and eventually opens a chain of Indira IVF across the country.

The film, produced by Indira Entertainment (Ajay Murdia's sons Nitiz and Kshitiz are credited as producers), perhaps set out to celebrate Ajay, who inspite of his modest beginning is full of ideas and has big dreams. At some point, it also became a tool to portray a grand picture of a doctor, who apart from achieving immense success in his field of work also amassed a huge amount of wealth. The audience is informed about he making land deals, a board member of his company getting an astronomical amount as monthly pay cheque and more such things.

The narrative was also keen to incorporate how his heart beats for women when they face harassment because they can't get pregnant. It briefly focusses on how he believes that a woman should not be blamed for her inability to bear a child as the male partner might have a medical problem. But these are fleeting conversations in the course of this lengthy convoluted narrative that chooses to focus on an insidious courtroom drama. It banks heavily on flashbacks, loud background score and tacky CGI to keep the audience engaged.

The film casts Esha Deol as Meenakshi, a lawyer who is fighting Ajay's case. He is charged in a hit-and-run case. To the audience, however, it is evident that he is framed by Rajiv, who was fostered by the doctor but now wants his downfall. However, it is not made clear why Rajiv bears such feelings for Ajay. Even though Meenakshi is entrusted with the task of fighting the case, she is frequently shown not having enough faith in winning. Later, she takes a backseat with older Ajay (Kher) cross-examining the witnesses himself.

The narrative is often incoherent and full of contradictions. Though fictionalised, the narrative is fixated on Ajay and his achievements. Had it shifted focus and explored the stories of those who take the help of IVF; the burden of such an expensive treatment; and the effect it has on them, it could have been more impactful.



SNOW WHITE ★★

Director: Marc Webb **Cast:** Rachel Zegler, Gal Gadot, Andrew Burnap

Snow White on Thin Ice

SHALINI LANGER

IT DOESN'T do any more to have just a 'Magic Mirror' — especially not one that tells you "who is the fairest of them all". Films, especially those born of fairy tales, must also mirror our times.

In trying to be everything, *Snow White* falls between these two mirrors, without shattering any glass ceiling, let's be clear.

Given the struggles Disney waged to make this live action film — adapting what was its first feature-length animation, back in 1937 — one must ask, "Why?". The Covid delays, the social media storm over the story's White beauty standards, the woke outrage over that and more, the Israel-Palestine fissures courtesy its main actors, and how to go about the depiction of dwarves, there was

little that the behemoth didn't encounter in its latest dip into its franchise basement.

Sadly, all that blood, sweat and tweets don't reflect in this bland adaptation with passable songs and sub-magical actors.

Rachel Zegler, a Latina actor, as Snow White was one of Disney's concessions to make the story go down easy. With *West Side Story* behind her, Zegler was not really a risky choice, though she did have the studio reeling a bit with her pro-Palestine statements. However, good as she is, Zegler never bounces off the screen as a Princess — if we doth have princesses — must.

Andrew Burnap plays Jonathan, Snow White's love interest. He is no longer a Prince. Rather, he is one of the Robin Hood-like "bandits" fighting the good fight against the Evil Queen, and "in the name of the King (that is Snow White's father)", with a bunch of Merry

Men of own. The kindest thing to say about Burnap is that he is underwhelming, which may have been required in a plot where Zegler had to shine.

If you haven't yet guessed, or not watched too many "updated" fairy tales lately, this one's modern take involves Snow White fighting her own fight against the Evil Queen, rather than waiting for a Prince or a King to lead her. To avoid stepping on too many toes, the dwarves are rendered via CGI and motion capture, and they are pretty fine. Though, of course, this too has been torn apart by the tear-aparters.

Beyond that, Disney sticks to the main contours of the story, be it the Magic Mirror sustaining the Evil Queen's vanity, the squabbles and songs of the dwarves, the poisoned apple, and even the lover's kiss. The uneven pacing (director Marc Webb, *The Amazing*

Spider-Man 2) means that no one really suffers much, neither Snow White in an extended semi-coma nor Jonathan in a dungeon, while the relationship between the Princess and the dwarves (the soul of the story) is sliced into unsatisfactory, brief episodes.

If there is one sufferer, so to speak, it is Gadot. The charismatic Israeli actor has been stripped of all her star appeal in her strict black headgear and long painted talons, and is left grimacing, glaring and gnashing through her Evil Queen.

Still, she gets the one good line of this film. Referring to the fact that in the good old days of Snow White's father and mother, the three baked apple pies for their subjects as proof of their kindness, the Queen spits out to the Princess: "And what do you have to offer to your subjects? Dessert?"

Fair enough, the Mirror would rule.

Dead in the Drive

SHALINI LANGER

THE DOLUS SUV that is the real star of *Locked* (actually a Land Rover remodelled for the film) reeks of money, with dark tinted glasses, beige leather seats, and a crested logo that if you look closely features Lady Justice.

Locked wants you to look very, very closely, and not just at that logo, and exclaim "how clever". But even a million-dollar ride (the suggested price of the vehicle) can't hold the weight of this film where income inequality wrestles liberal permissiveness wrestles old vs young world view wrestles cancel culture wrestles Dostoevsky wrestles daddy guilt.

And that is not even counting the heavyweight Anthony Hopkins and the no-lightweight-himself Bill Skarsgard who tap into their chops to power all those ideas forward.

Skarsgard is Barry, a down-and-out petty criminal who is out of cash and in danger of losing any remaining credibility with his young daughter. He is counting on his old van, now in repairs, to turn a new leaf, but even that requires money. And hence it is that find-

ing the fancy Dolus, parked in the kind of lot where it does not belong, and unlocked at that, Barry breaks in hoping to find something he can steal — and discovers he can't get out.

Hopkins is William, a clipped British accented wealthy doctor and owner of the car, who has jiggled Dolus into a sound-proof, bullet-proof, mobile signal-jammed model of justice delivery. Barry happens to be the seventh person to break into his car, and William is determined to make a lesson of him — even if that means taser-ing, starving, freezing, frying him, and letting him bleed of a self-inflicted gun shot wound.

William is remote controlling the SUV, and communicating with Barry through a dashboard device, plus cameras all through the vehicle. Exhausted of all the curses and options,

Barry finally gets talking to William.

As it turns out, William has a lot to say, about "scumbags like Barry". And Barry has a massive chip on his shoulder, about "elites like William".

Yarovsky has his finger on the political moment, you think? But no, the four cred-



ited screenwriters, working on an Argentinian film that is *Locked*'s inspiration, don't want to really Piketty their brains — probably realising the thin ground on which both Barry and William stand. Hence the skimming over every big and small cultural fissure roiling the American landscape.

But, the thing is, you can't work up feelings for Barry — Skarsgard has had too many weirdo roles, which seep into this one. Or for William, who gets barely a backstory, apart from the fact that he is from South Wales, insists his money is all his hard work, and loves classical music — a refined opposite hence to

the street smarts of Barry (street smarts being a word much used and abused in *Locked*).

When William takes Barry for a ride through the dark underbelly of the city, still remote controlling Dolus, there is a promise, of the film finally walking its talk. As there is when Hopkins makes an appearance in person, sliding into the driver's seat with his brand of chilly menace like second skin.

But even if Hopkins can run on fumes alone, *Locked* needed a steady supply of fuel, which went beyond words. Dolus, for example, is Latin for fraud. Are you impressed yet?

The Beats are Familiar

Khakee: The Bengal Chapter ★★

Director: Debatma Mandal
Cast: Prosenjit Chatterjee, Jeet, Ritwik Bhowmik, Chitragada Singh, Saswata Chatterjee, Joy Sengupta, Aadil Zafar Khan, Mimoh Chakraborty, Aakansha Singh, Shruti Das, Parambrata Chattopadhyay
Streaming on: Netflix

SHUBHRA GUPTA

WITH THE catchy title song going, 'ek aur rang bhi dekhiye Bengal ka', we are hopeful that this new Neeraj Pandey series, set in Calcutta/Kolkata, will actually be different.

The eight-part show starts with a kidnapping going wrong, and then the story begins unpacking its wares in right earnest: sloppy goons, sharp cops, a posse of politicians with

murky underground connections, nefarious activities involving dead bodies and organ harvesting.

A promising start quickly descends into predictability. The beats are familiar, the character types are even more so. Apart from the fact that the faces are mostly Bengali actors — some familiar, some not so — *Khakee: The Bengal Chapter* comes off as same old. And that's too bad, because the ensemble comprises some of the most popular actors working in Bengali, starting with top stars Prosenjit Chatterjee, Parambrata Chattopadhyay, and Jeet, amongst others.

As in *The Bihar Chapter* (2022), also created by Pandey, which was lifted by a clutch of stirring acts, especially from Avinash Tiwary, Ashtutosh Rana and Jatin Sama, we are given a tussle between mobsters-with-history and good-and-bad-cops. Which is fine, because cops-and-robbers will never go



out of vogue: all you need is a slap-up plot with enough edge. But that's not what we get here: even the Bengali dialogue is leavened with enough Hindi and English for us to feel comfortable, the patina of newness kept carefully in check.

Some of the casting choices have been made keeping familiarity in mind. Saswata Chatterjee playing a menacing bad guy is not

that new even for those who don't follow Bengali cinema: remember him as the creepy Bob Biswas in the Vidya Balan starrer *Kahaani*? Parambrata Chattopadhyay made his Bollywood debut as a smart cop in Sujoy Ghosh's 2012 delicious thriller: here he is again, playing a policeman. Chitragada Singh, as an ambitious politician, reminds you of her lovely idealistic young woman in

Sudhir Mishra's 2003 *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*, in her crumpled cotton saris. And Prosenjit Chatterjee's star turn as the powerful legacy studio owner in Vikramaditya Motwane's 2023 *Jubilee* is still top-of-mind-recall: here he plays a dodgy *neta*.

The action flashes back to the early '50s when Shankar Barua Bagha (Saswata Chatterjee) comes to the city as a boy with his mother, and carves his way to the top of the crime heap, displaying the kind of savagery required to run a hard gang. His faithful acolytes Sagar Talukdar and Ranjit Thakur (Ritwik Bhowmik and Aadil Zafar Khan) keep everything humming, keeping an eye on their own lower rungs, as well as the *netas* who use their services. As crafty politician Barun Roy who uses every trick in the book to keep ahead of the game, Prosenjit has his moments. Sadly, Parambrata is confined to a guest appearance: more of him would have done this Bengal chapter good. Jeet, as upright cop Arjun Maitra whose mission is to clean up his city — "not the city of joy but *bhoy* (fear)" — is effective too, but too many close-ups as

STREAMING WATCH LIST

BY ALAKA SAHANI



WICKED

JIOHOTSTAR
THIS IS the untold story of the witches of Oz. It features Cynthia Erivo as Elphaba, a young woman, misunderstood because of her unusual green skin, who is yet to discover her true power, and Ariana Grande as Glinda, a popular young woman, gilded by privilege, who is yet to discover her true heart. The two forge a friendship in this Jon M Chu-directed adaptation.



OPPENHEIMER

NETFLIX
A CINEMATIC epic, Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* won seven Oscars, including Best Picture. The 2023 film follows the story of physicist J Robert Oppenheimer, who spent years working with a team of scientists to develop the atomic bomb. Their work resulted in the world's first nuclear explosion in 1945, changing the course of history.



SKY FORCE

PRIME VIDEO
SKY FORCE reminds the audience of the 1965 Indo-Pak War, when India faced a devastating surprise attack. Wing Commander Ahuja leads a retaliatory strike, but Squadron Leader Vijaya goes missing after a heroic solo engagement against a superior enemy jet. Ahuja spends 23 years uncovering a cover-up, and ultimately securing posthumous recognition for Vijaya's sacrifice.



ANORA

JIOHOTSTAR
SWEEPING the Academy awards by winning in five categories, the much-acclaimed film revolves around Anora, a young woman from Brooklyn, who gets her chance at a Cinderella story when she impulsively marries the son of an oligarch. Its impressive cast features Mikey Madison, Mark Eydelshteyn, Yura Borisov and Karren Karagulian.

reaction shots slow things down.

Every time there's a combing operation, the goons mysteriously manage to get the upper hand. Ooh there's a mole amongst us, says a cop, with deep surprise: it's like no one's heard of bad eggs in the police department before. The banal bits weigh heavily on some of the interesting twists, and you are left wondering where so much of the cultural specificity of Bengal, which should have really made this thing sing, has vanished.

Does it have to do with the imperatives of streaming in India, to make everything palatable to everyone, even if that leads to flattened narratives? Whatever happened to taking creative risks in order to create the excitement which a show like this needs? Examples are not far: Netflix's own latest show, *Adolescence*, which has blown us all away, is set in a small British town, with its characters speaking in accents-and-cadences completely their own, without fearing if the audience will be alienated. Can we please have a show like that for Indian audiences? Or is that too tall an ask?

PLAYING TODAY

KKR vs RCB, Eden Gardens, 7:30 pm.
 ■ Live on JioStar and Star Sports network.

PREVIEW: KKR VS RCB

KKR bank on their mystery spinners to deliver goods



Varun Chakravarty during a practice session at Eden Gardens. Partha Paul

SAYAK DUTTA
KOLKATA, MARCH 21

WHILE PREPARATIONS are on full swing for the IPL opener as well as the glittering opening ceremony, the weather in Kolkata might have other ideas. On Friday, practice sessions had to be cut short due to rain. The Meteorological Department predicted that thunderstorms and rain are likely in parts of West Bengal till Saturday owing to favourable wind patterns and strong moisture incursion from the Bay of Bengal.

At the time of the match, the rain threat lessens but still reads at 6% probability of thundershowers at night which might lead to a shortened match.

Kolkata's leadership transition

Even after retaining a majority of the players from their third trophy-winning season, KKR are firmly in transition with huge changes in leadership positions.

Ajinkya Rahane has replaced Shreyas Iyer in the captaincy hot seat while mentor Gautam Gambhir took up the India head coach position and was replaced by former Chennai Super Kings icon Dwayne Bravo. Coupled with the loss of Phil Salt and Mitchell Starc, the Kolkata-based franchise will look to sidestep their tendency of slumping after winning a title.

They won the trophy in 2012 and 2014; they finished 7th in 2013 and 5th in 2015.

Even though his previous captaincy record is nothing to write home about, with the Mumbai player captaining 25 matches in the star-studded league and winning just 9, with Rahane as their skipper, Kolkata might just have the experienced hand it needs to keep the ship on course.

The batter has had a tremendous domestic season in 2024, leading Mumbai to the Irani Cup and Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy titles. In the SMAT T20s, he even topped the batting charts, smashing 469 runs in 8 innings at an average of 58.62 and a strike rate of 164.56. With Bravo, KKR have roped in a player who has a habit of winning. The West Indian all-rounder has won 17 franchise titles, including the IPL with Chennai Super Kings as both player and coach. If he can inject that 'winning mentality' into the current crop of Knights, the franchise will be looking at a glorious future.

Chakravarty, a vital cog

The Knights have lost Starc to the Delhi Capitals in the auctions which has left them wanting in the pacers' department with the ageing Anrich Nortje, Harshit Rana and Spencer Johnson leading the lines. But the Purple and Gold franchise's real bowling strength comes in the form of the deadly duo of Varun Chakravarty and Sunil Narine, who played a huge part in securing the franchise's 3rd title last year.

Chakravarty, who was a vital cog in India's recent victorious Champions Trophy triumph, was the second-highest wicket-taker in last year's IPL with 21 scalps while the economical Narine stifled the opposition batters and took 17 wickets in 14 innings at an economy of 6.69, averaging just 21.64. With IPL introducing the new rule where a team has the option of using a second ball after the 11th over with the umpire's permission in case dew plays spoilsport, expect KKR's spin combo to be their most lethal weapon.

Can Salt deliver?

RCB made some shrewd buys in the mega auctions securing big names like Salt, who they bought for Rs 11.5 crore after the English batter wasn't retained by the KKR franchise, as well as forking out Rs 12.5 crore for Aussie pacer Josh Hazlewood.

To add to their batting power of Virat Kohli and Salt, they also recruited big hitters like Liam Livingstone and Tim David who will help them shore up their middle and lower order. The franchise also braces itself for a change in leadership. New captain in Rajat Patidar is relatively inexperienced in a leadership role, but he will have the comfort of relying on the advice of players like Kohli, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Hazlewood, Salt and Krunal Pandya.

The million-dollar baby turns 18, leaving its immense footprint on the game and beyond. *The Indian Express* captures its vaulting growth as a standalone sporting spectacle, commercial colossus, super brand, cultural phenomenon and an Indian summer reality.



RAIN OR RUNS?

Dark clouds loom in the sky as the players train on the eve of the opening match of the 2025 IPL, between Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bengaluru, at the Eden Gardens. Partha Paul

How does the broadcaster keep viewers glued to the screens

From background storylines to hyping up turning points to strategically keeping packages ready for dead matches, the official broadcasters are armed with many tricks so that IPL pervades all senses

SANDEEP DWIVEDI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

BACK IN 2014, late one evening, while watching a one-sided IPL game on television, seasoned broadcaster, and present CEO (Sports) at JioStar, Sanjog Gupta made a snap decision that he has stood by till date. It was the visuals of the crowd leaving the stadium, captured dutifully by his camera person, that had got him thinking.

Those in the business of keeping fans glued to the seats at the venue, or sofas in the living room, can't afford to advertise the fading interest in the game. That day the one-time standard 'dead match' self-defeating frame breached its last.

"That's the first thing I shut down. There's a blanket rule on our broadcasts: you will not show a fan leaving the stadium. We don't want anyone leaving the broadcast," says Sanjog, a day before IPL turns 18. The official broadcaster JioStar wants to maximize their viewership to cover the close to Rs 50,000 crore they paid for the five-year IPL broadcasting deal.

In these media-rich times of endless options it is not easy to earn the undivided attention of cricket fans. However, there is potential, since unlike the international contests, in IPL as Sanjog puts it "Indians win every night". If not Rohit, it's Virat. If not Dhoni, it's Shreyas. If not Sanju, it's KL. If not Axar, it's Pant.

But still there are challenges. Apps on mobile screen screaming for attention, even cricket junkies have fingers that itch to press the remote control button. Serials, shopping and sleep vs Cricket – it is never a one-sided battle.

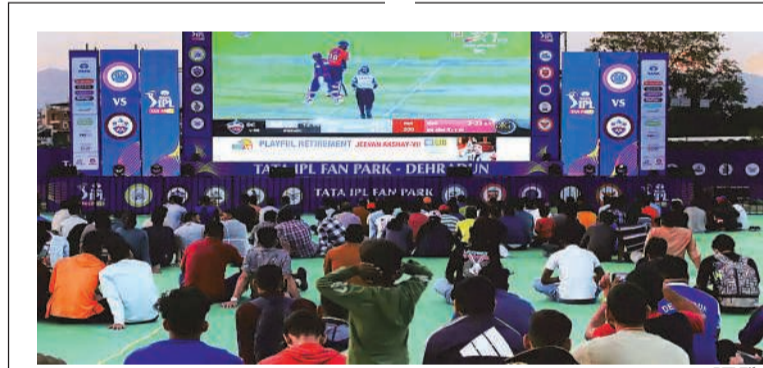
Sanjog has been part of the dog-eat-dog world of sports broadcasting long enough to know it. He talks about the pains he and his team take so that 'no one moves or gives up' on the game. He uses an interesting phrase to make his point. He jokes he has a copyright for it.

"Our objective is to maximize viewer engagement by creating 'micro-moments of awesomeness'... Yeah, it's Sanjog Gupta copyright but now widely followed across the JioStar broadcasts," he chuckles before getting brass-tacks.

The constant search for 'awesomeness' isn't just about the wait for an audacious stroke, a dream ball or a jaw-dropping catch to unfold. It could even be Rohit's endearing 'tapori' chat with his mates caught by the stump mic. Or Sunil Gavaskar's expression of organic disappointment, the 'stupid, stupid, stupid' comment during Border Gavaskar Trophy that went on to inspire copy writers in an advertising company with a travel app account. It's no longer about just capturing the eye-ball, it's about arresting the mind, not allowing it to think beyond what's here on the telly.

'Eventifying every occasion'

Sanjog says that they are in the "business of eventifying every occasion". By that he means every ball, each over and the games. For most TV networks, sports, read cricket, is the bread and butter. As for IPL, it isn't a loaf, it is sliced bread. One game is divided into 20



BEFORE THE TOSS TO AFTER THE LAST BALL

Broadcasters do their homework and are on the ball to ensure viewership doesn't drop during the course of an IPL match

BEFORE THE GAME: Research team compiles a document of key statistics, possible narratives, details about the stadium and pitch, match-ups of rivals and club history of cricketers.

BEFORE FIRST BALL: To get viewers to settle down in front of the TV, broadcasters build anticipation. For example, if Trent Boult, a known wicket-taker in the first over, is playing, clips of his past dismissals are shown. Promos of big hitters Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head are on air before the start of an SRH match.

MID-MATCH: For example if it is a match between Mumbai Indians and

Royal Challengers Bengaluru, once Jasprit Bumrah finishes his first spell and if Virat Kohli is still batting, the producer pulls out archival footage of a young Bumrah taking his first IPL wicket – Kohli beaten by the bowler with the unusual action.

POST MATCH: After a CSK game, MS Dhoni's 'on-field post-match tutorials' for the youngsters have become a regular feature of IPL coverage.

DEAD-GAME SCENARIO: 'Dead Match' packages are compiled well in advance, like the clips of the best catches taken in the tournament.

ENS

overs, 120 balls – each occasion comes with a tantalizing '... to be continued' teaser.

This needs serious pre-event planning. It is a fascinating process that combines arts, science and commerce – psychology, mathematics and economics. Sanjog gives a behind-the-scenes tour of the IPL coverage. "The producer and director are the custodians of visual and audio storytelling for the match... You need a mix between 'micro moments of awesomeness' and enriched storytelling that engages viewers," says the JioStar CEO.

It all starts with the network's research team compiling a document of 30-odd pages that has key statistics of players, possible narratives, details about the stadium and pitch. It also mentions the stage of the tournament, match-up of rivals and club history of cricketers.

Armed with the abridged version of this research document, the commentators get slots. "The roster is designed to get the balance right. There are those commentators who deliver quotable quotes, they are paired with someone who

can fashion the storyline well. This is why there is always a storyteller, or "caller," in the commentary box and experts who add either color or expertise," says Sanjog.

Sidhu-Sehwag tag team

For the 2025 season, JioStar has signed up the charmingly soft-spoken Kiwi Kane Williamson. There are also plans to pair motor-mouth Navjot Sidhu and one-liner expert Virender Sehwag. It's a recipe for a parallel storyline running the commentary box.

Then comes the plan to fire the first salvo, the pursuit to get the viewers at 'hello'. That again is a tough task. Broadcasters believe that fans take their time to settle in front of television. There's popcorn to be heated, beers to be cooled and friends to call. So how do you get the fan in the kitchen to rush to the couch at Ravi Shastri's Ladies and Gentlemen's shout out?

Over to Sanjog, "Say someone like Trent Boult (New Zealand and Mumbai Indian pacer) is playing. He gets wickets in the first

over. So visuals of him getting early wickets are rolled out from the second or third ball of his first over. Clips of his past dismissals, Hawkeye trajectory... all pre-produced. Similarly, we will promote Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head (SRH big-hitters) as an opening pair that demands attention from ball one because they're aggressive from the start," he says.

Building a sense of anticipation goes a long way in fans staying tuned. So in case during the MI vs RCB game, Jasprit Bumrah has finished his initial burst and Kohli is still at the crease, the producer reaches out of the archival footage. Soon on screen will be a young Bumrah over the moon after taking his first IPL wicket – the legend of the game beaten by the bowler with unusual action. "Kya Bumrah is baar King Kohli ko out kar sakeenge?" – the commentator is background sounding like the eerily creaking door from a suspense movie.

But what about the games with no hope in hell to generate 'edge of seat' excitement. The broadcasters are prepared for that eventuality too. It is for such days, the 'Dead Match' packages are compiled well in advance. "If a match is dead, like 100 required in 3 overs, we shift the conversation to something interesting to viewers, unrelated to the match result. It could be about the best catches taken in the tournament," says Sanjog.

In regular games, the more time-tested way to keep the viewers tied to the game is what broadcasters call "the elements of pre-emption and prediction in commentary". One is about assuring the fans that all's not lost in a seemingly 'finished' game and other is about a well-experienced pundit sharing an educated guess about the outcome of the game. This is another case of the broadcaster trying to get into the fan's mind, pointing to the sliver of light inside the dark tunnel.

Sanjog shares an anecdote from the 2015 World Cup to explain this. "It is from the India vs Australia semi-final we lost. India lost three quick wickets and was chasing 300-plus. It looked like the game was over. Dhoni comes out to bat, and we put out a statistics: In 21 matches, Dhoni remained unbeaten, India hadn't lost. Despite the situation, this gave hope," he said.

Dhoni did give hope, till he finally got run-out. In IPL, these days, even when Chennai Super Kings have no chance to win, televisions don't get switched off around the country or the crowd don't head for the stadium gates. With him all set to walk into the sunset, they want to savour every moment.

Post-game strategy

The broadcasters are too smart to have missed this trend. Post-game, Dhoni's 'on-field post-match tutorials' to the young have become a regular feature of IPL coverage. Sanjog's producers still don't show fans leaving, they know that the 'micro moments of awesomeness' can unfold even after the game has ended and awards are distributed. Dhoni imparting wisdom to the next generation too is an event.

In IPL, if broadcasters have their way, you can't check out anytime or leave the stadium.

In Focus: Motu, Patlu, Gen Gold & Gen Bold

Cameras that cater to different demographics will make IPL viewing ultra-curated.

OVER TO MOTU-PATLU

From their fictional town of Furfuringanagar, the cartoon characters *Motu and Patlu* will be travelling to the IPL commentary box this season. Also among the new signings for the season are former stars, Kane Williamson and India's dashing opener Shikhar Dhawan.

The animated 3D figures of the kurta-wearing bald desi comics will be interacting with real cricketers during the live coverage of the game to cater to the younger fans. "We noticed many kids watch with their families, so we're creating programming and live feeds appealing to kids," says Sanjog Gupta, CEO (Sports) at JioStar.

What could be a hit pair of the season would be the Navjot Singh Sidhu and Virender Sehwag combination that JioStar is planning to unleash on the fans.

CUSTOMISED COVERAGE

Ever wondered why the IPL visuals for each region across the country are different? That's because the broadcasters believe in customization. So in case RCB is playing CSK, those in Chennai might have Dhoni on screen and it will be Kohli in Bangalore. As for the rest of the country, they might be seeing fans screaming into the cameras at that very moment.

"On TV, we focus on Hindi, English, and Southern languages: Tamil, Telugu, Kannada. Two-thirds of the viewership is in Hindi, 25 per cent Tamil, Kannada, and Telugu and English is 7 per cent," Sanjog says. In a country of 1.4 billion these are big numbers worth investing in. Production, commentators, language and narrative too are different. If you watch CSK in Chennai the cameras would focus more on players in yellow. Though, Kohli can never be airbrushed from any coverage.

GEN GOLD, GEN BOLD

With the stalwarts gradually moving towards the exit gate, there is a need to give the younger stars more screen time. This is the thought behind JioStar's Gen Gold and Gen Bold theme. "Gen Gold references Dhoni, Kohli, and Rohit, who are in their sunset years, and there's a desire to see them do well because of the joy they've brought. Gen Bold represents players like Hardik, Rishabh, Shubman Gill, and KL Rahul, who play differently, with more audacity. There's a passing of the baton in this 18th edition, where Gen Gold is present, but Gen Bold is taking its share of the spotlight," says Sanjog.

SANDEEP DWIVEDI

