# The YouTube Election

This time, YouTube has emerged as the primary channel of digital campaigning for political parties, leaders and critics DEEP DIVE >> 4

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### **Inside Story**

### Deep Dive P4&5

India's Spice Companies Feel the Heat

■ Vanishing Vanaspati

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Padmaavat Ke Director-Saab, a Good Dose of Secular Feminism This Time?

Got Your Digital Doppelgänger Yet?

### Techtonic P8

Can Chennai Turn into a Hub for GCCs?

Shellfish

Leisure P9 ■ Don't Clam Up! Celebrate

# World Play P10

Man City Throw Down the Gauntlet

■ The Other Power Play at IPL, **Between Owner & Captain** 





**Nod for Buying RCap** 

**Biz**; Conditions Apply

Can't pledge cos' shares: Regulator

Sangita.Mehta@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: The insurance regulator approved the Hinduja Group's acquisition of Reliance Capital's life, ge-

**Coverage Plan** 

NCLT has directed IIHL to

For lenders this implies

IIHL to Pay Lenders ₹211 cr ➤> 3

a 40% recovery

pay lenders by May 27

NCLT has

said that

payment

to lenders

is subject

approvals

to all

neral and health insuran-

ce businesses on condi-

tion it will not pledge sha-

res of the companies, said

people with knowledge of

the matter. The Hinduja Group is yet to receive the

approval of the Reserve

Bank of India (RBI) and

the Competition Com-

mission of India (CCI) for

the deal to be concluded,

IRDAI gave its approval

on Friday evening, ad-

ding that "the shares of

the insurer shall not be

pledged or encumbered'

without the regulator's

the people said.

### EYE ON 10M HOUSEHOLDS UNDER ROOFTOP SOLAR SCHEME

# 100,000 Hands to be Trained to Put Solar Panels in Homes

Government is also looking to train 50,000 vendors for entrepreneurship

#### Shilpa.Samant @timesgroup.com

New Delhi: The government is working on readying a 100,000strong workforce skilled in installation and management of solar panels to support its plan of helping 10 million homes run on solar energy.

People aware of the development said the ministries of renewable energy and skill development and entrepreneurship have jointly framed a "skilling plan" for the 'PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana', a government rooftop solar project that aims to help households generate 300 units of electricity thro-

in February this year, offers subsidies of up to Rs

#### **Green Power Play** PM Surya Ghar: It offers subsidies of up **Muft Bijli Yojana** to ₹78,000 to those launched willing to install solar in February power generating units Installed rooftop solar

"The number of people to be trained may be increased, depending upon the requirement," ugh grid-connected solar one of the persons cited earlier, said, adding that state-owned The scheme, launched RECLtd, which is also the nodal agency for the revamped rooftop solar programme, is likely to col-

78,000 to those willing to install laborate with centres like the train 50,000 vendors for entrethe solar power generating units. National Power Training Institute and the National Skill Development Corporation for this.

> another challenge for such a portal, unlike the current syscale of implementation would stem of registering with the disbe the need for a large number tribution companies. of vendors. An official said the government is also looking to Vendor Registrations Soon → 7

# **Measures in Place** to Meet Peak Power Demand, says Govt

The government has taken adequate measures to meet the estimated 235 GW peak power demand in May and 240 GW in June, according to an official statement. >> 3

preneurship.

According to the official, more vendors are expected to register Besides trained manpower, on the national rooftop solar

# **Wanted More Women** in Taxi, Logistics Lane

Staffing cos and fleet operators see surge in demand for female drivers, delivery staff

#### Lijee Philip & Rica Bhattacharyya

Mumbai: Taxi operators and logistics providers, who traditionally employed men as drivers, are increasingly hiring women to drive cars and commercial vehicles and deliver ecommerce orders on two-wheelers.

Demand for female drivers is growing faster than that for male personnel — 20% against 14% year-on-year — though on a low base, according to data from staffing services provi-

der Teamlease. Staffing companies and fleet operators said they are facing a shortage of female drivers to fill the growing

One of the reasons for this, they said, is the work from office mandate that more companies are adopting.

### Higher Retention Rate ►► 7

Demand for female drivers growing at 20% YOY vs 14% for

comprise only 1% of 1.7-2m pool and 6-7m two-wheeler riders

Women

male drivers Most of the female drivers/riders found in southern and western parts of India

# India Inc Hunts for **New Cyber Warriors**

Roping in experts for cloud and network security, incident response

#### Brinda Sarkar & Sreeradha D Basu

Bengaluru: Corporate India is on the hunt for cybersecurity talent.

Amid data breaches, progressive regulatory expectations and introduction of generative artificial intelligence platforms making security controls and processes vulnerable, companies are beefing up their cybersecurity teams across le- Top Priority for Biz Continuity → 7

# On the Defensive

38% organisations feel highly exposed to cyber risks: PwC survey



vels. They are hiring experts in threat intelligence, security operations, incident response, cloud security, network security, data archival and compliance, among other areas.

### APRIL BRINGS GOOD NEWS

# **Consumer Goods** Winning Majority **Votes During Polls**

Weekends spoiling the party in April-June qtr due to 7 days of store closures for elections

#### Writankar.Mukherjee @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: Chief executives of leading consumer goods manufacturers said demand for necessities has bucked the uncertain trend that's typical in an election season, growing at a record pace. However, retailers said the sevenphase, April 19-June 1 polls with voting days around weekends has led to some disruptions despite the solid recovery in March and April.

The heatwave, early summer vacations and political rallies have boosted sales of cooling appliances as well as out-of-home consumption of small packs of biscuits, juices and snacks, apart from packaged water, an absolute necessity. AC maker Blue Star managing director B Thiagarajan said on its earnings call last week that it can be difficult to anticipate demand during an election season.

From the fourth week of March, there was a surge in demand and AC sales shot up 70-90% in April from the year earlier. Leading biscuit maker Parle Products senior category head B Krishna an snacks and chips have surged Rao told ET there has been a 15-18% jump in sales of Rs 5 and Rs 10 packs of biscuits and snacks since April due to higher out-of-home consumption led by political rallies.

### **Successful Campaign**

AC, air coolers, smaller packs of biscuits, packaged water and snacks have grown at high pace since April

Sales Boost due to heatwave. early summer vacations and political rallies



monsoons start and the election results come, things will look much better. So we are going to make it a mission to make sure that we get the top line to grow much faster VARUN BERRY, MD, Britannia

Indian snacks and chips have surged with sales growing at 12-13% in the last 45 days compared to 6-7%

company saw value brands like Parle G, Krack Jack and Monaco sequentially growing at a faster pace. The head of a leading packaged food FMCG firm said Rs 10-20 packs of traditional Indiwith sales growing at 12-13% in

"These

March were

struggling to

growat 4-5%,"

he said. The

Politically-sensitive Localities ►► 7

out-of-home consumption.

the last 45 days as compared to

6-7% sequentially due to higher

# **KEJRIWAL TARGETS PRIME MINISTER**

# 'Modi Will Arrest All Oppn Leaders'

A day after Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal got interim bail, the AAP convenor accused PM Narendra Modi of attempting to "crush" not only the opposition but also his own party's leadership to

propagate the idea of "One Nation, One Leader". Addressing a press conference, he said: With this arrest you have given a message to the country if I can arrest Keiriwal, I can arrest you also, I can arrest anyone." >>> 2

# IN THE D2C MARKETPLACE...

# Investments in "Not my Parents' Brands" are #Trending

Gen-Z focussed cos, setting themselves apart from older consumers, hot picks

> Jessica.Rajan @timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Investors in the increasingly crowded direct-to-consumer (D2C) space are following a new thesis for placing their bets: to back young brands that focus on Gen Z (those born between 1997-2012) and have nothing to do with incumbent brands popular among older consumers.

At Titan Capital run by Snapdeal cofounders Kunal Bahl and Rohit Bansal, this unwritten investment thesis has a name - "not my parents brand". Several such brands have emerged over the past few years across food and beverages, home furnishing, fashion and footwear, oral care, and luggage, including Perfora, Mokobara, Nasher Miles, Wakefit, Sleepy-Cat, Hocco and NIC. This phenomenon

### Hocco and NIC D2C startups raised nearly \$1.8 billion

**POPULAR GEN Z BRANDS:** 

Perfora, Mokobara, Nasher

Miles, Wakefit, SleepyCat,

**BuZy Being** 

Different

In Q1 of 2024, D2C startups received \$395 million through 45 transactions

in 2023 across

113 deals

innovation uniqueness and social standing drive Gen Z's preferences

Design,

No emotional connection with traditional, incumbent brands

sectors such as automotive and smartp-

hones, Bahl said. "Consumers are increasingly gravitating towards new-generation EV brands, motivated not only by environmental concerns but also by a desire to differentiate themselves from their parents' preferences,"

he told ET.

Niche Categories ▶▶ 3

# STRONG PERFORMANCE

# ABB India Q1 Profit Up 87% at ₹460 cr

revenues came in at ₹3,080 crore, up 28% from a year ago. >> 3



of not using pa-

rents' brands is

visible in even

Electrification and automation major ABB India has posted an over 87% rise in net profit at ₹460 crore in the quarter to March, on the back of higher revenues. The company follows a January to December financial year. During the guarter, consolidated

REUTERS

### **RBI, CCI APPROVAL PENDING** CO TO SHIFT OPS TO KRUTRIM AI Hindujas Get IRDAI Ola Says Goodbye to MS over a Pronoun

Move in response to LinkedIn blocking Aggarwal's post

# **Our Bureau**

Bengaluru: The Ola group of companies, which spans ride-hailing and EV manufacturing, will snap ties with Microsoft's Azure cloud and begin using the cloud service of its sister firm Krutrim AI, founder Bhavish Aggarwal said on Saturday. The aggressive stance comes as a riposte to Microsoft subsidiary LinkedIn blocking a post by the Ola founder on May 6. In a post on the professional networking site, Aggarwal had termed the usage of the pronoun 'they' an "illness", prompting LinkedIn to take it down on the grounds that it fell afoul of its community policies.

Anti-Azure Posts by Aggarwal ➤> 3 **Souring Ties** 

Ola moved to the Azure platform in 2017, also collaborated on connected car

days after Krutrim Al infrastructure

opened up cloud and services for businesses

Move comes





### Contest, in Malmo, Sweden. RELATED REPORTS ▶ 7

# Luxe Car Cos Keep It Cool Inside with Advanced Glass Coatings Merc, Audi and Volvo are using thermally insulated glass tech to prevent excess heat buildup in cabin in harsh summer

Lijee.Philip@timesgroup.com

approval, according to one of the persons cited.

Mumbai: Automakers are using advanced glass coatings to keep vehicle cabins cool, alleviating the air-conditioning load as summer sweeps India, sending temperatu-

res past 45°C in some cities. The

Windshield

up 8% and

total glass

12% over

years

surface area

the past few

area has gone

surface areas and thermal loads grow with the shift toward larger models requiring increased battery pack space. With glass typically comprising

hield area has in-25-30% of a vehicle's surface area, creased 8% and total glass surface is up 12% These solar-reflective

> They absorb solar infrared radiation to reduce heat

SUPPLIERS: Asahi, Saint-Gobain and

developed specialised solar-reflective coatings incorporating ultra-thin layers of metal oxides such as silver,

> parent metallised coatings absorb solar infrared

zinc and tin. These trans-

with vehicle electrification and enhanced safety features, said

Saint-Gobain and Webasto offer specialised automotive glazing products. Mercedes equips select top-end

and 1991, respectively, perform during the stage re-

hearsal of the Grand Final of the 2024 Eurovision Song

models such as the EQS 580 sedan, GLS SUV, Maybach GLS 600, Maybach S680 and Maybach S580 with "acoustic comfort packages" fitted with infrared-absorbing laminated glass. "Not only does this special gla-

zing block harmful UV rays, it reduces exterior noise penetration and prevents excessive heat build-up in the cabin, even during India's harshest summers," said Santosh Iyer, MD, Mercedes-Benz India.

#### as cars have become bigger, accorpush comes as vehicle sizes, glass rising consistently with increased insulated glass technologies. sunroof adoption, moderating the ding to Jato Dynamics estimates. Leading suppliers like Asahi, sun's fierce heat with glazing is Automotive glass suppliers have vehicles such as SUVs and electric becoming critical, car makers said. Over the past few

years, average winds-

radiation to reduce interior temperatures. Amid rising global tempecoatings include ultra-thin ratures, the role of advanced glass layers of metal oxides such coatings is a must-have solution to beat the searing summer heat. as silver, zinc and tin Their widespread adoption aligns

> Luxury car makers such as Mercedes, Audi, Volvo, BMW have

been prioritising these thermally- Heat-reflecting Windshields Deployed → 3

MODI SEEKING VOTES FOR SHAH AS HE WILL RETIRE AFTER TURNING 75 IN 2025: KEJRIWAL

# Modi Will Jail All Opposition Leaders And Then End Politics of BJP Netas: Kejriwal

**Our Political Bureau** 

New Delhi: A day after Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal got interim bail to campaign for the Lok Sabha elections, the AAP convenor accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of attempting to "crush" not only the opposition but also his own party's leadership to propagate the idea of "One Nation, One Leader".

Addressing a press

conference, which resembled an election rally with supporters crowding AAP headquarters on Deen Dayal Upadhyay tion One Leader'. He wants to fi-Marg, Kejriwal said: "Why did you arrest Kejriwal? With this arrest you have given a message to the country — if I can arrest Kejriwal, I can arrest you also, I can id, adding: "If they win the elecarrest anyone."

"This mission is called 'One Na- Thackeray, Tejaswi Yaday, MK hajan ji, Murli Manohar Joshi ji Krishna Nagar,



POLL Kejriwal and Mann during a road show in New Delhi-IANS

nish all leaders through this. The entire opposition will be put behind bars and then he will finish the politics of BJP leaders," he sation, you take it in writing on an He said the Prime Minister was affidavit from me, Mamata didi hind bars. I am here to beg from 140 crore - save my country, save my India from this

dictatorship."

Sabha MP Sande-

Flanked by the top leadership of his party, inclu-Shah will take ding Punjab chiover from Modi the nextyear; Yogi Bhagwant Mann. Rajya will be

disposed of

like Advani, ep Pathak and Joshi and Delhi ministers others, says Gopal Rai, Atishi Delhi CM Saurabh Kejriwal said: Bharadwaj, "They ask us who is the PM can-

didate of the INDIA bloc? Today, I ask the BJP - who will be your PM? Next year on September 17, ji had made a rule that anyone

Stalin - everybody will be be- and Yashwant Sinha ji. If their government comes to power, within two months they will dispose of Yogi. Then who will become PM? Amit Shah. Modi is not seeking votes for himself but for Amit Shah. But will Amit Shah fulfil the guarantees of Modi?"

> Trying to address the BJP's demand that he quit and not try to run the government from jail, Kejriwal said: "It wasn't any greed for power or chief minister's chair that I didn't quit. It is my fight against the dictatorial powers. It will become so easy for them - they lose an election, imprison the CM and make him quit and the government falls. In fact, Hemant Soren ji shouldn't have resigned. He should have run the

government from jail." Kejriwal began the day with a vi-Modi ji will be 75 years old. Modi sit to a Hanuman temple with his wife. This was followed by the who is above 75 will retire. They press conference. Later, he held on a very dangerous mission. will be behind bars, Uddhav retired Advani ji, Sumitra Ma-roadshows in Mehrauli and

### AFTER AIYAR'S REMARK THAT PAK BE TREATED WITH CAUTION

# Vote Bank Politics Kept Cong From Acting Against Pak: PM

**Our Political Bureau** 

New Delhi: In the wake of Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's remarks that Pakistan should be treated with caution as it also has the atom bomb. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday that Congress did not act against the neighbouring country due to the fear of losing its vote bank (read Muslims) in India.

"Congress repeatedly tries to scare our country. They say tread cautiously, Pakistan has an atom bomb. These virtually dead people are killing the minds of the people too. Congress has this attitude they talk about Pakistan's bomb when the situation there is such that it Jharkhand. cannot handle the bomb. It is out to sell it and there are no buyers. People know the quality is worthless and doesn't sell. Due to this weak attitude of Congress the people of Kashmir faced terrorism for 60 vears, and the country faced many



terror attacks," the prime minister said at a public meeting in Odisha. Campaigning in Odisha, Modi held election rallies in Kandhamal, Bolangir and Bargarh. He al-

instead of teaching a lesson to terrorists, Congress used to hold negotiations with them. They did not haperpetrators. And why? Because its Assembly polls along with the 21 Congress and INDI Alliance felt Lok Sabha seats.

that if we take action our vote bank will get antagonized," Modi said. May 11 also marks the anniversary of the Pokhran-II nuclear tests. Modi recalled the event and its impact. "On this day, 26 years ago, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government conducted the nuclear tests at Pokhran, showing how a patriotic dis-

pensation functions," he said. Former union minister Mani Shankar Aiyar had said in April that Pakistan should be treated with caution as it is also a nuclear power. Congress has distanced it-

self from his remarks. During his election campaign, Modi also slammed Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, saying so addressed a rally in Chatra, he is throwing a challenge that the BJD leader will not be able to name "The country cannot forget that the districts of the state. He said the people have suffered for several years under BJD rule and sought "just five years" to set things right ve the courage to act against the in Odisha. The state is also holding

# Will Not Visit Raj Bhavan, Guv

Kolkata: Demanding the resignation of West Bengal governor CV Ananda Bose, chief minister Mamata Banerjee said on Saturday that she would never go to the Raj Bhawan or sit next to Bose as she

Banerjee's statement comes in the backdrop of an allegation of molestation levelled against him by a female employee of the Raj Bhawan. Speaking at an election rally at Hooghly, the Trinamool Congress supremo said she would never visit the governor at the Raj Bhawan. "If he calls me, I will stand on the road and talk to him,' she said, adding: "Hon'ble governor, you must resign. Who are you

Everything is not out yet, the CM said, referring to the allegation. "I have received a full video and a pen drive. It is full of scandals, several

### CITING DIFFERENT REASONS TO SUPPORT UBT, MINORITIES SEEN SUPPORTING THE PARTY ACROSS THE STATE

# Muslims Shun Apathy for Uddhav Sena

Kumar.Anshuman @timesgroup.com

Pune: In February, while addressing a party worker meeting in Mumbai, former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray said the Muslim community is coming with Shiv Sena because their brand of Hindutva is different from BJP's brand of Hindutva. "Our Hindutva strives to light stoves in the homes while BJP's Hindutva works on burning houses," he said.

Three months later, his words have found resonance on the ground. For the first time, Muslims are siding in large numbers with Uddhav Thackeray with many saying they feel reassured of equal treatment under his faction of Shiv Sena.

son is emerging as the new symbol of inclusive politics in Maharashtra, beating even Congress. Abdul Karim Salar, president of Iq- Thackeray among ra Educational Society in Jalgaon Muslimscanbefelt

that runs several educational institu-

ray. "Bala Saheb Thackeray used to give inciting speeches which made Muslims uncomfortable. With Uddhav Thackeray, I have felt that he never spoke anything to incite communal conflicts," he said.

In Jalgaon Lok Sabha seat, BJP's Smita Uday Wagh is pitted against Karan Pawar of Shiv Sena (UBT) faction.

Salar feels that for the first time

Muslims would line up to vote for Uddhav Thackray's Shiv Sena in Jalgaon. "The recent statements by the PM and this socalled numbers of increasing Muslim population have not gone well within the community. Last time even a percen-

tage of Muslims voted for

(this time)," he said. The rising popularity of Uddhav across the state. Pe-

MUNGER

perspective vis a vis Uddhav Thacke- rity community cite different rea- blast of 2008. "There is some resentsons for it.

> tral zone president of Shiv Sena (UBT), is an old Shiv Sainik. When Eknath Shinde parted ways with the party, he went to meet Uddhav Thackray. "I was the vice president of Shiv Sena minority wing. I told Uddhav ji to restructure the minority wing. He said there will not be such a wing as there can't be any division among Shiv Saniks. This tou-

> > ched my heart," Asif said. Malegaon comes under the Dhule parliamentary seat where BJP is pitted against Congress. "Even if there was a Shiv Sena candidate, people from minority communities would have voted in large numbers," he added.

> > > cial activist based in Malegaon who also writes for Urdu newspapers, said Muslims in the area have moved ahead

Khalil Abbas, a so-

ment among the people as those accu-Mohammad Asif, Malegaon cen- sed are out. But society has moved beyond this," he said.

According to Abbas, there are reasons for Muslim community to repose faith in Uddhav Thackeray. "When he was the CM, there was this controversy about the use of loudspeakers for Azaan. Despite several allegations, he didn't ban use of loudspeakers. This was a surprise from Muslim community and they took it positively," he said.

Abdul Hussain Malik, 31, who runs a steel furniture shop in Dhule, said Uddhav Thackeray speaks of 'Sarva dharma sambhav'. "Sabko sath lekar chalne ki baat karte hain (He talks of inclusivity taking everyone

along)," he said. Malik recalls that during the Palghar lynching incident in 2020 when two Sadhus got killed, several political parties tried to give it a communal colour. "As a chief minister, he stood firm with reality and denied any communal angle in the case. We felt good as someone is there who considers from the Malegaon every citizen as equal," he said.

### SANDIPAN BHUMRE HAS BEEN FIELDED BY SENA (SHINDE)

# AIMITMI Jaicei Tries to Keep Seat From Khaire of UBT

Krishna.Kumar@timesgroup.com

Aurangabad: For overfour decades, Chandrakant Khaire raised the slogan-Khan pahije ki baan pahije-—to project himself as a Hindutva leader out to protect the interests of the community in the communallysensitive Lok Sabha seat of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (formerly Aurangabad).

The slogan—meaning do you want a Khan or do you want a bow and arrow-did seem to work, for Khaire won four Lok Sabha terms from 1999 to 2019 as a nominee of the (undivided) Shiva Sena, which had the bow and arrow symbol.

The polarisation of the electorate though did not favour him in the 2019 election, which he lost to All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AI-MIM) candidate Imtiaz Jaleel.

Khaire and Jaleel are once gain pitted against each other, but this time the dynamics have changed. Khaire has ditched his pet slogan and turned 'secular'.

"He came here and told us that we should forget whatever has happened in the past," Sayed Anis, who runs a provision store in Moti Karanja area of Aurangabad city, said referring to the communal clashes the city suffered in the past.

Khaire is contesting the polls this time as a nominee of Shiv Sena (UBT).

Khaire suffered a narrow defeat in 2019, losing to Jaleel by around 4,500 votes. The defeat was largely seen as an aberration as the Hindu community vote that Khaire counted on got has done good work. divided between him and Harshvardhan Jadhay, a former MLA from Kannad. Jaleel, on the other hand, also got the dalit community votes as he had fought the election in alliance with Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi.

The presence of two more prominent candidates has also turned the contest multicornered this time. Jadhav is contesting as an independent and state minister Sandipan Bhumre has been fielded by Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde).

would be able to defeat Jaleel this time around, things have changed considerably on the ground. Jaleel has now made inroads in-

to the constituency and people across the board are lauding his

VOTE SHARE (%)

8.23

2019

Winner

**ARJUN MUNDA** 

BJP

This sentiment may get Kachchap

some votes as she is being seen as the

voice of the tribals fighting for their

# **AURANGABAD** Lok Sabha Results VOTE SHARE (%) INC 30.48

2009 Winner CHANDRAKANT KHAIRE 2014

Winner 52.99 CHANDRAKANT KHAIRE

32.09 2019 Winner **IMTIAZ JALEEL** SYED "In so many years

we haven't got an

MP like Jaleel, he is building a 400-bed Aurangabad spital in Aurangabad. He is approachable, he is unlike other politicians," said Dharmapal Awasarmol, a resident

of Satara Parisar. When guizzed on Jaleel's AIMIM being accused of playing communal politics, Awasarmol says, "He is the

right man in the wrong party". Yusuf Ahmed, who runs a water cooler shop in Lakadmandi, said Jaleel

Sayed Anis from Moti Karanja

area, however, has a different take. "He has not done any work on roads here. Yes, he has done roads in other areas but not here. We have not found him approachable," said Anis. While the Shiv Sena has fielded Bhumre, he does not have a connect

in the constituency and is seen as an outsider. Bhumre, however, is relying on the fact that of the six assembly constituencies that form the Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar Lok Sabha constituency, three have Shiv While Khaire is confident that he Sena MLAs and two have BJP MLAs. Former independent MLA Harshvardhan Jadhav has again muddied the matters but he may not get the same margin-283,000 votes-that he got in 2019. The majority of the votes he secu-

red in 2019 were from the Maratha community, which is now miffed with the BJP, and may vote for Khaire now.

# Must Resign: **West Bengal CM**

**Our Political Bureau** 

felt "sitting beside him is a sin".

to torture a woman?"

scandals," she claimed.

# THIRD EYE

### **Left Searching** For Space

After returning to Congress from BJP on LS poll eve, prominent politician Chaudhury Birender Singh and his then MP son Brijendra Singh found themselves in limbo. After winning his Hissar seat on BJP symbol, ex-IAS babu Brijendra was supposed to receive a Congress ticket, but AICC Congress gave it to Hooda loyalist Jai Prakash. A little bird said neither AICC nor Haryana party brass supported Brinjendra when Congress CEC chose Haryana candidates.

### All Eyes on Maken's Move

AAP and Congress supporters in Delhi are asking when Ajay Maken, a prominent Delhi Congress leader, will launch a full campaign for the seven LS candidates. Since Maken, a former Delhi CM and now a Karnataka Rajya Sabha MP, was a staunch critic of AAP and CM Kejriwal and had commented on the 'Sheesh Mahal scam' on renovating CM Keiriwal's official residence. they are waiting to see how much the AAP-Congress deal has'reformed' him and how much his much-laboured Rajya Sabha entry has 'mellowed him.

### **Wearing Faith** on Sleeves

Sharad Pawar and his family have never worn their faith on their sleeves throughout their decades in power. Sharad Pawar and daughter Supriya Sule claim progressivism. Anti-superstition groups in the state have used the Pawar family as poster boys. At least till now. Sule told a campaign narrative about a snake that landed on her father as he slept and made him Chief Minister eight days later. Naturally, progressive family members had crimson faces.

#### the BJP. But this is not Sena founder Bal Thackray was called a 'Hindu Hriday Samrat'. Now, his going to be the case

tes, said there is a change in Muslim ople from the mino-

# Munger to Test Nitish Kumar's Hold on OBCs, Expecially Own Caste Kurmi

KUMAR SUCCESSFULLY BROUGHT UPPER CASTES, PARTICULARLY BHUMIHAR, AND OBC UNDER ONE PLATFORM IN MUNGER

RJD has fielded a strong OBC here in Anita Devi, wife of convicted criminal Ashok Mahto, against NDA's Rajiv Ranjan

Sanjay.Singh2@timesgroup.com

Maranchi (Munger): The Munger Lok Sabha seat is all set to test the popularity of chief minister Nitish Kumar among the OBCs, particularly his own caste Kurmi.

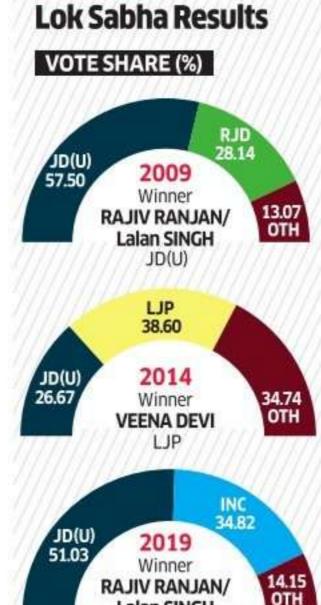
Reason: Opposition RJD has fiel-

ded a strong OBC candidate here in Anita Devi, wife of convicted criminal Ashok Mahto, Mahto is a Kurmi and Devi a Dhanuk. Dhanuk and Kurmi are a socio-politically united combination. Now, out of the five assembly seats under the present Munger Lok Sabha

seat, two – Barh and Mokama – were part of the erstwhile Barh Lok Sabha constituency represented by Nitish Kumar for five terms in the past. Kumar successfully brought upper castes, particularly Bhumihar, and a

section of the OBC under one political platform. RJD is now looking to make a dent

into this caste combination. The NDA candidate, sitting MP Rajiv Ranjan aka Lalan Singh, who is close to Nitish Kumar and belongs to the Bhumihar caste, is said to be spending sleepless nights to keep intact his party's support base in this constituency. Singh was elected to the Lok





#### Sabha from here in 2009 and 2019 and was also the national president of the JD(U) in the past. "RJD aims to break the political

combination of the voters of Bhumihar and Kurmi castes in the 2024 LS polls," one Tarun Kumar from Maranchi area of Mokama town told ET. "Nitishji's development model united them. His development model always remains helpful to bring a strong politicombination of upper

castes, Kurmi-Dhanuk and most backward castes in this area accommodating Nalanda, Nawada and Munger," he said. RJD leader Tejash-

wi Yaday, during his election cam- the socio-political empowerment of paign here, has already given enough indications about his party's attempt to consolidate OBC votes in favour of Anita Devi.

So, JD(U) is not leaving anything to chance for protecting its social support base here. BJP's prominent OBC faces such as Shambhu Sharan Patel and several JD(U) leaders including Harish Sahni, Madan, Sahni, Ramprit Mandal, and Damodar Raut are camping in Munger LS constituency to keep intact NDA's ters here," he said.

social support base. JD(U) is focussing on MBC voters

who also matter in this seat. The party has tasked MLC Neeraj Kumar to camp in Mokama. On Friday, Neeraj was busy in Maranchi area to mobilise MBC voters. He met several women voters, gathered at a shop, who were unhappy with the JDU for not getting the piped water distribution networks in areas dominated by MBCs. Neeraj gave patient hearing to their problems. He immediately talked

to the officers concerned and assured them that they wo-Munger uld soon get a water connection. Neeraj also reminded them of the contribution of theCM in

the MBC voters. "Now, people from the MBCs get elected to various posts in the Panchayati and local bodies. You have a special place under the Nitish government," he told the women voters. Talking to ET, Neeraj said there is no place for "caste and criminalisation" in Munger. "Apart from the deve-

lopment model of Nitish Kumar, the rule of law matters for vo-

39.46

OTH

# work.

# Arjun Munda Facing Another Cliffhanger in This Reserved Seat

don't know anything."

# Union minister's principal challenger is Congressman Kalicharan Munda

Nidhi.Sharma@timesgroup.com

Khunti: "He is sitting at home now. There is no construction work currently, and he doesn't hold a regular job." said Krishna Purti, as she prepared an omelette at her makeshift roadside 'dhaba' at Bichna village, about 70 km from Ranchi. Her husband, a mason, has been out of job for more than a month, and they rely on her only source of income-the dhaba.

She thought long and hard when asked about the government schemes. "Piped water?" she said. "No. Housing?" "Yes, I filled the form under Awas scheme a number of times. But now the state government has come is the Pathalgadi movement, which amendments did not get the gover-

up with a new scheme and we will surely get it," she said.

Khunti, the epicentre of the Pathalgadi movement, which saw tribals assert their right to land between 2016 and 2020, presents a challenging electoral turf – central minister Arjun Munda is fighting to protect BJP's track record; his principal challenger Congressman Kalicharan Munda is contesting to save his family legacy; and expelled JMM former MLA Basant Longa and Pathalgadi activist Babita Kachchap are queering the poll pitch.

The ST reserved constituency has been at the heart of a number of key announcements of the Modi government, including the PM Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (JANMAN) scheme which is particularly for the vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs). It has also been a showcase constitu-

village Ulihatu, which is about 90 minutes' drive from Ranchi. What reverberates the most till now

ency since it is home to Birsa Munda's

INC 25.48 2009 36.53 33.33 Winner KARIA MUNDA BJP

**Khunti Lok Sabha Results** 

Khunti

vereign territory and prohibiting the entry of outsiders. This resistance continued when the Raghubar Das-led BJP government in the state sought to amend the Chhota Nagpur Tenancy Act and the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act. The proposed amendments allowed the governments to take tribal land on lease for commercial use. Though the

lages, declaring them so-

saw stone plaques come up outside vil-

KARIA MUNDA BJP gion still bears the scars of the crackdown on activists.

JKP 24.01

2014

Winner

"No party has done anything here for us. If the BJP government tried to take our land, Congress and JMM have not said a word on this," said Avinash (name changed), a tribal

tered by the BJP government."

The poverty is visible as the entire constituency is dependent on farming. Prakash, a resident of Khunti, said, "We have fields, but since the region does not have ample water, we grow only one crop. We cannot subsist on that for the rest of the year." who did not want his village to be The situation is forcing farmers to

"Jal, Jangal, Zameen".

45.97

turn to cannabis farming, which is ilidentified. "They haven't moved to withdraw cases against tribals regislegal. Another villager admitted that it happens, but quickly added, "We Congress have a clear edge.

For Munda, the election will not be easy. In 2019, he won by a margin of just 1,445 votes - the lowest victory margin in Jharkhand. Munda has been camping and campaigning tirelessly. The trouble could come from within. Congress candidate Kalicharan Munda's brother, Nilkanth Singh Munda, is a BJP MLA from Khunti. Balancing the scale in the electoral contest is rebel JMM leader Longa, who could cut Kalicharan's votes. Khunti Lok Sabha constituency

comprises six Assembly segments. Though Arjun Munda had won the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the party did not fare well in the Assembly polls a few months later. Of the six Assembly segments under the Khunti seat, the BJP won only Torpa and Khunti; the remaining went to the INDIA bloc allies JMM and Congress (Kharsawan and Tamar for JMM and Simdega and Kolebira for Congress).

If Assembly elections are any indication, INDIA bloc allies JMM and

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# **Prestige Estates CEO Resigns, Co Revamps Senior** Management

**Our Bureau** 

Mumbai | Bengaluru: Realty developer Prestige Estates has rejigged its senior management following the resignation of chief executive Venkata Narayana K, who is moving out to start a real estate fund.

Narayana had assumed the role of the CEO in August 2017, Prior to that he was its chief financial officer (CFO) and company secretary. The company named Amit Mor as the group CFO.

No replacement has been announced for Narayana, but it appointed business heads for each vertical and geography.

Swaroop Anish has been named executive director and CEO of the residential segment & business

development, while Juggy Marwaha will be the CEO of the office segment and Muhammed Ali will head the retail segment as its CEO.

Co has not announced a replacement Venkata Narayana, Amit More named group CFO

appointments include Su-Singaravelu (executive director & CEO, hospitality segment), Tariq Ahmed (executive director & CEO, West India), Nayeem Noor (executive director, Lia-

ison), V Gopal (executive director, projects and planning) and T Arvind Pai (executive director, le-

The next generation of the promoter's family is actively involved in the business and will shape its future, the company said in a news release.

Executive director Faiz Rezwan is responsible for overseeing construction and execution of projects, including key aspects such as procurement, contracting and value engineering.

Zayd Noaman, also an executive director, is tasked with business development and will oversee corporate finance and strategic investments.

The Bengaluru-based real estate firm has completed 288 projects spanning a developable area of 172 million square feet. It also has 56 ongoing projects, for a total developable area of 86 million sq. ft.

# Two M3M Group **Cos Denied Land** Parcels in Noida for Poor Pricing

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The Uttar Pradesh government has cancelled the allotment of two land parcels in Noida to M3M Group subsidiaries Lavish Buildmart and Skyline Propcon, saying the companies were allotted the land at a "non-competitive rate". M3M had paid over ₹1,000 crore for the land parcels in Noida's Sec-

tor 72 and Sector 94. The move comes as a big blow for M3M, which is already facing Enforcement Directorate investigations. It also puts home buyers in a quandary as both the projects were launched and parts of them sold.

"Both the land parcels were allotted on the basis of a single bid, where the bidders

M3M had paid over ₹1,000 crore for the land parcels in Noida's Sector 72 and

quoted just ₹5 lakh more than the reprice." served Anil Kumar Sagar, principal secretary - infrastructure and industrial development department, Sector 94 UP, said in an or-

der issued on Friday. "It is clear that there was not proper competition and both the land parcels were allotted to a single company at a non-competitive rate."

M3M had announced an investment of ₹700 crore in developing luxury retail and penthouses as part of a commercial project in Sector 72. The investment included ₹250 crore land cost and ₹450

crore construction cost. It had also launched M3M The Cullinan in Sector 94. Spread across 13 acres with over 4 million square feet of saleable area, M3M had said it would invest ₹4,000 crore in the pro-

The developer had got all the app rovals for the two projects, including registration from the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA).

ject, including land cost.

### JSW Steel's Crude Steel Output Stays **Near Flat in April**

NEW DELHI JSW Steel's consolidated crude steel production in April remained almost flat at 21.21 lakh

tonnes (LT). Consolidated output was 21.13 LT in April 2023, JSW Steel said in a filing on Saturday. In India, the company produced 20.55 LT crude steel against 20.33 LT a year ago. Production of JSW Steel USA — Ohio fell to 0.66 LT in April from 0.80 LT in the year-ago period. JSW Steel is the flagship business of the \$23 billion JSW Group. — PTI

# Measures in Place to Meet Peak Power Demand: Govt

Demand projected to scale to 235 GW and 240 GW during day in May and June, respectively, states the ministry of power

Press Trust of India

the estimated 235 GW peak power and 235 GW during evening hours according to an official statement.

"With various measures, we have been able to successfully meet the peak evening power demand of 224 GW during April 2024," the Mini-

stry of Power on Friday.

The power demand is projected to peak at 235 GW during the day-time New Delhi: The government has and 225 GW during evening hours taken adequate measures to meet for May and 240 GW during day-time demand in May and 240 GW in June, for June 2024, it said in the statement. The power ministry has estima-

ted around 260 GW of peak demand during this summer season. Elaborating on the measures, the ministry said section 11 directions



have been issued to gas-based po- available another 5 GW for the wer plants besides coal-based units to make full capacity available for electricity generation.

generation has made available an

demand during May and June. of partial and forced outages of thermal power plants have made June 2024," the statement said.

summer season, the ministry said. Besides, power generated from wind is expected to increase by 4 The optimisation of hydropower GW to 5 GW during May and June.

"With these measures in place and additional 4 GW for meeting the the current generation trend...it is expected that the power demand Further, the shifting of planned would be adequately met both dumaintenance and minimisation ring the day and during night hours in the summer months of May and

### ROBUST QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE

# Strong Revenue Pushes ABB India Net Profit Up 87% in Q1

**Our Bureau** 

Mumbai: Electrification and automation major ABB India has posted an over 87% rise in net profit at ₹460 crore in the quarter to March, on the back of higher revenues.

The company follows a January to December financial year. It had posted a profit after tax of

₹245 crore in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year. During the quarter, consolidated revenues came in at ₹3,080 crore, up 28% from ₹2,411 crore in the year-ago period.

"We announce a strong start to 2024, building on our robust performance from Q4 of 2023. The increased demand for technologically superior solutions, coupled with the government's capital expenditure focus on new-age themes such as energy efficiency, decarbonisation and digitalisation has significantly driven our order momentum," ABB India said in a statement on Friday.

During the quarter, the company had an order backlog of ₹8,932 crore, up from ₹7,170 in the year-ago quarter. Total orders surged to ₹3,607 crore, the highest for the first quarter in the last five years.

"Growth in orders underline the success of our multi-division portfolio to capture different cycles in the market segments. The quarterly growth was led by our electrification and process automation business areas, which more than offset the temporary customer decisions sluggishness in motion and robotics and discrete automation business areas," the company said. ABB India's scrip ended at ₹7,128, up 2.76% on BSE Friday. Benchmark Sensex ended 0.36% higher. The earnings were announced after market hours.

In turn, Aggarwal said the Ola

group of companies would move

"Since LinkedIn is owned by Microsoft and Olaisa big customer of

Azure, we've decided to move our

entire workload out of Azure to

our own @Krutrim cloud within

the next week..." Aggarwal said in

"Any other developer who wants

to move out of Azure, we will offer

a full year of free cloud usage. As

long as you don't go back to Azure

Agarwal's combative announce-

ment comes just days after Krut-

rim AI, the artificial intelligence

unicorn founded by him, opened

up its cloud infrastructure and

cloud services for business. Krut-

rim Cloud will be offering GPU-

as-a-service on its AI computing

infrastructure, allowing enter-

prises and developers to train and

fine-tune their models, according

Aggarwal also took aim at prevai-

after that," he wrote.

a post on microblogging site X.

their businesses inhouse.

▶▶ From Page 1

**ABB India** 3000

Jan 1, 2024



# **Eicher Motors Q4 PAT Rises 18%**

for FY23.

May 10, 2024

NEW DELHI Eicher Motors on Sa- from 2,14,685 units in the yearturday reported an 18% increase in consolidated profit after tax to ₹1,070 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2024, dri- ₹4,001 crore against ₹2,914 crore ven by higher sales.

after tax of ₹906 crore in the same period last year. Total revenue rose 12% to ₹4,256 crore in the January-March qu-

arter of FY24 compared with ₹3,804 crore in the corresponding quarter of 2022-23, Eicher Motors said in a statement.

division of the company, recorded sales of 2,27,925 motorcycles in the fourth quarter, up 6%

ago period. For fiscal 2024, the company reported a 37% rise in PAT to

The company posted a profit The company's revenue from operations grew 14.5% to ₹16,536 crore from ₹14,442 crore recorded in FY23.

During the last fiscal, Royal Enfield's registered sales rose 9 per cent to 9,12,732 units from 8,34,895 units in 2022-23.

The company said its board re-Royal Enfield, the two-wheeler commended a final dividend aggregating to ₹1,396.41 crore at ₹51 per share for the financial year ended March 31, 2024.

# **PropEquity Net** up 10% in FY24 on Better Income

NEW DELHI PE Analytics, which runs real estate data platform PropEquity, has reported 10% increase in consolidated net profit at ₹11.6 crore for the last fiscal on better income. Its net profit stood at ₹10.6

crore in the preceding year. According to a regulatory filing on Friday, total income grew 37% to ₹44.1 crore last fiscal from ₹32.3 crore in 2022-23.

Samir Jasuja, founder and CEO of PropEquity, said: "We have done reasonably well in FY24, with 10.4% growth in our profits before tax (PBT) compared with the preceding financial year. Our overall revenues also continue to rise 37% to ₹44.1 crore."

He said the valuation business vertical has performed well as revenue grew 106% since the last financial year.

"We are adding new verticals in the valuation business which are auto valuations and plant and machinery valuations in FY25, which will help grow our business manifold," he said.

# Finolex Standalone Profit Grows 2% on Higher Revenues

NEW DELHI Pipes maker Finolex ment on Saturday. Industries has posted about a 2% its standalone profit after tax to ₹161.4 crore in the March 2024 quarter on the back of higher reve- from ₹1,141.06 crore in the year- Our operating performance du-

It had posted a profit after tax of ₹158.3 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal, the company said in a state-

Anti-Azure Posts by Aggarwal

during the quarter under review also rose 8.27% to ₹1,235.4 crore

ago period, it added. EBITDA fell 3.91% to ₹208.9 crore in the last quarter compared

with ₹217.4 crore a year ago. Prakash P Chhabria, Executive ted to improve further."

Payment Interface (UPI) to coun-

ter what Aggarwal termed as

nes" should be the Indian law. No

corporate person should be able

to decide what will be banned,"

said the 38-year old technology fo-

Ashwini Vaishnaw had told the

Rajya Sabha that the government

would introduce legislation and

take other steps to ensure social

media platforms are more acco-

support from peers such as Unaca-

demy founder Gaurav Munjal, as

well as several other users of Lin-

In 2017, Ola Cabs had moved to

**DEMAND FOR CLOUD SERVICES** 

"Linkedin's "monopoly".

dia framework similar to Unified Microsoft's Azure cloud plat-

"The only "community guideli- Ola Play. Azure competes with

In February, Union IT Minister helped by rising demand for

Chairman, Finolex Industries sa-Total income from operations id: "PVC prices remained stable during the second half of the year, leading to a healthy demand. ring the year has been robust and with the company's increased focus on the plumbing and sanitation segment, the same is expec-

form, adding that Azure would

also power and market the for-

mer's connected car platform

the likes of Amazon Web Servi-

ces and Google Cloud in India. In

FY23, Microsoft's India entity

reported a 39% rise in operating

revenue to ₹19,229 crore, partly

Azure and for its AI services to

Besides providing cloud servi-

ces, Aggarwal's Krutrim AI has

also launched standalone mobile

markets regulator after submit-

ting its draft listing papers late

last year, Ola Cabs is undertaking

restructuring and retreating

from international markets as it

attempts to improve profitability

before a market listing.

enterprise clients.

# IIHL to Pay ₹211 cr Extra to Lenders

▶▶ From Page 1

The Hinduja Group confirmed that it had got the regulator's consent.

"We are happy to acknowledge the receipt of approval from Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India(IR-DAI) yesterday on the auspicious occasion of Akshay Tritiya. The approval is subject to certain 'regulatory, statutory, and judicial' clearances/compliances," an IIHL spokesperson said in an email.

"IIHL stands committed to wor king towards obtaining the same as soon as possible and aims to close this transaction by the NCLT's stipulated date May 27." The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had given its nod to a ₹9,661 crore resolution plan proposed by the Hinduja Group's IndusInd International Holdings Ltd(IIHL). The court has directed IIHL to make the payment by May 27, subject to all necessary approvals. Additionally, the Hinduja Group entity will be required to pay an extra ₹211 crore to lenders, which will be adjusted against the capital infused by them in Reliance General Insurance to maintain its solvency margin.

"IIHL is prepared to pay Reliance Capital's lenders within 48 hours of receiving the insurance regulator's approval," IIHL chairman Ashok Hinduja had told reporters a week ago.

Under the plan, IIHL will establish a subsidiary, IIHL BFSI Holdings (Mauritius), in which it will hold 51%, while other group companies will collectively hold the remaining 49%. IIHL BFSI (Mauritius) will float a 100% subwhich, in turn, will hold a 100% tributed among lenders.



stake in Reliance Capital, formerly an Anil Ambani company. "These changes in the holding structure will necessitate a fresh approval from RBI from the fit

and proper point of view," said

one of the persons cited above. Reliance Capital will hold 74% of Reliance General Insurance and Reliance Health Insurance, and the balance 26% will be held by Aasia Enterprise, a Hinduja company. In the case of Reliance Nippon Life Insurance, Aasia Enterprise will hold a 26% stake and Reliance Capital will retain 25%. Nippon currently has a 49% stake.

Ashok Hinduja had said the plan is to grow the life and non-life businesses and start health insurance operations.

Y Nageswara Rao, the administrator appointed by the Reserve Bank, had admitted claims worth ₹25,345 crore from lenders as of January 10, 2024. The company has a cash balance of about sidiary, IIHL BFSI (India) Ltd, ₹300-400 crore, which will be dis-

# **Heat-reflecting Windshields Deployed**



At Volvo Car India, "we prioritise comfort and safety through cutting-edge heat and UV protection technologies like infrared-reflecting coatings on our sunroofs," sa-

though not silver-based coatings specifically. The increased thermal load from larger EV battery packs makes effective cabin cooling solutions even more essential.

"For extreme conditions like the current heat wave, windshields and sunroofs with silver-based co- $\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}_{\mathbf{m}}(\mathbf{m})(\mathbf{m}$ 

atings can decrease cabin air temperatures compared to conventional glazing and customers are now demanding comfortable cabin environments," said a senior executive at a glass and window solutions company. Metallised coatings are just the

beginning when it comes to hightech automotive glazing solutions for extreme weather, said Ravi Bhatia, regional director of Jato "Increasing use of head-up dis-

plays, 5G connectivity and even integrated antennas will necessitate coatings to control solar heat," he said. Managing heat will become paramount for glass suppliers and they'll be pushed to create more sophisticated coatings combining solar control and electromagnetic properties, Bhatia said.

# Product Innovation in Niche Categories

▶▶ From Page 1

Deepak Shahdadpuri, MD of venture capital firm DSG Consumer Partners, said: "There is no connection between someone who is 18 years old and incumbent brands. There is zero emotional connection."

DSG has backed brands such Chai Point, Sleepy Owl Coffee, SleepyCat and Epigamia among others.

"In the old days...it was difficult to build awareness, distribution was hard, and the only brand you got were the brands you saw," Shahdadpuri said. "Now, all the brands are starting from scratch. You have to earn the right to be purchased —

that's the starting point." That's not easy in the highly competitive D2C industry where scores of new brands are mushrooming across segments. Overall, D2C startups raised nearly \$1.8 billion in 2023 across 113 deals. In the first quarter of calendar 2024, such startups received \$395 million through 45 transactions, according to data sourced from Ven-

**Bhavish Aggarwal** 

creators instead of being owned

by the corporates who make mo-

ney using our data and then lectu-

reus on "community guidelines,"

Ola will help build a digital pub-

on Saturday.

ling business models in his post licinfrastructure(DPI)socialme-

viour is taking place as a result of both the messaging being crafted by these brands as well as product innovation in niche categories, according to investors and founders.

te much in the space for the last 20-

that sells mattresses and furnitu-The change in consumer beha-re. "Even if they did, those innovations were superficial, such as changing the outer cover of the mattress for aesthetic appeal or al-

> Partners and Elevation Capital among others.



While for a number of these brands, the early focus is on the Gen Z segment, particularly with niche and differentiated offerings, investors believe that may only be

the first step. "Brand building is very important to become successful...discounting alone does not help," said Prashant Prakash, founding partner at venture capital firm Accel Partners. "But all said, to scale and become big, Gen Z cannot alone be the target user group," he told ET.

A New Delhi-based investor said larger conglomerates operating in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) space are focused on the mass segment, leaving newage brands to target niche spaces

to begin with. "Big FMCG companies are still trying to change consumer behaviour in rural areas of India, which is a big market in itself...and that can only be done by them with their scale," the person said. "Younger brands will often catch on to a small part of the market, where they can create consumer trust and then build and scale

ra, backed by consumer-focused investment firm Sauce VC, aims to become a ₹100-crore brand in the ongoing fiscal. The startup, founded in 2021, clocked Rs 45 crore in revenue for FY24.

"Gen Z wants to consume from brands which their parents, or the older generation, were not consuming because they have this innate desire to stand out," Jatan Bawa, cofounder at Perfora told ET. "They're also very inclined towards design, which is a big element that goes into their purchase behaviour and decision-making approach. They are more about consuming a brand rather than consuming a product," he said.

A Gurgaon-based founder of a D2C footwear brand said the next generation is "highly social" and what it consumes "defines their personalities".

"A 22 years old wouldn't be caught dead wearing a pair of shoes from a legacy brand... It would affect his or her social standing within their social group," he said. "Increasingly, our market studies have shown that unlike millennials or Gen X, which was largely influenced in consumption choices by their parents, Gen Z wants to go

thereon." One such oral care brand, Perfo- the other way," he added.

untable for any slanderous conapps for the Krutrim AI assistant used by end consumers. These are id MD Jyoti Malhotra. "This tent posted on their platforms. In a series of posts following Linblocks about 80% of solar heat gasimilar to the apps offered by OpekedIn's actions against his post, nAI for ChatGPT and Microsoft in to ensure optimal cabin tempefor CoPilot, OpenAI is also backratures." Aggarwal intensified his protests. Audi India said heat-reflecting "Dear @LinkedIn this post of mied by Microsoft. windshields and side glass are dene was about YOUR AI imposing a Meanwhile, both Ola Cabs and Dynamics. ployed in several models such as political ideology on Indian users Ola Electric are bound for the the A8, Q8, RS5 and the e-tron EV, that's unsafe, sinister," he said. public markets. While Ola Electric is awaiting approval from the "Data should be owned by the Aggarwal's vocal protests drew

# Titan Capital's Bahl said the yo- ir parents, no longer resonate as lingegowda, cofounder of Wakefit

to the company.

**PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE** 

ture Intelligence.

unger generation is now immersed in a vast array of content through platforms like YouTube and Instagram, fostering a burgeoning desire for new experiences alongside increasing incomes. "This convergence of factors fuels a curiosity to explore emerging brands that were previously unheard of. Additionally, there's a sense that traditional brands, once revered by the- 30 years," said Chaitanya Rama-

deeply with them," he said.

"The incumbents did not innova-

tering the colour of wardrobe doors, without improving the product or reducing prices.' Wakefit is backed by Peak XV

упинининининий.

Most influencers

on YouTube do

**Cultural references in** 

local languages make

it harder to detect

ROHINI LAKSHANÉ,

WhatsApp

for propaganda

has become the

platform where

you could openly

misinformation"

VIJETA DAHIYA,

YouTube content

researcher

call out their

remains critical

factories but YouTube

misinformation"

technologist

not disclose paid

partnerships for

political content.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES | NEW DELHI / GURGAON | SUNDAY | 12 MAY 2024 | WWW.ECONOMICTIMES.COM

If Facebook was the dominant online platform in the 2014 election, it was WhatsApp in 2019. In 2024, YouTube has emerged as the primary channel of digital campaigning for political parties, leaders and critics

rhe YouTube

Shephali Bhatt

t has been a pretty hectic month for Vijeta Dahiya. The YouTube content researcher has been analysing political themes for infotainment creator Dhruv Rathee, working late nights to help him produce videos on topics concerning Election 2024. "Yesterday, I managed to rest a bit after working 34 hours on a fourpart election series, with very little sleep in between," says Dahiya. The long hours are worth it, he says. "I think these videos are creating a massive on-ground impact. They bring up ideas like democracy and accountability of elected leaders."

Dahiya can see people's enthusiasm reflected in the sudden surge in subscribers over the past month, along higher number of comments on vidand not celebratory.

According to data from analytics YouTube videos via the platform. firm Social Blade, Rathee gained 2.5 turned-digital news influencers such Sharma, who are known for creating ing day," he recalls. political content on YouTube, have seen a significant bump in monthly TUBE OF THE TIMES 175% and 115%, respectively, accord- WhatsApp and now YouTube indiing to data from Social Blade. This is, in many ways, the YouTube election.

Dahiya, a writer-filmmaker from Haryana, sees this as a break from the 2019 election for which WhatsApp was the primary channel of digital campaigning. "That period was marked by a flood of fake news and it continues to flourish, making it harder to trace who is receiving what kind of messaging," he says.

The "WhatsApp Forward Era", he says, may have inadvertently paved the way for the YouTube wave in this election. "WhatsApp remains critical for propaganda factories that prefer to work in stealth mode, but someone has to openly call out their misinformation and disinformation," he says. This is where YouTube steps in. It has over 500 million active users in India, nearly equalling the reach of the Meta-owned WhatsApp in the country.

Besides critics and dissenters of the government, political parties, too. have actively built a presence on YouTube in the past year, says Talha Rashid, political strategist and cofounder of Discourse Consulting. Many party leaders have launched YouTube channels to share live streams, rally videos, interviews and more, alongside collaborating with news, might have contributed to the digital influencers for podcasts.

A Rest of World report from February noted a two-to-four-fold increase in YouTube subscribers of several political leaders like Raghav Chadha (AAP), Shivraj Singh Chouhan (BJP) and Revanth Reddy (INC) in the second half of 2023. At the time of going to press, AAP had 6.26 million subscribers on its YouTube channel, 360,000 more than theruling BJP's 5.9 million. Congress trailed behind the two on YouTube with 4.77 million subscribers. Representatives of these political parties did not respond to ET's request for a comment.

In 2019, parties mainly utilised WhatsApp for targeted digital messaging, with one major party reportedly creating over 200,000 WhatsApp

E ecton This time around, the focus has shifted to producing videos to shape the with better likes-to-views ratio and a narrative. Instead of crafting visual and textual messages exclusively for eos even when the content is critical WhatsApp forwards, there's a trend of circulating 30-second clips from

Rashid says each general election million subscribers on YouTube in cycle over the last decade has had a April alone. He has 19.4 million sub-different dominant platform for poscribers overall, accumulated over a litical engagement. "In 2014, decade-long journey. Similarly, since Facebook emerged as a central hub January, television journalists- for political activities, with parties utilising pages and events for rallies. as Ravish Kumar and Abhisar Facebook even issued alerts on poll-

views on their channels—a rise of The transition from Facebook to

Besides critics and dissenters of the government, political parties, too, have actively built a presence on YouTube in the past year" TALHA RASHID, cofounder, Discourse Consulting

cates how shifts in people's internet habits often shape the role of social media in electoral processes. The rise of YouTube as a dominant platform for building election narratives and critiquing can be attributed to the TikTokification of content consumption and the emergence of video-editing apps for smartphones, says Meghnad S, a YouTuber who focuses on politics, society and the internet on his channel, Meghnerd. A general dissatisfaction with the coverage of important civic issues in prime-time TV news may have also contributed to a surge in news consumption on YouTube, he adds.

Further, the deluge of WhatsApp forwards, along with the platform's campaigns and efforts to combat fake

groups for this purpose, says Rashid. decline in the popularity of "WhatsApp University". "Anecdotally, I've observed increased scepticism towards WhatsApp forwards, particularly in urban areas. There have been instances where members of political party-created WhatsApp groups have called out misinformation being propagated within those groups," says Meghnad.

> WhatsApp offers some data to support this. Since 2019, it has set a limit on forwarding messages and channel updates to just five chats at once. In an email, WhatsApp told ET: "The limits imposed on 'forwards' have reduced the spread of 'highly forwarded messages' on WhatsApp by over 70%." In 2022, the app added new limits for forwarding messages to groups, where messages that have the "forwarded label" can only be forwarded to one group at a time, rather than five.

The improvement in internet speeds and the low cost of mobile data have made video browsing on YouTube and elsewhere seamless and more affordable. According to a survey by cable.co.uk covering 200 countries, the average global cost of 1 GB of mobile data has plunged by 68% from \$8.8 to \$2, between 2019 and 2023. India ranks 7th on the list of countries with the most affordable mobile data plans, with Israel, Italy and Fiji topping it.

Shahana Sheikh, a PhD candidate at Yale University who is studying election campaigns, says that some of her findings from 2022 foreshadowed the current YouTube trends. "About one and a half years ago, I surveyed over 400 party functionaries from various levels in BJP and SP in Uttar Pradesh. Less than a quarter reported using YouTube for party purposes, including campaigning," she says. In contrast, among the nearly 2,000 voters who used smartphones, surveyed in the same context, the share of daily YouTube

WhatsApp users. She found this to be the case for both male and female smartphone users. "Political parties seem to have understood the power of YouTube as a platform to reach voters using video content,' adds Sheikh.

WHERE'S THE MONEY GOING? The transition is also impact

ing party expenditures on political advertising. Between February 5 and May 4, 2024, both BJP and Congress allocated more funds for Google Ads for videos alone, than they did for Meta Ads across ad formats. BJP spent ₹50.4 crore on Google Ads for video content, more than three times what it spent on Meta Ads across all formats —₹15.4 crore. Similarly, Congress spent ₹24.5 crore on Google Adsfor video content and ₹8.1 crore on Meta Ads across various formats during the same period. These expenditure deusers matched that of daily tails were obtained from Google's Ads Transparency Center and Meta's Ad Library Report. While WhatsApp has

been busy constraining the virality of forwarded messages, YouTube has been proactively moving in the direction of becoming the go-to digital platform for election news and information. A March post on the Google India blog says, "For news and information related to the 2024 election, YouTube highlights high-quality content from authoritative news

sources during key

moments, through its 'Top News' and 'Breaking News' shelves, and news watch page." Google has also collaborated with the Election Commission of India (ECI) to enable easy discovery of critical voting information. "YouTube shows a variety of election information panels, including on how to register to vote, how to vote and candidate information," says the blog.

**CHALLENGES ON YOUTUBE** 

While YouTube solves the traceability issue in terms of checking misinformation, it has its challenges, says Rohini Lakshané, technologist and interdisciplinary researcher. "On YouTube, a lot of promotional videos of political parties involve influencers who do not disclose paid partnerships. Many of them are in local languages, using cultural references that make it harder for the platform to detect misinformation," she says.

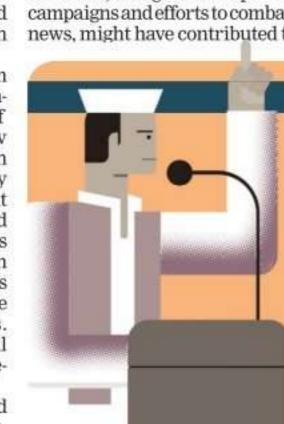
According to YouTube, violative content made up 0.11-0.12% of views on its platform in Q4 2023. However, Lakshané quotes a recent study from Tech Global Institute that found that 85% of political content uploaded by Indian influencers across different platforms did not disclose it as sponsored content.

Further, being an open platform isn't always an advantage. "The government, a major regulatory body for these platforms, could potentially request the closure of critical channels," says Srinivas Kodali, an independent researcher from Hyderabad studying digitisation in India. "An open platform is thus susceptible to easy control," he adds. Additionally, he questions whether people can access quality content on YouTube when most platforms serve as echo chambers.

Kodali says that if the Data Protection Act is implemented before the next election, platforms may face increased pressure to combat hate speech, potentially driving most election-related content underground. While he anticipates AI and deepfakes to dominate the digital battleground in the next polling season, the impact of regulations

on social media's role in the electoral process remains uncertain.

> shephali.bhatt@ timesgroup.com



# 2014: The Facebook Election

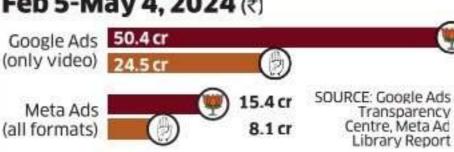
 Facebook issued polling day alerts Political parties created FB pages Parties had FB events to announce rallies

2019: The WhatsApp Election Parties created WhatsApp groups for political messaging

Personalised campaign was delivered to groups/individuals There was unchecked fake news. misinformation

2024: The YouTube Election Party leaders have YouTube channels

 They have podcasts with digital influencers Critical political channels see Spends on Political Ads in Feb 5-May 4, 2024 (₹)



# 2024 Highlights

Advantage YouTube Easier to check misinformation

driver. The iPhone has been one of the high-

est selling handsets in the last two years, with

no signs of slowing down. The average sell-

ing price of smartphones has been going up

for three years, rising 14%, in 2023, year-on-

year, to \$255. The share of premium segment

has gone up from 6% in 2022 to 10% in 2023,

and is expected to continue growing this year,

Xiaomi, which used to see much of its busi-

ness in the budget segment, has stated its

ambition to crack the premium and luxury

segments. Its rivals like Realme, Motorola

and Transsion, too, are trying to position

"The premiumisation trend has pushed

themselves in the premium segment.

according to research firm IDC.

WhatsApp Still Strong Biggest distribution channel Alternative for audience Accessible to less fatigued by TV news tech-savvy audience

OnePlus

Its claim

settlements

are pending

for a year

Low trade

margin of

distribution

only 4%

· Poor

PHONE IS RINGING OFF THE HOOK Highlighting OnePlus's retail operations, Chandra of Sangeetha Mobiles says the company allows retailers to pick up stocks only when they pay in advance. Phones are then shipped from its factory to retailers. It takes at least six days for stocks to reach Sangeetha Mobiles' hundreds of retail stores across south India where OnePlus does not have distributors or warehouses. "It's a ridiculously loss-making proposition for retailers, and we are better off not selling

OnePlus devices," says Chandra, who is joining a demand for a boycott of the brand. TS Sridhar, president of Organised Retailers Association (ORA), says OnePlus has promised retailers that it will settle all claims by mid-May and will also hold discus-

sions to increase trader margins.

In a written response to ET, OnePlus spokesperson says it remains in active communication with retail bodies to address their concerns: "We are constantly in touch

with them to identify solu-OnePlus is tions that benefit all parties, most importantly one that in active benefits our consumers." communication with Refuting claims by retail retail bodies and is bodies that the company dedicated to does not have a good distribution network, it says it opaddressing recent erates through various matters" channels, including its own experience stores, ecom- Spokesperson, OnePlus

format retail stores like Reliance Digital, Vijay Sales and Croma. It has announced a partnership with Jio Mart Digital, Reliance's electronics distribution arm, to sell its entire portfolio at over

merce platforms and large-

63,000 retail stores in India. Retailers are also protesting against Poco, which had promised to distribute its products nationwide through distributors, but remains absent in retail stores. In a letter to the company, All

Retailers Association alleges that the brand is colluding with ecommerce platforms to distribute products through unauthorised channels, bypassing distributors and evading taxes. "This encompasses situations where both aggregators and students buy in bulk using

credit cards and distribute to retailers with-

out proper documentation or legitimate in-

voices, as the brand doesn't utilise official channels," said the retailer association Poco did not respond to emails seeking

comment on grey market practices. However, in a recent statement, country head Himanshu Tandon said the company is working with legitimate channels, including strategic partnerships with Jio Mart Digital as its official offline distributor for mainline retail partners.

In the case of Realme, retailers allege that even before its new phone, Realme P1, was launched, the model had flooded the grey market. ORA wrote to the brand: "We have been informed by the directors of Realme that the above model would be launched on April 22. But the grey market is already flooded with stocks of the above model, and the product has found its way into the retailer's shelves." Realmedid not respond to ET's emails seeking comments. Smartphone brands generally respond to

retailer demands, promising to fix issues and coordinate better. Heads of retailer associations are often invited to launches and factory visits, and are granted regular meetings with top leadership.

This time, industry experts point to a Catch-22 situation. While increasing margins and supply are necessary for the retail expansion of brands, the high cost over-

heads of retail channels are eating into their profits, especially at a time when there is growing government pressure on them to improve profitability.

"The cost structures of both business models are slightly different. In online business, the cost structures are slightly more competitive because you don't have a large infrastructure of logistics, deliveries and warehousing, which the partner platform takes care of. In the retail world, the business model is a little more expensive, because there are margins, multiple layers of India Mobile distribution, in-store branding and promoters, which add to the cost," says Sudhin Mathur, smartphone industry consultant and a former MD of Motorola.

Smartphone industry consultant Sharma says the only way for brands to increase margins is to raise prices, which is not easy in a highly competitive industry. "Brands would liketomaintain the status quo, but the status quo seems to be unacceptable to sellers,' says Sharma.

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# Hello, We Have a Complaint

a meteoric rise

Chinese smartphone companies looking to expand their footprint face a loud adversary—Indian retailers

# Subhrojit Mallick

The Chinese smartphone companies, which are facing pressure from the Indian government to localise operations, are staring at a loud adversary-mobile phone retailers. While the brands are looking to expand their footprint and tap the country's hinterland, retailers, big and small, are up in arms, alleging low margins, unrealistic targets, insufficient supply of stocks and pilingup of dues.

Retailers in South India, for instance, have been protesting against OnePlus, offering customers a with some refusing to stock diverse range of units from the brand. Others have pushed back against Xiaomi's subbrand Poco, and Realme channels, including a over the availability of stocks in the grey market and have even urged government authorities to cancel their trade licences. In the case of OnePlus, re-

tailers have alleged that the company store promoters and appointing national and takes more than nine months to clear pending dues, when the industry standard is much shorter. They demand higher margins and increased supply of stocks. "Various brands take time, ranging from one week to one month, to settle claims with retailers. But OnePlus takes nine months on average, and as we speak, we have claims pending from February 2023. They also give the lowest trade margin—4%," says Subhash Chandra L, MD of Sangeetha Mobiles, a leading retail

chain with over 800 stores in south India. This is not the first time retailers have clashed with smartphone brands, but their voices have become louder at a time when the offline segment is commanding the lion's share of the \$40 bil-

lion Indian smart-

of shipments in Q1 2024, up from 56% in the previous quarter, a sign that smartphone brands are looking at brick-and-mortar stores to chart their growth. "Offline retailers have realised that they are now in a position to dictate. They are pushing

hard against what they feel are unfair practices because they are in a dominant position," says Ajay Sharma, an industry veteran who held Poco India is top roles in Micromax. committed to

phone market. According to Counterpoint

Research, the offline segment cornered 64%

Karbonn and HTC. This has resulted in constant bickering between retailers and smartphone brands which had earlier positioned themselves as onlinefirst and were operating mainly through ecommerce platforms. With consumer preferences shifting towards premium products, the

Country Head, Poco India brands are opening more retail stores, investing in inregional distributors. That's when the problems started.

purchasing options

through legitimate

strategic partnership

with Jio Mart Digital"

HIMANSHU TANDON.

STING IN THE RETAIL Why are brands targeting offline retail now? Year 2023 ended with flat growth for the signs of recovery, but instead of volume-heavy budget phones driving demand, premium phones

smartphone market. There are have become the growth

big-ticket features and financing schemes," Q1 '23 says Tarun Pathak, research director, Q2'23 58% Counterpoint Research. Q3 '23 51% Brick-and-mortar stores, which were bat-Q4'23 56% tered by lockdown restrictions during the Q1'24 64% pandemic, should have welcomed this. Then why are retailers not happy?

network smartphone brands, which were happily online-centric, to expand their retail foot Share of Shipments in print—to be present at a retail store in a shopping mall, where customers can get a touch-Offline Channels Rises and-feel experience. That's where a Offline Channel Online Channel company's promoters can convince a cus-Shipment Share | Shipment Share tomer to buy their offering, luring them with 42% 49% 44% 36% Source: Counterpoint Research

**Retailers' Complaints** 

Poco

Not all models are

available for stocking

Limited distribution

through illegitimate

Sale of products

Products in grey

market before

official sale

channels

Realme

Indian spice companies are feeling the heat in the global market—while Hong Kong and Singapore have recalled some products, US has rejected a number of shipments. The regulator needs to act fast to reassure customers at home and abroad

Shantanu Nandan Sharma

t was just a routine food surveillance exercise in Tsim Sha Tsui, a shopping hub known for its hotels and restaurants overlooking the Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong. The Centre for Food Safety, a government entity, collected samples of spices from some retail outlets. Unexpectedly, the test revealed the presence of a pesticide, ethylene oxide, in four products of two popular Indian spice brands-MDH's Madras Curry Powder, Sambhar Masala and Curry Powder, and Everest's Fish Curry Masala. It had a domino effect across the region even as countries across the globe sat up and wondered if there was a pesticide in their curry. The authorities in Hong Kong swiftly directed vendors to remove the items from shelves and stop their sale. Within a fortnight, the Singapore Food Agency ordered a local importer, SP Muthiah & Sons PteLtd, to recall Everest's Fish Curry Masala from the city state and went as far as advising people who had consumed it and had health concerns to "seek medical advice".

Indian spice companies are feeling the heat in the global market. Australia is contemplating a course of action and has not ruled out a recall. The Maldives, amid diplomatic tensions with India, has gone a step further and banned the sale of Everest and MDH products. The US, a key importer, has ramped up inspection and rejected a number of Indian spice shipments due to salmonella contamination.

Experts believe that timely action by Indian regulators and the cleaning up of the domestic spice market are essential to regain trust across the border, a prerequisite for the country's spice industry to achieve the goal of \$10 billion export by 2030.

India is both the biggest consumer and exporter of spices. Called the spice bowl of the world, it cultivates more than 75 spices. The country's spice exports in FY23-24 were valued at \$4.25 billion. The major spices exported from India include chilli powder, cumin, turmeric, "curry powder and paste", cardamom, pepper, coriander and nutmeg.

"Inorder to reestablish credibility in the global market, India needs to clean up its domestic production system through regular inspection, tests, etc," says Jayant Dasgupta, former Indian ambassador to the World Trade Organization (WTO). "If we improve the quality of our domestic spice market, our export quality will also see an improvement," he says, adding that major spice exporters probably source ingredients from smaller producers that cater to domestic markets. Estimating that the recent dispute could af-

fect spice exports worth \$700 million, a report published by Delhi-based think tank, Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), said last week that the overall situation called for "a fundamental shift in how India handles food safety", adding that transparency, stringent enforcement and clear communication are critical "to maintain the integrity of its exports and domestic products alike".

According to Dasgupta, the European Union, known for its strict standards, must have taken note of the dispute by now. "We may hear from the bloc soon," he says, adding that if the EU detects an anomaly in an agricultural product, it will immediately destroy the affected consignment rather than return it, a measure for which it invokes select WTO provisions.

### WHAT NEXT?

The trajectory of the present controversy may largely depend on the response of other prominent importers. China, India's primary spice destination, with imports totalling \$928 million in FY24, has so far remained silent.

Australia has not dismissed the possibility of recalling certain spice products from India. In an email response to ET's query, a spokeswoman of Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) says they are aware of "the potential contamination of spice products from India" as well as the action taken in Hong Kong and Singapore. "We are working with federal, state and territory food enforce-



ther action is required in Australia (e.g. a food recall)," she adds, adding that "ethylene oxide is not permitted to be used as a treatment for foods sold in Australia".

ment agencies to

determine if fur-

Everest, which produces more than 10 million spice packets a day and exports to over 60 countries, says that some nations do demand a treatment by ethylene oxide, which is basically "agas and not an ingredient that can be added to any product", adding that the pesticide is primarily used to control microorganism and pathogens in food products to achieve a longer shelf life.

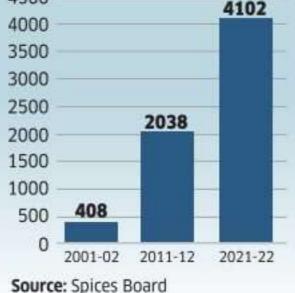
In a written reply to ET's queries, a company spokesperson says, "Everest Fish Curry Masala, which became a matter of controversy, was one of 33 products that were sent for trial and testing in the Hong through ships, ports and long travel days in Singapore, as stated in a Singapore Food asked to recall only one product." The through adverse weather conditions. spokesperson says the company had to accept the recall as their local importer "did not wish to confront the authorities".

Reiterating that the spices which the company sells in India and abroad are safe, the spokesperson says the ethylene oxide treatment is not used for domestic items. "In an international market, the products go

#### **TOP 10 INDIAN SPICES INDIA'S SPICE EXPORTS** (in \$ million) **EXPORTED IN FY2023** (in ₹ cr) 4500

Chilli

Cumin



Accordingly, to avoid any adverse effects on the products, a few countries like the US and

The acceptance of ethylene oxide differs in

Canada prefer ethylene oxide sterilisation overother methods for food safety."

(PDS) was

one of the

poor," says Mutha.

reasons for its association with the

Devendra Shah, chairman of Parag

Milk Foods, which launched ghee un-

der the Gowardhan brand in the late

1990s, says, "The first thing to change

with an improvement in lifestyle is

food. As disposable income grows,

people upgrade their food. With grow-

ing incomes, people started shifting

Then came imported refined oils.

Although India was heading towards

self-sufficiency in food grains and

milk with green and white revolu-

tions, it was facing a shortage of

cooking oils. The widening gap be-

tween the demand and supply of

from vanaspati to packed ghee."

different geographies. In the US, it is allowed to a level whereas it is banned in spices for domestic consumption in India. In

Spice Oils 4.085 3,573 Mint Products 1,666 Turmeric Curry Powder/Paste 1,416

10,445

4.193

875 Cardamom 726 Pepper Coriander 665 480 Other Seeds Source: Spices Board

Kong market. The food safety authorities the sea, and our consignment has to go Agency statement issued on April 18, "it is not authorised for use in food" but "can be used to fumigate agricultural products to prevent microbial contamination" ET did not get any response from MDH, the

> other exporter at the centre of the controversy. Earlier, the company's statement, as reported by news agency PTI, said the allegations were "baseless, untrue" and "lack any substantiating

**EVEREST RESPONDS** 

# 'Ethylene Oxide is Used for Sterilisation. **Many Countries Demand It'**

A spokesperson of India's leading spice exporter Everest responds to ET's queries on the recall of its Fish Curry Masala by Hong Kong and Singapore. Edited excerpts

#### On the recall of its product by Hong Kong and Singapore:

A recall is a very standard process followed in the food industry by all countries, and it does not mean the brand has been banned. Everest is not banned in Hong Kong, Singapore or any other country.

#### On the presence of high levels of ethylene oxide in its products:

Many major countries demand ethylene oxide (EtO) treatment. It is basically a gas and not an ingredient. EtO is largely used by food companies and pharma companies for sterilisation purposes. It is primarily used to control microorganisms and pathogens in food products, for a longer shelf life.

#### On the details of the recall:

Everest Fish Curry Masala, which became a matter of controversy, was one of 33 products that were sent for trial and testing in the Hong

Kong market. In Hong Kong, the food safety authorities ordered the recall of only one product and passed the remaining 32 products. Our local importer did not wish to confront the authorities. Hence they accepted the recall process in Hong Kong. Singapore never tested the Fish Curry Masala. They only followed the Hong Kong recall order.

#### On whether ethylene oxide in present in its domestic products:

The spices we sell in India do not require or undergo EtO treatment. In an international market, the products go through ships, ports and long travel days in the sea, and our consignment has to go through adverse weather conditions. Accordingly, to avoid any adverse effects on the products, a few countries like the US and Canada prefer EtO sterilisation

over other sterilisation methods for food safety, which is a common norm globally. Every country has its own parameters and we treat products based on the importer's request to meet the norms of the respective importing country.

has set up laboratories in Guwahati and Jorhat in Assam and Varanasi in UP.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India(FSSAI), a regulator mandated to check the standards of food articles consumed in Board is trying to ad- the country, has recently said that it has been collecting samples of branded spices and dismissed reports that it allowed high levels of pesticide residues in spices and herbs.

> However, widespread production of illicit and inferior spices is a concern in India. Last week, the Delhi Police seized 15 tonnes of spurious spice powder from factories in Karawal Nagar. While busting the masala racket, the police also recovered rotten rice, spoiled pearl millets and wood dust that were used to make adulterated spice powder.

These have been disastrous signs for India's spice trade whose exports have climbed steadily from \$408 million in FY2002 to \$4.2 billion now. During the 14th World Spice Congress held in Navi Mumbai last September, officials said India's spice export is expected to reach \$10 billion by 2030.

The spice route to India is a couple of millennia old. Romans undertook voyages to India mainly for spices. Under the Romans Alexandria became the greatest commercial centre of the world and "was also the leading emporium for the aromatic and pungent spices of India," according to Britannica.

If that legacy has to endure, regulators have to put their foot down and spice companies have to clean up their act.

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# Vanishing Vanaspati

While the consumption of vanaspati has drastically declined, it still occupies a big fat role in the calculation of WPI

# Jayashree Bhosale

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, one of the main responsibilities of a young Rupinder Sodhi was to keep an eye out for the arrival of a truck that would carry tins of vanaspati to the ration shop at Sector 1, RK Puram in Delhi. "I used to keep watch on the arrival of the truck with supplies of Dalda and Rath vanaspati and would immediately inform the entire neighbourhood to rush to the ration shop before the stocks got exhausted. We had to stand in long queues to get our monthly quota of about 5 kg vanaspati," recalls Sodhi, who is now in his 60s. Long after playing the vanaspati watchman, Sodhi went on to work at Amul, the largest dairy cooperative which is also a top producer of ghee, for more than 40 years and retired as its managing director.

The golden vanaspati, the Indian term for hydrogenated vegetable oil, looks like ghee but it isn't. However, it is much cheaper than the dairy fat.

In the 1930s, it arrived in Indian kitchens in cans of Dalda, the first and most popular brand of vanaspati in the country. It became an integral part of Indian cooking in the

Even today, vanaspati has the

calculate the Wholesale Price Index (WPI). However, in the past one and a half decade, the consumption of vanaspati has declined—from around 6% of total cooking oil consumption in 2010-11 to about 3% in 2022-23.

While there are many brands of

vanaspati—Rath, Anchal, Gagan, Scooter, Raag, Gemini, Nature Fresh, Shakti Bhogand Rasoi, among others—Dalda became a generic word for it.

# **GOLDEN FAT**

Dalda was brought to the market of pre-independent India by a British company called Lever Brothers, Consumption of which is today known as vanaspati has Unilever. The cheaper aldeclined in the ternative to ghee became country-from such a kitchen staple in free around 6% of India that the government total cooking oil had to ration it. Even today, consumption there is a huge difference in 2010-11 to between the prices of ghee about 3% in and vanaspati; while ghee is 2022-23 available for ₹540 a kilo, the

latter costs just ₹90. In the 1970s and 1980s, the government supplied imported cooking oils at subsidised rates to licensed vanaspati manufacturers. The price of vanaspati was controlled by the government to make it affordable to conhighest weightage in the basket of sumers. There was even a governcooking oils, whose prices are ment company, the Hindustan

to make vanaspati. Sachin Ranka, a third-generation

**®** 

wholesaler of grains and cooking oils in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, recalls that even 20 years ago, consumption of vanaspati was very common. "Ghee was consumed by the middle class upwards. Every grocery

list for wedding feasts included 7-8 tins of 15 kg vanaspati. Now the demand has drastically come down." Bharat Mutha, a whole-

saler of cooking oils in Nashik, Maharashtra, says that when vanaspati consumption was at its peak, there were hardly any companies selling ghee. It was available only in the unorganised sector. Then, in the 1960s, Amul started selling ghee. Still, its consumption was limited to the upper classes in big cities. It was only in the 1990s, post liberalisation, that packed and branded ghee became in-

creasingly available to consumers. As disposal income grew, consumers moved away from vanaspati, says an Adani Wilmar spokesperson. Industry veterans recall that vanaspati, which Indians had embraced as a modern means of cooking, came to be associated with the food of the poor: "The distribution of vanaspati monitored by the government to Vegetable Oils Corporation (HVOC), through the public distribution sys-cooking oils in the 1980s led to the gov-modity. There was no mar-

single biggest factor responsible for the slow death of the vanaspati industry. "Refined oils replaced vanaspati in making jalebis and

> every other Indian sweet. Refined palm oil became especially popular with halwais and the hotel industry," says Mutha. A government report from 1997, which discussed the losses faced by HVOC, observes that

ernment incentivising the

import of refined oils,

which proved to be the

the production of vanaspati suffered after the industry was delicensed in July 1991. The consumer preference is gradually shifting from vanaspati to refined oils. The per capita demand of vanaspati has fallen and that of refined oils

A government

1997 observes

capita demand

of vanaspati

has fallen

and that of

refined oils

report from

that the per

has risen. Almost 40% of the vanaspati industry is lying idle in India. Edible oil was placed under OGL (open general licence) by the Government of India in March 1995. Its free import

competition," it says. Former Amul man Sodhi, who is now the president of the Indian Dairy Association, says, "After the liberalisation of the economy, everyone started manufacturing ghee and it became a com-

has further added to the

which cannot operate at thin margins, to exit this category. By the 1970s, refined cooking oil had come to India and people started realising that it was better than vanaspati."

gin in it. This forced the MNCs.

evidence".

dress these problems in a

transparent manner," says

board member SThirumurugan,

is also a cardamom grower in

Finally it did. In a nine-page circular dated

May 7, the Spices Board, a regulatory author-

ity promoting the export of Indian spices,

advised exporters to "identify EtO as a haz-

ard" and take measures "to ensure the ab-

sence of EtO and its metabolites in spices

and spice products throughout the supply

chain". The agency under the Union minis-

try of commerce and industry further said,

"Exporters shall test raw materials, process-

ing aids, packaging materials and finished

goods for EtO contamination." It advised the

firms to "perform a root cause analysis" if

Another member of the Spices Board and

director of Assam-based spice company

Sigma Spice Industries, Gautam Ghosh, says

there are meticulously crafted protocols both

for exports and domestic markets. "At Sigma,

we sign an agreement with a supplier only

after it agrees to meet our parameters. Once a

consignment arrives, we do some basic tests

in our own labs," says Ghosh, whose compa-

ny, which caters only to the domestic market,

they detected it, to avoid future recurrence.

who

Theni, Tamil Nadu.

"The Spices

Along with the influx of cheap refined oils and the growing availability of ghee in the organised sector, controversies and rumours spread, and vanaspati fell off the kirana list. "There were rumours that vanaspati was made from animal fator beef tallow. This made vegetarians desert vanaspati," says Mutha.

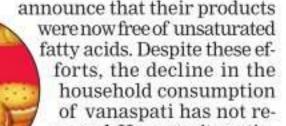
Pune-based Sunanda Desale, who is in her 60s, says, "We the central government: "The conused to have vanaspati just like ghee about 10-15 years ago. We spread it on chappati, added a spoonful to rice and made sabudana khichdi with it. But we started hearing that it had animal fat. It was also not considered to be good for the heart."

# OUT, TRANS FAT, OUT

This was the time when people became aware of transfats that can clog arteries. And there were high levels of transfats

in hydrogenated vanaspati. Doctors started advising people to avoid food made in 'dalda' aka vanaspati, which led to a further decline in its consumption.

The Food Safety Standards Authority of India went on to say trans fat in vanaspati should be limited to 2%. The forced leading vanaspati brands, including Dalda, to



versed. However, it continues to be used as margarine in processed foods and the baking industry. The cooking oil industry

The decline in

the household

vanaspati has

not reversed.

to be used in

foods and the

processed

**But it continues** 

has been pleading with the consumption of central government to take note of the change in consumer preferences and revise the weightage of oils in the edible oil basket of WPI The Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA), which baking industry represents the cooking oil industry, recently wrote to

sumption pattern of edible oils has totally changed in the last few years. Price sensitivity and availability are the top factors that have led to a change in the consumption pattern of cooking oils, followed by health factors. According to SEA, the consumption of cooking oils has increased from 162.71 lakh tonnes in 2010-11 to 251.78 lakh tonnes in 2022-23, up by 154%. Meanwhile, the consumption of vanaspati has fallen from 9.89 lakh tonnes to 7.5 lakh tonnes, down by 24% during the same period.

The tables have turned: ghee and butter are now hailed as healthy cooking fats. "A lot is being written about ghee in the US. This has increased the demand for its export," says Shah of Parag Milk Foods.

Dairyman Sodhi says the Indian consumer's choice of cooking fat has come full circle—from homescourge of trans fats also made ghee to vanaspati to refined oils and back to ghee.

jayashree.bhosale@timesgroup.com



# PADMAAVAT KE DIRECTOR-SAAB, A GOOD DOSE OF SECULAR FEMINISM THIS TIME?

With Heeramandi, Sanjay Leela Bhansali has joined the Hindi cinema patriotism game, only to refute it - hurrah! But coming from a filmmaker who has depicted crude clichés before, it seems too scripted - boo!



ANNA MM VETTICAD

Solomon Grundy. Born a filmmaker on Monday. Feministon Tuesday, Patriarchal on Wednesday, Liberalon Thursday, Islamophobicon Friday, Othering on Saturday, Normalising on Sunday, That is the tale Of Solomon Grundy

With due apologies to the English nursery rhyme's anonymous creator, my mind spon-

taneously adapted it after I watched Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Heeramandi, the largely bland Hindi-Urdu series on Netflix this week.

Heeramandi is set among the tawaifs of Lahore during the Quit India movement. When viewed in isolation, there is much to commend in the stances Bhansali is evidently taking on the show. For instance, his decision to set the story in Lahore, rather than any other part of undivided India where nawabs and nautch girls were to be found.

Lahore is now in Pakistan, a country that has been obsessively portrayed in nationalist Hindi cinema as a 'dushman desh' filled with gluttonous monsters intent on swallowing Kashmir. Propaganda is a psychological game that employs word and image associations to manipulate a people. By showing Heeramandi's tawaifs repeatedly advocating for 'mulk' (country), 'mitti' (land), 'vatan' (homeland) and 'azaadi' (freedom) - all catchwords of patriotism in Hindi cinema - Bhansalijoins the game to refute it.

The motherland on this show is India. But love for her is being expressed by women of a city that went to Pakistan after Partition. They don't fit the stereotype of the evil Pakis-



SO, WE HOLD THIS POSE TILL HIS NEXT MOVIE?

tani that dominates popular Hindi cinema. These are women who look like us, sound like us, bleed like us when struck by British weapons. They are us. How then can they be the Other?

Heeramandi is also overtly feminist in its depiction of these self-respecting, intelligent women who, despite their marginalisation, contradict the stereotype of the hapless oppressed Muslim woman prevalent even in

These multiple subversive strands in the film are overshadowed, unfortunately by Bhansali's tendency to prioritise visual grandeur over characterisation - he seems to look upon people in a scene with the eye of an interiordesignerarrangingfurniture-and by his

wildly inconsistent politics. Odd days: glorifying sati.

Even days: empowering women characters. Odd days: demonising Muslims. Even days: busting anti-Muslim clichés.

### The film's subversive strands are eclipsed by its focus on visual grandeur than characterisation

venture, Padmaavat (2018), which remains one of Hindi filmdom's biggest box office grossers. At a time when Islamophobia in India has turned into a din, Bhansali chose to pander to majoritarian forces in Padmaavat. Alauddin Khilji (Ranveer Singh) and others in Padmaavat were painted as animalistic creatures literally tearing into meat and women, in keeping with the right-wing view of Muslims as savages, while the infidelity of the lustful but well-mannered Hindu king (Shahid Kapoor) was pitched as romance.

A procession of tawaifs defying the British in Heeramandi unwittingly harks back to the carefully choreographed procession of women, led by a perfectly-styled Deepika Padukone, heading to their customary suicide in Padmaavat's jauhar scene.

Jauhar was a Rajput practice requiring women to jump to their deaths in a fire to escape rape by an invading army. It was based

Heeramandi cannot offset the damage on the understanding that a husband has an wrought by that other Bhansali directorial exclusive right to his wife's body, and if his property were to be utilised by a third party, then it must be deemed as soiled beyond redemption and therefore, discarded.

In an India that continues to devalue women who have been raped, Bhansali chose to romanticise jauhar in Padmaavat through a voiceover, and his framing of that scene almost as a glamorous fashion parade. Feminism and minority rights are com-

mitments, not passing fancies. If a filmmaker alternates between progressive and regressive values in his works, it is logical to wonder whether those values stem from conviction, or the audience he has chosen to please on a given day.

Spare me the liberalism and feminism of Heeramandi. They mean little when coming from the Bhansali who also made Padmaavat.

The writer is author of The Adventures of an Intrepid Film Critic

**Beethoven's Hair** 

Is it saved as a relic, like in the case of

A few locks were in fact preserved

but the real story is what new anal-

vsis of the hair reveals about the

legendary composer's physical ail-

ments including, most famously,

Ah! What was the hypothesis about

There were, as you could imagine,

many. Apart from deafness he also

struggled with stomach cramps,

flatulence and diarrhea. So, a wide

range of reasons have been debated

– from irritable bowel syndrome to

For an immensely talented, success-

ful person, that sounds quite miser-

Indeed. His fans, up to the present

day, have been

agog to know

might

caused

misery.

religious relics?

his deafness.

syphilis.

### **RED HERRING**



**INDRAJIT HAZRA** 

# **Big Wobbles May Be** Temporary, But the **Tempos Are Forever**

'Ambani-Adani' sending vans with cash to Congress is an odd image to pull out

There are very few things as fascinating as the Big Wobble. I saw it in front of my eyes at Bernabéu Stadium on late Wednesday night - relax HR, I was WFH (watching from home) - when the ever-so-dependable hands of Bayern Munich goalkeeper Manuel Neuer spilled an easy-peasy save, resulting in the sprayed ball being tapped into the net like a billiard ball by Real Madrid striker Joselu to equalise with two minutes left in regulation time.

Till the 88th minute, Bayern had seen itself within pinching distance of reaching the Champions League final to face their German arch-rivals Borussia Dortmund. But then, Big Wobble struck.

Once Big Wobbled, you saw Teutonic calmness - yes, that's a Pitroda-esque ethnological cliché, so kill megive way to decapitated chicken panic. And sure enough, with 10 minutes of added time, a double-espressoed Real Madrid tucked in the winning goal and called in the fat lady to sing. Final scoreline: Real 2 Tropicana Munich 1.

As it happens, earlier the same day, there was another Big Wobble. For anyone who cares to acknowledge strange messaging in BJP these days, at an election rally at Karimnagar in Telangana, the prime minister accused Congress of striking a deal with 'Ambani-Adani' to make 'shehzada' - that is, the prince formerly known as Rahul Gandhi - stop his usual tirade against the Thompson and Thomson of India Inc. Especially visual was the question that BJP's guarantor presented to the crowd: 'Were tempos filled with currency notes sent to Congress?' Narendra Modi channelled his inner Gabbar, asking, 'Ambani-Adani se kitna maal uthaya hai?"

To charge one's principal opponent of getting paid by corporate fat cats so as to refrain from casting slurs against those very corporate fat cats is usually seen as a mild rhetorical device used for political virtue-signalling by everyone but Chet-shirt-wearers. That Modi was overturning the usual narrative of Gandhi -that BJP was in league with AA, making the central government a Deewar-flavoured 'suited-booted sar-

kar' - would have been chuckle-in-

ducing... ...were it not for the fact that Modi had just conjured up the image of AA doing unto what Congress Congress usually accuses AA of doing unto BJP: filling tempos with dubious cash. (Interestingly, 'tempo' is the generic name given in India to open-back



SCREAMING ABOUT **HUSH MONEY** 

originally manufactured by the Hamburg-based Vidal & Sohn Tempo-Werke that shut shop in 1977.) Who needs electoral bonds when you have tempos?

Effectively, Modi was accusing AA of bribing Congress to make Gandhi shut up. Or, let me rephrase: Was Modi accusing AA of bribing Congress to make Gandhi shut up? Congress response was, unsurprisingly, very Congress-like. Partymen trotted up instances since elections were announced - the duration that the PM said Gandhi had been mum about any AA-GoI nexus - of their boss bringing up the 'government-industrialists complex'. They even made the bynow quite reasonable demand in ED-CBI season that Enforcement Directorate and CBI look into AA possibly laundering money on the back of open vans.

Modi's 'sudden' lurch towards national socialism or critique of crony capitalist behaviour - may well be seen by his admirers as a clever countermove to hit two birds with one stone: one, get rid of any 'suitedbooted' connotation during this poll season that his government may reek of for some non-attar-applied nostrils; two, come across as a more relatable Thomas Picketty of Indian politics than any entitled member of the opposition.

But what about AA? Even if you believe that the PM picked up the phone and called A and A, telling them, 'Listen, I'll have to badmouth you a bit for a bigger cause. Don't mind,' people are liable to wonder well after the hurly-burly's done and the electoral battle's lost and won, where AA stands in the scheme of things. And more importantly, where a BJP government stands in its dealings with India Inc in general, and AA in particular.

Whether BJP forms the next government or not, we may have just witnessed a Great Wobble. Every time AA interacts with a future government, we shall now

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see tempos.

GOT YOUR DIGITAL DOPPELGÄNGER YET? Digital clones - AI-created replicas of yourself - can take multitasking to a whole new level. But hang on a second...



**ATANU BISWAS** 

ances giving expert opinions on two TV channels simultaneously. Both, I reasoned, can't be live programmes. Or, is that possible in today's tech-driven world?

Last year, Wall Street Journal columnist Joanna Stern wrote an article, 'I Cloned Myself With AI. She Fooled My Bank and My Family'. Even though AI Joanna was able to trick the voice biometric system on her credit card, the automated system asked for additional verification when a video intern for WSJ called and did her best Joanna impression.

Influencer Caryn Marjorie launched CarynAI, a speech-based chatbot, last year. CarynAI functions as a 'virtual girlfriend' and has a voice and demeanour like Marjorie in real life. People actually paid \$1 a minute to chat with CarynAI.

This chatbot reminds me of the 2013 SF romantic drama film, Her. The Spike Jonze film follows Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix), who develops a relationship with Samantha (Scarlett Johansson), an AI virtual as-

voice. Things get eerie down the way. a 'low price'. This represents a paradigm shift in how people engage in their personal and professional lives. Today, audio-video footage will suffice to make a clone in place of DNA. Information from various sources, including podcasts, videos, and texts, is amalgamated to create a replica that can mimic the user's speech, voice, ideas, and even humour.

The term 'digital thought clone' was Recently, I found one of my acquaint- first used by Jon Truby and Rafael Dean Brown in a 2021 paper, 'Human digital thought clones: the Holy Grail of artificial intelligence for big data'. The paper describes the evolution of digital cloning into a more advanced

personalised form that consists of a crease his practice by setting up a Chat Humans are creating their own digital 'replica of all known data and beha- GP2 dead ringer. clones out of their desire to become many. viour on a specific living person, re- So, are we moving towards an era Several companies are offering clones at cording in real time their choices, pref- when many people can receive individerences, behavioural trends, and decision-making processes'.

> with your loved ones, respond to emails, and manage your social media accounts. Creators, influencers, and business professionals are meticulousstartling, lifelike precision.

Music producer Raymond Ibanga Jr a.k.a. Illmind launched All His Wisdom. a 'smart and intuitive' AI-powered clone that advises aspiring producers. Deepak Chopra developed a life-like AI version of himself for Zoom calls. Your GP is probably making plans right now to in-

When will your clone remain your clone? He or she could one day say that you are his/her clone



WELL, IT'S STILL IN A KBC BETA STAGE

sistant personified through a female 

# Of Fans & Fanatics, and Being Loud'n' Proud

Pride in pursuing an interest has become so fervent that achievement's secondary

# **WORD COUNTS**

**TUSHAR GORE** 

Fervent enthusiasm in sports and politics is nothing new. Religion was the original activity of choice for displaying fanatical interest. The dictionary defines the word fanatic as 'a person with obsessive interest in and enthusiasm for a particular activity.' The Latin root for fanatic is fanum - temple which explains the original association of the word with religious passion.

There are silent fanatics who keep their firmly held positions to themselves. There is also a proud display of such enthusiasm, evident in fan behaviour during major events. Lately, a similar type of behaviour is noticeable in other pursuits. People used to be enthusiasts, amateurs, dilettantes, and aficionados and casually pursued hobbies and time-pass activities without much fanfare and publicity. Not anymore. There is zeal and enthusiasm in all such dabbling. Moreover, this is not silent fer-

vour. Here is an intense pride about having this focus. And this pride about the pursuit is expressed so fervently that just the pursuit and interest are made out to be an achievement in themselves and becomea distinguish-

personality trait. I know somezealously proud of his affection for, and interest in, Indian classical music. Any actual achieveof interest seems secondary.

income, and the rise of social media. The first allows for a substantial investment in pursuing non-income-generating ities. The second enables broadcasting one's activities and satisfies the desire to stand out

ottam Laxman Deshpande-affectionately known as PL in English and PuLa in Marathi – described ic and point of view. For examsimilar behaviour in his satirical essay on the characteristics of Punekars, the inhabitants of Pune.

In his 1990 essay, which sucthe Maharashtrian identity and the differences between citizens of Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur (Mumbaikars, Punethat one trait that sets Pune-

consequential facts, such as Pune's association with Shivaji,

Surge in 'fervent dilettantism' is tied to increased disposable income and social media growth



WHAT PUNJAB LEARNT FROM PUNE

ment and competence in the field or its link with leaders such as Lokmanya Tilak. There is legiti-This recent rise in 'fervent dilet- mate pride even for seemingly tantism' has multiple causes that mundane aspects, such as the include an increase in disposable number of the local community's Ganesh idols in the immersion procession line during Ganesh Chaturthi. Besides the inherent satisfac-

tion of having this point of pride, such self-regard serves another purpose and enables Playwright and scholar Purush- another Punekar characteristic - as noted by PL, the ability to debate and challenge any topple, taking pride in 'indigenous' games to question and criticise the importance shown to cricket. Or, to take pride in cinctly and hilariously dissects Gopal Agarkar as a reformer and freedom fighter during the birth celebration of Tilak or Mohandas Gandhi.

Despite such passionate difkars, Nagpurkars), PL jokes ferences about myriad topics, Punekars have skilfully mankars apart is their fiery pride aged a long history of peaceful for their city and aspects of existence. This Pune mindset will be in much demand, as He further observes that the there is growth in groups interpoint of pride need not only be ested in - proudly interested in a wide variety of activities, such as photography, model railroads, single malt, antiques, etcetera etcetera.

Pune was the administrative centre of the Maratha empire. At its zenith, it covered a large part of modern India - from Punjab to some parts of Tamil Nadu, and from Rajasthan to Odisha. (Yet another matter for Punekars to be fiercely proud of.) Modern trends, however, have

done more to disperse this Pune trait across India and the world-than the Maratha empire's far-reaching geographical conquest. While satirising this Punekar attribute in the 1990s, PL never imagined it would be this widely held one day. Should this universalisation of fervent pride fill the Punekar in me with, well, pride? Or, should I lament the loss of a distinguishing Pune trait becoming oh-socommonplace?

The writer is managing director, Resonance Laboratories, Bengaluru

ualised instruction from 'many' coaches and experts at a significantly re-Such a digital clone can communicate duced cost? Will politicians and CEOs have digital doubles to attend separate meetings simultaneously? Could election campaigns make good use of such digital doubles by being in many places ly crafting clones of themselves with at the same time without the sameness of media coverage?

And what about ordinary people? Can four of me divide the load and work on a meeting, teach my students, write this column and watch a movie? As Truby and Brown explain in their paper, the commercial Holy Grail for profit-seeking big data firms and advertisers, who have commoditised forecasts of digital behaviour data, will be digital thought clones. As almost identical AI counterparts

take on human duties, there are, of course, significant worries about identity theft, job displacement, and decline of genuine (sic) human connection. Will individual coaches and teachers become obsolete? Should important biometric information, such as voice and physical characteristics, be accessible to create these clones? Can machines be trusted to operate, giv-

en the plethora of available parameters? Can a Joe Biden clone meet up with a Benjamin Netanyahu clone to talk about the Israel-Iran conflict without officially talking? What if Dr Jekyll's AI clone acts as Mr Hyde? And when will your clone remain your clone? He or she could one day jolly well turn around and say that you are his/her clone.

The writer is professor of statistics. Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Kolkata

### what have the DNA analysis has now progressed sufficiently to hold out clues. And? What did it say? Morparia

The director of the lab which did the analysis told The New York Times that one lock of his hair had over 250 micrograms of lead per gram of hair while another had 380 micrograms. Normal level is supposed to be less than 4 micrograms of lead per gram of hair.

Whoa! Was he drinking lead?

That's not inaccurate. One likely source of lead is thought to be cheap wine. During the composer's time, lead acetate used to be added to poor quality wine to improve the taste. And Beethoven is supposed to have drunk about a bottle a day, believing it to be good for his health. Even on his deathbed, he had a few spoonfuls of wine, fed by his friends, with the best of inten-

Ouch. Did that cause his deafness? Yes, experts say it's very likely that this is what led to the deafness, since it would have affected his nervous system. In later years, he also took a lot of medicines, many of which would also, unfortunately, have contained lead. Text: Indulekha Aravind

2 Bizarre writer pulled up

3 Irritable editor, heartless guy

resurrected holy object (5)

15 Marshal Rommel sat in state of

17 Tease jerk church banned (4)

20 Feature of columnar chapel?

21 Performance cancelled? Put

unit made up (6)

housed (5)

upset (4)

24 What 29 did on ring, and

where he did it? (5)

on a personal display (4,3)

22 A representative in Dublin has

26 Restrict student at US college

27 Man, for instance, Elsie almost

18 A supporter's keeping endless

cereal for folk in Mali, say (8)

4 Scorn director said to be in

trouble at home (7)

7 Gas ran out tragically for

Jason's crew ... (9)

tournament ... (4)

pyramids (4)

upheaval (9)

14 ... surrounded by some

16 Tailless fish in barrel (3)

8 ... sailors in the drink (8)

11 Singer takes part in royal

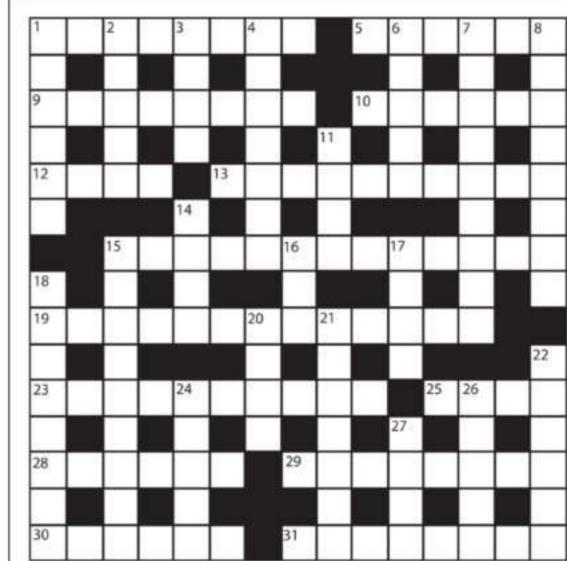
6 German story-teller

blankets (5)

0063

# ET Sunday Crossword

**NO OFFENCE** 



 It's hard to handle doctor duly drinking mulled wine (8)

5 Reptile's again on the loose round

youth centre (6) 9 Narrow-minded priest's half eaten stewed 10 without one (8)

10 Long to return to eat a good Scottish speciality (6) 12 Fusses over mixer (4)

13 Bean and lentil spilt on it? (5,5) 15 Mike and Tom often worked with girl in time of crisis (6,2,5) 19 Accidental remarks interpreted as 1 His pup is out of control and cocky (6)

sinful pride (8,5)

25 Apartment's lost its sparkle (4) 28 Sand in a rough beard (6) 29 Badminton contestant has more moves at front of net (8) 30 Naughty boys nick money left for

castle and river (10)

icon (6)

23 Coach tour isn't designed to take in

31 A fellow celebrated getting start of ceremony moved (8) DOWN

22 Atoned, 24 Rodeo, 26 Limit. 18 Africans. 20 Arch. 21 Show off. 15 Maelstrom, 16 Tun, 17 Twit. 8 Absinthe. 11 Alto. 14 Amid. 4 Disdain. 6 Grail, 7 Argonauts. DOWN: 1 Uppish, 2 Weird, 3 Edgy

31 Affected. 29 Horseman. 30 Symbol. 23 Instructor. 25 Flat. 28 Abrade. truth. 19 Freudian slips. 13 Table linen. 15 Moment of ACROSS: 1 Unwieldy. 5 Iguana. 9 Priggish. 10 Haggis. 12 Soda. SOLUTION TO No 0063:

©The Daily Mail

# Flash Floods **Kill Hundreds** in Afghanistan



ISLAMABAD: Flash floods from seasonal rains in Afghan-

istan have killed hundreds of people and injured a "substantial number," a Taliban official said on Saturday. The floods hit the northern region of the country. The province of Baghlan bore the brunt of the deluges on Friday with officials preliminary reporting at least 50 people as dead. - AP

# **Ex-Malaysian** PM's Wife Sued over \$346m



sia Development Bhd. is among com-

panies that are suing the wife of former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak for allegedly obtaining over \$346 million worth of luxury goods through misappropriated funds. The companies are asking Rosmah Mansor to give up the luxury goods in her possession and pay \$346 million. - Reuters

# **Musk's Starlink** Disrupted by **Solar Storm**

NEW YORK: Starlink, the satellite arm of Elon Musk's SpaceX warned on Saturday of a "degraded service" as the Earth is battered by the biggest geomagnetic storm due to solar activity in two decades. Starlink owns around 60% of the 7,500 satellites orbiting Earth and is a dominant player in satel-

# **Top Priority** for Business Continuity

lite internet. - Reuters

# ▶▶ From Page 1

As cyberthreats continue to evolve in sophistication and frequency, organisations must prioritise cybersecurity to safeguard sensitive data, protect against cyberattacks, and ensure business continuity, said Tony Buffomante, global head of cybersecurity and risk services at IT firm Wipro. To hire "cybersecurists", the Bengaluru-based company is tapping into the global talent market, he said.

The company has more than 9,000 cybersecurity specialists and 12 global cyber-defence centres in 60 countries, and invests in training and upskilling initiatives to ensure that employees stay abreast of the latest security trends, technologies and best practices.

The skill sets that companies are looking for in cyber experts include proficiency in programming languages and an understanding of computer networking, operating systems, and cloud computing.

# TOP THREAT TO COS

At least two recent surveys cite cyber risks as the biggest threat facing organisations today. According to PwC's 2023 Global Risk Survey, 38% of organisations feel highly or extremely exposed to cyber risks. In Aon's latest Global Risk Management survey, cyberattack/ data breach is the No.1 risk facing Indian businesses, up from the seventh position in 2021.

HDFC Bank is scaling up in the areas of digital, application programming interface (API), cloud, data protection and cyber resiliency, amid the emerging and evolving threat landscape, regulatory and customer expectations and new tech

"Security-embedded digital is the future as it not only involves internal IT assets but also the vendor-regulatory ecosystem. This is an area where we are focusing right now so that customers can transact safely and securely," said Sameer Ratolikar, senior executive vice-president and chief information security officer at the country's largest

private sector lender. API security is going to be a focus area where the bank is looking to hire senior and mid-level professionals. Securing customer data, especially after the enactment of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, is now a must, and securing businesssensitive data is going to be an important area, he said.

FOR DATA CENTRES ALONE, FIRMS SET TO SPLURGE UP TO \$60B OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS

# Tech Giants Start to Treat SE Asia Like Next Big Thing

#### Bloomberg

New York: Long considered a tech hinterland, Southeast Asia is fast emerging as a center of gravity for industry.

The CEOs of Apple, Microsoft and Nvidia are among the industry chieftains who've swung through the region in past months, committing billions of dollars in investment and holding forth with heads of state from Indonesia to Malaysia. Amazon just this week took over a giant conference hall in downtown Singapore to unfurl a \$9 billion investment plan before a thousands-strong audience cheering and waving glow sticks.

After decades of playing second fiddle to China and Japan, the region of about 675 million people is drawing

### CHINA'S SUBSTITUTE



Southeast Asia's growing workforce is making

it a viable alternative to China as a centre of talent to support firms ops

**Taking Stock** 



DRIVING FACTORS China turns more

hostile to US firms India remains tougher

to navigate politically Silicon Valley is setting its sights on business-friendly

regimes and fast-

The advent of Al is spurring tech leaders to pursue new sources of growth

growing talent pool

more tech investment than ever. For data centres alone, the world's biggest companies are set to splurge up to \$60 billion over the next few years as Southeast Asia's young populations embrace video streaming, on-

line shopping and generative AI. Traditionally welcoming to Western investment, the region's moment has arrived as China turns more hoscon Valley is setting its sights on business-friendly regimes, fast-

growing talent pool and rising incomes. The advent of AI is spurring tech leaders to pursue new sources of growth, laying the digital infrastructure of the region's future.

"Countries like Singapore and Malaysia are largely neutral to the geopolitical tensions happening with China, US, Ukraine and Russia," said Sean Lim, a managing partner tile to US firms and India remains at Singapore-based NWD Holdings, tougher to navigate politically. Sili- which invests in AI-based projects and other areas.

"Especially with the ongoing wars, Holdings Pte and Bain & Co.

this region has become more attrac-

Take Tim Cook and Satya Nadella, who last month embarked on their biggest tours across Southeast Asia in years. The investments they pledged are set to help turn the region into a major battleground between the likes of Amazon, Microsoft and Google in future frontiers such as artificial intelligence and the cloud.

The region's growing workforce is making it a viable alternative to China as a centre of talent to support companies' global operations. As its governments pushed for improvements in education and infrastructure, it's become an attractive base for everything from manufacturing and data centers to research and design.

"The governments are pro crossborder investments and there's a deep talent pool," said NWD's Lim.

Southeast Asia has also become a sizeable market for gadgets and online services. About 65% of Southeast Asia will be middle class by 2030, with rising purchasing power, according to Singapore government estimates. That'll help more than double the region's market for internet based services to \$600 billion, according to estimates by Google, Temasek

# Israel Orders New Evacuations in Gaza's Last Refuge of Rafah

The UN warns that Israel's planned Rafah invasion will cripple humanitarian operations

Rafah, Gaza Strip: Israel ordered new evacuations in Gaza's southern city of Rafah on Saturday, forcing tens of thousands more people to move as it prepares to expand its military operation closer to the heavily populated central area, in defiance of growing pressure from close ally the United States and others.

Israel's military also said it was moving into an area of devastated northern Gaza where it asserted that the Hamas militant group has regrouped.

Israel has now evacuated the eastern third of Rafah, which is considered the last refuge in Gaza. The United Nations and others have warned that Israel's planned fullscale Rafah invasion would cripple humanitarian operations and cause a disastrous surge in civilian casualties. Rafah borders Egypt near the main aid entry points, which already have been affected. Israeli troops have captured the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing, forcing it to shut

Bloomberg

New York: Billionaire venture capi-

talist Vinod Khosla was dealt a new

setback in his 15-year fight to block

public access through his private

property to a popular surfing spot

A California state judge issued a

tentative ruling on Friday denying

Khosla's request to throw out a law-

suit brought by a state agency that

says the billionaire has no right to

close Martins Beach to the pub-

lic. Khosla erected a gate on the

road leading down to the cres-

cent-shaped cove after he bought

the property around the Pacific

beach in 2008 for \$32.5 million.

His lawyers contend he had

the right to do so as the

property owner un-

less he was offered

proper compensa-

south of San Francisco.

Khosla Loses Bid

to End California

Beach Access Suit

Foundation.



A woman and boy walk with belongings past barbed-wire fences as they flee from Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Saturday. - AFP

said there was "reasonable" evidence that Israel had breached international law protecting civilians in the way it conducted its war against Hamas—the strongest statement yet that the Biden administration has made on the matter. In response to the US report, Ophir

US President Joe Biden has said he Falk, foreign policy adviser to Is-

tion. He fought all the way to the US

Supreme Court, which refused in

2018 to take up his appeal of a lower-

court ruling in favor of the Surfrider

In Friday's tentative ruling, Supe-

rior Court Judge Raymond Swope

said state officials had provided

enough support for their claim of

public access to move forward with

The State Lands Commission

seeks a court order barring

Khosla from blocking the

road to the beach on the

grounds that the the pub-

lic "has acquired access

rights" to the land based

the judge to reconsider

his ruling at a hearing Mon-

day in Red-

wood City.

on historical use and Cal-

ifornia law. Khosla can ask

the case they filed in 2020.

will not provide offensive weapons to rael's prime minister, told the AP Israel for Rafah. On Friday the US that Israel acts in compliance with the laws of armed conflict and the army takes extensive measures to avert civilian casualties, including alerting people to military operations via phone calls and text messages.

More than 1.4 million Palestinians half of Gaza's population — have been sheltering in Rafah, most after fleeing Israel's offensives elsewhere.

The evacuations are forcing people to return north where areas are devastated from previous Israeli attacks. Aid agencies estimate that 110,000 had done so before Saturday's order, which adds a further 40,000.

"What should we do here? Do we wait until we all die on top of each other? So, we've decided to leave. It's better," said Rafah resident Hanan al-Satari as people rushed to load mattresses, water tanks and other belongings onto vehicles.

"The Israeli army does not have a safe area in Gaza. They target everything," said Abu Yusuf al-Deiri, earlier displaced from Gaza City.

Many people have been displaced multiple times, and there are few places left to go.

# VIOLATED INT'L LAW



**US President** Joe Biden has said he will not

provide offensive weapons to Israel for Rafah

# Sales Hit in Politically Sensitive Localities

# >> From Page 1

This year's general election is said to be the second longest voting exercise in India. The count will be held on June 4. Some chief executives said the election schedule is impacting business as stores have to shut for at least seven days in the quarter and even more in localities that are politically sensitive.

Department store chain Shoppers Stop managing director Kavindra Mishra said on its earnings call on April 30 that demand is sluggish in certain markets with the onset of election season despite an outstanding March and April first half.

Polls took place on two Fridays in April and last Tuesday in May. The next two voting days this month are on Mondays (May 13, 20) and subsequently on a Saturday (May 25). The final phase, June 1, is a Saturday, "So what happens is when you do that, the market... the stores get shut for the entire day, and obviously, there is a hit because retail as we know, is all about driving things very, very minutely" said Mishra.

Ajoy Chawla, CEO of the jewellery division at Titan Co, which runs Tanishq stores, told analysts last week that higher discounting in jewellery will continue in the near term due to low consumer demand, which persists amid elections and few wedding dates in the June quarter.

US-based shoe maker Skechers chief financial officer John Vandemore also flagged the ongoing elec-



tion in India, "which takes an awful long time to get done," as a factor that may impact the India busi-

ness on its recent earnings call. Some like Britannia Industries managing director Varun Berry told analysts this week that demand outlook and topline growth should improve after the election results are out and the June-September monsoon is underway. Notably, while AC and air cooler sales have soared because of the heat, the latter haven't particularly benefitted from their ubiquity on the election trail — they're a fixture on nearly every campaign speech stage.

# **Swedish Host** City Braces for **Eurovision Final**

More than 10,000 pro-Palestinian campaigners staged a non-violent protest ahead of semi-final



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators gather for a protest against the participation of Israeli contestant Eden Golan ahead of the final of the Eurovision Song Contest in Malmo, Sweden, on Saturday. - AP

### Reuters

Malmo, Sweden: Swedish host city Malmo geared up for the Eurovision grand final on Saturday as excitement mingled with the tension of heightened security threats and political protests over Israel's participation.

The 68th version of the song contest, which is always billed as nonpolitical, is taking place against the backdrop of the devastating Israeli military campaign in Gaza, triggered by Hamas' deadly October 7 attack on Israel.

A festival of tongue-in-cheek kitsch and ephemeral tunes, the contest has been thrust into the arena of political conflict with protesters, online and on the streets of Malmo, calling for Israel to be excluded from the competition.

Bookmakers have Croatia's Baby Lasagna, real name Marko Purišic, 28. with "Rim Tim Tagi Dim", a song about a young man who leaves home aspiring to become a "city boy" with better opportunities, as front-runner to win the contest. Israeli solo artist Eden Golan, 20,

and her song "Hurricane" also qualified for Saturday's final with betting odds on Friday showing her emerge as one of the leading contenders to win. The list of favourites also includes Swiss rapper and singer Nemo, 24, performing "The Code", a drum-and-bass, opera, rap and rock tune, about Nemo's journey of self-discovery as a non-binary person.

Other nations high on betting list include France, the Netherlands, Italy, Ukraine and Ireland, while streaming data from Spotify has also suggested a chance for host nation Sweden.

The world's biggest live music event, the Eurovision Song Contest is estimated to have drawn around 100,000 visitors to Malmo, Sweden's third-biggest city, while many millions more in Europe and further afield tune in for the broadcast.

Eurovision organisers resisted calls to exclude Israel over its military campaign in Gaza, arguing the competition is non-political, though they did demand that Israel tweak the lyrics of its entry, origithat is representing Sweden, said. 

nally titled "October Rain", to remove what they said were referenc-

es to the October 7 attack. The lyrics were altered, allowing Israel to take part, and Golan characterises her song as a strong power ballad that describes a person going through a storm of emotions. Some booing was heard from the crowd before, during and after Golan's performance in the semi-finals on Thursday, but also applause and Israeli flags waving, according to a Reuters journalist in the auditorium.

In central Malmo, more than 10,000 pro-Palestinian campaigners, including climate activist Greta Thunberg, staged a non-violent protest in the hours ahead of the

semi-final, waiving

Palestinian flags

and shouting "boy-

cott Israel". A small-

er group of pro-Is-

raeli supporters, in-

cluding members of

community, also

staged a peaceful

demonstration in

Jewish



biggest live music event is estimated to have drawn around 100K visitors to

the city, defending Golan and her right to take part in the contest. More demonstrations are planned for Saturday and again expected to draw thousands of protesters. There will also be an alternative music festival in the city

Malmo's

that has billed itself as the "genocide-free song contest". Protesters have complained of double standards as Russia was banned from Eurovision in 2022 by European Broadcasting Union (EBU) after several broadcasters called for the country to be expelled

following its invasion of Ukraine. The 26 contestants in Saturday's grand final include 10 from each of the two semi-finals of the past week, as well as the "big five" countries — Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain—and host country

Sweden. "Of course people want to express their own opinions and stuff like that. But for us, you know, it's just a dream and an honour to be a part of Eurovision," Marcus Gunnarsen, of duo Marcus & Martinus

# IMF Doubts Cash-strapped **Pak's Repayment Capacity**



has said that Pakistan faces major debt-repayment challenges and expressed serious doubts over the

cash-strapped country's capacity to repay the global lender, according to a media report on Saturday. The Washington-based bank's assessment of Pakistan's economy came as an IMF support team reached the country on Friday to hold

talks with officials here after Isla-

mabad requested a fresh bailout

package under the Extended Fund

Islamabad: The IMF Facility (EFF). "Pakistan's capacity to repay the fund is subject to significant risks and remains critically dependent on policy implementation and timely external financing," Geo News cited the lender as saying in its staff report.

"Exceptionally high risks—notably from delayed adoption of reforms, high public debt and gross financing needs, low gross reserves and State Bank of Pakistan's net FX derivative position. could jeopardise policy implementation," read the report. - PTI

# Vendor Registrations Soon

# >> From Page 1

The renewable energy ministry recently shifted to a new portal and will soon start the national vendor registration process.

The PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli 75,021 crore, entails implementa- for installations.

tion through power distribution companies and vendors with rationalised subsidies and collateral-free loans. Registrations under the scheme crossed the 10-million mark within a month of its launch. Of the registered consu-Yojana, which has an outlay of Rs mers, almost 800,000 have applied

# Higher Retention Rate

Vinod Khosla

▶▶ From Page 1 This is leading to more women working from offices and on night shifts, and companies prefer female cab drivers for scheduled drops of these employees who work late hours, said Balasubramanian A, vice president and head of consumer and ecommerce at TeamLease Services.

"Usually if it's a male driver, the company would send a security guard to accompany women employees which is an extra cost, but not a challenge," said Balasubraes, he added. However, women concerns for the female drivers more than men. Though it is hard veral of whom are now employ- katesh Krishnamoorthy.



still account for just about 1% of the 1.7-2 million pool of cab drivers. Data show southern and western parts of the country are with women cab drivers, this is employing more female drivers than in the North, where it may manian. "It is a smart and cost-ef-still be a taboo for women to drive ficient option too." The demand is cabs or commercial vehicles, said personnel. Women, they have fomostly concentrated in metro citi- experts. Besides, there are safety und, are likely to stay in the job tan', has trained 180 women, se- said chief operating officer Ven-

themselves in many regions, especially in the North.

There is also a spike in demand for female two-wheeler riders from delivery companies, which are facing monthly attrition of as high as 40% among their delivery

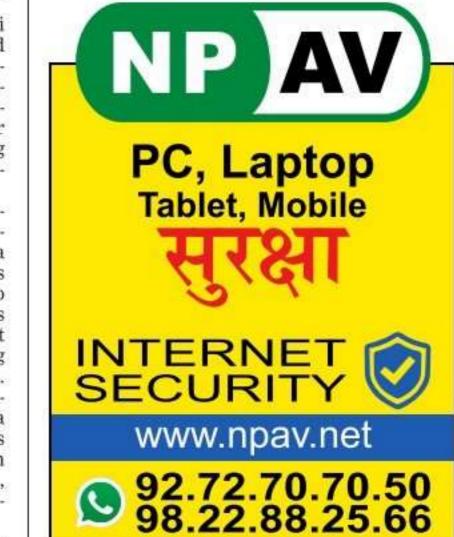
to get women on board, once they ed as bus drivers with the Delhi join it is easy to train them and their retention rate is higher, said Balasubramanian. Attrition among women is almost half that of male riders. But here too, of the estimated 7 million two-wheeler riding executives who deliver ecommerce and other orders, women account for under 1%.

TRAINING AND UPSKILLING Several companies are investing in training and upskilling

women in driving skills. In fiscal 2024, Maruti Driving Schools, which are run by the automaker's dealers, trained more than 355,000 people and over 44% of them were women. Ashok Leyland, through its partnership with the Delhi go-

Transport Corporation, said Raja Radhakrishnan, the commercial vehicle maker's president-human resources. Separately, Ashok Leyland last year provided specialised training covering diverse driving conditions to 100 women.

MG Motor India and the Vadodara Police have a partnership wherein women are provided with a platform to learn driving skills and basic soft skills. MG also helps women get driving licences and facilitates female drivers get employed through ride-hailing firms and car-rental agencies. Employee transportation company Moto Business Service India, a subsidiary of Yamaha Motor, has trained several female drivers on vernment's 'Mission Parivar- electric two- and four-wheelers,



# South Side Story

Can a slew of attractive sops from

the state government and a competitive

workforce turn Chennai into a hub for GCCs,

positioning the state as a healthy alternative

to Bengaluru and Hyderabad?

**Beena Parmar & Annapurna Roy** report

Hyderabad, its more cosmopolitan sisters from the South. But with these two metropolises reaching saturation levels, the Tamil Nadu capital has spotted an opportunity to make its move. Accordingly, it has put into motion a plan to lure multinationals and position itself as the new tech city of the South.

state government, Chennai is now among the locations global firms are eyeing to set up their tech bases and global capability centres (GCCs).

High-quality English-speaking talent, a thriving industrial ecosystem and the latest round of government incentives could entice multinationals, experts say. "We are seeing a slow movement to Chennai, as it is catching the attention and fancy of companies, which was not the case previously. Earlier, it used to be among the top five or six most preferred cities. But it's part Centre (GTIC) in of the shortlist now — not because of the incentives but because of the administration, talent, connectivity India and South Asia, and other benefits," said Lalit Ahuja, Hitachi Energy. founder and CEO of ANSR, a leading firm that helps multinationals set up GCCs in India.

A case in point is German athletic apparel and footwear brand Adidas setting up a GCC in Chennai, its first and only GCC in Asia outside China. Last year, firms such as Hapag Lloyd and United Parcel Service entered Tamil Nadu, while Bank of America, Standard Chartered, Amex and Citi are all expanding.

#### **EVOLVING NUMBERS**

Besides financial companies such as banks and automotive firms, manufacturing, pharma, tech and product companies in the fintech space are all considering setting up centres in Chennai.

"Chennai is catching the attention and fancy of companies, not because of government incentives but because of benefits like administration, talent and connectivity."

> - Lalit Ahuja, founder and CEO, ANSR

As of March 2023, there are around 2,740 GCC units in India, according to data from Zinnov, a management consulting firm that works with GCCs in India. Of these, Chennai accounts for just about 10 per cent. FY24 numbers are yet to be disclosed.

"Chennai's GCC ecosystem ranks fifth in India, with more than 259 existing centres that employ over 150,000 skilled professionals. This growth is being fuelled by the government's definitive involvement through key policy initiatives like 'Guidance Tamil Nadu'. These initiatives, including incentives on land cost, training, innovation labs, etc, will have a tangible, positive impact on the ecosystem," said Nilesh Thakker, president, Zinnov.

Of the 10 GCCs that were set up in India in Q4, only one was based in Chennai — by Hitachi Energy,

hennai has long the Nasscom report said. Hitachi lived in the shadows Energy plans to house 2,500 energy of Bengaluru and transition technologists with post-doctorate, doctorate and postgraduate degrees specialising in grid automation, transformers, high-voltage and grid integration.

"Tamil Nadu is one of the country's most industrialised states with enormous business potential, accounting for 15 per cent of doctorates and 11 per cent of post-graduates. Chennai is at Thanks to latest sops offered by the the centre of this growth, gaining prominence as an innovation and R&D hub in the country. Its robust infrastructure, skilled talent pool in the region, and conducive business environment attracted us to set up our operation in Chennai in 2007 for R&D and innovation on a small scale. Today, Hitachi

Energy is leveraging these characteristics and the immense talent pool for its largest Global Technology and Innovation Chennai," said N Venu, MD and CEO.

Number of GCC units across different cities

City	#of GCC Units
Bengaluru	823
Hyderabad	327
Pune	334
Mumbai	350
NCR	433
Chennai	259
Kolkata	214
Total	2,740
	SOURCE: ZINNOV

EThadreported in March that amid increasing interest among overseas firms to set up their tech centres in India, the Tamil Nadu government decided to incentivise firms to be the preferred choice to set up shops here. In its state budget, the TN government also said that it will provide a payroll subsidy for the creation of high paying jobs i n new GCCs. Industry experts see this as a booster to help the southern

#### REAL ESTATE AND ADMINISTRATION

and Hyderabad.

This is also reflective of the strong movement in GCC-focused real estate in 2023. A report by Knight Frank India in March showed that such transactions dominated more than half of the office volume

state compete with Bengaluru

"The biggest advantage of Chennal is the availability of technology and domain talent at scale. Because of this. financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, automotive, telecom and logistics companies are making a beeline

for the city." Ramkumar Ramamoorthy. partner, Catalines Chennai's GCC push

Tamil Nadu Government to incentivise monthly salaries of over ₹1 lakh with subsidy of 30% in the 1st year, 20% in 2nd year and 10% in the 3rd year

Of the around 2,740 GCC units in India. Chennai accounts for 10%, as per March 2023 numbers from Zinnov

Of the 10 GCCs set up in Q4 FY23, one was based in Chennai – Hitachi Energy

Total 6.02 mn sq ft across 71 deals in FY23, highest from BFSI companies at 30%

GCC-focused real estate transactions in 2023 were over 50% of the office volume deals in Chennai

"Chennai's GCC ecosystem ranks fifth in India, with more than 259 existing centres employing 150,000 professionals. This growth is being fuelled by the state government's involvement and key policy initiatives."

> Nilesh Thakker, president, Zinnov

phenomenon for Chennai, Ramamoorthy quickly added. "About 30 years ago, the earliest enterprise GCCs—such as Citibank,

locations such heexplained. Bengaluru and Hyderabad stole a march pointed out.

Moreover, the IT witheraway. revolution in the 1990s backed by heavy sops helped Bengaluru and Typically, a company aiming to quicker.

is also a former CMD of Cognizant India, GCCs in the state. biggest advantage other cities is

domain talent at scale. It is for this reason that the biggest names across manufacturing, auto, telecom and logistics—have made a beeline for Chennai," he added.

### **BEYOND BENGALURU**

Chennai

during 2023, totalling

6.02 million sq ft across

71 deals. The highest metrics were

from BFSI companies at 30 per cent

followed by manufacturing and

other service sectors. About 57 deals

were recorded in 2022, totalling

partner at Chennai-based consulting

firm Catalines, said that Tamil Nadu

is the most urbanised state and has

(GER) in higher education among all

major states in India. And because it

has always been a metro city, it has

received robust talent service from

other parts of the state. Besides, it

also has a strong academic culture

and demonstrated administrative

However, GCCs are not a new

stability too.

office space of 2.18 million sq ft.

It's also important to note that companies beyond Fortune 500 and Global 2000 have started establishing their GCCs in India today. But given Bengaluru's reputation for across banking, insurance, being a GCC and tech talent hub, the city has become both space and talent saturated. This is especially and transportation. true post the Covid pandemic, with engineers now more comfortable working from their home towns. Global software giant IBM

"Its robust infrastructure, skilled talent pool the highest gross enrolment ratio and conducive business environment attracted us in 2007. Today, we're leveraging these characteristics for a global technology and innovation centre in Chennai."

> N Venu, MD and CEO, India and South Asia, Hitachi Energy

**High-Level Finternet Architecture** 

(products) Dinesh Nirmal recently told ET that hiring is not as swift as they would like it to be in Bengaluru. "It is harder to hire and retain talent in Bengaluru," he had said.

ANSR's Ahuja added, "Corporates don't set up GCCs for incentives. They are not the primer driver. Incentives do help, but the core is talent, connectivity, ease of setting up business there."

In this regard, the incentives offered by the TN government can't be enough. "They help from an entry perspective, but won't give you a huge amount of money over a longer period. Typically, if you look at the Bank of America, American characteristics of a GCC, once you Express and Dun & Bradstreet — set it up, like a services company, established their headquarters in projects can come and go, but the Chennai. In the GCC is there to stay in perpetuity. intervening years, You don't move its location however, other [depending on incoming projects],"

> He added that a lot of incentives are designed to help companies over Chennai." he set up their bases, but that over a longer period of time, these will

#### THE SHORTLISTING PROCESS

Hyderabad attract firms establish GCCs will go through an exhaustive and sophisticated loca-Ramamoorthy, who tion selection process, based on not just talent but also a cultural match. "You may have service partners in sees subsidies as a a particular location and so firms demonstration of Tamil would want to create that connected Nadu's commitment to ecosystem; the city needs to be expat attracting the world's friendly; travel should be easy for most progressive people on both sides of the fence; it companies to should have international connecestablish their tivity, etc," Ahuja added.

So, even if Chennai has the irrespective of incentives and there are good their size and managers in place, the question industry they remains if people will move there operate in. "The from Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Delhi, etc. "People are relatively for Chennai over resistant. If there was a movability index, locations like Bengaluru, the availability Hyderabad, even Pune, will rate of technology and way higher, as these are more cosmopolitan locations. Chennai gets very hardcore on that front," Ahuja added, pointing out that industries — financial several technology majors such services, healthcare, as Amazon, Tesco and Walmart continue to be based in Bengaluru, where the ecosystem is bottoms up.

In order to attract firms, Ramamoorthy said, Tamil Nadu should focus on its core select industries, such as financial services, health sciences, manufacturing, transportation/ supply chain—irrespective of scale -given the deep domain capability healthcare, pharma, industrial engineering, automotive, logistics

He said that many companies in these industries are driving R&D and innovation from their GCCs, enabling technology transfer and Ramkumar Ramamoorthy, a Software's senior vice-president know-how, and contributing to academic enrichment in the state through faculty development, curriculum and program curation, among others.

> "The biggest incentives that the state provides any GCC include highquality talent at enviable scale, rich domain capability in key industries of focus, a service-oriented work culture, an ecosystem of thriving industries and next-generation startups. Any other incentive is only the icing on the cake," he added.

The idea is revolutionary from a

tokenisation standpoint, he said

at the BIS Innovation Summit 2024 that was held from May 6

"Tokenisation allows us to

having piecemeal steps to

complete a financial transac-

tion, you package all together in

the form of tokens, and you just

exchange tokens, he explained.

"To get to that degree of simplic-

ity, you must do many complex

things. This is where technolo-

supervision are needed to make

sure money retains its value

and that the Finternet does not

provide a means to bypass laws

or exploit regulatory loopholes,

Regulation checks could be

built in; compliance checks

could take place in moments

Nilekani and Siddharth Shetty

did not respond to ET's requests

Shetty is a technology advisor

Foundation for Interoperability

of Bengaluru-based non-profit

rather than days, he said.

gies come into play," he said.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Carstens told ET.

for a comment.

Robust regulation and

change the way we do financial

transactions," he said. Instead of

to May 8.

#### APPLE'S CHIP GAME TO POWER DATA CENTRES AND NEW IPAD

This year, Apple will roll out some of its AI features through data centres integrating its own Al chips. It is putting its Al chips into cloud computing servers to process advanced AI features that will be rolled out in its devices.

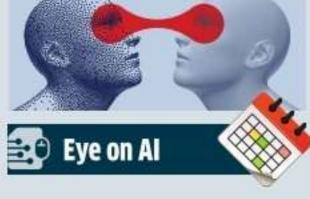
Apple also introduced the M4 chip, its next generation silicon, in the new iPad Pro upgrade. It said this makes the new iPad Pro "an outrageously powerful device for artificial intelligence". It said that the neural engine in the M4 chip is more powerful than any neural processing unit in any existing AI PC (personal computer). Further, the iPadOS has advanced frameworks that help developers leverage the neural engine to run powerful diffusion and generative AI models on device.

#### META LAUNCHED NEW GEN AI TOOLS FOR ADVERTISERS

Facebook and Instagram parent Meta launched enhanced generative AI features for advertisers, such as full image and text generation. Advertisers can now create full image variations inspired by their original ad creative with text overlay, building on capabilities to generate

backgrounds around product images and expanding images to better fit multiple surfaces. In the coming months,

advertisers will also be able to provide text prompts to better tailor the creative variations



offered. The features will be rolled out globally by the end of the year, and Llama-3, its latest gen Al model, will be integrated for enhanced ad performance, the company said.

# OPENAI JOINED THE C2PA STEERING COMMITTEE

ChatGPT maker OpenAI joined the steering committee of the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA), a

digital content authentication standard used to prove that a piece of content comes from a particular source.

"As generated audiovisual content becomes more common. we believe it will be increasingly important

> for society as a whole to embrace new technology and standards that help people understand the tools used to create the content they find online," OpenAl said. Earlier this year, the

company began adding C2PA metadata to all images created and edited by its latest image model Dall-E 3, as well as in ChatGPT and the OpenAl API. It will do so for its video generation model Sora.

#### US LOOKS TO BLOCK CHINA'S **ACCESS TO ADVANCED AI MODELS**

US lawmakers introduced a bill to make it easier for the Joe Biden administration to control exports of Al models to prevent them from getting into the hands of international bad actors.

The US commerce department was mulling regulations to restrict exports of proprietary closed source AI models, Reuters reported.

The Biden administration, which over the past two years took steps to curb the export of Al chips to geopolitical rival China citing security reasons, is now looking to safeguard US AI software capabilities from China and considering placing guardrails around the country's most advanced AI models.

### MICROSOFT AND OPENAL LAUNCHED \$2-MN FUND FOR AI LITERACY FOR VOTERS

Software giant Microsoft and ChatGPT maker OpenAl announced that their \$2-million Societal Resilience Fund would go towards AI education of voters.

"It is more important than ever to provide tools and information that will help people navigate an increasingly complex digital ecosystem and find authoritative resources," Microsoft said in a blog.

The fund will provide grants to organisations like Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity (C2PA), International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, and Partnership on Al. "Our shared goals are to combat the growing risk of bad actors using AI and deepfakes to deceive the voters and undermine democracy,"

Microsoft said. Compiled by Annapurna Roy

# The Rise Of The Finternet

A new model proposed by Nandan Nilekani and Agustín Carstens envisages multiple financial ecosystems interconnected with each other

User-Controlled

Attested or

Regulated assets

can be

# Suraksha P

"I am delighted to announce the Finternet, co-authored with Agustín Carstens, which presents a visionary framework for empowering individuals and businesses by placing them at the centre of their financial lives," tweeted Nandan Nilekani, co-founder of Infosys and founding chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India. on April 16. The new term soon took the internet by storm.

But what is Finternet? Multiple financial ecosystems interconnected with each other is called Finternet. The system has been proposed by Carstens, who is the general manager of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), and Nilekani through a recent working paper of BIS.

"We foresee a system in which individuals and businesses could transfer any financial asset, in any amount, at any time, using any device, to anyone else, anywhere in the world," Carstens told ET over email. "Financial transactions would be cheap, secure and near instantaneous. And they would be available to anyone," he added.

# **EASY ACCESS**

The building blocks for the Finternet combine technological advances with sound governance. "One is the ability to create a

digital representation of physical assets, like a bond, property or savings in a bank. These digital tokens are brought together on programmable platforms that can trigger automated actions, such system, ensuring trust in money,



as payment that triggers the sale of an asset," he further said. Designed to empower indi-

viduals and businesses by placing them at the centre of their financial lives, Finternet advocates for a user-centric approach that lowers barriers between financial services and systems, thus promoting access for all.

The proposed system uses technologies such as tokenisation and unified ledgers, with an underlying economic and regulatory framework, to expand the range and quality of financial services. "This would reduce the

complex processes that happen behind-the-scenes today and make transactions slower and expensive. Another key feature is the framework. Central banks would remain at the core of the

but (like today) work closely

with commercial banks," said Carstens, who was the Governor of the Bank of Mexico from 2010 to 2017.



with the BIS team to put together the Finternet paper. The problems that plague the financial system today, in terms of speed, cost, products, and availability of different products and services, need a multifaceted approach to solve them, said Shetty at the BIS Innovation Summit.

The characteristics of safety and interoperability must be plugged in right from the start, he said. The finternet, much like the internet, can be made available to eight billion people and 300 million businesses, if it is universal, he said.

# The Man Who **Never Says** No to Zendaya



Celebrity stylist Law Roach opens up about quitting the profession and working only on his own terms

### The New York Times

Last March, Law Roach seemed to be at the peak of his career as a celebrity stylist. He had won the first stylist of the year award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America, and was working with Zendaya, Celine Dion, Anya Taylor-Joy and Anne Hathaway, among others. Then, out of the blue, he announced on Instagram that he was quitting.

"The politics, the lies, and false narratives finally got me!" he wrote. "You win ... I'm out."

There were rumours that he had called Privanka Chopra Jonas fat. Another rumour said he had thrown a tantrum because Louis Vuitton wouldn't seat him next to Zendaya in the front row. It was quite a dramatic career pivot then.

This year, on May 6, Roach dressed Zendaya, a host of the Met Gala. The same day, he made his debut as a judge on a new TV show. Roach has a how-to book coming out. And he is plotting a certification course for would-be stylists that will essentially massmarket and formalise his

Edited excerpts from an interview:

#### Were you surprised by the reaction to announcement?

The first two, three months were really hard. So much of who I was depended on what I was doing, and I felt like I didn't know who I was. I was just tired. Also, my nephew died the year before. He was three, and he fell out a window the day before Thanksgiving. never had time to grieve because I was working. So, I went through this grieving process for him and for my career. I went through guilt, thinking that people who look up to me were going to see me as a quitter.

But you chose to announce

that you were quitting. Was

it because you think stylists

don't get enough respect? I felt like every time I came into a room, I had to prove myself. I changed the trajectory of people's careers, their visibility, but Istill have to argue for what I think is the best look.

"Not saying that we [Roach and Zendaya] don't argue, because we do fight. But I know my place. I knowshe's the boss, and she also has enough respect and love for me to let me be the boss sometimes"

# You don't seem that retired.

I'm the most unretired retired person. But everything I'm doing now is on my own terms. I've been saying no to a lot of unhappy people. Except Zendaya. I can't say no to her.

#### Zendaya has been your client since she was 13. Do you tell her what to wear?

We call each other fashion soulmates. We also refer to our relationship as "big ideas, small details".

Not saying that we don't argue, because we do fight over things. But I know my place. I know she's the boss, and she also has enough respect and love for me to let me be the boss sometimes.

#### What mistakes have you made along the way?

My first year, I made \$120,000. I thought I was rich, to be quite honest, but nobody had ever tapped me on my shoulder and said, "Hey, most of that has gone into taxes." So, I spent \$100,000. And then I got into tax debt. I owed \$65,000. The only reason I knew is because I went to an ATM and there was no money in there.

# The Austrian Spa Town That Shaped Beethoven's Music

The night Ludwig van Beethoven's monumental Ninth Symphony rang out in a Vienna concert hall for the first time almost exactly two centuries ago, the great German composer was anxious for all to go well.

He needn't have worried. The audience erupted into spontaneous applause during the performance, but Beethoven was already so hard of hearing that he had to be turned around by a musician to notice it.

While he was born in Bonn in 1770, Beethoven spent most of his life in Vienna after moving there as a 22-year-old.

Despite receiving repeated offers to relocate, the legendary composer never left Vienna, where he had found his home away from home, surrounded by supportive fans and generous patrons. "It was the society, the culture that



This four-part 2021 series unpacks the

glitzy, extravagant rise and the equally staggering fall of the billion-dollar

clothing giant LuLaRoe. The company

a multilevel marketing business

known for its bright, patterned

leggings (think neon kitties and

kaleidoscopes of pizzas) – was

built on the backs of an army

of saleswomen (often stay-athome mothers and wives)

trying to make their own

income. They were

lured by promises of

independence, flexi-

bility and jaw-

dropping





characterised the city that appealed to him so much," said Ulrike Scholda, director of the Beethoven House in Badén, Austria.

The picturesque spa town just outside Vienna deeply shaped Beethoven's life — and the last symphony he would complete, she said.

"In the 1820s, Baden was certainly the place to be", with the imperial family, the aristocracy and a who's who of cultural life spending their summers there, Scholda said.

#### THE FINAL SYMPHONY

Beyond his hearing loss, Beethoven also suffered from various health problems ranging from abdominal pains to jaundice, and regularly went to Baden to recuperate. Enjoying long walks in the countryside and bathing in Baden's medicinal springs helped

him recover, while simultaneously inspiring his compositions.

In the summers leading up to the first public performance in 1824, Beethoven stayed at what is now known as Baden's Beethoven House, which now serves as a museum. It was there that he also composed important parts of his final symphony.

A letter Beethoven sent from Baden in September 1823 details the pressure he felt to finalise the symphony to please the Philharmonic Society in London which had commissioned the work. Scholda said.

Upon completing the symphony in Vienna, weeks of intense preparations followed, including an army of copyists duplicating Beethoven's manuscripts and last-minute rehearsals that culminated in a premiere on May 7, 1824.

From pyramid schemes to scammy texts, explore how the world of true crime has ensnared many, through these films, TV shows and podcasts

The New York Times

iere are so many true crime offerings dedicated to scams, frauds and con artists that it can be overwhelming. Many of these are astonishing stories documenting financial, medical or romantic deceptions. But the most surprising part is how painless it can appear to be to lay traps, and how many people—regardless of personal circumstances—take the bait.

Here are four picks across television, film and podcasts that stand out, all of which underscore what can unfold when a hunger for money, power or prestige is put above all else.

#### OPERATION VARSITY **BLUES: THE COLLEGE** ADMISSIONS SCANDAL

The end of the academic calendar is an appropriate time to revisit one of the most outrageous education scandals in recent years: A \$25-million bribery scheme that prompted a federal US investigation called 'Operation Varsity Blues'. The mastermind behind it was William Singer, a basketball coach-turnedcollege admissions counsellor who ran a criminal enterprise that opened a path for wealthy people to have their children accepted by elite varsities under the guise that they had earned entry based on academic or extracurricular excellence.

Test scores were doctored, for example, and athletic credentials were fabricated in ludicrous ways. Dozens of powerful people were accused and arrested, most famously actors Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin, both of whom served time in prison.

In this 2021 film, director Chris Smith puts a fresh spin on reenactments, long the lifeblood of true-crime television and films, by re-creating full scenes and pulling dialogue directly from wiretaps. Matthew Modine (Stranger Things, Oppenheimer) who plays Singer, and other actors bring it all to life.

bonuses, all wrapped up in a culture of social media influencing and

hollow feminism. The company has been embroiled in numerous legal battles, including class-action lawsuits. A lawsuit filed by the Washington state attorney general in 2019, and settled in 2021, accused LuLaRoe of being a pyramid scheme that had swindled thousands of associates out of millions of dollars. The creators of this

docuseries interviewed people, former present (the company is in business). most interestingly, founders, Mark and DeAnne Stidham, who revealed that, despite everything, they hadn't

stopped selling the dream. EARCH ENGINE: WHO'S BEHIND THESE SCAMMY **TEXT MESSAGES WE'VE** ALL BEEN GETTING?

On this 70-minute episode, we hear from Zeke Faux,

> The most surprising part is how painless it can appear to be to lay traps, and how many

people - regardless of personal

circumstances - take the bait

an investigative journalist who dived deep into a technological rabbit hole that led him halfway around the world. He uncovered what is behind those oddly-worded text messages or direct messages so many of us receive from random numbers, scams most commonly in the form of messages like "Are we still meeting at the golf course?" or "Hi! I just wanted to thank

you for last night's lessons." What may seem like silly fodder to laugh at is actually underpinned by a grim reality that involves blackmail. forced labour and even human trafficking. It's crucial information that should change how we see and talk about such messages and beyond.

SOUR GRAPES As an antidote to some of the heavier fare above, this 2016 documentary from Reuben Atlas and Jerry Rothwell is both a palate cleanser

and a boggling ride through the inner sanctums of the ultra-wealthy.

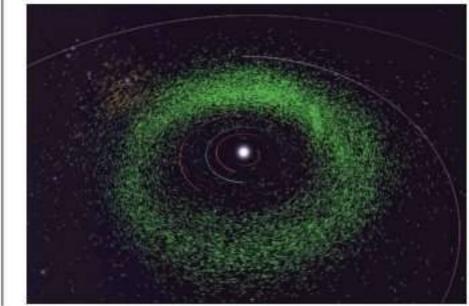
It tells the story of Rudy Kurniawan,

an unassuming young man who's called both, a "geeky young guy that likes wine" and "the Gen X Great Gatsby". Kurniawan engineered what was possibly the world's biggest wine fraud, duping some of America's richest leaders. The film transports viewers back to the boom times leading up to the 2008 financial disaster, particularly the rare wine auction market scene. In 2006

alone, Kurniawan sold \$35 million

worth of the stuff.

# Killer Asteroid Hunters Spotted 27,500 Overlooked Space Rocks



# The New York Times

A few years ago, a team of researchers dedicated to finding asteroids swirling around in our solar system came up with a new trick: Instead of scanning the skies for these killer rocks, they wrote an algorithm that would sift through old pictures of the night sky.

In April, they revealed a big bounty: 27,500 solar system bodies. That is more than the number discovered by all the world's tele-

scopes last year. The finds include about 100 near-Earth asteroids, the space rocks that pass within the Earth's orbit. While none of the 100 appear to be on a collision path with

Researchers found 100 near-Earth asteroids, but thankfully, none of the 100 appear to be on a collision path

with our planet

Earth soon, the algorithm will be a key tool in spotting future dangers.

Most of the space rocks lie in the main asteroid belt between Marsand Jupiter.

Others, known as Trojans, are trapped in Jupiter's orbit. The search also found some smaller worldsfarther out, beyond Neptune.

#### METHODS OLD AND NEW Historically, astronomers spotted

new planets, asteroids and comets by photographing the same night sky multiple times. The pattern of distant stars and galaxies remain unchanged, but objects much closer move noticeably within a few hours. Multiple observations of a moving object, called a 'tracklet',

sketch its path and provide enough information to give astronomers a good idea of where to look and pin down its orbit.

The algorithm used in the current research, Tracklet-less Heliocentric Orbit Recovery (THOR), is able to connect a dot of light seen in one image with a different dot of light in a different image taken on a different night sometimes by a different telescope —and figure out that these two dots

are actually the same object. usually an asteroid.

# **Celebrating How Shellfish Helped Humans Evolve**

# **FOOD FABLES**



VIKRAM DOCTOR

The second Sunday in May is Mother's Day in many places, but in Nerul, a village close to the mouth of the Mandovi river in Goa, it's time to celebrate clams. The sands of the riverbed and shore are ideal places to find tisriyo, small but very tasty shellfish. A village tradition has grown of gathering, cleaning and cooking tisriyo on this day. It isn't a priest is happy to give blessings.

This is excellent, because shellfish should be celebrated in India far more than they are. North Kerala loves mussels and Indian oysters are now found in upmarket restaurants, but given the length of our coastline, we hardly seem to do justice to shellfish. They tend to have an unclean reputation, perhaps because they are found in mud and are often filled with it, or because some species can occasionally be toxic, depending on the waters from which they have been filtering food.

Shellfish have often been left to marginalised communities, as Dalit writer Urmila Pawar recalls in her memoir Aaydan: The Weave of My Life. She writes of how women from her community would forage along coasts for oysters, make a small fire and place the shells on it, eating them as they opened. Foragers like



when they were safe to eat and how to leave the smallest ones, so they could grow and reproduce.

In recent years, there have been complaints from parts of Goa, like Chicalim bay, of hordes descending on the sands to collect shellfish indiscriminately, attracted by the religious event, though the local this would have known the seasons prospect of making easy money by the seasons prospect of making easy money by the seasons along the coastlines of our planet."

How much a lower by our species as we have led a load this would have known the seasons along the coastlines of our planet."

Goa is now promoting mussel from tisriyo.

The human species has been gathering and eating shellfish from shores since prehistoric times. Shellfish literally helped

harvesting tisriyo, because they have become popular in Goan fish thali restaurants. These 'outsiders' are blamed for endangering the shellfish, though polluted water and unrestrained sand mining seem more likely to cause problems.

The post-Covid period saw a particular boom in harvesting, possibly because shellfish flourished in the relative peace that the sands enjoyed during lockdowns. Watching the harvesters wade through the mud, feeling around for the shells seemed to recall something really ancient. In Dinner with Darwin, Jonathan Silverman's study of how food and evolution have interacted, he notes how the human species has been gathering and eating shellfish from shores since prehistoric times: "Mounds of discarded seashells punctuate the historical routes followed by our species as we travelled Shellfish literally

helped us spread across the world. Silverman notes that shellfish are rich in the omega-3 fatty acids needed for brain development, so they also helped transform us physically. Unlike fish, they don't need boats to catch them and unlike land-based plants and animals, littoral species like shellfish are less susceptible to droughts and other vagaries of weather. They can be eaten raw or, as roasted, which helps open them up, with the shells serving as natural utensils. In Richard Wrangham's Catching Fire, his book on how cooking helped create us as a species, he writes of how tribes like "the Yahgan of Tierra del Fuego used mussel shells to catch the drips from a roasting seal or to hold whale oil".

farming, which has already taken off in Kerala. Instead of the rocks on which they are naturally found, they are grown on ropes hung in the sea from rafts. Mussels, which were a minor food in Goa, are becoming increasingly available. But this shouldn't be at the expense of tisriyo, and some of the suggestions made after the rush for harvesting in Chicalim have been constructive, like enforcing periods when harvesting has to stop, or preventing the really small juveniles from being har-

Festivals like Nerul's could also be used as a way to educate people about shellfish. Perhaps in centuries to come, heaps of shells excavated in Goa could be proof of how much we valued and gained



#### Neeraj Vows to Win Next **Diamond League After** Finishing 2nd in Doha



Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra vowed to go one step ahead in the next Diamond League meeting after finishing a close second during the Doha

of 88.36m fell short by just two centimeters of Jakub Vadlejch's winning effort on Friday night. The 26-year-old Chopra trailed the veteran Czech – who won the title with his third throw of 88.38m throughout the competition. Chopra, taking part in his first competition of the season, made a last ditch effort but the Indian superstar failed to defend the title. "The most important competition for me this year is Paris Olympics, but Diamond League meetings are important too. This was the

leg in Doha. Chopra's final effort

centimetre margin but next time I will try to draw far and try to win," Chopra said. PTI Anderson to Play Last Test

finished second with a narrow two-

opener for me this season, I

vs West Indies at Lord's England star James Anderson believes the "time is right" to end his Test career after revealing July's clash against the West Indies at Lord's will be his final appearance in the five-day format. The 41-year old became the first seamer and just the third bowler in history to reach 700 Test wickets, after spinners Shane Warne and Muttiah Muralitharan, in his most recent outing against India in March. But Anderson has decided to call time on his Test career after talks with England head coach Brendon McCullum, who wants to modify his side's seam attack and build towards the future. Setting the first Test against the West Indies as his farewell date. Anderson wrote on Instagram: "Hi everyone. Just a note to say that the first Test of the

summer at Lord's will be my last

# Man City Throw Down the Gauntlet

Guardiola's side takes control of the Premier League title race with 4-0 win at Fulham to take 2-point lead over Arsenal who play Man United tonight



anchester City swept to the top of the Premier League as Josko Gvardiol's double inspired a vital 4-0 victory against Fulham on Saturday.

Pep Guardiola's side are two wins away from lifting an unprecedented fourth successive English title after a commanding display at Craven Cottage. Gvardiol put City ahead early on before Phil Foden's 25th goal in all competi-

tions this season increased their lead. By the time Gvardiol netted his second, City were strolling to three priceless points on a sunlit afternoon on the banks of the River Thames.

Julian Alvarez underlined City's superiority with a late penalty after Fulham's Issa Diop was sent off for fouling the Argentine

Now two points clear of second placed Arsenal, City will look for a favour from their arch rivals Manchester United, who host the Gunners on Sunday.

If Arsenal fail to win at Old Trafford, City will be crowned champions if they beat Tottenham on Tuesday or West Ham in their final game on May 19.

Regardless of Arsenal's remaining results against United and Everton, City know two more victories will make it a remarkable six titles in the last seven seasons.

City's 16th successive win against Fulham -- the longest run of consecutive victories over one team in English

SCORELINE **FULHAM** 

Gvardiol (13', 71'), Foden (59').

MAN CITY

Alvarez (90'+6' Pen) Premier League: Points Table

Mat W D L GD PTS 1 Man City 36 26 7 3 +58 85 2 Arsenal 36 26 5 5 +60 83 football history—also mathematically

ended third-placed Liverpool's title challenge. Guardiola had labelled the Fulham game as the first of four "finals" for City as they aim to clinch the title and then beat Manchester United in the FA Cupfinal.

They rose to his challenge in style and will head to Tottenham next week boastinga 21-game unbeaten league run, having also trimmed Arsenal's goal difference advantage over them to just two.

A social media video of Fulham players flying a kite during training this week had raised questioned about just how focused the hosts would be in a match that had little riding on it for them. Arsenal's fears were confirmed as City carved Fulham apart in typically swaggering style to take the lead

after 13 minutes. Guardiola had revealed City practised on a dry pitch with high grass this week in a bid to prepare for a similar surface to the one that caused them

problems on their previous visit to Craven Cottage.

City's preparation worked a treat as a flowing 19-pass move climaxed with Kevin De Bruyne clipping a pass to Gvardiol on the edge of the edge.

The Croatian defender took two deft touches as he glided through the Fulham defence before planting a composedlowfinishpastBerndLenoforhis fourth goal in his last seven appearances. City lost Dutch defender Nathan Ake to injury, but stayed on the offensive as long-range efforts from Bernardo Silva and Foden tested Leno.

Guardiola's men monopolised possession, with Manuel Akanji wasting a golden opportunity just before half-time with a wild swipe that sailed over from De Bruyne's corner.

Fulham threatened when Adama Traore's cross was flicked goalwards by Muniz, forcing Ederson to save at full stretch. But City took complete control in the 59th minute as Silva accelerated into the area, his progress halted by Joao Palhinha's tackle, only for the alert Foden to pounce with a perfectly-placed strike into the far corner.

However, City struck again in the 71st minute as Gvardiol stretched to turn in Silva's cross with an agile close-range finish. Alvarez put the seal on a clinical performance from the relentless champions, converting a stoppage-time penalty after Diop chopped him down. AFP

Mbappe to **Leave PSG** at End of

Kylian Mbappe confirmed on Friday that he will leave French champions Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season, with Real Madrid widely expected to be his next destination. The announcement brings an end to a prolific association with his hometown team, which began when he signed from Monaco in 2017 in a deal worth \$194 million. "I wanted to announce to you all that it's my last year at Paris Saint-Germain. I will not extend and the adventure will come to an end in a few weeks," Mbappe, 25, said in a video posted on social media. "I will

Season

WATCHOUT! Tonight

PREMIER LEAGUE Man United v Arsenal 9pm (Star Sports) LA LIGA Atlético Madrid v Celta Vigo 7:45 (Sports18) **BUNDESLIGA Bayern Munich v** Wolfsburg 9pm (Sony Ten) LIGUE 1 PSG v Toulouse 12:30am (Sports18)

play my last game at the Parc

des Princes on Sunday." AFP

# CAN OPT-OUT **CARD RIGHT THE PLAYER-OWNER BALANCE?**

The Rahul-Goenka episode is a reminder of where the power lies in the IPL ecosystem



OFF. Joy Bhattacharjya

It's telling that at the end of an extraordinary cricket match, the biggest news still had nothing to do with the on-field action.

After being set 166 to win in 20 overs by the Lucknow Super Giants, the Sunrisers Hyderabad openers accomplished the task in a jaw dropping 9.4 overs, averaging 17.27 runs per over. It was an amazing performance, but the post-game social media discourse was mostly about what the broadcast cameras picked up just off the field.

The LSG owner, Sanjiv Goenka, was in an animated discussion with his captain, KL Rahul. It was Goenka who was doing most of the talking, and the body language and expressions were clearly of a man who was angrily demanding an explanation for the debacle.

There is probably place for a postmortem about what Rahul could have done to stop, or at any rate stem the murderous assault mounted by the

most destructive opening The best-regarded pair in this year's tournaowners tend to ment. But most agreed hide their tensions that the visuals of Rahul from the team, let a top professional cricketer being taken to task professionals run by an owner who probathe sporting part bly hadn't played the of the business

game at anywhere approaching that level were disturbing and crossed a line that separated com-

merce from cricket. The line between professional owners and their sporting teams has always been difficult to draw. To expect zenlike patience and forbearance from owners who had invested millions of dollars and a great deal of passion is

not totally reasonable The best-regarded owners tend to hide their tensions from the team, let professionals run the sporting part of the business, and are content to be ceremonial heads of that part of the business, leaving the executive decisions to managers and coaches. But Silvio Berlusconi at AC Milan or David Tepper of the Carolina Panthers are just some of the more prominent internationals owners who have crossed that line and tried to micromanage

their team's performances. Closer to home, at least one legendary owner in Goa football would insist on sitting on the bench during games and ringing in the substitutes himself.

From the very start of the IPL in 2008, because of the auction process, owners have been perceived to have a far more direct relationship with selection. Players are bid for and bought, sometimes for jaw dropping prices. And

while professionals were definitely

playing a part in the planning, many teams finally chose to go hard after a particular player on the whims of their

It's easy to question the auction process, where players have little say in whether they are chosen or where they go, or even the price, once the reserve price has been exceeded. But that same auction process ensures a couple of important wins. First, that the league is not crippled by ballooning prices demanded by top players and their agents. And second, that one or two of the richer teams cannot corner the market by buying most of the top talent available.

These are important issues in a world where the Spanish La Liga struggles to look beyond its top two or three clubs, even the Premier League results are dominated by an elite set of clubs, and most clubs are struggling financially even with mammoth media deals for the league.

The IPL, currently, with all its issues, is a cash cow for its original owners, has seen 7 different champions in 17 years and even the 10th placed team can on its

day beat the league leader. So how does one right the balance between players and teams without totally changing the financial dynamics of the league, which are hugely

successful and a template that is the envy of many established leagues around the globe.

One way that tilts it a little more in favour of players and gives them some choice in the matter is to give each player an opt-out card. That means each

player has the right to refuse any one franchise if they so choose. All the remaining franchises can still bid for the player. The card is only known to the BCCI, and the franchise he is opting out of has to be specified beforehand by the player. The BCCI in turn informs the franchise who is barred from bidding for that particular player. To make sure egos are not ruffled, the information stays between the three parties.

If such a card was available, it would definitely be used with the greatest care, as any player offering their services in an open auction would not want to limit their options. But in those cases where that relationship was already broken, the player could decide not to tempt fate again.

And if one or two franchises had quite a few refusing to play for them, perhaps that would make sure that they improved their player/owner relationships.

It's not easy for hugely successful business magnates to accept that their teams will not win every time. But it's important for them to appreciate that the player is finally at the heart of this business, and slightly righting the dynamic between them will make a huge difference.

> The writer is former team director of Kolkata Knight Riders

# How Indian Team is Preparing For the Paris Olympics



Test." AFP

# Boria Majumdar

Sport is all about preparation, especially in elite high-performance sports. The work conducted away from the cameras helps in achieving that decisive one percent. In big tournaments, like the Olympics, it's this one percent that often makes the difference.

Under captain Harmanpreet Singh and coach Craig Fulton, Indian men's hockey team is doing exactly that in Bengaluru. Chasing that one percent.

Away from the public glare, the training regimen is rigorous. Two gym sessions, focusing on sprints and endurance training, are held in the morning. Evenings are for match simulations where players push each other to their limits.

"The fittest team will go on to make it to the podium. We know it and are training for it," said Harmanpreet Singh, the captain. "It is easier to say, but to get there is very tough. To be away from family and friends for weeks, no cheat meals, and the same daily routine, it is not easy for anyone. These things go unnoticed when we just focus on match results.

"The team that we will be seeing in Paris is getting formed now. Everything is being worked out in the camp. They know that things will never follow a pattern in Paris. Results will not always go your way. But as [PR] Sreejesh said, 'Not everyday you will play at your best. Even then you need to win'. And

that's what we need to do in Paris.' Witnessing the team's training firsthand was enlightening, particularly noting the relaxed demeanour of the players amidst the high stakes. Despite the pressure to perform, many view it as

an opportunity for growth. "Craig is like the Pep Guardiola of Indian hockey," said midfield general Hardik Singh, whose injury had cost India dear at the 2023 home World Cup. "With him around, there is no lack of attention to detail. For every situation he has a plan. Even when we win, there is a meeting where he tells us what more we could

do. I haven't seen a better coach.' "We need to be the best prepared. But you feel lonely and isolated at times because you are doing the same thing over and over again. There is a certain monotony about it. You are seeing the same faces, doing the same drills, eating the same food and it can't be easy," said Harmanpreet.



"That's why we need to find ways to relax. Some listen to music while many of us get after each other and lighten the mood. It is a happy bunch and a happy team is always the best team."

There are separate drills for drag flicks and for countering dragflicks.

"As a first rusher, my job is to see at what pace the ball is being pushed and in that fraction of a second decide when to rush. This anticipation is the key to stop the flick and save the goal. A mistake could cost us dear and we are training for it everyday," said Amit Rohidas, India's first rusher. "You can't leave things to chance. We are deter-

mined to change the colour of the medal. Each day we train like this we get that extra inch closer to our goal. We know this is our best opportunity and the moment you think what a medal can do to the sport at large, you know all this effort is worth it," said Manpreet Singh, who will be playing in his fourth Olympics.

training for it HARMANPREET

on to make it to

the podium. We

know it and are

The fittest

team will go

The best comment, however, came SINGH India captain from Sreejesh, who is perhaps playinghis last Olympics. "Thave said to the boys that if we win gold I am going to be around for LA [2028]," said Sreejesh laughing. "Why should I retire if we win a medal. I have said to my teammates that they need to get bet-

> ter than me for me to give up. By then Craig Fulton was there after a shower. He had monitored the training drills all morning

and was exhausted. And yet he was focussed. "We know there is pressure. But isn't this what we wanted. As players this is where you need to be. There is still a lot of work to do so all I will say is let's keep working hard. Every session, every drill, every movement and every detail — that's what I am focussed on. If we do these well, we will do well in Paris," Fulton said as someone passed

him a training plan for the afternoon. "We will start at 5:30pm again," announced Fulton, who is chasing excellence and that decisive one percent.

# 'We Want to Score **More Field Goals'**

Indian men's hockey team head coach CRAIG FULTON speaks with AMIT CHAUDHARY about his time with the Indian team, the Olympics preparations and more. Excerpts

It's been more than a year since you took over as coach. Has the team completely adjusted to your philosophy or is it still a work in progress?

No, it's still a work in progress. I think if you talk in Olympic cycles, which is four years, it's just been one year and we're already preparing for the first Olympics. So, some other environments have had an Olympics and then building into this Olympics with the same philosophy. We have obviously changed three quarters of the way through and are picking up the last kind of 15 months. But I'm okay with that in the sense that I knew what I was getting myself into and we had to qualify first. Now that we've done that, we're trying to make up for the shortfall a little bit. We're not there yet, but we're on track.

Which part (or parts) of the team has seen the biggest improvement since your arrival?

Something that gives you the most satisfaction. It depends what phase you're in. And it also depends what opposition you're playing. Because if you're playing certain opposition that aren't ranked high in the world, it's a lot easier to score field goals. When you're playing the top three teams in the world, it's not easy to score field goals. So we're obviously wanting to try and focus on our final third and score more field goals. But our conversion rate with our penalty corner is high. So we need to keep that. But we want to try and improve our conversion of field goals. That's one focus area.

What are the biggest challenges in preparing a

team for major tournaments like the Olympics? Yeah, there are [challenges]. But you always got to work back from the main focus. So, what is the priority tournament? And then you work back from that. And having a squad system, it's important to rotate players to keep everyone fresh but also at the same time giving competition to everyone. It's a balancing act.

Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. We learn as we go. How do you see India's recent performance against Australia? Isn't it worrisome to lose a series with such a margin (5-0) so close to the Olympics?

No. Because if we'd won all of those games, then what? Then we have nothing to work on. Do you know what I mean? Like, it's a balance. We per-

formed well in defence in those games because I've seen Indian teams lose five, six, seven goals against Australia in certain games. The first game didn't go well in terms of what we wanted to achieve. But from the second game onwards it was much better. And then having depth in the squad... we were able to play [a total of] 27 players in five games, that was really important to build depth. We also kept young Boby [Singh Dhamil and he scored on debut, so that was also important from a junior point of view to keep the four juniors playing.

What were the learnings from the series? We needed the competition. There was a gap between our performance and where we wanted to be. But we've also gained depth in our squad. We played a lot more players against higher-ranked opposition and we found out who can cope and who's still got some way to go. So that was good. Two Pro League events, in Belgium and London. are coming up in May end and early June. What roles are these events going to play in preparation for the Paris Olympics?

I think it will help with the squad selection. Also for set players and chemistry, like what we're trying to do with the team. So, we're playing with less players now. It's important to have these blocks of competition literally six, seven weeks out from the tournament. But it's the only competition we have that has full international umpires, video referrals, and we're sitting third on the log. So, we really want to try and stay on the podium, and we have eight games to do that

India were on the podium in Tokyo. Is there pressure to maybe repeat the performance or change the colour of the medal in Paris? Pressure is created through expectation So expectation is someone else's idea of what they should be doing. But right now we are ranked fifth or sixth in the world and there's a gap between us and the top three teams. We can compete with all of

them on our day, but it's to consist-

ently do it in five pool games. That's the deal. You need to do it well in the first five pool games, make the quarters. And then on your day, hope you've done enough work in all aspects of whoever you might play, and then be able to be ready to beat everyone. So that's

our focus.

# Djokovic Hit on Head by Drinks Bottle, But No Concerns Novak Djokovic insisted on Saturday

that he was "fine" and ready to play after being hit on the head by a water bottle as he signed autographs following his second-round win at the Rome Open.

World No. 1Djokovic was left crouched on the ground in agony on Friday as the bottlestruck him on the back of the head as he greeted fans on centre court at the Foro Italico. "Thank you for the messages of concern," Djokovic wrote Saturday on X, formerly Twitter: "This was an accident and I am fine resting at the hotel with an ice pack. See you all on Sunday." The 36-year-old had gotten off to a win-

France's Corentin Moutet 6-3, 6-1 to advance to the third round. He will face Chile's Alejandro Tabilo

ning start in the Italian capital, beating

nextasthe Serb warms up for the French Open Grand Slam with a great chance to add to his six titles in Rome. There had been fears that Djokovic might join the list of players to withdraw

from the tournament after the 24-time Grand Slam winner was covered by security staff as he was led from the arena on foot. However tournament organisers later released a short statement saying Djokovic's "condition is not a cause for concern", and shared a video showing that the bottle had accidentally slipped from a spectator's grasp.

# NADAL UNCLEAR ON FRENCH OPEN

minds about whether he will play in the my best'.



he was eliminated from the Italian Open in straight sets by seventh seed Hubert Hurkacz on Saturday. Poland's Hurkacz beat Nadal 6-1 6-3 in the second round. The 37-year-old Spaniard, who has said he expects to retire after this season, spent most of last year nursing a hip issue that required surgery, before a muscle tear in Brisbane stalled his comeback

in January. "You can see today on the court how difficult it is," Nadal told reporters. "Probably one is to say, 'Okay, I'm not ready, I'm not playing well'. Then it's the moment to take a decision in terms of not playing Roland Garros. Another is to accept how I am today and work the proper way to try to be in a different way

in two weeks. "The decision, as you can imagine, is not clear in my mind today. But if I have to say what's my feeling and if my mind is closer one way or the other way, I'm go-Rafa Nadal said he was still in two ing to say 'Be in Roland Garros and try AFP/Reuters