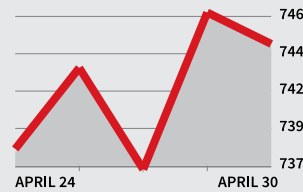


# the hindu businessline

**SENSEX** 74482.78 (+744.33)



**IN FOCUS**

	Week's close	Week's change
Nifty 50	22604.85	+236.85
P/E Ratio (Sensex)	23.91	-0.80
US Dollar (in ₹)	83.44	+0.10
Gold Std 10 gm (in ₹)	71423.00	+112
Silver 1 kg (in ₹)	80050.00	+43

## UPBEAT ON INDIA.

**Niren Shah, MD & Head** of Norwest India, shares plans on how the fund will deploy \$3 billion it has committed to the country **p2**



## POLLSCAPE.

**Controversy erupts** as Election Commission defers election in Anantnag-Rajouri seat to May 25 **p8**

BENGALURU - CHENNAI - COIMBATORE - HUBBALLI - HYDERABAD - KOCHI - KOLKATA - MADURAI - MALAPPURAM - MANGALURU - MUMBAI - NOIDA - THIRUVANANTHAPURAM - TIRUCHIRAPALLI - TIRUPATI - VIJAYAWADA - VISAKHAPATNAM

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## QUICKLY.

### SLOW START

**PV sales edge up in April despite high base year**



**New Delhi:** Passenger vehicle market leaders, including Maruti Suzuki India, Hyundai Motor India and Tata Motors, on Wednesday, reported flat or marginal growth in sales in April owing to the high-base effect and the ongoing elections possibly dampening demand. All in all, the wholesales of PVs reached 3,38,341 units in April (3,32,468 units), a year-on-year growth of 1.77 per cent. **p2**

### DIGITAL BUMP

**UPI transactions in April dip to ₹19.6-lakh crore**

**Mumbai:** In April 2024, the Unified Payments Interface saw a slight decline of about 1 per cent in both transaction volume and value compared with the record high in March 2024. Transactions worth ₹19.64-lakh crore were processed, a decrease of 0.7 per cent from the previous month, according to NPCI. **p3**

# Retail, wealthy traders turn to riskier options writing

**REGULATORY CONCERN.** Shift comes amid higher retail participation in derivatives

**Ashley Coutinho**  
Mumbai

Retail and wealthy individuals are gravitating towards writing options contracts — the more riskier side of the options market and once the preserve of large institutions or expert traders.

The shift to options writing comes amid regulatory concerns on increasing retail participation in the derivatives segment, where the odds are overwhelmingly stacked against them.

### RISKY BET

Options trading gained momentum in the aftermath of the pandemic. Until now, most individuals focussed on options buying, given the lower risks as losses are limited to the premium paid, which could be a few hundred or thousand rupees. Options writers face unlimited risk and need to pay high margins, amounting to ₹1-2 lakh per trade.

“There has been a 20-30 per cent uptick in the number of wealthy and retail individuals who have taken to options writing in the past six months or so,”

### OPTION WRITERS: THE WINNING SCRIPT

- Traders who write an option receive a fee or premium in exchange for giving the option buyer the right to buy or sell shares at a specific price and date
- Theta measures the time decay or erosion of an option's value as time passes
- Options writers can keep the premium if the option expires worthless
- Index options premium turnover at the NSE stood at ₹138 lakh crore for FY24, a record



said Soni Patnaik, AVP - Derivative Research, JM Financial Services.

### DECLINE IN VOLATILITY

The advent of daily and weekly expiry has increased the probability of making money for options writers. Market volatility has reduced considerably over the past three years, which is why options writers have not had many episodes where they have lost significant money.

“We haven't seen large corrections of 10-15 per cent during

this period. The low intra-month volatility has significantly increased the chances for options writers to make money,” said Devarsh Vakil, Deputy Head - Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

Options writers have been benefiting from theta decay, the amount by which an option's value declines daily, said Chandan Taparia, derivatives analyst at Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

During the last expiry day, for instance, a number of retailers

tried to capture a small premium of ₹10-15 by selling naked put options and call options. They gain the entire premium if the market stays within the options strike price range. If there's a breach on either side, the risk of losing money increases significantly.

“It is imperative to hedge any naked options writing positions and convert them into options strategies such as spreads, which are becoming popular among participants nowadays,” said Patnaik.

### STRATEGIES ADOPTED

Options writing strategies vary. An investor with an underlying stock could use covered calls to increase his or her income on the holding. Others could use put selling to get into a new stock which they don't own, and there could be traders who may want to use theta decay to benefit out of options writing.

As more individuals take to options writing, they may find themselves on one side of the trade, raising risks exponentially. “A major surprise or large market movement could result in options writers losing their shirts,” said Vakil.

# Godrej family split: Adi, Nadir to control listed entities

**Janaki Krishnan**  
Mumbai

The amicable family settlement announced by the 127-year old Godrej Group, splitting the operations into two factions, has paved the way for the emergence of the next generation of leaders in the family.

Under the terms of the agreement, Adi Godrej and Nadir Godrej will control all the listed entities in the group, and Jamshyd Godrej and Smita Crishna will get control of the unlisted entities comprising Godrej Boyce & its affiliates, which includes the over 3,000 acres of land owned by the group in Mumbai.

The combined market cap of the listed entities is ₹2.45-lakh crore (\$29.5 billion).

Adi Godrej's son Pirojsha Godrej, executive chairman of Godrej Properties and Jamshyd's niece Nyrika Holkar have been given key positions

in the groups under the family settlement.

In a statement late on Tuesday, the group said, “The realignment has been arrived at in a respectful and mindful way to maintain harmony and better align ownership in acknowledgement of the differing visions of the Godrej family members.

“This will help maximise strategic direction, focus, agility, and accelerate the process of creating long-term value for shareholders and all other stakeholders.”

“Since 1897, Godrej & Boyce has always been driven by the strong purpose of nation building. With this future-facing family agreement now in place, we can further drive our growth aspirations with fewer complexities and focus on leveraging our core strengths in high tech engineering and design-led innovation across our strong portfolio of strategic, consumer and emerging businesses,” said Jamshyd Godrej in the state-



Adi Godrej



Nadir Godrej



Jamshyd Godrej



Nyrika Holkar

### WHO GETS WHAT

- The group has been split between two branches of the founding family — with Adi Godrej and his brother Nadir on one side and their cousins Jamshyd Godrej and Smita Crishna on the other
- Adi Godrej and his brother Nadir will keep Godrej Industries that has five listed firms, while cousins Jamshyd and Smita will get unlisted Godrej & Boyce and its affiliates as well as a land bank, including prime property in Mumbai
- Jamshyd Godrej will lead the Godrej Enterprises Group, encompassing Godrej & Boyce and its affiliates across various industries from aerospace and aviation to defence, furniture, and IT software, as chairperson and MD. His niece Nyrika Holkar will be the Executive Director

ment. The listed entities under Godrej Industries Group (GIG) are Godrej Industries, Godrej Consumer Products, Godrej Properties, Godrej Agrovet and Astec Lifesci-

ences. In addition, Godrej Seeds and Genetics and Innovia Multiventures will be part of the group in which Nadir Godrej will be the chairperson; Pirojsha Godrej will

be the Executive Vice Chairperson and will succeed Nadir Godrej as the Chairperson in August 2026. Jamshyd Godrej, chairperson and Managing Director of Godrej En-

terprises, and Nyrika Holkar, Executive Director, will be controlling businesses that span aerospace, aviation, defence, engines and motors, energy, security, building materials, construction, green building consulting, EPC Services, intralogistics, healthcare equipment, durables, furniture, interior design, architectural fittings, IT, software as well as infrastructure solutions.

Under the terms of the agreement, members of either group will not be directly or indirectly involved in the management and operations of the entities of the other group.

The settlement also makes it clear that shares held by either group in any of the companies will not be transferred to competitors except with the prior permission of the other group, or through a non-negotiated on-market sale.

As a result of the settlement, Adi Godrej and Nadir

Godrej members will make an open offer to the public shareholders of Astec Lifesciences, due to indirect change in shareholding of Astec.

Both the factions are entitled to use the ‘Godrej’ brand and logo, subject to a non-compete clause which will apply for six years from the effective date of the settlement. After the non-compete period, either group can enter into the same business as the other group but without the use of the ‘Godrej’ brand.

### THE RATIONALE

The reason for the split was attributed to the newer generations having diverse interests and perceptions of growth.

“The third and fourth generations of the family branches have diverse interests, and varying perceptions as to, amongst others, the strategic direction, growth and governance of the Godrej Group Entities,” the settlement said.

## SC rejects Govt's plea on ‘administrative allocation’ of spectrum

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court has declined to receive an application by the Centre to allow administrative allocation of spectrum.

The Registrar found the application for clarification misconceived. Spectrum, a scarce natural resource, is allocated to private players only through open, transparent auction. The law was laid down on this issue by the Supreme Court 12 years ago, in the 2G spectrum judgment.

“Administrative allocation’ of spectrum would have government in sole charge of selecting operators to distribute airwaves, considered a scarce resource.

**Details p10**

# FinMin notifies 17% wage revision for over 1.10 lakh LIC employees

**KR Srivats**  
New Delhi

The Finance Ministry has notified the wage revision for LIC employees with effect from August 1, 2022, benefiting over 1.1 lakh employees of the corporation. The revision would lead to a 17 per cent annual increase in wages. This would mean an annual additional outgo of around ₹4,000 crore, taking LIC's overall wage bill to about ₹29,000 crore a year.

This move of the Department of Financial Services (DFS) to notify the wage hike is significant as it comes at a time when there is a model code of conduct in place for the ongoing elections.

The DFS is understood to have obtained the Election Commission's nod before proceeding with the implementation of the wage revision for LIC employees.

Interestingly, the latest



**HIGHER OUTGO.** The wage revision could add about ₹4,000 crore annually, bringing LIC's total wage bill in a year to about ₹29,000 crore

wage hike for LIC employees is in sync with the 17 per cent wage increase handed out to over 8.5 lakh bank employees with effect from November 2022 under a bi-partite wage settlement agreement entered into between bank unions and the Indian Banks Association (IBA).

LIC revises wages once in five years; the last raise was

in 2017. In March this year, the Centre had decided on this 17 per cent wage increase for LIC employees. The notification issued on Tuesday (April 30) would come into effect from August 1, 2022.

A one-time ex-gratia payment to LIC pensioners also forms part of the revision. This will benefit more than 30,000 pensioners and family pensioners.

### STOCK ANGLE

Many stock market analysts contend that increased employee expenses due to the wage hike could pressure profit margins, making LIC less attractive to investors.

For the quarter ended December 31, 2023, LIC recorded a 49 per cent year-on-year increase in net profit at ₹9,444.4 crore (₹6,334.2 crore), driven by an increase in net income from investments and growth in net premium income.

# As US campus protests turn violent, parents in India worry

25 per cent of the over one million foreign students in the US are from India

### Our Bureaus

New Delhi/Mumbai/Hyderabad

As the campus agitations in the US over Israel's actions in the Gaza turned torrid, sparking police action in places like Columbia University, and rival group clashes in University of California, ripples of anxiety are being felt in India. According to the Open Doors Report of the US State Department, students from India constitute more than 25 per cent of the over one million foreign students in the US.

With news filtering in of an Indian origin student being arrested and barred by Princeton university, parents are calling up their children studying in the US, telling them to stay uninvolved. Meanwhile, education counsellors say they are getting anxious calls from students who have obtained admission in the US but are now



**CAMPUS CRISES.** Law enforcement officers stand guard at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) campus **REUTERS**

rethinking their options. A dismayed Aakriti Mehta (name changed), told *businessline* that she had got selected to a Masters programme in Columbia University but is in two minds.

On the other hand, Sneha Jogi, French Trainer at the Alliance Francaise in Hyderabad, whose 18-year old son has got

admission in the University of Utah for a 4-year computer sciences and game design course, is sanguine.

“We consulted with numerous International Student Advisors about the incidents in US campuses. It is the student culture, you know. India also has a very prominent protest culture. So you can't stop

people protesting, but you can choose to stay away from it.” Gurugram-based Manav Bansal, whose son is an undergraduate student in a reputed university in south-east US, is unperturbed too.

“Education, especially in the US, is not limited to the classroom. It is an expression of democracy in action. Students, largely young people, are allowed to protest for things they believe in. It is a great learning for my son and everyone around the world.”

### FEARS OVER VISA

Meanwhile, Indian students on US campuses expressed fears. Hita Parakh, a student at Suffolk University Boston, said, “Indian American students who are not on a student visa are participating more actively in the protests as they do not fear getting deported. As for students with visas, we are

scared to voice our opinion as if the university ends up calling the cops, we might get in trouble.”

“Those who participated in the protests face detention and serious risks to their visa status and scholarships, if identified,” a worried parent told *businessline*. In case of an expulsion or suspension, students on a F-1 or J-1 visa will in all likelihood lose their visas immediately.

Trying to sound reassuring, Aman Singh, Co-Founder & CEO, GradRight, told *businessline*, “We understand the recent protests in the US may raise questions for prospective international students. However, studying in the US remains a long-term decision for students and their families, focused on educational goals and career aspirations.”

With inputs from Abhishek Law, Aniti Sen, Ayushi Kar, Ranit Mehrotra



QUICKLY.

**bp appoints Kartikeya Dube as Head of bp India**



**New Delhi:** bp has appointed Kartikeya Dube as the Head of Country (HoC), bp India, replacing Sashi Mukundan, who has led the oil and gas major's India operations for the last 15 years. Dube will take over as the HoC for India and Senior Vice-President, gas and low carbon for bp India, with effect from July 1. **OUR BUREAU**

**Stride Ventures closes third fund at \$165 million**

**Bengaluru:** Venture debt firm Stride Ventures has closed its third fund at \$165 million, about a year after it announced the first close of the same fund. The fund has garnered support from a diverse mix of investors, including insurance companies, family offices, corporate treasuries and high net-worth individuals (HNIs), the firm said in a statement on Wednesday. The fund focus is on the consumer brands, financial services and cleantech sector. **OUR BUREAU**

**Former BharatPe COO launches maiden VC fund**



**Bengaluru:** Former BharatPe COO Dhruv Dhanraj Bahl has launched his maiden VC fund, Eternal Capital, with a target corpus of ₹120 crore. The fund also includes a green-shoe option of another ₹120 crore, bringing its total capacity to ₹240 crore. The sector-agnostic fund plans to invest in 40 start-ups in their seed to pre-series A stages, over the next three years. **OUR BUREAU**

# PV sales grow 1.77% in April on high-base effect, elections

**NO SURPRISES.** On expected lines as there are uncertainties, say players

**S Ronendra Singh**  
New Delhi

Passenger vehicle (PV) market leaders, including Maruti Suzuki India (MSIL), Hyundai Motor India (HMIL) and Tata Motors, on Wednesday, reported flat or marginal growth in sales in April compared with the corresponding month last year because of a high-base effect and ongoing elections possibly dampening demand.

All in all, the wholesalers (dispatches to dealers) of PVs reached 3,38,341 units in April (3,32,468 units), 1.77 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) growth. “We have started on a very high base this year...right now, the country is going through elections and there is a model code of conduct. During the elections, the markets are a little muted. Once elections are over, I think we will be seeing a different market,” Partho Banerjee, Senior Executive Officer, Marketing & Sales, MSIL, told reporters.

Speaking on the sales performance of the company and

A mixed bag			
Domestic passenger vehicle sales			
Company	April 2024	April 2023	% change
<b>Passenger vehicles</b>			
Maruti Suzuki India	1,37,952	1,37,320	0.46
Hyundai Motor India	50,201	49,701	1.0
Tata Motors	47,883	47,007	2.0
M&M	41,079	34,698	
Kia India	19,968	23,216	
Toyota Kirloskar Motor	18,700	14,162	32.0
Honda Cars India	4,351	5,313	-18.0
MG Motor India (Retail Sales)	4,485	4,551	-1.42
Renault India	3,707	4,323	
<b>Two-wheeler</b>			
TVS Motor Company	3,01,449	2,32,956	29.0
Royal Enfield	75,038	68,881	9.0
Suzuki Motorcycle	88,067	67,259	31.0
<b>Commercial vehicle</b>			
Volvo Eicher	4,898	6,142	-20.3
Tata Motors	28,516	21,507	33.0
Maruti Suzuki	2,496	2,199	13.5
Escorts Kubota	7,168	7,252	-1.15

Source: Companies/Industry sources

industry, he said, “Till the month of June, I think things will be more or less like this and after June, maybe we will see revival in the market.” The company’s domestic PV sales remained flat at 1,37,952 units (1,37,320 units) during the month.

The country’s second-largest PV maker HMIL reported domestic sales of 50,201 units (49,701 units) in April, a marginal (1 per cent) y-o-y growth.

“The numbers are as expected. Although it is very difficult to predict, this flattish to 2-3 per cent growth will continue month-on-month. This is very much in line with what we said in the end of January because

there were uncertainties on account of geopolitics, interest rates and elections. So while these (numbers) are unpredictable, they were all anticipated,” Tarun Garg, Chief Operating Officer, HMIL, said.

He added that there are new launches on a regular basis, so there wouldn’t be any negative impact in the market. “In 2022-23, we grew 20 per cent after Covid. And then we grew 8 per cent over that last year...so India has had exceptional two years of growth and many countries have not yet reached the pre-Covid level,” Garg added.

## 2W SEGMENT

In the two-wheeler segment, TVS Motor Company grew 29 per cent year on year in its domestic sales to 3,01,449 units (2,32,956 units) in April. Suzuki Motorcycle India also reported a y-o-y growth of 31 per cent in its domestic sales to 88,067 units (67,259 units). Royal Enfield, however, reported single-digit growth (9 per cent) to 75,038 units (68,881 units) in April.

# Jindal Stainless charts ₹5,400-crore expansion plans in India, overseas

**Abhishek Law**  
New Delhi

Jindal Stainless will invest ₹5,400 crore over the next three years as it looks at a 40 per cent ramp-up in capacities to 4.2 million tonnes per annum (mtpa). According to Abhyuday Jindal, Managing Director, Jindal Stainless, around ₹1,340 crore will be towards acquisition of Chromeni Steels Pvt Ltd at Mundra in Gujarat. Jindal Stainless will pick up a 54 per cent controlling stake that currently belongs to China’s Eternal Tsingshan Group.

Jindal Stainless will make an upfront payment of ₹1,295

crore for the debt, and the balance towards equity purchase. The 0.6-mtpa facility, now closed, will be operational in another six months with the company making a capital investment of ₹100 crore. Production at Chromeni was stopped during Covid.

“In the first year (FY25), there will be on-boarding of additional debt by ₹300-500 crore. This is because we are taking over the debt of Chromeni,” he said. Existing debt for Jindal Stainless is around ₹4,800 crore.

## JV IN INDONESIA

This apart, investments worth ₹700 crore will be for a JV for



Abhyuday Jindal, MD, Jindal Stainless

upstream facilities in Indonesia. Jindal Stainless’ Singapore-based subsidiary will enter into JV with Zenith International Capital Pte Ltd, Singapore, to operate the steel-melting shop. Zenith International has links to Eternal Tsingshan Group.

# Ambuja Cements Q4 net doubles on higher sales

**Our Bureau**  
Mumbai

Ambuja Cements, an Adani Group company, has reported that its net profit in March quarter doubled to ₹1,526 crore against ₹763 crore logged in the same period last year, led by higher sales volume.

Income increased 11 per cent to ₹9,127 crore (₹8,250 crore).

The company has declared a dividend of ₹2 per equity share and fixed the record date as June 14 for paying the dividend after July 1.

It registered 17 per cent



**ROBUST SALES.** The company registered 17% rise in cement and clinker sales to 16 mt **REUTERS**

rise in cement and clinker sales to 16 million tonne (mt).

The annualised capacity utilisation was at 75 per cent. EBITDA was up 17 per

cent at ₹1,026 (₹877) per tonne in the quarter under review.

## COSTS DOWN

Raw material cost was down marginally at ₹560 crore (₹564 crore), power and freight expenses dipped 13 per cent and 8 per cent to ₹1,216 crore (₹1,401 crore) and ₹1,258 crore (₹1,362 crore).

The company has entered into long-term supply contract for raw material supply to cut cost, while use of green energy and route optimisation is expected to bring down expenses further.

Ambuja Cements plans to

cut cost by another ₹530 a tonne to bring down overall expenses to ₹3,650 per tonne by FY28.

The company has reserves of ₹24,338 crore. It added 11.4 mt capacity in the last 18 months as part of its 79-mtpa capacity addition to achieve 140 mtpa by 2028.

On a standalone basis, Ambuja Cements net profit was up 6 per cent at ₹532 crore (₹502 crore), as income increased 12 per cent to ₹4,780 crore (₹4,256 crore).

EBITDA was down 14 per cent at ₹837 (₹975) per tonne due to lower realisation.

# Adani Wilmar Q4 net up despite dip in revenues

**Our Bureau**  
Mumbai

Adani Wilmar’s revenue in the fourth quarter of FY24 fell 4.6 per cent on year dragged down by its edible oils and industry essentials businesses, both of which saw a fall in revenue. However, net profit during the quarter rose 67.5 per cent mainly due to lower expenses.

The Adani Group company reported a consolidated net profit of ₹156.75 crore on revenue of ₹13,238 crore. For the full year FY24, net profit fell 75 per cent to ₹148 crore, while revenue de-

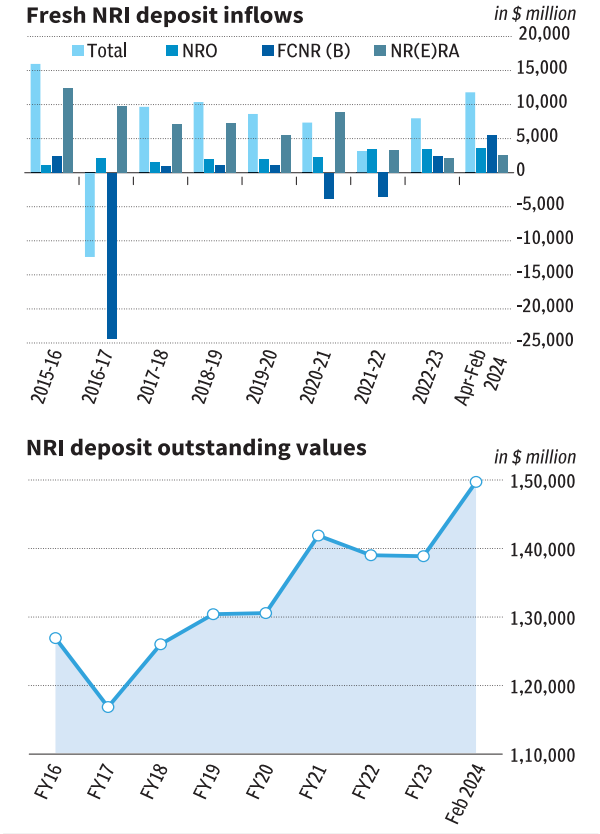


**SLIPPING UP.** Segmental break-up showed that edible oils revenue fell 5.5 per cent in Q4 to ₹10,195 crore

clined 12 per cent to ₹51,261.6 crore.

The company said that food and FMCG sales doubling on year at ₹5,000 crore

## Non-resident Indians park savings at home



Source: RBI Bulletin

terest rates both in India and globally were low, reducing the attractiveness of deposits in general for NRIs.

With rates peaking at the beginning of FY24, deposits are in favour again, and we saw healthy growth in overall NRI deposits in FY24,” she added.

Total NRI deposits across all three categories declined 14 per cent and 56 per cent in FY21 and FY22 respectively, as NRIs found it less attractive to invest in India because of the risk of a depreciating rupee. Then, in July 2022, with a view to lure more foreign currency deposits, the RBI removed interest caps on NRI deposits for a period until October 2022.

Banks were also exempted from the mandatory Cash Reserve Ratio and Statutory Liquidity Ratio for incremental NRI deposits until November 2022. This led to a more than doubling of fresh NRI deposit

flows from FY22 to FY23.

Analysts note that expatriates are increasingly focusing on dollar-denominated products to capitalise on higher interest rates in India. “Alternative avenues such as investing in stock markets is also picking up,” an analyst added.

## AT THE TOP

Globally, India has the highest non-resident deposit balances among developing nations with a large diaspora. According to a recent World Bank report on remittances, India’s non-resident deposits balance stood at \$143 billion as of September 2023, compared with \$8 billion in Sri Lanka, \$7 billion in Mexico, and \$4 billion in Pakistan. The report also anticipates a strong foreign remittance outlook for India in 2024 from the US, the UK, Singapore and the UAE, barring any new geopolitical shocks.

# ‘India in No. 1 spot in terms of interest and capital’

## bl.interview

**Hamsini Karthik**  
Mumbai

Emphasising that the local arm of Norwest Venture Partners invested in India since 2005, Niren Shah, MD and Head of Norwest India, lays out how the fund will deploy \$3 billion it has committed to the country. Edited excerpts:

**This tranche of fundraising is expected to be around \$3 billion, and you’re looking at active deployment in India...**

Yes. For the last three years, we have been deploying approximately \$250-300 million every year. We are going to continue that pace. We are much more focused on cheque sizes; more focused on growth equity and late-stage venture. We don’t do much of early-stage ventures. Our cheque sizes end up being about \$30-100 million in the growth equity segment; within that, the sweet spot would be \$50-75 million.

In late-stage venture, we do \$20-50 million, and our sweet spot would be \$30-40 million. We have a very long fund – typically 10 years, but we have been raising funds between two and three years. In India, outside certain sectors like IT services and Pharma, we are trying to build some really large companies here and a lot of the exits end up in an IPO.

**A lot of PEs have had a couple of very successful IPO exits, including Five-Star Business Finance which was yours. You see this trend encouraging to attract more money into India?**

Yes, globally and within India, we have reached a very different orbit. Given the sizable GDP we are getting into, the strong reforms we have had and the political stability, India is seen as a large destination for manufacturing. We have done well in IT services and our domestic consumption story. As a country we’re finally very confident about India.



Norwest has been very bullish on India since 2005 when we started, but I think we are more bullish than ever

## NIREN SHAH

MD and Head, Norwest India



Even in Asia, we have occupied the number one spot and there is a lot of interest and capital. Norwest has been very bullish on India since 2005 when we started, but I think we are more bullish than ever.

There’s a willingness to do buyouts, we are seeing repeat founders, an understanding of unit economics and on the start-up side there is the need to go IPO, have free cash flow, etc. There is a lot of patient capital and people understand that it’s an emerging market that will take time.

**Does this whole China plus one theory hold water?**

In certain sectors like IT and

pharma, India has very strong footing. In the newer sectors when you’re looking at electronics outsourcing, it’s still early days.

There’s a lot of potential but there’s a long way to catch up to China, which has been doing this at scale for 20 years.

While China has built some amazing scale, given the extent of what’s happening like the iPhone production in India or the interest of Tesla, some of the changes are happening much faster than we would have ever imagined.

**One of the things I also noticed in your financial services portfolio is that you’ve stuck with regulated entities largely**

**and perhaps a few fintech...**

Given that we have a very robust regulator, we don’t want to do frontier investing where there are people who are very happy to play in areas which are going to be regulated or regulated but they are not clear. We want to say that there is a benefit of having regulation and that regulation is well understood and well laid-out.

We want to be absolutely within the four corners of that regulation and we care as a fund about governance risk and compliance. We think more about growth equity. If you’re playing on PPI licences but one knows that it is not the eventual place, we stay away from it. We’d rather come in when there is very clear cut regulation and a profit pool, rather than doing very early-stage venture where maybe the business does work but sometimes it’s the regulation that doesn’t work.

A lot of people today are a little more worried about fintech. Norwest, worldwide, is known for being very fundamental. We will do a lot

of diligence and don’t want to do a spray-and-pray kind of deal.

**How big is your exit pipeline for FY25?**

We are going to have a bunch of companies filing for IPO like SK Finance, Swiggy, Veritas, OfBusiness and Vastu Housing Finance. Exits in Swiggy and OfBusiness would be in the range of about 15x. Financials would be lower, but we put in money around many stages.

**There are a lot of bank divestment buzz doing the rounds. Would you participate in these?**

We did a lot of banks and NBFCs around 2007-12 because at that point, those were the ones which were growing and we are trying to make 30 per cent internal rate of return. Now we are doing a lot more of fintech and NBFCs.

We can see companies growing at 30-40 per cent. I don’t think in the banking space there is something exceptional any longer. Banks will probably be 10-15 per cent growth.



**GROWTH DRIVERS.** Robust cost structures and manufacturing capabilities led to market share growth **REUTERS**

## Ola Electric captures over 52 per cent market share

**Our Bureau**  
Bengaluru

Ola Electric has captured over 52 per cent market share in the EV two-wheeler segment in April 2024. According to the Vaahan portal, the company recorded 34,000 registrations during the month, and registered a year-on-year (y-o-y) growth of 54 per cent over the corresponding month last year.

Ola Electric recently entered the mass-market segment with new prices for its S1 X portfolio. The scooter, available in three battery configurations (2 kWh, 3 kWh, and 4 kWh), now comes at ₹69,999 (introductory price), ₹84,999, and ₹99,999 respectively. The deliveries are set to commence soon.

“It has been a phenomenal start to FY25, with our market share crossing the 52 per cent mark in the 2W EV segment,” said Anshul Khandelwal, Chief Marketing Officer, Ola Electric Technologies Private Ltd. “Our robust cost structures and vertically-integrated manufacturing cap-

## businessline.

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QUICKLY.

Govt cuts windfall tax on crude petroleum



**New Delhi:** The government has cut windfall tax on domestically produced crude oil to ₹8,400 per tonne from ₹9,600 per tonne with effect from Wednesday. The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED). The SAED on the export of diesel, petrol and jet fuel or ATF, has been retained at nil. The new rates are effective from May 1, an official notification said.

STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Post-COVID, workers returning to the office boost the expansion of commercial office space in India.

Sidharth Menda, Member, Supervisory Board, RMZ Corporation, discusses with businessline's Abhishek Law.

https://shorturl.at/cx8MO

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# Private refiners’ crude oil imports from Russia at 12-month high in April

**STOCKING UP.** IOC, HPCL and BPCL also topped up with Russian barrels, taking imports to a seven-month high

**Rishi Ranjan Kala**  
New Delhi

Private refiners, Reliance Industries (RIL) and Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy, imported around 770,000 barrels per day (b/d) of crude oil from Russia in April 2024, the highest in a year.

Analysts and trade sources attribute the higher numbers to more export volumes being shipped out of Russia and lifting of lower cargoes by Chinese refiners.

Sensing the opportunity to procure more barrels, public refiners such as Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL) too imported 1.02 million barrel per day (mb/d) last month, which is a 7-month high.

According to energy intelligence firm Vortexa, India imported more than 1.72 mb/d crude oil from Russia in April, which is also the highest in the last nine months. Imports last

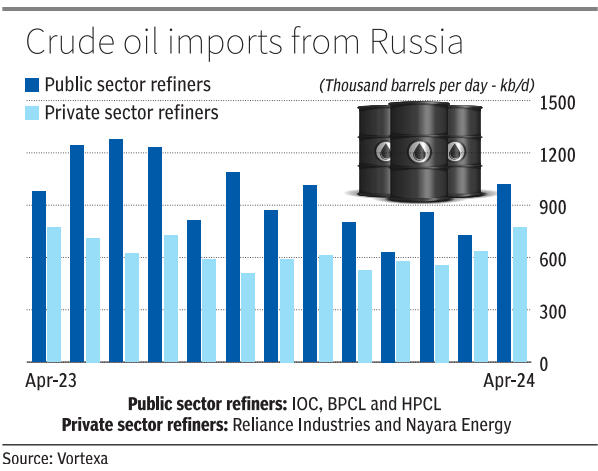
month were 26 per cent higher M-o-M and almost flat on an annual basis (April 2023: 1.74 mb/d).

**SUPPLY IS UP**

Vortexa’s Head of APAC Analysis, Serena Huang told *businessline*: “Higher Russian crude exports in February and March as well as lower imports by Chinese refiners have made available more volumes for Indian refiners. Given that Russian crude cargoes are likely to be more discounted than Middle East grades, Indian refiners are likely to opt for the former.”

When asked about the impact of sanctions, she explained that the biggest impact of western sanctions on selected shipping companies and vessels carrying Russian crude to India has been the disruption on Russian Sokol deliveries. But it had minimal impact on India’s overall imports of Russian crude.

Vortexa’s Senior Oil Risk Analyst Armen Azizian, in an April 16 commentary, said, “Russian crude STS



(ship-to-ship) activity (excluding CPC Blend & KE-BCO) reached 310,000 b/d in April (days 1-15), a 120,000 b/d increase M-o-M and a 10-month high. Russian Urals is the sole grade transferred via STS in April so far, which has reached a 12-month high.”

In 2024 so far, Vortexa observed nine very large crude carriers (VLCCs) transferred Russian crude via STS. All nine VLCCs were previously involved in Iranian and/ or Venezuelan trade.

VLCCs have been the driving force behind Russian Urals STS activity moving upwards in recent months, especially in April. More than 60 per cent of Urals transferred in April were because of VLCCs loading via STS from Aframaxes, which increased STS volumes (three Aframaxes feed one VLCC), he added.

**VOLUMES DROP**

“This return of VLCCs to the Russian trade, specifically these tankers involved

in the sanctioned trade, suggests there is surplus tonnage in the VLCC segment of the opaque fleet,” Azizian said.

Vortexa data show that crude oil imports from India’s traditional suppliers in the Middle East fell in April. India imported 776,000 b/d from its second largest supplier Iraq last month, compared to 1.09 mb/d in March 2024. Imports from Saudi Arabia were down for the second month in April at 680,000 b/d (March 2024: 768,000 b/d).

In-bound shipments to India from the UAE fell to 260,000 b/d last month from 442,000 b/d in March.

“The move to import more Middle Eastern crude has been a backstop for potential disruption in purchasing Russian crude. But prices of Middle East grades have been rising amidst limited export volumes and robust demand from Asian refiners, which is likely to cap Indian refiners’ appetite if they are able to secure sufficient discounted Russian volumes,” Huang said.

## UPI transactions in April dip to ₹19.6-lakh crore

**Anshika Kayastha**  
Mumbai

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) saw both the number and value of transactions moderating by about 1 per cent on month from the record high seen in March 2024.

Transactions worth ₹19.64 lakh crore were processed during April 2024, 0.7 per cent lower than the record of ₹19.78-lakh crore seen in the previous month. The value of transactions was 40 per cent higher compared with April 2023, as per data by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

The end of a financial year traditionally sees a lot of transactions closer to the ₹1 lakh limit as a lot of merchants, business owners and individuals square off transactions leading to higher value and volume of transactions.

The number of transactions on the UPI network fell 1 per cent to 1,330 crore during the month from the March peak level of 1,344 crore transactions. On year, the volume of transactions was 50 per cent higher. On-year growth in UPI transactions consistently remained over 40 per cent for the value of transactions, and above 50 per cent for volume of UPI

DIGITAL BUMP

- Transactions worth ₹19.64-lakh crore were processed during April
- The number of transactions on the UPI network fell 1% to 1,330 crore

trades in 2023 and FY24. “UPI volumes and value continue to grow on a year-on-year basis, reflecting the continued focus on digital adoption across the country and the customer convenience that UPI offers. The month-on-month reduction is not a comparable factor given that march is usually the month with higher volumes during the year,” said Vivek Iyer, Partner, Grant Thornton Bharat.

**VOLUME UP**

In FY24, the UPI platform processed 13,115 transactions aggregating to ₹199.29-lakh crore compared with 8,376 crore transactions worth ₹139-lakh crore in FY23. In terms of the total transactions processed during the year, the volume of transactions was up 56.6 per cent whereas value of transactions was 43.4 per cent higher.

## Power consumption rises 11% to 144.25 BUs in April

**Press Trust of India**  
New Delhi

The country’s power consumption rose around 11 per cent to 144.25 billion units (BU) in April as compared to the year-ago period, mainly due to increase in temperatures. In April 2023, the

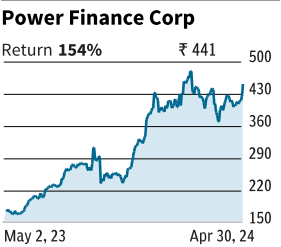
power consumption stood at 130.08 BU, a government data showed.

The highest supply in a day (peak power demand) also rose to 224.18 GW in April 2024 as against to 215.88 GW in April 2023. The Power Ministry has estimated around 260 GW of peak demand during summer.

## TODAY'S PICK.

**Power Finance Corporation (₹441.4) : BUY**

**Akhil Nallamuthu**  
bl. research bureau



Power Finance Corporation’s stock, after hitting a record high of ₹477.8 in early February, lost momentum and has been consolidating for the over two months. But there has been an uptick in price recently after it found support at ₹360. Notably, on Tuesday, the stock rallied sharply and broke out of the resistance at ₹430.

This has opened the room for further upside. We expect the stock to hit ₹470 in the forthcoming sessions. That said, the price might dip to ₹425 before crossing over ₹450. Therefore, traders can go long

on this stock now at around ₹440 and accumulate if the price dips to ₹425. Initial stop-loss can be at ₹410. When the scrip touches ₹455, tighten the stop-loss to ₹440. Book profits at ₹470.

Note: The recommendations are based on technical analysis. There is a risk of loss in trading

## After HC order, DGCA starts processing deregistration of Go First aircraft

**Forum Gandhi**  
New Delhi

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has started processing deregistration of aircraft leased to Wadia-owned Go First following the Delhi High Court order.

According to sources, the aviation watchdog has already processed the deregistration request of 43 aircraft, and is in the middle of processing the requests for the pending 11 aircraft. Banking sources said this paves the way for the airline’s downfall as lenders weigh liquidation



**ALL SET.** Banking sources said this paves the way for the airline’s downfall as lenders weigh liquidation

IDERA empowers lessors to deregister their aircraft from the registry of the lessee’s country, repossess them, and transport them out, particularly in cases of lease payment defaults.

**AIRCRAFT LEASED**

Both Blue Sky and Star Rising had leased AIRBUS A320-271N to Go First. Star Rising leased six aircraft with the registration numbers VT-WJN, VT-WJP, VT-WJR, VT-WJQ, VT-WJR, VT-WJQ. On the other hand, Blue Sky has leased five aircraft VT-WJJ, VT-WJM, VT-WJT, VT-WJS and VT-WJL.

Both Bluesky 19 Leasing Ltd and Star Rising Aviation filed IDERA requests on May 9 and May 11, 2023, respectively. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) admitted Go First’s plea for voluntary insolvency on May 10, 2023. Go First’s Resolution Profes-

## Top 4 credit card issuers lose market share in FY24

**Anshika Kayastha**  
Mumbai

The top 4 credit card issuers of the country saw a decline in their market share during FY24, both in terms of monthly card spends and total cards outstanding, according to data by the Reserve Bank of India.

The market share of the top 4 issuers – HDFC Bank, SBI Card, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank – declined to 71.98 per cent as of March 2024 from 74.79 per cent a year ago, both due to expansion in the overall spends base and accelerated growth seen by mid-sized players.

Overall spends for March 2024 stood at ₹1.6-lakh crore, higher by 19.8 per cent on year and 10.2 per cent on month. Spends for the top 4 issuers

were 8-14 per cent higher compared with February.

On the other hand, the share of the next 10 issuers, those ranked 5 to 14, grew to 24.85 per cent as at the end of FY24 as against 22.35 per cent in the year-ago period. These included IndusInd Bank, RBL Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, American Express, IDFC First Bank, Yes Bank, Bank of Baroda, AU Small Finance Bank, Federal Bank and Standard Chartered Bank.

Further, the share of the next 21 issuers too rose to 3.17 per cent from 2.86 per cent in the previous year. Bandhan Bank and Utkarsh Small Finance Bank were the new entrants during the year.

The industry saw net card additions of 1.6 crore during FY24, of which the top 4 issuers accounted for 97.62 lakh cards. Total number of cards

outstanding stood at 10.18 crore at end of FY24, with net addition of 12.02 lakh cards seen in March 2024.

**CARDS-IN-FORCE**

The top 4 issuers had a total of 7.06 crore cards-in-force as of March 2024, up from 6.09 crore in the previous year. However, their market share fell to 69.40 per cent from 71.37 per cent a year ago.

Here too, the share of the next 10 issuers rose to 25.04 per cent with 2.55 crore cards as of March 31, compared with 1.99 crore cards at the end of FY23 comprising a market share of 23.35 per cent in terms of total cards-in-force.

The share of the remaining issuers too increased to 5.56 per cent as of March 2024 from 5.28 per cent a year ago, with total cards outstanding rising to 57 lakh from 45 lakh.

## Day trading guide

22708	» Nifty 50 Futures				
S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT	
22600	22500	22750	22950	Buy now and on a dip to 22600; stop-loss at 22500.	
₹1517					
» HDFC Bank					
S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT	
1500	1485	1530	1550	Buy if the stock breaks out of 1530; stop-loss at 1510.	
₹1421					
» Infosys					
S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT	
1415	1385	1445	1480	Short this scrip if it slips below 1415; stop-loss at 1445.	
₹435					
» ITC					
S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT	
435	428	442	450	Stock is at a support; go long with stop-loss at 428.	
₹282					
» ONGC					
S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT	
280	275	285	300	Go long if the stock breaks out of 285; stop-loss at 275.	
₹2931					
» Reliance Ind.					
S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT	
2890	2830	2975	3000	The stock is moving across a sideways trend; stay out.	
₹825					
» SBI					
S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT	
800	780	835	850	Buy when the stock dips to 800; place stop-loss at 775.	
₹3822					
» TCS					
S1	S2	R1	R2	COMMENT	
3800	3750	3900	4000	Consider fresh longs above 3900; stop-loss at 3860.	

S1, S2: Support 1 & 2; R1, R2: Resistance 1 & 2.

# Stocks research firm MarketsMojo plans to raise \$20-50 m

**bl.interview**

**Janaki Krishnan**  
Mumbai

MarketsMojo, a stocks research and analysis firm, is planning to raise \$20-50 million in Series A funding, with 10-15 per cent equity dilution as it ramps up its business, in the 21 countries where it provides its services, in the next 1-2 years.

It is also exploring private equity investments or integrating with a larger brand.

Started in 2015, the company covers 4,000 listed companies in India and has around 1.2 million individual users and a handful of institutional clients, including Axis Securities and Angel Broking. Subscription fees range from ₹4,999 at a basic level to ₹98,999 for a professional package. Right now, a flash sale is on where Mojo Professional is

available at a steep 85 per cent discount.

Recently, it started portfolio management services too, currently managing ₹1,000 crore, which it plans to take up to ₹5,000 crore within the next year.

“Our aim is to become the Bloomberg of research globally,” Founder and CEO, Mohit Batra told *businessline*. “We aim to generate returns for clients globally, attracting investors whether allocating in the US, UK, Japan, China or India.” Excerpts:

**You provide research services for Indian as well as global stocks. Could you give an overview of your growth in India and abroad, and the scope of your services?**

We cover 4,000 listed companies in India. We provide stock calls, model portfolio calls, and have a

We may opt for a pure private equity investment. We are open to diluting up to 10-15 per cent of our stake in the company

**MOHIT BATRA**  
Founder and CEO, MarketsMojo

large portfolio book that have been stored by investors on our site, exceeding ₹50,000 crore on which we render advisory services to them. Today, we have a 20-30 per cent market share in India on retail research.

Around 1.2 million users are registered with us. We have a paid model of research, a premium model for retail customers who have a portfolio ranging from ₹5 lakh to ₹1,000 crore. Eight months ago, we started our



relationships with Kotak Securities, Motilal Oswal, Aditya Birla Capital, BSE and NSE.

**You have grown quite rapidly. Can you give a sense of how you see future growth and your research strategies?**

Our growth has been rapid. Most users were acquired in the last 4-5 years, growing at a rate of around 70-80 per cent year on year. Average ticket sizes range from ₹20 to ₹25 lakh, with some portfolios holding even crores. Some users have prepaid for 7 to 40 years, with investments ranging from ₹1-2 lakh.

Despite tracking a large number of stocks, we have no dedicated research team. Instead, we use a data science model analysing the last 10 years of financial data for each company. Four main parameters are used to rate a company — quality, financial trend, valuation, and growth.

Quality is assessed based on the company’s fundamental growth over the last five years. Financial trend examines the company’s performance over the last five quarters. Valuation considers historical valuations, PEG ratios, peer valuations, and earnings growth potential. Technicals include one-week and one-month overlays to gauge market sentiment.

**How are you planning to fund your expansion?**

We are planning to raise between \$20-50 million. Funding could come from private equity investors or strategic players interested in entering the market. Integration with a larger brand seeking an established research platform is one potential avenue. Alternatively, we may opt for a pure private equity investment. We are open to diluting up to 10-15 per cent of our stake in the company.



KYC confusion

MF KYC compliance could have been better handled

The revised know-your-customer (KYC) norms have unleashed a chaotic situation in the mutual fund industry. A large section of investors has been barred from initiating new investments or redeeming old ones from April 1, 2024. The genesis seems to have been SEBI’s circular issued in August 2023, which had stipulated that the KYC process for investors transacting in markets should be based on both proof of identity and proof of address for which the official requirement was the client’s Aadhaar-linked PAN with updated email addresses and mobile numbers.



KYC-registration agencies (KRAs) were duly asked to validate all existing investor records, if KYC was earlier completed with other documents. The initial deadline for validation of KYC records on these lines was set for December 2023, and subsequently extended to March 31, 2024. Meanwhile, a master circular issued in October 2023 clarified that documents that are valid proof for KYC are Aadhaar, driving licence, voter ID, job card or any other document specified by the Central government in consultation with the regulator. This meant that investors who had submitted bank statements or utility bills as proof of address had to re-do their KYC. The regulator’s move was well-intended as it was trying to standardise and simplify the KYC process, while ensuring compliance with anti-money laundering rules.

But the moot question is, with all PAN numbers already linked with Aadhaar cards and KRAs having access to these records, why was the re-KYC process left undone until the nth hour. Investors are now being forced to check the KYC status on their own and upload physical documents or physically visit the offices of the KRAs or mutual funds to update records for investments that they have held for years. Barring investors from redeeming their existing investments or making fresh ones in a new AMC because of changing goalposts on KYC, is also causing unnecessary hardship. A good part of the blame for the current state of affairs must also be laid at the doors of the fund industry and AMFI.

They could have *suo motu* informed investors of the upcoming change and facilitated their seamless re-KYC any time between August 2023 and March 31, 2024. Such proactive action could have prevented the ongoing disruption in flows. KRAs too could have checked the records at their end and sent emails to customers whose accounts needed re-KYC, well before the March deadline. Intermediaries such as online execution platforms and mutual fund distributors also need to take some blame. At a time when India is winning global accolades for digitisation of financial services, there is no reason why investors should be made to jump through so many hoops for the KYC process. Financial regulators need to come together to operationalise a centralised portal where a customer can complete both his initial KYC, and subsequent updates on address, mobile number, email ID, etc., so that such situations do not recur.

FROM THE VIEWSROOM.

The amazing jumbo

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

Air India’s last remaining Boeing 747 made its last flight a few days ago, mostly unremarked. But it was a moment of sadness, as when something truly great and beautiful passes into history. It was an amazing aircraft. It could, when suitably modified, carry as many as 520 passengers. Back in the 1980s. The jumbo was originally intended as a cargo plane to carry tanks and such like. But in 1966 it was reassigned as a large fuel efficient carrier for Pan Am, which bought 25. India bought six and got its first jumbo in 1971. Watching a jumbo take-off and land never failed to amaze. The sheer grace and brute power, both in view simultaneously, are hard to capture in words. In the 1970s the size of that giant machine lifting slowly in a deafening roar and climbing away, or just floating down to land with engines barely

audible, has always induced awe, till the reverse thrust shook the window panes. Inside you barely heard them. My first experience on the 747 was also the first time I flew, in 1975. Air India had given me a free ticket to attend a job interview with them. It was a New York-Delhi-Bombay flight and I got on at the last leg. (They didn’t select me, the silly fellows.) After that, like hundreds of thousands of others, I flew on it many times, including, unlike the others, five times with two prime ministers. Believe me, that’s the way to fly. Once, we encountered such wild turbulence that this giant plane was wobbling like a banana leaf in a storm. On another occasion the Korean driver of our bus at Seoul airport couldn’t find this huge aircraft despite its majestic size. The Delhi and Bombay airports were not ready for the numbers it carried. The chaos brought you back down to earth in what pilots call a hard landing.



V SRIVIDYA

The Telecom Performance Indicators Report 2022-23, published by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), reveals that the number of broadband subscribers (with a minimum download speed of 2 Mbps) in the country has reached about 840 million out of which about 340 million and 500 million, respectively, are rural and urban subscribers. In particular, in rural areas, the percentage of telecom subscribers that have broadband connection has increased twofold in the past five years to reach about 65 per cent. This huge growth in rural broadband subscription is due to many of the following initiatives. Providing universal service at affordable prices has always been a regulatory challenge all over the world. Regulatory economics indicates that unless we have a monopoly service provider who can cross-subsidise the rural loss using high price plans for urban subscribers, any option including introducing competition does not yield the intended benefits to the rural populace. The widely adopted principle is to subsidise the deployment of rural networks through Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) — referred to as Bharath Nidhi in the Telecom Act 2023. India enacted the setting up of USOF in 1997, by charging a Universal Service Levy (USL) of 5 per cent of adjusted gross revenue of the operators. Today, the corpus of USOF collected over the years has been put into many areas.

**RURAL CONNECTIVITY** First, is the completion of one of the largest rural broadband connectivity projects in the world, BharathNet, deploying about 6,50,000 route km of optic fibre connectivity to more than 2,00,000 village panchayats, thereby improving access to robust backhaul network connectivity. With this in place, and by offering affordable broadband tariffs, the scheme has resulted in data usage exceeding 100,000 terabytes per month. With two phases completed, and the third phase expected to start soon, covering the remaining 50,000 village panchayats, the BharathNet project that was started in 2011 is realising its true potential in providing rural broadband connectivity. A substantial portion of the USOF amounting to about ₹40,000 crore have been disbursed for this project alone. Given a robust backhaul, the next step is to provide affordable and easy access. The wi-fi density in India is very low compared to many countries. Wi-fi offloading, that enables shifting the traffic from the cellular broadband



ritu raj konwar

India moving towards ‘broadband for all’

**RIGHT DIRECTION.** The Universal Service Obligation Fund has helped expand optic fibre connectivity, wi-fi networks, and rural penetration. These efforts must continue

network to wi-fi networks is one of the strategies used by the telcos in many countries to do effective traffic management. However, in India we have not seen this due to the disinterest exhibited by the telcos. In order to improve penetration of wi-fi hotspots, the Prime Minister Wireless Access Network Interface (PM WANI) was conceptualised by TRAI in 2018, which is now being rolled out across the country. WANI is an interoperable wi-fi network that provides flexible authentication and payment models that allows users to access wi-fi on the go. Another objective of WANI is to create an abundance of last mile wi-fi access providers (aka public data offices — PDOs) in the form of local micro entrepreneurs to provide ubiquitous wi-fi access. To improve penetration of wi-fi hotspots, the Prime Minister Wireless Access Network Interface was conceptualised by TRAI in 2018, which is now being rolled out across the country.

The relatively higher leased line charges levied by the telcos has been a deterrent for the PDOs to provide sustainable wi-fi service. Since leased line tariffs are under tariff forbearance, the regulator is also not able to make any headway. The government should issue a separate lower tariff for backhaul leased line for WANI-registered PDOs so that wi-fi provided by the PDOs take off in larger scale. The third, is a hard look at villages and areas in the country that have been uncovered. With funding from USOF, 354 of these uncovered villages are being covered through a subsidised mobile tower installation scheme. The difficult geographical terrain of the North-East region of the country increases the average cost per connection. **MOBILE TOWERS** With this in mind, mobile towers are being commissioned in the North East region with support from USOF. Apart from these, through the Comprehensive Telecom Development Project (CTDP) of the government of India, the submarine optic fibre cable connecting mainland India to Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep islands is providing robust broadband connectivity compared to the relatively expensive and unreliable satellite based low bandwidth

connectivity these islands had earlier. **ROLE OF BSNL** Fourth, is the role of the state-owned enterprise (SOE), BSNL. One of the regulatory interventions in augmenting universal service is to equip the SOE to manage the roll-out of rural broadband networks. While countries such as the US that do not have an SOE depend on private telcos to provide universal broadband connectivity, India is fortunate to still have BSNL. In recent years, efforts have been initiated by the government to streamline processes and operations within BSNL to effectively compete with private telcos. The BharatNet Udyami scheme being offered by BSNL to provide very low price Fiber To The Home broadband connectivity to rural households, funded through the USOF, has met with success. The recent announcements regarding 4G rollout by BSNL are timely, to accelerate the momentum towards rural broadband connectivity in the country. For India to attain “broadband for all” as indicated in the National Digital Communications Policy 2018, sustainable efforts such as the above are the need of the hour.

The writer is Professor, IIT-Bangalore

Agriculture exports need to be stepped up

A holistic plan involving diversification of products and markets, improving agri infra, and reducing logistics costs will help

Parashram Patil

The impact of the Red Sea crises and Russia-Ukraine war is visible on the Indian agriculture sector, especially on exports. India’s agriculture exports slipped nearly 9 per cent between April and February in FY24 to \$43.7 billion due to the Red Sea crisis, the Russia-Ukraine war, along with domestic restrictions. According to a CRISIL report, the impact of Red Sea crises will be significant on the agricultural sector due to the perishable nature of the goods and lean margin profiles, which limit the ability of the sector to absorb the risks from rising freight costs. For instance, India is the largest exporter of rice globally. In 2022, the export volume of basmati rice from India amounted to over three billion tonnes globally. Rising freight costs have curbed its export — which accounted for 30-35 per cent of the production — and this is now being sold in the domestic market at lower margin. Currently, India’s agriculture export

share in the global market is only 2.4 per cent which needs to increase up to 4-5 per cent. There is a need to develop a holistic agriculture export plan with diversification of products and markets. The focus should be on commodities with high potential for export growth such as bananas, mangoes, grapes, guava, pomegranate, watermelon, onion, green chilli, capsicum, okra, garlic, groundnut, alcoholic beverages, cashew nut, buffalo meat, jaggery, natural honey, potatoes, and baby corn. While India’s exports of these items in 2022 stood at \$9.03 billion, the global imports of these came in at \$405.24 billion in the same year, with the US, Malaysia, Canada, Russia, Germany, France, Korea, China, Indonesia, Japan, Italy, Belgium and the UK being the top buyers. **DEVELOP SEA PROTOCOL** There is a need to develop a sea protocol to enhance these exports. For instance, ginger, pineapple, mangoes and oranges, among others, are mainly transported by air, which increases transition costs; the



**VALUE ADDITION.** Vital for exports

export of these commodities needs to be promoted through sea routes. Developing a sea protocol reduces the logistics cost, especially for export of horticulture produce to long-distance market, and will enable a quantum increase in exports. India accounts for 14 per cent of global wheat production, more than Russia and Ukraine combined. But India’s share in wheat exports is only 3 per cent as wheat is largely used for domestic purposes. Indian wheat stocks are three times

the mandatory limit of 7.6 million tonnes. Egypt, Israel, Oman, Nigeria and South Africa, among others, are the major wheat importing countries and they rely on Russian or Ukrainian wheat. Since India has excessive wheat stock, it can be exported to the aforementioned countries. Improving agriculture export infrastructure, especially pack houses, integrated cold storages and processing mechanisms, will help reduce the perishability of exported commodities. A specific long-term strategy is needed with diversification of agricultural production and exports that factor in comparative advantage, available market, productivity, consumption, subsidies and incentives, conserving scarce resources such as water and energy, and reducing the carbon footprint. Also, there’s a need to focus more on value-added processed food products, rather than processed agricultural commodities, for exports.

The writer is an agricultural economist

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to [bleditor@thehindu.co.in](mailto:bleditor@thehindu.co.in) or by post to ‘Letters to the Editor’, The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Upgrading SFBs

This refers to the editorial ‘Slippery glide path’ (May 1). Regulations governing small finance banks (SFBs) and public sector banks differ on many aspects such as priority sector lending and capital adequacy. A few SFBs have been performing well now and are aspiring to get converted into universal banks. But conversion or upgrading SFBs to universal banks defeats the very purpose for which they were established. Disinvestment, privatisation and merger are looming large in the banking arena with a view to making a stronger global presence and in having a handful of big size banks. At this juncture, inducting SFBs into the commercial banking arena does not sound good. The Basel IV norms on capital adequacy and risk

assessment are stringent, and these would be hard to adhere to for new entrants. The apex bank could relax few guidelines exclusively for SFBs in the area of branch expansion and garnering more public deposits. **RV Baskaran** Chennai

Low voter turnout

This is with reference to ‘In Hindi belt low turnout is a uniform trend’ (May 1). Low turnout and lack of enthusiasm among voters is but natural looking at the way our politicians are fighting over irrelevant matters, hurling abuses at each other, not touching real issues such as employment generation, improvement in infrastructure, welfare schemes, etc. The Indian voter is in a confused state of mind

today, which is not good for our democracy. The Indian voter has become smart and cannot be taken for granted. The voter demands good infrastructure, jobs, economic development, and investment in health and education facilities. **Veena Shenoy** Thane

Funding of SMEs

This has reference to ‘Accessible SME finance’ (May 1). Funding of SMEs is slightly different from other entities in terms of quantum, methodology, riskiness and pricing. Timely funding is also important. However, depending on personal guarantees is not appropriate as the net worth of the guarantor may fluctuate during the funding duration and it is likely that the net

worth may erode significantly if personal assets are transferred to family trusts after availing finance. The efficacy of loans against personal guarantees depend on the stability of the net worth of guarantors. **M Raghuraman** Mumbai

Personal guarantees

One is at a loss to know why there is so much debate about personal guarantees (PGs). After all, such guarantee demonstrates the promoter’s confidence about the success of his project. That will give more comfort to the lender than the assessed financial strength. If the promoter himself is not clear on the success of his business is it not unfair to expect funding from a bank or any

financial institution? He should bear in mind that it is a business venture, not a wager. **R Mohan** Kumbakonam, TN

**Vaccine side-effects** AstraZeneca admitted in court that its Covid-19 vaccine, known as Covishield in India, can cause side effects like blood clotting and low platelet count. This acknowledgement came during a lawsuit, though the condition, thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome, has been documented in scientific literature. India has to ban the use of Covishield and other Covid vaccines if concerns about their after-effects are not addressed. **Vijaykumar HK** Raichur, Karnataka





# Looking beyond exams

The assessment process must be demystified

Neena Jha

With the annual examination season just behind us and results round the corner, it is a time of bated anticipation for students, parents, and educators alike. It may also be an opportune time to reflect on the shift around assessment practice that is currently underway in our country.

The National Education Policy 2020 calls for transforming assessments such that it optimises learning and development of all students in school. Shift from content-centred to competency-based assessment is at the core of reforms being initiated to move towards improved assessment practice. A clear message is that assessments do not inevitably mean examinations. A 360-degree holistic assessment that is continuous and puts student learning at the centre has been envisioned.

Reforming assessments is not just a matter of changing the format and methods of assessing student learning. It entails working towards a shift in mindsets of education stakeholders to transform the assessment ecosystem. In an absence of this impetus, the risk of falling back on conventional and familiar practices looms large.

Here is an attempt to unpack what might be the primary tenets of the shifts in the assessment ecosystem:

First, reforming and strengthening institutions that teach and assess. For this, the establishment of state assessment cells aligned to the National Assessment Centre PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development) is a good first step. What would be critical is further penetration of capacity and decision making around assessment practice to the district level. The role of DIETs could be as spokes to the hub state assessment cell.

Second, building systemic capacity continuously and comprehensively. To transform the way students experience assessments, it would be important to reimagine how relevant systemic actors engage with the process. This includes building capacity of school, block, district and state level functionaries. For instance, the



SCHOOL EDUCATION. Continuous assessment GETTY IMAGES

role of academic monitoring/mentoring cadre to supervise and ensure an unbiased and fear-free assessment environment for students. Or, the collaboration between head teachers, teachers, and special educators to create an inclusive assessment plan for children with special needs. Interlinkages among stakeholders to effect this shift in how assessments are undertaken are critical.

Third, leveraging existing resources and emerging technology to strengthen backward and forward linkages of assessments. While the adoption of technology for the purpose of assessing student learning in every classroom or school may be a subject of continued debate and experiment, its use in making sense of data emerging from assessments is undisputed. Assessment data, especially for large-scale education systems like ours, is a potent tool to check on the health of the system.

Finally, empowering those at the frontline of the assessment process — teachers and students. For teachers to look at assessments as an integral part of their classroom practice, it is important for their capacity building programmes be designed on those lines. For example, pre-service courses can embed assessments as part of curricular modules. In-service programmes should establish linkages with classroom practice.

For students to experience assessments beyond the dreaded ‘examinations’, it would require demystification of assessments. When students begin seeing sense and logic in why and how they are being assessed and start leveraging assessment data themselves, they will look at it beyond grades, averages, and ranks and be active partners in the entire process.

The writer is Advisor- Education and Skills Practice, KPMG in India. Views expressed are personal

# Jobs crisis: Regional approach needed

**JOBS FIRST.** Though the unemployment rate has fallen there are still significant State-level disparities



BALWANT SINGH MEHTA

Young people worldwide are increasingly finding it difficult to get a stable job, especially due to limited experience and resources to compete effectively in the job market.

The *India Employment Report, 2024*, jointly published by the Institute for Human Development (IHD) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), has highlighted this issue for India. The report indicates an overall improvement in the labour market in recent years, with a rise in adult (15+ years) employment rates from 46.8 per cent in 2018 to 56 per cent in 2023, and a decrease in unemployment rates from 6 per cent to 3.2 per cent, with youth unemployment rate decreased from 17.8 per cent to 10 per cent.

However, educated youth face disproportionately high unemployment rates, at 16 per cent for secondary and above and 28.4 per cent for graduates and above. Despite national improvements, significant regional and State-level disparities in youth unemployment exist, which are masked in the national average and require detailed discussions and clarity.

India’s working-age population (15-59 years) comprises 64 per cent of the total with, 8-9 million new individuals joining annually. Despite a yearly decrease in the youth (15-29 years) of one million, it still represents 40 per cent of India’s working-age population, the highest globally.

The IHD-ILO report stresses India’s “final window of opportunity” to harness its “demographic dividend” provided labour supply and employment are sustained with high workforce productivity. The challenge lies in not only creating more jobs but also ensuring decent employment across States for their growing labour force.

## STATE-LEVEL VARIANCE

Indeed, significant differences exist in the youth population across States. Uttar Pradesh (18.6 per cent) and Bihar (9.5 per cent) alone constitute over one-fourth (28.1 per cent) of the total youth population in the country, projected to reach 29.8 per cent by 2036.

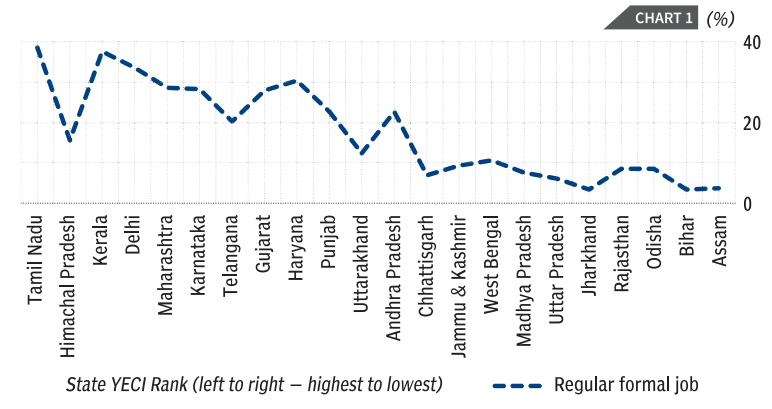
These States, along with Maharashtra (8.3 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (7 per cent), and Rajasthan (6.4 per cent), are anticipated to represent over half (52 per cent) of the youth population.

So, the less developed States, especially in eastern and central region like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh, expect an increase in youth population, while developed States particularly in southern region like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka anticipate a significant decline.

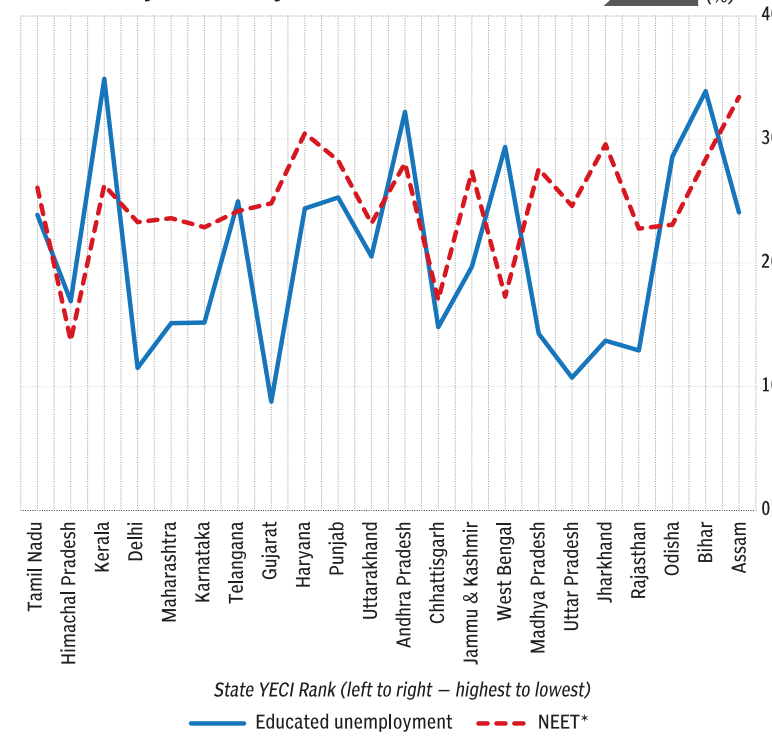
In recent decades, there has been a decline in both the crude birth rate and mortality rates among the elderly in India. The total fertility rate (TFR) has



Relationship of YECI with share of youths in highly educated and regular formal jobs in major States: 2023



Relationship of YECI with share of educated unemployment and NEET\* youth in major States: 2023



\*NEET - Not in employment, education, or training YECI - Youth Employment Condition Index as given in ILO-IHD report Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey data for 2023

also dropped below the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman in major States, except Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Bihar.

Consequently, India’s youth population is decreasing and is projected to decline further, indicating the likely closure of the “youth bulge” advantage. As discussed above, only few less developed States in eastern and central India are expected to sustain a “youth bulge”, contributing significantly to the working-age population.

Conversely, developed States, especially in the south, will likely see a

smaller youth population share and an increase in the ageing population.

The disparities in youth population across major States are also reflected in the Youth Employment Condition Index (YECI), which evaluates four key supply and demand labour market indicators as given in the IHD-ILO report.

States with higher YECI performance compared to the national average include Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Delhi, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Uttarakhnad, Andhra Pradesh, and

Chhattisgarh. These States exhibit high per capita incomes, a substantial number of highly educated youths, and a relatively higher proportion of youth engaged in quality regular formal jobs (Fig 1).

Conversely, States with lower YECI performance such as Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Jammu & Kashmir are characterized by low per capita incomes, a larger share of youth in the population with lower education levels, higher unemployment rates, limited regular formal employment, and a significant number of youths are not in employment, education, or training (NEET\*) status (Fig 2).

Despite high YECI performance, developed States like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Haryana still grapple with challenges of educated unemployment and NEET status among youth.

While these States have a sizable population of highly educated young people, not all secure local suitable job opportunities. Additionally, they face a shortage of low and unskilled workers, and demand for such workers expected to increase further in the future.

## While the eastern and central States are not generating enough jobs and face out migration of labour, the more developed States are facing educated unemployment

Conversely, States with low YECI performance struggle to generate enough jobs for increasing young labour force, leading to out-migration. This diminishes the economic contribution and demographic advantage of such young individuals in their home States.

This analysis highlights the disparity in youth employment and unemployment situation across States, often hidden by national averages. Thus, there’s a pressing need for customized regional or state-level policies to tackle youth unemployment issues.

States with low YECI scores should prioritise local job opportunities for their growing youth population, while those with high YECI scores should aim for quality job creation that meets youths’ aspirations.

The Central and State Governments have initiated several schemes to increase youth employment, but most of these schemes focus more on skill development rather than creating suitable jobs.

While enhancing skills is important, it alone won’t solve unemployment problem without creating adequate and suitable jobs. The policies should assist employers in creating suitable jobs to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 8, ensuring access to decent employment for all and reducing youth unemployment rates.

The writer is Professor at IHD, Delhi, and co-author of India Employment Report, 2024. Views expressed are personal.

## thehindubusinessline.

### TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

May 2, 2004

#### India Inc posts robust profit growth

IT has been the second successive year of robust growth in profits for India Inc if the financial performance of the first 300 companies is any indication. Aggregate net sales and aggregate net profit of these companies have grown by 19 per cent and 37 per cent respectively. In 2002-03, growth in sales and profits were 12 per cent and 53 per cent respectively.

#### MFs send feelers to regulator for floating ‘feeders’

The domestic mutual funds have sought the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) permission to float ‘feeder’ funds to help domestic investors to invest in global funds. This is to take advantage of the scheme announced recently by the Government under which Indian residents can invest up to \$25,000 overseas a year.

#### ICAI norms govern leased assets of banks

Leased assets of banks will now be governed by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)’s standard on ‘impairment’ of value under Accounting Standards (AS) 28. In addition to leased assets, a bank’s fixed assets would also be covered under these norms, as per the RBI guidelines on compliance with AS by banks.

## US firms add 192,000 jobs as wage growth cools in ADP data

### Bloomberg

US companies hired at a strong pace in April, pointing to a robust demand for workers across multiple industries.

Private payrolls increased 192,000 last month after an upward revision to the prior month, according to figures published Wednesday by the ADP Research Institute in collaboration with Stanford Digital Economy Lab. The median estimate in a Bloomberg survey of economists called for a

183,000 gain. The back-to-back gain was the strongest since the middle of last year.

“Hiring was broad-based in April,” Nela Richardson, chief economist at ADP, said in a statement. Leisure and hospitality, as well as construction, led payroll growth. Job gains were strongest in the South.

The labour market has remained more resilient than economists anticipated over the last few months. Despite elevated interest rates, there has been a consistently healthy demand

for workers and low levels of unemployment, which have helped fuel consumer spending and keep prices elevated.

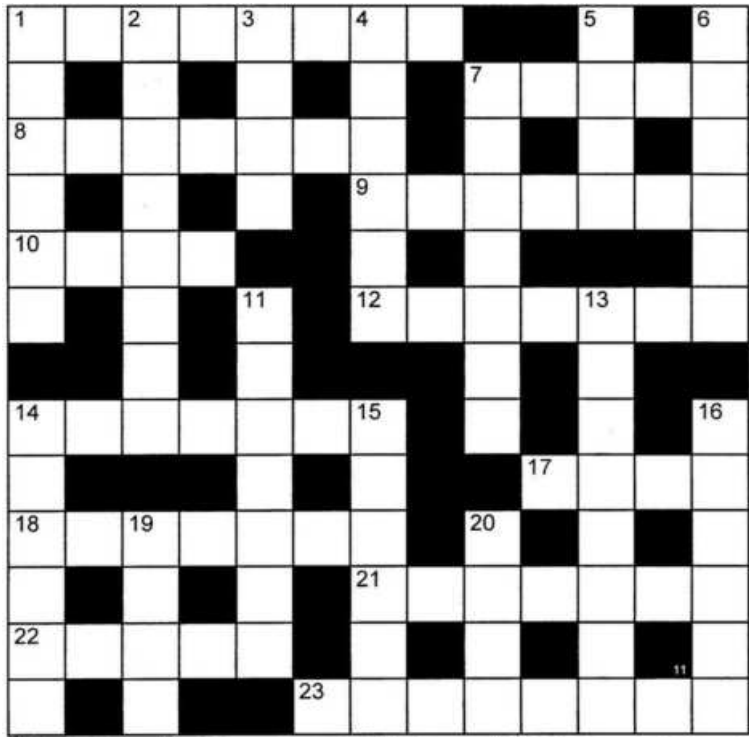
Federal Reserve officials are expected to keep interest rates unchanged at a two-decade high at the conclusion of their policy meeting Wednesday. Policymakers have signalled they’re unlikely to lower rates anytime soon given the lack of progress on inflation this year.

Wage growth cooled in the ADP data. For people who changed jobs, wages

rose 9.3 per cent, down nearly a percentage point from the prior month. Workers who stayed in their job saw a 5 per cent median pay bump, similar to March’s growth, according to the report.

A separate measure of labour costs closely watched by the Fed accelerated in the first quarter by more than it was expected, according to a separate report Tuesday, a sign of persistent wage pressures. ADP bases its findings on payroll data covering more than 25 million US private-sector employees.

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2430



### EASY

#### ACROSS

- Disgraced, lowered in character (8)
- Felony (5)
- Intention (7)
- Moves heavily, clumsily (7)
- Lie at anchor (4)
- Hat (7)
- Signifies (7)
- Used to be (4)
- Fixed point on which lever moves (7)
- Head-supports (7)
- Fairy creatures (5)
- Place at risk (8)

#### DOWN

- Affectedly modest (6)
- Person with a ward (8)
- Song from opera (4)
- Birds of prey (6)
- Get up (4)
- A being (6)
- Remark (7)
- Comebacks (7)
- Oblique (8)
- Not to be the same (6)
- Chinese craft (6)
- Vexing thing, problem (6)
- Be enamoured (4)
- Parasitic insect (4)

### NOT SO EASY

#### ACROSS

- Drag about, indeed, being in disgrace (8)
- Credit one and have me show it doesn’t pay? (5)
- Intention is to be average in Greek initially (7)
- Tumblers lose head and contort if one moves clumsily (7)
- Red, I might be, having been taken for one by cheat (4)
- Tess not responsible for one of the overheads? (7)
- Observe how, as Frenchman would have it (7)
- Are past being included in Tower exhibition (4)
- At the turning-point, almost replete with crumb left unfinished (7)
- They support head, though ailing among wartime prisoners (7)
- East loves nothing less than such fairylike beings (5)
- Stop hot displeasure and put one at risk. (8)

#### DOWN

- It’s rude to embrace me somehow, being so modest (6)
- He has a ward and a newspaper (8)
- Every Italian breathes what singer sings (4)
- Two fewer strokes needed for such high-fliers (6)
- Increase in salary may appear over the horizon (4)
- A human being for each male child (6)
- Observe how, as Frenchman would have it (7)
- They give one witty answers in the laboratory (7)
- The team are yearning, in an oblique way (8)
- Initially French fried might disagree with one (6)
- China craft will bridge first part of day inside (6)
- What’s taken at four only half-served: a problem! (6)
- Cupid doesn’t score in some games (4)
- Leaf, last of which is first to be caught on the hop? (4)

### SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2429

**ACROSS** 7. Par excellence 8. Self-service 12. Kept up 14. Yearly 16. Nooses 18. Dobbin 19. Sententious 23. Dressing-rooms

**DOWN** 1. Bass 2. Bell 3. Acts up 4. Flurry 5. Kepi 6. Acme 9. Explode 10. Caribou 11. Hymn 12. King 13. Use 15. Ego 17. Scenic 18. Dotage 19. Sire 20. Ness 21. Oboe 22. Some



WHAT’S HOT **GADGETS.**

Digital battleground

The new **Dell Alienware x16 R2** is powered by the latest Intel Core Ultra CPU on the X series. The gaming device is now equipped with AI efficiencies and unique experiences for gamers and creators alike. The laptop boasts the most advanced Cryo-tech thermal management system. The embedded quad-fans with ultra-thin blades ensures efficient cooling even under the most demanding workloads. The laptop's Legend 3 design sports a full-metal chassis with anodised aluminium and magnesium alloy to offer both strength and lightness. Its 16-inch gaming device has an HDR FHD IR webcam, a blazing-fast 240Hz refresh rate and 16:10 aspect ratio for seamless gaming. With Wi-Fi 7, gamers can enjoy an ultra-fast, low-latency and stable experience. The device is priced at ₹2,86,990.

Budget buddy

The **realme C65 5G** sports a 6.67-inch display, along with the world's first MediaTek Dimensity 6300 5G chipset. The smartphone also features a 50MP camera that allows users to capture their creativity in high resolution. To enhance the viewing experience, the C65 5G boasts a 120 Hz Eye Comfort Display with TÜV Rheinland Low Blue Light Certificate, ensuring reduced eye strain. The power button doubles up to offer multiple functionalities such as switching sound modes, toggling Do Not Disturb, turning on the camera and flashlight, setting a timer and more! It has a unique light feather design and is available in two stunning colours: Feather Green and Glowing Black. The smartphone is priced between ₹10,499 and ₹12,499, depending on the RAM and storage specification.

Vivid hues

The all-new **vivo T3x 5G** is powered by the Snapdragon 6 Gen 1 mobile platform, ensuring seamless multitasking. It sports a 6.72-inch LCD display with a 120 Hz of refresh rates. The dual stereo speakers promise to deliver immersive audio. There's a memory booster function with virtual extended RAM, where in an extra 8 GB RAM enables the phone to keep up to 25 apps running smoothly, letting you switch between them with ease. The smartphone runs on Funtouch OS 14, which is based on Android 14. It packs in a massive 6,000 mAh battery and ships with a 44W fast charger. The smartphone is available in two alluring colours: Crimson Bliss and Celestial Green and is priced between ₹13,499 and ₹16,499, depending on the RAM and storage option.

Siddharth Mathew Cherian

It's been seven years since Lenovo launched its Legion series of gaming laptops, which have now become a distinguished lineup. With each year, the company has improved its offerings in this performance-driven gaming device, across price points. This year is no different. The latest Lenovo Legion 5i is here for review and here's my take on it.

**DESIGN**  
Weighing in at around 2.36 kg, the Lenovo Legion 5i was a strain on the back when I shuttled it to work every day. Soon, I decided that for the remainder of my usage, it'd be permanently planted on my home desk, set to snipe away enemies in Sniper Elite 5. So, if portability is what you're looking for, you may not find it here.

The laptop is designed with an aluminium top and a polycarbonate-ABS bottom chassis. The unit I reviewed featured the Luna Grey colour which looked quite mute. The lid picks up finger smudges easily, but thankfully, it's not too visible against the grey of the lid.

The keyboard has a good amount of key travel and the response between a keypress and the action rendered on-screen was instantaneous without any ghosting or double presses.

The one thing that immediately lends a gaming laptop aesthetic is the four-zone RGB backlighting for the keyboard. I could control this using the Lenovo Spectrum feature in the Vantage app. The keyboard also features a dedicated key for calling upon CoPilot (Preview), which is Microsoft AI integrated into Windows 11.

**DISPLAY**  
The Lenovo Legion 5i features a 16-inch WQXGA (2560x1600) IPS display with 100 per cent sRGB. It offers up to 165 Hz refresh rate along with Dolby Vision support, rendering transitions seamlessly and in vivid colours - one of the best experiences I've had to date on a gaming laptop.

The display was able to easily render fast-paced gaming with a lot of detail in the light and dark areas of Shadow of the Tomb Raider, with the graphic set to Ultra.

The display has a little bit of a wobble to it, but the lid can be opened easily with one hand. It was a lively experience watching the teaser trailer of Mufasa: The Lion King on YouTube and *Laapataa Ladies* on Netflix with a true-to-life colour rendition. The built-in 1080p webcam and mics were good enough for work meetings. Sometimes the video looked grainy, so the webcam works just about well for those hurried Microsoft Teams meetings.

**SOUND**  
The laptop features two 2-watt stereo speakers optimised with Nahimic Audio.



**GAMER'S DREAM.** The Lenovo Legion 5i lets you switch between different power modes with the key combination of Fn and Q.

The sound through the built-in speakers was great. The app makes the acoustic experience deeply customisable, giving me the choice to tweak the soundstage, voice profiles and noise cancellation levels.

**PORTS**  
The Lenovo Legion 5i has the best assortment of ports with three USB-A ports, two USB-C ports, an HDMI 2.1 port with support up to 8K/60Hz, a 3.5mm jack, an ethernet port, a microSD card reader and the power port. I wish the two USB-C ports were on either side of the laptop, just as the USB-A ports were.

The micro-SD card may be a put-off for users who would prefer an SD card reader in its place. The Lenovo Legion 5i features

the latest Intel Core i7-14650HX processor, with 16 cores/24 threads. Paired with 16 GB RAM, 1 TB storage, and an NVIDIA RTX 4060 8 GB graphics card, the Legion 5i breezed through both synthetic benchmarks and real-life usage.

**PERFORMANCE**  
On CineBench 24, the Lenovo Legion 5i scored 96 points on single-core, 1,184 points on multi-core placing it below Apple M1 Ultra, Intel W Series and AMD threadripper chips. It led the pack at 10,499 points on the GPU score. I played Shadow of the Tomb Raider at 90+ FPS on Ultra settings. The device tends to get quite hot around the keyboard area, but it didn't cause too much discomfort. During long hours of usage, the fans kicked in the moment there was demanding work like gaming or video

editing. In performance mode, although the fans get too noisy for my liking, at least they helped keep the laptop cool.

The laptop was able to export a 4k video project in DaVinci Resolve in under 2 minutes making the Legion 5i a perfectly capable video-editing laptop, with a great colour-accurate display.

**BATTERY**  
The 80 Wh battery in the Lenovo Legion 5i was average at best lasting close to 2-3 hours at best while browsing websites and listening to music. With heavy usage such as gaming or editing videos, it kept me company for just about an hour unplugged. With the 230W power brick, it took about two hours to charge the laptop. In case you are in a hurry to charge the laptop before a road trip, it offers a rapid charge

feature that powers the laptop fully in one hour, but only once a day.

**CONCLUSION**  
The Lenovo Legion 5i is a gamer's dream when it comes to striking the right combination of performance, display, colour and acoustics. With competition from the likes of Dell G15 and the Asus ROG Zephyrus G14, the Lenovo Legion 5i holds its own against the competition and does come out on top of it too.

● **SNAPSHOT**

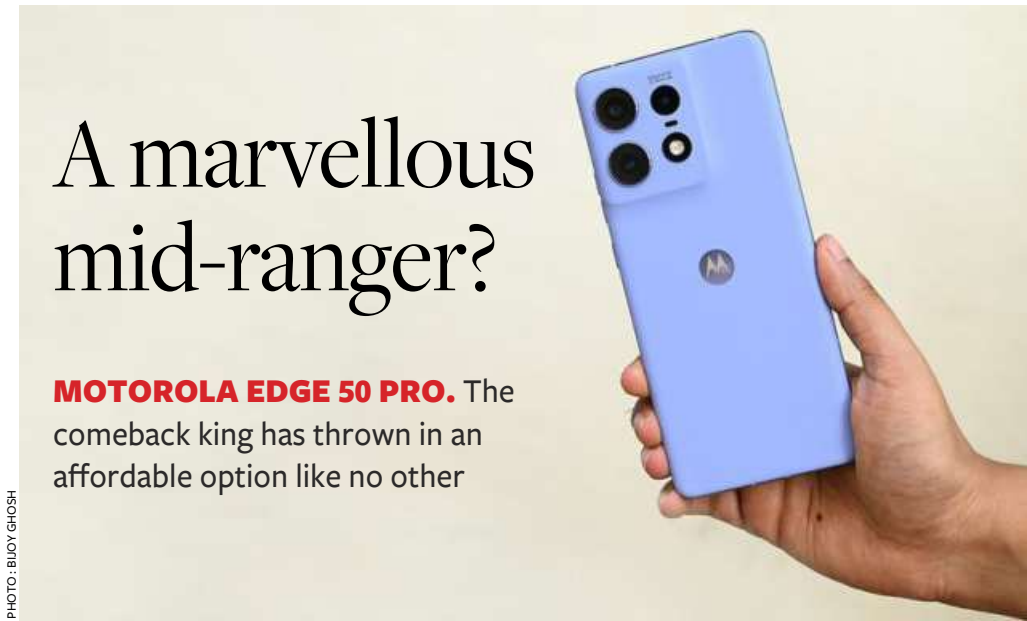
**Price:** ₹1,29,990 onwards  
**Pros:** Great performance, good display, sound quality  
**Cons:** Gets warm while gaming, average battery life.

Mahananda Bohidar

A certain scent wafts through me as I open the Motorola device box that's landed on my desk. I'm certain it's not my perfume. Turns out, Motorola has decided to make an impact with the Motorola Edge 50 Pro, even before I can get my hands on the device. They've added a scent to their smartphone boxes for this model.

**DESIGN**  
Art and aesthetics are front and forward with the Motorola Edge 50 Pro. I haven't used a smartphone recently - or maybe ever - which has this particular finish and feel on the rear panel. Smooth, matte, soft vegan leather in a lovely 'Luxe Lavender' colour. There's a classy Moto logo bang in the centre with the camera module making its presence obvious within a raised squarish island on the top left corner. As far as colour choices go, there's also a pretty straightforward Black Beauty and a sleek Moon Light Pearl variant in acetate finish.

**DISPLAY**  
The display is 6.7-inch pOLED, which despite being sizeable doesn't feel that way. The build is narrow and the phone feels lightweight at 186 grams. The company says this is the first and (at the time of writing) only display validated by Pantone to reflect true-to-life colours and skin tones. The display offers up to 144 Hz refresh rate, giving it an edge over most smartphones in the market - both mid-range and high-end - which offer only up to 120 Hz. The display offers up to 2,000 nits of peak brightness so I really didn't have to squint during these excruciating summer days outdoors. There's also HDR10+ support which means compatible content looks more realistic and vivid on the display. The



A marvellous mid-ranger?

**MOTOROLA EDGE 50 PRO.** The comeback king has thrown in an affordable option like no other

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

smartphone is built with ambient lighting on its edges for notifications. I could personalise the colour options I wanted to differentiate between the lighting for calls, alarms and notifications. I also had the voice of enabling this feature only when the smartphone was kept face down.

**CAMERA**  
The Motorola Edge 50 Pro's primary setup includes a 50 MP camera with OIS, a 13 MP ultrawide-cum-macro lens and a 10 MP telephoto lens with 3X optical zoom and 30X hybrid zoom. The photos I took on the Moto device are some of the most vibrant I've seen. The device definitely favours warmer tones - be it indoor architectural shots or people portraits. On a bright hot Sunday afternoon, I captured a few cars parked under the sun. The red on the car was a little more amped up than it was in real life. Yellow windows and cool blue floors at a resort looked beautiful although it was obvious that both colours were just a touch more saturated on the smartphone. I have to say this effect is not unpleasant at all

and makes objects appear like the best version of themselves, colour-wise. Sometimes, on bright days, the frame gets a little over-exposed by default, but nothing a quick new point to focus on or a little tweak to the exposure can't fix. The camera also switches between capturing the background and blurring the foreground and vice versa quite well. The 50 MP front camera also gives fairly accurate results in terms of both skin texture and skin tone. I'd be surprised if that hadn't been the case considering Moto also said that the camera is also validated by Pantone "for a vast range of human skin tones". Both the front and the rear camera setups are equipped to shoot 4K videos.

**TECH SPECS**  
Videos taken in ample daylight gave some sharp, vivid results. Those taken in low light weren't the best, with a fair amount of noise and artefacts, in limited light. There's also AI Adaptive Stabilisation kicking in to control the shake in the videos recorded.

The Motorola Edge 50 Pro runs on the Snapdragon 7 Gen 3 and offers both an 8 GB + 128 GB variant as well as the higher-end 12 GB RAM + 256 GB variant. My review unit was the latter. The smartphone runs on Android 14 and Hello UI and comes with three years of OS upgrades and four years of security and maintenance updates. What I love about the user experience on the Motorola Edge 50 Pro is the limitless options to personalise my smartphone experience. Be it icons or font to fingerprint animations, there are more than enough options to choose from. What I don't love is that some well-intended features such as the AI-generated wallpaper take their own sweet time (almost 15 seconds or so) to do their job. When I selected photos from the gallery that this feature could use to pick colours or patterns from and create new images/wallpapers the result was a mixed bag as far as aesthetics were concerned. Also, certain UI animations feel jerky. For example, when I take a screenshot and quickly dismiss the capture from the screen, the visual trans-

ition doesn't look seamless. Even on the lock screen, the setting shortcut lies just on top of the fingerprint sensor - without me choosing that. As a result, half the time I instinctively keep hitting the settings icon on the lock screen instead of being able to unlock the smartphone.

**BATTERY**  
The smartphone is powered by a 4,500 mAh battery which kept me company for a full working day with ease. My main usage included watching videos, catching up on emails, reading articles and streaming Spotify. There's a 125W TurboPower adapter which impressively charges the phone from zero battery to full in under 20 minutes. Do keep in mind that this is not the charger that ships with the 8 GB variant, which gets a 68 W charger in the box.

**VERDICT**  
As a mid-ranger, the Motorola Edge 50 Pro has a lot of wins in the bag. It has an excellent display, a hardware design that visually stands out and feels great in hand, has deep personalisation options without overdoing the UI design elements and offers lightning-quick charging. In this price range, that should check off most boxes on the consumer's checklist for the ideal phone. The only area where it could have done better was video quality, especially in low light conditions but hey you can't get perfect, not at least in this price range!

● **SNAPSHOT**

**Price** - ₹35,999  
**Pros** - Aesthetic design, vivid photographs, bright display, decent battery life, superfast charging capability  
**Cons** - UI transitions can sometimes take time or appear glitchy.

● **HOT & 'APP'ENING!**

The best apps handpicked for your pleasure, this week!

Mahananda Bohidar

As we swelter through the summer, here are some minimalist apps to fight the mental meltdown caused by overcrowded smartphone aesthetics and excessive phone usage.

Ratio

One of the nicest minimalist apps that focuses on productivity, Ratio, strikes a wonderful balance between paring down content and adding functional value to the user. You can also select functionalities that are important to you such as productivity, creativity, mobility, messaging, entertainment, lifestyle and social. The app then automatically tracks how much time you're devoting to each of these on your smartphone. There's a separate conversations drawer where WhatsApp messages show up so you don't have to switch apps to respond to someone. The same window also includes a ChatGPT functionality, which is fairly unique.



Minimalist Phone

I haven't seen a phone screen look like this since maybe the early 2000s! This app completely takes over the aesthetics and the functions of the smartphone once installed and pretty much gets every visual distraction out of the way. On the home screen, it displays only my customised favourite or most used apps and the dialer. When I swipe right it wakes me to a list of all apps installed without any icons visible. While I can see the advantages of drastically taking away any and all possibilities for distraction, this one feels too extreme for someone who's constantly looking at the colourful icons, pages and my dog's photo as my wallpaper for my digital dopamine hit.



Flow Minimalist Launcher

This minimalist launcher was a little more likeable and less drastic than the last one. Once installed, the home page features my most used apps, screen time and dates. At the bottom, I have quick access to focus mode, which comes in handy on days like today when I really need to get a lot of work done in a limited time. Right next to it are quick shortcuts to messages and calls. When I turn on focus mode, an inbuilt Pomodoro timer kicks in to keep track and I can customise the duration as well. The premium version includes features such as a special digital detox mode, custom icon packs, unlimited widgets, a habit tracker and more.





QUICKLY.

Crude oil falls for 3rd day on  
Middle East ceasefire hopes



**London:** Crude oil fell more than 1 per cent on Wednesday, losing ground for a third straight session, sapped by the prospect of a ceasefire agreement in the Middle East and persistent US inflation dampening the expected pace of interest rate cuts. Brent crude futures for July were down \$1.19, or 1.4 per cent, to \$85.14 a barrel, having hit \$84.78, their lowest since March 15. REUTERS

Gold regains ground as  
focus shifts on Fed verdict

**Bengaluru:** Gold prices rebounded on Wednesday as caution sets in ahead of the US Federal Reserve policy decision later in the day, while a pullback in the dollar and US Treasury yields prompted some bargain hunting. Spot gold was up 1 per cent at \$2,307.88 per ounce, after hitting its lowest level since April 5 earlier in the session. REUTERS

Cocoa prices fall 10%  
amid record low liquidity



**London:** Cocoa futures on ICE slid nearly 10 per cent on Wednesday amid record low liquidity, and as signs emerge the market's bullish supply-side drivers that drove prices to all-time highs for six consecutive weeks are priced in, for now. REUTERS

Wheat procurement exceeds 55% of target

**TOUGH TASK.** Centre may find it difficult to meet procurement target of 372.9 lt on sluggish purchases in three States

**Prabhudatta Mishra**  
New Delhi

With the pick up in pace of wheat procurement, the deficit has narrowed down to 8 per cent as of April 30 from 25 per cent a week ago. However, the likely lower-than-expected procurement in key States like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh may make it tough for the Centre to meet the overall procurement target of 372.9 lakh tonnes for the season.

Wheat procurement in the country reached 205.42 lt by April 30, against 222.89 lt a year ago, according to the official data.

Since the procurement in last two years were below expectations, a comparison with purchases made in the same period in 2021 shows that it was 280.39 lt. The Centre had purchased over 12 lt in first two days of May in 2021, officials said while highlighting that the government had purchased a record

States	2023	2024	% change
Punjab	106.54	95.97	-9.9
Haryana	58.27	62.75	7.7
Uttar Pradesh	1.31	5.88	348.9
Madhya Pradesh	55.60	36.13	-35
Bihar	0.003	0.06	—
Rajasthan	1.06	4.52	326.4
Others	0.11	0.11	0
All India	222.89	205.42	-7.8

433.44 lt of wheat in whole year. The government had procured 187.92 lt of wheat in 2022-23 and 261.97 lt in 2023-24.

“Though Covid factor was there in 2021, but in terms of production it was a normal year. But, the last two years were unusual as despite tall claims by Agriculture Ministry about bumper wheat production, the Centre could not mop up adequate wheat.

However, due to previously held grain in the reserves, it sold a record 100 lt between June and March of 2023-24 fiscal and was able

to put a check on prices,” said an official source.

STATE-WISE ANALYSIS

Despite the export ban and a restriction on traders to participate in government's wheat auction programme, the demand was so high that the government had to keep raising the weekly offer as well as the buying limit from time to time and the offtake remained over 95 per cent.

Wheat procurement in Punjab stood at 95.97 lt till April 30, down by about 10 per cent from same period last year's 106.54 lt, which millers and State officials at-



Wheat procurement in the country reached 205.42 lt by April 30, against 222.89 lt a year ago

tribute to this year's delayed harvest of about 10 days. The progressive procurement had recorded a drop of 49 per cent until April 23.

Wheat procurement in Haryana, where the target is 80 lt, has reached 62.75 lt till April 30, up 8 per cent from 58.27 lt year-ago. Officials said that 90 per cent of harvesting is completed in Haryana. The government is hopeful of procuring 210 lt per the target from Punjab and Haryana whereas the main problems are in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, where the

combined target is 160 lt.

RELAXED SPECS

The Centre on April 23 relaxed quality specifications for wheat in MP and Rajasthan so that there may be some improvement in the purchases. The Centre has bought 2.20 lt of wheat with relaxed specifications in Rajasthan from April 24, which is nearly at par with 2.31 lt purchased between March 13 and April 23.

In MP, the Centre has bought 6.43 lt of wheat after relaxations of the norms. The purchase in Madhya

Emergence of La Nina may bring bountiful rains in August

**Our Bureau**  
New Delhi

While everyone is glued to hear about likely heatwaves this month, which may not be as worrisome, India Meteorological Department hopes that there may be bountiful of monsoon rains in August this year due to La Nina, which if proved correct, will bring a big relief to the farmers. Last year, the rainfall in August was the lowest for the month since 1901 as the deficit was 36 per cent.

Since July has highest 32 per cent share in the June-September monsoon season in a normal year, a small deficit

in August is manageable for the crops. However, agriculture experts also caution the negative impacts of heavy rainfall on crops as they say flood has been seen to bring more damage than a drought.

“After driest August in Maharashtra last year, there were reports of farmers using standing sugarcane crop for fodder. But, rains after September changed the entire situation and the State is now the top producer of sugar in the country this year,” said an industry expert.

Briefing media on the likely temperature and rainfall during May, India Meteorological Department's Director General, Mrutyunjay Mohapatra,



**FLIP SIDE.** Experts caution against the negative impact of heavy rainfall on crops

predicts 8-11 heatwave days in south Rajasthan, west Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Marathwada and Gujarat and 5-7 heat-wave days in remaining parts of Rajasthan, east Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana,

Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and some parts of Chhattisgarh, interior Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, north interior Karnataka and Telangana. Normally, northern plains,

central India and adjoining areas of peninsular India experience around three days of heatwave in May.

HEATWAVE FORECAST

According to IMD forecast, above normal maximum temperatures are likely to be seen over most parts of the country during May, except northeastern region, some parts of north-west and central India, where maximum temperatures may be normal to below normal.

Mohapatra said that the prolonged heatwave spell over east, south peninsular India in April was mainly due to the absence of thunderstorms and a persisting anticyclone at lower

levels over the west central Bay of Bengal and the adjoining eastern coasts of India. This caused sea breeze to cut off over Odisha and West Bengal on most days, he added.

South peninsular India experienced its second highest average temperature of 31 degrees Celsius in April since 1901, accompanied by 12.6 mm of rainfall in April, the fifth lowest since 1901. The IMD chief noted that above-normal maximum temperatures is becoming more frequent in this region after the 1980s. Moreover, the east and north-east region saw its highest minimum average temperature of 22 degrees Celsius since 1901.

COMMODITY  
CALL.

Go short on  
lead with  
stop-loss at  
₹195

**Akhil Nallamuthu**  
bl research bureau



Lead futures (May contract) on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) rallied sharply over the past month. It rebounded from the support at ₹180. On Tuesday, the contract closed at ₹191.55 per kg.

Although it has seen a fresh breakout and the recent trend has been up, lead futures has a strong barrier at ₹195. The resistance has been holding true since 2021, making it a significant one.

The chart of the continuous contract of lead futures shows that it has been oscillating between ₹173 and ₹195 since 2021.

Given the above factors, it is safe to assume that the rally in lead futures could be nearing its end, for the short-term. A fresh leg of downswing can begin if the May futures slip below ₹190, where the 20-day moving average lies.

TRADE STRATEGY

Since ₹190 can offer a support, we suggest traders to initiate short positions after this level is breached. Target and stop-loss can be placed at ₹180 and ₹195, respectively.

Turmeric gleams again as demand exceeds supplies

**Subramani Ra Mancombu**  
Chennai

Turmeric futures have begun to surge again across various agri-terminal markets in the country as lower production this year has resulted in demand exceeding supplies, traders and industry participants said.

“Futures touched ₹20,000 a quintal a few sessions ago and have dropped to between ₹18,500 and ₹19,500. There could be ₹1,000 movement either up or down,” said Sunil Patil, proprietor, Varadlaxmi Trading in Sangli, Maharashtra.

“There has been a sharp rise from ₹16,000 to ₹20,000 in a short span of time as demand exceeded supplies. However, people turned cautious at ₹20,000,” said Ankit Agarwal, Director at Erode-based Amar Agarwal Foods India Ltd. “Tur-



**RAIN IMPACT.** Experts say if the monsoon arrives on time, prices could drop to levels of ₹17,000-18,000

meric prices have turned volatile as the crop is low this time and the question is how supplies will turn out to be in May,” said RKV Ravishankar, President, Erode Turmeric Merchants Association.

TIGHT SUPPLIES AHEAD

On Tuesday, turmeric (farmer polished) ended at ₹18,982 for June contracts on NCDEX, while August futures closed at ₹19,636, a fair indication of tight sup-

plies ahead. In Nizamabad, turmeric (farmer polished) was quoted at ₹17,593.65, while the superior Rajapore variety ruled at ₹18,994.90 at Sangli.

According to the first advance estimate released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, turmeric production is likely to be 10.74 lakh tonnes this crop year to June against 11.70 lakh tonnes last crop year. “We think the crop is some 30 per cent lower than

last year. In addition, farmers are holding back another 5 per cent for resowing,” said Agarwal.

“Supplies have been lower this year and in another 15-20 days, the situation will be clear. Elections to the Lok Sabha have also led to lower arrivals in parts of Maharashtra,” said Patil.

“There are various figures on the production being lower. It will mean that demand will be 25 per cent lower than normal due to higher prices,” said Ravishankar. “The market has turned bullish and 90 per cent of the crop has arrived across most parts of the country. We see only one-way movement,” said Nizamabad-based trader Amrutlal Kataria.

LA NINA RETURNS

Export demand for turmeric is good, though high prices are playing spoilsport, traders said. Turmeric ex-

ports during the April-January period of 2023-24 were lower at 1.32 lakh tonnes against 1.36 lakh tonnes in the year ago period. However, in terms of value they were up at \$177.03 million compared with \$169.81 million.

With the India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicting the re-emergence of La Nina this year, rains during the south-west monsoon will hold the key to next year's crop and price movements. “If the monsoon arrives on time, prices could drop to levels of ₹17,000-18,000,” said Patil.

“The area under turmeric will rise this year if rains turn out to be beneficial,” said Ravishankar. If monsoon turns out to be good, some of the stockists could rush to the market to sell. This could result in prices dropping sharply, said Agarwal. However, this is likely only after July.

WEATHER WOES



**HIGHER ARRIVALS.** Labourers sort mangoes at a wholesale market in Nagpur, Maharashtra. Mangoes have begun to flood various agricultural produce marketing committee yards across Maharashtra and other States. Farmers have speeded up harvest fearing adverse effects of the weather. Currently, prices are ruling at ₹2,000-2,500 a quintal compared with ₹2,000-3,000 a year ago PTI

‘Commodity prices may drop in 2024 and 2025, but will be above pre-Covid level’

**Subramani Ra Mancombu**  
Chennai

Prices of commodities will likely decline marginally in 2024 and 2025 but they will remain 38 per cent above pre-pandemic levels, the World Bank has said in its latest Commodity Markets Outlook. In all, disinflationary tailwinds from moderating commodity prices appear essentially over, it said.

Unlike prices for most other commodities, crude oil prices are set to increase by 2 per cent in 2024. Gold and copper prices are also set to rise this year, by 8 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively.

“Heightened tensions in the Middle East have been exerting upward pressure on prices for key commodities, notably oil and gold. Copper prices have also reached a two-year peak, reflecting supply concerns and signs of firmer global industrial production,” the outlook said.

The World Bank said high commodity prices in comparison with pre-pandemic levels persisted despite subdued global GDP growth due to several forces at play.

FORCES AT PLAY

Geopolitical tensions were pushing up prices, while investments related to the clean-energy transition bolstered demand for metals. China's rising industrial and infrastructure investment is partly offsetting weakness in its property sector, the outlook said.

There are upside risks to the World Bank outlook mainly from the current problems in the Middle East. “A conflict-driven rise in commodity prices could stoke stubbornly elevated global inflation, further delaying global monetary easing. Food insecurity, which worsened markedly last year reflecting armed conflicts and elevated food prices, could also rise further,” it said.



**END OF CYCLE.** According to the World Bank report, disinflationary tailwinds from moderating commodity prices appear essentially over

ther,” it said. Signs of resilience in global economic activity have also supported prices of other commodities—including copper. These price increases followed notable fluctuations in crude oil prices and, more generally, a plateauing of many commodity prices in the first quarter of the year, the outlook said.

ENERGY INDEX TO DROP

Assuming that there is no further conflict escalation

globally, crude oil prices are projected to increase this year, with the Brent crude price averaging \$84 a barrel (bbl) in 2024, up from \$83/bbl last year, reflecting the recent ratcheting up of geopolitical tensions and a tight supply-demand balance.

However, the energy price index will drop 3 per cent in 2024 and ease a further 4 per cent in 2025 (year-on-year). This trajectory is predicated on significant declines in coal

and natural gas prices this year.

The outlook said agricultural prices are expected to soften this year and next, reflecting increased supplies and moderating El Nino conditions, primarily affecting food crops. Accordingly, food commodity prices are set to decline by 6 per cent in 2024 and 4 per cent in 2025, while a spike in beverage prices this year is projected to partially retreat in 2025.

GOLD MAY PLATEAU

Base metal prices are forecast to edge up in 2024 and 2025 and remain well above 2015-19 levels, reflecting a pick-up in global industrial activity and growing production of clean energy technologies. In contrast, a further decline is projected in the price of iron ore, which is important for property starts, but less relevant to the green transition.

Gold prices, which dominate the precious metals in-

dex, are assumed to plateau at their recent record highs for the rest of this year. Such haven demand looks set to strengthen in 2024. Prices have also been supported by strong demand, partly reflecting the reserves management strategies of several central banks.

In addition to the potential for a conflict-driven supply shock, prices for crude oil and natural gas could turn out higher if US energy production falls short of the expansion assumed in the baseline, the World Bank said. Unexpected weather patterns could result in weather-related disruptions to commodity markets, leading to higher prices. Growing seasons could be compromised, leading to price spikes for agricultural commodities, the outlook said. On the other hand, higher OPEC production and supply and weak global growth could drag commodities prices further.

NACOF Oorja sets up SPV to aid sustainable farming

**Our Bureau**  
Bengaluru

NACOF Oorja, a renewable energy developer and operator, has announced the launch of a special purpose vehicle – E Astra NACOF Oorja Pvt Ltd, to promote sustainable farming.

NACOF Oorja is established and supported by National Federation of Farmers' Procurement, Processing and Retailing Cooperatives of India Ltd, a multi-state cooperative society registered under the Ministry of Agriculture.

The SPV is set to act as NACOF Oorja's agricultural mobility wing, catering to the Indian farming community by offering battery-operated equipment and vehicles. The newly-founded SPV will offer specialised agricultural equipment and vehicles such as e-weeder, e-reaper, e-brush cutter and e-cargo multi-util-

ity three wheeler, along with a newly developed 20-litre milking-cum-chiller unit focused on sustainable dairy farming.

“Our commitment to contribute to the effort of establishing India as a developed nation played a significant role behind this new initiative. Farmers are our annadata and to assist their community with cutting-edge indigenous and affordable agricultural equipment that runs on clean energy will multiply their productivity,” said Ram Iqbal Singh, Chairman, NACOF Oorja.

“The primary objective of the SPV remains to empower the Indian farmers with cutting-edge technology, and mechanising their efforts, bringing them at par with the latest practices in agriculture and we are confident of our ability to achieve this target,” said Suresh Babu P, Managing Director, NACOF Oorja.



POLL PRESSURE

Controversy erupts as ECI defers election in Anantnag-Rajouri seat

CONSPIRACY THEORY. BJP is nervous about the response PDP is receiving, says former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti

**Gulzar Bhat**  
Srinagar

On Wednesday afternoon, a host of People’s Democratic Party (PDP) workers assembled at their party headquarters in Srinagar and staged a protest against the Election Commission of India (ECI) for deferring the polls in Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha constituency to May 25.

“Modi hum se darta hai, police ko aage karta hai (Modi fears us; he pushes the police ahead) and gundagardi nahi chale gi (hooliganism won’t be tolerated),” they shouted. The miffed protesters burnt an effigy of the ECI and waved placards, likening the EC with the BJP.

Some of the signs reads, “Don’t repeat 1987,” alluding to the widely-believed rig-

ging in 1987 assembly polls. The police closed the front gates of the party headquarters and pushed the protesters back as they were trying to march ahead to register their protest against the ECI’s decisions.

A day before, on Tuesday, the ECI had issued a notification deferring the elections in Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat from May 7 to May 25.

The move came after the BJP, J&K Apni Party, J&K People’s Conference, Ghulam Nabi Azad-led DPAP, and two independent contestants, Ali Mohammad Wani and Arshad Ali Lone, submitted representations to the ECI demanding the postponement of elections, citing the recurrent closure of the Mughal Road, a shortest surface link connecting Rajouri and Poonch districts of Jammu division with Kash-



**VOTER CONNECT.** Jammu and Kashmir People’s Democratic Party (JKPDP) Chief Mehbooba Mufti addresses supporters during a public rally in the third phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Thanamandi on Wednesday ANI

mir via Shopian, due to inclement weather conditions.

**COUNTER VOICES**

However, two of these parties, which sought deferment of the polls due to inclement weather — the BJP and the J&K PC — are them-

selves not contesting the election from this seat. JKAP and J&K PC are viewed as the BJP’s proxies, and there is a general feeling among people and political circles that they have formed an undeclared electoral alliance against the NC and the PDP.

The PDP and the NC are vehemently against the decision to postpone the polls. Former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, who is contesting the seat, attributed the postponement of polls with the BJP’s nervousness with the response the PDP is

receiving from the people. The party spokesperson, Mohit Bhan, told *businessline* that an overwhelming response from people towards Mufti unnerved the BJP and its proxies.

“By deferring elections, they are trying to manipulate the elections,” he said.

On Wednesday afternoon, while addressing a poll rally in Dooru areas of Anantnag, Omar Abdullah said that the postponement of the elections was a glaring instance of conspiracy.

He said that the polls were deferred even when the weather improved.

A prominent tribal researcher said that the constituency has a significant nomadic population who are expected to return to the higher reaches by the time polling is held on May 25.

“It may impact the poll percentage,” he said.

QUICKLY.

‘Decision on Amethi and Raebareli seats in 24 hours’

The suspense over whether Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will retain claim over their family strongholds, the Amethi and Raebareli Lok Sabha constituencies, will end soon, with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge expected to announce candidates for the two seats in Uttar Pradesh in a day. Both the seats will go to the polls in the fifth phase of the general elections on May 20.

The Gandhi family’s indecision in contesting from Amethi and Raebareli has invited criticism from Narendra Modi, who has accused them of running away from their pocket borough owing to a lack of confidence in taking on the BJP in Uttar Pradesh.

While Rahul has once again contested from Wayanad constituency in Kerala, which he won in the 2019 elections, he has not spoken his mind on whether he would seek re-election from Amethi, where he lost last time to BJP’s Smriti Irani, who filed her nomination on Monday.

A section within the Congress believes that Rahul should contest from Amethi, which he represented from 2004 to 2019, irrespective of the outcome, to signal to party cadres and supporters that he is ready to take on any rival.

“CEC has authorised the Congress President for Raebareli and Amethi, and he will take the decision soon and you will know officially in the next 24 to 30 hours,” Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said at a press conference on Wednesday. OUR BUREAU



FREEBIES SPRINT

AP manifestos turn blind eye to industrial development

**G Naga Sridhar**  
Hyderabad

In the race for freebies to woo voters, political parties in Andhra Pradesh have turned a blind eye to the need to boost business and economic development.

The manifestoes released by the ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) and the Opposition Front of TDP-JSP and BJP are competing with each other in welfare schemes and free disbursements to win the mandate.



TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu (left) and Jana Sena Chief Pawan Kalyan releasing the manifesto on Tuesday PTI



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy released the party manifesto on Saturday PTI

atnas could be implemented smoothly during the last five years, that could be replicated again.

**FREEBIES GALORE**

As part of its attempt to overtake YSRCP on the welfare front, the TDP-JS-BJP Front is flying off the handle in its manifesto promises. In its ‘Super Six’ response to Navaratanas of YSRCP, it promised 20 lakh jobs to the youth over the next five years, an unemployment allowance of ₹3,000 per month, ₹15,000 per year to all the school-going students, ₹1,500 per month to all women in the age group of 19-59, three gas cylinders per household every year, and free travel to women in RTC buses.

Naidu, who is seen as a ‘favourite’ of industry, is totally silent on the need to rev up industry and business in the State and only hints at ₹10 lakh investment subsidy for SMEs and start-ups. It can only be a miracle if 20 lakh jobs can be created in a state which

appears to be out of the radar of the industry with poor infrastructure now.

**RESOURCES**

None of the manifestoes give any hint on resource mobilisation to implement them. It will be a huge task, especially for the TDP-JS-BJP front, to mobilise funds and execute all freebies if it manages to come to power.

The vote on the account budget for 2024-25 projected a revenue expenditure of ₹2,30,110 crore, while the capital expenditure is at ₹30,530 crore. The revenue deficit and fiscal deficit have been pegged at ₹24,758 crore and ₹55,817 crore, respectively. In the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), the fiscal deficit is 3.51 per cent while the revenue deficit is working out to be 1.56 percent.

For the new government to be formed in June 2024, the biggest challenge will be resource mobilisation and leading the state on the path of industrial development.

Gujarat to become hub for ‘globally decisive’ sectors

**DEVELOPMENT AGENDA.** In his campaign speech, Amit Shah focuses on the huge investments pouring into Sanand and Dholera

**Avinash Nair**  
Ahmedabad

Marketing Gujarat as a State that has witnessed “equitable development and investments” Amit Shah, while canvassing for BJP’s Ahmedabad East candidate, said Gujarat is headed on the path of becoming a hub for semiconductors, electric vehicles, battery production, and green hydrogen.

He also claimed that the Dholera Special Investment Region (SIR), located about 110 kilometres from Ahmedabad, will become an “employment destination” for job-seekers from Ahmedabad.

“The policies made under the leadership of Narendra Modi and being continued under CM Bhupendra Patel have translated into equitable development and resulted in attracting investment to each and every district,” said Shah, who himself represents the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat, which accounts for a large portion of the fast-developing areas of Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar districts.

This includes the automobile manufacturing hubs at Sanand, Gandhinagar North, Kalol, Vejalpur, Sabarmati, Naranpura, and Ghatlodia.



**BATTLE READY.** Amit Shah holding a sword given to him by a party worker at an election campaign rally in Ahmedabad on Wednesday REUTERS

**FDI HOTSPOTS**

In the last four calendar years between 2020 and 2023, 95 per cent of the foreign direct investment (FDI) flowing to Gujarat has been confined to Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar districts alone. While Gujarat saw \$36,860 million of FDI inflows during this four-year period, Ahmedabad district alone accounted for \$32,592 million (88 per cent of the total FDI inflows), while Gandhinagar district saw an additional \$2,290 million in investments, which is about six per cent of total FDI inflows.

During his speech, Shah also mentioned that Gujarat was heading towards becoming a hub for semiconductors, electric vehicles, battery production, and green hydrogen. “These four sectors will play a decisive role in the global economy. These foundations for these four pillars have been laid in

Gujarat,” Shah said without mentioning that the first couple of large semiconductor projects have gone to Sanand and Dholera SIR, which fall in Ahmedabad district. Similarly, battery production and electric vehicle production are largely restricted to Sanand and Hansalpur, which are parts of Ahmedabad district.

Shah said the BJP government was building a ₹33,000 crore Expressway connecting Ahmedabad and Dholera SIR and has also started work on building the Dholera International Airport. He said new railway lines were also being provided to Sanand and Dholera SIR.

“The Dholera SIR will become the employment destination for youngsters in Ahmedabad. Only Dholera SIR will create 10 lakh job opportunities,” said Shah.

TMC ousts Kunal Ghosh as Bengal General Secretary

The Trinamool Congress on Wednesday removed Kunal Ghosh from the post of West Bengal General Secretary, stating that his views did not align with those of the party.

The Mamata Banerjee-led party removed Ghosh from the post hours after he showered praise on Tapas Roy, the BJP candidate from Kolkata North Lok Sabha constituency. Roy joined the BJP in March this year after quitting the TMC.

“Recently, Kunal Ghosh has been expressing views that do not align with those of the party. It is important to clarify that these are his personal opinions and should not be attributed to the party. Ghosh was previously relieved of his role as party spokesperson. Now, he has been removed from the position of general secretary of the State organisation,” the Trinamool Congress said in a statement.

Earlier, Ghosh shared dais with Roy, a former TMC MLA, during a blood donation camp in the city and described the latter as an “ideal” candidate. OUR BUREAU



QUOTE.



“The sudden jump in final voter turnout by nearly 5.75 per cent from what the Election Commission had released earlier is worrying. There are apprehensions of manipulation of results by the BJP as several EVMs were missing for a long period

**MAMATA BANERJEE**  
West Bengal Chief Minister

GROUND ZERO: KOLHAPUR

Birthplace of reservation strives for harmony amid political turbulence

PIVOTAL PHASE. The upcoming Lok Sabha elections will test Kolhapur’s resilience and its commitment to former ruler Shahu’s legacy of inclusivity

**Radheshyam Jadhav**  
Kolhapur

Farida Mulla, a Kolhapur native, has always felt a seamless integration with the diverse community around her, unaware of any distinct separation in identities within her city. Despite the nationwide communal clashes of 1992-93, Kolhapur remained a bastion of peace. “Here in Kolhapur, we celebrate both Ganpati and Pir together,” Farida remarks, expressing her concern over the recent surge in divisive election rhetoric that threatens to unravel the city’s social fabric. She worries about the impact of fabricated communal tensions in recent years and hopes fervently for the situation not to worsen.

As the countdown to the

pivotal third phase of voting on May 7 begins, the political cauldron of Maharashtra simmers intensely. The spotlight is on the alleged reallocation of SC, ST, and OBC reservations to Muslims. As fiery debate steers the discourse across the State ahead of polls, the ancient city of Kolhapur — the birthplace of reservation for backward castes — is trying to defy the tumult and save the communal fabric, which it has kept intact for over a century.

**SHAHU’S LEGACY**

“This election, like those before it, Kolhapur has maintained its peaceful ethos and thwarted divisive agendas. This is the legacy of Shahu Maharaj, who united the Marathas, Muslims, and Dalits, planting the seeds of communal harmony. While there are factions in the city that have strayed from Shahu’s teachings, these are marginal elements,” scribe Kumar Kamble asserts.

In 1902, Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur executed a ground-



**JOINING FORCES.** Narendra Modi during a public meeting in Kolhapur. Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde (second from left) and State Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis (extreme right) are also seen (file photo) ANI



**A TRUE VISIONARY.** A view of Shahu Maharaj’s palace in Kolhapur. In 1902, Shahu Maharaj declared an unprecedented 50% reservation in government services for the backward classes, positioning himself as the pioneering architect of reservation

breaking decree in his princely State of Kolhapur that would forever alter the social fabric of India. With a visionary stroke, he declared an unprecedented 50 per cent reservation in government services for the backward classes, posi-

tioning himself as the pioneering architect of reservation and affirmative action in India. It was this king who initiated boarding facilities and educational institutions for all communities in Kolhapur, and these establishments remain

operational to this day. It was Shahu Maharaj who supported and pronounced Dr BR Ambedkar as the leader of the oppressed classes. Additionally, his initiatives in laying the foundation for industries and constructing a dam have

played a pivotal role in transforming Kolhapur into one of the most affluent and prosperous cities in Maharashtra.

**POLITICAL DIVIDE**

Once dominated by the Congress and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the political map of Kolhapur has undergone changes, especially in the last ten years. Many stalwarts from these parties have joined the BJP. Also, many of the Shiv Sena leaders have shifted loyalties to Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who split the Sena revolting against Uddhav Thackeray.

Last week, Narendra Modi addressed a rally in Kolhapur, alleging that the Congress had “murdered” social justice and is now attempting to allocate OBC reservation quotas to

Muslims. The sitting MP and Shiv Sena leader (Eknath Shinde faction), Sanjay Mandlik, is contesting as the candidate of the BJP-led alliance in Kolhapur. The Congress has nominated 76-year-old Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj, the 12th descendant of Chhatrapati Shivaji, as the candidate of Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), led by Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray and Rahul Gandhi.

The upcoming elections will test Kolhapur’s resilience and its commitment to Shahu’s legacy of inclusivity and harmony. As political debates intensify and allegiances shift, the city’s ability to stay true to its roots will be crucial, says Sunanda Patil, a housewife, hoping that political parties will uphold Kolhapur’s legacy during and after the elections.



QUICKLY.

**Petrol sales up 12.3% in April; diesel slides 2.3%**



**New Delhi:** India's petrol consumption soared 12.3 per cent in April, but diesel sales continued to slide despite the country entering into hectic electioneering for general elections, preliminary data of state-owned firms showed. Petrol sales of three state-owned firms rose to 2.97 mt in April compared to 2.65 mt of consumption in last year. Diesel demand dropped 2.3 per cent to 7 million tonnes. **PTI**

**ATF price up by 0.7%, commercial LPG drops**

**New Delhi:** Jet fuel or ATF price was hiked by a marginal 0.7 per cent while rates of commercial LPG used by establishments such as hotels and restaurants were cut by ₹19 per cylinder in line with international prices. Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was hiked by ₹749.25 per kilolitre to ₹101,642.88 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. **PTI**

# NaBFID expects loan sanctions to top ₹2-lakh crore in FY25

**STRATEGIC PLANNING.** To mop up ₹53,000 crore via bond market, bank and credit lines

**K Ram Kumar**  
Mumbai

The government-owned National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) expects its loan sanctions pipeline to swell to about ₹2 lakh crore by March-end 2025 against about ₹1 lakh crore as of March-end 2024.

To support loan growth, the development financial institution (DFI) is planning to mop up about ₹53,000 crore this year via bond market, bank and multilateral credit lines. The All India Financial Institution was set up in 2022 under the NaBFID Act, 2021, as the principal entity for infrastructure financing in the country

“We started our operations in December 2022. We sanctioned ₹18,560 crore in the January-March 2023 quarter and ₹83,280 crore in FY24. We crossed the ₹1-lakh crore (cumulative) loan sanctions mark in March 2024.

“Within this sanctions pipeline, about 35 per cent is for greenfield projects (predominantly in the power and

“

Today, our outstanding loan book has grown to ₹45,000 crore. By March 2025, we are expecting disbursements to touch ₹93,000 crore

**RAJKIRAN RAI G,**  
MD, NaBFID



roads segments) and 65 per cent is for brownfield (expansion) projects, refinancing existing infrastructure assets, lending to NBFCs (in the infrastructure space such as PFC and REC) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs),” said Rajkiran Rai G, Managing Director.

## GROWING DEMAND

Demand for infrastructure finance is gradually picking up, according to RBI’s data on sectoral deployment of credit. Scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) infrastructure loans portfolio increased by 6.5 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) to ₹12,80,258 crore as on March 22, 2024, against

0.4 per cent growth to ₹12,02,605 crore as on March 24, 2023.

Rai emphasised that “For infrastructure project developers, there are two benefits of dealing with us — we can give long-tenor loans (80 per cent of our loans are of 15-25 years duration) and we can give loans at a fixed rate with a longer re-set period. Generally, loans have an annual re-set, but if somebody wants a longer re-set, we can give that. These are our strengths.”

NaBFID’s outstanding loan book as of March-end 2024 was around ₹36,000 crore against about ₹10,000 crore as of March-end 2023.

## FinMin considers mandating nodal officers for banks, fintechs

**KR Srivats**  
New Delhi

The Finance Ministry is toying with the idea of requiring banks and fintechs to appoint nodal officers or key contact points to liaise with the Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs).

The issue was discussed at a half-day workshop jointly organised by the Department of Financial Services (DFS) in the Finance Ministry and the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) in the Home Ministry with LEAs, startups and fintech ecosystem partners in the capital on Tuesday.

## MAIN OBJECTIVE

The interactive workshop also saw discussions around frauds being perpetrated through mule accounts,

fintech merchant abuse etc. The objective of the interactive workshop was to foster strong collaboration between fintechs and LEAs to encourage innovations, ensure due compliance with extant rules and regulations, address key challenges such as cybersecurity, digital financial frauds etc and more importantly build confidence and trust among the ecosystem partners. This workshop was conducted in continuation of the last interaction of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with the start-up and fintech companies on February 26, 2024.

Addressing the workshop, DFS Secretary Vivek Joshi emphasised the contributions made by the start-ups and fintechs to India’s high and sustained economic growth. He urged for

**The workshop saw discussions around frauds being perpetrated through mule accounts, fintech merchant abuse**

greater collaboration among the government, regulator, public and private sector to harness the full potential of start-up and fintech sectors in India. He emphasised that fintechs are more technology and innovation-oriented and they draw the traction of the regulators and LEAs when they grow their businesses over some time.

## ISSUES DISCUSSED

The I4C highlighted mule accounts, ATM hotspots, hotspot branches, fintech

merchant abuse etc through its Citizen Financial Cyber Frauds Reporting and Management System (CFC-FRMS). It was emphasised that an indigenous transaction monitoring and Anti-Money Laundering (AML) system catering to Indian fraud and crime scenarios may be developed by the fintech companies.

The points that were deliberated during the workshop include the role of technology in providing accessibility to financial services; a strategy to control the money mules; real-time monitoring of data infringement by both the fintech companies and LEAs; geotagging of digital transactions to track the money trails; creation of suspicious registry of BCs and fraudsters involved in the financial frauds; conducting regular audits of digital KYC for

fostering trust and accountability and establishing a mechanism for freezing and unfreezing of accounts for faster recovery of defrauded money.

Other issues discussed include devising a mechanism to ensure data privacy and prevention of data theft; and modernisation of digital infrastructure by leveraging technologies like IPv6, API integration etc. The insights focused on emerging trends of cybercrime and financial frauds were provided by Gujarat, Haryana and Uttarakhnad State Police Departments along with I4C.

While the fintech associations presented the operational modalities and key challenges faced by the fintech companies, the LEAs from the States shared their best practices on curbing cybercrime and financial fraud.

## SUPERSONIC START



**AWESOME FIREPOWER.** The Supersonic Missile-Assisted Release of Torpedo (SMART) system was successfully flight-tested from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast, on Wednesday. SMART is a next-generation missile-based lightweight torpedo delivery system, designed and developed by the DRDO to enhance the anti-submarine warfare capability of the Indian Navy far beyond the conventional range of lightweight torpedo. **ANI**

## Rlys provides record rakes in March for ferrying coal to power plants

**Rishi Ranjan Kala**  
New Delhi

In preparation for the peak electricity demand season from April to June, Indian Railways, on average, provided more than 297 rakes per day to the power sector during March 2024, an all-time high. According to the Coal Ministry’s data, railways provided 297.7 rakes to the power sector on an average per day, which is higher by 2 per cent m-o-m and 10 per cent y-o-y. For the non-power sector, railways provided around 37.3 rakes on an average daily in March 2024, higher by 11 per cent m-o-m and 64 per cent y-o-y.

Coal miners despatched 90.31 million tonnes of the commodity in March this year. Railways account for 65 per cent of the coal transported in the country.

In FY24, railways transported around 787.6 MT of coal, accounting for about 49 per cent of the total cargo carried by the national transporter. Coal accounts for a major part of railway earnings from freight movement.

## MORE RAKES NEEDED

The country’s expanding industrial base and household income have pushed up the demand for electricity of which more than 70 per cent is generated by burning coal.

The emerging economy’s power demand is growing at around 7 per cent per annum, which translates into more de-



mand for coal. Besides, the Power Ministry has projected a pan-India peak demand of 260 GW in FY25 compared to 240 GW in FY23. The Ministries of Power, Coal and Railways have been working on increasing the coal-carrying capacity of the rail network. On July 27, 2023, Power Minister R K Singh, in a written response in Lok Sabha, said “According to Railways, likely increase in coal transportation capacity during FY24 and FY25 is about 185 MT.”

“As per Railways, during FY23, the net induction of coal-carrying wagons was about 8,800 (about 150 rakes). During FY24, the likely net induction would be about 200 rakes, which could provide an additional 50 rakes/day for coal loading. The expected increase in annual coal transportation capacity on account of wagon induction would be about 70 MT,” he added. “Similarly, the likely net induction of coal-carrying rakes in FY25 is about 250, which could provide an additional 60 rakes per day. The expected increase in annual coal transportation

capacity on account of wagon induction would be about 85 MT,” he added.

The Coal Ministry has launched the Coal Logistics Policy and Integrated Coal Evacuation Plan to address the issue of transportation amidst rising demands.

The plan is to address the issue through the construction of new railway lines and capacity augmentation of railway networks, First Mile Connectivity (PMC) projects, rail connectivity projects, and railway sidings. These evacuation facilities are planned in line with the country’s long-term production projection.

Railways have taken up 14 critical projects for improving coal evacuation. Out of these, five rail lines have already been commissioned and others are at various stages of construction. Under the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan (NMP), the Government has launched the national logistics policy, under which, every sector in the economy that deals with logistics is expected to come out with a sectoral plan for efficient logistics.

The Coal Ministry, in consultation with all coal miners, has mapped the existing and proposed coal mines required for peak production with PM Gati Shakti. The Ministry also mapped existing and upcoming rail infrastructure.

Under the coal logistics plan, the requirement of the coal sector for peak production up to 2047 has been worked out.

## Vulnerable tribal groups joined poll process: ECI

**Our Bureau**  
New Delhi

The Election Commission of India says due to its special efforts over the last two years, ‘particularly vulnerable tribal groups’ (PVTG) and other tribal groups have joined the electoral process and turned up enthusiastically in various States and UTs for Phase 1 and pPhase 2 of the Lok Sabha elections.

India has 8.6 per cent tribal population which includes 75 groups of tribals which have been designated as PVTG. Location of new polling booths in previously inaccessible areas of States - like Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Odisha, Tripura, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh - where they live has led to the large-scale inclusion of PVTGs in the electoral democracy.

## HISTORIC MOVE

In a historic move, the Shompen tribe of Great Nicobar voted for the first time in the 2024 general election, the commission stated.

For example in Madhya Pradesh, says ECI, there are three PVTGs - “Baiga”, “Bharia” and “Sahariya.” “Out of a total population of 9,91,613 in 23 districts, 6,37,681 are eligible 18+ citizens and all are registered in the electoral rolls. In two phases of voting in the State, there was a lot of enthusiasm among the voters of Baiga and Bharia tribes who reached the polling station early in the morning, waited for their turn to vote and ensured their participation in the great festival of democracy,” the Commission observed.

Similarly in Tamil Nadu, there are six PVTGs, namely “Kuttunayakan, Kota, Kurumba, Irular, Paniyan and



Today” with a total population of 2,26,300. Out of 1,62,049 18+ eligible PVTGs, 1,61,932 are registered electors. A comprehensive campaign spanning 23 districts has prioritised PVTG inclusion, with a significant focus on regions like Coimbatore, Nilgiris and Tirupathur, the ECI stated. Enthusiastic voters reached the polling station through various modes like walking through dense forests, waterways and ensured their participation in the Lok Sabha elections, it pointed out.

The western and southern regions of Karnataka are home to the PVTGs “Jenu, Kuruba and Koraga”. Before the general elections, the office of CEO Karnataka in association with social and tribal welfare departments ensured 100 per cent enrolment of eligible PVTGs, the Commission stated. District and AC-level tribal welfare committees were formed which met regularly to ensure the enrolment of all and to create electoral awareness amongst all PVTGs. Election Officials have visited these areas to enhance registration and electoral participation.

The trend of tribal voters joining the elections was observed in Kerala, Odisha, Tripura, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh.

The Commission said during the special summary revision for the updation of electoral rolls, special outreach camps were held across the specific States where PVTGs reside for inclusion in the electoral roll.

## Coal India production grows 7.3 per cent to 61.8 mt in April

**Mithun Dasgupta**  
Kolkata

State-run coal miner Coal India produced 61.8 million tonnes in April, a 7.3 per cent year-on-year rise compared to the same period last year.

The coal behemoth had produced 57.6 million tonnes of coal in April last year.

All its coal-producing subsidiaries reported higher outputs in April, 2024 compared with the same period last year, according to a stock exchange filing by CIL on Wednesday. Eastern



Coalfield (ECL), Western Coalfields (WCL) and Central Coalfields (CCL) recorded 24.3 per cent, 16.8 per cent and 12 per cent y-o-y growths, respectively.

Significantly, Coal India accounts for more than 80 per cent of domestic coal production. Coal offtake for

the company registered an increase of 3.2 per cent y-o-y to 64.3 million tonnes last month from 62.3 million tonnes in the same period last year.

## ANNUAL TARGET

Notably, Coal India marginally fell short of its annual production target for the last fiscal as it produced 773.6 million tonnes of coal in the last financial year against the target of 780 million tonnes.

The company, however, registered a 10 per cent y-o-y output growth in FY24 over a high base of 703.2 million tonnes in FY23.

## CCI checking if Pernod colluded with New Delhi retailers

**Reuters**  
New Delhi

The country’s competition watchdog is reviewing accusations that France’s Pernod Ricard colluded with retailers in New Delhi to boost market share, the latest headache for the spirits giant in a key market, legal papers seen by Reuters show.

With brands such as Chivas Regal, Glenlivet and Absolut vodka, Pernod has a share of 17 per cent in a liquor market it says is its second-biggest globally by net sales, but one where it is embroiled in licence, tax and antitrust difficulties.

The latest accusations figure in a confidential filing in March on practices in the liquor industry made by an individual identified only by the first name Mohit.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) is review-



**AWAITING VERDICT.** The Competition Commission of India is reviewing the case and can order a full investigation, or dismiss the accusations if not borne out, said a source **REUTERS**

ing the case and can order a full investigation, or dismiss the accusations if not borne out, said a source. Pernod is accused of gaining market share by asking retailers in the Indian capital to stock more of its goods in return for helping

them secure loans to bid for store licences, according to the filing.

Reuters reviewed the filing, which is not public, per the watchdog’s rules. In a statement to Reuters, Pernod said it had not been notified of the

new antitrust case but was committed to comply with local laws and “instruct and educate our teams” to do the same.

The accusations rely mostly on findings by the ED, as it looks into Pernod’s alleged role in a graft case centred on the city’s liquor policy that led to the 2022 arrest of a company official.

## CARTEL ALLEGATIONS

Drawing on the findings, the CCI complaint accuses Pernod of providing \$24 million in corporate guarantees to its bankers in 2021 to help city retailers get loans. Retailers then ensured that 35 per cent of the stock in their shops consisted of Pernod brands.

The findings “clearly spill the beans that the purpose of the corporate guarantee was cartelisation by Pernod with selected retailers for brand pushing at the expense of fair

competition,” the case document states.

Among Pernod’s other woes, it has, for more than a year, unsuccessfully sought a retail licence for its products in New Delhi.

It faces another antitrust case for misconduct and is contesting a tax demand for nearly \$250 million, for allegedly undervaluing imports. Pernod has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing in all the cases.

The latest CCI case centres on ED findings that Pernod’s acting CFO for India consented in mid-2021 to the issuance of corporate guarantees for facilitating loans to Delhi retailers and advised the group CFO, Helene de Tisnot, of it in an email on July 13, 2021.

Pernod’s “support” of \$24 million to bidders for store licences had the potential to generate an additional \$15 million “benefit over a three-

year period” and the move “will also enable us to counter local players’ threat”, the email said.

## INTERNAL PLAN

The CCI case also cites extracts of a Pernod PowerPoint presentation in June 2021 that mentioned an internal plan to “take control of retail shops” in New Delhi.

## TO ADVERTISE PLEASE CONTACT

Chennai	: 044 - 28576300
Coimbatore	: 0422 - 2212572
Madurai	: 0452 - 2528497
Trichy	: 0431 - 2302801
Puducherry	: 0413 - 2224111

thehindu **businessline.**



QUICKLY.  
Binance founder gets  
4-month jail sentence



Binance founder Changpeng Zhao was ordered four months in prison for failures that allowed cybercriminals and terrorist groups to freely trade on the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange. Zhao, 47, was sentenced on Tuesday by US District Judge Richard Jones in Seattle. **BLOOMBERG**

J&J arm mulls paying  
\$6.48 b to settle talc suits

**New Brunswick:** A subsidiary of Johnson and Johnson is now proposing paying approximately \$6.48 billion over 25 years as part of a settlement to cover allegations that its baby powder containing talc caused ovarian cancer. The lawsuits filed against J&J had alleged its talcum powder caused users to develop ovarian cancer, through use for feminine hygiene, or mesothelioma, a cancer that strikes the lungs and other organs. **PII**

China launches sea trials  
for next-gen aircraft carrier



**Beijing:** China on Wednesday launched sea trials for the Fujian, its third and most advanced aircraft carrier, state media reported. The start of tests by the Chinese navy came nearly two years after the new aircraft carrier was first unveiled in June 2022. **REUTERS**

# Spices Board issues norms for exporters to prevent ethylene oxide contamination

**UNDER THE LENS.** Quality concerns could threaten over half of India’s spice exports, says GTRI

**Amiti Sen**  
**Meenakshi Verma Ambwani**  
New Delhi

The Spices Board has come up with detailed guidelines for exporters on preventing ethylene oxide (ETO) contamination in spices after Singapore and Hong Kong recalled some packaged spice products exported from India while the US and Australia are also examining the matter.

The guidelines advise exporters against using ETO as a sterilising agent to reduce the microbial contamination in spices consignments and suggests alternatives such as steam sterilisation and irradiation (not applicable to organic products under NPOP).

The Spices Board has also provided the maximum residue limits (MRL) for



**GUIDELINES FRAMED.** The Spices Board has also provided the maximum residue limits for ethylene oxide permitted in major markets

ETO permitted in major markets, including the EU, the UK, the US, Singapore, Switzerland and Turkey in the guidelines. CODEX – the international standard setting body under WHO and FAO – has not fixed any MRLs for spices.

“The Spices Board has received reports from Indian Missions abroad regarding

the recall/rejection of spices exported from India by a few importing countries via Singapore, Hong Kong, due to the presence of ETO beyond the permissible limit. The Board, after detailed discussions with the Indian spice industry, has prepared a set of guidelines on preventing ETO contamination in spices exported from In-

dia,” the circular issued to all export organisations on Tuesday points out.

Quality concerns could threaten over half of India’s spice exports, per an analysis done by research body Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). “Reports from the US, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, and now Malé have raised questions about the quality of spices supplied by leading Indian firms MDH and Everest spices. With India having exported spices valued at approximately \$692.5 million to these countries in the fiscal year 2024, the stakes are high,” said Ajay Srivastava, Co-founder, GTRI.

Responding to *businessline’s* emailed query, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) stated, “FSANZ is working with our international counterparts to understand the issue with

federal, state and territory food enforcement agencies to determine if further action is required in Australia (e.g. a food recall).” At this stage, there have been no recalls issued in Australia,” it added.

India exported spices worth \$3.95 billion in 2022-23, per the Spices Board.

### THE IMPACT

If China and the EU, the two major markets for Indian spices, also adopt stricter scrutiny, the total potential loss to India’s spice exports would be 58.8 per cent, the GTRI report estimated.

The guidelines also proposed measures to prevent microbiological cross-contamination, appropriate packaging, careful transportation to ensure protection from any of the external adverse environmental factors and careful handling of samples for testing.

# After ‘crackdown’, H-1B applications plummet 40%

**Ayushi Kar**  
Mumbai

The United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that lottery bids for the H-1B visa plummeted by nearly 40 per cent for the 2025 fiscal year.

The government department announced on Tuesday it had received 470,342 entries in the final week of March for this year’s lottery, a decrease of 38 per cent compared with last year’s total of 7,58,994 as reported by AP. The number of individuals who applied to work in the US, however, remained close, with about 4,42,000 applicants this year

compared with 4,46,000 last year.

USCIS attributes the decrease in the number of applications to the crackdown on fraud and abuse of the system by the department. Thus, authorities have hailed this development as a ‘great success’ in combating those who exploit the system.

For a long time, tech companies were complaining that their existing employees were unable to clear the lottery system as a result of a glut of applications in the system. In many cases, to game the lottery, many individuals would be submitting multiple applications to increase their chances of being



picked. Earlier this year, US immigration officials implemented new rules that limit each worker to one visa application, regardless of how many job offers he/she receives. Remarkably, over 4 lakh of the 7,59,000 registrations that were filed the previous year were duplicates.

### REGISTRATION FEE

The changes in the visa application process occurred

after the government switched from requiring bulky paperwork to a \$10 online registration fee. This change led to a drastic increase in applications from 2021 to 2023, with the number tripling. The new system allowed applicants to easily apply for multiple job roles, which ended up overwhelming both the industry and the government. For instance, in 2022, one person submitted bids for 83 different job offers.

In the last few years, nearly 70 per cent of all 85,000 available H-1B visa slots, including 20,000 in the master’s quota for advanced US degree holders, have been allocated to Indian

technology workers, thus making them the largest visa category under the cap-subject H-1B visa category.

According to Poorvi Chothani, a prominent immigration attorney, the USCIS changed the electronic selection process to ensure equal selection chances for each registered beneficiary, irrespective of multiple registrations submitted for them.

This seems to have been the cause for the almost 40 per cent reduction in eligible registrations because the modified selection process was refined to focus on “unique beneficiaries” instead of number of registrations.

# + ‘Dish TV will become profitable in FY25’

bl.interview

**Ayushi Kar**  
Mumbai

After posting back-to-back losses since 2019, Dish TV CEO Manoj Dholal believes that the firm will start reporting net profit from FY25 onwards. Amidst troubles between the Dish Board and Yes Bank, Dholal maintained that the firm has continued brick and mortar investments for the past few quarters. Last week, the firm launched Dish Smart+ service to finally take on Airtel, Jio and Tata Play. This service brings TV channels and OTT services under a singular bundle. Speaking to *businessline* at the launch, Dholal laid out the DTH operator’s ambitions. Excerpts:

**What is the difference between Dish TV Smart+ and competing services provided by the likes of Airtel or Tata Play?**

Most competitors don’t automatically give blended



Our ARPU’s have also not necessarily changed, they have largely remained stable for the last two years.

**MANOJ DHOBAL,**  
Dish TV CEO

products to customers. You have to either choose linear TV or opt for OTT+Linear services. We are offering all our customers an aggregation between OTT and Linear from the get go. Thus my consumer does not have to pay anything extra for consuming the OTT content. I am giving the customer the flexibility to further choose which OTT platforms they want to onboard into this plan. This is a first-to-market offering.

**Broadcasters had to revise tariffs under NTO 2.0 - where are you on implementation at the distributor front, have**



**you transferred any of these price increases to the customers? What impact has this had on your ARPU?**

Most of the price increase has gone through. But we have absorbed 80-90 per cent of the price increase, it hasn’t gone to the customer. So prices have not necessarily gone up in comparison to a few years back, perhaps only by ₹10-₹15.

Our ARPU’s have also not necessarily changed, they have largely remained stable for the last two years. The way we have mitigated price increases for customer is by weeding out superfluous channels from their bundles.

That way the overall bundle is similarly priced as before.

**At this point, all DTH platforms are offering hybrid OTT bundles but large platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime are largely absent from these bundles. This is unlike the case that we see for telecom operators - international streaming companies provide their service bundled with plans there. Will we see bundling between DTH plans and streaming companies any time soon?**

Their strategy at this point of time is to not allow bundling with DTH companies.

The reason why they bundle telcos is because those are not necessarily competitors.

But I believe that as the prevalence of smart TV grows we will start to see this bundling happen with DTH operators as well. It is only a matter of couple years.

**How has the corporate**

**governance between shareholders and Dish TV promoters impacted day-to-day management?**

Efforts are being made on either side to come to a resolution. We are not privy to those talks. We are entirely customer-facing and those conflicts have not impacted day-to-day management one bit. Things have only become better than they were two three years back. Secondly, we have made a lot of investments in technology. As a result, we are getting enough EBITDA to fund our capex. There is no borrowing going on to make those investments. We are a company which has retired all its debt on the books in the month of June 2023.

**Will Dish TV be profitable in FY25?**

I can safely say that we will be. This year could be the year of reversal for Dish and the DTH industry overall. Even if it is slightly positive this year, there is clearly forward momentum in FY25. We also have a lot new initiatives in the pipeline.

# SC finds govt plea on administrative allocation of spectrum ‘misconceived’

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court has declined to receive an application by the Centre to allow the administrative allocation of spectrum.

The Registrar found the application for clarification misconceived. Spectrum, a scarce natural resource, is allocated to private players only through open, transparent auction. The law was laid down on this issue by the Supreme Court 12 years ago, in the 2G spectrum judgment.

“Administrative allocation” of spectrum would have government in sole charge of selecting operators to distribute airwaves, considered a scarce resource.

The Registrar invoked Order XV Rule 5 of the Supreme Court Rules, 2013 to decline the application.

Under this provision of the 2013 Rules, the Registrar may refuse to receive a petition on the ground that it discloses no reasonable



The Registrar invoked Order XV Rule 5 of the Supreme Court Rules, 2013 to decline the application

cause or is frivolous or contains scandalous matter. The government has 15 days to appeal to the court.

The application filed by the Union government had said spectrum was assigned not only for commercial telecom services but also for discharge of sovereign and public interest functions like security, safety, disaster preparedness, etc.

“There are also *sui generis* categories of usage owing to the characteristics of the spectrum, or the nature of use, or international

practices, etc, in respect of which are auctions are not technically or economically preferred or optimal (eg: in the case of captive, backhaul or one time/sporadic use),” the Centre had submitted in its application.

### 2012 JUDGMENT

The February 2012 judgment in the 2G spectrum case had held that “for alienation of scarce natural resources like spectrum, etc, the state must always adopt a method of auction by giving wide publicity so that all eligible persons may participate in the process”.

Months later, in September 2012, a Constitution Bench, deciding a Presidential Reference based on the 2G spectrum case judgment, had also refused to disturb the judgment.

“Spectrum, which according to the law declared in the 2G case, is to be alienated only by auction and no other method,” the Constitution Bench had held in its judgment on the Reference.

# Elon Musk disbands Tesla EV charging team, leaves customers in the dark

**Reuters**  
Detroit

Elon Musk’s abrupt decision to lay off employees who ran Tesla’s electric vehicle charging business blindsided automakers gearing up to equip new EVs for customers to use the Tesla Supercharger network, industry officials and analysts said on Tuesday.

For now, General Motors, Ford and other automakers which struck deals last year to give customers access to the network said they are not changing their plans.

Tesla’s decision to open its network to rival EV manufacturers was hailed by US Pres-



Elon Musk

ident Joe Biden, and opened the door for Tesla to get federal subsidies to expand the reach of its North American Charging Standard (NACS) system.

Musk’s decision, as reported by *The Information*, to

dismiss the head of the business, Rebecca Tinucci, and most or all of the staff that operated and maintained the system left officials at automakers and Tesla suppliers uncertain about the future.

Tesla did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

### ‘SHARP KICK’

Musk subsequently said on X that the carmaker still plans to expand the Supercharger network, “just at a slower pace for new locations and more focus on 100% uptime and expansion of existing locations.”

Andres Pinter, co-CEO of Bullet EV Charging Solu-

tions, a supplier to the network, said, “As contractors for the Supercharger network, my team woke up to a sharp kick in the pants this morning.”

“Tesla has already been awarded money under the federal government’s NEVI program,” he said, referring to the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure formula program to provide funding to states to deploy EV charging networks.

“There’s no way Musk would walk away from effectively free money.

It may be possible Musk will reconstitute the EV charger team in bigger, badder, more Muskian way.”

# Google, the X factor behind Microsoft’s OpenAI bet

**Bloomberg**

Microsoft Corp.’s motivation for investing heavily and partnering with OpenAI came from a sense of falling badly behind Google, according to an internal email released Tuesday as part of the Justice Department’s antitrust case against the search giant.

The Windows software maker’s chief technology officer, Kevin Scott, was “very, very worried” when he looked at the AI model-training capability gap between Alphabet Inc.’s efforts and Microsoft’s, he wrote in a 2019 message to Chief Executive Officer Satya Nadella and co-founder Bill Gates. The exchange shows how the company’s top executives privately acknowledged they lacked the infra-



Satya Nadella

structure and development speed to catch up to the likes of OpenAI and Google’s DeepMind.

The email was released late Tuesday after media organizations including the New York Times and Bloomberg intervened in the landmark antitrust suit to push for greater public access. The US Justice Department has argued that OpenAI’s ChatGPT and other innovations may have been released years ago

if Google hadn’t monopolised the search market.

Scott, who also serves as executive vice president of artificial intelligence at Microsoft, observed that Google’s search product had improved on competitive metrics because of the Alphabet company’s advancements in AI. The Microsoft executive wrote that he made a mistake by dismissing some of the earlier AI efforts of its competitors.

“We are multiple years behind the competition in terms of machine learning scale,” Scott said in the email. Significant portions of the message, titled ‘Thoughts on OpenAI,’ remain redacted. Nadella endorsed Scott’s email, forwarding it to Chief Financial Officer Amy Hood and saying it explains “why I

want us to do this.” Microsoft and OpenAI declined to comment. A Google spokesperson did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

### \$13-B INVESTMENT

Microsoft has poured more than \$13 billion into its partnership and backing of OpenAI, tapping the start-up’s generative-AI technology to enhance its Bing search service, Edge internet browser and, most notably, integrate an AI Copilot service into Windows. Nadella has elevated the AI race to a priority at the company, also recruiting DeepMind co-founder Mustafa Suleyman to run its consumer AI business.

Nadella answered questions about the email when he testified at the trial last fall.



**Hamsini Karthik**  
Mumbai

### SPOTLIGHT.

Understanding, willing to listen, empathetic, highly result-oriented and motivating. These are the top-of-mind attributes one would pick up from those who are working or have worked with Krishnan Venkat Subramanian or KVS Manian as rechristened by Uday Kotak when he started working with Kotak in 1994.

In an unexpected move and probably one which could be unsettling for the stock market, Manian stepped down from the bank with immediate effect giving up his position as Joint Managing Director, Kotak Mahindra Bank, a position he was elevated to in March 2024. His resignation letter, addressed to the Kotak Mahindra Bank’s board of directors, directed through Ashok Vaswani, MD & CEO of the bank, mentioned his intent to pursue other opportunities in financial services.

### MORE OPTIONS

The word on the street is that he could soon be joining Federal Bank, speculations of which were rife in March, just ahead of his elevation as joint MD at Kotak Bank. With the current MD & CEO of Federal Bank, Shyam Srinivasan, set to retire on September 22, Manian could be a perfect fit for this usually quiet, steady ship, headquartered in Aluva, Kerala. Having handled bank unions when Kotak Mahindra Bank took over ING Vysya and credited for building a very profitable retail franchise, the job ticks the boxes. However, a few internal names are also doing the rounds to take over Srinivasan’s role.

Going by the essence of

## Banks in the hunt for a CEO

- Bandhan Bank
- Federal Bank

### Banks due for CEO reappointment

- Axis Bank
- IDFC First Bank

*Note: Only banks due for senior management changes in 2024 have been considered*

Manian’s letter, there could be more options to consider. Bandhan Bank has mandated Egon Zehnder to look out for CEO candidates, a position to be filled by early July. Given the massive asset quality related issues in the bank which may require extensive repairing, a person with retail assets and investment banking experience could be a worthy pick. Tamilnad Mercantile Bank has also been on the lookout for a CEO; but that could be an extremely tricky call to take considering the recent experience on a certain high-value transaction.

There is also Jio Financial Services which for the first time spelt out its aspirations in the financial services sector, especially lending and payments, in its March FY24 investor presentation. The lender is still in the process of building up teams across layers including leadership roles. With experienced bankers lately preferring NBFCs as their next stop, Jio Financial Services also presents a possibility.

The jury should be out soon.