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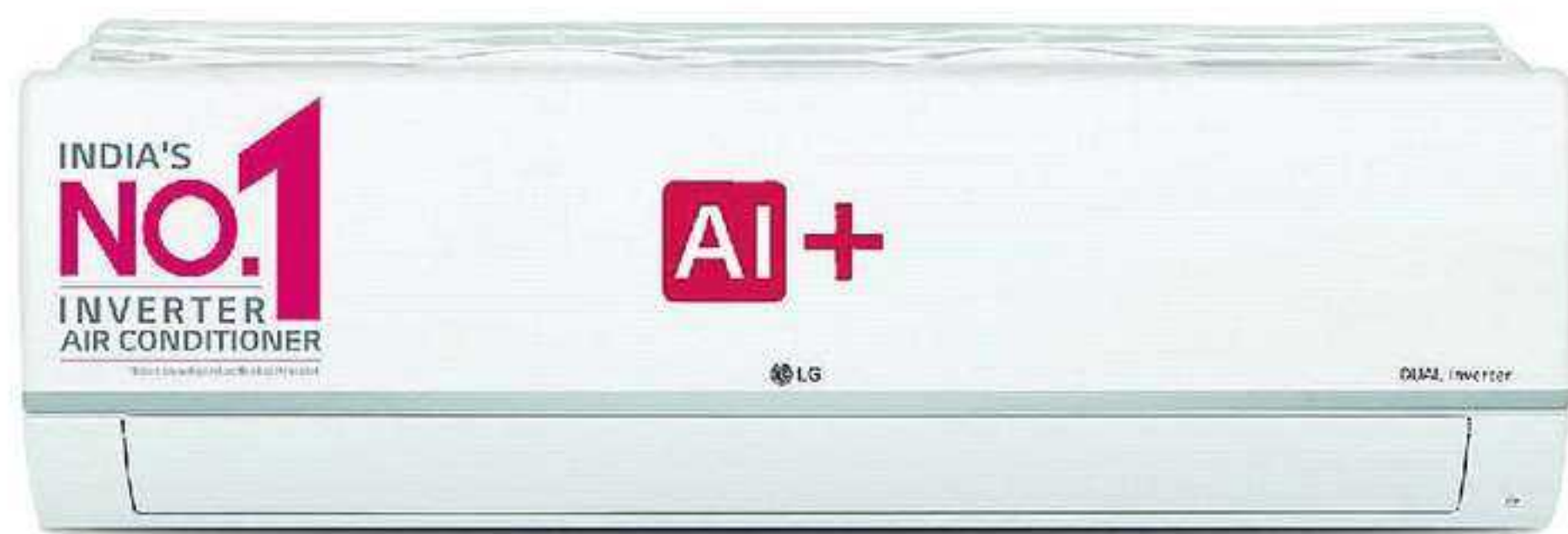
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Hindustan Times

Poll bonds: Donor-party link public after SC push

Aditi Agrawal and Utkarsh Anand

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday released State Bank of India (SBI) data listing the unique serial number linked with each electoral bond (EB) and other details about beneficiaries and donors, allowing the matching purchasers of bonds with the political parties that received the funds.

The latest tranche of data – the third such trove to be released over the past two weeks on the orders of the Supreme Court – appeared to be the final key to the political funding puzzle locked away behind a veil of anonymity that was finally dispelled by the Supreme Court when it held the scheme unconstitutional last month.

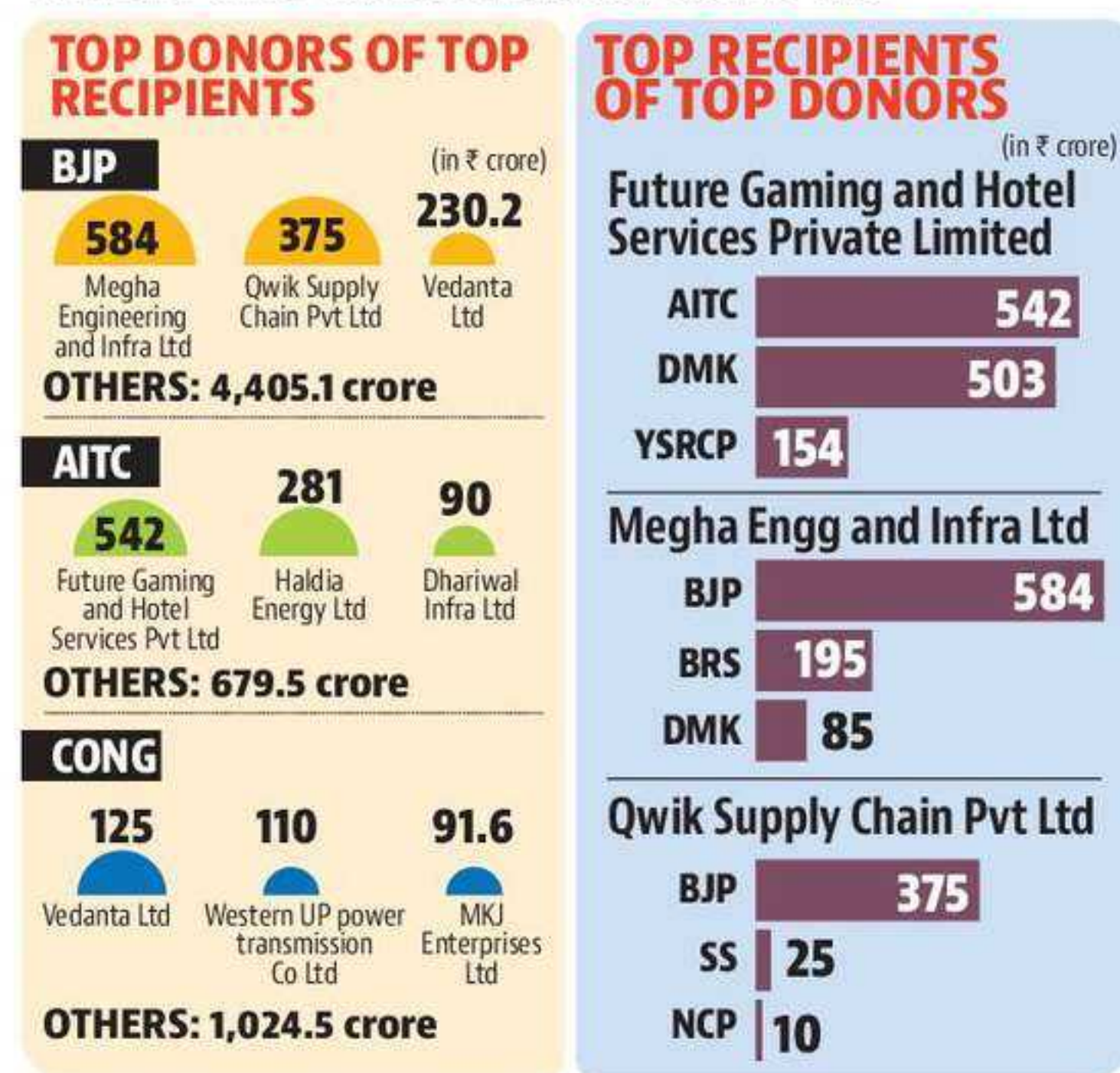
"In compliance with the Supreme Court's directions, SBI has provided data pertaining to electoral bonds to ECI today i.e. March 21, 2024. The ECI has uploaded it on its website as received from SBI on an 'as is where is basis,'" the poll body said in a statement.

The two sets of data – 552 pages of details of redemption by political parties and 386 pages of details of donors – cover electoral bonds purchased and redeemed from April 12, 2019 until January 11, 2024. In the end, SBI took three days to disclose the data that it had asked the Supreme Court three months time for.

The data revealed that Tamil Nadu-based Future Gaming and Hotel Services, the top donor that accounted for ₹1,365 crore worth bonds, donated across

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What the latest data tells us



SC BLASTS TAMIL NADU GOV FOR NOT REAPPOINTING STATE MINISTER

Abraham Thomas

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday slammed Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi for "defying" it by refusing to swear in K Ponmudi as minister after the court suspended the DMK politician's conviction in a disproportionate assets case. It gave Ravi till Friday to "set it right", failing which, it said, it would "pass an order asking the Governor to follow the Constitution". →P12



RAW operative shunted out over Pannun plot

HT Correspondent

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NEW DELHI: An intelligence operative has been removed from his position and several others were reshuffled following an investigation into US claims of an alleged plot to kill Khalistani leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, people familiar with the matter have said.

The investigation concluded "rogue operatives not authorised by the government had been involved in the plot", Bloomberg reported, citing unnamed senior officials. The developments in

the probe by a high-level committee set up by India last year to examine inputs provided by the US were first reported by Bloomberg.

The operative removed from his position in the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) is a mid-level official seconded to the agency from a paramilitary force, the people cited above said on condition of anonymity. Several other operatives were part of a reshuffle carried out in recent weeks by the agency amid the probe by the committee, they said.

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DHONI GIVES CSK CAPTAINCY TO GAIKWAD ON EVE OF IPL OPENER

CHENNAI: In surprising announcement, MS Dhoni on Thursday "handed" over the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) captaincy to opener Ruturaj Gaikwad on the eve of the Indian Premier League (IPL) opener in Chennai. "MS Dhoni has handed over Chennai Super Kings' captaincy to Ruturaj Gaikwad ahead of the start of TATA IPL 2024. Ruturaj has been an integral part of Chennai Super Kings since 2019 and has played 52 matches in IPL during this period. The team looks forward to the upcoming season," CSK said in a statement. →P21

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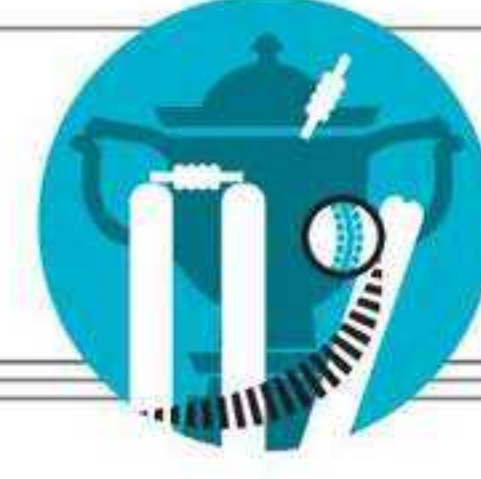
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IPL 2024

Five talking points to watch out for

By Vivek Krishnan

As IPL's 17th season gets underway on Friday with Chennai Super Kings taking on Royal Challengers Bengaluru at Chepauk, there are many things likely to grab our attention beyond the close contests. Here are some prominent ones



Dhoni's final season?

On the eve of CSK's opening match, MS Dhoni handed over the captaincy to 27-year-old opener Ruturaj Gaikwad. It's the surest sign yet that this may be Dhoni's final IPL season. He likes to keep everyone guessing, but some insiders hinted that the fact that he's growing his hair — he started his career with a long mane — may be another sign of Dhoni wanting to bow out just like he began. Dhoni had given the captaincy to Ravindra Jadeja at the start of the 2022 season, too, but took it back midway through the season after a poor run of results. By anointing Gaikwad now, he is perhaps aiming to groom the opener for the top job before exiting.

Dhoni's IPL record for CSK	MATCHES	RUNS	BEST	AVG	STRIKE RATE
	220	4,508	84*	39.89	137.48

Rohit-Hardik transition at MI

At Mumbai Indians this year, there are many subplots. None more interesting than the equation between Hardik Pandya and Rohit Sharma after the franchise's decision to bring back the all-rounder from Gujarat Titans and hand him the captaincy. Rohit is still India's skipper, but he will have to play under Pandya at the franchise. While there's a perception of the move causing discontent among some players, Pandya will take on the challenge with confidence given his record as GT captain — a title and a runner-up finish in his two seasons.



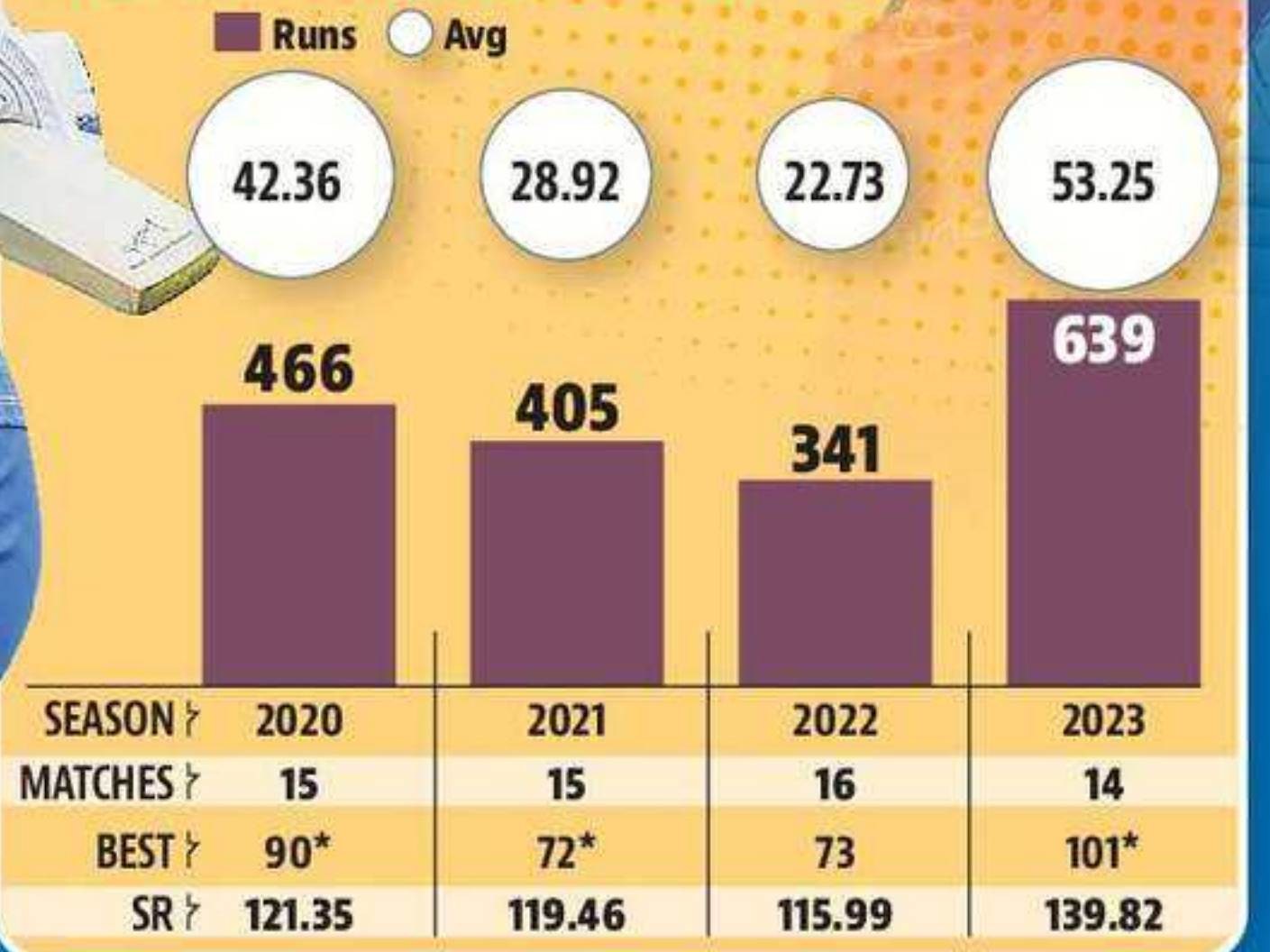
Pandya's record as captain



Kohli's approach

Will Virat Kohli be on the plane to New York when the Indian team travels for the T20 World Cup in June? The answer is likely to hinge on his batting approach for Royal Challengers Bengaluru. With the T20 format constantly evolving and asking batters to play with greater freedom, it is imperative that Kohli shows the willingness to attack from ball one. He has only played two T20s since the conclusion of the last T20 World Cup in Australia in 2022.

Kohli's record since 2020



Pant's comeback

After 14 months on the sidelines due to a car accident, Rishabh Pant is back! There was doubt about Pant's readiness to take on the wicketkeeping role after two knee reconstruction surgeries, but that was cleared when BCCI declared on March 12 that he is fit to play as wicketkeeper-batter. The Delhi Capitals skipper will hope to hit his stride in the coming weeks as he looks to make a case for selection in India's T20 World Cup squad.



Pant's IPL record

MATCHES	RUNS	BEST
98	2,838	128*
Avg	SR	
34.61	147.97	

Audition for the T20 World Cup

With the T20 World Cup beginning on June 2, IPL will help a few India hopefuls make a case. The first few weeks will hold the key, with the deadline for the announcement of the T20 World Cup squads being May 2. The keeping position seems to be up for grabs as Pant (provided he is fit), Dhruv Jurel, Jitesh Sharma, KL Rahul and Sanju Samson scramble to prove their worth. While Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh are set to be the main pacers at the marquee event, the backups in this department may also be decided by IPL performances.





Hindustan Times

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KEJRIWAL, UNDER ARREST

Nine summonses later, chief minister in ED custody after HC denies him relief in liquor policy case

HT Correspondents
 letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday night arrested Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for his alleged role in the state's controversial 2021-22 excise policy after questioning him at his residence, hours after the city's high court turned down his plea for interim protection from arrest—a stunning turn of events that leaves the Capital's politics in turmoil and pushes to new heights the ongoing conflict between the Union government and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) weeks before the general elections.

The arrest on corruption charges marks a dramatic moment for a leader who surged to power after platforming himself as an anti-corruption crusader and shook up the Capital's entrenched political structures.

"He will continue as the chief minister of Delhi. If need be, he will run the government from jail. There is no rule that stops him from running the government from jail," Delhi minister Atishi said outside Kejriwal's residence. The party has claimed that a survey it conducted of Delhi's citizens said he should continue. The AAP has been preparing for his arrest for months, and warned of its imminence several times.

ED officials aware of the matter said he was evasive during interrogations and pointed out that he had skipped all nine

continued on →15



Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal after being arrested by ED following a raid at his residence on Thursday.

HT PHOTO

Kejriwal will remain CM, run govt from jail if needed: AAP ministers

Snehil Sinha and Alok KN Mishra
 letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Delhi minister Atishi, among other AAP functionaries, said that the AAP chief will continue working as the chief minister of Delhi from jail — a situation that political

experts, as well as lawyers, said was out of the ordinary but not entirely impossible. To be sure, there is no prohibition either in the Constitution or any statute that mandates a sitting CM to resign after arrest in a criminal case, if not convicted. However, the convention is that arrested leaders quit top posts.

→P4



Security personnel outside Kejriwal's residence.

ARVIND YADAV/HT

EXCISE POLICY THE BRAINCHILD OF CM: KEY ED CLAIM

Neeraj Chauhan

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The 2021-22 excise policy, allegedly designed to line the pockets of the Aam Aadmi Party and some of its leaders, was the "brainchild" of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Enforcement Directorate has claimed, according to court submissions it has made in connection with other accused and remarks by officials who chose to stay unnamed.

An official said there were broadly three reasons why the CM was held: first, there was evidence he was involved in the formulation and implementation of the policy, two, because he ignored repeated summons, and three, he was evasive during questioning.

→P6

A PUBLIC JOURNEY FROM I.T. OFFICER TO ED CUSTODY

NEW DELHI: A little less than three decades ago, Arvind Kejriwal was an officer in the Income Tax department in Delhi, reporting under the same larger organisation structure of the department of revenue, from where ED sleuths placed him under arrest.

Between quitting his job in 2006 and his arrest, Kejriwal transited through the three main dimensions of public life: a civil servant, an activist, and a politician on a journey that saw him described as RTI activist, India Against Corruption leader, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener, and chief minister.

→P6

Cong hits out at govt for 'attack on party funds'

HT Correspondent

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Thursday fielded its top three leaders, party president Mallikarjun Kharge and former presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, to launch a frontal attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his administration, accusing the government of virtually freezing the main opposition party's bank accounts weeks before the general elections.

In the first joint press conference addressed by the three, the leaders alleged there was no level playing field before the polls because the Congress was unable to operate its accounts. They also disclosed that in addition to the ongoing tax dispute with the Income Tax (I-T) department over the assessment year (AY) 2018-19, the party received a fresh notice on March 14 over alleged discrepancies in AY 1994-95, when the late Sitaram Kesri was the party treasurer.



Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi at Congress HQ in Delhi.

HT PHOTO

continued on →17

SC halts notification on fact-checking unit

Abraham Thomas

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the implementation of rules that the government used a day earlier to set up a "fact check unit" to take down online content deemed fake or misleading, citing serious constitutional concerns over freedom of speech.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud said there was a "prima facie case" to stay Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and

Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules 2021 (that was amended in 2023). Using the rule, the government on Wednesday designated the Press Information Bureau as the government's fact-checking body for any content relating to the central government.


"The challenge to Rule 3(1)(b)(v) involves serious constitutional questions. The impact of Rule 3(1)(b)(v) on the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and expression protected under Article 19(1)(a) would fall for analysis by the high court," said the bench.

→P3


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{ MY INDIA } ENDANGERED BIRD

Ban on power lines in GIB habitat eased



The Supreme Court on Thursday relaxed the ban on overhead high power transmission lines across an area spread over 80,680 sqkm in Rajasthan and Gujarat, the habitat of the endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) and formed an expert committee to consider feasibility of limiting the ban to 13,663 square kilometres. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud directed the committee, comprising independent experts, members of the National Board of Wildlife, representatives of power companies, and former and serving bureaucrats drawn from departments of environment and forests and ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) to suggest ways to balance two objectives — the conservation of the bird and India's sustainable development goals. The first report of the committee is to be submitted to the Court by July 31 this year.

→P2

{ BUSINESS } STRONG SIGNAL FOR IPOs

Reddit shares surge in robust NYSE debut



Reddit shares jumped as much as 67% over their initial public offering price after the social media platform and its shareholders raised \$748mn priced at the top of a marketed range, sending a strong signal that the window for U.S. IPOs is reopening. The company's shares traded on Thursday at \$51.86 each as of 1:39pm New York time, 53% above their \$34 per share IPO price. It had marketed 22 million shares for \$31 to \$34 each. At the current price, Reddit has a market value of \$8.2 billion based on the outstanding shares listed in its filings with the US Securities and Exchange Commission. Including stock options and restricted share units, Reddit's fully diluted valuation is about \$10 billion. Some analysts argued before the pricing that the company merits a valuation around the \$10bn it achieved in a 2021 funding round.

→P8

{ MY INDIA } MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT VIOLATION

EC tells Centre to stop Viksit Bharat WhatsApp messages



The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday directed the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) to immediately stop delivery of bulk WhatsApp messages under the "Viksit Bharat Sampark" initiative, to voters, that underlines Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration's record over the last decade. The poll body, which passed the order after receiving several complaints of violation of the Model Code of Conduct that came into force on March 16, ordered "no further delivery" of the messages and sought a compliance report from the ministry in the matter. "The move is a part of a series of decisions taken by the Commission to ensure a level-playing field," ECI said in a statement. Asking the government to ensure there is "no further delivery" of the bulk WhatsApp messages to the voters, ECI sought an "immediate" compliance report on the matter from the ministry.

→P10

{ WORLD } ISRAEL-HAMAS

US urges 'immediate' ceasefire at UN body



The United States has circulated for the first time a draft UN resolution calling for an "immediate" ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, as warnings grow of famine in besieged Gaza. Washington had blocked previous Security Council texts using the word "immediate" but US top diplomat Antony Blinken confirmed the shift in position on Wednesday. Blinken, who is to meet five Arab foreign ministers in Egypt on Thursday, stressed any immediate truce must be linked to the release of hostages snatched by Palestinian militants during the October 7 attack that set off the war. The Israeli bombardment of Gaza continued overnight with the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory saying at least 70 people had been killed, pushing the overall toll towards 32,000.

→P17

{ BUSINESS } ANTITRUST LAWSUIT

US sues Apple over monopoly in phones



The US justice department on Thursday announced a sweeping antitrust lawsuit against Apple, accusing the tech giant of engineering an illegal monopoly in smartphones that boxes out competitors and stifles innovation. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in New Jersey, alleges that Apple has monopoly power in the smartphone market and uses its control over the iPhone to "engage in a broad, sustained, and illegal course of conduct." The lawsuit — which was also filed with 16 state attorneys general — is the latest example of the justice department's approach to aggressive enforcement of federal antitrust law that officials say is aimed at ensuring a fair and competitive market, even as it has lost some significant anticompetition cases. Apple in a statement said the antitrust lawsuit is "wrong on the facts and the law" and that it will vigorously defend against it.

→P18

ELECTORAL BONDS

Bonds and their donors: What data tells us

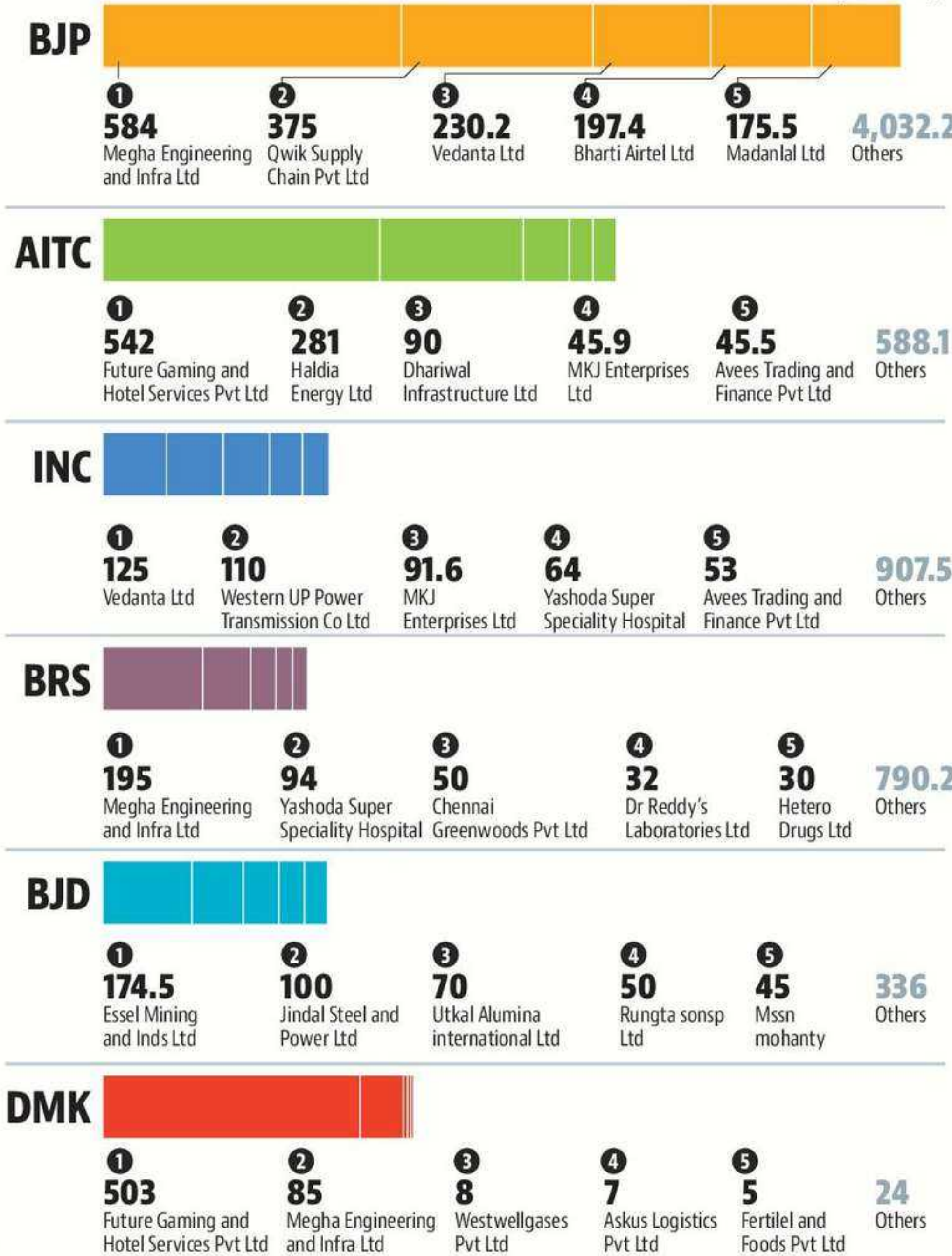
ECI published the details of electoral bonds purchased and redeemed by parties with the alpha numeric codes on Thursday, making it possible to match donors and recipients for ₹12,146 crore of bonds purchased after April 12, 2019. How India Lives and Abhishek Jha matched this data with donor-recipients and the MCA database of companies. Here are some takeaways

Top 5 parties

THE TOP DONORS OF TOP PARTIES

The top five parties by value of bonds redeemed (excluding bonds whose donors could not be matched) from April 12, 2019 in ECI's data release on March 21 were BJP, TMC, Congress, BRS (formerly TRS), and BJD. The top three donors of the BJP's ₹5,594.2 crore worth of bond receipts were Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited (₹584 crore), Qwik Supply Chain Private Limited (₹375 crore), and Vedanta Limited (₹230.2 crore). Notably, BJP received just 28% of its total donations from its top five donors, the lowest among all parties, indicating the spread of its donors. The top three donors for TMC's ₹1,592.5 crore of bonds receipts were Future Gaming and Hotel Services Private Limited (₹542 crore), Haldia Energy Limited (₹281 crore), and Dhariwal Infrastructures Limited (₹90 crore). The top three donors for Congress' 1,351.1 crore of bond receipts were Vedanta Limited (₹125 crore), Western UP Power Transmission Co. Limited (₹110 crore), and MKJ Enterprises Limited (₹91.6 crore). The top donors of other parties are shown in the accompanying chart.

(in ₹ crore)

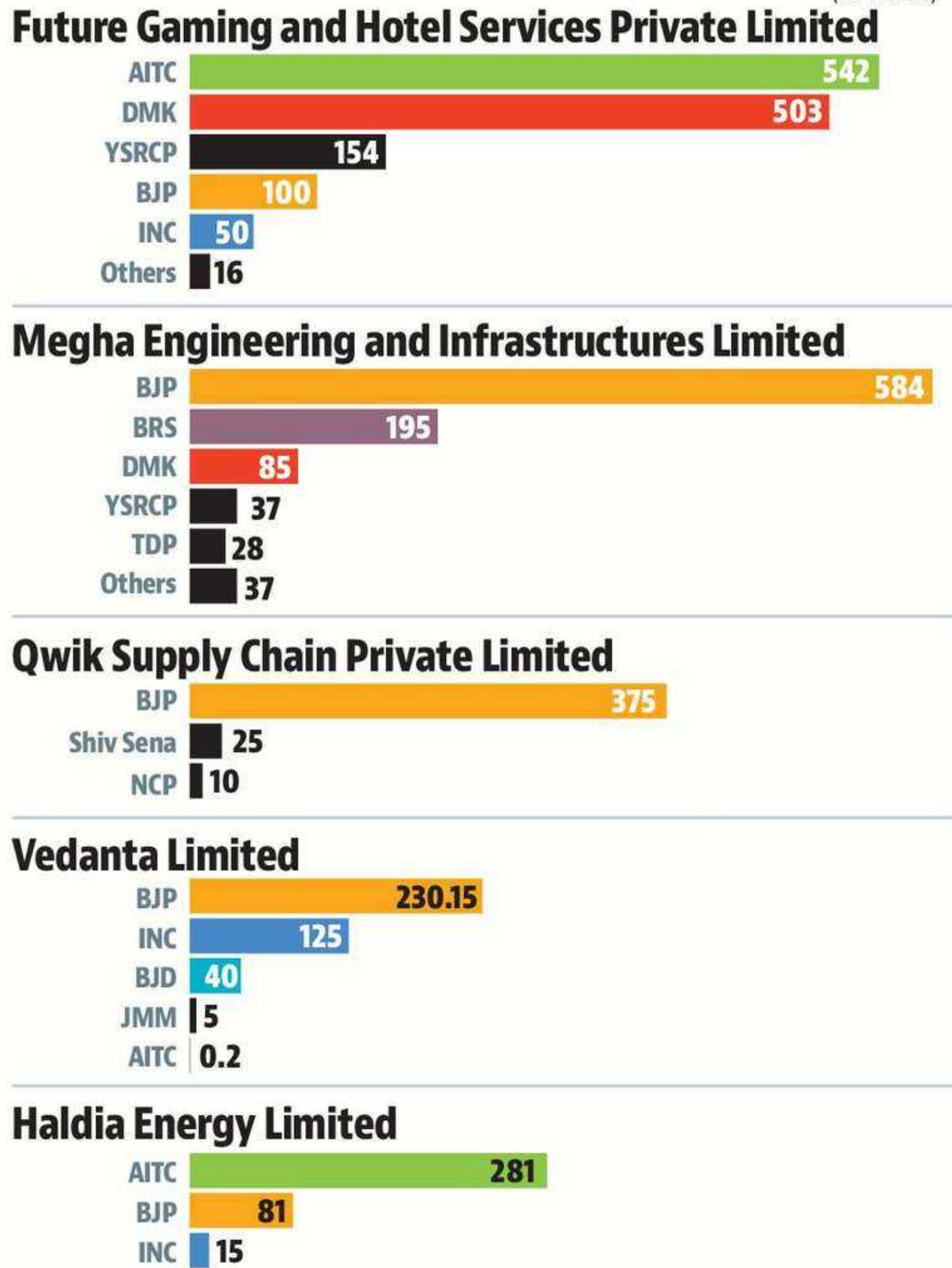


Top 5 donors

THE TOP PARTIES OF TOP DONORS

The top five purchasers of electoral bonds (excluding those whose recipients could not be matched) from April 12, 2019 from ECI's data release on March 21 were Future Gaming and Hotel Services Private Limited, Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited, Qwik Supply Chain Private Limited, Vedanta Limited, and Haldia Energy Limited. These companies donated ₹3,518 crore out of the total ₹12,146 crore donated through Electoral Bonds for which recipient details are available. The top recipients of a total ₹1,365 crore worth of bond donations from Future Gaming were the TMC (₹542 crore), the DMK (₹503 crore), and the YSRCP (₹154 crore). The top recipients of ₹966 crore worth of bond donations from Megha Engineering were the BJP (₹584 crore), the BRS (₹195 crore), and the DMK (₹85 crore). The top recipients of Rs 410 crore worth of bond donations from Qwik Supply Chain were the BJP (₹375 crore), the Shiv Sena (₹25 crore), and the NCP (₹10 crore). Other top donors and their top recipients are shown in the accompanying chart.

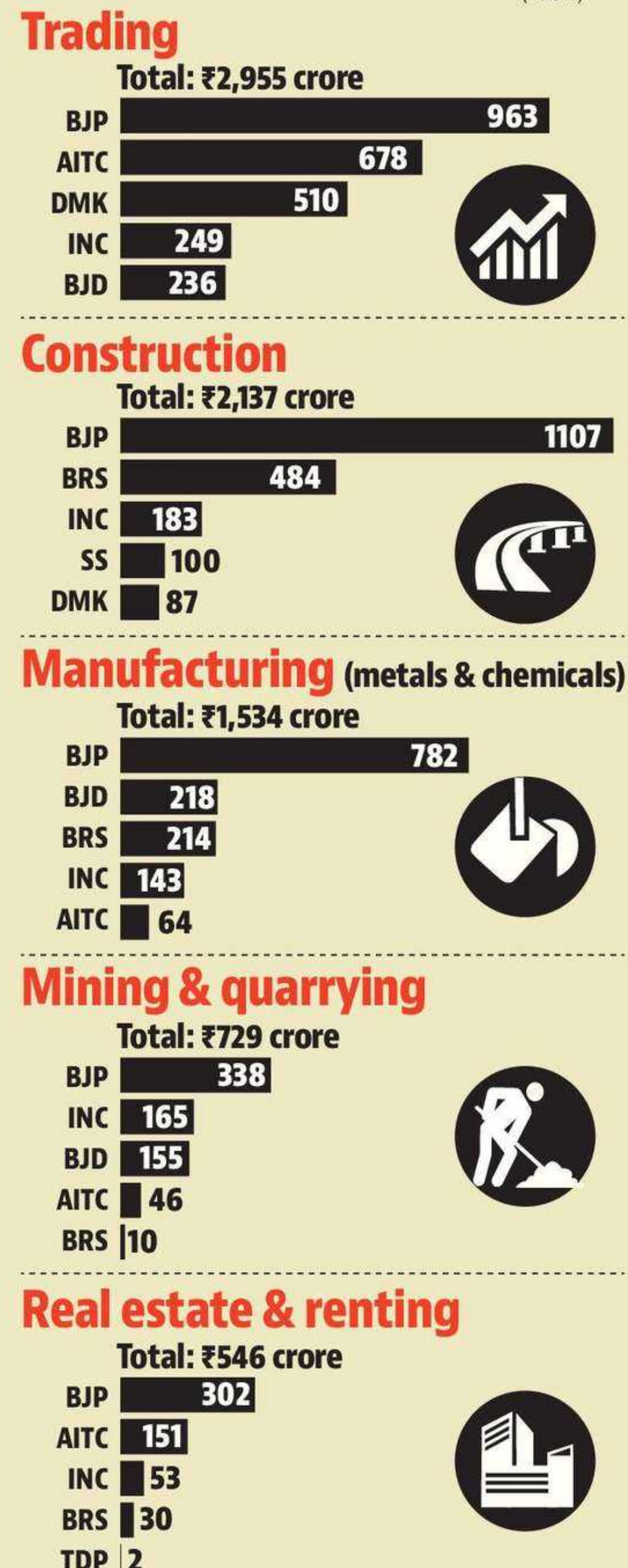
(in ₹ crore)



THE SECTOR SPLIT

Companies from just five sectors accounted for about two-thirds of the total donations that were handed out via electoral bonds

Donations of electoral bonds by companies by registered sector (₹ crore)



Share of top 10 donors for each party

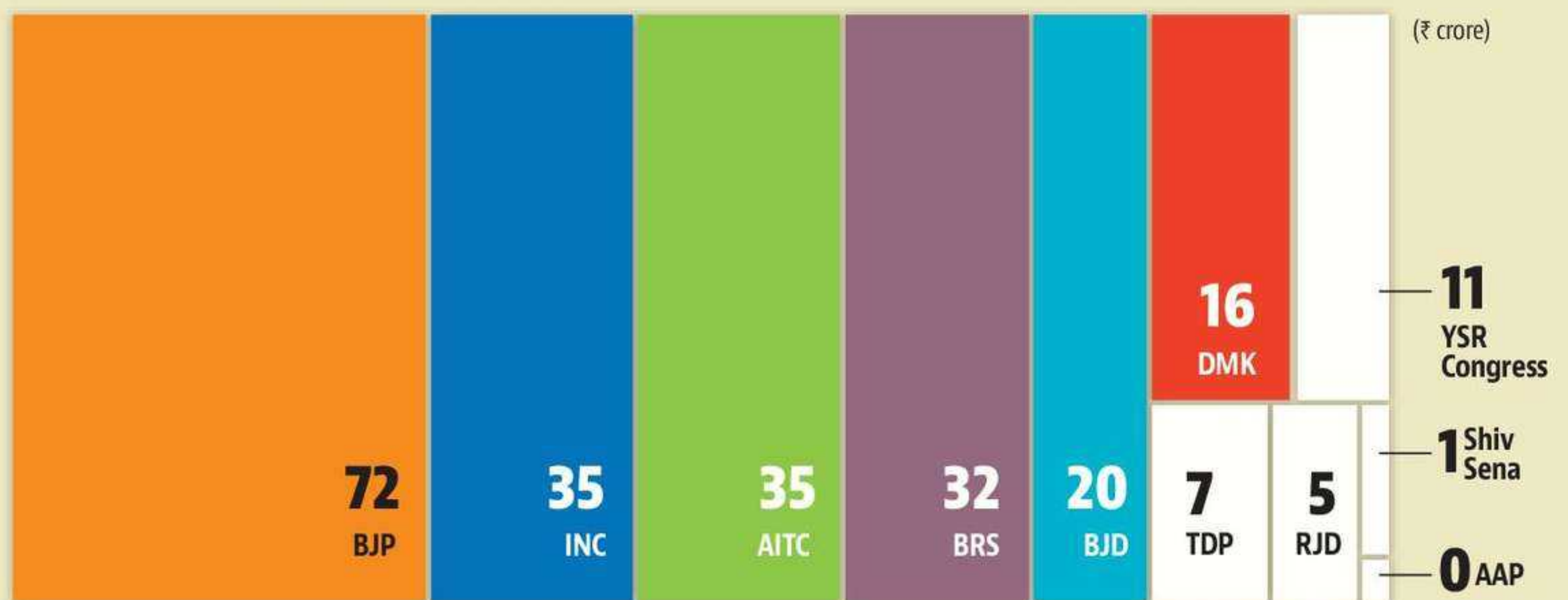
An analysis of the share of top 10 donors for each political party shows that the BJP received the smallest share of its total Electoral Bond donations from the top ten donors. This share is just 38% for the BJP. For other parties, ranked by the total amount redeemed from April 12, 2019, this share is 75% for TMC, 45% for the Congress, 55% for BRS (formerly TRS), 79% for BJD and almost 100% for DMK.

Share in %



Donating firms with the minimum mandated capital of ₹1 lakh

There were 62 companies whose paid-up capital was Rs 1 lakh—the minimum mandated under Indian laws for a company, which is usually the preserve of small companies. These 62 companies donated a cumulative ₹235 crore. Of this, the BJP received the most, 31%, followed by INC and AITC, with 15% each.



Source: ECI, SBI, MCA

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Night of drama: Kejriwal to stay CM, insists AAP

Snehil Sinha and Alok KN Mishra
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: A night of drama unfolded around Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence on Flagstaff Road as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) first questioned and then arrested the senior Aam Aadmi Party leader on Thursday evening, prompting his party to allege that the AAP leader's incarceration was part of a "political conspiracy" by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led central government.

Delhi minister Atishi, among other AAP functionaries, said the AAP chief will continue working as the chief minister of Delhi from jail — a situation that political experts, as well as lawyers, said was out of the ordinary but not entirely impossible. However, given there is no precedence — as Kejriwal is the first incumbent chief minister to be arrested — it may be difficult to run daily affairs of the Capital from jail.

To be sure, there is no prohibition either in the Constitution or under any statute that mandates a sitting CM to resign after arrest in a criminal case. It is only after their conviction and an imposition of a jail term that they must resign. Some precedents and political prudence have seen CMs stepping down after arrests.

Kejriwal was arrested by ED for his "involvement in the controversial Delhi excise policy 2021-22, being evasive during questioning, and skipping nine summons issued by the agency".

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi was afraid of Kejriwal", "The people of Delhi love Kejriwal and consider him as their family member. PM Narendra Modi is afraid of Arvind Kejriwal. ED and BJP do not respect the courts. When the court has sent a notice, why they cannot wait for the next date?" said Atishi, speaking to media outside the CM's residence.

Several AAP leaders and workers, including ministers and MLAs, also arrived outside Kejriwal's official residence and protested against the ED. Elaborate security arrangements were in

place and Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said AAP ministers were not being allowed to go inside the residential complex.

Bharadwaj who arrived at the CM's residence soon after ED, alleged the agency came prepared to arrest Kejriwal. "It appears that ED has raided the residence of chief minister... No one is being allowed to go inside the CM residence. It appears they are fully prepared to arrest the CM. The people are watching, we will not remain silent," said Bharadwaj.

By late evening, roads leading to the CM's residence were cordoned off and personnel from Delhi Police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were deployed in and around to maintain law and order. Delhi Speaker Ram Niwas Goel, said: "All MLAs have unanimously decided Kejriwal will not resign as chief minister after arrest."

May continue as CM
Experts and lawyers said that if the CM has not lost his seat, he can continue to discharge his duties from inside the prison from a constitutional point of view.

"It is an option for the CM to run the government from jail. However, how convenient will it be for all the files to be sent to jail for signatures every day and will the jail authorities allow that? It will also depend on what norms the jail authorities follow," said PD Thankappan Achary, former secretary general of Lok Sabha.

A second person said if the CM and AAP decide Kejriwal will resign, he can either appoint one of the ministers as acting CM or nominate a relative, such as his wife, to be the CM. Former Bihar CM Lalu Yadav deputed his wife when he got arrested for the fodder scam was cited as precedence.

"In such a situation, the relative will have to win the election for his seat within the next six months," said SK Sharma, former secretary of the Delhi Assembly.

Experts added that legally, the President's Rule is not a possibility in the current situation. "President's Rule would be unconstitutional as there is no political emergency," said Sunil Gupta, a senior lawyer at the Delhi high court.



AAP workers protest outside Kejriwal's residence on Thursday evening.

ARVIND YADAV/HT PHOTO

Protest, police, and traffic snarls

Paras Singh and Karn Pratap Singh
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Hundreds of Delhi Police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel formed a tight grid around chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's official residence at Flagstaff Road on Thursday evening, as a mass of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) workers sat in protest.

Hours earlier, the chief minister's residence was raided by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with alleged irregularities in the excise policy case, and around 9.10pm, Kejriwal, the AAP's national convenor, was arrested by the federal agency.

A senior police officer, on

condition of anonymity, said that a team of ED officials sought police presence at Flagstaff Road at around 6pm, following which police imposed prohibitory orders under CRPF section 144 in the area.

"We were told that they are likely to arrest the chief minister at night and need our assistance outside his residence. We were asked to maintain law and order, since the officials suspected that Aam Aadmi Party supporters may stage a protest," the officer said.

However, as soon as news of Kejriwal's arrest broke, a large number of protesters — including AAP legislators — rushed to the chief minister's residence and nearby areas, holding marches and shouting slogans

against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Centre and ED. Delhi speaker Ram Niwas Goel, who was present at the spot, said, "It may be a small setback but the party will emerge stronger out of this episode."

Mayor Shelly Oberoi said: "People of Delhi are with Arvind Kejriwal. He may be arrested but his ideas cannot be imprisoned."

According to the police, the protesters not only violated section 144 but also led to traffic snarls in the area, and many of those demonstrating, including Mangolpuri legislator and Delhi deputy speaker Rakhi Bidlan, were detained and whisked away by the Rapid Action Force (RAF) — a specialised CRPF unit.

"We had to ensure that on the traffic movement was smooth.

The protesters were removed. Few of them were detained. We didn't take strict action against anyone," the officer said.

Later at night, members of the Congress — the AAP's alliance partner in Delhi — also arrived at the spot to show solidarity with Kejriwal.

"There can be no justification for this action... This is against the spirit of democracy... People should be worried about democracy. Such things happen in Pakistan," Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely said.

Delhi minister Gopal Rai, meanwhile, addressed the supporters and called for a nationwide protest on Friday. He also asked people to assemble at the AAP headquarters near ITO on Friday morning.

How events unfolded

- 2021**
 - November 17** Delhi government introduces new excise policy for 2021-2022
- 2022**
 - July 20** LG VK Saxena recommends a CBI probe into alleged irregularities in the new policy
 - August 17** CBI registers a case against 15 accused, including then deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, in connection with the implementation and formulation of the policy
 - August 22** ED launches parallel money laundering probe in the case
 - August 31** 2021-22 policy scrapped, and replaced by the previous 2020-21 regime
 - November 25** CBI files charge sheet against seven accused in the case
- 2023**
 - February 26** CBI arrests Sisodia after interrogating him for eight hours
 - February 28** Sisodia moves Supreme Court against his arrest, but the top court asks him to move high court. Sisodia resigns from the Delhi cabinet
 - March 9** ED arrests Sisodia from Bihar
 - October 4** ED conducts raids at AAP Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh's residence. Singh is later arrested
 - November 2:** ED issues first of nine summons to Kejriwal
- 2024**
 - March 15** ED arrests BRS leader K Kavitha, alleged to be part of the "South Group", in connection with the case.
 - March 21** ED raids Kejriwal's residence, arrests him

What ED says
Excise policy promoted cartel formations, awarded exorbitant wholesale profit margins of 12%, "incentivised" other illegal activities as part of a conspiracy to extract kickbacks from liquor businesses
Policy specifically brought by Sisodia
AAP received kickbacks to the tune of ₹100 crore from the "South Group" — to finalise the policy, and a chunk of this was used in AAP's Goa elections campaign

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If you have not registered your property yet, please register it immediately by visiting MCD website www.mcdonline.nic.in and create Unique Property Identification Code (UPIC) latest by 31st March 2024. Pay your outstanding dues to avoid legal action including prosecution and imprisonment.

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'A part of conspiracy, brain behind policy': ED claim on CM's role

Neeraj Chauhan
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The 2021-22 excise policy was allegedly designed to line the pockets of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and some of its leaders, and was the "brainchild" of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has claimed in court submissions made in connection with other accused, and according to remarks by officers who asked not to be named.

Following his arrest, an ED officer said there were broadly three reasons why the CM was arrested: first, there was evidence he was involved in the formulation and implementation of the policy; two, because he ignored repeated summons; and three, he was evasive during questioning. AAP has denied all charges.

Broadly, the allegations around the excise policy pertain to ₹100 crore in kickbacks being paid by a group of businessmen and politicians referred to by investigators as the "South Group" to AAP. This money was shovelled back to the party's leaders in return for securing nine retail vending zones for alcohol under the new policy, according to the federal agency.

The allegations around Kejriwal, while not detailed on record, pertain to two counts: one, that the policy itself was the CM's "brainchild"; and, two, that a specific decision to fix 12% profit margin was taken at the AAP leader's residence during a meeting with other ministers.

The contentions are based mostly on purported statements by a businessman and a former secretary of Kejriwal's then deputy Manish Sisodia, who too is one of the leaders arrested over the case. Kejriwal is the third high-profile leader from the AAP to be arrested — and the 32nd overall arrest in the case — after former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh.

On March 15, ED also arrested Bharat Rashta Samithi (BRS) leader and daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chan-

Approvers from 'South Group' shaped ED case

Neeraj Chauhan
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Statements recorded by two key people of the alleged South Group, one of whom turned approver in the case, have helped the Enforcement Directorate (ED) establish the role of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in the Delhi excise policy-related irregularities, officials aware of the matter said.

Srinivasulu Reddy, a businessman and politician, in his statement recorded under section 164 of the CrPC before a magistrate on July 17 last year, said that he had tried to meet Kejriwal in March 2021 during the parliament session after he saw advertisement in newspaper about new excise policy in Delhi, the officials said. When he

met Kejriwal on March 16, 2021, he told him that "we welcome everyone in Delhi to do business", they added.

When Reddy met K Kavitha in March, she told him that Kejriwal had spoken to her and asked her to give ₹100 crore and accordingly she asked Reddy to arrange ₹50 crore," the note said.

Srinivasulu Reddy's son Raghav Magunta has also recorded statement favouring ED's allegations about payment of bribes worth ₹25 crore to Abhishek Boinpally (who was coordinating from South Group) and Gorantla Buchibabu. Another key person in the South Group, Sarath Reddy, who turned approver for ED in June 2023, also mentioned the CM's name in a statement recorded before the magistrate.

drasekhar Rao, in connection with its investigation into money laundering charges linked to the now-scrapped excise policy.

ED has claimed in one of its charge sheets that a "conspiracy was hatched" by political leaders including Kejriwal, Sisodia and Kavitha, among others. "Kavitha orchestrated a deal with CM, Delhi Arvind Kejriwal and then deputy CM and excise minister Manish Sisodia, wherein she along with other members of the South Group paid them kickbacks through a string of intermediaries and middlemen. In exchange for kickbacks paid to the leaders of AAP, Kavitha had access to the policy formulation and was offered provisions to ensure a favourable position to her," ED said in its remand note last week after arresting Kavitha.

ED cited a December 7, 2022 statement recorded by Sisodia's then secretary C Arvind, who spoke of changes made to the 12% profit margins for wholesale pri-

vate entities.

In its sixth charge sheet filed in December 2023 against AAP leader Sanjay Singh, ED claimed that kickbacks worth ₹45 crore were used by AAP in the Goa assembly elections campaign in 2022, making it a beneficiary of the proceeds of crime (POC). The charge sheet also said that "some AAP leaders personally benefitted from the POC". ED claimed to have established that Sisodia got ₹2.2 crore bribe while Sanjay Singh got ₹2 crore and Vijay Nair got ₹1.5 crore. However, the ED or the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) have not yet directly linked any proceeds of crime to Kejriwal.

The financial crimes probe agency has so far filed six charge sheets in the excise policy probe against 31 individuals and entities. All the leaders mentioned have denied charges, and the AAP has called the probe "political vendetta" at the behest of the BJP.



THE 9 ED SUMMONS, AND WHAT AAP SAID

2023

- Nov 2** At a Punjab rally, Kejriwal said, "I don't know whether I will be in jail... on the day of the (LS polls) counting."
- Dec 21** Kejriwal said, "I am ready to accept every legal summons. ED summons is politically motivated."

2024

- Jan 3** In a letter to ED, Kejriwal gave reasons for skipping the summons, describing ED's actions as "opaque"
- Jan 18** Kejriwal called the summons illegal and invalid, and alleged that the purpose of the summons was to "arrest me before polls and stop me from campaigning."
- Feb 2** AAP said, "Kejriwal will not appear before ED today as well... the summons is unlawful. We will comply with the lawful summons."
- Feb 19** AAP said, "The matter of ED summons is now in court. ED itself went to court. Instead of sending summons again and again, ED should wait for the court's decision."
- Feb 26** AAP said, "They want us to break the alliance (INDIA). The matter is in court and they are sending summons... Informally, we have got messages to break the alliance."
- Mar 4** AAP said, "The summons are illegal, but Kejriwal is still ready to answer ED's questions through video conferencing. He has sought a date after March 12."
- Mar 21** Summons issued on March 16, after a court granted him bail for not appearing before ED

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON
See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Vinay Gupta S/o Rameshwar Prasad R/o Vegabond, Rameela Maidan, Pillanji, Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi** has committed the offence FIR No. 160/2018 dated 13.11.2018 u/s 379/511 IPC P.S. Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi & it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Vinay Gupta** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Vinay Gupta** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Vinay Gupta** accused of FIR No. 160/2018 dated 13.11.2018 u/s 379/511 IPC P.S. Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on **23.04.2024 at 10:00 A.M.**

By Order: **Sh. Vaibhav Kumar Metropolitan Magistrate-05 Court No. 13, Patiala House Court, New Delhi**

DP/3375/SW/24

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON
(SEE SECTION 82 Cr.P.C.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person(s) **Dheeraj S/o Kalu Ram R/o House No. T-130, Gali No. 20, Prem Nagar-2, Kirari, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in Case FIR No. 663/18, U/s 323/354/451/509/506 IPC, PS Aman Vihar, Distt. Rohini, Delhi and it has been returned to a Warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused person(s) **Dheeraj** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person(s) **Dheeraj** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person(s) **Dheeraj** of Case FIR No. 663/18, U/s 323/354/451/509/506 IPC, PS Aman Vihar, Distt. Rohini, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before dated **27.04.2024.**

By Order
Ms. Preeti Rajoria Metropolitan Magistrate (North) Mahila Court, Room No. 18 Rohini Courts, New Delhi

DP/3154/RD/2024 (Court Matter)

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता
विद्युत परीक्षण खण्ड (नगरीय) उपाकालि,
18 ईंसी० रोड, देहरादून
E mail: etdurban@yahoo.in

पत्रांक : 525/ वि.प.ख. (न.) / दे. दून दिनांक 21/03/24

तिथि विस्तार सूचना
निविदा सं.-16/वि.प.ख.(न.)/2023-24 एवं निविदा सं.-17/वि.प.ख.(न.)/2023-24 जो कि विद्युत परीक्षण खण्ड (नगरीय), देहरादून द्वारा आमंत्रित की गई है व दिनांक 22.03.2024 को खोली जानी थी, को अपरिहार्य कारणों से निम्नानुसार विस्तारित किया जाता है।

निविदा संख्या	निविदा क्रय करने की अन्तिम तिथि व समय	निविदा खोलने की तिथि व समय
16/वि.प.ख.(न.)/2023-24 एवं	24.04.2024, 12:00 बजे तक	24.04.2024 15:00 बजे
17/वि.प.ख.(न.)/2023-24		24.04.2024 15:15 बजे

अधिशासी अभियन्ता,
वि.प.ख. (नगरीय), दे.दून
18 ईंसी० रोड, देहरादून

"राष्ट्रहित में विजली बचाम्"

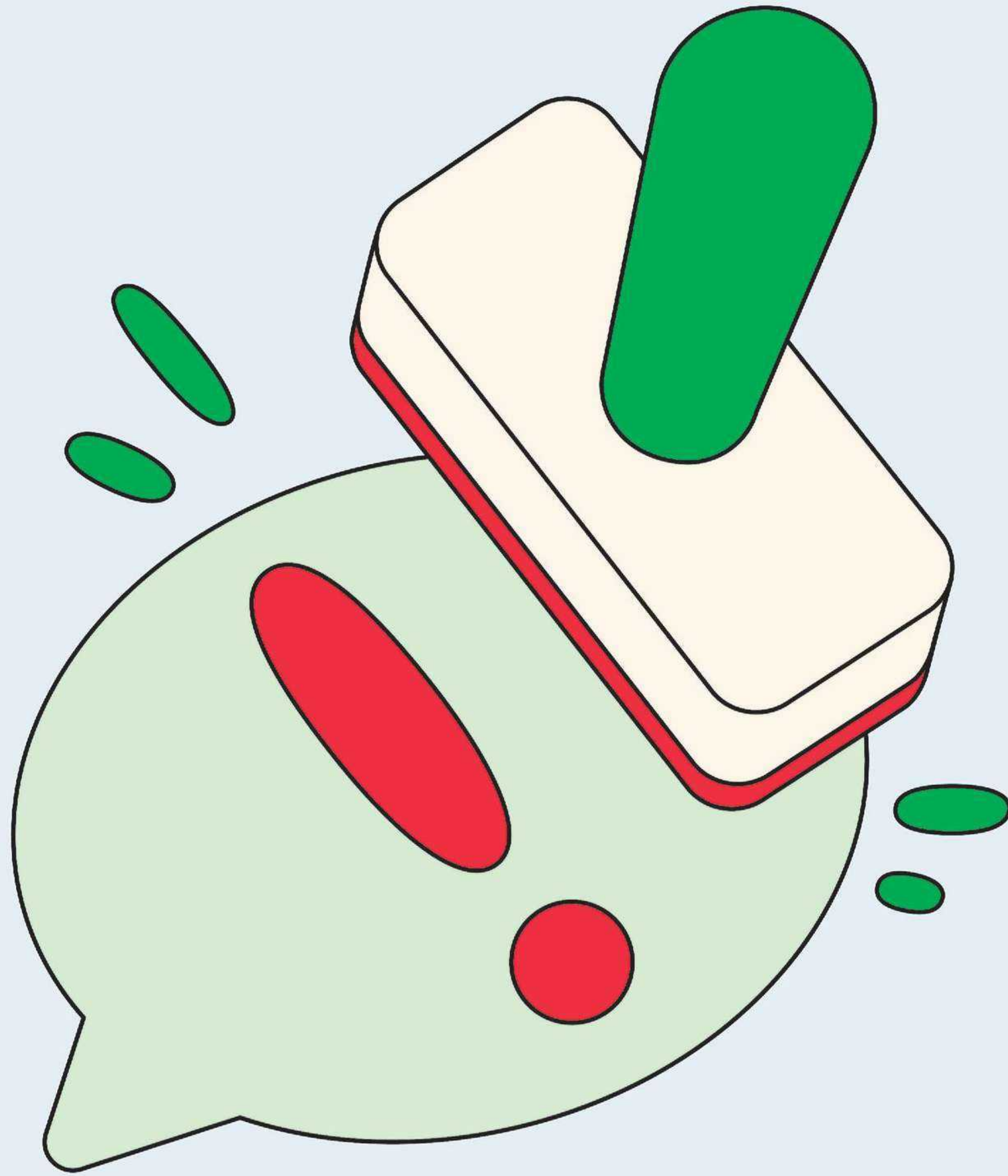
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INDIA bloc backs Kejriwal, says BJP afraid of elections



Security forces deployed outside the Delhi chief minister's residence on Thursday. ARVIND YADAV/HT

HT Correspondent
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: INDIA bloc partners stood behind Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal as Enforcement Directorate (ED) officers arrested him on Thursday evening from his residence. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of freezing Congress's accounts earlier in the day, posted on X: "A scared dictator wants to create a dead democracy. While capturing all the institutions including the media, breaking up the parties, extorting money from companies, freezing the account of the main opposition party was not enough for the 'devilish power', now the arrest of elected chief ministers has also become a common thing. INDIA will give a befitting reply to this."

Before Kejriwal's arrest, another sitting CM of the INDIA bloc, Hemant Soren, was arrested on January 31 in an alleged land scam. Support from the Congress, with which Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party has forged an alliance for Lok Sabha elections in Delhi, also came from Arvinder

Singh Lovely. "They (BJP) are doing this kind of thing as they are afraid of the elections... Congress's accounts were arrested and today in Delhi, just before the elections, the arrest has been done. Using the agencies is shameful. We want to make this clear that Congress will not be afraid of all these things and we will strongly fight the elections. AAP is a partner of the alliance (INDIA alliance), we are strongly standing with them and we support them," said Lovely, who joined protesters on the streets of the Capital. Another senior INDIA bloc leader, Nationalist Congress Party's (NCP) Sharad Pawar strongly condemned "the vindictive misuse of central agencies to target the opposition, especially as general elections loom. This arrest showcases the depth to which BJP will stoop for power. INDIA stands united against this unconstitutional action against #ArvindKejriwal."

Trinamool Congress, Kejriwal's closest ally in the INDIA bloc, wondered how a fair election can be conducted.

"We vehemently condemn the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, an elected chief minister, especially when Election Commission is in charge and MCC is in place. Earlier his administrative powers were snatched through an illegal ordinance. How can we expect fair elections in India if sitting CMs and prominent opposition leaders are arrested weeks before polls? If Supreme Court and ECI fail to act now, who will stand with people against BJP's oppressive politics in future?" tweeted Trinamool's Rajya Sabha member Derek O'Brien. CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the BJP and the Prime Minister are in panic. "Strongly condemn the arrest of Delhi CM, Shri Arvind Kejriwal by the ED. It's the second sitting CM of the INDIA bloc to be arrested. Clearly, Modi and the BJP are in panic over people's rejection in the ongoing elections. All opposition leaders who defected and joined the BJP are protected and patronised. They are the 'Satya Harihschandra'! These arrests will only cement people's desire to defeat BJP, defend democracy and Indian Constitution," he said.

THEY SAY

A scared dictator wants to create a dead democracy... Now the arrest of the elected Chief Ministers has also become a common thing...

RAHUL GANDHI, Congress



Strongly condemn the arrest of the Delhi CM... Clearly, Modi and the BJP are in panic over people's rejection in the ongoing elections...

SITARAM YECHURY, CPI (M)



We condemn the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal... Earlier his administrative powers were snatched through an illegal ordinance

DEREK O'BRIEN, TMC



I stand in solidarity with Arvind Kejriwal. This is yet another politically motivated arrest by the ED at the behest of the BJP...

SUPRIYA SULE, NCP (SP)



ALSO ARRESTED IN EXCISE CASE



Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal after his arrest by ED officials on Thursday. PTI



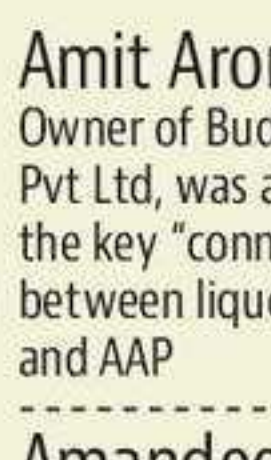
Manish Sisodia
ED said that the excise policy, specifically brought by the former deputy chief minister, promoted cartel formations and "incentivised" other illegal activities



Vijay Nair
According to agencies, Nair met all the liquor businessmen, fixed commissions



Sameer Mahendru
Owner of Indo Spirits Ltd, who connived with the alleged "South Group" to get control of at least nine retail zones



Amit Arora
Owner of Buddy Retail Pvt Ltd, was allegedly the key "connect" between liquor cartels and AAP



Amandeep Singh Dhall
Director of Brindco Sales, he was arrested for allegedly paying bribes and being part of the criminal conspiracy hatched to manipulate the excise policy in exchange for advance kickbacks



Arun Pillai
A Hyderabad-based businessman, Pillai was allegedly a frontman for the "South Group"



Abhishek Boinpally
Alleged part of the "South Group", he protected interests of the lobby in excise policy



Sanjay Singh
ED said the AAP Rajya Sabha member is directly related to proceeds of crime to the tune of ₹2 crore and is a "key conspirator" in the case. ED also said Singh exploited and gained money generated from the alleged scam



K Kavitha
The primary allegation against the BRS leader is that she was part of the alleged "South Group" of businessmen and politicians, that paid ₹100 crore kickbacks to AAP leaders in lieu of getting nine retail zones under the excise policy

BJP demands Kejriwal's resignation

Alok KN Mishra
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The president of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Delhi unit, Virendra Sachdeva, on Thursday demanded the resignation of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal following his arrest in the Delhi excise case even as the Aam Aadmi Party insisted that he will stay on in the post. "Arrest of Kejriwal symbolises the defeat of corruption, and now Kejriwal should resign immediately. It is an insult to constitutional norms for leaders of the Kejriwal party to say that Kejriwal will run the government from jail," said Sachdeva. Leader of the Opposition in Delhi assembly Ramvir Singh



Arvind Kejriwal being taken away from his residence. PTI

Bidhuri said that Kejriwal has lost the moral and constitutional right to remain in the office of the chief minister. "Arvind Kejriwal has been arrested by ED and he no longer has any moral or constitutional right to remain in his post. Running the government from jail after Kejriwal's arrest is not constitutional.

Therefore, he should immediately resign from his post," Bidhuri said. "The statement of leaders of the Kejriwal's party that Kejriwal will run the government from jail is an insult to constitutional norms. Hemant Soren also said the same thing, but upon being arrested, he had to resign, and the same will happen in Delhi as well," said Sachdeva. In a dramatic turn of events on Thursday evening, barely hours after the Delhi high court refused to grant the AAP chief protection from coercive action in connection with the excise policy case, a team from the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) arrived at Kejriwal's residence for questioning him in the case.

He was arrested at 9.10pm and was taken from his official home on Flagstaff Road in Civil Lines to the ED office around 11.15pm. Bidhuri said that the BJP has always been saying that corruption worth crores of rupees has taken place in the "liquor scam". "Many leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party are already arrested and they are not even getting bail. As the head of the government, Kejriwal has been the mastermind of this entire scam but he has also been refusing to join the investigation. There was a scam of crores of rupees in the purchase of flow meters in Delhi Jal Board when Kejriwal was the chairman and ED has issued summons in that case too," Bidhuri said.

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Empowering Future Leaders: KIIT World School's Vision for Holistic Education

Progressive thinking combined with an innovative approach towards the teaching-learning process is the need of the hour for the holistic development of each child. As educators, it is our responsibility to provide avenues for every individual to reach their optimum potential. KIIT World School, Pitampura, acknowledges the changes that are written on the wall and is fully equipped to embrace evolving educational paradigms. Here, education transcends from the tunnelled vision of mere disseminating information to focused preparation for life and its multifaceted challenges. Realising that the advent of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has marked a significant shift in India's education landscape, the school is prioritising concept clarity over rote learning. The policy emphasises child-centred classrooms brimming with joyful energy, fostering creativity and critical thinking. One of the crucial changes streamlined by NEP 2020 is the integration of arts, storytelling, and gamification into the curriculum. This



Dr. Sangeeta Bhatia, Principal, KIIT World School, Pitampura

multi-disciplinary approach not only enhances learning but also nurtures students' diverse talents and interests. Through art integration and storytelling, complex concepts become more accessible and engaging, fostering a deeper understanding and retention of knowledge. Moreover, the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) further enriches the learning experience,

providing personalised assistance and innovative tools for both learners and educators. With AI-driven resources, students can explore subjects in interactive and immersive ways, promoting curiosity and exploration. At KIIT, teachers are equipped with advanced technologies and can facilitate dynamic and inclusive classrooms, catering to the individual needs of every student. However, KIIT's vision extends beyond academic excellence; it aims to cultivate leaders and innovators who can thrive in an ever-changing world. By fostering an entrepreneurial mindset, KIIT empowers students to not just seek jobs but to create opportunities. Through project-based learning, internships, and mentorship programs, students develop the skills, confidence, and vision to shape their destinies.

Anti-graft crusade to arrest: Kejriwal's political journey

Alok KN Mishra
alok.mishra@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: A little less than three decades ago, Arvind Kejriwal was an officer in the Income Tax department posted in Delhi, reporting under the same larger organisation structure of the department of revenue, from where sleuths of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) turned up on Thursday and placed the now 55-year-old under arrest. Between quitting his job as joint commissioner of Income Tax in 2006 and his arrest over allegations related to alleged irregularities in a now-abandoned 2021-22 excise policy, Kejriwal transited through the three main dimensions of public life: a civil servant, an activist, and a politician on a journey that saw him described as RTI activist, India Against Corruption leader, Aam Aadmi Party convener, and chief minister. Thursday's arrest is in connection with allegations pertaining to Delhi's excise policy that his AAP administration launched in its sixth year in power in the national capital. The party, which has seen three of its top leaders jailed by federal agencies in connection with the case, has claimed that the allegations are a part of a political conspiracy by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a charge the ruling party at the Centre has dismissed. Over the years, Kejriwal and his colleagues have demonstrated electoral performances that do indeed make them a formidable presence in the national political landscape after the AAP scripted political history by winning its first elections in 2013, a year after it was set up. Behind Kejriwal's and AAP's political disruption of the nation's political establishment was an anti-politics populist message honed during the 2011 India Against Corruption demonstrations. In just over a decade, the party has secured brute majority governments in Delhi and Punjab, won seats across Gujarat and Goa, and sent 10 members to the Rajya Sabha. It is now the third-largest party nationally after the BJP and the opposition Indian

In the run up to Kejriwal's arrest

6.30pm Hours after the CM failed to secure interim protection, ED team reaches his official residence to carry out searches and question him

7.34pm Delhi ministers and AAP leaders Saurabh Bharadwaj and Atishi arrive at Kejriwal's residence

7.42pm Kejriwal's legal team files petition in SC against HC order refusing the interim relief

7.57pm Bharadwaj says no one allowed to enter CM's residence, "seems house being raided"

8.05pm Police reinforcements rushed to outside Kejriwal's residence

8.06pm AAP leaders, workers stage protest on the road to CM's home

8.14pm Kejriwal will not resign after arrest, says Delhi assembly speaker Ram Niwas Goel

9.10pm Kejriwal arrested

Developments in the high court

- HC asks ED to show material backing summons to Arvind Kejriwal in excise case
- Additional solicitor general SV Raju says ED is summoning him as an individual "and not in an official capacity. There is material to call him."
- HC asks ED to show the material while considering

Kejriwal's plea seeking to restrain the agency from taking coercive action against him

- Court refrains from stopping ED from taking coercive action
- The court tells Kejriwal that unless he heeds summons, "how would you know what information they want?"



Arvind Kejriwal and other AAP leaders in 2013. HT ARCHIVE

VK Saxena recommended a CBI probe into the excise policy, the federal agency registered a case against 15 accused, including then Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia. Sisodia was arrested on February 26, 2023 and in October, AAP MP Sanjay Singh — another prominent face — was arrested in the same case. Kejriwal and his colleagues have often cited these political cases to accuse Modi and his party of being unscrupulous political powers that play an unfair game and in doing so, have attempted to position the activist-turned-politician as a future alternative to Modi himself. All eyes will now be on the nature of the fight — legal and political — the party launches with some of its main leaders imprisoned, and the implications that lie for the Lok Sabha elections due over the next two months.

National Congress. The first victory, with 28 seats, led to a short-lived government of mere 49 days — it was the party itself that pulled the plug on the government with a plan to seek a bigger political mandate. The gamble worked and after an electric campaign marked with door-to-door canvassing and mohalla outreach, the party snagged a historic 67-seat victory in 2015. Then came a repeat victory in Delhi in 2020, and a sweep of Punjab in 2022. At the centre of AAP's success is Kejriwal himself, an omnipresent figure deeply involved in strategy, messaging, and shaping the party's upstart brand of governance. His supporters laud policies like free electricity and water in Delhi, alongside a focus in education and health care. But since its victory in Punjab in 2022, the party has faced major headwinds. It began with then health minister Satyendar Jain being arrested by the ED on May 30, 2022 for alleged money laundering. In July 2022, after Delhi lieutenant governor (LG)

Two killed in building collapse in N-E Delhi

Karn Pratap Singh
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NEW DELHI: Two people were killed while another was critically injured after a two-storey building collapsed in a residential neighbourhood at Kabir Nagar in northeast Delhi early on Thursday, police said.



The two-storey building which collapsed at Kabir Nagar in northeast Delhi on Thursday. SANCHIT KHANNA/HT PHOTO

The three men were friends and lived with their families in the same lane, some 50 metres away from the old and rickety building which was being used for running an illegal jeans stitching unit. They were working on the ground floor when the incident took place around 2.00am, the police said.

Delhi Fire Services (DFS) chief Atul Garg said at about 2:19am, the fire control room received a call regarding a building that had collapsed near the Kabir Nagar crematorium. Four fire tenders along with a rescue team rushed to the site.

"From locals, our firemen learnt that a two-storey building had collapsed, and some people were trapped under the debris. The rescue teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) also arrived. We launched a rescue operation and brought out three people from the debris. They were critically injured and were rushed to Guru Teg Bahadur hospital. Two of them were declared dead by doctors," added Garg.

The deceased were identified as Arshad Ansari, 26, Mohammad Tauhid Rauf, 20, both residents of Kabir Nagar.

Their injured friend, Rehan Ahmed, 22, was also from the same neighbourhood. Rehan needed multiple stitches on his head and the left portion of his face was engorged due to injuries caused by blunt objects, the police said.

The owner of the building, Mohammad Shahid, who is in his 50s and also lived in the same neighbourhood with his family, absconded soon after the building collapsed. He could not be caught till evening.

A case of death by negligence and negligent conduct with respect to pulling down or repairing buildings was registered under Sections 304A and 288 of the Indian Penal Code, deputy commissioner of police (northeast) Joy Tirkey said.

"Demolition work was going on in the adjacent building that is the ancestral house of Shahid. Our initial investigation has

revealed that some heavy metal beams and rods of the demolished building were kept on the roof of the two-storey building. There is a possibility that half of the building came crashing down owing to the weight of the items kept on its roof. We are also probing if the building had developed cracks and damages due to the demolition work in the adjacent house. Both properties were owned by Shahid," DCP Tirkey said.

The process of demolishing the remaining portion of the two-storey building began after the search and rescue operation by the rescue teams of the NDRF and the DFS concluded late in the morning.

The area around the building was cordoned off by the agencies by putting "do not cross" tapes and deployment of security personnel, to stop people from going near it, the police said.

JNUSU ELECTIONS SET TO BE HELD TODAY AFTER GAP OF FOUR YEARS

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: Student union elections will be held at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) after four years on Friday. Students will vote for the four posts of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU), the results for which will be declared on Sunday.

In 2019, JNU's Left Unity group, comprising Left-affiliated students' organisations — All India Students' Association (AISA), Students' Federation of India (SFI), Democratic Students Federation (DSF) and All India Students' Federation (AISF) — swept the JNUSU polls for the fourth year in a row. SFI's Aishe Ghosh was made president.

JNUSU polls have not been held since the Covid-19 outbreak in 2019. This time, the Left Unity has fielded PhD student Dhananjay as its presidential candidate while BJP-backed Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) has named Umesh Chandra Ajmeera for president.

For the remaining posts, the Left Unity has fielded Avijit Ghosh (SFI) for vice president, Swati Singh (DSF) for general secretary and Sajid (AISF) for the post of joint secretary. ABVP's nominees are Deepika Sharma for vice president, Arjun Anand as secretary and Govind Dangi for the joint secretary's post. Other parties include the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), the Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students' Association (BAPSA) and Samajwadi Chatra Sangathan (SCS).

Gang that dismantled cars busted

Leena Dhankhar
leena.dhankhar@hindustantimes.com

GURUGRAM: The Nuh police on Thursday announced that they have busted a gang that dismantled cars that were stolen from the National Capital Region (NCR), and said that they have arrested one person involved in the racket.

According to police, after dismantling the cars, the gang then sold the parts they salvaged as scrap to syndicates based in

Uttar Pradesh. The syndicates in UP would then reassemble the parts, and sell the vehicles to northeastern states such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur.

An average of nine vehicles are reported stolen in Gurugram every day, making vehicle theft one of the most prevalent crimes in the city, said police. Meanwhile, more than 100 cars are reported stolen in Delhi per day, according to police data.

Sharing the modus operandi

of the gang, Nuh superintendent of police Narender Bijarniya said that the police received a tip-off, based on which they raided a workshop at Rajaka village in the district. "When the police team reached the spot, they saw a man dismantling a jeep. The team then recovered a few scrapped vehicles, a gas cylinder, gas cutters, and other equipment. A pick-up truck was also parked at the spot, and some vehicle parts were loaded in it," the SP said.

Bijarniya said that during questioning, the man, identified as Mustaqeem Khan, revealed that he and his aides used to dismantle six vehicles every day, and would transport the parts twice a week to Meerut in UP, preparing a bill for scrap metal in order to ensure that they have a safe passage to UP.

The police said that they have registered a case against Khan under Indian Penal Code sections 379 (theft), 420 (fraud) and 201 (destruction of evidence).

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Forest department notice to DDA over tree-felling inside Sanjay Van

HT Correspondent
htreporters@hindustantimes.com

New Delhi: Delhi's Forest and Wildlife department has issued a notice to the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) regarding the illegal felling of trees in Sanjay Van, based on allegations by a group of activists.

The department said though it had given permission to prune trees at Sanjay Van last year, based on the complaint, it was seeking a response from the DDA on the status of pruning and whether any trees were felled in the forest.

"Whereas, it has been alleged that a tree offence has been committed by illegal cutting of trees located at Sanjay Van, Mehrauli, without permission, which is a violation of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994.

The statement or presence of the person (s) addressed in this notice is required to find out the factual position and to determine the extent of the offence according to its merit," said the order, addressed to the deputy director, horticulture of DDA's divisions 4 and 6, a copy of which HT has seen.

The order directed DDA officials to appear before the deputy conservator of forests (south) and tree officer at their office in south Delhi's Tughlakabad on April 17, 2024 at 10:40am, adding failure to appear will result in legal action being initiated against the officials concerned.

A senior forest department official said, based on allegations and submission of photographs showing trees that were possibly head hacked, action

has been initiated. "We have sought a response on the same. An officer will present their case before us," said the official, adding that permission to prune trees was given early last year, but no permission was given to fell trees.

On HT's visit to Sanjay Van, it found pockets where trees were being pruned, with excessive pruning also observed in some parts. Saplings were seen planted around the trees that were pruned.

A senior DDA official, when contacted, denied that even a single tree was felled in the area. "DDA has taken up ecological restoration of Sanjay Van since last year. Native tree species of the Ridge are being planted and to do that, weeds are being cleared and the invasive vilayati kikar is being pruned, to make

openings in the top canopy. Over 20,000 saplings have been planted underneath such trees," said an official. He added that over 10,000 more native saplings will be planted this monsoon season.

The allegations were made by a volunteer group - There is No Earth B, which organises regular clean-up drives at Sanjay Van. The group, which has over 1,500 volunteers that take part in drives from time-to-time, said it carried out a thorough investigation at Sanjay Van on March 17, which led to them discovering multiple trees that were felled, it said.

"Such activities pose a severe threat to the ecological balance of Sanjay Van," said Stuti Chaturvedi, 20, a student of Miranda House and one of the volunteers.

HT Homage

Your Wisdom Continues to Inspire



C. S. Puri

29.06.1929 - 22.03.2022

Your love was, is, and always will be our anchor...

On this anniversary, we celebrate the beautiful life you lived and the enduring impact you've had on us

Puneet Puri (Son), Ajay Puri (Son)
Ankit (Grand Son), Anya (Grand Daughter)
S. S. Puri (Brother), Sudesh Puri (Sister-in-law)
M: 9891975363

Puri Consultants & Associates

COURT NOTICE TO GOVT ON FUNDS FOR DELHI WAQF BOARD SALARIES

NEW DELHI: The Delhi high court on Thursday issued notice in a plea challenging the Delhi government's scheme of using consolidated funds of the state to release salaries of the Imam and muezzin of the Delhi Waqf Board and non-Waqf Board.

A bench of acting chief justice Manmohan and justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora sought responses from the Delhi government, its Finance and Planning department and the Delhi Waqf Board, saying that the matter needed examination.

"The matter requires examination. Issue notice," the bench said in its order while also making the Delhi government's Revenue Department a party and posting the plea for July 22.

The plea filed by social activist and lawyer Rukmani Singh claimed that the Constitution of India provided that the state shall be secular and thus by paying salaries/honorarium to people of a particular religion, the Delhi government's policy was against the Constitution.

HTC

238 bird species sighted in annual Delhi bird race

HT Correspondent
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: At least 238 different bird species were sighted across the National Capital Region (NCR) on March 17 during the annual Delhi Bird Race, the findings of which was released on Thursday.

The Delhi Bird Race is a day-long event where birders set out from dawn to dusk to make note of different bird species across NCR. This year, 10 different teams set out across the region to record avian diversity, with a team led by birder Arvind Yadav logging 184 different species, officials said.

"The rare sightings made during the count included the Laggar falcon at Chandu wetlands, the ultramarine flycatcher at Bhondsi, and the fire-capped tit, also at Bhondsi," said birder Kanwar B Singh, one of the organisers of the event, whose team covered Bhondsi.

Singh said the extended win-

ter appeared to have delayed the arrival of summer breeding migrants. "This includes birds such as the golden oriole, blue-tailed and blue-cheeked bee-eaters, pheasant-tailed jacana, and the crested bunting, among others," he said.

Yadav said the overall diversity and density of birds was low

for this time of the year, adding more Aravalli forest birds were sighted in comparison to water species and waders. "We covered Najafgarh, Sultanpur, Chandu and Bhondsi, with the ultramarine flycatcher being a rare, interesting sighting. The bird has been sighted at Bhondsi for 10 days or so now," he said.

Delhiwale

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Mayank
Austen Soofi



The seller of diaries

Glimpsing into a citizen's life

{ PRIVATE CAPITAL } There's the cart for gol gappe. The other cart is selling nariyal pani. That one is crammed with bananas. The street outside the RK Ashram Metro station looks ordinary. And then you spot something extraordinary. A cart piled up with hundreds of 2024 diaries.

Nitin Kumar got the idea of such a stall way back in 2014 when he first arrived in Delhi and spotted a pavement establishment stocked with diaries in Mukherjee Nagar. He was in the locality for the same reason that draws many other young ambitious folks there—to enrol in one of the many coaching centres for competitive exam preparations. "I found the coaching fees too high, but I thought of starting a similar business to fund my stay and studies in Delhi," he says in a Hindi so eloquent and smooth-flowing that it is a joy to hear him speak.

A native of zila Etawah, Nitin Kumar aims to build a career in the police. He left his village after completing Class 10, and pursued higher educa-

tion while working in Delhi—he obtained his BSc degree from Jhansi's Bundelkhand University as a correspondence student. He says he left the home "income ke liye." Next moment, he makes a correction — "what I earn cannot be called income, it only helps me meet basic necessities." He could not succeed in the exams for Rajasthan Police, he says, and is now preparing for the similar exams for UP Police.

By selling diaries in Delhi, and keeping focus on the sub-inspector's post, Nitin Kumar has broken a tradition in the family. He explains in detail. "I'm from a zameeni-level background. My grandfather was a farmer, my father is a farmer, if I too become a farmer, then my children too will become farmers, and I don't want that." He lifts his gaze towards the Metro station, contracting his eyes. "In my life, I want parivartan."

Nitin Kumar gets the diaries from wholesalers in Old Delhi's Nai Sarak, and operates the stall everyday from noon to 9pm, after which he boards the Blue Line Metro back to his pad in distant Dwarka. The stall is destined for a short life, since its owner will consign it to history as soon as he realises his ardent dream.



READ: For more stories by Mayank Austen Soofi, scan the QR code

ॐ "A good book has no ending..." ॐ



In Loving Memory of SMT. INDIRA NARAIN

9 June 1934 - 21 March 2024

Our dear mother has left for her heavenly abode on 21st March 2024. Her kindness, grace, and wisdom touched each of us deeply. As we gather to honour her life, let us offer prayers for her peaceful journey and draw strength from the beautiful memories she leaves behind.

Prayer Meet

Saturday 23rd March 2024 | 4:00 pm - 5:00 pm
At her residence 1, Oak Drive, DLF Chattarpur Farms,
New Delhi - 110074

Fondly remembered by

Anil & Smita Narain Shalini & Varun Aggarwal
Sunil & Sangeeta Narain Kamini & Late Amit Gupta
All her grandchildren & great-grandchildren

"Memories grow more meaningful with every passing year..."

HT Homage

॥ ॐ शांति ॐ ॥
In the loving memory of Shri. Rajesh Batra



(25th December 1947 - 20th March 2024)

Uthala will be held at Chinmaya Mission, Lodhi Road
on Friday, 22nd March 2024, from 4 - 5 pm

In Grief
Karmawali Bajaj

Kamlesh Batra
Ruchi & Sameer Batra
Mili & Chintan Batra
Kanta & Ved Jawa

Kavita & Rakesh Batra
Kanika & Manav Batra
Kritika & Rahul Seth
Neetu & Sunil Saigal

Divij, Nishant, Avvya, Aryan, Rishit, Sanchit, Reyaansh, Reyaana
Sachdev, Sachdevas, Behals, Kumras, Sachdevs, Seths, Tanejas

Towa Sales Corporation, Photovision
New Delhi



Dr. S.K. Jain
(Eye Surgeon)

7th August 1938 - 22nd March 2016

In Loving Memory Of

A Life So Beautiful Lived

And A Heart So Deeply Loved

Fondly remembered by,

Prabha Jain (Wife),

Dr. Surdeep Kishore Jain (Son),

Manisha Jain (Daughter-in-law),

Dr. Aditya Kishore Jain (Grandson),

Dr. Nikita Jain (Grand Daughter-in-law),

Divij Kishore Jain (Grandson)

541 - 543, Cycle Market and

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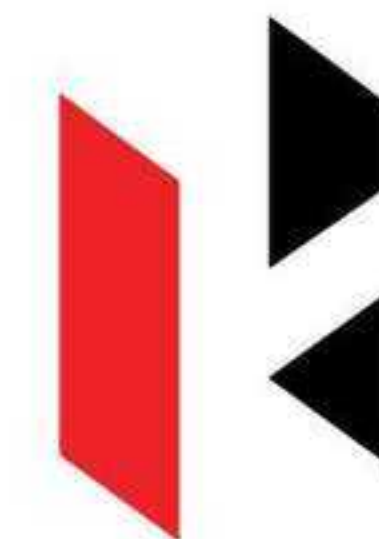
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SC refuses to stay appointment of poll officers through new law

Utkarsh Anand

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NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to stay the appointment of two new election commissioners (ECs) under a recently enacted statute, noting that the law cannot be blamed exclusively for lacking a judge on the selection panel, and added that the court cannot order Parliament to draft legislation in a specific way.

Even as the bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta did not find the situation "exceptional" or "extraordinary" justifying its interference, it berated the Centre for expediting the appointment process while the matter was still before the highest court. It also questioned the delay in sending the shortlisted names to the selection panel that it said considered 200 names in two hours, observing that the government ought to have been "more careful" in avoiding the controversies around the constitutional posts.

The proceedings before the top court on Thursday centered around a pair of pleas demanding a stay on the operation of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

Questioning the alleged haste shown by the government in appointing two new ECs on March 14, the pleas argued that until the legality of the 2023 law was decided, the government should be ordered to fill the vacancies in the Election Commission of India (ECI) through a consultative procedure that included the Chief Justice of India (CJI) in the selection panel.

Senior counsel Vikas Singh, Sanjay Parikh, Gopal Sankaranarayanan and advocates Prashant



Bhushan and Kaleswaram Raj appeared on behalf of applicants seeking a stay on the Act and pressing that a fresh appointment of two new ECs should take place by a selection panel envisaged by a Constitution bench judgment of the Supreme Court in March last year. The judgment in Anoop Baranwal Vs Union of India said that the selection of CEC and ECs should be done by a panel headed by the Prime Minister and comprising two other members — leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and the CJI, to ensure transparency in the selection mechanism.

Turning down their plea, the bench said that the March 2023 judgment was a "nudge" to Parliament for enacting a law since all appointments were being made by the President on an advise from the council of ministers.

"It's not that elections were not being held before this judgment. And we had some excellent election commissioners. We agree there was a push from this court on the procedure. But this court did not say what sort of a law must be passed. Until a law was framed, a via media was prescribed (in the form of a selection panel including

the CJI). This court stepped in to ensure there is a law. Once a legislation is framed, it will have to be challenged on different grounds."

Agreeing with the petitioners that independent ECs are a must in the interest of democracy, the bench said that it cannot be postulated that all panels must have a member of judiciary.

"The judgment (in Baranwal case) does not say that a member of the judiciary has to be there. The Constitution bench took exception to the council of ministers advising the President. It then left it for Parliament to frame a law and lay down a mechanism for the time being. Now, the old mechanism has been replaced by a parliamentary law. Nowhere in this judgment did the court say who should be the members. How can a court direct Parliament to frame a law in a particular manner...we cannot say all other methods where there is not a judicial member is wrong," it remarked.

The court said it is willing to examine the new law's validity, but the legislation cannot be stayed in the meantime. "Those are exceptional cases where the law was stayed. This is not a case

where we can say you are bound to succeed. We may accept your submission once we hear the case, but we cannot say today that it's the only possible outcome," it added.

Further, the bench said that the balance of convenience lies in favour of the government when the general elections are round the corner. "One member commission or three-member commission? And there are no allegations against the members," it said.

Turning to solicitor general Tushar Mehta, the bench asked the law officer representing the government to explain the procedure of how the two ECs were picked up. The President on March 14 appointed retired bureaucrats Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu as ECs after the high-level selection committee met in the morning. It was the first time that ECs were chosen under the new law. Two days later, ECI announced the 2024 general elections, due to begin on April 19.

"One of the ways to ensure fairness is to give sufficient time to the members of the selection panel for examining the names. You gave all names to them only on the morning of March 14... What was the time given to LoP to consider the names? 200 names had to be considered within two hours... You could have been transparent. Your search panel should have been activated earlier. This could have been easily avoided by giving names in advance of 2-3 days," it told the SG.

While Mehta pointed out that the expediency followed due to the election schedule, the bench said that adequate time must be given to all members of the selection committee when appointments of ECs are to take place. "Their views are important...One has to be careful. These are constitutional

appointments. Every member of the selection committee must have sufficient time to apply his or her mind. Justice must not only be done, it must also be seen to be done," it said.

The court also did not find favour with the Centre "fast-tracking" the appointment of ECs while the applications for stalling the appointments remained pending before it. "What is a matter of concern that it should have been avoided. Not only what happened in the committee but also that the appointments could have been deferred since there were applications in this court...Once it was mentioned, it should have been delayed by a day or two," it said.

The court further told Mehta: "You should have gone a little slowly. For selecting one EC, you earlier fixed the meeting on March 15. For appointing two, you advanced it to March 14?" The SG said that he would be able to satisfy the bench on all counts once the matter is heard in detail.

In an affidavit on Wednesday, the Centre opposed the pleas filed by Congress leader Jaya Thakur and non-profit Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) for suspending the 2023 law, emphasising that the new law envisions a "democratic, collaborative and inclusive" regime that cannot be faulted solely for not having a judge on the selection panel.

"The case of the petitioners is premised on one fundamental fallacy that independence can only be maintained in any authority when the selection committee is of a particular formulation. It must be noted that the independence of the Election Commission, or any other organisation or authority, does not arise from and is not attributable to the presence of a judicial member in the selection committee," said the affidavit.

{ ORDER ON BULK WHATSAPP MESSAGES }

EC directs govt to stop Viksit Bharat messages

Akshita Kumari

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NEW DELHI: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday directed the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) to immediately stop delivery of bulk WhatsApp messages under the "Viksit Bharat Sampark" initiative, to voters, that underlines Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration's record over the last decade.

The poll body, which passed the order after receiving several complaints of violation of the Model Code of Conduct that came into force on March 16, ordered "no further delivery" of the messages and sought a compliance report from the ministry in the matter.

"The move is a part of a series of decisions taken by the Commission to ensure a level-playing field," ECI said in a statement.

Asking the government to ensure there is "no further delivery" of the bulk WhatsApp messages to the voters, ECI sought an "immediate" compliance report on the matter from the ministry.

The poll body also said that "MeitY informed that although the messages were sent out before the Model Code of Conduct came into force, some of them could have possibly been delivered to recipients with a delay because of systemic and network limitations," the statement said.

The ministry did not respond to queries on the poll body's order.

Through the WhatsApp messages, which voters began receiving on Friday, a day before the Election Commission announced the schedule for the Lok Sabha polls, Modi sought suggestions for shaping the Centre's "Viksit Bharat" (developed India) agenda and underlined his administration's record over the last decade.

In a letter, Modi said: "I need and indeed, look forward to your ideas, suggestions and support as we work to fulfil the resolve of building a Viksit Bharat."

The "Viksit Bharat" agenda is

Election body orders transfer of non-cadre DMs, SPs in 4 states

Shriya Ganguly

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NEW DELHI: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday issued orders for transfer of non-cadre officers who are posted as District Magistrates (DMs) and Superintendents of Police (SPs) in Gujarat, Punjab, Odisha and West Bengal, citing its commitment to a level-playing field in the Lok Sabha polls.

It also ordered transfers of the senior superintendent of police Bathinda in Punjab and the SP in Sonitpur, Assam, in view of their "kinship or familial association" with elected political representatives.

"The officials in these two districts have been transferred as pre-emptive measures to dispel any apprehensions of administration being



The LS polls to be held from April to June.

biased or perceived to be compromised," the Commission said.

According to an official, the ECI is continuing its strict crackdown by transferring bureaucrats with close ties to the ruling party in their respective states. On March 18, the Commission ordered the transfer of the Director General of Police of West Bengal and the Home Secretaries of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

complaint regarding the bulk WhatsApp messages.

According to a statement on Tuesday, after examination of the complaint, the district media certification and monitoring committee found prima facie evidence of a violation of the Model Code of Conduct.

The TMC welcomed ECI's order on Thursday. Talking to reporters in Kolkata, senior party leader and West Bengal minister Chandrima Bhattacharya questioned why the central government seemed unaware of the restrictions.

"It is good EC has looked into the complaints and taken immediate steps as the Model Code of Conduct is already in force. But how come the Modi government was not aware of that?" she asked.

"If the fruits of development truly reached the people, why did the ruling party in Delhi have to take so much trouble to list its achievements under the 'Viksit Bharat' campaign," she added.

AIADMK releases final list of 16 candidates for TN; 1 for Puducherry

Divya Chandrababu

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CHENNAI: The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) on Thursday released its second and final list of 17 nominees — 16 seats in Tamil Nadu and the lone constituency in Puducherry — for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The AIADMK, which will contest in 32 of the 39 segments in the state, has now completed the exercise of naming nominees for the single-phase general elections on April 19, and party chief Edappadi K Palaniswami is all set to launch his election campaign from Tiruchirappalli on March 24.

The party had announced its first list of 16 candidates on Wednesday, soon after its finalised its seat-sharing arrangement with allies Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) and Puthiya Tamizhagam (PT). According to the electoral pact, DMDK will contest from five seats while PT and SDPI have been allocated one seat each.

In its second list, the party has fielded Simla Muthuchozhan, who had unsuccessfully contested against late AIADMK matriarch J Jayalalithaa from the RK Nagar assembly constituency in 2016, from Tirunelveli.

Daughter-in-law of former DMK leader SP Sarguna Pandian, Muthuchozhan is the only woman candidate announced by the AIADMK for the Lok Sabha polls. The list also named doctors G



Edappadi K Palaniswami

Premkumar and S Pasupathi from Sriperumbudur and Vellore seats, respectively.

The ruling DMK has named veteran leader T R Baalu and Kathir Anand, son of top leader and Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan for Sriperumbudur and Vellore constituencies, respectively.

The party has nominated U Rani from Vilavancode segment in Kanniyakumari district, bypoll to which will be held on April 19 alongside the Lok Sabha polls. The vacancy was caused due to the resignation of Vijayadharani, who joined the BJP after quitting her MLA post.

Besides Sriperumbudur and Vellore, Palaniswami announced candidates for the Lok Sabha segments of Dharmapuri, Tiruvannamalai, Kallakurichi, Tirupur, Nilgiris (SC), Coimbatore, Pollachi, Tiruchirappalli, Perambalur, Mayiladuthurai, Sivaganga, Thoothukudi, Tirunelveli and Kanniyakumari.

The party has fielded G Tamizhvendan from the lone Puducherry seat, which will also go to polls on April 19.

UNRAVELLING THE TAX TROUBLES OF CONGRESS

How the law works

1 Section 13A applies to political parties registered with ECI under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951

2 Political parties are allowed to accept voluntary contributions from anyone, including corporates

Section 13A of the Income Tax Act, 1961 deals with tax provisions relating to political parties

Exemptions under the law...

100% EXEMPTION House property, other sources, capital ON INCOME FROM gains & voluntary contributions received

...With some caveats

- The exemption is subject to a set of stipulations, including maintenance of books of account, records of each contribution of more than ₹20,000 and audit reports by a chartered accountant
- Parties must not receive donation of more than ₹2,000 other than by way of cheques, demand drafts or through bank account transfer
- Parties must also furnish their verified return of income for previous year

Tax demands on the Cong

₹105 cr Recovery demand Cong faces as outstanding tax for AY 2018-19

Its claim for full exemption under Section 13A was rejected on two grounds:

- The party did not submit its IT return within the time limit
- Congress received cash donations of ₹14.49 L in excess of ₹2,000
- The recovery demand includes around ₹35 crore as interest

Congress defence

- Congress maintains it submitted income return within the stipulated time
- Says ₹14.49 lakh received from office-bearers, MLAs can't be construed as "donations" under IT Act

The adjudication so far

- **June 2021:** IT dept issues Cong a ₹105 crore demand notice
- **October 2021:** IT commissioner (CIT-Appeals), Delhi rejects a stay plea
- **March 2023:** CIT-Appeals junks Congress's challenge to January 2023 IT notice
- **May:** Cong moves Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT)
- **February 13-14, 2024:** IT department writes to the bankers of Congress for marking a lien on the amount lying in the party's bank accounts under Section 226(3) of the IT Act
- **February 20:** IT department receives bank drafts of ₹65 crore from Congress bankers
- **March 8:** ITAT rejects party's plea to stay recovery proceedings
- **March 13:** Delhi HC rejects Congress's appeal against ITAT order
- **March 20:** Congress receives a fresh IT notice dated March 14 for reassessment of tax for AY 1994-95

HC to decide today on CBI's petition against acquittal of A Raja in 2G case

NEW DELHI: The Delhi high court will pronounce its verdict on Friday on whether to admit the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)'s plea challenging the acquittal of former telecom minister A Raja and others in the 2G spectrum allocation case.

The order on the CBI's "leave to appeal" is scheduled to be pronounced by Justice Dinesh Kumar Sharma at 10.30am on Friday. The judge had reserved his decision on this aspect on March 14.

"Leave to appeal" is a formal permission granted by a court to a party to challenge a decision in a higher court.



A Raja

The special court had, on December 21, 2017, acquitted Raja, DMK MP Kanimozhi and others in the CBI and Enforcement Directorate (ED) cases related to the case.

On March 19, 2018, the ED approached the high court, challenging a special court's December

2017 order acquitting all the accused in the case. A day later, the CBI too challenged the acquittal of the accused in the high court.

The CBI has contended before the high court that there are glaring illegalities in the trial court's judgment acquitting all the accused in the case.

Besides DMK leaders Raja and Kanimozhi, the special court had acquitted former telecom secretary Siddharth Behura, Raja's former private secretary RK Chandolia, Unitech Limited managing director Sanjay Chandra in the 2G scam case lodged by the CBI.

{ BETWEEN APR 12, 2019 AND JAN 11, 2024 }

BJP got 84% of bonds bought by top 10 individuals

Aditi Agrawal

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The top 10 individual donors bought electoral bonds worth ₹180.2 crore between April 12, 2019 and January 11, 2024, and of this, ₹152.2 crore or 84.5% was donated to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), according to the latest tranche of data released by the Election Commission on Thursday.

The second biggest recipient was the Trinamool Congress (TMC) which got ₹16.2 crore or about 9% of the money. The

third biggest was the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) with ₹5 crore.

The top donor, Arceel Mittal's chairperson Lakshmi Niwas Mittal, bought bonds worth ₹35 crore, all of which were donated to the BJP.

The second top individual donor was Laxmi Das Valabhadas Merchant, who donated all his ₹25 crore to the BJP in November 2023.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Merchant is the Group Controller of Reliance Industries Ltd, and has been at the company for more than 33

THE 2ND BIGGEST RECIPIENT WAS THE TMC, WHICH GOT ₹16.2 CRORE OR ABOUT 9% OF THE MONEY, WHILE BRS EMERGED 3RD WITH ₹5 CRORE

years.

Of the top 10 individuals, Mittal, Merchant, KR Raja JT, Inder Thakurdas Jaisinghani, Rahul Jagannath Joshi and his son

Harmesh Rahul Joshi, Raju Kumar Sharma, Saurabh Gupta, and Anita Hemant Shah donated only to the BJP.

Jaisinghani is the chairperson and managing director of Polycab India, the country's largest manufacturer of wires and cables. The Joshi father-son duo are directors on the boards of multiple freight companies.

IndiGo's Rahul Bhatia donated Rs 16.2 crore to the TMC, and ₹3.8 crore to the Nationalist Congress Party.

Separately, IndiGo and related entities donated ₹31 crore to the BJP in May 2019,

and ₹5 crore to the Congress in April 2023

Rajesh Mannal Agrawal, the CEO of Ajanta Pharma, donated a total of ₹13 crore — ₹5 crore each to the BJP and the BRS, and ₹3 crore to Congress. Ajanta Pharma separately donated ₹3 crore to the BJP and ₹1 crore to the Congress.

Another significant individual donor, Biocon's Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, ranked 12th in the list of individual donors and donated ₹6 crore — ₹4 crore to BJP, and ₹1 crore each to the Janata Dal (Secular) and Congress.

Adhir among 56 named in Cong's 3rd LS poll list

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: The Congress on Thursday named its Lok Sabha floor leader Adhir Ranjan Choudhary, former lawmaker MV Rajeev Gowda and former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) minister Jayaprakash Hegde, who jumped ship earlier this month, in its third list of 56 candidates for the much-anticipated Lok Sabha elections this summer.

The party had earlier declared the names of 82 candidates as it released its two lists on March 8 and 12, respectively. With the latest announcement, the party has announced 138 candidates so far.

The third list was released on a day the Congress's Central Election Committee (CEC) held its fifth round of meeting on the remaining poll candidates, details of which are yet to be announced.

According to people aware of the matter, the CEC cleared the candidature of former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijaya Singh from Rajgarh. While former MP Kantilal Bhuria will be fielded from the state's Ratlam city, Arun Yadav, another former lawmaker, will be fielded from Guna, to take on Union civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia.

The party, people cited above said, also cleared Danish Ali's candidature from Amroha, and Tanuj Punia, son of CEC member PL Punia, from Barabanki, in UP.

The party's third list named two candidates from Arunachal Pradesh, Il from Gujarat, 17 from Karnataka, three from Maharashtra, six from Rajasthan, five from Telangana, eight from West Bengal and for the lone seat in Puducherry. The seats included 12 reserved ones. The Congress left the Sikar seat in Rajasthan for the CPI(M), its ally in Bengal.

According to the list, Chowdhury will contest the elections from Baharampur in Bengal and Gowda from Bangalore North in Karnataka. Hegde, who switched over from the BJP to the Congress earlier this month, will contest from Udipi Chikmagalur in the southern state. Besides them, former Union minister K Rehman Khan's son Mansoor Ali Khan has been fielded from Bangalore Central. Similarly, BN Chandrappa, working president of Karnataka

Breakdown of Cong's 3rd list

The Congress fielded 56 candidates and allotted one seat to its ally, Communist Party of India (Marxist), in the third list for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections

ARUNACHAL PRADESH	MAHARASHTRA	WEST BENGAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NABAM TUKI Arunachal West ● BOSIRAM SIRAM Arunachal East 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MRUNAL RAVINDRA HEBBALKAR Belgaum ● SAMYUKTA S PATIL Bagalkot ● RADHAKRISHNA Gulbarga ● G KUMAR NAIK Raichur ● SAGAR KHANDRE Bidar ● K RAJASHEKAR BASAVARAJ HITNAL Koppal ● WINOD ASOOTI Dharwad ● ANJALI NIMBALKAR Uttara Kannada ● PRABHA MALLIKARJUN Davanagere ● JAYAPRAKASH HEGDE Udipi Chikmagalur ● PADMARAJ Dakshina Kannada ● BN CHANDRAPPA Chitradurga ● M LAKSHMAN Mysore ● MV RAJEEV GOWDA Bangalore North ● MANSOOR ALI KHAN Bangalore Central ● SOWMYA REDDY Bangalore South 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SUNITHA MAHENDER REDDY Malkajgiri ● DANAM NAGENDER Secunderabad ● GADDAM RAJITH REDDY Chevella ● MALLU RAVI Nagarkurnool ● WEST BENGAL ● ALI IMRAN RAMZ (VICTOR) Raiganj ● MOSTAQE ALAM Malda Uttar ● ISHA KHAN CHOWDHARY Malda Dakshin ● MD MURTOJA HOSSAIN (BOKUL) Jangipur ● ADHIR RANJAN CHOUHDARY Baharampur ● PRADIP BHATTACHARYA Kolkata Uttar ● NEPAL MAHATO Purulia ● MILTON RASHID Birbhum
KARNATAKA	TELANGANA	PUDUCHERRY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AMITBHAI CHAVDA Anand ● KALUSINH DABHI Kheda ● GULABSIKH CHAUHAN Panmahal ● SUKHRAMBHAI RATHWA Hota Udupur ● NILESH KUMBANI Surat ● PRIYANKA JARAKIHOI Chikkodi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GOWAAL K PADAVI Nandurbar ● BALWANT BASAWANT WANKHEDE Amravati ● VASANTRAO BALWANTRAO CHAVAN Nanded ● RAVINDRA HEMRAJ DHANGEKAR Pune ● SHIVAJIRAO KALGE Latur ● PRANITI SUSHILKUMAR SHINDE Solapur ● SHAHU SHAHAJI CHATRAPATI Kolhapur ● KULDEEP INDORA Ganganagar ● LEFT FOR CPI(M) Sikar ● SUNIL SHARMA Jaipur ● SANGEETA BENIWAJ Pali ● UMEDA RAM BENIWAJ Barmer ● URMILA JAIN BHAYA Jhalawar-Baran ● GADDAM VAMSI KRISHNA Peddapalle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● VE VAITHILINGAM Puducherry

Pradesh Congress Committee and a former MP has been named from Chitradurga. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's son-in-law and children of five Karnataka ministers figured in the party's third list of candidates.

Public works minister Satish Jarkiholi's daughter Priyanka Jarkiholi has been named from Chikkodi; transport minister Ramalinga Reddy's daughter Sowmya Reddy from Bangalore South, co-operative minister Shivanand Patil's daughter Samyukta S Patil from Bagalkot, women and child development minister Laxmi Hebbalkar's son Mrinal Ravindra Hebbalkar from Belgaum and minister for forest, ecology and environment Eshwar Khandre's son Sagar Khandre from Bidar.

Former Union minister Tushar Chaudhary has been repeated

from Sabarkantha while Sonal Patel has been fielded against Union home minister Amit Shah in Gandhinagar, in Gujarat.

In Bengal, Congress MP Pradip Bhattacharya will fight from Kolkata Uttar. In Arunachal, former chief minister Nabam Tuki will fight from Arunachal West and Bosiram Siram from Arunachal East. The Congress, in Maharashtra, gave a ticket to MLA Vasantrao Balwantrao Chavan from Nanded and fielded Praniti Shinde, daughter of former Union minister Sushil Kumar Shinde, from Solapur. Kasbapeth legislator Ravindra Dhangekar will fight the polls from Pune while Balwant

Wankhede, Daryapur MLA, is the candidate from Amravati (reserved for Scheduled Caste). Shahu Chatrapati, scion of Kolhapur royal family, is the party's candidate from Kolhapur, while Shivajirao Kalge will contest from Latur (Scheduled Caste) seat.

In Rajasthan, the Congress announced the names of five candidates - all fresh faces - while reserving the Sikar seat for the CPI(M). AICC secretary Kuldeep Indora will fight from Ganganagar and former minister Pramod Jain Bhaya's wife Urmila Jain Bhaya from Jhalawar-Baran seat.

Sangeeta Beniwal, chairperson of Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, has been fielded from Pali. Mallu Ravi, a vice-president of Telangana Congress, fielded from Nagarkurnool (Scheduled Caste) seat.

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BJP fields 9 candidates for TN in third list for LS polls

Smriti Kak Ramachandran and Divya Chandrababu
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NEW DELHI/CHENNAI: The former Governor of Telangana and LG of Puducherry, Tamilisai Soundararajan, who resigned from the gubernatorial position earlier this week, will be the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s candidate from Chennai South, Union minister L. Murugan from Nilgiris and party's Tamil Nadu unit chief K Annamalai has been given the ticket to contest from Coimbatore, according to a list of nine candidates announced for the state that will go to polls in the first phase of general elections on April 19.

Soundararajan had a controversial stint as Telangana governor, and accused the then ruling Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) of disrespecting a woman governor. A doctor-turned-politician, she was a former president of the party's Tamil Nadu unit but has not won any Lok Sabha or assembly polls. In 2019, she lost to DMK's Kanimozhi from Thoothukudi.

"I thank our Prime Minister Narendra Modi and national president (JP Nadda) for giving me this opportunity. The mood of the people is electrified toward the lotus," Soundararajan said.

L. Murugan, who is minister of state for information and technology, was renominated as the party's candidate for the Rajya Sabha from Madhya Pradesh in February. A Dalit face of the party, it was during his presidency that the party positioned itself as an alternative to the regional satraps the DMK and the AIADMK. His "vetrivel yatra" carried out in reverence for local deity Lord Muruga made him a household name.

Although Murugan shared amiable ties with the AIADMK, his

TN in focus of BJP's 3rd list

Constituency	Candidate
Chennai South	Tamilisai Soundararajan
Chennai Central	Vinoj P Selvam
Vellore	AC Shanmugam
Krishnagiri	C Narasimhan
Nilgiris	L Murugan
Coimbatore	K Annamalai
Perambalur	TR Paarivendhar
Tirunelveli	Nainar Nagendran
Kanniyakumari	Pon Radhakrishnan

successor, Annamalai, raised eyebrows for going against the party line by attacking the ally. The strain in ties between the BJP and the AIADMK is largely attributed to the former IPS officer's aggressive posturing. Annamalai earned a pat on the back from Modi who commended him for his "En Mann En Makka" (translate) yatra.

"Heartfelt thanks to our beloved PM @narendramodi for constituting his faith in me and making me to contest from Coimbatore in the 2024 Parliamentary election. This comes at a time when the people of TN are awaiting a political change that will take TN towards the destiny of development," Annamalai posted on X.

Striking a balance between experienced hands and new faces, the party has also given a ticket to Pon Radhakrishnan from Kanyakumari and Vinoj P Selvam from Chennai Central. Radhakrishnan was the minister of state for finance and shipping between May 2014 and May 2019. Born in Alathankarai village in Kanyakumari in 1952, he was elected to the 13th Lok Sabha from Nagercoil Lok Sabha constituency in 1999. In 2000, he became an MoS

for Youth Affairs and Sports and was later given charge of urban development and poverty alleviation. "He is an old hand, a well-known face of the party in the state. He won the seat from Kanyakumari in 2014 as well," said a state leader.

The 37-year-old Selvam, a former president of the state's youth wing, is an alumnus of the London School of Economics and had unsuccessfully contested the assembly polls from Chennai Harbour.

From Vellore, the party has fielded A C Shanmugam, the founder of the New Justice Party. He was earlier a member of the AIADMK and won the Lok Sabha elections in 1984.

C Narasimhan will contest from Krishnagiri, TR Paarivendhar from Perambalur and Nainar Nagendran from Tirunelveli. The DMK has allotted the Tirunelveli seat to the Congress which is yet to announce their candidate.

The initial list released by the BJP suggested that Nagendran was to contest from Thoothukudi, from where Kanimozhi is seeking a re-election, but a corrected list was released a few minutes later.

CONG ANNOUNCES FIRST LIST OF 34 CANDIDATES FOR ARUNACHAL POLLS

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: The Congress on Thursday announced the first list of 34 candidates, including three former ministers, for the upcoming assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh. The state will go to assembly and Lok Sabha elections simultaneously on April 19.

Among the prominent names in the list are former ministers Kumar Waii, Takam Pario, and Tanga Byaling. The three women debutants are Gollo Yapung Tana from Pakke Kessang constituency, Jermai Krong (Tezu) and Marina Kenglang from Changlang North constituency.

Other first-timers fielded by the party are Sanhey Phutsok from Mukto constituency represented by Chief Minister Pema Khandu, Kompu Dolo (Chayang-Tajo), Tame Gyadi (Seppa East), Nabam Tado (Doimukh), Rughu Tado (Tali), Reri Kirbe Dulom (Daporijo), Yomkar Riba (Basar), Talling Yaying (Rumgong), Takku Jerang (Pangning), Bimar Dabi (Nari-Koyut) and Okom Yosung (Pasighat East).

The BJP announced it list of 60 candidates for Arunachal Pradesh assembly polls on March 13.

Several MLAs, who had jumped ship to the BJP, secured their place in the list. Senior Congress MLA and former Union Minister Ninong Ering and Wanglin Lowangdong, and NPP's Mutchu Mithi and Gokar Basar joined the party during a function at its headquarters on February 24.

In the 2019 assembly elections, the Congress contested in 46 of the total 60 seats but could manage to win in only four; while the BJP won 41.

BJP's CT Ravi booked for 'promoting enmity'

BENGALURU: An FIR has been registered against former BJP national general secretary CT Ravi over his social media post allegedly promoting enmity on the grounds of religion, among others, according to the Election Commission. In a post on X on Wednesday, the BJP leader had attacked the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi. Taking cognisance of it, Chikkamagalur district election officer filed an FIR against him at Chikkamagalur Town Police Station under section 153A (promoting enmity between different groups) of the Indian Penal Code and 126 of the Representation of the People Act, it said.

'Not quitting BJP': Sadananda refutes reports

BENGALURU: Former Karnataka chief minister and sitting MP D V Sadananda Gowda on Tuesday, who is upset with the BJP, said he is not quitting the party to join the Congress, and would work towards "purification" of the party's state unit. Alleging "pariwarwad" in the Karnataka BJP, the 71-year-old leader said he is "upset" over being denied the ticket to contest again in the Lok Sabha polls from Bangalore North. "Yes, I'm pained and upset over not getting a ticket. Yes, I got an invitation from Congress. But, no, I will not join Congress. My future step will be towards purification of Karnataka BJP," Gowda said.



WITNESS THE SPLENDOUR OF SPRING AT THE TULIP GARDEN, SRINAGAR

23RD MARCH 2024 ONWARDS

Department of Tourism, J&K

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  JKTourismOfficial
  JandKTourism

SC raps TN gov for refusing to reinstate Ponnudi as minister

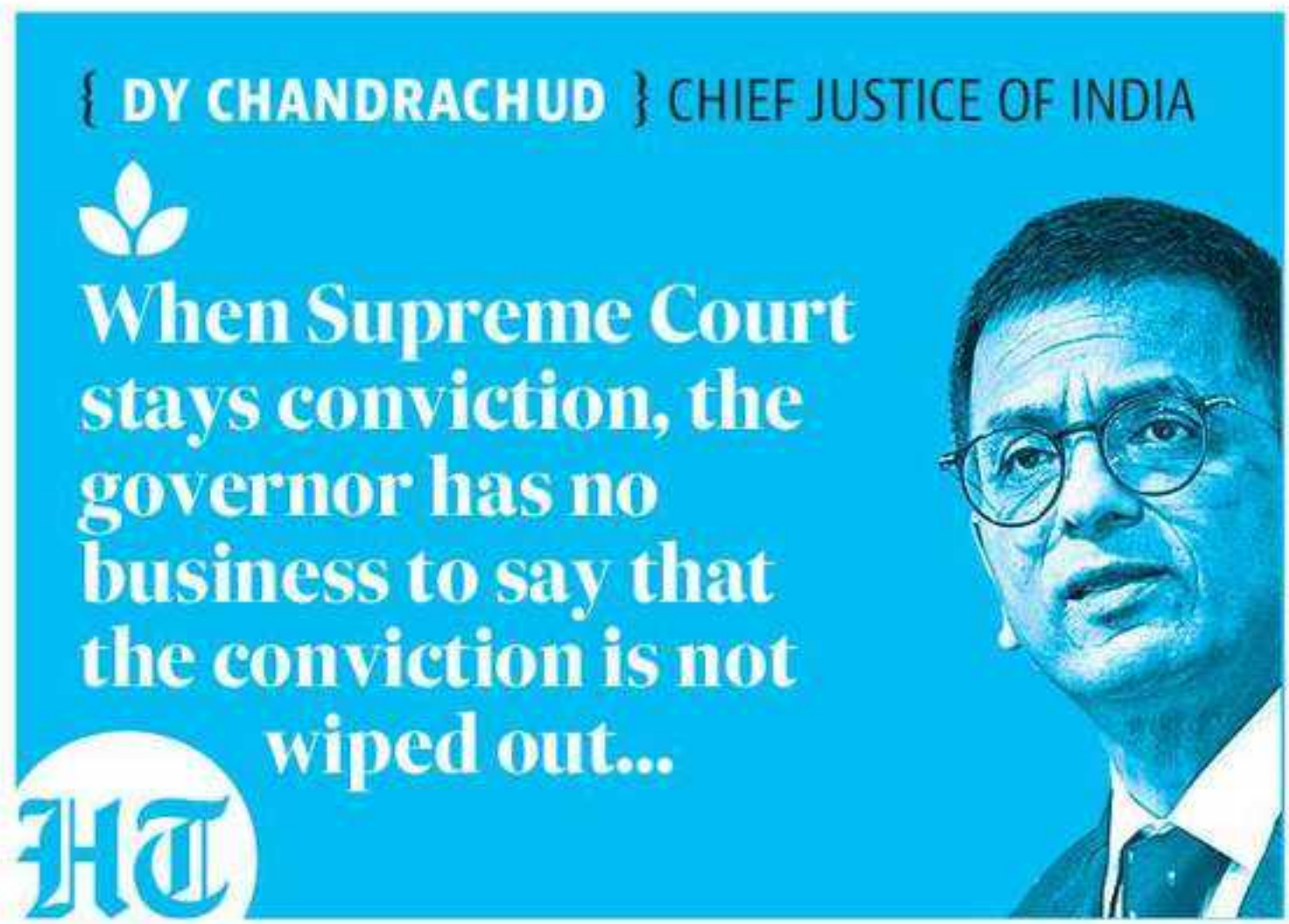
Abraham Thomas
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NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday slammed Tamil Nadu governor RN Ravi for "defying" it by refusing to swear in K Ponnudi as minister after the top court suspended the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) politician's conviction earlier this month in a disproportionate assets case, and gave him till Friday to "set it right", failing which, it said, it would "pass an order asking the Governor to follow the Constitution".

The ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu approached the top court on March 18, a day after the governor rejected chief minister MK Stalin's request to swear in Ponnudi as higher education minister. Ponnudi was disqualified on December 21 when the Madras high court convicted and sentenced him to three years imprisonment in a disproportionate assets case. But on March 11, the top court suspended the conviction.

Rejecting Stalin's request in a letter on March 17, the governor noted that Ponnudi's conviction has only been "suspended, not set aside". He further claimed that Ponnudi is "tainted of corruption" and his appointment would be against "constitutional morality".

Hearing the matter on Thursday, a bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud said: "We are seriously concerned about the



{ DY CHANDRACHUD } CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

When Supreme Court stays conviction, the governor has no business to say that the conviction is not wiped out...



conduct of the governor. He is defying the Supreme Court of India. Are we governed by rule of law. When Supreme Court stays conviction, the governor has no business to say that the conviction is not wiped out. We are deeply concerned on who has advised him and the manner in which this matter has proceeded."

Attorney General (AG) R Venkataramani, appearing for governor, sought time to take instructions. He objected to the manner in which the state government raised the issue about the swearing in of a minister in a pending petition from last year that challenged the governor's inaction to clear pending bills and appointments. The court, however, told AG: "Can the governor say I will defend my constitutionally illegal conduct by pointing fingers at the state for moving an appli-

cation. Do we close our eyes to the constitutional breach by the governor on this technical issue...what do the states do if governor does not follow the Constitution. They have to approach this court."

The elected governments of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, and Punjab, all ruled by parties opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party which runs the Union government, have alleged that governors are exceeding their constitutional remit by refusing to sign off on legislations and behaving like agents of the Centre.

Posting the matter for Friday, the bench observed, "We will keep it tomorrow otherwise...if we don't hear in a positive manner from you, we will have to pass an order asking the governor to follow the Constitution. We don't want to do that as we

want the governor to set it right."

The bench, also comprising justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, further asked: "How can the governor say that after the SC stayed the conviction, his (the politician's) re-induction will be against constitutional morality."

Referring to a past judgment by the top court on what "stay of conviction" means, the bench said: "Once substantive order of conviction is suspended by this court, there is no conviction that exists. You can't say then that he is tainted."

The bench further reminded the governor that he is a titular head holding a constitutional office. "How can any constitutional authority act in this manner? It is not about subjective perception about a minister. I may have a view about a particular person but we must act according to Constitution. On his conviction being stayed, the chief minister wants to re-induct him as part of Parliamentary democracy. And when Supreme Court has stayed the conviction, law must follow its course," the bench said.

Senior advocates Abhishek Manu Singhvi and P Wilson, appearing for the state government, alleged that the governor's action "amounts to destruction of constitutional ethos". "He is coking a snook at the Supreme Court by saying Supreme Court is guilty of not following constitutional morality. Primacy of elected government is part of basic structure of Constitution.

His action amounts to destruction of constitutional ethos."

Venkataramani told the court, "I am not justifying what the governor has done but I need to know what persuaded him to do that. But I am objecting to the way this application has been filed."

By separate orders on December 19 and 21 last year, the Madras high court reversed an acquittal order passed by the trial court in April 2016 against Ponnudi and his wife, P Visalakshi. The trial court held that clubbing the property of Ponnudi with his wife was not permissible under law as she is not a public servant, but runs independent business and has a separate source of income.

The FIR against the minister was registered in 2011 on the allegation that during his tenure as minister of mines and higher education in the state between 2006 to 2010, he acquired assets that were nearly 66% more than his known sources of income.

While suspending the conviction, the top court on March 11 held that disqualifying him for holding office of minister and MLA would be an "irreversible situation". Following the SC order, the speaker of the Tamil Nadu assembly declared that Ponnudi's disqualification had ceased to operate and even the Election Commission on March 16 withdrew the notification of vacancy of Thirukovilur assembly seat arising from Ponnudi's disqualification.

{ PARAMILITARY RECRUITMENT }

SSC declares revised Manipur selection list

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NEW DELHI: The Staff Selection Commission (SSC) on Thursday released results of successful recruits from Manipur as constables in central paramilitary forces, four days after the first result was withdrawn citing a clerical error.

The new results showed that at least 84 non-tribal candidates have cleared the test.

This follows controversy on the results that the SSC released on Friday that showed that the test was cleared exclusively by tribal candidates, except one Meitei OBC.

Meitei candidates and groups had alleged that these results had errors and had demanded a probe. Protests broke out on the weekend, following which chief secretary Vineet Joshi hurriedly flew to Delhi to prevent a potential law-and-order problem in a state already roiled by ethnic clashes that have claimed 219 lives since May 2023. A joint action committee of non tribals students—Meitei, Meitei Pongle, Nepali, Bengalis, had also met chief minister Biren Singh on Monday and complained of the anomaly.

Admitting that an error had occurred during processing, the SSC withdrew the results on Monday night. "While processing the result dated March 15, the



The state has been roiled by ethnic clashes since May 2023.

data pertaining to one phase was inadvertently missed out. In view of the above, the result published on March 15 is treated as withdrawn. The revised result in respect of Manipur incorporating the complete data of the candidates will be published shortly," the commission said in a statement.

In the notification that released the fresh results on Thursday, the SSC said, "The final result declared on March 15 for the state of Manipur was withdrawn vide the Commission's Notice dated May 18. Based on a comprehensive review of the complete data, the discrepancy has been rectified and changes have been effected."

The results that SSC released on Thursday showed that 391 male candidates cleared the examination, which included six

Schedule Caste (SC) candidates, 158 from Schedule Tribe (ST), 34 from Other Backward Classes (OBC) and 193 from Under Reserved (UR) category.

Of the 193 who had got the jobs in the UR category, there was one EWS candidate, 14 SC, 130 ST, 29 OBC and rest were general category candidates.

According to the withdrawal result that was released on Friday, 232 male candidates had cleared the examination—231 were from multiple tribes while one was a Meitei OBC. Of the 231 tribal candidates, almost 70% were Kukis. The SSC has said that because of the law-and-order situation in Manipur, the physical and medical tests of candidates belonging to the state were conducted in multiple phases and the results of one phase was inadvertently missed.

{ AFTER HC NOD }

ASI survey of MP Bhojshala today

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BHOPAL: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will begin on Friday a scientific survey of Bhojshala, a protected 11th-century monument in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district, officials on Thursday said, as the local administration put in place security measures to provide safe access to the site amid questions over its religious character.

While Hindu consider Bhojshala to be a temple dedicated to Vagdevi (Goddess Saraswati), Muslims call it Kamal Maula Mosque. According to ASI AMLA Alok Tripathi, the team will reach the contentious site on Friday and will aim to complete the exercise within six weeks.

In a letter to Indore divisional commissioner as well as the collector and SP of Dhar, Tripathi requested local authorities to provide safe access to the site in compliance with the high court order to conduct "archaeological survey/scientific investigation/excavation" of the site.

"The team will reach on Friday and that's why we have requested to provide safe access to the site to conduct the archaeological investigations and adequate security to the team during the stay and work," Tripathi said. HT has seen the letter.

On March 11, the Madhya Pradesh high court's Indore bench directed ASI to conduct a scientific survey of the Bhojshala complex by forming a committee of five members, and submit a report within six weeks. The court allowed the exercise on the lines of a Supreme Court direct-

HINDUS CONSIDER BHOJSHALA TO BE A TEMPLE DEDICATED TO VAGDEVI, MUSLIMS CALL IT KAMAL MAULA MOSQUE

ive for a survey within the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi.

The high court's order came on a petition filed by the Hindu Front for Justice on May 2, 2022, against offering of namaz at the Bhojshala and ASI's 2003 order that prohibited Hindus from offering daily puja in it.

The state government and ASI have supported the petition to determine the character and nature of contentious premises. ASI Bhopal superintendent Manoj Kurmi said: "As directed by the court, ASI will conduct the survey using the latest methods and techniques... A detailed scientific investigation will be held..." On Tripathi's letter, Dhar SP Manoj Kumar Singh said: "We have received a letter from the ASI ADG informing us that a team is reaching Dhar to conduct a survey of Bhojshala. There will be tight security measures during the survey..."

He added: "We have summoned one company of special armed police of 100 personnel. We have also arranged for 60 cameras to monitor the situation." A meeting was also held with representatives of both Hindu and Muslim communities, the SP said. The Hindus will be allowed to offer prayers on Tuesdays and the Muslims on Fridays, he added.



Mahua Moitra

CASH-FOR-QUERY CASE: CBI FILES F.I.R. AGAINST MOITRA

NEW DELHI: The Central Bureau of Investigation on Thursday registered an FIR against former Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra in the cash-for-query case, officials said.

The CBI filed the FIR acting on the directions of anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal.

The Lokpal had issued the directions to the CBI after receiving findings of the agency's preliminary inquiry into allegations made by BJP Lok Sabha member Nishikant Dubey against Moitra. The Lokpal had directed the CBI to submit its findings in six months before it after investigating all aspects of the complaints against her in the matter. Lok Sabha had expelled Moitra in December last year for "unethical conduct".

The former MP has challenged her expulsion in the Supreme Court and will again be on the hustings during the general elections as the TMC's candidate from the Krishnagar Lok Sabha seat.

Dubey had alleged that Moitra asked questions in Lok Sabha in exchange for cash and gifts from Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani to mount an attack on industrialist Gautam Adani and Prime Minister Narendra Modi among others.

Moitra has denied any wrongdoing. **HTC AND AGENCIES**

Ban on power lines in habitats of Great Indian Bustard relaxed

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NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday relaxed the ban on overhead high power transmission lines across an area spread over 80,680 square kilometres in Rajasthan and Gujarat, the habitat of the endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB), and formed an expert committee to consider the feasibility of limiting the ban to 13,663 square kilometres.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud directed the committee, comprising independent experts, members of the National Board of Wildlife, representatives of power companies, and former and serving bureaucrats drawn from departments of environment and forests and ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE) to suggest ways to balance two objectives—the conservation of the bird and India's sustainable development goals. The first report of the committee is to be submitted to the court by July 31.

"This is a perfect example of why energy is called a wicked problem. Any viable solution comes with its own set of challenges. In this case, the court has attempted to establish some boundaries between the core and non-core areas of the GIB via the expert committee. It is important for this committee to have on it the best of minds representing industry, community and the environment. It is important to recognise that biodiversity benefits are not



GIB is listed as Critically Endangered by International Union for Conservation of Nature. SHUTTERSTOCK

precisely quantifiable in the way that renewable energy generation can be quantified. It is, therefore, better to err on the side of caution and have a larger area that protects GIBs," Deepak Krishnan, associate director of energy program at World Resources Institute India, said in a statement.

The top court, while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by wildlife activist MK Ranjitsinh and others for preserving the dwindling population of GIBs on April 19, 2021, directed installation of bird diverters in the potential habitat areas and undergrounding of overhead transmission lines in these areas in Gujarat and Rajasthan that are home to many solar power projects. In December 2021, the government returned to court with an application claiming undergrounding of power cables was not feasible and requested modification of the order.

Dealing with the application, the bench, also comprising justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra,

said: "It does appear that there is no adequate basis to impose a general prohibition in regard to installation of transmission lines as wide as over 80,680 square kilometres. A blanket direction for undergrounding high voltage and low voltage power lines in the nature as directed by this court cannot be accomplished. For the priority area identified (by a report of the Wildlife Institute of India) to be 13,663 square kilometres, there still seems to have some basis."

Relaxing its earlier order, the bench said, "The injunction imposed by our order dated April 19, 2021 in respect of area described as potential area shall stand relaxed subject to conditions that the expert committee appointed by this court will law down."

The court said the committee would comprise of director, WII Dehradun, NBWL member Hari Shankar Singh, ex-principal conservator of forests Niranjani Vasu, ex-wildlife warden and former PCCF, Maharashtra, B Majumdar, former deputy director of Corbett Foundation Devesh Ghadvi, joint secretary of MNRE Lalit Bohra, and joint secretary of ministry of environment, forests and climate change (MoEFCC).

The court said that issues of this nature "are best left to domain experts instead of being adjudicated by courts" as it further directed the committee to call two members from the power and transmission sector as special invitees in its deliberations. Senior advocate Shyam Divan,

assisting the court as amicus curiae, requested for a judicial member to be head of the committee as he said that the pressure is huge on the government to sanction power lines in the area. He further requested the court to ensure bird diverters continue to be installed in potential areas and in a further area of 6,654 sq km, identified as an additionally important area for survival of GIB.

The bench allowed the committee to recommend any further measures for protecting GIBs in areas other than priority area, "untrammeled" by the court's April 2021 direction.

The Centre was represented by attorney general R Venkataramani, solicitor general Tushar Mehta and additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, who submitted that steps have already been taken to preserve GIB population and collision with overhead transmission lines is not the only reason for causing bird deaths.

The GIB population in India was said to be 150 at the time when the April 2021 direction was passed. Additionally, the Centre claimed that through protective breeding, efforts are on to scale up their population. However, it is believed that there are currently less than 100 surviving GIBs in the wild.

The GIB is listed as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in its Red List of threatened species. They are also protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Court allows personal attendant for Goyal in hospital, pulls up ED

Rutuja Gaidhani
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MUMBAI: A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court on Thursday allowed Jet Airways founder Naresh Goyal to avail the services of a personal attendant and family visits during his stay at a hospital as it pulled up the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for its approach.

Goyal filed an application last week requesting permission to meet his family HN Reliance Hospital, Girgaon, where he is undergoing treatment. Additionally, Goyal sought approval to avail himself of the services of a personal attendant and to permit him to consult and get legal assistance from his lawyers.

This plea came weeks after Goyal's cancer was detected and confirmed by the medical board of the JJ Hospital.

On March 1, the PMLA court rejected Goyal's application for interim medical bail for six months but allowed him to be



Naresh Goyal

admitted to Tata Memorial Hospital or any other hospital of his choice under escort for two months.

In his order special judge MG Deshpande criticised the ED for drawing a premature conclusion, and holding Goyal guilty, forgetting the basic principle of criminal jurisprudence that "The accused is presumed to be innocent until his guilt is proved beyond a reasonable doubt, that too at the end of the trial."

"This court has addressed all objections raised by the ED and endeavored to maintain a balance while considering the prayers made by the applicant, who is 75-year-old and suffering from cancer," reprimanded the judge.

MOOSEWALA IVF ROW: PUNJAB ISSUES NOTICE TO HEALTH SECY

CHANDIGARH: The Punjab government issued a show-cause notice to the health department principal secretary for acting on the Centre's request seeking a report in the matter related to the in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment of late singer Sidhu Moosewala's mother, without first bringing it to the notice of the chief minister and the state health minister.

The Aam Aadmi Party-led state government asked principal secretary Ajoy Sharma to reply to the notice within two weeks. "...given the significance of the issue involved, you were required to bring it to the notice of your minister-in-charge and chief minister and take their orders regarding further course of action," said the notice, seen by HT.

The notice said the officer proceeded to act in the matter without bringing it to the notice of Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann and state health minister Dr Balbir Singh. "This is a serious lapse on your part. Hence, you are asked to show cause within two weeks as to why proceedings...should not be initiated against you," said the notice, dated March 20. **HTC**

Wildlife clearance for projects only after green nod, says panel

Jayashree Nandi
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NEW DELHI: The standing committee of the national board for wildlife has decided that it will consider proposals for wildlife clearance for projects only after they have received forest approvals, a new protocol that officials said were aimed at avoiding conflicting decisions and to enable higher scrutiny of projects in eco-sensitive zones.

Some experts, however, warned that granting forest clearance before wildlife clearance could create a fait accompli situation, as forest clearance itself is a major screening step in eco-sensitive zones.

In a letter dated March 18, the wildlife division of the Union environment ministry told all states and Union territories that "proposals requiring recommendations/approvals of the SCNBWL (Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife) and forest clearance under Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 shall be placed for consideration on

THE POLICY SHIFT CAME AFTER THE STANDING PANEL RECENTLY CONSIDERED A PROJECT IN BUFFER ZONE OF RAJAJI TIGER RESERVE

the SCNBWL, only after receipt of forest clearance."

Previously, forest and wildlife clearances for infrastructure projects coming up in forest areas or around wildlife sanctuaries were often considered in parallel. But senior officials said the new policy will avoid contradictory rulings by having higher scrutiny at the forest clearance level first. "Both the process of forest clearance and wildlife clearances can go parallel but decision on wildlife clearances in those cases which involves forest clearance will be taken later, for a better-informed decision," an official said, asking not to be named.

Experts said the step, while

welcome, could have unintended consequences. "This is a welcome step, as it could provide the Wildlife Board with valuable official information...such as site inspection reports and wildlife affected, which are supposed to be officially documented in the process of forest clearance," said Debadevi Sinha from Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. But, he cautioned that "ensuring that the grant of forest clearance does not become a means to endorse wildlife clearance might pose a challenge, as both fall under separate legislation."

The policy shift came after the standing committee recently considered a road project in the buffer zone of Rajaji Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand. Despite recommendations from state wildlife authorities, some members objected that the project lacked prior forest clearance as required under a previous Supreme Court order.

Officials say the new policy standardises processes and allows wildlife board to make better decisions aided by prior forest clearance assessments.

{ BUDAUN CASE }

Second accused held for double murder

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LUCKNOW: The Uttar Pradesh Police arrested a second suspect in the double murder case of two children in Budaun district earlier this week, officials said.

According to Budaun SP Alok Priyadarshi, Mohd Javed (25), brother of prime accused Mohd Sajid, who was allegedly involved in the crime that was committed on Tuesday and went missing thereafter, surrendered before Bareilly police on Wednesday night. He was subsequently arrested on charges of murder. Sajid was gunned down three hours after he committed the murders. Police had announced a reward of ₹25,000 for any information on Javed.

"Javed arrived at Satellite police outpost in Bareilly and surrendered on Tuesday mid-night. He was subsequently arrested," Priyadarshi said. On Tuesday, Sajid, who ran a barber shop across the victims' house in Baba Colony, brutally attacked the two minor brothers—Ayush



Javed is key accused's brother.

Singh (13) and Aahan Singh (6)—with a knife. The 27-year-old was killed in an alleged police encounter later, when he was reportedly trying to flee.

The FIR registered in the case said Sajid entered the house on the false pretext of seeking ₹5,000 to treat his pregnant wife. Javed was standing outside the house at the time of the murders but fled thereafter. While police are yet to ascertain the motive of the crime, after a preliminary probe indicated that the prime accused and the victims' family shared good relations, they said that Javed's arrest could shed some light. According to autopsy reports, Sajid slit the throat of the two children before stabbing them multiple times.

Apex court puts on hold setting up of Centre's fact-checking unit

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NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the implementation of rules that the government used a day earlier to set up a "fact check unit" to take down online content deemed fake or misleading, citing serious constitutional concerns over freedom of speech.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud said there was a "prima facie case" to stay Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules 2021 (that was amended in 2023).

Using the rule, the government on Wednesday designated the Press Information Bureau as the government's fact-checking body for any content relating to the central government.

"The challenge to Rule 3(1)(b)(v) involves serious constitutional questions. The impact of Rule 3(1)(b)(v) on the fundamen-

tal rights of freedom of speech and expression protected under Article 19(1)(a) would fall for analysis by the high court," said the bench, which also comprised justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra.

The top court's order came in response to petitions filed by stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra, the Editors Guild of India, and the Association of Indian Magazines. They had challenged orders passed by a division bench of the Bombay high court, which gave a split verdict on the issue — including on interim orders restraining the government — on January 31.

A third judge on March 11 said there was no need for an interim stay till the larger challenge to sections of the IT Rules 2021's validity was settled. The Union government issued a notification for the unit on March 20.

The Supreme Court stayed the notification as well as the Bombay High Court's order of March 11 that refused interim relief to the petitioners.



The order came in response to petitions filed by Kunal Kamra, the EGL, and the Association of Indian Magazines.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, argued there was no reason for the top court to interfere as the high court would decide the matter next month. He clarified that the rule did not require social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to take down content critical of the government's functioning.

"The rule under challenge does not require the social media intermediaries to take down any post against the 'business of government' but can give a dis-

claimer indicating that a content on its platform is fake, false or misleading, once it receives an alert from the FCU," Mehta told the court.

However, the petitioners, represented by senior advocates Darius Khambata, Shadan Farasat, and Gautam Bhatia, highlighted the "chilling effect" the rule could have on free speech, especially during elections.

"For 10 months, this rule has not been notified. Why the haste now. There are elections coming up and this is the time public must have information about Central government and not want FCU to take down any information," Khambata argued.

Farasat, representing the Editors Guild, said, "This is a classic case where the state is restricting speech about itself. This is the worst time to bring the rules as during elections, it affects the ability of the media to present both sides to an issue."

Bhatia raised concerns about the rule's impact on the "safe harbour" protection for interme-

diaries under Section 79(1) of the IT Act, which could be lost if they fail to comply with the fact check unit's directions.

The Supreme Court bench said the issue was "whether the status quo as it obtained before the division bench can be allowed to be altered at this stage" when one judge had declared the rule invalid and the other had interpreted it with safeguards.

Kamra's petition stated, "While the IT (Intermediary) Rules are facially directed at intermediaries, it is users (and the information created and hosted by them on various platforms) that are the subject of the impugned Rules."

With the split verdict of the Bombay high court, the matter was referred to a third judge, justice AS Chandurkar, whose opinion will determine the fate of the controversial rule. The Supreme Court refrained from commenting further, given the pending consideration before justice Chandurkar.

Over 700 yoga exponents take part in global fest in Utkhand

HT Correspondent
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HARIDWAR: More than 700 yoga exponents and practitioners from across the country and abroad participated in the week-long annual International Yoga Festival in Uttarakhand's Rishikesh that concluded on Thursday.

Organised by the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, the festival, which started on March 15, was held at the Yog Bharat Ganga Ghat at Muni-Ki-Reti, with a raft of sessions that took participants through the nuts and bolts of yoga, meditation and spiritual awareness.

"The state government has been promoting the International Yoga Festival with an intent to provide a common platform for yoga enthusiasts, trainers, experts and students within India and beyond. Rishikesh has become the global yoga capital and this festival plays a vital role to further that," state tourism minister Satpal Maharaj said.

According to officials aware of the details, more than 700 yoga exponents, practitioners and learners from over 25 countries,



The festival organised by the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board had started on March 15.

including the US, joined the event.

Expert Douglas Atmanand Rushford from the US, who conducts sessions at the festival every year, said yoga is an ancient art which leads to attainment of peace of mind, happiness and health.

"From Ashtanga yoga to laughter yoga, varied asanas, postures, and breathing techniques make

yoga stand out differently and way ahead. The whole world is realising and benefiting from this ancient art..." Rushford said.

Yoga and religious institutions like Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, Isha Foundation, Shivanand Ashram, Manav Dharma Ashram and Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram also participated in the festival.

Serene world of Carnatic music roiled by award controversy

Divya Chandrababu
letters@hindustantimes.com

CHENNAI: The world of Carnatic music — usually tranquil, at least on the surface — was roiled by a controversy that has been brewing since March 18, when the Music Academy decided that this year's top honour, the title of Sangita Kalanidhi, would go to singer TM Krishna, a man, who ironically, has not performed at the Academy's venue since 2015 in his effort to democratise Carnatic music, and who has openly and repeatedly challenged what he believes is a caste privilege entrenched within classical music and also opposed the worldview of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ideological parent the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS).

But in the space of 24 hours, the issue boiled over, with at least six top musicians and performers pulling out, and one even returning his own Sangita Kalanidhi award, and the Academy, founded in 1928 — it instituted the award, of which usually only one is given every year, in 1942 — standing its ground.

Krishna declined to comment on the controversy, but the incident, which comes against the backdrop of the summer's Lok Sabha elections, where the BJP, which is going it alone in Tamil Nadu, hopes to stamp its presence in the state with a decent showing, in terms of votes, if not seats, has rapidly acquired political colour.

On Monday, when the Academy, which, in some ways, stands for everything Krishna has spoken against, named him as the recipient of its top award, it generated the expected murmurs. But things really heated up on Wednesday, when sisters Ranjani and Gayatri, both popular singers, shot off a letter to the Academy and posted a series of posts on X in which they said that they will not perform during the music festival hosted by the Academy this year.

They added that it was "dangerous" to overlook Krishna's eulogising of Dravidian movement founder E V Ramasamy, revered as 'Periyar'. "His actions have tried to spread a sense of shame in being a Carnatic musician and has been exhibited through his consistent denigration of spirituality in music," the sisters said. "We believe in a value system that respects art and artists, vageyakaras (lyricist/composers), rasikas (fans), institutions, our roots and culture. We will be in moral violation if we were to bury these values and join this year's conference."

The sisters weren't immediately available to talk to HT.

Krishna, a Ramon Magsasay awardee (for his social activism in music) continues to perform in smaller venues (called sabhas),

communities and marginalised landscapes," Aves said.

Krishna, he said, also collaborated with Tamil writer Perumal Murugan, singing on a range of topics from birds to manual scavenging. "He is saving an art form from its obsolete fixity and giving it a future in this evolving world through what he is doing. As public we only see the performances and we can now see the sub-surface realities of this space."

Krishna also writes, and in a sea of Carnatic musicians supporting the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he has stood out as a staunch critic.

But it wasn't so much his political leanings as his disdain for fellow musicians, past and present — in 2017, he said singer MS Subbulakshmi, a Bharat Ratna awardee "brahminised" herself to gain acceptance — that seems to have angered his fellow musicians.

Instrumentalist Chitravina

He also performs in a festival at a fishing neighbourhood in Chennai's Besant Nagar beach — the Uroor-Olcott Kupppam festival — that is organised by the city's environmentalists.

Naturalist Yuvan Aves who has worked with Krishna on several campaigns, including for Chennai's Ennore-Pulicat wetlands, said the move to honour Krishna has exposed the casteist underbelly of the music community.

"In such a huge music community, he has been the only person who brought Carnatic music form to honour the marginalised



TM Krishna

tradition when it comes to the art". Responding to the honour, Krishna said through his journey, his friends have kept him grounded and challenged his ideas so he can think and act with greater care. On Wednesday, it expressed shock at Ranjani and Gayatri's letter.

N Murali, President, Music Academy, said the letter is "replete with unwarranted and slanderous assertions and insinuations verging on defamation, and its vicious tone against a respected senior fellow-musician." The executive committee of the Academy chose Krishna based on his excellence in music over a long career with no extraneous factors influencing their choice, he added. "We regard your decision to withdraw from the upcoming annual conference because the Academy has chosen for the award a musician you dislike and malign as unbecoming of artists and in poor taste."

Music Academy said it was honouring Krishna for "his powerful voice" and "adherence to

the Academy.

A Harikatha exponent, Dushyanth Sridhar said he was withdrawing from the event noting that he has had a "sea of ideological" differences with Krishna. "I am pained by many of his public statements on dharma, Ayodhya and Sri Rama," Sridhar said. The Trichur Brothers too said that

they were boycotting the music conference presided over by Krishna because they didn't want to be hypocrites.

But the Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam's K Kanimozhi, running for a second term from Thoothukudi Lok Sabha constituency said that the hate Krishna was receiving for his engagement with Periyar is uncalled for. "A basic reading of Periyar's ideas shows us that he is one of the greatest feminists the world has seen. He never called for a genocide," Kanimozhi said in response to Gayathri-Ranjani's statement that Periyar was against Brahmins and women.

Kanimozhi likened their letter to the hate speech of Union minister and BJP leader Shoba Karandlaje's remarks linking Tamilians to the Rameshwaram cafe blast in Bengaluru.

Music Academy said it was honouring Krishna for "his powerful voice" and "adherence to

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I. SHER Mohammad Safi S/o Ashak Ali, R/o 389/58 Baba Nagar, Meerut Road, Ghaziabad, U.P. - 201003 have changed my name to Sher Mohammad for all future purposes.

I. ANSHUL Kumar S/o Ram Niwas R/o RZG-69, Gali No.5 Vishwas Park, Uttam Nagar West Delhi-110059 Have Changed My Name To Anshul For all future purposes.

I. ARMY No. 6941365L Rank HAV S. Palanihamy, S/o Subhayan, R/o Door No. 240/5, Melmathipatty, Srirampuram Village, Poothampatty Post- 624702, Vedasandur Taluk, Dindigul District, State of Tamilnadu, have changed my name from P. Indrajit to Indrajith P in my service record & also in all other documents.

LOST & FOUND

I. ANU Madan D/o Virender Kumar Madan R/o Flat No. 905, Plot no. 8C Arjun Apartment, The Khattar CGHS Ltd., Sec-7, Dwarka phase-1, Delhi-110045 have lost Original Provisional Possession Certificate of Vrinda City, L-203, Plot No Glt 02 Sec- Ph-I-V, G. Noida. If found please contact : anu.madan@hotmail.com

I. LOST my Possession Letter & Payment Receipts of my Flat G-1005, Logix Blossom County, Sector-137, Noida-201301, UP. Finder call Manoj Goel: 9810085588

TENDER NOTICE

DELHI GYMKHANA CLUB LTD
2, Safdarjung Road, New Delhi-110011
CORRIGENDUM
Kindly refer to the advt published on 20 March 2024 for Procurement of Perishables in the Delhi Gymkhana Club. The last date of submission of application forms, may be read as 8th April 2024 by 3 PM in Secretary's Office.
Secretary
Delhi Gymkhana Club Ltd.

BLUE ENERGY
BLUE ENERGY LTD.
Notice Inviting Tender (ICB)
Notice No. BEPL/PKG-EOT
Cranes - Date: 22.03.2024.
Blue Energy Ltd. (BEL) has been entrusted to develop Super Trishuli Hydro Power Project (100 MW) on river Trishuli in Nepal by Govt. of Nepal on BOOT basis. Through this invitation, BEL invites bids for competitive bidding from reputed Manufacturers in respect of 160/3210MT EOT crane for Powerhouse and 10MT EOT crane for GIS hall of the project.
BEPL/PKG-EOT Cranes: Design, Manufacture, Supply, Inland Transportation, Erection, Testing & Commissioning of Electric Travelling Cranes.
Tender documents may be obtained from the office of BEL/website between 22.03.2024 and 08.04.2024. The last date of receipt of completed tender is 10.05.2024. For detailed NIT and bid document, please visit our website: https://blueenergy.com.np
Mr. Sandesh Pant, Blue Energy Ltd., 5th Floor Alliance Tower, Charkhal Road, Dillibazaar Kathmandu, Nepal, Mob No: +977 9841177500, Landline No. +977 01 4545927, Whatsapp Number: +977 9841177500, Mail Id: sandeshpant@blueenergy.com.np

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I. KRISHAN Gopal Oberoi S/o Rustom Chand Oberoi have lost my property document i.e. EMD Slip for Plot No. 388, Sector-K, Bawana-II, Bhorganh, Delhi-110039. Finder contact: 9811917506

COURT NOTICES

Notice of Lodgement of Petition of Appeal to the Respondent (RULE 9(b) & (c) of ORDER XIX, S.C.R. 2013).
IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION CIVIL APPEAL No. 2171 OF 2016 (Appeal by Special Leave granted by this Court's Order dated the 15th February, 2016 in Petition for SLP(C) No. 6153 of 2016 from the Judgment and Order dated the 20th August, 2015 of the HIGH COURT OF PUNJAB & HARYANA AT CHANDIGARH, PUNJAB in RSA No. 3981 of 2015)
NARINDER NATH (DEAD) Petitioner(s)/Appellant(s) VERSUS MASTER NERAJ BATRA AND OTHERS Respondent(s)

To, 1. Ms. Gurvinder Kaur (W/o Sh. Surinder Singh) D/o Lt. Sh. Hans Raj, C/o Lt. Sh. Hummal Singh, VPO-Sansarpur, Jalandhar Cantt. District, Jalandhar, Punjab. Ptd. 5/492/2024 For R/R] in C.A. No. 2171/2016 (Sec. IV).
2. Ms. Indira Rani @ Rano (W/o Mohan Lal) D/o Lt. Sh. Hans Raj, H No. 2552, Mohalla Ambala Cantt. District-Ambala, Haryana Ptd. 5/493/2024 For R/R] in C.A.No.2171/2016 (Sec. IV).

TAKE NOTICE that the Appellant above-named has on the 09th January, 2016 filed in the Registry of the Supreme Court, Petition for SLP(C) No. 6153 of 2016 from the Judgment and Order of the High Court above mentioned and pursuant to this Court's order dated granting Special Leave to Appeal the case has been registered as CIVIL APPELL No. 2171 of 2016.
NOTICE IS HEREBY given to you that if you wish to contest the appeal, you may appear before this Court within thirty days of the receipt of this Notice either in person or by an Advocate-on-Record of this Court appointed by you in that behalf and take such part in the proceedings as you may be advised.
TAKE FURTHER NOTICE THAT in default of your appearance within the time prescribed, the appeal will be proceeded with and determined in your absence and no further notice in relation thereto shall be given to you.
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CHANGE OF NAME

I. ASHWITHA Ramesha Shetty R/o Flat no E10 52, fifth floor, Block E, cluster-2, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi 110070 have changed the name to Ashwitha Mitthesh Shetty

CHANGE OF NAME

I. NIRMLA Mittal spouse of No. 3982740X Havikar Jawahar Mittal R/o F-56, Sector-27, Noida - 201301, UP, have changed my name from Nirmla Mittal to Nirmla Mittal vide affidavit No. IN-UP03059790844700 W date: 20.03.2024

I. UDHAM Singh S/o Jagbir R/o Village Karna, Teh. & Distt. Palwal have declared that my father name Jagbir and Jagveer both names are same & one person. In future his will be known as Jagbir.

I. PRIYANKA D/o Raj Kumar Goel, R/o Dasna Dehat, Distt. Ghaziabad-201302 have changed my name to Priyanka Goel for all future purposes.

CHANGE OF NAME

NAME CHANGE -Aadhrit-Adrit -We (Mr. Akash Goyal (CMrs. Sweta Bansal) have changed our Minor Son's Name from Aadhrit Goyal to Adrit Goyal as per the documents.

I. REENA Rani W/o Narender Pal R/o H. No-252, Gali No-6, Near Shri Shankar Road, Om Vihar Phase-I, A, D K Mohan Garden, Uttam Nagar, Dwarka West Delhi-110059, have changed my minor daughter's name from Vaishali to Vaishali Rani for all purposes.

I. ARIYAN Chaudhary, S/o Sh. Naveen Chaudhary, R/o WW 1002, Ireo Grand Arch, Sec-58, Gurugram, Haryana, have changed my name to Ariyan Chaudhary for all future purposes.

I. UDHAM Singh S/o Jagbir R/o Village Karna, Teh. & Distt. Palwal have declared that Udhham Singh and Udhham both names are same and one person. In future I will be known as Udhham Singh.

CHANGE OF NAME

I. ALISHA D/o Shaikat Ali R/o V-35, Gali No.27, Vijay Park, Mauipur, North-East Delhi-110053. Have Changed my Name to Alisha Naz for all future purposes.

IT IS for general information that Sonal Bhardwaj alias Sonal D/o Sh. Rajinder Bhardwaj R/o JB-180, LIG Flats, Hari Nagar, Near Swarg Ashram, Delhi-110064 declare that I got divorce from my husband vide Court Decree No. HMA 778/2006, dated 14-12-2006. Further I have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Sonal Abrol in future for all purposes.

I. REENA Rani W/o Narender Pal R/o H. No-252, Gali No-6, Near Shri Shankar Road, Om Vihar Phase-I, A, D K Mohan Garden, Uttam Nagar, Dwarka West Delhi-59, have changed my minor daughter's name from Ridhima to Ridhima Rani for all purposes.

I. HASEEN W/o Sher Mohammad, R/o 389/58 Baba Nagar, Meerut Road, Ghaziabad, U.P. -201003 have changed my name to Haseena for all future purposes.

I. RENU Verma W/o Sh. Arvind Verma R/o House No.16, Sai Datta Road, Sarsawan, Arjunang, Lucknow U.P.-226002. Declare that I have changed my name from Sona Verma to Renu Verma. I request you to change my name in my husband service record JC 389648F Nb Sub Arvind Verma for all purposes.

I. LAVI Devi W/o Manoj Kumar R/o NH-24, Mahrauli, Ghaziabad (U.P.) has changed my name from Lavi Devi to Leksh Sangwan for all future purpose.

I. MUKESH Kumar S/o Sanwal Dass, R/o B-11/A Samrala Nagar, Near Sadiq Ghaziabad, U.P. -201003 have changed the name of my son Risabh Bindoria (DOB-13.08.2013) aged 10 yrs and he shall hereafter be known as Risabh Bindoria for all future purposes.

IT IS for general information that I Sameer Khan S/o Salim Khan R/o A-95, nehru camp, govindpur, kalkaji, ND-19 declare that name of my father & my mother has been wrongly written as Saleem Khan & Nisha in my 10th & 12th class educational documents. The actual name of my father & my mother are Salim Khan and Jabulnisha respectively which may be amended accordingly.

I. PARUL Goel W/O, Deepak Kumar R/o House No-91 Ground Floor Front Side Ashoka Enclave Part-1 Faridabad-haryana 121003 have changed my name to Panul.

I. RAJENDRA Prasad R/o B-7, Pocket B, Customs Quarters, INA Colony, New Delhi-23 have changed my minor daughter's name from Vidhi to Vidhi Thapliyal for all future purposes.

I HAVE changed my name change from Nisar Ahmad to Nishar Ahmad s/o Abdul Latif R/o H. No. 640 Shaipuri Bambenta Ghaziabad for all future purposes.

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{ FROM PAGE 1 }

KEJRIWAL ARRESTED

summons the agency had issued.

"He has been arrested under Section 19 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), because there is evidence he was involved in the formulation and implementation of the policy, in which AAP leaders were paid kickbacks of ₹100 crore. He has repeatedly dishonoured summons sent by us. When we went to question him, he was evasive," said an ED officer who asked not to be named.

ED has not referred to Kejriwal as a suspect in any of its six charge sheets in the liquor policy case. However, one of the charge sheets mentions that the policy was Kejriwal's "brainchild".

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), meanwhile, demanded that Kejriwal resign as chief minister.

The arrest is a blow for the AAP, which has built its politics on a fine balance of delivering welfare programmes, providing concessions for various demographic groups and shoring up the Capital's basic infrastructure.

Kejriwal is the third major AAP leader to be arrested in the probe after his former deputy and senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia as well as the party's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh. This part, ED arrested Bharat Rashtia Samithi leader and Telangana lawmaker K Kavitha in the case last week.

Major drama played out in Civil Lines as a 10-member ED team accompanied by several Delhi Police contingents swooped down on the chief minister's official residence on Flagstaff Road around 7pm. As police teams set up barricades around the house, top AAP leaders and dozens of party workers swarmed the narrow lane outside in a last bid to keep the chief minister from being taken in.

Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel and additional companies of central forces were also called in, even as Section 144 was imposed.

After his arrest, Kejriwal was taken to the ED headquarters at APJ Abdul Kalam Road, where he will be kept in custody overnight and questioned by the probe team.

He will be produced before the special court at Rouse Avenue on Friday where ED will seek his custody.

His arrest came hours after the Delhi high court turned down his plea to protect him from arrest.

"After hearing both the parties, we are not inclined to grant the relief at this stage," a bench of justice Suresh Kumar Kait and justice Manoj Jain said in the order. The court also asked Kejriwal why he

had not approached the lower court seeking anticipatory bail if he was apprehending arrest.

Kejriwal has skipped summonses on the grounds that they are "illegal", and because ED has not specified in which capacity he is being called in—as an accused or witness, as Delhi CM or as national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party.

"Until and unless you attend any of the calls, how would you know what information they want? The summons started from the month of October. If you had apprehension that if you attend their call... then why did you not challenge? What prevented you from not going to the court below from filing an anticipatory bail?" the bench asked senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, who represented Kejriwal.

The court asked the probe agency what prevented it from arresting the minister. "What prevented you not to arrest? You are sending him summons after summons," the bench asked additional solicitor general SV Raju, who represented ED. Raju also clarified to the court that Kejriwal was being summoned in his individual capacity in the case.

But the series of events that culminated in Kejriwal's arrest on Thursday evening germinated nearly three years ago, when then deputy chief minister Sisodia launched the Delhi excise policy—a regime that was meant to revolutionise the city's liquor business.

It aimed to revitalise the city's flagging liquor business by replacing a sales-volume based regime with a licence fee one for traders, and promised swankier stores and a better customer experience. The policy also offered customers discounts on liquor for the first time, ever.

It, however, came to an abrupt end after Delhi's lieutenant governor VK Saxena recommended a probe into alleged irregularities in the regime in July 2022. This resulted in the policy being scrapped and being replaced by the previous policy.

While not named as an accused in the case yet, Kejriwal's name has found mention in court documents, including charge sheets and remand papers, in reference to alleged meetings, fixing commissions for private players, and the entry of political players and businesspeople from the south into Delhi's liquor business.

The first major arrest in the case was Sisodia's, in February last year, in what was the first sign that the excise policy was beginning to embroil the AAP. Singh was

arrested months later, on October 4.

ED has claimed in past court documents, including charge sheets, that the decision to carve out a 12% profit margin for wholesale private entities in the excise policy was taken at Kejriwal's residence in March 2021.

Thursday leaves the AAP in a moment of reckoning. Delhi voted overwhelmingly for the AAP in two straight elections, giving it 67 seats in the 70-member assembly in 2015 and 62 in 2019. The AAP also garnered upwards of 50% of the vote share both times.

But the party has fared poorly in the Lok Sabha elections, winning no seats both in 2014 and 2019. Delhi goes to polls in 2025.

Kejriwal was first anointed Delhi chief minister in December 2013, when he dislodged three-term CM and formidable Congress leader Sheila Dikshit. That year, he beat Dikshit from her bastion from—New Delhi.

He rose to the echelons of Delhi's local politics as an angry disruptor and a leader of the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement, aiming his anger at the Congress and the alleged corruption in the system.

Still, he allied with the Congress in the 2013 polls, after the Bharatiya Janata Party, which fell short of a majority with just 32 seats, refused to form a government. The AAP won 28 and the Congress was relegated to a distant third with just eight, a pale shadow of its former self.

Yet, Kejriwal snapped those ties in dramatic circumstances just 49 days later, arguing that he was unable to deliver in a coalition government.

Just over 14 months later, Kejriwal stormed back to power, leaving the BJP with just three seats in the assembly and the Congress zero.

Opposition parties and the AAP's partners in the INDIA grouping condemned the arrest.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in a post on X said: "A scared dictator wants to create a dead democracy... While capturing all the institutions including the media, breaking up the parties, extorting money from companies, freezing the account of the main opposition party was not enough for the 'devilish power', now the arrest of the elected Chief Ministers has also become a common thing."

Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin said the BJP had "sunk to despicable depths".

"Ahead of #Elections2024, driven by fear of a decade of fail-

ures and the imminent defeat, the Fascist BJP Govt sinks to despicable depths by arresting Hon'ble Delhi CM @ArvindKejriwal, following the unjust targeting of brother @HemantSorenJMM," Stalin said on X.

Delhi minister Saurabh Bhardwaj said, "The entire CM residence was searched during the raid. Only ₹70,000 was found, which the ED returned before leaving. The CM's cellphone was seized and he was arrested. No evidence, no proof, no documents of any property, no unaccounted money or money trail was found during the raid."

POLL BONDS

party lines. Out of this, 39.7% (₹542 crore) went to the All India Trinamool Congress, 36.8% (₹503 crore) to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), 11.3% (₹154 crore) to the YSR Congress, 7.3% (₹100 crore) to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and 3.7% (₹50 crore) to the Congress.

The second highest donor—Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Limited (MEIL)—donated 60.5% of its ₹966 crore to the BJP and 20.2% (₹195 crore) to the Telangana-based Bharat Rashtia Samithi (BRS).

The third highest donor, Thane-based Qwik Supply Chain donated 91.5% of its ₹410 crore to the BJP followed by 6% (₹25 crore) to the Shiv Sena. It donated ₹10 crore (2.4%) to Nationalist Congress Party. According to Zaubacorp, a website that scrapes data from the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, and LinkedIn profiles, two of the directors of the firm are employees of the Reliance group and are directors of multiple Reliance Group companies.

Mining behemoth Vedanta Limited donated ₹230.15 crore, or 57.5% of its total bonds worth ₹400.35 crore, to the BJP, followed by ₹125 crore (31.2%) to the Congress.

The Kolkata-based RP-Sanjiv Goenka Group's Haldia Energy donated 74.5% of its ₹377 crore to the TMC followed by ₹81 crore (21.5%) to the BJP.

For the BJP, which received ₹5,594.2 crore, MEIL was the largest donor at ₹584 crore, followed by Qwik Supply Chain at ₹375 crore and Vedanta at ₹230.15 crore. Others contributed ₹4,032.15 crore. In all, the BJP netted ₹6,061 crore of the ₹8,252 crore between April 12, 2019 and January 11, 2024.

The TMC received its biggest chunk of funds from Future Gaming at ₹542 crore, followed by Hal-

dia Energy at ₹281 crore and Dharwad Infrastructure at ₹90 crore. Others contributed ₹588.12 crore. In all, the TMC netted ₹1,610 crore of the ₹1,708 crore between April 12, 2019 and January 11, 2024.

For the Congress, the biggest donor was Vedanta at ₹125 crore, followed by Western UP Power Transmission Company Limited at ₹110 crore and MJK Enterprise at ₹91.6 crore. In all, the Congress netted ₹1,422 crore of the ₹1,952 crore between April 12, 2019 and January 11, 2024.

The data disclosure has gained additional importance given that it was revealed just weeks ahead of general elections, where political funding is expected to be among the issues raised during the campaign.

The data solves the mystery of who anonymously donated ₹10 crore to the Samajwadi Party by post. Keventer Food Park Infra, a part of the Kolkata-based FMCG group Keventer, donated 10 ₹ crore bonds to the SP. These bonds were bought on May 7, 2019 and redeemed by the party on May 10, 2019.

But another mystery—of who handed over a sealed envelope with 10 ₹ crore bonds to the Janata Dal (United) in its office on April 3, 2019—still persists because the bonds were credited into JD(U)'s account on April 10, two days before the cut-off of April 12.

Under the 2018 EB scheme—which was quashed by a Constitution bench of the Supreme Court on February 15 because it completely anonymised contributions made to political parties—each electoral bond is imprinted with a unique number that can assist in tracking the issuance and redemption of bonds, and in tracing the bond back to the purchaser.

On March 18, the bench led by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud ordered SBI to disclose the unique serial number associated with each EB and all other information the bank possesses while supplying the ECI with data for public release.

On the day, the bench, also comprising justices Sanjay Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, noted that the February 15 judgment required SBI to disclose all information in its possession, which will include alphanumeric numbers and serial numbers, besides the date of purchase or redemption, the recipient's or buyer's name, and the denomination of EBs.

It called for a categorical affidavit of the SBI chairman by 5pm on March 21 that the bank has dis-

closed all the information in its custody and that no details have been withheld. The court further directed that as soon as ECI receives the information from SBI, it will post it on its website "forthwith".

Complying with this direction, the SBI chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara filed his affidavit on Thursday afternoon, stating that "SBI has now disclosed all details and that no details (other than complete bank account numbers and KYC Details) have been withheld from disclosure."

Details of purchaser furnished to ECI on Thursday include EB's serial number and URN number, bond number, journal date, date of purchase, date of expiry, prefix, name of the purchaser, denomination, issue branch code, issue teller and status.

The information about redemption by political parties, the affidavit said, includes EB serial number, date of encashment, name of the political party, last four digits of the account number, prefix, bond number, denomination, pay branch code and pay teller.

The bank clarified that prefix and bond number are the alphanumeric number, adding that the complete bank account numbers and KYC details of political parties are not being made public as it may compromise the security of the account. "Similarly, KYC details of the purchasers are also not made public. However, they are not necessary for identifying the political parties," the affidavit stated.

SBI maintained that it was now revealing information which will show the name of the EB purchaser, denomination and specific number of the bond, name of the party that has encashed the bond, last four digits of the bank account number of political parties and denomination and number of the bond redeemed.

EBs, which were bearer banking instruments that did not carry the name of the buyer or payee, used to go for sale in 10-day windows in the beginning of every quarter—in January, April, July and October—besides an additional 30-day period specified by the central government during the Lok Sabha election years.

Introduced in 2018, EBs were available for purchase at any SBI branch in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore and could be bought through a KYC-compliant account. There was no limit on the number of electoral bonds that a person or company could pur-

chase. Donations made under this scheme by corporate and even foreign entities through Indian subsidiaries enjoyed 100% tax exemption while identities of the donors were kept confidential both by the bank as well as the recipient political parties.

But on February 15, a five-judge Constitution bench struck down the scheme, declaring it to be "unconstitutional" because it completely anonymised contributions made to political parties, and added that restricting black money or illegal election financing—some of the articulated objectives of the scheme—did not justify violating voters' right to information in a disproportionate manner.

The bench directed SBI—the only designated EB-issuing bank—to stop the issuance of EBs, adding that the bank should submit details of EBs purchased since April 12, 2019, till that date to the poll watchdog by March 6. By March 13, the judgment ordered all funding received by political parties—since the court issued an interim direction to parties to submit such information with ECI—to be made public on ECI's website.

On March 4, SBI told the court it needed till June to break down the details of 22,217 EBs. But the apex court rejected the plea on March 11 and gave the bank one day.

PANNUN PLOT

The Indian side has revealed nothing officially about the work done by the high-level committee, or its composition or findings since an indictment filed by US prosecutors in a Manhattan court last November alleged that Indian national Nikhil Gupta, acting on the instructions of an unnamed Indian official, was involved in a plot to kill Pannun on American soil.

It is understood the operative removed from his position is the Indian government official referred to only as "CC-1" in the US indictment against Gupta. The indictment described CC-1 as a "senior field officer" responsible for "security management" and "intelligence" who directed the plot from India.

Bloomberg reported that "one person directly involved in the alleged attempted assassination is no longer working" for RAW. This person is "still employed by the government and India hasn't started any criminal action against him", the report said. India has also informed US authorities about the findings of the high-level committee, the report added.

The "murder for hire" plot, as US officials have referred to the incident, has emerged as an irritant in an otherwise robust India-US relationship that now encompasses collaboration on critical emerging technologies, joint development of military hardware and close cooperation on defence and security issues.

The US has pressed India to prosecute those involved in the plot, and this was a message conveyed to Indian officials by Donald Lu, the assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, when he visited New Delhi in January.

Participating in a US House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing in Washington on Wednesday, Lu described the plot as a "serious issue between the US and India". He added: "We take this in the administration incredibly seriously and have raised it at the highest levels with India. We are, at the moment, working with India to encourage India to hold accountable those responsible for this terrible crime."

Lu noted that India has created a committee of inquiry to look into the matter and said, "We ask them to work quickly and transparently to make sure justice is done."

According to the indictment by US prosecutors, Gupta contacted a person whom he believed to be a criminal associate for help in killing Pannun. However, the person contacted by Gupta was a confidential source working with US law enforcement. The indictment said this source introduced Gupta to a purported hitman, who was an undercover US law enforcement officer.

Gupta is currently in jail in the Czech Republic, where the justice minister is examining his challenge to a court ruling that he can be extradited to the US.

Pannun, who holds US citizenship and is a senior leader of Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), has already been declared a terrorist by India.

About two months before the US indictment was made public, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau triggered a diplomatic row by alleging there was a "potential link" between Indian government agents and the killing of Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in the town of Surrey in June 2023. India dismissed Trudeau's accusation as absurd and said the Canadian side hasn't provided any evidence to back up the allegations.

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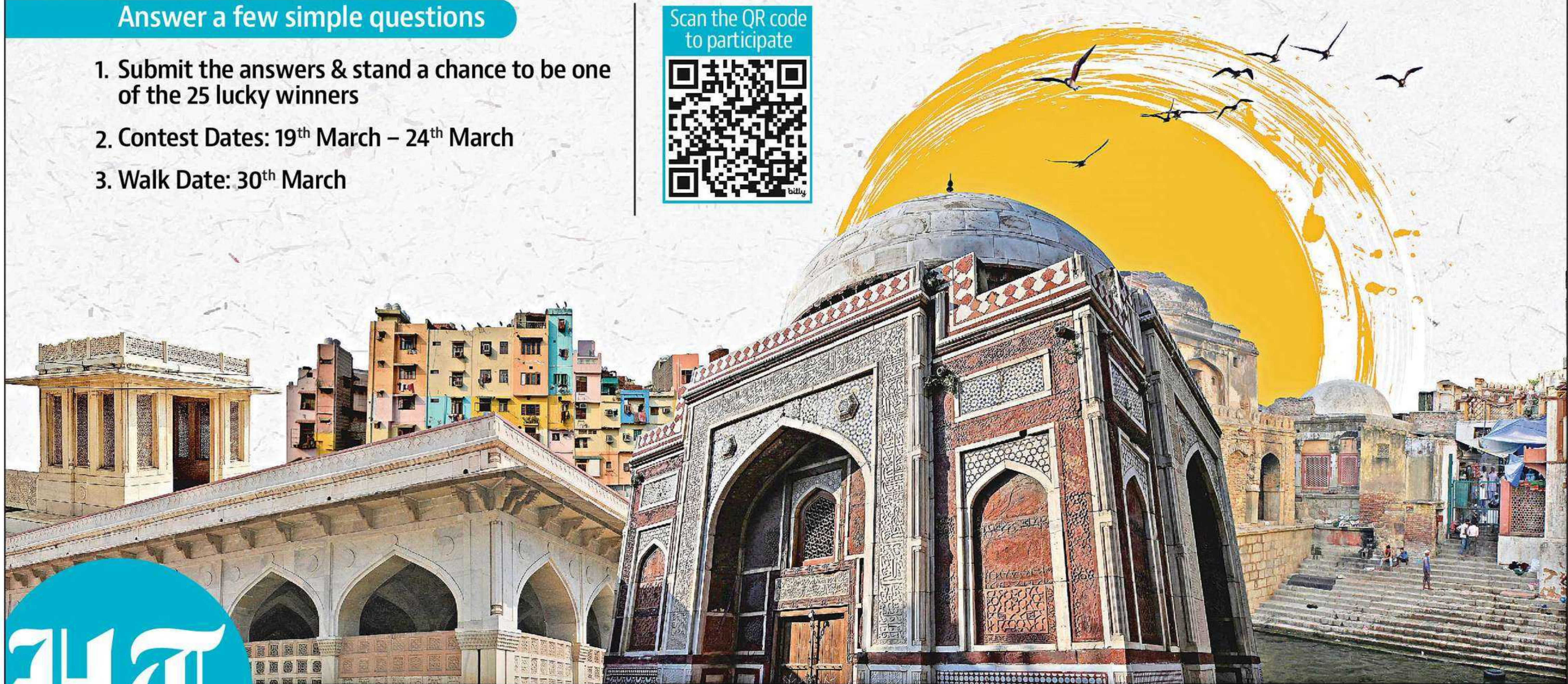


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OPINION

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OUR TAKE

Act now or face extinction soon

The State of the Climate report details the defining challenge that humanity faces. Nations need to take action

Much has been written about the year 2023 and all the temperature records it broke. The latest State of the Climate report by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) confirmed that the year was the warmest on record, with the global average near-surface temperature at 1.45 °C above the pre-industrial baseline, and that it was the warmest 10-year period on record. Every day of the year, nearly one-third of the global ocean was gripped by a marine heatwave; by the end of 2023, over 90% of the ocean had experienced heatwave conditions; extreme ice melt in western North America and Europe drove the global set of reference glaciers to the largest loss of ice; and Antarctic sea ice extent was by far the lowest. The report, however, has made it clear that the crisis is much more than about high temperatures.

The crisis has become "The defining challenge that humanity faces", WMO secretary general Celeste Saulo said, as witnessed by the growing food insecurity, population displacement, and biodiversity loss it has brought about. The number of food-insecure people has more than doubled from 149 million before the pandemic to 333 million in 2023. Weather hazards continued to trigger displacement, and raise the costs of food production with farmlands destroyed. While some of these parameters, updated after the pandemic and with two wars raging on, may not be the direct result of climate extremes, the sudden spikes have been triggered by these extremes. Temperatures will continue to rise for many years to come, WMO warned, with concentrations of three main greenhouse gases showing a continued rise after reaching record levels in 2022. The report also highlighted the unusual warming in areas such as the Northeast Atlantic, which did not correspond to typical patterns of warming associated with El Niño, and has puzzled scientists. But there is a glimmer of hope: Renewable energy capacity additions increased by almost 50% from 2022 driven by solar radiation, wind and water cycle.

The report is just a confirmation — a document for history books — of what humanity faced all of last year. It needs to be seen as a "Red Alert" for a society facing a threat to its existence as changes to the fundamental Earth systems speed up. It is also a now constant reminder of the urgent need to cut emissions drastically. UN secretary general António Guterres rightly said the records are "chart-busting" — the Y-axes for several scales were extended this year to accommodate the higher values set last year. Whether this rhetoric spurs action is to be seen.

A manifesto for federal politics

The political ambitions of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) are mostly confined to Tamil Nadu. However, it has always seen itself as a flagbearer of India's federal politics and constitutional provisions that protect the balance of power between the Centre and states. The DMK manifesto released on Wednesday suggests that the party takes its historic legacy seriously and believes its federal stance can also be an electorally attractive position.

The DMK manifesto promises to restrict the powers of governors, restore statehood and hold elections in Jammu and Kashmir, conduct population, caste and poverty census every five years, and scrap the National Education Policy 2020 and the Army's Agnipath recruitment scheme. These positions are drawn from the party's own experience in office and Parliament, of repeated scraps with the Centre over turf. In fact, it defined the DMK's parliamentary politics in the 1960s and '70s, especially after the Centre began to weaponise Article 356 to dismiss non-Congress governments. The Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations looked at these federal concerns in depth.

They receded into the background in the 1980s with the weakening of the Congress and the rise of regional parties. The Telugu Desam, CPI-M, National Conference, and Asom Gana Parishad among others were allies of the DMK in articulating a federal politics that found its parliamentary voice in the third fronts of the late 1980s and '90s. That these agendas are back in circulation suggests the re-emergence of old federal faultlines. This is the outcome of BJP's unitarian political vision, which, despite the talk of cooperative federalism, is perceived to favour centralisation in governance, including in subsidies and taxation. These issues call for a deeper conversation.

BEYOND THE BYTE

Rajdeep Sardesai



Elections 2024 is a match of unequals

The Opposition is in disarray. However, it deserves the benefit of a level playing field at the time of elections

The 2024 election bugle has been sounded but the traditional *band-baja* buzz is missing. This could be partly because a general election is more a marathon than a sprint, spread over two and a half months in excruciating summer heat. The lack of excitement is more likely because the outcome seems preordained: Never before in recent memory has there been a consensus on the inevitability of the result. Barring the most miraculous twist in fortune, Narendra Modi is set to emulate his *bete noire* Jawaharlal Nehru and win three consecutive five-year terms. But while the result appears a foregone conclusion, here is the nagging question: Is there really a level playing field in what is meant to be a free and fair democratic battle?

There is little doubt that the Opposition is in disarray. The INDIA bloc has been badly fractured, struggling to deal with the numerous contradictions that lie within. Except for Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, there is no major state where the alliance has held firmly together. The Congress

mirrors the state of a rudderless Opposition with Rahul Gandhi embarking on a nationwide *yatra* at a critical juncture while his party struggles with alliance permutations.

And yet, even a bedraggled Opposition deserves the benefit of a level playing field at election time. Take the Election Commission of India (ECI), which is legally empowered to conduct the elections in a fair and even manner. A neutral umpire is not just meant to be fiercely non-aligned but must be seen to be so. Sadly, that constitutionally mandated role has come under increasing scrutiny. In 2019, election commissioner Ashok Lavasa's dissent note on a series of clean chits given by the ECI to the Prime Minister (PM)'s allegedly divisive speeches was not even placed on record and he was eventually shunted out from the election body. Now, in 2024, the government has negated a Supreme Court order by ensuring its total supremacy in appointing election commissioners. Even the elongated election schedule raises troubling questions: Why, for example, does Maharashtra with no history of electoral violence have a five-phase poll? Is it to only allow the PM as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s star campaigner to crisscross the state in every phase?

The diminishing credibility of the ECI reflects a larger institutional corrosion in which official conduct rules

are being tested. For example, the Centre's move last year to get top officers to spread awareness of the Modi government's achievements as *rath prabharis* during a Viksit Bharat Yatra sparked controversy over the unabashed politicisation of the bureaucracy. Another order from the ministry of defence asked soldiers on leave to promote government schemes as soldier-ambassadors. In effect, the lines between a ruling party and government have been blurred.

The weaponisation of central investigating agencies, in particular the Enforcement Directorate (ED), has ensured that Opposition leaders remain on tenterhooks. The arrest of Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal late Thursday in the alleged Delhi liquor scam is a part of this pattern. With the Bharat Rashtia Samithi leader K Kavitha also arrested in the liquor case, ED's looming presence is spreading a growing sense of disquiet in Opposition ranks. The Income Tax department is just as proactive: It has frozen the accounts and sought recovery of ₹100 crore from the Congress over alleged discrepancies in its 2018-19 tax returns.

Moreover, as details of electoral bonds have revealed so far, there appears to be a correlation between coercive action by agencies and bond donations, a *quid pro quo* that smacks of unseemly deal-making. As many as



Here is the nagging question: Is there really a level-playing field in what is meant to be a free and fair democratic battle?

14 of the top 30 donors are companies who faced investigative action in the period when bonds were purchased suggesting that monies might have been paid as "protection" from prosecution. That more than 50% of these bond monies went to the BJP is less surprising: The party is the dominant party nationally and has huge access to resources, be it in cash or bonds. But when one party has more spending power than all the rest put together, it does create a financial muscle mismatch that skews the overall campaign. Just look at the multi-media blitzkrieg of the Modi government and the picture becomes clearer.

Which brings us to the media itself, a large section of which appears to have abandoned any pretensions of playing the role of watchdog and demanding a measure of accountability from the ruling establishment. A survey conducted in April 2019 ahead of the general elections by Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC), the premier TV viewership monitoring agency, shows that Prime Minister Modi received three times more TV airtime than his political adversaries, most of it suitably adulatory. Expect the balance to be even more heavily weighted in favour of the frontrunner

this time. It isn't as if Modi wouldn't win without a fawning media. Or he would lose without the institutional capture of the State. The fact is the PM is a domineering personality, a larger-than-life figure whose energetic presence and muscular leadership easily connect with vast multitudes across a subcontinental size country. A *vishwaguru* to some, a Hindu priest to others, from a delivery-oriented administrator to a nationalist icon, the *Ayeyga toh Modi hi* (only Modi will win) chant symbolises a polity where all dissenting voices are being squeezed out. But even in a match where the winner is almost certain, the other side deserves equal space on the pitch. Denying that basic opportunity is to do a grave disservice to democracy.

Post-script: A more reassuring note was struck during the recent ECI press conference. When asked to respond to hate speech violations of the model code, the chief election commissioner assured that "no matter how renowned a politician is" action would be taken. Will the Commission walk the talk?

Rajdeep Sardesai is a senior journalist and author. The views expressed are personal

The controversy over Sangeetha Kalanidhi

What was the Academy thinking? As I write this, a growing number of eminent musicians including, and beginning with, Ranjani-Gayatri, Trichur Brothers, Vishakha Hari, and Dushyanth Sridhar have withdrawn from performing in the Music Academy's 2024 season. Chitravina Ravikiran has returned his Sangeetha Kalanidhi award. You could argue that their arguments for taking this stance are flawed — there was no need to draw Periyar's name into the debate. But united they stand against the Academy's decision to give this year's Sangeetha Kalanidhi award to polarising and polemic musician TM Krishna.

The problem is that Krishna's public persona is that of a self-righteous scold — and nobody likes that. His admirers revel in the fact that he has upended the conservative world of Carnatic music by singing songs by new and hitherto unheard-of authors (Kuvempu, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Tagore and more) in new and radical locations — on a public transport bus and amongst fisherfolk.

Well, guess what? Everything that Krishna has done in the name of revolutionising Carnatic music has been done before. Except it was done with quiet albeit firm grace and a respect for tradition, consensus and community. The list of musicians who advanced and evolved Carnatic music is long but one commonality is that they are linked by tradition and a respect for what Indian poetics called *auchitya* or appropriateness.

Take my guru, Sangeetha Kalanidhi RK Srikantan. He once told me in the quiet confines of his modest home that *ragas* had an innate proportion. He mocked performers who told up "thukkada" *ragams* and made them the main *ragam* of the concert. He did not name names — that wasn't his style. Rangaramanuja Ayyangar, who wrote the magisterial book, *History of South Indian (Carnatic) Music*, championed Tamil composer Papanasam Sivan, worshipped the music of Dhanammal, and helped ML Vasanthakumari and her mother notate the *krithis* of Purandara Dasa. New directions in music, all of them, done without fuss or diatribe.

Musical stalwarts like Ariyakudi Ramanujayyengar and Veenai Dhanammal were no less revolutionary in their desire to change the format and structure of Carnatic music. But they earned the respect rather than the revulsion of their fellow musicians.

How did Ariyakudi do it? How did he carry people along when he decided to alter the way Carnatic music was performed pretty much forever — given that most musicians except Krishna had adhered to this tradition so far? In an article for *Sruti* magazine, Ariyakudi's student, Alleppey Venkatesan describes the process by which Ariyakudi decided to drastically reduce the expansive hour-long *raga alapana* that were the norm in those days. "...he successfully prevailed upon his violinists never to exceed his own duration of *raga alapana*, even if the violinist happened to be a senior artist like Malaikottai Govindaswamy Pillai... He quietly asserted the primacy of the singer and his prerogative as to time management for the success of the concert." Talk about revolutionising the form without inviting deni-

gration from your fellow musicians.

In his 1938 presidential address to the Madras Music Academy, Ariyakudi explained his thought process. He began by noting the Urdu origins of the word, *kacheri*. As explained by scholar Lakshmi Subramanian in her book, *New Mansions For Music: Performance, Pedagogy and Criticism*, Ariyakudi laid down a list of prescriptions of how to perform music but "these expressed the collective wisdom of a generation of musicians". In other words, you have to carry people along — which Krishna does not seem to want to do.

Is it because he is a rabble-rousing self-serving iconoclast who seems to seek publicity above all else? I am not sure; I don't think so, but I don't know what to make of him. Krishna fancies himself as a revolutionary, but he is an inconsistent reactionary whose argument is "anti-whatever the norm is" rather than cogently thinking through the evolution of music. He is incongruent in his stance, which is fine for an artist, but not if you want to establish a legacy that changes the status quo. Surely, there are those in the musical fraternity whom Krishna respects. Why couldn't he have created an informal *adda* with his musical peers and tried to persuade them of his ideologies much like Ariyakudi and others before him did? Instead, Krishna chose disdain and the path of social media rather than building consensus.

I have met Krishna a few times. I last met him at my friends, Valli and Ramesh Swamy's house. He was light, playful and informal, relishing the home food after singing at the Odukathur Mutt to a packed house. Ramesh told me that Krishna never charges a rupee for his concerts for Unnati — the organisation that they run. He is a gifted musician — no more gifted than the others who have taken up cudgels against him, but no less either. But there appears to be a lacuna inside him that I cannot fathom, something that his music doesn't seem to fill. Isn't music enough, I once asked him at an author evening in Bengaluru and he basically said "No, for him, it wasn't".

Although I don't agree with the conservative ideals of Anglo-Irish philosopher, Edmund Burke (I fall more on Mary Wollstonecraft's side in that debate), I agree with Burke's thesis that "society is but a contract between the dead, the living and those yet to be born". In choosing a maverick path for its own sake, in drawing attention to the cult of personality rather than the strength of his ideas, and in his incongruent and inconsistent arguments, Krishna has decided to ignore the dead — the ancestors and elders of this grand Carnatic music tradition — and has, unlike previous innovators of the form, muddled the waters without providing a clear path for "those yet to be born".

In giving the award to a musician who disdains and insults his musical fraternity and doesn't respect the gradual evolution from tradition and modernity, the Madras Music Academy may well have reduced its stature, invited questions about its motives, and, you could argue, made itself a subject of derision amongst those who love Carnatic music.

Shoba Narayan is a writer and journalist. The views expressed are personal

KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA | MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE IMF



When central banks and governments play their roles, we have seen better control of inflation and lower financial stability risks. We must preserve and strengthen central bank independence

India needs to douse its many water fires

World Water Day (WWD) is observed on March 22 every year, to spur action on protecting water for future use. WWD 2024 revolves around the theme "Leveraging water for peace", which deals with water's role in global harmony. In many countries, communities and families below the poverty level are also without safe and easily accessible water. Clean water access, thus, is a stepping stone to economic growth.

Globally, the water picture is far from rosy. One in three people already live without access to safe drinking water, and by 2050, about 5.7 billion people will be living in areas where there is no access to water for at least one month a year. By 2040, global water demand is expected to increase by more than 50%. Given how extreme weather events impact water availability, if global warming is restricted to 1.5 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial level, related water stress could be halved.

Out of a total of 192.7 million households in India, 144.5 million (March 5, 2024) rural households have received tap water connections. The states/Union Territories (UTs) that achieved 100% connections in rural areas are Haryana, Telangana, Gujarat, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Puducherry, and Arunachal Pradesh. Rajasthan (47%) and West Bengal (45%), on the other hand, haven't achieved even 50% tap water coverage.

Once access to water is ensured, rural households can use the time spent earlier for water collection on productive engagement. Analysis of Jal Jeevan Mission data shows that the employment generation potential during the construction stage of tap water connections is on average 5.99 million person-years in direct employment, and 22.2 million person-years in indirect employment. The operation and maintenance stage adds another 1.11 million person-years in direct employment annually.

Water can help fight poverty too as it plays a critical role in ensuring food security. Agriculture accounts for more than 70% of water consumed in the country and the employment of the poor in this sector helps in alleviating poverty. Irrigation helps raise crop intensity and per hectare yield, which consequently expands the need for labour and contributes to employment generation while raising rural real wages.

Resolving water disputes and conflicts among states over sharing of water from interstate rivers can ensure peace. Since Independence, conflicts among states in this regard have

been on the rise. These have often acquired political overtones, as seen in the case of Cauvery water sharing between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and in the case of the Sutlej link canal dispute between Punjab and Haryana. High water demand spurs conflicts between states, and there is little realisation that water resources are finite.

Amicable water sharing will bring peace among the countries too. For instance, the 1960 Indus Water Treaty between India and Pakistan has settled some of the issues, as has the Ganga Water Treaty 1996 between India and Bangladesh. There is a need to accelerate tap water coverage in states/UT where the progress is not satisfactory. Empowering Nari Shakti for interactive decision-making through *paani samitis*, and water and sanitation committees should be the guiding principle for water access. Agricultural water use has been on the rise over the years, with a low use efficiency of about 40%. Crop diversification, changing the crop calendar, enhancing water use efficiency through the use of drip and sprinkler irrigation, and better agro-economic practices should be adopted extensively to conserve water.

The water saved can then be reallocated to other high-demand sectors for spurring employment and poverty reduction. A basin authority should be set up for every river in India, with its jurisdiction extending across states. Statutory powers should be given to such authorities for sustainable water management.

In the absence of such authority, the Interstate River Water Disputes (ISRWD) Act, 1956 should be reviewed. A Bill to amend this Act is under the consideration of Parliament, which proposes to empower the Union government to constitute a dispute settlement committee for amicable settlement of disputes among states. The Bill calls for the setting up of an Interstate Water Dispute Tribunal for adjudication of water disputes with multiple benches and mandates that the tribunal's order will have the same force as that of a Supreme Court order, which is binding on the parties. The progressive amendment of the ISRWD Act should be given priority in the coming years for peaceful resolution of water disputes.

SK Sarkar is distinguished fellow, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), and former secretary, ministry of water resources, Government of India. The views expressed are personal

**AFGHANISTAN:
AT LEAST 20
DIE IN SUICIDE
BOMBING IN
KANDAHAR**

KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN: The death toll from a suicide bombing in Afghanistan's Kandahar early on Thursday has reached at least 20 people, a source at a major hospital in the southern city told AFP. "Mirwais Hospital has received 20 people killed since this morning from the explosion," the source said on condition of anonymity.

Taliban authorities said the suicide bombing was carried out by the Islamic State group.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but the interior ministry said a "preliminary report shows that this crime has been carried out by Daesh", using another name for the jihadist group.

"The investigations are ongoing," interior ministry spokesman Abdul Mateen Qani told AFP. "As soon as possible the criminals will be identified... and punished for their actions."

Afghanistan's capital is Kabul but Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada lives in Kandahar city, in the southern province of the same name that is the birthplace of the Taliban movement.

The explosion at around 8:00am (local time) targeted a group of people waiting outside the New Kabul Bank branch in central Kandahar city, said Inamullah Samangani, director of information and culture of Kandahar province.

In the aftermath of the explosion, Taliban authorities surrounded the area outside the bank and did not let journalists close to the site. **AFP**

**US urges 'immediate' truce
at UN as Gaza war grinds on**

US had earlier blocked UNSC texts using the word 'immediate', but Blinken has now confirmed a shift in Biden admin's position

Agencies

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GAZA: The United States has circulated for the first time a draft UN resolution calling for an "immediate" ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, as warnings grow of famine in besieged Gaza. Washington had blocked previous Security Council texts using the word "immediate" but US top diplomat Antony Blinken confirmed the shift in position on Wednesday.

Blinken met Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Cairo on Thursday after ceasefire talks resumed in Qatar this week, centred on a truce of around six weeks that would allow the release of 40 Israeli hostages in return for hundreds of Palestinians detained in Israeli jails.

Blinken told the Arabic broadcaster Al Hadath that such a ceasefire would bring "immediate relief to so many people who are suffering in Gaza — the children, the women, the men", and that the US had drafted a UN resolution

to that effect. The main sticking point remains that Hamas says it will release hostages only as part of an agreement that would end the war, while Israel says it will discuss only a temporary pause. "I think the gaps are narrowing, and I think an agreement is very much possible," Blinken told Al Hadath.

The Israeli bombardment of Gaza continued overnight with the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory saying at least 70 people had been killed, pushing the overall toll towards 32,000.

Gaza's biggest hospital has emerged as a major flashpoint after Israel accused Palestinian militants of hiding out there and launched a days-long raid, which it said on Thursday had killed more than 140 fighters.

Hamas said the ongoing attack on the vast Al-Shifa hospital complex, crowded with patients and people seeking refuge, was a crime.

Gaza's civilian infrastructure has largely collapsed and UN agencies are warning that the territory's 2.4 million people are on the brink of famine.

'Strong message'

The United States has vetoed previous UN Security Council (UNSC) texts on the nearly six-month war, objecting even last month to the term "immediate" in a draft submitted by Algeria. A new version circulated by



A picture taken from Rafah shows smoke billowing after Israeli bombardment on Khan Younis in Gaza Strip on Thursday. **AFP**

the US and seen by AFP stressed "the need for an immediate and durable ceasefire" to protect civilians and allow aid into the territory.

No vote has been scheduled on the text but Blinken told Saudi media outlet Al Hadath

on Wednesday that support for the resolution would send a "strong message".

The US secretary of state, whose diplomatic push is running alongside mediation efforts in Qatar, will land in Israel on Friday.

The Qatar talks were considering a Hamas proposal for a six-week ceasefire to allow hostages to be exchanged for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel and increased aid deliveries.

But a senior Hamas official based in Lebanon, Osama Hamdan, said Israel's response had been "largely negative" and called it "a step backwards".

The US and Israel are also engaged in a diplomatic tug-of-war over the southern Gaza city of Rafah, the last part of the territory still largely untouched by Israeli ground troops.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have fled to the city to escape fighting elsewhere, but Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted a ground incursion is the only way to finally root out Hamas.

US officials said they supported Netanyahu's goal but wanted Israel to try strategies short of a potentially catastrophic invasion of an area where around 1.5 million people are hemmed in by the Egyptian border.

The bloodiest-ever Gaza war broke out after Hamas's attacks resulted in about 1,160 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Militants also seized about 250 hostages, of whom Israel believes 130 remain in Gaza, including 33 who are presumed dead.

{ AUSTRALIA }

**Record migration:
Student visa rules
set to be tightened**

SYDNEY: Australia will begin enforcing tougher visa rules for foreign students this week as official data showed migration hit another record high, which is likely to further exacerbate an already tight rental market.

From Saturday, English language requirements for student and graduate visas will be increased, while the government will get the power to suspend education providers from recruiting international students if they repeatedly break rules. "The actions this weekend will continue to drive migration levels down while delivering on our commitments in the migration strategy to fix the broken system we inherited," Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil said in a statement.

A new "genuine student test" will be introduced to further crack down on international students who look to come to Australia primarily to work.

The moves follow a raft of actions last year to close off Covid-era concessions introduced by the former government, including unrestricted working hours for international students. The government at the time said rules would be tightened for students that could halve its migrant intake over two years.

Australia boosted its annual migration numbers in 2022 to help businesses recruit staff to fill shortages after the Covid-19 pandemic brought strict border



Students walk past stalls during an orientation week at The University of Sydney in Australia. **REUTERS**

controls, and kept foreign students and workers out for nearly two years.

But the sudden influx of foreign workers and students has exacerbated pressure on an already tight rental market.

Data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on Thursday showed net immigration rose 60% to a record 548,800 in the year to September 30, 2023, higher than the 518,000 people in the year ending June 2023. Overall, Australia's population rose 2.5% — the fastest pace on record — to 26.8 million people in the year to last September.

The record migration - driven by students from India, China and Philippines - has expanded labour supply and restrained wage pressures, but it exacerbated an already tight housing market. **REUTERS**

{ ELON MUSK'S START-UP }

**Neuralink wonder: 1st
brain-chip patient plays
online chess using mind**

Reuters

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NEW YORK: Elon Musk's brain-chip start-up Neuralink livestreamed on Wednesday its first patient implanted with a chip using his mind to play online chess. Noland Arbaugh, the 29-year-old patient who was paralysed below the shoulder after a diving accident, played chess on his laptop and moved the cursor using the Neuralink device. The implant seeks to enable people to control a computer cursor or keyboard using only their thoughts.

Arbaugh had received an implant from the company in January and could control a computer mouse using his thoughts, Musk said last month.

"The surgery was super easy," Arbaugh said in the video streamed on Musk's social media platform X, referring to the implant procedure. "I literally was released from the hospital a day later. I have no cognitive impairments."

"I had basically given up playing that game," Arbaugh said, referring to the game Civilization VI, "you all (Neuralink) gave me the ability to do that again and played for 8 hours straight."

Elaborating on his experience with the new technology, Arbaugh said that it is "not perfect" and they "have run into some issues".

"I don't want people to think that this is the end of the journey, there's still a lot of work to be done, but it has already changed my life," he added.

Kip Ludwig, former pro-



Neuralink logo and Elon Musk photo in an illustration taken, on December 19, 2022. **REUTERS**

gramme director for neural engineering at the US National Institutes of Health, said what Neuralink showed was not a "breakthrough".

"It is still in the very early days post-implantation, and there is a lot of learning on both the Neuralink side and the subject's side to maximise the amount of information for control that can be achieved," he added.

Even so, Ludwig said it was a positive development for the patient that they have been able to interface with a computer in a way they were not able to before the implant. "It's certainly a good starting point," he said.

Last month, Reuters reported that the US Food and Drug Administration inspectors found problems with record keeping and quality controls for animal experiments at Elon Musk's Neuralink, less than a month after the startup said it was cleared to test its brain implants in humans.

**PORTUGAL'S NEW
PREMIER VOWS
STABLE GOVT BUT
FACES TOUGH TASK**

Agence France-Presse

letters@hindustantimes.com

LISBON: Portugal's new Prime Minister Luis Montenegro vowed "stable" leadership after his appointment on Thursday but faces a tough job ruling in a minority government with opposition from a rising far right. The 51-year-old lawyer and veteran parliamentarian was named premier after midnight early on Thursday after final results came through from the March 10 polls.

Despite falling far short of a majority in parliament, he has ruled out teaming up with the anti-immigration Chega party in government. "There is no internal or external reason to doubt our ability to have a stable government," he said on Thursday after meeting with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels.

His government "has the confidence of the voters", he said.

"It also has what is required of all political players, including those now in opposition, that is a sense of responsibility," Montenegro added.

Montenegro's Democratic Alliance (AD) had campaigned on promises to boost economic growth by cutting taxes, and to improve unreliable public health services and education, which have been hit by strikes by teachers and school workers over pay.

Montenegro is scheduled to present his new government next Thursday and it will take office on April 2.

Thursday that it had targeted Ukrainian

**Russia targets Kyiv after Putin
vows revenge for border strikes**

Agencies

letters@hindustantimes.com

KYIV, UKRAINE: Russia fired more than 30 missiles at Kyiv early on Thursday, the largest attack on the Ukrainian capital in weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin vowed retribution for escalating strikes on Russia's border regions.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on the West to deliver air defence systems after the attacks, which wounded 17 in Kyiv and the surrounding region.

Ukraine's air force said it shot down 31 Russian missiles fired towards Kyiv.

"Such terror continues every day and night," Zelensky said in a Telegram post on Thursday.

"It is possible to put an end to it through global unity... Russian terrorists do not have missiles capable of bypassing Patriot and other leading world systems," he said. "This protection is required in Ukraine now."

From Kyiv to Kharkiv, Sumy to Kherson, and Odesa to the Donetsk region. This is entirely possible if our partners demonstrate sufficient political will."

For weeks a vital \$60 billion US military aid package for Ukraine has been blocked in Congress amid domestic political arguments.

Local officials said falling debris from the missiles injured 17 people — 13 in Kyiv and four in the surrounding region.

The air force said Russia fired two Iskander ballistic missiles and 29 cruise missiles, launched from strategic bombers. Russia's defence ministry said on Thursday that it had targeted Ukrainian



Firefighters work at the site after a Russian attack in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Thursday. **AP**

military sites with "long-range high-precision weapons, including Kinzhal hypersonic missiles".

The attack comes after a sharp escalation in Ukrainian strikes on Russian border regions and oil refineries over the last two weeks. Speaking last week after a wave of Ukrainian attacks on Russia, Putin said: "These strikes by the enemy do not and will not go unpunished."

US backs \$50bn Ukraine bond using Russian assets
The US proposed to its Group of Seven allies that they create a special purpose vehicle to issue at least \$50 billion of bonds

backed by the profits generated by frozen Russian sovereign assets and use the proceeds to support Ukraine, according to people familiar with the plan.

The proposal would pool the \$280 billion of Russian central bank assets that have been immobilised by G-7 countries and the European Union in the SPV, the profits of which would back the so-called freedom bonds, said the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. More than two-thirds of Russia's frozen assets are blocked in the EU, where they generate about \$3.6 billion of net profits a year.

Proceeds from the prospective bond offering would nearly

equal the \$60 billion of US aid that is still stuck in Congress.

Western allies are struggling to get funding to Kyiv at a critical moment in the war, as Ukrainian troops face artillery shortages and as Russia has made advances in the east. EU leaders meeting in Brussels on Thursday were to discuss how to use profits from the frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine.

Ukraine's international bonds were among the biggest gainers across emerging markets on Thursday, with its dollar notes due in 2026 trading at the highest since June 2022.

Spokespeople for the White House National Security Council declined to comment.

{ TRUMP'S HUSH }

**'Trump's hush
money trial should
start on April 15'**

NEW YORK: New York prosecutors on Thursday urged a judge to start Donald Trump's hush money criminal trial on April 15, saying the defence's calls for further delays or dismissal of the case because of a last-minute evidence dump were a "red herring". **AP**

**China on track
to invade Taiwan
by 2027, US says**

WASHINGTON: China is building its military and nuclear arsenal on a scale not seen since World War II and all signs suggest it's sticking to ambitions to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027, a top US admiral told the House Armed Services Committee. **BLOOMBERG**

**Rushdie: AI only
poses threat to
unoriginal writers**

PARIS: Artificial intelligence tools may pose a threat to writers of thrillers and science fiction, but lack the originality and humour to challenge serious novelists, Salman Rushdie wrote in a French journal published on Thursday. In an article translated into French for literary journal La Nouvelle Revue Française, Rushdie said he castrated ChatGPT by asking it to write 200 words in his style. He describes the results as "a bunch of nonsense". **AFP**

CONG HITS OUT AT GOVT

"A systematic effort is underway by the PM to cripple Congress financially," said Sonia Gandhi. Rahul Gandhi echoed her. "This is a criminal action on the Congress by the PM and the home minister. This type of activity doesn't happen without them in today's India," he said.

The Congress leadership said that they were unable to book flights for its leaders or advertisement spaces due to the shortage of funds.

Kharage contrasted the Congress's inability to operate its account to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) "amassing huge resources through electoral bonds and other means". "This can't be called a free and fair election... In the 75 years of India's democratic system, no other party has amassed so much money (as the BJP). For the first time, the government is making money from various

ways... if you want an impartial election, our party's account should be freed. BJP has never paid any income tax. We are waiting for the final decision of the law," he said.

In her statement, Sonia Gandhi said the issues taken up were "extremely serious".

"This issue affects not just the Congress, but impacts our democracy most fundamentally. A systematic effort is underway by the PM to cripple the INC financially. Funds from the public are frozen and money from our accounts is being taken away forcibly. However, even under these most challenging circumstances, we are doing our very best to maintain the effectiveness of our poll campaigning," she added.

Registered political parties are exempted from paying tax on specified income such as voluntary contributions, house property, income from other

sources and capital gains, under section 13A of the Income Tax Act. But this exemption is subject to a set of stipulations, including maintenance of books of account, records of each contribution of more than ₹20,000 and audit reports by a chartered accountant. Additionally, political parties must not receive donation of more than ₹2,000 otherwise than by way of cheque, demand draft or through bank account. Parties must also furnish their verified return of income for the previous year.

The Congress's claim of full exemption was rejected on two grounds. One, the party did not submit its return of income within the time limit and two, the Congress received cash donations to the tune of ₹14.49 lakh in excess of ₹2,000. The Congress has rejected the allegation, saying it submitted returns within the stipulated time and

the money received was from party legislators and office-bearers, and therefore could not be construed as "donations" under the IT Act.

I-T authorities have already attached ₹65 crore from five bank accounts of the Congress and its youth and students' wings against the lien of ₹115 crore placed by the tax department on the party's accounts in a case related to a delay in filing I-T returns for AY 2018-19. A lien is a sort of a hold on an amount that is owed. In this case, the lien was put through two letters sent by the department to the managers of Bank of Baroda and State Bank of India last month.

The Congress has appealed the order in the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal and the Delhi high court unsuccessfully. The party now plans to go to the Supreme Court.

Tax officials say the case pertains to the Congress's tax dues

of assessment year (AY) 2018-19. The initial due to the tax department was ₹103 crore, and ₹32 crore was added to this on account of interest. The tax due was reassessed at ₹105 crore on July 6, 2021.

After this, the tax officials said, the Congress appealed before the Commissioner, Appeals but did not pay the mandatory 20% of the tax due to initiate the appeal. It paid only ₹78 lakh, prompting the commissioner to dismiss the plea. The Congress, the officials added, then appealed Commissioner, Appeals again in May 2023, and in October, paid ₹1.72 crore. They pointed out that the Congress has not applied for any stay on the tax demand in its appeal.

On Thursday, the Congress said it got a fresh notice over I-T discrepancies in 1994-95. "Last week, we got a notice for Sitaram Kesari's term. Now, they will

freeze more funds. Every political party is exempted from I-T. Why is the Congress targeted?" treasurer Ajay Maken asked.

Rahul Gandhi appealed to the Election Commission to intervene. "The idea that India is a democracy is a lie. This is being orchestrated to cripple us in this election. Even if our bank accounts are unfrozen, huge damage has been done. It is ridiculous. It is the duty of all institutions to protect democracy. You are being robbed of a democratic asset, democratic architecture. This is criminal action by PM on Congress."

"This is a punishment on our entire financial identity. There are institutions to protect our democratic framework. But the EC has not said, 'wait a minute, you have frozen the bank account of the largest opposition party.' We have already lost a month. We are unable to prepare for our election," said Rahul

Gandhi. In a statement issued later, the Congress blamed the government.

"The BJP has looted the donations given to the Congress party by the common public by freezing our accounts... No political party, including the BJP, pays income tax, yet the Congress party's 11 bank accounts were frozen. Why?"

The BJP rejected the criticism. BJP president JP Nadda said the Congress's top leadership ranted against democracy and institutions because the party was going to be rejected by the people in the upcoming elections. "They are conveniently blaming their irrelevance on 'financial troubles'. In reality, their bankruptcy is moral and intellectual, not financial. Instead of correcting their own errors, Congress is blaming authorities for their troubles," Nadda said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

Senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad said the Congress party's calling the freezing of its accounts to an assault on democracy was misplaced and it had "shamed Indian democracy globally". "In utter desperation of imminent defeat the Congress party at the highest level sought to create an alibi today," he said.

Prasad said there is a provision in the IT Act, 13 (a) that says party is exempted from paying income tax, but they have to file their returns and cite details of the donors. "If this is not filed every year with a certified auditor's report, you lose the exemption... Sections 220 and 221 also give details of the collection and recovery (of dues)," he said.

Singling out Rahul Gandhi, the former union minister also said, "Our gentle advice to the Congress, we wish you well, the more you allow Rahul Gandhi to speak: the more you are losing ground in the country" he said.

{ FROM PAGE 1 }

Apple sued for monopoly in US smartphone market

Apple has also been subject to antitrust probes and orders in Europe, Japan, Korea

Reuters

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WASHINGTON: The U.S. Department of Justice and 15 states on Thursday sued Apple, alleging it used the powerful demand for its iPhone and other products to drive up prices for its services and hurt smaller rivals in the first major antitrust effort against the smartphone maker by the Biden administration.

Apple joins a list of major tech companies sued by U.S. regulators, including Alphabet's Google, Meta Platforms and Amazon.com across the administrations of both former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden.

"Consumers should not have to pay higher prices because companies violate the antitrust laws," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement. "If left unchallenged, Apple will only continue to strengthen its smartphone monopoly."



Apple joins a list of tech firms sued by US regulators, including Google and Meta. AFP

The Justice Department, which was also joined by the District of Columbia in the lawsuit, alleges that Apple uses its market power to get more money from consumers, developers, content creators, artists, publishers, small businesses and merchants.

The 88-page lawsuit, filed in U.S. federal court in Newark, New Jersey, said it was focused on "freeing smartphone markets from Apple's anticompetitive and exclusionary conduct and restoring competition to lower smartphone prices for consumers, reducing fees for developers,

and preserving innovation for the future."

In the lawsuit, the U.S. added that "Apple repeatedly chooses to make its products worse for consumers to prevent competition from emerging."

Apple disagreed in a statement, saying: "This lawsuit threatens who we are and the principles that set Apple products apart in fiercely competitive markets. If successful, it would hinder our ability to create the kind of technology people expect from Apple — where hardware, software, and services intersect."

Apple shares were trading 3% lower. Apple has already been subject to antitrust probes and orders in Europe, Japan and Korea, as well as lawsuits from corporate rivals such as Epic Games.

One of Apple's most lucrative businesses - its App Store, which charges developers commissions of up to 30% - has already survived a lengthy legal challenge under U.S. law by Epic. While the lawsuit found that Apple did not violate antitrust laws, a federal judge ordered Apple to allow links and buttons to pay for apps without using Apple's in-app payment commission.

META, MICROSOFT SLAM APPLE OVER APP STORE POLICY

AFP

feedback@livemint.com

SAN FRANCISCO: Meta, Microsoft, X and online dating giant Match Group hit at Apple on Wednesday for overcharging on app purchases.

The four companies filed a rare joint amicus brief in a California court in charge of applying a ruling that Apple must allow companies to link to alternative payment options outside the app store for iPhone users.

That ruling was stemmed from a 2020 lawsuit by video gaming giant Epic Games, which has been fighting Apple in courts across the globe for years over its strict app store policies.

Apple takes a cut of as much as 30% on all transactions in its app shop, prompting complaints about an unfair "tax" on companies. Apple's proposed solution allows it a 12 to 27% fee on external purchases outside its app store, which amounts to just a small discount from what it charged within the app store.

Ola Electric on road to IPO, touts battery tech

Alisha Sachdev

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NEW DELHI: Bhavish Aggarwal-led Ola Electric is close to signing up anchor investors for its initial public offering (IPO), the first in India's electric vehicle space, two people aware of the development said. The maker of S1 series of e-scooters has pitched its state-of-the-art battery technology under development as its USP in road shows, the people said. Singapore-based Eastspring, a subsidiary of Prudential Plc, and UK-based Pictet are among investors that have shown interest to be anchor investors, the people cited above said requesting anonymity.

Ola Electric, which dominates India's electric two-wheeler space with over 40% share in March, expects its battery arm Ola Cell Technologies to help reduce costs and increase profitability. According to the people cited above, Ola Electric has told prospective investors that its cell division is developing advanced batteries with the '4680' form factor, adopted by battery tech pioneers such as Tesla and Panasonic. This hard-to-make form factor, adopted by Tesla in 2020, enables longer ranges, quicker charging, and better performance.

Ola Electric, Pictet and East-



Ola Electric expects its battery arm to help reduce costs and increase profitability. REUTERS

park did not respond to *Mint's* emailed queries.

In its share sale papers, Ola Electric had said it will use some of the proceeds to expand the capacity of its cell factory from 5 GWh to 6.4 GWh. "We are constructing the Ola Gigafactory for cell manufacturing in Krishnagiri district in Tamil Nadu, India. Phase 1(a) of the Ola Gigafactory is expected to be operational by March 31, 2024, at which time it will have a production capacity of 1.4 GWh. We expect to complete Phase 1(b) and expand the production capacity of the Ola Gigafactory to 5 GWh by October 2024", it added.

"We aim to develop new cell form factors which are capable of storing five times the energy of conventional cell form factors

and use advanced technologies such as advanced electrode manufacturing technologies", the company had said, in an apparent reference to the 4680 form factor that it is pitching to investors now.

Recently, *Reuters* reported that Ola Electric was looking to bid for lithium blocks being auctioned by the government, aiming to secure a key raw material for batteries.

"Original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) having presence across the value chain of electrification from localization to charging infrastructure will enjoy the advantage of economies of scale, provided they are able to scale their output, thereby delivering cost efficiencies. This will help India emerge as a large manufacturing base for electric two- and three-wheelers," said Hemal Thakkar, senior practice leader and director at Crisil.

On 13 March, Centre unveiled the ₹500 crore Electric Mobility Promotion Scheme (EMPS) 2024 to encourage the purchase of electric two- and three-wheelers, a measure expected to support companies including Ola Electric. However, despite EMPS extending subsidy benefits for four months, the quantum of subsidy per vehicle has been lowered, noted Rohan Kanwar Gupta, VP, ICRA.

INOXGFL GROUP PLANS TO SELL MAJORITY STAKE IN C&I BUSINESS

Utpal Bhaskar

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NEW DELHI: INOXGFL Group has hired EY for a planned majority stake sale in its commercial and industrial (C&I) business, two people aware of the development said, a transaction with a potential equity value of around \$200 million.

"It will be a majority stake sale mainly through primary infusion, and the process is at an early stage," one of the two people cited above said, requesting anonymity.

An EY spokesperson declined comment. Queries emailed to an INOXGFL Group spokesperson on Tuesday evening remained unanswered till press time.

Devansh Jain, executive director of INOXGFL Group, had said in an earlier interview to *Mint* that Inox Wind, a group company focused on wind energy solutions, plans to set up a C&I vertical to cater to the group's captive power demand, which is around 500-600 MW.

Noida-headquartered INOXGFL Group is present in chemicals manufacturing and renewable energy businesses through Gujarat Fluorochemicals Ltd (GFL); GFCL EV Products Ltd; GFCL Solar & Green Hydrogen Products Ltd; Inox Wind Ltd; Inox Green Energy Services Ltd; and Inox Wind Energy Ltd. Inox Green Energy Services Ltd is one of the major wind power operations and maintenance (O&M) service providers in the country, servicing a 3.2 giga watt (GW) portfolio.

India's C&I segment has been attracting strong investor interest of late, driven by rules that allow large power users to source energy from the open market rather than the costlier grid. C&I projects are also shielded from risks such as power procurement curtailment by state-run power distribution firms. Also, state electricity regulatory commissions (SERCs) have implemented time of day (ToD) tariffs—varying rates at different times of the day—for large C&I consumers, which has helped sustain investor interest and deal activity in the space as reported by *Mint* earlier.



The manufacturing sub-index increased to 59.2 compared with the final reading of 56.9 in February.

Flash PMI rises to 61.3 in March on buoyant demand

Ashokamithran T

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India's business activity as measured by the HSBC Flash India Composite Purchasing Managers Index (PMI), was up to 61.3 in March from a final reading of 60.6 in February on increase in sales and buoyant demand, according to a statement from S&P Global.

Flash PMIs are released a few days before the actual PMI numbers and they include more than three-fourths of the responses that go into the calculation of final PMIs. India became only the eighth country in the world to have its Flash PMI reading in January this year.

The manufacturing sub-index increased to 59.2 compared with the final reading of 56.9 in February. This was the fastest rate of expansion in more than three years.

The Flash services index reading fell to 60.3 marginally lower than the final reading of 60.6 in the previous month. This means that most of the increase in the composite number comes from the performance of the manufacturing sub-index. "New orders rose at a faster pace than in the previous month, and within that both domestic and export orders

showed improved vigour" said Pranjul Bhandari, chief India economist at HSBC India in the statement.

"With strong output and new orders, spare capacity shrank, particularly for service providers. As backlog of works rose, firms increased hiring at the fastest pace in about 6 months. Worth mentioning here that the pace of hiring is trending faster than the long-term-average" said Bhandari in a research note from HSBC India.

Input cost inflation however picked up in both manufacturing and service sectors although the latter experienced a higher degree of increase. This was because of higher labour and transportation costs along with food, metals and plastic prices, Bhandari said in her note.

Manufacturers slowed the increase in output price, sacrificing their profit margins. On the contrary, service providers increased the prices charged and were able to "broadly maintain margins" the research note added. Overall, corporate margins did narrow in March.

"We found that consumption spending looks to be stronger than GDP data indicates" said Bhandari in the note. Increasing new manufacturing and service orders in the March Flash PMI supported their view, she added.

Reddit set for much anticipated debut on NYSE

Reuters

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Social media platform Reddit geared up for its high-profile market debut on the New York Stock Exchange on Thursday, in a test of investor appetite for companies looking to go public this year.

The San Francisco, California-based company priced its initial public offering (IPO) at the top end of the \$31 to \$34 range. The IPO valued Reddit at \$6.4 billion, while the company and its selling shareholders raised \$748 million.

THE EYEBALL-GRABBING DEBUT WILL BE A MAJOR TEST OF THE IPO MARKET

Reddit's long-awaited entry as a publicly traded company has been in the works for more than two years. It confidentially filed for an IPO in Dec. 2021, but the stock rout due to the Federal Reserve's quantitative tightening led to a delay.

The eyeball-grabbing debut will be a major test of the IPO

market, where investors are seeing some green shoots, thanks to increasing bets of a soft landing.

"If Reddit trades poorly, it will cast a shadow over the IPO market. Many companies will hit pause on their IPO initiatives," said Julian Klymochko, CEO of alternative investment solutions firm Accelerate Financial Technologies.

Reddit's popularity rose to new heights during the "meme-stock" saga of 2021 in which a group of retail investors collaborated on its forum "wallstreetbets" to buy shares of highly

shorted companies like GameStop. As part of its plan to reward its user base, Reddit has reserved 8% of the shares on offer for eligible users and moderators, certain board members, as well as friends and family members of its employees and directors.

It has also offered some shares to retail investors through online brokerage platforms Robinhood, SoFi Morgan Stanley Wealth Management and Fidelity Brokerage Services.

But the move is fraught with risks, analysts have said. Typically shut out of bidding in an

IPO, retail traders eager to gain exposure to a newly listed company buy shares only when they start trading, which could lead to a first-day pop.

Allowing early access to the IPO could dampen some demand. Such buyers are also not under a lock-up period and could choose to sell when the stock starts trading, potentially increasing the price volatility.

"I don't know one company which really benefits from allocating shares to their users," said Alan Vaksman, founding partner at investment firm Launchbay Capital.

Flipkart converts increment into payouts for majority of its staff

Priyamvada C & Devina Sengupta

priyamvada.c@livemint.com

BENGALURU/MUMBAI: Flipkart has rolled out a number of tweaks to its annual increment policy that could deny a majority of its remaining employees the immediate gratification of salary hikes come April, although they will all be awarded bonuses.

The Walmart-backed e-commerce platform, which let go of about 5% of its staff in January, has split its annual salary increases into two quick tranches for its junior and middle management employees, as per an internal communication that *Mint* has reviewed. These increases will not reflect in an employee's salary structure, and will effectively be merit-based payouts.

These merit-based payouts, however, will be handed out in April and October, unlike increments that would be staggered across an entire year.

Senior employees will receive neither annual increments nor merit-based payouts. But unlike last year, senior employees such as those at the levels of vice president and senior vice presi-



These measures are expected to help the company retain employees across levels. MINT

dent will also receive bonuses, the company has said.

Employees being promoted, across levels, will enjoy all three—pay increases reflecting in their overall salary structure, merit-based payouts, as well as bonuses.

These changes come on the back of Flipkart's attempts to contain attrition rates. This, however, is not specific to Flipkart as the broader startup ecosystem has struggled through similar patterns, undergoing a vigorous talent hunt, especially at senior levels.

As for employees, those who were paid handsome salaries during the pandemic rush for hiring at tech-led companies are now struggling to sustain their pay cheques after funding dried up and startups became focused on conducting their operations more efficiently.

Mint could not immediately quantify Flipkart's attrition rate.

Kalyan Krishnamurthy, Flipkart's chief executive officer, issued a communication to the company's more than 20,000 employees on Thursday detailing the new compensation structure. Flipkart recently had a spate of layoffs, and these measures, according to company executives, are expected to help it retain employees across levels.

"Instead of usual compensation increases, we will be delivering merit-linked payouts to all eligible employees, in Grade 12 and below. These merit list payouts shall be made as two lump sum payments in April and October this year, and equivalent, in value to the merit increase that would have typically been paid through the year," Krishnamurthy said in his letter addressed to Flipkart's employees.

FII's snap up consumer durables stocks in February

Dipti Sharma

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MUMBAI: Consumer durables stocks seem to be the flavour of the season. Surpassing all other sectors, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) poured a staggering net \$1.042 billion into the sector's stocks in February 2024, according to data from National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL).

This figure also marks the highest influx of FII buying in the sector since January 2020. FIIs had net sold \$27 million worth of consumer durables stocks in January 2020. Despite the lacklustre corporate commentary following the December quarter earnings (Q3FY24), FIIs have lapped up stocks of consumer durables companies. FII interest was evident from



Other sectors that witnessed FII buying in February included automobiles and auto components. MINT

their acquisition of stakes in Whirlpool of India Ltd and Eureka Forbes Ltd through block deals that took place in February.

Nirransh Jain, India analyst for consumer durables at BNP Paribas, explained that the sector had been grappling with sev-

eral challenges in the past couple of years. These included an inflation-led slowdown in discretionary demand, increased costs of commodities, energy rating implementation and heightened competition. These factors contributed to companies experiencing multi-year low margins

and subsequent de-rating of stock valuations, he said.

"We see a renewed interest in this sector now," Jain added. The fact that the consumer durables sector has the potential to generate multi-year double digit revenue growth is comforting, he said.

Even domestic institutional investors (DIIs) are willing to increase stakes in select pockets of consumer durables, according to Nirav Karkera, head of research, Fisdom. Data compiled by Fisdom Research shows a 7.5% month-on-month increase in mutual fund ownership in the sector, he said.

Looking at Q3, overall demand in the sector remained weak as consumer spending stayed low. The festive season fell short of expectations, resulting in subdued sales.

However, room air condi-

tioner (AC) sales were healthy, driven by channel filling in anticipation of the upcoming summer season. Product categories experiencing healthy growth included cable and wires, as well as ACs.

In FY24, the AC industry is projected to grow by 10-15%, while Blue Star Ltd is targeting a 20% rise, contingent upon robust demand during the peak summer months, the Mumbai-based home appliances company said in its recent earnings call.

Categories such as fans, consumer lighting, kitchen appliances, small domestic appliances, refrigerators and washing machines either showed flat growth or experienced a decline.

Some investors are banking on a resurgence in demand to act as a catalyst for growth in the consumer durables sector.

{ THE CROSSWORDS }

CRYPTIC CLUES

- ACROSS
- A bag containing spare washing (7)
 - One of the great forenames (5)
 - The crumpled state in which linen is found (4)
 - A train driver (8)
 - Vegetarian fare for an athlete? (6,4)
 - Fur returned to the French firm (6)
 - Possibly alerts to changes (6)
 - Openly enjoying a stay in the country? (7,3)
 - Ugly in an awkward way (8)
 - Current variation in diet (4)
 - Sort of marbles Nigel played with (5)
 - Short cut in English perhaps (7)

DOWN

- Indistinct note to a king (5)
- Full of humanity? (8)
- Like food that's not clean? (6)
- The kind of wind that is generally expected (10)
- Bound to have equal scores (4)
- Screen has red centre and unusual rose ending (7)
- Flags put out in honour of brave man (10) (4,1,5)
- Unwavering (6)
- Ascribe (6)
- The complex details (3,3,4)
- Mountain area of SE Europe (8)
- Woodwind instrument (4)
- Unenthusiastic (5)
- Young hare (7)

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTIONS (16813)

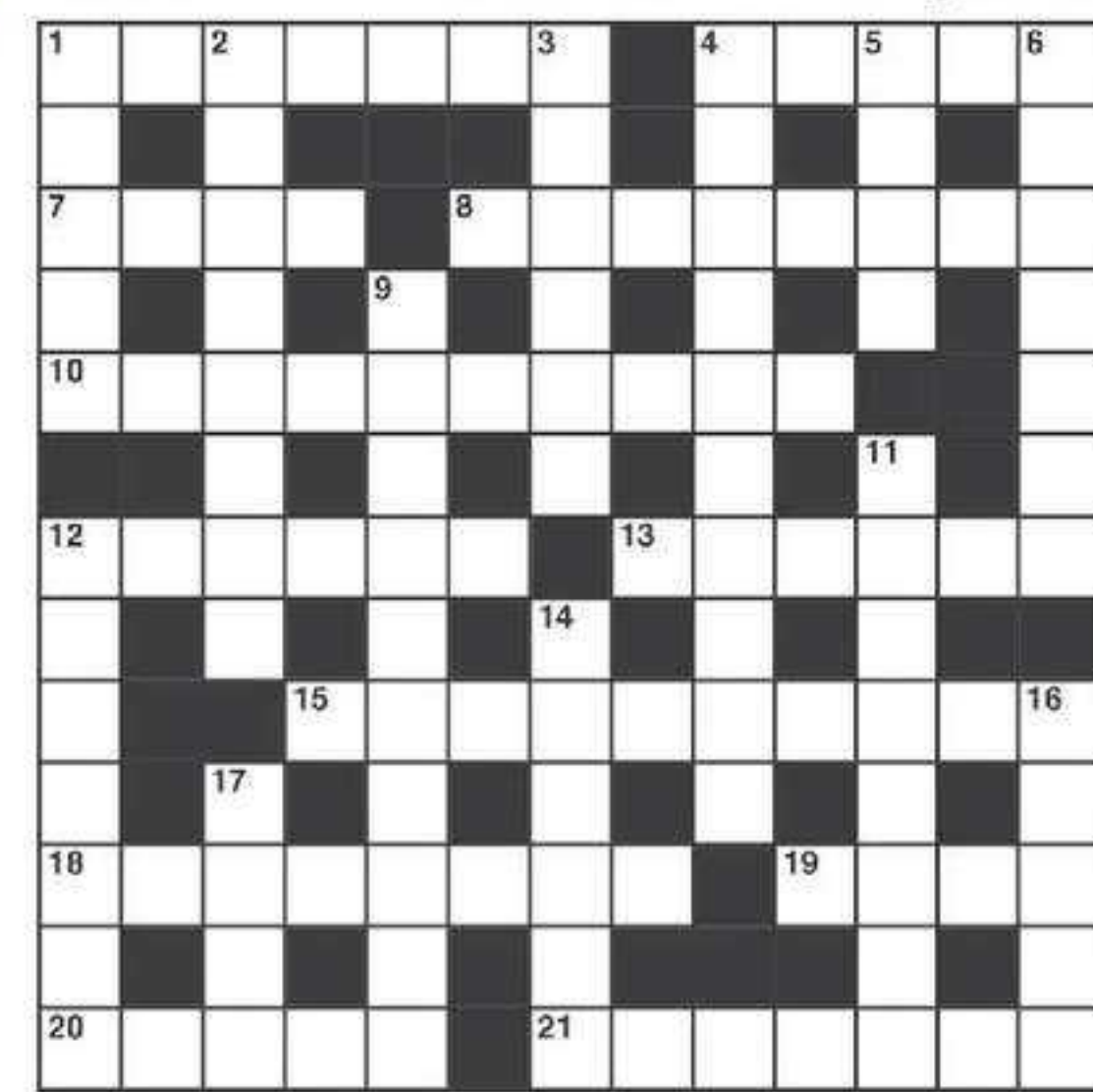
CRYPTIC

D O A L L O N E C A N
C F F I B X J J
O F F B E A T P L A I D
L E F A P A C E C E
D A R K P I N N A C E S
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D S T E O M H
S E N S A T I O N A L

QUICK

O V E R A B A R R E L
U E E E E E O G
P E R H A P S P A U S E
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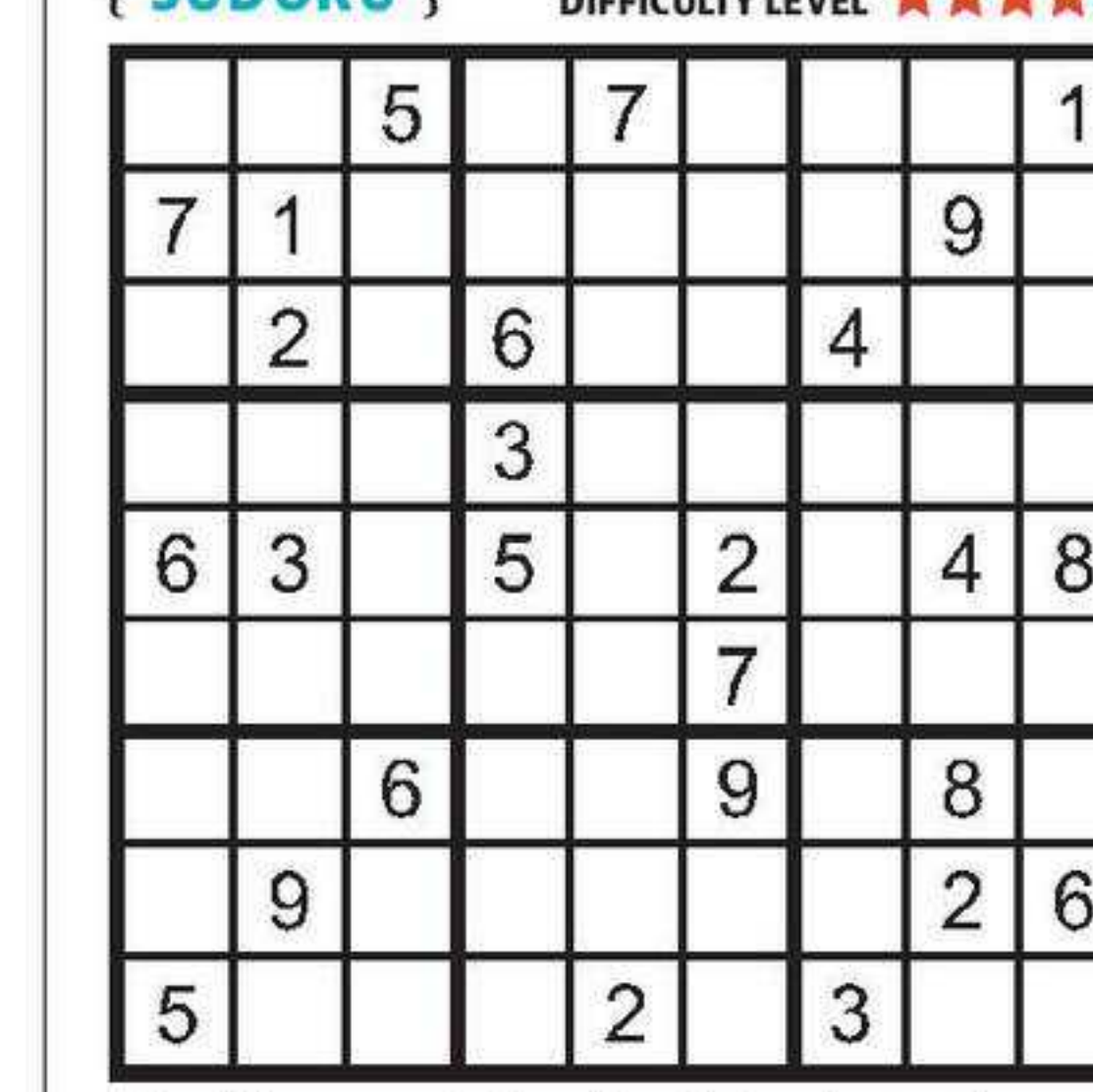
PUZZLE 16814 © Gemini Crosswords 2018 All rights reserved



QUICK CLUES

- ACROSS
- Small amount (7)
 - Robber (5)
 - Dumb (4)
 - Aspiration (8)
 - Make contemptuous gesture (4,1,5)
 - Unwavering (6)
 - Ascribe (6)
 - The complex details (3,3,4)
 - Mountain area of SE Europe (8)
 - Woodwind instrument (4)
 - Unenthusiastic (5)
 - Young hare (7)
- DOWN
- Ridicule by imitation (5)
 - Impartial (8)
 - An instant (6)
 - Well suited to the purpose (6-4)
 - Tuberous flowering plant (4)
 - Burst of publicity (7)
 - In close association (4,2,4)
 - A salad vegetable (8)
 - Request earnestly (7)
 - Handbook (6)
 - Mixture of rain and snow (5)
 - Dreary place (4)

{ SUDOKU } DIFFICULTY LEVEL ★★★★★



Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, column and each of the 9x9 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

{ WEATHER }

TEMPERATURE • HIGH • LOW

FRIDAY
Mainly clear sky
34°C | 16°C

SATURDAY
Strong surface winds during day time
34°C | 17°C

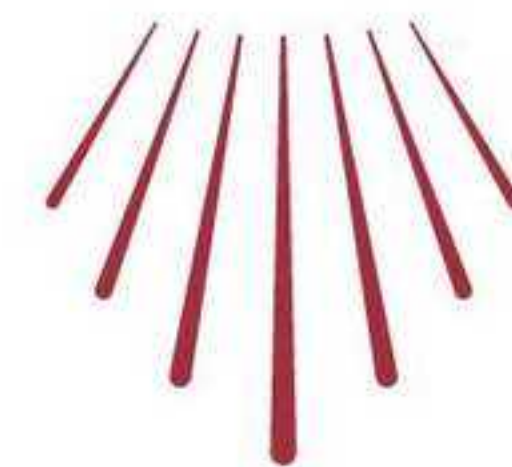
SUNDAY
Strong surface winds during day time
33°C | 17°C

ALMANAC

Today is
22nd March 2024
• 31 Ramadan, HA5
• 28 Phalguna, Krishna Paksha, 1
• Sankranti 2080
Sunset: Friday at 06:33 p.m.
Sunrise: Saturday at 05:21 a.m.
Moonrise: Friday at 04:06 p.m.
Moonset: Saturday at 05:25 a.m.

TEMPERATURE IN FOUR METROS

Delhi 34°C | 16°C
Mumbai 35°C | 22°C
Kolkata 28°C | 21°C
Chennai 34°C | 26°C



manuvel
malabar
JEWELLERS



Every drop is precious

#WorldWaterDay2024

manuvel malabar jewellers

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Can IPL 17 help put together a champion team for India?

With the T20 World Cup scheduled in June, performances in IPL will be a factor when the selectors decide the squad for the marquee event

Rasesh Mandani
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MUMBAI: What's changed from Ravindra Jadeja's title-winning whip down the leg side last year for Chennai Super Kings late in the night of what ended up being a three-day 15-overs-a-side IPL final? Well, MS Dhoni, 42 years young, will be back as promised after a knee surgery with a throwback look, now sporting long hair. But true to his propensity of throwing up surprises, a day before the tournament opener and just like that, he handed over captaincy to Rituraj Gaikwad. The Maharashtra batter has been CSK's opening batter for four seasons across 52 IPL matches.

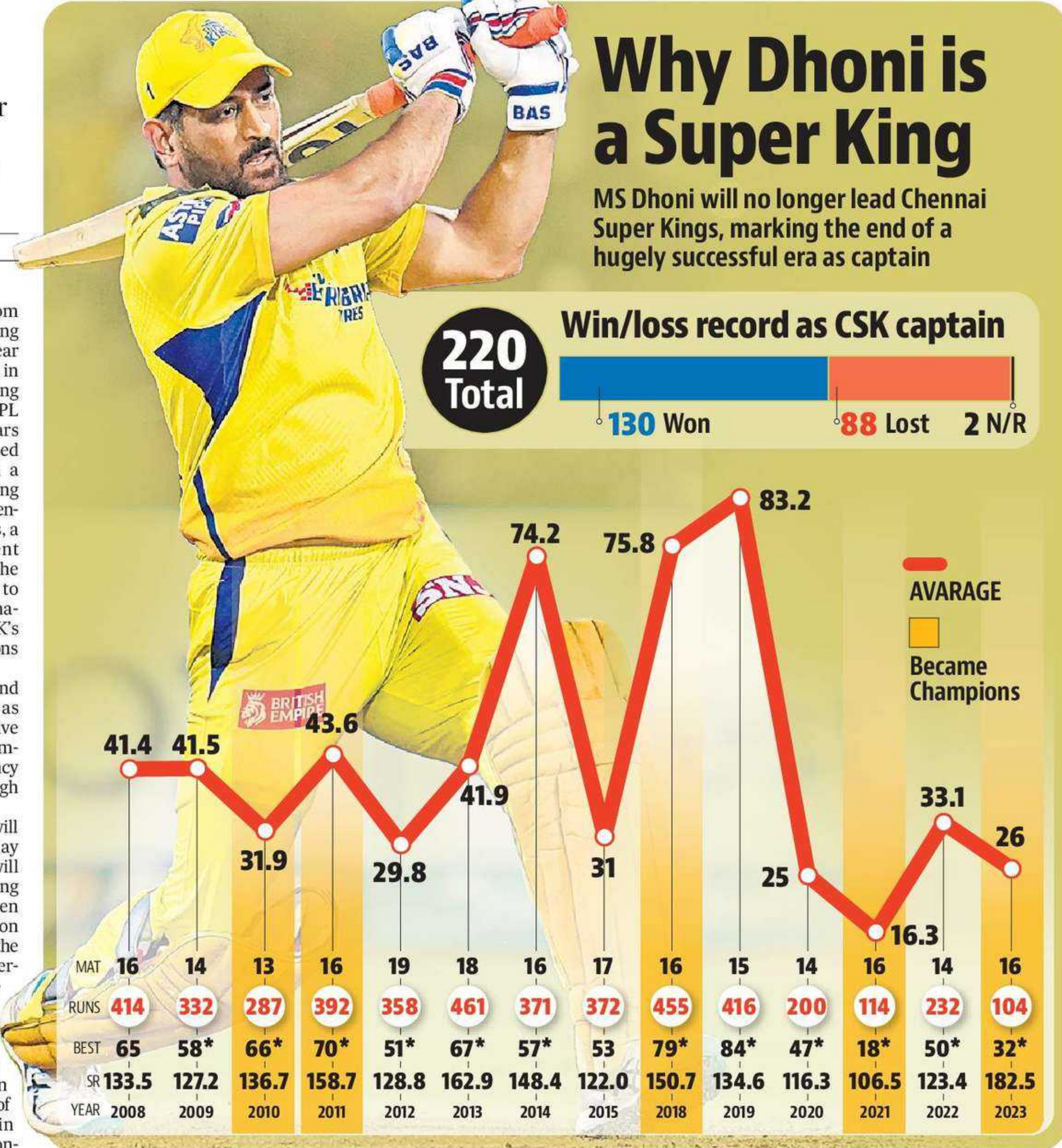
This may finally bring an end to Dhoni's illustrious stint as CSK captain where he won five titles, the last one in 2023 coming after taking back captaincy from Jadeja mid-way through 2022.

Neither Dhoni nor Kohli will walk out for the toss on Friday but make no mistake, they will be the poster boys of the opening match. Kohli, wearing an even sharper beard, returns to action after two months away from the spotlight. This may almost certainly be Dhoni's farewell season. Expect Chepauk to be dressed in yellow.

The CSK philosophy will remain intact, but they now have a sizable Kiwi presence in the squad with the addition of Daryl Mitchell and Rachin Ravindra, even as Devon Conway is ruled out.

Meanwhile, Rishabh Pant will rise again, brushing away bad memories of his charred car and serious injuries from the road accident around 14 months ago. Nothing will please the fans more than to see the dynamic wicket-keeper back as Delhi Capitals captain for their first match against Punjab Kings in Chandigarh on Saturday afternoon.

There's more that's happened in the year gone by. Ishan Kishan first lost his place in the ODI playing XI, then went his Test match spot and finally his T20I place. Frustrated, he took a personal leave giving the entire Ranji Trophy season a miss. For this, he lost his BCCI contract. The coming IPL will mark his return with a point or three to prove. KL Rahul will return from yet another injury. He will also be on the long list of wicket-keeper batters fighting for a



World Cup ticket.

Like Kishan, Shreyas Iyer too was penalized for missing Ranji matches. He's the captain of the men in purple — Kolkata Knight Riders. Iyer's immediate focus would be to have a game plan to counter the two bouncers in an over allowance the bowlers will have this time. If the Impact player rule freed up batters last year to hit out with more abandon, will the additional bouncer for the fast bowler manage to keep them in check?

RCB have finally won a trophy, but that's the WPL. Whether that will ease the pressure on the men's team or burden them with more expectations is difficult to say. With Kohli as the constant, they come with a change in name — now

Royal Challengers Bengaluru, not Bangalore.

Trophy they may not have, but the RCB batting core remains strong as ever to exploit the short boundaries at home. Cameron Green, roped in as a cash trade before the auction, will create room for himself even among a strong set of batters such as Kohli, skipper Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell.

Sunrisers Hyderabad have changed their coach and captain, yet again. Daniel Vettori replaces Brian Lara as head coach. Having spent ₹20.5 crore to secure Pat Cummins's services, he's been handed the captain's armband too.

That makes him the second overseas captain in IPL 2024 other than Du Plessis. Among

the eight Indian captains, India captain Rohit Sharma won't be leading this year. After three trophy-less seasons, he was told by the Mumbai Indians management that his time as leader was up. Rohit will play under Hardik Pandya, whose all-cash trade from Gujarat Titans to MI dominated cricket headlines. When the two franchises from west India lock horns in the Sunday night blockbuster at Ahmedabad, expect television ratings to soar.

You could choose to listen to Virender Sehwag call the match in Haryana or watch out for Sidhuisms as Navjot Sidhu returns to the commentary box.

The pre-tournament colour and sparkle has not dimmed one bit. Even Chandrakant Pandit is doing 'Ole Ole' on KKR's social media handle, while Justin Langer of all Australians let his

hair down on Lucknow Super Giants' social media page.

The selectors' eye

India's five wise men will be watching from the sidelines. The T20 World Cup will begin less than a week after the IPL final. The last time a T20 World Cup was preceded by the IPL — 2021 in the UAE — it turned out to be a forgettable one for India. The selectors would be conscious not to take each headline performance at face value and see if they can separate the wheat from the chaff.

They need to identify a lower-order wicket-keeper bat, a fast-bowling backup, finalize the spin attack and above all keep an eye on the intent quotient — it's about time the glitziest T20 league throws up a team that can bring the World Cup home to India.

As MSD passes the baton, CSK say they are prepared

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NEW DELHI: MS Dhoni must have thought through his decision to hand over the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) captaincy to Rituraj Gaikwad for many days, if not weeks or months. In trademark Dhoni style though, it was only on Thursday — the eve of the opening IPL game against Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai — that he let it out to the wider world via a short press release by the franchise.

Dhoni, 42, has a habit of taking these big calls without giving away much. Sample his Test exit in Melbourne in 2014, which again came through a BCCI release shortly after a media interaction at the end of a drawn Test where he remained tight-lipped about his intentions. The retirement from limited-overs cricket for India — in 2020 — also came without any emotional speeches or teary-eyed farewells, a social media post that read "from 1929 hrs consider me as Retired" marking the end of a decorated international career.

Almost five years since he last played for India, Dhoni is likely to call it a day altogether after this IPL season. And the move to pass on the CSK captaincy to Gaikwad is a sign of that, as is the long mane that he's growing in a throwback to his early days in the spotlight.

It goes without saying that Gaikwad has big boots to fill, for Dhoni is undoubtedly among the finest captains to have graced the limited-overs game. His legacy as CSK leader is unlikely to ever be matched, having won five IPL titles in an extremely successful tenure that began in 2008. CSK have won 130 of the 220 matches

I am expecting MS to play and play well. The indications from his pre-season are that he is going really well. His body is a lot better and stronger than last year.

STEPHEN FLEMING, Chennai Super Kings head coach

that Dhoni has led them in.

This is not Dhoni's first attempt at bringing about a leadership transition at CSK. In 2022, he decided to relinquish captaincy and let star all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja take charge. The franchise, however, won only two of their first eight games, resulting in Jadeja stepping down and Dhoni taking back the captaincy as CSK finished a lowly ninth.

If Gaikwad is the chosen man this time, it's because he has established his credentials as an opening batter for the past four seasons. And given that he's 27, CSK will be able to build their team around him when a mega auction takes place in 2025.

In a pre-match interaction on Thursday, CSK coach Stephen Fleming revealed that this was solely Dhoni's decision. "It was MS with a lot of consideration, with one view to the future on the back of a good season last year. The timing was good. Behind the scenes, Rituraj and others have been on a captaincy grooming process. The opportunity has come up. MS is the best judge and he felt the timing is right," the New Zealander said.

Fleming, who has been CSK coach since 2009, admitted that they weren't well prepared for a transition when Jadeja became captain in 2022. "The big thing with a couple of years ago is we probably were not ready for MS to move aside," the 50-year-old

conceded. "What that did was shake us as a leadership group into looking at the possibility of when he does go. Up until that stage, it was almost unthinkable. We have worked pretty hard on making sure that any mistakes that were made then aren't made again."

Asked whether Dhoni will play on-field mentor to Gaikwad, Fleming said: "Yeah, hope so. It's about getting that balance right without interfering but also providing the leadership that he can't ignore. He (Dhoni) is too big a presence that you can't just turn that off."

While Dhoni's leadership attributes have compensated for a dip in his personal returns over the past few seasons, CSK will hope that his skills with the bat come to the fore this year. He was hampered by a knee injury last season and slotted himself mostly at No.7 or 8 as a result, but having undergone surgery in June, he will hope to unfurl those big hits and win more matches off his bat.

"I am expecting MS to play and play well," Fleming said. "The indications from his pre-season are that he is going really well. His body is a lot better and stronger than last year. From what I can see, his desire to contribute and do well is as high as ever, which is great for us. He is hitting the ball beautifully in the nets."

Armed with variations, pacer Arshdeep aims to shine again

Shalini Gupta
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CHANDIGARH: Arshdeep Singh is great at adjusting. Be it adjusting from white-ball to red-ball cricket or making a shift from speaking in Punjabi to English. The Punjab Kings (PBKS) left-arm seamer is having to seamlessly switch languages very often these days while attending training sessions and then striking conversations with captain Shikhar Dhawan and coach Trevor Bayliss ahead of the IPL tie against Delhi Capitals (DC) at the newly-built Punjab Cricket Association stadium in Mullanpur near Mohali.

Both Dhawan and Bayliss believe Singh could well be the weapon for PBKS in the IPL given his acumen and accuracy both with the new ball and dishing out yorkers in the death



Arshdeep Singh.

mat. His showing in the IPL paved the way for Arshdeep to make his T20I and ODI debuts. And his success could be attributed to the variations he has in his armoury.

Arshdeep's preparation for serious cricket started in 2018, when he had come back from the India U-19 World Cup triumph. Giving more details, his coach and former Ranji cricketer Jaswant Rai said, "That time the India U-19 seamers Shivam Mavi and Kamlesh Nagarkoti were bowling consistently at 145kmph and Arshdeep was bowling at 135. So, we worked hard on developing variations and bowling a tight line and length. He has made good progress and IPL has been a boon for him." Rai said. IPL 2021 was most productive for Arshdeep with 18 wickets in 12 games.

SRH's revolving door policy continues

What is bothering SRH?

SRH have a new captain in Pat Cummins and a new coach in Dan Vettori. They face an uphill task

A seven-year slump

Hyderabad have gone from bad to worse to plain miserable considering that they had strung together five consecutive playoff finishes — with a title in 2016 — preceding this slump. They finished eighth out of eight teams in 2021 and eighth out of 10 in 2022, and 10th out of 10 teams in 2023.

Chopping and changing

Four seasons in a row SRH have changed the captain and coach combination — moving on from David Warner and Trevor Bayliss in 2021 to Kane Williamson and Tom Moody in 2022, Aiden Markram and Brian Lara in 2023 and to Pat Cummins and Daniel Vettori now.

Klaasen the lone ranger

South African batter Heinrich Klaasen finished last season with 448 runs in 11 innings, striking at 177.07, with two fifties and a century. Travis Head at the top, Klaasen in the middle, Cummins and Wanindu Hasaranga anchoring the bowling seems the likely overseas roster.

SRH in IPL over the years



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KOLKATA: There is no one way to win the Indian Premier League (IPL). Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings will tell you something different though. Get an Indian captain, better still a batter, form a solid Indian core, preferably a mix of young and experienced, and get at least two world-class bowlers.

The longer a franchise retains this composition in a viable environment, the better the returns. The coaching staff don't always get mentioned in the same breath, but CSK and MI will be the first to share how stability behind the scenes has reflected in their sustained success.

It's a model many franchises have tried to replicate and failed, before trying again. But some take it too far. Like Sunrisers Hyderabad. Four seasons in a row they have changed the captain and coach combination — moving on from David Warner and Trevor Bayliss in 2021 to Kane Williamson and Tom Moody in 2022, Aiden Markram and Brian Lara in 2023 and Pat Cummins and Daniel Vettori now.

And the results reflected that instability too. Eighth out of eight teams in 2021 and 10th in 2022, and bottom-placed in 2023, Hyderabad have gone from bad to worse to plain miserable considering that they had strung together five consecutive playoff finishes — with a title in 2016 — preceding this slump.

Back they went to the drawing board to build a squad from scratch this time. Releasing Harry Brook and Adil Rashid helped with the purse, allowing Sunrisers to go all out for World Cup-winning Travis Head and Pat Cummins after pocketing Wanindu Hasaranga for a bargain price of ₹1.50 crore.

The Australian buys were clearly performance related, given the auction was barely a month after last November's ODI World Cup final. But leave alone an IPL team, Cummins hasn't even led a T20 side before this. His IPL economy of 8.54 isn't much to write home about, and there remains considerable doubt over how quickly he can gel with the Indian bowling attack comprising Bhuvneshwar Kumar, T Natarajan and Umran Malik in just under a week before the tournament begins.

It also highlights an underlying problem of SRH trying to rely too much on too few players. Last season began with fanfare as Brook hammered a hundred against KKR but apart from that he did not score 30 even once. Mayank Agarwal proved a dud, Malik was conspicuously absent in many games as captain Aiden Markram looked clueless at times. Struggling to find stability in both batting and bowling, Sunrisers used seven opening combinations and 23 players overall.

Also disappointing is how they have failed to maximise the talent of Washington Sundar and give him the confidence to be a long-term asset. To be fair to the fran-

chise, Sundar — he is known to be injury-prone — hasn't done justice to his talent either. Same with Abhishek Sharma and Abdul Samad and therein lies a problem Sunrisers can do nothing about, apart from hoping. The only exception among the Indians was Mayank Markande who was difficult to score off in the middle overs, finishing with an economy rate of 7.89.

It automatically puts the pressure back on the overseas players, barring Heinrich Klaasen, who finished last season with 448 runs, striking at 177.07, with two fifties and a century. And that can't be a great setting to begin in, especially when Cummins and Head know little of the franchise, its culture, and the management.

Putting Daniel Vettori at the helm might seem a smart move given his extensive IPL experience, both as player and coach, apart from the fact that he has been in the same dressing room as Cummins and Head. Even then, Sunrisers' fate will likely boil down to the management skills of the Australia Test and ODI skipper. This, no doubt, has been the season of Cummins, but IPL is a slightly more complicated job than leading Australia. Momentum is a massive factor. This being an Indian election year, Cummins will also have to take into account the staggered nature of the tournament. More pressing seems the need to get the combination right and stick with it even if it doesn't yield the desired results at the beginning.

IPL SNIPPETS

RR LEG-SPINNER ZAMPA WITHDRAWS

Rajasthan Royals were on Thursday dealt a big blow when leg-spinner Adam Zampa pulled out of the Indian Premier League (IPL) citing personal reasons, a report said. Zampa, who was retained by Rajasthan Royals ahead of last year's auction for ₹1.5 crore, has withdrawn his name following a busy season for Australia. Zampa's manager confirmed the development to ESPNcricinfo. The spinner was a part of Rajasthan's attack that included ace off-spinner R Ashwin and leggie Yuzvendra Chahal.

HAPPY TO HELP GILL, SAYS WILLIAMSON

With Shubman Gill leading in the IPL for the first time, the unassuming Kane Williamson says he will be happy to help his Gujarat Titans teammate in any way he can. Williamson said he considers Gill a "great thinker", a huge compliment given the Kiwi's vast experience as captain himself. "He (Gill) is a great player and like I said a great cricketer brain, and I would certainly encourage him to walk that path and take his decisions. No doubt that he will look to do the same," Williamson told PTI. "I will be more than happy to help Shubman in any way I can and Shubman knows that," said Williamson. Gill is taking over the reins from Pandya, who led Gujarat Titans to the title in 2022 and a runners-up finish in 2023.

CSK'S PATHIRANA TO MISS A FEW GAMES

Sri Lanka and Chennai Super Kings (CSK) pacer Matheesha Pathirana will miss the initial few matches for the five-time champions after sustaining a hamstring injury during the second T20I against Bangladesh in Sylhet earlier this month, according to ESPNcricinfo. The 21-year-old pacer was one of the standout performers for CSK in their title-winning season last year, taking 19 wickets in 12 matches at an average of 19.53. He has played 12 ODIs and six T20Is for Sri Lanka. The right-arm pacer also failed to take part in the third T20I against Bangladesh. According to ESPNcricinfo, Pathirana will join CSK's squad after he gets clearance from Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC).

HT

SL make Hasaranga available for WC T20

SYLHET: Sri Lanka Cricket defended the inclusion of Wanindu Hasaranga in the Test squad for the series against Bangladesh despite his suspension by the ICC. The move allows Hasaranga to serve out his ban during the Tests and save himself for the T20 WC. If he were not included, he would have to sit out the first four matches of the World Cup.

Shubhankar shoots 68 in Singapore

SINGAPORE: Shubhankar Sharma overcame an early double bogey to card 4-under 68 and was placed tied-21 after the first round of Singapore Classic. Kiradech Aphibarnrat shared lead with 8-under.

Ashok, Parmjeet qualify for Paris

NEW DELHI: Asian Games bronze medalist Ashok and Parmjeet Kumar (49kg) qualified for the Paris Paralympics by winning a silver medal each at the Para Powerlifting World Cup in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. Competing in the 41kg category, Manpreet Kaur earned a bronze.

Nerurkar wins in future category

MUMBAI: Eleven-year-old Aansh Nerurkar won the future category of the Prague International Chess Festival alongside securing the best team award with GM R Praggnanandhaa. Nerurkar scored eight points from nine rounds.

Robinho to serve 9-year prison term

BRASÍLIA: Ex-Brazil striker Robinho must serve a nine-year rape sentence in Brazil, judges in Brasilia ruled. The court decided in favour of an Italian request that Robinho be jailed in Brazil after he was found guilty of taking part in the gang rape of an Albanian woman celebrating her birthday at a Milan nightclub in 2013.

The switch in Baboo's tale: Marathon to race walking

Coming from humble background, Baboo has emerged as one of India's top race walkers in the lead up to the Paris Olympics

Shantanu Srivastava

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NEW DELHI: It is tempting to assess Ram Baboo's incredible rise through the prism of his humble beginning. His fairytale is, without doubt, inspirational but there is more to him than that.

The 25-year-old finished third at the Dudinska 50 Meet in Slovakia last Saturday, clocking a personal best time of 1:20:00 in the 20km race walk. In the process, he also breached the Paris Olympics qualification mark of 1:20:10.

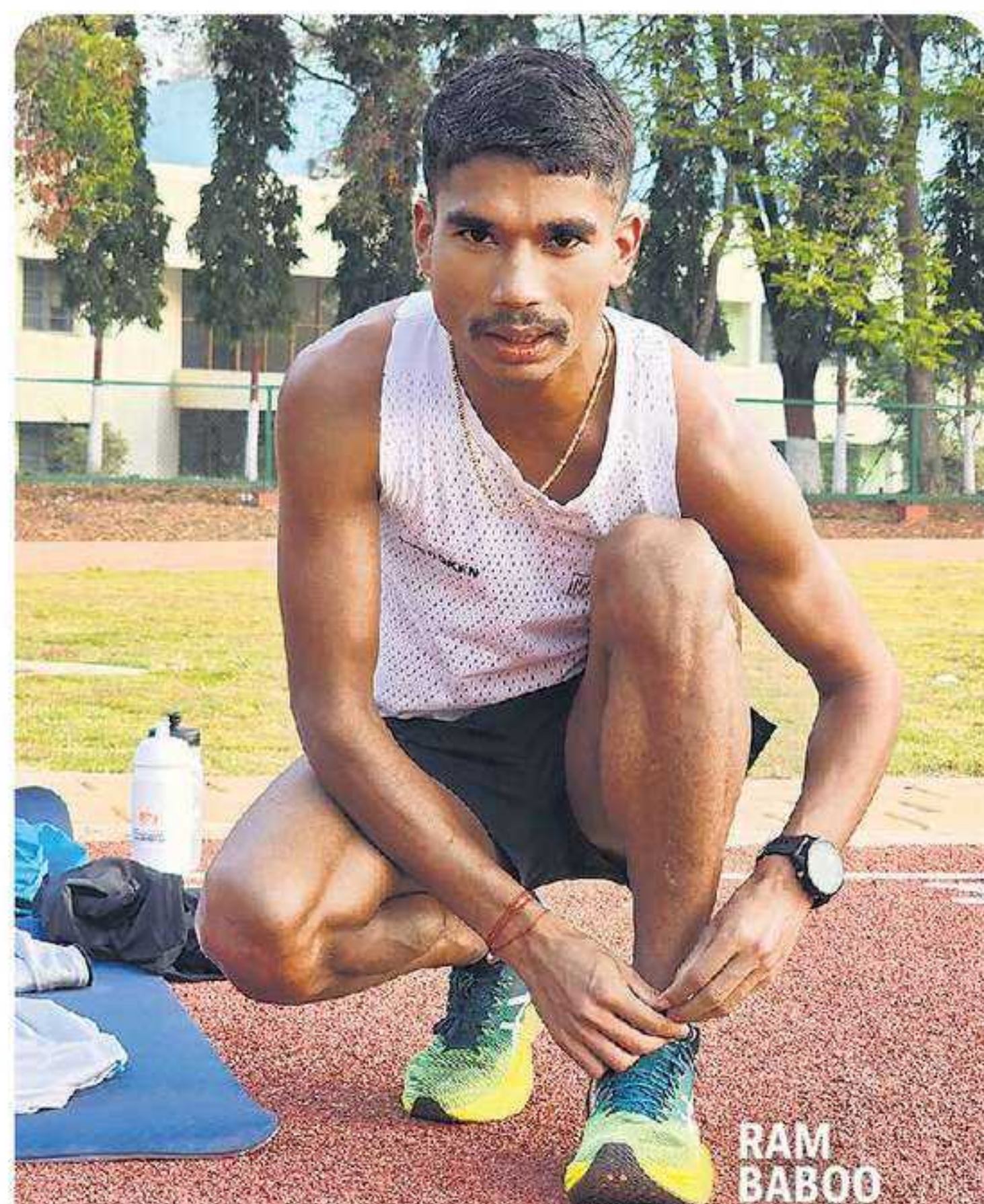
A bronze medalist in the 35km mixed team event at the Hangzhou Asian Games, Baboo is the seventh Indian male walker to make the cut for Paris. The others — Akshdeep Singh, Suraj Panwar, Servin Sebastian, Arshpreet Singh, Pramjeet Bisht, and Vikas Singh — are currently training in South Africa under the tutelage of race walking coach Tatiana Sibileva while Baboo is back at his base in the Army Sports Institute (ASI) in Pune.

Each country can field a maximum of three walkers in a category and the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) is likely to select the team in June.

But before that, Baboo will line up in Antalya for World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships. Having already trained in Antalya last year for a month after the Asian Games, he is confident of making an impression.

"The podium finish in Slovakia is a big confidence booster. Also, prior knowledge of conditions in Antalya should stand me in good stead next month," he says.

The race in Slovakia pitted Baboo in cold, testing conditions with temperatures plummeting to 7°C. A steady shower



Indian walkers to have qualified for Paris Games

20km race walk	MEN	Best time
	Akshdeep Singh	1:19:38
	Vikas Singh	1:20:05
	Paramjeet Bisht	1:20:08
	Suraj Panwar	1:19:44
	Servin Sebastian	1:20:03
	Arshpreet Singh	1:20:04
	Ram Baboo	1:20:00
	WOMEN	Best time
	Priyanka Goswami	1:28:45

on the morning of the race didn't help matters. "It was quite chilly and it took a while for the body to warm up. The loop was wet too which affected the pace," Baboo, who is managed by IOS Sports and Entertainment, said.

The rhythm and pace of the race were also quite different

from what Baboo is used to. While the Indian race walkers train to run the first half of the 20km race faster than the second half, the race in Dudince panned out differently. The lead group began slow, leaving Baboo to make hectic calculations on the go.

"I was running against my

natural rhythm which is what made me very nervous. The race was quite slow for the first five kilometres. I had thought of picking up the pace after five kilometres and maintaining a steady tempo till 10 kilometres before accelerating. But the race went at the same pace for ten kilometres. It was only after halfway mark that the group began to accelerate," he remembered.

"I knew at the back of my mind that if I go too slow, I may miss the Paris mark. At the 15km mark, I was clocking 1hr 16sec. I was slow in the 16th km even as the group picked pace. At that stage, I was 23 seconds slower than my target, and so, in the last four kilometres, I decided to go all out."

"I was making quick calculations in each kilometre — how many seconds I am in plus or minus. When you go slow, you are always wary of leaving too much to cover up." Baboo, who bettered his personal best time set in January, explained.

Having moved from marathon to race walking about six years back, Baboo picked up the nuances of the tricky discipline within a week. Race walking rules mandate that athletes must always have one foot in contact with the ground at all times, as visible to the human eye. Also, the walker's front knee must not bend as the body passes over it.

"I started training for race walking in Saifai, UP, under coach Siddharth Krishna. He told me that people usually take up to six months to perfect the technique, but I picked it in 7 days. It told me that perhaps I made the right choice," Baboo, who has also competed in 50km and 35km events, said.

With sporting success translating into financial rewards, Baboo's father doesn't have to labour anymore. The youngster is also building a house in his village, a feat that was beyond imagination until last year.

"Tough times made me who I am. I don't regret anything. It doesn't matter where you begin, what matters is where you end," he mused. Baboo's race has only just begun.

Mary Kom chef de mission, Sharath flag bearer for Paris

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NEW DELHI: Veteran table tennis player and reigning CWG champion Sharath Kamal will be India's flag bearer at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games while legendary boxer MC Mary Kom was on Thursday appointed the chef de mission of the country's contingent.

The 41-year-old table tennis player symbolises "the unity and spirit of our contingent as they compete on the Olympic stage", the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) said in a statement while making the announcement.

"It has been an unbelievable three weeks. From not even sure of Olympics berth to playing the way I did in Singapore last week, jumping 54 spots in the rankings to being named India's flag bearer," Sharath Kamal said.

"It is the biggest honour and fairytale stuff considering it is going to be my fifth and last Olympics. Also, not many TT players have got that honour, globally. I just got a call from IOA and I could not believe it."

Sharath Kamal was India's flag bearer at the closing ceremony of 2022 Birmingham Com-



MC Mary Kom.



Sharath Kamal.

monwealth Games, where he won three gold medals.

Recently, the Indian men's and women's team had qualified for the team events of Olympics for the first time by the virtue of their rankings.

Six-time world champion Mary Kom, bronze medalist at the 2012 London Olympics, will be assisted by luger Shiva Keshavan, who has been appointed the deputy chef de mission.

"Mary Kom's unparalleled dedication to sports and inspiring journey makes her a natural choice to guide and mentor our athletes at the Olympics," IOA said. "Keshavan, a former Olympian in luge, brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to

support the team's management and coordination efforts."

Olympic bronze medalist in rifle shooting Gagan Narang will oversee India's operations at the shooting range, which is very far from the main venues.

India will be sending their largest-ever shooting contingent to Paris with 19 quotas already in pocket. "His (Narang's) meticulous approach and understanding of athletes' needs will ensure a conducive environment for our shooters," the statement added.

"These appointments represent a blend of experience, expertise, and leadership that will contribute significantly to the success of our athletes on the global stage," it added.

TREESA-GAYATRI WIN, TANISHA AND ASHWINI BOW OUT

Agencies

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BASEL: The Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Joly and Gayatri Gopichand progressed to the quarterfinals of the Swiss Open with a straight-game win over compatriots Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra.

The eighth seeded CWG bronze medalists hardly broke sweat as they won 21-10, 21-12 in 36 minutes. Treesa and Gayatri, who are sharing the 14th place in the Olympic qualification ranking, will face Australia's Setyana Mapasa and Angela Yu.

Later, world No. 20 Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who are 6,296 points ahead of Treesa and Gayatri in the Paris qualification race at 12th spot, lost 17-21, 16-21 to Japan's Rui Hirokami and Yuna Kato.

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