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- Arvind Kejriwal
Chief Minister, Delhi



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1	Aastha IAS M-2, JyotiBhawan, Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-09 Website: www.aasthaias.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	8800233080 9810664003
2	AJAB'S Academy Pvt. Ltd. 202, 2 nd floor, Dr. Mukharjee nagar Delhi-09. Also having other centers at Mukharjee Nagar and Old Rajender nagar Delhi.	UPSC, Group A,B,C	011-45524887 011-45527887 08447557386 08929994301
3	Alternative Learning Systems Ltd (ALS) 1st and 2nd floor, Aggarwal Auto Mall, A Block, Plot-II, Shalimar Place, District Center, Delhi-88. also having centers at Mukharjee Nagar, Pusa Road Karol Bagh, Vardhman Central Mall Nehru Vihar Delhi. Website: www.alsias.net	UPSC Civil Services Examination & Law Judicial	9999343999 9899975666 9891990011
4	Bharti Concept 1st Floor, Batra Cinema Complex, Dr. Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-09. also having centers at Uttam Nagar, Tajpur Badar pur Delhi. Website: www.bharticoncept.com	One day exam SSC, DSSSB, Railway etc.	9250291082 9136335283
5	Bhartiya Sarvodaya computer and management educational society. 1449/21A, Durgapuri, Delhi-93. Also having centers at Sangam Vihar, Uttam Nagar, Munkaka Delhi.	Group A, B, C exam of SSC etc.	011-22130322 8750295007 011-22120322
6	Bright Brain Academy RZ D-6, Palam Dabri Main Road, Mahavir Enclave, N.Delhi-45 Also having centers at Raj nagar palam, Najafgarh Delhi. Website: www.brightbrainacademy.co.in	SSC, Bank, Railway, CLAT, NDA, DSSSB, MBA etc.	9868384354 8375919139
7	BSC Academy Pvt. Ltd. C-37, 2nd Floor, Ganesh Nagar, Pandav Nagar Complex, Delhi-92 Also having center at Rohini Delhi. Website: www.bscacademy.com	Bank PO/Clerk, SSC, Insurance, MBA, CLAT, NDA/CDS, Medical/Engineering	011-22484910-14
8	Career Plus Educational Society. 301/A,-37,38,39 Ansal Building, Comm. Complex Dr. Mukherjee Nagar Delhi-09. Website: www.careerplusgroup.com	UPSC Civil Services, SSC, CLAT	9891186435 9811069629
9	Chanakya IAS Academy 124, 2nd Floor, SatyaNiketan, New Delhi-110021. Also having centers at Outram lines and Rajendra Park Delhi. Website: www.chanakyaaisacademy.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	18002745005
10	Classic IAS Academy, UG 33-34, Ansal Chamber-1, BhikajiCama Place new delhi-66. Also having centers at Karol Bagh and Old Rajender Nagar Delhi. Website: www.classiciasacademy.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	9310034050 9310034060 011-40563010 011-40536473
11	Cyber information technology society NIC Institute, BarejaSadan, Main Mathura Road, Badarpur, New delhi-44. Also having other center at badarpur and Shahdara Delhi. Website: www.nicinstitute.com	Entrance Exam for professional courses Engg., Medical, Management, Law etc., All Group-A,B, C, Exams.	9582752030 8700844955
12	Dhyeya IAS, 102, A-12-13, Ansal Building, Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi. Also having centers at Old Rajender nagar and Laxmi Nagar Delhi. Website: www.dhyeyaias.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	011-49274400 9205274746
13	Dr. Lakshmaihia IAS Study Circle 57/17, Above Kaventers, Bada Bazar Road, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi-60. Also having center at Mukharjee Nagar Delhi. Website: www.drplakshmaiah.com	UPSC, ENGINEERING/NEET	9052265819, 8008497933
14	ELITE IAS A-1, Chandra House, Top Floor, Opp. ICICI Bank, Mukherjee Nagar Delhi-09. Also having center at Old Rajender Nagar Delhi. Website: www.eliteias.in	UPSC Civil Services Examination	8899999931/ 34
15	Evolution Educare Pvt. Ltd. B-11, first floor, commercial complex, Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi Website: www.evolution.co.in	UPSC Civil Services Examination	
16	GS Mentors 636, Ground Floor, Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-09. Website: www.gsmentors.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination, SSC, Bank PO, Bank Clerk	7840888666 7840888777
17	GS World 629, Main Road Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi. Website: www.gsworldias.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	011-27658013 7042772062/ 63
18	Helping Hands Welfare Society Gali Number 13, Sona Sweets, second and third floor, sangamvihar, New Delhi. Also having centers at Shahdara, Begum pur, Budh vihar Delhi. Website: www.hhwsskills.in	SSC, Group C	8178675397 9811920711
19	IES Academy PVT LTD 28 B/7,2nd Floor, Jia Sarai Near IIT HauzKhas, New Delhi-110016. Also having center at Muniraka Delhi. Website: www.iesacademy.com	IES, GATE, AE/JE.	9810958290 011-26537570
20	Ignited Minds A-2, 1st floor commercial complex, Mukharjee Nagar Delhi-09. Also having centers at Old Rajender Nagar and JJ Colony Tigri Delhi. Website: www.ignitedmindsias.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	8744082373 011-40109868
21	Jai Sri Ram Educational Society A-70, HardevPuri, Gali number 5, 100 feet road, shahdara, Delhi-93. Also having centers at Dilshad Garden, Laxmi Nagar, Johri pur extension, Yamuna Vihar and Mandoli Extension Delhi.	Group B&C Exams by SSC, DSSSB, Railway, Banking, Police etc., CTET, teacher recruitment	8447476274
22	K D Campus Pvt. Ltd. 1997, Outram Lines, GTB Nagar, New Delhi-09. Also having centers at Mukharjee Nagar, Gandhi Ashram Kingsway, Muniraka, Uttam Nagar, Badarpur, Laxmi Nagar, Website: www.kdcampus.org	UPSC/ Engg./ Medical and Various Group A,B, C Exams conducted by SSC, Bank, Railway, DSSSB Etc.	09555108888 9654346771 9821890425

S.No.	Name and Address of the Coaching Institute	Name of Competitive Examination	Contact Number
23	Khan Study Group 2521, Hudson Lane, Near GTB Metro Station, Delhi-09. Also having center at old rajender Nagar Delhi. Website: www.ksgindia.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	011-45552607 9811293743
24	Kiran Institute of Career Achievement. 3rd floor, A-4 hemkund building, opp. Chawla Restaurant, Mukharjee nagar, Delhi-09. Website: www.kicaonline.com	Various Group B and C Exams conducted by SSC, Bank, Railway, DSSSB Etc.	9999816446 7503213123
25	KRM Foundation (Dr. Ramaswamy IAS Academy) Flat Number 22, Rajinder Park, Rajindra Place Metro, Delhi. Also having centers at Rajender nagar and Mukharjee Nagar Delhi. Website: www.ramaswamyiasacademy.org	UPSC, Judiciary, Group A,B,C, CLAT	9999605344 9350933144
26	My Mission IAS Academy N-1, Dr. Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-110009. Website: www.missioninstitute.co.in	UPSC Civil Services Examination	9811334429
27	NIRMAN IAS a. 996, 1st floor, Mukherjee Nagar, Near Gandhi ViharBandh, Delhi-09. Website: www.nirmanias.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	011-47058219, 9717767797
28	Pahuja Law Academy Pvt. Ltd. 211-212, D-1, Second Floor, ViratBhawan, Dr. Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-09. Website: www.pahujalawacademy.com	Judiciary and Law Entrance (CLAT etc.)	9821593226 9821593229
29	Parinam Coaching center Pvt. Ltd. 207, 2nd floor, Satija House (A-23-24), Commercial complex, Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi. Website: www.theparinam.com	UPSC, Judicial, Clat, NDA/CDS	8810244737, 8368337869
30	Photon IAS Academy. Chamber number 3, 2nd floor, South Portion, Batra Cinema Complex, Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-09. Website: www.photonsias.com	UPSC, SSC (JE/AE)	9958489709
31	Ravindra Institute of Indian Civil Services (OPC) PVT. LTD. 102, Second Floor,8-9, Ansal Building, Chawla, Restaurant Lane, Mukherji Nagar, Delhi-110009 Website: www.ravindrasinstitute.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination, Other Group B and C Exams conducted by SSC, Railway, DSSSB etc.	9953101176 8700170483
32	Sachdeva Colleges Ltd. 29, South Patel Nagar, New Delhi. Also having centers at Uttam Nagar, Jasola Delhi. Website: www.sachdevagroup.co.in	SSC, Engineering, Medical, NDA/CDS	011-45063080 011-25848070
33	Sagar 83, basement, ground and 3rd floor, Mall Road, Kingsway Camp Delhi. Website: www.sagarindia.org	Civil Services, NDA, CDS, CAPF, SSC, DSSSB, CTET, Police.	7065900011, 7065900022, 8060450671
34	Samarpan for Education and Welfare Society, Shar Study Circle, 28 Jia Sarai, Near IIT Gate New Delhi-110016. Also having center at Kondali Delhi. Website: www.samarpanngo.in	UPSC Civil Services, SSC, Bank, CLAT	9205158136
35	Saraswati IAS A-20,102, Indraprasth Tower, Dr. Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-09 Website: www.saraswatiias.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	9899156495 011-27651250
36	Sihanta IAS Academy B-14, First Floor, Dr. Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-09 011-42071098. Website: www.sihantaias.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	011-42875012 8743045487
37	SIMTECH Education and Welfare Society Adarsh Building, 1449/9A, Durgapuri Chowk, Shahdara, Delhi-93. Also having center at Chajjipur, Shahdara Delhi. Website: www.simtech.in	UPSC, Group A,B,C	9315650970 7217875618
38	Sri Chaitanya Educational Institute (Managed by varsity Education Management Pvt. Ltd.) 63/3, Ghumman' House, Kalusarai, Sarvapriya Vihar, New Delhi-16. Also having centers at Vikas Puri and Punjabi Bagh Delhi. Website: www.srichaitanyadelhi.com	SSC, Engineering, Medical	9891337255 9555514995 9540763311 9953926783
39	St. Joan's Education Society, Lodhi Road Complex, Near new Barat Ghar, New Delhi-03. Website: www.stjoanscoaching.com	Engineering/Medical Entrance Examination	011-24610155 011-24610133
40	Sunrise Education and Welfare Society. 1/3716, Ram Nagar, Loni Road, Shahdara, Delhi. Also having centers at Kirti Nagar and Mundka Delhi.	UPSC, Group A,B,C	9250109187
41	Takshila Academy Pvt. Ltd. D-11/154, Sec-8, (Opp. Metro Pillar No.389), Rohini, Delhi-85 Also having centers at Janak puri, Kalusarai, Nirman Vihar, Preet Vihar, Punjabi Bagh, Burari Delhi. Website: www.takshilainstitute.in	Engineering/Medical Entrance Examination	9810477303 8882-145-145
42	The Cavalier C-73, shardapuri, Marbel Mkt. Ramesh Nagar, N.D.-15. Also having centers at Mukharjee Nagar Delhi. Website: www.cavalier.in	NDA, CDS, AF, Navy etc.	8448443353 011-41446601 011-41446602
43	The Success IAS 110, 2nd floor, Jaina extension, Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi-09 Website: www.thesuccessias.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	9971250993 9971250938
44	Think & Learn Pvt. Ltd.(Byju's Classes) 1-B, 3 rd Floor, Near Karol Bagh Metro Station Gate No. 8, Pusa Road Karol Bagh Delhi-110060 Also having center at Vardhman Mall Nehru Vihar Delhi. Website: www.byjus.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination, SSC	9873643487
45	Vajirao and Reddy Institute PVT Ltd. 19/1A, Shakati Nagar, Nangia Park, New Delhi-07. Also having center at Roop Nagar DU Campus Delhi. Website: www.vajiraoinstitute.com	UPSC Civil Services Examination	
46	Vajirao IAS Academy Pvt. Ltd. B-365, second floor, Nirman Vihar Metro Gate number 4, opp. V3S Mall, Delhi-092. Also having center at Bhalswa dairy area. Website: www.vajiraoliasacademy.com	UPSC Civil Services, NDA/CDS/DEFENCE, Group B&C exams by SSC, DSSSB, Banking Railway etc.	8800307444 8800301222

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The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Mr Bajaj speaks again

Government-business relations remain fraught.
But why PM Modi must pay heed



SANJAYA BARU

TWENTY-SIX YEARS AFTER he made news as the voice of beleaguered Indian big business, industrialist Rahul Bajaj has once again spoken on their behalf. In 1993, he voiced their fear of foreign competition. Today, he voices their fear of domestic governance. Fear of arbitrary governance is only one side of a multi-dimensional problem that Indian business has come to confront. There is also a growing concern about economic slowdown and policy uncertainty. Bajaj is known to speak a lot, and even shoot his mouth off on occasion, but he is a widely respected and a hugely successful leader of Indian business. His views must be heard with care.

In 1993, the then finance minister, Manmohan Singh, was publicly dismissive of the concern Bajaj and friends articulated about the threat to domestic business from external economic liberalisation. The business media also did not share the concerns of big business, dubbing those who met at a Mumbai hotel to draft a memorandum of shared concern regarding foreign trade and investment policy, as "The Bombay Club". The appendage of the word "club" damned them.

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, however, paid heed. He reached out to business leaders and fine-tuned policy. He said he was turning neither Right nor Left, but would walk the Middle Path. His critics, including the more enthusiastic liberalisers, called it the "Muddle Path", but the PM ensured he had everyone on board, stayed the course and moved India forward. The time has come for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to also reassure the nation that he will neither swerve to the Right nor the Left, but walk the Middle Path of "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas", with greater conviction.

If, in 1993, Bajaj voiced business's "concerns", today he voices its "fears". There is a world of difference between fear and concern. Concern can be about bureaucratic procedures and delays, poor infrastructure, dumping of subsidised goods by foreign competitors, and so on. Fear is often about the knock on the door, the tap of the phone, mysterious acts of retribution by persons in

power. They do no good to the reputation of a liberal democracy. It is good that Bajaj has spoken openly and it is equally good that Union Home Minister Amit Shah has publicly reassured him, stating emphatically that the government would "have to make the effort to improve the atmosphere".

It is not clear, though, how much of the fear of big business that Bajaj sought to convey is due to the chinks in their own armour and how much is due to unfair harassment. Indian business leadership has not covered itself with glory, still unable to run globally competitive businesses and continuing to seek a "level-playing field" seven decades after independence. The relationship between government and business, therefore, remains fraught. It is characterised by feudal supplication, on the one hand, and a willingness to cut corners and buy political cover, on the other. It has to be said in Modi's favour that he has been more forthright in weakening the foundations of crony capitalism than any previous government.

What ails this government is precisely what has ailed all governments — the arrogance of power. While such arrogance is often a mask for incompetence, business persons tolerate that arrogance in the hope of benefitting from the incompetence, and consequent arbitrariness. It is this incestuous nexus that Prime Minister Modi has tried to break, but in doing so he may have ignored the impact it would have on investor sentiment and business confidence. Clearly, it is time for some course correction.

The problem is not specific to the current ruling dispensation. It is inherent to the feudal nature of democratic governance in India. Today's humble in Opposition were yesterday's arrogant and arbitrary in power. Yesterday's beacons of hope have become today's cause for despair. That is true in state capitals too. Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is an old

adage, everyone quotes Lord Acton approvingly, yet few have mastered the art of wearing and bearing power lightly on one's shoulders.

Part of the problem in the government-business relationship is that both sides need each other and loath that fact. For Prime Minister Modi, the current conjuncture, with a combination of an economic slowdown, political setbacks and foreign policy challenges, is a moment of reckoning. He has faced setbacks before, but the multiple challenges he faces today require a major reset in policy and politics. More of the same cannot and will not do. He may still have a significant chunk of the national vote with him, but there is growing restiveness in his traditional constituencies. Both his slogans of a "New India" and a "\$5-trillion economy" have lost their shine and sheen.

The Opposition still has nothing new to offer. Its best faces remain those of an ageing leadership — from Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh to Sharad Pawar — and its best ideas are from manifestos of a bygone era. Provincial leaders offer no national alternative. Given this situation, Prime Minister Modi owes it to the nation to make something of the massive mandate he received. It may have been a mandate for a nationalist platform but nationalism means nothing without economic development.

The idea of a Rising India has been devalued and diminished by a faltering one. India is once again at a critical crossroads but runs the risk of yet again missing the bus. The focus of governance has to move away from divisive issues, including issues of identity and citizenship, to the here-and-now of investment promotion, employment generation and the building of a capable and competitive economy. Governance in public institutions, including in the fields of education, has to be prioritised for improvement. No one but the prime minister can and must provide the leadership needed to address these challenges anew.

The writer is a policy analyst and former media advisor to prime minister of India

IF THE GENERAL GOES

After court intervention, Gen Bajwa's position as army chief is undermined. Battle lines in Pakistan are actually within army

TWELVE YEARS AFTER Pakistan's Supreme Court took on an army ruler for ousting its chief justice, the country's higher judiciary has taken on another army chief, this time questioning the three-year extension given to him by the civilian government of Imran Khan. The bench, headed by Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khosa, cut the extension granted to General Qamar Javed Bajwa, whose term expired on November 28, to a bare six months while ordering the government to bring in constitutional changes to lay down the tenure of the army chief and other terms and conditions of his appointment. In the process, the government, which had announced the extension back in August, was exposed for its ineptness and inability to get the paperwork right in a matter as important as this. Bajwa continues as COAS at the pleasure of the court. Is this a rare civilian moment in the affairs of military-dominated Pakistan? Not really. Although the court has thrust into the public domain the issue of extensions to the army chief, a matter that has haunted many previous governments and jeopardised their continuance, the reality is that Prime Minister Imran Khan, who cheerfully admits to being on the "same page" as the army, sees no risk from Bajwa, and in fact, wants him to continue.

In the last two decades, there have been two other instances of a Pakistan Army Chief on extended stay. General Pervez Musharraf granted himself an indefinite extension as COAS in 2001. Musharraf's 10-year stay at the top, and his successor, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani's, six years (including one extension) held up the careers of scores of officers in the Pakistan Army. In the present instance, it was a member of the public who went to court against the extension to Bajwa. The chief justice, then, took it on as a matter of national interest. At least 11 three-star generals would have retired by the time Bajwa's three-year extension ended. The promotions of many others would have been held up.

The dissent within the army over this is perhaps not unconnected to the growing unease among officers that the institution and its leadership are seen on "the same page" as an increasingly unpopular civilian government. The sentiment was most apparent during the recent "long march" by a veteran Pakistani politician from a right wing religious party, who questioned the government's silence on Kashmir and contrasted this with its enthusiasm over the Kartarpur corridor. After the court's intervention, Bajwa's position as COAS is much undermined. It is possible that the Parliament may not be able to agree on amendments to Article 243 of the Constitution that deals with the army chief's appointment, as demanded by the court. An extension for Bajwa beyond the court-granted six months seems iffy. The battle lines are actually within the army, and the civilian politicians will only choose their side. It is not difficult to see which side those in the Opposition will pick. The next question, then, is: If Bajwa goes, can Imran Khan be far behind?

TIME IS NOW

Success of CoP 25 hinges on how urgently countries resolve discord over climate finance, carbon markets

ON SUNDAY, A day before the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) 25th Conference of Parties got under way in Madrid, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, issued a stern warning. "The point of no return is no longer over the horizon. It is in sight and hurtling towards us," he said. Over the next two weeks, as delegates from almost 200 countries attempt to firm up the commitments made in Paris in 2015, establish new rules for emissions trading, and create systems to compensate countries already affected by global warming, they would do well to keep this warning in mind.

Signatories to the Paris Pact will have to update their commitments to the landmark treaty — Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) — in 2020. Given that several studies have shown the inadequacy of these targets in combating the climate crisis, CoP 25 will be keenly watched for the signals given by countries in upscaling their NDCs. India and China have consistently resisted demands to enhance targets. The two countries have argued that their NDCs are way beyond their historical culpability for global warming and the developed countries, mainly responsible for the climate problem, should be doing more — especially when it comes to helping the poorer countries with funds and technology. In this context, a study by the US think-tank Climate Policy Initiative, which shows that global climate financing fell by about 11 per cent in 2018, compared to 2017, should be sobering to the delegates assembled at Madrid.

Carbon markets could be another thorny issue at CoP 25. The Paris Pact's predecessor, the Kyoto Protocol, allowed countries, or industries, to earn carbon credits for emission reductions they made in excess of what was required of them. These credits could be traded to the highest bidder, who could then show the emission reductions as their own. India, China and Brazil have accumulated huge amounts of carbon credits and want them to be incorporated in the Paris Pact's market-related clause — Article 6. But developed countries have been resisting such claims on the grounds that the Kyoto Protocol's weak verification procedures allowed dubious projects to obtain carbon credits. At the last CoP in Katowice, when the rulebook for the Paris Pact was drawn up, Article 6 was one of the unresolved issues. Resolution of the impasse will hold the key to the success of CoP 25.

THE RIGHT STUFF

Bottlenose dolphins have more in common with humans than we imagined. They even share our directional bias

DOLPHINS, PRESUMED TO be the most intelligent and empathetic creatures of the deep, have shared a deep bond with humans. There are innumerable heart-warming stories about dolphins helping to save doomed swimmers, heading off sharks, retrieving dropped tools for divers, and so on. But a paper on dolphin behaviour in the Royal Society's journal, *Open Science*, finds more common ground — like humans, dolphins are predominantly right-handed, and they are even more fundamentalist about their preference than humans. The authors observed that over 99 per cent of observations showed them favouring the right side.

Right-handedness appears to be intrinsic to cetaceans, which include whales and dolphins, the only creatures other than primates who are presumed to have some human-like qualities. This is bad news for the left-handed, who are oppressed quite enough already by the primacy of right-handedness among humans. The very words we speak are directionally weighed. Dexterity is from the Latin *dexter* (right), and sinister is Latin for "left". The modern meanings are derived via convoluted routes, including but not limited to myth and augury, but the association of the terms with cleverness and vileness are now permanently set. In politics, too, left and right originally signified your place in the pecking order. The world is deeply divided into nations which drive on the right and on the left, each side believing that the other is plain wrong. The list is endless.

The most egregiously handed word is hiding in plain sight. It's even in the headline above: "Right". A wily, duplicitous word signifying both a direction and rectitude, and thereby conflating the ideas. With that, the victory of the right in human affairs is complete. But fortunately, barring humans and cetaceans, the rest of nature is ambivalent about handedness. Mice and budgies just don't care, for instance. It's best that way.

A JUDICIOUS BALANCE

Supreme Court's recent judgments reaffirm its role as a vigilant monitor



SOLI J SORABJEE

ONE MAY CRITICISE our Supreme Court for some of its judgments, but no person can describe it as a passive judiciary. The recent judgments of the Court clearly portray it as an active, rather an overactive judiciary.

No one can claim unrestricted entry to any temple or religious institution or a public meeting. A person with proven criminal antecedents may be rightly denied entry. But, surely, it is irrational to deny entry to a certain class of citizens, for example, women, because of a natural physical phenomenon like menstruation. Menstruation is not a crime. This practice, prevalent at the Sabarimala temple in Kerala, ignited the jurisdiction of our Supreme Court which battled with this issue, and occasioned the dissenting judgment of Justice Indu Malhotra.

Lengthy and erudite arguments were advanced by parties who championed a woman's right of entry based on the guarantees of equality and prohibition of discrimination inter alia on the ground of sex. Parties supporting the no-entry practice relied on Article 25 which guarantees the right to practise and profess religion. They overlooked that this Article is "subject to other provisions of the Constitution". In other words, subject to Articles 14 and 15, which prohibit discrimination inter alia on grounds of gender.

Another argument was the right of the "Deity" Ayyappa, who is believed to be in dis-favour of the entry of women of certain ages in a temple and whose divine right, it is argued, should be respected.

Ordinarily, the Supreme Court judgment

should finally settle any controversial issue, but not in our country. This is evident from the heated debates on the issue on TV channels and in public meetings. Interestingly, many women support the no-entry rule, not on legal or constitutional grounds, but on the misconception that a menstruating woman is not "clean" and, therefore, allowing her to enter the temple would be a desecration of a holy place. To keep the pot boiling, the issue has been referred to a larger bench of seven judges. It is debatable whether the seven judge bench judgment will finally put a lid on the matter. The real remedy would be to cleanse the minds of the supporters of no-entry to women doctrine.

The Rafale case is another instance worth noting. The Supreme Court dismissed the review petitions filed against its previous order, which found nothing wrong with the Rafale transaction. This has not excited the public. What has is the Supreme Court's dismissal of the contempt petition against Rahul Gandhi for him attributing his comment — "chowkidar chor hai" — to the Court itself. Rahul Gandhi tendered an unconditional apology, which was accepted, but with a strong warning to him to be careful in the future. I think Rahul Gandhi was dealt with leniently. He is an influential political leader who should not make statements which are untrue and betray disrespect for the Court.

Another Supreme Court judgment which has hit the headlines is its decision to uphold the Karnataka Speaker's orders disqualifying 17 defectors. The Supreme Court, how-

ever, quashed the Speaker's order to the extent that it prevented the disqualified candidates to contest elections till 2023. The Court's exposition of the law relating to the inter-play between resignation and defection is welcome.

It ruled that the resignation does not take away the effect of a prior act that incurs disqualification. The Supreme Court made instructive observations about the role and function of the Speaker in dealing with cases of disqualification of a candidate on the grounds of defection. It ruled that Speakers are not given a free pass to sit on resignation letters indefinitely. Once it is demonstrated that a member is willing to resign out of his free will, the Speaker has no option but to accept the resignation. The Speaker is not empowered to consider the motives and circumstances whenever a resignation letter is submitted. The Supreme Court deplored that Speakers sometimes tend not to be neutral.

Hopefully, Speakers will pay serious heed to the Court's observations. When the anti-defection law was enacted in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, it was believed that the vice of defection would be effectively curtailed. Regrettably, subsequent developments have belied the hope. The remedy lies not so much in amending the law or introducing fresh legal provisions, but in arousing the conscience of every honest citizen to reject the defector at the poll booth.

The writer is a former attorney general of India

DECEMBER 3, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

POWER STRIKE OFF

UTTAR PRADESH POWER minister Rewati Raman Singh said that the agitating power engineers of the state electricity board had called off their strike. He said he had been informed of the decision by the Power Engineers Association president, Rejendra Prasad. The announcement came shortly after the association secretary, Shailendra Dubey, declared that the power engineers of Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh would go on "work-to-rule" in support of the agitating UP engineers.

NEW IRAN

IRANIANS STARTED VOTING to a non-secret

referendum to approve an Islamic constitution entrenching the religious leadership as the absolute rulers of the country. Approval by the simple "yes or no" vote would automatically confirm Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the uncrowned ruler of Iran for life with sweeping powers described as "dictatorial" by critics of the constitution. There was a brisk turnout of voters in Teheran's numerous polling stations, particularly to the poorer neighbourhoods of the capital, with men and women above 16 lining up separately to cast votes. "We've had more than 700 votes cast here already and only one was a no. And that was a mistake," an English-speaking official at the Teheran polling sta-

tion told the Associated Press.

ASSAM BANDH

THE STUDENTS OF Assam are on the war path and are determined to thwart elections in the state. The All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad have given a call for a 44-hour Assam bandh from 6 am on December 3 to 4 pm on December 4, to be followed by mass picketing from December 5 to 8 outside the state and central government offices. The main purpose of the agitation will be to thwart the move of candidates to filing their nomination papers. The essential services have been exempted from the purview of the bandh.



NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Over here

Turkey's Syria move highlights America's tactical nukes in Europe



A U.S. Air Force F-16 jet during a NATO exercise. During the failed coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2016, Incirlik hosted the refuelling tankers that allowed F-16 fighter planes to threaten Istanbul and Ankara. Reuters

GERMANY OWNS no nuclear weapons. It renounced the very idea when it reunified in 1990. But if war were to break out in Europe today, German pilots could clamber into German planes, take off from Büchel Air Base in Rhineland-Palatinate and drop nuclear bombs on Russian troops.

The Luftwaffe can do that thanks to NATO's nuclear-sharing scheme, under which America quietly stations nuclear bombs across five countries in Europe. The arrangement is decades old. But it has raised questions for some time—and clashes involving one of those nuclear hosts, Turkey, are making matters worse. As NATO leaders gather in London for a summit next week, Turkey's bombs will be on many minds.

In 1950 America moved its first bombs to Britain. In the subsequent decades it stashed a vast trove of nuclear weapons across Europe, numbering over 7,000 at their peak in 1971. Many were small devices known as tactical, or non-strategic, nuclear weapons. They were capable of exploding with yields of as little as a fraction of a kiloton—far smaller than the 15-kilotonne bomb dropped on

Hiroshima. The smallest of them could fit into a backpack.

Today only about 150 remain. These are B61 free-fall bombs whose yield can be set anywhere from a third of a kilotonne to more than 170. They remain in American custody in peacetime and could be released only by a presidential order—but European pilots still train to drop them. Italy and Turkey are thought to have the most, perhaps 60 to 70 each, with smaller numbers in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.

The bombs that most worry American officials are stored in vaults at Incirlik air base in southern Turkey, a few hours by road from the Syrian border. During a military coup in 1960 and a diplomatic spat in 1975, America considered removing the bombs. During the failed coup against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2016, Incirlik hosted the refuelling tankers that allowed renegade F-16 fighter planes to threaten Istanbul and Ankara. Mr Erdogan's regime responded by cutting power to the base and arresting its commander.

That prompted alarm in Washington about the security of its weapons and the risk that they could become hostages in

the strained relationship with Turkey. Senior officers were sent to Incirlik, only to conclude that the bombs did not need to be removed. The warheads can be armed only by a code, and the vaults are automatically sealed if power is cut off, giving American forces time to fight their way onto the base if required. Nevertheless, in recent years America has considered spiriting away the bombs and replacing them with dummies.

Nukes were taken out of Greece in 2001 and from Ramstein air base in Germany in 2005. Pulling bombs out of Incirlik would remove vulnerable targets and implicit leverage. But if done clumsily it could worsen the diplomatic crisis and even prompt Mr Erdogan to pursue a nuclear-weapons programme of his own, something he hinted at in September. It would also restart a fraught debate over the presence of B61s elsewhere in Europe.

Opposition to nuclear-sharing has been simmering in Germany, in particular. Although Angela Merkel, Germany's chancellor, has defended the practice, her coalition partners over the past decade have repeatedly asked for the bombs to

be withdrawn. Keeping them is tricky for technical reasons, too. Europe's current dual-capable aircraft (DCA)—those wired up to carry nukes as well as ordinary bombs—are approaching the ends of their lives. Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands are all buying America's F-35 as a replacement, but Germany ruled this out in January.

That was partly in deference to France, which wants to build its own next-generation warplane with Germany. The Luftwaffe could instead buy the F-18, an older American DCA. Or it could retrofit the European-built Typhoon to accommodate B61s. But as well as being expensive and time-consuming, that would expose European technology to American eyes. And neither plane is especially stealthy.

Nor is Incirlik the only cause for security concerns. In 2008 an American airforce review concluded that most European bases hosting weapons did not meet its standards. Support buildings, fencing, lighting and security systems were all deemed in need of repair. Two years later, peace activists entered a base in Belgium and roamed near its B61 vaults for an hour.

Timebombs

If the bombs are politically troublesome and vulnerable, why keep them in Europe at all? Some NATO planners fear that if Russia attacked an ally like Estonia and then conducted a limited nuclear strike to stave off a Western counter-attack, it would not make sense for the alliance to respond with "strategic" weapons—those on longer-range missiles and aircraft that have much higher, city-destroying yields. Smaller bombs like the B61s are thought to allow a proportional response.

It is not entirely clear that the enemy would appreciate the distinction, however. And the military case for B61s is dubious for other reasons. The planes—if not destroyed on the ground—would struggle to get through Russian air defences. So America would probably use stealth bombers dispatched from across the Atlantic or submarine-launched missiles armed with a new low-yield warhead built under the Trump administration. NATO acknowledges that its "supreme guarantee" is provided by American, British and French strategic forces in this way, rather than by the

Europe-based B61s.

In truth, the purpose of the nuclear-sharing scheme is more political than practical. The aim is to create a tangible and symbolic link between America and Europe. Allies who enjoy American nuclear protection must share the moral burden of nuclear use—and the cost of potential retaliation. At the same time, Europeans get a larger (if still modest) say in how American nukes might be used. That is thought to assuage their fear of abandonment.

That reassurance comes at a price. President Barack Obama toyed with the idea of bringing the bombs home, but ultimately deferred the decision. Instead, he authorised a \$10bn programme to extend their lives and increase their accuracy. The total cost of American tactical nuclear weapons will run to \$25bn between 2017 and 2046, about \$1bn a year. And if Turkey's relationship with allies continues to crumble, Europeans may feel less soothed than alarmed by the several megatonnes of weaponry sitting at Incirlik.

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ISRAELI POLITICS

Highly charged

Binyamin Netanyahu's allies reconsider their indicted leader

THE RALLY'S organisers feared that turnout would be low. Even after a flurry of text messages and a big internet campaign, an underwhelming crowd of several thousand people showed up in downtown Tel Aviv on November 26th to protest against the "coup d'état". That is how Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, refers to the legal campaign against him. Five days earlier he was charged with bribery, fraud and breach of trust stemming from three corruption cases. Mr Netanyahu is the first sitting prime minister to be indicted. He denies all charges.

The prime minister claims to be the victim of a left-wing conspiracy. Biased courts, police and media are to blame for his problems, he says. But after a decade in power, his grip on Israeli politics is weakening. His coalition of nationalist and religious parties failed to win a majority in two successive elections, in April and September. The opposition, led by the Blue and White party, has also come up short. Yet it has frustrated Mr Netanyahu's attempts (and failed itself) to form a government, pushing the country towards another election. Cracks are even showing in his own Likud party, where he faces the most immediate challenge to his rule.

Likudniks stuck with Mr Netanyahu even as it became clear earlier this year that the charges against him were coming. Many believe he is indeed a victim. Others think his

political acumen gives them the best chance of winning elections. But some are starting to question both notions. It "isn't an attempted coup," says Gideon Saar, a former Likud minister. "Not only is it wrong to say that, it's also irresponsible to say that." He plans to challenge Mr Netanyahu for the party's leadership: "I haven't heard one person who thinks that after a third election, or a fourth, or a fifth, or a sixth, Prime Minister Netanyahu will succeed in forming a government."

Other Likud bigwigs are steering clear of the prime minister. The rally on November 26th was organised by the party, yet most of

The prime minister claims to be the victim of a left-wing conspiracy. Biased courts, police and media are to blame for his problems, he says. But after a decade in power, his grip on Israeli politics is weakening. His coalition of nationalist and religious parties failed to win a majority in two successive elections, in April & September

its members of the Knesset (parliament) didn't show up. Mr Netanyahu has conceded that a vote on his party leadership is needed. Mr Saar wants it to be held immediately, so that a new leader would have a shot at negotiating a government with Blue and White before the December 11th deadline, after which another election must be held. Mr Netanyahu prefers to delay in order to guarantee himself more time in power. Even if he loses control of the party, he would remain prime minister until a new government is formed.

Since its founding by Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon in 1973, Likud has had only four leaders. It has never voted one out. Most have been successful: prime ministers from Likud have led Israel for 30 of the past 41 years. Having grown accustomed to power, some members now fear losing it. Mr Netanyahu no longer resembles the political "magician" who won four elections and became Israel's longest-serving leader earlier this year. But he is still popular with the party's rank and file. And, so far, no high-ranking Likudnik other than Mr Saar has called for him to go.

Mr Netanyahu could lose his job in other ways. The law does not explicitly require an indicted prime minister to step down, but many Israelis question Mr Netanyahu's ability to run the government while mounting his defence, and note the potential conflicts



Supporters of Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu protest outside Likud Party headquarters in Tel Aviv, on November 22. Reuters

of interest that come with his power over the justice ministry and the police. His decision to remain in office is therefore likely to be challenged in court. Israel's president, Reuven Rivlin, may also refuse to ask Mr Netanyahu to form a government even if he wins another parliamentary election.

The prime minister is already preparing for one. His rhetoric is strikingly similar to that used by President Donald Trump, who is fighting his own battle against impeachment in America. "This is an attempted overthrow of a prime minister with a biased investigation," says Mr Netanyahu, ignoring the fact

that his former cabinet secretary, who is now attorney-general, brought the charges. Critics say Mr Netanyahu, like America's president, is sowing division and damaging institutions—but perhaps not for much longer.

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BRIEFLY

Hate to see Smith 'white-anting' Paine: Ian Chappell

Adelaide: Former Australian captain Ian Chappell feels Steve Smith undermined current skipper Tim Paine by trying to set the field in the second Test against Pakistan, which the home team won by an innings and 48 runs here on Monday. Smith captained the team before losing the position in the aftermath of the ball-tampering scandal last year. Chappell said the batting mainstay should not be as involved in field placements as he seemed to be on Monday when Australia wrapped the 2-0 series triumph. "I tell you what I don't like to see, Steve Smith is moving a few fieldsmen around," Chappell told 'Macquarie Sports Radio'.

"He did have a chat with Tim Paine, trying to talk Tim Paine into moving a fielder on the off-side, but I'm not sure Tim Paine moved him as far as Steve Smith wanted. Steve Smith started moving him, I hate to see that," he added. David Warner's 335 was the highlight of Australia's victory here. Chappell said Smith's conduct amounted to "white-anting" Paine. White-anting is an Australian term to describe action which seeks to bring down from within. "England used to do it a bit, blokes other than the captain and I always felt it was white anting the captain," he said. Smith was banned from Australia's captaincy for two years due to his role in the ball-tampering scandal and will be eligible for the role in April next year.

Graeme Smith confirms discussions over S. Africa role

Cape Town: Graeme Smith has confirmed he is again in discussions with Cricket South Africa (CSA) to be their new Director of Cricket, but said a Sunday newspaper report that he had already been appointed was premature. Smith, the most successful test captain in cricket history with 53 wins, had been encouraged to apply by embattled CSA chief executive officer Thabang Moroe as the organisation seeks a long-term replacement for Ottis Gibson, whose contract was not renewed after a dismal World Cup in England. Smith turned down the job in November, but a report in South Africa's Sunday Times said that he had now been persuaded to accept it. However, he said that was not true, at least not yet. "Contrary to media reports I have not been appointed Director of Cricket by CSA. As previously advised, I withdrew my application for the role. I am, however, in ongoing discussions with CSA, but I still have real concerns, which I have reiterated to them," he said via Twitter.

Nepal's Anjali Chand takes 6/0, best figures in T20Is

Pokhara: Nepal's Anjali Chanda on Monday scripted history by producing the best bowling performance in a women's T20 Internationals with figures of 6/0 in a match against Maldives at the 13th South Asian Games here. This is the first time ever a bowler has taken six wickets for no run in any international match. Nepal won the match by 10 wickets, reaching 17 for no loss in 0.5 overs. Earlier, the record belonged to Malaysian Mas Elysa, who had claimed six wickets for three runs from her 4 overs against China women in January this year. The 24-year-old Anjali dismissed six batswomen — all for nought — in 2.1 overs as Nepal bowled out Maldives, who elected to bat, for just 16 runs from 10.1 overs. AGENCIES



ROOT 2.00

Joe Root celebrates after bringing up his double hundred on Day Four of the second Test against New Zealand in Hamilton on Monday. Root made 226. Reuters

Lyon king

Pink-ball phenom takes five wickets as Australia beat Pakistan by an innings to win the Test series 2-0

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE ADELAIDE, DECEMBER 2

SPIN KING Nathan Lyon snared five wickets, including dangerous half-century makers Shan Masood and Asad Shafiq, as Australia wore down a stubborn Pakistan to clinch the second Test and wrap up the series 2-0 Monday.

Pakistan resumed day four of the day-night match on a precarious 39 for three with Masood not out 14 and Shafiq on eight after being bowled out for 302 in their first innings and forced to follow on.

It followed Australia's mammoth 589 for three declared, built around David Warner's exceptional 335 not out -- the 10th highest Test score of all time.

Needing another 248 to force Australia to bat again and avoid a second successive innings defeat, they had a decent crack but were eventually all out for 239 with the home team claiming victory by an innings and 48 runs.

It was Australia's sixth consecutive win in a pink ball Test -- four of them at Adelaide -- with every day-night Test played so far since the concept was introduced in 2015 producing a result.

"Really happy. Barring few slip-ups in the field yesterday, we played excellent cricket in the last two matches," said Australia captain Tim Paine.

"David and Marnus (Labuschagne) have been unbelievably good. We all witnessed a special knock from David Warner. It is among the top one or two innings ever by an Australian."

Lyon was Australia's saviour, finishing with 5-69 on a lifeless pitch that offered little for the home side's fast bowlers, who were made to toil.

It was his 16th five-wicket haul and his first against Pakistan, who have lost all four



Nathan Lyon finished with 5-69 on a lifeless pitch. AP

Tests they have played this year after two defeats to South Africa in January.

Defeat continued Pakistan's appalling record in Australia, where they have now crashed in 14 consecutive Tests.

"I would like to congratulate Australia and especially David Warner," said Pakistan skipper Azhar Ali. "We have been beaten by a better team. We will take some positives from here. As a bowling unit, we need to control the scoring rate."

At least they offered some resistance on Monday, with Masood, who models himself on England's Alastair Cook, playing some glorious strokes as he assumed a leadership role after Babar Azam and captain

Azhar Ali fell cheaply on Sunday evening.

His sixth Test 50, in his 17th Test, arrived with a boundary off Lyon, his sixth four, before he chipped the spinner to mid-off on 68 where Mitchell Starc collected an easy catch.

Shafiq, who has 12 Test hundreds to his name, proved to be Masood's equal and brought up his 25th half-century with a single off Josh Hazlewood. But Lyon struck again, with Shafiq getting a thin edge to a flighted ball that carried to Warner at slip and he was gone for 57.

Lyon then removed Iftikhar Ahmed, caught at short leg by Labuschagne for a battling 27, before trapping surprise first-

innings century-maker Yasir Shah lbw for 13. Shaheen Afridi became his fifth victim, caught at mid-off by Hazlewood on the last ball before dinner.

Commanding victory

The new pink ball was taken when they returned and with the lights on it didn't take long to finish off the tail, with Hazlewood clean-bowling Mohammad Rizwan for 45 and Mohammad Abbas run out. It capped another commanding victory for Australia who exploited Pakistan's inexperienced bowling attack, which includes two teenagers.

Warner's triple century was the highlight while Labuschagne shored up his burgeoning reputation by making 162 to go with the 185 he made in the first Test at Brisbane.

Mitchell Starc was the destroyer in Pakistan's first innings, taking 6-66 to reinforce his position as perhaps the best pink-ball bowler in the world. Tougher opposition awaits them with the arrival this month of New Zealand for three Tests -- in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia first innings 589 for three declared beat Pakistan first innings 302 all out & second innings 239 all out (Shan Masood 68, Asad Shafiq 57, Mohammad Rizwan 45; Lyon 5/69, Hazlewood 3/63) by an innings and 48 runs.

RANJI TROPHY

YADAV NAMED MUMBAI SKIPPER

Batsman Suryakumar Yadav will lead Mumbai in this year Ranji Trophy, which begins next week. It's a turnaround for the 29-year-old after getting dropped from the team during the last edition of the tournament.

Captain Root hits double, gives England a sniff against New Zealand

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE HAMILTON (NEW ZEALAND), DECEMBER 2

JOE ROOT could not hide his delight after a masterful 226 ended his run drought and gave England a much-needed boost in the second Test against New Zealand on Monday as they ended day four believing they can square the series. It took a five-wicket haul for the tireless Neil Wagner to bring England's first innings to an end at 476, a lead of 101.

At stumps, New Zealand were 96 for two and needing to bat late into the final day although rain may yet have the last word with further showers forecast for Tuesday.

"It felt good," a beaming Root said as he put a stream of low scores behind him. "Once I got in and had the bit between my teeth I wanted to make it a real big one and try and get us in a position where we can force a result in this game. I know there's a bit of weather around but you just never know. It'll be one big last push from everyone to try and come away with a levelled-up series."

Root said it had been a frustration more than a worry that he had gone 14 Test innings without a century but his return to form gave him confidence.

'It's been a while'

"It's nice to get back to scoring some big runs," he said. "I found a really good rhythm out there, felt pretty comfortable and I just wanted to keep going. It's been a while since I've had that amount of time out in the middle and you get really hungry for it."

New Zealand openers Jeet Raval (nought) and Tom Latham (18) were out early in their second innings, and for Raval it continued a disappointing run in which he has failed to reach double figures in six of his last 10 innings. But after being 28 for two, New Zealand's most skilled batsmen Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor prevented further damage with Williamson on 37 at stumps and Taylor on 31.

If Raval was feeling the pressure of his slump with an away series against Australia looming, he need only look Root's timely double century to see fortunes can change. England were 24 for two in their first innings when he went to the middle where he controlled proceedings in a marathon knock during which he faced 441 deliveries in nearly 11 hours. It was Root's third double-century, his longest innings in terms of time and balls faced and it ended just 28 runs short of his Test best 254 against Pakistan three years ago.

Tireless Wagner rewarded

He had partnerships of 177 with Rory Burns for the third wicket and 193 for the sixth-wicket with Ollie Pope. On a placid wicket, Root and Pope slowly accumulated runs early on the fourth day to ensure a first-innings lead and then picked up the pace to build on the advantage.

The 21-year-old Pope, in only his fourth Test, progressed to 75 before his valuable contribution ended with an edge to yet another Wagner bouncer. Four balls later, it was all over for Root whose exquisite timing deserted him when an attempt to hit Mitchell Santner out of the ground turned into a soft catch to Henry Nicholls at deep cover. He left the field to a deserved standing ovation but barely had time to take his seat when Wagner mopped up the England tail to finish with five for 124, his second five-wicket haul in the series.

"I'm blessed in that with that with my body that I can bowl long spells and if you keep putting pressure on then hopefully wickets come your way," Wagner said. "Even when it's flat you've got to make sure you graft away and (batsmen) tire out as well."

BRIEF SCORES: New Zealand first innings 375 all out & second innings 96 for two (Williamson 37 batting, Taylor 31 batting) trail England first innings 476 all out (Root 226, Rory Burns 101, Ollie Pope 75; Wagner 5/124) by 5 runs.

RINGING OFF THE HOOK

What's at receiving end of BCCI phone line? Abuses, requests, last wishes

DEVENDRA PANDEY MUMBAI, DECEMBER 2

THERE ARE people out there who will go to any extent to talk to their favourite cricketer. At least, that's what can be gauged from the recollections of Bernard Fernandes, who recently quit as a receptionist at the Indian cricket Board headquarters in Mumbai after 15 years of service.

Fernandes recalls that he routinely fielded calls from fans asking to be connected with some top player or the other — in some instances, while the cricketer was in the middle of a match. It took a lot of politeness and patience to hear them out and tell them that their request could not be entertained.

"One day, a man called up and said his father was about to die and that he wanted to hear the voice of this cricketer, is it possible to speak to him?" Fernandes recalls for *The Indian Express*. "How could I rudely

tell them that they don't stay in BCCI's office. I need to respect their emotions; I just politely made them understand the situation that it is not possible for him."

The BCCI landline phone tends to ring off the hook on India's match days. Even on non-match days, BCCI gets calls from fans enquiring about match tickets or a request to speak to a cricketer.

In the past few years, fans from South India has been calling to speak to 'Thala' aka Mahendra Singh Dhoni. Asking him not to retire is the common line. There are fans who want to speak to Virat Kohli and, at times, even retired Army officers call up, says Fernandes.

"So what if he is batting now, can't I speak to Virat Kohli?" "I want to speak to my Thala (MS Dhoni) now, I want to tell him not to retire".

Fernandes used to try his best to ensure such fans saw reason.

"The match is on, the match is happening in some other part of India. I always tell them,



A common request from fans is for the phone numbers of top cricketers. Judging by the sheer number of such calls, KL Rahul appears to have the biggest female fan following.

'sir Kohli is batting, how can he speak' but some of them remain stubborn and say try in break."

Another common request from fans is the phone numbers of top cricketers. Interestingly, Kohli, Dhoni and Rohit Sharma don't have the biggest female following in this regard. It's KL Rahul whose number is the most sought after.

One of the most common calls — and annoying to Fernandes — is when people make call up to ask for the score of an ongoing game. "My colleagues and I always used to say, 'there is TV, the internet, you can check it

there' but people still persist. If I told them the score, they would want more details and ask who scored how many, in how many balls, how many wickets, how many fours-sixes. Sometimes it's irritating but if you don't respond, they will abuse," Fernandes says.

Handling fans can also get tough when India are playing Pakistan. Fernandes recalls a day when BCCI had to shut down its landline for a few hours because fans across the border called up to sing 'Mauka-Mauka', the punchline of a television commercial for the World Cup match between the arch rivals. Pakistan has never beaten India on that stage.

When India played Pakistan at the 2015 World Cup, some fans warned BCCI to be ready to face consequences if India lost the game. India won and there was no security issue. But when India lost to Pakistan in the 2017 Champions Trophy final, fans took out their anger by dialling board numbers. Some of them abused Fernandes and his colleagues; some even asked him "why did India play Pakistan when soldiers are dying at the border".

Emerging from the shadows

With Bolt having hung his spikes, Blake trains his eyes on gold at 2020 Tokyo Olympics

SHAHID JUDGE
MUMBAI, DECEMBER 2

A QUESTION comes from the media scrum: "Have you ever beaten Usain Bolt in the nationals?" Yohan Blake smiles before saying, "I won't say. I won't say."

Through all his career, the 29-year-old Jamaican has lived in the shadow of the world record holder and eight-time Olympic gold medallist Bolt. The only times Blake has managed to win the yellow metal at the Olympics has been when he shared the podium with the world's fastest man, in the 4x100m relay races at the 2012 London and 2016 Rio Games. But that's not to say Blake is an insignificant name in the world of athletics.

With a personal best of 9.69 seconds and 19.26 seconds in the 100m and 200m respectively, Blake is the second-fastest sprinter in history – behind Bolt's mark of 9.58 seconds (100m) and 19.19 seconds (200m). And now that 'Lightning Bolt' has hung his spikes, Blake is looking to make his move up the podium at the Olympics next year.

"I'm always the favourite, I'm the second-fastest man in the universe," he said at a promotional event in Mumbai on Monday. "Everyone has to look up to me. This is going to be my last Olympics, so I'm definitely going for the gold. I have got many medals in the past, but this will put the icing on the cake for me at the Tokyo Olympics."

The Jamaican sprinter, whom Bolt dubbed 'The Beast', had first announced his name at the 2011 World Championships in Daegu, when he surprised the field and raced to gold. That made him the youngest ever sprinter till date – at 21 years and 245 days – to win a 100m gold at the World Championships. On that occasion though, Bolt, the favourite, was disqualified because of a false start. It's an achievement that will always have an asterisk beside it. But Blake doesn't care.

"If you take Usain out of the picture, I'd be the fastest man. I feel I was born in the wrong time," he says lightly. "Nevertheless, I'm still proud with what I have achieved. It was Usain's time and I was competing against a giant."

Blake was at hand when his senior com-



Yohan Blake is the second-fastest sprinter in history – behind Usain Bolt's mark of 9.58 seconds in 100m. File

Everyone has to look up to me. This is going to be my last Olympics, so I'm definitely going for the gold. I have got many medals in the past, but this will put the icing on the cake for me at the Tokyo Olympics.

YOHAN BLAKE

patriot set an Olympic record in the 100m at London 2012. And he was also there when Bolt stumbled past the finish line, in last place, in his last competitive race, at the 2017 World Championships.

"He was hardly training (in the run-up to the event). He was partying a lot instead.

He didn't feel the urge as it was his last race. He said he was just going to have fun, he just wanted a medal. Everyone wants to win, but he just wanted a medal," recalls Blake. "On the day of the race, he said he was feeling his hamstring. When I came around the corner to give him the baton, I knew he was not going to make it. I thought, 'what about my medal?' "But he had done so much for Jamaica, for the world, and I forgive him that once. But it was a bad end to his career."

Now Blake's looking forward to his own swansong at what will be his third Olympics. He reckons that his body is "firing" and that everyday he's "hungry and running with purpose."

But in the longer run, for athletics, he's critical of the changes the world body – The

International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), now called World Athletics – has been making to international events. In the coming season, the 15 Diamond League meets will no longer have the 200m sprint, discus throw, triple jump and 3000m steeplechase.

"If he (IAAF president Sebastian Coe) can take away the 200 and triple jump, I don't know if he is trying to build athletics or trying to kill it. But that's a stupid move he is making. He must enhance the sports, but he is killing it," he says. "This is people's career and where they make money. For Coe to be doing that, everybody is hating him. It's madness." But whatever comes of the alterations with the Diamond League, Blake remains unfazed in his goal. Gold. At the Olympics. On his own terms.

'New generation should have replaced me by now'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

VETERAN INDIAN tennis player Leander Paes on Monday hinted at a possible retirement, saying he has lived his career and doesn't see himself playing past another year. Paes was named in India's Davis Cup squad for the Pakistan tie after several top players made themselves unavailable to travel to Islamabad. The 46-year-old Indian went on to better his own record by achieving his 44th Davis Cup doubles win, this time partnering debutant Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan, as India routed Pakistan 4-0 last week.

"My experience carries me through now but in the longer run what's best for the team is that I should not be playing past another year," Paes told reporters.

"I am not going to play much longer, I have had a great 30-year stint in Davis Cup. I have lived my career playing for the country." However, Paes said he will always be there to represent his country, if need be. "For me, when it comes to being called for a tie whatever the circumstances I will represent my country."

The Atlanta Olympic bronze medallist said that nurturing a young team should be the main objective for Indian tennis right now. "Already by 46, I should have been moved out by the next generation coming up," Paes said.

"So to really be looking at it objectively, to nurture a younger team is what's impor-

tant," he said. Paes, who has won 18 Grand Slam titles, said coaching youngsters is one of the things he plans to do in the future.

"I was really focused on this tie, I had to motivate the youngster. Now I'm going to think about my 2020 season. I will be thinking hard about these 30 years I have just completed. And I'm going to evaluate with my team what this new season brings," he said.

"There are other things that are motivating me so much. A dream of mine is to coach and train and nurture youngsters to win Olympic medals, to win the Wimbledon championship." Talking about the Pakistan tie, Paes said he volunteered to play because he didn't want India to be relegated in the Davis Cup.

"My reason for this Davis Cup was to make sure India as a team didn't forfeit the tie with the players not going to Islamabad to play... then for the next three to four years we would be relegated to a zonal group and would have to fight our way up," he said.

"None of us have put 30 years to see that happen. The last time that happened was in 1974 when India was to play South Africa." Meanwhile, coach Zeeshan Ali and non-playing captain Rohit Rajpal lavished praise on Paes, saying the experience the veteran brings with him is unmatched.

"Experience is one thing that he brings to the table, having played the amount of Davis Cup matches that he has played and won. No matter where we go and which team we play, they all look up to him. It does not have to be only Indian players," Ali said.



Leander Paes says coaching youngsters is something he plans to do in the future.

Starc opts out of next year's IPL; Maxwell, Lynn in auction pool

PTI/ENNS
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 2

AUSTRALIA PACE spearhead Mitchell Starc has opted out of the Indian Premier League for a second successive year even as compatriots Glenn Maxwell and Chris Lynn have listed their names for the player's auction to be held on December 19 in Kolkata.

The 29-year-old Starc last featured in the IPL in 2015 when he represented Royal Challengers Bangalore. The left-arm quick had been signed by Kolkata Knight Riders for Rs 9.4 crore in the auction before the 2018 IPL, but was unavailable for the entire tournament because of injury.

Earlier this year too, Starc was recovering from injury ahead of the IPL 2019 auction and had opted out to give priority to Australia's World Cup campaign. He is the highest wicket-taker in the last two editions of the 50-over World Cup. He will feature in the first edition of The Hundred in the UK, where he will represent Welsh Fire.

England's Test captain Joe Root is another notable absentee from the auction pool of 971 players.

Maxwell and Lynn, however, will be up for grabs and have set their base price at the highest level of Rs 2 crore. The former, who had taken a break from cricket to deal

with "difficulties with his mental health" made a positive return to club cricket on November 23.

Apart from Maxwell and Lynn, the others to list their base price at Rs 2 crore are Australian fast bowlers Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood and all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, South Africa quick Dale Steyn and Sri Lanka batsman Angelo Mathews.

Among other overseas big names in the auction list is South Africa pacer Chris Morris, who became the only retained player in 2018 to be released ahead of the upcoming auction. Out of the 971 cricketers to go under the hammer, 713 are Indians and 258 overseas players. There are 215 capped players, 754 uncapped and two cricketers from Associate Nations, who will compete for the available 73 spots in the eight franchises.

Apart from India, the countries represented in the auction pool are Afghanistan (19), Australia (55), Bangladesh (6), England (22), Netherlands (1), New Zealand (24), South Africa (54), Sri Lanka (39), USA (1), West Indies (34) and Zimbabwe (3).

With the IPL Player Registration closing on November 30, teams now have time till December 9 evening to submit their short-list of players that will make up the final Player Auction list.

NITIN SHARMA
CHANDIGARH, DECEMBER 2

A SILVER medal at the wrestling nationals is a big achievement for anyone, especially one who had once quit the sport and drove a truck – without licence – to support himself and his family for four years.

Sonaba Gogane Tanaji had to settle for second place in the 61 kg category at the nationals in Jalandhar last week, losing to World U-23 championship silver medallist Ravinder. But he has come a long way from the time he rode a pick-up truck throughout the day for four years. Those memories came rushing back for the 23-year-old when he saw a mini pick-up truck parked just outside the tournament venue.

"I wanted to put the medal on the mini truck and remember all the days when I drove a similar vehicle, sometimes for more than 14 hours in the day, to support myself and my family," the Kolhapur grappler said.

"When I started wrestling in 2006 at the village akhada, my father's health was a big concern and we couldn't earn as much as we should have from our 4.5 acre of land. That's why, three years later, I quit training at the akhada and bought a mini pick-up truck after taking loan of Rs 1.5 lakh. I would manage to save Rs 400-500 after buying diesel for the truck. I didn't have a licence and wouldn't enter towns for fear of being caught. A year later,



Sonaba Gogane won silver in the 61 kg category at the nationals in Jalandhar.

I exchanged the truck for a bigger tempo after taking another loan of Rs 3 lakh."

It was a chance meeting with 2008 Youth Commonwealth Games champion Ranjeet Nalawade at the Pune Railway station that brought Sonaba back to wrestling in 2013 and he started making progress through the ranks. He first won a bronze at the Cadet Nationals before becoming state champion.

"Nalawade bhai was the main reason that I resumed training and when I won the bronze medal at the cadet nationals, my fa-

ther distributed sweets in the village," he remembers.

In 2017, Sonaba claimed his first medal at the senior level – a bronze in the 61 Kg category in the nationals at Indore. He had also joined the Maratha Regiment in the Army by then, and is a Havildar now.

It was the year when his father suffered a paralysis attack but his job with the Army meant that Sonaba could support his family financially. Last year, the youngster had to miss the nationals due to injury but won the

title in the mud wrestling nationals at Pune. He also reached the quarterfinals at the world championships in Budapest, Hungary, where he lost to Gadzhimurad Rashidov of Russia.

The accolades kept coming for Sonaba this year with a silver medal at the Asian U-23 Championships in Mongolia.

The youngster has also been sparring with 2019 World Championship bronze medallist Bajrang Punia in the national camp and considers him his idol, even though a freak injury during one of those sessions kept him out of action for a while.

"I often seek tips from Bajrang bhai and he always helps me. I suffered a shoulder injury as Bajrang bhai's hand slipped due to sweat from the grip in practice, but things like these happen. Apart from Bajrang bhai, I also talk with (world championship bronze medallist) Rahul Aware bhai. We fought in the Maharashtra dangal last year where I lost 6-9. I plan to shift to 65 Kg category next year and my target is the CWG and Asian Games podium," said Sonaba.

National coach Jagmandar Singh believes avoiding injuries will be key to Sonaba's success in coming years.

"He has the willpower and stamina to succeed but his style of wrestling is more prone to injuries. Perhaps he did not put much focus on technique during his early days but is improving with time. If he can avoid injuries, he can win more medals," said Singh.

[SPORTS BAR]



Minakshi, Rituz win on Day 1 of boxing nationals

Punjab's Minakshi, Chandigarh's Rituz and crowd favourite Anchu Sabu emerged winners on the opening day of the fourth Elite Women's National Boxing Championship on Monday. A total of 235 boxers from 33 teams will be seen in action at Mundayad Indoor Stadium. A total of 23 matches were played on the first day with Punjab pugilist Minakshi (48kg) beating Meghalaya's Eva Marbaniang 5-0. Rituz defeated Ladakh's Dechen in the light fly weight category. Anchu Sabu (48kg) sprung the surprise of the day as she beat Manika Kumari from Bengal with an RSC verdict in round 2.

Pressure is all on Joshua, says Ruiz Jr

World heavyweight champion Andy Ruiz Jr believes his re-match with Anthony Joshua will be a harder fight than his stunning victory in June but says all the pressure is on the Briton ahead of their showdown in Saudi Arabia this weekend. Mexican-American Ruiz produced one of boxing's biggest upsets when he dethroned the previously undefeated world champion Joshua with a seventh-round stoppage at New York's Madison Square Garden. "We've got to see where he's at because all the pressure is on him. The pressure isn't on me because I followed my dream, made my dreams come true," Ruiz said ahead of the so-called 'Clash on the Dunes'.



Austrian Peter Seisenbacher won judo gold at 1984 and 1988 Olympics. Reuters

Olympic champ gets 5 years for child sexual abuse

Two-time Olympic judo champion Peter Seisenbacher was sentenced to five years in prison on Monday for sexually assaulting two young girls he was coaching in the early 2000s. An Austrian regional criminal court found Seisenbacher guilty of the abuse, which took place in Vienna between 1999 and 2004. The women filed charges against their former coach in 2013. Seisenbacher has always denied wrongdoing, claiming the women made up their stories. However, chief judge Christoph Bauer called the victims "extremely credible." "We didn't get the impression that they were lying, that they were misleading us, that they were plotting," Bauer said. The 59-year-old Seisenbacher started coaching following a successful career, which included winning gold medals at two consecutive Olympics in the 1980s. Seisenbacher was convicted of sexually assaulting one of the girls in 1999, when she was 11, and abusing her on multiple occasions until 2002. Also, he allegedly sexually assaulted a 13-year-old girl in 2004.

SAG: Badminton teams win gold medals

Indian men's, led by Kidambi Srikanth, defeated Sri Lanka 3-1 while the women's side blanked the same opponents 3-0 to make gold medals at the 13th South Asian Games (SAG). In the taekwondo event, India won nine medals, including two golds. In male team poomsae (17 years above to under 23 category) the trio of Lalthlamunapua, Lalafakzuala and Daniel Lalhumthanga claimed the top honours. The country's second gold was won by the duo of Gaurav Singh and Harsha Singha in the pair poomsae (23 years above to under 29 category) event.



Federer's face to be minted on Swiss coin

Tennis great Roger Federer is to become the first living Swiss to have a coin minted in their honour, with a commemorative 20 franc (\$20.06) silver piece bearing his image being issued in January. The 38-year-old 20-time Grand Slam champion is regarded by many as the greatest tennis player ever and is a national hero in Switzerland. Swissmint confirmed that 55,000 of the coins, featuring Federer delivering a backhand, will be produced and will be available for pre-order from Tuesday until Dec. 19. "Roger Federer's sporting achievements, his charitable commitments, his easy-going nature and his accessibility to his fans have prompted Swissmint to dedicate this 20-franc silver coin to him – the first time it has done so with a living person," a Swissmint spokesperson told Reuters.

Napoli fines contested by world players' union FIFPro

ASSOCIATED PRESS
ROME, DECEMBER 2

NAPOLI'S DECISION to fine its players for abandoning an in-season training camp ordered by the club is being contested by world players' union FIFPro. The training camp was called for by Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis following a 1-1 draw at home with Salzburg in the Champions League a month ago.

"Napoli's intention to withhold player salaries is without valid grounds and is being contested collectively," the union said in a statement over the weekend. "FIFPRO believes that the ad-hoc decision of Napoli forbidding players to go home and re-join their families was unjustified. "Like every other employee, professional football players have the right to ensure that their private life is respected, especially considering the already congested fixture list which sees many players away from home for prolonged periods," FIFPRO added.

De Laurentiis fined the players up to 50 per cent of their October salaries, with captain Lorenzo Insigne reportedly ordered to pay the most at 350,000 euros (nearly \$400,000), followed by midfielder Allan at 150,000 euros (\$165,000).

The fines could total 2.3 million euros (\$2.5 million). Since Napoli coach Carlo Ancelotti said publicly that he was not in agreement with the training camp, Italian Players' Association president Damiano Tomassi said "it needs to be understood if and how the request for the training camp was formalised." FIFPRO said the grounds for the fines "contradict provisions in Italy's collective bargaining agreement."

Meanwhile, Napoli has continued to struggle amid a six-match winless streak in Serie A that has dropped the Partenopei to seventh place, prompting Ancelotti to announce on Monday that another training camp will be held beginning Wednesday for three nights - concluding with Saturday's match at Udinese. Including the Champions League and a 1-1 draw at defending champions Liverpool last week, Napoli have gone eight games in all competitions without a victory.

Messi Madrid's nemesis again

Scores 86th-minute winner as Barcelona extended their unbeaten run against Atletico in La Liga

TALES AZZONI
MADRID, DECEMBER 2

ATLETICO MADRID'S ordeal against Barcelona continues in the Spanish league. Lionel Messi made up for a lacklustre performance by scoring in the 86th minute on Sunday, giving Barcelona a 1-0 win at Atletico and extending the Catalan team's unbeaten run against their Madrid rivals to 19 league matches.

"It's always a big advantage to have Messi in even games like these," Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde said.

Messi struck with a low left-footed shot from outside the area after being set up by Luis Suarez to keep Barcelona unbeaten against Atletico for nine years.

"We played a great match, but when Leo shows up he can make a difference," Atletico forward Saul Niguez said. "It's incredibly easy for him to do these things, that's why he is the best." It was Messi's 30th career goal against Atletico, who hadn't lost at home in 17 matches in all competitions.

"Messi appeared out of the match for a long time, but when he had a chance he broke free and scored a great goal," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said.

The victory put Barcelona back at the top of the league above Real Madrid - who won at Alaves on Saturday - on goal difference.

Atletico dropped to sixth place, six points behind Barcelona and Real Madrid who have a game in hand after their October clasicos was postponed until December 18 because of a separatist rally in the Catalan capital.

Sevilla stayed third after beating last-place Leganes 1-0 earlier on Sunday, while Real Sociedad are in fourth place after routing Eibar 4-1 on Saturday.

"The league is very long, we have to keep working to stay close to the leaders," Simeone said. The match marked Antoine Griezmann's return to the Wanda Metropolitano Stadium after being transferred to Barcelona at the end of last season. He was loudly jeered by most Atletico fans nearly every time he touched the ball. The France striker had a quiet performance and never posed a significant threat.

Atletico had most of the chances at the Metropolitano, but both teams squandered good opportunities throughout the match.



Lionel Messi scored his 30th career goal against Atletico Madrid, who hadn't lost at home in 17 matches in all competitions. Reuters

Each side hit the woodwork in the first half, and both goalkeepers - Atletico's Jan Oblak and Barcelona's Marc-Andre ter Stegen - made some good saves to keep the game scoreless. Messi broke the deadlock after an exchange with Suarez, whose perfect touch

just outside the box set up the playmaker's well-placed low shot.

Atletico's last league win over Barcelona was in February 2010, a 2-1 victory at the now demolished Vicente Calderon Stadium. It hadn't lost at the Metropolitano since a

United blow another lead to lose ground

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
MANCHESTER, DECEMBER 2

MANCHESTER UNITED threw away a second-half lead to remain eight points outside the Premier League's top four with a 2-2 draw at home to Aston Villa on Sunday.

Jack Grealish put Villa in front with a superb solo effort, but United levelled before the break when Marcus Rashford's header hit the post and came off Villa goalkeeper Tom Heaton into his own net before Victor Lindelof then headed the hosts in front.

But a week after Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men surrendered a late lead to draw 3-3 with Sheffield United, they did not learn their lesson as Tyrone Mings secured a deserved point for Villa. The loss of those four points has cost United the chance to climb up to fifth in the table. Instead they lie down in ninth and trail two points behind a revitalised Tottenham, who visit Old Trafford on Wednesday with new boss Jose Mourinho eyeing revenge against the club that sacked him 11 months ago.

"I wouldn't be sat here talking about us sitting fifth if we had got that goal extra," said Solskjaer. "The league table at this point is not the biggest concern, it's so tight. I just need to make sure we get performances and get three or four performances and results after each other."

"What I can say is so far we have had the lead in so many games and haven't been able to win those games. Six or seven times we have been up and we should be better at seeing these games into wins."

First, United themselves had to come from behind after a superb 11th-minute opener from Grealish, who has scored three league goals and made four assists this season. Anwar El Ghazi burst down the right wing before crossing through the United area for Grealish to gather the ball on the left-hand side and take advantage of Andreas Pereira's decision to back off by curling a precise shot into the top corner of David de Gea's goal.

"It was a super goal but that's what I've come to expect from him," said Villa manager Dean Smith. "I thought the first 30 minutes he was running the game."

"But then he missed a chance he would have scored 99 times out of 100 and they go up the other end and score."

25 Number of points Lionel Messi has helped Barcelona gain against Atletico in the Spanish league though his goals and assists.

428 Messi has found the back of the net on 428 occasions at a rate of 0.928 GPG in the Spanish league. Rival Cristiano Ronaldo has 425 top-flight goals from 555 matches.

9 Number of years since Atletico last defeated Barcelona in La Liga. The Catalans have extended their winning run in the league to 19 matches.

game against Real Madrid in February.

Barcelona have won 14 matches against Atletico since that loss in 2010, with five draws. Atletico's last win against Barcelona in all competitions was a 2-1 result in the quarterfinals of the 2015-16 Champions League. Atletico's worst streak against a single club is a 23-match winless run against Real Madrid from 2000 to 2013.

Sevilla stay close

Sevilla beat Leganes to keep pace with the leaders. Brazilian defender Diego Carlos scored in the 63rd to give the team its fifth straight win in all competitions.

Julen Lopetegui's squad hasn't lost in 10 matches in all competitions, since a 4-0 rout at Barcelona in the league.

Leganes are at the bottom of the 20-team standings with six points from 15 matches. They haven't won in five consecutive league games, with four losses and a draw. Three of the losses came against Real Madrid, Barcelona and Sevilla.

Athletic Bilbao beat Granada 2-0 at home for their fourth straight victory.

Raul Garcia scored from a penalty kick in the 41st minute and Yuri Berchiche sealed the win in the 83rd at the San Mames Stadium, putting Athletic in fifth place with 26 points, five behind Barcelona and Real Madrid. AP

Saudi Arabia embraces Western sports to rehabilitate image

NEW YORK TIMES
RIYADH, DECEMBER 2

ON HALLOWEEN, as two female WWE wrestlers battled inside a roaring King Fahd International Stadium, Najla Ibrahim stood with a hand on her heart and another in the air, capturing the moment with her smartphone. For years, the nurse from Riyadh followed wrestling from afar and yearned for the day when women would take the ring in her country.

"I'm very proud because they are making history," Ibrahim, 23, dressed in a black abaya and seated next to her older sister, said as the match ended under a shower of fireworks. "I've been waiting for this for so long."

A year after the state-directed assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi Arabian dissident columnist for The Washington Post, the government of Saudi Arabia is accelerating efforts to diversify its economy, cultivate domestic spending and polish its global image by broadening cultural offerings centered on Western sports and entertainment.

Staging a women's wrestling match is no small feat in a kingdom where strict interpretation of Islamic law has long dictated that women be segregated, wear full-body coverings and have a male guardian. While the moment was notable, it was also carefully manufactured, stirring debate about whether Saudi Arabia is progressing or just glossing over its past.

"It's definitely 'sportswashing,'" said Philippe Nassif, Amnesty International's advocacy director for the Middle East and North Africa. "In the case of Saudi Arabia, they are infamous for the oppression of women's rights and ethnic and racial minority rights. What better way to attempt to change that image than an all women's wrestling match?"

The relationship between international brands like WWE and the Saudi government is symbiotic, as companies seek untapped markets while the kingdom tries to move its economy beyond dependence on oil production.

But the push comes with complications. Western businesses and stars have faced backlash and boycotts amid accusations that they are aiding a public relations initiative from an oppressive Saudi government.

Getting into the game

Saudi Arabia made sports a priority in 2016, as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's "Vision 2030" economic development program. To lay the groundwork, Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan, now Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States, last year worked with an American lobbying firm to set up meetings with the National Basketball Association, Major League Soccer, World Surf League and Formula One auto racing to discuss bringing international



Lacey Evans (top) and Natalya Neidhart at the first-ever WWE women's match in Saudi Arabia, in Riyadh on October 31. AP

sports to the kingdom.

Big money soon flowed. In July, Saudi Arabia's General Sports Authority announced a \$650 million investment to develop local athletes and teams and to attract international events. Speaking at an investment conference in Riyadh in October, Prince Abdul Aziz bin Turki Al-Faisal, chairman of the General Sports Authority, explained how making Saudi Arabia a hub of global sports can lift economic growth and create thousands of jobs.

"A big part of the change within the kingdom is the sector of sport, and growing the sector of sport," he said.

Wrestling is one sliver of Saudi Arabia's new appetite for athletics.

This month, Anthony Joshua and Andy Ruiz Jr. will travel to a custom-built arena in Diriyah, outside of Riyadh, for a heavyweight boxing title fight billed the "Clash on the Dunes." February brings the debut of the Saudi Cup, a horse race with a \$20 million purse — the richest in history. A Ladies European Tour golf tournament is being planned for March.

"We are in a really huge transformation, softening the image," Majed Al-Sorour, chief executive of the Saudi Golf Federation, said on the sidelines of the Future Investment Initiative conference in Riyadh in October.

Boundaries broaden

The sports expansion is part of Prince Mohammed's attempt to bring in foreign investment and increase the financial potential of a country whose population skews young. Of the kingdom's 22 million citizens, about two-thirds are under 30.

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled accord-

ing to Shariah law. After Prince Mohammed was elevated to crown prince in 2017, he pursued a campaign aimed at convincing the world that Saudi Arabia was changing culturally with a series of reforms that were methodically rolled out to burnish its image. In the last 18 months, movie theaters opened for the first time in more than 35 years, women gained the right to drive and segregation of the sexes was relaxed in public places.

On a Monday night in late October, Saudi men and women in their 20s swayed to hip-hop music at a fashion boutique that opened for Riyadh's Design Week. As with international companies, young people in Saudi Arabia are also adjusting to new boundaries and calibrating their ambitions.

At the event was Mohammed Alhamdan, who five years ago was an aspiring actor working at McDonald's in Riyadh before he started creating satirical music videos that went viral on YouTube. Now he has more than 7 million followers on his social media networks and is paid to create and perform in advertisements for brands like McDonald's and Pepsi, which operate in the kingdom.

"Everything is new, for us and the country," said Mr. Alhamdan, 25, who goes by the online persona Warchieff.

Saudi Arabia's growing circle of social media influencers still tread cautiously when approaching cultural taboos. Mr. Alhamdan said he was careful to create videos that grab attention without veering into cultural criticism that will get him in trouble with a government that aggressively stifles online dissent.

The Indian EXPRESS
FILM CLUB

ARTICLE 15

A STORY ABOUT EVERYDAY DISCRIMINATION.
A DISCUSSION TO QUESTION IT, EVERY DAY.

Director: Anubhav Sinha | Curator: Shubhra Gupta, Film Critic, The Indian Express
Screening Date: 6th December, 2019 | Time: 7:00 PM
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Here are some comments shared by our readers about the unique format of The Indian Express Club.



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