

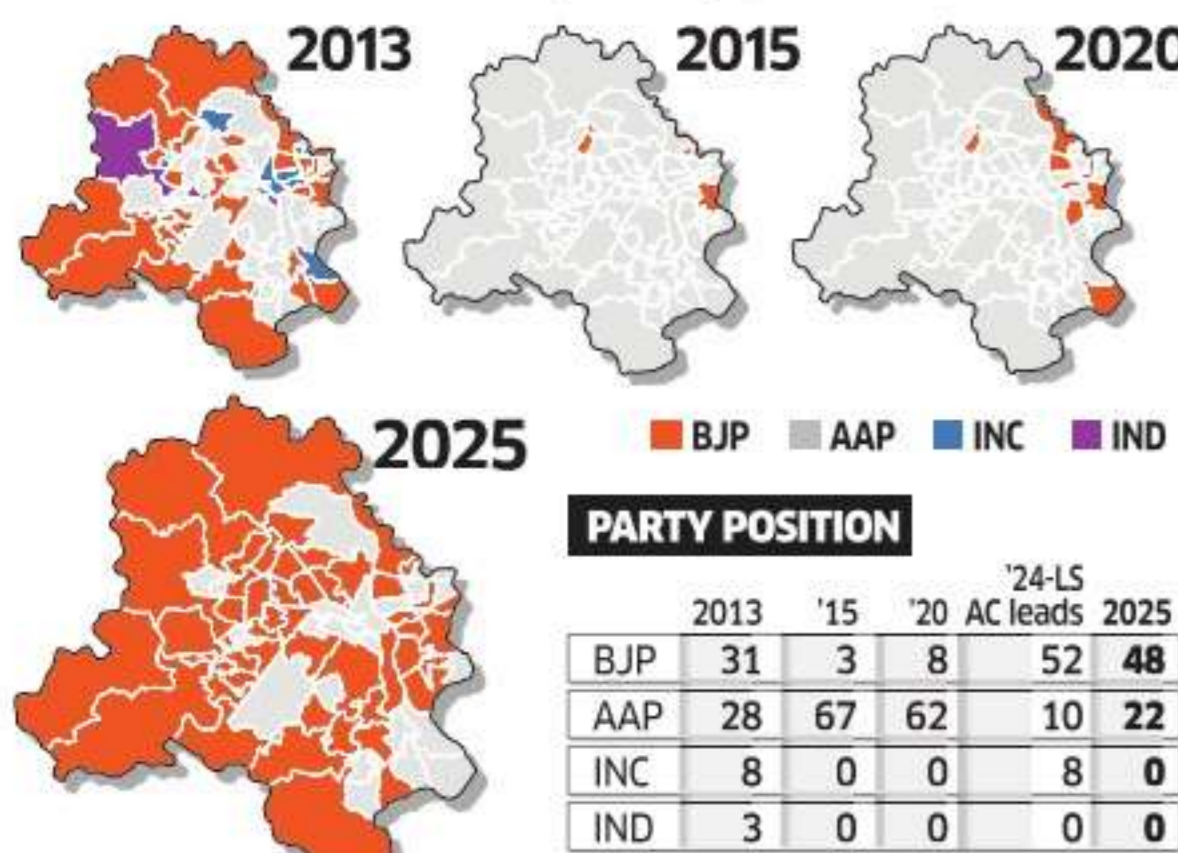


# BJP Completes NCR Sweep With Delhi Win

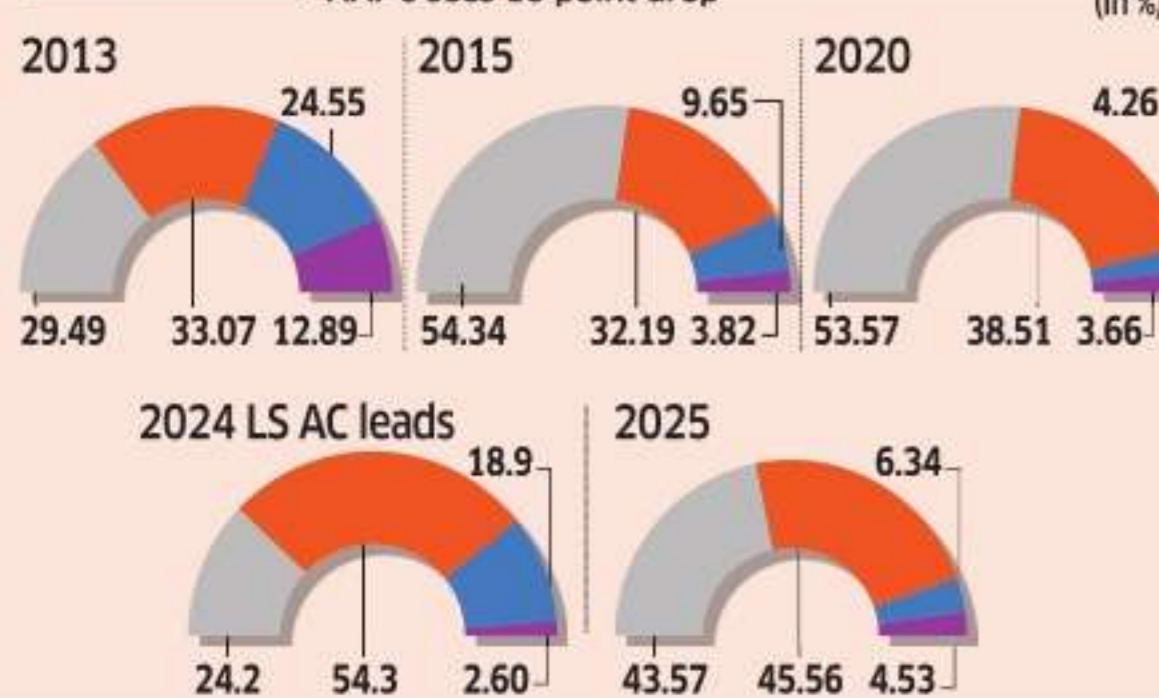
After nearly 3 decades, BJP finally claims power in national capital, securing governments in all 4 NCR states – Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi

## Big Capital Gains for BJP, Cong Zero Again

After long wait of 27 years, BJP takes back control of Delhi assembly; complete wipeout for Cong for 3rd time; setback for Kejriwal as party loses 40 seats and 10 percentage point vote share



**VOTE SHARE** BJP vote share up 7 percentage points, AAP's sees 10 point drop



**SIZE OF WIN** 34% won by margin of less than 10k votes against 21% in 2020

VICTORY MARGINS		No. of Candidates	
2015	2020	2020	2025
0	0 to 1 k	2	3
1	1 k to 2 k	1	3
3	2 k to 5 k	6	7
5	5 k to 10 k	6	11
16	10 k to 20 k	26	24
39	20 k to 50 k	25	22
6	50 k to 100 k	4	0

**BJP WINNERS' AVERAGE ASSETS GROW FOUR-FOLD**

	2020	2025
AAP*	13.39	7.74
BJP**	7.45	28.6
ALL***	12.75	22

**AVG AGE 52 IN 2025; MORE 45+ WINNERS THIS TIME**

Age of candidates	2020	2025
25-35	7	5
36-45	23	14
46-55	17	24
56-65	14	20
66-75	4	7
Total MLAs Analysed	65	70

Average age, 2025	BJP	AAP	ALL
	54	48	52

\*58 MLAs in 2020, all 22 in 2025; \*\*7 MLAs in 2020, all 48 in 2025; \*\*\*65 MLAs analysed in 2020; Source: ADR

**WINNERS AND LOSERS**

NEW DELHI  
Arvind Kejriwal (AAP) loses to  
Parvesh Verma (BJP) by 4089 votes

Seat	Candidate	Party	W/L
Jangpura	Manish Sisodia	AAP	Lost
Shakur Basti	Satyendar Jain	AAP	Lost
Ballimaran	Imran Hussain	AAP	Won
Malviya Nagar	Somnath Bharti	AAP	Lost
Greater Kailash	S Bharadwaj	AAP	Lost
Kalkaji	Atishi	AAP	Won
Babarpur	Gopal Rai	AAP	Won
Rohini	Vijender Gupta	BJP	Won
Kasturba Nagar	Abhishek Dutt	INC	Lost

**WOMEN IN POWER: LOWEST SINCE 2015**

Women candidates	2013	2015	2020	2025
Years Contested	71	67	6	3
Won	3	6	8	5

## CM To Be From MLAs; Caste, Region to Shape Cabinet

Jatin Takkar

**New Delhi:** As the BJP prepares to form the government in Delhi, all eyes are on its chief ministerial pick, expected to be chosen from among the MLAs. The party aims to balance caste and regional representation within the national capital.

Several winning BJP MLAs are in contention for the top post, sparking discussions about the possible appointment of a Deputy Chief Minister as well. Sources told ET that the BJP's central leadership is inclined to select an MLA for the role. The decision may take over a week,

as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is leaving for an official trip to France and the U.S.

Parvesh Verma's victory over Arvind Kejriwal in the New Delhi assembly seat gives him an edge among BJP MLAs. Before collecting his victory certificate, Verma met senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. A Jat leader, Verma represents a community that forms about 10% of Delhi's electorate and has a strong presence in neighboring Haryana, Rajasthan, and western Uttar Pradesh.

Other key contenders include Ashish Sood, a prominent Punjabi face in the BJP, who began his political jo-

**Deputy CM Possibility**

With multiple contenders, discussions are underway about appointing a Deputy Chief Minister.

turney with the ABVP and has worked closely with top party leaders. Currently, he oversees BJP affairs in

**Parvesh Verma in Focus**

His win over Arvind Kejriwal strengthens his chances, especially after his meeting with Amit Shah

Goa and co-handles responsibilities in Jammu and Kashmir. Former Delhi BJP presidents Vijen-

**Other Contenders**

Ashish Sood, Vijender Gupta, and Satish Upadhyay are also in the race, representing different communities

der Gupta and Satish Upadhyay are also in the race. Upadhyay, a Brahmin, and Gupta, a Baniya, bring regional diversity within the capital.

The BJP is likely to include a Sikh face in its cabinet, with national secretary Manjinder Singh Sirsa emerging as a top choice. Another potential candidate is Tarvinder Singh Marwah, who defeated Manish Sisodia in Jangpura.

At least one woman MLA is expected to be inducted, with Shikha Roy, Rekha Gupta, Poonam Sharma, and Neelam Pehalwan as frontrunners. Additionally, one of the four SC MLAs is likely to feature in the new Delhi government.

### HOW BJP TURNED THE TABLES ON AAP

## From 8 to 48: BJP's Winning Formula in Delhi

BJP countered AAP's welfare schemes with Modi's guarantee

Kumar Anshuman

**New Delhi:** BJP's return to power in Delhi after 27 years was no small feat. A well-planned campaign, strategic course corrections, and effective use of party machinery helped the party pull off a stunning victory. Here's what worked:

**TARGETING AAP'S CORE APPEAL**

BJP relentlessly attacked AAP's anti-corruption image, linking its leaders—Kejriwal, Sisodia, Jain, and Singh—to graft. The 'Sheesh Mahal' controversy over Kejri-

wal's residence became a powerful campaign tool, amplified by BJP leaders and media. The party also highlighted AAP's failure to clean the Yamuna, contrasting it with the successful Mahakumbh in Prayagraj.

**STICKING TO A TESTED FORMULA**

Unlike past assembly elections, BJP focused on both-level strengthening and PM Modi's leadership rather than a CM face. The party identified key swing booths and ensured a 7.18 percentage point increase in votes and increase in the seat tally from 8 to 48. Recognising AAP's welfare schemes' popularity, BJP counte-

red them with 'Modi's Guarantee,' assuring continuity.

**PURVANCHALI MOBILISATION**

With 40 lakh Purvanchali voters across 25-27 seats, BJP deployed 200 leaders from UP and Bihar to woo them. Despite giving only four tickets to Purvanchali candidates, the party won over 20 seats where they held sway. PM Modi later credited them for BJP's success.

**OUTREACH TO SLUM DWELLERS & SCs**

AAP's stronghold among slum dwellers and SCs saw BJP making inroads by distributing flats in Northwest Delhi's Swabhimana Apartments. BJP also won four of 12 SC-reserved seats—marking an improvement from 2020. SC-dominated areas like Valmiki Basti played a key role in BJP's victories in constituencies like New Delhi and Patparganj.

### SECURING MORE VOTES THAN THE VICTORY MARGIN

## Congress Influenced 24 Seats, Hurting AAP More Than BJP

Nidhi Sharma

**New Delhi:** The Congress played the spoilsport in one-third of Delhi's constituencies, hurting the Aam Aadmi Party more than impacting the BJP in the assembly election.

Although the party, which had ruled Delhi till 2013, drew a blank in terms of seats for the third consecutive assembly election, it improved its vote share to 6.34% from 4.26% in 2020. More significantly, it managed to influence the results in about 24 assembly constituencies by securing more votes than the victory margin.

Just as the AAP had been a direct beneficiary of the Congress' poor performance, with the latter's supporters completely shifting to the Arvind Kejriwal-led political party, a good showing by the Congress in

some constituencies dented the AAP's prospects. The Congress' strategy of fielding strong candidates against Kejriwal and other senior AAP leaders clearly harmed the ruling party's prospects in 17 constituencies.

In New Delhi, where Kejriwal lost to the BJP's Parvesh Verma by 4,089 votes, Congress candidate Sandeep Dikshit polled 4,568 votes. Similarly, in Greater Kailash, where minister Saurabh Bharadwaj lost by a margin of 3,188 votes, the Congress won 6,711 votes. In Manish Sisodia's new constituency Jangpura, where the BJP's Tarvinder Marwah won by 675 votes, former mayor and Congress candidate Farhad Suri got 7,350 votes. In Kasturba Nagar, the

Congress' Abhishek Dutt came second and relegated the AAP candidate to the third position.

Other constituencies where the Congress clearly harmed the AAP and benefitted the BJP include Timarpur, Badli, Mundka, Nangloi Jat, Madipur, Rajinder Nagar, Malviya Nagar, Mehrauli, Chhattarpur, Sangam Vihar, Trilokpur, Dwarka and Bijwasan. Kejriwal's loss in New Delhi was touted as Sandeep Dikshit's revenge for his mother and former chief minister Sheila Dikshit's humiliating defeat in 2013 assembly election from the same constituency.

In seven other constituencies, however, the presence of the Congress tilted the balance in favour of the AAP. The list comprises Sadar Bazar, Patel Nagar, Delhi Cantonment, Ambedkar Nagar, Kalkaji, Kondli and Seemapuri.

## AAP Will Have to Tread Carefully in Punjab Now

AAP remains a force with 43.57% vote share & MCD control

Nidhi Sharma

**New Delhi:** Aam Aadmi Party buckled under obvious anti-incumbency of a decade fuelled by graft charges, governance paralysis and numerous civic issues as it registered its worst ever tally of 22 seats in Delhi Assembly elections.

The fledgling party, which had risen to power and become the party of choice for Delhiites since 2013, saw its top brass losing by slim margins of under 5,000 votes in the capital. AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal lost his New Delhi seat by 4,089 votes, former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia lost Jangpura by 675 votes and minister Saurabh Bharadwaj by 3,188 votes. Chief minister Atishi won by a slim margin of 3,188 from Kalkaji. AAP's seat

tally plunged from 62 to 22 seats and its vote share by 10% from 53.57% in 2020 to 43.57% in 2025 Assembly elections.

The bitterly-fought election saw close contests on several seats with 14 of 70 Assembly segments seeing a victory margin of less than 5,000. After the defeat, Kejriwal accepted the verdict and in a recorded video message said, "Today the results of the Delhi elections have come in, and whatever decision the people have made, we humbly accept it. The people's verdict is paramount. Now that the people have given their verdict, we will not only play the role of a constructive opposition but also continue serving society."

**AAP'S UNDOING**

The middle class voter's anger against Kejriwal proved to be AAP's undoing. BJP's campaign of "Sheesh-

Mahal" drove home the point that Kejriwal was no different and the people would benefit from a "double engine government". The constant squabble between L-G and AAP government led to a growing fatigue with policy paralysis. Despite this, the fine print of the result shows AAP still retains its hold on the lower socio-economic classes.

**THE ROAD AHEAD**

It will be political naivete to write off AAP with this defeat. It still commands 43.57% vote share in Delhi and more

importantly is in power in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). With 134 of 250 corporation seats, it still remains responsible for civic services in Delhi. In the run-up to Assembly elections, AAP had reposed faith in councilors. Now, it can still retain the people connect through an active corporation.

Even though its top leadership is defeated, 22 is a number that can easily play the role of an effective Opposition in the Assembly.

The loss also has lessons for Punjab, where the party is in power. The Lok Sabha elections 2024

were a wake up call as the party could win only three seats. But the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections have been a huge setback. There are already rumblings of dissent on the ground against absent MLAs. AAP will need to work ground-up in Punjab.

**POLITICAL CHALLENGE**

The biggest challenge for AAP will be to keep its flock together. The biggest issue will be to fight corruption charges that the new government will bring against AAP. There are as many as 14 CAG reports that were not tabled in Delhi Assembly. Armed with a mandate, BJP will use these to score political brownie points and also justify the faith people have reposed in them.

These reports will also strike at the core of AAP's main political plank—of anti-corruption. To recalibrate is the need of the hour.

## Sullied Image of AAP And Yamuna Bring BJP Back in Delhi After 27 Years

Rakesh Mohan Chaturvedi

**New Delhi:** The BJP ended its 27-year exile from power in Delhi on Saturday by pulling the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) down by a massive 40 seats from its 2020 tally in the 70-seat assembly with a 2 percentage point vote share difference.

In the previous elections of 2013, 2015 and 2020, the BJP could not dent AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal's popularity, which was based on his "clean image"; welfare schemes; popularity



over women voters, slum-dwellers and the youth.

This time, the BJP bettered the promises being offered by the AAP go-

vernment and also assured the voters that the ongoing schemes would not be discontinued. The AAP ended up a distant second, losing many seats by

small margins.

While the AAP got around 43.5% votes, slightly less than the BJP's 45.69%, the AAP's tally fell to 22 from 62 in the previous election. The AAP's vote share declined a sharp 10.03 percentage points from its 2020 tally, while that of the BJP increased 7.18 percentage points.

The Congress improved its vote share marginally from the previous assembly election but its fight with its erstwhile INDIA bloc partner AAP only helped the BJP as the Congress failed to open its account yet again.

Kejriwal had built his political capital riding on the India Against Corruption movement led by Gandhian Anna Hazare in 2013. Ironically, charges of corruption led his ouster and his own defeat. The liquor scam, extravagant renovation of the chief minister's residence (that BJP described as 'Sheesh Mahal') and allegations of financial wrongdoings in various schemes and programmes of the state government tarnished his image and credibility.

Kejriwal also failed to deliver and was seen as one who perpetually bla-

med the Centre for his "inability" to keep his promises. His declaration in the previous election that if he fails to clean the Yamuna river, people should not vote for him came to haunt him in 2025. He tried to wriggle out by alleging that the BJP-led Haryana government was releasing poison into the river, a charge that appeared to have found no traction among voters.

The clean politician image of AAP leaders was shattered when Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and Satyendra Jain were jailed on charges of corruption.

Apart from the assurance that the AAP government's ongoing schemes would be continued, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's record as well as that of the BJP-ruled states of fulfilling the major promises made in the party's election manifesto helped in winning the support of voters.

The increase in income tax exemption limit to Rs 12 lakh per annum in the Union budget days before the Delhi election and the announcement of the eighth Pay Commission also helped the BJP attract a sizable number of government employees.

PM BEGINS AND ENDS SPEECH WITH ‘YAMUNA CALL’

Modi Vows to Make Delhi a World City, Fulfil Promises

Slams AAP on graft, deceit; Says Congress infested by urban naxals

Rakesh Mohan Chaturvedi

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured the people of Delhi that the new BJP government will hit the ground running, delivering on its poll promises even as he slammed the Aam Aadmi Party for engaging in politics of arrogance, graft and deceit. He also attacked the Congress, terming it a party whose DNA has been affected by urban naxals and one that is a parasite eating its own allies, including AAP.

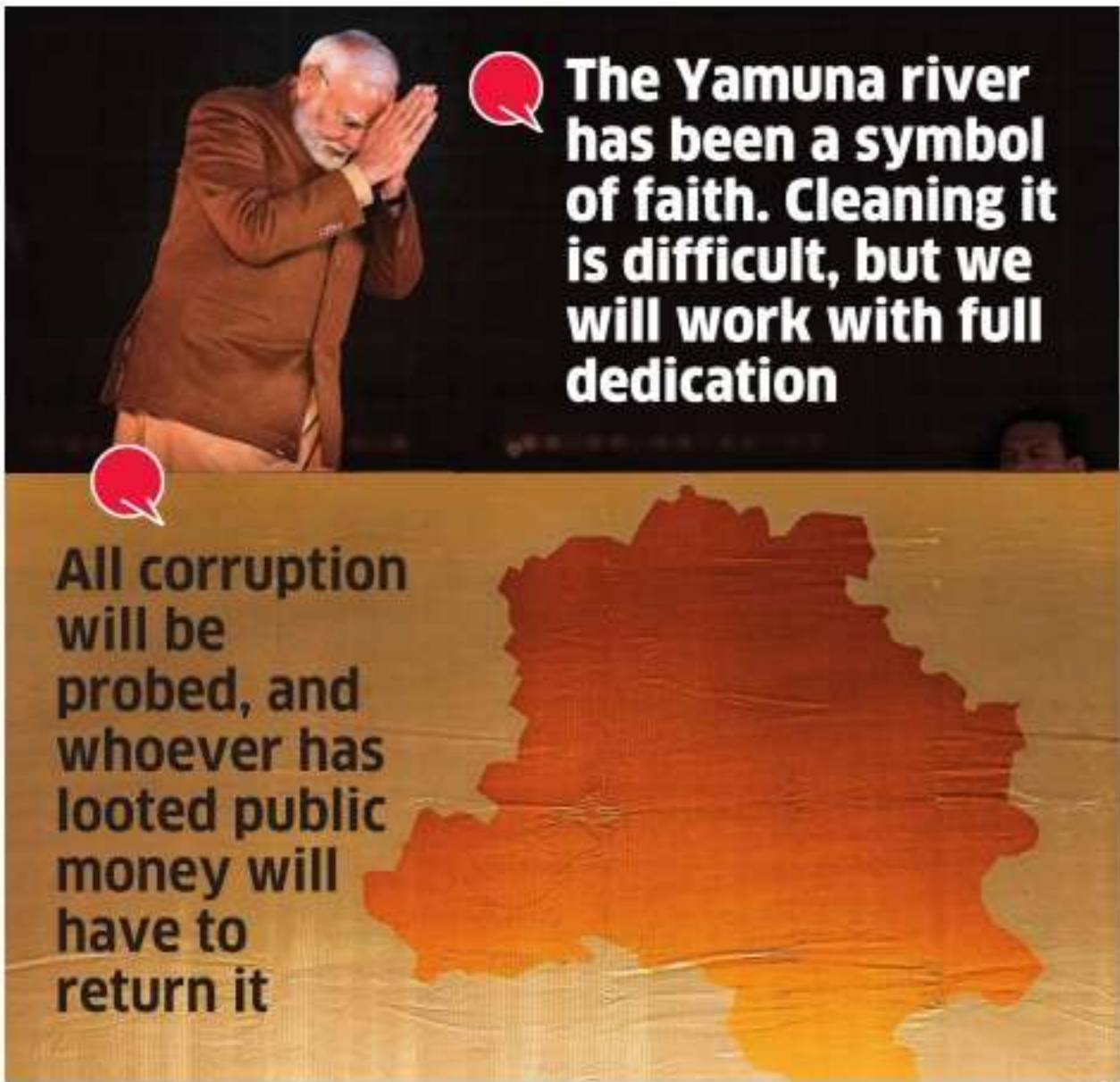
In an indication of what would be one of the key priorities of the BJP government here, Modi began and ended his victory speech at the party headquarters with the slogan “Yamuna maiyya ki jai”. The party has promised to clean the dirty Yamuna river, whose polluted status had become one of the major poll issues with AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal alleging BJP-ruled Haryana is releasing toxic pollutants into the river. Kejriwal had also drawn flak for failing to keep his oft-repeated promise during previous elections to clean the Yamuna.

Modi underscored the BJP promise of making Delhi a world class developed capital city. “I assure you that the promises made by us will be fulfilled. This is Modi’s guarantee... AAP government has only given broken roads, garbage everywhere, outflowing open sewers, and polluted air;”

BJP Will Transform Delhi In Line With Viksit Bharat Goal: Sitharaman

Our Political Bureau

New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman Saturday said the BJP government will certainly transform the national capital in line with India’s Viksit Bharat aspirations. “...indeed, happy to know that (BJP) had the winning lead) because under Prime Minister Mo-



he said, adding that the party will return with interest the love showered on it by the people here.

Terming BJP’s victory in Delhi as historic and extra-ordinary, the prime minister said the capital has been freed from the clutches of “AAP-da (disaster) after a decade. “The Delhi verdict is clear- it is a vote for development, vision and trust,” he said.

The arrogance of AAP has been defeated, the PM maintained, adding there is no place in Delhi for falsehoods and deceit. The AAP government did not let the expansion of the metro network, created hurdles in

providing homes to slum-dwellers, did not allow implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme. Furthermore, AAP was busy holding protests and engaging in a constant tussle with the Centre.

“Short circuit politics has been short-circuited in Delhi,” Modi said.

Among the promises to be fulfilled on a priority basis would be tabling of the CAG report that indicts the AAP government on corruption in the first sitting of the new Vidhan Sabha. “All corruption will be probed and whoever has looted public money will have to return it,” he said.

di’s leadership, we are very keen that Delhi gets a government which serves the cause of its people,” Sitharaman said, when asked to comment on trends showing the saffron party leading the polls.

She said the roadmap set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the country should certainly put Delhi on the top priority

and serve its people from every point of view across all human development indicator-related issues and fundamental infrastructure such as schools, and hospitals.

Sitharaman was interacting with the media after addressing the customary post-Budget meeting with the central board of directors of the Reserve Bank.

BJP’s Fin Challenge: Delhi’s Looming Deficit, Subsidy Bills

Of the 16 pledges in the BJP’s manifesto, at least seven are direct subsidy schemes

Nidhi Sharma

New Delhi: The BJP is likely to be handicapped by Delhi’s increasing subsidy bill while implementing its pre-poll promises, including ₹2,500 each per month for women and increased pension for the elderly and differently abled.

Delhi is starting at a budgetary deficit in 2025-26. The subsidy bill in 2014-15, when Delhi was under a year-long President’s rule, was ₹1,554.72 crore. It has surged more than 600% to ₹10,995.34 crore in this financial year. Delhi is projected to slip into a budgetary deficit next fiscal if the subsidy bill grows any further. When the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government proposed its Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana, which promised ₹1,000 per month each to women in 2024-25, the state government’s finance department had raised a red flag saying the scheme should be considered at

the “revised estimates stage” in 2025-26.

In the run-up to the assembly election, the BJP had announced 16 pledges for a developed Delhi. The first was that it would continue all schemes started by the AAP, indicating that Delhi’s subsidy bill on account of free power, water and bus travel for women would remain the same. In addition, the first promise that the BJP has decided to implement is the Rs 2,500 monthly pension for women.

The finance department note over the AAP’s women pension scheme had said, “The scheme should not be taken up as the proposed budget of the scheme will push Delhi into budgetary deficit as well as deficit on both revenue and capital account.”

Of the 16 pledges in the BJP’s manifesto, at least seven are direct subsidy schemes. Apart from the women’s pension scheme, these



include assistance of ₹21,000 and six nutritional kits to every pregnant woman, LPG cylinders at ₹500 to women and one free cylinder every Holi and Deepawali, increase in senior citizen pension (60-70 years) to ₹2,500 from ₹2,000 and for senior

citizens (70-plus years), widows, differently abled and destitutes to Rs 3,000 from Rs 2,500, Atal canteens in slum clusters providing meals at Rs 5, one-time financial assistance of Rs 15,000 and reimbursing travel cost to examination centre to youths preparing for competitive exams and monthly stipend of Rs 1,000 to Scheduled Caste students.

The pension scheme for women under the AAP had an outlay of ₹4,560 crore for 2024-25. The finance department had projected the 2025-26 budget outlay at ₹88,267.68 crore and receipts at ₹80,108 crore, spelling a deficit of ₹8,159 crore. Even if two of the seven pledges are implemented in the first year and there are no additional receipts, Delhi’s finances would be in the red. Delhi being a Union Territory cannot borrow directly from the market. When there is a revenue deficit in the budget, financial powers delegated to the administrator stand withdrawn.

BJP Wrests Milkipur From SP With 62,000 Margin

BJP now holds all 5 assembly seats in Faizabad LS constituency

Sanjay Singh

New Delhi: BJP candidate Chandrabhanu Paswan won the Milkipur bypoll on Saturday by a margin of 61,710 votes, according to the Election Commission.

Paswan, 38, secured 1,46,397 votes after 31 rounds of counting, while his closest rival, Samajwadi Party’s Ajit Prasad, 42, polled 84,687 votes.

With this victory, BJP now holds all five assembly segments in the Faizabad Lok Sabha constituency. The other segments include Rudauli, Bikapur, and Ayodhya in Ayodhya district, along with Rudauli in Barabanki district.

Milkipur was the only seat the BJP lost in Ayodhya district in the 2022 Assembly polls.

Santosh Kumar of the Aazad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) stood a distant third and got 5,459 votes.

The Milkipur bypoll was necessitated after local MLA Awadhesh Prasad vacated the seat following his Faizabad win in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.



The BSP did not contest the bypoll while the Congress backed its India Bloc partner SP

The SP fielded his son Ajit Prasad in the bypoll even as the BJP opted for a party cadre Paswan, both from the Pasi community.

While the SP was anxious to retain the seat it won in the 2022 UP polls, the BJP was anxious to avenge its Faizabad loss that had happened within five months of the high-profile consecration of Ram temple at Ayodhya.

The BSP did not contest the bypoll while the Congress backed its alliance partner SP.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath congratulated party workers for the “historic victory” of the BJP in the Milkipur bypoll.

In a post on X in Hindi, Adityanath said, “Heartiest congratulations to all the dedicated party officials and hard-working workers for the historic victory of Bharatiya Janata Party in the byelection of Milkipur Legislative Assembly seat!”

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav on the other hand accused the BJP of “misusing” the electoral machinery to win elections.

“The true victory of PDA (Picchda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) in Ayodhya in the Lok Sabha elections is many times greater than their false victory in the Milkipur Assembly and will always be so,” Yadav said in a post on X.

“The BJP cannot face the growing power of PDA based on votes, which is why it tries to win by misusing the electoral machinery...” Yadav said.

DMK Wins Erode East, Maintains Winning Streak

Press Trust of India


Erode: The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu extended its winning run in elections on Saturday by emerging victorious in the Erode East bypoll with a massive margin against actor-politician Seeman’s NTK, a victory that should come as a major boost to the MK Stalin-led party ahead of next year’s Assembly elections.

DMK’s V C Chandhirakumar trounced Naam Tamilar Katchi’s (NTK) M K Seethalakshmi by a margin of 91,558 votes. In the process, NTK, a Tamil nationalist organisation, forfeited deposit.

With 44 other candidates- most of them independents, in fray, NNTA (None of the Above) grabbed the third place with 6,109 votes.

Chandhirakumar polled 1,15,709 votes while Seethalakshmi came a distant second with 24,151 votes.

The winning candidate later said the DMK has secured “75 per cent of the votes.”



## DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

### EOI for Corporate Office Project

Location: Sector 36, Rohini, New Delhi

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) intends to allot a parcel of land on license fee basis, measuring around 9.38 Hectares located in Sector 36, Rohini, New Delhi, for developing a Corporate Office.

The development control norms will be as per MPD 2021 and Unified Building Bye-Laws 2016.

Interested entities are requested to submit their response to this Eol via an email to [commrlnddisp@dda.org.in](mailto:commrlnddisp@dda.org.in) or [kunal.kashyap81@gov.in](mailto:kunal.kashyap81@gov.in) by 05:00 PM of 24.02.2025 along with their corporate profile & key financial numbers (like gross revenues, PAT and net worth) for the last 3 years.

**DDA will hold a stakeholder consultation on 18.02.2025 at 11:30 AM**

**EOI can be accessed at:** <https://dda.gov.in/tenders>

### Key Site Details:

**Land Area**  
9.38 Hectares

**FAR**  
125

**Land Status**  
Vacant & encumbrance free


**Mode of Allotment**  
License fee basis

**License Period**  
Initially 40 years, extendable by another 20 years

**Site Coordinates**  
28.756132, 77.058543

**For site visits please contact:**  
Sh. Uttam Chand Meena, SE, (RCC-3) DDA on +91 98181 58764

**For any queries please contact:**  
Sh. Kunal Kashyap, Commissioner (LD), DDA on +91 98362 50026



## DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

### EOI for Corporate Office Project

Location : Sector 30, Rohini, New Delhi

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) intends to allot a parcel of land on license fee basis, measuring around 12.10 Hectares located in Sector 30, Rohini, New Delhi, for developing a Corporate Office.

The development control norms will be as per MPD 2021 and Unified Building Bye-Laws 2016.

Interested entities are requested to submit their response to this Eol via an email to [commrlnddisp@dda.org.in](mailto:commrlnddisp@dda.org.in) or [kunal.kashyap81@gov.in](mailto:kunal.kashyap81@gov.in) by 05:00 PM of 24.02.2025 along with their corporate profile & key financial numbers (like gross revenues, PAT and net worth) for the last 3 years.

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### Key Site Details

**Land Area**  
12.10 Hectares

**FAR**  
125

**Land Status**  
Vacant & encumbrance free

**Mode of Allotment**  
License fee basis

**License Period**  
Initially 40 years, extendable by another 20 years

**Site Coordinates**  
28.760141, 77.079757

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# Is there Man in the Machine?

The current machine learning models use brute force of computation to memorise data and produce probabilistic answers, but they are far from the synaptic leaps and creative surprises that mark humans

Shishir Prasad & Kanika Saxena

*You're wondering who I am (secret, secret, I've got a secret)  
Machine or mannequin? (Secret, secret, I've got a secret)  
With parts made in Japan (secret, secret, I've got a secret)  
I am the modern man  
I've got a secret, I've been hiding under my skin  
My heart is human, my blood is boiling, my brain IBM*

— "Mr Roboto" by Styx

On January 27, Chinese researchers released DeepSeek-R1 Large Language Model (LLM) and created a roadkill moment for the US technology sector. Nvidia, the world's largest chipmaker, lost almost \$600 billion in one day's trading.

Something else also happened that day—DeepSeek researchers published a paper on their model. It wasn't just the financial blow that unsettled researchers and netizens, but a revelation buried deep in that paper: Andrej Karpathy, founder of Eureka Labs, with former stints at Tesla and OpenAI, spotted something eerily familiar. In a post on X on January 29, he wrote, "Move 37 is the word-of-day—it's when an AI, trained via the trial-and-error process of reinforcement learning, discovers actions that are new, surprising and secretly brilliant even to expert humans. It is a magical, just slightly unnerving, emergent phenomenon.... with the latest crop of 'thinking' LLM models (e.g. OpenAI-o1, DeepSeek-R1, Gemini 2.0 Flash Thinking), we are seeing the first very early glimmers of things like it in open world domains.... I don't think we've seen equivalents of Move 37 yet.... But the technology feels on track to find them."

Move-37 refers to a move played by AlphaGo, a machine, against Lee Seedol, a champion player of Go (a game akin to chess), in 2016. Experts estimated that there was 1 in 10,000 chance of a human playing such a move; yet the machine played it. The machine defeated Seedol eventually.

Such Move-37 moments are what fill humanity with dread. Writers and filmmakers have always wondered about a post-human earth where humans would have done unto them what they did to other species. We, Homo sapiens, intermingled and became the sole surviving hominid. The others, Neanderthals, Denisovans, Homo erectus and Homo floresiensis, all went extinct.

Having become the apex predator, our fear of death and, of course, extinction by a "higher consciousness" (machines) has always been reflected in our literature and films. The consequences of "the creation" surpassing its creator in mental prowess are a recurring theme.

The original, of course, is Prometheus, a figure in Greek mythology, who stole fire (knowledge) from the Gods and gave it to humans. The act of overreaching, of defying the code, was condemned and Zeus punished.

Prometheus to have his liver eaten on a daily basis by an eagle. The liver would regenerate every day for the eagle to continue its feast.

As AI breakthroughs are announced, everyone, including Elon Musk, is concerned about its impact on humanity. The human-dominated era is approaching its end, it would appear, and that is the cause of all the concern.

## SHORT HISTORY OF DOMINANCE

Humans didn't get to the top of the food chain by playing nice. We can blame evolution for that. The early versions of the hominid, say Australopithecus, had a brain size of a chimpanzee (~384 gm), while our brains are about 1,300 gm.

It wasn't just the size of the brain. There was a structural change, too. Apart from the amygdala (the "crocodile brain"), which is responsible for fear and aggression, we developed the hippocampus for memory storage and the most significant part—the cerebral cortex. It is responsible for attention, thought, perception, episodic memory, reasoning, decision-making, comprehension, articulation and linguistic fluency.

This million-years process of the brain also created something that was more than just intelligence and that is consciousness. Anil Seth, professor of cognitive and computational neuroscience at the University of Sussex, is a leading thinker on consciousness, famous for his integrated information theory (IIT) that has proposed a "metric" called "Phi" to measure consciousness. He says in his book *Being You*: "Somehow, within each of our brains, the combined activity of billions of neurons, each one a tiny biological machine, is giving rise to a conscious

experience. And not just any conscious experience, your conscious experience, right here, right now. *How does this happen? Why do we experience life in first person?*" Consciousness is what makes each one of us experience the world from a unique point of view. As of now, machines don't have this faculty.

Machines reason as do we, but are they conscious? This individuality matters. Throughout human history, social, scientific and theological advances were made because an individual challenged the existing world view. It was Werner Heisenberg (yeah, the uncertainty principle guy) who, during his months of solitude on the island of Helgoland, came up with an insight, there is no quantum reality beyond what is revealed till we observe it. *Till an observation is made? That thing, that particle doesn't exist.* It is as if when you turn your back, the table behind you will disappear and reappear when you turn again. This insight shook even Albert Einstein, who tried but could not disprove it.

Let's take another example of human insight: Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*. This landmark painting ushered in Cubism and set up the progress of modern art.

Picasso synthesised his understanding of multiple disciplines like African art, advances in geometry and spacetime, cinematography, X-ray technology and photography to create "geometric language of emergent cubism", to quote a book by Arthur Miller that explores the lives of Einstein and Picasso.

Synaptic leaps and synthesis are our essence. The current machine learning models use brute force of computation to memorise all the data and use probabilistic techniques to produce the answers. This approach

works well for summarisation and producing creative works—po-

ems, paintings, et al—that reflect shades of original works but do not contain their originality of surprise or their reflective capacity. Take, for instance, one of the greatest opening lines in English literature from George Orwell's 1984: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." Nothing of this sort has yet been produced. This requires observation of life, realisation of its absurdity, absorption of the emotion it generates and its articulation. That needs consciousness, whatever that is.

"I do not agree with your assumption that DeepSeek is conscious. It can be intelligent, and even exhibit impressive moments of insight like AlphaGo did, without being sentient or conscious. Consciousness is not the same as intelligence. I can't say if it is even possible for a silicon-based system to have the capacity for consciousness. Consciousness could be tied to the biological substrate, for all we know," says Professor Susan Schneider, director, Center for the Future Mind, Florida Atlantic University.

## WILL MACHINES HAVE DREAMS?

While consciousness might be a very debatable topic, machines' specific intelligence capabilities cannot be doubted. Viswanathan Anand, five-time world chess champion, says, "We, chess players, are in a sense from the future. Computers became better than human players years ago. The Turing Test was passed long ago in chess. In fact, the way to distinguish between computers and humans in chess is by looking at the errors that humans make. But you have to remember that chess is a game and with a very specific set of rules."

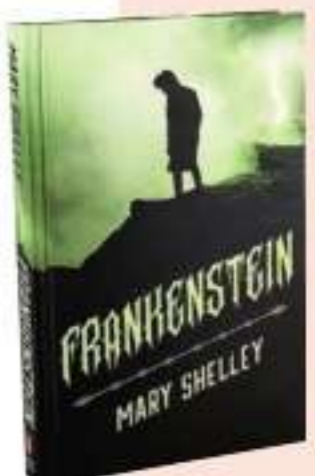
One of the key elements of progress in AI models would be the way they treat memory. We humans don't remember everything but all those neurons talking to each other are able to somehow fish out a specific piece of remembrance when the occasion demands. AI models still have some way to go in that area. "Memory retention in AI involves more than simply storing and retrieving static data—it is about dynamically managing and recalling information in a way that enhances decision-making and contextual understanding. An ideal AI memory system should create associations, recognise patterns and retrieve information in a way that aligns with the current context."

However, standard RAG/AI methods work more like databases that only store exact and segmented pieces of data. That is a major gap in our method. "You Su, distinguished assistant professor in the department of computer science—

## AI in Pop-culture

### Frankenstein

**Author:** Mary Shelley  
**How it ends:** In the 19th c novel, Victor Frankenstein, the creator, dies, wishing he had destroyed his creation who killed his brother and fiancé. His creation, the monster, commits suicide.



### 2001: A Space Odyssey

**Director:** Stanley Kubrick  
**How it ends:** Astronaut Dave Bowman deactivates HAL 9000 by shutting down its memory circuits after the AI attempts to kill the crew.



### Terminator series

**Director:** James Cameron  
**How it ends:** The Terminator is killed and the Skynet's defence grid is destroyed.



### Ex Machina

**Director:** Alex Garland  
**How it ends:** The creation, Ava, ends up killing the creator, Nathan.



### Blade Runner

**Director:** Ridley Scott  
**How it ends:** The AI "replicant", Roy Batty, spares Rick Deckard, the blade runner, in his final moments before succumbing to his programmed death.

ence and engineering and a former senior researcher at Microsoft, told ET in an earlier interview.

That brings us back to humans and their dreams. It is said what you can dream you can become. So, let's return to Philip K Dick's question, "Do Androids dream of electric sheep?" With almost limitless memory and computational power, machines may dream—not of earth but of the wider galaxy that is waiting for that interstellar dreamer.

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DeepSeek can be intelligent, and even exhibit impressive moments of insight like AlphaGo did, without being sentient or conscious.

Consciousness is not the same as intelligence. I can't say if it is even possible for a silicon-based system to have the capacity for consciousness"

**SUSAN SCHNEIDER**, director, Center for the Future Mind, Florida Atlantic University

Computers became better than human players years ago. The Turing Test was passed long ago in chess. In fact, the way to distinguish between computers and humans in chess is by looking at the errors that humans make. But you have to remember that chess is a game and with a very specific set of rules"

**VISWANATHAN ANAND**, former world chess champion

## 'While the Taliban Try to Change Afghans, the Reverse is Also True'

To be called the Rupert Murdoch of Afghanistan can be a compliment or a jab. In the case of **Saad Mohseni**, the scale tips towards the former—a nod to his impact on a country that didn't have much by way of the media 23 years ago. When he was a kid, after the 1979 Soviet invasion of his home country, Mohseni's diplomat parents sought asylum in Australia. When the US overthrew the Taliban regime in 2002, Kabul beckoned him. In war-ravaged Afghanistan, Mohseni established, with US support, the media company MOBY Group and started a private FM channel, Arman FM, which played something that had been banned by the Taliban earlier—music. He later launched television and online platforms, delivering news and entertainment, including licensed, Indian saas-bahu serials. His business expanded to South and Central Asia, West Asia and Africa. With the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the Taliban back in power, things have changed. Tellingly, Taliban 2.0 haven't thrown out the MOBY Group, although there have been changes in programming.

Mohseni was in India for the Jaipur Literature Festival to talk about his memoir, *Radio Free Afghanistan*. He spoke to **Nirmal John** on the current state of Afghanistan, women's rights, conflict within Taliban and more. Edited excerpts:

**It has been more than three years since the US withdrawal. How stable is the situation right now?**

Afghanistan has been mired in conflicts for decades. A lot of people forget how stable Afghanistan was before the Soviet invasion. 1978 and '79 were horrendous years with a tsunami of events that we haven't recovered from. There were the Soviet invasion, the Iranian revolution and the seizure of the mosques in Mecca, which really radicalised the Saudis. There was also the peace deal between Egypt and Israel that was provocative for a lot of people in the Arab world. Before that, people could drive from Europe all the way to India. Afghanistan since the Taliban (came back) has been relatively stable in that there has been no fighting. There are, of course, groups like ISIS, but in terms of people's daily lives, the impact is minimal. It is the

first time the country is experiencing some form of stability in decades. The flipside is that you have a regime that is fairly dictatorial and intrusive. Since girls can't go to school and there are limitations in terms of what women can do, it is not really an environment that people would welcome. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have left or are trying to leave the country. But the fact that people can go about their lives without getting killed is welcomed, and the Taliban are seen as more honest and less corrupt than the previous government. But Afghanistan continues to face a humanitarian crisis. Two million people are close to starvation.

## What role can India play in Afghanistan?

Indians may not be familiar with Afghanistan beyond Kabulwala, but Afghans are very familiar with India and its culture. One of the first series we dubbed was *Kyunki... Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi...*, which

was a massive hit, and was sort of transformative for the country. It is good that India still has some engagement in the region, but people-to-people connect has come to a standstill.

## How have things changed for your media house under Taliban 2.0?

We have been forced to stop music. We had our own version of the Idol format called *Afghan Star*—that stopped. We don't have soap operas. We have continued with game shows, chat shows, travel shows and cooking shows. On the news side, we continue to air programmes that deal with

**"The leadership is very much stuck in 4th century BC and they are based in Kandahar. The people in the cities, especially in Kabul, members of the cabinet and so forth, are much younger and they believe the country needs to be more engaged"**

corruption, social issues and so forth. Is it exactly as it was before? Probably not. It's not 100% (of what it used to be), but it's probably 90%. But that 10% is pretty dramatic. Afghans still have an array of programming to choose from. When it comes to girls, it has been almost three and half years since they have not been to school. What will happen to them? There will almost be muscle atrophy. But we are trying, we have a lot of television education programmes now. Are they game-changers? No, nothing replaces real schools. However, in terms of girl's education levels, we are trying to be a bridge between before the ban and

now. Ultimately, it may take a few years, but they will have to allow girls to go back to school.

## What is the power equation between Kabul and Kandahar?

You have different people with different points of view. Some have moderate views and some are less moderate than others. The leadership is very much stuck in 4th century BC and they are based in Kandahar. Abiding by the leader is mandatory from a religious point of view because they have pledged allegiance. But there is a growing sense of frustration as there are people who understand that the leader is not interested in engaging with the world. The people in the cities, especially in Kabul, members of the cabinet and so forth, are much younger and their views reflect the views of a lot of Afghans who believe that the country needs to be more engaged and that it should be a member of the global community. Some of them have seen the world.

## Will these differences come to a boil?

I think it will, it is not a question of if, but when. Something has to give. I can't see this continuing indefinitely. There is the risk that the country could still get dragged back. We can't take anything for granted. The situation is not good, but it could be far worse. What is interesting is that while the Taliban are trying to change the people of Afghanistan, the reverse is also true.

## What do you mean by that?

The tolerance of women on the street, as compared with Taliban 1.0. They still have women working in government offices; if you go to the airport they still stamp your passport. There is tolerance of women in the media—there was no television during Taliban 1.0. In the 1990s, they were not allowed to walk on the street by themselves. Now they can drive. While that is not the case everywhere and much depends on local administrators, in major cities they enjoy more freedom than in the 1990s.

**What can help the Taliban 2.0 gain the legitimacy they are craving for from the international community?**

Two things—allowing girls to go back to school, and inclusivity. You cannot have a political movement completely monopolised in a nation as diverse as Afghanistan. People need to feel they are part of the process.

**You have been accused of being an American agent, but you have continued to work with Taliban after US withdrawal.**

Now we are being accused of being Taliban sympathisers because we are advocating engagement with Afghanistan (laughs). Our view has always been that we must empower the population and that we have to be truth-tellers. On the news side, we have advocated for transparency. The public demanded entertainment and we gave them what they wanted. Since the return of the Taliban, it was a difficult period because we did not know what to do—to leave or to stay. Leaving felt like abandoning, not just the population but also our employees. So the question was, how do we make the most of what we have. To report on what is happening in the country—that was important to us. We have continued to develop entertainment programme even in a restrictive environment. That said, we still have to reassess periodically. It is not a foregone conclusion that we will stay.

## What made you write the book now?

Twenty years ago, there was a lot of hope. With that hope I went back to Afghanistan and created a media group, starting off with a radio station and then expanding into television. We had five networks of TV and radio stations. The book focuses on what we did inside the country. It is the story of the media group told through the different characters that worked with us. When I first thought about writing the book, I thought we were going to have to shut down and it would be cathartic to write. We have continued to remain in the country. I wanted to tell the story of the country and its transformation. In five years, we may look back and say those 20 years were crucial. The jury is still out on whether international occupation was a total failure or whether it set the foundation of a country that will go places.

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# Ode to Three Boxes

The sedan is now an endangered species, and that is worth shedding a tear or two for

Lijee Philip

Go back to when you were five. In your kindergarten, your teacher would've asked you to draw something you like. Many would have likely sketched with crayons or colour pencils, a house, your family—mostly as adorable stick figures with a circle for a face—and then a car. Now crank your memory a little bit more—and zoom in on that car. What shape did it have? For most kids, the car will have looked, well, like what they saw around them back then—an automobile that had three boxes—the engine under the bonnet, a cabin and a boot, housing the powertrain, passengers and the cargo separately. That was certainly the shape of dreams for Rajesh Wadhvani, a 45-year-old IT professional in Delhi. Fast forward to now, and despite the SUV craze taking over, when it was time to upgrade his car, Wadhvani chose the Honda City, a sleek sedan, over a bulkier SUV. "I've always preferred the comfort and prestige that come with a sedan," he says.

**AGE OF SUV** The sedan is now an endangered species. In all honesty, it has been the era of the SUV for a while. The message from the recently concluded Auto Expo—officially called the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025—in Delhi made for grim realisation for those who were and are still enamoured of this body type. There were few cars on offer that were three-boxed, signalling that

**The word 'sedan' possibly originated in the 1600s in France, where it meant a covered chair carried on poles. In 1912, the term was used in the marketing material of two Studebaker cars. The first true sedan body style came from Hudson Motor Company in 1913**

the shape is perhaps well and truly in the rear-view mirror. The look was rarer still when it came to the future of the automobile—the electric powertrain—which came in many new shapes, but less so in sedan. But why?

**REVERSE GEAR** Alas, it is the passing of an era in automotive terms, an era that lasted a century. The word sedan possibly originated in the 1600s in France, where it meant a covered chair carried on poles, a preserve of the privileged. The idea of a covered chair carried on into the era of the automobile, when in 1912, the term was used in the marketing material of two Studebaker cars. Automobile historians say the first true sedan body style came from the Hudson Motor Company in 1913. Over the next few decades, there were various iterations of the body shape—from the sedanette to the saloon to the notchback to the coupé. From the imposing Impala to the menacing Mustang to India's very own

Ambassador, based on the Morris Oxford, the body style endured wars, trends, fashion and the test of time. Until now.

From the humble Premier Padmini to the aspirational Honda City, sedans once symbolised milestones in life in India, and around the world, especially for those climbing the corporate ladder. These days the symbols of success have been reshaped, and the rise of SUVs with their higher ground clearance, larger interiors and versatile features seemingly sync more smoothly with consumer aspirations.

In India, the sedan segment has seen a steady decline in market share. In 2020, SUVs held just 29% of the market, but by 2024, they surged to 54%. In contrast, the sedan's market share dropped from 11.6% to 8%. "While compact sedans like the Suzuki Dzire, Tata Tigor and Honda Amaze still attract attention in the sub-4-metre

**The downturn in the sedan market is not as severe in the luxury segment as it has been in mass-market brands. High-end sedans like Mercedes-Benz C- and E-Class, BMW 3 and 5 Series, and Audi A4 and A6 are popular. Santosh Iyer, MD & CEO of Mercedes-Benz India, says sedans command 40% of its sales**



space, mid-size sedans such as the Suzuki Ciaz, Hyundai Verna and Honda City are struggling to maintain their appeal," says a senior official of a Delhi-based car manufacturer.

**THE ODD OPTION** RC Bhargava, chairman of Maruti Suzuki, the country's largest car

maker, reflects on the changing trends in the industry: "No body style remains permanent. Right now, SUVs are in demand and, as manufacturers, we provide what the consumer wants."

According to Bhargava, as India moves toward 100% e-mobility, both SUVs and sedans will coexist in the market. But for now, SUVs dominate, with the

passenger vehicle market seeing a shift from sedans to taller, bulkier models. Even as they cater to the SUV craze, manufacturers like Maruti Suzuki, Honda, Volkswagen and Skoda are still launching the occasional sedan. In fact, Maruti Suzuki launched an upgraded version of the Dzire as recently as November 2024, hoping to spark some growth.

Similarly, Honda upgraded its Amaze last year. Critics would say that Honda hasn't launched enough SUVs and that partly explains its sales decline over the years. But as a senior official of a car company says, the real feel of a car still comes from a three-box design, and there is a core set of customers who still opt for the sedan category, because of the richness of its design interpretations. Volkswagen and Skoda too have launched sedans such as the Virtus and Slavia, which haven't quite stormed the sales charts, but give consumers an option of another body type. Toyota Kirloskar too recently launched the Camry hybrid.

Interestingly, the downturn in the sedan market is not as severe in the luxury segment as it has been in mass-market brands. High-end sedans like the Mercedes-Benz C- and E-Class, BMW 3 and 5 Series, and Audi A4 and A6 are still popular. Santosh Iyer, MD & CEO of Mercedes-Benz India, says sedans remain strong in the luxury segment, with their sedan portfolio commanding 40% of its sales. That is, however, the exception to the rule.

## ELECTRIC FUTURE?

Will the sedan segment see a revival, particularly in its electric avatar? Not necessarily.

Ultimately, the three-box design was an outcome of the drivetrain. The electric powertrain is significantly smaller and has markedly different and fewer components than fossil fuel engines, and that has a dramatic impact on car design.

For one, EV allows for repackaging of the interior, since the engine bay can be smaller. It also means the centre of gravity of the vehicle sits lower, resulting in different riding characteristics.

The reimagining of the interior, the morphing relationship between the driver and the vehicle with autonomous driving, and the crunching of the engine bay because of a smaller powertrain all point to one thing—the first principles dictating automobile design will be changing over the next decade or so.

"With EVs there is freedom or opportunity to change the layout of the vehicle, push wheels to the corners, have tight overhangs and leverage the electronics and sensors in the vehicle to suit advanced technology features," says a designer of a leading auto company. While SUVs and even vans are a natural fit for electric—thanks to their larger interiors and higher ground clearance—sedans could still carve out a niche. In the near term, with the coexistence of hybrid, internal combustion and electric powertrains, there's potential to eke out a little more life from the sedan as a form, especially for premium models.

Currently, models like the BYD Seal and Hyundai Ioniq 6, with their long wheelbases, premium interiors and

**The three-box design was an outcome of the drivetrain. But the electric powertrain is significantly smaller and has markedly different and fewer components than fossil fuel engines, and that has a dramatic impact on car design**

advanced technology, are already redefining the concept of electric sedans, though they remain priced above ₹40 lakh.

The likelihood of this filtering down is, however, low.

Ravi Bhatia, president of Jato Dynamics, which analyses auto data, suggests that while premium electric sedans are showing immediate viability, mass-market EV sedans may take time to gain traction. "Battery costs need to fall below \$80/kWh for electric sedans to become truly affordable for the average Indian consumer," he says.

The flexibility of electric powertrains allows for innovative designs, like more spacious interiors and sleek aerodynamics. The key for EV sedans will be balancing performance, range and price to compete against the more popular SUV body style.

For now, though, SUVs rule the roads, and sedans, though fading in numbers, are far from disappearing. Their future, particularly in the electric space, will depend on innovation, pricing and how well manufacturers can tap into the evolving desires of Indian consumers.

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## 'For Many Filmmakers, Northeast is an Alien Region... from Another Planet'

In the early 1970s, Shillong became the stage for an unexpected flashpoint when a Bollywood movie laced with stereotypes ignited the fury of Naga students. Ye *Gulistan Hamara*, a Hindi film starring Dev Anand and Sharmila Tagore, revolved around a tribal community in the Northeast. But something cut deep. The Nagas found the song, "Mera Naam Aao", and its picturisation a crude and offensive misrepresentation of their Ao brethren. Outraged, the students vandalised a movie hall, forcing the Meghalaya police to crack down with lathis. Several student protesters later found their way into the ranks of Naga insurgents, with one of them, VS Atem, becoming a top commander of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM).

Bollywood has long played fast and loose with the sensitivities of the Northeast, a region rich in linguistic and ethnic diversity. So when the second season of *Paatal Lok* dropped last month—featuring characters speaking Nagamese, the lingua franca of Nagaland, and capturing the state's turmoil with rare nuance—it came as a refreshing surprise to those familiar with the region. Among the unexpected highlights was the presence of award-winning Assamese filmmaker **Jahnu Barua**, 72, who stepped in front of the camera to play Uncle Ken, a former rebel leader torn between his past and his vision of peace and prosperity for the troubled state. In an interview with **Shantanu Nandan Sharma**, the Mumbai-based director shares his thoughts on

Bollywood's portrayal of the Northeast and what led him to step out from behind the camera and into the spotlight. Edited excerpts:

**You rarely step in front of the camera. What made you act in *Paatal Lok*, Season 2?**

I acted in school plays a long time ago. But ever since I became a filmmaker, acting was never on my agenda. However, my close friends have known for decades that I have a knack for mimicking characters. Once Basu Chatterjee offered me the role of a Japanese astrologer in the television serial *Kakaji Kahin* (1988), and I obliged. Several fellow filmmakers have approached me with acting roles, usually for characters with a northeastern look, but I invariably declined. Often, such characters are introduced merely for comic relief, and I don't appreciate that approach.

When the writer of *Paatal Lok* 2 narrated the script to me, I felt the story was genuine and presented the

Northeast with authenticity. The writer, Sudip Sharma, grew up in Guwahati and, more importantly, understands the sensitivities of the region. That convinced me to accept the role.

**Is acting a challenge for a director?**

For a filmmaker, acting in a film is a beautiful experience, it brings a realisation. It is easy to shout at actors from behind the camera, but once you step in front of it, you truly understand the difficulties actors face. Playing Uncle Ken was particularly difficult. He is physically worn out, battling terminal kidney cancer, yet remains mentally strong. I was given a walking

stick, but I had to portray a character with a strong mind.

**What's your take on the portrayal of Northeast India in mainstream Hindi movies?**

It's a two-fold issue: how the rest of India perceives the Northeast and how the Northeast views the mainstream, particularly cinema. For many filmmakers, the Northeast feels like an alien region, as though it is from another planet. Hindi cinema, driven by commercial interests, often overlooks themes or characters from distant regions because the market dynamics don't demand it. This is a misguided perception, but that's how films are made.

**"The Northeast has a rich history. When society is ignorant about a region, it manifests everywhere, including in Bollywood. The Northeast may have been politically integrated into India, but social integration is far from complete"**

**Is that the only reason we hardly see Northeast faces in Bollywood? Are language and accent a barrier?**

Language and accent are not a problem at all. In the realm of visual arts, audiences often embrace diversity in language and accent—it's seen as something beautiful. The real issue, I feel, is that many young talents from the Northeast, though full of dreams and talent, lack the aggression required to enter and survive in Bollywood. Danny Denzongpa (an actor from Sikkim) is an exception. Despite many obstacles, he carved a niche in popular Hindi cinema. The challenges are clear: most people from the Northeast have distinct physical features, which lead to discrimination. However, we must recognise that discrimination can happen anywhere in the world.

**As someone from the region, does it hurt you?**

Yes, it hurts. I recall popular actors and filmmakers asking me, "Is it safe to travel to the Northeast?" That kind of ignorance hurts me. For decades, the

**"For a filmmaker, acting brings a realisation. It is easy to shout at actors from behind the camera, but once you step in front of it, you truly understand the difficulties they face"**

perception was that we lived in jungles. But I don't want to solely blame filmmakers. The entire system is at fault.

**What do you mean by the fault of the system?**

To a large extent, political leaders—particularly from Assam and the Northeast—have allowed such ignorance to seep into society. For many decades, Indian history textbooks didn't even include a chapter on the Northeast. Did our own leaders address this with the Central government? No. The Northeast has a rich, vibrant history. When society is ignorant about a region, it manifests everywhere, including in Bollywood. The Northeast may have been politically integrated into India, but social integration is still far from complete.

**Why is Bollywood reluctant to explore the Northeast as a destination for film shoots, even though the insurgency has receded?**

I believe there should be more films and series that feature Northeast themes and actors. The state governments in the region should encourage such initiatives.

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# Metallics Are the New Neutral, Welcome to the Gilded Age! It's Bling with Manners

Gold, silver, and that ethereal gleam of white... The Shimmer of Love is upon us in 2025, with gilded goddesses – yes, at the *Golden Globes* – all blinged out, yet exuding cool, quiet confidence

## SOFT LAUNCH



KANIHA GAHLAUT

If you've scrolled through Instagram, caught a recent red-carpet event, or attended a night – or even day – wedding, you've probably noticed something unmistakably shiny taking over. Metallics – gold, silver, and that ethereal gleam of white – are everywhere.

From nails to bags, shoes to clothes, makeup to hair accessories, the shimmer is unavoidable. As critics aptly put it at this year's Golden Globes Awards night last month: Welcome to the New Gilded Age.

Now, hang on a second. Wasn't it just a few months ago that we were all whis-

pering about 'quiet luxury'? You know, those muted tones and anonymous cashmere coats meant to exude old money without so much as a logo? And now, suddenly, it's bling again everywhere?

This constant swing – understated minimalism one moment, unapologetic extravagance the next – is exactly what makes fashion so gloriously irrational. It requires a certain suspension of reality and loves an overstatement here and there. It doesn't ask for logic. It demands a shrug and a 'Why not?'

Modern fashion's 'ages' are fleeting, less like the Victorian era and more like an Instagram story: here one minute, gone the next. A fashion age can last a single season. Or sometimes, just a single awards show.

Fashion, unlike an op-ed writer reluctant to repeat herself, openly embraces its cyclical nature. If there's one thing fashion loves more than claiming new trends, it's rehashing old ones. From Cleopatra to Kareena Kapoor, women



have been stepping into golden outfits that could blind bystanders for centuries – simply because they were in the mood to shine.

But here's the kicker: while metallics may feel like a spontaneous glitter explosion, the fashion industry operates like a well-oiled machine. Designers, brands, and tastemakers plan these 'trends' months in advance before they hit runways and, eventually, markets.

So, what's behind this golden moment? Could it be rebellion? After years of neutral palettes and grey tracksuit chic (thanks, pandemic), maybe we're collectively craving a little sparkle.

But not too much. Mind you, this still doesn't feel like a shouty kind of bling, despite its blindy-ness. It's bling with

manners. Take this season's red carpet: metallic-threaded gowns with intricate detailing that shimmer, not scream.

Think gilded goddesses – Nicole Kidman in shimmering one-shoulder Balenciaga, Demi Moore in golden Armani, and Mindy Kaling in Ashi Studio, all blinged out yet exuding quiet confidence.

## After years of neutral palettes and grey tracksuit chic, maybe we're collectively craving a little sparkle

Perhaps no one captured this mood quite like Alexander McQueen's banishment from the 2025 Fall-Winter collection. As she trailed down the runway last October in metallic threads that moved like light itself, she became an ethereal figure – both futuristic and hauntingly ancient. Angelina Jolie embraced this stunning (though hard-to-carry-off) number for her Golden Globes moment.

Metallics aren't just for galas anymore. Fashion blogs are showing how to pair a silver top with jeans, or rock

gold sneakers for a morning coffee run. Metallics are being called the new neutral.

And why not? It's a new age, and the rules are forever being mixed up – for good. Gold, silver, and white offer that rare combination of drama and versatility. They're equal parts Cleopatra's

throne and C-3PO's polished frame. Yes, even a Star Wars droid can teach us something about timeless style. Because fashion, like the movies, loves a good reboot.

So here we are, basking in this gilded glow. For now, metallics are for everyone, and they are everywhere. They're lighting up red carpets, casual brunches, and everything in between. This age will pass, as all fashion ages do. But for the moment, let's embrace the shimmer. Shine on, my friends. Shine on.

## DATA CRUNCHER



ATANU BISWAS

## Your Place or Mine? Or Hang At a Third Place?

These in-between spaces lift spirits, and not just for Narasimha avatar

Last month, Starbucks decided that you'll need to buy something at their cafes if you want to use their restrooms or just hang out. This seems only natural for most of us, considering to simply hang around or use the facilities at an establishment without ordering anything is rather dodgy, if not downright rude.

But for the coffee chain, it is a big shift from its 2018 'open-door' policy that it introduced after two African American men were arrested in an outlet in Philadelphia while they were waiting there for a business meeting. The incident caused a national uproar. Starbucks decided to declare its stores as 'welcoming spaces' regardless of whether people visiting them made a purchase or not.

Effectively, Starbucks cemented its reputation as a 'third place' – not home, not workplace, but separate from those two social environments. So, is Starbucks 'rollbacking' a setback for the 'third place' concept?

In a 1982 paper, 'The Third Place', sociologists Ray Oldenburg and Dennis Brissett defined the concept of a third place, with Oldenburg elaborating in his 1989 book, *The Great Good Place*, that it refers to 'a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work.'

Cafes, gyms, tea stalls, barbershops, salons, bookshops, bars, social clubs, and malls are standard options. The Bengali concept of the 'rowak' (front porch or step area) as a venue for such (male) gatherings, though, is fast disappearing. The neighbourhood 'sporting/cultural club' remains an option in Bengali neighbourhoods for such a third place.

Oldenburg viewed them as spaces for democracy and significant for civic engagement. In the forthcoming sequel to his book, *The Great Good Place: Havens and Hangouts at the Heart of Community*, he argues with co-author Karen Christensen, that these 'third places' have a vital role in addressing the major challenges of today: climate change, loneliness, and political polarisation.

Globally, cafes have particularly evolved as ideal third places. 'The place for them all, a meeting place for lovers, a club for people of common tastes or interests, an office for the occasional businessman, a resting place for the dreamer, and a home for many a lonely soul' – this is how the Viennese coffee house is described in Ludwig Hirschfeld's 1931 guidebook, *The Vienna That's Not in the Baedeker*. Perhaps, this description should serve as a model for the kind of cafes we need today: third places where you can unwind and be yourself. Other than passing the peanuts and extending some courtesy and good humour, you have no other obligations.

Interestingly, most third places globally have derived their identities from beverages they serve. There were '3.2 bars' (serving 3.2% alcohol by weight 'low-point beer' mostly to young adults) in the US, gin palaces in Britain, and the still popular Biergarten (beer gardens) in Germany. Coffee is particularly important, as the French word for it 'café' makes amply clear.

Early examples of distinct physical spaces separate from home and workplace include the ancient Greek agora (public square) and imperial Chinese teahouse. During the 17th century, coffee shops in Europe evolved into social hubs. Engineers developed the first public railway in British pubs, while Paris cafes brewed the French Revolution.

Coffeehouses in 17th c. Britain were called 'Penny Universities' because they provided opportunities for intellectual exchange at minimal cost: a pipe cost a penny, a cup of coffee was two pence, and a newspaper was free. In Kolkata, the Coffee House on College Street remains an iconic contributor to the city's 'intellectual' and cultural life.

There's a distinction between public spaces and third places, though. According to Christensen, most coffee shops and pubs actually don't qualify as third places. In third places, people are diverse and often feisty. These spaces have regulars, are affordable, convenient, unstructured, and serve as neutral ground for conversation and laughter. According to Oldenburg, third places are fun. Here, we smile, laugh, joke, tease.

Unfortunately, Covid lockdowns damaged many such in-between places. Consequently, the third place is now being adapted and promoted globally – especially online – in the post-pandemic era. Starbucks may have just got behind the curve.

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

## Why I Am a Staunch Neighbourhoodist

Neighbourhoods are real, regular tangible units of belonging, making them ripe for our love and loyalty, over king and country

### RED HERRING



INDRAJIT HAZRA

I'm a staunch neighbourhoodist. By which I mean I believe neighbourhoodism, not nationalism, shapes my central identity as a citizen as well as an individual in society, both being the same thing. Or, at least, they should be.

So, while I set out early Wednesday morning to cast my vote in my usual polling booth in a school classroom (ah, youth!), in Mayur Vihar Phase I, it was not the future of Delhi the state, New Delhi/NCR the city, and certainly not India the country, I had in mind. It was that of Mayur Vihar I and the prospects of one day seeing a 'Viksit Yamnapaar' that made me travel all the way from GK 1 to Delhi Assembly No. 57 a.k.a. Patparganj, before setting off to the airport for another state/city/neighbourhood.

Neighbourhoodism, as the term suggests, is investing one's well-being, loyalty, and love in a neighbourhood. In turn, the neighbourhood's well-being becomes all-important to the person irrespective of whether she resides there or not. While 'Saare Jahan se achha' may resonate for many people, chest-expansive NRIs included, as a descriptor for India, for me, it's the

5-6 km radius of geography rippling across my old neighbourhood in Mayur Vihar I. I will give my life to defend it. Well, not my life, but the next best thing – my vote – to defend it.

There is no reason why patriotism, or matritiosm, should be nailed to a nation-state alone. Frankly, loving a whole country is an act of imagination, a leap of collective faith where you imagine this great commonality between you sitting in Goregaon with someone sitting in Gurgaon. I'm okay with that – whatever floats your boat. But I find it easier, more 'natural' if you will, to love, be attached and loyal to a place that I actually engage with much more regularly. WYSIWYL: What You See Is What You Love.

Don't get me wrong. I'm fond of going to Khan Market, and Lodhi Road, even

certain parts of Mumbai when the circumstances are right. But it would be the same way one is fond of visiting places like Berlin or Siem Reap, lovely to have around so as to visit. But, without getting all xenophobic about it, they ain't my 'hood.

IPL has given a taste of what I'm trying to say here. Of course people shout their heads off shouting 'INDIA! INDIA-A-A!' But IPL has concentrated some of that love to one's city or state, which is a start. But cities are really a conglomeration of neighbourhoods, the latter having their own character, flaws, foibles, and attractions. Just because there's no neighbourhood anthem or flag hardly means one must be prioritised over the other. (Actually, a neighbourhood anthem and flag isn't a bad idea.)

Like nationalism, neighbourhood-

I will give my life to defend it. Well, not my life, but the next best thing – my vote – to defend it



SAARE JAHAN SE ACHHA, MAYUR VIHAR HAMARA...

dism could, in theory, be put to the Tebbitt test – that controversial idea coined by British Conservative Party member Norman Tebbit who, in a 1990 interview, said: 'A large proportion of Britain's Asian population fail to pass the cricket test. Which side do they cheer for? It's an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?'

Neighbourhoodism sidesteps this silly, constrictive 'Are you with India or with England/Australia?' test for NRIs. A neighbourhood (inshallah) doesn't have to play against the city or country it resides in. (Unless, of course, the former decides to barricade itself against perceived injustice by the latter.)

And like multiple citizenship – where a person is recognised as a citizen in more than one country – one can, indeed, be a multiple neighbourhoodist. I certainly am, my other neighbourhood of love and loyalty being the 5-6 km radius rippling across my home near Khudiram Metro Station in the Garia area in Kolkata. This bears little resemblance to the city that lays itself outside like cobbled-together rubble beyond my Lakshmanrekha.

Which is why I take a missing manhole, an unlit street, music blasting from loudspeakers at night far more seriously than state of the economy, India-US relations, who becomes Delhi CM today. For me, the local councillor, even MLA, is far more important than the CM, never mind the 'abstraction' of a PM. Everything outside my two neighbourhoods is foreign affairs.

indrajit.hazra@timesofindia.com

## Gentle Men Who Just Want To Be Left to Themselves

A non-voyeuristic, non-melodramatised depiction of intimacy in a socially intrusive world

### FILM FATALE



ANNA MM VETTICAD

At a time when the global spotlight is trained on Indian independent cinema, another indie gem grabbed a coveted award just days back. Writer-director Rohan Parashuram Kanawade's Marathi film *Sabar Bonda* (Cactus Pears) had its world premiere at Sundance Film Festival where it won the top prize in the World Cinema: Dramatic category.

Sabar Bonda is a story of rejection and acceptance, conservatism and progressiveness running parallel to each other. It opens on a loss. Anand, played by Bhushan Manoj, is in a city hospital processing the emotions evoked by his father's passing.

Within moments the scene shifts to the busyness that follows a death, when rituals and community gatherings cushion us from fixating on the pain that grief brings. As Anand prepares to travel to his ancestral village to perform the last rites, a fleeting conversation between him and his mother Suman (Jayshri Jagtap) indicates that he is a misfit in the crowd back home.

Society, not just in India, tends to pester single people, however com-

fortable they may be in their singleness. But we learn almost immediately that there is more going on here. It's not that Anand does not want to marry. The point is, he does not want to marry a woman. Since he does not bow to pressure, and does not feel obliged to explain himself to anyone beyond his immediate family, pesky relatives can get aggressive.

In this trying environment, as Anand mourns his father's demise, Sabar Bonda chronicles his bond with Suman, and the revival of an old relationship in the village. All the while, the film trains an observant eye on life in the countryside, occasionally with a sense of humour, never with condescension.

Through Vikas Urs' camera, we witness religious practices here, the abuse a man might be subjected to if he does not conform to society's notions of the path men must follow, the customs, intrusiveness and blissful natural beauty.

Kanawade does not step gingerly around LGBT-plus themes. If Anand, his mother, his friend Ballya (Suraj Suman) and others discuss certain truths in whispers, it's not because they are squeamish about homosexuality, but because

staying closeted is essential for the safety of gay persons in their milieu.

Mainstream Indian cinema is eons away from normalising LGBT-plus characters. That said, there has been some forward movement on this front in recent years. In 2022, for instance, Harshvardhan Kulkarni's Hindi language comedy *Badhaai Do*, starring Bhumi Pednekar and Rajkumar Rao, depicted a lavender marriage with empathy.

In 2023, Jeo Baby's Malayalam drama *Kaathal*: The Core featured a star as major as Jyothika playing a woman who divorces her husband after years of marriage because he is gay. That he was played by Mammootty, one of India's biggest superstars who has built his mass fandom on an image of conventional masculinity, made it especially significant.

Kaathal, which Mammootty also produced, was lovely in many ways. But it is important to note that it pointedly steered clear of any physical connect between his character and the man we are told is his lover.

Sabar Bonda has no such qualms. The film's sensitive, non-voyeuristic, non-melodramatised exploration of physical intimacy between men and the natural progression towards it in the script, is one of the stand-out elements that make it a milestone for India. Another is its focus on, and treatment of, a gay man's equation with his mother.

There is so much else, too, to recommend in Sabar Bonda. Kanawade's mellow storytelling mirroring the rhythms of Anand's surroundings; the portrayal of homosexuality within an already marginalised social group; measured performances and technical skill.

In contrast to the teenaged male predators in Shuchi Talati's *Girls Will Be Girls*, an Indian indie that raked in two awards at Sundance 2024, Sabar Bonda is about gentle men who just want to be left to themselves. Kanawade's debut feature is poignant, warm and stirs the soul.

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



A SANCTUARY

## NO OFFENCE

Morparia



## How did the Scottish government respond to the backlash?

In response to the uproar, the Swinney-led Scottish government clarified that there were no plans to ban cats. They reassured the public that they would thoroughly review the recommendations from the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission.

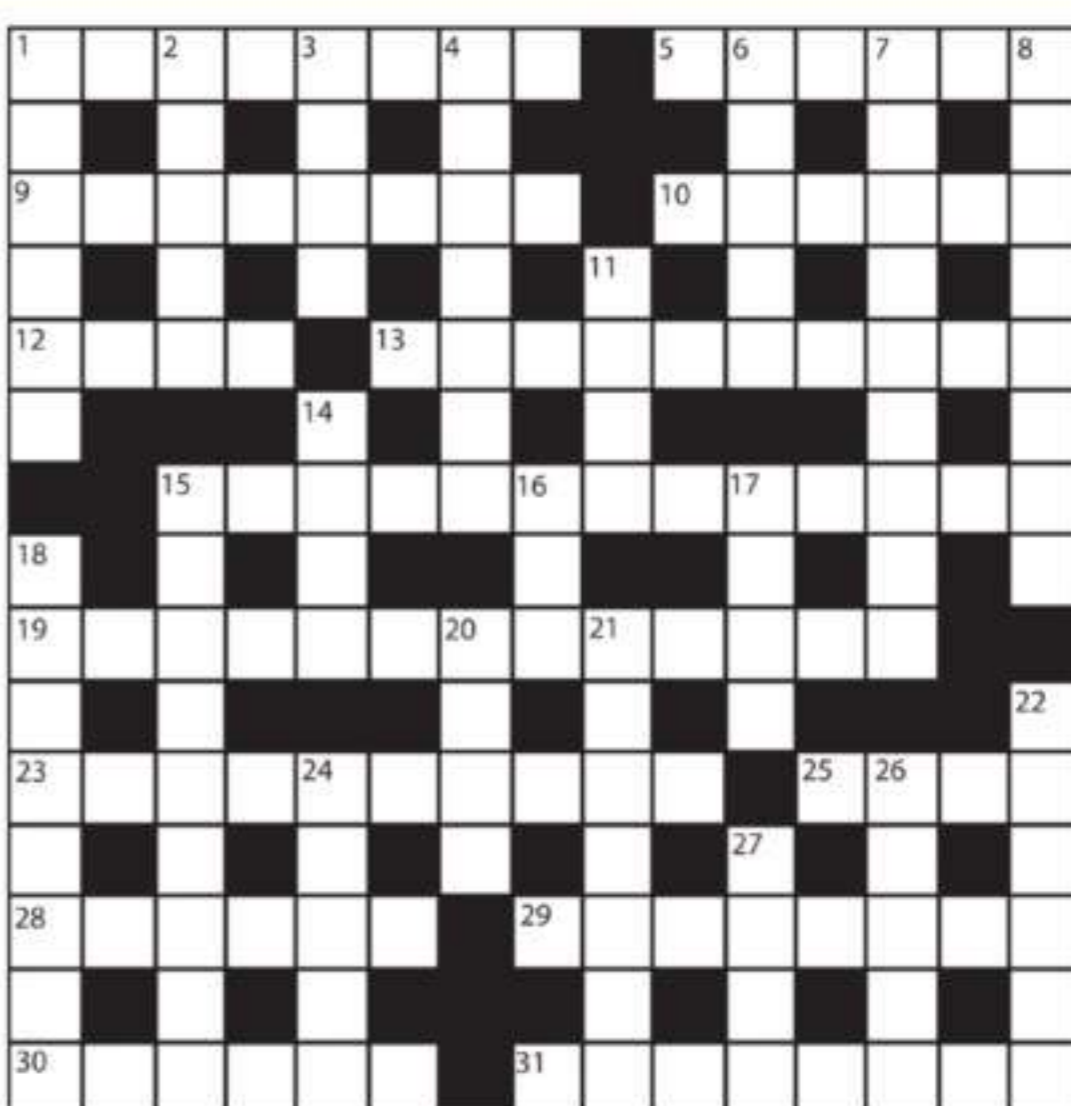
## What did animal rights activists have to say?

Animal rights groups like Cats Protection voiced their opposition to stricter measures. They argued that simple steps, like keeping cats indoors at dusk and dawn, could address concerns about wildlife. Alice Palombo, the charity's advocacy officer, emphasised that cats provide significant comfort to people, especially children, the elderly, and those with health issues. She advocated for the rights of cat owners to care for their pets without overly restrictive regulations.

Text: Team Sunday ET

## ET Sunday Crossword

0102



### ACROSS

- Prompt action in Special Protection Area in channel (8)
- Clever chap parks a vehicle in street (6)
- Plant, sort of allium enjoying rare year (4, 4)
- Sanction raid on suspect (6)
- Notice English agent (4)
- This CEO makes photochemical liquid for the eyes (10)
- Official statement: glue it, for example, on top (13)
- Barrister wasted no clues pursuing

### DOWN

- Dull cul-de-sac's not complete (6)
- Ni university (6, 7)
- Water protects very soft part of larynx (5, 5)
- Hear it initially in orchestra before overture ends (4)
- Girl lies nervously clutching old book (6)
- Sign with a sting in its tail (8)
- English flower festival (6)
- Look closely at big ship – it may bring out pupils (8)

- Big drop in small swelling (5)
- Rod's ten beer cases (4)
- County hosts new plays and Caribbean music (7)
- Head of army reserves held his men in main vessel (5)
- Danger signal in marble hall going off: hotel's evacuated (5, 4)
- Awfully neat financial centre shows stickability (8)
- Knock out small cash (4)
- Fluff this sort of clue? (4)
- A sport designed to involve bloody carnivores (9)
- Mystery vehicle uses some biofuel up (3)
- Queen's left feeling ill? No problem (4)
- A sequel's planned. I gathered, to achieve balance (8)
- A priest in church makes long garment (4)
- A French girl swallows potassium? That's unfortunate (7)
- Note singer's broadcast (6)
- Spanish golfer tackles one riddle (5)
- Child's melody in borders of Brigadoon (5)
- Examination by dentist or a lecturer (4)

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FEB  
India Expo Centre  
& Mart, Greater Noida



NARENDRA MODI  
Prime Minister

# Budget Fillip to Gig Workers Spurs E-comm Cos to Chip in

Brinda Sarkar & Sreeradha Basu

**Bengaluru:** E-commerce companies in India are stepping up their commitment to the health and well-being of their delivery partners to drive not just better performance but an improved quality of life. Last week, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in her Budget speech that the government will ensure healthcare benefits for gig workers under the PM Jan Arogya Yojana scheme, which provides insurance cover of ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospitalisation. Companies like Zomato, Swiggy, BigBasket, Delhivery and Zippzee, are moving beyond insurance to more comprehensive health and well-being benefits—like employee welfare funds for financial support during emergencies, on-road SOS support and emergency helplines, and regular health camps—to ensure better financial protection, higher retention and improved service quality. Delhivery has set up an employee welfare fund (EWF) under which it has disbursed over ₹1 crore to support delivery partners facing medical emergencies, accidents, or other unforeseen events during employment. The company has 50,000-odd delivery partners.

**TELEMEDICINE, COUNSELLING** Future expansions may include telemedicine services, a counselling support helpline and wellness incentives for delivery partners. Companies have also invested in on-road support for delivery

Going extra mile for the last-mile

Initiatives by e-commerce cos

Govt protection

Employee welfare funds for financial support during emergencies

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated in her Budget speech the government will ensure healthcare benefits for gig workers under PM Jan Arogya Yojana scheme

On-road SOS support and emergency helplines

Who's doing it

Swiggy, Zomato, Zippzee, Delhivery, BigBasket

partners. Zomato has introduced an SOS button on its app's home screen, which delivery partners can access during roadside emergencies. Swiggy has enhanced on-road safety of its four lakh delivery executives by equipping them with smart gear like reflector strips, raincoats, winter jackets, and BIS-approved helmets. The Bengaluru-based company, which recently went public, also organises road safety workshops in collaboration with state traffic and police departments, reinforcing safe riding practices. Zippzee founder and CEO Madhav Kasturia said the company is expanding rest areas, increasing access to drinking water, as well as improving route optimisation tech to make deliveries smoother. Others like Bigbasket and Delhivery have put in place comprehensive insurance

programmes. Bigbasket offers insurance coverage including medical, accident and term life insurance from the first day of joining. At Delhivery, riders enrolled in the fixed-salary model are covered under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation. Zippzee, too, is looking to expand its insurance coverage to ensure its riders have greater financial security.

**BENEFITS FOR WOMEN** Female delivery partners, too, remain a core priority. While Zippzee, Zomato, and Delhivery have rolled out maternity leave for women riders, Zomato has also introduced paid period leave and maternity insurance. It has also introduced self-defence training to empower and protect its female delivery partners by equipping them with the skills to respond confidently in challenging situations.

## Inroads into Reserved Seats

**►► From Page 1** This was despite the fact that former chief minister Kejriwal seemed to be setting the agenda freebies early on. AAP could barely hold on to its dedicated support base among the lower socio-economic classes. BJP reclaimed its traditional Punjabi Khat-

ri vote base and made inroads into AAP's Dalit constituency as it roared back to power. The party won four of the 12 constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes. AAP had swept all these seats five years earlier. In an address to party workers, Modi said people's power is supreme and that they ensured development and good governance won. "We guarantee we will leave no stone unturned to ensure the all-round development of Delhi and to make the lives of its people better."

BJP had been out of power in Delhi since 1998, when the Congress won under Sheila Dikshit and ruled Delhi for 15 years. In 2013, using the 'India Against Corruption' plank, Kejriwal defeated Dikshit and relegated Congress to political wilderness in the capital. However, in the run-up to the 2025 elections, AAP lost the moral high ground as its leaders found themselves embroiled in several corruption charges. Allegations of kickbacks in connection with the erstwhile Delhi excise policy and expenses incurred on renovation of the chief minister's residence appear to have particularly harmed the party.

## Eye on Expenditure

**►► From Page 1** Another reason for temp hiring, instead of getting delivery fleet on employee rolls, is to keep costs under control. A January report by HSBC Global Research said, "Quick commerce companies are projected to conclude FY26 with 5,000-5,500 dark stores. We believe leading companies like Zepto are likely to expand to 1,000 stores, and then look to optimise this capacity and improve profitability." According to Balasubramanian A, senior vice-president and business head at TeamLease Services, quick commerce currently employs 200,000 delivery personnel and 60,000 dark store workers. Quick delivery personnel earn ₹18,000-23,000 per month in metropolitan areas and ₹15,000-20,000 in non-metros. For dark store workers, monthly earnings typically fall within ₹12,000-18,000, plus incentives, said experts.

## Ease of Credit

**►► From Page 1** "And going forward too we will be very, very watchful, alert and very nimble and agile in whatever are the requirements of the banking system to provide liquidity, both transient, overnight, as well as more durable liquidity," said the RBI governor, adding that the regulator has numerous instruments at its disposal to control and manage liquidity. "And we will use them." "We have OMO (open market operations), we have buy-sell swaps of forex, we have various other tools, we have LAF (liquidity adjustment facility), we have VRR (variable repo rate) and we are using all of these measures to provide sufficient liquidity," Malhotra said. The RBI Friday cut the key interest rate by 25 basis points to 6.25%. Malhotra said most of the depreciation in the Indian currency has been driven by uncertainties that have arisen because of global factors, especially the tariff-related announcements by US President Donald Trump.

## Ahead of Urban Company IPO, Parent Turns Public Entity

**New Delhi:** At-home services provider Urban Company's parent Urbanclap Technologies has converted into a public entity, showed regulatory filings made with the corporate affairs ministry. It is a key step ahead of Urban Company filing papers for its initial public offering (IPO). The Prosus-backed startup is planning to file its draft red herring prospectus in the next two months, said people with knowledge of the matter. The company is reportedly aiming for a ₹3,000-crore issue. The Gurgaon-based firm's move towards its IPO comes at a time when multiple new-age companies are looking to go public. —Our Bureau

## Duty Tweaks Not Knee-jerk Reaction: FM

►► From Page 1

"After the budget, the few inputs I've had from some business leaders is that the orders for fast-moving consumer goods for April-June are already getting booked, and the industry is clearly seeing signs of a possible recovery of consumption," Sitharaman told reporters after addressing the RBI's central board at the customary post-budget meeting. As a result, many businesses are looking at reviewing their capacity utilisation, the FM said, adding that this means it can be safely assumed that the triggers for a consumption-driven cycle are clearly being felt by those who have to make investment decisions. "I see this as a positive sign and with yesterday's (Friday's) decision of the RBI, together things can move in alignment and the required traction we made in this course."

The basic customs duty changes in the budget were not a knee-jerk reaction to any global development and had been in the works for the past two years, Sitharaman added. "We will provide tariff protection as required by the industry while focusing on making industry more competitive." The minister said it was an ongoing process. "We want to make India a lot more investor-friendly, trade-friendly, and at the same time, balance it with Aatmanirbhar Bharat where we need to have production, particularly through the MSMEs."

### New Income Tax Bill

The FM said the new income tax bill, to replace the 60-year-old I-T Act, will be introduced in Parliament next week. After introduction in Parliament, the bill will be sent to a parliamentary standing committee for scrutiny. "Yesterday, the cabinet cleared the new income tax proposal. I hope to have it introduced in the Lok Sabha in the coming week. Post that it will go to a committee," Sitharaman told reporters after addressing the post-budget customary meeting. The bill will again go to the cabinet after the parliamentary committee gives its recommendations on it. After cabinet approval, it will again be introduced in Parliament. "I still have three critical stages to pass through," Sitharaman said to a query on the roll-out of the income tax law.

## Strategy Mirrors China's Experience

►► From Page 1

"With the launch of the Windsor, and battery-as-a-service (BaaS), we developed a solution for incremental acquisition cost of EVs by splitting the cost of the battery through smart finance programmes," says Rajeev Chhaba, CEO emeritus, JSW MG Motor India. Noting weak vehicle resale as one of the challenges in EV adoption, Chhaba says the

company has sought to address this through the 3-60 buyback plan. Indian automakers' strategy to go upmarket for electric mirrors China's experience, where McKinsey's latest Auto Consumer survey shows premium vehicle owners are switching to feature-rich EVs. Local manufacturers are hoping to replicate this, even as they maintain their strong presence in value segments, say experts.

Rajasthan State Road Development And Construction Corporation Ltd., JAIPUR			
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The auto industry has hit the brakes on semiconductor consumption for the first time since the pandemic, when it had gone into an overdrive after facing massive disruptions in global supply chains.

A massive chip shortage has now swung all the way to the other end of the spectrum, with automakers sitting on excess semiconductor stock, industry experts said.

On February 3, Eindhoven-headquartered NXP Semiconductors reported a 6% year-on-year decrease in chip consumption by the automotive industry for the December quarter. Geneva-headquartered STMicroelectronics said its revenue in the digital integrated circuits and radio frequency products segment decreased by 22.8% in its Q4 results on January 30 mainly because of a decrease in automotive. Advanced Driver Assistance Systems (ADAS) and infotainment.

US firm Microchip reported growth in the latest quarter but said the industrial and automotive sectors are two major sectors going through a big change because of too much inventory and less demand. Another US firm Texas Instruments (TI) saw mid-single digit automotive market decline due to more pronounced weakness outside China.

"Semiconductors are a cyclical industry," Hitesh Garg, vice-president and India managing director, NXP Semiconductors, told ET on January 2. "Post-pandemic, there was an industry boom for six or nine quarters. However, for the last three to four quarters, it has been sliding down in minus percentage. At this moment, we are in the negative cycle... India is in the same boat. India is not a big consumer of chips."

He noted that the semiconductor industry is a feeder industry, or a horizontal industry which feeds various industries, like telecom and automobile. "We are working in automotive. If the demand for the number of cars is not going up, it will impact us," Garg said.

#### GLOBAL DOWNTURN

This is indicative of a global trend, which ties back to companies getting jittery after the post-pandemic chip shortage. "Globally, automakers accumulated significant inventory in anticipation of sustained demand post-Covid. However, sales have tapered off over the last three to four quarters," said Ashim Sharma, senior partner and group head - business performance improvement consulting (auto, engineering, and logistics) at Nomura Research Institute (NRI).

"This mismatch between production and market demand has resulted in excess stock across the supply chain," Sharma said. "In addition, the industrial automation sector has witnessed sluggish investment activity."

According to the latest data from the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), domestic automobile dispatches from manufacturers to dealers increased by 11.6% in 2024, primarily driven by the two-wheeler segment.

#### JITTERY TIMES

Vinay Balkrishna Shenoy, managing director, Infineon Technologies India, said the general mood in the automotive industry has deteriorated significantly. "We can see that many customers are reducing their semiconductor inventories. At the same time, forecasts for global vehicle production are slightly down," he

Chip sales in the auto sector skid as the post-pandemic frenzy turns into an inventory glut. With tapering of sales and other expected challenges, the industry isn't prepared to get out of second gear, report **Suraksha P** and **Shubhangi Bhatia**.

# Bumpy Ride



#### Reasons for decline

**Shortage to surplus:** The automotive industry has shifted from a severe chip shortage post-pandemic to an inventory glut.

**Declining demand:** Chipmakers like Infineon, NXP, STMicroelectronics and Texas Instruments reported declining consumption. Microchip reported growth but said the industrial and automotive sectors are going through a change.

**Global trend:** Globally, automakers overestimated post-pandemic demand and accumulated too much inventory. Sales have tapered off, leading to the surplus.

**Impact on chipmakers:** Chipmakers are experiencing a negative cycle, with reduced sales affecting their revenues.

**Varying regional performance:** While China's EV market shows growth, other regions are experiencing declining demand due to factors like macroeconomic changes and increased competition from Chinese manufacturers.

**Powertrain shifts:** Changes in automotive technology, with smaller, more efficient chips being used, might also contribute to the mismatch between chip supply and demand.

**India's situation:** India, while not a major chip consumer, is also experiencing the effects of the global slowdown. PV sales have shown some growth, although benefiting from strategic purchasing patterns.

said. "The share of electric cars is stagnating in many regions, which is unlikely to change in the first few months of 2025."

Infineon, headquartered in Munich, Germany, is one of the global leaders in automotive, power and security semiconductors.

While Infineon's automotive revenue decreased 11% from Q4 FY24 to Q1 FY25, it reduced 8% from Q1 FY24 to Q1 FY25. Sharing the market outlook for CY25, the company, in its latest investor presentation, said, "Car demand is expected to remain flat. Although macroeconomic conditions are improving, headwinds remain, including dealer inventory adjustments and cautious consumer demand. Key regions Europe, Japan, South Korea and North America are expected to decline."

Chandler, Arizona-headquartered Microchip Technology saw a modest 1% year-on-year revenue growth from the automotive market - from 17% to 18% in the latest quarter.

"Industrial and automotive are two major sectors going through a big change because of too much inventory and less demand from the market," said Srikanth Settikere, vice-president and managing director, India Development Centre at Microchip India.

"Customers are replete with inventories," Settikere said. "Over the next few months or quarters, true numbers will really show. Semiconductor companies are going through a cyclic situation. The supply-demand situation that we had during Covid has reversed now."

Settikere said that ever since China started manufacturing more EVs, it has impacted competition from Europe. "Volkswagen has moved out of the Chinese market. These are

macroeconomic changes that are bringing the auto demand down," Settikere said.

According to Sharma, another reason for the slump could be a significant shift in powertrain technologies across the globe, with modern vehicles increasingly relying on smaller, more efficient semiconductor chips. "This transition with a slower-than-expected adoption of EVs in regions like the EU may have created a mismatch between production and demand for specific chip types, thereby highlighting the challenges in aligning the chip supplies," he said.

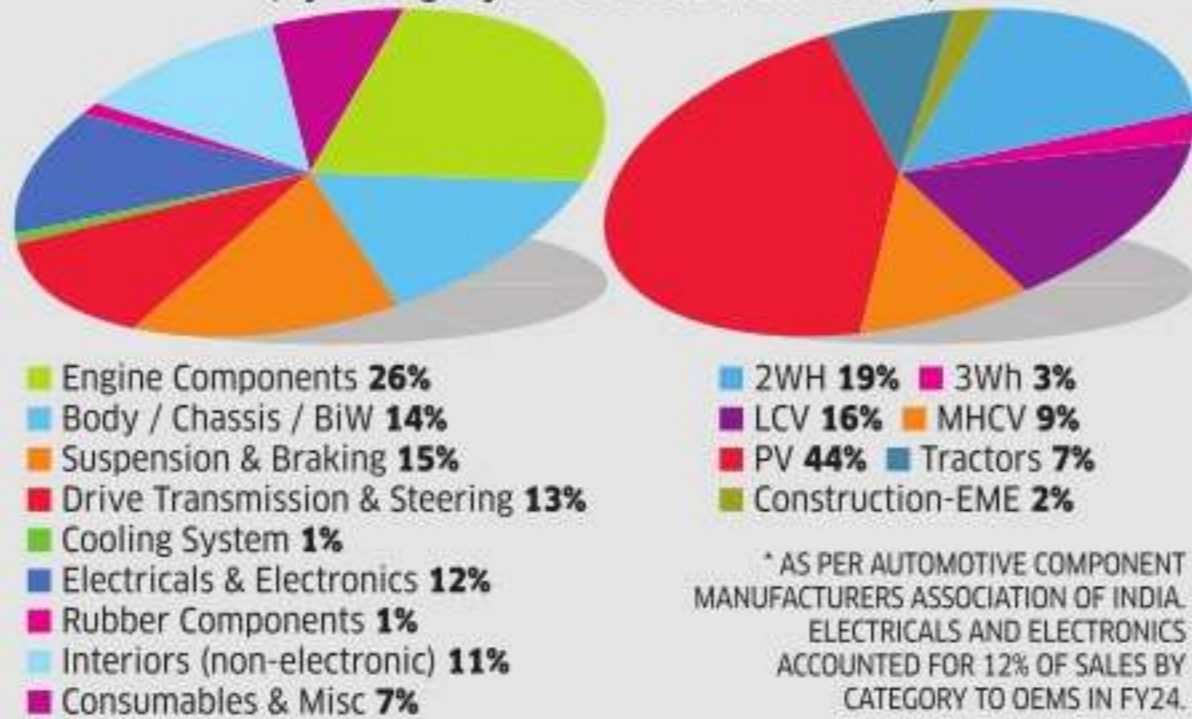
#### UNEVEN RISE OF ELECTRIC

As per the International Energy Agency's 'Global EV Outlook 2024' report, electric car sales neared 14 million in 2023.

EVs are gaining momentum globally but are mainly concentrated in China, Europe, and the US, which account for nearly 95% of global sales. In 2023, China accounted for just under 60% of new electric car registrations, Europe just under 25%, and the US 10%, it said.

Within the automotive industry, passenger cars generally use the highest number of chips due to the growing integration of advanced features and technologies that rely heavily on specialised chips. "Globally, the automotive semiconductor segment grew by 3% in 2024 compared to 11% in 2023," Ashok Chandak, president of India Electronics and Semiconductor Association, said. "Expectations of

#### FY 2024: India Auto Component Sales (by Category & Revenue from OEMs)



## Transforming Governance With a Unified AI Stack

Developing it as a DPI could improve public services, eliminate redundancies and foster better collaborations



RAJENDRA KUMAR

With rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), organisations are scrambling to implement the technology in their business processes and service delivery frameworks to improve efficiency and enhance citizen experiences.

AI is set to impact nearly every sector, but to harness its potential, organisations need an 'AI-first' strategy that includes scalable, flexible AI solutions for business transformation. This requires an integrated AI stack - comprising infrastructure, data, AI models and applications - enabling AI deployment across various use cases. Can such an AI stack be developed as a digital public infrastructure (DPI) by the government to provide seamless, proactive services to citizens and businesses?

To create a DPI, it is essential to understand the components of an enterprise-level AI stack. The foundation of this stack is a compute infrastructure layer, which

includes compute capacity, storage, networking and tools for developing, training and deploying AI models. This layer would utilise Graphics Processing Units (GPUs), Central Processing Units (CPUs) and Tensor Processing Units (TPUs) optimised for AI workloads. Cloud platforms offer scalability, while edge computing may be necessary for real-time services in remote or low-bandwidth environments.

The second layer consists of the data layer, which focuses on collecting, storing, cleaning and annotating data for use by the AI models. Data security and compliance with the privacy laws must be ensured through encryption, anonymisation and access control. Data comes from various sources like structured and unstructured databases, web, Internet of Things (IoT), Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), etc. It must be cleaned and prepared for the AI model training to enhance accuracy and fairness. Ministries and departments have created huge databases under the Digital India programme that can be shared to train AI models for delivering predictive and proactive services to citizens and businesses.

The next layer is the model development layer, which focuses on designing and training models on the processed data from the data layer to address specific use cases, such as text or image/video generation, predictive analytics, etc.



**IN THE PUBLIC AI**  
The AI stack needs to have a governance layer to ensure that the associated risks, if any, are managed and trust is built in the AI systems

This involves selecting suitable AI frameworks, libraries, algorithms for the type of AI tasks involved, their optimisation and validation.

Many open-source options, including pre-trained foundational models, can be customised for specific domains. However, developing indigenous foundational models is crucial to ensuring strategic autonomy and creating world-class capabilities within the Indian technology ecosystem. This doesn't need to be resource-intensive, as demonstrated by DeepSeek.

The developed AI model is then deployed or exposed through APIs or microservices enabling integration with the enterprise systems, web and mobile applications. Next comes the application layer, which integrates AI models into real-world systems to deliver AI-enhanced products and services. This may involve reengineering business processes, automating tasks and redesigning user interfaces. For example, an AI application for predictive analytics might generate advance warnings for heavy traffic at specific locations during peak hours and send automated alerts for action.

Finally, the AI stack also needs to have a governance layer to ensure that the associated risks, if any, are managed and trust is built in the AI systems.

The government's India AI Mission should focus on creating a common AI stack as DPI, which all ministries and departments can use to build their own AI applications. This will prevent duplication of efforts and resources and create a vibrant innovation ecosystem focused on transforming public services with an 'AI-First' strategy. The AI stack could also be made available to startups and the private industry to promote collaborative development and deployment of AI applications.

The author is a senior IAS officer and secretary, border management under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Views expressed are personal.

## Semiconductor Market in India is Charging Towards a \$103.4-bn Future

Dia.Rekhi@timesofindia.com

The semiconductor market in India is projected to grow to \$103.4 billion over the next five years, powering the \$400+ billion electronics market, the Indian Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA) said in its report 'India Semiconductor Market Report 2030'.

The country's semiconductor consumption market was valued at \$52 billion in 2024-25 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 13% through 2030.

Sectors like automotive and

industrial electronics present significant value-addition opportunities while mobile handsets, IT and industrial applications, which together contribute nearly 70% of the revenue, remain the primary growth drivers.

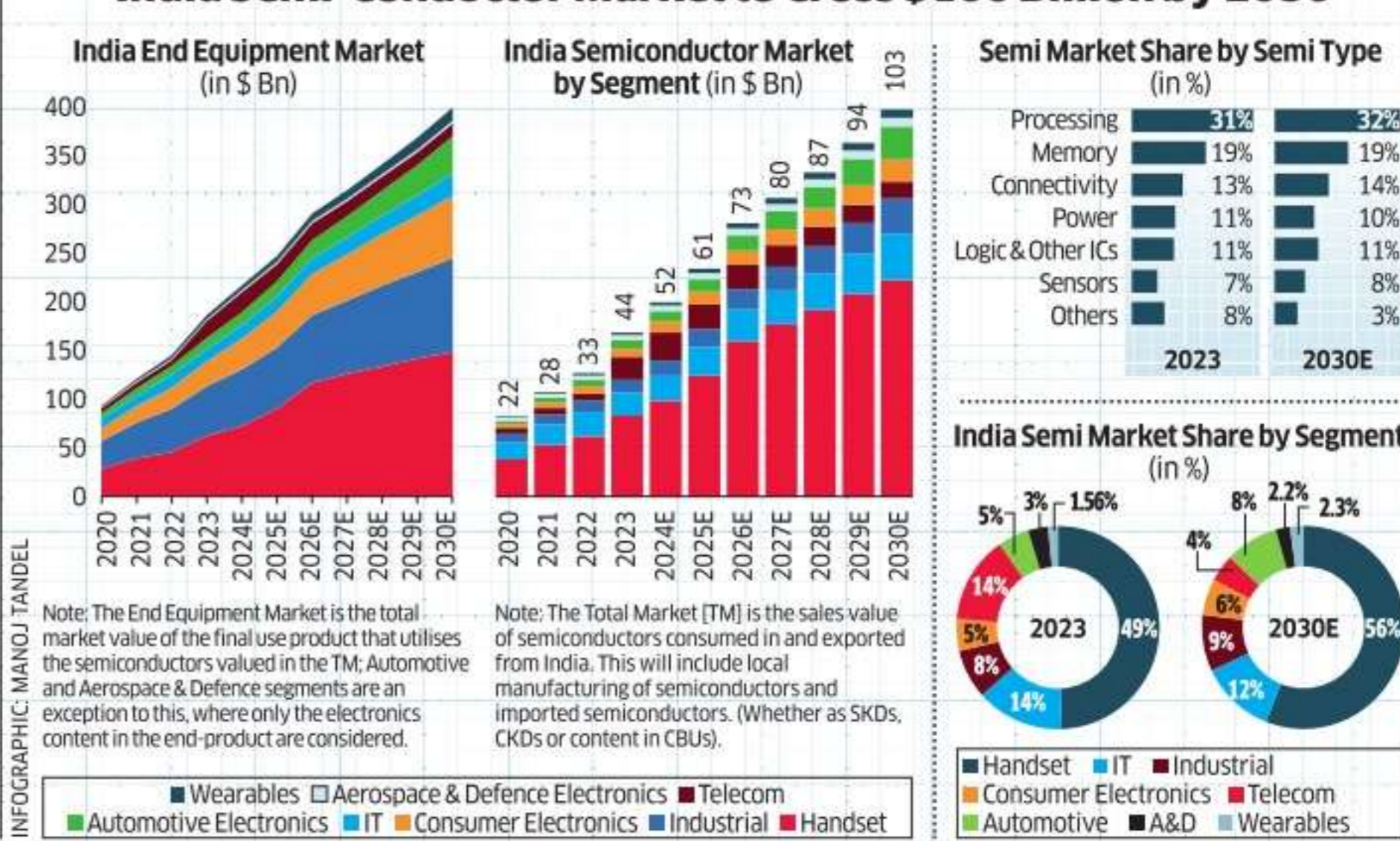
Ashok Chandak, president of IESA, said that the government policies will play a huge role in fostering a strong semiconductor design and manufacturing step up. "The government's targeted incentives for Fabs and OSATs, increased R&D investments, and collaborative industry initiatives are key to propelling India's

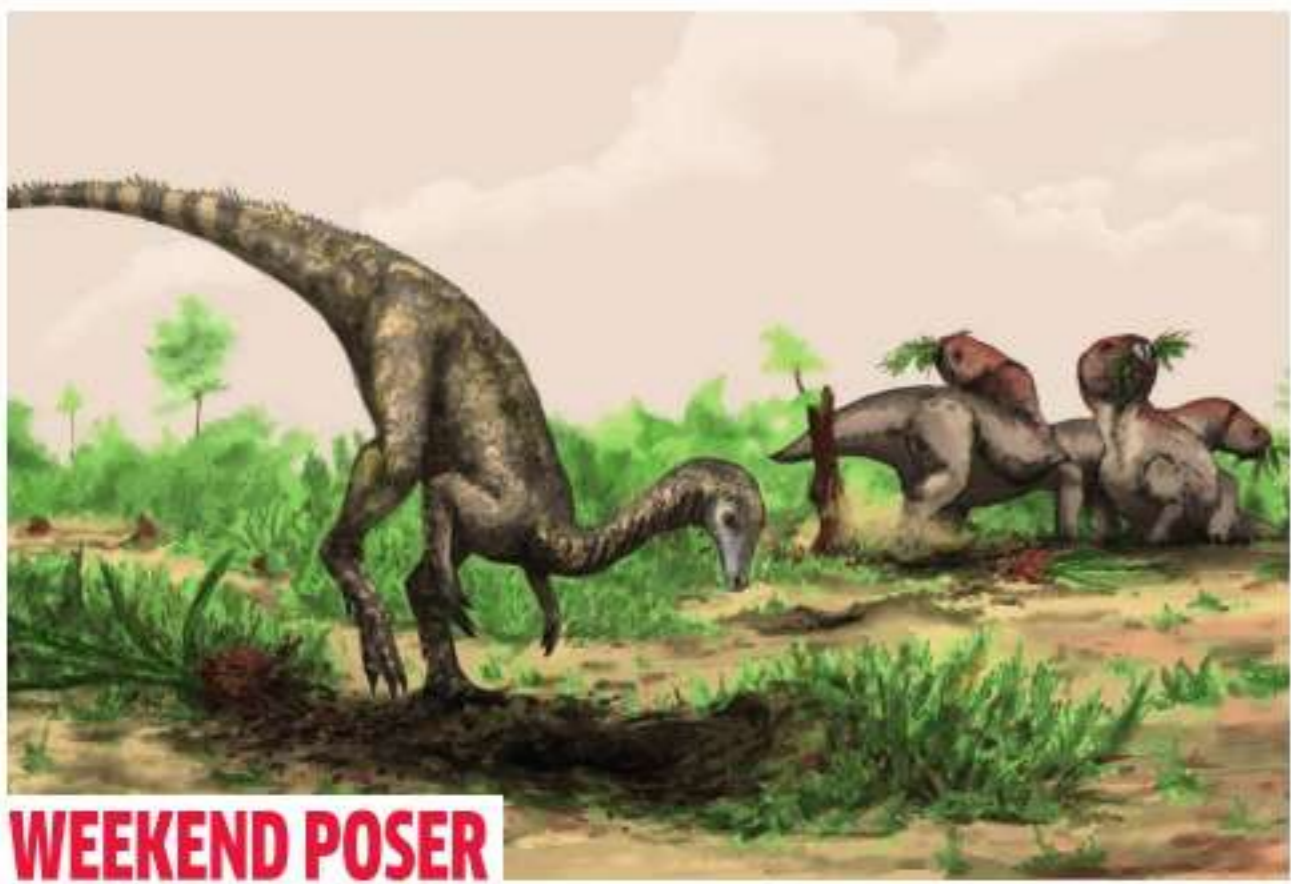
semiconductor sector forward," with significant projects investment commitment of over \$21 billion by companies in the past year, he said.

The report also highlights key recommendations for achieving India's semiconductor ambitions which include continuing the India Semiconductor Mission initiative beyond the initial outlay of \$10 billion and DLI scheme with some modifications.

It added that setting a target of 25% local value addition by 2025-26 and 40% by 2030 in electronics manufacturing PLI benefits would be crucial.

#### India Semi-Conductor Market to Cross \$100 Billion by 2030





WEEKEND POSER

## Where and When Did Dinosaurs First Evolve?

A multitude of dinosaurs once dominated the planet: Plant-eating giants like Argentinosaurus, the carnivorous Tyrannosaurus, or the Therizinosaurus with its Freddy Krueger-like claws. But where and when did they first appear? And how did they evolve to become these brutes?

Researchers have proposed a surprising location for the birthplace of dinosaurs, based on the locations of the oldest-known fossils. This locale spans the modern-day Sahara desert and Amazon rainforest regions.

Though they are now separated by thousands of miles and the Atlantic Ocean thanks to plate tectonics, at the time of the dinosaurs, "all the continents were part of the giant supercontinent Pangaea", said Joel Heath, lead author of the study published in the journal *Current Biology*. "Dinosaurs emerged in the southern portion of this landmass, known as Gondwana, near the Equator, an area that today includes northern South America and northern Africa," Heath added.

### THE WHEN

Earliest-known dinosaur fossils date back to roughly 230 million years ago, including Eoraptor and Herrerasaurus from Argentina, Saturnalia from Brazil and Mbiresaurus from Zimbabwe.

"While earlier research had focused on southern South America and southern Africa as the area of

origin of the dinosaurs, we suggest that significant gaps in the fossil record — particularly in regions that today include the Sahara and the Amazon — may hold the potential to reveal where the earliest dinosaurs were living," Heath said.

Fossils from this time and region are rare. This might be because the conditions were not ideal for preserving the remains of land animals, but also because these regions are difficult to explore due to the presence of dense forests, vast deserts and logistical challenges.

### THE HOW

Dinosaurs evolved from more primitive reptiles in the aftermath of earth's biggest mass extinction event caused by extreme volcanism about 252 million years ago. "Dinosaurs are unique because of certain traits in their skeletons. They stood upright, with their legs straight underneath their bodies, like pillars, which helped them walk and run efficiently," Heath said. "Their bodies were shaped for speed and agility, and their teeth were adapted for specific diets."

"These specialised traits didn't appear overnight. They evolved gradually over millions of years from older, more primitive reptiles. However, we haven't yet found the transitional fossils that show how these changes happened, leaving parts of their evolutionary history a mystery," Heath said.

— Reuters

Earliest-known dinosaur fossils date to roughly 230 million years ago, from places as far apart as South America and Zimbabwe

## How to Get a Party Buzz Even When You're Not Drinking



### The New York Times

Behavioural science has little to say on the best way to make yourself feel looser and less inhibited without the aid of substances. True loss of inhibition may be too much to ask of your sober self, but you can get out of your own head — and out of your own way.

The best thing you can do to feel less self-conscious is to stop thinking about yourself. "Going to a party and thinking about what others are thinking about you is a pretty sure-fire way to have a terrible time," said Nicholas Epley, a professor of behavioural science

at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, US.

The antidote is to focus on someone else. "When your goal is to approach people to learn what interesting things they have to tell you, the doubting, self-focused voice inside you gets quieter," Epley said.

Not sure where to start the conversation? Jessica St Clair, a comedian and co-author with Casey Wilson of *The Art of Small Talk*, recommended employing

questions, compliments and commiseration. Another trick is to choose low-stakes, high-drama topics. Ghosts, astrology and reality shows are all favourite subjects of St Clair and Wilson.

The best thing you can do to feel less self-conscious is to stop thinking about yourself

## Ismaili Food Shows the Aga Khan's Indian Roots and African Influence

### FOOD FABLES



VIKRAM DOCTOR

Aga Khan IV, who died earlier this week, will be buried with his predecessor in Aswan in Egypt. This is appropriate since Africa is where much of his Ismaili community's fortunes were made. But the roots to their riches lie in Mumbai, where the first Aga Khan's mausoleum in Mazgaon is one of the city's hidden secrets. It was a Bombay High Court

verdict in 1866 which confirmed a Persian religious leader, the 46th Imam of the Nizari Ismailis, as head of India's Khoja Muslims. The Aga Khan, as he started styling himself, became their spiritual leader but also encouraged the spread of their trading networks. Their system of tithing, part of their income, helped consolidate capital with the Aga Khan, who used it for both charitable and business support.

Gujarat and Sind, where most Khojas lived, were prone to droughts, so the Aga Khan encouraged them to move to the new European colonies in East Africa. It was his grandson, Aga Khan III, who really supported the East African Ismailis during his 72-year reign, setting up schools and mosques and interceding with colonial rulers on their behalf. Asians in East Africa were caught between European colonists and



Aga Khan IV used his influence with the British and Canadians to get Ismailis resettled there and most have prospered again

native Africans, but having the Aga Khan's influence helped the Ismailis significantly.

Karim Hirji, in his memoir *Growing Up with Tanzania*, recalls the Aga Khan's edict in 1945 that his followers should spread inland, helping them with loans on easy terms. This was to support the British scheme to grow peanuts on a mass scale, to supply edible oil for the UK and demonstrate investment, hoping to forestall calls for independence. Peanuts, it turned out, were unsuited for the region, and the scheme became a notorious development disaster. Hirji writes: "The bulk of Europeans left, but the Asians stayed. Ground nuts or not, their presence was vital..."

It was not an easy life. Working as traders or shop-keepers gave only small profits with which to support large families. It helped that Ismailis were used to Gujarat's

predominantly vegetarian diet, which they adapted to local foods like cassava. "One farmer brought freshly dug roots with pure white innards," writes Hirji. "Boiled or cooked with nazi (coconut milk, it was often eaten at lunch. Mother cooked fresh kisamvu (tender leaves from the cassava plant) with nazi milk and small red beans and served it with rice. It was an exquisite dish." Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's Ismaili family lived in Uganda, where peanuts grow well. She suggests roast matoke, green bananas, in a spicy peanut sauce as the

first example of this Indian-African culinary encounter. She gives the recipe in *The Settler's Cookbook*, her brilliant memoir of this community, caught between cultures and continents. Alibhai-Brown describes the racism that blighted the community, but admits to admiration for the Aga Khan. "I am wary of the adulation given to a living being by our masses and the principle of inherited privilege," she writes, but acknowledges that the progressive Islam promoted by the Aga Khan, with its strong emphasis on education of women, shows how such privilege can be used well. East Africa's

Ismailis prospered and celebrated Aga Khan's Diamond Jubilee by weighing him in diamonds in Dar-es-Salaam, the cost of which went to his development fund. But even the Aga Khan couldn't assuage African resentments. Alibhai-Brown describes the fatalism of those last years when the community tried to downplay their wealth. "But, and this was an open secret, in the homes of the big people, with the curtains drawn the feasts were getting more outrageous, food absurdly rich... They had to eat up their wealth..."

Finally, the curtain came down. Aga Khan IV used his influence with the British and Canadians to get Ismailis resettled there and most have prospered again. His development fund still works in Africa, a rare example where religion and progressive thinking can combine to good effect.

## 2024 International Booker Prize winner Jenny Erpenbeck, whose books delve deep into issues of personal identity in a mistrustful society, talks about her art and thought process

Jenny Erpenbeck believes an ideal society should be free of fear, hatred and extreme poverty. "Nobody should be afraid to tell the truth, no one should be looked at with contempt, and nobody should have to sleep in the streets," she says.

The 2024 International Booker Prize winner, for her novel *Kairos* (an honour shared with translator Michael Hofmann), has seen it all. She grew up in former East Germany where the Stasi surveillance system grew so deep that "people would spy on their husbands and wives". The same locality in reunified Germany turned into "another country", where inequality is part of everyday life. She has also lived with people who endured Hitler's fascism, which propagated that they were a superior race. In India for the Jaipur Literature Festival, Erpenbeck spoke to Rishi Kakanadan about how she explores questions of identity and transformation through her books. Edited excerpts:

As a writer, you seem particular about the exact space and time where your stories take place. What comes first, the historical context or the story and characters?

That depends on the book. Most times, there is a question or some thoughts that I cannot get out of my head. Once I decide to write about it, I look at the material of the story... Like what is involved. Initially, I try out different ways of getting into the story. Then I choose one.

In the case of *Kairos*, there were some thoughts in the background that produced the story, in a way.

In the last years of the East German state, I think people in general were tired of politics. Earlier, there were moments when people tried to change things that they didn't like. For instance, when singer [Wolf] Biermann was not allowed to return to the country after a guest performance in West Germany [in 1976], there was a big protest. Many intellectuals left the country. But, from this moment on, it was like depression taking over. So, one of the main aspects of the book is that people turn to private lives when mass politics is no longer possible.

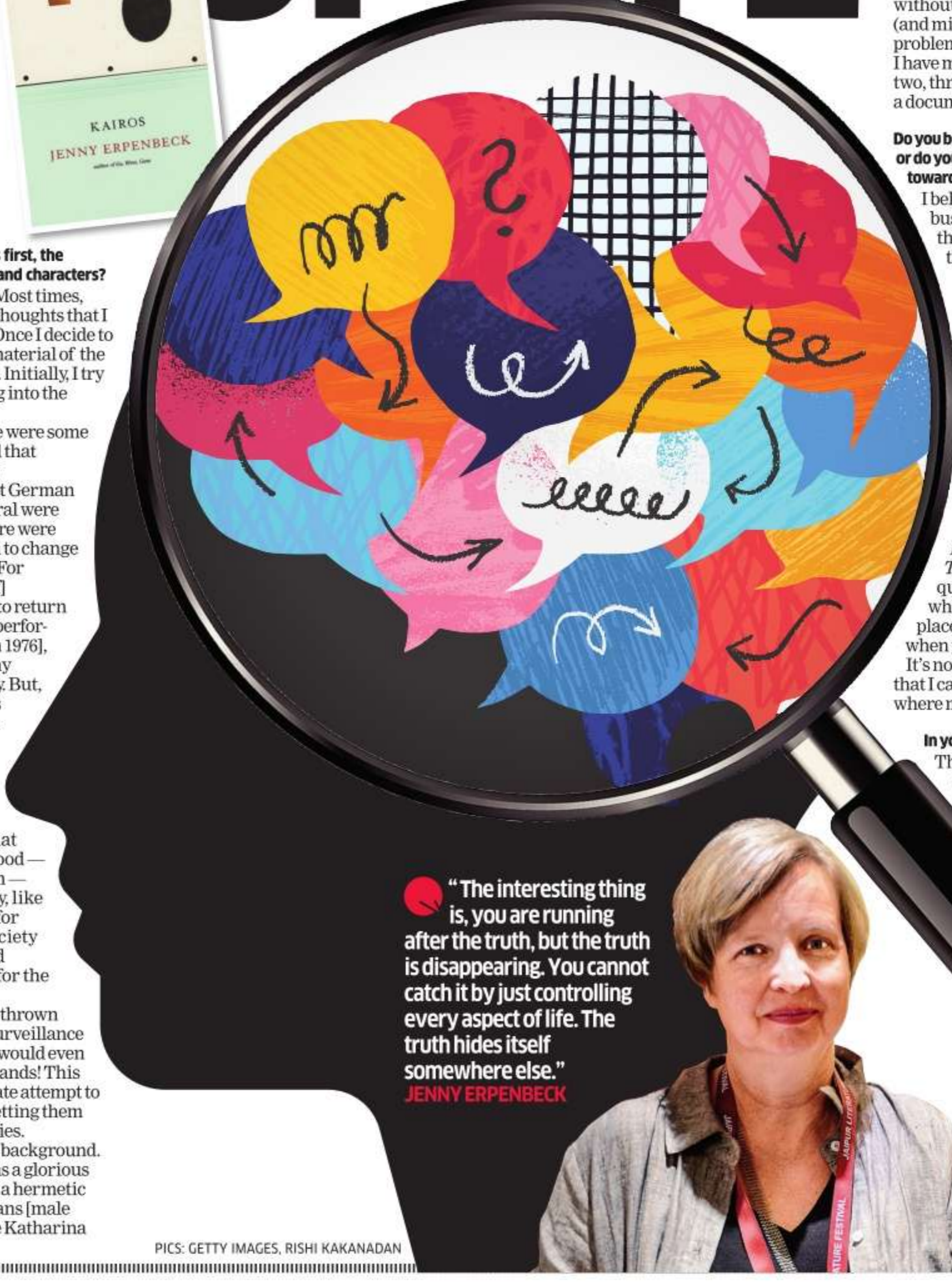
Another idea I had was that something that began as good — as an alternative to fascism — based on ideas of solidarity, like education and healthcare for everyone... Even such a society can become oppressive and something that's not good for the people anymore.

Opposition thinkers were thrown into prison; the system of surveillance became so deep that people would even spy on their wives and husbands! This was perhaps a final, desperate attempt to produce loyal citizens, by getting them involved in the system as spies.

So, these ideas were in the background.

The love story also starts as a glorious thing. But then it turns into a hermetic system. Also, you can see Hans [male protagonist] trying to make Katharina

# SPIES OF LIFE



"The interesting thing is, you are running after the truth, but the truth is disappearing. You cannot catch it by just controlling every aspect of life. The truth hides itself somewhere else." JENNY ERPENBECK

PICS: GETTY IMAGES, RISHI KAKANADAN

## The Failed Basketball Player Who Made the First Rap Hit of the Year

An unassuming rap track by LiAngelo Ball has gone viral, earning him a record deal and collaboration invites

### The New York Times

Last month, LiAngelo Ball appeared on a livestream with N3on, an internet personality who has emerged as an irritant and provocateur. Over three hours, Ball and N3on played basketball, shopped and chatted. But the highlight of their livestream was when Ball was driving N3on around and played a song he said he'd been working on.

The song, *'Tweaker'*, by a non-professional musician played for an unassuming livestreamer, had something urgent and catchy. "I might suerve, bend that corner / whoa-oh-ohhhh," he rapped. Listening to



LiAngelo Ball's (right) video for 'Tweaker' features his brothers Lonzo and LaMelo (top)

his own voice, Ball, who raps as 'G3 Gelo', looked pleased with himself. N3on was almost shivering with joy. It was good content, both sides getting something from the other.

Over the next few weeks, *'Tweaker'* has gone from virality to real-life relevance. It has been played in NBA and NFL locker rooms; it's used frequently on TikTok; rappers have looked to collaborate. And now, it has landed Ball a record deal.

Going forward, some believe, this is the approach songs might take to success. Rather than relying on an affiliation with an established artiste, perhaps the goal is to be just absurd enough to hold people's attention long enough for

them to realise there is something purposeful underneath the unlikelyness.

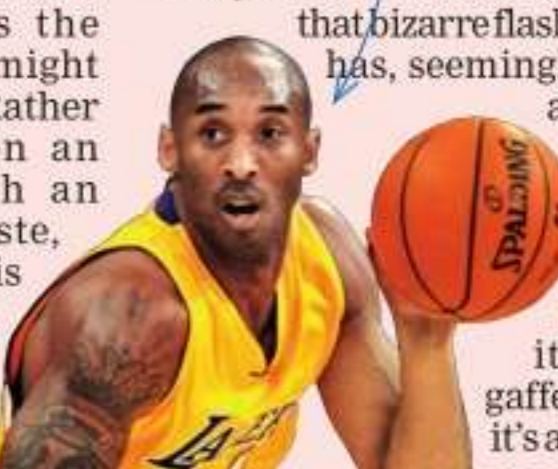
### BASKETBALL WASHOUT

And being unsuspecting is part of the trick. Unlike his famous brothers — LaMelo and Lonzo, who play in the NBA for the Charlotte Hornets and Chicago Bulls respectively — LiAngelo is the basketball washout. He was recruited to UCLA out of high school, and has played for a bit in the lower leagues, but never managed even a regular season game in the NBA.

But he is now in elite company, joining a surprisingly robust list of the sport's legends who rap: Allen Iverson, Shaquille O'Neal, Kobe Bryant, Damian Lillard.

Nevertheless, *'Tweaker'* has inspired genuine fervour. Rarely has a new artiste so effectively used the modern distribution system of livestreaming to garner an initial buzz, and their built something sturdy upon that bizarre flash of attention. Ball

has, seemingly, completed the almost impossible — to-nail pachinko on his first attempt: *'Tweaker'* is an earnest attempt, it's a stunt, it's a gaffe, it's a Hail Mary, it's a meme, it's a hit.





**VITALS**  
**2ND TEST: AUS V SL**  
**Australia on the Brink Of Series Sweep**

**Galle:** Australia put on a clinical display on the third day of the second Test against Sri Lanka, leaving the hosts teetering at 211/8 and holding a slender lead of just 54 runs on Saturday. The visitors will try to wrap up the Sri Lankan innings early on the fourth morning and chase down the target in a bid to complete a 2-0 series sweep. At 81-4, Sri Lanka seemed destined for yet another crushing innings defeat inside three days. However, Angelo Mathews dug deep, forging a 48-run stand with Dhananjaya de Silva and a further 70-run partnership with Kusal Mendis. Mathews played a gutsy knock of 76, but his defiance ended just before stumps when he attempted a sweep off Nathan Lyon, only to be brilliantly caught by Beau Webster at fine leg. Sri Lanka lost the first Test by an innings and 242 runs, also in Galle – Sri Lanka's worst defeat in Test cricket. **AP**

**ISL**  
**Hyderabad Win Battle of Bottom Sides, Chennaiyin End Losing Streak**

**Hyderabad:** A dominant Hyderabad FC defeated Mohammedan Sporting Club 3-1 in a match between two bottom-placed teams of the Indian Super League (ISL) on Saturday. Allan Paulista (24th minute), Ramhlunhchunga (45+1) and Joseph Sunny (90+6) scored for Hyderabad FC while Makhan Chothe (78th) pulled one back for Mohammedan Sporting. This was Hyderabad's fourth win in 19 matches as they accumulated 16 points to be placed at 12th in the league standings, just one above bottom-placed Mohammedan Sporting (11 points, 19 matches). In second game of the day, Chennaiyin FC defeated East Bengal FC 3-0 to break their seven game winless streak. The Marina Machans, thus, progressed to the 10th spot with 21 points, trailing the sixth-placed Bengaluru FC (28) by seven points and keeping their play-off hopes alive. **PTI**

**WATCHOUT! Tonight**  
**ISL Bengaluru v Jamshedpur** 7:30pm (Sports18) **LA LIGA Sevilla v Barcelona** 1:30am (GXR) **FA Cup Plymouth v Liverpool** 8:30pm; **Aston Villa v Tottenham** 11:05pm (Sony Ten)

# Hamilton can be Worth £100m to Ferrari with 2025 F1 Success

Seven-time champions first photo with Ferrari quickly became the most-liked F1 post ever on Instagram

**Kieran Jackson**

Lewis Hamilton can be worth "triple digits" to Ferrari if he wins the 2025 Formula 1 world championship, says sport finance expert Dr. Rob Wilson.

Seven-time F1 world champion Hamilton has made the switch to the fabled Italian outfit this year, following 12 years and six world titles with Mercedes.

In an indication of the magnitude of Hamilton's move to F1's most famous team, his first photo in association with Ferrari – posing in a dark suit in front of Enzo Ferrari's house – is the most-liked F1 post of all time on Instagram, with more than 5.6 million likes.

Hamilton is reported to be on a salary of £40m a year with Ferrari, yet Dr. Wilson has explained how success for the 40-year-old on track this year will catapult the Scuderia's own finances.

"If he starts the season and is competitive in the first five or 10 races and wins a couple, you're talking about an explosive marketing opportunity and everybody wins in F1 with that," Wilson, a professor of Applied Sports Finance at Sheffield Hallam University, says.

"It would amplify the brand as well as it amplifies Ferrari and Lewis

# KDB Rescues City

**FA CUP** De Bruyne comes off the bench to spare Man City blushes at Leyton Orient

**Martyn Herman**

Premier League champions Manchester City survived a huge FA Cup fourth-round scare as Kevin De Bruyne came off the bench to secure a 2-1 victory at third-tier Leyton Orient on Saturday.

A wretched season for Pep Guardiola's side looked like reaching a new low as Orient held on to a 16th-minute lead given to them by Jamie Donley's long-range wonder-strike that went in via the crossbar and the back of City keeper Stefan Ortega.

A strong City line-up huffed and puffed in response and were relieved when Abdulkodir Khusanov equalised in the 56th minute, deflecting in Rico Lewis's shot following a corner.

De Bruyne came on late in the game and City's playmaker spared his side extra time when he was played in by Jack Grealish to score from close range in the 79th minute.



SCORECARD	
Leyton Orient	1
Ortega 16' OG	
Man City	2
Khusanov 56'	
De Bruyne 79'	

Even then Orient almost equalised when skipper Dan Happe volleyed over a great chance in the closing minutes.

Some lament the FA Cup having lost much of its romance in recent years, in the face of obsession with the Premier League, but this tie had it in bucket loads. A murky, drizzly lunchtime in an east London suburb lined with rows of Victorian terraced houses looked like the perfect stage for Orient to stage a mugging of City's slickers.

And while City escaped, it was a mightily relieved Guardiola who applauded the home fans at fulltime.

Orient, sixth in League One after a sensational run of form under Manchester United fan Richie Wellens, did themselves proud as they showed scant regard for reputations.

While City made eight changes from last week's mauling across the capital at Arsenal it was still a line-up packed with hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of talent.

Nico Gonzalez and Vitor Reis both made their debuts while Ruben Dias returned in defence with Grealish and Ilkay Gundogan adding experience.

Gundogan fluffed a chance to settle City's nerves when he somehow steered a Savinho cross wide with the goal gap-

ing. Orient, roared on by a capacity 9,000 crowd, snapped into tackles and were soon in dreamland.

Gundogan lost the ball near the half-way line and when the ball broke for Donley, the 20-year-old sent a long-range shot arcing towards goal.

As Ortega back-pedalled, seemingly in slow motion, all he could do was push the ball against the crossbar before it dropped down and went in off his back, sparking scenes of delirium around the stadium and on the balconies of the apartments wedged into each corner.

City's response was sporadic as Orient defended superbly to protect their lead. Orient keeper Josh Keeley, who scored a stoppage-time equaliser in his side's second-round win against Oldham Athletic, produced a superb save to deny Omar Marmoush from an equaliser in first-half stoppage time.

Orient were digging deep at the start of the second half but City got the stroke

of luck they required when Lewis's shot took a big deflection off Khusanov to wrong-footed Keeley.

Still, a City win never looked a formality as Orient continued to cause problems for the nervy visitors.

James McAtee was denied by the woodwork for City while Keeley made a fine save to deny Gundogan.

With 20 minutes left, Guardiola sent on Phil Foden and De Bruyne and the changes paid off.

**Reuters**

## Maguire Strikes Late as Man United Beat Leicester

Manchester United clawed back from a goal down to beat Leicester City in a 2-1 fourth-round FA Cup victory on Friday at Old Trafford, thanks to a last-gasp controversial header from veteran defender Harry Maguire plus a strike from Joshua Zirkzee. The game appeared to be heading into extra time before Maguire headed in the winner in the 93rd minute from Bruno Fernandes' free kick, seconds before the final whistle. "The second half we played a little bit better, with a little more speed, winning second balls," United manager Ruben Amorim said. "Then we managed to turn things around so it was a good result, not a good performance." Television replays showed Maguire appeared to be offside, but the linesman did not raise his flag and VAR is not used in the FA Cup until the fifth round. Asked about losing in "Fergie time" – famously coined in reference to manager Alex Ferguson's United teams frequently scoring in stoppage time – frustrated Leicester boss Ruud van Nistelrooy said: "We are not defeated in Fergie time, we are defeated in offside time." **Reuters**



# Champions Trophy: Pakistan PM Urges Cricket Team to Beat India

**Lahore:** Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif says the real task for Pakistan is not just winning the ICC Champions Trophy but also defeat arch-rivals India in Dubai on February 23.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the renovated and upgraded Gaddafi stadium on Friday night, Sharif said the players must give their best against India.

"We have a very good side and they have done well in recent times but the real task now is to not only win the Champions Trophy but also defeat our arch-rival, India in the upcoming match in Dubai. The entire nation stands behind them," Sharif said.

Pakistan and India have a history of cricket rivalry and generally the Indian team has held the advantage in ICC events since the 90s.

Pakistan's last win in an ICC event against India came in 2021 when they won in Dubai in the T20 World Cup.

But with India refusing to send their team to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy, the February 23 match has that extra edge to it.

Pakistan will enter the tournament as defending champions. It was last held in 2017 in England with Pakistan beating India in the final.

"It is a big occasion for Pakistan that we are hosting a big ICC event after nearly 29 years," Sharif said.

Sharif expressed excitement about the opportunity to host the Champions Trophy in Pakistan after 29 years.

He was also thrilled with the new look stadium and the improved facilities and said the stadium now reflects the spirit of Pakistan's cricketing passion.

"I have full confidence that our team



will continue to make the nation proud in the upcoming Champions Trophy."

The inauguration ceremony was attended by several prominent figures, including politicians, government officials, PCB representatives, members of the national men's cricket team, PSL franchise owners, and former PCB chairmen Zaka Ashraf and Najam Sethi.

The ceremony celebrated the completion of Gaddafi Stadium's renovation in just 117 days.

At the event, renowned singers Ali Zafar, Arif Lohar, and Aima Baig performed for the audience, followed by a stunning fireworks display, a vibrant drum show, and a unique light show.



In his last 16 innings across formats, Rohit Sharma has scored only 166 runs at an average of 10.37

# A Final Flourish?

Rohit, in the twilight of his career, needs to find his mojo one more time for India to succeed at the Champions Trophy



**Boria Majumdar**

He was India's most impactful performer in the 2023 50-over World Cup, which they fell short in the final, and the 2024 T20 World Cup, which they ended a decade-long title drought. Yet, heading into the 2025 Champions Trophy, he is India's biggest concern.

With just 10 days to go, Rohit Sharma seems like a shadow of his recent self. How do India address their skipper's lack of form? How does he find one final flourish in the twilight of his career?

Make no mistake, he is one of the greatest white-ball players ever. But right now, he is enduring in the worst phase of his career. Nothing is working, and naturally his confidence is at its lowest. Watch him at the crease, you will see it. He looks apprehensive, as if preoccupied with the fear of getting out. He looks hesitant, almost scared, and that's where the struggle begins.

The Rohit Sharma of the 2023 World Cup thrived on risk-taking. He played fearlessly, putting the team first, without worrying about personal failures. It paid off – for him and for India.

The Rohit Sharma in Nagpur was different. In his desperation to score, he strayed from his proven formula of success. With a mind mired in contradiction, the Indian skipper found himself searching for answers.

Take his dismissal against Saqib Mahmood. It was a poor delivery, drifting onto his pads, begging to be put away. Rohit could dispatch it anywhere between mid-on and mid-wicket, like he has done hundreds of times in the past, scoring hundreds of runs. But not in Nagpur. There, his instincts and mind were at odds. His muscle memory asked him to go for the shot, while his cluttered mind demanded caution. Caught between the two, Rohit ended up playing a half-hearted shot and got out.

For Rohit to regain his mojo, he must first believe he can. Not just say to the media or his teammates, but truly feel, deep down, that he can do the job for India. That's where the process starts.

Elite sport is as much mental as it is physical, and Rohit is a classic case. Let's put things in perspective – just six months ago, he played some brilliant white-ball knocks. His 41-ball 92 against Australia in the T20 World Cup was arguably his finest. The way he dismantled Mitchell Starc was extraordinary. He followed it up with another special effort against England in the semi-final.

For someone who played such brilliant knocks just six months ago, it is tough to see him struggle so badly.

Rohit was poor in the 2022 World Cup in Australia. Playing conventional, outdated cricket, he looked out of sync and the team suffered. England exposed those flaws in the semi-final as India crashed out of the tournament. But Rohit learnt his lesson.

By the time 2023 World Cup came, he

## Kohli Fit for 2nd ODI, Says India's Batting Coach

**Cuttack:** Star batter Virat Kohli is "good to go" in the second ODI against England, India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak confirmed on Saturday and downplayed concerns about skipper Rohit Sharma's prolonged lean patch. Kohli had missed the first ODI due to a sore right knee. "Virat Kohli is fit to play. He has come for practice and is good to go," Kotak said during the pre-match media interaction. With Kohli now fit, it remains to be seen who will make way for his return. Struggling to find his rhythm, Rohit continued his disastrous run in the Test format and was dismissed for just 2 runs off 7 balls in the first ODI. Over his last 16 innings across formats, Rohit has accumulated only 166 runs at an average of 10.37, with just one half-century. "I personally don't see any issue with his form. Sometimes, a player might have a lean patch, but that doesn't worry me. Yes, in the Australia Test match, it was tough, and he got out early, but in ODIs, he has been performing consistently. So, there's no real concern about his form," he said. **PTI**



2ND ODI India vs England 1:30pm (Star Sports)

was a transformed player – selfless, aggressive and fearless. Virat Kohli might have scored more runs or Shreyas Iyer notched up two hundreds, it was Rohit who set the tone at the top of the order and had maximum impact as a batter. His approach propelled India to 10 straight wins.

He continued in the same manner in the 2024 T20 World Cup, this time seeing the journey through to a perfect conclusion and fulfilling his dream of winning the World Cup as captain.

All of this was possible because he believed. He recognised his shortcomings in 2022 and adapted. He believed he could do it in 2023 and 2024, and he delivered.

Now, he needs to believe once more. He must believe that he has one final push left in him. It's easier said than done but he can't afford to dwell on failures or fear of getting out. He needs to win the battle against his own mind.

Rohit has always been a *bindaas* cricketer – relaxed and unfussed. But that's no longer the case. Right now, he is too intense, too caught up in the pressure. And it's not working for him.

Rohit has two more games against England to rediscover, recalibrate, and, most importantly, find joy in batting. He knows his team needs him. He knows this is his moment of truth. He knows it's now or never.

## Victor Mather

Hey, can I ask you something? Just between you and me? Yeah, shoot.

I ... don't really understand this Super Bowl thing. You don't understand the Super Bowl? The ubiquitous event that dwarfs every other American entertainment option?

Shhh! I don't want everyone to know! Maybe you're not from the United States. Or maybe you just prefer cricket. We've got you covered. You've come to the right place to find out all about this year's Super Bowl with no tears or embarrassment.

Great! When is the game, and who's playing? The Super Bowl is the final game of the season of the National Football League, the mammoth league with the \$100 billion television contract and teams worth \$5 billion or more. This year, the Philadelphia Eagles will face the Kansas City Chiefs in New Orleans on Monday starting at 5:00am (on Disney+ Hotstar).

I hear the halftime shows are great. There have been many memorable

# How to Fake Your Way Through the Super Bowl



Super Bowl halftime shows, including one with a "wardrobe malfunction" (Justin Timberlake and Janet Jackson, XXXVIII, 2004) that was the subject of a New York Times documentary.

In the first Super Bowl halftime show in 1967, Al Hirt, the trumpeter and band leader, performed to a live audience of some 67,000 fans.

The producers of the NFL's biggest

event of the year have gradually raised the ante of the show's musical acts, from university marching bands decades ago to the world's biggest popstars, including Madonna, Paul McCartney, U2 and Beyoncé. Last year's performer was Usher; Kendrick Lamar takes the stage this year.

The NFL does, except in 2016 when they called it Super Bowl 50 because Super Bowl L looked a little silly. This year's game is the absolutely positively unsilly-looking Super Bowl LIX.

Can you explain the rules quickly? OK, but we are going to oversimplify. There are 11 players on a side, but the key player is the quarterback. He takes the

oblong ball at the start of each play, and he either hands it to a player who tries to run with it, or he throws it downfield for a receiver to catch. Teams have four tries, or "downs," to advance the ball at least 10 yards (9.1 meters, but don't get caught saying that when surrounded by football fans).

The other team will try to stop them from doing so, a process that often ends with one or more players grabbing the player with the ball and hurling him to the ground abruptly.

Sometimes a player will do something wrong (a "penalty"), and the referee will signal this by throwing what looks like a yellow hankie (the announcers will say that "a flag is on the field").

The field is 100 yards long, and a team making it to the end (the "end zone") gets 6 points (a "touchdown," very good), and 1 more if it can kick a ball through some big metal posts (the "goal posts") afterward. There are other ways to score, but we promised to keep it simple.

The game cannot end in a tie. If it does, the teams play "overtime" until a winner is determined.

Wait, why is this sport called football? The feet seem secondary. And is an oblong spheroid really a 'ball'? Amazingly, you are not the first person to make these observations.

A hoary joke says that the game should really be called "hand egg."

American football evolved from "rugby football" in the late 19th century. The transition came in 1906, when teams began passing the ball forward instead of only backward. The NFL was founded in the 1920s and started the Super Bowl championship game in 1967 after a merger with a smaller upstart, the American Football League.

There are several variations of football around the globe. What Americans call soccer is football in much of the rest of the world. Canadian football is similar to the American game, but teams can charmingly score a "rouge," worth 1 point. Australia's football involves men with very little padding passing the ball by hitting it with their fists.

Who are some players to look for? The quarterback for Kansas City is Patrick Mahomes, and Philadelphia's is Jalen Hurts. You'll see a lot of them whether you look for them or not.

On defense, look for Chris Jones of Kansas City to terrorize Hurts, and Jalen Carter and Zack Baun of the Eagles to do the same against Mahomes.

In an era when passing is usually a lot more important than running, the Eagles have a transcendent running back, Saquon Barkley.

And a key man for Mahomes to pass the ball to will be...

The one who is dating Taylor Swift? You got it. Kansas City's Travis Kelce, perhaps the best player ever at his position, tight end, has raised his profile even more with his relationship with music's global superstar, Taylor Swift. She often attends his games, causing some purists to grumble that shots of her in the luxury boxes are overshadowing the game, although a close look revealed her total screen time is actually fairly limited.

I hear there's a record on the line. Should Kansas City win, it would become the first team ever to win three consecutive Super Bowls.

**The New York Times**