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PAPER WITH PASSION

No special treatment

The top court is against fresh guidelines governing the arrest and remand of Opposition leaders

By refusing to entertain a plea filed by 14 parties seeking fresh guidelines governing the arrest and remand of Opposition leaders, the Supreme Court has simply asserted the cardinal principle of democracy: all are equal before the law. A Bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice JB Pardiwala correctly said that "laying down general guidelines without having relation to facts of a case will be dangerous." Representing the petitioners, led by the Congress, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi argued that mass arrests are a threat to democracy and a sign of authoritarianism. Chandrachud's response to this was reasonable and sagacious: "When you say that space for opposition has shrunk, the remedy is in that space, the political space. Not [in] the court." This is a message that not just the Opposition but also the Government should learn. Why don't Opposition leaders engage with the Government as much as they should? Why do they disrupt proceedings in Parliament and Assemblies? Why don't they allow ministers to make statements? It is not that in recent times Bharatiya Janata Party leaders have been setting new, commendable norms by their conduct within and outside legislature buildings, but that doesn't give Opposition leaders the licence to lower the standards of political debate in the country. As we have always emphasised—and it's a universal truth—two wrongs don't make a right.

Owing to vociferous, and sometimes vituperative, political debate and perverted public discourse, our leaders seek solutions to their problems elsewhere. Like in courts. Hence the 14 parties' petition in the apex court. They themselves can't resolve their own issues, and then seek a judicial resolution (And if this results in greater powers and importance of the Supreme Court and high courts, they also grumble about 'judicial activism' and 'judicial overreach,' but that's another story). This is cutting across party lines. Opposition parties now seek relief from the apex court. The BJP wants the judiciary to kill, or at least tame, the beast called populism. So, a few months ago, a BJP leader, Ashwini Upadhyay, petitioned the Supreme Court, seeking restrictions on parties on distributing "irrational freebies" before elections. It is another matter that the BJP's own conduct is little better than other parties. In the matter of legal action against Opposition leaders, the apex court, while not accepting the Opposition parties' plea seeking special guidelines, has offered an olive branch to them. The Bench said, "You please come back to us when you have an individual criminal case or group of cases." That's fair enough. Besides, there are special courts for expeditious trials of criminal cases involving MP/MLAs. The Central Government set up these courts as directed by the Supreme Court. Importantly, the SC also monitors their performance. In a nutshell, there are enough safeguards to shield Opposition leaders.



The Tamang community people offer prayers at Boudhanath Stupa in Kathmandu, Nepal

PTI

Four most important existential questions

We all have free will, which allows us to think and achieve big. Of course, our honest endeavours should be aided by the divine

We all have many questions. I feel that four questions definitely need answers. These are: why have we been made so small, I mean as souls; why is materialism discouraged; why is the creation God-centric; and what are the criteria for pleasing God?



We are capable of doing big tasks aided by divine authorities and others.

As for materialism, why is it discouraged? There are two basic ways to view the universe – the spiritual and the materialistic. In material consciousness, one feels that there is no God or any divine arrangement. Consequently, there is no 'Karmaphala' phenomenon. What does such consciousness do? It keeps us at lower levels. Not only do we make mistakes, not fearing retribution, but also deny ourselves what God can do for us. And God can do a lot for us.

Now the next question is about why the creation is God-centric. What else could

it be? With so many of us in this universe itself, God had to be unimaginably big, and He is absolutely incomprehensible so that He could manage vast creation. Otherwise, how can good people survive when demons outnumber good persons by far? Lord Krishna has given a little hint about God's fathomless qualities when He stated, "whatever there is opulent, effulgent or even energetic, all that you should know as produced from a fragment of My splendour." (10.41) God has to be what He is in order to maintain order in this world. As God owns everything, He doesn't need anything from anyone. Is He not best placed to judge our actions? God even incarnates to re-establish dharma. (4.7) God is kind towards devotees because they are assets to the creation. The current model of creation works because God ensures it.

The last question has to be about ways to please God. Let us be guided by God Himself. Lord Krishna instructs, "You should always do your duty. Because action is superior to inaction. Maintenance of the body will not be possible through inaction."

tion." (3.8) Would you believe that even a newly born has a duty? He must cry to attract attention if he is hungry, wet or unwell. Time, place, and circumstances determine duties for all of us without exception. The next important instruction is to take God's shelter, because we are severely incomplete, even though we may lull ourselves to think that we are self-sufficient. This creation is entirely interdependent; we must serve others and they must do likewise. However, this serving mentality goes only this far when one goes beyond self-interest; one must go beyond and do public welfare. (6.40) For a higher quality of life, one must take shelter in God, because God alone has the power to grant peace, bliss and security. We do realise it at some point when we may be utterly helpless. Only very fortunate souls have this realisation in time and do something about it; otherwise, this precious life is wasted. Wise persons make every effort to please God. The way to do so is just as Arjuna understood: "I will do as you say." (18.73) (The author is a spiritual teacher)



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Spirit of voluntarism in Salt Satyagraha



RAJDEEP PATHAK

The relevance of a voluntary movement in India and abroad, inspired by the Gandhian framework, is crucial for establishing a non-violent world order

It had been 13 days since the march for Salt Satyagraha had already begun under the leadership of a 61-year-old Mahatma Gandhi from Sabarmati. Deciding to embark on a 240-mile foot march to Dandi to break salt at Dandi, he involved the entire country in this act of defiance.

On the morning of March 25, the Satyagrahis (thousands of volunteers) started from Samni for Tralsa. While going to Tralsa, Gandhiji and his companions walked through water and deep mud. Here, they were given a warm welcome. Kasturba Gandhi, his wife, and Kakasaheb Kalelkar came here to meet Gandhiji. The Salt March had gathered momentum. It was on the previous night (March 24) at Samni village where Gandhiji emphasised the breach of the Salt Act, and wearing and making khadi.

Dandi March and volunteerism
The spirit of volunteerism and nonviolent protest has been a crucial aspect of India's history. The Gandhian era saw this in full glory during the Salt Satyagraha, which showcased the power of nonviolent protest in achieving social and political change through nonviolent protest, even when Satyagrahis were met with severe brutality by the British authorities.

One of the significant aspects of the movement was the participation of volunteers — ranging from students, farmers, labourers and women, who participated in the protest despite the risk of arrest, imprisonment and violence from the British. This (Gandhian) concept of volunteerism is based on the idea of selfless service or Seva, which involves giving one's time, skills and resources for the greater good of society without expecting anything in return. The movement sparked a wave of protests and civil disobedience and led to the release of thousands of political prisoners. The volunteers not only ensured the success of the protest, but helped collect funds, arrange food and accommodation for the marchers and provide medical aid to those injured during the protest.

Beyond the protest, the volunteers continued to work towards building a sustainable



economy based on cottage industries and promoting the use of khadi (hand-spun cloth), which the Mahatma had time and again emphasised upon.

Gandhiji had felt the nation's pulse. He knew of the springing of emotions and excitement and was cautious too. On March 28, after reaching Ramya, Mahatma Gandhi said, "I feel it is difficult to leave any of the districts of Gujarat. I feel like staying in every district and starting manufacturing salt here, but we cannot do everything we like. We do whatever is appropriate, therefore, we should reach Dandi."

Impact on India & the world
The spirit of volunteerism in the Salt Satyagraha serves as an inspiration for people around the world and highlights the power of collective action towards a common goal. The principles of nonviolent protest that were championed by the Mahatma continue to be used in various movements worldwide, from the Civil Rights Movement in the US to the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar.

The voluntary movement inspired by Gandhian leadership has been instrumental in bringing about social and political change in India. Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, self-reliance and service to others has inspired generations of Indians to work



THE SPIRIT OF VOLUNTEERISM AND NONVIOLENT PROTEST HAS BEEN A CRUCIAL ASPECT OF INDIA'S HISTORY

towards building a better society. Gandhi's emphasis on self-reliance and service to others also played a crucial role in inspiring the voluntary movement in India. Gandhi believed that every individual had a responsibility towards society and that voluntary action was a way of fulfilling that responsibility.

Gandhi's influence on the voluntary movement in India can be seen in various fields. Many organisations and individuals have been inspired by Gandhi's philosophy of service and have worked towards building a better society through voluntarism.

One of the most successful examples of a voluntary movement is the Chipko Movement, which was inspired by Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence and environmental conservation. Started in the 1970s, it was aimed at protecting forests and promoting sustainable development. It inspired similar movements across India and around the world as it helped raise awareness about the importance of environmental conservation and the role of voluntary action.

Another example is Barefoot College, a voluntary organisation established by Bunker Roy in 1972, which has been successful in providing education and vocational training to rural communities, particular-

ly women. Similarly, the Aravind Eye Care System in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, another voluntary organisation, has been successful in providing high-quality eye care to millions of people.

Though there have been limitations and criticisms of many voluntary organisations in India for their lack of transparency and accountability and sustainability, it cannot be denied that the relevance of the voluntary movement in India and the world is crucial for the establishment of a non-violent world order with service to others, and collective action as its key principles.

This is important from a world perspective for peaceful and sustainable social change. One such example is the Black Lives Matter Movement in the US, which has drawn inspiration from the Gandhian framework, with many activists emphasising the importance of nonviolence and community service.

Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, self-reliance and service to others has inspired generations of Indians and people across the world to work towards building a better society through voluntary action. This power of collective action towards a common goal continues.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RENAMING OF ARUNACHAL'S AREAS

Sir — China's 'renaming' of areas in Arunachal Pradesh is a deceitful endeavour and a game of dirty tricks, aiming to provoke India. The dispute over Arunachal Pradesh has been long-standing between the countries, resulting in military stand-offs and diplomatic tensions that remained frosty ("India raps China: Inventing names doesn't alter fact", April 5, 2023).

The renaming of areas in Arunachal Pradesh is a deliberate ploy by China to create confusion and commotion for its long-term sinister design in the international community. There will be no takers in Arunachal Pradesh for these kinds of insular approaches by China. History is a living witness to show that Arunachal Pradesh was never a part of China at any given point in time.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

SEERS SHOULD BE APOLITICAL

Sir — Seers should be above politics and they should be a symbol of sacrifice. Of late, the involvement of seers in politics through the back door is increasing. Some seers want their community candidate to be the Chief Minister. Some seers have been fighting for reservation and increased reservation in favour of candidates hailing from their community. The Sringeri seer, Udipi seer and many others have set good examples in not interfering with government policies and programmes. Praying for the good of the people and the good of the nation should be their motto. Many seers have entered into healthy competition in churning out good disciples.

The attempted suicide bid by a Banjara community seer in Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai's constituency has been foiled. Attempted suicide is an offence in the Indian Penal Code. It is for the law to take its course in dealing with the situation. Banjara community members have been protesting against the recent classification of reservations. Residents of Lambani tandas or hamlets have announced that they would boycott the Assembly polls in Karnataka. Reservation

Development of smart cities



India is lagging in the development of smart cities as per a new report and we are compelled to think about whether the Indian smart cities are really smart. It is to be noted here that we have just successfully repackaged citizens' essential needs into a new project called 'smart cities'. The index was published by the Smart City Observatory, which is part of the Swiss business school, Institute for Management Development. It ranks 141 cities based on how they use technology to address the challenges its citizens face to achieve a higher quality of life. Singapore is Asia's smartest city and the seventh smartest city in the world; Zurich is the world's smart city. This is the third time Singapore has been seventh on the list. The top 10 cities are a mix of European,

Australian and Asian destinations: Zurich, Switzerland, Oslo, Norway, Canberra, Australia, Copenhagen, Denmark, Lausanne, Switzerland, London, the UK, Singapore, Helsinki, Finland, Geneva, Switzerland, Stockholm and Sweden.

The Index takes into account input from cities' residents on how technology has improved their lives. It combines both survey responses as well as hard data, to understand (and represent) the extent to which technology has helped achieve a higher quality of life for a city's residents. The data has been collected from over 20,000 citizens, who were surveyed on about 15 aspects of living in these cities. Some of the questions included those on affordable housing, road congestion, green spaces, fulfilling employment needs structures and technologies built to address their concerns and how comfortable the respondents were with technologies such as face recognition and sharing personal data to improve traffic. It is worth mentioning that only four cities Delhi, Mumbai Bangalore and Hyderabad are included in the ranking and their ranking is below 100. The Government should, therefore, take necessary steps so that the world ranking can improve.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

mania has been taking alarming proportions. Another seer Revana Siddaiah Shrishallayya of Honiyal gives ₹1 lakh cash to the Kalyana Rajya Pragathi Paksha candidate. This is so at a time when the code of conduct is in force. The netizens are angry with the Raibag taluk administration for not taking any action against the seer. Unfortunately, some people donning the robe of seers are playing politics. The seers should preach and practice selflessness.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

BANKING ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Sir — Canara Bank is a pioneer in banking services in India and now it is peaking after its amalgamation with Syndicate Bank in 2020. In these three years, we hear Canara Bank doing great guns and now hitting top headlines in the banking indus-

Jayanthi S Maniam | Mumbai



FIRST COLUMN

THE US, CHINA BLOCS AIM AT HIVING POWER

America is trying to neutralise China's attempts to influence market access



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

In the shifting sands of geopolitics, several changes in the past few weeks would make agile diplomacy the key instrument of foreign affairs for any country. First up is the difficult, India-US-Russia tightrope trick. Russia last week announced their new foreign policy, which emphasises the deepening of ties with strategic allies India and China. The Russian NSA and his Indian counterpart also got into a huddle on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, NSA-level meeting, to discuss expanding the bilateral defence partnership. It now emerges that the two sides could have discussed expanding the partnership for joint research and manufacturing of next-generation supersonic Brahmos missile systems.

Russia seems to have greater technological know-how for the development of this high-speed (at least five times faster than the speed of sound with higher degrees of manoeuvrability) missiles, ahead of both China and US. Meanwhile, India is all set to enhance its naval capabilities including its ability for defending its sea frontiers, from the recent acquisition of superior technology helicopters, missiles and torpedoes capable of taking down submarines, from the US. The initial reluctance from the US to have India as a strategic defence partner in the Indo-Pacific region now seems to have given way to a pragmatic approach, keeping in mind India's strategic defence needs, and its centrality to the Indo-Pacific.



The Indo-Pacific region, at one point in time, relegated to appendix sections of Washington's foreign policy books, has found complete bipartisan support from opposite ends of the political spectrum in US politics. The imminent threat is the rising heft of China in the region, which has assumed the role of being the biggest bully, having clawed into some of the most influential national economies in the region. Most of the influence China wields in the Indo-Pacific rides on its opaque infrastructure funding policies, which have forced many of these growth-hungry economies to fall into a fatal debt trap. These economic blunders in turn give China the upper hand to start influencing the nation's domestic politics, which goes well with the dragon's expansionist agenda.

However, the US has taken note and brokered a peace truce between Japan and South Korea, the two technology-aided Asian giants. These two countries, even though not too warm to each other due to historical reasons, are joined in the common threat of an aggressive China in their backyard. The US knows that any future dominance in the global world order would be defined by technological advancements, and the ability to integrate technology into their defence equipment. Every breakthrough, every new use case and standard set, for emerging technology such as Artificial Intelligence would be critical for the race to the top.

It has already operationalised the US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging technologies, to expand the existing defence industrial partnership and strategic technology partnership to a wider set of stakeholders. Meanwhile, discussions regarding supply chain resilience, expansion and cooperation, on new technology form the pillars for all QUAD discussions, which has the US, India, Japan and Australia, as its members. The US is also aggressively pushing countries in South and South-Southeast Asia into a like-minded bloc of partners through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework initiative, where India is also a founding member. China meanwhile has also managed to stitch together one of the largest free trade agreements in the world, through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, giving it market access to most of the economies in the region. India chose to sit out of RCEP, citing the unfair advantage accrued to China.

Against this backdrop, the guns are still blazing in eastern provinces of Ukraine. Many expect China and India to play the silent backroom boys role to broker peace between Ukraine and Russia. It is going to be volatile situations ahead for every country.

(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)

Mess in Delhi's power distribution business



UTTAM GUPTA

The problem can be eradicated only if the State Government liberates the three discoms from its controls and gives them the much-needed freedom



In 2018, the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) issued an order requiring the Delhi Government to give subsidies to its preferred consumers, primarily households, 'directly' by crediting it to their bank account using the direct benefit transfer (DBT) mechanism instead of routing it through the three power distribution companies (discoms) namely BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL), discom for South & West Delhi; BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) — discom for Central & East Delhi; and North Delhi Power Limited (NDPL) — discom for North Delhi which is the existing practice. The order was never implemented and is now reported to have been withdrawn quietly.

Under the Electricity Act, of 2003, the State Electricity Regulatory Commissions (SERCs) are mandated to fix tariffs chargeable from different categories of consumers besides ensuring compliance with various provisions of the Act. Now, if a directive issued by the SERC (in this case, DERC) is not complied with and even forced to withdraw, it speaks volumes about the prevailing mess in the electricity distribution business in the National Capital.

At the outset, let us highlight a few basic facts regarding how discoms arrange electricity for supplying to consumers, their tariff-setting process and how the subsidy comes into play.

Under the extant arrangements, the discoms purchase power from the public sector undertakings (PSUs) such as the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), etc., and independent power producers (IPPs), under power purchase agreements (PPAs) which are mostly long-term contracts up to 25 years. A tiny fraction of the demand, not more than 5 per cent is purchased from the electricity exchange.

The discoms are expected to sell electricity to the consumers at tariffs — duly approved by the regulatory commission — that are set in a manner such that the revenue generated from sale at these tariffs fully cover the power purchase cost plus the cost of wheeling, and distribution. This is necessary to ensure that they maintain their financial viability and remain in robust

health. The requirement is mandatory under the Electricity Act, of 2003.

The SERCs rarely follow this cardinal principle while approving tariffs which are invariably set at levels that fail to generate revenue sufficient to cover discoms' power purchase and distribution costs. They recognize that the gap exists but don't do anything meaningful to plug it on a sustainable basis. Far from that, they allow the discoms to book this gap as receivable in their balance sheet — giving it a fancy name Regulatory Assets (RA).

It is an act of legitimizing a highly irresponsible act. No wonder, this has led to a proliferation of RAs over the years. As on June 30, 2022, these were Rs 88,720 crore. This could be much higher even exceeding Rs 100,000 crore if claims bogged down in legal disputes at the appeal level or in higher courts are also included. In Delhi, the current RAs are around Rs 20,000 crore.

Why does a gap between the cost and revenue arise?

This has to do with the top political brass in the State establishment directing discoms to sell a major slice of electricity to households (HHs) (besides farmers in several states), either at a fraction of the cost of supply or even free. This results in under-recovery on such sales which is aggravated by aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses — most of it is plain theft. In a bid to offset the losses, discoms charge high tariffs on supplies to industries/businesses (in Delhi, this is Rs 16 per unit). Yet, overall they incur a loss.

When discoms give power to the target group free or an artificially low tariff under orders from the State government, the latter is obliged to reimburse the former shortfall in realization from sale vis-à-vis the cost of supplying it. But, most states don't reimburse or do it partially. Even when they do, this is after

considerable delay.

As a result, discoms are trapped in a vicious cycle of increasing losses and ballooning RAs. This has even prompted the SERCs to often take recourse to ad-hoc and arbitrary measures to boost revenue; for instance, in Delhi, there is an eight per cent surcharge. Even as this exacerbates the burden on paying customers, the problem remains.

The problem can be eradicated from its root if only the State governments liberate the discoms from state controls and give them the much-needed freedom to set a tariff on supplies to 'all' consumers based on the cost of purchase and distribution. As for the subsidy, they can give 'directly' to the target beneficiaries under DBT.

With this, discoms will be able to recover their full cost on sales to HHs and farmers. With no under-recovery on such sales, they need not charge more from industries and businesses thereby making power affordable to them. Unshackled from state control, they would also be able to rein in power theft. RAs and losses will be a thing of the past even as discoms turn into financially viable entities.

Under DBT, it will be easier to make way for the de-licensing of the electricity distribution business, breaking the monopoly of a few players and injecting competition leading to more choices and resultant lower tariffs for consumers.

Imagine the gains the Indian economy would have reaped if only all SERCs had ensured the implementation of DBT in the respective states. But, ALAS! none has done it. DERC issued an order to this effect but that has remained on paper.

In Delhi, all consumers other than those who are the beneficiaries of largesse granted by Kejriwal dispensation (read: no charge from HHs consuming up to 200 units a month and Rs 800 from HHs con-

suming between 200 and 400 units) could be staring at a steep hike in tariff of up to 100 per cent as in a recent order, the Supreme Court (SC) has directed the DERC to let discoms recover their RAs. DERC has decided to contest the order but for now, Delhiites face a real threat.

The non-compliance with the 2018 order of DERC, could point towards something more serious. The order essentially meant that discoms would charge beneficiaries/consumers the full amount as per the cost of supply, hence, the Delhi government didn't need to reimburse them. But, the order wasn't implemented.

This meant that discoms continued to supply power to the beneficiaries free of charge/subsidized tariff. But, it would appear that the Delhi government didn't reimburse them for the shortfall in realization vis-à-vis the cost. Could it be that this 'uncompensated' amount since 2018 is sitting as RAs in their balance sheets?

Alternatively, even if discoms get full reimbursement of the shortfall from the government, yet they have huge RAs, this too is preposterous. The state of affairs points towards serious irregularities in the handling of power subsidies. This requires a thorough investigation into the accounts of both discoms and the Delhi government and required action taken to deal with the RAs instead of making consumers pay for them.

Delhi is not alone when it comes to messing in the discoms. The malady is gripping most of the states. At the core of it is their uncompromising stance to give free/heavily subsidized electricity and routing the same through discoms. Unless this serious flaw in approach is addressed by adopting the DBT mode for giving subsidies both in the letter and spirit, the discoms will remain in dire straits perpetually.



THIS MEANT THAT DISCOMS CONTINUED TO SUPPLY POWER TO THE BENEFICIARIES FREE OF CHARGE/ ON SUBSIDISED TARIFF

(The writer is a policy analyst)

The dream of universal health care can be realised

On the occasion of World Health Day today, we must renew our pledge for 'Health For All' and find the missing link to 'good health'

World Health Day, 7th April, is celebrated as the World Health Organisation (WHO) was established on this day 75 years ago. Among its many public health achievements is the eradication of Smallpox, eradication of Polio, Cervical cancer vaccine, malaria vaccine and helping global community tackle newer health problems and pandemics like SARS, Swine flu, Ebola, Covid-19 and others with 'Science, Solution and Solidarity'.

The theme for this year's World health day is 'Health for All'. Universal health care (UHC) means everyone must have access to health care when they need it, where they need it and without financial hardship. Health emergencies like the Covid-19 pandemic,



SUDHA SHARMA

climatic crises, economic constraints and wars have made action for UHC an urgent need. Is this an achievable dream, given that 30% of the global population does not have access to essential services and more than 2 billion people are facing catastrophic health expenditure?

According to WHO, primary health care approach to give essential services is the most cost-effective approach. Our country has a strong infrastructure of District level hospitals to CHCs, PHCs and sub centres. These sub centres have been upgraded to HWCs- Health and Wellness centres. All facilities are trained to give promotive, preventive and curative services for all groups of diseases infectious diseases and non-communicable

diseases. Along with the Government sector, the Private sector, NGOs, charitable institutions and public-private partnership ventures shoulder the responsibility of providing quality healthcare to the community. But we are still facing so many diseases!!

Where is the missing link?

Life has become EASIER but not HEALTHIER. Amid these diseases threatening us, the show stoppers are Non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke, the so-called lifestyle diseases and COPD and cancers. These are the cause of 61.8% of deaths in our country. We are the diabetes capital of the world. Other alarming figures point to the fact that a lot needs to be done at the individual and

community levels.

In all types of diseases, there is a 'host-agent-environment interaction' required to produce disease. So the good news is, agents alone cannot cause diseases. Changes in the host, the person(us), and the domestic environment can modify these risk factors and can benefit us in many ways. Living a healthy 'life in style' can not only protect, prevent and control NCDs but also set an example for others to follow...So, what are these steps that can make our homes a wellness centre?

Like all the best things in life, these too are very simple and inexpensive. As recommended by WHO, the best buys for reducing NCDs are having a balanced nutritious diet with fresh fruits and veg-

etables, giving up tobacco, giving up alcohol, daily physical activity, salt restriction, reduction of refined sugar consumption. To the list, one could add curtailing fat consumption especially trans fats, and regulating excessive use of mobile phones.

Don't underestimate the power of these simple interventions:

They can create wonders for you if followed regularly. Another paradigm shift we need is to assess the 'health affordability' of our choices, not the financial affordability.

A last word of advice for those suffering: Regular medications and lifestyle changes will keep complications at bay and significantly improve your quality of life. Investing in strong health systems is criti-

cal for a prosperous society but there needs to be a major shift from economies driven by profit and pollution to economies driven by fairness and well-being and economies driven by sustainable and need-based development.

Universal health coverage is a political and social choice. We need strong political leadership and public demand. This public demand should be towards the Governments for services, legislations and insurance schemes but our role to change ourselves and our environments to transform our lives should not be ignored. So, the next time you have to choose between driving your children to the mall or cycling to a nearby park.

Make a wise healthy choice: Let us pause on this world

health day and check which roadblocks are preventing our progress on this road to health. And you would find that there are many which would require a simple change of habits and thought patterns. Like in all aspects of life, in health too, there are two solutions to any problem. We can either wait for others like Governments (by banning fast food and cold drinks) and friends and family to make healthy choices for us, or we can use our self-determination and willpower to make healthy choices and be role models for others. Our active participation will be a game changer in realizing the dream of universal health coverage. Let us on this day promise Good health to ourselves and pledge to ensure 'Health For All'.

REAL SMASH BARCA TO REACH COPA FINAL

AP ■ BARCELONA

Karim Benzema struck a hat-trick as Real Madrid hammered Barcelona 4-0 at Camp Nou to reach the Copa del Rey final on Wednesday, progressing 4-1 on aggregate.

deficit, with Benzema adding a second-half treble. After netting three at the weekend against Real Valladolid in La Liga, Benzema repeated the trick to humiliate Barcelona on a painful night for coach Xavi Hernandez in front of almost 95,000 distraught fans.

Los Blancos trail their arch-rivals by 12 points in La Liga and were beaten by Barca in the Spanish Super Cup final in January, but triumphed here to reach the Copa final for the first time since 2014, where they will face Osasuna.

"It was a complete game — when you play a complete game, you win 4-0 like that," said Ancelotti. "This is the most important moment of the season and when we're at the right temperature (like this), we're good."

Madrid turfed out the record 31-time cup winners with a muscular performance on a spiky night in Barcelona, where they also ended a demoralising run of three consecutive Clasico defeats.

The game started at a furious pace and intensity, both teams keen to reach the final, but absolutely desperate not to be knocked out by the other. Barca coach Xavi was booked for protesting a foul as tempers boiled over, while Gavi and Vinicius were also issued yellow cards as they scrapped.



Barcelona's Sergi Roberto said letting in Vinicius' goal on the stroke of half-time was a huge blow. "Their goal at the end of the first half killed us, we didn't deserve to let in that goal. I think we were better in the first half," the midfielder told RTVE.

Thousands of Barcelona fans chanted Lionel Messi's name in the 10th minute, amid speculation he could leave Paris Saint-Germain, and they would have dearly loved some of the Argentine's magic.

Los Blancos took the lead in stoppage time at the end of the first half, when they showed their prowess on the counter-attack. Thibaut Courtois made a fine save to deny Robert Lewandowski and exactly 20 seconds later, Vinicius struck at the other end.

LETHAL MADRID

Xavi was without injured quartet Ousmane Dembele, Pedri, Frenkie de Jong and Andreas Christensen, and eventually it told.

Rodrygo cut the ball back to the forward, who squeezed a shot home despite Jules Kounde's best attempt at a goal-line clearance. Benzema was on hand to make sure, but Vinicius' effort had already

Barca fans chant Messi's name amid PSG exit talk

AP ■ BARCELONA

Several thousand Barcelona fans at Camp Nou chanted Lionel Messi's name in the 10th minute of the Copa del Rey semi-final Clasico on Wednesday.



World Cup winner Messi, who will turn 36 in June, joined PSG in 2021 on a two-year deal which expires at the end of this campaign.



Nantes down Lyon to enter French Cup final

AP ■ PARIS

Nantes reached a second straight French Cup final as Ludovic Blas' brilliant goal gave the holders a 1-0 last-four victory over Lyon on Wednesday.

PSG suffered a second straight early exit in the last 16 to Marseille, who were then dumped out by Annecy.

Antoine Kombouare's side booked a place in the April 29 showpiece at the Stade de France against either Toulouse or second-tier Annecy. Lyon are still waiting for a first appearance in the final since winning the competition in 2012, after failing to back up last weekend's Ligue 1 victory over Paris Saint-Germain.

Nantes striker Mostafa Mohamed missed good chances either side of half-time, calling Lopes into action again before blazing wide. Blas made no such mistake in the 57th minute, though, controlling Fabien Centonze's long ball on his chest before slamming a left-footed volley past Lopes.

Rashford fires Man Utd into top four

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Marcus Rashford sent Manchester United back into the Premier League top four with the winner as the Red Devils beat Brentford 1-0 on Wednesday, while Newcastle won 5-1 at West Ham to stay third.



Joelinton doubled the Magpies lead inside 13 minutes as the Brazilian latched onto Fabian Schar's ball over the top and coolly rounded Lukasz Fabianski before slotting into an empty net.

Dutch to probe Feyenoord-Ajax violence

AP ■ THE HAGUE

The Dutch government pledged a top-level investigation on Thursday after Ajax's Dutch Cup semi-final at Feyenoord was halted when a player was injured by an object thrown from the stands.



rivals are often flashpoints but there has been a rising incidence of football violence in the Netherlands.

in our sport or in society all players have to be safe and secure to play the game, and I call on the relevant authorities to ensure that this is respected at all levels.

Rashford started through the middle as Ten Hag's patience with Wout Weghorst finally ran out and that decision bore fruit when the England international was perfectly placed to side-foot home Marcel Sabitzer's knockdown for his 28th goal of the season.

attacking threat for the first hour but were nearly gifted an equaliser when Ivan Toney charged down David de Gea's clearance and the ball flew inches wide.

just six minutes. Kurt Zouma's header just before half-time briefly gave West Ham hope.

LAMPARD RETURNS TO CHELSEA AS CARETAKER BOSS

AP ■ LONDON

Frank Lampard insisted it was an "easy decision" to make his surprise return to Chelsea as caretaker manager until the end of the season on Thursday, just over two years after he was sacked by the Premier League club.

Hall of Famer and a legend at this club. "As we continue our thorough and exhaustive process for a permanent head coach, we want to provide the club and our fans with a clear and stable plan for the remainder of the season."



6 WC stadiums to be used for Asian Cup

AP ■ DOHA

Six of Qatar's eight World Cup stadiums will be used for the Asian Cup to be staged in the Gulf state next January, the AFC has announced.

be "a true spectacle never before experienced in Asian football history."

Werner takes Leipzig to German Cup semis

AP ■ LEIPZIG

Holdings RB Leipzig kept their hopes of a second straight German Cup title alive, winning 2-0 against Borussia Dortmund to reach the semi-finals on Wednesday.

told German TV "in the first half, Leipzig ate us up". "We did not deserve to win that game," he added.

Dortmund, who opened 2023 with 10 straight wins in all competitions, have now lost three of their past five.

Stuttgart, who opened 2023 with 10 straight wins in all competitions, have now lost three of their past five.

Argentina reach top of FIFA rankings

AP ■ ZURICH

World Cup winner Argentina topped the FIFA rankings on Thursday for the first time in six years.

But the Lusail stadium used for the World Cup final and the iconic 974 stadium made from containers will not be part of the 24-nation tournament to run from January 12 to February 10.

SHARDUL, SPINNERS STAR IN KOLKATA'S WIN

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Shardul Thakur smashed a counter-attacking half-century before the spinners played their part to perfection as Kolkata Knight Riders made a memorable homecoming with an 81-run win over Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2023 match here at the Eden Gardens on Thursday.

Kolkata Knight Riders found themselves tottering for 89/5 before Thakur led a superb recovery with his 29-ball 68 to power his team to 204/7 after RCB opted to bowl.

Coming in at No 7, Thakur hammered the joint-fastest fifty of the season off 20 balls and shared an entertaining 103-run wicket partnership off 47 balls with Rinku Singh (46 off 33).

In reply, Royal Challengers Bangalore failed to last the distance and folded up for 123 in 17.4 overs with the trio of Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine and debutant Suyash Sharma sharing eight wickets between themselves.

It was Kolkata Knight Riders' first win of the season.

Thakur also took one wicket in his all-round show in KKR's first home match after almost four years.

Royal Challengers Bangalore were going great guns at 44 no loss in 25 balls in pursuit of the big chase before the Sunil Narine triggered the

collapse, foxing Virat Kohli (21; 18b) with a beauty in his 150th IPL match.

Chakravarthy then gave a double blow dismissing Glenn Maxwell (5) and Harshal Patel (0) in three balls before ending with splendid figures of 3.4-0-15-4.

Thereafter, it was 19-year-old leg-spinner Suyash Sharma (4-0-30-3) who made a dream debut after being included as an impact player in place of Venkatesh Iyer.

The long-haired mystery spinner got two wickets in one over to have Kolkata Knight Riders reeling at 86/8.

Suyash got his maiden wicket when he deceived Anju Rawat (1) with a tossed up delivery and in space of three balls, he grabbed the prized scalps of Dinesh Karthik (9) with a fuller delivery.

Fresh from his 82 not out against Mumbai Indians, Kohli teed off in style, scoring a boundary off the first ball of the innings against Umesh Yadav.

At 42 for no loss, the RCB opening duo looked set for another easy chase when Narine triggered the collapse, cleaning up Kohli with a beauty.

The star Indian completely missed the line as the ball sharply turned in to knock his stumps.

Earlier, David Willey (4-1-16-2) and Karn Sharma (3-0-26-2) took wickets off successive deliveries in



powerplay and middle overs respectively to give RCB the initial edge.

Willey exposed KKR's fragile top-order, when the England leftarm pacer knocked over Venkatesh Iyer (3) and Mandeep Singh (0) off successive deliveries.

But RCB frittered away the start with Rahmanullah Gurbaz first taking the charge against a wayward Akash Deep en route to his 44-ball 57, his maiden IPL fifty.

It turned from bad to worse for KKR when a reverse-sweeping Nitish Rana (1) got out following a good review from RCB in the very first ball after powerplay.

KKR looked in trouble at 47/3 but Gurbaz led the charge against the 'local' Bengal pacer Akash Deep, pulling him for a six before collecting back-to-back boundaries.

Gurbaz took a review to overturn an LBW decision on 30 and raced to a 38-ball fifty with a powerful sweep over long leg boundary.

But RCB again seized the momentum when the legspinner Sharma had Gurbaz and Russell off back-to-back deliveries in the 12th over.

Thakur then took Akash Deep to cleaners in his knock studded with nine fours and three sixes.

Apart from Willey (4-1-16-2), none of the RCB bowlers failed to impress and Akash Deep conceded 30 runs from his two overs. Siraj also looked wayward and returned with 1/44 from his four overs. They also leaked 23 runs in extras.

MEREDITH REPLACES JHYE

Mumbai Indians on Thursday named Riley Meredith as a replacement for injured fast bowler Jhye Richardson. Richardson is suffering from a hamstring injury and was earlier ruled out of the Indian Premier League.

His replacement, Australian fast bowler, Riley Meredith has played 5 T20 Internationals, picking up eight wickets.

The 26-year-old has previously represented the Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians in the IPL.

"He joins MI for Rs 1.5 Crore," read an IPL advisory.

TOPLEY OUT OF IPL

England pacer Reece Topley was on Thursday ruled out of the Indian Premier League due to a dislocated shoulder.

Topley had suffered the injury in Royal Challengers Bangalore's opening home game at the Chinnaswamy Stadium against Mumbai Indians.

"Topley has been ruled out of the IPL and has flown back home. His replacement will be named soon," RCB head coach Sanjay Bangar said on air during the game against Kolkata Knight Riders here.

He also informed that star spinner Wanindu Hasaranga is expected to join the squad on April 10 and Australian pacer Josh Hazlewood, who could not play the Test series in India due to injury, on April 14.



Williamson to undergo surgery, likely to miss ODI WC

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

Kane Williamson is likely to miss the KODI World Cup in India later this year as the New Zealand skipper is set to undergo a surgery for the treatment of his right knee which he injured while playing for Gujarat Giants in the ongoing IPL.

Following the injury, Williamson returned to New Zealand and the scans have confirmed that he has ruptured the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) of his right knee.

Williamson suffered the injury while fielding for the holders against Chennai Super Kings in Ahmedabad.

According to New Zealand Cricket statement, the right-handed batter will go under the knife within the next three weeks.

On receiving the news, Williamson

acknowledged the support he had received from his franchise and NZC following the injury.

"I've received great support over the past few days and want to thank both the Gujarat Titans and New Zealand Cricket for that," he said.

"Naturally it's disappointing to get such an injury, but my focus now is on having the surgery and starting rehab.

"It's going to take some time, but I'll be doing everything I can to get back on the field as soon as possible," he added.

According to the standard rehabilitation period for such an injury, Williamson is unlikely to be fit and available for World Cup which is scheduled to be held in October-November.

"I look forward to doing what I can to support Gary (Stead) and the team



over the next few months," Williamson said.

New Zealand coach Stead too feels it would be very difficult for Williamson to be fit before the World Cup.

"You take Kane the player for a start, but then Kane the leader and the person he is within our group as well, it's a huge spanner in the works for us," Stead said.

"We haven't given up hope that he might be right but at this stage it does look unlikely. Our first thoughts are with Kane at the moment, it's a tough time for him, it's not an injury you expect... it hits you pretty hard."

Williamson had quit Test captaincy in December 2022 but leads the Black Caps in the limited overs format. He has played 161 ODIs, scoring 6554 runs at an average of 47.83.

SRH look for inspiration from new skipper

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Jolted by a crushing defeat in their campaign opener, Sunrisers Hyderabad will be bolstered by the return of their South African recruits, including new skipper Aiden Markram, when they play Lucknow Super Giants in an away IPL match here on Friday.

In the absence of Markram, Bhuvneshwar Kumar led SRH in their opening game, which they lost by a huge 72-run margin against Rajasthan Royals.

But in a big boost to the team, Markram and two fellow South Africans — Marco Jansen and Heinrich Klaasen — have joined the side after completing their national duty.

SRH finished last in 2021 and eighth among 10 teams last year and they will bank on Markram's leadership skills to deliver results this season.

However, if the opening game is anything to go by, SRH cut a sorry figure as they struggled against RR, who dominated both the powerplays — racking up 85 for 1 first and then conceding just 30 for 2 in the first six overs while defending 203 for 5.

Coached by the legendary Brian Lara, SRH will look to put up a much better show, especially in the powerplay on Friday.

The arrival of the South African players came as a big

relief for SRH as Markram, apart from his tactical acumen, can provide solidity to the batting line-up and Jansen can add teeth to their pace department.

Save T Natarajan (2/23), none of the seamers could put up a fight against RR. While Afghanistan's Fazalhaq Farooqi claimed two wickets, he ended up conceding 41 runs in four overs, while Bhuvneshwar, despite all his experience, was not good enough.

Umaran Malik claimed a wicket but he too was expensive, bleeding 32 in 3 overs.

In the spin department, Washington Sundar and Adil Rashid had an ordinary day and they will have to buck up if SRH want to put the opponent batters under pressure.

For LSG, skipper KL Rahul's form is cause of concern as he failed to capitalise on his starts but Kyle Mayers produced some extraordinary hitting during his two blistering fifties in the last two matches. Even though the batters failed to take LSG home against Chennai Super Kings, overall they have chipped in when required.

Among bowlers, Ravi Bishnoi has been impressive with five wickets so far, while England pacer Mark Wood blew away Delhi Capitals with a five-wicket haul in their opening match and also accounted for three scalps in their last game.

Wood wants to prove he's among best in business in IPL

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

England and Lucknow Super Giants pacer Mark Wood wants to prove that he is among the best in the business in the IPL after his disappointing debut in the cash-rich T20 league five years ago.

Wood bowled four wicketless overs for Chennai Super Kings, conceding 49 runs, back in 2018 in his only IPL match before this season. He is now looking for redemption, having taken eight wickets in LSG's first two matches so far.

"I felt like I had a bit of unfinished business, in terms of trying to come here and prove myself on a big stage," Wood said ahead of LSG's match against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Friday.

"I've played for England in World Cup finals (50-over and T20 both) but I hadn't cracked in IPL. So this time, I'm trying my best to prove that I can be in the mix in IPL, with the best players.

"(I will) try to prove a point, that I'm up to this standard."

Wood took 5 for 14 against Delhi Capitals and then 3 for 49 in Monday night's defeat to Chennai Super Kings.

"I don't think I was really prepared for CSK at that time. I played one match and I got smashed," Wood said about his first IPL experience in 2018.

He was signed by Lucknow Super Giants for Rs 7.5 crore in the 2022 auction, and was then retained for 2023. He missed the last season of IPL due to an elbow injury which also ruled him out of England's home international summer.

"I'm here this year, trying my best to contribute for Lucknow, trying to repay the faith that they've shown in me, sticking by me and picking me



again," said the 33-year-old.

"So far, I've absolutely loved it. KL Rahul has been brilliant with me. The management have been excellent, keeping my role clear, what they expect."

He said he has been using the experience of captain KL Rahul to good effect.

"He's someone from India, he knows the pitches well, (and) he's a vastly experienced player in these conditions. So (I will) use him and my own knowledge, and try and come up with the best plan on the field for these wickets.

"It's great to get the wickets. That's what my role was going to be, coming to LSG."

Buttler likely to miss RR's next match against DC

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Rajasthan Royals' batting mainstay Jos Buttler has got multiple stitches on the little finger of his left hand during team's IPL game against Punjab Kings and could miss his team's next game against Delhi Capitals on April 8.

Royals lost the game by five runs. Ravichandran Ashwin was promoted as an opener as Buttler, who injured his little finger while taking a catch to dismiss PBKS batter Shahrukh Khan, was getting stitches on his finger.

Buttler ran from deep and took a sliding catch off Jason Holder's bowling in the last over but immediately looked in pain as he left the field with a couple of balls still remaining.

"Jos was not fit. He was getting stitches for his finger after the catch," skipper Sanju Samson said during post-match presentation ceremony.

In fact, Buttler, who got a sponsor's award for the best catch, came to collect his cheque with a distinct white strapping on his little finger.

The finger will certainly be sore and fielding could be an issue and hence Royals medical staff might just want to give him rest for a game or two with next match to be played within 72 hours.



We're just one hit away from win: Samson

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Rajasthan Royals skipper Sanju Samson has blamed the dip in momentum in the middle overs during their stiff chase as the reason behind the five-run loss against Punjab Kings in the IPL here. Chasing a tricky 198-run target on Wednesday, RR could manage 192 for 7 in the end.

"We started off really well, we finished the powerplay really well. In the middle overs, we were expecting to get the boundaries here and there but they bowled really well. That's where I think the momentum went a bit down," Samson said.

"We did well to get so close after the fall in our run rate. We just fell short of a six, just one ball hit away."

Meanwhile, Punjab Kings' batting coach Wasim Jaffer praised young Prabhsimran Singh, who made 60 off 34 balls while opening the batting along side captain Shikhar Dhawan.

Orleans Masters: Rajawat stuns Nishimoto to enter quarterfinals

PTI ■ ORLEANS

India's Priyanshu Rajawat notched up a stunning straight-game win over top seed Kenta Nishimoto of Japan to progress to the men's singles quarterfinals of the Orleans Masters Super 300 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

World number 58 Rajawat showed immaculate skills and tactical acumen en route a 21-8, 21-16 win over world No. 12 Nishimoto, who had claimed the Madrid Spain Masters title on last Sunday. In another men's singles match, Mithun Manjunath lost to Chi Yu Jen 15-21, 19-21 in the round of 16.

In women's singles, Tanya



Hemant also suffered an 8-21, 17-21 defeat to Natsuki Nidaira of Japan in round of 16.

The mixed doubles pair of Sai Pratheek and Tanisha Crasto went down fighting against seventh-seeded Malaysian duo of Chen Tang Jie and Toh Ee Wei 23-21, 17-21, 21-23 in the quarterfinals.

Tucker's debut hundred leads Ireland fightback

AP ■ DHAKA

Debutant Lorcan Tucker became only the second Irishman to hit a Test century, ably assisted by Andy McBrine's unbeaten 71, to lead a tenacious fightback against Bangladesh in Dhaka on Thursday.

Ireland reached 286-8 at stumps on the third day to lead the hosts by 131 runs after resuming on a precarious 27-4 in the one-off Test.

Tucker made 108 off 162 balls before falling to the bowling of Ebadot Hossain, with Shoriful Islam taking the catch at extra cover.

The wicketkeeper-batsman hit 14 fours and a six during his time at the crease and was brilliantly assisted by Harry Tector and McBrine in partnerships of 72 and 111 to put the pressure back on Bangladesh.

Tector resumed overnight for a 28-run partnership with Peter Moor before left-arm pacer Shoriful gave the hosts their first breakthrough of the day.



Moor was gone for 16 but Tector and Tucker staved off further damage with their stand.

Tector departed after he was found leg before wicket off Tajjul Islam, but his 56 made him the first Irish cricketer to hit half-centuries in both innings of a Test match.

Tucker brought up his century with a cover drive for four off left-arm spinner Tajjul, raising his bat after hugging McBrine.

Mark Adair was next to bat, accompanying McBrine in a 31-run stand before he was removed by Tajjul, the most successful Bangladesh bowler of the innings with 4-86.

Kevin O'Brien is the only other Irishman to hit a Test century, scoring 118 against Pakistan during Ireland's 2018 maiden Test in Dublin.

Ireland have lost all three of their previous Tests since becoming a full member of the International Cricket Council in 2017.