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**PM Fasal Bima Yojana  
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Claims worth ₹1 lakh 54 thousand crore  
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Main Putin critic Navalny, who survived poisoning bid in 2020, dies



AGENCIES  
MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 16

ALEXEI NAVALNY, Russian President Vladimir Putin's most formidable opponent, died on Friday after a walk at the Arctic penal colony where he was serving a 19-year jail term, Russian authorities said. He was 47.

Navalny was jailed in 2021 when he returned to Moscow after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin.

Western leaders paid tribute to Navalny. Some, without citing evidence, accused the Kremlin of murder. "Russia is responsible for this," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

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## THE MORNING AFTER TALKS

Security personnel fire teargas shells at protesting farmers at Shambhu, Punjab-Haryana border Friday, a day after farm leaders announced 'ceasefire' following talks with the Centre. Talks will resume Sunday. *Harmeet Sodhi*

PAGES 7, 23

## Govt unlikely to contest SC verdict on poll bonds, door open for PIL

Releasing names breach of Govt promise, bank laws: official

LIZ MATHEW  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

RELEASING THE names of those who purchased electoral bonds would be a "breach of promise" made by the government and in

violation of bank confidentiality norms but the Centre is unlikely to contest Thursday's landmark Supreme Court verdict that struck down the scheme as "unconstitutional," government sources have told *The Indian Express*.

The view in the establish-

ment is that the fraught issue of poll funding in the wake of the apex court's order should be left to the next government which may "consider" alternative ways to "better the election funding system," sources said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### BUSINESS AS USUAL

BY UNNY



### TAX DEMAND Rs 210 CRORE

## Citing tax dues, I-T freezes Cong accounts, party calls it vendetta

Assault on democracy, say Kharge, Rahul; partial relief from I-T tribunal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

A POLITICAL row erupted Friday with the Congress announcing that its bank accounts had been frozen by the Income Tax department in connection with a dispute over a tax demand of Rs 210 crore, and that the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) later allowed it to partly operate its accounts until next Wednesday when it would hear the matter.

Targeting the Modi government, the Congress, its president Mallikarjun Kharge and leader Rahul Gandhi expressed outrage, and called the I-T action a "vendetta" and "a deep assault on India's democracy" in the



I-T Dept imposed disproportionate penalty of Rs 135 cr on Cong... What have we done?

VIVEK TANKHA  
CONGRESS MP, RAJYA SABHA

countdown to the Lok Sabha elections.

While there was no official  
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



PM Narendra Modi being presented a memento at an event in Rewari Friday. PTI

Everyone is leaving Cong, only one family at top, says PM

VIKAS PATHAK  
REWARI, NEW DELHI,  
FEBRUARY 16

DESCRIBING THE "blessings of people" as "my biggest capital", Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked the Congress, saying it has "only one agenda: anti-Modi, strong anti-Modi" and "everyone is abandoning the Congress, leaving only one family at its helm".

Unveiling a string of projects dedicated to Rajasthan and  
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Recce aircraft to anti-tank mines: Green light to big-ticket purchases

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

THE DEFENCE Acquisition Council (DAC) Friday cleared a series of big-ticket procurements worth Rs 84,560 crore for the armed forces including 15 maritime reconnaissance and multi-mission maritime aircraft for the Navy and the Coast Guard as well as six flight refueller aircraft for the IAF and new generation anti-tank mines for the Army.

The DAC, headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, is among the top bodies for clearing major capital acquisitions for defence.

**EXPLAINED**  
**E** Boosting home tech

THE DAC, while clearing proposals to boost the capabilities of the armed forces and Coast Guard, laid special emphasis on procurement of equipment from Indian vendors. Amendments to the DAP 2020 were also cleared to promote procurement of advanced technologies from start-ups and MSMEs.

The Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) is the first step in the long Defence procurement process. The grant of AoN does not always lead to a final order.

Sources said these 15 maritime reconnaissance aircraft will be the marine versions of the C-295 medium lift tactical aircraft inducted by the IAF last year. Of the 15, nine will be for the Navy and six for the Coast Guard.

A senior official said that once inducted, the aircraft will be a major addition to the existing P-81 maritime surveillance aircraft used by the forces for surveillance patrols and interdiction, and will significantly augment

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Served notice, French reporter exits India: 'In tears, forced to leave by Govt'



Dougnac got FRRO notice, was accused of 'malicious' reporting

DIVYA A & MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

VANESSA DOUGNAC, a Delhi-based French journalist who was issued a notice last month by the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) which accused her of "malicious" reporting and sought an explanation on why her Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) status should not be cancelled for alleged violation of rules, left the country Friday, saying she was "being forced to leave by the Government of India".

A former South Asia Correspondent for *La Croix*, *Le Point*, *Le Temps*, *Le Soir*, Dougnac is married to an Indian national and, in 23 years as a journalist, has written on a range of subjects including the Maoist insurgency.

In a statement Friday evening,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Student visas processed by Canada dipped 42% amid diplomatic row

R RADHIKA  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

THE EXPULSION of 41 Canadian diplomats from India at the peak of the diplomatic row between the two nations last year has had an unexpected fallout.

According to latest data sourced from the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### HOW OTTAWA PROCESSED STUDENT VISAS

QUARTER	2020	2021	2022	2023
Q1 (Jan-Mar)	40,826	63,335	72,403	85,444
Q2 (Apr-Jun)	1,034	52,583	67,466	89,265
Q3 (Jul-Sep)	12,194	57,755	1,03,692	63,691
Q4 (Oct-Dec)	21,908	62,403	1,19,923	69,203
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>75,962</b>	<b>2,36,076</b>	<b>3,63,484</b>	<b>3,07,603</b>

Source: IRCC

Hours after his 500th Test wicket, R Ashwin said Friday, at the end of the second day's play against England in the third Test at Rajkot, "It's been quite a long journey. Firstly I'd like to dedicate this feat to my father." Late at night, the BCCI said Ashwin had pulled out of the Test squad due to a family emergency. PTI



Ashwin celebrates after claiming England's Zak Crawley, his 500th Test wicket. Later, the BCCI said Ashwin had pulled out of the Test squad due to a family emergency. PTI

squad, effective immediately due to a family emergency".

Earlier in the day, Ashwin's father RAVICHANDRAN recalled his son's journey from tennis ball cricket on the streets of West Mambalam in Chennai:

THE 500-WICKET milestone is an unforgettable moment for me. I've been dreaming about it for a long time and this wicket will keep playing in my mind until my last breath. My memory jogs back to the days when I took him on my scooter to school and for coaching. For a father to have

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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**THUNDU MOVIE REVIEW: BIJU MENON, SHINE TOM CHACKO FILM WILL GAUGE YOUR PATIENCE LEVEL AT THE COST OF A TICKET**

Thundu movie review: Despite Riyas Shereef's story having a decent setup for a funny flick, the Biju Menon, Shine Tom Chacko-starrer totally misses the mark and doesn't use it to its full potential.

**TECHNOLOGY****SORA, TEXT-TO-VIDEO MODEL FROM OPENAI IS HERE**

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**EXPRESS AUDIO****Electoral Bonds verdict, Chinese nationals near LAC, a star MP resigns**

In this episode of 3 Things, we discuss the SC verdict declaring the Electoral Bonds Scheme unconstitutional, the Chinese villages along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and the resignation of TMC MP Mimi Chakraborty.

**• Govt unlikely to contest SC verdict on poll bonds**

With the 15th session of the 17th Lok Sabha already prorogued and election notification barely weeks away, sources said, the government is neither considering filing a review petition nor issuing an ordinance to put in a new funding system. However, the source added that "the PIL route" can be used by someone.

Although the official BJP line on Thursday was that the electoral bond scheme was initiated to bring in transparency in political funding, sources pointed out that the scheme was introduced to get rid of black money in election spending. "Until 2017, it was unregulated cash play. The scheme was brought in to improve the election funding system from the murky, unregulated way to the use of white money," said a source.

The court has also directed that "the issuing bank shall here-with stop the issuance of electoral bonds" and asked the SBI to "submit details of the electoral bonds purchased since the interim order of the court dated April 12, 2019, till date to the ECI."

On Thursday, *The Indian Express* reported that officials in the Election Commission are confident that, following the court's order, the release of the names will be very much possible by March 13. "We haven't yet had the opportunity to read the order in detail but it's abundantly clear to

us that SBI will have to share the names of those who purchased electoral bonds. So there's no doubt about it," said an EC official who requested anonymity.

What remains uncertain at this moment is whether the data shared by SBI will be presented in a format that helps one match the bond buyer to the political party that received the same bond. "Irrespective of whether the format is reader-friendly or not, finding out the identity of the donor and recipient will not be impossible. It may just mean a lot of work for people interested in finding out the same," the official added.

Significantly, SBI has in its custody the names, Aadhaar, and PAN card details of everyone who has bought an electoral bond, irrespective of the denomination.

EC officials said it was premature to comment on whether the Commission would disclose details shared by SBI as received, or if the Commission would choose to present them in a manner that is easily understandable.

**FROM PAGE ONE** **I-T freezes Cong accounts**

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statement from the I-T department on its action involving Congress bank accounts, official sources maintained "it was a routine process against anyone who has not paid income tax dues for years" and "The I-T department did exactly what it will do to an ordinary citizen if he or she fails to pay income tax dues".

AICC treasurer Ajay Maken, who told a press conference about the I-T action, later posted on X copies of a letter the I-T department had purportedly written to two banks where the Congress and the Youth Congress have accounts.

He said the letter stated that Rs 135 crore and Rs 75 crore were due from the Congress and directed the banks to "pay to me forthwith any amount due from you to or, held by you, for or on account of Bank Account No... and any other bank account/fixed deposit with your bank in the name of Indian National Congress up to the amount of arrears shown above."

Maken said, "All our bankers are being sent this... Is this not attaching/seizing/freezing our accounts?"

Pawan Khera, chairman of the Congress media department, also took to X, posting an I-T letter to a bank, and said, "After targeting and freezing the accounts of @INCIndia & @IYC, it is now the turn of Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee. @INCDelhi just received this notice from the @IncomeTaxIndia department."

The Congress said four of its main bank accounts were frozen on Wednesday and Thursday.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Congress Rajya Sabha MP and lawyer Vivek Tankha, who appeared before the I-T on Friday, said the tax dispute had been going on for a couple of years.

Maken told the press that the

I-T department had demanded a recovery of Rs 210 crore on the basis of Income Tax returns filed for 2018-19 and the first reason given was that the accounts were submitted after a 45-day delay.

Secondly, there was also a discrepancy in cash receipts of Rs 14.4 lakh given to the party by its MLAs and MPs as donations made from their salaries in 2018-19.

The Congress turned the freezing of accounts into a political issue with the Youth Congress holding street protests. The party has decided to hold demonstrations outside Income Tax department offices across the country Saturday.

Maken said, "We got information two days ago that cheques being issued by us were not being honoured by banks... We don't have money to pay electricity bills, pay salaries to our employees."

Tankha, meanwhile, approached the ITAT and appeared before it through video-conferencing. The ITAT allowed the Congress to partly operate its accounts and posted the matter for hearing next Wednesday.

Maken said, "On our petition, the Income Tax department and the ITAT has said that we have to ensure that Rs 115 crore have to be kept in the banks. This 115 crore is the lien marked in the bank accounts. We can spend an amount over and above that. This means that Rs 115 crore have been frozen. This Rs 115 crore is much more than we have in our Current Accounts."

Tankha said the dispute pertains to assessment to the financial year 2018-19. He put the tax demand figure at Rs 135 crore.

"That assessment was completed with an addition of approximately Rs 102 crore plus interest, which came to Rs 135 crore. And that assessment had been upheld by the Commissioner of Income

Tax (Appeals). We appealed against that in the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal in May 2023. It was pending a hearing and the date for final arguments is fixed in April. In between, on February 14, they froze all our bank accounts.

Notices were sent to bankers to freeze all the transactions. On that day, we had approximately Rs 210 crore in our accounts," he said.

Tankha said he told the tribunal that the Congress would not be able to participate in the "festival of elections" if its accounts remained frozen. The tribunal will hear the matter next Wednesday before a final decision is taken on the matter.

Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and several senior leaders expressed outrage over the action of freezing its accounts.

"A power-drunk Modi government has frozen the accounts of the country's largest Opposition party, the Indian National Congress, just before the Lok Sabha elections. This is a deep assault on India's democracy. The unconstitutional money collected by the BJP would be utilised by them for elections, but the money collected by us through crowdfunding shall be sealed. That is why, I have said that there won't be any elections in the future. We appeal to the judiciary to save the multi-party system in this country and protect India's democracy," Kharge said.

Rahul Gandhi said, "Don't be afraid, Modi ji. Congress means the power of people and not the power of money. We have never bowed down before dictatorship, nor will we ever bow down. Every Congress worker will fight tooth and nail to protect India's democracy."

AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said, "Not just the Congress party's accounts, but India's democracy has been frozen."

or does, they oppose him. They are willing to incur significant losses for the country just to oppose Modi. Congress has only one agenda: anti-Modi, strong anti-Modi. They spread divisive propaganda against Modi, dividing society.

In Rewari in Haryana, where he made no mention of the ongoing farm protests at the state's border with Punjab, Modi spoke on themes like the Ram temple, abrogation of Article 370, and said people were now saying that they would "bless the party that removed Article 370" by "applying a tika of 370 seats on its forehead" in the Lok Sabha polls.

On the issue of farmers, he said the BJP government in Haryana had effectively addressed the water problem faced by the state's farmers, and also mentioned the Kisan Samman Nidhi, saying "Modi provides a guarantee to those who have nothing as guarantee".

Dedicating projects worth Rs 17,000 crore to Rajasthan and speaking via a video link, Modi praised the people of the state for the rousing welcome they gave the visiting French President recently, and said their hospitality was being discussed across the country and in France.

"When Modi fulfills commitments made to you, some individuals become worried. Look at the state of the Congress party. Recently, you taught Congress a lesson, yet they refuse to accept it. Their sole agenda remains to criticise Modi. The more one denounces Modi, the more they embrace him. They neglect discussions about a developed Bharat because Modi advocates for it. They evade discussions about 'Made in India' because Modi promotes it. They remain silent on 'vocal for local' because Modi advocates for it. When Bharat becomes the fifth-largest economic power, the entire nation rejoices, but Congress members remain discontent," he said.

"Regardless of what Modi says

"At that time, Rewari had blessed me with 272-paar (272-plus). Now people are saying that I have come here again, and this time it will be NDA 400-paar (more than 400 seats)... the blessings of people are my biggest capital," he said to chants of "Modi, Modi".

Calling Rewari the "biggest witness of Modi's guarantee", he recalled the many promises made in 2013 including the implementation of one-rank-one-pension if he came to power, he said he had fulfilled the promise.

In both speeches Friday, Modi referred to his visits to UAE and Qatar, and said India's global heft had risen to great heights in the last 10 years.

"Until 2014, we were just discussing terror attacks, unemployment and corruption," he said in his Rajasthan address, adding that now the country was looking forward to "great development".

**• Served notice, French journalist exits India**

Dougnac said, "Last month, I was sent a notice that accused me and my articles of being 'malicious', of harming the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India' and required me to respond to why my OCI card should not be cancelled. The notice further claimed that my articles could 'provoke disorder and disturb peace'."

"I am writing these words in tears," she said. "Today, I am leaving India, the country where I came 25 years ago as a student, and where I have worked for 23 years as a journalist. The place where I married, raised my son, and which I call my home."

"Leaving is not my choice, she said, adding, "I am being forced to leave by the Government of India."

"Sixteen months ago, the Ministry of Home Affairs denied my right to work as a journalist,

providing no reasons nor justifications, and no hearing," she said in her statement. "Since then, the Ministry has not once responded to my repeated requests for explanations or review of this arbitrary action..." Today, I am unable to work and have been unfairly accused of prejudicing the interests of the state. It has become clear that I cannot keep living in India and earning my livelihood. I am fighting these accusations before the competent forums and I have full faith in the legal process. But I can't afford to wait for its outcome," she said.

"The proceedings with respect to my OCI status have shattered me, especially now that I see them as part of a wider effort by the Government of India to curb dissent from the OCI community," Dougnac said.

In fact, France had raised the Dougnac issue with India during President Emmanuel Macron's visit last month for the Republic Day celebrations.

India had conveyed to the French side that the issue was about "compliance with the rules and regulations of the country", indicating that it was not related to her journalism. "This has been brought to our attention by the French side both prior to the visit (of President Macron) and during the visit," Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra had said, adding that the matter was being handled by the relevant department. The FRRO that operates under the Union Home Ministry had issued notice to Dougnac, asking her to explain why her OCI card should not be withdrawn, and giving her time until February 2 to respond.

The proceedings with respect to my OCI status have shattered me, especially now that I see them as part of a wider effort by the Government of India to curb dissent from the OCI community," Dougnac said.

Questions sent by *The Indian Express* to the Canadian High Commission on this drop did not elicit a response.

Study permits for Canada are issued to international students for programmes that are at least six-month long. Most permits are held by students enrolled in colleges and universities.

The decline in numbers is not entirely surprising, considering that IRCC had warned of an adverse impact on visa processing timelines in a statement dated October 19, 2023, immediately after Canada was asked to withdraw 41 of its 62 diplomats and their dependents from India.

However, the impact of reduced staffing levels has become apparent only now, with IRCC updating its open data sets on student visa finalisation statistics

for Indian applications this month. In September 2023, 18,000 applications were decided, compared to 38,000 in October 2022. Numbers from the last quarters of 2022 and 2023 show the decline: nearly 24,000 applications were decided in October 2023, 32,000 in November 2023, and 13,000 in December. In contrast, the figures stood at nearly 42,000 in October 2022; 44,000 in November 2022; and 33,000 in December 2022.

"I think the turnaround time for study permits may extend to six months and may not come by the time the college year starts. While there may be a decline in the number of applications processed, as per my experience, students are still applying for Canadian study permits," said Viral Doshi, a Mumbai-based education consultant.

India's decision to revoke immunity for all but 21 Canadian diplomats here stemmed from a dispute triggered by an accusation made by Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. On September 18, 2022, Trudeau accused India of involvement in the murder of prominent Sikh activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada and the allegation led to heightened tensions. Besides denying any involvement in Nijjar's killing, India accused Canada of harbouring separatists.

In an interview to Reuters in January this year, Canada's Immigration Minister Marc Miller had admitted that student permits to Indians had indeed dropped in wake of strained ties between the two nations. "Our relationship with India has really

halved our ability to process a lot of applications from India," Miller had said, adding that the trend was unlikely to change in the near future.

Global overseas consultants said the diplomatic row may not be the only reason behind Canada issuing fewer student permits in future. The country recently issued a new set of restrictive rules for international students aspiring to pursue studies in Canada. Recently, Canada announced a two-year limit on the number of new international student visas issued.

the capability of the forces. They will be configured accordingly with indigenously designed and manufactured sensors," the official said.

Another major acquisition cleared was that of midair refuellers for the IAF. These will be procured in addition to another tanker which the IAF would take on lease from interested global vendors to meet its training needs in the interim.

The Indian Express had reported last year that the IAF was

a wish or a dream is one thing. But for the son to buy into it and make sacrifices is different. Ashwin made us live a dream.

To concentrate on both studies and sports is not easy. When he was young, he understood the effort I was putting in for him.

Right from the time he started, Ashwin has been hard-working. Avan oru cricket paithiyam (he is a cricket tragic). When he was busy at the nets, I would borrow notes from his friends, take photocopies and hand it over to him.

Although cricket had become a part of our lives, we couldn't overlook education. He would cooperate because mathematics and science are important subjects, which you cannot ignore.

He had one condition when I sat down to teach him. He should also be able to follow the match on television. I never stopped him from watching cricket. Because if I did, I knew his mind would be thinking only about the game and he wouldn't pay attention on the books.

The only thing he didn't enjoy during his school days was learning music. Since his mother Chitra is interested in Carnatic music, we enrolled him for a class. He got

looking to procure "pre-owned" aircraft — which can be modified into tankers — for its tanker requirement so that they can serve for 25-30 years.

The IAF has been trying to buy these strategic assets since 2007 and two earlier attempts had not gone through.

When inducted, the refuellers will fill a critical capability gap in the IAF's inventory and would prove to be a vital strategic asset and a force multiplier as they will allow fighter jets to stay

airborne longer.

Currently, the IAF operates a fleet of six Russian Ilyushin-78 tankers procured in 2003-04, but at any given time only three-four are serviceable. Last year, state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) also signed an agreement with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to convert Boeing 767 passenger aircraft into tankers in India.

Proposals for follow on support (FOS) and repair/replenishment support through follow on supply support (FOSS) for 24 MH-60R helicopters under the Foreign Military Sale route with the US government have also been shown the green light.

There are multiple ways to solve a math problem and it is up to an individual to find what works for him. You have to pursue what your heart says. If you don't think, you will not improve. He is a voracious reader. And if he had not found new ways, at this level, he would have been found out easily and we won't be talking right now about 500. He has done so, only because he is not predictable. And that is because he uses his brain.

Speaking to him, I don't get the feeling that 500 wickets meant the world to

# IIT-D student found dead in hostel room

VIDHEESA KUNTAMALLA  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

A FINAL-YEAR MTech student at IIT-Delhi allegedly died by suicide inside his hostel room late Thursday evening, the admin said.

Varad Sanjay Nerkar (23), who hailed from Maharashtra's Nashik, was an MTech final-year student

inable. His family is expected to arrive from Nashik today (February 16)."

"A condolence meeting will be fixed by our registrar in due course. This challenging time re-emphasises the constant need for us to be there for each other. You are also requested to please utilise any of the multiple counselling avenues in our system if you need help to cope with this tragedy," the email further said.

Last year in November, a final-year BTech student at IIT-Delhi allegedly died by suicide at his East Delhi home. His family said he had been suffering from stress and depression for the last few months and was undergoing treatment.

In September 2023, IIT-Delhi student Anil Kumar allegedly died by suicide in his hostel room. He was pursuing BTech in Mathematics and Computing. In July of the same year, another BTech student, Ayush Ashna, was found hanging in the hostel.

Meanwhile, Aditya Mittal, Dean of Student Affairs, said a condolence meeting will be held soon. In an email sent to students on Friday, he wrote, "Dear all, with a heavy heart, it is our unfortunate duty to inform you of the tragic and untimely demise of our MTech student, Varad Sanjay Nerkar... Police have taken custody of his mortal remains. While we try to deal with unbearable pain, the loss to Varad's family is unimaginable."

According to a police officer, the student's family couldn't reach his phone, so a friend, along with the security staff, broke open his room door. "A crime team has inspected the spot. Further investigation is underway," said the officer.

An IIT-Delhi official said, "It is too soon to gather any details as

of now. We only found out that this incident happened last night. As far as we know, the student had not approached anybody to register a complaint or express concern regarding something bothering him."

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In September 2023, IIT-Delhi student Anil Kumar allegedly died by suicide in his hostel room. He was pursuing BTech in Mathematics and Computing. In July of the same year, another BTech student, Ayush Ashna, was found hanging in the hostel.

On February 12, a man claiming to be DCP, Mumbai Cyber Crime, told him to break his FD, stocks, and mutual funds and transfer all the money to a single account for "monitoring". All of this amounted to around Rs 56.7 lakh which he was asked to further transfer to an account with Punjab National Bank's Andheri Branch.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, the victim, who did not wish to be identified, said, "I had to sit in front of the camera for 72 hours and take permission before having my meals or taking bathroom breaks."

In his police complaint, the resident of Sector 51, said he received a call from someone claiming to be from FedEx, Mumbai, that a consignment of passport, credit

cards, narcotics and a laptop on its way to Taiwan had got flagged by the customs department. He was told that the booking was done using his Aadhaar card. "The caller asked to lodge a complaint and helped me connect with Mumbai Cyber branch," he said, adding the call was connected with person claiming to be an ASI. "He connected with me through Skype and said police would check my Aadhaar for money laundering links with underworld," he said.

The ordeal started February 11 and ended only on February 14 when the victim stumbled upon news of similar crimes on his phone and approached the police.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, the victim, who did not wish to be identified, said, "I had to sit in front of the camera for 72 hours and take permission before having my meals or taking bathroom breaks."

In his police complaint, the resident of Sector 51, said he received a call from someone claiming to be from FedEx, Mumbai, that a consignment of passport, credit

NOIDA COPS FOUND SNAKE VENOM AT RAVE PARTY LAST YEAR

Elvish Yadav case: Krait venom found in seized samples

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NOIDA, FEBRUARY 16

MONTHS AFTER Noida Police busted an organised group that allegedly sold snake venom at rave parties in NCR, samples seized during a raid revealed that venom of the krait species of snake was used, said officers.

In November last year, police received a complaint from an NGO alleging that an organised group was selling snake venom at rave parties'.

Five men were arrested while Bigg Boss OTT winner and YouTuber Elvish Yadav was named in the FIR. The 26-year-



The Bigg Boss OTT winner was named in the FIR

old YouTuber refuted all charges against him and expressed willingness to cooperate with the probe.

Police had recovered 20 ml of snake venom, 5 cobras, one python, 2 two-headed snakes and a rat snake. Police have now said 'krait venom' was found in samples sent to the FSL lab in Jaipur.

A case was lodged on a com-

plaint by an official from animal rights group, PFA (People For Animals). PFA chairperson and BJP leader Maneka Gandhi had also accused Yadav of involvement in illegally selling snake venom and sought his immediate arrest.

Yadav was questioned over suspected use of snake venom at a party.

Police said an investigation by the veterinary department also found venom glands miss-

ing in all nine rescued snakes.

Police had registered an FIR under IPC sections 120B (criminal conspiracy) and sections 9, 39, 48A, 49, 50, and 51 of The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, at Sector 49 police station.

**Delhi Tourism**  
Presents

# Basant Utsav

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Connaught Place, New Delhi

**Highlights:**

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DISHA PUBLICATIONS PLATINUM

## After 72-hour-call with conmen posing as cops, man loses Rs 56L

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
GURGAON, FEBRUARY 16

A 51-YEAR-OLD Gurgaon man ended up losing Rs 56 lakh after a group of men, posing as FedEx and Mumbai police cyber crime officers, targeted him – putting him on a 72-hour-long Skype call in the garb of investigation – and asked him transfer the amount to look into alleged money laundering activities.

The ordeal started February 11 and ended only on February 14 when the victim stumbled upon news of similar crimes on his phone and approached the police.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, the victim, who did not wish to be identified, said, "I had to sit in front of the camera for 72 hours and take permission before having my meals or taking bathroom breaks."

In his police complaint, the resident of Sector 51, said he received a call from someone claiming to be from FedEx, Mumbai, that a consignment of passport, credit

cards, narcotics and a laptop on its way to Taiwan had got flagged by the customs department. He was told that the booking was done using his Aadhaar card. "The caller asked to lodge a complaint and helped me connect with Mumbai Cyber branch," he said, adding the call was connected with person claiming to be an ASI. "He connected with me through Skype and said police would check my Aadhaar for money laundering links with underworld," he said.

On February 12, a man claiming to be DCP, Mumbai Cyber Crime, told him to break his FD, stocks, and mutual funds and transfer all the money to a single account for "monitoring". All of this amounted to around Rs 56.7 lakh which he was asked to further transfer to an account with Punjab National Bank's Andheri Branch.

SHO of Cyber Crime police station, Jasvir Singh, said such complaints have risen over the past eight months. "These calls come from internet-based numbers. We traced one such number to a man in Bareilly once, and he had nothing to do with the crime..."

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'OFFICIALLY ALLOTTED IN 2015'

## AAP office not encroachment, party tells SC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

THE AAM Aadmi Party has denied that its office in Rouse Avenue in the national capital is an encroachment on land allotted to the Delhi High Court for judicial infrastructure, and told the Supreme Court that it was officially allotted to it by the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi.

"Far from being an instance of 'encroachment', the subject premises were officially allotted to the applicant by the Government of NCT of Delhi (GNCTD) on 31.12.2015 for its state unit office" and that this was strictly in accordance with the party's entitlement as (at that time) a state party under the office memorandum dated 14.10.2015", AAP said in an intervention application filed before the top court.

While hearing a matter related to judicial infrastructure, the Supreme Court on February 13 was told that "a political party office" had encroached on land allotted to the HC. Expressing its displeasure, the court directed that "on the next date of listing, a specific timeline shall be furnished to this Court for the removal of the encroachment".

The court is slated to hear the matter next on February 19.

Seeking to intervene in the matter, the party said it was in "lawful occupation of the premises in Bungalow No. 206, Rouse Avenue, New Delhi..."

It said that a subsequent notice of cancellation of allotment was set aside by the HC on August 23, 2017, and added that "such allotment of office space for official party work is an essential element of public funding of elections in India and is designed to level the electoral playing field".

"In view of this, there is no question of the applicant 'encroaching' on a space that was duly allotted to it in 2015 and that has been in its possession

since then. The subject premises had been in the applicant's occupation long before it was earmarked for extending the Rouse Avenue Court Complex".

AAP said, "The L&DO allotted 3.03 acres of land to GNCTD on 18.09.2020 for building additional courtrooms for Rouse Avenue Court, which was stated to be adjacent to the Rouse Avenue Court. When the land was to be taken over, it was then stated by L&DO on 12.12.2023 that, not just the vacant land that is adjacent to the Rouse Avenue Court complex, but a blemished road and the office of Aam Aadmi Party existing on the said land is also to be allotted for the construction.

"There is no explanation forthcoming for why due diligence was not exercised by the L&DO by examining the pre-existing status of the land and its vicinity," it added.

The AAP said that subsequent to the allotment of land on Rouse Avenue, it "has risen to become a National Political Party. This change in the applicant's character and status has further enhanced its need for, as well as its entitlement to, office spaces in the New Delhi Municipal Area, at par with the five other national parties each of which are enjoying, at least, similar allotments in similar locations".

The party claimed that relevant policy guidelines for allotment of land to political parties entitle it to two office spaces: one for its national unit and another for its Delhi state unit; but as of now, it has been allotted office space only for the state unit.

The party said that given the need for land for judicial infrastructure, it is willing to relocate to an alternative space but its requests for such an alternative space for its state unit office have been denied. The plea said that therefore, "immediate vacation will mean that the party will be left with none of the two office spaces it is entitled to..."

TO BE DISCUSSED TODAY IN ASSEMBLY

## CM moves trust motion, BJP claims bid to duck court, ED

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

**The AAP convener has also been summoned for the sixth time by the ED on Monday**

ploy to avoid his appearance before court and the ED.

Tabling the motion, Kejriwal said, "A few days ago, two MLAs came to me and said they had been approached by the BJP and were told we are going to arrest your Chief Minister in a few days... that we have already contacted and convinced 21 MLAs to leave the party... we are also in touch with others."

Alleging that investigating the "alleged liquor scam" was not the objective but toppling the AAP government in Delhi was what the BJP aimed to accomplish, Kejriwal said this was being done since the opposition party was aware that it cannot form government in the Capital by winning elections.

"Since they can't win the elections, they are trying everything to form a government... but the people's faith in us led them to failure yet again (at poaching)... To test and exhibit this (faith) to the people... I table this motion of confidence," he said.

The motion was admitted by Speaker Ram Niwas Goel for a discussion at 11 am on Saturday.

Leader of Opposition Bidhuri, meanwhile, said the schedule for the ongoing Budget Session did not have a sitting on Saturday, the day Kejriwal was summoned by court.

"In view of this, the Chief Minister, by deliberately hatching a conspiracy, has scheduled a meeting of the House on February 17 and presented a vote of confidence to his government in it," Bidhuri alleged.

"It is surprising that the issue on which he has presented the trust vote and the allegation that the BJP is trying to buy his MLAs

is already being investigated by Delhi Police. Police have issued a notice to him and asked for evidence but he could not present any; he is now presenting a vote of confidence on the same baseless and imaginary allegation," he said.

Sources said Kejriwal has not challenged the summons issued to him by an Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in front of a Sessions Court. According to CrPC Section 205, the accused may be exempted from personal appearance by a magistrate if his appearance is not compulsory in the interest of justice, provided the accused gives a valid reason.

Terming it a "parliamentary manoeuvre", the Delhi government stated that the rationale behind bringing the motion of confidence, according to the CM, was "to demonstrate... that once again, the BJP's 'Operation Lotus' has faltered in Delhi. None of our MLAs defected, and all remain steadfastly aligned with us."

PM scheme has put end to exploitation of street vendors: Puri



Union Minister Puri and L-G Saxena with a beneficiary. Express

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

EXPLOITATION OF street vendors and workers has stopped under PM Narendra Modi's government, Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri said on Friday as he disbursed loans to 10,000 beneficiaries of PM SVANIDHI scheme in a programme jointly organised by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), State Level Bankers Committee, Delhi, and Punjab National Bank.

"Under PM Modi, the benefits of the government welfare schemes have directly reached the eligible beneficiaries," he said. "In time to come, India will be the third largest economy in the world and street vendors will play an important role in this achievement," he added.

The programme was attended by Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxon; Minister of State for Culture and External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi; Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad; Chandni Chowk MP Dr Harsh Vardhan; Delhi Chief Secretary Nareesh Kumar; and MCD Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti; among others.

The programme was attended by Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxon; Minister of State for Culture and External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi; Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad; Chandni Chowk MP Dr Harsh Vardhan; Delhi Chief Secretary Nareesh Kumar; and MCD Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti; among others.

pressed condolences to the families of those who lost their lives, alleging that the incident was the result of "corruption" in the Delhi government and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). "It is a matter of investigation as to how a dangerous factory was running in such a (densely) populated area," Sachdeva said, announcing assistance of Rs 50,000 to the family of each deceased for funeral expenses, and Rs 25,000 for help in the treatment of the injured.

Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely said, "Had the Fire Brigade reached the Alipur fire accident site on time, and had the injured got timely medical help, the lives of 11 dead people could have been saved... The compensation amount announced by the government is inadequate..."

ALIPUR FIRE: POLITICAL BLAME GAME ENSUES

## CM announces Rs 10L relief for kin; opp trains guns at govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

lapses which led to it.

Meanwhile, in addition to relief for the next of kin of the victims, Kejriwal also announced a compensation of Rs 2 lakh for two injured persons who suffered major injuries while two others, who had minor injuries, will be given Rs 20,000 each.

"We will fully assess the government's policy regarding the shops and houses that were burnt. I just had a word with the DM, and the loss incurred will be compensated as per the government's policy," Kejriwal said following the visit.

"It will also be investigated how such a combustible factory was running in a residential area... I will order an inquiry into it and whoever is guilty of this, will not be spared," he added.

After interacting with the locals in Alipur, Kejriwal in a post

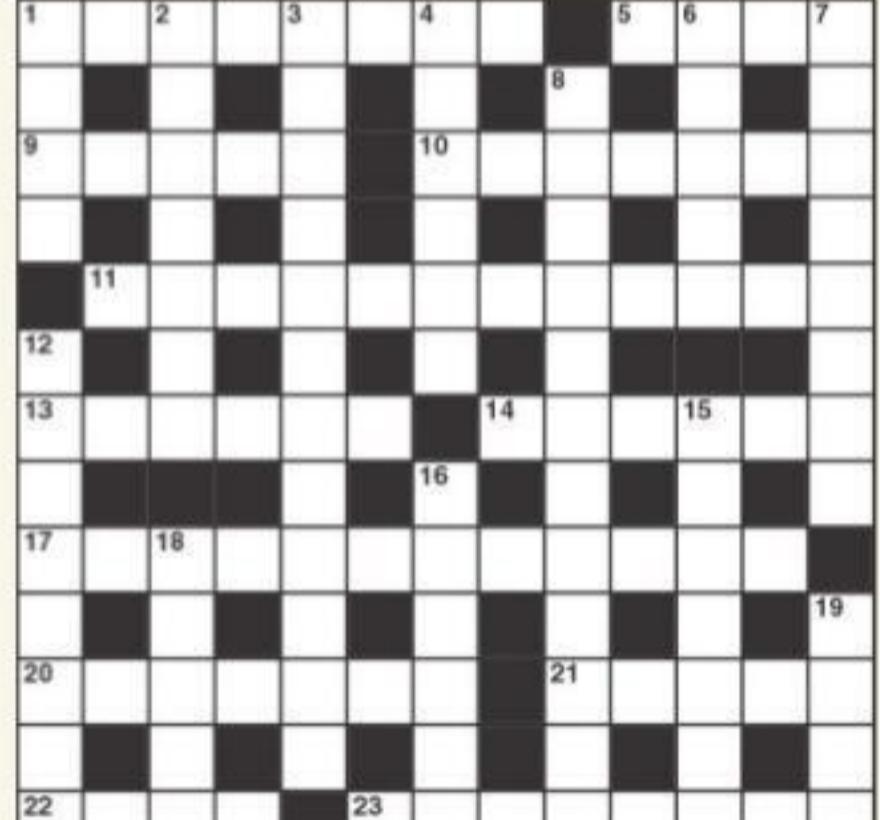
on X, said, "The fire that broke out here yesterday is a matter of great sadness. They are saying that there was a paint factory, and we know how inflammable paint is, and due to the fire, the chemicals in it started flowing into the drains and everything in

the surrounding area caught fire..."

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, following his visit, ex-



### CROSSWORD 5290



**ACROSS**

- Bread yet to be baked and given away (8)
- Sound barrier (4)
- The doctor joins me in a drink (5)
- Registered pain from Dr White's manipulation (7)
- A day-dreaming sheepdog? (4,8)
- Take in with the eye of a sailor (6)
- Check an oarsman's support (6)
- He can't help helping himself (12)
- Observe perhaps in so many words (7)
- Moira becomes a New Zealander (5)
- Standard measure (4)
- Ill-temper shown by a girl in a moodle (8)

**DOWN**

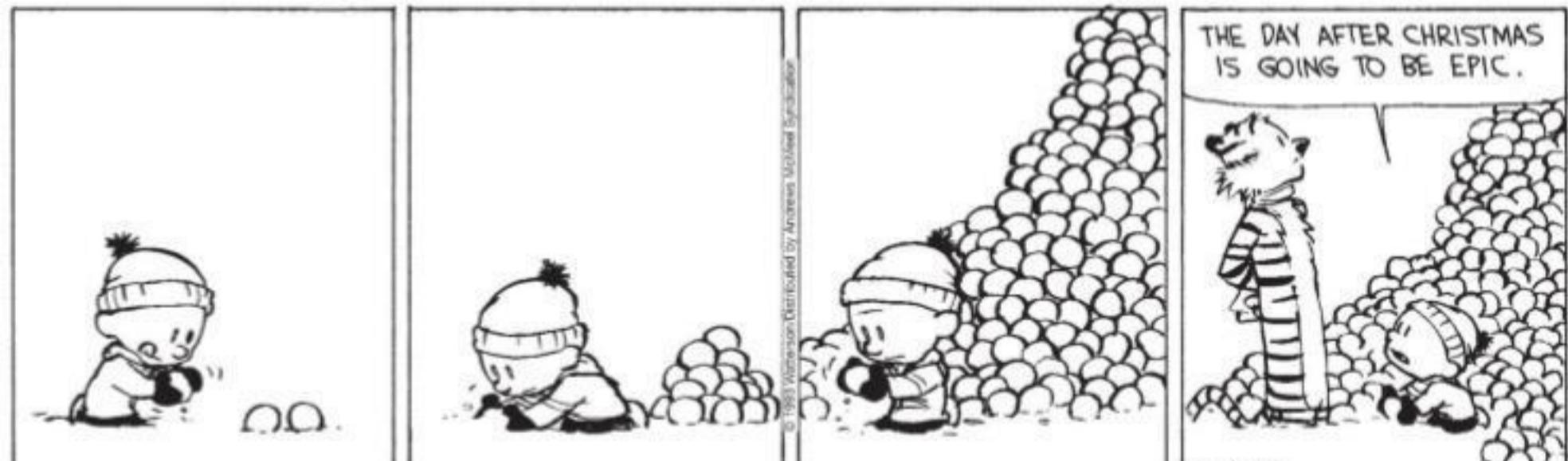
- A striking elevation of knowledge (4)
- Boring; is due to be spruced up (7)
- Article one put out after a bill for a rate increase (12)
- New arrangement takes blame for cover up (6)
- What's different about pot, heroin and cocaine (5)
- Mild way to rebuke (8)
- Presumably he can be relied upon for dexterity (5-4,3)
- To cross the street is an easy undertaking (8)
- A hit lyric that's fashionable (1,2,4)
- Hold up means I'm deep in trouble (6)
- Enter the lists? (5)
- Notice the absence of failure (4)

**Solutions Crossword 5289 Across:** 1 Play-actor, 8 Erred, 9 Amusing, 10 Hawser, 11 Dreamt, 12 All right, 15 Punished, 18 You win, 20 Reacts, 21 Doeskin, 22 Thief, 23 Free trade Down: 2 Lemur, 3 Yes-man, 4 Centaph, 5 Repair, 6 Presage, 7 Adoration, 11 Desperate, 13 Ladylove, 14 Invalid, 16 Setoff, 17 Purser, 19 Illad

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry &amp; T Lewis



CALVIN &amp; HOBBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



### DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

You may have been having a bumpy ride in a relationship recently, but there's no doubt that you are quite capable of giving as good as you get. Put intensely personal affairs on one side and get on with practical matters and the business of day-to-day survival.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

It is a fine moment to indulge in practical chores, especially if you're teaming up with other people. Family activities are favoured, as are casual social gatherings. There also seems to be a secret romance on the horizon, or perhaps other feelings that are difficult to admit to.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

Today's lunar alignments combine a need for relaxation with a desire to stay active. The best way to enjoy yourself should therefore be to pursue a number of your favourite interests or hobbies. Besides, a part-time activity could eventually bring financial benefits.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

This could be a great day for fiddling around at home,

completing chores of no great consequence. I have to report that, unexciting as this prospect may be, if you stick to practical pursuits, then you will leave yourself spare time for pleasure later on.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

Certain facts of life are inevitable for all those born under the sign of the Crab. For example, you often experience emotional conflicts and insecurities which you find it difficult to talk about. Now is the time to start bringing such deep feelings into the open.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

You have a tendency to bury your head in the sand and ignore certain warning signals. You must try to follow your intuitions and listen to your dreams. The messages will be very subtle, but they're there nonetheless. You should remember that you are in control of your feelings.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

You should be in charge at home, at least according to the stars. You may translate your celestial potential into reality by making sure that family members and anyone else you live with do what they're told! You might have to back your harsh words with some subtle persuasion, though.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

Social gatherings should veer towards the large and impersonal rather than the small and intimate.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

A number of planets are lined up in positive formations. Venus, that most graceful and charming celestial body, is now coming to your aid, making your day-to-day affairs that much more pleasant. Even the tiniest activities can be enjoyable.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

It is a fine moment to indulge in practical chores, especially if you're teaming up with other people. Family activities are favoured, as are casual social gatherings. There also seems to be a secret romance on the horizon, or perhaps other feelings that are difficult to admit to.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

Do not let a minor matter depress you. Rather than dwelling on secret problems you should set about tackling them with practical skill and experience at your disposal. You must seek expert assistance where necessary, consulting the people who have been there and done that.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Opportunities for progress and growth are often disguised as challenges which at first seem to be nothing more than difficulties or problems. However, such situations should be seen as the grit which produces the pearl in the oyster, creating emotional riches.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

You may devote a little extra time and energy to spending and investments, no matter how small or apparently unimportant. Social engagements will be most enjoyable if they are of a slightly traditional, restrained nature: the old ways are the best ways.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

Social gatherings should veer towards the large and impersonal rather than the small and intimate. Important money decisions should have been finalised by now. Take an unfussy and down-to-earth approach in all personal discussions, and you'll soon find that other people become more respectful.

### JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

The intuition of \_\_\_\_\_ gives us the truth. - Corliss Lamont (4,4)

CLTEE

ISUVLL

ABRIR

ADELFW

SUDOKU 5475

Difficulty Level 1s  
Instructions  
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level  
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy;  
3s = Medium; 4s = Hard;  
5s = Very Hard;  
6s = Genius

6	1	3	7</
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# Give your house the gift of free electricity and solar power

## Be a part of **PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana**

“

**The scheme will lead to more income,  
lesser power bills and employment  
generation for people.**

– Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

”



### ₹75000 crore scheme for 1 crore houses

#### KEY FEATURES OF THE SCHEME

Up to 300 units of  
electricity per month

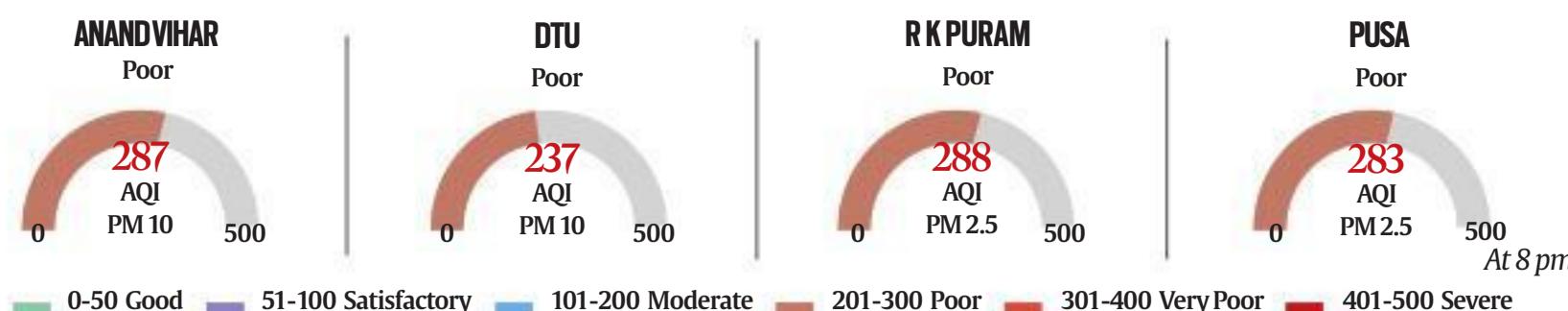
Up to ₹78000  
subsidy

Loan at lower  
interest rates

Easy enrollment  
process



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Login or scan QR code for registration



S K Y W A T C H  
FORECAST: February 17  
Mainly clear sky.  
Mist/shallow fog in  
the morning.

MAX: 27  
2.6°C above normal | MIN: 8  
3°C below normal

## ALIPUR FIRE: DEATH TOLL RISES TO 11, FACTORY OWNER AMONG VICTIMS

# A spark, a blast — before flames engulfed factory

**ARNABJIT SUR**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

AT a factory in Alipur's Dayal market on Thursday, seven men and a woman were manufacturing and packaging paint, while two welders — one working outside and one inside — were making steel racks to store the containers. Keeping an eye on them from his cabin was the factory owner. Around 4 pm, they heard a loud blast. Within minutes, a fire began to spread rapidly. With the only exit locked, they were trapped inside and eventually charred to death. The man working outside the gates too couldn't escape.

What caused the deadly blaze? According to senior police officers, a spark during welding may have fallen on the paint and spread to a room with drums containing paint thinner, which then blew up. However, police also said they are probing the possibility of a short circuit behind the incident.

Of the 11 victims, eight have been identified so far: Ashok Kumar Jain (62), owner of Om Suns paint; Ram Surat (44); Vishal Gaund (19); Anil Thakur (46); Pankaj Kumar (29); Shubham (19); Mira (44); and Brij Kishore (19).

The workers, who worked 10-hour shifts, were involved in various tasks: three made paint using a paint-making machine installed inside the factory, while the others packaged it into plastic containers and affixed labels onto the product.

Meanwhile, neighbours and eyewitnesses claimed the owner used to keep the main steel gates of the factory shut throughout the shift and only opened it for 30 minutes during lunch break.

**Spread to houses via 'polluted' drains**

According to the Delhi Fire

Service (DFS), they received a call around 5.25 pm — over an hour after the blaze broke out — and 22 fire tenders were rushed to the spot. By then, the factory's roof had collapsed.

Through the drains, which contained thinner and other waste discharged by the factory, fire officials said the flames spread rapidly to four shops and houses nearby, as well as a Nasha Mukti Kendra located across the factory.

Police said the centre's 15 occupants, including five staffers, jumped onto the terrace of the neighbouring building and got to the other side by holding onto steel grilles. "Constable Karamveer of Alipur police station (part of the team deployed to the spot) also rushed to the top of the de-addiction centre and helped rescue those trapped. He sustained burn injuries and was admitted to Safdarjung Hospital," said DCP (Outer North) Ravi Kumar.

Police also rescued a dog from the centre.

The DCP added that three more people living in nearby buildings sustained injuries and were referred to Lok Nayak Hospital. "The National Disaster Response Force, along with the fire department, conducted a search operation inside the burnt buildings. A total of 11 charred bodies were recovered from the paint factory and their remains have been preserved at BJRM Hospital," Kumar said.

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**Spread to houses via 'polluted' drains**

According to the Delhi Fire



(Clockwise from top) The remains of the factory in Alipur which was gutted in the blaze; several shops nearby were damaged as well; officials examine drums containing paint thinner, which may have exploded and caused the fire. Amit Mehra

## Teen on first day at work, father of two kids among 11 dead

**UPASIKHA SINGHAL & ARNABJIT SUR**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16



(Clockwise) Pankaj; Ram Surat; Vimal; Anil

ON THURSDAY, 18-year-old Vishal Gaur, youngest among four siblings, had set out from his accommodation in Outer Delhi in the morning. It was his first day at work — working as a welder at a factory in Alipur. Within a few hours, his family members were informed that he was no more.

"He had studied till Class 8... he was an expert at welding," said his brother Dharmendra.

"He has been doing this work for around nine months. He came to Delhi from our village in Azamgarh for the first time... he earned between Rs 300 and Rs 400 on a contractual labour basis," said Dharmendra, as he waited outside the hospital mortuary to identify his brother's body. Vishal was among 11 people who died after a massive fire broke out inside a paint factory in Outer Delhi's Alipur on Thursday evening.

Unlike Vishal, Anil Kumar Thakur (42), a resident of Kirari village in Northwest Delhi, had been working at the factory as a paint-maker for a year. Said his uncle Nirsham Jha (61): "He was the sole breadwinner of his family. His two sons are studying in school... he used to earn around Rs 7,000 a month and was one of the three labourers at the factory who specialised in making paint." Thakur also perished in the blaze.

Rahul, brother of Brijkishore (19), who hailed from Gonda district in Uttar Pradesh, remembered him as a man who was "very hardworking and sincere at his job." The brothers

lived next to the factory. "When I saw the flames at the factory site, I knew my brother could not have survived... As the fire spread, I ran for my life," said an inconsolable Rahul.

Meanwhile, Sonia Vihar resident Dinesh Singh (43) received news of the fire around 7 pm. His brother Ram Surat Singh (40) had been working at the factory as a contractual labourer, a job he had landed only two days ago. "We don't know what to do," he said.

Pankaj Kumar's (40) brother Rajesh (47) received a call about the fire from someone near the factory. Kumar rushed to the hospital but was told he couldn't see the bodies. "Police told us that we wouldn't be able to identify them. I lost hope then. His wife is still holding onto the hope that he has somehow survived," said Rajesh. Pankaj is survived by his wife and two children.

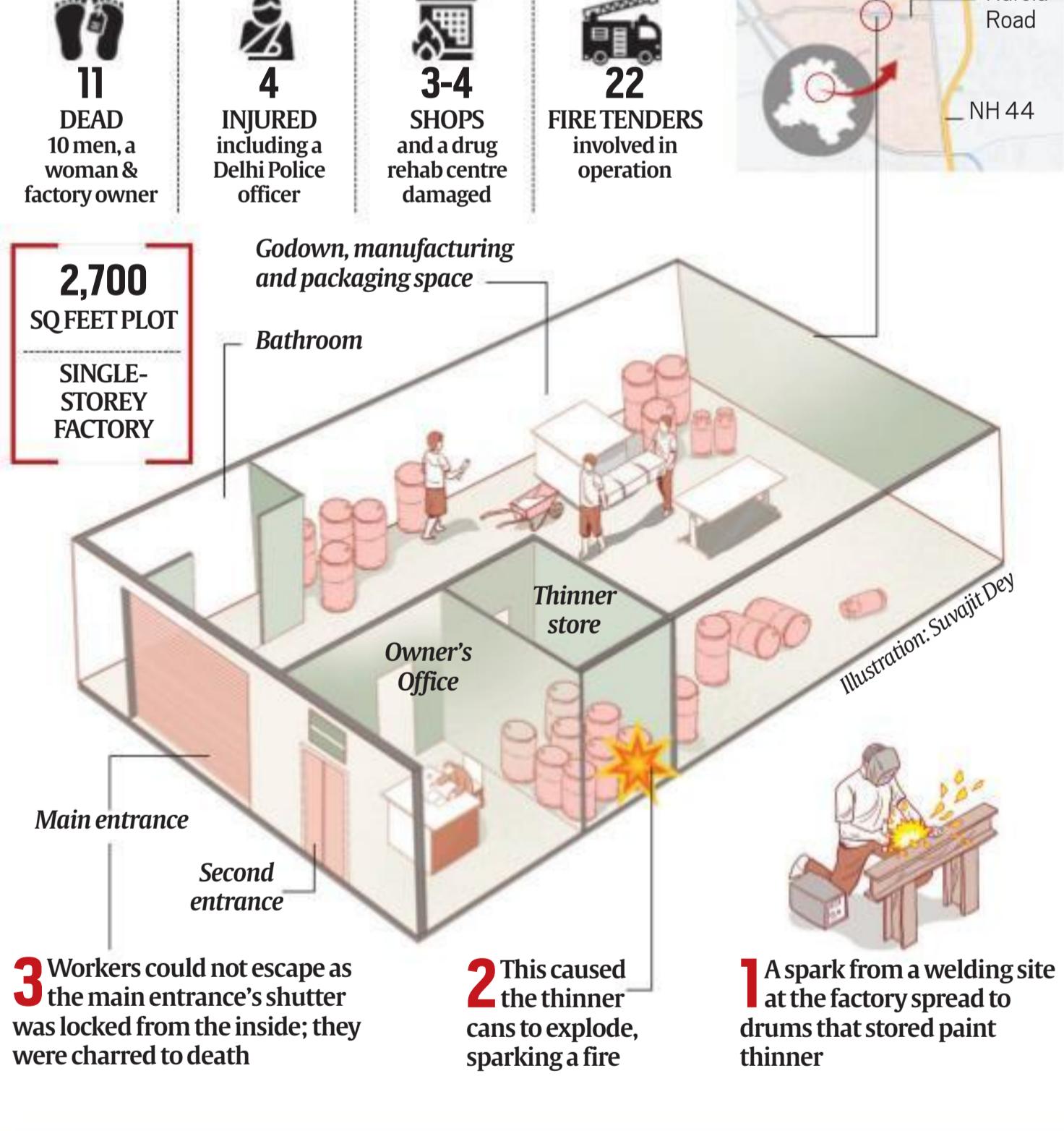
Police said with the bodies charred beyond recognition, the victims were identified through rings, shoes, clothes, and phones.



Residents gathered at the spot, Friday. Amit Mehra

## WHAT TRANSPRIED

The paint factory was located in a narrow bylane and surrounded by houses and other factories.



## FOR WORKER WHO LIVED IN RENTED ROOM RIGHT BEHIND FACTORY, A NARROW ESCAPE

# 'Woke up to flames near mattress, room filled with smoke'

**UPASIKHA SINGHAL & ANKITA UPADHYAY**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

A SUDDEN BOUT of illness, quick thinking relatives, a distance of a few feet — those who survived Thursday's blaze at a paint factory in Outer Delhi's Alipur were able to cheat certain death in more ways than one.

Govinda (18) took the day off on the day the factory caught fire, coming back from work in the afternoon feeling sick all of a sudden after filling paint into containers all day.

A few feet away, Urmila (45)

had also laid down for a nap in the afternoon when she was woken up by screams coming

from the street. "I thought a gas cylinder had exploded... but later

took some medicine after eating food and fell asleep," the factory worker said. He was awoken a few hours later by flames licking at the foot of his mattress and his rented room — right behind the paint factory — engulfed in smoke.

So close was his house to the factory that his room's window overlooked the building he worked in. When the factory caught fire, the flames also made their way towards him. "I ran away with the others to save my life," said Govinda.

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Govinda (18) took the day off on the day the factory caught fire. Amit Mehra

found out that it was the paint factory," she said.

She recalled picking up her children and running away from the site. "I saw the fire travelling through the open drains and the entire street looked like it was on fire," she said. Her nephew's barber shop next door to the factory and her brother-in-law's kirana shop next to it were burnt to ashes.

"We don't have much savings to buy houses elsewhere. These businessmen buy cheap plots here to set up their factories and we can't even tell them to not do that," Urmila said bitterly.

Out of the four injured, two

were admitted at Lok Nayak Hospital with inhalation injuries. According to doctors at the hospital, a mother-daughter duo are in a stable condition.

Divya (20) and her mother Jyoti (42) were at home just a few feet from the factory when the incident happened and due to excessive smoke, fell unconscious. According to Divya's uncle Suresh Kumar, her father Sunil was not around when the incident happened.

"There is just a 10 foot road between the factory and the house... They were lying unconscious and were found by my sons who took them to hospital,"

said Suresh, adding that his wife Urmila too went with his sons.

Urmila said she was busy with her daily chores when she heard that a fire had erupted in front of the house. "My sons and I ran towards their house which was engulfed in smoke. We broke the door and windows and my son wrapped a bedsheet and took the mother and daughter outside," Urmila said.

She added that due to excessive smoke, they were not able to locate Divya for almost an hour while Jyoti was lying unconscious near the stairs and were unidentifiable as they were covered in black soot.

According to the civic body, the premises was a flat being used for factory purposes located on a 10x12 wide street in a residential area.

"The fire broke out in a dense residential area located on Lal Dara Abadi of Alipur village. The house in which the fire broke out was used illegally for... mixing chemical paint. (this) was ap-

prised by neighbours... recently," the MCD said in a statement.

DC (Narela Zone) also reached the spot and looked after the process of evacuation personally, according to the MCD.

Meanwhile, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) confirmed that the factory was built illegally.

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NEXT ROUND OF TALKS WITH CENTRE TOMORROW

# Haryana police use teargas on 'unruly' farmers

KANCHAN VASDEV  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 16

HARYANA POLICE Friday fired teargas shells to disperse protesting farmers when they moved towards the barricades at the Shambhu barrier on Punjab-Haryana border, hours after the farm leaders announced a "ceasefire" after a marathon third round of talks with a team of three Union ministers remained inconclusive.

The fresh confrontation comes on the fourth day of the farmers' 'Dilli Chalo' march, and two days before the fourth round of talks between the farmers and the Centre on Sunday. The forces stationed on Haryana side fired the teargas shells around 2pm after some youth on the Punjab side allegedly set some gunny bags afire and hurled them at the security personnel.

The incident is reflective of the uneasy calm prevailing at the Haryana-Punjab border, where the protesters are waiting for a go-ahead from the farmer leaders.

Despite pleas from the organisers of the march — Samyukt Kisan Morcha (non-political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) — not to succumb to provocation and to maintain calm, a group of young farmers went ahead and carried out the mischief, said Dilbagh Singh Harigopal, a member of BKU-Ekta-Azad.

Ishaan Singh Brahmpura from Tarn Tarar also tried to talk sense to a small group of youths even as the youngsters voiced frustration questioning the purpose of the protest if leaders weren't ready to march to Delhi.

## Baramati: Ajit's wife starts campaigning, likely to take on Sule

AJAY JADHAV  
PUNE, FEBRUARY 16

Supriya Sule (left) and Sunetra Pawar. Facebook

SUNETRA PAWAR, wife of Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, is likely to be pitted against sitting MP Supriya Sule in Baramati — setting stage for a direct fight between the Pawar family members in the Lok Sabha elections.

While Ajit Pawar Friday said that official announcement regarding the National Congress Party's Baramati candidate will be made after the seat-sharing talks, a vehicle bearing an audio-visual public address system and photographs of Sunetra Pawar and her husband Ajit Pawar has been moving around in Baramati.

The PA system belts out information on the social work being done by Sunetra Pawar, who has incidentally been meeting local leaders in the constituency.

On Thursday she paid a courtesy visit to Kanchan Kul, the BJP candidate in 2019 Lok Sabha election and wife of legislator Rahul Kul.

On Friday, Ajit Pawar addressed his party workers in Baramati and said he would work hard to elect the apt candidate who would declare for the constituency.

"I am going to put up a candidate in Baramati because we want to be part of the ruling alliance

Tejinder Singh Teja, a young farmer from Upperi village near Rajpura, said, "What is the need of this morcha, if we can't move forward?" Meanwhile, KMM coordinator Sarwan Singh Pandher accused the Centre of trying to "suppress" the voices of the protesters, claiming social media accounts of farmers and YouTubers have been suspended.

Talking to reporters, Pandher said that during the meeting with Union ministers on Thursday, "we raised the issue of the suspension of Internet and X handles of farmer leaders".

Also alleging that the government has suspended the accounts of around 70 YouTubers who were showing farmers' protest, he said it appears "the government wants to suppress our voice." Pandher said that during the talks, they raised the issue of the use of "force" against farmers by the paramilitary personnel deployed at the Punjab-Haryana border who fired teargas shells at the protesters.

He claimed that around 70 farmers have sustained serious injuries in an action by Haryana security personnel at Shambhu and Khanauri borders. The farmer leader said the talks with the Union ministers were held in a positive atmosphere and various demands of the protesters, including a law on MSP and debt waiver, were discussed. The government said they wanted to continue talks, Pandher said, adding that their 'Dilli Chalo' call still stands and the protesters were staying put at the Punjab-Haryana border so that a solution emerges through talks. **WITHPTI**



Teargas shells being fired at protesting farmers at the Shambhu border, in Patiala on Friday. PTI

## Mediator Mann urges farmers to find solution

KANCHAN VASDEV  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 16

**THE RULING** Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab had promptly showcased Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann as the bridge between the farmers and the Centre after he mediated and arranged a meeting between farmer leaders and three Union ministers, a day before the agriculturists were to launch their Dilli Chalo march.

On Thursday, as the farm leaders arrived for a third round of talks with the Union ministers in Chandigarh, Mann told the former: "I am your advocate". In the same breath, he informed them that he will be part of the meeting as custodian of the people of his Punjab, to ensure that nobody suf-

fered due to the farmers' protest.

Sarwan Singh Pandher, the general secretary of Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, and Jagjit Singh Dallewal of Bharti Kisan Union (Sidhpur) met Mann before meeting Food and Civil Supplies Minister Piyush Goyal, Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, and MoS (Home) Nitin Gadkari.

Mann asked farmers to be positive, and take part in the meeting with an open mind to work out solutions rather than insisting on the protest. "He said he did not want to see the youth suffering pellet injuries, or losing limbs or lives. He also mentioned that wisdom was in looking for a resolution, especially when the LS polls were around the corner, and the code of conduct could be announced any moment," said a source.

## Stir upsets SAD, BJP reconciliation plan

NAVJEEVAN GOPAL  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 16

**THE PUNJAB** farmer unions' "Dilli Chalo" agitation is heating up state politics with the Lok Sabha elections just round the corner. It has already had an impact on the attempts being made by former NDA allies, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the BJP, to reach out to each other in a bid to restitch their alliance for the upcoming polls.

Both camps are closely tracking the outcome of the talks undertaken by the BJP-led Centre with the agitating farmer bodies to resolve the standoff.

The third round of talks between farm unions and three Union ministers — Piyush Goyal, Arjun Munda and Nitin Gadkari — on farmers' various demands — including a law on minimum support price (MSP) for crops and loan waivers — concluded on a "positive note" on Thursday-Friday night. They will meet again on Sunday evening, with the meetings also involving Chief Minister and AAP leader Bhagwant Mann.

The Sukhbir Badal-led SAD has already expressed solidarity with the protesting farmers, with the

party's core committee, its highest decision-making body, going into huddle on Thursday to deliberate on the fast-developing situation.

The SAD core committee, while reiterating the party's full support to the farmers, decided that the party should not pursue a re-alliance with the BJP until a solution is found for redressal of their grievances.

A member of this top SAD panel told *The Indian Express* that a majority of its members were of the view that "at this stage and till the issues of farmers are resolved and the farm agitation ends, Akali Dal must not explore an alliance with BJP".

Another senior Akali leader said, "Though 75 per cent of the top party leaders were of the view that having an alliance with BJP was in the interests of both the parties, but citing the farm stir, they said Akali Dal should desist from having an alliance at this stage. All were unanimous not to go ahead with any alliance talks till the concerns of farmers are resolved".

However, if the farm stir continues, it would put the BJP on back foot and reduce its bargaining strength vis-a-vis Akalis.

PM DEGREE CASE

## HC refuses to quash summons against Kejriwal, Sanjay Singh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
AHMEDABAD, FEBRUARY 16

that proceedings can be initiated, Justice Suthar recorded that though the university is considered a state authority under Article 12, it, however, cannot be considered as a state for all purposes under Article 1 or claim any privilege or sovereign powers.

In a temporary relief to the two leaders in January, the Supreme Court had stayed the trial proceedings until February 16 while directing the Gujarat HC to decide their petitions by then. With Friday's verdict, the trial is due to commence again unless a further stay is granted by SC. The AAP leaders' counsels did not seek a stay on the HC order.

Arguing on behalf of Kejriwal and Singh, senior advocate Rebecca John had on February 2 made submissions that defamation charges are not made out, corroborative witnesses examined by the court were not independent witnesses but all GU employees and the university cannot be called an aggrieved person".

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Director

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SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Report submitted, quota to Marathas in special session

Mumbai: The Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission on Friday submitted a report on the social and educational backwardness of the Maratha community for which it had undertaken a survey of around 2.5 crore homes within a span of only nine days.

The report has not been made public, but sources said it has confirmed the social and educational backwardness of Marathas, and has put the onus on the state government to find a way to extend reservation to Marathas.

"We will be calling a special session of the legislature on February 20 to discuss the issue of Maratha reservation based on the report. We will first table it before the Cabinet. We are positive on this issue of giving reservation to Marathas without harming the reservation of OBCs," said Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. **ENS**

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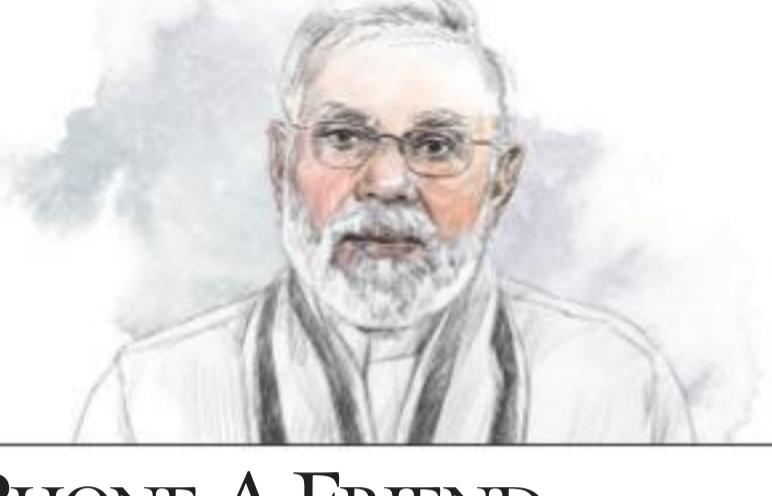
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For nomination, refer to the website: [www.curaj.ac.in](http://www.curaj.ac.in)

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DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



## PHONE A FRIEND

TO MOBILISE crowds for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally in Haryana's Rewari on Friday, the government, it seems, tried a new outreach. People got calls on their cell phones on Thursday evening, sometimes more than one call, with a male voice introducing himself as Union Minister Rao Inderjit Singh and requesting them to attend the Prime Minister's rally. PM Modi on Friday laid the foundation stone of AIIMS-Rewari, which will be a 750-bed hospital.

## LONG-DISTANCE DEFENCE

RAJYA SABHA member and lawyer Vivek Tankha represented the Congress before the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal on Friday from Singapore. The MP is visiting his daughter and son-in-law's house in Singapore to celebrate his grandson's second birthday. Tankha is expected to return in a day or two and argue the case before the tribunal on Wednesday. The Congress approached the tribunal after its bank accounts were frozen by the Income Tax department in connection with a dispute over a tax demand.

## LEADING LIGHTS

THE SARDAR Patel Marg in Delhi, which people often take to come to the Lutyens' zone from the airport, has been plastered with large cutouts of Central BJP leaders, one after another, attached to almost every lamp post. The cutouts welcome delegates to the national council of the party, which is being held in New Delhi on Saturday and Sunday.

## Fibernet case: Naidu named in Andhra CID charge sheet

**Amaravati:** The Crime Investigation Department of Andhra Pradesh Police on Friday filed the chargesheet in the Rs 114-crore AP Fibernet Scam case in the Vijayawada ACB Court, naming TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu as the main accused.

Besides Naidu, the CID named V Hari Krishna Prasad, managing director, Net India, Hyderabad and K Sambasiva Rao, IRTS officer, as the other accused persons, the CID said in a statement.

"Naidu, the then CM, was holding portfolio of energy, infrastructure and investment department. He personally recommended getting the fiber net project executed..." said the CID in the statement on the alleged tender manipulation case that occurred between 2014 and 2019. PTI

## India steadfast with its policy in support of peace in Afghanistan: Dy NSA Misri

**SHUBHAJIT ROY**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16



Spoke in  
Bishkek,  
Kyrgyzstan,  
on Friday

DEPUTY NATIONAL Security Adviser Vikram Misri Friday said Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has granted admission to more than 3,000 students, including 600 Afghan girls, since August 2021, and a Humanitarian Air Corridor between Delhi and Kabul has been created.

Speaking at the 6th Regional Dialogue of Secretaries of Security Councils/ National Security Advisors on Afghanistan in Bishkek Friday, Misri, sources said, underlined that on terrorism "our collective approach has

been articulated in UNSCR 2593. Afghan territory should not be used for sheltering, training, planning or financing terrorist acts; specifically, terrorist individuals proscribed by the UN Security Council, including those belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad."

According to sources, Misri said it is well established that any instability in Afghanistan is a threat to the whole region. Misri with the Afghan people date

## BID TO VITIATE ATMOSPHERE OF STATE, SAYS TMC MP

## Police stop Congress, BJP teams from visiting Sandeshkhali, cite restrictions

SWEETY KUMARI  
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 16

THE BJP and the Congress hit out at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Friday after their delegations were stopped by the police from visiting unrest-hit Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district due to prohibitory orders.

The six-member BJP delegation, which included Union Ministers Annapurna Devi and Pratima Bhowmick, was stopped at Rampur, barely five kilometres away from Sandeshkhali. The Congress team was led by the party's state unit chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and was stopped at Sarberia and Rampur. The parties called the action "unconstitutional and unethical".

Prohibitory orders under CrPC Section 144 have been imposed in Sandeshkhali after violent protests by local villages. The protesters accused local Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Shahjahan Sheikh and his aides of land grabbing, sexually harassing women and assaulting local labourers.

According to reports, a team of BJP leaders reached Rampur



BJP leader Agnimitra Paul with other party leaders sit on dharna; (right) Congress leader in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, in North 24 Parganas district on Friday. PTI

Friday morning where they were stopped by the police from proceeding towards Sandeshkhali.

The BJP leaders alleged that they were heckled by the police. The leaders sat on a dharna on the road for hours.

Devi told reporters: "It is unconstitutional and unethical to stop us and other MPs (from going to Sandeshkhali). You can't stop criminals but you are proactive in stopping MPs and ministers, who are here just to hear people's plight."

BJP MLA from South Asansol Agnimitra Paul said: "We said only five members will go, but

they still didn't let us go. Then, we asked for the two ministers to be allowed to go, but the police still did not budge."

The team also spoke to some of the women in Sandeshkhali on a video call. Around 1 pm, the BJP committee left for Raj Bhawan in Kolkata to meet Governor CV Ananda Bose.

Later, Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury protested on a road in Rampur after police stopped him from going to Sandeshkhali. The Behrampore MP questioned the installation of police barricades in Rampur. "It is a public road. Why are there bar-



SC to consider urgent hearing of plea on probe

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

THE SUPREME Court Friday said it will consider a request for urgent hearing of a petition seeking a court-monitored CBI or special investigation team (SIT) probe, on the lines of what was done in the Manipur sexual violence incidents, into allegations of sexual assault on women by members of the ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali.

Advocate Alakh Alok Srivastava who filed the petition urged CJ D Y Chandrachud Friday to take it up urgently. The CJ said he will look into the request.

Villagers in Sandeshkhali have pointed fingers at the abscunding Shahjahan Sheikh, a local TMC leader, for alleged atrocities. The plea cited a report published by *The Indian Express* on February 15, wherein some victims alleged molestation by accused persons but they kept silent out of fear.

TMC MP Shantanu Sen said: "Why did the BJP not show such proactivity in Hathras (in Uttar Pradesh). Police did the right thing by stopping the BJP delegation. It intends to vitiate the atmosphere of the state."

2021 Bengal poll violence: SC stays cases in trial court over CBI plea

ANANTHAKRISHNANG  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

ITS COUNSEL assaulted by alleged Trinamool Congress workers, a trial court in Birbhum granting bail to accused in a murder case even after the Calcutta HC cancelled the bail granted earlier, prosecution witnesses threatened — these are among the instances cited by the CBI before Supreme Court seeking transfer of trial outside the state in 45 cases arising out of the violence that followed the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections.

On February 14, a bench of Justice Sanjay Karol, while issuing notice on the CBI's plea, stayed the trial in the cases.

"Notice be issued returnable on 11.03.2024...In the meanwhile, further proceedings of the trial...shall remain stayed", the court ordered.

The agency, which had taken up the investigation in the cases on the order of the Calcutta HC, said that "while the trial has commenced in the...cases", it is facing severe hostility in the State of West Bengal and...has a justifiable and reasonable apprehension that in the current facts and situation, free and fair trial of the aforesaid cases in the State of West Bengal would not be possible..."

It said that "in many cases, the complainants or the prosecution witnesses and even the counsel for the prosecution agency have been threatened and manhandled, within the Court premises, thereby pressurising them to not depose truthfully before the concerned Trial Courts".

The agency said that "further, the state government has even failed to act on the complaints or threats received by the witnesses in the trials being conducted".

FULL REPORT  
[www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)

Held in 'ration scam', Mallick removed as Bengal minister

Kolkata: Months after he was arrested by the ED in connection with the ration distribution 'scam', the West Bengal government on Friday removed Jyoti Priya Mallick as the state forest minister and allocated the department to Bibarna Hansda.

Hansda is the MoS for Forests and Self-Help -Self-Employment Group (Independent Charge).

The portfolio of Public Enterprises and Industrial Reconstruction held by Mallick was allocated to Partha Bhowmick, according to a statement issued by the Raj Bhavan.

In October last year, Mallick was arrested by the central probe agency after marathon raids over alleged irregularities in the public distribution system (PDS) in Bengal. Mallick had held the food and civil supplies portfolio from 2011 to 2021 – when the alleged scam took place.

ENS



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with RJD leader and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav at a public meeting in Buxar district on Friday. PTI

## Tejashwi joins Rahul yatra in Bihar, calls Nitish a 'tired CM'

MAULSHREE SETH  
KAIMUR, BIHAR, FEB 16

RASHTRIYA JANATA Dal (RJD) LEADER Tejashwi Yadav joined Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra in Bihar on Friday, standing next to the Congress leader in a red-coloured vehicle and even driving it for a stretch.

This is the first time that both

these leaders were seen together

after the recent exit of Janata Dal (United) leader and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar from the INDIA bloc.

Both targeted Nitish as they

addressed a joint rally in

Dhaneycha area of Durgawati

block in Kaimur district of Bihar,

where Tejashwi referred to

Nitish as "Thake Hue Mukhya-

mantri," (Tired Chief Minister) while Rahul Gandhi equated Nitish with "actors standing next to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the limelight."

Maintaining that the RJD never wanted to enter into an alliance with Nitish in the first place, Tejashwi said, "The (Bihar) Chief Minister had come pleading before my parents and said he made a big mistake. He said that (Prime Minister) Modi was breaking his party. He sought forgiveness and asked to us to join hands with him to defeat the BJP."

"Woh thake hue mukhya-

mantri se, humne 5 lakh sarkar naukri dilwane ka kaam kiya..." (From that tired CM, Nitish Kumar ji, I ensured 5 lakh jobs

were generated...) claimed Tejashwi.

He said, "He (Nitish) had no answer as to why he sided with the BJP. Even I cannot say whether it was out of fear of the ED or the CBI."

Rahul Gandhi said that one would see actors along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and these days, sometimes even Nitish Kumar would also be seen along with PM, but neither him nor Tejashwi would be seen as they raise the issue of farmers, poor, labourers and small traders.

Rahul said that first step towards social justice is a caste-based census and added that first task is to find out how many Dalit, ST or backwards are there.

tween the south and the Centre. With the rise of population share in the Hindi heartland states, and decline in the south, the southern states feel they will be penalised for what should have been lauded as their achievement. The Tamil Nadu Assembly on Wednesday passed a resolution opposing delimitation.

With a political divide coinciding with the geographic divide, this could become problematic as the Congress and regional parties are in power in the southern states and the BJP is in the saddle in the Hindi heartland. The BJP in that case may not have the instrumentalities to navigate the southern terrain when problems arise.

Thus, the PM's southern outreach in the lead-up to the Ram Temple consecration – he visited major temples in the region with links to the Hindu deity – was a welcome step. For the same reason of stopping a political divide from turning into a geographic one, it is just as important for the Congress to revive in Uttar

Pradesh and retain its hold in north India.

But then again, the BJP may decide it can ignore these voices from afar. The party can calculate that it can be home and dry with more than 300 Lok Sabha seats after sweeping the Hindi heartland on the strength of the Ram Temple issue and given that Gujarat is likely to stay by its side and Maharashtra is now on its radar.

In the past, those who have ignored these signs have rue their decision. Given Modi's pan-India popularity and that he is on the cusp of a likely third term, he has the space to ensure that an already polarised polity doesn't open new fault lines along geographic lines. That too when leaders who can step across the aisle and talk to the other side, or just be ready to listen, are few and far between nowadays.

Neerja Chowdhury, Contributing Editor, has covered the last 10 Lok Sabha polls. She is the author of *'How Prime Ministers Decide'*



Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah, Deputy CM DK Shivakumar and other state ministers protest in Delhi last week. Tashi Tobgyal

both at home and abroad. Yet, voices from different parts of India – from the north to the east to the south – are trying to make themselves heard.

At the moment, farmers from Punjab are trying to seek a better deal for themselves with their "Dilli Chalo" cry, demanding, among other things, a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for their crops. Legally guaranteed MSP is just one of the demands in their 10-point charter.

No one knows the import of optics in politics better than the PM. And yet the protesters were met with barricades, concrete slabs covered with barbed wires, and drones dropping tear gas as the BJP-led Haryana government stopped them at the Punjab border, refusing to let them through.

A team of three Union Ministers, including Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, have been engaging in dialogue with the farm unions; even after a long session on Thursday night, tear gas was

used Friday morning.

One argument the farmers are making is that they need a better deal. The 2018-19 government figures put the average income of a farmer from agriculture at Rs 27 a day. The situation, therefore, calls for urgent reforms and a safety net for the farmers. A legally guaranteed MSP is fraught but the government needs to come up with viable options as farmers in Punjab are increasingly losing their pride in being a kisan even as their relatives in the UK, USA, or even Gurgaon do much better financially.

The northeast, Manipur continues to be a reminder of what might have been had an early intervention taken place.

From the south, there have been recent calls for "financial justice". Last week, the CMs of Karnataka and Kerala came to Delhi for a "Chalo Delhi" campaign of their own, accompanied by their ministerial colleagues and MLAs, and protested against

"financial excesses" by the Centre. While Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah and his team held a dharna at the Jantar Mantar on February 7, Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan followed suit the next day. Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin lent support to Vijayan.

The protest by Karnataka came days after Congress MP DK Suresh, the brother of Deputy CM DK Shivakumar, triggered a row

# GOVT & POLITICS

If (Kamal Nath) is pained about Congress insulting Ram, he is welcome (to join us): BJP's MP chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
BHOPLA, FEBRUARY 16

BJP'S MADHYA Pradesh state unit president V D Sharma Friday said former chief minister Kamal Nath is welcome to join the ruling party if he has pain in his heart that the Congress insulted Lord Ram by boycotting the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony invite.

Sharma made the statement in Bhopal during a media interaction, while addressing rumours of Nath joining the BJP.

"If someone has belief in the BJP leadership and believes in its policies, for such people the doors are open," Sharma said. "We have opened our doors to those in the Congress who think that their party boycotted the Ram Mandir consecration event. Ram is in Bharat's mind and Ram resides in its heart. He was insulted by the Congress. If these leaders have pain in their heart, then they should be given an opportunity."

"The name you are taking (Nath), if in his heart he has such pain, then I think he is welcome." Congress party leaders have said talk of Nath joining the BJP are nothing more than rumours spread by the ruling party to poach leaders before the Lok Sabha elections.

Several leaders close to Nath, including Jabalpur Mayor Jagat Bahadur Singh 'Ann', have left the Congress and joined the BJP.

Nath was asked earlier this month about the rumours, to which he said, "There are so many rumours going on, what can I say about them?" Nath had last month criticised the BJP for politicising the consecration event. "The way the BJP has given a political hue to



V D Sharma (left) and Kamal Nath. File

this programme and tried to bring religion on political platform is unfortunate and sad. Lord Ram has always been, and will always be, at the centre of faith for all of us. Politics on this is like playing with religious freedom and traditions," he said.

He and his son, the current MP of Chhindwara, Nakul, are currently on a tour of the constituency. Nakul has announced himself as the Lok Sabha candidate in Chhindwara, despite the Congress high command not formally making the announcement.

Nath has been participating in "abhaarsabhas" in several villages of Chhindwara, where he meets locals, apart from being involved in and block level meetings with Congress leaders and karyakartas.

Earlier this month, BJP leader Sumita Mahajan had said, "If he (Nath) wants to come and do good work for the nation, he should join by taking Ram's name and work. Those who want to join for work, they are all welcome." Senior BJP leader and state Urban Development and Housing Minister, Kailash Vijayvargiya, had on the other hand said all doors were closed for Nath.

"We will not accept him; our doors are closed. Why would we take him? When you go to the market, will you take fresh or rotten fruit?" he had said.

INSAT-3DS, a 2,274 kg satellite with a mission life of 10 years, will

GSLV-F14 to lift off at 5.35 pm; INSAT-3DS to have a mission life of 10 years

ANONNA DUTT  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

METEOROLOGICAL SATELLITE INSAT-3DS will be launched into space onboard a Geosynchronous Launch Vehicle (GSLV) Saturday evening, in a crucial mission for the rocket nicknamed "naughty boy" for its spotty record.

The GSLV-F14 will lift off at 5.35 pm Saturday from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, the ISRO said. It will be the rocket's 16th mission overall and its 10th flight using the indigenously developed cryogenic engine.

The mission's success will be crucial for the GSLV, which is scheduled to carry later this year the Earth observation satellite, NISAR, which is being jointly developed by NASA and ISRO.

NISAR will map the entire globe in 12 days and provide "spatially and temporally consistent" data for understanding changes in Earth's ecosystems, ice mass, sea level rise and natural hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis, according to ISRO.

At least four of the 15 launches using the GSLV so far have been unsuccessful. In comparison, only three of the 60 missions so far by ISRO's workhorse PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle), and none of the seven by its successor LVM-3, have failed.

INSAT-3DS, a 2,274 kg satellite with a mission life of 10 years, will



INSAT-3DS, a 2,274 kg meteorological satellite, set for launch at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. PTI

take over the functions of INSAT-3D (launched in 2013) and INSAT-3DR (September 2016) that have come to the end of their mission life. It has been fully funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

After around 18 minutes of launch, the satellite will be injected in a 36,647 km x 170 km elliptical orbit.

Once operational, it will provide advanced weather observations of both land and ocean surfaces. It will help in short-range forecasts of extreme weather events such as thunderstorms, provide visibility estimation for aviation, and help in studying forest fire, smoke, snow cover, climate studies.

According to ISRO, Cartosat-2's natural de-orbiting phase was initially estimated to be around 30 years since launch, but given its lowering onboard fuel, it was decided to lower its perigee – the point of its orbit at which the satellite is closest to



Cartosat-2 in an ISRO clean room before its launch in 2007. ISRO

Earth – from 635 km to 380 km in 2020.

On February 14 this year, the orbit was further lowered to 130 km before it was finally deorbited, facilitating its re-entry over the eastern regions of the Indian Ocean.

Among various parameters of what constitutes misleading advertisements by a coaching are concealing important information related to name of the course (whether free or paid) & duration of course opted by successful candidate, making false claims regarding success rates, selections or rankings without providing verifiable evidence, and falsely representing students' success as solely attributable to the coaching.

Also, any person in a coaching will not use names, photos, testimonials or videos of successful candidates in advertisement without express consent, state or lead the consumers to believe that enrollment in coaching will guarantee the student a rank, high marks, temporary or permanent job, admissions to institutions, job promotions, salary increase, etc.

Before drafting, the CCPA had formed a panel on December 8, 2023 to deliberate on the issue of misleading advertisement in coaching sector. It also held a stakeholder consultation on January 8, 2024.

Draft govt rules on coaching centre ads: No false claims of 100% selection

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

THE CENTRE Friday unveiled draft guidelines to curb misleading advertisements by coaching institutions, which said that any person engaged with coaching centres will not make false claims, including 100 per cent selection or 100 per cent job guarantee.

The guidelines, drafted by the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) titled Prevention of Misleading Advertisement in Coaching Sector, released by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, sought public opinion within 30 days.

Among various parameters of what constitutes misleading advertisements by a coaching are concealing important information related to name of the course (whether free or paid) & duration of course opted by successful candidate, making false claims regarding success rates, selections or rankings without providing verifiable evidence, and falsely representing students' success as solely attributable to the coaching.

With the skies becoming more crowded due to the entry of private players, experts are worried about an increasing threat from space debris, which poses a collision risk for satellites, especially in low-Earth orbit.

Until 2019, the satellite equipped with over 12,000 coupled charged devices used its "panchromatic and multi-spectral cameras" to generate high-resolution images that were extensively used for urban planning, monitoring of road networks and water distribution, creation of land use maps, among others.

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## Champai keeps Home as Hemant's brother enters Jharkhand Cabinet



Basant Soren after the swearing-in ceremony in Ranchi on Friday. PTI

ENS & PTI  
RANCHI, FEBRUARY 16

JHARKHAND GOVERNOR C P Radhakrishnan Friday administered oath to eight ministers, including former Chief Minister Hemant Soren's brother and Dumka MLA Basant Soren and Chaibasa MLA Deepak Birua.

With the addition of the two new faces, the Jharkhand Government expanded its cabinet to 10 ministers. Later, Jharkhand CM Champai Soren allotted portfolios to ministers, keeping key departments like Home and Personnel for himself in addition to those not allocated to other legislators. Basant Soren was given charge of Road Construction, Building Construction and Water Resources.

Biru (JMM), who belongs to the Ho tribe, was given the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe/OBC welfare and transport ministries. Satyanand Bhokta (RJD) was re-assigned the labour portfolio, and also given charge of the Industry Department.

JMM MLA Baidyanath Ram, who was allegedly dropped

Important to name who forced MLAs to resign, says Rajasthan ex-LoP

**Jaipur:** Former Leader of Opposition Rajendra Rathore on Friday said it is important to reveal the name of the person who 'forced' the Congress MLAs and ministers to submit their resignations in September 2022 since they had claimed that the signatures were not voluntary.

The matter pertains to resignations of 81 MLAs in September 2022. Since then, both sides have made claims and counter claims over the validity of the Speaker's decision to reject the resignations.

Leader of Opposition and senior BJP member Amar Bauri alleged the JMM-led ruling alliance in Jharkhand has "betrayed" the Dalit community by "dropping" Ram. He said almost the same faces, who were in the previous

Hemant Soren Cabinet, have been inducted as ministers, which shows the "actual intention" of the Champai Soren government.

Jharkhand Congress in-charge Ghulam Ahmad Mir said, "Finally, there is a full Cabinet under Champai Soren ji. They should aim at completing all the unfinished tasks."

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**MANIPUR VIOLENCE**

# Minor among 2 dead, Kuki group calls for shutdown

SUKRITA BARUAH  
GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 16

THE KUKI-DOMINATED Churachandpur district in Manipur remained on the boil Friday, a day after a mob of hundreds stormed the offices of the Superintendent of Police and the Deputy Commissioner. As security forces retaliated, two people – 29-year-old Letalkhoul Gangte and a youth aged 15 – were killed. The mob had gathered on Thursday night to protest the suspension of a Kuki head constable over a video showing him alongside armed men from the community.

On Friday, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum – an influential Kuki-Zo organisation – called for a shutdown in protest against the two deaths and issued a public notice stating that it held the Superintendent of Police Shivanand Surve and Deputy Commissioner S Dharun Kumar "entirely responsible" for the incident.

"As high-ranking officials, the SP and DC are fully aware of the nature of the conflict in Manipur and the sensitivities involved on the ground. But that did not stop from acting in a manner that would lead to tension and violence," it stated, adding that the "firing order on civilians is done by the District Magistrate".

The ITL threatened that if the suspension of the head consta-

ble was not withdrawn within 24 hours and the two officers did not leave, all government offices would be closed and "both the SP and DC will bear the responsibilities for any untoward incidents that may fall on them".

They also demanded that the two officers – both from the Manipur cadre – be replaced by Union Territory cadre officers, "preferably from the Kuki-Zo community".

While Surve could not be reached for a comment, Kumar told The Indian Express, "We will take a decision based on the situation as the SP and DC cannot abandon people of a district and disappear. We have to protect the general public come what may, that is why we are here... We are All India Service officers who have come from faraway places to help people and work under challenging circumstances. We have no issue in serving in any location where the government deems fit."

In his order suspending the head constable, seen at what appears to be a "frontline" firing position in the hills, the SP had said it was "tantamount to a very grave misconduct".

On Thursday night, the mob had also set ablaze state property which, according to security officials, resulted in damage to the DC's official residence, parts of his office, and several vehicles. Dozens were injured as security forces repelled the mob.

Speaking at the inauguration event of the Dr Rajendra Prasad National Law University here, Chandrachud said, "Technology has given us the ability to reach out to far-flung students. Despite developments in legal education, the contemporary legal-education system favours only English-speaking urban children."

He said, "A survey conducted on diversity in five law universities shows that children from diverse backgrounds are unable to get admission in these universities because of not being able to speak English."

Rs 210 crore in our accounts.

**What did you tell the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal?**

My first argument was that when we have approximately Rs 210 crore in our accounts and the claim is for Rs 135 crore, why should you freeze all the accounts? You cannot freeze more than what we owe you finally, even if we don't succeed in winning the appeal. Secondly, I said elections are a festival of democracy. We, the Congress, are one of the largest stakeholders of this festival. And on the eve of the festival, if you are choking us completely, then this stakeholder will be out of that festival. So, I asked whether the I-T Department doesn't want democracy to survive in India. Thirdly, I said the Congress had an income of approximately Rs 199 crore. We had an approved expenditure of Rs 197.5 crore. We had a surplus of Rs 1.5 crore. So, set aside the entire return and reject everything that I have done and say that the whole thing is taxable, it is a disproportionate action. And for what? They are saying we were 15 days late. In my view, we were not late. My date was till March 31. I filed it in early February. That

**Since when has this dispute been going on?**

In 2021, there was an order by the Assessment Officer. Then we filed an appeal before the Appellate Commissioner, which was decided in early 2023, against which we filed an appeal before ITAT in May 2023. I told the Tribunal that as an Additional Solicitor General when I used to appear for the Income Tax (Department), Chief Justice (S H) Kapadia would always tell me that an assessee had practically no real opportunity in the first stage and second stage. That is when you are before departmental officers. The first independent opportunity comes only when you come before ITAT. I cited this and told the Tribunal that it is my first independent opportunity for justice.



**THE EXPRESS INTERVIEW**  
WITH  
**VIVEK TANKHA**  
SENIOR ADVOCATE & RAJYA SABHA MP

**What did the appellate tribunal say?**

We sought a stay on the order freezing our accounts and sought their de-freezing... told them that we would only maintain a lien. So the Tribunal agreed... We have to maintain a minimum account. They said Rs 115 crore would be the lien. We can operate our accounts. The tribunal will hear the matter

next Wednesday before a final decision is taken on the matter.

**What does this mean for your daily operations?**

On Wednesday, they (the tribunal) will hear the interim application and decide what terms and conditions have to be imposed. That crisis of not being able to operate our accounts is over.

**What will be your legal option if the tribunal rules against you?**

We will approach the High Court. But we are hopeful that we will get a good order in ITAT. It was very gracious of the Tribunal to have intervened in favour of the assessee and allowed us to operate the bank accounts. We are an over 130-year-old party. And we are one of the biggest stakeholders in the current elections. Can you have the festival of democracy without the Congress?

**The bank accounts were frozen a day before the Supreme Court verdict on electoral bonds ...**

The government is only getting bad publicity. They are not getting good publicity.

DGCA notice to Air India over death of elderly passenger at Mumbai airport

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 16

THE DIRECTORATE General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday said it has slapped a showcase notice on Air India after one of its passengers recently collapsed allegedly due to non-availability of a wheelchair at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai, leading to his death.

It has been alleged the elderly passenger waited for a wheelchair, but as he did not get timely access to wheelchair at the airport he decided to walk, which eventually led to his fatal fall.

The passenger has been identified as Babu Patel, 76, who had arrived from New York on February 12 by flight AI-116. He was accompanied by his spouse Narmadaben Patel.

As per information released by authorities, both passengers had booked wheelchairs. The passengers were requested to wait as there was a high demand for wheelchairs.

One wheelchair was available for Narmadaben. Patel decided to start walking along with his wife, who was in a wheelchair.

After walking a short distance, Patel collapsed near the APHO Office.

The Mumbai International Airport Ltd (MIAL) doctor was called and after examining the passenger, he was asked to be hospitalised after being given CPR.

The passenger was rushed to Nanavati Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. The exact cause of the death has not been specified yet.

Taking a serious note of the incident, the DGCA has called for a report from the airline. The apex aviation body informed that as per rules airlines are mandatorily required to provide assistance to persons with disability (Divyangan) or reduced mobility.

Accordingly, a showcase notice has been issued to Air India for not complying with the provisions of the CAR in violation of Aircraft Rules, 1937 and submit a reply to DGCA within seven days of the issue of the notice, a DGCA statement states.

**GUJARAT**

## 2 constables, homeguard among four held for rape

GOPAL KATESHIYA  
RAJKOT, FEBRUARY 16

TWO POLICE constables, a homeguard and an alleged aide of a local policeman were arrested by the Gir Somnath Police on Friday, two days after a 28-year-old widow accused them of raping her repeatedly in lieu of allowing her to sell liquor.

The police identified the accused as Salim Bloch, Mohan Makwana, Paresh Shingoda and Hanif Shahmadar. While Bloch and Makwana are constables attached to two units of district police, Shahmadar is a homeguard.

Shingoda, the police said, is a private person who identified himself as the aide of a policeman. As per the complaint, the woman's husband, who used to sell liquor illegally, had died last January. Following this, the woman, a mother of three children, started selling liquor to support her family. The statement said it was then that Bloch, Makwana and Shingoda started demanding money and sexual favours from her. They allegedly repeatedly sexually assaulted her while Shahmadar demanded sexual favours from her over telephone. Based on a complaint filed by the woman, a case was lodged on Thursday.

Express News Service  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

AN ABSCONDING murder convict with an Interpol Red Notice against him was repatriated from the UAE Friday in an operation coordinated by the CBI using the international police agency's channels.

"(Convict) Narendar Singh was wanted by Haryana Police in a murder case registered on December 26, 1994, at Tohana police station. He had allegedly hacked to death a certain Swaran Singh using a machete. He was acquitted by the trial court in 1998 but the Punjab and Haryana High Court awarded him life-term in 2009," a CBI spokesperson said.

The state police had approached the CBI seeking an Interpol Red Notice against Singh suspecting that he had gone missing. "The CBI had got a Red Notice issued against him from the Interpol General

Secretariat on November 7, 2023, on a request by the Haryana Police. The notice was circulated to all Interpol member countries for location and arrest of the accused," the spokesperson said.

Using Interpol channels, the CBI managed to locate him in the UAE. "The Global Operations Centre of the CBI coordinated with Interpol NCB Abu Dhabi, Haryana Police, Embassy of India in Abu Dhabi, Ministry of External Affairs, and a Red Notice subject was returned today (Friday) from the UAE to India with a security detail from the STF of Haryana Police," the spokesperson said.

"Due to close coordination and follow up with foreign law enforcement agencies via Interpol channels, 29 criminals wanted by Indian law enforcement agencies were returned from abroad in 2023. The CBI got published 100 Red Notices through Interpol on fugitives wanted by Indian agencies in 2023," the spokesperson said.

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MOTIVE STILL UNKNOWN

## California police suspect Kerala man killed wife, 2 sons before shooting self

**SHAJU PHILIP**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
FEBRUARY 16

POLICE IN San Mateo, California, have said that the deaths of a couple from Kerala and their two minor children were the result of a murder-suicide.

It was on Monday that the bodies of Anand Henry (42), his wife Alice Benzigar (40), and their minor twin sons were found at their home. The couple were from Kollam in Kerala, and had moved to the US seven years ago, working as IT professionals.

In an official release on Thursday, San Mateo police said: "Both Anand and Alice succumbed to gunshot wounds. Anand has been identified as the suspect. A 9mm handgun legally registered to Anand was located on the bathroom floor where both adults' bodies were located. Our investigation shows Alice succumbed to multiple gunshot wounds, while Anand suffered from a single shot. The cause of death for the minor boys is still pending pathology, but we can confirm they did not die from gunfire or show signs of bodily trauma."

Police said their probe into the motive behind the crime is still on. "There is no history of violence at home. The incident seems to have happened last Saturday afternoon," they said.

Police had entered the house through an unlocked window after not receiving a response when they arrived to conduct a welfare check on Monday. Inside the house, they found the four

bodies, but could not find any sign of forced entry.

Anand was the son of Dr Henry, who had retired as the principal of Fathima Matha College in Kollam, and retired school teacher Santhamma. Alice, daughter of Benzigar and Juliet, was also from the same district.

Alice's mother had been with her daughter and family in California for nearly a year, and returned home just a week ago.

When the news of the tragedy reached Kerala, Dr Henry was away at Madurai in Tamil Nadu. "He does not know what actually led to the murder and suicide. His other sons have gone to the USA. They plan to bring the bodies to Kollam for burial. However, no final decision has been taken so far," sources close to the family said.

Henry and Santhamma had six sons. "Two elder sons died years ago – one in an accident and another in a suspected suicide. All the six sons were highly educated and well settled. They all moved to different parts of the world. While Anand was in the US, his brothers Ajesh, Antony and Ajith moved to Singapore, Australia and UAE, respectively," family sources said.

Anand and Alice had moved to the US seven years ago, where Anand had worked with Google before recently launching his own venture. He had come to Kerala on vacation in the past, but had never taken his family along with him.

**Tribunal formed to see if SIMI can be banned under UAPA**

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

THE MINISTRY of Home Affairs has constituted a tribunal headed by a Delhi High Court judge to adjudicate whether there is sufficient cause for declaring the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) as a banned group under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

On January 29, the Central Government had extended the ban on SIMI for five more years.

In a gazetted notification issued on Friday, the officer said: "Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred... the Central government hereby constitutes the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal consisting of Justice Purushadra Kumar Kaurav, Judge, High Court of Delhi, for the purpose of adjudicating whether or not there is sufficient cause for declaring the SIMI as an unlawful association."

The government had said the group has been involved in fermenting terrorism and disturbing peace and communal harmony. Ten states – Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, UP – have recommended declaring SIMI an unlawful association under the UAPA.

**BRIBERY CASE**

**Jalandhar regional passport officer among three held**

*New Delhi:* Three persons, including Jalandhar regional passport officer Anup Singh, have been arrested by the CBI for allegedly receiving bribes to issue a passport.

Singh was arrested along with two assistant passport officers, Hari Om and Sanjay Srivastava. During searches on Friday, the CBI seized Rs 20 lakh cash and incriminating documents," a CBI spokesman said. A case has been registered against Hari Om on a complaint that he had demanded Rs 25,000 for issuing two passports. "It was alleged that the complainant had applied for fresh passports for his granddaughter and grandson," he said.

**ENS**

**REMARKS AGAINST HINDU DEITIES'**

## School head: Karnataka teacher suspended due to 'pressure from BJP MLA'

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**

BENGALURU, FEBRUARY 16

DAYS AFTER an English teacher in Mangaluru was suspended reportedly over her comments against Hindu deities, the school authority said they were forced to suspend her allegedly under pressure from a BJP MLA.

Speaking to the mediapersons, St Gerosa English Higher Primary School headmistress Sister Anitha said English teacher sister Prabha "did not make any comments that would hurt religious sentiments but had to suspend her as MLA Vedavyas Kamath along with a group of

**RAVIK BHATTACHARYA & ATRI MITRA**

KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 16

SIXTY-TWO CHILDBIRTHS took place in the jails of West Bengal in the last four years with most of these women inmates already expecting at the time of being brought to prisons, says a report prepared on the basis of the information shared by the state's Department of Correctional Services that was submitted in the Supreme Court.

The report, filed by apex court amicus curiae advocate

Gaurav Agarwal, further says that in some cases the women prisoners became pregnant when they had gone out on parole.

Titled "Application for directions on behalf of amicus curiae", the report says the Additional Director General (ADG) and the Inspector General (IG), West Bengal Correctional Services, informed Agarwal in this regard.

Of the 62 women in question, 11 women were deported to Bangladesh along with their children, it says. In 'Annexure-A4' (pages 13 to 19), the report shares details of these women inmates.

Six women "expressed about pregnancy during the first health screening", 20 "detected on admission screening and confirmed after test", 32 were "received with pregnancy", while four women were "received with pregnancy after coming back from parole", the report reads.

According to the list, 20 cases were reported from the Dum Dum central correctional home, six from Jalpaiguri central correctional home, five each from the Alipore women correctional home, five each from the Krishnanagar district correctional home and the Midnapore

central correctional home, four from the Berhampore central correctional home, three cases each from the Burdwan central correctional home, Balurghat central correctional home and the Cooch Behar district correctional home, two each from the Bankura district correctional home and the district correctional home in Raiganj, and one case each from the Hooghly district correctional home, Suri district correctional home, Siliguri special correctional home and the Jhargram special correctional home.

"There is the need for a complete security audit of women's jails and barracks across the country. Also, there is the need to examine medical facilities in women's jails to ensure that proper examinations of women are conducted at the time of being lodged and at regular intervals," the report says.

"The senior-most woman judicial officer in the district may be requested to assess the available security measures in the women's jails/barracks," it added.

The amicus curiae also suggested the need for checking the availability of sufficient women

personnel for the purposes of security and welfare of women prisoners and their regular health check-ups.

On February 8, submissions were made by an amicus curiae in a writ petition before a division bench of the Calcutta High Court on inhuman conditions in prisons, highlighting that women inmates were getting pregnant in different jails of West Bengal.

Later, the Supreme Court took up the matter and decided to examine the issue of women's condition in jails on a pan-India basis.

## For second time in a week, elephant tramples man to death in Wayanad

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
FEBRUARY 16

Mananthavady. Later, he was moved to the Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode, where he was declared dead.

This is the third death in Wayanad from elephant attacks this year. On January 30, N Lakshmanan, an estate watcher at Tholpetty in the district, was killed in an elephant attack. Then, on February 10, a farmer named Ajesh was killed by a radio-collared wild elephant in the district, triggering massive protests.

The victim, Vellachalil Paul (49), was on duty near Kuruvadweep, also known as Kuruvu Island, a prominent eco-tourism destination in Wayanad. Paul is a member of the Vana Samarakshana Samithi (forest protection committee) at the eco-tourism destination. Members of the samithi, under the aegis of the Forest Department, are involved in the running of the eco-tourism centre.

According to Pulpally panchayat member Jolly Narithookkal, who represents Kuruvu Island, the tourist destination was closed for visitors after last week's elephant attack in Mananthavady. "However, people would still come to the island. He was put on duty at a junction (around 400 metres from Kuruvu Island), known as Cheriyamala, to inform the visitors about there being no entry into the island. At around 9.30 am, when he spotted a herd of elephants in the forest nearby, Paul tried to escape. But while running away, he fell on the ground and an elephant walked over him, crushing his chest," the panchayat member said.

Details of his leaves show that between January and June 2015, a 14-day furlough had turned to 136 days of leave owing to Chandana surrendering late by 122 days. Chandana and 10 other life

term convicts in the Bilkis Bano case had surrendered shortly before midnight on January 21, after the SC on January 8 annulled the remission and premature release granted to them by the Gujarat government on August 15, 2022.

According to the Gujarat government's affidavit before the Supreme Court in October 2022, Chandana was out of jail for 1,576 days (1,198 days of parole and 378 days of furlough) – the maximum among the 11 convicts in the case – during the period of his incarceration since 2008.

Chandana surrendered late by 122 days.

Chandana and 10 other life

term convicts in the Bilkis Bano case had surrendered shortly before midnight on January 21, after the SC on January 8 annulled the remission and premature release granted to them by the Gujarat government on August 15, 2022.

The Gujarat government had released the convicts as per its 1992 remission policy, based on a May 2022 SC order in a petition filed by one of the convicts, Radheshyam Shah. Bano had challenged the state government's decision before the SC.

Bano was 21 years old and five months pregnant when she was gangraped while fleeing with her family from Randhikpur during the 2002 Gujarat riots.

Fourteen members of her family, including her three-year-old daughter, were also killed.

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Hunter Biden

**Ex-FBI man charged with lying on Hunter Biden ties to firm**

**Washington:** An FBI informant has been charged with fabricating a multi-million-dollar bribery scheme involving President Joe Biden, his son Hunter, and a Ukrainian energy company, a claim that is central to the Republican impeachment inquiry in Congress. Alexander Smirnov falsely reported to the FBI in June 2020 that executives associated with the Ukrainian energy company Burisma paid Hunter and Joe Biden USD 5 million each in 2015 or 2016, prosecutors said in an indictment. Smirnov told his handler that an executive claimed to have hired Hunter to "protect us, through his dad, from all kinds of problems," according to court documents.

AP

**GREECE**  
**Greece makes same-sex marriage legal**

**Athens:** Greece Thursday became the first Orthodox Christian country to legalize same-sex civil marriage, despite opposition from the influential, socially conservative Greek Church. Across-party majority of 176 lawmakers in the 300-seat parliament voted late Thursday in favor of the landmark bill drafted by Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' center-right government. AP

**NEPAL**  
**Voice to drop secular tag get louder in party**

**Kathmandu:** As voices get louder across the country to drop 'secularism' from the Nepal Constitution, its echo is now being heard in the Nepali congress, the biggest party in Parliament and the ruling coalition. At least 22 central committee members of the party on Thursday submitted a written petition to the party secretariat demanding that the party General Assembly beginning February 19 'resolve to seek Nepal's return to Hindu state dropping 'secularism' from the current constitution. Nepal was the world's only Hindu Kingdom till 2006 and it became a secular republic in 2008, with scattered but large traditional groups opposing it. ENS

**Egypt building wall near Gaza as Israel plans Rafah offensive**



Protesters with a portrait of Alexei Navalny in front of the Russian embassy in Berlin on Friday. Reuters

**Putin and his govt... lie incessantly. But if this is true, I want Putin, his entire entourage, Putin's friends, his govt to know that they will bear responsibility for what they did to our country, to my family, to my husband**

**YULIA,  
ALEXEI NAVALNY'S WIFE**

Russia is responsible for this," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said before meeting Navalny's wife in Munich.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharchova said the death was still being probed, but "the West's conclusions are already ready."

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is shocked by the reported death in detention of Navalny and calls for a "full, credible and transparent

**Putin tried and failed to murder Navalny quickly and secretly with poison, and now he has murdered him slowly and publicly in prison. He was killed for exposing Putin and his mafia as the crooks and thieves they are**

**GARRY KASPAROV  
EX-WORLD CHESS CHAMPION**

ent investigation" into the circumstances, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

US President Joe Biden blamed Putin for Navalny's death, saying he was "not surprised" but "outraged" by the opposition leader's passing. "...there is no doubt that the death of Navalny was a consequence of something that Putin and his thugs did," Biden said.

"Putin fears nothing more than dissent from his own people."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Russia has ques-

**RUSSIAN OPP LEADER'S DEATH****HALEY BLASTS TRUMP FOR 'PUTIN TIES'**

Republican presidential contender Nikki Haley slammed Donald Trump Friday for maintaining an amiable relationship with Vladimir Putin. "Donald Trump continues to side with Putin - a man who kills his political opponents, holds journalists hostage, and has never hidden his desire to destroy America," Haley said in a statement.

**PUTIN RESPONSIBLE, SAYS BIDEN;**  
rot at the heart of the system: Blinken

# World leaders denounce Putin over Navalny's death: Murdered in jail

**Death under probe, but West's conclusions are already ready, says Kremlin**

**AGENCIES  
MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 16**

**ALEXEI NAVALNY,** Russian President Vladimir Putin's most formidable opponent, collapsed and died on Friday after a walk at the "Polar Wolf" Arctic penal colony where he was serving a 19-year jail term on extremism charges, the Russian prison service said.

The death of Navalny, a 47-year-old former lawyer, robs the disparate Russian opposition of its most courageous leader as Putin prepares for an election which will keep the former KGB spy in power until at least 2030.

Navalny's wife, Yulia, told the Munich Security Conference she could not be sure her husband was dead because "Putin and his government... lie incessantly".

The Kremlin said Putin had been informed. Putin was shown meeting workers at a factory in Chelyabinsk, in the Ural mountains. Western leaders paid tribute to Navalny's courage as a fighter for freedom. Some accused the Kremlin of murder and said Putin should be held accountable for the death.

"His death in a Russian prison and the fixation and fear of one man only underscores the weakness and rot at the heart of the system that Putin has built.

Russia is responsible for this," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said before meeting Navalny's wife in Munich.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is shocked by the reported death in detention of Navalny and calls for a "full, credible and transparent

**Zelenskyy says Putin doesn't care who dies, must lose everything**

**ASSOCIATED PRESS  
TALLINN, ESTONIA, FEB 16**

WORLD LEADERS and Russian opposition activists wasted no time Friday in blaming the reported death of Alexei Navalny on President Vladimir Putin and his government.

"It is obvious that he was killed by Putin," said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who was visiting Germany for the Munich Security Conference as he sought aid for his country as it fights off an invasion by Russia. "Putin doesn't care who dies – only for him to hold his position. Putin must lose everything and be held responsible for his deeds," Zelenskyy added.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz praised the Kremlin critic's bravery and said his death makes clear "what kind of regime this is."

Piotr Verzilov, a member of the Russian protest group Pussy Riot, said "Navalny was murdered in prison." In a post on X, Verzilov added: "We will definitely take revenge and destroy this regime."

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said Navalny's death showed that "Putin fears nothing more than dissent from his own people."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Russia has ques-

**E** Opp voice falls silent in Russia

THERE ARE now no opposition leaders of such prominence left in Russia.

For some young urban Russians, Navalny also offered hope of an alternative future to Putin. His death would leave the country without its most prominent opposition voice at a time when Putin has amassed near-total power, invaded neighboring Ukraine and drawn the sharpest divisions with US-led Western allies since the end of the Cold War.

tions to answer. US Vice President Kamala Harris, also in Munich, called his death "a further sign of Putin's brutality" and that "whatever story they tell – let us be clear – Russia is responsible."

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron echoed her remarks, saying "we should hold Putin accountable for this."

Canadian PM Justin Trudeau said: "It shows the extent to which Putin will crack down on anyone who is fighting for freedom."

# UK bypoll results deliver double trouble for Sunak

**ADITI KHANNA  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 16**

BRITISH PRIME Minister Rishi Sunak suffered two heavy blows to his leadership ahead of a general election later this year as the Opposition Labour Party overturned strong Conservative majorities to win by-elections in England on Friday.

Labour's Dan Egan won the House of Commons seat of Kingswood, south-west England, and the party's Gen Kitchen won Wellingborough, in the East Midlands region of England. The results reflect double trouble for the British Indian leader as the Conservatives had won both seats by decisive margins at the last general election under Boris Johnson in December 2019.

Another emerging trend saw the far-right Reform UK – the re-organised anti-immigration Brexit Party – coming third, ahead of the Liberal Democrats and Green Party, piling further pressure on the Conservatives on contentious issues such as migration. The latest results from this week's polls are the ninth and 10th by-election defeats for the Tory-led government since the 2019 general election.

The by-poll in Kingswood was held after Tory leader Chris Skidmore resigned as an MP in protest over Sunak's green policies. Labour's Egan managed to overturn his majority of more than 18,000 in the seat.

In Wellingborough, the vote followed Tory MP Peter Bone being recalled by his constituency over claims of bullying and sexu-



Labour Party says people want change, ruling party says support for Sunak leadership is solid

ally inappropriate behaviour, which he denies. Labour's Kitchen overturned his majority of more than 18,000 to win the seat with a swing of 28.5 per cent – the second highest of all time.

The Kingswood and Wellingborough results show that people want change and are ready to put their faith in a changed Labour Party to deliver it," said Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer. The twin defeats will come as a major blow for the governing Tories as they prepare for a general election, which Sunak, 43, has indicated will be held in the second half of the year. The party sought to downplay the significance of the by-election result as a vote of discontent against the Tories. Conservative MP and former minister in Boris Johnson's Cabinet Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg told the BBC the Kingswood result was "not as bad as I'd expected" as Tory voters appeared to have stayed at home. He suggested more could turn out at a general election. He insisted that support for Sunak's leadership was "solid" and "by-elections don't change that".

PTI

# Working very hard to thwart attacks on Indian students: US

**LALIT K JHA  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 16**

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden and his administration are working very hard to thwart and disrupt attacks on Indian and Indian American students, the White House has said.

The announcement by John Kirby, Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council in the White House comes amid a slew of attacks on Indian and Indian American students in various parts of the country. "There is no excuse for violence, certainly based on race or gender or religion or any other factor. That's just unacceptable here in the US," Kirby told reporters here when asked about the series of attacks on students from India and also those from the Indian American community.

"The president and this administration have been working very, very hard to make sure we're doing everything we can to work with state and local authorities to try to thwart and disrupt those kinds of attacks and make it clear to anybody who might consider them that they'll be held properly accountable," Kirby said.

Deaths of at least four Indian American students have been reported in the last several weeks. "It's crucial to address safety issues to ensure the well-being of Indian students studying in the USA," he said.

**US HOUSE PASSES CHINA-TIBET BILL**

Washington: The House of Representatives has passed a Bill that will strengthen the efforts of the United States to push the Chinese government to resolve the long-standing Tibet-China dispute through dialogue with Tibetan leaders. The bipartisan 'Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act', also known as Resolve Tibet Act, aims to pressure the Chinese government to resume negotiations with the Dalai Lama's envoys or the democratically elected leaders of the Tibetan people, which have been stalled since 2010. Introduced by Congressman Jim McGovern and Michael McCaul, it dismisses as inaccurate the Chinese claim that Tibet has been part of China since ancient times and empowers the State Department to actively counter China's disinformation about Tibetan history, people, and institutions. PTI

weeks. "It's crucial to address safety issues to ensure the well-being of Indian students studying in the USA," he said.

saved themselves by claiming they were siblings. It's not just the seventeen-year-olds who have to be careful about who they are seen with. Seventeen-year-olds like Mahin, and the taxi driver, both consenting adults, have to hide from a nosy neighbour when she comes enquiring about hearing 'a man's voice' in the house.

As the unexpected encounter between these two progresses, the film also makes a powerful statement about the importance of intimacy, and humanity. If only it were as simple as tossing up a favourite piece of confectionary.

DIRECTORS OF IRANIAN FILM DENIED PERMISSION TO TRAVEL FOR WORLD PREMIERE AT BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

# Keyke Mahboobe Man: Predictable beats, but a joyful and moving watch



EXPRESS AT BERLINALE

BERLIN, FEBRUARY 16

SEVENTY-YEAR-OLD Mahin is the loneliest widow you ever saw. Her army man husband has been dead thirty years. Her grown-up daughter has left Iran,

and made a life elsewhere. But as she tells the man she picks up – yes, that's what she does – as step one of the most unusual yet spirited seduction that I've seen on screen, Tehran is her home.

Why should she leave? He is a taxi driver, and also lives alone, and most of the film focuses on these two elderly people, trying to make a connection in a country drowning under draconian gender rules.

The directors of *Keyke Mahboobe Man* (*My Favourite Cake*), Maryam Moghaddam and Behtash Sanaeih, were refused permission to travel to the world premiere of their film at the

74th edition of the Berlin International Film Festival. It's one of the first Iranian films that shows women in their home without a hijab, and the filmmakers said they are aware that there can be grave consequences of their choice. But the sight of Mahin, literally letting her hair down in the company of a male stranger, puts a smile on your face: this is a film whose beats are predictable, but also joyful, and moving.

The two empty chairs at the press conference after the screening was an eloquent statement against the continued restrictions against filmmakers in



Actor Rooney Mara promotes movie 'La Cocina' at 74th Berlinale International Film Festival in Berlin, Friday. Reuters

world. 'My Favourite Cake', a warm, funny film about loneliness and repression, manages to hit the sweet spot between the personal and political: a late-morning walk in the neighbouring park leads to an encounter with the morality police out scouring for women they can corral, and only her intervention saves a young girl, whose hair is visible under her not-so-tightly worn scarf, from being carted off to the cop station.

The young girl is here to meet her boyfriend. She knows what it is like to be targeted.

Once before, when the cops showed up, the twosome had

WHAT'S IN THE BIG SHIFT FOR RLD, BJP

# The Jayant factor

After decades of nursing a social combination of Jats and Muslims in western UP, first under Charan Singh and later Ajit Singh, the RLD and its party chief Jayant Singh, are now fighting to stay relevant. Will a new camp lift its fortunes?

BHUPENDRA PANDEY & VIKAS PATHAK

**I**T HAS been almost a week since Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Jayant Singh Chaudhary announced his decision to leave the Samajwadi Party (SP) camp and cross over to the NDA. So far, his 'friend' and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav has not criticised him or made any direct attack on him. Jayant, too, has not made any comment on the SP or Akhilesh.

This, sources in both the SP and RLD say, is a sign of not just the camaraderie the two UP politicians shared, but an acknowledgment that the move to the NDA may be the most pragmatic way forward for a party and leader whose hold over Western UP has been steadily shrinking.

Speaking about his party chief and his crossover to the NDA fold, an RLD leader said, "Woh kam bolte hain lekin jab aur jahan jawab dena hota hai toh sakhti se dete hain (He doesn't speak much but when he needs to, he does so firmly)."

It's this part of his personality, this leader insists, that came into play when Jayant ended weeks of speculation with his not-so-subtle tweet, "Dil jeet liya", in response to the Prime Minister's announcement of Bharat Ratna for his grandfather and former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh.

A couple of days later, he announced his shift to the NDA camp, dealing a second blow to the Opposition INDIA alliance that had barely recovered from the JD(U)'s exit.

#### Heir apparent, ties with SP

Born in 1978 in the US, where his father Ajit Singh worked as a software engineer, Jayant, who graduated from Delhi University and did his Master's in Accounting and Finance from the London School of Economics, made his political debut in 2009. Under the close watch of his father, Jayant contested – and won – the Mathura Lok Sabha seat in the Lok Sabha elections of that year.

While Ajit Singh managed to sustain his father Charan Singh's Lok Dal variety of politics in the sugarcane belt of West UP – by bringing together the party's Jat constituency and a section of Muslims – given the BJP's aggressive luring of the Hindu vote, this would soon prove to be a strategy with diminishing returns.

The year 2013 was to severely dent the RLD's prospects in Western UP. The Jat-Muslim social arrangement nurtured by the party broke with the Muzaffarnagar riots that saw around 50,000 Muslims being displaced during Akhilesh Yadav's term as CM.

In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, the RLD lost all the eight seats it contested, with Ajit Singh failing to win from his home turf of Baghpat and Jayant, the sitting



MLA from Mathura, too ending up on the losing side. The BJP won all eight seats.

The next state election, in 2017, was the last where Ajit Singh made some interventions. Then came the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and Jayant took complete control of the party and its decision making.

For the first time since Ajit Singh founded the RLD in 1996, Jayant broke down the barriers his father had erected between himself and the Samajwadi Party. Jayant approached Akhilesh, who had then newly taken over as SP chief, for an alliance.

The 2019 elections were significant for UP's politics since that year, two of SP patriarch Mulayam Singh's rivals, the BSP led by Mayawati and Ajit Singh's RLD, joined hands with the SP to contest together.

While the Mulayam-Mayawati rivalry, which has defined UP politics for decades, started with the guesthouse incident of 1995, in the case of Mulayam and Ajit Singh, the fallout was over the socialist legacy of Chaudhary Charan Singh.

A veteran socialist leader, who was active in the 1970s' Lok Dal led by Charan Singh, recalls Ajit Singh was in the US when a young Mulayam, who had served as state president of Lok Dal, earned Chaudhary Charan Singh's trust. The veteran socialist leader says Ajit "got a little late" in claiming Charan Singh's legacy and Mulayam beat him to it. This paid off for Mulayam in 1989 when the Janata Dal formed the government in UP and he was picked over Ajit for the chief minister's post.

The bitterness stayed, though Ajit Singh supported Mulayam's government in 2003 with his 15 MLAs.

Following a prolonged illness, Ajit Singh passed away in May 2021 and Jayant took over as party president the same month.

Though he stayed on in the SP-Congress camp, there was another factor that was at play in Western UP. With the BJP making inroads into the region since 2013, Jayant had reasons to worry. It was clear that the Jats had shifted to the BJP in large numbers and the RLD's social coalition now stood frayed.

In the Lok Sabha elections that year, the RLD, part of a coalition with the SP, BSP and Congress, contested only three seats – Muzaffarnagar, Baghpat and Mathura. All of them, including Ajit and Jayant, finished runners-up behind the BJP. But this time, there were straws to clutch at. In Muzaffarnagar, Ajit secured

49.2% of the vote, just 0.4% votes shy of the winner, while Jayant won 48.5% of the votes in Baghpat, losing out by 1.8% of the votes.

But the slide continued. In the 2022 Assembly polls, of the 33 seats that the RLD contested, it won eight, though its vote share improved from 1.8% in 2017 to 2.9%.

Jayant, however, made his presence felt with a defining win for his party candidate in the crucial Khatauli bypoll held over six months after the 2022 state elections. It was a high stakes election since it was in Katal village, in Khatauli, that the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots erupted over the killing of two Jat youths and a Muslim.

The RLD-SP alliance soon rose to the next level and Akhilesh was seen sharing space with Jayant in press conferences

and election campaigns. Akhilesh and Jayant would often take to social media to share photographs of the two together, furthering the image of a happy alliance.

But with another Lok Sabha election looming, the writing was on the wall – crossing over to the NDA would ensure that the RLD can at least hold its head above water. At least for now.

#### Why the BJP needs RLD

Riding on the back of the Ram temple consecration, the BJP was already confident about its prospects in the Lok Sabha elections in UP when the RLD entered its fold.

Why then did the BJP, which is confident of a good showing in the region without or without the RLD, work to get Jayant into its fold?

A BJP insider told *The Indian Express* that apart from dealing a blow to the INDIA alliance, winning the RLD over is part of a strategy to ensure a "clean sweep" for the party-led alliance.

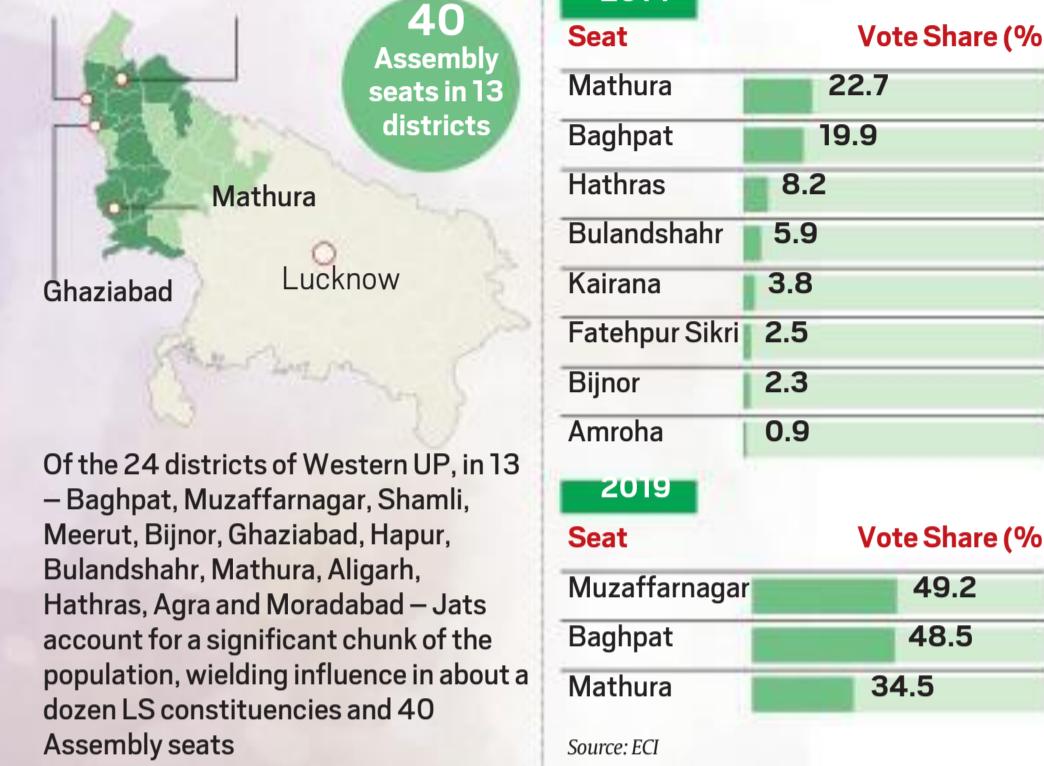
"The alliance is a blow to the INDIA bloc in general and for the SP and Congress in particular. At the same time, had the INDIA alliance remained intact, there was a chance that they would have managed some seats in Western UP that have a high proportion of Muslims and a significant presence of Jats. With Jayant coming over to the NDA, we are set for a clean sweep in Western UP," the leader said.

Another leader added that the alliance was more important for Jayant than for the BJP.

"The last Lok Sabha election, Ajit Singh and Jayant both lost their seats despite a grand Opposition alliance in the state, suggesting that the BJP was seeing an incremental growth even among Jats. Another debacle would have been difficult for him to handle. So, Jayant has ensured that his party survives this time and also wins the few seats it gets," said the leader adding that if the BJP continues growing, the RLD may eventually get assimilated into the BJP. "But that would be an honourable exit route, rather than a sorry one, for the party," the BJP leader said.

Illustration: Suvajit Dey

#### RLD's vote share in LS polls



40 Assembly seats in 13 districts

Of the 24 districts of Western UP, in 13 – Baghpat, Muzaffarnagar, Shamli, Meerut, Bijnor, Ghaziabad, Hapur, Bulandshahr, Mathura, Aligarh, Hathras, Agra and Moradabad – Jats account for a significant chunk of the population, wielding influence in about a dozen LS constituencies and 40 Assembly seats

## A sailor's story: A piracy attack, months in captivity and a new start

As piracy and drone attacks on merchant ships continue in the Gulf of Aden, Chirag Bahri recalls his nightmarish experience that led him to work for other seafarers

SUNANDA MEHTA

TWO WEEKS ago, as Chirag Bahri talked to the crew members of a ship that had been boarded by pirates off the Gulf of Aden, the first thing he asked them was how they coped in those excruciating few hours as they sat huddled in the citadel of the ship, while armed pirates outside were trying desperately to get in.

When they told him of the fear that had gripped them in those moments, Bahri could relate to it instantly.

Now part of an international network that works for the welfare of seafarers, Bahri was in 2010 in a similar situation, the merchant vessel he was in was sailing through the same troubled waters of the Gulf of Aden, when the ship was hijacked by Somali pirates and he and the other crew spent a harrowing eight months in captivity.

"It was the good fortune of this ship that international help arrived before the pirates could succeed in breaking into the citadel and the ship was escorted back safely. Wish we had had that kind of support," says the former marine engineer.

Bahri, International Operations Manager, South Asia, of International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN), says that though it has been 14 years since his colleagues and he were taken away by Somali pi-

rates, the recent attacks in the Gulf of Aden – around 30 merchant ships having been attacked since November 2023 – have brought back horrific memories of those months.

#### That day, 14 years ago

It was in April 2010 that Bahri, then a 28-year-old marine engineer from Noida, boarded the Belgium-bound chemical tanker MV Marida Marguerite. On their way from Gujarat's Kandla, the crew was informed that their vessel would be transiting through the Gulf of Aden, a narrow bottleneck that's part of the key Suez Canal route. Now, a combination of attacks by Iran-backed Houthi rebels and Somali pirates has made this one of the most troubled shipping routes in the world.

Bahri says that as the ship entered the Gulf, the crew put up razor wires all over the vessel, installed salt-water hoses (to prevent pirates from climbing up) and pulled up all ladders to deter pirates from boarding the ship.

Clearly, the defences were far from adequate. In the early hours of May 8, 2010, someone on the ship spotted a high-speed pirate skiff coming towards them. Tactical manoeuvres were immediately put into place – the ship increased its speed to maximum and started zigzag navigation to shake them off. After some time, it seemed they had succeeded. But by afternoon, the boat reappeared on their radar. This time, it was just

miles away. The ship was put on high alert. Though Bahri and his colleagues were in the engine room phone rang and a voice screamed – "Come to the bridge immediately. Pirates on board".

"I looked at my colleague and shrugged. How could that be true? We had so many measures in place. It's a prank," recalls Bahri.

Another call came after 5 minutes. This time, the voice was full of panic – "Why aren't you all coming up?" "We immediately trooped up to the bridge. As we approached the bridge, we heard strange noises from inside. And then, the door opened. And I froze," he says. The barrel of an AK-47 was pointing straight at his forehead.

As Bahri stumbled inside the bridge, he saw that the rest of the crew was already there, huddled as far away as possible from the six gun-toting pirates.

"Since we were the last to arrive, we had to sit in the front. If any of the Somalis had turned their guns towards us, I would have been the first target. My life flashed before my eyes. I thought of my parents and wife back home," says Bahri, who had only been married for two months before he boarded this ship.

Much to the crew's relief, one of the pirates declared that they did not intend to harm them. "Company pay money, we leave



Bahri during his sailing days. Chirag Bahri

At anchorage, around 50 more Somalis boarded the ship, each armed with a gun. "By then, the six who had initially captured the vessel had robbed me and the other crew members of everything – laptops, mobiles, clothes – all of which they stuffed in our own bags and suitcases, and carried away. The new set further stripped the ship of its curtains, television screens, microwave ovens, cutlery, etc," said Bahri.

For about two months, the ship's rations lasted for the crew and the pirates. After that, the crew was served half-boiled rice with stones, which "most of us hardly ate anyway".

If hunger did not break them, the violence almost did. "The torture was unbearable – there were regular beatings with iron rods. They would tie us upside down for hours, kick us with their boots and spit on our faces. For six months, we would hear screaming every hour. One time, they blindfolded the Master and Chief Engineer, and fired guns near their ears to terrorise them. Then, they beat them up mercilessly. Once, we all told them to kill us as we couldn't take it anymore. They just laughed in response," says Bahri.

What kept them going was just each other, as they shared their traumas and fears. "We would cry together, console each other and celebrate small joys, like a week without torture. I would constantly think of my mother and her pleas to not sail in pirate-in-

fested waters," said Bahri.

Finally, in December 2010, after eight long months, the company agreed to pay the kidnappers \$5.5 million.

#### Home at last

After 24 hours, the pirates deboarded the ship and sent it on its onwards journey to Salalah in Oman. From Salalah, the crew members were flown back to India. Bahri landed in Delhi on January 7, 2011. He reached home to discover that his mother had passed away five months ago. That wasn't all. His wife had left the house and slapped a case of dowry harassment on him.

What followed were rounds of police stations as Bahri fought back the charges, even as he grappled with the trauma from the captivity. But he ploughed through the dark days, settling the terms of divorce as demanded by his wife. He has also remarried and has a seven-year-old son.

In the meantime, realising the gap that existed between the training given to seafarers and the challenges they faced on sea, he began reaching out to the families of seafarers who, like him, had gone through hijacking episodes.

Does the trauma of the days in captivity still haunt him? "Not now. The initial days were very difficult to cope with, but one has to move on. I have."



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## DAY AFTER, WAY AHEAD

SC strike-down of electoral bonds opens up space for wider discussion on how best to clean up election funding

**W**ITH THE SUPREME Court striking down electoral bonds, India is back to square one on the issue of electoral finance. While many had argued that electoral bonds were a step in the wrong direction, many others, including the former finance minister, Arun Jaitley, saw it as a first step towards cleaning up campaign finance. It is critical for the continued health of India's democracy that the rejection of the electoral bonds scheme does not mean an end to the idea of reforming electoral finance.

In its judgment, the apex court devoted a complete section to a discussion of the close association between money and politics. "It is believed that money does not vote but people do. However, studies have revealed the direct and indirect influence of money on electoral politics," it says. In particular, the court noted that money "creates entry-barriers to politics by limiting the kind of candidates and political parties which enter the electoral fray". In other words, absent regulation, money can not only exclude candidates who belong to socio-economically weaker sections but also make it tougher for political parties that are new to the electoral fray, and in particular, parties representing the cause of marginalised communities. The court also noted that there is "an underlying dichotomy in the legal regime" when it comes to this issue in India. That's because the law only regulates contributions to political parties, not to individual candidates. However, when it comes to expenditure, the law regulates the expenditure by candidates and not by political parties.

Experts point to four key aspects that future regulation must tackle. These are: Regulation of donations, expenditure limits, public financing, and disclosure requirements. Around the world, one can spot various norms and experiments. For instance, the US imposes restrictions on contributions based on the kind of donor whereas there is no such regulation in the UK. But the UK regulates expenditure – political parties are not allowed to spend more than £30,000 – while the US imposes no such constraints. On the old question of public financing, Germany is an oft-quoted example where parties receive public funds on the basis of their importance (based on criteria such as the number of votes received in the last elections) in the political system. A noteworthy experiment in this regard was the use of "democracy vouchers" in local elections in Seattle, US. In this, publicly funded vouchers were distributed among eligible voters, who, in turn, donated them to the candidate of their choice. Lastly, the issue of disclosure, the balance between transparency and anonymity – the specific count on which electoral bonds were binned. To be sure, there is no single ready-made solution to this issue, especially since politics differs dramatically between countries as well as within the same country over time. A glaring lapse in the electoral bonds case was the government's decision not to have any consultations either with other political parties or with the general public. For finding a robust solution it will be necessary to avoid that mistake.

## STRAWS IN TRADE WIND

India's goods exports picked up slightly in January.

But conflict in Red Sea continues to pose risk

**D**ATA RELEASED BY the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Thursday showed that India's merchandise exports grew by 3.1 per cent to \$36.92 billion in January, from \$35.8 billion last year. Goods exports have now registered a positive growth in three of the last four months. But for the financial year so far (April-January), total goods exports have touched \$353.9 billion, down almost 5 per cent from \$372.1 billion over the same period last year. Excluding oil exports, the decline is less, with non-oil exports down around 2.5 per cent this year.

The segment wise data shows that electronic goods continued to register a healthy performance, growing at 9.31 per cent in January. For the year so far, electronic exports are up a healthy 20.7 per cent, even as overall exports have fallen. Alongside, drugs and pharmaceutical exports are also up 8 per cent. However, major labour intensive segments such as gems and jewellery, textiles, leather and products have not fared well. Alongside, goods imports also grew at 3 per cent in January. However, excluding oil and gems and jewellery, imports were 2.3 per cent lower than last year. For the year so far (April-January), imports stood at \$561 billion, down 6.7 per cent from \$601 billion over the same period last year. The segment wise data shows that vegetable oil imports are down almost 29 per cent, fertiliser around 40 per cent and coal roughly 25 per cent. Imports of petroleum, crude and products, chemicals, pearls, precious and semi-precious stones and transport equipment are also significantly lower than last year. On the other hand, imports of gold, electronic goods and machinery, electrical and non-electrical goods are up.

There were expectations that the January trade data would reflect the disruptions caused due to the conflict in the Red Sea. The region accounts for 12 per cent of global trade, and around 80 per cent of India's goods trade with Europe passes through it. Attacks by Houthi rebels on ships had forced vessels to take the longer route. As per a report in this paper, in January, India's petroleum exports to Europe had been affected by these developments. However, based on the January trade data, a report by Nomura says that, "on a value basis, there doesn't seem to be major disruption to trade from the Red Sea escalations." It is possible that the effects will be visible in data still to come.

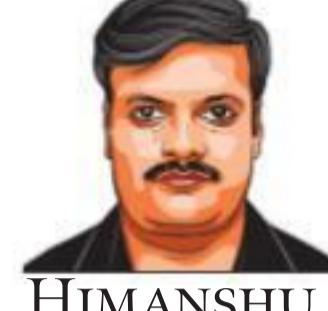
## LET THEM TELL STORIES

Hugo Awards debacle points to spectre of censorship cramping one of the most inventive corners of world literature

**A**BIG REASON for the popularity of science fiction and fantasy (SFF) literature – among writers and readers – is that it offers a creative way to address subjects that cannot be discussed otherwise. Which is why the revelation that the Hugo Awards, the top honour for SFF works, succumbed to censorship is especially jarring. Leaked emails show that in preparation for its first ever event in China, which took place last October, the award organisers ensured that works of a "sensitive" political nature were kept out of the running. The news confirms rumours in the SFF community that books by Chinese-origin writers R F Kuang and Xiran Jay Zhao, which had qualified for nominations, were taken off the list for fear of offending China's government.

Around the world, even as the number of books published each year grows, the spectre of censorship looms large. Nowhere is this more the case than in China, where using proscribed words and concepts or including references to historical happenings such as the Tiananmen Square protests can invite the authorities' wrath. For writers, the act of telling a story can sometimes be a complex negotiation, to elude the punishing gaze of the state and sidestep censorship and avoid prison. Many choose the tropes of SFF to do so, setting commentary about contemporary China on distant planets and in alternate timelines. They have helped create one of the most thriving and inventive corners of world literature, producing groundbreaking works such as The Three-Body Problem series by Liu Cixin, which wraps criticism of the Cultural Revolution's excesses in a story about an alien invasion.

The Hugo Awards debacle has caused disappointment and anger among fans, resulting in the resignation this week of a member of the committee and an apology from the body responsible for the event that is taking place in Glasgow later this year. For the writers who risk the might of a state simply to tell the story they want to, it is a betrayal.



HIMANSHU

## The MSP fallacy

Cost of legal guarantee to protect farmer incomes and consumer interests has been greatly exaggerated

FARMERS ARE BACK on the streets. Unlike the last time, when they marched to Delhi against the enactment of the three contentious farm laws, this time there is no immediate trigger. The demands of the farmers are manifold, but primarily, they are asking for a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Prices (MSP). While this has been a longstanding demand, there is little clarity on what it actually means. The lack of clarity has obviously led to fear mongering, with exaggerated claims about fiscal costs, monopolisation of agricultural trade and missing markets. There was similar fear mongering during the run-up to enactment of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The reality is that neither of these pieces of legislation has bankrupted the government. Instead, they proved to be a lifeline for people during the pandemic.

MSP is a simple mechanism to ensure the price stability of essential agricultural commodities. Similar mechanisms are available to farmers in other countries. The purpose is to insulate farmers from price volatility with government actions through active intervention when the market prices fall below the MSP. It has been in existence in India for more than five decades. Why, then, are farmers asking for a legal guarantee? Every year the government announces MSP for 23 crops before the sowing season. But for most crops, the announcement of MSP is not followed by any intervention by the government. It is in practice only implemented for rice and wheat, two major crops, and occasionally for pulses and other crops. But even in these cases, market intervention by the government is not done to support the farmers, but to fulfil the statutory requirements to fulfil its obligations under NFSA. Farmers are only demanding that the government implement the MSP scheme as envisaged.

Despite political consensus, with most parties and unions supporting such a legal guarantee, successive governments have dithered on legalising this mechanism. The

It is unfair to treat the cost of procuring rice and wheat as the cost of the MSP programme for rice and wheat. In fact, almost all of it is a subsidy to consumers and not to farmers. But then this is a commitment by the government under NFSA and is necessary, irrespective of the MSP guarantee. Farmers are only getting the minimum value of their hard-earned produce and nothing more. For the remaining crops which are not part of the NFSA bundle, procurement by the government is not a cost unless the government sells it with a subsidy. The cost for the government is only the difference between the economic cost of procured grain and the issue price. For the remaining crops which are not part of the NFSA bundle, procurement by the government is not a cost unless the government sells it with a subsidy. The cost for the government is only the difference between

primary reason has been the fear of excessive fiscal requirement to meet the costs of such a guarantee. Large figures to the tune of Rs 10-18 lakh crore have been floated as the cost of the guarantee. Most of these assumptions are based on a poor understanding of agricultural markets or the role of MSP in stabilising prices.

The belief that a guarantee to implement MSP would mean that the government will have to procure all the agricultural produce is a fallacy for two reasons. First, only a fraction of the produce is available in the market, generally referred to as the marketable surplus. Second, even in the case of marketable surplus, government intervention is only needed in case the market price of a commodity is lower than the MSP. But even in this case, intervention is only necessary to the extent that it creates excess demand and raises the market prices. In most cases, it may be only a fraction of the market arrivals. In years when the market prices are higher, the government will not have to intervene at all. And even if the government intervenes, farmers are unlikely to sell at prices lower than market prices. This happened in the last two years for wheat. As against the 2022 target of 44 million tonnes, government procurement was only 19 million tonnes. In 2023, government procurement was 26 million tonnes against a target of 35 million tonnes. In both these years, market prices were higher than the MSP.

However, it is unfair to treat the cost of procuring rice and wheat as the cost of the MSP programme for rice and wheat. In fact, almost all of it is a subsidy to consumers and not to farmers. But then this is a commitment by the government under NFSA and is necessary, irrespective of the MSP guarantee. Farmers are only getting the minimum value of their hard-earned produce and nothing more. For the remaining crops which are not part of the NFSA bundle, procurement by the government is not a cost unless the government sells it with a subsidy. The cost for the government is only the difference between

the economic cost of procured grain and the issue price. For the remaining crops, which the government does not sell by subsidising, the cost is zero with the entire expense being recovered. In rare instances, the government can also make a profit by selling the procured produce at a minimal mark-up in the domestic and international markets when market prices are higher. This will not only cool down domestic prices when there is an inflation surge but will also help stabilise market prices. For several years in the recent past, the government has not only undertaken open-market operations but also exported stocks to benefit from higher international prices.

A guaranteed MSP may not solve the farmers' problems. But it offers a good opportunity to rectify the imbalances in the MSP and procurement system. Procurement today is restricted to certain geographical locations and limited to rice and wheat. A regionally diversified and expanded MSP to cover a larger basket of crops is necessary to bridge the regional imbalances in agricultural productivity. It will also ensure investment, expansion and strengthening of storage management along with crop diversification, which is necessary for natural resource management.

In many ways, the anger of farmers and the demand for a reform of the MSP system reflects years of neglect of the agrarian economy which has seen declining real incomes and real wages. While it is difficult to estimate the cost of such a guarantee, it will certainly be less than the cost of inflation management that the economy has to pay in terms of higher interest payments and rise in cost of capital. Price stability will also protect the average consumer from the vagaries of inflation. More importantly, at a time when the rural economy is struggling with deficient demand and rising inflation, protecting the income of farmers will also help revive the rural economy.

The writer is associate professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University



HITESH JAIN

## A THOUSAND STEPS BACK

SC's electoral bonds verdict derails reform. But it affirms Court's independence

IN AN ERA where transparency and accountability in political funding are more crucial than ever, the Supreme Court's (SC's) recent judgment declaring electoral bonds as ultra vires marks not just a setback but a colossal misjudgement that threatens to derail years of progress towards cleansing India's political financing system. Electoral bonds were introduced with a vision to revolutionise political funding by introducing an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability. By mandating that all political donations be made through formal banking channels, the government took a bold step towards dismantling the stronghold of black money in politics. This initiative aimed to ensure that every rupee contributed to the political sphere was accounted for, traceable and legal.

The anonymity provided by electoral bonds has been a point of contention, yet it is widely misunderstood. This feature was designed as a protective shield for donors, safeguarding them from potential backlash or victimisation for their political affiliations or support. In a democratic society, the freedom to support a political cause or party without fear of reprisal is fundamental. The anonymity of electoral bonds promotes a healthier, more inclusive political funding environment.

However, the SC's judgment overlooks these critical benefits. By focusing narrowly on the potential for misuse, the Court disregards the broader context. This ruling not only halts progress but also implicitly endorses a return to the opaque, cash-driven

The anonymity provided by electoral bonds has been a point of contention, yet it is widely misunderstood. This feature was designed as a protective shield for donors, safeguarding them from potential backlash or victimisation for their political affiliations or support. In a democratic society, the freedom to support a political cause or party without fear of reprisal is fundamental. The anonymity of electoral bonds promotes a healthier, more inclusive political funding environment.

practices that have plagued Indian politics for decades.

The resistance to electoral bonds echoes the opposition faced by other reformatory measures, such as the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC). Both initiatives were met with scepticism and legal challenges, yet they share a common goal: To enhance transparency and accountability within key democratic processes. The discrepancy in the acceptance of these reforms reveals a selective approach to transparency, one that is willing to embrace change in certain areas but not others.

This judgment sends a chilling message to reformers and policymakers alike, suggesting that efforts to clean up the murky waters of political funding will be met with support but with obstruction. At a time when the integrity of democratic processes is increasingly under scrutiny, this decision represents a thousand steps back, pushing us further away from the ideal of a transparent, accountable, and clean political system.

In light of this judgment, there is an urgent need for dialogue. Stakeholders across the political and social spectrum must come together to challenge this decision, highlighting the potential of electoral bonds to transform political funding. The narrative must be reframed, emphasising that the true risk to democracy lies not in the misuse of electoral bonds but in the unchecked flow of black money into the political arena. The SC's ruling on electoral bonds should be seen not as the final word but as a call to action. It is imperative that we engage in a constructive, in-

formed debate about the future of political funding in India, exploring ways to refine and improve the electoral bond scheme rather than abandoning it.

It is also essential to revisit now the broader discourse surrounding the SC's independence and its relationship with the executive. Critics, particularly from opposition quarters, have oscillated dramatically, citing instances like the Article 370 and Ram Mandir judgments as evidence of the Court's alleged alignment with the government. However, the decision on electoral bonds presents a compelling counter-narrative, underscoring the Court's autonomy. It challenges the narrative posed by some factions that the SC has ceded ground to executive influence. By meticulously applying the law, the Court reaffirms its role as the guardian of constitutional principles, disproving accusations of partiality.

This judgment should not be seen merely in the context of its immediate impact on electoral financing but as a testament to the judiciary's unwavering independence. The critique of the Court's supposed favouritism towards the government is negated by its consistent adherence to legal rigour and constitutional fidelity. Considering this, it is also incumbent upon critics to acknowledge the nuanced role of the Supreme Court in balancing complex legal and constitutional mandates, free from the binary of political allegiances.

The writer is vice president, Mumbai BJP and managing partner, Parinam Law Associates



## FEBRUARY 17, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

## AMBUSH ON CRPF

A CONSTABLE OF the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) was killed and a naik injured in an ambush by five extremists in Gurdaspur district as authorities decided to extend the curfew in six towns to check the recurrence of violent incidents witnessed during the Punjab bandh on February 14. Constable Ranjit Singh was killed on the spot and naik Mangal Singh was seriously injured in the grenade attack.

## A R ANTULAY'S CASE

THE SUPREME COURT overruled the judg-

ment of R B Sule, Bombay special judge, that said that sanction to prosecute A R Antulay was necessary as he was a public servant in his capacity as a member of the legislative assembly. The Court felt that an early trial was in the interest of Antulay, former Maharashtra chief minister, and, therefore, ordered the cases to be withdrawn from Sule's court and sent to the Bombay High Court.

## BUDGET SESSION

THE REVISED PROGRAMME of the forthcoming budget session of Parliament puts an end to the speculation that the government might be planning to have only a vote on ac-

count, cutting the session short. The session begins on February 23 with the President's address to the joint sitting of both Houses. The motion of thanks on the President's address will be discussed till March 1.

## AUCTIONING OFF BOOKS

DID GEN ZIA-UL-HAQ auction the Quran and all rare manuscripts related to the holiest of Muslim religious texts because they belonged to a person who refused to cooperate with the military junta? Pakistani Muslims are upset and Nashir Sheikh, who possessed the Quran, said the government auctioned all his rare and expensive books on medicine and furniture.

# The core of who we are

A gay man married to a woman, who is forced to sacrifice her youth for a marriage of convenience — Malayalam film 'Kaathal' quietly breaks a silence



## OPENING ARGUMENT

MENAKA GURUSWAMY

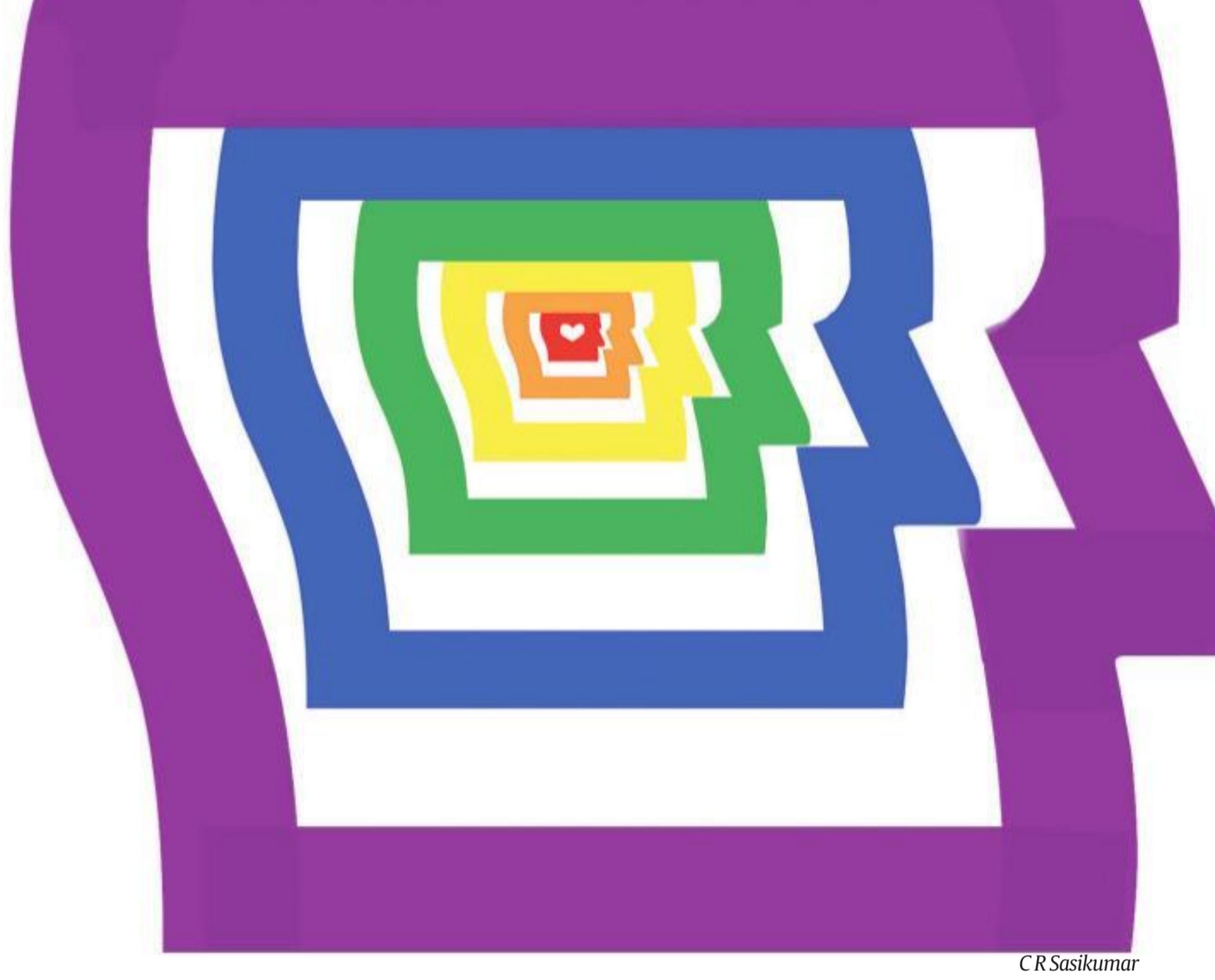
CONTEMPORARY BOLLYWOOD (HINDI) to Tollywood (Telugu) and Mollywood (Malayalam) amongst others — all our "mainstream" film industries and their culture of storytelling is located around a macho male superstar. This actor is not an artiste but a superstar without any nuance, not allowed any deviation from a script that is built around a triumphant masculinity. So, it's a rare joy to witness a superstar like Mammootty reveal the artiste within him, by playing the role of a gay man in *Kaathal*, a Malayalam movie streaming on Amazon Prime.

Released on November 23 2023, *Kaathal* that means "the core", stars Mammootty as Mathew Devassy who lives with his wife Oman, daughter and father, all comprising a prominent church-going Christian family. A picture of respectability, everyone plays the role assigned and expected by society. Oman, essayed by the actor Jyotika, is a dutiful daughter-in-law dedicated to her aged father-in-law, a wife who is constantly tending to the house and family that she has married into, and clearly a friend to her college-going daughter. Set in any idyllic town of Kerala, the elegant mundu-wearing, apparently straightforward and decent Mathew, (who can believe that Mammootty is 72 years old!) is chosen as the candidate for a "left" party for the local elections. He is a shoo-in to win the election. Or will he? Is Mathew really who he shows himself to be?

For there is a secret that is at the core of Mathew's personality and envelops the family. Mathew is gay and is in a relationship with his lover Thankan (beautifully portrayed by Sudhi Kozhikode). Mathew's secret also cloaks the film with sadness. Laughter and lightness are scarce in the family and hence in the film. Can there be any happiness amid deception?

Two months before the elections, Oman has finally decided that she has had enough. She files for divorce on grounds of "cruelty" — here the inability of Mathew to fulfil his "marital obligations". As she explains in court, they have had sex four times in a 20-year marriage.

The strength of the movie is its restraint. As Oman explains, she files the suit for divorce to save them both from this never-ending loneliness. You see that play out through some delicately crafted scenes. As Oman stands up to testify in court, she hands her purse to Mathew to hold. A mundane yet intimate act between two people who have been sharing a home for 20 years. As Oman and Mathew drive back home together, after a hearing in the divorce court, they sit in silence. The silence is not just caused by the filing for divorce, but also by the revelation of the core of their relationship to be what it is — a gay man married off to a woman, who was forced to sacrifice her youth for this marriage of convenience. This thick silence is



CR Sasikumar

quite different from the companionable silence that long-term couples enjoy.

There are a few scenes in this film that stay with you, for they reveal the magnitude of fear in a life in the closet. Mathew is the political candidate unable to acknowledge his lover Thankan of many years, as the latter stops by the campaign office to pick up fliers. As the two lovers avoid acknowledging each other in the small party office, the party workers look at them with a mixture of pity and disgust. Thankan walks back to his car and tenderly runs his fingers over the flier that has a picture of Mathew on it.

The court scenes are intended to be enlightening, about sexuality, about fear and about the role the law plays in subduing people's aspirations. When Oman is asked in court why she waited so long to file for divorce, her lawyer explains that if she had filed earlier Mathew would be accused of committing a crime as Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1861 that punished and criminalised "unnatural sex" and gay people with 10 years to life imprisonment was only eradicated in 2018. So, she files for divorce when the law would not criminalise Mathew upon her revelations.

The film helps appreciate that the law matters, criminalising queer people stigmatises them and forces them to lead a double life. By extension, denying queer people equal rights like marriage or partnership benefits means that the Mathews and Omanas of the world will continue to have happiness stolen from their lives.

But we live in 2024, and here's a film about a gay man and his heterosexual wife, both of whom have a long overdue release from the despair. Eventually Mathew's father Devassy (strongly played by R S Panicker) testifies on behalf of his daughter-

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in-law, accepts knowledge of his son's sexuality and forcing his son to marry a woman despite knowing that he was gay. Mathew comes out, solidifies his friendship with his now ex-wife and proceeds to help her find prospective grooms. The film also suggests that Mathew wins the elections.

The absence of any scene, or interaction of any sort, between Mathew and his lover is a core weakness of the film. What is it that makes Mathew and Thankan tick? Surely, it cannot just be sex? For, sexual encounters are freely available to all — gay and straight people. What draws the two men together? Is there humour? Is there love? Is there intellectual compatibility? Why are we drawn so strongly to another human being? *Kaathal* disappoints deeply on that count. Contrast this to the relationship depicted by Tabu as the RAW agent and her female lover the Bangladeshi actor Azmeri Haque Badhon in the delightful film *Khufiya*. The film wasn't scared of showing what draws the two women together.

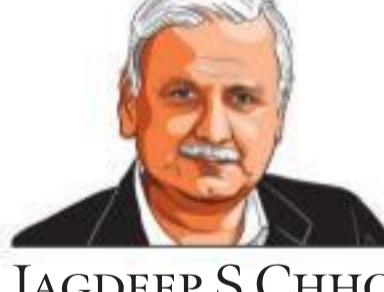
*Kaathal* is a triumph for Jeo Baby, a skilled director, aided by a strong cast and a captivating script written by Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria. Produced by Mammootty, *Kaathal* is film-making as it should be — a movie that stays in your heart. You agree with parts, disagree with parts, and feel a range of emotions from suspense to sadness. It's not perfect. But, it does what a good film should do, makes the viewer think.

In my case it not only made me think, but also hold the hand of the person I love and give thanks for what we have an abundance of in our life — joy. More constitutional rights would also be useful.

The writer is a senior advocate at the Supreme Court

# The watchful guardian

SC verdict on electoral bonds will help restore faith in rule of law



JAGDEEP S CHHOKAR

THE SUPREME COURT'S judgment in the electoral bonds is a perfect example of the "sentry on the Qui Vive" doing its job to perfection. The expression, made immortal by Justice Patanjali Sastry in his 1952 judgment in *State of Madras vs V.G. Row*, can be translated as the "sentry on watch". Justice Sastry used it to mean that the Supreme Court of India (SCI) of India is the "sentry on watch" to guard the fundamental rights of citizens. The SCI, while declaring the Electoral Bonds Scheme introduced by the government in 2017 as unconstitutional, has done exactly that.

The scheme announced in 2017, and notified in 2018, introduced a new financial instrument called the electoral bond, which could be purchased by anyone including companies, from the State Bank of India (SBI), and handed over to any political party that had polled more than one per cent of the vote in the previous election. The receiving party was to deposit the bond in a pre-designated bank account within 15 days of issue. The key, according to the scheme, was that no one except the SBI was supposed to know who had given how much money to which party.

Even before its introduction, constitutional authorities such as the Election Commission of India (ECI) and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) opposed the scheme but their opposition was overlooked. As the details of the scheme emerged when it was implemented, it became clear that all the apprehensions that were anticipated came true. The political party in power, through the gov-

ernment of the day and the Finance Ministry, could easily access the information with the SBI and choke the flow of funds to Opposition parties. This became clear when declarations by political parties on receipt of contributions through electoral bonds to the ECI showed that the ruling party had received 60 to 90 per cent of the total money donated.

The scheme amended several other laws such as the Representation of the People Act, the Companies Act, the Income Tax Act, and the Reserve Bank of India Act, making it impossible for citizens to know which corporate was donating how much to which political party.

In two separate but concurring judgments, a five-judge constitution bench of the SCI declared not only the electoral bonds scheme but also all the corresponding amendments unconstitutional. It also directed the SBI to communicate details of all the electoral bonds sold, including who purchased the bonds and which party they donated to, to the ECI within three weeks of the date of the judgment. It further directed the ECI to post these details on their website within a week of receiving them from the SBI.

Thus, we can now expect that by March 15, 2024, everyone who is interested should be able to know which corporate house or individual has donated how much money to which political party between 2018 and 2023. This information has the potential to uncover the real reasons for several policy

decisions and actions of the government during this period, and that should provide a rationale for voters to make their decisions in the forthcoming elections.

The Court has also nullified the government decision that companies can donate any amount of money to political parties, removing the earlier ceiling of 7.5 per cent of the average profits of the company for the last three years. This had opened the floodgates for all companies, whether profit-making or loss-making, to donate all that they wanted to, to political parties.

Another issue that stands out relates to all the political parties. Though many political parties often spoke against the electoral bonds scheme and some also expressed opposition in Parliament, several of them accepted donations through the bonds. Only one political party, the CPI(M), filed a petition challenging the scheme. It seems most Opposition parties were ambivalent towards the scheme, hoping that as and when they became a ruling party even in a state, they may reap some benefits.

Another feature of the hearing was that though the ECI had written a very strong letter to the Finance Ministry opposing electoral bonds, during the hearings in the court, it made seemingly confusing statements.

Also, several averments made by the government about the scheme turned out to be wrong and some were violated by the government itself. For example, it was claimed that the physical bonds issued did not have

any individual identifying characteristics. Journalists discovered that a unique alphanumeric number was visible under ultraviolet light on the bond. Also, the original scheme as announced by the government said that it was meant for only Lok Sabha elections but very soon, for the immediately following Karnataka assembly elections, the government asked the Finance Ministry to open another window of sales of EBs. The Finance Ministry reminded the government that the scheme was meant exclusively for Lok Sabha elections. It was reported that the government asked the Finance Ministry to make an exception for Karnataka Assembly elections.

This is a landmark judgment which will help restore people's faith in democracy, in the rule of law, and the Supreme Court of India. While we justifiably celebrate the judgment, in our euphoria, we must not overlook the ground reality of several pre-2017 infirmities in our electoral system. Work on those must also be commended.

This is a landmark judgment which will help restore people's faith in democracy, in the rule of law, and the Supreme Court of India. While we justifiably celebrate the judgment, in our euphoria, we must not overlook the ground reality of several pre-2017 infirmities in our electoral system. Work on those must continue.

The writer is a founder-member of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), one of the petitioners in the Supreme Court

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The tragedy is not merely that Mr Sunak has overseen this descent into recession. It is also that he lacks any clue about how to extricate Britain from it... it embodies precisely what is wrong about this government. It forgets nothing and learns nothing... No wonder the public think the country is in decline." — **THE GUARDIAN**

# Facing the people

PM Modi's address at Dubai World Government Summit underlines his government's commitment to people-centrism



RAM RAJYA

BY RAM MADHAV

THESE DAYS, THERE IS PALPABLE unease among sections of political scientists over a perceived increase in "democracy deficit" and the rise of "strong man democracies" in different countries. *The Economist* magazine released its annual Democracy Index this week, bemoaning that this year was "not an auspicious one for democracies". While ranking countries under four categories, it placed India in the second category of "flawed democracies", just below the "full democracies" category. Interestingly, it also placed other big countries like the USA and Indonesia in that category.

One leader who applied this principle of empowering the masses was Mahatma Gandhi. In his grand design to bring the mighty British to their knees, Gandhi resorted to massive non-violent mass movements. He not only outgrew the Congress but did not hesitate to deploy religious and cultural symbols. His methods transformed the nature of Indian political resistance to the British.

No two leaders can be compared, especially ones seven or eight decades apart. It was a different challenge for Gandhi to mobilise the masses against a foreign government. But in Modi's case, the mobilisation was to make them shoulder responsibility for their own future. It was "democracy at the grassroots", unknown in classical Western discourse.

Desperate at the scale at which Modi has implemented this people-centrism, his adversaries complain about autocracy and cultism. Incidentally, Gandhi too faced similar criticism, not only from the British but also from his own countrymen. Radical humanist leader MN Roy went to the extent of stating privately that he wished "to destroy the curse of Gandhism". So did Ambedkar Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) disagreed with Gandhi initially. But in the end, everyone realised how fundamental and organic Gandhi's approach had been in the context of a civilised nation like India. Roy publicly praised Gandhi after Independence, while JP not only turned a Gandhian but declared in his "Manifesto for Bihar" that had Gandhi lived for five more years, he would have mobilised the masses against the rulers. What Gandhi couldn't do, JP did in 1975 by mobilising the countrymen against the dictatorship of Indira Gandhi.

In a speech, "Back to the Mahatma", JP had argued that "the leaders of the country must go to the people, to live and work with them, to serve, guide and help them. They must do all this not to strengthen their parties and gather votes for themselves but in order that the people should rise and put their heads, hearts and hands to the tasks of national development".

Modi was talking about that role for the governments in the world, not the all-powerful and authoritarian one that people in many countries experience today. By asserting that "Sarkaron ka abhaav bhi nahi hona chahiye aur dabaav bhi nahi" — "there shouldn't be a lack of governance, but there shouldn't be an overbearing governance either" — Modi was echoing Gandhi, who viewed "an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear", because it does "the greatest harm by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress".

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the RSS

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### WIN FOR DEMOCRACY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A Pyrrhic victory' (IE, February 16). The Supreme Court in its landmark judgement struck down the Electoral Bonds Scheme. It deciphered the legislative smoke screen meant to hide the real import of this scheme and explained how it undermined the level playing field of elections with opaque funding. Also, the voters are blind to the quid pro quo between the donor and the political party, and they can't make informed electoral choices. The writer says SBI has not been asked about the specific identification number of EB purchasers. Can SBI hide behind the hyper-technicality when SBI has given direction to provide the details of donors and recipients? Imagine the potential of this expose if one finds out that shell companies or loss-making firms have bought bonds worth crores. It is uncharitable to call this a Pyrrhic victory.

LR Murmu, New Delhi

### TRANSPARENT FUNDS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Democracy's guardian angel' (IE, February 16). The Supreme Court's historic judgement on electoral bonds is a triumph. However, one hoped the subject of such import could be heard on priority considering the bulk of secret donations through bonds were flowing into the coffers of only one political party, which is certain to have impacted several electoral outcomes and policy decisions post-2018. With its riches growing leaps and bounds, the BJP lavishly managed its electoral and political battles. The verdict has shattered PM Modi's claims of combatting corruption and money laundering. When the SC-mandated disclosures of bond-related information become public, they will reveal the extent of cronyism that has taken root under his regime. Unless, of course, he brings an ordinance to overturn the judgment.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru



## AXIS BANK LTD. Registered Office: "Trishul", 3rd floor, Opp. Samartheshwar Temple, New Law Garden, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad - 380 006

Notice is hereby given that the following persons have availed locker facilities from our Bank .

These persons have failed and neglected in making payments towards the locker rentals to the Bank / not operated locker for a considerable period. The Bank is in the process of issuing the notices to them via a) SMS on their registered mobile no., b) Email on their registered email ID & c) Letters to their last known recorded address with the Bank, advising them to make the payment of locker rentals / operation of locker and/or close the locker facility(ies).

This is a final notice to notify that if the above-mentioned person(s) fails to pay the arrears of locker rentals to the Bank / operate locker or before 17.05.2024 (A date which falls precisely on the 90th day of the publication date of this public notice to be mentioned), the Bank shall break and open the locks of the locker at locker hirer's risk and responsibility, as per the Banking Law and Practice and take inventory of items, if any, lying in locker and keep the same in Bank's custody until such time the arrears of rent along with interest, expenses, charges, etc. are paid to the Bank.

The Bank reserves the right to adjust the cash, if any found in the locker against the outstanding dues of the above persons to the Bank and it shall be treated as proper discharge on the part of the Bank and no claims, whatsoever, shall be entertained thereafter in this regard. For the balance dues of locker rentals, the Bank reserves its right to proceed legally against the locker hirer/s for recovery of its dues.

Locker No.	Name of the Locker Hirer(s)	Address	Amount Due (INR)	Amount Due from
THE CONTROLLING CIRCLE OFFICE FOR BELOW LISTED BRANCHES IS:				
NAME: CIRCLE OFFICE SOUTH DELHI, ADDRESS: AXIS BANK LIMITED, 1 RAVISSANCE HOUSE, 1ST FLOOR, RING ROAD, LAJPAT NAGAR-4, NEW DELHI -110024.				
BRANCH ADDRESS : CHITTARANJAN PARK, AXIS BANK LTD CHITTARANJAN PARKK-1998, CHITTARANJAN PARK, NEW DELHI-110019				
5079	BHAWNA BALODHI	L-1/137 D DOA FLATS KALKAJI, NEW DELHI-KALKAJI-110019	22488.45	3-JUN-22
2014	DEBABRATA ROY	11/1 CENTRAL ROAD JADAVPUR JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY SOJADAVPUR UNIVERSITY-KOLKATA-700032	43800.77	26-DEC-19
4139	MANOJ SETHI	S/0 KASTURI LAL SETHI-12, GROUND FLOOR, 6K2 GREATER KAILASH, SOUTH DELHI, DELHI-110048	0	
1011	AMRITA PUKHERJEE	A-2151, GREEN FIELD COLONY-FARIDABAD-110006	0	
BRANCH ADDRESS : DEFENCE COLONY, NEW DELHI [DL] AXIS BANK LTD DEFENCE COLONY B-81, DEFENCE COLONY, NEW DELHI-110024				
275	GURSHARAN SINGH CHANA	KENWOOD 57, BRAKE BRIDGE ROAD SUITON COLD TOWER HILL BIRMINGHAM-7425L	1975.05	25-OCT-23
403	ALOKENDRA BANERJEE	3D 1A SWASTIK SAROMACHAPEL ROAD HASTINGS KOLKATA-KOLKATA-700022	0	
246	SANJAY KUKREJA	A 362 DEFENCE COLONY LAJPAT NAGAR, LAJPAT NAGAR SOUTH DELHI-DELHI110024	0	
110	GREENPLY INDUSTRIES LIMITED	23, CHETLA CENTRAL ROAD, 5TH & 6TH FLOOR-KOLKATA-700027	11669.72	29-MAR-22
124	GREENPLY INDUSTRIES LIMITED	23, CHETLA CENTRAL ROAD 5TH & 6TH FLOOR-KOLKATA-700027	11669.72	29-MAR-22
134	HARISH SAINI	1563/3 1ST FLR TULA NAGAR KOTLA MUBARKPUR-NEW DELHI-110003	0	
235	TISHA MEHRA	B-90, FREEDOM FIGHTER ENCLAVE, NEB SARAI, NEW DELHI-110062	162242.82	13-DEC-18
175	PRITHVI PAL SINGH	28 HARI NAGAR, ASHRAM-NEW DELHI-110014	0	
BRANCH ADDRESS : DWARKA AXIS BANK LTD., DWARKA SHOP NO. 603, 604, 605, 605 & 1ST FLR, HL ARCADE SECTOR 5 (MLU) PLOT NO. 14, DWARKA NEW DELHI-110075				
192	AMITABH SANDHU	A-3/94, FIRST FLOOR, JANAK PURI, NEW DELHI-NEW DELHI-110075	117627.25	8-JAN-19
340	ROHINI CHHATHWAL	FLAT NO 45, 1ST FLOOR NISHKAM APARTMENTS, DABRIROAD, DWARKA, NEW DELHI-110075	24603.83	14-FEB-20
354	MUKESH PRATHASTHA	C-904, TULIP IVORY SECTOR 70, SOUTH CITY-2, GURGAON-122018	17024.72	11-JUN-20
480	RAJITHA ANIL ABRAHAM	FLAT NO. 6, 6TH FLOOR, SANTA RITTA ST JOHNS ROAD, BANDRA WEST ANDHERI MUMBAI, SUBURBAN NEAR GOLDS GYM MUMBAI-400050	0	
399	PRIYANKA KUMARI	C-332, PROYOKTI APARTMENT, SECTOR 3, PLOT NO 11, DWARKA NEW DELHI, NEW DELHI-110075	7980.31	24-NOV-23
428	MANPREET KAUR	WARD NO 23, BAWA NIHAL SINGH STREET, KATKAPURA ROAD-MUKTASAR-152026	0	
354	RITEU SOOD	FLAT NO 2271, SECTOR-D, POCKET 2, VASANT KUNJ, NEW DELHI-110070	0	
404	GOVIND SINGH	H. NO. -199, NEW PRATAP CHOWK, NEAR DHANUA KHAN, DELHI-CANTT-DELHI-110010	28637.72	13-DEC-18
BRANCH ADDRESS : EAST OF KAILASH, AXIS BANK LTD., EAST OF KAILASH, AXIS BANK LTD E-224, EAST OF KAILASH, EAST OF KAILASH NEW DELHI - 110065				
1035	NIHARIKA SHARMA	W/O ANURAG SHARMA, 29 SANT NAGAR EAST, OF KAILASH EAST OF KAILASH, PHASE I, SRINIWASPUR KALKAJI SOUTH DELHI-DELHI-201301	22169.72	30-JUL-19
BRANCH ADDRESS : GREATER KAILASH II, DELHI [DL], AXIS BANK LTD GREATER KAILASH II-5-266, GREATER KAILASH II, NEW DELHI - 110048				
145	MANPREET MANPREET KAUR	SVERRIES VE 20 LORENSKOGLORENSK KERKHUSLOREN SKOG1473	0	
262	SAGAREKA SEN	G568, FIRST FLOOR KALKAJI, NEW DELHI-110019	0	
299	ATRI SENGUPTA	E 15 59 GARDEN ESTTE AT GORU DRONA CHARVA METRO STATION SIKANDERPUR GURUGRAM-122002	0	
1019	TARLEEN PURI	E-415, FIRST FLOOR, GREATER KAILASH PART-2, SOUTH DELHI, GREATER KAILASH SOUTH DELHI-110048	0	
173	JYOTI JAIN	E 284 SECOND FLOOR GREATER KAILASH II, NEW DELHI-110048	0	
319	DEEPA VASHISTH	W 41, GREATER KAILASH PART 2, NEW DELHI-110048	0	
126	YASMINE GILL	H NO 2-1ST FLOOR, MAHARANI BAGH, SRINIWASPUR SOUTH DELHI, NEW DELHI, DELHI-110065	18220.81	7-JUL-21
308	SUITI ACHARYA	D-100, GROUND FLOOR, PANCHSHEEL PARK-NEW DELHI-110017	43750.58	26-DEC-19
BRANCH ADDRESS : GREEN PARK, AXIS BANK LTD GREEN PARKK-12, GREEN PARK MAIN, NEW DELHI, NEW DELHI-110016				
722	MOHAMMAD IQBAL ALAM	128, 12B, REHMANI BLDG, FLAT 303, IIRD FLOORSTREET NO. 15, ZAKIR NAGAR, OKHLA-NEW DELHI-110025	0	
431	ANIL PERMON MALIK	P.O.BOX 44942, ABDU DHABI-XXX	41426.56	12-JUN-20
595	MADHOO MEHRA	C-372-C, SUSHANT LOD-1, GURGAON-GURGAON-122002	22238.32	26-DEC-19
96	MONA BHAT	C-7/232, NAVIN NIKEANTS D AREA, NEW DELHI-110016	0	
100	HEMAN PAHWA	31, SAGE CREEK, IRVINEA 52603, IRVINE 92603	38531.91	10-OCT-22
391	SUBHI GUHA THAKURTA	FLAT NO.2,LAKE GREEN APPETS, 1 LAKE WEST ROAD SANTOSHPURO-KOLKATA-700075	0	
709	ADITI CHAKRABORTY	508 PALACE COURT 66 MALL AVENUE, LUCKNOW, NEAR CONGRESS OFFICE, LUCKNOW-226001	20250.61	25-AUG-23
277	VIKRANT SHARMA	F NO D-802, BLK D TYPE A PKT 3, DFLA BIPAT, DABRIROAD, DWARKA, NR POLICE STATION-NEW DELHI-110059	11669.72	3-JUN-21
936	NEDA UPADHYAY	568 KHA/112 1/56 PEEL GATE, ALAMBAGH, LUCKNOW UTTAR PRADESH-LUCKNOW-226005	0	
313	SUMAN RAJPAL	22, BHAMRI MANSION RAMJAS ROAD, KAROL BAGH, NEW DELHI-110016	0	
1004	RTU SHARMA	C-711 NEW FRIENDS COLONY, NEW DELHI-110065	168794.91	14-FEB-20
768	MUKESH KUMAR	A-14, SADHNAPURI, GARDENBAGH, PATNA-800001	0	
435	ANJALI VERMA	FLAT NO-132, DEIRA TOWER, NASH SQUARE, DEIRA, DUBAI	107528.75	1-APR-08
713	VISHAL CHIB	1728, CATANIA, MAHAGUN MODERN, SECTOR-78,GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR, NOID-A201301	0	
BRANCH ADDRESS : JASOLA, AXIS BANK LTD JASOLA, NEW DELHI GROUND FLOOR & BASEMENT PLOT NO. 51, POCKET 1, JASOLA, NEW DELHI-110025				
1014	PARTHA SARATHI GUHAPATRA	HOUSE NO -193, 2ND FLOOR, ASHOKA ENCLAVE, PALLA-03, BEHIND PIN BULCHI, AMARNAGAR, FARIDABAD-121003	30598.98	13-DEC-18
BRANCH ADDRESS : KHAM MARKET, AXIS BANK LTD., KHAM MARKET, AXIS BANK LTD, NO. 1, KHAM MARKET, NEW DELHI - 110003				
187	RASHMI SKADEGARD	262 MOTT STREET APARTMENT, NEW YORK-10012	0	
34	SANGAMITRA SHARMA	C-33, J.Y.T'S GARDENS, CHATTARPUR EXT., MEHRULLI, NEW DELHI-110030	17999.73	25-JUN-20
200	SUTAPA MITRA	2602 VERONA CHSCLIFF, AVENUE ROAD, POWAI NEAR HIRANANDANI GARDENS, MUMBAI-400076	0	
44	IK NARULA	A-78, BLOCK A, PANDORA ROAD, NEW DELHI-110003	31963.63	26-DEC-19
119	V AHMED SIDDIQUI	S/0 ABDUL QADIR JEELANI, FLAT NO 202, HYM SWARAJYA RESIDENCY, BALAJI NAGAR, SIRIPURAM, VISAKHAPATNAM URBAN VISAKHAPATNAM-530003	0	
220	PRADEEP KUMAR MISHRA	13 SUMMERFIELD DRIVE PRINCETON NJ 08540-8558-NEW JERSEY-854085	0	
91	PREMILATA VERMA	EKTA 166 SECTOR B, BLOCK A, 4TH FLOOR, DWARKA-NEW DELHI-110075	0	
BRANCH ADDRESS : LAJPAT NAGAR, NEW DELHI [DL], AXIS BANK LTD LAJPAT NAGAR B-6, LAJPAT NAGAR-II, NEW DELHI-110024				
1004	MR. SUDARSHAN K GAMBIH	112, NAVIJAN VIHAR, MAHILYA NAGAR, NO 20, SOUTH DELHI-NEW DELHI-110017	0	
3054	LALIT DINESH YADAV	C-202, II FLOOR, SWARANY JIANTARAM, GHZABAD-201013	0	
11066	DILIP KUMAR NIRANJAN	G-12/1, SECOND FLOOR, MALVIYA NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110017	18927.84	3-JUL-20
3044	JASPREET SINGH CHADHA	237 RPS FLATS, SHEIKH SARAI, PHASE 1-NEW DELHI-110017	15667.68	23-JAN-23
10303	SUDHA YADAV	N 298 SHIVALIK NAGAR, RANIPUR RANGEBEHL HARIDWAR HARIDWAR, NEAR MANDIR HARIDWAR-249403	18061.07	12-JUN-20
13015	SUBHASH YADUVANSH	25 1ST FLOOR JIA SARAI, NEW DELHI110016	0	
3038	SANJU S/O MALLA	18/126, C-8, ANNA NAGAR, T-HUTS, RING ROAD 1 DEPTO-NEW DELHI-110049	26146.07	23-APR-19
708	SUCHIN SINHA	A 1401, WORLD SPA EAST, SCTOR 30, GURGAON-GURGAON-122001	76997.67	3-JUL-20
2034	KIRAN LATI RAIZADA	HOUSE NO. 34, NEAR MORN SARWAL, COLONY REHARI MOHALLA JAMMU, REHARI MOHALLA, JAMMU-180005	0	
9049	RTI ANAND	44, TREGORRICK ROAD, EXCHALL COVENTRY, O- CV79FH	0	
11002	MOHIT SHARMA	G-1/9, GROUND FLOOR, MALVIYA NAGAR-NEW DELHI110017	0	
BRANCH ADDRESS : NEHRU PLACE, AXIS BANK LTD NEHRU PLACE CORPORATE TOWERS GROUND FLOOR, NEHRU PLACE OPP NEHRU PLACE METRO STATION NEW DELHI-110019				
402	ZAHID AHMED	TOWER E 401, ANTRIKSH GOLF VIEW 20, SECTOR 7B NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR-201301	0	
318	RAM AWATAR SINGH	104, 2ND FLOOR, SOUTH DELHI, SUKHDVE VIHAR-SOUTH DELHI-110025	0	
453	RAM AWATAR SINGH	115, NEW MANGALPURI MEHRULLI, NR GOVT SCHOOL, NR GOVT SCHOOL, NEW DELHI-110030	0	
176	REENA MAJUMDAR	C-453, CHITTARANJAN PARK, NEW DELHI-110019	31200	30-DEC-10
337	NIRUPAMA RANA	B-42, SECTOR 53, NOIDA-NOIDA-201307	0	
102	ANSHU BHUDRAJA	HOUSE NO 10A, PASCHIM MARG, LFL PHASE-I, GURGAON-122001	5658.04	3-JUN-22
BRANCH ADDRESS : MALVIYA NAGAR, NEW DELHI [DL], AXIS BANK LTD MALVIYA NAGAR C - 75 MALVIYA NAGAR SHIVALIK ROAD NEW DELHI - 110017				
1004	YASH PAL WALIA	78 BEACHEE AVENUE, NEAR PARKITY NEW BASFORD, NG77LN	0	
BRANCH ADDRESS : RING ROAD, AXIS BANK LTD RING ROAD AVIANCE HOUSE, GROUND FLOOR AND FIRST F				

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Locker No.	Name of the Locker Hirer(s)	Address	Amount Due (INR)	Amount Due from	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : M-GROAD, GURGAON, PBBRANCH, AXISBANKLTD MROAD, GURGAON, PBBRANCHSHOP NO.03,03A,4FIRSTFLOOR,AND05, G.F.,MEZANDFF, MEGA CITY MALL, M.G.ROAD, GURGAON-122002</b>					
13085	AMAN RANA	Q-2/22 DLF PHASE-20,GURGAON122001	0		
13008	RAJARSHI BHATTACHARYYA	CE-133 SALT LAKE SECTOR 1 KOLKATA-KOLKATA700064	12420	17-AUG-22	
7017	USHA BHARDWAJ	8,ANAND GRAM,MEHRAULI-GURGAON RD, GHITTORNJ..NEW DELHI110030	0		
8018	USA BHARDWAJ	8,ANAND GRAM,MEHRAULI-GURGAON RD, GHITTORNJ..NEW DELHI110030	0		
14044	KISHUNK RAJPUT	E-264 DLF PARK PLACE SECTOR 54 Gurgaon SECTOR-54 Gurgaon SECTOR 56.....GURGAON122011	5658.04	17-AUG-22	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : MANESAR, AXIS BANK LTD MANESAR SHOP NO.34 TO 39 &amp; 64 TO 66,66A, 66B,67 TO 69 TOWER J, SECTOR-2 IMT MANESAR- 122050</b>					
17	DALCHAND	1071 OHANIRAM GARIBDAS SHAHPUR GURGAON122001	7297.46	11-JUN-20	
26	HUKAM SINGH	S/O RAM PRASAD HNU 12 VPO BHORA KALAN BETHAPATI-GURGAON122013	16503.3	13-DEC-18	
21	PARDEEP SHARMA	C O RAMESH SHARMA N 591 SECTOR 1 IMT MANESAR-GURGAON122052	0		
76	PARDEEP SHARMA	C O RAMESH SHARMA N 591 SECTOR 1 IMT MANESAR-GURGAON122052	0		
129	SUSHIL SINGH CHAUHAN	S/O RAM AVATAR SINGH 169PREDNANAS COLONY KAWAN PATTIKAWAN PATTI BAHORA KALAN (134) KAWAN PATTI GURGAON122413	0		
126	KAVITA SHARMA	DHANI LAKHMI WALI (BHORA KALAN), GURGAON,BILASPUR(146)-GURGAON122413	0		
125	VIKRAM SHARMA	S/O DAULAT RAM 170 FRENDNS COLONY KAWAN PATTI BAHORA KALAN (134)GURGAON KAWAN PATTI GURGAON122413	0		
130	RANI CHAUHAN	W/O SUSHIL SINGH CHAUHAN 165, FRENDNS COLONY,KAWAN PATTI BAHORA KALAN (134),GURGAON CITY - GURGAONGARH122413	0		
<b>AXIS BANK LTD PALAM VIHAR, GURGAON, GRD FLR SHOP NO.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,1ST FLOOR OFFICE SPACENO.02, H BLK, SURY PALAM CENTRAL GURGAON-122017</b>					
4009	PURNA CHANDRA BEHERA	1101 TOWER 16 UNITECH HORIZONPL NO 6 SECTOR PI-II-GREATER NOIDA201308	29269.82	13-DEC-18	
4010	KALPANA SHARMA	HNO C 678 FIRST FLR PALAM VIHAR-GURGAON122017	26457.22	13-DEC-18	
1031	SREEVIDYA	305/MS 8 SECTOR 56KENDRIYA VIHAR-GURGAON122001	0		
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : PALWAL, AXIS BANK LTD PALWAL, MUNICIPAL NO-4041/1,NEAR RASULPUR CHOWKDELHI - Agra BY-PASS ROAD PALWAL- 121102</b>					
331	REENA JAIN W/O VIVEK JAIN	HOUSE NO-1670, SECTOR-28 FARIDABAD,FARIDABAD SECTOR 29-FARIDABAD121008	0		
469	RAJESH	S/O OM PRAKASH VILLAGE MOHAMMADPURGULAW (113) GULAWAD PALWALNEAR-BUS STANDOPALWAL121102	33100.3	13-DEC-18	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : ROSEWOOD CITY , GUR HNR, AXIS BANK LTD ROSEWOOD CITY,GROUND FLOOR, UNIT NO. G-21, G-22,-C-238 G-24,SECTOR 49&amp;50 ROSEWOOD CITY, EROSITY SQARE, GURGAON- 122001</b>					
73	MADHUSA CHAKRABORTY	J-1103 WEMBLEY ESTATE ROSEWOOD CITYSECTOR-49-50-GURGAON122018	14611.2	3-JUN-21	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR 10A, GURGAON [HNR], AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR 10A, GURGAON, GROUND FLOOR &amp; BASEMENT S.C.O. NO. 00, SECTOR 10A, NEAR HERO HONDA CHOWK GURGAON-122001</b>					
63	LALIT YADAV	H NO 1423 SECTOR 210-GURGAON122001	49284.47	7-FEB-19	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR 15, GURGAON, AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR 15, GURGAON, SCO-50 &amp; 51,OLD JUDICIAL COMPLEX,CIVIL LINES, SECTOR-15 GURGAON-122001</b>					
3028	DHARM SINGH	HOUSE NO 830 SECTOR 14 GURGAONNEAR SEC 14 HUDA MARKETGURGAON122001	0		
1026	NAVEEN THAKRAN	H NO 118 ISLAMPUR 97GURGAON-GURGAON122218	22169.72	23-OCT-19	
2017	MRINAL BENIPURI	C 2/2 HAVELOK ROAD COLONYHUNSAANGANJHUNSAANGJLUCKNOW265001	11669.72	23-MAR-21	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR 16, FARIDABAD, AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR 16, FARIDABAD, BASEMENT &amp; GROUND FLOOR,SCO-8,SECTOR-16,HUDA SHOPPING CENTER FARIDABAD-121002</b>					
1023	AMIT BHATRA	H.NO-321, G,SEC-1100-FARIDABAD-121002	28823.92	13-DEC-18	
4028	RAJESH CHANDELA	S/O ZELE SINH VILLAGE BUDEHUNA-FARIDABAD121004	22169.72	23-APR-19	
4053	BHARAT PARASHAR	SECTOR 18 NEAR KHERI PULL JEELWAN DHARAM KANTAKHERI KALAN(113) HOUSE NO 219-220 RAJIV NAGAR-FARIDABAD 121002	0		
4029	RAHUL	VILL-BUDEHUNA-SECTOR-66 FARIDABAD-FARIDABAD121002	22169.72	19-SEP-19	
3053	HEERESH	H NO 197SECTOR 28-FARIDABAD121001	22169.72	15-MAY-19	
5012	SUNIL KUMAR	HOUSE NO 160 17 SECTOR 17 FARIDABADHARYANA-FARIDABAD121002	11669.72	28-APR-22	
3036	AMIT JINDAL	B/16 3 SEC 11NA MADHUM VATHIKA-FARIDABAD121001	16913.6	3-JUN-21	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR 21C, FARIDABAD, AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR 21C, FARIDABAD, GROUND FLOOR &amp; BASEMENTS/SCF/SCO NO 141SECTOR 21 C, HUDA, FARIDABAD-121003</b>					
2033	PUSHPA	HOUSE NO 586 SECTOR 46FARIDABADNEAR MARKET SEC 46FARIDABAD121003	22169.72	23-APR-19	
1003	RAM MAHER CHAPRANA	VILLAGE-MEWLA MAHARAJ PUR H NO-1612WARD NO-13 NEAR SECTOR 46.-FARIDABAD121010	14047.3	7-JUL-21	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR 22, GURGAON, AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR 22, GURGAON, GROUND FLOOR AND BASEMENT,SCO/F, SECTOR 22,HUDA MARKET,GURGAON-122001</b>					
19	SUMITRA DEVI	W/O LEKHRAJ YADAV HOUSE NO 73A NEARSECTOR-22B MOLAHERA(65) PALAM ROADGURGAON NEAR SECTOR	27366.17	7-MAR-19	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR 31-32A, GURGAON [HNR], AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR 31, GURGAON, GROUND FLOOR &amp; BASEMENTS,C.NO 29, SECTOR 31-32A, URBAN ESTATE , GURGAON-122001</b>					
2050	AVIN MITTAL	BUILDING 4 FLAT 6B THE HIBISCUS GROUP SECTOR 50SOSUTH CITY 1/GURGAON122018	0		
44	GUNJAN CHANANA	HOUSE NO 003 RAJKHAN TOWER RETREAT APPARTMENTS SOUTH CITY 1-GURGAON122001	5658.04	22-JUN-22	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR 49, GURGAON, AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR 49, GURGAONGROUND FLOOR, SHOP NO 05A, 05B, 06 &amp; 7UNIVERSAL TRADE TOWER, MAIN SOHNA ROADSECTOR-49, GURGAON-122001</b>					
3018	AMITAVA	FLAT NO 802 TOWER 4 PARSIVATH GREEN VILLESONA ROAD-GURGAON122001	0		
1021	DEEPAK THANVI	TB-703 PARASUNATH GREEN VILLESES 48 SONHA ROADOPP OMKA MALLGURGAON122002	0		
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR 57, GURGAON [HNR], AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR 57, GURGAON, SHOP NO G-1, G-2 &amp; G-3, GROUND FLOORBESTECH CENTRAL SQUARE, BLOCK G,SUSHANT LOK, PHASE II, SECTOR 57 GURGAON-122001</b>					
105	KRISHNA KISHORE SINGH	HNO -D-114 RIDGEWOOD ESTATE DLPHSE 4 GALLERIA DLF IV-GURGAON122009	11669.72	27-APR-22	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SECTOR-29, GURGAON, AXIS BANK LTD SECTOR-29, GURGAON,UNIT NO 102(E102/F, 102I), TOWER ASIGNATURE TOWERS SECTOR-29GURGAON-122001</b>					
1027	RAJIB KUMAR MISHRA	B-2/73 POSESSOR -33, CHAKHARUPURKACHARPUR (74)GURGAON122002	12470.81	7-JUL-21	
2056	NEERAJ KUMAR	S/HARI RAM SHARMA VILLAGE SILKROKHP BADLU RAM DHARMHALA SECTOR 45-GURGAON122001	0		
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SOHNA, AXIS BANK LTD SOHNA, GR FLR,BASEMENT,KHEWAT NO93 KHATONI.1191,MUSTATILENO 219,KILLA 3,2,25,-5,2,1,8,0-15WARDS,OPP DEVILAH, SOHNA,GURGAON-122103</b>					
64	SANDEEP SHARMA	WARD NO 3 SUSHIL NAGAR,SONHAGURGAON...CHUNG NO 150HNA122103	12251.25	3-JUN-21	
37	KULDEEP	VILL DAMDAMA TEHSILSONHAGURGAONGURGAONSOHNA122103	0		
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : SUSHANT LOK, GURGAON, AXIS BANK LTD SUSHANT LOK, GURGAON,G-32,-6,5,UPPERGROUND FLR,SUSHANT LOK-1,GURGAON-122002</b>					
5	VIVEK KUNWAR	S/O RAJENDRA KUNWAR RAMESHWARMAKCOLONY RANCHI BARIATUNEER SHIV MANDIRANCHI834009	0		
20	AMARJEET SINGH SAREEN	2922 SE 11TH STREET OCALAFLORIDA CALACALOCA34471	17757.47	26-DEC-19	
<b>THE CONTROLLING CIRCLE OFFICE FOR BELOW LISTED BRANCHES IS:</b> <b>NAME: CIRCLE OFFICE NORTH WEST DELHI, ADDRESS: AXIS BANK LIMITED, AXIS HOUSE, TOWER 3, 4TH FLOOR, SECTOR 128, NOIDA-201304.</b>					
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : GHAZIABAD, AXIS BANK LTD GHAZIABAD PLOT NO 3-N-20 AMBEDKAR ROAD NEHRU NAGAR GHAZIABAD (U.P.) GHAZIABAD 201001</b>					
2014	DAVINDER SINGH	KG-111 KAVI NAGAR GHAZIABAD GHAZIABAD 201001	86543.26	23-JAN-23	
3026	KRISHAN KUMAR MITTAL	H.NO. -148-A SEC-6 CHIRANEEV HAVI GHAZIABAD - GHAZIABAD 201001	39291.16	10-DEC-22	
1026	KUSHIN SINGH	J-29/PRATAP VIHARSECTOR-12 0 - GHAZIABAD 201001	39463.41	10-DEC-22	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : GREATER NOIDA</b>					
5015	NAVRATNA GUPTA	AXIS BANK LTD GREATER NOIDA-G-4, G-5, G-6, G-7, G-18,I-3, F-04 D-1, ALPHA COMMERCIAL BELT-I , GREATER NOIDA 201308	22169.72	15-MAY-19	
5058	ASHISH CHAUDHARY	MOPUVANYA, GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR, JHANSIRANGPUR - GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR 203141	0		
3054	SANJEEV KUMAR AGARWAL	769 STREET NO 4 LANE NOT 1 RAJENDRA NAGAR KAULAGHAR DEHRADUN 248001	5658.04	19-OCT-22	
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : ROSHANARA ROAD, DELHI, PROPERTY NO 70128/K-7, GROUND FLOOR, ROHINI ROAD, ROHINI, DELHI, 110007</b>					
34	ASHOK KUMAR SINGH	TOWER NO-13 FLAT NO-301 COMMONWEALTH GAMES VILLAGE IP EXTENSION EAST DELHI DELHI 110092	0		
<b>BRANCH ADDRESS : INDIRAPURAM (GHAZIABAD), AXIS BANK LTD INDIRAPURAM (GHAZIABAD) BG-1, BF-1,ADITYA CITY CENTER, PLOT NO. 3, VAIBHAV KHAND, INDIRAPURAM GHAZIABAD 201010</b>					
2014	DAVINDER SINGH	KG-111 KAVI NAGAR GHAZIABAD GHAZIABAD 201001	86543.26	23-JAN-23	
3026	KRISHAN KUMAR MITTAL	H.NO. -148-A SEC-6 CHIRANEEV HAVI GHAZIABAD - GHAZIABAD 201001	39291		



Sr. DEE/TRD/WCR, Bhopal acting for and on behalf of the President of India, invites E-Tenders against following works, upto 11.00 hours on the dates mentioned against each tender. The complete tender documents and details information regarding tender, is available on the website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>. Manual offers are not allowed against these tenders. For any correction, in this tender, if necessary, corrigendum will be uploaded on website prior to tender opening date which may be seen up to the date of tender opening. **Tender No.**: BPL/TRD/DRG/WC/418. **Description of work:** Replacement of rusty anticrepic wire in ET-KNW section of Bhopal division. **Completion Period:** 12 month, **Estimated Cost (Rs.)**: 14676948.64, **EMD (Rs.)**: 223400/-, **Closing Date and Time for submission of Tender:** 11.03.2024 at 11.00 hrs.

सच्च भारत अधिनियम  
एक कदम स्वतंत्रता की ओर

BEFORE DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, DELHI  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Jeevan Tara Building, Parliament Street, New Delhi-110001

In the matter of TA/2425/2022

IDBI BANK

Versus

HARISH AGARWAL

To, (1) Harish Agarwal  
S/o, Late Shri Shiv Kumar, R/o, 62, 3rd Floor East End Enclave, Near Prayadarshini Vihar, Lakshmi Nagar, East Delhi-110092

(2) Ms. Leena Agarwal

Ms. Leena Agarwal, D/o, Late Shri. Shiv Kumar, R/o, 62, 3rd Floor, East End Enclave Near Prayadarshini Vihar, Lakshmi Nagar, Delhi-110092

(3) Ms. Universal Capital

1005, Antarkris Bhawan, K.G. Marg, New Delhi-110001

(4) Ms. Capital Traders

218, Gurudwara Road, Gold Plaza Building, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case for recovery of Rs. 1,03,67,068 (Rupees One Crore Three Lakh Sixty Seven Thousand And Sixty Eight Only) against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before the Registrar/ Recovery Officer/I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT website [www.tribunal.gov.in](http://www.tribunal.gov.in) Phone Number: 011-23748739. (for further details kindly visit DRT website [www.tribunal.gov.in](http://www.tribunal.gov.in) Phone Number: 011-23748739). Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

Due to ongoing Pandemic Situation, all the matters will be taken up through Video Conferencing and for that purpose:- (i) All the Advocates/Litigants shall download the "Cisco Webex" application/ software. (ii) Meeting ID" and "Password" for the next date of hearing qua cases to be taken by "Registrar/Recovery Officer/I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT Official Portal i.e. "drt.gov.in" under the Public Notice Head. (iii) in any exigency qua that, the Advocates/Litigants can contact the concerned official at Ph. No. 011-23748473.

Given under my hand and seal of the Tribunal on this 30<sup>th</sup> January of 2024

By Order of this Tribunal  
Assistant Registered

Respondent may contact under mention Phone number for further enquiry.

Mr. Amit K. Dar, Lt. Registrar, DRT-I, Phone No.: 011-23748473,

Email: [drt1delhi-dfs@nic.in](mailto:drt1delhi-dfs@nic.in)

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL - I, DELHI  
4TH FLOOR, JEEVAN TARA  
BUILDING, PARLIAMENT  
STREET, NEW DELHI- 110 001.

TA 3298/2022

ICICI BANK LIMITED  
VS

CHANDER PAL SINGH & ANR,

To, (1) CHANDER PAL SINGH  
S/O SH. MOHAR SINGH,  
HOUSE NO. 708, SANJAY  
COLONY, FARIDABAD- 121 001  
NORTH, DELHI

(2) CHARAN SINGH  
(GUARANTOR), S/o SH. ATAR  
SINGH, VILLAGE GHARORA,  
FARIDABAD- 121 001

Whereas the above named applicant has instituted a case for recovery of RS. 1,83,186.16 (Rupees TEN LAKH EIGHTY THREE THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED EIGHTY SIX AND SIXTEEN PAISA ONLY) against you and whereas it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Tribunal that it is not possible to serve you in ordinary way. Therefore, this notice is given by advertisement directing you to make appearance before the Registrar/ Recovery Officer/I and Recovery Officer-II shall be available one day prior to the next date at DRT website [www.tribunal.gov.in](http://www.tribunal.gov.in) Phone Number: 011-23748473. Take notice that in case of your failure to appear on the above mentioned day before this Tribunal, the case will be heard and decided in your absence.

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SINGH, VILLAGE GHARORA,  
FARIDABAD- 121 001

## Classifieds

## PERSONAL

It is for general information that I MANISH GUPTA S/o KANAHIA LAL GUPTA, residing at House 524 Pocket-5 Mayur Vihar Phase-1 New Delhi-110091, declare that my name has been written wrongly as Manish Kumar Gupta in my educational certificates, the actual and correct name of mine is Manish Gupta which may be amended accordingly.

0040714800-1

I, hitherto known as REKHA, D/O-Matadin Gupta,R/O-126, Krishna Gal, Pahar Ganj Swami Ram Tirth-Nagar, New-Delhi Central-Delhi-110055, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME AND SHALL HEREAFTER BE KNOWN AS Rekha Gupta.

0040714816-3

I, Vinita Arunkumar, D/O-Vijayakumar Yadrami is legally wedded spouse of SB Arunkumar, presently residing at, House No. 151, Arun Colony, Manjupur Nagar, Hubli, Distt-Dharwad, Karnataka-580030, have changed my Name from Vinita Arunkumar to Vinita Arunkumar vide Affidavit Dated 15/02/2024 at New Delhi. 0040714774-9

I, Vijay Dhankhar, S/o Sh. Devanand Dhankhad, R/O-RZF-870, Lal-Bahadur Shastri Marg, Raj Nagar-2, Dwarka, South-West, Delhi-110077, Have changed My Name From Vijay Kumar to Vijay Dhankhar, For all Future Purposes. 0040714795-7

I, TABASSUM,W/O MD AMEEN, ADD-J-2-B-2,2 GUPTA-COLONY SANGAM VIHAR, SOUTH DELHI-110062, changed my name to MOHD SHOAIB, for all future purposes. 0040714816-5

I, Sunil Kumar Gupta,S/O-Gyan Prakash,R/O-A-58-A-Block,pocket-00-60 MTR,Plot Sector-2,Rohini,North West DELHI-110085, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME Sunil Kumar Gupta to SUNIL for all Future purposes. 0040714858-1

I, VAANI GAUR, D/O ARJUN KOHIT R/O-N-240, GREATER KAILASH PART-1 DELHI-110048, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO VAANI KOHLI. 0040714795-11

I, Subhankar Shrikant Gaware S/o Shrikant Gaware R/o,Flat-No.91, Lok-Vihar Apartments, D-Block, Vikaspuri, New Delhi-110018, have changed my name to Subhankar Shrikant Gaware. 0040714836-4

I, Simran D/o Kuldeep Singh R/o-Haiatpur (78), Nirjan, Jind, Haryana-126102 have changed my name to Simran Rani. 0040714799-9

I, Shankrappa Bevinamarad Arunkumar, Son of,SB Bevinamarad, resident of,House No. 151, Arun Colony, Manjupur Nagar, Hubli, Distt-Dharwad, Karnataka-580030, have changed my Name from Shankrappa Bevinamarad Arunkumar to Shankar Bevinamarad Arunkumar vide-Affidavit.No. Dated-15/02/2024, at New-Delhi. 0040714774-8

I, SURBHII CHARAK, wife of, RAMAN DEV SINGH CHARAK, residing at, 24-D, Marut-Camp, Air force-station, New-Delhi-110003, have change my name, from SURBHII CHARAK TO SURBHII ANDOTRA, vide-Affidavit Dated-16.02.2024. 0040714816-10

I, SUNDER S/o Dharmpal Malik R/o 142.BLOCK-HR, Pul Pehlajpur Delhi-110044 have changed my name to SUNDER MALIK. 0040714831-6

I, SHOBHAN LAL MALLICK S/O RIPON MALLICK R/O FLATNO.297,PKT-GH,BAGHBN-APARTMENT,SECTOR-28,ROHINI,DELHI-110085.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO SHOBHAN MALLICK. 0040714795-5

I, Rubal Singh Renu,S/o Mamnoon Singh R/o-161B/16,Ganesha Pura Tri Nagar MCD Primary, School Onkar Nagar,Delhi-110035, have changed my name to Rajbala. 0040714774-5

I, Raj Kumar Verma S/O Jagdish Chander R/O no.364B,Ward no-5,Devi Wada, Sonipat ,Haryana-131001,have changed my name to Rajkumar permanently. 0040714795-4

I, DILSHAD S/O SH.JEET PAL, R/O IAI/CHIPUR, GHAZIABAD,UTTAR PRADESH-20102, have changed my name as JITENDER PAL,for all,future purposes. 0040714774-4

I, Divya Marwah D/o Harish Marwah,W/o Arman Sablok,R/o Plot No.54/55,H.No.302,3rd-Floor,Gali No.4, Rajendra Park,Gurugram (H.R.)-122001, have changed my name to Divya Sablok. 0040714831-10

I, Devendra Kumar S/o Ramesh Chander R/o H.No.2117, Sector-8, Faridabad, Haryana-121006, have changed my name to Devendra Rawat permanently. 0040714799-2

I, Atul Kumar S/o Devendra Kumar,R/o-A2-1002, Panchsheel Green-1, Bishrakh,Gautambudh-Nagar, U.P.-201306, have changed my name from Atul Kumar to Atul Gupta,for all,future purpose. 0040714799-5

I, Monalisa D/o Birnalkumar Kamanakrishna Biswas, W/O Debanjan Mukherjee R/o B-73, Manavsthali Apartment, Plot No 6, Vasundhara Enclave, Preeti Vihar, Delhi-110096, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Saumili Birnalkumar Biswas. 0070889534-1

I, Asharam S/O-RAM CHET VERMA,R/O-HO-N-BO-293,STREET,NO-10,GAGAN VIHAR,GHAZIABAD UTTAR PRADESH-201005, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ASHA RAM VERMA,FOR ALL PURPOSES. 0040714774-1

I, Akib Malik S/o Mohammad Yamin,R/o-H.No.24, Main-road Shani Bazar, Kardampuri, delhi-110094, Inform that my father, and mother name has been wrongly-metiong Yameen, and Shakeela in my 10th class certificate.that my father correct name Mohammad Yamin and mother correct name Shakila,for all future purposes. 0040714746-1

I, Pradeep Kumar S/O Shiv Shanker,R/O K-111,Bal Udyhan Road,Uttam Nagar,New Delhi-110059,Have Changed my Name to Pradeep Kumar Gupta. 0040714795-10

I, ARVIND KUMAR ALIAS ARVIND KUMAR AGARWAL ALIAS ARVIND AGARWALS/S/ORM SHANKER R/O-L-265, SARITA VIHAR, NEAR APOLLO HOSPITAL, DELHI-110076 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ARVIND AGARWAL, FOR ALL PURPOSES. 0070889574-1

I, Poonam Bhardwaj alias Poonam alias Poonam D/o,Kundan Lal Bhardwaj W/o,Pankaj Datta R/o-G-59,Kirti-Nagar, Ramesh-Nagar, New Delhi-110015, have changed my name to Poonam Datta. 0040714836-5

I, PUNEET KAUR ANAND,W/O KARANJEET SINGH, ADDRESS,A-40,NARANG COLONY, JANAKPUR-B-1, NEW-DELHI-110058, changed my name to PUNEET KAUR. 0040714774-3

I, Nitesh@Nitesh Kumar,S/o Roop Lal,H.No.58/59,Golden-Rana Ji Encleve, South West Delhi-110043, have changed my name to Nitesh Lal, for all purposes. 0040714836-2

I, Nighat Sultana,W/o-Ehsan Elahi,R/o-957,Lambi Gali,Mohalla Kishan Ganj,Teliwara,Azad Market Delhi-110006, have changed my name to Nighat Sultana, for future. 0040714799-4

I, Manmeet Narang W/o Rattan deep singh hora,R/o J-155, 1st Floor, Rajouri Garden, Delhi-110027, have changed my name to Manmeet Kaur Hora. 0040714799-6

I, Manmohan Singh Renu,S/o Karam Singh Renu R/o-1618/116,Ganesh Pura Tri Nagar MCD Primary, School Onkar-Nagar, Delhi-110035, have changed my name to Manmohan Singh. 0040714831-5

I, Maneesh Yadav S/o Shyambabu Yadav R/o C-744 Street No.4,Phase-2,Shiv Vihar Karawal Nagar Delhi-110094, changed my name to Manish Yadav 0040714831-3

I, MD SHOAIB, S/O MD AMEEN, ADD-J-2-B-2,2 GUPTA-COLONY SANGAM VIHAR, SOUTH DELHI-110062, changed my name to MOHD SHOAIB, for all, future purposes. 0040714816-4

I, MD SHAMIM,S/O MD NEYAMUDIN,ADD-HN-31A,IST FLOOR FRONT-SIDE,NAI BASTI ,ABUL FAZAL ENCLAVE, 1,JAMIA-NAGAR,SOUTH- EAST-DELHI-110025, CHANGED MY NAME TO MOHAMMAD SHAMIM, For all,Future Purposes. 0040714795-3

I, Kaushlendra Kumar,S/o Ram Das Sharma,R/o D-54,Near Water Tank Aya Nagar Delhi-110047, Have Changed My Name To Kaushlendra Sharma,For Future. 0040714836-3

I, KMK AARTI ARORA,W/O KUNAL DUREJA R/O R-2/76, SECTOR-2, RAJ NAGAR, GHAZIABAD,(U.P) have changed my name to AARTI DUREJA. 0040714816-2

I, KARANJIT SINGH,S/O SURJIT SINGH ADDRESS:C-10, DAYANAND COLONY, LAJPAT NAGAR-IV, NEW DELHI 110024, changed my name to KARANJEET SINGH. 0040714799-1

I, KAPIL SINGLA,S/O SHRI RAMESH SINGLA R/O 1035,GR,FLOOR, SHAKTI KHAND-4, IDIRAPURAM,SHIPRA SUNCITY, GHAZIABAD,U.P.-201014,THAT INSTEAD MY NAME IN MY DAUGHTER NAMELY' TISHIKA SINGLA"PASSPORT NO.N7276481,IN MENTIONED IS KAPIL KUMAR SINGLA HE WOULD BE KNOWN & CALLED KAPIL SINGLA AS PER MY Aadhar CARD/PAN-CARD THAT I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME KAPIL KUMAR SINGLA TO KAPIL SINGLA, FOR FUTURE,ALL PURPOSE. 0040714747-6

I, JUNED KHAN,S/O SH.ELIYAS KHAN,R/O-E-12/104,HAUZ RANI,SOUTH DELHI, DELHI-110017, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME JUNAID TO JUNED FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSES. 0040714858-2

I, Divya Marwah D/o Harish Marwah,W/o Arman Sablok,R/o Plot No.54/55,H.No.302,3rd-Floor,Gali No.4, Rajendra Park,Gurugram (H.R.)-122001, have changed my name to Divya Sablok. 0040714831-10

I, Devendra Kumar S/o Ramesh Chander R/o H.No.2117, Sector-8, Faridabad, Haryana-121006, have changed my name to Devendra Rawat permanently. 0040714799-2

I, DILSHAD S/O SH.JEET PAL, R/O IAI/CHIPUR, GHAZIABAD,UTTAR PRADESH-20102, have changed my name as JITENDER PAL,for all,future purposes. 0040714774-4

I, BOOBY KHUNDRA S/O KEWL KRISHAN KHUNDRA R/O HNO.98.GROUND-FLOOR,AVTAR ENCLAVE, PASCHIM VIHAR,DELHI-110063, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO BOBBY KHUNDRA. 0040714795-4

I, Naushad Ali S/o Abjad Ali, R/o Flat No-I-1908, VIPV-Homes, Gaur City-2, Sector-16C Greater Noida(west), Gautam Buddha Nagar U.P have changed my name to Naushad Ali for all future purposes. 0070889569-1

I, Kumar S/o Raghavan Nair R/o A-3/120, Sector-17, Rohini, Delhi-110089, have changed my name to Manju Gupta. 0040714799-10

I, Pitambar Singh S/o Jay Daw Singh R/o C-92, West Vinod Nagar, East Delhi, Delhi-110092 have changed my name to Pitambar Singh. 0040714759-1

I, POOJA W/O SUMIT GAUTAM R/O KHASRANO, 41/5, GALINO 4, GAUTAM-COLONY, NARELA, DELHI-110040. HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO POOJA SINGH. 0040714836-6

I, Neera Alias Neera AGARWAL W/O ARVIND AGARWAL, R/O L-265, SARITA VIHAR, NEAR APOLLO HOSPITAL, DELHI-110076, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO NEERA AGARWAL, FOR ALL PURPOSES. 0070889579-1

I, Monalisa D/O Birnalkumar Kamanakrishna Biswas, W/O Debanjan Mukherjee R/o B-73, Manavsthali Apartment, Plot No 6, Vasundhara Enclave, Preeti Vihar, Delhi-110096, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Saumili Birnalkumar Biswas. 0070889534-1

I, Manjur Mahammad Tamboli,S/o Mahammad Tamboli,R/o 2nd-Floor, 564,Sec-9, Gurgaon-122001(Haryana), have changed my name to Manjur Mahammad Tamboli. 0040714831-8

I, ASHARAM S/O-RAM CHET VERMA,R/O-HO-N-BO-293,STREET,NO-10,GAGAN VIHAR,GHAZIABAD UTTAR PRADESH-201005, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ASHA RAM VERMA,FOR ALL PURPOSES. 0040714774-1

I, Akib Malik S/o Mohammad Yamin,R/o-H.No.24, Main-road Shani Bazar, Kardampuri, delhi-110094, Inform that my father, and mother name has been wrongly-metiong Yameen, and Shakeela in my 10th class certificate.that my father correct name Mohammad Yamin and mother correct name Shakila,for all future purposes. 0070889513-1

I, ARTI DUREJA W/O KUNAL DUREJA R/O R-2/76, SECTOR-2, RAJ NAGAR, GHAZIABAD(UP) have changed my name to ARTI DUREJA. 0040714816-1

I, ANURUPA W/O SANJIV KUMAR SINGH,O/ FLAT.NO. 12A/2102,LOTUS BOULEVARD, SECTOR-100,NOIDA(U.P.) HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ANURUPA BAGCHI SINGH. 0040714816-6

I, TANIL TOKAS,S/O MR.OMPRakash TOKAS,R/O-H.NO.130-A, MUNIRKA VILLAGE,NEW DELHI 110067, have changed my son's name NIKEET to NIKETT, for all purpose, whose date of birth is 17.02.2009. 0040714831-7

I, ANIL S/O HARNARAYAN R/O 275/21,LADHOT ROAD, RISHI NAGAR ROHTAK,HARYANA-124001.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ANIL KUMAR. 0040714795-6

I, Vipin Seth S/o O. P. Seth R/o-247 Deepali,Enclave Tipampura 124001 have changed my name to Vipan Seth 0040714799-7

I, Manmohan Singh Renu,S/o Karam Singh Renu R/o-1618/116,Ganesh Pura Tri Nagar MCD Primary, School Onkar-Nagar, Delhi-110035, have changed my name to Manmohan Singh. 0040714831-5

I, TANIL S/O HARNARAYAN R/O 275/21,LADHOT ROAD, RISHI NAGAR ROHTAK,HARYANA-124001.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ANIL KUMAR. 0040714795-6

I, TANIL S/O HARNARAYAN R/O 275/21,LADHOT ROAD, RISHI NAGAR ROHTAK,HARYANA-124001.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO ANIL KUMAR. 0040714795-6

I, SUSANT KUMAR Mishra,S/o Jayanta Kumar Mishra,R/o B-202,Plot-8, Tarika Apartment, Sector-43,Gurgaon(Haryana)-122001, have changed my name to Sushant Mishra. 0040714831-9

I, Suraj Prakash S/O Ram Nandan Singh, R/o H.No. 181/2 Chetan Vihar, Gopal Nagar Khaira Road Near Railway Factory, Nagaon, North West Delhi-110035, have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Suraj Prakash Singh. 0070889525-1

I, Shashank S/O Sanjiv Singh, R/o C-100 First Floor, VTC Inder Puri, Central Delhi, Delhi-110012, have changed my name and shall hereafter be Known as Shashank Singh. 0070889521-1

I, Shakuntala Prajapati W/o Jitesh Kumar R/o UG-03, Upper Ground Floor, Block-B, ACC Homes, Defence Enclave, Sector-44, Noida, G.B.Nagar U.P. have changed my name to Shreya for all future purposes. 0040714795-1

I, Sunita Devi W/o NO. 2876964V RANK EX HAV LATE HARDEEP SINGH R/o J-902, RANJIT VIHAR, 2, INDIAN HEIGHT SCHOOL, SECTOR-23, DWARKA, DELHI-110027, HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO SUNITA VIDE AFFIDAVIT DATE 14-02-2024 BEFORE DELHI. 0070889506-1

I, Renu Sehgal D/o Chander Bhan Malhotra W/o Anil Kumar Sehgal, R/o DD-18, Third Floor Rear Kalkaji, Delhi-110019. Declare that Name of My Father has been wrongly written as Anil Kumar Sehgal in my Voter Id and Pan Card. The actual name of My Father is Chander Bhan Malhotra, which may be amended accordingly. 0040714754-1

SENSEX: 72,426.64 ▲ 376.26 (0.52%) NIFTY: 22,040.70 ▲ 129.95 (0.59%) NIKKEI: 38,487.24 ▲ 329.30 HANG SENG: 16,339.96 ▲ 395.33 FTSE: 7,699.70 ▲ 102.17 DAX: 17,142.07 ▲ 95.38



GOLD

₹62,450



USD RATE

₹83.01



OIL

\$81.77



SILVER

₹75,500

Note: Gold, silver rates at Delhi spot market; gold per 10g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) as of February 15

International market data till 1900 IST

## BRIEFLY

**India buying Russian Sokol oil after hiatus**

**New Delhi:** India has resumed imports of Russian Sokol oil after a two-month gap with at least two refineries so far taking deliveries of the light sweet crude in February, four trade sources said and ship tracking data showed. India's Hindustan Petroleum Corp has bought Sokol oil from a trader, the sources said. HPCL is likely to pay for the oil in UAE dirhams, three of them added. Indian state refiners had to stop buying the grade last year after the government advised them against using Chinese yuan to pay for Russian oil amid strained relations between New Delhi & Beijing. **REUTERS**

**SBI seeks lower CRR for green deposits**

**Mumbai:** The State Bank of India (SBI) has asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for a reduction in the cash reserve ratio that needs to be maintained on green deposits raised by banks. SBI Chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara said Friday. Currently, banks have to maintain a CRR of 4.5% on their total deposits, with no distinction provided for green deposits. "We have put across the asks. One, of course, is a reduction in CRR for green deposits and second, if at all as a policy it can be incorporated," Khara said. The regulator has taken initial steps towards encouraging green deposits but it could take two to three years to start having an impact on the pricing, Khara said. **REUTERS**

**Novartis AG to review biz listed in India**

**New Delhi:** Drug major Novartis AG on Friday announced a strategic review of Novartis India Ltd, a public company listed on the BSE. The strategic review will include an assessment of the 70.68% shareholding of Novartis AG in the company, the drug firm said. Novartis India Ltd is separate from Novartis Healthcare Pvt Ltd, the wholly-owned subsidiary of Novartis group in India. The review will not impact Novartis Healthcare. **PTI**

**Nike to cut 2% jobs to lower costs**

**NIKE** WILL cut about 2% of its total workforce, or more than 1,600 jobs, the sportswear giant said late on Thursday to lower expenses as demand for its shoes and sneakers comes under pressure. Higher rental and interest rates have led customers to cut back spending on high-priced goods such as sportswear. **REUTERS**

**HITESH VYAS**  
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 16

**THE RESERVE** Bank of India (RBI) has ordered one of the card networks to stop "unauthorised payments" done via business cards. The regulator, without naming any card network, said it was allowing businesses to make payments to entities that are not authorized to accept card payments, which is a violation of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act. The RBI also raised concerns over non-compliance of Know Your Customer (KYC) norms in such transactions.

**What was the alleged modus operandi?**

A "close scrutiny", the RBI said, revealed that "such arrangement qualified as a pay-

# SpiceJet MD Ajay Singh, UAE-based firm submit bids for bankrupt Go First

Singh's bid in personal capacity, submitted jointly with little-known entity Busy Bee Airways

**SUKALP SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

**BANKRUPT CARRIER** Go First, which is undergoing the corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP), has received two bids, including a joint offer by the managing director of the troubled SpiceJet, Ajay Singh, and a little-known entity called Busy Bee Airways. The other offer is by United Arab Emirates-based aviation company Sky One.

Singh, who is also SpiceJet chairman, submitted the bid with Busy Bee Airways in his personal capacity. If the bid is successful, SpiceJet's role would be that of an operating partner. This would entail providing essential staff, services and industry expertise.

According to Registrar of Companies records, Busy Bee Airways is a Delhi-based com-



Go First has not been operating flights since May 3 last year

pany incorporated in 2017. The records show that the company currently has two directors, both of whom were appointed on December 25 – around a week after SpiceJet expressed interest in bidding for Go First.

Confirming Sky One's bid, its chairman Jaideep Mirchandani

said: "We have submitted the bid for Go First and look forward to the next stage, which is due diligence. Given our vast aviation experience across the globe, we are confident about the acquisition. Indian aviation is at the cusp of unprecedented growth and we are glad to play a part in it."

Budget airline SpiceJet is itself grappling with financial difficulties. The airline is currently implementing a revival plan, having recently completed the first tranche of capital infusion amounting to ₹744 crore, with additional subscriptions pending regulatory approval.

"This collaboration is anticipated to generate synergies between the two carriers, leading to improved cost management, revenue growth, and a strengthened market position within the Indian aviation industry. For SpiceJet, serving as the service provider presents significant opportunities for revenue expansion. By leveraging its established infrastructure and operational capabilities, SpiceJet can optimize resource allocation and achieve cost efficiencies across various functions, including maintenance, ground handling, and engineering," SpiceJet said.

According to SpiceJet, coordinated route planning initiatives are likely to enhance passenger traffic and drive ticket sales for both the carriers.

"I firmly believe that GoFirst holds immense potential and can be revitalized to work in close synergy with SpiceJet, benefiting both carriers. Apart from coveted slots at domestic and international airports, international traffic rights, and an order for over 100 Airbus Neo planes, GoFirst is a trusted and valued brand among flyers," Singh said.

Cash-strapped Go First announced on May 2 that it was filing for voluntary insolvency proceedings with the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), blaming "failing" engines from manufacturer Pratt & Whitney (P&W) for the grounding of 25 aircraft. Go First cancelled all its flights starting May 3 and has not resumed operations yet.

**FOUR FLIGHTS EVERY WEEK ON MUMBAI-DOHA ROUTE**

## Akasa Air to start international flights from March

**ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

**FLEDGLING CARRIER** Akasa Air Friday announced the launch of international operations from March 28 with Doha as its first overseas destination. With the launch of this service, Akasa Air will become the first Indian carrier to fly overseas in just 19 months since its inception.

Starting 28 March 2024, Akasa Air will operate four non-stop flights a week, connecting Mumbai with Doha, enhancing air connectivity between Qatar and India. Bookings for flights are now open...," the carrier said.

Prior to 2016, Indian carriers became eligible to fly overseas after completing five years of domestic operations and having a minimum fleet size of 20 aircraft. In June that year, the government

did away with the five-year requirement, making the 20-aircraft fleet size the only criteria to mount international flights.

Akasa Air received its 20th aircraft in August 2023, barely a year after it started commercial operations. The airline is initially eyeing high-traffic geographies like the Middle East and Southeast Asia for its international operations. Apart from Doha, Akasa Air has received

government approvals to operate flights to Riyadh, Jeddah, Doha, and Kuwait.

"We are delighted to announce our international operations with the launch of our first destination – Doha, to our growing network. The introduction of four flights a week, connecting directly with Mumbai, a key Indian commercial hub, will cater to a diverse set of travellers from the two countries, facilitat-

ing tourism, commerce and strengthening bilateral ties.. Our foray into Qatar marks the next phase of growth as we continue our journey towards becoming one of the world's top 30 airlines by the turn of this decade," said Vinay Dube, Akasa Air's founder and chief executive officer.

This comes weeks after Akasa announced a firm order of 150 Boeing 737 MAX planes, taking its order size for the aircraft to 226.

## 'Copper is key to energy transition, strong demand in India may emerge from 2030'

**WITH DEMAND** for copper growing annually at 16 per cent in FY23, policymakers and corporations have increasingly turned their attention to its critical role in spurring economic growth. **MAYUR KARMARKAR**, India team leader at the International Copper Association, speaks to **AGGAM WALIA** about India's copper import dependency and domestic copper demand.

**Copper demand is often seen as a barometer of economic activity. Can you explain why?**

Unlike most other commodities, copper prices are linked to three things – the demand/supply scenario, the overall money market and the speculative environment. A combination of these three also works very well for oil. If you track copper and oil prices, they move more or less together. It is therefore a global economic indicator by large. Also, unlike other commodities which are dependent on very specific sectors, copper is used in all the sectors of the economy.

**Can you give an overview of copper demand in India compared to other parts of the world?**

Copper is critical for the clean energy transition and that's very evident in markets like China and Europe. The demand for copper coming from China is largely attributed to clean energy technologies, just as in Europe.



**THE EXPRESS**  
**INTERVIEW**  
WITH  
**MAYUR**  
**KARMARKAR**  
INDIA TEAM LEADER AT  
INTERNATIONAL COPPER  
ASSOCIATION

But in the case of India, our traditional demand drivers are much stronger because we still have to build basic infrastructure. If you see the overall copper demand growth in India for the last financial year, we had around 11 per cent growth in building construction, 14 per cent growth in power infrastructure, 13 per cent growth in consumer durables, and 14 per cent growth in overall industrialization, largely because of the PLI schemes. Then, there was 34 per cent growth in transportation, within which railways had a huge share. We saw a modest growth of 6 per cent in the

agricultural sector. This is very different from other parts of the world where they did not see much growth in the traditional sectors. Overall, copper growth in the world is still 3 to 4 per cent, which is similar to previous decades, so there has not been much change in overall demand but the pattern has changed. In India, strong demand from the clean energy sector will emerge maybe from 2030 onwards, but it is not very sizable at the moment.

**The government has included copper in its list of critical minerals and there is an ongoing auction for the exploration of copper blocks. What impact will these steps have on India's dependency on copper imports?**

The government has understood the need for local production of copper but that does not mean that it will lead to sufficiency. For example, our total mine resources were around 1.6 billion tonnes, which is a huge number. However, reserves are around 136 million tonnes, out of which we hardly mine 20,000 to 25,000 tonnes of copper. The government has now come up with an auction for critical minerals, of which copper is a part. The most important question is: Why has no mining or exploration happened in the country up till now? This is because the mining sector was represented by state mining departments, which gave priority to minerals which they can access easily and convert into im-

mediate markets – like coal, iron ore, and limestone. Now, the central government has taken leadership in the mining of critical minerals, which is going to create a larger availability of locally-mined copper. But that does not mean that our import dependency will be low. In fact, world over, copper concentrates are mined in the southern hemisphere and are exported to countries like the US, Japan, South Korea, and China. So, we will be one of them – a buyer. The government is also looking at the processing of critical minerals because that is where China still has dominance globally.

**What is the current scenario of copper processing infrastructure in India?**

In the late 1990s, India was the leader in copper processing when Hindalco and Vedanta put up their own smelters. But unfortunately in 2018, due to issues at the Vedanta smelter in Tuticorin, we were largely import dependent even for processed copper. But hopefully, with Adani's recent announcement of \$1.2 billion investment in a copper processing unit and an eventual resolution at Tuticorin will take us to a comfortable position. In the near future, we won't have to import copper cathodes anymore if these two smelters come in quickly. But we still require further investments in melting, refining.

**FULL INTERVIEW ON [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)**

**THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST**

**RBI GIVES 15-DAY EXTENSION**

**Paytm Payments Bank gets March 15 deadline to stop ops**

**ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU**

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 16

**THE RESERVE** Bank of India (RBI) Friday extended Paytm Payments Bank Ltd's (PPBL) deadline to halt most of its operations by 15 days to March 15.

The central bank, in a January order, had told PPBL to stop deposits, credit transactions and top-ups in customer accounts, prepaid instruments and wallets, FASTags, National Common Mobility Cards, etc. after March 15, 2024 (extended from the earlier stipulated timeline of February 29, 2024), other than any interest, cashbacks, sweep-in from partner banks or refunds which may be claimed anytime," the RBI said.

On Friday, the RBI said it relaxed the deadline as customers and merchants may need time to make alternative arrangements. "No further deposits or credit transactions or top ups shall be allowed in any customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, National Common Mobility Cards, etc. after March 15, 2024 (extended from the earlier stipulated timeline of February 29, 2024), other than any interest, cashbacks, sweep-in from partner banks or refunds which may be claimed anytime," the RBI said.

On Friday, the central bank issued a set of clarifications for PPBL customers and merchants. Here's a look at some of them:

■ Customers can use funds in accounts, prepaid instruments and FASTags – including savings accounts, current accounts, prepaid instruments and FASTags – beyond the deadline and until they are exhausted.

■ They can use UPI and IMPS to transfer funds. Automatic debit mandates, such as for EMIs or through UPI, will continue to get executed until there is balance.

■ Accounts, including FASTags, cannot be topped up after March 15.

■ Customers who receive salaries, subsidies or direct benefit transfers into PPBL accounts have to make alternative arrangements.

**POLL BOND DISCLOSURES: SBI FACES LEGAL HURDLE**

**PRASANTA SAHU**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

**THE STATE** Bank of India (SBI) may be restrained by banking laws in disclosing the details of electoral bonds. "As per banking laws, certain customer details can't be revealed (in the interest of privacy of the customers)...(revealing such details) will be a breach of law and trust," a source familiar with the developments said.

On Thursday, the Supreme Court termed the electoral bonds scheme unconstitutional and asked SBI, which issued such bonds to political donors, to submit details of such bonds purchased since the interim order of the court on April 12, 2019, till date on Friday.

Mahindra plans to use certain platform components, as well as Volkswagen's unified battery cell, for its own electric platform, called INGLO, the companies said.

Mahindra shares climbed as much as 5.6% to a record high in Mumbai trading after the news.

The Indian company will be the first external partner to use the unified cell, a new cell technology that Volkswagen plans to use for 80% of its battery cells and promises will reduce costs by half.

Volkswagen said the agreement would run "over several years" and have a total volume of about 50 gigawatt hours of energy storage capacity over its lifetime. The two companies were evaluating further opportunities for collaboration, the statement added.

Volkswagen has developed a modular, open vehicle platform for EVs, called MEB, which is used to build its cars and those of other group companies including Skoda and Audi.

There are five authorized card networks in India – Visa, Mastercard, RuPay, Diners Club and American Express.

One of the card networks, Visa, in a recent statement said, "We have been directed by the regulator to ensure that all Business Payment Service Provider (BPSP) transactions be kept in abeyance till further notice. Hence, we kindly ask that all BPSP merchants registered by

ourselves with Visa be immediately suspended till advised by us to the contrary."

BSPSS offer business-to-business payment services to corporates using credit cards. It enables corporates to improve cash flow.

"For avoidance of doubt, any transaction authorized prior to the communication would be settled in the ordinary course of business. We kindly ask that you send us a confirmation at the earliest that such merchants/merchant IDs have been blocked and transactions ceased. Failure to adhere to these instructions could result in regulatory sanction and non-compliance assessment under the Visa rules," Visa had said.

**KERALA WATER AUTHORITY e-Tender Notice**

Tender No: RE-E-Tender /No 292/2023-24/SEPH/CHN

KIFB-AUGMENTATION OF WSS TO ANGAMALY - PART I -PACKAGE 1 CONSTRUCTION OF 99 M DIA WELL CUM PUMP HOUSE, SUPPLY AND LAVING OF 600 mm DI RAW WATER PUMP SET ETC at Thrikkadavu General Civil Work EMD: Rs. 5,00,000/- Tender fee: Rs. 19,18 Last Date for submitting Tender: 05-03-2024 03:00 pm Phone: 0484-2360648 Website: [www.kwa.kerala.gov.in](http://www.kwa.kerala.gov.in), [www.etenders.kerala.gov.in](http://www.etenders.kerala.gov.in)

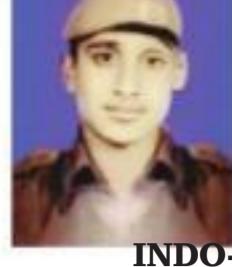
**SALUTE THE SOLDIER**

Sub Inspector Srichand



ITBP salutes its braveheart Sub Inspector Srichand of 9th Battalion, who made supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on this day in Jammu & Kashmir in 2003

**Resident of :** Village: Manka, Distt- Alwar, Rajasthan

**Lance Naik Ram Karan**

ITBP salutes its braveheart Lance Naik Ram Karan of 1st Battalion, who laid down his life in the line of duty on this day in Leh (J&K) in 1990.

**Resident of :** Village: Bagi Binola, Distt- Bilaspur, Himachal Pradesh

**INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE(ITBP)****22****NORTHERN RAILWAY****Tender Notice**

Name of Work	30-Elect-64-T-2023-24-E-3
and its location	Electrical work in connection with NRMU office (Kothi No. 12) Hall at C.Road, New Delhi
Approx cost of the works in	₹ 26.47 lacs
Address of the Office	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi
Bid Security	Rs. 53000.00
Date & time of submission of tender	26.03.2024, 12.00 Hrs
Opening of tender	26.03.2024, 12.00 Hrs
Website & notice board	<a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in &amp; Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi">www.ireps.gov.in &amp; Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi</a>
	531/2024

Serving Customers With A Smile

**NORTHERN RAILWAY****TENDER NOTICE (Through e-tendering)**

**Name of work with its location :** Provision of ELB in place of MLB, provision of RTUs and improvement of power supply arrangements in interlocked LC gates under ADSTE/ROK and ADSTE/PNP section of Delhi Division  
**App. Cost of the work :** Rs. 2,08,48,992.54/- only  
**Bid Security :** Rs. 2,54,300.00/- only  
**Address of the office :** Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3rd Floor, Annexe-1, DRM office, New Delhi-110055.  
**Date & Time for upload the tender / closing of tender :** Tender uploading 16.02.2024 / closing date & time- 11.03.2024 up to 15.00 hrs.  
**Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc. :** See the Northern Railway website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) & Notice board at S&T branch, 3rd Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110055.

No.: 558-Sig-16-M-TENDER-1416 Dated: 16.02.2024 531/2024

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

**महिला एवं बाल विकास विभाग, गुरुग्राम, हरियाणा**

महिला एवं बाल विकास विभाग, हरियाणा के अंतर्गत जिला गुरुग्राम के आगांवाड़ी केन्द्रों द्वारा सामग्री कम्युनिटी सामान की दुलाई टांसपोर्टेशन के लिए निविदाएँ आमंत्रित हैं जिसका ई-टेंडर क्र. 2024\_HRY\_350084, 1 है। आमंत्रित निविदाएँ दिनांक 23.02.2024 को प्रातः11:00 बजे शुरू हो जानी हैं। आमंत्रित निविदाएँ दिनांक 22.02.2024 को साथ 5:00 बजे तक ऑनलाइन अपलोड की जा सकती हैं। दस्तऐज विसमें नियम व शर्तें शामिल हैं उन्हें वेबसाइट e-tenders.hry.nic.in पर देखें। डाउनलोड की जा सकती है।

जिला कार्यपाल अधिकारी  
महिला एवं बाल विकास,  
गुरुग्राम।

25054

**MAHARASHTRA METRO RAIL CORPORATION LTD.**

(A joint venture of Govt. of India & Govt. of Maharashtra)  
**"Metro Bhavan", VIP Road, Near Dikshabhoomi, Ramdaspath, Nagpur-440010. E-mail : md.mnrc.tenders@gmail.com**

**Tender Notice No. N2-031/TR-03/2023 Dt. 16.02.2024**

**Name of work :** Design, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Receiving Cum Auxiliary Main Cum Traction Sub Stations Including EHV Connection From Grid Substation, 33 kV Cable Network, ASS & SCADA System For Nagpur Metro Rail Phase-2 Project.

**Cost of Documents :** INR 1,18,000/- (inclusive of GST).**Date Of Prebid Meeting :** 06.03.2024

Interested Bidders may visit [www.metrorailnagpur.com](http://www.metrorailnagpur.com) or CPP Website : <https://eprocure.gov.in> for NIT. Bid documents can be downloaded from <https://mahatenders.gov.in> from 16.00 Hrs on 16.02.2024.

**Executive Director/ Procurement  
Maha-Metro**

Nagpur Metro : City's Transport Solution

**NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY****INDIAN RAILWAY****"PUBLIC NOTIFICATION"**

Notice hereby given to all user of Railway line and premises situated on the completed section of the under noted section of north Central Railway, That the 132 KV Tr. line shifting work is in progress in connection with ROB at LC No.- 146 (Ajaibpur-Dadri Station) at Loc 1411/27-29. This Tr. line will be shifted in between Tower No. 378-381 Near Palla & Bodaki village, Railway station Bodaki, Tehsil Dadri & Distt Gautam Buddha Nagar Utter Pradesh. This 132 KV Tr. line will be energized on **29.02.2024** or after the date from the same date the Tr. line shall be treated as live line at all times and no unauthorized person shall attempt to access or act on this tr. line.

**Section:** Shifting of 132 KV Railway transmission line in connection with construction of Road over bridge at level crossing No.146 between Ajaibpur - Dadri Station of Prayagraj Division of North Central Railway.

**Tower No./KM/Location/Chainage:** From Tower No. 378 To Tower No. 381, Date of Energization: **29.02.2024**

(Yogesh Yadav)

For Dy. Chief Electrical Engineer/Const.

285/24 (P) North Central Railway Kanpur

[@www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in @northcentralrailway X @CPRONCR](http://www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in)

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM**  
**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER,**  
**PWD (ROADS), ASSAM**  
**CHANDMARI :: GUWAHATI-3**

No. CE/STBR/II/18/2023-24/06

**SHORT NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST AND FINANCIAL PROPOSAL FOR EMPANELMENT AND ENGAGEMENT OF CONSULTANTS FOR PROVIDING CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR PREPARATION OF DETAILED PROJECT REPORT (DPR) FOR CONSTRUCTION OF ROB AT RAILWAY L.C. GATE NO NN-136 AT FAKIRAGRAM TOWN, KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT, BTR, ASSAM UNDER CONSTRUCTION OF ROBS ON 50:50 COST SHARING BASIS.**

The Chief Engineer PWD (Roads), Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati -3, invites Expression of Interest and Financial Proposal from eligible Consultants for Empanelment and Engagement of Consultants for Providing "Consultancy services for preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR) for construction of ROB at Railway L.C. Gate No. NN-136 at Fakiragram Town, Kokrajhar District, BTR, Assam under construction of ROBs on 50:50 cost sharing basis" for an amount of Rs. 65.077 Lakh (Approx).

Detail description of project, Eligibility criteria, Scope of Services and payment of Professional fees etc. given in the Terms of Reference may be seen at <http://www.apwd.in>.

**Chief Engineer PWD (Roads)**  
**Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati - 3**

JANASANYOG/CF/5612/23/17-FEB-24

**22****Science, Technology & Technical Education Department**

Office of Principal

**MUZAFFARPUR INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY,  
MUZAFFARPUR, BIHAR – 842003****WALK-IN-INTERVIEW FOR GUEST ASSISTANT PROFESSOR**

Muzaffarpur Institute of Technology, Muzaffarpur, is going to conduct a walk-in-interview for the empanelment of GUEST ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, Interested and eligible candidates may appear for the walk-in-interview with duly filled prescribed application form available on website along with all their original academic certificate, category certificate, Residential certificate, 02 sets of photo copies of all the original documents/certificate, and 02 recent passport size photographs as per the following schedule:-

Sl. No.	Post	Subject/ Department	Academic Qualification and Experience	Date and Time of Interview	Walk-in-interview Venue
1.	Guest Assistant Professor	Biomedical & Robotics Engineering	As per AICTE/DSTTE Norms	02.03.2024 (Reporting Time: 10 AM) (Tentative)	Muzaffarpur Institute of Technology, Muzaffarpur

प्रियदर्श जानकारी [state.bihar.gov.in/prdbihar](http://state.bihar.gov.in/prdbihar) पर प्राप्त की जा सकती है।

PR. No.017530 (Sci. &amp; Tech.) 2023-24

नशे से बनानी दूरी है, क्योंकि परिवार जरूरी है

Principal

M.I.T. Muzaffarpur

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM****OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD (ROADS), ASSAM, CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI -03**

No. CE/Maint/MMPPNA/01/2023-24/22

**PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER**

The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites bids on behalf of Governor of Assam for 15 (Fifteen) nos. of packages for Construction of Roads Projects including Routine Maintenance for 4 (four) years under Mukhya Mantri Paki Path Nirman Achani (MMPPNA) for the year 2023-24 in Kamrup (Rural) & Kamrup(Metro) District of Assam amounting to Rs.36.20 Crores (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam.

Details may be seen from 17-02-2024 to 08-03-2024 at website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in). Amendment /Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website [www.assamtenders.gov.in](http://www.assamtenders.gov.in).

Formal work order will be issued after receipt of Administrative Approval from competent authority.

Note: - N.I.T Value is inclusive of GST (12%), Labour cess (1%) etc.

Chief Engineer, PWD (Roads)

JANASANYOG/CF/5624/23/17-FEB-24

**Jharkhand BijliVitran Nigam Limited**  
**(CIN : U40108JH2013SGC001702)**  
**Regd. Office : Engineering Building, H.E.C., Dhurwa, Ranchi-834004,**  
**Telephone :-0651-2400799 & Fax : 0651-2400799 [https://www.jbvn.co.in](http://www.jbvn.co.in) Email- cecr2018@gmail.com**

**3<sup>rd</sup> EXTENSION Notice**

NIT No. - 348/PR/JBVNL/2023-24

E-tender for selection of full turnkey contractor for development of distribution infra structure in Electric supply Circle ,Dhanbad for an estimated cost Rs 282.32 Crores under Loss Reduction of Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) sanction by Ministry of Power, GoI and approved by GoJ is hereby extended as per below given revised calendar of events

SN	Details of Work
1	Development of distribution infrastructure like replacement of LT Conductor to AB Cable Erection of LT & 11kv line, installation of New DTR,etc
2	Estimated Cost- Rs 282.32 Crores(all inclusive)
3	Calendar of Events :
I	Last Date / Time for receipt of bids(online) 22.02.2024at 15:00Hrs
II	Last Date / Time for receipt of offline documents in office of GM(Coml) 22.02.2024upto17:00Hrs
III	Date and Time for Opening of Technical bid 23.02.2024at 17:00Hrs

The tender documents with detailed conditions can be obtained through web site <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in> and should upload all relevant documents as mentioned in the tender document only through online e-tender portal/website <http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in>

PR. No. 316180

Save Energy ,Save Nation for Better tomorrow

PR.NO.319233 Jharkhand Bijlee Vitran Nigam Ltd(23-24):D

Sd/-  
General Manager (Coml)Sd/-  
General Manager (Coml)

All other conditions will remain unchanged.

Director -Cum – Special Secretary  
Department of science Technology & Technical Education, Bihar, Patna

PR- 17541 ( Sci &amp; Tech ) 2023-24

नशामुक्त हो जाए विहार, सुरक्षित रहे घर परिवार।

NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION

Senior Divisional Commercial Manager/Freight, Delhi Division, Northern Railway, in terms of Railway Board letter no. 2022/TC(FM)/10/

# China's 'defence villages' along LAC, which it is populating

**AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA**  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 16

**EXPLAINED  
DEFENCE**

**What are China's 'Xiaokang' border defence villages?**

China has constructed 628 "Xiaokang" or "well-off villages" along India's border with the Tibet Autonomous Region for more than five years now. These have been constructed all along the LAC, including the Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh borders.

The structures include mostly double-storey, large, and spacious buildings. The construction for most of these planned villages has already been completed, according to officials familiar with the development.

Some villages along the LAC, opposite the Lohit Valley, and the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh, are now being occupied by residents, according to the senior officials familiar with the matter. This was first reported by *The Indian Express* on Thursday.

LAC. Therefore, they have been a concern for the Indian military.

The length and, at some places location, of the LAC has been a bone of contention between India and China for years. While India considers the LAC to be 3,488 km long, China says it is around 2,000 km.

**What is the legal status of these villages in the Chinese system?**

A new law on China's land borders was brought into effect from January 1, 2022. The law was passed in 2021 by the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress — China's 'rubber-stamp' Parliament — for the "protection and exploitation of the country's land border areas".

According to China's official news agency Xinhua, "The law also stipulates that the state shall take measures to strengthen border defence, support economic and social develop-

ment as well as opening-up in border areas, improve public services and infrastructure in such areas, encourage and support people's life and work there, and promote coordination between border defence and social, economic development in border areas."

Thus, this border law would appear to cover the border defence villages programme.

**How has India responded to the law?**

The Indian government announced the Vibrant Villages Programme in 2022 to develop its border villages into modern villages with all amenities, and as tourist attractions. The programme builds on the existing Border Area Development Programme (BADP) under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

Under the programme, India plans to develop 663 border villages into modern vil-

lages in the first phase. Of these, at least 17 such border villages along the borders with China in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh, have been selected for development as a pilot project.

In Arunachal Pradesh, villages in the eastern part of the state and the Tawang region

have been identified such as Zemithang, Taksing, Chayang Tajo, Tuting, and Kibithu.

**What other infrastructure is China developing along the LAC?**

China has been constantly building infrastructure all along the LAC, including in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang region and the Siang Valley.

This includes the construction of new roads and bridges to improve connectivity through the passes. China has been constructing houses and other infrastructure in Bhutanese territory too.

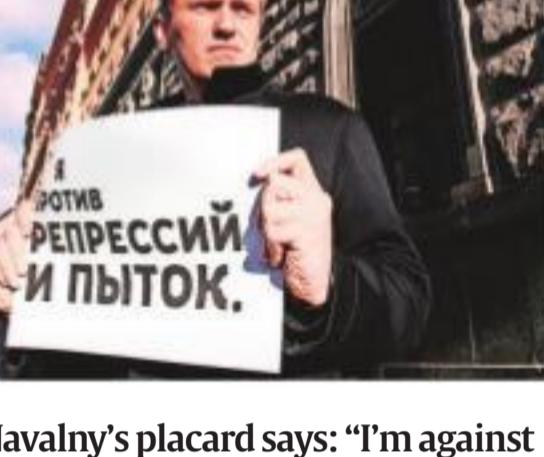
India has also focused on strengthening its border infrastructure and improving forward connectivity with the construction of new roads, bridges, and helipads.

There has been a push to develop alternate routes to the LAC and improve inter-valley connectivity in the Northeast region.



**EXPLAINED GLOBAL**

## PUTIN'S BIGGEST CRITIC DIES IN ARCTIC PRISON: WHO WAS ALEXEI NAVALNY?



Navalny's placard says: "I'm against repression and torture". *Reuters/File*

ing an extremist organisation and "rehabilitating Nazism", to "involving a minor to commit illegal acts" (stemming from the fact that people under 18 attended Navalny's rallies).

Navalny, however, maintained his innocence, saying that all charges against him were fabricated to keep him out of public life. Amnesty International recognised him as a "prisoner of conscience" — a term used to refer to people who have been incarcerated for the non-violent expression of their conscientiously-held beliefs.

### Sent to Arctic prison

In December 2023, he was moved to the IK-3 penal colony, also known as the Polar Wolf colony, some 1,900 km northeast of Moscow, and inside the Arctic Circle.

One of Russia's toughest penal colonies, "inmates endure long, dark, cold winters as well as clouds of mosquitoes in the summer," *The NY Times* reported. He also spent more than 280 days in isolation, his spokesman Kirill Yarmash said last month.

Navalny was the last prominent Putin critic still in Russia. Others have either fled the country or died under mysterious circumstances. In 2015, opposition leader Boris Nemtsov was shot dead on a Moscow bridge, a stone's throw from the Kremlin. In August 2023, Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin died in a plane crash, weeks after leading an armed mutiny.

Putin heads to polls next month, all but unchallenged, as he seeks to extend his reign till 2030.

Despite the attempt at his life, he returned to Russia in 2021, where he was arrested on arrival for violating his parole. He had been in prison ever since. In August 2023, he was handed a 19-year sentence on charges ranging from creating and fund-

### Persecuted by the Kremlin

The Kremlin has gone to great lengths to portray Navalny as an "extremist", and a "CIA puppet".

In August 2020, Navalny fell ill on a flight from Siberia to Moscow. He survived and was flown to Berlin, where he was treated for the effects of Novichok, a neurotoxin developed in the Soviet Union, and a weapon of choice for Russian secret agents.

Despite the attempt at his life, he returned to Russia in 2021, where he was arrested on arrival for violating his parole. He had been in prison ever since. In August 2023, he was handed a 19-year sentence on charges ranging from creating and fund-

ing an extremist organisation and "rehabilitating Nazism", to "involving a minor to commit illegal acts" (stemming from the fact that people under 18 attended Navalny's rallies).

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NEW DELHI

(From right)  
Prashant Kishor in conversation with Vandita Mishra, National Opinion Editor, *The Indian Express*, and Anant Goenka, Executive Director, The Indian Express Group



# 'When support to the BJP crosses 55 pc, then start paying attention to the call for Hindu Rashtra'

**A**t a recent Express Adda in New Delhi, Prashant Kishor, election strategist-turned-activist, who now heads the Jan Suraaj Abhiyan, spoke on how 2024 will be a vote for or against Prime Minister Modi, the Opposition squandering their chances and why the BJP got Nitish Kumar

#### On Brand Modi

Whether it's money or *mandir*, it's all subservient to Brand Modi. The vote is going to be for or against Mr Modi, the person, his ideology, his work style, what he has delivered, not delivered, what people think of him, good, bad, whatever, but it's very clear that the vote is on and around Mr Modi.

#### On the Opposition not capitalising on opportunities

The Opposition is not going to struggle always. Never underestimate the Opposition in India. Opposition parties or formations could be weak but the Opposition is not weak in India. A lot of us think that in the last 10 years Modi has had a one-way run. That's not true. The Opposition had at least three opportunities – 2015 electoral losses in Delhi and Bihar, distress due to the 2016 demonetisation and the 2018 electoral losses – when they could have pushed the BJP on the backfoot. But it did nothing. It allowed the BJP to make a comeback. Those opposed to the BJP have given opportunities but the Opposition has not capitalised on them.



Scan the QR code to watch Adda

those who believe in the BJP's Hindutva are with them. But even if they are with them, let's assume that there are a lot of people who are fans of Mr Modi. They have the organisation, they have the message, machinery, everything. But put together, they are only 38.

Of the hundred people who went to vote, only 38 voted for the BJP. The remaining 62, despite the masses, despite Hindutva, despite the organisation, despite the muscle, were still opposed to the BJP. Now the challenge is: how to get the majority of this 62... So I wouldn't spend time on how to counter Hindutva. I would say how do I first galvanise those who are not convinced with this Hindutva.

#### On the BJP consolidating their votes post-Mandir

My sense is that Mandir is a very big issue, a big chatter point. It will certainly enthuse BJP cadres, supporters, voters and to that extent maybe the polling percentage will be higher... But I do not meet many people who say that because of the Mandir, I'm shifting (to BJP).

I have seen that though, to my surprise, in the case of Article 370. There are many more incremental voters that have come BJP's way, courtesy Article 370 than the Mandir. The Mandir is definitely a steroid but it's not going to give you an incremental vote.

I know a lot of people sitting in Delhi are obsessed with this idea of Hindutva. Let's say



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NEW DELHI

AJIT GULABCHAND  
Chairman and Managing Director, Hindustan Construction Company



RESHMA SHETTY  
Managing Director, Matrix



SHIBANI SHARMA KHANNA  
Founder, SSK



MICHELLE ELMS  
Diplomat, US Embassy in India



AVARNA JAIN  
Editorial Chairperson, Hello! Magazine



HARSHAVARDHAN NEOTIA  
Chairman, Ambuja Neotia Group

#### On an ideological shift in society

I don't see a tectonic shift in Hindu society, that as a community we are getting more radical, that all of a sudden we have started hating Muslims, that we want Hindu Rashtra. No. Over the last 30 or 40 years of effort of the Sangh at societal level, it has moved the needle from 40 per cent Hindus to 45 per cent. It takes a lot more effort and time than what we think.

The moment it crosses 55 per cent, then you should start paying attention to the call of *sanatana dharma*, Hindu Rashtra and all. You need a minimum of 55 to 60 per cent Hindus to be following and buying that idea because the moment you have 60 per cent Hindus voting for the BJP, you are talking about a 48 per cent-plus vote. But even though it seems that from 45 to 55 is only 10 percentage points, it could take 20 to 30

years. And if there is a counter, then it could go down again.

So it has taken almost 50 years-plus effort on the part of the Sangh to have this level of, I would say, not polarisation, but Hindus coming together under the idea as professed by it, of a Hindu ideology, but still they have not crossed 50 per cent.

#### On 'secular' becoming a bad word

The Opposition is not losing because of using the word secular. It is losing because they are not up to the task, they have been lazy. You made the INDIA alliance, for whatever it is worth, nine months before the general elections. What prevented all these wise men and women who are running the Opposition parties to do this two years ago or immediately after the Bengal (elections), when the chips were down for BJP?

From the first meeting of the INDIA

**WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE INDIAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE AND WHAT MAKES YOU DESPAIR? DO YOU THINK OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE NOT POLITICAL PARTIES BUT FAMILY FIRMS?**

**IT'S NOT A** question of only them being family firms. They have killed the natural democratic flow that would have strengthened their party. If you are a young political activist or an aspiring politician, you will probably not look at the Congress as a platform because you know that there is a ceiling. The biggest disservice by promoting themselves or their sons and daughters, they (politicians) have done is to themselves, to their own parties. What gives me hope? The have-nots are not as



**TAVLEEN SINGH**  
Columnist, *The Indian Express*

**ON CRITICISM WITHIN THE HINDUTVA FOLD AGAINST MODI'S POLICIES OF APPEASEMENT, DO YOU THINK IT HAS ANY WORTH? SECOND, WHILE MODI IS MILITANT IN GOBBLING UP CHIEF MINISTERS WHO BUCKLE UNDER PRESSURE, IF ANYONE STANDS UP TO HIM, LIKE MAMATA BANERJEE, HE BACKS OFF.**

intimidated as the well-offs. The have-nots in India are still a majority and I do not see them being fearful of saying what they think, if they're not happy with Mr Modi or Akhilesh Yadav or Rahul Gandhi. In India, the well-off need to be a bit more aware about what their fellow citizens are facing.

**DIRECTIONALLY**, I see more prominence of hardliners. Anyone who is incumbent would look less of a hardliner. When Mr Vajpayee was seen as liberal, there was the same sentiment against him and people were flag bearers of Mr Advani. We saw the same happen between Mr Advani and Mr Modi. This



**MADHU KISHWAR**  
Founder, Manushi

trajectory is moving in that direction, when we talk about Yogi's cult. It's like an ideological intoxication. You need a higher degree of hardline talk and actions to keep the same level of effect. On the second question, anyone who will stand up can take on the BJP because there is opposition on the ground.

**BEFORE 2014, SOME SCHEMES STARTED BY THE UPA WERE OPPOSED BY BJP, SUCH AS AADHAAR, GST. THEY ADOPTED THOSE SCHEMES AND ARE SHOWING THEM AS THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS. WHY HAVE THE OPPOSITION PARTIES NOT TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THIS SHIFT?**

**I DON'T** read the two examples in the same way. Much before Aadhaar was opposed by the likes of Mr Modi or talked about in a dissenting tone, within the UPA they were fighting and it was an issue between Nandan Nilekani and the then Home Minister. They were not convinced whether they should have a national register or Aadhaar. Mr Modi came and saw merit in it. He was decisive and is



**BHARAT MEHTA**  
CEO, HR Synergy

benefiting from its use. Sometimes you might not be supportive of something as CM but as PM your role is different. You are bound to be wary of GST because the consumption states are going to benefit more in GST. As the PM, you are the PM of both the manufacturing states and the consuming states.



**Dalbir Singh, Chairman, One Globe Forum, and (right) Freddy Svane, Ambassador of Denmark to India**



**(Left to right) Dilip Cherian, Founding Partner, Perfect Relations; Poonam Mutreja, Executive Director, Population Foundation of India; Sunil Saraogi, former Chairman, Sikkim Urja Limited**



**Lorenzo Parrulli, EU Representative, Second Secretary (Political Affairs), with (right) Laurent Triponey, First Counsellor, Embassy of France in India**



**If these politicians were stocks, who would you pick: Akhilesh Yadav, Aditya Thackeray, Chirag Paswan, KTR (KTR Rama Rao), Jagan Reddy, Raghubir Chaddha, Omar Abdullah, Udhayanidhi Stalin, Abhishek Banerjee.**

They are all potted plants, so none.

**So give us your pick.**

I don't know the name but I will just borrow something I heard from Bill Gates. He was asked, 'Who will replace you as the richest person on the planet?' He said, 'I don't know who will, but I know for sure that the person who is going to replace me is not in the business today. Because if he would have been in the business I would not have surpassed him'.

**Is there one person, who is not in politics today, who you think has a great opportunity in politics?**

Anyone willing to put in 12 hours and has a 10-year plan has an opportunity.

**What is the number one weakness that may hurt the BJP electorally?**

Over-dependence on Mr Modi.

**BJP after Modi — who is likely to take**

## QUICK QUESTIONS

**his place?**

Whoever comes will be more of a hard-liner than Mr Modi.

**The one thing you've learned from Nitish Kumar?**

The ability to maneuver and gain from the place of weakness. He has never worked from the position of strength.

**Would you advise state parties to push for caste census?**

State parties yes, national parties no. The Congress paid a heavy price in MP and Chhattisgarh for overplaying this card.

**One secret ingredient behind Naveen Patnaik's political longevity.**

Just remaining out of sight. If you are not visible, it's very difficult to attack you.

**If Mayawati were to call you and ask for**

**advice, what would you say?**

That I have retired.

**If you're reading Mayawati's book today, what chapter are we on?**

I would say, the last chapter is already written.

**Which institution has a better finger on the pulse of the nation — RSS or BJP?**

The RSS, any day.

**Between Stalin, Mamata, Kejriwal, Jagan, Uddhav, Nitesh and Amrinder, which campaign was the toughest?**

Toughest was Punjab in 2017 because it was



with Amrinder Singh and the Congress, against the rising force of AAP.

**One big difference between the Modi of 2019 and the Modi of 2024.**

In 2019, he was taking India to greater glory. In 2024, he is bringing God to India.

**Identity or welfare, which one of these is the more potent election weapon?**

Welfare. A bad government, no matter how much you play (the identity card), whether it's *mandal* or *karmandal*, will give you some votes but not victory.

**The one thing that needs to change in Dravidian politics?**

Dependence on caste. The influence of money in politics is far greater and worrisome than what it is in northern India.

**If you were to predict seats for BJP, NDA?**

I would say, as of now, the Modi-led NDA or BJP has a significant advantage.

**Is there anything Prashant Kishor is afraid of?**

I am afraid of getting up in the morning and realising that my brain is not working.



**Prashant Kishor interacting with guests at Express Adda**



**Dr Jahnavi Das, Prashant Kishor's wife  
CS Arora, Visiting Professor, Delhi Technological University**

## On the BJP getting Nitish Kumar

BJP has not got Nitish Kumar because he will get them more votes. BJP is going to lose seats in Bihar in Lok Sabha because they have to now adjust Nitish Kumar, so they will be fighting for fewer number of seats. They have got him because they wanted to kill this perceptual thing that, you know, there is an Opposition alliance or block called INDIA.

By taking one of the founders of INDIA, they have given a big psychological blow to the Opposition rather than them taking because they cannot win Bihar or they cannot do politics in Bihar without Nitish Kumar. So I would say BJP knows the data and the facts, but it's a strategy where they have decided to lose the battle to win the war.

## On the women's vote

Increasingly, more and more political parties win or lose purely on the basis of the women's vote. In Bengal, the difference between men and women voting for TMC (All India Trinamool Congress) was 13 percentage points. So all the men who think that they control their wives, they are making a big mistake. Some of the commentary which I see in the papers says that because women turnout is more, hence XYZ has won. Please read the data carefully, it's largely a denominator effect. There are fewer women registered as voters, hence sometimes just the voting percentage appears more for the women, actually it's not more.. Women who are going to vote have their own issues, they are much smarter but they are less expressive and that's why surveys tend to get women preferences wrong.

## On being ideology-agnostic

My approach has been, don't make yourself and your judgments subservient to ideology. And to that extent, yes, I am ideologically agnostic. I do not want to become a prisoner of ideology. If I think something is wrong, I must have the courage to go and say it's wrong, whether it is coming from my ideological base or opposing my ideological base.



**ANANT MARWAH**

Director, BSR & Associates LLP



**RAHUL MUKUND**

Policy Adviser, New Zealand High Commission, New Delhi



**INEKA TEWARI**

Consultant, Apollo Tyres



**LASZLO MAKK**  
Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Hungary in India



**BHAVNA VIJ**

Senior Political Economy Adviser, British High Commission, New Delhi



**DINESH KHANNA**

Photographer



**IQBAL KHAN**

Partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co

**YOU HAVE REGISTERED THE JAN SWARAJ PARTY. WHAT IS YOUR PLAN WITH IT?**



**LIZ MATHEW**

Deputy Editor, *The Indian Express*

**DO YOU THINK THE YATRAS BY RAHUL GANDHI WILL BENEFIT THE CONGRESS? LK ADVANIJI DID A RATH YATRA LONG AGO AND IT'S NOW THAT THE BJP IS FINDING SUCCESS. ALSO, ARE YOU GOING TO JOIN THE CONGRESS? IN A RECENT INTERVIEW YOU STATED THAT YOUR IDEOLOGY MATCHES WITH THAT OF THE CONGRESS.**

Even in the domain, if you block a name, people take that domain and then seek money from you or some benefit or recognition. Because we are doing the whole effort under the name of Jan Swaraj, if somebody has the brand name Jan Swaraj Party, he or she would have some leverage.



**CHANAKYA**

Director, Trust Group

not do the yatra two months before elections. This is the time when he (Rahul Gandhi) should be at the headquarters rather than Manipur. I don't understand the logic. Ten years, yes if you continue this path and erase the elections in between, but you have to be alive to fight after ten years. As they say in economics, in the long run everyone is dead.



**MAHIR AMIR**

Judicial Law Clerk, Supreme Court of India

newspapers and so on. Over the last ten years, Modi's charisma, approval rating and support among the younger lot, 18 to 25, on a relative basis has gone down while he has gained more trust and support among those who are above 50. So it's not supporting what you think it is.

## On a Sour Note

KUCH KHATTA HO JAAY

**Director:** Ashok G  
**Cast:** Guru Randhawa, Saiee Manjrekar, Anupam Kher, Ila Arun



SOMEWHERE BURIED underneath the dominant loud chatter, haphazard storytelling, and a convoluted plot, there perhaps is a beating heart that wants to encourage women to pursue their dreams and men to support them wholeheartedly. But that heart gets overshadowed by the hotchpotch manner in which this story unfolds.

In case you have not guessed from the title already, the whole film revolves around a young couple having a baby – an heir for the owner of a century-old sweet shop. Anupam Kher plays the patriarch who desperately wants Heer Chawla (Guru Randhawa) to get married and have a baby as soon as possible. Heer is head over heels in love with Iraa Mishra (Saiee Manjrekar), whose primary goal in life is to become an IAS officer. However, Iraa is under pressure from her family to get married. Heer promises to help her and facilitate her preparation. Once they are married, all that the supporting characters can talk about is when Iraa is getting pregnant. The story becomes progressively confusing and long-drawn as Iraa initially pretends to be pregnant, then pretends to lose the baby, and then tries to conceive. Even though one's mind is exhausted by these logic-defying twists and turns, one wonders why it is so difficult to attempt a massy comedy without the story being riddled with age-old tropes, banality, and an overdose of emotional manipulations.

The film tries to make some amends towards the end. That's too little and too late. It also relies too much on caricaturish characters and stereotypes to get the laughs. **AS**



## THE HOLDOVERS ★★★

**Director:** Alexander Payne **Cast:** Paul Giamatti, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Dominic Sessa, Carrie Preston

## Never Let Me Go

## SHALINI LANGER

SEX," SAYS Paul Hunham, a dour, curmudgeonly teacher at a boarding school for boys. "is 99 per cent friction, and 1 per cent goodwill."

Hunham (Giamatti) has gone in for the first part all his life and earned none of the latter – and the film is tactfully elusive on whether he has managed to hit that 100 per cent mark, ever. We have been here before – schools with boys running around like wild horses and teachers who see their job as breaking them in. Till, there is that one teacher who sits down and listens to the boys, or girls, and changes their worlds.

Director Payne, a teller of stories bearing a lifetime of regret, brings it down to one teacher, one student, and one mess staffer. Hunham has nowhere to go, Angus (Sessa) has been abruptly told by his mother that the St Kitts vacation he was looking forward to

stands cancelled, and Mary (Randolph) has just lost her son in the Vietnam War. This Christmas hence, they are the "holdovers" at the prestigious Barton School – in other words, the "Christian orphans" with no family to go to at this festive time.

Barton is a school for largely White, privileged kids, and while Angus is one of them, both Hunham and Mary are the "outsiders" who have made it into the system. Hunham was a scholarship kid, who came back to teach because he loved Barton. Mary took up a job of the mess cook so that her son could study at the school.

It's over a lonesome, snowy fortnight, with the three of them confined to a small quarter of the big school kept heated during the vacations, that *The Holdovers* unfolds.

Angus is rebellious but smart, earning the best grades in the class but carrying the baggage of having a mother who has moved on to her next husband, and his previous expulsions from two schools. Sessa has an unusual

face that can look extremely vulnerable and young at some places, and prematurely old at others. What is evident is that Angus has aged too fast, and the sorrow he bears, even when at his risible best.

Randolph is exquisite as Mary, who has buried her grief deep within folds of stoicism – as much to hold herself together, as to not let others see her as only an aggrieved mother. As a single, Black mother, she waged unsaid battles to get where she – and her son – did, and this is her last stand. Randolph has picked up several nominations, and some awards for her performance, and an Oscar might just be the next one.

That brings us to Giamatti, an actor of formidable range who is doing his second film with Payne after *Sideways*. It's a pleasure to see the 56-year-old on screen as he melts from a bitter, hard-nosed teacher – who defines "bringing up good men with strong character", and showing them little latitude, as the school's aim – to one discovering un-

expected kindness. An opening shot of his room at the school shows an unmade bed and a dirty sink with an ointment to manage piles – a glimpse of a man who has long given up on company.

Hunham's body language changes visibly as Angus and Mary, and another staff member played sweetly by Preston, make space in his heart. He looks bigger, straighter, warmer, his good eye and the glass one expressing his wonder at this surprise so late in his life. The moment when the regret over all the lost years washes over Hunham's face comes later – and there is hardly a throat without a lump in the theatre.

As Giamatti and the film, too, head for the Oscars, if there is a part that juts out, it is the chip the film carries on its shoulders about the "privileged" vs the 99 per cent. In a free-flowing film such as this, where true words are spoken on all sides without hurting hearts, it is a point that is too blunt and too frequently laid out.

## STREAMING WATCH LIST

BY ALAKA SAHANI



## PLAYERS

NETFLIX New York-based sportswriter Mack Mack (Gina Rodriguez) alongside her best friend Adam (Damon Wayans Jr) has spent years running trademark hookup plays that keep their friend group drowning in one-night stands. All of that changes when she meets Nick (Tom Ellis), and unexpectedly falls head over heels for him. *Players* is directed by Trish Sie from a screenplay by Whit Anderson.



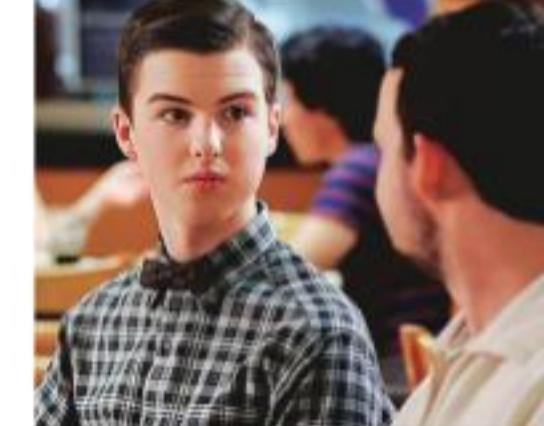
## THIS IS ME... NOW

PRIME VIDEO In collaboration with director Dave Meyers, pop star-actor Jennifer Lopez has created a narrative-driven cinematic experience. Lopez created an album by the same name but did not want to take the conventional route for the album launch. With the help of Meyer, she visualised her idea of love and started writing a script, which then resulted in *This Is Me... Now: A Love Story*.



## TOKYO VICE S2

LIONSGATE PLAY In the second season of *Tokyo Vice*, Ansel Elgort steps into the shoes of a daring Western journalist navigating the underworld of Tokyo. Tasked with talking on one of the city's most formidable crime bosses, Elgort's character dives into a gripping tale of journalistic courage and criminal intrigue. The ensemble cast that includes Koshi Uehara, Ken Watanabe and Rachel Keller.



## YOUNG SHELDON S7

PRIME VIDEO This coming-of-age sitcom television series, created by Chuck Lorre and Steven Molaro, is a spin-off prequel to the American sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* and follows main character Sheldon Cooper growing up with his family in East Texas. For Sheldon, it isn't easy growing up in East Texas. Heading into the show's seventh and final series, the once nine-year-old genius is now a 14-year-old teenager. Starting Friday, one episode will premiere weekly.

## Labour of Love

## LOVE STORIYAAN

★★★

**Director:** Hardik Mehta, Vivek Soni, Shazia Iqbal, Akshay Indikar, Archana Phadke, Colin D'Cunha  
**Streaming on:** Amazon Prime Video

## SHUBhra GUPTA

YEH KAISA pyaar hai, asks a character in *Love Storiyaan*. Nothing unusual, you might say, about Aekta Kapoor and Ullekh NP getting together. She, a North Indian Punjabi woman, comes with baggage from a failed marriage; he is from Kerala, with a mother reluctant to accept that her beloved son could go in for such a 'dangerous' relationship, as opposed to a 'normal' marriage.

After meeting Aekta and her grown-up daughters and Ullekh and his mother, whom we see softening during their trip to the latter's homestead in Kannur (*An Unsuitable Girl*, directed by Hardik Mehta), we move on to the rest: two radio jockeys, Hindu and Christian, meeting through an unusual conduit (*Love On Air*, by Vivek Soni), a Hindu-Muslim couple coming back to Dhaka to relive their romance (*Homecoming*, directed by Shazia Iqbal), a Dalit-upper class Brahmin meet-cute against the backdrop of big-dam protests in Chhattisgarh (*Raah Sangharsh Ki*, by Akshay Indikar), an Afghan man and an Indian woman's relationship cemented by distance (*Faasley*, by Archana Phadke), and two Kolkata-based individuals who find their identities through a gender-switch (*Love Beyond Labels*, by Colin D'Cunha).

Hence, Ezekiel's powers; and hence Cassie's, with her mother's extremely detailed diary of notes a big help. The teenage girls (who are so generic as to be offensive, including the otherwise eye-catching Sweeney) fit into the entangled webs of these two. How? You can watch this to find out. Or not. **SL**



mould, whether it is inter-state, inter-caste, or inter-faith, to get hitched. And you might be right. But the reason *Love Storiyaan* needs to be acknowledged is that it courageously celebrates the joys of romantic diversity at a time when the space for such things is shrinking rapidly.

In India of 2024, and especially in India of 2024, any 'deviation' from the norm is up for challenge, especially when the state is determined to get into our bedrooms in order to police the forms in which we can love and live.

It's in this background that this new show, quite appropriately from Karan Johar's stable, and executive-produced and conceptualised by Somen Mishra, becomes so precious. It gives the people who are retelling their love stories, as well as us who become participatory viewers, a chance to celebrate the many hues of romance, to realise that there is no set construct for people to fall in love, that Cupid – that poor, overworked god of love – can strike anywhere. It gives us a chance to breathe freely, and to feel all is not lost.

The six stories, based on journalists Priya Ramani, Samar Halarnkar, and Niloufer Venkatraman's Instagram page,

'India Love Project', are carefully chosen to represent different parts of the country, and different kinds of 'love'. Not all six are equal. The best efforts are from Indikar and Iqbal, who keep us with their narratives – the former springs to life around the bright-faced Dalit activist Subhadra Khaperde who is alive to the rhythms of her sexual life with her partner; the latter does have the courage to show us that not all homecomings are hunky-dory, and that you carry your happiness with you. The other four are looser and not as impactful.

There's also the presence of banal situations, and while we do get that not all romance can be full of drama as it would be too exhausting, we do hope that the next season takes care of this. The device of using actors for flashbacks is more annoying than inventive, and the background music threatens to make things generic. Real-life love is and can be really spiky, and we the viewers, cannot only deal with it, but revel in four are looser and not as impactful.

But then you look at the faces of these lovers, who have fought the hard fight and have made a home together in the face of tremendous odds, and you break into a smile. *Haan, yehi pyaar hai*.



safety. They survived the attack and he performed at the show two days later. But he along with his band members shifted to

London soon after.

By then, the audience is acquainted with his political beliefs and deep faith in Rastafari,

a religious movement among Black Jamaicans. The film, however, does not delve deeper into the beliefs that guided his music. This limits our understanding of the artist and his motivations.

Once he is in London, the narrative focuses mostly on his music, especially how he created the successful album, *Exodus*, with his supporting band, The Wailers. Marley uses reggae, which he calls "music of people", to serve a cause and convey messages of harmony. He painstakingly works on making music that's "natural" and "flows like a river". With *Exodus*, considered to be one of the most significant albums of the 20th century, Marley gained prominence as a sought-after international star.

The 95-minute-long movie doesn't offer much insight into his personal life. But it does give glimpses of his trauma and struggles – being abandoned by his British father when

he was a child; his youth dedicated to making music; and his emotional dependence on Rita. Now, it is up to the viewers to join these dots.

What works for the film, other than Marley's music, is the captivating performance by Ben-Adir and Lynch. In one particular scene, when Bob and Rita are having a showdown, the dynamics of their relationship are laid bare. Rita, an artist in her own right, has not only been a supportive spouse who accepted Bob's transgressions as well as children from other women but is an integral part of his band. She, too, had another love interest while being married to Bob. It's impossible to take your eyes off these two actors during this scene.

Though *Bob Marley: One Love* doesn't give a complete picture of a brilliant artist, it reiterates his belief that music and message can go together.

## A Bit Out of Tune

## BOB MARLEY: ONE LOVE ★★

**Director:** Reinaldo Marcus Green **Cast:** Kingsley Ben-Adir, Lashana Lynch, James Norton, Henry Douthwaite, Sevana, Hector Lewis

## ALAKA SAHANI

FIRST, A disclaimer: *Bob Marley: One Love* is not a typical biopic. It's more like a cinematic memoir that showcases the incredible rise of Marley as a global superstar. The movie focuses on a crucial period – from 1976 to 1978 – of his extraordinary career. It is bookended by the reggae genius leaving Jamaica after an assassination attempt on him days before he was to perform at a peace concert, and, two years later, Marley returning to his home

country, after the success of his album *Exodus*, for 'One Love' concert that was meant to send out the message of unity.

When the movie opens, Marley (Kingsley Ben-Adir) has already established himself as a popular star in Jamaica with a political voice. He believes strongly that his music can play a role in ending the civil war in post-colonial Jamaica and bring the two warring political groups together. But a gun attack on him, his wife Rita Marley (Lashana Lynch), and some of his collaborators, days before a peace concert, makes him worry about their

safety. They survived the attack and he performed at the show two days later. But he along with his band members shifted to

London soon after.

By then, the audience is acquainted with his political beliefs and deep faith in Rastafari,

# Ton for Ben, alarm bells for Team India

England opener Duckett's blistering hundred hands visitors the advantage in Rajkot Test despite trailing by 238 runs at stumps

**SRIRAM VEERA**

RAJKOT, FEBRUARY 16

THOUGH IT was England that was trailing by 238 runs in the first innings and will be batting in the fourth innings, at the end of the second day, the pressure seemed to be on India. England had blitzed to 207/2 in 35 overs and threateningly for India, opener Ben Duckett was still out there on 133 with 21 fours and 2 sixes. The day and the game couldn't have captured the stark contrast between the two teams' approach any better.

One team wanted to win, the other wanted to hang in there, stretch the game, see where it takes. Usually that would play out in reverse: the foreign team would take the second approach, the home team would show who the boss was. Here, England walloped, India dawdled with the bat. England attacked with Bazbaiting on field with innovative tactics, India tried but were reduced to being mere witnesses to Duckett's destruction.

"I wanted to clap for a couple of shots from Ben Duckett. Some of those slog sweeps were that good. But I am competitive and so I didn't clap!" Ravichandran Ashwin would sum up the second day's play with that rave as Duckett produced one of the most stirring counterattacks seen in this country recently by an overseas player to make India sweat despite making 445.

The fall of Sarfaraz Khan, the only batsman who showed up the quality of England's spinners and the state of the pitch, through a horrible mix-up with Ravindra Jadeja would prove costly. No wonder Rohit Sharma was so aghast that he flung the cap in the moment last evening. Once Joe Root baited and trapped Jadeja with a full-pitched fighters - he mistimed one and hit the next straight back to the bowler, India's balloon was deflated rather early in the morning.

They were on 331/7 and suddenly gripped with the prospect of being bowled out for a 375-ish score that would have been an utter disaster on this track. And so, the debutant Dhruv Jurel and Ashwin shut shop, trying to slowly inch towards respectability. The pitch still played fine - the odd ball kept low and there was some reverse as Mark Wood would later say, but Ben Stokes kept the pressure with imaginative field-settings to further choke India's progress. "It was a bizarre day. At one point, India was going nowhere and they were stuck," Wood would say, seeming genuinely perplexed by the proceedings.

There was nothing to be perplexed with England's batting. The surprise at how they bat has long faded. Even the journalists from England would talk about once they saw England thrash over 500 on the opening day of the Rawalpindi Test (506 runs) in December 2022 against Pakistan, this approach has been normalised. A couple of journalists say that had happened even before that - probably when they beat India at Edgbaston Test in July 2002, chasing 378 in the final innings with seven wickets in hand.



Ben Duckett used the sweep en route to a century on Day 2 of the third Test in Rajkot. PTI

at nearly five-runs an over.

Still, this was India. Not a turner but as Wood said there were a couple of factors that made the bowlers feel they were in the game. But England were having none of it.

"They have managed to increase the scoring rate through the series. They have also exploited the inexperienced batting line of ours. That's two facets," Ashwin would say. India's hope rests on Jasprit Bumrah, who yet again produced a stirring spell in the evening troubling even Duckett with yorkers and slower ones.

A yorker had induced an inside-edge past the stumps and another had rapped him on the pad but India's DRS for lbw showed it had hit the toe end of the bat. Duckett's response was telling: when Bumrah went for another yorker, and it ended up as almost one - really full low-dipping ball, Duckett crouched lower and managed somehow to cleanly whistled it past the bowler to the straight boundary.

India will now hope that the pitch, which has got increasingly slower, produces more invariable bounce and turn on the third day. If England ran away to a lead and quickly at that, all the pressure would come crashing down on "our inexperienced batting line-up".

India will now hope that the pitch, which has got increasingly slower, produces more invariable bounce and turn on the third day. If England ran away to a lead and quickly at that, all the pressure would come crashing down on "our inexperienced batting line-up".

For father Nem Singh, a retired Havaldar in the Indian Army, it has been nothing but a dream ride over the last one year.

"Dhruv played in the IPL, he played for India A, and now he has been picked for the Indian team. It is a dream for us. We don't know how to thank people and God. The other day, I spoke to Dhruv and told him to be more grounded than before," he says.

There was a time when Nem wanted his son to crack the National Defence Academy (NDA) exam and serve the country as a soldier.

Jurel Sr, a Kargil war veteran, wanted Dhruv to carry forward the legacy but the youngster was too enamoured by cricket to follow in his father's footsteps. No one in the family has played cricket, and getting a stable job has been the big goal.

However, Dhruv had something else in mind. In his early days, his father got feedback from many that his son bats very well and should focus on it, but concerns about a future in the game remained.

"No one from my family has played cricket. Everyone who saw him bat said, 'ladda acha hai, aap ise cricket mein daalo'. But I'm a father and was worried about his future too. Cricket nahi hua toh kya hoga (what if he didn't make

## ASHWIN PULLS OUT DUE TO FAMILY EMERGENCY

Ravichandran Ashwin has withdrawn from the Indian Test squad due to family emergency, effective immediately which means he'll miss the remainder of the ongoing 3rd Test at Rajkot, the BCCI announced late Friday night. "Ravichandran Ashwin has withdrawn from the Test squad, effective immediately due to a family medical emergency. In these challenging times, BCCI and the team fully supports Ashwin," the BCCI statement read. "The BCCI extends its heartfelt support to the champion cricketer and his family. The health and well-being of the players and their

loved ones are of utmost importance. The Board requests respect for the privacy of Ashwin and his family as they navigate through this challenging time," it added. The nature of the emergency is yet to be known but the board stated that any necessary assistance to the player and his family will be provided and said it appreciated the fans and media for their empathy.

Late on Friday, BCCI vice president Rajiv Shukla, in a post on X, wished speedy recovery to Ashwin's mother. "He has to

rush and leave Rajkot test to Chennai to be with his mother," he wrote.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

five-fors and 10-wicket hauls, the glory balls - there was something far deeper about his art that makes him more than a mere programmable wicket-taking machine. That is his devotion to grasp his art, exploring the wicked nuances and myriad possibilities of manipulating a cricket ball. In spirit, he is a pilgrim of his craft.

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There is the classicist, who bargains his wickets with grand old trickery of flight, drift, dip and turn. There is the modernist with a reverse-flicking carrom ball. There is the experimentalist who toys with his action, release points, angles and seam position. If Shane was the king of tricks, Ashwin was the alchemist, still exploring the magic formula in his spin laboratory.

### The big picture

When we think about Ashwin as a bowler, we tend to do so in the compound: great series rather than great spells, an archetype of excellence rather than any par-

## DIPA, PRANATI IN FINAL

Star Indian gymnasts Dipa Karmakar and Pranati Nayak qualified for the vault final of the FIG Apparatus World Cup, a Paris Olympics qualifying event, in Cairo on Friday. PTI

How Duckett tamed Ash with hockey-inspired sweep shots

**TANISHQ VADDI**

FEBRUARY 16

BENDUCKETT'S school coach isn't one bit surprised at the events unfolding in Rajkot where his ward almost threatened Gilbert Jessop's long-standing English record for the fastest Test hundred. Playing hockey and excelling in reverse hits in that sport is the reason Duckett sweeps as well as he has done this series, says the coach James Knott.

R Ashwin was on a high after taking his 500th Test wicket, and the evening's contest had resolved into Ashwin vs Ben Duckett. Ashwin has had experience of four innings against Bazball, the last of which he had won in the chase at Vizag. He has also had prior success against Duckett in 2016 when the left-hander was dropped after eking out just 18 runs from three innings. When he had returned to his school coach in England after that trip, his "confidence was hit" but he was determined to plot his comeback. By the time Ashwin had come on in the second day at Rajkot, Duckett had swept and reverse-swept Kuldeep Yadav out of attack and unfurled a few characteristically nonchalant chops through the off side to neuter Mohammad Siraj who had made a promising start with the new ball.

Ashwin had to do something now. He did, but the ball was repeatedly thrown back from deep midwicket. With his low centre of gravity, the short-statured Duckett would time and again stretch his right foot way across to the on side, opening himself up considerably, and stay low to thunderously sweep the ball from the line of stumps up and over midwicket. Ashwin kept changing the angle further away, but Duckett kept smashing them. When the inevitable dragging back of the length - and not a short ball necessarily but a tad shorter, Duckett would whack it over midwicket.

Watching Duckett unfold his trickery from England is his batting coach James Knott from Stowe school. "Ben played hockey and rugby, as well as cricket from a young age. In hockey, he was a great exponent of reverse hitting the ball and could already play the reverse sweep and switch hit when he arrived at Stowe. We worked more on the orthodox sweep and the paddle sweep which he didn't play as much," the coach tells *The Indian Express*.

Three times Ben Duckett has gone out to spin the series has been all trying to defend the ball. But when he tried to get on one knee and unleash the broom the Indian spinners had no answers whatsoever.

Duckett's cuts of Siraj stood out for its startling simplicity. He made it appear as Siraj was bowling far shorter. He would side-step a touch or stay compactly side-on, collapse his arms, creating width where none existed and that wristy quick-arm flourish finishes the execution. "Again he will get one side of the ball; he tends to get the leg side of the ball to cut on the off side. You would think that in swinging balls might cause troubles to him but it does to most people. But he is allowed to play that way and that is a refreshing thing for you as a player that you get the backing of everyone. Then it makes it easier to play," Julian Wood says.

## Nightmares of 2016

As confident as Duckett looks now, the 2016 failures in India did hurt. "He did, he came into school for a session not long after he got back. His confidence was hit and he needed to get that back," Knott would recall. "It took time to come, but he has always been at his best when positive and taking the attacking option.

At the age he is now he knows his game inside out and knows better how to deal with different pitches and situations."

The coach says even he has been surprised with one development. "I thought this (resurgence) would be in white ball but delighted at how successful he has been in Test s," Knott says. In 29 innings Duckett opened he scored 1234 runs at an average of 45.73. "Ben doesn't care who the opposition is; he just wants to be out there batting." Not just batting, but batting the living daylight out of the opposition.

## The Jurel story: Mother pawned jewellery to buy him cricket kit

**DEVENDRA PANDEY**

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 16

AS WAS expected Dhruv Jurel made his Test debut in the third Test against England in Rajkot on Thursday. With the team management not too impressed with the performance of wicketkeeper-batsman KS Bharat, the 23-year-old from Agra got the Test cap for the vital game of the series that is tied at 1-1.

Dhruv has impressed those who matter and when the team management and selection committee decided to drop Ishan Kishen, they picked the talented Uttar Pradesh wicketkeeper.

For father Nem Singh, a retired Havaldar in the Indian Army, it has been nothing but a dream ride over the last one year.

"Dhruv played in the IPL, he played for India A, and now he has been picked for the Indian team. It is a dream for us. We don't know how to thank people and God. The other day, I spoke to Dhruv and told him to be more grounded than before," he says.

There was a time when Nem wanted his son to crack the National Defence Academy (NDA) exam and serve the country as a soldier.

Jurel Sr, a Kargil war veteran, wanted Dhruv to carry forward the legacy but the youngster was too enamoured by cricket to follow in his father's footsteps. No one in the family has played cricket, and getting a stable job has been the big goal.

However, Dhruv had something else in mind. In his early days, his father got feedback from many that his son bats very well and should focus on it, but concerns about a future in the game remained.

"No one from my family has played cricket. Everyone who saw him bat said, 'ladda acha hai, aap ise cricket mein daalo'. But I'm a father and was worried about his future too. Cricket nahi hua toh kya hoga (what if he didn't make



For Jurel's family it has been nothing but a dream ride over the last one year.

it big in cricket?) Dhruv was not that good in studies either," his father recalled.

Nem met coach Parvendra Yadav, who ran the Springdale Academy in Agra, and requested him to make his son a good cricketer.

Cricket is an expensive sport, especially if one wants to become a batsman. Dhruv's father remembers how he wanted a bat costing Rs 800 and his mother had to pawn her only gold chain to buy his first kit.

"I had to borrow 800 rupees then because we didn't have money. He later wanted a kit bag but it was very expensive, some 6000 rupees. I said 'nat khelo, itna paisa nahi hai (leave the game, I don't have so much money)'. But he locked himself in the bathroom and his mother decided to pawn her only gold chain, which was how we managed to buy his first

kit bag. Now, I laugh sometimes when I recall those moments but one thing was clear. He was ready to work hard," Jurel Sr adds.

Nem is now referred to as Dhruv's father wherever he goes. He is enjoying the spotlight and waiting for the day his son dons India colours. He feels proud but is trying to stay grounded. For a father who remembers all his scores and has watched most of his games in junior cricket, the conversation these days revolves around food and values.

"I don't talk to him about cricket anymore. The other day when he called, I asked him whether he had food. How has he been? I remind him not to forget his sanskar (values) so that everyone looks up to him. Give respect to all those who have helped him till date," Nem advises

## Spin-nerd Ashwin's 25,714 calculated steps to conquer Mt 500

**SANDIP G**

FEBRUARY 16

A CONTENT smile spread on Ravichandran Ashwin's face, when he grabbed his 500th Test scalp and waved the ball towards the audience on the stands. The smile captured both the sheer joy and satisfaction that seized Ashwin when he reached a significant milestone of a spectacular career. He is now the ninth highest wicket-taker in Tests and the fifth highest among the spinners. Filter the achievement further and he is India's second-most successful bowler ever. Anil Kumble with 619 wickets sits at the top of the pile.

A more illuminating number in Ashwin's career is 25714, the number of balls he has bowled to complete his 500th. Only the Australian Glenn McGrath has brought wickets at a faster clip. The more you dissect his numbers, the more head-spinning an experience it would be, and the more convinced you would be of his place among the all-time greats of the game.

But beyond all these—the wickets, the numbers, the match-winning spells, the

five-fors and 10-wicket hauls, the glory balls—there was something far deeper about his art that makes him more than a mere programmable wicket-taking machine. That is his devotion to grasp his art, exploring the wicked nuances and myriad possibilities of manipulating a cricket ball. In spirit, he is a pilgrim of his craft.

In that sense, he is one of the rare originals of the game. He is both a scientific romantic, and also a romantic scientist. The worlds of Ashwin are many, rather he is one world in many.

There is the classicist, who bargains his wickets with grand old trickery of flight, drift, dip and turn. There is the modernist with a reverse-flicking carrom ball. There is the experimentalist who toys with his action, release points, angles and seam position. If Shane was the king of tricks, Ashwin was the alchemist, still exploring the magic formula in his spin laboratory.

### The big picture

When we think about Ashwin as a bowler, we tend to do so in the compound:

great series rather than great spells, an archetype of excellence rather than any par-



Ravichandran Ashwin's devotion to grasp his art, exploring the wicked nuances and myriad possibilities of manipulating a cricket ball sets him apart.

Williamson (5). Not to forget the four successive times he got Kumar Sangakkara.

Neither could a single ball define him. Watching Ashwin is like listening to a long symphony. The build-up should be watched to appreciate the crescendo, the whole spell needs to be devoured in attention to admire the wicket. It's how Ashwin gets the kick from his wickets, through elaborate planning and plotting. The thought, the tease, the torment and the kill.

The lone quibble could be that he has not been as successful outside Asia, as he is in the subcontinent. As many as 397 of his wickets were reaped in Asia.

It's often the case with finger spinners from Asia. Rare are the opportunities—only 25 of his 98 Tests (and 71 wickets) have come overseas. Unfortunately, his time coincided with his greatest spin peer Ravichandran Jadeja, whose superior batting skills have seen him nudged ahead of Ashwin in overseas Tests.

Erasing the anomaly would be the untouched box in his bucket list. He might have already begun prepping for the tour Down Under. It's this nerdish obsession that has been his guiding light to Wicket No 500.

# BCCI to players: Skip domestic cricket, face severe implications

DEVENDRA PANDEY  
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 16

BOARD OF Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah on Friday wrote to top cricketers – centrally contracted as well as India A – warning them that domestic cricket remains a “critical yardstick for selection” to the national team and non-participation in it will have “severe implications”.

The reason for the communication, according to the letter, was “the concerning trend of players prioritising the IPL over domestic red-ball cricket”.

“There is a recent trend that has started to emerge and is a cause for concern. Some

players have begun prioritising the IPL over domestic cricket, a shift that was not anticipated. Domestic cricket has always been the foundation upon which Indian cricket stands, and it has never been undervalued in our vision for the sport,” Shah said in the letter accessed by *The Indian Express*.

He also said that “domestic cricket forms the backbone of Indian cricket and serves as the feeder line to Team India”.

“Our vision for Indian cricket has been clear from the outset – every cricketer aspiring to play for India must prove themselves in domestic cricket. Performance in domestic cricket remains a critical yardstick for selection and non-participation in domestic cricket will carry severe implications,” wrote the BCCI secretary.



BCCI secretary Jay Shah. File

The letter shares the board’s concerns about “the health and status of our domestic cricket”.

Shah wrote that while the board is proud of the IPL’s popularity and success, players must prioritise domestic red-ball game and understand its relevance as a stepping stone to representing India.

The letter comes after players, including but not limited to wicket-keeper-batsman Ishan Kishan, ignored calls to play in the ongoing Ranji Trophy to stay fit and prepare for the upcoming IPL season. Kishan, as well as the likes of Shreyas Iyer and Deepak Chahar, skipped the final round of Ranji Trophy matches that started on Friday.

Shah also cited examples of how play-

ers in the past embraced every opportunity to represent their states in domestic tournaments. “Legends like Sunil Gavaskar exemplified this dedication, playing club cricket the morning they arrived from an international tour. Domestic cricket was seen not just as a commitment but as a responsibility and a source of pride,” he wrote.

Earlier this week, the BCCI secretary made it clear that the board will not tolerate excuses from centrally contracted players who wish to skip playing domestic red-ball cricket and followed up on his promise that he would write letters to the players in question.

The board’s latest diktat has left no ambiguity in the matter.

## Why Sindhu will play doubles vs Japan at BATC

SHIVANI NAIK  
FEBRUARY 16

PV SINDHU has been called upon to play the second doubles rubber partnering Ashwini Ponnappa as the Indian women’s team at the Badminton Asia Team Championships shuffles its personnel to field the strongest possible challenge looking for a win against better-ranked Japan.

On Friday, India ensured its first-ever medal in the women’s event of the event by defeating Hong Kong 3-0 thanks to wins for Sindhu, Ashmita Chaliha and Ashwini-Tanisha Crasto. They also ensured Uber Cup Finals qualification in the process.

Gunning for a bold finals spot, the Indians will juggle their top names and that means Sindhu will need to be ready for the fourth match of the tie.

The decision, while also largely tactical, was taken after a niggle to India’s top doubles shuttler. Tanisha Crasto is unfortunately injured and not playing. The call to shuffle the doubles teams was taken by team management and Sindhu who will play doubles was on board the decision, “said Badminton Association of India, when contacted.

Sindhu and Saina Nehwal have both been fielded in doubles, even together, earlier in Uber Cups and team events, to take the best shot at earning 3 points. Sindhu, who has won both her matches against China and Hong Kong, is slated to meet Japan’s Aya Ohori for the first match. The Indian star has beaten the World No 14 southpaw Ohori all 13 times they have played and will fancy her chances of putting India 1-0 up.

The order of play is first women’s singles (WS1), first doubles (WD1), WS2, WD2 and WS3, and world rankings determine who is first and second doubles combine. Ashwini-Tanisha at No 21 are India’s WD1, but Treesa-Gayatri take that spot with Ashwini and Sindhu unranked. Japan’s first doubles is World No 6 Nami Matsuyama and Chihiro Shida according to the team sheet on tournamentsoftware.com as of Friday night. While Ashwini has never faced this pairing alongside Tanisha, Treesa-Gayatri have nicked a set in the past, and will give it a good go on Saturday. The best way Ashwini can take a stab at the second doubles vs the World No 11s Rena Miyaura and Ayako Sakuramoto is if she’s paired with Sindhu. Given Sindhu plays the first singles, she will be required to be given two matches interval before her doubles, thus ensuring they play the fourth rubber, if necessary.

Before that, Ashmita Chaliha lines up at second singles. She has the almighty task of taking down former world champion, Nozomi Okuhara, currently ranked No 20. National champion Anmol Kharb, if called upon at a possible 2-2 juncture, will face Natsuki Nidaira, ranked world No 29.

Apart from the Sindhu singles match, the other faceoffs of the semis tie are strongly leaning towards a Japan win. But this Indian team managed a 3-2 win over China in their pool tie. They might as well now go for broke, and align in the best likely combinations.

Later in the day, the Indian men’s team disappointed when they went down to Japan 3-2 in the quarterfinals.



PV Sindhu in action. PTI

# ‘Greatest day in Indian TT’

Ayhika and Sreeja score stunning wins over Chinese World No 1 & No 2 but India eventually lost group stage tie 2-3 at team worlds

VINAYAK MOHANARANGAM & ANIL DIAS  
FEBRUARY 16

IN THE wee hours of Friday morning in Busan, Ayhika Mukherjee and Sreeja Akula produced something incredible. The two Indian paddlers beat the top two players in the world – No 1 Sun Yingsha and No 2 Wang Yidi – in their respective singles matches of their Group 1 encounter against China at the ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships being held in Busan.

“It’s the greatest day for Indian table tennis. Beating the Chinese World No. 1 and World No. 2 in a single day is stunning. It would’ve been even better had we won this match but these two results are indeed phenomenal,” beams Kamlesh Mehta, eight-time national champion and the General Secretary of the TTFI. The strong Chinese team ultimately fought back to win the match as Manika Batra lost both her matches to World No. 4 Wang Manyu and Yingsha while Ayhika couldn’t quite pull off another upset against Manyu in the decider.

Even though India lost the tie, beating China’s top players, considered unthinkable for Indians till very recently, is bound to send ripples across the table tennis world. Former India player Neha Aggarwal Sharma underlining the importance of the win said: “If you beat China, people go crazy and mind you, entire China is taking note of it.”

These Championships are vital for India as it’s a qualifier for the Paris Olympics later this year. If they manage to reach the quarterfinals it guarantees a team spot at the Summer Games. In a group that has Hungary, Spain, Uzbekistan and China, India needs to finish in the top three to reach the knock-outs, and a second place will help with a better draw.

For that to happen, India would expect Ayhika and Sreeja to continue their giant-killing spree. Ready to take over the mantle of Indian women’s table tennis from Manika, the tandem duo have contrasting personalities.

Ayhika, who calls herself an extrovert, hit balls last year when she teamed up with Sutirtha Mukherjee to win a historic women’s doubles bronze medal at the Asian Games, where they beat the reigning world champions in their backyard. Her international career has seen a huge upswing in the past year and a half, especially since she recovered from a career-threatening lower back injury.

Today the 26-year-old floored her fancied opponent, Yingsha, with her forehand attack. She saved three game points in the opener, to win 12-10. The second game was one-way traffic as Sun breezed through 11-2 and then had a 9-5 lead in Game 3. Ayhika once again fought back, taking the third game 13-11. In the fourth game, the Indian finished strongly with five points in a row from 6-6, handing a first-ever defeat for Yinghsa in team World Championship events for China, as per WTT.

Sreeja, on the other hand, is much more



Sreeja Akula. File

soft-spoken and prefers to keep to herself. The 25-year-old, who won the 2022 Commonwealth Games mixed doubles title partnering Sharath Kamal, won her first WTT tournament at Corpus Christi last month before reaching the quarterfinal of the Goa Star Contender that saw her break into the top-50 of world rankings.

Against Wang Yidi, Sreeja didn’t show any sign of nervousness, even when she let her 8-2 lead slip in the third game to take it into tiebreaks. That she managed a straight-games win over Yidi is beyond exemplary.

Sreeja pocketed the first two games 11-7 and 11-9 with her forehand working like a dream. She led 8-2 in the third but Yidi fought back to have a game point at 10-9. It was the forehand that once again came to her rescue as Sreeja made it 10-10, and it would be a magnificently inside-out winner that gave her a match point that she converted.

“India was leading 2-1 against China – this statement itself has given the whole team a lot of confidence. We had a very good start with Ayhika’s win and the team spirit was very high which motivated me,” says Sreeja. “I have mixed emotions because, although I am happy I won, I am extremely sad that it wasn’t enough to win the tie, but now we know we can take on the best.”

While there has been a lot of talk of the varying kinds of defensive rubbers that Indian women’s players use, they showed on Friday that they are capable of producing some stunning attacking play too. Ayhika hardly used her defensive anti-spin rubber on her backhand and attacked with her short pimpled rubber (attacking) on the forehand. Sreeja also barely used her long pimpled backhand. Instead, she was extremely swift as hits winners.

Incredible as the results on their own are, Indian table tennis must see this as a springboard. Neha believes events on Friday send a message to the world that we’re here to stay, but the players must need to be more consistent. “It’s quite exciting how we’ve gradually improved just in time for the Paris Olympics. What’s great is that it’s not just only about Manika anymore,” she says.

## RANJI ROUND-UP

Odisha score 314/4 on Day 1  
Indrajith takes TN to 291/4

DELHI CRICKET establishment continued with its dodgy selections even during an inconsequential final group league game as Odisha’s batters reached 314 for 4 riding on a century from Subhransu Senapati. The match at Jamia Millia Islamia featured three debutants -- batter Gagan Vats, left-arm spinner Sumit Mathur and leg-spinner Prince Chaudhary. The Delhi team didn’t feature left-arm seamer Siddhant Sharma, who got a five-for including seven wickets in the previous match against Himachal Pradesh in Dharamsala.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Odisha 314/4 in 88 overs (Subhransu Senapati 109 batting, Shantanu Mishra 76, Sumit Mathur 2/69, Pranshu Vijayarajan 2/64) vs Delhi.

**Shardul, Dube shine**  
SHARDUL THAKUR and Shivam Dube starred with the ball and the bat respectively as 41-time champions Mumbai took the upper hand on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy Group B match against Assam on Friday. Shardul (6/21) was simply unplayable with the new ball as he dismantled Assam for a meagre 84 in 32.1 overs after Mumbai opted to bowl.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Assam 84 all out in 32.1 overs (Shardul Thakur 6/21) vs Mumbai 217 for 6 in 48.4 overs (Shivam Dube 101 not out; Rahul Singh 2/42).

**Misal, Redkar share honour**  
GOA REACHED 309 for 9 in 83 overs on the opening day after being invited to bat, riding on half centuries from Darshan Misal (88) and Mohit Redkar (80). Arjun Tendulkar contributed 45 off 70 balls in Porvorim.

**BRIEF SCORES:** Goa 309 for 9 in 83 overs (Darshan Misal 88, Mohit Redkar 80, Arjun Tendulkar 45; Siddharth Desai 2/47) vs Gujarat.

# Hockey coach Fulton’s vision of control over chaos

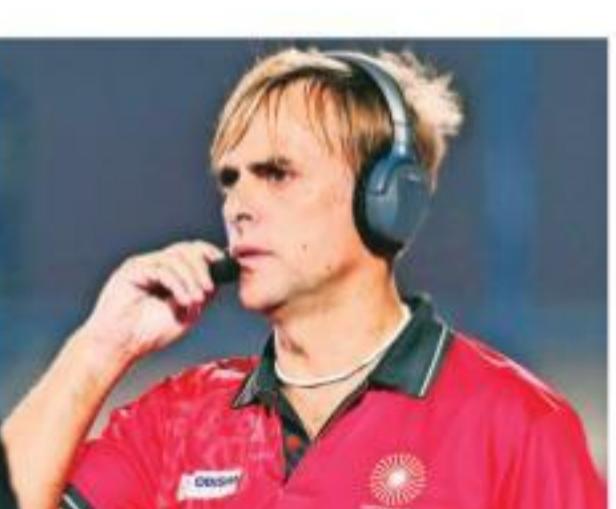
MIHIR VASAVDA  
BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 16

NED WAS just a nickname until it became a motivation mantra of sorts that could well be plastered on the walls inside the dressing room. Ned – Never Ending Dream.

The acronym was born when ‘Ned’ started his own company more than a decade ago. When he moved to hockey coaching and took charge of Ireland, it became a rallying cry for the underdogs’ quest to qualify for the Olympics for the first time since 1948. In 2018, it became Belgium’s motto as they lifted their first World Cup. Ned’s dream now continues with India, the team he now coaches.

Ned is Craig Fulton. The South African who, with his emphasis on defensive structures, transformed Ireland and turned Belgium into an unstoppable force. “He made us very tough to beat. We were defensively very good in that period,” says Michael Robson, Ireland veteran.

The latest chapter of Fulton’s Never Ending Dream is to make India eliminate chaos and embrace control. ‘Control’ is not commonly associated with Indian hockey, on the field and off it. But it remains at the core of what Fulton, a former international coach of the year, wants India to do: be strong defensively, without actually being too defensive. It goes against everything ingrained in the mind of an Indian player, for whom it is second nature to charge forward



Craig Fulton. Hockey India

instantly after winning the ball. But as Fulton’s past – Ireland – collided with his present on Friday at the Kalinga Stadium in the FIH Pro League, he must have been pleased with what he saw. Ireland, in the same group with India at the Paris Olympics, showed they still remain a team very much in the Fulton mould, tough to break down. They played man-to-man, never left any gap and although reactive, defended with authority. “Mourinho’s Chelsea,” is how Fulton described them. “No disrespect, even we do that sometimes.”

India shifted flanks, the players rotated positions and tried a multitude of things, show-

ing patience that doesn’t come so naturally to them before Gurjant Singh scored the winner with just 61 seconds remaining in the match.

Then again, executing Fulton’s vision hasn’t been a problem for India when they have played teams ranked around or lower than them. At the Asian Champions Trophy and Asian Games last year they looked to have fully bought into his philosophy. India asserted complete control, showed the ability to switch tactics mid-game and never tried to force the issue.

The script muddles a little when they play the world’s top two or three. As was the case against Australia on Thursday. At half-time, Fulton demanded control from his team. What he got was everything but that as Australia erased a two-goal deficit and scored six past India to win 6-4.

“We can’t concede six goals. Six goals are way too many in a game like that,” the coach said. Fulton was talking about winning a match but if India harbour the ambition of winning an Olympic gold, they’ll have to listen to their coach even more carefully. Since the Sydney Olympics in 2000, only once (Argentina, in 2016) has a team won the gold medal after conceding more than two goals in a game throughout the campaign.

Fulton was honest in his assessment for the simple reason that the tactical tweaks – subtle, yet profound in impact – are designed to ensure such scorelines are erased. In the last 8

months or so, India have adopted a mid-block instead of the high-press, which was much more aligned with the country’s ethos.

The tactical tweak, Fulton hopes, will give India a chance to exploit the full range of their counter-attacking prowess while also shoring up the defence as, during transitions, the players start at the half-line to reduce the risk of being caught out in a counterattack.

Fulton is still trying to fit the jigsaw pieces perfectly by identifying the right players for different positions and making new combinations – like Manpreet Singh and Harmanpreet Singh in defence against the top teams.

The likes of Australia, Belgium and the Netherlands play with the confidence that at some point, India will make at least one mistake which will give them a chance to land a killer blow.

It happened during the European leg of the Pro League last year, where India executed the tactic to the T and starved Belgium for space for most periods before conceding a late goal. And it happened again on Thursday against Australia.

Colin Batch, the Australian coach, said after the match the foundation for the comeback was laid by two things. “We had to possess the ball and shift the play,” he said. In other words, control the match.

It’s what Ned wants India to do. For a team that thrives in chaos, though, this could be a never ending dream.