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PAPER WITH PASSION

Papering over

Some sort of a compromise formula has been worked out in Rajasthan between the CM and CM-in-waiting

In the recent meeting in Rajasthan to assess its chances and chalk out a strategy for the forthcoming elections, some sort of a compromise formula seems to have emerged as both CM Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot, the CM-in-waiting, have agreed to bury the hatchet for now. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi, AICC in-charge for Rajasthan Sukhinder Randhawa, Rajasthan Pradesh Congress Committee president Govind Dotsra, Pilot and several MLAs and ministers from the state were present at the meeting. Gehlot attended the meeting via video conferencing. Congress asserted it can win the Rajasthan assembly elections provided there is unity and warned of strict action against those not maintaining discipline and speaking outside the party forum. The party, however, indicated it is unlikely that it will declare a chief ministerial face for the polls due later this year. Congress claimed that it has resolved all issues while seeking



to end talks of differences between Gehlot and his former deputy Sachin Pilot, who have often gone against each other in public. Indeed, they need to work together to buck the trend of the ruling party being voted out of power in the state. All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary KC Venugopal has said that all leaders agreed that the Congress could win the assembly polls slated later this year provided there is complete unity. But this is easier said than done. Of the three major states going to polls -- Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan -- Rajasthan is going to be the biggest challenge for Congress to make a comeback.

Rajasthan by convention votes out the party in power in every election. Given the infighting in Congress, it makes the BJP's job even easier though it would have to work hard to dislodge Gehlot, an astute politician. He knows that any spat with Sachin would harm the party's chances, hence the truce as the no-love-lost relationship with Sachin is not going to change otherwise. Secondly, he has launched a plethora of schemes for almost all sections of society to counter anti-incumbency. On the other hand, the BJP high command is still struggling to deal with Vijayaraje Sindia who could make or mar the party's prospects in the state. But she is at loggerheads with PM Modi.

Congress campaign starts now but the BJP is yet to set its house in order. While the BJP struggles to find the face for the elections, Congress has tactically left the people guessing about Congress CM, should the party return to power. Finalisation of the candidates for the state polls starts in the first week of September and, officially, winnability will be the only criterion for their selection. However, the frontrunner would be decided at that juncture as the leader who gets the maximum number of candidates' tickets and also makes it to the top post.

PICTALK



Lord Shiva devotees or 'Kanwariyas' carrying holy water from the Ganga river to their home in Delhi

Of twisted facts and divisive agenda



BHOPINDER SINGH

To assume that the fault resides only on one side of the warring factions in ongoing conflicts is completely partisan, convenient and dangerous

As the Manipur tensions linger, news of violence from France posits a similar conundrum and lessons. Globally, local societies are predicated on tense 'arrangement' amongst its diversities which can suddenly flare up with deep-rooted and subliminal perceptions, whenever a trigger disrupts and re-ignites the status quo of that 'arrangement', in the tinderbox. Consequential societal dissonance and polarisation are invaluable to three elements i.e., amoral politicians who seek to sharpen their polarising agendas with the selective blame game, secondly, the loyal partisan cadres (social media savvy but distant from the place of actual tension) who connect the unrelated dots to contextualise the situation towards even more polarisation, and lastly, the opportunistic rioters who simply take situational advantage to loot and plunder.

It happened in Manipur, and now it is happening in France. Truth is never black-or-white but cherry-picking of facts by all three participating elements ensures that the situation rarely heals. Those in primary position to thaw the situation i.e., politicians or leadership of conflicting groups, do not do so for fear of losing their legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents -- instead, optics of make-believe bravado, irreconcilability and inflammatory allusions tend to strengthen their hold. Therefore, nuance is the first and foremost casualty. In Manipur, it was the single-bench order that fractured the existing 'arrangement' amongst the restive groups, and soon the situation exploded. There were equal merits of arguments on both sides of the conflicting parties, except the politicians and their loyal cadres fronted only those faultlines that built their case and chose to ignore the other parties' grievances. Soon the worst happened, and the local narrative evolved that the dispensation of the day was batting for one side of the 'divide'. This is a dangerous evolution as it even taints the actions of apolitical and unbiased Armed Forces who were requisitioned towards the situation as the Police had capitulated. Besides the



hate and trolling that has now become the norm on social media, dog whistling and innuendoes by senior functionaries of the neighbouring states kept the unnecessary passions, alive. It took the Supreme Court to step in and state the obvious that, "It is a completely wrong order" as the issue was beyond the remit of the High Court. An important lesson in maintaining (or even changing) the existing 'arrangement' with due sensitivity and demonstrated impartiality in a cauldron like Manipur, was forgotten. One cannot appeal for calm and throw oil on fire, simultaneously. Governance failed in Manipur, as in France. The lay of the land in France is similarly tense with contrasting issues of integration or racism (as perceived by opposite sides) of immigrants, with the native French. There has been a history of unrest and polarisation that requires any incident to flare up into full-fledged riots, as now. Like any democracy, there are genuine grievances for both sides of the 'divide' to complain about, affording various competing political parties and ideologies to selectively prey upon the same and for the looters to ultimately exploit. To assume that the fault resides only on one side of the 'divide' is completely partisan, convenient and



THE LAY OF THE LAND IN FRANCE IS SIMILARLY TENSE WITH CONTRASTING ISSUES OF INTEGRATION OR RACISM (AS PERCEIVED BY OPPOSITE SIDES) OF IMMIGRANTS, WITH THE NATIVE FRENCH

dangerously escalatory. Such vulnerable situations and times necessitate the primary forces i.e., ruling politicians, to shed their partisan positions and assume neutrality, even at the cost of defying their earlier stances. This is exactly where politicians invariably fail the situation. In France, a 17-year-old immigrant boy was shot dead during a traffic stop. One side of the argument alluded to an obvious wrong (driving without a license) and violating the rules by attempting to escape the police, whilst the other side spoke about the disproportionate reaction from the police owing to discriminatory and racist tendencies towards the immigrants. Both sides of the argument were valid, and it is the application of a binary or selective lens that inflamed the situation. This specific situation also brought in the importance of questioning the officialese, as the French Police were made to retract its initial position that it had acted in self-defence. Last year, 13 instances (entailing mainly immigrants) of occupants of cars in similar situations were killed and not one conviction of police took place -- it is highly unlikely that had this incident not been recorded, the police would not have accepted its overreaction. Importantly, the French

President led the situation by immediately describing the incident as 'inexplicable and inexcusable' (to the consternation of the Police), therefore nothing justifies the continuing riots.

Perhaps the sanest voice came from the mother of the victim who said, "I don't blame the police, I blame one person: the one who took the life of my son" and that he, "saw an Arab face, a little kid, and wanted to take his life". But as it always happens, the voice of the real victims takes a backseat as the politicians stick to their guns and the looters take to the streets in the name of the victims.

The finger(trigger) happy on social media are content to peddle their preferred versions that practically disallow the politicians to be restrained and rise above partisan agendas. A nation that revels each time Zidane or Mbappe score a goal, can regress into its baser instinct just as quickly, just as some immigrants refuse to accept French ways, without conditions -- reality is always more complicated, politics always simplistic and unhinged.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LALU'S ADVICE TO RAHUL GANDHI

Sir -- Incident involving Lalu Prasad Yadav and his comments directed towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Lalu's swipe at Modi, as he clarified his 'get married' advice to Rahul Gandhi, has sparked a significant amount of controversy and deserves further analysis.

Firstly, Lalu Prasad Yadav's statement advising Rahul Gandhi to get married was initially met with confusion and speculation. However, his recent clarification has shed some light on his intentions. Lalu claims that his advice was not meant to be taken literally but rather as a metaphorical suggestion for Rahul to establish a stronger political alliance or partnership. While such metaphors can be subject to interpretation, it is essential to consider the context and underlying message being conveyed. While Lalu's metaphorical suggestion could have been better articulated, it raises valid concerns regarding coalition politics and leadership styles. As responsible citizens, let us focus on constructive dialogue that addresses substantial policy matters and benefits the nation as a whole.

Maimul Safui | Howrah

DENGUE DANGER

Sir -- Monsoon brings with it a host of infections and diseases. Mosquito-borne viral infections and diseases like common cold, typhoid and dengue are reportedly on the rise in different parts of the country. In particular, dengue has raised its hood in some areas of India. A deviation in the common duration of symptoms like fever is noted in dengue patients across the country. Fever that used to subside in four to seven days is being observed for ten days or more in a few cities. Since nearly 400 million global people are affected by dengue, many asymptomatic, the infection has to be viewed with utmost seriousness. Mosquito control is the key; simple measures like keeping the windows and doors of houses closed should do the trick. Stagnant water, a fertile source for mosquitos, should be expeditiously cleared

Pawar Vs Pawar



Sharad Pawar would have seen it coming. His nephew Ajit has been snapping at his heels for what must seem like an eternity. Sharad Pawar has a well-earned reputation for unbeatable political cunning. Political observers in Maharashtra, who have seen this inscrutable tactician at work over decades, find it hard to believe that he hadn't bargained for Ajit's next move, his attempts to wean away the uncle's loyalists among the elected legis-

lators. At the press conference, barely an hour after the split in his NCP (Nationalist Congress Party) was formalized, Pawar Sr looked cheerful and sounded almost relieved.

The NCP split as irreversible damage to the Sharad Pawar camp which has the support of fewer MLAs than the Ajit faction, are perhaps missing the point that this assembly will dissolve next year, and even before that there will be a Lok Sabha election, which may substantially alter the dynamics of the state election later in the year.

The Marathas, mostly with the Congress and NCP, are about 30-32 per cent. Parsing the BJP's political moves they had to dig a tunnel into this vote bank, but there is likely to be a massive backlash. Even after all these manoeuvres, the MVA vote will stay intact. With this BJP have made the biggest blunder for going with Shinde and Ajit group and affecting their prospect in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

only! How can it get certified as "Manipur flag" when it does not represent the Kukis Nagas and other tribes of the Hills like Mizos who are also part and parcel of the state! Are the Kukis Nagas and others not part of Singh's "my Manipur" despite their collective numerical strength being close to 50% of the state population! Are one and only the Meiteis falling victims to the current arson in Manipur! Are the Kukis also not suffering! Even if it gets believed that Jeakson Singh is in much sincere pain for the man-made miseries being suffered by all persons of Manipur irrespective of ethnicity and religion; still his apparently constructive action is definitely not inclusive enough as symbolically the Kangleipak flag doesn't represent the non-Meitei communities.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Fintech apps help in financial management

Fintech apps and tools are revolutionising the way individuals create and manage budgets

Managing personal finances effectively is crucial for achieving financial goals and securing a stable future. Fortunately, the rise of fintech has brought forth a wide range of apps and tools that simplify personal finance management. In this article, we will explore how fintech has made personal finance management more accessible, convenient, and efficient. From budgeting and expense tracking to goal setting and investment management, fintech apps and tools are empowering individuals to take control of their finances and make informed financial decisions.

Fintech apps have revolutionised the way individuals create and manage budgets. These apps provide intuitive interfaces and automation features that make budgeting effortless. Users can track their income, expenses, and savings goals in real-time, categorise transactions, and receive personalised insights on spending habits. Some apps even offer smart notifications and alerts to help users stay within



their budgetary limits. With the convenience of automated expense tracking and budgeting, individuals can gain a clear understanding of their financial standing and make informed decisions about saving and spending.

Cash Flow Management

Fintech tools facilitate seamless cash flow management by consolidating various financial accounts into a single dashboard. These tools enable users to view their account balances, analyse cash inflows and outflows, and monitor bill payment due dates. By centralising financial information, individuals can effectively plan their cash flow, avoid late payments, and minimise financial stress. Fintech apps also offer features like automatic bill payments and payment reminders, streamlin-

ing the process and ensuring timely payments. With enhanced cash flow management, individuals can maintain financial stability and avoid unnecessary fees or penalties.

Financial Planning

Fintech apps provide users with the ability to set financial goals and track progress towards achieving them. Whether it's saving for a down payment, building an emergency fund, or planning for retirement, these apps offer goal-specific tools and calculators. Users can set targets, establish timelines, and receive personalised recommendations on how to reach their goals. Fintech tools also integrate investment planning, allowing users to evaluate different strategies and make informed decisions based on their risk tolerance and time horizon. By enabling effective goal setting and financial planning, fintech apps empower individuals to turn their aspirations into actionable plans.

Robo-Advisory Services

Investing can be complex and intimidating for many individuals. Fintech has

addressed this challenge by offering investment management tools and robo-advisory services. These tools utilise algorithms and artificial intelligence to create and manage investment portfolios based on an individual's financial goals and risk tolerance. Users can access personalised investment advice, monitor portfolio performance, and make adjustments as needed. With lower fees compared to traditional investment management services, fintech-driven investment platforms make investing more accessible to a broader range of individuals, allowing them work towards financial independence.

Financial Education Fintech apps and tools go beyond transactional functions by providing financial education and insights. These platforms offer educational resources, such as articles, tutorials, and videos, to enhance financial literacy. Fintech apps and tools have transformed personal (The writer is the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of PaySprint and SprintVerify)



S ANAND



FIRST COLUMN

NATUROPATHY, YOGA CAN HELP IN ANAEMIA

Healthy blood cell production can be supported by resorting to these means



BABINA NANDAKUMAR

Do you sometimes experience fatigue, weakness and poor health, but tend to dismiss it as seasonal impact? However, persistent feelings of lethargy and sluggishness could be an indication of an underlying health condition, such as anaemia. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), India has one of the highest rates of anaemia globally, particularly among women.

Anaemia is commonly caused by an imbalance of red blood cells (RBCs) in the body, often resulting from excessive blood loss, low production of RBCs or autoimmune diseases. Regardless of the cause, anaemia can hinder an individual's overall growth and development, and can also stem from iron and folate deficiencies. Haemoglobin levels typically decrease in various types of anaemia, as this protein in RBCs transports oxygen throughout the body.

Several factors can increase your likelihood of developing anaemia. If your diet lacks essential vitamins and minerals such as iron, Vitamin B-12, folate and copper, you are at a higher risk. Intestinal disorders, such as Crohn's disease and celiac disease, which can affect nutrient absorption in the small intestine, also increase the risk of anaemia.

Women who have not gone through menopause are more likely to develop iron deficiency anaemia than men and postmenopausal women due to the loss of RBCs during menstruation. Pregnant women who do not take multivitamins with folic acid and iron are also at risk of anaemia.

Chronic conditions like cancer and kidney failure can lead to anaemia of chronic disease by causing a shortage of RBCs. Additionally, slow, continuous blood loss from an ulcer or other internal source can cause iron deficiency anaemia. Consuming a diet rich in iron, vitamin B12, folate and copper can help address anaemia by replenishing the body's stores of RBCs and supporting healthy blood cell production.



Leafy greens are an excellent source of essential vitamins and minerals that can help address anaemia, including folate and iron. Foods such as kale, spinach and collard greens are naturally rich in these nutrients and can be an important component of a balanced diet to treat anaemia and iron deficiency.

Root vegetables are a valuable addition to a diet aimed at increasing blood count and treating anaemia due to their high mineral content. Regular consumption of root vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes can be beneficial for boosting nutrient intake and improving blood cell production. Seeds and nuts are a nutrient-dense food group that can help treat anaemia due to their high mineral and vitamin content. These can also be a rich source of dietary fibre, which can aid in improving blood cell production and increasing blood count.

Increasing the intake of Vitamin C can be beneficial in mitigating anaemia as it promotes the absorption of iron. Iron absorption occurs primarily in the duodenum and Vitamin C helps to capture non-haeme iron and facilitate its absorption. By sealing the iron in specific areas of the body, Vitamin C can help the body absorb it effectively. Including foods such as citrus fruits, strawberries and bell peppers in a balanced diet can be a simple way to increase Vitamin C intake.

Besides, yoga is a well-known practice that offers numerous benefits to the human body. Regular yoga practice can help improve the functioning of the heart which, in turn, may contribute to improving the levels of haemoglobin. Certain yoga poses have been identified as particularly effective in enhancing haemoglobin levels. By incorporating these poses into a regular yoga routine, individuals may be able to address anaemia and other related health concerns. Such poses include Sarvangasana, Anulom-Vilom Pranayama and Ujjayi Pranayama.

(The writer is the Chief Medical Officer, Jindal Nature Cure Institute)

Decoding voters' minds for 2024 LS elections



VK BAHUGUNA

Indian voters have the uncanny habit of fooling political leaders by exercising their franchise in a subtle, intelligent manner. Will they do so again next year?



The cacophonies of political leaders have started all over India for the next Lok Sabha elections to be held in the year 2024. This time the fractured polity of the country has also reached abroad where the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has been giving vitriolic anti-Modi speeches and inviting the people abroad to help protect Indian democracy. On the other hand, Prime Minister Modi had addressed the Indian Diaspora in Sydney about his government's achievements in the last 9 years recently while on an official tour to Australia in May 2023 and his party has started the campaigns in right earnest with Amit Shah claiming that BJP will win 300 seats.

The Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar who ran the state government for more than 20 years with BJP is now spearheading a movement along with R Chandrasekhar Rao Telangana Chief Minister to unite the opposition and strategising to unseat the BJP-led NDA from power. The Congress and its allies are upbeat after winning a thumping majority in the May 2023 Karnataka Assembly elections. West-Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is also eyeing the leadership of the opposition in case the BJP is sidelined in the race for power.

Thus all political parties had already started their campaigns both for the upcoming assembly elections in 2023 in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Telangana and the 2024 Lok Sabha Election. The freebies and Dharna and road blockage policy announcements had again surfaced with Kisan panchayats and others busy in making announcements to focus on capturing powers to get through these means of attracting the attention of the voters. The population of the country had already crossed to over 142 crore and India had surpassed China as the world's number one country in terms of population.



THUS ALL POLITICAL PARTIES HAD ALREADY STARTED THEIR CAMPAIGNS BOTH FOR THE UPCOMING ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN 2023 IN RAJASTHAN, MADHYA PRADESH, CHHATTISGARH AND TELANGANA AND FOR THE 2024 LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

(The writer is former Director-General of ICFRE, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change)

In a democracy with such a varied landscape and a huge population of young unemployed people, the waiting political subterfuge and mobilizations of people by political parties by morally unfair means like freebies are not uncommon. In such a situation the common man, the voter, has to analyse the rhetoric of politicians and choose their rulers. However, the Indian voters have the uncanny habit of fooling the political leaders by exercising their votes in a very subtle and intelligent manner to choose the best possible option right from the days of post Emergency. However, this character of voters has seen a change in recent years when they have been falling for the allurements of freebies. From the perspective of our informed voters let us analyse what are the issues of national importance in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Today the biggest hindrance to the equitable distribution of fruits of development is the rising population and unequal distribution of wealth and thus poverty removal. Because of this people fall for promises of freebies. Nothing can be free in a vibrant economy as the taxpayers' money political parties are promising to squander without calculating the capacity of the exchequer to shoulder the burden. Indian economy is viable and largely unaffected by global events because of the fiscal prudence we exercise. The freebies going to damage the economic stability very badly and the election commission or the Supreme Court must come out to stop it 'suo motu' as the protector of our constitutional propriety.

It is a misuse of the electoral

process and morally unconstitutional except for free education and health care but no political party is promising to provide free quality education and health care. The country needs a law on population control to strictly enforce punitive measures for population control. The government with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment had already enforced it by denying opportunity to parents with more than two children from contesting the Panchayat elections. The second important issue is the adherence of our political parties to true democratic values for the long-term survival of democracy both in the intra-party dialogues as well as inter-party confabulations and in the assemblies and parliament. Our politicians have often been criticizing the Judiciary for its out-reach to executive functions but they forget that it is their biased and uncalled-for actions the judiciary had to intervene when the warring politicians move High Courts and Supreme Court on small matters like calling the session of state assemblies to prove majority etc.

It thus calls for massive electoral reforms. The third issue is the controlled influx of foreigners in a planned manner in the country by the foreigners by procuring documents and sectarian agendas of political parties play a key role in this regard. Such influx had in the past created tension in many states and the time has come to firmly deal with such illegal immigrants through appropriate and strong legal means which should fix punitive accountability for the government servants for issuing or helping in the procurement of documents. The fourth issue is de-criminal-

izing politics as most political parties have not only been taking the help of criminals but the criminals responsible for heinous crimes are getting repeatedly elected to parliament and state assemblies and are slurred in the name of democracy.

If this trend is not checked it will pose the greatest threat to the rule of law in the country which is evident in many ways now. The fifth issue from the citizens' point of view is the use of money and muscle power in the elections. Even national political parties are taking money for issuing tickets to aspirants and even after monitoring by the election commission, a middle-class person cannot think of standing in Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. Once these moneyed people win they go for rampant corruption and therefore, this is another great threat to our democracy.

Sixth is ignorance of providing forums and solutions for the regional aspirations and the voters are to be blamed also as they fail to put forward their demands or they give way to propaganda machines during elections. The seventh important issue is related to the demand for the old pension scheme which the opposition is milking in recent state elections and the ruling BJP is oblivious. Old pension scheme should be opted with certain conditions like eligibility after 25 years and cutting down the flab or else NPS should guarantee 50% of the last pay as pension. The Eighth is to focus on the creation of employment and reforms in bureaucracy to end red tape and biased decision-making. Hope some of these issues on behalf of voters find a place in the forthcoming elections this year and in 2024.

Ecosystems: A casualty of compensatory afforestation

Planting more trees under 'Compensatory Afforestation' may replace the greenery but the exercise will not recreate the lost ecosystems

On the face of it, Compensatory Afforestation (CA) is a well-meaning policy that aims at saving the lush forests of India while enabling economic development. The CA law promulgated in 2016 mandates that every time forest land is diverted for non-forest purposes such as mining or industry, the user agency pays for planting forests over an equal area of non-forest land, or when such land is not available, twice the area of degraded forest land. Additionally, in line with the 'polluter pays' principle, the entity responsible for such land diversion is also liable to contribute funds for establishing the compensatory forest fund. But of late CA has attracted negative attention in India mainly due



KOTA SRIRAJ

to its lacklustre contribution towards achieving its goals.

The inherent flaw in CA makes it presume that cutting down an old-growth area that has created an ecosystem of its own can be compensated by planting young saplings elsewhere. Old-growth forests are complex ecosystems that mature without external interference, providing a home to rare and unique biodiversity while storing substantial amounts of carbon. Once felled, these trees release vast amounts of carbon back into the atmosphere. As compensation, usually, non-native trees that might not be suitable for the region are planted in their stead. The new plantation cannot compensate for the loss of carbon stocks and other ecosystem services in any realistic time-

frame and are hazardous to the existing ecosystem.

In the last three years, the Niti Aayog proposed measures "to promote competitive spirit amongst the UTs to expedite the process of development." As a part of this, ecologically sensitive regions were identified for projects involving forest land use change.

One such proposal was the ₹72,000 crore Great Nicobar Project which proposed a land use change of 166.10 sq km involving the felling of 8.5 lac trees. The project adversely impacted an area 78% of which is a pristine tropical forest with unique, endangered wildlife species. The project has already resulted in the denotification of Galathea Bay wildlife sanctuary and a part of a tribal reserve that directly

threatened the survival of the indigenous Shompen and Nicobarese communities. The timely intervention of the National Green Tribunal thankfully resulted in a stay on the project.

The forests of the future depend a lot on how Compensatory Afforestation is implemented today. As part of its international climate change commitments, India has promised to increase its forest and tree cover to ensure that it can absorb an additional amount of 2.5 billion to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030. Forests are under stress due to the need for rapid industrial and infrastructure development, and accompanying urbanisation. In the last 10 years, more than 1,611 square km of for-

est land, a little more than the area of Delhi, has been cleared for infrastructure or industrial projects. Nearly a third of this — 529 sq km — has been cleared in the last three years.

According to T.V. Ramachandra, associate faculty, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, dense forest areas in northern, central and southern Western Ghats have decreased by 2.84%, 4.38% and 5.77% respectively over the last decade. Currently, up to 25,000 hectares of forests—250 sq. km, or more than twice Chandigarh's area—are handed over every year for "non-forestry activities".

This state of affairs can be remedied to an extent by planting more trees under CA, but a mere afforestation

effort may replace trees but not recreate the lost ecosystems. This is the glaring deficiency at the heart of the CA concept that needs to be addressed quickly before more damage is inflicted on the environment in the garb of CA. Another issue plaguing the CA in India is the chronic misuse of funds. Despite the establishment of a dedicated fund for Compensatory Afforestation, it has failed to achieve its intended goals. The funds are not being used for the designated purposes and land is left without any afforestation.

The government must also revisit the system under which CA is conducted. Continuous evaluation and monitoring are a must during afforestation drives as so much can go wrong. For

example, the survival rate of saplings is often extremely variable in new plantations, but all that is recorded are the number of saplings planted. Monitoring year on year is the key. It is never a 100 per cent success the way it is made out to be in official data. Compensatory afforestation as it exists now is inadequate for offsetting the loss of natural forests ecosystems and biodiversity. A working definition of forest is needed to accurately measure the success of the CA policy and to ensure that replanted forests are of suitable quality. Without this, the policy is likely to be nothing more than a whitewash, with little or no benefit to the environment and ecosystems will continue to be a casualty.

ALCARAZ AND SABALENKA BOTH ADVANCE AT WIMBLEDON

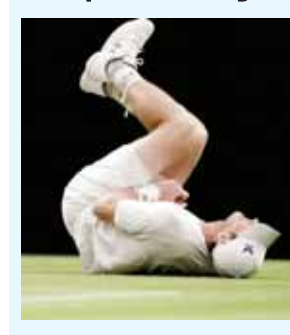
AP ■ WIMBLEDON (ENGLAND)
Top-seeded man Carlos Alcaraz and second-seeded woman Aryna Sabalenka both won at Wimbledon on Friday. Top-seeded woman Iga Swiatek and second-seeded man Novak Djokovic should be on court soon.
Alcaraz, a 20-year-old Spaniard considered to be the next great thing in the tennis world, advanced to the third round for the second straight year, beating Alexandre Muller 6-4, 7-6 (2), 6-3 on Centre Court.
The 2022 U.S. Open champion is making only his third appearance at the All England Club. He reached the fourth round last year for his best showing at the grass-court Grand Slam. Sabalenka played on No. 1 Court, the second biggest stadium on the Wimbledon grounds, and defeated Varvara Gracheva 2-6, 7-5, 6-2 to reach the third round.
Sabalenka reached the semi-finals in Wimbledon in 2021 but

was banned from the tournament last year with other Belarusian and Russian players because of the war in Ukraine. She trailed 5-4 in the second set but dropped only three points in winning the next three games.
"I didn't play my best tennis. It was really crazy, crazy experience," Sabalenka said. "But then I change my strings, kind of adjust my game a little bit, start feeling better on court. But, yeah, I was just keep telling myself keep fighting, keep trying, and probably you'll be able to turn around this game."
Later Friday, Swiatek was scheduled to face Petra Martic on Centre Court in the third round, followed by seven-time champion Djokovic against Stan Wawrinka - also playing for a spot in the fourth round.
Before that, though, two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray will finish his match against fifth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas. That match was suspended Thursday with Murray leading 6-7 (3), 7-6 (2), 6-4.



Earlier, Petra Kvitova reached the third round for the second year in a row, nine years after winning the second of her two titles at the All England Club. The 33-year-old Czech, who was injured in a knife attack at her home in 2016, beat Aliaksandra Sasnovich 6-2, 6-2 on Day 5 of the grass-court Grand Slam tournament.
The left-handed Kvitova first won the Wimbledon title in 2011 and then added another in 2014. She has only reached one other Grand Slam final, losing to Naomi Osaka in the deciding match at the 2019 Australian Open.
Madison Keys, an American who won the Eastbourne International title on grass ahead of Wimbledon, also reached the third round. The 25th-seeded Keys defeated Viktorija Golubic 7-5, 6-3.
Keys will next face Ukrainian player Marta Kostyuk. She advanced when Paula Badosa retired from their match with a back injury with Kostyuk leading 6-2, 1-0.
Badosa is dating Tsitsipas and social media has been filled with photos and videos of the two of them lately.
"It's amazing to have him supporting me. As you know, we have a very good relationship," Badosa said. "We're there for each other, so it's nice to have him. But not only in this tournament. It's nice to have him in general."
Also in the second round, third-seeded Daniil Medvedev advanced by beating Adrian Mannarino 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (5), sixth-seeded Holger Rune defeated Roberto Carballes Baena 6-3, 7-6 (3), 6-4, eighth-seeded Jannik Sinner eliminated Quentin Halys 3-6, 6-2, 6-3, 6-4, and 19th-seeded Alexander Zverev beat Yosuke Watanuki 6-4, 5-7, 6-2, 6-2.
"Getting there," Medvedev said when asked if he was feeling at home on grass.

Wimbledon grass courts 'grippy' despite slips, says director



AFP ■ LONDON
Wimbledon tournament director Jamie Baker said Friday the grass courts were "good and grippy" despite several high-profile tumbles in the first week of the Grand Slam.
Two-time champion Andy Murray had a nasty fall on Centre Court as he served for a two-sets-to-one lead in his second-round match against Stefanos Tsitsipas late on Thursday but got back up and won the set.
US veteran Venus Williams fell heavily in her

first-round defeat to Elina Svitolina also on Centre Court on Monday, hurting her already-banded right knee.
"I was literally killing it, then I got killed by the grass," said the 43-year-old five-time champion.
Novak Djokovic's match on the same day was delayed for nearly 90 minutes due to a damp court as players expressed concerns over the surface.
On Thursday, France's Alize Cornet crashed to the Centre Court turf when her left leg slipped late in her defeat to defending champion Elena Rybakina, though she was able to carry on with heavy strapping.
But Baker said players had not expressed concerns over the state of the grass at the Grand Slam, which has been disrupted by rain.
"I'm really happy," he said. "I think the surface is as good and as grippy as I can remember to be honest in the early part of the tournament."

IPL Impact Player rule in SMAT, Asian Games participation approved

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The IPL version of the much-talked about Impact Player Rule will be used in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 Trophy (SMAT) beginning October 16, the BCCI Apex Council approved on Friday.
The Impact Player was introduced in SMAT last season but it had to be brought before the end of the 14th over and had to be named before the toss. However, this will change from the next season. Like IPL, the

teams will be allowed to name four substitutes besides the playing eleven before the toss. Out of the four substitutes, only one can be used as an Impact Player.
"Both teams are allowed to use one Impact Player per match. It is, however, not compulsory," read one of the guidelines on the rule. Impact Player was used widely by the 10 IPL teams but the introduction of it divided opinions.
Former Australian captain and Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting had said that it

almost negated the role of an all-rounder in the side.
"It actually almost negates the role of all-rounders in the game now. So unless they're absolutely world-class and they're getting picked either as a batsman or as a bowler, then sort of a bits and pieces guy, then I don't think you'll see many, many teams this year actually use the guy that might bat at seven and maybe bowling over or two. Because you don't need those guys anymore," Ponting had said.

ASIAN GAMES PARTICIPATION APPROVED
The Apex Council also approved the participation of the men's and women's teams for the Asian Games in Hangzhou in September-October.
A second-string Indian team will participate in the men's competition, beginning September 28 while a full-strength side will be picked for the women's event, beginning September 19.
Cricket has been played only thrice in the Asian Games

history and the last time it was held in Incheon in 2014 when India did not take part.
The competition coincides with crucial time for men's team with India hosting the ODI World Cup from October 5.
In a note, BCCI said considering the crowded international schedule, it will be a challenge to field a team at Asian Games but contributing to the national cause is also important. India will be favourites to win gold both in men and women categories.

Manuel Ugarte joins PSG on 5-year deal

AP ■ PARIS
Paris Saint-Germain made its third signing of the summer transfer window by adding Sporting Lisbon midfielder Manuel Ugarte to its squad on Friday. PSG said the Uruguayan international signed a five-year contract through June 2028.
PSG has been active on the transfer market recently. In addition to hiring Luis Enrique as its new coach, the French champions have also signed Marco Asensio and Milan Skriniar. No official fee for Ugarte was announced but French newspaper L'Equipe said it was 60 million euros (\$65 million).
Ugarte has made eight appearances for Uruguay. "I am sincerely very happy to be able to take this big step in my career, in such a big club," Ugarte said.



Kenyan record-breaker Faith Kipyegon plans double at worlds

AFP ■ NAIROBI
Kenya's record-breaking running star Faith Kipyegon confirmed on Friday she will go for a 1,500m-5,000m double at the world championships in Budapest next month. The 29-year-old smashed the world records in both events in June, running 3:49.11 in the 1,500m in Florence, and seven days later an explosive 14:05.20 in her 5,000m debut race at the Paris Diamond League.
Kipyegon was back in sparkling form again on Friday when she clinched victory in the women's 5,000m at the Kenyan trials for the world championships taking place in the Hungarian capital in August.
"I didn't expect to win the 5,000m here today, as I did in Paris, but I did and I am happy about it," said Kipyegon, who clocked a time of 14:53.90, ahead of Lilian Kasait and Margaret Chelimo.
"The 1,500m remains my favourite event but I am doing very well in the 5,000m. So I am going to double up in both the 1,500m and 5,000m in Budapest," she added.
Kipyegon, considered the greatest ever women's 1,500m runner, won gold in the discipline at the 2016 Olympics in Rio and at the Covid-delayed Tokyo Games in 2021.



World 800m bronze medalist Mary Moraa bettered her national 400m record for the second time this year to qualify for the world championships. Moraa, who is also the Commonwealth 800m champion, ran a solo effort to clock 50.38 seconds, obliterating her earlier time of 50.44 which she recorded during the Botswana Golden Grand Prix in April.
She said she was ready to run both the 400m and 800m in Budapest if she is selected on Saturday.
"I have trained hard for both events and, if the selectors want, I can do the 400m-800m in Budapest," Moraa said.
In the men's events, Boniface Mweresa returned from a doping suspension to win one of the two 400m semi-finals and qualify for Saturday's final.
Kenyan 400m champion Zablon Ekuam won the first semi-final in a time of 45.77sec to set up a clash with Mweresa, who remains the only Kenyan to have attained the 45.00sec qualifying mark for the world championships in the event.
Last year's men's 5,000m Diamond League winner Nicholas Kimeli won the men's 10,000m in a time of 27:29.8, beating Commonwealth silver medalist Daniel Simiu Ebenyo into second place and Bernard Kibet in third.

Red Bull dominate British Grand Prix opening practice

AFP ■ SILVERSTONE (UNITED KINGDOM)
Max Verstappen outpaced his teammate Sergio Perez as the Red Bull pair scored a predictable one-two in Friday's opening practice for this weekend's British Grand Prix.
The defending double world champion and runaway series leader, seeking his first win at Silverstone since 2020, clocked a best lap in one minute and 28.600 seconds to beat the Mexican by four-tenths.
It was a typically dominant performance from the champion team as they seek this weekend a record-equaling 11th consecutive race victory, to draw level with McLaren's 1988 achievement.
Behind the duo from the nearby Milton Keynes-based team, Williams' Alex Albon took third ahead of two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin, Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Esteban Ocon of Alpine.
Carlos Sainz was seventh in the second Ferrari ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris, Lance Stroll in the second Aston Martin and Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren.
Verstappen was the only man to dip below the 1:29 barrier.
On a bright day at the former wartime airbase, packed with fans, Verstappen was quick to take command in the opening session and was soon on top ahead of the two Ferraris.



After 20 minutes, the Dutchman had lapped seven-tenths faster than Leclerc with Sainz third, a further tenth adrift, ahead — until he was dislodged by an improved lap from Perez, who took third.
Verstappen soon had his Red Bull team-mate in much closer proximity in second place before, with half an hour remaining Sainz went top in 1:29.357 on soft tyres.
There was little for the home British fans to cheer at this stage with Lewis Hamilton sixth, George Russell 17th and Norris in 15th, the seven-time champion reporting "bouncing is pretty bad" after one lively lap.
Leclerc, on softs, then went second before Russell took fourth as most teams switched to softs.
With 15 minutes remaining, Red Bull made the switch to softs. Perez swept back to third and then Verstappen, in 1:28.836, demonstrated his current level of supreme form.
He was almost half a second clear of Leclerc at the first attempt — until Alonso went second, four-tenths off, to be swiftly replaced in second by Albon, in 1:29.089, an impressive lap by the Williams driver.
As Mercedes persisted on mediums, Hamilton survived a big over-steer moment at Stowe, before Perez slotted into second to ensure Red Bull had a one-two outcome. The Mercedes men ended up 12th and 14th.

Saliba signs new long-term contract at Arsenal | Sindhu, Sen enter quarterfinals of Canada Open

AFP ■ LONDON
William Saliba has committed his future to Arsenal after signing a new long-term deal with the Gunners on Friday.
The French centre-back, who was an integral part of Arsenal's unexpected challenge for the Premier League title last season, has reportedly agreed a four-year deal worth £10 million (\$13 million) a season.
Indeed, it was a back injury to the 22-year-old that played a major role in a dip in form for Mikel Arteta's men towards the end of the campaign that allowed Manchester City to retain their title.
"To have William extend his contract with us was something we have wanted to do for a long time," said Arteta.
"William proved last season just how good and how important he is to our squad.
"The ability he has at his young age of just 22 is exciting, and there is of course so much more room for development with any player at this stage of their career."
Saliba had just one year left on the contract he signed when joining from Saint-Etienne in 2019 for £27 million.
However, he spent most of the next three seasons back in France on loan spells to Saint-Etienne, Nice and Marseille.



His form at Marseille earned him international recognition with France for the first time and he was part of the squad that reached the World Cup final last year in Qatar.
Saliba follows teammates Bukayo Saka, Gabriel Martinelli and Aaron Ramsdale in recently signing new deals.
Arsenal are also reportedly close to strengthening their squad significantly in a bid to become champions of England for the first time in 20 years.
Kai Havertz has already joined from Chelsea in a £65 million deal with moves for Declan Rice from West Ham and Ajax's Jurrien Timber also close to completion.



PTI ■ CALGARY
Star Indian shuttlers PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen progressed to the quarterfinals of the women's and men's singles competitions respectively at the Canada Open Super 500 tournament here.
While Sindhu advanced to the last eight after her opponent Natsuki Nidaira of Japan gave a

important role in China's win at the Asia Mixed Team Championships this year.
Sen, who is a Commonwealth Games gold medalist, takes on Belgium's Julien Carraggi.
However, Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnuvardhan Goud Panjala couldn't cross the pre-quarterfinal stage, going down 9-21 11-21 to Indonesian second seed and world number 7 Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan.
Sen has been slowly regaining his touch after going through a lean patch early in the season.
On Thursday, Sen faced a tough battle against Coelho, who erased a 0-2 deficit with a four-point burst and then kept it tight. The duo moved neck and neck till 13-13 when Sen managed to march ahead and sealed the contest after jumping to 20-15 with a five-point burst.
In the second game, Sen hardly had any issues as he galloped to 12-2 and took giant strides to comfortably seal the match.

