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Flower Power in Hindi Heartland

The rise of Telugu masala movies and mysterious disappearance of the quintessential Hindi blockbuster

DEEP DIVE >> 5

magazine

Inside Story

Deep Dive P 4

■ Cos Offering 'Better-for-you' Products, Sans Refined Flour & Palm Oil, are Hitting Critical Mass

■ Can Alternate Cola Brands that Ride Anti-US Sentiment Play the Long Game?

Sunday Chatter P 6

■ What Lies Below Star City Mall Doesn't Matter in the Here & Now

■ This New Year, Let's All Manifest, Mindfully

Techtonic P 8

■ Mapping New India

Leisure P 9

■ The 7-Minute Stress Workout

World Play P 10

■ India in tatters after Head's scintillating 140 in second test

■ Behind India's rise in chess is WestBridge Anand Chess Academy

Pure Politics, Bottom Line & Around the World

ET WEALTH ON MONDAY

14th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

wealth

RETIREMENT PLANNING

Are you doing it right?

PURE POLITICS
PAGE >> 2

MVA MLAs Skip Oath Event, say Mahayuti Tampered with EVMs

The opposition MVA boycotted the swearing-in of new MLAs at the Maharashtra Assembly, alleging that the Mahayuti alliance won by manipulating the EVMs. The opposition alliance seems to be coming apart, with the SP talking about quitting it. **Krishna Kumar** reports.

BJP Looking to Field Heavyweights Against Senior AAP Leaders

BJP is gearing up for Assembly polls in the National Capital, and is looking to field its heavyweights against senior AAP leaders including Arvind Kejriwal, reports **Jatin Takkar**. Within the BJP, there is a feeling to give more emphasis to young and fresh faces.

REDUCING NCLT WORKLOAD

New Insolvency Framework to be Creditor-led: Mital

IBBI chair says focus on CoC; RBI DG Rao bats for 'enforceable code of conduct' for CoC

Our Bureau

New Delhi: Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) chairman Ravi Mital on Saturday said a creditor-led resolution framework under the bankruptcy law is in the offing. The move aims to lower the workload of the adjudicating authority by enabling the committee of creditors (CoC) to take on greater responsibility and expedite the rescue of stressed firms, he said.

"We would be happy if less work goes before the NCLT (National Company Law Tribunal)," Mital said, conceding that the adjudicating authority is now over-burdened. He also rooted for a formal group insolvency framework.

Mital was speaking at an international conference, organised by IBBI and INSOL India. ET reported on September 18 that a creditor-led insolvency resolution mechanism, largely involving out-of-court arrangements, is in the works to ease NCLT's burden and quicken recoveries for lenders.

A voluntary group insolvency mechanism is being finalised, ET reported in October, which could empower the CoC of various bankrupt companies of a group to decide if they need to join hands or pursue resolution processes separately. The CoC typically comprises financial creditors. A formal group insolvency framework was necessi-

Boosting Outcome

Creditor-led resolution framework | A formal group insolvency mechanism

Mediation between creditors and debtors

New tech platform in 1-1.5 yrs

RAO'S SUGGESTIONS

An enforceable code of conduct for CoC

Quick insolvency filing by lenders after default

Adequate skill sets for RP

WHY DELAY IN IBC FILING IS COSTLY

86.1% recovery vs fair value of firms, firmed up after cases are admitted

31% recovery vs creditors' claims (partly due to value erosion between default and filing dates)

tated after the interconnected nature of group companies delayed resolution in a few cases, such as Videocon, Era Infrastructure, Lanco, Educomp, Amtek, Adel, Jaypee and Aircel.

Prompt Action Sought >> 7

GROWING FOUR-FOLD SINCE FY20...

Outstanding I-T Demands at ₹42Lcr

Outstanding demands at the Income Tax Department have quadrupled to ₹42 lakh crore, from ₹10 lakh crore in 2019-20. Of this, ₹27 lakh crore is flagged as difficult to recover by the department, according to a report of the parliamentary standing committee on finance. >> 3

APPAREL ORDER ENQUIRIES ON THE RISE

B'desh Hangs by a Thread; Surat may be Stitch in Time

Global garments brands unhappy with political unrest, look to shift to India

DP Bhattacharya

Gandhinagar: Many brands, both global and local, that were procuring garments from Bangladesh are now looking at Indian manufacturers to meet their demand, as they grow increasingly uncomfortable with continuing instability in the neighbouring country.

Textile industry insiders in Surat said they are getting enquiries for the production and supply of ready-to-wear garments from such brands. If these materialise into orders, they estimate the growth of Surat's garment sector could accelerate to 20-25%, from the current 12% a year. Textile hubs in Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Noida too could benefit from

Textile Test

If interest keeps shifting from Bangladesh, Surat garment sector may grow faster

Expansion may be 20-25% per annum instead of its current 12%: Market watchers

SURAT Current production 10m garments/mth

Specialises in man-made fibre, denim

Other cotton hubs may also benefit if trade moves away from Bangladesh

BANGLADESH PRODUCTION CLUSTERS
Dhaka, Chittagong, Gazipur, Ashulia, Narayanganj, Khulna, Narsingdi, Rajshahi



FOR CHINA, MYANMAR SUPPLIES

B'desh Overturns Hasina Internet Plan for India's N-E

Bangladesh's internet regulator has reversed a decision of the Sheikh Hasina govt to let the country be the transit point for internet supply to India's northeast. It has claimed the plan will adversely impact prospects to become a regional internet hub. **Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury** reports. >> 2

Govt Assistance >> 7

Battery Innovations may Boost E-car Revolution in Sub-₹20 lakh Segment

Cos look at China's charging solutions that can lift electric PV sales in India

Lijee Philip

New Delhi: India's electric car market is shifting into high gear, particularly in the affordable segment, with 86% of sales concentrated in the sub-₹20 lakh segment. With consumers increasingly choosing battery-powered SUVs over traditional hatchbacks, the electric PV sales are expected to exceed the 100,000 mark this year. While early market leader Tata

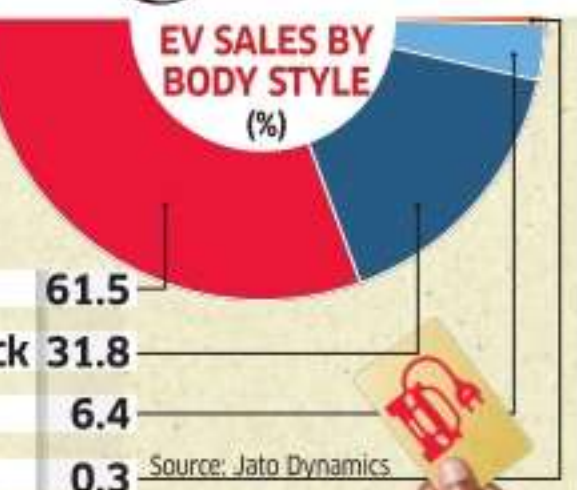
Motors is facing headwinds, upcoming launches of Suzuki e-Vitara, Mahindra BE.6e and CEV9e early next year are expected to recharge the market and boost competition.

Experts said more choices in the electric PV space will only make the market grow. They also said stricter emission penalties and the growing environmental benefits of EVs are driving automakers towards electrification.

Taking cues from China, the world's largest electric vehicle market, most car companies are exploring innovative solutions including battery-as-a-service and battery swapping stations to overcome charging infrastructure challenges.

Industry Set for New Launches >> 7

All Charged Up
NO. OF ELECTRIC MODELS BY BODY STYLE (JAN-OCT '24)



Road Ahead
Upcoming launches to intensify competition

China's battery-as-a-service model, battery swapping stations show the way to tackle charging infra challenges

AUTOMAKER WILL ALSO CONTEST CASE FILED BY INDIGO PARENT

M&M to Rename New eSUV as BE 6

M&M will rebrand its eSUV as "BE 6" from "BE 6e", after IndiGo owner InterGlobe Aviation filed a trademark infringement case against it. M&M will also contest brand rights of BE 6e. >> 3

BID TO BOOST EMPLOYEE OFFICE PRESENCE

Cos Fix WFO Blues It's Not All Work & No Play for Staff

Companies are avoiding strict return-to-office mandates that may alienate staff, raise attrition

Two-way Street
STEPS TAKEN TO MAKE WFO MORE ATTRACTIVE

Addressing staff resistance through open communication

Upgraded office space with wellness, recreation zones and collaborative areas

Team engagement activities

Flexibility to teams to decide their days in office

Offer flexible options such as commute benefits, subsidised meals, recharge breaks to ease transition

Sreeradha Basu & Brinda Sarkar

Bengaluru: A bunch of companies are trying to find the right balance between flexibility, employee well-being and incentives as they look to ease the transition of getting staff back to more days in office.

"Work away credit" policies, upgraded office spaces with wellness zones and collaborative areas, commute benefits, team engagement activities, wellness programmes, scheduled recharge breaks and flexibility to teams to decide their days in office are among the options companies like Bizongo, Thoughtworks, Veeva Group and Intuit are giving to employees to make them more amen-

le to return to office (RTO). Organisations are also prioritising open communication, actively seeking employee feedback and addressing employees' personal challenges when it comes to in-office work to tailor their approach accordingly.

This comes at a time when there is growing resistance to strict return-to-office mandates which run the risk of alienating talent and increasing attrition.

Companies like Amazon are facing a backlash globally after its new policy which requires employees to work onsite five days a week.

"For those companies that will be bringing more people back onsite, achieving the right level of call to return (in terms of number of days) and avoiding strong mandates while co-creating flexible work designs, offering enough opportunities to collaborate physically or virtually with employees to mitigate attrition risk, is critical," said Mansee Singhal, careers leader India at HR consulting firm Mercer.

Rewarding Experience >> 7



Plumping for Pandas

Panda sculptures on display at Avenue of Stars in Hong Kong on December 7. The 2,500 sculptures are a part of Panda Go! Fest HK, the largest panda-themed exhibition in the city. **AFP**

Global Brands' Pay Scale Tips in Favour of Indian Chiefs

Indian heads' earnings at least 15% more in 2023-24 vs expat peers at auto & electronic cos

Writankar Mukherjee

Kolkata: In the global brand-dominated auto and electronics industry in the country, Indian professional chief executives are raking in far higher fortune than their expat counterparts irrespective of the size of the business in the country.

As per an ET study of over a dozen top brands including Samsung, Maruti Suzuki, LG, Sony, Xiaomi, Whirlpool and Mahindra & Mahindra, with data sourced from regulatory filings, the Indian chief executives drew at least 15% higher gross remuneration in 2023-24 than the expat chief executives, including commission and perquisites. And in most cases even more, with the pay gap getting wider last fiscal.

Industry executives said this reflects the fact that several global brands have started relying on local talent and there is no more hardship allowance for an India posting in the CEO package unlike earlier.

"The pay gap between an Indian professional CEO and expat CEO working in India will only widen in time to come," said Shiv Agrawal, managing director at ABC Consultants, an executive search and talent advisory firm.

"There is always a premium for high

quality Indian CEOs since in most cases their experience or quality is a notch or two higher. Hardship allowance for working in India has now become history. Of course, some companies may always like to have an expat from their home country to lead Indian operations, but it's that much only," said Agrawal.

Samsung India's expat managing director JB Park's gross salary in FY24 was ₹6.8 crore while that of LG India's managing director Hong Ju Jeon was ₹5 crore. Samsung is the country's largest consumer electronics company whose sales was ₹1,02,626 crore.

Domestic Replacements >> 7

Local is Vocal

2023-24 PAY PACKAGE OF CEOs/MDs

INDIANS

Sunil Nayar, Sony India ₹7.62 cr

Muralikrishnan B, Xiaomi India (resigned last month) ₹12.27 cr

Narasimhan Eswar, Whirlpool India ₹17 cr (includes stock options from parent)

EXPATS

Unsoo Kim, Hyundai Motor ₹7.4 cr

Hisashi Takeuchi, Maruti Suzuki ₹5.1 cr

Hong Ju Jeon, LG India ₹5 cr

Source: RoC

OTHER NEWS
OF THE DAY101 Farmers to
March to
Delhi Today:
Pandher

Chandigarh: Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said on Saturday that they have not received any message from the Centre for talks to address their issues and said a group of 101 farmers will again begin their march to Delhi on December 8.

On Friday, protesting farmers suspended their foot march to the national capital for the day after some of them suffered injuries due to tear gas shells fired by security personnel, who stopped them at the Punjab-Haryana border. The farmers have been pressing for various demands, including a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Addressing the media at Shambhu on the Punjab-Haryana border on Saturday, Pandher said 16 farmers suffered injuries and one of them lost hearing ability because of the tear gas shelling by Haryana security personnel. —PTI

Mamata
Expresses
Desire to Lead
INDIA Bloc

Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had expressed her desire to lead the INDIA Alliance. The development came on Friday.

Banerjee in an interview to a Bengali mediachannel, said that she can 'run the show' if opportunity is given to her and also mentioned that she has named it INDIA alliance. "I have formed the INDIA alliance and if an opportunity is given, I will ensure the smooth functioning of the bloc. It is the responsibility of those leading from the front to manage it properly. If they can't do it, what can I do? Everyone should be taken along. But I will not move outside West Bengal, if assigned, I can run it from this state," Banerjee said.

Banerjee's comments come days after two Trinamool Congress MPs Kalyan Banerjee and Kirti Azad mentioned that Mamata Banerjee should be the chief of the opposition alliance and also slammed Congress for debacle in Maharashtra Assembly election. Durgapur-Bardhaman MP of the party Kirti Azad even said that Mamata Banerjee's track record is perfect against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. —PTI

DHAKA REVERSES HASINA-ERA DECISION TO BECOME INTERNET TRANSIT HUB

Bangladesh Not to
Route Internet to NE

Claims earlier move impacted its ability to supply internet to parts of China, Myanmar

Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

New Delhi: Bangladesh's internet regulator has reversed a decision of the Sheikh Hasina government that allowed the country to be the transit point for internet supply to India's northeastern states.

The internet regulator has claimed that the plan, if implemented, will adversely impact the country's prospects to become a regional internet hub, ET has learnt.

In 2023, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) sought the country's telecom ministry's permission after local firms Summit Communications and Fiber@Home applied to supply bandwidth from Singapore via the Akhaura border to the northeastern region of India through Bharti Airtel.

Sources in Dhaka claimed that the Hasina government's decision would have "impacted" Bangladesh's ability to provide internet

ISKCON Temple Set
Afire, Idol Damaged
Near Dhaka

A group of people set fire to an ISKCON temple in Dhaka district in Bangladesh in the early hours of Saturday. The attack in Dhaur village, under Turag police station in Dhaka district, took place in the early hours of Saturday. A Turag police station official said a manhunt was launched to track down the culprits. —PTI

services to parts of Myanmar and northwestern China through its own infrastructure.

Under the previous arrangement, Bangladesh would have served as the transit route—enabling faster internet connection for Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, As-

sam, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland.

At present, the northeastern states receive internet connection via Singapore through submarine cables in Chennai using India's domestic fibre optic network. This has impacted the speed of the internet in the northeastern states.

ET has learnt that in the coming days, Bangladesh's interim government led by Muhammad Yunus may also review other cross-border projects that were put in place over the last 15 years.

Meanwhile, US Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi has expressed grave concern over the recent unrest in Bangladesh following the arrest of ISKCON priest Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari.

THE FIRST DAY OF A THREE-DAY SPECIAL SESSION

Maharashtra Opposition
Skips Swearing in of MLAs

Alleges Mahayuti retained power by manipulating EVMs

Krishna Kumar

Mumbai: The opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) boycotted swearing in of the newly elected members of the Maharashtra assembly Saturday, the first day of a three-day special session, alleging that the Mahayuti coalition retained power by manipulating electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The MVA said it would soon launch a campaign against the use of EVMs in the election, from Markarwadi village in the Malshiras assembly constituency. This even as the opposition alliance in the state already seems to be coming apart with the Samajwadi Party talking about quitting it.

"If the Mahayuti really won by such a huge mandate, then the entire state should be excited, yet everyone here is questioning the result. The question in everyone's mind is whether the mandate is from the people or derived from the EVMs and the Election Commission of India," said Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) legislative party leader Aaditya Thackeray.

The Maharashtra opposition is highlighting the issue of the Markar-



Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnis with Deputy CMs Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, at Vidhan Bhavan, in Mumbai, on Saturday —ANI

wadi village, where some villagers disputed the votes captured in the EVM and wanted to hold a mock poll through the use of ballot papers. The EC had objected to the plan and police have filed cases against those who organised the poll.

"The Markarwadi mock poll was important as we wanted to show the difference between the polling in EVMs and the ballot boxes. All of those who are protesting (opposition MLAs) are those who have won yet we are disputing the results. We will be planning a long march (from Markarwadi)," said Thackeray.

State Congress chief Nana Patole said he has spoken to party leader

Rahul Gandhi on taking out a march in Markarwadi seeking the use of ballot papers in elections.

While MVA MLAs have boycotted Saturday's swearing in, they have indicated that they will take oath on Sunday.

SP MLAs TAKE OATH

Meanwhile there was division within the MVA opposition alliance on the issue with SP's Abu Asim Azmi and Rais Shaikh deciding to swear in on Saturday. Azmi poked holes in MVA's EVM manipulation theory, saying that the defeat of the coalition was due to no coordination among the allies.

THIRD EYE

Wedding
Costs Party
Membership

Recently dismissed from the party, Rampur-based

BSP politician Narendra Sagar said he was suspended because his son wed a Samajwadi Party MLA's daughter. His son Ankur married Kusum, the daughter of Alapur SP MLA Tribhuvan Dut. The wedding was on November 27, and the reception was on December 3rd. Akhilesh Yadav, the SP president, was among the guests at the celebration. Sagar claims certain local BSP leaders forwarded the images to the party leadership, and he was suspended from the party.

Sparking
Many Jokes
Among MPs

The money seized from Abhishek Manu Singhvi's seat

on Friday has sparked many jokes and laughter among MPs, who are concerned that anyone can now put any offensive item on their seat and they will be held accountable. Abdul Wahab, an IUML Rajya Sabha MP, joked with BJP MP Rajiv Pratap Rudy that money had fallen from his seat and even offered him a demonstration. Rudy, who has made significant contributions to the Constitution Club, has a positive connection with MPs from all parties.

RAMESH BIDHURI, PARVESH VERMA MAY FIGURE IN BJP LIST THIS MONTH END

BJP Looking to Field Heavyweights
Against Senior AAP Leaders in Delhi

Jatin Takkar

New Delhi: BJP is gearing up for assembly polls in the national capital, and is looking to field its heavyweights against senior AAP leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal.

Within BJP, there is a feeling to give more emphasis on young and fresh faces by replacing some senior party leaders in Delhi assembly polls.

A section of the BJP also feels that the party should give more tickets to Purvanchalis and Jats to tackle AAP challenge in the national capital.

By the end of December, the BJP may announce its first list of candidates is likely to field several former MPs including Parvesh Verma and Ramesh Bidhuri.

Verma could be BJP's candidate

from New Delhi against AAP supremo and former Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal. While Bidhuri is keen to contest from Kalkaji against incumbent Chief Minister Atishi Marlena.

But BJP's state unit feels that Bidhuri should contest from Tughlakabad. Besides Verma and Bidhuri, Harish Khurana son of former Delhi

Chief Minister Madal Lal Khurana could be fielded from Moti Nagar, Vishnu Mittal from Vishwas Nagar, Manjinder Singh Sirsa from Rajouri Garden.

Satish Upadhyay could be BJP's nominee from Malviya Nagar. Kailash Gehlot who recently switched from AAP to BJP is also likely to be nominated from Najafgarh.

Kailash Gehlot who recently switched from AAP to BJP is also likely to be nominated by the saffron party. He wants to contest from Bijwasan but BJP feels he should contest from his existing seat Najafgarh.

Senior BJP leaders Vijay Goel and Harshvardhan have also expressed their desire to contest elections. BJP chief Virender Sachdeva is likely to be fielded by the party. He could be fielded from Kasturba Nagar or Krishna Nagar assembly seat.

Sachdeva is scheduled to start a yatra across Delhi from this week. The yatra is aimed at galvanising the party workers and launching party's campaign for the upcoming assembly polls.

Meanwhile RSS has also started holding meetings and its joint general secretary Arun Kumar, stationed in the national capital is looking after Sangh's coordination with BJP.

Water Supply Will Not be Snapped to
Rohingyas in Jammu: J&K minister

Press Trust of India

Jammu: Amid an ongoing drive against Rohingya Muslims here, Jammu and Kashmir Jai Shakti Minister Javed Ahmed Rana on Saturday said the water supply will not be snapped to the slums housing the illegal immigrants, pending a call from the Centre on their deportation.

Rana's statement came after Rohingyas living on three plots of land in Narwal area of Jammu claimed that their power and water supply was snapped recently by the administration.

"The government is duty-bound to ensure water supply to all human beings. We will ensure water supply to them (Rohingyas) on humanitarian grounds till the government of India takes a call on their issue,"

Rana, who is also minister for forest, ecology and environment, and tribal affairs, told PTI.

The minister said he will take up the disconnection issue with the officials. "Water cannot be stopped to anyone, it is the requirement of all living beings," the minister said, expressing surprise over the alleged snapping of water supply to a few plots housing Rohingyas by the department.

18 MINISTERS OVERALL NOW

Assam CM Sarma
Expands Cabinet, 4
Ministers Take Oath

Bikash Singh

Guwahati: What is seen as the preparation for the 2026 assembly polls, three and half year old Himanta Biswa Sarma led government has on Saturday inducted four ministers in the council of minister.

On Saturday four ministers were inducted in the council of ministers and with these the strength of council of ministers has gone to 18.

Assam Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office to the four new ministers — Prasanta Phukan, Kausik Rai, Krishendu Paul, and Rupesh Goala. The chief minister and members of his cabinet were present on the occasion.

Phukan and Goala represent the Upper Assam tea districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia respectively while Paul and Rai are from the two

Barak Valley districts of Sribhum (formerly Karimganj) and Cachar. Labour and Tea Tribe Welfare Sanjay Kishan has resigned from the ministry recently after he asked by the chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to resign.

Rai is MLA from Goala is first time MLA from Dibrugarh. Paul is MLA from Lakhimpur. Both are from Patharkandi. Both are from Barak valley. Two other ministers are from Upper Assam. Rai is also a first time MLA.

On June 9, 2022, two ministers were inducted. Post Lok Sabha election Sarma has stated that he will affect the cabinet reshuffle by August 15 this year.

facturing-linked solar scheme, sent to Andhra Pradesh energy secretary by APPCC and accessed by ET, shows that concerns were raised before the signing of power supply agreement with Solar Energy Corporation of India Limited (SECI). However, these concerns were rejected and state government went ahead with the deal offered. One of the concerns was on tariff of ₹2.49 per unit offered by Adani Green Energy Limited (AGEL) and Azure Power India Private Li-

ANOTHER REJECTED PROPOSAL

The then-Andhra govt had rejected APPCC suggestion that SECI re-negotiate tariff of tranches for 2025 & 2026 as per then prices

mitted (APIPL). According to the report, APPCC had said, "Since the projects are outside the state, the tariff should be inclusive of basic customs duty as stipulated by the Government of India and trading

margin of SECI..." APPCC had also suggested that SECI should re-negotiate tariff of tranches that would come in September 2025 and 2026 as per the prices prevalent then. These suggestions were re-

jected by the state government.

As the present N Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP government is poring over the documents related to the controversial solar power project, it has found that the tariff does not include basic customs duty, GST and transmission losses. The tariff could well turn out to be ₹3.80 per unit. With solar power prices down, if Andhra Pradesh were to buy power today, it would be between ₹2.56 and 2.6 per unit (all inclusive).

Kundarki Win: BJP Feels It Has Turned The Panna on Minority Support

BJP candidate Ramveer Singh's inclusive work, out-of-power SP leaderships inability to help and desire to connect with govt works for party in seat with 65% Muslims

Sanjay Singh

Kundarki (Moradabad): The Kundarki assembly constituency stood out among the nine that went to bye-election in Uttar Pradesh recently.

The BJP got the seat, which has 65% Muslim voters, for the first time in 3 decades. Thakur Ramveer Singh won with a margin of 1,45,000 votes from the constituency previously held by Samajwadi Party's Zia ur Rahman Barq, who is now the Sambhal MP. Kundarki is part of the Sambhal Lok Sabha constituency.

There were several factors which contributed to the BJP's victory in this Muslim-dominated constituency. In Kundarki,

Muslims are divided mainly into three groups: Turks, who claim to be non-converted Muslims; Sheikhzadas, who are converted Muslims and OBC Muslims such as Dafali, Nai, Dhoobi, Badhai and Teli.

The Turks, who politically and economically dominate the area, apparently saw their business interest. The Sheikhzadas, who match with the population of Turks, had perhaps the poor political representation in their mind. These two communities seem to have influenced the decision of OBC Muslims, and the BJP bagged votes of all the three groups.

Turks dominate the transport business, as

well as own agricultural land and run commercial establishments. Sheikhzadas, who also own lands, are mainly associated with farming.

Political representatives at the ground level were in full support of the BJP candidate to ensure

re development, as they feared poor development may cost them when they face elections in future.

It took more than three decades for BJP candidate Thakur to build his political credibility among the Mus-

lim voters here. Muslims played active roles as panna pramukhs, booth presidents, booth palaks and the convenor of the shak-

kendras during the BJP's preparations for the by-poll.

Thakur has been working hard since 2007 to woo Muslim voters. He entertains both Muslim and Hindu voters at his residence to hear their problems, and distributes sewing machines, buffaloes and blankets to the poor people of both communities. He enjoys full support of chief minister Yogi Adityanath in this area.

Thakur remains available for us 24 hours, said a former gram pradhan of Sihorabaje, a village in Moradabad's Mundha Pande block. "He contested the assembly elections in 2007, 2012 and 2017 and Muslim votes for him increased gra-

dually. So, he was never untouchable for Muslims in Kundarki."

At Virpur village, Haji Mehboob said he had sought help from Thakur for the issuance of his passport for the Haj pilgrimage. "He took personal interest. I got my passport," he said.

Farukh of Sajjana village said Muslim voters have realised that there is no chance of development by sending an MLA from the opposition camp.

All BJP's 15 panna pramukhs in Asadpur village are Muslims, said gram pradhan Mujeel. "Our village has a high number of truck owners and drivers. We campaigned in favour of Thakur in different villages. Thakur maintains personal contact with us," he said.

Paytm Parent to Sell 5.4% Stake in Japan Co PayPay to Soft Bank

Meta Asked to Curb WhatsApp Related Scams

What's In A Name! M&M Rebrands e-SUV

Tough to Mop Up Taxman's Outstanding Demand

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WHO HAS TO PAY ADVANCE TAX

Every person* whose tax liability for the F.Y. 2024-25 as reduced by tax deducted/collected at source is ₹10,000/- or more is liable to make advance tax payments.

MODE OF PAYMENT

- Taxpayers can pay advance tax both online & offline. e-payment is mandatory for all corporates and for those assesseees whose accounts are required to be audited u/s 44 AB of the Income-tax Act, 1961.
- e-payment is convenient for other taxpayers also as it ensures correct credit.

SCHEDULE FOR PAYMENT OF ADVANCE TAX

Due Date	Amount
1) On or before 15 th June, 2024	15% of the Advance Tax payable
2) On or before 15 th September, 2024	45% of the Advance Tax payable
3) On or before 15 th December, 2024	75% of the Advance Tax payable
4) On or before 15 th March, 2025	100% of the Advance Tax payable

Short/Non-payment or deferment of payment of Advance Tax will result in levy of interest.

*Persons who opt for the presumptive taxation scheme for FY 2024-25 are required to pay advance tax in one payment by 15th March, 2025. Additionally, Senior citizens (Individual aged 60 or more) are not required to pay advance tax if they do not have any income from business or profession.

Income Tax Department

Central Board of Direct Taxes

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Maida-less in India

As consumers crave smart snacking, companies are coming up with 'better-for-you' products sans refined flour & palm oil

**Apoorva Mittal
& Lijee Philip**

Krutu Modi's kitchen shelves tell a story. Over the past 10 months, the Mumbai-based marketing professional has been systematically replacing her pantry staples such as pasta, bread and instant noodles with brands that promise better nutritional value. The change was motivated by a desire to improve the health of her seven-year-old daughter. "I want her to enjoy all her favourite foods, but in healthier versions," says Modi. "Surprisingly, we haven't had to compromise on taste."

New brands are capitalising on this craving for healthier foods. They are offering snacks and pantry essentials that are "better-for-you" (BFY). These are not entirely free of preservatives but have less or no sugar and refined flour.

While products that are free of preservatives face challenges like a short shelf life and, therefore, limited retail availability, these BFY options offer a middle ground. These include maida-free bread and bhujia made with healthier oils.

These brands are relying on substitutions: groundnut oil replacing palm oil, besan or millet flour standing in for refined flour, and natural sweeteners like coconut sugar and jaggery taking the place of refined sugar.

"The 100% health brands cater to the top 1% of consumers, while the BFY brands target the top 5-10%," says Revant Himatsingh, who is better known by his Instagram handle @foodpharmer and is the creator of the campaign "Label Padhega India". "Some brands strive to eliminate every ingredient that is potentially harmful, which sounds great in theory, but it significantly drives up costs. Sometimes, it's more practical—and impactful—to focus on being 'better for you' than aiming for perfection."

WINNING OVER MOMS
At a time when health brands have struggled to scale, some of these BFY brands have found the

**WickedGud (2011),
MUMBAI**

Funds Raised: \$2.1 million
Products: Noodles, pastas and chips free of maida and palm oil. Instant noodles not fried but steamed and dried

If you can create a win-win where kids get their favourite food and mothers can serve it without second thoughts, you are solving a real problem. Mothers will choose these snacks because of the ingredients, and they don't mind paying a premium for that peace of mind
BHUMAN DANI
Founder & CEO, WickedGud

**SMART
SNACKING
IN INDIA**

Smart snacking market is growing
1.2x Faster
than traditional snacks
in terms of value
Source: NielsenIQ

target for marketing their products—moms. "We looked at categories where there is conflict between kids and mothers. Since kids dictate consumer behaviour, mothers end up domesticating junk," says Bhuvan Dani, founder and CEO of Mumbai-based WickedGud, which sells non-fried instant noodles that do not have maida and palm oil. "If you can create a win-win where kids get their favourite food and mothers can serve it without second thoughts, you are solving a real problem. Mothers will choose these snacks because of the ingredients, and they don't mind paying a premium for that peace of mind."

This strategy resonates with entrepreneurs like Ruchika Agarwal, founder of direct-to-consumer (D2C) brand Banter, which produces nut butters such as almond butter, peanut butter and cashew butter without oil and sugar. Her largest customer base is mothers who are aware of nutrition and want to inculcate good food habits in their children. The brand began to target mothers in a big way in 2022. "People want to snack mindfully and to reduce the negative aspects of everything they consume," says the Hyderabad-based founder.

Even celebrities are entering the market. Former cricketer Yuvraj Singh recently launched Twiddles that offers healthier spreads and snacks. "While indulgent snacks are still popular, there is a clear shift towards healthier, more conscious snacking options," says Singh.

SNACKING BOOM

A NielsenIQ report called "Snacking Habits — From Mindless to Mindful" says India ranks second in the Asia-Pacific region in the rate of growth of the

packaging and mass marketing of unique Indian offerings (yoga, meditation, etc) can be equated with the marketing prowess of cola brands.

Are we seeing the opposite of this, with colas being equated to 'adharma' in a sense?

Let us unpack this bit by bit, or sip by sip, starting with a look at religion and consumer behaviour.

Religion and consumer behaviour has been a topic of great interest to me. In fact my PhD thesis was on how religiosity can affect the way we choose and consume products and services. Surprisingly, religion has not been a hot topic among consumer researchers. While there are some pioneering work done by researchers like Elizabeth Hirschman of the University of Virginia, you will not find hundreds of researches on the topic.

Why, you may ask? For one, religion is seen as a taboo topic, not to be asked, at least in a market research interview. Readers of this paper may be surprised to learn that the US census does not collect religious affiliation of the respondents. In India we have been collect-

The rise in awareness around health and nutrition is driving demand for better-for-you brands, but it also raises the bar. Consumers want snacks that check all the boxes—taste, health and convenience
MEGHANA NARAYAN
Cofounder, Wholsum Foods

snacking market, after Myanmar on a smaller base. The report also highlights that one in five snacks now carries a health-related connotation. While metro cities lead the trend in smart snacking, its growth is equally noticeable in rural areas and smaller towns. NielsenIQ's Trend Spotting survey identifies the key drivers of smart snacking in India—health benefits, nutritional content of snacks and a growing preference for ingredients like multigrains, nuts, dried fruits and antioxidants.

According to "Sweetness Score" survey by Zyduz Wellness' Sugar Free, nearly 40% of respondents said they always read food labels for sugar content. This growing focus on label transparency reflects the evolving preferences of mindful eaters.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

It is not easy, though, for the new brands. They are facing a tough funding market and scalability challenges. They are also up against FMCG giants in the food industry. ITC, Zyduz, Marico and Parle are all doubling down on the healthier food category.

ITC is launching a range of Bingo! Popped Chips that has no palm oil. Says Kavita Chaturvedi, COO, snacks & noodles, food division, ITC Ltd: "While taste remains the critical factor in snacking, other aspects such as ingredients, processing and macro-nutrients are starting to play a role in consumer decisions owing to changing lifestyles and nutritional habits."

Parle's Nutricrunch, its premium range of health biscuits, uses millets as well. It contributes to 10% sales and is likely to account for 25% in the premium range in five years.

Tarun Arora, CEO of Zyduz Wellness, says there is a marked shift towards mindful eating: "While the bulk continues to be traditional snacking, more and more consumers are looking at balancing taste and health." With the acquisition of Rite Bite and Max Protein, Zyduz plans to expand its footprint in the healthy snacking space.

Consumers are increasingly aware about nutrition but they are not willing to compromise on taste, which makes the sector more challenging for companies.

How good are the better-for-you snacks? Dr Parmmeet Kaur, chief dietitian at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi, says while substitutes for sugar offer to satisfy sweet cravings without added calories, their effect on health is still a topic of debate and research studies are inconclusive. She adds that the quantity of cooking oil for an adult with a sedentary lifestyle should be limited to 20-30 grams daily. "Snacking should be approached

**Twiddles (2024),
GURGAON**

Funds Raised: Pre-seed, undisclosed
Products: Almond and walnut chocolate spreads and pocket-sized bites made without palm oil, and with less sugar

While indulgent snacks are still popular, there is a clear shift towards healthier, more conscious snacking options
YUVRAJ SINGH
Cofounder, Twiddles

with balance, by focusing on whole foods, such as roasted or boiled chana, nuts and seeds, fresh fruits and vegetables instead of over-processed alternatives. It's also important to read food labels to support your dietary needs and look for foods." The key, she says, is to foster healthy dietary habits early in life.

"The rise in awareness around health and nutrition is driving the demand for BFY brands, but it also raises the bar. Consumers want snacks that check all the boxes—taste, health and convenience," says Meghana Narayan, cofounder of Wholsum Foods, whose brands like Slurp Farm and Mille sell millet-based cookies, noodles and cereals for kids and adults. Founded in 2016, the company crossed an annualised revenue run rate of ₹100 crore.

Mayank Shah, VP, Parle Products, says it was difficult to incorporate millets in digestive biscuits but they

have managed to use them in cookies.

While some of the young brands have raised capital, they have yet to build efficient, profitable businesses or go mainstream. Recently, news website Inc42 reported that Reliance Consumer Products was acquiring D2C snacking startup TagZ Foods for ₹28 crore in what seemed like a distress sale. It was reported that TagZ, which sold potato chips free of palm oil, halted production a few months ago as it was struggling to scale its business.

Zoeb Ali Khan, vice-president of early-stage consumer fund Sauce.vc, says there are two stages of consumption. "If you look at market size, indulgence category rules the roost. Take burger and pizza companies or ice-cream brands. These categories have seen a significant growth as consumers earn money and prioritise spending on indulgence," he says, adding, "Once that phase of indulgence subsides, as consumers become more educated, they transition into the BFY segment, moving toward healthier options." So while indulgent brands continue to grow rapidly, the better-for-you snacks market is secondary in scale. "India is a massive market, and it will take another five to ten years for this segment to mature and deliver

While the bulk continues to be traditional snacking, more and more consumers are looking at balancing taste and health
TARUN ARORA
CEO, Zyduz Wellness

financial products in several countries with significant Muslim population. Some mutual funds, even in India, offer compliance with Shariah guidelines by not investing in specific types of companies like those involved in alcohol production. It may surprise readers that devout Muslims are often averse to insurance products.

Financial products are high-involvement purchases. At the other end of the spectrum are low-involvement products such as soft drinks, chewing gum and deodorants. Does religion have any role in the purchase of these products?

While there is no published research on the topic of religion and consumption of specific brands of soft drinks and chewing gum, there is ample evidence to show that colas are targeted not because they are or are not halal, or are high-involvement. The targeting of colas is more a protest against what is seen as American imperialism.

I suppose brands like Coca-Cola and McDonald's are seen as symbols of America that a common consumer can identify with. In this digital age the more ubiquitous symbols of America should be Google, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, X, etc. But consumers who use these see the posts of their own family and friends—America is invisible in these digital brands.

Then there is Coca-Cola, Pepsi and McDonald's. There is even the "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict



**Banter (2020),
HYDERABAD**

Funds Raised: Bootstrapped
Products: Nut butters free of palm oil, sugar, preservatives

People want to snack mindfully and reduce the negative aspects of everything they consume
RUCHIKA AGARWAL
founder, Banter



broader outcomes," he says.

Aditi Handa, cofounder and head chef of 'The Baker's Dozen', which makes artisanal, handmade products, says, companies need to balance quality and cost to grow in this space. "Consumers are willing to pay a small premium for genuinely healthy products, but only up to a point. Creating a product that is truly healthy, fits the consumer's budget and works for the business is a tough balance to strike, but is something that every brand needs to learn to be able to grow," she says. Last year, the company made ₹45 crore in revenue and is on track to hit an annualised rate of ₹85-90 crore.

QCOMM SPARKS GROWTH

Brands are tapping quick commerce channels to expand reach. Consumers are experimental and this is a segment that prompts impulse shopping.

The Health Factory, known for its zero-maida bread, says its quick-commerce sales are 75% of its total volume, an 80% growth in more than two years. "Our channel strategy of prioritising quick commerce has been a game-changer, enabling us to achieve significant market penetration by leveraging the extensive reach of these platforms," says Vinay Maheshwari, founder and CEO, The Health Factory.

Consumers are munching away—and there is no stopping them. Saugata Gupta, MD and CEO of Marico, says the snacking market is poised for a massive growth driven by the popularity of convenience food, implementation of quality standards by FSSAI and the penetration of e-commerce companies and distribution channels. The Indian consumer's preferences are continually evolving. Marico's Saffola Oats delivered a mid-teen growth rate, while relatively newer franchises like True Elements, which has a range of healthy breakfasts, and Plix, with a plant-based nutrition portfolio, have maintained an accelerated growth, adds Gupta.

The BFY brands have to be better for themselves as well. As food inflation squeezes consumer wallets, their ability to transition from niche to mainstream will depend on striking the right balance between nutrition and taste. They have to manage production costs without compromising on quality and persuade value-conscious consumers that the health benefits are worth the premium. The outcome of this delicate balancing act could redefine India's snacking landscape in the years to come.

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Message in a Cola Bottle

Can cola brands that try to ride the anti-US sentiment in the wake of Hamas-Israel conflict play the long game?

Ambi Parameswaran

Gaza Cola is a new cola brand launched in the UK with the promise of sending all its profits for rebuilding Palestinian hospitals. The brand is trying to exploit an anti-US sentiment in the light of the Hamas-Israel conflict. Mecca Cola, launched in France in 2002, was probably the first to take an anti-US stance by going after the big American cola boys.

Why do protests pick the sugary drink for their single-minded attention and do these strategies work? Remember what Gita Mehta expounded in her book *Karma Cola*—

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the packaging and mass marketing of unique Indian offerings (yoga, meditation, etc) can be equated with the marketing prowess of cola brands.

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Why, you may ask? For one, religion is seen as a taboo topic, not to be asked, at least in a market research interview. Readers of this paper may be surprised to learn that the US census does not collect religious affiliation of the respondents. In India we have been collect-

ing religion information for the last 90+ years and this year there is a debate on more granular information to be collected about the respondents.

What does the existing research done on religion and consumer behaviour point to? Religiosity can be studied from two angles. One is the religious affiliation (Hindus, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims etc). The other is the intensity of religious belief, or how actively religious is a person. The research one could access did say that across Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews and Hindus, there were some differences in the way they decide on their purchases. For example, Muslims and Jews were seen to be more innovative and adventurous in their purchase decisions. The research I did in India did not show any major difference across various religious consumers when it came to purchase of consumer durables.

But there was a significant difference between those who were highly religious and those less religious; the more religious were more demanding from brands than the less religious.

When it comes to consumer products like drinks and soaps, you would imagine that religious affiliation and religiosity should have less of an influence (barring food products that have been explicitly banned). There are food restrictions across religions. Muslims pre-

fer food products labelled 'halal'. We don't know if Muslim consumers boycott products that are not labelled halal. Other categories also ride the halal wave. There are several cosmetic brands that are halal; L'Oréal even has a factory in Indonesia that is halal-certified.

The use of financial products and services also have a religious flavour. Given that usury is averse to Islam, there has been a growth of what is called 'Islamic Banking' and there are Shariah-compliant



Targeting of colas is more a protest against what is seen as American imperialism. Mecca Cola, launched in France in 2002, was probably the first to take an anti-US stance by going after American biggies and Gaza Cola has been launched in the UK with the promise of sending all its profits to rebuild Palestinian hospitals

Prevention". This theory was proposed by writer Thomas Friedman in his 1999 book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. That theory has been violated multiple times in the recent past.

When a consumer is sipping a can of Coke or Pepsi, he or she is not just sipping a highly carbonated, high-sugar drink, but they are sipping a little bit of America itself. And that bit of fantasy has stood the test of time and will endure

The launch of Gaza Cola is also reminiscent of the cola brand Double Seven (Satatari) that was launched in 1977 by the Morarji Desai-led Janata government, after it booted out Coca-Cola. The brand was marketed by the government-owned Modern Food Industries, makers of Modern Bread. The brand fizzled out just like the coalition government that launched it.

My surmise is that these anti-Coke brands may not be able to play the long game. Quite simply, when a consumer is sipping a can of Coke or Pepsi, he or she is not just sipping a highly carbonated, high-sugar drink, but they are sipping a little bit of America itself. And that bit of fantasy has stood the test of time and will endure.

The writer is an independent brand coach & founder of Brand-Building.com

Crowds totalling two lakh, plenty perched atop light towers and hoarding scaffoldings for a better glimpse of the action, cops waving lathis across police barricades.

That was the scene at the trailer launch which flagged off the promotional tour for actor Allu Arjun's *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, the highly anticipated sequel of the Telugu movie *Pushpa: The Rise* (2021).

It isn't just that the launch of a movie trailer drew such hordes. It is that all this was unfolding 1,100 km from Hyderabad, in the quintessential heartland of Hindi—Patna—that makes it astounding. Patna may seem a strange choice for a Telugu blockbuster's opening salvo. Not so in the India of 2024, and not for those who have been observing the decades-in-the-making rise of Telugu potboilers in its home market and beyond, and the simultaneous weakening of mainstream Hindi movies.

ET spoke to film academics, distributors, seasoned journalists, entertainment companies and others to explain the seamless with which dubbed Telugu movies became the toast of Hindi heartland audiences, culminating in Allu Arjun's party in Patna.

THE PREQUEL

The journey to Patna began in the late 1990s, and with one phenomenon—multiplexes. That was the start of the alienation of the mass audience from the mainstream Hindi cinema, which changed considerably in subsequent years.

What worked in the smaller confines of a multiplex was a certain genre of storytelling that clicked with urban audiences, which a new bunch of film-makers who grew up in urban environs could instantly identify with.

This contrasted with their predecessors, whose points of reference were different and who were far more grounded and aware of the world beyond the urban bubble.

They knew of the concerns and realities and dreams of people of almost all classes and derived a great deal of raw material from life, literature and lived experiences.

Consequently, their films cut across classes and geographies. Even movies like Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Parinda* (1989), which appealed to the urban audience, struck a chord with the masses because of the universality of its storytelling.

That's not quite how it worked in the world of multiplex movies.

Avijit Ghosh, a veteran journalist and author of *Cinema Bhojpuri*, points out, "There was an explosion of a feel-good cinema which had sensibilities and style of narratives which worked with urban audiences."

The rise of multiplexes changed the plot. That was the start of alienation of the mass audience from mainstream Hindi cinema. The new wave focused more on western culture and aesthetics

The new wave focused more on western culture and aesthetics. It also catered to non-resident Indians (NRIs) to a great extent.

Anupama Chopra, editor, *The Hollywood Reporter India*, points out, "There are mainstream Hindi films which are set abroad and speak a language which the masses cannot understand or relate to."

For instance, the aesthetics of thriller writer James Hadley Chase showcased in *Johnny Gaddaar* (2007) may not work with the masses, with their markedly different language, ideological references, worldview and jargon. Simply put, the single-screen audience could not identify with this cinema.

This led to the disappearance of the commoner from mainstream Hindi films, resulting in the dwindling of those quintessential mass entertainers.

Brijesh Tandon, a film exhibitor from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh regions, says: "The masses want stories which contain multiple emotions, easily hummable music, and stories which can be watched along with families."

Such movies were made solely with the intent to entertain. Movies like *Ghayal* (1990), *Krantiveer* (1994) and *Ghatak* (1996) are prime examples.

As Dr Sanjay Ranade, associate professor, department of communication and

Flower Power in the Hindi Heartland

What's the secret sauce that makes viewers in Patna and Varanasi devour tales from Sheshadri Hills and Godavari Valley? Rajesh N Naidu dives into the fascinating world of Telugu masala movies and investigates the mysterious disappearance of the quintessential Hindi blockbuster



A huge crowd gathered to see actors Allu Arjun and Rashmika Mandanna at the trailer launch of *Pushpa 2* in Patna

Still from the movie

MOST WATCHED DUBBED TELUGU FILMS

Dubbed Telugu Film	Views (in m)
Nenu Sailaja (2016)	630
Sarrainodu (2016)	483
Dear Comrade (2019)	415
Mr. Majnu (2019)	353
Vunnadhi Okate Zindagi (2017)	309
Brindavanam (2010)	264
Race Gurram (2014)	175
Magadheera (2009)	174
Amar Akbar Anthony (2018)	147
Iddarammayilatho (2013)	146
Don No. 1 (2007)	130

Source: Goldmine Telefilms

stereotypes create a sense of familiarity with the underclass as they have been missing these elements in commercial Hindi films."

Over the years, dubbed Telugu films also have exhibited a structure which has worked well with non-Telugu audiences, reflected in the film's pace and editing to its music.

Sanjay Ranade of University of Mumbai reckons that there are four key parameters which make dubbed Telugu films work in the Hindi heartland. They are slapstick comedy, crisp editing, engaging music, using interesting techniques and sound and action-oriented scenes.

"In this manner, dubbed Telugu films have been creating more expansive narratives which are more generalised," he says. Another aspect is their production value.

Manish Shah, owner of Goldmines

Telefilms, a YouTube channel with more than 101 million subscribers, which showcases dubbed southern languages films shares, "In dubbed Telugu films, money is invested in films and not in stars. As a result, the production value of these films is top-notch, which enhances their entertainment quotient." He adds, "Largely, there is not much vulgarity which makes them suitable for collective viewing especially with family."

Add copious amounts of dishoom dishoom. Most of these movies being action oriented also help cut across geographical boundaries and appeal to the Hindi belt, says Bhaskar.

Ghosh adds, "Despite modern action sequences, Telugu films have retained these elements. Also, these films have a certain degree of earthiness with which the Hindi heartland audience identifies. The character Pushpa is a case in point. He is a throwback to an old hero. One can imagine a person from eastern Uttar Pradesh or Bihar emulating Pushpa's swagger."

THE CLIMAX

No wonder then, as a seasoned event management professional puts it, the Hindi heartland is now home turf for Telugu heroes. "There is nothing unusual about Allu Arjun promoting *Pushpa 2* in Patna.

Telugu films have simply managed to achieve the masala entertainer grammar seen in mainstream Hindi films of directors Manmohan Desai and Prakash Mehra. The Hindi heartland audience is a mass audience. It helps that the composition of the audience in Telugu-speaking states is not materially different.

The undivided Andhra Pradesh has been a cinema-loving state. This is reflected in the number of single screens (largely associated with the masses) in the state. According to the Film Federation of India, the number of single screens in undivided Andhra Pradesh was 2,809. The only other state with a similarly large number of single screens is Tamil Nadu (1,546).

As more and more Telugu films become bolder and bigger in their technique, scale and grandeur, will this sustain?

Let's wait for the third installment of *Pushpa*.

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When there is demand, supply will find its way. The journey of dubbed Telugu films into Hindi heartland began with TV, and interestingly, piracy. Local stores supplied films on pen drives

tolerate injustice. The story contains almost every trope that clicks with the Hindi heartland. The setting is a village. Gana is a man of principles. He is fearless. He fights for the have-nots and the oppressed. Gana is the template for the hero the Hindi heartland craved for. Bhaskar explains, "The Hindi heartland audience goes for characters rather than actors since they do not know them well. So, the narrative of oppression, fight for justice and action genre are elements in dubbed Telugu films which work."

The angry young man for the modern age then.

PLOT TWIST

What also worked is the folktale structure Telugu movies tend to follow.

Take for instance, the dubbed Telugu film *Don No. 1* (2008), a cult hit in the Hindi heartland. The film unfolds like a folk tale. Surya, the film's hero, kills his parents' killer. He wins because he is righteous.

As Manjunath notes in his book, "All mainstream Telugu films are folk tales. Not just the actions of these heroes, even the themes and tropes in these films stem from and are steeped in folk traditions." He adds: "The hero (in Telugu films) does not survive because he is the hero; he is a hero because he survives."

This kind of storytelling gives not only a sense of rootedness but also provides a great deal of familiarity in its setting for the Hindi heartland audience.

As Avijit Ghosh points out, "Tropes such as a zamindar with a henchman or a mother pining for a son seen in old Hindi films are quite present in dubbed Telugu films. These

journalism, University of Mumbai, underscores, "Hindi cinema as an alternative does not exist for the Hindi heartland. There is no entertainment in Hindi cinema. It is time for Hindi cinema to shut operations and go in a thinking mode."

That is quite the indictment.

MASS ENTRY

It is in the nature of economics that when there is demand, supply will find its way.

The journey of dubbed Telugu films into Hindi heartland began with television, and interestingly, piracy.

Ira Bhaskar, who taught cinema studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), explains, "One of the reasons why dubbed Telugu films clicked with Hindi heartland audiences is piracy. They were hardly released officially in the northern region." In many areas, she says, local stores supplied dubbed Telugu films on pen drives.

Those who viewed one wanted more.

It had the cultural elements they craved for—the larger-than-life hero, action, themes, storytelling structure.

The preeminence of the hero stood out in Telugu cinema.

Author Mukesh Manjunath in his book *The Age of Heroes: The Incredible World of Telugu Cinema* observes, "All Indian film industries have produced stars, megastars and superstars. But one peculiarity differentiates the Telugu film industry from others: Telugu films do not produce stars, they manufacture 'heroes'."

Concurring with this thought, scriptwriter Jaidev Hemmady points out, "Telugu films have a typical larger-than-life hero who has a devil may care attitude which strikes a chord with the North hinterland audiences whereas mainstream Bollywood has become too politically correct."

Sarrainodu (2016) is an example of this. In that movie, Gana, the hero, played by Allu Arjun, is a former army major who does not

Grow Up. Rev Up. Gear Up.

India's biking scene is maturing, opening up for more adventure, and certainly a lot more business

higher performance. Simultaneously, the country's motorcycle-as-a-hobby culture is moving past 'ownership' as the currency, to something more experiential.

India's bikers are now looking for horses for courses—specific motorcycles that can provide specific thrills, whilst reflecting their personalities. No longer content with just riding for leisure, they're seeking out bikes that promise adventure, community, and unforgettable experiences.

"It's no longer about parking an expensive bike in your garage," says Kochi-based Edwin Punoose. "Today's superbikers are serious about their craft—investing in training, safety gear, and building genuine connections within the community," says this 55-year-old, who is awaiting delivery of Harley-Davidson Forty Eight.

Few embody the shift more than Sanket Raykar. When he bought his first motorcycle aged 18, it was a

budget-friendly, entry-level machine. At 30, he found himself in a Ducati dealership, eyeing the 959 Panigale. After getting a taste of a track motorcycle, he upgraded to BMW GS Adventure Tourer 1250cc, and followed it up recently with a Ducati Hypermotard 1000cc.

"I didn't think I'd be here so soon," Raykar, now 38, admits. "But after attending a few community rides and seeing what these bikes can do, I just had to upgrade... It's about the different genres, the experience, the journey," says Raykar, who just came back from a tour of Italy.

That attitude is driving upgrades. Mayank Khatan (39), recently upgraded from a Ducati Monster 821 to a BMW GS 1250. "Easier to cruise on the highways with these refined hypercyclobikes," says Pune-based Khatan, who does frequent road trips from Pune to Goa, Surat and Bhopal.

"The expectations and preferences are different as we move from one product segment to another," said Vikram Pawah, president and CEO, BMW Group India.

Ducati's upward trajectory in the 500cc+ segment similarly reflects the demand for premium offerings. "We have achieved double-digit growth

in 2024, surpassing our internal targets and market expectations," said Bipul Chandra, MD, Ducati India.

RIDING IN SYNC

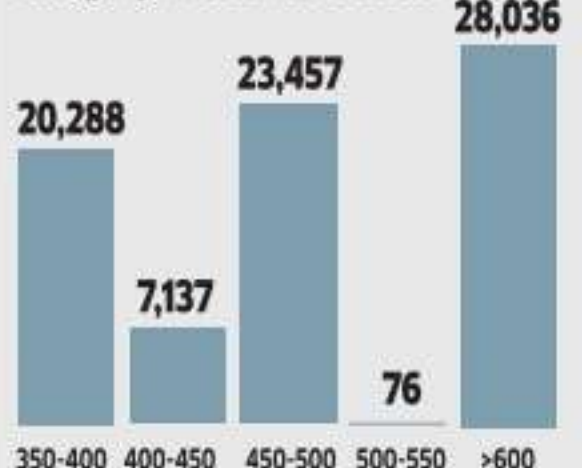
It's a new era for the biking world, one where passion and luxury meet the open road. Brands like BMW, KTM, Ducati and others are recognising this shift and responding with tailored offerings, exclusive events, and immersive community rides.

"Our customers are a regular part of BMW Motorrad safaris, weekend escapes, training and track days. In 2024 alone, over 72 expeditions will be held through safaris and weekend escapes," adds

THE YEAR OF THE BIKE

Sales for Jan-Sept 2024

Category in cc for units sold



Pawah, pointing out that demand for BMW Motorrad bikes from the 900cc–1800cc segment has increased by around 140%, in last five years.

"We see more track days where these motorcycles are used on a closed racing circuit in safer conditions. There is huge growth in adventure travelling," said Baljit Parmar, India representative of KTM Motorcycles, which is currently running a 14-day tour in Nepal. "It was sold out within hours of being announced," said Parmar. Several brands offer professional training programmes to ensure safe riding. BMW Motorrad runs its own motorcycle training programmes across the country.

KTM has also invested in a motocross training facility in Bengaluru. It also has a comprehensive programme called KTM Pro-XP, which curates experiences that help

customers understand their motorcycles better and receive training to be safer riders, says Parmar.

Ducati has run training programmes on the racetrack, and at offroad adventure parks. For 2025, it plans to roll out DRE Road Academy across five cities, teaching riders the fundamentals of riding a superbike, making them safer and more confident on the road.

"Our Great Himalayan Dream Tour was a standout initiative this year, bringing not only members of Ducati Owners Club (DOC) Pune to the Umling La Pass, the highest motorable road in the world but also blending adventure, rider marshals, backup services," said Chandra.

GEAR-ED UP!

As the super biking culture grows, brands are introducing high-quality riding gear tailored to Indian consumers. Companies like Ducati, BMW Motorrad, KTM, Harley-Davidson all sell premium gears including jackets, helmets and boots. Riders are also investing in accessories.

The accessories in demand reflect the core values of these brands. Take for instance, the Akrapovic for Ducati exhaust systems (meant for track use only), which while improving performance, adds a distinctively throaty exhaust note.

As the sun sets on another weekend of riding, it's clear that India's superbike culture is now a lifestyle that demands dedication, rewards passion, and builds lasting bonds—one kilometre at a time.

Lijee Philip

There used to be a time when Sunday morning rides perched atop expensive motorcycles was the pursuit of the few uber-wealthy.

Those days are slowly disappearing in the rearview mirror. After years of trudging along in second gear, India's superbike scene is maturing and moving into a higher cog, finally.

Fuelled by increase in disposable income, a steady stream of launches, and affordability enabled by easy access to credit, there are a lot more higher cubic capacity (cc) bikes being sold in India now, to a larger number of folks than before.

Sales of motorcycles above 600cc are zooming, touching 28,036 units for January to September period, according to Jato Dynamics data.

Premium dealerships report buyers are increasingly young professionals in their 30s, often from tech and finance, who view superbikes as both a passion and a statement, said Ravi Bhatia, president, Jato Dynamics.

Motorbike companies have been on the pulse. They have launched more accessible superbikes catering to specific needs, allowing riders to upgrade gradually.

A HIGHER GEAR

A major trigger for the uptick? Buyers shifting from being casual riders to adventure enthusiasts, willing to spend on



SUPERBIKERS KIT

Full airbag riding suit ₹1-5 lakh

High-end helmets ₹50,000-200,000

Airbags (street/race) ₹35,000-70,000

Specialised boots ₹65,000-120,000

Knee braces ₹48,000-90,000

Body armour ₹35,000-90,000

Complete titanium exhaust system ₹10.5 lakh

Gloves - up to ₹35,000

Advanced communication system ₹35,000-60,000

Source: Jato Dynamics

WHAT LIES BELOW STAR CITY MALL DOESN'T MATTER IN THE HERE AND NOW

For those whose patriotism for Mayur Vihar Phase 1 in East Delhi knows no bounds, news that there may be forces bent on destroying the neighbourhood's 'eternal symbol' is disturbing

RED HERRING



INDRAJIT HAZRA

Star City Mall is the pride of East Delhi's Mayur Vihar. In fact, it's the pride of East Delhi without most people living in Yamnapaar thinking of it as such. (Ask any resident of Paris' 7th arrondissement of what they think of the Eiffel Tower and you'll get the picture.)

As a shopping mall, it's not quite Milan's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. In fact, with no department store, there's not much to shop at Star City. There's no cineplex either, although a travelling circus does pitch its tent in the hardscrabble field behind it from time

to time when AQI levels and India's precarious circus economy permit. SCM's 40,000 sq ft of atrium space, out of a total area of 2.5 lakh sq ft, was once touted to house the biggest Reliance supermarket in Delhi-NCR. Didn't take off. An HDFC Bank branch still conducts business as if it's a Chase Manhattan branch on the Upper West Side that never got the memo about being gobbled up by JPMorgan 24 years ago.

But today, SCM's singular USP lies in the plethora of liquor shops it contains, arguably the highest per sq ft density in the country. Thoughtfully, it even has one store exclusively for women. While not quite abuzz with life as it was till the early 2010s, its cheek-by-jowl private liquor stores, ancillary namkeen-chips-cold drinks shops, few functional ATMs, one CCD outlet, and idiosyncratic escalators make it a living mall.

If Mayur Vihar is India, SCM, for whatever it's worth, is its Taj Mahal. It's the visible symbol of my intense patriotic



LET SLEEPY MALLS LIE

feelings towards Mayur Vihar Phase 1. Patriotism, for reasons that have to do with taxes, votes, and rationalising shortcomings of the state, has come to mean the feeling of love, devotion, and a sense of attachment to a country – 'my country', since there seems to be some unwritten rule against being patriotic towards 'another' country. In this restricted

As a mall, it's not quite Milan's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. There's not much to shop at Star City

form, such a definition of patriotism makes little sense.

The word 'patriot', like 'patriarchy', comes from the Greek 'patrios', or 'of one's fathers' – not to be confused with the Bengali phrase targeted at a busybody: 'Tor baaper ki?' ('What is it to your father?'). In fact, according to Finnish historian Aira Kemiläinen, patriotism was 'applied to barbarians who were perceived to be either uncivilised or primitive and who

had only a common Patris or fatherland'. In other words, unsophisticated enough not being able to develop one's own bonds with a place, so having to rely on the easy template of 'pitribhumi'.

As it happens, my father's association with Mayur Vihar is highly tenuous. He has been here only a few times while visiting me in Delhi. And yet,

what I feel for Mayur Vihar is what we are exhorted to feel for India: love, fondness, belonging. Now exiled from MV, it's the entity, both in space and idea, that I am nostalgic about. Not for the city where I was born or grew up in, or, for that matter, any city at all, but this stretch of Yamnapaar – And its quarter-century-old eternal symbol, Star City Mall.

So, imagine my shock when I learnt that some ragtag organisation was

claiming that underneath Star City Mall there apparently lies an 'ancient structure' that needs to be 'reclaimed'. This being the first week of December, the 32nd since 1992, my discomfort has been translated into mental images of the destruction of the Sheila Dixit-era Star City Mall to reinstall an HKL Bhagat-era restaurant under it.

Something always lies above something else. So, it stands to reason that something else always lies buried below something. Cities like Delhi and Rome are built upon layers and layers of historical remnants. As are neighbourhoods, which are far easier, less unnatural to give one's heart to than wholesale nation-states. So, whether there are remnants of a tandoori restaurant destroyed during the Emergency on top of which Star City Mall today stands, or idols of deities buried within Jama Masjid in Old Delhi, what holds your gaze and heart is what you see now. No matter how much the mall footfall has fallen and the mighty despair:

indrajit.hazra@timesofindia.com

SEN & SENSIBILITY



RAJYASREE SEN

Ah, My Beauty Past Compare (With the Present)

62-yr-old Demi Moore plays the role of her life in this body-horror feminist take

What is the price you would pay for eternal youth and adulation? Would you live in limbo for two weeks every month, so that you could vicariously live through a younger, fitter, more beautiful version of yourself in that time? Demi Moore's comeback film, *The Substance*, tackles that question head-on.

The movie is a fabulous take on today's obsession with beauty, quick-fix weight loss, and cosmetic treatments, as well as pressures on female celebrities. Director Coralie Fargeat takes the body-horror genre and makes it a – decidedly unsuited – commentary on feminism.

The coup d'état is to cast Moore, one of the fittest and most beautiful 62-year-olds I have seen to play the ageing and insecure star Elisabeth Sparkle. When we meet Sparkle, she is a TV fitness guru. Sparkle is informed by her TV boss, an old man in a suit deciding what constitutes beauty, that she's being put out to pasture and replaced by a younger model.

What follows is how Sparkle decides to try 'the substance', which will allow her a taste of youth. How will this happen? Each instalment of the 'substance', which has vials, syringes, and elixirs that must be injected, is delivered in brown cardboard packages to a post-box – without needing any human interaction. The kit comes with multiple warnings, much like Ozempic and Mounjaro that reportedly make many users nauseous and have bouts of diarrhoea.

Moore injects herself with a liquid which creates a younger self – Margaret Qualley's character, Sue – who climbs out of her body in a gruesome scene in which Moore's back splits down her spine. The procedure is completed by inserting an IV shot of nutrients labelled 'FOOD' every day. Every week the two selves must switch to regenerate, leaving



A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

one version comatose while the other steps out into the world.

Little sachets of what looks like glucose liquid marked as 'FOOD' are not unlike the newly popular glutathione IV drips and injections, which celebrities and anyone so inclined can take for 'skin whitening, reducing pigmentation, and maintaining overall skin health and hyperpigmentation.' Glutathione is injected straight into your bloodstream through an IV for 20 minutes – and voila, your skin and hair do look younger. Slight side effects are mild nausea and sometimes a rash. But who cares about nausea and the runs as long as you look like Snow White with Scarlett O'Hara's waistline?

The storyline takes a twist when Moore's younger self gets greedy and doesn't want to hibernate for a week, and instead starts stealing more and more time in the real world – ageing Moore's body like Dorian Gray's painting. It all ends in a triumph of body horror.

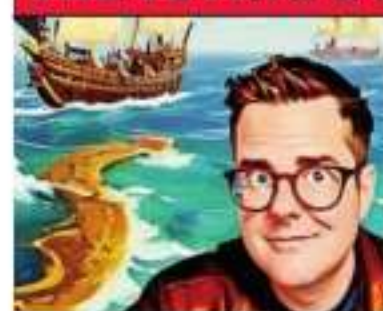
What makes this film effective is the fact that while unreal beauty standards have always existed for women and female celebrities, never has the cult of unreal youth been as celebrated as it is today. We have made national icons of Bollywood and industrialist wives who celebrate the use of botox, fish sperm facials, and facelifts, while never lifting a book to read. Nip, tuck, lift, inject. Thin women with stretched, immobile faces trying to be thinner while perpetually looking surprised.

The charm of *The Substance* lies in Moore's bravery in choosing this as her comeback vehicle at 62, stripping herself literally and figuratively naked in the process. There is cleverness in casting her as an ageing celebrity who will do anything to remain relevant, even though she looks better than most women at 42. Who knew that this was how we would all become women of substance?

ARE YOU A TOURIST OR TRAVELLER?

The idea of being 'first' or 'authentic' while exploring the world is inconsequential – what matters is the experience itself

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN



MICHEL BAAS

In the quintessential 1949 travel novel *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles, an elite American couple heads for the North African desert to get as far away as possible from everything they have ever known. The first time we 'meet' them is in an elegant coffee shop in the company of a close friend, Tucker, their plans unclear. The other day, waiting for my coffee and a croque monsieur at Hôtel de Paris in Tangier, I could picture Bowles sitting in a corner observing newcomers.

In Bernardo Bertolucci's 1990 movie adaptation, Bowles features as the narrator, already an elderly gentleman, giving the wisdom of his words even more gravitas. He's seen it all. 'Because we don't know when we will die,' he says, 'we get to think of life as an inexhaustible well.' Yet, he insists, everything happens only a very small number of times, and of those you will remember even less. Travelling being the most constant factor in my life I am often reminded of these words.

After journeying across Morocco and Tunisia the past few weeks, I am currently in Saudi Arabia, camping out in a non-descript hotel room overlooking

Jeddah's skyline while nursing a slight fever, having picked up a rather tiresome cough in the desert. Having reread *The Sheltering Sky* in Tangier, the character of the husband, Port Moresby, has stayed with me the longest, his restless push to seek out ever more remote destinations touching a raw nerve.

Having sat down to discuss the intention to explore the Sahara Desert, at some point, his friend Tucker remarks that they must be the first tourists here since the war: Port's wife Kit is quick to correct him by saying: 'We're not tourists. We're travellers.' It is clear from the start though that only Port truly envisions himself as such. Tucker seeks

comfort over adventure while Kit just wants to create a homely feeling.

The first time I visited India a particularly popular novel among backpackers was William Sutcliffe's 1997 'gap year' novel, *Are You Experienced?* Its main character, a British lad, who wasn't particularly interested in 'discovering' the country to begin with, and his fellow backpackers all seem to be in something of a pissing contest to determine who is the most 'experienced' traveller. More Indian than locals in dress and food habits, they were determined not to be seen as tourists, which ironically often makes them stand out even more.

Back in *The Sheltering Sky*, Port eventu-

ally contracts typhoid fever on a journey pushing for an off-the-grid desert town. Seeking solace in the rhythms of a troupe of Berber musicians who he's convinced will be able to drive the fever from his body, he dies a lonely death in a bare mud room. Kit seems to know she's been losing him much longer than that though, his death setting her free. Exiting through the city's gates, she wanders off into the desert and joins a Bedouin tribe, closing the doors on a return home for good.

Bowles's existential account of travelling must have been partly influenced by the travellers he would have encountered in Tangier, pouring over maps and guidebooks, the mysterious remoteness of North Africa with its intoxicating rhythms and arcane customs waiting to be discovered.

Not too far from where Bowles lived himself, the crisp-white tomb of Ibn Battuta can be found hiding in a residential pocket of Tangiers' medina, the 'non-European' part of a northern African city. A Maghrebi explorer who lived between 1325 and 1354, Battuta travelled across Africa, West Asia and even spent time in India. Covering four times the distance than Venetian traveller Marco Polo, his writings continue to enthrall and offer a unique insight into people he met locally.

While Bowles' novel is now some 70 years old, Battuta's writings go back some seven centuries. His tomb is surrounded by plump cats. They only acknowledge visitors with the smallest of meows. Barely taking a break from licking their paws and washing their pelts, their haughty disinterest seemingly suggests not to think that you were here first. Leave it to cats to set the record straight.

After Port's death, Kit wanders off into the desert and joins a Bedouin tribe, closing the doors on a return home for good



TOURING AMONG THE TUAREGS

This New Year, Let's All Manifest, Mindfully

Examine your consumption choices – for your virtuous self, and for the world at large

SOFT LAUNCH



KANIKA GAHLAUT

Cambridge Dictionary has chosen 'manifest' as its 'word of the year'. I love it. It signifies an immediate future we can actively steer toward our intentions. It's about making things happen and embracing a mindset of purposeful action.

Coincidentally, I watched *Buy Now!* The Shopping Conspiracy, which just dropped on one of the streaming platforms. The documentary examines our shopping habits, exposes industry double standards, and aligns perfectly with the ethos of the 'manifest' collective. Its mantra is simple but powerful: buy less.

In the face of a global environmental crisis, 'manifest' becomes a call to intentionality in our collective actions.

The environment has long been a cause for concern, both ethically and scientifically. That a mainstream streaming platform is addressing it, signals that there has been a global shift in mass priorities – even as governments in developed and developing countries struggle to take decisive action.

Terms like carbon footprint, say no to plastic, global warming, sustainable fashion, and sustainable food are no longer confined to the jargon of environmental scientists. Today, they are part of mainstream conversations, understood by almost everyone. This widespread awareness is a promising sign of change.

On a personal level, I've been trying to up my game. For years, I've been trying to go vegan after almost a lifetime of vegetarianism, a journey I began at 14. I've also been making efforts to reduce my plastic use. Have I achieved these goals fully? The bad news is no. The good news? I've become more mindful.

As the documentary suggests, the act of buying less has been my starting point. Some changes were easy – like choosing cola cans over plastic bottles, or carrying a cloth grocery bag. Others required more thought. Beauty products, for example, often come wrapped in layers of plastic. I've cut back, buying only essentials. This winter, I

paused to consider the plastic wrappers on the cough lozenges I buy and asked myself: do I really need to get these in bulk and pop them like sweets? I decided to buy less.

Then there's takeout. The sight of all the plastic that arrives with food delivery has made me reconsider ordering in. These days, I order food far less frequently and only when necessary. Attempting veganism has made me aware of how much animal produce is hidden in everyday snacks – from pav bhaji to pastries. On my evening walks to the market, I now opt for shakarkandi chaat, paanipuri, and orange bars. These options are not only free of animal products, but also healthier than my previous indulgences.

It's not about changing the world singlehandedly, but about contributing to a collective movement – one where mindful consumption becomes second nature. Mohandas Gandhi said, 'The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated'. Mindfulness begins with examining our personal choices. But it extends to how we treat the planet and all its inhabitants.

It's easy to get swept up in the whirlwind of consumption. Because let's be honest – buying feels good. But that buzz fades fast, and the mess we've created lingers, as the documentary reminds us with exposés of how brands manipulate us into shopping more via chilling interviews from whistleblowers.

This is where mindful consumption comes in. It isn't just a nice-to-have – it's a necessity. It's not about feeling virtuous, but confronting the unsustainable ways we buy, consume, and dispose of things. If we want to change anything, it starts with our own habits.

The small shifts matter, even if they don't feel like much in the grand scheme. Together, they can manifest something powerful: a future shaped by intentional, mindful actions. Let's manifest, mindfully.

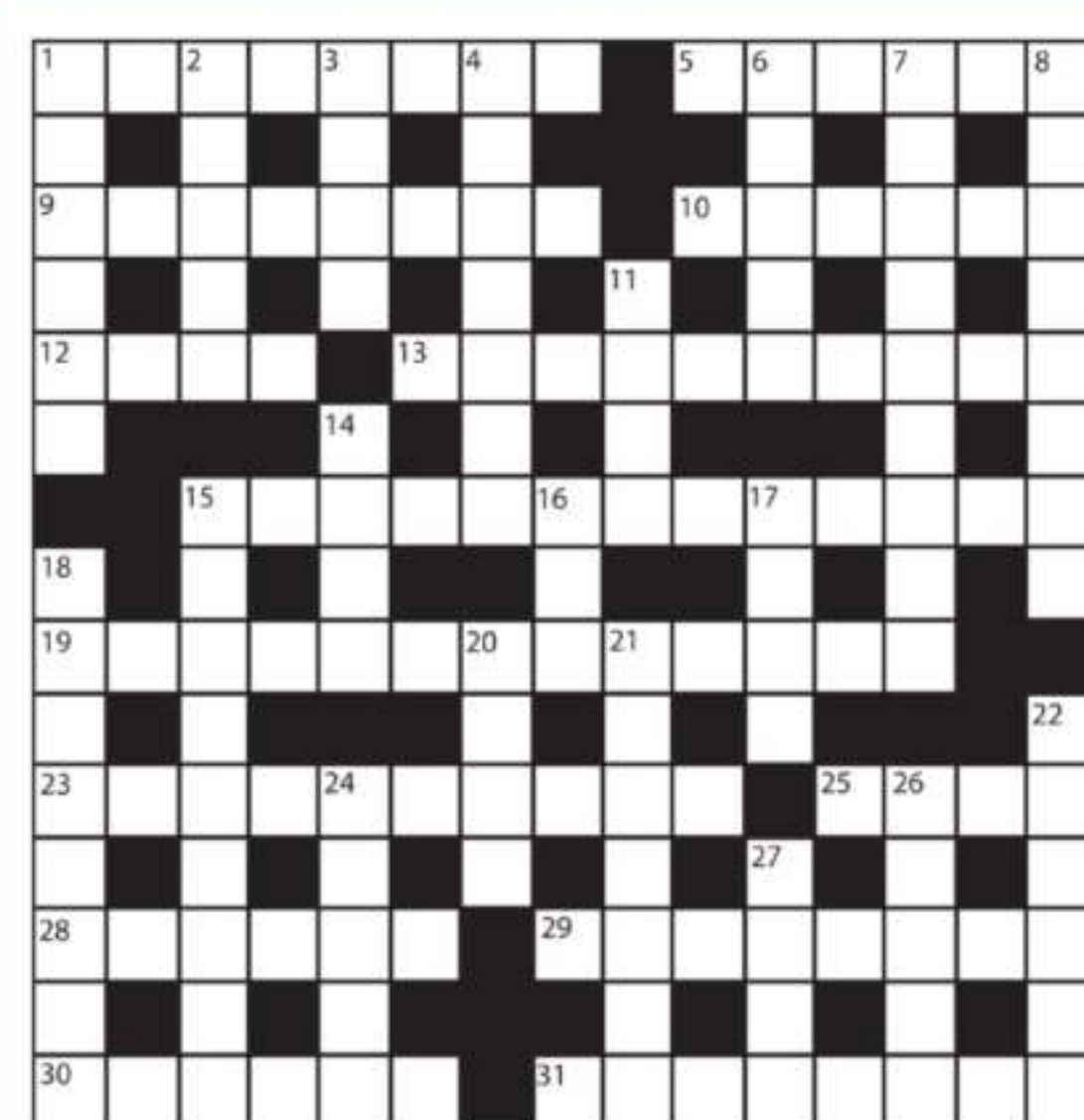


STOP BEFORE YOU DROP TILL YOU SHOP



ET Sunday Crossword

0093



ACROSS

- Rubbish here is best disposed of in wagon (5,3)
- He makes drink in a British Raj jug (6)
- Exotic larks in a country in Asia (3,5)
- Formal statement by director: I'm adopting TUC shifts (6)
- Sexy novel about stealing gemstone (4)
- Mother penned version of a modern message (10)
- Crack it if ladder collapses over barrel in new house? (8,5)
- Scurrilous tales of an MP involved with crime saga? (5,8)

DOWN

- Busy men tend to welcome attention and affection (10)
- Finished a few deliveries at Edgbaston (4)
- After reorganisation, our NHS makes a charge (6)
- A Parisian's parting snub: 'Your life depends on it' (8)
- Water bird? There's a big one in Blackpool (6)
- Ulster females have less trouble getting over cold (8)

- Norman's accumulated knowledge (6)
- Mildly erotic photo taken in Seychelles (5)
- Feel anxious about energy (4)
- Writer dipped into it at home, sounding put out (7)
- Intermittently irradiate a 2 dish (5)
- Reserved, like the money in an ATM (9)
- Call to mind legislator following note (8)
- A few or the full amount, say (4)
- Inferior work turned up with soldiers (4)
- Traffic control's hard to fathom in parts overall (5,4)
- Pick up crazy mother (3)
- I'm British, leading edge (4)
- A booster's needed to find orbiting rock (8)
- William Morris features shells, for example (4)
- Emperor's book? (7)
- Good artist endlessly struggled for nothing (6)
- A way for newlyweds to find a small rocky outcrop (5)
- Watch Roman poet avoiding river (5)
- Staff sign, reducing division (4)

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694 Aisle, 695 Aisle, 696 Aisle
697 Aisle, 698 Aisle,

South Korea's Yoon Survives Impeachment

SEOUL South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol survived an impeachment vote in parliament on Saturday prompted by his short-lived attempt to impose martial law this week, but the leader of his own party said the president would eventually step down. Yoon's People Power Party boycotted the impeachment vote, put forward by the main opposition Democratic Party, and the motion was scrapped after not enough lawmakers participated. After the vote, however, PPP leader Han Dong-hoon said the party had decided that Yoon would resign. — Reuters

Insurance Exec Killer may have Fled NY: Police

NEW YORK New York police said on Friday they believe the man suspected of gunning down a top health insurance executive may have fled the city on a bus following the brazen daylight murder. The development deepens the mystery surrounding the fresh-faced suspect, an image of whom was released by investigators Thursday and who has now been on the run for almost three days. The masked assailant was caught on camera entering a bus station in a northern neighborhood of Manhattan in the wake of Wednesday's slaying, but he could not be identified exiting the facility on foot, a spokesman said. — AFP

Domestic Replacements



LG India is the largest in home appliances with ₹21,557 crore sales. In contrast, Sony India managing director Sunil Nayyar's package in FY24 was ₹7.62 crore when it was less than one-tenth the size of Samsung in India, while homegrown air-conditioner manufacturers Voltas India MD Pradeep Bakshi's last fiscal package was ₹7.2 crore and that of Blue Star MD B Thiagarajan's was ₹11.24 crore, which included commission as well. Even in the auto industry, Indian CEOs outstripped others in moolah. For instance, market leader Maruti Suzuki India's expat managing director Hisashi Takeuchi's gross package was ₹5.1 crore in FY24 while Mahindra & Mahindra's CEO, auto and farm sectors, Rajesh Jejurikar's package was over ₹19 crore. Hero Moto Corp CEO Niranjan Gupta's remuneration was ₹10.84 crore last fiscal. Some global companies such as Sony and Panasonic, who at one point had expats leading Indian operations, now have replaced them with Indians. "Expat CEOs take time to settle in the Indian market and understand the dynamics of business, which is quite complex. A local chief executive can add value instantly," said the Indian chief executive of a leading MNC appliance manufacturer.

Prompt Action Sought from Creditors

From Page 1 Addressing stakeholders at the event, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) deputy governor M Rajeshwar Rao called for an "enforceable code of conduct" for the committees of creditors under IBBI, arguing that their performance in insolvency resolutions has been "lacking in several aspects." In August, IBBI issued guidelines for the committee of creditors, stipulating how it needs to conduct itself, but these were essentially self-regulatory in nature. Rao also called on financial creditors to take "prompt action" to prevent further erosion of the stressed firms' value, highlighting

NOTRE DAME REOPENING TURNS INTO A DIPLOMATIC HIGH POINT

Macron Welcomes Trump in Paris with Presidential Pomp

The future American prez says the two will be discussing a world that's gone 'a little crazy'

AP Paris: French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed Donald Trump to Paris on Saturday with a dose of presidential pomp as the two men resumed the relationship they established during Trump's first term after a four-year hiatus. Trump, the once and future American president, said the two would be discussing a world that's gone "a little crazy" as they met one on one before a celebration of the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral five years after a devastating fire. Trump's visit to France comes as Macron and other European leaders are trying to win Trump's favour and persuade him to maintain support for Ukraine in its defence against Russia's invasion. Macron's office said that would be discussed as well as the wars in the Middle East. As Trump arrived at the Elysee Palace, the official residence of the French president, Macron went out of his way to project an image of



(From left) US President-elect Donald Trump, France's President Emmanuel Macron and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Paris on Saturday. — AFP

close ties, posing for multiple handshakes interspersed with plenty of back-patting. Trump said it was "a great honour" and talked about the "great relationship" they have had. At the palace, a grand red carpet was rolled in the same way the

mediately joined them. The trio posed for a picture but made no further public comment before starting the talks. Trump has pledged to end the war in Ukraine swiftly but has not specified how, raising concerns in Kyiv about what terms may be laid out for any future negotiations. Macron, who has had an up-and-down relationship with Trump, has made a point of cultivating a relationship since the Republican defeated Democrat Kamala Harris last month. But Macron's office nonetheless played down the significance of the invitation, saying other politicians not now in office had been invited as well. The red carpet treatment, however, was a sign of how eager both Macron and other European leaders are to win Trump's favour and placate him even before he takes office. Democratic President Joe Biden was invited as well but will not attend. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre cited a scheduling conflict and said first lady Jill Biden will represent the United States.

ZELENSKY PRAISES DENMARK, LAMENTS LACK OF DEDICATION FROM OTHER ALLIES

Ukraine Confirms Second Danish Delivery of F-16 Jets

AP Kyiv: Denmark has delivered a second batch of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday as he travelled to Paris to meet with top politicians and dignitaries. In a message on Telegram, Zelenskyy praised Denmark and lamented a lack of dedication from other allies. "The first batch of planes provided by the Danes are already shooting down Russian missiles; rescuing our people and our infrastructure. Now our air shield is reinforced even further," he said. "If all partners were so determined, we would have been able to make Russian terror impossible." The announcement comes as Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region marks a day of mourning for 10 people killed in a Russian attack on Friday. A further 24 people, including two children, were injured when a missile struck a local service station, said regional Gov Ivan Fedorov. Another three people were

killed in a strike on the Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih on Friday, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said. Addressing the attacks, Zelenskyy said that Russian President Vladimir Putin did not seek "real peace". Putin "only seeks the ability to treat any country this way, with bombs, missiles, and all other forms of violence," Zelenskyy said. "Only through strength can we resist this. And only through strength can real peace be established." Zelenskyy is due to meet other world leaders on Saturday, including French President Emmanuel Macron, at an event in Paris celebrating the renovation of Notre Dame Cathedral after a devastating fire in 2019. US President-elect Donald Trump is among those expected to be in attendance, with European leaders keen to cultivate the incoming leader's favour to persuade him to maintain support for Ukraine against Russia's three-year invasion. It's not clear whether Trump will meet Zelenskyy.

Fitch Affirms Ukraine's Rating at Restricted Default Level

Reuters Western partners as well as the government's domestic borrowing. Despite the tax increase, Fitch said it expects the general government deficit to remain Kyiv: Fitch credit rating agency on Friday affirmed Ukraine's long-term foreign currency sovereign credit rating at 'RD' (restricted default) as its war with Russia drags past the 33-month mark. The agency also affirmed the sovereign's 'CCC+' long-term local currency amid the ongoing debt restructuring, aimed at easing its wartime financial pressures. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in late November, signed into law Ukraine's widely contested wartime tax increases, raising the war tax for residents to 5% from 1.5%. The tax increases are expected to raise about 140 billion hryvnias (\$3.4 billion) in additional revenues next year to fund Ukraine's defence efforts. Ukraine expects to cover its budget deficit of about \$38 billion with financial aid from Kyiv's

DEFENCE DENTS General govt deficit may remain high in 2024 and 2025 as defence spending mounts while foreign grants are anticipated to fall

high in 2024 and 2025 as defence spending mounts while foreign grants are anticipated to fall. The rating agency said a peace agreement is unlikely and expects the war to continue into 2025.

'Syrian Insurgents have Reached Damascus Suburbs'

Active in Maadamiyah, Jaramana & Daraya, seizing key Syrian cities: A rebel commander



A member of Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces stands in Deir al-Zor, after US-backed alliance led by Syrian Kurdish fighters captured Deir el-Zor, government's main foothold, in Syria on Saturday. — Reuters

AP Beirut: Syrian insurgents have reached the suburbs of Damascus as part of a rapidly moving offensive that has seen them take over some of Syria's largest cities, opposition activists and a rebel commander said on Saturday. Rami Abdurrahman, who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said insurgents are now active in the Damascus suburbs of Maadamiyah, Jaramana and Daraya. He said that opposition fighters on Saturday were also marching from eastern Syria toward the Damascus suburb of Harasta. A commander with the insurgents, Hassan Abdul-Ghani, posted on the Telegram messaging app that opposition forces have started carrying out the "final stage" of their offensive by encircling Damascus. He added that insurgents were headed from southern Syria toward Damascus. Earlier, the Syrian army withdrew from much of southern Syria on Saturday, leaving more areas of

the country, including two provincial capitals, under the control of opposition fighters, the military and an opposition war monitor said. The redeployment away from the provinces of Daraa and Sweida came as Syria's military sent large numbers of reinforcements to defend the key central city of Homs, Syria's third largest, as insurgents approached its outskirts. The rapid advances by insurgents is a stunning reversal of fortunes for Syria's President Bashar Assad, who appears to be largely on his own, with erstwhile allies preoccupied with other conflicts. His chief international backer, Russia, is busy with its war in Ukraine, and Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah, which at one point sent thousands of fighters to shore up his forces, has been weakened by a yearlong conflict with Israel. Iran, meanwhile, has seen its proxies across the region degraded by Israeli regular airstrikes. The Syrian army said in a statement on Saturday that it has carried out redeployment and repositioning in Sweida and Daraa after its checkpoints came under attack by "terrorists."

Trump's NASA Pick a Boon for SpaceX, But to Face Hurdles

Elon Musk's close ally Isaacman is likely to spruce commercial side of space industry

Reuters Washington: US President-elect Donald Trump's pick to helm NASA, a private astronaut and close ally of Elon Musk's SpaceX, is a central figure of a speedy, commercial-focused side of the space industry who would face unfamiliar political challenges as an administrator. Jared Isaacman, the CEO of payment processing company Shift4 Payments, has made landmark visits to space on two ambitious SpaceX missions, including the first-ever privately funded spacewalk in September. In accepting Trump's decision, he envisioned a "thriving space economy" and vowed to "usher in an era where humanity becomes a true spacefaring civilisation". But the path to pursuing a faster, more privatised human spaceflight agenda is expected to involve a delicate political tango of trimming costly, entrenched programs and wooing lawmakers to increase the space agency's \$25 billion budget. "He's going to definitely push NASA, but he'll do it in a positive way," said Garrett Reisman, a retired NASA astronaut who has been an

adviser to SpaceX. Musk had recommended Trump pick Isaacman and has since told associates he sees the tech billionaire as someone who will get things done at NASA, according to two people familiar with the discussions. "He is a man (of) high ability and integrity," Musk said on Wednesday of Isaacman on his X platform. Targets at NASA for Trump and Musk's cost-cutting agenda that Isaacman is expected to eye include the agency's over-budget, \$24 billion Space Launch System rocket and the in-development Gateway space station poised to sit in a lunar orbit, according to people familiar with the transition team's space plans.

Govt Assistance

From Page 1 Surat currently has a monthly turnover of about ₹600 crore. While it largely deals in man-made fibre, the cotton hubs in Tiruppur and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, Ludhiana in Punjab and Noida in Uttar Pradesh are also expected to reap the benefits of the developments in the neighbouring country, he said. "While we shall see some gains in the short term, if the situation is capitalised well, we should be able to grow significantly in the garment manufacturing sector," said Gujarati. "But that would also call for some assistance from the government." The garment sector in Bangladesh has already been under pressure and the country has reported

unrest among workers due to financial stress. Clusters in that country are located around Dhaka, Chittagong, Gazipur, Ashulia, Narayanganj, Khulna, Narsingdi and Rajshahi. Dhaka and Chittagong have been facing major unrest, while trouble has been reported from other areas as well. In November, Swedwatch, a Swedish non-profit organisation reporting on business relations in developing countries, published a scathing report on the garment workers' plight in Bangladesh. It asked European Union members to enforce stricter diligence to ensure the protection of workers' rights. The organisation also recommended global brands sourcing garments from Bangladesh to "avoid contractual cascading or seeking blanket assurances from suppliers, but instead invest in meaningful stakeholder engagement when identifying potential and actual impacts and developing corrective action plans". It suggested brands join hands with trade unions for the betterment of workers, including targeted training programmes. These are expected to ensure better working conditions and fair wages for textile workers.

UNDER STRESS Garment sector in Bangladesh has already been under pressure and the country has reported unrest among workers

Rewarding Experience

From Page 1 Mumbai-based supply chain financing and working capital software venture Veefin has introduced several incentives to make the return-to-office experience rewarding and engaging, said chief HR officer Gitesh Karnik. These include enhanced facilities by way of upgraded office spaces, breakfast and lunch on in-office days at subsidised rates, free fun Friday snacks, onsite recreation rooms and regular team-building events to foster collaboration. The organisation is in the process of introducing shuttle services. "Our organisation follows a flexible work-from-home policy where employees can work from home on request. For the New Year, we are reviewing the policy to balance operational needs and employee well-being... the final plan will be based on feedback from employees and business requirements," Karnik said. Flexibility can clearly drive performance — with 64% of workers saying they are more productive working remotely, but it takes leadership and transparency of outcome, said Mercer's Singhal. B2B e-commerce platform Bi-

zongo follows a hybrid work model, encouraging employees to work from the office any 12 days a month. To encourage in-office presence, it has introduced a "Work Away Credit" policy. Under this initiative, employees who work from the office for 15 days or more in a month earn Work Away Credits, which can be redeemed for flexible remote work schedules, enabling better planning around holidays, festivals, or personal needs. "Since the launch of this policy, there has been a 78% increase in the number of employees working from office for more than 15 days a month, boosting collaborative opportunities and team camaraderie," said Aarfa Shaikh, associate director, people success at Bizongo. **EMPOWERING TEAMS** American software company Intuit follows a hybrid work model where employees work 2-3 days in the office each week. To make returning to the office meaningful, it has enhanced workspaces to provide for more collaboration and comfort; smaller teams have the flexibility to decide their days in office.

Industry Set for New Launches

From Page 1 "Battery swapping technology in China has reduced refuelling time to just five minutes, providing a promising model for the Indian market," said Ravi Bhatia, president, Jato Dynamics. The MG Windsor EV, a recent launch, has been a key driver of growth for the company. Launched with a unique battery-as-a-service model, the Windsor EV can be purchased at ₹9.99 lakh. It separates the vehicle cost from the battery price, allowing consumers to pay for the battery based on usage at the rate of ₹3.5 per km. "Windsor's success is beyond metros, with half of its sales coming from tier-2 and -3 cities," said Satinder Singh Bajwa, chief commercial officer, JSW MG Motor India, underscoring the growing sig-

nificance of new energy vehicles to the company's revenue and market strategy. Last month, Mumbai-based automaker Mahindra & Mahindra made its first full-fledged foray into India's nascent EV market with the introduction of two pure electric models. M&M plans to launch three to five more models based on the same vehicle architecture over the next few years. The UV major is targeting lifestyle buyers. Its target is to convert internal combustion engine (ICE) to lifestyle EVs, a senior executive said at the recent unveiling event. The maker of Thar and Scorpio SUVs is targeting total monthly sales of 10,000 units from the two new EV models. Tata Motors though is likely to record lower EV sales this fiscal, marking a sharp reversal for the company after a 48% surge in FY24.

कार्यालय श्री साँवलिया जी मंदिर मण्डल

मण्डफिया, जिला-चित्तौड़गढ़ (राज)
कमांक / लेखा / श्रीसामन / 2024-25/3023 दिनांक-04.12.2024
-- ई-निविदा सूचना संख्या - 20/2024-25 --
श्री साँवलियाजी मंदिर मण्डल, मण्डफिया द्वारा Operation and Maintenance of Cottage of Shri Sanwaliya Seth Dharmashala of S.S.M.M., at Mandfiya (Raj.) कार्य हेतु पंजीकृत एवं अनुमोदी व्यवसायी / प्रतिष्ठान/फर्म से निविदाएं प्राप्त में ई-प्रोक्चुरमेंट प्रक्रिया के माध्यम से ऑनलाइन निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा प्रपत्र व सम्बंधित विवरण व अन्य डॉक्यूमेंट वेबसाइट www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in तथा www.sppp.raj.nic.in पर दिनांक 07.12.2024 को प्रातः 09:00 बजे से उपलब्ध होकर दिनांक 26.12.2024 सायं 06:00 बजे तक ऑन लाईन गमा किये जा सकते हैं। निविदाओं का निविदा शुल्क, धरोहर राशि व प्रोसेसिंग फीस श्री साँवलियाजी मंदिर मण्डल के बैंक ऑफ इंडिया, राख्ता-मण्डफिया के खाता कमांक 52430100000001 IFSC-BARB0MANDPH में RTGS/NEFT/IMPS के माध्यम से जमा करवाना होगा। प्राप्त निविदाओं की तकनीकी निविदाएं दिनांक 27.12.2024 को दोपहर 12:00 बजे ऑनलाइन खोली जावेगी। UBN- SMM2425SLOB000085
मुख्य कार्यालय अधिकारी श्री साँवलियाजी मंदिर मंडल

The country's geospatial market is set for explosive growth, fuelled by technological innovations and increasing demand across key sectors, finds **Suraksha P**

Mapping New India

India's geospatial market is forecast to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.5% to reach ₹25,000 crore by 2025, said India Geospatial Market Outlook 2024, a knowledge paper published by Geospatial World recently. In 2023, the market was valued at about ₹18,000 crore.

Initiatives like the Smart Cities Mission, PM Gati Shakti, Deep Ocean Mission and the push for precision agriculture have heightened the demand for location-based analytics, satellite imagery and real-time data, propelling the industry forward, the paper by Geospatial World, an organisation that advocates for technologies and organisations working in the geospatial sector said.

The paper forecast that the domestic market will expand significantly, driven by increased adoption of geospatial technologies across industries such as agriculture, urban development, logistics and defence.

The paper identifies the Indian companies driving the investment surge in the geospatial industry as Skyroot, Pixxel, Agnikul, SatSure, Skylark Drones, ideaForge and GalaxEye.

Between 2019 and the second quarter of 2024, more than \$1 billion was cumulatively invested in 126 unique companies by 176 investors, reflecting a dynamic and growing market. However, both the number of investments and the total amount invested have experienced fluctuations during this period.

The peak occurred in 2022, when total investment surged to \$355 million across 40 deals. This period saw large funding rounds, as companies moved from early-stage innovation to commercialisation and scaling up.

The 2023 and Q2 of 2024 reflected a cooling period, with investments falling to \$327 million in 2023 and \$225 million by mid-2024, driven by consolidation in the industry and more selective capital allocation by investors.

The number of deals also decreased to 30 and 22, respectively, indicating a phase of maturation where established companies began dominating the landscape.

SPACE EXPLORERS

Pixxel, which has raised \$71.7 million so far, is known for its earth observation satellites using hyperspectral imaging. Pixxel secured significant funding, contributing to the overall investment spike in the sector. The company's focus is on building a constellation of satellites that provide high-resolution hyperspectral images for a wide range of applications, from agriculture to climate monitoring.

Earth observation and satellite imaging have traditionally been dominated by a handful of global players, with no Indian company making its mark in this space—until now, said Awais Ahmed, co-founder and chief executive of Bengaluru-based Pixxel.

"Hyperspectral imaging, which captures hundreds of wavelengths



of light, allows us to see details invisible to conventional satellites, like early signs of crop disease, soil nutrient levels, water pollution or methane leaks," he said. "This is the kind of information that can transform industries like agriculture, mining and urban planning and address critical global challenges such as climate change and food security."

Pixxel is building the world's first commercial hyperspectral imaging constellation, designed to deliver global coverage at a resolution that is 50 times more detailed than multispectral satellites.

This technology will enable industries and governments to monitor changes in near real-time, with actionable insights that were previously impossible to obtain.

"India's space ecosystem is growing rapidly, and we're proud to be the first Indian company to position ourselves as a serious player in the

\$7-billion global Earth Observation data market," he said. "Our goal is to not just establish India's presence but to fundamentally shift how satellite data is used to make better decisions for the planet," Ahmed explained.

ABOVE GROUND LEVEL

Known for its indigenous development of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), ideaForge focuses on providing drone solutions for

With improvements in technological capacity, India is likely to increase its share in international geospatial services, aided by growing collaborations with global space agencies and private firms

defence, security and industrial applications. Its drones are recognised for their durability and operational efficiency, making them popular across both government and commercial sectors.

Ankit Mehta, chief executive of ideaForge Technology, said the demand for accurate and actionable geospatial data is at an all-time high, driven by the increasing reliance on data-driven solutions across industries.

"Drone technology is at the forefront of this evolution, enabling the capture of centimetre level, high-resolution, precise and real-time geospatial data, which can be converted to proper ortho-rectified maps for geographic measurements, unlike satellite data," Mehta said.

"Our involvement in initiatives like Operation Dronagiri under the National Geospatial Policy 2022 reaffirms our commitment to leveraging geospatial technologies to enhance decision-making, improve citizen services and drive sustainable development," he added. "We believe drone data represents the forefront of innovation and is shaping the future direction of the industry."

SKY IS THE LIMIT

With an overall funding of \$95.5 million, specialising in satellite launch vehicles, Skyroot Aerospace raised the highest funding among

Domestic market

- The traditional sectors (inclusive of defence and intelligence, transport infrastructure, urban development, and utilities) accounted for the maximum share of the geospatial market in India in 2021, and is expected to do so in 2025 too - i.e. up to 55% of the total market share.

- Defence and Intelligence, followed by urban development, utilities and transport infrastructure are also the future growth sectors.

- Non-traditional sectors such as banking and finance, insurance, supply chain and logistics, are new sectors where the adoption of geospatial technologies (primarily digital maps) is at a nascent stage. However, these sectors are also the fastest growing market sectors within the Indian geospatial and space industry.

Indian space tech startups. Their focus is on providing cost-effective, reliable access to space, aiming to make satellite launches more accessible for global customers.

Pawan Kumar Chandana, co-founder and chief executive of Skyroot Aerospace, said that whether it is internet services beamed from orbit or ground data captured from above, opportunities are expanding exponentially.

International trade

- The Indian geospatial industry relies heavily on geospatial hardware and software imports for its geospatial technology requirements.

- The country imports most of its geospatial hardware equipment, such as Total Stations, LIDAR, and Mobile Mapping Devices, from leading geospatial technology providers of the United States, Europe and China.

- While the imports remain high, there is a significant increase in the consumption of geospatial data and technology worldwide.

- India, being a hub of global IT exports, also exports geospatial services and solutions in high percentages to countries worldwide.

- The export market for geospatial services and solutions was ₹13,000 crore in 2023 and is estimated to be about ₹17,000 crore by FY25 and ₹36,500 crore by 2030.

SOURCE: INDIA GEOSPATIAL MARKET OUTLOOK 2024

The record-breaking investments in the Indian space sector reflect this inflection point, he said.

"But there exists a critical bottleneck today in the form of access to space—with only a handful of launch providers catering to the growing demand," he pointed out.

Our funding rounds are a recognition of this market gap and our efforts to address it," Chandana said, "Through our

Vikram-series launch vehicles, we aim to provide cost-effective launch services that will enable an ecosystem of space startups to build for space. Our maiden orbital flight of Vikram-1 in 2025 will mark the beginning of this journey."

FILLING IN THE VOID

Infosys, India's second-largest software services firm, has invested ₹17 crore (about \$2 million) in Bengaluru-based startup GalaxEye Space Solutions. The company, incubated at IIT-Madras, is developing multi-sensor satellites that integrate Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) and optical sensors for high-resolution, all-weather imagery. The investment supports the upcoming Drishti Mission, set to launch in 2025, and marks Infosys's foray into space tech.

"Raising capital from leading investors like Mela Ventures and Infosys, especially in a tough market, is a testament to the company's strength. We're not here to imitate the West—we're here to disrupt the earth observation and geospatial industry," said Suyash Singh, co-founder and chief executive of GalaxEye.

While companies like Ola, Swiggy and Zomato have leveraged navigation satellites to reshape industries, we have not seen the same with earth observation, he pointed out. GalaxEye is stepping up to fill that void, making a bold impact not just in India, but on the global geospatial stage, he said.

MATURING SYSTEM

India's competitive pricing in satellite launch services (through ISRO) and its growing capabilities in geospatial data processing make it an attractive partner for global markets. With improvements in technological capacity, India is likely to increase its share in international geospatial services, aided by growing collaborations with global space agencies and private firms.

Sanjay Kumar, founding chief executive of Geospatial World, explained that the domestic market is projected to play a larger role in the overall industry composition by 2028.

"While exports contributed nearly equally to the market in 2019, by 2025 and 2028, the domestic market is forecast to outpace exports significantly," he said.

This shift is indicative of a maturing geospatial ecosystem within India, driven by increasing public sector projects, private investment and sector-specific applications that require geospatial solutions, Kumar said.

The geospatial market is expected to grow to ₹1 lakh crore by 2030, with significant integration across sectors like defence, agriculture and telecommunications, the paper said.

The domestic market's contribution to the total industry size is forecast to rise to ₹63,500 crore by 2028 from ₹12,000 crore in 2019, reflecting growing demand.

The export market, while maintaining a steady growth trajectory, is expected to contribute about ₹17,000 crore by 2025, and ₹36,500 crore by 2028, up from approximately ₹11,000 crore in 2019.

Cloud Powers India's Digital Leap

Businesses are leveraging digital technologies, particularly AI, with cloud migration

Annapurna Roy

Indian businesses are embracing cloud transformation as a critical enabler of artificial intelligence adoption, underscoring the vital role of cloud in India's digital leap, according to an EY study of cloud implementation.

As many as nine out of 10 Indian companies said that AI adoption would not have been possible without cloud migration, with nearly seven in 10 currently transitioning applications to the cloud, the survey found. "The rapid adoption of cloud technology in India is more than just a technological upgrade—it's a transformational shift that empowers businesses to reimagine their operating model, products or services," said Abhinav Johri, technology consulting partner, EY India.

"By leveraging cloud to enable AI capabilities, companies can now respond faster to evolving client needs and market changes and deliver enhanced value through AI-led solutions. This marks a new wave of progress, which may potentially position India as a global leader," Johri said.

Most Indian companies follow a hybrid approach, managing applications partly on the cloud and partly on-



State of cloud adoption in India

67% of Indian companies are currently transitioning applications to the cloud

80% are managing enterprise applications partly on the cloud and partly on-premises

Cloud and innovation are connected

90% of Indian companies affirmed that AI adoption would not have been possible without cloud migration

37% highlighted AI/ML technologies as crucial in driving product and service innovation following cloud migration

37% cited improved innovation of natively developed in the cloud, compared to developing them on-premises and migrating them to the cloud

What are the challenges?

- Nearly **1 in 4** regard cybersecurity as the biggest hurdle for cloud transformation

- Nearly **30%** reported budget constraints as the biggest hurdle for cloud transformation

Silver lining...

- Only **25%** of Indian companies, compared to **38%** globally, view skills and capability gaps as a primary barrier to developing cloud-native applications

Green line and bottom line

- Nearly **30%** reported improved monitoring of carbon emissions due to cloud-native development

100% reported ease in demonstrating cloud return-on-investment to the C-suite

SOURCE: EY GLOBAL CLOUD IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

premises, which makes for a balanced strategy allowing for flexibility while enabling gradual progress toward full cloud migration, the study noted.

The 20% of organisations that are fully on cloud are typically the new-age, digital native companies. Of the 80% that follow a hybrid approach, 30-40% have cloud-native business applications, including their software-as-a-service applications, Johri noted.

"This is a very encouraging trend, showing that there is an enhanced level of confidence in the functionality provided by these cloud applications," he said. "This also means that there is a standardisation happening and capabilities are being offered vis-a-vis something that you might want to develop yourself."

Companies may want to maintain on-premises capabilities due to operating models or sectoral limitations, for instance, banks, non-banking financial companies, telcos and others where data protection and high levels of confidentiality are of major importance.

Improving cloud adoption could require more awareness regarding its advantages and greater investment by companies in cybersecurity, Johri said, which continues to be a concern as some decision-makers see security as an afterthought.

Bits & Bytes

GOOGLE SPLIT STILL ON THE TABLE: EU ANTITRUST CHIEF

A potential split of Google's business is still under consideration, said Teresa Ribera, the European Union's new competition chief, who also pledged to build bridges with incoming US President Donald Trump.

Ribera said that divestments—launched by her predecessor Margrethe Vestager and the US Department of Justice—are one way of preventing Big Tech firms grabbing too much market power.

Vestager had pitched a potential breakup of Google's ad-tech arm to address its dominance on digital advertising, while the US has urged broader divestments, including the forced sale of the company's Chrome browser to address its alleged stranglehold on online search.

One of Ribera's challenges will be dealing with Trump, who has repeatedly accused Europe of treating the US badly and threatened a trade war.

AMAZON SUEW OVER SLOW DELIVERIES TO LOW-INCOME AREAS

The attorney general of the US District of Columbia has sued Amazon, accusing it of violating consumer protection laws by making slower deliveries to members in lower-income neighbourhoods.

According to the lawsuit, Amazon had deliberately and secretly stopped its fastest delivery service to the poorer neighbourhoods, instead using third parties like United Parcel Service and the Postal Service to make deliveries there for the past two years. That resulted in slower deliveries than those made by Amazon's own delivery drivers, who serve other Washington residents.

Amazon "cannot covertly decide that a dollar in one ZIP code is worth less than a dollar in another," said Attorney General Brian I. Schwab.

Indonesia said that it has received an improved investment offer worth \$1 billion from Apple, in the tech giant's latest bid to lift a ban on the sale of iPhone 16 devices in Southeast Asia's largest economy.

Indonesia had prohibited the sale of Apple's flagship iPhone 16 devices, saying it has failed to comply

with domestic content requirements for smartphones and tablets. The company had pledged in 2023 to invest 1.7 trillion rupiah (\$107 million) for developer academies across Indonesia, yet had fallen short by some \$10 million.

Investment Minister Rosan Roeslani doubled down on an earlier demand that Apple should offer Indonesia a better deal than Vietnam, where it has funnelled about \$15 billion for manufacturing facilities.

OPENAI TO PARTNER WITH MILITARY DEFENCE TECH FIRM

OpenAI and military defence technology company Anduril Industries said they would be working together to use artificial intelligence for "national security missions".

The companies said they will focus on improving defences against drone attacks.

The companies said the deal would help the US maintain an edge over China, a goal that OpenAI chief Sam Altman has spoken of in the past.

"Our partnership with Anduril will help ensure OpenAI technology protects US military personnel, and will help the national security community understand and responsibly use this technology to keep our citizens safe and free," Altman said.

— Agencies

PICS: GETTY IMAGES, BLOOMBERG



PIC: UNITED ARTISTS KOBAL COLLECTION

The Friendship Behind Annie Hall and Manhattan

The New York Times

In the mid-1970s, writer and director Woody Allen was known for farcical movies about subjects such as the search for the world's best egg salad. But as he headed in a new artistic direction, he took a friend along for the ride: A folk musician-turned-humorist named Marshall Brickman.

Together they worked on *Annie Hall* (1977), a comic, wistful remembrance of a failed relationship, and *Manhattan* (1979), which focused on characters struggling to find themselves in work and romance. The films came to be widely considered the two essential Woody Allen movies.

After Brickman died on November 29, Allen spoke about their collaboration:

“Marshall was one of the authentically funny people. He was a wonderful wit”
WOODY ALLEN

murder mystery. I felt it could be changed just to a regular story. We worked on it together. It evolved from many walks and talks. We lived directly across from Central Park. He would usually walk over in the morning. We'd go sit in the park. We would talk about many things — not always the script — but much of the conversation would be about it. We had a good time delighting each other with new jokes or new ideas, plot twists and things. Gradually, drafts would evolve.

What were Brickman's contributions to *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*?

His contributions were the same as mine. He was very good at jokes and dialogue and good at plot and good at character, the same as me.

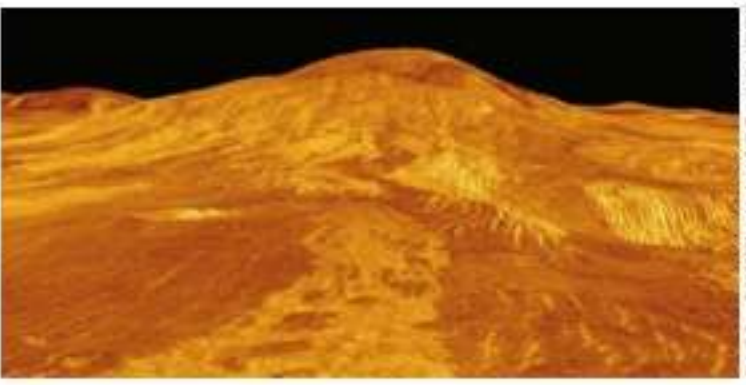
You read and hear all the time, “This one is a comedy genius.” Comedy geniuses are a dime a dozen. But Marshall was one of the authentically funny people. He was a wonderful wit.

Does any memory of your friendship stand out?

When we finished *Annie Hall* and the two of us were searching for a title, we came up with *Anhedonia*, which was a little-known psychological term for the inability to experience pleasure. The two of us were so delighted. We thought we had the best title in the world. United Artists thought that it was the worst title in the world. They said: “This is a delightful movie. You can't call it that.” But I remember the sense of manic euphoria that Marshall and I had.

WEEKEND POSER

Did Venus Ever Have Oceans?



PIC: GETTY IMAGES/REUTERS

Earth is an ocean world, with water covering about 71 per cent of its surface. Venus, our closest planetary neighbour, is sometimes called Earth's twin based on their similar size and rocky composition. While its surface is baked and barren today, might Venus once also have been covered by oceans?

The answer is no, according to new research that inferred the water content of the planet's interior — a key indicator for whether or not Venus once had oceans — based on the chemical composition of its atmosphere.

PARCHED SURFACE

The researchers concluded that the planet currently has a substantially drier interior that is consistent with the idea that Venus was left desiccated after the epoch early in its history when its surface was comprised of molten rock — magma — and thereafter has had a parched surface. Water is considered an indispensable ingredient for life, so the study's conclusions suggest Venus was never habitable. The findings offer no support for a hypothesis that Venus may have a reservoir of water beneath its surface. Volcanism, by injecting gases into a planet's atmosphere, provides clues about

the interior of rocky planets. As magma ascends from an intermediate planetary layer called the mantle to the surface, it unleashes gases from deeper parts of the interior.

NEVER HABITABLE

Volcanic gases on Earth are more than 60 per cent water vapour; evidence of a water-rich interior. The researchers calculated that gases in Venusian eruptions are no more than six per cent water vapour, indicative of a desiccated interior. “We suggest that a habitable past would be associated with Venus's present interior being water-rich, and a dry past with Venus's present interior being dry,” said Tereza Constantinou, a doctoral student at the University of Cambridge's Institute of Astronomy and lead author of the study published in *Nature Astronomy*. “The atmospheric chemistry suggests that volcanic eruptions on Venus release very little water, implying that the planet's interior is equally dry. This is consistent with Venus having had a long-lasting dry surface and never having been habitable,” Constantinou added.

— Reuters

Follow this seven-minute workout that can help quieten the anxious mind

Calm Movement

The New York Times

The world is an unstable place. Whether it's politics or your career — the ground is constantly shifting. And if the world feels unstable long enough, your mind and body can enter a perpetual state of high alert. The psychological experience of this anxiety can result in physical symptoms: A racing heart rate, higher blood pressure and shallower breathing, for example. And while some tools like cognitive behavioural therapy can be useful for treating the mind, there are others that start with the body and help the mind to follow.

“Strengthening the connection between the body and the mind is a two-way street,” said Cassandra Vieten, a clinical professor of psychology and director of the Center for Mindfulness at the University of California, US. Just as your thoughts can influence your body, moving your body can influence your thoughts. It's like “reverse engineering your mindfulness,” she added.

In recent years, a small but growing number of fitness and mental health professionals have tried to find specific movements that can lower stress level on

Anti-anxiety routines can go by many names — somatic movement, embodied exercise or even yoga therapy — but generally fall under the umbrella of mindful movement

demand. Unlike conventional workouts, the goal isn't to get your heart rate up, but down, allowing you to emerge feeling emotionally stronger and more resilient, regardless of your fitness level.

Anti-anxiety routines can go by many names — somatic movement, embodied exercise or even yoga therapy — but generally fall under the umbrella of mindful movement.

Here is a seven-minute workout of fundamental calm-inducing movements to add to your mental health toolkit.

OVERVIEW

Time 7 minutes

Intensity Low

What you will need

• A medicine ball or pillow

• A short playlist of your favourite songs

How often

This workout can be done as a stand-alone routine or as a complement to your regular exercise regimen. Set an alarm to do it the same time every day or turn to it whenever you're feeling anxious.

Adjust for you

Consider this as a starting point. The exercises can be mixed and matched, and they can also be helpful individually. If you find some moves are more effective than others, don't hesitate to drop those that aren't working for you. The exercises can be done standing or



using a chair for extra stability. If you are unable to squat, you can simply reach forward and up with your arms.

WARM UP

Breathe deeply

Begin with slow, deep breathing, placing one hand on your heart and another on your belly. As you inhale through your nose, your belly should expand. As you exhale through your mouth, it should deflate. Repeat three times.

Why this helps Some experts say deep breathing in which your belly expands on the inhale — also called diaphragmatic breathing — can help activate your body's parasympathetic nervous system, slowing down your heart rate.

Push and pull

Start with your hands in front of your chest and inhale through your nose. As you exhale through your mouth, press your palms away. Make fists and inhale,



PIC: GETTY IMAGES



pulling your arms back toward your chest. While doing this exercise, think about pushing away stress and pulling in calm. Repeat three times.

Why this helps For some, physically acting out a desired emotional state — say, calm and steadiness — can encourage your brain to experience it, Vieten said. “Your brain is not only sending out signals to the rest of your body,” she said, “it's receiving signals from you.”

Shake it out

Gently shake and wiggle, moving from your head down to your feet. Move at whatever intensity and speed feels good.

Why this helps Movement therapists often find shaking helps to settle people's minds by discharging pent-up jitters.

BUILD INTENSITY

Rock from side to side

Plant your feet on the ground and gently bend your knees, relaxing your shoulders. Begin rocking at the pace of your thoughts. For instance, if your mind is racing, rock quickly. Then slow down your body as a way to slow your mind.

Why this helps Rocking can soothe the nervous system by creating a sense of predictable rhythm and steadiness.

Dance party for one

Cue up a favourite song, and dance (or march) at moderate intensity until it ends.

Why this helps Dancing (or moving rhythmically) has been found to help release of mood-boosting chemicals such as dopamine and endorphins.

Move your hips

Twist, floss or hula for 30-60 seconds. **Why this helps** Stress can create tight hips and gently moving them helps to release tension, which can help your whole body feel more relaxed.

Medicine ball throw

Grab a lightweight medicine ball or pillow and stand with your legs hip-width apart, gently bending your knees. Slowly bring the ball over your head, then swing your arms through your legs and slam it down on the floor. (This can also be done seated.) Consider letting out a grunt or shout during the slam. Repeat one to three times.

Why this helps Physically expressing whatever intense emotions you're feeling can be effective in letting them go.

Squat, with an upward arm reach

Slowly squat. As you stand back up, reach your arms up into the air, focusing on the feeling of taking up space.

Why this helps Squatting can help create a sense of stability, which can lead to feeling more grounded emotionally. This can be helpful if anxiety makes you feel disconnected from your environment.

COOL DOWN

Sighs of relief and give yourself a hug (really)

Breathe in through your nose, and as you exhale, let out a sigh. Repeat three to six times, allowing the sigh to lengthen and deepen each time. Then wrap your arms around your torso and hold for at least 10 seconds.

Why this helps Sighing can help to induce calm by increasing your oxygen intake and lowering your heart rate, similarly to diaphragmatic breathing. Self-embrace can create a sense of personal safety and security.

What Goes Into an ‘Enhanced’ Version of the Olympics

The New York Times

In the summer of 2023, Aron D'Souza shocked the sports world with an announcement that he was creating an event called the Enhanced Games, which would be a far-ranging athletic competition seeking to challenge the Olympics. It would allow participants to use a variety of banned substances, including performance-enhancing drugs.

The reactions that came in to the news were overwhelmingly negative: Critics, including representatives from anti-doping agencies and sports commissions, called the concept a “clown show” and said it was “dangerous and irresponsible”, while the International



Olympic Committee told multiple news outlets that the Enhanced Games did not “merit any comment”.

Since then, the furor over the Games has largely settled down, even if the core question about whether they should exist still remains.

THE THREE PILLARS OF PLANNING

Much remains to be done for the Enhanced Games to become a reality. D'Souza, 39, said that he was focused on “three major pillars” of planning: Determining health protocols and working with government regulators, finding an appropriate venue (or venues) for the events and recruiting athletes to participate. D'Souza, a



PIC: GETTY IMAGES, NYT

long-time venture capitalist previously known for playing a critical role alongside Peter Thiel in Hulk Hogan's lawsuit against *Gawker*, says he has “no doubt that the Enhanced Games will be one of the most-watched sporting events in history” and that they would “capture the global imagination”.

He sees the Enhanced Games as a reflection of the world's appetite for athletic excellence unfettered by the usual regulations. He believes people are so interested in what enhanced athletes are capable of that “a billion people would watch it even if it was just eight guys running around a track”.

Of course, his plans are much

grander than that.

GAME CHANGER?

Rick Adams, a former member of the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee who is the senior vice-president for games delivery at the Enhanced Games, said that D'Souza had given him “a blank slate to show sport in ways that it's never been seen — places that it's never happened, formats that are non-traditional”.

D'Souza said that he and his team had not yet settled on an initial host city for the Games — which he hopes will kick off next year — but that he was undergoing “a bidding process with several cities”. As these plans are firmed up and as athletes are recruited, he said, the company will plan an elaborate presentation for public viewing. “We want to say, ‘Here we are, and we've changed the world,’” he said.

Spring Onion's Freshness and South Korea's Protests

FOOD FABLES



VIKRAM DOCTOR

History might call it the Spring Onion Revolt. South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol's crisis crystallised after a recent supermarket appearance where he said the price of \$75 won for a bunch of spring onions was reasonable. Koreans noted this was a just temporary discount at that supermarket spurred by subsidies.

The real market price was between 3,000 and 4,000 won.

Yoon appeared out of touch and duplicitous. Protestors waved spring onions, their long green leaves a vivid rebuke to the president. His party lost its parliamentary majority, precipitating a political confrontation in which the president declared martial law on December 3. Six hours later, massive protests and a parliamentary vote forced Yoon into a humiliating reversal.

The vegetables most associated with Korean cuisine are cabbages, used for their iconic fermented *kimchi*, or medicinal plants like *ginseng* and *mugwort*. But spring onions are valued too, their mild pungency and green freshness putting them in both herb and vegetable categories. They are fermented into *pa-kimchi* and fried in *pajeon* pancakes.

In *Eating Korea*, Graham Holliday's exploration of the cuisine, he describes old women selling spring onions by the roadside: “These women were widows and selling what they could grow was their way to supplement any meagre savings they might have along with the paltry state pension.” Spring onions grow easily, as William Carlos Williams noted in his poem “To Be Hungry Is To Be Great”. He describes “the small yellow grass-onion/ spring's first green...” which when fried are “inclined to be a little slimy, if well cooked/ and served hot on rye bread/ is to be a perfect appetizer/ and the best part/ of it is they grow everywhere”.

The eighth-century Chinese poet Du Fu also linked them to drinking with an old friend: “You send them off to fetch the wine-jar/ And pull spring-onions in the rain/ Cook

them now with yellow millet/ Saying ‘Well, we so rarely meet/ Fill my wine-cup ten times over...’

Wherever people have grown onions, they have relished the young bulbs with their long green stalks. This was usually a seasonal treat, but in Eastern Asia, they are valued in themselves and combined with ginger and garlic as a basic flavouring. Other varieties are grown like Welsh onions, Chinese onions and tree onions, and have been cross-bred for more varieties to ensure continuous supply. This explains their variations, from fat

The vegetables most associated with Korean cuisine are cabbages. But spring onions are valued too, their mild pungency and green freshness putting them in both herb and vegetable categories

white bulbs to thin stalk ends, and from eye-watering pungency to mild savouriness.

In Catalonia, a special variety called *calçots* is grown, with earth heaped up the stalks to ensure a longer white part. These are grilled and enjoyed with wine.

What is really confusing is their different names, with scallions, spring onions and green onions used almost interchangeably and sometimes in the same cookbook. Outside Korea and Catalonia, they tend to appear as flavourings, garnishes or salad ingredients. This diffuses their value, making them seem more of a supplementary ingredient rather than a main one.

Indian cuisines, some of which are averse to onions of any kind, rarely stipulate them. Home usage is probably higher than it seems, with recipes like a Kashmiri one for

spring onions cooked with eggs or a Konkani one where they are cooked with dried prawns. Many recipes for cooked greens derive extra flavour from spring onions chopped in.

Shahu Patole, in his outstanding recently-translated book *Dalit Kitchens of Marathwada*, gives a recipe rooted in that region's soil, one of the main growing areas for India's onions. When the delicate onion seedlings are replanted in fields, some are found to be only partly grown. Instead of being discarded, these are collected and cooked for a dish with a unique taste. He writes:



“These ultra-tender fresh leaves are called ‘lekuravali paat’, literally meaning a leaf which gives birth to many more leaves.” It is a tribute to the special powers of spring onions that South Korea's growing protests could embrace.

VITALS

FIFA Gives Club World Cup New Opening Day for Messi, Inter Miami



Zurich: The 2025 Club World Cup will now kick off one day earlier with Lionel Messi's Inter Miami opening the monthlong tournament on June 14, and ending with a week of games at MetLife Stadium near New York. FIFA published the 63-game schedule on Saturday for the first 32-team edition, two days after making the draw in Miami. FIFA has now brought forward the opening game to a Saturday, at an 8 p.m. local time start at Hard Rock Stadium for Messi and the hometown team to play Al Ahly of Egypt. MetLife Stadium was already announced as hosting the final on Sunday, July 13, and FIFA said Saturday the venue also will stage the two semifinals on July 8-9 and the fourth quarterfinal on July 5. **AP**

WATCHOUT! Tonight

ISL NorthEast United v Mohun Bagan 7:30pm (Sports18) **Premier League** Fulham v Arsenal 7:30pm; Tottenham v Chelsea 10pm (Star Sports) **LA LIGA** Atletico Madrid v Sevilla 1:30am (GXR)

2ND WOMEN'S ODI Focus on Batting as India Look to Avoid Series Defeat Against Australia

Brisbane: A desperate India will need their under-fire batters to step up in the second women's ODI against Australia on Sunday, as the visitors aim to avoid yet another series loss Down Under. India were bundled out for 100 in the series opener, leading to a demoralising five-wicket defeat, their heaviest in terms of balls remaining — 202 balls — since ODIs were reduced to 50 overs a side. India have never won a series Down Under and they will have their task cut out against a quality Australian side, which showed no signs of rust despite playing in the format after a gap of nine months. **PTI**

LIVE on Star Sports, 5-15 am

ABU DHABI GRAND PRIX McLaren Target Title After Front Row Sweep



Abu Dhabi: Lando Norris (right) led a McLaren front row sweep in qualifying for the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix on Saturday with the team perfectly placed to win their first Formula One constructors' title since 1998. The Briton swept to pole position 0.209 seconds clear of Australian teammate Oscar Piastri (left) at the floodlit Yas Marina circuit. "We want to win, I want to win. We know what we have to do... tomorrow we will have a good chance," said Norris, calling it a perfect day. Ferrari, 21 points behind McLaren, saw their challenge unravel with Carlos Sainz third on the grid but Charles Leclerc set to start on the back row after qualifying 14th with an additional 10 place penalty. "I think it was already extremely difficult, a mission impossible before the weekend started," said Sainz of Ferrari's prospects. **Reuters**

LIVE on FanCode, 8:30pm

Australia Headbutt India

Indian batting collapses after Head's scintillating 140 as Kangaroos zero in on series-levelling victory in second Test

BORDER-GAVASKAR TROPHY DAY 2, SECOND TEST | ADELAIDE

Travis Head blazed a sparkling 140 before Australia demolished India's top order to close in on victory in the day-night second Test on Saturday. At stumps on day two the visitors were floundering at 128/5, still 29 runs adrift, after a fiery blast under the Adelaide Oval lights from Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Scott Boland.

Rishabh Pant was on 28 and Nitish Kumar Reddy 15 as the hosts eye their eighth straight pink-ball victory in Adelaide to level the five-Test series after being crushed by 235 runs in Perth. Australia were all out just after tea for 337 after resuming on 86/1, with Head producing a typically flamboyant knock on his home ground in front of a big crowd.

Batting at five, he scored at almost a run a ball, slamming 17 fours and four sixes, while Marnus Labuschagne chipped in a gritty 64 to build a first-innings lead of 157. "Thope it's going to be a dominant position, we have played well over the last two days," said Head.

In reply, India struggled as the sun went down with KL Rahul lasting just 10 balls before Cummins sent a short one to the ribs and he gloved to Alex Carey behind the stumps.

Yashasvi Jaiswal, out for a golden duck in the first innings, made 24 this time, but he had no answer to Boland, whose first ball angled away and took a nick to Carey. Boland stunned Virat Kohli (11) in similar fashion, with Carey holding his third of the night to leave India tottering at 66/3.

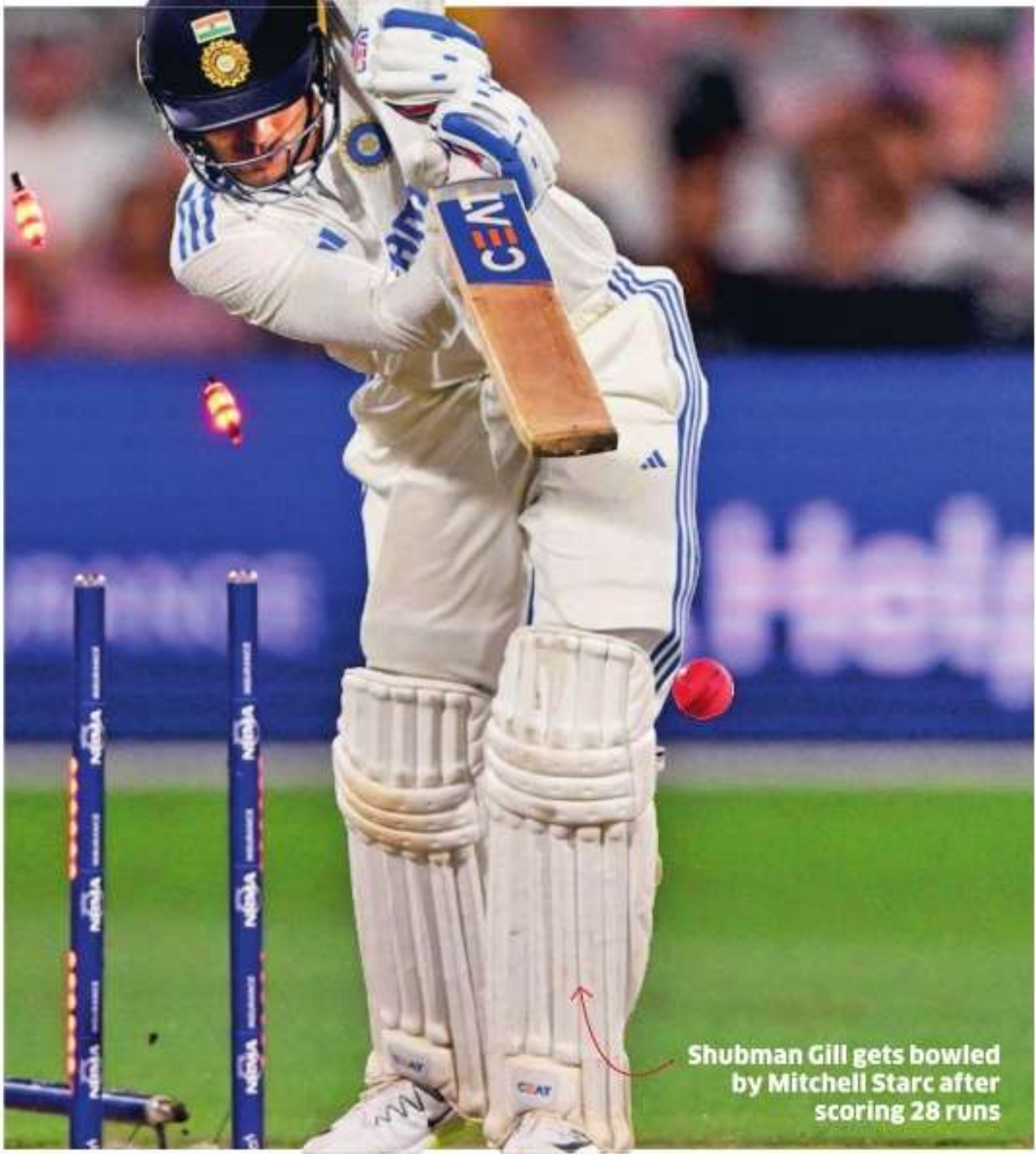
Shubman Gill was next to go after a determined 28, with his middle stump removed by Starc, before Cummins bowled Indian captain Rohit Sharma for six.

India bowling coach Morne Morkel admitted his team had their work cut out, and praised Head's contribution. "Head is a guy that is looking to score, as a bowler he puts you under pressure," he said. "When he came to the crease we bowled really well, I thought we could knock him over, but credit to him, he got through that phase then put the pressure on us."

Head adopted his usual aggressive posture, blasting two sixes off spinner Ravichandran Ashwin as he reached his half-century from 63 balls. He then ramped up the attack, racing to his second 50 off just 48 balls to clock an eighth Test ton, riding his luck along the way after being dropped on 76 by Mohammed Siraj. Head finally succumbed to Siraj, clean-bowled, with the pair involved in a fiery exchange in the aftermath after the Indian quick gave the home-town hero a send-off. **AFP**

BRIEF SCORES India 180 and 128/5 (Pant 28*, Gill 28, Jaiswal 24; Cummins 2/33, Boland 2/39) trail Australia 337 (Head 140, Labuschagne 64; Bumrah 4/61, Siraj 4/98) by 29 runs

Travis Head 140 Runs off 141 balls



Shubman Gill gets bowled by Mitchell Starc after scoring 28 runs

Is Pink Ball Test a Failed Experiment?

Is the pink ball Test a failed experiment? A decade earlier, with the dwindling number of spectators in Test matches, the day-night Test seemed like an exciting idea, the panacea for the problem.

Over the years, it seems to have lost its sheen. Except Australia, no country plays it regularly. In fact, they have hosted 13 out of 23 pink ball Tests that have been played so far. England and South Africa haven't hosted a pink ball Test since 2017. Sri Lanka have never hosted one. India haven't played a pink Test at home since March 2022 and there is nothing to suggest that it will change anytime soon.

For all practical purposes, it has been reduced to tokenism championed by Australia whenever a touring side travels down under.

Test cricket is supposed to be a level playing field. But with the pink ball, it isn't. The scale is always tilted heavily towards Australia because no other country plays with the pink ball as often as they do. Take the case of Harshit Rana, who received a lot of flak for bowling poorly in Adelaide. But Rana rarely gets a chance to bowl with the pink ball. Not everyone is Jasprit Bumrah and it isn't fair to expect the same from Rana.

India practiced with the pink ball for eight days and on the basis of that they were expected to be competitive in Adelaide. They will again not play with the pink ball for the next two years perhaps. In such a scenario the pink ball is actually giving the Australians an unfair advantage and it is essential cricket boards look into the relevance of it going forward.

Some might argue it is a novelty and there is an economic dimension to it. The counter argument is simple. The Perth Test saw the highest crowds ever. The Boxing Day Test is



Boria Majumdar

already a sold-out affair and close to 1,00,000 people are expected to be there at the MCG. Sydney too is a sell-out. Even Brisbane next week is all set to witness serious crowd presence when the two sides match up in the third Test. Why only Australia. Even India versus England in June-July 2025 is expected to be a huge draw and the Lord's ballot is already over-subscribed.

The build up to the Border-Gavaskar Trophy is proof that you don't need the pink ball to market the sport. Train stations in Perth were all branded with pictures of Rohit Sharma and Pat Cummins and the coverage in the Australian press is evidence how big a draw this Indian team is. It is perhaps time to shun the pink ball experiment.

Cricket is a battle between bat and ball. Test cricket more so. That's what happens with the red ball. Quality bowlers match up against the best batters and the product is lapped up globally by purists. With the pink ball, at least for the first 25 overs, the bowlers have a clear advantage. Take Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc. Both can bat and have played many a handy innings for Australia in the past. But the moment the Indians opted for the second new ball, they started to throw their bat at literally every ball. One knew it was just a matter of time. One Bumrah delivery swung a country mile to go for four byes, bringing dry smiles to everyone's faces. The batter is like a prey waiting to be consumed.

Maybe that's why Australia were always expected to have the upper hand in Adelaide. Going forward, it will be interesting to see if the Indians agree to playing a pink ball Test. The experiment has failed. Hopefully, the pink ball will now get the burial it deserves.

Shatranj Ke Khiladi

Behind the recent success of India's chess players is an NCA-style academy preparing them to take on world's best



Left to right: Savitha Shri Baskar, Sandeep Singhal, R. Vaishali, Praggnanandhaa R, Nihal Sarin, Viswanathan Anand, D Gukesh, Sandipan Chanda, Raunak Sadhwani, Leon Mendonca WACA

Amit Chaudhary

Sometime in early 2019, five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand was invited to address a gathering in Bengaluru. The attendees were not chess players or coaches or sports administrators. In fact, it had nothing to do with the sport of chess. Yet, it would turn out to be a game-changer for chess in India.

WestBridge Capital, the Bengaluru-based investment firm that had invited Anand, wanted him to talk to their investors about pattern recognition and its applicability in chess and business. It's safe to assume that those investors went home better-informed, but chess was definitely the biggest benefactor.

During a conversation, Sandeep Singhal, the co-founder and managing partner of WestBridge Capital, suggested to Anand that they should "do something together... for Indian chess". He said, "let's think about it" and then a few months later he came back with an idea of setting up an elite fellowship, where we take the sort of brightest young individuals and try to help them with that last bit that can be the gap between someone who's best in India to someone who's best in the world," Singhal says.

And that led to the formation of WestBridge Anand Chess Academy (WACA), a catalyst in the rise of several young Indian chess players — including the youngest World Championship contender D Gukesh — in the last couple of years.

INSPIRATION

"Sandeep gave me a pretty broad canvas to think up some ideas. We could have done a tournament or something like that, but I thought that we could try and figure out why we have so many good promising youngsters but not enough are breaking into the top," Anand says.

Having grown up in the era of Soviet Union and American domination in chess, Anand had a fair idea what was lacking in Indian chess and how to fix that. He took inspirations from the famous Botvinnik Chess Academy, the alma mater of chess greats Anatoly Karpov, Garry Kasparov and many others, and the Samford Fellowship that provides grants to young and promising chess players in the US.

"A lot of these ideas are from a different time. But I tried to do something that's a mix of all that and that's kind of what resulted in WACA," Anand elaborates. "So, we support the youngsters at a crucial stage in their career. We try to give them things like regular training, monitoring and come up with helpful suggestions. Our approach is to complement what they're already doing. We fit into where their parents and their trainers work, because they have a good setup and they're working hard. We really try to amplify that."

CHALLENGE The first big challenge came even before the academy could take off the ground. They planned to launch the academy in April 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic stopped the world in its tracks and plans were temporarily shelved. However, by the end of that year, the world found a way around the pandemic limitations and moved all the work online. And that's what Anand and his team also did. The online mode also helped WACA tap into the best coaches from around the world without the need to bring them to one location.

"I asked a lot of my former trainers if they would conduct regular classes. The trainers were scattered around the world — Germany, Israel, Poland, and in India itself. The obvious solution was to go become an online academy, at least for regular classes. And during the pandemic, it was extremely useful. It gave them (players) a regular source of high-quality classes, so that they could keep their intensity even if they were not able to travel," Anand says.

PURPOSE In its current form, WACA works with select players and equips them with the resources required to succeed at the elite level. And, they want to remain that way, at least for the foreseeable future as they believe there are enough coaches and academies who are doing a good job at the grassroots level. They want to make WACA the chess equivalent of the National Cricket Academy (NCA), which incidentally is also in Bengaluru.

"I think we have to use our resources appropriately. It's like the National Cricket Academy (NCA) can only take the elite cricketers," Singhal says.

"This (elite academy) is what was missing in India actually. The hardest is to put this (elite academy) infrastructure, to attract the world's best coaches and Anand's time. He's still an active player. So, we have to optimize those resources and

bring it to the benefit of that select few who can really utilize that and take it all the way."

PROGRESS The results were quick. Within a year, youngsters like Gukesh and R Praggnanandhaa started doing well at the elite level and were breaking the 2700 elo ratings, a sign of a truly world class player. The proof of the progress came at the 2022 Chess Olympiad in Chennai, where India's youngest team comprising Gukesh (then 16 years old), Nihal Sarin (18), Praggnanandhaa (16), Adhian Bhaskaran (29) and Raunak Sadhwani (15) came closest to winning the gold medal. They eventually finished with bronze.

"It was clear that they were becoming very strong very soon," Anand says.

Two years later, India won the Chess Olympiad in both open and women's categories.

At this year's Candidates tournament that decides the challenger for the World Championship match, three out of eight contenders were Indians — Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi.

Gukesh, however, was the most impressive among and looked ready to take on the best in the world. Anand realised that the youngster had reached a stage where he needed a full-time coach working exclusively with him. He teamed up Gukesh with Grzegorz Gajewski, former Polish national champion and a trainer at WACA.

"Gukesh was essentially getting invitations to all the top events, so we had to change (his training) a bit. By the end of the year (2023), he qualified for the Candidates already," Anand says.

Gukesh, 18, went on to become the youngest to win the Candidates. After nine games of the World Championship that is under way in Singapore, Gukesh is tied on points with defending champion Ding Liren of China. If he goes on to win, he will be the youngest world champion in the history.

SUPPORT Competing at the elite level is very expensive in terms of not just facilities but also acquiring the services of experts, who don't come cheap. That's where WestBridge Capital's support and expertise help.

"It allows me to create a very nice setup. There is some organisational help, of course. They know how to structure an academy, manage all the background work and so on. But obviously their support is financial. I can hire the best trainers. And then if I make a recommendation, they usually follow through on it. So they contribute in a lot of ways," Anand explains.

"It (money) is very important if you want the best help and resources. There are people in other countries who get very high-level support. If you want to compete like that, it is important. Obviously, you can do it yourself, but then it's quite a burden and puts a lot of pressure on you. When you have a company like WestBridge that is willing to support that, it takes a lot of worry off your head."



Deadlocked WCC Remains Tied With Only Four Games to Go

Singapore: Defending champion Ding Liren and his teenage challenger Dommaraju Gukesh (in pic) of India remained even on Saturday with only four games to go in their World Chess Championship match. The score is deadlocked at five points each after 10 games in the 14-match series as both agreed to a draw.

Each player has won one game apiece, with Ding taking the opening match and Gukesh coming back to defeat the champion in game three. The rest ended in draws.

Ding, 32, gained early advantage on Saturday playing with the white pieces but the game soon fizzled to a draw as neither player made any inroads after 36 moves.

As the tournament neared the homestretch, both players admitted that each move will be crucial. "Now, the cost of one game is higher than it was maybe... a few games before," the 18-year-old Gukesh said after the match. "But my approach and my goal is still the same: to play good games in every single game."

Ding said "there's not so much room to make mistakes" anymore and every loss "will result in a very bad situation".

If both remain tied after 14 rounds, the match will move to a tie-breaker, which will be played on December 13. **AFP**

Hamilton's Mercedes Farewell Ends F1's Greatest Era

The Brit had a remarkable run with the team, winning six titles, but after today's race he will be racing for Ferrari

Ian Parkes

After 12 seasons, 246 Grands Prix, 84 victories and six drivers championships with Mercedes, the curtain will come down on one of the most storied periods in Formula One on Sunday.

Lewis Hamilton bows out of Mercedes, leaving behind a legacy on and off the track. Next year, at 40, he will "fulfill a childhood dream," he said, and drive for Ferrari.

"We've had an absolutely incredible journey together," he said of Mercedes. "We've created history within the sport, and it's something I take a lot of pride in, and I'm very proud of what we've achieved."

On joining Ferrari, Hamilton said he "felt like it was time to start a new chapter" in his career.

"It was not that difficult to convince Lewis" to join, said Fred Vasseur, the Ferrari team principal. "It is a move that has been 20 years in the making," he added, referring to when Hamilton drove for Vasseur's team in the Formula Three Euro



Series in 2005. "At the time, he was tied to McLaren-Mercedes," Vasseur said, "but he already had in mind that, sooner or later, he would go to Ferrari."

Hamilton departs Mercedes as the most successful driver in the team's history and it will miss him.

"He said he needed change, and I can understand that," said Toto Wolff, the team principal. "We've been together 12 years, and we've had tremendous success."

Could Golden At-Bat Give Baseball A New Shine?

Jayson Stark

A few weeks ago, MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred stopped by the podcast of Puck's John Ourand and dropped hints about a rule change that seems like it might be coming someday to a ballpark near you.

"There are a variety of them that are being talked about out there," Manfred said. "One of them — there was a little buzz around it at an owners meeting — was the idea of a Golden At-Bat."

What is a Golden At-Bat? It is an idea that would change everything about how baseball — the ultimate team sport — has always worked.

What if a team could choose one at-bat in every game to send its best hitter to the plate even if it wasn't that guy's turn to hit? That's the Golden At-Bat

concept in a nutshell.

Say there are two outs in the 10th inning in October. The New York Yankees and Cleveland Guardians are tied. In this alternate October universe, it's not Juan Soto who is due up. It's, say, Oswaldo Cabrera. Except the Yankees say: No, we're going to use our Golden At-Bat here, and send up Soto. Then home run magic happens.

That would have been the ultimate Golden At-Bat homer, one front-office executive mused, as we were talking about this concept. "Can we send Juan Soto up there to do that? He actually did hit that homer in that moment."

He did. And that's the goal. So should baseball change the rules to attempt to create more of those moments? That's the question.

HOW WOULD THE RULE WORK?

Baseball hasn't settled on the details of how this rule would work. And MLB officials declined to speak with The Athletic about any possible future rule changes. But many variations have been tossed around. Here are some:

◆ Each team gets to pick one at-bat — at any point in the game, but only once — to play its Golden At-Bat card. So would it save that card for The Juan Soto Moment? Or would it play it in the second inning,

with the bases loaded and a chance to blow up a game?

◆ Each team gets one Golden At-Bat per game — but only in the seventh inning or later.

◆ Only a team that is trailing (or tied) in the ninth or later gets to use a Golden At-Bat. One potential wrinkle: The Kansas City Royals use their Golden At-Bat to let Bobby Witt Jr. lead off the ninth. He makes an out. But who's batting second? Whaddya know, it's Witt's turn in the line-up. So here he comes again. Yes, that could be a thing.

COULD THIS REALLY HAPPEN?

On Ourand's podcast, Manfred described this idea (and others) as being "in the conversation-only stage right now." So that makes it sound iffy — except for one thing:

Manfred also dropped that bread-crumbs on Ourand's podcast. When the

conversation veered toward possible tweaks to that game, Manfred tipped his golf cap to his TV partners at Fox Sports, saying, "They're always thinking. They're never short of ideas. And they are reasonable."

So, what All-Star Game idea has had gotten his attention? "Most of the changes we have discussed," he said, "involve producing the matchups, in the context of an exhibition game, that the fans want to see the most. You know, more freedom in terms of substitution and whatnot. I am receptive to those ideas, in the context of an exhibition game."

ARE PLAYERS READY FOR THE GOLDEN AT-BAT?

I surveyed players about this five months ago. I asked them first about trying it in the All-Star Game, then flipped to regular-season games.

When I asked Milwaukee Brewers outfielder Christian Yelich about how he felt about three starters reentering the All-Star Game in the late innings,



The New York Times

He chose to talk about this out loud, where everyone could hear it.

He also used the word "buzz" to describe the response. Which is interesting, because from what I can discern, it's not the buzziest buzz in the baseball cosmos at the moment.

It's clearly not as buzzy as the electronic strike zone, anyway. It wasn't a topic at the owners' meetings that were held in the past two weeks. And there is no evidence that this concept has even been presented to the players at any meeting of the competition committee.

In the minor leagues, folks have heard "buzz" that the league would like to test the Golden At-Bat in some form in the minors sometime in the next couple of years. So, if any variation of the Golden At-Bat does surface next year, here's where I'd guess you would see it: in the MLB All-Star Game.

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his face lit up. "That would be kind of cool," he said. "I mean, it's an exhibition game after all, right? So, you want to keep it to where it's a game, but also, if you want to add a wrinkle that makes it more entertaining or do stuff geared for the fans and keep the entertainment value high, I'm all for it."

But when I asked if he would be open to something like the Golden At-Bat in regular-season games, his wheels started spinning. "I'd have to see it more," he replied, but didn't rule anything out.

Los Angeles Dodgers first baseman Freddie Freeman wasn't quite on board with the All-Star Game idea: "I'm going to fight against that, because they're all All-Stars, and I wouldn't mind anybody hitting."

And in the regular season? "No, no, no," he said. "I'm old school, you know, even as a young guy. I like baseball. I'm a baseball purist. So, I'm going to go no."

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