WWW.ECONOMICTIMES.COM

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

BENNETT, COLEMAN & CO. LTD. | VOL. 52 NO. 100 | NEW DELHI / GURGAON | 14 PAGES | ₹4.50 OR *₹9.50 ALONG WITH THE TIMES OF INDIA | MONDAY, 20 MAY 2024

*Applicable only on monthly purchase (in Delhi/NCR)

To order your favourite newspaper, call 1800 1200 004 toll free or visit subscribe.timesgroup.com. To advertise with us, call 1800 120 5474

WINDFALL GAINS LIKELY IN FY25

Centre may Get Around ₹1 Lcr in RBI Dividend

Reduction in government borrowings via T-bills	Govt cash balance estimate as on May 10	FY25 budget estimate for dividend from RBI, PSU banks, financial bodies	Dividend transferred to govt in FY24
₹60,000 cr	₹2.6 Lcr	₹1.02 Lcr	₹87,416 cr

Potential decline in govt cash balance via new bond buyback ₹60,000 cr

*Estimate by ICICI Securities Primary Dealership; Source for T-bill, bond buyback data: RBI

Interest earnings on securities and interest from liquidity operations may boost RBI surplus

Central bank may announce surplus fund transfer in May end

Bhaskar.Dutta @timesgroup.com

Mumbai: Recent actions by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) suggest that it may transfer a higher dividend — possibly in the region of ₹1 lakh crore — to the government than last year, giving a potential boost to New Delhi's finances.

Last week, the RBI announced a steep cut in the government's borrowing through Treasury Bills, reducing the amount of funds that the Centre would have garnered through these short-term instruments by ₹60,000 crore.

The central bank also took some measures to ensure greater success of an upcoming operation where the government plans to prematurely pay back ₹60,000 crore of earlier borrowings.

Both these actions, which seek to utilise government funds that are currently sitting idle due to election-related constraints on spending, also hint that the Centre's finances may soon be handsomely replenished.

The RBI, which is the government's debt manager, is likely to announce the transfer of its surplus funds to the government in late May.

"We expect the RBI to transfer a surplus of INR 1,000 billion (₹1 lakh crore) to the government in FY25... while there are many moving parts in the RBI dividend calculation, our assessment shows a likely repeat of a strong dividend number," Union Bank of India's chief economic advisor, Kanika Pasricha, recently said in a research note.

Earnings from Foreign Assets ▸▸ 8

AS HC BARS LENDERS FROM ISSUING LOOKOUT NOTICES AGAINST BORROWERS

Banks to Tap FinMin on LOC Power

Several state-owned banks plan to move the finance ministry for statutory backing of their power to issue lookout circulars against errant borrowers. **Sugata Ghosh** reports. ▸▸ 7

DIALLING UP THE FIGHT: 1.8M SIMs LIKELY TO BE BLOCKED SOON

BANDH HO JAA SIM SIM

Govt Targets Cyber Thieves

Kiran.Rathee@timesgroup.com

ALL IN A YEAR

17 million mobile connections disconnected

186,000 handsets blocked for involvement in cybercrimes

365 FIRs registered against 1,890 point-of-sale agents

CLOSE WATCH

Govt coordinating through digital intelligence platform (DIP)

DIP now accessible to over 650 stakeholders such as law enforcement agencies, banks, etc

It helps in real-time coordination among stakeholders for immediate action

New Delhi: Telecom operators are likely to disconnect a record 1.8 million or so mobile connections in one go as part of the government's first countrywide operation to curb cybercrime and online fraud, officials said.

This follows a comprehensive investigation by various law enforcement agencies to track misuse of mobile connections for committing cybercrime and financial fraud.

"During investigations, it was detected that in many instances, a single handset was used with thousands of mobile connections," an official privy to the details told ET.

On May 9, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) had asked telcos to disconnect 28,220 mobile handsets and re-verify over two million mobile connections misused with these handsets.

"Typically, we have found that in such instances, only 10% of the connections get verified and the rest get disconnected, failing re-verification," the official said. "The disconnection will be done once the telcos complete the reverification in 15 days." The development comes amid a steady rise in the number of mobile phone-based cybercrimes in the country. According to National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP), victims of digital financial fraud lost ₹10,319 crore in 2023. More than 694,000 complaints were received in 2023, as per a report by the parliamentary standing committee on finance.

Fraudsters typically use SIM cards of different telecom circles and regularly change the combination of SIM and handset to duck the radar of law enforcement agencies as well as telcos, officials said.

Earlier Investigations ▸▸ 8

After Harley Finds a Hero in X-440, India Pact Moving into Higher Gear

Hero set to sell more Harley models under scaled-up partnership; could include exporting from India

Vroom, Vroom

Harley-Davidson stopped making in India in 2019

Partnership inked with Hero MotoCorp in 2020

The two co-developed Harley-Davidson's X-440 model in India

Customer orders for X-440 in India growing

Hero MotoCorp has ramped up production capacity of these bikes to **10,000 units** per month

Mohit Bhalla & Sharmistha Mukherjee

New Delhi: Hero MotoCorp and Harley-Davidson Inc are set to expand their partnership to bring more models of the iconic US motorcycle maker to India, riding on the overwhelming response to the X-440, multiple people aware of the negotiations told **ET**.

The two companies are close to finalising an agreement to broaden their existing partnership, which is limited to a single model, the sources said. The pact could also include manufacturing of Harley-Davidson models for export to other markets, they said. An announcement is likely within weeks, they added.

Hero MotoCorp and Harley-Davidson did not respond to ET's queries until press time on Sunday.

The market for premium motorcycles is growing and Harley-Davidson executives have stated their satisfaction with the Hero joint venture, people cited above said.

Also Sells Own Variant ▸▸ 8

M&M Valuation to Ride on SUV, Tractor Demand ▸▸ 7

OTHER NEWS OF THE DAY

Kumar, Pai Won't Continue on Byju's Panel

Former SBI chief Rajnish Kumar and Manipal Global Education chairman Mohandas Pai will not be renewing their contracts to be a part of the board advisory council at Byju's, adding to its troubles. The contracts end on June 30. ▸▸ 12

Sales Growth Least in FY24 for Zara in India

Zara saw its slowest India sales growth, excluding the pandemic year, during FY24, amid rising competition, reports **Sagar Malviya**. Inditex Trent, that runs 23 Zara stores in India, saw revenue rise 8%, from 40% a year ago. ▸▸ 14

Cos Knowingly Violated FAME Scheme: Panel

A government panel has held that companies knowingly violated "very clear" guidelines of the Faster Adoption & Manufacturing of EVs (FAME) subsidy scheme, reports **Twesh Mishra**. It counters findings of an earlier probe by a joint secretary. ▸▸ 11

POLL CALL 2024

Ph 5 Polling Today; Odisha to See Voting in 35 Assembly Seats

Polling for the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections covering 49 constituencies in six states and two UTs, and 35 assembly seats in Odisha, will be held on Monday. This round will mark the completion of voting exercise in around 78% (427) of parliamentary seats. ▸▸ 2

BJP has Launched 'Op Jhaadu' to Crush AAP, says Kejriwal

Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal claimed the BJP has launched a campaign "Operation Jhaadu" to crush AAP. Addressing party workers ahead of the protest march to BJP HQ, he asked the cadre to be prepared for bigger challenges ahead. ▸▸ 5

Swati Maliwal Alleges CCTV Camera Tampering ▸▸ 5

Parties in Chorus to Criticise Killing of J&K Ex-Sarpanch ▸▸ 5

RESCUE EFFORTS ON

Chopper Carrying Iran President Raisi Crashes

A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister crashed on Sunday as it was crossing mountain terrain in heavy fog. Rescuers were struggling to reach the site. An Iranian official said the lives of Raisi and minister Hossein Amirabdollahian were "at risk." ▸▸ 10

SUITS & SAYINGS

Talk in All Directions

Some smooth moves up, some close scanning and a possible return— mark a newsy week. Read about this and an NBFC name game on ▸▸ PAGE 10

QR Code Payments Swiping at PoS Terminals

New PoS deployment in FY24 grows at slowest pace since demonetisation, shows RBI data

Pratik.Bhakta @timesinternet.in

Bengaluru: The convenience of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) platforms is increasingly winning over merchants and consumers alike, taking the sheen off debit cards for cashless transactions.

While new point-of-sale (PoS) terminals — the devices where the cards are swiped — are still being deployed as merchants and businesses want to offer all forms of payments to customers and also because of increasing credit card usage, the preference is tilting towards QR code-based UPI transactions.

New PoS deployment in fiscal 2023-24 grew at the slowest pace since the days of demonetisation, show data from the Reserve Bank of India. The only exception during this period was 2021-22, when Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns hurt offline commerce drastically.

Between March 2023 and 2024, new PoS terminal deployment rose 14% — about half the rate of 28% and 29% in the preceding two years — to 8.9 million. The fastest growth in recent years was in 2016-2017, when new deployment increased 82% as a direct impact of demonetisation. In 2016, the base was 1.38 million machines.

Meanwhile, the deployment of QR codes for UPI payments through platforms like PhonePe, Google Pay and Paytm has doubled in the last two years. From auto drivers to street corner shops, these QR-code stickers have found space at every business point.

According to RBI data, there were 346 million such QR codes in use in March this year, compared with 172 million in the same month in 2022. While the convenience of a smartphone scan over a card dip is definitely helping UPI grow, the mandate from the government for zero merchant discount rate (MDR) — the fee charged for processing a transaction — is also encouraging merchants to switch to UPI payments over card swipes.

Banks Taking a Hit ▸▸ 8

CARDS VS UPI

	PoS Machines: Number of terminals (m)	PoS Machines: Volume of transactions (m)*	QR Codes: Number of stickers (m)	QR Codes: Volume of transactions (b)
March 2024	8.9	296	346	8.3
March 2023	7.7	305	256	4.8
March 2022	6	310	172	2.2

*Includes both credit and debit cards **Source:** RBI, NPCI

Illustration: ZAHID

April Release: Political Drama & a BO Tragedy

Polls eclipse film releases; collections under ₹500cr

Javed.Farooqui@timesgroup.com

₹457 CR GROSS BOX OFFICE MOP-UP IN APRIL

Mumbai: The general election has weighed heavily on the box office in April, amid delay in releases and underperformance of Bollywood films, experts said, adding that the scenario will remain unchanged or worsen in May. According to Ormax Media, gross domestic box office (BO) collections for April stood at ₹457 crore — below the ₹500-crore mark for the first time since February 2023.

A year ago, in April, the gross box office mop-up was at ₹618 crore, led by the performance of Tamil film *Ponniyin Selvan II*.

This year, despite Eid, Ugadi and Tamil New Year holidays falling in April, only one film managed to cross ₹100 crore at the box office, according to the report. Malayalam action-comedy *Aavesham* was the top grosser, garnering ₹101 crore.

Two more Malayalam films, *Manjummel Boys* and *Aadujeevitham – The Goat Life*, earned more than ₹100 crore at the box office so far this year. However, the second-highest grosser in April, Hindi action thriller *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*, only managed ₹73 crore, followed by sports drama *Maidaan*, at ₹61 crore.

Miraj Entertainment managing director Amit Sharma said, "Elections have kept film releases away post-Eid."

No Improvement in May ▸▸ 10

Parliamentary Polls

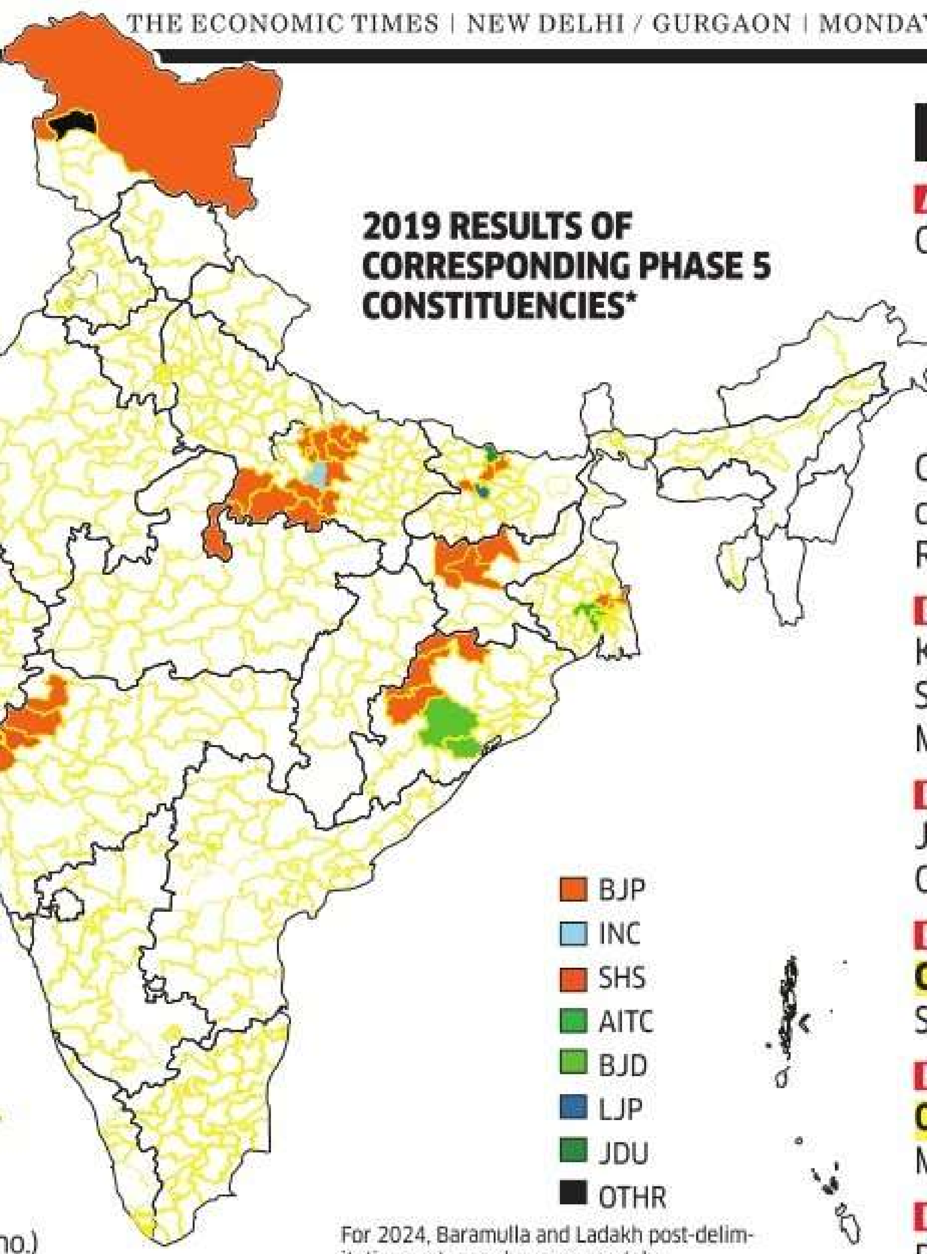
Phase 5: 49 Seats | 695 Candidates

CRUCIAL ROUND FOR BIG NAMES

Polling for the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections covering 49 constituencies in six states and two UTs, and 35 assembly seats in Odisha, will be held today. This round will mark the completion of voting exercise in around 78% (427) of parliamentary seats. Voting for the remaining seats will be held on May 25 (58 seats) and June 1 (57 seats). While Arunachal and Sikkim results will be out on June 2, Lok Sabha, Andhra and Odisha results will be declared on June 4. A look at the key numbers:

39 General
7 SC
3 ST

Polling officials in Leh on Sunday (ANI)



For 2024, Baramulla and Ladakh post-delimitation seats are shown separately

SEATS & CANDIDATES

Spread across 8 states/UTs

	Phase 5 Seats	Candidates
Bihar (Total seats: 40)	5	80
Jharkhand (14)	3	54
Maharashtra (48)	13	264
Odisha (21)	5	40
Uttar Pradesh (80)	14	144
West Bengal (42)	7	88
Jammu & Kashmir (5)	1	22
Ladakh (1)	1	3
Total	49	695

PARTY-WISE

149 parties field 402 candidates; 293 independents in fray

Bahujan Samaj Party	46
Bharatiya Janata Party	40
Indian National Congress	18
Samajwadi Party	10
Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray)	7
All India Trinamool Congress	7
Shiv Sena	6
Biju Janata Dal	5
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	5
Communist Party of India	4
Rashtriya Janata Dal	4
All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen	4
137 other parties	246
Independents	293

82 Women Candidates

94,732 Polling Stations

ELIGIBLE VOTERS

8.95 crore

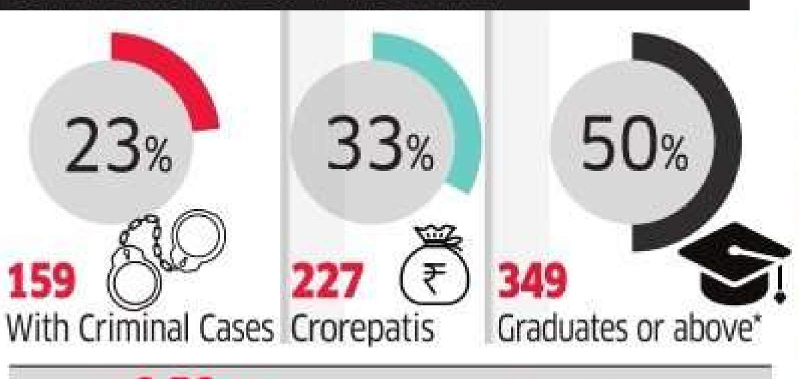
Male 4.69 cr | Female 4.26 cr

7.81 lakh 85+ years | 24,792 100+ years | 7.03 lakh PwD | 5,409 TG

PwD: Person with disability; TG: Third Gender

DELIMITATION OF PCs

CANDIDATES' PROFILE



₹3.56 cr Average Assets of Candidates

* excl diploma holders

Source: ADR

PREVIOUS ELECTIONS

Seat Position Ph 5 (in no.)

Party	2009	2014	2019
BJP	5	27	32
SHS	1	6	7
AITC	6	7	4
BJD	3	4	2
JKN	1		1
LJP		1	1
INC	14	2	1
JDU	3		1
OTHR	16	2	

Others [*2009;@2014]: SP*(6); NCP*(3); IND*(2); RJD, CPM BVA, BSP, JVM*(1 each); BLSP, PDP@(1 each)

Vote Share Ph 5 (in %)

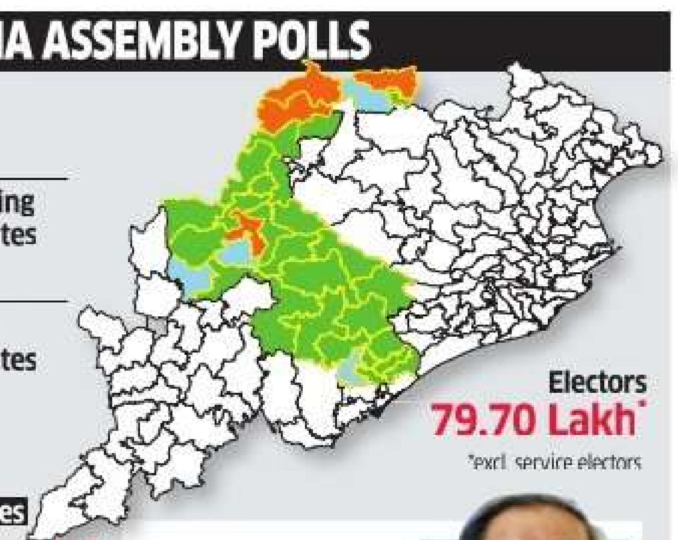
Party	2009	2014	2019
BJP	13.34	31.06	40.70
INC	20.09	14.27	10.78
AITC	8.91	8.59	8.11
SHS	3.34	5.96	7.46
SP	6.81	5.62	5.27
BJD	4.19	4.50	4.41
BSP	8.09	5.90	4.24
NCP	3.45	2.79	2.85
RJD	2.09	1.94	2.12
CPM	10.03	5.71	1.69
JDU	2.06	0.99	1.10
OTHR	17.60	12.67	11.26

ODISHA ASSEMBLY POLLS

Seats 35

Contesting candidates 265

Women candidates 41



Electors 79.70 Lakh*

*excl. service electors

Candidates

BJD	35
BJP	35
INC	33
AAP	10

CM Naveen Patnaik is fighting from Kantabanji and Hinjili

PREVIOUS RESULTS (Corresponding seats of Ph 5 2024)

SEAT POSITION

	2014	2019
BJD	23	26
BJP	4	4
INC	6	4
CPM	1	1
SKD	1	

VOTE SHARE (in %)

	2014	2019
BJD	41.48	44.35
BJP	19.48	33.43
INC	26.16	15.53
CPM	0.79	1.08
BSP	0.90	0.74
CPI	0.60	0.30
OTHR	10.59	4.59

KEY CONTESTS

AMETHI BJP's Smriti Irani vs Cong's Kishori Lal

BARAMULLA NC's Omar Abdullah vs PDP's Mir Mohammad Fayaz vs People's Conference's Sajad Gani Lone vs independent candidate Engineer Abdul Rashid Sheikh

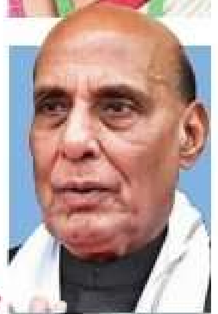
BOLANGIR BJP's Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo vs BJD's Surendra Singh Bhoi vs Cong's Manoj Kumar Mishra

FATEHPUR BJP's Niranjan Jyoti vs SP's Naresh Chandra Uttam Patel

HAJIPUR LJP (Ram Vilas)'s Chirag Paswan vs RJD's Shiv Chandra Ram

HOOGHLY BJP's Locket Chatterjee vs CPM's Manadip Ghosh

HOWRAH AITC's Prasun Banerjee vs CPM's Sabyasachi Chatterjee vs BJP's Rathin Chakravarty



KALYAN Sena's Shrikant Eknath Shinde vs Sena UBT's Vaishali Darekar - RANE

LADAKH Cong's Tsering Namgyal vs BJP's Tashi Gyalson

LUCKNOW BJP's Rajnath Singh vs SP's Ravidas Mehrotra

MUMBAI NORTH BJP's Piyush Goyal vs Cong's Bhushan Patil

RAEBARELI Cong's Rahul Gandhi vs BJP's Dinesh Pratap Singh

SARAN BJP's Rajiv Pratap Rudy vs RJD's Rohini Acharya

SRERAMPUR AITC's Kalyan Banerjee vs CPM's Dipsita Dhar vs BJP's Kabir Shankar Bose

SUNDARGARH BJP's Jual Oram vs BJD's Dilip Kumar Tirkey vs Cong's Janardan Dehury

VIKASH SHARMA

FATE OF SEVERAL IMPORTANT LEADERS TO BE SEALED

Elections in Fifth Gear

RakeshMohan.Chaturvedi@timesgroup.com


Polling officials in Lucknow on Sunday - BCCL

New Delhi: The fifth phase of polling for Lok Sabha elections, taking place on Monday, will decide the fate of several important leaders, including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, defence minister Rajnath Singh, commerce minister Piyush Goyal, women and child development minister Smriti Irani, National Conference leader Omar Abdullah, former Union minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya, former public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam and Bahubali leader Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son Karan.

Rahul Gandhi is contesting from Raebareli, his mother Sonia Gandhi's seat since 1999, and is facing UP minister Dinesh Pratap Singh. Congress has fielded the points-person of the Gandhis in the twin constituencies, Kishori Lal Sharma, as its candidate from Amethi against Smriti Irani who gave a shock defeat to Rahul in 2019.

Former J&K CM and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah is in the fray from Baramulla. Independent candidate Abdul Rashid Sheikh, known popularly as Engineer Rashid, is said to be putting up a good fight against Abdullah and People's Conference leader Sajad Lone in this triangular contest. Rashid is in jail under UAPA. In Ladakh, BJP replaced sitting MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal with Tashi Gyalson as its candidate this time.

Some of the seats going to polls in Bihar are being keenly watched. After winning the Saran seat in 2014 and 2019, Rudy is in the fray again but the battle is tougher this time as he is pitted against Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya, who had gained a lot of sympathy for donating her kidney to her ailing father.

POLL CALL 2024

Chirag Paswan is contesting from Hajipur as LJP (RV) candidate under the NDA umbrella. He has moved to his father Ram Vilas Paswan's erstwhile seat. A win will establish Chirag's status as the inheritor of his father's legacy. RJD candidate Shiv Chandra Ram is putting up a good fight but Chirag is likely to sail through.

Among the 13 seats of Maharashtra going to polls, Goyal is contesting from Mumbai North. Former public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam is BJP nominee from Mumbai North Central, replacing sitting MP Poonam Mahajan. Chief minister Eknath Shinde's son Srikant is contesting from Kalyan. Union minister Bharati Pawar is reportedly in a tough contest in Dindori (ST) seat.

The five seats of Odisha going to polls include Bolangir. Former minister Jual Oram will try to retain the Sundargarh (ST) seat again.

In Uttar Pradesh, Faizabad MP Lallu Singh will try to retain his seat with BJP banking on the consecration of Ram temple for his victory. In Kaiserganj, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who is embroiled in the sexual harassment case filed by top women wrestlers, managed to get BJP ticket for his son Karan as his replacement.

In West Bengal, Locket Chatterjee (Hooghly) is fighting against CPM candidate Manadip Ghosh; AITC's Prasun Banerjee is contesting against Rathin Chakravarty of BJP in Howrah.


Carrying election materials in Belur area of Howrah district on Sunday - PTI

CONSTITUENCY HAS BEEN WITH BJP SINCE 1991; VAJPAYEE HELD IT BETWEEN 1991 AND 2004

Rajnath Seeks 3rd Straight Win from BJP's Bastion Lucknow

His rival, Ravidas Mehrotra of SP, is betting on anti-incumbency and consolidation of votes

Vatsala.Gaur@timesgroup.com

Lucknow: Lucknow Lok Sabha seat has been a BJP bastion for over 30 years, largely owing to the enduring popularity of its longest-served MP, the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Union defence minister Rajnath Singh, who is seeking his third consecutive term from here, is confident that the trend will continue as he seeks votes based on his contribution to the web of roads and flyovers in the rapidly expanding and urbanising Uttar Pradesh capital and the 'development plank' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

ELECTION TRACK

His rival, senior Samajwadi Party leader Ravidas Mehrotra, the current and two-time MLA of Lucknow central, is betting on anti-incumbency as well as consolidation of Muslim votes and a section of upper castes to end BJP's stronghold here.

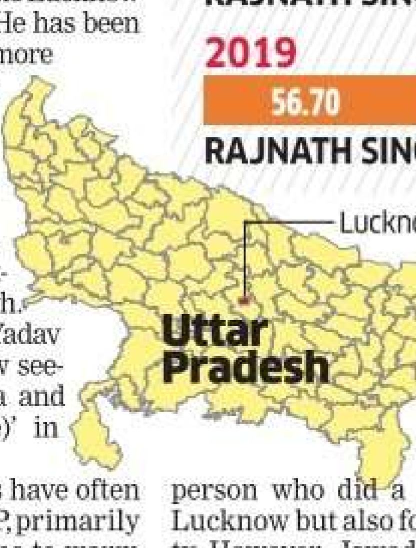
Lucknow has been with BJP since 1991, and was held by Vajpayee between 1991 and 2004, followed by Lalji Tandon once and then Singh since 2014. Singh, often seen as a reflection of Vajpayee here, never misses to invoke his name. "I have tried to fulfil Atalji's dreams for Lucknow," he says in almost all his addresses.

Known for their moderate stance and politics, the two leaders also appealed to a section of the one-fourth Muslim population of Lucknow, prominently the Shia minorities numbering about 2.5-3 lakh in the city.

Among the most prominent contributions of Singh, he invokes the 100-km Outer Ring Road built at a cost of ₹6,000 crore besides a slew of local flyovers and bridges. He also lists kickstarting the construction and completion of the Gomti Nagar Railway Station, foundation stone for which was laid by Vajpayee in 2000, apart from the Brahmos missile factory being set up in Lucknow. Singh said 12-13 more flyovers have been approved and will be constructed soon.

His younger son Neeraj Singh is playing a prominent role in his campaigning, with some BJP workers suggesting this might be his grooming for a possible foray in the city's politics later. Rajnath's elder son Pankaj Singh is MLA from Noida and is also campaigning here.

SP-Congress alliance candidate Mehrotra was a feisty student politician from his days in the Lucknow University. He has been jailed for more than 250 times in his political career, not for any crime but for demonstrations and protests. Among other things, he is also invoking the local versus outsider plank against Singh. SP leader Akhilesh Yadav held a massive roadshow seeking votes for Mehrotra and for 'parivartan (change)' in the city on Friday.



Within Muslims, Shias have often in the past sided with BJP, primarily due to efforts of Vajpayee to warm up to the community and the resolution of the Azadari dispute and the smooth facilitating of their religious processions. However, this time the community is divided as their reverence for Rajnath is dwarfed by bread-and-butter issues as well as BJP leaders' communal rhetoric.

Maulana Kalbe Jawad, the most revered Shia cleric of the city, on Friday said while he has not made any directions to vote for any party, Rajnath was "an extremely decent (shareef)" person who did a lot not just for Lucknow but also for the community. However, Jawad said one could vote for whoever one preferred.

"We listen to him in matters of Islam but our political choice is ours," said Sayyed Rizvi, a Shia voter. "Rajnath is fine, but will he be made the PM? It would have been nice if he could be made CM here instead of Yogi, but even that is not to happen. Look at Dinesh Sharma — he is such a decent man, respects everybody. He was also removed as deputy CM... Then, what is the point? We will vote for change," he said. Another Shia voter, Ahmed Hussain pointed to how he had to shutter his Zari Zardozi work after demonetisation and is now forced to sell small hardware tools like scissors, etc. on the road. "Shias and Sunnis, everybody will vote for change," he said.

Lucknow LS Results

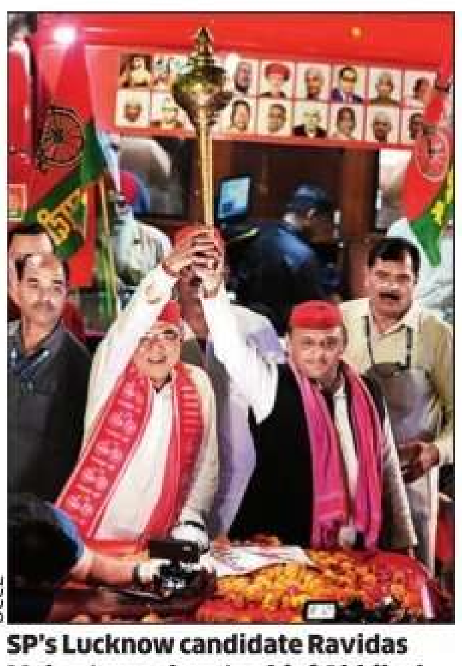
VOTE SHARE (%) (TOP 2 PARTIES & WINNER)

INC | BJP | SP | OTHRS

Year	Winner	BJP	Runner-up	OTHRS
2009	LALJI TANDON BJP	34.93	27.93 (INC)	37.14
2014	RAJNATH SINGH BJP	54.27	27.89 (INC)	17.84
2019	RAJNATH SINGH BJP	56.70	25.59 (SP)	17.71


ANI

Defence minister Rajnath Singh at a recent public meeting in Lucknow


BCCL

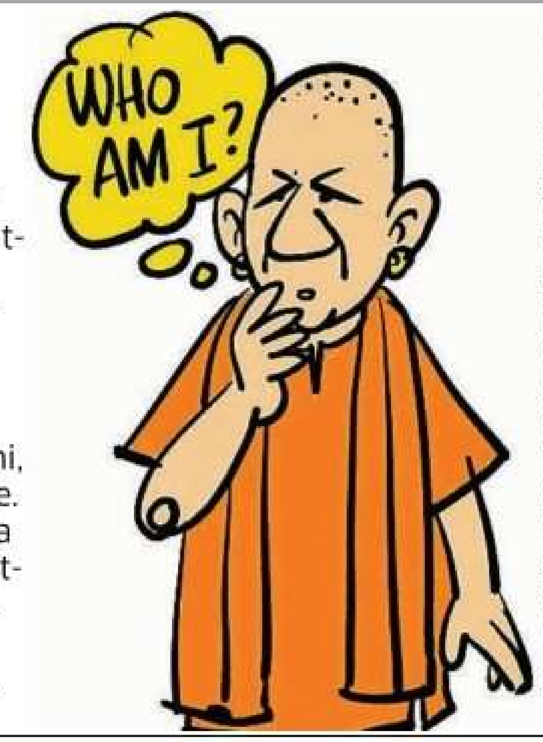
SP's Lucknow candidate Ravidas Mehrotra and party chief Akhilesh

THIRD EYE


R PRASAD

Sultanpur Slip

Uttar Pradesh minister and Nishad Party leader Sanjay Nishad was recently addressing a public meeting in Sultanpur for BJP candidate Maneka Gandhi. Throughout his speech he praised Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, with Maneka on the stage. At the end of his speech, a BJP MLA got up and pointed out the political blunder to Nishad, who corrected himself instantly.



Dropping a Hint on UP CM?

During a public meeting in favour of his son Karan Bhushan Singh, BJP candidate from Kaisarganj, Brijbhushan Sharan Singh addressed Uttar Pradesh minister AK Sharma, who was also on the stage, as 'yashashwi mukhya mantri' (chief minister of the state). The crowd was naturally shocked. But this has now become the talk of the town: "Has Singh dropped a hint about a possible change?"

Proof is in the Pudding

Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde faced an embarrassing moment during a road show in Thane for Shiv Sena candidate Naresh Mhaske. One of the party supporters near his vehicle kept shouting that 'they are with Uddhav saheb'. Whether the sloganeering was a mistake or whether it was a ploy by the Uddhav Thackeray faction is not known. However, Shinde and Mhaske quickly realised what was happening and put an end to it. The footage went viral, with the Thackeray faction claiming that this was a proof that Shinde's own people in Thane are not with him.

Poliloquy R PRASAD

If it was Maa Ganga who called Modi to Varanasi, it was Maa Sonia who called Rahul ro Raebareli!

PUBLISHED FOR THE PROPRIETORS, Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. by Rajeev Yadav at Times House, 7, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110 002, Phone: 011-23302000, Fax: 011-23323346 and printed by him at Times of India Press, 13 & 15/1, Site IV, Industrial Area, Sahibabad (UP). REGD. OFFICE: Dr Dadabhai Naoroji Road, Mumbai-400 001. EDITOR (DELHI MARKET): Vinay Pandey (Responsible for selection of news under PRB Act). © Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of the publisher is prohibited. All rights reserved. RNI NO. 26749/74 | MADE IN New Delhi AIR CHARGE Raipur, Ahmedabad, Srinagar, Leh & via ₹2.00 | PRICE IN NEPAL: NEP ₹15.00 except Saturday & Sunday : NEP ₹25.00

In remembrance

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः।
स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते॥

Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow.
And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.

- The Bhagavad Gita 3.21

Padma Bhushan Shri Narayanan Vaghul

August 4, 1936 – May 18, 2024

Former Chairman, ICICI Bank

A dharma yogi, institution builder, guru, visionary, author, philanthropist, and doyen of Indian industry.

A legendary banker who transformed ICICI from a development bank to a universal banking group covering commercial banking, insurance, investment banking, mutual funds, and more.

A visionary leader who was instrumental in setting up many pioneering financial institutions.

A guru who mentored generations of leaders across banks, corporates and educational institutions.

We, the ICICI family, will forever remain grateful to you, Sir.

ICICI Bank

ADDRESSES THREE BACK-TO-BACK RALLIES

After June 4, All Corrupt Will Land in Jail: Modi in Bengal

Says a batch of 300 people has already received citizenship through Citizenship Amendment Act

Our Political Bureau

Kolkata: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that a batch of 300 people has already received citizenship through the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and that people of West Bengal will also receive citizenship in the coming days while attacking the Trinamool Congress for opposing the CAA.

"CAA is for giving citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christians who fled religious persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh," Modi said. "People have lost faith in TMC…Trinamool has raised questions about the character of women in Sandeshkhali. Women will reply through votes and take every revenge against the torture through votes," Modi said at public rallies in tribal dominated Purulia and Bishnupur today.

"Trinamool came to power with the slogan 'Ma, Mati and Manush' (Mother, land and people) and today they are exploiting the Ma, Mati and Manush."

"In order to save Sheikh Shahjahan, Trinamool is pointing fingers towards the characters of Sandeshkhali women…First Trinamool committed the sin and then they tried to save the culprits," Modi said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Purulia, West Bengal on Sunday – PTI

Hitting out at Congress and Trinamool, Modi said, "They want to snatch the reservation from Adivasis. BR Ambedkar was against reservation on religious lines. In Karnataka, reservations were given on religious lines. Trinamool is supporting Congress. Do you want to end your reservation? You are not the vote bank of Trinamool and Congress, so they don't care about Adivasis."

'SAME SINS'

Trinamool, Congress and Left Front may look different but their sins are all the same, says PM during a public rally

Modi addressed three rallies today in Junglemahal belt-Purulia, Bankura and Midnapore constituencies.

"We need your blessing for 'Vikshit Bharat' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'. Bengal must develop to fulfil such missions," the PM said.

"After June 4 and the formation of a new government, all the corrupt will land in jail. This is my promise," Modi said, adding, "In 2024, I am saying I will not allow the corrupt to stay outside the jail. Those who are looting must be caught. This is Modi's guarantee."

Attacking the Trinamool government on corruption and scams, Modi said, "In Bengal, where Ma Sarswati is worshipped, corruption in job scams has marred the state. It is not only youth who are affected by the job scam but there are hardly any teachers in rural schools. Trinamool have stolen the future of these children in Bengal. They have also spoiled the lives of youth in Bengal."

Attacking the INDIA bloc, Modi said, "Trinamool, Congress and Left may look different but their sins are all the same."

SIMULTANEOUS LOK SABHA AND ASSEMBLY POLLS

In Slogan War, it is BJD's 'Double Conch' Vs BJP's 'Double Lotus'

Kumar.Anshuman
@timesgroup.com

Bhubaneshwar: In 2019, Odisha was the only state where the voters chose two different parties in simultaneous polls. In the Lok Sabha, the BJP saw an increase of seats from one to eight seats. In the assembly elections, the BJD repeated its successful run with a two-thirds majority. But in the LS elections, the BJD lost eight seats.

On April 22 when BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik launched his campaign, he posted a video of himself with his party symbol — two conches — in his hand with the slogan, 'Jodi Shankha'. "This time vote for a double conch, one for MLA and one for MP," he said. This has become the election slogan for the party and the BJD is appealing to voters to avoid splitting their votes.

The BJP has also come up with a counter slogan: 'Duithara Padma. Duiguna Vikas' (Press two lotus buttons for 2X development). Stamped with a seal of Modi's Guarantee, the slogan is everywhere.

"We have a proven track record of fast track development and growth in states where we have our governments along with the Centre," Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan told ET. "The people now want an alternative and growth will take place with BJP having a government at the Centre as well as the state." On the ground, the voters are quite comfortable with split voting. "Till the time Naveen Patnaik is alive, the vote in the assembly election will go to him," Smruti Sagar Nayak (25), a hotel management graduate in Khorda, Bhubaneshwar, told ET.

"For the country, Modi is good, and we voted for BJP in 2019. This time too we will vote for Modi," he says.

Post 2019, BJD sided with the government on several issues. Some voters even mention this as their reason for split voting. "Even the BJD MP supports Modi in Parliament. It is better to vote for the BJP in the LS polls. Locally, Patnaik is good," Priyabrath Samal, a private sector employee in Sonepur town, told ET.

BJD MLA Samir Dash Joins BJP

Bhubaneswar: In a boost to the BJP in Odisha, BJD Nimapara MLA Samir Ranjan Dash on Sunday joined the saffron party after quitting the regional outfit.

BJP Odisha unit president Manmohan Samal, party's Odisha in-charge Vijay Pal Singh Tomar and other leaders welcomed Dash at the party headquarters here. Dash had earlier in the day resigned from BJD. The three-time legislator was annoyed after being denied a party ticket to contest the 2024 Assembly elections.

"I have joined BJP after losing confidence in the BJD leadership. I will ensure that BJP candidate Pravati Parida wins elections in Nimapara assembly segment," Dash said. Dash tendered his resignation letter to BJD president Naveen Patnaik conveying his decision to quit the primary membership of the regional party. – PTI

OTHER NEWS OF THE DAY

Security personnel check a vehicle on the eve of the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday – PTI

Jailed Radical Preacher Amritpal Singh Gets 'Mike' as Poll Symbol

Chandigarh: Jailed radical preacher Amritpal Singh, who is contesting from the Khadoor Sahib seat in Punjab as an independent candidate, has been allotted the poll symbol of 'mike'. He was among the 169 Independent contestants, out of total 328 candidates who have been allotted election symbols.

Amritpal, the chief of the 'Waris Punjab De' outfit, is lodged in Assam's Dibrugarh jail under the National Security Act.

Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, who is contesting from the Faridkot (reserve) constituency as an Independent, has been allotted the poll symbol of 'Ganna Kisan' (sugarcane farmer). – PTI

'More and More BJP Leaders Using Anti-Muslim Tropes' in Lok Sabha Election: CPIM Complains to Poll Body

New Delhi: Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Sitaram Yechury on Sunday wrote to the Election Commission alleging poll code violations by BJP leaders, and claimed more and more leaders of the saffron party are now "resorting to inciting hatred using anti-Muslim tropes".

Yechury, in a post on X, shared a copy of his complaint to the EC, and said the poll panel must act immediately.

"The ECI must act immediately. ECI cannot consciously remain silent which is tantamount to the betrayal of its constitutional mandate to conduct free and fair polls," Yechury said.

In his letter, he said the CPI(M) has filed a series of complaints against BJP leaders for Model Code of Conduct violation. – PTI

CONTROVERSY ERUPTS

Some RKM and BSS Monks Working for BJP, Alleges Banerjee

Our Political Bureau

Kolkata: Controversy erupted over West Bengal chief minister's Mamata Banerjee's comments about a section of the monks, who, according to Banerjee, expressed political views during the Lok Sabha polls.

Banerjee named a particular monk in a public rally on Saturday and said he has instructed Trinamool polling agent will not be allowed to sit in the polling booth.

Banerjee, at a rally in Hooghly, named Bharat Sevasram Sangha monk Kartik Maharaj (or Swami Pradiptananda) in Murshidabad for his political comments. "There is a Maharaj in Murshidabad2, Kartik Maharaj. I have been hearing about him for a long time. He says he will not allow any Trinamool agent in the poll booth. I do not consider him a saint because he is directly involved in politics," Banerjee said. She also referred to RKM and also said that there were "instructions (the order had got) from Delhi". "Some monks are violating the rules. There is another monk in Asansol," she claimed.

Banerjee also said. "I used to respect Bharat Sevashram Sangha a lot. It has been on my list of respected organisations for a long time."

"Some monks of Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are working under the influence of Delhi," she alleged.

'I do not consider Kartik Maharaj a saint because he is directly involved in politics'

responding to the allegations, Swami Pradiptananda (Kartick Maharaj) from Beldanga Bharat Sevasram Sangha, said, "I am challenging West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee. I have not threatened any polling agent of Trinamool. I am a monk. I am not a political person. This is not the truth."

Meanwhile, during his visit to Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, slammed Trinamool for belittling the saints of Bengal and attacking Bharat Sevashram Sangh, Ramakrishna Mission and ISKON.

SUPPORTERS TRY TO REACH STAGE IN PRAYAGRAJ

Amid Stampede-like Situation, Rahul & Akhilesh Leave Rally

Our Political Bureau

Lucknow: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav had to abandon a joint poll meeting in Prayagraj's Phulpur area without delivering their speeches, as a chaotic situation arose after supporters broke through the barricades in a bid to reach the stage.

During this, the mics stopped working but the two came up with a unique format of having a ten-minute discussion on polls in UP while on stage, for the video to be shared later on social media. They discussed their historical relationship in Prayagraj- the native birthplace of Jawaharlal Nehru and also his parliamentary seat as well as how this time, a new partnership has developed between the SP and Congress, akin to a "natural alliance".

"We always had a difference in ideology here (in Prayagraj), but never compromised on principles. Congress remained pretty close to SP in matters of principles," Yadav said. "I think this time a new kind of partnership has developed because the cooperation being seen this time has not taken place before…," Gandhi said. "The best thing is the more they (BJP) say" do ladkon ki jodi, the more the youth has gotten associated with us and the alliance. So this is a natural alliance," Yadav said.

Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav during a public meeting, in Phulpur on Sunday – ANI

The joint rally was organised in favour of Amarnath Maurya who is contesting on a SP ticket from the Phulpur Lok Sabha seat. Later, however, they attended another rally in Prayagraj where Congress' Ujjjwal Raman Singh is contesting.

AMOL KIRTIKAR VS RAVINDRA WAIKAR

Two Candidates Fighting to Represent 'Real' Shiv Sena in Mumbai NW Seat

Krishna.Kumar
@timesgroup.com

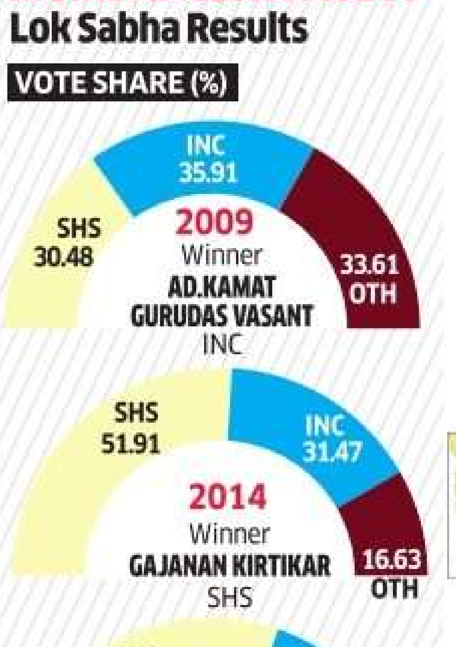
Mumbai: The contest in North West Mumbai Lok Sabha seat is not only interesting but confusing also for the voters and both the main candidates fighting from here claim to represent the "real" Shiv Sena. That is not the only thing connecting Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray Sena leader Amol Kirtikar and his rival Jogeshwari East MLA Ravindra Waikar from the Shinde camp of Sena. Both have allegations of being involved in scams against them and both are being probed by the Enforcement Directorate.

Kirtikar is the son of Gajanan Kirtikar, current MP from the seat. After the Shiv Sena split, the MP joined the Shinde faction whereas the son preferred to stay back with the UBT camp. Amol has been rewarded for his "loyalty" by his party by giving him the ticket even when the Congress was very keen to contest the seat as it wanted to field Sanjay Nirupam from here.

Chief minister Eknath Shinde after looking at a number of permutations and combinations finally gave the ticket to a reluctant Waikar. The Jogeshwari East MLA, who was a close aide of Uddhav Thackeray, moved to the Shinde faction in April this year. The BJP has been alleging that Waikar has dubious property deals with Uddhav's family. He was also facing a probe by the ED in connection with the construction of a luxury hotel in Jogeshwari.

MUMBAI NORTH WEST Lok Sabha Results

VOTE SHARE (%)



Just a week ago, Waikar created a controversy when in an interview to a newspaper he claimed that he was "forced" to leave the UBT Sena as he was threatened with jail in the ED case. But later, he organised a press conference and claimed that his words were distorted.

His rival Amol Kirtikar is also being probed by the ED in connection with the 'Kichdi scam' which is related to the khichdi (steamed rice and pulses) provided to migrants during the Covid wave. Amol had gotten a head start in the elections as Uddhav had signaled in March that he would be the candidate from the constituency whereas Waikar entered into the contest on April 30.

Amol has been calling Waikar "a traitor" and has been appealing to the Marathi voters to vote for him claiming that the UBT Sena is the "real" Sena and that Waikar betrayed Uddhav.

Waikar is also claiming that he represents the "real" Shiv Sena. Despite entering the fray quite late, Waikar seems to be on a solid footing due to the demographic of the constituency which has six lakh Marathi voters, whereas the north Indian community vote is close to 3.80 lakh.

The Muslim community is around 3.20 lakh whereas the Gujarati population is around 1.90 lakhs. The north Indian community, especially in Mumbai and the Western suburbs in particular, has been voting for the BJP for the past decade.

Sanjay Nirupam has also been campaigning for Waikar among the north Indian community. Another person campaigning for Waikar among the north Indian community is Pradeep Sharma who was arrested by the NIA in connection with the Antilia-Mansukh Hiran murder case.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Gajanan Kirtikar had defeated Nirupam by a margin of 2.60 lakh votes. The BJP believes that the 2.60 lakh margin would not matter as the BJP was part of the alliance with the Shi Sena before the split.

ELECTION TRACK

IN UP'S FAIZABAD

Caste, Bread & Butter Factors Competing With Temple Tide

Vatsala.Gaur@timesgroup.com

Ayodhya: Ayodhya, for which this will be a historic Lok Sabha election being held after the inauguration of the Ram temple, caste and convenience matters are seen to be competing with the temple tide.

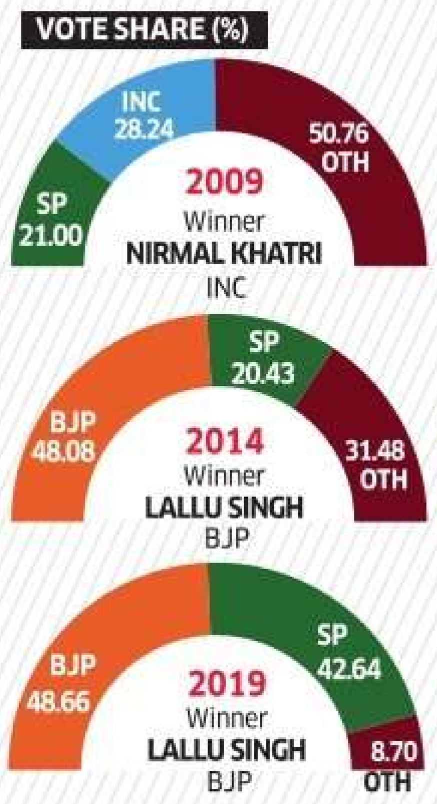
BJP MP Lallu Singh is eyeing his third consecutive term from the seat, but it's the fielding of nine-time Dalit SP MLA from Sohawal and Milkipur constituencies Awadhesh Prasad, 78, which has made the contest a keen one with Dalits forming the largest singular voting bloc in the seat, likely to be aided by the prominent Muslim and Yadav population. However, the CPIM has also fielded Arvindsen Yadav, son of popular MP from Ayodhya, Mitrasen Yadav, who had represented CPI, SP and BSP in his three different tenures from the seat, and he could dent the SP's prospects. BSP has fielded Sachchidanand Pandey who could also complicate matters. PM Narendra Modi had held a roadshow here earlier this month.

Talking about the entire population of the district, Faizabad, renamed as Ayodhya (but remains Faizabad Lok Sabha in EC registers) 'Ramrajya' is still many, many years away. One gets a sense of which direction the wind is blowing politically, depending on where one asks.

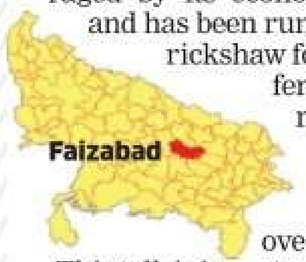
In Faizabad city and Ayodhya town, residents try to reconcile the immediate pains of a city in transition with the long-term vision of the place becoming a tourist hub. They also speak of the larger issues of inflation, but hint at voting for the BJP. In villages, support for the INDIA bloc candidate is more vocal as many feel shortchanged by the ruling party, complaining that the entire focus in Ayodhya has been on the temple, with bread and butter issues of the poor being neglected.

FAIZABAD Lok Sabha Results

VOTE SHARE (%)



"Vikaas hoga toh vinaash bhi hoga," says Ram Prasad, who runs a refreshment shop, a km away from the temple. "But who else do we vote for? It is unthinkable that SP would win here," he says. Prasad's story is the same as many others who say the rise in devotees has only benefitted a few thousand commercial establishments in the immediate vicinity of the Hanumangarhi and Ram temple. There are also encouraging signs of prosperity. Raju, who worked for two years at a textile factory in Surat is now back in his hometown, encouraged by its economic potential, and has been running a battery rickshaw for two months, ferrying the tourists. If he earned about ₹700/day there, he earns over ₹1,000 here.



This talk is in stark contrast to the woes of people in rural Rudauli. Ganga Ram (60) takes off his glasses to show the whiteness in his eyes impacted due to the air pollution caused by the waste generated by the Balrampur sugar mill.

Dharam Raj summarises the contest thus: "I am a Modi supporter but we are facing too many problems. Ram temple is for the rich. Large hotel chains will come and benefit. Perhaps this is why there is an undercurrent favouring Awadhesh Prasad as he is a grassroots leader and will do something for the poor and the weak," he says.

IN BIHAR'S SITAMARHI & MADHUBANI

BJP Ally JDU Banking on 'Modi Magic' as RJD Hopes to Regain Lost Ground

Sanjay.Singh2@timesgroup.com

Patna: In the fifth phase of polls on May 20, all eyes would be on Mithilanchal's two seats — Madhubani and Sitamarhi — which share international boundaries with Nepal. While NDA ally JDU banks on "Modi magic" to register its second consecutive victory in Sitamarhi, RJD is struggling hard to keep its support base among Yadavs in Madhubani to regain its lost political ground.

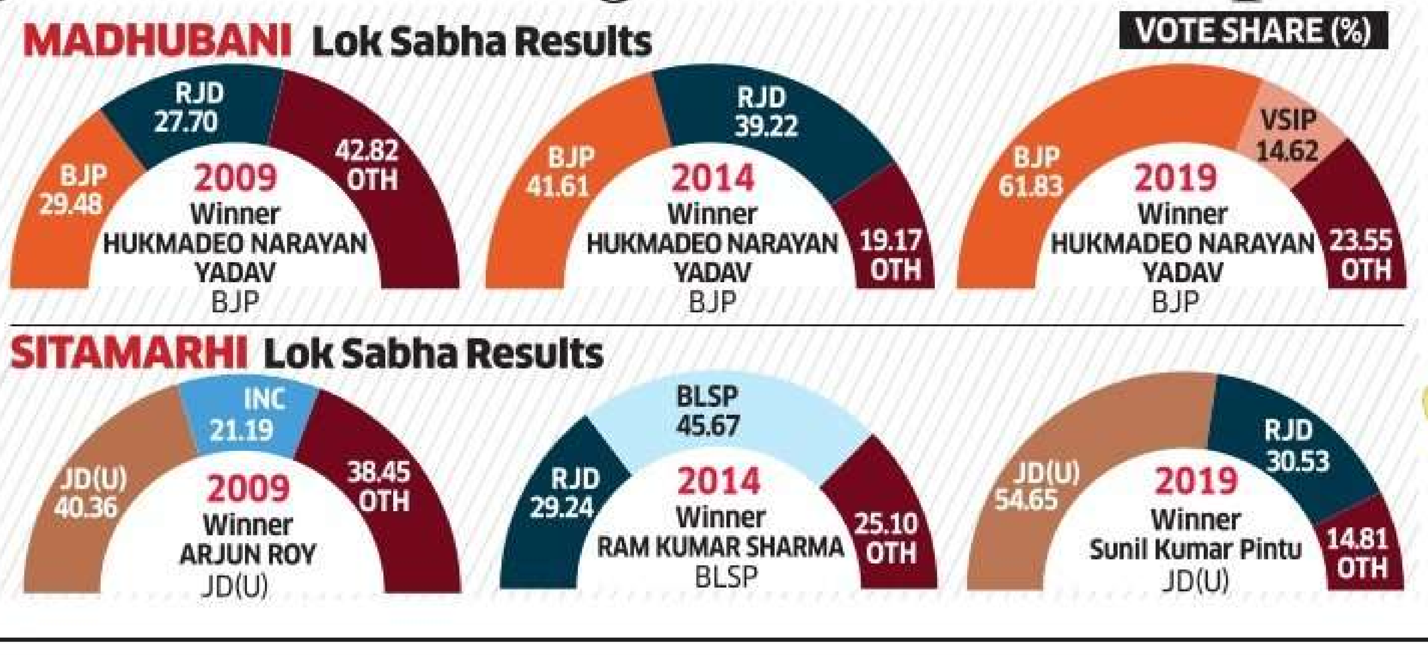
In Madhubani, RJD's nominee and former Union minister Mohammad AA Fatmi faces a tough task to keep his party's Yadav vote-bank intact in view of the presence of Ashok Yadav, son of BJP leader Hukum Deo Narayan Yadav, as BJP nominee. His father was elected to the Lok Sabha from the Madhubani seat four times.

Ashok is seeking a victory for a second consecutive time.

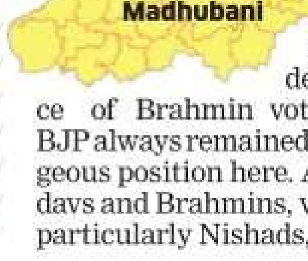
Although Fatmi was elected to the Lok Sabha four times from Darbhanga seat, he has now shifted to Madhubani to make his presence felt in the Mithilanchal area. He was last elected to the Lok Sabha from Darbhanga seat in 2004. This time, the Madhubani seat is apparently in the special focus of the RJD and the party has been trying to stop the division of its core support base of Yadavs.

MADHUBANI Lok Sabha Results VOTE SHARE (%)

SITAMARHI Lok Sabha Results



If the RJD succeeds in keeping its Yadav support base intact in this Lok Sabha seat, it may create trouble for the BJP nominee Ashok Yadav. Since Ashok's father is respected among Yadav voters in this area, Ashok may be able to make a dent into the Yadav support base of the RJD.



Madhubani has a considerable presence of Brahmin voters and thus, BJP always remained in an advantageous position here. Apart from Yadavs and Brahmins, votes of MBCs, particularly Nishads, matter in any election in Madhubani.

In Sitamarhi, JDU has fielded Devesh Chandra Thakur who is contesting Lok Sabha polls for the first time. Thakur, who has been a member of Bihar legislative council for over two decades, is native of Sitamarhi. The good thing for Thakur in Sitamarhi is that of its six assembly constituencies, five are with the NDA.

Tirhut Graduate constituency which Thakur represents in the state legislative council, also covers Sitamarhi. "He is the right choice. He is aware about the basic problems Sitamarhi continues to face," JDU's district president Satyendra Singh Kushwaha told ET.

HITTING THE STREETS

AK Targets BJP, Maliwal Cites Nirbhaya

BJP has Launched 'Operation Jhaadu' to Crush AAP: Kejriwal

Asks party workers to be prepared to face bigger challenges

Our Political Bureau

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal with party workers protesting against BJP in New Delhi on Sunday – ANI

New Delhi: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday claimed that BJP has launched a campaign 'Operation Jhaadu' to crush the Aam Admi Party, which it sees as its primary adversary.

Addressing party workers and leaders ahead of AAP's protest march to the BJP headquarters at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, he said there would be bigger challenges ahead and asked the cadre to be prepared to face them. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi is worried about the rise of the AAP. The party has risen too fast. They have started 'Operation Jhaadu' to crush the party. In the coming time, our bank accounts will be frozen and we will be brought to the streets since our office will also be taken away," he said. "There will be bigger challenges ahead. Please be ready to face them. Remember one thing...we faced many challenges in the past. We have the blessings of Lord Hanuman and God. We would have not survived these. Walk on the path of truth. We want to work for society," he told them.

The controversy over the alleged assault of Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal has become political over the last one week.

As the police suspected that the CCTV footage around the time of the alleged incident has been tampered with, AAP debunked the claim. AAP targeted the Delhi Police on Sunday and accused them of being part of the day-to-day conspiracies of the BJP.

> **There will be bigger challenges ahead. Be ready to face them... Walk on the path of truth. We want to work for the society**
> **ARVIND KEJRIWAL** *Delhi CM*

"Everyone knows that Bibhav Kumar was in Lucknow with the CM, but the Delhi Police planted the news that he is absconding. Ten teams have been formed for him... Delhi Police is involved in the day-to-day conspiracies of BJP...Another lie being circulated is that the CCTV camera's footage is missing... CCTV footage of the chief minister's residence, along with DVR, has already been taken by the police...Why are the Delhi Police continuously spreading lies?" Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said at a press conference.

Kejriwal, who is out on interim bail in the excise policy case, had said on Saturday that he and other AAP leaders would go to the BJP headquarters on May 19. "We will peacefully march to the BJP headquarters and if the police stop us, we will sit at that spot. We will wait for half an hour and see if they arrest us. If they do not arrest us, it will be their defeat. You can send us all in jail and see for yourself if the party ends or it rises more," he said.

TAKING TO SOCIAL MEDIA TO STRESS THE POINT

Swati Alleges CCTV Camera Tampering

Says CM aide Bibhav formatted his phone

Our Political Bureau

> **There was a time when he (Kejriwal) hit the streets to get justice for Nirbhaya. Twelve years later, they are hitting the streets to save an accused**
> **SWATI MALIWAL**
> *AAP Rajya Sabha MP (on X)*

New Delhi: Aam Aadmi Party Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal alleged that the closed circuit cameras at the chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence were being tampered with and his aide Bibhav Kumar had formatted his mobile phone.

In its remand note, police have said a portion of the footage from the CCTV cameras at the chief minister's residence is showing blank. Maliwal took to social media to stress this point. Referring to the 2012 Delhi gangrape-murder, she posted on X, "There was a time when he hit the streets to get justice for Nirbhaya. Twelve years later, they are hitting the streets to save an accused who deleted CCTV footage and formatted the phone. I wish they had tried so hard for Manish Sisodia. If he was here, maybe something so bad would not have happened to me." Sisodia, Delhi's former deputy chief minister, is in jail for over a year now in the Delhi liquor policy case.

Maliwal has alleged that Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar assaulted her on May 13 when she went to the CM's residence to meet him. AAP has trashed her allegations.

The controversy, which has come a week ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi, has become political with BJP questioning Kejriwal's silence over the issue. Addressing a press conference, BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said, "Arvind Kejriwal is protesting to save a person who has misbehaved with a woman at his residence... The same man earlier talked about women's safety but today, Arvind Kejriwal is protesting to save the man who hit a woman..." "Now, the people as well as Delhi want to know what happened with Swati Maliwal at the residence of Arvind Kejriwal."

Funeral procession of BJP leader and former sarpanch Ajaz Sheikh in Shopian, Kashmir, on Sunday – ANI

SCORES PARTICIPATE IN FUNERAL PRAYERS

Parties in Chorus to Criticise Killing of J&K Ex-sarpach

Tourist couple from Raj attacked in Pahalgam

HakeemIrfan.Rashid
@timesgroup.com

Srinagar: Scores of people participated in the funeral prayers of a former sarpanch of the BJP, Ajaz Sheikh, who was killed in his native village of Herpora in Shopian of southern Kashmir late Saturday evening. Around the same time on Saturday, unidentified gunmen opened fire on a tourist couple from Rajasthan in Yanier area near the famous tourist spot of Pahalgam. Both of them are stated to be stable.

Locals claim that four attackers had come to Sheik's house and two of them barged inside and opened fire at Sheikh who has been a vocal advocate of BJP's policies in Kashmir.

Political parties, across the spectrum, condemned the attack but questioned the timing of such attacks as Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency is going for polls on May 25.

Former chief minister of J&K Mehbooba Mufti, who is contesting from Anantnag-Rajouri where the incidents happened, questioned the timing of these attacks. "The timing of these attacks, given that the South election was delayed without any reason, is a cause of concern, especially keeping in mind the normalcy claims touted by the GoI," said Mufti.

"The killing of BJP's former sarpanch is a highly condemnable act. No one deserves to be killed for his/her political ideology. These acts should have no place in society," said Ruhullah Mehdi of National Conference, who is the party's candidate from Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency. "I would also want to ask a question which genuinely concerns me. What was the purpose of the Home Minister's visit a few days ago? HM's visit should ensure a better security situation. Why has the situation worsened after his visit?" Mehdi said.

J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha also strongly condemned the attacks in Shopian and Pahalgam stating that a free hand has been given to the security forces to bring the perpetrators to justice.

"He was an exemplary grass-roots leader and will be remembered for his selfless service to the people. I have complete faith in the bravery of our personnel and the perpetrators of this attack will be punished soon. Our security forces will also hunt down those elements who are helping the terrorists and trying to disrupt J&K's journey of development," said Sinha.

> **Our security forces will hunt down those elements helping the terrorists & trying to disrupt J&K's developmental journey**
> **MANOJ SINHA**
> *LG of J&K*

> **Timing of these attacks given that the South election was delayed without any reason is a cause of concern**
> **MEHBOOBA MUFTI**
> *Former CM of J&K*

> **The killing of BJP's former Sarpanch is a highly condemnable act. No one deserves to be killed for his/her political ideology**
> **RUHULLAH MEHDI**
> *National Conference*

'AT LEAST ONE MORE' PROSECUTION COMPLAINT

Another ED Charge Sheet likely in Delhi Excise Scandal

To elaborate hawala operators' role in transfer of kickbacks from South group to AAP workers

Raghav.Ohri@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) will file "at least one more" supplementary prosecution complaint (equivalent of a chargesheet) in the Delhi excise scandal, people aware of the matter told **ET**.

It will elaborate on the alleged role of hawala operators in the alleged transfer of kickbacks from a South India-based group to functionaries of Aam Admi Party (AAP) for the party's Goa assembly election campaign in 2022.

The federal agency had arrested an alleged Delhi-based cash courier named Vinod Chauhan earlier this month. The agency, in one of its previous charge sheets, had alleged that Chauhan received cash bags from associates of BRS leader and co-accused in the case K Kavitha, which were then allegedly transferred through hawala to AAP leaders in Goa.

The agency has alleged that it has recorded a statement of one of the staff members of Kavita that revealed that Chauhan had collected "two heavy bags containing cash" from the co-accused's office. ED has accused Chauhan of playing a pivotal role in transferring "proceeds of crime".

The federal agency, so far, has filed eight prosecution complaints (one original and seven supplementary) in the case. This would be the ninth complaint.

This means that the trial in the scandal involving Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and others will not commence until the agency concludes its investigation and files the "final" charge sheet.

The apex court, while rejecting Sisodia's bail plea last October, had recorded the assurance of the probe agencies that the trial in the case will be concluded within six to eight months. The top court had given Sisodia the liberty to approach the trial court for bail if there is a "protracted delay" in the commencement of trial.

Case Count

A hawala operator was arrested by ED earlier this month in Delhi excise scandal

ED has claimed that it has recovered incriminating chats between Kejriwal & hawala operator

Commencement of trial in Delhi Excise scandal to continue after ED files final supplementary charge sheet

ED has already filed 8 charge sheets in the case

Last week, filed eighth chargesheet in the case, first against AAP & Kejriwal

8 COMPLAINTS ALREADY

> **The federal agency, so far, has filed eight prosecution complaints (one original, seven supplementary) in the case**

Earlier this month, a local court had lambasted Sisodia and other accused for moving applications and making oral submissions as a "concerted effort" to delay the trial in the case. The trial court held that Sisodia's accusation that the prosecution was delaying the trial was unfounded.

Sisodia moved the Delhi High Court against the said order. The High Court last week reserved its order on his plea.

The ED last week filed its eighth complaint. It made AAP the first political party to be accused under anti-money laundering laws.

COURT ACKNOWLEDGES IT ISN'T THE FIRST CRIMINAL CASE AGAINST KUMAR

Delhi Court Orders 5-Day Police Custody for Bibhav

Says fact that video footage was deleted 'speaks volumes' about the accused

Our Political Bureau

Bibhav Kumar in New Delhi – ANI

New Delhi: A Delhi court on Saturday granted five day police custody to chief minister Arvind Kejriwal aide Bibhav Kumar over allegedly assaulting former DCW chief Swati Maliwal earlier last week. The court while granting his custody noted facts about the case that "speaks volumes" about the accused, including the fact that the video footage was deleted from his pendrive.

During the hearing, the court observed that "the fact that the video footage was not found in the pendrive provided by the JE to the IO during the course of the investigation and the mobile phone was formatted by the accused speaks volumes."

Metropolitan Magistrate (MM) Gaurav Goyal remanded Bibhav Kumar in police custody for 5 days on Saturday after taking note of the multiple submissions and documents placed on record by the Delhi Police. The court also acknowledged that this is not the first criminal case against Kumar.

"Considering the submissions made on behalf of both parties, I find there is a necessity of police custody remand in this case. Accordingly, the application moved by the IO is partly allowed and the accused is remanded to police custody for a period of 05 days," MM Gaurav Goyal said.

Passing the order after midnight on May 19, the court said that Bibhav Kumar will be allowed to meet his lawyers every day for half an hour between 6 pm to 7 pm. He has also been allowed to meet his wife daily while he remains in custody.

Additional Public Prosecutor (APP) Atul Kumar Srivastava submitted said that despite the notice by the IO, the DVR footage of the incident was not provided. An officer of JE rank has provided the CCTV footage on a pendrive, but again, when the same was checked, the video footage was blank for the relevant time.

Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday declared a 'Jail Bharo' march to the BJP headquarters, attacking the saffron party for arbitrary arrests of its leaders. Section 144 was declared on DDU Marg by the Delhi Police, and AAP workers were unsuccessful in reaching the BJP headquarters.

(With inputs from agencies)

UNDER PUBLIC SAFETY ACT

3 Terror Associates Detained in Poonch

Jammu: Three men alleged to be overground workers (OGWs) of terrorists were detained under the Public Safety Act (PSA) in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday. Terming the action necessary to maintain public order, police said the three men were were assessed to be posing a significant threat to the safety and security of the state.

The detainees were identified as Iftar Ahmed alias "Kaka", Khurshid Ahmed and Ghulam Abass, all residents of Gursai village of Mendhar, a police spokesperson said.– PTI

Jharkhand Labourer Shot in Manipur

Guwahati: After a lull of some days, violence is back in Manipur. A labourer from Jharkhand was killed and two others injured in an attack by unidentified assailants in Imphal West district. The incident took place in Naoremthong area on Saturday night.

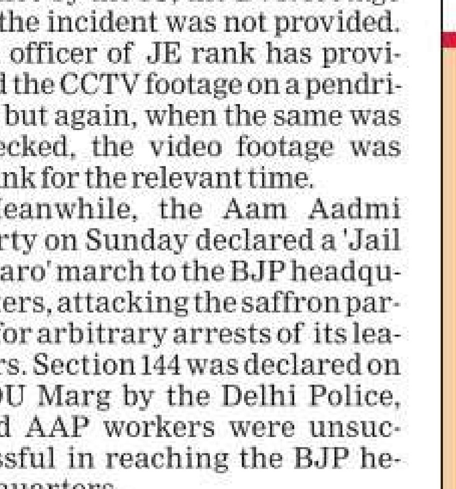
A police official said the assailants pulled out the three labourers of a construction company from their rented accommodation and targeted them. One of them, identified as Shree Ram Hangsada, succumbed to his injuries. The injured, also from Jharkhand, are undergoing treatment at the Regional Institute of Medical Science and Hospital.

A senior police officer who do not want to be named told ET, "We are examining if extortion demand from the construction company was sought." – **Bikash Singh**

CGHS Recast in Works to Cut Red Tape and Dues, Link with Ayushman Bharat

Cabinet secretary holding meetings with stakeholder ministries to address issues

Anubhuti.Vishnoi
@timesgroup.com



RELUCTANT PARTNERS

> **with the rates of procedures/diagnosis not revised since 2014, many private hospitals are seen as reluctant partners in the scheme**

New Delhi: The Centre seems to be readying a major reform plan for the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) ahead of the new government taking charge next month.

It is learnt that the cabinet secretary has been holding rounds of discussions with stakeholder ministries and departments over the last few weeks to address various problems currently ailing the CGHS – from flagging partnership with major private hospitals amid pending dues to taxing referral system and shortage of doctors and healthcare staff to the simmering concern on linkage of CGHS cards with the digitalised Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) cards.

A committee of secretaries is learnt to be looking into the issues.

The key focus is on cutting the red tape and backlog with a simpler process that distinguishes high value transactions from petty/lower value ones, **ET** has learnt. The government plans to bring a minimal scrutiny regime for low value transactions below ₹10,000 while ensuring proper verification process for higher value transactions of above ₹10,000.

The CGHS caters to over 4.5 million people, ensuring cashless healthcare services to serving and retired central government employees, their dependents, and other beneficiaries across governmental and private hospitals/health facilities empanelled with the government.

CGHS has empanelled 1,735 private hospitals and 209 laboratories across the country for carrying out investigations and indoor treatement facilities, as per submissions made to a parliamentary panel in February this year.

However, with the rates of procedures/diagnosis not revised since 2014, several private hospitals are seen as reluctant partners in the scheme. The stagnant government rates, clubbed with heavily delayed settlement of dues, have dragged down the scheme's efficacy and treatment capability considerably.

Assessments in the government point to the burgeoning bills for settlement pending within, most of which are low-value transactions.

"In all, the low-value transactions are clogging the settlement chain considerably even though they may be just about 10% of the total billing value," an official in the know told ET.

Pakistan Bid to Defuse Kyrgyzstan Crisis Faces Trust Issues

ATTACKS ON FOREIGN STUDENTS Pak foreign minister and deputy PM travel to Bishkek; India issues advisory to students to exercise caution

DipanjanRoy.Chaudhury
@timesgroup.com

Kyrgyz Prez Sadyr Japarov

IN PROTEST

> **Kyrgyz govt has lodged protests with Pak and issued a statement blaming Pakistani media for spreading rumours**

New Delhi: The spat between Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan over violence against foreign students in Bishkek reveals a sentiment of mistrust that is thwarting Islamabad's efforts to improve ties with the Central Asian nation by playing the religion card.

The Kyrgyz government has not only lodged protests with Pakistani authorities but also issued a statement blaming the Pakistani media for spreading rumours.

On Sunday, Pakistan's foreign minister and deputy prime minister travelled to Bishkek in a bid to diffuse the crisis.

While India's external affairs ministry has issued an advisory urging Indian students to exercise caution and contact the Indian Embassy for emergency support, Bishkek has assured India that its citizens will be safe.

At the heart of the matter is derogatory remarks allegedly made by Pakistani students against their local counterparts. There are also allegations that a section of the Pakistani students misbehaved with local women.

On Saturday, some Pakistani students returned to Lahore.

At present, 12,000 Pakistani students are studying in Kyrgyzstan. The Pakistani government said it aims to bring back 500 students from Kyrgyzstan on Sunday.

Compared with Indian nationals, Pakistanis are often treated with scepticism across Central Asia.

The goodwill of Indian nationals dates back to the days of the Soviet Union and soft power. Bollywood movies are hugely popular in all erstwhile Soviet Union states, including Central Asia. And Indian students, studying mostly medicine, have not faced any discrimination across Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan. The Central Asian state has been attracting Indian workforce in recent months.

Meanwhile, Pakistani nationals are under the scanner for exporting extremism, including training of local youth in radical seminaries in Pakistan, according to experts on Central Asia.

Central Asia is characterised by secular values, multiculturalism and pluralism.

Less Enthusiasm on The Spectrum Front

More because of network rollout, utilisation

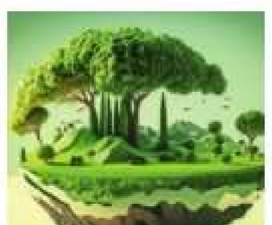
Telecom companies are bidding less enthusiastically in the upcoming spectrum auctions, or that's at least what earnest money deposits would suggest. This is partly on account of the low conversion to 5G networks by subscribers of Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel. Vodafone Idea, the troubled third operator that has been slower off the blocks in the 5G race, needs to catch up. Airtel has to top up on spectrum that is lapsing in select telecom circles. Jio can afford to take it easy after having cornered the biggest chunk of airwaves put up for sale in the previous round of auctions in 2022. In the event, Jio still remains the most hungry for spectrum, signalling its interest to buy three times as much as Airtel, and 10 times as much as Vi.

Part of the reason for low interest has to do with the fact that the previous auction had a lot more spectrum on offer than the upcoming round scheduled for June 6. And it is also a reflection on the financial strength of the bidders. Jio's aggression is based on its rude health, while Airtel is more circumspect, and Vi is not out of the woods despite a government lifeline thrown to the industry. Also, Airtel and Vi had placed an overwhelming part of their bids on spectrum for 5G services in the 2022 auctions at the outset of 5G rollout in the country. The three companies will bid for a little over half the spectrum on offer next month, with frequencies in some super-efficient bands having been exhausted.

The overall picture emerging from bidding intent is India's telecom companies are under less strain in buying what remains expensive radio frequencies. Their lack of enthusiasm is on account of network rollout and utilisation considerations more than in their ability to pay. This is a healthier picture than obtaining prior to changes in spectrum sales rules that allowed for, among other things, payment in parts.

Do It Right, for Sake Of Land Acquisition

In a densely populated developing country like India, there are competing demands on land — farming, housing, infrastructure development and factories. This, on more occasions than one would like, has led to conflicts. According to Land Conflict Watch, there are 781 land conflicts, affecting 9.4 mn people and ₹3.11 tn investments. In this context, last week's Supreme Court judgment on land acquisition is significant. Delivering its order in a case involving the Kolkata Municipal Corporation Act, the apex court said that seven sub-rights of Article 300A — right to notice, right to be heard, right to a reasoned decision, duty to acquire for public purpose, right of restitution or fair compensation and duty of the state to restitute and rehabilitate, right to an efficient and expeditious process, and right of conclusion — mark the real content of the Right to Property. Non-compliance will amount to a violation of the right.



This is a welcome judgment. But it must not be construed that the top court is putting a question mark on land acquisition per se. Instead, it is reiterating that these sub-rules need to be followed if the state and industry want to ensure a time-bound acquisition for projects to reduce project delays. India, unfortunately — especially under the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 — has had a history of executive failure to ensure proper compensation to landowners.

Transparency improved significantly after the passage of the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013. But it is still a work in progress. With land demand rising and climate change rendering large tracts unusable, it is imperative that the acquisition process is as per law, and that compensation is fair and time-bound. Otherwise, these regular conflicts will singe the economy and give the kind of signals India can't afford to give out at this stage.

JUST IN JEST

As a bogeyman, this archetypal stereotype remains a threat for some

'Desi Angrez', an Endangered Species

Once again, holding up a mirror to the country's many complexes and petit paranoias, the electioneering politician has thrown up yet another bogeyman: the 'desi Angrez'. Like the ABCD — American-Born Confused Desi — and other archetypal stereotypes (or are they 'stereotypical archetypes'?), the desi Angrez is a figure of both derision and envy, the former emotion covering the latter. The concoction created is infused with a few clichés: one, as the description suggests, anglicisation, or a penchant for speaking not just in English but a kind of hifalutin English; two, as a corollary of the first quality, covertly harbouring derision for 'vernaculars'; three, holding everything that is 'Indian' to be subpar and all things 'phoren' to be of quality, including, say, 'chicken tikka masala'.

While this kind of person may still exist here and there, he or she is no longer the epitome of elite in circa 2024 India. How one holds one fork while delving in sweet Greek salad with spiced feta is no longer seen as an 'issue' since the relative democratisation of such 'Angrezi' khana. But having 'Angrez' in the descriptor still holds a bugbear appeal that allows for a quick denouncement to the 'burey din' of Angrez Raj that, for many, lasted till May 2014. But as far as the entity goes, 'desi Angrez' exists as much as Soorma Bhopali does today.

India will have to find ways to reduce India Inc's over-reliance on a belligerent neighbour

Get Bullish in a China Shop

Saibal Dasgupta

Trading blows

Almost suddenly, many small and big companies have been put in a position where they will have to review their business strategies that involve imports of crucial raw materials and machinery from China. Last week, S Jaishankar obliquely questioned the patriotism of firms that source material from China that could be bought or manufactured locally.

'If peace and tranquillity in border areas are disturbed, would you do business with someone who has just barged into your drawing room and is trying to make a mess of your house fencing? It's common sense that if a country has gone back on written agreements and is doing something on our borders, how can we then say that the business world will continue as normal and other things won't,' the foreign minister said at the CII annual business summit in New Delhi last Friday.

The timing of this statement is significant for two reasons. One, it comes just 17 days before EC is due to announce the results of the ongoing parliamentary elections that will lead to the formation of the next government. Two, China has just emerged as India's biggest trading partner surpassing the US, according to figures released by Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI).

The numbers show that Indian exporters contributed just 14% in the total India-China trade amounting to \$118.4 bn, with Chinese sellers taking up the rest. The GTRI figures show that India's exports were worth \$16.67 bn and imports \$101.7 bn in FY24.

For decades, Indian politicians and officials have been complaining that China has not been doing enough to increase purchases from India and reduce the trade deficit. But this is a rare occasion when Indian business has been reprimanded for taking the 'easy option' of imports, instead of supporting GoI's efforts at reducing reliance on an unfriendly country.

'I have a neighbour like China. I have to learn to compete,' said Jaishankar in a recent interview, adding, 'By my complaining, China is not going to stop doing things. If I do not build up my strength at home, our foreign policy will be as good as our domestic policy.' His comments show that GoI is unhappy about insufficient responses from the industry about 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', which amounts to creating additional manufacturing capabilities, particularly in products sourced from China.

The minister made it clear that GoI was not asking importing companies to entirely stop buying from China. What it expects from firms, according to him, is that they explore local alternatives and consider the aspect of national security.

The timing of Jaishankar's statement is significant — one, it comes 17 days before EC will announce election results; two, China has emerged as India's biggest trading partner

Seen in the context of past efforts in this area, this is the wisest statement on the subject to date. It is also a sign that GoI has begun to review the success of past efforts like the PLI scheme, quality control orders and anti-dumping duties to discourage imports from China.

But it is also essential to ask if 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' that was launched after the Chinese incursion in 2020 was allowed to wane, as India buying from China continued to surge in later years. 'India imported \$4.2 bn worth of telecom and smartphone parts, accounting for 44% of total imports in this category, indicating significant reliance on Chinese components. Laptops and PC imports from China totalled \$3.8 bn, making up 77.7% of India's imports in this sector,' states the GTRI report.

What is often not understood is that heavy reliance on imports is shrinking the elbow room that Indian diplomats need during negotiations with China. What if China was seriously dependent on India for some important products? This would have given our negotiators a special leverage.

For decades, China's steel industry relied heavily on Indian iron ore, which was the most important component in India's export basket. But China has drastically reduced its reliance on India after asking its own steel industry to look for alternative sources, even if they prove to be a little more expensive.

Another example pertains to China's import of pharma products from India. Beijing has been under great pressure from Chinese citizens, particularly cancer patients, to import India-made drugs that cost a fraction of their prices from developed countries. But Beijing has refused to sufficiently open up its market for Indian exporters because that would give India an edge during bilateral negotiations.

Heavy reliance on imports is shrinking the elbow room that Indian diplomats need during negotiations with China

On the other hand, GoI has been asking the Indian pharma industry to manufacture locally and reduce its dependence on China-made active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), the raw material for drug manufacture. Has the industry responded positively? The chemicals and fertilisers ministry told Parliament in December 2023 that import of APIs from China grew from ₹23,273 cr in 2021-22 to ₹25,551 cr in 2022-23.

The question is whether the new government after the elections will push Indian industry to embark on the import substitution route, instead of making it entirely voluntary, as has been the case so far. It is clear that the government will not opt for irrational curbs on imports because that can derail several industries. But it will have to find ways to reduce reliance on a belligerent neighbour that is relentlessly fortifying its position on the LoC.

The writer is author of Running with the Dragon: How India Should Do Business with China

Stop Cos Stretching the Truth

Karthik Kondepudi

Recently, Patanjali found itself under the scanner of regulatory bodies and Supreme Court in the context of dodgy advertising practices. Welcome as this development was, the ayurvedic major is hardly alone in stretching the truth when it comes to advertising. While regulatory authorities must ensure that advertising adheres to ethical standards and doesn't mislead consumers, such scrutiny should be applied across the board.

Every label coming out from FMCG, nutraceutical, cosmetic, pharmaceutical and wellness sectors must be properly checked by regulators. In this context, Supreme Court rightly pulled up the Indian Medical Association (IMA) last week for not taking action against Patanjali on complaints for the company's alleged 'misleading' claims and 'disparaging' ads against the allopathic system of medicine.

Regulatory bodies should ensure that consumer goods are not allowed to introduce or sell their products in the market where the consumer assumes that products match what they are sold as — and, more importantly, that they are *not* sold as what they are not, especially by making disparaging comparisons.

Many FMCG and pharma companies have little ethics, pretty much eschewing consumer welfare they claim to deliver. They often mislead the public with their false claims and use distorted ads to lure the unsuspecting buyer.

Many nutraceutical supplement products we see on shelves are far from 'genuine'. Many of them are filled with 'fillers' used over GRAS — generally recognised as safe — limits. There is also unrestrained use of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs). Maltodextrin, a kind of carbohydrate, for instance, is the most commonly used filler. Excess intake of maltodextrin may lead to serious adverse reactions.

Really?

Not only does such adulteration threaten consumers but it also points to a rampant counterfeit culture, especially in the nutraceutical industry. Major online retail stores and pharmacies aid the widespread sale of such counterfeit products. Furthermore, these products are mislabelled as being 'safe' and 'natural' for regular consumption.

Regulatory bodies have made strides in doing their bit that FMCG, pharma and nutraceutical companies aren't immune to the law, and that they can't wriggle out of cases of misappropriation and misdeeds. But as the Patanjali case indicates, they must step up to the plate and do much more.

It's time that companies with questionable standing and intent are alerted of the consequences of fraudulence, and do better in terms of maintaining authenticity and quality of their products. They must be made to use the power of 'exaggerative marketing' restrictively.

The writer is partner, Herbochem

Turnout's Turning Out All Right

Akshay Rout

In the 17 Lok Sabha elections starting from 1951, turnout went past 60% only on seven occasions, of which the 65% mark was crossed only in 2014 and 2019. For all the attention to 'declining' turnout, the first four phases of the ongoing polls have registered a score of 66.95%. In absolute numbers, 451 mn people have voted so far. Postal ballots will add up on counting day.

If this rate is maintained in the remaining three phases after today, 2024 could become only the third general election to get past 65%. Globally speaking, this turnout level measures in the top half of countries having democratic elections.

Phase 1 turnout has been 66.14%, which moved to 66.71% in phase 2 and 65.68% in phase 3. In the fourth phase, it nudged past the 2019 count with 69.2%, also indicating an incremental rise phase after phase. Everyone who has interest in the game appears to have pushed the envelope a bit after the initial phases.

EC has been bringing new interventions, many aimed at dealing with extreme heat conditions, after the small dip in turnout in the first phase. Major telecom providers have been marshalled to deliver celebrity messages coaxing voters to get out to vote. 'Voting invites', energetically pushed by EC, have permeated all networks — banks, post offices, petrol pumps, airports and in-flight messages, railway stations, and even at stadiums during IPL matches. All forms of carriages — print, TV and digital — are flush with voting awareness content. Popular aggregators are in the act too, at their own cost. Playful incentives like discounts and prizes by big brands have added to the excitement of the 'democracy festival'. Civil society and India Inc's collaboration in promoting electoral participation, the best of public good, augurs well for the future.

For over a dozen years, Indian democracy has been savouring constantly rising rates of electoral participation, especially the 66.44% and 67.40% turnouts in 2014 and 2019, respectively. This has raised the level of aspiration, with election managers doing whatever it takes to maintain the momentum. It also marks a special shift as, till not long ago, an ideological debate was circulating whether turnout was a legitimate area of management intervention at all, or if it was better left only to political contestation.

Compared to several other countries where voter education has been a part of statute, India did not have a firmed-up approach till it embraced Sveep (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) programme in 2010. Presently, turnout is at the core of election management, under the close watch of the three-member EC and campaigns like 'Mera pehla vote: Desh ke liye', 'Nothing like voting, I vote for sure', and 'Chunav ka parv, desh ka garv'.

Prior to today's voting, polling is now complete in 23 states, of which eight states have beaten their 2019 turnout levels. Bihar, UP, Maharashtra and the mega-urban centres still hold significant concerns over voter participation among the remaining 164 constituencies. EC has put chief electoral officers in states on extra alert. Along with district election officers, they will need to up the nudge for voters and further bolster 'ease of voting'.

Don't forget your line

Weather conditions have not been the friendliest in several parts, especially with heatwave condition warnings announced in parts of the country in the next few days. Those who manage elections have not been short of empathy either. From water, ORS and shamianas at polling stations to air ambulances and helicopters parked for emergencies, they have mobilised it all. Citizens who are 85-plus, or have disabilities, can vote from home.

EC has ordered a task force to review heat conditions before each phase of poll. Farmers, fishermen, factory workers, roadside vendors, etc, take the brunt of the scorching sun and humidity. But a larger number of them come and vote election after election. Queuing up at the polling station is a stout democratic and civic action that isn't dependent on comfort.

Preparing to facilitate the sizeable migrant population's 'ease to vote' is commendable. The over 200 mn young people on the electoral roll should vote to secure their stakes. The urban elite must question herself or himself for choosing not to vote.

But there is no gloom arising out of voter turnout this season. Universal adult suffrage has been a defining foundation of India's democracy. Universal voting will remain an ideal pursuit. Yes, 100% is the best turnout. But 65% in an electorate of 970 mn would suggest voter participation is on track.

The writer is former director general, Election Commission of India

THE SPEAKING TREE

Time and Death

J KRISHNAMURTI

We do not know death and we do not know life. We know the turmoils, the anxieties, the guilt, the fears, the appalling contradictions and conflicts, but we do not know what living is. And we only know death as something to be dreaded, feared; we put it away and do not talk about it, and we escape into some form of belief, like flying saucers, or reincarnation, or something else.

So, there is a dying and, therefore, a living when time, space and distance are understood in terms of the unknown. Our minds work in terms of the known, and we move from the known to the known; and when death cuts off this continuity of the known with the known, we are frightened. What we want is comfort, not the understanding of the living with something we do not know.

So, the known is yesterday. We do not know what tomorrow is. We project the past, through the present, into the future; and hope and despair are born. But to comprehend the thing called death, which must be something extraordinary, unknowable, unthinkable, unimaginable, one must learn about it, one must live with it, one must come to it without knowledge and without fear.

And I say it is possible, that one can die to the many yesterdays. After all, the many yesterdays are pleasure and pain. And when you die to yesterday, the mind is empty; and it is frightened of that emptiness and so it begins again, going from one known to another. But if one can die to pleasure and pain… then the mind is without time and space.

MELODY FOR MONDAY

Alive

Pearl Jam

From the breaking waves guitar riff that introduces us to this raging song, Pearl Jam's 'Alive' washes over you. A seminal track from the band's 1991 debut album Ten, 'Alive' captures the raw power and diving depths, and yet is goosebumps-inducingly uplifting. The beauty of the song lies in its juxtaposition of heavy brooding while shouting out what it means to be resilient, to survive.

Eddie Vedder's vocals are a force of nature — the very opening line, 'Son/ She said/ Have I got a little story for you,' carrying a mix of anguish and defiance. Inspired by Vedder's own experiences, 'Alive' wades into themes of identity, loss, and revelation of life's harsh truths. The refrain, 'I'm still alive,' in the swirl of guitars and skipped-heartbeat drums, becomes a triumphant declaration of existence, turning personal pain into an anthem of perseverance.

Mike McCready's soaring guitar solo is iconic, blending intricate melodies with gritty emotion. Jeff Ament's pulsating bass and the relentless drumming of Dave Krusen ground the song to the earth.

It is, as it soars as well as plunges, a modern-day rock classic that makes all of us treat it as personally as a bruise.

Chat Room

Vaghul Leaves Banking Richer

Apropos the news report, 'Narayanan Vaghul, the Doyen of Banking, Passes Away at 88' (May 19), a veteran banker and former ICICI Bank chairman, N Vaghul was a great talent spotter and a believer in gender-neutral meritocracy. He built the ICICI brand and has many firsts to his credit. He was the youngest bank chairman, of Bank of India, at 44, and the youngest chairman of the Indian Banks' Association. It was Vaghul who headhunted K V Kamath, who took ICICI Bank to the next level. Many other financial sector leaders today, Madhabi Puri Buch, Renuka Ramnath, Kalpana Morparia and Shikha Sharma, were all spotted and mentored by Vaghul. He will be remembered for his contribution to the Indian banking sector.

SUDHAKAR PANDEY
Thane

FPIs holding record bearish derivative bets on Nifty ahead of the election results; domestic individual investors, however, have aggressive bullish positions on an optimistic note

Divergence in Foreign and Local Bets Hints at A Volatile Future

Kairavi.Lukka@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: A tug-of-war between overseas fund managers and domestic individuals over Dalal Street's near-term prospects is at play.

Foreigners are holding record bearish derivative bets on the Nifty as uncertainty over the outcome of the general elections is prompting them to hedge their portfolios here. Signs of renewed global investor interest in battered Chinese and Hong Kong stocks could also be driving them to be cautious about Indian equities, said analysts. Crossing swords with the sophisticated foreign institutions are domestic individual investors, who have created aggressive bullish wagers, underscoring their continued optimism over the market outlook.

The Nifty has gained 2.5% in the past week while Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) retained their elevated short positions in index futures and options through the third week of May.

According to analysts, the net bearish positions of FPIs in index futures stood at a record 2.46 lakh contracts last weekend. These investors net sold shares worth ₹24,500 crore so far in May after selling to the tune of ₹8,671 in April.

The client-side—including retail and high-networth investors (HNIs) — held 2.7 lakh contracts at the end of the week.

"We have seen record levels of aggressive positions from FPIs, being net short on index futures, while the client side has been net long, which may lead to higher volatility in the markets in coming days," said Sahaj Aggarwal, head of derivatives research at Kotak Securities. "However, record short positions may not be an indicator that the markets would move only in their favour."

'If uptrend continues, then FPIs could look to cover the shorts which will add fuel to the rally'

Concerns that the BJP-led NDA may not secure as many seats as anticipated earlier is one of the main reasons for the bearish tilt in FPIs bets on Indian equities. With domestic market valuations are also elevated, foreign investors are also speculated to be moving part of the money from India to a cheaper China.

Some analysts said the recent change in the lot size of Nifty derivative contracts could be creating a perception of aggressive bets.

"The numbers are very high if we compare with the historical data, but that does not show the true picture as the lot size of Nifty has changed recently. So, it is prudent to see the figures in percentage terms where they (FPIs) have only 28% positions on the long side," said Ruchit Jain, lead research analyst at 5Paisa.com. "Historically, their positions are considered short-heavy when this ratio falls below 20%."

Nonetheless, widely-tracked market indicators have been flashing caution of late. India VIX, or the Volatility Index, a fear measure of the market, has surged 52% in the past month to 20.5, suggesting traders see near-term risks to the market.

Some analysts said elevated levels of bearish bets by foreigners could be a contrarian signal for the market.

"High levels of FPI shorts in index futures (in range of 68-73% of their total index futures open interest) historically has been the precursor of a market rally many a time," said Sriram Velayudhan, senior vp of alternative research, IIFL Securities. "As of last Friday, it stood at 72%."

Jain of 5Paisa.com said domestic investors are optimistic because the Nifty has managed to hold above an important support level of 22,000-21,800. The index closed at 22,502 in a special trading session on Saturday.

"If the uptrend continues, then FPIs could look to cover the shorts which would add fuel to the rally; and the index could attempt to rally towards new highs soon," said Jain.

TO RESTRAIN ERRANT, UNRESPONSIVE BORROWERS FROM CROSSING BORDERS

Banks Want to Regain Power to Issue Lookout Notices, to Move FinMin

Sugata.Ghosh@timesgroup.com

MONEY MATTERS

- **BANKS GOT** powers to issue LOC in Oct 2018
- **BUT THE** power was not coded in any law
- **PROMOTERS WERE** rattled as they could not fly out
- **HC SAID** power given to banks excessive, unconstitutional

BUT BANKS DON'T WANT TO LOSE THE POWER

Mumbai: State-owned banks will jointly move the government to regain their power to stop dodgy borrowers from fleeing the country.

Last week, several high-street banks took a decision to make a joint representation to the finance ministry for obtaining a statutory backing to their ability to issue 'look-out circulars' (LOCs) that alert immigration authorities and restrain errant, unresponsive borrowers from crossing the borders and escaping the local law enforcement agencies.

"It is a tool we don't want to lose," a senior industry official told **ET**, confirming the decision. "We have reasons to believe that it helps in loan recovery," said the person.

Banks primarily issued LOCs to fraudulent borrowers and wilful defaulters — who they suspected could run off to take the residency or even citizenship of another country. However, last month, the Bombay High Court struck down the powers of chairmen, managing directors and CEOs of all public sector banks to issue LOCs on the grounds that the 'right to travel abroad' cannot be taken away by an executive action and the powers given to bank chiefs is arbitrary and unreasonable.

The ruling did not go down well with bankers who are keen to retain in leverage over such borrowers. How would New Delhi, which may well share the views of banks, go about addressing this?

According to Chirag Naik, associate partner at the law firm MZM Legal LLP, "In view of the court ruling, either a new law has to be enacted, or an existing law will have to be amended to make the statutory basis and procedure for issuance of an LOC and introduce within it a detailed procedure where these requests are adjudicated and processed by an independent Tribunal/Authority." "The government," said Naik, "may also choose to adopt a system inspired by blocking and tapping procedures under the Information Technology and Indian Telegraph Act."

Bank heads were allowed to issue LOCs in a home ministry circular in October 2018 — months after the Nirav Modi-Mehul Choksi scam came to light. It was spurred by requests from the finance ministry and the department of financial services. Public sector bank CEOs were thus added to a list of officials who could request for opening LOCs. The latter included officers not below the rank of deputy secretary (GOI), joint secretary (state government), district magistrate, superintendent of police (SP), SP in Central Bureau of Investigation, zonal director in Narcotics Control Bureau, deputy commissioners of apex tax bodies, assistant director of the Enforcement Directorate among others.

Last month, the Bombay High Court struck down the powers of chairmen, MDs and CEOs of all public sector banks to issue LOCs

The new power given to banks was criticised by some of the industry associations when some of the big names in Corporate India were rattled to discover (only after reaching the airport) that they were barred from flying out. Some felt that the enforcement agencies pushed for extension of LOCs (beyond a year) even though they had very little ground.

In the case of banks, the court had said that since a bank has financial interest in recovery of loans, it cannot be the judge and executioner at once. However, the court has left the room open as it also said that "..this judgment cannot and will not prevent the Union of India from framing an appropriate law and establishing a procedure consistent with Article 21 of the Constitution of India."

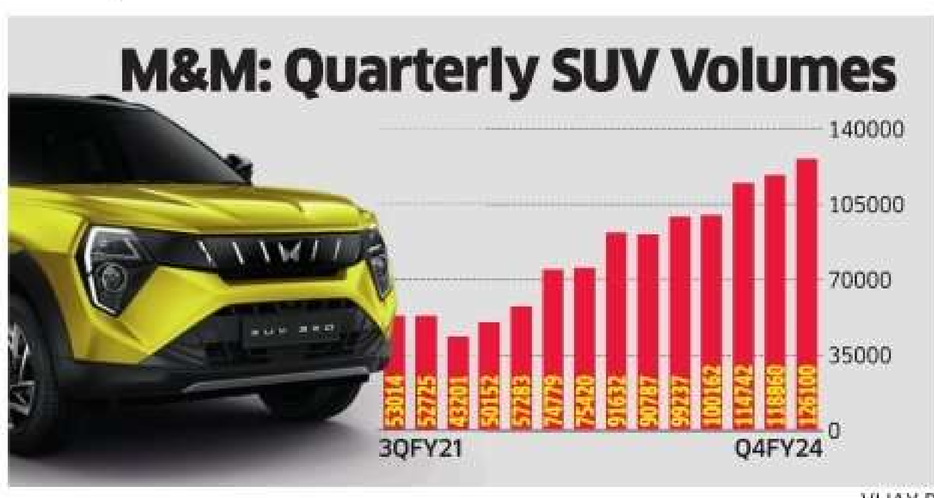
The issuance of LOCs is governed by a home ministry letter dated September 5, 1979. The directive was subsequently fine-tuned to lay down the seniority of officials who could issue LOCs and under what conditions. Bank chiefs were empowered (through an 'office memorandum') after non-performing assets (NPAs) had peaked in loan books of financial institutions, and a few high-profile borrowers had left the country.

10-12% EPS UPGRADE EXPECTED FOR FY25

M&M's Premium Valuation to Ride on SUV, Tractor Demand

20%-plus SUV volume growth, end of tractor downcycle can help topline cross ₹1 lakh cr

Ashutosh .Shyam
@timesgroup.com



VIJAY P

ET Intelligence Group: Mahindra & Mahindra may see earnings-led upgrade due to encouraging bookings for its newly-launched compact SUV and forecasts of improvement at the tractor segment, helping capture investor interest in a stock that outperformed the market with 28% returns in three months.

Volume growth of more than 20% in the SUV segment and low single-digit expansion in tractors as predicted could help the company post ₹1 lakh crore in standalone revenue in the current fiscal year. This may translate into an earnings-per-share upgrade of 10-12% for ongoing fiscal 2025. M&M would be the third vehicle maker to cross the revenue milestone of ₹1 lakh crore, after Tata Motors and Maruti Suzuki.

The SUV segment where the company is the market leader by revenue continues to surprise the Street, thanks to the newly-launched XUV 3XO compact SUV that got orders for 50,000 units in the first hour of booking. This took M&M's total order book to 221,000 units — about half of its fiscal 2024 sales volume — and helped soften the rate of sequential decline in total outstanding booking on a quarterly basis. The XUV 3XO offers features similar to its key rival products but is priced about ₹70,000 cheaper. This should help improve M&M's current market share of 9-10% in the compact SUV segment.

The market size of compact SUVs is around 600,000 units with the Tata Nexon and Maruti Brezza leading the segment with a 28% share each. The volume of compact SUVs of M&M may rise to 110,000-120,000 units in the current fiscal year from 54,000 in FY24. Consequently, the total SUV volume could increase by 20-25%. This would be the fourth year in a row when the company would deliver more than 20% volume in the SUV segment that would take its automotive revenue to reach about ₹84,000 crore in FY25 (and over ₹1 lakh crore including farm equipment), compared with ₹73,500 crore in the previous fiscal year.

The M&M stock is trading at 23 times one-year forward earnings compared with long-term average of 14 times

The longer-term trajectory of the SUV franchise is improving even as M&M plans to launch 13 models by 2030. The company is also expanding the SUV capacity to 72,000 units per month by the end of the next fiscal year — a gain of 50% over the FY24 exit capacity. This would further strengthen the auto franchise.

On the farm equipment segment, volume dropped by 7% in FY24 due to a 20% decline in the last quarter due to inventory correction and weak demand. Historical data suggest that the tractor industry is now in the late stage of a downcycle. In the last 20 years, the average length of a downcycle was about six quarters. The India Meteorological Department has predicted above-average monsoon in 2024, which bodes well for a recovery in the tractor segment. The company has guided for industry volume to grow 5% in FY25, while analysts have forecast 0-5%, therefore it offers earnings upside from the tractor segment.

The stock is trading at 23 times the company's one-year forward earnings compared with the long-term average of 14 times. The premium valuation may sustain on improving the auto franchise and maturing tractor downturn.

Big Funds Bet the 'Anything But Bonds' Trade is Poised to End

Bloomberg

Big US bond investors have been aggressively shifting money into long-dated notes, betting that the unloved asset class will be one of the winners from eventual interest rate cuts. The largest 20 mutual fund managers in the US have increased duration over the past two months as yields climbed, according to research by JPMorgan Chase. Investors have been building positions by "piling into" high-grade corporate bonds to avoid the negative carry of government debt, said Nikolaos Panigirtzoglou, a global market strategist at the lender.

Long-dated corporate bonds are winning back investors who fled as the market dialed back bets on imminent easing by the Federal Reserve. Now, the allure is returning as markets price in two rate cuts this year after data showed US inflation ebbing for the first time in six months.

The largest 20 mutual fund managers in the US have increased duration over the past two months as yields climbed

"History shows pretty consistently that yields rally hard starting three to four months before the Fed actually starts cutting," said Gershon Distenfeld at AllianceBernstein Holding, who recently extended duration in the $23 billion American Income Portfolio he manages. That could happen "a month or two from now, six months from now, or not until 2025," he said.

Hindujas' Acquisition of Reliance Capital Hits Financing Hurdle

Shilpy.Sinha@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: The financing of Hindujas' acquisition of Reliance Capital has hit the coupon hurdle as lenders including Standard Chartered Bank and Barclays are seeking a 15.5% coupon on a ₹2,000 crore loan each, people familiar with the matter said.

Hinduja Group's holding company IndusInd International Holding Ltd (IIHL), which is racing against time to close the deal this weekend, is negotiating for a reduction in coupon, they said.

"IndusInd International Holdings (IIHL) is trying to reduce the cost by nearly one percentage point and is seeking a cheaper loan through ongoing discussions with the lenders," one of the sources said. "The loan arrangement must be finalised before May 27, as IndusInd International Holdings needs to close the Reliance Capital deal by then," the person added.

IIHL has been looking to borrow ₹7,500 crore for the deal, but it has been facing pricing challenges with various credit funds demanding rates on the higher side.

In a media interaction earlier this month, Ashok P Hinduja had said the company had received interest from lenders offering ₹7,500 crore debt for this acquisition. The company will bring in the remaining funds as equity from IIHL.

The loan facilities have to be closed before May 27 as lenders of RCap need to be paid by then to complete the acquisition

360 One Prime, a non-banking finance company, has offered ₹2,500 crore at a rate of over 15%, while other lenders have shown interest in dividing around ₹2,000 crore with stricter covenants, one of the people cited above said.

"The negotiations are on the pricing where IndusInd wants to keep the cost low but lenders' ask is a bit higher due to the collateral being assets from bankrupt Reliance Capital, which it is acquiring through insolvency proceedings in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)," the person said.

Spokespersons of Barclays and 360 One Prime declined to comment while spokespersons of Standard Chartered Bank and IndusInd did not immediately respond to requests for comment till press time on Sunday.

NCLT has approved Hinduja Group's acquisition of Reliance Capital in February this year and Hindujas have to pay lenders by May 27 to conclude the deal.

IndusInd International Holdings, IIHL BFSI (India) Ltd, and Aasia Enterprises LLP had made a ₹9,650-crore offer for the bankrupt Anil Ambani company.

In 2021, the Reserve Bank of India superseded the board of Reliance Capital due to the company's payment defaults, appointing Y Nageswara Rao, former executive director of Bank of Maharashtra, to lead the resolution process.

Why did the RBI Reject Most Bids in the Bond Buyback Programme?

ET EXPLAINER

For the past couple of weeks, India's sovereign bond market has been buzzing with developments surrounding a particular kind of operation that the Reserve Bank of India carries out in its role as the government's merchant banker. The operation in question is a buyback of government bonds.

But the stops and starts in executing the operation show the enormity of the task that the central bank faces in executing two of its mandates that are sometimes at odds with each other — the making of monetary policy and the management of the government's debt. **Bhaskar Dutta** explains the issue that has been capturing financial market headlines:

WHAT IS A GOVERNMENT BOND BUYBACK?

In a buyback, the government uses its cash balances to prematurely pay back a portion of its outstanding borrowing through bonds. This eases some of the pressure on scheduled debt repayment obligations and has the potential to bring down the government's interest costs as a new source of demand typically pushes up bond prices and brings down their yields.

HOW DOES A BOND BUYBACK AFFECT LIQUIDITY IN THE BANKING SYSTEM?

Given that banks are amongst the largest holders of government bonds, a buyback operation injects liquidity into the banking system as lenders receive cash in exchange for bonds they are selling back to the government.

WHY NOW?

Liquidity in the banking system is at a deficit because government expenditure — which flows through banks — is constrained during elections. So, by conducting a buyback, the government both eases future repayment obligations and infuses funds into the banking system, thereby keeping borrowing costs anchored.

HOW DID THE RECENT BUYBACKS PLAY OUT?

Out of a total of ₹1 lakh crore of bonds the government offered to buy back from banks, the RBI accepted bids worth only ₹12,582.98 crore. This was because banks offered to sell back bonds at higher prices — or lower yields — than the RBI was comfortable with.

WHY WAS THE CENTRAL BANK UNCOMFORTABLE?

It is understandable for banks to want to sell bonds back to the government at a profit, but for the RBI, the problem lies with the message it may send out on the interest rate policy front. If it accepted bids at very high prices, short-term bond yields would have fallen as if the RBI had cut interest rates. That would represent easier financial conditions. Given that inflation is still above 4%, the RBI would not want markets to start pricing in rate cuts when the central bank is working hard to keep inflation expectations anchored.

ET Q&A

K RAJARAMAN
Chairperson, International Financial Services Authority

Forex Settlement Next Step by GIFT to Onshore What's Offshore

Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City) will soon take another step to resemble state-of-the art global finance centres as the hub is set to launch its own foreign currency settlement system, K Rajaraman, chairperson of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA) told **Bhaskar Dutta** in an interview. He also listed out the latest steps being taken by the IFSC Authority to "onshore what is offshore". Edited excerpts:

FUTURE MOVES

We are working on several new policy measures including direct listing of Indian companies on IFSC exchanges... One new area for employment generation is BATF

Markets have been telling us about the development of an international-style instant foreign exchange settlement system in GIFT City. What is happening on the ground?

Having a foreign currency settlement system (FCSS) for the IFSC has been a long-standing demand for market participants. Similar systems exist in major IFCs, most notably the Hong Kong Clearing House Automated Transfer System for settling US dollar and euro transactions. An FCSS system is being set up in the IFSC with the support of the RBI, along similar lines, which, in the first phase shall settle transactions between IBUs (IFSC banking units) in US dollars on a real-time or near-real-time basis. We are targeting for the system to be up and running by October 2024 at the latest. Other currencies may be added in due course. Once fully operational, the FCSS system will save IBUs both the time and cost of using the correspondent banking channel to settle transactions among themselves. For this purpose, the Clearing Corporation of India has set up a subsidiary in IFSC to act as the system operator for the FCSS. They are in discussions with Indian Financial Technology and Allied Services to provide the software solution for the FCSS. A settlement bank having direct membership of the RTGS (Real-Time Gross Settlement) system in the US is also being identified. We expect some other local IBUs from GIFT City to join as joint venture partners.

What are the new policy measures being considered to attract global businesses to GIFT City?

GIFT City started off with the premise of onshoring what is offshore. A lot of businesses focused on India almost entirely happen in the rest of the world.

We are working on several new policy measures including direct listing of Indian companies on IFSC exchanges. The new IFSCA listing regulations will be notified shortly, which will open new avenues for Indian companies including startups to raise global capital. One new area for employment generation is our BATF (Book-keeping, Accounting, Taxation and Financial Crimes Compliance Service) regulations, which will be notified in the next few weeks. This will open new avenues to provide global accounting and taxation business from IFSC in a cost-effective manner given India's talent advantage.

SUCCESS STORY

Fund management is one of the earliest success stories of GIFT IFSC... Since May 2022... have attracted more than 112 fund managers

What else can be done?

There are many, many NRIs probably who are sending money for various purposes but there are many who would like to diversify. They invest in the US stock markets, the Singapore stock markets, the Dubai stock markets, etc. So, we would want such kind of people to invest; we want to onshore that. That's why we have created this platform so that people who want to come back to India can hold a part of their investments as dollars here as well, in terms of either capital market investments or bank savings.

Indians who work abroad also sometimes migrate globally. Creating the same foreign exchange savings pool in India provides them with portability in terms of insurance. For instance, suppose they were to subscribe to an insurance product in GIFT City – that gives them the portability of working anywhere while at the same time being insured in dollar terms.

We are also working on a pension product. Very shortly, maybe in the next three months, you will see the pension regulations also come out. There are nomination facilities available and there is portability. Wherever they are, they will save with their pension account here and when they come back here, all the money is theirs in a very simple cost-effective way.

Sebi recently allowed foreign funds at GIFT City to take in full investment from NRIs. On the policy front, how would enablers be put in place?

India has the unique advantage of a very vast, active, and wealthy diaspora across the world who not only bring pride to us through their success and achievements but also participate in the Indian economy's growth story through their inward remittances and investments. As you may be aware, India continues to be the highest recipient of inward remittances for several years in a row. However, out of the total remittances, the amount towards equity investment is less than 10-12%.

The IFSCA has been engaging with Sebi and other authorities to facilitate greater participation of the Indian diaspora through GIFT IFSC in a manner which addresses various regulatory concerns. The IFSCA has already issued an enabling circular on May 2, 2024, to operationalise one of the two routes enabled by the Sebi board. We expect Sebi to announce the rest of the framework shortly.

You had referred to the issuance of a sovereign masala bond from GIFT City, while the RBI recently permitted foreign players in the IFSC to invest in sovereign green bonds. When could these be implemented?

The IFSCA already has the enabling regulatory framework in place (for a sovereign masala bond). The Government of India may take a call on this at an appropriate time.

With the objective of providing easier access for foreign investors, the RBI and IFSCA, along with the Government of India, have been working towards the operationalisation of investment and trading of sovereign green bonds at the IFSC. The IFSCA is working with the government and RBI towards the implementation of this scheme over the next three months. The objective is to enable new non-resident investors, who are not currently registered as FPIs (foreign portfolio investors), to participate in the primary auction and to facilitate trading and settlement in US dollars at the IFSC. Capital market infrastructure institutions at the IFSC, including depository and clearing corporations, by establishing a connect with RBI systems, will enable the holding of government securities and settlement of secondary market transactions at the IFSC. The availability of sovereign green bonds at the IFSC will also add impetus to the vibrant ESG-labelled debt securities issued and listed at the IFSC, which recently crossed $12 billion.

How have fund management activities evolved in GIFT City?

Fund management is one of the earliest success stories of the GIFT IFSC. We started with domestic regulations for fund management activities. Thereafter, the IFSCA carried out certain tweaks in the extant regulations to bring them more in sync with the global norms.

Since coming into effect in May 2022, these regulations have attracted more than 112 fund managers in the GIFT IFSC who have launched more than 125 schemes and have targeted to raise approximately $34.5 billion from investors. The fund managers in the IFSC have already deployed close to $4 Billion. We are closely monitoring the growth of this area and also creating supporting regulatory frameworks to further catalyse the pace, such as the introduction of an accredited investor framework which allows sophisticated investors to invest in IFSC funds without any minimum investment threshold.

We also hope to facilitate fund managers focussed on niche areas such as aviation and ship financing.

OFFERS TO PAY ₹400 CR MORE to bondholders in exchange for their consent to defer the trigger date for coupon payment

SP Group Arm Goswami Infra Sweetens Bond Deal

Shilpy.Sinha@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: The Shapoorji Pallonji Group (SP Group) is offering ₹400 crore more to the bondholders of group company Goswami Infratech, in exchange for their consent to extend the deadline to meet certain covenants on ₹14,300 crore of borrowings.

The company, which has to pay ₹1,400 crore in interest this month, has sought a four-month window to allow it to sell some assets and ensure the payment at 18.75%.

In a letter seeking consent from bondholders on May 18, Goswami Infratech has requested them to extend the deadline to September 30, 2024. This involves updating the agreement to push back the date when extra costs or higher interest rates would apply under the original agreement. The extension will give it more time to manage the debt without facing immediate financial penalties.

"There was a pushback from some holders of the bond and, therefore, the SP Group has tried to sweeten the deal for them," said a person in the know.

Large private credit funds including Varde Partners, Davidson Kempner, Canyon Capital, Cerberus Capital and Deutsche Bank had invested in the rupee-denominated bond, borrowed primarily against the SP Group's shares in Tata Sons and Afcons. Goswami Infratech has informed its bondholders that the SP Group is in the process of securing a loan facility from a new lender through its main investment vehicle, Sterling Investment Corp.

BUYING TIME

Goswami Infratech seeks to defer the trigger date by four months to manage its debt without facing financial penalties

"However, even upon consummation of the transaction with the new lender, it shall only be possible to repay a part of the existing sterling indebtedness as the amount available from the new lender shall be less than the outstanding Sterling indebtedness," it said.

On May 10, it had written to the bondholders seeking to tweak a debt covenant. Unlike that letter, the company has now offered a higher payout to push back the trigger date when higher interest rates would apply.

In June 2023, Goswami Infratech raised ₹14,300 crore through zero-coupon bonds maturing in April 2026, offering an 18.75% redemption premium. These bonds included a so-called 'most favoured nation' (MFN) clause, suggesting that if any SP Group affiliate borrows at a higher rate after May 26, 2024, Goswami Infratech must offer the same return to its bondholders. The date, May 26, 2024, is referred to as the 'trigger date'.

According to the debenture trust deed, the MFN trigger event is defined as the earlier of May 26, 2024, or the date of raising sterling indebtedness. However, the company has indicated that it may not be able to fulfil this obligation as specified.

Also, the bond terms stipulate that yields will rise by 200 basis points if Goswami Infratech fails to raise funds by listing its affiliate company, Afcons Infrastructure, by the end of June. The SP Group was to repay part of its debt by monetising Afcons Infrastructure, which has already filed a draft prospectus with the market regulator for listing. Earlier it had to monetise Gopalpur Port by December 2023, which it monetised in March 2024 by selling it to Adani Ports.

Banks Taking a Hit

▸▸ From Page 1

According to transaction data from the RBI, almost 160 million debit card transactions were made in March at merchant outlets, down 32% from 237 million a year earlier.

UPI merchant transactions, meanwhile, increased 72% to 8.30 billion from 4.82 billion.

While UPI with no fee on transactions is helping expand the country's digital payments ecosystem, it is having a negative impact on banks, as the decline in debit card usage is hurting their revenue from payments business.

"The value of debit card transactions has fallen in FY24 compared to FY23; even ecommerce usage of these debit cards has declined over the same period of time and therefore the combined effect is a significant decline in the interchange income for banks," said Rohan Lakhaiyar, partner at consultancy firm Grant Thornton Bharat.

"The government needs a rethink on the zero-MDR regime. If banks cannot make any money on these transactions, how will they invest in building safety features on digital payments ... there are so many fraud attacks on the payment ecosystem on a daily basis," said V Balasubramanian, chief executive of FSS, which helps banks process digital payments.

Meanwhile, the slide of debit card swipes has partly been compensated by exponential growth of credit card usage. Today, there are more than 100 million credit cards issued in India; the number has almost doubled over the last three years.

These cards are still getting used on the merchant terminals, keeping PoS machines busy and relevant.

"Banks are pushing deals on credit cards which are encouraging users to pay via those instruments. Even large organised retail is processing significant volumes of card payments, so overall the industry is seeing steady 14-15% growth, but yes the popularity of UPI is eating away debit card volumes in the smaller retail segment," said Rajeev Agrawal, chief executive at Innoviti Payments, which deploys payments infrastructure at large retailers.

The RBI has enabled RuPay credit cards to be linked on UPI, but the share of such cards in circulation is still limited. So large merchants where the average ticket size of the transaction is big, card machines continue to be relevant.

KEEPING POS RELEVANT

India has a large untapped market for credit, so making credit widely available for all types of payments is crucial, said Ramesh Narsimhan, chief executive officer-India at Worldline. PoS devices, he said, are capable of accepting multiple modes of payment.

To keep these terminals relevant, card payment companies like Pine Labs, Innoviti Payments and Worldline are building software services on top of the payment functions.

Pine Labs, for instance, has launched Credit+, a full stack credit issuance and acquisition platform for its clients. These platforms allow merchants to convert card swipes into buy-now-pay-later transactions and EMI payments.

"PoS machines are smart devices connected to the internet; they can be programmed to provide an array of real-time information and analytical insights to the merchants going beyond payment acceptance devices to providing many value-added services that allow merchants to sell better," Lakhaiyar of Grant Thornton said.

Also, most of the face-to-face payment processing companies have gone full stack omnichannel these days. Pine Labs launched Plural, an online payment gateway. Innoviti and MSwipe, two retail-focused players, recently bagged the payment aggregator licence from the RBI.

Also Sells Own Variant

▸▸ From Page 1

Hero MotoCorp already manufactures the X-440 range at its Neemrana facility in Rajasthan.

A licensing agreement signed between Milwaukee-headquartered Harley-Davidson and Hero MotoCorp in October 2020 gave India's leading two-wheeler maker the right to manufacture Harley's X-440 model in India. Under a distribution agreement, Hero also has the rights to sell and service motorcycles and also sell parts and accessories and general merchandise, riding gear and apparel through a network of brand-exclusive Harley Davidson dealers and Hero MotoCorp's existing dealership network in India.

The legendary US motorcycle maker founded in 1903 had decided to stop manufacturing operations in India in 2019 because of poor demand and sales, largely due to high import tariffs that made its products uncompetitive.

It struck an agreement a year later with Hero MotoCorp which could locally develop its products at more attractive prices.

Hero MotoCorp also sells its own variant of the X-440 under the Mavrick brand.

Hero MotoCorp sold 14,837 units of these two models – X-440 and Mavrick - in the last financial year. It is already the country's third-largest seller of motorcycles in the premium segment with engine capacity greater than 350 cc and lower than 500 cc, after Bajaj Auto and Royal Enfield.

Given the strong response from Indian consumers to the motorcycles codeveloped on the 440cc platform with Harley, Hero ramped up production capacity of these products to 10,000 units per month in March, from 6,000 units in January.

"The market for roadsters is 800,000 units, and is growing," Niranjan Gupta, CEO of Hero MotoCorp, had said in a recent interaction. "It should touch a million units in the next couple of years. The potential (in the segment) is huge," he had said.

The X-440 – the first product jointly developed by the two companies – is priced at around Rs 2.4 lakh, and intends to challenge the dominance of Royal Enfield in the premium bike category where operating profit margins are much higher than in sub-250 cc segments.

Earlier Investigations

▸▸ From Page 1

"For instance, an Odisha or Assam circle SIM could be used in Delhi NCR," a second official said. "To avoid the radar, fraudsters make only a few outgoing calls and then change the SIM as too many outgoing calls from the same number would get detected by telco systems."

As part of an earlier investigation, telcos had disconnected around 200,000 SIM cards last year for alleged involvement in cybercrimes. In another instance, the government had undertaken investigations in areas like Mewat in Haryana and over 37,000 SIM cards were disconnected.

COORDINATED ACTION

To effectively check the menace of cybercrime, the government feels that telcos need to be more proactive in detecting usage patterns of SIMs, particularly those bought outside home circles.

"As part of their roaming detection system, telcos can instantly capture when a person moves out to a different circle," the second official said.

Similarly, when thousands of SIM cards are used with one handset, telcos are largely equipped to detect it. "If telcos take proactive measures at their end, it can be helpful in combating online fraud," the official added.

In fact, telecom carriers are mandated to put a fraud management and prevention system in their networks and report any suspect subscribers.

As part of the unified licence, call detail records for outgoing calls made by customers need to be analysed, especially in case of subscribers making innumerable outgoing calls day and night to various telephone numbers.

NON-SEQUITUR

Earnings from Foreign Assets

▸▸ From Page 1

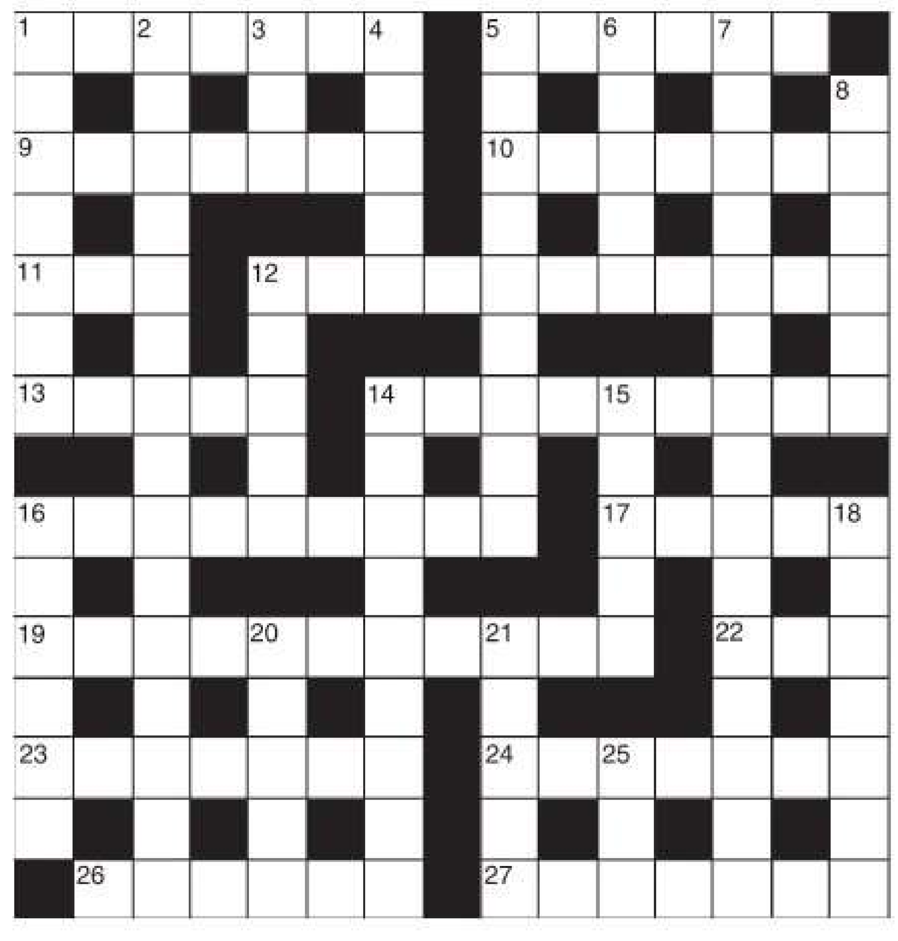
Calculations conducted by analysts based on public information about the RBI's balance sheet make a case for the central bank to surpass the surplus transfer of ₹87,416 crore that was given to the Centre last year.

"Totalling up all the operating expenses and subtracting them from total income, we arrive at a surplus (before provisions) of ₹3.4 trillion (₹3.4 lakh crore). Once we account for provisions of ₹2.2 trillion, that leaves us with a dividend of ₹1.2 trillion," A Prasanna, head of research at ICICI Securities Primary Dealership, recently wrote in a note to clients. "Such a large dividend is likely to be paired with the maximum permissible rise in (the central bank's) core capital ratio as well, thereby strengthening RBI's balance sheet for a rainy day."

Among the key factors that could contribute to a large surplus transfer is a sharp increase in interest that the RBI would have earned through its foreign exchange assets, amid aggressive rate increases by the US Federal Reserve over the last couple of years.

Further, while the RBI's gross sales and purchases of US dollars were lower in FY24 than FY23 — a year when the central bank intervened heavily in markets to shield the rupee from excessive volatility — analysts still expect a hefty boost to the central bank's earnings from foreign assets.

Crossword 8977



ACROSS
1 Crosses poet Robert (7)
5 Acquire beer regularly in seedy joint (6)
9 Bob and Alec possibly lacking a degree, describing some old streets? (7)
10 Comprehensive information about revolutionary in charge (7)
11 Complaint, not good, is publicly revealed (3)
12 Peter's again mislaid make-up for actors (6,5)
13 Second group of players has source of heat? (5)
14 Fine ride arranged by wealthy German painter (9)
16 Secure rule about entrance to this Somerset town (9)
17 Rex with day gone avoids tightly packed crowds (5)
19 Cheat limits sadly quality required in sport? (11)
22 Tree found in Israel mainly (3)
23 European prompt to acquire diary and pastoral work (7)
24 Put down and omitted? (7)
26 Very large flower for Egyptian deity (6)
27 Really troubled about latest sign of increasing sensitivity (7)

DOWN
1 Bishop without rector calculates gestures (7)
2 Line new website devised about lead in Hamlet during breaks? (2,7,6)
3 Set stage in a contest put up (3)
4 Grasslike plant beginning to sprout on border (5)
5 Breakdown of fuel naturally done? (9)
6 Approach series ahead (3-2)
7 Excited pair receiving fern shorn of cover and climbing plant (8,7)
8 Put an end to spirit in the U.S. (6)
12 A couple of months in Georgia for Greek character (5)
14 Corpulence in fast set when in a loose state (9)
15 Variety of wheat in largely useless alcoholic spirit (5)
16 Marine mammals in part of the UK, reportedly (6)
18 Dome, say, renovated at a point in the future? (7)
20 Energy required by independent German for Swiss mountain (5)
21 Some disdain dialogue in cricket-playing country (5)
25 Hens not following bird with large eyes (3)

SOLUTION TO No. 8976:
ACROSS: 1 Income group. **9** Lucinda. **10** Tie down. **11** Tee. **12** Ordains. **13** Slovene. **14** Yen. **15** Gable. **17** Tatty. **18** Drawl. **20** Aided. **22** Oaf. **24** Camp bed. **25** Hoffman. **26** Roo. **27** Dislike. **28** Seconds. **29** Case history.
DOWN: 1 Incidental music. **2** Canning. **3** Meats. **4** Gateshead. **5** Open out. **6** Protection money. **7** Bloody. **8** Annecy. **16** Brandreth. **18** Decide. **19** Lobbies. **21** De facto. **23** Finish. **25** Hoses.

HIDATO
FIND THE PATH - SOLVE THE PUZZLE

Complete the grid so that numbers 1 - 65 connect horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

www.hidato.com Dif. ★★★☆☆

Yesterday's puzzle solution.

Hidato Sol.

54	53	22	23	25	27	28	29
55	21	52	51	24	26	30	1
20	56			50	3	2	31
57	19		6	4	49	48	32
18	58	8	7	5		47	33
17	9	12	11			34	46
16	13	10	42	43	38	45	35
14	15	41	40	39	44	37	36

LEADER BOARD

HIDATO	7 LITTLE WORDS
Saanvi Gangula Thane	**Rajan Nair** Mumbai
Pratiksha Andheri West	**Karthik** Bengaluru

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES	SOLUTIONS
1 lobbed (5)	
2 like an ice cream holder (7)	
3 switches to a new subject (6)	
4 struggled clumsily (10)	
5 conductors' instruments (6)	
6 put in a hiding place (9)	
7 they care for "canines" (8)	

TH	ED	SEG	CO	FL
CAL	ENS	STS	BAT	DE
ONS	CED	ND	UES	NI
OU	NTI	REW	CON	ER

Yesterday's Answers: 1. HURRY 2. RUMPLY 3. PLEDGED 4. TUDORS 5. PUNCTUATED 6. BENCH 7. PIANOS

ET will carry the names of winners for Hidato and 7 Little Words every day. Please whatsapp your solutions for both to 79 01 01 01 74 with your name and city.

APEDA
fssai
Food Safety & Standards Authority of India
MOFPI
MINISTRY OF FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE
Indian Chamber of Commerce
PRESENT
3rd PLANT BASED FOODS SUMMIT
21 MAY 2024, TUESDAY - Le MERIDIEN, NEW DELHI
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM
ORGANISED BY
Plant Based Foods Industry Association
KNOWLEDGE PARTNER
EY
CHIEF GUESTS
G. KAMLA VARDHANA RAO
CEO
Food Safety & Standards Authority of India
RAJESH AGRAWAL
Additional Secretary
Ministry of Commerce & Industry
HOSTS
SANJAY SETHI
Executive Director
Plant Based Foods Industry Association
DR RAJEEV SINGH
Director General
Indian Chambers of Commerce
SPEAKERS
SAMUEL PRAVEEN KUMAR
Joint Secretary
MoA & FW
DR. RANJIT SINGH
Joint Secretary
Ministry of Food Processing Industries
DR. SUDHANSHU
Secretary
APEDA
INOSHI SHARMA
Executive Director
FSSAI
GAURAV TANEJA
Partner & Leader - Govt. & Public Sector Practice, EY
DR. RAVINDER SINGH
Director Science & Standard, FSSAI
JOSH TETRICK
CEO
East Just Inc, USA
STÉPHANIE JOSEPH
Director Global Growth
Pall Corporation, France
MADHUPARNA BHOWMICK
Senior Director
Indian Chamber of Commerce
DR. TARUN BAJAJ
Director - BEDF, Processed Food Division, APEDA
DR. SK MALHOTRA
VC, Maharana Pratap Horticultural University
SANJEEV ASTHANA,
CEO
Patanjali Foods
SATYAM SHIVAM SUNDARAM
Partner
Ernst & Young
VISHWAJEET SANGLE
International Tennis Player
SNEHA SINGH
Acting Managing Director
GFI India
ABHISHEK SINHA
Co-Founder & CEO
Good Dot
RANJAN SINHA
Director - Strategy & Transaction
Ernst & Young
WILL McNAIR
Director - Human Soybean and Oil
USSEC
ABHAY RANGAN
Co-Founder
Nourish You
ADITYA BAGRI
CEO
Bagrry's
ASHU PHAKEY
VP - Frozen & Fresh Foods
ITC Ltd
SHUBHAM SABOO
CEO
Shiv Health Foods
SANDEEP DEVGAN
CEO
Stonefield Flavours
CS JADHAV
CEO
Nutricircle
ROMIL RATRA
CEO
Plantaway
DR. RAVINDER KUMAR
Assistant General Manager
ACME Greentech Foods
RAJESH SRIVASTAVA
Chairman
Prowess Advisors
RAJIV YADAV
COO
Agrocorp
PALAK MEHTA
Founder & CEO
Vegan First
SATISH KOLHE
Regional Regulatory Head
Givaudan
GAURAV SHARMA
CEO
Greenest
ARAVINDAN V
CEO
Vijay Sweets
JUNE SWER
SBU Head
Chatha Foods
DILIP KUMAR
Head of Investments
Rainmatter Health
SHIVNAYAN AGGRAWAL
Market Transformation
RSPO
SUMAN SHARMA
VP - Marketing & Growth,
Relsus
AMY AELA
Co-Founder
Meat Less Meat More
DR. APARNA PATHAK
Product Development (R&D)
Fytomax Nutrition (Mahyco)
VIKAS PATIL
Director
Mirtillo
DR. RAJ KUMAR MISHRA
Principal Scientist
ICAR - IIPR, Kanpur
GOPAL CHAKARAPANI
Country Manager
Innova Market Insights
JINESH SHAH
Founder
AltX Ventures
NITIN JAIN
Founding Member
eFuture Ventures
SHREYA GHODAWAT
Founder & CEO
Sustainable Guides
SHASHANK JAIN
President
Shree Financials
SUMIT AGARWAL
Director
Bionutrients
CHEF DAVINDER KUMAR
Vice President
Le Meridien, New Delhi
SIDDHARTH MANVATI
CEO
Clear Meat
POWERED BY
US SOY
JUST
PALL
amazon shipping
SOUPHERB
Plantaway
nutricircle
DBS
JBT
SUPPORTED BY
RSPO
AAK
PATANJALI
CHATHAFOODS
Marine Hydrocolloids
GREENBIRD
Vezlay
nourish you
So Good
mirtillo
RELSUS
To Register
Scan the QR Code or visit
www.pbfia.org
For queries, contact at: sanjay.sethi@pbfia.org +91 9004777119 | +91 93184 55875

Chopper Carrying Iran's President Raisi Crashes

Mishap took place while he was crossing mountainous terrain amid heavy fog; officials say lives of Raisi and foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian 'at risk'

Dubai: A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister crashed on Sunday as it was crossing mountain terrain in heavy fog, an Iranian official told *Reuters*, and rescuers were struggling to reach the site of the incident.

The crash comes at a time of growing dissent within Iran Reuters

The official said the lives of Raisi and foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian were "at risk following the helicopter crash", which happened on the way back from a visit to the border with Azerbaijan in Iran's northwest. "We are still hopeful but information coming from the crash site is very concerning," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Iranian state media said bad weather was the cause of the crash and complicating rescue efforts. The Iran's army chief of staff ordered all its resources and those of the Revolutionary Guard to be put to use in search and rescue operations. "It is dark and it has started raining, but the search continues. Rescue teams have reached the area... however, the rain has created mud, making the search difficult," a local reporter told state TV.

State TV had earlier stopped all its regular programming to show prayers being held for Raisi across the country and, in a corner of the screen, live coverage of rescue teams deployed on foot in the mountainous area in heavy fog.

The rescue teams were expected to reach the probable site of the crash later on Sunday evening.

PROTEST CRACKDOWN

The crash comes at a time of growing dissent within Iran over an array of crises. Iran's clerical rulers face international pressure over Tehran's disputed nuclear programme and its deepening military ties with Russia during the war in Ukraine.

Raisi, 63, was elected president in 2021, and since taking office has ordered a tightening of morality laws, overseen a bloody crackdown on anti-government protests and pushed hard in nuclear talks with world powers. **Reuters**

Assange Stares at US Extradition as Trial in London Starts Today

London: A British court could give a final decision on Monday on whether WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange should be extradited to the United States over the mass leak of secret US documents, the culmination of 13 years of legal battles and detentions.

Two judges at the High Court in London will rule on whether the court is satisfied by US assurances that Assange, 52, would not face the death penalty and could rely on the First Amendment right to free speech if he faced a US trial for spying. Assange's legal team say he could be on a plane across the Atlantic within 24 hours of the decision, could be released from jail, or his case could yet again be bogged down in months of legal battles.

"I have the sense that anything could happen at this stage," his wife Stella said last week. "Julian could be extradited, or he could be freed." She said her husband hoped to be in court for the crucial hearing.

WikiLeaks released hundreds of thousands of classified US military documents on Washington's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — the largest security breaches of their kind in US military history — along with swathes of diplomatic cables. The US authorities want to put the Australian-born Assange on trial over 18 charges, nearly all under the Espionage Act, saying his actions were reckless, damaged national security, and endangered the lives of agents. His supporters call the prosecution a travesty, an assault on free speech, and revenge for causing embarrassment.

The Wikileaks founder could be on a plane to the US in 24 hours if two judges rule in Washington's favour

DETAINED SINCE 2010

Assange was first arrested in Britain in 2010 on a Swedish warrant over sex crime allegations that were later dropped. Since then he has been under house arrest, holed up in Ecuador's embassy in London for seven years, and held since 2019 in Belmarsh top security jail, latterly while he waited a ruling on his extradition.

On the other hand, if the judges reject the US submissions, then he will have permission to appeal his extradition case on three grounds, and that might not be heard until next year. **Reuters**

JSW Steel to Spend Over ₹19K Crore to Expand Dolvi Plant

Nikita.Periwal@timesgroup.com

Jayant Acharya, CEO JSW Steel

Mumbai: The cost of JSW Steel's third phase of capacity expansion at its plant in Dolvi will be among the lowest for brownfield expansions for the company, a top official told **ET**.

JSW Steel will spend a little over ₹19,000 crore on this capacity addition, which will help it cater to the demand for value-added special steel products, Jayant Acharya, chief executive officer of JSW Steel, said.

"It will be very cost effective since some of the infrastructure facilities are already there (and) some of the equipment are already there as part of phase two," he said.

This investment will take the firm's total capital expenditure to more than ₹64,000 crore in three years.

The country's largest producer of steel announced that it will be adding another 5 million tonnes of capacity at its plant in Dolvi, Maharashtra, taking it to a total 15 million tonne per annum by September 2027. Pan-India, the company aims to have a total production capacity of 42 million tonnes by then.

The National steel policy 2017 envisages India's steel production capacity at 300 million tonne by 2030-31.

While JSW Steel intends to have a capacity of 50 million tonnes by then, Tata Steel's target is to have a production capacity of 40 million tonnes.

"In Dolvi, we will hold the capacity at 15 million tonnes," Acharya said. "We have brownfield options in Vijaynagar, BPSL and Jharsuguda, which gives us the leverage to go beyond 50 million tonnes."

JSW Steel's cost for adding five million tonnes of capacity at Dolvi is around $460 per tonne, significantly lower than the global average cost of $700 per tonne. The company plans to largely fund this capex through internal accruals.

SUITS & SAYINGS

ET's roundup of the wackiest whispers and murmurs in corporate corridors & policy parlours

That's the Deal

That's how some of them are built. They thrive in adversity. This mega merger of two entities was supposed to have reset a whole industry in India, but it was not to be. It got stuck in a regulatory quagmire and that was that. So, we can safely assume the brains behind the move would have quietly settled into the sunset, right? But no. We hear the multinational involved has recently elevated its main man who helmed the deal efforts.

Destination Scanner

So, this family in Mumbai, planning a destination wedding overseas, approached two mid-sized private sector banks for transferring funds to book the venue and hotel rooms. But they were in for a surprise when the banks insisted on the full guest list along with the PAN details. Why this scrutiny? Do they want to keep a tab on outflows for non-business activities? Or, it could well be a case of over-zealous banks, having caught the hint from the very top, are finding ways to discourage opulent weddings abroad! But this wasn't the only case. A few months ago, the promoter of a granite company was politely reminded by officials of a certain dreaded agency that there were many exotic locations to hold a wedding in India. How did the agency even know? Well, they got a whiff of the charter plane booking.

Welcome Back

A South Korean auto major who was dumped in the cold by its India partner could be making a quiet entry back to Indian markets. Word has it that the company is in advanced discussions for a technology transfer pact with a large Indian conglomerate. We can only hope that the second homecoming will be more fruitful for the Korean player who may just have the last laugh after a not so amicable exit a few years back.

Rose by Any Name

What's in a name? Will a good business by any name still be a good business? In this time and age when many go for Gen Z-sounding names, why would anyone go for "ordinary" ones? This question was put to the top leader of a recently listed mid-tier NBFC which bears a rather generic name. Well, he lamented that while their business case is more than solid, it lacks an equally solid family name to back it unlike some of its peers. Hence a general-purpose name!

Wow, More Chairs

Shareholders of PSU banks may have benefited in the last few years, but the life of the top executives may not have changed much. Turns out this summer, the sun is shining on them too. These banks which lost many senior positions like that of the executive director due to mergers could see the number of openings going up. In fact, in the next round of ED interviews, bankers expect as much as 12 positions compared with seven now, thanks to the RBI norms on size of the board based on the asset size of the banks.

Privy to the whispers in power corridors or juicy tips on India Inc? Do share with us at etsuits.sayings@gmail.com

Improvement in May Not Likely

▸▸ From Page 1

"Due to this, April has been one of the worst months so far," said Sharma of Miraj. He also pointed to subpar performances of the two Hindi releases in April and indicated that a dearth of big openings may lead to further deterioration at the box office in May.

PVR Inox executive director Sanjeev Bijli expects a surge in moviegoers after the election. "What will change is the robust pipeline. People (will be) back at cinemas because of the supply... the appetite to go out and watch movies has always been there," he said during the company's fourth quarter earnings call recently.

Cumulative box office collections for January-April are Rs 3,071 crore, on a par with the same period last year.

The top grossers of 2024 till now are *Fighter* (₹243 crore), *Hanu-Man* (₹240 crore), *Shaitaan* (₹179 crore), *Manjummel Boys* (₹170 crore) and *Guntur Kaaram* (₹142 crore).

Hindi films had the highest share of gross domestic collections (36%), followed by Telugu (21%), Malayalam (19%), Tamil (9%) and English (8%).

India Calls for Details on Ambit of Proposed EU Deforestation Norms

Regulation likely to hit India's agricultural exports worth $1.3 billion starting Dec 2024

Kirtika.Suneja@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: India has sought information from the European Union about its proposed regulation that seeks to benchmark exporting countries as low or high risk basis deforestation levels. The EU's deforestation-free product regulation has implications for India's coffee, cocoa, soya, wood products, rubber and its products, and leather goods exports.

The regulation requires firms to ensure that the product exported to the EU has been grown on land which has not been deforested after December 31, 2020. It prescribes fines up to 4% of a firm's annual turnover in the EU, confiscation of product and revenues gained from a transaction.

The new rules will apply to large firms from December 2024 and small firms from June 2025.

New Delhi's concerns relate to one of the conditions on whether the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change cover emissions and removals from agriculture, forestry and land use.

"India has asked the EU to elaborate on the rationale behind setting agriculture-related NDC commitments as a criterion for the benchmarking system," said a Geneva-based official.

The EU's Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) is expected to hit India's agricultural exports worth $1.3 billion to the EU starting from December 2024.

"Indian exports may take a bigger hit than exports from other competing countries to the EU because of India's higher deforestation rate," said a trade expert.

At the World Trade Organization (WTO), India has also asked the bloc if it would cover adaptation costs in traceability and due diligence requirements of the unilateral measure.

As per the regulations, operators in third countries, including smallholders, could face costs to develop or implement systems to allow EU operators to comply with the new requirements, where they do not already have systems in place.

Further, additional costs in producing countries to ensure compliance with the regulation would be any costs of switching to production practices compliant with the "deforestation-free definition".

India has also sought details of the grants provided to protect, restore and sustainably manage forests in partner countries, as well as details pertaining to grants provided to support sustainable agriculture in partner countries.

Bone of Contention

- **Rules** benchmark exporting nations as low or high-risk basis deforestation levels
- **Rules prescribe fines** up to 4% of a firm's annual turnover in the EU
- **Also confiscation** of product and revenues gained from a transaction

India asks EU if it would cover traceability, due diligence costs

- **Grants provided to protect, restore, manage forests in partner nations details sought**

ITC's Sanjiv Puri Takes Over as CII President

Our Bureau

New Delhi: Chairman and managing director of ITC Sanjiv Puri on Sunday took over as president of Confederation of Indian Industry for 2024-25, the industry body said in a statement.

He has succeeded R Dinesh, chairman of TVS Supply Chain Solutions.

Puri heads ITC Ltd, a conglomerate with businesses in FMCG, hotels, paperboards & packaging, agribusiness and IT. He is also the chairman of ITC Infotech India Ltd, its subsidiaries in the UK and US and Surya Nepal Private Ltd.

The CII also announced the appointment of Rajiv Memani, chairman India region of EY (Ernst & Young), as president-designate for 2024-25. Memani is also a member of EY's global management body as the chair of its global emerging markets committee.

The industry body also named Tata Chemicals Ltd MD and CEO R Mukundan as its vice president for 2024-25. Mukundan is a distinguished alumnus of IIT, Roorkee, a fellow of Indian Chemical Society and an alumnus of Harvard Business School.

During his 33-year career with Tata Group, Mukundan has held various responsibilities across the chemical, automotive and hospitality sectors of the group, it added.

Govt Recovers ₹852 cr Under Amnesty Scheme for Exporters

New Delhi: The government has recovered about ₹852 crore under the amnesty scheme for exporters for one-time settlement of default in export obligation by the holders of advance and EPCG authorisations, an official said. The figures are likely to increase further as the exercise is on for the compilation of the data, the official added. The government has fixed March 31 as the last date for payment of customs duty plus interest. "Under the scheme, 6,705 applications were filed and as per the provisional figures, an amount of about ₹852 crore has been recovered. This figure is further expected to increase," the official said. —**PTI**

Better Half

Are women faring better in urban job market? Women's labour force participation in urban areas rose to its highest level in Q4FY24 since the start of the series in 2018, whereas the unemployment rate declined further to 8.5%. But their share in salaried work has declined further. Ishaan Gera takes a look:

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AT HIGHEST LEVELS SINCE 2018

Female labour force participation rises to 25.6% in Q4FY24 | It was up nearly 3 pps since Q4FY23

UNEMPLOYMENT DECLINED TO A 24-QUARTER LOW

Unemployment fell further to 8.5% in Q4FY24 | It was in double digits until Q4FY22

BUT WOMEN SHARE IN REGULAR SALARIED WORK LOWEST

Share of women in regular salaried work at 52.3%, lowest since April 2018

More women working as unpaid helper in household enterprises | Regular wage women earned 2.3 times more than self-employed in 2022-23 (July-June)

(% share of total)	Own account worker, employer	Unpaid helper in household enterprise	Other self-employed	Regular wage/salaried employees	Casual labour
Q1FY19	23.3	9.9	1.3	56.1	9.4
Q4FY19	22.7	9.2	0.9	58.2	9.1
Q1FY20	23.8	8.9	0.6	58.3	8.4
Q4FY20	22.9	9.8	2.1	57.5	7.7
Q1FY21	15.4	7.7	10.9	61.2	4.8
Q4FY21	24.8	11.2	0.7	54.0	9.3
Q1FY22	22.7	9.8	4.5	55.8	7.2
Q4FY22	24.3	10.2	0.8	56.7	8.1
Q1FY23	24.8	11.1	0.7	55.8	7.6
Q4FY23	26.0	11.7	0.8	54.2	7.3
Q1FY24	26.3	11.9	1.0	54.0	6.8
Q4FY24	27.5	12.6	1.2	52.3	6.5

BID TO PROTECT GLOBAL WORKFORCE

ILO to Come Up with Legal Framework on Bio Hazards

Yogima.Sharma@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: The International Labour Organisation will soon come up with a comprehensive legal framework for protection of the global workforce against biological hazards.

India along with 186 other countries will, for the first time, deliberate on the potentially devastating impact of biological hazards on the global workforce triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and how it can be minimised at the 112th International Labour Conference in Geneva next month.

Following this, member countries will be expected to develop their national policies for prevention and protection of workers against biological hazards, aligning them with the international standards. As per the ILO's technical brief, this can be a standalone legislation or part of the legislation governing the occupational safety, health and working conditions for workers in their respective countries.

Further, the national policy in this regard should lay down provisions concerning employers' duties and responsibilities with respect to prevention and protection in relation to biological hazards, besides providing for regular review and update, where necessary, and risk assessments with regard to the safety and health of workers arising from biological hazards, taking into account the vulnerable categories of workers.

The ILO is of the view that in workplaces such as hospitals and laboratories, cattle producing factories and grain silos, in sewage maintenance facilities, collection of waste and many other activities, workers may be exposed to biological hazards including bacteria, viruses, parasites, fungi, prions, DNA material, bodily fluids as well as other micro-organisms and their associated allergens and toxins. "These biological hazards may not only cause, impact or exacerbate communicable diseases such as Covid-19, but also non-communicable diseases such as allergies," the ILO added. Though the precise data regarding the impact of biological hazards in the working environment is not available, an ILO study of 2021 said that work exposure to contagious and non-contagious biological risks accounted for 550,000 fatalities in that year.

On The Table

THE THEMATIC AGENDA OUTLINED FOR THE ILC INCLUDE:

- **Protection against** biological hazards
- **Strategic objective of fundamental principles and rights at work**
- **Decent work and** the care economy
- **Abrogation of four** international labour conventions

LATEST REPORT COUNTERS FINDINGS OF EARLIER MHI PROBE

Cos Knowingly Violated FAME Subsidy Scheme, Finds Panel

December 2023 report was not accepted by Centre, which had ordered a fresh probe in February 2024

Twesh.Mishra@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: A high-level government panel has held that companies knowingly violated Faster Adoption & Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME) subsidy scheme guidelines that were 'very clear', officials said.

The report, submitted by the panel earlier this month, counters findings of an earlier probe by a joint secretary in the Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) that said some key terms in the FAME were not clearly defined.

The December 2023 report by the joint secretary was not accepted by the Centre, which ordered a fresh probe in February.

Electric two-wheeler (e2w) makers have cited the previous rejected report to delay repayment of subsidies they were accused of wrongfully availing.

"The December 2023 report is vague, incomplete and suffered from numerous shortcomings, and contradictions such as failure to properly consider the scheme guidelines and failure to examine any officials," one of the officials cited above said, adding that this had prompted a fresh probe.

"It has been effectively concluded that the whole scheme notifications and guidelines were clear and well understood by all relevant stakeholders, including test agencies, EV makers and MHI," the official said, adding that the latest report has pointed out the numerous gaps, limitations and shortcomings in the December 2023 report.

Besides studying the FAME II guidelines, this high-level committee has also examined the role of government functionaries, which allowed the subsidy disbursals without establishing competence of beneficiaries, officials said.

The government launched the first FAME scheme in 2015 with a budget of Rs 895 crore. FAME II, an expanded iteration of the programme, was rolled out in 2019 with an outlay Rs 10,000 crore. These schemes were aimed at supporting the sale of electric vehicles (EV) made in the country.

Subsidy disbursals in the programme were linked to a phased manufacturing programme (PMP), which ensured higher localisation as years passed. While companies did not adhere to the PMP, they continued seeking FAME subsidy, defeating the intent of the scheme.

The government, after an initial probe, sent out recovery notices in the current fiscal (2023-24) totalling ₹469 crore to seven companies for violating local sourcing norms. Amounts wrongly claimed were disbursed for sales made from 2020 to 2023.

Probing EV Subsidies

- **Panel** concludes FAME guidelines were clear
- **Companies** violated localisation norms
- **Centre to recover over ₹300 crore**
- **Three EV** two-wheeler makers yet to payback

...The December 2023 report

- Probe by Joint Secretary rejected
- Lapses found in investigation
- Not enough consultations held

Oil Firms Blamed for Ethanol Stock Pile-up

OMCs not buying enough quantities leading to demand-supply imbalance

Kirtika Suneja & Sanjeev Choudhary


ISTOCK

New Delhi: Ethanol distilleries in the country are faced with high and rising stock of the biofuel amid a demand-supply imbalance that, they allege, is because state-run oil marketing companies (OMCs) are not buying sufficient quantities.

Two executives at OMCs, however, said they are buying as much ethanol as is required to meet the target of blending 15% ethanol in petrol. "The stock at ethanol producers is rising as OMCs are unable to lift enough quantity," said an ethanol industry executive who didn't want to be identified. "This could be due to limited storage capacity at OMCs' depots," the person added. State-run oil marketing companies Indian Oil, Hindustan Petroleum, and Bharat Petroleum purchase ethanol from diverse producers to blend it with petrol at their depots before supplying the fuel to pumps.

These companies did not respond to **ET's** request for comment until press time Sunday.

But two OMC executives, who didn't want to be identified, said their firms were on course to meet the blending target of 15% for the current year. They said the current trouble in the ethanol industry was an outcome of rapid enhancement in biofuel production capacity in the country. Ethanol company executives confirmed massive capacity buildup in the industry. "A lot of ethanol production capacity has been added in recent years, but OMCs need a limited quantity to meet their 15% blending target for the current year," an ethanol industry executive said. "Next year, when they have a higher blending target of 20%, OMCs may procure more, easing the current supply-demand mismatch." The OMCs may by then also increase ethanol storage capacity at their depots, the executive added.

India's ethanol production capacity was about 13.80 billion litres per year in November 2023, of which 8.75 billion litres were molasses-based and about 5.05 billion litres grain-based, according to government data. The production capacity was about 4.20 billion litres in 2014.

Some ethanol industry executives also attributed the current problem to the government's decision to cap the quantity of B-heavy molasses – a byproduct of sugar production – that can be used as feedstock for producing ethanol this year in a bid to ensure adequate sugar availability. "OMCs haven't yet been able to collate the quantity of B-heavy molasses-based ethanol each distillery can produce and offer to OMCs," the executive quoted above said.

"Once that is done, OMCs may issue tenders for procurement of ethanol." Some ethanol producers are also unhappy with a recent policy of OMCs to give preference to ethanol suppliers from the same state where the depot is located, disregarding the distance between the depot and the distillery.

India's ethanol production capacity was about 13.80 billion litres per year in November 2023, of which 8.75 billion litres were molasses-based and about 5.05 billion litres grain-based, as per government data

India Ratings and Research expects the country's GDP growth rate for the March quarter at 6.7% and around 6.9-7% for the 2023-24 fiscal, its principal economist Sunil Kumar Sinha said. **PTI**

DUE TO DEMAND-SUPPLY MISMATCH...

Pulses Inflation to Stay High till Oct: Experts

'Progress of monsoon to drive sentiment on inflation'

Ishaan Gera & Shambhavi Anand

New Delhi: Demand-supply mismatches could keep prices of pulses elevated until the new crop starts arriving in the market in October, putting further pressure on already high food inflation, say experts.

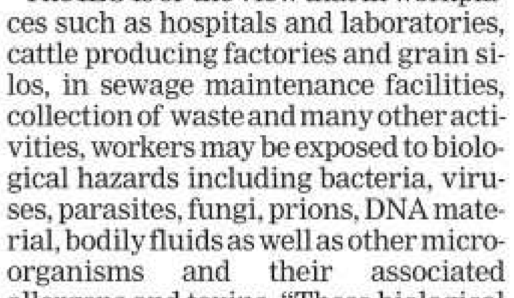
Higher prices of pulses — tur, chana and urad — despite myriad measures to keep them under check have been a cause of concern for the government.

In April, inflation in pulses was 16.8%, with tur at 31.4%, gram at 14.6% and urad at 14.3%. Pulses account for a 6% weight in the food basket and 2.4% in the overall consumer basket for inflation calculation. Food inflation accelerated to 8.7% in April from 8.5% the previous month. "New crop comes October onwards, and given that tur production was down last year, there would be lower stocks, which will exert pressure on prices," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist, Bank of Baroda. Monsoon's progress will drive sentiment on inflation in pulses, which will be in double digits till then, Sabnavis said. "Pulses inflation has been in double digits for 11 months and is unlikely to ease until the end of the second quarter of FY24," said Paras Jasrai, senior analyst at India Ratings & Research. This will be one of the push factors for food inflation, Jasrai said, adding: "If monsoon conditions are not conducive, the pulse inflation could stay higher for an even longer period." "The next sowing of pulses — mainly tur and urad — will only start in June-July after the onset of monsoon, with harvest for urad happening in October-November while that of tur starting January," said Suresh Agarwal, president of the All India Dal Mill Association. Although some pulses, especially moong, are also sown in the summer season between rabi and kharif, their production is not significant enough to cause any major impact on prices.

PLAYING CATCH UP

Even though India is the largest producer of pulses in the world, local consumption exceeds production. To meet the shortfall, the country imports pulses. India's output of pulses in the 2022-23 crop year was 26.05 million tonnes. Annual consumption is estimated at 28 million tonnes, which is growing steadily with increasing purchasing power of the consumer. For the last two years, India has seen a fall in the production of tur and urad, forcing the government to ease import restrictions. Last year, the government placed tur, urad and masoor (lentils) under a zero-duty import regime till March 2024. The deadline has now been extended to March 2025. In early December 2023, the Centre also allowed duty-free imports of yellow peas until March 2024. This too was extended till June.

Surging Prices


Pulses inflation to remain in double digits till October, say experts

Pulses inflation at 16.8% in April | Tur saw 31.4% inflation

Tweet OF THE DAY

AARON LEVIE
@LEVIE

Given the pace of breakthrough innovation happening in AI right now, it's critical to build for what's possible in the future not just what's possible today. If you build for only what's possible today, you're at the mercy of being disrupted by a single AI model update

Tech Buzz

OpenAI's AI Risk Team Disbanded

SAN FRANCISCO: OpenAI confirmed that it has disbanded a team devoted to mitigating the long-term dangers of super-smart artificial intelligence. OpenAI began dissolving so-called "superalignment" group weeks ago, integrating members into other projects and research. Company co-founder Ilya Sutskever and team co-leader Jan Leike announced their departures from the ChatGPT-maker this week. The dismantling of an OpenAI team focused on keeping AI under control comes as tech faces increased scrutiny from regulators and fears mount regarding its dangers. – Agencies

20,000
additional cars Zoomcar plans to add by 2025.
–Agencies

AWS, MS Azure, Google Hold 66% of Cloud Spends

NEW DELHI: Amazon Web Services (AWS), Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud collectively grew by 24%, accounting for 66% of total spending in the first quarter (January-March) period. Microsoft outpaced both AWS and Google Cloud, with sales rising by 31% YoY, nearly double the AWS's growth rate of 17%, while Google Cloud grew 28% YoY, according to market research firm Canalys. The report said despite holding the largest market share at 31%, AWS faces increasing competition from its fast-growing competitors. Microsoft Azure was second with a market share of 25% and Google Cloud was third, with a market share of 10% in Q1 this year. – Agencies

Rajnish Kumar, Mohandas Pai to Exit Byju's Advisory Council

Mutually decided that tenure of the advisory council should not be extended: Edtech co

Our Bureau

RAJNISH KUMAR AND MOHANDAS PAI'S CONTRACTS END ON JUNE 30

The council was formed with a one-year timeline... Given how things are at the firm, the council will essentially dissolve now

A source

Rajnish Kumar and Mohandas Pai

Bengaluru: Former State Bank of India chief Rajnish Kumar and Manipal Global Education chairman Mohandas Pai will not be renewing their contracts to be a part of the board advisory council at Byju's adding to the mounting troubles at the cash-strapped edtech firm.

Pai and Kumar's contracts end on June 30, people familiar with the matter said. They had joined the advisory council after investors Peak XV Partners, Prosus and Chan Zuckerberg Initiative left the edtech firm's board year.

The company along with Pai and Kumar said there was no need to extend the tenure of the advisory council beyond the previous decided one year. "Based on our discussions with the founders, it was mutually decided that the tenure of the advisory council should not be extended. Though the formal engagement concludes, the founders and the company can always approach us for any advice. We wish the founders and the company the very best for the future," Kumar and Pai said in a joint statement, shared by the company's spokesperson.

"There has not been much to discuss recently because most of the disputes are in various courts and tribunals. The council was formed with a one-year timeline... Given how things are at the firm, the council will essentially dissolve now," a person aware of the matter said.

While Kumar and Pai, a former chief financial officer at Infosys, were part of the council, only the founding members of Byju's – Byju Raveendran, his wife Divya Gokulnath and brother Riju Ravindran – are on its board now.

The latest departure comes soon after Byju's India chief executive Arjun Mohan left the firm last month, spending little over six months in the role. "Rajnish Kumar and Mohandas Pai have provided invaluable support in the past year. The ongoing litigations by a few foreign investors have delayed our plans but their advice will be relied upon in the ongoing rebuild which I am personally leading," founder Raveendran said in a statement.

Nikhil Kamath, Manyavar Family Office may Join A91 in Rare Rabbit's ₹500cr Raise

Co to get ₹250cr in primary capital with rest via secondary sale by Manish and Akshika Poddar

Pranav Mukul & Samidha Sharma

New Delhi | Mumbai: New-age men's apparel and fashion brand Rare Rabbit is closing its maiden institutional funding round of ₹500 crore led by investment fund A91 Partners, multiple people in the know said.

The fundraise will see participation from the family office of Ravi Modi, founder of Vedant Fashions that runs ethnic fashion brand Manyavar, and Zerodha's cofounder Nikhil Kamath. They are likely to invest around ₹150 crore collectively. A91 is expected to pump in the remaining ₹350 crore.

The transaction will see about ₹250 crore in primary capital come into the company with the rest of it being a secondary share sale by the husband-wife duo of Akshika and Manish Poddar, according to people close to the deal.

Rare Rabbit's valuation is pegged at ₹2,200 crore, these people said. Bootstrapped till now, the brand is among the buzziest direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands to have emerged in the fashion segment.

Queries sent to Poddar, Kamath, and A91 Partners did not elicit any response. Manyavar family office's chief investment officer Siddhartha Saraf declined to comment.

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

According to one of the people cited above, Rare Rabbit clocked revenue of over ₹600 crore in fiscal 2024, with an operating profit of more than ₹100 crore. The topline figure marks over 60% year-on-year growth for the company, which reported ₹376 crore in operating revenue for FY23. As per documents sourced from the Registrar of Companies, the firm reported a net profit of ₹32 crore for fiscal 2023. It has yet to file the FY24 financials.

Industry executives said premiumisation has been a top driver of growth in the men's fashion segment over the last 18-24 months. In addition to formal wear, casual shirts, denims and trousers in the premium segment have posted significant growth, people in the know said.

"Many premium brands have crossed the ₹1,000-2,000 crore revenue mark as apparel premiumisation proceeds at a rapid pace... In a year like FY24, when growth has been slower for many brands, the premium segment has grown at a fast clip," an investor in the segment said.

AI-focused TCS Sees its Staffers Clocking More Learning Hours

IT firm saw its avg learning hours per employee jump to 87.1 in FY24, compared to 82.4 in FY23

Sameer Ranjan.Bakshi
@timesgroup.com

AI PUSH

Move comes close on the heels of TCS doubling its generative AI projects pipeline to $900 million

Bengaluru: In the process of building one of the largest AI-ready workforces in the world, TCS saw its average learning hours per employee increase to 87.1 hours in FY24 from 82.4 hours in FY23.

Not just juniors and mid-level employees, but even senior employees saw their average learning hours increase in FY24, the IT bellwether disclosed in its annual report for FY24.

The development comes close on the heels of TCS doubling its generative AI projects pipeline to $900 million. Interestingly, senior female employees have been putting in more hours to learn than their male counterparts for the last four years, as per the annual report.

While junior male employees at TCS clocked an average of 126 learning hours last fiscal, female junior employees clocked an average of 115 learning hours in the same period. In the case of middle level employees, male and female spent 57 and 51 hours, respectively. And in the senior level, male employees and female employees clocked 49 and 54 learning hours, respectively.

TCS also continued its focus on leveraging internal talent through upskilling and cross-skilling for growth opportunities. In FY24, 33% of job requirements were fulfilled through grooming its internal talent.

The company was not available for comment beyond what is stated in its annual report.

While the percentage of employees above 50 years saw a marginal rise in the last fiscal, the percentage of TCS employees in India aged below 30 dropped from 59% in FY22 to 53% in FY23 and then 50.3% in FY24.

"In FY 2024, TCSers logged 51 million learning hours, and acquired nearly 5 million competencies," K Krithivasan, chief executive and managing director of TCS, said in his letter to shareholders in the annual report of FY24. "A culture of lifelong learning and innovation, by closely linking learning with careers and rewards, has placed us as the global top employer for the 9th consecutive year, across 32 countries — placing us as one in only 16 organisations worldwide to achieve this status."

TCS Elevate – the company's pioneering programme linking learning to career growth and reward – covered over 423,000 employees. More than 35,200 employees were identified as high talent and saw an increase in their compensation, the company said.

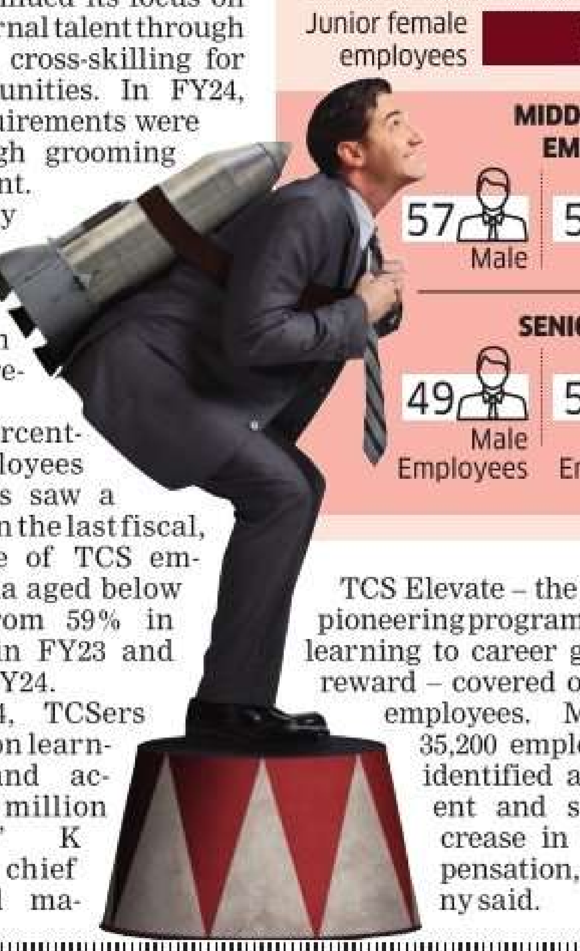
Stepping Up

AVERAGE LEARNING HOURS

FY24	FY23
87.1	82.4 (*Per employee)

Category	Hours
Junior male employees	126
Junior female employees	115

	Male	Female
MIDDLE LEVEL EMPLOYEES	57	51
SENIOR LEVEL	49	54



SIDDHARTH

Investors Taking a Shine to Indian Climate Tech Space

Supportive govt policies, growing consumer cohort attract risk investors to early-stage cos

ON THE HORIZON

CLIMATE TECH COS HAVE INVESTOR'S ATTENTION	2023	2024 (Jan-Apr)
Funding ($ million)	157	45
Number of deals	52	12

RAISING BETS ON CLIMATE SECTOR

Regulatory tailwinds, growing customer cohort attracting VCs

Early investors such as Blume, Leo Capital, Synapses stepping up

EDWARD HOPPER, Sunlight on Brownstones

Jessica.Rajan@timesgroup.com

NewDelhi: Supportive policies and a growing consumer cohort is attracting risk capital investors to back startups in India's climate tech space, especially in the early stages.

Investors like Blume Ventures, enterprise software and fintech-focused Leo Capital, and new firms like Synapses have been raising climate bets over the last 12-15 months.

In March, early-stage venture firm Leo Capital, which has backed startups such as IndiaGold and LambdaTest, made its first climate-tech investment, leading a $3-million round in carbon emission management startup Sprih.

Last month, IIT alumni and veteran investors Ruchira Shukla and Karthik Chandrasekar launched Synapses, a venture capital firm that aims to invest in climate tech and health tech startups. Synapses is looking to raise $125 million for its maiden fund.

Global early-stage firm RTP Global, which closed a new $1-billion fund last year, has stepped up on investment in climate tech startups, having backed three startups last year. In February, it led a $8.7 million funding round in Varaha, which helps offset greenhouse gas emissions.

According to Venture Intelligence data, startups in the climate tech space raised nearly $157 million in 2023 across 52 deals. In the January-April period of 2024, startups in this space raised $45 million through 12 transactions.

Early-stage investor Blume Ventures has two deals in the pipeline in the climate tech space for this year, and is looking to back 10-15 startups over the next three to four years. "Investors follow growth in the (customer) market," said Arpit Agarwal, partner at Blume Ventures.

FOR FULL REPORT, GO TO www.economictimes.com

Wipro Consumer VC Looks for More Follow-on Rounds

THE BLUEPRINT Fund to invest $1-3 m per deal to build a portfolio of 15-16 cos: Sumit Keshan

Beena.Parmar
@timesgroup.com

Bengaluru: The venture capital arm of Wipro Consumer Care & Lighting plans to do more follow-on investments from its second fund, which has a corpus of ₹250 crore, according to its top executive.

The approach of Wipro Consumer Care – Ventures has been to invest $1-3 million per deal with a follow-on investment that can go up to $4 million. The second fund will look to build a portfolio of around 15-16 companies, largely with the same ticket sizes, with a little more focus on follow-on funding, said the VC firm's managing partner, Sumit Keshan.

"We will do more cases of follow-on (investments) in fund II. The need for capital for good and growing companies is still there. So, the options they have is to either look internally or externally. Over a period through learning, we realised that probably we need to increase follow-on as that can be helpful for those companies, and can look at the return on the new money as well," Keshan said.

"And if the going is good, you don't want to keep funding that firm. I think that is the thesis that we want to go with," he added.

Part of the billionaire businessman Azim Premji-led Wipro group, the corporate venture capital firm of Wipro Consumer Care & Lighting aims to start committing capital from the second fund after fully deploying the balance 25% from the ₹200 crore first fund.

According to Keshan, amid the slowing funding environment, as the measurement criteria get stiffer and investment committees get more micro in their approvals, the flow of deals narrows down.

"So, while deals are still happening, they are slower. Weak companies will continue to have problems. More than valuation, they will have a problem raising funds itself ... In that sense, to focus more on portfolio and invest in them is another strategy. And I think this will continue in the future also. It's also a huge confidence booster for the company," he added.

The investor will be doing another two-three deals from the first fund, he said.

SUMIT KESHAN
Managing partner at Wipro Consumer Care – Ventures

The need for capital for good and growing companies is still there

TimesPro's Revenue Tops ₹ 850 cr in FY24; Eyes 5x Growth in 3 Yrs

Our Bureau

VINEET JAIN
MD, The Times Group

As an Indian education brand, we are excited to further the national vision of becoming the global skills capital of the world

New Delhi: TimesPro, an edtech player in the higher education domain, said it surpassed ₹850 crore in revenue for fiscal 2024, growing at a compound annual rate of 75% over the past three years, with overall profitability and growth across several metrics.

In the year ended March 31, the company recorded a 140% increase in earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation (Ebitda) over fiscal 2023, it said in a statement.

"Even as the sector now starts to rebuild itself with a focus on profitability and free cash flow, TimesPro's disciplined strategy from day one stands out - from its financial prudence in managing B2C unit economics to the early diversification into multiple lines of business," the company said, adding that this "helped power its fast-growing, profitable education business".

The company said it expects to grow fivefold in the next three years. It now has a learner base of more than 3.5 million.

"As an Indian education brand, we are excited to further the national vision of becoming the global skills capital of the world," The Times Group managing director Vineet Jain said.

"Our continued growth at TimesPro is testimony to our vision of making quality education and new-age skills widely accessible through technology across the learner life cycle."

The company is currently in the midst of an extensive digital transformation that will enhance the learner experience and enable it to expand the offerings to a wider audience seeking affordable courses, TimesPro said.

It provides face-to-face vocational training for free to learners in government schools, as well as low-cost online job skilling and high impact online Executive MBA programmes from IIMs and IITs.

In the enterprise training business, TimesPro said, it offers state-of-the-art capability building programmes for the managerial pool in corporate and government entities. These include the development of core leadership and technology skills.

The company has further diversified its offerings in the government-funded skilling space and currently works with the skilling initiatives of the central and state governments, it said.

Infy Throws Open Sprawling B'luru Campus to Staff Kids

Our Bureau

Event aimed at helping children get a better understanding of their parents' workplace

Bengaluru: Infosys has thrown open its electronic city campus in Bengaluru for children of its employees for four days from April 20 as the software major seeks to accelerate return to pre-pandemic days.

The event, 'bring your kids to work' aims to draw a large number of employees with their children to the sprawling campus. It is aimed at helping children get a better understanding of their parents' workplace.

"We encourage your child to explore your work area under your supervision," an internal email to employees said. The mail asks employees to keep their teammates informed about their children and bring along some activity books or games to engage the child throughout the day. Infosys did not respond to an email query as of press time on Sunday.

Gopi Thotakura Becomes India's First Space Tourist

Jeff Bezos' space firm Blue Origin launches Indian citizen and five others into space in their NS-25 mission

Nirmal.John@timesgroup.com

Bengaluru: On Sunday evening, Gopichand Thotakura, a 30-year-old from Vijayawada, became India's first civilian astronaut and the country's first space tourist.

He was part of a six-member crew aboard space company Blue Origin's New Shepard NS-25 mission which launched into space from West Texas in the United States. Blue Origin is Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' space company.

Talking exclusively to **ET** right after the crew capsule landed back on earth, Thotakura couldn't contain his excitement.

"Everyone should see earth from the other side," a beaming Thotakura gushed, adding that the view of space that he took in "was not like what was shown in the movies."

Last minute technical checks delayed the launch by about 15 minutes, after which the countdown resumed. The launch saw the crew enduring gravitational forces – or g-forces of up to 5G – or five times bodyweight.

"I tried lifting my hand after the launch, but it was pushed down by the g-forces," said Thotakura.

The crew capsule separated from the rocket around the "Karman line", giving the astronauts a few minutes at the edge of space. At its apogee or peak altitude, Thotakura's spacecraft was 347,500 feet above sea level.

"The Karman line", which is at an altitude of between 80km and 100km, is the boundary between the planet's atmosphere and outer space. There are 657 people who have gone beyond this line, and Thotakura is the latest.

Thotakura, who is a US-based entrepreneur and pilot, has still not revealed how much the entire sojourn cost him.

THE NS-25 CREW (From left) Gopi Thotakura, Mason Angel, Carol Schaller, Ed Dwight, Ken Hess, and Sylvain Chiron

Return gift
A Chicago museum has renamed itself after Kenneth Griffin in recognition of a $125-million gift from the billionaire

ET Panache

NEW DELHI / GURGAON
MONDAY
20 MAY 2024

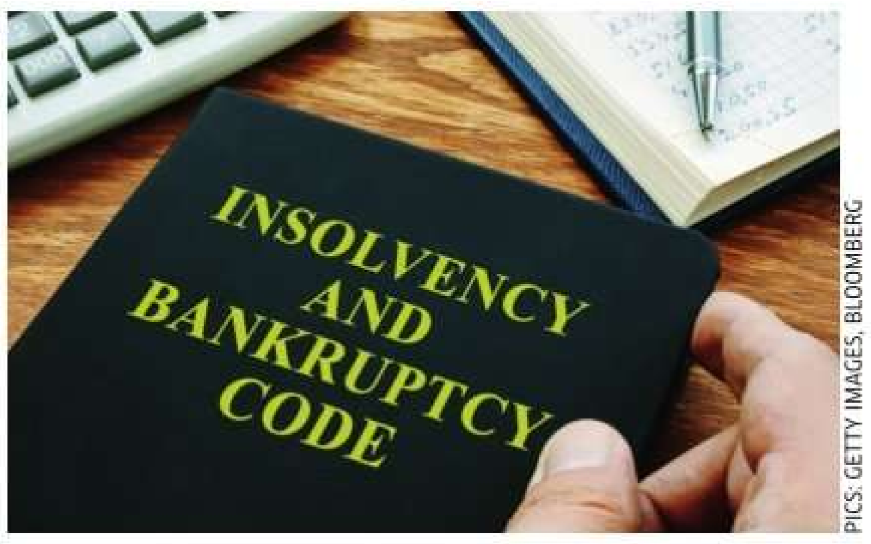
www.etpanache.com

ADVERTORIAL & PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

How one of the world's oldest hedge funds went bankrupt

A series of missteps — like paying executives six-figure bonuses while on the brink of insolvency — sank the Weiss group

The order came straight from founder George Weiss: Sell, sell it all. The fund was closing, he said, near tears, to a group of portfolio managers. After 46 years, his eponymous investment firm — founded in 1978 — was spiralling towards oblivion.



PICS: GETTY IMAGES, BLOOMBERG

This stunning directive marked the culmination of a series of missteps that sank one of the world's oldest hedge funds into bankruptcy.

Interviews with people familiar with Weiss depict a collapse caused not by disastrous trades, but rather years of high spending. Weiss, 81, and chief investment officer Jordi Visser ran the $2.3-billion firm with the glitz of larger, multi-strategy rivals, but without the discipline or ruthlessness to cut losing traders, nor the ability to push more costs onto investors. That proved fatal when Weiss's biggest creditor demanded payment, later accusing the founder of using the firm as his "personal piggy bank".

Good times, bad times

For years, executives racked up miles on the corporate jet and kept portfolio managers on the payroll even as they dragged down returns.

While the fund lost money in only three of its 46 years, it struggled to manage costs. At its 2021 peak, the firm ran $4 billion and had at least 110 employees, including well-compensated traders and a packed back-office staff. Rent for its Park Avenue location in New York alone came to $3 million a year.

George Weiss
Jordi Visser

Veteran executives were kept on even after they posted declines worth tens of millions of dollars. Deputy CIO Mike Edwards lost more than $100 million between 2020 and 2023 and stopped trading as a result, those interviewed said.

Exacerbating these woes, Weiss stopped charging clients for various expenses, unlike what most multi-strategy firms do. Like when the fund fell 0.6 per cent in 2022, it didn't receive performance fees but still had to pay bonuses.

Last-ditch efforts

Last year, in desperate need of aid, Weiss approached potential buyers — including Izzy Englander's Millennium.

Its creditor and strategic asset partner Leucadia granted Weiss more time to pay its debts on at least three occasions. But Weiss didn't have the money. The firm owes Leucadia roughly $100 million, according to a court filing.

According to people with knowledge of the firm's inner workings, colleagues had misgivings about Visser. He joined Weiss after his own hedge fund, Anchor Point Asset Management, lost money and wound down; he once ran a portfolio at Weiss that performed so poorly that the firm shut it. Some staff described him as having a volatile temper and belittling colleagues in meetings.

Weiss's biggest creditor accused the founder of using the $2.3-billion firm as his 'personal piggy bank' to 'line the pockets of' his inner circle

His romantic relationship with Jena Roche, a 39-year-old director, also concerned some colleagues. While she reported to Weiss, executives raised the relationship as a potential conflict.

Visser was also described as being too preoccupied with the podcast, his video series, *Real-Time With Jordi Visser*, and his newsletter, *Jordi's Journal*.

Costly bonuses

Even as the financial situation deteriorated, in February this year, the firm paid more than $28 million in year-end bonuses, with some staff receiving more than their target amounts. Visser and Edwards each received six-figure payouts, people said.

On April 29, Weiss filed for bankruptcy. The hedge fund sued Leucadia to recover $20 million, claiming the payments either favoured Leucadia over other creditors or were obtained unfairly under the threat of litigation over the bonuses.

Leucadia denied the allegations and sued Weiss, claiming he used his firm as a "personal piggy bank" to "line the pockets of" his inner circle.

Still, employees speak highly of the founder, calling him philanthropic and disciplined. His major misstep, they said, was giving executives too much autonomy.

— Bloomberg

Are celebrity keepsakes the new investment trend?

It was just two years ago that Kim Kardashian caused a stir online after walking down the Met Gala's red carpet with the iconic nude mesh dress Marilyn Monroe wore when she sang '*Happy Birthday, Mr President*' to John F Kennedy.

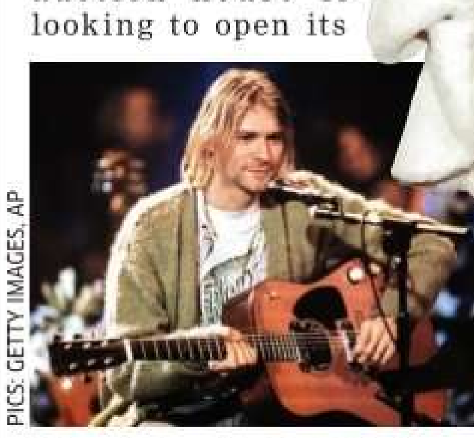
That couldn't have happened without Julien's Auctions, a boutique house that specialises in trading celebrity memorabilia. It sold the gown to *Ripley's Believe It or Not!* in 2016 for a record $4.8 million and helped Kardashian negotiate the loan for the 2022 soiree. Soon after, a Monroe fan called Julien's offering $10 million to buy the outfit, but *Ripley's* declined, preferring to keep it as a trophy asset.

The episode shows that keepsakes, like fine art, are now increasingly viewed as an alternative investment that can yield lucrative returns, says Darren Julien, who founded Julien's.

Market attraction

The Los Angeles-based auction house is looking to open its first Asian office in Hong Kong to take advantage of the booming business in the region. In a sign that pop culture is extending beyond the US, a set of ensembles worn by Korean boy-band BTS for the '*Dynamite*' music video recently sold for more than quadruple the top estimate.

"People do look at this like the stock market," Julien, 55, said in an April interview in Hong Kong, adding that buyers often ask him who'll be the next "blue-chip" artists they should add to their portfolio.



PICS: GETTY IMAGES, AP

(Above) The guitar Kurt Cobain played during his *MTV Unplugged* performance sold for $6 million; (Right) A Marilyn Monroe fan made a $10-million bid for the dress Kim Kardashian wore to the 2022 Met Gala

Strong demand

While high borrowing rates and a volatile economy have hurt art sales, the market for keepsakes has surged and is expected to expand to $762 billion by 2032 from $475 billion last year, according to Econ Market Research.

The items easily go for millions of dollars: In 2020, Julien's sold the guitar Nirvana's Kurt Cobain played at the *MTV Unplugged* concert in 1993 for a record $6 million, and in November, a client bought another one that belonged to Eric Clapton for $1.3 million. Rival auction house Sotheby's sold six of Michael Jordan's championship sneakers for $8 million in February, while a rookie card signed by the basketball legend went for more than $1 million at a Christie's auction two years ago.

— Bloomberg

quote unquote

Seth Waugh

PIC: GETTY IMAGES, AP

"It's messy and it seems to get messier every week. I'm a very optimistic type and I'm sort of hoping it's darkest before dawn, but I think the best thing for the game is a deal."

— SETH WAUGH, CEO, PGA of America, on how the delay in the talks between the PGA Tour and Saudi-backed LIV Golf league is impacting the sport.

PIC: GETTY IMAGES

40 The number of rhinos that a billionaire-backed non-profit is relocating to wild areas, following the purchase of the world's biggest privately-owned herd.

African Parks, whose backers include the charitable foundations of Howard Buffett and the Walton Family, had acquired 2,000 rhinos, but will relocate 40 of them to the community-owned Munywana Conservancy in South Africa, as part of a plan to relocate 15 per cent of the global population of the pachyderms.

Sports World Play

VITALS

World Para Athletics C'ships: Silver, Bronze For India on Day 3

The Indian team picked up its first medals in the World Para Athletics Championships with high jumper Nishad Kumar and 200m runner Preethi Pal winning a silver and bronze respectively in Kobe, Japan, on Sunday. Kumar, a Tokyo Paralympics silver medallist, cleared 1.99m to finish second in the men's T47 high jump final and pick up India's first medal on the third day of competitions. Preethi Pal then added a bronze to India's tally after finishing third in women's T35 200m final with a time of 30.49 seconds. PTI

No personal Coaches, Media Blackout in NRAIs Oly Guidelines

The National Rifle Association of India has laid down strict rules for Paris Olympic-bound shooters, which includes not taking the help of personal coaches at the national camp and a "media blackout". In a letter sent to Olympic-bound shooters, titled, "NRAI Olympic Team Undertaking and SOP for Paris 2024 Olympic Games - Pistol/Rifle Teams", the NRAI said: "Personal coaches and including physics, nutritionist, psychologist will not be entitled as part of the NRAI National Team program of the Olympic Games." PTI

Satwik-Chirag Wins Thailand Open

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy (L) and Chirag Shetty after winning the Thailand Open in Bangkok on Sunday PTI

In a confidence-boosting performance ahead of Paris Olympics, star Indian shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty won the Thailand Open Super 500 badminton tournament in Bangkok on Sunday. They beat Chen Bo Yang and Liu Yi of China in straight games.

Satwik and Chirag, the world number three pair, prevailed 21-15 21-15 over Liu and Chen, ranked 29th, for their ninth BWF world tour title in men's doubles.

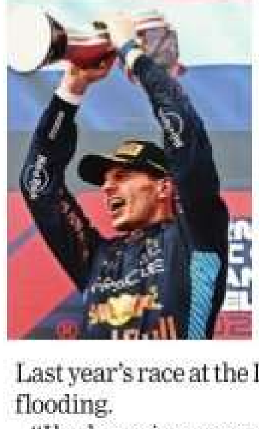
It was also the second title of the season for the Asian Games champions following their triumph at the French Open Super 750 in March. They had also finished runners-up at Malaysia Super 1000 and India Super 750.

"It has been a lucky tournament for us. The journey started from here. We lifted this title in 2019 and again we are lifting it here now. After 2019, we went on to win many tournaments and, hopefully, it will give more boost to us in the upcoming important tournaments," Satwik said after the win.

"They keep on playing fast and we knew we couldn't relax. Overall, I think it's the best match we played throughout the tournament".

Asked about Paris Games, Chirag said: "Not just us but all athletes want to go out there in the Olympics and win that medal and we too want that and hopefully we will play well there." PTI

There's No Stopping Max



Max Verstappen held off a late charge by McLaren's Lando Norris to win the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix by less than a second in Imola, Italy, on Sunday.

Red Bull's triple Formula One world champion took the chequered flag just 0.725 of a second ahead of the man who beat him at the previous round in Miami and sensed he might snatch another.

The win was Verstappen's fifth in seven races this season, the 59th of his career and the third edition in a row at Imola. Last year's race at the Italian circuit was cancelled due to heavy flooding.

"I had no grip anymore. I was sliding a lot. I saw Lando closing in. The last 10 laps were flat out," said a relieved Verstappen, who had appeared set for another easy win but had to sweat ultimately for the spoils.

Reuters

CITY, MAN!

Manchester City clinch fourth successive Premier League title with win over West Ham

Richard Jolly

And so, some 136 years after the foundation of the Football League, England finally has a team who have done the quartet. Manchester City are the first team to become champions in four consecutive seasons. Pep Guardiola has a historic achievement; another one, given the rare and unique distinctions he has engineered and amassed amid his own track record of unparalleled success. There is a debate to be had if this City side are the greatest England has seen but they can claim to be the most relentless. Since the Club World Cup, they have taken 57 points from a possible 63. If Arsenal's excellence left them with little room for error in the run-in, City made none, finishing with nine straight wins, each by at least two goals. They have turned winning into a routine: across games, months, seasons and an era.

There remains the odd juxtaposition of 115 still unheard charges and the brilliance of the homegrown Phil Foden but, for now, the latter proved the determining factor. Any notion that West Ham could deliver Arsenal the title, the Premier League a seismic upset and David Moyes a glorious farewell was swiftly disabused. While City have endured final-day drama before, Guardiola's prediction that this would be like the nerve-shredding last game against Aston Villa in 2022 proved very wrong. Mohammed Kudus produced a late contender for goal of the season, but only when City were already up. A goal ahead inside 80 seconds, two to the good within 20 minutes, this was a saunter in the sunshine. City were dominant, Foden rampant, his early double a further illustration of his capacity to score goals that are both important and excellent.

Pepped Up

An unprecedented 4-straight Premier League title and a sixth in seven seasons under manager Pep Guardiola

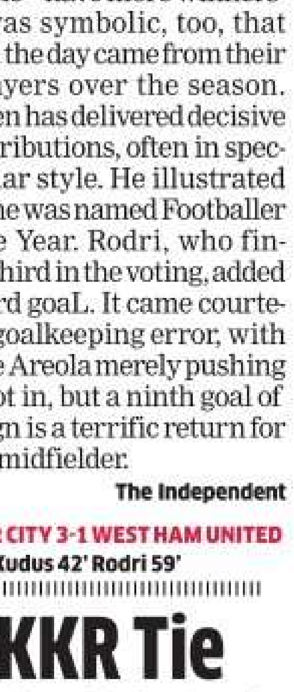
A 17th trophy for Guardiola in eight years at the club —could rise to 18 if they beat Manchester United in next week's FA Cup final.

Guardiola had already led City to back-to-back titles in 2018 and '19 with totals of 100 and 98 points before his run was ended by Liverpool.

PREMIER LEAGUE FINAL STANDINGS

# TEAM	Mat	W	D	L	G	Pts
1 Man City	38	28	7	3	+62	91
2 Arsenal	38	28	5	5	+62	89
3 Liverpool	38	24	10	4	+44	82
4 Aston Villa	38	20	8	10	+15	68
5 Tottenham	38	20	6	12	+13	66

2022-23 season was the crowning glory when they won the PL, Champions League and FA Cup. They have also won three League Cups and



While Guardiola's remarkable managerial career has brought 12 league titles in 15 seasons, at 23, Foden has won the Premier League for a sixth time. It underlines the scale of City's success in recent years that, already, only five Manchester United greats – Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Gary Neville, Denis Irwin and Roy Keane – have more winners' medals. It was symbolic, too, that City's goal on the day came from their two best players over the season.

It is so hard to put into words what we've done today...we have put ourselves into the history books
PHIL FODEN after scoring twice (At 23, the City midfielder has already won 6 Premier League titles)

Foden has delivered decisive contributions, often in spectacular style. He illustrated why he was named Footballer of the Year. Rodri, who finished third in the voting, added the third goaL. It came courtesy of a goalkeeping error, with Alphonse Areola merely pushing his low shot in, but a ninth goal of the campaign is a terrific return for a defensive midfielder.

The Independent

MANCHESTER CITY 3-1 WEST HAM UNITED
Foden 2', 18' Kudus 42' Rodri 59'

SRH Chase Down 214 with Ease

Abhishek Sharma bossed Punjab Kings (PBKS) bowlers with yet another explosive half-century as Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) cruised to a four-wicket win in the IPL in Hyderabad on Sunday.

Opting to bat on a flat track, PBKS posted an imposing 214/5 riding on Prabhsimran Singh's 45-ball 71 and skipper Jitesh Sharma's final over heroics.

But SRH looked in complete control of the tall chase after losing Travis Head off the first ball and chased down the target with five balls to spare.

Abhishek went about his business with utmost nonchalance for a 21-ball fifty, his third half-century of the season. He smoked six sixes and five boundaries in his knock of 66 from 28 balls. PTI

Abhishek Sharma

BRIEF SCORES

Punjab Kings 214/5 in 20 overs (Taide 46 in 27, Prabhsimran 71 in 45, Rossouw 49 in 24; T Natarajan 2/33)

Sunrisers Hyderabad 215/6 in 19.1 overs (Abhishek 66 in 28, Tripathi 33 in 18, N Reddy 37 in 25, Klaasen 42 in 26; Arshdeep Singh 2/37)

Rain Washes Out RR-KKR Tie

Abhishek Rajasthan Royals were denied a shot at a top-two finish in the IPL as their final league match against Kolkata Knight Riders was abandoned without a ball being bowled because of rain in Guwahati on Sunday. As a result, KKR will face Sunrisers Hyderabad in Qualifier 1 at Ahmedabad on Tuesday, while third-placed RR will take on Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Eliminator at the same venue on Wednesday. IANS

THE PLAYOFFS

MAY 21 Qualifier 1 (Ahmedabad)
Kolkata Knight Riders vs **Sunrisers Hyderabad**

MAY 22 Eliminator (Ahmedabad)
Rajasthan Royals vs **Royal Challengers Bengaluru**

MAY 24 Qualifier 2 (Chennai) Loser of **Qualifier 1** vs **Winner of Eliminator 1**

MAY 26 FINAL (CHENNAI) Winner of **Qualifier 1** vs **Winner of Qualifier 2**

POINTS TABLE

TEAM	M	W	L	NR	PTS	NRR
KKR	13	9	3	1	19	1.428
SRH	14	8	5	1	17	0.414
RR	13	8	5	0	16	0.273
RCB	14	7	7	0	14	0.459
CSK	14	7	7	0	14	0.392
DC	14	7	7	0	14	-0.377
LSG	14	7	7	0	14	-0.667
GT	14	5	7	2	12	-1.063
PBKS	14	5	9	0	10	-0.353
MI	14	4	10	0	8	-0.318

Aurobindo, Dr Reddy's, Sun Pharma Recall Products in US

PTI

New Delhi: Drugmakers Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharma and Aurobindo Pharma are recalling products in the US market due to manufacturing issues, as per the latest Enforcement Report of the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA).

Dr Reddy's Laboratories is recalling close to 20,000 cartons of a medication used to control blood phenylalanine levels in adults and children. Princeton (New Jersey)-based Dr Reddy's Laboratories is recalling Javygtor (sapropterin dihydrochloride) Powder for Oral Solution (100mg) due to it being a "sub-potent drug", USFDA stated.

The company is also recalling another lot of sapropterin dihydrochloride for the same reason, it added. The USFDA said the drug maker initiated the Class I recall in the US on April 8 this year.

Firms have manufacturing issues, as per the latest Enforcement Report of the USFDA

As per the US health regulator, a Class I recall pertains to defective products that can cause serious health problems.

The USFDA said Sun Pharma is recalling 11,016 vials of Amphotericin B Liposome for Injection, used to treat fungal infections, in the US market.

The company's US-based arm initiated the Class II recall on April 19 this year due to "Out of specification for assay", the USFDA stated.

Similarly, "Aurobindo Pharma is recalling 13,605 bottles of Clorazepate Dipotassium Tablets (3.75mg and 7.5mg), used to treat anxiety, in the American market. The company's US-based arm is recalling the affected lot due to "Discoloration: Dotted and yellow spots on tablets", USFDA stated. The company initiated the Class II recall on April 24 this year.

The USFDA stated that another drug firm FDC Ltd is recalling 3,82,104 units of Timolol Maleate Ophthalmic Solution, used to treat glaucoma, in the American market.

Growth Gets Thinner for Zara as Competition Grows in Size

Inditex Trent's revenue grew at a slower pace of 8% in FY24 as against 40% in previous year

Sagar.Malviya@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: Spain's Inditex, the owner of fashion brand Zara, saw its slowest ever sales growth in India, excluding the pandemic year, in FY24 as the world's largest fashion group faced rising competition from global rivals in the clothing market that is increasingly getting cluttered.

Inditex Trent, its joint venture with Tata that runs 23 of Zara stores in India, saw revenue rise 8% to ₹2,775 crore last fiscal, significantly down from 40% growth a year ago, according to Trent's annual report. Net profit was down too at ₹244 crore, an 8% drop.

Zara has been a runaway success since its arrival in the country more than a decade ago but after initially doubling sales every two years, the brand's rate of expansion had come down in the past few years. "The market is very competitive, and the challenges are real. Nevertheless, the opportunity pool and the size of the market means that there is space for multiple successful players. Trent remains well placed to navigate this next phase of growth by leveraging our platform and growth engines," P Venkatesalu, chief executive officer at Trent, said in the report.

Trent that runs Westside has shifted focus on its lower priced fast fashion brand Zudio, which opened about four new stores every week on average last fiscal to take the total store count at 545 doors. Trent also has a separate association with the Inditex group to operate Massimo Dutti stores in India. The entity saw revenues rise 14% to ₹102 crore.

Net profit of Inditex Trent, its JV with Tata, was down too, at ₹244 crore, an 8% drop

Experts said consumer demand has been affected in the past couple of years with brands having to work extra hard to get same-store growth and much of top-line growth has come for brands from store additions.

"Most international and premium Indian brands are competing for a relatively narrow slice of the population pie in the larger urban centres. While the Indian market is a bright spot amid the gloom in the world's major economies, global pressures are likely to play a part in the confidence among brands to invest in expansion," Devangshu Dutta, founder of retail consulting firm Third Eyesight, said, adding there is not necessarily "fatigue" for the brand.

"But if the contest for the consumer's attention is more intense and the consumer's choices are more fragmented across a wider choice of brands, that will definitely have an impact on any individual brand's performance." Being the world's second most-populous country, India is an attractive market for apparel brands, especially with youngsters increasingly embracing western-style clothing. Most of Zara's backend and merchandise sourcing are handled by Inditex, while the Tata expertise is mainly for identifying real estate and locations.

VIJAY P

PE MAJOR MAY INVEST $150M TO BUY 26% STAKE IN TANDON GROUP FIRM

KKR in Talks to Buy into Healthcare BPO Co Infinx

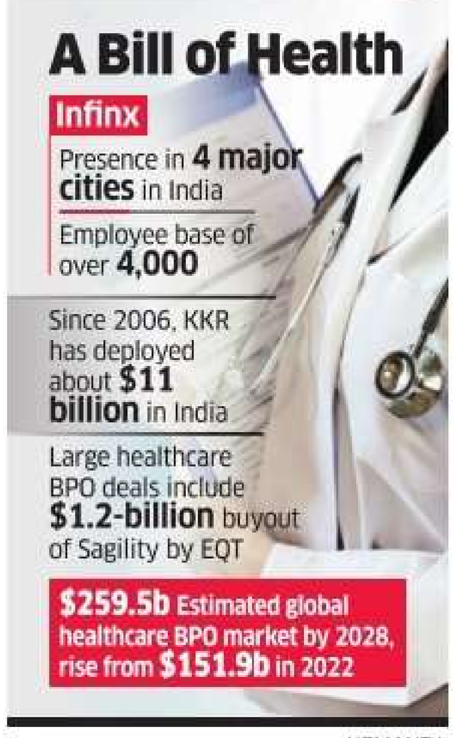
Reghu.Balakrishnan
@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: KKR is looking to acquire a minority stake in the Tandon Group-owned healthcare BPO Infinx Healthcare. The global private equity major is likely to invest about $150 million, or ₹1,250 crore, to acquire about 26% stake in Infinx, two people aware of the development told ET.

"We expect this sector (healthcare BPO) to continue growing in India, driven by global demand, and believe that Infinx is well placed to meet this gap through its tech-enabled solutions," Akshay Tanna, partner and head of India private equity at KKR, told ET.

"We will draw on our local knowledge and healthcare expertise to support Infinx's growth and build a healthcare platform, including through organic and inorganic growth strategies."

He refused to disclose further details, but said India is one of the world's top providers of healthcare RCM solutions, given the depth of local talent and range of quality solutions. KKR is looking to build Infinx into a platform by doing bolt-on acquisitions — or, acquisition of smaller companies in the same line of business — over time and grow it, said one of the people cited above. Based in San Jose, Infinx Healthcare works with medical billing companies, radiology groups, physician practices and long-term care pharmacies, providing complete revenue cycle management (RCM) solutions.



HEMANT L

RCM refers to the process of identifying, collecting, and managing incoming payments.

Launched in 2012 as Tandon Information Solutions, Infinx is also into medical transcription, eligibility and benefit verification, complete medical billing, medical coding (across specialty) and comprehensive account receivable management services.

It has presence in four major cities in India and an employee base of over 4,000. "KKR's investment is a testament to Infinx's success over the past decade," said Jaideep Tandon, chief executive of Infinx Healthcare. "Success of our customers is central to us at Infinx and with KKR's support and experience in healthcare and technology we will be able to strengthen our capabilities to deliver innovative, AI-backed solutions to accelerate Infinx's growth, and help healthcare providers to provide exceptional care to their patients," he added.

Headquartered in Mumbai and Silicon Valley, Tandon incubates startups in India. Its operating companies include Infinx Healthcare, Isharya and Syrma Technology. One of its startups, FreeCharge was sold to Snapdeal in 2015 for ₹2,400 crore, which is regarded as one of the largest internet M&A deals in India.

Founded in 1975, the group has invested in startups including payment gateway Razorpay, goods delivery platform Porter, used car platform Spinny, fast food delivery service Daily Ninja, and pharmacy Generico. It is promoted by chairman Manohar Lal Tandon, and his sons Sandeep, Jaideep and Sudeep who play leadership roles at Tandon Group.

KKR has been an active investor in the healthcare sector globally. Early this month, it acquired Indian medical devices company Healthium Medtech (formerly Sutures India) from Apax Partners for ₹7,000 crore ($840 million) enterprise value, outbidding a consortium of Mankind Pharma and ChrysCapital.

IANS

Burning Rubber

Participants try out some stunts during the Indian Racing Festival organised by RPPL and JK Tyre at KTPO Convention Centre Main Road at Whitefield in Bengaluru on Sunday.

Workspace Co Smartworks Rents 14-Floor Tower in Pune

FILE PHOTO

Kailash.Babar@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: Managed workspace platform Smartworks has picked up an entire tower with 14 floors of office space spread over 600,000 sq ft in Pune's Balewadi through a long-term lease to set up a coworking center and expand its presence in the city.

The company has leased the space for a total of 15 years in an upcoming commercial tower 43 EQ close to Balewadi High Street taking its portfolio of managed workspaces in Pune to over 3 million sq ft.

"Our growth in Pune has been outstanding and this expansion aligns with our aim to empower businesses by offering them tailored office solutions to boost productivity and foster growth in a professional, fully equipped and managed setting," said Neetish Sarda, founder of Smartworks.

The company has leased the space for 15 years in an upcoming commercial tower 43 EQ close to Balewadi High Street

The company is aiming to start operations at this new co-working hub in October and once live, the hub is expected to accommodate over 8,000 desks.

With a presence in 13 cities and a portfolio comprising more than 39 centres spanning over 8 million sq ft, Smartworks caters to sector-agnostic large organisations, including large enterprises, as well as unicorns and soonicorns, serving over 550 clients. The upcoming office space is being tailor made and aimed at offering a conducive environment for enhanced productivity and opportunities for collaboration and networking, the company said.

Owing to the increased need for adaptable workspace solutions from large corporations and dynamic startups globally, the Indian market has emerged as one of the fastest-growing hubs for flexible office spaces, particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Several factors, including the expansion of startup ventures, evolving work environments, and the requirement for economical and versatile solutions, have been contributing to the escalating demand for flexible office spaces.

In a Nutshell

NCRTC Invites Bids for Commercial Space Leases

NEW DELHI The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC), which is executing the ₹30,000-crore Delhi-Meerut regional rapid transit system (RRTS) project, has invited bids for leasing of commercial space at three stations along the corridor. The NCRTC plans to develop the stations as retail hubs, which will help increase its non-fare revenue. The project has received funding from the Asian Development Bank, New Development Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Experts say the network of rapid rail will revive realty markets of Ghaziabad, Meerut and other areas along the corridor. **—Faizan Haidar**

'High Airfares Remain a Challenge'

NEW DELHI High airfares remain a challenge that impacts India's leisure and business travellers, Thomas Cook India's executive chairman Madhavan Menon said. In an interview with PTI, he shared that airline capacity too continues to be a challenge despite an increase in scheduled flights. "We hope to see the demand-supply constraints ease a bit with new aircraft being introduced into the network, but this will be over the long term," Menon said. He informed that Thomas Cook India is working on expanding and strengthening its physical network.

Investors Will Take Final Call on Zee Leadership: Goenka

EARNINGS CALL Yet to discuss his reappointment with shareholders, says MD facing a Sebi probe

Javed.Farooqui
@timesgroup.com

VARANI SAHU

Mumbai: Zee Entertainment Enterprises managing director and chief executive Punit Goenka said he has not discussed his reappointment with any shareholder, even as his five-year term is set to end in December.

"So, at the end of the day, it is the shareholders who will decide whether I am the right person or not, or whether somebody else needs to lead this company," Goenka told analysts during the company's Q4 earnings call on Friday.

Domestic institutional investors own a 35.56% stake in the company as of March 2024. Some of the top investors include ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund and HDFC Mutual Fund.

Goenka, who is part of the promoter family that holds a 4% stake, is the longest-serving CEO of Zee. In 2019, Goenka was reappointed as the MD and CEO of the entertainment giant, beginning January 2020.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India is investigating Goenka and his father, Subhash Chandra, for allegedly diverting the entertainment company's funds to promoter-owned firms.

In August 2023, the capital market regulator passed a confirmatory order against Goenka and Chandra, barring them from holding directorships or top managerial roles in Zee.

The Securities Appellate Tribunal lifted Sebi's ban order against Goenka in October last year while allowing the regulator to continue its probe against the Zee promoters.

The Sebi investigation against Goenka was a key reason for the failure of the merger deal between Zee and Sony Pictures Networks India. Sony was averse to having him as the CEO of the proposed merged entity and instead wanted its executive, NP Singh, to lead it.

Sony terminated its merger agreement with Zee in January this year. Recently, Zee also withdrew its application from the National Company Law Tribunal that sought the implementation of the merger agreement.

"This decision (withdrawing the petition) will enable the company to sharply focus on growth and strategic opportunities in order to generate higher value for all shareholders," Goenka said, adding that the company will continue to contest Sony's $90 million termination fee demand before the Singapore International Arbitration Centre.

Goenka, who is part of the promoter family that holds a 4% stake in the company, is the longest -serving CEO of Zee

Goenka said his single-minded focus is to ensure that the company achieves its 18-20% Ebitda target by FY26. Zee has terminated 15% of the staff and cut down investments in the technology centre and content, as part of efforts to reduce cost.

"We have been implementing a series of steps since the latter half of the quarter, the results of which will reflect on the bottom line in the financial year 2025," Goenka said.

Smartphone Co HTech Plans to Raise $100-M to Diversify Operations

Proceeds will also be used to co-create India-specific products

Subhrojit.Mallick
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: HTech, the newly formed smartphone company which has a licence to sell Honor-branded handsets in India, is looking to raise about $100 million from investors to diversify into manufacturing, co-create India-specific products and improve customer experience, a top executive said.

"We've already ploughed in $10 million into the business and are now looking to raise another $100 million, of which $20 million will be raised in the next six months," Madhav Sheth, chief executive officer of HTech, told ET. The smartphone player will be looking to dilute equity in the company — in which Sheth is now a majority shareholder — to raise the funds. "When you are doing something for the first time, having an equity partner will ensure the scale of growth is much faster," the executive said.

Since inception in August 2023, HTech has launched two handsets across the mid-premium and budget segments, and is looking to launch six more by the end of 2024, targeting the fast-growing premium segment which contributes 20% in volume terms to the smartphone market, according to Counterpoint Research.

"We are looking to launch six mid-range and premium products, out of which some will be imported, and may be three or four could be locally manufactured," Sheth said, adding that by the end of 2025, the company plans to sell at least 5 million units of locally made Honor phones in India.

HTech is in talks with electronics manufacturing services partners to get started on manufacturing Honor devices in India from the third quarter (Q3) of the 2024. "CBUs (completely boxed-units) are not able to survive in India anyways due to high duties, but to test the waters, we will continue to import a few units to see if they match the Indian consumer's expectations," said Sheth.

Cos Revamp Parental Leave Policies in Bid to be Inclusive

Many cos rolling out foster caregiver leave policy, gender-neutral parental leave programme among other initiatives

Sreeradha.Basu@timesgroup.com

Bengaluru: India Inc is revamping parental leave policies in a nod to changing family structures and an increasingly diverse work environment, as companies seek to foster inclusion, spur women's workforce participation and attract and retain talent from varied backgrounds.

Such policies, being implemented under heads such as parental, adoption, supporting caregiver, foster and kinship, are designed to support parents — including biological, LGBTQIA+, adoptive and surrogate — challenging traditional gender roles and enabling everyone to participate equally in childcare.

Last week, Colgate-Palmolive India extended its supportive caregiver policy from four weeks (to be availed within six months of the child's birth or adoption) to three months (to be availed within a year), to enhance gender equality at the workplace by fostering a culture of shared or equal parenting. Secondary caregivers include partners, spouses or other family members supporting the primary caregiver and the policy covers biological parents, adoptive parents and those involved in surrogacy.

"It's an evolution of the thinking that has been in the company for a while," said Balaji Sreenivasan, executive vice-president, human resources, Colgate-Palmolive India. "We, as an employer, have a role in making equal parenting a reality in this country."

A large number of women in Corporate India drop out of the workforce after childbirth, and gender-neutral parenting leave can level the playing field for working mothers.

"In Scandinavian countries, there is high women's employment, and equal parenting plays a big role in this," said Sreenivasan.

In March, in a first-of its kind initiative, Hindustan Unilever rolled out a foster/kinship caregiver leave policy, offering up to four weeks of leave to employees who opt for pre-adoption foster care or become legal guardians as per their familial requirements. The company also enhanced its secondary caregiver leave and expanded its daycare tie-ups.

"We are deeply committed to fostering an inclusive environment for people from all backgrounds and acknowledge the changing societal structures. Our approach is guided by active listening and proactively anticipating evolving needs," said Anuradha Razdan, executive director, human resources, Hindustan Unilever.

"In fact, all our parental policies — be it birth, adoptive or surrogate — are gender-neutral, and same-sex partners are included wherever applicable. These initiatives reflect our dedication to providing essential support, enabling our employees to thrive both professionally and personally," she said. In July last year, Volvo Group India introduced a gender-neutral parental leave programme, which allows 26 weeks of leave for primary caregivers (who will also be entitled to another 26 weeks of unpaid extended leave or flexible working), and a month of leave for secondary caregivers, available in tranches up to a year later.

ZAHID