

City's first sports bar with golf simulators

Hyderabad: Entertainment scene in Hyderabad has just gone up a notch with the debut of 'Swing Lounge', the city's first-ever sports lounge with golf simulators. This isn't your typical hangout spot, as Swing Lounge offers an immersive social experience, providing patrons with a cosy lounge to play and enjoy food, and refreshing beverages. Situated within the premises of One Golf at Financial District, the new lounge boasts a massive screen and an array of thrilling virtual games, offering a one-of-a-kind simulation experience that's enjoyable for both golfers and non-golfers alike.

More than just a place to play, Swing Lounge inspires people of all ages and interests to come together. With a commitment to providing Hyderabadis with a topnotch golfing experience, each bay at Swing Lounge features the industry's best technology. "Trusted by hundreds of pros and featuring over 100 golf courses worldwide to play on, we are equipped with a full bar and multiple HDTVs to watch the big game, one can hit the range, join a league, get a private lesson, or play 18 holes with friends at the lounge," explains Sannith Reddy M, founder and MD of One Golf and Swing Lounge. What sets this

place apart is its state-of-the-art technology, including super high-speed camera technology, which provides a realistic indoor golfing experience.

"You can enjoy playing golf in any of the world's famous golf courses and improve your play using in-built driving ranges," adds Sannith. With the multiplayer functionality, Swing Lounge allows groups of up to eight people to play golf together, complete with a digital scorecard and shot history for each player. And with plans to expand to other metro cities, including a second location in Gachibowli, Swing Lounge is poised to revolutionise the sports lounge scene. But this lounge isn't just about golf; it's about embracing a variety of sports and activities. In addition to golf, Hyderabadis can look forward to upcoming games such as soccer, baseball, and other classic games.

The lounge also has in-house golf instructors to assist guests in mastering the game. "With the immense response, we are planning to take this to other metro cities. We are aiming to open another 4-5 locations by the end of next year. The second location is coming up in Gachibowli, spreading over 15,000 square feet," shared Sannith



Emergency pumping begins at Nagarjuna Sagar



Hyderabad: To ensure Hyderabad has access to uninterrupted supply of drinking water during the ongoing summer, emergency pumping with 10 pumping motors began at Nagarjuna Sagar on Saturday. The second phase of pumping will also be taken-up in the coming days, if the need arises, Water Board MD Sudarshan Reddy on Saturday said.

In the next few weeks, the water board

will also make arrangements to supply drinking water through submersible pumps. From May 15, emergency pumping of water will be carried out at the Yellampally Reservoir. Assuring that there is enough reserves of water at Himayatsagar, Osmansagar, and Singur, the Water Board MD said that the department is ready to draw water from these

water bodies if the need arises. As of April 20, the water storage capacity of Nagarjuna Sagar is 127.630 TMC which is at 507.6 feet. On the same day last year, there were 156.67 TMC at 524 feet of water.

The full tank level of Nagarjuna Sagar is 590 feet and it is now at dead storage level. Because of this deficit, after a period of 7 years, the Water Board has take-up emergency pumping of water from Nagarjuna Sagar, he said. With Hyderabad expanding up to Outer Ring Road (ORR), to meet the drinking water needs of the growing population, the Water Board is drawing Krishna drinking water supply phase 1, 2 and 3 from Nagarjuna Sagar,

Akkampally Balancing Reservoir. A total of 270 MGD of drinking water is being supplied to Hyderabad from these two (Nagarjuna Sagar and Akkampally) on a daily basis. Based on this calculation, every month, about 1.38 TMC of water is supplied per month to Hyderabad. Sudarshan Reddy said that when compared to last year, the Water Board this year is supplying an additional 175 MLD, especially in those areas where the borewells have gone dry. Moreover, from April 15, an additional 7 MGD (30 MLD) of water is being supplied to Hyderabad. The Water Board is also preparing to supply an additional 30 MLD of drinking water from May 15, he said.

Baisakhi Mela celebrations held at Hitex Exhibition Center in Hyd

Hyderabad: The sprawling Hitex Exhibition Center, Madhapur was abuzz with enthusiastic crowds who gathered to celebrate the Baisakhi Mela, organised by the Telangana Punjabi Sabha (TPS) on Sunday. The celebrations captivated attendees with vibrant music, dance, sumptuous food, and plenty of fun. Kicking off with energetic Bhangra performances at the venue's entrance, the rhythmic beats and traditional Punjabi dance steps entertained incoming guests.

Why everyone's counting on the Census — and why a delay hurts

The 128th Constitutional amendment — also called the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam — that provides 33 per cent reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State legislative Assemblies has brought the focus back on India's delayed census. The electoral seats will be reserved only after the delimitation exercise. And the delimitation to redraw the constituencies will be based on the "first census after 2026". In effect, this whole series of electoral reforms will have to wait for a fresh census. For the first time since 1881, India's decennial census — a mammoth, exhaustive exercise where every Indian stands up to be counted — could not be held in 2021 due to the Covid pandemic. This cascading effect of a delayed census prompts a few questions: Is a census needed at all? Can India do without a census? What and how does the country stand to lose if it does not have timely census information?

Why have a census?

Since the start of economic reforms in 1991, there have been two big changes when it comes to publicly available data. One, India's economy is becoming increasingly digital and generates a lot of data — for example, telecom and internet data — that can guide policymakers. Two, with the rollback of the centralised plan economy and the broad-based acceptance of the 'minimum government' paradigm, it can be argued that the government's dependence on one central database to arrive at policy decisions has come down. Not to mention a whole bunch of surveys done by private firms. As such, an argument can be made that the country's everyday functioning will not be terribly impacted if the census is delayed, or indeed, even done away with altogether. Census The 2021 Census was put off due to the Covid-19 pandemic — the first time since 1881 that India's decennial census could not be held. (File) To begin with, the idea of dropping the census is not completely unheard of.

"Even in a country such as the US, their Census Bureau has considered stopping their census," says Sonalde Desai, one India's leading social demographers who is Distinguished University Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Maryland, and Professor and Centre Director, NCAER-National Data Innovation Centre, New Delhi. Desai says the debate in the US was whether to instead simply rely on something called the American Community Survey, which is a "survey" that carries on continuously (every month, every year) and provides vital information on a yearly basis. Of course, being a survey and not a census, it covers only a sliver of population — 30-odd million in a decade. But eventually, the US stuck to conducting the decennial census partly because of the constitutional requirement to have a census but more importantly, says Desai, because the ACS may not accurately capture from a policy perspective some of the most important segments of the population such as migrants and the

homeless. Many of these concerns are even more heightened in India's case. Even so, can India do without a census and instead look at some other source to supply the data? For instance, administrative statistics — that is, the data collected by government departments. One could argue that over time, the Indian government has improved its capacity to know about the public. Since governments run a whole host of schemes, providing everything from general sanitation to individual housing, can't all that data — instead of relying on an exercise as monumental as a census — be used to govern effectively? Desai says the problem with basing policymaking on administrative statistics is that many Indians fall outside of their scope. For instance, the migrant workers. Since many schemes may not be effective in targeting them, using data from such schemes will lead to obvious exclusions. Census The Census schedule of 1951, Independent India's first Census. (Credit: Census of India) Yamini Aiyar, President and CEO of Centre for Policy Research, points out that there are huge standardisation issues with MIS data across states. "Every government department has an MIS system, each one follows its own set of data standards, definitions etc. So comparability becomes a huge problem. Whereas in the census, the data is comparable across the country and over time," she says. Pronab Sen, former Chief Statistician of India, also warns against thinking that administrative statistics or any such set of data can replace the census. Administrative statistics can be faulty for a variety of reasons — ranging from neglect to incompetence to corruption. Sen gives the example of the data on open defecation. "Recall that the Prime Minister had announced that India was open defecation free and that every household had a toilet based on the administrative data. But then came the National Family Health Survey and it showed that this wasn't the case and that 30% of the households don't have toilets," points out Sen. So the Census is needed for a reality check on administrative data instead of the latter being used as a replacement for the census. Census Census enumerators at a village in Delhi in 1981. (Credit: Census of India) If, for instance, data from a housing scheme claims that all the intended beneficiaries have received houses, it is only by conducting a census that one can be sure. A confirmation means the housing scheme has to end and if the census shows gaps, then it has to be continued. How the delay hurts Given that there are no real reliable alternatives to a census, how does a delay affect India? Data and the statistical system Census is the foundation for the entire statistical system of the country. Sen explains that all the household surveys that are undertaken in the country draw their sample based on the census data. "When you are drawing a sample, you try to draw one which is as representative of the actual population — the picture of which is



provided by the census — as possible," says Sen. However, if the census is delayed, the original picture is distorted and, as such, samples based on it will also fail to be representative of the reality. The same logic applies to the results of a survey. Ordinarily one could project the survey results to the whole population but with delays one runs into problems. "So in the absence of a relatively recent census, the quality of survey data also becomes suspect," says Sen. Desai says that in the short-term, projections based on the last census will be reasonably accurate but as the years roll on, a few metrics start getting out of whack. The first metric where the data starts to falter is rural-urban population distribution. "We must use census town definition as against the statutory town definition because as things stand, there is a lot of political incentive for people to stay 'rural' that villages really don't want to convert themselves into towns," says Desai. Census Vallabh Patel, then Deputy PM, addressing a Census meeting in 1950. (Credit: Census of India) Second, internal migration. Typically, after each Census, the Census Commissioner also produces annual population projections for the next two decades. "(However), population projections are based on estimates of only fertility and mortality data. On migration, we never have reliable projections because that is one that changes quite rapidly," says Desai. Contrary to popular imagination, most of India's international migration happens intra-state and intra-district. This has massive implications for policymaking whether it is in reference to how much housing is needed in different parts of the country or how the tax revenues are divided between states. The third metric that suffers in the absence of a timely census is mortality data. Desai says that while the National Family Health Surveys give "very good quality" fertility data, we do not have good data on mortality. Unless we have a good understanding of mortality data, our age-distribution projections could suffer significantly. "India is clearly going to face an ageing challenge. Lower age groups are affected by fertility while the upper ages are affected by mortality. So unless we have a good understanding of the mortality data and consequently the age distribu-

tion, we will not be able to frame an accurate policy response such as assessing the extent of old-age pension requirements etc.," says Desai. The lag in census data has already started claiming its victims.

Himanshu, professor of economics at JNU, says that almost all the major policies are decided on the basis of census data — be it the number of Primary Health Centres and their location or the allocation of subsidised foodgrains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). "The worst example of what a delay in census can do is to look at how genuine beneficiaries are being excluded under the NFSA," he says. Since the Act specifies a ratio of population that needs to get the benefits (up to 75% of the rural population and 50 per cent of the urban population), the use of a dated population base has meant that as many as 100 million Indians are getting excluded from NFSA. Rajendran Narayanan, who teaches at Azim Premji University and has traveled extensively across rural India to study the efficacy of government programmes, provides a very real example of how the delay in Census results hurts some of the weakest citizens. His example ties in with the mortality data problem that Desai pointed to as well as the policy implementation problem that Himanshu mentioned. "Consider a household of a man and woman that was not eligible for a ration card as per the 2011 Census. There is evidence to show that in India, life expectancy of men is lower than that of women. If the man dies, that leaves the woman as the lone bread winner of the house. If she is successful in getting all the nods, then, under the National Social Assistance Programme, she will get a widow pension of Rs 200 per month. Getting her included in the list of ration card holders will be difficult because targets would be set based on the 2011 Census," says Narayanan. While the census may have started out just as a population count, and even now is often seen as a central government exercise, its biggest contribution is not in providing a macro estimate, but in providing the exact and granular detail of India's reality. For instance, a census can tell us how many people in a particular village of a particular district in a particular state were disabled?

9th Nizam of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty, Raunaq Yar Khan, Joins Yoda Diagnostic Center opening along with Mega Star Chiranjeevi



Nawab Raunaq Yar Khan, 9th Nizam of the Asaf Jahi Dynasty, graced the occasion of the inauguration of Yoda Diagnostic Center in Madhapur, Hyderabad. Participating in a traditional pooja, Nawab Raunaq Yar Khan lent his auspicious pres-

ence to bless the new establishment.

Accompanying the Nawab were his childhood friend and Telangana's Health Minister, Damodar Narsimha, along with the esteemed client and neighbor, Cine Mega Star Chiranjeevi. Known for utilizing

the Nawab's expansive estate in Jubilee Hills for creating cinema sets, this collaboration showcases the close bond between these prominent personalities.

This event served as a testament to Nawab Raunaq Yar Khan's royal lineage

and his deep connection to the secular Asaf Jahi Dynasty of the Nizams of Hyderabad State.

It highlighted the Nawab's commitment to upholding his heritage and showcasing the dynasty's rich credentials.

New WhatsApp feature enables quick responses to status updates

New Delhi: Meta-owned WhatsApp is reportedly testing a new feature that will allow users to react quickly to status updates on Android. According to WABetaInfo, the "quick reaction feature for status updates" is set to release for a future update of the app. With this feature, users will be able to quickly add a reaction to status updates, allowing them to express their appreciation for the posted content with ease. As per the report, these reactions will occur on the status screen, rather than within the conversation thread. With this new approach, users can easily engage with status updates while keeping conversations clutter-free. The quick reaction fea-

ture for status updates has a significant aspect, which is its compatibility with end-to-end encryption. This means that the quick reaction will be entirely secure and private, ensuring that neither WhatsApp nor any third party can access or view the quick reaction exchanged between users, the report mentioned. Meanwhile, WhatsApp is reportedly working on a feature for iOS users that will allow them to track the view count of channel updates. This feature, which is still under development on WhatsApp beta for Android, was designed to provide both channel owners and followers valuable insights into the reach and engagement of the content.



7% is not an adequate growth rate... India ought to be growing more rapidly because of the demographic dividend: Jayanth R Varma

Jayanth R Varma, one of the external members of the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), believes that food price shocks, which were transient in the previous fiscal, are expected to be short-lived in FY2025 as well. And, Inflation is 'firmly' on a path of gliding towards the 4% target, he says. Varma, who has been voting for a 25 basis points (bps) cut in the repo rate for the previous two meetings, told HITESH VYAS and GEORGE MATHEW that the monetary policy should be wary of keeping the interest rate so high that it prevents revival of private sector capital investment. The projected GDP growth of 7% for FY2025 is achievable but it is not an adequate rate as the country is well below the pre-pandemic level, said Varma, who is Professor of Finance in IIM Ahmedabad. Edited excerpts:

What is your assessment on India's growth in FY2025? Do you think 7% growth is achievable?

I think the projected growth rate of 7% is achievable though many professional forecasters expect a somewhat lower rate. The more important point is that 7% is not an adequate growth rate at this juncture where we are still well below the pre-pandemic trend line. This is also the period where India ought to be growing more rapidly because of the ongoing demographic dividend. What are the major risks to inflation and growth projections for FY2025? Geopolitical tensions, weather related uncertainties and the global environment are the major risks for the Indian economy during this financial year. As the MPC statement says, the risks are evenly balanced.

Do you expect food price pressures to ease and the disinflation process to accelerate in FY25 considering that monsoon is expected to be good this year?

The good news in 2023-24 was that food price shocks tended to be transient, and I expect the same transience this year as well. A favourable monsoon this year should reduce the severity and frequency of these transient shocks. All these factors make me confident that inflation is firmly on a path of gliding towards the target.

You mentioned that a high real rate imposes significant costs on the economy. Can you elaborate? Is it already happening?

The economy has been held up by government investment, and the ongoing process of fiscal consolidation is gradually withdrawing that stimulus. It is necessary for private capital investment to pick up the baton, but we have been waiting for many quarters now for this to happen. Monetary policy should be wary of keeping rate so tight that it prevents a revival of private sector capital investment.

You voted for a neutral stance on withdrawal of accommodation. How will it help in aligning inflation progressively to the target?

In my view, a real interest rate of 1-1.5% would be sufficient to glide inflation to the target of 4%. The current real policy

rate of 2% (based on projected inflation for 2024-25) is therefore excessive. Moreover, as inflation continues to fall, a progressive reduction in the nominal policy rate is necessary to prevent an unwarranted increase in the real policy rate. Do you see rate cuts to begin this fiscal? CPI inflation is expected to be below 4 per cent in the second quarter? There are some expectations that RBI may start cutting rates from the second quarter of FY25. I cannot forecast how the rest of the MPC will evolve in the coming months. My own view has been in favour of a rate cut for two meetings now.

Can global risks delay the rate easing cycle in India?

The risks are definitely there. The geopolitical situation is very volatile and miscalculations by various players could still lead to very unpleasant outcomes. All that I am saying is that this is not the base case for projections at this point of time.

Do you think monetary policy decisions of other major central banks influence the RBI decisions?

I think the macroeconomic environment in India is very different from that of many advanced economies. In particular, there is no evidence in India of the kind of overheating that is raising concerns in the US. India today has enough monetary autonomy to set monetary policy on the basis of domestic considerations without having to emulate US policy.

Do you think the recent escalation of tensions in the Middle East and rise in crude oil prices can pose a significant threat to the price stability?

Actually, the geopolitical situation



looks less scary today than at the time of the meeting. Crude futures prices have shown a very muted market reaction to the Israel-Iran conflict. We do not know how the situation would evolve in the coming weeks, but as of now, the situation is not worrisome.

The US 10-year treasury yield has crossed 4.6%. What will be the impact on India?

The primary impact of this is on the exchange rate, and the US Dollar Index has trended up in recent days reflecting an appreciation of the dollar against major

world currencies. However, the mandate of the MPC does not include the exchange rate, and we have to set rates taking account only the domestic macroeconomic environment in terms of inflation and growth. What's going on in the rural sector? Demand has not picked up to the desired level despite high GDP growth of 7% plus. I have been pointing out for some time now that we must not lose sight of the low cumulative growth rate since the pre-pandemic period. This implies that there is a lot of catchup growth that is required to restore the economy to the pre-pandemic trend line.

This Quote Means: 'If you want to test a man's character, give him power'

Power is a subject to which philosophers and thinkers have devoted a great deal of thought – in defining it, in discussing who wields it, what ought to be done with it, and whether power is inherently a good or bad thing. In popular culture too, quotes such as "With great power comes great responsibility", and "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" give great weight to it. Another popular quote says: "If you want to test a man's character, give him power". Popularly attributed to US President Abraham Lincoln, it likely has another source but is nevertheless a testament to power being linked to larger ethics and morality. What exactly does it say about the nature of power, and how does it differ from other views on the matter? We explain. Further, topics related to ethics and morality also form a part of the UPSC CSE syllabus.

What does this quote mean?

According to a Reuters fact-check from 2021, the quote comes from an American politician named Robert G Ingersoll, who said it about Lincoln. In an 1883

speech, he reportedly said: "If you want to find out what a man is to the bottom, give him power. Any man can stand adversity — only a great man can stand prosperity. It is the glory of Abraham Lincoln that he never abused power only on the side of mercy." It argues that in times of trouble, every person gets down to their survival instincts. However, it is when a person is given power, which may be understood as the capacity to affect or change things meaningfully, that we get a sense of what their true character is like. Power can also mean control over resources. A poor person may not be able to accomplish what she wants, or transform her intentions (good or bad) into reality. But when someone has power, they can make a difference, and it is then that we can understand a person's true character. Even at an individual or micro level, this can be witnessed to a degree, say when someone becomes the head of a local neighbourhood association or becomes in charge of organising an event. As part of the responsibilities they are given, do they become a team player

or simply give instructions to others? Are they more interested in letting their vision prevail or are they open to criticism? Are they using that power for their benefit, say by asking others to do their work for them? In this way, power allows us to understand a person's worldview. On a larger level, when politicians get elected to powerful posts, or when bureaucrats or judges or media persons have to handle big issues related to their jobs that can affect thousands of people, one can witness their values and ethics through their work. Different views of power Nivedita Menon, a professor of political thought at Jawaharlal Nehru University, wrote that in political and social theory, "power refers to the ability to do things and the capacity to produce effects within social interaction." Therefore, it is deeply connected to not individuals but them in relation to others. Political scientist Hannah Arendt viewed power not just as coercion but as a tool of communication between people. No one can suddenly emerge and exercise power — it is something that gets its legitimacy from a group of people who agree to be part of a system.

New shoe sizing system proposed for Indians: What is 'Bha' and the need for it?

A pan-India survey on the feet sizes of Indians was recently carried out as part of a larger project for developing an Indian sizing system for footwear. Proposed to be named 'Bha' (?) to represent Bharat, it could form the basis for manufacturing footwear in India. Upon its implementation, Bha will replace the existing UK/European and the US sizing systems. Initially, the hypothesis was that at least five footwear sizing systems would be required for Indians to be inclusive of various ethnicities. Prior to the survey, it was thought that people from northeast India, on average, had smaller feet sizes compared to the rest of India.

A survey was conducted between December 2021 and March 2022, covering 1,01,880 people across 79 locations in five geographical zones. 3D foot scanning machines were deployed for understanding the size, dimensions and structure of an average Indian foot. 3D foot scanners were used to obtain the dimensions, size and structure of over one lakh Indian users. 3D foot scanners were used to obtain the dimensions, size and structure of over one lakh Indian users. (Photo via CLRI) Overall, Indians' feet were found to be wider than that of Europeans or Americans. Due to the narrow footwear available under the UK/European/US sizing systems, Indians have been wearing footwear which are a size bigger than required. Many Indians were found to be wearing extra-long, ill-fitted and tight footwear. In the case of high-heeled women's footwear, wearing a bigger size was both inconvenient and a cause for potential injuries.

For men, shoelaces were tightened much more than ideal to ensure the shoes were not loose fitting. This affected the normal flow of blood for the wearer. By wearing footwear not designed according to their feet's specifications, Indians have been vulnerable to injuries, shoe bites and compromised foot health – especially among elderly women and diabetics. A statistical analysis of the massive data obtained from the survey concluded that a single shoe sizing system could be applied for Indians.

Why was the need for an Indian shoe sizing system felt?

The British introduced UK sizes in India before Indian independence. According to it, an average Indian woman wears footwear sizes between 4 and 6, and the average man between 5 and 11. Since there existed no data on the feet structure, size, dimensions of Indians, developing an Indian system had been difficult and was never undertaken. With an Indian user now owning an average of 1.5 footwears each and India being the world's most populated country, it is one of the world's biggest markets and manufacturers of shoes. Industry stakeholders also said that an estimated 50 per cent of the footwear ordered online were rejected by customers. With Bha, both the users and the footwear manufacturers could benefit.

What are the survey's recommendations?

Bha proposes eight footwear sizes: I – infants (0 to 1 year), II – babies (1 to 3

years), III – small children (4 to 6 years), IV – children (7 to 11 years), V – girls (12 to 13 years), VI – boys (12 to 14 years), VII – Women (14 years and above) and VIII – Men (15 years and above). For commercial purposes, initially manufacturing of footwears ranging in sizes III – VIII would be sufficient. Footwear manufactured as per Bha could give nearly 85 per cent of the country's population the right fitting and better comfort. The biggest advantage of adopting Bha would be that footwear manufacturers would need to develop only eight sizes as against the present 10 sizes (English system) and seven sizes (European system). In addition, half-sizes would not be needed. The shoe last size will have an additional 5mm foot length. The Bha system will also be wider at its girth than the footwear currently available commercially.

What is the current status of Bha?

The Chennai-based Council of Scientific and Industrial Research–Central Leather Research Institute (CSIR–CLRI) conducted the survey. It submitted its recommendations to the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), which comes under the Union Ministry of Commerce. The DPIIT has forwarded them to the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), which is the Indian authority to implement this sizing system, for approval. Since Bha will completely overhaul the existing sizing systems, the departments have suggested that footwear manufactured as per Bha size standards should be given to users for trial, testing and feedback. Bha is expected to be implemented sometime in 2025.



What is the significance of Earth Day?

Earth Day A drone view of a large-scale land art piece by local artists Sand In Your Eye of a girl holding the Earth for Earth Day in Hebden Bridge, Britain April 19, 2024. REUTERS/Molly Darlington Every year, April 22 is observed as Earth Day, an international event celebrated around the world to pledge support for environmental protection. The year 2024 marks the 54th anniversary of the annual celebrations. In a post on X (formerly known as Twitter), UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: "On #EarthDay, we must stand for our planet. A planet threatened by climate change, by pollution, by biodiversity loss. A planet that needs to be rescued. So we must unite. And we must mobilize all our efforts for #ClimateAction." Here is a look at the significance of Earth Day and what this year's theme is.

Why is Earth Day important?

Earth Day was first observed in 1970 when 20 million took to the streets to protest against environmental degradation. The event was triggered by the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill and other issues such as smog and polluted rivers. For over the next half century, Earth Day continued to play

an important role in environmental activism. The landmark Paris Agreement, which brings almost 200 countries together to set a common target to reduce global greenhouse emissions, was signed on Earth Day 2016. In 2009, the United Nations designated Earth Day as International Mother Earth Day. According to earthday.org, Earth Day aims to "build the world's largest environmental movement to drive transformative change for people and the planet." The movement's mission is "to diversify, educate and activate the environmental movement worldwide." Earth Day is celebrated to remind each of us that the Earth and its ecosystems provide us with life and sustenance. This day also recognises a collective responsibility, as called for in the 1992 Rio Declaration, to promote harmony with nature and the Earth to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations of humanity. Earth Day also provides an opportunity to raise public awareness around the world of the challenges regarding the well-being of the planet and all the life it supports. What is the theme of Earth Day 2024?



This year, the theme is 'Planet vs. Plastics'. The theme highlights the threat plastics pose to the planet and human health. It calls for an end to all plastic waste by demanding a 60% reduction in the production of plastics by the year 2040. Plastic poses a grave threat to human health as it breaks down into microplastic, releasing toxic chemicals into food and water sources and circulating through the air humans breathe. "Plastic production now has grown to more than 380 million tons per year. More plastic has been produced in the last ten years than in the entire 20th century, and the industry plans to grow explosively for the indefinite future," according to earthday.org.

Radio telescopes could spot asteroids with unprecedented detail

Astronomy is a passive science. Its practitioners usually earn their livings studying what they are given: light and other forms of radiation emitted by stars and nebulae, sometimes after it has bounced off other objects, such as planets. But there is an exception. A small but dedicated band of astronomers is not content with the views which nature offers. They choose, instead, to illuminate their targets artificially, by beaming microwaves at them and looking at the reflections. They are, in other words, observing by radar. Astronomy is a passive science. Its practitioners usually earn their livings studying what they are given: light and other forms of radiation emitted by stars and nebulae, sometimes after it has bounced off other objects, such as planets. But there is an exception. A small but dedicated band of astronomers is not content with the views which nature offers. They choose, instead, to illuminate their targets artificially, by beaming microwaves at them and looking at the reflections. They are, in other words, observing by radar.

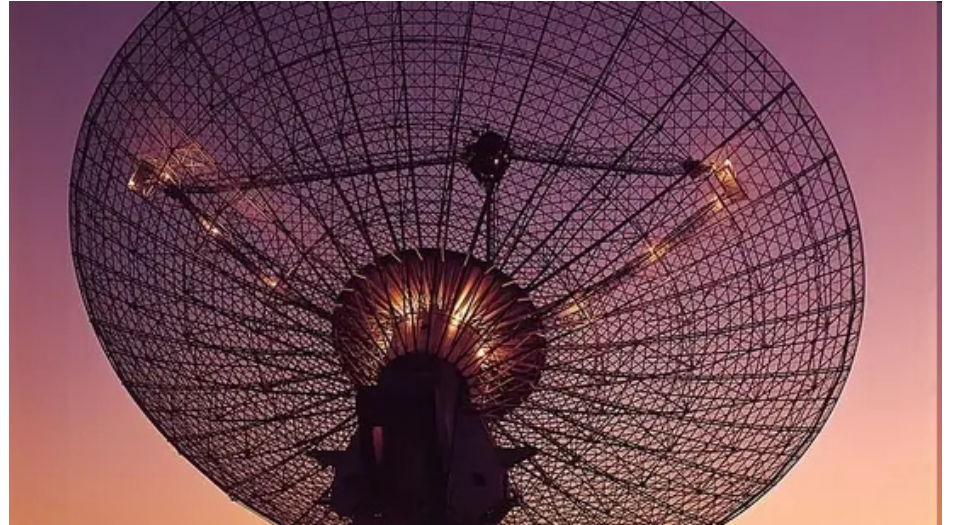
Since 1946, when American military engineers bounced a radar signal off the Moon, this approach has been used to examine planets, moons, and various asteroids and comets. Unfortunately, the field lost one of its two principal instruments in 2020, when the transceiver dish at Arecibo, Puerto Rico, collapsed, leaving the Goldstone Solar System Radar in California to carry the burden.

Now, as the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Denver heard, radar astronomers are lobbying for a powerful new tool they call the Next Generation Radar programme (ngRADAR). This would take the world's largest steerable radio-telescope dish, at Green Bank, West Virginia, (pictured) and turn it into a transmitter, shining a microwave spotlight into space. Unlike Goldstone and Arecibo, however, the Green Bank telescope would not gather the reflections of the beam it sent out. This would be done with sets of smaller radio telescopes elsewhere. To start with, the plan is to recruit the Very Long Baseline Array. This has ten dishes, each on different sites on American territory, scattered from Hawaii in the west to the Virgin Islands in the east. Eventually, if all goes well, the Very Large Array in New Mexico, which has 27 dishes (and one spare), and its successor, the Next Generation Very Large Array, could be included, too.

Increasing the receiver-collecting area by employing arrays of detectors in this way would allow weaker signals to be analysed. And ngRADAR would also operate at a shorter wavelength than previous systems, making finer details visible. The upshot, as Patrick Taylor, of America's National Radio Astronomy Observatory, explained, would be a system that could see an object five metres across when it was as far away as the Moon. This would allow astronomers to study the shapes,

surface features and composition of passing asteroids in perhaps better detail than can be managed by sending spacecraft to visit them. That is a twofold win, for space missions are both scarce and expensive. A taste of what the radar study of asteroids has already achieved was provided by Marina Brozovic of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. Dr Brozovic uses the Goldstone dish for her research. In 2012 Goldstone scanned an asteroid called Toutatis when it was 7m kilometres from Earth. Pictures reconstructed from these data had a resolution of 3.75 metres, which approaches the 2.25-metre resolution of the best optical images taken by Chang'e 2, a Chinese spacecraft that flew past Toutatis the same year.

Goldstone was also involved in DART, the Double Asteroid Redirection Test carried out in 2022. This involved thumping a small asteroid called Dimorphos, which was in orbit around a larger one, Didymos, with a 600kg probe and watching, by means including radar, how its orbit changed. This test suggested that, with enough notice, a space rock on a collision course with Earth might be nudged into an orbit where it would miss. Edgard Rivera-Valentín of Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, in Maryland, meanwhile, broadened the discussion to describe some of radar astronomy's successes in examining objects other than asteroids. Dr



Rivera-Valentín worked with the Arecibo telescope until its collapse. Before that, he explained, it mapped the surface of Venus, studied subsurface features such as lava flows on the Moon and Mars, and detected ice in polar craters on Mercury, where craters' walls keep it in perpetual shadow (remarkably, this predated similar discoveries on the Moon).

But it is asteroids that are of most practical concern to today's radar astronomers, and the primary task of ngRADAR, if it is approved, will be tracking and understanding those nearest Earth, especially any that might one day hit humanity's home planet.

The searchlight narrowness of the beam means it will be of little use for discovery. But, as with enemy aircraft during the Second World War, once a target is located a searchlight's narrow beam can track it remorselessly. This will permit orbits to be established with precision. If doing that suggested a risk in a few years or decades' time, a diversionary mission based on DART's findings might be put together. If the worst came to the worst, though, and a rock was found that was likely to hit Earth in short order, such tracking would at least be able to predict where it would enter the atmosphere, and thus allow civil-defence measures to be invoked in time.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg meets key Samsung, LG officials

The CEO of Meta Platforms, Facebook's parent company, had a luncheon with Cho and other senior officials from the South Korean electronics giant in Seoul, according to officials from LG Electronics.

Seoul: Meta Founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg met with Samsung Chairman Lee Jae-yong and LG CEO Cho Joo-wan on Wednesday to discuss ways to enhance corporate collaborations in the artificial intelligence (AI) and extended reality (XR) sectors.

The CEO of Meta Platforms, Facebook's parent company, had a luncheon with Cho and other senior officials from the South Korean electronics giant in Seoul, according to officials from LG Electronics, reports Yonhap news agency.

Later in the day, Zuckerberg and Lee held talks over dinner at a reception hall the Samsung chairman uses for meetings with key officials to discuss collaborations in the areas of AI memory chips and XR businesses, according to sources.

Zuckerberg came to the South Korean

capital the previous day to have a series of business meetings with key business gurus, including Cho and Lee. Meta has earlier announced new plans to build its own artificial general intelligence (AGI) and work on a new AI chip.

Samsung, the world's No. 1 memory chipmaker, has created a new unit for AGI research and development in Silicon Valley. Zuckerberg had met with Lee in South Korea in 2014 and visited Samsung Electronics' R&D lab in the United States in 2022. The Cho-Zuckerberg meeting, meanwhile, came as the two companies shared mutual interest in advancing XR technologies as a key driver for future innovation and growth. Last month during the CES 2024, Cho expressed the company's commitment to forging partnerships to expand its presence in the XR market. Meta released its new virtual reality headset, the Quest 3, at the end of last year in a bid to take a lead in the fledgling XR market. It rivals Apple's latest Vision Pro headset, which made its global debut last month. In addition to his meetings with Samsung and LG executives, Zuckerberg met with repre-



The CEO of Meta Platforms, Facebook's parent company, had a luncheon with Cho and other senior officials from the South Korean electronics giant in Seoul, according to officials from LG Electronics.

sentatives from at least five AI and XR startups, including AI startup Upstage, at Meta Korea's office in southern Seoul in a closed-door session, the sources said. Meta reportedly arranged the meeting directly with the startups as part of apparent efforts to advance the company's XR headset technology.

The anatomy of an impending, likely, fall

Chavan was one of few Congress leaders in Maharashtra who had on-ground support. He led the party to victory in the 2009 assembly election. He suffered a setback following the Adarsh housing scam when he had to step down, but bounced back in the 2014 general election winning from the Nanded constituency at the height of the Modi wave. Following the party's defeat in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, he resigned as the state unit chief. Following Chavan's exit, there is unease in Maharashtra Congress. Most of the party's 43 MLAs are on good terms with Chavan, at least a dozen are considered to be close to him. State AICC in charge Ramesh Chennithala has begun to talk to the MLAs and persuade them against leaving. But the mood in the party is not upbeat.

Chavan and other leaders have been unhappy with the way state Congress president Nana Patole functions. Theoretically, Patole's appointment makes sense for Congress in Maharashtra. He comes from the Vidarbha region, where the party can hold hope for a revival. He is an Other Backward Classes (OBC) leader and is thus, in line with the party's vision of building a national support base among OBCs. Besides, he comes from the Kunbi community which largely stood with the Congress in the 2019 assembly elections and may continue to support the party as it is unhappy with chief minister Eknath Shinde's decision to allow Marathas with Kunbi antecedents to get Kunbi certificates for OBC quota benefits. (Kunbi is a peasant sub-caste of the Maratha community and falls under the OBC category). He is also one of the very few Congress leaders in Maharashtra who criticises Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP aggressively. His close aides point out that most seniors are too careful while speaking about Modi — and even deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnis — as they are worried that the Central agencies may knock on their doors.

However, on the ground, Patole has not been able to do much for the party. There is no concentrated effort to revive the party in Vidarbha, once its stronghold. Following splits in the Shiv Sena and the NCP, the Congress had a chance to recover its lost ground in the region where it won 82 seats in the 2009 assembly elections but lost almost half in 2019. This has not happened, several party leaders said. Maratha leaders are also upset with Patole, and think the community is being sidelined in the party. According to a senior leader who did not wish to be named, Maratha leaders like Chavan and a few others had conveyed their grievances against Patole to the party leadership and suggested a change in leadership, but were rebuffed. On the contrary, Rahul Gandhi during his visit to Maharashtra as part of the Bharat Jodo Yatra heaped praises on Patole. "It won't be a surprise if a bunch of party leaders and MLAs switch over to BJP and NCP in the coming days," said a legislator from western Maharashtra region. The party still has a significant num-



ber of young leaders who, if given responsibility and respect, would help rebuild the party but there doesn't seem to be an initiative to do so, he said.

"A majority of us have stayed back in Congress not because we don't have options. It is because we want to be in Congress. Ruling parties are leaving no stone unturned to defeat us and on the other side, there doesn't seem to be a fightback from the party. Our leaders are more interested in keeping the focus on themselves by talking to TV channels and posting videos on social media," the legislator said.

A former minister also pointed out, on the condition of anonymity, that the party's core concerns are also unattended to. "There is no outreach to Muslims, Dalits and tribals. All these sections are our traditional supporters. We are not even talking to them. The general feeling among top leaders is that the people are angry with the Modi government and they would themselves support Congress. They need to wake up and see what happened in five states. The best example is the neighbouring Madhya Pradesh," he said. Meanwhile, however, Congress leaders are downplaying Chavan's exit. Legislative party chief Balasaheb Thorat said, "This is not the first time that people have left Congress. We have a number of young party workers who are ready to take the position of those who left." On the problems in the party, he said, "I agree there is a need for better communication within the party. We are working on that. We also need to reach out to people in a better way. Certain things are being done and the results will be visible. I don't see any major problem with the party in the state." Is the Congress headed for more trouble in Maharashtra? Will it be reduced to a minor party like it has become in states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar? With barely a fortnight to go before the Lok Sabha elec-

tions are announced, the Congress is in a mess in the state where it was hoping to turn the tables on the BJP. Shailesh

Gaikwad, political editor of HT Mumbai, breaks down the most important political news in Maharashtra this week

Study finds high rate of lung damage in Indians after acute COVID-19, experts decode why

Indians suffer high rates of lung function damage after acute with about half reporting shortness of breath, according to a recent study, a worrying finding that experts attribute to various reasons, including co-morbidities and pollution. The study by the Christian Medical College, Vellore, is the largest from India to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on lung function. It examined 207 individuals, showcasing substantial impairment in lung function, exercise capacity, and quality of life among recovered individuals.

The study revealed a high prevalence of respiratory symptoms among Indians who recovered, even after a mean of over two months following acute illness, with shortness of breath reported in 49.3% and cough in 27.1% of the cohort.

"It is clear from the study that lung function is affected more in the Indian population compared to data from other countries across every category of disease severity," said study lead researcher D. J. Christopher, professor of pulmonary medicine at CMC Vellore. "Although it is impossible to know the exact cause of worse impairment among Indians, co-morbidities may be a factor contributing to lung damage, as our population had much higher co-morbidities than the others." Dr. Christopher told PTI.

The study, published recently in the journal PLOS Global Public Health, compared data from Europe and China. An Italy-based study, for instance, found dys-

pnoea or shortness of breath present in 43 per cent and cough in less than 20 per cent of the subjects. The corresponding figures from a Chinese study were also lower than those seen in the Indian study.

However, the CMC study did not cite any specific data from China or from European countries other than Italy.

In terms of co-morbidities, CMS Vellore researchers found 72.5% of individuals reporting underlying health conditions such as diabetes mellitus, systemic hypertension, and chronic lung diseases. Lung function tests revealed a concerning trend of impairment, particularly in diffusion capacity (DLCO), a sensitive test to assess the lungs' ability to transfer gas from inspired air to the bloodstream, the researchers said.

Nearly half (44.4%) of the participants showed impaired diffusing capacity, with rates of impairment being higher in those with more severe COVID-19 infection. Therefore, those who needed invasive or non-invasive ventilation and had recovered had the worst lung function impairment. Links to high TB prevalence, air pollution

Reacting to the study findings, Delhi-based pulmonologist Vivek Nangia said the most unique feature that predisposes Indians to greater damage to COVID-19 or disease-induced lung injury could be a high prevalence of tuberculosis in the country, which is weakening our immune system and also damaging the lungs.

In Bengal's tea belt an unsavoury brew — lack of jobs, land issues and migration

"There are no jobs here, and no hope. My two sons are in Bangalore working as daily wage labourers. A majority of youths here have left their homes and the state to find jobs elsewhere," says Lohar, whose sons — Amar and Aman — are 28 and 24 years old, respectively. There are around 302 tea gardens in the state's tea belt with each spread over 200 to 1,200 acres. According to a government estimate, nearly 3 lakh people, mostly Nepali-speaking tribals, work in the tea gardens or are indirectly linked to them. But around 20 tea gardens have shut. Kalchini tea garden is among them. It has been shut for more than seven months.

"When the tea garden was open, we used to get Rs 250 as daily wage along with the PF (provident fund) amount of Rs 350. But when the tea garden was closed, we could earn around Rs 200 to Rs 220 per day, minus the PF," says 52-year-old Kali Lama. "We are paid this rate by the committee, but the tea is sold to wholesalers at a very high rate," he adds, referring to "committees" formed by the ruling TMC in closed tea gardens through which workers collect tea leaves and through touts and middlemen sell them to wholesalers.

Shyamali Tanti (43), who works at the Dheklapara tea estate that has been shut for months, says, "Last year, the tea garden opened, but before the end of the year it closed again. We did not get Puja bonus. My husband was forced to look for a job outside the state. I am now going to the Binnaguri tea estate to earn some money." Tanti says that while she has been able to get free ration under the TMC government's Lakshmir Bhandar scheme, she has not received financial assistance under FAWLI. FAWLI or Financial Assistance for Workers of Lockout Industries (FAWLI) is a state government scheme through which every worker of a closed tea garden gets Rs 1,500 per month. The scheme was started during the Left Front government. The TMC government has continued the scheme. Last February, the government decided that closed tea gardens at Rungmook Cedar, Moonda Kotee, Chongtong, Nagri, Peshok, Ambootia in Darjeeling; Trihana in Siliguri; Sonali, Bamandanga, Samsing in Jalpaiguri district; Dalsingpara, Dalmore, Kalchini, Raimatang, Dheklapara, and Ramjhora tea gardens in Alipurduar district would come under the FAWLI scheme.

Chaa sundari Houses under the Chaa Sundari scheme. Express photo by Partha Paul. However, the TMC government's ambitious housing scheme for tea workers has found hardly any takers here. Rows and rows of blue and white houses built under the Chaa Sundari project near Torsha tea garden in Alipurduar lay vacant. Out of nearly 500 houses built under the state government's scheme, only around 70 have been occupied by the families. Despite the houses having a kitchen, two bedrooms, a toilet and a regular water and electricity supply, there are few takers for these houses. The main reason for people not moving into the Chaa Sundari houses is the distance. Workers are used to living near or around the tea gardens. But the



Shyamali Tanti (43), who works at the Dheklapara tea estate that has been shut for months, says

houses built under the scheme are located far away from the tea gardens... Those who moved into the houses are either relatives of tea garden workers, or in some cases workers have rented them out to locals," says Dhiren Mahali (52), a resident of a Chaa-Sundari housing colony. Kusum Bhujel, 25, who stays in one of such houses in Torsha tea garden, says, "My house is in the name of my cousin sister. She stays at Dalchinpara tea garden. Instead of her, we are staying here. My husband Padam Lama (50) is a driver and he used to work as a commercial driver at Jaigaon which is near here."

Another tea worker Santosh Oraon (32) says, "I'm staying at my sister-in-law's house here. At Torsha tea estate, my father, mother, and elder brothers are currently staying. As the family grew, the house became small for our whole family. So, I came here with my family and we have been staying here for the past six months." After the Chaa Sundari scheme flopped, the TMC government launched another scheme in which tea workers could stay on their land in the tea estate and they would get "patta" for the land. "The problem is that we are getting only "patta" which is basically a land lease. We cannot sell or cannot take loan against that land. Also, if we get land in the area, then it is fine. But if we get land outside the estate, then what will we do? Here, even after the garden is closed, we can pluck leaves here and earn something but if we go outside the garden how will we earn?" says Kali Lama, who

resides in Kalchini tea garden. tea garden residents Cha Sundari project at Torsha Tea Garden. Express photo by Partha Paul. According to a local leader of CITU, the trade union organisation of the CPI(M), there is a wide wage gap between tea workers in North Bengal vis-a-vis southern states. "Tea workers in southern states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka Tea get around Rs 450 as daily wage as per the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. Whereas, the governments of Assam and West Bengal are reluctant and politically unwilling to enforce the Minimum Wages Act strongly. So, in the TMC-ruled West Bengal and BJP-ruled Assam, tea workers are getting Rs 250 per day," says CITU leader Jia Alam.

"Education, health, and employment scenarios are deteriorating fast, and the rate of school and college dropouts is also increasing. Migration from tea gardens of West Bengal and Assam towards South and subsequent increasing absenteeism in the tea gardens here is a major issue," he adds. While the state tea belt's two Lok Sabha constituencies — Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri will vote in the first phase of Lok Sabha polls on Friday, polling in Darjeeling will take place a week later on April 26. Meanwhile, the TMC blames the BJP government at the Centre for the deteriorating condition of tea workers, the BJP blames the TMC government in the state.

TMC leader and West Bengal Tea Directorate member Sourav Chakraborty says, "From 2014, Narendra Modi prom-

ised that the Central Government will acquire tea gardens. Then he promised that the Centre would give a Rs 500 crore special package for the development of tea gardens in West Bengal. But none of the promises were fulfilled. However, because of the wrong policy of the Central Government, the tea industry is facing many problems. All these things are now known to tea workers, and they will not vote for BJP this time." BJP MLA from Madarihat, Monoj Tigga, who is contesting from Alipurduar, says the welfare of tea workers is the responsibility of the TMC government in the state. "The TMC government not only deteriorated the livelihood of tea garden workers but also took away their normal facilities which labourers used to have. The BJP government at the Centre, on the other hand, has always tried to develop tea gardens through the tea board. The Centre's Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) helped workers to get free ration. Tea workers know that the BJP always stands for them and will vote for Modiji." In Alipurduar, Tigga is facing a challenge from sitting TMC Rajya Sabha member Prakash Chik Baraik. The alliance of Left Front and Congress has fielded RSP leader Mili Oraon from there. In Jalpaiguri, sitting BJP MP Jayanta Roy is pitted against TMC MLA from Dhupguri, Nirmal Chandra Roy. Here, the Left Front candidate is Debraj Burman. In Darjeeling, TMC has fielded Gopal Lama against sitting BJP MP Raju Bista. The Congress, on the other hand, has given the ticket to local leader Munish Tamang, who is being backed by Hamro Party.