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SCAN FOR FESTIVE OFFERS

Inside Story

Deep Dive P4, 5

- Could the Madhya Pradesh Poll Be Heading for a Photo Finish?
- When Apps Go Yackety-Yak

Sunday Chatter P6



■ In Case You Thought Diwali is Just a Desi Indian Festival, Think Again

■ Diwali Resolution: Try Again. Fail Again. Fail Better

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Great Games P10

- The Teams Who Won the Hearts at the ICC World Cup
- 15 Years of Djokovic Victories

Pure Politics & Bottom Line

ET WEALTH ON MONDAY

WEALTH



The offices of The Economic Times will remain closed on Sunday, November 12, on the occasion of Diwali. Hence, there will be no edition of the newspaper on Monday, November 13.

PURE POLITICS

PAGE ▶▶ 2

Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code Likely Next Week

Amid ongoing elections to five states and Lok Sabha polls months away, the BJP government in Uttarakhand is set to heat up the political narrative with the Uniform Civil Code – readying to be brought in through a special assembly session planned for next week. An expert panel, due to submit its report, is learnt to have reworked its earlier proposals. **Anubhuti Vishnoi** reports.

Panel to Examine SC Sub-category Demand: PM tells Madiga Dalits

Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to the Madiga Dalit community of Telangana in Secunderabad, promising to form a committee that will look into their long-standing demand for sub-categorisation within the Scheduled Caste. Modi also invoked former BJP chief Bangaru Laxman. **Rakesh Mohan Chaturvedi** reports.

India Inc on Gifting Spree to Lift Staff's Festive Spirits

Cos offer sustainable products, personalised hampers and gadgets to appreciate employees' resilience amid tough macro scenario

Brinda Sarkar
& Prachi Verma Dadhwala

Bengaluru | New Delhi: As Diwali festivities light up the country, corporate India is celebrating with employees including third-party blue-collar workers, sending out gift hampers, sustainable products, electronic gadgets and even silver coins.

Even amid a freezing winter and widespread layoffs, companies like PepsiCo, MakeMyTrip, UpGrad, NoBroker and Noise are rewarding employees for their resilience amid tough

macroeconomic conditions. While healthy and sustainable products are the flavour of the season, employees are also receiving products like meditation kits and devices such as the Amazon Echo smart speakers.

Cola maker PepsiCo is including family members of employees in festive celebrations, and this year organised a family day across India with activities for children and adults,

while edtech firm Upgrad is curating special gift boxes for employees. Fintech startup Simpli is using the occasion of Diwali to promote sustainable living

among its workforce, gifting them healthy snackable options, meditation kits and a virtual assistant (Amazon Echo).

"Our goal is to make this festive

season special for our employees by not only acknowledging their commitment but also by promoting their well-being," said Sneha Arora, chief human resources officer at Simpli.

Bengaluru-based property

platform NoBroker is hosting an event for employees along with third-party admin and security staffers who work for it.

"Every year, we appreciate our employees, but this year, we wan-

ted to recognise the efforts of our support people who work so hard for us yet remain nameless," said cofounder Amit Agarwal. The startup is also giving out silver coins as gifts to its support staff.

MakeMyTrip and Noise are brightening up the workplace with festive celebrations.

MakeMyTrip organised a shopping and food fiesta in office, catering to employees' last-minute festive purchases. Most of the stalls were employee-led, shining a light on their personal passions and talents.

Recreational Activities ▶▶ 7



VARANI SAHU

LEGAL OPINION SOUGHT ON ISSUE

Cos Fear New Data Law may Upset Cross-selling Cart

Banks, telcos say seeking user nod each time to access info to sell different products will hurt operations

Suraksha P, Joel Rebello & Urvi Malvania



On the Edge

New data law mandates cos to delete personal info if a customer withdraws consent

Says businesses need to state 'purpose' for seeking data to prevent misuse

Banks, telcos which offer multiple services – say move will curtail cross-selling opportunities

A hospital chain has sought a carve-out for health data

LEGAL VIEW Data can be accessed in cases where no restrictions are put in place

User fatigue could set in on repeated queries for data

AFTER FITCH DOWNGRADE IN AUGUST...

Moody's Turns Negative on US Credit Outlook

Fiscal deficit, decline in debt affordability, political polarisation raising concerns

Reuters

New York | Washington: Moody's is the last of the 3 major agencies to affirm AAA rating for US

Moody's is the last of the 3 major agencies to affirm AAA rating for US

US federal funding expires on Nov 17

Slippery Slope

Moody's is the last of the 3 major agencies to affirm AAA rating for US

Sharp rise in treasury yields increasing pressure on debt affordability

Move to mount pressure on Republicans to advance funding legislation

No impact of downgrade likely on US bond market, say investors



Moody's affirmed its long-term issuer & senior unsecured ratings at AAA on economic strengths

contributing to a sell-off that took US government bond prices to their lowest levels in 16 years.

It is hard to disagree with the rationale, with no reasonable expectation for fiscal consolidation any time soon," said Christopher Hodge, chief economist for

the US at Natixis. "Deficits will remain large ... and as interest costs take up a larger share of the budget, the debt burden will continue to grow."

The ratings agency said in a statement that "continued political polarisation" in Congress raises the risk that lawmakers will not be able to reach consensus on a fiscal plan to slow the decline in debt affordability."

Stopgap Spending Measure ▶▶ 7



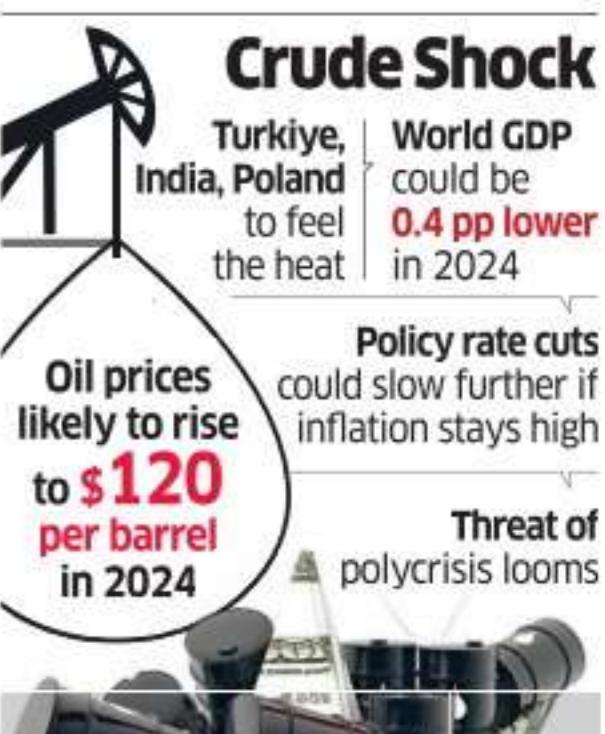
Making Merry

Revellers celebrate during the start of carnival season in Cologne, Germany on Saturday.

GEOPOLITICAL UNREST

Higher Oil Prices to Push Inflation in 2024: Fitch

Israel-Hamas conflict to disrupt oil supply, upend growth figures



New Delhi: The geopolitical uncertainty from the Israel-Hamas conflict could upend countries' inflation and growth calculations with oil supply getting disrupted, leading to a higher-than-expected inflation for India as well, Fitch Ratings has said.

In its earlier report, Fitch had predicted India to grow 6.3% in FY24 and maintain 6.5% growth until FY28

"Higher oil prices would lead to higher-than-expected inflation rates in 2024, followed by corrections in 2025. Turkey sees the highest percentage point rise in forecast inflation, followed by India and Poland," the global rating agency noted in a report.

"However, India and Poland's relative increases would be much larger," it added.

The calculations assume oil prices going up to \$120 per barrel in 2024 and staying elevated at \$100 per barrel in 2025, owing to supply restrictions.

"World GDP growth would be 0.4 pp (percentage point) lower in 2024, but only 0.1 pp lower in 2025," the rating agency said.

Muted Monetary Policy Response ▶▶ 7

Dark Chocolate Turns White Knight for Indians Wanting a Healthy Bite

Category growing at fast pace due to health benefits and better awareness

Glynda Alves
@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: The bar chart for chocolate has shown a growth since the time 4,000 years ago when early chocoholics in ancient Mesoamerica (present day Mexico), used the cacao plant in rituals and as medicine. They extended their belief to the seeds too, acknowledging them to be a gift from the god of wisdom.

Centuries later, the Mayans, followed later by the Aztecs in the 15th century, believed that chocolate came from the gods.

Divinity combined with healing and taste led to the gradual spread of chocolate across the world – with the global chocolate market size valued at around

\$127.7 billion as of 2023. The market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 4.4% in the forecast period of 2024-2023 and is expected to be valued at \$165.4 billion by 2032. In 2021, Mondelez was the largest chocolate confectionery firm in India with a

market share of close to 60%, followed by Nestlé with a market share of about 15%.

The total size of the Indian chocolates market was ₹15,512 crore in 2022.

Packed with Antioxidants ▶▶ 3

Bittersweet Indulgence

West African nations of Ivory Coast and Ghana account for two-thirds of global cocoa production

Size of chocolates market in India in 2022: ₹15,512 cr
Estimated growth by 2027: ₹23,700 cr*

*Source: Euromonitor

Not all cocoa is the same. Ghana cocoa trades at a premium on the world market, thanks to its high quality and consistency

DR KRISTY LEISLE Founder & CEO, African Cocoa Marketplace

More Women Learning on the Job as Manpower Crunch Hits Shop Floors

4-5x surge in demand for young female apprentices in last six months

Rica Bhattacharyya & Lijee Philip

Mumbai: Manufacturing companies are aggressively expanding the pool of women apprentices on their shop floors.

prompted by a biting shortage of skilled manpower as well as their drive to address the gender imbalance in their factories.

There is a 4-5x surge in demand for young women who have completed Class 10/12 to be appointed as apprentices in the

last six months, shows data shared by TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship with ET.

"Factories are becoming increasingly gender agnostic as they are facing a big talent shortage," said Sumit Kumar, chief business officer of TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship. "India has a skill shortage of approximately 130-150 million people across various sectors," he said. The uptick is largely driven by a boom in auto, EV, electronics and phone manufacturing, Kumar said.

Companies hiring women apprentices in big numbers for their factories include Maruti Suzuki, MG Motors, ReNew, Lumax and Maruti Suzuki, MG Motors, ReNew, Lumax, and Maruti Suzuki.

Gender-diverse Workforce ▶▶ 7

Train of Thought

Girls who've completed Class 10/12, diploma holders being hired

On-the-job training, hands-on learning, and dexterity skills over 3 yrs on offer



Maruti Suzuki, MG Motors, ReNew, Lumax hiring in big numbers

SET TO BUILD THE ELECTION NARRATIVE FROM NOW TO 2024

Uttarakhand Uniform Civil Code Likely Next Week

Coparcenary rights for Hindu men and equal property rights for women likely to stay on

Anubhuti.Vishnoi
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Amid ongoing elections to five states and Lok Sabha polls months away, the BJP government in Uttarakhand is set to heat up the political narrative with the Uniform Civil Code – readying to be brought in through a special assembly session planned for next week.

An expert panel, which is due to submit its report and the draft Bill to the state government, is learnt to have re-worked its earlier proposals, dropping significant recommendations on ensuring maintenance for senior citizens, ending of coparcenary rights for Hindu male heirs and accommodating same-sex unions through a gender-neutral vocabulary.

The report, ET gathers, will look to keep "women at the centre" as originally decided and pitch equal property rights for women from all religions.

Following a 2005 order of the Supreme Court, Hindu women now have equal claim on parental property as men. The UCC panel will aim to extend equal property share to Muslim women as well against the current 25% share they are accorded under Muslim personal laws.

Polygamy and polyandry, permissible among Muslims and tribals, are likely to find disfavour. The age of

marriage for women is likely to be moved up from 18 to 21 years.

Simplification of the marriage registration process to ensure a woman's rights in her marital home are protected is also likely to figure in the final panel report.

These issues are backed by strong public support in the form of suggestions received, sources said.

THE MISSING PART

The panel is learnt to have dropped a key aspect: ending the male bias in Hindu coparcenary rights.

Coparcenary rights refer to ancestral property rights by birth al-

lowed only to Hindu male heirs (kartas) of a joint family; an issue closely discussed by the panel chaired by former Supreme Court Judge Justice (Retd) Ranjanra Desai.

ET gathers it is now unlikely to find its way in the final report, citing its limited remit on concurrence list aspects.

The issue is also a tricky one as any change in the coparcenary rights of male heirs will impact numerous Hindu families/HUF-run business models, especially in terms of tax implications.

"With the SC order of 2005 giving Hindu women equal rights on ancestral and agricultural property, the male coparcenary rights already stand diluted. It comes only under the Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) unit facilitated through the Income Tax Act. The HUF system will also gradually end in the light of the

panel's report in May 2022.

In November 2022 ahead of the Gujarat assembly polls, the BJP-led state government announced a committee to ensure implementation of UCC in the state. The BJP also held out the UCC promise in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka ahead of state polls. Several other BJP-ruled states have also seen top leaders pitch a UCC plan.

PHOTO: AGENCIES

AT A RALLY IN SECUNDERABAD

Modi Assures Madiga Dalits a Panel to Examine SC Sub-category Demand

RakeshMohan.Chaturvedi
@timesgroup.com



PM consoles Madiga Reservation Portora Samiti chief—ANI

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to the Madiga Dalit community of Telangana at an election rally in Secunderabad, promising to form a committee that will look into their long-standing demand for sub-categorisation within the Scheduled Caste. In a surprise move, Modi also invoked former BJP Chief Bangaru Laxman who was a Madiga who was disgraced and later convicted for accepting a bribe of Rs 1Lakh for an alleged defence deal.

At the BJP rally on Saturday, Modi was effusive in his praise for Manda-

der Bangaru Laxman and to learn from him," Modi said, adding that he could understand the issues of the Madiga community due to this association. He maintained that now he has got the good fortune of working with Krishna who hails from the same community.

In his speech, Modi said BJP has stood by Madigas for three decades and will continue to do so.

"I assure you we will form a committee very soon to look into your issues. We will be firmly with you in the Supreme Court," Modi said.

With the community having a sizable number, Madigas constitute 60% of the Dalit population in Telangana and their support can give BJP a big boost in the ensuing elections.

"I had the good fortune of working un-

OTHER NEWS OF THE DAY

BJP MP Manifesto Promises LPG Cylinder at ₹450...

Bhopal: The BJP's manifesto for Madhya Pradesh assembly polls bets big on women voters via its ongoing Laadli Behna Yojana, promises houses and gas cylinders at ₹450 for beneficiaries of the scheme.

The BJP has also promised free education to girls from poor families till the time they finish their post-graduation, in its manifesto released by BJP chief JP Nadda. It also promises to pay ₹1,200 per year to every student for uniform, books and school bags. The manifesto released by BJP president JP Nadda also promises 100 units of electricity for ₹100, higher MSP for wheat and paddy, ₹2,700 per quintal for wheat and ₹3,100 per quintal for paddy. Notably, the Congress has promised MSP of ₹2,600 for wheat.—OPB

I Didn't Expect Maharaja to Betray: Digvijaya

Guna: Former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and Congress Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh has taken a potshot at Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia saying that he didn't expect that such a king of the Scindia family would betray Congress like this. Singh made the remark while addressing a program in Bamori assembly constituency in Guna on Friday. "I did not expect that such a king of the Scindia family would betray Congress like this. What did the Congress not offer him? First, they made Bade Maharaja (Mahavrao Scindia) MP from here then former PMs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi made him a minister, gave respect. Jyotiraditya Scindia came to Congress and the Congress made him MP and then minister twice. What is the reason that he left," the former CM said.—ANI

Don't Speak in Public on INDIA, Cong Netas Told

Guwahati: The Congress party in Assam has asked its leaders to refrain from openly discussing alliance and seat-sharing for next year's Lok Sabha polls. The party is expected to announce a list of candidates next month. Recently, Congress legislator Kamalakhy Dey Purkayastha had said that allies of INDIA alliance, like Trinamool Congress, hardly have a base in Assam. This evoked a sharp reaction from the TMC, which asked the Congress leadership to rein in its leaders and ask them not to talk about seats.

State president of the TMC, Ripun Bora, recently said the party would seek five seats from the grand alliance, including Karimganj. Assam Congress president BK Borah said Congress leaders are asked to make statements in public regarding seats in public.

Is Always There in Need

Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde is widely known for his magnanimity. Leaders from across the political spectrum claim that Shinde goes out of his way to help MLAs and other politicians inspite of any political rivalry. Last week, it was proved yet again when NCP leader Eknath Khadse suffered a heart attack in his hometown Jalgaon. With doctors asking him to be airlifted to Mumbai, his daughter Rohini Khadse dialed Shinde for help who immediately organised an air ambulance and had Khadse airlifted to Mumbai.

FAGGAN SINGH KULASTE

Niwas Assembly segment in Mandla district. For Kulaste, who belongs to the Gond community, standing for election from the ST reserved seat has much at stake, as his brother lost the last Assembly election by some 28,000 votes to Congress candidate Ashok Marikar. This time, the Congress has fielded Chain Singh Warkade, a move that could work in Kulaste's favour. However, anti-incumbency is making his job harder.

RAKESH SINGH

Jain, the chief whip of the BJP in Lok Sabha, was the party's state unit chief during the 2018 Assembly polls, which the BJP lost narrowly. He has been fielded from Jabalpur West against Congress candidate Tarun Bhanot, a former finance minister in the Kamal Nath government. Bhanot, a Punjabi, is popular among the locals in Jabalpur West, while there is an anti-incumbency sentiment against Singh, an MP from Jabalpur. This seat was represented by BJP national president JP Nadda's mother-in-law, Jaishree Banerjee, in the 1990s.

UDAY PRATAP SINGH

In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, his

21,216 teachers in 7,442 madrasas have not received honorariums since 2017

Vatsala.Gaur@timesgroup.com

Lucknow: In Uttar Pradesh's Balrampur, madrasa teacher Tahir sells jaggery on a cart after school hours, making about ₹300 on a good day. Some 40 kilometres away in Gonda, Ashraf makes ₹100-150 a day stitching and repairing women's garments.

Their supplemented earnings, however, fall woefully short of the ₹15,000 they were taking home every month some years ago teaching subjects like English and mathematics at the madrasas. Both Tahir and Ashraf said their honorariums are stuck for the last six years. ET has learnt that it's because the central government hasn't released its share of the money.

The ministry of minority affairs, in an affidavit filed in the Allahabad High Court in this regard, put the onus on the state government, saying

it is answerable for the claims. ET has seen a copy of the affidavit. It also said the scheme is "under review". Last year, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment had pulled up the ministry for delay in approving the continua-

tion of the scheme. "We continue to teach in the hope that the government will consider our plight someday," said Tahir.

Under the scheme, aimed at modernising and enhancing the quality of madrasa education, ₹6,000 is to be pa-

id per month to graduate teachers for subjects like English, math, social science, etc., and ₹2,000 per month to graduate teachers with a B.Ed or post graduate degree.

Apart from the honorarium, the state government also pays the teachers ₹2,000-3,000 to help them sustain. This has continued.

The state government has repeatedly requested the Centre to release funds under SPEMM. In this regard, chief minister Yogi Adityanath has written twice to the Centre—in November 2021 and November 2022.

The scheme was handled by the ministry of education since its inception, but was transferred to the ministry of minority affairs in 2021. Barings in 2021-22 when the then minister of minority affairs, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, facilitated a release of a total

of Rs 162 crore to eight states, with Uttar Pradesh getting Rs 109 crore for dues of 2013-17, there has not been any movement of funds. In 2022, Navgi was replaced by Smriti Irani.

INDEED DEPLORABLE: HC

After more than 400 teachers moved the Allahabad High Court on the matter, the court on July 11 asked the ministry of minority affairs to remit its share of the scheme, as per an order issued in 2019, within four weeks or show cause as to why the amount has not been remitted.

CENTRE'S RESPONSE

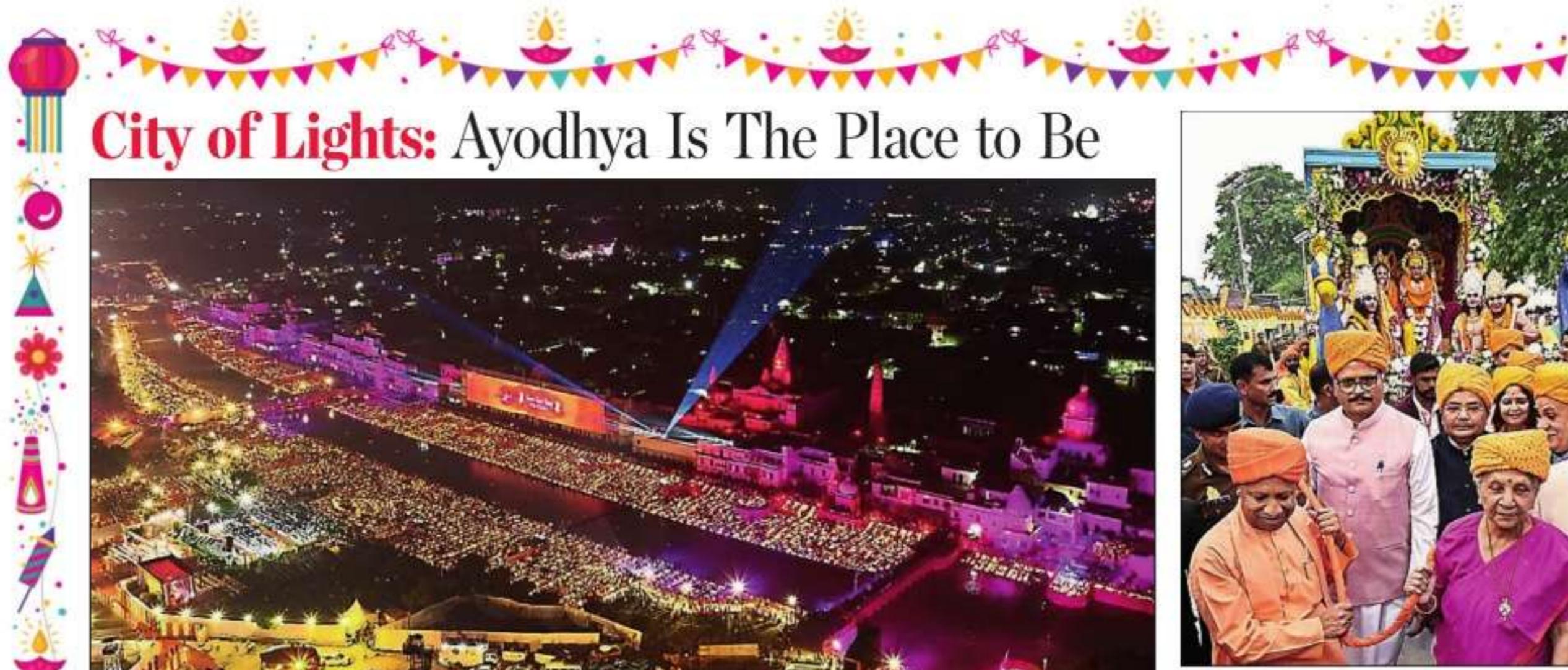
In an affidavit filed in August in response to the high court's order, the Centre sought to pass the buck, saying the state government is answerable for the claims as the scheme is

implemented "under the aegis of the respective state governments". It also said the scheme was approved till March 31, 2022, and is currently under review.

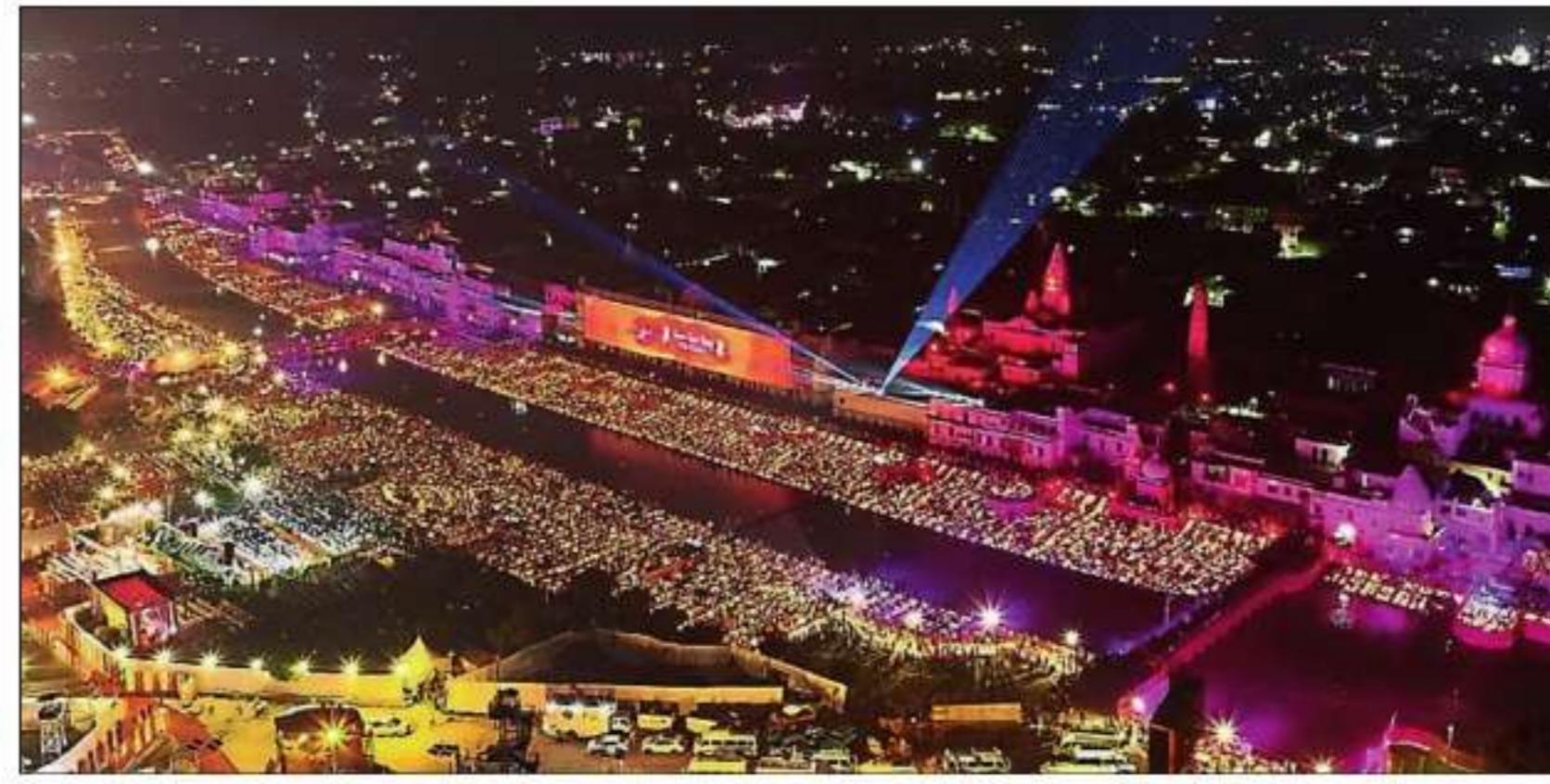
Regarding pending dues, the ministry passed the ball to the ministry of education for not having funds to meet the honorarium requirements between 2017 and 2021.

STATE MUST TAKE OVER: TEACHERS

The Islamic Madrasa Modernisation Teachers Association (IMMTA) of India has requested the state government to amend rules so that it can release its 40% even without the Centre's release as the state anyway makes provision for the scheme every year in its budget, but is not able to disburse it due to the centre not releasing its share.



City of Lights: Ayodhya Is The Place to Be



22.2 lakh

A new world record was set on Saturday for lighting up maximum number of diyas

18 Tableaux

Taken out in Ayodhya depicting life of Lord Ram

Jan 22, 2024

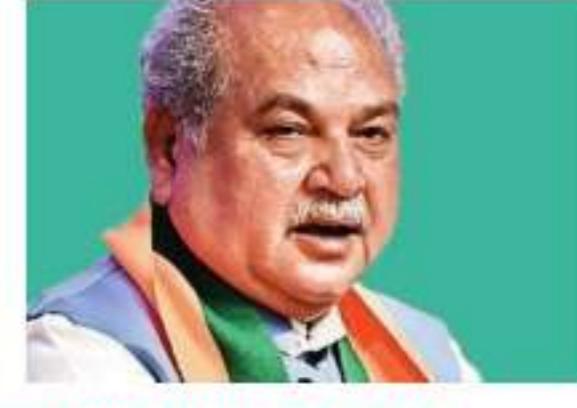
Consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya



FIGHTING TO BE THE FIRST CHOICE OF VOTERS IN MADHYA PRADESH

Not All Union Ministers, MPs Find The Going Easy

The BJP has fielded seven parliamentarians, including three Union ministers, for the Assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh. A week ahead of polling, ET's Jatin Takkar looks at how these leaders are placed in the contest. Excerpts:



PRALHAD SINGH PATEL

Among these seven members of Parliament (MPs), Patel is possibly the most comfortably placed. This is the first Assembly election for the five-time MP and OBC (other backward class) leader, who is contesting from Narsinghpur. His main rival is Congress candidate Lakhman Singh Patel.

Patel, who belongs to the Lodhi community, is among the few ministers who were also part of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led Union Cabinet. He was seen as the force behind the BJP's victory under Uma Bharti in Madhya Pradesh. He had left the BJP along with Bharti but rejoined later. Pralhad Singh Patel's brother, Jalani Singh Patel, is a sitting legislator.

Many believe his candidature has influenced the Lodhi voters—a large community in the Mahakaushal region—and his being an OBC politician makes him a strong contender for the CM's post, should the BJP win the polls.



The four-time parliamentarian is seen as the dark horse in the race for chief minister if the BJP retains power in Madhya Pradesh. The main contest for Singh, a Kurmi by caste, is with Siddharth Kushwaha, who belongs to the Kushwaha caste, a sub-sect of the Kurmis. Kushwahas are in substantial numbers in this assembly segment, which the Congress won last time.



The two-time soft-spoken BJP parliamentarian is contesting from the Sidhi Assembly segment in her Lok Sabha constituency, Sidhi. The town came into news in July this year after Parvesh Shukla, purportedly linked with local BJP legislator Kedarnath Shukla, was seen urinating on a tribal man. Chief Minister Chouhan later met the victim and washed his feet. After the BJP denied Shukla a ticket, he became a rebel and is contesting as an independent, increasing the challenge for the BJP to retain this seat.

Madrasa Teachers Make Do With Odd Jobs as Centre, UP Differ on Funding

21,216 teachers in 7,442 madrasas have not received honorariums since 2017

Vatsala.Gaur@timesgroup.com

Lucknow: In Uttar Pradesh's Balrampur, madrasa teacher Tahir sells jaggery on a cart after school hours, making about ₹300 on a good day. Some 40 kilometres away in Gonda, Ashraf makes ₹100-150 a day stitching and repairing women's garments.

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id per month to graduate teachers for subjects like English,

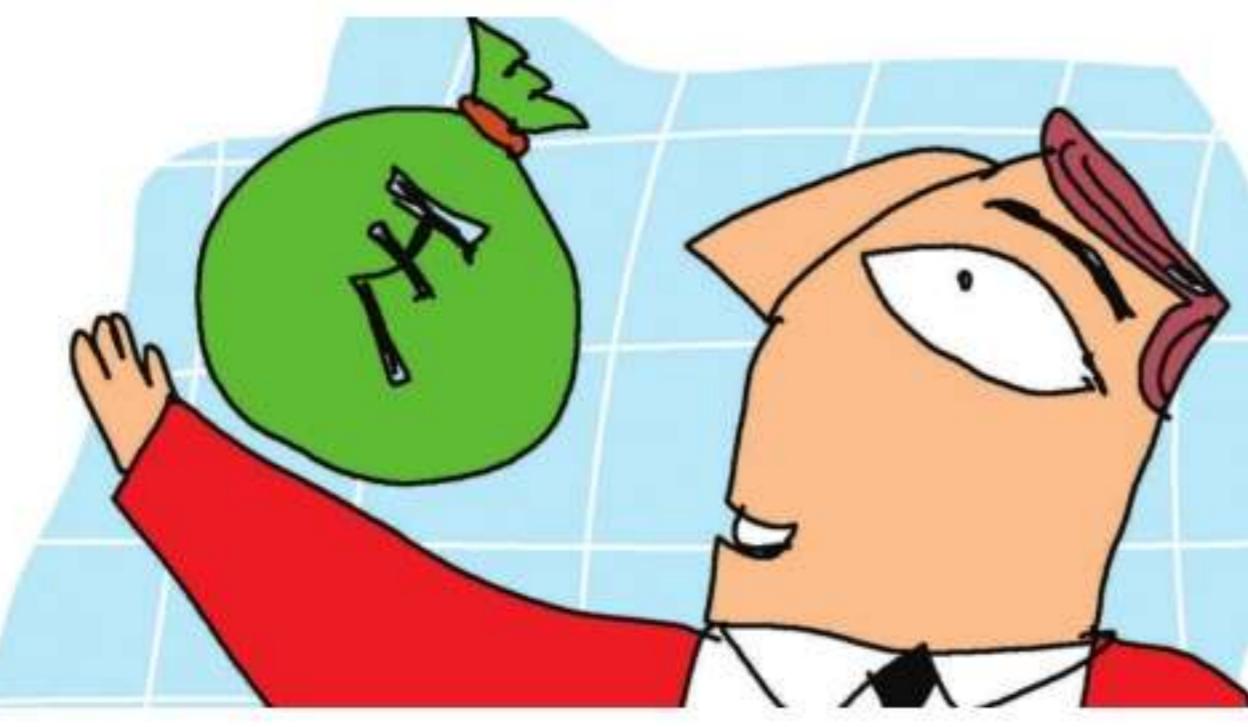
EPFO to Launch Drive to Recover Arrears

3-month drive meant for speedy recovery of dues and not for harassment of employers or defaulters, says fund body

Our Bureau

New Delhi: The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will initiate a special drive for three months from December 2023 to February 2024 to augment the recovery of arrears.

"The increasing trend of slow recovery of arrears of provident fund and allied dues has been a matter of great concern. So much so that performance in recovery of current and arrear dues is far below the targets fixed by the headquarters," the retirement fund body said in a directive



issued to its regional offices. The drive will cover both exempted and unexempted establishments, it said.

According to EPFO, this drive is meant for the speedy recovery of dues and not for any harassment of employers or defaulters.

In the absence of recovery of dues from defaulting establishments, EPFO can initiate recovery actions such as attachment of movable and immovable properties, and attachment of bank account. It can also appoint receiver for the recovery of dues and take legal steps to detain the employer in prison.

EPFO has also directed its zonal of

fices to submit weekly consolidated recovery reports on performance of regional offices during the special recovery drive. Besides, it has asked its regional offices to ensure that all targets for the recovery are met during the special drive.

The organisation had in the past conducted such special drives to recover dues from defaulters through its regional offices. EPFO has more than 60 million subscribers and manages a corpus of over ₹12 lakh crore. Its beneficiaries are entitled to provident funds, pension and insurance benefits under three different schemes.

NDTV Leases Office Space from Max Estates in Noida

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New Delhi: New Delhi Television (NDTV) has leased 128,000 square feet of commercial office space in Noida's Max Square, Max Estates said without disclosing financial details of the transaction.

Managed work space firm Skootr had earlier leased 100,000 sq ft of space spread across two floors in this complex, developed by Max Estates, the real estate arm of the Max Group.

Max Estates said in a statement that the latest transaction with NDTV is a clear reflection of Noida Expressway and particularly Max Square fast emerging as a "new centre for corporate office beyond a back-office hub". "With this, Max Square, within 6-9 months of receiving its completion, has transacted (including letters of intent) 50% of the office space, including 100% of the retail/F&B (food and beverages) is committed," it said.

Max Estates, which has concluded the reverse merger of Max Ventures and Industries with itself, launched Estate 128, its first luxury residential development in Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) in the second quarter of this financial year and got bookings worth ₹1,800 crore. The company also got a positive response for commercial office leasing at both of its new assets—Max Square on Noida Expressway and Max House—Phase II in south Delhi.

It has pre-leased 54% of the office space at Max House—Phase II even before receiving completion, which is expected in the ongoing quarter. Total leasable area for Max Square is 700,000 sq ft and New York Life Insurance Company is a 49% partner in the project. Rentals in this project are at a 25-30% premium over the prevailing market rate. On 100% occupancy, the total annual rental income from the complex is expected to be ₹395-4,71 crore.

Shriram Properties Q2 Sales Bookings Up 40% on Housing Demand

NEW DELHI Realty firm Shriram Properties has clocked 40% growth in its sales bookings to ₹608 crore in the second quarter of this fiscal year on better demand for its housing projects. Its sales bookings stood at ₹435 crore in the year-ago period. According to an investors' presentation, Shriram Properties sales bookings grew 14% to 1.15 million sq ft during the July-September period of this fiscal from ₹1.01 million sq ft in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Private Engineering Colleges See 50-70% Drop in Placements

Burdened by macroeconomic challenges, companies – mainly in IT sector – cut back on hiring

Neil.Ghai@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: India's private engineering institutes are reporting a 50-70% drop in placements this year as macroeconomic challenges force companies, especially those in the information technology sector, to cut back on hiring.

The slowdown in placements is forcing these institutes to rework their plans, said officials at some of the private engineering institutes ET spoke with.

Santanil Dasgupta, senior director of BML Munjal University's career guidance development centre, said they have adopted a wait-and-watch approach.

Companies are hiring judiciously and the sentiment is low for the fresher recruitment drive, said Dasgupta.

IT service providers – usually the main campus recruiters – had gone heavy on hiring over the last two years expecting good growth. But they are now rethinking their plans amid a slowdown in client spending. Hiring for the other engineering streams is either flat or low.

"Last year, 63% of students had been placed by this time (overall 95%). This year, 20-25% of students have been placed thus far," said Dasgupta. The batch size at the university is 175. Some other private institutes shared a similar sentiment.

"Hardly 30% of the students have been placed thus far," said Anjan Kumar Bhatnagar, deputy director of placement cell at Amity University. "By this time last year, 60% of the batch had been placed."

Career Graph

Institute	Batch Size (Number of students)	%age of batch placed till date	Median pay packet so far this year (in ₹ lakh per annum)	Median pay last year (in ₹ lakh per annum)
Amity University, Noida	1,200	30	5.4	5.45
BML Munjal University	175	20-25	7.6	7.6
Galgotias University	2,000	38	5.4	5.45
Koneru Lakshmaiah University	2,000	35	8	7
Thapar Institute of Engineering & Technology	2,199	26	11.17	11.89

Bhatnagar said the university is changing tack.

"We need to target those companies that are niche in nature. Even if they are not niche, these companies need to have their operations in India because these are the companies that are recruiting these days," said Bhatnagar.

The campus placements this year are "not as impressive" as the previous year, said Saravananabu J, senior director of placements at Kone

ru Lakshmaiah University.

"The IT services companies are not hiring this year. This created a big impact in the placement figures," he said. "Same time last year, we had reached 80% of the campus placements

(2023 batch). This year (2024 batch), we have reached 35% in the engineering stream."

The institute has more than 2,000 students in the engineering stream.

At Galgotias University, about 45% of the final year students had been placed by the first week of November last year. This year, it is down to 38% despite campus recruitment beginning a month earlier. The batch size at the university is 2,000.

"Companies are coming this year, but they are picking up fewer students," said Manisha Chaudhary, director of placements at Galgotias University. "For example, an MNC specialising in IT services and consulting hired 120-130 students last year. This time around they hired 30 students."

The Pro VC of Sharda University, Parma Nand, said the industry is cautious in hiring freshers. There's a

5-7% drop in the number of students placed this time of the year as compared with a year ago.

Ajayinder Singh Jawanda, the chief industry engagement officer at Thapar Institute of Engineering and Technology (TIET), said: "Compared with last year, the number of IT companies has been less to start with, as some of the leading recruiters of last year have delayed their hiring by a few months or have declined to come this year."

The placements process at TIET began in the middle of August.

"The numbers hired this year by many are less due to over-hiring last year and economic reasons. Many new companies, especially start-ups, are coming this year," said Jawanda. "Despite the effects of wars and post-pandemic economic upheavals the placements are expected to do well this year, although delayed."

Jawanda said he is cautiously optimistic about the placement scenario in the face of economic headwinds.

Data from other colleges and universities paint an equally gloomy picture for placements in the engineering streams of automobile, aeronautics, biotechnology, biomedical science, electronics and communications, electronics instrumentation and control, and electrical.

Riya Mariam Babu, a mechanical engineering student at Amity, is one of the four in a batch of 35 students who has secured a job. Placements for core engineering courses have only just begun at her university. "The placements tend to pick up during the 8th semester (January) after companies have concluded their recruitment drives at government colleges," she said.

Besides this upcoming facility in Navi Mumbai, CLINT has three data centres under development in India.

CLINT, formerly known as Ascendas India Trust, was listed on the Singapore Ex-



change Securities Trading in August 2007 as the first Indian property trust in Asia. Its principal objective is to own income-producing real estate used primarily as business space in India.

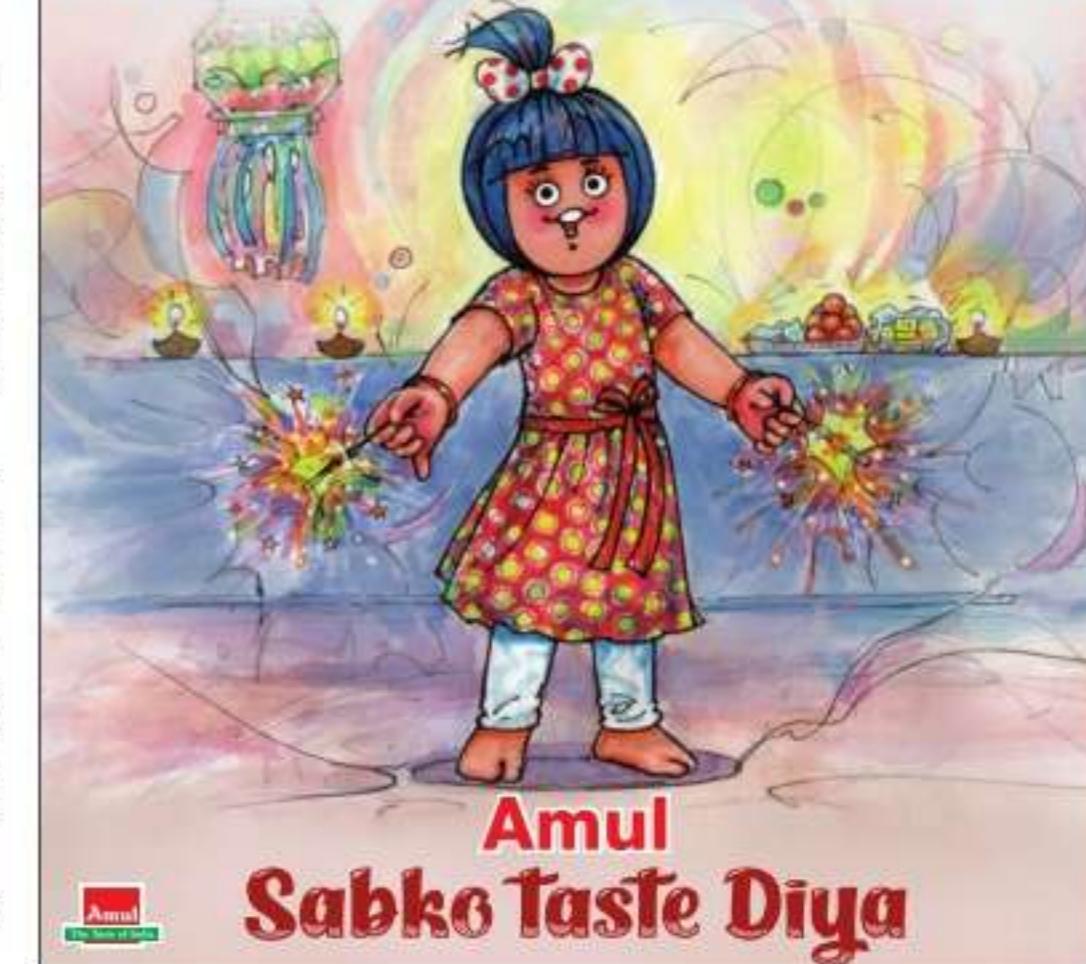
CLINT may also develop and acquire land or undeveloped developments. As of September 30, it had \$2.7 billion of assets under management.

CapitaLand has already started the construction of the data centre, which is scheduled for completion by mid-2025. The data centre will have a power capacity of 108 MW.

Besides this upcoming facility in Navi Mumbai, CLINT has three data centres under development in India.

Demand for data centres in India is rising due to improved technology infrastructure and the adoption of new technologies like 5G, artificial intelligence, cloud and Internet of Things.

Diwalicious Treats!



Amul
Sabko Taste Diya

CLINT Secures ₹1,300-cr loan from JP Morgan

CapitaLand India Trust to use this onshore loan to build data centre in Navi Mumbai

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Bengaluru: CapitaLand India Trust (CLINT) has secured a five-year construction loan of ₹1,300 crore from JP Morgan India to finance the Phase-I development of its data centre in Navi Mumbai.

"Securing this onshore loan in India would diversify our funding sources and help us to optimise our funding costs," said Sanjeev Dasgupta, chief executive of CapitaLand India Trust Pte Ltd.

CapitaLand has already started the construction of the data centre, which is scheduled for completion by mid-2025. The data centre will have a power capacity of 108 MW.

Besides this upcoming facility in Navi Mumbai, CLINT has three data centres under development in India.

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MahaRERA Recovers Over ₹133 cr from Defaulting Builders

Authority issued 1,053 warrants to recover more than ₹627 cr for delay

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Mumbai: The Maharashtra Real Estate Regulatory Authority (MahaRERA) has recovered compensation worth more than ₹133.56 crore for homebuyers from real estate developers who have failed to handover the possession of apartments to the buyers.

"We shall continue to invest in development of human resources, new products, technology infrastructure, etc, and thus pursue long-term growth shareholders and deliver on our mission of Vibrant BSE 2025," MD & CEO, Sundaram Ramanamurthy, said.

The exchange's average daily turnover in the equity segment increased to ₹5,922 crore in the quarter under review, from ₹4,740 crore in the year-ago period.

Also, the board of directors of BSE in their meeting on Friday have approved the fund infusion of ₹22.36 crore in India International Exchange (IFSC) (India INX) and ₹33.88 crore in India International Exchange (IFSC) (India ICC) towards purchase of equity shares through subscription of rights issue.

The Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital, says that one can call an ingredient as superfood if it fulfills the following: It should be rich in compounds such as bioactive, vitamins and minerals. Chocolate ticks all the boxes. "It is rich in antioxidants like magnesium, zinc, manganese and selenium and is known to be beneficial for mental and physical well-being. It is rich in flavanols which helps in increasing blood flow to muscles and brain," she says.

"Flavanols are plant compounds that have been shown to have a number of health benefits, including anti-ageing properties," shares Dr Rakshak.

According to a 2007 report by medical journal The Lancet, flavanols improved coronary vascular function in 11 heart-transplant recipients compared with patients taking a cocoa-free control chocolate.

Dr Ruchi Rai, dietitian at SRV Hospitals shares that "flavanols stimulate nitric oxide production, enhancing blood flow and relaxing arteries, reducing blood pressure."

Dark chocolate's nutrient content,

including manganese, magnesium, iron, selenium, copper, zinc and potassium, makes it an ideal after-

meal treat, she observes.

WRAPPED IN NUTRIENTS

Nevertheless, dark continues to wear a superfood cape. "With high cocoa content it is often considered a superfood due to its potential health benefits when consumed in moderation," says Dr Rakshak.

He says that to get the superfood health benefits, the chocolate needs to have at least 70% cocoa content. "This usually means more antioxidants and less sugar," he says.

Vedika Premani, clinical dietitian at

GETTY IMAGES

FSSAI shares with ET that the FSS Act 2006 does not specify the definition of 'superfood'. "Therefore, no product could be categorised as superfood. Regulation 2.7.4 Chocolates under Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011 prescribes standards for chocolate and FSSAI does not have any information that more chocolate brands in India are going the healthy way. There is no category specified for selling healthy chocolates under FSSR," a spokesperson said.

Globally as well, the term 'superfood' has no official definition by regulatory authorities in major consumer markets such as by USFDA.

In 2007, the marketing of products as 'superfoods' was prohibited in the EU,

unless accompanied by a specific authorised health claim supported by credible scientific research.

WRAPPED IN NUTRIENTS

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Therefore, no product could be

Shantanu Nandan Sharma |
Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain

Narendra Dabi, who owns a footwear shop in Sonkatch, a town in Madhya Pradesh, greets a customer with a smile before showing him some sandals and floater. The customer, Sukhram Pawar, is a soybean farmer. He tries a couple of them before choosing a pair of black slippers. As Dabi puts the money in the cash drawer and starts wrapping the product, a hot political topic—the forthcoming assembly election in Madhya Pradesh—crops up, leading to a flurry of heated exchanges between the two.

Pawar is rooting for the re-election of Sajjan Singh Verma, the Congress MLA from Sonkatch, a constituency in Dewas district, which lies midway between Bhopal and Indore. He then mocks Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan as a ghoosnaveer; one who is good at making announcements. At this, Dabi responds angrily: "Congress is only good at giving guarantees. It has a very bad track record in implementation. BJP will win this seat and also Pradesh (the state)." The famous marketing motto, the customer is always right, seems to fall by the wayside when a high-stakes poll battle is around the corner.

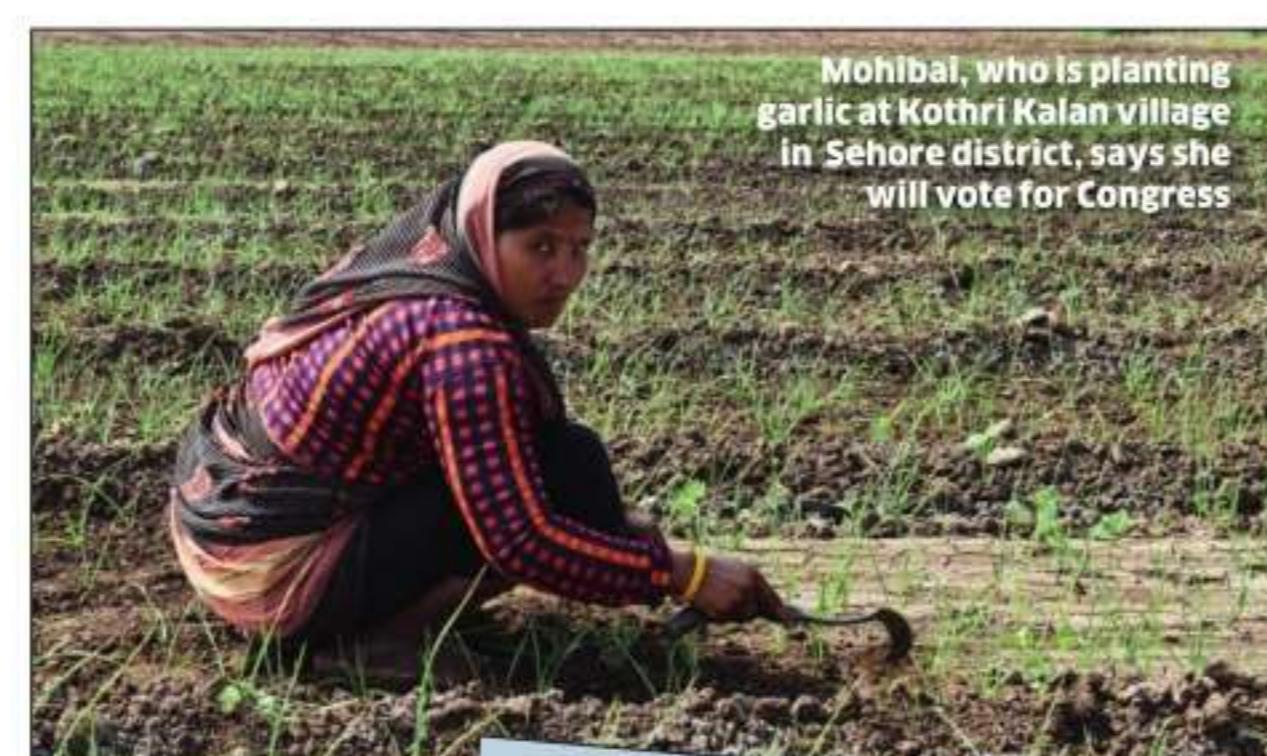
All 230 seats in Madhya Pradesh will go to the polls on November 17. The counting of votes, with 56 million people eligible to vote, will take place on December 3.

Here is another instance of the election battle spilling on to the ground. Mohibai, 35, who is busy planting garlic at Kothri Kalan village in Sehore district, says she will vote for hath ka panja (hand, the Congress symbol) and not kamal ka phool (lotus, BJP's symbol). Both these parties, she says, are engaged in a "kaante ki takkar" (a close fight). Not everyone in her family is supporting Congress, though. "My brother-in-law is voting for BJP," she says with an impish smile, pointing towards a man who is irrigating a nearby wheatfield.

Earlier this week, as ET interacted with people in districts like Bhopal, Sehore, Dewas, Ujjain and Indore, one thing emerged clearly—the battle is evenly poised. The 2023 Maha election is

Close One to Call

The Madhya Pradesh poll could be heading for a photo finish even as both BJP and Congress are campaigning hard to clinch a decisive mandate



Mohibai, who is planting garlic at Kothri Kalan village in Sehore district, says she will vote for Congress

PHOTO: SHANTANU NANDAN SHARMA, PTI

2023 MP Assembly Poll

Total seats **230**

Voting: NOVEMBER 17
Results: DECEMBER 3

2018 ELECTION RESULTS

Congress	114	BJP	109	BSP	2
SP	1	Independent	4		

Voter turnout **75%**
No. of women elected **21**

Source: Election Commission of India

Congress has made it clear that Kamal Nath is the CM candidate, with billboards and posters carrying a big photo of him towering over small head shots of party president Mallikarjun Kharge and the Gandhis—Sonia, Rahul & Priyanka



Punit Sharma, a manager of a company in Indore, says the wind is blowing in BJP's favour

assembly election could head for an epic photo finish, like it did in 2018, even as both BJP and Congress are campaigning at a blistering pace to clinch a decisive mandate. The silent voters and those sitting on the fence will make a big difference.

BACK IN 2018

Five years ago, the state had witnessed neck-to-neck fight between the two parties, with

Congress forming the government with the help of independent candidates. In that

election, Congress secured 114 seats, one short of the halfway mark, and BJP came a close second, bagging 109 seats. In terms of vote share in seats contested, the difference was a meagre 0.02% (Congress: 41.35%; BJP: 41.33%). The government led by Kamal Nath, however, lasted just 15 months as Jyotiraditya Scindia deserted the par-

ty along with 22 Congress MLAs, including six ministers. They joined the arch-rival, BJP.

Chouhan, who had been chief minister for about 13 years, from 2005 to 2018, again took on the mantle of CM. For Chouhan, it was a new political innings on Shyamla Hills, a highland in Bhopal, which houses the CM's bungalow, among others, overlooking the beautiful lake, Bhojtal.

Nath has also single-handedly stalled a proposed rally of the new Opposition alliance, INDIA, in Bhopal, fearing that DMK leaders' comments against Sanatana Dharma might resurface,

shifting the focus away from his poll plank of guarantees—₹1,500 a month for every woman, a gas cylinder for ₹500, return of the Old Pension Scheme, free electricity for the first 100 units and the conducting of a caste census. Nath has also refused to accommodate other partners of the alliance such as Samajwadi Party, which has infuriated SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, and Aam Aadmi Party, which has a marginal presence in some pockets in the state.

"Shivrajji has promised that the amount will keep increasing every year till it reaches ₹3,000 a month. That's a big sum for a poor family like ours," says Gauri. "My vote is for kamal ka phool, not Kamal Nath."

However, not all BJP supporters fancy Chouhan's return as chief minister; a reason why the party's central leadership has decided not to project the veteran politician as the CM candidate this time around. In many billboards placed all over the state, his photo figures only among 11 small faces below a large cutout of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Other faces include Union ministers Scindia and Narendra Singh Tomar, party's national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and state home minister Narottam Mishra, each of whom is now eying the elite address of 6 Shyamla Hills.

In sharp contrast, Congress has made it clear that Kamal Nath is its CM candidate, with billboards and posters carrying a big photo of him towering over small head shots of party president Mallikarjun Kharge and the three Gandhis—Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka.

In Huzur constituency on the outskirts of Bhopal, three-time BJP MLA Rameshwar Sharma is campaigning while his supporters are playing the dhol, showering flower petals and chanting Jai Shri Ram slogans. What is the scenario for BJP? "It's Jai Shri Ram all around. It's Sanatana all around. We will form the government once more," says Sharma. Who will be the next CM? "The CM will be from BJP. The central leadership will decide the name later," he says.

While BJP is playing the Hindutva card yet again, an astute Nath seems to have succeeded in neutralising attempts to polarise voters along religious lines in a state where 91% of the population are Hindus, with only 6.5% being Muslims (2011 Census). Nath has been highlighting

his initiative in constructing a 101-ft-tall Hanuman statue in his pocket borough Chhindwara. While billboards welcoming party leader and "Shiv bhakt" Rahul Gandhi surfaced in Bhopal ahead of the 2018 poll, his recent pilgrimage to the Kedarnath shrine has been packaged well in the Congress campaign this time.

Nath has also single-handedly stalled a proposed rally of the new Opposition alliance, INDIA, in Bhopal, fearing that DMK leaders' comments against Sanatana Dharma might resurface, shifting the focus away from his poll plank of guarantees—₹1,500 a month for every woman, a gas cylinder for ₹500, return of the Old Pension Scheme, free electricity for the first 100 units and the conducting of a caste census. Nath has also refused to accommodate other partners of the alliance such as Samajwadi Party, which has infuriated SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, and Aam Aadmi Party, which has a marginal presence in some pockets in the state.

Jitendra Verma, a farmer in Sehore and a staunch supporter of BJP, acknowledges Nath's "noble contribution in building a large number of gaushalas (cowsheds) across the state."

when he was chief minister for 13 months. He adds, "This election is not fought on who's a good Hindu and who's not, but on who gives what, and who can better implement the promises. I support BJP but don't want Shivrajji as the CM again."

The fatigue of the Chouhan brand is remarked upon by people in Ujjain and Indore as well. "Modi, not Shivraj, is the face of BJP. Most people don't even know who the local candidate is. We vote for the party for Modi and Modi alone," says Devi Lal Rathore, 54, a farmer in Ujjain, adding that there is anti-incumbency against some BJP candidates in the city that houses the famous Mahakaleshwar temple.

Although Shivraj Singh Chouhan (below) is not being projected as BJP's CM candidate, a humiliation for the veteran, he is carrying on as if the party will offer him the top post. In public meetings, he keeps reminding people about "mama's" guarantees

In Indore district, where BJP was marginally ahead in the last election (BJP: 5, Congress: 4), Congress is putting a great deal of effort to change the score, with its general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra visiting the place twice in a week—first to address a public meeting and then to hold a roadshow two days later. Punit Sharma, manager of a company handling road-construction equipment in the city, says the wind is blowing in favour of BJP in Indore but "things may change if prices continue to rise", adding how onion prices skyrocketed in Indore in the last fortnight, touching ₹80 per kilo.

In its campaign, Congress is turning the spotlight on issues such as price rise and unemployment, and promises to conduct a caste census. But it is also subtly focusing on soft Hindutva to arrest any bid to polarise the voters. While campaigning for the incumbent MLA of Bhopal Madhya constituency, Arif Masood, on Tuesday night, Kharge didn't forget to mention Rahul Gandhi's recent pilgrimage to Kedarnath. "The real Shivraj (Lord Shiva) resides in Kedarnath," he said.

Meanwhile, Shivraj, the CM, is unlikely to be a pushover if BJP retains power in the state. Although he is not being projected as the CM candidate, a political humiliation for the veteran, he is carrying on as if the party will offer him the top post. In public meetings, he keeps telling people about "mama's" guarantees (he is often referred to as mama, maternal uncle). His guarantees include "pratyek parivar, ek rojgar" (one job in every family), elite schools for bhanja and bhanji (niephews and nieces) and making each of his "1.32 crore sisters a lakhati didi".

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Apoorva Mittal

Karishma Tushar claims to have an eye for removing "the evil eye". A Mumbai-based tarot reader, she conducts about a dozen "nazar-removing" rituals a month for her clients, invoking "a blend of deities and angels" to "dispel negative energies" from their lives. Who are these clients? Forty per cent of them are in their 20s, while the rest fall in the 30-44 years age group, she says. This clientele comprising millennials and Gen Z attribute many worrying experiences—from a partner's distant behaviour to a delayed promotion to a phase of ill health—to nazar; the superstitious belief that someone's jealous-jealous gaze is causing them harm.

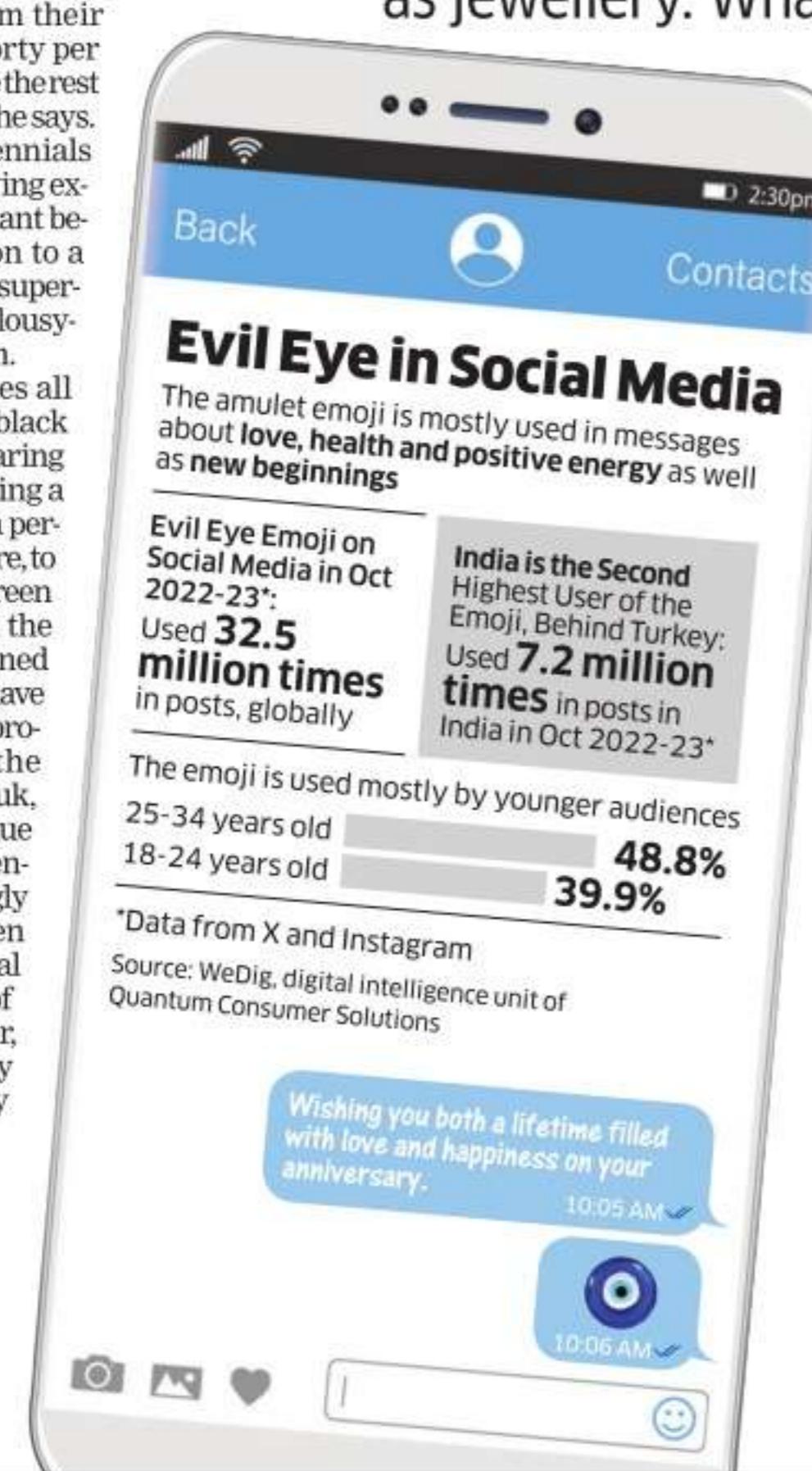
In India, dispelling nazar takes all sorts of forms—from putting a black dot on an infant's forehead to wearing black threads or tibazee, to twirling a fist of dried red chillies around a person and tossing those in kitchen fire, to hanging a string of lemon and green chillies in front of a vehicle. In the post-pandemic world, a heightened sense of vulnerability seems to have driven a section of people to seek protection in something else—the Turkish evil eye. The nazar boncuks, as it is called, are often made of blue glass and depicted as four concentric circles. People are increasingly wearing it as jewellery and even scattering the nazar emoji on social media. The concentric design of the evil eye motif, claims Tushar, distracts "people from the beauty of a person or a thing", thereby protecting them.

CHARMED CIRCLE

For the younger generation, the Turkish evil eye has become a fashion staple and a trendy accessory with the added function of a charm. Says Shraddha Joshi a 26-year-old working in a fintech startup in Mumbai:

Eye for an Evil Eye

The blue evil eye is everywhere—be it as emoji on social media posts or as jewellery. What is behind its charmed growth in India?



What's Driving Demand

- Aesthetic appeal
- Seeking security in times of uncertainty

Brands Looking at Evil Eye Designs

In Mynta, demand for evil eye jewellery has gone up by 35% over last year

Mynta's evil eye selection has gone up by 70% from last year

Source: CaratLane, Mynta

"Gen Z has turned the nazar into an aesthetic expression." She says her generation doesn't want to be caught wearing a black thread to ward off the evil eye but the blue amulet is acceptable.

To cater to this growing demand, jewellers have begun to incorporate the evil eye motif in their designs. Avnish Anand, cofounder and CEO of CaratLane, says they began their catalogue expansion for evil eye jewellery in 2021 and have sold approximately 30,000 pieces in FY2023 and FY2024 so far. Its evil eye collection has rings, pendants and even man-

galsutra, with prices starting from ₹5,000 and going up to ₹40,000. "Millennials and Gen Z form the majority of our customers for evil eye jewellery. The key drivers are the symbol's extensive presence on social media and its frequent adornment by celebrities," says Anand.

Mounita Roy, an assistant professor of economics at Ahmedabad University, says from the point of view of behavioural economics, beliefs and superstitions play a significant role in consumer decisions, especially in a society that heavily relies on them. Referring to a 2014 paper by Boris Gershman of the American University on the prevalence of the evil eye in agrarian societies, she explains that "in highly unequal societies, the belief that others will envy your wealth can significantly influence consumer behaviour".

Superstitions remain deeply ingrained in consumer decision-making, showcasing an interplay of rational and instinctual thinking, says Roy. "When too many people around you believe in a particular superstition, it becomes very difficult to maintain a rational sense about it—like wearing an evil eye charm is not really helping you the way you think it would," says Roy. "As human beings, it's very difficult for us to be always sane and rational so people succumb to these rash and instant decisions."

E-commerce platforms are taking note of what Roy calls the "bandwagon effect". Nykaa has 500 units of evil eye jewellery from brands such as Pipa Bella, Outhouse and Joker & Witch. A brand spokesperson says that the trend peaked in April 2020 when global celebrities like Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle, singer Gigi Hadid and model Zayn Malik were spotted wearing evil eye accessories, "resulting in the segment witnessing a considerable increase in sales".

A Mynta spokesperson says demand for evil eye jewellery has gone up by 35% over last

year. They have scaled up the selection by about 70% from last year.

Mamta Gupta, founder of Delhi-based jewellery brand Zariin, says she plans to incorporate evil eye designs in her 2024 collection.

SOCIAL CONVERSATIONS

Recently, Mumbai-based Lavina, who does not want to reveal her last name, posted a photo with her spouse on Instagram Stories, adding an evil eye emoji for good measure. "It was to protect our togetherness and love," she says. "I have heard from friends that when they post a pretty picture of themselves and they receive compliments, they fall sick soon after. I am taking precautions while posting a photo, because we never know what kind of energy the person looking at it has," she says.

The evil eye emoji has become ubiquitous in social media conversations, contributing to its productification by brands. According to an analysis done for ET by WeDig, digital intelligence unit of Quantum Consumer Solutions, a market research and insight consulting firm, India was the second highest user of the nazar emoji, after Turkey, between October 2022 and October 2023, featuring in 7.2 million conversations across X and Instagram.

This analysis reveals that the emoji is most frequently used in conversations on aspirations and celebrities as well as in posts conveying good luck, blessings and support. Vartika Hali, partner, Quantum Consumer Solutions, says the evil eye is being increasingly stripped of its negativity and used in a positive context online. "All the words that come up with it are positive. It is not so much about warding off the evil eye—while that aspect is there, I'm also seeing a big shift to it becoming expressively positive," says Hali. That is like warding off the evil eye.

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Shephali Bhatt

Riya Ramu credits GPay for saving her friendship. "Recently, I had blocked a friend across social media and messaging apps over some differences," says the marketing professional from Mumbai. Unable to approach Ramu via any other digital platform, her friend finally reached out to her on the Google-owned mobile payments app, asking to reconcile. GPay isn't typically seen as a communication tool, so it hadn't occurred to Ramu to block her friend there as well. She was amused by her friend's ingenuity and moved by their effort to reconnect.

On another occasion, she used GPay's chat interface to communicate with a fellow passenger she had met on a flight. "I had lost my wallet in the airport and they lent me some cash, which I promptly returned via the app." Later, she messaged them on GPay to share that the airport authorities had found her wallet. Who would have thought that an app focused on transactions could mend and forge human connections?

Besides using GPay as an unintentional chat app, Ramu also uses Pinterest's messaging feature to share and discuss images she likes on the visual bookmarking site. "Wherever there is shareable content, having a messaging interface helps to have seamless conversations without leaving the platform," she says.

WhatsApp is the undisputed leader of messaging apps, with over 535 million monthly active users in India, and more than 2.7 billion worldwide. Lately, though, instead of relying on WhatsApp alone, people are using all kinds of apps that have a chatting interface for some form of communication, even though that's not the platform's primary offering. This trend signifies a shift from calling to texting culture, compelling internet platforms and brands to prioritise enhancing their messaging interfaces, all the while raising questions on the future of digital messaging.

WHAT'S UP WITH WHATSAPP?
The shift has happened partly because WhatsApp has stopped being the perfect messaging app it once was. Meta, its parent company, has been pushing businesses to onboard its ad solutions platform, WhatsApp Business, to monetise the app that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg bought for \$19 billion in 2014.

In Q1 2023, paid messaging [by businesses] on WhatsApp grew by 40% quarter-on-quarter, Zuckerberg said in an earnings call in April. By June, WhatsApp Business reached 200 million monthly active users worldwide. In India, "businesses send 6 to 60 lakh messages to

growth of people engaging with businesses in India. Last earnings, Zuckerberg noted that every week, more than 60% people on WhatsApp in India message a business app account. Daily conversations between people and businesses more than doubled in India since last year," the spokesperson adds.

Users express certain concerns. "WhatsApp feels like a chaotic blend of various elements, with everyone from your family, friend circle and work life interacting with you via the same app," says Kashvi Parekh, 21, a community lead at World of Women, a digital membership club for art, tech and culture based on blockchain. "My communication landscape comprises 60% Instagram DMs (direct messages)," she adds. "I like that I can sort my conversations into Primary and General categories on Insta." She even uses the mes-

sage other apps, says Shaheena Attarwala, a product designer. "On WhatsApp, you need to make that decision to message someone and often there is an awkward start to it. On platforms like Instagram, you can break the ice with people who might not even be in your inner circle by just liking or commenting on their posts." WhatsApp is a pure-play communication tool, whereas unintentional messaging apps like Instagram add nudges to conversations and help one reconect organically, she adds.

Further, people expect real-time responses on WhatsApp because work often spills into that inbox. Nikhil Taneja recently updated his WhatsApp status to inform his contacts that he is not very active on the app anymore. "I

HOW CHAT APPS DRAW POWER

Median Resource Usage of Messenger Apps on Android Devices

App	Power Draw (in microwatts)	Bandwidth (in bytes per second)	RAM (in megabytes)
Facebook Messenger	21,282	9	189
WhatsApp	3,988	10	128
Viber	756	10	183
Telegram	568	25	91

Source: decentim.grafana.net, discussed on Hacker News (Y Combinator)

A study by a software developer, Andriy Utkin, shows that Facebook Messenger uses 5x-6x more power than WhatsApp on Android devices

LESS TIME ON WHATSAPP

Avg Time Spent on WhatsApp Per Month is Falling Globally

2022: 17.3 hrs a month
2021: 18.6 hrs a month
2020: 19.0 hrs a month

Source: Verloop.io, datareportal.com

WHY ARE APPS SO CHATTY THESE DAYS?

- WhatsApp is cluttered with spam
- People preferring text over call
- Rising acceptability of asynchronous communication
- Open-source availability of messaging app infrastructure

THE GOOD SIDE

- Compartmentalised communication
- Companies building better chat interfaces for customer care

THE BAD SIDE

- Unintentional messenger apps may not have end-to-end encryption
- It will be hard to keep track of communication history in such apps

Source: Industry stakeholders

an open-source network. A study by a software developer, Andriy Utkin, shows that Facebook Messenger still uses 5x-6x more power than WhatsApp on Android devices. The study, not without its fair share of criticisms, was widely discussed on Hacker News, a Y Combinator news website.

There are surveillance concerns, too. "If it's not a core messaging app, it may not be obliged to ensure the privacy of your chats," says Prateek Waghre, policy director at Internet Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit that advocates for free and open internet.

"If the chatting interface does not have end-to-end encryption, it means your

APPS GO YACKETY YAK

Almost every app is a chat app now. From Instagram to GPay, most of them are seeing a high usage of their chatting interface even if that's not their main offering. What has been the impact of this shift?

users in says an ex-analytical platform's a day," executive at an company that tracks business performance. "Some international companies have started sending OTPs (one-time-passwords) on WhatsApp as well, as it costs them one-third the price of sending OTPs via SMSes," says the executive quoted above who wishes to remain anonymous.

WhatsApp's usage has fallen. The average time a user spends on it has gone down from 19 hours a month in 2020 to 18.6 in 2021 to 17.3 in 2022, as per global data on Verloop.io, a customer support automation platform, and analytics site datareportal.com. But they do not pin this fall on spamming messages. Verloop attributes it to "mobile usage patterns moderating following the abrupt surge seen during the pandemic".

The open rate for business messages on WhatsApp has also fallen from 94% to 83% in the last two years, says the anonymous executive at the analytics company. Open rate is the share of recipients who open a message out of the total recipients it is sent to. However, a Meta spokesperson says in an emailed response to ET that the opening rates mentioned are still "well above standards for the industry and would be considered highly successful". "We continue to see the

This trend of people using all kinds of apps for some form of communication signifies a shift from calling to texting culture, compelling internet platforms and brands to prioritise enhancing their messaging interfaces

HEARTING INSTA DM Ankit Kumar, 25, a growth consultant from Bengaluru, finds Instagram DMs convenient to keep in touch with people: "I can connect with friends just by sharing memes and reacting to the ones they sent." He prefers Instagram and Twitter to make new connections as they eliminate the need for phone numbers. "It's easier to ask for someone's social media handle," he adds.

Conversations via WhatsApp tend to be more intentional than in

wrote it because due to work messages and spam, I was missing out on some of my friends' messages there. People feel entitled to your time on WhatsApp and label you as rude if you don't reply as soon as you have seen the message. I believe we should have the power to choose when we reply," says Taneja, cofounder of Yuva, a platform for youth. He has made Insta his main chat app as asynchronous communication is the expected norm there.

"On Instagram, the role of DMs has evolved," a Meta spokesperson tells ET on email. "While it continues to be a space for transparent, honest and direct communication, it is also a space for larger friends' groups, and for connecting with brands."

Earlier this year, Instagram introduced 'Quiet mode,' which disables notifications and notifies senders that the recipient hasn't been informed about their DM. The app also enables you to send messages without notifying friends late at night or when they are busy, by adding "@silent" in the message. In July, Instagram's head, Adam

notes, Instagram and WhatsApp both allow disappearing messages. WhatsApp is also reportedly working on launching a feature called 'Alternate Profile' that will allow users to separate their personal and professional avatars on the app.

"While social media platforms are working harder towards making their chat experiences superior to the competition, the rest of the companies are trying to leverage their own offerings as a feature through chat," says Prasanna Venkatesh, director of design at a consumer internet company in Bengaluru. "Companies are realising the value of conversational experiences in the digital world."

Now, customer care issues for certain food delivery, telecom and ecommerce apps, as well as booking confirmation for certain hyperlocal services are all accomplished through messaging interfaces. Certain airlines also handle booking changes by redirecting to a messaging app to take the transaction forward.

Building a smooth chat experience is challenging although the messaging infrastructure is available on

Insta head Adam Mosseri says teens favour DMs over stories and the feed. He has redirected resources to develop messaging tools, even transitioning the Instagram Stories team to focus on DMs

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Social Experiment

India's social stock exchanges will see more listings and tweaks following the debut listing by nonprofit Unnati

Being the first one to try out something in a new domain can give the risk-taker a first-mover advantage. However, Ramesh Swamy, director of Bengaluru-headquartered not-for-profit SGBS Unnati Foundation, jokes that they had to overcome the "first-mover disadvantage".

Unnati, which works on skilling underprivileged youth to increase their employability, is set to be the first NGO to list on India's new social stock exchange (SSE) later this month, following its zero-coupon, zero-principal (ZCP) bond issue that opened on October 30. But with everything around it being so new, challenges were aplenty. "When I approached the Registrar of Companies and said I needed to file a particular form, they asked me what a social stock exchange was," he laughs. The last date for the ₹2 crore issue was originally November 7 but has been extended to November 22. Director AS Narayanan says this was to ensure the issue will be fully subscribed. "We are sure it will be—it's just a matter of time," he says. Swamy, too, is optimistic. "The (stock) exchanges have been extremely proactive. It's a work in progress but it was important that this happens now since the SSE was announced in 2019."

Four years ago, in the July 2019 Budget, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed setting up an electronic fund-raising platform "under the regulatory ambit of Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi)" for list-

HELLO, RETAIL DONORS

A social stock exchange is a platform for profit social enterprises and/or not-for-profit organisations, which aim for social impact, to raise capital. Countries like Canada and the UK have experimented with various models of SSE. "If you look at the journey of SSE, several emerged over the last few years, but most have gone," says Balasubramanian, who feels India can learn from others' mistakes. While it took time to get the initiative off the

ground in India, Balasubramanian, founder of the nonprofit Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement, says he is confident of its success for

multiple reasons, including government support, a more mature ecosystem and factors like a fund to build capacity for the new process.

A nonprofit wishing to list on a social bourse needs to first register with it and meet a host of criteria, make annual disclosures and produce extensive documentation, just as a company planning an IPO would. This includes a detailed fund-raise document with financial statements, risks, social impact strategy to its vision.

To move

funds on an SSE, NGOs can currently issue zero-coupon, zero-principal bonds, instruments which will not give you interest or return the principal and are essentially like a donation. Other instruments like mutual funds have also been recommended. Both NGOs and for-profit social enterprises will have to go through annual social audits to gauge impact. Gupta says while the exchanges are meant for both NGOs and social enterprises, the bulk of interest is from the former. "The regulations began to be issued from July 2022. Since then, scores of NGOs have come forward and shown interest but very few social enterprises." At the end of August, 31 nonprofits had registered with both exchanges.

Currently, nonprofits raise money largely from philanthropic foundations, high net-worth individuals, corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds of companies and foreign donations, though the current Union govern-

ment has considerably tightened the rules around the last. One aim of launching a social stock exchange is to increase fund-raising avenues by including more individual, or "retail", donors. "Retail giving continues to be vastly untapped in India and is largely informal, such as donations to religious institutions or to the needy one knows. I feel this will bring in a larger pool of donors to the sector," says Pushpa Aman Singh, founder of the NGO repository GuideStar India and member of Sebi's advisory committee for SSE. The India Philanthropy Report 2023 by Bain & Company and Darsa estimates that only 22% of the contribution value of retail giving in India is from formal giving.

The hope is that the extensive documentation and criteria that listing entails will attract more donors by increasing transparency and accountability. "We work with lakhs of donors on the GiveIndia platform. One of the biggest concerns we hear all the time is around trust: how can we trust that the money we are giving will be fully utilised and create the impact it claims?" says Atul Satija, CEO, GiveIndia, an online donation platform. "This is a huge problem and needs a lot of attention so I, personally, feel social stock exchanges are a welcome move."

By having a broader donor base, the idea is that the influence of an individual with disproportionate capital on the development paradigm will be limited, says Vineet Rai, founder, Aavishkaar group, and member of the first working group on social stock ex-

changes. "Concentrated funding by a philanthropist or foreign donor can make a nonprofit organisation prone to their influence and could go against the national interest—that was the thought process."

To appeal to a wider base and simplify the process, various changes are under consideration, such as giving tax exemption to the purchase of bonds, reducing the minimum application size from ₹2 lakh to ₹10 lakh, reducing the minimum issue size from ₹1 crore and allowing CSR funds to participate. To reduce the cost of application for NGOs, money from the capacity utilisation fund could be used. Says Unnati's Swamy: "I was fortunate that the law firm Trilegal and the financial advisory firm Unitus Capital offered their services pro bono for the issue. Otherwise, that would have cost me at least ₹10 lakh."

For Unnati, the bond issue is not just about raising funds, he says. "This gives NGOs a chance to say our governance and social impact are perfect, which is very powerful. I have been in this space since 2011, but donors still grill us about our credibility."

Being the first off the block, all eyes are on how the issue will perform. Unnati needs to raise at least 75% of ₹2 crore to avoid being under-subscribed. But even if this issue is a success, social stock exchanges will take time to become mainstream. GuideStar India's Singh says one should not worry if the inflection point takes 15-20 years as it is critical to get the architecture right.

Aavishkaar's Rai says it will take less time and predicts that adoption will follow a "J curve", wherein a novel idea takes a reasonable amount of time to get accepted, but once it does, finds success. "I don't expect the SSE to set everyone's imagination on fire for another two years. But in five, it will be one of the most acceptable ways for both domestic and foreign capital to engage with India's developmental thought process."

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SOCIAL STOCK EXCHANGES

► Social stock exchanges (SSE) in India are platforms that allow registered not-for-profit organisations (NPOs) and social enterprises to raise funds electronically via different instruments under a regulatory framework drawn up by Sebi. Rules include a social/impact audit and criteria for registration and listing

► Both BSE and NSE have set up social stock exchanges

► 31 NPOs registered with the two exchanges as on Aug 2023

► Make participation tax exempt under 80G

FIRST TO LIST ON SSE

SGBS UNNATI FOUNDATION

Subscription window: Oct 30 to Nov 22, 2023

Size: ₹2 crore

Purpose: Skilling of 10,000 final-year undergraduate students in govt colleges

Instrument: Zero-coupon, zero-principal bonds. These cannot be traded, will not pay interest or principal, are akin to donations

Retail giving is still vastly untapped in India. Social stock exchanges will bring in a much wider pool of donors

PUSHPA AMAN SINGH, CEO, GuideStar India

Kudos to Unnati for going through the pains of the initial process. We have several more (listings) in the pipeline!

HEMANT GUPTA, head, BSE SSE

HEMANT GUPTA, head, BSE SSE

HEMANT GUPTA, head, BSE SSE

06

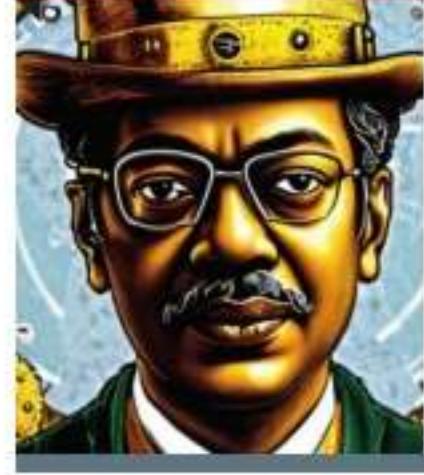
SUNDAY CHATTER

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

IN CASE YOU THOUGHT DIWALI IS JUST A DESI INDIAN FESTIVAL, WELL, THINK AGAIN

With Indians in positions of power across the world, and India growing in soft power, lighting up diyas on D Day is no longer confined to India and countries with a large Hindu population - Diwali is a trending global fest

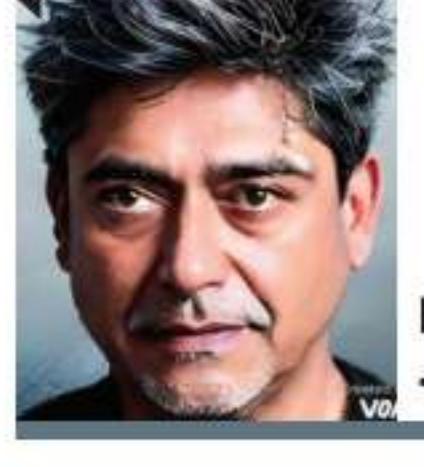
DATA CRUNCHER

ATANU
BISWAS

Today, I'm sure to receive Diwali greetings from one of my Malaysian co-authors. He has visited Kolkata several times and knows that Durga Puja is the primary Bengali celebration. Nevertheless, hailing from a country with a roughly 8% Indian-descendent population, he only greets me on Diwali. Perhaps because it's the foremost Indian festival.

Traditionally, countries like Singapore, Fiji, Nepal, and Mauritius also celebrate Diwali with the usual aplomb and lights.

NO FILTER

RUCHIR
JOSHI

What Sorcery is This? Old Monk With a New Label!

Did someone really have to 'update' the iconic label on the iconic bottle to make it, er, trendy?

Just as Akbar had his Navratnas, India has its select band of iconic products. These are brands that have not only grown along with our independent republic but also which have helped the country grow from its inception and brought it through to the awkward but functional behemoth we are today.

Now, imagine that you manage one such product that is the equivalent of Parle Glucose, Lifebuoy, or Bata. Imagine you are responsible for the IMFL counterpart of the Hindustan Ambassador: Old Monk. The ubiquitous bottle and the rum inside have had currency and agency from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, bringing succour and joy to tipplers from Kutch to Kohima.

Yes, we know that just as some of the other Navratna brands started as British products, first making their mark in the subcontinent during the last decades of the British Raj before finding their commercial wings in a newly independent India, so did Old Monk – selling a version of rum in a copycat version of a British bottle design.

Just as the Morris Oxford flopped in Britain before becoming the legendary workhorse of Apna Desh in the shape of the Ambassador, so also did the unpretentious, hangover-free quality of your harsh but friendly pirate-potion win over lakhs of grateful customers.

Its almost monopolistic market share decreased as pretenders joined the battle. But over the decades, it retained a loyal core of customers. It didn't matter if we could now afford much more expensive imported stuff. It didn't matter that we had ourselves visited the Caribbean and tasted ojinal rum. It didn't matter that one of the biggest American brands selling variations of that liquor descended on India with a tsunami of ad campaigns.

For those of us who love our brand of firewater, nothing else would quite do. Eventually, after far too long, the iconic Old Monk bottle began to rub glass shoulders with other famous brands in trendy, knowledgeably stocked bars abroad. In the meantime, supplies of Old Monk would mysteriously dry up in the local liquor shops, while other much inferior wannabes tried to take its place. And then, your 'distribution people' would fight back and the precious supply would break through the competition blockade.

All this is well-known about the legendary Old Monk brand. But I repeat all this in case you're new to the team – or if you've forgotten, I'm repeating this before asking you what I must. What possessed you? Was it, as ever, the fault of marketing? If not, then whose bright idea was it to change the label on the Old Monk bottle?? Which genius thought this up, and which other geniuses bought it?

Did some bright spark, newly joined from What-on-Earth Bizness Skool suggest it?

First was the problem, the 'asmanjass', the dilemma. Let's call it the Ancient Ascetic's Bind: 'Our brand is getting old and yet the damn bottle has such great recognition we can't afford to tamper with it.' After much wrangling and brain-typothing came the solution: 'Listen, let's stick to the same old bottle, ok? Also, let's not mess with the product inside the bottle.' We get you, continue. 'But... let's change the label to a brighter colour and claim it's an improved, smoother version of the old Old Monk!'

And thus, some of us had to experience the nasty double jolt – triple, actually. First, the familiar black label on the bottle was gone, replaced by something that looked like a famous German football team had bought the brand. Second, there was the threat, the sinking of heart, because they claimed to have fixed that something which wasn't broken. Third, you paid a higher price than you've ever paid.

Oh, there's a fourth, however not a jolt, but relief: you're thankfully drinking old 'wine' from an old bottle with a new label. Duh.

The writer is author of *The Last Jet-Engine Laugh*

But of late, this de-lightful Indian festival has expanded its footprint by solidifying the Indian identity globally.

Perhaps, the brightest spotlight ever shone on Diwali in the US was the 2006 episode, 'Diwali', of the iconic Steve Carell-starring sitcom, The Office, based on the British original with the same name. Being watched live by 8.8 million viewers helps to push a cause – in this case, a festival. That episode singlehandedly played a big role in bringing Diwali to mainstream American attention – although Carell's character did call Diwali the 'Hindu Halloween' in the episode.

Fifteen years later, an episode revolving around Diwali of the American comedy-drama TV series And Just Like That, a 2021 reboot of the cult classic, Sex and the City, demonstrated how the Indian festival of lights has illuminated America. Sarah Jessica Parker went Diwali-shopping while donning a lehenga – again, nevermind that she called it a saree.

So, is Diwali a global festival now? Possibly, yes. India's growing soft power has much to do with that. And even more so



From George W to the present POTUS, White House's non-Hindu First Residents have been regularly lighting Diwali diyas

federal holiday has now been presented in the US Congress.

Remember, Obama visited Mumbai on Diwali in 2010. After lighting the first-ever diya in the Oval Office in 2016, he remarked, 'Michelle and I will never forget how the people of India welcomed us with open arms and hands and danced with us in Mumbai on Diwali.' Deep-wali was no longer a quaint religious observation, but a calendar festival in the US.

A vibrant Diwali celebration has been held at New York's Times Square since 2013. As Diwali is a public school holiday in New York City effective from this year, mayor Eric Adams expressed Diwali pride. Meanwhile, across the pond, during this Diwali celebrations, London's Pakistani-origin mayor Sadiq Khan has even encouraged Bollywood to remake 'Amar Akbar Anthony' set in Britain, hinting at Sunak and Amar himself as Akbar and King Charles as Anthony.

Britain may have its first-ever Indian-origin PM. But Gordon Brown began giving 10

Downing Street a festive twist with diyas in 2009. With a 3.1% Indian diaspora, Diwali is part of British 'national life', as then PM Theresa May observed in 2016.

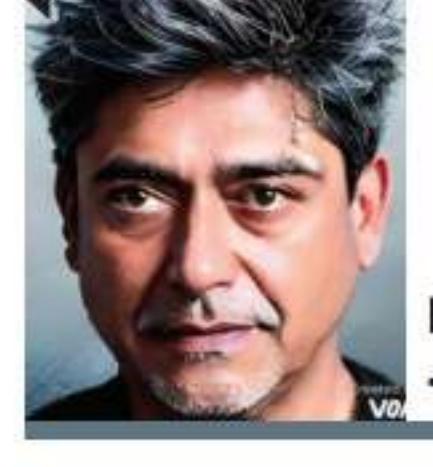
And then, there's Canada. Considering that almost 5% of Canadians are of Indian descent, Canadian Diwali should be equally enlightening. Well, after becoming PM in 2015, in a first-of-its-kind event, Justin Trudeau visited a Hindu temple and a gurdwara in Ottawa to celebrate Diwali with the Indo-Canadian community.

Unfortunately, it looks like Trudeau has a bizarre history of reading Indian culture and the Indian mindset. He tweeted 'Diwali Mubarak' in 2017, accompanied by a photo of himself lighting a lamp in a black shawl. He was widely mocked. Perhaps, it would be wise, especially today, to change it to 'Happy Diwali'.

Wishing all of you, wherever you may be across the world, a very happy Diwali.

The writer is professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), Kolkata

RED HERRING

INDRAJIT
HAZRA

Diwali Resolution: Try again. Fail again. Fail better

Targets - \$5 tril economy by 2027, developed country by 2047, ₹45 cr in the bank by 2061 - how are they thought up? Who'll hold whom accountable?

RED HERRING



For the last decade or so, as part of a larger personal decolonisation mission – it's not quite IBS (irritable bowel syndrome), but the problem does lie in the colon – I have been making not New Year resolutions, but Diwali resolutions. Well, Kali Puja resolutions, to be precise. But why quibble?

Bringing my letter of intent to myself forward by some two months bears some distinct advantages. For one, November seems like an easier time to tell myself that I'll, say, stop smoking by the start of the new year, than commit to it on the first day of the new year. In November, very few people hold you to your word.

Also, if I do stop the filthy habit in a smoky, grimy, dirty town from today on Diwali, and manage to stick to it till January 1, at least I'll be seen as being resolute for those one-and-a-half months, rather than be seen making a promise on January 1 and succumbing within a few weeks.

The issue of making resolutions

is tied up to another matter – targets. In marketing, you have something called SOM: serviceable obtainable market. A business identifies a group of customers within its market and uses its resources to win them over. One's SOM rasa essentially resolves to win this group over.

SOMs are tricky. Once you've identified a target, if you meet it by the stipulated time, well and good. But what happens when you don't? When do you decide to cut your losses? Which is why time-bound resolutions help.

As far as resolutions go, India's Five-Year Plans were a good exam-

ple of what Samuel Beckett had set out as advice in his 1983 novel, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*: 'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.'

By 1978, with the Janata Party government becoming the first non-Congress government at the Centre, it rejected what was the Fifth Five-Year Plan, and introduced its own Sixth Five-Year Plan. That's somewhat like you making a resolution to lose 10 kg in six months, and then, someone taking over your body in the second month and re-resolving to put on 4 kg in the next four months. But by the time Congress return-

ed to power in 1980, the new government scrapped the Janata Sixth Five-Year Plan and brought in its own 65YP.

What followed was what became (euphemistically) known as Rolling Plans – with targets revised every year to the tune of '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction'. The good thing about shifting goalposts so rapidly was that failure was always averted. And if not averted, then things were seen as 'failing better', Beckett-style.

One problem with rolling plans/ shifting targets, though, was that any policy action would become notoriously difficult to be undertaken.

If you're planning to make four sales by Friday, but then de-

mark in 2026-27. Ergo, the advent of longer targets. In 2023, India aims to become a 'developed country' by 2047. That's 24 years from now – if all goes hunky-dory, five general election cycles. Who's going to hold whom accountable then if India stays a 'developing' country? How are these resolutions made? Who will, in 2070, say, 'Can you please get those chaps who said that India will be net-zero by this year explain what happened?'

Which is why this Diwali, as I make a resolution to somehow have ₹20 crore in my bank account by 2061 – I'll be 90 then, so actually make it ₹45 crore – I'm not breaking into nervous sweat.

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MORAL OF THE STORY: KEEP MOVING THE TARGET

Our Lather Who Art in Heaven: A Soap Opera

A Margo loyalist reminiscences when bars were square, yet hip, and ads did the choosing

ON THE LEDGE

PALASH
KRISHNA
MEHROTRA

There's a reel doing the rounds on Instagram in which Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi are, in separate occasions, asked about their skincare regime. The audiences are different, but the question is the same: What's the secret behind your glowing face?

Last month, speaking in an interaction with students from Jai-pur's Maharanji College, Gandhi is seen saying that he uses nothing – no soap, no cream, only water.

Modi, when asked the same question in a 2020 interaction with Rashtriya Bal Puraskar winners, attributes his facial glow to the oil of til: 'Mehmat ke paseene ki malah se.' Frankly, it's unlikely that both men have never used soap.

In economics class, we were taught that goods are divided into three categories: necessity, comfort, and luxury. Back in the 1980s, a soap bar was all three rolled into one. Those were the days before facewash, body wash or shower gel became a thing. The entire family used the same bar. The cost was a factor. The bar was used until it became a sliver and ultimately vanished into the thin, wet air between one's palms.

What India wanted in a soap was best encapsulated in the TVC for Vigil, featuring Dilip Vengsarkar. The jingle spelt it out: 'Parivaar ka saabun Vigil', 'Iski keemat kuch bhi nahin' (₹2.75), and 'Zyada din tak chaleye Vigil' (a soap for the entire family, which fits your budget and lasts and lasts). The commercial had a slippery moment that required suspension of disbelief: father and son lathering each other and frolicking in a porce-

lain bathtub. All we middle-class families (the target consumers) had was the plastic bucket or the metal pail. But buckets are not sexy.

A new soap was an object of beauty. I'd open the packaging like I was opening a fragile envelope. I'd run my fingers over the embossed brand name as if it were a crown. Wait, there was a soap called Crowning Glory – a 'beauty' soap. Soaps were divided into two categories: beauty and 'tandurusti'. Lux ('The beauty soap of filmstars') was the former, while Vigil and Lifebuoy ('Tandurusti ki raksha karta hai Lifebuoy') promised robust health.

Our bathrooms didn't have a bidet or hand-held toilet sprayers. (TP? What's that?) Lifebuoy, launched in India in 1922, took care of the matter in hand.

Come to think of it, I see parallels between soap and car design. Both used to be hard rectangles. Remember Hamam? Gradually, they developed rounded edges, although contemporary Cinthol still likes to keep it retro. Soap commercials were the stuff of urban legend. In school, we gos-

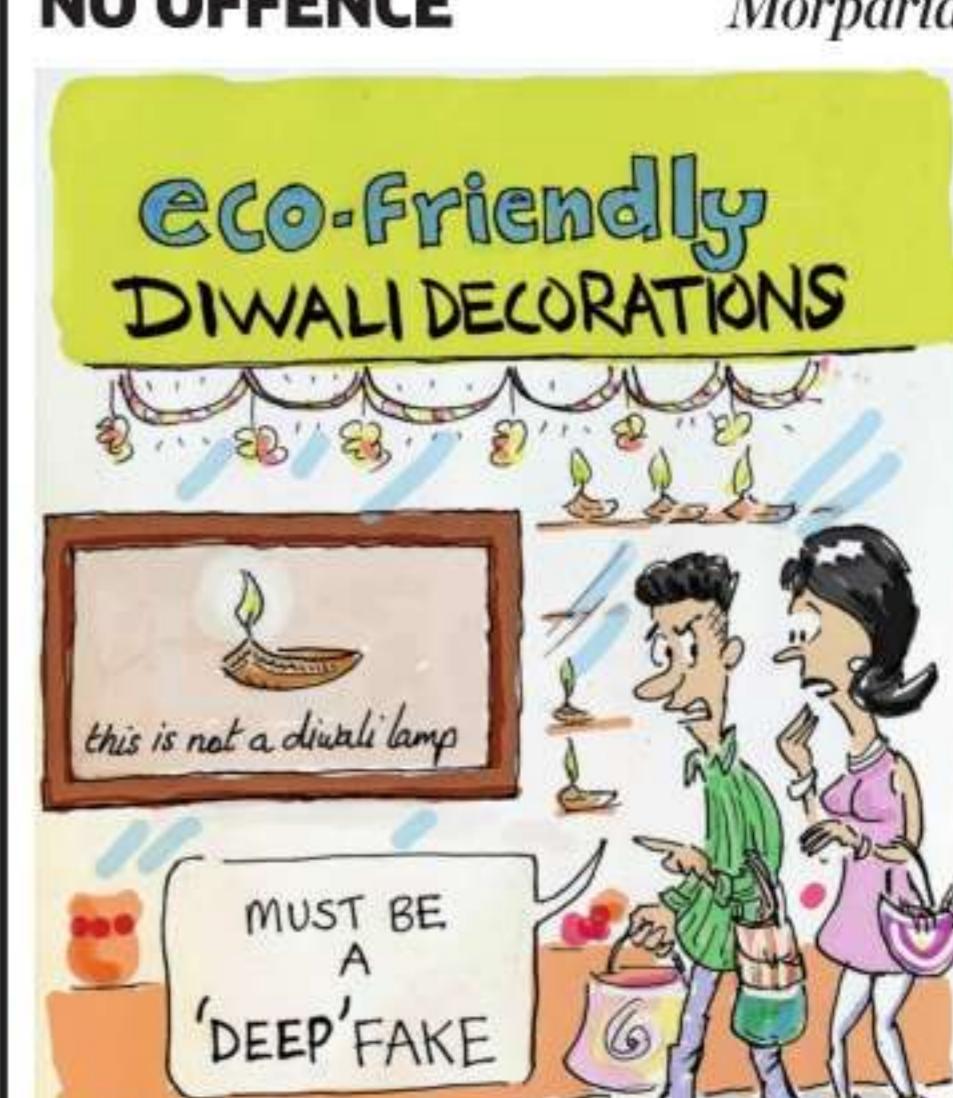
Soap ads made for urban legend. We gossiped how the Liril girl had slipped and died (she hadn't)

*The writer is author of *The Butterly Generation: A Personal Journey into the Passions and Follies of India's Technicolor Youth**



FROM BEAUTY TO TANDURUSTI

NO OFFENCE



Morparia

claim that explicit Palestinian symbols get the side-eye from US-based platforms, making the watermelon a stealthy solidarity messenger.

Don't tell me that savvy folks on social media came up with the ingenious idea

Of course, not. The roots of this fruity solidarity symbol trace back to a resistance period in 1987-1993, or so the tales go. Yet, two Palestinian bloggers argue that there's no mention of this practice in the literature of that time. While some references note people using watermelons as an illustration of the prohibited colour combination, there's no substantial evidence of the widespread use of watermelons as a political statement or as a stand-in for the Palestinian flag.

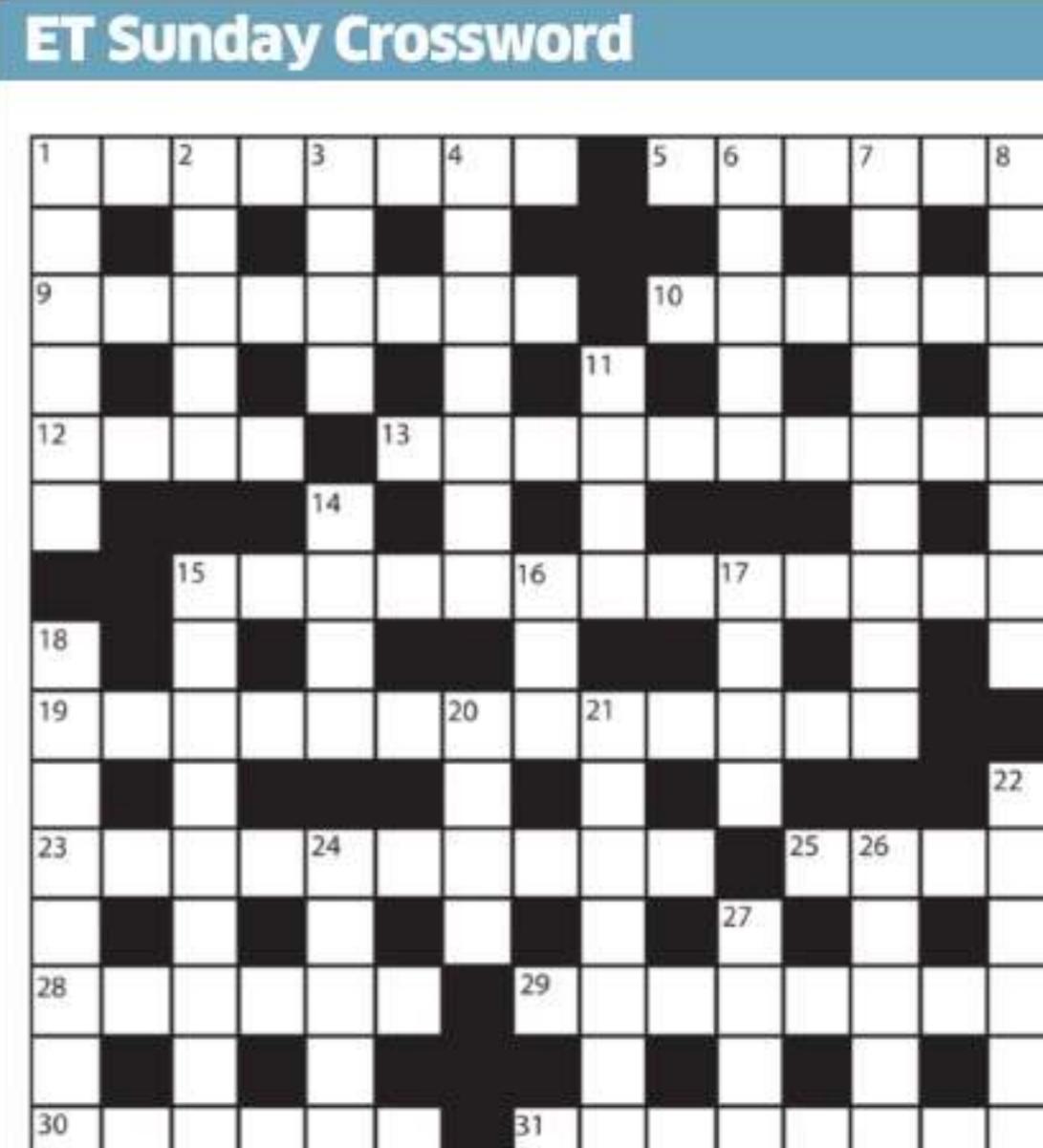
So, the origins seem to be a bit fuzzy, eh?

Yes, but one thing is for sure: artists and Palestine supporters continue to ride the watermelon wave.

Text: Apoorva Mittal

ET Sunday Crossword

0037



brought up (8)

DOWN

1 Cool river, small but ideal for these animals (6)

2 Topic of article on Middle East (5)

3 Girl left foot (4)

4 Drink more after training top man (7)

6 Relative measure in operation (5)

7 Powerless radio amateur sort of grants (9)

8 Star forgets his words and miscellaneous items (8)

11 High-flier's equipment on summit of Everest (4)

14 Metal discovered in quartz in Cairngorms (4)

15 Little red flower was literally elusive (9)

16 Energy supplier cut harbour off (3)

17 Girl from Dublin's divorced husband (4)

18 Very refined but ghostly tale about this place (8)</

Actors' Union Okays Deal to End Strike

NEW YORK: Board members from Hollywood's actors union voted on Friday to approve the deal with studios that ended their strike after nearly four months, with the union's leadership touting the gains made in weeks of methodical negotiations. Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists' executive director and chief negotiator, announced at an afternoon news conference that the tentative agreement was approved with 86% of the vote. Ireland said the deal "will keep the motion picture industry sustainable". -AP

MS Chief: Russia is Spreading Disinformation

PARIS: Russia has been spreading "disinformation" about the situation in the Middle East, the president of Microsoft said on Saturday, as tensions soar in the region due to the Israel-Hamas war. Brad Smith, Microsoft vice chair and president, was asked about the role of the US tech giant in promoting peace at an international peace forum in Paris. He said that Microsoft and its competitors were fighting against disinformation, in particular by using AI. Smith said that Microsoft and other companies are doing this "by creating technological tools that facilitate the detection of manipulated, modified, altered content," according to remarks translated in French by radio France Inter. -AP

Gender-diverse Workforce

► From Page 1

This helps them grow and induct talent based on skill requirements to cater to their growth plans.

These apprentices are imparted on-the-job training and dexterity skills, mostly over a period of three years in partnership with an academic or skill institute. Average stipend is ₹13,000-15,000 per month for the first one year, which may increase depending on the potential.

Company executives said women bring a diverse and varied set of skills to the highly male-dominated shop floors.

"Women bring about more dynamism with their varying perspectives and backgrounds," said Rakesh Uppal, an executive board member (HR and IT) at Maruti Suzuki. The country's largest carmaker is formulating a strategic proposal to expand its women apprentice pool to drive expansion plans, he said.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

It engages more than 3,000 fresh apprentices from ITIs (Industrial Training Institutes) a year, Uppal said. The company has also signed a flexi MoU with the government to upskill nearly 2,300 students every year with vocational training at its factories.

Maruti places women apprentices across different business verticals including vehicle inspection and parts and accessories.

Rival carmaker MG Motors has an MoU with Kaushalya, a skill university in Gujarat, and has set a target of upskilling 100,000 students. The company aims to be 50% gender diverse, Yeshwinder Patial, senior director HR at MG Motors India, said. "A gender diverse workforce adds tremendous value in bringing in different ideas, innovations, and solutions to the workplace," he said.

EXPANDING TALENT POOL

Leading auto component manufacturer Lumax conducts dedicated drives at diploma colleges to hire women apprentices. "We expect to have at least 30-35% women on the shop floor in the next 2-3 years," Lumax managing director Dipak Jain said. The apprentices are given dexterity training to have a safe working environment on the shop floor, he said. At renewable energy firm ReNew, 34% of the apprentice pool is women. "Given the dearth of women in the renewable manufacturing value chain, our talent philosophy is focussing on 'growing our own timber,'" said Vaishali Nigam Sinha, cofounder and chairperson sustainability of ReNew.

ISLAMIC-ARAB SUMMIT

Summit on Gaza Calls for Immediate End to War

Leaders of Iran, Türkiye, Qatar and Syria attended the meeting in Riyadh

Reuters

Riyadh: Saudi Arabia and Muslim countries called on Saturday for an immediate end to military operations in Gaza, declaring at a joint Islamic-Arab summit in Riyadh that Israel bears responsibility for "crimes" against Palestinians. The meeting roundly condemned Israel's actions in its war, as fears mount the conflict could draw in other countries.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, gathered Arab and Muslim leaders for the summit as the kingdom has sought to exert its influence to press the US and Israel for an end to hostilities in Gaza.

Dozens of leaders, including Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who was welcomed back into the Arab League earlier this year, attended the meeting. Prince Mohammed



Deputy governor of Riyadh Region Prince Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz (R) with Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi in Riyadh.

Designate Israel Army 'Terrorist Organisation', Says Iran Prez

AFP

Riyadh: Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi called on Saturday on Islamic governments to designate Israel's military a "terrorist organisation", citing its current operations in the Gaza Strip. "Islamic governments should designate the army of the occupying and aggressor regime as a terrorist organisation," Raisi told a summit of Arab and Muslim leaders in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

The emergency meeting of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) comes after Hamas militants' bloody October 7 attacks that Israeli officials say left about 1,200 people dead, mostly civilians, and some 240 taken hostage.

We are facing a humanitarian catastrophe that proves the failure of the Security Council and the international community to put an end to the flagrant Israeli violations of international laws'

SAUDI CROWN PRINCE MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN

said the kingdom affirms its "condemnation and categorical rejection of this barbaric war against our brothers in Palestine". "We are facing a humanitarian catastrophe that proves the failure of the Security Council and the international community to put an end to the flagrant Israeli violations of interna-

tional laws," he said. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said Palestinians are facing a "genocidal war" and called on the US to end Israeli "aggression". As he headed to Riyadh, Raisi said it was time for action rather than talk. Iran's semi-official Tasnim news site said Raisi will propose that Muslim countries ban Israel from using their air-space and prevent the US from shipping weapons to Israel from its military bases in the region.

SAUDI CROWN PRINCE MOHAMMED BIN SALMAN

Western Allies Express Alarm Over Israel's Tactics

PM Netanyahu says the responsibility for any harm to civilians lies with Hamas, militant group uses civilians in Gaza as human shields

AP

Deir Al-Balah, Gaza Strip: Israel's prime minister pushed back on Saturday against growing calls from Western allies to do more to protect Palestinian civilians, as troops closed in on Gaza's largest hospital that Israel claims is Hamas' main command post but still hosts thousands of patients and people seeking shelter.

Benjamin Netanyahu said the responsibility for any harm to civilians lies with Hamas, repeating long-standing allegations that the militant group uses civilians in Gaza as human



A woman and a child looking out from the window of a damaged building following Israeli bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Saturday.

shields. He said that while Israel has urged civilians to leave combat zones, "Hamas is doing everything it can to prevent them from leaving."

His statement came after French President Emmanuel Macron pushed for a cease-fire and urged other leaders to join his call, telling the BBC there was "no justification" for Israel's ongoing bombing.

Following Hamas' deadly October 7 attack on Israel, in which at least 1,200 people were killed, Israel's allies have defended the country's right to protect itself. But now into the second month

of war, there are growing differences in how many feel Israel should conduct its fight. The US has been pushing for temporary pauses that would allow for wider distribution of badly needed aid to civilians in the besieged territory where conditions are increasingly dire.

However, Israel has so far only agreed to brief daily periods during which civilians are able to flee the area of ground combat in northern Gaza. Since these evacuation windows were announced a week ago, over 150,000 civilians have fled the north, according to UN monitors.

Al Shifa Hospital Suspends Ops: Health Ministry

Reuters

Gaza: The spokesperson for the Gaza health ministry said that operations in Al Shifa hospital complex, the largest in the Palestinian enclave, were suspended on Saturday after it ran out of fuel.

"As a result, three babies died in the neonatal unit of Al-Shifa hospital, including a newborn baby died inside the incubator, where there are 45 babies," Ashraf Al-Qidra, the spokesman for the Health

Ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza said. Israel's military, which residents said had been fighting Hamas gunmen all night in and around Gaza City where the hospital is located, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. "The situation is worse than anyone can imagine. We are besieged inside the Al Shifa Medical Complex, and the occupation has targeted most of the buildings inside," Qidra said by telephone.

Meanwhile, a defence official said on Saturday that Israeli forces are not firing on Al Shifa hospital in Gaza City but there are clashes with Hamas militants around it. And added that people there can still leave the hospital safely. Colonel Moshe Tetro of COGAT said.

Three babies died in neonatal unit of the hospital, says the ministry

Muted Monetary Policy Response'

► From Page 1

"Although the absence of a significant rebound suggests there could be a persistent moderate impact beyond the initial shock," the agency said.

In its earlier report, Fitch had predicted India to grow 6.3% in FY24 and maintain 6.5% growth until FY28.

The agency had last week raised India's medium-term potential growth to 6.2% from 5.5%, but still said India is likely to grow slower than its pre-pandemic potential. Oil prices of the Indian crude basket rose to \$90.08 in October, compared



with \$83.76 at the start of the fiscal, but have since declined to \$85.55 in November.

"The monetary policy response is quite muted in this scenario because a supply-

side shock would increase price pressures through higher petrol prices and costs, but reduce demand from firms and households," Fitch said.

"Central banks would, all else being equal, look to increase policy rates to address higher inflation, but loosen policy in response to demand shortfalls." This would lead to slower rate cuts in the second half of 2024, it said.

RBI TO REMAIN CAUTIOUS The Reserve Bank of India held policy rate at 6.5% for the fourth consecutive time in its October meeting and is likely to do so for its De-

cember meeting as well.

But experts indicate that it may end up delaying its rate cut further if inflation stays high. "Within food, while the earlier Q3 surge in perishable food prices has corrected, pressures from non-perishable food prices persist," Barclays economists said in a report released on Saturday. "Even with the moderation in core inflation, we think the RBI is likely to remain cautious over a potential recurrence of supply shocks and their impact on inflation expectations, and thus keep rates on hold for longer, till at least Q3 2024," they said.

Recreational Activities

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At Noise, employees took part in recreational activities like games, stalls, quizzes and art exhibitions. The amount collected through these activities is being donated to a non-profit organisation working towards the welfare of children.

New-age companies are increasingly gravitating towards utilitarian gifts like electronic gadgets, high-end personalised accessories and wellness products as their top choices, said Uday Gutgutia, director-category, Ferns N Petals, which retails gifts including flowers and plants.

"These gifts not only add value to employees' lives but also effectively promote brand recognition and goodwill. Apart from traditional gifts, the personalised and sustainable gift hamper category is witnessing steep growth," Gutgutia said.

Feedback to be Submitted to IBA

► From Page 1

Under the DDPD Act, 2023, this type of data usage for cross-promotion is not allowed. Banks are in the process of submitting feedback to the government through the Indian Banks' Association (IBA), they added.

"Banks do a lot of cross-selling and upsell to customers based on the data they have, and this new law could limit those opportunities. It is simply not possible to take customer consent every time we use their data," said an executive director at a public sector bank.

It could also hinder banks from offering the best-suited products to customers. "The idea for the law should be to prevent misuse and bombardment of offers to customers but this could prove detrimental," he added.

Shalini Warrier, executive director at Federal Bank, said the industry will need to review and work through the impact. "The account aggregator

framework does provide banks like us the ability to use customer consented data in an effective manner, and we have to watch the impact, if any, on that framework," she said.

An account aggregator enables the sharing of data between individuals and financial institutions. Lenders can seamlessly review this information before providing a loan to an individual or an entity without having to source numerous documents from various sources.

Legal experts are of the view that the DDPD Act, 2023 has a lacuna in the way that it defines consent-based data processing. Akash Karmakar, partner at law firm Panag & Babu, noted that wherever there is no specific prohibition, there is permission to use personal data.

"This would naturally lead companies to draft terms in a broad-based manner so as to avoid having to repeatedly seek consent in a manner that disrupts commerce," he said.

Yellen to Intensify Communication with China's Vice Premier

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng are expected to intensify communication on economic issues but warned him to crack down on Chinese companies that give material support to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

Reuters

San Francisco: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Friday that she agreed with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng to "intensify communication" on economic issues but warned him to crack down on Chinese companies that give material support to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

The two "had candid, direct, and productive discussions" on issues from US export controls to possible areas of cooperation, including climate change and debt relief for low-income countries, Yellen said after a press conference after two days of meetings in San Francisco.

The two held talks before the November 15-17 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) gathering of leaders in San Francisco, which will feature a planned meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Yellen said that the Treasury has

Russia Renews Missile Attacks

Kyiv: Russia launched a missile attack on Ukraine's capital Kyiv and the nearby region for the first time in weeks on Saturday and pounded the east and south of the country with drones, Ukrainian officials said. Serhiy Popko, head of the Kyiv city military administration, said a Russian ballistic missile was launched toward the capital at about 0600 GMT. "After a long pause of 52 days, the enemy has resumed missile attacks on Kyiv," Popko said. — Reuters

seen evidence that Chinese companies and banks may be aiding in the flow of equipment for use in Russia's war in Ukraine despite Western sanctions, and warned He that these firms "will face significant consequences" if they do.

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

Discussing the Israel-Hamas war, Janet Yellen spoke of the need to prevent escalation and expansion of the conflict in the Middle East

Stopgap Spending Measure

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"Any type of significant policy response that we might be able to see to this declining fiscal strength probably wouldn't happen until 2025 because of the reality of the political calendar next year," William Foster, a senior vice president at Moody's, told Reuters in an interview.

Republicans, who control the US House of Representatives, expect to release a stopgap spending measure on Saturday aimed at averting a partial government shutdown by keeping federal agencies open when current funding expires next Friday.

Moody's is the last of the three major rating agencies to maintain a top rating for the U.S. government. Fitch changed its rating from triple-A to AA+ in August, joining S&P which had an AA+ rating since 2011.

While it changed its outlook, indicating a downgrade is possible over the medium term, Moody's affirmed its long-term issuer and senior unsecured ratings at 'AA' citing US credit and economic strengths.

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unitech

Public Notice for the Homebuyers of Unitech Group

1. It is hereby notified that the Hon'ble Supreme Court has, vide its Order dated 03rd November, 2023, (also available on the website of Unitech) permitted those homebuyers, who had earlier opted for 'Refund' on the Amicus portal, to change their options from 'Refund' to 'Possession' as a one-time measure by sending their particulars at the Company's dedicated email, latest by 15th December, 2023. Accordingly, the Company has created a dedicated email ID refundtopossession@unitechgroup.com for the purpose, on which the homebuyers may send their details. For further details, please refer to the Process Note dated 06.11.2023 uploaded on the website – www.unitechgroup.com.

2. The Homebuyers of various projects who had been given partial refunds and who wish to change their options from Refund to Possession

Less than a month after the Karnataka government announced the framework of its proposed fact-check units (FCUs), Tamil Nadu has followed suit. To combat misinformation, different state governments in the country are setting up FCUs. This is even as the central government notification under the IT Rules 2023 to set up an FCU was challenged by comedian Kunal Kamra, and is stayed until the Bombay High Court pronounces its judgment. The matter is listed for December 1 this year.

The decision to set up such units at the central and state government levels has been criticised, with many fearing that they might impede on freedom of speech and expression. But governments at both levels have contested these claims.

Darshan HV, Karnataka's director of the department of electronics, IT and biotechnology, made it clear that they want to "do something positive with respect to misinformation". "Even with so many misinformation tackling units working — private, non-profit and non-government organisations, there is still misinformation going on. That is why the government wants to take proactive steps," Darshan told *ET*.

But signatories to the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN), a community of fact checkers around the world, have expressed their inability to do so. IFCN signatory status is not granted to organisations whose editorial work is controlled by the state, a political party or politician, they said.

Jency Jacob, managing editor, BOOM, a fact-checking website and one of the first Indian organisations to be certified by the IFCN, told *ET*, "We have made our position very clear. We are not applying for the Karnataka government's information disorder tackling unit. It is very clear that no one is going to apply for it, because the IFCN code of principles don't allow them to."

"The IFCN remains committed to supporting fact checkers doing their work with thoroughness and independence, following the values of accuracy, non-partisanship and transparency," Angie D Holan, director, IFCN, added.

TWO SIDES OF THE DEBATE

The Government of Karnataka is serious about tackling misinformation, disinformation and fake news, state IT minister Priyank Kharge had said, in a post on X. An expression of interest has been floated for empanelment of agencies to set up an information disorder tackling unit for the government.

The expression of interest talks about a fact-verification team, which will consist of impartial fact-checking organisations chosen by the state government to detect and address false information.

But the fact checkers say setting up a body like this is self-contradictory. "This kind of a project has not been done by anyone. This is a first. There has never been a precedence, because it goes against the principles of what fact checking is all about — that it must be independent," Jacob said.

Kharge had said they had received 15 proposals for the fact-check unit, although the final number of applicants hasn't been revealed. But Jacob maintained that working with a government or political body is "untenable". "We can't work with a party or a government while running a fact check unit. That's not allowed under our code of principles, so there's no question of asking for concessions in the expression of interest," he said.

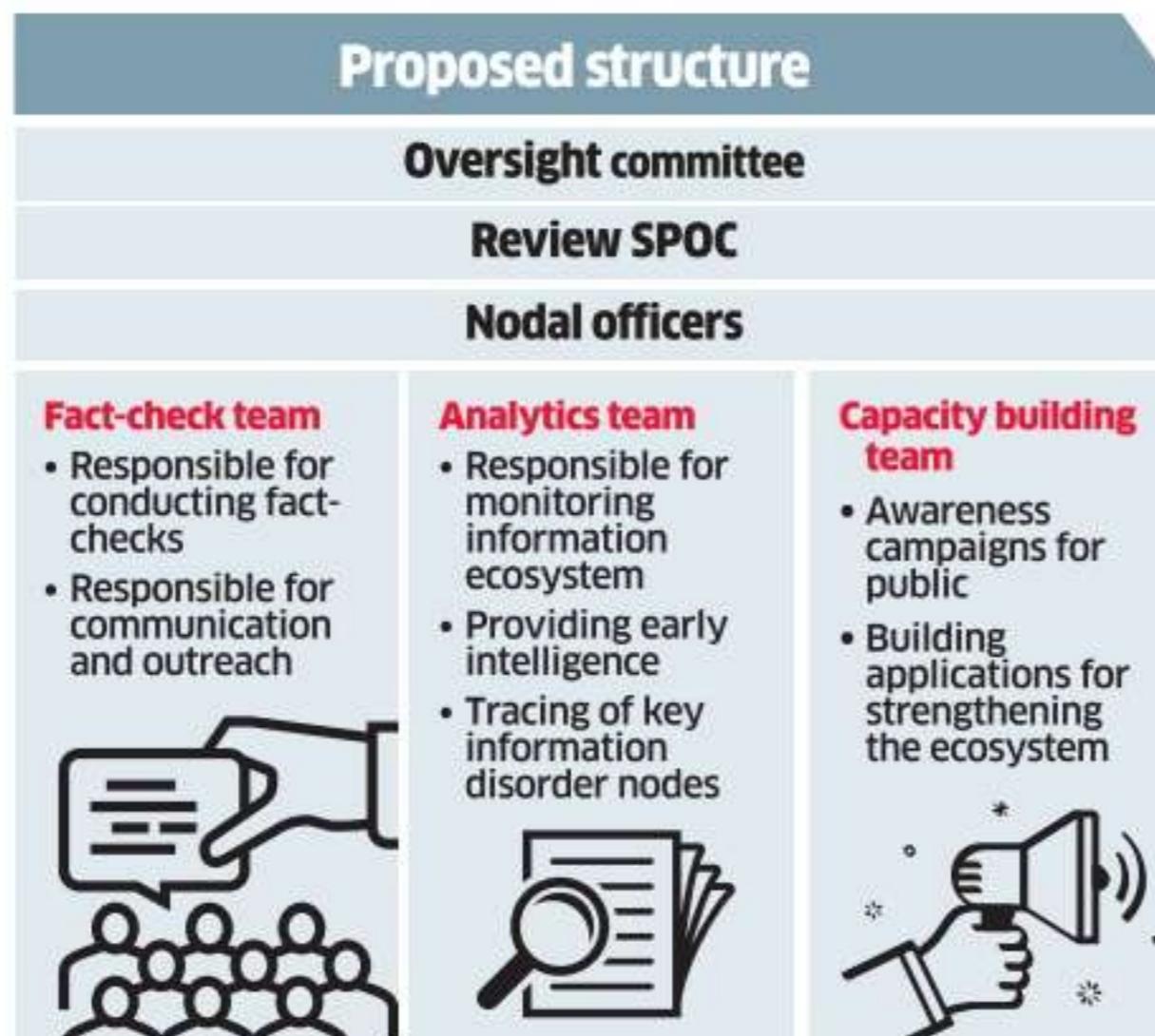
The government's expression of interest also talks about an analytics squad that will utilise advanced technologies such as data analytics and artificial intelligence. This team will actively monitor the misinformation ecosystem. And finally, a capacity development team will lead public awareness campaigns to educate people about the presence and con-

Different state governments are in the process of setting up fact-check units to combat misinformation. **Suraksha P** asks career fact checkers for answers

Fact: Check or Mate?



MATTER OF FACT
The government of Karnataka is serious about tackling misinformation, disinformation, malinformation and fake news: Kharge



- Guiding principles**
- Apolitical and unbiased
 - MDM (Misinformation, Disinformation, and Malinformation) hunting in Kannada, English and other regional languages
 - Relying on primary sources wherever available; disclose all sources referred to
 - Where facts aren't clear, provide all available and unambiguous information
 - Provide details of methodology adopted
 - Transparent corrections when new facts come to light



MISINFORMATION

- Proposed composition of oversight committee**
- Head, department of IT, Bt and S&T
 - ADGP, intelligence/ADGP, CID
 - Representative from DIPR
 - MD, KITS
 - Dean EECS, IISc
 - Additional advocate general
 - Centre head, CySeck
 - Representatives from civic society

PICS: BCCI, GETTY IMAGES
states, the situation is not very different from the regulation of free speech and media content in general, he said, as each state always retains the ability to prosecute acts it deems illegal, independent of the view adopted by other states.

KPS Kohli, a partner at law firm Seraphic Advisors, said action against fake news, misinformation, and misleading information by state-specific bodies would benefit everybody, but it will add to the compliance burden. Varied agencies trying to achieve the same end may also lead to conflict of decisions, he said.

Falaq Patel, a technology and data privacy lawyer, said, "With laws in place that govern social media and information technology, this measure at a state level by the Karnataka government seems misguided and without proper delegated legislation."

However, it appears that the Karnataka government is powering through with its decision. It would now be interesting to see if state governments will be successful in operationalising FCUs under the garb of maintaining public order within its powers, Patel pointed out.

Satya Muley, an advocate in the Supreme Court of India and the Bombay High Court, said FCUs currently appear to be a tool to meet political intentions, especially given that the next general elections are less than a year away.

Needless to say, freedom of speech and expression, including that of the Indian media as enshrined in Article 19, is fundamental to Indian democracy. "To weed out such threats, it will be ideal that such a unit only functions at the central level, without any parallels at state

"You cannot work with any political body where they are trying to fact check any claims. They won't fact check their own claims either. It vitiates and poisons the respect that people have for fact checkers. There's no question of ever working with them."

— Jency Jacob, managing editor, BOOM

levels," Muley said.

Kazim Rizvi, founder of the public policy think tank The Dialogue, said any endeavour by state governments to unilaterally establish fact-checking bodies under their jurisdiction must be re-evaluated. To ensure both legal soundness and adherence to global best practices, a fact-checking body must not only be conceived within the contours of constitutional authority but also preserve its independence and neutrality in alignment with established international guidelines, he said.

In the evolving sphere of online content regulation, the legality of state governments establishing fact-checking bodies necessitates careful examination and consultation, Rizvi said.



LEGAL REOURSE
Comedian Kunal Kamra has filed a PIL challenging the setting up of a fact-check unit by the central government

'Karnataka's fact-checking unit will need Centre's assistance'

State IT minister Priyank Kharge defends the fact-check unit, saying it will help curb fake news

Aashish Aryan



December 1. The ambit of the proposed Information Disorder Tackling Unit (IDTU) will however, not be limited to fact-check misinformation, disinformation or fake news that is likely to cause disturbance in communal harmony, he said. Explaining the role of the proposed unit, Kharge said that there were reports that discredited government plans and

schemes, and they needed to be fact-checked in order to ensure that the correct information reached the desired beneficiary.

He cited the example of the state's initiative to offer free bus rides for women. "An incident from Andhra Pradesh where a woman had lost her hand in an accident and was left bleeding on the road was shown to be from Karnataka, claiming that

in October, the state government had floated an expression of interest asking for relevant bids to set up a fact-verification team, an analytics squad and a capacity development team to develop and lead public awareness campaigns.

The proposed fact-check unit will have an observing committee in place with civil society,

academia, public policy and media members, apart from government officials, Kharge said.

Misinformation of this kind impacts governance, law and order directly and therefore must either be preemptively checked or controlled after it is out on the internet and social media, Kharge added.

"The analogue is the traditional way of fact-checking, which is collecting, combing and looking at evidence. The other will be using artificial intelligence and machine learning, which will work preemptively," he said.

The state government, however, may not ask social media intermediaries to take down every piece of information that is fact-checked and proven to be false, Kharge said. "We are not forming any new rule or coming out with a new policy. We are connecting the dots with respect to the guidelines and laws already present and operational," he concluded.

The dark side of the festival of lights

Follow these tips to protect yourself from scams and cyberattacks

Sourabh Kulesh

Cyber criminals are constantly on the lookout for unsuspecting victims, especially during the festive season. This time of year sees an increase in online shopping and digital transactions, and cyber criminals are preparing for their kind of celebration. They send phishing emails and messages, and create fake websites in an attempt to steal your personal information and money.

This Diwali, you can protect yourself with a little awareness and vigilance. Here are some common types of cyberattacks and scams you may come across around this festive season and how to safeguard yourself.

MESSAGES WITH LINKS ON WHATSAPP AND SMS

You may receive SMS and text messages on WhatsApp from unidentified numbers claiming to be from a legitimate company. These messages have a link and receivers are asked to click the link to claim a gift card. However, in reality, the link installs malware that can track your activities.

The best way to avoid gift card scams is to never click a link from an unknown number. Always question, "Why would someone send me a gift card from an unidentified number?"



PICS: GETTY IMAGES
And nothing comes for 'free'. Lastly, never enter personal details or share OTPs on any third-party websites.

'FREE COURIER' IS A SCAM

Courier scams have been prevalent for some time now. People get contacted and they are told that they have an expensive gift from someone they know, however, to be able to get that delivered to them, they must pay a fee.

Another type of scam involves a courier executive and a government law enforcement agency officer. The courier executive tries to convince the potential victim that the company received a courier in their name but the parcel contains illegal items, such as drugs, and has been seized at the airport. The victim is then threatened with consequences,

which often include a jail term and hefty fines.

Be aware of unexpected calls from courier services or law enforcement agencies, especially when you are not expecting any packages. Don't rush into believing what they say over calls or messages and do not share your details, such as bank information. Never pay them even if they show urgency or threaten you.

PHISHING ATTACKS THROUGH EMAILS

Businesses usually use emails to send best wishes around the festive season. Hackers usually pounce on such opportunities and send emails with catchy taglines that appear to come from a reputable source.

Receivers must tread carefully into clicking links in such emails. They must pay attention to the grammar and spelling mistakes in the emails as incorrect English is a red flag. Keep an eye out on the email address of the sender, they usually seem like they were sent from a legitimate source but have some kind of discrepancy, such as a 'dot' or 'underscore'.

WEEKEND POSER

Ghosts: Are They for Real?

They can be spooky fun, but there's no evidence they exist



PIC: GETTY IMAGES

Lots of people believe in ghosts—a spirit left behind after someone who was alive has died.

People may think they're experiencing ghosts when they hear strange voices, see moving objects, witness balls or wisps of light or even translucent people.

Yet, no one describes ghosts as aging, eating, breathing or using bathrooms.

So, could ghosts be made of a special kind of energy that hovers and flies without dissipating?

If that's the case, that means when ghosts glow, move objects and make sounds, they are acting like matter—something that takes up space and has mass—like wood, water, plants and people. Conversely, when passing through walls or vanishing, they must not act like matter.

But centuries of research have found nothing like this exists, which is why physicists say ghosts can't be real.

And so far, according to science, there is no proof that any part of a person can continue on after death.

WHAT'S THE EVIDENCE?

Never before in history have people recorded so many ghost encounters, thanks in part to mobile phone cameras and microphones. It seems there would be great evidence by now. But scientists don't have it.

Instead, there are lots of ambiguous recordings sabotaged by bad lighting and faulty equipment. Popular television shows on ghost hunting can convince viewers that blurry images and emotional reactions are proof enough.

When ghost hunters descend on an allegedly haunted location for a night of meandering and measurement, they usually find something they later deem paranormal. It may be a moving door (breeze?), a chill (gap in the floorboards?), a glow (light entering from outside?), electrical fluctuations (old wiring?), or bumps and faint voices (crew in other rooms?).

Noone describes ghosts as aging, eating or breathing. So, could they be made of a special kind of energy that hovers and flies without dissipating?

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS? Virtually all ghostly experiences involve impediments to making accurate perceptions and judgments—bad lighting, emotional arousal, sleep phenomena, social influences, culture, a misunderstanding of how recording devices work and the prior beliefs and personality traits of those who claim to have seen ghosts. All of these hold the potential to induce unforgettable ghostly encounters.

But all of these can be explained without ghosts being real.

— AP

Six Books to Keep by Your Bedside

The days are getting shorter and colder, which mean it's ideal to spend more time indoors with books. Here are some good fiction reads



AI GENERATED

THE FRAUD.
BY ZADIE SMITH
Mashing two separate stories into one, Smith first introduces us to Eliza Touche, a 19th-century intellectual forced into the role of a housekeeper for her famous cousin, the author William Harrison Ainsworth. We're then introduced to the book's other protagonist, a man named Andrew Bogle, who grew up enslaved on a plantation in Jamaica. Eventually their worlds overlap. The two narratives never quite emulsify, but it's best to enjoy the lightly humorous prose of Smith, a dazzlingly skilled writer.



THE MANIAC.
BY BENJAMIN LABATUT
Labatut's latest novel is a fictional chronicle of the mathematician John von Neumann, widely considered the father of the computer. Through this, we also get the history of a wealthy Jewish prodigy in pre-war Hungary, who by dint of serene genius, transforms the world's understanding of mathematics and science. Labatut still occasionally stumbles, but his

writing is tighter, smoother and more convincing [than his previous works].

FAMILY MEAL,

BY BRYAN WASHINGTON

Washington became famous with *Lot*, his first short story collection, which Barack Obama named as one of his favourite books of 2019. In *Family Meal*, a grieving protagonist Cam throws himself into meaningless sexual encounters and messy emotional entanglements with equal abandon. After a while, the recurring emphasis on the emptiness of sex begins to feel a little adolescent, but Washington's empathy for his characters keeps you coming back for more.

ROMAN STORIES.

BY JHUMPA LAHIRI

A masterclass in how to grab readers and never let them go, Lahiri's newest collection of short stories presents a mosaic of perspectives loosely set in the

Eternal City. Originally published in Italian, the book has Lahiri effortlessly switching among class, race and gender and imbuing each protagonist with a unique inner life.

TREMOR,

BY TEJU COLE

Reader of Cole's first novel in 12 years would be well served to do some homework in advance: If you're not familiar with the Benin Bronze restoration debate, 15th century master Hans Memling, contemporary painters Luc Tuymans and Lynette Yiadom Boakye, the music of John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk, and the cellist Anne Blysma's recording of Bach's cello suites, start brushing up.

The good news is that even if you don't get around to all this, you'll still enjoy Cole's account of an emotionally and intellectually conflicted Harvard professor's return to Nigeria.

DAY, BY MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM

Is it too soon for a Covid-19 novel? As this one begins, Isabel, a magazine editor, lives in a New York brownstone with her two schoolchildren and musician husband Dan. They're rejoined by her brother Robbie, who's forgone medical school and lives in their attic. Cunningham sets up a true-life family dynamic: The family relies on and resents one another. Once the pandemic sets in, it slowly becomes clear that something or someone is going to snap —the only questions are who and when.

— Bloomberg

For 50 years, the international community has precariously balanced two different ways of keeping time. Now, it's time for a giant leap for the Leap Second. Is humankind ready?

Second Thoughts

The New York Times

This month, delegations from around the world will head to a conference in Dubai to discuss international treaties involving radio frequencies, satellite coordination and other tricky technical issues. These include the naging problem of the clock.

For 50 years, the international community has carefully and precariously balanced two ways of keeping time. One method, based on the Earth's rotation, is as old as human timekeeping itself, an ancient and common-sense reliance on the position of the sun and stars. The other, more precise method, coaxes a steady, reliable frequency from the changing state of cesium atoms to provide essential regularity for the digital devices that dominate our lives.

FORECAST FOR LEAP SECOND

The trouble is that the times on these clocks diverge. The astronomical time, called Universal Time, or UT1, has tended to fall a few clicks behind the atomic one, called International Atomic Time, or TAI. Every few years since 1972, the two times have been sync'd by the insertion of 'leap seconds'—pausing the atomic clocks briefly to let the astronomic one catch up. This creates UTC, Universal Coordinated Time.

But it's hard to forecast precisely when the leap second will be required. This has created an intensifying headache for tech companies, countries and the world's timekeepers.

"Having to deal with leap seconds drives me crazy," said Judah Levine, head of the Network Synchronization Project in the Time and Frequency Division at the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Colorado, US. Levine is a leading thinker on coordinating the

A capsule containing cesium before being put in an "oven" that vaporises it into a beam of atoms in an atomic clock



ONE WORLD, TWO CLOCKS

The troubles date to the early 1970s, with the introduction of atomic time. Until then, the world had largely relied on astronomical time. It seemed logical: The sun came up and there was day, then it went down and there was night and so forth. And though there were minor irregularities caused by the slowing of Earth's rotation and other natural forces, these variations went largely unnoticed by humans. Not so much by machines.

Computers require precise, lock-step time-keeping, so that their commands stay orderly. After atomic time's introduction, it became essential to a growing number of functions—like landing airplanes and timing stock trades—not without a growing number of problems as society got more mechanised.

"Cesium clocks became very common, and right away, there was a problem," Levine said. "The astronomical clock and the cesium clock began to walk away from each other."

DEALING WITH HYSTERIA

The introduction of the leap second in 1972 codified that a second would be introduced every time the two clocks diverged by more than 0.9 seconds. This had at least three aims: To keep time connected to the natural world and the tradition of astronomy; to suit digital technology; and to reconcile and synchronise the two clocks. Over the last 50 years, leap seconds have been used 27 times.

Around the turn of this century, another problem arose, driven by a new set of stakeholders: Big tech. The likes of Google, Amazon and Facebook developed their own methods for reconciling astronomical and atomic time, essentially bypassing the leap second. But now there are many methods, creating a timekeeping free-for-all and threatening uniformity.

The Vatican and the Russians

Last year, Patrizia Tavella, director of the Time Department at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures in Paris, spoke to the

Reverend Paul Gabor, an astrophysicist and the vice-director of the Vatican Observatory Research Group in Arizona, US, about the leap second. His concern, she said, was that "eliminating the idea could create some uneasiness, as humans feel connected and want to remain connected to the natural world... Men look to the sky and count days; this is something 'unspoken' but deep in the heart of men".

Over the last decade, the growing challenges of implementing the leap second have prompted a willingness to change the current system. There were holdouts, notably the Russians, who have argued vigorously, if mysteriously, for keeping the leap second. The presumption is that the Russian Glonass satellite system is built to account for leap seconds and that altering the current timekeeping methodology could have military implications for them.

"Nobody fully understands this," said Elizabeth Donley, chief of the Time and Frequency Division of NIST. "It's probably a matter of national security. They never really give a good answer."

"We made a mess of time all over the world," said Patrizia Tavella, director of the Time Department at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures in Paris.

Levine, with his leap-minute solution, is highly regarded among time-keeping scientists, said Demetrios Matsakis, former director of the US Naval Observatory's Time Service Department. Matsakis finds the new proposal compelling. Then again, he said, the proposal could stall previous proposals aimed at reconciling the clocks, which have ground to a halt by an international community of vested interests and strong opinions. "You're dealing largely with hysteria," Matsakis said.

Which brings the world community to the World Radio Conference in Dubai. The agenda calls for discussions about the leap second, but American time scientists are not optimistic that the conversation will yield a result.

Here's What You Need to Know About Energy Drinks

The New York Times



those sold as small shots, can allow a person to take in a lot of caffeine in a short amount of time, before they feel the effects on their bodies, she said.

If you feel jittery, anxious or nauseous or as if your heart is racing, that's a sign you've had too much of it.

There is no legal limit on how much caffeine can be in energy drinks. Energy drinks can also contain many other ingredients, including other stimulants, which could interact with caffeine to enhance its effects.

HOW CAN I MITIGATE THE RISKS?

You should avoid strenuous exercise after consuming an energy drink, Higgins said, so as to not tax your cardiovascular system. And don't mix energy drinks with alcohol, which can strain the heart.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH CAFFEINE?

Most healthy adults can consume up to 400 milligrams of caffeine a day, according to the US Food and Drug Administration.

Sensitivity to caffeine varies widely, and it matters how quickly you consume it.

Concentrated ener-

gy drinks, especially

If you feel jittery, anxious, nauseous or as if your heart is racing, that's a sign that you've had too much of the energy drink



Lead – Poisoning Food and Minds for Centuries

FOOD FABLES



Dr. Hemant Morparia, the cartoonist, once drew a strip based on an incident from his radiology residency at KEM Hospital in Mumbai in 1987. A boy was admitted with abdominal pain, vomiting and weight loss. His parents said that nothing had worked, not even holy ash from their guru.

The boy's chest X-ray seemed normal, but Morparia noticed white

bands on the bone ends, indicating metal poisoning. Acting on a hunch, he did a quick X-ray of the ash, which showed up totally opaque. It was lead which was poisoning the boy. The boy was treated, yet the parents asked for the return of the ash which almost killed him. Because it came from their guru, they still wanted it.

Lead poisoning is a problem across the world, but particularly in South Asia. Global measures to remove lead from paint and petrol have helped remove two main sources of lead poisoning, yet rates remain high here. A 2020 UNICEF report suggested 275 million children in India had blood lead levels higher than the tolerable limits of five microgrammes per decilitre. Earlier this year, Down to

Earth magazine reported a case of a very sick boy in Barabanki whose blood had a staggering 186 microgrammes per decilitre. His father ran a lead battery recycling business from home, and in children, lead is easily absorbed, potentially causing long-term mental issues. In adults, it accumulates in the body causing organ damage and reproductive issues.

Some sources of lead are obvious, like battery recycling, but others are more insidious. As far back as 1982, *The Times of India* reported on lead chromate, which is a vivid yellow, being used to boost the colour of turmeric: "Consumers seem to think only the brilliant yellow type is pure and genuine." But some turmeric was pale, so lead chromate, or a dye called metanil yellow, was used to boost the colour.

A recent Stanford study has confirmed that persistent lead poisoning in Bangladesh is linked to turmeric. *The Economist* noted that "India was the source of much of the poisonous pigment found in

Bangladesh and is estimated to have the highest incidence of lead poisoning of any country".

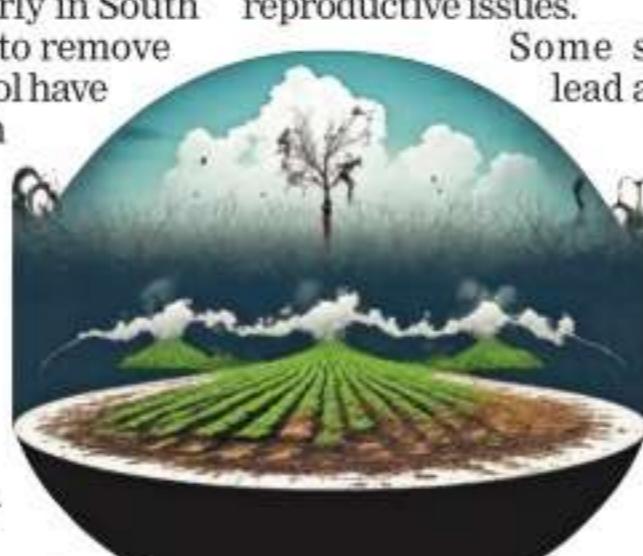
By noting how Bangladesh was working vigorously to end the problem, *The Economist* called out India's apathy on the issue. Does this stem from hostility to international studies, as *The Economist* suggests, or is there disinclination to consider problems with turmeric, whose virtues the government has done much to promote?

Consuming lead is a habit humans find hard to stop. Its potential toxicity has been noted for centuries, yet we have continued to use it for its ease of melting, resistance to corrosion, useful weight and even taste. Lead gives a sense of sweetness which, as Bee Wilson points out in *Swindled*, her history of food adulteration, was why Victorian children enthusiastically chewed lead pencils and toys

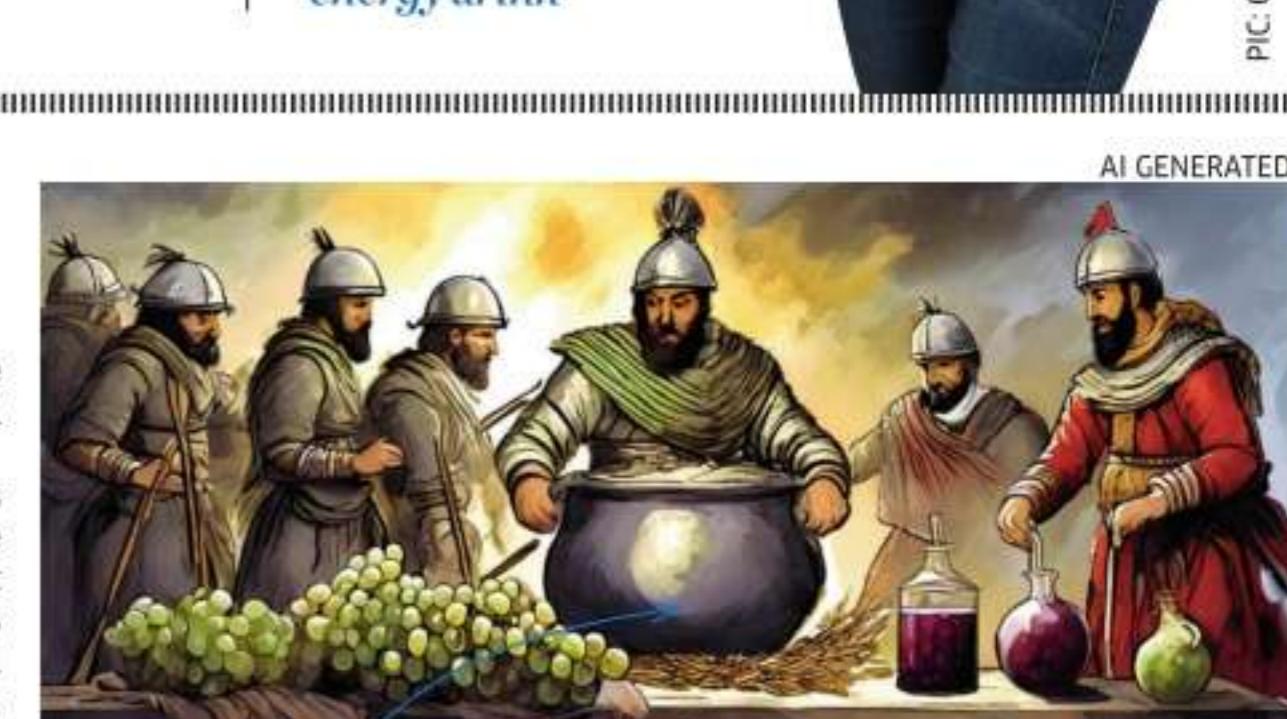
moulded from lead.

Romans were particularly addicted to lead, which they consumed through *sapa*, a concentrated grape juice boiled in lead-lined vessels. This was added to wine, to sweeten and help preserve it, since lead is as toxic to microbes as it is to humans. It's been suggested that lead poisoning caused impotence and mental decay, which helped bring down the Roman empire. At the very least, it helped shorten Roman lifespans. Part of the problem with lead is that

its presence is unclear. Do *eyya chombus*, the pots that make famously good *rasam* in Tamil Nadu, have a proportion of lead mixed in with their tin alloy? The evidence is unclear, but the possibility has made many people dump their *eyya chombus*. Did an Arctic expedition in 1845 lose all its 129 men because of lead just bad planning? As with the parents Morparia met, it comes down to your belief — and whether lead might have poisoned that.



Lead's potential toxicity has been noted for centuries, yet humans have continued to use it for its ease of melting, resistance to corrosion, useful weight and even taste





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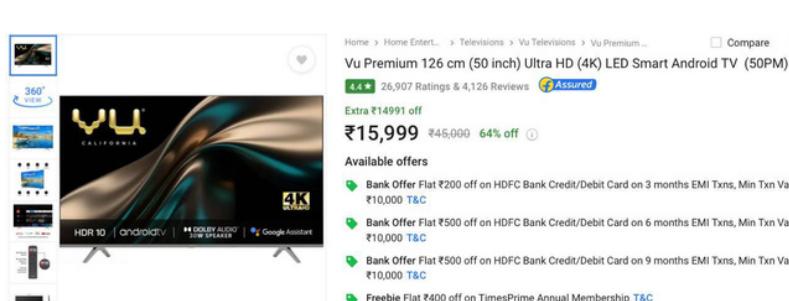


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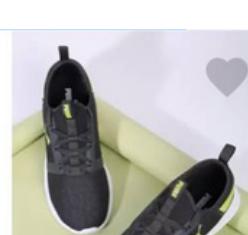
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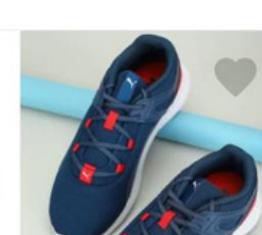
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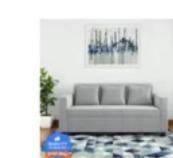
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