



Hindustan Times

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BJP's fifth list out: Govil, Pradhan, Ranaut named

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NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday announced its fifth list of Lok Sabha contenders for the upcoming general elections, fielding among 111 candidates four Union ministers including Dharmendra Pradhan, actors Kangana Ranaut and Arun Govil, and industrialist and former Congress leader Navin Jindal.

The party also made some key exclusions, dropping Varun Gandhi from Pilibhit in UP, minister Ashwini Choubey from Buxar in Bihar, minister of state (MoS) Gen (ret'd) VK Singh from Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, and former minister Anant Kumar Hegde from Uttara Kananda in Karnataka.

The list contained candidates from 17 states, including 18 from Odisha, where the party announced on Friday that it will not ally with the state's ruling Biju Janata Dal, ending weeks of speculation.

Ranaut will contest from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh and Govil, who played Lord Ram in the TV series Ramayana, will fight from Meerut in UP. Jindal, who joined the BJP on Sunday evening, will contest from Kurukshetra in Haryana.

With Sunday's announcement, the party has now declared contenders for 402 constituencies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set a target for the BJP to win at least 370 seats on its own in these Lok Sabha elections and more than 400 for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) it leads.

Among other key names was that of the party's Kerala unit

Big names on the list of 111

NAVEEN JINDAL Kurukshetra, Haryana	KANGANA RANAUT Mandi, Himachal Pradesh	SITA SOREN Dumka, Jharkhand	ARUN GOVIL Meerut, Uttar Pradesh	MANEKA GANDHI Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh
K SURENDRAN Wayanad, Kerala	ATUL GARG Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh	JITIN PRASADA Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh	FORMER JUSTICE ABHIJIT GANGOPADHYAY Tamluk, West Bengal	VARUN GANDHI Pilibhit

PROMINENT EXCLUSIONS

- MoS Gen (ret'd) VK SINGH, Ghaziabad
- MoS ASHWINI KUMAR CHOUBEY
- Ex-MoS SANTOSH GANGWAR

402 candidates declared so far for the polls

18 candidates named from Odisha, where the party announced on Friday that it will not ally with BJD after days of speculation

Varun dropped, Maneka to contest as party fields highest no. of women

Manish Chandra Pandey and Arun Kumar
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LUCKNOW/PATNA: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dropped three-time lawmaker Varun Gandhi from Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh, replacing him with the state's public works department (PWD) minister Jitin Prasada.

However, his mother and nine-time MP Maneka Gandhi will return to contest the Sultanpur seat that she won in 2019, the party said in its fifth list of names for the general

elections. The party fielded 13 candidates from Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP has so far announced candidates for 63 of the state's 80 seats.

The party is yet to announce its candidate for the Kaiserganj Lok Sabha seat, where six-term MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who was accused of sexual harassment by wrestlers, is the incumbent MP.

The party has also not announced its candidate from the Congress bastion of Rae Bareilly, which was earlier repre-

sented by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

The party also fielded candidates for the 17 seats it is contesting in Bihar. Its alliance partner, the Janata Dal (United) is fighting 16 seats.

Meanwhile, in its five lists for the Lok Sabha polls, so far, the BJP has named 66 women. Even if there are no women candidates in its subsequent lists, the BJP will definitely have the highest number and, likely, the highest share of women candidates ever fielded by it in this year's elections. →P6

TWO SITTING MPs DROPPED AS JD(U) NAMES ALL ITS 16 CANDIDATES

Arun Kumar
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PATNA: The Janata Dal (United), or JD(U), on Sunday announced the names of candidates for all the 16 Lok Sabha in it is set to contest in the electorally crucial state of Bihar, whose 40 Lok Sabha seats will go to the polls in seven phases beginning April 19. Two sitting MPs have been dropped, with preference given to backward class leaders.

The party has named 12 sitting MPs, and dropped Sunil Kumar Pintu from Simatari Sheohar and Kavita Singh from Siwan. Two turncoats — Lovely Anand, who recently joined the JD(U) from the Rashtriya Janata Dal; and Vijaylakshmi Kushwaha, a former RLM MLA from Ziradei — have been given tickets. →P6

FORMER IAF CHIEF BHADAURIA JOINS BJP AHEAD OF LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

Akshita Kumari
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NEW DELHI: Former Indian Air Force Chief Rakesh Singh Bhadauria (ret'd) and YSR Congress Party's Varaprasad Rao Velagapalli joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday ahead of Lok Sabha elections.

Bhadauria, who retired from service in September 2021, thanked the party leadership for giving him the opportunity to "contribute to nation-building once again".

"I served the IAF for more than four decades, but the best time of my service was the last eight years under the leadership of the BJP government," he said. →P6

Russia mourns victims, vows revenge



Women hug next to a makeshift memorial for the victims of an attack at the Crocus City Hall concert venue in Moscow. Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's security council, said Moscow will target those behind the shooting that killed over 130 people. Related story on P11 REUTERS

Oppn to hold rally on democracy on Mar 31

Paras Singh
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NEW DELHI: The Opposition's INDIA grouping will organise a protest at Ramlila Maidan in central Delhi on March 31 to "safeguard democracy" ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, state minister and senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Gopal Rai said, adding that the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) arrest of Arvind Kejriwal was part of an attempt to "wipe out" dissident voices.

Key Opposition leaders will participate in the rally, Rai said during a press conference at the Constitution Club in New Delhi, where he was accompanied by party colleagues and Delhi legislators Atishi and Saurabh Bhadrawaj, as well as state Congress

Kejriwal issues order from jail, tells Atishi to solve water issues

CBI names Moitra, Hiranandani in its cash-for-query FIR

NEW DELHI: Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday in connection with alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy 2021-22, has issued his first order after he was remanded to the federal agency's custody, water minister Atishi said on Sunday. →P3

NEW DELHI: Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani, who accused former MP Mahua Moitra of sharing her Parliamentary login ID and password with him, has been named as an "accused" along with the TMC leader in an FIR filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation in connection with the cash-for-query case. →P7

chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, former Delhi Congress chief Subhash Chopra, as well as Left leaders. "Democracy and the country are in danger. All INDIA bloc parties will take part in this

Over 90% of capex committed to states disbursed as central loans

Rajeev Jayaswal
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NEW DELHI: The Union government by the end of February disbursed more than 90% of the over ₹1.05 lakh crore committed in 2023-24 as interest-free, long-term loans to states for capital expenditure, two officials said. The remaining amount is expected to be released by March 31.

As on February 29, the Centre released more than ₹95,226 crore under the scheme to nudge states into making capital investments with extremely positive response from them, they said, requesting anonymity.

The government on February 1 slashed the initial corpus of ₹13 lakh crore in the budget estimates (BE) for 2023-24 to ₹1.06 lakh crore in the revised estimates (RE) for the financial year to March 31. The downward revision

AS OF FEB 29, THE CENTRE RELEASED OVER ₹95,226 CR UNDER THE SCHEME TO NUDGE STATES INTO MAKING CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

sion was mainly because some states could not meet the eligibility criteria and some had high unspent balance from 2022-23, they said.

Although the amount for 2023-24 was reduced, the Centre is committed to meet the entire requirement under the scheme in the financial year, they said, citing example of 2022-23.

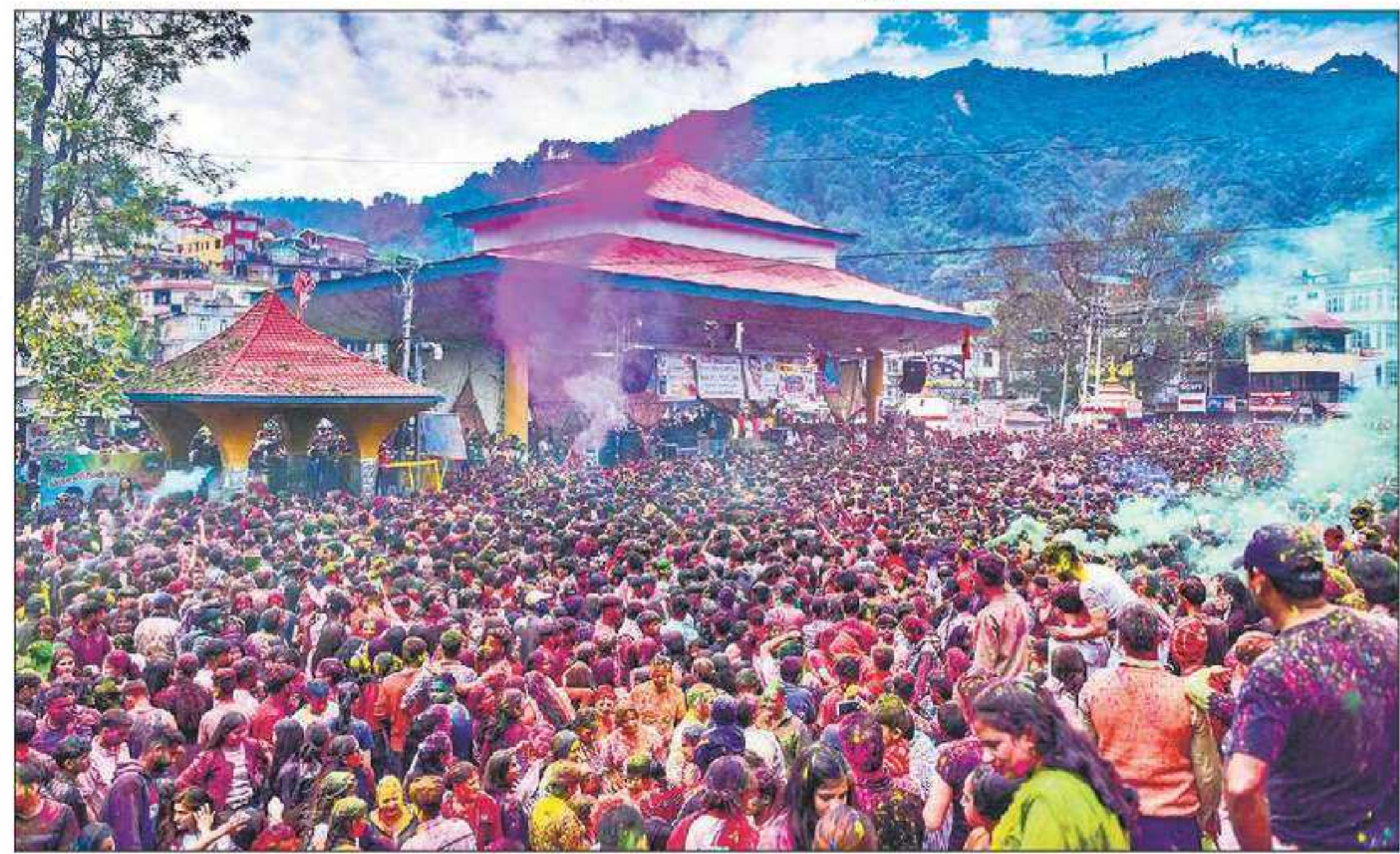
In that fiscal year, the government initially announced ₹1.07 lakh crore under the scheme, kept it at ₹1 lakh crore in BE,

revised it to ₹76,000 crore at RE stage, and finally released ₹81,195.35 crore on actual demand.

The amount is likely to exceed the revised estimates even in 2023-24 as there has been a sharp jump in the disbursements since January. After states started providing utilisation certificates for projects, about ₹28,481 crore was released in just one month (February), which was about 27% of the entire corpus.

"The scheme has been very successful in nudging states to undertake citizen-centric reforms. A redesigned scheme for 2024-25 is intimated to states on February 26 with a corpus of ₹1,30,000 crore, which includes incentives for developing tourist centres to global scale," one of the officials said. A detailed guideline for it will be intimated to them shortly, he added. →P7

Holi festivities begin with gusto



People celebrate Holi in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi city on Sunday. P11

Western disturbance cools Capital, maximum mercury dips below 30°C

NEW DELHI: Parts of the Capital experienced a drizzle on Sunday evening owing to a western disturbance influencing northwest India, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), which added that winds of up to 40km/hour swept through some areas on a gusty day and pushed temperatures down.

Delhi's maximum temperature dropped to 29.8°C, two degrees below normal for this

time of the year and a sharp dip from 34.1°C on Saturday.

To be sure, though IMD had on Friday forecast that strong surface winds of 25-30km/hour would bluster through the city over the weekend, the weather agency has also predicted a steady rise in daytime temperatures over the last week and predicted that the maximum would touch 35°C by Monday. However, the department on Sunday said a cloud cover will persist in the

region till Tuesday and that the maximum will now hover around 32-33°C.

"Most parts of NCR saw overcast skies and winds of up to 40km/hour during the day. This was due to a western disturbance across northwest India..." said Kuldeep Srivastava, scientist at IMD, adding that no rain was likely on Monday.

Meanwhile, the minimum temperature was 16.9°C, around normal for this time of year. →P3

Doubts over delivery of 1st LCA Mk-1A fighter to IAF as deadline looms

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NEW DELHI: A question mark hangs over the delivery of the first light combat aircraft (LCA) Mk-1A jet to the Indian Air Force by state-run plane maker Hindustan Aeronautics Limited by the approaching deadline of March 31 as it is yet to make its maiden flight and some key certifications are still not done, officials aware of the matter said on Sunday.

IAF ordered 83 Mk-1A fighters for ₹48,000 crore in February 2021, and plans to buy 97 more Mk-1As at a cost of around ₹67,000 crore.

"HAL is trying its level best to carry out the first flight as early as possible. But there are some

software iterations that need to get cleared. Sticking to the March 31 deadline seems to be a bit difficult right now, though efforts are still on," said one of the officials cited above.

"Some key certifications are going on right now, with different agencies involved including the Aeronautical Development Agency, Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification, and foreign OEMs (original equipment manufacturers). All this must fall in place before the first aircraft can be delivered," said a second official, who also asked not to be named.

The aircraft is in good shape, he said. The delivery of the 83 jets already ordered is expected to be completed by 2028. →P8

FOUR CHILDREN DIE IN MATTRESS FIRE CAUSED BY PHONE BATTERY

MEERUT: Four children were charred to death after a short-circuit led to a mobile phone explosion, triggering a fire in their rented house in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, police said on Sunday. Their parents sustained severe burn injuries while trying to rescue the children and are currently recovering in different hospitals.

According to the police, the incident took place late on Saturday at the Janta Colony in Pallavapuram area in Meerut district.

"They tried to plug the charger of a mobile phone into an extension cord, which was placed on the bed. A short-circuit occurred, causing an explosion in the mobile phone, and the mattress caught fire," superintendent of police (Meerut), Ayush Vikram Singh, said.

The parents, who were in the kitchen at the time of the incident, rushed to rescue the children and sustained severe injuries while trying to douse the fire, he added. →P7

Four-year-old sexually assaulted at tuition in Delhi's Pandav Nagar

NEW DELHI: A 34-year-old man has been arrested for the alleged sexual assault of a four-year-old girl in the Pandav Nagar area of East Delhi, with the incident prompting protests by locals who accused the police of inaction.

The girl used to visit the house of the accused where she took tuitions from his sister, police officers said. The accused is a businessman.

The incident took place on Saturday morning when the girl went to his house. The accused allegedly took the girl to a separate room where he assaulted her, said the police.

"It is likely that the teacher did not know about the incident," a senior police officer said, asking not to be named.

When the girl returned home, her parents noticed blood on her clothes. "She was taken to Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital and later referred to AIIMS," the officer said, adding that the girl is

THE GIRL USED TO VISIT THE HOUSE OF THE ACCUSED WHERE SHE TOOK TUITION FROM HIS SISTER, POLICE SAID. THE ACCUSED IS A BUSINESSMAN

now stable and receiving counselling.

Based on a complaint filed by her parents, the accused was taken into custody, and has been booked under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code pertaining to sexual assault and the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act, said the officer.

The incident led to protests in the area. According to police, the minor and the accused belong to different communities, which led to the spread of rumors. →P4

{ ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS }

Green tribunal asks for redefinition of floodplains



The Yamuna's inundated floodplains during the floods in Delhi last July. SUNIL GHOSH/HT ARCHIVE

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NEW DELHI: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the Delhi government to demarcate Yamuna floodplains keeping one-in-100-year risk probability in its calculations, according to documents seen by HT, a direction that can significantly expand the area that could be made out of bounds for settlements and construction work.

Current efforts to demarcate Yamuna floodplains take into account a one-in-25-year flood-

ing risk. A one-in-25-year floodplain includes and refers to land along a river that has a one-in-25, or 4%, chance of flooding every year. Therefore, a one-in-100-year demarcation will include floodplains that have even a 1% risk of flooding each year.

While these numbers may seem minuscule, last year's flooding is an apt example on why floodplain protections must be strong. In July, swathes of the city were inundated in the worst flooding seen in 45 years, with

HT wishes its readers a **HAPPY HOLI**

HOLIDAY NOTICE
The offices of Hindustan Times will remain closed on Monday, March 25, on account of Holi. There will be no edition of this paper on Tuesday, March 26.

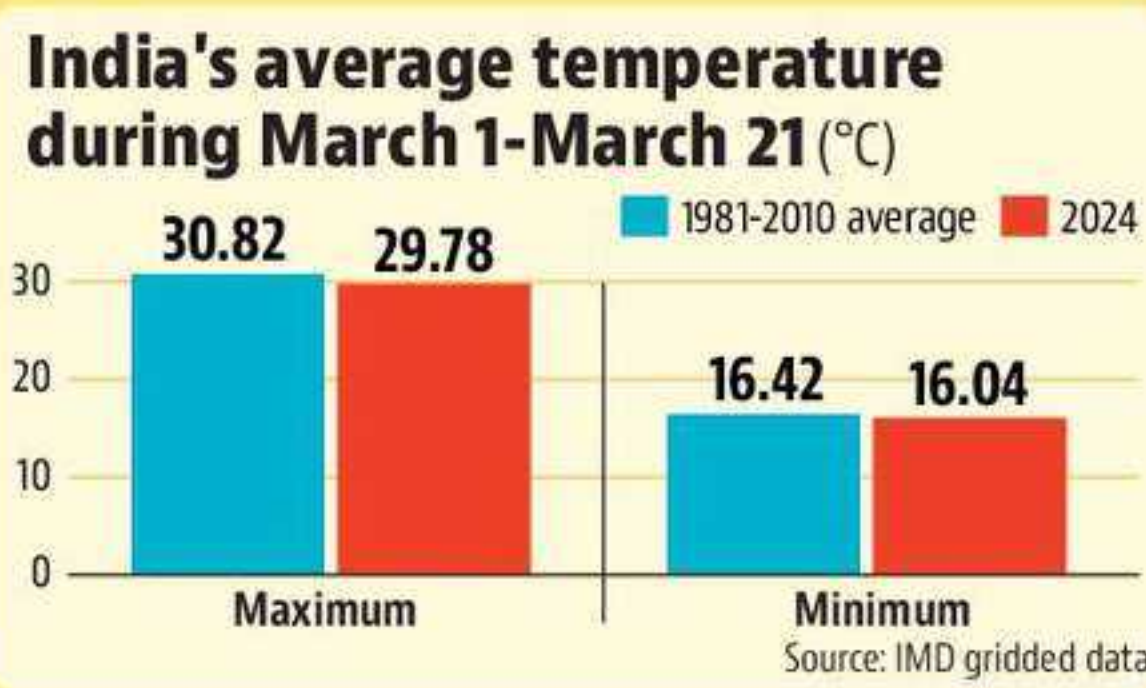
NUMBER THEORY Has spring been more pleasant than normal?

By Abhishek Jha

In the Earth's annual revolution around the Sun, the Sun's rays fall perpendicular to the equator twice a year — these days are known as the equinoxes. The first of this year's equinoxes took place on March 20. In the northern hemisphere, this is called the spring equinox because it falls roughly in the hemisphere's spring season. While India does not have an official spring season, March may be considered so because of the spring equinox and given that winter ends in February. How pleasant, or not, is the 2024 spring season in India? Here are some charts that answer this question.

1 Spring has been cooler in terms of both max, min temperatures so far

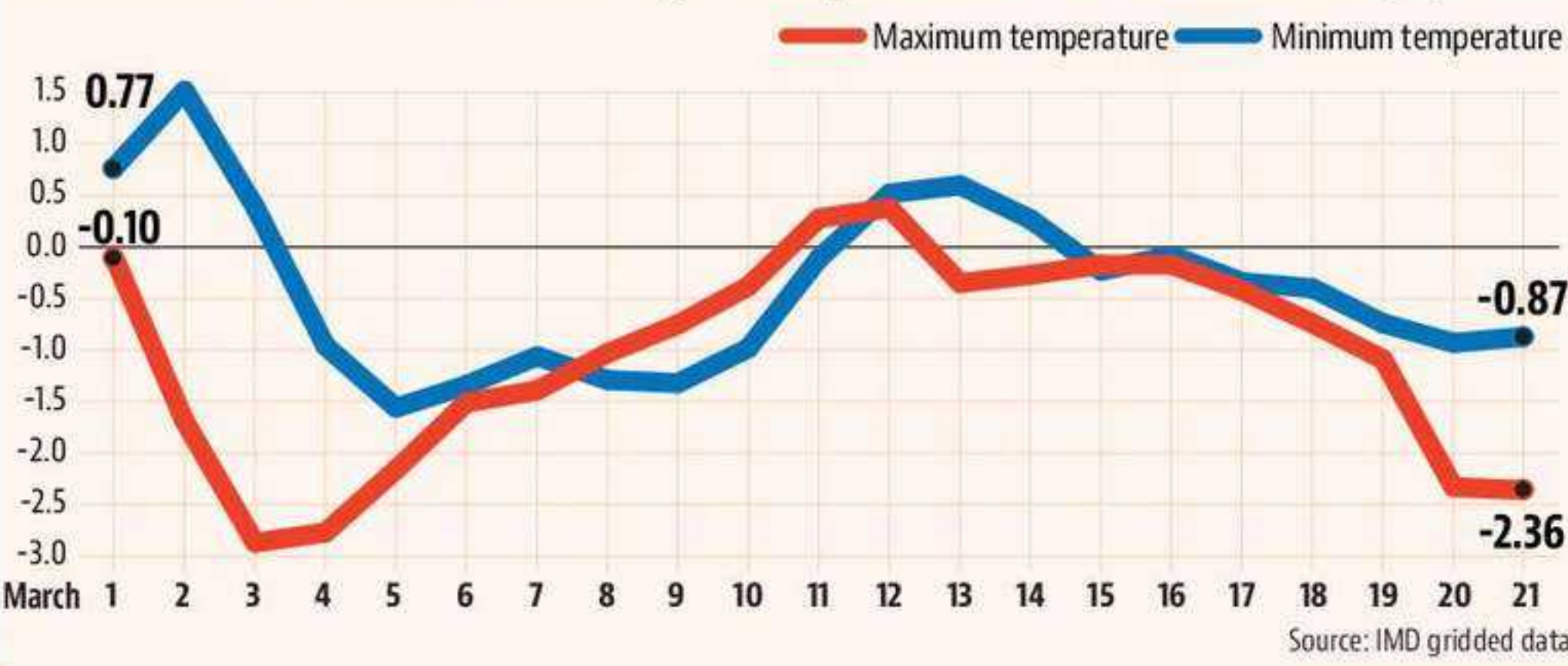
India's average maximum in the first three weeks of March was 29.78°C, according to India Meteorological Department's (IMD) gridded dataset. This is more than a degree Celsius lower than the 1981-2010 average (considered temperature's normal) for this part of March: 30.82°C. Similarly, India's average minimum for the first three weeks of March was 16.04°C, also lower than the normal of 16.42°C. This suggests that India is experiencing a cooler than normal spring so far this year.



2 But most of the cooling compared to normal was in early March

To be sure, the numbers given hide some variations that are important to understand how the month felt. One such variation is how daily temperatures behaved over the course of the month. It is important to check this because March is a month of transition between winter and summer in India. For example, even the average maximum for India reaches the 30°C mark by March 6 on the normal chart and the 32°C mark by March 18. Therefore, the part of the month driving the month's average trend can affect how the month felt. Cooling in the early part of the month might delay the feeling of spring and cooling in the later parts can prolong the feeling of spring. Daily temperature trends show that it is the former that has primarily driven the average for the month below normal. To be sure, both the maximum and minimum were close to normal in the week after March 10. This means that at least the latter part of the month has not been very warm for India on average.

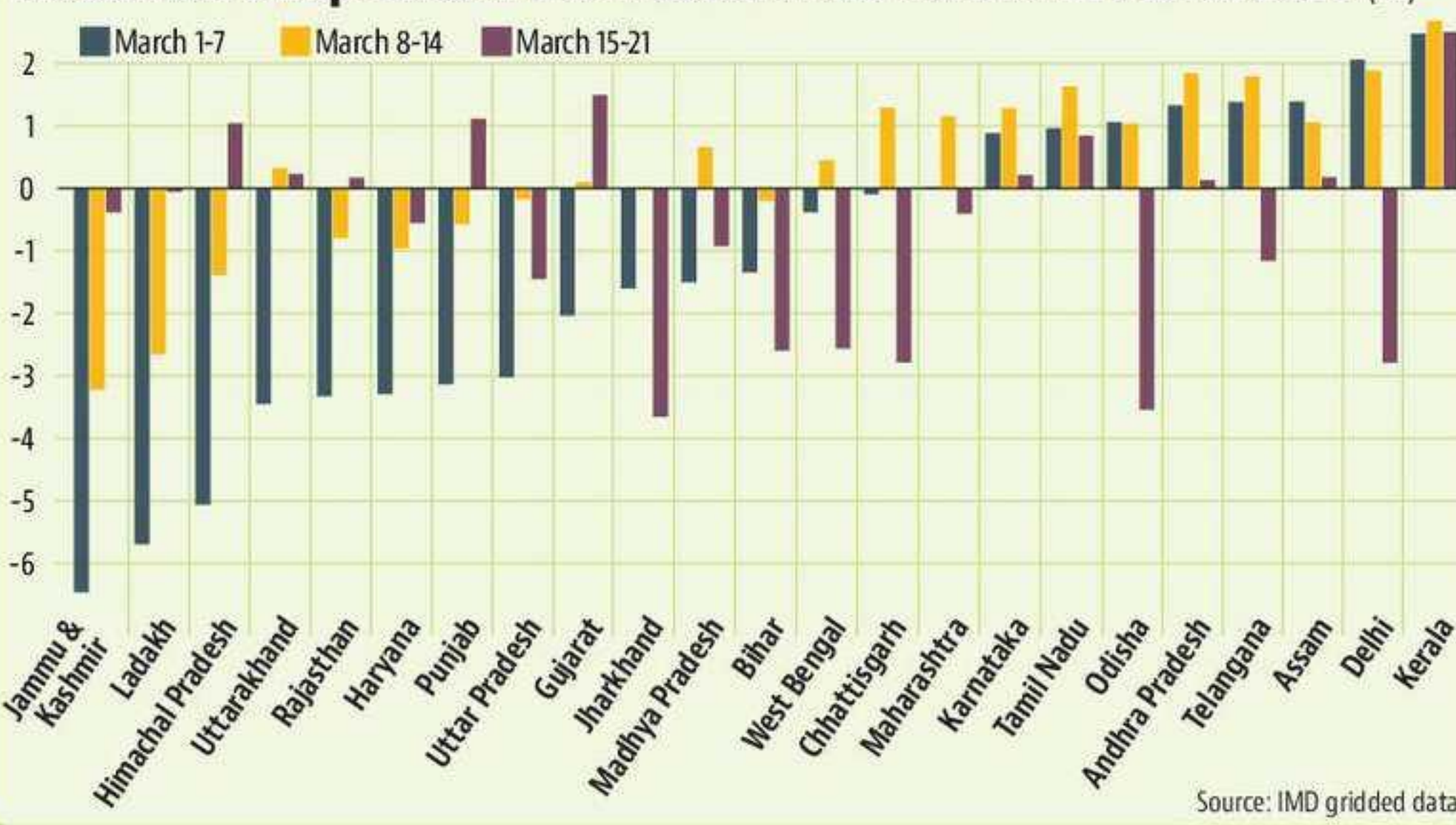
Deviation of India's average temperature from normal (°C)



3 Cooling in maximums was also limited to the northern half of the country

Perhaps an even more important aspect of March 2024 temperatures this year is its regional trend. For example, the drastic cooling in maximums seen in the charts above was limited to the northern half of the country. In most northern and north-western states, maximums were cooler than normal on average in at least two of the first three weeks of the month. One exception to this was Delhi, which was warmer than normal in the first two weeks, but turned cooler than normal in the third week. To be sure, Delhi in this analysis is bigger than its administrative boundaries because IMD's gridded data on temperature cannot capture small areas. In contrast to the northern states, most peninsular and north-eastern states have been warmer than normal in each of the first three weeks of March. Among big states, the worst warming was in Kerala, where maximums have been at least 2.5°C warmer than normal in each of the first three weeks of March.

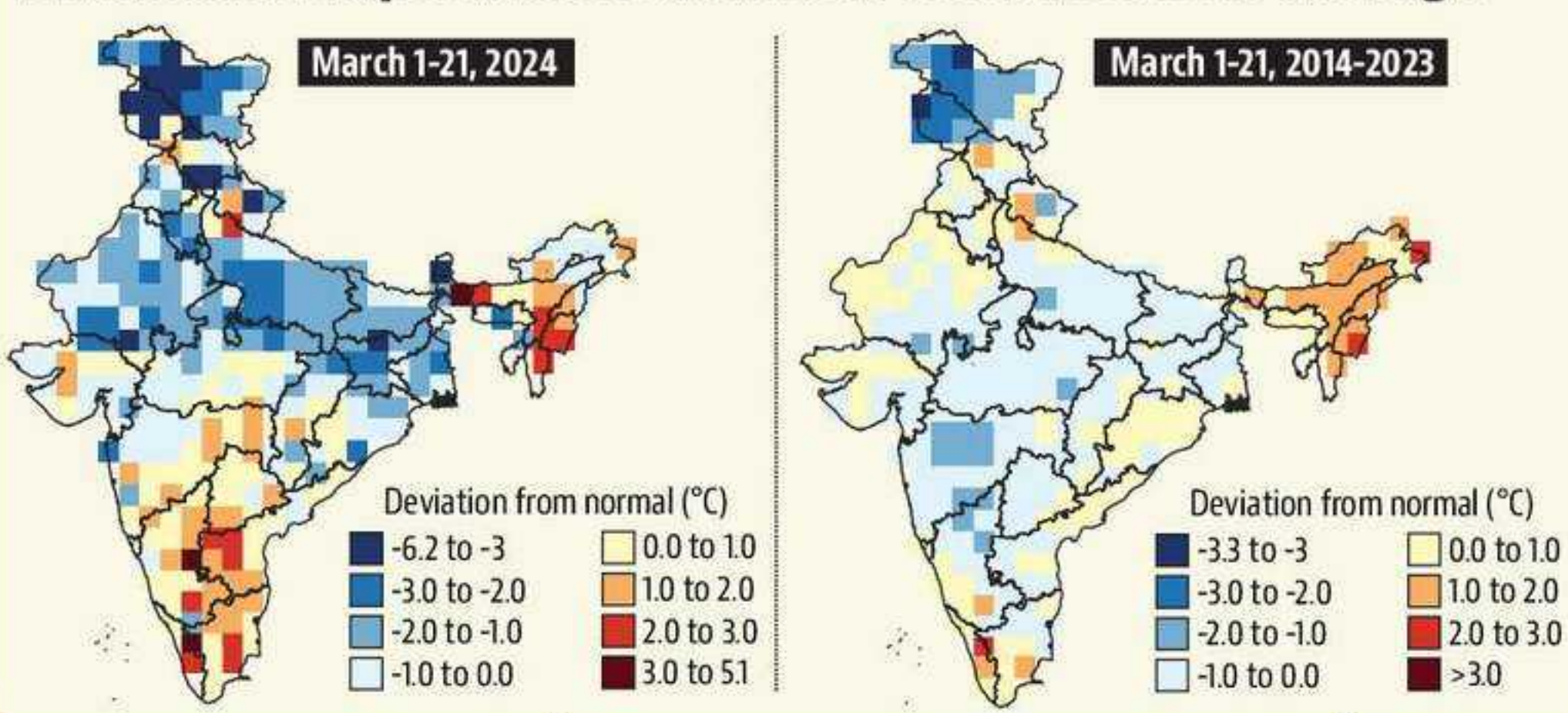
Maximum temperature's deviation from normal in March 2024 (°C)



4 Geographic trends in spring maximums this year have long-term parallels

One such parallel is that 2024 is not a rare year when peninsular and north-eastern regions have experienced higher than normal maximums in the first three weeks of March. These two regions have experienced warmer than normal maximums on average even in the past decade in this part of March. This suggests that a warmer than normal March in these regions in 2024 is part of a long-term trend. However, such warming has also been seen in north-western India in the past decade, which is not the case this year. This suggests that north-western India has experienced a relatively cooler spring than it became used to in the past decade. However, this may not last long. The Met department's extended range forecast issued on March 22 shows that each of the next four weeks are likely to be warmer than normal in north-western India.

Maximum temperature's deviation from 1981-2010 average



{ WORLD } TO SUCCEED VARADKAR Harris to be Ireland's youngest-ever leader



Ireland is poised to get its youngest-ever premier after Simon Harris secured the leadership of the Fine Gael party on Sunday, replacing Leo Varadkar who announced his resignation last week. The 37-year-old, who is the higher education minister, was the only candidate to put his name forward to succeed Varadkar, who had been Ireland's previous youngest prime minister, or what Ireland calls its taoiseach. Harris won a series of endorsements from within the Fine Gael parliamentary party and is expected to be formally elected premier in April. →P11

{ MY INDIA } SEAT SHARING TALKS Lalu, Tejawhi in Capital as deadlock with Cong deepens



Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad and his son Tejawhi Yadav arrived in the Capital on Sunday amid a deadlock among the INDIA bloc partners over seat-sharing in Bihar just weeks before the state votes in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections. According to leaders aware of the matter, fault lines deepened last week after the RJD allotted party symbols among its candidates without announcement of a seat-sharing agreement, especially on Aurangabad, Purnea and Katihar seats that were being eyed by the Congress too. →P6

{ SPORT } AUSTRALIAN GP Verstappen's streak ends as Sainz soars

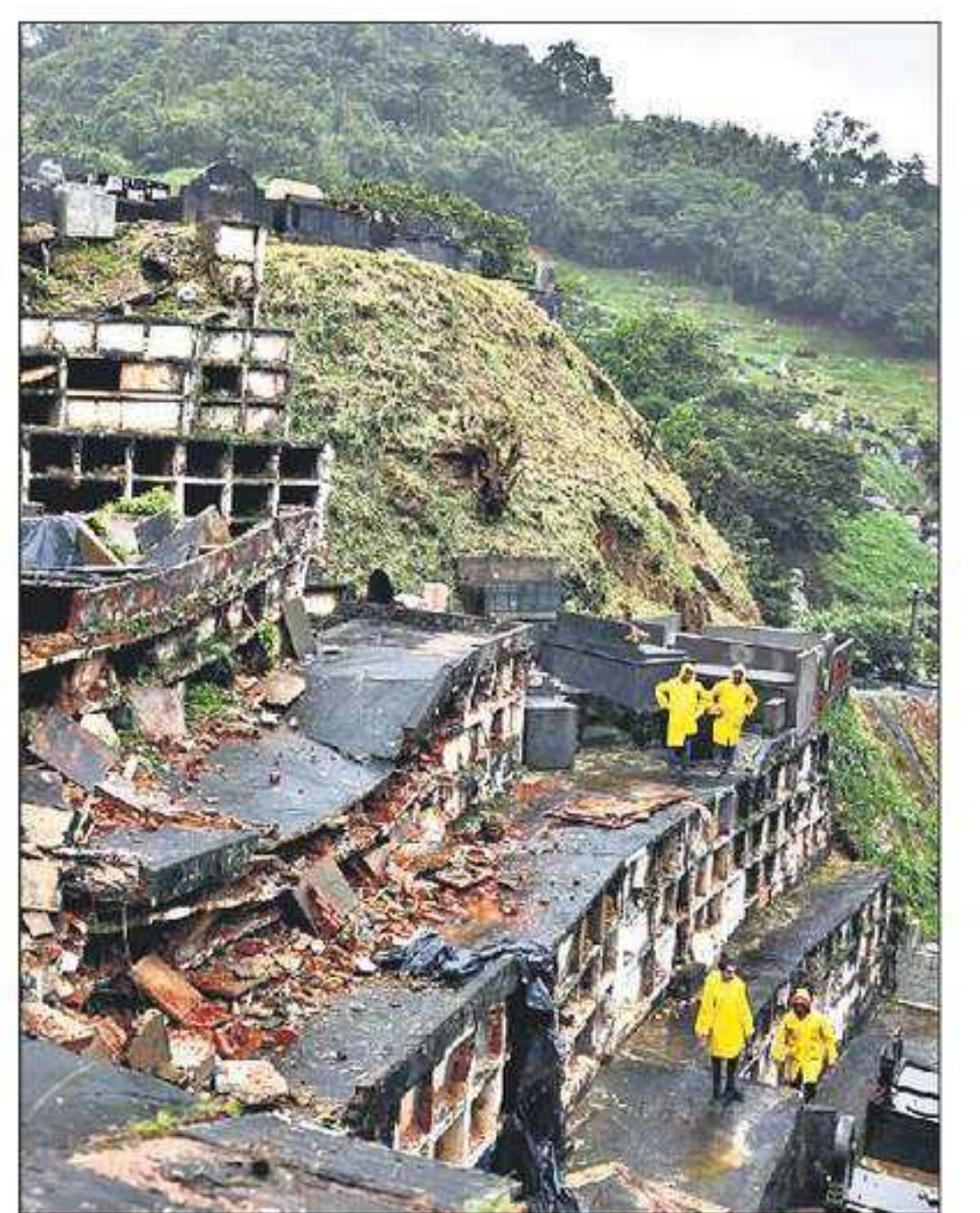


Ferrari's Carlos Sainz ended Red Bull's Formula 1 winning streak Sunday when the Spaniard took advantage of Max Verstappen's early retirement to win the Australian Grand Prix just two weeks after missing the previous race in Saudi Arabia due to an emergency appendectomy. Verstappen had won the first two F1 races of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and was on a nine-race winning streak. Sainz finished ahead of teammate Charles Leclerc for Ferrari's first 1-2 result since the 2022 Bahrain Grand Prix, with McLaren's Lando Norris finishing third. →P14

Heavy showers batter Brazil, kill 23



Heavy rains in Brazil over the weekend killed 23 people between the southeastern states of Rio de Janeiro and Espirito Santo. The latter's state government on Sunday said that 15 people died and almost 5,000 are out of their homes due to heavy rains since Friday night. Rio authorities reported eight deaths on Saturday. Rescue teams in both states had to stop their work Friday night because of risks of new landslides, with efforts restarting Saturday afternoon. AP & REUTERS



{ IIT GUWAHATI STUDENT } ATTEMPTED TO LEAVE INDIA UAPA slapped on IITian trying to join IS terrorists

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SILCHAR: A 20-year-old student of IIT Guwahati has been arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Assam police officials said on Sunday, a day after he was held in Kamrup district of the state while trying to leave the country in an attempt to join the Islamic State.



Touseef Ali Farooqui

Another student, also suspected to have links with the terror outfit, has been identified but the police are still looking for him, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who also holds the home portfolio, said.

Of the two, Touseef Ali Farooqui, who is a 4th-year student in Bioscience department at IIT, was detained on Saturday.

Giving details of his arrest, Assam Police's special task force officials said that an email that Touseef wrote his family was key.

Kalyan Kumar Pathak, additional superintendent of police, STF Assam, said that the officials received information through some local news portals and sprung into action.

"We saw the news and asked IIT Guwahati authorities if this person exists at all. They checked the hostel room and found that it was closed," Pathak said.

The STF collected details of the student from the institute, from where he was found to be a resident of Manipur.

circle," Pathak said.

Touseef had sent an email to his family members, IIT-G authorities and police, the STF found.

"He marked a top official of Assam police and the IIT-G authorities in the email where he used some symbols which were found to be similar to those used by IS. We called some experts to verify this," Pathak said.

Touseef left his hostel room on Saturday afternoon, STF found. Soon, his photos and other details were sent to the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati, and railway stations.

"At around 7.30pm, we received an information that some locals have nabbed a boy at Damdama Bus Stand in Hajo, Kamrup, who looked like Touseef. Police rushed to the spot and identified him as the IIT-G student," Pathak said.

He was taken to the STF office in Guwahati where police questioned him, Pathak said.

He said a black flag, "purportedly similar to that of ISIS", was

found in his hostel room and was being sent for verification to specialised agencies which deal with proscribed outfits.

"We are going through the items seized, it is early to say much. We are investigating the intention of sending the email. The student has given some details, but we cannot disclose anything further now," Pathak added.

Assam director general of police (DGP) Gyanendra Pratap Singh, in a post on X, said on Saturday night: "Reference IIT-Guwahati student pledging allegiance to ISIS - the said student has been detained while travelling and further lawful follow up would take place."

In a video that has surfaced on social media since Touseef can be seen preaching IS ideology to a crowd at the bus stop. HT could not independently verify the authenticity of the video.

His email contained a similar message, Pathak said. The student was detained three days after the IS India head Haris Farooqi alias Harish Ajmal Farukhi and his associate Anurag Singh alias Rehan were arrested in Dhubri district after they had crossed over from Bangladesh.

Police said that Farooqi is a resident of Uttarakhand's Dehradun while Anurag Singh is a resident of Haryana's Panipat. "Farooqi is the head of ISIS in India. His associate Anurag Singh got converted to Islam a few years back and moved to Bangladesh where he married a Bangladeshi national," police said.

China to weed out Intel, AMD chips, Windows from govt PCs, servers

Agencies
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: China has introduced guidelines to phase out microprocessors manufactured by US firms Intel and AMD from government personal computers and servers, the *Financial Times* reported on Sunday.

The guidelines also seek to sideline Microsoft's Windows operating system and foreign-made database software in favour of domestic options, the report said.

Government agencies above the township level have been told to include criteria requiring "safe and reliable" processors and operating systems, when making purchases, the newspaper said.

China's industry ministry in late December issued a statement with three separate lists of CPUs, operating systems and centralised database deemed "safe and reliable" for three years after the publication date, all from Chinese companies, Reuters checks showed.

The State Council Information Office, which handles media queries for the council, China's cabinet, did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment.

Intel and AMD did not immediately respond to Reuters' request for comment. The US has been aiming to boost domestic semiconductor output and reduce reliance on China and Taiwan with the Biden administration's 2022 CHIPS and Science Act.

THE U.S. HAS FOR ITS PART BEEN AIMING TO BOOST DOMESTIC SEMICONDUCTOR OUTPUT AND REDUCE RELIANCE ON CHINA AND TAIWAN

It is designed to bolster US semiconductor and contains financial aid for domestic production with subsidies for production of advanced chips.

The global semiconductor ecosystem itself has been in flux for several months now, with developing economies across the world, including Malaysia and India, trying to jump in amid production shortages and supply bottlenecks.

China's new guidelines were introduced last December, even as the state's testing agency put out its own list of "safe and reliable" operating systems and processors, all of them from Chinese companies. According to the *Financial Times*, the 18 approved chips included those from Huawei and state-backed group Phytium.

The news outlet also reported that China was Intel's largest market last year, contributing to 27% of the global giant's sales. It also provided 15% of AMD's sales, with analysts underscoring the obvious sales dents the two firms are expected to bear as a result of China's curbs.

Kejriwal issues first govt order from ED custody, BJP dismisses 'gimmick'

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NEW DELHI: Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday in connection with alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy 2021-22, has issued his first order after he was remanded to the federal agency's custody, water minister Atishi said on Sunday.

According to Atishi, Kejriwal in a signed order directed her to address water- and sewage-related grievances from various parts of Delhi, and asked her to make arrangements for water supply for the upcoming summer season.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hit back, claiming that the order was only a gimmick to "stay in the news".

Separately, ED officials said they have taken cognisance of Kejriwal's order, with people aware of the matter stating that the federal agency will probe whether the directions are in line with a special court's order issued to ED and Kejriwal during his custody period.

Kejriwal was arrested on Thursday night after he was questioned at his home by ED sleuths in connection with the excise policy, and on Friday was remanded to ED custody till March 28 for "detailed and sustained interrogation". The Delhi high court on Saturday refused a request by Kejriwal's lawyers to urgently hear an appeal against his arrest.

But Atishi on Sunday announced that she has received an order from the chief minister to ensure that enough tankers are prepared for areas which face a water shortage. "I got this order last night. This brought



While AAP burnt effigies of BJP leaders to protest Kejriwal's arrest...



...BJP leaders burnt an effigy of AAP leaders to protest alleged corruption.

tears to my eyes. How can a person who has been arrested, think about the people in such a difficult period? Arvind Kejriwal does not consider himself to be just chief minister of Delhi but a family member of 20 million Delhi residents. People are not just voters for him, he considers them a member of their family," she said at a press conference.

"I wish to tell the BJP that they may have arrested Kejriwal, but the love he has for the people of Delhi will not be imprisoned," she said, adding that Kejriwal also wrote that in case the need arises, the Delhi ministers should "seek help from the lieutenant governor. He will certainly help you".

Responding to the development, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor accused the Aam Aadmi Party of gimmicks to stay in the news. "Delhi residents know such

melodramas will continue till May 25 (the day the Capital will vote in the Lok Sabha elections) but this will not affect the mindset of the people who have already decided to vote for the BJP. People stand with development represented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and reject the anarchic forces led by Arvind Kejriwal," Kapoor said.

Meanwhile, BJP leader and North East Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari said the order may be fake. "The person in ED custody is an accused, and a script is being played out. The people of Delhi have not come out in support of the chief minister. If people want to know the real situation of Delhi, they should visit the lanes of jhuggies and colonies. Kejriwal came to know about these problems only after going inside jail after nine years? People of Delhi will not listen to this script," he said.

AAP decides to relaunch its 'Main bhi Kejriwal' campaign

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: The Aam Aadmi Party on Sunday said it will relaunch the "Main Bhi Kejriwal" campaign in the coming days in the aftermath of Delhi chief minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal's arrest.

The party made the announcement after a meeting involving ministers, MLAs, councillors and party functionaries was held.

AAP general secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak said that the party has decided that Kejriwal will not resign from the chief minister's post and the ministers, MLAs and the party workers will continue to take his orders from jail.

Addressing the gathering, senior AAP leader Atishi said, "It is a moment when the world is watching whether democracy will survive in India or not. For the first time, following the announcement of elections, a national convener of a party has been arrested in a fake case."

4 APPREHENDED WITH ₹3 CRORE CASH ON NH-48, INVESTIGATION ON

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police apprehended four men with two bags containing ₹3 crore on NH 48 in south-west Delhi on Friday — the first seizure in the Capital of unaccounted cash in a large quantity since the model code of conduct was invoked across the country on March 16 due to the Lok Sabha elections, officers aware of the matter said on Sunday.

The suspects, who were taking the money from Gurugram to Delhi, told investigators that it belonged to a scrap dealer, said police officers associated with the case. The suspects along with the seized cash have been handed over to the income tax department for further investigation, they added.

DCP (southwest) Rohit Meena said that after the model code of conduct came into effect, police were asked to closely monitor people and vehicles carrying illicit liquor and unaccounted money. On Friday afternoon, the Subroto Park police post personnel received a tip off.

The suspects were identified as Mohammad Shomeen, 26, Mohammad Jishan, 27, Mohammad Danish, 22, and Santosh Kumar, 22. "The four men revealed they were carrying hawala money that belonged to Mohammad Valuk Malik, who is a scrap dealer. They failed to produce valid documents for the cash," the officer said. HT

In first JNU student polls in 4 yrs, Left sweeps 4-0

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: A coalition of Left student parties, the Left Unity, swept the student union elections at Jawahar Lal Nehru University (JNU), winning all four central panel seats on offer — president, vice president, general secretary, and joint secretary.

The JNU student union (JNUSU) elections were held on Friday but the results were declared on Sunday. These were the first student body elections held at the university since 2019, following a four-year break brought on by the pandemic.

For the elections, student organisations such as the All India Students' Association (AISA), Democratic Students' Federation (DSF), Students' Federation of India (SFI), and the All India Students' Federation (AISF) formed a united Left front, facing off against the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) student outfit Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP).

Other parties in the fray included the Congress-affiliated National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and the Samajwadi



Left Unity's Dhananjay is the new JNUSU president.

Chitra Sangathan (SCS). A total of 19 candidates were contesting for positions on the central panel of JNUSU, with eight candidates in the fray for the post of the president.

According to the results declared late on Sunday, Dhananjay (goes by a single name) from the Left was elected president, defeating ABVP's Umesh Chandra Ajmeera by 922 votes; Avijit Ghosh (Left) defeated Deepika Sharma (ABVP) by 927 votes for the vice-president's post; Priyanshi Arya (Birs

Ambedkar Phule Students' Association, supported by the Left) defeated Arjun Anand (ABVP) by 926 votes for the general secretary's post; while Mohammad Sajid (Left) defeated Govind Dangi (ABVP) by 508 votes for the joint secretary's post.

Chairperson of the JNU election committee Shailendra Kumar said, "For the post of president, the names of the candidates are Dhananjay (Left) with 2598 votes, Umesh Chandra Ajmeera (ABVP) with 1676

votes...I declare Dhananjay (Left) elected."

Kumar also announced the election of Ghosh, Arya, and Sajid. A total of 42 councillors were also chosen through elections for the various schools of JNU.

Dhananjay, a PhD student from the School of Arts and Aesthetics who is originally from Gaya in Bihar, is now the first Dalit JNUSU president since Batti Lal Bairwa in 1996-97.

According to the final list of electorates released by the student election committee, a total of 7,751 voters were expected to cast their votes to elect the members of the central panel as well as the councillors for the various schools.

Additionally, arrangements of a digital voting system had also been set up for visually impaired students. Kumar had said that this year's voter turnout was around 73% of the expected number.

In the run-up to polling on Friday, JNU on Wednesday night held the presidential debate, with candidates promising improved infrastructure on campus ranging from more hostel rooms and a hospital and improved women's safety.

Drizzle in parts of Delhi; IMD: Max to remain low

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: Parts of the Capital experienced a drizzle on Sunday evening owing to a western disturbance influencing northwest India, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), which added that winds of up to 40km/hour swept through some areas on a gusty day and pushed temperatures down.

Delhi's maximum temperature dropped to 29.8 degrees Celsius (°C), two degrees below normal for this time of the year and a sharp dip from 34.1°C on Saturday.

To be sure, though IMD had on Friday forecast that strong surface winds of 25-30km/hour would bluster through the city over the weekend, the weather agency has also predicted a steady rise in daytime temperatures over the last week and predicted that the maximum would touch 35°C by Monday. However, the department on Sunday said a cloud cover will persist in the region till Tuesday and that the maximum will now hover around 32-33°C.

"Most parts of the National Capital Region (NCR) saw overcast skies and winds of up to 40km/hour during the day. This was due to a western disturb-



The max temperature dropped to 29.8°C on Sunday.

ance across northwest India. Its impact is likely to be over by Monday morning, but due to moisture in the air, we will still see partially cloudy skies," said Kuldeep Srivastava, scientist at IMD, adding that no rain was likely on Monday.

Meanwhile, Delhi's minimum temperature was 16.9°C on Sunday, around normal for this time of the year. It was 16.2°C on Saturday. The agency's forecast for Monday shows the maximum is likely to be around 32°C, while the minimum should hover around 16°C.

IMD data showed that Safdarjung, Lodhi Road and the Ridge station recorded trace rainfall between 8.30am and 5.30pm on Sunday. No rain was recorded

at the other weather stations in Delhi.

Srivastava said days are likely to become warm again from Wednesday, with the maximum likely to cross 35°C and 36°C by Thursday. "As cloudiness gradually reduces, we should see clear skies once again by Wednesday and the maximum could touch 36°C by Thursday. At the same time, the minimum could rise to 19°C by Thursday," he added.

The combination of good wind speed and rain, meanwhile, helped Delhi's air quality improve to the "moderate" zone once again. The 24-hour average air quality index reading stood at 194 (moderate) at 4pm on Sunday, an improvement from the 232 (poor) recorded on Saturday.

BJP fields Atul Garg for Ghaziabad seat, BSP nominates Solanki from GB Nagar

Peeyush Khandelwal and Vinod Rajput
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GHAZIABAD/NOIDA: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday announced that it will field its sitting Ghaziabad MLA Atul Garg as its candidate for the Ghaziabad Lok Sabha seat, dropping sitting MP and former chief of army staff General VK Singh (retired).

Other major parties, including the Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), are yet to announce their candidates for the Ghaziabad parliamentary constituency.

Meanwhile, the BSP on Sunday announced it will field Rajendra Singh Solanki, 70, from the Gautam Budh Nagar seat, against sitting MP and BJP candidate Dr



(Left) Atul Garg and (right) Rajendra Singh Solanki



Mahesh Sharma and Samajwadi Party's Rahul Awana, a first-time candidate.

Uttar Pradesh is one of three states in which the Lok Sabha elections will be held in seven phases between April 19 and June 1, and as per the Election Commission of India schedule, the Ghaziabad and the Gautam Budh Nagar constituencies will

won the assembly elections from Sikandrabad in 1985. Thereafter, he remained associated with the party but did not contest any more elections.

Earlier this year, he quit the Congress and joined the BSP. "I was appointed as Congress's state youth chief in 1976, and also worked under then UP chief minister ND Tiwari before the 1980s... Now I have joined the BSP, as they offered me to contest the 2024 general elections," Solanki said.

The GB Nagar constituency, spread over parts of Bulandshahr too, was carved out of the earlier Khurja seat following a delimitation exercise in 2008. BSP candidate Surendra Nagar won the first election held on the seat in 2009.

Man sexually assaults 4-year-old in East Delhi, locals hold protest

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: A 34-year-old man has been arrested for the alleged sexual assault of a four-year-old girl in the Pandav Nagar area of East Delhi, with the incident prompting protests by locals who accused the police of inaction.



A mob vandalised a number of cars in the locality, following which police personnel were deployed to control the situation.

The girl used to visit the house of the accused where she took tuitions from his sister, police officers said. The accused is a businessman.

The incident took place on Saturday morning when the girl went to his house. The accused allegedly took the girl to a separate room where he assaulted her, said the police.

"It is likely that the teacher did not know about the incident," a senior police officer said, asking not to be named.

When the girl returned home, her parents noticed blood on her clothes. "She was taken to Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital and later referred to AIIMS," the officer said, adding that the girl is now stable and receiving counselling.

Based on a complaint filed by her parents, the accused was taken into custody, and has been booked under relevant sections of the Indian

Penal Code pertaining to sexual assault and the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences (Pocso) Act, said the officer.

The incident led to protests in the area. According to police, the minor and the accused belong to different communities, which led to the spread of rumors.

A group of locals and some local leaders staged a protest

outside the house of the accused, and damaged two vehicles belonging to his family, police said.

"The agitated crowd damaged two vehicles which belong to the family of the accused. The local staff immediately intervened and removed them. They have made some serious allegations and spread rumours which are

false. The girl is alive and is with her parents. We have already arrested the accused. We also detained the tuition teacher to question her. The case is being properly investigated..." the officer cited above said.

Security has been stepped up in the area following the protests, officials said, adding that additional commissioner of police Sagar Singh Kalsi also visited the spot.

"There were rumours about the child's health. The mob also entered a shop (of the family of the accused) and tried to vandalise it. However, the police intervened in time. We removed the protesters and have spoken to locals to stop spreading rumours. Peace has been restored," Kalsi said.

Legal action will also be initiated against the crowd who indulged in vandalism, he said.

"The girl was referred to AIIMS because they have a one-stop centre for minors with better facilities than LBS. Her parents are with her and she's undergoing counselling," Apoorva Gupta, DCP (east), said.

Following the incident, Delhi minister Atishi wrote to lieutenant governor VK Saxena, seeking the "harsh punishment" for the accused.

In her letter, a copy of which the Aam Aadmi Party leader shared on X, Atishi wrote: "What could be a more heinous crime than this? LG Saheb: The safety of women and girls of Delhi is your constitutional responsibility. These criminals should be punished immediately, and the harshest punishment should be given. As a woman, I urge you to fulfil your constitutional responsibility and provide a safe environment to the women of Delhi."

AAP MLA Kuldeep Kumar said that the AAP will gherao the local police station to demand action in the case. "The police is busy targeting the AAP and preventing our demonstrations. The law and order is deteriorating and police has failed to carry out its core duty," Kumar, who the party has fielded from the East Delhi Lok Sabha constituency, said.

Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party president Virendra Sachdeva said that the BJP strongly condemns the incident. "We demand immediate arrest of the accused who is from minority community as is being demanded by the local citizens," he said.

Angry at being teased, man stabs woman on Mukherjee Ngr street

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: A 22-year-old woman was stabbed multiple times on Friday allegedly by a man for repeatedly making fun of him, the Delhi Police said on Sunday, adding that the suspect has been arrested.

According to police, the woman, a resident of Jafraabad, was preparing for competitive exams and was headed to a library when the incident occurred.

The accused, identified as Aman (police officers did not reveal his last name), a scrap dealer, allegedly stabbed her multiple times on her left arm and waist following which she suffered at least three wounds, police said.

A purported video of the incident, which was circulated on social media, ostensibly shows the suspect repeatedly attacking the woman who was trying to dodge the attack. He

then tries to flee but comes back to attack her again.

The man is then stopped by locals.

Police said the woman was taken to a nearby dispensary by the locals.

According to police, the accused and the woman know each other.

"On Friday, she had made fun of the accused and called him names. Enraged, Aman managed to get a knife from a vegetable vendor on the street and stabbed her. The incident occurred in front of a PG accommodation," said an officer aware of the case, asking not to be named.

An eyewitness, requesting anonymity, said Aman is an aloof person.

"We were inside when we heard screams of the woman. Aman was shouting at her and stabbing her. People often make fun of him and he rarely talks to anyone," said the person.

CIVIC BODY SEEKS FEEDBACK FROM DEPTS ON NDMC ACT AMENDMENT

NEW DELHI: The New Delhi Municipal Council, the civic body which oversees the New Delhi area, has initiated the process for departmental feedback for amendment to the law that governs the local body, senior officials said. The law department of NDMC has issued circular to all the constituent departments to provide inputs and comments on the amendment to NDMC Act 1994.

"All the head of departments are requested to submit their inputs and comments post discussions held in council room on the month of February 2024 on the subject matter for onward submission to the chairperson NDMC," the circular from the law department reads. HT has seen the copy of the circular. A senior NDMC official said feedback from all stakeholders is being taken. "Many provisions of the act become outdated... We can only make suggestions. The final decision has to be taken by the Centre," official added requesting anonymity. **HTC**

{ CHINTELS PARADISO } RWA EXPRESSES DISAPPOINTMENT OVER NEW RATE

Compensation to some flat owners increased

HT Correspondent
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GURUGRAM: The Gurugram district administration has approved an increase in compensation for flat owners in Tower J at Chintels Paradiso—a residential tower deemed unsafe for habitation — by ₹400 per square foot (psf), officials aware of the matter said, adding that the owners of these flats will be eligible for ₹6,900 psf.

But the flat owners expressed unhappiness over rate of revision, and demanded more compensation from the authorities.

On February 10, 2022, renovations at a sixth-floor flat of Tower D in Chintels Paradiso society in Sector 109 led to the ceiling of a bedroom collapsing, causing a cascade effect in which portions of flats caved in all the way down to the first floor.

Following the incident, in which two residents were killed, the Haryana department of town and country planning (DTCP) ordered a structural audit of the entire complex, and based on a report prepared by IIT-Delhi, the Gurugram administration deemed five of the nine towers in the complex — D, E, F, G, and H — unsafe, and in need of demolition, and fixed a compensation

COMPENSATION HAS BEEN HIKED FOR FLAT OWNERS IN TOWER J, BY ₹400 PER SQUARE FOOT (PSF) FROM ₹6,500 PSF TO ₹6,900 PSF

amount of ₹6,500 psf for flat owners.

Subsequently in January this year, Tower J was also deemed unsafe, but flat owners in this tower demanded a revision in the rate of compensation as the price of land and flats in the area has increased significantly.

A senior official said that the decision to revise rate was taken last week by the district committee, headed by additional deputy commissioner Gurugram, which is overseeing the matter.

"The rate was revised from Rs 6,500 psf to Rs 6,900 psf. The committee submitted the proposal to the deputy commissioner and it has been approved," the official said, on condition of anonymity. Stamp duty, and cost of interiors will also be paid additionally to the flat owners, the official said.

Gurugram deputy commis-

sioner Nishant Yadav confirmed the development and said, "The rate has been revised as per district committee's report."

Tower J flat owners and the Chintels Paradiso RWA, however, said that the revision in compensation was too low, and urged the authorities to revise the rates in line with the current market rates.

"The ₹6,900 psf valuation is too less and it is not acceptable. The previous valuation price was ₹6,500 psf as on February 10, 2022. The market has appreciated significantly. Without revaluation, how they can decide a new value? Our valuation should be more than ₹10,000 psf," said Rakesh Hooda, president of the RWA.

A Chintels spokesperson said, "After the SC verdict, a negotiation team was formed comprising of residents of affected flats. After negotiations, several residents have accepted the plan. These residents also sent us emails saying that the RWA does not represent them in any way. Most RWA members are from phase II and have been actively trying to stall solution. We stand with our commitment to rebuild the towers and all agreements have been made keeping the SC verdict in mind and following it."

TWO CRUSHED TO DEATH BY GOODS TRAIN AT F'BAD RAILWAY STATION

Debashish Karmakar
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GURUGRAM: Two people were killed at a Faridabad railway station after a goods train ran over them, police officers said.

The deceased were identified as Murti Devi, 70, from Samalkha in Panipat, and her sister-in-law Ramkali Devi, 65, of Morkhi in Jind. Officers said the incident occurred at 8am on Saturday at platform number 3 of the Old Faridabad railway station.

Raj Pal, station house officer of the Faridabad government rail police station, said, "Murti and Ramkali were scheduled to board the Gita Jayanti Express from the Old Faridabad railway station to reach Panipat."

Police said Ramkali suddenly fell on the track just as the goods train was approaching, and Murti tried to pull her back on to the platform, but both women were run over by the train and killed. It was not clear whether Ramkali was pushed on to the track or she slipped, said police.

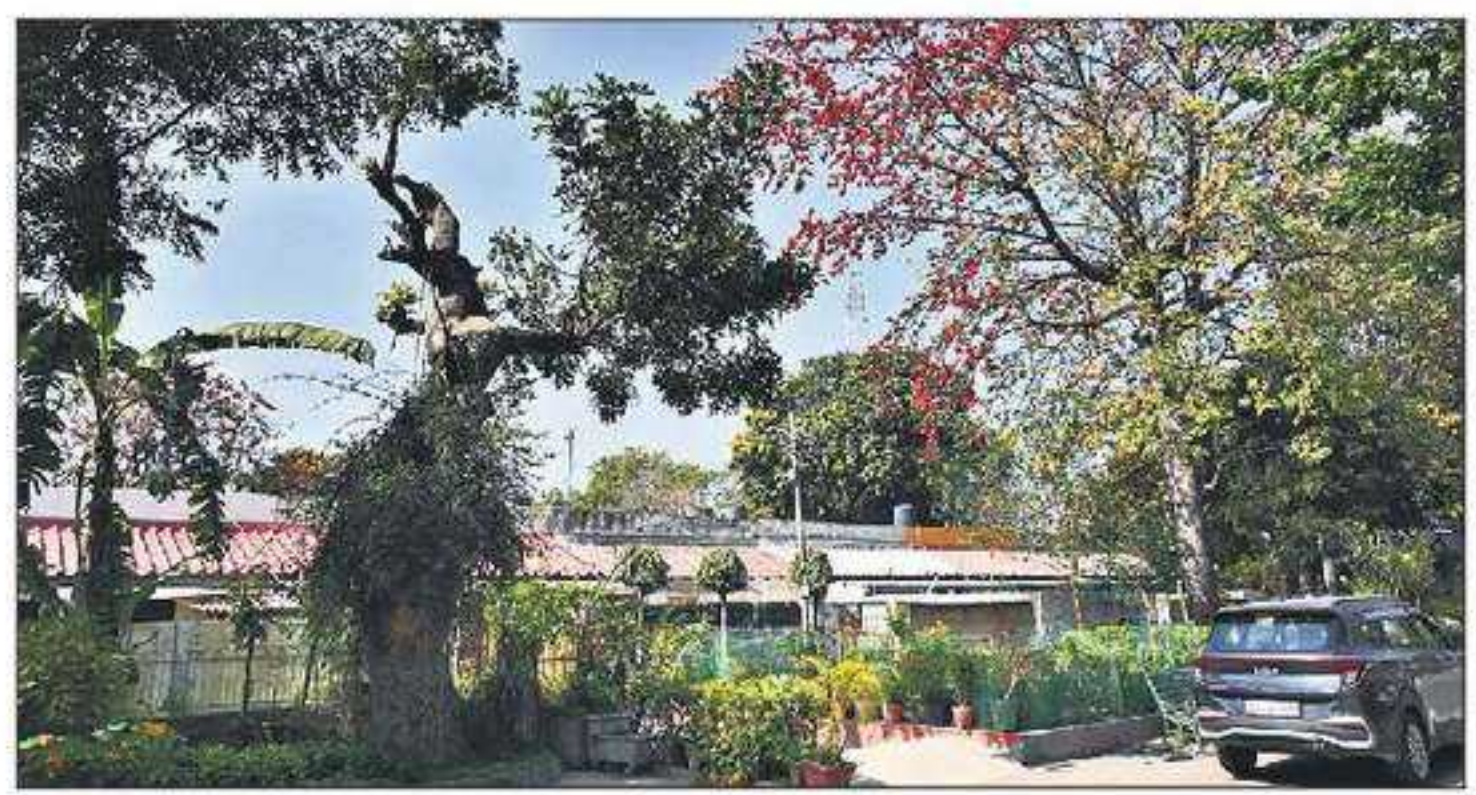
MCD to raze its staff flats on Minto Road, replace them with highrises

Paras Singh
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NEW DELHI: The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) plans to raze the existing single-storey flats for the civic body's officials at Minto Road in central Delhi and redevelop them as high rises, officials aware of the matter have said.

The site currently has 41 flats, ranging from Type-2 to Type-5, that were built in the 1940s. However, these buildings are in various stages of disrepair, the officials said, adding that only 19 are currently occupied. As part of the MCD plan, these flats will be demolished, and five towers with nine storeys each shall be developed at the site, in a project that will cost an estimated ₹121.4 crore.

Municipal commissioner Gyanesh Bharti, in a letter to the municipal secretary dated February 23, said that the architect department has prepared a con-



MCD flats on Minto Road on Wednesday. **ARVIND YADAV/HT PHOTO**

ceptual plan for the project, which will have a plot area of around 13,500 sqm, with each tower having a height 32.7m, which will include a 3m stilt.

"The existing set of municipal flats are very old and are in a poor state. Out of the 41 municipal flats, only 19 are currently occupied and 22 are lying vacant due to inhabitable conditions. As more than 50% of the flats are lying vacant and

remaining occupied flats require frequent maintenance over a period, they have become uneconomical and unviable to MCD," the letter states.

HT has seen a copy of the letter.

The proposal was put before the corporation on March 7, but its consideration has been postponed for the next meeting.

To be sure, the erstwhile North MCD had also attempted

to redevelop the site in 2018-19, proposing to redevelop the existing flats as office space, but the project could not be executed due to technical hurdles and poor the financial state of the civic body.

Before it can start its fresh attempt, MCD will need to first get the land use of the area changed.

"The chief town planning office has stated that the site falls under district park as use marked in the zonal development plan of the Master Plan of Delhi. These flats were handed over from NDMC to MCD in 1958. The land use will have to be changed with the help of DDA (Delhi Development Authority). The process of change of land use will go simultaneously with the preparation of detailed estimates for the project but the tenders will be invited only after getting the land use changed," an official aware of the project said.

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ANKITA BIBRA
(06.08.1996 - 25.03.2018)

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Missed & Remembered by Family

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON
(See Section 82 Cr.PC)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Vivek Kumar Dube, S/o Vinod Kumar R/o 2099 & 2090/1C Gali No.15, Punjabi Basti, Baljeet Nagar, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No.31/2020 u/s 33/58 Delhi Excise Act, P.S. Patel Nagar, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Vivek Kumar Dube** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Vivek Kumar Dube** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Vivek Kumar Dube of FIR No.31/2020 u/s 33/58 Delhi Excise Act, P.S. Patel Nagar, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **23.04.2024**.

By Order,
Ms Upasana Satija
Ld. Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate,
Room No.145, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi
DP/3517/CD/2024

WESTERN RAILWAY - BHAVNAGAR DIVISION
OUTSOURCING OF PSI MAINTENANCE AND BREAKDOWN ACTIVITIES

The Divisional Railway Manager (TRD) Western Railway, Bhavnagar Para invites E-Tender on behalf of President of India for the following work. Tender Notice No. DRM/TRD/BVP/2023-24/01. Date: 18-03-2024. Tender No. 07-TRDBVP-2023-24. Name of Work: Bhavnagar Division-Outsourcing of PSI maintenance and breakdown activities of PSI depots Botad, Dhola Jn. and Savarkundla for two years. Tender amount: ₹ 1,39,39,923/-. Tender Fee: NIL EMD Amount: ₹ 2,19,700/-. Address: DRM (Traction) BVP, DRM Office, Bhavnagar Para-364003. The bidders have to apply online through link i.e. www.irps.gov.in only. For further details please visit website www.irps.gov.in. Last date to apply online will be 18-04-2024 up to 15:00 hrs. for above mentioned tenders. BVP-188

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RAKUL-JACKKY'S 'PEHLI HOLI' SET TO BE SPECIAL

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Dilli Haat, a centrepiece of city, turns 30

Aheli Das

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: In March 1994, Ruby Ahmed, a shy and petite newlywed, followed her husband Islam to Delhi — 1,919 km away from their modest home in Guwahati in Assam — with 50 handwoven bamboo baskets.

The couple had been hand-picked by the state government to exhibit the baskets at an experimental haat (market) in Delhi for 15 days.

"We were unhappy at first. Why did we have to go so far away to a city we had never set foot in to sell baskets? We already did that in Assam. In this new city, there was also no guarantee of sale," recalled Ruby, 46, seated on a wooden stool at that haat 30 years later, surrounded by bamboo baskets with embroidered roses.

Ruby and Islam were the first few artisans from across the country who (reluctantly) set up a stall at Dilli Haat in INA market — the city's first open-air haat for artisans — when it first opened in March 1994.

Dilli Haat, which boasts 166 stalls of artisans from across 28 states, 29 food stalls from 24 states, and is a part of all "must visit" lists, turns 30 this month.

"At that time, who knew that something that seemed so absurd at first would turn out to be such an indelible part of my life? We return almost every year... My daughter even goes to college in Delhi," said Ruby, with a smile on her face, as she greeted shoppers on a sunny March afternoon.

From pashmina shawls of Kashmir, printed cotton shirts of Sangarner, Gond art of Chhatargarh to steamed momo and fruit beer at the Nagaland food stall, puran poli at the Maharashtra stall, and yak cheese from Ladakh — Dilli Haat has something for everyone.

And in the middle of all this cacophony is 50-year-old Rampal who plays old Hindi film songs on a wooden sarangi. "When I play the sarangi on the side of a road, very few get sold but when I do the same at Dilli Haat, people buy. People stop and watch me play. They inquire about the instrument and end up buying — foreigners and children mostly," said Rampal, who has been a sarangi seller at Dilli Haat since 1996.



MARCH 2024
His contract gets renewed every 45 days, and when it's being processed, he earns a living by driving an e-rickshaw in Jahangirpuri.

From artisan to customer, sams the middleman

Spread across six acres, Dilli Haat's red brick masonry aesthetic and the option of shopping in an organised open-air market attracted throngs of people in the 1990s. For a city that was starved of safe, open spaces, Dilli Haat proved to be just the right spot for cash-strapped college students, young professionals, and for weekend family outings with kids in tow.

In the early 2000s, Kankana Das, who was a journalist at the time, would often visit Dilli Haat with her colleagues for a quick snack. "We would go there just for the cutlets and the momo, but would end up shopping so much. The food would be served on torn newspaper, and the entrance was less congested back then. Now the stalls all have this permanent concrete look and the idea of a haat is lost," she said.

Das, who still frequents the place, shared a tip for Gen Z

shoppers at Dilli Haat: "If you like something there, buy it or you will regret it because the stalls change every 15 days."

This was not an arbitrary feature added in the 1990s. Jaya Jaitly, politician and craft promoter, who founded the Dilli Haat along with Ministry of Textiles, Delhi Tourism, and New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), told HT that craftspeople couldn't be expected to have unlimited stock of items. "They made things with their hands, and they would only have a small inventory. So, 15 days was the perfect time for them to sell their stock, go back, restock and return," said the 81-year-old.

Of the 166 stalls, four in the Purbashree emporium are fixed for states from the north-east, while the rest change every 15 days, said a Delhi tourism official. "We ensure that all states have a stall but the artisans from the states change. Many of them, however, come back on a rotational basis," said the official, who asked not to be named.

For craftspeople, Dilli Haat also gives them respite from middlemen. The artisans must apply for a stall with the Delhi Tourism department, and the

highest bidder for each stall from a state gets it for 15 days.

Eghlaque Ansari, 28, a handloom craftsman from Uttar Pradesh's Varanasi, who sells tussar and katan silk saris, folded a gold katan silk saree — priced at ₹27,000. "It takes us 40 days to weave one such piece. At Dilli Haat, I don't have to deal with middlemen. I earn what I deserve," said Ansari who has been coming to Dilli Haat for five years.

A few metres away, Ambika Devi, 72, from Bihar, who is the custodian of Madhubani art pieces, echoes Ansari's sentiment. "I have been coming here since the day it opened. I am glad that I get to sell directly to the customer. Art has soul, and people will buy it if they connect with the artist. There is no middleman here, and that works for me," said Devi.

Jaitly said that back in the 1990s, as urban markets welcomed global brands, a sense of vacuum existed when it came to Indian craftspeople. "We had to think about our own people. Our craftspeople needed to see the kind of markets they could have on their fingertips, with no exporters or middlemen involved. I used to organise

crafts bazaars in different parts of the city, but they were temporary events. It made sense to open something similar for artisans that was a permanent feature, and that's when the idea of Dilli Haat came up," she said.

It still took six years for the idea to turn to reality as the project suffered teething problems like location. It was proposed to be built behind Bhairav mandir near Purana Qila but the National Zoological Park raised a concern regarding its proximity to the zoo.

"The then-head of the NDMC had taken keen interest and proposed this empty land, over a nallah. Finally, the location was decided," recalled Jaitly.

The launch of the project was advertised on Doordarshan, and a 'test' crafts bazaar with a handful of people was also arranged. Dilli Haat has also helped artisans connect with each other and adopt helpful sale practices. "Initially, Madhubani artists used to sell their painting on a piece of paper, but then they saw how other artists brought framed paintings, which sold more. So, they changed their practices too," said Jaitly.



JANUARY 1999
(Left) Visitors at Dilli Haat, an open-air market spread across 6 acres that has proved to be just the right spot for cash-strapped college students, young professionals, and for weekend family outings with kids in tow; (Above) A folk artiste performing during a Gujarat cultural festival at the haat in January 1999; (right) Two girls on a swing during the Teej festival celebrations at Dilli Haat in August 1997.

ARVIND YADAV/HT PHOTO, HT ARCHIVE

Changing times

For Ravi Kumar, 30, who sells juttis and other footwear, it's an opportunity to meet celebrities, especially Hindi film actors. "I met Jahanvi Kapoor once. She haggled like all other customers do," he said, with a laugh.

His family, based in Haryana, has been setting up a footwear stall at Dilli Haat for 15 years and has closely observed the changes — from cash transactions to reliance of customers and shopkeepers on UPI, and from weekend rush to weekday crowds.

In 1994, when Delhi Tourism nervously opened gates of Dilli Haat to public, there were just 62 stalls. But over the years, as business and footfall grew, the stalls did too. Now, there are 166 stalls which are allotted to different craftspeople every 15 days.

The food stalls have gone up from 25 to 29, and the ticket price has increased to ₹30 from



₹10. "At first, 200-250 people would visit Dilli Haat every day," said an official from Delhi Tourism.

In January 2024, Dilli Haat recorded 142,126 visitors, and at least 125,093 visitors in February this year.

Suparna Valla (51), who worked with Pradeep Sachdeva — the celebrated architect who built and designed Dilli Haat — said that the original plan included a lot of open space. "I visited in January and noticed how much the character had changed. The space feels cluttered now, with selfie points set up near the entrance and concrete shops. The excitement that we used to feel because it was an open bazaar unlike the other markets of the city is gone. Earlier the shops did not even have shutters but now there are shops selling mass produced products and it looks like any other market in the city,

with just more space."

She recalled how there were hand-painted mosaic tiles that had the shop number written on them, outside each stall. "They have now been replaced with machine-made placards. The place was made for handicrafts and handlooms, so the machine-made concept does not go with the original vision... There was a kite-maker Umar Daraz who exhibited here for some years ago, he couldn't afford a stall here. The vision was to create a place for people like Daraz but now the essence is lost," said Valla.

Despite the tangible changes, Valla remains a Dilli Haat loyalist, especially in the monsoon and winters. "There are red bricks all over the area, which absorb rainwater... And what better than the fragrance of geeli mitti and some pakoras and tea after a successful shopping expedition?" she said.

Reduce tree transplantation to get green nod for bus depot, NBCC told

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NEW DELHI: Delhi's State Expert Appraisal Committee (SEAC), a body that advises the state on environmental clearances to development projects, has asked central public sector enterprise NBCC to reduce the number of trees to be transplanted from the site of an upcoming bus depot at Vasant Vihar in south Delhi in order to get a green nod for the project, officials aware of the matter said.

The four-storey bus depot — a ₹375 crore project — will have a built-up area of 80,907 sqm, the NBCC proposal submitted to SEAC states.

As part of the NBCC proposal, the project site has 110 trees, of which none is to be felled, while 46 are to be transplanted.

ACCORDING TO NBCC PROPOSAL, THE 4-STOREY BUS DEPOT PROJECT WILL BE BUILT AT A COST OF ₹375 CR OVER AN AREA OF 80,907 SQM

For the 46 trees being transplanted, NBCC said it will carry out compensatory plantation of 460 trees, for which DDA has already allotted them land.

However, the State Expert Appraisal Committee — a body comprising 12 members, including retired IAS officers and experts in the fields of architecture and environment — noted in a February 26 meeting that some of the trees proposed for transplantation have a wide

girth and are a "part of the city's natural heritage", and asked NBCC to bring down the final figure for transplantation in order to get environmental clearance.

SEAC said it had identified seven trees which have a fairly large girth.

"The girth of these trees... ranges from 2.95 metres (pilkhan) to 8 metres (bargad). This is an extraordinarily high concentration of high girth trees in one row and are part of the natural heritage of the area and the city. This row of trees needs to be conserved by giving sufficient ground space around the trees as breathing space. In particular, the bargad tree of 8-metre girth needs sufficient space unpaved ground space around the tree base of 1-2 metre width," the minutes of the meeting, issued recently, said.

SEAC chairman Vijay Garg told HT that the body has asked NBCC to submit a fresh proposal.

"The environmental clearance has not been awarded, as we have identified some trees which are fairly old and have a good girth too," he said.

"The trees being saved should not be limited to the ones mentioned, but overall too, we have asked them to bring down the number of trees being impacted," he added.

HT reached out to NBCC, but officials there did not comment on the matter.

Gurpreet Bindra, the president of the Vasant Vihar residents' welfare association (RWA), said there is hardly any land left in the area for development, adding that it is important to preserve as many trees as possible.

{ FROM PAGE 1 }

OPPN RALLY

'maha rally' to safeguard the country's interests and democracy," said Rai, three days after the federal agency arrested Kejriwal for his role in Delhi's controversy-ridden 2021-22 excise policy. Kejriwal and the party have maintained their innocence and accused ED of acting at the Bharatiya Janata Party's behest.

The BJP, however, said opposition parties were trying to divert attention from the corruption allegations levelled against the AAP.

A local court on Friday sent Kejriwal to six days' ED remand, even as the AAP maintained that he would "run the government" from the confines of prison, arguing that statutes did not require an arrested chief minister to step down from the position unless convicted.

Indeed, 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. However, the

convention is that arrested leaders quit top posts.

"The way Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has been arrested, there is anger in the hearts of people across the nation who love and respect the Constitution... The Prime Minister is misusing central agencies," Rai alleged.

Rai cited the arrest of former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and alleged that West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav are also being targeted, even as he said that Kejriwal's arrest had galvanised the grouping.

"All INDIA bloc leaders are being framed in false cases," he said.

The Congress, which initially led the charge against the 2021-22 excise policy, has lent its weight behind the AAP and Kejriwal since his arrest. The two parties, formerly bitter rivals, in February sealed a seat-sharing pact for the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. The AAP will contest four seats while the Congress will contest three.

Lovely alleged that Opposition parties are not being given a level-playing field. "The March 31 'maha rally' will not only be a political one but a call to save the country's democracy and raise voices against the BJP-led Centre," Lovely said.

He also underscored that the Opposition bloc — which has often failed to find common ground given the parties' colliding interests in various states — was united in its defence of Kejriwal.

"We are with all INDIA bloc partners on this issue. Freedom and democracy have been achieved through the sacrifices of our freedom fighters. The atmosphere prevailing today is against democracy," Lovely added.

Delhi minister Atishi said, "The rally is not being organised to save Arvind Kejriwal but to save the democracy. The opposition is facing one-sided attacks."

Rai added: "Either MLAs are being bought or they're being threatened to join BJP. Fake cases are registered against people who are not ready to be sold or those who don't bow

down."

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva asked why the courts denied Kejriwal relief if he was innocent.

"If Kejriwal is innocent, why didn't he get relief from any court earlier and why is he not getting bail after arrest?" he asked.

"Most parties in the alliance, including the Congress, have been troubled by the investigations into scams before 2014 or during their state governments' tenures," he added.

To be sure, Kejriwal's bail plea has not yet been heard. The Delhi high court is scheduled to hear the matter on Wednesday, having denied the chief minister an urgent hearing on Friday.

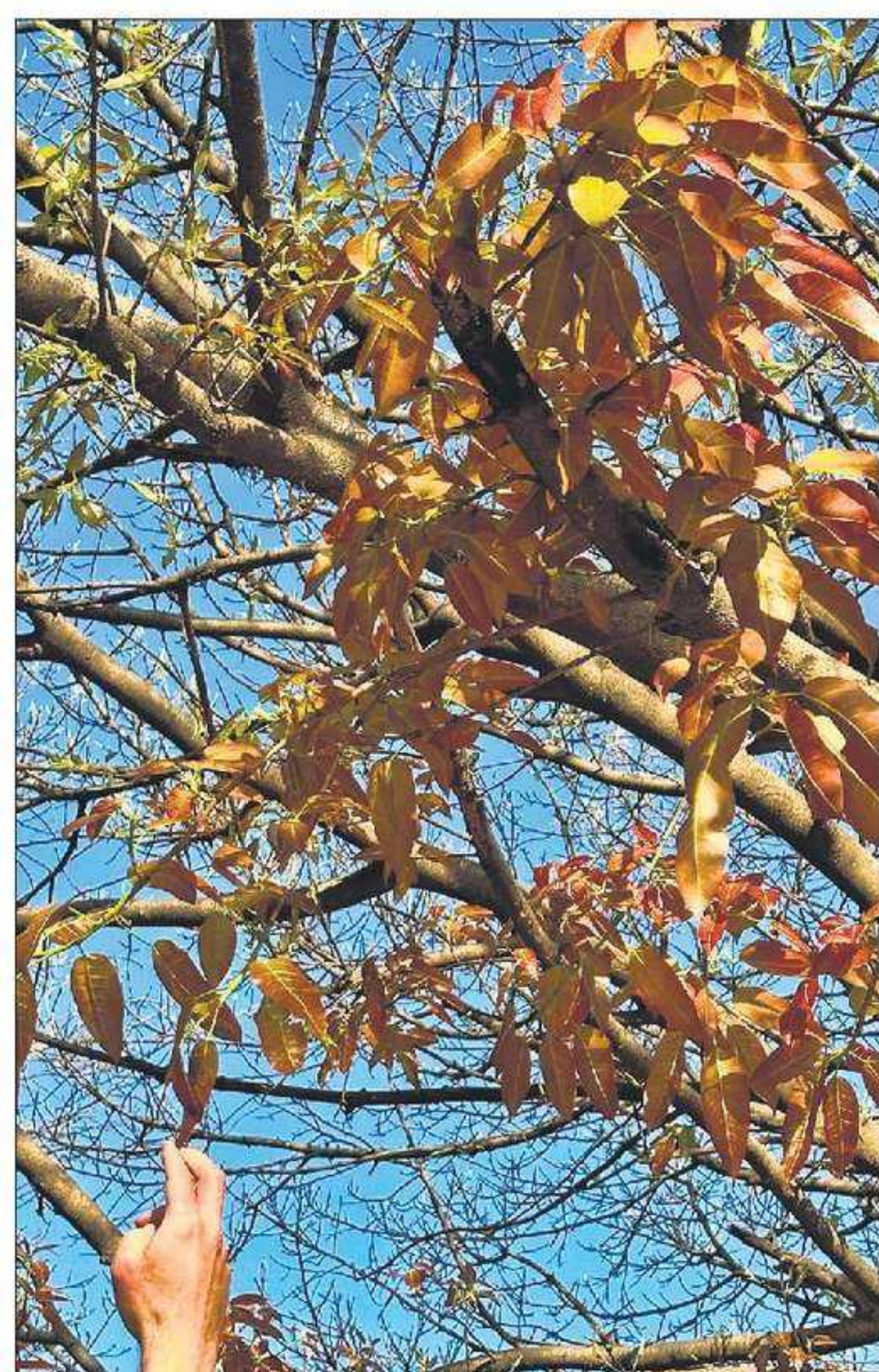
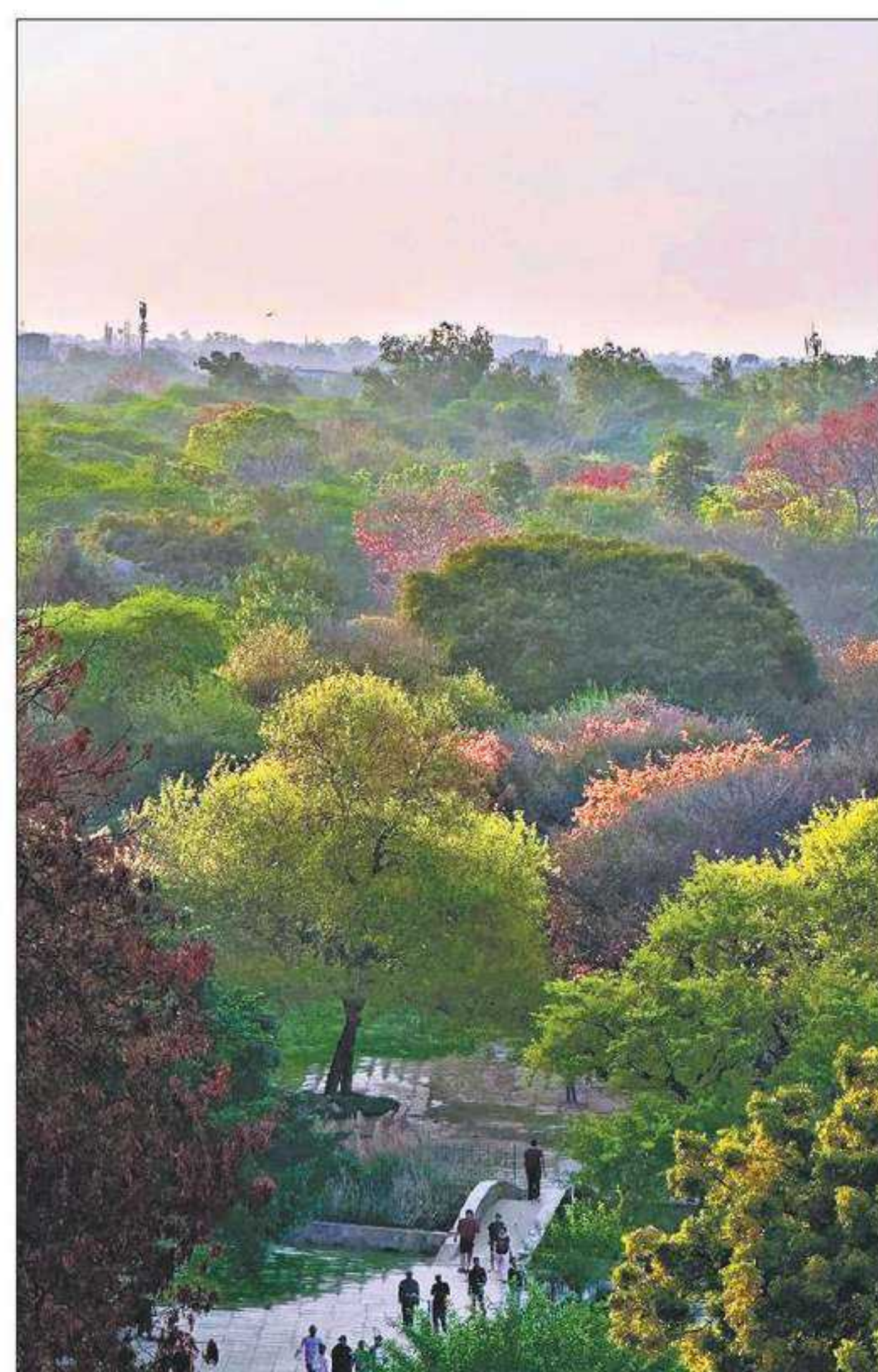
Meanwhile on Sunday, AAP workers fanned out across the streets of Delhi to protest Kejriwal's arrest.

"There is a Kejriwal in every family of Delhi. The BJP has made a huge mistake by arresting Arvind Kejriwal. There are lakhs of Kejriwals in Delhi and they will come out on roads," said AAP leader Sandeep Pathak.

Delhiwale

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Mayank Austen Soofi



Speaking of colours

On the magic of a park's pilkhan

{ PUBLIC INTEREST }

Holi hai! This day of colours ends in hours, but some of the colours of Holi shall linger among the trees of Delhi (even though the season's red bloom of semal tree is reaching an end).

All you have to do is to visit the District Park in Hauz Khas Village next week. The place has quite a few pilkhan trees, and most are about to dress themselves up in new leaves. The leaves will be special — they glow in striking shades of red.

Pointing to a tree, the guard at the park's entrance identifies it as pilkhan, saying the green leaves will fall any day now. "Naye patte" will be out in 8-10 days, he promises, which will be "laal," making the tree look "as if it were set on fire." Those new leaves will glow in tones of russet and bronze, before turning to a firmer red, ultimately becoming pale green.

Pilkhan typically start shedding in February, replaced by a new stock in March. The red of the fresh leaves is sporadically starting to show across

the capital — including along Neeti Marg, around Mandi House traffic circle, in Kaka Nagar, and in Gurugram's Sadar Bazar, close to the area's Jama Masjid. That said, the most extravagant pilkhan spectacle unfolds here in the District Park.

On gazing at the park from a distance — actually from a roof in Hauz Khas Village — the panorama is a green painting with unwieldily daubs of red, which are in fact the new leaves. See left photo. On standing directly under one of these red daubs, it looks like the sunset shade had slyly embedded itself inside the flesh of each leaf. A tall man is trying to touch the leaves. See the other photo.

The red leaves shall come up in the park in much greater numbers after a few days. The sight will be magnificent, like clouds of Holi's lal-bhure gular suspended in mid-air.

Eventually the leaves shall turn green, losing their transitory magic.

Fret not, Delhi is on the cusp of summer. Amal-trees are to soon bloom with their 2024 crop of brilliant yellow flowers, keeping the Holi's colourful spirit alive.



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BJP banks on veterans, new faces in battle for Hindi heartland states

Manish Chandra Pandey and Arun Kumar
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LUCKNOW/PATNA: The BJP looked to maximise its electoral gains in the crucial states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as it attempted to strike a balance between veteran leaders and new faces in the two heartland states in its fifth list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections released on Sunday.

The party fielded 13 candidates from Uttar Pradesh replacing nine sitting MPs, including current and former Union ministers. In Pilibhit, the party replaced three-time MP Varun Gandhi with UP PWD minister Jitin Prasad, ending months of speculation surrounding Varun's candidature.

In a post on X, Prasad thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, party president JP Nadra and chief minister Yogi Adityanath for fielding him for the Lok Sabha contest.

"Considering the trust of all of you as my invaluable asset, I am ready to serve Pilibhit with full dedication and hard work," he said.

In the past, the Samajwadi Party (SP) said that it was open to supporting Varun if the BJP did not field him as the buzz over the BJP leader's political future continued to grow. The SP's Pilibhit candidate, Bhagwat Saran Gangwar, said on Thursday said that he will exit the electoral fray and go back to his home district of Bareilly to help the party's candidate from there if the high command asked him to.

The BJP repeated former Union minister and Varun's mother Maneka Gandhi, from Sultanpur, the seat she won in the 2019 elections. A nine-time MP, Maneka is the longest-serving sitting lawmaker in the Lok Sabha, having won her first election in 1989 from Pilibhit constituency in Uttar Pradesh, which her son Varun Gandhi later went on to occupy. She won the Sultanpur seat by a slender margin in 2019, winning 459,196 votes, narrowly pipping the Bahujan Samaj Party's (BSP) Chandra Bhadra Singh, who got 444,670 votes.

Gandhi was also the Union women and child development minister in the first Narendra Modi cabinet between 2014 and 2019.

From Bareilly, the BJP replaced veteran nine-term MP and former Union minister Santosh Gangwar with another Kurmi leader, Chaatrapal Singh Gangwar. Union minister VK Singh was replaced from Ghaziabad by Atul Garg.

Hours before the BJP declared the list, Singh posted on X: "I have

made a difficult but thoughtful decision. I will not contest the 2024 elections. This decision was not easy for me, but I have taken it from the depths of my heart."

In Badaun, the party dropped its sitting MP Sanghmitra Maurya, the daughter of rebel party leader Swami Prasad Maurya, who switched over to the SP before the 2022 assembly elections. He resigned from the SP in February and floated a new outfit, the Rashtriya Shoshit Samaj Party (RSSP) as he announced his support for the Opposition's INDIA bloc.

From Kanpur, sitting BJP MP Satyadev Pachauri was replaced with Ramesh Awasthi, a senior journalist-turned-BJP leader.

The BJP has so far announced candidates for 63 of the state's 80 seats. The party is yet to announce its candidate for the Kaiserganj Lok Sabha seat, where six-term MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who was accused of sexual harassment by women wrestlers, is the sitting MP. The party has also not announced its candidate from the Congress bastion of Rae Bareilly, which was earlier represented by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

The BJP also fielded candidates for 17 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar, dropping three sitting MPs, including Union minister Ashwani Kumar Choubey, who was replaced by Mithilesh Tiwari.

"I have got the big opportunity from an important constituency like Buxar. It is a cultural centre. The party leadership has reposed faith in a young worker like me and I will be happy to contribute to 400-plus target of the party," said Tiwari.

Out of the state's 40 seats, the BJP will fight on 17, the same as 2019, and its principal ally, the Janata Dal (United) will contest in 16, one lower than 2019 as part of the seat-sharing deal sealed by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) members earlier this week.

The Chirag Paswan faction of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) will contest on five seats.

Union ministers R K Singh, Giriraj Singh and Nityanand Rai will seek re-election from Ara, Begusarai and Ujjainpur Lok Sabha seats respectively, according to the list.

Former Union ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad was renominated from Patna Sahib, Radha Mohan Singh from Purvi Champaran, Rajiv Pratap Rudy from Saran and Ram Kripal Yadav from Patliputra.

The party also dropped its incumbent MPs Chedi Paswan and Ajay Kumar Nishad from Sasaram and Muzaffarpur constituencies respectively.

Breakdown of BJP's fifth list

BJP declared candidates for
402/543 LOK SABHA SEATS | **111** CANDIDATES ANNOUNCED ON SUNDAY | **291** CANDIDATES DECLARED EARLIER

<p>ANDHRA PRADESH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> KOTHAPALLI GEETHA (Ara) CM RAMESH ANAKAPALLE D PURANDARESHWARI (Rajahmundry) BUPATHIRAJU SRINIVAS VARMA (Narsapuram) VARAPRASAD RAO (Tirupati) N KIRAN KUMAR REDDY (Rajampet) 	<p>BIHAR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SANJAY JAISWAL (Paschim Champaran) RADHA MOHAN SINGH (Purvi Champaran) ASHOK KUMAR YADAV (Madhubani) PRADEEP KUMAR SINGH (Ara) GOPAL JEE THAKUR (Darbhanga) RAJ BHUSHAN NISHAD (Muzaffarpur) JANARDAN SINGH SIGRIWAL (Maharajganj) RAJIV PRATAP RUDY (Saran) NITYANAND RAI (Ujjainpur) RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD (Patna Sahib) RAM KRIPAL YADAV (Patliputra) RK SINGH (Ara) MITHILESH TIWARI (Buxar) GIRIRAJ SINGH (Begusarai) SHIVESH RAM (Sasaram) SUSHIL KUMAR SINGH (Aurangabad) VIVEK THAKUR (Navada) 	<p>HIMACHAL PRADESH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAJEEV BHARADWAJ (Kangra) KANGANA RANAUT (Mandi) <p>JHARKHAND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SITA SOREN (Dumka) KALICHARAN SINGH (Chatra) DULU MAHATO (Dhanbad) <p>KARNATAKA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JAGADISH SHETTER (Belgaum) RAJA AMARSHWARA NAIK (Raichur) VISHWESHVAR HEGDE KAGERI (Uttara Kannada) K SUDHAKAR (Chikkaballapur) <p>KERALA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> K SURENDRAN (Wayanad) TN SARASU (Alathur) KS RADHAKRISHNAN (Ernakulam) G KRISHNAKUMAR (Kollam) <p>MAHARASHTRA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SUNIL BABURAO MENDHE (Bhandara - Gondiya) ASHOK MAHADEV RAO NETE (Gadchiroli-Chimur) RAM SATPUTE (Solapur) <p>MIZORAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VANLALHMUKHA (Mizoram) <p>ODISHA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PRADEEP PUROHIT (Bargarh) RAJESHBHAI CHUDASAMA (Junagadh) BHARATBHAI MANUBHAI SUTARIYA (Amreli) HEMANG YOGESHCHANDRA JOSHI (Vadodara) <p>HARYANA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NAVEEN JINDAL (Kurukshetra) RANJIT CHAULTALA (Hisar) 	<p>MOHAN LAL BADOLI (Sonapat)</p> <p>ARVIND KUMAR SHARMA (Rohtak)</p> <p>AVIMANYU SETHI (Bhadrak)</p> <p>RUDRA NARAYAN PANY (Dhenkanal)</p> <p>SANGEETA KUMARI SINGH DEO (Bolangir)</p> <p>MALVIKA KESHARI DEO (Kalahandi)</p> <p>BALABHADRA MAJHI (Nabarangpur)</p> <p>BAIJAYANT 'JAY' PANDA (Kendrapara)</p> <p>BIBHU PRASAD TARAI (Jagatsinghpur)</p> <p>SAMBIT PATRA (Puri)</p> <p>APARAJITA SARANGI (Bhubaneswar)</p> <p>ANITA SUBHADARSHINI (Aska)</p> <p>PRADEEP KUMAR PANIGRAHY (Berhampur)</p> <p>KALERAM MAJHI (Koraput)</p> <p>RAJASTHAN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PRIYANKA BALAN (Ganganagar) SHUBHKARAN CHOUDHARY (Jhunjhunu) RAO RAJENDRA SINGH (Jaipur Rural) MANJU SHARMA (Jaipur) SUKHIBIR SINGH JAUNPURIYA (Tonk-Sawai Madhopur) BHAGIRATH CHAUDHARY (Ajmer) MAHIMA VISHWESWAR SINGH (Rajsamand) <p>SIKKIM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DINESH CHANDRA NEPAL (Sikkim) <p>TELANGANA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TANDRA VINOD RAO (Khammam) <p>UTTAR PRADESH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAHNAV LAKHANPAL (Saharanpur) SARVESH SINGH (Moradabad) ARUN GOVIL (Meerut) ATUL GARG (Ghaziabad) <p>SATISH GAUTAM (Aligarh)</p> <p>ANOO VALMIKI (Hathras)</p> <p>DURVIJAY SINGH SHAKYA (Badaun)</p> <p>CHHATRAPAL SINGH GANGWAR (Bareilly)</p> <p>JITIN PRASADA (Pilibhit)</p> <p>MANEKA GANDHI (Sultanpur)</p> <p>RAMESH AWASTHI (Kanpur)</p> <p>RAJANI RAWAT (Barabanki)</p> <p>ARVIND GOND (Bahraich)</p> <p>WEST BENGAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> JAYANTA ROY (Jaipur) RAJU BISTA (Darjeeling) KARTICK PAUL (Raiganj) DHANANJAY GHOSH (Jangipur) RAJAMATA AMRITA ROY (Krishnanagar) ARJUN SINGH (Barrackpore) SILBHADRA DUTTA (Dum Dum) SWAPAN MAJUMDER (Barasat) ABHIJIT GANGOPADHYAY (Tamluk) REKHA PATRA (Basirhat) ASHOK PURKAIT (Matherapur) DEBASHREE CHAUDHARY (Kolkata Dakshin) TAPAS ROY (Kolkata Uttar) ARUN UDAY PAUL CHOUDHURY (Uluberia) KABIR SHANKAR BOSE (Sreerampur) ARUP KANTI DIGAR (Arambagh) AGNIMITRA PAUL (Medinipur) ASHIM KUMAR SARKAR (Bardhaman Purba) DILIP GHOSH (Bardhaman - Durgapur)
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REPRESENTATION BY WOMEN CANDIDATES

The BJP had fielded 433, 428, and 436 candidates in 2009, 2014 & 2019 elections. Out of these 45, 38 and 55 were women, respectively, all numbers bigger than in the pre-2009 general elections.

In its five lists for the LS polls, so far, the BJP has named 66 women. Even if there are no women candidates in its subsequent lists, the BJP will definitely have the highest number and, likely, the highest share of women candidates ever fielded by it in this year's elections.

After BJD alliance talks fail, BJP fields 18 Odisha candidates

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BHUBANESWAR: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday named candidates for 18 Lok Sabha seats in Odisha, formalising its decision announced earlier this week that it will not have a pre-poll alliance with the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD), as speculation earlier suggested.

Discussions between the two parties started in the first week of March, raising hopes of them coming together for the first time in 15 years after the BJD exited the National Democratic Alliance in 2009. The two parties have largely cooperated in Parliament in the last decade.

However, on March 22, after days of protracted negotiations, BJP's Odisha chief Mamohan Samal announced that the national party would fight alone across every seat "to create a developed India and a developed Odisha under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi". Hours later, BJD organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das said his party will contest all the seats and win more than "three-fourths" majority.

On Sunday, the BJP announced candidates for 18 of the state's 21 Lok Sabha seats, nominating Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan from the prestig-

ious Sambalpur seat and renominating party's national vice-president Baijayant 'Jay' Panda from Kendrapara. Pradhan contested the Lok Sabha poll for the first time after he won from Deogarh (now abolished following delimitation) Lok Sabha seats in 2004. Panda, who won from Kendrapara in 2009 and 2014 on the Biju Janata Dal ticket, and quit it in 2019 to join BJP, has been renominated from the same seat.

The party also named candidates for crucial Bhubaneswar and Puri Lok Sabha seats that had become a sticking point during alliance discussions with the BJD, people aware of the matter said. While MP Aparajita Sarangi has been fielded from Bhubaneswar, party's national spokesperson Sambit Patra has been named as a candidate for the prestigious Puri seat.

Reacting to the list, BJD's organisational secretary Pranab Das said his party will soon announce its list of candidates for all the 21 Lok Sabha constituencies and 147 assembly constituencies. "We will win more than three-fourth seats under the leadership of Naveen Patnaik. BJD will continue to take decisions keeping people of Odisha at the forefront always and their welfare in true spirit of cooperative federalism and statesmanship required for nation building," he added.

{ BJP ANNOUNCES 19 NAMES }

Ex-Calcutta HC judge gets Lok Sabha ticket

HT Correspondent
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KOLKATA: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fielded former Calcutta high court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay from the Tamluk seat in West Bengal and shifted the party's former state president from Midnapore constituency to Bardhaman-Durgapur as it announced 19 names for the crucial eastern province as part of its fifth list of candidates for next month's general elections on Sunday.

With this, the BJP has declared candidates for 39 of the state's 42 seats. The party is yet to announce names for Birbhum, Diamond Harbour and also Jhargram.

Five of the 19 are sitting MPs and four are women. One of them is Rekha Patra, a village-level party worker who will contest the charged Basirhat seat, which houses the strife-torn Sandeshkhali village that has been riddled by allegations of sexual exploitation and land-grabbing by TMC

THE BJP HAS DECLARED CANDIDATES FOR 39 OF THE STATE'S 42 SEATS

leaders. "I am grateful to the BJP leadership for giving me this huge responsibility," Patra told the media. The list sprung several more surprises. For instance, Agnimitra Paul, the legislator from the Asansol South assembly constituency, was fielded from Medinipur.

The party also pitted from Krishnanagar seat Amrita Roy, a member of the city's erstwhile royal family. She will take on the TMC Mahua Moitra, who won the seat last year before being expelled from the Lower House in December. BJP leaders, meanwhile, said the move to shift Dilip Ghosh from Medinipur was taken after surveys showed him losing ground among local workers and voters.

LALU AND TEJASHWI ARRIVE IN DELHI AS BIHAR SEAT-SHARE IMPASSE CONTINUES

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PATNA: Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad and his son Tejashwi Yadav arrived in the Capital on Sunday as a deadlock continued among the Mahagathabandhan and INDIA bloc partners over seat-sharing in Bihar just weeks before the state votes in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections. The two leaders, who are in Delhi for a private event, are likely to meet the Congress top brass, people familiar with the matter said.

According to leaders aware of the matter, fault lines in the 26-party Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc deepened last week after the RJD allotted party symbols among its candidates for the Lok Sabha polls without any announcement of a seat pact with the allies, especially on crucial Aurangabad, Purnea and Katihar seats that were being eyed by the Congress too.

"The main reason for the dispute on seat sharing was the RJD's offer of seven seats to Congress, against its demand for nine. Both the parties' joint claims on Katihar and Purnea seats, among others have triggered a fresh flashpoint," a Grand Alliance leader said.

State Congress chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh said: "Everything is going in the right direction and hopefully seat allocation will be sealed in a day or two." He added that the meeting between top leaders may end the deadlock.

An RJD functionary, however, said the party is not keen on leaving Purnea and Katihar seats. "We have already offered 7 seats to Congress, but there are some complications on Purnea and Katihar,"

Ex-IAF chief joins BJP, lauds govt for taking 'tough steps'

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NEW DELHI: Former Indian Air Force Chief Rakesh Singh Bhadauria and YSR Congress Party's Varaprasad Rao joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday ahead of Lok Sabha elections.

The two joined the party in the presence of BJP general secretary Vinod Tawde and Union Minister Anurag Thakur. Bhadauria, who retired from service in September 2021, thanked the party leadership for giving him the opportunity to "contribute to nation-building once again".

"I served the IAF for more than four decades, but the best time of my service was the last 8 years under the leadership of the BJP government. The tough steps taken by this government to empower and modernise our armed forces and make them self-reliant have not only given rise to a new capability in the forces but also given them a new confidence," he said.

"The results of the self-reliant move by the government can be seen on the ground. From the point of view of security, the steps being taken by the government are very important and will take India to new heights globally," he added.



RKS Bhadauria

Welcoming Bhadauria, Tawde lauded his extensive service in the IAF and expressed confidence that he will now contribute actively in the political field after playing an active role in the defence forces. Besides Bhadauria, former YSR Congress Party MP Rao also joined the BJP, and hailed PM Narendra Modi as a "dynamic" leader.

"In my whole career as a politician, I have not come across anyone as dynamic as PM Modi. When I was an MP from 2014-19, I saw his dynamic decisions. I have admired how the BJP has been cleansing the system of ills and working towards development," Rao, who will be contesting from Tirupati, said.

Welcoming the two into party fold, Thakur noted: "A prosperous, safe and a developed India is possible only under the leadership of Narendra Modi. The decades-old demand of our soldiers for 'One Rank, One Pension' was fulfilled by Narendra Modi." He said that it was this government that fulfilled the demand for 'One Rank, One Pension' of armed forces veterans, scrapped Article 370, and boosted the country's internal security.

JD(U) announces candidates for 16 seats

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PATNA: The Janata Dal (United), or JD(U), on Sunday announced the names of candidates for all the 16 Lok Sabha seats it is set to contest in the electorally crucial state of Bihar, where 40 Lok Sabha seats will go to the polls in seven phases beginning April 19. Two sitting MPs have been dropped, with preference given to backward class leaders.

The development comes a week after the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) announced the five-party coalition's seat-sharing arrangement in Bihar, with the BJP contesting 17 seats, the same as 2019, and its principal ally, the JD(U) getting



Nitish Kumar

16, one lower than 2019. It is for the first time that the BJP would be contesting more seats than the JD(U). The Chirag Paswan faction of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) will fight five seats, while Upendra Kushwaha's Rashtriya Lok Samta Party (RLSP) and Jitan Ram Majhi's Hindustan Awam Morcha (Secular) will fight one seat each. General elections in Bihar will

be held in all seven phases from 19 April to 1 June to elect 40 members of the 18th Lok Sabha. In its list, chief minister Nitish Kumar-led JD (U) has nominated 12 sitting MPs, and dropped two — Sunil Kumar Pintu from Simatari Sheohar and Kavita Singh from Siwan. Two newcomers — Lovely Anand, who recently joined the JD(U) from the Rashtriya Janata Dal; and Vijaylakshmi Kushwaha, the former RLM MLA from Ziradei — have been given tickets from the Sheohar and Siwan Lok Sabha seats, respectively.

Lovely Anand is the wife of former MP Anand Mohan who was released from jail last year after serving 15 years of imprisonment in a murder case, said

senior party leaders aware of the details. Announcing the seats, JD(U) MP Sanjay Jha said that 12 seats had sitting candidates, while there were new faces on four due to change of seats on three and one candidate was changed. "Everything is smooth in the NDA and we are in touch with the BJP for better coordination to ensure that all Lok Sabha seats come to our kitty," he added. Among the other sitting MPs who will be seeking re-election from their respective seats are former JD(U) president Rajiv Ranjan Singh 'Lalan' (Munger), Dulalchandra Goswami (Katihar), Rampreet Mandal (Jhajarhpur) and Santosh Kumar (Purnea).

In a reflection of the impact of

Congress changes Jaipur candidate amid uproar

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NEW DELHI: The Congress replaced Sunil Sharma, its controversial candidate from Jaipur, with Pratap Singh Khachariya, a former Rajasthan minister who has been a spokesperson of state unit and is party president of Jaipur.

A controversy erupted after Sharma was given a ticket from Jaipur in an earlier list. His critics pointed to Sharma's long association with Jaipur Dialogues, an organisation that has been critical of the Congress. Sharma's candidature was questioned by Congress leader and central working committee member Shashi Tharoor. "He must have undergone some sort of Pauline epiphany on the road to 24 Akbar! This is just one of

several dozen tweets from his handle attacking me," Tharoor wrote on X.

The dominant section of the state leadership had backed Sharma, who is known as a resourceful person in political circles, a member of the party's poll panel maintained, seeking anonymity. The party has also named Pratibha Suresh Dhanorkar from Maharashtra's Chandrapur and Murari Lal Meena from the reserved seat of Dausa in Rajasthan.

Candidates dropped in fourth list

The Congress has changed more than 60% of its candidates in its latest list — its fourth since early March — that was announced on Saturday, pushing new faces, especially where it has done poorly in recent elections.



Congress changed over 60% of its candidates in its latest list.

It has changed candidates in 11 of 12 parliamentary constituencies in Madhya Pradesh, including two-term chief minister Digvijay Singh. In 2019, Singh had fought against Sadhvi Pragya Thakur but lost. This time, Singh has been shifted to Raigarh that has his family bastion of Raghogarh. "After the assembly poll debacle in Madhya Pradesh, there is a need to rethink about the poll strategy. Of course, we have given ticket to sitting MP

Nakul Nath, but we decided to make wholesale change in the list of candidates," a leader involved in the selection said.

In December, nearly all Congress leaders had expected the party to win in Madhya Pradesh, a state where it won in 2018 but the government toppled in 2020 due to defections.

In the fourth list, only veteran Congress leader Kantilal Bhuria has retained his seat from Ratlam in Madhya Pradesh.

In Uttar Pradesh, a state where the Congress won just one of the 80 seats, the party has made a number of changes. Of the seven candidates the party announced from the state on Saturday, only Ajay Rai has been retained from the 2019 list. In six other seats, the party has fielded new candidates. Rai has once again been pitted against Prime

Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi. He fought Modi in 2014 as well.

For four seats of Maharashtra, the Congress has opted for new candidates in each constituency. This is the first time when the Congress, Uddhav Thackeray faction of Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction) have formed an alliance for Lok Sabha election.

In its first list for Tamil Nadu, the party has made only one change.

Sasikanth Senthil, in-charge of the Congress' war room, has been fielded from the reserved seat in Tiruvalluvar. The Congress has changed both its candidates in Manipur. Angomcha Bimol Akoijam from Inner Manipur and Alfred Kannagam S Arthur from Outer Manipur are its candidates.

Centre disbursed 90% capex funds to states by Feb: Officials

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NEW DELHI: The Union government by the end of February disbursed more than 90% of the over ₹1.05 lakh crore committed in 2023-24 as interest-free, long-term loans to states for capital expenditure, two officials said. The remaining amount is expected to be released by March 31.

As on February 29, the Centre released more than ₹95,226 crore under the scheme to nudge states into making capital investments with extremely positive response from them, they said, requesting anonymity.

The government on February 1 slashed the initial corpus of ₹1.3 lakh crore in the budget estimates (BE) for 2023-24 to ₹1.06 lakh crore in the revised estimates (RE) for the financial year to March 31. The downward revision was mainly because some states could not meet the eligibility criteria and some had high unspent balance from 2022-23, they said.

Although the amount for 2023-24 was reduced, the Centre is committed to meet the entire requirement under the

ALTHOUGH THE AMOUNT FOR 2023-24 WAS REDUCED, THE CENTRE IS COMMITTED TO MEETING ENTIRE REQUIREMENT UNDER THE SCHEME

scheme in the financial year, they said, citing example of 2022-23. In that fiscal year, the government initially announced ₹1.07 lakh crore under the scheme, kept it at ₹1 lakh crore in BE, revised it to ₹76,000 crore at RE stage, and finally released ₹81,195.35 crore on actual demand.

The amount is likely to exceed the revised estimates even in 2023-24 as there has been a sharp jump in the disbursements since January. After states started providing utilisation certificates for projects, about ₹28,481 crore was released in just one month (February), which was about 27% of the entire corpus.

"The scheme has been very successful in nudging states to undertake citizen-centric

reforms. A redesigned scheme for 2024-25 is intimated to states on February 26 with a corpus of ₹1,30,000 crore, which includes incentives for developing tourist centres to global scale," one of the officials said. A detailed guideline for it will be intimated to them shortly, he added. To avail the fund, states must undertake that they would not change the name and brands of any centrally sponsored scheme.

The scheme — special assistance to states for capital expenditure — was first launched with a small corpus of ₹12,000 crore in 2020-21. As it became an instant hit, the Centre gradually raised the amount, starting from ₹15,000 crore in 2021-22 to ₹1.30 lakh crore in the 2024-25 (BE).

When the scheme was first launched, ₹2,500 crore was earmarked for the northeast and hill states (called part-I), ₹7,500 crore was allocated to other states in proportion to their share in central taxes (part-II) and ₹2,000 crore was provided under the part-III of the scheme if states carried out citizen-centric reforms, such as implementation of the one nation, one ration card system, implemen-

tion measures for ease of doing business, reforming local bodies and power sector reforms.

The next year, the allocation was raised to ₹15,000 crore — ₹2,600 crore for part-I, ₹7,400 for part-II and ₹5,000 crore for part-III, which included divestments of state enterprises and asset monetisation. The scheme saw a 61% jump in allocation in 2022-23 at ₹1.07 lakh crore — ₹80,000 for states in proportion to their share of central taxes as per the award of the 15th Finance Commission and an incentive ₹27,000 crore for seven types of reforms — PM Gati-Shakti related expenditure, supplemental funding for Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, incentive for digitisation, capital projects on optical fibre cable, urban reforms, asset monetisation and scrapping of old vehicles.

Initially, the scheme in 2023-24, the BE had an increased corpus of ₹1.30 lakh crore — ₹1 lakh crore under part-I and incentives of ₹30,000 crore for undertaking specific reforms such as scrapping old vehicles, urban reforms and making urban local bodies creditworthy.

HT

76-yr-old Tamil Nadu lawmaker hospitalised
ERODE: Lok Sabha Member of Parliament (MP) from Tamil Nadu's Erode district, A Ganeshamoorthy, 76, was on Sunday hospitalised in an emergency condition. Amid unverified reports of a suicide attempt, a police officer told HT that they have not received any complaint from the family of the politician. "We are awaiting a report from the hospital," the officer said.

BJP releases list for Sikkim assembly polls
GANGTOK: The BJP on Sunday announced 14 candidates for the polls to the 32-member Sikkim assembly, even as its three outgoing MLAs resigned from the party. The Lok Sabha and assembly elections will be held simultaneously in the state on April 19. According to the list, the state unit president DR Thapa will contest from Upper Virtual, and senior leader NK Subba to fight from Manebung Dentam.

India hits out at Pak on terror activities at IPU
NEW DELHI: India on Sunday hit out at Pakistan at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and advised it to stop its terror factories. "Lectures by a country which has an abysmal track record of democracy is laughable, to say the least. It would have been better if Pakistan did not undermine the importance of a platform like IPU," said Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh.

UP: Short-circuit triggers mobile explosion, 4 die in ensuing fire

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MEERUT: Four children were charred to death after a short-circuit led to a mobile explosion, triggering fire in their rented house in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, the police said on Sunday. Their parents sustained severe burn injuries while trying to rescue the children and are currently recovering in different hospitals.

According to the police, the incident took place late on Saturday at the Janta Colony in Pallavapuram area in Meerut district.

"The children — Sarika (10), Niharika (8), Golu (6) and Kallu (5) — were playing in a room of their rented house in the Janta colony of Pallavapuram area on Saturday night. They tried to plug the charger of a mobile phone into an extension cord, which was placed on the bed. A short-circuit occurred, causing an explosion in the mobile phone, and the mattress caught fire," superintendent of police (Meerut), Ayush Vikram Singh, said.

POLICE SAID THE INCIDENT TOOK PLACE AT THE JANTA COLONY IN PALAVAPURAM AREA IN MEERUT

The parents — Johnny and Babita — work as labourers and were in the kitchen at the time of the incident, the SP said, adding that they heard screams and rushed to rescue the children, and sustained severe injuries while trying to douse the fire.

"The situation worsened when the parents splashed water on the short-circuit wires to douse the fire," the SP said, adding that all six people were then rushed to a nearby hospital by the neighbours.

"All six were later shifted to Medical College Hospital, where two of the children succumbed to their injuries during treatment on Saturday night, while the other two died early on Sunday," he said.

While Johnny (41) is said to be out of danger, his 37-year-old wife is in critical condition and has been referred to AIIMS, New Delhi, for further treatment.

{ CASH-FOR-QUERY CASE }

Bizman Hiranandani named as accused in FIR by probe agency

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NEW DELHI: Dubai-based businessman Darshan Hiranandani, who had earlier levelled allegations against former MP Mahua Moitra of sharing her Parliamentary login ID and password with him, has been named as an "accused" along with the latter in the first information report (FIR) filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation in connection with the cash-for-query case.

The CBI filed the first information report, dated March 21, based on the order from the Lokpal — a body to probe corruption cases against public servants including legislators — directing a formal probe by the central agency against Moitra. A complaint into the matter was filed by Bharatiya Janata Party lawmaker from Jharkhand, Nishikant Dubey.

The FIR, issued in compliance



Mahua Moitra

with Lokpal's order, registered a case against Moitra, Hiranandani, and "unknown others" under Sections 120-B of the Indian Penal Code and relevant provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act. Moitra has denied any wrongdoing, and is set to contest the 2024 Lok Sabha elections on a Trinamool Congress (TMC) ticket from Krishnanagar in West Bengal.

The FIR has been lodged based on "the allegations that Ms. Mahua Moitra indulged in corrupt practices including, but not limited to, taking bribes and other undue advantages from Sh. Darshan Hiranandani S/o Sh.

Niranjan Hiranandani, Private Person for compromising her parliamentary privileges and causing national security threats by sharing her login credentials of Lok Sabha."

On Saturday, the CBI conducted raids at multiple locations, including the Kolkata residence of the TMC leader, in connection with its probe into the cash-for-query case. Moitra on Sunday wrote to the Election Commission, saying that the CBI conducted consecutive raids at four of her properties on Saturday to "hinder her campaign" and "create a negative perception about her," and urged the poll panel to intervene.

Moitra was expelled on December 8 last year over the cash-for-query charges. She alleged "substantial illegality" and "arbitrariness" by the House's ethics committee that recommended the action against her.

Wangchuk-led groups in Ladakh protest for constitutional protection under 6th schedule

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NEW DELHI: Several groups in Ladakh led by environmentalist and educationist Sonam Wangchuk are demanding constitutional measures enabling them to protect their land, culture, environment. Ladakh is being treated like a colony, with bureaucrats from outside controlling all policies related to the ecologically sensitive region, Wangchuk alleged on Sunday in a webinar.

Wangchuk is currently on a 21-day fast in Ladakh in the open in subzero temperatures to press for his demands. The webinar to express solidarity with Ladakh's cause was attended by over 350 persons, including Medha Patkar, leader of the National Alliance of People's Movements, and environmentalist Ashish Kothari. "Since the time Ladakh got separated from Jammu and Kashmir in 2019, the local people



Sonam Wangchuk

expected conservation of our unique environment landscape and climate. The government had promised in different meetings and those promises are in the meeting minutes of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, Tribal and Law ministries," Wangchuk said.

"But, after a few months, it became a crime to remind them about those promises. Boys were being picked up, detained for protesting," he alleged. "This is not only an environmental movement now; it's a matter of truth and justice. Promises are not being delivered."

"Ladakh has become like a colony. Some commissioners from a far off place with no link with local people or ecology are trying to run this place. Ladakh is in fact like Mars. Imagine someone, say from Lucknow, trying to make policies for the region. They wouldn't understand and they will end up making big mistakes, cause irreparable damage to our valleys, mountains," Wangchuk added.

The 21-day fast that he is currently undertaking will be followed by a relay fast, the activist said. "Women will fast for 10 days, then you, then bhikshus (Buddhist monks), nomads," Wangchuk said. "Saving Ladakh is important for the country. People's confidence is important as it's a sensitive region."

The main demand of the groups is to include Ladakh in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which contains provisions regarding the administration of tribal areas in the states of

Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. It allows for local communities to have a significant say in how these areas are administered.

In August 2019, Ladakh received a Union Territory status that the people of Ladakh had been demanding for over seven decades because their aspirations were long ignored by the then Jammu and Kashmir state government, he said.

"However, UT status without legislature, or adequate constitutional safeguards to protect the unique cultural identity and fragile ecosystem and culture of Ladakh, has jeopardized this potential," according to a March 22 note released by Vikalp Sangam, which counts many grassroots and environmental organisations as members.

"If corporate projects and their proponents/builders are given an open access, Ladakh will be damaged beyond repair," it said.

कोटा कॅरियर सिटी या सुसाइड सिटी...?

वर्तमान में युवाओं में बढ़ती आत्महत्या की प्रवृत्ति सिर्फ एक शहर या देश की ही नहीं बरन वैश्विक चुनौती है। स्कूल, कॉलेज से लेकर कॅरियर बना चुके युवा तक सुसाइड कर रहे हैं। विशेषज्ञों के अनुसार आत्महत्या की प्रवृत्ति भावनात्मक एवं मानसिक मनोविकार है और इसे समझने की जरूरत है।

आत्महत्या : राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर कोटा की स्थिति ?

- देश में कुल आत्महत्याएं 170924 हुईं, जिनमें सर्वाधिक 30 वर्ष तक के 69313 (करीब 40 प्रतिशत से अधिक) युवा हैं।
- देश में 10 लाख से अधिक आबादी के 53 शहरों में प्रति लाख आत्महत्या का औसत 16.4 व्यक्ति है।
- विजयवाड़ा में यह दर सर्वाधिक 42.6 है। टॉप-10 शहरों में यह औसत दर 28 से 42 व्यक्ति प्रति लाख तक है। टॉप 53 शहरों में कोटा 45वें नम्बर पर आता है। कोटा में यह दर 14.1 व्यक्ति प्रति लाख है जो राष्ट्रीय औसत से भी कम है। 10 लाख की आबादी के शहर कोटा में 2 लाख कोचिंग स्टूडेंट्स की संख्या को जोड़ने पर यह दर और भी कम हो जाती है।

— (स्रोत: एनसीआरबी ताजा रिपोर्ट)

फिर कोटा ही क्यों सुसाइड सिटी ?

किसी भी छात्र द्वारा उठाया गया गलत कदम दुखदायी होता है। कोटा इनको लेकर पूरी तरह से सजग है और इसके लिए गंभीरता से कार्य भी कर रहा है। दुःख की बात यह है कि इस अति संवेदनशील विषय को व्यवसायिक प्रतिस्पर्धा में आगे बढ़ने का माध्यम बनाया जा रहा है। निहित स्वार्थों के लिए कोटा की छवि को बारम्बार खराब किया जा रहा है। जब कोटा देश में होने वाली आत्महत्याओं के मामलों में टॉप-53 शहरों में 45वें नम्बर पर है तो फिर कोटा ही कैसे सुसाइड सिटी है ?

वास्तविकता में कोटा क्या है ?

एक ऐसा शहर जो युवाओं के सपने पूरे कर रहा है, बड़े शहरों से लेकर छोटे गांव-कस्बे के परिवारों की प्रतिभाओं को एक समान वातावरण देकर आईआईटी और मेडिकल कॉलेज में पढ़ाई के लिए तैयार कर रहा है। यहां पढ़कर एक मजदूर का बेटा भी गुगल में तो वेल्डर का बेटा माइक्रोसॉफ्ट तक पहुंच रहा है। कुली का बेटा डाक्टर बन रहा है, तो नरेगा मजदूर का बेटा आईआईटी में पहुंच रहा है। आज कोटा कोचिंग से सर्वाधिक स्टूडेंट्स इंजीनियरिंग व मेडिकल कॉलेज में जा रहे हैं। कोटा कॅरियर के साथ-साथ केयर सिटी भी है, जिसने लोकडाउन के दौरान यहां रह रहे 50 हजार स्टूडेंट्स को अच्छे से केयर की और उन्हें स्वस्थ व सुरक्षित घर भी भेजा। कोटा के इस इवेक्वेशन ड्राइव व केयरिंग को देश-दुनिया में सराहना मिली।

माननीय प्रधानमंत्री श्री नरेन्द्र जी मोदी ने भी कोटा को शिक्षा की काशी कहा है। अब दुष्प्रचार कर कोटा की छवि को खराब किया जा रहा है।

छात्रों के मानसिक स्वास्थ्य पर कोटा के प्रयास

- 10 लाख की आबादी वाले शहरों से तुलना करें तो सबसे अधिक अनुभवी साइकोलॉजिकल काउंसलर्स कोटा में हैं।
- प्रशासन, पुलिस व कोचिंग संस्थानों द्वारा छात्रों की काउंसलिंग हेतु 24x7 हेल्पलाइन संचालित है।
- कोटा देश में संभवतः एकमात्र शहर है जहां स्टूडेंट्स mental wellbeing के लिए विशेष केन्द्र स्थापित है। यहां साइकोलॉजिकल काउंसलर्स एवं क्लीनिकल काउंसलर्स मौजूद रहते हैं।
- मानसिक एवं शारीरिक स्वास्थ्य के लिए कोटा में नियमित योगा सेशन होते हैं।
- स्टूडेंट्स के व्यवहार को समझने व उनकी केयरिंग बेहतर करने के लिए आमजन को जोड़ते हुए देश में सबसे ज्यादा QPR गेटकीपर ट्रेनिंग (WHO से प्रमाणित) कोटा में दी गई।
- कोटा देश में एकमात्र शहर है जहां पेन्टस की भी काउंसलिंग की जाती है, उन्हें अपने बच्चों के व्यवहार में बदलाव को समझने और उसके अनुरूप व्यवहार के लिए मार्गदर्शन दिया जाता है।
- कोटा में स्टूडेंट्स वेल्फेयर सोसायटी व कई संस्थाएं मिलकर छात्रों को घर जैसा माहौल व केयरिंग देने के लिए समर्पित रूप से कार्यरत है।
- कोटा में एक दर्जन से अधिक तरह से स्टूडेंट्स की काउंसलिंग की जाती है।
- कोटा कोचिंग में स्टूडेंट सपोर्ट के लिए डेडिकेटेड मेंटर सिस्टम है, हर छात्र की केयरिंग के लिए मेंटर होते हैं।
- यहां पर देश के ख्यातनाम विषय विशेषज्ञों व वक्ताओं के प्रेरक उद्घोषण होते हैं।
- हॉस्टल व पीजी में स्टूडेंट्स की सुविधा, सुरक्षा और समन्वय के लिए संसाधन और जीवनरक्षा उपकरण लगे होते हैं।

देश के 10 लाख से अधिक आबादी के टॉप-53 शहरों में होने वाली कुल आत्महत्याओं के आंकड़ों में कोटा 45वें नम्बर पर है।

Ranking	City	Total No. of Suicides	Actual Population (in Lakh)	Rate of Suicides (Per Lakh)
1	DELHI (CITY)	3367	163.2	20.6
2	BENGALURU	2313	85	27.2
3	CHENNAI	1581	87	18.2
4	MUMBAI	1501	184.1	8.2
5	SURAT	1204	45.9	21.9
6	PUNE	1003	50.5	19.9
7	AHMEDABAD	928	63.5	14.6
8	NAGPUR	771	25	30.8
9	INDORE	746	21.7	34.4
10	VIJAYAWADA	634	14.9	42.6
45	KOTA	141	10	14.1

देश के 10 लाख से अधिक आबादी के टॉप-53 शहरों में होने वाली कुल आत्महत्याओं की सुसाइड रेट में कोटा 37वें नम्बर पर है।

Ranking	City	Total No. of Suicides	Actual Population (in Lakh)	Rate of Suicides (Per Lakh)
1	VIJAYAWADA	634	14.9	42.6
2	KOLLAM	472	11.1	42.5
3	RAJKOT	550	13.9	39.6
4	ASANSOL	468	12.4	37.7
5	DURG BHILAINAGAR	378	10.6	35.7
6	INDORE	746	21.7	34.4
7	RAIPUR	379	11.2	33.8
8	NAGPUR	771	25	30.8
9	AURANGABAD	358	11.9	30.1
10	BHOPAL	527	18.8	28.0
37	KOTA	141	10	14.1

गत 6 वर्ष में 69058 स्टूडेंट्स ने आत्महत्या की है। देश में आत्महत्या की दर सर्वाधिक युवाओं में 15 से 29 वर्ष आयु वर्ग में है। लैस्ट रिपोर्ट में आत्महत्याओं के बारे में दी गई जानकारी।

IIT-AIIMS सहित उच्च शिक्षण संस्थानों में भी पिछले पांच वर्षों में 103 (अप्रैल-2023 तक) आत्महत्याएं हुई हैं। इस संबंध में पूरे गण सवाल पर लोकसभा में दिया गया सरकार का जवाब।

भारत में छात्र आत्महत्याएं

एनसीआरबी के आंकड़ों के अनुसार, 2022 में 13,044, 2021 में 13,089, 2020 में 12,526, 2019 में 10,335, 2018 में 10,159, 2017 में 9,905 छात्रों की आत्महत्या के कारण मृत्यु हो गई। 2021 में महाराष्ट्र में छात्रों की आत्महत्या की सबसे अधिक संख्या दर्ज की गई, जिसमें 1,834 मौतें दर्ज की गईं, इसके बाद मध्य प्रदेश में 1,308 और तमिलनाडु में 1,246 मौतें हुईं।

लैस्ट के एक अध्ययन में कहा गया है कि भारत में आत्महत्या से मृत्यु दर दुनिया में सबसे अधिक है और वयस्क आत्महत्या से होने वाली मौतों का एक बड़ा हिस्सा 15 से 29 वर्ष की आयु के बीच होता है।

ANNEXURE

ANNEXURE REFERRED TO IN PART (a) to (d) OF THE REPLY TO THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 456 TO BE ANSWERED ON 03/04/2023 REGARDING "INCREASE IN SUICIDE CASES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS" ASKED BY SHRI BENNY BEHANAN AND SHRI RAJMOHAN UNNITHAN, HON'BLE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

S. No.	Institutes/ Universities	Number of students who committed suicide during the last five years and the current year					
		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1.	IITs	8	8	3	4	9	3
2.	IIMs	1	0	1	1	1	0
3.	NITs	3	8	1	2	7	3
4.	AIIMS	2	0	4	2	3	0
5.	CUA	6	4	4	1	5	9
	Total	20	20	13	10	25	15

राष्ट्रीय अपराध रिकॉर्ड ब्यूरो की ताजा रिपोर्ट के अनुसार देश के पांच बड़े राज्यों में 49.3 प्रतिशत सुसाइड होते हैं। इनमें राजस्थान नहीं है।

Number and Percentage Share of Suicides in States/UTs

The State/UT and City wise information on the incidents of suicides, its percentage share in total suicides and rate of suicides during the year are presented in Table-2.2.

Majority of suicides were reported in Maharashtra (22,746) followed by 19,834 suicides in Tamil Nadu, 15,386 suicides in Madhya Pradesh, 13,606 suicides in Karnataka and 12,669 suicides in West Bengal accounting for 13.3%, 11.6%, 9.0%, 8.0% and 7.4% of total suicides respectively. These 5 States together accounted for 49.3% of the total suicides reported in the country. The remaining 50.7% suicides were reported

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Uncovering the origins of CAA and its implications for India

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NEW DELHI: On March 11, the Government of India formally notified the rules implementing the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The law provides persecuted religious minorities fleeing from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan an expedited pathway to Indian citizenship, provided they belong to the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Parsi, or Sikh communities. Notably, the law does not provide such a pathway to those who belong to the Muslim faith.

The notification of the CAA rules—on the eve of India's 2024 general election—has kicked off a fresh debate over the law, its implementing provisions, and the resulting implications for the future of secularism in India. On last week's episode of Grand Tamasha, a weekly podcast on Indian politics and policy co-produced by HT and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, legal scholar M Mohsin Alam Bhat joined host Milan Vaishnav to discuss the law, the rules, and the political impacts.

Bhat, a Lecturer in Law at Queen Mary University of London, specialises in constitutional law

THE NOTIFICATION OF THE CAA RULES — ON THE EVE OF INDIA'S GENERAL ELECTIONS — HAS KICKED OFF A FRESH DEBATE OVER THE LAW

and human rights and has written extensively about law and citizenship in India.



GRAND TAMASHA

Asked about using religious persecution as a criterion for fast-tracked citizenship, Bhat said there's nothing wrong with taking religion into account given it is one of the major grounds of persecution. Furthermore, India has a responsibility toward religiously persecuted minorities in its region.

However, Bhat argued, one cannot ignore the political and social context in which the CAA and the subsequent rules have been unveiled. "What India is doing is a political project, a transformation of India into a religiously, sectarian ethnic state. It is not the response of a secular, inclusive, just democratic country to address problems of religious persecution in its neighbourhood, even if it piece-

meal," he said. Bhat continued, "For instance, the government could have said that we're interested in handling religious persecution, it's a piecemeal project, there's a current emergency in Bangladesh, and we can resettle [refugees]. But that is not what is happening here. It is part of a political project to reimagine India in a very different manner."

On the question of the law's constitutionality, Bhat says "critics of the law, including myself, have started arguing that the real challenge [with the CAA] is... about constitutional identity. If India is a secular country and citizenship status is fundamentally a constitutional question which relates to the very foundations of the polity, it cannot be that the test for citizenship in a secular country is a sectarian test." Ultimately when the Supreme Court will decide this case, Bhat noted, "it will have to make up its mind about the future course of what constitutional identity of India—particularly secular identity—means."



LISTEN: Scan the QR code to listen to the next episode of the Grand Tamasha's latest season

{ IN CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH BIOFABRI }

Bharat Biotech starts TB vaccine's trials in adults

Rhythm Kaul
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NEW DELHI: Bharat Biotech has begun clinical trials of the Spanish anti-tuberculosis vaccine among adults in India, the Hyderabad-based pharmaceutical company announced on Sunday. The vaccine candidate called MTBvac is the first live attenuated vaccine of mycobacterium tuberculosis isolated from a human.

"The trials are carried out by Bharat Biotech in close collaboration with Biofabri," the company said in a statement. "Trials to evaluate the safety and immunogenicity of MTBvac have started with a pivotal safety, immunogenicity and efficacy trial planned to start in 2025."

"It is a giant step to test in adults and adolescents in the

TUBERCULOSIS KILLS AT LEAST 1.6 MILLION PEOPLE AND INFECTS AT LEAST 10 MILLION WORLDWIDE EACH YEAR

country where 28% of the world's TB cases accumulate," said Esteban Rodriguez, CEO of Biofabri. "More effort and funding is needed to combat TB, which remains one of the world's leading infectious causes of death, especially in India."

The only related vaccine in use today, BCG (Bacillus Calmette and Guérin), is an attenuated variant of the bovine TB pathogen. It is at least a 100 years old and has a limited effect on pulmonary tuberculosis, which

is responsible for the transmission of the disease.

"Our quest for a more effective vaccine against tuberculosis received a big boost today with clinical trials in India," said Krishna Ella, executive chairman of Bharat Biotech. "Our goal to develop TB vaccines to prevent disease in adults and adolescents has taken a big step today." Tuberculosis, which is transmitted through the respiratory tract, kills at least 1.6 million people and infects at least 10 million worldwide each year. In 90% of infections, the immune system recognises and controls the bacillus without causing disease. However, in 5-10% of infected people, the bacillus develops tuberculosis, which is fatal in half of patients without treatment. If the infection is in the lungs, it can find a free path

to progress, multiply and spread the disease.

Although there are antibiotics that can kill the bacilli at a higher rate than they reproduce, the tuberculosis bacteria have a coat that protects them from the immune system and makes it difficult for many of these drugs to penetrate, and multi-drug resistant strains have emerged in recent decades, making it crucial to get an effective vaccine against the disease. After the recent completion of a phase II dose-finding trial, a double-blind, controlled phase III clinical trial in newborns has started in 2023, comparing the vaccine with the current BCG vaccine. Seven thousand newborns from South Africa, 60 from Madagascar and 60 from Senegal will be vaccinated. Bharat Biotech said. Over 1,900 babies have been vaccinated till now.

POLICE: 5 CRUSHED TO DEATH BY A DUMPER IN RAJ

KOTA: Two brothers were among five men who were allegedly crushed to death by a dumper over a dispute in the Pagaria area of Jhalawar district in Rajasthan, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred late on Saturday and the two accused — Ranjeet Singh and Dunder Singh — fled the spot after the crime, they added.

The victims were identified as siblings Bharat Singh (22) and Dhiraj Singh (20), and Tufan Singh (33), Goverdhan Singh (28) and Balu Singh (20).

Pagaria SHO Vijendra Singh told PTI that there was a dispute between Ranjeet Singh, Dunder Singh and Bharat Singh and others on Saturday. The reason behind the dispute is yet to be ascertained, he said.

The SHO said Bharat Singh, his brother and the three other victims left for the police station on two motorcycles after they failed to resolve the dispute.

They had barely travelled half a kilometre when Ranjeet Singh and Dunder Singh allegedly took a dumper that was parked nearby and drove it over the motorcycles, killing four on the spot. The fifth victim died on the way to hospital, the SHO said. The two accused then abandoned the dumper and fled, he said. The police have lodged a case under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code. PTI

{ DEADLINE NEARS }

Doubts shroud delivery of first LCA Mk-1A jet to IAF

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NEW DELHI: A question mark hangs over the delivery of the first light combat aircraft (LCA) Mk-1A jet to the Indian Air Force by state-run plane maker Hindustan Aeronautics Limited by the approaching deadline of March 31 as it is yet to make its maiden flight and some key certifications are still not done, officials aware of the matter said on Sunday.

IAF ordered 83 Mk-1A fighters for ₹48,000 crore in February 2021 and plans to buy 97 more Mk-1As at a cost of around ₹67,000 crore.

"HAL is trying its level best to carry out the first flight as early as possible. But there are some software iterations that need to get cleared. Sticking to the March 31 deadline seems a bit difficult right now, though efforts are still on," said one of the officials cited above, asking not to be named.

LCA Mk-1A is an advanced variant of the LCA Mk-1, which has already been inducted by IAF. The Mk-1A will come with digital radar warning receivers, external self-protection jammer pods, superior radar, advanced beyond-visual-range (BVR) air-to-air missiles and significantly improved maintainability.

"The Mk-1A is a totally new aircraft with new systems, software and weapons. Some key certifications are going on right now, with different agencies involved including the Aeronautical Development Agency, Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification, and foreign OEMs (original equipment manufacturers). All this must fall in place before the first aircraft can be delivered," said a second official, who also asked not to be named.

The aircraft is in good shape, he said. The delivery of the 83 jets already ordered is expected to be completed by 2028.

LCA is set to emerge as the cornerstone of IAF's combat power in the coming decade and beyond. IAF, the world's fourth largest air force, is expected to operate around 350 LCAs (Mk-1, Mk-1A and Mk-2 versions), with a third of those already ordered,



A pair of LCA Mk-1 jets in action.

some inducted, and the rest figuring out the battlefield and crushing any threat to the country's security.

In October 2023, HAL handed over the first trainer version of LCA Mk-1 to IAF chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari in Bengaluru, with the twin seater set to fill a key training role and double as a fighter if needed.

The aircraft was part of an earlier order for 40 Mk-1 jets in the initial operational clearance (IOC) and the more advanced final operational clearance (FOC) configurations — the first variants of LCA. Of the 40 Mk-1s, IAF inducted 32 single seater jets and raised two LCA squadrons. The remaining eight aircraft are trainers and all of them will be delivered to IAF soon.

One of the 32 LCA Mk-1s inducted crashed near Jaisalmer on March 12, minutes after taking part in a tri-services exercise that sought to demonstrate the strident India has made towards self-reliance in the defence manufacturing sector. That was the first LCA crash.

The aircraft had flown during the tri-services Bharat Shakti exercise at the Pokhran firing range near Jaisalmer along with another LCA jet before it went down. Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the integrated tri-services 'live fire and manoeuvre' exercise, which sought to display how the Indian military plans to leverage its

indigenous capabilities for dominating the battlefield and crushing any threat to the country's security.

In November 2023, Modi flew in the LCA in Bengaluru and described the experience as "incredibly enriching" while also heaping praise on the country's indigenous military capabilities.

His sortie in a LCA Mk-1 fighter jet was seen as a significant endorsement of the LCA programme, and turned the spotlight on the locally produced fighter jet that IAF is looking at inducting in big numbers and India is also seeking to export.

The newer variants, Mk-1A and Mk-2, will come with significantly improved features and technologies over the current Mk-1 aircraft. IAF will deploy some LCAs at forward air bases in the western sector to bolster its combat readiness against Pakistan and fill the gap left by the gradual phasing out of the Soviet-era MiG-21 fighter jets.

Timely delivery is a top priority for IAF, which is grappling with a shortage of fighter squadrons.

IAF's leadership firmly backs the LCA programme. In a review last year, Chaudhari described the fighter aircraft as the flag-bearer of IAF's efforts towards the indigenisation of its combat fleet.

IAF could order more than 100 Mk-2s, and the aircraft will be ready for production in five years. The world's leading air-

craft engine maker GE Aerospace and HAL signed a memorandum of understanding in Washington in June 2023 to produce F-414 engines in the country for LCA Mk-2, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first state visit to the US.

F-414 has evolved from the F-404 engine that powers the existing LCA variants.

The production of the engines in India will result in the new fighter jet having an indigenous content of around 75% compared to 55%-60% in LCA Mk-1A and 50% in the existing Mk-1 variant. The LCA project was sanctioned in 1983 as a replacement for MiG-21s.

IAF raised its first LCA squadron in Suler with two aircraft in July 2016. While the existing Mk-1 and Mk-1A variants will replace MiG-21 fighters, the Mk-2 aircraft is planned as a replacement for the air force's MiG-29s, Mirage-2000s and Jaguar fighters that will start retiring in the coming decade.

The LCA Mk-2 fighter will be equipped with the more powerful GE-414 engine, better avionics and electronics, and will be capable of carrying a higher weapons payload. It will have improved range, enhanced survivability, better situational awareness for pilots, network-centric capabilities, and the ability to quickly switch from one role to another.

The 17.5-tonne Mk-2 fighter will have a maximum speed of 1.8 Mach, compared to the 1.35-tonne Mk-1A that has a top speed of 1.6 Mach. The new aircraft will come with a payload capacity of 6.5 tonne (compared to 3.5 tonne for the Mk-1A) and it will carry a mix of weapons including BVR air-to-air missiles, air-to-ground missiles, heavy precision guided weapons and conventional bombs.

Other features of the LCA Mk-2 include enhanced fuel capacity, unified electronic warfare suite, indigenous flight control actuators, improved digital flight control computer, better cockpit displays, infrared search and track capability to detect threats at long ranges, missile approach warning systems and countermeasure dispensing systems for self-protection.

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{ FROM PAGE 1 }

YAMUNA FLOODPLAINS

knee-deep waters reaching bungalows in Civil Lines, the iconic Salimgarh underpass archway, and the intersection of the Yamuna Bank Metro station.

The river rose to an unprecedented 208.66m on July 13, sending water as far inland as the Supreme Court, a stone's throw from the Pragati Maidan area where the government held the G20 Summit just months later.

The floodplains are officially demarcated as Zone O of the Yamuna and in a submission to the National Green Tribunal in January, the government said that taking a one-in-25-year probability would bring 9,700 hectare of land into the floodplain category. These lands include spots on which 94 unauthorised colonies are settled at present.

The new direction will inevitably widen the extent of the floodplains. The tribunal, while stating that this will record the river's deepest flow inland, also asked the government for details of a standard operating procedure (SOP) it was following for the demarcation of the floodplain land and gave it three weeks to submit a fresh report.

NGT had in October, taken suo motu cognisance of a media report, when it formed a joint committee headed by the Delhi chief secretary to identify, demarcate and notify floodplains of the Yamuna as per the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order, 2016. It said the delineation of Yamuna was required to prevent illegal developments in the floodplains.

Referring to the 2016 order, NGT said it had clearly defined floodplains to be "an area of the river Ganga or its tributaries which comes under water on either side of it due to floods corresponding to its greatest flow or with a flood of frequency once-in-hundred years."

"The response which has been placed on record reflects that in terms of the above order the authorities intend to define the floodplain zone by taking 1:25 years as the criteria whereas the Rejuvenation Order, 2016 defines the floodplain as stated above. Therefore, with the river Yamuna being a tributary of Ganga, the flood plain corresponding to its greatest flow or with a flood frequency once in 100 years, is required to be

demarcated," said a bench headed by NGT chairperson justice Prakash Shrivastava in an order dated March 21.

In the latest submission made by the government on March 19, detailing progress of the demarcation, the environment department of the Delhi government informed the tribunal that the process of demarcation was nearing completion with major government departments and bodies like the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), the Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC) department and the forest department having already provided details of land under them on the floodplains in a KML file format to prepare maps virtually.

Referring to the latest report, the order sought clarity on the process being followed by the government for demarcation, stating based on the submission made, nothing had been done yet to protect the floodplain zone.

"Nothing has been placed on record to show what criteria or SOP has been adopted for demarcation of flood plain, or the contour intervals taken for demarcation of flood plain or the contour mapping which is done for that purpose. Therefore, prima facie it appears that no effective step till now has been taken... though an earlier order of the Tribunal was passed in the year 2015," said the order, giving authorities — both the Delhi government and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) — three weeks for a fresh action-taken report.

Bhim Singh Rawat, a Yamuna activist and member of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP), said the directions from NGT are welcomed and will allow more areas to be counted as floodplain zones.

"The criteria for floodplains has become more stringent and this will allow more land along the river to be counted as a floodplain, as compared to earlier. This will also mean if demarcated properly, more encroachments are likely to be removed," said Rawat, adding that despite multiple orders of NGT, there was no transparency on Yamuna's floodplain area.

"Boards have also been placed in some parts along the river, stating this was a floodplain area, but they are not maintained properly and are suffering from wear and tear. Until we carry out a proper demarcation, such boards have no meaning," he added.

BJP LIST

chief K Surendran, who will contest from Wayanad — the constituency of former Congress president Rahul Gandhi. The party has announced only four candidates in the coastal state, including KS Radhakrishnan from Ernakulam.

In Andhra Pradesh, the party fielded D Purandeswari — its first woman president in the state — from Rajahmundry, Kiran Kumar Reddy (a former Congress CM) from Rajampet and Kothapalli Geeta from Araku. Only six candidates have been named from the state.

The fifth list contained 19 women candidates. For Himachal Pradesh, the party named Rajeev Bhardwaj as the candidate from Kangra and in Maharashtra, it picked three candidates. The seat sharing formula with ally Shiv Sena is still to be worked out, people in the party aware of the matter said, asking not to be named.

Former Union minister Jugal Oram will contest from Sundargarh in Odisha, Sangeeta Kumari Deo from Bolangir, Malvika Keshari Deo from Kalahandi, Bijayant Jay Panda (a vice president of the BJP and in-charge of Uttar Pradesh) from Kendrapara, and Sambit Patra (a party spokesperson) from Puri.

In Bihar, where the party is contesting 17 of the 40 seats on its own, it repeated ministers Giriraj Singh from Begusarai, Nityanand Rai from Ujjarpur and RK Singh from Arrah. Former minister Ravi Shankar Prasad will contest from Patna Sahib and Rajya Sabha MP Vivek Thakur was given a ticket to contest from Nawada. Mithlesh Tiwari will replace Ashwini Chaubey in Buxar, while spokesperson Rajeev Pratap Rudy was chosen to contest again from his seat in Saran. Former party president Sanjay Jaiswal was assigned to contest from Paschim Champaran.

In Goa, the party fielded Palavi Srinivas Dempo from South Goa.

In Gujarat, the party announced six candidates and replaced Bhikaji Thakor with Shobhnaben Baraiya in Sabarkantha and Ranjanaben Bharr with Hemang Joshi in Vadodra. Both Thakor and Bharr had pulled out of polls citing personal reasons.

Gen (ret'd) VK Singh too had said earlier on Sunday that he would not contest elections, say-

ing he wanted to "take my energy and time in new directions, where I can serve my country in a different way".

Among the prominent political turncoats given tickets are Jindal, who switched from the Congress earlier in the day, Ranjit Chautala, who also joined BJP on Sunday, from Hissar; and Sita Soren, the daughter-in-law of former Jharkhand chief minister, Shibu Soren. Sita Soren joined the party last week and will contest from Dumka.

Jagdish Shettar, who had quit the party ahead of the assembly polls in Karnataka last year, was given a ticket to contest from Belgaum.

Former MP and MLA Velagapalli Varaprasad Rao, who also joined the BJP on Sunday, will contest from Tirupati.

In West Bengal, the party announced 19 names, including that of former Calcutta high court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay from Tamuk. He joined the BJP earlier this month after resigning as judge, a position in which he often attacked the Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress.

Former West Bengal president Dilip Ghosh has shifted from Medinipur to Durgapur-Bardhaman, Arjun Singh has been fielded from Barrackpore, Debashree Chaudhary from Kolkata Dakshin and Raju Bista has retained his seat from Darjeeling.

The party has fielded Rekha Patra from Basirhat in Bengal. Patra is one of the victims from Sandeshkhali, a hamlet in Bengal where massive protests broke out in February against local Trinamool leaders.

The party announced candidates from seven seats in Rajasthan and one each in Sikkim and Mizoram.

Two candidates were announced for elections in Telangana and 13 in Uttar Pradesh, including Maneka Gandhi from Sultanpur, Jitin Prasada (who replaces Gauram Gandhi) in Pilibhit, Satish Vautan in Aligarh, and Raghav Lakhnampal from Saharanpur.

The party dropped former minister Santosh Gangwar from Bareilly and Sanghamitra Maurya from Badaun. Gen (ret'd) VK Singh has been replaced by Atul Garg.

Arun Govil, the Meerut candidate, replaces Rajendra Agarwal who was president in the Lok Sabha when the security breach happened in December last year.

SPOTLIGHT

With the stage set for the ultimate electoral contest, a look at the key factors that may dictate the outcome

How partisanship plays out in India

Partisanship is a significant part of everyday political life. To translate partisan sentiments into healthy political engagement, India will need to ensure the free flow of reliable political information as well as open political debates

Ankita Barthwal and
Francesca Refsum Jensenius
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Elections in India are notable for their volatility; voters' choices are notoriously difficult to predict, with large swings from one election to the next. Adding to this uncertainty is the fact that historically, party brands are weak and official party membership is low. It is no wonder then that partisanship has not featured prominently in discussions of contemporary Indian politics. In political science parlance, the term "partisanship" is used to describe the stable and emotional attachment that some voters feel toward political parties. This emotional attachment, which transcends mere support for the party at the ballot, is prevalent among voters in most parts of the world and affects political discourse and behaviour in fundamental ways.

In India, the idea of partisanship has received little attention, and yet "Bhajpai," "Comrade," or "Congress" are frequently used to describe party loyalists across the political spectrum. These terms reflect a belief that at least some people have entrenched partisan affiliations. Anecdotal evidence too suggests that party loyalty is rising, with an increasing share of voters self-identifying with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and social media echo chambers polarising political debates. As Indians head to the polls to select a new Lok Sabha, we examine Indians' deep-rooted partisanship which, contrary to received wisdom, is a significant part of everyday political life.

Why partisanship matters

Measuring partisanship involves asking people about their self-identification into party camps. Hence, the most common survey question to measure such attachment is simply: "Which party do you identify with?" Other times, voters are asked whether there is a party they feel close to or how they feel about different parties. In some studies, researchers have also tried to experimentally tease out the strength of individuals' partisan attachment. Several decades of research suggest that partisan attachment remains surprisingly stable over time, even when parties or individuals change their policy positions.

These lasting attachments influence several outcomes in the political space. Three in particular are worth mentioning. First, partisans are believed to be loyal voters, meaning that parties can be reasonably certain that these voters will turn out and support them on the election day. This makes elections more predictable and allows parties and politicians to focus on developing long-term policy platforms rather than spending resources on short-term,

populist measures to sway voters.

Second, partisanship shapes how people understand the political world by serving as a heuristic to interpret political information. People tend to believe that if their party views an issue favourably, then they too should hold a similar view. Therefore, parties play a role in shaping opinions, which can make it easier for voters to follow key debates and hold elected representatives accountable.

Third, partisanship shapes how people interpret the information they receive. Those who feel attached to parties are more likely to be biased in favour of whatever the party does. They are often more willing to ignore negative information about their party and more likely to pounce on negative information about other parties. This bias, often referred to as motivated reasoning, hampers objective evaluation and can increase hostility between groups. Scholars of partisan polarisation are concerned about increasingly siloed camps, arguing that this may further enhance distrust and stymie political deliberation.

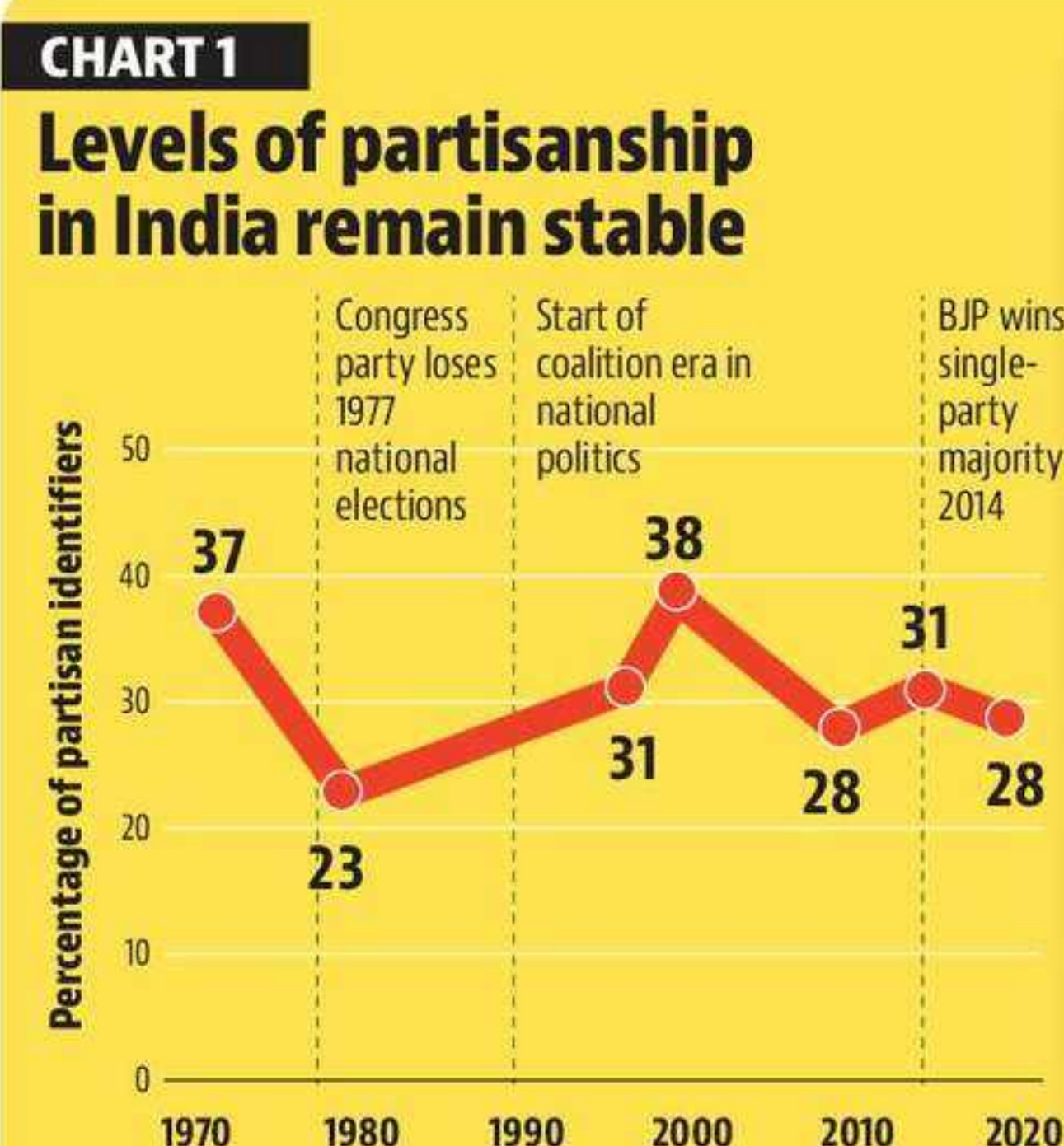
Studies from the United Kingdom, Europe, and several other democratic contexts attest to the global relevance of partisanship. Voters tend to self-sort into party camps even in the presence of more than two parties and in systems with proportional representation. However, all of these polities share one key similarity: The political party system is well-institutionalised. Such parties are stable entities with clearly defined ideological profiles, which helps boost party attachment. Nevertheless, even in less-institutionalised contexts such as Brazil, Turkey, Argentina, Mexico, and Taiwan, there is a growing belief that partisanship plays an important role in shaping democratic competition.

Partisanship in India

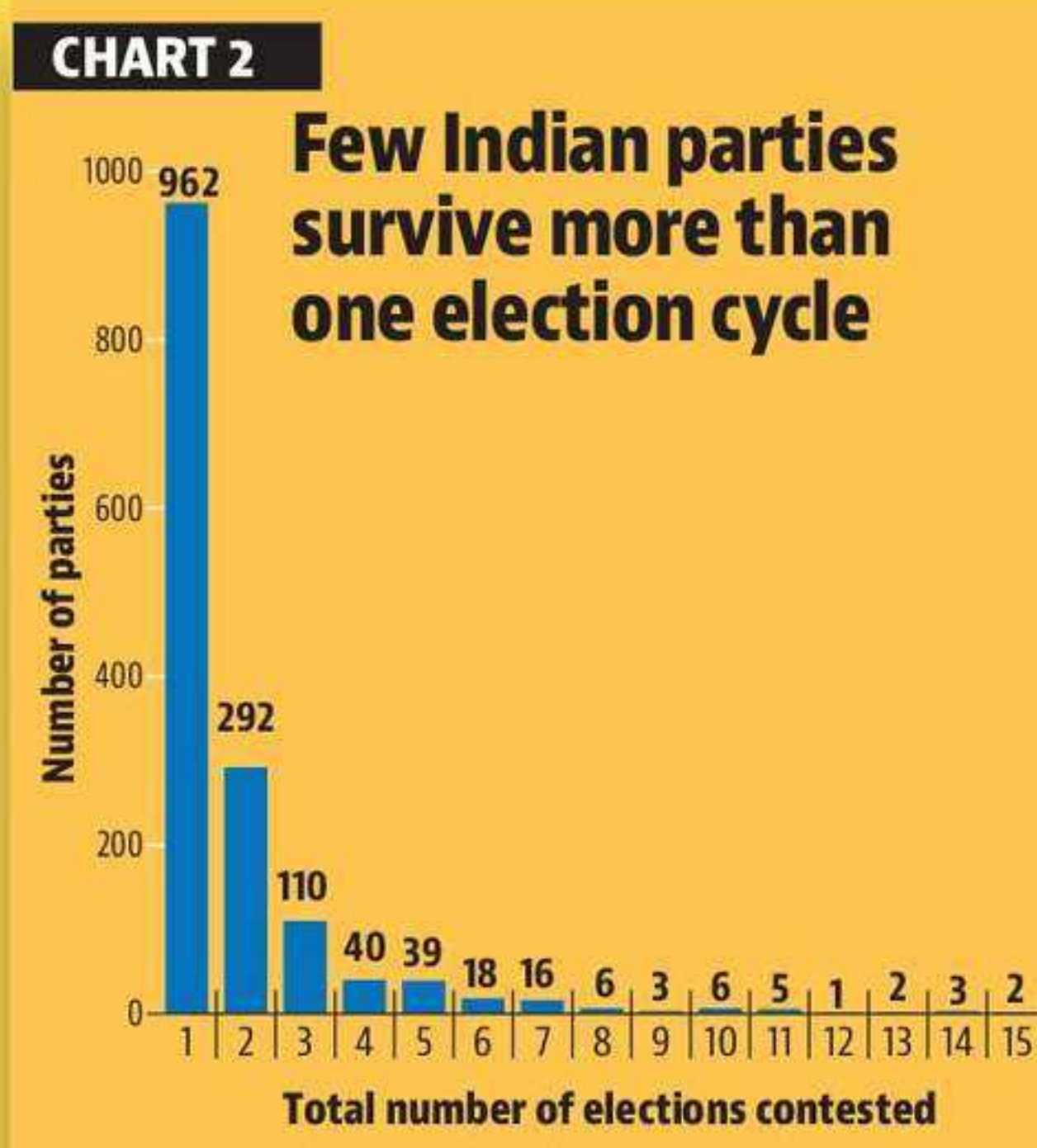
In India, as in other contexts characterised by unstable and unpredictable voting patterns, partisanship may not appear to matter at first glance. Indeed, the very presence of high electoral volatility—a measure of vote swings between parties across elections—seems to suggest that voters do not stay loyal to any one party. Still, when asked about political preferences, many voters express clear partisan loyalties. We observed several instances of this in Himachal Pradesh before the 2022 state assembly elections. Most memorably, a group of women in the Shimla rural district were keen to discuss their individual party preferences, making sure to highlight how these differed from the rest of their families'. Even after marrying into families with different partisan preferences, these women held onto their own partisan opinions.

Such attitudes are also visible at the aggregate level. Figure 1 tracks the presence of partisanship across India, drawing on data from the National Election Studies (NES). Each election cycle, survey respondents were asked: "Is there any political party you particularly feel close to?" Across elections, around 30% of survey respondents expressed partisan attachments. This is lower than large democracies such as the United States, but similar to levels observed in democracies in Latin America, such as Brazil.

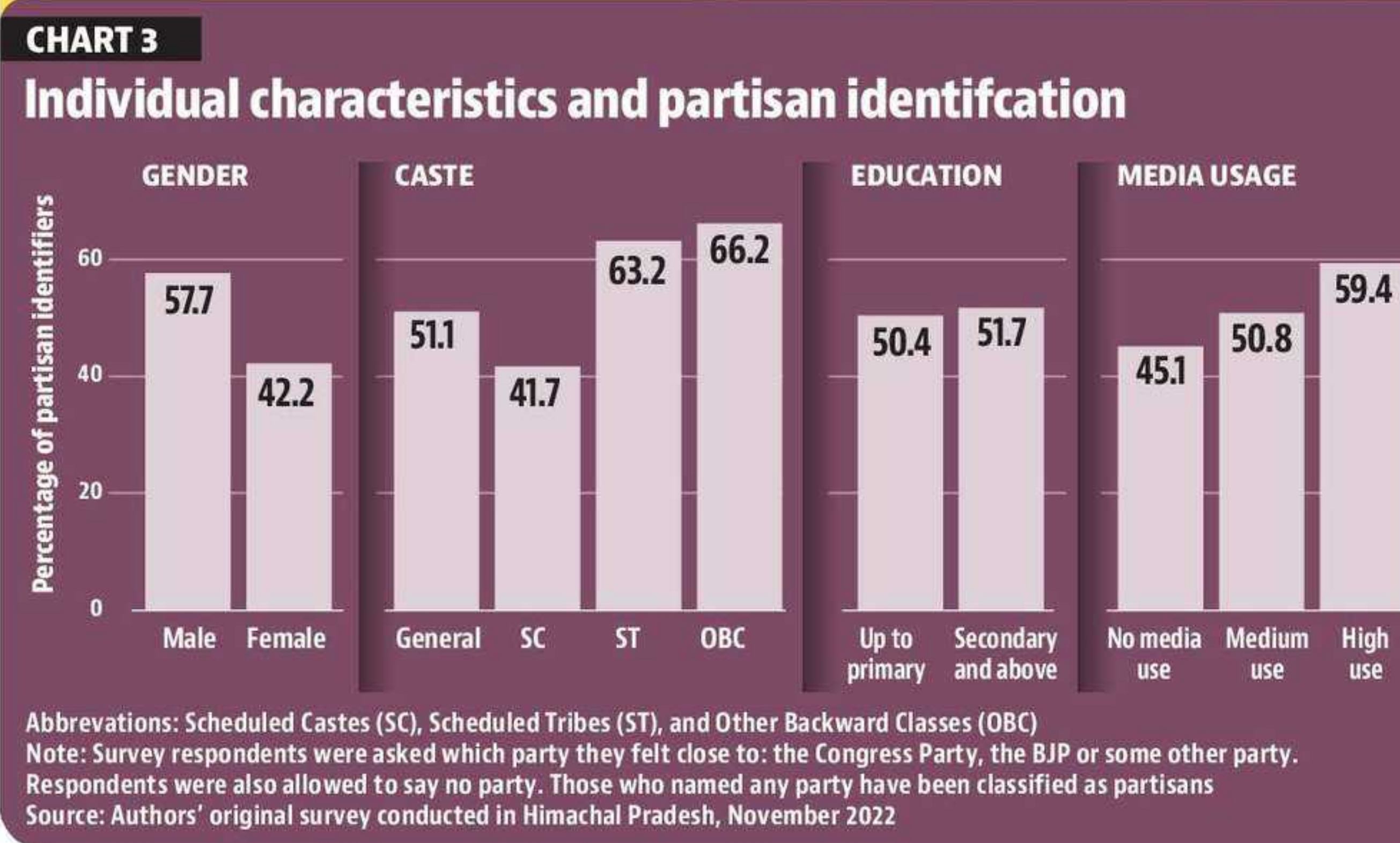
What is striking is the relative stability of partisanship despite periods of massive political shifts. In the 50-year



Source: Data are sourced from the NES surveys conducted by the Lokniti Programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies accessed at <https://lokniti.org/national-election-studies>



Note: Figure displays the total appearances of all parties since 1962. Source: Authors' analysis based on data from Ananay Agarwal, Neelesh Agrawal, Saloni Bhogale, et al., "TCPD Indian Elections Data v2.0," Trivedi Centre for Political Data, Ashoka University, <https://tcpd.ashoka.edu.in/lok-dhava>.



Abbreviations: Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Note: Survey respondents were asked which party they felt close to: the Congress Party, the BJP or some other party. Respondents were also allowed to say no party. Those who named any party have been classified as partisans. Source: Authors' original survey conducted in Himachal Pradesh, November 2022.

period in question, the Indian political system has moved from single-party dominance under the Congress to a more fragmented party system marked by coalition rule and then back to a party system dominated by the BJP.

This raises the question: Which parties do voters feel especially close to? In India, a huge number of parties contest elections, but few of them survive more than one electoral cycle. As Figure 2 demonstrates, a vast majority of parties that contested national elections in India between 1962 and 2019 participated in only one general election. Of course, some parties have exhibited staying power, and many of them have developed unique party brands. Most prominent are the Congress and the BJP. NES data from 2019 indicate that more than half of the self-identified partisans across India report feeling close to either the Congress (19.2%) or the BJP (41.2%). Other parties with footholds in a particular state—such as the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh or the Trinamool Congress in Bengal—also have partisans, but since their support is regionally concentrated, none of them were named by more than 5% of partisan loyalists at the national level.

Figure 3 looks at how partisanship varies by individual-level characteristics, using data from an original field survey we conducted in Himachal Pradesh in 2022. In a random sample of

3,200 respondents, the overall level of partisanship was 52%. The results showed that women, members of the Scheduled Castes, and those with limited media exposure were less likely to express a partisan attachment.

How partisanship matters

There is compelling evidence that partisanship exists in India, but how might it matter for elections? In line with studies from other parts of the world, survey data indicate that Indian partisans are substantively different from nonpartisan voters in three crucial respects: voting stability, informed political opinions, and biased reasoning.

The first point is related to the stability of voting patterns in Indian general elections. According to data on voters in the 2019 general elections, about 61% of partisan voters repeated their vote choice from 2014, compared to 54% of nonpartisans, and about 64% of the partisans voted for the party they said they felt close to.

It might seem underwhelming that less than two-thirds of partisans eventually voted for the party they identify with, given that many voters regularly proclaim to be party loyalists. However, this number is biased downward because parties do not always field candidates in every electoral constituency in every election cycle. When considering only constituencies where the

party in question actually fielded a candidate for reelection, close to 86% of respondents supported the party they reported feeling loyal to. This signals a high degree of stability for this particular voter group.

In other parts of the world, partisanship is associated with more informed political behaviour, higher trust in parties, and more belief in the efficacy of the vote—all of which are considered signs of democratic health. There is compelling evidence for the same logic working among Indian partisans. For instance, our survey in Himachal Pradesh revealed that partisans were much more likely to express trust in political parties, far less ambiguous about political choices, and better at deciphering issue ownership among parties. Notably, partisanship is associated with these traits even when education, media exposure, and political interest were held constant.

Although stable partisanship might be a sign of democratic vibrancy, it also has its downsides, namely partisan polarisation. Many studies outside of India find that greater consolidation along party lines and a shrinking middle ground are linked to an increase in partisan animosity between groups. While there is no systematic data from India on the levels of animosity between supporters of the two main poles in India—the Congress and the BJP—there is increasing evidence that

party identities have a marked effect on co-partisans' worldview. For instance, a recent survey of young, urban-dwelling Indians found evidence of substantial co-partisan bias: Partisan respondents attached to either the Congress or the BJP exhibited little agreement over politically coloured issues such as India's G20 presidency or even about supposedly objective issues related to population growth and current economic conditions.

Expressing negative feelings toward another party, commonly called "negative partisanship," is another way in which researchers detect partisan animosity. Typically measured by asking respondents if there is any party that they dislike or would not support, negative partisanship is associated with negative opinions not just about the other party but also about people associated with that party. Our survey revealed that partisans were indeed more likely to express negative partisanship; compared to nonpartisans, they were twice as likely to name parties they would never support. However, disaggregated by partisan identity, the picture is more nuanced. Only 26.4% of the BJP partisans and 20.5% of Congress partisans expressed a strong distaste for other parties. This signals less partisan rigidity than one might expect, indicating that unmitigated political polarisation is perhaps not as widespread as commonly believed.

Conclusion

Despite claims to the contrary, partisanship plays a significant role in Indian elections. High levels of electoral volatility and ubiquitous party switching conceal the presence of partisan loyalties among a substantial share of Indian voters. The stabilisation of political competition, featuring a similar set of parties running in election after election, has the potential for further fostering partisanship in India.

Extant data indicate that heightened partisanship can translate into more informed, engaged voters who demand greater accountability from their elected leaders. Fostering such partisanship also has clear advantages for political parties, since partisan voters tend to be steadfast and decisive in their opinions and actions. In the current context, this means that parties that enjoy substantive partisanship, such as the BJP, can be confident of their future prospects.

At the same time, intensely held partisan identities risk hampering deliberative democracy. Unchecked bias—can cloud voter judgements. To translate partisan sentiments into healthy political engagement, India will need to ensure the free flow of reliable political information as well as open political debates in which supporters of competing political camps engage with those espousing alternative viewpoints. By discouraging such engagement, the current political climate runs the risk of creating belligerent camps, thereby undermining the positive potential of partisanship.

Ankita Barthwal is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo. Francesca Refsum Jensenius is a professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Oslo. In the months ahead, the Carnegie-HT "India Elects 2024" series will analyze various dimensions of India's upcoming election battle—including the role foreign policy plays, the impact of women voters, and the evolution of conservative parties.

{ GREEN PIECE }

Holi is a reminder of nature's will to survive, grow and reproduce

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NEW DELHI: It's Holi today, a festival that marks the onset of late spring. Some people, including me, love the festival. Others, such as my family, detest it.

I am not suggesting people run after their neighbours with fist-full of organic colours and water, and sing loudly over food.

Still, I believe Holi is for everyone. There is a strong logic for this.

Holi marks spring, it celebrates new energy, the will of nature to survive, grow and reproduce more beauty. You can still wander around without fainting in the heat in many parts of the plains. So, why don't we revel in this ephemeral season, savouring nature?

It is particularly hard in North India to wander around on Holi day, and the days preceding it, without being col-

oured. But right after that, it is possible to enjoy the logic of Holi.

A walk in parks will reveal soft, bright green leaves and shoots, a few, short months away from dark green adulthood. Bird calls are louder, more audible and almost endless: they are close to breeding. The last of the winter flowers defiantly refuse to wither away.

Time amid nature is the best mental health mantra for many of us. The glorious festival of Holi reminds us to take in this free therapy, rapidly and deeply. Come summer and it becomes harder to be outdoors. Don't think of Holi as a mere occasion to colour your friends or escape being coloured. Know it as a reminder to treat yourself to a fleeting, joyful season.

Bharati Chaturvedi is an environmentalist and writer. She is the founder and director of Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group.

Regional airlines look to capitalise on emerging demand

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NEW DELHI: A new carrier, FLY91, will launch a flight between Bengaluru and Goa this month, as a couple of regional airlines seek to capitalise on the emerging trend of Indians flying to short-haul destinations that were earlier covered by road or rail.

These travel segments, connected by smaller ATR, Bombardier Q400s and Embraer aircraft, are not catered to by established carriers such as IndiGo and the Air India group despite increasing demand. IndiGo, India's largest carrier by market share, operates a fleet of around 45 ATRs and the Air India group does not have any regional aircraft in its fleet. SpiceJet offers regional flights with around 34 Bombardier aircraft. These airlines have clearly left the segment for regional carriers, who are now starting to move in.

FLY91 has started operations with a fleet of two ATR aircraft and plans to induct 30 more aircraft in the next five years. The space is underserved, with capacity in this space accounting for a meagre 3% and regional aircraft fleet of less than 10% of the total domestic fleet.

The entry of regional airlines with a sustainable and viable business model could give wings to this segment, industry experts said. "Regional air transport in India has been quite neglected in the sense that no dedicated focused player ever really existed since Vayudoot in the 1980s or possibly Indian Airlines up until 1995," said Mark D Martin of Martin Consulting.

Currently IndiGo, and Kingfisher and Jet Airways in the past, provided more of a feeder service than being focussed on regional connectivity along with their national network, Martin added. "With that in context, the launch of FLY91 and the expansion of Kolhapur-based Sanjay Ghodawat group's regional aviation venture Star Air are good signals for the regional segment," he said.

With major airlines in India going through challenging times as there have been supply chain issues, regional connectivity would have never been on their growth plan and the entry of these carriers will help the segment grow, experts said.

The central government in its 2016 policy introduced a new category of airlines, which were scheduled commuter airlines with a low capitalization thresh-



Goa chief minister Pramod Sawant flagged off FLY91's first flight operations at Mopa in North Goa on March 12. ANI

old, and also allowed airlines operating on regional routes under its Udey Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) scheme with viability gap funding to form code share partnerships with carriers operating on major routes to make regional airlines somewhat viable. A code share is a business arrangement in which two or more airlines publish and market the same flight under their own airline designator and flight number as part of their published timetable or schedule.

As of now, only about 54% routes are operating under the scheme, according to a response

to a Right to Information application filed by HT. But the concept of code share of regional airlines seems to have not worked as they are not seen to be happening in domestic routes. Even the government-owned regional airline Alliance Air has been struggling, posting losses of over ₹500 crore annually.

However, Martin appreciated the strategies of both the newly launched FLY91 and Star Air. "It's good to see that both FLY91 and Star Air clearly seem to come with fundamentals in revenue models, which don't need viability dependence on the

UDAN scheme," he said. Speaking on the scope for regional airlines, travel industry veteran Manoj Chako, who is managing director and CEO of FLY91, said there is huge scope for regional aviation as the middle class is constantly growing in India.

"India is the fastest growing market in the world. We are on the cusp of exponential growth in aviation and obviously regional aviation becomes a very critical element in it," Chako said. "If we want to compare with other markets' population, number of airports, density and propensity to spend, we are only scratching the tip of the iceberg." Pointing out inadequate capital to fund operations in the long-term as one of the reasons for more regional carriers not being launched, a former official of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said the promoters must be ready to step in to capitalise the airlines during crises.

"Fuel cost accounts for 30-40% of the total cost of the airlines. While this cost on a per kilo litre basis is the same across airlines, considering the target audience for the regional airlines, the airfares have to be kept much lower so as to attract more number of passengers for main-

taining adequate passenger load factors," the former official of the aviation watchdog said on condition of anonymity.

"There are significant opportunities in the regional space and FLY91 is well-funded and professionally managed. Star Air has done well too. However, regional airlines' viability should be beyond UDAN," said Kapil Kaul, CEO and director of CAPA India, an aviation advisory.

The strategy was to start strong. "We studied 24 failed airlines and we learnt that the reason for their shutting down eventually boiled down to these two reasons, where you either did not know how to manage the assets and second, you did not have the right capital structure to support the growth," Chako said. "One of the reasons for the airlines to fail is also when one thinks aviation as a vanity project. If the airlines have the right approach and capital, I don't see a reason why they would fail."

Chako has raised \$25 million from private equity and A-listers to begin with. "We are the best capitalised regional airline to start anywhere in the world," he said. "By the end of five years, we will open five bases and will have a fleet of 35 aircraft."



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

OUR TAKE

After the terror strike in Moscow

The attack by Islamic State in Russia renews the call for a global alliance against terrorism

Reports of the involvement of Islamic State (IS), especially its so-called Khorasan Province affiliate, in the gruesome terror attack last week on the outskirts of the Russian capital that left 133 people dead should be a cause for concern. It was believed the IS was past its peak and had been stripped of its networks and firepower in West Asia, and was only capable of carrying out attacks within Afghanistan, where it remains locked in conflict with the Taliban.

It is also significant that Russia was alerted by the US early this month about a planned attack in Moscow and that Washington has concluded the IS bears sole responsibility for the strike. The IS claimed responsibility for the attack on messaging app channels, providing gruesome images of the terrorists involved. The terror group has a strong motivation to target Russia since President Vladimir Putin supported President Bashar al-Assad against the group in the civil war in 2015. The IS has frequently criticised Putin and security analysts believe the group's networks in Afghanistan and Central Asia give it the capability to carry out such an attack.

How Putin responds to this terror attack could have larger repercussions for global power relations, especially at a time when Russia is locked in a dragging war with Ukraine. It would be disingenuous for Russia to claim there is some sort of Ukrainian link to the terror strike, especially since Moscow has presented no evidence to back up such allegations. On the other hand, there is evidence purportedly linking some of the attackers to Tajikistan, which fits in with Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP)'s efforts to expand to Central Asia. A UN Security Council report in January had warned about IS-KP's ability to project influence into the region and beyond, and about its increased appeal within Tajik networks.

The Russian leadership will do well to focus on the real source of the problem and work with countries in the region, including Afghanistan, where the Taliban has been fighting IS-KP in its backyard. Unlike the Moscow theatre siege by Chechen terrorists in 2002 or the Beslan school hostage crisis in 2004, the implications of the IS attack won't be restricted to Russia's borders. Russia can hardly afford to open any new fronts, and the need of the hour is more focused action, including collaborating with countries where the IS has a presence, to hunt down those responsible for the carnage.

BJD-BJP tie-up slips on Odisha goals

It is no surprise that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-Biju Janata Dal (BJD) talks did not translate into an alliance, given the BJP's vaulting ambitions and the internal contradictions that came up at the prospect of the two largest political parties in Odisha joining hands. The BJD, the dominant player in the state, has been standing with the BJP in Parliament, even helping the latter's ministers get elected to the Rajya Sabha. This arrangement insulated the BJD's interests from coming in the crosshairs of the Centre; however, it faced an electoral hurdle since both parties aspired to dominate Odisha's electoral landscape. And the bonhomie among the top leaderships of the parties, clearly, had not percolated down to the cadres.

The BJD has been in office in Bhubaneswar since 2000 while the BJP has been expanding fast in Odisha: In 2019, it won eight Lok Sabha seats, up from one in 2014, and replaced the Congress as the primary Opposition party in the state. The BJP's internal survey reportedly suggests that politics in Odisha has reached a tipping point, which could pivot the party to pole position. If the seat talks still lingered on, it was because the BJP central leadership was keen to increase its LS tally even if it meant ceding space in Bhubaneswar — the party had reportedly sought 14 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats.

Data from 2019 elections suggest a BJP-BJD seat deal could have led to a clean sweep in both elections: The two parties fought separately and had a combined vote share of 81.1% and 77.2% in the parliamentary and assembly elections, respectively, in the state. The absence of a deal will now spice up the contest in Odisha.

Anticipating Biden versus Trump rerun

On several issues, there has been continuity in US policies over the past eight years under Trump and Biden. However, there are important differences in their approaches to alliances, climate policy, immigration, tariffs, and democracy

As India prepares for polls, another election is looming in the United States (US). The presumptive presidential candidates are incumbent Joe Biden, a Democrat, and former president Donald Trump, a Republican. Public opinion surveys currently give Trump a slight edge, with voters expressing dissatisfaction with Biden's age and his handling of inflation, border security, and the West Asia policy. But Biden's campaign believes that factors such as the strong performance of the economy, low unemployment, debt relief, and Trump's legal woes could reverse the tide by November, when people go to the polls.

At this early stage, predicting the outcome of the US presidential election is futile. The result in all but a handful of states is already a foregone

conclusion, and the overall result may well be determined by about six crucial "swing states" and less than a million votes. Nonetheless, it would be prudent for observers to start anticipating policy implications. While many areas might witness policy continuity or greater transactionalism on the part of Washington, trade and immigration policy could see some dramatic changes.

On several issues, there has been significant continuity over the past eight years under both Trump and Biden. One, China is increasingly understood as the US's foremost strategic competitor, leading to shifts in US domestic, economic, and security policy in the Indo-Pacific. Two, the US believes it should no longer offer non-reciprocal market access in the spirit of neoliberalism or globalisation. Trade deals that do not tilt the playing field in the US's favour are out of the question. Three, the US body politic is firmly against direct and open-ended military expeditions, which critics decry as "forever wars". Four, despite complications, the US has mostly stood firm in its support for Israel and the Gulf Arab States.

There are, however, some important differences between Biden and Trump on alliances, climate policy, immigration, tariffs, and democracy. While Trump readily criticises US allies as freeloaders, Biden has adopted an allies-first approach in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. A Trump

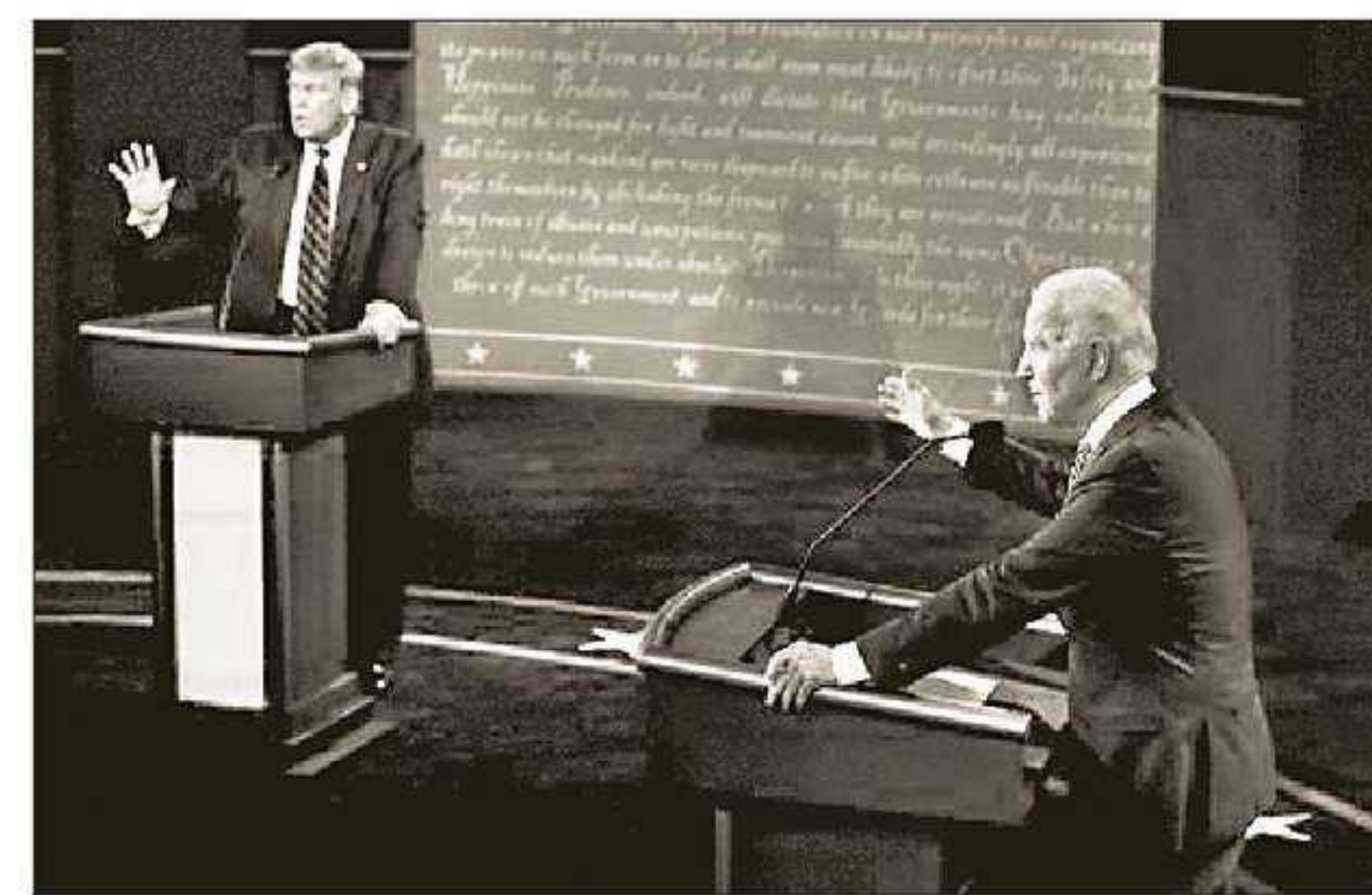
victory would have particular implications for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and US support for Ukraine. On climate and environmental policy, which is important for the Democratic base, Biden has supported large subsidies for domestic industry and active climate diplomacy. While Trump may not scrap subsidies (which benefit Republican constituents), he would certainly walk back international climate commitments.

Another area of difference is immigration, which the Republicans seek to stem and the Democrats hope to facilitate. On the Mexican border, a Republican administration will adopt a deliberately brutal approach to deter illegal migration. Trump has also expressed a greater willingness to employ tariffs and other punitive measures to counter perceived trade imbalances. Finally, while Biden has often cast his worldview as one of democracies vs autocracies, a Trump administration would care less about the state of democracy and human rights around the world.

Some US allies and partners, including in Asia, are already anticipating the implications of a potential second Trump presidency. His return will be accompanied by greater conviction about his agenda — particularly on military assistance, trade, and immigration — but also greater professionalism in its execution. Unlike in 2016, when Trump surprised even



Dhruva Jaishankar



Public opinion surveys currently give Trump a slight edge, with voters expressing dissatisfaction with Biden's age and handling of border security

himself by winning the election and entered office somewhat unprepared, his return would see a much more adept operation to execute his vision. Much more of the rank-and-file of the Republican Party would be behind him. Former trade negotiator Robert Lighthizer, ex-national security advisor Robert O'Brien, and domestic policy advisor Stephen Miller are among those who would play key roles in shaping trade, foreign policy, and immigration policy. Preparations are underway to staff key government positions on the first day of a Trump administration and many erstwhile Trump critics in the Republican Party are reaching out to him about the possibility of joining his administration.

What are the implications for India? Compared to US allies who depend upon Washington for deterrence or military aid, or major trade partners reliant on US market access, the outcome of the election will matter somewhat less for New Delhi. In many respects, India will adjust to Trump's transactionalism, as it did between 2017 and 2021, presenting itself as a partner willing to burden-share.

Nonetheless, New Delhi will have to brace for dramatic changes in at least two areas — trade and immigration. Given India's trade surplus with the US, tariffs will have to be anticipated and some tough negotiations will be inevitable. A shared understanding of the need to de-risk from China while hedging against the prospect of US tariffs is already animating discussions among the world's other large economies: India, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Europe.

Immigration will be more dramatic. Indians will have to anticipate slowdowns and greater scrutiny in the processing of legal migrants — permanent residents, high-skilled professionals, and even students, tourists, and businesspeople. The rising number of undocumented migrants will almost certainly face harsher detentions. Overall, while India may be less directly affected than most other countries in the event of a Trump victory, the contours of his policies can already be anticipated.

Dhruva Jaishankar is executive director, ORF America. The views expressed are personal

UP's journey towards a trillion-dollar economy

Our unwavering commitment to serve, protect, and foster the prosperity of the 25 crore people of Uttar Pradesh (UP) completes its seventh year. Embracing the vision of Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi as our mission, the double-engine government embarked on a transformative journey in 2017. The result is the emergence of a new UP, an example of good governance.

The overwhelming support received from the public throughout the development journey of the state has strengthened the belief that diligent efforts, transparent policies, genuine intentions, and steadfast planning inevitably lead to success. At the heart of this positive change lies the "Triple C" mantra — culture, connectivity, and commerce.

Recognising the significant role of tourism as a catalyst for economic growth, planned efforts were made in UP in the realm of tourism and culture. Consequently, the state is on its way to becoming a premier tourism destination in India. The consecration of the Shri Ram Lalla temple in Ayodhya, the rejuvenation of the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple, and comprehensive development efforts in the Vindhyas Dham Corridor, Braj Bhoomi, Naimisharanya Dham, and Soron-Sukar area, among others, have bestowed a fresh identity upon the state as the core of India's cultural consciousness.

In the past few years, millions of devotees from various parts of the country have flocked to the state, significantly boosting the local economy. Today, UP boasts of excellent road, water and air connectivity. The state provides the country's largest rail and road network. This is the only state with five international and 16 domestic airports. The junctions of the Eastern and Western Dedicated Freight Corridors are located here. Besides, six expressways are operational while seven are under construction. A new expressway connecting Chit-rakoot Link, Farrukhabad Link, and Purvan-chal Expressway to the Agra-Lucknow Expressway is in the works.

Our aim is to ensure that by early next year, when saints and devotees from across the globe gather for the Prayagraj Mahakumbh, they relish a delightful experience on the Ganga Expressway. The country's first inland waterway was initiated in our state. In line with these endeavours, the Inland Waterways Authority was also constituted in the state. Today, the country's first rapid rail, Namohat, is showcasing UP's cutting edge transportation services to the world.

By recognising its talent, tradition and potential, the state has become synonymous with effective governance and progress where there is reverence for faith, tradition, and heritage, alongside a dedicated focus on economic prosperity. Today, UP is the second largest economy in the country, contributing 9.2% to the national Gross Domestic Product. Its gross domestic income has more than doubled in the

THE PAST SEVEN YEARS OF THE DOUBLE-ENGINE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN A JOURNEY FROM RESOLUTION TO ACCOMPLISHMENT

last seven years. It is the result of well-planned efforts that UP has gained an identity as a revenue-surplus state and is moving rapidly towards achieving self-reliance. The PM has envisioned making India a \$5-trillion economy. By aligning with this goal, UP is swiftly progressing towards achieving a \$1-trillion economy. Investment proposals of Rs40 lakh crore from across the globe at last year's Global Investors Summit (GIS) were an unprecedented milestone. Within just one year of the success of GIS, we also started the implementation of projects worth more than Rs 10.24 lakh crore.

While substantial investments will propel the state towards achieving a \$1 trillion economy, they will also contribute to realising the aspirations of our youth. During these years, 6.5 lakh youth have secured government jobs in a transparent manner. Our journey from attracting initial investment proposals of Rs 4 lakh crore to proposals amounting to Rs 40 lakh crore has fostered a culture of innovation and startups in the state. Consequently, today, the youth of the state are transitioning from being mere job seekers to becoming job creators.

These seven years of the double-engine government have been a journey from resolution to accomplishment. By completing irrigation projects pending for decades, we have managed to create additional irrigation facilities for 23 lakh hectares of land. This achievement has led to a decrease in farming costs and an increase in both production and productivity. UP farmers are now exempted from paying power bills for irrigation.

There is absolute clarity in our promises, claims, policies, intentions, and planning. For us, "Viksit aur Atmanirbhar Uttar Pradesh" is not merely a slogan, but an ongoing mission. The concept of *Ramrajya* serves as the foundation for our policies and ideology. Initiatives like Ujjwala Yojana, Saubhagya Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, SVANidhi, Ayushman, construction of toilets, free ration, etc, are improving the lives of all, regardless of caste, creed and religion. The Direct Benefit Transfer is a great example of how technology can positively impact the lives of people. Whether it is the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, housing instalments, monthly pensions, or funds and scholarships for school children's uniforms and study materials, all benefits are now directly credited to the bank accounts of beneficiaries. This has eliminated leakages in the system and improved the ease of living.

Today, through the Swachh Bharat Mission, the entire state has become free from open defecation. The dream of providing pure tap water to every household in Vindhyas and Bundelkhand is becoming a reality. By end-2024, tap water facilities will be available to 26.5 million families in the state. The significant reduction in encephalitis cases in eastern UP can be attributed to the availability of toilets and clean drinking water.

Today, UP is on the path to transforming from a labour-centric state to an economic powerhouse. The double-engine government remains steadfast in its commitment to fulfilling the dreams of the people of the state.

Yogi Adityanath is the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. The views expressed are personal



Yogi Adityanath

{ ELON MUSK } FOUNDER, SPACEX AND TESLA

US immigration is completely backwards: trivial to enter illegally and nightmarishly difficult to enter legally!

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



Who stands to gain from anti-corruption politics?

The coming general elections will have a distinction: It will be the first elections in which two chief ministers (CMs), a deputy chief minister, a Member of Parliament, and a minister are in prison on the charges of corruption. There are dozens more who have either spent time in jail or are headed for it. Is this an outcome of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's declared anti-corruption agenda, or a plot to weaken the Opposition?

Let's start with Delhi CM and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal. In the early years of the last decade, Kejriwal emerged as a "crusader" for the truth. He had quit the Indian Revenue Service to work for an NGO and as a Right to Information activist. His involvement in the 2012 Anna Hazare-led anti-corruption movement brought him recognition. His comrades and he had then proclaimed they had nothing to do with electoral politics and were merely fighting for truth, fraternity, and justice. So, his admirers were startled when he announced the launch of the AAP. He argued then that cleaning politics required getting your hands dirty. He projected himself as an unconventional leader. He could be spotted sitting with auto-rickshaw drivers or members of the working classes. But after the first election, he took help from the Congress, a party he had earlier accused of corruption, to gain power. The AAP is fighting the general elections, this time, with the Congress.

Over time, some of Kejriwal's colleagues started noticing inconsistencies between his words and deeds. Many either left the party or were dismissed. Kejriwal has an incredible ability to understand voters from the underprivileged and middle classes. The AAP won the hearts of the residents of Delhi through measures such as offering subsidies on water and electricity. His government also did well in education and health. In exchange, the people of Delhi gave him an overwhelming majority in two successive elections. His party also succeeded in forming the government in Punjab and was recognised as a national party, when it cornered 12.92% of the votes polled at the Gujarat assembly elections.

The question now, though, is: Despite these successes, how did Kejriwal's journey land him behind bars? Did it happen due to the high cost of contesting elections, where all parties require funding from known and unknown sources? If so, how is he different

from the others? It's also notable that he was detained for the alleged excise scam. Kejriwal and colleagues developed an excise policy that made Indian-made foreign liquor cheaper in Delhi. The AAP was gaining momentum by relaxing the liquor policy.

Vijay Nair, one of the new faces that emerged in the AAP, had a say in the new alcohol policy. He was the first among Kejriwal's colleagues to be arrested but is out on bail. Later, deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh were sent to Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody. Kejriwal's detention has prompted numerous questions. The AAP argues that their leaders were imprisoned despite no "money trail" being established and that they have yet to receive justice from the courts.

Kejriwal, who is used to forging new paths, did so again this time. In the past, politicians suspected of corruption or other such charges, used to resign if they faced arrest. Jharkhand's Hemant Soren was the most recent example. Kejriwal's colleagues have indicated, though, that he will not step down. The question that arises in this context is: Can a government be run from jail? The Constitution is silent on this matter, but provisions in the jail manual will prove to be an impediment. In political circles, speculation is rife whether Kejriwal and Soren would gain from a sympathy wave. It's also said that only those who oppose the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are being detained. That the BJP is not a party, but a "washing machine". Is this a new trend? Certainly not. Who was in control when the Supreme Court referred to the Central Bureau of Investigation as a "caged parrot"?

Another difficulty arises. After Kejriwal and Sisodia are jailed, there is no popular figure who can keep the AAP unified. Following Soren's imprisonment, his party, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, faces a similar predicament. Hemant's sister-in-law, Sita Soren, has sought refuge in the BJP. If Soren remains in jail for an extended duration, how will his family keep the party in their control?

With the general elections looming, both the BJP and Congress are hoping to see these movement-based parties become embroiled in scandals. They understand that bystanders reap maximum benefits when the market is plundered.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

WORLD

UN chief: Aid to Gaza 'requires Israel removing the obstacles'

Israel's government is under international pressure to ease its bombardment and ground offensive

Agencies
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CAIRO/GAZA STRIP: United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said on Sunday in Cairo that delivering the necessary aid to famine-threatened Gaza strip "requires Israel removing the remaining obstacles and chokepoints to relief".

Guterres repeated his call for an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" to alleviate "the plight of Palestinian children, women and men struggling to survive the nightmare in Gaza", during a joint press conference with Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry.

He had visited on Saturday the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, where nearly six months of war and siege have displaced the vast majority of the territory's 2.4 million people and destroyed its civilian infrastructure. "Looking at Gaza, it almost appears that the four horsemen of war, famine, conquest and death are galloping across it," the UN chief said.

"The whole world recognises that it's past time to silence the guns and ensure an immediate humanitarian ceasefire," he continued.

The Israeli government is under growing international pressure to ease its bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza, which the territory's health ministry says have killed at least 32,226 people, most of them women and children.

The war was sparked on October 7 by Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel, which resulted in about 1,160 deaths,



Relatives and supporters of Israeli hostages held in Gaza since the October 7 attacks by Hamas militants, attend a demonstration in front of the defence ministry in the coastal city of Tel Aviv amid the ongoing conflict, on Saturday.

mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official Israeli figures.

Israel has vowed to pursue its retaliatory military campaign all the way to Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, where 1.5 million Palestinians have sought shelter, penned in by the Egyptian border.

Israeli forces besiege two more Gaza hospitals
Israeli forces besieged two more Gaza hospitals on Sunday, pinning down medical teams under heavy gunfire and forcing the evacuation from one hospital of most patients and displaced people sheltering there, the Pal-

estinian Red Crescent said.

Israeli forces say hospitals in the Gaza Strip where war has been raging for over five months have frequently been used as strongholds of Hamas militants harbouring bases and weapons. Hamas and medical staff deny this.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said one of its staff was killed when Israeli tanks suddenly pushed back into areas around Al-Amal and Nasser hospitals in the southern city of Khan Younis, amid shelling and gunfire.

Separately, the Israeli military said it had captured 480 militants in a continuing week-long raid into the Palestinian enclave's

largest hospital, Al-Shifa, in Gaza City in the north of the densely populated strip.

CIA, Mossad chiefs leave Qatar after truce talks
US intelligence chief Bill Burns and his Israeli counterpart David Barnea left Qatar late on Saturday following talks on a Gaza truce and hostage release deal, a source briefed on the talks told AFP.

The CIA and Mossad chiefs "departed Doha to brief their respective teams back home on the latest round" of talks, the source said on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions.

"The talks focused on details and a ratio for the exchange of hostages and prisoners", the knowledgeable source added, explaining that "technical teams remain in Doha".

Meanwhile, deep differences exist between Hamas and Israel in negotiations for a Gaza truce, an official from the Palestinian militant group with knowledge of the talks told AFP on Saturday.

"There is a deep divergence in positions in the negotiations between Hamas and the occupation (Israel) because the enemy understood the flexibility shown by the movement as weakness," the official said.

{ RUSSIA } ATTACK CLAIMED BY I.S. GROUP

Toll rises to 137 as victims of terror attack mourned

MOSCOW: Russia observed a national day of mourning on Sunday after a massacre in a Moscow concert hall killed 137 people, the deadliest attack in Europe to have been claimed by the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group.

President Vladimir Putin has vowed to punish those behind the "barbaric terrorist attack", saying four gunmen trying to flee to Ukraine had been arrested.

Kyiv has strongly denied any connection to the attack, with President Volodymyr Zelensky accusing Putin of trying to shift the blame.

"The whole country is in mourning with those who lost their loved ones in this inhumane tragedy," public television channel Russia 24 said on Sunday morning.

Putin, in his only public remarks on the attack, made no reference to IS's claims of responsibility.

At least 137 people, including three children, were killed when camouflaged gunmen stormed the Crocus City Hall, in Moscow's northern suburb of Krasnogorsk, and then set fire to the building on Friday evening.

Russia's Investigative Committee also said on Sunday that guns and rounds of ammunition had been found both there and in a car that was used by the suspected gunmen to flee the scene.

The agency posted a video of the four suspects being dragged into its headquarters in Moscow. There was no statement on the other seven suspects arrested in connection with the attack. Officials have not named the shooters, but said they were all foreign nationals.



A suspect in the terror attack is escorted to the investigative committee headquarters in Moscow, on Sunday.

'Machine guns, knives and firebombs'

The IS group posted on Saturday on Telegram that the attack was "carried out by four IS fighters armed with machine guns, a pistol, knives and firebombs" as part of "the raging war" with "countries fighting Islam".

A video lasting about a minute and half, apparently filmed by the gunmen, has been posted on social media accounts typically used by IS, according to the SITE intelligence group.

The video, which appears to have been filmed from the lobby of the concert venue, shows several people with blurred faces and garbled voices, firing assault rifles with inert bodies strewn on the floor and a fire starting in the background.

Russian investigators said that after walking through the theatre shooting spectators, they set fire to the building, trapping many inside who died from smoke inhalation.

{ IRELAND } HIGHER EDUCATION MINISTER

Simon Harris poised to become country's youngest-ever premier

Associated Press
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LONDON: Ireland is poised to get its youngest-ever premier after Simon Harris secured the leadership of the Fine Gael party on Sunday, replacing Leo Varadkar who announced his surprise resignation last week.

The 37-year-old Harris, who is the government's further and higher education minister, was the only candidate to put his name forward to succeed Varadkar, who had been Ireland's previous youngest prime minister, or what Ireland calls its taoiseach.

Harris won a series of endorsements from within the Fine Gael parliamentary party and is expected to be formally elected premier in the Irish parliament in April after lawmakers return from their Easter break.

"I think he's done a really good job in securing the leadership in as comprehensive a way as he has," Fine Gael deputy leader Simon Coveney said.

Harris has said that he would remain fully committed to the



Simon Harris

programme for government agreed upon with coalition partners Fianna Fail and the Green Party. He has stopped short of ruling out a general election this year, but insisted such a poll was not his priority.

Varadkar, 45, has had two spells as taoiseach — between 2017 and 2020, and again since December 2022 as part of a job-share with Michael Martin, head of coalition partner Fianna Fail.

He was the country's youngest-ever leader when first elected at age 38, as well as Ireland's first openly gay prime minister.

Airspace of Poland breached as Russia launches major missile attack on Ukraine

Associated Press
letters@hindustantimes.com

KYIV: Poland demanded an explanation from Russia on Sunday after one of its missiles strayed briefly into Polish airspace during a major missile attack on Ukraine, prompting the Nato member to activate F-16 fighter jets.

It was Russia's third big missile attack on Ukraine in the past four days, and the second to target the capital, Kyiv.

The head of Kyiv's military administration, Serhiy Popko, said Russia used cruise missiles launched from Tu-95MS strategic bombers. An air alert in the capital lasted for more than two hours as rockets entered Kyiv in groups from the north. He said the attacks were launched from the Engels district in the Saratov region of Russia.

According to preliminary data, there were no casualties or damage in the capital, he said.

Armed Forces Operational Command of Poland, a member of Nato, said in a statement that



An explosion of a missile is seen during a Russian strike in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Sunday.

there was a violation of Polish airspace at 4:23am (local time) by one of the cruise missiles launched by Russia against towns in western Ukraine.

The object entered near Oserdow, a village in an agricultural region near the border with Ukraine, and stayed in Polish airspace for 39 seconds, the

statement said. It wasn't immediately clear if Russia intended for the missile to enter Poland's airspace. Cruise missiles are able to change their trajectory to evade air defence systems.

Polish defence minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz later told reporters in a televised news conference that the

Russian missile would have been shot down had there been any indication that it was heading towards a target in Poland.

He said that Polish authorities monitored the attack on Ukraine and was in contact with Ukrainian counterparts. Polish and Nato F-16s were activated as part of the strategic response.

HIT TWO RUSSIAN SHIPS IN STRIKES ON CRIMEA, SAYS UKRAINE'S MILITARY

Associated Press
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KYIV: The Ukrainian military said it hit two large Russian landing ships in attacks on the annexed Crimean peninsula early on Sunday, as well as a communications centre and other infrastructure used by the Russian navy in the Black Sea.

The statement did not say how it hit the targets, but a Moscow-installed official in the region reported a major Ukrainian air attack and said air defences had shot down more than 10 missiles over the Crimean port of Sevastopol.

"The defence forces of Ukraine successfully hit the Azov and Yamal large landing ships, a communications centre and also several infrastructure facilities of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in temporarily occupied Crimea," Ukraine's military said.

Mikhail Razvozhayev, the Russian-installed governor of Sevastopol, said on the Telegram messaging app that a 65-year-old man was killed when three homes were hit by shrapnel.

US: Biden, Trump win Louisiana primary, collect more delegates

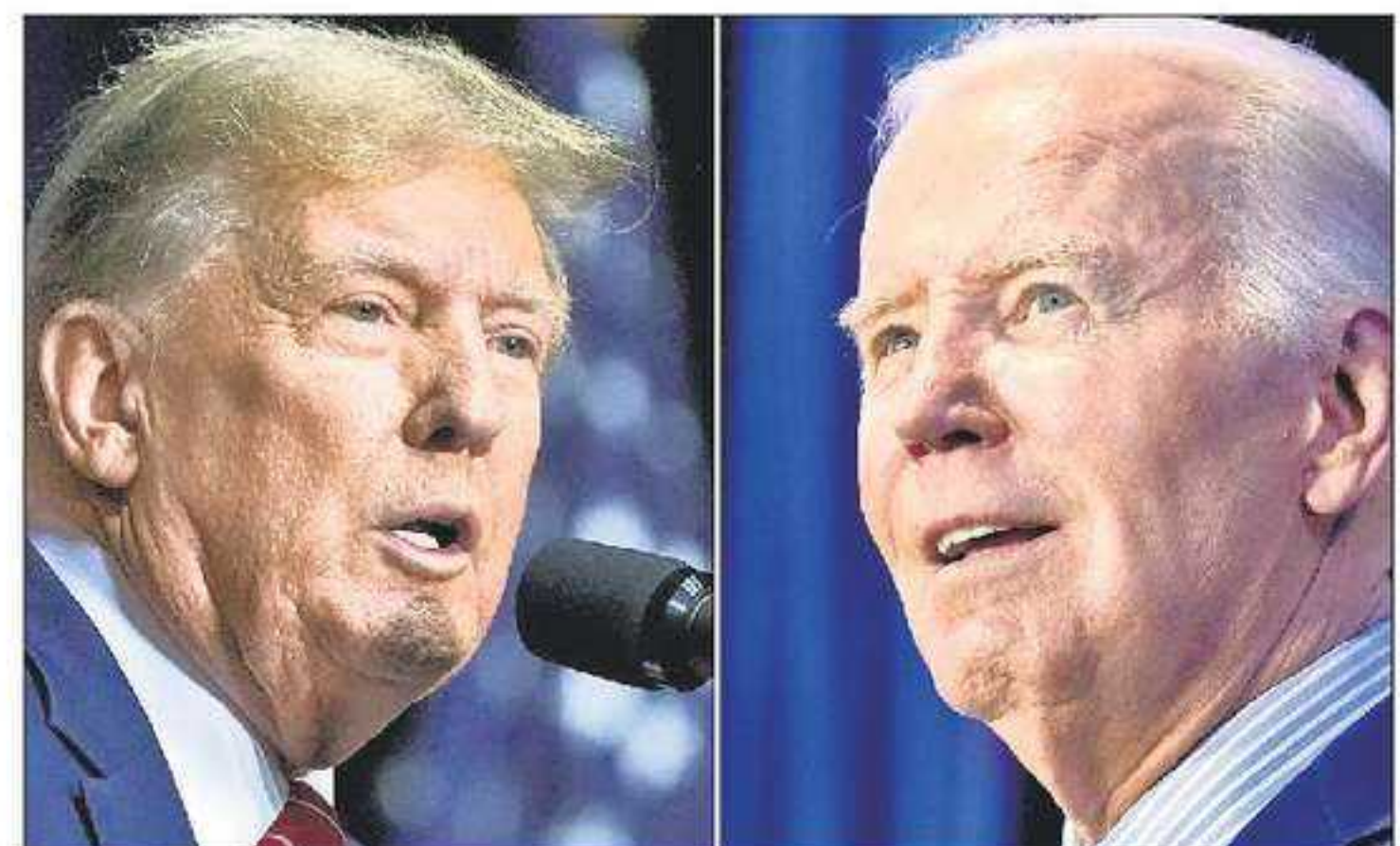
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WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump won Louisiana's primary on Saturday, collecting more delegates after they already clinched their party nominations. Biden also appeared in Missouri's Democratic primary, with results not expected to be reported sometime this week.

None of the races were in suspense. Biden and Trump have already beaten their major competitors. But the primary races are still closely watched by insiders for turnout and signs of protest voters.

For Biden, some liberals are registering their anger with Israel's war against Hamas following the militant group's October 7 attack.

More than 32,000 people, two-thirds of them women and children, have been reported killed by Gaza authorities since



Ex-president Donald Trump (left) and President Joe Biden

Israel launched its offensive. A protest movement launched by Arab-American communities in Michigan has spread to several other states.

Trump is his party's dominant figure and has locked up a third straight Republican nomination.

But he faces dissent from people worried about the immense legal jeopardy he faces

or critical of his White House term, which ended shortly after the January 6 insurrection mounted by his supporters and fuelled by his false theories of election fraud.

Saturday's primary was the Missouri Democratic Party's first party-run primary since new law, while Louisiana's primaries delayed due to Covid-19 pandemic.

{ CLIMATE } NEW ENGLAND AND CALIFORNIA SEE RAIN, HEAVY SNOW AND GUSTY WINDS

Weather advisory as wintry weather blankets parts of US

Associated Press
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BOSTON: It may officially be spring, but wintry weather blanketed the US on Saturday with New England and California seeing a mix of rain, heavy snow and gusty winds.

In the West, a winter storm warning was in effect through Sunday morning for parts of the Sierra Nevada, and a 147km/hr wind gust was recorded at Mammoth Mountain near the California-Nevada line. About 30 centimetres of snow had fallen by Saturday morning north of Lake Tahoe.

A winter weather advisory was issued through Sunday night for parts of northern Arizona, the Grand Canyon and Flagstaff to the New Mexico border with up to 15cm of snow possible at upper elevations and winds gusting to 64km/hr.

In Maine, the National Weather Service warned of a treacherous travel day with an increase in ice forming inland



Snow clings to the trees along a walking path at Como Lake in St Paul, Minnesota, on Friday.

from the coast, on top of snow or sleet that had already fallen. Farther inland forecasters called for anywhere from 30 to 61cm of snow across the mountains in western Maine and areas north and in New Hampshire's White Mountains,

according to Maura Casey, a lead forecaster for the weather service, based out of Gray, Maine.

Across Connecticut, New York City, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, the storm was expected to remain largely a

rain event. In New York City, a flood watch and wind advisory were in place until 2am (local time) on Sunday.

Flooding impacted subway service, shutting down a section of the Staten Island Railway in both directions. Flooding also

closed part of the Cross Island Parkway in Queens, and police warned motorists about standing water on roadways throughout the city.

The storm was blamed for hundreds of delayed and cancelled flights at New York-area airports.

The Mount Washington Avalanche Center issued an avalanche warning along the White Mountain's Presidential Range until 7am (local time) on Sunday. "Very dangerous avalanche conditions exist. Natural and human-triggered avalanches large enough to bury people are very likely," the centre said. "Some avalanches will be large enough to snap trees or destroy a house and may run far into areas previously considered safe."

In South Florida, severe thunderstorms delayed departures at the Miami International Airport during the busy spring break season, suspended a popular electronic music festival and disrupted matches at a high-profile tennis tournament.

Private InvITs can now bid for highway projects

Only private sector InvITs can bid in auction for completed road projects

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NEW DELHI: The Centre will auction completed road projects directly to private sector InvITs to encourage higher participation from global investors in India's infrastructure development programme, two people aware of the matter said.

In a policy shift, completed and revenue-generating highways under the toll-operate-transfer (ToT) mechanism will be directly and exclusively auctioned to private InvITs, the people said. Private-sector highway developers and funds such as sovereign wealth funds will not be allowed to participate in the auctions.

Earlier, such road projects were offered only to state-owned National Highways Authority of India's InvIT, the National Highways Infra Trust (NHIT). In the proposed system, once a road project or highway bundle is won by a private InvIT in a bidding process, it would mobilize global investments by offering subscriptions of its units, one of the two persons



The projects up for monetization next fiscal year are yet to be identified.

quoted above said on condition of anonymity.

An InvIT or infrastructure investment trust is a pooled investment vehicle—similar to a mutual fund—that is used for development of infrastructure projects such as highways.

"InvITs play a critical role in channelizing financial capital into the further development of Indian roads sector. And its basket needs to expand now given that increasing number of projects are coming up for monetization," the first person cited earlier said.

The projects up for monetization next fiscal year are yet to be identified.

"With highways already attracting private-sector developers—some with global fund

participation—for operation and maintenance contracts of ToT projects, provision of such highways to InvITs would be a logical extension and would provide options for better valuation under a competitive process," said an official of the ministry of road transport and highways (MoRTH), also requesting anonymity.

The official added that NHAI has been asked to carve out road bundles that could be auctioned to private InvITs in the next financial year (2024-25) once a new government takes office at the Centre after the general elections.

Queries sent to the road ministry remained unanswered till press time.

According to ICICI Direct, as

of December 2023, there are only 22 InvITs in India even though Sebi launched InvITs in 2014. Some of these are Cube Highways Trust, India Infrastructure Trust, IRB Infrastructure Trust, and IndInfra Trust. Most of these InvITs either directly participate in the auction of ToT projects that are open for all (developers, InvITs, fund houses, etc.) or get projects that are transferred by their parent highway development companies. There is no separate window for InvITs to acquire completed road projects.

"Some existing listed private InvITs are directly participating in the ToT bids by NHAI; having a bid where ToTs are exclusively offered to InvITs will probably reduce competition as developers and funds (such as sovereign wealth funds) would not be able to participate in such bids," said Maadhav Poddar, Partner—Infrastructure Practice, EY India.

"Having said that, given that the cost of capital for InvITs is likely to be lower compared to developers and funds, the money generated on such bids may be comparable to the existing ToT bids. Secondly, such a structure will obviate the need for developers/ funds to first acquire the ToT bundles and then flip into InvITs," Poddar added.

State govts unlikely to meet FY24 SDL target

Rhik Kundu

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NEW DELHI: State development loans (SDL), or bonds issued by state governments to manage their revenue and fund their fiscal deficit, are unlikely to meet the target for FY24, much like last fiscal.

That, however, may not be much of a worry, considering that state fiscal deficits are on the way down, thanks to higher tax collections and long-term interest-free loans from the Centre. So far in FY24, states have raised about ₹9.76 lakh crore of the targeted ₹10.88 lakh crore, according to data from Reserve Bank of India (RBI). In FY23, the ₹7.78 lakh crore raised from SDLs had fallen short of the targeted ₹9.96 lakh crore.

In a case resembling a year-end sale, 18 states have offered to auction SDL stock for a cumulative ₹60,032.49 crore in the current fiscal's final weekly auction on 26 March, according to the



So far in FY24, states have raised ₹9.76 lakh cr. ISTOCKPHOTO

RBI. But even that is unlikely to help achieve the target.

The more-than-expected proceeds from goods and services tax (GST) and release of a large chunk of 50-year interest-free loans from the Centre in the current fiscal have likely given states the financial space without having to raise more from the markets, said a finance ministry official, who spoke under the condition of anonymity. "It's important for states to be fiscally prudent even in the face of looming elections," the official added.

In addition, as of 31 December 2023, (Q3, FY2024), the Centre had released about ₹60,104 crore in interest-free, capital expenditure loans to states, out of the ₹80,000 crore earmarked for this fiscal year, according to finance ministry data.

Meanwhile, the total gross GST collection so far during the current fiscal (April 2023-February 2024) stood at ₹18.40 trillion, 11.7% higher than the mop-up for the same period last fiscal. The budget estimates for FY25 has pegged states' share of tax devolution at ₹12.2 lakh crore, an increase of over 10.4% to the amount devolved in FY24, according to the revised estimates for the fiscal. A Union finance ministry spokesperson didn't respond to queries.

An SDL is a bond that state governments issue and can be bought by mutual funds, pension funds, provident funds, commercial banks, insurance companies and even individual investors through an RBI platform.

IL&FS SEEKS NCLAT NOD TO SELL INSOLVENT COMPANIES

Press Trust of India

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NEW DELHI: IL&FS group has approached the NCLAT to seek permission to sell its stake with a "haircut" and without shareholders' approval in its companies, which are insolvent with unsustainable debts and placed under the Category II list of resolution framework.

The government sought time to file a reply from the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) in the last hearing earlier this week over IL&FS' interim application to sell a stake in group entities falling under Category II, whose highest bid amount was lesser than their debts. In this process, "lenders, as well as shareholders, would anyway have to take a haircut for their respective debt/equities," IL&FS said, adding that it would also ensure the revival of such entity, balancing the interests of stakeholders.

The resolution of such companies is in line with the process followed under the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code, where the requirement of seeking consent from shareholders is dispensed with, IL&FS has submitted.

This will "resolve the category II companies (where IL&FS shareholding is less than 100%) by writing down 100% of their shareholding in exchange for bid proceeds to be utilised to discharge 100% of the debt liability of the said entity".

This will help and result in the extinguishment of debt liabilities of Category II listed companies. However, it is facing objections from other stakeholders of such companies, thwarting a successful resolution. IL&FS submitted in its plea filed before the NCLAT. It has requested the NCLAT for "permitting writing down of the entire share capital of such Category II Companies upon payment of the bid value/proceeds without the requirement of obtaining any further approvals from the shareholders of such Category II Companies, resulting in the final resolution of the said entities".

Packaged food, beverage firms stock up ahead of election rallies

Suneera Tandon

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NEW DELHI: Packaged food and beverage companies are stepping up supplies on the ground ahead of the coming general election, as large rallies and outdoor gatherings raise demand for low-priced biscuits, snacks and beverages.

The Election Commission of India announced dates for the 2024 Lok Sabha election on 16 March. Voting will start on 19 April, and go on till 1 June, across seven phases.

"With upcoming elections and the dates declared, we expect buoyancy in the market and good spending on ground," said Krishnarao Buddha, senior category head, Parle Products. "Consumers also get more disposable incomes, different parties dole

out freebies or even cash. For our category, it does have an impact. We will have to wait and watch. But it will be positive, given the number of rallies. Wherever rallies happen, we see a large congregation of people." Election months typically see a 10-15% jump in demand for the company's brands as out-of-home mobility increases.

"Accordingly, we are gearing up to stock as well," he said. Parle Products sells brands such as Parle-G biscuits and Hide & Seek cookies. Dairy cooperative Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) that markets dairy products under the Amul brand said the general election, coupled with a strong summer, will help in an uptick in demand for low-priced beverages such as shakes, lassi and even ice-creams.

"Any economic activity has a direct impact on business," said Jayen Mehta, managing director, GCMMF. "Large congregations help the sale of soft drinks and other beverages. This is especially true in rural areas and among low-income classes." The company has also bolstered its range of beverages this summer.

Distributors said early summer and polls could drive up demand for chips, low-priced packs of cookies and beverages in the next quarter. "The season has started strong with an early summer, so yes, elections and rallies will benefit companies in the coming quarter. This will have an impact on demand for packaged foods and not much on personal care items," said Dhairayashil Patil, president, All India Consumer Products Distributors' Federation.

Controlling your credit card cycle

Here is how RBI's new rules on credit card billing cycle can work in your favour.

Compiled by Shipra Singh
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What

You can now change billing cycle of credit card at least once

Why

You can set billing date such that...

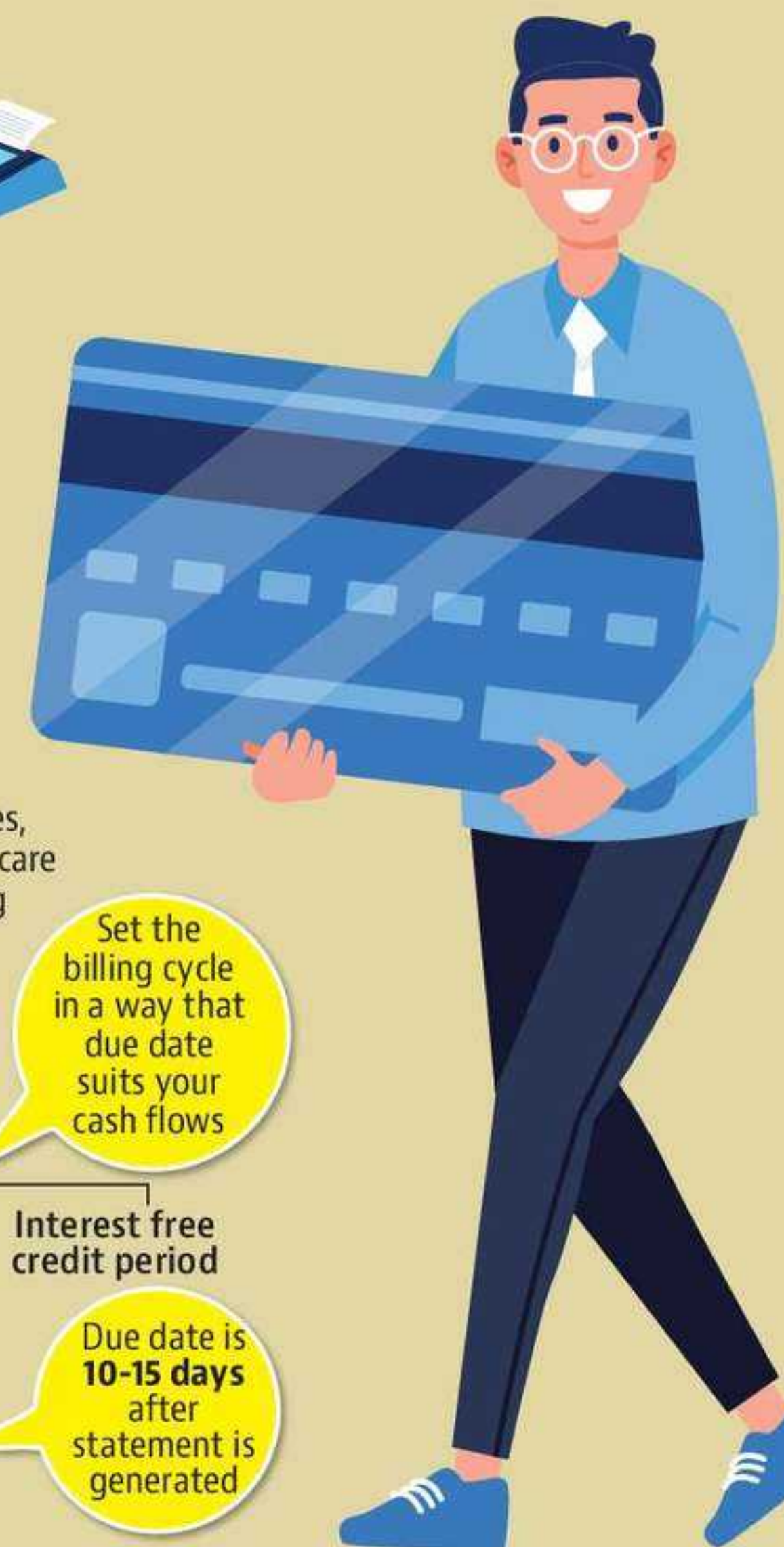
- it suits your cash flows
- you can maximise interest free credit period
- due dates of all cards fall together

How

After clearing all outstanding dues, email your bank or call customer care helpline. Some banks allow billing date change on mobile app.

What is billing cycle

10 Mar	Statement day
11 Mar	Billing starts
10 Apr	Statement day
25 Apr	Bill due date of 11 Mar-10 Apr



Don't fall for minimum amount due (MAD)

By just paying MAD, interest free credit period on outstanding amount is reversed and all subsequent transactions from next billing cycle attract interest

Rahul's* billing cycle for March and April

Transaction	Amount	Interest free period
2 Mar	₹10,000	Interest free period
8 Mar	₹12,000	
20 Mar	₹22,000	Bill generated
1 Apr	₹25,000	Interest free period
5 Apr	Rahul pays MAD of ₹1,100 on due date	
10 Apr	₹10,000	No interest free period
20 Apr	₹57,165	Bill generated
	₹55,900	outstanding from March & April + ₹1,265 interest (incl 18% GST)

**24% annual interest rate charged

Maximise interest free credit period

Rahul* gets his ₹2 lakh salary on 1st of each month. 50% of it gets spent in the first two days.

Assumptions:

Due date is 15 days after bill is generated

5% annual interest rate on a savings account

On ₹1 lakh spent...

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2
Billing cycle	starts on 1st of each month	starts on 15th of each month
Interest free period	about 45 days	about 30 days
Interest earned	₹616	₹411

*It's a hypothetical case



Graphic: Pranay Bhardwaj/Mint

TECH MAHINDRA TO MERGE TWO US SUBSIDIARIES

Press Trust of India

feedback@livemint.com

NEW DELHI: IT services and consultation company Tech Mahindra said it plans to merge its two wholly-owned subsidiaries, BORN Group and Tech Mahindra (Americas), to synergise business operations, optimise operational cost, and reduce compliance risks.

The merger is subject to regulatory approvals in the country of incorporation. According to a regulatory filing, the appointed date of the plan of merger is April 1, 2024.

"A Plan of Merger of BORN Group, Inc., a wholly-owned step-down subsidiary of the Company with its parent company viz. Tech Mahindra (Americas) Inc., a wholly-owned material subsidiary of the Company, has been approved by the respective companies on Friday, 22nd March 2024," the company said.

While BORN specializes in providing Brand strategy, visual design, brand identity exploration, and more for digital products, mobile apps, and physical products in the US, TMA provides computer consulting, programming support services and IT Management & Consulting Services.

{ THE CROSSWORDS }

CRYPTIC CLUES

ACROSS

- As far as one can go in a race (8)
- A fool gives reliable information (4)
- Proficiency displayed in task illustrated (5)
- Possibly respect a sign of authority (7)
- Forbidding places? (7,5)
- Encourages good health (6)
- Like a seabird following the ship (6)
- You may like a nip from this dog (5,7)
- Best alternative under the sun (7)
- Enter into a US business contract with ancient city (5)
- No excuse for pleasure that's certain (4)
- Agree on two points then another colour (3,5)

DOWN

- When bulbs come to life? (4)
- Sudden attack leads to capture (7)
- Every kind of repetition is initial repetition (12)
- Actors show they have star potential (6)
- Dismissed by the party, is overcome (5)
- Regular air service (8)
- Describing pre-arranged loathing (12)
- Cuts out a ballet movement (8)
- Some wear a cheerful smile in affliction (7)
- Brilliant red (7)
- Qualification for figuring the angles? (6)
- Put in last place (5)
- Press club (4)

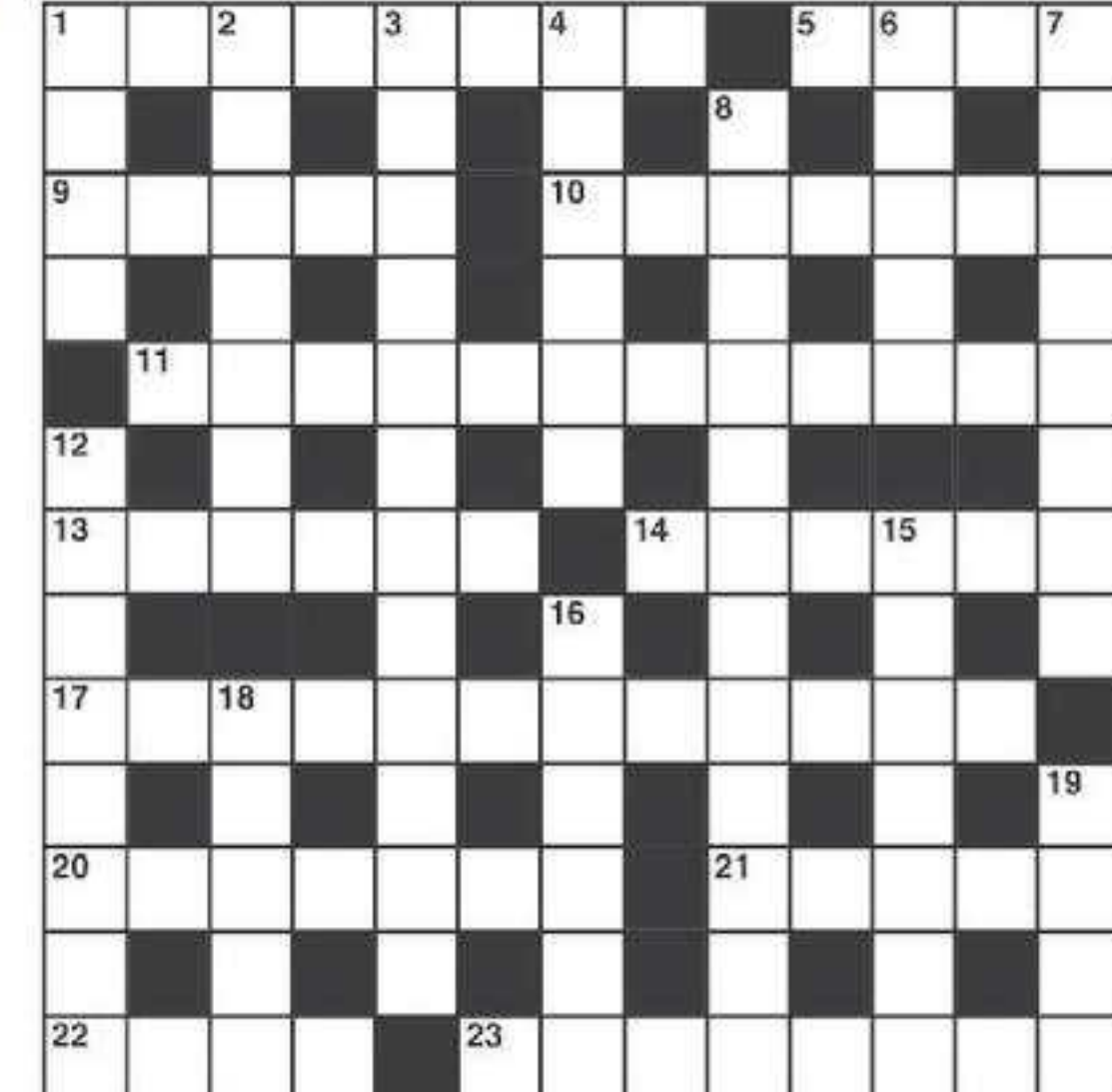
YESTERDAY'S SOLUTIONS (16815)

CRYPTIC
WINDFALLS SP
REPUBLICA
NEERSTICKS
GERTIE RIT
O A I A L R
DESERTED UE
T G E YONDER
UNREAD B F L
R T R GIRAFFE
NOBLE R I T I
S E D E I O D I O R A N T

QUICK

AFFIDAVIT T O
A N T H E R O N
P U B L I C R E A O
L O E H I D D E N
S T R A I N L U E
E D G O P L A C E S
M S T A E I
B R E A T H E R B D
L M R A L L U D E
A N I M U S S I R
N N I F I C T I O N
C R A S S T H S S
E R M A K E S E N S E

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QUICK CLUES

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Graven (8) | 1 Matter for printing (4) |
| 5 Catch sight of (4) | 2 Cowboy movie (7) |
| 9 Put forward (5) | 3 Court disaster (4,3,1,4) |
| 10 Significance (7) | 4 Mourning (6) |
| 11 One's personal advantage (4-8) | 6 Composite (5) |
| 13 To disregard (6) | 7 Simultaneously (8) |
| 14 Ask as a price (6) | 8 Assume control (4,3,5) |
| 17 Deceive (4,3,1,4) | 12 Aversion (8) |
| 20 Brilliant red (7) | 15 Excessive bureaucracy (3,4) |
| 21 As a total (2,3) | 16 Shell-hole (6) |
| 22 Comfortable (4) | 18 English Romantic poet (5) |
| 23 Potential customer (8) | 19 Dull (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.

A 140-yr-old policy revives India Post insurance

Dhirendra Kumar

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NEW DELHI: India's purportedly dormant postal department has been alive and kicking successfully in an unexpected quarter—life insurance.

The Postal Life Insurance scheme, a policy first introduced in 1884, has grown at 14.5% year-on-year so far this financial year—in terms of premium income between April and February. It's grown in double digits for the first time since FY21, far outpacing the rest of the industry.

Apart from a sense of security for funds invested in a state-run insurance plan, a key factor that has allowed the postal department to compete in India's highly competitive and



The Postal Life Insurance scheme, a policy first introduced in 1884, has grown at 14.5% y-o-y so far this financial year.

yet under-penetrated market has been its digital push.

"The reformative steps taken by India Post have helped in pushing the growth story of postal life insurance. Now, the beneficiaries have the option to

pay their premiums online, which was not happening a few years ago. Besides, claim settlement has also now become seamless," a senior postal department official said, asking not to be identified.

Overall, the postal department's life insurance business has edged out its private-sector competitors. Factoring in the much younger Rural Postal Life Insurance scheme as well, the department's insurance business has grown at nearly 16% until February this financial year, show postal department data accessed by Mint.

India's private life insurance sector has grown by 14% till February in FY24, while industry behemoth Life Insurance Corporation's premium base contracted by 8% during the period, according to CareEdge Ratings.

Postal secretary Vineet Pandey and Postal Life Insurance member Jitendra Gupta did not reply to Mint's queries till press time.

The overall industry's growth this financial year until February is 0.2%. The report attributed the slow pace to reduced single premiums, primarily from LIC, and changes in the tax regime.

The Postal Life Insurance scheme is a money-back policy with a maximum sum assured of ₹50 lakh, best suited for those who need periodical returns. It was established 140 years ago for the welfare of postal employees, and extended to Telegraph department employees in 1888. In November 2022, the PLI scheme was made available to all individuals.

The department introduced the Rural Postal Life Insurance scheme in March 1995, with a maximum sum assured of ₹10 lakh.

{ WEATHER }

TEMPERATURE • HIGH • LOW

MONDAY Partly cloudy sky 34°C 16°C	TUESDAY Partly cloudy sky 34°C 16°C	WEDNESDAY Generally cloudy sky 35°C 17°C
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ALMANAC

Today is 25th March 2024
 • 14 Ramadan, 1445
 • 30 Phalguna, Shukla
 • Palkha, Purnima
 • Samat 2088
 • Sunset: Monday at 06:35 pm.
 • Sunrise: Tuesday at 06:17 am.
 • Moonrise: Monday at 06:44 pm.
 • Moonset: Tuesday at 06:46 am.

TEMPERATURE IN FOUR METROS

Delhi	34°C 16°C
Mumbai	36°C 22°C
Kolkata	32°C 24°C
Chennai	35°C 25°C

SPORT



Sanju Samson on way to an unbeaten 82 off 52 balls against LSG in Jaipur on Sunday. BCCI

Sanju leads Royals to win over Super Giants

Vivek Krishnan
vivek.krishnan@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: In a game where Rajasthan Royals and Lucknow Super Giants had three wicket-keeping options each, it was only apt that the biggest contributions came from them. Electing to bat, skipper Sanju Samson hit an unbeaten 52-ball 82 to take RR to 193/4. In response, Nicholas Pooran, who didn't don the keeping gloves with LSG captain KL Rahul performing that role, also produced fireworks with an unbeaten 64 off 41 balls.

But if Samson took the honours of contributing to a 20-run win in their opening IPL game in Jaipur on Sunday, it was thanks to a performance no less important by medium-pace Sandeep Sharma. When LSG needed 49 runs off the final four overs, they would have backed themselves because Pooran and Rahul had added 85 runs in 51 balls for the fifth wicket till then.

But Sharma, with the nerve to bowl at the death, produced a precious five-run 17th over that included Rahul's wicket. R Ashwin backed up Sharma by giving away only four runs in the 18th over while also claiming Marcus Stoinis' scalp. It left LSG needing 38 runs in the last two overs, too much for even a batter with Pooran's power to track down.

That LSG came even this close was unexpected when they were pegged back with three wickets in 3.1 overs for 11 runs. Trent Boult was offered a gift in his opening over when a half-volley on leg stump was flicked by

Quinton de Kock to Nandre Burger at long leg. In his second over, Boult bowled Devdutt Padikkal (0-3b) with a short ball that kept low and slid underneath the batter's attempted pull. Ayush Badoni chipped Burger to Jos Buttler at mid-off.

Despite the wretched start to Lucknow's chase, Deepak Hooda counterattacked with a 13-ball 26. With Rahul seemingly predisposed to slow starts, Hooda's stay, though brief, was crucial to keeping the asking rate within reach. When Hooda was dismissed by Yuzvendra Chahal in the eighth over, Rahul had consumed 19 balls for 20 runs. Rahul subsequently caught up in the 11th over with a sequence that read 6, 4 and 4 against Burger. Next over, a paddle sweep off Ashwin earned Rahul another four.

That was when Samson brought Boult back for his final over in search of a wicket. Pooran tore into the left-armed, cutting, driving and slogging for two sixes and a four in a 20-run over. Pooran's big-hitting exploits, however, were trumped by Samson earlier in the evening.

The 29-year-old got the hosts going alongside Yashasvi Jaiswal (24-12b) with a 36-run stand that took them to 49/2 in five overs. The fifth over, by Mohsin Khan, was punished for 17 runs — Samson teed off with a four and six before Jaiswal moved across his stumps and paddled a full ball over fine leg for his first six. A productive over for RR ended though with Jaiswal miscuing a pull to Krunal Pandya at mid-on.

Samson and Riyan Parag added only 14 runs in the next three overs, but that was only a temporary lull in an otherwise boundary-laden display. Seamer Yash Thakur's introduction in the ninth over was the prompt for the duo to shift gears. The 25-year-old from Vidarbha played into the batters' hands by repeatedly pitching it short in a 21-run over that included three sixes.

Two more sixes quickly followed in the 11th over by leggie Ravi Bishnoi, whose tendency to slide the ball into the right-hander allowed Parag to pick his slot wide of long-on. Two balls later, Samson went straighter but got as much distance for the fourth six of his innings.

While Samson brought up his fifty off 33 balls, Parag slowed down a trifle before picking up pace again with a four and six in the 15th over — the latter over long-off against Naveen-ul-Haq was akin to a tennis forehand crosscourt. But the Afghanistan pacer had his revenge when Parag sliced a pull to Hooda at deep square leg, ending a 93-run partnership for the third wicket.

Samson staying through to the end allowed RR to score 50 runs off the final five overs and get to what proved a match-winning total. **Brief scores:** Rajasthan Royals 193/4 (S Samson 82*, R Parag 43). Lucknow Super Giants 173/6 (N Pooran 64*, KL Rahul 58, T Boult 2/35). **RR won by 20 runs.**

Gujarat bowlers hold nerve at the death for win over MI

Rohit and Brevis add 77 but Mumbai fail to get 43 in last 5 overs to falter in run chase of 169 in Ahmedabad

Somshuvra Laha
somshuvra.laha@htlive.com

KOLKATA: Umesh Yadav was carted for a six and four by Hardik Pandya before he rallied to defend nine runs from four balls by taking two consecutive wickets and inspire Gujarat Titans to a stupendous six-run win against Mumbai Indians in another last-over IPL humdinger at Ahmedabad on Sunday. Titans' 168 looked well short of the par score as Mumbai Indians raced to 107/2 after 12 overs, needing 62 from 48 balls. But they lost seven wickets from that point as Titans held their nerve in a tight victory.

Pandya getting roundly booed at the ground where he had won Titans' maiden title in 2022, Shubman Gill making a calm, collected debut as one of the youngest ever IPL captains, Jasprit Bumrah coming back to bowl after missing the entire 2023 season, Ishan Kishan resurfacing after leaving South Africa mid-tour in January — this IPL match had a dizzying number of plots and subplots. Nothing, however, could have been more intriguing than how Rohit Sharma — undoubtedly in the last leg of his illustrious IPL career — took to not leading Mumbai Indians in the backdrop of an upcoming T20 World Cup where he remains undisputed captain of India.

An inside edge off the first ball he faced couldn't have boosted the confidence. Neither would have some of the false shots induced by the slower bowlers of Gujarat Titans. But Rohit hung back and waited for the right balls in an approach diametrically opposite to what he has followed recently in international cricket. It served the purpose though. Rohit couldn't anchor the chase all the way but a 29-ball 43 was just the kind of knock needed to shake off an inexplicable two-season rust that may have triggered this tectonic captaincy change.

And it featured all the vintage Rohit shots too. When Yadav bowled short, he stepped out and pulled him over midwicket for a sumptuous four. When Yadav bowled full and wide, Rohit leaned into a glorious drive. Getting the ball full and in his slot,



Gujarat Titans skipper Shubman Gill (L) celebrates with Umesh Yadav and Vijay Shankar after a six-run win over MI on Sunday. BCCI

Team	Pld	Won	Lost	Net RR	Pts
1 Rajasthan Royals	1	1	0	1.000	2
2 Chennai Super Kings	1	1	0	0.779	2
3 Punjab Kings	1	1	0	0.455	2
4 Gujarat Titans	1	1	0	0.300	2
5 Kolkata Knight Riders	1	1	0	0.200	2
6 Sunrisers Hyderabad	1	0	1	-0.200	0
7 Mumbai Indians	1	0	1	-0.300	0
8 Delhi Capitals	1	0	1	-0.455	0
9 Royal Challengers	1	0	1	-0.779	0
10 Lucknow Super Giants	1	0	1	-1.000	0

Rohit nonchalantly flicked Yadav over midwicket for six. The sweep off Rashid Khan behind square leg was slightly uppish but it fetched a boundary nevertheless, as did a near-perfect reverse sweep off Sai Kishore.

Rohit looked to be in his elements but equally impressive was the 20-year-old Dewald Brevis, mixing caution with aggression in a 38-ball 46 before Mohit Sharma held on to his return catch and

tilted the scales. Together, Rohit and Brevis had added 77 in 55 balls but their dismissals triggered a slowdown that neither Tilak Varma — who had inexplicably turned down easy singles off Rashid Khan — nor Tim David could arrest.

So deep is Mumbai Indians' batting that they could afford Pandya coming in at No.7 with 27 required from the last two overs. Varma clobbered Spencer John-

son for a massive six over long-on but was dismissed the next ball itself. And when Johnson snared Gerald Coetzee, Pandya was tasked with scoring 19 from the last over. First ball was slightly short from Yadav and Pandya climbed into it for a six over extra cover. It seemed all over for Titans when Pandya slapped the next ball through covers for four but he then misjudged another pull and holed out to Rahul Tewatia at long-on. Piyush Chawla is used to wielding the long handle but this time he couldn't clear Khan at deep midwicket. Two singles off the next two balls and Titans had pulled off an upset, purely because 168 was probably 20 short of the par score.

And Bumrah, quite predictably, was the chief reason behind it with 4-0-14-3 as he beguiled Titans batters with an array of slowers, yorkers and short balls to keep the lid on the scoring despite the hosts reaching 100 in the 12th

over. Bumrah not opening the bowling with Pandya came as a surprise but he got the ball in the fourth over and did his job by unleashing a yorker that broke through the defence of Wriddhiman Saha who was threatening to run away with the initial momentum. Foxing the doughty David Miller with a slower ball, further dousing Titans' hopes by inducing Sai Sudharshan into flicking him to a diving Varma at backward square-leg. Bumrah landed the punches just when Mumbai needed them before closing his three-part, 14-dot-balls act with a seven-run penultimate over. Pandya was expensive but more effective in his batting, which unfortunately for Mumbai Indians didn't quite yield the desired result on his MI captaincy debut.

Brief scores: GT 168/6 (S Sudharshan 45, J Bumrah 3/14). MI 162/9 (D Brevis 46, R Sharma 43; S Johnson 2/25). **GT won by 6 runs.**

TODAY'S MATCH

RCB vs PBKS

WHERE: Bengaluru | WHEN: 7:30 pm

FAF DU PLESSIS
CAPTAIN, RCB

Till he was at the crease against CSK in the season opener, RCB were going strong. His dismissal for a 23-ball 35 saw a flurry of dismissals, leaving Dinesh Karthik and Anuj Rawat with too much to do at the end. The South African will need more support from the top order as RCB seek to win at home vs Punjab

SHIKHAR DHAWAN
CAPTAIN, PBKS

Dhawan got off to a rapid start in the victory over Delhi Capitals on Saturday. Though he couldn't carry on, he would want to show more attacking intent this season. If that's the case, it's a good idea as there's depth in the batting unit. In his quest to bat deep in the previous seasons, Dhawan has tended to drop anchor

HEAD-TO-HEAD

RCB WON 14

31

PBKS WON 17

MATCHES PLAYED

GLENN MAXWELL (RCB)

The Aussie 360-degree batter fell first ball in the loss to CSK. One criticism of him in past seasons has been that it's either feast or famine. RCB will hope he gets going more often. Like in the ODI World Cup vs Afghanistan, there's no stopping him at his best

ARSHDEEP SINGH (PBKS)

The left-arm pacer is one of India's frontline T20 bowlers, and he justified that status with 4-0-28-2 against DC. He can strike with the new ball as he moves the white Kookaburra either way. And when he returns at the death, he can nailing his yorkers

KEY PLAYERS

Lost to Chennai Super Kings by 6 wickets | **PREVIOUS MATCH** | Beat Delhi Capitals by 4 wickets

IPL SNIPPETS

ANUJ RAWAT EYES LONG-TERM ROLE AS RCB'S WICKETKEEPER-BATTER

Anuj Rawat hoped to cement his position as RCB's long-term keeper-batter after veteran Dinesh Karthik announced that this will be his last IPL season. Rawat gave a glimpse of his versatility with a 25-ball 48 that helped RCB register a competitive 173/6 after initial struggles against the Chennai Super Kings. It was quite fitting that the 24-year-old left-hander played that innings in the company of Karthik, who did the duty of wicketkeeper for RCB over the last couple of seasons. Rawat said the RCB management has clearly communicated to him about his new role. "The communication has been very clear to me as in batting down the order," Rawat said ahead of RCB's match against Punjab Kings. "Last season also, I kept wickets in a few games and it gave me more confidence" said the Delhi cricketer.

KKR'S RANA FINED 60% OF MATCH FEE

Kolkata Knight Riders pacer Harshit Rana has been fined 60 percent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct. According to an IPL statement, Rana breached the rules under Article 2.5. "He was fined 10 percent and 50 percent of his match fees for the two respective offences," the statement said. While the IPL statement did not go into details about the incident, which attracted the code of conduct violation, it could be the 22-year-old's celebration following Mayank Agarwal's wicket. After dismissing Agarwal in the sixth over, Rana walked in front of the SRH opener and blew him a flying kiss. "Rana committed two Level 1 offences," said the IPL statement.

Harshit Rana gives a send off to SRH batter Mayank Agarwal. PTI

Narine's stifling lines make it hard for batters even during Powerplay

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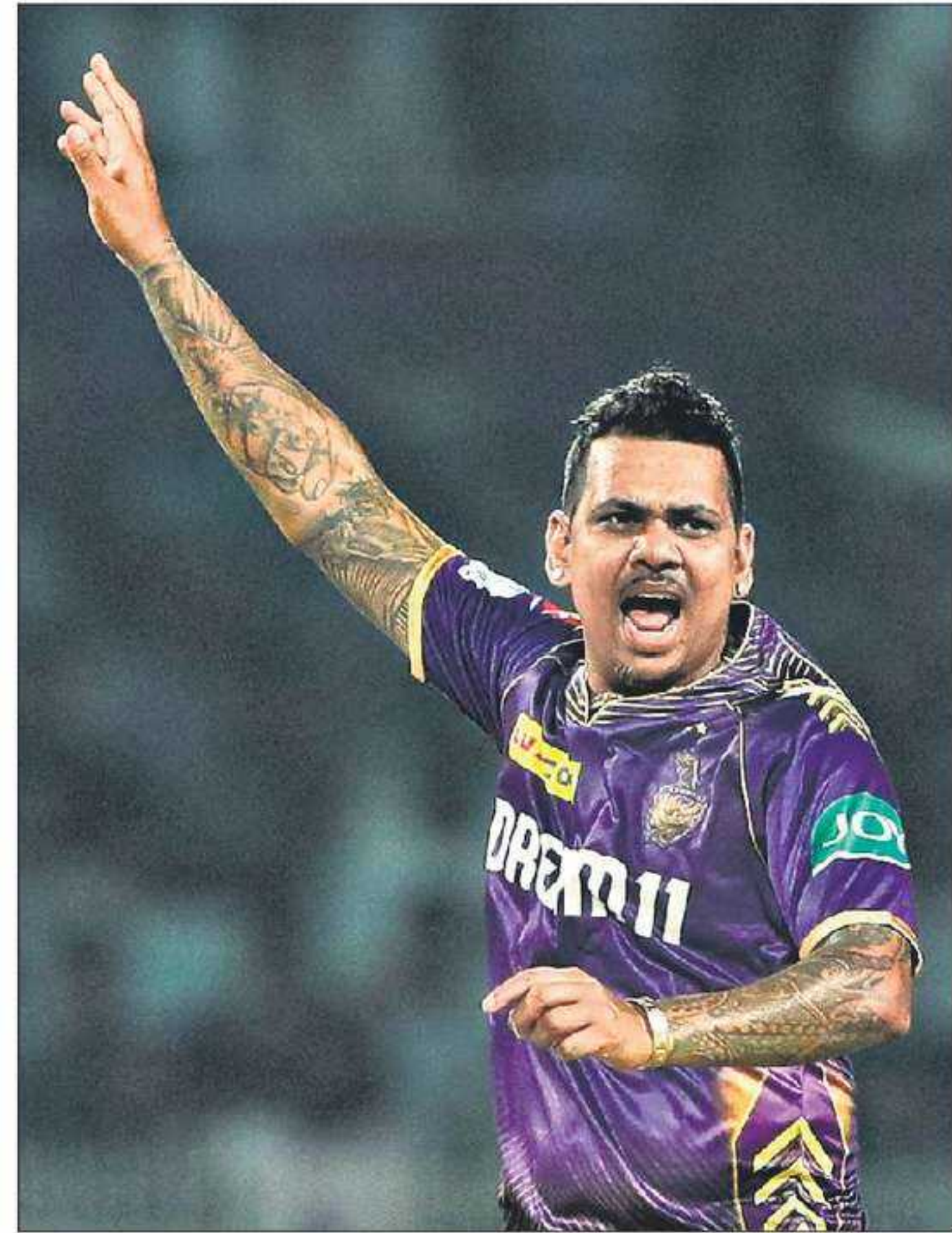
KOLKATA: It's still early days but the first match returns will fall well short of immediately justifying the ₹24.75 crore Kolkata Knight Riders forked out for Mitchell Starc, who ended up conceding 53 runs — including 26 runs in the penultimate over — in Saturday's humdinger against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

KKR's moneyball, however, doesn't start and end with Starc. It has a place for underrated power-hitters like the ₹20 lakh pick Ramandeep Singh, who set up KKR's innings with a 17-ball 35. Or the ₹1.5 crore pick Phil Salt, who despite playing his first IPL match, displayed remarkable tenacity to help KKR navigate the choppy middle overs with a responsible fifty.

Prominently placed is Andre Russell — picked for next to nothing (₹60 lakh) in 2014 and retained through the years — who choreographed the final flourish with a 25-ball 64. More sincere but equally complex perhaps is the relationship KKR has forged with Sunil Narine that nudges the franchise into persisting with him.

There have been more ups than downs, but with fitness slowly becoming an overarching concern — Narine giving up on even trying to return to his crease on Saturday being a case in point — KKR could be forced to think otherwise someday. But as long as Narine keeps bowling like he did on Saturday, trust KKR to keep deferring that thought.

Averaging 4.75 without conceding a boundary in a slugfest that produced 412 runs is no



Sunil Narine appeals for the wicket of Abdul Samad of SRH. BCCI

mean feat. But this is not new. Interesting is how Narine keeps doing this in his 13th season on the trot when data analysis and innovative batting threatens to sort out even the most mysterious bowler. Which is not the case with Narine as once presumed because he basically is an off-break bowler.

It's his stifling lines though that tend to keep batters on their toes even when the fielding restrictions are on. Which is also why KKR have made Narine open the bowling. He has also

bowled in the death but has been most successful in the middle overs where his economy is 5.87.

It's also a typical Gautam Gambhir move, using Narine in the middle overs to arrest the momentum of the innings, not only by drying up the runs but facilitating dismissals. When Narine came on in the seventh over, Sunrisers Hyderabad were ahead of the asking rate of 10.28. A two-run over from Narine meant Sunrisers were immediately seeking a boundary to release the built-up pressure.

That spell of 4-0-19-1 again highlights how Narine continues to be basic but effective in an age where the bowler needs to innovate to stay ahead of the batter. Accuracy, pace and two-three spin variations are the ingredients he started out with in 2012 and pretty much stuck to till now. Factor in the progression of a career in which the economy of the first three seasons never went beyond 6.35 and Narine still retains pretty much the same intensity despite a bowling action correction.

This makes him the all-season bowler KKR would be happy to retain again and again.

First ball the following over Russell was hacked wide of deep third for a four but next ball he got Abhishek Sharma. Another quiet over and Sunish Sharma almost got a breakthrough off his own bowling.

Had KKR reviewed a leg-before appeal, Narine wouldn't have had to wait till his last over to dismiss Rahul Tripathi. But by keeping at it, Narine ensured Aiden Markram caved in to Varun Chakaravathy in the next over.

Difficult to pick
There wasn't much turn as this wasn't a typical summer pitch at Eden, with low and slow bounce, but Narine kept varying his speed and length. "I think it's simply that the batters find him difficult to pick," Sunrisers coach Daniel Vettori said later at the press conference. "In the night, with the ball getting older and darker, you can't premeditate, predict what he is going to bowl because of those variations. He has good pace, is incredibly accurate and asks questions all the time."

Sainz wins as Verstappen pulls out with engine fire

Spaniard prevails at Australian GP to end Red Bull driver's winning streak; Leclerc ensures 1-2 finish for Ferrari

Associated Press

sportsdesk@hindustantimes.com

MELBOURNE: Ferrari's Carlos Sainz ended Red Bull's Formula 1 winning streak when the Spaniard took advantage of Max Verstappen's early retirement to win the Australian Grand Prix just two weeks after missing the previous race in Saudi Arabia due to an emergency appendectomy.

Sainz, who started on the front row alongside Verstappen, kept his place into turn one, but passed the Dutchman on lap two at turn nine for the lead and took control once his rival retired two laps later with a fiery mechanical failure.

Verstappen had won the first two F1 races of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and was on a nine-race winning streak.

Sainz finished ahead of teammate Charles Leclerc for Ferrari's first 1-2 result since the 2022 Bahrain Grand Prix, with McLaren's Lando Norris finishing in third for his first podium at Albert Park.

His teammate, Australian Oscar Piastri, was fourth.

Sainz, who will be replaced by Lewis Hamilton at Ferrari from 2025, was thrilled to get his third career win against the odds, his first since last year's Singapore Grand Prix.

"I felt really good out there," he said. "Of course, (I felt) a bit stiff, especially physically. It wasn't the easiest, but I was



Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. celebrates after winning the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on Sunday.

REUTERS

lucky that I was more or less on my own so I could just manage my pace, manage the tires, manage everything.

"Life sometimes is crazy, you know. What happened at the beginning of the year, then the podium in Bahrain, then appendix, the comeback, the win, it's a roller coaster. But I loved it." Leclerc, on the podium for the second straight race, was encouraged by Ferrari's pace, and its ability to take the fight to rival Red Bull during its period of dominance.

"We knew that pole position and the race win was possible because we had very good tire

degradation, very good pace," he said. "That is a very encouraging sign. However, if you look at the first three races, two out of the first three races, they (Red Bull) had the upper hand in the race, so we still have a lot of work to do." Norris said it wasn't a surprise that he was able to earn his first podium since Brazil last year.

"I think when you take a Red Bull out of it, I would say no," he said. "I think our pace has been good all weekend. We put things together very nicely yesterday. We showed good long run, high fuel pace on Friday, so I wouldn't have said we had no chance."

The race finished under the virtual safety car, ensuring there was no racing for most of the final lap, after Mercedes' driver George Russell crashed on turn seven. Red Bull's Sergio Pérez closed out the top five, and made just one place from where he started in sixth, after he was handed a three-place grid penalty for impeding Nico Hulkenberg in qualifying.

Two-time world champion Fernando Alonso was sixth for the second straight race, having leap-frogged Aston Martin teammate Lance Stroll. But the Spaniard will face the FIA stewards, along with Russell, for their bat-

tle for sixth on the final lap.

Russell's teammate Lewis Hamilton also didn't finish following a lap 17 engine failure for Mercedes' first double non-points score since the 2021 Azerbaijan Grand Prix, ending its strong run of reliability.

Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda earned RB, the team formerly known as AlphaTauri, its first four points for the season after finishing in eighth. American team Haas earned its first double points finish since the 2022 Austrian Grand Prix, with Hulkenberg and teammate Kevin Magnussen closing out the top 10 in ninth and 10th respectively.

Shubhankar slips to end T-7 in Singapore Classic

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NEW DELHI: Shubhankar Sharma had a fleeting stay at joint lead chasing a third win on the European tour (DP World Tour) before struggling on the final nine put paid to that hope as he finished tied 7th in the Singapore Classic at the Laguna National Golf Resort Club on Sunday.

The 27-year-old, fourth overnight at 11-under over three rounds and two shots off the lead, briefly climbed to the top after birdies on the par-5 third, par-3 seventh and par-4 eighth holes. But bogey on the ninth and 12th saw him lose steam. Despite another birdie on the par-5 13th, his fourth of the round, he went one-over from there to finish 12-under for the tournament.

His 1-under final round (68, 69, 68, 71 = 276) left him in a four-way tie for seventh, and a prizemoney of 56,206 euros. More importantly, it extends Sharma's wait for a win on the tour since his twin success in late 2017 and early 2018. However, his decent form should boost his hopes at this week's Indian Open, at his familiar DLF Golf and Country Club in Gurugram. His best finish in the Indian Open is T7.

The tournament had an exciting finish. Shane Lowry (T29) and Paul Casey (6th) briefly promised to steal the show, but could not maintain the momentum, leaving Sweden's Jesper Svendsen to snatch his first win in the first event on the DP World Tour's Asian swing.

The 28-year-old (68, 73, 67, 63 = 271) shot a sensational 9-under 63 to equal the course record in the final round — his card was strewn with eight birdies and



Shubhankar Sharma tees off on the fourth hole on the final day of the Porsche Singapore Classic on Sunday.

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two eagles besides three bogeys — to finish 17-under for the tournament, only to be caught by Thailand's seasoned Kiradech Aphibarnrat (64, 72, 71, 64 = 271), who carded 64 with a brilliant final nine. He sank three birdies in a row from the 14th hole before an eagle on the par-5 18th pushed the pair into a playoff.

On the playoff hole (18th), Svendsen and Aphibarnrat birdied the first time and then had pars. The Thai bogeyed the third time, leaving the Swede to two-putt for par and win.

Gangjee second in Kolkata Challenge
Rahul Gangjee ended runner-up in the Kolkata Challenge on Sun-

day, having come within two shots of his maiden European Challenge Tour title.

Gangjee shot 67-69 to get a good shot at the title and totalled 14-under as Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen held his nerve on the final day to secure his maiden Challenge Tour title at the Royal Calcutta Golf Club. The Dane, who led by four shots going into the final round, held off the challenge from Gangjee to triumph by two strokes after signing for a one under par final round of 71 to go with rounds of 68-65-68 and a 16 under par total.

The 24-year-old finished two shots clear of Gangjee and Englishman David Horsey who shared second on 14 under par.



Kamindu Mendis.

SRI LANKA ON VERGE OF WIN AGAINST B'DESH AFTER DE SILVA, MENDIS TONS

Agence France-Presse

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SYLHET: Dhananjaya de Silva and Kamindu Mendis slammed their second century of the match as Sri Lanka set up a 511-run target for Bangladesh before pushing the hosts to the corner in the first Test on Sunday.

The visitors were all out for 418 in their second innings at Sylhet, with Mendis making 164 to go with his 102 in the first innings and De Silva, who also scored 102 runs in the first innings, adding 108.

Sri Lankan pacers began the victory push immediately, reducing Bangladesh to 47/5 at stumps, with 464 more needed for an unlikely win.

Vishwa Fernando claimed 3/13, while Kasun Rajitha and Lahiru Kumara claimed a wicket each as Mahmudul Hasan (0), Najmul Hossain Shanto (6), Zakir Hasan (19), Shahadat Hossain (0) and Liton Das (0) all departed.

The sorry display from Bangladesh batsmen came after De Silva and Mendis dominated the bowlers for the better part of the day, becoming only the third pair in Test history to score a century in both innings.

The Chappell brothers, Greg and Ian, of Australia achieved the feat against New Zealand in March 1974, before Misbah-ul-Haq and Azhar Ali emulated it against Australia in Abu Dhabi in 2014. The pair, who shared 202 runs in Sri Lanka's first-innings total of 280 runs, put on 173 runs together this time.

Resuming on 119/5, the visitors lost nightwatchman Fernando early to Khaled Ahmed, before De Silva and Mendis took control.

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 280 and 418 (K Mendis 164, D de Silva 108). Bangladesh 188 and 47/5 at stumps on Day 3.

Brazil's Endrick, 17, sets record with a goal against England at Wembley

Agencies

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LONDON: Brazil's new boss Dorival Junior started his bid to revive the five-time world champions with a 1-0 win against England as teenage sensation Endrick bagged his first international goal in Saturday's friendly at Wembley.

Coming off their worst period for over 60 years, Brazil hope Dorival Junior can trigger a revival in time to challenge for the 2026 World Cup.

This was a first significant step in the right direction for the Selecao, who marked their manager's debut with victory against an England side expected to make a strong challenge to win Euro 2024.

On a cathartic evening for Brazil after their wretched 2023, it was fitting the highly-rated Endrick bagged Brazil's late winner.

The Palmeiras forward, due to join Real Madrid in July, has been tipped to succeed Neymar as Brazil's latest superstar and his match-winning cameo appearance off the bench was a suitable coming of age moment in his third appearance.

Endrick stole the spotlight in the 80th minute when the teenager tapped in, defying England's appeals for offside after Vinicius Junior's shot was saved by Jordan Pickford.

Aged 17 years and 246 days, Endrick is the youngest senior international goal-scorer at Wembley.

He is also the youngest player to score for Brazil since Ronaldo in 1994.

"Time will tell how far he can go. We have to be calm and patient with him," said Dorival Junior.

Endrick's emergence is a breath of fresh air for Brazil after an unusually stale period for the Selecao.

Snubbed by Real Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti and frustrated by the failings of two caretaker managers, Dorival Junior has been tasked with ensuring Brazil qualify for the World Cup.

The 61-year-old left Sao Paulo to take charge of Brazil in January, moving into world football's most scrutinized job at a time when his country had just finished a calendar year with more defeats (five) than wins (three) for the first time since 1963.

Beaten in three consecutive World Cup qualifiers for the first time ever, Brazil face a nervous fight to qualify for the



Christoph Baumgartner (L) of Austria in action during a friendly against Slovakia in Bratislava.

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Year	Player	Team	Opponent	Time (seconds)
2024	CHRISTOPH BAUMGARTNER	Austria	vs Slovakia	6
2024	FLORIAN WIRTZ	Germany	vs France	7
2013	LUKAS PODOLSKI	Germany	vs Ecuador	7
2016	CHRISTIAN BENTEKE	Belgium	vs Gibraltar	8.1
1993	DAVIDE GUALTIERI	England	vs San Marino	8.3

Fastest goals in World Cups (In seconds)

Year	Player	Team	Opponent	Time (seconds)
2002	HAKAN SUKUR	Turkey	vs South Korea	11
1962	VACLAV MASEK	Czech Republic	vs Yugoslavia	16
1934	ERNST LEHNER	W Germany	vs Austria	24
1982	BRYAN ROBSON	England	vs France	27
2014	CLINT DEMPSEY	USA	vs Ghana	30

2026 tournament.

But in the dynamic display of Vinicius Junior, the emergence of Endrick and the combative performances of his teammates, Brazil have cause for optimism at last.

England boss Gareth Southgate was impressed with the new Brazil, saying: "The difference was one moment of ruthlessness."

Austria, Germany score two of the fastest goals
PARIS: Austria's Christoph Baumgartner scored in six seconds on Saturday for the fastest-ever international goal and was then quickly followed by a similarly lightning strike by Germany's Florian Wirtz.

Baumgartner, 24, went into the record books during a friendly match in Bratislava.

The Leipzig attacker drove through the home defence from kick-off before unleashing a 25-metre shot past Martin Dubravka in goal.

"We've done this variation before, sprinting from kick-off at full risk. The fact that I hit it like that... it's of course sensational."

Baumgartner's strike pipped the seven seconds it took forward Lukas Podolski to score for Germany against Ecuador in May 2013.

The Austrian FA described

Baumgartner's effort as the fastest goal in the history of international football.

"Of course we got off to a really good start, that goal by itself was probably worth the price of admission," said Austria coach Ralf Rangnick.

Meanwhile, later Saturday, Wirtz scored in seven seconds against France in a friendly in Lyon that Germany won 2-0.

The Leverkusen player beat 'keeper Brice Samba with a superb shot under the crossbar. "I don't think anyone understood or realised what was happening. We were all quite surprised, but there was obviously a lot of joy," Wirtz told German broadcaster ZDF after his first international goal.

"You can't start a match any better."

Swiss Open: Srikanth makes semi-final exit

BASEL: Kidambi Srikanth lost in the semi-final of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament to Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi. The former world No. 1 went down 21-15, 9-21, 18-21 in a gruelling contest that lasted one hour and five minutes on Saturday night. The match marked Srikanth's first semifinal appearance in 16 months. He had last reached the last-four stage at the Hylo Open in November 2022. After taking the opener, Srikanth took a 4-1 lead in the second game. However, errors started to creep into the game and Srikanth lost the momentum.

Diksha Dagar finishes T-26th on Epton Tour

NORTH CAROLINA: Diksha Dagar rounded off the week at the Atlantic Beach Classic with an eagle-birdie closing to finish tied-26 at the Atlantic Beach Country Club here on the Epton Tour event. Rookie Briana Chacon hung around all week before she finally made a splash and came down the stretch. Chacon had never held a share of the lead until the last three holes, as she finished birdie-par-birdie to win. Jessica Porvasnik (69) and Kim Kaufman (71) were tied for second. Diksha bogeyed the third and the eighth and then finished with an eagle on 17th and birdied the 18th for a total of 1-over.

Mohd Amir comes out of retirement

KARACHI: Pakistan left-arm pacer Mohammad Amir has decided to come out of international retirement and make himself available for selection for the T20 World Cup. Amir, who was banned from cricket for five years between 2010 to 2015 on spot-fixing charges and was also jailed for his crime, had retired in 2021. He has kept playing in T20 leagues and now the new PCB regime under Mohsin Naqvi has convinced him to take back his retirement. "I still dream to play for Pakistan! life brings us to the points where at times we have to reconsider our decisions..." he said.

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