



Hindustan Times

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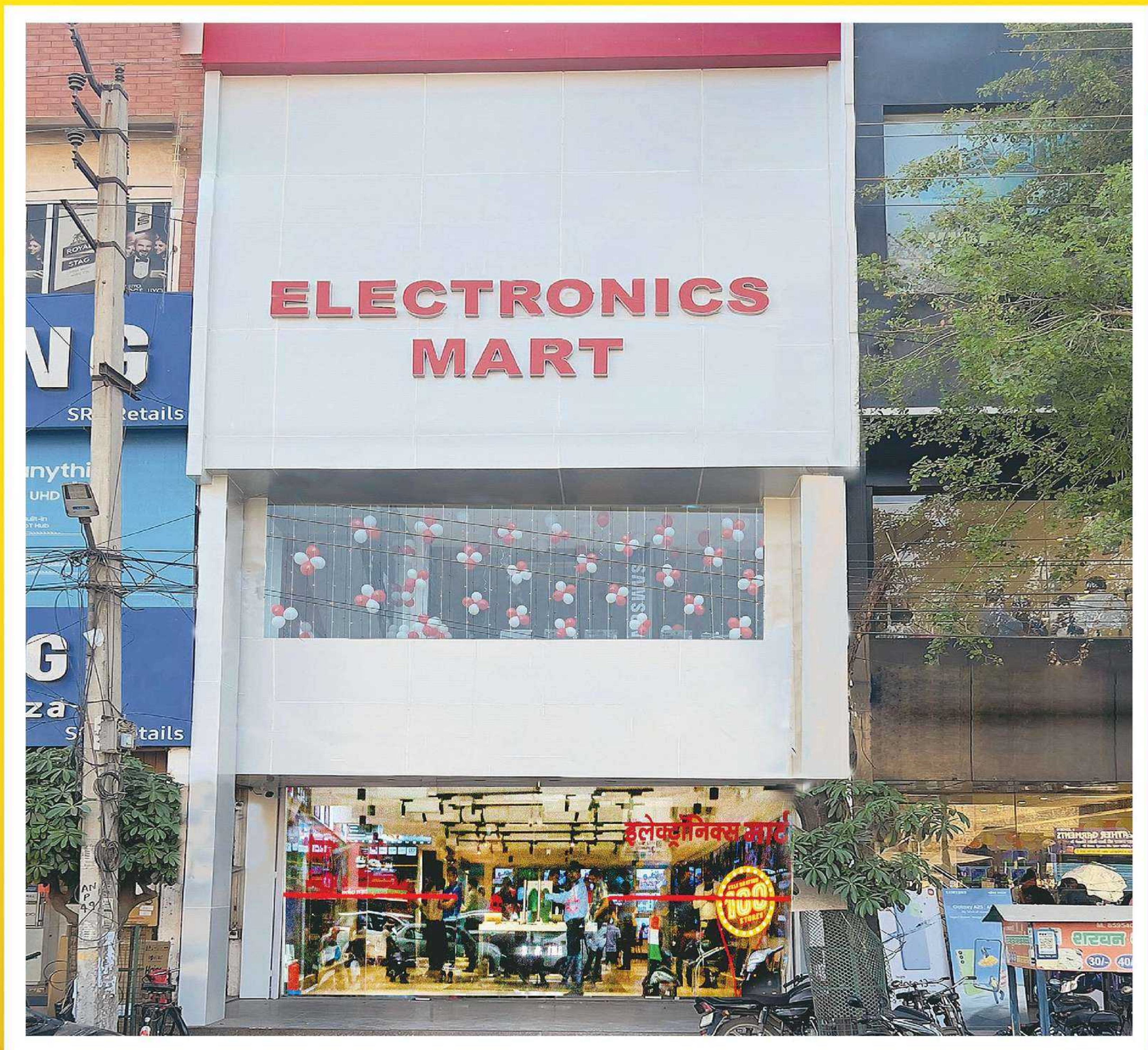
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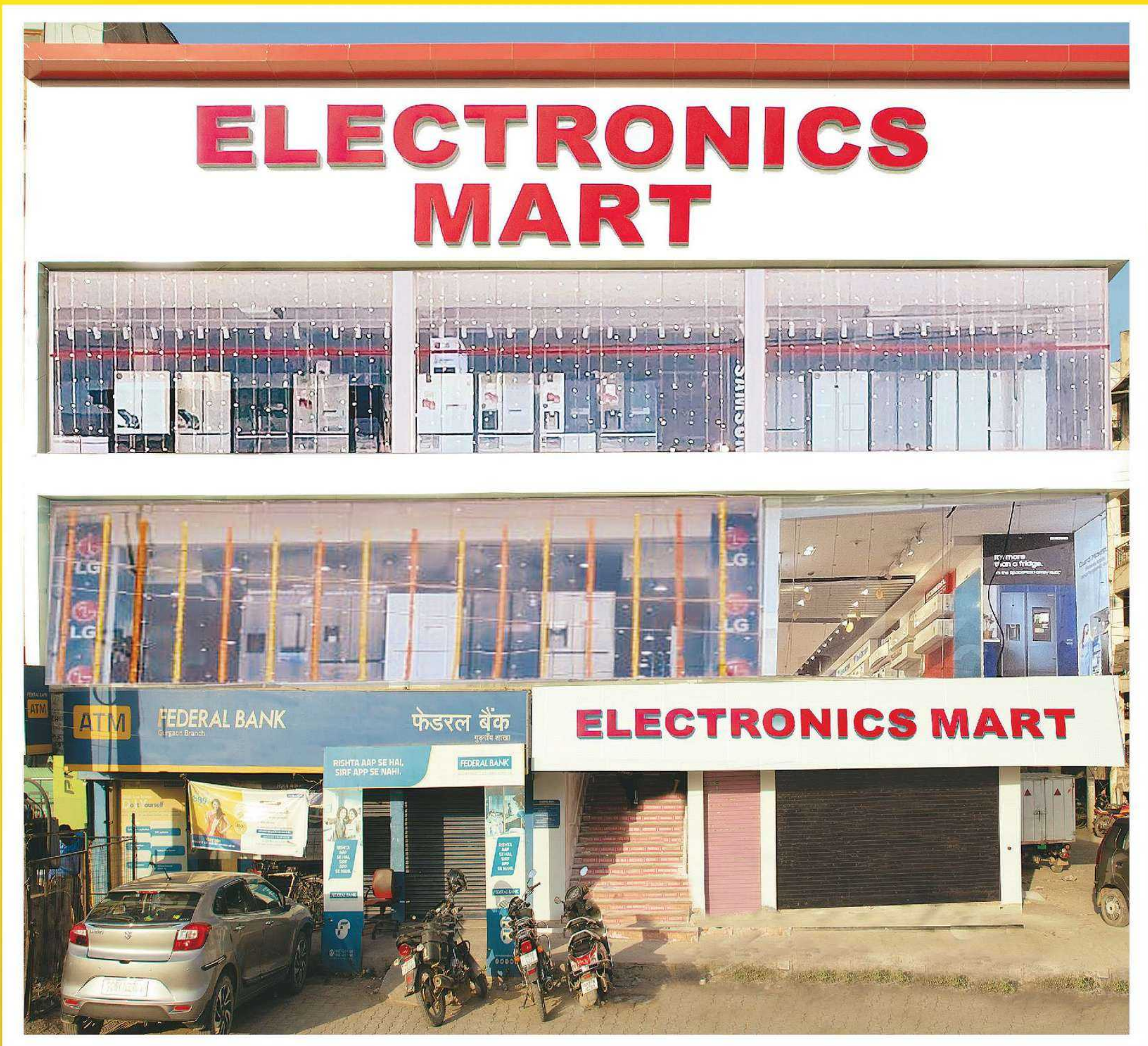
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Hindustan Times

Cong cites fresh tax notice to attack BJP, war of words ensues

Saubhadra Chatterji
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Income Tax authorities (IT) have served the Congress a fresh notice to pay ₹1,823.08 crore, citing arrears in Fiscal Year (FY) 94 and between FY17 and FY20, the opposition party announced on Friday as it accused the government of "tax terrorism" three weeks before the general elections kick off.

The new notice came weeks after the party paid ₹135 crore for another tax demand last month. A livid Congress announced nation-wide protests against "continuing tax terrorism of the Modi government on @INCIndia" over the weekend and party treasurer Ajay Maken dubbed the IT department as "BJP's frontal organisation" and said the Congress will approach the Supreme Court on Monday.

The Delhi high court has already rejected the party's petitions for a reassessment of a previous dispute, which erupted last month and pertained to assessment year (AY) 2018-19. "Efforts are being made to financially cripple the Congress, but we are not going to be cowed down," party general secretary Jairam Ramesh said. "We

More arrears demanded

₹1,823.08 cr

in arrears in fiscal year 94, and between FY17 and FY20 sought from the opposition party three weeks before the general elections kick off

DETAILS OF THE NOTICE

in ₹ crore



Tax terrorism, says Congress

"Efforts are being made to financially cripple the Congress, but we are not going to be cowed down."
— Jairam Ramesh, Congress general secretary

will not be scared of these notices. We will be more aggressive and fight these polls," he added. The party also alleged that the BJP should be probed for an alleged default of ₹4,617.58 crore because it allegedly failed to disclose the name and address of various donors in form 24A to avail tax benefits. "We have analysed all the submissions of the BJP to the Election Commission (EC). The party has faltered every year," Maken said.

The BJP dismissed the allegations and said the Congress should follow legal procedures and fulfil its tax obligations instead of levelling allegations against the Income Tax Department and the judiciary. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said that if the government changed, exemplary action would be taken against those who tried to disintegrate democracy. "When the government changes, action

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MAOISTS CLAIM ENCOUNTER WAS FAKE, MEN KILLED IN COLD BLOOD

Ritesh Mishra
letters@hindustantimes.com

RAIPUR: Two days after six Maoists were killed in an alleged encounter in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) on Friday said the victims were killed in a "fake" encounter, a claim denied by the police force. "We demand justice for the innocent villagers who were mercilessly killed..." the CPI (Maoist) said in a statement. →P8

MY PREDECESSOR WORKED UNDER A FOREIGN POWER: MALDIVIAN PREZ

NEW DELHI: Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, who has made several moves to reduce his country's dependence on India, has alleged that his predecessor Ibrahim Mohamed Solih operated on the orders of a "foreign ambassador" though he stopped short of naming any country. Muizzu is widely perceived in New Delhi as pro-China. His remarks on Thursday, coming on the back of his demand for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel who operate three aircraft in the Maldives, were perceived as an apparent reference to India. →P13

BJP CANDIDATE SAYS TMC LEADER MADE PERSONAL DETAILS PUBLIC

KOLKATA: Rekha Patra, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Lok Sabha candidate from Basirhat in West Bengal and one of the victims of atrocities against women in Sandeshkhali, has lodged a complaint against Trinamool Congress (TMC) nominee Debangshu Bhattacharya for alleged violation of her privacy. In a complaint to the chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW), Patra alleged that Bhattacharya, the TMC candidate from Tamluk constituency and head of party's social media cell, made her personal details public. She also shot off a letter to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, alleging that the offence was violative of the SC/ST (prevention of atrocities) Act. →P8

ITian dies in high-speed superbike crash



The remains of a 1,000cc superbike that crashed on Gurugram's Golf Course Road on Friday. The rider, a 27-year-old IT-Kanpur graduate and a resident of Sushant Lok I in Sector 43, died in the crash after he lost control of the motorcycle at around 6am, police said, adding that impact of the accident was such that his body was severed in half. Related story on page 4 PARVEEN KUMAR/HT PHOTO

Ukraine lobbies for support at foreign ministers' meeting

Rezaul H Laskar
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NEW DELHI: Ukraine lobbied for India's support for a peace summit planned for summer during a meeting on Friday between foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar, who said New Delhi is committed to strengthening the overall bilateral relationship. Kuleba, on his first visit to India at the invitation of Jaishankar, has called on India to back the peace summit to be hosted by Switzerland to build on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's peace formula, especially in view of New Delhi's standing in the Global South. →P7



External affairs minister S Jaishankar with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in New Delhi. PTI

HT brunch

What's Imaad into?

The musician, actor and soon-to-be filmmaker is tripping on Libyan disco, reading up on Delhi history, plugged in to nerdy podcasts and loves loves loves a little-known fish from Goa. Could these be your favourites too? →P14

{ 'OVER FAILURE TO GIVE HIM A MALE CHILD' }

Bihar man on the run after slitting throats of his wife and their three minor daughters

Sandeep Bhaskar
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BETTIAH: A 50-year-old man is on the run after allegedly killing his wife and three minor daughters by slitting their throats in Champaran district of Bihar, police officials said on Friday. On Thursday night, the accused, Idu Miyan, 40, and his wife, Afreen Khatun, 40, got into an argument over her "failure to give him a male child", the police officials said quoting the family's neighbours.

In a fit of rage, Idu attacked Afreen with a sharp-edged weapon and then slit her throat with a knife. The deceased, Afreen, and her daughters Arbun Khatun (15), Shabrun Khatun (12) and Shahzadi Khatun (9), were found on Friday at their house in a pool of blood, with deep cuts on their throats, police said. The incident reportedly came to light when their neighbours spotted blood on the floor outside their house, police officials said.

THE INCIDENT REPORTEDLY CAME TO LIGHT WHEN NEIGHBOURS SPOTTED BLOOD ON THE FLOOR OUTSIDE THEIR HOUSE, COPS SAID

"The accused is at large and a search is on to nab him," said Ranjan Kumar, sub divisional police officer (SDPO), Areraj.

Idu was previously accused of killing another daughter, who was 16 at the time of the incident, by pushing her off a moving train near Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh in 2017, the police said. Idu was booked for murder and served a prison sentence of five years in that case. He was released on bail in 2022, officials said. The SDPO said, "Idu had married twice. His first wife, who bore him two sons, died long ago. Afreen was his second wife

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SPOTLIGHT

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

The closest three-way title race enters home stretch

howindialives.com

As the last quarter burst of the English Premier League (EPL) gets underway this weekend, Manchester City hosting Arsenal on Sunday has a lot more riding on it than any other remaining match. In a title race of three fine teams, separated by finer margins, this match between two of them has the potential to alter the title race irrevocably for both.

After 28 matches, the top three — Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester City — are separated by just one point, in what is the thinnest margin among the top three sides at this stage in the 32-year history of the EPL. Although all three sides have 10 matches remaining, their remaining itineraries are such that the match at the Etihad acquires an outsized importance in the title race.

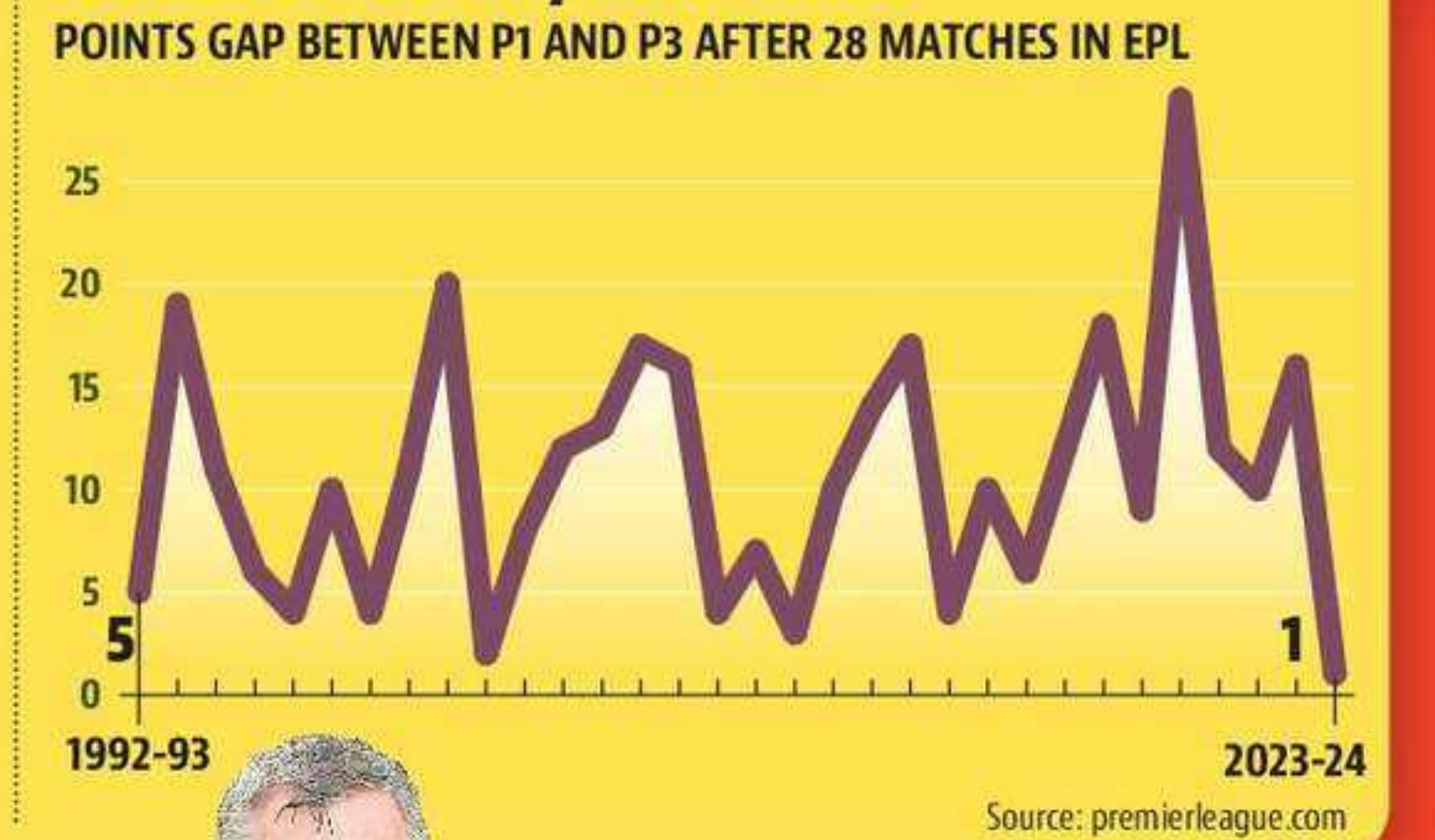


Remember 2001-02

In the previous 31 seasons, after 28 matches, the average points difference between the top-placed side and the third-placed side has been 11 points. There have been blowouts. For example, in 2019-20, a season disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, Liverpool opened an 18-point lead to Manchester City and a 29-point lead to Leicester City. Similarly, in 2000-01, Manchester United had a 16-point lead over Arsenal and a 20-point lead over Liverpool. In both cases, the leading side cantered home.

That lopsided 2000-01 title race gave shape to 2001-02, which comes closest to the current season for intermediate margins. After 28 matches, three sides — Manchester United, Arsenal and Newcastle United — were separated by just two points, with Liverpool a further two points behind. After match 35 of 38, the difference between the top 3 was five points. In the end, Arsenal broke away, and ended up with a gap of 7 points to Liverpool and 10 points to Manchester United.

The current EPL season is seeing the closest threeway title chase



United steeliness

In the previous 31 seasons, after 28 matches, the average points difference between the top-placed side and the third-placed side has been 11 points. There have been blowouts. For example, in 2019-20, a season disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, Liverpool opened an 18-point lead to Manchester City and a 29-point lead to Leicester City. Similarly, in 2000-01, Manchester United had a 16-point lead over Arsenal and a 20-point lead over Liverpool. In both cases, the leading side cantered home. That lopsided 2000-01 title race gave shape to 2001-02, which comes closest to the current season for intermediate margins. After 28 matches, three sides — Manchester United, Arsenal and Newcastle United — were separated by just two points. After match 35 of 38, the difference between the top 3 was five points. In the end, Arsenal broke away, and ended up with a gap of 7 points to Liverpool and 10 points to Manchester United.

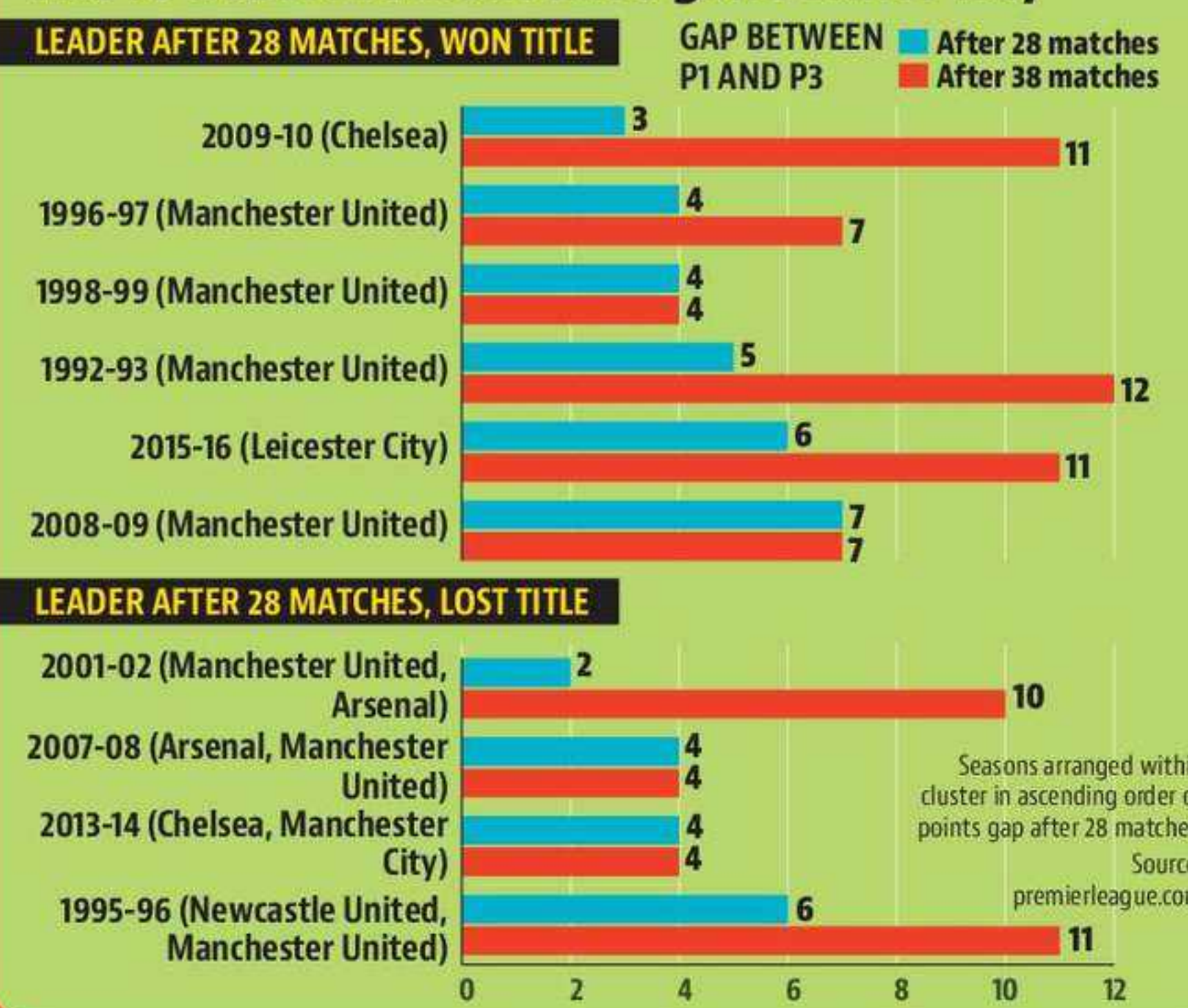


Arsenal's away conundrum

In the case of fine margins, anything is possible. Prior to this season, there have been 10 instances where the top three teams in EPL have been separated by up to seven points after 28 matches. On six of those occasions, the team that was leading after 28 matches won the title. On four instances, that was not the case.

The other strand that runs through this is the handling of pressure in crunch time. As many as seven of these 10 seasons involved Manchester United in their glory days under Alex Ferguson. In four of those seven seasons, United led after 28 matches and went on to win the title. In another two instances, in 1995-96 and 2007-08, they came from behind to win a close title race. The 2001-02 loss to Arsenal were the only one in this set where they came out on the wrong side.

The 10 closest seasons have gone either way



Among the top 3, Arsenal have the toughest schedule



The Villa challenge

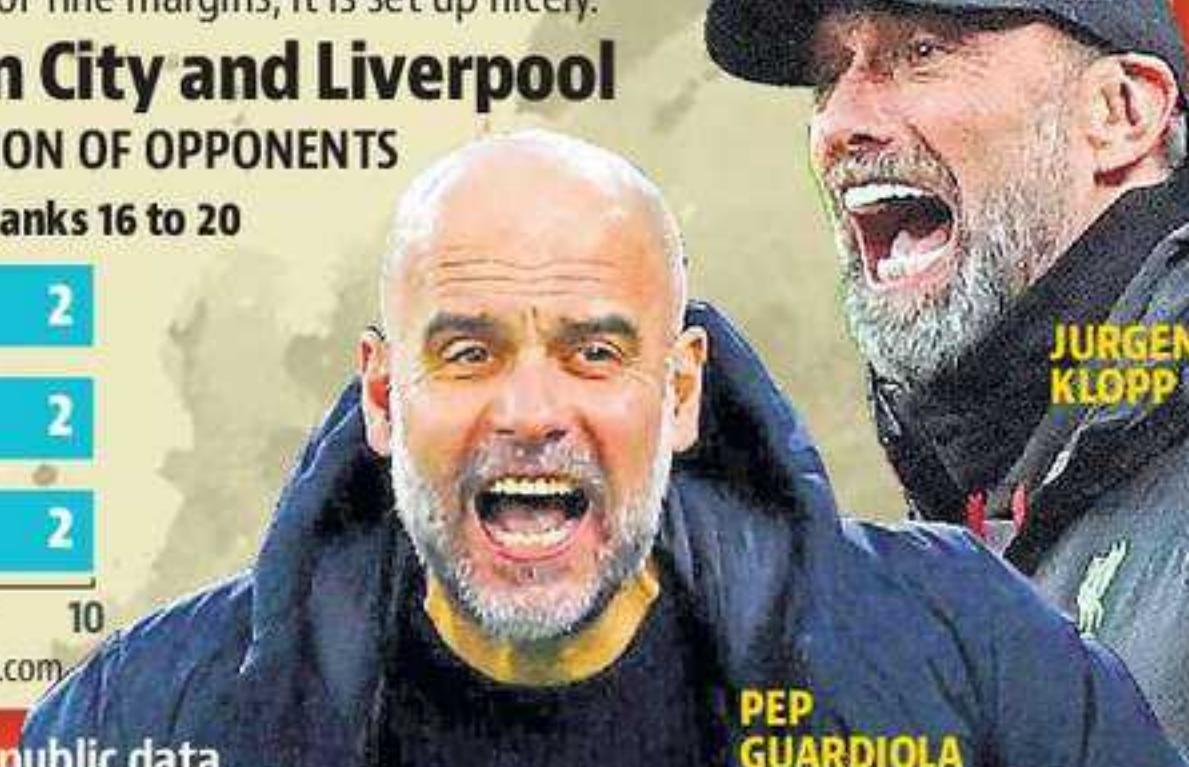
In remaining matches, Arsenal play one more match against teams currently in the top 5 than City and Liverpool. Besides City, they play Aston Villa at home and Tottenham Hotspur away. Both Liverpool and Manchester City have two matches each against top 5 sides. Liverpool play Aston Villa away and Tottenham Hotspur at home. City play both Arsenal and Villa at home. Seen another way, their paths all flows through Aston Villa, which is having an outstanding season under Unai Emery, who was once sacked by Arsenal.

Of the three sides, City has the least matches to play with the top 10. But they also have more commitments. They are in the semi-finals of the FA Cup. In Europe, Arsenal and City are in the Champions League quarter-finals, while Liverpool are in the Europa Cup quarter-finals.

Other factors, however, are more intangible. City under Pep Guardiola have shown not only a recent history of dominance in the league — winning five of the last six seasons, particularly on the back of a stellar run post-Christmas. For Liverpool, this title run assumes even more significance as it is the final season of legendary manager Jurgen Klopp — a factor that is guaranteed to galvanise players. For Mikel Arteta's Arsenal, who have not won the EPL title in 20 years, it is a chance at redemption and revenge — having missed out last year's title by a whisker.

In a season of fine margins, it is set up nicely.

Arsenal will play the top 5 clubs more than City and Liverpool





Hindustan Times

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INDIA announces deal on seat-sharing in Bihar

Anirban Guha Roy
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PATNA: The five-party opposition Mahagathabandhan or Grand Alliance (GA) in Bihar on Friday announced its seat-sharing pact a day after the deadline for filing nominations for the first phase, allotting the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) 26 of the state's 40 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress nine, the Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist (Liberation) three, and the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist) one each.

The quantum of seat distribution was on expected lines though the choice of some seats — such as Purnea in eastern Bihar where the Congress wanted to field strongman former parliamentarian Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav but which has gone to the RJD — might cause some consternation in the alliance. Still, the announcement marks an important moment for the Opposition INDIA bloc that is still struggling to clinch seat pacts in crucial states such as Maharashtra.

"We have arrived at a unanimous decision, demonstrating a cohesiveness that you may not find in the NDA. We will defeat them at the hustings," said RJD leader Manoj Jha, adding that the names of the candidates will be announced soon.

To be sure, RJD candidates Abhay Kushwaha from Aurangabad, Archana Ravidas from Jamui, Kumar Sarvjeet from

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Formula for division of seats

The quantum of seat distribution in Bihar was largely on expected lines, though the choice of some seats might cause some consternation in the alliance, experts said.



Purnea, however, was one of several points of contention in the division. Cong's Pappu Yadav hinted he may contest as an independent. "People of Purnea have said 'Pappu is their son, he won't go anywhere', I will have to follow the order (of the people)," Yadav said on Friday.

Cong manifesto on Apr 5 set to offer job quota for women

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: The Congress party is likely to announce its manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha election on April 5 in New Delhi and follow it up with rallies across the country starting with Jaipur on April 6, a senior functionary said on Friday. The party has also planned a rally in Hyderabad.

The event in Delhi, is expected to see the top three leaders—Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, the party's parliamentary head Sonia Gandhi and former chief Rahul Gandhi — releasing the manifesto that hinges on 5 set of guarantees — one each for women, youth, farmers, workers and social justice.

The party will use the tagline "Haath badlega Halaat" (The hand — a reference to the party's poll symbol — will change the situation) in the polls. The Congress will launch its Ghar Ghar Guarantee campaign on April 3 under which party leaders will reach out to more than 80 million households across the country. Ahead of the manifesto release, Rahul Gandhi reiterated the promise to give 50% reservation for women in government jobs if the Congress is voted to power.



Bill Gates and PM Modi

WON'T ALLOW DIGITAL DIVIDE IN INDIA: MODI TO BILL GATES

Aditi Agrawal
 letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: In a one-on-one interaction with Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates on February 29, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that health, agriculture and education are the focus areas for digital governance, and that he has been working to ensure that digital divide does not plague India.

Digital governance, artificial intelligence, and deepfakes dominated the first half of the 45-minute video of the interaction which was released on Modi's personal YouTube channel on Friday. The video was not released on any government handles including those of the Prime Minister's Office, or the Press Information Bureau, presumably because of the Model Code of Conduct that has been in force since the declaration of general elections on March 16.

"When I used to hear about the digital divide in the world, I used to say that I will not let anything like that happen in my country. Digital public infrastructure is a big requirement for that," Modi said.

READ: Women leading tech revolution in India, says PM Modi

Seven convicted in 2005 murder of BSP MLA Pal

Pawan Dixit

letters@hindustantimes.com

LUCKNOW: A special Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) court in Lucknow on Friday convicted seven men for the murder of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) lawmaker Raju Pal in 2005 and sentenced six of them to life imprisonment, drawing the curtain on a sensational daylight killing that came to exemplify the influence that strongmen and criminals once held on the politics of India's most populous state.

Gangster-turned-politician Atiq Ahmad was also accused in the same case but the proceedings against him and his brother Khalid Azim alias Ashraf were stopped after they were gunned down by three assailants posing as journalists outside a hospital in Prayagraj last year.

A third accused, Rafiq Ahmed, died in prison in 2020. Additional district judge Kavita Mishra, who was presiding

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The body of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari was taken to his hometown, Ghazipur, amid heavy security on Friday.

Ansari's death: Court orders judicial probe

Haidar Naqvi

letters@hindustantimes.com

BANDA: A chief judicial magistrate's court in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh on Friday ordered a judicial inquiry into

the death of gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari, even as the autopsy report prima facie ruled out suspected poisoning and cited heart attack as the cause of death, people familiar with the matter said.

→P8

Kejriwal's wife launches support campaign ahead of Mar 31 protest

Alok KN Mishra

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife, Sunita, on Friday launched "Kejriwal ko Aashirwad [Bless Kejriwal]" campaign on WhatsApp, urging people to send blessings and good wishes to the jailed Aam Aadmi Party

(AAP) leader.

"You can also share any message. Many mothers and daughters have sent wishes for their son and brother [Kejriwal]. I got many calls, and many people were observing fast for Arvind Kejriwal. Write and send your love on this WhatsApp number. He will feel good reading your messages. I

will deliver all the messages to him in jail," said Sunita.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested Kejriwal on March 21, hours after the Delhi high court denied his request for interim protection from arrest for alleged irregularities in the now-scraped 2021-22 excise policy.

→FULL REPORT ON P5



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From **HT** Archives

PADUKONE WINS ALL-ENGLAND TITLE, 1980



Prakash Padukone was given a rousing welcome on his arrival at Bangalore on March 28, 1980 after his victory in the All-England Championship. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

When Padukone gave India a grand badminton boost

A 24-year-old scripts history by becoming the first Indian to win the All England title

HT Correspondent

In the list of great Indian sporting achievements, March 23, 1980 will be inscribed in golden letters. That was the day when a player who, as a 16-year-old, had captivated Indian badminton fans by winning the junior and senior national titles in Madras (now Chennai), fulfilled his great promise and helped the country realise a dream.

At the Wembley Arena in London, Prakash Padukone became India's first great champion at global level, winning the prestigious All England title. The 24-year-old defeated top-seed and defending champion Liem Swie King 15-3 15-10 in the final, crushing the Indonesian's hopes of completing a hat-trick of titles.

The unassuming bank officer from Karnataka completed a sensational run without dropping a game in the final. He achieved a grand slam, having won the Danish and Swedish Opens in the build-up to this tournament, topping off a glorious run that started when he won Gold at the 1978 Commonwealth Games. The subsequent rise to world No.1 made his status official.

Padukone's victory was a pioneering effort. Badminton was born in India and hence very popular with the country's sports fans, and All England, still as popular as ever, was considered the unofficial world championships until the game's global body started its tournament in 1977. For Indians, winning it was akin to victory at Wimbledon, where their best was Ramanathan Krishnan reaching the semi-finals.

India had come closest to winning the All-England title in 1947, when Prakash Nath lost in the final in the year the tournament resumed after a break forced by World War II.

Back to 1980. Padukone's first victory over Liem in five meetings came in grand fashion.

He has been justifiably hailed a touch artist — his net deception is believed to be unmatched in Indian badminton to this day — and his Indonesian rival had no answer to his flicks and net dribbles.

According to reports of the match, King made many unforced errors and India's nine-time national champion controlled the match. The Indonesian had trouble finding his range right from the start and the efforts flowed from his racket under the pressure of the relentlessly resilient Padukone. The Indonesian, who would later inspire badminton players to adopt a power game, saw his serve broken straightaway. Padukone reeled off 10 consecutive points before Liem found a way to slow down the progress. But he could not stop Padukone for easing to the opening game.

In the second game, Liem showed more resistance. There were some magnificent rallies and the Indonesian led 4-3, but Padukone seized control and raced to 10-4. Liem chipped away at the lead to recover to 10-13, but that was as close as he got. Padukone reached match point with an immaculate drop shot off the net cord, winning the match with another drop shot that Liem knocked it up for the Indian player to kill.

"It feels great, this has been one of my life's ambitions," Padukone said after the victory. "Now I will try for the world title in Jakarta in May." (He won bronze in Copenhagen 1983). "I felt competent all the way through. I knew he was quicker, but I can control the shuttle better and tried successfully to slow him down. My flicks from the net were slightly deceptive and I noticed that his backhand strokes were limited," he added. "It was easier than I thought. I just tried to keep the shuttle in and he made all the mistakes."

A dejected Liem only said: "I just want to rest."

Padukone didn't drop a game in the tournament. He started off with a 15-7, 15-12 win over Sufian Abu Bakr of Malaysia and beat Wirawan Hadiyanto (Indonesia) 15-10, 15-10 next. In the quarter-finals, he beat Svend Pri of Denmark 15-4, 15-4 a then Morten Frost in the semi-finals, 15-8, 15-10.

He would also reach the final in 1981, but Liem would win that one 11-15, 15-4, 15-6, successfully drawing Padukone into long rallies and tiring him out in the end.

It would take 20 years before another Indian would win the All-England title.

Pullela Gopichand wasn't a favourite when he went all the way in 2001. He beat then world No.1 Peter Gade of Denmark in the semi-finals and Chen Hong of China in the final.

This year, the tournament now called the All-England Open and staged in Birmingham since 1994, completed its 125th edition.

{ MY INDIA } RAMBAN ACCIDENT

10 killed as car falls into gorge in Jammu



At least 10 persons, including nine labourers from Bihar, were killed when a car veered off road and fell into a 500 metre gorge amid heavy rain on Jammu-Srinagar national highway during the intervening night of Thursday and Friday in Ramban district, said officials. The driver of the cab was also killed in the mishap. The accident took place near Battery Chashma on NH-44 around 11:55am, said Ramban deputy magistrate Baseer-ul-Haq Chaudhary. The vehicle ferrying the labourers was on its way from Jammu to Srinagar. "10 bodies have been recovered on the steep slope," he said. →P9

{ WORLD } LOUIS GOSSETT JR

First Black man to win Oscar as best supporting actor dies



Louis Gossett Jr., the first Black man to win an Academy Award as best supporting actor, has died aged 87, a family statement confirmed on Friday without revealing the cause of death. The Oscar-winning actor's roles ranged from an enslaved man in the TV mini-series "Roots" to a no-nonsense drill sergeant in "An Officer and a Gentleman." In "Sadat," he had the title role, playing the Egyptian leader who made peace with Israel. Gossett, who was also a producer, director, social activist and the founder of the Eracism Foundation to combat racism, died at a rehabilitation center in Santa Monica, California, the Washington Post reported. AGENCIES →P17

{ BUSINESS } SUBDUED SALES AHEAD?

Passenger vehicle sales drop in March



Car sales slowed in March as key festivals such as Navratri that boost purchases fall in April this year, apart from the high base effect of the last two years' record sales. The slowdown in March signals the beginning of a period of subdued passenger vehicle sales from the new fiscal year starting April, industry executives said, adding it may prompt automakers to lower production volumes to match the changed demand-supply dynamics. The industry is expected to report wholesales in the range of 370,000-375,000 units in March, with retail sales trailing, said senior officials at Maruti Suzuki. →P17

{ EASTER TRAGEDY } 8-YEAR-OLD IS ONLY SURVIVOR

Bus falls off bridge in South Africa, 45 die

A bus carrying worshippers headed to an Easter weekend church gathering in South Africa plunged off a bridge on a mountain pass on Thursday, killing at least 45 people. A look at what transpired.

THE ACCIDENT

A bus with worshippers was on its way from Botswana to the town of Morija in South Africa's northern province of Limpopo. It plunged off a bridge on a mountain pass and burst into flames after hitting the rocky ground below. The driver appeared to have lost control and the bus ploughed into the barriers along the side of the bridge and then over the edge. The crash happened near the town of Mokopane, which is about 200 km north of Pretoria. Officials said the bus veered off the Mmamatlakala bridge and plunged 50m into a ravine before bursting into flames.

45 people killed

THE LONE SURVIVOR was an 8-year-old child who suffered serious injuries.



No chance of survival

Search operations were ongoing, local officials said, but many bodies were burned beyond recognition and trapped inside the vehicle, while others were thrown out of the bus. Hours after the crash, smoke continued to seep from the mangled, burned wreck underneath the concrete bridge.

Officials were quoted as saying by local news that judging by the height from which the bus fell, and the state of the wreckage, there was

"next to no chance of survival" for most of the victims

On a pilgrimage

All the people in the bus were from Botswana, and were on a long-distance roadtrip to Morija for a popular Easter weekend pilgrimage that attracts hundreds of thousands of worshippers from South Africa and neighbouring countries who follow the Zion Christian Church.

EASTER TRAFFIC DANGER: The South African government often warns motorists to be cautious during the Easter holidays, which is a particularly busy and dangerous time for road travel. More than 200 people died in road crashes during the Easter weekend last year. Just a day before the bus crash, the government called on people to be extra careful on Thursday and Friday due to the rush to Morija.

{ U.S. MARINE ACCIDENT } SIX PEOPLE DEAD

Immigrants killed in accident died doing job 'others do not want to do'

Reuters

letters@hindustantimes.com

BALTIMORE: They came to the US for a chance at a better life. They found work filling pot holes on a bridge in the middle of the night, and they ended up dead in the Baltimore harbour.

The six victims of the Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse were all immigrants from Mexico and Central America, doing the kind of gruelling work that many immigrants take on, when a container ship crashed into a support pillar at 1:30am EDT on Tuesday and sent them plunging into the icy Patapsco River.

Divers pulled the bodies of Alejandro Hernandez Fuentes and Dorlan Castillo from a red pickup truck 25 feet underwater the following day.

Four are missing and presumed dead: Maynor Suazo from Honduras; Jose Lopez from Guatemala; Miguel Luna from El Salvador; and another whose name has not been released. Another two workers were rescued.

The news rippled quickly through Baltimore's Hispanic community, which has nearly doubled in size in recent years, transforming the modest row-house neighbourhoods near the sprawling port complex.

Churches held vigils for the missing workers, and advocacy groups quickly raised \$98,000 for the victims' families.

Some said they were not surprised that all of the victims were immigrants, even though they account for less than 10% of the population in Maryland's largest city.



A crane works on the debris of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, which collapsed after a container ship crashed into it, on Friday in Baltimore. AFP

"One of the reasons Latinos were involved in this accident is because Latinos do the work that others do not want to do. We have to do it, because we come here for a better life. We do not come to invade the country," said Lucia Islas, president of Comité Latino de Baltimore, a nonprofit group.

Hispanic workers are more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to die on the job, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, with construction being a particularly deadly industry. Government and industry figures show that Hispanics are over-represented in high-risk jobs: 51% of construction workers, 34% of slaughterhouse workers and 61% of land-scaping workers.

The workers on the Key Bridge were employed by Brawner Builders Inc, a local

construction company that has done extensive work for the state and has been cited seven times since 2018 for safety violations. Company officials have said they are devastated by the loss, and declined comment when contacted by Reuters.

Community leaders said many Hispanics in the city take low-paying work that provides scant benefits. "The only choice is to work, when you don't have the same salary that a citizen might earn," said Carlos Crespo, 53, a mechanic from Mexico.

"Many don't value our Hispanic community. They see us as animals or think that we live off the government. But that is not true, we pay our taxes too," he said. Crespo and others involved in the fund-raising effort said it was built on years of similar attempts to help provide a safety net for people who struggle to

find affordable health care and adequate housing or navigate services that are only provided in English.

'Wait with faith and hope'

"We go from one crisis to another," said Susana Barrios, vice president of the Latino Racial Justice Circle.

The disaster comes in the middle of a US presidential election in which immigration is once again a top concern for voters, as Democratic President Joe Biden's administration has struggled to manage a recent record number of border crossings.

Republican candidate Donald Trump has employed racist rhetoric against immigrants, referring to them as "animals" and "not people" on the campaign trail and has said he would dramatically ramp up

deportation if re-elected on November 5.

Baltimore, which has struggled with high crime and a poverty rate nearly double the national average, historically hasn't been home to a large Hispanic population, but the community has grown in recent years. Hispanics made up 7.8% of the city's population in 2020, up from 4.2% in 2010, according to U.S. Census figures.

Nelson Amaya, a pastor of a Pentecostal church in the nearby suburb of Severn, said many Central American immigrants have moved from nearby Washington, DC, suburbs in search of jobs and more affordable housing. Many Hispanic markets, restaurants and other businesses have opened in recent years, he said.

"In more or less the last five years, the Hispanic population here has grown a lot," he said. "That has a big, big impact on the economy."

The White House said on Thursday that existing immigration rules could allow for relatives of the victims who are abroad to visit the United States.

In the meantime, some struggled to come to grips with their loss. "We continue to wait with faith, with hope, that our brother's body can be found so that we can begin the repatriation process, which is what interests us most," said Martin Suazo, brother of one of the missing, in Azacualpa, Honduras.

"We believe they should not forget the suffering of the families of the four victims whose bodies have not been found."



#LEGACY OF TRUTH



HT put the news of Padukone's victory on its front page in the edition of March 24, 1980.

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Construction sites to get pollution colour codes

Jasjeev Gandhiok

jasjeev.gandhiok@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Delhi's environment department has prepared a colour-coded four-stage warning system for all construction and demolition (C&D) sites in the Capital with an area of over 5,000 sqm, in a bid to control local sources of dust and air pollution, officials aware of the development have said.

The department, in a review meeting held on March 27, informed the Commission for Air Quality Management that it has asked all C&D sites with an area of over 5,000 sqm to install real-time air quality sensors, the data generated from which will be transmitted to Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC).

It added if PM10 levels rise beyond permissible limits, SMS alerts will be immediately sent to the construction site.

The warning system, based on colour codes — yellow, orange, red and purple — will allow DPCC and environment department to take action, which includes warnings, fines and eventual closure of the site itself, the officials said.

PM10 are solid particulate matter with diameters of less than 10 microns, which can easily enter the lungs and bloodstream and cause serious ailments. While PM 2.5 pollution is largely associated with combustion sources, PM 10 largely comes from dust.

According to data collected by the environment department, Delhi has 611 active C&D sites registered with the Delhi government, of which 329 are sharing real-time air quality data. An environment department official said the target is to bring the remaining 282 sites under real-time monitoring too, following which this colour-coded system will be formally implemented.

"We have asked the remaining C&D sites to install them before the coming summer. This will

Aim to control PM10 levels

611 active C&D sites (over 5,000 sqm) registered with Delhi government

329 sites currently sharing real-time air quality data with government

282 sites not sharing real-time air quality data with government

Colour codes for C&D sites of area 5,000 sqm or above

	Yellow (Stage 1)	Orange (Stage 2)	Red (Stage 3)	Purple (Stage 4)
Condition	No data shared for 24 hours OR PM10 levels above norms by 20%	4 or more yellow alerts in a period of 7 days	4 or more orange alerts over a period of 30 days	Action taken report not submitted to authorities
What site should do	Check problem and fix it	Immediately take action to correct the deviation and submit a written response to DPCC	Take corrective action and inform DPCC. Record observations for local sources, if any.	Pollution-intensive activities to be halted, DPCC to do root cause analysis on ground
Action by authorities	Auto-generated SMS to be sent to builder	Auto-generated SMS to be sent to builder	Warning letter from DPCC, to which an action taken report is to be submitted by builder within 3 days	Physical inspection to be done by DPCC. May issue fines/close down site
Threshold for PM10 levels at C&D site set at 100µg/m³	Annual average safe limits for PM10 set at 60 µg/m³	What is PM10? Solid particulate matter with diameters of less than 10 microns, which can cause serious ailments		

allow all sites to be monitored remotely," said a senior environment department official on condition of anonymity.

Data gathered by the environment department shows that of the 282 sites, the highest concentration was in Rajouri Garden, where 63 such sites exist, followed by Greater Kailash (41), Kalkaji (38), Punjabi Bagh (37) and Vasant Vihar (31).

"These areas have the higher density of active construction sites (within a 3km range) that are not uploading their air quality data at the moment," the report shared with CAQM said.

The official quoted above said, "Based on the data, SMS alerts will be sent to the sites, informing them that their levels are exceeding permissible norms. If PM10 levels are beyond permissible levels on multiple occa-

sions, a formal warning will be issued via SMS, and if corrective action is still not taken, then a physical inspection will be done, along with a possible fine. The site can also be shut down."

The official said in the first or yellow stage, if PM 10 levels are 20% higher than the threshold of 100µg/m³, then an auto-generated SMS will be sent to the builder. This will escalate to second or orange stage if four yellow alerts are issued within one week, with another SMS to be sent to the builder, seeking immediate corrective action.

If four orange alerts are issued in 30 days, then the C&D site will be placed under third or red stage, where an official warning letter will be sent to the site. Under the red stage, the site will also be required to identify local sources impacting air quality.

If an action report is not submitted within three days, the plan states that the site will then be placed in the fourth or purple stage, which will require a physical inspection by DPCC, with all pollution-intensive activities to be stopped immediately. Sites can be shut down in the purple stage, if adequate corrective action is not taken, or violations are large-scale, officials said.

Dipankar Saha, the former head of Central Pollution Control Board's air laboratory, said dust, which leads to a spike in PM10 levels, is among the primary sources of pollution during summer, requiring focused action. "The plan should help pinpoint sites leading to local air pollution. It is also important to look beyond C&D sites and ensure dust is controlled at the neighbourhood level too," he said.

IT grad dies in horrific bike crash on Golf Course Road

Debashish Karmakar

letters@hindustantimes.com

GURUGRAM: A 27-year-old man driving a superbike on Golf Course Road in Gurugram was killed on Friday morning after he lost control of the vehicle and rammed the divider and a street light, police officers aware of the case said.

Police identified the deceased as Rituj Beniwal, a resident of Sushant Lok I in Sector 43. Officers investigating the case said that he was riding his black Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10 around 6.10 am when he lost control, adding that the impact of the crash was such that Beniwal's body was severed in half, and his superbike broke apart. Looking at the severity of the damage to both the motorbike and his person, police suspect that Beniwal was riding at a speed of around 130-140kmph at the time of the accident.

Investigators said Beniwal, who was from Jaipur, completed his B.Tech and M.Tech from IIT-Kanpur, and was working with Gurugram-based Logic Fruit Technologies for the past three years. Police said he lived in a rented flat in Sushant Lok I, and was a motorbike enthusiast, adding that according to his flatmate Shantam Sharma, Beniwal took out his superbike for joyrides on weekends and holidays.

Police said around 6am on Friday—a holiday on the occasion of Good Friday—Beniwal left his flat wearing biking gear, including a helmet and gloves, and rode to Golf Course Road.

Investigators said that parts of the mangled motorcycle and the lower part of the man's body were found at least 20-30 metres

away from the accident spot.

Mayank Gupta, deputy commissioner of police (east), said the accident took place around 200 metres away from the entrance to Belvedere Towers.

"Beniwal was on the main lane of the Golf Course Road, which connects to the Jaipur-Delhi carriageway. He was speeding and ended up hitting the divider after losing control," the DCP said.

"He hit the metal wires fencing above the divider and a street light pole at the spot, resulting in mutilation of his body, which led to his instant death," Gupta said.

Virender Sharma, security officer at a nearby condominium, said he heard the crash and sent a security team to the spot.

"The deceased was alone at the spot. Our guards said there was no other vehicle near him," he said.

Meanwhile, police said Beniwal's family do not suspect any foul play and have not got a first information report (FIR) lodged.

"We are carrying out an inquiry based on the statement of his father Ajeet Beniwal," said a senior police officer.

Captain Bobby Singh Sehgal, head of Riders of Storm Forever—a Gurugram-based motorcycle club—said that there are three major clubs in the city, which have 50-100 members each. "There are several such smaller groups in the city," he said.

According to Sehgal, most crashes involving superbikes happen due to speeding. "In other countries, a separate driving licence is issued to the owner of a superbike, but not in India," he said.

Gruesome accident

Rituj Beniwal, 27, was driving his Kawasaki Ninja ZX-10 superbike when he lost control and crashed. The deceased's flatmate said he was extremely fond of high-end motorcycles, and took out his superbike for joyrides on weekends and on holidays

ILLUSTRATION: ASHISH DASS



Beniwal leaves his Gurugram Sector 43 residence on Friday morning for a joyride, wearing his helmet and gloves



On Golf Course Road, Beniwal loses control and rams into the divider and a street light. Police said the impact of the crash was such that Beniwal's body was severed in half

PWD ASKS ITS MAINTENANCE UNIT TO INSPECT FLYOVER DEFECTS

NEW DELHI: The Public Works Department (PWD) has decided that flyovers across the city will be maintained in their respective zones, to make the process easier and to reduce delays in the maintenance process. Every PWD zone has a maintenance unit that usually hands over the flyovers to another team, the flyover unit, after construction. However, the flyover unit is short-staffed and has just about two engineering staff. This has made it difficult for it to keep track of minor repairs of over 100 flyovers spread across the city under PWD, officials aware of the matter said on Friday.

Officials said the decision was taken after repair-related complaints were received regarding multiple flyovers across the city, most of which did not require big-budget approvals.

Delhi PWD issued a memorandum on Thursday directing its maintenance unit to inspect the flyovers/underpasses/bridges and inform the flyover unit about any defect or deficiencies in the structures.

"Maintenance unit should continue to inspect the flyovers/underpasses/bridges in general and intimate any defect/deficiencies in the structural member for information to flyover unit. This will not require specific efforts by the maintenance team as length of flyover is 1-2 km and jurisdiction of maintenance division is around 100 kilometres," the order said. hrc

Car rams divider in Nuh on Mumbai e-way, four killed

Debashish Karmakar

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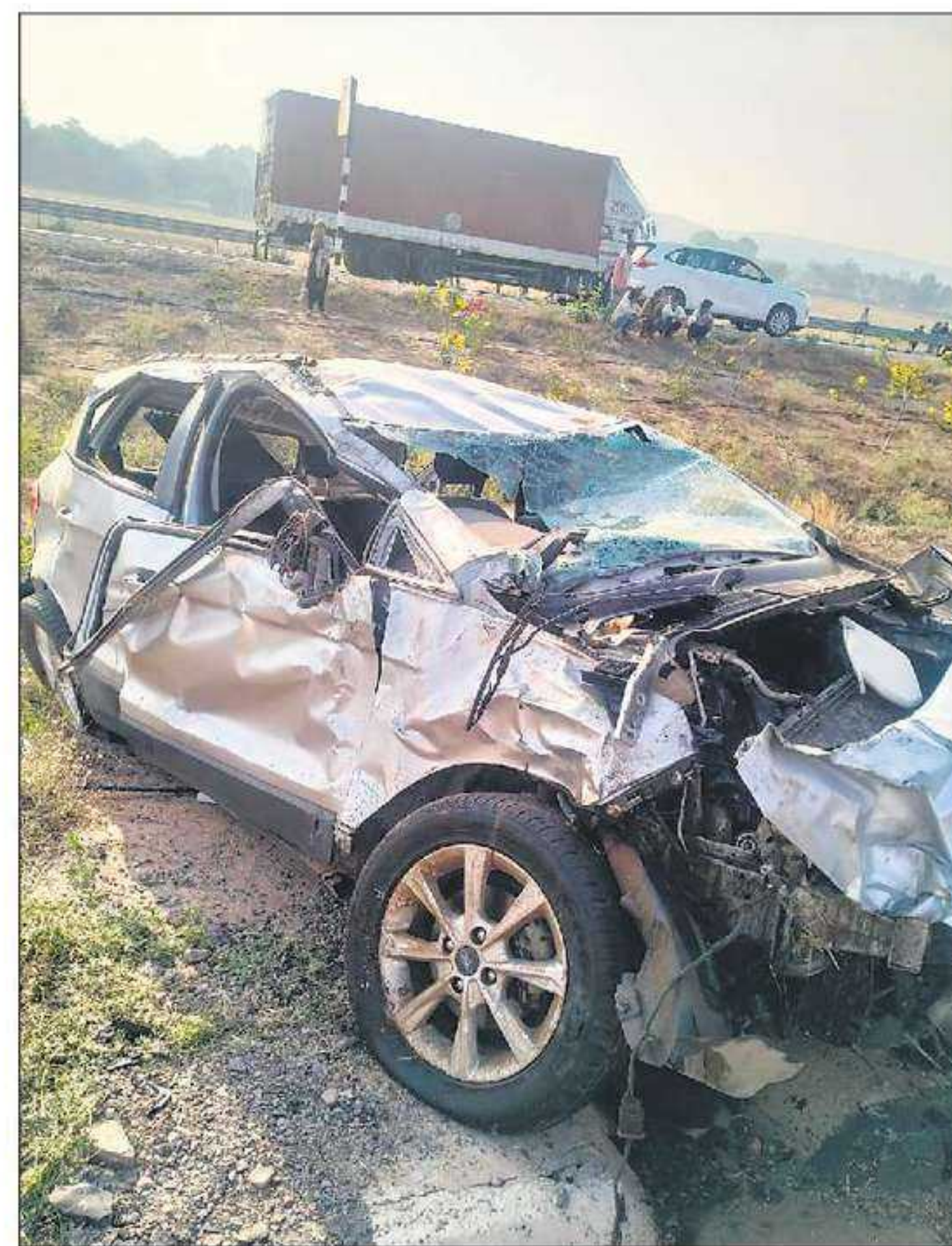
GURUGRAM: Four people were killed and three were injured after the car in which they were travelling swerved off the Delhi-Mumbai expressway near Jhimrawat village in Nuh, police officers aware of the matter said. The driver lost control of the vehicle after one of its tyres burst on the high-speed corridor, they added.

Police said that the incident took place at about 6 am on Thursday, when seven members of a family were travelling in a Ford EcoSport from Meerut to offer prayers at Mahakal temple in Ujjain.

The deceased were identified as Anita Devi, 42, her son Sambhav Varun, 19, and her two nephews, Piyush, 13, and Deepanshu, 29 (both identified by their single names). The injured were identified as Anita's daughter Geetanshi Kumari, 15, and sister-in-law Pushpa Devi, 42, and Pushpa's son Himanshu Kumar, 32.

According to police, Varun was driving the car when one of the tyres burst, causing him to lose control. The car subsequently veered off the expressway, hit the divider, and flipped multiple times, before coming to a rest on the carriageway going towards Delhi, they said.

Inspector Kuldeep Singh, station house officer of Pingwan police station, said Geetanshi told police that she heard an



The mangled car near Jhimrawat village in Nuh on Friday. HT PHOTO

explosion, after which the car flipped. "Three of the occupants were killed on the spot, and the remaining four were rushed to a hospital in Mandikhera, where Anita died during the course of treatment," he said.

"The injured were shifted to a

government college and hospital in Nalhar. Their family members later got them shifted to a private hospital in Gurugram," he said.

Police said the family did not suspect any foul, due to which an inquiry under CrPC section 174 was being carried out.

Right to education does not confer choice of school as well, rules HC

Shruti Kakkur

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NEW DELHI: The fundamental right to free and compulsory education does not confer on any child a constitutional right to be educated in a particular school of choice, the Delhi high court has said, adding that the state is only obligated to ensure that every child receives such education free of charge till the age of 14.

"The right guaranteed to every child under Article 21A of the Constitution or under the RTE (Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education) Act is only for free and compulsory education till the age of fourteen. The state is only obligated to ensure that every child receives such education free of charge. The child, therefore, has a right only to receive such edu-

cation. Article 21A does not, however, confer, on any child, a constitutional right to be educated in a particular school of her choice. The right available under Article 21A of the Constitution or under Section 12 of the RTE Act is only to free and compulsory education till the age of fourteen, not for being provided such education in a particular school," a bench of justice C Hari Shankar said in the March 22 order.

The court was of the view that the right to be educated in a particular school of choice would only arise if a child applies to the Directorate of Education (DOE) as an economically weaker section (EWS) student for admission in the entry-level class for that year and is shortlisted in the computerised draw of lots conducted by DOE.

The court laid down this principle while denying admission to a seven-and-a-half-year-old girl in Maharaja Agrasen Model School for the academic session 2023-24 in Class 2.

The girl sought admission on the ground that the school refused to admit her irrespective of her name being shortlisted for admission as an EWS student to Class 1 for academic session 2022-23 after the computerised draw of lots conducted by DOE.

Relying on the provisions of the RTE Act read with circulars issued by DOE, the girl, in her petition before the high court, contended that the school could not have refused to admit her.

Rejecting her contention, justice Shankar ruled that a child who failed to secure admission into a school as an EWS candidate despite having been shortlisted by DOE can even initiate

legal action in that regard. However, it noted, "Each year constitutes a fresh academic session. A child, who, for whatever reason, is unable to secure admission into a school as an EWS candidate despite having been shortlisted by DOE, and allows that academic year to pass without initiating any legal action in that regard, cannot claim that on the basis of the said shortlisting, that she or he has an enforceable right to admission in that school for the next academic year to the next higher class. There is no such automatic carry forward of the right which ensures in favour of the student, consequent to the draw of lots conducted by DOE for a particular academic year, to the next academic year, in that class or in any higher class. Rights, it must be appreciated, extinguish with time."

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

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person(s) Vishal Singh S/o Jitender Singh R/o Village Pahasu, PS: Pahasu, Tehsil Khurja, Dist. Bulandshahr, U.P., also at House No. T-98, Mavi Mohalla, Tekhand Village, New Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in Case FIR No. 03/21, dated 02.01.2021 U/s 33/52 Delhi Excise Act, PS Pul Prahlad Pur, South-East Distt., New Delhi and it has been returned to a Warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused person(s) Vishal Singh can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person(s) Vishal Singh has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person(s) Vishal Singh of Case FIR No. 03/21, dated 02.01.2021 U/s 33/52 Delhi Excise Act, PS Pul Prahlad Pur, South-East Distt., New Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before dated 30.04.2024.

By Order
Sh. Himanshu Tanwar
Metropolitan Magistrate-10,
South-East Distt., Room No. 307,
3rd Floor, Saket Courts, New Delhi

DP/3678/SE/2024
(Court Matter)

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

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Bintu Ram, S/o Om Prakash, R/o Village Lalwala Tohana, PS Sadar Tohana, Distt Fatehabad, Haryana has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 407/22, dated 20.07.2022, U/s 33/58 D.Ex. Act, P.S. Kirti Nagar, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said Bintu Ram cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Bintu Ram has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said Bintu Ram accused of FIR No. 407/22, dated 20.07.2022, U/s 33/58 D.Ex. Act, P.S. Kirti Nagar, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before 06.05.2024.

By Order
Ms. Sonam Gupta
Chief Metropolitan Magistrate
West
DP/3666/WD/2024
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

उत्तराखण्ड लोक सेवा आयोग
हरिद्वार
फोन नं. 249404

संख्या: 339/01/डीओआर(डिजी)/सेवा-2/2021-22
दिनांक: 28 मार्च, 2024

विज्ञापित
असिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर (राजकीय महाविद्यालय) चयन-2021

एतद्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि असिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर (राजकीय महाविद्यालय) चयन-2021 के विज्ञापन दिनांक 04 दिसम्बर, 2021 एवं विज्ञापित दिनांक 19 जनवरी, 2022 द्वारा प्राप्त ऑनलाइन आवेदन पत्रों में अंकित एणोटाईड स्कॉर के आधार पर शादीतिरिक्त/संशोधित शादीतिरिक्त परीणाम में सफल अभ्यर्थियों से प्राप्त किये गये अभिलेखों की सन्निरीक्षा के क्रम में असिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर समाजशास्त्र (Sociology) विषय के लिए अर्ह अभ्यर्थियों हेतु साक्षात्कार दिनांक 22 एवं 23 अप्रैल, 2024 को निर्धारित किया गया है। अभ्यर्थियों के लिए साक्षात्कार ज्ञाप, साक्षात्कार कार्यक्रम को आयोग की Website: psc.uk.gov.in पर प्रसारित किया गया है। अभ्यर्थी साक्षात्कार कार्यक्रम हेतु आयोग की वेबसाइट का अवश्य अवलोकन करें।

अभ्यर्थी आयोग की वेबसाइट से साक्षात्कार से संबंधित आवेदन पत्र इत्यादि को डाउनलोड करने के पश्चात् प्रपत्रों को पूर्ण रूप से भरकर समस्त संलग्नकों एवं बैंक लिस्ट सहित मूल अभिलेखों के साथ साक्षात्कार के लिए उक्त निर्धारित तिथि को उत्तराखण्ड लोक सेवा आयोग, हरिद्वार के कार्यालय में प्रथम सत्र पूर्वाह्न 09:30 बजे एवं द्वितीय सत्र अपराह्न 12:30 बजे उपस्थित होना सुनिश्चित करें। यह भी सूचित किया जाता है कि अभ्यर्थियों को साक्षात्कार ज्ञाप डाक के माध्यम से प्रेषित नहीं किये जायेंगे।

(गिरधारी सिंह रावत) सचिव।

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2. Tender No: T-03/CPD/CTPS/2023-24 online e-Bids are invited for the "Supply of Hydrochloric Acid (30% Conc.) for 2x660MW, CTPS, Obra". E-tender has been uploaded on 21.03.2024 on http://etender.up.nic.in Estimated cost of work approximately Rs. 1,45,250.00 only, E.M.D. 1,400.00, Tender Cost 354.00. Last date of submission 18.04.2024 up to 13.00 Hrs., SE, E&MCC-V

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4. Tender No: 10/SE(CMC-I)/CMD-II/2024-25 online e-Bids are invited for the "Work of supply and fixing of PVC water storage tank in CISE Colony, OTPS, Obra". E-tender has been uploaded on 28.03.2024 on http://etender.up.nic.in Estimated cost of work approximately Rs. 11,56,329.00 only, Time period: 06 Month, E.M.D. 23,000.00, Tender Cost 1180.00. Last date of submission 20.04.2024 up to 16.00 Hrs., SE, CMC-I

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Sacred day



Christians gather for prayers at Sacred Heart Cathedral Catholic Church at Gol Dak Khana, New Delhi on the occasion of Good Friday, marking Jesus' death by crucifixion. SANJEEV VERMA/HT PHOTO

Send blessings for Kejriwal: CM's wife launches WhatsApp campaign

Alok KN Mishra
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife, Sunita, on Friday launched "Kejriwal ko Aashirwad [bless Kejriwal]" campaign on WhatsApp, urging people to send blessings and good wishes to the jailed Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader.

"You can also share any message. Many mothers and daughters have sent wishes for their son and brother [Kejriwal]. I got many calls, and many people were observing fast for Arvind Kejriwal. Write and send your love on this WhatsApp number. He will feel good reading your messages. I will deliver all the messages to him in jail," said Sunita. "You do not need to be an AAP worker to send him a message. Do send messages to Arvind Kejriwal regardless of which party you belong to," she said in a video shared by the Aam



Sunita Kejriwal. HT PHOTO

Aadmi Party on its social media platforms.

She asked people to send their messages on WhatsApp numbers 8297324624 and 9700297002.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested Kejriwal on March 21, hours after the Delhi high court denied his request for interim protection from arrest for alleged irregularities in the now-scrapped 2021-22 excise policy.

Sunita referred to Kejriwal's

statement in a Delhi court on Thursday as ED got an extension in his remand. She added Kejriwal has challenged the most corrupt, dictatorial, and powerful forces. "Arvind Kejriwal spoke in the court yesterday [Thursday] and presented his side. You all must have heard it. If you have not heard it, please hear it once. It requires a lot of courage to speak in front of the court the way he did it. He is a true patriot, similarly, our freedom fighter used to fight against the dictatorship of the British," she said.

During his remand hearing on Thursday, Kejriwal accused ED of running a racket in the name of probing the excise policy case. He said ED's sole intention was to crush the AAP and implicate him. Kejriwal attempted to link a "racket" in the excise probe to money received by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) through electoral bonds from some businessmen linked to the probe.

Sunita asked people to consider Kejriwal their son and brother. "Will you not support him in this fight? I have full faith that together we will fight this out."

This was Sunita's third media appearance since Kejriwal's arrest. AAP ministers have clarified that Kejriwal will continue as the chief minister, insisting his arrest is a political conspiracy.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said AAP is synonymous with forgery. "Two former ministers and one MP and now CM Arvind Kejriwal have been arrested for corruption. Instead of apologising to the people, the party is now trying to portray Arvind Kejriwal's arrest as a sacrifice. By fielding chief minister's wife AAP is trying to garner sympathy. The people of Delhi will not be misled nor will there be any misunderstanding about Kejriwal's arrest," he said.

MHA nod to CBI probe against AAP's Jain in jail extortion case

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has given sanction to the Central Bureau of Investigation to probe jailed Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and former Delhi minister Satyendar Jain over allegations of extortion by alleged conman Sukesh Chandrashekhar, an action that the AAP described as "vindictive".

An official aware of the matter, who asked not to be named, said that the case is related to allegations made by Chandrashekhar, who wrote to the Delhi lieutenant governor in November 2022, alleging that Jain had demanded ₹10 crore from a minister in the Delhi cabinet.

Jain, until his arrest in May 2022 in a money laundering case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), held key portfolios such as health, home and prisons in the Delhi government. Chandrashekhar has been lodged



Satyendar Jain (left), and Sukesh Chandrashekhar. ANI

in prison since 2017.

"LG had earlier written to the MHA recommending a probe. MHA has granted sanction. CBI may also register a case in the matter," said an official, who asked not to be identified.

"The vindictive and vendetta-filled politics of BJP has now reached a new low. A notorious conman's word is believed and accepted as gospel truth against a person who gave the world famous Mohalla Clinic concept to Delhi," AAP spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar said in a statement.

"For a free and fair investiga-

tion, inquiry must also be initiated on LG who, according to the prison jail manual, is liable for the safety and security of the inmates, and protection money, if any, could only have been given to LG," Kakkar said, pointing out that law and order in Delhi are under the domain of LG and the central government.

MHA and CBI spokespersons did not comment on the development.

HT has seen a copy of the complaint filed by Chandrashekhar to LG on October 7, 2022. In the complaint, Chandrashekhar alleged that sometime in 2019,

Jain, his secretary and another person had visited him in prison and demanded ₹2 crore as "protection money". Chandrashekhar has alleged that around ₹10 crore was handed over 2-3 months to a man in Kolkata. The money, he alleged, was for Jain and other top officials of Delhi jails.

Between 2020 and early 2021, when Chandrashekhar was in Delhi's Rohini jail, he posed as a top bureaucrat and took ₹200 crore from jailed industrialist Shivinder Mohan's wife, Aditi Singh. Police have alleged that Sukesh spoofed phone numbers, posed as two senior bureaucrats, and called Mohan's wife with an offer to get bail for her husband.

Chandrashekhar's counsel, Anant Malik, said, "We welcome the CBI probe and will fully cooperate. A free, fair and impartial investigation will bring out the truth with respect to the extortion racket run under the leadership of Satyendar Jain and jail officials against whom Sukesh had filed the complaint."

Rabri Devi became the first female CM of Bihar in 1997 when her husband, Lalu Yadav, resigned as the Bihar CM ahead of his arrest in connection with the fodder scam. HT

SUNITA PREPARING TO HOLD CM POST LIKE RABRI DEVI: HARDEEP PURI

NEW DELHI: Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Friday said that chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife Sunita was perhaps preparing to hold the post of her husband like former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi.

"The madam you are naming is perhaps preparing to hold the post like Rabri Devi did in Bihar," the senior BJP leader told reporters at the inauguration of the Delhi BJP's election office.

Puri was responding to a question about Sunita Kejriwal who has made several appearances in the media since Arvind Kejriwal's arrest by the ED last week. Sunita Kejriwal, a 1994-batch Indian Revenue Services (IRS) officer, served in the Income Tax (I-T) department for 22 years.

Rabri Devi became the first female CM of Bihar in 1997 when her husband, Lalu Yadav, resigned as the Bihar CM ahead of his arrest in connection with the fodder scam. HT

ED trying to access CM phone: Atishi

NEW DELHI: Senior Delhi minister Atishi on Friday alleged that the Enforcement Directorate is working as a "political tool" for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and added that the agency wants to get details of AAP's Lok Sabha election strat-

egy by accessing Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's phone.

"So, it's not the ED but the BJP that wants the password of Arvind Kejriwal's phone and want to know through Kejriwal's phone what preparations

the Aam Aadmi Party has made for the elections," she alleged.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said Atishi was making misleading statements.

"They must tell why Kejriwal and Sisodia changed their phones frequently," he said. HT

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Delhi logs warmest day so far at 37.8°C, rain in parts of city

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NEW DELHI: The mercury continued its steady climb in Delhi on Friday, with the maximum temperature rising to 37.8 degrees Celsius (°C) — five degrees above normal and the highest maximum so far this season.

Prior to Friday, Delhi's highest maximum was 37°C, recorded both on Wednesday and Thursday. On Tuesday, the maximum was 34.6°C.

The city on Friday recorded clear skies in the first half of the day, making for another warm afternoon. In the evening, parts of Delhi recorded drizzle or light rain, following a passing spell of thunderclouds from an active western disturbance influencing north-west India, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The Met department also predicted another spell of light rain before Saturday night.

IMD data showed no rainfall was recorded at any weather station in Delhi till 5pm. However, "trace" rainfall was recorded at



Dark clouds hover over Raisina Hill on Friday. SANJEEV VERMA/HT

the Safdarjung observatory in the next three hours, while Palam logged 0.2mm rain. The Met department said there were chances of more rain late on Friday and in the early hours of Saturday, before the western disturbance weakens on Sunday.

"We saw a passing spell of

active thunderclouds towards the evening due to the prevailing western disturbance. Most parts of Delhi saw windy conditions and a drizzle was also recorded at several places in the city. There are chances of light rain on Saturday too, so a yellow alert has been issued," said Kuldeep

Srivastava, scientist at IMD. Delhi's minimum temperature too remained above 20°C for the second consecutive day. It crossed 20°C for the first time this year on Thursday, touching 21.2°C. In comparison, it was 20.5°C on Friday, which was two degrees above normal.

IMD's forecasts showed that rain is likely to bring down the maximum temperature to around 36°C on Saturday, with it hovering around 35°C on Sunday. The minimum should also remain around 20°C till Sunday, it said.

In March last year, the highest maximum recorded was 34.3°C on March 16. In 2022, it went up to 39.6°C on March 31 and in 2021, it touched 40.1°C on March 30. In 2020, the highest maximum in the month of March was 33.3°C (March 26) and it was 39.2°C in 2019 (March 31).

Meanwhile, Delhi's pollution levels continued to remain "moderate". The 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) was 176 (moderate) at 4 pm on Friday. It was 160 (moderate) at the same time on Thursday.

7-year-old boy dies in East Delhi house collapse, 2 held

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NEW DELHI: A seven-year-old boy, the son of construction workers, was killed after a portion of an under-construction house collapsed on him in Shahdara's Farsh Bazar area, police officers aware of the case said.

The boy's parents and relatives were construction workers in the same house, the said.

The incident occurred on Wednesday morning, and police said that they arrested two people in connection with the case on Friday.

Police identified the victim as Bunty Rekvaar. Officers said his parents were working inside the house when the iron shuttering collapsed on the boy. The boy, who sustained severe injuries to his head and chest, was rushed to hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries, officers said.

Giving details of the case, police said the Rekvaar family is originally from Tikamgarh in Madhya Pradesh and worked as contractual workers at under-construction buildings, where

I wanted to settle down in Delhi with my family. We have been trying to find a room for months. My poor boy was crushed, and I could not do anything.

RAKESH REVKAAR,
victim's father

they often stayed for the duration of the construction. The family had been living at the current site for around 25 days, officers said.

At around 10am on Wednesday, police said, the iron shuttering of the house collapsed.

"The boy was trapped under the iron shuttering and debris. His relatives had to pull him out and he was rushed to Dr Hedgegar Hospital, but he succumbed to the injuries" said a senior

police officer aware of the case. Bunty's father Rakesh Rekvaar, 40, said, "I wanted to settle down in Delhi with my family. We have been trying to find a room for months. I also wanted Bunty to study. My poor boy was crushed and I couldn't do anything. I want strict action against the contractor."

On the basis of a complaint by Rakesh, the police filed a first information report (FIR) against Ompal Dhama, the owner of the property, and Lachchi Kumar, the contractor, under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections relating to causing death by negligence.

In his complaint, Rakesh alleged: We had placed tarp sheet inside the house and were staying there. The iron shuttering was already in place but I had repeatedly complained that it was not strong enough... But they didn't pay heed and forced us to work. On Wednesday, around 10 am, I was working when the shuttering collapsed." Police said the labourers were also not provided with any safety equipment, adding that Lachchi and Dhama were arrested on Friday.

PRO-SEPARATIST GRAFFITI PAINTED AT PUNJABI BAGH METRO STATION

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police has registered a case after some miscreants painted separatist graffiti and slogans on the pillars of the Punjabi Bagh Metro station, officers aware of the matter said on Friday. The slogans and graffiti, spotted on Thursday, were promptly erased, and officers said they have registered a case and have initiated a probe into the incident.

Deputy commissioner of police (west) Vichitra Veer said, "A case under relevant sections of Delhi Prevention of Defacement of Public Property Act was registered and investigation has been taken up."

A police officer aware of the matter said that a social media post claimed that pro-"Khalistan" graffiti and slogans were painted outside four Metro stations, but was detected only at the Punjabi Bagh Metro station. "CCTV footage from the area will be obtained and scanned to identify the suspects," the officer said on condition of anonymity.

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) did not comment on the matter. HTc

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This way to Gali Mandir Wali

The Walled City dictionary

{ PUBLIC INTEREST }

Here's a book binding establishment, two tailoring workshops, a travel agency, a chai stall, a computer institute, a beauty parlour, many homes, many side-lanes, a wall of lakhori bricks, a dead peepal tree, and Shri Nav Durga Mandir. This mandir gives its name to this street.

As part of our 'Walled City' dictionary series, that's chronicling every Old Delhi street.

The temple of Gali Mandir Wali, in Kucha Chelan, opens only in the mornings and evenings. "The aged priest lives outside the Walled City," says bookbinder Anil Girotra, the privileged holder of the all-important mandir keys. His large binding workshop is right beside the temple. Anil grew up in the street, but like almost every Hindu family that lived in Gali Mandir Wali, he explains, his family too moved out in the 1990s. He now lives in distant Janakpuri. "The only reason for the exodus was that the area had become too congested, and people wanted to live in more khuli jagah (open spaces), outside cramped Purani Dilli." The gali's present residents are Muslim, he says, except for one house with a Hindu family.

Offering a darshan of the temple even though it is closed for the afternoon, the kind Anil pulls apart the red metal grills and opens the mandir's door.

The chamber is filled with space, silence and shant. A series of curtained alcoves line the facing wall. Each alcove enshrines a sacred idol. "In the old times, the mandir had a tin shed above," Anil recalls, glancing towards the ceiling. The new building came up in 1975, as inscribed in the foundation stone.

This afternoon, the mandir is empty but it nevertheless evokes the presence of its devotees—the walls in many places are laid with memorial plaques detailing the names of temple donors and of their loved ones: Lala Shamlal and wife Kaushalya Devi Sunej; Dharampal Singh Mahatta and his late father Seeta Ramji Mahatta; Pannalal Shivchand Rai; Lakshman Das and wife Kaushalya Devi.

The mandir's short flight of staircase is similarly inscribed with names of peoples past: Harbans Lal Talwar and his parents Sevaramji Talwar and Kaushalya Devi; Ramchandra Yogeshwar and his parents Krishna Chandra and Hari Devi; Sheeta Prakash and his late mother Yashoda Devi; Seeta Devi, wife of late Thakur Das.

"All these people lived in the vicinity, ikke-dukke were inhabits of the gali," remarks Anil.

On emerging out into the street, he stumbles into his friend Muhammad Ahsan Nawab, a publisher. "This locality is my karam bhoomi," Ahsan says. Both graciously agree to be snapped.



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After raging for five days, Noida dump fire doused

Ashni Dhaor

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NOIDA: A fire that was raging in an empty plot in Noida's Sector 32 for five days was finally doused on Friday, fire officials said, adding that the operation involved around 150 firefighters and more than 4 million litres of water.

According to fire officials, the blaze started at around 6pm on Monday at a spot used as a dumping ground by the horticulture department, and added that the fire was "deliberately set" by unknown miscreants.

Dry leaves and branches at the open ground were 30 feet deep and kept feeding the fire, the officials said.

"All the 150 firefighters, who were working round the clock to douse the flames, battling the smoke, are elated, but are still on alert. They are hoping that the flames do not get reignited," Noida chief fire officer Pradeep Kumar Chaubey said.

As a precautionary measure, two fire tenders have been stationed on the spot, he added.

"We are also using earthmovers to cover the whole area with damp mud so that fire does not get reignited. So far, we have used over 4 million litres of



The fire at the open plot in Sector 32, began on Monday. SUNILGHOSH

water to douse the flames," Chaubey said.

To be sure, this is the same site where a huge fire had broken out in May 2023, which was finally doused following continuous firefighting efforts that lasted six days.

Asked whether any investigation will be launched to find the people who set fire to the site, Anand Mohan Singh, deputy director, horticulture department, Noida authority, said, "The incident happened on the evening of Holi. Hence, it is

highly likely it was caused by someone under the influence of intoxicating substances. It is very difficult to identify such people. A decision to launch an investigation into finding the culprits has not been taken yet."

Meanwhile, residents in the area heaved a sigh of relief.

"The whole locality had been reeling under a thick cloud of smoke since Monday but we are glad that the fire is under control now," said NP Singh, president of Sector 35 Residents' Welfare Association.

SUSPECT PLANNED RAPE, MURDER OF BAWANA MINOR FOR DAYS: POLICE

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New Delhi: Two days after a 27-year-old man was arrested from Asansol in West Bengal for kidnapping, raping and brutally murdering a five-year-old girl in Delhi's Bawana, the police said that the accused had been planning the crime and his escape for days.

On March 24, the accused allegedly lured the minor to an abandoned factory, where she was raped, bludgeoned to death with a brick, and her throat was slit. Her body was hidden inside another factory, and was only found three days later when the accused was arrested, police said.

Senior police officers, aware of the matter said the accused, originally from Asansol, had planned the crime for days. According to the police, the accused and the girl's parents, who operate a tea stall, have known each other for years as they live in the same locality in Bawana.

On Sunday afternoon, he took the girl to a factory on the pretext of offering her food, but raped her. He then killed her and escaped to Kolkata by train, they added.

Investigators said the accused then travelled to Howrah, and took another train to Asansol. "He killed the girl because he knew he would be caught. He has known the family since the girl was born. He knew she could easily identify him" an officer said on condition of anonymity.

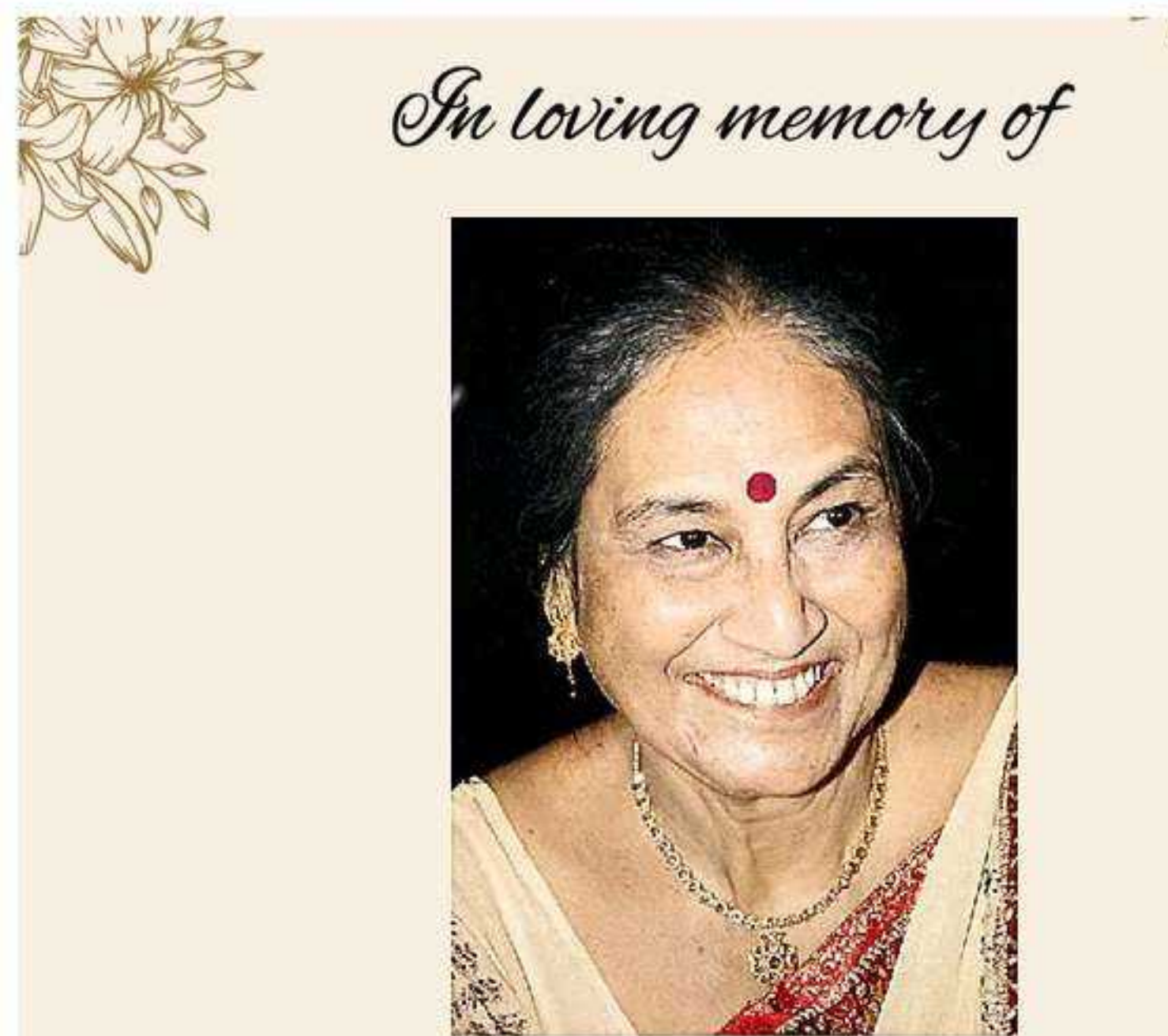
"We identified him with the help of CCTV footage and followed him to his home town and arrested him on Wednesday... We questioned him and found that he had planned the rape and murder. He specifically chose the time around Holi since he knew most of the factories around the area would be shut. We also found that he had conducted a recce to find an abandoned factory to commit the crime and later hid the body," he added.

POLICE SAID THE SUSPECT KILLED THE GIRL AS HE KNEW HE WOULD BE CAUGHT

HT Homage

9th Death Anniversary
Dr. Swarn Chawla
on 30th March, 2024
Yours life and deeds continue to inspire us.
You will live in our hearts forever.
CA. J.P. Chawla (Husband)
CA. Rajat & CA. Richa Chawla (Son & Daughter-in-law)
Dr. Rachit & Dr. Esha Chawla (Son & Daughter-in-law)
Manan Chawla, Arin Chawla (Grand Sons)
Chawla's, Mehra's & Juneja's and Gauba's
Dr. Swarn Chawla Memorial Foundation

1st Year Remembrance
Dalip Singh Vedi
01.03.1946 - 30.03.2023
We miss you every moment in our life, your presence continues to surround us, in our hearts, you are always there.
Deeply Missed by:
VEDI FAMILY



In loving memory of
Smt Asha Saxena

11 March 1943 – 28 March 2024

सब सुख लहै तुम्हारी सरना ।
तुम रच्छक काहू को डर ना ॥

All joys are found in Your refuge.
With You as the protector, there is nothing to fear.

A prayer meeting to honour her memory will be held at
Chinmaya Mission, 89 Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110003.
Sunday, 31st March 2024 | 11:30 am to 12:30 pm

Mohan Behari Lal Saxena
Atul & Meeta | Malini & Pranav
Grandchildren & Great Grandchild

HT Unforgettable

In Everlasting Memory
Shri Dharam Pal Diwan
1927 Dalwal Distt. Jhelum
30.03.1999 New Delhi. The
Memories of your courageous
and inspirational lifestyle are
alive with us. We follow your
path of working incessantly
and sincerity of purpose. **The Family.**

DELHI COURT PULLS UP COP FOR SLOPPY PROBE

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Wednesday pulled up the Delhi Police calling for action to be taken against the investigating officer (IO) for sloppy investigation and seeking release of the main accused in a case regarding possession and sale of drugs.

"IO being the law protector should not be allowed to become crime promoter as he is leaving the big fish i.e. the main culprit who is supplying the contraband but only catching the small fishes i.e. the delivery boys, who are delivering the contraband," said special judge Ekta Gauba Mann. "IO ASI Naresh Kumar has not investigated properly... it is a very strange fact that the IO has himself moved an application... before Ld. Predecessor of this Court for release/discharge of accused Farman Ali," the court said in the order. HTc

Woman murders husband in Ggm

Debashish Karmakar
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GURUGRAM: A 49-year-old man was strangled to death by his wife and her mother after a domestic spat at their Gurugram Sector 9A residence, police officers aware of the case said on Friday. Initially, the women tried to cover up the murder by claiming that the deceased had died of excessive liquor consumption. Both the women were arrested, they added.

Police identified the deceased as Ajne Mandal, adding that his wife Rakhi Devi Mandal, 35, and her mother Opehri Mandal, 58, killed him on March 23. Police said Ajne used to return home in an inebriated state almost every evening, and would fight with

his wife and mother-in-law.

On the night of the murder, Ajne returned to his home at Surya Vihar in Sector 9A in an inebriated state, and began a verbal altercation with Rakhi. She pushed him hard, and he cracked his head on a wall and fell unconscious. Rakhi called Opehri and they strangled Ajne to death using a cloth.

They took the body to the Sector 10A civic hospital, where doctors declared him dead and informed police, officers said.

Inspector Rambir Kumar, station house officer of the Sector 9A police station, said two women tried to cover his death by linking it to excessive drinking. "However, it was clear from the post-mortem report that he was strangled," he said.

Modi, Gates discuss AI, India's key role in tech

Aditi Agrawal
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NEW DELHI: In a one-on-one interaction with Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates on February 29, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that health, agriculture and education are the focus areas for digital governance, and that he has been working to ensure that digital divide does not plague India. Digital governance, artificial intelligence, and deepfakes dominated the first half of the 45-minute video of the interaction which was released on Modi's personal YouTube channel a month later on Friday. The video was not released on any government handles, including those of the Prime Minister's Office, or the Press Information Bureau, presumably because of the Model Code of Conduct that has been in force since the declaration of general elections on March 16.

"When I used to hear about digital divide in the world, I used to say that I will not let anything like that happen in my country. Digital public infrastructure is a big requirement for that," Modi said. According to ICRER's State of India Digital Economy 2024 report, while "India as a nation is highly digitalised, the average Indian is not". "Nearly 48% of Indians do not access the internet and the quality of fixed line internet services does not match up to other G20 countries." According to IAMA's internet in India report 2023, at 759 million, 52% Indians have access to the internet.

The ICRER report noted that India's gender gap in internet connectivity is, at 10%, higher than the world average of 9%, and the rural-urban divide is at 58%, higher than the world average of 49%. While the digital divide along gender is large, it is declining, it said. "Even when I went for the G20 summit in Indonesia [in 2022], all nations around the world were curious about how India brought about the digital revolution. I explained to them that I have democratised



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates talk in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

this technology so that nobody can have a monopoly over it. It will be of the people, by the people and whatever emerging talent in the public makes a value addition to it, that will keep happening so that common man can also trust the technology," Modi told Gates.

In February, the parliamentary standing committee on communications and technology asked the government to promote local Indian players in the fintech sector following a submission by the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) which said that Walmart-owned PhonePe and Google Pay account for 83.3% of the UPI market in the country, HT reported on February 10. To demonstrate how he uses AI, Modi showed Gates a feature in the Narendra Modi app, commonly called the "NaMo" app, which has been created and is run by the BJP.

"I am using my NaMo App and I use AI a lot, and I find this very useful across the country," Modi said. He asked Gates to take a selfie on the app's Photo Booth feature. The app immediately showed Gates all photos that included the two of them over the last 20 years, causing Gates to exclaim, "Whoa!"

"Even if in some public function, even if just 1/10th part of you was visible, then it will pull all photos where that 1/10th of you is visible and where I am visible, it will retrieve that photo," Modi said.

"Earlier, when I used to go around the country, people used to request me for my photo. Now, I tell them to go to my AI [on] my NaMo app, to the Photo Booth, take a selfie, and you will get all your photos with me even if you are in the corner of the photo."

NaMo app's chief compliance officer, nodal contact person and resident grievance officer is Amit Malviya, the national convener of the BJP's IT Cell. The app is a part of the narendramodi.in website which is also run by the BJP.

Watermarking for AI-generated content is an important first step: PM

Modi said that powerful tools such as AI tools need to be used responsibly, and cannot replace actual human expertise. "If we use AI as a magic[al] tool, there might be great injustice done. Or if I use AI due to laziness, [for instance] if I have to write a letter to someone and I don't draft it [myself] and instead ask ChatGPT to draft the letter for me, that is the wrong way [of using AI]..." he said. He acknowledged the problem of being misled by AI-generated content, including but not limited to deepfakes.

"I have noticed that if such a powerful thing is handed to someone without properly training them first, the chances of it being misused increase... I said that to begin with, all AI generated content should have a watermark that

says that this is AI-generated so that no one is misguided. This isn't a bad thing; it is simply AI generated so that I can ascertain its value for myself. Deepfakes - in a vast democratic country like India, if someone uploads a deepfake, for instance if someone uploads something bad in my voice, initially people will believe it and it will lead to a fire [chaos]. It is important to mention that deepfake is AI-generated and to mention its source," he said.

To be sure, deepfakes and synthetically altered content are not defined under the law and experts differ over what would meet the threshold that requires labelling.

Modi told Gates, "In these initial days [of deepfakes], such steps are required; we may not need them in future. But for now, we will need to think over such dos and don'ts. In the same vein, I should extract that work from AI which is within my field of expertise. To use AI for something where I don't have expertise [or understanding], [or something] I am tired or lazy about, that is not right."

Gates asked about privacy, Modi focussed on using data for research

Gates asked Modi about how he was looking at privacy and data security related concerns, especially when AI depends on large amounts of data. "Data is a huge issue right now. We must look at its security. India has the legal framework but we need to increase awareness too."

Modi talked about ease of living through the Digital Locker which allows the data processor to retrieve necessary personal documents of an individual. On privacy, he said, "First, we need to train the common man for quality data... Second, the data owner must know for what purpose the asking entity is going to use the data for. If the entity wants to monetise the data through an agreement, then it should be allowed [consented to by the data owner] first. The first priority should be for research..."

IAF TO KICK OFF MEGA 10-DAY DRILLS ON APRIL 1

NEW DELHI: The Indian Air Force will showcase its capability to carry out high-tempo operations during an upcoming exercise, Gagan Shakti-2024, which will involve all air force bases and assets scattered across the country, officials aware of the matter said on Friday.

The pan-Indian drills will be carried out in a realistic environment from April 1 to April 10, the officials said.

Gagan Shakti was last held in 2018 when IAF clocked more 11,000 sorties during the two-phase air manoeuvres that saw the concentration of the air force's deployed assets move from western sector to the eastern front in less than 48 hours.

It sought to test IAF's readiness for a two-front war with China and Pakistan. From deep strikes to air dominance and maritime operations to air defence, IAF practised every manoeuvre in its preparation for a short and intense war.

The latest drills follow Exercise Vayu Shakti-24, conducted on February 17 at the Pokhran air-to-ground range near Jaipur.

That exercise saw IAF deploy its front-line assets including Rafale fighter jets, Mirage-2000s, Sukhoi-30 MKIs, Tejas light combat aircraft, Jaguars, Chinook heavy-lift helicopters, Apache attack helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles and surface-to-air missile systems.

This year's Vayu Shakti was followed by the tri-services Bharat Shakti exercise, which was witnessed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Pokhran on March 12.

{ JAISHANKAR, KULEBA HOLD TALKS }

Ukraine seeks India's support for peace meet

Rezaul H Laskar
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NEW DELHI: Ukraine lobbied for India's support for a peace summit planned for summer during a meeting on Friday between foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar, who said New Delhi is committed to strengthening the overall bilateral relationship.

Kuleba, on his first visit to India at the invitation of Jaishankar, has called on India to back the peace summit to be hosted by Switzerland to build on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's peace formula, especially in view of New Delhi's standing in Global South.

India has refrained from publicly criticising Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, though it has backed dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward to end the conflict.

In a post on X, Jaishankar said he had an "open and wide-ranging" conversation with Kuleba that focused on the "ongoing conflict and its wider ramifications". Without giving details, he said the two sides exchanged views on "various initiatives in that context".

The two sides also discussed global and regional issues. "Reiterated our commitment to strengthen the overall relationship, including bilateral cooperation," Jaishankar said.

Kuleba alluded to the pro-



EAM Dr S Jaishankar with Ukraine foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba. SJAISHANKAR X

posed summit figuring in the discussions in a post on X. "We paid specific attention to the Peace Formula and next steps on the path of its implementation," he said. A statement from the external affairs ministry said the talks included a comprehensive discussion on the Ukraine conflict and "efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement".

The talks also focused on strengthening ties in areas such as trade, investment, science and technology, defence, agriculture, health and education. Kuleba also met deputy national security adviser Vikram Misri.

The peace summit was initially planned for March but is now expected to be held in the first half of June.

Ahead of his meeting with Jaishankar, Kuleba told Hindustan Times during an interaction with a small group on Thursday night that Ukraine is looking to India's participation in the peace summit as this will

help convince other countries, especially in the Global South, about the initiative. "India can take the lead to become the first major non-Western power to openly support the summit on President Zelenskyy's peace formula. The conversation with Russia can begin one day, and India can be well placed in this process," Kuleba said.

"If India wants to lead, it has to move. Having India's confirmation of support for the peace formula will mean having a big player on board. India is a voice that matters to others, especially in the Global South, and it will help to convince them," he said.

Kuleba added: "India matters and we would like to have it on board. It will add legitimacy to the international efforts and bring other countries on board."

Kuleba acknowledged the legacy of India's long-standing ties with Russia and said New Delhi could pick one or two topics from Zelenskyy's 10-point formula, "possibly the return of children and the prisoners of war as well as energy security".

This formula envisages restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, withdrawal of Russian troops, formal confirmation of the end of war, and radiation and nuclear safety, especially in the context of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

Jaishankar and Kuleba also co-chaired a review meeting of the bilateral inter-governmental commission.

NewsClick case charge sheet likely tomorrow

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police may file on Sunday a several thousand-page charge sheet in the UAPA case registered against the news portal NewsClick, which is accused of receiving a huge amount of money to peddle pro-China propaganda through its stories, officers said on Friday. The Delhi Police Special Cell had last year registered a case under sections 13, 16, 17, 18 and 22 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act along with sections 153A and 120B of the IPC in the matter.

NIA summons 8 TMC leaders in 2022 blast case

KOLKATA: The NIA on Friday again summoned eight Trinamool Congress leaders for questioning in connection with a blast that occurred at Bhupatinagar in West Bengal's Purba Medinipur district in 2022, an official said on Friday. The TMC accused the BJP of engineering the NIA's move. The central probe agency asked the eight to appear before its officers at 11 am on Saturday, after they skipped the earlier summons that directed them to visit the NIA office at New Town near here on March 28.



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3-time Cong MLA from Chhindwara in MP joins BJP

BHOPAL: In a setback to the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, its three-term MLA from Amarwara in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district, Kamlesh Shah, on Friday joined the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Shah also resigned as MLA, assembly principal secretary AP Singh told news agency PTI. It has been accepted by speaker Narendra Singh Tomar and the Election Commission of India will be informed about the resignation soon, he added.

BJP releases names for J'khand, Raj assembly bypolls

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party on Friday announced the candidates for the by-elections to be held in Ghazipur assembly seat of Jharkhand and Bagidora assembly seat in Rajasthan. The party has fielded Dilip Kumar Verma from Gandey assembly, while Subhash Tamboliya has been given a ticket from Bagidora assembly in Rajasthan. The bypoll to Bagidora assembly will be held on April 26, while the Gandey assembly bypoll will be on May 20.

Amit Shah set to campaign in Assam on April 6

GUWAHATI: Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said that Union home minister Amit Shah will campaign for the first phase of Lok Sabha polls in the state on April 6. The BJP leader will campaign in Lakhimpur seat and in Hojai, which falls under Kaziranga seat, Sarma said.

Heart attack resulted in Ansari's death: Autopsy

Haider Naqvi

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BANDA: A chief judicial magistrate's court in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh on Friday ordered a judicial inquiry into the death of gangster-politician Mukhtar Ansari, even as the autopsy report prima facie ruled out suspected poisoning and cited heart attack as the cause of death, people familiar with the matter said.

Banda chief judicial magistrate (CJM) Bhagwan Das Gupta appointed district MP-MLA court judge Garima Singh as the investigating officer and sought the probe report on the death of Ansari (60) within a month, a senior official said.

After the completion of the post-mortem examination, which was conducted by a panel of doctors at Rani Durgavati Medical College in Banda, a convoy of 26 vehicles, including an ambulance, carrying Ansari's body left for Ghazipur, around 400km away, on Friday evening. "The (autopsy) report negated any suspected poisoning and cited heart attack as the cause of death," another official said, requesting anonymity.

According to the police, Ansari's son Umar Ansari along with his two cousins, Ibrahim and Usman, were present inside the ambulance carrying the body. The Uttar Pradesh government had in advance chalked out the route for taking the body amidst tight security, police said.

According to the Ansari family, the former Uttar Pradesh legislator will be buried at the family cemetery at Mohammadabad's Kali Bagh in Ghazipur. Heavy security arrangements have been put in place around Ansari's residence and the cemetery.

Station house officer (SHO) of Mohammadabad police station, Pawan Kumar Upadhyay, said Ansari's family members have



Mortal remains of Mukhtar Ansari being taken to his residence in Ghazipur, from a hospital in Banda, Uttar Pradesh, on Friday. PTI

said that if the body reaches Ghazipur by 10pm, then the burial will be held on Friday itself, else it will be held on Saturday morning.

Ansari, once among Uttar Pradesh's most dreaded gang leaders who represented Mau assembly seat between 1997 and 2022, was brought to Rani Durgavati Medical College from Banda prison for a second time in a week shortly before he was declared dead on Thursday. He was admitted for 14 hours on Tuesday after he complained of abdominal pain.

"At approximately 8.25pm, Ansari was brought to the emergency wing in an unconscious state after having complained of vomiting. A team of nine doctors gave urgent medical attention to the patient, but despite efforts, he died of a cardiac arrest," said a bulletin issued by the hospital.

During the post-mortem examination, Ansari's family stayed inside the autopsy room with the entire process being video recorded. The panel of doctors preserved the viscera, which would be sent for forensic examination to ascertain

whether there was any poisoning or not, officials said.

The post-mortem examination was conducted by ENT specialists Mukesh Kumar, Mahesh Gupta, senior physician SD Tripathi, orthopaedic Dr Vikasdeep Bilatia for an hour. The process began at 2pm. Two senior officials confirmed that there were instructions to strictly adhere to protocols, as the case could face legal scrutiny.

The autopsy report negated the allegation by Umar Ansari that his father was subjected to "slow poisoning" and not given proper treatment, a charge refuted by authorities.

"This is not a natural death, but a murder," Umar told reporters, adding his family intends to pursue legal avenues for investigation. "I spoke to him on phone at 3.30pm on Thursday. He told me he was feeling too weak. My father instructed me not to come... he seemed to have sensed his demise," he added.

Earlier, Umar had sent a hand-written application to Banda district magistrate Durga Shakti Nagpal, demanding that the post-mortem examination

be conducted at AIIMS, Delhi or by its doctors. Umar Ansari also said he had no hope for justice from the local administration, medical team and the police. "They should either reject or approve the request, we have given them the demand," he said.

Ansari, who had over 60 heinous crimes registered against him, was brought to Banda jail from a Punjab jail on April 7, 2022 on the order of the Supreme Court.

Uttar Pradesh additional director general of police (law & order) Amitabh Yash said the state police was on high alert since Thursday night and extra deployment was done strategically in sensitive districts in view of the Friday prayers and death of Ansari in Banda. He said extra forces were sent to districts such as Mau, Ghazipur and Banda to ensure peace and maintain law and order. Heavy police force has been deployed from the residence of the Ansari family to the graveyard, and barricades have been put up at various places.

(With agency inputs)

{ LOK SABHA POLLS }

Cong releases list of 5 names for K'taka, Raj

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NEW DELHI: The Congress on Friday announced two more names for Rajasthan and three more for Karnataka in its latest list for the Lok Sabha elections, fielding former assembly speaker CP Joshi in place of party leader Damodar Gurjar from Bhilwara seat in the desert state.

Gurjar has been fielded from Rajsamand seat from where party leader Sudarshan Rawat was earlier named.

Joshi handled multiple portfolios during the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government, including rural development and railways. An advocate of legislative reforms, Joshi served as speaker of the Rajasthan assembly during senior leader Ashok Gehlot's tenure as chief minister.

The Congress also announced candidates for three seats, including two reserved ones, in Karnataka. Sandur legislator E Thukaram, who was the state minister for medical education from 2018 to 2019, has been fielded from Bellary.

The party announced Sunil Bose's candidature from Chamarajanagar. Bose is the son of state social welfare minister HC Mahadevappa. A Congress leader pointed out that the party initially wanted his father to contest from the reserved seat.

Raksha Ramaiah's candidature was also announced in the latest list. The party has fielded him under the "Youth Congress quota", said a senior leader. Ramaiah is the national general secretary of Indian Youth Congress (IYC) and also the former state president of the IYC unit in Karnataka. With the latest list, the party has so far announced the names of 213 candidates.

On Wednesday, Congress announced the names of 14 candidates, hours after its Central Election Committee (CEC) cleared the names of candidates for a host of seats in Uttar Pradesh, including Prayagraj and Ghaziabad, but did not touch Amethi or Rae Bareilly. The party, during the CEC meeting, also discussed the nominations in three other states — Jharkhand, Telangana and Goa — and the Union territory of Daman and Diu. The next CEC is expected to be held on Sunday.



Breakdown of list

KARNATAKA	RAJASTHAN
● E THUKARAM Bellary	● DAMODAR GURJAR Rajsamand
● SUNIL BOSE Chamarajanagar	● CP JOSHI Bhilwara
● RAKSHA RAMAIAH Chikkballapur	

With the latest list, the party has so far announced the names of 213 candidates for the coming seven-phase Lok Sabha elections.

Party manifesto may be released on Apr 5

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NEW DELHI: The Congress is likely to announce its manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections on April 5 in New Delhi and follow it up with rallies across the country, starting with Jaipur on April 6, a senior functionary said on Friday.

The event in Delhi is expected to see the top three leaders — Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, party's parliamentary head Sonia Gandhi and former party chief Rahul Gandhi — releasing the manifesto that hinges on five set of guarantees — one each for women, youngsters, farmers, workers and social justice.

The party will use the tagline "Ghar Ghar Guarantee" campaign on April 3 under which party leaders will reach out to more than 80 million households across the country. "We did the same thing in Karnataka and Telangana," pointed out a senior leader.

The Congress has planned to spend 40% of its funds on social media and television and about 15% in advertisements in print media and 5% on outdoor advertisements, the leader said.

While a fresh income tax notice for penalties to the tune of ₹1,800 crore has been issued to the Congress for alleged discrepancies in its tax returns, party leaders added that it won't be a key poll issue for them. "We will focus on pressing issues such as price rise and unemployment," said a senior strategist.

Ahead of the manifesto release, Rahul Gandhi reiterated the promise to give 50% reservation to women in government jobs if the Congress is voted to power.

Asserting that powerful women will change the destiny of the country, the former Congress chief asked why even today, only one in three women is employed and why there is just one woman in every 10 government jobs.

"Isn't the population of women in India 50%? Is the presence of women in higher secondary and higher education not 50%? If so, then why is their share in the system so low. Congress wants, 'Aadhi Abadi Poora Haq'." We understand that women's potential will be fully utilised only when women have equal contribution in the government running the country," he said in a post on X.

In its guarantees, the Congress has also promised to fill up 3,000,000 public sector vacancies and give ₹1 lakh annually to all poor households.

{ WEST BENGAL } AGAINST TMC POLL NOMINEE

BJP candidate complains to NCW over breach of privacy

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KOLKATA: Rekha Patra, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Lok Sabha candidate from Basirhat in West Bengal and one of the victims of atrocities against women in Sandeshkhali, has lodged a complaint against Trinamool Congress (TMC) nominee Debangshu Bhattacharya for alleged violation of her privacy. In a complaint with the chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW), Patra alleged that Bhattacharya, the TMC candidate from Tamluk constituency and head of party's social media cell, made details of her personal information and bank accounts public. She also shot off a letter to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, alleging that the offence was violative of the SC/ST (prevention of atrocities) Act.

"Recently, through a post on



Rekha Patra

Debanshu Bhattacharya's Facebook account, the TMC candidate from Tamluk has shared the private details of my client, such as phone number, bank account details, Swasthya Sathi scheme details, as well as the Duare Sarkar scheme details, which is a clear violation of my client's right to privacy and an outrage to her modesty by making her personal details public," Patra's lawyer Suraneel Das wrote in an email to NCW chief Rekha Sharma.

On Thursday, Bhattacharya had attacked Patra, alleging she availed the state-sponsored health insurance scheme, Swasthya Sathi, in

2021. He uploaded Patra's details on his social media account, which the TMC also shared on X.

"Caught red-handed! @BJP4India's MP candidate from Basirhat, Rekha Patra, plays the ultimate game of hypocrisy, enjoying the benefits of @MamataOfficial's schemes... PM @narendramodi, the next time you call her, don't forget to inquire about her Swasthya Sathi card. It might help you understand how our leader's brainchild, Swasthya Sathi, surpasses the failed Ayushman Bharat scheme," the TMC posted on X.

The attack came two days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Patra and lauded her as a "shakti swarupa". Patra, through her counsel, urged the commissions to take immediate action against the TMC leader for "violating her right to privacy, outraging her modesty, and breaching provisions of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Protection (Prevention of Atrocities) Act."

CPI, CPI(M) also under scrutiny of I-T officials

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NEW DELHI: While the Congress has received a fresh tax notice of ₹1,823.08 crore, for alleged arrears in FY94 and between FY17 to FY20, two other Opposition parties, CPI(M) and CPI, are also under the scrutiny of the Income Tax (I-T) department.

According to CPI functionaries, the I-T department had served a notice to the party over use of "old" PAN cards by some of its state units a few years ago. "Three state units, including the one in Telangana, had used old PAN cards. The I-T department fined us to the tune of ₹11 crore. We are fighting the matter legally," a senior CPI functionary said.

A senior member of the CPI(M) Politburo said the outfit was served a tax notice six months ago. "It is related to some alleged discrepancies in FY16-17. It is a sub-judice case," the member said.

For the CPI(M), the tax

A SENIOR MEMBER OF THE CPI(M) POLITBURO SAID THE OUTFIT WAS SERVED A TAX NOTICE SIX MONTHS AGO

amount demanded is ₹15 crore. A second Politburo member said: "Usually, I-T authorities inform you about the tax anomalies. Then, assesses are given time to respond. But we got the tax demand notice unilaterally. They didn't allow us to explain our situation."

A party leader said: "This is a ploy to disable the opposition before the Lok Sabha elections."

At a press conference on Friday, Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said: "It's not only us. But two other opposition parties have also got I-T notices. The government is nervous and trying to stop the opposition parties from fighting the elections."

{ TELANGANA }

Ex-DCP held in phone tapping case

Srinivasa Rao Apparasu

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HYDERABAD: A former deputy commissioner of police (DCP) of Hyderabad police task force was on Friday arrested in connection with the case of phone tapping and destroying certain computer systems and official data during the tenure of previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government in Telangana.

P Radhakrishnan Rao, the retired IPS officer, was in the evening produced before a Hyderabad court, which sent him to 14-day judicial remand. Rao became the fifth police officer to be arrested in the case.

"As part of the investigation in the case, the said person (Radhakrishnan Rao) was called for questioning yesterday to Banjara Hills police station, and during

P RADHAKISHAN RAO WAS SENT TO 14-DAY JUDICIAL CUSTODY AFTER HE CONFESSED HIS INVOLVEMENT IN THE CASE, POLICE SAID

his questioning he confessed about his involvement in the commission of the reported crimes of conspiracy to develop profiles of private persons, exploiting the official resources meant for lawful duties," a police release said on Friday night.

Rao had served as the DCP of Hyderabad task force police till 2019 and later continued in the same office as officer on special duty (OSD). Besides Rao, the

Punjabgutta police also arrested inspector B Gattu Mallu for his suspected involvement in phone-tapping incident, in association with suspended deputy superintendent of police (DSP) Duggayala Praneeth Rao of the special intelligence bureau (SIB), people familiar with the matter said.

Praneeth Rao was arrested on March 13 for allegedly tapping phones of "unknown persons", believed to be political leaders from opposition parties, and tampering with vital evidence and call data records. Last week, two former policemen, N Bhujanga Rao and M Tirupattanba, were also arrested in the case.

Meanwhile, police are on the lookout for prime accused, former Telangana Intelligence Bureau chief T Prabhakar Rao, who is believed to have fled to the US after Praneeth's arrest.

{ INTERVIEW } KANGANA RANAUT, BJP CANDIDATE FROM MANDI

'Time has come to fight a bigger battle for the people'

MANDI: Actor Kangana Ranaut, who is the Bharatiya Janata Party's candidate for the Lok Sabha elections from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, began her poll campaign with a roadshow from Banoha to her native village Bhambla. In an interview with Dar Ovais, she speaks about her decision to enter the political arena and her priorities. Edited excerpts:

Why did you decide to join politics?

Joining politics was on my mind for the past few years. People gave me so much success and it was time to fight for their welfare. From raising issues of pay parity and women empowerment, the time has now come to fight a bigger battle for the people. For this, I needed a larger platform and it was natural for me to align with the BJP.

Who is your role model?

I admire Swami Vivekananda, who instilled a fair sense of nationalism in me and Sadhguru ji, who has inspired me to



become a karmayogi. Another person who influenced my mind, my thinking and perspective is Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

What will be your priorities for Mandi?

Right now, honestly, we have been given the task to win by maximum margin and once that happens, I would have a voice to raise for Mandi. There is a lot of work to be done in every department, such as schools, hospitals and roads. I will become the voice of people of Mandi in Parliament and will

fight for their rights.

How do you see Congress's criticism of your absence during last year's floods?

I am like you all. I am just janata here. People have chosen their representatives and they were hoping to see them by their side in the hour of crisis. People in power are answerable for that and not me.

Is Congress leader Supriya Shrinete's social media post a closed chapter now?

It is up to the Election Commission of India to decide.

EC: MORE THAN 79K COMPLAINTS ON VIOLATIONS OF POLL CODE SO FAR

Shriya Ganguly

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NEW DELHI: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Friday said it received over 79,000 complaints through its cVigil app regarding violations of the Model Code of Conduct since the announcement of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

More than 99% of the complaints have been resolved and close to 89% of those were resolved within 100 minutes, the commission said. It said more than 58,500 complaints (73% of total) were against illegal hoardings and banners, 1,400 pertained to the distribution of money, gifts and liquor, while 2,454 were regarding the defacement of property.

According to the commission, 535 complaints regarding the display of firearms and intimidation were received, of which 529 have been resolved. Nearly 1,000 complaints reported were for campaigning beyond the prohibited period, including the use of speakers beyond the permitted time.

cVIGIL is a mobile application that allows citizens to report incidents of political misconduct.

Bijapur encounter faked, say Maoists; police deny charge

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RAIPUR: Two days after six Maoists were killed in an alleged encounter in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) on Friday claimed there was no gunfight and the victims were caught and killed in a "fake" encounter, a claim denied by the police force.

The Maoists also called for a "bandh" in Bijapur and Sukma on April 3 against the incident.

"On March 27, 2024, in the village of Chipurmati, Bijapur district, our two party activists along with six villagers were subjected to a heinous massacre which was claimed as an encounter," a statement issued by the South Bastar divisional committee of CPI (Maoist) said. "We demand justice for the innocent villagers who were mercilessly killed... We demand the unconditional release of the innocent villagers who were detained."

Inspector general of police (IGP), Bastar range, Sunderaj P rejected the allegations as "old



CRPF and its CoBRA unit during a search operation in Bijapur on Wednesday.

tactics" of Maoists.

"It is the typical modus operandi of Maoists to level allegations against the security forces to puncture the credibility of security forces. Maoists conveniently forget that they are responsible for brutal killings of hundreds and hundreds of innocent civilians," the IGP said.

"Just to distract the attention from their inhumane behaviour, they issue these kind of statements. All concerned understand the reality that the Maoists are facing their extinction."

The Maoists further claimed that no armed groups were present during the said encounter and the claim by security forces of seizing a large quantity

of weapons, explosives, and daily use items was a "blatant lie".

"Our party activists, Gangi Para and Punem Nagesh, along with another member, were attending meetings in the area to address community issues. Acting on information provided by police informants, they were ambushed and apprehended while they were asleep around 4am on the day of the encounter and later killed," the statement alleged, claiming the other three people killed in the incident were villagers.

Meanwhile, a photograph purportedly taken on the same day shows a person with his hands tied up and surrounded by security forces. The person in the purported photograph, which was widely circulated on social media and authenticity of which HT could not independently verify, resembles one of the suspected Maoists who was killed in the said encounter.

When asked about the photograph, the Bastar IGP said, "I will gather information regarding the authenticity and facts about it from the concerned units."

LEFT ANNOUNCES CANDIDATES FOR TWO MORE SEATS IN WEST BENGAL

Press Trust of India

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KOLKATA: The CPI(M)-led Left Front on Friday announced candidates for two more Lok Sabha constituencies in West Bengal, expressing hope that the talks with the Congress and ISF over sharing of seats would conclude in a few days.

Addressing a press conference, Left Front Chairman Biman Bose named CPI(M)'s Biplab Moitra for the Arambagh constituency and Sonamani Murmu Tudu for Jhargram. He said the final list of the Left Front would be out in a few days after the talks conclude.

With this, the Left Front has announced candidates for 22 seats, while the Congress has named nominees for nine seats in the state. In the Coochbehar seat, which is going to the polls in the first phase on April 19, the Congress and Left Front constituent Forward Bloc have fielded candidates, complicating the discussions. There are 12 more seats for which neither of the two has announced any candidates. Notwithstanding, the ISF has announced candidates for eight seats.

NIA links 'Thirthahalli module' to IED blasts in parts of K'taka

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BENGALURU: A group once associated with graffiti near a police station in Mangaluru has become the most wanted terror module in Karnataka. Known in police circles as the "Thirthahalli module", this group is believed to be responsible for a series of improvised explosive device (IED) explosions in both Mangaluru and Bengaluru, with aspirations of establishing an Islamic State Caliphate within Karnataka's forests, according to a charge sheet filed by NIA.

Mussavir Hussain Shazib, identified as the bomber in Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Café blast, and Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa, the alleged key conspirator, have emerged as key figures within this module. Interestingly, both were previously associated with another extremist group before the inception of the Thirthahalli (literally, village of holy water) module.

Their emergence on the radar of investigative agencies dates back to January 2020 when state police uncovered the Al Hind terror module, inspired by the Islamic State (IS), operating in Bengaluru's Suddaguntepalya. Spearheaded by Mehboob Pasha, affiliated with the Al Hind Trust, Shihabudeen and Khaja Moideen from Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu the module aimed at establishing an IS province through insurgent activities spanning Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

"They formed the Al-Hind module and selected Bengaluru as their base and conducted several criminal conspiracy meetings in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu since April 2019," NIA said in its charge sheet filed in the Al-Hind module case in September 2021. "They had propagated the ideology of the proscribed terrorist organization, ISIS and conspired to collect arms and explosives for murdering police



Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa and Mussavir Hussain Shazib

officers and Hindu leaders. The investigation has revealed that charge-sheeted accused Shihabudeen was part of the larger conspiracy and as per the directions of Khaja Moideen had collected and handed over arms and ammunitions in Mumbai to other accused persons. These arms were further used in the murder of Special Sub-Inspector Wilson of Tamil Nadu Police (January 2020)," it added.

Its reference is to the 2020 killing of A Wilson, a special sub-inspector who was shot dead while on duty at a check post along the Kaliyakkavilal Market Road in Kanyakumari close to the Tamil Nadu-Kerala border.

According to a senior official of the Internal Security Division that initially investigated the case, when Bengaluru police cracked down on this module as part of the investigation into the murder of police officer Wilson, two names came up - Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa and his distant relative Mussavir Hussain Shazib, who had become members of the module. However, they were on the run.

While on the run, the two men ended up in their hometown of Thirthahalli, where the second chapter of the module began. During their time there they began radicalising several youths from their home town to carry out terror attacks, said the officer.

The activities of this alleged module first caught the attention of state police in November 2020 when three individuals, Maaz



Muneer and Mohammed Shariq from Thirthahalli, and Syed Yasin from Mangaluru were arrested for painting pro-terror graffiti on the walls of a building in the East police station limits and on a wall in the North police station limits.

NIA said that Taahaa and Hussain indoctrinated the youth and instructed them to write graffiti in support of terror and terror outfits at two places in Mangaluru. Even in this case, Taahaa and Hussain evaded arrest.

It was two years later, in September 2023 the names of those involved in the graffiti case popped up again. Shivamogga police on September 23, 2022 said that two associates of a person arrested in connection with a stabbing incident during a clash over Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's poster in Shivamogga on August 15 were linked to the Islamic State.

One of the four men arrested in the stabbing told police that Mazz Muneer, who was arrested in the graffiti case was his associate. When police took Muneer into custody, he told police that along with other members of his group, he had conducted trial bomb blasts along the banks of the Tungabhadra river.

An officer who investigated the case said that during raids carried out in 11 locations as part of the investigation police seized 14 mobiles, two laptops, remnants of the experimental bomb found at the site of the blast, materials required to make

bombs and a half-burnt Indian national flag.

Explaining the findings of the investigation, the officer said that in the days following Independence Day, the national flag of India was burnt near the spot where the bomb was set off and it was videographed on the mobile phones of Muneer and others. "The accused profess the ideology of Islamic State. They were of the view that India got independence merely from the British. But the real independence would be achieved only after establishing a caliphate in the forests of Karnataka and enforcing Sharia law," the officer said. Further investigation revealed that Hussain and Taahaa planned and supported the trial blast. Maaz Muneer and Syed Yasin were subsequently arrested in connection with this case, while another associate Mohammed Shariq managed to evade capture.

Shariq, who was on bail in the graffiti case and later on run in the trial blast case resurfaced in Mangaluru on November 19, 2022 with an IED packed inside a pressure cooker. Even though the target was a prominent temple in the city, the IED exploded accidentally inside an autorickshaw injuring the driver and Shariq.

Shariq's interrogation revealed that Hussain and Taahaa were the planners. They have been on the run until their involvement in the Rameshwaram Café blast in the city on March 1, 2024.

On Thursday NIA said Muzammil Shareef, a key conspirator who extended logistic support to Mussavir Hussain Shazib and Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa, was arrested on Wednesday after several terms of the federal agency raided 18 locations across Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. He, like the other two, is from Shivamogga district in Karnataka.

NIA ANNOUNCES ₹10L REWARD FOR INFO ON ACCUSED

NEW DELHI: The National Investigation Agency (NIA), which is probing into the March 1 blast at the Rameshwaram cafe in Bengaluru, on Friday announced a reward of ₹10 lakh each for sharing information leading to the arrest of two key absconding suspects - Mussavir Hussain Shazib(30) and Abdul Matheen Ahmed Taahaa (30).

The federal agency has already identified Hussain as the one who planted the improvised explosive device (IED) at the café that caused injury to at least nine people and severely damaged the property of the café.

Taahaa has been using "Hindu identity documents" and a forged Aadhaar card in the name of Vignesh to conceal his identity, NIA said. Hussain, NIA said, has been using a forged driving licence in the name of Mohammed Juned Sayed.

NIA officials said the two men are staying in places such as men's hostels, sharing accommodations, low budget hotels and lodges. Officials said the arrest of the two absconding men was crucial not only for the case, but also because Hussain and Taahaa could provide crucial information about the Al Hind terror module, inspired by the Islamic State (IS), active in parts of south India.

"The two have been friends since 2020 when they met in Chennai. They are linked in many cases of terror activities. They were behind spreading messages of terror groups in the November 2022 Mangaluru blast case, in which a pressure cooker bomb had exploded accidentally in an autorickshaw. Before this they were also in touch with people who had painted pro-terror messages in Mangaluru in 2020," an official said. **HTC**

{ AT THE HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL }

Justice Gavai highlights power of judicial review

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NEW DELHI: The judiciary has a duty to do more than merely interpret the law and overturn any legislation or governmental actions that are in conflict with the Constitution, Supreme Court judge Bhushan R Gavai has said, emphasising the courts must also correct the current situation by ensuring appropriate course of action that the political branches ought to take for adhering to constitutional requirements.

"As recognised by the courts, making policy is not within the judiciary's realm. However, in numerous cases, the courts have laid down policy guidelines or issued administrative directives to the government and its instrumentalities to act in the interest of the people. Increasingly, countries across the globe see judicial review as not only a mechanism for checks and balances but also a tool to ensure that the institutions work in the interest of its citizens," said the judge.

Delivering a lecture at the Harvard Kennedy School on Thursday, justice Gavai elucidated the intricate facets of judicial review, shedding light on its paramount importance in regulating legislative and executive actions as well as evolving new constitutional mechanisms and legal principles to benefit people.

"The court's mission extends beyond just interpreting the language of the law in a vacuum and striking down legislation or administrative activities that are inconsistent with the Constitution. It shall also extend to remedying the situation at hand by issuing frequent directives and prescribing correct recourse that political branches need to do to meet constitutional standards," he said. Justice Gavai began the lecture by summarising the basics of judicial review and citing its function as a safeguard



Justice Bhushan R Gavai

for constitutional supremacy and the conformity of legislative and executive acts to core values.

He underscored how judicial review empowers courts to scrutinise laws, administrative decisions, and even constitutional amendments, thereby safeguarding individual rights and maintaining balance between the three pillars of the State.

Highlighting the roots of judicial review in India's constitutional framework, justice Gavai, who is in line to become the Chief Justice of India in May 2025, elucidated how the Indian judiciary, inspired by the U.S. Constitution, has entrenched the concept of judicial review as a fundamental feature of the Indian Constitution.

"Judicial review ensures the supremacy of the Constitution, as it can be used as a check on the actions of wayward majorities...The courts have to review and keep the actions of the different organs of the State, i.e., legislature and executive, in check and remove any inconsistency with the ideals and provisions of the Constitution," said the judge, stressing on the judiciary's pivotal role in preserving constitutional values and serving as the guardian of citizens' rights.

Justice Gavai discussed how judicial review influences policy through different avenues as he explored the relationship between court rulings and policymaking; he also went on to

clarify how courts review legislative actions against established principles, striking down laws that contravene constitutional provisions or violate fundamental rights. The judge illustrated this with landmark cases where the Supreme Court invalidated statutes deemed unconstitutional, such as the abolition of mandatory death sentences and the decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relationships.

In addition, justice Gavai highlighted the judiciary's role in filling constitutional vacuums and legislative gaps, citing instances where the Supreme Court invoked Article 142 to ensure "complete justice" and laid down guidelines in the absence of legislation. He lauded the judiciary's progressive interpretation of the Constitution, which has expanded the ambit of fundamental rights to encompass emerging rights such as the right to privacy and the right to education.

Explaining how the judiciary promotes communication between the government, the court, and litigants to guarantee accountability, openness, and constitutional observance, justice Gavai emphasised the "dialogical aspect" of judicial review.

The judge gave instances of how the constitutional courts in India examined governmental actions to protect fundamental rights and encourage reasonable decision-making during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Justice Gavai underlined the global prevalence of judicial review as a mechanism for constitutional supervision, noting its evolution from a tool of checks and balances to a catalyst for policy reform. Concluding his address, the judge highlighted the judiciary's role in upholding constitutional principles, protecting individual rights and steering policy changes in line with constitutional mandates.

Avalanche hits Sonamarg



Rescue operations underway after several tourists were left stranded due to an avalanche near Hung area of Sonamarg, in J&K on Friday. No loss of life was reported in the incident. **ANI**

Ex-IAS officer among 5 booked for gurdwara kar sewa chief's murder

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DEHRADUN: Five people, including a retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, have been booked on charges of murdering Nanakmatta Gurdwara Kar Sewa chief Baba Tarsem Singh in Uttarakhand's Udham Singh Nagar district on Thursday, police said on Friday.

According to a first information report (FIR) registered at Nanakmatta police station late on Thursday, Sarbjit Singh, a resident of Tam Taran in Punjab, and Amarjeet Singh, a resident of Rampur in Uttar Pradesh, visited the shrine to carry out the murder on Thursday morning.

Retired IAS officer Harvansh Singh Chugh, who is a resident of Gadarpur in Udham Singh Nagar and head of Nanakmatta Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee that oversees the affairs of the gurdwara, Baba Anup Singh from Rampur in UP, and Pritam Singh Sandhu, from Gadarpur and vice president of a regional Sikh organisation were named as accused for their alleged involvement in the case. All the five men have been booked under sections 302 (murder), 34 (common intention) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code.

HT has seen a copy of the FIR. "We have named five people in the FIR on the basis of a complaint received by dera (resting place) sewak Jasvir Singh. Our teams are still gathering inputs and probing the murder from all angles. Police are yet to ascertain the motive of the crime," senior superintendent of police (SSP) Manjunath TC said.



A grab of the CCTV footage of the accused.

On Thursday morning, Tarsem Singh was allegedly shot dead by two unidentified men on the premises of the shrine in Nanakmatta town. According to the police, the incident took place at around 6.15am when two of the accused arrived on a motorcycle and the one riding pillion opened fire at him using a rifle.

Police also said that a preliminary probe revealed that the accused stayed at the premises for nine days, till Wednesday, a day before the murder took place.

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said a special investigation team has been formed to probe the case. In the FIR, Jasvir Singh said Sarbjit Singh and Amarjeet Singh stayed in room number 23 of yatri niwas (traveller's hostel) of the gurdwara since March 19. "Both were seen on the dera premises two days ago. One of them identified himself as Sarbjit Singh... The two assailants came to yatri niwas without any private vehicle and were not carrying any weapon. A local resident is suspected to have provided them with the motorcycle and weapon... The assailant riding pillion was Amarjeet Singh," the FIR said. **PTI**

Navy responds to pirate attack on Iranian vessel in Arabian Sea

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NEW DELHI: Two Indian Navy warships were on Thursday sent to track a hijacked Iranian fishing vessel (FV) in the Arabian Sea, with the navy intercepting it on Friday, the navy said.

This is the latest in a series of anti-piracy operations the navy has undertaken during the last 100 days.

"Based on the inputs on a potential piracy incident on board Iranian Fishing Vessel 'Al Kambat 786' late evening on 28 Mar 24, two Indian Naval ships, mission deployed in Arabian Sea for maritime security operations, were diverted to intercept the hijacked fishing vessel," the navy said in a statement.

The FV was around 90 nautical miles south-west of Socotra and was reported to have been boarded by nine armed pirates, it said. "The operation is currently underway by the Indian Navy towards rescue of hijacked FV and its crew."

The development came days after the navy apprehended 35 Somali pirates and ensured safe evacuation of 17 crew members of hijacked vessel Ruen after a

THIS IS THE LATEST IN A SERIES OF ANTI-PIRACY OPERATIONS THE NAVY HAS UNDERTAKEN DURING THE LAST 100 DAYS

40-hour operation that involved the elite marine commandos being air-dropped from C-17 aircraft around 1,400 nautical miles (2,600 km) from the country's shores.

The mission involved INS Kolkata, which intercepted the pirate ship, INS Subhadra, Sea Guardian remotely piloted aircraft and P8-I maritime patrol aircraft. The 35 pirates were handed over to the Mumbai police on March 23.

"Indian Navy remains committed to ensuring maritime security in the region and safety of seafarers, irrespective of the nationalities," the statement added.

The navy, which has more than 10 warships deployed in the region, has thwarted several piracy attempts in and around

Arabian Sea during the last 100 days and responded to distress calls made by merchant ships hit by missiles and drones launched by the Houthis.

On March 23, navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar said not a single Indian-flagged vessel has been targeted in and around Red Sea by Iran-backed Houthi rebels, who have mostly attacked ships linked to Israel and western nations after tensions escalated in the region following the Israel-Hamas conflict that began on October 7, 2023, but the situation in the western Indian Ocean is volatile and the Indian Navy will remain deployed there till normalcy returns.

In the last 100-plus days, 21 Indian warships have been deployed for operations in the region, accounting for around 5,000 naval personnel being at sea, and 900 hours of flying by the maritime surveillance aircraft, according to Indian Navy data. The navy has carried out almost 1,000 boarding operations on the high seas.

It is conducting maritime security operations in three areas - n and around Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and off the Somali coast.



Rescue work underway at the accident spot in Ramban. **PTI**

9 labourers among 10 killed in J&K accident

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JAMMU: At least 10 people, including nine labourers from Bihar, were killed after the vehicle they were travelling in veered off the road amid heavy rains and plunged into a 500-metre gorge near Battery Chashma on Jammu-Srinagar national highway during the intervening night of Thursday and Friday, police said.

Ramban district deputy magistrate Baseer-ul-Haq Chaudhary said the vehicle was on its way from Jammu to Srinagar to ferry labourers from Bihar.

"While the debris of the cab, believed to be a Tavera, has not been traced yet, 10 bodies have been recovered. It was a sort of free fall. The chances are grim

for any survivors." Ramban SSP Anuj Kumar said, "The site where the crash happened has cemented crash barriers and the road is also wide enough. Prima facie it appears that due to rain and dark, the road might have turned slippery and the driver might have felt drowsy causing the accident."

A case has been registered into the matter under relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code at Ramban police station. In a post on X, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief about the accident and extended "his condolences to the bereaved families."

The PMO said an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh would be given to the next of kin of each of the deceased.

ACTIVISTS CALL FOR MORATORIUM ON MEGA PROJECTS IN HIGH HIMALAYAS

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NEW DELHI: Civil society organisations have called for a complete moratorium on all mega infrastructure projects in the High Himalayas and sought a multi-disciplinary review of the impacts of existing projects.

A coalition of the organisations, the People for Himalaya, released a charter of demands on Friday. "A top-down model of development and region cannot work for the region which has its unique topography, culture and lifestyle," climate activist Sonam Wangchuk said at a meeting on Friday.

Mayalmit Lepcha, from Affected Citizens of Teesta, and Mohan Saikia from the North East Dialogue forum expressed serious concerns about the ecological impacts of massive hydropower development proposed on the Brahmaputra and its river basins allegedly without the consent of local indigenous communities.

Wildlife Biologist Tsewang Namgial and glaciologist Smriti Basnet raised concerns about the loss of biodiversity and glacial health in the High Himalaya region. "Mountains do not need this development which is hasty, haughty and haphazard," said Namgial. The charter of demands will be shared with political parties ahead of elections.

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- 500 12 mtr A-B block
- 500 A-Block Corner

DLF-II

- 300 K-Bik 400 M-Block
- 215 J-Bik (Park/ East)

SUSHANT LOK-I

- 270 A-Block North
- 270 A-Block 24 mtr road

SUNGITY

- 360 Park North

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- 270YD 12 Meter & 30 Meter
- SUSHANT LOK PHASE 3
- 813YD 12 Meter East
- 737YD 12 Meter Road
- 418YD 12 Meter Road
- 300YD 24 Meter Road
- 270YD 24 Meter East
- 215YD Corner 12 Meter

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- 500YD Gated Near Park
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- 360YD North, Park, Gated
- 316YD Bodhi Marg East
- 300YD 12 Meter East
- 270YD 12 Meter & 30 Meter
- SUSHANT LOK PHASE 3
- 813YD 12 Meter East
- 737YD 12 Meter Road
- 418YD 12 Meter Road
- 300YD 24 Meter Road
- 270YD 24 Meter East
- 215YD Corner 12 Meter

SUNGITY, GOLF COURSE ROAD

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- 500YD 24 Meter Road

SECTOR 39

- 368YD 30 Meter Road
- Corner Opposite Medanta

SECTOR 52

- 500YD 30 Meter Road
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- 400YD 18 Meter Road
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{ FROM PAGE 1 }

BIHAR SEAT-SHARING

Gaya and Shrawan Kushwaha from Nawada filed their nominations on Thursday, the last day for filing nominations for the four seats (out of 40) that go to polls in the first phase in the state on April 19.

The nominations caused some heartburn among alliance partners with some leaders expressing the view that the RJD had announced the candidates unilaterally, and before a final agreement could be arrived at. The Congress's Nikhil Kumar, for instance, had his heart set on Aurangabad.

The alliance does not include the Pashupati Paras-led faction of the Lok Janshakti Party. Shrawan Kumar, the national spokesperson of the faction, said his party had neither talked about it nor approached the GA on seat-sharing agreement and reports of a possible alliance between RLPJ and GA were "rumours and speculations".

"We have no intention of going with GA. Our leader Pashupati Paras has been authorised to take a call on any seat adjustment in state and national interest. It will be done soon," he said.

Bihar is expected to be among the most crucial provinces in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), comprising the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Janata Dal (United), the Chirag Paswan faction of the Lok Janshakti Party, the Hindustan Awam Morcha (Secular) and the Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP), has already announced its seat pact.

In 2019, the NDA swept Bihar, winning 39 out of the 40 seats in the state. But the Opposition hopes to do better this time on account of chief minister Nitish Kumar's flip-flops — he won in the 2020 assembly elections in alliance with the BJP before joining hands with the RJD in 2022, only to desert his new partner in January this year and going back to the BJP — and anti-incumbency against the state government.

The Purnea seat, where the RJD and Congress had a rift over the latter's keenness to field Pappu Yadav, went to the RJD. The regional party also kept Madhepura, Supaul and Gopalganj while allotting Katihar — where former MP Tariq Anwar is likely to contest — to the Congress. Both Purnea and Katihar are among the five seats in the state where elections will be held on April 26, during the second phase. Nominations for these five seats opened on March 28.

Leader of the Opposition in the state assembly Tejashwi Yadav was not present in the joint press conference, which was addressed by RJD's senior leader Abdul Bari Siddiqui, Congress state chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh and Jha.

On Tuesday, Yadav announced that seat arrangements were finalised but tensions erupted hours later between the Congress and RJD, which unilaterally announced its candidates for the four seats that go to the polls in the first phase.

Purnea, where Pappu Yadav, who recently joined the Congress, hinted that he might fight as an independent if not picked by the alliance, and Begusarai, where the Congress wanted to field former student leader Kanhaiya Kumar, were sticking points.

But Thursday's seat pact showed that the Congress had been allotted neither of the seats. From Purnea, the RJD is all set to field Bina Bharti, a JD(U) legislator who switched sides recently. The last date of nomination for the Purnea seat, going to polls in the second phase on April 26, is April 4.

From Begusarai, the CPI is likely to field MLA Awadesh Rai. The party's general secretary D Raja had made the announcement last week. Congress did not comment on the announcement.

Asked about Pappu Yadav's assertion that he was keen to fight in Purnea, Jha said alliances are done between political parties. "Alliance is done between political parties and not individuals," he said. Other leaders from the Congress and left parties did not speak.

"I will file nomination... let the party leadership's response come. People of Purnea have said 'Pappu is their son, he won't go anywhere', I will have to follow the order (of the people)," Yadav told reporters in Purnea on Friday.

"I am committed to making Rahul Gandhi the country's Prime Minister and helping the Congress revive in Bihar where, five years from now, it will be a force to reckon with in all 40 Lok Sabha constituencies," he added.



Bihar RJD and Congress leaders announce the seat-sharing pact for the Lok Sabha elections, in Patna. SANTOSH KUMAR/HT PHOTO

Nawada, Jehanabad, Aurangabad, Buxar, Patliputra, Munger, Jamui, Banka, Valmiki Nagar, Purvi Champaran, Sheohar, Sitamarhi, Vaishali, Saran, Siwan, Gopalganj, Ujijarpur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Jhansi, Supaul, Madhepura, Purnea, Araria, and Hajipur.

The Congress will contest Kishanganj, Katihar, Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, West Champaran, Patna Sahib, Sasaram and Maharajganj.

The CPI-ML (liberation) will contest Arrah, Karakat and Nalanda. It will also fight the Agiaon assembly bypolls.

The CPI will fight in Begusarai and the CPI(M) in Khagaria. Nawal Kishore Chaudhary, political analyst and former Principal of Patna College, said the seat sharing in the GA appeared realistic, and would be able to put a good fight against the NDA. It is quite realistic and would give a good fight to the NDA. "Of course, RJD has taken a big share, but this is a realistic seat sharing arrangement," he said.

FRESH NOTICE TO CONG will be taken against those who "disintegrate democracy". And such action will be taken so that no one will have the courage to do all this again," he posted on X.

The IT notice asked for ₹53.9 crore for FY94, ₹181.99 crore for FY17, ₹178.73 crore for FY18, ₹198.45 crore for FY19 and ₹490.01 crore for FY20.

Legal experts close to the IT department said on the condition of anonymity that key matters pertain to AY2014-15 to AY2020-21 (assessment years are one year after the fiscal year, so the assessment year for FY16-17 will be AY17-18).

"Based on incriminating material seized, during search operations specifically in April 2019, reflecting extensive use of cash in electoral process, assessments of INC were reopened for seven years (AY 2014-15 to AY 2020-21). Notices under section 153C of Income Tax Act were issued in March 2023. The assessment proceedings for these seven years were getting time barred on 31.03.2024 as per law," one of them said, requesting anonymity.

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

The Congress's claim of full exemption was earlier rejected by the IT department on two grounds. One, the party did not submit its return of income within the time limit and two, the Congress received cash donations to the tune of ₹14.49 lakh in excess of ₹2,000. The Congress has rejected the allegation, saying it submitted returns within the stipulated time and the money received was from party legislators and office-bearers, and therefore could not be construed as "donations" under the IT Act.

The notice for ₹1,823 crore is the second such tax dispute that the party finds itself embroiled in. The IT department has already initiated recovery proceedings for ₹135 crores of "outstanding demand" after the income tax appellate tribunal and the Delhi high court dismissed petitions by the Congress to stay the recovery process. The party has alleged that it is unable to fund poll expenses because of the tax action.

The legal experts cited above said that the IT department had followed the principle of natural justice. "As per the law, it is very much in the domain of the department to consider all the evidence available before the initiation of reassessment proceedings as well as the evidences collected during the reassessment proceedings while making any additions subject to following the principle of natural justice. All the evidences

available with the department were given to INC. Ample number of opportunities were given to INC to reply especially with respect to various observations of Delhi HC. After considering all the replies filed by the INC, the department has now completed the assessment of seven years," said one of the experts, requesting anonymity.

On Friday, Maken said the party's finances will suffer a huge blow due to the new notice. "The party is not able to spend its own money for the election," he said.

In the press conference, the opposition party also hurled fresh allegations at the BJP, based on what it said were its "internal, AI-based calculations".

It said that in FY18, 92 names were missing in the donors list of the BJP and the total donations taken without names was ₹4.5 lakh. In the same financial year, Maken alleged, the address of 1,297 donors of the BJP were missing and the total donations taken without address were ₹42 crores. "Both the name and address were missing for three donors and the total donations taken without both name and address stood at ₹1.50 lakh," he said.

Form 24A is filed with the Election Commission before the due date for furnishing a return of the political party's income of the concerned financial year under section 139 of the Income-tax Act, 1961 (43 of 1961) and a certificate to this effect should be attached with the Income Tax Return to claim exemption.

"A certain family of the Congress party believes that they should be exempted from rules and that special laws should apply to them, but it is not feasible in modern India," BJP national spokesperson Zafar Islam said in an apparent reference to the Gandhi family.

The Congress maintained that the tax action was an attempt to "paralyse the functioning of the party during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra".

"This action was designed to choke the Congress financially and prevent, stop, delay, and disable any election-related expenditure on ads, travel, salaries, agencies... Is this how a fair election is supposed to be conducted? Is the idea of a level playing field only on paper? Why is the Election Commission a mute spectator to this?" asked Maken.

The tax dispute involving the Congress has drawn international attention in recent weeks. The US state department on Wednesday doubled down on its call for fair legal processes to deal with the Congress's allegations that tax authorities had frozen its bank accounts ahead of general elections, drawing strong censure from the ministry of external affairs.

RAJU PAL CASE

over the special CBI court, convicted Abid Pradhan, Javed (who also goes by Bachau and Shamsul Haq), Ranjeet Pal, Abdul Kavi, Gulhasan, Mohammed Farhan and Israr Ahmed under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including 120B (criminal conspiracy), 147 (rioting), 148 (rioting by using weapon), 149 (committing crime for a common object), 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder).

The court also imposed a fine of ₹1.90 lakh each on all those convicted. Additionally, Farhan was awarded a four-year prison term under Section 27 of the Arms Act and another fine of ₹25,000 was imposed on him.

The court also declared accused Israr Ahmad an absconder and issued a non-bailable warrant against him. He has been on the run since 2005.

Raju Pal was gunned down outside his house on January 25, 2005 in Prayagraj as a result of political rivalry with Atiq Ahmad's brother Ashraf, whom he had defeated in the 2004 bypoll to the Allahabad West assembly seat.

The BSP leader had lost the election to the same seat as Atiq Ahmad in 2002 but when Atiq vacated it after being elected to the Lok Sabha, Pal defeated Ashraf in the bypoll.

The brazen murder of the lawmaker sparked sweeping outrage and forced the then Samajwadi Party state govern-

ment to move against Atiq — a former five-time state legislator and former Lok Sabha member who had 100 cases against him — and charge him with murder. The case also underlined the influence strongmen had over the state's politics during the time.

Soon after the verdict, Puja Pal, the Samajwadi Party MLA from Kaushambi's Chayal, said truth can never be defeated. "We have got justice today. I respect the court's decision. The struggle that has been going on for 19 years has finally borne fruit," she said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) took over the probe in 2016.

Pal was murdered nine days after his wedding and his wife Puja Pal lodged a first information report at the Dhoomanganj police station in Prayagraj on the same day, naming eight accused, including Atiq and Ashraf.

But as the probe moved at a snail's pace and Atiq continued to run his fief from behind bars, Puja Pal approached the Supreme Court in December 2015, seeking a CBI probe. Following the apex court's order, the case was transferred to CBI on January 22, 2016.

According to district government counsel (Lucknow) Manoj Tripathi, the Supreme Court had directed the Uttar Pradesh government to transfer the investigation to CBI.

The Raju Pal murder case again jumped into spotlight after advocate Umesh Pal, who was a witness in the 2005 case, was killed outside his home in Prayagraj by armed men who opened fire on the lawyer and his two police guards on February 24, 2023.

On a complaint filed by Umesh's wife Jaya Pal, a first information report was registered against 27 people, including Atiq Ahmad, his wife Shashita Parveen and sons Umar, Ali and Asad, and others. They were booked under sections 147 (rioting), 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapon), 149 (unlawful assembly), 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code and provisions of the Explosive Substances Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

Ruksana Begum, who's family was friends with Raju Pal, was a witness to the incident. Pal had offered her a lift in his car when he was attacked.

"Raju Pal was driving the car when it was fired on. Two bullets hit me and fell unconscious... Remembering how Raju [Pal] was killed before my eyes still sends shivers down my spine," she said.

"The incident changed our lives forever as Atiq [Ahmed] and his gang came after us after the murder. He was our family friend and we supported him when he contested elections. So, we decided to become witnesses in his murder case as well," she added.

The trial began in 2017. It had 21 witnesses. It was not clear if the defence will move the high court. The defence lawyer declined a request for comment.

The state government said the criminals had been brought to justice. "Effective prosecution by the state government in trial courts ensured that criminals were brought to justice. There are no unnecessary adjournments during hearing of the cases," said additional advocate general Vinod Kumar Shahi.

Owing to the improved law and order situation, witnesses are turning up in courts to record their statements without fear, he added.

The BSP did not comment on the verdict.

BIHAR MAN ON THE RUN with whom he had five daughters". The eldest daughter is married, but neither the police nor the officials could verify the whereabouts of the sons or the eldest daughter.

"The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination," the SDPO said.

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
E-Tendering Notice No: 2024-March-06
E-TENDER NOTICE
Divisional Railway Manager (Engineering), N.C. Rly Agra for and on behalf of the President of India invites "Open Tender" through on Line only (E-Tendering) for the following works. The details of the tender are as under:-

S.No.: 1	Tender No.: 2024-March-06-01	Approx. Cost (Rs.): ₹ 25355391.28
Description of work : Replacement of OHT of 90KL capacity with pipeline arrangements at Agra Fort, Kuberpur, Chhalesar, Etmadpur & Bilochpura stations.		
S.No.: 2	Tender No.: 2024-March-06-02	Approx. Cost (Rs.): ₹ 20547534.49
Description of work : Provision of Track Depot at IDH with all infrastructure facilities in place of existing depot at Agra cant.		

For full details and submission of bid please see the Indian Railways website "www.ireps.gov.in". Tenders can only be submitted through web portal "www.ireps.gov.in" up to 15.00 hrs on 22.04.2024. 573/24 (A)

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
E-Procurement Tender Notice No.-02/2023-24
E-Procurement Tender Notice
On behalf of the President of India. Senior Materials Manager, North Central Railway, Jhansi, invites the E-procurement tender for following item.

SR	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.
1	54245121	Set of items required for modification of pantograph mounting insulator in high reach pantograph for conventional loco to railway board letter No RB letter no. EL.2.2.1/High Reach dt. 11.10.19(1) Stainless steel stud to SS 304 grade of size m14x155 MM length with both side thread upto 50 mm length. Qty-01 no/set(2) Nylock Nut of size 14 mm conforming to DIN 985 grade-8.make:TVS, Unbrako, LPS only. Qty-01 no/set(3) Spring washer of 14 mm to IS: 2016. Qty-01 no/set	500 Set
2	54241014C	Contact jaw assembly for Roof line insulator/as per Drg No ELWB/LWAM-4/2/123.021.ALT-3 or LATEST	20 Nos.

Tender closing/Opening date : For each SR : 22.04.2024. Note : The complete information of above E-Procurement is available on IREPS website i.e http://www.ireps.gov.in 568/24 (D)

Have fun with facts on Sundays
Catch the latest column of HT TWTW THE WEEK THAT WAS A quiz on the week's development.

Office of Chief Engineer, Municipal Corporation Moradabad
Ref No.: 480/मो.ए.-2/सु.अभ./न.नि.सु./2023-24
Corrigendum
Date: 29.03.2024
The critical dates of CMGRIDS tender notice published dated 15.03.2024 having reference number 467/मो.ए.-2/सु.अभ./न.नि.सु./2023-24 are amended as follows due to compelling circumstances.

S. No.	Event	Revised Date and Time
1	Availability of tender documents on E-Tendering portal	From 30.04.2024, 12:00 Noon
2	Pre- Bid Meeting	10.05.2024, 3:00 PM at URIDA, office, Lucknow/ Online
3	Last date of uploading the tender document on the E-Tendering portal	10.06.2024, 03:00 PM
4	Opening of tender (technical bid)	10.06.2024, 04:00 PM

Details of works, terms and conditions may be seen on Moradabad Nagar Nigam, Website www.moradabadnagarigam.in. Any further Corrigendum/addendum or any other additional information related to the tender will be available on above mentioned website.
Chief Engineer
Municipal Corporation Moradabad

SEARCH FOR MISSING FEMALE
General Public is hereby informed that one female (depicted in the photo) namely Kamla W/o Hariram R/o 3089/5, Ram Bazar, Mori Gate Kashmere Gate GPO North, Delhi Aged-71 Years has been reported missing since 17.03.2023 at about 6 PM from her residence vide DD No.105-A Dated 18.03.2024 registered at Police Station Kashmere Gate, Delhi. Her physical description is as under:-
Complexion: Shallow, Height: 4'4", Face: Round, Built: Medium, ID: Mentally weak, Clothing: White, red & Black coloured saree, Shawl and Slipper in feet.
Any person having any information/Clue about this missing female, may inform SHO, Kashmere Gate, Delhi at E-mail : cic@cbi.gov.in or website : <http://cbi.nic.in> Sd/-
Tele No. : 011-24368638 or 24368641 SHO, Kashmere Gate, Delhi
FAX No. : 011-24368639 Tel. : 011-23962210
DP/3354/N/2024 Mob.: 8750870123, 9350310032

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED
SEE SECTION U/S 82 Cr. P.C.
Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Anand @anna @M. Pandi S/o Ganesh R/o H.No.337 T Camp Raghuraj Nagar Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in Case FIR No. 147/2018 U/S 324/452 IPC P.S. Rajouri Garden New Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused Anand @Anna @M. Pandi cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Anand @anna @M. Pandi has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Anand @anna @M. Pandi of FIR No.147/2018 U/s 324/452 IPC P.S. Rajouri Garden, Delhi, is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 08.05.2024
By Order
SH.MILAN GOEL,
Metropolitan Magistrate-02
Room No.356, West Delhi
Tis Hazari Courts, New Delhi
DP/3233/WD/2024

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON
See Section 82 Cr. P.C.
Where as complaint has been made before me that accused Sameem Ansari S/o Sh. Raseed Ansari, R/o- H. No. 709/4, Prem Nagar, Paharganj, Delhi has committed (or suspected to have committed) the offence in case registered vide E-FIR No. 000039/19 U/s 379/411 IPC P.S. Sadar Bazar, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused Sameem Ansari can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said Sameem Ansari has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).
Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused Sameem Ansari of case E-FIR No. 000039/19 U/s 379/411 IPC P.S. Sadar Bazar, Delhi is required to appear before this court (or before me) to answer the complaint on or before the day of 30.04.2024.
By Order
Sh. Gaurav Goyal
Metropolitan Magistrate-06
Room No.247, Central
Tis Hazari Court, New Delhi
DP/3683/N/2024 (Court Matter)

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION
General public is hereby informed that an unidentified dead body of a man namely Unknown, S/o: Unknown, R/o: Unknown was found dead on 24.03.2024 at E-Pole KM No. 7-19/7-21, Platform No. 1, Patel Nagar, Delhi. In this regard DD No. 02 A, dated 24.03.2024 has been lodged at Police Station, Delhi Cantt Railway Station, Delhi. Identification of unidentified dead body of male is as under:
Name: Unknown, Age: 40 Years, Height: 5'7", Complexion: Shallow, ID Mark: Tattoo (Jyoti) on Left Hand, Injury: Head Injury, Wearing: Yellow Colour T-Shirt.
If anyone have any information or clue about this male deceased may kindly be inform undersigned.
SHO
Police Station, Delhi Cantt Railway Station, Delhi
DP/3652/RLY/2024 Ph.: 011-25688505, 9013098409

CENTRAL ELECTRICITY REGULATORY COMMISSION
3rd & 4th Floor, Chandernagore Building, 36 Janpath, New Delhi-110001, Phone: 23353503, Fax : 23753923, Website : www.cerclind.gov.in
Petition No. 47/TL/2024 Dated: 23.3.2024
NOTICE UNDER CLAUSE (a) OF SUB-SECTION (5) OF SECTION 15 OF THE ELECTRICITY ACT, 2003
An application under Sections 14 and 15 of the Electricity Act, 2003 (the Act) has been made by Bikaner III Neemrana Transmission Limited, B-9, Qutab Institutional Area, Katwaria Sarai, New Delhi 110 016 for the grant of an Inter-State transmission licence to establish the "Transmission system for evacuation of power from Rajasthan REZ Ph-IV (Part-1) (Bikaner Complex): PART-A" on a Build, Own, Operate and Transfer (BOOT) basis (hereinafter referred to as "the Project") consisting of the following elements:

S. No.	Name of the Transmission Element	Scheduled COD
1.	Establishment of 6x1500 MVA (along with one spare unit of 500 MVA), 765/400 kV & 5x500 MVA 400/220 kV Bikaner-III Pooling Station along with 2x330 MVA (765 kV) Bus Reactor (along with one spare unit of 110 MVA) & 2x125 MVA (420 kV) Bus Reactor at a suitable location near Bikaner. 765/400 kV 1500 MVA ICTs: 6 nos. (19x500 MVA including one spare unit) 765 kV ICT bays- 2 nos. 765 kV line bays- 2 nos. 330 MVA Bus Reactor-2 nos. (7x110 MVA, including one spare unit) 765kV reactor bays- 2 nos. 400/220 kV, 500 MVA ICTs- 5 nos. 400 kV ICT bays- 11 nos. 420 kV reactor bays- 2 nos. 125 MVA, 420 kV bus reactor-2 nos. 400 kV line bays - 6 nos. (4 nos. for LILo of Bikaner-Bikaner-II D/c line & 2 nos. for Bikaner-II D/c line) 220 kV ICT bays- 5 nos. 220 kV line bays- 5 nos. (for RE connectivity) 220 kV BC (2 nos.) and 220 kV TBC (2 nos.) 220kV Sectionalization bay: 1 set Future provisions: Space for 765 kV line bays along with switchable line reactors—6 nos. 765kV Bus Reactor along with bay: 1 no. 400 kV line bays along with switchable line reactor—4 nos. 400 kV line bays-4 nos. 400/220kV ICT along with bays-5 nos. 400 kV Bus Reactor along with bay: 1 no. 400kV Sectionalization bay: 2 sets 220 kV line bays for connectivity of RE Applications- 8 nos. 220kV Sectionalization bay: 2 sets 220 kV BC (2 no.) and 220 kV TBC (2 no.) STATCOM (2x330MVA) along with MSC (4x125 MVA) & MSR (2x125 MVA)	24 Months from SPV transfer
2.	LILo of both ckt of 400 kV Bikaner (PG)- Bikaner-II D/c line (Quad) at Bikaner-III PS	
3.	Bikaner-II PS – Bikaner-III PS 400 kV D/c line (Quad)	
4.	2 no. of 400 kV line bays at Bikaner-II. • 400 kV line bays - 2 nos.	
5.	Bikaner-III - Neemrana-II 765 kV D/c line along with 330 MVA switchable line reactor for each circuit at each end • 765 kV, 330 MVA switchable line reactors at Bikaner-III PS – 2 nos. • 765 kV, 330 MVA Switchable line reactors at Neemrana-II S/s – 2 nos. • Switching equipment for 765kV 330 MVA switchable line reactors at Bikaner-III PS – 2 nos. • Switching equipment for 765kV 330 MVA switchable line reactors at Neemrana-II S/s – 2 nos.	
6.	2 no. of 765 kV line bays at Neemrana-II S/s • 765kV line bays at Neemrana-II S/s- 2 nos.	

Notes:
1. POWERGRID to provide space for 2 nos. of 400 kV line bays at Bikaner-III PS.
2. Developer of Neemrana-II S/s shall provide space for 2 nos. of 765 kV line bays at Neemrana-II S/s for termination of Bikaner-III - Neemrana-II 765 kV D/c line.
3. Provision of suitable sectionalization shall be kept at Bikaner-III PS, at 400kV & 220kV level to limit short circuit level."
2. The Central Transmission Utility of India Limited vide its letter dated 23.1.2024 has recommended for the grant of transmission licence to the applicant to establish the proposed transmission system.
3. Based on the material available on record, the Commission vide order dated 21.3.2024 in Petition No. 47/TL/2024, has proposed to issue transmission licence to the applicant for establishment of the transmission scheme as noted in para 1 above.
4. A copy of the application, along with its annexures and enclosures, made by the applicant for the grant of an inter-State transmission licence to Bikaner III Neemrana Transmission Limited before the Commission can be accessed at the website www.powergrid.in/subsidiaries or inspected by any person in the Commission's office by following the laid down procedure.
5. Notice is hereby given in pursuance of clause (a) of sub-section (5) of Section 15 of the Act that suggestions or objections, if any, to the Commission's proposal to grant a transmission licence to the applicant, as aforesaid, be sent to the undersigned by 8.4.2024 at the above noted address. The suggestions or objections received after the specified date shall not be considered.
6. The application shall be taken up for the further hearing by the Commission on 10.4.2024. Any person who files suggestions or objections may in his/her discretion attend the hearing, for which no TA/DA shall be paid by the Commission.
Sd/-
(Harpreet Singh Pruthi)
Secretary

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OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

OUR TAKE

The maha battle in Maharashtra

Constituents of the two major alliances are competing with each other to safeguard territory, making seat negotiations inconclusive

The Maha Vikas Aghadi and Mahayuti, the two political alliances in Maharashtra, have been riven by internal dissensions so much so that they have not been able to finalise seat allocations even though five constituencies in the state vote in the first phase. This is not surprising since these recently formed alliances are ridden with contradictions, including overlapping social bases and competing political legacies.

Maharashtra politics had a settled look until the 1980s. The Congress ecosystem constituted the main pole of state politics for the first three decades while multiple contenders, including breakaway groups from the Congress, jostled for the Opposition space, and even won office in 1978. The entry of Shiv Sena into electoral politics and its alliance with the BJP in the 1989 elections produced a clear second pole that was distinctly ideological and opposed to the Congress' brand of nationalism. The next 30 years saw politics in the state revolve around these two poles, with the Sena-BJP combine, representing the combined strands of Marathi nativism and Hindu nationalism, gaining ground. The collapse of the Congress system — splits, decline of the cooperatives — also facilitated this power shift. However, the stability was disrupted when the Sena-BJP alliance fell apart in 2019, leading to a reconfiguration of political equations. The formation of Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) was significant since it saw the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and its parent outfit, the Congress, agreeing to join a government led by the Shiv Sena. The chum further intensified when the Sena and NCP split and the BJP formed Mahayuti with the splinter groups, now recognised as the mother outfits.

This is the first election since the formation of MVA and Mahayuti. Besides, both the alliances have an unsettled look with the NCP and Sena factions yet to grow into distinct parties. In this chaotic landscape, each party/faction is aiming to consolidate its strengths, among its followers as well as in the various regions, which has triggered intense competition within the alliances. The tussle between the Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) over Sangli and constituencies in Mumbai is something that exemplifies this trend. Sangli in western Maharashtra lies in the Congress-NCP heartland, where the Sena-UBT wants to make its presence felt so that it is not seen as a party limited to Mumbai and Konkan. The cross-movement of party factions has resulted in former partners making claims for the same seat, largely also to retain its base. The fragmentation of the Sena and NCP has also opened up the contest and provided space for many smaller parties to bargain beyond their actual strength. Prakash Ambedkar's Vikas Bahujan Aghadi (VBS), a legate of Maharashtra Dalit political tradition, bargained hard with the MVA in the hope the latter would need its help to consolidate the non-Hindutva vote in the state — the talks have failed. Throw in the parties speaking up for peasant interests (Raju Shetty-led Swabhimani Paksha) or influential figures such as Manoj Jarange-Patil representing the restive Maratha constituency, and the picture that emerges is of chaos and confusion.

The big prize, of course, is the assembly polls in December. For the NCP and Sena factions, the general elections are the first big test of their ground strength. No party wants to cede space to a rival lest it should cost the future. Which is why it has become tough for party/alliance managers to resolve seat disputes.

THIRD EYE

Barkha Dutt



AAP story: Leader in prison, party on the backfoot

Whether the AAP can stay intact and fight with its senior leadership in prison is the existential question before the party

The arrest of Arvind Kejriwal throws up three sets of questions — legal, moral and political. The legal case goes something like this: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is accused of receiving ₹100 crore in kickbacks from a cartel of businessmen in return for a liquor policy that gave undue benefits to private vendors. The AAP has repeatedly challenged the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on the fact that no money has been recovered despite multiple raids. The ED has argued that the money was funnelled into the party's Goa campaign. The courts will have the last word on the specificity of guilt and innocence.

The public morality questions tie to the larger debate around electoral bonds. Now, other than the Communists, no party can claim moral superiority on the principle of the bonds. The largest chunk of money may have gone to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), yes, but that is the cynical truth about power, politics and business. Corporates will put more money on winning horses, so to speak. In the Kejriwal case, the electoral bonds have entered the debate because of the testimony of an accused-turned-approver in the Delhi liquor scam. Sarath Reddy's company Aurubindo Pharma bought ₹22 crore worth of electoral bonds for different parties before his arrest in November 2022. At the time, the bulk of his bonds were for the Bharat Rashtia Samithi (BRS), still in government in Telangana and a small amount (₹4.5 crore) was given to the BJP. After his arrest and spending six months in jail, Reddy became an approver in the case in June

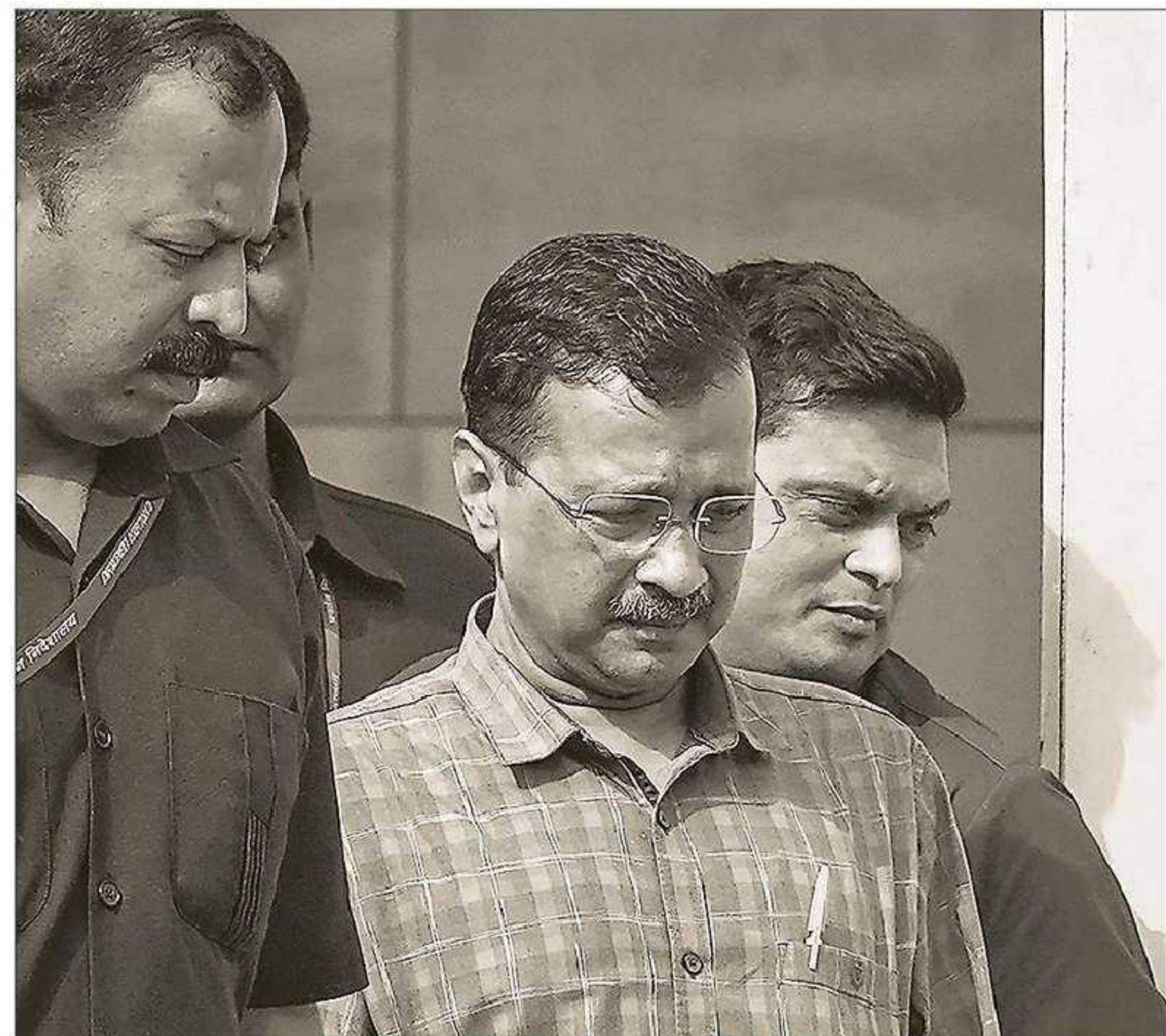
2023. In November 2023, Reddy's company and its subsidiaries bought ₹50 crore worth of bonds for the BJP, taking his total value of bonds for the ruling party up to ₹59.5 crore.

Again, this is not the only example of eyebrow raising details in the electoral bonds data. Whether it's the Trinamool Congress (TMC) being the largest beneficiary of the much-raided lottery king of India or the Congress receiving ₹10 crore from Megha Engineering's subsidiary, the questions thrown by the data make for a long list. The pro- and anti-arguments on electoral bonds go well beyond the BJP. But in Kejriwal's arrest, his lawyers will have to prove and the court will have to determine if there is any link between the approver status to Reddy, his testimony against the chief minister (CM) and the BJP's interest in seeing him behind bars. As legal arguments go, it's a stretch, but the beleaguered CM will use the case to further his brand as a victim.

This takes us to the last set of implications, political and electoral.

There are many takers for the theory — and I am one — that by not electing an interim/replacement CM (like Hemant Soren did before being taken into custody) while he is in jail, Kejriwal is daring the Lt Governor to recommend President's Rule. This will help him build on the persona of being an anti-establishment figure

DELHI'S PEOPLE ENDORSE AND SUPPORT BOTH ARVIND KEJRIWAL AND PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI AS REFLECTED IN THE DISTINCTLY DIVERGENT RESULTS OF THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AND THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS



The main challenge for the Aam Aadmi Party and Arvind Kejriwal now is to stay united — not just in Delhi, but also in Punjab — till the assembly elections in the capital

with shades of his agitational avatar.

There are two obstacles to this effort, though. Delhi is a region whose people endorse and support both Arvind Kejriwal and Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi as reflected in the distinctly divergent results of the assembly elections and the Lok Sabha polls. That is the reason why, for several years, Kejriwal pivoted and stopped criticising the PM personally. In one interview with me, he even likened Modi to his elder brother. Now, by making the BJP and the PM his direct adversary, Kejriwal is enforcing a choice on the voters that they may not want to make.

But as the cliché goes — what does not kill you only makes you stronger.

The main challenge for the AAP and Kejriwal now is to stay united — not just in Delhi, but also in Punjab — till the assembly elections in the Capital. That's roughly a year away. Sushil Kumar Rinku, the lone AAP Lok Sabha member of Parliament from Punjab, has already left for the BJP camp along with an MLA. The AAP has explained Kejriwal's wife Sunita being the face of public interventions by saying she is the only

one who is able to meet him daily and thus bring back his missives. But will a party whose main leaders are behind bars — Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh, Satyendra Jain and now Kejriwal himself — be able to hold itself as one in this ad hoc arrangement?

Kejriwal has always enjoyed a recall and profile disproportionate to his electoral numbers. That's because he represented an idea that the ordinary citizen saw as new and fresh. The problem today is an anti-corruption crusader standing accused of corruption. And all those he breezily branded as corrupt in the infancy years of his politics may be enjoying a moment of schadenfreude.

Kejriwal's challenge is to reinvent himself as an idea.

Will Kejriwal be diminished or emerge stronger?

Honestly, it depends on the next hand he plays.

Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal

Takeaways from Chipko for today's eco warriors

Imagine a time before hashtags and viral campaigns, when a movement sparked a global conversation about the environment. Picture villagers, their voices strong and hearts resolute, standing firm against powerful forces to protect their beloved forests.

In 1972, a decision was made to change the vision of the Hill Area Development and Forest Policy from "logging rights for local communities" to "environmental conservation" after a working committee realised the impact of deforestation on Himalayan communities and their ecosystem. Women were the first to recognise the importance of this decision and inspired other community members to join a campaign that became a significant movement.

When the verdant tapestry of the Himalayan foothills, once a symphony of whispering woods and cascading waterfalls, echoed with the ominous clang of axes, a movement bloomed. This was the Chipko movement. Rooted in a profound love for the environment, its branches stretched outwards, reaching the hearts of not just a nation, but a global community.

A testament to the power of grassroots activism, women's empowerment, ecological protection, and community resilience, Chipko's enduring message is a siren call for sustainable development and climate action. In March 1974, Chipko's first protest took place in Reni village. Marking the 50th year of the Chipko movement, let's revisit its six key messages that continue to inspire new generations, ensuring its legacy endures.

The Chipko movement exemplified the transformative power of women in action, showcasing their resilience, determination, and leadership in protecting their ecosystem. Led by Gaura Devi, a group of homemakers in Reni staged the first tree-hugging protest of the movement. Rooted in sisterhood, rural women emerged as leaders of the movement. Sharing childcare responsibilities, Himalayan women became key actors in the movement, actively protesting, organising campaigns, and advocating for forest conservation with unwavering sisterhood.

Their deep connection with the land and thorough understanding of the direct and indirect impact of deforestation brought attention to the critical issues of deforestation and environmental degradation while challenging traditional gender roles and inspiring other women to join and lead. As we reflect on the enduring impact of Chipko, we recognise that women in action are catalysts for change, driving progress towards a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

A core principle that Chipko lived by is "change driven by conviction instead of coercion". The movement shunned aggression, opting for peaceful protests symbolised by villagers, especially women, hugging trees to protect them from logging. The movement's ability to mobilise communities through non-violent means inspired many concurrent environmental movements globally.



Haritima Bahuguna

mals, fibre for clothing, fuel for cooking, and fertiliser for agriculture — that come from a healthy forest. The "five Fs" of Chipko are a constant reminder of the essential role ecosystems play in sustaining human life. By embracing this philosophy, the movement fostered a deep sense of environmental responsibility that continues to resonate with us today, a reminder that we are not separate from the environment, but part of it, and its well-being is our well-being.

Sunderlal Bahuguna's leadership played a pivotal role in shaping and expanding the Chipko movement. He recognised the importance of aligning the movement's focus with ecological preservation, a vision that was urgent, resonated deeply within Himalayan women and,

soon, within most local communities. Bahuguna championed this new direction, tirelessly advocating for sustainable forestry practices. Through relentless campaigning, hunger strikes, and powerful written appeals, he ensured the movement's demands reached the relevant authorities globally. He built networks with international environmental organisations, bringing the fight for sustainable forestry practices to the world stage.

Chipko's message travelled through conferences, newspaper articles, and even personal letters, sparking solidarity movements around the world. In 1981, Bahuguna's unwavering commitment was evident at the United Nations Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy in Nairobi, Kenya. He carried a bundle of wood on his back, a potent symbol of the daily struggle faced by millions of rural women who rely on dwindling forests for fuel. He proved that dedication, strategic communication, and a clear message can resonate far and wide, even without the instant reach of today's technology.

The Chipko movement is not a relic of the past; it is a source of inspiration for the challenges we face today. The climate crisis, deforestation, and resource scarcity threaten our planet's future. Chipko reminds us that change starts with everyday heroes, with communities united by a common purpose. It teaches us that courage, compassion, and a deep connection with nature are the most potent weapons in our arsenal. Here's the beauty of Chipko's legacy — it's not a rigid set of rules, but a wellspring of inspiration. Every action, big or small, can contribute to a healthier planet. Our actions must build a future.

Haritima Bahuguna, policy officer at the department of transport and Planning, Victoria, Australia, is Sunderlal Bahuguna's granddaughter. The views expressed are personal

ANOTHER DAY

Namita Bhandare



The mood has changed, misogynists better behave

Candidate lists are trickling in, seat-sharing configurations are being hammered out, but you can already smell it: That unmistakable stench of misogyny and sexism.

The announcement of actor Kangana Ranaut as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate for Mandi did not surprise political watchers. Ranaut is open in her admiration for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the saffron party, and has considerable clout on X with 2.9 million followers.

Her tweets have, unfortunately, been less-than-exemplary; for instance when she called fellow actor Urmila Matondkar, a Congress

candidate in 2019, a "soft porn actor". Regardless, every person who believes in common decency took umbrage at an absolutely vile comment that came from the social media handle of Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinat.

Shrinat has denied making the comment, and has deleted it. It was taken from a parody account, she said; moreover, many people have access to her social media accounts and it could have been any of them. It's a poor excuse. Surely a party spokesperson should vet posts before they are uploaded.

Women in public life have been easy targets since the time Indira Gandhi was dismissed as a *goongi gudiya* (dumb doll) in 1967 by clueless

men who were proved laughably wrong.

But nearly 60 years later, trash talk about women, including from women themselves, continues. Partly this is because it makes for juicy clickbait-y headlines. But mainly it's because there are no serious consequences, apart from a 24-hour outrage cycle, to calling the president of a political party a "jersey cow" or the wife, now deceased, of a political opponent a "₹50 crore ki girlfriend". When the leadership flags off the race to abuse and denigrate, it's a greasy pole downwards.

This abuse of women cuts across party lines. In 2014, Congress spokesman Sanjay Nirupam used gutter language for Smriti Irani on national television while she was talking about the 2012 Gujarat election results. She slapped defamation charges, then won the elections and became a powerful minister. Nirupam continued in state politics and everyone moved on from that story.

A morphed photo of Gul Panag hit X even before the Aam Aadmi Party had officially declared her its candidate from Chandigarh in 2014. Altered photographs of Jaya Prada were plastered all over Rampur, during the 2009 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections, allegedly at

the behest of the Samajwadi Party's Azam Khan. Zero consequences.

Thankfully, it's 2024 and there is a new mood. The Bill to earmark 33% seats for women was passed in Parliament amidst eloquent speeches from all parties on empowering our mothers and sisters. It's another matter that we don't know when reservation will kick in but *nari shakti* as a slogan has caught on.

Some sought to look for meaning in the fact that, despite deleting the offensive social media post, Supriya Shrinat's name was left out of the Maharajganj seat in Uttar Pradesh. Is this a message from the Congress? It's hard to say, given that she had lost from here the last time around.

But one thing is clear, women, and political parties, now recognise our power as voters. It is then up to us to signal our displeasure and intolerance for verbal abuse. It is on us to say enough.

Unfortunately, when every other party seems to be an offender, just how and who do you call out?

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal

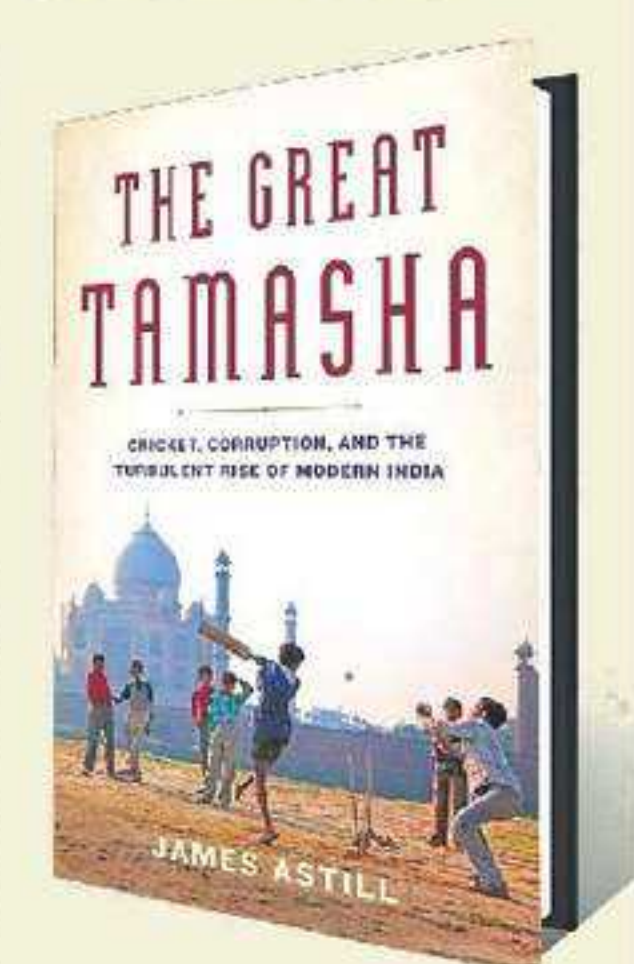
EDITOR'S PICK

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY CRICKETERS

The Indian Premier League (IPL) kicked off its 17th edition last week. Few in 2008 thought the BCCI had hit on a gold mine that would transform the face and character of cricket, not just in India but all over the world. IPL changed the fortunes of many talented cricketers from small town India and turned them into billionaires. The fast-paced cricket also forced many to boldly reimagine the way the game could be played.

This week, we recommend *The Great Tamasha* by James Astill, which dives deep into the early years of IPL and how the cricket league became today's glitzy and glamorous media sensation. The writer has spoken with the who's who of the cricketing world of the 2000s, including people like Vijay Malaya and Lalit Modi, early backers of IPL. Yet, at the heart of Astill's work are the moving stories of aspiring cricketers from faraway towns and the people who coach them. It is they who have helped IPL successfully cement itself as India's national obsession.



The Great Tamasha: James Astill Year: 2013

WORLD

HT

Sri Lanka inflation dips to lowest level since crisis

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's statistics office said on Friday that inflation had slowed to 0.9% in March, the lowest year-on-year price increase since an unprecedented economic crisis. The island nation defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt in April 2022 after a foreign exchange wipeout left it unable to import food, fuel and other essentials.

Italy records 15th consecutive year of declining births

ROME: Births in Italy dropped to a record low in 2023, the 15th consecutive annual decline, national statistics bureau ISTAT said on Friday, as the population continued to shrink. Italy's ever-falling birth rate is considered a national emergency, but despite successive governments pledging to make it a priority, none have so far been able to halt the drop. Italy's 2023 birth rate of 379,000 marks a 3.6% decrease from 2022.

Prison rioting in Ecuador leaves 3 dead, 6 injured

QUITO: At least three prisoners were killed and six injured in an overnight revolt in an Ecuador prison, from which one of the country's most feared gang leaders escaped in January, authorities said on Thursday. It marked the latest prison violence in Guayaquil — the port city that has become a dangerous hub for cocaine exports to neighbouring countries. The prison agency, SNAI, stated that three inmates died during a clash with security forces on Wednesday.

36 Syrian soldiers among 44 killed in Israeli airstrikes

The strikes on Syria have increased since Israel's war with Hamas began on October 7 last year

Agencies

letters@hindustantimes.com

BEIRUT/JERUSALEM: The Syrian army says Israeli airstrikes on Friday near the northern city of Aleppo killed or wounded "a number of" people and caused damage. A war monitor said the strikes killed 44, most of them Syrian soldiers.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said Israeli strikes hit missile depots for Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group in Aleppo's southern suburb of Jibrein, near the Aleppo International Airport, and the nearby town of Safira, home to a sprawling military facility.

The observatory said 36 Syrian soldiers, seven Hezbollah fighters and a Syrian member of an Iran-backed group died, and dozens of people were wounded, calling it the deadliest such attack in years. There was no immediate statement from Israeli officials on the strikes.

Israel, which has vowed to stop Iranian entrenchment in its northern neighbour, has carried out hundreds of strikes on targets in government-controlled parts of Syria in recent years, but it rarely acknowledges them.

"Israeli strikes" targeted "a rockets depot belonging to Lebanon's Hezbollah" close to Aleppo airport, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which has a network of sources inside Syria.

Meanwhile, the Israeli army said it killed the deputy head of Hezbollah's rocket unit, Ali Naim, in a separate attack on southern Lebanon.

The Israel-Hamas war began with the Gaza-based Palestinian militants' unprecedented attacks that resulted in about



Destroyed buildings in the Gaza Strip are seen through the window of a US C-17 Air Force plane, on Friday.

1,160 deaths in Israel, mostly civilians. Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed at least 32,623 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. Israel and Hezbollah exchange near-daily cross-border fire, sparking fears of a major regional conflagration.

Netanyahu approves new Gaza truce talks

ISRAEL: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has approved a new round of Gaza ceasefire talks to take place in Doha and Cairo, his office said on Friday, days after the negotiations appeared stalled.

Since the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on Monday demanding an "immediate ceasefire", Hamas and Israel have traded blame for their failure to agree a deal.

Arab states ready to recognise Israel in future deal, says US prez

Bloomberg

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NEW YORK: President Joe Biden said Arab countries including Saudi Arabia were prepared to "fully recognise Israel" in a future deal as he and his Democratic predecessors Bill Clinton and Barack Obama pushed back on critics of his Middle East policies on Thursday.

Biden's comments came during a discussion with his fellow presidents at a star-studded fundraiser at Radio City Music Hall in New York intended to display Democratic party unity ahead of a general-election rematch with Republican Donald Trump. The

presidents, though, were interrupted at least four times by pro-Palestinian protesters, highlighting the tensions within the party over Biden's handling of Israel's war with Hamas and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

"I've been working with the Saudis and with all the other Arab countries, including Egypt and Jordan and Qatar. They're prepared to fully recognise Israel," Biden said after one such interruption. "There has to be a post-Gaza plan, and there has to be a trade to a two-state solution. It doesn't have to occur today. It has to be a progression and I think we can do that."

Obama offered his support to Biden, responding to another protester by saying "you can't just talk and not listen". He said Biden, his onetime vice-president, had shown "moral conviction and clarity" in office and was "willing to acknowledge that the world is complicated".

"He's willing to listen to all sides in this debate, and every other debate and try to see if we can find common ground," Obama said. "That's the kind of president I want."

Biden has faced pressure from progressives and Muslim and Arab-Americans who want the administration to do more to rein in Israel's military campaign in Gaza to root out Hamas.

{ BRIDGE COLLAPSE } 'VERY LONG ROAD AHEAD'

Baltimore: Biden admin approves \$60 million in aid

Agencies

letters@hindustantimes.com

BALTIMORE: Maryland Governor Wes Moore warned on Thursday of a "very long road ahead" to recover from the loss of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge as the Biden administration approved \$60 million in immediate federal aid after the deadly collapse.

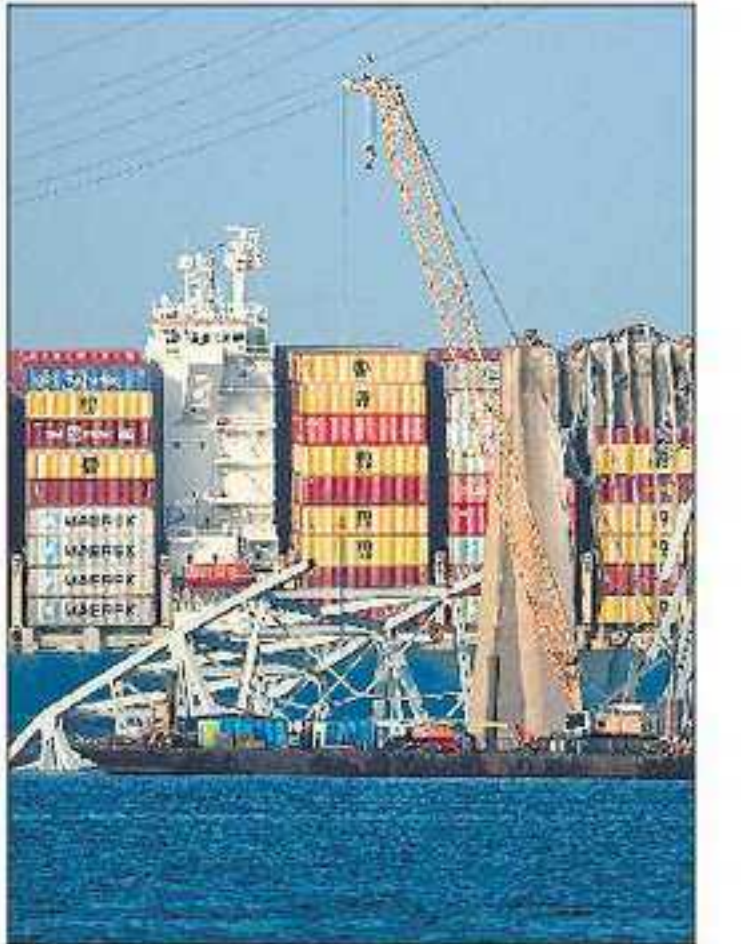
Meanwhile, the largest crane on the US Eastern Seaboard readied on Friday to begin salvage work to clear Baltimore harbour and reopen the key shipping route, Moore said. The crane can lift up to 1,000 tonnes while a second crane with a 400-tonne capacity could arrive on Saturday.

Moore promised on Thursday that "the best minds in the world" were working on plans to clear the debris, move the cargo ship that rammed into the bridge from the channel, recover the bodies of the four remaining workers presumed dead and investigate what went wrong.

"Government is working hand in hand with industry to investigate the area, including the wreck, and remove the ship," said Moore, a Democrat, who said the quick aid is needed to "lay the foundation for a rapid recovery".

President Joe Biden has pledged the federal government would pay the full cost of rebuilding the bridge.

"This work is not going to



A crane begins clean-up at the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore.

take hours. This work is not going to take days. This work is not going to take weeks," Moore said. "We have a very long road ahead of us."

Senator Chris Van Hollen said 32 members of the Army Corps of Engineers are surveying the scene of the collapse and 38 Navy contractors are working on the salvage operation.

The devastation left behind after the powerless cargo ship struck a support pillar early on Tuesday is extensive.

Divers recovered the bodies of two men from a pickup truck in the Patapsco River near the bridge's middle span Wednesday, but officials said they have to start clearing the wreckage before anyone could reach the bodies of four other missing workers.

China's firms halt two key dam projects after Pak suicide bombing

Agencies

letters@hindustantimes.com

PESHAWAR: Chinese contractors have halted construction on two major dam projects in Pakistan after a suicide bomber killed five Chinese engineers and a Pakistani driver this week, a provincial official told AFP on Friday.

The companies have demanded that Pakistan authorities come up with new security plans before reopening the sites where around 1,250 Chinese nationals are working, the official said.

The security of Chinese workers is a major concern to both countries, with nationals frequently targeted by militants hostile to outside influence.

The workers were targeted on Tuesday by a suicide bomber who rammed into their vehicle on a mountainous road near one of the dam sites.

He detonated his explosives on impact, plunging their vehicle into a deep ravine.

A senior official from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa interior department told AFP on condition of anonymity that since Wednesday, China Gezhouba Group Company has halted work on the Dasu dam in the province and Power China has stopped work on Damer Bha-



The site of suicide bombing in Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Tuesday.

sha dam, which straddles two provinces.

China joins probe

Chinese investigators arrived in Pakistan on Friday to join a probe into the killing of five Chinese nationals in a suicide attack. Pakistan's interior ministry said, seeking to stem assaults threatening Islamabad's drive to modernise the economy.

Tuesday's incident was the third major attack in little over a week on China's interests in the South Asian nation, where Beijing has invested more than \$65 billion in infrastructure projects as part of its wider Belt and Road initiative.



A Ukrainian serviceman from anti-drone mobile air defence unit fires a Browning machine gun at his position during combat, amid Russia's attack in Chernihiv region, on Thursday.

Russia launches barrage of 99 drones, missiles on Ukraine's energy infra

Agencies

letters@hindustantimes.com

KYIV: Moscow launched a large-scale attack on Ukraine's energy infrastructure Friday, with a mass barrage of 99 drones and missiles hitting regions across the country, Ukraine's armed forces said.

Air raid warnings rang out across the nation, with 10 Ukrainian regions coming under fire, the country's interior minister, Ihor Klymenko, said.

Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukraine in recent days, launching several missile barrages on the capital, Kyiv, and hitting energy infrastructure across the country in apparent retaliation for recent Ukrainian aerial attacks on the Russian border region of Belgorod. Such sporadic attacks, however, have been common throughout the war.

Large-scale blackouts have already affected Ukraine's eastern city of Kharkiv, where 700,000 people lost power after the city's thermal power plant was hit in a drone and missile attack on March 22.

In the winter of 2022-23, Russia targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure, causing frequent blackouts. Many in Ukraine and the West expected that Russia might repeat that strategy this

winter, but Russia instead initially focused its strikes on Ukraine's defence industries.

Ukraine's state-owned grid operator, Ukrrenergo, said Friday's attack deliberately targeted thermal and hydroelectric power plants across central and western regions.

Zelensky and US House speaker hold talks on aid Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Thursday pressed US House speaker Mike Johnson to help deliver "vital" military aid to Kyiv after a recent escalation in Russian attacks.

A \$60 billion support package has been stalled in the US Congress since last year, delaying the delivery of crucial weapons and ammunition to Ukrainian troops on the front lines.

Talking to Telegram, Zelensky posted that during a call on Thursday, he told Speaker Johnson, "In this situation, quick passage of US aid to Ukraine by Congress is vital."

Washington has been Kyiv's key military backer since Russia invaded in February 2022. But the latest major aid package has been held up by wrangling in the Republican party over President Biden's immigration policies. Zelensky has repeatedly said delays to aid cost Ukrainian lives on the battlefield.

Predecessor operated on orders of a 'foreign ambassador': Maldives prez

HT Correspondent

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NEW DELHI: Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu, who has made several moves to reduce his country's dependence on India, has alleged that his predecessor Ibrahim Mohamed Solih operated on the orders of a "foreign ambassador" though he stopped short of naming any country.

Muizzu, who is widely perceived in New Delhi as pro-China, made the remarks during an interview with state-run Public Service Media (PSM) on Thursday.

His remarks, coming on the back of his demand for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel who operate three air-

craft in the Maldives, were perceived as an apparent reference to India.

Solih, who was president during 2018-23, operated on orders from a foreign ambassador and this resulted in "extensive damage", Muizzu said during the interview while responding to a question on the opposition's criticism of his government's decision to procure military drones from Turkey.

Without specifying which country he was referring to, Solih added: "We had lost independence in all sense of the word, including economically. After having done all this, they would naturally not accept our efforts to remedy all this and put the country on a track that the Maldivian people want...."



Ibrahim Mohamed Solih (left) and Mohamed Muizzu.

Solih's government had implemented an "India First" policy and the Maldives was one of the main beneficiaries of India's "Neighbourhood First" policy. New Delhi poured billions of dollars into development and infrastructure projects during Solih's tenure.

{ U.S. PRESIDENTIAL POLLS } DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Biden, Obama, Clinton rake in \$25mn at NY campaign stop

Agence France-Presse

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW YORK: US President Joe Biden was joined in New York on Thursday by his predecessors Barack Obama and Bill Clinton at a blockbuster fundraising event where he collected \$25 million to go towards his re-election bid.

The Democrat's bumper evening took place at Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan, around an hour's drive from where his Republican rival Donald Trump had earlier attended a wake for a New York police officer killed on duty.

Biden's campaign team announced ahead of the event a "record" collection of more than \$25 million, noting it was more than Trump had raised for the whole of February.

Thursday's event had a celebrity tinge.

Singers Queen Latifah and Lizzo, among others, warmed up the room before the 42nd, 44th and 46th presidents of the United States sat down for a question-and-answer session moderated by comedian Ste-



President Joe Biden (centre), and former presidents Barack Obama (left) and Bill Clinton take part in a fundraising event at Radio City Music Hall in New York, on Thursday.

phen Colbert. Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour was also in attendance.

The discussion mixed serious topics with jokes, and ended when Obama and Clinton joined Biden in donning aviator sun-

glasses, Biden's favourite accessory. Trump's campaign spokesperson, Steven Cheung, had blasted on social network X the "glitzy fundraiser... with their elitist, out-of-touch celebrity benefactors".

Earlier in the day, Trump made a short statement after attending the wake of police officer Jonathan Diller, who was shot and killed on Monday during a traffic stop. "We have to stop it. We have

to get back to law and order," said the 77-year-old billionaire, who refrained from criticising his 81-year-old rival directly.

Biden and Trump, who faced off at the ballot box in 2020, are guaranteed to win their respective parties' nominations for the November presidential election this summer.

The star-studded fundraiser for Biden, however, underscored his party's ability to drum up cash.

According to NBC News, guests at the event could pay \$100,000 for a photo with the trio.

"The numbers don't lie: today's event is a massive show of force and a true reflection of the momentum to re-elect the Biden-Harris ticket," Jeffrey Katzenberg, the campaign's chief fundraiser, said in a statement, referring to vice-president Kamala Harris.

Biden has better-stocked campaign coffers than his Republican opponent, who is using some of the funds raised from his supporters for legal expenses in the multiple court cases he is facing.

HT brunch

RELAX. THE WEEKEND'S HERE

The making of a Madboy

Imaad Shah, musician, actor, curl boss and soon-to-be filmmaker, is tripping on Libyan disco, reading up on Delhi's history, plugged in to nerdy podcasts and loves loves a little-known fish from Goa. Could these be your favourites too?

Karishma Kuenang

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Which Imaad Shah do you know? The 34-year-old actor who made his debut in Yun Hota To Kya Hota (2006), appeared in a clutch of indie films, played the nice guy friend Ron in Bombay Begums (2021), and the dreamy Roman in Made in Heaven 2 (2023)?

The other half of Madboy/Mink, the funk/disco act he formed with Saba Azad in 2012, and who has a separate acoustic career and performs solo too?

The son of acting stalwarts Naseeruddin Shah and Ratna Pathak Shah, who's worked on productions of Katha Collage, Waiting for Godot. By George and Manto Ismat Haazir Hai?

The filmmaker-in-waiting, whose untitled short film has been selected for NFDC Film Bazaar's Work in Progress Lab?

Or as someone whose curls have simply defied gravity through it all?

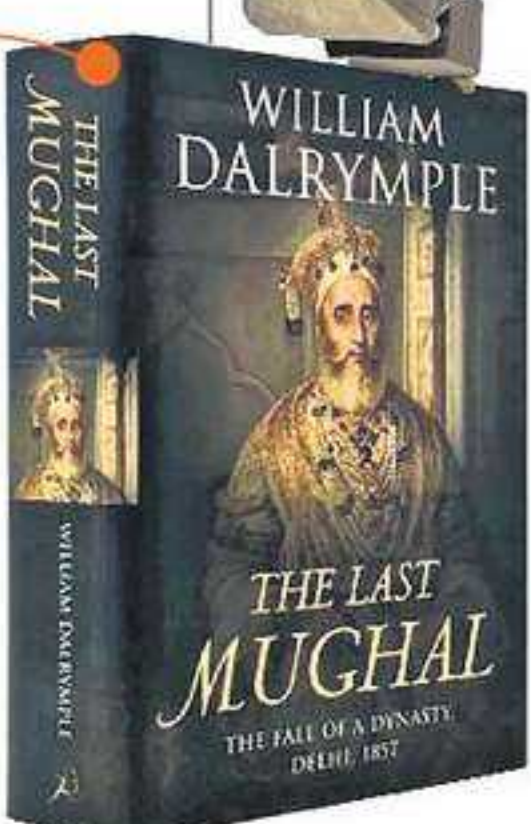
If it seems like a lot, it's only because Shah sees them as extensions of the same idea. "For me, at the end of the day, a successful person is someone who is fulfilling their own creative requirements, someone who has created a life in which they can express themselves the way they want, be it in art, food or running a business. And they are doing it freely," Shah says.

Unsurprisingly, his interests include everything from Bosnian history and Libyan disco to Goan chonak fry and horror comedy. Here are his favs.

Five books you've liked recently.

The Last Mughal (2006) by William Dalrymple. "It's an incredible portrait of Delhi on the eve of the First War of Independence in 1857. Poetry, Corporate Greed, Old Delhi, Ghalib - it has everything."

Delhi Ki Aakhri Shama (1986) by Mirza Farhatullah Baig. "A fictionalised account of the last musahaira under the patronage of Bahadur Shah Zafar. A satire and a



great account of 1850s Delhi, offering a sense of the language and culture of the time."

Midnight Freeway (2021) by Vivaan Shah. "Hard-boiled noir. A detective story set in contemporary Mumbai. Entertaining, gripping and consistently funny."

Byculla to Bangkok (2014) by S Hussain Zaidi. "It's the sequel to Dongri to Dubai. Hard to put down."

Fav podcast.

Empire (2022-) by William Dalrymple and Anita Anand. It looks at the history of the British empire, colonialism, slavery. And Team Deakins (2020-), in which cinematographer Roger Deakins interviews film professionals.

Parivarnama (2022) by Shehla Hashmi Grewal. "A family history intertwined with the story of Delhi from when it was called Shahjahanabad. It follows one Muslim family's commitment to India's freedom and to progressive and humane ideals."

Five shows you've binged on.

I am a Virgo (2023). "It's funny, sarcastic, political. I love Boots Riley's work and would recommend his film 'Sorry to Bother You' as well."

Tabbar (2021). "Well acted, gripping, tense, great buildup."



Deadloch (2023). "Dark comedy-mystery is one of my favourite genres. This is another testament to how amazing Australian filmmaking is."

The Great (2020). "Another political satire. The tale of Catherine the Great is set in Russia, but with the actors talking in British English."

Rise of Empires: Ottoman (2020). "Most of my reading these days is about the rise and fall of empires. The series about the Ottomans was one of the most interesting."

Five movies you've enjoyed.

Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam (2023). A man falls asleep on a bus and wakes up believing he's somebody else. "Lijo Jose Pelliserry is such an original director. The characters, the situations, the acting, the writing, all so good."

El Conde (2023). "A horror comedy and a political satire that shows the Chilean dictator Pinochet as a vampire. Angry and funny at the same time."

Fav music app.

YouTube. But I've gone back to what we were doing when we were teens, recommendations from people.



Naseem (1995). "A beautiful film from one of my favourite directors, Saeed Mirza, and featuring a great performance by Kaifi Azmi. As relevant as ever and one out of a very short list of Hindi films with decent Muslim representation."

No Bears (2022). "A Jafar Panahi film about two parallel love stories unfolding in the interiors of Iran. It's realistically paced and yet very gripping."

Death in Sarajevo (2016). "Moments from Bosnian history, including the 1990s genocide, told through a very gripping, high stakes story."

Five foods you're always craving.

Kulcha Nihari. "Particularly from Mubeen's in Lucknow. Those flaky kulchas are unlike any other roti."

Chonak fry. "One of my favourite fish, mostly available in Goa and a few obscure Malvani joints in Mumbai."



My deceased Dadi Ammi's kheema samosa. "Takes me back to childhood."

Undhiyu. "A Gujarati dish made of winter vegetables. Again closely connected to my heritage."

Tamil Nadu's biryanis. "Every part of our country has its own biryani. In my opinion, these are the best."

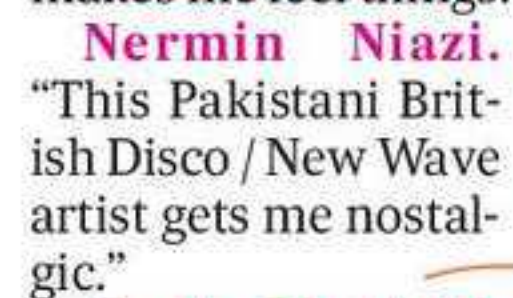
Five artists you're listening to.



Ahmed Fakroun. "Libyan Disco. It's unbelievably funky. Tasteful, aesthetic and whenever I play any of it during DJ sets, people lose it on the dance floor."

Thelonious Monk. "He was a pure legend. His music is the Bible of jazz for me."

Zohrabai Ambalewali. "The playback singer from the '30s and '40s. Her voice makes me feel things."



Nermin Niazi. "This Pakistani British Disco / New Wave artist gets me nostalgic."

Curtis Mayfield. "Guitar player, poet and singer. He used his songs to advocate civil rights for black people and all marginalised people. One of the icons of the '70s."

Five Insta handles you're following.

Middle East Eye @MiddleEastEye. "It's independent journalism from the Middle East and North Africa which has played a very important role reporting from Gaza."

Masalalab @MasalaLab. "Krish Ashok debunks a lot of pseudoscience and hearsay about food."

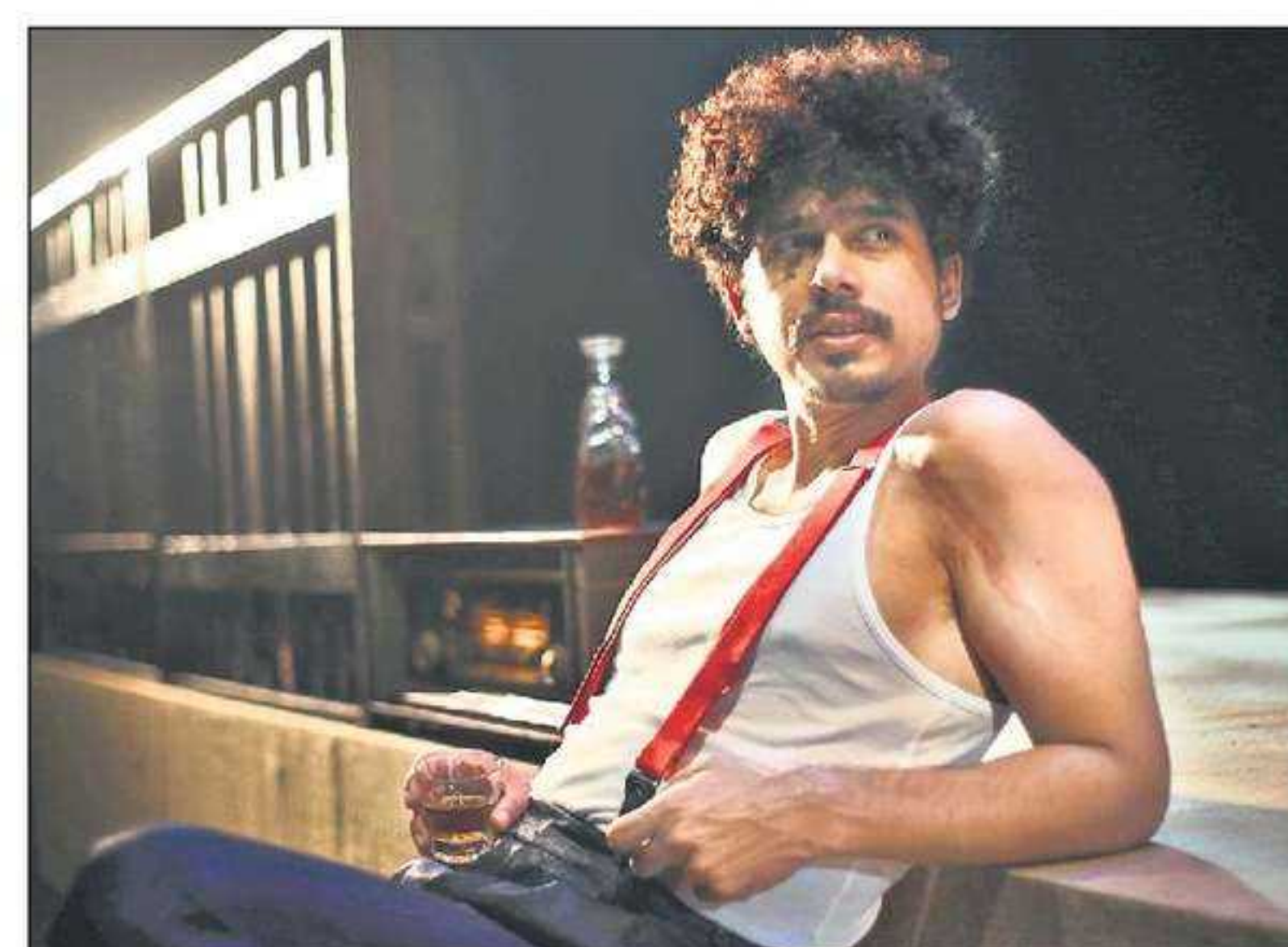
Fatima Khan @Fati.Amma. "One of the best journalists in the country right now."

Jazzie Sillona @JazzieSillona. "A cinematographer shooting Hong Kong, documenting great jazz music and sharing colour-grading tips."

Mohsin Qureshi @Chef Mohsin Qureshi. "I love that she shares recipes and talks about the history of food."

Fav new music act.

A musical rendition of Sufi poet Amir Khusrau's life Jo Dooba So Paar, in which a group of singers sit on stage and sing their hearts out.



"For me, at the end of the day, a successful person is someone who has created a life in which they can express themselves the way they want. And they are doing it freely," says Imaad Shah. PHOTOS: SANAH ABBOTT



So much more in HT Brunch! Stories about life, love, good times and good vibes. People, places, and strange new worlds. All a swipe away in the compact, shareable, e-magazine out every Saturday. Check it out. It's free!



READ the e-mag here!

{ HOW ARE WE FEELING? }
This week, we're...

Dying to sing along



Joker: Folie à Deux releases in October. We were already excited about Joaquin Phoenix and Lady Gaga serenading us and now, even more so. The movie is being marketed as a jukebox musical, with 15 covers of "very well-known" songs. We know that Judy Garland's That's Entertainment from the 1953 musical The Band Wagon is on the list. Just release the set already so we can start practising.

Heading back to high school

Everyone agrees that John Tucker Must Die (2006) was a terrible movie. It didn't stop any of us from watching it (more than once). Now, 18 years later, a sequel has been confirmed. Will they ruin it by trying to be politically correct? Or will John Tucker get what's coming to him? Either way, it's on the watchlist.



Still in shock

After last year's gory (and terribly rated) Winnie-the-Pooh: Blood and Honey, and this year's worse sequel, the makers of the films have had the audacity to say that they're creating a "twisted childhood universe" and will pick up more beloved characters to adapt. Oh hunny, no.

Giving Pankaj Tripathi a salute



He steals the show in Homi Adajania's film Murder Mubarak. And this is a film that also stars Dimple Kapadia, Sanjay Kapoor, Tisca Chopra and Karisma Kapoor. Tripathi plays a bumbling, murder-solving police official, a mix of Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Clouseau. He's a cop who doesn't look like a cop, unreliable and easy to manipulate. But he proves everyone wrong with his observational skills. Poirot, is that you?

Calling out IPL for animal cruelty



When a stray dog entered the field during the Gujarat Titans vs Mumbai Indians match in Ahmedabad, the staff and cops chased it away with kicks. At football matches abroad, furry interruptions are handled better. Staff and players calmly catch or lead the pupper away. Time for a sensitivity check?

SOUTH AFRICAN APPLES & PEARS

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BEAUTIFUL FRUIT
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{ LISTICLE }

Glow forth and conquer

Growing up is no picnic. These 10 celebs, however, transformed right before our eyes, leaving us reeling

Arshia Dhar

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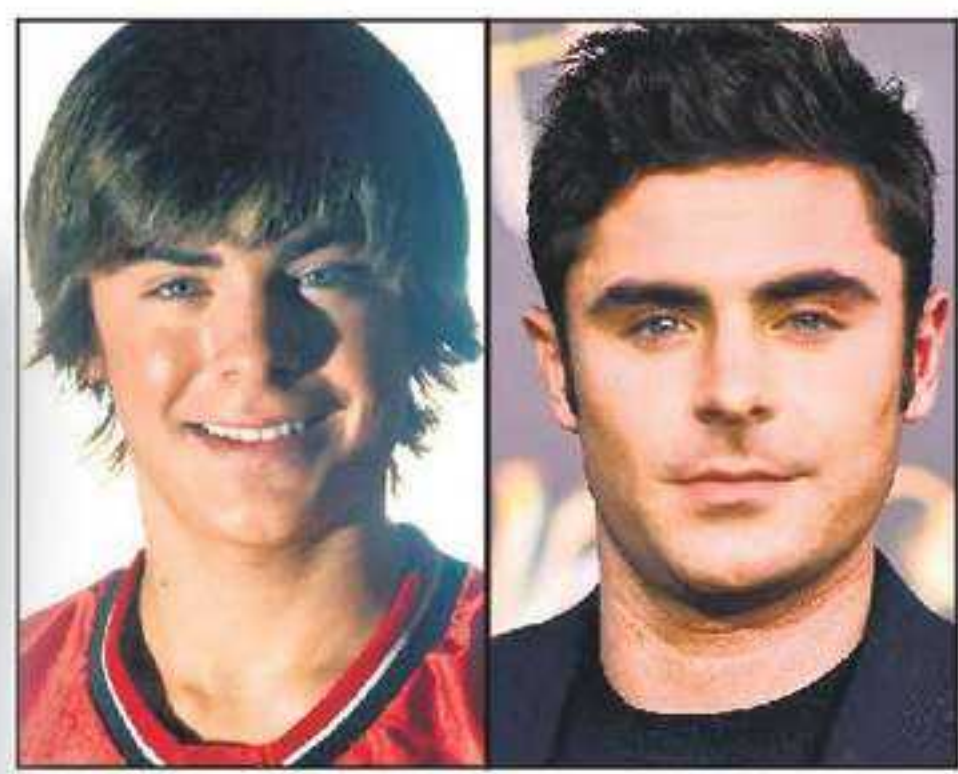
Ariel Winter

We watched child genius Alex Dunphy grow up on *Modern Family*. She went from bespectacled nerd who ratted out her siblings, to gorgeous slay queen who turned heads. As Winter, 26, grew older through the course of the show, she got braces, lost them, and puberty did what puberty does, pushing her into the spotlight for reasons that had nothing to do with her acting. It's led her to take a break from the screen and become a mental-health advocate.



Ahsaas Channa

She's the spooky little boy from Ram Gopal Varma's *Vaastu Shastra* (2004); she's also Shah Rukh Khan's spiky haired son in *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna* (2006); and the curious little boy in *My Friend Ganesha* (2007). After years of being mistaken for a boy due to her on-screen roles, Channa has finally come into her own as a stunning young lady playing lead roles on *Girls Hostel*, *Kota Factory*, *Hostel Daze*, and *Mismatched*.

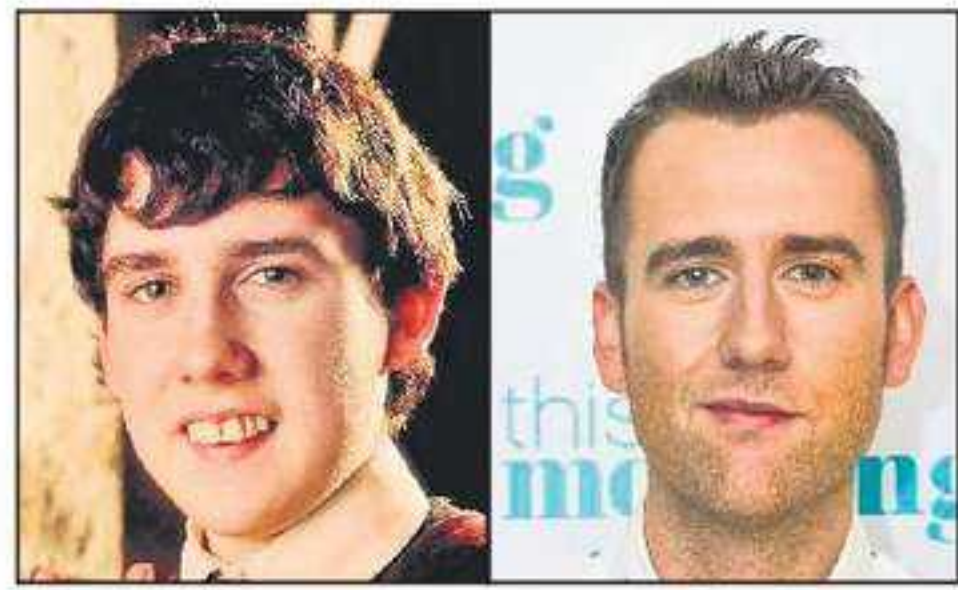


Zac Efron

Not all transformations are grunge-to-glam. Efron, 36, got his big break as the star of *High School Musical* in the '00s. Blue eyes, smooth skin, wide grin, perfect hair – he looked like he was minted in a Mattel factory. While most actors stick to what works, he chose to become the bronzed and intense hottie in *The Iron Claw* (2023) and *Firestarter* (2022) and *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019) in which he played the serial killer Ted Bundy.

Matthew Lewis

Watch Neville Longbottom in the *Harry Potter* films and you'll feel sympathy for the bumbling little orphan, terrified of his grandmother, left behind at Yule Ball. Watch the actor now, and you'll feel some very different emotions. Those chiselled cheekbones and that sexy stubble can give the Harrys and the Cedrics of the wizarding world a run for their money. Watch him in the 2020 comedy *Baby Done*.

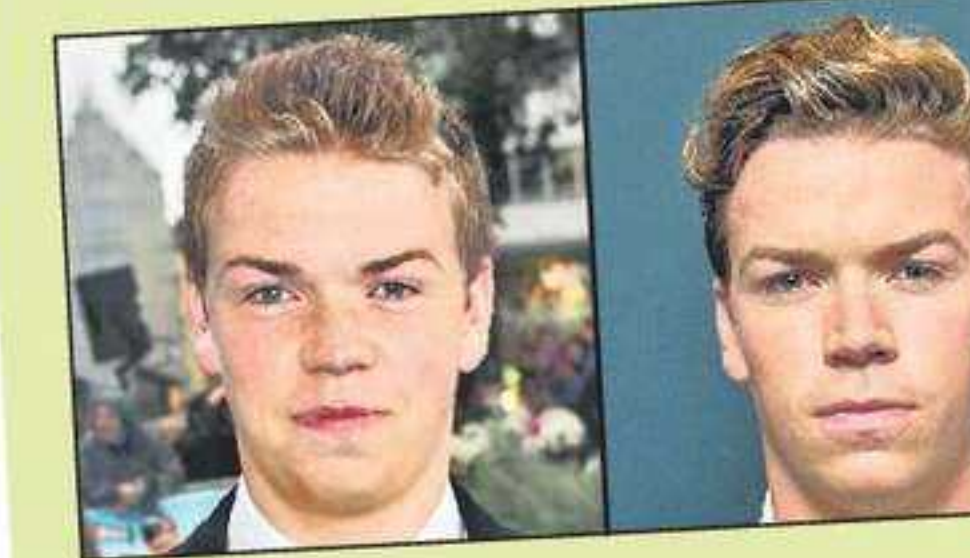


Will Poulter

The 31-year-old British actor broke into the scene as a teen, in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (2010). He played the petulant, selfish and arrogant little brat to perfection. His brows were almost as famous as he was. But for *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*, he got the ripped *Marvel* glow-up. We aren't complaining.

Calvin Harris

He shot to fame for dating Taylor Swift in 2015 and 2016. But DJ Calvin Harris, 40, took the world by surprise only in 2022, when he emerged all bronzed up after the pandemic. He went from dorky, toothy brunette, to a tanned, smouldering hunk. TV presenter Vic Hope says she turned him down when he first asked her out several years ago. She married him last year. Shows it's never too late to bring your A-game.



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Virat Kohli

The 35-year-old former skipper of the Indian national cricket team, and national hottie had humble beginnings. A quick Google search reveals older images, when Kohli, bubbling with raw potential and talent, had a chubby face, unkempt brows, but the same sharp gaze. With time, not only did the athlete power through the rungs of the cricketing world, he's muscled up, settled on a fine beard and gained a tonne of rizz.

Millie Bobby Brown

Eleven from *Stranger Things* had a great start on screen. Audiences loved the bald little girl with superpowers (and scowl and nosebleed). The British actor, 20, began turning heads as an adult after making red-carpet appearances in gorgeous gowns, and launched her own make-up line in 2019. She's been open about growing up in the spotlight, showing off acne breakouts on Instagram and shutting down trolls who sexualise young girls. That's a glow-up done right.

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{ PERSONAL AGENDA }

Ananya Panday

Actor, @AnanyaPanday

Veenu Singh

letters@hindustantimes.com

Currently I am:

Waiting for the show *Ananya Unscripted* in Singapore to release.

High point in life:

The release of my first film *Student Of The Year 2* (2019) and my parents' reaction to it.

Low point in life:

When my Dadi passed away.

My most star-struck moment:

My family and I were once locked in a store with Leonardo DiCaprio, because they had to shut down the store as soon as he entered, and we were the only people in there. We saw him try on a bunch of sunglasses.



On my playlist:

I Wanna See You Dance, from *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*; Mardy Bum by Arctic Monkeys; What the Hell Navya podcast.

Today I'm craving:

I am always craving butter chicken, but lately, I've been craving satay, which I had at Lau Pat Sat in Singapore.

One thing I would never buy:

Anything made with real fur.

App I check before bed:

Instagram, WhatsApp.

Advice I'd give my 18-year-old self:

Don't be so harsh on yourself, enjoy every moment because it won't come again.

My secret skill is:

Texting with my eyes closed. It's sad but true!

If you could travel back or forward in time:

I'd totally revisit that night I rode a vintage Vespa sidecar through the streets of Joo Chiat in Singapore.

My favourite bad habit:

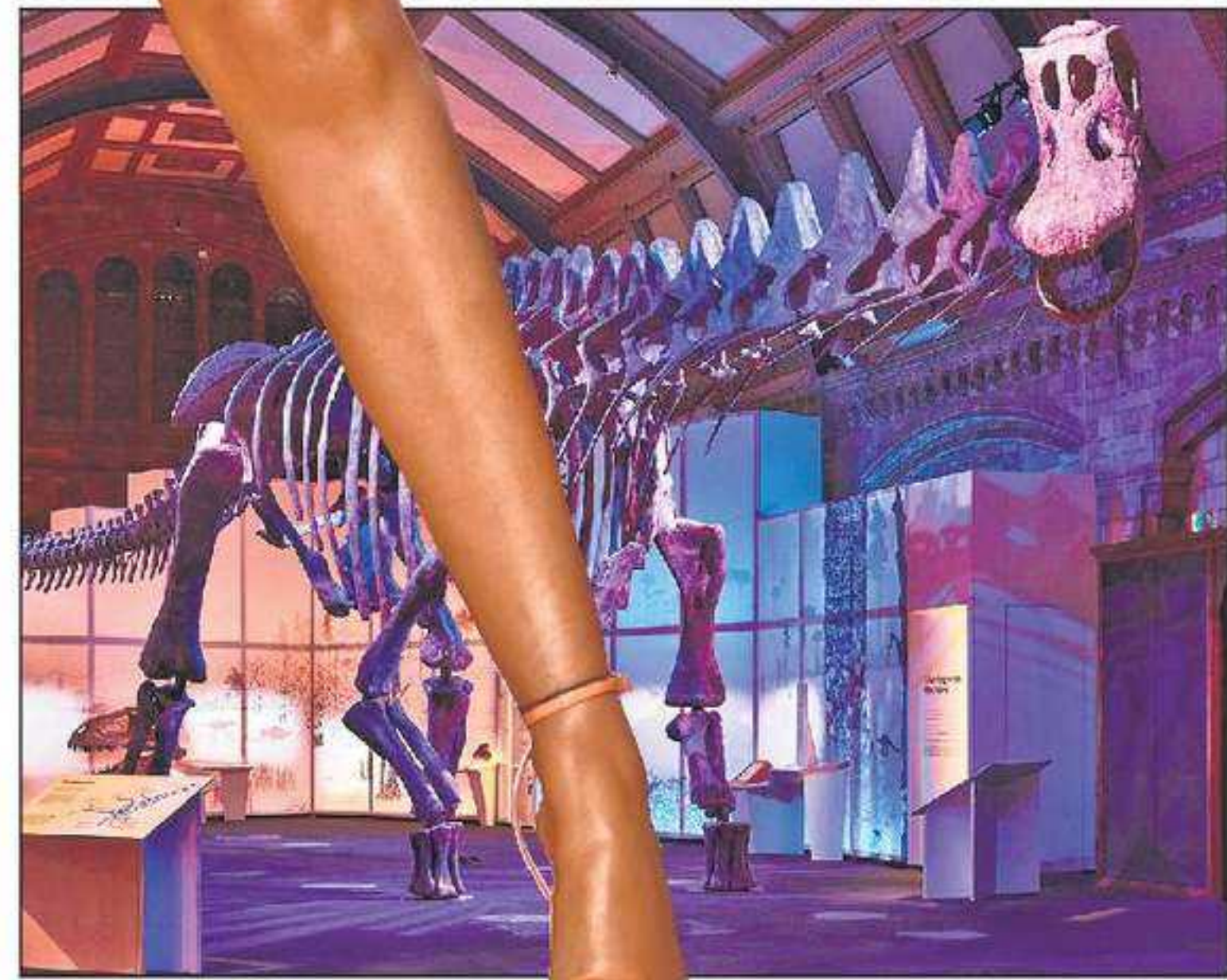
Looking into every mirror I pass.

My favourite subject in school:

Biology.

Last thing I ordered online:

Tickets to the Titanosaur exhibit at London's Natural History Museum.



column { rude food }

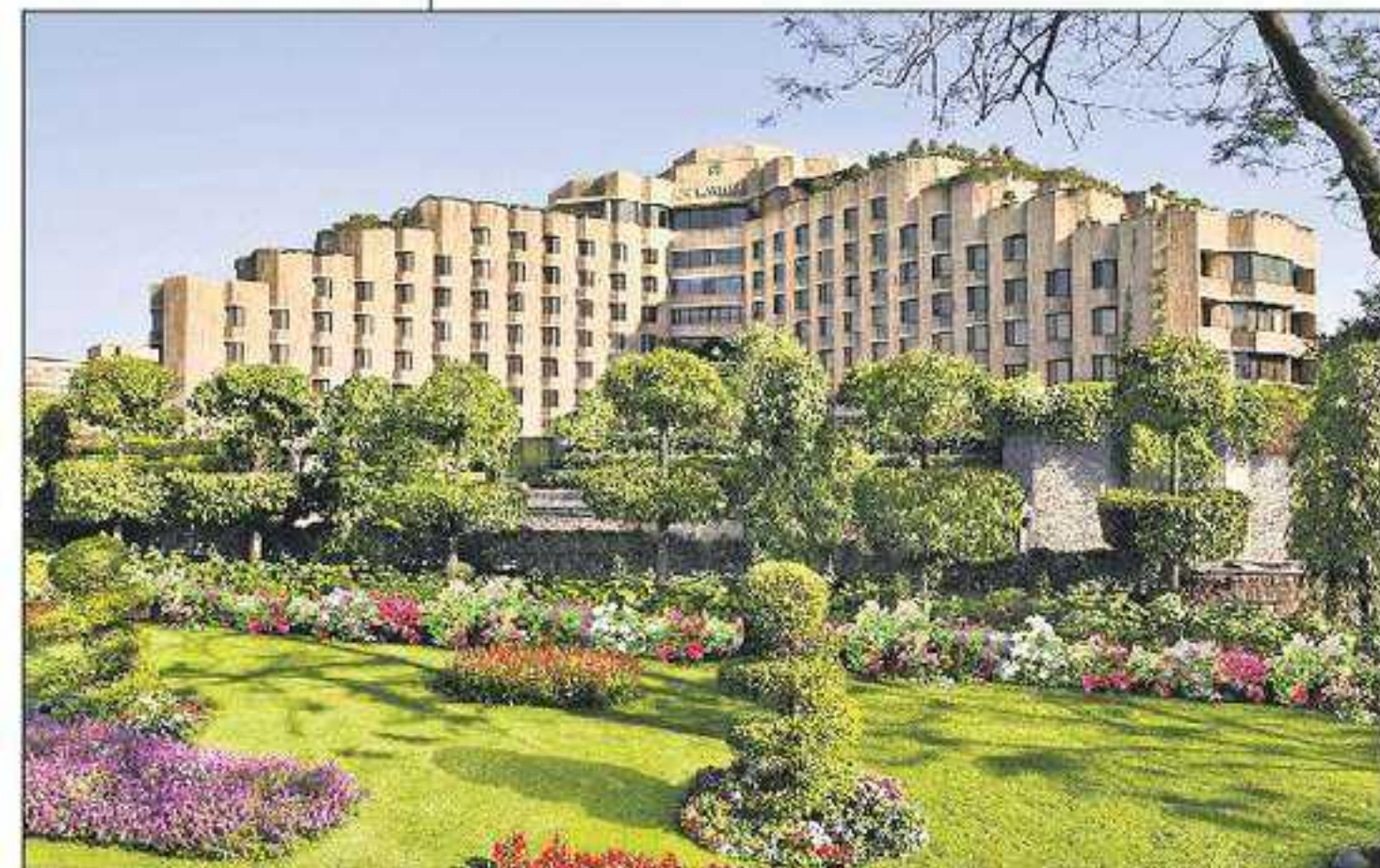
Take a hands-on approach

Bukhara, possibly the most famous Indian restaurant in the world, is 45 years old this year. No rice, no cutlery, huge kababs and legendary dal. How do they pull it off?



VIR SANGHVI

ITC Maurya in Delhi (below) is home to Bukhara, the restaurant famous for hosting dignitaries, presidents and royalty. Dishes served include the signature Dal Bukhara. ITC MAURYA



Bukhara, which will begin celebrating its 45th anniversary this weekend, is now the most famous Indian restaurant in the world. Nearly every US President since Bill Clinton has eaten Bukhara's food. Clinton called it "a meal of a lifetime" (He ate a lot.) So have many British Prime Ministers, including Tony Blair, who praised the kababs. Bukhara claims that even Prince Philip, hardly my idea of a global gourmet, liked the murg malai tikka.

The restaurant's fans include such rock stars as Mick Jagger. And as far back as the late 1980s, when the Amnesty Human Rights Tour came to Delhi, the singers went out to dinner at Bukhara the night before the concert. If you were there, you would have seen Bruce Springsteen, Sting, Peter Gabriel and others huddled over a plate of seekh kababs and tandoori chicken.

Among the world's greatest chefs, it is a legend. Massimo Bottura loved it. So did Mauro Colagreco. When I took Heston Blumenthal for dinner there, it turned out that not only had he been there before, he also knew JP Singh, the chef and the two men had a conversation about the right time to add the yogurt to a marinade. What Heston hadn't eaten before was Bukhara's giant

naan — designed to overwhelm and engulf adventurous foodies like Blumenthal. (I still have the picture!)

There are thousands of restaurants selling kababs in Delhi. So, what makes Bukhara so special? Why do the Clintons eat there each time they are in India? Why did even Donald Trump, whose idea of haute cuisine is a fast food cheeseburger, ask to have Bukhara food sent to his suite? Why do so many foreigners who are not even great fans of most Indian dishes go into raptures when they talk about Dal Bukhara?

It is a hard question to answer. Certainly, no one had expected Bukhara to reach these heights when the restaurant opened in 1978. It was actually an afterthought. AN Haksar, the legendary former chairman of ITC, had long dreamt of opening a spectacular Delhi hotel. Though ITC had other projects (properties in Chennai and Agra) Haksar wanted Delhi's Maurya to be known for the excellence of its food. He had already hired Imtiaz Qureshi and planned Mayur (the predecessor of Dum Pukht).

But even as the construction of the Maurya neared completion, Haksar felt that the hotel needed a restaurant that was somewhat rustic and not overly sophisticated. He settled on a basic kabab place, which he wanted to call Samarkand. There was no provision for such a restaurant in the original plan, so Haksar carved out a new restaurant from part of the coffee-shop kitchen and the space behind it.

As it turned out, there was a problem with the Samarkand name, so he settled on Bukhara. But he never deviated from his basic concept: He wanted wooden tables and stools and no cutlery on the tables. The food would be served in Flintstones-like sizes.

(Even today, a piece of Bukhara's murg malai kabab is double the size of a chicken tikka at most places and the naan is large enough to sink a battleship.) The idea was for guests to leave their manners at home and rip into the meat with their bare hands.

The mechanics of the food came next. Madan Jaiswal, who had worked at the President Hotel on Asaf Ali Road, was brought in to revise and rethink the traditional kabab menu. Jaiswal began making his chicken tikkas with a little processed cheese (murg malai tikka); he chose different cuts for the goat kababs and, thanks to Haksar's deep and abiding contempt for broilers, the Bukhara Tandoori Chicken was made with small free-range birds and without the red food colour that many of us consider integral to the dish.

The origins of Dal Bukhara remain controversial. I have always believed that it was a refined version of the Moti Mahal black dal, which had added tomatoes and dairy products to a traditional Punjabi dal. The great Manjit Gill who was part of the pre-opening team at the Maurya and eventually retired many years later as ITC's top chef, insists that it was original and different. Jaiswal and the team spent a year getting trying various cooking times and different dals to get the perfect texture. It remains the most copied restaurant dal in the world.

In a sense, Bukhara saved ITC's bacon. The Maurya opened at roughly the same time as the Taj Mahal hotel on Man Singh Road and the Taj had the more glittering opening. But it had nothing like Bukhara. From the day it opened, Bukhara became Delhi's top restaurant and was jam-packed for dinner. It wouldn't take reservations (it still doesn't; not after 8pm) so there was always a line of people outside waiting for tables. That was back in 1978, but who would have thought that even today in 2024, the queues would be just as long?

In the early years, Haksar's successors at ITC tried opening Bukharas abroad (in America and the Far East). None of them was particularly successful, so ITC



Anil Chadha (left) runs ITC hotels and is personally involved in all major F&B decisions. Perhaps that is why Bukhara (above) still serves a naan (inset) large enough to sink a battleship.

ern Punjab with nothing after Partition. They longed for a place where they could tear their naans apart, chew contentedly on their kababs and if they dropped dal on themselves, it did not matter because Bukhara provided bib-like aprons.

It's the grandchildren of the original Bukhara customers who now occupy those seats and wear those bibs. They have all become so successful that they don't mind that prices are many times what they were in their grandpa's time.

They like the fact that the menu has remained mostly unchanged since 1978 and that the Maurya has kept the little rules that the restaurant opened with. Not one grain of rice has been served in Bukhara since 1978. No pickle is put on the table. ("You don't need it.") Cutlery is only provided if you ask for it. Naans and parathas are served whole; never cut into halves or thirds. (Nothing is cut at Bukhara. It has to be torn apart by hand.) There are no gravy dishes, though if you are a regular, you can order the semiwet Chicken-Khurchan which is off-menu. There was once (briefly) butter chicken on the menu, but it was suddenly removed. (Why not try bringing it back?)

The Maurya has huge celebrations planned for the 45th anniversary. But no, they won't be making any changes to the menu. Not to the left side of the menu which has remained largely unchanged since 1978. And sadly, not to the right side either, which could do with a little celebratory discounting!

Hindustan Times BOOKS

Photobook: The Songs of Our People by Anurag Banerjee



Rs 599; DM @banerjee.anurag on Instagram to buy copies.

This photobook explores identity and belonging through the lives of musicians in the north-eastern state of Meghalaya. In seeing the lengths that artists in the state will go to, in order to keep their love and passion for music alive, the book transcends its central themes and delves into topics such as grief, loss, hope, community, love, reflection on culture and tradition, on the past and present.



{ MAMANG DAI } EDITOR, IN SEARCH OF THE INDIAN VILLAGE

Villagers are not so simple. The idea of the peaceful village is a bit of an illusion.

On the Books & Authors podcast at www.htsmartcast.com

{ INTERVIEW } CHARLOTTE AGER, ILLUSTRATOR

'Self-doubt can completely freeze you up'

On writing, reading and being commissioned to remake several of Orhan Pamuk's book covers

Kunal Ray

letters@hindustantimes.com

1 You were recently commissioned to make new covers for seven of Orhan Pamuk's novels. The covers are spectacular. How did you come up with the ideas?

Thank you, they were a really lovely series to work on. Ahlawat Gunjan, art director at Penguin India, reached out to me asking if I would illustrate a re-jacketing of several of Pamuk's titles, and I instantly wanted to be involved because I love opportunities to work across a series of images.

It began with prompts from Gunjan about the idea of what they would like for each title. Then I did lots of visual research on each book, to get a sense of place and atmosphere. I created a few rough ideas for each cover, and when they were decided upon, did another round of roughs to consider colour. Before starting on the final designs, I did lots of colour and material testing to work out how each image would come together.

The finals are hand-rendered in layers, so I had to spend a while figuring out how these would overlap. For some of the covers there were multiple attempts at getting this right. They are made with gouache paints and watercolour pencil, which I hope gives them a feeling of intimacy and immediacy. It was special to be able to make the covers in this way, as often digital methods are chosen instead, because of time and ease.

2 You also work as an illustrator. How does your reading of a book change when you have to illustrate it?

I think I am more conscious of looking at and figuring out the details of a place. I try and pay more attention to the language around describing, rather than getting carried away with the story. I am looking for more specific visual details that are mentioned and that could feature in a design.

3 Can the writing or the writer often determine the style of your works?

I think the visual voice I use is definitely affected by the writer and tone of whatever media I'm illustrating. I believe Ahlawat selected my hand-rendered or softer work as it suited the style of Pamuk's writing. I think this is something that I like about illustrating — that your visual voice has to shift to suit different commissions. It presents new challenges and considerations; it makes things exciting.

4 You are a visiting lecturer at several institutes. Are there any must-have qualities for an illustrator?

From my experience as an illustrator, self-doubt can completely freeze you up, making it impossible to make any work at all because you worry about what, how or why to make. Developing skills to just start doing can be really important for students. Making work can be extremely personal and can make you feel vulnerable. I think creative resilience is probably one of the most important qualities for an illustrator to develop.



An India caught between colonialism and fascism

Diya Gupta's *India in the Second World War* draws from accounts of soldiers, civilians, intellectuals, poets and writers to present a novel view of Indian involvement

Prasenjit Chowdhury

letters@hindustantimes.com

What was happening in India when the Second World War was raging? Two-and-a-half million men from undivided India served the British, whose account is blurred first by a Eurocentric memory of the war in the UK, and next overshadowed by nationalist histories of independence from the British Empire in South Asia.

Diya Gupta not only recovers the emotional history of India in the Second World War, but also salvages it. She argues that "colonialism and imperialism are as implicated as fascism" and unfolds India's conflicted involvement as being torn between the twin imperatives of fighting against colonialism at home and fascism at large. "While nationalism contested colonialism and therefore challenged participation in an imperial war..." she writes, "India could not be partitioned into those who supported and those who opposed the war; neither did such political positions remain fixed for the duration of the war".

Indians felt as ruptured as the British Raj. Should they support the British in the transnational fight against fascism? Or should they join hands with nationalists? The British, for their part, were divided: threatened abroad by imperialist ambitions of the Axis powers and in India by rising nationalist forces.

In September 1939, the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow declared India a belligerent state. That same month, Hitler invaded Poland and the global war gathered a momentum of its own. The narrative is tortuous and more complicated than the account of Indian participation in World War I.

In the First World War, more than one million Indian soldiers were drafted to fight on behalf of the British Empire. They fought in France and Belgium, Egypt and East Africa,

Gallipoli, Palestine, and Mesopotamia.

By 1918, the Indian Army had transformed into an effective tool of British imperial expansion and contributed decisively to Britain's final victory over Ottoman Turkey. In the spring of 1919, following protests against the Rowlatt Act, soldiers from the same Indian Army, under the command of Colonel Reginald Dyer, fired into a crowd of hundreds of unarmed Indians.

The Second World War delivered decolonisation and the Partition of 1947 — neither of which was foreseen in 1939. On the one hand, an extraordinarily diverse and international cast of men from the continents of Australasia, Africa, North America and Asia made the "British" victories at El Alamein, Monte Cassino and Kohima possible, while the "British" Indian Army fought in Ethiopia against the Italian Army, in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria against both the Italian and German armies.

On the other, a different social history — the arrival in India of soldiers and nurses from around the world, the recruitment and overseas service of thousands of Indian soldiers, the employment of millions of labourers, the panic and rumours about possible Japanese invasion and the profound economic hardship (or windfall profit for some) — remained outside the loop of South Asian history writing.

History duly takes note of the death of six million people in Europe under fascist terror during the Second World War. However, the fact that three million civilians in undivided Bengal, India, were made to die during the shorter sub-period of the war (1943 to 1944) in what came to be known as the Bengal Famine has largely escaped international scrutiny. Books on the famine and its aftermath are yet to match the grander scale of European historiography. Some aspects of the war relating to India — especially the Burma campaign — have, however, received more sustained attention.

Gupta's book is a fair register of the emotions of such troubled times and of "the contested social and political history of the 1930s and 1940s". It offers a clue to the social context and, alongside tales of disgust, heartbreak and fear, there are tales of loyalty, betrayal and nationalism. She sources them from a wide array of people — combatants and non-combatants, civilians and prisoners-of-war,

poets, novelists and intellectuals — taking varied and often overlapping stands in relation to Indian involvement in the Second World War as a British colony.

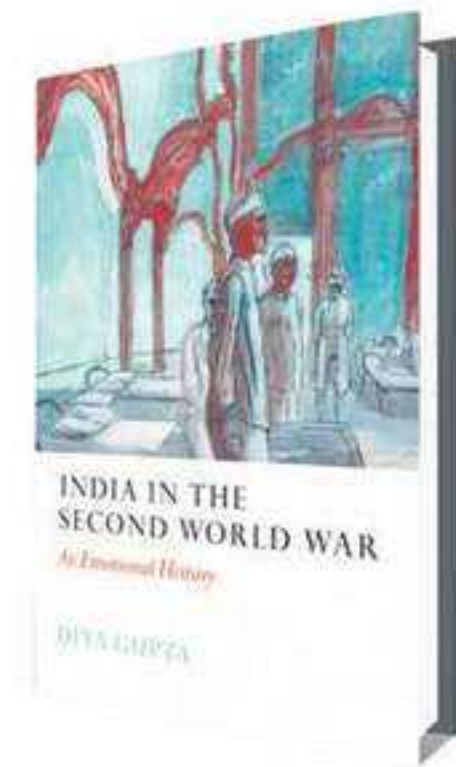
The emotional world is prised open through the Second World War letter extracts documented in the censorship reports, where a typical Indian soldier talks of Hitler, expresses wonder and pleasure on seeing Europe for the first time, and describes the hardships of life in the desert. The letters talk of the range of entertainment offered by mobile Indian cinemas, the joys of gorging on a big feast, the "annoying" lack of cigarettes, the changes wrought by the Quit India movement in the country, the extreme difficulties in procuring leave from colonial authorities, and hardships in India resulting from the 1943 Bengal Famine. The contemporary reader notices a form of self-censorship. Soldiers aware of the colonial censor's gaze do not document emotional responses to combat experiences, do not express political opinions or even physical longings or sexual desires in letters home.

Gupta draws extensively on Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), novelist Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), diasporic Tamil poet MJ Tambimuttu (1915-1983), communist poets Sukanta Bhattacharya (1926-1947) and Samar Sen (1916-1987), social reformer and poet Tara Aji Baig (1916-1989), educationist and poet Muriel Wasi (1912-1995) and soldier-novelist Baren Basu (author, Rongrut, translated from the original Bengali as *The Recruit* in 1950) for insight into the turbulent zeitgeist.

Gupta has also pored over the India Office Records at the British Library, and photographs and private papers from the Imperial War Museum, among others.

In *India's War: World War II and the Making of Modern South Asia*, Srinath Raghavan stated that the mountain of monographs on Indian history in the decade preceding 1947 treat the Second World War "as little more than mood music in the drama of India's advance towards independence and partition". Gupta's emotional history, which goes much beyond that, is a departure from the trodden path.

Prasenjit Chowdhury is an independent writer. He lives in Kolkata



India in the Second World War: An Emotional History
Diya Gupta
319pp, ₹4,173
Oxford University Press

{ HT PICKS } NEW READS

THE STORY OF A NATION AND THE STORY OF A LIFE

Gurcharan Das has been a lifelong champion of both economic and political freedom. "For over two centuries," he writes, "liberal democracies and free markets spread around the world to become the only sensible way to organize public life." After years of the stifling license raj, he celebrated India's move towards a liberal order in the 1990s, as market reform and a maturing democratic process began to yield remarkable results.

He recorded this progress in *India Unbound*. But after three decades, as in the rest of the world, liberalism is in retreat in India too. The liberal today is on a lonely road.

In order to elucidate the dilemma of the Indian liberal, Das recounts his own professional and intellectual journey. While telling his story, he also narrates the story of a nation struggling to become a successful liberal democracy. Written with conviction, insight, scholarship and immense clarity, this is an urgent and illuminating read. It is a book that every Indian invested in the future of the country should read.

The Dilemma of an Indian Liberal
Gurcharan Das
192pp, ₹499, Speaking Tiger

CLASSIC TALES RETOLD

Meet a deaf Snow White, a wheelchair-using Rapunzel, a neurodivergent Ugly Duckling.

In the world of fairy tales that often demonised characters who live with disability, these new re-imaginings seek to challenge our understanding of the people around us. The authors of this collection seek to retell classic stories by weaving in their own everyday experiences — the struggles, joys and frustrations that may not be known to the non-disabled.

And They Lived... Ever After grew out of a programme organised by Rising Flame, an award-winning non-profit organisation that seeks to build an inclusive world in which diverse bodies, minds and voices can thrive with dignity and live free of discrimination and abuse. This book is every bit as enchanting as it is important.

And They Lived... Ever After
Edited by Rising Flame
241pp, ₹399, HarperCollins

FOLLOWING IN A SULTAN'S FOOTSTEPS

Using the legendary love story of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni and his Turkish slave-cum-lover Ayaz as the backdrop, *Mahmud and Ayaz*, set in contemporary Mumbai, tells the story of a young, casually radicalised Muslim man, Mahmud Fakhar, who has a temporary teaching job in a second-rate college. At a loose end after his family dies in the 2015 Hajj stampede, he runs into a homeless Hindu, hires him as his domestic help, converts him to Islam, renames him Ayaz, and begins an affair with him. It is the start of an unusual life together, and a series of journeys.

After some odd adventures, things come full circle when their wayward life ends again in Mumbai, in the neighbourhood of Mahmud's birth, even as AIDS afflicts one of them. Narrated with deadpan humour, R Raj Rao's new novel is unlike any love story that Indian readers would expect.

Mahmud and Ayaz
R Raj Rao
280pp, ₹499, Speaking Tiger

ontheweb

READ: An exploration of womanhood, *Lost on Me* by Veronica Raimo is entirely character-driven. Originally written in Italian, the book, which has been longlisted for the International Booker Prize 2024, stands out for its humour and solid punchlines.



Scan the QR code to read the review by Rahul Singh

{ NOVEL } A SEARCH FOR THE SELF

All the lives she ever lived

Saurabh Sharma

letters@hindustantimes.com

"Strange and disturbing" are the two adjectives American writer HP Lovecraft used to describe Russian painter Nicholas Roerich's mountain-scapes. Roerich died in Naggar in Himachal Pradesh in 1947. It is fitting that the cover image of Namita Gokhale's *Never Never Land* is modelled on his painting, *Otrot Messenger of the White Burkhan* (1925), based on a myth from the Altai region.

Never Never Land seems to share Roerich's spirit as it verbalises an urban melancholia. Its middle-aged narrator, Iti Arya — who has recently moved to Gurgaon, which she can "never call

Gurugram — is a freelance editor according to her LinkedIn profile. The novel begins with Iti being overwhelmed by the barrage of messages on the WhatsApp group of the 1982 batch of St Dolorosa Convent. "Their lives stink of safety and leisure and the security nets of family," she notes. Her singleness and loneliness set her apart.

Gokhale's bare prose is full of metaphysical underpinnings. On one doleful night, Iti, an aspiring novelist, breathes "filtered air" and thinks of returning to her home, The Dacha, in Kumaon, "where everything began." She writes about it in her journal, which is rendered in a different font in this book. Her grandmother, Badi Amma — housemaid to a 102-year-old Rosinka Paul Singh — is "happy to see"

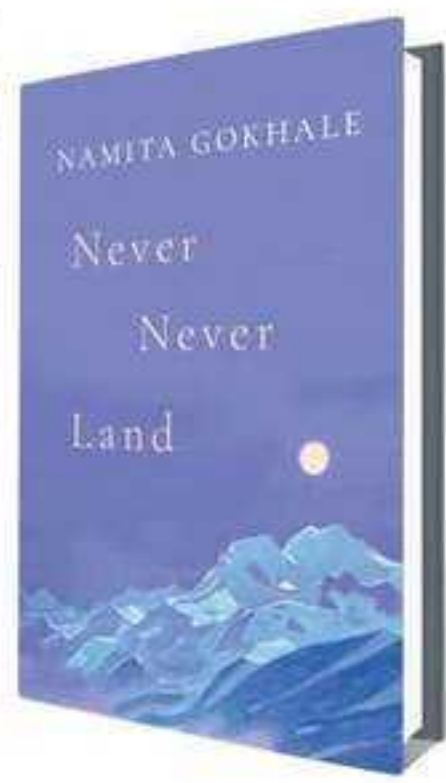
her. Back home, things haven't changed much because the dust of the past hasn't settled. For now, her focus is on her grandmother Lila, who has been christened "Lily" by Rosinka.

"The pair of them have aged well, achieved a sort of timelessness that has them residing as much in memory as in the present," she remarks as she thinks of archiving their memories. But she's soon disturbed by the appearance of young Nina and her relationship with Badi Amma. Questions about the girl's true identity begin plaguing Iti. She tries to investigate her own relation-

ship with the region, and with forces much larger than she is able to articulate. The specks of poetry here and there, the inconsistent supply of electricity and descriptions of a quiet life in the mountains, heighten the drama.

But each time Iti makes any progress in solving the mystery, her attempts appear like false starts to the novels she has thought about writing but failed to finish. (Among these are *Promises to Myself*, *HypeReality*, and *A Litany of Lost Loves*. The last one "was soon abandoned, indeed

Never Never Land
Namita Gokhale
176pp, ₹499
Speaking Tiger

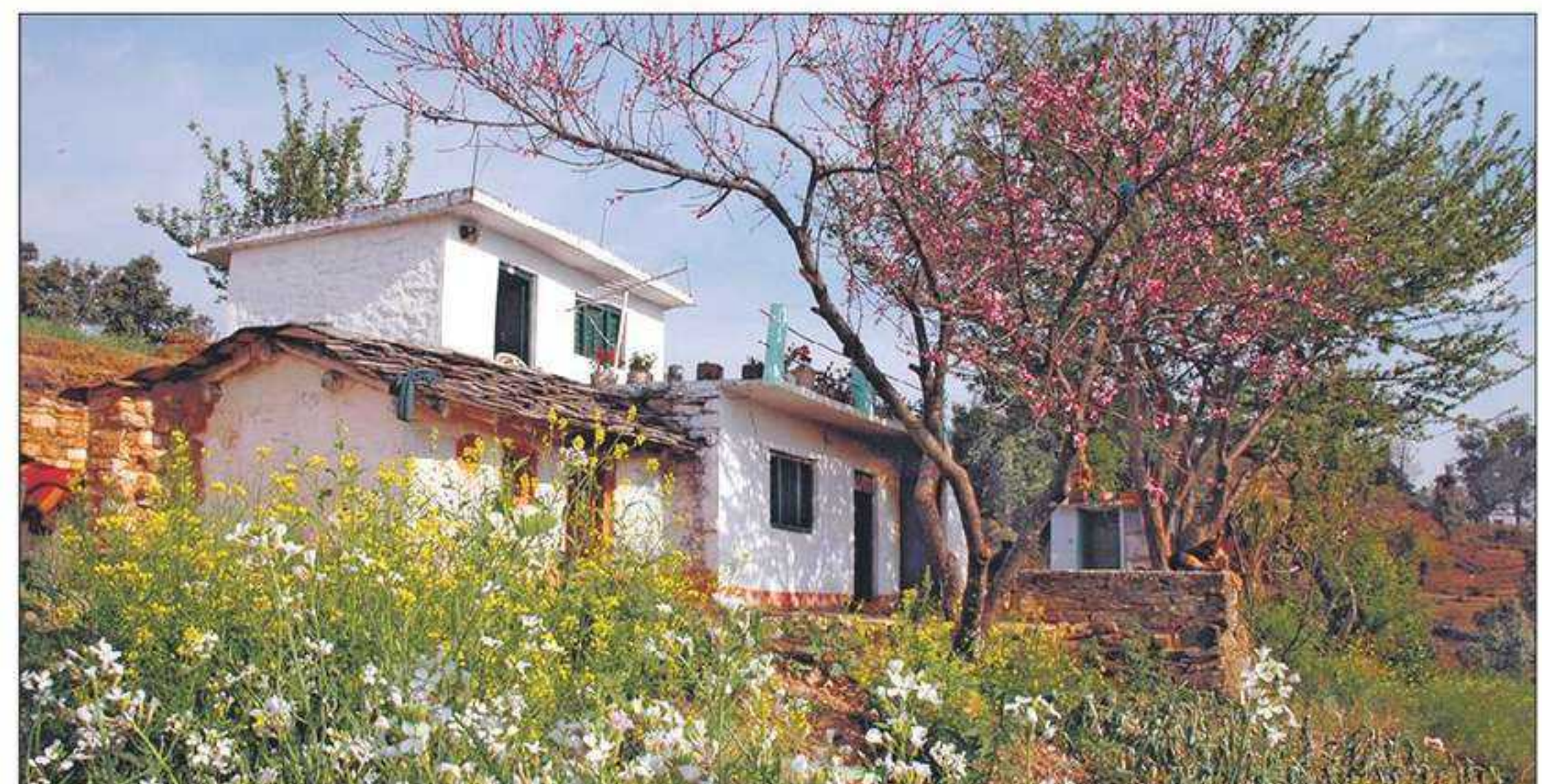


aborted, but those past heartbreaks... continued to haunt me," Iti notes.)

Readers might be shocked by the narrator's memories, and in penning them, Gokhale demonstrates the ease with which she focuses on several issues that she raises in her novels. In *Never Never Land*, she highlights the anxieties of multiple generations and presents the rootlessness that often comes with a well-connected urban existence.

"Friendship can be a good substitute for love," Iti observes, analysing the co-dependent existence of Rosinka and Lila. Thinking of love, she grieves the perennial mother-shaped hole in her life. It is obvious that Iti is in search of herself. She is troubled too that the two old women are living more youthful lives than she is. As she continues to mine their stories, the haunting aspects of the novel resurface.

Particularly striking are the chapters titled *Rosinka's Dream Diaries* and *Badi Amma's Memo-*



Homes in Kumaon, Uttarakhand.

RAJEEV SACHDEVIA / UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ries, which steer the narrative in a different direction while satisfying the reader's curiosity about the other characters in this slim novel. Gokhale is deft at handling narrative shifts and conjures a new beginning at the end, when Iti chooses to begin a new

novel: "A straight narrative with a clear arc of actions and consequences is clearly not possible. Especially not here, in *Never Never Land*." Thankfully, there is no compulsory closure.

"Art is the evidence of the mind that created it," noted

Jenny Tinghui Zhang in *Four Treasures of the Sky*. *Never Never Land* is evidence of the originality of Gokhale's creative spirit.

Saurabh Sharma is an independent writer. They are @writerly_life on Instagram and X



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VASANT VIHAR F9/4, rare toilet, throw off flats, semirunish, ready end April, lift, indpt B w/tilt, shared bath, rent 24.20 lak, meet kapur, NSC tech. 989999005.

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GOPALA 2,57,000/ICICI BANK 1,02,000
TATA WESTSIDE 2,60,000/HDFC BANK 1,97,000
DR. LAL PATH LAB 3,28,000/AXIS BANK 3,50,000
BLUESTONE 6,51,000/AXIS BANK 4,03,000
MULTIPLY 11,50,000/MNC (Full Build.) 17,50,000
Required Vacant Independent on Main Road Property in Delhi & Gurgaon
NARESH AGGARWAL PROP
9810110325, 9650244077

RENTED
RBL Bank 48,000 **Relaxo** 1,80,000
INDUSIND Bank 1,45,000 **Manyavar** 3,50,000
UTKARSH Bank 2,19,000 **MULTIPLY** 9,00,000
BANDHAN Bank 2,70,000 **MALDIRAM** 11,40,000
ICICI Bank 4,25,000 **MOTEL** 17,75,000
Malls / Multiplexes / MNC's / Industries
Returns - 8 to 12% (Since 1985)
ANAND AGGARWAL PROP.
9810327243, 9811257394

CHANGE OF NAME
I. GUNJA Kumari W/o No-15794685Y Hav Ashish Kumar Singh R/o Adharsh Gram, Road No-1, Kollha Paigambarpur, Muzaffarpur, Bihar-843108, declare that I have changed my name from Gunja Kumari to Gunja Singh for all future purposes vide affidavit before Executive Magistrate Delhi dt-27-02-2024
IT IS hereby declared that Rolley Varma/Rolley Mahendra/Rolley Verma and Rolley Mahendra Varma as stated in various documents are the name of same person Rolley Mahendra Varma vide of Praveen Kumar Varma.
I. KHUSHBANTI D/o Brijesh Gupta W/o Mayank Bansal R/o Ward No. 16, Kaji Wada Mohalla Hoda, Distt. Palwal has changed my name to Khushbanti Bansal for all purposes.

AVAILABLE FOR RENT COMPLETE BUILDING / PARTIAL / FLOORWISE
Industrial Building, 425 Sq.Mtr.
Total builtup area 10000 Sq.ft. Corner, Basement (14'), Ground/Stilt (10'), 1st Floor (12'), Second Floor (half built height 12'), New RCC Construction, B'fub Flooring and Granite on stairs
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BEST SUITABLE FOR Light Industries/Offices/Godown
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Cont Owner +91 9871152158

AVAILABLE
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b) FARM HOUSE LAND ON SOHNA - BALLABHGARH ROAD.
c) R-ZONE LAND IN GURUGRAM, PATAUDI & SOHNA.
d) LAND FOR NURSING HOME & COMMERCIAL USE IN SOHNA
CONTACT
9050180404, 9811146655

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CHANGE OF NAME
I. SURENDER Kumar S/O Stay Narayan, Village Sobhapur, PO Bhushan Kalan, Distt. Mahendragar, Haryana has changed my son's name from Dipak Sharma to Daksh Vastish for all future purposes.
I. AMARJEET SINGH S/O Shri Amrik Singh R/O H.No. 125 Block 1, Subhash Nagar, New Delhi-110027 have changed my name from Amarjeet Singh to Amarjeet Singh Thethi for all future purposes
IT IS for general information that I have changed my name from Dicky Domra Sherpa W/o Amit Kumar R/o Dahar, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh-250344 to Dicky Domra Sherpa with verified affidavit dated 28/03/2024.
CHANGE OF NAME
I. MONISH Arora (HID 432804249120) S/O Late Shri Sudesh Kumar Arora has changed my name to Manish Arora for all future purpose. Monish Arora & Manish Arora is one and same person
I. NITIN Jain S/o Sh. Mukesh Chand Jain R/o H.No. 657, G/F, Kabool Nagar, Shahdara, Delhi-32 have changed my daughter's name from Naysha Jain to Kavya Jain (DOB:29.12.2019) for all purposes.
IT IS hereby declared that Praveen Varma/Praveen Kumar Varma/Praveen Verma as stated in various documents are the name of same person Praveen Kumar Varma son of Yash Pal Varma.

CHANGE OF NAME

I. SHRIYA Madho Agrawal D/O, Shri Dhirendra Kumar Agrawal R/o 1516 Valencia Tower Mahagan Mazzaria Sector-78 Noida Uttar-pradesh Pin 201305 have changed my name to Shriya Madho.
I. GAJENDRA Singh S/o Paan Singh R/o E-80,Gali No.3,Dheeraj Nagar Part-2, Elmudpur Sector 30, Faridabad, Haryana-121003 have changed the name of my minor son namely Bhuvек aged 10 years and he shall hereafter be known as Bhovек Chhinwaan.

I. VIPIN Kumar S/O Sh. Shyamdev Prasad R/O H.No. 403/10 Durga Enclave Sehatpur, Faridabad, Haryana have changed my minor son's name from Hardik to Hardik Kashyap for all future purposes.

I. ASHOK Kumar residing at Plot No. 757 SF-4 Front 2nd Floor Sunrise Apartments Nitiand 1 GDA, Indirapuram, Ghaziabad-201014, hereby declare that I have been commonly known by two names: Ashok Kumar and Ashok Dhoundiyal. Both names refer to the same individual, and my son Shakti Dhoundiyal has used them interchangeably for official documents. I declare that all previous documents, contracts, and agreements bearing either my first or second name shall remain valid and binding.

I. RISHI Shyam Sunder Bansal S/O Shyam Sunder Bansal R/o G-2, Plot No. 170, Media Enclave, Sector - 6, Vaishali, Ghaziabad, UP have changed my name to Rishi Bansal

I. SEEMA W/o JC 857728N Nb/Sub Harijagan, Ghaziabad-201014, Chandpur, Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh-203001 have changed my name from Seema Devi to Seema Devi Affidavit IN-04-40355815198W Dated 26/3/2024 before Notary Public New Delhi.

I. RAJENDRA Prasad S/o. Gopal Prasad Sharma R/o. B-8/144, Sector - 4, Rohini North West Delhi - 110085, have changed my name to Rajinder Prasad Sharma for all purposes

I. GUNJA Dubey W/O, Raj Kumar Dubey Stelar Jeevan D-702 Sector 1 Greater Noida West Gautam Buzh Nagar UP -201306 have changed my name to Gunja Devi.

I. JITENDRA Singh Manral R/o G-92, HIG S5, Sector-11, Pratap Vihar, Ghaziabad, UP has changed the name of my Daughter from Anaya to Anaya Manral for all future purposes.

MY DAUGHTER'S name in her birth certificate is Abha, while her real name is Abha Ajay Yerpude. Now she should be known by this name. Ajay Kumar Yerpude R/o V-01, Ordinance House, Ordinance Factory estate, Muradnagar, Ghaziabad

I. NEENA Sikka W/o Sh. Deepak Sikka R/o H.No. 2147, Sec-16, Faridabad have changed my name from Neena Rani to Neena Sikka for all future purposes.

I. BIMLA W/o Late Jitender Kumar R/o A-24, DDA Flats, New Ranjeet Nagar, New Delhi-110008 have changed my name from Baby to BIMLA for all future purposes.

LOST & FOUND

MY ALLOTMENT letter related to the property (flat - 1203, Block C-11, CGEWHO, Sector P-4, Greater Noida) (Registration No. GNC5692; CGEWHO, 4 April 2016) was lost at Park Chowk Greater Noida. Lost Article Report has also been reported L.A.R No. 2024000025609. If anyone finds this document, please contact on mobile 918340429805 or the address given below. Surendra Kumar S/o Shri Vishwanath Prasad, R/o H.No. - 12, Road no - 1F, Kadam Kuan, Near Water Tank, Rajendra Nagar, Patna Bihar - 800016.

I HAVE lost Original Sale Deed of my property C-315 Fourth Floor with Roof Rights, Sushant Lok Phase-1, near fauji market, Gurgaon (HR)-122001. Founder contact me Lakshay Bhatia 9810340392

I HAVE lost my JNU - B.Tech degree & Semester wise marksheet, Year 1994, Roll No. NDA/69/021. If found, Pls. Cont: Praveen Kumar Varma S/o Yash Pal Varma, R/o D-902 CGRC, Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Mob: 8882485114

I HAVE lost Allotment letter F-17789 and Position letter of my Flat No-506, Tower Yucca Paramount Symphony, Crossing Republik Ghaziabad. If found, please contact: Abhishek Kumar and Dimple Kumari 886003795

I. KAMLESH D/o Late Sh. Ram Chander have lost all original documents of my Property D-28 Bharat Vihar, Uttam Nagar, Delhi-110059. If anyone found please contact at: 991152297

I HAVE lost my JNU - B.Tech degree & Semester wise marksheet, Year 1994, Roll No. NDA/69/021. If found, Pls. Cont: Praveen Kumar Varma S/o Yash Pal Varma, R/o D-902 CGRC, Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Mob: 8882485114

I HAVE lost my JNU - B.Tech degree & Semester wise marksheet, Year 1994, Roll No. NDA/69/021. If found, Pls. Cont: Praveen Kumar Varma S/o Yash Pal Varma, R/o D-902 CGRC, Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Mob: 8882485114

PUBLIC NOTICES

ADRIKA MARKETING LLP
AAH-4552
C-87/2, L/ Side, KH.No. 193, 194, Flat No. 7 Sauridajab Paryavaran Complex, New Delhi-110030
Before The Central Government Registrar of Companies, Delhi
Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the ADRIKA MARKETING LLP proposes to make a petition to Registrar of Companies under section 13(3) of the Limited Liability Partnership Act, 2008 seeking permission to change its Registered office from the state of "DELHI" to the state of "UTTAR PRADESH".
Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the registered office of the LLP may deliver or cause to be delivered or send by Registered post of his/ her objections supported by an affidavit stating the nature of his/ her interest and grounds of opposition supported by an affidavit to the ROC within 21 (Twenty One) days from the date of publication of this notice with a copy to the petitioner LLP at its Registered office at the address mentioned above.
For and on behalf of
ADRIKA MARKETING LLP
RAJNEESH RANJAN
(Designated Partner)
DPIN: 07099580
Place : New Delhi
Date : 29.03.2024

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QUICK BOOKING CENTRES

There is one near you

NORTH DELHI
Ashok Vihar : Jain Ads, E-88, (Basement), Ashok Vihar, Phase-1, Delhi-110052, Ph: 011-47082653, 9810098228; **Prashant Vihar (Rohini)** : Paavan Advertiser, D-4, 1st Floor, Safeway House, Commercial Complex, Central Mkt., D-Block, Prashant Vihar, (Rohini), Near PVR Cinema, Delhi-85 Ph: 9311288839, 9811288839; **Shalimar Bagh** : Adage Classifieds, BN (Poorvi) 55, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-88, Phone: 27494444/27490353/ 9810065095; **Delhi Classifieds Ad Agency**, AL Market, AL-85-B, 2nd Floor, Shalimar Bagh, (Near SBI BANK) Delhi - 110088, Ph: 9810588681, 9810588680, 011- 27472626; **Shakti Nagar** : Disha Marketing, 19, (GF) Chadha Bhawan, 23/4, Shakti Nagar, Delhi, Ph: 47095220/ 23840010/ 9811215599; **Mukherjee Nagar** : Make My Ad Private Limited, E-4, Gandhi Vihar, Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-110009. Ph: 9999339437, 9999889437; **Kishanganj** : Shri Narain Advertising, 205, (FF) Kishanganj Market, Old Rohtak Road, Delhi-7, Ph: 23696326/9811095804.

EAST DELHI
Mayur Vihar : The Vision Advertising, 13-A, Pocket 1 Pratap Nagar, Mayur Vihar, Phase 1, Near Mayur Vihar Metro Station New Delhi, Mob.: 9999278636, 9717557792; **Preet Vihar** : Ad-Bridge Classifieds, 305/8, Chopra Complex, (Behind McDonald), Preet Vihar, Delhi, Ph: 42421234/ 22017210/ 22057210; **Yamuna Vihar** : Hello East News, Ganga Vihar, Nr. Yamuna Vihar, East Delhi-110094 Mob: 80102 88833, 80102 88822; **Shakarpur (V35 Mail Chowk)** : Ritika Ad, 1st Floor, Parichay Complex, 4-5 Veer Savarkar Block, Madhuban Road, Shakarpur, Delhi-92, Ph: 22449890 / 9968289890 / 9350309890; **Mandawali** : Bhaskar Advertising, F-11, Office No. 109, Jai Ambay Complex, Main Road, Mandawali, Near IP Extn., New Delhi - 110092, Ph: 8826693931 / 9899733173; **Shakarpur (Vikas Marg)** : Kamdhenu Advtg & Mktg, A-146/8, 1st Floor, Chaudhary Chamber (Opp. Walia Nursing Home), Main Vikas Marg, Shakarpur, Delhi-92, Ph: 011-43096853, 09891265685; **Surajmal Vihar (Anand Vihar)** : Vidhi Advertising Pvt. Ltd., Kamal Complex, Krit Plaza, A-Block Market, L.S.C., Surajmal Vihar, (Above Chaska Restaurant), Delhi-110092, Ph: 9899701024, 9899701023; **Dilshad Garden** : Damask, 31-D, Pocket-B, Dilshad Garden, Delhi-110095, Ph: 9810735111.

WEST DELHI
Dwarka : Rebel Advertisers & Sales Promoters, 227, Vardhaman Plaza, (Building Adjacent to Indusind Bank, Above SUB-WAY) Plot No. 3, Sector-10 Market, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075, Ph: 9811727991 9312225551; **Janakpuri** : Aero Ad Agency, D1B/2-A, Janakpuri, New Delhi-58; Ph:28520666/ 9811254535; **Janakpuri Distt. Centre** : Elegant Advertising, 104, Vishal Tower Distt. Centre, Janakpuri, New Delhi-58, Ph: 9971259928, 011-42401558, 47010215; **Uttam Nagar** : Atul Advertising Agency, D-8, Om Vihar Main Market, (Near Santoshi Mata Mandir) Uttam Nagar, New Delhi - 110059. Ph: 9810497098, 9625908234; **Tilak Nagar** : Verma Ji Business Center, 69-D, Mukherjee Park (Gate No. 6), Tilak Nagar, New Delhi-110018, Ph: 9891461543 / 9310347796 / 011-25980670; **P. S. Enterprises**, H.No. WZ-44/2D, Street No.16, Krishna Puri, Tilak Nagar, New Delhi - 110018, Mob. 9810056896, 9810799269; **Ramesh Nagar** : Advertising Hub, E-77, Double Storey, Ramesh Nagar, New Delhi-110015, Ph: 9891195327, 9310006777; **Moti Nagar** : Lakshay Ads Media, Shop No. 2, 1st Floor, DLF-1, Najafgarh Road, Moti Nagar, (Nr. Metro Station), New Delhi-110015, Ph.: 9312272149, 8585901553; **Rajendra Place** : Connection, Shop No.144, Rajendra Bhawan, Rajendra Place, New Delhi-110008, Mob. 9911889108, 9899786999; **Paschim Vihar** : Berry Ads, Shop No. G-8, Ground Floor, Ansal Utility Commercial Complex, Plot No-4 & 5, Paschim Vihar, Opp. Jwala Heri Market, New Delhi-110063, Ph: 9250680913, 011-25262135, 25275947; **Peera Garhi** : Delhi Ad Media : D-181, 3rd Floor, Peera Garhi Chowk, Main Rohtak Road, Opp. Peera Garhi Metro Station, Above Pooja Tyres, New Delhi-87, Ph.: 991194013, 9871488907; **Karampura** : Shiva Ads Media, G-73, GF, Karampura, Nr. Radha Krishna Mandir, New Delhi-110015, Ph.: 9811636804, 9211122625, 25937947.

SOUTH DELHI
Alaknanda : Libra Lehar, D7-8 1st Floor, Pushpa Bhawan, Alaknanda Commercial Complex, New Delhi-19, Ph: 011-49573333, 9910484810; **Defence Colony** : Gupta Enterprises, 160, Flyover Market, (Near SBI Bank) Defence Colony, New Delhi, Ph: 24640698/24611788/9810205253; **Lajpat Nagar-I** : Durga Advertising, D-218, Basement, Lajpat Nagar-1, New Delhi-110024, Phone: 9891297117 / 41037117; **Saket** : Apex Advertising, Garage No 70-C, pkt-A-11, Surya Apt, Kalkaji Extn, New Delhi-110017 - Mob. : 9910644333, 9810786304; **Vasant Vihar** : Dee Ad & Design, B9/21, Ground Floor, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi. Ph: 9873999000; **Kalkaji** : M/S Sankalp Advertising, E-8, 2nd Floor, Main Road, Kalkaji, New Delhi -110019, Ph.: 011-41020040, 40660010; **Nehru Place** : Evershine Agencies & Consultants, 106, Saraswati House, 27, Nehru Place, New Delhi-19, Ph.: 9811043482, 8700346710; **Ashram** : Hindustan Advertising, 60, Ground Floor, Hari Nagar Ashram, New Delhi-110014, Ph: 9899395929, 9810135711; **Vasant Kunj** : Ad Connect, 3125, Sector D-3 Vasant Kunj, Opposite Fortis Hospital, New Delhi-110070, Mob.: 9310292725, 9810292725.

CENTRAL DELHI
Fatehpuri (Chandni Chowk) : Ramniwas Advertising & Marketing, R-18, (F.F.), Coronation Building, Fatehpuri, Delhi-6, Ph: 011-23942577 / 9810145472.

NCR
Gurugram (Sector-49) : Key Stone, Office No. 406, The Sapphire Mall, Uppal's Southend, Sector-49, Sohna Road, Gurugram-122018, Telefax : 0124-4147312, 9811242312; **Gurugram (Sector-28)** : Tarnic Advertisers, 1250 'A' Maruti Vihar, DLF-IV, Sec-28, Gurgaon. Ph.: 0124-4004264, 9990380427; **Gurugram** : Kamal Hari Advtg., Shyam Hari Bhargava Place, New Railway Road, Gurugram. Ph: 0124-4064901/9811360969; **Faridabad** : Chatarbhuja Advertising, 207-208, 2nd Floor, Dwarka Complex, Sector-16, Near IDBI Bank, Faridabad, Ph: 0129-2412798, 9811195834; **Usha Ad Media**, House No. 9, Bidhuri Colony, Agwanpur, Near Ambedkar Chowk, Sec-91, Faridabad, Ph. 9958943475, 8383031096; **Saransh Advertising & Marketing**, A-55, 2nd Floor, Neelam Flyover Market N.I.T. Faridabad, Ph: 0129-4166498, 9811502088, 9818078183; **Ghaziabad (Vaishali)** : Ad Facilities, Shop No. LG-18, GDA Commercial Arcade (Behind Income Tax Office), Sec-3, Vaishali, GZB. Ph: 0120-2778298, 011-65739660, 9810074627; **Indirapuram** : Active Ad Point, Plot No.70, Shakti Khand-IV, Indirapuram, Ghaziabad Ph: (M) 9311638496, 9311638497, Telefax: 0120-4132275; **Vasundhara** : Yash Communication, 13/1197, Sec-13, Vasundhara, (Gzb.) Ph:0120-4155807, 9891185384; **Ghaziabad** : Tirupati Balaji Communication, Plot No. 516, Sec12, Friends Cooperative Society, Gate No. 2, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad. Mob. : 9818373200, 8130640000; **Noida** : M.M. Communications, Block A-41A, (Near Super Bazar), Sec-17, Atta Peer, Noida, Ph: 0120-2512700-800 / 9810746461; **Attre Advtg.**, O-93, 1st Floor, Sector-12, (Opp. Noida Stadium) Noida, Ph: 9811715867; **Unique Advtg. & Mktg. Group**, 11/17, 1st Floor, Amby Complex, Sharma Market, Sector-5, Noida. Ph: 8826977227/0120-4223289.

OUTSIDE NCR
Muzaffarnagar : Reshu Advertising Pvt. Ltd., Reshu Chowk, Reshu Vihar, Circular Road, Muzaffarnagar-251001, Mob. : 9927013166, 8899120120; **Bareilly** : Agarwal Communications, 23, Sita Kiran Plaza, Opposite Old Roadways, Rajendra Nagar, Bareilly, Ph. : 0581-3553679, 9412294199; **Rewari** : Tanya Advertising Agency, Shop No.7, First Floor, Shiv Complex, Garhi Bolni Road, Rewari-123401, Ph: 9728111777; **Karma AD Point**, G-53, Kamla Palace, Near Dharuhera Chowk, Rewari (Hr.), Ph: 01274-251333, 09416882312, 09215302430, 09416302430; **Hisar** : Verma AD Point, 1890, Ground Floor, Main Railway Road, Hisar-125001, Ph: 01662-225293; **Rohtak** : Aggarwal Advertising Agency, Shop No.1, 2nd Floor, Subhash Road, Opp. Radio Station, Near Mann Hospital, Rohtak, Ph: 08950002523, 09050449290; **Karnal** : Star Media Advertising Agency, Office No. FF-16, Second Floor, Super Mall, Sector-12, Karnal, Haryana, Ph: 0184-4023001, 08398956000; **Panipat** : Om Ad Agency, Plot no 125, Shop No 4, 1st Floor Sukhdev Nagar, Panipat, Mob. : 8708672844, 9729302332

March car sales dip, signal muted financial yr ahead

Manufacturers may have to lower production to match lower demand

Alisha Sachdev
alisha.sachdev@livemint.com

NEW DELHI: Car sales slowed in March as key festivals such as Navratri that boost purchases fall in April this year, apart from the high base effect of the last two years' record sales.

The slowdown in March signals the beginning of a period of subdued passenger vehicle sales from the new fiscal year starting April, industry executives said, adding it may prompt automakers to lower production volumes to match the changed demand-supply dynamics.

The passenger vehicles industry is expected to report wholesales, that is, shipments to dealers, in the range of 370,000-375,000 units in March, with retail sales trailing that number and adding more stock to showrooms, said Shashank Srivastava, senior executive director, Maruti Suzuki.

By contrast, a little over



The PV industry is expected to report wholesales in the range of 370,000-375,000 units in March.

300,000 units with dealers are considered a normal stock level, equalling 30 days of sales, Srivastava said.

"However, the industry will have to be watchful because there will be no leeway to pump in vehicles in the event of a temporary slump in retail sales and demand and supply will have to be carefully matched," he cautioned. Total dealer dispatches for FY24 are expected to come in at 4.23 million units, with retail sales expected at 4.21 million, he added.

Production adjustments by original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) are expected

from April, said Tarun Garg, chief operating officer of Hyundai Motor India, which makes models such as the Creta mid-SUV.

"March was a slow month in terms of retail, for three broad reasons", he said. "Retail sales are influenced by the timing of auspicious and inauspicious periods in a month. Last year, Navratri fell between 22 March and 31 March, with the Gudi Padwa festival on 22 March. This year, these occasions have shifted to 9 April through 17 April.

"Historically, Navratri occurs in March 80% of the time. Addi-

tionally, the timing of Holi has also shifted, with it falling on 25 March this year compared to 8 March last year, which is preceded by an 8-day inauspicious period.

"These changes in festival timing contribute to variations in consumer behaviour, that's one.

"The second point to note is that the industry witnessed a growth rate of 8% in the previous calendar year, compared to a robust 22% in the year before. Now, the high base effect is going to come into play, and we will head towards low single-digit growth for the current year. Lastly, stock levels across the industry are reported to be either normal or slightly higher. At Hyundai, because of our newly-launched Creta, however, deliveries are ongoing and stock levels are only at three weeks," Garg explained.

"It's evident that we must adjust to the reality of single-digit growth now. This trend is expected to continue through-out the current calendar year, characterized by selective discounts, stable stock levels, and waiting periods for only a few models," he added.

Byju's offers renounced shares to its investors

Priyamvada C
priyamvada.c@livemint.com

BENGALURU: Byju's will offer renounced shares to its dissenting investors who did not participate in its rights issue to prevent further dilution to their shareholding, the cash-strapped edtech firm said on Friday.

In a letter to shareholders, founder and CEO Byju Raveendran said that the company had secured more than 50% of the votes needed to increase the authorized share capital to accommodate its \$200-million rights issue.

"Despite the animosity shown by some of the investors in pursuing uncalled for legal actions, we continue to show good faith towards all our shareholders and would like all of you to be part of our turnaround story," Raveendran said in the letter, extending an olive branch to the company's select investors who have complained of mismanagement and lack of corporate governance at Byju's.

Byju's held its extraordinary general meeting (EGM) early on Friday to augment the authorized share capital of the company, a proposal that sailed through without any objection from the investors who participated. Securing a majority vote for its proposal to increase authorized share capital means



Byju Raveendran, founder and CEO of Byju's

the company can issue fresh shares to investors. The company's \$200-million rights issue at a 99% cut from its peak valuation of \$22 billion, achieved in 2022, was opposed by some of its existing investors, including Prosus Ventures, who did not participate in the fundraise.

In a rights issue, if existing investors don't participate, their shareholding gets diluted as a result of the additional shares issued by the company. Raveendran added that the company had received "significant interest" from third parties, but will continue to prioritize "existing shareholders" by "extending"

this offer.

"I hope you will see the value in continuing with Byju's in the same spirit with which you first joined our journey. I look forward to your response and to our continued partnership to transform the global educational landscape." Existing investors of Think & Learn, Byju's parent, led by Prosus, had petitioned the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) Bengaluru to stay Friday's EGM and block the rights issue fearing a near wipe-out of their investments, which was turned down by the bankruptcy court. The NCLT will next hear the case on 4 April.

Prosus, along with other investors including General Atlantic and Peak XV had in an EGM in February voted to sack Byju Raveendran as the company's CEO, and remove his wife and co-founder Divya Gokulnath, as well as his brother Riju Raveendran from the board. These decisions were part of a series of resolutions aimed at addressing governance, financial mismanagement, and compliance issues at Byju's.

The Karnataka High Court on Thursday extended the interim stay on the decision of the 23 February EGM to sack Byju Raveendran as CEO, adjourning the matter to 28 May.

INDIA SEES 1.68 L BIZ REGISTRATION IN FY24; HIGHEST IN FEBRUARY

Gireesh Chandra Prasad
gireesh.p@livemint.com

NEW DELHI: February saw the highest number of business registrations this financial year so far, with Maharashtra on top with 18% share followed by Uttar Pradesh (11%) and Delhi (9%). Business services accounted for over 70% of the 17,260 new company registrations in February.

So far, more than 1,68,700 companies have been formed in FY24 with ₹19,774 crore as paid-up capital, compared to over 1,59,500 companies registered in FY23 with a paid-up capital of ₹18,132.16 crore. Paid-up capital is the shares subscribed and paid for, which can be further augmented.

ONGC Green Ltd, PFC Infra Finance IFSC Ltd, IRCTC Payments Ltd, Indbank Global Support Services Ltd, Jamnagar Transmission Ltd and Bhadla III & Bikaner III Transmission Ltd are the state-owned companies registered in February, showed official data from the ministry of corporate affairs.

In January, 14,327 companies were registered in the country. Only 2,818 companies were registered in February 2023 when a technological upgrade of the statutory filing portal was underway. The average paid up capital in the companies so far registered this year is ₹11.72 lakh, indicating that new business registrations are led by small businesses, which form a key segment of the industry.

India also has a large informal sector, with over 60 million unincorporated non-agriculture micro, small and medium enterprises accounting for over 11 million jobs in the country.

At present, two thirds of the 2.64 million companies registered in the country cumulatively, are active. Data separately available from the ministry showed that 2,38,301 incorporations have happened from 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2024 as compared to 1,89,446 incorporations for the same period in previous year. This includes limited liability partnerships (LLPs) as well.

GeM is world's 3rd largest e-market for public procurement

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NEW DELHI: India's Government e-Market or GeM portal is the world's third largest e-commerce platform for public procurement after Korea ON-line E-Procurement System (KON-EP) and Singapore's GeBiz with total sales value crossing ₹4 lakh crore in current financial year ending on March 31, a senior official said.

"GeM closes this financial year with over ₹4 lakh crore gross merchandise value (GMV), almost a 100% jump from the GMV at the end of previous fiscal year, exhibiting its unique ability to promote digital inclusion," GeM CEO PK Singh said. GMV represents the total value of goods or services sold within a specific period.

Launched in August 2016, the total value of orders placed through GeM in 2018-19 was ₹17,445 crore, which gradually went up to about ₹1.07 lakh crore in 2021-22. In the previous financial year (FY23) the value of orders (or GMV) was little over ₹2.01 lakh crore.

While both public and private sectors companies can sell their products and services through GeM, buyers can only be government entities, including gram panchayats. Defence procurement is one of the major business activities in the platform. "Assembly of BrahMos missile is being done through GeM as a service contract. In defence, right from supplying eggs up to the missile parts is being done through the portal," said Singh.

"GeM provides a level-playing field for domestic businesses, particularly smaller ones, physically distant from popular markets. Of the ₹4 lakh crore GMV, orders nearly 50% has been awarded to marginalised seller segments such as artisans, weavers, craftsmen, micro and small enterprises, women-led units,



PK Singh, GeM CEO.

farmer producer organisations and startups," he added.

The portal has collaborations with over 5.2 lakh Common Services Centres (CSCs) and more than 1.5 lakh India Post offices to link remotest locations of the country for seamless procurement, he said. "Through supportive handholding at every step to help diverse sellers and service providers grow their business on GeM, the platform has given impetus to hyper local economies across regions in India, resulting in job creation and greater incomes."

According to Singh, services procurement through GeM is rapidly growing. Procurement of services from the portal was worth ₹66,000 crore in 2022-23, which jumped to ₹2.05 lakh crore in the current fiscal year. Goods procurement in FY24 (as on March 28) was valued at ₹1.95 lakh crore, marginally lower than the services procurement.

"GeM has been exceptionally successful in breaking down the cartel of established and renowned service providers, paving way for small domestic entrepreneurs to participate in government tenders from anywhere at any time. The vast repository of services on GeM has enabled states to procure innovative solutions that cater to all their dynamic needs," he said.

Bank loan to NBFCs slows amid RBI warning

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MUMBAI: After repeated warnings about a risky credit binge, the central bank cracked the whip in November. Now, the results are showing.

Bank credit growth to non-bank financial companies (NBFCs) fell to 14.7% in February, against 31.9% a year earlier and 15.6% in January, latest Reserve Bank of India data showed.

Total bank credit exposure to

TOTAL BANK CREDIT EXPOSURE TO NBFCs STOOD AT ₹15.14 LAKH CR AT THE END OF FEB AGAINST 31.9% A YEAR AGO

NBFCs stood at ₹15.14 lakh crore at the end of February.

During the six-month period between August and January, bank loans to NBFCs grew at an

average of around 21%, a CareEdge Ratings report said on Thursday, against 28-30% in the 12 months earlier. Costlier bank loans also prompted many NBFCs to turn to the bond market. After the merger of HDFC Ltd with HDFC Bank, banks' outstanding exposure to NBFCs also reduced sequentially, it said.

"We expect fund-raising from the banking sector will moderate, while that from bond markets should increase back to earlier levels. NBFCs may utilize

the extra cushion on asset-liability management (ALM) currently available, but this should not lead to a negative stance on ALM. We expect credit growth rate from NBFCs to moderate slightly by about a couple of percentage points from current levels of around 20%, mainly due to the elevated base effect," said Sanjay Agarwal, senior director, CareEdge Ratings.

On 16 November, RBI raised risk weights on bank loans to NBFCs, as well as all unsecured consumer loans, by 25 percent-

age points.

Categories like housing loans, education loans, vehicle loans and loans secured by gold and gold jewellery were excluded.

According to rating agency ICRA, higher risk weights may affect incremental funding to NBFCs and raise their cost of funds, as banks set aside more capital to extend such loans. The tight funding environment may lead to a 1-3% moderation in NBFCs' loan growth from the base projection of 13-15%, the rating agency said.

66 firms to lift \$17.7 billion in equity lock-ins by 29 July

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MUMBAI: With 66 companies expected to have their shareholder lock-ins worth \$17.7 billion lifted between 1 April and 29 July, a wave of block deals is expected to hit the market, attracting bids from both domestic and international institutions, as well as high-net-worth individuals.

"The value pertains to total lock-up opening shares, but it's important to note that not all the shares will come up for sale, as a sizable portion is held by promoter groups," said Abhilash Pagaria, head, NuVama Alternative and Quantitative Research.

Pagaria's analysis, based on listings until 25 March, revealed strong investor interest for the initial public offerings (IPOs) of several companies. Tata Technologies led the pack with a staggering 69-fold oversubscription for its IPO, and witnessing a 140% surge in stock price above the issue price on debut.

Other notable examples include Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) with a subscription of 38.8 times, ESAF Small Finance



There has been a strong investor interest for the initial public offerings of several companies.

Bank (77 times), Jyoti CNC Automation (40.5 times), and Inox India (61.3 times). Even Honasa Consumer, which saw a subscription of 7.6 times, witnessed strong investor interest.

"Not all of these blocks can easily get absorbed. Like in any deal making, there has to be meeting of minds of both buyers and sellers. Plus, there has to be a triangulation of the company being able to consistently perform on the basis of the expectations at the time of an IPO for an investor to build up their positions," said Bhavesh Shah, managing director and head, investment banking, Equirus.

"While there have been strong inflows in the market, the stock sentiment also needs

to be supportive to get the trade done," Shah added.

Nuvama's analysis revealed the following IPO schedules: IREDA will offer 1.47 billion shares on 30 May, ESAF Small Finance Bank will offer 334 million shares on 9 May, Tata Technologies will issue 262 million shares on 27 May, Fedbank Financial Services will open for subscription with 180 million shares on 29 May, Honasa Consumer will offer 158 million shares on 2 May, Jyoti CNC Automation's IPO with 159 million shares is scheduled for 11 April and 16 July, Muthoot Microfinance will issue 99 million shares on 24 June, and Inox India's IPO with 51 million shares will open on 20 June.

Govt mandates weekly reporting on wheat stocks to prevent hoarding

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NEW DELHI: The government has asked traders, wholesalers, retailers, large chain stores, and food processors to report their wheat stocks every Friday.

This measure is aimed at ensuring food security, and curbing hoarding, and speculative activities that could harm market stability. These entities are required to declare their wheat stock on the government portal every Friday, starting April, according to an official announcement. The current wheat stockholding limit expires on 31 March.

The decision also comes against the backdrop of central wheat stocks being at their lowest in 16 years. As of 27 March, wheat inventories held by the Food Corp of India (FCI), which maintains the government's granaries, dropped to 7.71 million tonnes (mt). The last time



The decision also comes as central wheat stocks being at their lowest in 16 years.

wheat stocks were below this level was in 2008 when it had dipped to 5.8 mt. The FCI aims to procure 34.15 mt in the 2024-25 rabi marketing season (April-September). In the previous season, the government bought 26.2 mt of the grain from local farmers.

An existing mandate already requires all relevant entities to declare their rice stocks to regulate grain prices and ensure availability. In December, the

government revised the wheat stockholding limits for retailers and large chain stores, emphasizing a reduction to manage supplies more effectively. For retailers, the revised limit for each outlet was cut from 10 tonnes to 5 tonnes. Big chain retailers were allowed to stock 5 tonnes for each of their outlets and 1,000 tonne at all their depots. Earlier, it was 10 tonnes and 2,000 tonnes, respectively.

The government had stated that if entities possess stock levels exceeding the designated limit, they must reduce their stocks to comply with the specified limits within 30 days from when the notification was issued.

Last month, the consumer affairs ministry took steps to further restrict wheat stock limits for traders, wholesalers, and processors. For traders and wholesalers, the limit was revised from 1,000 tonnes to 500 tonnes.

From Gorakhpur to Gatwick, Indian airlines' big plans

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NEW DELHI: Spurred by rising demand for both leisure and business travel and improving airport infrastructure, Indian airlines have laid out plans to fly to more domestic and international destinations this summer season, according to data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

For instance, Akasa Air plans to connect to cities such as Darbhanga, Gorakhpur, Prayagraj, Ranchi, Thiruvananthapuram, Durgapur, Kanpur, and Patna, as per the latest summer schedule data released by the DGCA. This aligns with the rise in passenger traffic at some of these airports.

For instance, between April 2023 and February 2024, the air-



This summer, Akasa Air plans to connect its network to cities such as Darbhanga, Gorakhpur, Prayagraj, Ranchi.

port at Prayagraj, a religious destination at the confluence of three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati, saw 560,226 passengers, marking an 8% increase from a year ago and 65% surge compared to the 339,134 passengers travelling through the city's airport during

the pre-pandemic period of April 2019 to February 2020.

Similarly, the airport at Darbhanga, currently undergoing expansion, has been consistently recording an annual passenger count of over 600,000, despite being launched around three years ago in November

2020. It has become a vital hub for the highly mobile local population travelling to destinations across India for work.

The summer schedule also allocated Tata Group-backed Air India slots to operate non-stop flights from Delhi to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. In addition, the airline also plans to operate direct flights from Bengaluru to Dubai, as well as to London Gatwick airport.

Although slots are allocated in consultation with stakeholders, airlines take the final call to launch flights in line with their network strategy, demand, and market dynamics. Slots allocated by the DGCA permits an airline to operate a flight.

Air India Express, a subsidiary of Air India, received slots to launch direct flights between Mumbai and Kathmandu, and

from Chennai and Kolkata to Dhaka. The carrier, undergoing a merger with AIX Connect, formerly AirAsia India, also plans to start flights from Ahmedabad to Bengaluru, Pune, Varanasi, Kolkata Goa and Hyderabad. It has also got slots for Chandigarh-Bengaluru. It will also be the first major carrier to launch a flights from Hindon airport to Hyderabad, Kolkata, Goa, Bengaluru, and Pune. At present, the Hindon airport is only connected through regional carriers such as Star Air and Flybig.

So, what explains the rush by airlines to fly to these less travelled destinations? According to ratings agency Ica domestic air passenger traffic is likely to have grown by 8-13% in FY24, reaching 150-155 million, surpassing the pre-covid-19 levels of 141.2 million in FY20.

{ SUDOKU }

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL
★★

Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, column and each of the 9x9 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

{ WEATHER }
TEMPERATURE • HIGH • LOW

SATURDAY
Generally cloudy sky with light rain
36°C | 22°C

SUNDAY
Mainly clear sky
35°C | 20°C

MONDAY
Partly cloudy sky
34°C | 19°C

ALMANAC
Today is 30th March 2024
• 9: Ramadan, 1445
• 05: Chaitra, Krishna Paksha, 05
• Samvat: 2080
* Sunset: Saturday at 06:38 p.m.
* Sunrise: Sunday at 06:32 a.m.
• Moonset: Saturday at 8:54 a.m.
• Moonrise: Sunday at 11:26 p.m.

TEMPERATURE IN FOUR METROS

Delhi 36°C | 22°C
Mumbai 36°C | 25°C
Kolkata 36°C | 28°C
Chennai 35°C | 25°C

SPORT



Sunil Narine plays a big shot on his way to a 22-ball 47 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Friday.

Promoted to No.4, Parag walking the talk for RR

Vivek Krishnan

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NEW DELHI: In an age where talented young cricketers are monitored at every step, trained to deliver drab cliches in media interactions and instructed to sanitise their social media accounts, Riyan Parag speaks his mind, hits back at online trolls and celebrates as he wishes to. You can perhaps be excused for doing the latter when you have the currency of runs and wickets, but Parag's innate confidence seemed to border on arrogance and even delusion because he hadn't backed it up with numbers.

To be sure, the middle-order batter's record in the IPL hadn't merited much leeway. In 54 matches across five seasons till 2023, he had tallied 600 runs at an average of 16.21 and a strike rate of 123.96 with two fifties. And yet, Parag was unabashed in celebrating the odd high, irking his detractors even more in the process. Parag's personality hasn't changed. As his pinned post on X says, "You do you who cares what they think."

What has changed though is his output with the bat. Two games into the 2024 edition, there's already a sense that Parag, leaner and hungrier, means business with his performances on the field. In RR's opening match against Lucknow Super Giants, he scored 43 and stitched together a crucial 93-run partnership with skipper Sanju Samson. Former India batter Robin Uthappa's reaction to the knock was revealing of the popular perception about Parag. "It is good to see Riyan doing well. Earlier he used to talk more on X and do less. This time he is finally letting his bat talk," Uthappa, who played for RR in IPL 2020, said on JioCinema.

Against Delhi Capitals in Jaipur on Thursday, Parag built on it by producing a match-winning 84 not out off 45 balls.

Both these knocks have come at No.4, a promotion in the batting order that's come on the back of a prolific domestic season for Assam. He was the highest run-getter in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy with 510 runs in 10 innings including seven consecutive fifties as Assam reached the semi-finals. In the Ranji Trophy, he was his team's best batter with 378 runs in six innings at an average of 75.6.

It suggests that Parag is maturing and gradually realising the enormous talent that saw him play the 2018 U-19 World



Riyan Parag has made a superb start to the 2024 IPL season.

Cup for India at the age of 16. That Parag is only 22 needs underlining, for the spotlight over the past five years can make us forget that he's still very much in the infancy of his career. Credit is due to the RR management, which has nurtured Parag despite the torrent of criticism that has come his way. Just like Yashasvi Jaiswal and Dhruv Jurel, Parag has spent many sessions at the RR academy in Talegaon fine-tuning his skills under the watch of director of cricket, Zubin Bharucha.

In a ruthless environment where results are paramount for these IPL franchises, Parag could have been easily discarded. Instead, RR have chosen to give him greater responsibility this year by pushing him up, allowing Parag a bit more time to weigh the situation before going for his shots. That was the most impressive aspect of Parag's knock against Delhi. When R Ashwin was clearing the boundary after being sent in as a pinch-hitter at 36/3, Parag may have been previously tempted perhaps to try and match his batting partner. He was mature enough on this occasion to rein himself in at the start and hit the accelerator only when Ashwin departed after a quickfire 29.

And once Parag chooses to change gears, he has all the shots expected of a batter who carries the ambition to play for India across formats. From pulling Kuldeep Yadav over midwicket for a six to belting Anrich Nortje over cover for the same result, there was no pocket of the outfield that he didn't access.

The revelation by Parag at the post-match presentation that he was unwell in recent days means the innings should be held in even greater regard.

"I know what my ability is and I never let that change — irrespective of whether I perform or not. A lot to do with the domestic season, where I scored a lot of runs. Someone in the top four has to take it deep. First match, Sanju bhैया did it, today I did it. I had to work very hard. I was on bed on the last three days. I could manage it today," he said.

What Parag has never lacked is absolute conviction in his ability. "I'm going to play for the country sooner or later, that belief is always there. No one can take that away from me. I'm fixated on that," he had said in an interview in January.

If he keeps playing these knocks, his belief about playing for India may soon become reality.

Narine, Venkatesh lead KKR to season's first away victory

Kohli's 83* goes in vain as Knight Riders chase down 183 in 16.5 overs against RCB in Bengaluru

Somshuvra Laha

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KOLKATA: No IPL team had lost at home till Thursday but Royal Challengers Bengaluru's bowlers grossly erred in their lengths and pace variation as Kolkata Knight Riders rode a fifty from Venkatesh Iyer and a stellar 22-ball 47 from Sunil Narine — playing his 500th T20 match — to coast to a seven-wicket victory at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Friday.

Virat Kohli anchored RCB's innings with a 59-ball 83 — his second consecutive fifty this IPL — along with contributions from Cameron Green and Glenn Maxwell but it needed an eight-

ball 20 from Dinesh Karthik to finish with a semblance of flourish. KKR however came out guns blazing as openers Phil Salt and Sunil Narine put on a stand of 86 before Venkatesh steered them through the middle overs with a responsible fifty that allowed KKR to win with 19 balls to spare.

Six and a wicket seemed to be the recurrent theme at Chinnaswamy when RCB captain Faf du Plessis and Green fell in similar fashion but Kohli kept the innings together from one end with one of the more curious innings of his career where he missed more than usual. Karthik took a few deliveries to get his eye in before finding his range, clearing long-off, long-on and fine-leg to propel RCB to 182/6. It however did little to paper over the gaping holes in RCB's scoring graph — 61 runs

in the Powerplay but 73 in the next nine and 48 in the last at the smallest IPL venue.

Change of pace was at the heart of this downturn for RCB as all their premier batters struggled to put bat to ball on a pitch that was also slower than usual. Slow left-arm bowler Anukul Roy conceded just six off two suffocating overs before Varun Chakaravarty put the brakes on RCB with a three-run over but it was Andre Russell who rubbed it in with the slower balls that Kohli just wasn't able to connect. With Green gone after playing an innings-steadying 21-ball 31, Kohli and Maxwell had the time to consolidate and attack.

For the second match in a row Mitchell Starc went wicketless as well as expensive but overall, KKR's bowling proved to be difficult to score off. Like

in the 11th over when Russell's speed gun readings went from 121 kph to 132 and back to 115 kph, flummoxing Kohli and Maxwell with a phenomenal over that yielded just two runs. Chakaravarty went 6, 4, 4 in the next over but this time Narine tightened the screws with a five-run over.

Maxwell rode his luck too during this phase, getting dropped twice in the 11th (by Randeep Singh) and then again in the 13th over. But Rinku Singh doesn't drop many and Kohli soon found himself trying to play from both ends before Karthik entered the fray. By then though, Harshit Rana had once again stifled RCB's progress with a five-run over where his speed never went above 119 kph.

Fifty-one percent of KKR's deliveries were slower ones but strangely enough, RCB didn't pick that cue from them. First over, Mohammed Siraj was

averaging 135 kph but Salt clobbered him a six and four before muscling his 105 kph slower over long-on for another six. Even quicker was West Indian pacer Alzarri Joseph, clocking 147.4 kph one ball but watching it sail down the leg-side for a massive six.

If Salt liked the ball coming on to his bat, Narine seemed to relish the extra yard of pace even more as started messing with RCB's plans to such an extent that even their lengths went awry. No one however erred more than Yash Dayal who kept banging short and Narine kept carting him around the ground for a 21-run over that helped KKR finish the Powerplay on 85/0 and set up an easy chase.

Brief scores: RCB 182/6 in 20 overs (V Kohli 83*; A Russell 2/29). KKR 186/3 in 16.5 overs (V Iyer 50, S Narine 47; V Vyshak 1/23, M Dagar 1/23). **KKR won by 7 wickets.**

Alcaraz bows out of Miami Open

MIAMI: World No.2 Carlos Alcaraz was knocked out of the Miami Open quarter-finals on Thursday, beaten 6-2, 6-4 by Grigor Dimitrov. Bulgarian Dimitrov will now face Germany's Alexander Zverev for a place in the final. Alcaraz was unhappy with the way he played. "I have a lot of frustrations right now, because he made me feel like I'm 13 years old. I was talking to my team saying that I don't know what I have to do. I don't know his weakness. I don't know anything," Alcaraz said.

Alonso to stay at Bayer Leverkusen

MUNICH: Xabi Alonso, who was seen by many as Liverpool's top target to replace Jurgen Klopp as their manager, said on Friday he is staying at Bundesliga leaders Bayer Leverkusen next season. The 42-year-old Spaniard has Leverkusen on course for a trophy treble, including their first ever German league crown.

Stones and Walker out of Arsenal tie

LONDON: Manchester City have been dealt a double injury blow as Kyle Walker and John Stones will miss Sunday's crucial clash in the Premier League title race against Arsenal. Both players were injured on international duty with the England team.

The Bumrah conundrum: Should MI rethink how they use ace pacer?

Rasesh Mandani

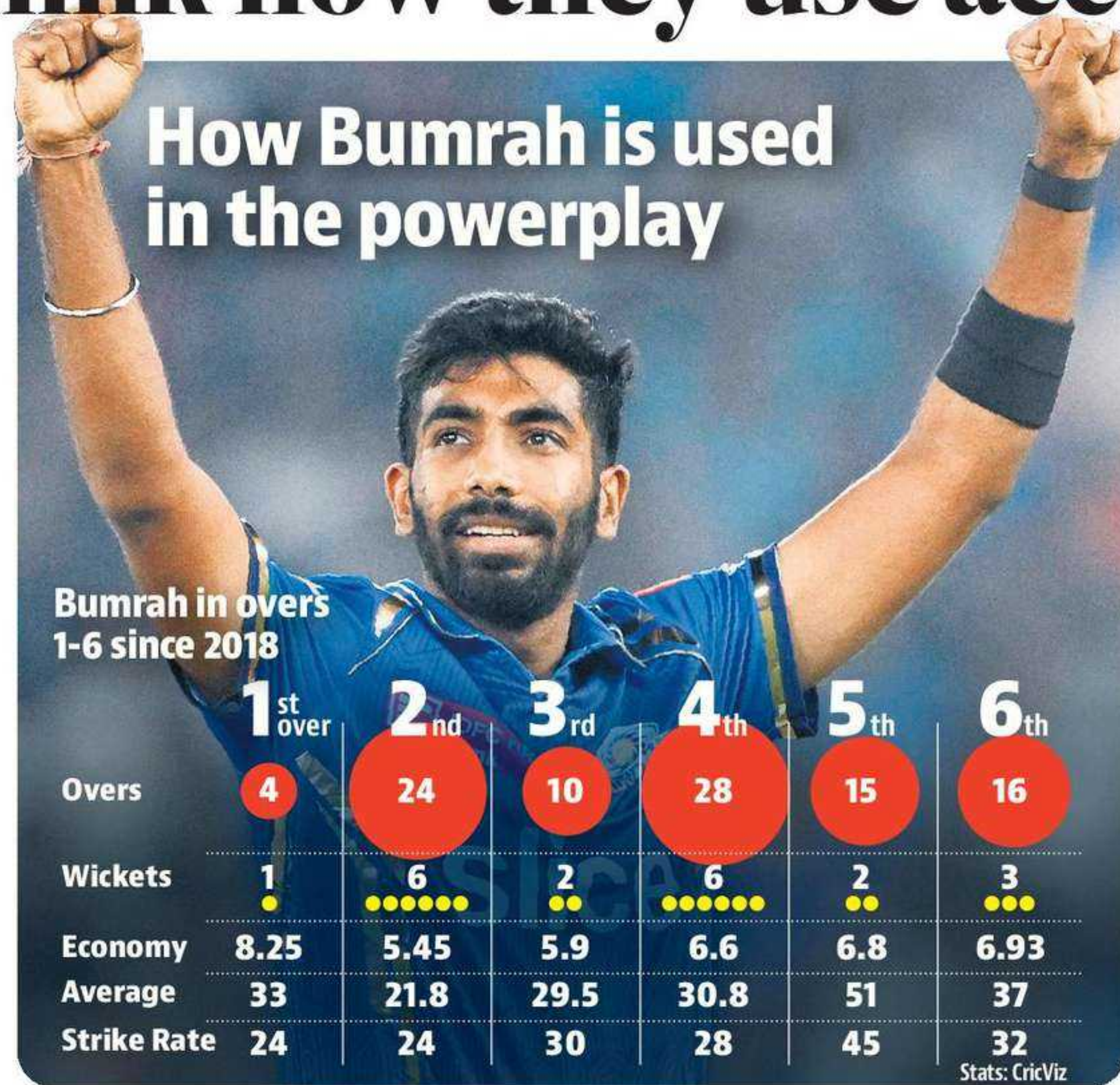
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MUMBAI: Are Mumbai Indians utilising their best bowling resource as well as they possibly could? The question is on everyone's mind after IPL's box office team got off to a poor start with two successive defeats. Arguably the numero uno fast bowler in T20s, Jasprit Bumrah has bowled only one over in the powerplay — the fourth over in both of MI's matches so far. Gujarat Titans had raced to 27/0 before Bumrah arrived. In the next match, Sunrisers Hyderabad had zoomed to 40/0 when the pace ace was brought on to apply the brakes.

It's not just the fans who are giving Hardik Pandya a difficult time. Even pundits have expressed dismay at new MI skipper's tactics. From 45/0, SRH galloped to 173/3 before Bumrah was reintroduced. "Where is Jasprit Bumrah?? Game nearly done and your best bowler has only bowled ONE over!" Tom Moody, former SRH head coach, said on X.

Moody wasn't the only one with doubts. As it turned out, even Bumrah couldn't hold SRH back as they amassed a record 277 on a batting paradise at Hyderabad. Bumrah still got the dressing room medal for his 0/36 while the rest of their bowlers conceded from 11.5 to 17 runs per over. It's time for MI to consider if they can use Bumrah more aggressively.

It may have been the captain's call, but in today's day and age, there's always a guidance that comes from the analysts' table. Let's see what data of the past five IPL editions that Bumrah has played (2018-22 and 2024) shows. Does it encourage Bum-



rah's limited use in the powerplay?

There's some merit, but a lot of it has got to do with the blunted force that MI's bowling attack is now. And it's not the only way. By any yardstick, Bumrah is the best fast bowler in the shortest format. He chokes the run flow (ER 7.7), picks up wickets at will (SR 12.1) using his range in the death overs and he delivers time and again. Saving two of his overs for the slog overs is tactically sound as no one else does it better. That leaves the captain with

only two overs of Bumrah. While on air, former pacer Brett Lee said that the best fast bowler must bowl the first over. That may be true in theory, but it's not always possible. Only on four occasions in 75 matches has Bumrah bowled the first over in IPL.

MI didn't have to save Bumrah for the middle overs when they had Rahul Chahar and Krunal Pandya to do the job. After releasing them before the last mega auction, Mumbai haven't found spinners who are as effective. Piyush Chawla saved them

the blushes last season when Bumrah was absent, but can he be as consistent this year too? Left-arm wrist spinner Kumar Kartikeya hasn't been trusted enough.

Even among fast bowling enforcers, Hardik Pandya and young Gerald Coetzee are returning from injuries. To plug the gaps as well as exploit the two bouncers' rule, MI appears to have made a conscious call to save one of Bumrah's overs for the middle overs. So far, it isn't working.

In terms of powerplay wicket-

taking potency, Bumrah is not the very best (SR 29.1). Daniel Sams, Trent Boult, Mitch McClenaghan, Hardik, Krunal Pandya and James Pattinson have all struck at a better rate for MI. But Bumrah is a mean fast bowler. Even with two boundary riders, he concedes only 6.4 runs per over. Not always does a T20 match situation demand banana swing and magic balls in the powerplay. Stifling runs is the other way to change momentum. Besides, it creates opportunities at the other end.

That's what Heinrich Klaasen, who punished MI in the last match, alluded to. "They didn't bowl their best bowler in the powerplay... that was our plan," Klaasen said. "They missed a trick up front. We've got incredible strikers up front in our batting line-up. They just set the tempo, so our work was basically done."

In Bumrah's early years for MI, he had Lasith Malinga and Mitchell Johnson to work with. Later, Trent Boult came in. MI's current bowling attack lacks a similar edge. A lot of the heavy lifting has to be done by Bumrah. India use the pace spearhead as more of an attacking force in T20s (43.7% of his overs come in powerplay and only occasionally (18.6% in the middle). But the national team has the entire spin bowling pool comprising Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and more recently Ravi Bishnoi to choose from. For MI, Bumrah bowls lesser in the first six (33.2%) and comparatively more in the middle (24.3%).

That may soon have to change. Perhaps it's time for MI to build on Akash Madhwal's promise from last season and for Hardik to swap new-ball duties with Bumrah.

TODAY'S MATCH
LSG VS PBKS
 WHERE: Lucknow | WHEN: 7:30 pm

HEAD-TO-HEAD
 LSG WON 2 | 3 MATCHES PLAYED | PBKS WON 1

KL RAHUL CAPTAIN, LSG
 While the LSG captain hit 58 in his team's opening game, consuming 44 balls in a steep chase of 194 may be construed as being a tad slow. The early wickets dictated Rahul's approach to an extent. He will hope that he continues scoring but at a greater tempo in the coming games.

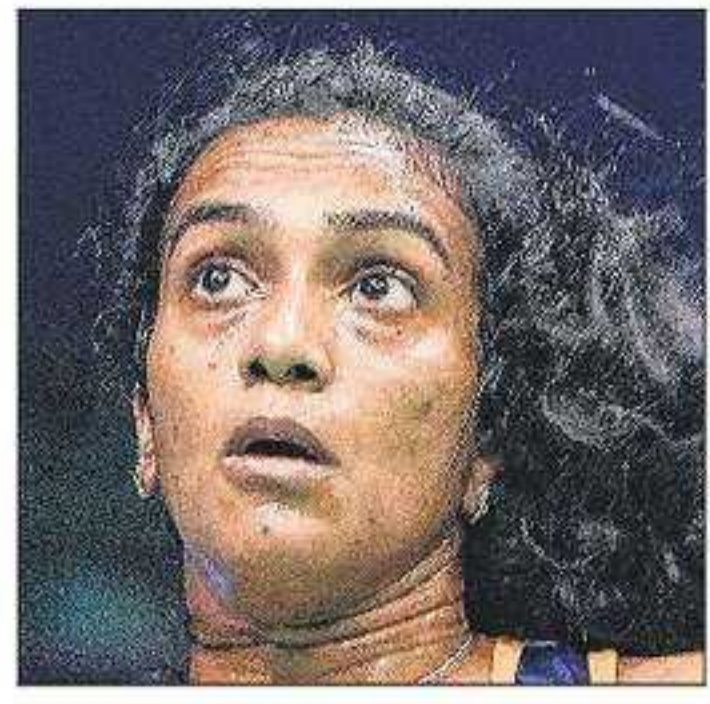
SHIKHAR DHAWAN CAPTAIN, PBKS
 Dhawan has had starts in both games but is yet to notch up a big score. With Punjab short on Indian batting pedigree, it is up to Dhawan to take up responsibility and deliver more consistently. If he can do that, it will free up Liam Livingstone and Sam Curran in the middle order to play their shots.

KEY PLAYERS

NICHOLAS POORAN (LSG)
 When Pooran came in at 60/4 in a chase of 194, LSG seemed to be down and out. But the left-hand batter smashed an unbeaten 64 off 41 balls and brought LSG to within touching distance of an improbable win. One of the cleanest ball-strikers going around, Pooran will hope for a more solid start from the top order against Punjab.

JONNY BAIRSTOW (PBKS)
 For a player with his experience and calibre, Bairstow clearly needs to be doing more. In Punjab's two games, he has been dismissed for 8 and 9. Having repeatedly had starts in the Test series versus India without making it count, Bairstow may be due for a big one. His team will hope that's against LSG on Saturday.

PREVIOUS MATCH
 LSG lost to RR by 20 runs | PBKS lost to RCB by 4 wickets



PV Sindhu. PTI

FRUSTRATED SINDHU LOSES IN QUARTERS AT SPAIN MASTERS

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NEW DELHI: A frustrated PV Sindhu suffered a quarter-final exit at the \$210,000 Spain Masters after she went down fighting in three games at the Centro Deportivo Municipal Gallur in Madrid on Friday.

The former world champion was down five match points (15-20) in the decider before staging a brilliant fightback to level the contest at 20-all. But a couple of errors from Sindhu let Thai sixth seed Supanida Katethong win 24-26, 21-17, 22-20 in a marathon contest that lasted an hour and 17 minutes.

Frustrated at not having pulled it off, second seed Sindhu smashed her racket on the court, perhaps for the first time in her career, to earn a yellow card from the chair umpire.

Effectively the top seed after local girl Carolina Marin pulled out of the Super 300 tournament, Sindhu had a good chance of ending her title drought — her last title came at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham — as none of the top players are playing in Madrid. Instead, southpaw Katethong has booked a semi-final date against South Korean third seed Kim Ga Eun.

This was Supanida's fourth win in nine meetings against Sindhu, who is next scheduled to play at the Badminton Asia Championships in Ningbo, China, in April. Mixed pair and couple N Sikki Reddy and B Sumeeth Reddy continued their strong run by reaching the semi-finals with a 14-21, 21-11, 21-17 win in 41 minutes against Indonesian fourth seeds Rehan Naufal Kusharjanto and Lisa Ayu Kusumawati. They will next face sixth seeds Rinov Rivaldy and Pitha Haningtyas Mentari for a place in the final.

Candidates 2024: An intriguing clash of generations and styles

The elite stars and young talents will be competing in Toronto for the right to face Liren in the World Championship match

Susan Ninan
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BENGALURU: Levon Aronian likens playing the Candidates tournament to climbing a mountain. The Armenian-American former world No.2 has played it at least half a dozen times and should count as something of an authority on it. Over the next three weeks, the chess smarts, emotions and endurance of 16 players (eight each in Open and women) will be put through the cauldron. Only two of them will make it to the other side.

"When you try to climb a mountain, all the weaknesses and problems you have in your body are revealed. Similarly, you might arrive at a Candidates tournament thinking you're in great shape. Then, over each round, you're laid bare. You are forced to reassess, adapt and make changes," said Aronian.

This time, it's a particularly delicious clash of generations and styles — the bonafide elite going up against young stars of the game. In the Open section, three players — D Gukesh, R Praggnanandhaa and Alireza Firouzja are aged 20 or below. Four of the five Indians in the overall field are playing their first Candidates. In a chess world now driven by computer engines and AI, how do you prepare for a top classical tournament where your opponents have access to pretty much the same resources and conclusions? The top choices of the computer in most positions are already examined threadbare by everyone.

"The major novelties of the past are no longer possible," said Grzegorz Gajewski. "Now, you look for a new direction that is not necessarily stronger, or mind-blowing in any way. But you have a plan behind the move and you hope that your

A battle to take on the champ
This is the first time ever that five Indians are taking part in the Candidates across the open and women categories. The winner of the meet will challenge for the title of world champion

Dates:
April 3 to 23
Venue:
Toronto,
Canada



The open and women's events will be held simultaneously

The winner of the Candidates in the open section will play Ding Liren in this year's World Championship match

Three Indians — R Praggnanandhaa, Vidit Gujrathi and D Gukesh — feature in the open category

Two Indians — Koneru Humpy and R Vaishali — feature in the women's category



Player	Elo rating	Qualification route
Ian Nepomniachtchi	2758	2023 World C'ship runner-up
R Praggnanandhaa	2747	2nd in World Cup
Fabiano Caruana	2804	3rd in World Cup
Nijat Abasov	2632	4th in World Cup
Vidit Gujrathi	2747	Won Grand Swiss
Hikaru Nakamura	2789	2nd in Grand Swiss
D Gukesh	2747	2023 FIDE Circuit winner
Alireza Firouzja	2760	Best by rating

opponents won't be familiar with all its nuances and ideas. It's kind of what everybody's doing these days."

Gajewski, who served as a second for Viswanathan Anand, and is now coach to Gukesh, uses the example of his 17-year-old pupil to make a case for using engines judiciously and not smothering creativity and independent thinking. Gukesh kept away from engines right from his early years in chess and only began using them in the past few years. "Lots of strong players suffer if they're forced out of the book early. Gukesh is not one of them. If he doesn't get to revise a few lines before a game, we're usually not too worried. We know he can handle it on the board," said Gajewski. "Many players who had a similar quality, lost it after

they decided to immerse themselves in theory. Even though these days Gukesh uses engines to check tactics and lines, we're careful to not overdo it."

Gajewski added: "You want good preparation and you want all kinds of novelties in your arsenal that you can find. But what you have to remember is that these ideas may not win too many games or any game at all. So, our approach is just to get the kind of position that will allow Gukesh to prove that he is the better player on the board."

The evolution of preparation has made it much harder for players to get into a fight or play decisive games. "Classical chess is not about finding the best moves anymore; it's about finding something unexpected and being very practical," said Aronian. "For my recent tourna-

ments, I tried to keep engine use to a minimum. I want neither to blur my vision nor complete precision in my play. There should be some room for human error."

Aronian says he typically tries to use something dubious, that isn't part of his preparation in the first rounds. "It's a long tournament, you want to throw others off the scent and also try to get them to waste time going over lines you aren't going to play again. The rounds just past the halfway mark, particularly Rounds 8 and 9 are crucial. By the time you get to them, you have to be clear about what you're playing for."

In the eight-player Open section, there's an unlikely player — Nijat Abasov — who's roughly 100 Elo lower than the rest of the field. The rest of the seven

players will possibly be eager to have a flawless 2-0 score against him which could open up opportunities for the Azerbaijani to land a blow as well.

"When I was working with Vishy (Anand) we had a very academic approach," says Peter Heine Nielsen, currently Carlsen's second. "It's not possible anymore. Vishy was pretty good with using surprises as well (think Ld4 vs Kramnik in Bonn) but these days, that strategy has been taken much further and almost suspicious lines are being employed in trying to play something obscure. Like at the previous World Championship. It was interesting but also felt like a gamble and perhaps a bit unnecessary. I'm curious to see what happens in the Candidates. From an opening theory perspective, it's hard to play an interesting game of chess. But given the field, my impression is these players will make it interesting."

In a tournament like the Candidates, it's not easy to coast on your lead either. "There are players with very unpredictable styles so there are a lot of dynamics in it," said five-time world champion Anand. "I believe it's about being calm and sensible because it's a long tournament. You also need the presence of mind to shift gears when you smell blood. It's to some degree a test of endurance as much as talent. You can do well for 10 rounds and still have events go unpredictably."

Aronian knows a thing or two about the latter as well. Though the 41-year-old has played the tournament a greater number of times than he cares to remember, he's yet to make it to the other side. "You prepare for months and accumulate all this knowledge. But without the emotional capabilities, nothing matters. I've won World Cups but have had a problem getting a grip on my emotions only in this particular tournament. You are one step away from a World Championship, the biggest dream of every chess player. You want to be calm and focused but you also want to be passionate and hustle. It's a tough balancing act."

'Paris Olympics doors not closed for any wrestler'

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Bajrang Punia. HT

NEW DELHI: The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Friday said the doors are not closed on any wrestler, including Olympic medallists Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya, in their quest to remain in contention for the Paris Olympics. Bajrang and Dahiya, the two Tokyo medalists, lost in the domestic selection trials for Paris qualification tournaments but WFI president Sanjay Singh said they will go by their selection policy which says performance of the quota winning wrestlers will be reviewed before taking a call on holding a selection trial before the Paris Olympics.

"There is no confusion now. The ad-hoc committee is not there anymore and WFI will follow the rules and regulations of its selection policy. It says that whoever wins the Olympic berth, his or her performance will be seen. If the performance is good, the same wrestler will go to Paris, or else the wrestler who is performing well in the same weight class will get an opportunity. A trial might or might not take place depending on the situation," he said.

Asked about Dahiya and Bajrang, he said, "Discussion will happen seeing their performances and that goes for every wrestler. There will be no discrimination against anyone."

The teams for the two Olympic qualification tournaments were decided based on the selection policy of the ad-hoc panel following a court order and it said the top-four wrestlers from these trials will be also eligible for a final trial in May for Paris Olympics. It remains to be seen what happens in the 53kg weight class where Antim Panghal has already qualified, while double world medallist Vinesh Phogat is among the contenders to challenge her for Paris.

However, Phogat will have the opportunity to book a berth for India in 50kg category too. Phogat won the 50kg trials in Sonepat but there was an uproar as

she competed in two weight classes. "Vinesh will be going to the Olympic qualification tournament in Bishkek in 50kg," confirmed Singh.

WFI acts against secretary general

The WFI Special General Meeting in Noida, where it is also organising the U15 and U20 National Championships, approved amendments in its constitution. It passed resolutions related to age, tenure, and cooling off period as per the Sports Code. The 70-year age cap and two consecutive terms (or eight years), followed by a mandatory four-year cooling off period to be eligible to contest for a third term will be now applicable to all the posts of WFI executive council. All state associations have been asked to follow the age and tenure guidelines of the Sports Code that also include 25 percent seats in their executive committees comprising prominent sportspersons.

The SGM also adopted a resolution to conduct Athletes Commission elections as mandated by United World Wrestling (UWW). The Athletes Commission elections will be held during the Federation Cup in Varanasi from April 24-26.

WFI secretary general Prem Chand Loheab, who came from the camp of protesting wrestlers, has not attended any of the three meetings of WFI. WFI adopted a resolution that if the secretary general is not forwarding the proposed amendments to every member of the general council as described in WFI constitution, the president may authorise one of the joint secretaries to do the task.

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Veer Ahlawat in action on the second day of Indian Open. HT

Veer and Manu keep hopes alive at Indian Open

Shantanu Srivastava
sportsdesk@hindustantimes.com

GURUGRAM: Veer Ahlawat and Manu Gandas, both products of DLF Golf and Country Club and part of the next generation of Indian golfers trying to assert themselves on the global stage, came good on their home course while their experienced compatriots endured another poor day at the Hero Indian Open here on Friday. Overnight T-22nd, Ahlawat jumped 16 places to solo sixth, carding an impressive six under on another sweltering day. Gandas, a 2022 PGTI Order of Merit winner, logged a bogey-free round to finish T-16 at seven under, up from T-80th on the opening day.

The cut couldn't be applied on Day 2 as the play was called off in the evening due to lightning. Japan's Keita Nakajima, overnight joint leader, ended the day as clubhouse leader, equating the winning score - 14 under - of 2023 on Day 2 itself. He holds a two-shot lead over Frenchman Romain Langasque (66-66) and Italian Matteo Manassero (65-68) at 11-under. The 23-year-old Major League Baseball fan, who spent a record 83 weeks at the top of the World Amateur Golf Ranking, is playing his maiden DP World Tour event after topping the Order of Merit on the Japan Golf Tour last season. After an aggressive opening day that saw him go seven under, Nakajima started on front nine and made birdies on

five consecutive holes starting from par 5 fourth hole. Two more birdies arrived on 10th and 11th before he made a hat-trick of bogeys on holes 14-16.

Nakajima was not done. He birdied the 17th from ten feet before holing a 15-footer on the last hole to complete another seven under day. "I'm comfortable being the leader of the pack. The birdie on the 17th was big for me because I had made three bogeys before," he said.

Among the Indians, eight out of 31 in the 14-strong field are projected to make the cut, including Aman Raj (T-8), Karandeep Kochhar (T-16), Gaganjeet Bhullar (T-22), Rashid Khan (T-31), and Shubhankar Sharma (T-31). Aman, part of the top-rated Indian trio on Thursday, played a safe bogey-free round before play was called off with Aman having made last of his three birdies on the par 5 fourth hole. Kochhar, four under on Thursday, fired seven birdies to go with a double bogey to finish two under.

Much like the opening day, the course conditions remained optimum for better part of the day as wind picked up only late in the afternoon. The greens played soft, offering a nice roll and decent control, giving ball strikers enough premium for their hits. Gandas, one over on Day 1, made most of the friendly conditions on his back nine, scoring five birdies in his last six holes to go with the two shots he had saved earlier at the front.

Five-member AIFF committee for discussion with coach Stimac

HT Correspondent
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KOLKATA: In the aftermath of the draw and defeat against Afghanistan, All India Football Federation (AIFF) has formed a five-member committee to discuss recommendations of the

technical committee with head coach Igor Stimac. The committee comprises IM Vijayan, the technical committee chair, and member Climax Lawrence, vice-president NA Harris and executive committee members Menla Ethenpa and Anil Prabhakaran. An AIFF press release on Fri-

day said the technical committee was "disappointed" with the performance against Afghanistan who at 158 are 41 places below India in FIFA rankings. HT had spoken to technical committee members on Thursday who had said they were unhappy with the head coach

following the dismal performance, 0-0 away and a 1-2 defeat in Guwahati, and wanted him out.

With Stimac travelling home to Split, Croatia, on Friday and with the Easter holidays in between, it is possible that discussions will start on Tuesday.

The sticky point in wanting Stimac out is the size of the severance package. AIFF sources put it at \$720,000. That is his salary of \$30,000 till June 2026. Paying a hefty severance is normal practice for coaches who are sacked before their contract runs out.

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