

Inside Story

Deep Dive P 4, 5

■ Has the Music Season in Chennai Caught a Chill?

■ Indian Startups are Taking Baby Steps Towards Nuclear Fusion

Sunday Chatter P 6

■ The Many, Many Macondos

■ MAGAstar's Shaking Up Nationalism

■ Sen's Sensibility, The Rebellious Act of Sticking Around

■ Statue-tory Warning: Fort's Boy Wonder is an Anomaly

Techtonic P 8

■ Women are Reshaping India's Semiconductor Landscape

World Play P 10

■ Jannik Sinner & Carlos Alcaraz Herald a New Rivalry



ET WEALTH ON MONDAY

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

wealth

SHOULD YOU TAKE A CAREER BREAK?

PURE POLITICS

PAGE >> 2

Indonesian Prez Drops Pak Visit as India Preps BrahMos Loan Offer

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto will visit Malaysia from India, instead of Pakistan, after India voiced displeasure, reports **Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury**. New Delhi is working on a \$450 million loan to Indonesia for purchasing BrahMos missiles.

Thackeray's Shiv Sena to Go It Alone in Maha Local Body Elections

A day after questioning the viability of INDIA alliance, the Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray Sena Saturday said it would fight the Mumbai, Thane, Pune, Nagpur and all other municipal and local body polls on its own. **Krishna Kumar** reports.

Program for Trump 2.0: Tech Titans to Show Up for Swearing-in

Silicon Valley Makes Overtures OpenAI, Meta and Uber chiefs set to attend new US govt inauguration events, pledge donations

Bloomberg

Several prominent tech leaders are planning to attend the Donald Trump dispensation's inauguration event this month, the latest sign that the industry is trying to bolster its relationship with the president-elect ahead of his return to the White House. OpenAI chief executive Sam Altman plans to go to the swearing-in ceremony on January 20, said a company spokesperson. Meta Platforms Inc chief



Professionals Loosen Reins, Ready to Forfeit Rat Race

Many execs are taking major career calls with a keen eye on work-life balance, refusing to shift locations and even changing jobs for a less hectic schedule

Sreeradha Basu & Writankar Mukherjee

Bengaluru | Kolkata: An increasing number of corporate executives are putting their families and work-life balance firmly front and centre, amid an intensifying backlash against the notion of a 70-hour or 90-hour and seven-day work weeks. Some are even ready to give up existing jobs or turn down offers if it means being separated from family. Others, working out of locations away from their loved ones, are regularly shuttling between cities to ensure they don't miss out on family time. A leading home-grown appliance manufacturer has been seeing a spate of mid-to-senior exits af-

ter shifting its business team from New Delhi to Mumbai. Five senior executives, including vertical heads, have put down their papers, refusing to change cities as their families are settled in the Capital, according to people familiar with the matter. At least eight other senior executives fly

back to New Delhi every weekend at their own expense to be with their family and take the dawn flight back to Mumbai on Mondays, they said. Experts said the shift, discernible across India Inc, reflects a change in mindsets of employees since the outbreak of Covid-19,

when people started prioritising their personal lives.

For instance, a senior executive at a new-age company quit his job to be with his ailing parent when he was required to move to New Delhi, from Bengaluru. Another senior hand at a technology, media and communications firm

made a conscious decision to pursue entrepreneurship when her hectic work schedule forced her to frequently miss trips to meet family in Mumbai.

Satish NS, president of electronic company Haier India, travels to Mumbai every weekend to be with his family, while working

out of Greater Noida.

"There's a generational shift in not just going by what the employer tells you to do, but going by free choice," said S Venkatesh, group president at Mumbai-headquartered RPG Enterprises, who has spent years dividing his time between Mumbai and Bengaluru, where his family is.

People are becoming increasingly cautious about making changes, whether it's for a new job or even an internal movement, Venkatesh said, adding, "Incremental gains are not enough. They (executives) are checking to see if the disruption is worth it. The reward has to be very high, be it by way of compensation or the role."

Cos Offering Flexibility Too >> 7

Keeping it Simpler

Executives prioritising family and work-life balance more than ever

This marks a growing shift in employee mindsets

Some quitting; turning down job offers if it means moving away from family

Some employers providing more flexibility to attract and hold on to talent

Trend gaining ground across age groups; more so among relatively younger lot

47% of Gen Z considers work-life balance as a crucial factor: Unstop survey

PART OF FRESH TRADE SANCTIONS

US Sanctions 2 Indian Cos for Violating Russia Curbs

State Dept accuses the cos of helping Russia transport LNG; India studying implications

Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

New Delhi: The outgoing Joe Biden administration in the United States on Friday slapped sanctions on two Indian companies, Skyhart Management Services and Avison Shipping Services, for being allegedly involved in the transportation of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG), violating American curbs.

Skyhart Management Services "is an India-based entity that became the operator of US-designated LNG carrier *Mulan* shortly before it loaded LNG from US-designated LLC Arctic LNG 2", the US State Department said.

Avison Shipping Services "is an India-based entity that became the operator of US-designated LNG carrier *New Energy* shortly before it loaded LNG from LLC Arctic LNG 2", it said.

Slippery Slope

Refiners in India and China became the biggest buyers of Russian crude exports after war

Russia remained India's top supplier in Dec, with a 33.4% share of crude imports

Many vessels, traders, 2 big oil cos & some Russia execs designated in US sanctions

The two companies, both based in Gurgaon, have been penalised for having materially assisted, sponsored or provided financial, material or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, Arctic LNG 2, the State Department said. It said two vessels, *Pravasi* and *Onyx*, are managed by Avison and are being identified as property in which the company has an interest.



FOOTFALL DOWN; REGIONAL FILMS HITS

Pushpa Blooms Again, But Takings for 2024 Wilt a Bit

BO collections down 3% on waning crowds, dependence on higher ticket price, big grossers

Javed Farooqui

Mumbai: Indian cinema's box office receipts totalled ₹11,833 crore in 2024, marking the se-

cond-highest collection after hitting a record in the previous year, according to Ormax Media's annual box office report.

Box office receipts declined 3.21% from ₹12,226 crore in 2023, while footfall fell a steeper 6% year-on-year to 883 million, well below the pre-pandemic peak footfall of over 1 billion recorded in 2019, indicating increased dependence on average ticket price (ATP), which went up 3% to reach a historic high of ₹134.

Kannada and Telugu films saw

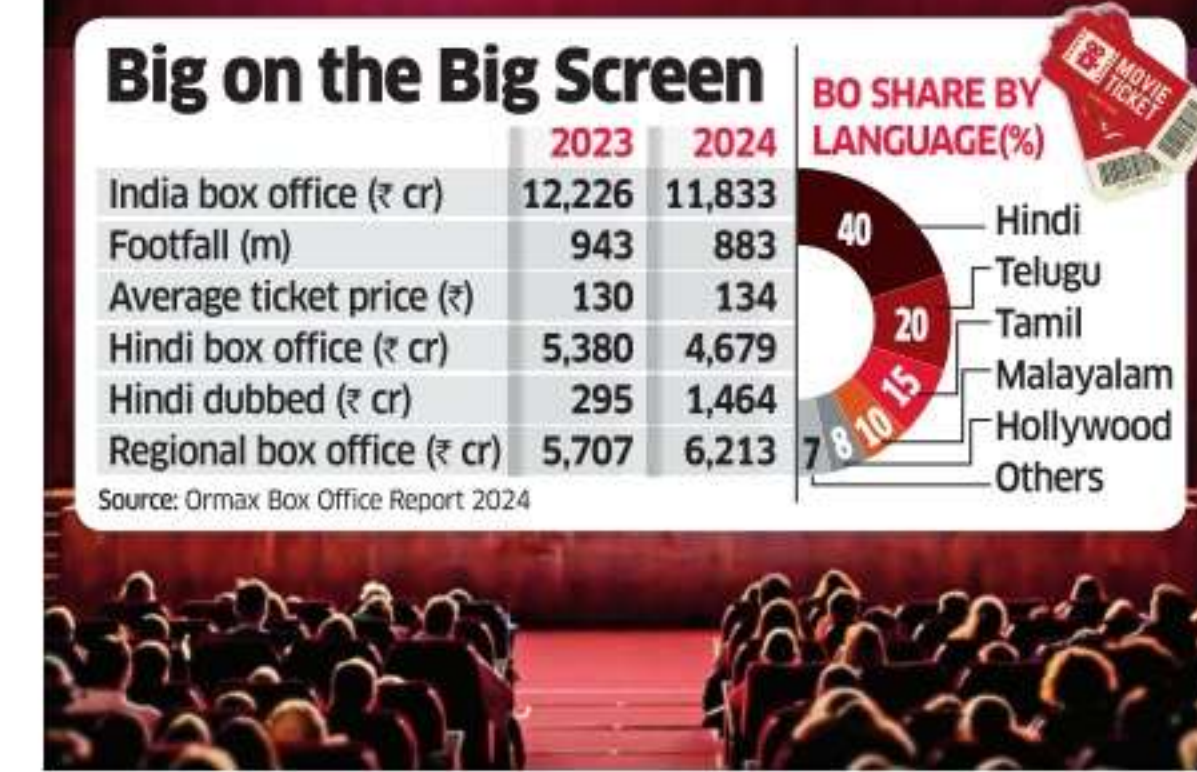
ATP hikes owing to government cess and premium pricing, while Hollywood and Hindi films recorded the highest ATP of ₹245 and ₹203, respectively.

Sanket Kulkarni, head of business development (theatrical) at Ormax, saw the trend of relying on higher ticket prices rather than increased footfall to drive box office revenue continuing, signalling that cinema-going is increasingly becoming an event-driven activity, rather than a habit, especially in the case of Hindi films.

"Release schedule optimisation, better supply of films, understanding the changing taste of the audiences and strategic utilisation of franchises would be key for maximising box office collections in 2025," he said.

Hindi cinema faced a tough year, with collections falling 13% year-on-year to ₹4,679 crore, reducing its share by four percentage points to 40%. Despite hits such as *Pushpa 2: The Rule* (Hindi) and *Street 2*, only six original Hindi films crossed receipts of ₹100 crore each, compared to 16 in 2023.

Shift in Audience Preferences >> 7



Consumer Body Seeks More Info from Ola Electric

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has sought additional documents from Ola Electric as part of investigation over alleged consumer rights violations, misleading ads and unfair trade practices. The electric two-wheeler maker earlier got a six-week extension to submit its response. >> 3

DMart CEO to Quit Next Yr; Unilever's Asawa to Come In

Avenue Supermarts, which runs DMart retail stores, said Unilever's Anshul Asawa will replace its current managing director Neville Noronha in February 2026. Noronha, one of India's richest CEOs, chose not to extend his contract more than two decades after he joined the supermarket chain. >> 3

WINNING STRATEGY

Cos Rushing to Hire Consultants, but not in Traditional Way

As cos chart growth plans, they're vying for professionals with strategic orientation

Rica Bhattacharyya

Mumbai: India Inc is rushing to attract experienced talent from blue-ribbon strategy houses such as McKinsey, Bain and BCG and the Big Four audit firms—Deloitte, EY, PWC and KPMG—with generous compensation packages to propel their growth plans including forays into new businesses, said industry executives.

Around 200-250 professionals have switched over from top strategy and consulting firms to large Indian corporates and mid-sized new age companies in the last three years, according to estimates by executive search firms. These are mostly mid-level to senior professionals including partners, associate partners, and engagement managers with 10-20 years' experience, said search industry officials.

Leading conglomerates such as Reliance Industries, Mahindra & Mahindra, Aditya Birla Group, Tata Group, and RPG Group are among those vying for the talent pool, according to search executives.

A variety of reasons is fuelling the increased demand for experienced professionals. These include conglomerates' foray into new areas of business, transition from promoter-led to professionally run management, adoption of inorganic growth strategies, cost and work role optimisation, digital/tech-led transformation and rise in multi-agency partnerships.



Why are Strategy Pros in Demand?

Bright people with good pedigree (mostly from IITs, IIMs, other premier institutes)

Have the ability to work with multiple clients across industries

CAN DELIVER UNDER HIGH PRESSURE

Have the exposure and comfort of working with top level executives, C-suite

What's on Offer?

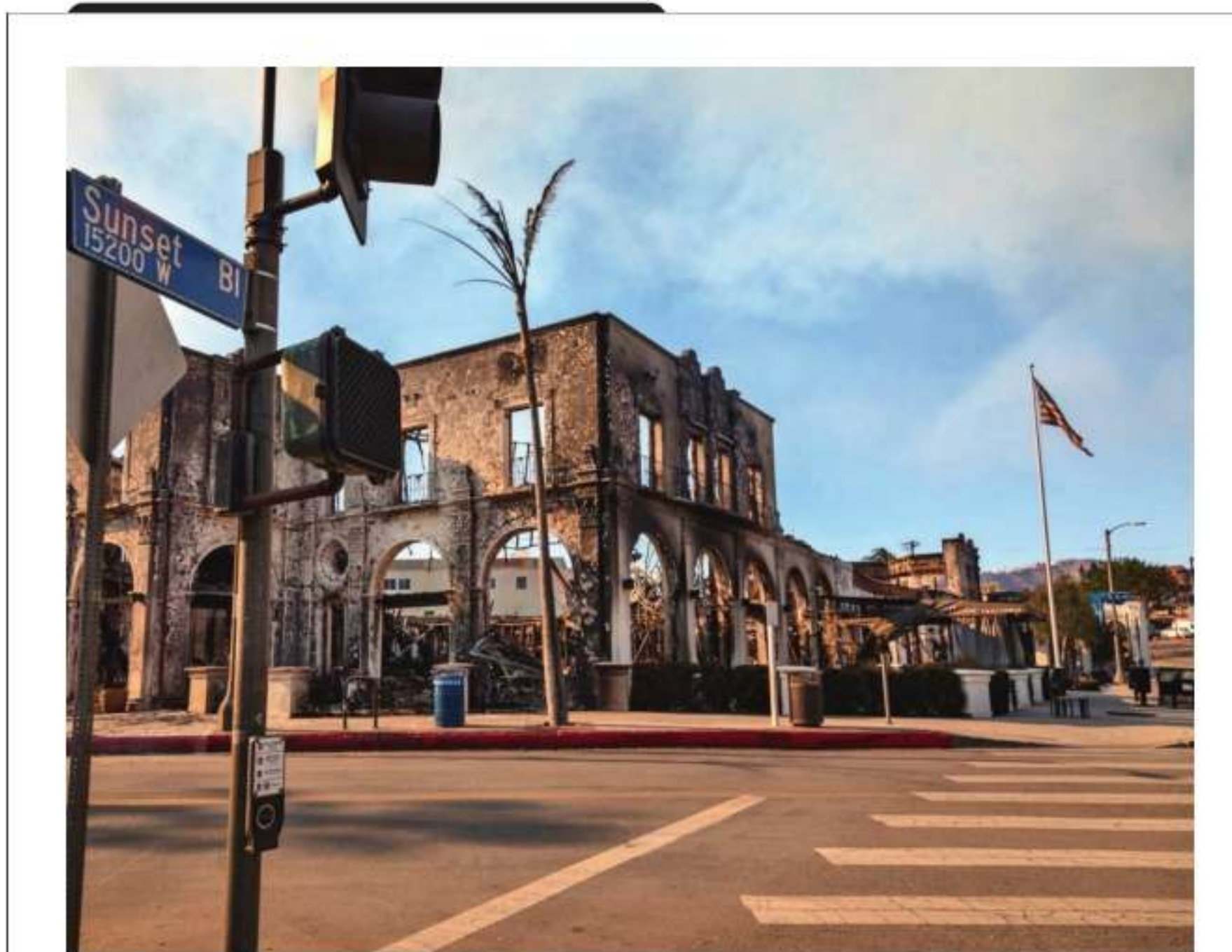
Lucrative pay packages of ₹3-6 cr (or experience of 15 years or above)

Fast-track growth trajectory; many given P&L role in 2-3 years

Roles such as Chief of Staff, Chief of Strategy, head of change management, head of M&A etc are tailor-made for such candidates

Roles such as chief of staff, chief of strategy, head of change management and transformation, and head of M&A are tailor-made for such candidates. Many of them report to the MD & CEO with a promise of a P&L (profit and loss) role in the near term. A P&L role entails direct responsibility for the financial performance of a business unit or department.

Dynamic Roles >> 7



Road to Perdition

Only charred remains of a restaurant on Sunset Boulevard seen in the wake of the blazes in Pacific Palisades area of Los Angeles, California. The largest of the raging wildfires that reduced entire neighbourhoods to ash was reported to have shifted direction on Saturday, triggering more evacuation orders and challenging exhausted firefighters.



(L-R) Mark Zuckerberg, Sam Altman and Dara Khosrowshahi

AFTER PHILIPPINES AND VIETNAM, INDONESIA COULD BE THIRD SOUTHEAST ASIAN CUSTOMER FOR THE CRUISE MISSILE

Indonesia's Prez Cancels Pak Detour As India Readies BrahMos Loan Offer

Indonesian defence ministry seeks \$450 million loan to purchase missiles produced jointly by India and Russia

Dipanjn Roy Chaudhury

New Delhi: Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto has decided to visit Malaysia from India instead of travelling to Pakistan, following India's formal displeasure over his decision to club Pakistan with his visit to New Delhi, even as India is working to arrange a \$450 million loan to Indonesia for purchasing BrahMos missiles.

India had formally expressed displeasure with the Indonesian government on Subianto's decision to travel to Pakistan from New Delhi, where he will be the chief guest for the Republic Day celebrations.

Pakistan was not part of his plan until he met Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. However, Malaysia was part of his original plan. Indonesia has been among Organisation of Islamic Cooperation member countries that have not backed Pakistan's



FILE PHOTO

position on Kashmir at the forum.

Meanwhile, Indonesia's defence ministry has sent a letter to India seeking a \$450 million loan for purchasing BrahMos missiles jointly developed by India and Russia, according to people familiar with the matter.

India is considering offering a loan to Indonesia from either State Bank of India or another state-run bank for

the deal and the specifics are being worked out, they said.

ET had first reported earlier this month that purchase of BrahMos missiles would figure prominently on President Subianto's wish list during the trip despite budget constraints at home.

Amid a lack of availability of funds for purchasing BrahMos missiles

due to the Subianto government's sharp focus on social sector projects in the first year in office, Indonesia

A LONG-TERM FRIEND

Indonesia, an OIC member, has not supported Pakistan's Kashmir policy

decided to seek a loan from India for purchasing the state-of-the-art missiles, according to the people.

When Subianto visited India as defence minister in 2020, BrahMos missiles were among the key talking points on the agenda of his meeting with his counterpart Rajnath Singh. But the deal could not be finalised owing to the financial constraints of

the previous Indonesian government due to Covid-19.

After the Philippines purchased BrahMos missiles from India, Vietnam has finalised purchase of BrahMos missiles and Indonesia could be the third customer in Southeast Asia.

Indonesia has long been seen as a potential importer of the missiles as it is keen to modernise its military. Under its current President the country has a former general who could boost defence industry requirements given Indonesia's long coastline.

Subianto could also seek India's support to maintain Sukhoi 30 fighter jets of the Indonesian Air Force. Following the Russia-Ukraine war and Russia's preoccupation, the Indonesian Air Force has faced some difficulties in maintenance of Su-30s and may approach India, it has been learnt. The Indonesian Air Force has Su-27, Su-30MKK/MK2 and Su-30MKI in its fleet.

AFTER FATAL ALH CRASH

330 Indigenous Choppers Remain Grounded For Transmission Checks

Manu Pabby

New Delhi: A possible transmission fault is being probed after a fatal crash of an Advanced Light Helicopter that led to the deaths of three coast guard personnel this week. The indigenous fleet of helicopters—about 330 of them are currently in service—has been grounded for comprehensive checks while the crash is being probed.

Sources said that the crash occurred after the crew reported a sudden loss of control second before the chopper hurtled to the ground. It is learnt that flight data being studied did not show any obvious reason for the loss of control and the probe team is now examining the transmission system for a possible failure.

Earlier, the indigenous helicopter had undergone comprehensive design review by Netherlands based NLR and had been given a green signal. Recently some changes were made in the transmission system and control rods were changed after instances of material failure came to light.

Sources pointed out that the accident rate of the ALH is 6.5 incidents per lakh hours of flying, saying that the global average is 7.5 incidents per lakh hours. The ALH fleet has flown over 4.5 lakh hours by now and serves in areas ranging from the high seas to high altitude mountain bases.



FILE PHOTO

ACCIDENT RECORD

Indigenous fleet has accident record of 6.5 incidents per lakh hours of flying; comprehensive checks done

They added that from 2004 to 2024, there have been nine major accidents involving the fleet, three of which were attributed to human error and three to a technical fault. The reason behind the remaining could not be conclusively determined.

While the air force has the best safety record with the fleet, the coast guard has had the most number of incidents, including a ditching at sea late last year during a complicated Night time rescue attempt. A call on resuming flight operations will be taken jointly by the services and manufacturer HAL.

A DAY AFTER QUESTIONING INDIA BLOC VIABILITY

Sena (Uddhav) Decides to Go Solo in All Local Polls

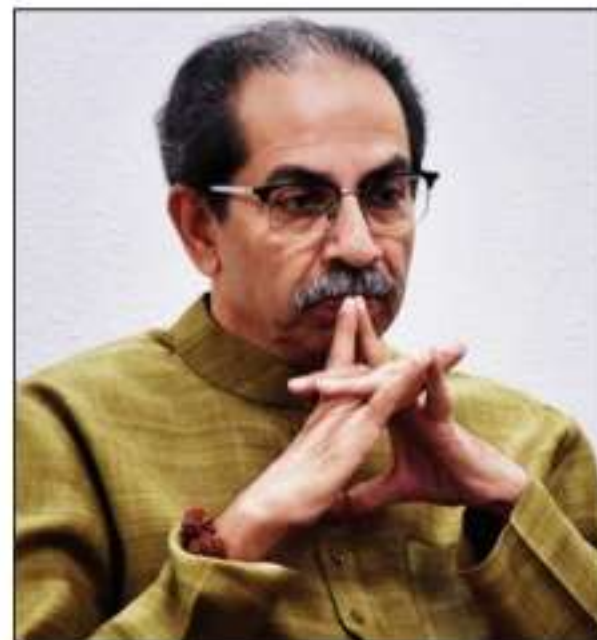
Krishna Kumar

Mumbai: A day after questioning the viability of the INDIA alliance and warning the Congress that if the opposition alliance is broken will not be able to join together again, the Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray Sena on Saturday announced that they would be fighting the Mumbai, Thane, Pune, Nagpur and all other municipal and other local body polls on their own and not in an alliance with its allies Congress and Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party.

"We have decided that for all the local municipal elections from Mumbai to Nagpur we will be going solo. Whatever happens we will see," said Sanjay Raut Rajya Sabha MP of the UBT Sena.

Raut said that the UBT had decided to fight on its own as it wants to expand its party and feels that if the party goes into an alliance with the Congress and NCPSP for the local body polls it would mean lesser seats for its grassroot workers. "When would our grass root workers get an opportunity to fight elections? Hence all local body polls like Municipal Polls, zilla parishad and Panchayat polls would be contested by our party independently," said Raut.

Raut claimed that Party President Uddhav Thackeray has already held meetings with party leaders and workers and has given them a go ahead. While Raut has made the announcement today the UBT had decided immediately after the assembly polls to go solo as several UBT leaders told Uddhav while taking a review meeting of



ANI

CAUTIOUS MOVE

Congress says it will approach Uddhav Thackeray once more to request him to reconsider decision

the assembly poll debacle that the party's alliance with the Congress and NCPSP has not paid dividends to the party.

The Congress has reacted to UBT's announcement cautiously; with Congress leader Vijay Wadetiwar claiming that they would approach UBT President Uddhav Thackeray once more to request him to reconsider their decision. "We would request uddhav ji once to change his mind, if not then the Congress and NCPSP are natural allies, so we too would fight the elections together," said Wadetiwar.

IN RUNUP TO DELHI ASSEMBLY POLLS

Every Slumdweller in Delhi Will Get House: Shah

Arvind Kejriwal is the only CM who did not resign even after going to jail: Shah

Our Political Bureau

New Delhi: Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday promised a permanent house to every slumdweller in Delhi if the BJP comes to power after the February 5 assembly election.

Addressing a 'Jhuggi-Basti Pradhan Sammelan' at Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium, he said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Delhi had not fulfilled its promises made to slumdweller.

"People living in slums of Delhi are getting dirty water... People living in slums are asking us why Delhi is the most polluted city in the world... What did Arvind Kejriwal do in Delhi in the last 10 years?... If you are not able to do anything against Arvind Kejriwal, then you should leave the government. BJP will give all the benefits... Arvind Kejriwal is the only CM who did not resign even after going to jail," Shah said.



People during the 'Jhuggi Pradhan Sammelan' addressed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, in New Delhi, on Saturday—PTI

Attacking AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal, Shah said the people who had launched an agitation against corruption broke all records of corruption. "AAP has become an 'AAP-da' (disaster) for Delhi but Arvind Kejriwal has become an 'AAP-da' for AAP," he said.

Assuring the slumdweller, the minister said that the BJP had made a list of all problems of the slumdweller and given it to the party's national president JP Nadda and Prime

Minister Narendra Modi. He said the BJP's manifesto would be PM Modi's guarantee of fulfilment, unlike the manifestos of the AAP and Congress.

"PM Modi has given houses to more than 3.58 crore poor people in the country. This is PM Modi's guarantee and every person living in a slum will be given a permanent house," Shah said. "Congress and AAP-da cannot benefit the people of Delhi. Only the BJP can benefit them... They are making promises every day just for the sake of the vote bank. Can Arvind Kejriwal declare the CM face of BJP?... After the formation of the BJP government in Delhi, not a single welfare scheme for the poor will be stopped."

Shah said February 5 would be a day of liberation for the people of Delhi from an incompetent government, corruption and mismanagement.

Sarpanch Murder Case: All 8 Accused Booked Under MCOCA

Our Political Bureau

Mumbai: The State CID has booked the seven accused in the murder of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh under Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA). MCOCA is a stringent act meant to crack down on organised criminal gangs that gives wide ranging powers to the investigating agencies to investigate and keep behind bars for a longer duration people booked under MCOCA.

Deshmukh on December 9, was allegedly killed for opposing an extortion bid on a wind turbine company in Beed. Valmik Karad, a close aide and business partner of Maharashtra Nationalist Congress party minister Dhananjay Munde has been booked in the extortion case, while seven other accused who are directly involved in the murder case have been booked under MCOCA. At least three of the seven murder accused are NCP party functionaries. The Maharashtra opposition and the ruling party including MBAs from the NCP have demanded that Munde should resign till the investigation in the case is completed. BJP Ashti MLA Suresh Dhas has been raising the issue of lawlessness in Beed.



MCOCA is a stringent act meant to crack down on organised criminal gangs

AMID RUMBLINGS IN KARNATAKA CONGRESS

Don't Want Any MLA to Shout Out Support For Me: Shivakumar

KR Balasubramanyam

Bengaluru: Karnataka deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said that he was not looking for anyone's support and that he worked as per the wishes of the Congress party, speaking out amid public voices of resistance within the cabinet to his ambitions to succeed chief minister Siddaramaiah.

The CM is scheduled to present the state budget in March and there is speculation that the party might begin preparations to replace him with Shivakumar in the following months. Shivakumar is also the president of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee.

A dinner meeting was organised by public works department minister Satish Jarkiholi and another was planned by home minister G Parameshwara, both tall leaders from the Scheduled Caste (SC)/Schedule Tribe (ST) communities. Parameshwara's meeting, however, got cancelled on intervention by the All India Congress Committee general secretary RS Surjewala, reportedly on complaints from Shivakumar.

Cooperation minister KN Rajanna, another leader from the SC/ST community, has publicly protested any change in the middle of the term and told the media that Shivakumar should not eye a 30-month tenure but instead work for a full five-year term after 2028, when the state will face assembly polls. Industries minister MB Patil has openly canvassed for Siddaramaiah's continuation during this term and beyond.

The efforts to hold dinner mee-



ANI

tings by SC/ST ministers are seen as an effort to prevent any change in leadership and pitch for a Dalit CM if the high command were to opt for a change.

Speaking to media persons in the temple town of Sringeri on Saturday, Shivakumar said, "As per the Sanskrit saying 'Karmayevadhikaraste', I put in the effort and leave the results to God. I don't want anyone's support and I will do what the party wants me to do."

On sections of party workers backing him for the CM's post, he said he did not want anyone to put pressure on his behalf. "I do not want anyone's support. I don't want any MLA to shout out his support for me. It is between the Congress party and me. I will do whatever the party wants me to do. I am just doing my duty," he said.

Asked about his increased temple visits in recent days, he said, "I am a believer in Dharma. I offer prayers every day. I pray for the welfare of the state, my well-wishers and myself. If praying is dubbed a temple run, all the temples must be closed."

CROCODILES IN GUJARAT TO FERAL DOGS IN LADAKH

Centre Seeks Localised, Humane SOPs For Taming Human-Animal Conflicts



National wildlife panel asks WII to bring in advance tech, gadgets for conflict hotspots

Anubhuti Vishnoi

New Delhi: From Andhra Pradesh to Ladakh, state forest departments have red flagged concerns over human-wildlife conflict situations and the Centre is now looking to bring in a posse of measures—from a nationwide 'humane' SOP to advanced gadgetry—for conflict hotspots and a 'think tank' like long term mitigation approach.

Factor this, at the December 21, 2024, meeting of the National Board of Wildlife—Gujarat has emphasised the need for population control for leopards and crocodiles while Andhra Pradesh has pointed to increasing Black buck and Sloth bear populace besides migrant elephants from other states.

The chief wildlife warden, Ladakh, specifically drew attention to the menace of over 4000 free ranging feral dogs in Protected Areas of Ladakh. Ladakh has time and again raised concerns on increasing feral dog population fed off leftovers at army camps located near border areas.

These feral dogs attack wild animals and are also cause for transmission of zoonotic diseases. Ladakh has complained suggesting that a policy be brought in place.

Uttar Pradesh has sought a protocol for release of captured leopards while Uttarakhand feels rescue district needs a transit rescue centre for captured wild animals.

Chief wildlife warden, Rajasthan, on the other hand, informed that the state has established prey base augmentation centres at various places to prevent carnivores from straying into habitations for food.

Several states from Telangana to Kerala suggested a national level uniform SOP for handling conflict scenarios.

In the NBWL meeting, chaired by environment minister Bhupendra Yadav, the panel has asked the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) to hold consultations with experts, technology providers and stakeholders to develop a 'long-term humane methods & SOPs' for species-specific and location-specific strategies for human-animal conflict situations, records show.

The Centre is also looking at bringing in technology for the same.

The WII has been asked to look at ways to equip Rapid Response Teams with advanced technology, gadgets for tracking, forewarning, prescribing surveillance and Intrusion Detection Systems in HWC hotspots.

Training of field practitioners and community to execute conflict mitigation measures was also suggested at the

ANDHRA HAS POINTED TO BLACK BUCK AND SLOTH BEAR POPULATION WHILE LADAKH HAS RAISED CONCERNS OVER WILD DOGS



NBWL meet.

Experts at NBWL have suggested a new 'think tank' approach to develop a strategic framework and make species specific assessments at landscape level.

Population control measures have also been suggested for animals whose population density per sq kms is very high. Besides the need for augmenting prey based to ensure the likes of tiger and leopards do not stray out to human habitations.

Kerala highlighted the need to identify the root cause for such conflict besides need for proper reporting modalities on species involved and strong stakeholder engagement.

Chief wildlife warden, Maharashtra suggested establishing a dedicated centre for disseminating research on HWC management. Both Karnataka and Maharashtra also emphasized on the need for developing radio collars within the country for increased tracking of such animals.

The discussions have been initiated by the NBWL following concerns raised from several quarters. The NBWL has held that Human-wildlife conflict poses a 'significant challenge' in the country, particularly with 'overabundant species' like wild boars and nilgai who frequent human-dominated landscapes and often lead to crop damage, property loss, and safety concerns. Noting 'growing instances of HWC' in agricultural and peri-urban areas that threaten livelihoods and public safety, the NBWL had taken the matter for review in its latest meeting.

Gujarat has emphasised the need for population control for leopards and crocodiles



OTHER NEWS OF THE DAY

Anything Possible: Fadnavis On Sharad Pawar's RSS Praise

Mumbai: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has weighed in on NCP chief Sharad Pawar's recent statement praising the RSS for the BJP's victory in the Maharashtra Assembly elections.

Fadnavis attributed Pawar's comment to the success of the RSS Vichar Pariwar in countering the "fake narrative" created by the Maha Vikas Aghadi in the Lok Sabha elections.

According to Fadnavis, the RSS played a crucial role in bringing national forces together to fight against "anarchist forces" in the Maharashtra elections.

"In the Maharashtra elections, we requested the RSS Vichar Pariwar that national forces need to come together against the anarchist forces. People from various sectors of the RSS Vichar Pariwar played their roles in their respective fields only to fight against anarchy. Due to this, we were able to end the fake narrative and the results of the Assembly elections were different from the Lok Sabha," he said.—ANI

Gujarat Has Turned Into Hub For Kite Manufacturing: CM

Gandhinagar: With ambassadors of about several countries attending, Gujarat's three day's International Kite Festival 2025 organized by Gujarat Tourism Corporation took off on Saturday in Ahmedabad.

Inaugurating the event, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel pointed out that Gujarat has over the years gained global recognition as the largest kite manufacturer due to the passion of Gujaratis for kite flying.

Gujarat contributes 65% of the kite market in India. Patel said adding that ambassadors from various countries attend the festival annually. This year, 11 ambassadors are in Gujarat to witness the celebrations, he added.

Patel also recalled Modi's role in elevating the Uttarayan festival into a globally celebrated International Kite Festival and underlined the integration of tourism into this festival, which has become a significant global identity for Gujarat.—OPB

UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES
Consumer Body
Seeks More Info
from Ola Electric

Our Bureau

Mumbai: The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has sought additional documents from Ola Electric as part of its ongoing investigation into the electric two-wheeler manufacturer.

"In continuation of the earlier letter received from the Central Consumer Protection Authority dated December 04, 2024, by Ola Electric Mobility Limited we would like to inform you that the company has received further request for information via email dated January 10, 2025," Ola Electric said in a stock exchange filing on Friday.

It comes days after the Karnataka High Court granted the Bhavish Aggarwal-led firm a six-week extension to submit its response to the CCPA. The CCPA first issued a show-cause notice to Ola Electric on October 8, 2024, over alleged consumer rights violations, misleading advertisements and unfair trade practices.

Indian Students Redraw Study
Abroad Plans Amid Rising Costs

Lenders and education consultants say financial constraints and evolving loan options alter aspirations

Neil Ghai & Prachi Verma

New Delhi: A weak rupee is exacerbating the challenges of Indian students looking to study abroad and who are already grappling with high tuition fees. For them, the focus has shifted from determining the optimal study destination to figuring out ways to fund their overseas education while ensuring a return on investment (ROI).

Loan providers and education consultants reported a surge in applications and inquiries, reflecting a growing financial awareness among students and their families.

"While education spends have been growing across the entire spectrum of the student lifecycle, overseas education has been one of the sub-segments with significant growth in recent years," said Amit Gainda, chief executive of Avanse Financial Services (AFS).

Student loan disbursements by AFS to international students have



ve surged more than threefold to ₹4,712.80 crore in FY24 from ₹1,551.25 crore in FY22.

Implying that the average student going abroad is borrowing more, the sanctioned average ticket size of study abroad student loans rose to ₹33.1 lakh in FY24 from ₹28.8 lakh in FY22.

"This increase in the average ticket size of overseas education loans has primarily been on account of

increase in course fees, living and other expenses due to inflation and depreciation in the value of the Indian rupee," said Gainda.

With annual tuition fees of \$30,000-80,000 for the top destinations, financial challenges remain daunting, leading many families to intensely scrutinise the affordability of overseas education.

Echoing this sentiment, Adarsh Khandelwal, cofounder of Collegi-

fy, an education consultancy, pointed to the growing loan dependency of Indian students in the US.

"Around 70-80% of Indian students fund their education through loans. The average loan amount typically ranges from \$50,000 to \$100,000, with repayment terms stretching over 7-10 years," he said.

Advising students to stay away from the so-called 'prestige trap' of studying a non-essential course in a prestigious university, Khandelwal said, "Students need to evaluate the employment rate, average salaries, and industry demand for their field of study to avoid falling into the 'prestige trap' of an irrelevant programme."

Degrees in political science, history, and liberal arts often fail to provide direct employment pathways or salaries that justify their high costs.

**FOR FULL REPORT, GO TO
www.economictimes.com**

SHAPING GLOBAL STANDARDS & PRACTICES

India Joins UN Panel
of Experts on Big Data
for Official Statistics

Move to help country align its advancements in big data and data science with int'l goals

Our Bureau

New Delhi: India has joined the United Nations Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UNCEDD), a platform established to explore the opportunities and challenges of big data as well as its potential for monitoring and reporting on sustainable development goals.

The milestone coincides with India's recent membership in the United Nations Statistical Council, the ministry of statistics and programme implementation (MoSPI) said on Saturday.

"As part of the committee, India will contribute to shaping global standards and practices in harnessing big data and data science for official statistical purposes," it added. The participation will also enable India to align its advancements in big data and data science with international goals.



ISTOCK

The ministry also noted that India's involvement in the committee will showcase its initiatives like the establishment of the Data Innovation Lab and the exploration of alternative data sources, including satellite imagery and machine learning, for policy development. The Data Innovation Lab focuses on fostering an ecosystem for innovation to strengthen the National Statistical System (NSS).

Additionally, by incorporating non-traditional data sources like internet of things (IoT), satellite imagery, and private sector data, India aims to modernise its statistical system, enhance the accuracy of estimates, and enable timely access to crucial data for policy formulation and governance, MoSPI mentioned.

FOMO Restaurant Culture Spices Up Dining in Metros

Eateries cultivate a 'book early or miss out' craze which appeals to diners craving unique culinary escapades

Apoorva Mittal

Mumbai: For Zeishah Amlani, the increasingly frenzied dining scene in Bengaluru stirs more frustration than appetite. The 32-year-old creative strategist, who grew up in the city, recalls simpler times.

"The only place you'd ever queue up for was Vidyarthi Bhavan," she says, referring to the iconic South Indian restaurant. "And even that could be avoided by showing up early in the morning."

But those days are a distant memory. Across major metros like Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi, a new wave of experiential dining has emerged, creating a storm of exclusivity and FOMO or the fear of missing out.

With limited seating, these restaurants have naturally cultivated a "book early or miss out" culture that appeals to diners craving unique culinary escapades. For many, the challenge of securing a reservation only heightens the allure.

Take Naru Noodle Bar in Bengaluru, where chef Kavan Kuttappa reveals that on reservation days, about 5,000 people vie for just 600 spots. "Trying to make a reservation for Naru Noodles has been my personal Everest," reads one frustrated post on X. The competition is just as fierce at Papa's, a 12-seater chef's counter in Mumbai run by Hunger Inc. Hospitality. The restaurant opens reservations on the first of each month for the following month, with only about 180 spots available. Diners often compare the experience to scoring tickets for a



VARANI SAHU

Coldplay concert and say the reservation for the entire month gets sold out in mere seconds.

Raaj Sanghvi, CEO of Culinary Culture, sees this frenzy as a reflection of India's evolving dining culture. "At the higher end of the market, demand far exceeds supply," he says.

Sanghvi believes this shift highlights the aspirations of India's young middle class, who are increasingly willing to spend on exceptional dining experiences. "This trend is just beginning," he predicts. "Securing a reservation at India's top tables will only get more competitive."

Some diners have developed strategic approaches to landing these elusive reservations. "Have all your personal details and payment information ready on your digital notepad," advises Shivam Agarwal, a 33-year-old product head at a Bengaluru startup. After months of trying, this strategy finally got him into Naru's. When he applied the same technique to Papa's, he succeeded on his first attempt—and booked a flight to Mumbai for the experience.

This frenzy has sparked suspicions of bots—a phenomenon common in cities like New York, where bots refresh apps hundreds of times per second to snatch reservations, sometimes reselling them for a premium on ticketing platforms.

Ishu Mehta, a Mumbai-based banker, has been trying to book a table at Papa's since April 2023. "The spot disappeared as I was typing my email to confirm my booking. How can someone be

faster than this? We're all human; we operate at the same speed. It shouldn't be this hard—it's becoming more of a privilege thing than an enjoyable food experience."

Others question whether FOMO is entirely genuine. Agarwal from Bengaluru notes, "Some places look empty when you pass by, but online, they're always sold out."

However, Sanghvi says that while FOMO is an effective tool for smaller restaurants, success isn't guaranteed. "Realistically, it's not so simple. First, the economics of serving such a small number of customers must make sense, especially in cities with high rents. Restaurateurs paying full rent may find it hard to sustain such small-scale operations," he notes, adding that both Papa's and Naru's are in non-traditional rental arrangements. For instance, Papa's is on the first floor of an existing restaurant by Hunger group.

**FOR FULL REPORT, GO TO
www.economictimes.com**

DMart's Noronha to Leave Next Yr;
Unilever's Asawa is CEO-designate

Our Bureau

Mumbai: Avenue Supermarts, which runs DMart stores, said Anshul Asawa will replace its current managing director Neville Noronha in February 2026. More than two decades after he joined the supermarket chain, Noronha chose not to extend his contract.

The company's board has appointed Asawa as the CEO-designate, effective March 15, 2025. He spent 30 years at Unilever, where he had leadership roles in India, Asia, and Europe. He currently

serves as country head of Unilever in Thailand and general manager for the home care business unit in Greater Asia.

Noronha, who owned around 1.95% of the company at the end of the September quarter, is one of India's richest CEOs with that stake worth about ₹1,700 crore.

"A hallmark of Neville's leadership is his conviction that while business strategy is evolved out of a complex metrics of ideas and competing claims, competent execution requires that it is articulated in simple and precise terms, ensuring they are easy to understand and everyone across all levels in the company is able to understand and execute it," the company said.



Cremation & Prayer Meeting



Mrs. Manju Nahata
(August 13, 1962 - January 10, 2025)

With profound sorrow, we inform the sad demise of Mrs. Manju Nahata, the beloved wife of Mr. Mahendra Nahata, Managing Director of HFCL. She departed for her heavenly abode on Friday, January 10, 2025.

Cremation Ceremony
Sunday, 12th January, 2025 at 6 pm
at Nigam Bodh Cremation Ground, New Delhi.

Smriti Sabha & Prayers
Tuesday, 14th January, 2025 | 3-4 pm
Hotel The Ashok, 50-B, Diplomatic Enclave,
Chankyapuri, New Delhi-110021

May the Almighty grant the departed soul eternal peace and surround her loved ones with strength, comfort, and the enduring warmth of her cherished memory.

In Grief:

Mahendra Nahata (Husband)

Babulal Nahata (Brother-in-law)
Neha and Anant Nahata (Daughter-in-law and son)
Priyanka and Alok Sanghi (Daughter and son-in-law)

Krishiv and Aariv Nahata; Advita and Viraj Sanghi (Grand kids)
Pushpa and Banechand Maloo (Sister-in-law and Brother-in-law)
Sunita and Anil Nahata (Sister-in-law and Brother-in-law)

Nahata family Choraria family HFCL & Exicom family

Dia Rekhi

Every city has a season. New York has fall. Tokyo has spring. Chennai has music. It is probably the only metropolis to have a monthlong season of ragas. The Tamil month of Margazhi, from mid-December to mid-January, is when Chennai moves to a different talam. It woke up to TM Krishna singing Swathi Thirunal's "Pankaja Lochana" in Raga Kalyani and Perumal Murugan's freedom song on Christmas morning. It sat rapt listening to Sanjay Subrahmanyam's "Sri Subramanyaya Namaste" in breathtaking Kambhoji, and Vishakha Hari's "Andavane" in Shanmukhapriya.

The Margazhi festival has been around for almost a century. It began with the founding of the Music Academy in 1928, celebrating, in particular, Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam.

But is there a chill in the sabhas—the cultural organisations that are the force behind and the venue of concerts or kutcheries—this season? From insiders to hoteliers, many complain of a drop in the footfall of rasikas or connoisseurs. And yet a few others resist that narrative and say fans are flocking in and the festival is, indeed, on song.

MISSING RASIKAS

"There has been an almost 20% drop in footfall in kutcheries this year," says a sabha insider and industry watcher, who does not want to be named. "Ticket sales have plummeted across the board this year. There are multiple reasons for this. For one, sabhas are livestreaming performances, which leaves very little incentive for people to attend a kutchery in person as they are content listening to it on YouTube for free." Tickets often cost between ₹100 and ₹750, with some artists charging as much as ₹3,500 for VIP seating. Meanwhile, numerous singers perform for free.

Star performers like Krishna—who returned triumphantly to the Music Academy, after a decade of cold war, to receive the Sangita Kalanidhi MS Subbulakshmi Award—and his bete noire in the controversy, the vocal duo Ranjani-Gayatri, sang to packed halls. As did Hari and Subrahmanyam. However, several artists, says the sabha insider, were unable to attract huge crowds.

The hospitality sector, too, rues that

We were fully booked for only 15 days. We had a lot of cancellations and vacancies for the rest of the period. After this season, we will have to chalk out some plans to offset the slowdown we are seeing during Margazhi"

VENKATARAMANA BABU,
General Manager,
New Woodlands Hotel, Chennai

there has been a fall in listeners. About 400 m from the Music Academy is the 87-year-old New Woodlands Hotel. It used to be sold out for the entire season, but not this year. "We were fully booked for only 15 days. We had a lot of cancellations and vacancies for the rest of the period," says Venkataramana Babu, general manager of the hotel. "We have been seeing a dip in bookings over the years, but this time was the lowest so far. Many of the patrons are very old and cannot travel. There is also added travel anxiety because of the heavy rains and floods in Chennai around this time."

Babu says the Margazhi festival is an important contributor to the hotel's revenue in December, one of their busiest months. "After this season,

Nupur Amarnath

It was bound to happen. After all, losing weight is one of the most popular resolutions of the new year. That it would be your cabin luggage did not feature on any frequent flyer's 2025 Bingo card. The announcement came at the end of 2024 when the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security proposed only one handbag weighing 7 kg, and the size does matter—it cannot exceed 55 cm in height, 40 cm in length and 20 cm in width.

Frequent travellers who swear by "never checking a bag" are not chuffed to be travelling lighter. Gautam Sinha, founder and creative director of artisanal leather brand Nappa Dori that also makes travel luggage, flies frequently within India and to Dubai, London and Sri Lanka to manage his many stores. He is concerned that it will be a major disadvantage to travellers, and says, "It has been proven by the experience of similar structures in European and American budget airlines that the consumer ends up paying a lot more for a basic flight." One thing he is sure of: "It will definitely make people think more before they pack now."

CHOOSE THE RIGHT LUGGAGE

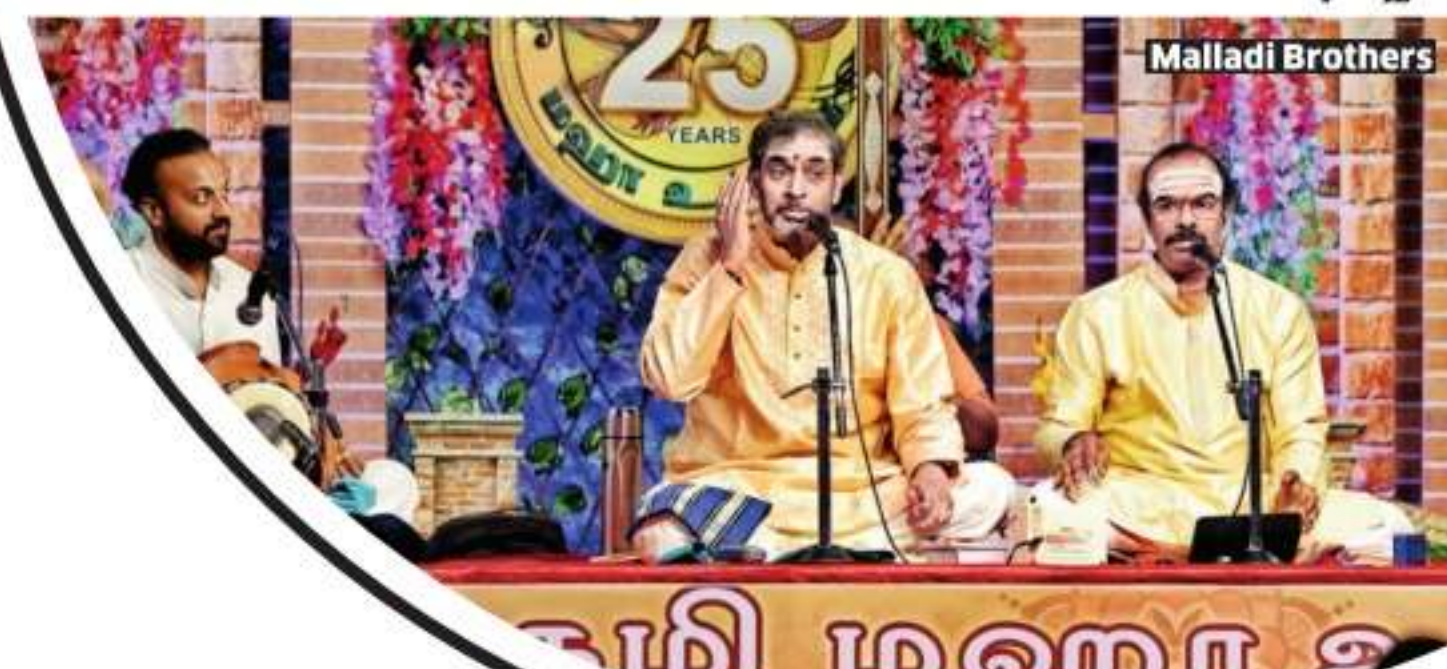
Soft or hard? Fashion or function? Wheelie or weekender? A travel bag is definitely not a one-size-fits-all. Image consultant and corporate trainer Yatan Ahluwalia leans in favour of hard top cases as they are more secure and easier to move around. He says, "Brands or labels don't really matter. Your bags should be lightweight, functional and durable. Keep your height, build and capacity to carry weight in mind." While picking a suitcase, check

A Falling Note?

Has the celebrated music season in Chennai caught a chill? While insiders and hoteliers point to a drop in the footfall of rasikas, some sabhas resist that narrative and say the festival is on song



Amritha Murali and Nisha Rajagopalan



Malladi Brothers

Sikkil Gururcharan

we will have to chalk out some plans to offset the slowdown we are seeing during Margazhi," he says.

Down the road is the 50-year-old Hotel Maris, flanked by the Music Academy and Narada Gana Sabha. It has been an accommodation of choice for rasikas for decades. The hotel's general manager, Vijay Venkatesh, says the festival feels different this year: it does not have the "buzz" of previous years. "We generally have 85% occupancy during the Margazhi season but this year it is only around 50%," says Venkatesh. "Only 60% of our regular patrons have showed up this year. Tour operators, who are generally on an overdrive planning large groups for the Margazhi season, have gone silent this year. We barely got any enquiries for bulk bookings."

The industry watcher says sabhas need to move with the times. Chennai has around 36 sabhas of which the largest are the Tamil Isai Sangam, The Music Academy, Narada Gana Sabha, Parthasarathy Sabha, Sri Krishna Gana Sabha and Vani Mahal. The insider says that, barring the big names, sabhas are having a tough time pulling in the crowds. He blames it partly on the lack of infrastructure such as good acoustics, comfortable seating and even clean toilets. "On a good day when star musicians are performing across sabhas, there will be 3,000-4,000 listeners," says the sabha insider. "That is still a very minuscule number compared with what popular music attracts. It is a very niche audience and one that has gotten used to listening to Carnatic music for free. The smaller sabhas do not make any money. It is the duty of the rasika to buy tickets because unless that happens, the sabhas will see no money."

The larger sabhas, the insider adds, are better off as they let out their concert halls throughout the year for various performances and functions, which keep the cash register ringing.

A FULL HOUSE

Narada Gana Sabha does not have any complaints. Says secretary K Harishankar: "This year we saw a larger crowd than we did in 2022 and 2023. We sold more season tickets and daily tickets and got more revenue than in the last two years. It looks like the festival has stabilised after the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021." He says there are about 10 established sabhas that conduct concerts during the music season. "These sabhas have concerts and functions through the year whereas the smaller venues generally come together

TM Krishna returned triumphantly to the Music Academy, after a decade of cold war, to receive the Sangita Kalanidhi Award



SA R I G A M A

Sabhas are cultural organisations that conduct concerts

Largest Sabhas: Tamil Isai Sangam, The Music Academy, Narada Gana Sabha, Parthasarathy Sabha, Sri Krishna Gana Sabha and Vani Mahal

No. of Sabhas in Chennai: About 36

Cost of Tickets
₹100-750
but a lot of artists do free shows

THE WORRY

While star performers like TM Krishna, Ranjani-Gayatri and Sanjay Subrahmanyam had packed halls, smaller sabhas were unable to draw large crowds

Insider says there has been a

20% drop

in footfalls to kutcheries or concerts this year over last year

► Hotels that used to be booked throughout had a drop in occupancy

► Hotel Maris had only 60% of its regular patrons show up

► New Woodlands Hotel was booked for about 15 days this year as opposed to 30 days generally

The fall in patronage at certain halls might be seen as a mark of silent protest by certain rasikas. But to say that this was the case across the board would be inaccurate"

PALGHAT RAMPRASAD,
Vocalist



of the community.

This season, Ranjani-Gayatri sang to packed halls across the city but did not sing for the Music Academy. Krishna, however, took the Music Academy stage on December 25 and performed to a full house.

Some singers say a drop in footfall could be true of certain sabhas but it cannot be said of the festival as a whole.

Says vocalist Palghat Ramprasad: "I had about 12 shows this season and I did not see any drop in rasikas. In fact, I would say there was a marginal increase. The fall in patronage at certain halls might be seen as a mark of silent protest by certain rasikas. But to say that this was the case across the board would be inaccurate."

Ramprasad says the number of youngsters attending concerts has gone up. "Social media has helped us reach this demographic that is curious to know more about classical music," he says. "Many of my students travelled for the Margazhi festival and I would argue that the landmark hotels that once housed rasikas saw a drop in occupancy probably because all these youngsters are staying in Airbnbs and serviced apartments."

FOOD OF LOVE

Whether the rasikas went to the sabhas or not, they did flock to the sabha canteens. "During the entire December music season, if we keep the average price of a ticket at ₹250, concerts bring in just over ₹1.3 crore to Chennai sabhas," said V Sriram, music historian and secretary of the Music Academy, at a recent talk on the economics of the Margazhi season.

"Meanwhile, food at sabha canteens brings in ₹6 crore. Concert ticket sales are nowhere near canteen sales. People from various parts of the city think there is a food festival going on and dine at the canteens."

Music may be the food of love but it still comes second to the love for food.

dia.rekhi@timesofindia.com



Sandeep Narayan

Vishakha Hari

Bharat Sundar

Go Lightly, My Friend

With strict rules for hand baggage in force, can you pack a week's worth in your cabin bag and still meet the weight goal of 7 kg?



the overall weight. Usually soft-shell nylon is lighter than hard-shell polycarbonate, but it also depends on your preference, says Naina Parekh, founder of luggage brand EUME that designs only hard luggage. Parekh says soft-shell luggage loses shape. She says, "You carry the cabin bag on you at all times, so it's your personal style statement. Aesthetics play a big role in the decision but that does not mean you compromise on functionality." Now bags come with features like a charging port and even a cup holder.

German brand Rimowa is considered to be at the top of the luggage ladder, with its Essential Lite Cabin weighing in at 2 kg, albeit it will make your wallet weigh lighter too (starts from ₹1 lakh). Samsonite's C-Lite Spinner (₹36,400) made with HS Curv—a material made of woven layers of polypropylene—weighs in at 1.9 kg.

Celebrity stylist Akshay Tyagi oscillates between his steadfast Samsonite, a roomier Muji (which may not pass muster with the size specifications) and an upcycled weekender from an indie brand No More—and he picks the one that suits the trip.

Riaan Jacob George, content creator and entrepreneur, too, favours a Samsonite hard case with his Tumi backpack. He says, "It is important to invest in good luggage if you are a frequent traveller. Since I travel almost once a week, I do not experiment with my bags. I have two-three styles and brands that I have stuck to for the past 20 years."

Other things to keep in mind while picking up a bag? Tyagi's tip is to test the wheels—on the floor and a carpet area to see how it rolls. He says, "Stick to a tried-and-tested brand. I don't trust a lot of these Insta brands." One last tip: stick to the dimensions specified.

CUT IT OUT

Professional organiser Gayatri Gandhi,

India's first KonMari (the organising method invented by Marie Kondo) consultant and founder of Joy Factory, advises against "just-in-case" packing: "Don't overpack or keep things just because you think you might need them." Luxury influencer Vivek Dhadha is used to travelling light and is able to achieve it by planning ahead. Make sure outfits and shoes can be matched in different combinations, he says. His tip: To keep the weight light, carry lightweight garments like linens rather than denims and opt for wrinkle-free fabrics.

CLOTHES

Rohini Rajagopalan, founder of Organise with Ease, is a professional organiser and space consultant who is a big believer in making lists. Her advice: Make a list of what you would wear day wise and then create a capsule wardrobe. "Have clothing that can be repeated. Opt for multi-functional clothes like reversible jackets. Stick to one colour palette to mix and match."

The KonMari method that swears by sticking to anything that "sparks joy" can be applied to packing too, says Gandhi. Her advice: think about how you want to enjoy and experience your trip and pack items that align with that vision. Or, follow Sinha's formula: Twice the number of uppers than bottoms.

SUITS

Gandhi says one of the first things is to

pick the right suit, read wrinkle-free. "To fold: turn one shoulder inside out and tuck the other shoulder into it. Fold the jacket vertically then horizontally, so it fits flat in your suitcase. Keep the folds big so there are less creases. For trousers, fold them along the crease to maintain their shape and place them on top of the jacket." Place the folded suit on top of other items in your bag. Her tip: "As soon as you reach your destination, hang

Soft or hard? Fashion or function? Wheelie or weekender? A travel bag is definitely not a one-size-fits-all. While picking a suitcase, check the overall weight. Usually soft-shell nylon is lighter than hard-shell polycarbonate, but it also depends on your preference

the suit in the bathroom with a hot shower. The steam will help smooth the wrinkles."

TOILETRIES

Both George and Tyagi have one packing hack in common: a travel toiletry kit that is always ready to go. The kit is a pared-down version of the basics. Tyagi says, "When buying fragrance, ask for a small tester." Get travel-sized containers (available online) into which you can decant the toiletries to minimise bulk, and use hotel toiletries when possible.

SHOES

All experts agree that two shoes are enough. Pack the softer one that doesn't lose shape and wear the

heavier one. Rajagopalan says, "Use a shoe bag and position them at the bottom corners of your carry-on for stability." Ahluwalia suggests using the inside of the shoes to store socks or small items.

FLIGHT ESSENTIALS

Everyone has their go-to travel bag or backpack for all essentials from laptop to books. Sinha, who is big on compartmentalisation, uses a tech bag for all his wires and chargers as it is easier to fish out. Rajagopalan suggests carrying a small pouch for toiletries like lip balm, sanitiser, etc. Tyagi adds a mouth fresher to the list. He also carries a fresh shirt in his bag and a scarf. Ahluwalia's advice is to fold an empty smaller bag into a larger one, to be used as a day bag.


BE A PACK LEADER

Tyagi suggests using packing cubes while Parekh swears by compression packs to manage suitcase space. George prefers to pack his bag "look-wise"—shirt, socks, pants and underwear all together as one set. As a rule, says Tyagi, pack heavier things at the bottom and work your way up. The longest trip he has taken with just a carry-on was for five days. "But that was Goa. It gets trickier for colder places."

Fold or roll is one of the key decisions to managing packing space. Ahluwalia says make sure you pack ironed clothes as they occupy less space, while Gandhi suggests file folding and storing vertically. Dhadha is a garment roller.

Still unsure? Follow Susan Heller's advice: "Lay out all your clothes and all your money. Then take half the clothes and twice the money."

nupur.amarnath@timesofindia.com



Mission Fusion

Nuclear fusion is the holy grail of energy—clean, cheap and abundant. Three Indian startups are taking baby steps to solve the challenges it poses for commercial development

FUSION	FISSION
Light nuclei combine to form heavier nucleus	Heavy nucleus splits into smaller nuclei
Huge amount of energy produced	Less energy than fusion
Far less radioactive waste than in fission	Hazardous isotopes are a byproduct
High temperatures and pressure are prerequisites	Can happen at lower temperatures than fusion
Still in experimental stage	It is the technology behind nuclear power plants and n-weapons

TOP GLOBAL STARTUPS

- Commonwealth Fusion Systems, US
- Tokamak Energy, UK
- Helion Energy, US
- Xcimer Fusion, US
- Tae Technologies, US
- Zap Energy, US
- First Light Fusion, UK
- Fusion Fuel, Portugal
- Marvel Fusion, Germany
- Life Fusion, US

FUSION GLOBALLY

Startups (E): **50**

Total investment in the fusion industry: **\$7.1 bn**

Funding in 2023-24: **\$900 mn**

Total govt funding: **\$426 mn**

Source: News reports

Nirmal John

Shaurya Kaushal's eyes light up when he talks about nuclear fusion. The 31-year-old computational physicist with a PhD in computational fluid dynamics and a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering is a nerd's nerd. Kaushal and fellow geek Roshan George, a computer science engineer, have been hard at work since May, hoping to solve one of engineering's most enduring problems—achieving sustained and profitable nuclear fusion. Their startup, Pranos, is just coming out of stealth mode, having raised an undisclosed amount from investor Rahul Seth's seed fund Industrial47.

It isn't only Pranos that is bringing in the excitement of nuclear fusion to India. At least two more Indian startups are taking baby steps in the sector.

Anubal Fusion, headquartered in Hyderabad, was the first Indian startup to throw the hat into the ring. It has raised a pre-seed round from VC firm Speciale Invest.

Hyderabad-based Hylenr has, meanwhile, received a patent for its version of a low-energy reactor which, in theory, could have applications in specific low-energy use cases like aboard satellites.

The three startups, all at an early stage, are taking different routes to solving the challenges in sustaining fusion.

There is also buzz that an Indian conglomerate will soon make an announcement of interest in fusion.

Fusion is emerging into the spotlight in India. With experts estimating fusion to be operationalised commercially within the next 10 years, it is too big an opportunity for India to let go, and that's what makes the efforts of these young companies critical.

SCIENCE LESSON

What's fusion? A tremendous amount of energy is released when lighter elements are fused under extremely high temperatures and pressure. In case you didn't pay attention to Class VI physics, fusion is what powers the sun, where hydrogen—

the lighter element—fuses to form the heavier helium nuclei.

Here's how it works.

- ◆ Atoms are heated to very high temperature and subjected to high pressure.
- ◆ Under these conditions, electrons are freed from atoms, creating a cloud of ions called plasma, which is the fourth state of matter.
- ◆ When ions in the plasma collide with enough force, overcoming the repulsion of their positively charged nuclei, they fuse together.
- ◆ This releases energy.

So, where exactly does the energy come from?

The mass of the fused nucleus is less than the mass of the two original nuclei, and the difference is released as energy. Remember Einstein's $E=mc^2$? Nuclear fusion is that equation at work.

PRANOS, Bengaluru

Founders: Shaurya Kaushal and Roshan George

Process: Magnetic confinement fusion

Funding: Pre-seed, not announced

"I knew early on that I didn't want to work on small problems that gave quick gratification when there are larger problems you can work on"

—SHAURYA KAUSHAL



focused on sustaining stable fusion long enough to deliver more energy than what it consumes—a milestone called ignition by nuclear nerds.

Another trigger of interest in fusion, especially after the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011, is that unlike nuclear fission, where atoms are split, fusion is cleaner and doesn't come with the threat

of a meltdown.

Research into fusion picked up pace in the last decade, thanks to increased computational power enabling better design and advances in material sciences.

In 2022, for the first time ever, researchers at the National Ignition Facility in the US created more energy than what they had put in through fusion in a lab setting. The next step is the design and creation of reactors that can sustain such a fusion reaction, giving a continuous output of energy.

In other words, the challenge is the engineering required to create a practical fusion power plant.

Martin Freer, chief executive of the UK's Faraday Institution and former head of the School of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Birmingham, says, "As such, it has been demonstrated that the physics principles work, but the engineering is now key—how to turn the current experimental reactors into working power stations. There are some key challenges in making that transition."

STATE OF PLAY

Fusion is following the same trajectory as most technologies of consequence—the internet, aerospace, etc.—and has stepped out of government research labs. The race is now on among private enterprises to profit from all that research and tap into humankind's insatiable appetite for energy.

Over the last decade or so, about \$7 billion has been invested globally in private fusion companies, with around \$900 million of that coming in between mid-2023 and mid-2024.

That makes the buzz around nuclear fusion a global phenomenon, and if anything, Indian startups are slightly late to the party. But in a tech that is still in its infancy, they could still be early enough to make a difference.

Vishesh Rajaram, managing partner at deeptech VC Speciale Invest, says, "You need to be patient. After all, nobody has solved it yet."

A key challenge in making fusion work is confinement, essentially keeping plasma in a specific area,

ANUBAL, Hyderabad

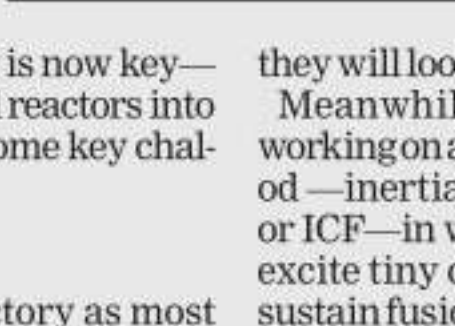
Founder: Pravin Kini

Process: Inertial confinement fusion

Funding: Pre-seed, \$297,000

"Fusion work is 80% simulation, and only 20% is actual experiments. Each of the equations we try to solve takes a couple of days of compute time"

—PRAVIN KINI



they will look at building a reactor.

Meanwhile, Anubal Fusion is working on a whole different method—inertial confinement fusion or ICF—in which lasers, not magnets, are used to excite tiny capsules of fusion fuel to trigger and sustain fusion.

Pravin Kini, founder of Anubal Fusion and serial entrepreneur, says, "Unlike most work that has been done on inertial confinement so far, our design is centred on using a single powerful beam of laser rather than the 250-plus beams that are usually used."

Hylenr is working on what is the most difficult and controversial route—cold fusion. There is a lack of consensus in the scientific community on this method, which theorises that fusion can happen at room temperature.

All three companies will require significant funding to first compute and validate their equations, simulate plasma in their designs and, finally, build a working prototype of a reactor.

In India, VCs, who are just coming out of their consumer-business obsession, have to prep for an entirely new generation of deep-tech startups and their naturally longer investment horizons.

avoiding interaction with anything outside optimal inertial or magnetic field. That is key to sustaining a stable fusion reaction.

Pranos' attempt to design a reactor is based on magnetic confinement fusion (MCF) where electromagnets are used to keep the plasma confined and away from the walls of the reactor.

The first step to doing this is to simulate the behaviour of plasma, a compute-intensive process, which is what the company is currently focusing on. A key aspect of what they are doing, says Kaushal, is to iterate on designs faster through better simulations. "Currently it takes about three months to come up with a design and work on simulations. We want to bring it down to 10 days."

Once they have a design that works,

For VCs with the stomach for that journey, the promise at the end of what would be a long, patient journey is the mother of all pots of gold. A report by Bloomberg Intelligence pegs the valuation of the nuclear fusion market at \$40 trillion. Beyond abundant energy, there is a retinue of long-tail applications, from material sciences to healthcare.

NEED FOR CLARITY

One of the key challenges that India's fusion startups will have to navigate is policy.

India's Atomic Energy Act (AEA) of 1962 governs "energy released from atomic nuclei as a result of any process, including the fission and fusion processes". A key clause restricts private entities from working on such processes, without differentiating between fission and fusion.

Lack of clarity between fusion and fission has been a global problem, and in the US, where the highest number of such startups exist, a bill has been introduced to amend their "Atomic Energy

Act of 1954 and the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act to clarify existing requirements relating to fusion machines, and for other purposes".

Rajaram is optimistic that policy will catch up, just as it has done for other sectors like electric vehicles.

There could also be an interesting trigger round the corner. Abundant access to energy is a civilisational problem, and it would not be a surprise if bigger conglomerates in India get involved in the development of fusion energy soon. That could bring in more heft, accelerating changes at the policy level to provide clarity in fusion energy development.

What might take a little more time is educating the public on the difference between fission and fusion, with the former having quite a bad reputation. Fission produces unstable nuclei that can be radioactive for thousands of years whereas fusion reactors produce little to no long-lived radioactive waste.

The threat of radioactivity has been a key reason why people push back on nuclear energy in India, and it would be a key public policy challenge for those engaged in fusion to underline its difference, in particular its status as a source of clean and safe energy.

nirmal.john1@timesofindia.com

Beside Vasco da Gama's Tomb, 500 Years Later

The empty tomb of the Portuguese explorer in Fort Kochi, and the Red Hills in Imphal tell a story of neglected opportunities to lure foreign tourists

Shantanu Nandan Sharma

On Christmas Eve, I found myself in Fort Kochi—a lively beachfront enclave in Kerala's coastal city where art, culture, cuisine and history seamlessly merge into an symphony. A quick, 20-minute ride on an air-conditioned water metro, with a modest ₹50 ticket in hand, transported me to an entirely different world—a cultural mosaic shaped by the Portuguese, Dutch and British legacies.

What instantly caught my attention were the charming bylanes with curious names: Princess Street, Napier Street and Peter Cell Street, all dotted with elegant European-style homes. At the centre of it stood a square named after Vasco da Gama, a figure plucked straight out of my school history books.

I made my way to St Francis Church, one of Kerala's oldest churches, where the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama was laid to rest for 14 years until his son, Pedro de Silva da Gama, carried his mortal remains back to Portugal. Inside, an enclosure marked by a signboard reading "Vasco da Gama Tomb" caught my eye. Taking a seat on a nearby wooden bench, I began googling the famed navigator, only to be stunned by an unexpected

revelation—da Gama died in Kochi on December 24, 1524.

"OMG! I'm here exactly 500 years after his death!" I thought. Yet, no one around me, not even the guide enthusiastically narrating da Gama's story to a group of German tourists, seemed aware of the significance of that day.

Why had the government shied away from turning this significant milestone into an opportunity to attract European tourists, specifically Portuguese, to India this winter? After all, da Gama remains a celebrated figure in Portugal, with bridges and shopping centres bearing his name in Lisbon.

True, da Gama, like many European colonisers, carries a contested legacy. To some, he's a pirate and imperialist, exploiting communities along the Malabar coast for mercenary gains. But 77 years after India's independence, isn't it time to move beyond such historical grievances and harness the myriad colonial legacies scattered across the country to attract foreign tourists?

Are our central and state tourism departments crafting fresh, compelling narratives, or are they still clinging to old slogans like Incredible India and God's Own Country?

The signs aren't encouraging. From anecdotal reports of Goa's iconic



(Clockwise from above) St Francis Church in Fort Kochi; Memorial of Vasco da Gama inside the church; the tomb where da Gama was originally buried

Inside St Francis Church, where Vasco da Gama was laid to rest for 14 years, I began googling the famed navigator, only to be stunned by an unexpected revelation—da Gama died in Kochi 500 years ago, to the day, on December 24, 1524

beaches struggling to draw foreign tourists to hard government data showing a decline in foreign arrivals, the message is clear: India's tourism sector needs a bold, creative overhaul. For the record, only 4.7 million foreign tourists visited India between January and June 2024, a

10% drop over the corresponding period in pre-Covid 2019.

NEGLECTED HISTORY

While reporting near the India-Bhutan border two years ago, I came across a sight that left me stunned. In a village in Assam's



Gossaigaon subdivision, locals had turned the steam engines of a historic British-era tramway into racks to dry clothes. The tramway, established in 1901, once hauled logs of sal, velkor and other varieties. Decades of neglect meant most of its rails had been stolen or discarded. Just two forlorn engines remain as relics of a bygone era.

This site lies adjacent to Raimona National Park, which shares a contiguous forest belt with Bhutan's Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary. Here, wildlife enthusiasts brave jungle roads to catch a glimpse of the elusive golden langur, a species as rare as it is mesmerising.

Why wouldn't the authorities restore the antique tramway and transform it into a tourist attraction? Imagine the allure of an abandoned tramline paired with the charm of encountering a golden langur—a perfect blend of history and nature waiting to be rediscovered.

Further east, atop a hillock about 20 km southwest of Imphal in Manipur, history echoes on the site of a ferocious World War II clash between Japanese and Allied forces.

Known as Red Hills, this battlefield saw its legacy honoured in 2019, on the 75th anniversary of the conflict, with the inauguration of a peace museum, supported by Japan's Nippon Foundation.

The event was graced by distinguished guests, including the then Japanese ambassador Kenji Hiramatsu and UK high commissioner Dominic Asquith, underscoring the shared commitment to reconciliation. Nearby, a peace memorial built by the Japanese government bears a poignant inscription, my favourite: "This monument will stand as a prayer for peace."

Should India dismiss the memories of World War II merely because it is often labelled as a conflict of colonial powers? Or, should Manipur's Red Hills be reimagined as a pilgrimage site, drawing Japanese and British tourists to honour a shared history of sacrifice and reconciliation?

The fact that foreign tourist arrivals to India are lagging pandemic levels, even amid the global wave of a so-called revenge travel, should serve as a wake-up call. Let's not forget: the tourism sector sustains 45 million jobs and contributes 6.8% to our GDP. It's time to move beyond tired slogans and embrace a dynamic approach to attract foreign visitors and reinvigorate this vital industry.

Let the remnants of our colonial past earn us a share of the global tourist dollar.

shantanu.sharma@timesofindia.com

No, There Isn't a Real Place Called Macondo, and Yet... There Are Many, Many Macondos

The town that forms the heart of Gabriel García Márquez's most famous novel is echoed in Colombia's Aracataca, Guatemala's Antigua, and finds fictitious resonance in RK Narayan's Malgudi

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN



MICHEL BAAS

There's no easy way to say this, but Macondo doesn't exist. With the 2024 OTT TV series adaptation of Gabriel García Márquez's 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* capturing audiences globally, the hunt is on once more though.

Even though the novel came to the author like a fever dream spent in seclusion in Mexico, García Márquez hails from the (real) Colombian town of Aracataca. The locals are convinced that Macondo is based on it, even though much to their chagrin, none of them were cast in the Colombian production. The OTT platform company spent

days in the town looking for inspiration and scouting potential. Aracataca doesn't feature in the series. Neither does any other known town. It's all fiction.

A few years ago, we headed to our 'Macondo' – the river-facing Colombian town of Santa Cruz de Mompox. On a García Márquez-inspired journey, we had taken the night bus from Bucaramanga reaching Mompox in the morning. We found the town asleep. The intense mugginess hit us almost immediately as we exited the air-conditioned bus. And so did the town's infamous mosquitoes.

Unable to sleep on the bus, I had once again returned to the novel that I had attempted to read many times, but never finished. Somewhere halfway, I tend to lose interest, a sense of loss with previously beloved characters stopping me from warming up to the new generation, the similarity in names driving me to desperation. By this time, Macondo also no longer feels as mythical as it once did, as if I have overstayed my welcome, its bubble of magic burst.

Finding our hotel cloaked in darkness, we banged on its door to no avail. Until the dogs



THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE IT

decided to join in, their barks waking up the rest of the streets. A heavy lock was being opened with a rusty key, and a heavily moustachioed, balloon-shaped man appeared in the doorway.

We now found ourselves in a sprawling drawing room filled with antique furniture,

ornately decorated chests, an eclectic mix of statues – some dressed in 18th c. regalia – and a stuffed black panther, its growling face still menacing. Our room was ready. Breakfast would be served in an hour. The hotel's restaurant next door was aptly named Macondo.

To relish Malgudi or Macondo 'days', one has to return to the novels where these towns exist for all eternity

Macondo had been inescapable on our journey across Colombia. From Barichara to Cartagena to Popayán, every colonial town seemed to treasure its own imagined connection with the place. Such associations do not stop at the Colombian border though.

Staying at a hotel housed in an old convent in Antigua in Guatemala last month, we literally found ourselves comparing it to 'life' in Macondo. It didn't help that we were binge-episodes of the series at night, then waking up early and finding the straggling courtyard with its carefully carved pillars awash in verdant green, flowers buzzing with butterflies, and a bunch of lazy cats occupying couches overflowing with baroque embroidered pillows.

The coffee shop around the corner was also named Macondo, a pile of García Márquez's novels waiting to be read while sipping a Guatemalan single-origin brew.

Having crossed over into Guatemala from El Salvador, each Salvadorian town some-

how reminded us of Macondo as well. A church in the centre, a small park adjacent, locals congregating for a chat, it felt like they were all props in an elaborate setup.

In India, the closest that any place comes to a 'Macondo' vibe is RK Narayan's fictional small town of Malgudi. A portmanteau of the Bangladeshi neighbourhoods of Malleshwaram and Basavanagudi, like Narayan's hometown of Mysore, these areas are now so resolutely urban that it's hard to imagine they may have once offered inspiration for his stories. Examining the bookshelves in Narayan's home a few years ago. I did find myself longing for Malgudi though.

To relish Malgudi or Macondo 'days', all one has to do is return to the novels where these towns exist for all eternity unchanged, near-perfect microcosms of a time and place basking in a nostalgic past. On the road, it's the dream of reaching such mythical places that will propel you forward, the journey never quite ending.

FILM FATALE



ANNA MM VETTICAD

Sen's Sensibility, The Rebellious Act Of Sticking Around

A documentary on the maker of one of the best Indian films of all time

"The very act of surviving here amounts to making history," Parvathy Thiruvothu told me just days back. The actor-activist was recalling those who cautioned her at the start of her career that a woman artiste has a limited 'shelf life'. You cannot last beyond a decade, after which you will be relegated to playing sister, aunt, and mother, they warned her. 'It's now been over 18 years since I entered films,' she added. 'My survival is my answer to those who said [that].'

It is a happy coincidence that I ended 2024 on a stage conversing with Parvathy on the theme, 'She Is Writing History,' at the Wayanad Literature Festival, and I began 2025 watching a documentary on Aparna Sen, actor, director, magazine editor, activist, and all-round exemplar in the matter of both survival and history-making. Suman Ghosh's *Parama: A Journey with Aparna Sen* was released in theatres in Kolkata early this month after a positive reception on the festival circuit last year.

The juxtaposition of these two women's stories in my mind took me back to my childhood when I first watched Sen's directorial debut, *36 Chowringhee Lane*. Many years would pass before it occurred to me that until then I had not sampled the work of an Indian woman director. When *36 Chowringhee Lane* was released in 1981, Sen was a rarity. The scenario has improved somewhat, but not dramatically so. Women directors are still not common.

Sen wears her achievements and struggles lightly in Ghosh's documentary. That there were struggles is clear from remarks by her and other interviewees – marriages that ended, a difficult relationship with one of her daughters, financial hardship, acting jobs she took to keep her house running rather than out of interest. She found her true calling in direction. With the baton in hand, she has given us a range of excellent films – dominated by Bengali – on loneli-



TRUE CAMERA-DERIE

ness, female friendships, and female rebellion.

36 Chowringhee Lane, an English film, starred Jennifer Kendal as an elderly Anglo-Indian teacher in Kolkata who is comfortable with a solitary existence as a single woman, until a young couple enter the picture, only to use and cruelly discard her. Her Bengali film four years later, *Parama*, had Rakhee Gulzar playing a woman in a dull marriage who is an unapologetic about embarking on an extramarital affair.

Sen's filmography as a director is strikingly uneven. But when she has shone, she has been nothing short of great. Of her prolific output, my favourites remain *36 Chowringhee Lane* – one of the best Indian films of all time, in my view – *Paromita Ek Din* (One Day of Paromita, 2000), *Mr and Mrs Iyer* (English, 2002) and *Goynar Baksho* (Box of Jewels, 2013).

What stands out in each of these is her empathy for the other – an ethnic minority at sea in post-Independence India, a wife constrained in a conservative home, a wife who is taken for granted, a Muslim in an increasingly majoritarian India, a widow. That empathy is evident too in the gutsy political stands she has taken for decades irrespective of the political party in government in West Bengal or in New Delhi.

Sen is now nearing 80 and still busy. In the documentary, actor-director Konkona Sen Sharma mentions asking her superstar mother whether it would not be better to 'sleep in the afternoons... look after yourself... enjoy the later part of your life', instead of taking on the physically gruelling task of making another film. And I remember her saying, 'Sensharma adds, with a tinge of admiration, 'that I don't want to keep my body alive just for my children and grandchildren. If I'm not doing things or engaging meaningfully, I don't want to live.'

As Parvathy pointed out, sticking around is, in itself, an act of resistance in arenas where women are expected to fizzle out. Witnessing Aparna Sen's resistance, as she sticks around with an undying passion for what she does, is an inspiration and a blessing.

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

MAGAstar's Shaking Up Nationalism

Using Canada, Greenland, and the Panama Canal, 'America First' Don has started a radical conversation about 'notion-states'

DATA CRUNCHER



ATANU BISWAS

MAGA star Donald Trump wants to Make America Greater Again. In sq kms, that is. We all know of the US annexing nearly 13 lakh sq km of Mexican territory after winning the war with Mexico in 1848; buying 76,800 sq km in present day southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico – the area known as Gadsden Purchase – from Mexico in 1854; buying Alaska from Russia in 1867; annexing independent Hawaii in 1898; procuring 117 sq km of Guantánamo Bay to set up a US detention camp in 1903, which the Cuban communist government has considered illegal since it came to power in 1959.

There's, of course, the United States of America itself, carved out of lands not 'owned' by anyone when it was occupied by Native Americans, then turned into a British colony, and ultimately an independent nation state in 1776 according to Westphalian sovereignty norms invented in 17th century Europe.

But less well known is America's territorial losses. The Panama Canal Zone, which it acquired in 1904 from private and public Panamanian owners, was returned to Panama in 1979, formally ceding its control in 1999. In Oceania, Japan-occupied

Marshall Islands, which the US occupied after WW2, got its independence in 1979. The same 'transition' model was followed with Federated States of Micronesia and Palau, both of which officially gained independence from US 'trusteeship' in 1990 and 1994, respectively.

So, yes, Trumpus Maximus can jolly well float his expansive expansionary idea, following Putin's playbook to acquire Crimea, Donetsk, Kherson... and Xi Jinping's 'One (and All) China' policy. Trump's suggestion to economically seduce Canada, grab Greenland by hook or by chequebook, and plans for MPCAA – Make Panama Canal American Again – inspired Trump's son Eric to share a meme of his father purchasing these territories on Amazon. Surprisingly, the e-commerce giant

doesn't offer these items for sale. Yet. Trump is unhappy with the US spending 'protection money' on Canada, not to mention with imports of Canadian cars (the country exports \$51 bn in vehicles, with 93% of these going to the US), lumber, and dairy products that widen a \$80.1 bn (2022) trade deficit.

In violation of the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the incoming POTUS threatened to levy a 25% tariff on Canada and Mexico. Trump has promised that if Canada joined the US, it would be totally secure from the threat of the Russian and Chinese ships, 'taxes would drop significantly and there would be no tariffs. Unsurprisingly, most Canadians are unimpressed. According to a December 2024 survey by Canadian market research firm Leg-

er, 82% of respondents said they didn't like the idea. Ontario premier Doug Ford joked about how Canada should purchase Minnesota, Minneapolis, and Alaska instead.

Greenland is another bee in Trump's bonnet. In 1946, when tensions between the US and the Soviet Union were at their height, Harry Truman made Denmark an offer of \$100 mn in gold to purchase the Danish autonomous territory. Copenhagen saw the offer as insulting. Trump has now reaffirmed his 2019 assertion that the US has an 'absolute necessity' to own and control Greenland.

Trumpian colonialism, however, differs significantly from its 19th c. predecessors. It reflects geopolitical, economic, security, and strategic insight in a shifting global order. Through a Trumpian glass, of course.

As a businessman, Trump has a mercantilist perspective on geopolitics. His Greenland and Canada offers a real estate counter to the dangers posed by Chinese and Russian Arctic incursions. Also, the Arctic region is home to 13% of the world's undiscovered oil, almost 30% of its undiscovered gas, and rare earth metals worth an estimated \$1 tn. Property prices should spike if and when drilling and mining begin.

Even if the US doesn't end up controlling these regions, Trump's ideas represent an attempt to negotiate a larger US involvement in them. And, perhaps, more importantly, they make us relook at the tenuous strings by which the concepts of nation-state and sovereignty hang. Paradoxically, America's great patriot Donald Trump has shaken up the rather recent concept of nationalism.

The writer is professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

Trumpus Maximus can jolly well float his expansive expansionary idea, following Putin's and Xi's playbook



GOL MAAL HAI, BHAI, SAB GOL MAAL

Statue-tory Warning: Fort's Boy Wonder is an Anomaly

Our obsession with erecting statues of dead public figures is only matched by their ugliness

RED HERRING



INDRAJIT HAZRA

I'm mortally terrified of statues. Even though I find most I encounter hilarious, once the mirth subsides – Diego Maradona holding up the World Cup looking like Rishi Kapoor holding up his dafti in Sargam; Subhas Bose looking like BR Ambedkar; and vice versa; Gandhi busts that boom – the sheer fact that our cities are overpopulated with statues, overwhelmingly of historical figures, makes me feel like I'm inhabiting a giant catacomb. On top of that, their sheer ugliness only intensifies my terror of living in this monkey gallery of Kitschkindha.

So, when a statue does strike me as being, well, striking, I'm not only delighted, but also stand for minutes on end to admire such wonderful anomalies in stone. As I did recently when I was staying in the Fort area of Mumbai and chanced upon a figure reading a book on top of a cupola held up by a two-storeyed, many-pillared, intricately carved structure.

Even in the busy gol chakkar of P D Mello Road and Mint Road, with his pedestal crisscrossed by lawless electric lines and *très anar-chic* pigeons trying their damndest best to make him look up from his book, the figure – on closer inspection, a boy – is unperturbed, utterly immersed. His right hand holds the book as if it's a Kindle. His left hand to his side is balled up in a fist as if reacting to a particularly riveting, or even disturbing, passage.

Over a fortnight, I passed this arresting figure every day, standing in stone above the boisterous crowds, a boy having no care for the world fudging its way below him. Soon enough, I learnt that the structure is Muljee Jetha

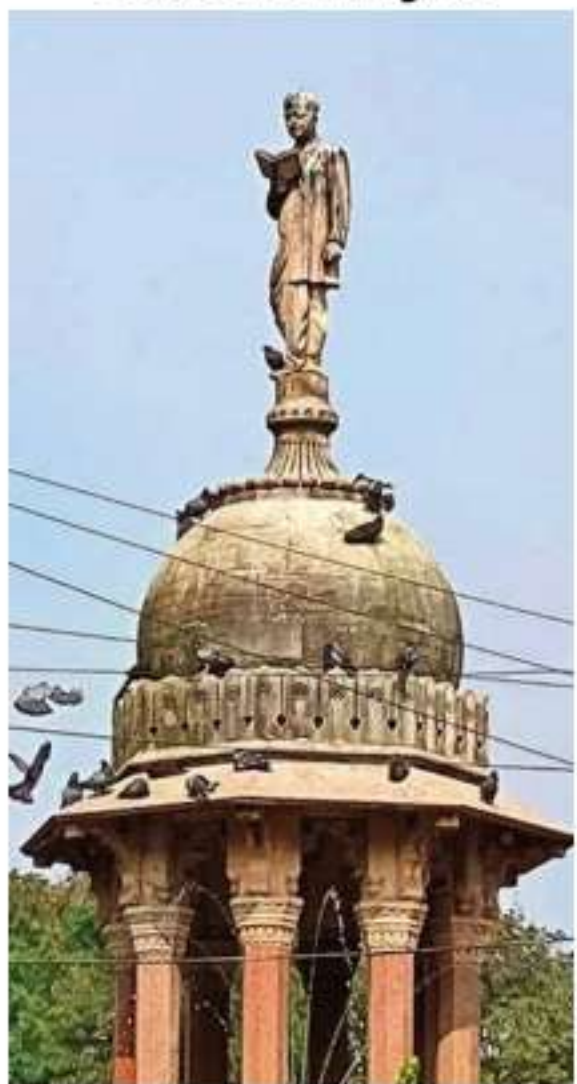
Fountain, and the statue on top is of Dharamsee Muljee, son of Ruttonjee Muljee, a cotton merchant.

Young Dharamsee had died at the age of 15 in 1889 and his father, commemorating his son's love for reading, commissioned the fountain. Designed by Frederick William Stevens, also designer of the nearby Victoria Terminus a.k.a. Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, it was unveiled in 1894.

But it is the statue, sculpted by John Griffiths, head of Bombay School of Art (later Sir JJ School of Art), that holds your gaze standing as it does above the Mumbai din and raat. This is a rare case where a statue in an Indian city tells a story without us knowing the story as national or cultural myth.

Most importantly, the statue is beautiful – poignant, strangely haughty, otherworldly, even as it

This statue tells a story without us knowing the story as national or cultural myth



THE SOLITARY READER

inspires. Thankfully, unlike most other old, historic roadside statues and structures, especially those *not* depicting dead politicians and other historical figures, Muljee Jetha Fountain was wonderfully restored in 2017 by conservation architect Vikas Dilawari with funds gathered by Kala Ghoda Association.

Back in the other city I'm familiar with, in a reply last week to an RTI enquiry, Kolkata Municipal Corporation informed that between 2013 and 2024, some 189 statues and busts were installed here. A breakdown of the identity of statues reported is revealing, and tiresome: 24 Swami Vivekanandas, 22 Rabindranath Tagores, 21 Subhas Boses, 15 Ma Sharadas, 8 Mother Teresas, 7 Nazrul Islams, 6 Mohandas Gandhis and Khudiram Boses...

This is hardly an exhaustive or representative list. Ramakrishna statues and busts are almost as prolific on Kolkata's streets as the number of Mamata's photos appearing in Kolkata newspapers and of Modi's in those of other cities. And the twin 35-ft statues of Gandhi and Subhas Bose – recognisable only by his Lennon glasses and 'Congress' cap – erected in 2019 near my parents' home in Belegata are white, limewashed, Godzilla-class monstrosities.

Chandril Bhattacharya, one of the sharpest social commentators of our times, got it bang on when he recently observed in the context of sense of humour among Bengalis, 'Just erect another statue and you've done your bit. You don't have to read him, know him, understand him, or even remember him. Just turn him into a statue.'

Our statue-culture is almost psycho-sexual. Check the pair of 'Football Legs' that stop till the torso outside Kolkata's Salt Lake Stadium and you'll know what I mean. Which is why it doesn't matter how any statue or bust in a public space looks. Unlike Fort's poignant figure of Dharamsee Muljee, grotesques erected in the name of worthies is all that counts.

indrajit.hazra@timesofindia.com

NO OFFENCE

Morparia



With apologies to James Gillray's 1805 cartoon of British PM William Pitt and Napoleon carving up the world between them

Ok, that sounds gross. I foresee many debacles.

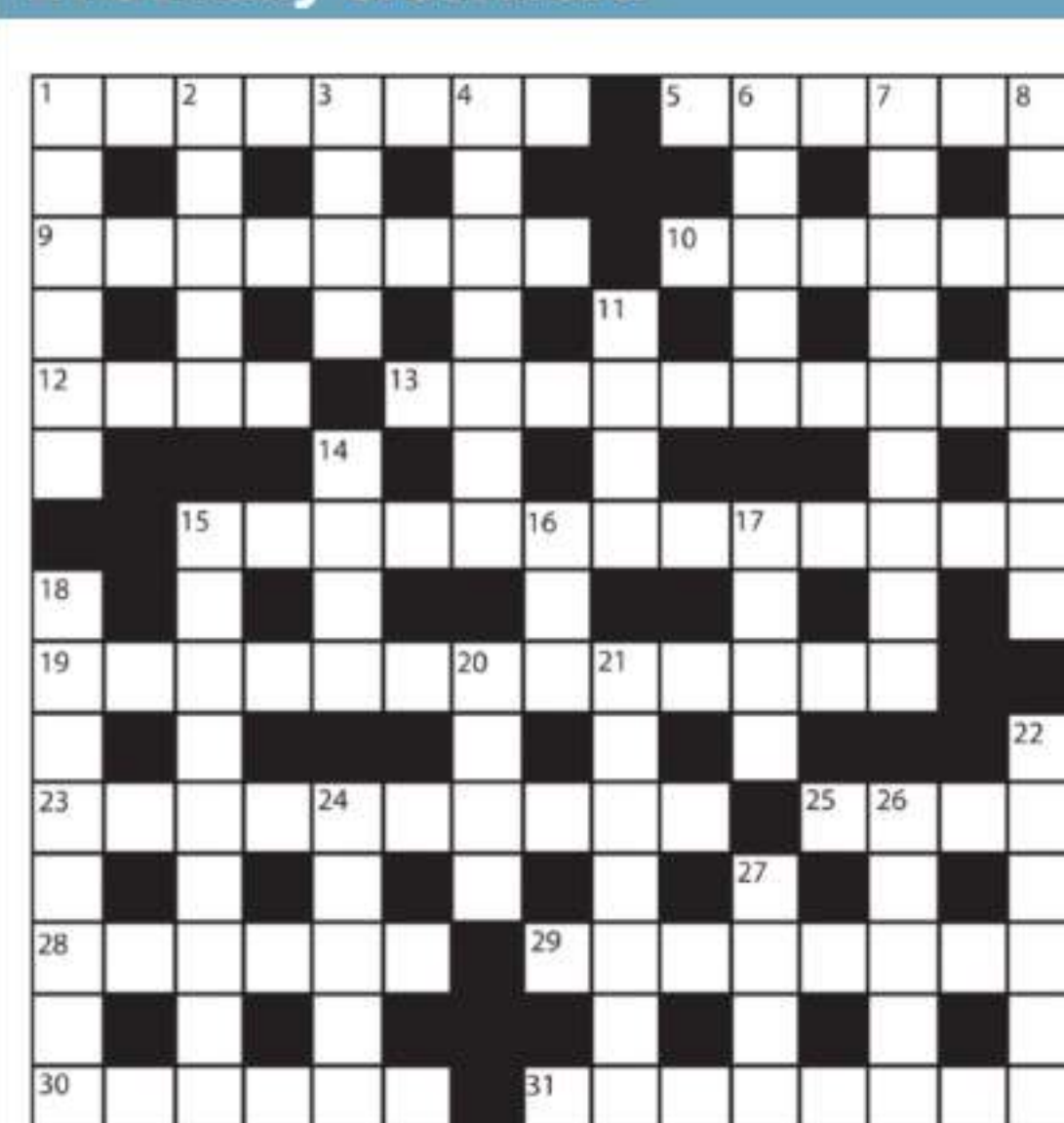
Yes! It involves onerous preparation. Staff members begin by pouring five 1-gallon containers of mayonnaise into a large Gatorade-sized cooler. Then, they take turns briskly stirring the mayo for more than 25 minutes with a large wooden stick. In 2021, though, one of the handles slipped, and South Carolina's coach got a surprise mayo shower – plus a bucket to the head! But don't worry, we've since reinforced those handles.

Any lessons learned from that mishap? Absolutely! The mayo dumpers now go through rigorous training. They practice pouring on a 'dummy coach' to make sure no one gets a head knock. After that incident, they got serious with a mayo selection camp. They had 10 candidates lifting mayo buckets and catching footballs with mayo-coated hands to make sure they're strong and skilled enough for the job. It's a tough gig, but we've got it down now!

Text: Team Sunday ET

ET Sunday Crossword

0098



ACROSS
1 He drives in low cloud over duck on hill (8)
5 Old English composer had written off for best example (6)
9 Menial shadows laid round department (8)
10 Hindu says it could snare intruders almost (6)
12 Singer moves back within spotlight's range (4)
13 Macca used to play without one – used to (10)
15 Taking chances, left new units in charge after work (13)

DOWN
1 Reckless aide-de-camp brought in plan (6)
2 Not working in this evening? Get drunk (5)
3 Polish bottom of pretty stone (4)
4 Cocktail may give you caries, dentist's chief admitted (7)
6 Brewer's agent certainly has a temperature (5)
7 New poetry inspires Thomas – it offers better views (9)
8 It's doomed to failure, like wildflower's victim (4,4)
11 Spiritual guide turns up in Uruguay (4)
14 e.g. rugby or cricket forfeits right to notice (4)
15 Prime, old, phoned union, then Brown (5-4)
16 Some institutes briefly display disapproval (3)
17 Battered coin's famous image (4)
18 E = mc²? Difficult question, answer not satisfactory (8)
20 Add up energy and get inspiration (4)
21 Henry Muldoon almost knocked over man in mob (7)
22 It's pretty small and it changed at end of July (6)
24 Live way out across Sweden (5)
26 Extremist engaged in dreadful travesty (5)
27 Wildest praised to the heavens? (4)

DOWN
1 Reckless aide-de-camp brought in plan (6)
2 Not working in this evening? Get drunk (5)
3 Polish bottom of pretty stone (4)
4 Cocktail may give you caries, dentist's chief admitted (7)
6 Brewer's agent certainly has a temperature (5)
7 New poetry inspires Thomas – it offers better views (9)
8 It's doomed to failure, like wildflower's victim (4,4)
11 Spiritual guide turns up in Uruguay (4)
14 e.g. rugby or cricket forfeits right to notice (4)
15 Prime, old, phoned union, then Brown (5-4)
16 Some institutes briefly display disapproval (3)
17 Battered coin's famous image (4)
18 E = mc²? Difficult question, answer not satisfactory (8)
20 Add up energy and get inspiration (4)
21 Henry Muldoon almost knocked over man in mob (7)
22 It's pretty small and it changed at end of July (6)
24 Live way out across Sweden (5)
26 Extremist engaged in dreadful travesty (5)
27 Wildest praised to the heavens? (4)

26 Ultra, 27 Gross, 28 Exist, 29 350W, 30 100W, 31 150W, 32 100W, 33 150W, 34 100W, 35 150W, 36 100W, 37 150W, 38 100W, 39 150W, 40 100W, 41 150W, 42 100W, 43 150W, 44 100W, 45 150W, 46 100W, 47 150W, 48 100W, 49 150W, 50 100W, 51 150W, 52 100W, 53 150W, 54 100W, 55 150W, 56 100W, 57 150W, 58 100W, 59 150W, 60 100W, 61 150W, 62 100W, 63 150W, 64 100W, 65 150W, 66 100W, 67 150W, 68 100W, 69 150W, 70 100W, 71 150W, 72 100W, 73 150W, 74 100W, 75 150W, 76 100W, 77 150W, 78 100W, 79 150W, 80 100W, 81 150W, 82 100W, 83 150W, 84 100W, 85 150W, 86 100W, 87 150W, 88 100W, 89 150W, 90 100W, 91 150W, 92 100W, 93 150W, 94 100W, 95 150W, 96 100W, 97 150W, 98 100W, 99 150W, 100 100W.

© The Daily Mail

Dynamic Roles

►► From Page 1

“Most of these people are sought for roles that are very dynamic but may not be very structured and defined. As a result, it requires a high level of thinking, strategising and key decision making,” said Suresh Raina, partner at Heidrick & Struggles India, a global executive search firm.

“Large conglomerates look at this pool to hire seasoned hands who have the capability, stamina and comfort to keep pace with the rapidly growing size and scale of their businesses and can operate in a high pressure environment.”

While large conglomerates mostly prefer talent from the top three strategy houses—McKinsey, Bain and BCG—the last 1-2 years has also been witness to surging demand for consulting professionals from Big Four and others such as Kearney and Accenture.

“Indian companies are investing big time globally and a lot of M&As are also happening, leading large Indian companies to rope in strategy and consulting professionals who have that strategic orientation,” said Jyoti Bowen Nath, managing partner, Claricent Partners, an executive search firm.

S. Venkatesh, group president-HR at RPG Enterprises, noted that “consulting and strategy firm professionals bring in the ability to work with multiple clients and also have the exposure of dealing with top management people at the client’s end”. “Most of them are from top business schools, IITs or other reputed institutions and are very bright. We have been hiring from this pool,” he said.

“Strategy firm hires are sought after due to their pedigree, ability to work with multiple clients across industries, ability to deliver under pressure, and comfort of working with top level executives and C-suite,” said Prabir Jha, founder of Prabir Jha People Advisory and former CHRO at Reliance and Global head-HR at Tata Motors.

Companies are offering lucrative packages to rope in such talent with salaries at the senior level—15 years or above experience—touching ₹3-6 crore, said search industry officials.

K Sudarshan, MD, India, and regional chair Asia, EMA Partners, said, “The extremely competitive environment at the strategy firms also leads to some people looking at the option of corporates for career growth where they are often given a P&L role in 2-3 years.”

Pledge to Undo AI Order

►► From Page 1

Altman, meanwhile, personally donated \$1 million to Trump’s inauguration fund after having previously given money to President Joe Biden’s 2024 reelection campaign.

“I think artificial general intelligence will probably get developed during this president’s term, and getting that right seems really important,” Altman said in a recent interview, referring to a hypothetical, advanced form of AI. “Supporting the inauguration, that’s a relatively small thing. I don’t view that as a big decision either way. But I do think we all should wish for the president’s success.”

Trump’s party has pledged to undo Biden’s



executive order on AI, saying that it “imposes radical left-wing ideas” on the field. With Trump’s win, Musk has also gained newfound influence in Washington. That’s sparked concerns that Musk could pursue policies that favor his own companies, including his artificial intelligence startup xAI. Altman, whose company is in a legal battle with Musk, recently said he does not think the billionaire will use his political power against rivals like OpenAI.

OpenAI president Greg Brockman and chief product officer Kevin Weil also plan to be at the inauguration, according to a company spokesperson. OpenAI also has hired a lobbying firm run by a well-known figure in Trump world, Jeff Miller, according to a filing.

Shift in Audience Preferences

►► From Page 1

Notably, 31% of Hindi cinema’s revenue came from dubbed south Indian films, and collection from original Hindi films fell 37% on-year. Footfall declined 16% to 230 million, significantly below the pre-pandemic levels of more than 300 million. Experts said that despite declining footfall, Indian cinema showed resilience in 2024, with revenue driven largely by a few blockbusters. They highlighted significant growth in regional cinema, suggesting a shift in audience preferences, even as they cautioned that sustaining engagement would remain a key challenge.

“Though there has been a decline in terms of footfall, 2024 has been a year of tentpole movies and amongst them, *Pushpa 2* turned out to be the biggest, holding the pole position of the highest grosser in Indian cinema, beating *Bahubali 2*’s record by collecting Rs 1,200-plus crore,” said Nitin Menon, managing partner of NV Capital. “Though the overall box office collection is similar to 2023’s, the worry is footfall, which is below pre-pandemic levels. High ticket prices, shorter OTT (over-the-top)

windows and a lack of good content continue to be large factors in the dipping occupancy levels.”

Karan Taurani, senior vice-president at Elara Capital, said regional film markets continued to thrive, while the Hindi film industry faced challenges. “I wouldn’t be surprised if box office collection drops by 20% in 2025, especially if Hollywood films underperform. The decline in footfall has become a persistent issue and rising average ticket prices are insufficient to offset the losses,” he said.

REGIONAL TOUCH

Malayalam cinema had its best year yet, with box office revenue surging 104% from the previous year to Rs 1,165 crore, doubling its share to 10%. Footfall increased 88% to 12.6 crore, driven by hits such as *Manjummel Boys* and *Aavesham*, which performed well even outside Kerala. Telugu cinema set a record with Rs 2,348 crore in box office revenue, up 4% from the year ago, though footfall dropped 12% to 213 million. This marked the third consecutive year that Telugu cinema exceeded Rs 2,000 crore, led by *Pushpa 2* and *Kalki 2898 AD*.

Long-term Contracts in Favour

►► From Page 1

This includes contracts with Indian entities. Russian energy firms are steadily moving towards long-term contracts abroad instead of spot selling. Indian authorities are also studying the implications of the impact the recent round of sanctions will have on the global oil prices.

“The United States is imposing sanctions today on more than 200 entities and individuals involved in Russia’s energy sector and identifying more than 180 vessels as blocked property. This wide-ranging, robust action will further constrain revenues from Russia’s energy resources and degrade Putin’s ability to fund his illegal war against Ukraine,” the US State Department said on Friday.

“Of these targets, the Department of State is sanctioning nearly 80 entities and individuals, including those engaged in the active production and export of liquefied natural gas from Russia. Others include those attempting to expand Russia’s oil production capacity; those providing support to the US-sanctioned Arctic LNG 2 project; those involved in Russia’s metals and mining sector; and senior officials of State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom,” it said.

It further said that the Department of the Treasury was concurrently sanctioning more than 150 entities and individuals, including major Russian oil producers Gazprom Neft and Surgutneftegas, Russian insurance companies and shadow fleet vessels.

Firms Offering Flexibility Too

►► From Page 1

He said there had been several such cases while hiring at RPG Enterprises, where candidates initially agreed but backed out later. Similarly, in cases of internal movements, many executives refused to switch locations despite being offered career progression.

“They’ve either been fine with the existing role or chosen to bide their time and move out later,” he said.

“It’s a very healthy sign and I believe it’ll only intensify,” said Prabir Jha, chief executive of Prabir Jha People Advisory.

Jha said he was increasingly meeting people in their 20s-50s, who were being more choosy about the quality of their lives. “Beyond a point, how much money do you even need? There are people turning down career opportunities abroad to stay back with family,” he said.

Many companies, especially multinationals, are also striving to offer employees more flexibility, rather than lose out on talent. “Smart companies are realising they don’t need people to be under their nose all the time,” said Jha. Kolkata-based Emami, for instance, has agreed to let several of its critical executives work out of New Delhi and Mumbai. These include heads of growth and mergers and acquisitions, product development and brand managers of some of its top selling brands, such as Smart and Handsome, Kesh King and Zandu Balm. To cite another ex-

ample, the chief executive of a leading electronics brand is based out of Bengaluru, while its corporate office is in Mumbai. It makes sense, said Navnit Singh, chairman and regional managing director at executive search firm Korn Ferry, adding that this phenomenon holds even more true for the younger lot, as compared to those in their 50s, who are often empty nesters.

ROOM FOR MORE

Many companies, especially MNCs, are striving to offer employees more flexibility, rather than lose out on talent

“There’s a change, for sure. If people don’t get the balance they want, they don’t last for more than 12-18 months,” he said.

On Saturday, the social media post of a Pune techie—on why he left the job at an IT bellwether without an offer letter in hand and despite being the sole breadwinner of his family—went viral. While his reasons for the decision were different—such as no monetary hikes despite promotions, lack of recognition and stagnant career prospects—it also reflected a greater propensity among Indian employees to prioritise their mental peace than before.

Municipal Corporation Alwar (Raj.)
Sr.No./MC/NCAP-NIRMAN /2024/3505 Dt. 10.01.2025
Nit No./42 /2024-25 E-Procurement Notice Inviting Bid
Bid for civil work of “Construction of water Harvesting Structure for Conservation of Rainwater adjoined area of Pratap Bandh, Alwar” at Municipal Corporation Alwar invited for interested bidders up to 31.01.2025 Other particulars of the bid may be visited on the procurement portal(<http://sppp.raj.nic.in> & www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in) of the state. The approximate value of the procurement is 504.99 lac
UBN No. DLB2425WLOB14825
TENDER ID 2024_DL4_422695_1
Commissioner
Municipal Corporation, Alwar
Raj.Samwadi/C/24/10198

NP AV
PC, Laptop
Tablet, Mobile
सुरक्षा
INTERNET SECURITY
www.npav.net
92.72.70.70.50
98.22.88.25.66

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT KASHIPUR
Applications are invited for admission to
MBA (Analytics) 2025 (6th Batch)
Two Year Residential Programme
Excellent Ecosystem & Exposure, Blended Focus - Analytics & Management
The full time MBA (Analytics) programme aims to prepare future leaders who will shape the data-driven economy of the future. IIM Kashipur nurtures students in an academically rigorous environment in pristine natural surroundings, leading to a wholesome experience. The admission is merit-based through CAT/GMAT, followed by a personal interview. The Government of India reservations norms for admissions apply.
Eligibility
• A full time Bachelor’s degree in any discipline or an equivalent academic pursuit (i.e. 10+2+3), with a minimum of 50% marks or equivalent CGPA (47% marks for NC-OBC/EWS, 45% marks for SC/ST/DAP).
• Any of the following qualifying exam score: Valid CAT-2024 Score (or) GMAT score where the exam was not taken earlier than May 1, 2023.
How to apply?
• Apply online by 28th February 2025. The online application and detailed information about the program structure and fees are available at <https://www.iimkashipur.ac.in/academics/mba-analytics/mba-analytics-admission>. Queries may be addressed to admission@iimkashipur.ac.in.

Cremation & Prayer Meet



13.08.1962 - 10.01.2025

With immense grief and sorrow we share the news of the heavenly abode of our beloved & respected

Smt. Manju Nahata
w/o Mr. Mahendra Nahata
on 10th January, 2025.

Cremation

Sunday, 12th January, 2025 at 6 pm
at Nigam Bodh Cremation Ground, New Delhi.

Prayer Meet

Tuesday, 14th January, 2025 | 3-4 pm
Hotel The Ashok, 50-B, Diplomatic Enclave, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi-110021

In Grief:

Abhilash and Jawahar Lal Oswal

Sanjana and Rishabh Oswal

Manisha and Kamal Oswal

Neha and Anant Nahata

Ishita and Abhinav Oswal

Ritu and Dinesh Oswal

Krishiv and Aariv Nahata

Sambhav & Tanvi Oswal

Electronic Queens of India

Women are strategically reshaping India's semiconductor landscape, making bold moves and claiming a slice of this rapidly growing industry, reports **Annapurna Roy**

Amid India's growing strides in the semiconductor sector, the involvement of women in the space is rising. From 20% in 2020, women are now close to a fourth of India's chip design and engineering workforce, which numbers more than 220,000. Their share is expected to rise to over 30% by 2027, while the total workforce is expected to increase by 18-20% over this period, according to data sourced by ET from staffing firm Teamlease Digital.

Semiconductor companies like Micron and NXP say that the expansion of the sector will open up more opportunities for women. They are investing in supporting and retaining female employees, expanding the talent pool and creating a pipeline of senior women leaders by chalking out career advancement paths.

Micron, which has over 4,000 employees, including contractors, in India, has 28% women's representation across groups and functions, with IT having the highest share at 30%, said Sharmila Khan, director, country HRBP, Micron Technology. Functions like procurement, data science, design engineering are also seeing healthy representation, she said.

POWERING UP

At NXP Semiconductors, women comprise 24% of its India workforce of over 3,000, up from 18% in 2019. Nearly 40% of new engineering graduate hires each year are female, said Hitesh Garg, vice-president and India country manager, NXP.

"As India is looking to become a semiconductor manufacturing hub, we anticipate an uptick in demand in various roles in the semiconductor space," Khan said, highlighting areas like design, system design engineering, software development, manufacturing supply chain, engineers, operators, technicians,

and materials engineering.

"As the momentum around semiconductors grows, there is likely to be a skill gap within the semiconductor workforce. This will also open up opportunities for diverse groups to participate to address skills shortages," she said. The increasing participation can also be attributed to the pay gap in this sector being less than 10% as well as the emphasis on employee benefits such as maternity leave, allowing for career breaks, work-from-home, part-time and project-based work, said Munira Loliwala, vice-president, strategy and growth, Teamlease Digital.

About 40% of the resources in firmware development engineering teams are now women, the data showed. In hardware testing and development roles, however, only about two or three in 10 positions are held by women.

"Increasing participation of women can be attributed to the pay gap in this sector being less than 10% as well as the emphasis on employee benefits such as maternity leave, career breaks, WFH, etc."

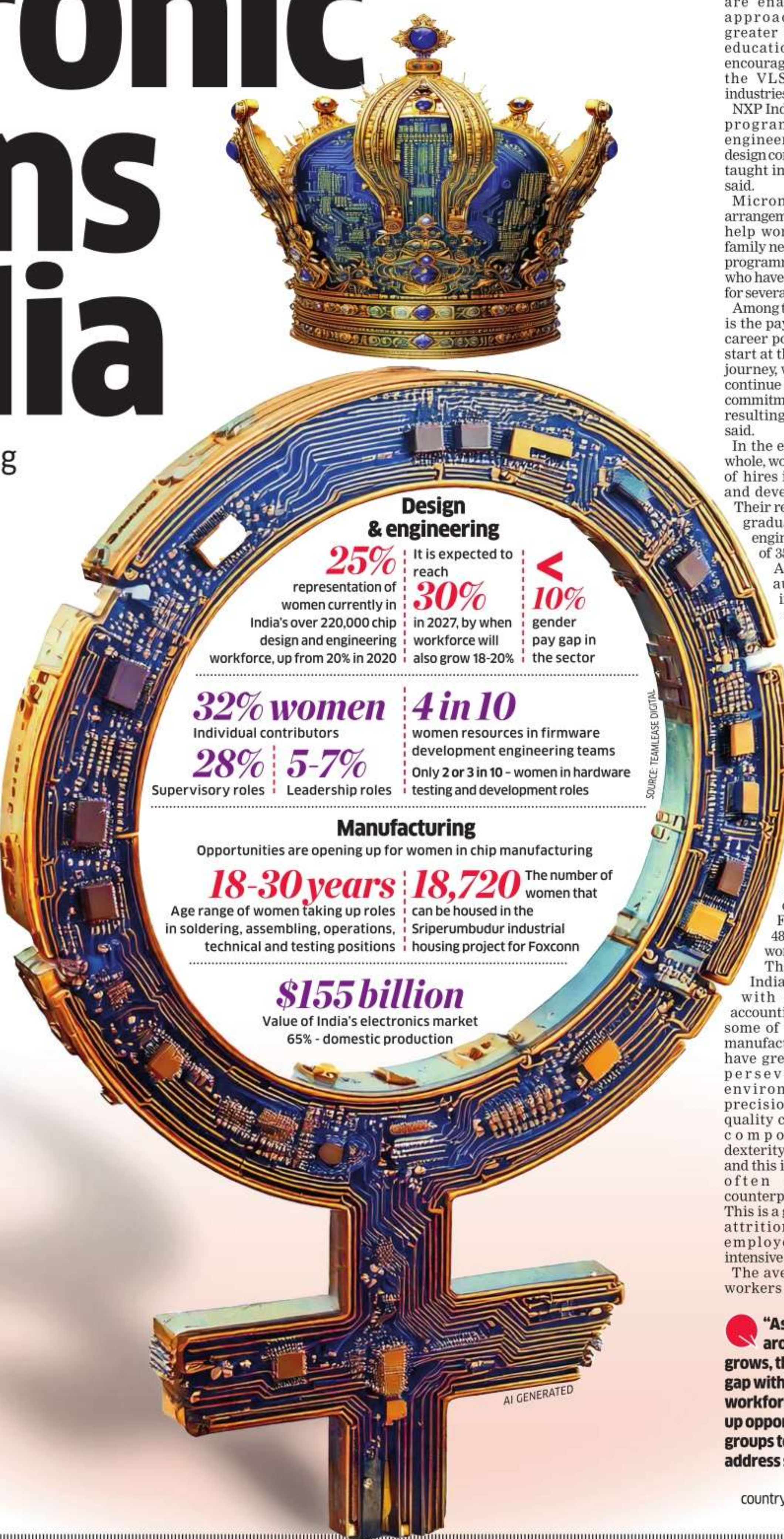
— **Munira Loliwala**, VP, strategy and growth, Teamlease Digital

IN THE LOOP

Women currently account for about 32% of individual contributor roles and 28% of supervisory roles in the semiconductor industry, but only about 5-7% of leadership roles, Teamlease Digital data showed.

Data centres have gone far beyond being simple storage facilities; they have become powerful hubs driving innovation and enabling the rapid growth of global businesses and economies. This transformation is driven by the massive increase in data, and as AI becomes integral to modern operations, enterprises must evaluate whether their current data centre infrastructure can handle the complex demands of AI-driven workloads. One question that's often asked is: How do hyperscale data centres differ from traditional data centres? While both are digital infrastructures, the difference lies in scale, efficiency and purpose. Traditional data centres operate like shared office spaces, serving multiple businesses with limited resources. On the other hand, hyperscale data centres are massive facilities that are designed to meet the vast computing needs of tech enterprises. They offer unparalleled processing power and storage capacity, enabling seamless delivery of services to millions of users worldwide.

Hyperscale data centres are designed for rapid scaling. They



"At NXP, we are focusing on increasing women's representation in leadership roles, and for this, we are enabling a multifaceted approach, beginning with greater access to early STEM education, which is vital for encouraging more women to enter the VLSI and semiconductor industries," said Garg.

NXP India runs a Women in Tech programme to train female engineering students on VLSI design concepts, with over 100 being taught in the past two years, Garg said.

Micron offers flexible work arrangements, including timings, to help women balance home and family needs. It also has returnship programmes for women candidates who have been out of the workforce for several years.

Among the challenges women face is the pay differential at the mid-career point. While both genders start at the same pace, during the journey, women may not be able to continue due factors such as family commitments or spouses relocating, resulting in a wider gap, Loliwala said.

In the electronics industry as a whole, women account for over 33% of hires in engineering, research and development (ER&D) units. Their representation among new graduate trainees is 26-30% in engineering roles and upwards of 35% in services.

As digitisation and automation in the sector increases, more women are able to get roles in design, engineering, equipment testing, quality control and development, Loliwala noted.

WIRED FOR SUCCESS

Women aren't just benefiting from design-oriented roles arising from the electronics boom in India. They're on the shop floor as well at Foxconn, the largest contract manufacturer in the world, and Tata Electronics.

During a visit to India in August last year, chairman Young Liu said Foxconn employs around 48,000 people in India, with women accounting for 70%.

The electronics market in India is valued at \$155 billion with domestic production accounting for 65%. Executives at some of the largest electronics manufacturing firms said women have great learning ability and perseverance, ideal for environments that demand precision work and stringent quality control. Assembling fine components requires dexterity and concentrated focus, and this is where women excel and often outperform male counterparts, the executives said. This is a global trend, with a lower attrition rate among female employees in such labour-intensive tasks.

The average age of the women workers at many large units in

"As the momentum around semiconductor grows, there is likely to be skill gap within the semiconductor workforce. This will also open up opportunities for diverse groups to participate and address skills shortages."

— **Sharmila Khan**, country head, people organisation, Micron India

Tamil Nadu would be around 22 years and they mainly hail from regions within the state. Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and the Northeast. Roles such as soldering, assembling, operations, technical positions and testing are increasingly being filled by women, mostly in the 18-30 years age group. As this trend grows, experts said it's imperative for companies to prioritise the safety, security, health and comfort of female employees by tailoring workplaces to meet their needs.

FIXING THE SYSTEM

To sustain long-term growth and enhance operational efficiency in India, companies like Foxconn should focus on developing robust social infrastructure.

"This includes setting up worker housing, healthcare facilities, and transportation systems to attract and retain a skilled workforce," said Dhruv Shekhar, senior associate at Koan Advisory Group said. "Foxconn's plans to replicate its township model in India, akin to its facilities in Taiwan and China, are a crucial step in this direction."

Foxconn's Zhengzhou facility in China is one of its largest, featuring a sprawling factory complex integrated with dormitory-style housing, hospitals, entertainment facilities and even fire stations. Shekhar said these townships not only improve quality of life for workers but also enhance productivity and operational efficiency.

"We remain committed to fostering the development and promotion of women in technical and leadership positions. In India, women play a pivotal role in R&D, with nearly 40% of our new engineering graduate hires each year being female."

— **Hitesh Garg**, vice-president and India country manager, NXP

Taking a leaf out of China's book, the Tamil Nadu government became the first state to set up an industrial housing project in Sriperumbudur, built exclusively for Foxconn. The project was inaugurated in August last year and can house up to 18,720 women employees of the key Apple supplier. The facility spread over 20 acres was built at a cost of ₹706.05 crore in Vallam Vadagal near Sriperumbudur.

In December, ET had reported that the company completed a \$230-million project to build dormitories for its workers in Tamil Nadu. The project consists of six, nine-storey residential blocks as well as two blocks for utilities within the company's Sriperumbudur compound, which houses the factories.

As India looks to scale its electronics manufacturing ambitions, having women as part of the design and manufacturing ecosystem will be critical as the country tries to pip China and compete with countries like Vietnam to be the destination of choice for large electronics manufacturing firms. Collaboration between government authorities and private stakeholders will be crucial to create safe, sustainable and worker-friendly environments. To be sure, there are concerns to be addressed, be it the effect of aluminum dust and other toxic materials, ensuring maternity leave and adequate rest.

— *With inputs from Dia Rekhi*

CES Round Up



Atul.Bandekar@timesofindia.com

The CES is a Kumbh Mela for tech enthusiasts. And CES 2025 took it to another level — from tech in outer space to AI in the streets, we saw innovations galore. There were chipsets promising computing power with speed and capabilities opening up exponential possibilities.

Then AR glasses went from gaming to real time transitions and navigation. The new-gen health innovations are not just limited to painless blood glucose monitoring but also use AI for accurate predictions, acting as precise tools for diagnosis.

Air mobility achieved greater heights with urban solutions enabling fully or partial capabilities of vertical take offs and landing, which can be a game changer for urban transportation systems and could be deployed in real use from as early as 2030.

Hyperscale Data Centres Promise to Transform Computing in the Age of AI



SHARAD AGARWAL

Data centres have gone far beyond being simple storage facilities; they have become powerful hubs driving innovation and enabling the rapid growth of global businesses and economies. This transformation is driven by the massive increase in data, and as AI becomes integral to modern operations, enterprises must evaluate whether their current data centre infrastructure can handle the complex demands of AI-driven workloads.

One question that's often asked is: How do hyperscale data centres differ from traditional data centres? While both are digital infrastructures, the difference lies in scale, efficiency and purpose. Traditional data centres operate like shared office spaces, serving multiple businesses with limited resources. On the other hand, hyperscale data centres are massive facilities that are designed to meet the vast computing needs of tech enterprises. They offer unparalleled processing power and storage capacity, enabling seamless delivery of services to millions of users worldwide.

Hyperscale data centres are designed for rapid scaling. They

can quickly add or remove servers and storage to meet changing demands.

These centres rely heavily on automation for resource management, including AI-driven technologies for optimising power, cooling and workload distribution. They're built with high redundancy to ensure minimal downtime and use failover systems to provide continuous operations. While hyperscale centres offer high-speed data transfer and reduced latency to meet the demands of cloud services, AI and IoT applications, this also makes them excellent candidates for beta testing of upcoming technologies.

Data centre providers are

CRYSTAL GAZING

Hyperscale data centres will continue to evolve with AI-driven automation, potentially leading to fully autonomous operations



constantly striving to bring innovative technologies such as integrating AI and ML into operations, which require robust data collection, powerful computational capabilities and skilled personnel. Operationally, hyperscale data centres don't just enable AI/ML workloads but also allow them to be integrated into design and operation.

AI is revolutionising data centre operations by enhancing efficiency, reliability and security. Through predictive maintenance, AI can identify patterns in equipment behaviour, reducing downtime and minimising costly repairs. AI-driven tools also offer comprehensive performance monitoring, adjusting systems to ensure optimal operation without human intervention.

AI optimises the distribution of computing, storage and networking resources based on real-time demand. As workloads fluctuate, AI can automatically scale resources up or down, ensuring efficient utilisation and preventing bottlenecks. AI-enhanced systems also constantly analyse network traffic and user behaviour to quickly identify vulnerabilities, block malicious activities and adapt security protocols to evolving threats.

Hyperscale data centres will continue to evolve with AI-driven automation, potentially leading to fully autonomous operations where AI manages monitoring, maintenance and resource allocation.

— *The author is CEO, Sify Infinit Spaces Limited. All views expressed are personal.*

Bits & Bytes



PENTAGON ADDS TENCENT TO MILITARY BLACKLIST

The Pentagon has labelled social media giant Tencent as a Chinese military business operating in the US, the latest action in an escalating series of retaliatory moves between the world's two biggest superpowers.

The US Defense Department updates an annual list of "Chinese military companies", entities it has identified as having both military and commercial technology. There are now 134 companies on the list. In 2021, Xiaomi sued the Pentagon to be removed from the list.

Tencent said its name on the list was a "mistake" because "we are not a military company or supplier". It added that the listing would have "no impact on our business", and that it would "work with the Department of Defense to address any misunderstanding".

BRAZIL JUDGE SAYS BIG TECH MUST COMPLY WITH LOCAL LAWS

Brazilian judge Alexandre de Moraes, who last year had led the Supreme Court decision that temporarily suspended social

media platform X in the country, said that all tech firms would need to comply with laws in order to keep operating in Brazil. "In Brazil, (the companies) will only continue to operate if they respect Brazilian legislation, regardless of the rant of Big Tech managers," he said.

Brazilian prosecutors also ordered Meta to clarify whether recent changes to its fact-checking program in the US will also be applied to the South American country. Meta was given 30 days to provide a response.



NETHERLANDS SECURES NVIDIA'S SUPPLY FOR POSSIBLE AI FACILITY

The Dutch government said it had reached a deal with Nvidia for the supply of hardware and technological knowledge for a possible AI facility. The Netherlands aims to build a facility where an AI supercomputer can contribute to research and development as part of broader EU projects to strengthen Europe's digital economy.

Last year, the Dutch government had set aside 204.5 million euros for investments in AI, while it said it also aims to

use European subsidies. Economy Minister Dirk Bejaerts said chances of realising the project increased significantly through the agreement with Nvidia, without giving specific details. "Competition is fierce, the whole world is after this technology," he said.

ROBOTS EMERGE NEXT CASH COW FOR SAMSUNG, LG, HYUNDAI

South Korean giants Samsung, LG and Hyundai are all targeting the robotics sector as their next major cash cow amid growing demand for smart factories and automated manufacturing facilities, according to data and industry officials.

The companies are strategically focusing on developing more advanced humanoid robots designed to replace human labour on major production lines. Samsung expanded its stake in a robotics startup, which the company said will boost its foothold in developing more state-of-the-art humanoid robots powered by AI and software expertise. Meanwhile, Hyundai unveiled its first-ever wearable robot for commercial purposes and will be deployed on production lines of the company's car affiliates.

LG, which has showcased diverse commercial robots for a few years, is also betting big on commercial robots, making it the firm's next key growth area.

— **Agencies**



AI GENERATED



PIC: AP

The Joy of Winter Swimming

Even as the mercury dropped below freezing, enthusiasm soared among about a dozen hardy swimmers during an annual ritual in northeast China's ice city of Harbin.

The swimmers had trained daily throughout the year for this moment.

They first had to carve out a pool in the Songhua River, thawing the 10-centimetre thick ice that froze overnight. Then they stripped down and, one by one, plunged into the bone-chilling waters of the pool about 10 metres long.

Chen Xia, from the eastern coastal province of Zhejiang, dived into the river even though she was suffering from a cold. She said the waters in her home city were warmer than those in Harbin, where the temperature was about 0-degrees Celsius.

The experience strengthened her confidence in winter swimming, a sport she has been devoted to for about two decades.

Harbin resident Yu Xiaofeng said winter swimming in her city dates back to the 1970s, after locals saw Russian Orthodox faithfuls being baptised in the river. In 1983, the city's winter swimming association was established.

Harbin is considered a "holy land" for winter swimming, she said, as the sport gained popularity there earlier than in other parts of China.

You Decang, 76, said swimming kept him healthy and he had never caught a cold. "If I go just one day without winter swimming, I feel quite uncomfortable," he said.

— AP

Serve Up Pasta With a Herb Sauce



PICS: NYT, GETTY IMAGES

Ingredients

- Salt
- 1 ½ cups heavy cream
- 3 sage leaves
- 3 sprigs thyme or oregano
- 1 small rosemary sprig
- 1 cinnamon stick (or a grating of nutmeg)
- Black pepper
- 450 gms linguine, fettuccine or another long noodle
- 1 bunch dark leafy greens, such as kale, mustard greens, broccoli rabe or mature spinach, stems removed and cut or torn into two- to three-inch pieces

The New York Times

Method

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. In a small saucepan, combine the heavy cream, sage, thyme, rosemary, cinnamon and a pinch of salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer over medium and cook until the cream has thickened slightly and is reduced to about one cup, 12 to 15 minutes. Remove from heat until the pasta is ready.

2. When the cream is at the halfway point, add the pasta to the boiling water and cook until a minute or two shy of al dente. About three minutes before draining the pasta, add the greens to the water. Reserve ½ cup pasta water; then drain the pasta and greens with a colander and return to the pot.

3. Place the colander over the pot of pasta, then strain the infused cream through the colander into the noodles. (Discard or compost the herbs and cinnamon stick.) Add the ½ cup pasta water to the pasta, set over medium-high heat, and cook, tossing, until the sauce glosses the noodles. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

From big shows in London and Amsterdam to a Cézanne tribute in the south of France, these art experiences will be worth the journey

Art Escape



The New York Times

'LEIGH BOWERY', TATE MODERN, LONDON

Note the exclamation mark in the title: 'Leigh Bowery' at Tate Modern (February 27 through August 31). It's the first large-scale exhibition to present the multidisciplinary output that was the work and too-short-life of the boy from suburban Sunshine, Australia, who out-weirded the colourful 1980s London club scene. Bowery is best known for his fabulously outré costumes: Oversized bulging eyes and painted smiles, wigs of inflated spikes, bedazzled masks, baroque bustiers, sky-high platforms, PVC, bondage gear, tulle, feathers... You name it, he wore it.

This avant-garde garb, which he wore to London's chicest deviant venues (including the famously 'polysexual' club Taboo, where he mingled with Boy George, John Galliano and George Michael), has influenced countless haute-couture runway shows since Bowery died in 1994, at age 33. But Bowery was a brilliant polymath, whose work included performance, live art, dance, music, modelling, television and club promotion. His larger-than-life persona knew no confines; art and life were one and the same.

'SUZANNE VALADON', CENTRE POMPIDOU, PARIS

Before she shocked turn-of-the-century Paris audiences as the first European woman artist to present a full-length male nude, Suzanne Valadon waited tables, made funeral wreaths, sold vegetables and flew through the air as a circus acrobat. A fall ended her trapeze career when she was just 15, leading her to the studios of Montmartre's most prolific artists, where she found employment as a model for impressionist luminaries including Edgar Degas, Berthe Morisot, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and more.

It was Degas who encouraged Valadon to pick up a brush and move to the other side of the canvas, and Toulouse-Lautrec who nicknamed her Suzanne (she was born Marie-Clémentine). The Pompidou Center is mounting a vast retrospective (January 15 through May 26), including new archival material that paints a picture of Valadon's plucky and pioneering personal life.



'SAG MIR WO DIE BLUMEN SIND', STEDELIJK AND VAN GOGH MUSEUMS, AMSTERDAM

'Sag mir wo die Blumen sind' implores the poetic title of a sprawling Anselm Kiefer exhibition that will span two of Amsterdam's most prestigious institutions: The Stedelijk Museum and the Van Gogh Museum (March 7 through June 9). The show takes its title from the German version of Pete Seeger's anti-war folk ballad, 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?' — made



popular by Marlene Dietrich at a UNICEF gala in 1962 — and presents work old and new by Kiefer, whose oeuvre reckons with memory, ruins, history, war, mythology and landscape. A new, 80-foot site-specific installation of the same name will occupy the grand staircase of the Stedelijk, while its galleries present new and never-before-seen Kiefer works from the museum's impressive collection alongside other highlights from the artist's 60-year career. A two-minute walk away, the Van Gogh Museum will be

focusing on Kiefer's relationship with Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh's life and art, juxtaposing works by the two, including their many blooming offerings: Sunflowers and more sunflowers, representing life and death, prospering and decay, with art as the eternal bridge between the two.

'THE ANGEL OF HISTORY', BODE MUSEUM, BERLIN

Swiss artist Paul Klee painted many angels throughout his life. Angels ascending, angels descending, angels serving breakfast; weeping, forgetful, vigilant, doubting, full of hope. His most famous is the 'Angelus Novus' (1920), now commonly known as the Angel of History, a name assigned to it by philosopher Walter Benjamin, who owned the unique print and considered it his most prized possession. Benjamin wrote of the angel — a curly-haired seraph in sepia tones, arms raised in excitement or alarm — as facing the past while being driven toward the future by a storm too strong for his wings to beat against: 'The storm of progress.'

'The Angel of History' (May 8 through July 13), places the 'Angelus Novus' alongside other angels struck by damage and disaster, including a reproduction of Caravaggio's 1602 'St. Matthew and the Angel', destroyed in Berlin in 1945, and screenings of Wim Wenders's 'Wings of Desire' (1987), whose pensive spirits look down on the divided city.

'WHEN WE SEE US: A CENTURY OF BLACK FIGURATION IN PAINTING', BOZAR, BRUSSELS

Hot on the heels of her announcement as curator of the 2026 Venice Art Biennale, Koyo Kouoh is bringing her exhibition 'When We See Us: A Century of Black Figuration in Painting' to Bozar, Brussels (February 7 through August 10). The Cameroonian-born curator and her team at Zeitz MoCAA, the Cape Town museum that she has run since 2019, have put together a rich and varied exhibition that includes works by over 120 artists who address how people from Africa and its diaspora have been represented during the past century.

The show is organised around themes that include sensuality, spirituality, joy, revelry and emancipation.

'INTELLIGENS. NATURAL. ARTIFICIAL. COLLECTIVE.', VENICE

To the beautiful but sinking city, Carlo Ratti, the curator of Venice's 19th International Architecture Biennale, brings 'Intelligens' (May 10 through November 23), an exhibition that considers how architecture can harness natural, artificial and collective intelligence to combat climate change. "To face a burning world, architecture must harness all the intelligence around us," Ratti said when he was announced in the role, adding that the building industry was one of the biggest contributors to atmospheric emissions and urgently needed to change.

Ratti's show will be complemented by 29 national pavilions.



CÉZANNE, MUSÉE GRANET, AIX-EN-PROVENCE, FRANCE

You've seen it, or some aspect, in dozens of paintings by Paul Cézanne, whether you know it or not: Jas de Bouffan, a large country house and farm just outside Aix-en-Provence, which the artist's father bought in 1859. The stately 18th-century house, with its cream-coloured facade, blue shutters and sloping terra-cotta tiled roof, is where Cézanne worked for 40 years and it appears in many of his paintings — near, far, obscured by thickets of trees.

This year at the Musée Granet, the exhibition 'Cézanne au Jas de Bouffan' (June 28 through October 12) will gather 100 paintings, drawings and watercolours to show the special relationship the artist had with his family home and its environs in the south of France. As part of a citywide tribute to Cézanne taking place across Aix-en-Provence, you can also visit the newly renovated house itself and the painter's final studio, Les Lauves, where he worked from 1901 until his death in 1906, and see what Cézanne saw.

A Glimpse into PAMELA ANDERSON'S Inner World

From the books she loves to the artworks she has inspired, the actress talks about her favourite things

The New York Times

Pamela Anderson has been part of the Hollywood A-list for over three decades now, but it's only this year that she received her first Golden Globe nomination for *The Last Showgirl*. Anderson called the role — of a veteran Las Vegas dancer whose show abruptly closes — "healing" after raising two sons while being objectified and often devalued in her career. Here are some more little-known things about Anderson:

Films: "I've always been a cinephile. I watch every night be-

fore I go to bed. I love [Jean-Luc] Godard, [Federico] Fellini, [Werner] Herzog and [John] Cassavetes. And Gena Rowlands — she's my favourite actress."

Persona by Ingmar Bergman has touched me so profoundly. It's such a beautiful film about transference. And I feel myself merging with these Bergman women — physically, emotionally, artistically. I start taking on characteristics, the way the women are so closely examined."

Books: "I read *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* [by Carl Jung] as a young girl, which is kind of an odd book to have as a teenager when you're not studying psychology. I think it started with dream interpretation and got more into the unconscious and the

psychological. I loved it. I thought maybe I should be a therapist."

Poetry: "The *Innocence and Experience* poems [by William Blake] are interesting because that's what we dance between — our imagination and reality. I write poetry, too."

Art: "I used to go to the National Gallery with Vivienne Westwood, and she really loved 'Diana and Actaeon' by Titian. When I see it, I think of how female friendships are so powerful."

"It may sound clichéd to mention the 'Mona Lisa', but it reminds me that every woman is a movie. That isn't a smile or a grimace, but a mystery that draws us in."

"Jeff Koons used to put me in a lot of his paintings. A lot of my body parts were in his works. I remember his mother would say, 'This is your arm, this is your leg, this is your hair.' Koons is the one who

told me every time you leave the house, it's like performance art."

Travel: "The first time I visited Paris, I had a humble apartment in Montmartre, and I wandered and had my picture drawn in charcoal. Then I'd go to Sacré-Coeur and light candles after my espresso and dark chocolate. I still continue the tradition."

Cars: "I love collecting old cars. I'm looking for an El Camino right now. My dad gave me his old two-tone brown Ford 80. I painted it white. I redid the engine. On the island, I've got this garage and I say, 'You can call it Pam's Chop Shop.'"



IMAGE IS FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE

Celebrating Gerald Durrell's Centenary Through his Food Writing

FOOD FABLES



VIKRAM DOCTOR

Gerald Durrell was born in Jamshedpur on January 7, 1925. His mother craved champagne when she was pregnant, which, he said, explained his love of alcohol. His love of food was shown in one of his earliest memories of "the wonderful taste of my favourite breakfast, which was rice boiled in buffalo milk, with sugar".

Durrell's centenary is being

celebrated for his work for animal conservation in the wild combined with breeding endangered species at his Jersey Zoo. He is also famous for books about his family's life on the island of Corfu and his animal collecting trips across the world. He only wrote to raise money for conservation work, yet his books were bestsellers and inspired a hit TV series.

Durrell's love of food and drink permeates his books. This column has written about David Shimwell's *Dining With The Durrells*, which celebrates his mother's love of cooking, rooted in her family's multi-generation life in India, where she learned to cook elaborate, spicy meals. This was passed on to her son who loved to cook and eat and remember it in his writing. His books are full of feasts, picnics and foods encountered on his travels.



PIC: BLOOMBERG

As Durrell travelled the world to save animals, he savoured local food. In Mauritius, he stopped at "a tiny shop where the owner and his entire family, from grandmother to youngest child, were absorbed in manufacturing chapatties and rolling them up with a filling of spiced lentils inside... we

purchased a goodly supply of these delicacies". At an Argentine barbecue, he wrote: "To lean forward and slice a fragrant chip of meat from the brown, bubbling carcass in front of you, dunk it in a fierce sauce of vinegar, garlic and red pepper, and then stuff it, not sweet and juicy into your mouth, seemed like one of the most satisfying actions of my life."

Durrell noted that animals also had food loves, like a tortoise called Achilles who adored strawberries and "would become positively hysterical at the mere sight of them, lumbering to and fro, craning his head to see if

you were going to give him any, gazing at you pleadingly with his tiny boot-button eyes". He described cooking for pangolins like a TV chef: Mix powdered milk, water, raw eggs and minced meat and "finally garnish with a small portion of chopped tree ants' nest and a drop of formic acid. Serve immediately. You will... be the most popular pangolin party thrower of the season". Some naturalists might criticise this as inappropriate anthropomorphism, but Durrell knew that people easily saw personalities in animals — and if this helped make them more appealing to the humans who held such power over them, then why not?

Durrell's food writing also

appears in his fiction. In his story *The Michelin Man*, he writes about enjoying the food at a Michelin-starred French restaurant, particularly a fine pâté, a preserved meat paste, named after one Albert Henri Perigord. The

Gerald Durrell only wrote to raise money for conservation work, yet his books were bestsellers and inspired a hit TV series

chef explains that he inherited the restaurant from his father-in-law who, at that time, lacked a Michelin star and was desperate for one. To ingratiate himself, the younger man arranged for Perigord, a friend of his who loved eating, to

impersonate one of the Michelin Guide's secretive restaurant inspectors.

The older chef eagerly cooked elaborate meals, which Perigord happily consumed — until he dropped dead from over-eating. The older chef was distraught that this might lose him the Michelin star, while the younger man knew that alerting the police would expose the deception. Then he had a brainwave: "We turned my friend into a pâté, monsieur. It is perhaps somewhat ironical that it was for this very pâté that we were awarded our star by the Michelin..." Hinting at cannibalism might seem like bad taste, but Durrell might have reasoned that just as most humans had no compunction eating other animals, it was only justice that sometimes they were eaten themselves.

VITALS

ICC Looking to Give Bowlers More Leeway On Wides: Pollock

Durban: South African legend Shaun Pollock, who is the media representative of the ICC's cricket committee, said that the body is working towards giving bowlers "bit more leeway on wides" as the current rule is "very strict on them", particularly when batters make last minute movement. "If a batter jumps across (at the) last minute, it doesn't really work out for me," Pollock told PTI on the sidelines of SA20. "I think a bowler, at the start of his run-up, needs to know where he can bowl. How can a bowler be expected to change his game plan at the last second when he's bowling? He needs to have a clear idea where he can go. So, it's in the pipeline, we're all discussing. We need to give a little bit back to the bowlers," he added. **PTI**



BWF/Badminton Photo

Satwik-Chirag Lose in Malaysia Open Semis

Kuala Lumpur: Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's impressive run at the Malaysia Super 1000 badminton tournament came to an end following a straight-game loss to Korea's Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae in the semifinals on Saturday. Seeded seventh, Satwik and Chirag, who reached the finals last season, lost 10-21 15-21. "They played really well, and we could have followed our game plan a bit better. Instead, we played some random strokes, but kudos to them for playing a solid game," Satwik told reporters. "Today, the pace of the game was very slow compared to the last three days. It's part of the game. It was a valuable learning experience for us. It is disappointing, but we have a long way to go. Today's match showed that we can still make it a good fight." **PTI**

Maclaren's Record Goal Guides Mohun Bagan Past East Bengal

Guwahati: Riding on Jamie Maclaren's record second-minute goal, Mohun Bagan Super Giant extended their dominance in the Kolkata derby with a 1-0 win over traditional rivals East Bengal in their Indian Super League match on Saturday. Jamie Maclaren scored the fastest goal of the Kolkata derby in ISL and it was enough for the reigning champions to see out their arch-rivals, while going eight points clear (35) at the top of the table, compared to the second-placed Bengaluru FC (27). The Mariners have now won nine times and drawn once in their 10 derby clashes against East Bengal FC in the ISL. **PTI**

Real Target Super Cup Final Success in Clasico to Atone for Barca Mauling



Jeddah: Real Madrid's humiliating 4-0 home loss to Barcelona in October still haunts the club as the rivals prepare for their second Clasico of the season in the Spanish Super Cup final on Sunday. LaLiga leaders Real recovered from that setback and are on a five-match winning streak ahead of defending the Super Cup in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, but coach Carlo Ancelotti is cautious. "We have to think about what happened in the first game because they beat us (in LaLiga)," Ancelotti told reporters on Saturday as he looked forward to Real's second cup final in a month, having won the Intercontinental Cup in December. "We've made a pretty clear assessment, so we'll have to repeat the good things we did and avoid the mistakes. A Clasico is always a Clasico, but a final puts a bit more pressure on you." **Reuters**

WATCHOUT! Tonight

ISL Mumbai City v Jamshedpur 7:30pm (Sports18)
SPANISH SUPER CUP Real Madrid v Barcelona 12:30am (FanCode) **LALIGA Atletico Madrid v Osasuna** 8:45pm (GXR) **FA Cup Tottamworth v Tottenham** 6pm; Arsenal v Man United 8:30pm (Sony Ten) **HIL Kalinga Lancers vs Hyderabad Toofans** 8:15pm (Sony Ten)

The Challengers

Australian Open 2025 Alcaraz and Sinner have a real rivalry atop men's tennis

Howard Fendrich

When Carlos Alcaraz is on court for a training session, perhaps working on his newly revamped service motion, he's doing so to buttress a game already good enough to claim four Grand Slam titles.

He's also got his young rival, Jannik Sinner, in mind.

"The good thing for me is, when I'm seeing him winning titles, when I'm seeing him in the top of the ranking, it forces me to practice even harder every day. In practice, I'm just thinking (about) the things that I have to improve to play against him," Alcaraz said Saturday, a day before the start of the Australian Open. "That, I think, is great for me: Having him (and) such a great rivalry, so far, just to (force me to) give (my best), every day."

Alcaraz, 21, and Sinner, 23, head into the 2025 tennis season at the top of the men's game, coming off a year that portended greatness for both. With Rafael Nadal now joining Roger Federer in retirement, leaving 24-time major champion Novak Djokovic as the lone remaining member of the Big Three on tour, it appears as though Alcaraz and Sinner have separated themselves from the rest of the next generation, each taking two of the four Slam singles trophies in 2024.

Forever, it seemed, the sport's most important laurels were dominated by Federer, Nadal and Djokovic, and anyone harbouring hopes of claiming them needed to defeat at least one, and often two, of that trio. The names have changed, but the dynamic is similar.

"I feel like now, with Jannik and with Carlos, it kind of moved toward the same way, just with new guys. You have to go through them to win big tournaments. It's as simple as that," said Alexander Zverev, a two-time major finalist who is seeded No. 2 at Melbourne Park, between No. 1 Sinner and No. 3 Alcaraz. "They both won two Grand Slams (last) year. And they're the two best players in the world, for sure. And you have to beat them to win the tournament."

Sinner is the defending champion in Australia, and went on to also win the U.S. Open in September, part of a season in which he went 73-6 with eight titles—but also dealt with a doping case in which he tested positive twice for trace amounts of an anabolic steroid, blamed it on accidentally being exposed to a banned substance via a massage from his trainer and was exonerated. (The



CARLOS ALCARAZ



JANNIK SINNER



3 Aryna Sabalenka will be attempting to win a third consecutive women's singles title at Melbourne Park, something last accomplished by Martina Hingis from 1997 to 1999

World Anti-Doping Agency appealed that ruling; a closed-door hearing will be held at the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland on April 16-17.)

Alcaraz exited from the Australian Open in the quarterfinals against Zverev last January, but then triumphed at the French Open, getting past Zverev in the final, and Wimbledon, where he won against Djokovic in the final for the second year in a row.

On Sunday, Zverev faces wildcard entry Lucas Pouille at night, after defending champion Aryna Sabalenka takes on 2017 U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens. Other top names scheduled for Day 1 action include 2024 Australian runner-up and Paris Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen and three-time major finalist Casper Ruud. Alcaraz, Sinner and Djokovic, along with five-time major champ Iga Swiatek, will get started Monday or Tuesday.

If Alcaraz, whose first major title came at the 2022 U.S. Open at age 19 and propelled him to a debut at No. 1, wins this Australian Open, he would be the youngest man in tennis history to complete a career Grand Slam, with at least one championship from each of the sport's four most prestigious events.

"It's truly remarkable," former player Feliciano Lopez said, "what he has achieved in the last three years."

Alcaraz and Sinner already are establishing quite a head-to-head rivalry, one that already has shown glimpses of the potential to become as memorable as Federer vs. Nadal, or Djokovic vs. Nadal.

"You have more eyes on us," Sinner said, "because this is a match most people want to see."

Overall, Alcaraz leads 6-4. In 2024 alone, he went 3-0 against Sinner, who was 73-3 against everyone else, with setbacks only against Daniil Medvedev, Andrey Rublev and Stefanos Tsitsipas.

"When I'm playing against him, I have a different mindset, a little bit. I mean, when you're facing the ... best player in the world, you have to do something different—different preparation or different mindset or whatever," said Alcaraz, who was 54-13 with four titles last season. "When I'm facing him, I just know that I have to play my best if I want to win. That's it. Probably if I have a bad day against Jannik, it's 99% that you're going to lose." **AP**

The Guide

AUSTRALIAN OPEN 2025

Venue: Melbourne

Dates: January 12-26

Time: Morning Session 5.30am IST,

Night Session 1.30pm IST

LIVE on Sony Sports Network

Money-line Favourites

(BetMGM Sportsbook)

WOMEN

Aryna Sabalenka +225

Iga Swiatek +450

Elena Rybakina +900

MEN

Jannik Sinner +120

Carlos Alcaraz +350

Novak Djokovic +550

Alexander Zverev +1000

Defending Champions

Women Aryna Sabalenka

Men Jannik Sinner

Total prize money

\$60 million

Singles Champions

\$2.15 million

(up from \$1.95 million a year ago, but still below the pre-pandemic high of \$2.55 million in 2020)

24

The number of Grand Slam singles championships won by Novak Djokovic, tied with Margaret Court for the most by anyone in the history of tennis. One more will give Djokovic sole possession of the record

MONFILS MAKES HISTORY AS OLDEST WINNER ON ATP TOUR

Gael Monfils beat Zizou Bergs 6-3 6-4 in the Auckland Classic final on Saturday to become the oldest player to win an ATP Tour title in a boost before his Australian Open campaign.

At 38 years and four months, the flashy Frenchman eclipsed Roger Federer, who was 38 years and two months when he won in Basel in 2019. It was a 13th ATP title for Monfils, nearly 20 years after claiming his first in Sopot, Poland in 2005.

"Age is a number, but we keep working," Monfils said on court. "I'm still striking a good ball. Hopefully many more to come."

Monfils is the oldest tour-level winner since Australian Ken Rosewall claimed the Hong Kong Open title in 1977 aged 43. **Reuters**



Man United's Transfer Problem: Unsellable Players

High wages, ageing players and repeated injuries make United's squad unappealing for other clubs

Richard Jolly

Ruben Amorim was deflecting suggestions he was spending January in a search for reinforcements. "My players are always my favourites and want to keep my players," said the Manchester United head coach. But there was a caveat, one inserted four times into three answers: "We will see".

It was deployed once when Amorim was asked if he wanted Kobbie Mainoo to stay. The answer came in the affirmative, but with that proviso: we will see. Because it is, as Amorim variously described it, a difficult moment. Which, in turn, is less because of a Premier League table that shows United in 13th. Or even, given they are going to Arsenal on Sunday with their defence of the FA Cup Erik ten Hag won potentially ending at the final hurdle.

But financially. Somehow United posted an income of £661m last year yet reported a £113m loss. They are both one of the richest clubs in the world and yet have among the least room for manoeuvre in the transfer market, constrained by PSR rules that they had hoped were supposed to limit the nouveau riches. Their squad has a combined value of £666m, according to Transfermarkt valuations, which can sound a lot until it is factored in that Ten Hag spent over £600m, none of it on homegrown players such as Mainoo and Marcus Rashford and previous managers' recruits like Bruno Fernandes, Diogo Dalot, Luke Shaw and Harry Maguire.

And so Mainoo stands out in the Frankenstein of a squad that Amorim inherited: one where, he implied while arguing he had never said he wants new players, fits neither his tactics nor the pressure of playing for United. Mainoo is an anomaly in this group, because Mainoo is sellable. He has admirers at Chelsea. Were he to go, the funds would count as pure profit, unlocking a greater ability to spend under FFP. He is also young and fit; the same cannot be said for all of his teammates. And while United are fielding interest in several of his colleagues this month,

they are wanted on loan. That would not boost United's transfer coffers or dramatically improve their FFP position. Rashford's suitors include AC Milan, Joshua Zirkzee is wanted at Juventus and Real Betis are among those eyeing Antony. In two cases, that could involve expensive United signings playing for someone else; in all three, they might end up subsidising their wages.

Because high salaries are a reason why so many United players fall into the category of the unsellable. Indeed, some



CAN YOU SEE THE EXIT SIGN? Casemiro and Marcus Rashford may be offloaded

fall into multiple categories. Take Antony; and how United must wish someone would. Pound for pound, the worst signing in their history amounts to an £85m disaster. But even amortising his fee over a five-year contract means selling him would, given his low actual value, bring an FFP loss.

United probably can't sell those whose contracts expire in 2025 for meaningful fees. That means Victor Lindelof, Christian Eriksen, Jonny Evans and Tom Heaton. Those whose deals end in 2026 have a reduced worth and they are Casemiro, Maguire and Tyrell Malacia. Age means the thirty-somethings have a depreciating value. They are Heaton, Evans, Casemiro, Eriksen, Maguire, Lindelof and Bruno Fernandes.

The injury records of Shaw, Malacia and Mason Mount mean that, logically, there would be little interest in them. Meanwhile, Rashford's desire to go weakens United's negotiating position: so does his form in the last 18 months.

The thorny reality for United is that most of the sellable tend to be those they might want to keep. **The Independent**

The Champions Trophy Jigsaw Puzzle

A breakdown of the options India could consider in the weeks leading up to the CT25



Boria Majumdar

As the focus shifts from the Test debacle to the Champions Trophy, the upcoming ODI series against England could serve as a dress rehearsal for under-pressure India. With Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli's form under scrutiny, Jasprit Bumrah's injury and doubts over Mohammed Shami's return, it is a rare white-ball tournament where India would be considered favourites. The shift in expectations might not be a bad thing for the Indian men's cricket team in the current circumstances.

Before that, India have to make certain decisions regarding their personnel. Here is a role-wise breakdown of the options that the selectors could consider while picking up the squad:

OPENERS: ROHIT, GILL, JAISWAL

Rohit and Shubman Gill are likely to be the first-choice options going into the tournament. Rohit has been a stellar performer in white-ball cricket. His red-ball woes notwithstanding, the captain can well rediscover his mojo in the 50-over format. It was his efforts at the 2023 World Cup that helped India get off to flying starts and he will want to do the same in Dubai, where India will play their Champions Trophy matches. Gill, however, needs to be more consistent. While he deserves his place in the starting eleven, he will know that a few bad games could result in Yashasvi Jaiswal getting a look in. In that sense, the Champions Trophy is a big test for Gill as well. Jaiswal is going to be India's back-up opener to start with. He offers the left-hand option that India miss in the top order.

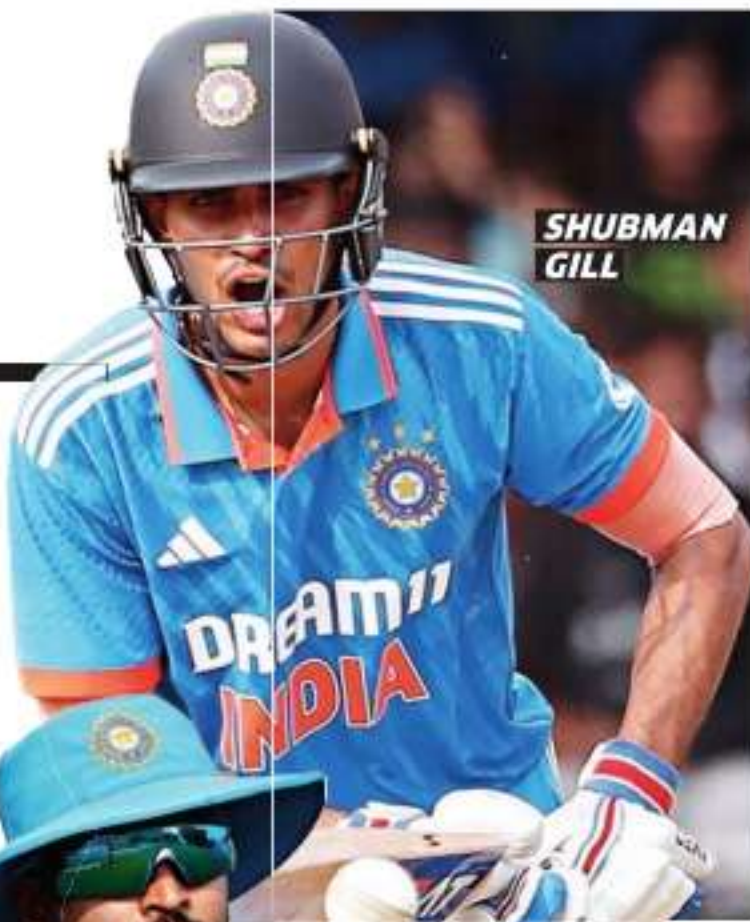
MIDDLE-ORDER: KOHLI, IYER, RAHUL, PANT, PANDYA, REDDY, SAMSON

There is no debate that Virat Kohli will be India's No. 3 option with Shreyas Iyer at No. 4. With so much talk on his future, there is enough incentive for Kohli to push himself. For Iyer, making an India comeback is a priority. After a good World Cup, he endured the worst few months of his career which included losing his central contract. With a very good domestic season behind him, it is time for Iyer to make the India jersey his own once more.

At No. 5 and 6, India will go in with Hardik Pandya and one between Rishabh Pant, KL Rahul and/or Sanju Samson. Two of the three wicketkeepers will get picked. While Samson has an average of 56 in the 50-over format, that he did not play in the Vijay Hazare Trophy could go against him. Hardik is India's go-to all-rounder and there is an outside chance Nitish Reddy, who stood out in Australia, could get a look in.

SPINNERS: AXAR, JADEJA, WASHINGTON, CHAKRAVARTHY, BISHNOI, KULDEP

This is where the selection becomes tricky. While Kuldeep Yadav's fitness remains uncertain, he is a guaranteed pick if fit. Currently, Axar Patel is the preferred left-arm spinner in white-ball cricket, and Washington Sundar could be the off-spin option. But don't rule out Ravindra Jadeja, while Ravi Bishnoi



SHUBMAN GILL



SHREYAS IYER

PACERS: BUMRAH, SIRAJ, SHAMI, ARSHDEEP, MUKESH, KHALEEL, RANA

The two big question marks are over Shami and Bumrah. Both are awaiting clearance from the National Cricket Academy (NCA) and remain key options for India. If all goes well, both are likely to feature in the squad, with Bumrah potentially playing one ODI against England ahead of the Champions Trophy.

Shami, on the other hand, has played enough domestic cricket on his comeback and it will be surprising if he continues to be sidelined. Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh are strong alternatives, and India might find it tactically appealing to field a left-arm seamer against Pakistan on February 23. If one or both of Bumrah and Shami miss out, Mohammed Khaleel, Mukesh Kumar and Harshit Rana could get a look in as back-up options.

After Test defeats in Australia and at home against New Zealand, the Indian cricket fans need some good results and the Champions Trophy offers a great opportunity for Rohit and Gambhir to change things around at the start of 2025.

Rana could get a look in as back-up options.

After Test defeats in Australia and at home against New Zealand, the Indian cricket fans need some good results and the Champions Trophy offers a great opportunity for Rohit and Gambhir to change things around at the start of 2025.

Shami Named in T20I Squad for England Series

Mumbai: Nearly 14 months after he last played an international match, Mohammed Shami on Saturday returned to the Indian team for the five-match T20I series against visiting England. The 34-year-old Shami's last outing for India was the 2023 ODI World Cup final against Australia at Ahmedabad on November 19, after which he was out of the team for a long time due to an ankle injury for which he underwent surgery last year. **PTI**

T20I SQUAD Suryakumar Yadav (C), Sanju Samson (wk), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Hardik Pandya, Rinku Singh, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Axar Patel (vc), Harshit Rana, Arshdeep Singh, Mohammed Shami, Varun Chakravarty, Ravi Bishnoi, Washington Sundar, Dhruv Jurel (wk)

Schedule

	1st T20I	22 Jan	Kolkata
	2nd T20I	25 Jan	Chennai
	3rd T20I	28 Jan	Rajkot
	4th T20I	31 Jan	Pune
	5th T20I	02 Feb	Mumbai

All matches at 7pm

How to Improve NBA's Ratings? More Fireworks from New Superstars

Marcus Thompson II

Donovan Mitchell of the Cleveland Cavaliers, presented with the challenge of solving the NBA's oft-discussed ratings issue, smiled as he offered a cure. "Get into more fights," he said.

He was joking, of course, but maybe he was on to something.

The biggest issue with the NBA these days isn't how many 3-pointers are being cast. Nor is it the length of the season, or the perceived triviality of regular-season games. Are those concerns? Yes. But only as low-hanging fruit for the unsatisfied.

The real issue, the one proved by the spike in ratings on Christmas Day, is the waning magnetism of the league's stars not named Stephen Curry, LeBron James and Kevin Durant. It's the next generation of NBA ambassadors who have yet to do enough to seize attention. James and Curry now lead mediocre teams, but they still dominated the NBA's showcase day.

Sure, it may be unfair to compare the appeal of the next wave of stars with legends who have footprints in three decades. But it's certainly fair to wonder

who will take the baton from them. Or who even wants it. We know Anthony Edwards does, but the Minnesota Timberwolves star has got to win for his charisma to matter. We know Jayson Tatum wants it, but the Boston Celtics leader's charisma does not quite match his success. It's a tricky dance.

The NBA was built on superstardom, on the magnetism of Magic Johnson and Larry Bird. Michael Jordan made sure he was always dressed well and presentable, honouring the reality that seeing him was a moment for people. Kobe Bryant groomed his whole life for the mantle. James has been willingly in the public eye since he was 16. Curry saturates the market with himself. Durant would seem to be the anti-superstar, but he embraces accessibility and cares about the league and the game as much as anyone, if not more.

What NBA superstars, the ones who carried the league, al-



Jayson Tatum's (R) charisma doesn't quite match his success

ways seemed to understand is that the role is as much a responsibility as a perk. Along with the maximum contracts comes the burden of carrying the torch.

Not diving headfirst into this setup is actually a rational response. But since players are not compensated rationally, it is fair to ask them to go ahead and dive in anyway. We need more from the next generation.

The players have the greatness down — their skill is off the charts. "For us," Mitchell said, referring to the role of the next wave of stars, "it's continuing to play high-level basketball. There's always going to be discourse. There's always going to be something to talk about. Just continue to play high-level basketball."

He added, "I think the biggest thing for us is to continue to carry the game."

Yes. But it takes more than just great basketball, and manicured personas aren't cutting it. It takes more than safe comments for fear of going

First Time in NBA History: Two Players Record Triple-doubles in Same Game Twice In a Season

Denver: Denver's Nikola Jokic and Russell Westbrook made NBA history on Friday night, becoming the first pair of teammates to record a triple-double in the same game multiple times in a single season. Jokic finished with 35 points, 15 assists and 12 rebounds for his NBA-leading 15th triple-double of the season in the Nuggets' 124-105 win over the Brooklyn Nets. Westbrook had 25 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists. They're also the first to record a 25-point triple-double in the same regular-season game. "Wow. That's pretty crazy. We're watching history, folks," Denver coach Michael Malone said. The pair also accomplished the feat at Utah on Dec. 30. Jokic had 36 points, 22 rebounds and 11 assists that night while Westbrook had 16 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists. **AP**

viral. It takes more than just wanting to play basketball and go home.

Mitchell, 28, is one of the torchbearers. His Cavaliers being atop the Eastern Conference is setting him up to be one of the league's chief ambassadors. When the smoke arrives in the NBA playoffs, whether from Boston or Milwaukee, Mitchell will inhale.

On Wednesday night, the Cavaliers clashed with Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and the Oklahoma City Thunder. If that was a preview of the NBA Finals, we should be so lucky Cleveland's 129-122 victory at home delivered tension and quality. The game matched up two

of the most explosive guards in Mitchell and Gilgeous-Alexander and two incredible young players in Jaalen Williams and Evan Mobley. Mitchell scored just 11 points on 3-of-16 shooting, and Cleveland still beat the best team in the West.

But the matchup could have used some fireworks.

The NBA's secret sauce has always been rivalries, and rivalries are sparked by personalities and storylines: the clashing of stars, players who inspire hate and love.

The NBA is culpable. Ownership's bent on suppressing dynasties also de-

prives the league of that special element dynasties bring. Now rivalries in the game are lacking, and it is unclear from where they will come.

This only increases the need for players to uphold the banner. But doing so requires vulnerability from the characters, being OK with revealing more than just one's game, having the willingness to play a part in the melodrama of it all.

"More fights," as Mitchell joked, can be translated to more of a willingness to mix it up. More of a willingness to clash with one another. More of a willingness to competitively, theatrically, challenge one another. More of a willingness to at least be transparent and embrace whatever drama comes as a result.

That's how James and Curry got to this point, where they are senior citizens of basketball and still the chief needle movers. They dued for four consecutive years at the highest levels. They went at each other. Their history includes trash talk and competitive ice. They've inspired disdain as much as adoration, which doubled their interest. They weren't interested in playing it cool. **The New York Times**