Rabi paddy arrivals from Telangana trigger decline in rice prices

Hyderabad: Increasing arrivals of the Yasangi (Rabi) paddy in Telangana's markets have significantly impacted rice prices. The State is a leading producer of Rabi paddy followed by Tamil Nadu and to some extent Odisha. In less than one month of the commencement of the Rabi harvest operations, both government agencies and private traders have purchased nearly 10 lakh metric tonnes of paddy from farmers in the State, according to officials.

According to millers and wholesale traders, non-basmati rice prices have fallen by up to 7 per cent in April consequent to the arrival of new crop. The popular non-basmati variety, Sona Masoori, is now priced at Rs.58 per kg in the retail market as against Rs.62 per kg last month. On the whole, rice prices have seen a drop of Rs.10 per kg on an average.The prices may witness a further decline with paddy arrivals in the markets picking up as expected by the end of this month. The Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD), Government of India has projected the paddy procurement by States for Rabi crop during 2023-24 at 90 lakh metric tonnes to

one crore metric tonnes. Telangana alone seeks to meet 60 per cent of the estimate.

The area under paddy during Yasangi witnessed a drop by five lakh acres, because of the shortage of water that paved the way for a crop holiday under the Nagarjuna Sagar Project (NSP) in Krishna basin and Kaddam project in Godavari basin. But the Rabi paddy output projection (for Yasangi 2023-24) in the State was put at 102.91 lakh metric tonnes.The Yasangi paddy from Telangana has started flooding the markets in neighbouring States in a big way impacting the price. Millers from Andhra Pradesh are also taking paddy from Miryalaguda and Nalgonda to meet their requirement for the year, according to a major rice exporter from Andhra Pradesh. Rice millers in Telangana are already overburdened with the paddy stocks from the previous seasons. Telangana had a huge stockpile of stocks to be disposed or lifted from the 2022-23 season procurement. The States of Kerala and Tamil Nadu also witnessed considerable raise in paddy production thus reducing their demand for Telangana

paddy.Even the Basmati price also witnessed a drop because of tough competition from Basmati farmers in Pakistan and a few other South Asian countries. The exporters are eagerly awaiting some relaxation in the restriction on the export of

white rice after July next.Non Basmati rice prices fallen by seven per centWholesale prices witnessed average drop of Rs 10 per kgGovt agencies and traders bought 10 lakh tonnes from TS farmersRabi paddy from TS set to flood neighbouring markets

Tenant farmers face tough future in Telangana

For instance, G Raghu, owner of six acres land at Shanigaram village in Siddipet district and small businessman in Hyderabad,

Hyderabad: While farmers with their own agricultural land are struggling to survive the ongoing agriculture crisis, the condition of tenant farmers is proving to be much worse in Telangana.Due to the de-

lay in implementing the much-touted Rythu Bharosa, tenant farmers are now not only forced to pay the lease amount in advance, but nearly double the amount that they paid last year in some areas.

During the Assembly elections, the Congress had promised to launch the Rythu Bharosa scheme as part of its six guarantees, assuring Rs.15,000 per acre per year to both farmers and tenant farmers.Though it promised to implement Rythu Bharosa from the ongoing Yasangi (Rabi) season, the State government differed it citing delays in finalising modalities for implementing the scheme.Further, the government had sought the Praja Palana applications from those seeking benefits under these schemes. Telangana has about 25 lakh tenant farmers, cultivating around 25 lakh acres.Depending on the area and water availability, they strike a deal with land owners to pay lease amounts ranging from Rs.12,000 to Rs.25,000 per acre.But considering the uncertainty over implementation of Rythu Bharosa and extent of its beneficiaries, the land owners are demanding the tenant farmers to pay the lease amount in advance. They have also increased the lease amount to an average of Rs.25,000-40,000 per acre in some areas, depending on availability of assured water resources.

For instance, G Raghu, owner of six acres land at Shanigaram village in Siddipet district and small businessman in Hyderabad, leased out his land to a family for an average of Rs.14,000 per acre. But this year, he decided to lease out only if

they pay Rs.25,000 per acre."Earlier, I received Rs.12,000 per acre per annum under Rythu Bandhu of the previous government. I do not have a ration card and could not apply for Rythu Bharosa under Praja Palana application.Thus, there is an uncertainity on the government offering financial assistance to me, while the tenant farmers are being offered Rs.15,000 per acre per annum," he reasoned.The lease amounts are higher ranging from Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 per acre in areas like erstwhile Nalgonda district which had adequate water resources.P Yadav Reddy, a tenant farmer from Suryapet district, said the lease amount has been increased to Rs 35,000 per acre which is a huge burden for him. If there is no sign of rains, he is mulling over giving up cultivation during the upcoming Vaanakalam (Kharif) season.

Unless the State government comes up with a solution to address the situation and extends Rythu Bharosa to tenant farmers, experts fear there could be a huge decline in cultivation area especially with regard to paddy cultivation during the monsoon season.The State government had recently initiated efforts to finalise the modalities, but farmers are uncertain if they will be formulated before the sowing begins in June considering the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

When players go beyond cliches and illuminate the format

The IPL has made one thing clear over the years. There will be huge sixes, big scores, startling bowling figures, misreading of pitches, surprising results. But one thing won't see as often is the memorable quote or the telling comment. Putting the ball in the right areas is the bowler's favourite cliche while batters prefer to play it safe with: "I am taking it one game at a time — the idea is to go out there and enjoy yourself."But occasionally a line emerges that causes the kind of surprise a maiden over might. The essential honesty and self-awareness of a performer comes through, shining a light on himself while simultaneously making a comment on the format itself.When the No. 1 batter in the world, Suryakumar Yadav says, "It has been two or three years, (I) have never batted against Jasprit Bumrah in the nets," and explains why, "Either he breaks my bat or my foot," honesty, self-deprecation and admiration for a teammate are rolled into one admission.Dispenser of possibilities

With ball in hand, Bumrah is a dispenser of possibilities. After his ridiculously short run-up, will he deliver a ball over 145kmph, a yorker, one screaming past or staying its course, a slower delivery, any of which he can do without an easily discernible change in action? The viewer is as keen as the batter, but enjoys the comfort of distance.Asked how he did it, Bumrah told an interviewer at the end of a match where he had taken five wickets that he worked hard, kept going back to watch himself bowl and ensured he was not a one-trick pony. He summed it up with, "There is no ego in this format."

That's an interesting concept. But in fact, there are two kinds of ego in competitive sport; one positive, and perhaps necessary, the other destructive."I know everything there is to know about my craft, no one can get the better of me," is thinking that belongs to the negative kind of ego. "Batters might have worked out how to play me, I have to keep one step ahead of them with practice and experimentation," is the positive kind. Bumrah, India's pride, is talking about the negative kind that has no place in any format.Importance of dataIf you played (and watched) cricket in the first eight decades of the last century, chances are you look down upon computers and data analysis as unnecessary. "The only computer you need is between your ears," the great Bishan Bedi said often. Recently, the equally great Erapalli Prasanna told a fan, "Data cannot help you bowl better. It adds nothing to your skill."This of course is correct. A leg spinner might know that a batter is weak against the googly based on the percentage of his dismissals to that delivery. But if he cannot bowl a googly himself, that data cannot help him.Sport throws up so much data on a running ba-

sis that sometimes it can get too much even for the player. So when Sunil Narine, KKR's opening batter says, "I have one role, and the less I know the better it is for me," he is telling us how he clears his mind of irrelevancies. His strike rate after five matches is 183, and he is in the wonderful position of knowing that his batting is a bonus in a team where he is the leading spinner. Why clutter his mind, therefore? His role is clear: see ball, hit ball.His 39-ball 85 against Delhi Capitals was the foundation of victory. He will fail on occasion, but even if he succeeds only forty percent of the time, he would have done his job at the top.Few batters in the IPL have such clarity. A Rohit Sharma or a Virat Kohli might like to think their job too is 'see ball, hit ball', but they know that they have greater responsibilities.

The state of the match matters, the job of blunting the opposition's main bowler is theirs, their dismissal can demoraliSe those waiting to bat.So there you have it. Three quotes, from a top batter, a great bowler and a leading all-rounder. There's hope. We are not yet at the half-way stage.

In Rajasthan's Shekhawati region, Congress hopes to upset BJP with Jat anger

"EACH ONE is unique" reads the title of Chapter 2 of the Class 4 English textbook of Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education. Along with a person's story, it has his photo in action – his left amputated arm in the front and the right arm holding a javelin.While the chapter has been part of the syllabus for a few years now, the person in this story, Padma Bhushan Devendra Jhajharia, is the BJP's Lok Sabha candidate from his hometown Churu in Rajasthan this time.At his Churu rally earlier this month, PM Narendra Modi said Jhajharia's candidature symbolises that the country remembers its players, and incentivizes them. Mentioning "very close old ties" with Jhajharia, he said, "Churu mein Devendra, aur Dilli mein Narendra." Behind Modi's statement were political exigencies which forced the BJP to put the spotlight back on Jhajharia. The dominant Jat community here has had plenty of reasons to be unhappy with the BJP.

Among the reasons: denying the community the CM and deputy CM posts; non-inclusion of Jats in Central OBC list; dissatisfaction over Agnipath scheme; treatment of women wrestlers and non-action against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh; sidelining of "Jat ki bahu" Vasundhara Raje; and removal of Satish Poonia as BJP state president. However, the last nail in the proverbial coffin appeared to be denial of party ticket to sitting BJP MP Rahul Kaswan, a Jat, allegedly at the behest of BJP veteran and seven-term MLA Rajendra Rathore, a Rajput.Kaswan wasted no time in quitting the BJP to join the Congress, which fielded him from Churu. In his campaign, Kaswan has kept his guns trained at Rathore. Rathore has hit back, turning the Churu fight into a Jat vs Rajput contest.Hoping to reap most from the situation, the Congress has been propagating – apart from having a Jat state president – that in last year's Assembly elections Kaswan only had a say in Sadulpur ticket while Rathore decided tickets for all other seats in Churu, and that the BJP's Churu MLA, Harlal Saharan, a Jat, lacks agency and directs people to Rathore, thus further diluting the Jat identity.Following a surprise loss in December last year, Rathore had in an outburst at a rally in Churu blamed the "Jaichando, Vibhishano" — used to imply traitors, and Kaswan — for the loss. Then a purported transfer list of nearly two dozen Jat officers out of Taranagar — from where Rathore lost — and his former constituency Churu also went viral on social media along with allegations that he is being vindictive towards the Jat community. This further fanned the Jat anger.Although there are other Lok Sabha seats such as Nagaur, Sikar and Bharatpur where the Jats wield considerable influence, Churu has become the ground zero for Jat dissatisfaction.Although Jhajharia too is from the community, Congress leaders say he is not seen as a Jat leader as this is his first foray into politics, and Rathore's involvement has diluted his position as well.

Xiaomi Upgrades Its Redmi Note 13 5G Series to the Human-centric Operating System- Xiaomi HyperOS

Xiaomi India announced the rollout of its latest user interface - Xiaomi HyperOS on its Redmi Note 13 5G Series in India, promising enhanced performance, intuitive interface, and seamless functionality to users. Building upon the Redmi Note 13 5G Series' legacy of constantly pushing boundaries, it introduces pro-level features for users seeking improved smartphone performance, particularly in key areas such as Comprehensive Refactoring and End-to-End Security.Comprehensive Refactoring: Optimize performance for Redmi Notes 13 5G SeriesEnhancing performance for the Redmi Note 13 5G Series, Xiaomi HyperOS ensures smoother gameplay with optimized power consumption. It optimizes task scheduling, maximizing hardware performance by distributing tasks across multiple computing units.End-to-End Security: Ensure robust system-wide privacy and securityXiaomi HyperOS prioritizes security by safeguarding users' device, ensuring comprehensive privacy and security across the system.Enhancing User Experience on Redmi Note 13 5G Series:

• All-new Personalized Lock Screen: Users can create multiple unique lock screen alterations with personalized backdrops and styles, effortlessly switching between them. From clock styles to widgets, users can express their individuality and elevate their device's aesthetic.• Easy access to all your needs: The redesigned control centers on the Redmi Note 13 5G Series are tailored to suit users' preferences. With a label-free layout, accessing essential functions becomes more intuitive and hassle-free. Interactive Notifications: Notification Spotlight introduces a new way for users to interact with system app notifications on their Redmi Note 13 5G Series, enhancing user engagement and convenienceEnhanced Photography Experience: Furthermore, the camera on the Redmi Note 13 Pro+ 5G has been upgraded with this interface to deliver superior performance, ensuring an elevated photography experience for the users.Reimagined App Icons & Animations: Inspired by the ALIVE DESIGN PHILOSOPHY, the new Light icons add a touch of intuitiveness to the home screen while maintaining familiarity for users. Animations have become lighter & much more responsive.

• Easier Access with New Categorizations: The reimagined File Manager makes it easier for users to access their files, introducing new categorizations for improved organization and navigation.New Visual Rendering of Weather Forecast: The new weather animations have been meticulously designed to provide accurate representations of weather conditions, enhancing the overall intuitive experience. Users can now delve deeper into various weather metrics including AQ (Air Quality), UV Index, Humidity, Wind Direction, Pressure, and more. Multi-Window Support: By simply long-pressing from the recent history, Redmi Note 13 5G Series users can effortlessly transform their apps into a split-screen layout. This feature enables users to interact with or moni-

tor two different apps simultaneously. Additionally, users have the flexibility to convert multiple apps into a floating window, facilitating seamless multitaskingIn addition, it's worth noting that numerous opti-

mizations have been implemented in the underlying technology stack to further enhance the capabilities of the already powerful Redmi Note 13 5G Series. Xiaomi remains steadfast in its commitment to deliv-

ering seamless experience on its devices and is dedicated to continuously enhancing the HyperOS feature with further advancements.

Parenting is 18 years of prompt engineering: Elon Musk

New Delhi: Raising a kid is 18 years of prompt engineering, said Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk on Wednesday."Whoa, I just realised that raising a kid is basically 18 years of prompt engineering," he wrote in a post on X.com.In his post on Wednesday, Musk also cautioned on what schools can teach the children."Our first child will be born next month – what's your biggest piece of advice?" asked a user."Be super careful about what schools teach your kids," Musk

replied.The billionaire had earlier also talked down about education, noting that colleges are for fun and not learning."You don't need college to learn stuff. Everything is available basically for free. You can learn anything you want for free. It is not a question of learning.

I think colleges are basically for fun and to prove you can do your chores. But, they're not for learning," he was seen saying in a video."You can learn anything you want, thanks to the internet.

MG Motor India announces ownership experience program for Gloster

MG (Morris Garages), a British automobile brand with a 100-year-old legacy, has announced a unique ownership experience program for the MG Gloster, India's first autonomous (Level 1) premium SUV. The newly introduced program aims to elevate the experience further by ensuring zero expenditure on car maintenance with complete peace-of-mind. Under this ownership experience program, MG Motor India has introduced after-sales service offers tailored to complement the Gloster's several incredible features seamlessly.

MG Gloster, an off-roader SUV, has carved a niche for itself in the premium vehicle segment, winning over customers with its bold design, a reputation for robust build quality, luxurious features and now takes the ownership experience a step further. MG Gloster owners can now enjoy Zero Service and Repair Costs, including wear-and-tear parts expenses, for the first three years of ownership upto a limit of 45,000km of car running, setting a new benchmark for customers' convenience. Under this program, MG Motor India covers an expansive range of elements such as wiper blades, Engine oil, oil filters, electrical wiring, hoses, motors, and brake pads, allowing for no maintenance costs.* In addition, MG Motor India is offering an assured buyback option to Gloster customers after three years of vehicle ownership. Customers can also opt to buy plans to extend this 3-year coverage to up to 5 years / 75000 km.

MG Gloster is amongst the preferred SUV for no service cost. The Gloster offers luxury with over 30 safety features, including a unique Driver Fatigue Reminder System, bolstering passenger confidence in varied road conditions. Its Driver Assist System (ADAS) introduces pioneering features like Door Open Warning (DOW), Rear Cross Traffic Alert (RCTA), and Lane Change Assist (LCA), ensuring superior safety in this premium SUV. It is available in 2WD and 4WD variants, accommodating six or seven passengers.

Its potent 2.0-litre diesel engine, including a first-in-segment twin-turbo variant with 158.5 kW power, ensures remarkable performance. In addition to premium features, the MG Gloster includes an all-terrain system with seven modes, a dual panoramic electric sunroof, a 12-way power-adjustable driver seat with massage and ventilation, and wireless charging. The

Gloster's ADAS further enhances safety with innovative features like DOW, RCTA, and LCA, reinforcing its commitment to passenger and road safety.

Spotify launches RADAR Punjabi and Fresh Finds Punjabi for emerging artists to showcase their music

Given the steady growth of Punjabi music on Spotify globally, the audio streaming platform announced the launch of RADAR Punjabi and Fresh Finds Punjabi, programs that put the spotlight on rising Punjabi artists. RADAR is Spotify's global program for emerging artists, to help them deepen their connections to new and existing audiences around the world. Fresh Finds focuses on developing artists, serving as a launch pad for up-and-coming artists who are beginning their careers.

With music beyond films, including that produced by labels and independent artists, coming to the forefront, Spotify sees a huge opportunity to help artists grow their fan base not just in India, but across the world. Each month, one Punjabi artist will feature as a part of the RADAR program, and four artists as a part of Fresh Finds. This month, Raf Saperra features on the cover of RADAR Punjabi, while Fresh Finds Punjabi launches with Basant Kur.

"Punjabi music listeners are amongst those who spend the most amount of time on Spotify in India, and we have seen tremendous growth in the consumption of this language, year-on-year. With dedicated emerging artists programs for Punjabi artists, including RADAR and Fresh Finds, our intent is to provide these artists with a platform, help them grow, and put a spotlight on Punjabi music," said Dhruvank Vaidya, Head of Music and Podcast, Spotify India. "We're also celebrating four years of RADAR in India this year, and hope to enable more artists to find their audience and showcase their talent through this program", he added.

Since its launch in India Spotify has focused on deepening engagement between local artists and listeners. With its artist-first approach, Punjabi music is an important part of this strategy. In fact, Punjabi music playlists are some of the biggest contributors to the worldwide growth of Spotify's editorial playlists from India. While Hot Hits Punjabi witnessed the highest increase at 10,000%, Punjabi 101 grew at 1400%. Meanwhile, Hot Hits Punjabi is among the top 20 Spotify editorial playlists globally.Between 2020 till date, RADAR India has featured 40 emerging artists as a part of the program, providing them with playlist curation and marketing support.

In the last year alone, RADAR India created 2.4 million new user-artist discoveries, and in 2023, the most listened to artists on the playlist saw their listenership grow by over 700% on average on the platform. Since its launch in 2021, over 120 artists have featured on the cover of Fresh Finds India, with over 1500 additional artists having been curated through the playlist.

Apple features 5 Indian filmmakers in 'MAMI select-filmed on iPhone'

New Delhi: From the golden sands of Jaisalmer to the peaks of Kashmir, Apple on Friday showcased five talented independent filmmakers in India who created short films on the iPhone 15 Pro Max device.

The five emerging filmmakers that were selected by the Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI) to create short films for the '2024 MAMI Select-Filmed on iPhone' programme, were mentored by filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj, alongside fellow industry icons Vikramaditya Motwane and Rohan Sippy.The filmmakers — Saurav Rai, Archana Atul Phadke, Faraz Ali, Saumyananda Sahi and Prateek Vats — are reimagining traditional cinematic conventions by shooting on iPhone 15 Pro Max, said the company.All five of their short films were premiered on the MAMI YouTube channel on Friday."Our aim is to create an ecosystem that facilitates emerging filmmakers by creating opportunities that help them do new work and showcase it to a larger audience," said Anupama Chopra, director of the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival.Each filmmaker also used MacBook Pro with the M3 Max chip, allowing them to edit in even the most remote locations, said Apple.'Gudh' (Nest) — Rai's debut film that was an official selection at the 69th Cannes Film Festival in 2016 — was inspired by his own childhood memories.His new film, 'Crossing Borders', is no exception which tells the story of a woman who smuggles goods, like saris and umbrellas, across the Indo-Nepalese border to make ends meet.
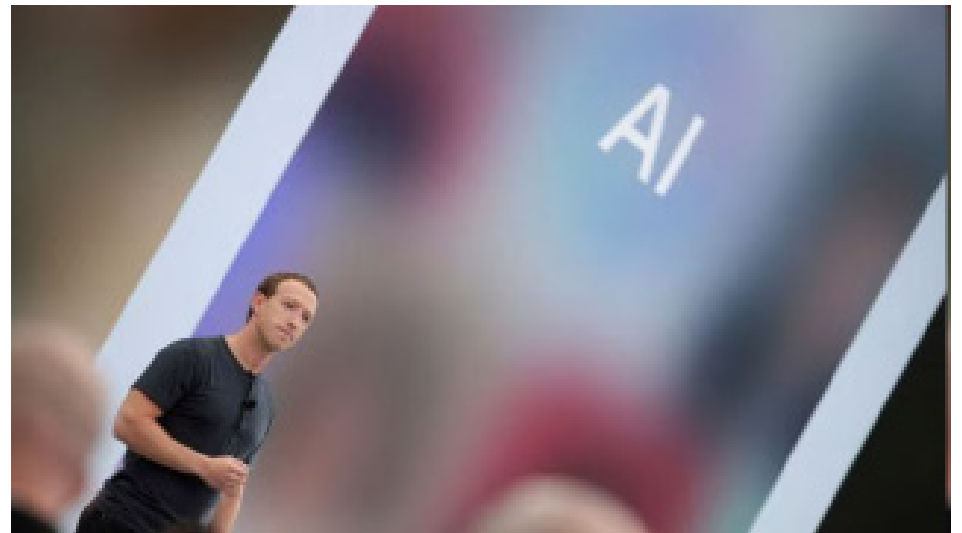
Having used Apple products for a long time, Rai said iPhone 15 Pro Max is made for filmmakers.

Meta AI is the 'most intelligent, freely-available' AI assistant, says Mark Zuckerberg

It seems Meta is on its way to make significant strides in artificial intelligence. On Thursday, Mark Zuckerberg in an Instagram post announced that Meta's large language model and AI assistant are getting a slew of upgrades. Along with new upgrades, in a separate interview, Zuckerberg told podcaster Dwarkesh Patel that Meta was looking forward to bringing 'multimodality, multi-linguality, and bigger context windows'.Along with early versions of Meta's latest LLM, Llama 3, the company also released an image generator that updates pictures in real time while a user types prompts. This is seen as Meta's bid to catch up on the generative AI market which is currently dominated by OpenAI. The first models of Llama 3 have been released in two sizes, 8B and 70B parameters, and have been integrated into MetaAI, the company's artificial intelligence assistant.Meta AI aims to soar

Meta is currently pitching its virtual assistant as the sophisticated AI that is ahead of its peers in areas like reasoning, coding, creative writing, rivalling models owned by Google, and even French AI startup Mistral AI. The latest version of Meta AI assistant will be a prominent feature in Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger apps. It will also reportedly have a standalone website making it a direct competitor of OpenAI's ChatGPT. When asked about the latest models from Meta AI, Zuckerberg told Patel that people are going to see a new version of Meta AI, Llama-3. He said that the models are released as open-source for the developer community and will also be powering Meta AI. "We

think now that Meta AI is the most intelligent, freely-available AI assistant that people can use. We're also integrating Google and Bing for real-time knowledge," he said. Describing the key features of the new releases from Meta AI, Zuckerberg said that Meta is going to make it 'a lot more prominent across its apps'. "At the top of Facebook and Messenger, you'll be able to just use the search box right there to ask any question. There's a bunch of new creation features that we added that I think are pretty cool and that I think people will enjoy. Animation is a good one. You can basically take any image and just animate it. It now generates high-quality images so quickly that it actually generates it as you're typing and updates it in real time," he told the host.Divulging more details on Llama 3, Zuckerberg shared that his company has been training three versions, the 8B parameter model 70B model, and another 405B dense model which is still training. The CEO said that his company is also releasing its 82MMLU and has leading scores in maths and reasoning. "The 8 billion (model) is nearly as powerful as the biggest version of Llama-2 that we released."On working towards artificial general intelligence (AGI) and if it will become a key priority for Meta, Zuckerberg said that it's been a big deal for a while. He said that Meta started FAIR (Fundamental AI Research) 10 years ago. "Over the last 10 years, it has created a lot of different things that have improved all of our products. There's obviously a big change in the last few years with ChatGPT and the diffusion models around image creation com-

ing out. At that point we started a second group, the gen AI group, with the goal of bringing that stuff into our products and building leading foundation models that would power all these different products," he told the host.At a time when AI models are increasingly being benchmarked on their coding capabilities, Meta AI models seem to be a departure from the norm. Zuckerberg revealed that when they were working on Llama 2 they didn't prioritise coding because, according to him, people weren't going to ask Meta AI a lot of coding-related questions in WhatsApp. He acknowledged that over the last 18 months coding has become an important aspect in many domains "Even if people aren't asking coding questions, training the models on coding helps them become more rigorous in answering the question and helps

them reason across a lot of different types of domains."When asked at what point an AI model will be powerful enough to replace a programmer, Zuckerberg said that all the ongoing developments will be progressive over time. "I'm not sure that we're replacing people as much as we're giving people tools to do more stuff."On the potential dangers of open-sourcing powerful AI models, Zuckerberg asserted that Meta is very pro-open-source. However, he added that he isn't committed to releasing everything they test. "I'm basically very inclined to think that open-sourcing is going to be good for the community and also good for us because we'll benefit from the innovations. If at some point however there's some qualitative change in what the thing is capable of, and we feel like it's not responsible to open source it, then we won't."

Apple says it was ordered to pull WhatsApp from China App Store

Apple said it pulled the Meta-owned apps WhatsApp and Threads from its app store in China on Friday on government orders, potentially escalating the war over technology between the United States and China.The iPhone maker said that China's internet regulator, the Cyberspace Administration, ordered the removal of WhatsApp and Threads from its app store because of national security concerns. Apple said that it complied because "we are obligated to follow the laws in the countries where we operate, even when we disagree."A Meta spokesperson directed requests for comment to Apple. The Wall Street Journal earlier reported Apple's removal of the apps.A person briefed on the situation said the Chinese government had found content on WhatsApp and Threads about China's president, Xi Jinping, that was inflammatory and violated the country's cybersecurity laws. The specifics of what was in the content was unclear, the person said.Several other global messaging apps had also been removed from Apple's App Store in China on Friday, including Signal,

which is based in the United States, and Telegram, which is based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, according to Appfigures, a market research firm that analyzes the digital economy. Signal didn't immediately have a comment and Telegram didn't respond to a request for comment.

The actions thrust Apple and Meta into an intensifying tussle over technology between the United States and China. In the United States, the House of Representatives was preparing to vote on a bill as soon as this weekend that would force Chinese internet company ByteDance to sell its popular video app TikTok or have it be banned in the United States. U.S. lawmakers have said TikTok poses a national security threat because of its ties to China. Chinese officials have condemned the push to force a TikTok sale.The White House has also recently worked to restrict Beijing's access to advanced technologies that could be used in war, as well as extend restrictions to American dollars that are used to finance the development of

such technologies within Chinese borders. Beijing has responded by banning memory chips from the U.S. chipmaker Micron and moving to curb other American chip companies' sales.China has long blocked American websites including Facebook and Instagram by using an elaborate system called the Great Firewall. While WhatsApp, one of the world's most popular messaging services, and Threads, an X-like app for digital conversation, were permitted in app stores, they were not used widely in China. The apps were dwarfed by Chinese ones such as WeChat, which is owned by the Chinese internet company Tencent.Still, Chinese users had been able to download WhatsApp and use it with the assistance of a virtual private network, or VPN, which are used to set up secure web connections and view prohibited content inside China.WhatsApp had been downloaded 15 million times on iPhones in China since 2017, while Threads had been downloaded 470,000 times, according to Appfigures.Apple has been more vulnerable than most companies to the rising ten-

sions between the United States and China. It became one of the world's most valuable public companies by tapping China's vast workforce and manufacturing muscle to build its iPhones and then selling the devices to the country's growing middle class. China now accounts for about one-fifth of Apple's annual sales, more than $68 billion last year.For years, Apple has bowed to Beijing's demands that it block an array of apps, including newspapers, VPNs and encrypted messaging services. It also built a data center in the country to house Chinese citizens' iCloud information, which includes personal contacts, photos and email.

As the relationship between the United States and China deteriorated, Apple began diversifying its supply chain and has started assembling iPhones, AirPods and Apple Watches in India and Vietnam.Tim Cook, Apple's CEO, has been in Asia this week, where he has visited suppliers in Vietnam and spoke with Indonesia's president about building a manufacturing plant there.

A referendum on India's future

Even as campaigning gathers pace for the 2024 general election, distant seem the days when the world hailed our elections as a wondrous and clamorous affair that reaffirmed our greatest achievement: being the world's largest democracy. But the past decade has diminished us in the eyes of the world, and to some extent our own, to an "electoral autocracy". There is a palpable sense that in this election, we are fighting to save our democracy itself.It is impossible to escape the widespread perception that our elections increasingly sustain only the bare bones of democracy, even as its sinews — the legislature, judiciary, media, "autonomous" watchdogs such as the Election Commission of India and the Reserve Bank of India, and agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate and the Central Bureau of Investigation — are either hollowed out or hijacked.More pernicious still is the politics of hate, vigilantism in the name of religion, and the demonisation of minorities that the Bharatiya Janata Party government and its fellow travellers have promoted. Together with the intimidation of large sections of the media, the purchasing of Opposition Members of Parliament and Members of the Legislative Assembly and the villainisation of dissidence as "anti-national", democracy is gasping for air in the suffocating embrace of its self-proclaimed "Mother".As we elect our 18th Lok Sabha, at stake here are not only 543 seats but also the India of our Constitution, the Hindustan which Iqbal eulogised as saare jahaan se achcha, and the Bharat for whose pluralism and inter-religious coexistence Mahatma Gandhi laid down his life; 2024 is a referendum on India's future: a choice between a hateful ethno-nationalism that disdains democratic accountability, and a civic nationalism — anchored in the Constitution and its institutions — that safeguards our democracy and diversity.

Much has changedOur first general election of 1951-52, the most audacious democratic experiment in history, was also a referendum on India's future. The farther we drift from that moment in time, the more we take for granted its majesty. To remember it now, over 70 years later, is to realise how much has changed.

The spadework of nearly five years, carried out in cataclysmic conditions, preceded that general election. Onerous enough were the tasks of nation-building and reversing the depredations of colonial rule, but the makers of modern India had a lot more to reckon with: the flames of Partition had to be doused and refugees rehabilitated, the ferocious invasion of Kashmir had to be quelled, and over 500 princely states with recalcitrant rulers had to be drawn into the Union. Yet, nothing could dampen the democratic zeal of Jawaharlal Nehru and his compatriots. While many other decolonised nations tumbled into authoritarianism, India drafted a trailblazing Constitution, affording a largely indigent and illiterate populace universal adult franchise: something even the United States, the world's oldest modern democracy, had not yet done. With the passage of the Rep-

resentation of the People Act, 1950, we began evolving a system of voting for our enormous, geographically diverse country with 176 million eligible voters, about 85% of them unlettered. An American observer noted that the challenge of preparing for the world's largest election was of "colossal proportions".A quest to translate a vision into a reality

Far from building a cult of personality around himself to consolidate his power, Nehru faced, even before the electoral contest of 1951–52, a formidable challenge to his values and leadership from within his own party. In August 1950, Purushottam Das Tandon had become president of the Congress. The elderly and socially conservative Tandon represented everything Nehru detested: a belief in the primacy of Hindus over India's minorities, a searing mistrust of Muslims, and a fervour for Hindi's nationwide imposition.In Nehru's view, Tandon's presidency blurred the lines between the Congress and communal organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha. Worried that the party was abandoning its ideals, Nehru resigned from the Congress Working Committee, Parliamentary Board and Central Election Committee, stopping just short of quitting the party itself. Terrified of losing their foremost vote-getter right before the election, the Congress rallied behind the Prime Minister. This compelled Tandon to resign in September 1951, at which point Nehru himself was elected president.

With the party in his thrall, Nehru strove to reshape it into a vehicle for delivering a "stable, secular and progressive" India. Though it inherited the legacy of our freedom struggle, the Congress was never unopposed — not even at the genesis of our democracy. From J.B. Kripalani and Jayaprakash Narayan to Babasaheb Ambedkar and S.P. Mookerjee, redoubtable leaders of all stripes berated Nehru

and the Congress every day. Not one to criticise the Opposition for doing their job, and frequently commending them on the campaign trail, Nehru devoted himself to translating the Constitution's vision into reality.Desiring greater representation of women in Parliament, he wrote to the Chief Ministers in 1950 and suggested they encourage women legislators to resign from the State assemblies and contest for the first Lok Sabha. As adoring crowds swirled around him everywhere on the campaign trail, he persistently reminded them to exercise their franchise: "It does not matter for whom you vote," the star campaigner of the Congress would say, "but vote."

While the intoxicating popularity of two men — two Prime Ministers — characterises both our first and latest general election, the ideas of India they embody are radically antithetical. Weeks ahead of the 2024 general election, the bank accounts of India's largest Opposition party were frozen and an incumbent Chief Minister, a leading light of the Opposition, was cast behind bars. Long gone is Nehru's age, where even the Communist Party of India, which had launched an armed rebellion against the Indian state in 1948, was welcomed into the political fray as a legitimate competitor. In the event, the Communists emerged second, garnering 16 out of 489 seats in the first Lok Sabha and testifying to the freeness and fairness of our great experiment with democracy.Indians went to the polls in 1951-52 amid a surcharged communal atmosphere. While the horrors of Partition continued to haunt their victims, the reprehensible persecution of Hindus in East Pakistan had led to vengeful violence against the Muslims of Calcutta, sparking more atrocities against Hindus in Dacca and its vicinity. This bolstered Nehru's resolve to pursue, regardless of how Pakistan treated its minorities, his efforts at forging a secular state, making him thunder in

Parliament that "we shall not let India be slaughtered at the altar of bigotry". Commencing his electoral tour at Ludhiana in 1951, he declared an "all-out war against communalism", lambasting parties that in the garb of Hindu and Sikh culture were spewing hatred like the Muslim League had once done. Nehru waged a battle in defence of India's soul, and called upon ordinary Indians to be his soldiers: their votes were to determine our future. Sure enough, harmony triumphed over hatred, with Jawaharlal Nehru leading the Congress to a resounding victory.Standing alone before a ballot box during the first general election, 107 million Indians (out of the 176 million eligible), their breaths held in awe, cast their votes and became the custodians of India's fate. Today, 17 general elections later, we are again waging a battle for India's soul. Let us honour the wisdom of our ancestors of the 1950s, who voted for an India that belonged to everyone, where Ram and Rahim were equivalent, and where their devotees together toiled to propel this country to dazzling new heights.Such an India appals our ruling party. Petrified of the power of a united people, it has sought to divide us, hoping we never rise as one in defence of our republic. The choice is ours. We have already witnessed a partition of the Indian soil; the past decade has threatened to partition the Indian soul. This we must resolutely oppose, for in the words of our first Prime Minister: "Who lives if India dies?"

Navigating life as a consumer with disability

Every year, March 15 is celebrated as World Consumer Rights Day to create awareness about the rights of consumers. One section of consumers who might remain invisible in these celebrations or even in the discourse around consumer rights is consumers with disabilities.Imagine yourself in the place of a person with visual impairment heading to the supermarket to buy a toaster. You start by booking a cab ride through a mobile app, but since the app is not accessible, you seek external help to book the ride. At the supermarket, there are no tactile pavements in the building, so you seek external help to reach the electronic appliance section and buy a toaster. When you reach home, you realise the toaster is defective and try to contact the customer support of the toaster company. But since the contact details are printed on the outer pack, you seek external help to read them. Discovering that the company only accepts written complaints via postal mail, once again you seek external help to send a complaint to the company.Every single day, persons with disabilities face this struggle of seeking help for the most basic human activities, and the consequent loss of dignity, independence, and privacy. The pervasive inaccessibility that they encounter as consumers not only undermines their right to lead an independent life but also prevents them from equally participating in society as others.

The potential change-makersThe situation discussed above highlights two major challenges for consumers with disabilities: the inaccessibility of goods and services and the inaccessibility of customer support options. This brings us to the most pertinent question: who bears responsibility for this rampant inaccessibility? Rather, who has the capacity to enhance the consumer experience of persons with disabilities?

Businesses could be a starting point. Businesses generally don't perceive persons with disabilities as their target consumers. This is evidenced by their inaccessible offerings, which are typically designed for 'mainstream' consumers. In India, persons with disabilities account for 5-8% of the population (World Bank, 2009). Therefore, if not out of generosity, businesses could consider making their offerings accessible just to broaden their customer reach.Another entity capable of making a difference is the government. The gap in sensitisation among businesses can be abridged through effective policy measures. For example, FSSAI in October 2023 issued an advisory to all food business operators for incorporating QR codes containing product information on all food products. This simple yet effective step will allow people with visual impairment to ascertain crucial product information on their own. While transformative, this measure is limited to one type of product. The government could consider bringing comprehensive accessibility guidelines for all goods and services. India can build on the lessons from the initiatives in countries such as Australia, the U.S., and Canada and in-

tegrate similar strategies into its policies.Legal reforms

Persons with disabilities are also empowered by laws that safeguard their rights and interests as consumers. The primary legislation in this regard is the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWDA), 2016, which grants a bouquet of rights including the rights to equality, accessibility, and reasonable accommodation. In particular, the Act includes provisions for universally designed consumer goods and accessible services (Sections 43 and 46). The Rules notified under the RPWDA also require all Information and Communications Technology (ICT) goods and services to be accessible in accordance with the BIS standards laid down by the government. In case of a violation of these rights, a consumer with disability can file a com-

plaint with the Disability Commissions established under the Act. For example, following a complaint by one of us (Rahul), the well-known healthcare service provider Practo was directed to make its website and application accessible. Similarly, complaints regarding accessibility barriers in services such as banking, insurance, and hospitality have also been filed. However, Disability Commissions only issue recommendatory directions. So, they often fail to provide effective redress.Another avenue is the Consumer Protection Act (CPA), 2019, which not only details various consumer rights but also empowers Consumer Commissions to impose penalties and award compensation against consumer complaints. Consumers with disabilities have successfully obtained such remedies in numerous cases brought before Consumer Commissions. For example, in S.

Suresh v. The Manager i/c, Gokulam Cinemas, a person with locomotor disability who encountered inaccessibility at a cinema hall was awarded a compensation of ?1,00,000.Unlike the RPWDA, the CPA has strong enforcement and compliance mechanisms. However, it lacks any dedicated rights for consumers with disabilities contrary to the RPWDA, which may deter them from filing complaints with Consumer Commissions. Hence, it becomes imperative to align the CPA with the RPWDA.In addition to these legal reforms, it is crucial to raise awareness about the existing rights and resources available to consumers with disabilities under the two chief legislations. While consumer awareness has been a key focus of the state, particularly with the launch of the flagship Jago Grahak Jago Campaign, consumers with disabilities have never received attention.

X takes down four posts by leaders of BJP, AAP, YSR Congress, TDP on Election Commission of India order

Social media platform X (formerly Twitter), released a letter by the Election Commission of India (EC) ordering a takedown of four posts on the platform by political leaders in the YSR Congress Party, the Telugu Desam Party, the Aam Aadmi Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party. The company said that it disagrees with the takedown order issued by the EC, and that "freedom of expression should extend to these posts and political speech in general". The company has taken the tweets down in India, but they are visible from non-Indian Internet connections.

This is the first time that X is proactively disclosing a takedown notice from India to the public since April 2023, when it stopped publishing summaries of such orders with links to affected posts on the Lumen Database website. The EC has issued such orders in the past to X, which have been disclosed and reported in the media; however, subsequent disclosures for government takedowns around the world come selectively through the handle of the social media platform's Global Affairs team. In the current batch of orders, the poll body has cited a prohibition on campaigners targeting their rivals' personal lives while politicking. The YSR Congress's post was not immediately available on Tuesday evening, indicating that the party has chosen to delete the post altogether. Telugu Desam Party leader N. Chandrababu Naidu's post featured what appears to be a document from the Central Bureau of Investigation, where he says that the agency "seized a staggering 25,000 kilos of drugs at Vizag Port, today," and that "non-cooperation of AP Police and port employees suggests complicity and point towards the potential involvement of the ruling party." Mr. Naidu's Telugu Desam Party is in the opposition in Andhra Pradesh.

Foreign policy shift may shape Lok Sabha polls

One of the most obvious yet understudied trends in India over the past decade has been the emergence of foreign policy as a domestic political concern. Viewed principally as an elite preoccupation, foreign policy has often been deemed too complex, too abstract, and too distant from the aam aadmi (common man). But today, foreign policy has descended from its rarefied perch. While elites might still dominate the production of foreign policy, its consumption has been democratised.

The downward penetration of foreign policy is evident in big ways and small. Campaign posters across the country hail India's presidency of the G20. The external affairs minister is eagerly sought out by party satraps to discuss India's standing in the world. Even the Opposition has taken notice: Congress's 2024 manifesto contains multiple pages on national security.As Indian voters prepare to go to the polls, foreign policy will be a hallmark of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) campaign. The rising domestic currency of foreign policy must be understood as part and parcel of India's broader quest to become a key protagonist in an increasingly multipolar world order. The salience of foreign policy to ordinary Indians is driven by a mix of structural geopolitical shifts, the ideological moorings of the BJP, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unique political credibility. While the evidence suggests that the elevation of foreign policy is paying rich political dividends, the full range of consequences remains unclear.

Rising powers and the quest for statusStatus-seeking behaviour has now become entrenched in our understanding of domestic politics in diverse polities, but a compelling logic extends these dynamics to states in international relations. Political scientist Rohan Mukherjee explains that rising powers such as India care deeply about their position in the global hierarchy of states. In the world of international politics, states pursue a higher status to facilitate entry into valued economic networks, key multilateral forums, and beneficial strategic partnerships. Status can also imbue rising powers with what Mukherjee calls "symbolic equality," which is manifested through norms, customs, and institutions that treat rising powers as co-equals at the global high table.

India's quest for status recognition is not novel, but there is a palpable feeling that something qualitatively different is afoot. The present government has expressed not only its desire for India to transition from a "balancing" power into a "leading" one but also the idea that this status transition has partly been achieved. Previous Indian prime ministers have supported the concept of "polyvocality"— the notion that the international order should be shaped by a range of voices representing the interests of the developed and developing world. The Modi government has gone even further — arguing for a global order based on multipolarity in which India serves as one of the principal poles. This shift appears to resonate with a wide swath of Indians, who wield aspirations for India domestically that are matched by their desires for the country to project power internationally.Scholars have historically conceived of two categories of policy issues in India. As Ashutosh Varshney argued, there has been a traditional separation in India between "elite" and "mass" issues. "Elite issues such as foreign policy, national defence, and international trade allegedly hold little resonance for the common person. By contrast, "mass" issues such as inflation, jobs, and welfare are perceived to directly impact the average Indian's daily existence.

The bifurcation between "elite" and "mass" issues is no more. Starting in 2019, Indian voters began to regularly speak about how Modi had put India on the map, implying that his leadership helped the country leap from backwater to marquee status. As one expert put it, "The message which has gone out is that India has really emerged very strong in the world. And it's only because of Modi."More systematic evidence also supports this contention. A May 2023 survey conducted by Lokniti-CSDS and NDTV found that 63% of respondents reported that India's global status had risen since Modi assumed office. The same poll found that most Indians believed the country had progressed in furthering its cultural capital, its status as a world leader, and its attraction as a destination for foreign investment since 2014. The February 2024 India Today Mood of the Nation poll found that 19% of survey respondents believed that Modi would be most remembered for "raising India's global stature", a response second only to the construction of the Ram Mandir (selected by 42% of respondents).From standard public opinion surveys such as the ones regularly fielded during elections, it can be hard to discern the impact of foreign policy on domestic political choices. Traditionally, "mass" issues such as development, inflation, or jobs and livelihoods are cited most often by voters, as reflected in Lokniti-CSDS national election surveys since 2009.However, this does not mean foreign policy is unimportant. For instance, the February 2019 attack on an Indian paramilitary convoy in Pulwama — and India's subsequent airstrikes on terror camps in Balakot, Pakistan — helped create a nationalist fervour that the BJP enthusiastically exploited leading up to general elections.

According to IANS-CVoter polling data, satisfaction with the BJP central government exhibited a 15-percentage-point bump in the weeks following Pulwama-Balakot before partially reverting. A Lokniti-CSDS survey found that roughly 80% of voters in 2019 had heard of the Balakot airstrike — 46% of whom favoured Modi's re-election, compared to 32% among those unaware of India's retaliatory strikes.However, foreign policy crises such as Pulwama-Balakot are infrequent and unpredictable. Foreign policy is more likely to factor into the intangible "hawa"— the mythical "wind" that captures public sentiment around Indian elections. The perceived gains that an incumbent makes in the foreign policy domain may not be strongly reflected in polling data compared to known, make-or-break Election Day issues. Nonetheless, such gains can further an impression of achievement, aiding in the creation of a feel-good sentiment as voters cast their ballots.Arguably, there are two sets of factors that explain why foreign policy is emerging as a domestic political issue at this juncture.

The first set includes structural factors related to the changing nature of international order. The unipolar moment of the US following the end of the Cold War has come to an end, with China emerging as a clear strategic competitor, and Russian revanchism under President Vladimir Putin rearing its head. The fragmentation of the international order has created space for India to flex its foreign policy muscles by skillfully playing adversaries off one another.But the emergence of foreign policy as a domestic concern goes beyond structure alone. The current government's unique worldview represents a second critical factor. The BJP government seized foreign policy as a crucial pillar of its ambition, striving that India under Modi's leadership reclaim its historical role as a civilisational power. The PM has said that he is leading India out of "12 centuries of slavery" while ushering in a new era of "Amrit Kaal". Such grand thinking demonstrates his conviction that India inhabits a geopolitical sweet spot.According to the ruling party, its ambitious agenda for India stands in sharp contrast to the Opposition's unwillingness to exercise power globally and maximise India's interests. Modi has explicitly painted this contrast, denouncing his predecessor's exercise of "strategic restraint" in the face of repeated terrorist attacks. Modi's unique mix of popularity, ambition, and marketing savvy has convinced many Indians that his leadership is an intrinsic part of India's revival, at home and abroad.The frenetic pace of activity around India's G20 presidency demonstrated the government's desire to communicate its foreign policy achievements to the masses. India's G20 logo, which incorporated the BJP's signature lotus, was slapped on everything from archaeological sites to standardised tests. Posters hailing India's presidency was plastered on flyovers, train stations, and major thoroughfares, and many Indians viewed this milestone as a coronation rather than the country's turn assuming a rotating leadership position. This physical marketing onslaught was paired with meticulous digital mobilisation.The effort to harness India's foreign policy status for domestic political purposes is especially noteworthy given the clear evidence that it has consolidated domestic support for the current government.

According to a 2023 Pew survey, nearly seven in 10 Indians believed that their country's global influence was getting stronger. Furthermore, eight in 10 Indians had a favourable opinion of Modi's performance. Surprisingly, even among those who did not support the BJP alliance, six in 10 agreed that India's status had grown. Indians hold especially positive views about their country's role in their neighbourhood. A 2022 CVoter-Centre for Policy Research (CPR) survey found that 33% of Indian respondents reported that India wielded the most influence in Asia, with the US and China a distant second and third respectively.A more recent YouGov-CPR-Mint survey of young, urban Indians found very high levels of public satisfaction with the Modi government, including on foreign policy matters. For instance, 70% of respondents were satisfied with India's G20 presidency, and a roughly equivalent share maintained a favourable view of the government's efforts to protect the country from terrorist attacks. Even on the issue of Chinese incursions, six in 10 respondents were happy with the way the government has handled the ongoing dispute.The newfound resonance of foreign policy is a striking development in a country where such matters were long out of sight and, hence, out of mind, for most Indians. But the transition of foreign policy from an elite to mass issue also raises questions about the deeper implications of this development.Scholars Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland have argued that foreign policy is expected to have the greatest domestic import when both clarity of respon