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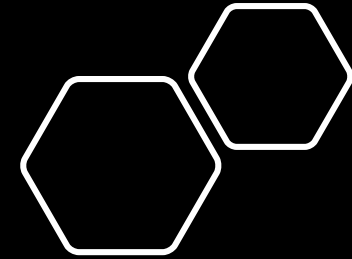




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EVMs' control units do not recognise parties or names: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday called the microcontrollers separately programmed by manufacturers in electronic voting machines (EVMs) “agnostic”, for they do not recognise political parties or candidates but only the buttons pressed by voters.

“Microcontrollers in the control units [of EVMs] are agnostic. They do not recognise party or candidate names. What they recognise is the buttons pressed on the ballot units,” Justice Sanjiv Khanna, heading a two-judge Bench, observed.

Justice Khanna said the buttons on the ballot units were interchangeable. “A party which got button 1 in a constituency would get button 6 in another constituency. The programming of the units are done at the manufacturer stage. Manufacturer would not know which party would get what button,” Justice Khanna surmised.

The case dealt with peti-



Polling officials check the EVMs in Mumbai on Wednesday. PTI

The morning session saw the Bench read out in open court the specific queries it had for the EC concerning the security and functional aspects of EVMs and VVPATs (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail). Post-lunch break, Deputy Election Commissioner Nitesh Kumar Vyas appeared in person to respond to the court's questions, which were exactly five in number.

Mr. Vyas, on the first query as to where exactly the microcontrollers were situated, said all three units comprising an EVM – ballot units, control units, and VVPATs – had their own

Justice Khanna said the buttons on the ballot units were interchangeable. “A party which got button 1 in a constituency would get button 6 in another constituency. The programming of the units are done at the manufacturer stage. Manufacturer would not know which party would get what button,” Justice Khanna surmised.

The case dealt with petitions claiming that the EVM system was opaque and prone to rigging.

The court emphatically said EVM source code should not be disclosed as it would be prone to misuse. “It will become a problem... Integrity will suffer,” Justice Khanna said.

The Bench of Justices Khanna and Dipankar Datta had reserved the case for judgment on April 18, but convened again on Wednesday, in an unusual move, with more questions for the top poll body.

This development came even as the Lok Sabha election is poised for the second phase on April 26.

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Mr. Vyas, on the first query as to where exactly the microcontrollers were situated, said all three units comprising an EVM – ballot units, control units, and VVPATs – had their own microprocessors.

To the second question about whether the microcontrollers were reprogrammable, the EC official said they were “one-time programmable” at the time of manufacturing. The microprocessors could neither be changed nor physically accessed, he said.

‘In doubt’

However, advocates Prashant Bhushan, Cheryl D’Souza and Neha Rathi, for the petitioner Association for Democratic Reforms, said the EC's claim that the microprocessors were not reprogrammable was “in doubt”.

🕒 THIS STORY IS FROM MARCH 30, 2022

Karnataka Assembly debates: 19 lakh voting machines missing since 2018

TNN / Updated: Mar 30, 2022, 10:05 IST



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Won't go by 'Marxist interpretation' of wealth redistribution: SC

Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri, speaker in the assembly, said he will "try and obtain" a clarification from the Election Commission of India (ECI) on the issue of 19 lakh electronic voting machines (EVMs) which have reportedly gone missing between 2016



Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)

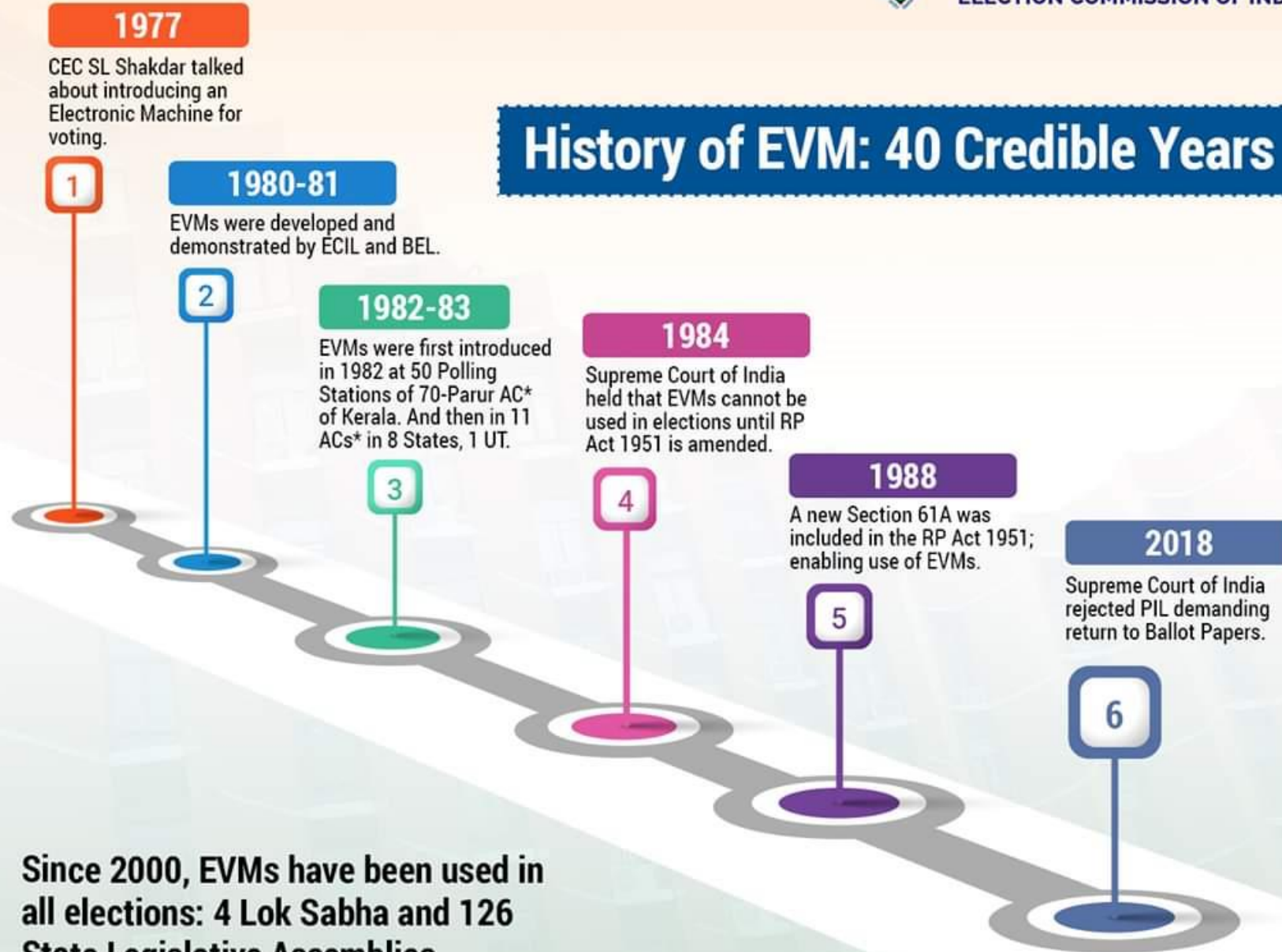
About EVM

- EVM is a portable microcontroller-based instrument for the purpose of conducting elections to the parliament, legislature and local bodies.
- In EVM there is no scope for invalid votes and total secrecy of voting data is maintained.
- In 1989, the Election Commission (EC) developed India's indigenous Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in alliance with the Electronics Corporation of India (ECIL) and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).
- EVMs were used for the 1st time in the Goa State Assembly elections of 1999.





History of EVM: 40 Credible Years



Since 2000, EVMs have been used in all elections: 4 Lok Sabha and 126 State Legislative Assemblies.

*AC: Assembly Constituency

- **Key Features:**

- **An EVM being used by ECI can record a maximum of 2,000 votes.**
- **They do not require electricity. They run on an ordinary battery assembled by**
- **Bharat Electronics Limited/Electronics Corporation of India Limited.**
- **The microchip used in EVMs is a one-time programmable/masked chip, which can neither be read nor overwritten.**
 - **Furthermore, the EVMs are stand-alone machines and there is no operating system used in these machines.**

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ANALYSIS GOVERNMENT

Whereabouts of 19 Lakh EVMs Not Known, Reveals RTI-Based Court Case



The Wire Staff

22/May/2019 · 5 min read



EC denies claims in Frontline's story, says it has no jurisdiction over State Election Commissions which also procure EVMs.



A powerful antidote to toxins in cobra, krait venoms developed

The current process of producing antivenom is outdated, involving injecting large animals with snake venom and collecting the animals' blood for the antibodies it produces. A group of scientists sidestepped animals and used human antibodies instead, eventually finding the potent 95Mat5

Rohini Subrahmanyam

For some people, snakes are exotic yet dangerous creatures of the wild; eerie but elusive, and not something to worry about in day-to-day life. For others, especially some farmers in India and Africa, they are a constant and terrifying threat to life. Venom from snake bites leads to more than 100,000 deaths every year, with around 400,000 people left permanently disabled. The mortality burden is especially higher in low and middle-income countries in Africa and Asia, with India alone at a staggering average of 58,000 deaths in a year according to a 2020 report. However, considered a "poor man's disease", relatively less attention has been paid to the devastation caused by the bites. In some of these countries, snakebite incidence is distressingly high but inadequate access to proper healthcare prevents fast and efficient treatment, leading to disproportionately more deaths.

Things were set to improve in 2017 when the World Health Organization (WHO) finally stepped in to alert the world about one of its biggest hidden health crises. It officially classified snakebite envenoming as a highest priority neglected tropical disease.

Animals in the middle
A major issue is that the current process of producing antivenom is outdated. It involves injecting large animals like horses with snake venom and collecting the animals' blood for the antibodies it produces against the venom. But the horses' blood could contain antibodies against other microorganisms as well, even against other components of the venom that are not harmful to humans. So only a fraction of the antibodies in the antivenom is useful to humans, leading to more variability and the need for larger doses.

In addition, because these antibodies are produced in another animal, the chances of humans developing an adverse or allergic reaction to these antivenoms are also higher.

A variety of venoms
Driven by these concerns, a group of scientists — part of a consortium funded by the Wellcome Trust — decided to sidestep animals and use human antibodies instead. Using a type of toxin found in many kinds of snakes, they synthetically developed a broadly applicable human antibody against the toxin. Their results were recently published in the journal *Science Translational Medicine*. "Venoms of snakes in India are so diverse that venoms of the same species across regions can't be neutralised by the same antivenom," Karthik Sunagar, head of the Evolutionary Venomics lab at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, and one of the lead authors of the study, said.

"Even in the same geographical location, if you look at individuals of the same species, antivenoms can only neutralise some venoms and not others. There is a stark variation in venoms, so that's why we wanted to figure out a solution that might work across regions



The banded krait (*Bungarus fasciatus*) is a large species of elapid snake found in the Indian subcontinent. ARIIP/2602 (CC BY-SA 4.0)

and across species."

Screening billions of antibodies

The scientists focused on three-finger toxins (3FTx) — one of the most abundant and lethal ingredients in elapid venoms. Elapids are a major medically relevant family of snakes that include cobras, kraits, and mambas.

The scientists narrowed their focus on α -neurotoxins, a specific class of 3FTx that target receptors in human nerve and muscle cells. These toxins prevent acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter involved in carrying messages from the neurons to the muscles, leading to paralysis, an inability to breathe, and eventually death.

Joseph Jardine, an antibody expert at Scripps Research Institute, in California, led the initial work of "finding the needle in the haystack" — i.e. finding the best antibody that could target the toxins among the billions of human antibodies available.

The scientists first synthesised variants of their toxin of interest, called long-chain 3FTxs (3FTx-L), a type of three-finger α -neurotoxin, in the lab. They then screened billions of human antibodies expressed on the surface of yeast cells for ones that bound best to the toxins in their study. This selection of antibodies far exceeds any number of antibodies that an animal's immune system could cook up in response to a venom. After multiple rounds, they had a shortlist of antibodies that broadly reacted with most of the 3FTx variants they used.

All but king cobra
Nicholas Casewell's group at the Liverpool School for Tropical Medicine in the U.K. then tested the antibodies *in vitro* in human cells, to see which of them could best neutralise the toxins. This step



The mortality burden is especially higher in low and middle-income countries in Africa and Asia, with India alone at a staggering average of 58,000 deaths in a year according to a 2020 report

brought them to an antibody they dubbed 95Mat5.

Finally, Dr. Sunagar's group tested 95Mat5 *in vivo* in mice, to see if this broadly neutralising antibody could help protect against lethal doses of α -bungarotoxin, the 3FTx-L in the highly venomous many-banded kraits. They also injected mice with whole venom from king cobras, black mambas, and monocled cobras — all different elapid snakes from Asia and Africa with venom containing 3FTx-L variants — and tested to check how their antibody worked against them.

"They found 95Mat5 worked well against all the snake venoms, protecting the mice from death, with the only exception being the king cobra's venom, where the antibody delayed but could not prevent death.

"We were surprised by the results of the black mamba, where the 3FTx-L is only 17% of the total venom composition. By knocking out that one toxin, we were able to protect mice fully from the other toxins in the venom in what may be a synergistic effect," said Irene Khalak, a scientist at Scripps Research Institute and one of the authors of the study.

An 'impossible' find
"The study is really well-performed, and I would expect that the antibody could be

used as an important component in future antivenoms against mambas and cobras in Africa and Asia," Andreas Hougaard Laustsen-Kiel, head of the Tropical Pharmacology Lab at the Technical University of Denmark, said.

Dr. Laustsen-Kiel was involved in a different study, published in *Nature Communications* last year, where a group of scientists discovered a similar broadly neutralising antibody against long-chain α -neurotoxins from snakes. "Because snake venoms are so complex, I would have thought it impossible to make an antibody that could knockout the whole venom," Dr. Sunagar said.

Closer to a universal solution
In the current study, the scientists found one reason why their antibody worked so well against their toxins of interest: the crystal structures of their antibody 95Mat5 and 3FTx-L variants revealed that the antibody bound the toxin exactly where the toxin would have bound its target receptor in human nerve and muscle cells. By mimicking the receptor-toxin interaction, the antibody could whisk the toxins away from the receptors and prevent them from exerting their deadly effects.

The custom antibody works well against a specific kind of toxin present in the venom of many dangerous snakes, but it is also a small first step towards a universal antivenom.

The scientists said they are keen on discovering specific antibodies like these against toxins in other snake venoms as well, like in vipers. "We need to discover antibodies for a couple of other toxins, then we can have a universal solution for the majority of snakes in the world," Dr. Sunagar said. (Rohini Subrahmanyam is a freelance journalist.)



Experts say the injury rates should concern clients, including NASA, Reuters

Injuries at SpaceX exceed industry average for second year

Reuters

Injury rates at SpaceX facilities continued to exceed an industry average in 2023, according to a review of safety data reported to U.S. regulators by the space venture controlled by billionaire Elon Musk.

The 2023 records, newly disclosed by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), also show that injury rates at some SpaceX facilities grew worse than those the company had reported in 2022.

At its manufacturing-and-launch facility in Brownsville, Texas, for instance, SpaceX reported 5.9 injuries per 100 workers, surpassing its rate of 4.8 injuries in 2022 and topping a space industry average of 0.8.

The company's high injury rate last year was the subject of an investigation that found at least 600 previously unreported workers injured at the rocket and satellite company. Those injuries, Reuters reported, led to crushed limbs, amputations, serious injuries, and one death.

SpaceX didn't respond to requests seeking comment on the latest figures.

Safety experts say the high injury rates should be of concern for SpaceX clients, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or NASA. The federal space program has increasingly relied on SpaceX in recent years and as of 2022 had paid the company at least \$11.5 billion (\$98,300 crore) for various contracts.

"NASA should be concerned about the quality of the work," said David Michaels,

An investigation found at least 600 previously unreported injuries at the company. Those injuries led to crushed limbs, amputations, serious head injuries, and one death

a former OSHA administrator who is now a professor at The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. High injury rates, he added, can be "an indicator of poor production quality and safety." A NASA spokesperson didn't respond to a request for comment. OSHA also didn't respond to questions about SpaceX's injury rate.

Reuters calculated the latest injury rates using data published by OSHA last week. The data for 2023 is the most complete yet provided by SpaceX, which reported injuries from eight major facilities, three more than it had in 2022. In years prior, SpaceX hadn't reported any data for most of its sites, which include manufacturing, launch, and other facilities.

At a unit that retrieves rocket boosters in the Pacific Ocean, SpaceX last year reported 7.6 injuries per 100 workers, more than nine-times the industry rate. Neither the company nor Mr. Musk, its billionaire founder and chief executive, have publicly addressed SpaceX's safety record in detail.

Gwynne Shotwell, SpaceX's chief operating officer, in March reposted a video on social media of emergency chutes being tested at a company site in Florida. Commenting on the video on X, the social media company that's also controlled by Mr. Musk, she wrote that "astronaut and personnel safety is SpaceX's highest priority."

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THE SCIENCE QUIZ

How far can you count?

Yasudevyan Mukundh

word for the number of value 1 lakh lakh crore? Hint: in regular, non-numerical use, this word means 'strangeness'.

QUESTION 1
If an octant is one-eighth, a quintant is one-fifth, and a trient is one-third, how much is a dodrant?

QUESTION 4
What's the name for the number worth 10,000? This name is descended from a Greek word meaning "of countless numbers" and is often colloquially used to mean a very large number.

QUESTION 2
In the Indian numbering system and in the Urdu language, 1 followed by five zeroes is a lakh, seven zeroes is a crore, and nine zeroes is an arab. What is the name for the number in which 1 is followed by 11 zeroes?

QUESTION 5
The short and long scales are two ways to name numbers expressed as powers of 10. In the short scale, a trillion is a thousand-billion; in the long scale, it's a million-billion. What's the name of a quadrillion on the long scale?

QUESTION 3
In the same Indian numbering system and in Tamil, what is the

Answers to April 23 quiz:

1. Metal named for island in the Mediterranean Sea — **Ans: Copper**
2. Element whose is derived from 'Bakur' in Karnataka — **Ans: Beryllium**
3. Swedish village for which four elements are named — **Ans: Ytterby**
4. Element named for building material used in 'City of Light' — **Ans: Lutetium**
5. Element named for city whose name means 'merchants' harbour' — **Ans: Hafnium**



Visual: Name the horse in this picture. In the early 20th century, Wilhelm von Osten (pictured) claimed this horse could count, but it was later found to be a classic case of experimenter's bias. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Please send in your answers to science@thehindu.co.in

Powerful antidote to toxins in cobra, krait venoms developed

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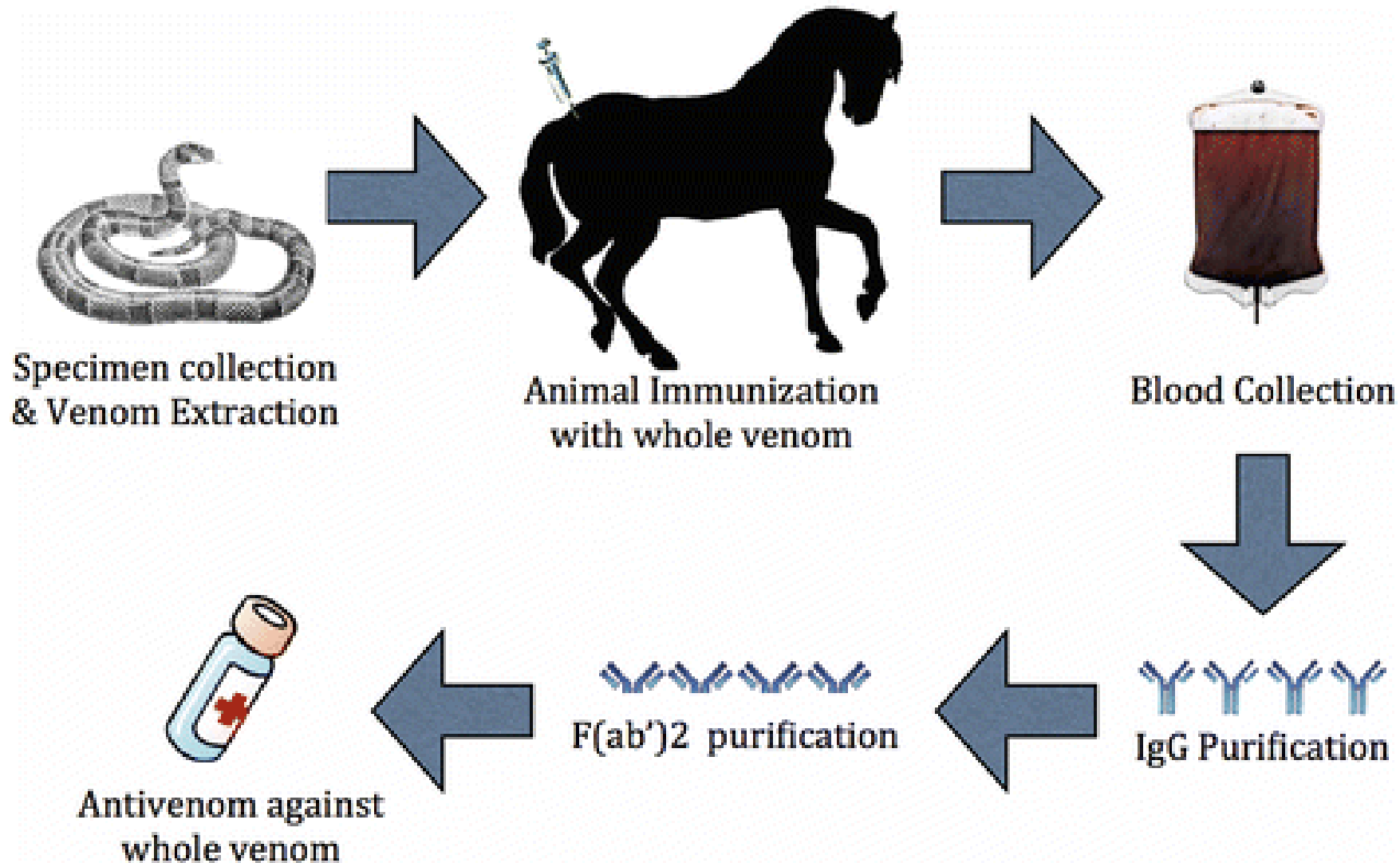
Venom from snake bites leads to more than 100,000 deaths every year, with around 400,000 people left permanently disabled. The mortality burden is especially higher in low and middle-income countries in Africa and Asia, with India alone at a staggering average of 58,000 deaths in a year according to a 2020 report. However, considered a “poor man’s disease”, relatively less attention has been paid to the devastation caused by the bites. In some of these countries, snakebite incidence is distressingly high but inadequate access to proper healthcare prevents fast and efficient treatment, leading to disproportionately more deaths.

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The banded krait (*Bungarus fasciatus*) is a large species of elapid snake found in the Indian subcontinent. ARUP2602 (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Traditional Antivenom Production



The reality of the Swachh Bharat Mission

India was ranked right at the bottom of 180 countries in the Environment Performance Index (EPI) in 2022. The EPI ranks countries on climate change performance, environmental health, and ecosystem vitality. It measures 40 performance indicators across 11 issue categories, such as air quality, and drinking water and sanitation. The government responded to the rank saying the methodology is faulty and does not quantify the Indian scenario objectively.

For 10 years, the Modi government has embarked on much-hyped campaigns of development. These included the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and the National Clean Air Programme.

Is the EPI linked to these missions? It should be, because these missions aim to enable better living standards. The SBM is meant to address the issue of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Health). Likewise, the SCM is supposed to deliver on the clean energy requirements of towns. However, what we have seen is an increase in the vulnerability of the population owing to air and water pollution, among others.

The Swachh Bharat Mission So, what went wrong? Let us take the example of the SBM and SBM 2.0, which was launched in 2021 and which aims to make all cities free of garbage. Sanitation and waste management in India are associated with the wide prevalence of caste. Historically, the subjugated caste have been forced to carry out sanitation work. The SBM tried to create a narrative that sanitation is everyone's job. Instead, it has ended up continuing the same old caste practices.

The SBM is a politically successful project, no opposition party or community has raised objections to it. While the entire

Tikender Singh

is a former deputy elected Mayor of Shimla and an urban practitioner.

project is governed and monitored by state agencies, the design makes it clear that large, capital-intensive technologies are promoted. The Union government claims that India is open defecation-free, but the reality is different. A Comptroller and Auditor General report in 2020 raised many questions about the government's claims over the success of the SBM on this front. It indicated the poor quality of construction of toilet under this scheme. A few urbanisation studies pointed out that in some metros, communities in slums still do not have access to public toilets. Even in rural India, toilet construction has not been linked to waste treatment. In peri-urban areas, the faecal sludge generated is tossed into the environment. Septic tanks are cleaned by manual scavengers and the sludge is thrown into various water systems.

One thing the government intended to do via SBM was to reduce the involvement of people in waste management by replacing them with larger, capital-intensive technologies. However, these installations have refused to live up to the promoters' promises, leaving town after town screaming for the government to fix them and, importantly, respond to the health crises emerging from badly managed waste (if at all) as well as the rates and forms of privatisation local governments believed these technologies would support. In this scenario, the governments outsourced most of the work to private players, who employed the same subjugated communities to handle waste. Take, for example, solid and liquid waste management in cities. In most towns, the Union government is employing technological solutions to handle waste, while the local governments are handling solid waste. Some of these solutions are in the form of waste-to-energy plants and biological mechanisation. But there are barely any success stories in either case.

City governments are being

asked to buy more machines including road sweeping machines that cost no less than ₹1 crore, more vehicles to transport the waste from one corner to another with geo-tagging, and so on. Funds are made available to the city governments for such plans. However, all this work is being handed over to large contractors and the contractors are making a profit entity. Most of the workers employed by these contractors are Dalits. Hence, a scheme fully owned by the state has become a toolkit for the privatisation of public health services and continues caste discrimination.

On March 30, 2024, in the Himachal Pradesh High Court, the Urban Development department said that there are just five sanitation inspectors in the Shimla Municipal Corporation, which comprises 34 wards. Instead of recruiting more such inspectors, this cadre is being declared dead after they retire. In a state where there are more than 50 municipal bodies, there are only 20 sanitation inspectors, which means that there are some municipalities that have no sanitation inspectors.

There are similar problems with other programmes too. Such failures have been dragging down India's EPI performance.

Development model The EPI may be quite comprehensive. However, one of its features of mapping exposes the unsustainability of our development processes. This means that our development models must be altered. The EPI must also be seen in the background of a recent judgment where the Supreme Court observed the links between technological solutions and human rights. Climate scientists have said that the reasons for the current problems are anthropogenic and systemic in nature.

We will have to link policies to human rights in order to tackle these issues.

Thriving on the politics of fear

The BJP's ads show the party's contempt for the Constitution and the rule of law

STATE OF PLAY

Janaki Nair

The Congress' victory in the 2023 Assembly election in Karnataka was difficult pill for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to swallow, especially since the party had secured its biggest vote share in 34 years. Then the Congress decided to implement its five guarantees: free bus rides for women, ₹2,000 a month to each woman-headed household, free electricity up to 200 units, 10 kgs of rice, and guarantees for the young and unemployed. But above all, the Siddaramaiah government has wrested control of the police. It has lost no opportunity to remind the police to return to the impartiality to which they are committed and literally shed their orange tinge (in two police stations, Kaup and Vijayapura, the police donned saffron for Vijayadashami). In short, the government has honoured its commitment to the Constitution both by offering welfare schemes and by protecting all citizens equally.

The previous 'stable engine' government (2019-23) had introduced, with extraordinary speed and little discussion, the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2021; the Karnataka Religious Structures (Protection) Act, 2021; and the Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Act, 2022. These laws had emboldened the majority and induced fear among the minorities. They had also bred a whole layer of intermediaries (apart from the police) who decided which parts of the cattle trade would be allowed. The regime also honoured as 'martyrs' those who

Karnataka

had dubious posts, such as Harsha of Shivamogga.

So it was with some relief that the citizens returned to things that mattered after May 2023: jobs, alleviation of poverty and price rise, freedom of speech, the rule of law, and dealing with the prospect of drought. The fulfilled guarantees drove public discourse in a different direction.

On the eve of elections, given that it had no positive pushback against the guarantees, the BJP tried to once again produce fear. There was an attempt to hoist a Bhagwa Dwar on government property; it swiftly thwarted. A purported quarrel between a shopkeeper and a gang of local toughs (Hindus and Muslims) was handily turned into opposition to the Hanuman Chalisa. But this too died down. Then a blast in Rameshwaram Café and the unfortunate killing of Neha Hiremath by her former classmate Fayaz have fallen like ripe fruit into the hands of the BJP and given it the verve it lacked on urgent economic questions.

Now, the BJP's full-page advertisement campaign has been random 'fears' into a full-fledged red alert. It crosses all standards of decency and amplifies isolated events. It also stands in stark contrast to the Congress' advertisements based on its guarantees and on the unfulfilled Union government promises. The BJP advertisement, in stark black

and red, warns against voting for the Congress. A man who resembles Mr. Siddaramaiah leaves bloody footprints as he walks away. A swirl of accusations posed as questions surging from a college, a young girl be sacrificed for love jihad. Should tea-drinkers have to fear bombs in a café? Should those visiting the Vidhana Soudha hear the slogan 'Pakistan Zindabad'? Should the grazing cow have to fear the chopping block? In this compilation of nine accusations, six single out the Muslim as the enemy and three others serve as assorted warnings about Nasal violence, the reallocation of Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe welfare funds, and the sharing of Cauvery waters. The advertisement appears in all the major Kannada newspapers, but curiously, the BJP has chosen to keep this warning only for the Kannada-reading public.

The advertisement about the dangers of voting for the Congress is ironically the BJP's warning against the Israeli Wracked by internal dissidence, it falls far short of the exhausted capital of Islamophobia, hoping to assert itself as the keeper of law and order, including instant 'encounter' and 'baludism' that reiterates its contempt for the Constitution and indeed the rule of law that the people of Karnataka enjoy.

The Congress' aggressive campaign for the rights of the Government of Karnataka to its share of coal is confined in its use of the *chombu*, colloquially, an empty vessel. The BJP's advertisement perhaps emboldened by the Prime Minister's warning that the Karnataka *chombu* is full of the blood of Hindus. As a coded call for 'revange', it thus buries any idea of Karnataka or, indeed, of India.

Tensions grow in West Asia, a heavily militarised region

West Asia accounts for 30% of the global arms imports and spends the most on the military among all other regions

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

West Asia supplies the most extractive resources for the world's energy consumption, which makes peace an imperative in the region. Yet tensions are escalating in the region on account of the Israel-Gaza conflict, the hostilities between Iran and Israel, and the attacks and counter-attacks between Israel and Iran-backed militias from Lebanon and Yemen. Apart from this, the region has also become one of the most heavily militarised in the world. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's "Trends in International Arms Transfers 2023", four of the top 10 largest importers of arms last year were from West Asia, with the U.S. being the main supplier (Table 1). All this has resulted in West Asia becoming a powder keg.

Crises in the region Israel's shadow war with Tehran underwent a dramatic escalation recently. Iran launched its first-ever full-scale military attack against Israel on April 13, 2024, in retaliation to the Benjamin Netanyahu government's attack on April 1 on an Iranian compound in Syria in which General Mohammed Reza Zohadi, the top commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was killed.

Israel has been continuing its attacks on the Gaza Strip in response to the October 7 Hamas attack which led to the death of 1,139 people. Nearly 34,000 Palestinians have been killed so far. The conflict persists despite the international community urging for an immediate ceasefire. The 10-month-long Gaza war and the ramping up of Iran-Israel hostilities has caused concern among international actors amid existing tensions such as the unresolved Yemen civil war, the Lebanese

political crisis, the 14-year-long Syrian civil war, and the Turkey-Cyprus conflict, among others.

Amid these crises, West Asia today accounts for almost 30% of the global arms imports and spends the most on the military among all other regions in the world. Chart 2 shows region-wise military expenditure as a share of the GDP. In this measure, West Asia and North Africa have been consistently leading for over three decades now, though the share has come down from the peak of over 10% of GDP reported in the 1990s. West Asia spent 4.6% of its GDP in 2020 on the military, compared with 3.5% in North America.

Share of GDP Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the oil and natural gas rich nation-states, have consistently spent over 5% of their GDP on defence in recent years, the highest among countries in this region. Jordan, Oman, Kuwait and Israel have also spent close to 5% of their GDP on their militaries in the last decade. Chart 3 shows the military expenditure as a share of GDP for individual countries in the West Asian region. Though Saudi Arabia and Oman's shares are on a decreasing trend, they continue to lead other when the share of the labour force employed in the armed forces is the highest.

Chart 4 shows that 2.5% of the labour force is engaged in the military in the West Asian and North African region, compared with only 1.2% in Europe and Central Asia. The consistent demand for arms can be attributed to the growing instability in the region fuelled by domestic insurgencies, transnational terrorist attacks, unstable regional boundaries, and, in some cases, foreign policies and the need to project 'hard power'. The hue and cry of the 'Arab Spring' that led to a lot of churning in the region, and the aforementioned tensions has also contributed to the increased militarisation.

A region in turmoil

The data for the charts were sourced from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute



Escalating tensions: A drone view of the apparent remains of a ballistic missile in the desert following a massive missile and drone attack by Iran on Israel, near the southern city of Arad, Israel, REUTERS

Table 1: United States has been the main supplier of arms to the West Asian countries. Numbers in %

Recipient	Top supplier	Second	Third
Qatar	U.S. (49)	U.K. (24)	U.S. (21)
S. Arabia	U.S. (32)	Spain (15)	France (6)
Turkey	Spain (13)	Germany (33)	U.S. (11)
UAE	U.S. (55)	France (27)	Turkey (12)
Israel	U.S. (53)	Germany (47)	Italy (0.6)
Yemen	Italy (94)	U.S. (6.9)	-
Bahrain	U.S. (100)	-	-
Iran	Russia (100)	-	-

While most of these countries are sourcing their military supplies from the U.S. and Europe, Iran is entirely dependent on Russia

Chart 2: The chart shows the region-wise military expenditure as a share of the GDP. West Asia and North Africa have been consistently leading all regions for over three decades.

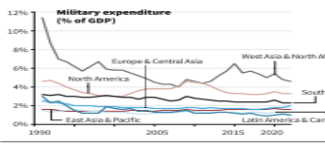
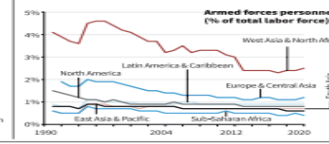


Chart 3: The chart shows the military expenditure as a share of a country's GDP in the West Asian region. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman lead in this measure in the region.

Country	Military expenditure (% of GDP)
Saudi Arabia	~5.5%
Qatar	~5.5%
Oman	~5.5%
Israel	~4.5%
UAE	~4.5%
Yemen	~1.5%
Bahrain	~1.5%
Iran	~1.5%

Chart 4: The chart shows the share of the labour force employed in the armed forces in the West Asian and North African region leads in this measure.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 25, 1974

Power Board's frantic efforts to get coal

Madras, April 24: The Tamil Nadu Electricity Board faced with coal crisis is leading a hard to mouth existence with only 2.5 million tons on hand. The daily requirement of both Basin Bridge and Ennore Thermal Stations is about 650,000 tonnes. The Chairman of the Board, Mr. M.G. Raja Ram, said: "I am frantically searching for coal all over the country. With the impending railway strike, coal receipts, particularly in Singareni, are very poor."

The Chairman sat on one ship, authorised by the Director General of Shipping, was at present loading about 6,000 tonnes of coal from the port. This was expected to dock in Madras in about ten days. The Board had chartered a foreign ship with the help of the South India Shipping Corporation and it was now on its way to Calcutta for loading coal. He said coal arrivals from Singareni had been disappointing. As against a monthly allotment of about 70,000 tonnes, despatches from Singareni for Madras had never exceeded 40 per cent of the requirement.

The State grid had now an average supply of 20.5 million units daily (this was the position at midnight on April 23). The relief from Neyveli accounted for about 5.6 million units, while Kerala gave about 1.7 million units on an average in Ennore, one that now set on one 60 mw set were generating power. The average generation was about 97 mw or 2.3 million units a day. Basin Bridge gave 1.05 million units of power that was fed into the grid accounted for 3.8 million units a day, and with Neyveli and Kerala power, the grid was receiving on an average 20.5 million units daily.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 25, 1924

Indian Railway orders in England

London, April 24: Orders have been placed with Messrs. Hawthorn, Leslie and Company of Bebbarn-on-Tyne and Kerr Stuart Company of London for 4 and 6 ton engines respectively for Indian State Railways in addition to 40 passenger engines recently ordered from the Italian Foundry of Newcastles-on-Tyne. The East Indian Railway Company. The contracts were secured in the face of the stiff competition, the deciding factors being high class character of work and speed in delivery.

Tensions grow in West Asia, a heavily militarised region

West Asia accounts for 30% of the global arms imports and spends the most on the military among all other regions

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

West Asia supplies the most extractive resources for the world's energy consumption, which makes peace an imperative in the region. Yet tensions are escalating in the region on account of the Israel-Gaza conflict, the hostilities between Iran and Israel, and the attacks and counter-attacks between Israel and Iran-backed militias from Lebanon and Yemen.

Apart from this, the region has also become one of the most heavily militarised in the world. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's 'Trends in International Arms Transfers

political crisis, the 14-year-long Syrian civil war, and the Turkey-Cyprus conflict, among others.

Amid these crises, West Asia today accounts for almost 30% of the global arms imports and spends the most on the military among all other regions in the world. **Chart 2** shows region-wise military expenditure as a share of the GDP. In this measure, West Asia and North Africa have been consistently leading for over three decades now, though the share has come down from the peak of over 10% of GDP, reported in the 1990s. West Asia spent 4.6% of its GDP in 2020 on the military, compared with 3.3% in North America.

Share of GDP

Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the oil and natural gas rich nation-states, have

A region in turmoil

The data for the charts were sourced from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute



Escalating tensions: A drone view of the apparent remains of a ballistic missile in the desert following a massive missile and drone attack by Iran on Israel, near the southern city of Arad, Israel. REUTERS





Table 1: United States has been the main supplier of arms to the West Asian countries. Numbers in %

Recipient	Top supplier	Second	Third
Qatar	U.S. (49)	U.K. (26)	Italy (21)
S. Arabia	U.S. (72)	Spain (15)	France (6.5)
Turkey	Spain (51)	Germany (31)	U.S. (11)
UAE	U.S. (55)	France (27)	Turkey (12)
Israel	U.S. (53)	Germany (47)	Italy (0.6)
Kuwait	Italy (94)	U.S. (6.0)	-
Bahrain	U.S. (100)	-	-
Iran	Russia (100)	-	-

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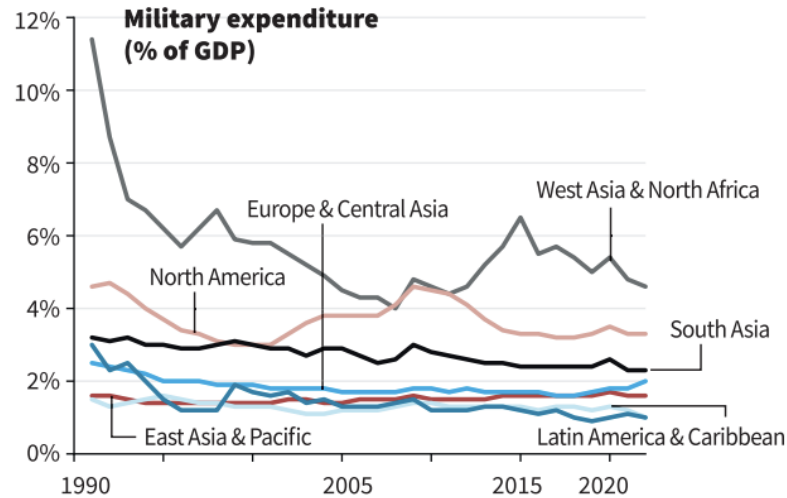


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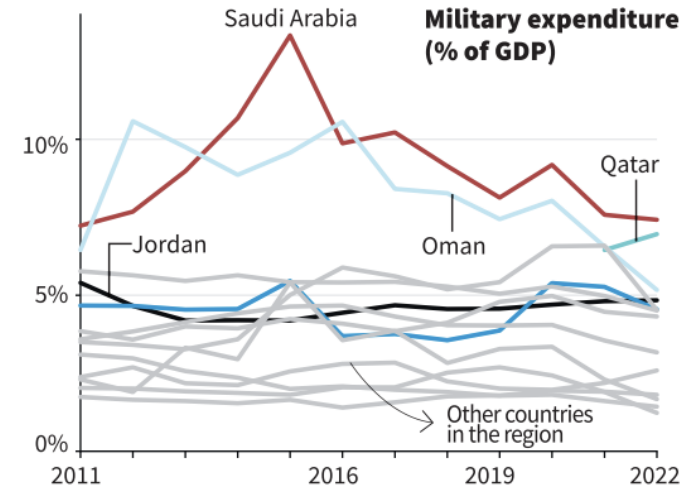
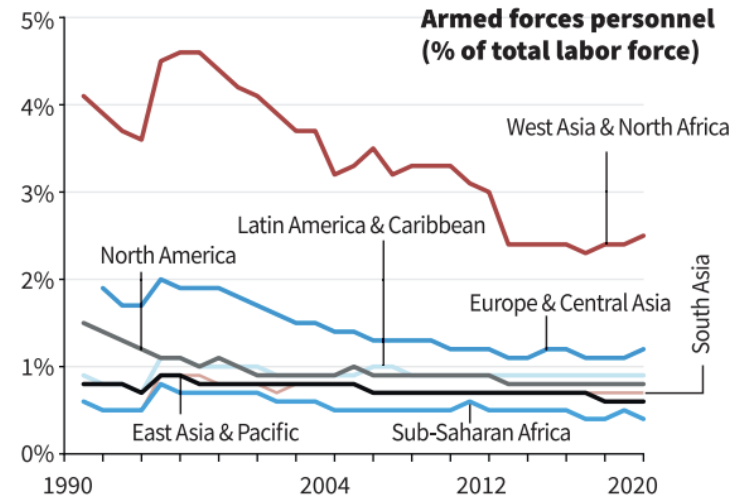


Chart 4: The chart shows the share of the labour force employed in the armed forces. The West Asian and North African region leads in this measure



NEWS IN NUMBERS

The number of people who faced acute hunger in 2023

282 in million. Food insecurity worsened around the world in 2023, with millions suffering from hunger due to conflicts, particularly in Gaza and Sudan, according to UN agencies.

The rise in India's pharmaceutical exports in FY24

9.67 in percentage. The All India Management Association (AIMA), a federation of local management associations, has witnessed a growth in the registration for the MAT (Management Aptitude Test) in 2023.

The growth in the MAT entrance exam registration: AIMA

20 in percentage. The All India Management Association (AIMA), a federation of local management associations, has witnessed a growth in the registration for the MAT (Management Aptitude Test) in 2023.

The loss posted by Boeing in the first quarter of 2024

355 in \$ million. The aircraft has been in trouble since a door plug blew out of a Boeing 737 Max during a flight in January. The revenue decline reflects the crisis gripping the aircraft manufacturer.

The age of the idols unearthed from Haryana village

400 years. Three metal idols were unearthed during the excavation of a huge construction project in Baghanki village.

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On the National Clean Air Programme

Why has the implementation of Clean Air Action Plans been inconsistent? Why are cities not using the allocated funds set aside by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change? What are some of the tools which can improve our understanding of the origins of pollution?

EXPLAINER

Anirban Banerjee

The story so far:

When the Indian government launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) in 2019, it was to cut the concentration of atmospheric Particulate Matter (PM) by 20-30% by 2024, from 2017 levels. This was later revised to 40% by 2026.

What is the NCAP?

Under NCAP, cities continuously violating annual PM levels in India need to prepare and implement annual Clean Air Action Plans (CAAPs). To facilitate this, the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change has allocated ₹10,422.73 crore. Most cities proactively submitted their CAAPs yet their implementation has been inconsistent. On average, only 60% of the allocated funds have been used thus far, according to the Ministry, with 27% of cities spending less than 30% of their designated budgets. Visakhapatnam and Bengaluru have spent 0% and 1% of their NCAP funds, respectively. Implementation delays hinder NCAP's success, particularly in approvals from the competent authorities (for example, the technical specification of tendering processes or for procuring products such as mechanical sweepers and electric buses).

There is also a lack of standard operating procedures for the implementation of CAAPs. Time-consuming tasks required to implement control measures and the absence of well-defined timelines create further delays. Yet other reasons include bureaucratic red-tape and lingering doubts regarding the effectiveness of proposed mitigation measures. After the recent findings over the inefficacy of outdoor smog towers, decision-makers' hesitation is justified. But experts also require a systemic approach based



Clearing the air: An anti-smog gun spraying water in New Delhi on January 12. FILE PHOTO

on Emissions Inventory (EI), Air Quality (AQ) modelling, and Source Apportionment (SA).

How can scientific tools help?

EI and SA studies are critical to identify and understand the origins of pollution. EIs provide insights into local pollution sources and their contributions, allowing experts to forecast future emissions based on demographic shifts and technological advancements across sectors, among other factors. EIs also help shape targeted pollution control strategies. They have their limitations, too, particularly in assessing the impact of transboundary pollution sources – such as when determining the effect of stubble-burning outside Delhi on the city's air quality.

SA studies offer a detailed analysis of contributions from various pollution sources, including those located afar.

However, they aren't suited for predictive analysis and require substantial resources, including specialised personnel and equipment for chemical analysis. SA studies also can't distinguish between the origins of pollution, like, say, emissions from diesel trucks 200 m away and 20 km away, because diesel emissions have similar chemical signatures.

These gaps can be bridged through AQ modelling, which informs our understanding of pollution dispersion, including from distant sources.

How are these being used?

Ideally, the cities should look into EI and SA data to pinpoint air pollutants and prepare mitigation measures targeting each polluting activity. According to the Portal for Regulation of Air-pollution in Non-Attainment cities, only 27% of cities have completed EI and SA studies,

meaning the remaining 63% don't have a clear idea about what is polluting their air. Thus, the effectiveness of CAAPs is questioned if the cities don't know the individual emissions reduction potentials of their proposed mitigation measures. Based on the potential and infrastructure requirements, cities need to set proper yearly targets and fund them.

Moreover, the NCAP's reliance on concentration data as a measure of population exposure to harmful pollution – further complicates the situation.

Pollution from high-smitting industries and other sources outside city limits, carried into urban areas by winds complicates urban air-quality management. Many existing control measures focus only on primary PM emissions, neglecting their secondary precursors. A shift towards comprehensive strategies addressing both primary and secondary pollutants is thus important. Further, although one of the NCAP goals is to set up infrastructure to forecast AQ, no city barring Delhi, Pune, Mumbai, and Abhanbali has a decision-support system.

What does NCAP need to succeed? Beyond the need for data and models, swift implementation on the ground is essential. For this, implementation agencies should seek to reduce

bureaucratic red tape by utilising shared, standardised technical evaluations. As NCAP funding is linked with the performance of cities based on the annual average PM concentration reduction, prior budgeting and time estimates are crucial. Technical feasibility, budgeting, and time estimates need to be part of the initial plans.

The journey towards cleaner air in India, as charted by NCAP, will be difficult but is necessary. NCAP's success hinges on a multifaceted approach that combines rigorous scientific studies, strategic funds, and swift implementation. The implementation of mitigation measures.

Centre for Quality at Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy.

THE GIST

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Why was the BJP candidate declared winner in Surat?

Why was the Congress candidate's nomination paper not accepted? What does the Representation of the People Act, 1951 state with respect to requirements for valid nomination?

Rangarajan R

The story so far:

The BJP's candidate from the Surat Lok Sabha constituency in Gujarat has been declared elected after the withdrawal of the nomination paper of the Congress party and the withdrawal of nominations by other candidates.

What is the law for nomination?

Section 33 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act) contains the requirements for a valid nomination. As per the RP Act, an elector above 25 years of age can contest Lok Sabha election from any constituency in India. The proposer(s) of the candidate should, however, be elector(s) from that respective constituency where the nomination is being filed. In case of a registered party (national or State), the candidate needs to have one proposer. Candidates set up by

unrecognised parties and independents need to be subscribed by ten proposers. A candidate can file up to four nomination papers with different proposers. This is to enable the acceptance of nomination of a candidate even if one set of nomination paper is in order.

Section 36 of the RP Act sets out the law with respect to the scrutiny of nomination papers by the Returning Officer (RO). It provides that the RO shall not reject any nomination for a defect that is not of a substantial character. However, it specifies that signature of the candidate or proposer found not genuine is grounds for rejection.

What is the current issue?

In the present case, the candidate of the Congress party for the Surat constituency, Nilesh Kumbhani had filed three sets of nomination papers. The proposers for these three nomination papers were his brother-in-law, nephew and business partner. A BJP worker objected to Mr.

Kumbhani's nomination alleging that the signatures of his proposers were not genuine. The RO also received affidavits from the proposers claiming that they had not signed the nomination papers of the candidate. He sought reply/clarification from the candidate within a day on the objections raised. As the proposers could not be produced before the RO within the stipulated time for scrutiny, all three sets of nomination papers were rejected.

The election rules allow for a substitute candidate to be fielded by a political party. The nomination of this substitute candidate would be accepted if the nomination of the original candidate is rejected. In this case, the Congress party had fielded Suresh Padada as its substitute candidate. However, the nomination of this substitute candidate was also rejected for the same reason, that is of the proposer's signature not being genuine. The other nominations were either rejected or withdrawn paving the way for BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal to

be declared winner.

THE GIST

There have been at least 35 candidates who have been elected unopposed to the Lok Sabha. Majority of them were in the first two decades after independence with the last being in 2012.

In the instant case, however, the Congress party has alleged that the proposers were coerced to backtrace on their signatures. It has approached the Election Commission (EC) seeking to set aside the decision of the RO and restart the election process.

However, it is unlikely that the EC would set aside the decision of the RO under the Constitution read with RP Act provides that no election shall be called in question by an election petition before the concerned High Court. One of the grounds on which such an election petition can be filed is improper rejection of nomination papers. Hence, the legal recourse available is to file an election petition in the Gujarat High Court.

The RP Act provides that High Courts shall endeavour to conclude such trials within six months, which has mostly not been followed in the past. Speedy disposal of election petitions would be a step in the right direction.

Rangarajan R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Politely Simplified'. He currently works as an associate professor at Officers IAS Academy. Views expressed are personal.

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STRASBOURG EU lawmakers agree to withdraw from treaty over climate fears



The European Parliament on Wednesday backed the EU's withdrawal from an international energy treaty over concerns it offers too much protection to fossil fuel companies.

BANGKOK Danger warning issued for Bangkok as extreme heat bites



Thai authorities issued an extreme heat warning for Bangkok on Wednesday, urging people to stay indoors as temperatures soared.

MOSCOW Dancer suspends priest who held Navalny's memorial service



Dmitry Safonov, a priest who oversaw a memorial on March 26 for late Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny, has been suspended for three years by the head of the country's Orthodox Church.

KATHMANDU Nepal's President asks Al Thani to help free hostage held by Hamas



Ram Chandra Poudel, Nepal's President asked Sheik Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, who is on a two-day visit to the South Asian country, to help release a Nepali student held hostage by Hamas, officials said on Wednesday.

Israel pummels Gaza after U.S. Congress approves aid

Senate's approval of the \$13 billion aid package sent a 'strong message to all our enemies', says Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz; fears are rising that Israel will soon launch an assault on Rafah

Agence France-Presse GAZA STRIP

Israel pounded Gaza with air strikes and artillery fire in its war against Hamas on Wednesday after the U.S. Congress approved \$13 billion in military aid.



Wiped out: Destroyed buildings in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said the Senate's approval of the aid package already passed by the House of Representatives sent a "strong message to all our enemies" in a post on social media platform X.

U.S.-Israeli relations been strained by Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's determination to send troops into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where 1.5 million people are sheltered in makeshift encampments.

Fears are rising that Israel will soon launch an assault on Rafah, which it

says is the "last major Hamas stronghold, but aid groups warn any invasion would create an "apocalyptic situation".

Early on Wednesday, hospital and security sources in Gaza reported Israeli air strikes in Rafah, as well as the central Nuseirat refugee camp. Heavy bombardment of several areas in northern Gaza during the night was reported, while the Israeli military said it aircraft

tents that had been set up in recent weeks in southern Gaza.

The Journal reported that Israel would then send troops into Rafah gradually, targeting areas where Hamas leaders are thought to be hiding in an operation expected to last six weeks.

Issam al-Thawaba, head of the Hamas government media office, said an invasion would be a "crime" and that central Gaza and Khan Yunis "cannot accommodate the numbers of displaced people in Rafah".

The war began with an unprecedented Hamas attack on October 7 that resulted in the deaths of around 1,170 people.

In retaliation, Israel launched a military offensive in Rafah, in which 34,262 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's Health Ministry.

Ranil bats for Global South during Iran President's visit

Meera Srinivasan COLOMBO

The Global South must strive for its strength and autonomy, Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Wednesday, even as he thanked his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi, who inaugurated a key power and irrigation project in the island nation.



Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe with his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi in Colombo.

Expressing "gratitude to Iran for their technical support", Mr. Wickremesinghe emphasised that without Iran's assistance, Sri Lanka would not be able to execute the crucial \$34-million irrigation project. Consequently to the project, around 6,000 hectares of agricultural land in three southern and central districts will receive water supply, his office said.

Further, the project is expected to generate and add 120 MW to the national grid.

Mr. Wickremesinghe's pitch for greater autonomy in the Global South amid media reports in Sri Lanka of "Western pressure" on Colombo, Mr. Rai-

si landed in Sri Lanka 10 days after Iran launched an unprecedented missile and drone attack on Israel, retaliating against the April 1 air strike on the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus. While the two sides appear to have backed off from a regional conflict for now, tensions remain high, with Israel continuing its attack on Gaza. During his just concluded three-day visit to Pakistan, President Raisi warned Israel that "nothing will be left of the Zionist regime" if Tel Aviv attacks Iran again.

Meanwhile, the Sri Lankan government announced the signing of five

U.S. sent ATACMS missiles to Ukraine

Associated Press WASHINGTON

The United States sent long-range ATACMS missiles to Ukraine for use inside its territory, and the weapons arrived in the country this month, the State Department said on Wednesday.

"I can confirm that the United States provided Ukraine with long-range ATACMS at the President's direct direction," State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel told Presspersons.

The weapons were part of a March aid package for Ukraine, not the one just approved by Congress and signed by President Joe Biden, but "we did not announce this at the onset in order to maintain operational security for Ukraine at their request," Mr. Patel said, adding that the "missiles arrived in Ukraine this month."

The White House has previously confirmed that the U.S. sent a shorter-range variant of ATACMS to Ukraine.

Blinken in China seeking pressure, but also stability

Agence France-Presse SHANGHAI

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken returned on Wednesday to China on his second visit in a year, as the United States ramps up pressure on its rival over its support for Russia while also seeking to manage tensions with Beijing.

The U.S. diplomat will meet China's top brass on Friday in Beijing, where he is also expected to plead for restraint as Taiwan inaugurates a new leader, and to raise concerns on Chinese trade practices — a vital issue for President Joe Biden in an election year.

Argentina seeks arrest of Iran Minister over '94 blast

Agence France-Presse BUENOS AIRES

Argentina has asked Interpol to arrest Iran's Interior Minister over the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people, the Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.



Ahmad Vahidi

The Foreign Ministry said the Iranian Minister, Ahmad Vahidi, was part of a delegation from Tehran visiting Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and Interpol has issued a red notice seeking his arrest at the request of Argentina, Argentina has also asked those two governments to arrest Mr. Vahidi, it added.

But Iran's official news

agency IRNA reported that Mr. Vahidi was back in Iran on Tuesday. An official from Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry said that Mr. Vahidi was not listed as part of an Iranian delegation that arrived in the country on Wednesday.

On April 12, a court in Argentina placed blame on

Iran for the 1994 attack against the AMIA Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires and for a bombing two years earlier against the Israeli Embassy, which killed 29 people.

The 1994 assault has never been claimed or solved, but Argentina and Israel have long suspected the Iran-backed group Hezbollah carried it out at Iran's request.

Prosecutors have charged two Iranian officials with ordering the attack, though Tehran has denied any involvement. The court also implicated Hezbollah and called the attack — the deadliest in Argentina's history — a "crime against humanity".

Russian Minister held over graft charges

Agence France-Presse MOSCOW

Timur Ivanov, a Russian deputy Defence Minister exposed in an investigation by late Opposition leader Alexei Navalny's team was remanded in custody on Wednesday on suspicion of taking large bribes.

He faces up to 15 years in prison for bribe-taking, it added. Ivanov denies the charges, his lawyer told the state-run TASS news agency.

Necessary education



Defending rights: Students protest for public university funding and against austerity measures proposed by President Javier Milei, in Argentina on Tuesday. The posters carried slogans like "With fascism, there are no rights" and "Why so much fear to educate the people?".

Columbia University cites 'progress' with Gaza protesters

Associated Press NEW YORK

Columbia University said early on Wednesday that it was making "important progress" with pro-Palestinian student protesters who set up a tent encampment and that it was extending a deadline to clear out, yet stand-offs remained tense on the Ivy League campus in upper Manhattan.

Student protesters "have committed to dis-

mantling and removing a significant number of tents," the university said. A smaller encampment remained on campus on Wednesday morning.

Protesters at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, some 480 km north of San Francisco, started using furniture, tents, chairs and zip ties to block the building's entrances on Monday.

Both campuses are part of intensifying demonstrations over Israel's war with

Hamas by university students demanding that schools cut financial ties to Israel and divest from companies that are enabling its months-long conflict. Dozens have been arrested on charges of trespassing and disorderly conduct.

Columbia president Minouche Shafiq on Tuesday set a midnight deadline to reach an agreement with students to clear the encampment, or "we will have to consider alternative options".

Iraq hangs at least 11 persons convicted in 'terrorism' case

Agence France-Presse NASIRIYAH

Iraqi authorities have executed at least 11 persons convicted of "terrorism" this week, security and health sources said on Wednesday, with rights group Amnesty International condemning an "alarming lack of transparency".

Under Iraqi law, terrorism and murder offences are punishable by death, and execution decrees

must be signed by the President. A security source in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province said that 11 "terrorists from the Islamic State group" were executed by hanging at a prison in the city of Nasiriyah, "under the supervision of a Justice Ministry team".

A local medical source confirmed that the health department had received the bodies of 11 executed people. They were hanged on Monday under Article 4 of the anti-terrorism law, which ordered, rescinding anonymity due to the sensitivity of the issue. All 11 were from Salahaddin province and the bodies of seven had been returned to their families, the medical official said.

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must be signed by the President. A security source in Iraq's southern Dhi Qar province said that 11 "terrorists from the Islamic State group" were executed by hanging at a prison in the city of Nasiriyah, "under the supervision of a Justice Ministry team".

Israel pummels Gaza after U.S. Congress approves aid

Senate's approval of the \$13 billion aid package sent a 'strong message to all our enemies', says Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz; fears are rising that Israel will soon launch an assault on Rafah

Agence France-Presse

GAZA STRIP

Israel pounded Gaza with air strikes and artillery fire in its war against Hamas on Wednesday after the U.S. Congress approved \$13 billion in military aid.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz said the Senate's approval of the aid package already passed by the House of Representatives sent a "strong message to all our enemies" in a post on social media platform X.

U.S.-Israeli relations have been strained by Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's determination to send troops into the southern Gazan city of Rafah, where 1.5 million people are sheltering, many in makeshift encampments.

Fears are rising that Israel will soon launch an assault on Rafah, which it



Wiped out: Destroyed buildings in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. AFP

says is the "last" major Hamas stronghold, but aid groups warn any invasion would create an "apocalyptic situation".

Early on Wednesday, hospital and security sources in Gaza reported Israeli air strikes in Rafah, as well as the central Nuseirat refugee camp.

Heavy bombardment of several areas of northern Gaza during the night was reported, while the Israeli military said its aircraft

"struck over 50 targets" over the previous 24 hours.

Mr. Netanyahu, however, has insisted the assault on Rafah will go ahead.

Citing Egyptian officials briefed on the Israeli plans, the *Wall Street Journal* said Israel was planning to move civilians from Rafah to nearby Khan Yunis over a period of two to three weeks.

Satellite images shared by Maxar Technologies showed new blocks of

tents that had been set up in recent weeks in southern Gaza.

The *Journal* reported that Israel would then send troops into Rafah gradually, targeting areas where Hamas leaders are thought to be hiding in an operation expected to last six weeks.

Ismail al-Thawabta, head of the Hamas government media office, said an invasion would be a "crime" and that central Gaza and Khan Yunis "cannot accommodate the numbers of displaced people in Rafah".

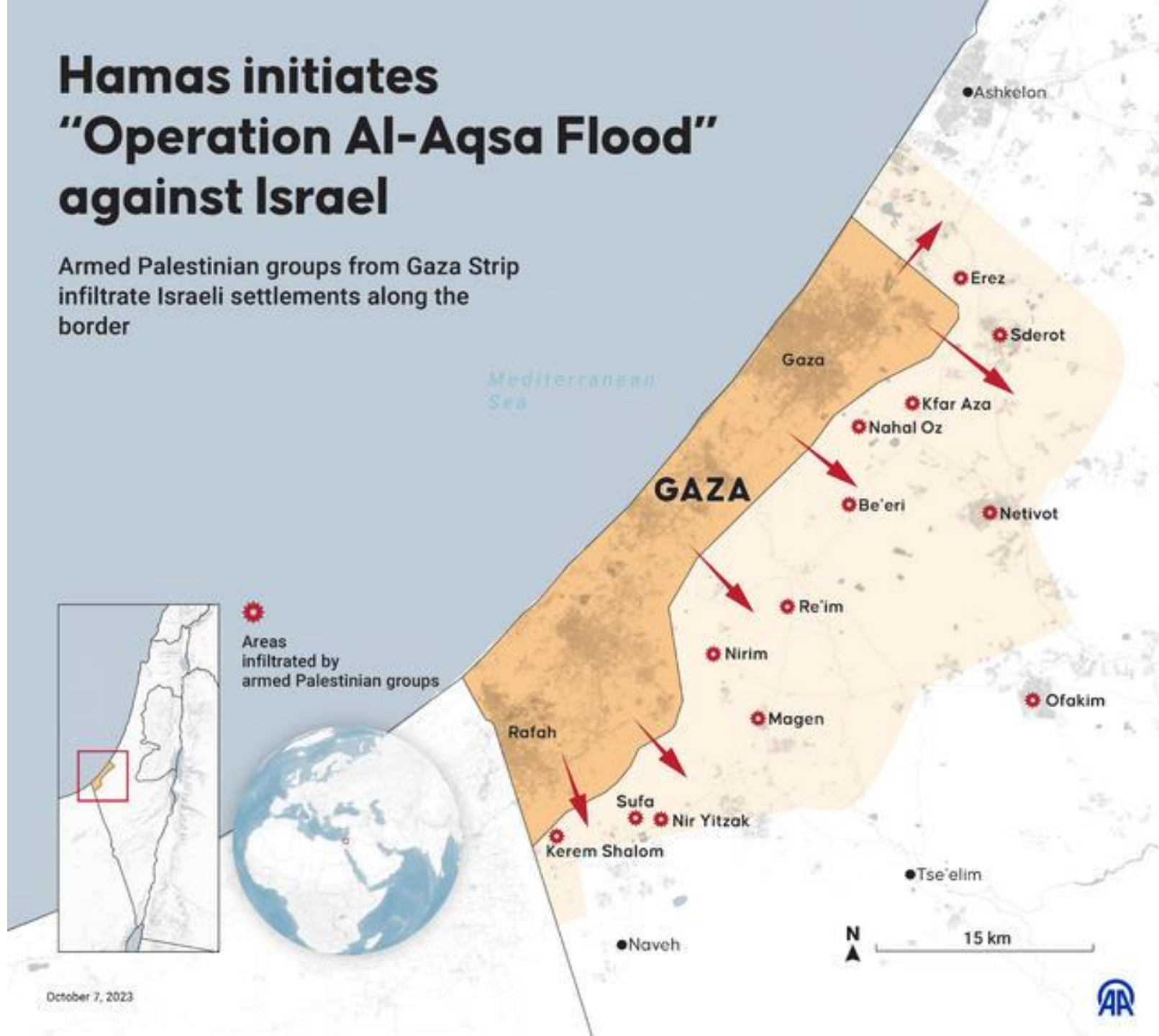
The war began with an unprecedented Hamas attack on October 7 that resulted in the deaths of around 1,170 people.

In retaliation, Israel launched a military offensive that has killed at least 34,262 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's Health Ministry.

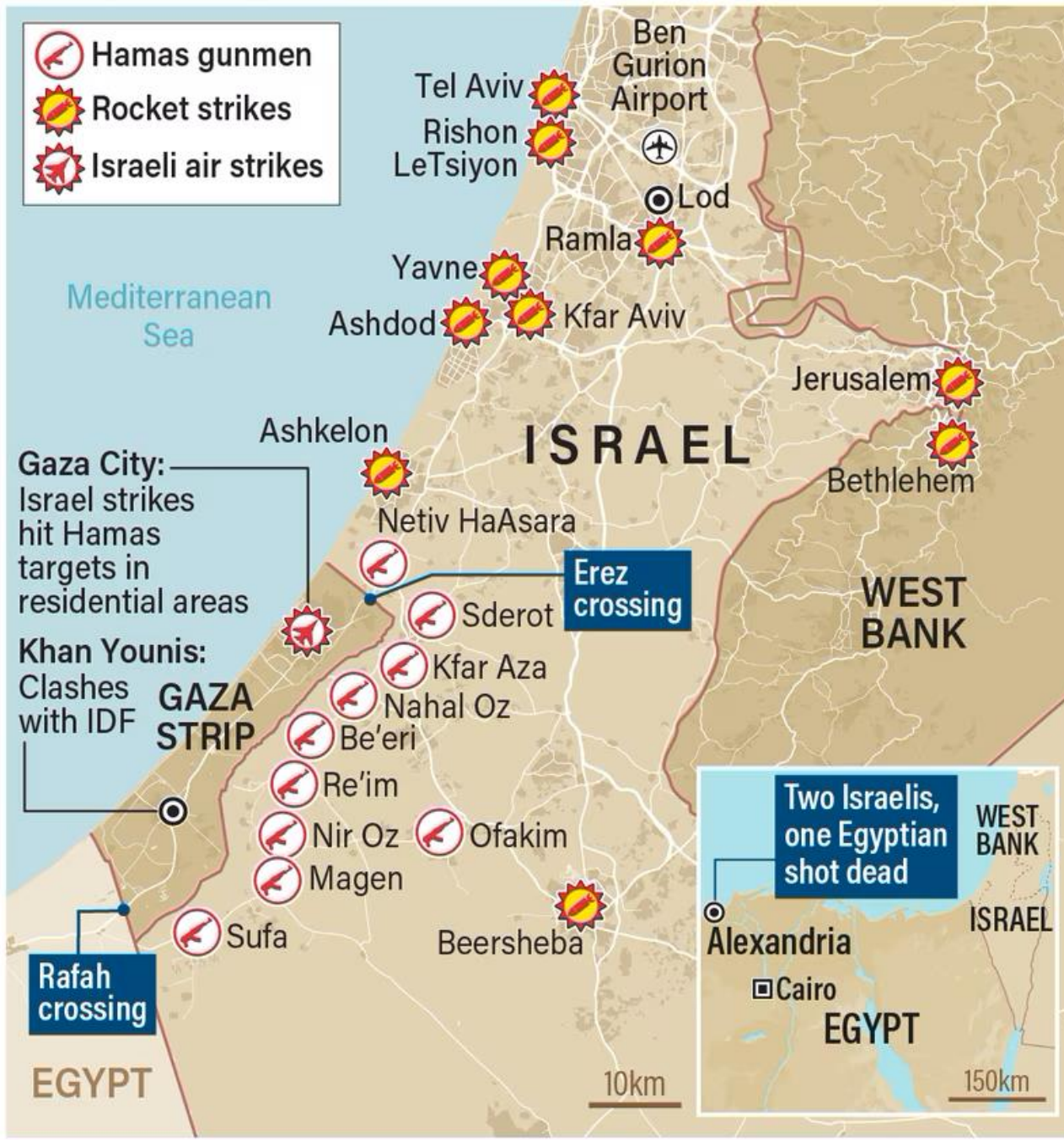


Hamas initiates "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" against Israel

Armed Palestinian groups from Gaza Strip infiltrate Israeli settlements along the border



ATTACKS IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE



IN BRIEF



Bolt named ICC Men's T20 World Cup ambassador

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday named Jamaican sprint legend and eight-time Olympic gold medalist Usain Bolt as the ambassador of the T20 World Cup to be played in the West Indies and USA from June 1 to 29. "I am thrilled to be an ambassador for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup. Coming from the Caribbean where cricket is a part of life, the sport has always held a special place in my heart," said Bolt.

Nadal to play French Open only if he 'feels competitive'

Rafael Nadal said on Wednesday he will only play at the upcoming French Open if he "feels competitive". "I arrive in Paris the way I feel today. I will not play," the 14-time Roland Garros champion said at the Madrid Open. "I will play Roland Garros if I feel competitive. If I can play, I play. If I can't play, I can't."

Aditi and Diksha set to participate in Paris Olympics

Indian golfers Aditi Ashok (46) and Diksha Dagar (38) are set to participate in the Paris Olympics whereas Shubhankar Sharma (19) and Gagandeep Bhatia (23) also have a strong chance of making it to the Games. While it will be a third appearance for Aditi at the Olympics, which is also the most for an Indian, Diksha will be competing for the second time. For Shubhankar and Bhatia, it would be their maiden appearance at the Olympics. India's best performance at the Olympics came from Aditi who finished fourth in the Tokyo Games 2020.



Uganda names Abhay Sharma as coach ahead of T20 WC

Uganda Cricket Association (UCA) on Tuesday named former Indian First Class player Abhay Sharma as the new head coach of the men's national team in the run-up to the T20 World Cup. The UCA announced Abhay's appointment on a three-year working contract in a statement on its website.

Deepanshu and Rohan make it a 1-2 in javelin

ATHLETICS

Sports Bureau

Deepanshu Sharma and Rohan Yadav brought a gold and silver in the men's javelin throw at the Asian under-20 athletics championships in Dubai on Wednesday. While Deepanshu threw a distance of 70.23m, his Uttar Pradesh State-mate Rohan had a best of 70.03m.



Podium finish: Deepanshu, right, and Rohan after their excellent show in men's javelin throw. **ASIAN**

Priyanshu, also from UP, came close to winning another gold in the men's 1500m, but he was beaten at the finish by Qatar's Al-moushahid. His silver came with a time of 3:50.85s. India won another silver, through Rink (5:2.23m) in the men's discus throw. Meanwhile Prachin Anushka finished fourth in the women's 3000m while Laxita Vinod Sandilsea and Tanvi Malik progressed to the women's 3000m final after the heats. **Amushka Dattatray**

Kumbhar and Sal Santosh Dodia also entered the medal round in the women's 400m and while male quartermiler Aman Choudhary also made the final. Strangely, Aman had been named only in the 4x400m relay in the Indian team list announced on Tuesday. Rapi Hansda, the country's fastest junior this year, and P. Abhinav were supposed to run the

A fighting Mumbai City FC records an incredible comeback victory

Down 0-2 in the 56th minute, the Islanders keep it late to show their best, scoring three goals in seven minutes against FC Goa

ISL
Animesh Dey
MUMBAI

Mumbai City FC fought till the end and clinched an incredible comeback victory, defeating FC Goa 3-2 in the semi-final first leg of the Indian Super League (ISL-10) at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on Wednesday. The Gaurs broke the deadlock in the 16th minute when Boris Singh tapped home a simple cross from Mohammed Yasin. Trailing 0-1 at the start of the second-half, Mumbai's urgency to score the equaliser was evident.



Man of the moment: Chhangte was the saviour for Mumbai City, scoring twice towards the end. **ISL**

However, Brandon Fernandes inflicted further damage on Mumbai in the 56th minute. Running into space, he curled the ball into the far corner, past Phurba Lachenpa, who

dived at full stretch but could not get his hand to the ball. Leading 2-0 at home and seeing their opponent

struggling, it seemed like a straightforward day at the office for the Gaurs, but the Islanders have made a

cause of their habit of not giving up, and they kept it late to show their best, scoring three goals in seven minutes.

In the 90th minute, Lalanzuala Chhangte pulled a goal back, showing excellent composure to find the net after receiving a per-

fectly weighted through-ball from Jayesh Rane.

Getting seven minutes of stoppage time, Mumbai had time to push for equaliser, and it got it through Vikram Parrap Singh, who was in the right place at the right time to score from the rebound after Goa goalkeeper Dheeraj Singh saved the initial shot from substitute Gurkirat Singh.

While a 2-2 comeback would have been impressive enough, Mumbai took it a notch further to steal the match from the Gaurs in front of their home fans.

In the seventh minute of stoppage time, Rane and Chhangte combined again, with the latter taking a touch to control the ball inside the box and smashing it inside the net to complete the comeback.

The result: FC Goa 2 (Boris 16, Brandon 56) beat Mumbai City FC 3 (Chhangte 90, 90+, Vikram 90+).

Akshay Dhere and Sahil Kundu rally to post fine victories

FED CUP WRESTLING

Y.B. Sarang
VARANASI

Young wrestler Akshay Dhere rallied to record a brilliant victory in the 57kg final against Parmod Kumar and win his maiden elite title in the Federation Cup on Wednesday. Dhere, a National junior bronze medalist in 2022, pinned Parmod to corner glory in one of the few exciting freestyle contests in an otherwise lacklustre day.



Perfect end: Akshay, left, pinned down Parmod with just two minutes left. **SANDEEP SAXENA**

Parmod grabbed an early 4-0 lead, but Dhere worked patiently to break his opponent's resistance to make it 4-4 in the first period. A swift double-leg attack and leg lace put the 21-year-old Aranyan from Kolhapur ahead at 8-4. He carried on the momentum to perform another take-down and eventually pin down Parmod with two minutes left.

In another neck-and-

neck fight, National silver medalist Sahil Kundu (65kg) recovered from 2-4 deficit to beat Amit 17-7 in a high scoring final bout.

Meanwhile, seven of the eight candidates in the fray won the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) athletes commission elections. They were Sahil, Smitha A.S., Bharti Baghel, Narsingh Yadav, Kushboo Pawar, Nikhil and Sweta Dubey. Narsingh was elected

chairman of the athletes' commission.

The medalists: Men: Freestyle 57kg: 1. Akshay Dhere (M), 2. Parmod Kumar (Ch), 3. Rohit Dhar, Janarthan Yadav (UP), 65kg: 1. Sahil Kundu (U), 2. Amit (Del), 3. Lalit Kaushal (MP), 68kg: 1. Aul (H), 2. Manish Goswami (Del), 3. Deepanshu (Ch), 70kg: 1. Shubham (UP), 2. Mahesh Laungre (H), 3. Pankaj Kumar (Del), Rohit Prajapati (MP); 74kg:

1. Sunny (Del), 2. Tejver (UP), 3. Rohan Narayan Ghewadi (K), 4. Navneet (H), 77kg: 1. Sahil Datta (H), 2. Mandep (Raj), 3. Akshay (M), Sandesh Halwade (K); 86kg: 1. Adish (Del), 2. Gopal Koli (K), 3. Parthab Datta (H), 97kg: 1. Virendrapal Singh (Ch), 102kg: 1. Amit Singh (Del), 2. Vishal Kumar (UP), 3. Vijay (H), 113kg: 1. Omkar Chavale (Mah), 2. Hari (Ch), 3. Anish (H); 125kg: 1. Lakshay (Del), 2. Gurraj Singh (U), 3. Sachin Parwar (Ch), Saket Yadav (Mah).

Cue Sports Premier League in Bengaluru from May 4

Sports Bureau

The Cue Sports Premier League (CSPL), a national-level snooker tournament, will commence at Bowling Institute here on May 4.

Multiple-time world champion Pankaj Advani, Aditya Mehta, Sourav Kohari and women's champion Vidya Pillai will feature in the first edition of CSPL, it was announced at a press conference here on Wednesday.

A total of 56 players, selected via auction, will compete in this tournament. Lightning Legion, Cyclone Crusaders, Summer Tuskers, Hurricane Hawks, Thunderstorm Titans, Tornado Tigers, Whirlwind Warriors and Monsoon Mavericks are the teams in the competition.

The CSPL is a unique event which is aimed at integrating players of three



Advani, left

different categories - national, state and club levels.

"As the conceptualiser, ambassador and player of CSPL, I'm looking forward to meeting several fans," Advani said.

Embassy Group will be the title sponsor of the national, state and club levels.

Matches will be telecast live on the Club Liv app.

Balaji and Begemann in doubles quarterfinals

TENNIS

Sports Bureau

Sriam Balaji and Andre Begemann beat Nikola Pietrangeli and Bart Stevens 6-3, 6-4 in the doubles pre-quarterfinals of the €74,825 Challenger tennis tournament in Rome, Italy, on Wednesday.

The results: €74,825 Challenger, Rome: Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals: Sriam (Balaj) & Andre Begemann bt Nikola Pietrangeli & Bart Stevens 6-3, 6-4. **\$25,000 ITF men, Santa Margherita di Pula, Italy: Pre-quarterfinals:** Andre Pietrangeli bt Manas Dhame 7-5, 6-0. **\$15,000 ITF men, Shymkent, Kazakhstan: Men: Pre-quarterfinals:** Vladyslav Orlov bt Ching Duan 6-4, 6-2; Masim Shit bt Yvan Mandel 6-2, 6-2; Dev Javia bt Gergely Lomkai 6-0, 6-3; 6-4; Aryan Shah bt Sergey Fomin 7-5, 6-0. **Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals:** Ching & Karan Singh bt Yvan & Marish Surshkumar 5-7, 6-4, (10-6); S.D. Praveen Dev & Sai Kartikey Reddy bt Savety Ivanov &

Dmitri Vasilev 6-0, 6-1. **Women: First round:** Ariana Gutkina bt Saumya Vig 6-4, 1-6, 6-2; Soha Sadiq bt Anushka Easwarimuthu 4-0 (retired). **Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals:** Gopal Anandilom & Chant Rustemova bt Anushka Easwarimuthu & Elina Healy 6-1, 2-6, (10-4). **\$100,000 ITF women, Tokyo: Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals:** Arienne Hartono & Parthena Theodorou bt Rebecca Marino & Carol Zhao 2-6, 6-3, (10-4). **\$60,000 ITF women: Charlottesville, USA: Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals:** Elvira Kalinina & Ann Li bt Katerina Volodko & Sabaja Yamaipalati 7-4(7), 5-7, (10-7). **\$40,000 ITF women, Lopota, Georgia: Pre-quarterfinals:** Ekaterine Gorgudze & Anikita Rainsa bt Aglaya Fedorova & Kira Pavlova 6-2, 5-7, (10-7). **\$40,000 ITF women, Wujiang, China: First round:** Ruijia Huang bt Zhuo Chen 6-0, 6-0, 6-2. **\$15,000 ITF women, Monastir: Pre-quarterfinals:** Wafiqah Adkar & Laris Aziz bt Wang Shuang & Zhang Jin 6-3, 6-4; Duv Bhabha & Zeel Desai bt Britney Chu & Elina Pavlaniangdonck 7-5, 6-3.

Arsenal rumbles on with a massive victory over Chelsea

PREMIER LEAGUE

Associated Press

LONDON

Kai Havertz scored twice against his former team and White also got a brace as Arsenal brushed aside a dismal Chelsea side 5-0 on Tuesday for its biggest league win over its London rival.

The win ensures Arsenal will go into the weekend atop the Premier League standings, lifting it three points ahead of Liverpool ahead of Wednesday's Merseyside derby at Everton. Man City is four points back before it plays at Brighton on Thursday.

For Chelsea, it was another disappointing season as it suffered a 1-0 defeat to Man City in the Cup semi-finals on Saturday that ended any hope of finishing a disappointing season on a high note. Chelsea's leading



Two-goal star: Havertz scores Arsenal's third. **REUTERS**

scorer Cole Palmer was absent with an injury but the manner of the team's seven-goal collapse will only renew questions about what progress — if any — the expensively assembled team has made in its first season under Maurizio Pochettino.

Arsenal's previous biggest league win over Chelsea was 5-1 in 1930. Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Kovac put Arsenal ahead in just the fourth minute by beating Chelsea goalkeeper Djordje Petrovic at his near

post from a tight angle. White swept home the second in the 52nd and Havertz added the third just five minutes later.

The German international got another one in the 65th with a shot from the middle of the area, and White added to the rout with a fortunate second goal when his attempt at a volleyed cross sailed into the net in the 70th.

The result: Arsenal 5 (Trossard 4, White 52, 70, Havertz 57, 65) bt Chelsea 0.



Bolt named ICC Men's T20 World Cup ambassador

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday named Jamaican sprint legend and eight-time Olympic gold medallist Usain Bolt as the ambassador of the T20 World Cup to be played in the West Indies and USA from June 1 to 29. “I am thrilled to be an ambassador for the upcoming ICC Men’s T20 World Cup. Coming from the Caribbean where cricket is a part of life, the sport has always held a special place in my heart,” said Bolt.

ICC Men's T20 World Cup



ICC Men's T20 World Cup Trophy

Administrator	International Cricket Council (ICC)
Format	Twenty20 International
First edition	2007  South Africa
Latest edition	2022  Australia
Next edition	2024  West Indies &  United States
Tournament format	↓ Various
Number of teams	20 ^[1]
Current champion	 England (2nd title)
Most successful	 England  West Indies (2 titles each)
Most runs	 Virat Kohli (1141)
Most wickets	 Shakib Al Hasan (47)
Most wickets in a match	 ICC  England vs  Australia

2007	 South Africa	Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg	 India 157/5 (20 overs)	India won by 5 runs (scorecard) ↗	 Pakistan 152 all out (19.4 overs)	12	MS Dhoni
2009	 England	Lord's, London	 Pakistan 139/2 (18.4 overs)	Pakistan won by 8 wickets (scorecard) ↗	 Sri Lanka 138/6 (20 overs)	12	Younis Khan
2010	 West Indies	Kensington Oval, Bridgetown	 England 148/3 (17 overs)	England won by 7 wickets (scorecard) ↗	 Australia 147/6 (20 overs)	12	Paul Collingwood
2012	 Sri Lanka	R Premadasa Stadium, Colombo	 West Indies 137/6 (20 overs)	West Indies won by 36 runs (scorecard) ↗	 Sri Lanka 101 all out (18.4 overs)	12	Daren Samm
2014	 Bangladesh	Sher-e-Bangla Stadium, Dhaka	 Sri Lanka 134/4 (17.5 overs)	Sri Lanka won by 6 wickets (scorecard) ↗	 India 130/4 (20 overs)	16	Lasith Maling
2016	 India	Eden Gardens, Kolkata	 West Indies 161/6 (19.4 overs)	West Indies won by 4 wickets (scorecard) ↗	 England 155/9 (20 overs)	16	Daren Samm
2021	 UAE  Oman ^[a]	Dubai International Stadium, Dubai	 Australia 173/2 (18.5 overs)	Australia won by 8 wickets (scorecard) ↗	 New Zealand 172/4 (20 overs)	16	Aaron Finch
2022	 Australia	Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne	 England 138/5 (19 overs)	England won by 5 wickets (scorecard) ↗	 Pakistan 137/8 (20 overs)	16	Jos Buttler
2024	 West Indies  United States	Kensington Oval, Bridgetown				20	



Uganda names Abhay Sharma as coach ahead of T20 WC

Uganda Cricket Association (UCA) on Tuesday named former Indian First Class player Abhay Sharma as the new head coach of the men's national team in the run-up to the T20 World Cup. The Cricket Cranes have booked their place in the competition for the first time and will be among 20 teams at the tournament being jointly hosted by USA and the West Indies from June 1. The UCA announced Abhay's appointment on a three-year working contract in a statement on its website.

BUSINESS AS USUAL BY UNNY



ECONOMY

RBI PUTS CURBS ON KOTAK: NO ONLINE ONBOARDING OF CUSTOMERS, NEW CREDIT CARDS

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2020 CONG CRISIS

Gehlot behind phone tap of Pilot & rebels, claims ex-aid of former CM



Ashok Gehlot's former OSD Lokesh Sharma in Jaipur, Wednesday. *Ashok Kumar Sharma*

HANZA KHAH

IN WHAT could spell trouble for former Rajasthan Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot, his former OSD on Special Duty (OSD) Lokesh Sharma alleged Wednesday that during the 2020 party crisis in the state, the phones of party rebels, including Sachin Pilke, and their movements were tracked at Gehlot's behest. He also alleged that it was Gehlot who passed on recordings of phone calls and asked him to "circulate them in the media".

Until late Wednesday night, there was no response from Gehlot to Sharma's allegations. Responding to Sharma's accusations, Congress spokesperson Swarnim Chaturvedi said, "He is not a member of the organisation and he is in touch with BJP leaders. Hence, he's acting on their instructions."

Incidentally, Sharma is also an accused in an FIR, lodged in connection with these audio clips, in Delhi in March 2021. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 6**

THE WORLD

ANAND MOHAN J PAINNA, TIRUNELVELI, APRIL 24

DIAMONDS MAY BE forever, but not in Madhya Pradesh's Panna district, where famed mines are running dry.

Standing atop a mound of excavated earth in Sarkaha village, supervising four workers chipping away to reach the Kimberlite, which may or may not contain diamond deposits, mine operator Vijendra Kumar, 39, says he is done. "We are not getting the same volume of diamonds and it is costly to run this operation."

Independent, or far from one? Minister faces surprise challenger in Barmer

is leaving no stone unturned in his bid to ensure the re-election of Union minister Kailash Choudhary from Barmer.

On the ground, the contest seems tough, with Choudhary facing not just the Congress's Ummedra Ram Beniwal, who has been a break candidate backed by the party, but also a growing challenge from Congress MLA Ravindra Singh Bhati or "Rava", as his supporters call him, who is a former BJP leader contesting as an independent. There is another BJP leader, guru Dharendra Shastri, the BJP-

NEW SLOGAN: 'CONG KI LOOT, ZINDAGI KE SAATH BHI, ZINDAGI KE BAAD BHI'

Seizing on Pitroda's tax remarks, Modi says Cong threatens family inheritance



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses an election rally in Surguja district of Chhattisgarh on Wednesday. *PTI*

Congress distances itself from Pitroda remarks: No link to policy, manifesto

JAYPRAKASH'S NAIDU, VIKAS PATHAK & ANAND MOHAN RAIPUR, NEW DELHI, BHOPAL, APRIL 24

AS CAMPAIGNING for Phase 2 of the Lok Sabha election drew to a close Wednesday in 89 constituencies of 13 states and UTs that will vote Friday, the gloves were off in the BJP-Congress standoff, with economic talking centrestage.

Widening his attack on the Congress, days after accusing it of working to give Muslims the first right to the nation's resources and wealth redistribution, Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested that the party now had its eyes on the wealth of all Indians.

Referring to Indian Overseas Congress chairman Sam Pitroda's remark that the inher-

EXPLAINED

POLITICS

UNDERSTANDING INHERITANCE TAX

PAGE 14

itance tax in the US was an idea that could be debated and discussed in India too, Modi, addressing a rally in Surguja in Chhattisgarh, targeted the Gandhi family and the Congress. "The adviser to the royal family prince, and advisor to the father of the prince, has said more taxes should be imposed on the middle class. Now these people have gone a step further. The Congress now says it will impose an inheritance tax. That it will impose tax on the inheritance received from parents. The property you have accumulated

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Under fire, Rahul digs heels in, says 'X-ray', survey will find way forward

MANOJ CG NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

TRIGGERING A political storm in the second phase of the elections with his remarks linking a nationwide caste census to an institutional survey, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi reaffirmed Wednesday that his party, if voted to power, would take up the "revolutionary" task of a "national X-ray" — his description of a caste census — along with an economic and institutional survey to determine "in which direction the country should move forward."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at the Samajik Nyay Sammelan in New Delhi on Wednesday. *AP/Anshu Sharma*

Census to kranti: How Rahul framed quotas as wealth re-distribution tool

MANOJ CG NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

ALMOST a year ago, on April 16, 2023, Rahul Gandhi first spoke about Jini Bahuj, utra jag or pro-constitutional representatives in Kolar, ahead of the Karnataka Assembly elections. Even after a win in the state, the Congress Working Committee, which met in October last year, refrained from spelling out this line. It passed a resolution saying a "nationwide caste census will reveal an accurate picture of

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

RETROGRADE

Congress's ideas on survey and inheritance are backwards and bad politics

PAGE 8

the socio-economic position of communities across the country and provide a sound, data-driven basis for policies to strengthen the foundations of social justice and ensuring inclusive development." This carefully worded state-

ment is now effectively out of the window as Rahul has talked about an "X-ray" — a financial survey which will make everything clear — doodi, ku doodi, ponni ku ponni — about who owns what and earns how much, and krantikari policies to

Over the course of the year, he has talked about an "X-ray" — a financial survey which will make everything clear — doodi, ku doodi, ponni ku ponni — about who owns what and earns how much, and krantikari policies to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

COMPLAINT REGARDING APRIL 9 RALLY

PM mention of Ram temple, appeal to Sikhs, no violation of MCC, EC set to say

Poll panel likely to argue this is mere listing of work done, no enmity stoked

RITIKA CHOPRA NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's reference to the construction of the Ram Temple in an election rally is not an appeal to vote in the name of religion. Monitoring the development of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor, a route for Sikh pilgrimages, along with the government's action of granting back copies of the Granth Granth Sahib — the Sikh holy book — from Afghanistan in a constituency with a sizeable Sikh population, does not violate the Election Code of Conduct (MCC).

This is the decision that the Election Commission (EC) is likely to communicate in its first disposal of a complaint against the Prime Minister alleging Model Code violations. The Indian Express has learned.

The decision is based on a complaint filed by lawyer Anand S Jondale, who alleged that Modi violated the MCC by seeking votes for "the party in

EXPRESS NETWORK

PETITIONS ON VVPAT SLIPS: SC SAYS CAN'T CONTROL ELECTIONS

PAGE 5

the name of Hindu deities and Hindu places of worship as well as Sikh deities and Sikh places of worship" during his address at a public rally in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit on April 9.

The all-clear from EC is expected to come even as the Commission is seized of a Congress complaint against the Prime Minister for his remarks at a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara on April 21, where he mentioned Muslims and said that the Congress, if voted to power, could distribute the nation's wealth among its losers and "those who have more children".

The poll panel has given a decision in this matter yet. Sources said the EC is **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



Samajwadi Party changes mind, Akhilesh to contest from Kannauj

PAGES 7, 10, 11

Days before elections, Maharashtra Govt gave guarantee for loans to 21 sugar mills

15 managed by ruling leaders, 9 of whom had switched over in last 2 yrs

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS PUNE, APRIL 24

DAVS BEFORE THE model code of conduct (MCC) for the Lok Sabha elections kicked in on March 16, the Maharashtra government had in the first week of March agreed to be the guarantor for 21 sugar mills and recommended their names for inclusion in the Maharashtra Cooperative Development Corporation (MCHDC).

Of the 21 mills, 15 are managed by leaders from the ruling alliance or those who recently jumped ship. Two are managed by Congress leaders who had sided with Sharda Pawar, and one by a Congress leader who switched to the BJP ahead of elections. Yet another mill in Solapur is managed by the son of late Bharat Bhalkhe, who was an MLA representing NCP (uni-

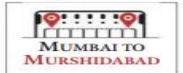
WHO GOT STATE GUARANTEE

- Of the 21 mills, 15 managed by ruling alliance leaders or those who recently jumped ship
- 2 with Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde)
- 2 with NCP (Ajit Pawar)
- 1 with Cong leader who switched to BJP
- 2 with BJP
- 1 with the son of NCP (undivided) MLA who joined BJP
- Remaining 9 mills support BJP

vided). He had joined the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) after his defeat in the bypoll. Of the six mills not managed by leaders of the ruling alliance, **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

AN EXPRESS SERIES - PART 2: GUJARAT

BJP dominance squeezes Opp, on Gujarat street, refrain once again is for 'jaisa chal raha hai'



VANDITA MISHRA, LEENA MISRA & KAMAL SHARMA VVARA, SURAT, BHARUCH, VADODRA, APRIL 24

COME TO Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state, which the BJP swept in the last two Lok Sabha elections, winning 26 out of 26 seats, and in which a BJP government has ruled uninterrupted since 1998, to get a glimpse of what total dominance looks like, even as especially when it is fraying at the edges. Winning 26 seats again is not the BJP's stated goal this time — the party is striking a bigger and bolder posture in its Gujarat showcase. It says it will win every seat here — the state goes to polls in Phase 3 on May 7 — by a margin of 10 seats.

Come to Surat in this election, where the BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal has just got elected unop-



Congress Bardoli candidate Siddharth Chaudhary with father Anarsinh Chaudhary, a former MP, MLA, in Vyara. *Komal Sanyal*

posed — after the nomination papers of the Congress candidate were cancelled because of alleged discrepancies in proposer's signatures, and alleged allegations of fudging, the rest of the candidates are not addressing election sabbas or meetings. No hearings or posters are put up in his name because, it is said, he presides over a well-known system of election "misro-management", in which the public outreach is minimal and the party's presence is, at best, silent and systematic.

The story goes that in 1992, Dalal, a third-term MP from the

adjoining constituency of Navsar, known not to conduct a campaign as it is defined conventionally. Dasit makes a point of not asking voters for their vote, takes care in not addressing election sabbas or meetings. No hearings or posters are put up in his name because, it is said, he presides over a well-known system of election "misro-management", in which the public outreach is minimal and the party's presence is, at best, silent and systematic.

The story goes that in 1992, Dalal, a third-term MP from the



a Rajput won the Barmer Lok Sabha seat in 2004, when the BJP's Manvendra Singh, son of its late founding member Jasant Singh, was victorious. Some in the Rajput community, who have been watching the resurgence of Vasundhara Raje in the



Independent candidate Ravindra Singh Bhati, 26, campaigns in Barmer constituency. *Facebook*

feel Bhati has what it takes to be the next big face in Rajasthan politics. Both Choudhary and Beniwal are Jats. While Union jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, who is contesting from Jodhpur, is seen as the party's tallest Rajput leader in Marwar, according to many sources, he has been watching the eclipse of Vasundhara Raje in the

falling out it also vote on April 26 — that drew hundreds. He has also held rallies in Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Surat. His supporters say it is the help he provided Union non-resident Rajasthani during Covid and later which explains the spread of his reach. Now, in the last leg of his campaign, Bhati has had a help-copier at his disposal. The independent, who declared assets of ₹27 lakh (including wife's), attributes it to the generosity of his supporters. Other **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

● **MOVE TIED TO AID PACKAGE CLEARED BY CONGRESS**

TikTok ban in US looms

Biden signs bill; app CEO says 'we aren't going anywhere'

REUTERS
Washington, April 24

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN signed a bill into law on Wednesday that bans TikTok in the United States if its owner, the Chinese tech firm ByteDance, fails to divest the popular short video app over the next nine months to a year.

The bill was tied to the legislations, cleared by the Congress, that provide for aid to Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan and other US partners in the Indo-Pacific.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said Wednesday the company expects to win a legal challenge to the law. "Rest assured — we aren't going anywhere," he said in a video posted moments after Biden signed the bill. "The facts and the Constitution are on our side and we expect to prevail again."

APP GETS 270-DAY SALE DEADLINE

TikTok may be forced out of the US, where a measure to outlaw it has won approval of the Congress and the president. The short video app's US users stare at uncertainty with a long legal battle set to unfold



WHEN INDIA BANNED TIKTOK

In June 2020, India banned TikTok and other Chinese apps due to security concerns amid escalating tensions along the border.

HOW DID USERS & CREATORS REACT?

Content creators took to YouTube shorts, Instagram reels that started post the ban and capitalised on the market vacuum.

INDIA'S ACTION Vs US MEASURE

The US action may be delayed by legal challenges. Unlike India, the US faces hurdles due to legal complexities.

TikTok and ByteDance argued the measure infringes the free-speech rights of the app's 170 million monthly users in the US.

Biden's signature capped years of scrutiny in Washington, where regulators and lawmakers from both parties have voiced increased concern that TikTok's Chinese ownership poses a risk to US national security. Proponents of the bill claim that China's government uses TikTok as a propa-

ganda tool and could demand that ByteDance share US users' data — allegations the company and officials in Beijing have denied.

With the legal battle set to unfold, TikTok's US users face a wave of uncertainty. If implemented, a TikTok ban would risk disrupting "a critical channel for engaging with younger audiences and building brand visibility," said Damian Rollison, director of market insights at SOCi.

Blinken lands in China

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has arrived in China on a mission to press Beijing on issues including its support for Russia and industrial overcapacity, with the threat of new US sanctions looming over the visit. He will hold talks with senior Communist Party officials in Shanghai on Thursday, before heading to Beijing for a final day of meetings, including a possible face-to-face with President Xi Jinping.

Now, Kotak Bank in RBI crosshairs

Barred from onboarding new customers in credit card, online businesses

SACHIN KUMAR
Mumbai, April 24

THE RESERVE BANK of India (RBI) on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from onboarding new customers via its online and mobile banking channels, and from issuing new credit cards.

In a notification under Section 35A, the banking regulator said that it has found serious deficiencies and non-compliances by the private lender in Information Technology (IT) risk and information security governance. However, the country's fourth largest private lender can continue to provide services to its existing customers, including its credit card users. Kotak Mahindra Bank's online portfolio is significant. Around 95% of the bank's new personal loan volumes, around 99% of new credit cards and 79% of new business loans are through the digital channels. It is also the country's fifth largest credit card issuer.

“For two consecutive years, the bank was assessed to be deficient in its IT Risk and Information Security Governance, contrary to requirements under regulatory guidelines,” stated RBI in the notification. During the subsequent assessments, the bank was found to be significantly non-com-

INSIDE

RBI walks the walk on compliance, again ■ PAGE 10

BIG BLOW



■ Around 95% of Kotak's new personal loan volumes are disbursed digitally



■ Around 99% of new credit cards and 79% of new business loans are through digital channels

■ Similar action has been taken on Bank of Baroda, Paytm Payments Bank, IIFL Finance and JM Financial Products over the past six months

■ The RBI said these restrictions are imposed on the bank in the interest of customers

Kotak Bank's response

THE BANK HAS TAKEN MEASURES FOR ADOPTION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES TO STRENGTHEN ITS IT SYSTEMS AND WILL CONTINUE TO WORK WITH RBI


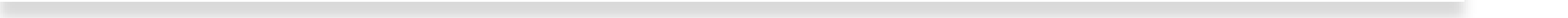
pliant with the Corrective Action Plans issued by the Reserve Bank for 2022 and 2023, as the compliances submitted by the bank were found to be either inadequate, incorrect or not sustained, added the central bank.


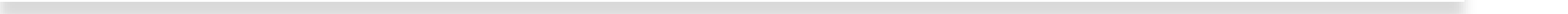
Continued on Page 12

Founded	1985; 39 years ago
Founders	Uday Kotak
Headquarters	Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
Key people	<p>Uday Kotak (non-executive director)</p> <p>Dipak Gupta (MD & CEO) (Interim)</p>
Products	<p>Consumer banking</p> <p>Commercial banking</p> <p>Insurance</p> <p>Credit cards</p> <p>Investment banking</p> <p>Mortgage loans</p> <p>Private banking</p> <p>Private equity</p> <p>Investment management</p> <p>Asset management</p> <p>Mutual funds</p> <p>Exchange-traded funds</p> <p>Index funds</p> <p>Wealth management</p> <p>Stockbroking</p> <p>Risk management</p>
Revenue	<p>▲ ₹67,981 crore (US\$8.5 billion)^[1] (2023)</p>
Operating income	<p>▲ ₹20,085 crore (US\$2.5 billion)^[1] (2023)</p>
Net income	<p>▲ ₹14,925 crore (US\$1.9 billion)^[1] (2023)</p>
AUM	<p>▲ ₹420,880 crore (US\$53 billion) (2023)^[2]</p>
Total assets	<p>▲ ₹620,429 crore (US\$78 billion)^[3] (2023)</p>
Total equity	<p>▲ ₹112,314 crore (US\$14 billion)^[3] (2023)</p>
Number of employees	100,000+ (March 2023) ^[4]

Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference

- **The Bhutanese government hosted the Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference on Earth Day 2024 to mobilise USD 1 billion over the next decade for conserving tigers and their habitats across Asia.**
- **What is the Sustainable Finance for Tiger Landscapes Conference?**
- **About:**
 - **The two-day conference will be hosted by Bhutan under the patronage of the country's queen, Jetsun Pema Wangchuck.**
 - **It seeks to mobilise the amount of USD 1 billion over 10 years for the preservation of tiger landscapes.**

- 
- The conservation of tiger landscapes is vital to maintaining biodiversity, sequestering carbon, supplying resources to over 100 million people, and ensuring the overall health of the planet.
 - The conference convened tiger range countries, visionary private and public sector donors, international development agencies, the Tiger Conservation Coalition, and other conservation organisations.
- 

- 
- Other Sources of Funding:
 - Since 2010, the Global Environment Facility has provided more than USD 197 million in financing and mobilized another USD 880 million, in co-finance, for tiger conservation.
- 

- **International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA):**
- **About:**
 - **India has proposed to launch a mega global alliance under its leadership to protect big cats and assured support over five years with guaranteed funding of USD 100 million.**
 - **The proposed International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) will work towards the protection and conservation of the seven major big cats — tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, puma, jaguar and cheetah.**
 - **Membership to the alliance will be open to 97 “range” countries, which contain the natural habitat of these big cats, as well as other interested nations, international organisations, etc.**

TIGER

Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera Tigris*) is the National animal of India.

Subspecies of Tiger

- * The continental (*Panthera tigris tigris*)
- * The Sunda (*Panthera tigris sondaica*)

Habitat

Tropical rainforests, evergreen forests, temperate forests, mangrove swamps, grasslands, and savannas



Countries Where Tiger Population Is Found

- Found only in 13 Tiger Range countries- India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Russia, China, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam
- As per the latest report by IUCN, tiger has gone extinct in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam

Protection Status

- IUCN Red List: Endangered
- CITES: Appendix I
- WPA 1972: Schedule I

Threats

- Habitat loss
- Poaching and illegal trade
- Human-Wildlife conflict

Conservation Efforts

- International Big Cats Alliance (IBCA):** For conservation of seven big cats namely Tiger, Lion, Leopard, Snow Leopard, Cheetah, Jaguar and Puma (launched by India)
- Tx2 campaign:** Launched by WWF; stands for 'Tiger times 2' signaling the goal to double the tiger population by 2022
- National Tiger Conservation authority (NTCA):** Constituted under the WPA, 1972
- Project Tiger:** Launched in 1973
- Tiger Census:** Every 4 years

Tigers In India

- India has the largest population
 - As of 2022, India has 3167 tigers
 - Largest population has been found in Central Indian Highlands & Eastern Ghats Landscape
- Tiger Reserves:** India now has 53 tiger reserves
 - Ranipur in UP is the latest
 - Nagarjun Sagar (Andhra Pradesh) is the largest while Orang (Assam) is the smallest (Core area)

New Schengen Visa Rules for Indians

- Recently, the European Union (EU) has announced the **new Schengen visa rules** for Indian nationals.
- **What are the new rules?**
- Until now, those Indians who intend to travel to one or more Schengen countries are required to apply for the much sought-after **Schengen visa**, which is given for a maximum of three months.

However, under the new Schengen visa regime, Indians will now be able to enter any of the Schengen countries multiple times for two years, which is further extendable by 5 years, and stay there like visa-free nationals.

But the only catch is that they won't be allowed to work and earn there like a local citizen.



To qualify for this two-year visa, applicants must have successfully obtained and used two Schengen visas in the past three years.



- **Schengen Area**

- The Schengen area consists of 29 European countries (of which 25 are EU states): Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden, along with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
- 



SCHENGEN AREA

-  Schengen area (EU countries)
-  Schengen area (non-EU countries)
-  EU countries outside the Schengen area



CURRENT AFFAIRS COURSE

- ✓ UPDATED CURRENT AFFAIRS (2023+2024)|
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A group of people are clapping in a dimly lit room. The focus is on the hands and forearms of several individuals, some wearing suits. The background is blurred, showing more people and a window. The overall mood is celebratory and professional.

Thank you
guys.
