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Former Thai Premier Thaksin Shinawatra

THAILAND

Thaksin projects power as loyalists cosy up

Bangkok: With politicians pouring in to greet him, a dinner with Thailand's prime minister and a police escort to places he went, billionaire former premier Thaksin Shinawatra looked more like a statesman this weekend than a convicted criminal on parole. Loyalists, ministers and lawmakers flew to Chiang Mai to visit and consult Thaksin, projecting an image of power for a tycoon who loomed large over politics throughout his 15 years in self-exile to skip jail for abuse of power and conflicts of interest. With his family's party in power and ally Srettha Thavisin PM, analysts say it will not be long before Thaksin tries to con-

SINGAPORE

Gambling abroad unlawful, China warns citizens

Beijing: China's embassy in Singapore on Monday urged its citizens in the city-state to stay away from all forms of betting, saying gambling overseas violates Chinese laws. The warning comes as Beijing intensifies its efforts to crack down on Chinese citizens gambling across Southeast Asia, a popular tourist destination. The embassy "solemnly reminded" the majority of Chinese in Singapore to enhance their legal awareness and stay away from gambling. Singapore has to two casinos, one operated by Las Vegas Sands and the other Genting Singapore

REUTERS

SAYS VICTORY SHOWS RUSSIA WAS RIGHT IN WAR WITH UKRAINE

After big election win, Putin warns NATO conflict could lead to WWIII

Says US-led alliance already in Ukraine, English and French being spoken on frontline

REUTERS

MOSCOW, MARCH 18

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin warned the West on Monday that a direct conflict between Russia and the U.S.-led NATO military alliance would mean the planet was one step away from World War Three but said hardly anyone wanted such a scenario. Asked by Reuters about the Macron remarks and the risks and possibility of a conflict between Russia and NATO, Putin quipped: "everything is possible in the modern world."

"It is clear... that this will be one step away from a full-scale World War Three. I think hardly anyone is interested in this," Putin said after winning the biggest ever landslide in post-Soviet history. Putin added that NATO military personnel were already in Ukraine, saying that Russia had picked up both English and French being spoken on the battlefield.

Putin cemented his already tight grip on power in a victory which he said showed Moscow had been right to stand up to the West and send troops to Ukraine.

The outcome means Putin, 71, is set to embark on a new six-year term that will see him overtake



Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Monday. He is set to become the longest-serving Russian leader. AP

Josef Stalin and become Russia's longest-serving leader for more than 200 years if he completes it.

Putin won 87.8% of the vote, the highest ever result in Russia's post-Soviet history, according to an exit poll by pollster the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM). First official results indicated the polls were accurate.

Western governments lined up to condemn Putin's victory as unfair and undemocratic, but China, India and North Korea congratulated the veteran Russian leader on extending his rule by a further six years.

REUTERS

E EXPLAINED Geopolitical fault lines get clearer

WEST CONDEMNED Putin's election victory, but India, China, North Korea congratulated him on his big win. This stresses the geopolitical fault lines that have gaped wider after the Ukraine war; in Africa, where the West is struggling to win support, some newspapers saw Putin's win as reinforcing the stance of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, who bolstered Russia ties following coups in recent years.

PUTIN SAYS RUSSIA WILL BUILD BUFFER ZONE IN UKRAINIAN TERRITORY IF NECESSARY

Moscow: Asked if he considered it necessary to take Ukraine's Khariv region, Putin said if the attacks continued, Russia would create a buffer zone out of more Ukrainian territory to defend Russian territory.

"I do not exclude that... we will be forced at some point, when we deem it appropriate, to create a certain 'sanitary zone' in the territories today under the

Kyiv regime," Putin said. A senior Ukrainian official said Monday Putin's idea of creating a buffer zone in Ukrainian territory was a clear indication that Moscow planned to escalate its war in Ukraine.

"This is... a direct... statement that the war will only escalate," presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak told Reuters in a written statement.

REUTERS

UK Bill to bypass court block on deportation plan returns to House

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON, MARCH 18



UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak

THE BRITISH government hopes one last push can revive its stalled plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda.

A bill aimed at overcoming a UK Supreme Court block on the deportation flights returns to the House of Commons on Monday, and could be passed into law within days.

That would be a boost for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who is facing disquiet from fellow Conservative lawmakers as the party lags in opinion polls ahead of an election due this year.

Lawmakers in the House of Commons are due to consider changes made to the Safety of Rwanda Bill by Parliament's upper chamber, the House of Lords. The Lords inserted a series of amendments designed to water down the legislation.

All 10 amendments are likely

to be removed by lawmakers in the Commons, where the Conservatives have a majority. After a back-and-forth tussle with the upper house, the Commons is almost certain to prevail because the unelected Lords can't overturn the elected lower house.

Once the bill becomes law, it could be weeks before any flights to Rwanda take off, as people chosen for deportation are likely to lodge legal appeals.

Sunak said Monday that he was sticking to a previous promise that flights would start "in the spring". Britain and Rwanda signed a deal almost two years ago that would see migrants who cross the English Channel in small boats sent to the East African country, where they would remain permanently.

All 10 amendments are likely

Mahsa Amini killing in custody unlawful, says UN mission

REUTERS

GENEVA, MARCH 18

A FACT-FINDING mission mandated by the United Nations said on Monday the death of Mahsa Amini in custody of Iran's morality police was "unlawful" and caused by violence and that women in the country remain subjected to wide-ranging discrimination.

"Our investigation established that her death was unlawful and caused by physical violence in the custody of state authorities," Sara Hossain, chief of the International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran, told UN Human Rights Council.

In response, Kazem Gharib Abadi, secretary general of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, accused the fact-finding mission of a "glaring lack of independence and impartiality".

REUTERS

ON A recent Tuesday night, around 20 people crowded into the second floor of Joniel Bon's newly opened internet cafe in Quezon City, 10 miles from Manila. Seated at computers with 34-inch curved monitors, they began playing video games such as Heroes of Mavia and Nifty Island, as music from Taylor Swift and Maroon 5 hummed from the speakers.

Playing these games can be a full-time job, and some of Mr. Bon's customers had settled in for the night with slices of pizza to fuel them. The games reward players with cryptocurrency tokens for completing small, daily

challenges. Often, players convert their tokens to pesos, the country's currency, earning around twice the Philippines' minimum wage of \$11 a day.

Bon, 40, had dreamed about the buzz of activity at his own business after cryptocurrencies crashed spectacularly two years ago, dashing his hopes for a thriving game collective at the time. "There was a point I had to say, 'I believe in this.' I had to hope," said Bon, a former information-technology worker. "We survived."

Bon's new internet cafe is a sign of how crypto has begun booming again in the Philippines, which has long been a center of crypto activity. This month, Bitcoin reached a record high, cap-

Israel raids hospital in north Gaza as ceasefire talks in Qatar set to resume

REUTERS

JERUSALEM, CAIRO, MARCH 18

ISRAELI TROOPS raided the compound of Gaza's Al Shifa Hospital early on Monday in an operation that Palestinian health authorities said caused multiple casualties and set off a fierce fire in one of the buildings.

The Israeli military said soldiers had conducted a "precise operation" based on intelligence that the hospital was being used by senior Hamas leaders, and were fired upon when they entered the compound.

"Twenty terrorists have been eliminated at the Shifa hospital thus far in various engagements, and dozens of apprehended suspects are currently in questioning," it said in a statement.

Al Shifa, the Gaza Strip's biggest hospital before the war, is now one of the only healthcare facilities that is even partially operational in the north of the territory, and is also housing hundreds of displaced civilians. Footage circulated on social media appeared to show an Israeli tank blocking the main gate of Al Shifa.

Meanwhile, an Israeli official said Israel will send a high-level delegation headed by its Mossad chief to Qatar on Monday for mediated talks with Hamas designed to secure a six-week Gaza truce under which the Palestinian militants would free 40 hostages.

This stage of the negotiations could take at least two weeks, the official estimated, citing difficulties that Hamas' foreign delegates may have in communicating with the group in the besieged enclave after more than five months of war.



Palestinians await food aid outside an UNRWA warehouse in Gaza City on Monday. Reuters

Gaza far exceeds famine-level shortages, mass death imminent: UN-backed report

REUTERS

MARCH 18

FAMINE IS imminent and likely to occur by May in northern Gaza and could spread across the enclave by July, a U.N.-backed report said on Monday, after more than five months of war which have shattered the Palestinian territory and cut off supplies.

Malnutrition and food insecurity probably exceeded famine levels in Gaza's north, and hunger-linked death rates were likely to do so soon, the report by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification

(IPC) said.

The assessment - a scale used by U.N. agencies, regional bodies and aid groups that sets the global standard on measuring food crises - comes amid global pressure on Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into the enclave of 2.3 million people.

Some 300,000 have been cut off by fighting in the north.

The European Union accused Israel on Monday of provoking famine and using starvation as a weapon of war - claims that Israel rejects, saying it does not target civilians and is only interested in eliminating the militant Islamist movement Hamas.

BIDEN DISCUSSES RAFAH, AID WITH NETANYAHU

Washington: US President Joe Biden spoke to Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday and discussed the situation in Rafah and efforts to increase aid to Gaza, the White House said. Netanyahu said they discussed Israel's commitment to achieve all the targets it had set out for the war: eliminating Hamas, releasing all the hostages and ensuring Gaza would no longer pose a threat to Israel.

REUTERS

Nepal ex-Speaker arrested over 'involvement' in gold-smuggling



Krishna Bahadur Mahara

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE KATHMANDU, MARCH 18

KRISHNA BAHDUR Mahara, a senior leader of the ruling Maoist party and former Speaker of House of Representatives, was arrested and sent for four days in custody by a Kathmandu court Monday, in relation to a major gold smuggling case.

Police arrested Mahara near Dang in western Nepal and then flew him to Kathmandu for further interrogation.

Mahara's arrest comes a day after Dipesh Pun - Maoist youth leader and son of Former Vice President, Nanda Kishore Pun - was arrested

The arrest was executed on the express order of Home Minister Rabindra Lamichhane based on an official investigation report that identified Mahara and a large chunk of Pun's secretariat when he was the vice President, as involved in gold smuggling to Nepal as a transit to India, police said.

The inquiry was constituted in July after 61 kg gold from West Asia cleared out by the Customs Department at the Tribhuvan International Airport was apprehended by the police outside the airport. The inquiry report submitted to the prime minister a few months ago said that some senior politicians - mostly from the Maoist party that heads the coalition government - were involved in the smuggling incident.

NEARLY UNIVERSAL INTERNET CONNECTION MAKES CRYPTO POPULAR EVEN IN RURAL AREAS

After 2022 meltdown, cryptocurrency comes roaring back to Philippines

ELITAN

QUEZON CITY, MARCH 18

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Bon's new internet cafe is a sign of how crypto has begun booming again in the Philippines, which has long been a center of crypto activity. This month, Bitcoin reached a record high, cap-



Joniel Bon (left), thought his hopes for a thriving game collective were over after the crypto crash in 2022. NYT

market meltdown and bringing other digital currencies like Ether along with it. On Sunday, Bitcoin was trading at around \$68,000.

New billboards for crypto companies have now popped up around Manila. People have started harvesting virtual crops from a crypto farming game called Pixels as a fresh source of income. Overseas Filipino workers are also returning to the country to earn crypto as metaverse Filipino workers.

In November and December, the value of crypto transactions in the Philippines increased 70 percent from September and October, to \$73 billion, according to the research firm Chainalysis.

The Philippine player base for Pixels spiked to over 830,000 in

March from 80,000 players in November, according to the game's developers. About 30 percent of the world's crypto-earning video gamers are based in the Philippines, they said.

The renewed activity has given some Philippine officials pause. At a crypto conference in Manila in November, Kelvin Lee, then a commissioner at the country's Securities and Exchange Commission, said the government was wrestling with how to regulate the technology as it regained popularity.

Cryptocurrencies have been at the center of frauds and scams in the past. The tokens that crypto-earning games dole out are more volatile than Bitcoin and Ether, meaning the boom could go bust

FIRST PUNITIVE STEPS OVER DOCTORS' WALKOUTS

S KOREA SUSPENDS TWO SENIOR DOCTORS' LICENCES

SOUTH KOREAN authorities have suspended the licenses of two senior doctors for allegedly inciting the weeklong walkouts by thousands of medical interns and residents that have disrupted hospital operations, one of the doctors said Monday. The suspensions are the government's first punitive steps after doctors-in-training walked off the job last month to protest the plan to sharply increase medical school admissions.

AP

TWO DAYS AFTER ATTACK ON PAK OUTPOST KILLED 7 SOLDIERS

Pak conducts airstrikes inside Afghanistan, kills 8 Rebels of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan group targeted, says Pak; three children among 8 civilians killed, say Taliban



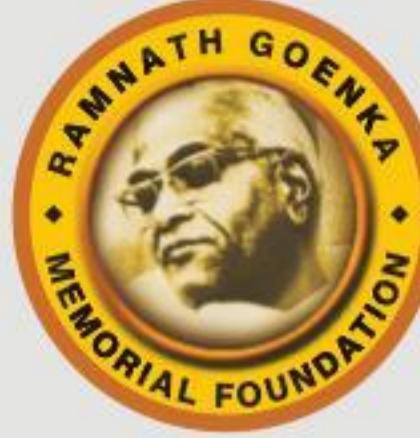
against Pakistan. "We urge these elements in power to rethink the policy of siding with Kharjari terrorists... and to... stand with the people of Pakistan," it said.

The FO said that over the past two years, it repeatedly conveyed its serious concerns to the Interim Afghan Government over the presence of terror outfits, including TTP, inside Afghanistan.

Pakistan also announced its decision to continue to work to prevent any terrorist organisation from sabotaging bilateral relations with Afghanistan.

The FO said that Pakistan accords prime importance to sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan.

It said



TVS

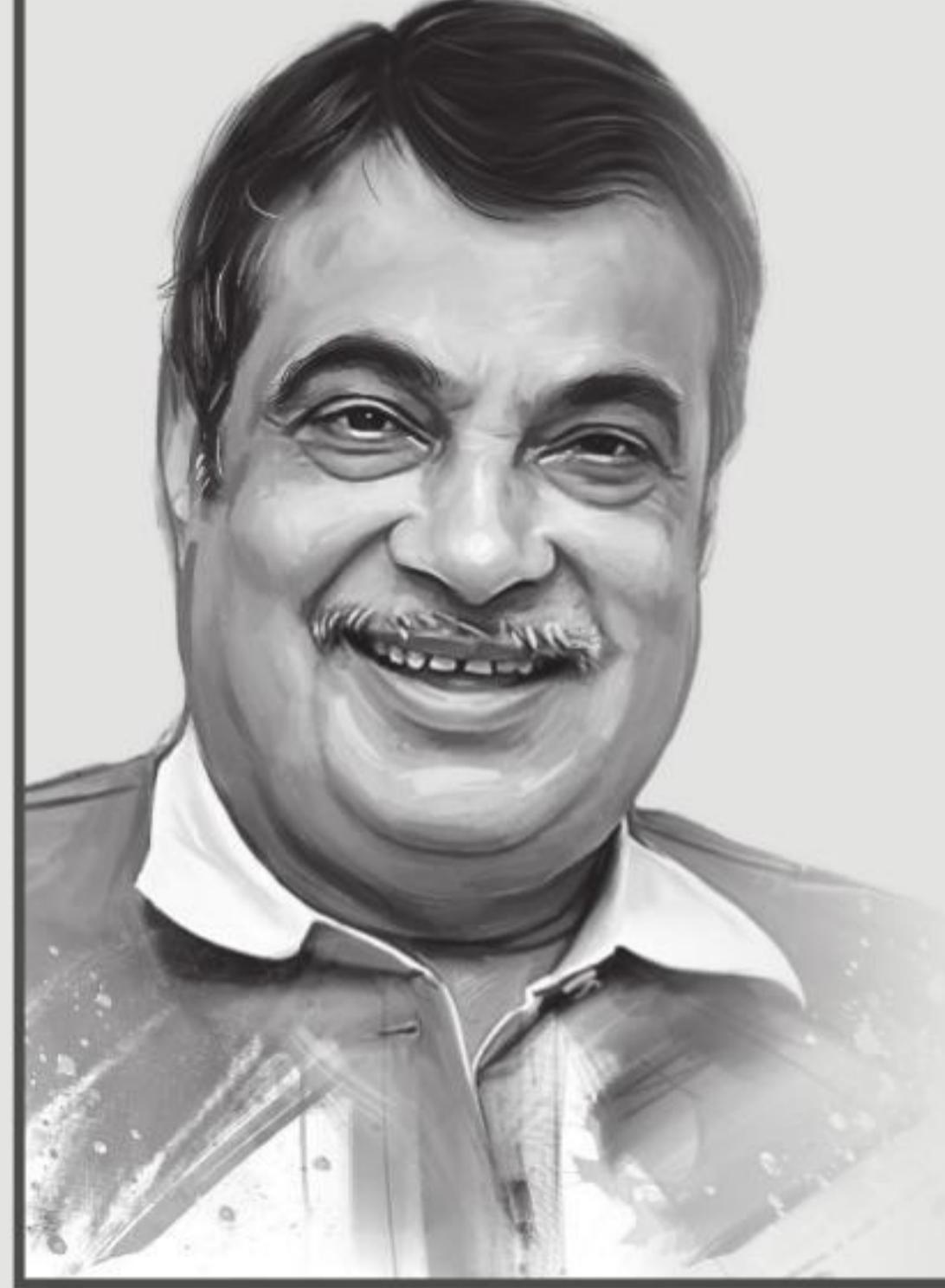
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THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, MARCH 19, 2024



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

EXPLAINED LAW

Disqualification over graft: Ravi vs TN govt again

K Ponnudiy was disqualified after Madras HC convicted him in a disproportionate assets case. SC stayed conviction, but Governor has refused to reinstate him

**APURVA VISHWANATH &
ARUN JANARDHANAN**
NEW DELHI & CHENNAI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME COURT on Monday agreed to hear a plea by Tamil Nadu seeking its intervention in reinstating K Ponnudiy, a senior leader of the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), as a minister. In December last year, Ponnudiy was disqualified after the Madras High Court convicted him in a disproportionate assets case.

The case has turned into yet another flash-point between the state government and Governor R N Ravi, after the latter last week refused to reinstate Ponnudiy even after the SC removed the basis of his disqualification.

The disqualification

The Madras High Court on December 19 last year overturned a trial court verdict acquitting Ponnudiy and his wife in the disproportionate assets case. The HC convicted the

former minister and his wife and awarded them a three-year jail term, along with a fine of Rs 50 lakh. The couple was on trial for amassing assets during Ponnudiy's tenure as minister for Mines and Minerals in the 2006–2011 DMK government.

The decision by the High Court triggered Section 8(3) of The Representation of the People Act, 1951, which states: "A person convicted of any offence and sentenced to imprisonment for not less than two years shall be disqualified from the date of such conviction and shall continue to be disqualified for a further period of six years since his release."

While Ponnudiy was disqualified and could no longer be a minister, he moved the Supreme Court challenging the HC ruling.

Stay of the conviction

On March 11, a Supreme Court Bench comprising Justices Abhay Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan stayed the conviction and the sentence. The grant of stay by the SC essentially meant that Ponnudiy's conviction was put in abeyance,

or was suspended pending a final decision — as though it did not exist until the final verdict on the appeal came through. Since his disqualification from the legislature followed from the conviction, with the grant of stay, no grounds existed for the disqualification.

The SC had acknowledged that the sentence had to be suspended as "in view of operation of Section 8(3) of the 1951 Act, irreversible situation will be created if the conviction is not suspended".

"Accordingly, we direct that the conviction of the appellant (K Ponnudiy @ Deivasigamani) under the impugned judgment and order stands suspended. Therefore, it follows that even the sentence stands suspended," the court had said.

This is the stated position in law and has been followed in a line of precedents, including in the recent, high-profile disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in August 2023. Rahul was disqualified from Parliament following a Surat trial court verdict in March 2023 in a criminal defamation case, in which

he was given a two-year jail sentence, the maximum allowed under that provision.

After the trial court and Gujarat HC refused to stay the conviction, the Congress leader moved the SC. Following the Supreme Court's stay on the conviction, he was reinstated as Member of Parliament.

Similarly, Lakshadweep MP Mohammed Faizal was disqualified after a sessions court in Kavaratti convicted and sentenced him to 10 years in jail in an attempt to murder case in January 2023. While the SC stayed his conviction, Lok Sabha dragged its feet on reinstating him. Eventually, hours before the SC was to hear a plea against the Lok Sabha's inaction, Faizal was reinstated in March 2023.

Governor's objections

Following the SC stay, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on March 13 wrote to the Governor to swear in Ponnudiy as a minister on March 14 and allot the Higher Education portfolio to him. However, Ravi rejected the recommendation to reappoint Ponnudiy, cit-

ing the ongoing corruption cases.

In a letter addressed to the CM, Governor Ravi stated that although the Supreme Court had suspended Ponnudiy's conviction, it had not nullified the existence of the conviction itself. Ravi argued that the conviction had only been "suspended, not set aside".

"It is pertinent to note that the Hon'ble Supreme Court, in light of Section 8(3) of the Representation of People Act 1951, in the said order has suspended the conviction by way of interim relief to Dr K Ponnudiy. It means the conviction of Dr K Ponnudiy though existent has been made non-operative. It has not been set aside," said Ravi's letter to the government, accessed by *The Indian Express*.

"The offences for which Dr K Ponnudiy has been held guilty by the Hon'ble Madras High Court are very serious amounting to moral turpitude, relating to corruption he committed as a public servant. His re-induction in the Council of Ministers while he remains tainted by corruption would be against constitutional morality. Hence, I am unable

to accede to your request," the letter added.

Larger tussle

Tamil Nadu's latest plea has been filed as part of an ongoing case on the role of the Governor, especially in granting assent to Bills.

Article 164 (1) of the Constitution states that the Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Governor and "the other Ministers shall be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister, and the Ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor". However, several Supreme Court rulings have interpreted that the power of the Governor primarily flows from the "aid and advice" of the Council of Ministers.

In November 2023, the Supreme Court expressed "serious concern" about Governors not acting on Bills. Following this, Governor Ravi had to return 10 pending Bills to the state government. Subsequently, the government called a special Assembly session to repeat the procedure of taking up the Bills again, under Assembly Rule 26.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

PUTIN WINS 88% VOTESHARE: WHO WERE HIS 'OPPONENTS'



Russia's poll candidates (from left)
Nikolai Kharitonov, Leonid Slutsky,
and Vladislav Davankov. Reuters

RUSSIA PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin Sunday has secured a whopping 87.97 per cent voteshare in the recent Presidential elections, results declared on Sunday showed. Another six-year term will make Putin, 71, Russia's longest-serving leader in over two centuries, having been in power since the turn of the century.

A very limited number of candidates were allowed to contest in the elections, which the West claims were held solely to legitimise Putin's rule. Moreover, since he first came to power, several of Putin's opponents have been barred from contesting polls, with some, such as Alexei Navalny, dying mysteriously. Given there was no real doubt about Putin's victory, who were the other candidates in the fray?

1. Nikolai Kharitonov

Kharitonov, 75, is a Member of Russia's lower house of Parliament, and a member of the Communist Party. He stood second, polling around 4.7% of the votes.

He contested Presidential polls earlier in 2004 too, losing to Putin. Recently, when a BBC journalist asked him why he would make a better President than Putin, he said, "It's not for me to say. That wouldn't be right." An AFP report noted: "On paper the Communist Party is in opposition, but in practice it backs up Putin's party, United Russia."

2. Vladislav Davankov

Davankov, 40, is from the New People party, garnering 3.6% of the votes.

According to Reuters, he served as the Deputy Chairman of the lower house of parliament and is from the New People political party, which his father helped set up in 2020. "Davankov has tried to position himself as someone opposed to excessive curbs on people's personal freedom and – in the context of Russian

politics – as someone who is more liberal," Reuters reported. However, his opinion on key issues, such as Russia's war with Ukraine, remain in sync with the Kremlin. While he favours peace talks with Ukraine, he has repeatedly reiterated that it should be "on our terms and with no rollback", *France 24* reported.

3. Leonid Slutsky

Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) nominee Slutsky, 56, stood fourth in the polls with 2.5% of the votes. He is currently the head of the lower house of parliament's foreign affairs committee, and also contested the 2018 election, when he got around 6% of the votes.

His ultranationalist party, according to the US Library of Congress, "aims to restore the Russian empire as well as foster greater political and economic ties with the Middle East as opposed to Europe and the United States."

Slutsky's conduct has also come under question at times. In 2018, a group of women journalists accused him of sexual harassment. Later, the Russian Parliament's State Duma Ethics Commission cleared him of the charges. ENS

EXPLAINED CLIMATE

Oceans have a fever — here's why

Average sea-surface temperature in February reached a new high in 2024. Oceans have been unusually warm for a year now, and the consequences for marine ecosystems can be severe and irreversible

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE AVERAGE global sea surface temperature (SST) — the temperature of the water at the ocean surface — for February 2024 stood at 21.06 degree Celsius, the highest ever in a dataset going back to 1979, the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said earlier this month. The previous record of 20.98 degree Celsius was set in August 2023.

The average daily SST has been off the charts since March 2023. In the graph alongside, the orange line shows 2023 temperatures, and the grey lines show the temperatures of previous years. The solid black line shows where we are so far in 2024 — and this is clearly above any other year, including 2023.

Why are the oceans getting warmer?

Since the middle of the 19th century, human activities such as the increased burning of fossil fuels has released high levels of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, and nitrous oxide are some notable GHGs, which trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to global warming. As a result, the average global temperature has risen at least 1.2 degree Celsius above pre-industrial times.

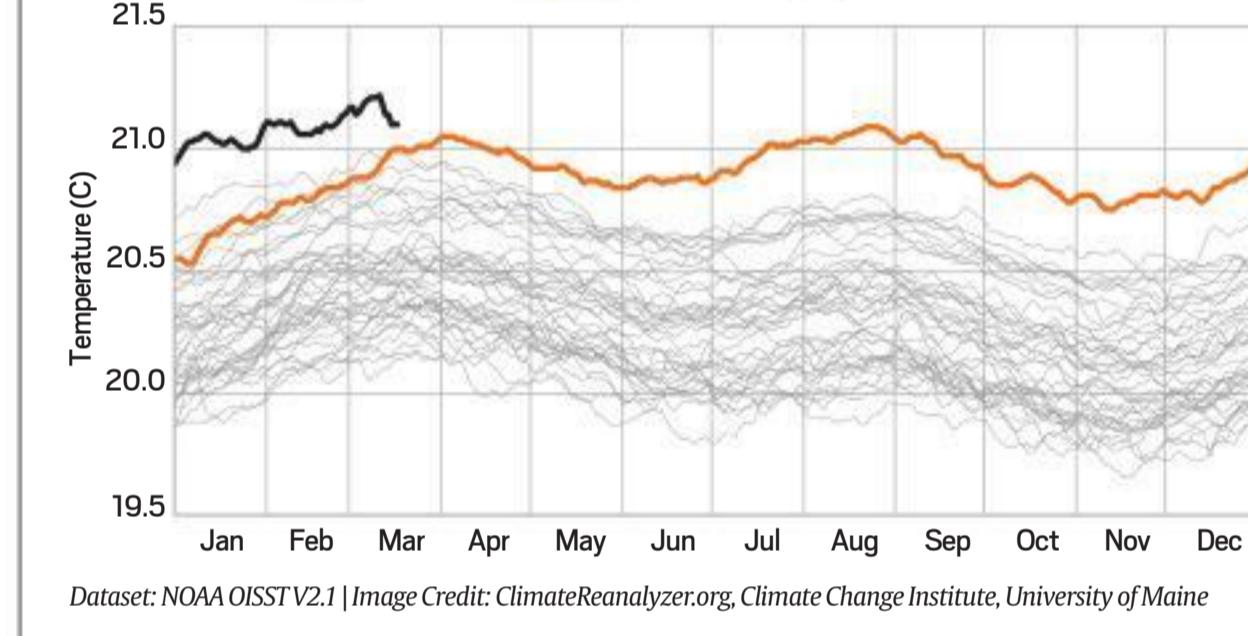
Almost 90 per cent of the extra heat trapped by GHGs has been absorbed by the oceans, which has made them steadily warmer over the decades.

Other factors too have contributed to the rise in ocean temperatures — for instance, El Niño, which refers to an abnormal warming of surface waters in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. The current high global daily average SST, however, began to rise well before the ongoing El Niño event developed fully — and remains unusually high even now, as the weather pattern has peaked and begun to wane.

There is also less dust blowing off the Saharan desert of late due to weaker-than-average winds. The dust typically forms a giant umbrella that shades the Atlantic water and reduces ocean temperatures, according to a report in *Wired* magazine. With this umbrella now partially folded, more of the Sun is beating down on the ocean, the report said.

Yet another factor is the drop in the amount of sulphur allowed in marine ship-

GLOBAL DAILY SEA SURFACE TEMPERATURE



Dataset: NOAA OISST V2.1 | Image Credit: ClimateReanalyzer.org, Climate Change Institute, University of Maine

IMPACT OF WARMER OCEANS

Increase in ocean stratification, which leads to less absorption of carbon dioxide by oceans

Marine heat waves become more frequent and more intense

Nutrients are not able to travel up to ocean surface from below, threatening a collapse of marine ecosystem

Hurricanes and cyclones may also become more frequent and more intense

and more intense

Coral bleaching takes place. It reduces the reproductive of corals and makes them more vulnerable to life-threatening diseases

pings fuels after international regulations were imposed in 2020 to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions, a health-damaging air pollutant. Sulphur dioxide leads to sulphate aerosols in the atmosphere, which act like a cloud, preventing solar radiation from reaching the ocean surface.

What are the consequences of such warming?

Higher ocean temperatures can have irreversible consequences for marine ecosystems.

For instance, warmer oceans lead to an increase in ocean stratification — the natural separation of ocean water into horizontal layers by density, with warmer, lighter, less salty, and nutrient-poor water layering on top of heavier, colder, saltier, nutrient-rich water.

Usually, ocean ecosystems, currents, wind, and tides mix these layers together. But the rise in temperatures has made it

harder for water layers to mix. Thus, the surface ocean becomes less dense than the deep ocean, and remains at the surface, where it may get even more warm. Due to this, oceans are able to absorb less carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and the oxygen absorbed is not able to mix properly with cooler waters below, threatening the survival of marine life.

Nutrients are also not able to travel up to the surface of the oceans from below. This could threaten the population of phytoplankton, the single-celled plants that thrive on the ocean surface and are the base of several marine food webs. Phytoplankton are eaten by zooplankton, which are consumed by other marine animals such as crabs, fish, and sea stars. A fall in the phytoplankton population could lead to a collapse of marine ecosystems.

Warmer oceans cause marine heat waves (MHWs), which occur when the surface temperature of a particular region of the sea rises to 3 or 4 degree Celsius above the

threshold of 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

The only way to avoid or blunt the impacts is to reduce GHG emissions. But the planet is nowhere close to doing that. In 2023, the concentration of GHGs reached the highest levels ever recorded in the atmosphere, according to C3S.

What now?

These disastrous consequences are set to become worse as the world continues to get warmer. The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) in its 2023 State of Global Climate report said there was a 66 per cent chance that at least one of the years between 2023 and 2027 would cross the threshold of 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

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Heat, aridity, clear skies: why forests are already ablaze in the Nilgiris

ANJALI MARAR

BENGALURU, MARCH 18

FOR ALMOST a week, forest fires have been raging in the Coonoor forest range in the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu. On Sunday, the Indian Air Force joined the ongoing firefighting efforts of the state forest department, deploying an Mi-17 V5 helicopter to conduct multiple "Bambi Bucket" operations that dumped some 16,000 litres of water on the fires.

The Bambi Bucket, also called a helicopter bucket or a helibucket, is a specialised container that is suspended by cable under a chopper, and which can be filled by lowing into a river or pond before being flown above a fire and discharged aerially by opening a valve at the bottom of the bucket.

The Bambi Bucket is especially helpful in fighting wildfires that are difficult or impossible to reach from the ground. Around the world, helicopters are frequently commissioned to fight forest fires.

Where do the most forest fires in India occur?

How common are forest fires in India?

BENCH TELLS BANK TO FILE AFFIDAVIT ON COMPLIANCE BY MARCH 21, 5 PM

Supreme Court pulls up SBI: Don't do selective disclosure, give poll bond numbers, full details

Order on bonds purchased and redeemed after April 2019

ANANTHAKRISHNANG
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court on Monday told the State Bank of India (SBI) to "disclose all details" on electoral bonds purchased or redeemed after its April 12, 2019 interim order, including their unique alphanumeric codes, to the Election Commission of India (ECI), and to file an affidavit on compliance by March 21, 5 pm.

Expressing its displeasure over "selective disclosure" of details by the bank, the five-judge Constitution Bench, presided by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, said: "There is no manner of doubt that SBI is required to make a complete disclosure of all details in its possession... This, we clarify, would comprehend the alphanumeric number and the serial number, if any, of the bonds which were purchased and redeemed."

The unique alphanumeric codes would enable matching the poll bond donors with the recipients.

The Bench, which included

EXPLAINED

E Matching donors with parties

THE UNIQUE alphanumeric code printed on each electoral bond will enable matching the donors with the recipients. While the electoral bond scheme does not mandate parties to keep records of donor details, some smaller parties, in compliance with the Supreme Court's order, either disclosed what they already knew or conducted a special exercise to ascertain contributor details and share them with the EC.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



The five-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud during the hearing in the electoral bonds case on Monday. PTI

Retrospective 'who paid whom' order has grave impact: Industry bodies

APURVA VISHWANATH & ANANTHAKRISHNANG
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court's directive to the State Bank of India to disclose the unique alphanumeric code on the electoral bonds to the Election Commission of India impacts India Inc's interests, industry body Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) told the Supreme Court on Monday.

"...it is imperative to recognise the potential adverse impact of mandating parties to breach confidentiality agreements and disclose information based on a new standard. Such a directive, if applied retrospectively, undermines the rule of law and presents grave implications for the industry's interests," Assocham said in its plea before the SC.

Three big industry bodies — Assocham, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

FULLER DISCLOSURE

SBI must not wait for Court to prod it, parties must step forward to place more information on electoral bonds in public domain

PAGE 10

GOVT & POLITICS

AS BONDS CHASE POWER, UNKNOWN SMALLER PARTIES RUE EMPTY COFFERS

15 INDIVIDUALS BOUGHT BONDS WORTH Rs 158 CR P7

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BJP cited law to keep names out, DMK reached out to its donors

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, NEW DELHI,
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

WHILE THE BJP, the largest recipient of electoral bond donations, cited the rulebook to justify its non-disclosure of donor details to the Election Commission of India (ECI), other smaller parties were less resistant and even reached out to donors to collect their details in order to comply with the top court's orders.

The DMK, currently the ruling party in Tamil Nadu, which received a total of Rs 656.5 crore via poll bonds from April 19, 2019, to November 14, 2023, with the largest chunk of Rs 509 crore coming from Future Gaming, informed the ECI that it had contacted its donors to collect details.

"The scheme... does not require the details of the donor to be furnished to the donee... Be that as it may, following the directions of Hon'ble Supreme

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

DELHI EXCISE POLICY CASE

Kavitha conspired with Kejriwal: ED; 'high-profile' arrests likely, CBI tells court

AAP hits back: False statement by ED, bid to malign image of Kejriwal and Sisodia

NIRBHAY THAKUR & MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

ON A day the Central Bureau of Investigation told a Delhi court that "some high-profile persons" may be arrested in the Delhi excise policy case, the Enforcement Directorate alleged — for the first time — that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was a conspirator in the case.

"ED investigation revealed that Ms Kavitha along with others conspired with the top leaders of AAP including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia for getting favours in the Delhi excise policy formulation and implementation. In exchange of these favours, she was involved in paying Rs 100 crore to the leaders of AAP," alleged the ED spokesperson on Monday. "By the acts of corruption and conspiracy in the formulation and implementation of Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22, a continuous stream of illegal funds in the form of kickback from the wholesalers was generated for AAP."

The ED spokesperson also alleged that "Kavitha and her associates were to recover the proceeds of crime paid in advance to AAP and to further generate profits/proceeds of crime from this entire conspiracy".

THE CITY



SATYENDRA JAIN BACK IN TIHAR AS SC REJECTS BAIL PLEA

PAGE 4

ceeds of crime paid in advance to AAP and to further generate profits/proceeds of crime from this entire conspiracy".

Kavitha, a Bharat Rashtri Samiti (BRS) leader and daughter of former Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekhar Rao, was arrested by the ED on Friday, hours after the agency and the Income Tax department conducted searches at her Hyderabad residence.

The ED had earlier alleged in its chargesheet that Kavitha was part of a 'South Group' that paid Rs 100 crore in kickbacks to AAP leaders in exchange for undue benefits under the now-scraped Delhi excise policy.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Poll panel orders transfer of home secretaries of 6 states, Bengal DGP

Gujarat, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal, Uttarakhand, UP officials shunted out

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE ELECTION Commission on Monday ordered the transfer of the home secretaries of six states — Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand — to ensure a level-playing field ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, sources said.

The poll panel also ordered that West Bengal Director General of Police Rajeev Kumar be shunted out. Following the EC's instructions, the West Bengal government appointed Vivek Sahay as the new DGP.

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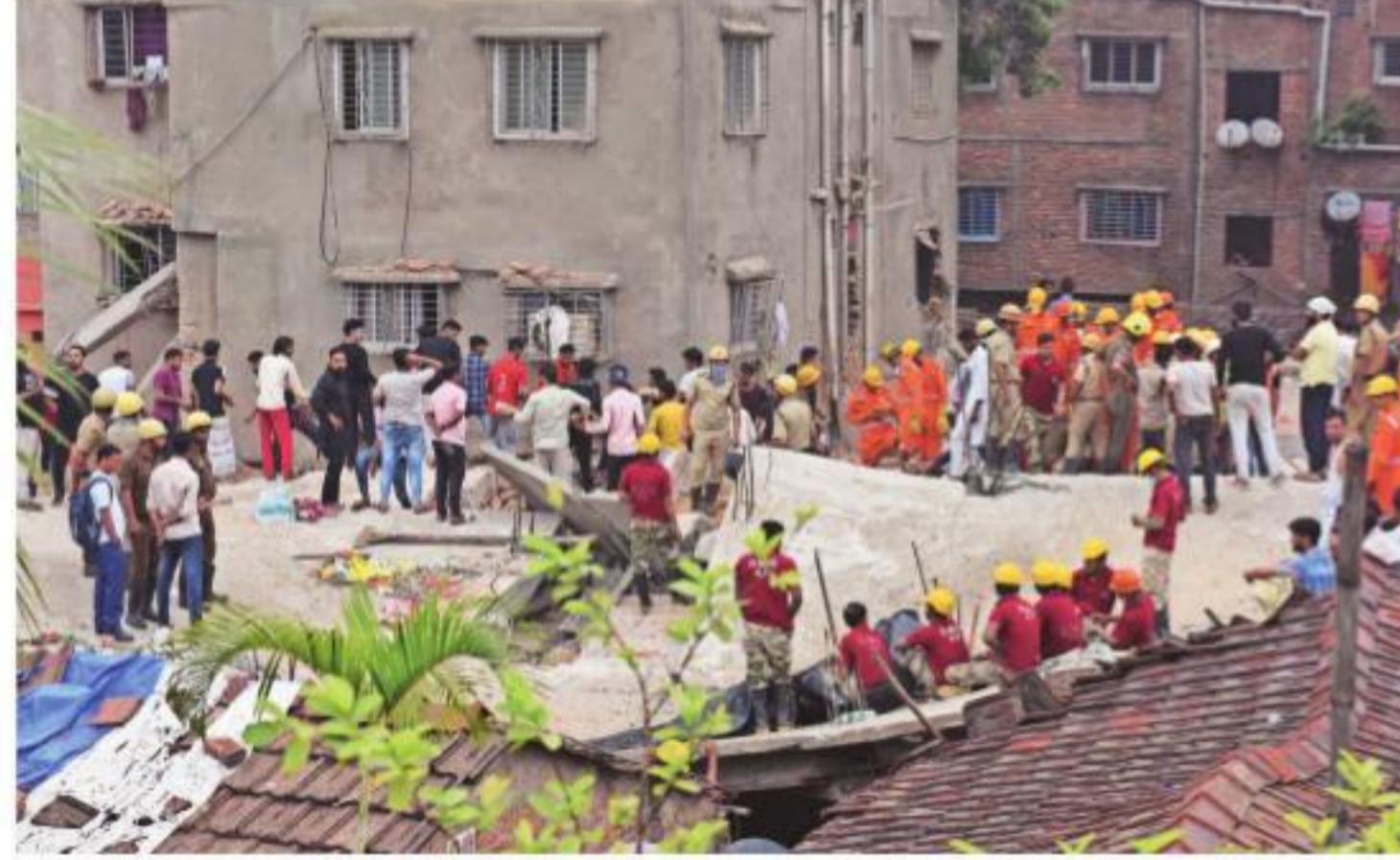
UP wanted its officer retained but EC stood its ground

RITIKA CHOPRA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

OF THE six states, where the poll watchdog removed home secretaries on Monday, Uttar Pradesh is the only one known to have argued against the removal of its officer, Sanjay Prasad, *The Indian Express* has learned. However, the Election Commission (EC) stood firm.

Prasad, an IAS officer of the 1995 batch, is said to be one of

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



9 DIE IN KOLKATA BUILDING COLLAPSE

At the site of a building collapse in Garden Reach area of Kolkata on Monday. At least nine persons, including two women, were killed in the incident. Express REPORT, PAGE 13

Nitin Gadkari to give away Ramnath Goenka awards for journalism today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18



Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways

FROM A story on how unplanned development can potentially lead to ecological damage in the higher reaches of the Himalayas to the relationship that Bastar tribals have with the State, from exposing a recruitment scam to highlighting the hardships faced by healthcare workers during the Covid pandemic — each of the winners of the Ramnath Goenka Awards for Excellence in Journalism Awards exemplify a basic tenet of journalism: the need to tell a story that touches lives.

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari will give away the awards for stories done in 2021 and 2022 — when the country stepped out of the shadow of a pandemic — at a ceremony in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Instituted by the Ramnath Goenka Foundation, the awards acknowledge and honour the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Co-presented by
adani

DECISION 2024



DAY AFTER RAHUL'S 'SHAKTI' REMARK, PM HITS BACK: INSULTED REVERED CONCEPT OF HINDUISM

NDA BIHAR DEAL: BJP TO FIGHT 17 SEATS, JD(U) 16, CHIRAG 5

PAGE 8



Land will be acquired around the existing temple

Potential to develop like Tirupati: Principal Secy to CM

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

AFTER THE Ram temple in Ayodhya, plans are afoot to make a "grand temple" for Sita in Sitamarhi district in north Bihar, considered to be her place of birth. The Bihar government has decided, in principle, to acquire 50 acres around an existing temple in Sitamarhi to construct a new temple.

The decision was taken at

Friday's meeting of the Bihar Cabinet.

"Sitamarhi is to Sita what Ayodhya is to Ram. It is a holy land for Hindus. People from all over the world will now come to worship at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and they would like to visit Sita's birthplace as well. Our contention is that a grand temple for Sita, befitting her stature, should be built in Sitamarhi," said Kameshwar Chaupal, a former MLC in Bihar, and a BJP member who is one of the prime

movers of the idea.

"There is a temple in Sitamarhi that was built about 100 years ago, but it is not in very good condition. Our proposal has been to build a new temple that is as grand as the Ram temple in Ayodhya," said Chaupal, the person who had placed the first brick during the Shilanyas, or foundation laying ceremony, of the Ram temple in Ayodhya in 1989.

He is also a trustee of the Ayodhya Temple Trust.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

**PAGE 1
ANCHOR**

As women turn power hitters, big question: time for bigger fields?

VINAYAK MOHANARANGAN

NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

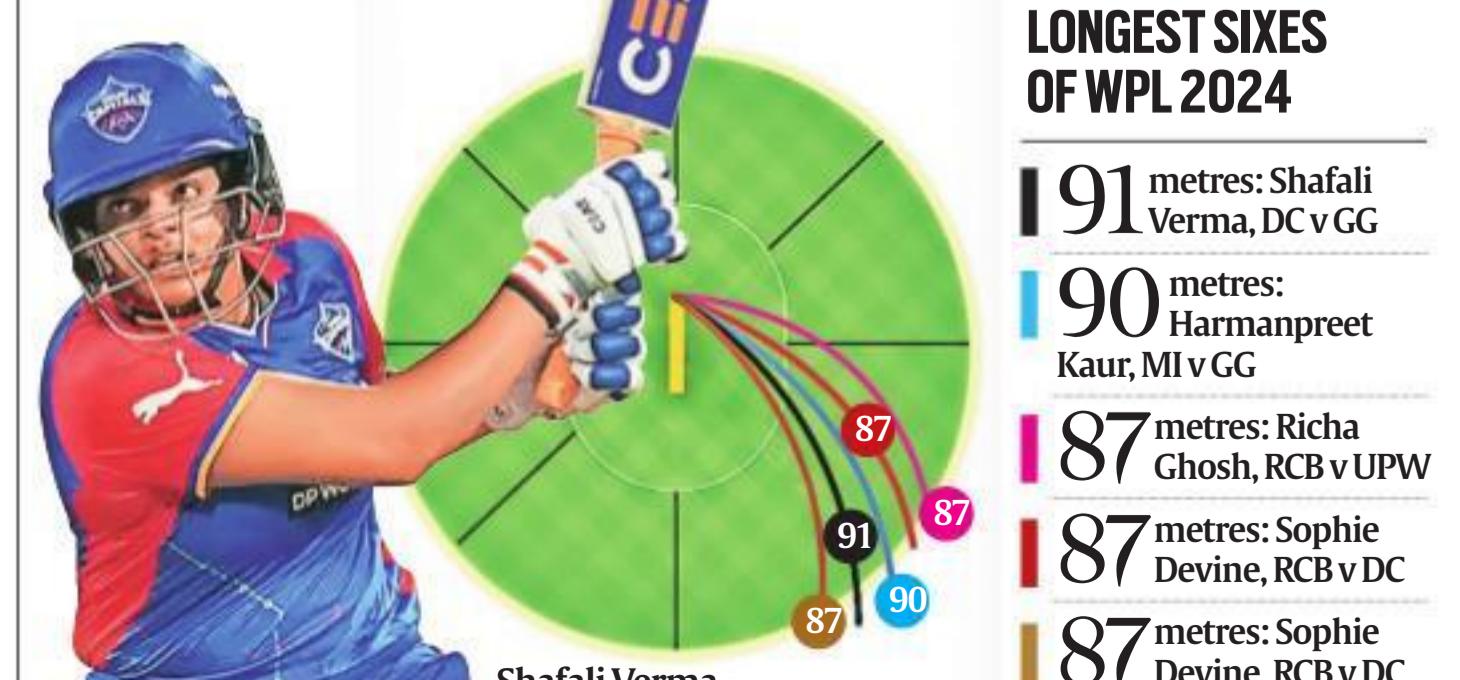
WHILE DELHI Capitals lost their second successive Women's Premier League (WPL) final, there was one undeniable bright spot. India opener Shafali Verma, 20, lit up Delhi's Ferozshah Kotla Stadium with her 27-ball 44 that included three cleanly struck sixes. Two of these landed just in front of the stands, comfortably clearing the boundary rope.

The Rohtak-born hard-hitter, coached by her father to smash cricket balls since she was eight,

topped this WPL's list of those hitting the maximum sixes. Shafali, known for her power game, finished with 20 sixes, far ahead of Smriti Mandhana and Richa Ghosh, who ended up with 10 each.

During the match against Gujarat Giants, Shafali struck a 91-metre six. The other batter to breach the 90-metre mark was Harmanpreet Kaur who struck big during a sensational run-chase against Gujarat Giants. The two were among four Indian batters to clear the 80-metre mark.

Meg Lanning, captain of the Delhi Capitals team who formerly captained the Australian national women's team, said,



LONGEST SIXES OF WPL 2024

91 metres: Shafali Verma, DC v GG

90 metres: Harmanpreet Kaur, MI v GG

87 metres: Richa Ghosh, RCB v UPW

87 metres: Sophie Devine, RCB v DC

87 metres: Sophie Devine, RCB v DC

"We could look at potentially having slightly bigger boundaries. There's so much more power and strength in the game now that people are clearing the ropes pretty easily. It is entertaining and is the same for both sides, so you can't complain too much."

It was an aspect that was highlighted by Australia's Rachael Haynes last year, when she was coaching Gujarat Giants. "At this level, perhaps in seasons to come, it would be nice to see the boundaries pushed out a few metres. The nature of players at this level and what they are capable of means that they are able to clear the boundaries easily."

Haynes had said.

As the power-hitting aspect in women's cricket keeps improving, perhaps the biggest takeaway from the season that concluded on Sunday is how Indians have dominated the six-hitting stats. While Shafali led the way, seven of the top 10 six-hitters were Indians. Of the 168 sixes hit in WPL 2024, 98 or close to 60% were by Indian batters. That number stood at around 35% in the first season. And it wasn't all about power, as Shafali and RCB's Richa Ghosh, who casually slog-swept a 87-metre six in Bengaluru,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

CDS: China playing 'game of checkers' in India's backyard not in our strategic interests

SUSHANT KULKARNI
PUNE, MARCH 18

STATING that the rise of China and unsettled borders will remain a formidable challenge for India, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan said on Monday that China playing the 'game of checkers' in India's backyard will not be in India's long-term strategic interests.

The CDS was delivering the inaugural address in the Strategic and Security Dialogue on 'Rise of China and Its Implications for the World' organised by the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies of Savitribai Phule Pune University along with the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy, New Delhi and Centre for Advanced Strategic Studies.

Speaking about the security landscape for India, Gen Chauhan said, "An important security challenge that we face today is the rising fragility, an outcome of political, economic and social instability in our immediate neighbourhood. India seems to be the only island of stability in a sea of turmoil and turbulence..."

"Instability in our immediate and extended neighbourhood has to be seen in the light that India needs to expand its footprint to cover all those crucial gaps that other people can fill in. It will not be in India's long term security interest that China plays the game of Chinese Checkers in India's backyards. India aspires and must become the first responder and preferred security partner in the Indian Ocean Region," he said.

"Another challenge is unsettled borders... Today India has disputed borders with both of our neighbours. Disputes followed by conflicts have led to the emergence of terms like Line of Actual Control, Line of Control and Actual Ground Position Line. The unsettled borders with China and the rise of China will remain the most formidable challenge that India and Indian Armed forces will face in the foreseeable future," he said.

"SBI was required to disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties, inclusive of the date of encashment and the denomination of the electoral bond," the court said. Read with its February 15, 2024 decision to strike down the electoral bond scheme, this "indicates that SBI was required to submit all details, both in terms of the purchase and in terms of receipt of contributions," it said.

"The expression 'include'... clearly demonstrates that the inclusive part was treated as illustrative and not exhaustive of the nature of disclosure which was to be made by SBI... In other words, there is no manner of doubt that SBI is required to make a complete disclosure of all details in its possession," the court said, adding, "This, we clarify, would comprehend the alphanumeric number and the serial number, if any, of the

FROM PAGE ONE | FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

SC orders 'complete disclosure' of bond data

Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B R Gavai, J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, however, rejected a request to direct SBI to disclose the unique codes of bonds purchased or redeemed prior to its interim order on April 12, 2019.

"To fully effectuate (its) order and to obviate any controversy in the future", the Bench also asked the SBI Chairman and Managing Director to file an affidavit, on or before March 21, 5 pm, "indicating that SBI has disclosed all details of the electoral bonds which were in its possession and custody and that no details have been withheld..."

Referring to its earlier orders, the court said the operative directions required the SBI to submit details of electoral bonds purchased since the interim order. The Bench recalled that it had said that "such details... shall include the date of purchase of each electoral bond, the name of the purchaser of the bond and the denomination of the electoral bond purchased".

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bonds which were purchased and redeemed".

The court also asked the EC to "forthwith" upload the details furnished by the SBI.

On March 15, the court had issued notice to the SBI, saying the bank was "duty-bound" to furnish the unique alphanumeric codes.

Hearing the bank's response on Monday, the CJL said: "We had expressly asked SBI to disclose all details. The language of the judgment was that all details have to be disclosed. Therefore, that includes the bond numbers as well".

"Let SBI not be selective in the disclosure of details... it shall disclose all details, including the bond numbers and every part of the information which is in its possession and custody. Don't wait for an order of the court. We banked on the fact that the State Bank of India would be candid and fair to the court," he said.

Asking why the bank had not disclosed the details, the CJL said: "SBI's attitude appears to be – you tell us to disclose a particular detail and we will disclose it. That's not a fair process."

The SBI chairman should have said this being the order of the SC, I am duty bound to comply with it and will disclose every part of the information which is in my custody as directed, he said.

"Because when we said all details of the purchases, that meant every conceivable detail which was available with SBI, and we clarified it by saying 'include'. SBI has the best legal advice open to it," the CJL said.

Senior Advocate Harish Salve, appearing for SBI, said the bank was ready to give all information, and sought to explain how it had understood the court's 2019 interim order and the February 15 judgment.

"We will give everything, there is no problem. The impression which is being created is that the SBI is playing ducks and drakes

with the court. Just wanted to clear that up," he said.

Salve said the April 2019 interim order was to political parties to furnish bond details to the ECI. "Political party does not need a bond number. If a political party comes and says I have received so much from so and so," he said.

The CJL then remarked: "We take it that you are not arguing a case for a political party."

Saying that he was not appearing for any political party, Salve said paragraph 16 of the interim order "only required political parties to give all these details, and these details have been given. If they have not been given, that's between the ECI and political parties... Para 17 was the mechanism for disclosure".

Justice Khanna said "the idea behind the interim order was that in case the writ petition is allowed, then data should come out and that's exactly what is required".

"We will give every bit of information – relevant, not relevant

– which we have so that there is no feeling that SBI is somehow interested in holding something back," Salve said.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan said that despite the interim order, only a few political parties had revealed details of bond purchases to the ECI and, therefore, disclosure of the details should start from the date of issue of the bonds scheme, and not just from the interim order.

The court, however, rejected this, saying, "Right or wrong, we have taken a conscious decision that the cut-off will be the date of our interim order".

"Of course, the Constitution Bench has an option to go all the way back to the date of the bond... we took April 12, 2019 because it was our considered view that once an interim order was pronounced, everybody was on notice... Now, we have maintained that. If you want that to go back... that's in a nature of review of the judgement... We had to draw the line somewhere, we had to hold the balance," the court said.

dia are constantly beating down... and petitioners giving interviews saying we will take the SBI to task, we will hold them up for contempt etc... We are also a public institution working in the space," Salve said.

He said that at the interim order stage, he had not come across any order which said all further action would be subject to the judgment of the court. "There was no such direction," he said, adding, "now, whether completely, you should lift the privacy or remove anonymity, matter of Your Lordships writ".

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- Kavitha conspired with Kejriwal: ED; 'high-profile' arrests likely: CBI to court

However, it had not named Kejriwal in connection with this allegation so far.

The only time Kejriwal had found a mention in the case was when the ED, in a supplementary prosecution complaint, alleged that he allegedly spoke to one of the main accused, Sameer Mahendru, in a video call and asked him to continue working with co-accused Vijay Nair.

Till date, the ED has conducted searches on 245 locations across the country, including Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai, Mumbai and other places, the ED spokesperson said Monday, adding that 15 persons, including Sisodia, Nair and Sanjay Singh from the AAP, have been arrested.

When Special Judge Nagpal asked the counsel to show him one PMLA case where bail was granted due to delay, Mathur said: "While granting bail to co-accused Benoy Babu, the Supreme Court had observed that 13 months of incarceration had elapsed." He said Babu was given bail based on delay.

"Today, the ED admits that their investigation qua me is complete... No significant progress has taken place in the trial since my arrest," said Mathur. He argued that the accused was not a flight risk and there is no chance of tampering of evidence.

Appearing for the CBI, Additional Public Prosecutor Pankaj Gupta said there was no delay from their side. "Trial starts after the arguments on charge. We're trying to start that, the accused are delaying the trial," he said. "Some high-profile persons may also be arrested in the case since the investigation is ongoing."

• Retrospective 'who paid whom' order has grave impact: Industry bodies

and Industry (Ficci) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) – moved the SC "opposing the limited directions passed by this Hon'ble Court pertaining to disclosure of the alpha-numeric numbers of the electoral bond."

Appearing for them, Senior Advocate Mukul Rohatgi sought to file applications in the Supreme Court for intervention in the electoral bond scheme. He said businesses had purchased bonds under a specific government scheme.

The top court, however, declined to hear him, and said the application was not numbered and that it had to follow procedure.

While specific details of the CII application were not known, a Ficci spokesperson told *The Indian Express*: "Ease of doing business is a key element of India's competitiveness globally. Retrospective actions lead to reduction of business confidence for Indian and global investors. This was the basis for our application." Sources in CII also said the bond scheme had promised anonymity, and seeking such disclosures retrospectively would hurt members of the industry body.

While business houses who would be directly impacted with the disclosures have not moved the SC, the industry chambers highlighted concerns that disclosures of who donated to which party could impact perception. A senior member of CII told *The Indian Express*, "If I

• Poll panel orders transfer of home secretaries of 6 states, Bengal DGP

Chahal and all additional commissioners and deputy commissioners who had remained in their posts for over three years. According to the EC policy, all officials who have been in the same post for three years or more have to be transferred before elections.

The EC also removed the General Administration Department (GAD) Secretaries of Mizoram and Himachal Pradesh governments, as they held additional charge in their respective CMOs.

Mondays orders were the first set of transfers after the EC announced the schedule for the

• As women turn power hitters, big question: time for bigger fields?

exhibited. Jemimah Rodrigues and Smriti Mandhana, too, showed that well-timed shots can clear the fence comfortably. Rodrigues spoke about employing the Virat Kohli school of batting, primarily focusing on finding gaps and getting the timing right – and if it is a six, it's a six.

The tone for the season was

• UP wanted its officer retained

Court, we contacted our donors and we were able to collect the details from them," the DMK said in its letter to the ECI on November 14, 2023.

The Janata Dal (Secular) in Karnataka, which received Rs 50 crore from Megha Engineering, the second-largest purchaser of electoral bonds, told *The Indian Express* that most donations to political parties are made with prior knowledge, allowing it to share details of its donors with the ECI. "We, as a party, know who has purchased electoral bonds in our favour. Once they purchase the bonds, we will get information on who the donor was as we will have to encash the amount... Usually, the donations are done with prior knowledge. Sometimes, we seek funds from

various companies during elections to fund poll activities," said a senior JD(S) leader on the condition of anonymity.

In addition to the DMK and JD(S), the AIADMK, NCP, Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), JD(U), AAP, SP, Sikkim Democratic Front and the Maharashtra Gomantak Party also disclosed details of donors, albeit partially, to the ECI.

When contacted, NCP (Sharad Pawar) treasurer Hemant Takle said, "We don't want to comment on it. All we had to say has already been provided." The NCP, in its submission to the ECI, disclosed Bharti Airtel and Serum Institute's Cyrus Poonawala among its poll bond donors in 2018-19. As reported by *The Indian Express* on Monday, the BJP's official position

before the ECI was to quote the rulebook and state that it was not obliged by law to maintain records of the names and particulars of electoral bond donors, and therefore, did not possess such details.

The Congress, on the other hand, told the ECI it has requested the SBI to share identity of its donors with the Commission as it didn't have these details.

The disclosure by the 10 regional parties is not unprecedented. The JMM had voluntarily disclosed Rs 1 crore donation from Hindalco Industries Ltd through an electoral bond in 2019-20. In April 2021, JMM spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharya had told *The Indian Express* that his party found out about the donor only when Hindalco reached out, seeking a receipt for the contribution.

Although demands for a new temple have been around for a long time, these have gained in strength since the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya began a few years ago. The Bihar government had approved a redevelopment project in the area and sanctioned Rs 72 crore for it earlier this year.

The decision to go in for land acquisition came just two days after a meeting of devotees with Siddhartha and other Bihar government officials.

Chauhan said the details of the proposed temple were still to be worked out.

"It is early days right now. The Bihar government has taken a very important decision by ensuring that land is made available. Now it is for people like us, the trust that runs the existing temple, and other interested people to take this forward. We are driven by the desire to make Sitamarhi, and this proposed new temple, an important pilgrimage site in the coming years," he said.

Interest in this place following the construction of Ram temple. It has the potential to develop into a Tirupati-like site, and we want to make sure that adequate space is available for that kind of development," Siddhartha said.

Sitamarhi is part of the Ramayana Circuit, a set of 15 important places mentioned in the Ramayana, that has been identified by the Central government for development in a bid to boost religious tourism.

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YouTuber Elvish Yadav 'supplied snake venom at parties to increase fans': Police

DHEERAJ MISHRA
NOIDA, MARCH 18

TO SHOW that he's "got swag", YouTuber Elvish Yadav allegedly took to supplying snake venom at "rave parties" in the National Capital Region (NCR) in a bid to increase his social media fan base – apart from making money – said sources in the Noida Police.

On Sunday, the Big Boss OTT 2 winner was arrested in connection with the case and sent to 14-day judicial custody by a local court. "During questioning, Yadav did not accept the crime... but we have a lot of evidence. For him, it was to make a statement that he's got 'swag' or 'bhaukaal'. He wanted to paint a picture among his fans as someone who is completely unafraid of law-enforcement agencies and can do whatever he wishes," said a police officer.

According to police sources, they found evidence of snake venom being used in more than six parties linked to Yadav. Officials involved in the probe said he was personally present at some of them. "Those who attended the parties in question are being identified; appropriate action will be taken against them for using the

snake venom," said an officer. The case came to light on November 3 last year following a tip-off from People for Animals, an NGO run by BJP's Sultanpur MP Maneka Gandhi, after which police arrested five people from a banquet hall in Noida's Sector 51. While Yadav was named as one of the accused in the FIR, he was not arrested at the time.

"We received information that a YouTuber, Elvish Yadav, shoots videos with snake venom and live snakes in farmhouses in Noida and NCR along with other gang members/YouTubers and organises rave parties illegally," read the FIR in the case.

The FIR was registered under IPC sections 120B (criminal conspiracy) and sections 9, 39, 48A, 49, 50 and 51 of The Wildlife (Protection) Act. Sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, and IPC sections of negligent conduct with respect to poisonous substances and negligent conduct with respect to animals, have been added in the case, said officers.

Meanwhile, Gurgaon Police said they will take Yadav on a production warrant to take him into custody for allegedly assaulting a content creator in a mall in the city. Sources said the request was prompted by an incident earlier this month when a Delhi Police sub-inspector was caught on camera kicking men offering namaz on a road outside a mosque in Inderlok. While the SI, Manoj Kumar Tomar (35), was suspended with immediate effect, security personnel had to be called in from nearby districts to prevent any tension in the area. They, however, got stuck in traffic and couldn't get to the spot in

POLICE APPROACH DELHI METRO, CISF

'In times of crisis, allow armed cops to travel on Delhi Metro'

MAHENDER SINGH
MANRAL
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

IMAGINE, A crisis unfolds in the Capital and police personnel have to be rushed to the spot but they end up getting stuck in traffic on the way and are delayed.

To prevent such a situation from transpiring in the future, the Delhi Police has approached the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to allow its personnel to travel on the Metro with their weapons – and without a token – in times of crisis, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Currently, police personnel can't travel on the Metro with their weapons.

Sources said the request was prompted by an incident earlier this month when a Delhi Police sub-inspector was caught on camera kicking men offering namaz on a road outside a mosque in Inderlok. While the SI, Manoj Kumar Tomar (35), was sus-



Currently, police personnel can't travel on the Metro with their weapons. Archive

time.

A senior police officer said after this incident, the Delhi Police Commissioner discussed the preventive action taken by personnel.

"It came to light that while local police reached the spot on time, other personnel, especially those coming from other areas, took more time due to protests over the incident and traffic snarls in the connecting area. A JCP-rank officer then suggested that they should start sending their personnel and outside

forces on the Metro so they can reach on time – without facing any traffic snarls," the officer said.

During the discussion, the officer said a plan was outlined: In the event of a crisis, a police officer would inform CISF and Metro officials about their numbers in advance and board the Metro. On reaching their destination, police vehicles of the district concerned would come to receive them," the officer said.

Another officer said since the Lok Sabha election dates have

been announced, this could also be part of the Delhi Police's security plan to prevent any untoward situations.

After the meeting, police said it was decided to approach DMRC and CISF for their permission. "The proposal was shared with both agencies a few days ago; their final approval on paper is awaited," an officer said.

Police have also requested the CISF to provide entry to their personnel, and they would coordinate with the DMRC to pay their bills.

2 stabbed to death in Outer Delhi

New Delhi: Two people were stabbed to death in Outer Delhi's Ranholi, Sunday. According to police, they received a call around 9.45 pm that an unconscious person, with stab wounds, was found in Baprola Vihar village. The man was later declared dead. Another body was soon found nearby with similar stab wounds. DCP (Outer) Jimmy Chiram said they are looking into the matter. ENS

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- If reduction of MAT/AMT credit is required
- If you have received notice u/s 133(6) of the Income - tax Act, 1961 for certain information about claim of deductions/exemptions regarding which suitable explanation/evidence is not available with you
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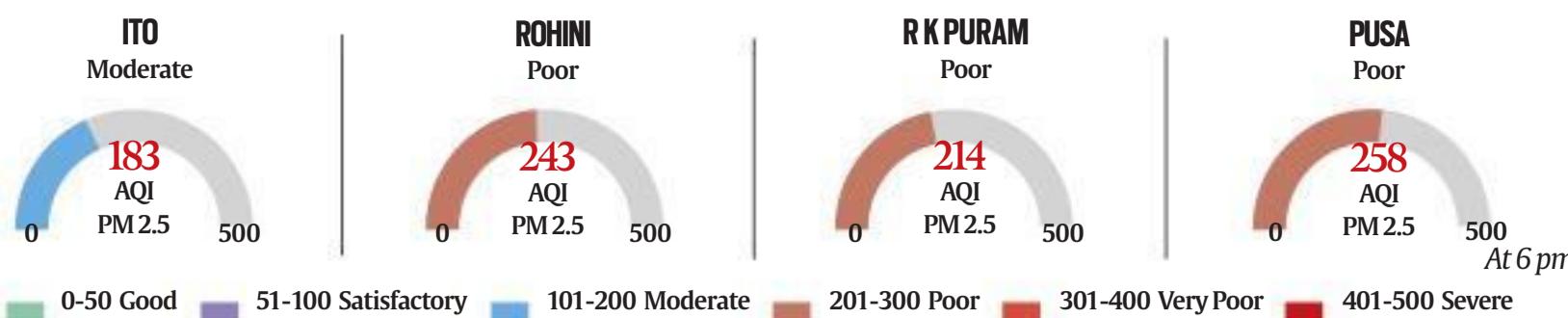
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SCHEME SERVED AN AVERAGE OF 7 LAKH USERS A DAY

Free WiFi service down for over one year; Delhi govt working on new plan

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

FOR MORE than a year now, the 11,034 free WiFi hotspots installed across Delhi have not been working. The reason? The project's contract has not been renewed, depriving nearly 7 lakh daily users of the facility, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

However, Delhi government sources said a discussion is underway to bring the scheme back soon. "While there were 11,000 hotspots earlier, the government is exploring a plan to increase the coverage to over 1 lakh," sources said.

Launched in December 2019, the free WiFi project was among the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) key poll promises.

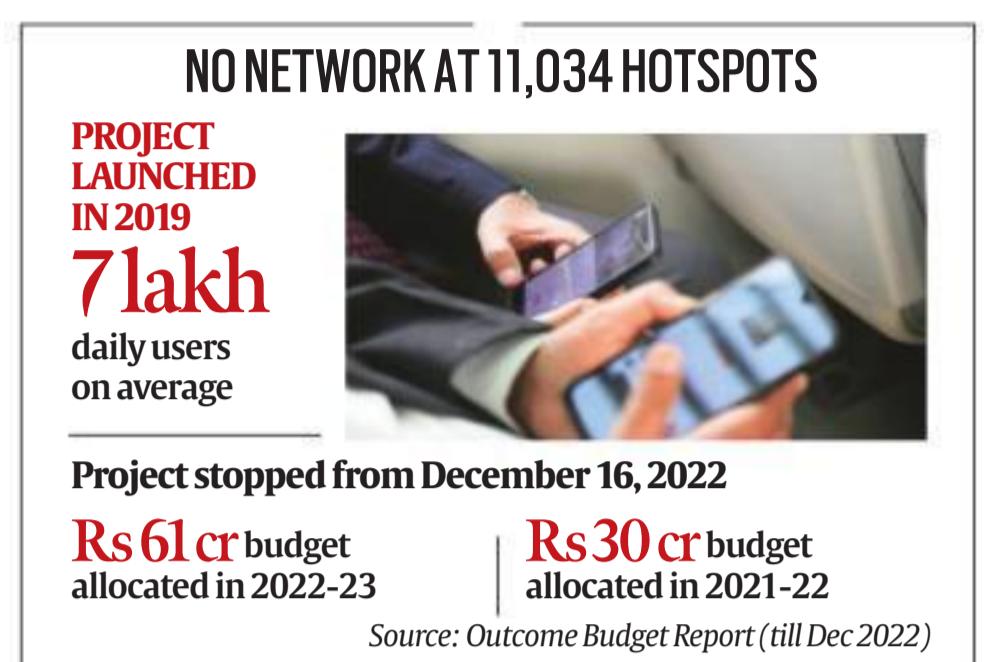
Users could sign up with their cellphone number and receive up to 15 GB of free data every month with a 200 Mbps Internet speed.

At the time, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had said: "Like we treat water and power as basic lifelines, we are also going to make Internet usage free".

In December 2022, sources said, the project came to a halt after the three-year contract given to a private service provider for the initiative ended.

"The (Public Works) Department sent a proposal to the Delhi government to renew the project, but there was no approval/intimation to continue the scheme," said a source.

These hotspots were installed at parks, bus stops, Metro stations, markets, and government buildings in all 70



Assembly constituencies, going by the government's outcome budget report (April to December 2022).

Data also showed an average of 7 lakh daily users availed free Internet and 99 per cent of them were satisfied with the network speed.

As per the outcome budget 2022-23, a budget of Rs 61 crore was allocated to the project for the fiscal year. Officials said more than 20 lakh people used the free

service in the three years. While the service provider/vendor bore the capital investment and infrastructure costs, the government bore the operating costs.

The PWD was asked to provide free WiFi till December 15, 2022. The service stopped on December 16 that year, a week after the MCD poll results were announced.

Another senior PWD official said: "It has been more than a year and there is no direction from above (government) to resume or restart the project. Initially, when the hotspots went down, complaints poured in from those who used the facility in the initial weeks before they stopped. A verbal discussion took place on re-launching the project in 2023, but there was no official meeting on the matter."

KEJRIWAL CALLS HIM 'HERO OF DILLIWALAS'

Top court rejects bail plea, Satyendar Jain back in Tihar



Former Delhi minister and AAP leader Satyendar Jain leaves his residence for Tihar Jail after the Supreme Court rejected his bail plea in the money laundering case. ANI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court on Monday dismissed former Delhi minister Satyendar Jain's bail plea in a money laundering case and asked him to surrender before the Special court. Jain did so in the evening, and was sent to Tihar Jail.

The SC said "there is sufficient material... to show that" he and the two other accused in the case "are prima facie guilty of the alleged offenses".

"Having regard to the totality of the facts and circumstances of the case, we are of the opinion that the appellants have miserably failed to satisfy us that there are reasonable grounds for believing that they are not guilty of the alleged offences. On the contrary, there is sufficient material collected by the respondent-ED (Enforcement Directorate) to show that they are prima facie guilty of the alleged offences," a bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mital said, while dismissing their appeal challenging the April 6, 2023, Delhi High Court order denying bail to the accused.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, meanwhile, tweeted, "He (Jain) is a hero for all Dilli wallas. He made arrangements for providing 24x7 electricity, free electricity, good govt hospitals and mohalla clinics. Feel extremely sad for him and his family. God bless him."

It added that Jain's health has been "very precarious" and he has undergone major spine surgeries from which he still has to recover. "He is still suffering from severe pain, numbness, tenderness and imbalance," the party said.

In August 2017, the CBI had booked Jain and five others on graft charges. Subsequently, in August 2017, the ED registered an ECIR (Enforcement Case Information Report) against him and two others – Vaibhav Jain and Ankush Jain – on the charge that he, "with the help of his family members and other persons, had acquired disproportionate assets during the period from 14.02.2015 to 31.05.2017,

which he was functioning as Minister of Govt. NCT of Delhi, and had laundered tainted cash amounts through Kolkata-based shell companies".

After investigation, the ED filed a prosecution complaint against them in July 2022, which is now pending at the stage of framing of charges.

10-YEAR RECALL

Cong online campaign to focus on 'decade of neglect' by BJP MPs

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE CONGRESS'S social media outreach across the city for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections will focus on a complete "recall of significant decadal events" in the Capital – from the alleged apathy of BJP MPs towards the citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic to the condition of 'model villages' adopted by them – said sources.

According to sources, the campaign – which would have content, especially videos, from the ground and testimonials from Delhi's residents – will seek to generate traction and raise hackles around the BJP's strategy of replacing faces in successive polls.

In addition to several visits to assess the state of civic amenities across the city, Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena has recently launched the 'Dilli Gramoday Abhiyan', which seeks to qualitatively transform the state of the city's countryside.

"Since the BJP is able to somehow counter anti-incumbency and the lack of performance of its MPs by changing them, we will target the entire party's apathy and not just of individuals who got elected on its tickets. We will present the BJP MPs' actual report card to the people," said a senior Delhi Congress leader.

"The Model Village programme, for instance, was among the first and most significant announcements made by the BJP after it came to power at the Centre a decade ago. But, only around a dozen of the city's 360 villages were included under it, and living conditions across the city's rural belt remain hellish," the leader added.

According to sources, Covid-19 would also figure prominently as part of its social media campaign and feature instances of "absenteeism" by MPs as successive waves of the pandemic claimed thousands of lives between 2020 and 2021.

On Monday, the All India Congress Committee Social Media Department reconstituted the Delhi state Social Media Department, which with a 114-member committee under the chairmanship of Mohd Hedayatullah, will seek to strengthen the Delhi Congress's outreach for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"The BJP has been spreading lies and falsehood about the party's 10-year misrule at the Centre, and non-existent development works," said Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely, adding: "We will tell people about the ground reality of stalled development works and inaction and incompetence of the seven BJP MPs in Delhi... It will also inform people about the five Nyay Guarantees of Shri Rahul Gandhi, which he has promised during his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra."

AAP's jailed leader Sanjay Singh allowed to take oath as RS MP



Singh was held in Oct 2023. Archive

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

A DELHI Court recently granted permission to AAP leader Sanjay Singh, an accused in the Delhi exercise policy case, to appear before the Parliament on Tuesday to take oath as a Rajya Sabha member. Singh was recently elected to Rajya Sabha for a second term, but denied summons to take oath.

The court of Special Judge MK Nagpal directed the Tihar jail authorities to ensure Singh is taken to the House under heavy secu-

rity, and not permit him to use his cellphone or talk to other accused.

Singh was arrested on October 4, 2023, following 10 hours of searches at his North Avenue residence. He was the third AAP leader to be arrested in the case, after former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and the party's communications in-charge Vijay Nair.



POLL-READY CAPITAL

A model of an EVM is installed outside the Election Commission's office in a bid to inspire citizens to cast their vote in the Lok Sabha polls. Praveen Khanna

Metro, DU campuses, traffic solution top priority: BJP picks release 100-day road map

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

A PLEDGE to prioritise developmental projects in the Capital within the first 100 days, if elected: The Delhi BJP has announced a roadmap for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, with each of its seven candidates presenting developmental plans for their respective constituencies in the first formal introduction on Monday.

With Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva emphasising the focus on health, education, and transport infrastructure, the candidates aim to open quality hospitals in all the constituencies, pod taxis within five years, and Delhi University campuses in East and West Delhi.

Manoj Tiwari

"We have completed major works such as the Signature Bridge and brought Metro to our constituency, resolving traffic congestion in Northeast Delhi," said Manoj Tiwari, outlining his achievements in Northeast Delhi – a seat that he has been holding for the past 10 years. Tiwari, who

is the sole candidate to retain his seat, said he would work on the completion of construction work on NH 709B, a 155-km-long corridor from Akshardham Mandir-Saharanpur in UP, among others.

Ramvir Singh Bidhuri

The extended population of villages outside Lal Dora, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said from South Delhi seat, will be regularised. A master plan is on the cards to end traffic jams in Sangam Vihar, Deoli and Chhatarpur. Sixty-nine effluent colonies will be regularised via property rights, said Bidhuri, who is the Leader of Opposition in the Delhi

Assembly and Badarpur MLA.

Harsh Malhotra

According to Harsh Malhotra, fielded from East Delhi, preferences would include Yamuna cleanliness and riverfront development projects, along with a university campus and a government hospital in the constituency.

Kamaljeet Sehrawat

Besides a special master plan for Shivaji Marg to curb traffic issues at peak hours, Kamaljeet Sehrawat from West Delhi seat said, she aims to work on the expansion of Metro lines from Noida to Nangloi and Dhanasa

village, on priority. The construction of a government hospital in Chhawala and sports stadium, a DU campus, among other projects will also be prioritised.

Yogendra Chandolia

BJP candidate from Northwest Delhi, Yogendra Chandolia, mentioned raising the demand for Bawana-Narela Metro phase, for which the Centre's approval is still awaited. "Drainage is a big problem in Kirari, I will try to start work on it in the first 30 days," he said.

Praveen Khandelwal

The 'Sansad Aapke Dwar' scheme will be implemented from the first month, said Praveen Khandelwal, from Chandni Chowk, adding: "This LS seat is the centre of culture and heritage of civilisation... work will be done to develop a culture conservation centre in Yamuna Bazar area..."

Bansuri Swaraj

"Crossing 400 this time is not just a slogan, but a resolution... I will prioritise the work of de-silting shopping centres and commercial premises in the first month..." said Bansuri Swaraj from the New Delhi seat.

I killed in market crash: Cops to write to JJB to try teen driver as adult



The incident occurred last Wednesday night, when the boy, who does not know how to drive, lost control of the car and barreled into food carts, shoppers in Mayur Vihar. Screen grab

ARNABJIT SUR

NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

DAYS AFTER a teenager allegedly rammed his car into shoppers at a crowded weekly market in East Delhi's Mayur Vihar, killing a woman and injuring six others, the Delhi Police will write to the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) Tuesday to try him as an adult owing to the nature of the crime, officers said Monday.

The boy, aged 17, is now at an observation home.

The incident took place last Wednesday night. Police said the boy's parents were out of town, so he decided to take the car out for a spin – despite not knowing how to drive – along with a friend. As they neared the market, he suddenly lost control of the vehicle and started vandalising it. So he kept driving and eventually ended up hitting several persons.

A senior police officer said his parents are evading the investigation and efforts are on to trace them. An officer said: "We have found that the boy's father is currently in Dadri; he had gone there a few days before the incident after his mother fell sick. The boy's mother is not in Delhi and is yet to join the probe... police teams have been deployed to trace them."

The officer added that once the parents join the probe, they will be questioned on how the boy managed to take the car.

The father had rented the vehicle to a driver with a cab aggregator. The driver, who was summoned in the case, told police he was out of town at the time.

"Three days before the incident took place, the driver handed over the keys to the owner before he went on holiday... Sensing an opportunity, the boy took the vehicle out for a joyride along with his friend. For now, we will move an application in the JJB to try the driver as an adult given the nature of the offence and the circumstances surrounding the incident," said the officer.

Police said that during questioning, the boy admitted he became "nervous" after a crowd surrounded his vehicle and started vandalising it. So he kept driving and eventually ended up hitting several persons".

Police have lodged a case under the IPC section of culpable homicide not amounting to murder against unknown persons.

CCTV footage of the incident shows the vehicle accelerating and hitting more shoppers and a vegetable vendor and eventually crashing into a bangle shop and a cloth shop. After halting at the spot for a few seconds, it reverses and speeds away. Passersby later stopped the car, beat up the boy, and vandalised the vehicle.



United Left Alliance fielded Dhananjay (left) as presidential candidate, and ABVP Umesh Chandra Ajmeera. Express

interests."

Ajmeera, who comes from an Adivasi Banjara (ST) background, hails from Telangana's Warangal district. He studied at

Ajmeera, was shot dead by Naxalites in 1997..."

Ajmeera said "my mother was forced to abandon her religion. She died within a few days unable to cope with the trauma. I strive to meet the expectations of ABVP in all the ways possible and take forward its positive work to every single student of the institution".

Apart from Dhananjay, the United Left Alliance – comprising Left-affiliated students' organisations – has fielded Avijit Ghosh from the Students' Federation of India for vice-president; Swati Singh of the Democratic Students' Federation for general secretary;

and Sajid from the All India Students' Federation for joint secretary. The ABVP has named Deepika Sharma as vice-president, Arjun Anand as secretary, and Govind Dangi as joint secretary.

The presidential debate, during which the candidates will address other students, is on March 20. Polling will be held on March 22 and the results declared on March 24.

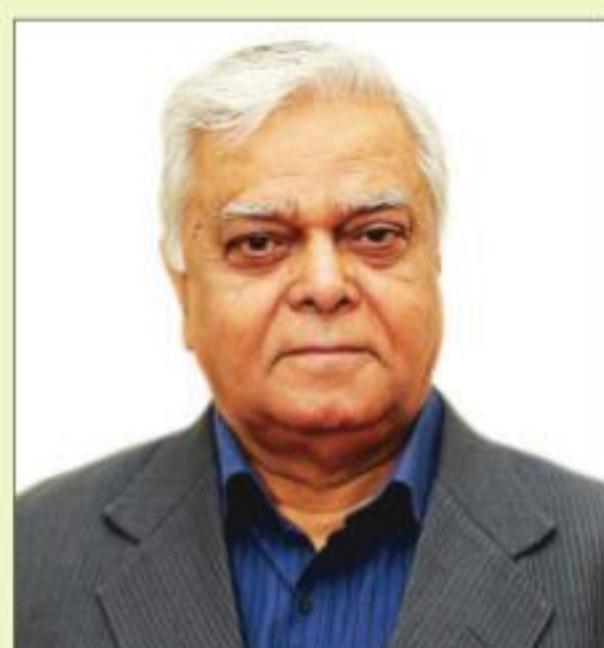
The polls are being held after a gap of four years.

AGRICULTURE

Backbone of the Indian Economy

AGRICULTURE has been the mainstay of Indian economy for centuries, providing livelihood support to millions of people across the country. It is a major source of income for rural households who dominate the Indian population. Despite current urbanization, agriculture sector continues to be the largest employer, more than 50% of the country's workforce providing livelihood support to millions of people. It has a multiplier effect on the economy, as it not only provides food but also raw materials to various industries in India. Food security is one of the key reasons why agriculture stands as a backbone of India's economy. This became evident during recent Covid pandemic the world faced for nearly two years when practically all activities were stand still but agricultural activity including production to distribution at door step of consumers continued unabated. The saying of our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that "Everything else can wait, but not Agriculture" came to be true during the worst phase of the pandemic. About Indian Agriculture, Bharat Ratna Dr M.S. Swaminathan use to say that "If Agriculture goes wrong, nothing else will have a chance to go right. India's economy has also been made robust by contribution of foreign exchange earnings. India is one of the world's largest producers and exporters of various agricultural commodities such as, rice, wheat, cotton, sugar, fruits, vegetables, tea, spices etc.

It is largely accepted that Indian agriculture has delivered as expected because it could take the country out of extreme food shortages, gross dependence on imports to huge stocks of food, self-sufficiency with enough to export. With geographical area of just 2.4% and water resources of 4%, India supports world's human population of 18% and cattle population of 31%. With the commencement of green revolution, series of agricultural revolutions have been made with appropriate policy support utilized by hard working farmers and scientists. Indeed, Indian agriculture production is a global success story. Between 1947-2023, India's population increased by a factor of 4.33, from 330 million to 1432 million, but its food pro-



DR C.D. MAYEE
President, Indian Society for Cotton Improvement, Mumbai and South Asia Biotechnology Centre, Jodhpur-New Delhi



duction rose by a factor of 6.61, from 50 million tons to 331 million tons, in the same period. The combination of newly developed elite cultivars backed by suitable agronomic practices of nutrient and water supply brought the magic. India is no more only a grain-centric country but also made mark in milk, eggs, fish, and honey. India's milk production grew at CAGR of 5.6 % in the last 10 years and the country is the largest producer of milk in the world. Agriculture's true contribution to the economy extends beyond its share of GDP. Its growth accelerates growth of service and industry sectors. Neither capital nor input intensive, the family owned small farms played a role in transformation of Indian agriculture which is unique in the world. The average size of operational land holding is only 1.08 ha, yet India's production has rapidly accelerated in recent decades.

All this sounds good but the current challenges threatening the sustainability and profitability of Indian agriculture are far outweigh the psyche of producers. There are several impediments to make the Indian economy that strong. Agriculture shall be continued as the backbone because of sheer population engagement and rural dependence. Today India ranks 107th position in

Global Hunger Index, baseline water stress because of ground water depletion, climate change, low productivity particularly in pulses and oilseeds, rising input costs of agriculture production, suboptimal farm mechanization, and yield gap between actual yield and realizable yields are pushing the Indian agriculture backwards. Soil health is adversely affected by range of factors such as; water erosion, wind erosion, water logging, salinity/alkalinity, soil acidity and many complex problems. These issues can be addressed suitably to achieve the target set for India to become US\$ 5 trillion economy. Indian farmers are fortunately multiskilled. Driven by economic necessity to maximize the returns, the small farmers have evolved through self-engineered innovation and therefore they produce variety of agricultural and allied products round the year. Given the desired policy support the farmers and farming shall deliver the targeted goals of Indian economy.

Globally agricultural sciences are experiencing series of innovations and development of technologies that could mitigate the effect of climate change, better the productivity, reduce the impact of soil salinity/alkalinity, acidity, drought, plodding and abiotic/abiotic stresses. The science of ge-


**CHAMBAL FERTILISERS
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nomics has exploratory changes where many crops are improved through the newly developed genome editing techniques like CRISPER Cas 9. Globally CRISPER-Cas based genome editing has been widely adopted for developing improved crop plants such as; high yielding rice, disease resistant wheat and tomato. The recent approvals of genome edited tomato in Japan, and mushroom, soybean, petunia in the USA are significant examples of translational progress in this area that would encourage other countries including India for crop improvement. India has already developed genome edited drought resistant rice, beta-carotene enriched banana and are in process of improvement of crop yields. Leveraging emerging innovations landscape and technology trends for growth of Indian agriculture will lead to improvement of productivity, profitability, and sustainability. Precision Agriculture is one such system being adopted world over for higher production. With precision farming, mechanization, sensor-based water and nutrient management,



billion by 2030 would be a testimony of India's will and capability to transform farm sector and harness true export potential of agriculture products

In the end, it is summarized that India has done a remarkable job in enhancing the agricultural production in nearly all the key areas. However, the current challenges are looming large over the coming years as the population is increasing. The country needs to step up production of many commodities by around 30% to feed the expected 1.7 billion people by 2050. Naturally strengthening research, development, and innovations to create new technologies will be an important step for Indian agriculture as a road ahead. Simultaneously like the current reforms in farm produce marketing, series of policy changes needed to give emphasis on technology and skill-intensive agriculture. Suitable policy reforms will certainly act as the confidential building mechanism amongst all the stakeholders of agriculture. Being the primary source of food, feed, fibre, income, and employment for majority of the population, agriculture shall continue to remain as backbone of Indian economy. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure its sustainable development for the benefit of the country.




**CHAMBAL FERTILISERS
AND CHEMICALS LIMITED**

Cultivating a brighter future for India. With agri solutions and beyond.

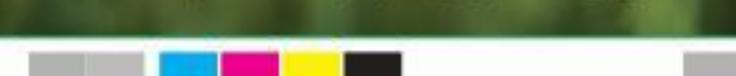
Across the fertile fields and terrains of India, Chambal Fertilizers' passion for Indian agriculture runs deep. For decades, we've dedicated ourselves to cultivating not just crops, but working tirelessly to redefine self-sufficiency in India's agri solutions' production. Wholeheartedly committed to boosting India's food security as we passionately deliver enriching solutions to ensure prosperity for farmers and an abundant tomorrow.



Farmer Outreach Initiatives of Chambal

- Uttam Santulit Poshan Abhiyan (USPA) | Seed-To-Harvest (S2H)
- Uttam Samadhan - Whatsapp Enterprise Bot Solution in 5 Languages
- Crop Seminars | Field Days | Uttam Pranaam for Sustainable Agriculture Practices
- Namo Drone Didi Scheme (SHG)

उत्तम का योगदान: सम्पूर्ण कृषि समाधान





DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



SURPRISE EXCLUSION

ONE OF the surprising exclusions from the BJP candidates' list was that of Union Minister Pratima Bhousik. After her much-hyped inclusion in the Union Government in July 2021, Bhousik was sent to contest Assembly election in February 2023 from Dhanpur, a CPI(M) bastion in Tripura. Her victory had led to speculation that she may be the BJP's first woman chief minister in the region. However, Bhousik was asked to resign from the Assembly seat and retain her Lok Sabha membership and ministerial post. Now she has been dropped from the party's Lok Sabha list and former Tripura CM and Rajya Sabha MP Biplob Deb is contesting from her West Tripura constituency. Although there's speculation that she might be given the Rajya Sabha seat once Deb wins the Lok Sabha seat, no one seems to be sure about it.

SEAT SUSPENSE

EVER SINCE former Union minister Sushma Swaraj's daughter Bansuri Swaraj was declared the BJP Lok Sabha candidate from New Delhi constituency, there was suspense over the fate of incumbent Meenakshi Lekhi, who is Minister of State for External Affairs and also Culture. There were rumours of her being fielded from Chandigarh, in place of sitting MP Kirron Kher. However, on Monday, her day-long engagements with civil society groups in Ludhiana gave rise to conjectures that she may be the party's candidate from that seat in Punjab.

EC BUSY

THREE DAYS after they joined office, the two new Election Commissioners — Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu — called on President Droupadi Murmu on Monday. The Election Commission is busy with preparations for the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. With the Model Code of Conduct in effect and the EC issuing orders for transfers of officers across states, the Election Commission headquarters saw a flurry of activities on the first working day since poll dates were announced on March 16, a day after the two ECs took charge. During the day, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar found time to interact with the 2023 batch of IFS trainees about the EC's role and functioning.

J&K dispensation does not want power back in people's hands: Omar



Former J&K CM Omar Abdullah

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, MARCH 18

FORMER CHIEF minister Omar Abdullah Monday said the current dispensation in Jammu and Kashmir does not want power in the hands of the people, given that the administration had told the Election Commission that assembly polls cannot be conducted alongside Lok Sabha elections.

"Jo maajooda hukumat hai Jammu Kashmir ki, unhone isko sabote kiya. Kyunki woh chahte nahin hain ki yahan pe iqtiad woh dobara logon ke haath mein ho. Betaj badshah bathe hue hain (The current dispensation has sabotaged. They do not want power to be in the hands of the people (of J&K) again. They are sitting here like uncrowned kings," he said, ostensibly referring to the Lieutenant Governor.

While all political parties in J&K have been pushing for assembly polls in J&K alongside Lok Sabha polls scheduled to take place in April and May this year, ECI's announcement on Saturday did not include a plan for polls in the Union Territory.

Omar, speaking on the side-

lines of a party function at Kulgam in South Kashmir, pointed out that as per directions of the Supreme Court of India, issued in December, J&K assembly polls have to be concluded before September 30, 2024. "Hopefully people can have their own government then, as the ECI has also stated," Omar said.

Meanwhile, with the National Conference digging its heels on contesting all three parliament seats from the Valley, leading to a war of words between the NC and the PDP, Omar said the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration coalition stands as it was and will also hold a meeting soon.

The PDP had expressed resentment at the NC's reluctance to set aside the South Kashmir seat for party chief Mehbooba Mufti. However, the NC argued that it had won all three seats in the last LS polls so it sees no reason to cede the constituency.

Omar, speaking on the side-

for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections now, Yediyurappa, 81 — who has again emerged as a decisive force in the selection of the BJP candidates from the state — has landed in a fresh controversy following the announcement of the first list of 20 party candidates.

On March 14, a complaint was lodged with the Bangalore police by the mother of a 17-year-old girl, alleging sexual harassment of her daughter by Yediyurappa. The police registered a complaint under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 and section 354 A of the IPC. The case has been transferred to the CID.

Yediyurappa has rejected the allegation. On March 15, he said:

"Around one or one-and-a-half months ago, they (victim and her

mother) came to my house seeking help. After listening to her, I called city police commissioner B Dayananda over the phone seeking to address her problem. Later, they spoke against me and I then suspected there was some health problem with her. I sent them to the city police commissioner's office. I even gave her some money as they were in trouble. I came to know that an FIR has been registered and will look into it. But this is what I have faced in helping someone."

Unlike the previous instances where the charges made by BJP dissidents pertained to the existence of private videos, the current allegation against Yediyurappa is of a serious nature since the POCSO law stipulates immediate

arrest of an accused person. Over the next week the Karnataka CID police are expected to record a formal statement in a court from the victim on what transpired at Yediyurappa's residence during their visit in February 2024.

The statements in court of a POCSO victim are often the basis on which police take action

</div

15 prominent individuals from corporate world bought bonds — Rs 2 cr to Rs 35 cr

RITUSARIN
& SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE ELECTORAL bond data released by the Election Commission of India (ECI) has revealed that at least 333 individuals purchased bonds worth Rs 358.91 crore between April 2019 and January 2024.

Of this, the share of 15 prominent individuals identified by *The Indian Express*, most of whom are associated with big corporate firms, is Rs 158.65 crore or 44.2%.

Queries were sent to the official email addresses of all the companies these individuals are associated with.

The 15 individuals are:

LAKSHMI NIWAS MITTAL:
Rs 35 CRORE

Listed by Forbes as having a net worth of Rs 1,670 crore, Mittal is the executive chairman and CEO of ArcelorMittal, one of the world's largest steel-making companies. He lives in London.

He purchased the bonds on April 18, 2019 during the Lok Sabha polls.

A spokesperson from ArcelorMittal said he had "no comments" on the subject.

LAXMIDAS VALLABHDAS MERCHANT: Rs 25 CRORE

A chartered accountant associated with Reliance Industries Limited, Merchant is a director with Reliance Life Sciences and several other companies including Reliance Life Sciences Pvt Ltd, Reliance Infosolutions Pvt Ltd, Reliance Global Management Services Limited, and Reliance Media Transmission Pvt Ltd. He was earlier director of Reliance Ventures Ltd.

He purchased the bonds in November 2023.

RAHUL BHATIA: Rs 20 CRORE

The promoter of India's largest airline, Indigo, Bhatia purchased bonds valued at Rs 20 crore in his personal capacity in

April 2021. In addition, three other Indigo entities — Interglobe Aviation, InterGlobe Air Transport and Interglobe Real Estate Ventures — also bought bonds totalling Rs 36 crore.

INDER THAKURDAS JAISINGHANI: Rs 14 CRORE

A second generation businessman, Jaisinghani is the chairman and managing director (MD) of Polycab Group of Companies, a major manufacturer of electric wires and cables. Polycab expanded impressively when he set up a factory in Halol, Gujarat for manufacturing and processing PVC pipes.

He purchased the bonds in April and October 2023.

RAJESH MANNALAI AGARWAL: Rs 13 CRORE

He is the owner and co-founder of Ajanta Pharma Limited, a multinational pharmaceutical company dealing with specialised formulations. Located in Mumbai, the company has a presence in about 20 companies, including the USA.

While Agarwal bought the bonds between January 2022 and October 2023, his firm was separately shown as a corporate purchaser of bonds worth Rs 4 crore.

A spokesperson of Ajanta Pharma responded to queries and said they had "no comments" to make.

HARMESH RAHUL JOSHI & RAHUL JAGANNATH JOSHI:
Rs 10 CRORE EACH

Among the directors of Om Freight Group of companies headquartered in Mumbai, they are individually associated with over a dozen, mostly group, companies such as Oscar Freight Private Limited and Seven Hills Shipping Private Limited.

Mumbai-based Om Group deals mainly in international logistics and freight, delivering to 700 locations in India and abroad.

They bought the bonds in January 2022 and November 2023.

KIRAN MAZUMDAR SHAW:
Rs 6 CRORE

She is the chairperson and founder of Biocon, a pharma company she launched in 1978, and spearheaded its evolution from dealing with industrial enzymes to a hub of complex biopharmaceutical manufacturing. Biocon currently sells products in 120 countries.

After her name appeared on the ECI list, showing she had purchased bonds in April 2023, she posted on X: "All parties want funding."

INDRANI PATNAIK:
Rs 5 CRORE

She is among the highest tax payers in India. A director of nine companies, she is primarily in the mining business, with the area of operation mainly in Odisha and West Bengal.

Her son Anurag was quizzed by ED on July 20, 2015 and on January 11, 2019 Income Tax raids were conducted at locations linked to her. She purchased the bonds on May 10, 2019.

SUDHAKAR KANCHARLA:
Rs 5 CRORE

Living abroad, Kancharla is chairman of Yoda Group and founder of Devansh Lab Works. He purchased the bonds on April 12, 2023.

Earlier this year, when veteran actor Chiranjeevi was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, he posted on X that it was "indeed a moment of immense pride and celebration for all of us."

ABHRAJIT MITRA:
Rs 4.25 CRORE

Mitra is director of Kolkata-based Searock Infraproject Private Limited. He was earlier associated with another firm, Technophile Innovations Private Limited, which is involved in computer-related activities like maintenance of websites/cre-

ation of multimedia presentations for other firms etc. He made the purchases in October 2023.

SAROJIT KUMAR DEY:

Rs 3.4 CRORE

Dey is director in seven West Bengal-based firms, including J D Agro Development Private Limited, JRD Realty Private Limited, and Limelight Vincom Private Limited. She purchased the bonds during 2021, 2023 and in January 2024.

DILIP RAMANLAL THACKER:

Rs 3 CRORE

Thacker, who bought the bonds in April 2023, is associated with 30 companies — majority in Mumbai, and two in Pune — mostly in real estate, infrastructure and hotels. Some of these companies were converted into limited liability partnerships (LLP).

Companies he is associated with include: Samudra Real Estate Private Limited; Jade Minerals & Mines Private Limited; Redstone Films Private Limited; Turner Films Private Limited; Global Kitchens (kg) LLP; and DT Multi Trade LLP.

PRAKASH BALWANT MENGANE: Rs 3 CRORE

Mengane is a director in Shreenath Stapatya India Private Limited, a Kolhapur (Maharashtra)-based company involved in manufacture of non-metallic mineral products. The company was incorporated on October 28, 2020. Mengane bought the bonds in November 2023.

NIRMAL KUMAR BATHWAL:

Rs 2 CRORE

Bathwal is director in 21 companies including Penguin Trading & Agencies Limited, which also bought bonds for Rs 27.5 crore. Most of these 21 companies — one in Mumbai and the rest in Kolkata — are either amalgamated or under strike off (process of being dissolved). He bought the bonds in January 2022.

ABHRAJIT MITRA:

Rs 4.25 CRORE

Mitra is director of Kolkata-based Searock Infraproject Private Limited. He was earlier associated with another firm, Technophile Innovations Private Limited, which is involved in computer-related activities like maintenance of websites/cre-

As poll bonds chase power, small parties rue empty coffers

RITUSARIN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

AMONG THE political parties that have submitted declarations of money received through electoral bonds to the Election Commission of India are hundreds of small ones; a majority honestly stating 'nil receipts', many emphasising they haven't received any donation 'as yet', and still some others candidly admitting they have just embarked on their political 'journey'.

From Janam Maran Party to Sacho Sach Party and from Tipu Sultan Party to Jalwa Dal, many of these do not ring a bell probably beyond their neighbourhood, and are mostly categorised as registered but not recognised political parties. They do make a mark though in the 523 declarations made public by the poll body on Sunday.

What is clear from the declarations of at least a score of parties is they haven't quite understood the EC's requirement and have hastily dispatched their audited account or bank balance statements. Many said since they had just about launched a political party or had never contested an election or had not received 1% of the votes, they were ineligible under the scheme. The question of receiving and encashing Electoral Bonds, hence, did not arise.

Some others have tried to explain to the poll panel why they could not submit declarations: they had either not yet enrolled in the EC's electronic portal, they did not have a bank account or a PAN number, or that their bank account had become defunct for lack of funds, or had been frozen. Some declarations just give an idea of the huge entry barrier.

ers to politics. For instance, the President of the Tamil Nadu Mahatma Gandhi Makkal Katchi party has poured his heart out on how difficult it is to run the "day to day" affairs of his seven-year old party. To prove it, he submitted the party's bank account details showing a balance of Rs 798.

A functionary of Makkal Nala Kazhagam, another party from Tamil Nadu, informed the EC it did not collect money "from anyone". The party was just about surviving with Rs 500 being deposited by its President into the party's bank account every three months.

There are any number of obscure, unknown parties which chose to ignore the questions on bonds. For instance, Bharat Ka Kisan Majdoor Party from Bihar pointed out that its President had to visit the office of the Election Commission in Patna to understand the "whereabouts and what's what of the Bond". Some others like the Rashtriya Secular Majlis Party, also from Bihar, admitted to 'Nil' receipts, and said, "We aren't tech savvy".

If many filed declarations along with party financial statements showing just a few thousand rupees in balance, leaders of some political outfits expressed displeasure at the Electoral Bond scheme launched in 2018. One, for instance, pointed out that the scheme was under "judicial review". Shoshit Samaj Party, registered in Delhi, said it was not using the scheme given the "political situation in the country since the past five years." Yet another party, the Bharateeya Manavadhikar Party of Kolkata, didn't bat an eyelid to state the bond scheme was an "unseen friend of corrupt people" and an "unseen secret financial weapon".

Some others have tried to explain to the poll panel why they could not submit declarations: they had either not yet enrolled in the EC's electronic portal, they did not have a bank account or a PAN number, or that their bank account had become defunct for lack of funds, or had been frozen.

Some declarations just give an idea of the huge entry barrier.

'Paper leak' in Jharkhand govt recruitment exams: State BJP chief Marandi demands inquiry by CBI

ABHISHEK ANGAD
RANCHI, MARCH 18

JHARKHAND BJP president Babul Marandi on Monday sought a CBI investigation into alleged question paper leaks in state government recruitment exams, including the Jharkhand Public Service Commission's (JPSC's) preliminary examination held on Sunday.

In a letter to the state's Chief Secretary, Marandi said the dreams of the poor and tribals in the state had been "mocked" by question paper leaks.

On the JPSC preliminary exam, in which officials said around 3.5 lakh students appeared, Marandi wrote: "I want to inform you that the JPSC preliminary examination was held March 17, in which many reports of paper leaks have come to light. In the mail sent to me by some students (in which screenshots are also attached) the paper

booklet number and OMR answer sheet number have been found to be unequal."

Several videos have gone viral on social media where aspirants complained that question papers for the JPSC exam were leaked at the Upendra Nath Verma College. However, let me make it clear that as per the JPSC guidelines, the question papers were opened in front of a magistrate, two students and two investigators, and it was videographed."

On the videos alleging paper leak in the Jamtara college, DC Kumud Sahay said the administration has formed a three-member special investigation team to "investigate".

Chhatra Assistant Collector Arvind Kumar, who is also the



HC JUDGES MEET WITH PRESIDENT

President Droupadi Murmu with Delhi High Court Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and other judges at Amrit Udyam in Rashtrapati Bhavan on Monday. ANI



Jharkhand
BJP chief
Babul
Marandi. File

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive/physical symbolic possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Bank/ Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" on the date as mentioned in the table herein below, for recovery of its dues due to the Bank/ Secured Creditor from the respective borrower(s) and guarantor(s). The reserve price and the earnest money deposit will be as mentioned in the table below against the respective properties.

S. No.	Name of the branch / Name & Address of the Borrower / Guarantors	Location & details of the property	Date of Notice u/s 13(2) - Date of Notice u/s 13(4) Symbolic/Physical Possession	Reserved Price	EMD	Date and time of E-Auction
1.	Kiran Sahu W/o Alok Sahu Add : Tengariya, A G Bazar Kursela, Katihar, Bihar-854101 Bo:Purnea Manju Complex (293100)	Hypo Of Truck, Regd. No. Br39p-7694, Chassis No. Mat44806313g 13650, Engine No. B59180325 1f63450911 Standing In The Name Of Kiran Shah.	Rs.4238153.90 as on 30.04.2022 13(2)- 15.05.2022 13(4)- 17.10.2023 with further interest costs and others charges and expenses thereon. Symbolic Possession	Rs. 4.50 Lakh (Hypo).	Rs. 0.45 Lakh (Hypo).	Email - cs8261@pnb.co.in Date/Time of E-Auction : 05.04.2024, 10.30 am to 04.00 pm. EMD AC : 2931003171160 IFS : PUNB0293100

1. On receipt of the earnest money, the user ID/password (mandatory for e-auction) of the tenderer will be received on his valid email ID.
2. Tender sale will be online through website: www.ibapi.in and E-mail is cs8261@pnb.co.in
3. The sealed tender will be deposited with the above authorized officer, Punjab National Bank, Purnea Latest by 03.04.2024 at 5 PM with demand draft for the earnest money, payable in favor of the authorized officer, Punjab National Bank, Purnea. Earnest money can also be deposited by NEFT/RTGS in E-auction under SARFAESI account.
4. Tenders received late for any reason will be considered cancelled and they will not be allowed to participate in the auction process. The Authorized Officer reserves the right to cancel/ accept/postpone/reject any tender and amend the terms and conditions of sale without assigning any reason. The bank reserves the right to participate in this auction. For information related to the property, manager/Senior Manager of Above mention, brach can be contacted on any banking working day, as well as inspection of the property can be done on any banking working day.
5. Increase of minimum bid will be Rs. 1000/- A mutual bid will be conducted between the tenderers, if necessary on the discretion of the authorized officer. For any other information, concerned branch manager can be contacted.
6. After acceptance of the offer, 25% of the sale amount (other than the earnest money) will have to be deposited immediately and the outstanding amount will have to be deposited within 15 days from the date of acceptance. Failure to adhere the above mentioned time period, deposited amount will be forfeited by the bank.
7. The successful tenderer will have to deposit the remaining 75% of the money within 15 days after ensuring the sale of the property, otherwise deposited amount will be forfeited.
8. If the outstanding amount with all expenses will be deposited in bank by the borrower or guarantors, the bank may cancel the auction on or before the day of the bidding.
9. Successful tenderers will have to bear all the stamp and registration fees and other expenses themselves for getting the property registered. The bank is not under any obligation for any dues of government, non-government, society, etc. on the property.
10. Sale certificate related to sale of property will be issued in the name of the tenderer.
11. All statutory dues/ attendant charges/ other dues including registration charges, stamp duty, taxes, statutory liability, arrears of property tax, electricity dues etc. shall have to be borne by the purchaser.
12. For detailed term and conditions of the sale, please refer www.ibapi.in, www.mstcecommerce.com, <https://eprocure.gov.in/epublish/app> & www.pnbindia.in.

For other conditions, information can be had from the website of bank www.ibapi.in.

Authorized Officer
Sastra Head, Purnea

TMC complaint against PM for 'flouting' MCC
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MARCH 18

Azam Khan gets 7-yr prison term in 2016 demolition case
MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, MARCH 18

SENIOR SAMAJWADI Party leader and former minister Azam Khan was on Monday sentenced to seven years imprisonment in connection with the demolition of a house in Uttar Pradesh's Rampur in 2016. This is the fifth case in which Khan, who is already in jail, has been convicted over the past one year.

Ahesham said that the accused had told him that this was being done to his family for not voting for Azam Khan. He then went to Azam Khan to complain about the incident, at which time the politician, along with others, abused and threatened him with imprisonment, he alleged.

"Besides sentencing him to seven years imprisonment, the court also imposed a fine of Rs 8 lakh on Azam Khan. A fine of Rs 3.5 lakh has been imposed on the other three convicts," district government counsel Amit Saxena said. Azam's lawyer Nasin Sultan said they would file an appeal against the conviction.

According to the prosecution, the incident occurred in 2016, but the case was filed three years later. In his complaint filed in 2019, Ahesham Khan told police that he had bought a parcel of land in Rampur district's Dongarpur in 2011-12 to set up a school. In a portion of the land, he had built a house where he started living

DECISION 2024

STATE'S OUTCOME CRUCIAL TO BJP'S TARGET 400

In NDA's Bihar seat-sharing, BJP gives 'fair deal' to Nitish, Chirag

Kushwaha, Paras in touch with INDIA bloc; BJP to contest 17 LS seats, JD(U) 16, Chirag 5, HAM(S) & RLM get 1 each

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, MARCH 18

THE RULING NDA finalised its seat-sharing in Bihar for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls Monday, allotting 17 seats to the BJP, 16 to the JD(U), five to the Chirag Paswan-led Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) and one each to Jitan Ram Manjhi's HAM (Secular) and Upendra Kushwaha's Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM).

The BJP needed to accommodate the HAM(S) and the RLM as well. Kushwaha seems to have suffered a loss due to the return of Nitish – who had shifted to the Mahagathbandhan camp in August 2022 – back to the NDA fold in January this year.

In the 2014 polls, Kushwaha's then party RLSP had won three seats it contested as part of the NDA. But he had then got more weightage in the NDA because Nitish had parted ways with it.

Kushwaha's space in the NDA has shrunk further following the rise of state BJP chief Samrat Choudhary, the deputy CM, who also belongs to the Kushwaha community.

Another highlight of the NDA's seat-sharing deal this time was Jamui MP Chirag Paswan getting the better of his uncle and Union minister Pashupati Kumar Paras, who had split their party in 2022.

Paras, who is currently Hajipur MP, failed to get any seat for his National LJP faction from BJP, which preferred Chirag to him in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Shivamogga on Monday. PTI

view of its assessment the latter was "real claimant" to his father late Ram Vilas Paswan's legacy and would hold on to Paswan vote. Chirag, however, had to concede one of the LJP's sitting seats, Nawada, to the BJP.

If Paras, who is said to be in touch with the INDIA camp, switches sides, there could be a contest between Chirag and Paras in Hajipur, the seat that Ram Vilas

represented nine times.

Declaring the seat-sharing pact, BJP national general secretary in charge of Bihar Vinod Tawde claimed that the NDA allies have clinched it in "48 hours".

The NDA, which had swept the state in the 2019 polls by winning 39 out of the state's 40 seats, has now set a target of winning all the seats. "Although the NDA parties will fight on their respective sym-

bols, we are fighting together – and all allies will fight with all their might," Tawde told the press conference, flanked by the JD(U)'s Sanjay Kumar Jha and other allies.

In 2019, the BJP, JD(U) and LJP together garnered 53% votes polled in the state.

Although the return of Nitish has boosted the NDA's prospects, the ruling coalition is likely to face a more formidable RJD-led Oppo-

sition in this Lok Sabha election.

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi setting a target of 400 seats for the NDA, the poll outcome in Bihar would be crucial for the BJP.

The JD(U) conceded its Karakat seat to Kushwaha's party, although it managed to get Sheohar from the BJP. Former RJD MP Lovely Anand, wife of ex-MP Anand Mohan, is likely to contest from Sheohar. Lovely and her son Chetan Anand joined the JD(U) Monday. HAM(S) chief and ex-CM Jitan Ram Manjhi would contest from the Gaya seat, which is currently represented by the JD(U)'s Vijay Kumar.

The BJP is likely to contest the West Champaran, East Champaran, Aurangabad, Madhubani, Araria, Darbhanga, Saran, Ujjainpur, Begusarai, Nawada, Patna Sahab, Pataliputra, Ara, Buxar and Sasaram seats. The JD(U) would contest from the Valmiki Nagar, Sitamarhi, Janjharpur, Supaul, Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Madhepura, Gopalganj, Siwan, Bhagalpur, Banka, Munger, Nalanda, Jehanabad and Sheohar constituencies. The LJP (Ram Vilas) would contest the Vaishali, Hajipur, Samastipur, Khagaria and Jamui seats.

With Modi repeating the same at different rallies Monday, it was clear the BJP saw Rahul's remark as reminiscent of controversies triggered by the use of words such as "neech" and "chhaiwala" by Congress leaders.

Addressing the INDIA rally, Rahul had said: "There is a word 'Shakti' in Hinduism. We are fighting against a shakti too. The question is, what is that shakti and what does it mean for us?"

Modi began the day Monday by claiming Rahul had insulted the revered figure of Shakti in Hinduism. "Don't we worship Shakti in India? Haven't we dedicated our Chandrayaan to Shiv Shakti (the name given to the site of the landing)? But these people are talking about a life without Shakti."

Modi said for the BJP, Shakti was symbolic of every woman. Pointing to women in the audience at a rally in Jagtial, Telangana, he said: "Mere saamne Shakti-swaroop beti, mahilayen, behnen, Shakti ka roop daaraan karke, mujhe aashirwad dene aayi hain (Daughters, women, sisters, the symbol of Shakti, are here before me, having taken the form of Shakti to bless me). For me every mother, sister, daughter is symbol of Shakti. Mein Bharat maa ka poojari hoon (I am a devotee of Bharat Mata)... I will sacrifice my life for security of mothers and sisters."

He said Rahul's remark could not be ignored as it was made at INDIA's first rally after the announcement of elections, and at the historic Shivaji Stadium. The PM said: "On June 4, it will be clear whether the country is run by Asuri Shakti (demonic power) or Daivik Shakti (divine power)."

Likening the BJP to "Asuri Shakti", the Congress said his 10-year reign had seen incidents such as the Unnao, Kathua and Hathras sexual assault incidents, parading of women after stripping them in Manipur, as well as the "harassment" of women wrestlers. Congress spokesperson Supriya Shriniwal said: "All these were forms of power."

The party added: "This country has always got its strength from 'Daivik Shakti' and the youths, women and farmers are standing with Rahul Gandhi."

However, the BJP is hoping to use Rahul's remark to bolster its claims that the INDIA bloc has "hatred against Hinduism and Hindu beliefs".

The Congress has been in this position before, with barbs by its leaders directed at Modi backfiring on the party. These include the "Chowkidar chor hai" campaign of 2019 by the Congress against the PM, led by Rahul. The BJP retaliated with its leaders adding "Main bhi chowkidar hoon" to their social media status.



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RSS BRINGS IN ITS YOUNGEST EVER NO.3 RUNG LEADERS WITH ROOTS IN JHARKHAND, MAHARASHTRA

Hinduism's revered concept insulted: Modi attacks Rahul on 'Shakti' remark

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18



IN THE excitement over the big INDIA rally at Mumbai Sunday to mark the completion of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, a remark made by the Congress leader regarding "Shakti" slipped by almost unnoticed. A day later, PM Narendra Modi picked it up to portray the coming election clash as one between "those who worship Shakti versus those who want to destroy it".

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Tension in
BJP-JDS alliance
amid delay in
seat-sharing

AKRAM M

BENGALURU, MARCH 18

THE JD(S) has expressed unhappiness with ally BJP over the delay in seat-sharing agreement in Karnataka.

Following a meeting at the JD(S) office Monday, JD(S) state president HD Kumaraswamy said leaders who attended the meeting were of the view that the delay in announcing candidates for the polls was affecting the party's prospects. Sources said party leaders also felt sidelined as they were not invited to PM Narendra Modi's recent rallies in the state.

"I have not asked for six or seven seats. Since discussions started, we have asked for three or four seats. I am confident that BJP will give me that. For two seats, should I go with such alliances?" he said. Though JD(S) was said to be promising three seats, the BJP is now looking to cede only two seats. Kumaraswamy said, responding to reports the party would get only two seats. "We will field candidates in Hassan, Mandya, and Kolar," he added.

During the meeting, JD(S) leaders discussed how party leaders and cadres can work together at booth level as they are stronger than BJP in some seats including Vijayapura and Kalaburagi.

Half the seats of UP, but 7 phases in both: Bihar Opp asks why

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, MARCH 18

AS BIHAR heads for a seven-phase Lok Sabha election for the second time running, the Opposition RJD has accused the BJP of misusing government institutions to its benefit.

Bihar has the lowest number of Lok Sabha seats among the 3 states where elections have been stretched across the seven phases – with the other two being UP (80 seats) and West Bengal (42).

Underlining Bihar has half the number of LS constituencies compared to Uttar Pradesh, RJD national spokesperson Subodh Kumar Mehta told *The Indian Express*. "We have witnessed an ominous trend under the NDA government, of misuse of government institutions, bureaucracy and the media. Polling in seven phases in Bihar across a month-and-a-half in the grueling summer does not make sense."

The RJD crying foul while accusing the EC proves that INDIA bloc constituent has accepted defeat even before elections," he said.

Anand said every party motivates its cadre with slogans and claimed the RJD is afraid of the BJP's slogan. "Our cadres' assessment shows that we will win all the Lok Sabha seats in Bihar. While we are confident with the announcement of polls, the RJD-Congress-Left combine is hesitant to face the BJP and NDA," he said.

According to him, the stretched elections reflected the nervousness of NDA. "First, they had to eat their words on not accepting Nitish Kumar (back into the NDA). Now, with such a

In Maharashtra's first 5-phase voting, Opp sees advantage BJP

SHUBHANGI KHAPRE
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

FOR THE first time, the Lok Sabha elections for its 48 seats will be held in 5 phases in Maharashtra, spread out between April 19 and May 20. The Opposition believes this schedule is only meant to give the BJP an advantage.

For example, the fact that Western Maharashtra and North Maharashtra are being kept for polling in the last 2 phases (May 13, 20). Rival parties point out the BJP and its allies are caught in a bitter seat-sharing tussle here, and it gives them more time now to coordinate when it comes to critical constituencies as well as figure out the best utilisation of their star campaigners.

Marathwada is one of the regions which will see polls in the most phases – three, for 8 seats. This is being seen as a precautionary step given this is a battleground of the Shiv Sena and NCP, and may see its different factions collide. In Vidarbha's 10 seats in contrast, polls are taking place in two phases (April 19, 26).

At the same time, Mumbai voting in the last phase might harm BJP's prospects. Party leaders point out its vote base in the region are North Indian immigrants, who often head to their native places for vacations.

48 SEATS, POLLS BETWEEN APR 19 & MAY 20

APRIL 19: Ramtek, Nagpur, Bhandara-Condia, Gadchiroli, Chandrapur, all in Eastern Vidarbha.

APRIL 26: Buldhana, Akola, Amravati, Wardha, Yavatmal-Washim in Vidarbha; and Hindoli, Nanded, Parbhani in Marathwada.

MAY 7: Osmanabad (now Dharashiv), Latur in Marathwada; Raigad, Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg in Konkan; Baramati, Solapur, Madha, Sangli, Satara in Western Maharashtra; and

MAY 20: Dhule, Dindori, Nashik in North Maharashtra; and Palghar, Bhiwandi, Kalyan, Thane, Mumbai (N), Mumbai (N-E), Mumbai North Central, Mumbai South Central, Mumbai (S).

The BJP is not shy of admitting it wants to cash in on the Modi factor in maximum seats. Given the gap between phases, its rallies can now be more easily planned across regions. Despite having the second-most constituencies in the country, 48, after UP's 80, Maharashtra has in the past seen four-phase LS polls at most.

Questioning the decision to hold five-phase polls this time, NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) president Jayant Patil said: "If the BJP is so confident of sweeping the polls, where was the need for five phases? It appears everything is being done to help the BJP?"

Congress state chief Nana Patole said: "Our question is simple. Does Maharashtra need five-phase polls? Who does it help? After each phase, there is a huge gap, which is clearly intended to support those in power."

Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule said, "EC decides timetable and number of phases." For the EC, law and order would have been paramount, he said, adding the number of phases didn't really concern BJP.

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10

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

FULLER DISCLOSURE

SBI must not wait for Court to prod it, parties must step forward to place more information on electoral bonds in public domain

THE DATA ON electoral bonds released by the State Bank of India must provide clarity on questions that are at the heart of the effort to bring transparency in political funding. It should give information on all the entities, companies and/or individuals, who purchased electoral bonds, which parties received them and when, and the link between the two — that is, who paid whom. The disclosures so far by the SBI, however, have only provided information on the donors who purchased the bonds and the parties that received them — the question of who paid whom remains unanswered. This information gap can be filled, firstly, by the State Bank of India furnishing data on the bond's unique alphanumeric code and serial number — not provided so far by the bank. On Monday, the Supreme Court asked the SBI to disclose these numbers for the bonds purchased and redeemed to the Election Commission. The Court has also asked the Chairman and Managing Director of the SBI to file an affidavit by March 21 stating that all information regarding the bonds has been disclosed. The court's continued push to ensure complete transparency is immensely welcome. But having said that, the SBI should now disclose all the information it has and not wait for the Court's prodding.

Some political parties have taken a step forward towards providing information on bonds. Reportedly, 10 parties, including the DMK, NCP, JD(U) and AAP, have voluntarily disclosed the names of their donors. For instance, Future Gaming and Hotel Services — the biggest purchaser with over Rs 1,300 crore worth of bonds between 2019 and 2024 — donated Rs 509 crore or just under 40 per cent of its total purchases to the DMK. Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd — the second largest purchaser of bonds — gave Rs 50 crore to JD(S). This was more than half of what the party received through this channel. Other parties must now take the cue and place more information in the public domain. At this moment, the onus is on parties to rise above short-term calculations and considerations and take forward the process started by the Court — of shining light on areas of darkness in a system that is mostly opaque.

The system of electoral financing in India is in dire need of reform, keeping at its centre the voter's right to know. This valuable opportunity must not be lost. But even full disclosures on electoral bonds cannot be the end of the matter. The next step will need to be taken — to set in place a more open system to replace the electoral bonds scheme struck down by the Court. There can be no going back to the earlier system. Conversations must begin on bringing in systemic changes and they must involve all stakeholders and parties.

MOB ON CAMPUS

Best universities in the world foster freedom. Attack on foreign students in Gujarat University belies NEP 2020's promise

ASTHE WORLD is becoming increasingly interconnected," says the National Education Policy (2020), it is the responsibility of institutes of higher education to "become active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable societies". The attack on five foreign students on Saturday night at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad by a mob, reportedly for offering namaz during Ramzan, flies in the face of that commitment and promise. In videos of the incident, about 25 young men can be seen assaulting the students, two of whom were hospitalised. The response from the authorities has been two-toned. First, dealing with the crime itself, the breach of law and order on campus. Two people have been arrested and the Ministry of External Affairs has issued a statement saying it is in touch with the Gujarat government on the matter. The second response, unfortunately, appears to lay blame on the victims.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, Vice-Chancellor Neerja Gupta has assured the foreign students — from Sri Lanka, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and African nations — that they will be moved to a different hostel. That this has become necessary for their safety is disturbing. But the VC's words also appear to rule out the possibility of an introspection on how and why the students were attacked: "They are foreign students and when they go to foreign countries there is a need to be culturally sensitive. From this incident it has emerged that there is still a need for cultural orientation." The onus of being "culturally sensitive", especially in terms of religious and cultural practices, has been put on the foreign students. It would seem, in this framing, that the mob that attacked them has been let off too lightly.

The best universities in the world are spaces that, first and foremost, foster freedom. The quality of education they offer depends crucially on the liberty of thought and freedom of debate that they play host to. The mob and its violence bring an end to the free exchange of ideas and, by extension, the idea of the university. Gujarat University would do well to heed the advice of NEP 2020: To ensure "scientific temper, liberty, responsibility, pluralism, equality, and justice", it is necessary to nurture a campus that has "full equity and inclusion as the cornerstone of all educational decisions".

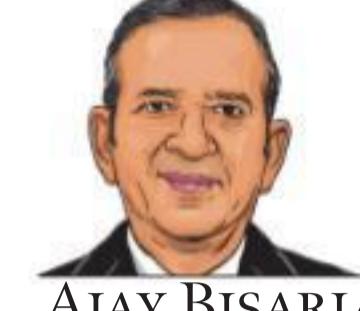
LIFE AND TIMES

Biopics have become a formula, offering prestige and instant publicity. But does the audience want more of the same?

AN ACTOR OF luminous beauty, with impeccable comic timing and a slew of successes, who is also one of Indian cinema's great tragic figures because of her doomed love life and early death: There is little doubt that the story of Madhubala would make for a compelling film. The announcement of a biopic of the actor, helmed by Jasmeet H Reen — director of the 2022 film *Darlings* — should, then, be cheering news. Yet, the general quality of biopics — a genre that seems to have become a Bollywood favourite since the box office success of *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* in 2013 — gives pause and elicits the question: What makes a good biopic?

The straightforward answer, of course, is that a good biopic is one that is not a hagiography. It is a film that attempts honesty, and resists the temptation to present its protagonist as an infallible or flawless figure. This, unfortunately, is where so many films falter, including recent releases such as *Sam Bahadur*, about Sam Manekshaw, and *Main Atal Hoon*, about Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Mere biographical details cannot be the anchor for a biopic. Perspective and the understanding that the great figures of history cannot be separated from their times are, perhaps, of greater importance. Could Vajpayee's story, for instance, have been used to tell a broader story of the India in which he rose to power and which he undoubtedly helped shape?

The real trouble, however, is that the biopic has increasingly become a comfortable formula, offering a ready-made story, a halo of prestige and instant publicity. Does the audience want more of the same? Going by the slew of biopics in the pipeline for this year, including films on Sourav Ganguly, Sambhaji Maharaj, Jhulan Goswami and Indira Gandhi, nobody in Bollywood seems to be asking that question.



AJAY BISARIA

IN THE AFTERMATH of the brazenly rigged elections of February 8, Pakistan has unveiled a new parliament, government and cabinet of ministers, in a spectacle carefully choreographed by its military establishment. The latest coalition government is headed by Shehbaz Sharif, the pliant politician who did the army's bidding in the 16-month Pakistan Democratic Movement government that replaced the government led by Imran Khan but was disbanded for the elections. The astute Asif Ali Zardari is back for a second term as president. Maryam Nawaz is taking her first stab at governance as Chief Minister of Punjab. Her father, the thrice-deposed PM, Nawaz Sharif, has been sidelined, under the looming threat of losing his Lahore parliamentary seat to a recount of votes.

The victor of the elections, Imran Khan, languishes in Adiala jail, now forbidden from running his post-election politics from there. The army has achieved its objective of a "minus Imran" and "minus Nawaz" political landscape, even if Army Chief Asim Munir's political tricks department could not stop the voters from giving a tantalising glimpse of an alternate universe, where Imran Khan's PTI would have won and run the government.

In dealing with the pain of a stolen mandate, Pakistan's commentator recalled three past elections. The only free and fair ones, in 1970, led to the break-up of the country, when they awarded the majority to the Awami League and its jailed Bengali leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leading the largely Punjabi army to conclude that the people of Pakistan could not be trusted with free elections. The 1977 elections, rigged by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, led to Zia ul-Haq's coup and held the lesson that rigging was a science that could not be left to the civilians alone, it needed to be supervised by the army. In 2018, the army refined the art of pre-poll engineering to create a "hybrid" regime with the then compliant Imran Khan. It deployed that model again in

Hybrid Pakistan

India will be in no hurry to do business with its new management. Onus of rapprochement lies on Pakistan

2024, failing to factor in public discontent. The newspaper, *Dawn*, pointed out that "though the people of Pakistan managed to deny the powerful (army) what they wanted, the powerful also managed to deny the people the outcome they wanted".

The peculiar caretaker system that Pakistan deploys ostensibly for the conduct of free elections, effectively became a vehicle for the army's manipulation of the polls. In a thinly veiled assertion of political supremacy, the army's corps commanders met a couple of days after the new PM was sworn in to issue an expansive statement. The army's top body gave itself a clean chit, dismissing criticism of rigging as "malicious efforts to create distortions, confusion and disinformation" and asking the people "to remain positive and united", to forget the pilfering of their mandate as a bad dream. The army will ensure dissenting Pakistanis don't take to the streets.

In a corporate analogy, the army chief is the powerful CEO presiding over a board of army corps commanders. This cohort has selected Shehbaz as the Chief Operating Officer, and Zardari as the largely ceremonial Managing Director. While the board will dictate security and foreign policy, the COO has the mandate to keep up the pressure on the jailed (former COO) Imran Khan and to steady the economy with a 6 billion-dollar IMF loan. The technocrat CFO approved by the board, banker Muhammad Aurangzeb, is tasked to secure the next IMF bailout and push for reforms. The shareholders — the populace — find themselves marginalised, with little agency in steering the nation's trajectory.

Shehbaz has on reviewing the economy expressed shock, calling it a crisis "higher than the Himalaya". The IMF would require tough reforms: Increasing energy prices and privatising bleeding public sector firms like steel mills and the national carrier PIA. A key structural reform — removing the generals from economic management — is above the pay grade

of the IMF but should be on the agenda of Pakistan's overseas mentors. India has cautioned the IMF that Pakistan should not use the 24th IMF programme to put cash into the army's kitty or to repay Chinese debt.

The army can be expected to double down on containing the "Imran challenge", bottling his over 90 independent legislators, perhaps even pressing Imran into a deal to quietly move to the "sub-jail" at his Bani Gala residence. The hybrid government can be expected to be shored up by the army for at least 18 months, when Asim Munir comes up for a second term and may wish to stir the cauldron to ensure his extension. He could then crown Bilawal Bhutto, eagerly waiting in the wings, as PM, fulfilling a Bhutto family dream.

India's reaction has been a perfunctory tweet from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which makes it clear that India has no views on Pakistan's flawed polls. India will focus on its own elections, while watching Pakistan with strategic patience. PM Modi made an even stronger statement with his "winning hearts" tour of the Kashmir Valley, aimed at reaping the post-Article 370 peace dividend. As he delivered a healing touch and a development promise, he made no mention of Pakistan or its export of terror.

Gone are the days when India would confute its approaches to Pakistan and Kashmir; the welfare of Kashmir is an internal matter, while dealing with Pakistan is a foreign policy challenge, and the twain will now not meet. India will be in no tearing hurry to do business with the new management of Hybrid Pakistan; the onus lies on its new leaders to seek board approval for creative rapprochement.

The writer was the last Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan and is author of Anger Management, a study of Indo-Pak diplomacy



SHRUTI JOSHI AND ANSHUMAN KAMILA

FINANCIAL INCLUSION IS essential for a nation's sustained development and growth. Its importance in building a sustainable and inclusive future is evident from the significance attached to financial inclusion in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Financial inclusion is seen as an enabler of eight out of the 17 SDGs. India has a below-average score in economy in the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 — health, education and politics are the other criteria in this report. The criteria on economy also deal with the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity — this is measured in terms of labour force participation rate and estimated earned income, *inter alia*. Financial inclusion of women helps to close these gaps. Therefore, taking stock is imperative.

As per the World Bank's Global Findex Database 2021, adult ownership of bank accounts or regulated institutions such as a credit union, microfinance institutions or a mobile money service provider has increased globally by 50 percentage points between 2011 to 2020. The increase in India has also been impressive, with a jump of 42 percentage points in this period. Moreover, the gender gap in account ownership has also closed substantially in India. In this context, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, launched in 2014, made a significant impact in enabling the opening of basic savings bank accounts, *inter alia*, for over 28 crore women (as of January 2024). Further, financial inclusion has received a fillip through steps taken to boost the participation of women in the economy — these include the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM), skill training under Skill India Mission, Mission Shakti and social protection schemes

A BANK ACCOUNT OF HER OWN

NFHS data offers clues on ways to bring more women under financial inclusion schemes

NFHS data also reveal several individual and household characteristics that have an impact on women's access to financial services. Using NFHS 5 data, collected during 2019-21 for 5.44 lakh women respondents in rural India, we identified the drivers of ownership and usage of accounts at a formal financial institution, usage of mobile phones for digital modes of payment and knowledge and utilisation of micro-credit programmes.

such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana.

Using multiple rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), we have found more dimensions of steady progress in the financial inclusion of women in India. It is heartening that in crucial criteria such as sovereignty over a certain sum of money, possessing a self-operated bank account, awareness about micro-credit programmes and availing of micro-credit schemes, women have clocked gains over the past two decades.

NFHS data also reveal several individual and household characteristics that have an impact on women's access to financial services. Using NFHS 5 data, collected during 2019-21 for 5.44 lakh women respondents in rural India, we identified the drivers of ownership and usage of accounts at a formal financial institution, usage of mobile phones for digital modes of payment and knowledge and utilisation of micro-credit programmes.

We found that education, skills (particularly digital skills), occupation, access to electronic media and age were significant drivers of financial inclusion among women. For instance, we found that educated women were more likely to know about the micro-credit schemes in their locality. Women with primary and secondary education were more likely to take a loan from these programmes, whereas women with higher education were less likely to use these programmes as opposed to women with no education. This is reasonable because although women with higher education are likely to be aware of and have the wherewithal to access formal channels of credit and lending, micro-credit schemes typically target women with low levels of education — such women find it hard

to negotiate formal banking relationships even though they are creditworthy in terms of their entrepreneurial ability. We found that working women in general — irrespective of their occupation group — were more likely to know about these loan programmes and avail them. Educated, digitally skilled, young and employed women were more likely to use digital modes of transaction. We also found that the gender of the head of the household and the assets and wealth he or she has, influences access to micro-credit.

This study throws up some important learnings to fine-tune our approach and increase financial inclusion. NFHS data suggests that women in women-headed households are favourably placed in owning and using a bank account, in using their mobile phone for digital financial transactions and in accessing micro-credit. Therefore, financial inclusion awareness programmes must give special attention to women in households not headed by women. Similarly, since skills and education positively impact financial inclusion, it would be advisable to incorporate modules on financial awareness in education and skill development frameworks. Given the shifting sands and novel developments in the financial sector, such modules must be updated regularly. The increasing use of digital financial transactions among the youth has lent greater urgency to the need to disseminate awareness about cyber safety and safe digital banking practices, especially so given the rising trend of financial cyber-crimes and frauds.

Joshi is with the Reserve Bank of India and Kamila is with the Indian Economic Service. Views are personal



MARCH 19, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

CALCUTTA VIOLENCE

FOUR PEOPLE, INCLUDING Deputy Commissioner of Police (Port Division) V K Mehta and his security guard were killed in violent incidents in Calcutta. They were killed by a rioting mob and another person died when the police fired to disperse the mob. A day-long curfew has been imposed as a precautionary measure.

PORT WORKERS' STRIKE

THE STRIKE OF the three lakh port and dock workers throughout India will continue till their "legitimate demands" are met, an-

nounced Shanti Patel, MP and president, All India Port and Dock Workers' Federation. Patel remarked that the government's declaration of the strike as illegal "has only strengthened the resolve to fight till victory is achieved." He appealed to PM Indira Gandhi not to make the issue one of prestige.

VIOLENCE IN PUNJAB

TWO PERSONS WERE shot dead and 11 others injured as terrorist activities continued unabated in different parts of Punjab. The two were gunned down by miscreants in a Firozpur-bound passenger train on the Ludhiana-Firozpur section of the Northern

Railway. The terrorists also robbed some 30 passengers of their valuables. The police arrested 32 persons on charges of violating prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrPC.

LABOURERS SHOT DEAD

EIGHT LANDLESS LABOURERS, mostly Harijans and Yadavas, were shot dead in the Lalsuna village of Masaurhi sub-division of Patna district. Reports alleged that the landholders' henchmen had done this to get even with the local Kisan Majdoor Samiti which was suspected to have been responsible for the killing of two landholders of the area in the first week of March.

THE IDEAS PAGE



CR Sasikumar

When the taps run dry

To reimagine Bengaluru's waterscape, it is essential to rebuild our lost relationship with the many meanings of water



SEEMA MUNDOLI

baavis (wells/stepwells), and *gokattes* (ponds for washing cattle). The lakes supported livelihoods such as grazing and fodder collection, fishing, and agriculture. *Nagarkallus* (snake stones) and shrines on the lake bund were worshipped by the local communities. Children and adults spent afternoons swimming in these lakes, while women foraged for greens that they included in the family meals. Thus, the lakes were central to the economic, cultural, and social lives of the local community.

But this almost idyllic waterscape that supported different kinds of use and was of immense ecological significance has undergone massive changes. Beginning in colonial times, many of these water sources were converted to different kinds of land use, a practice which continued after Independence. Thus, lakes became bus stands and stadiums. Ponds were filled for building homes. Wells fell to disuse. The transformation of the city into India's software capital, beginning in the 1990s, came at an especially huge cost. Buildings have come up where once wetlands were located, and the area covered by lakes has also reduced. The channels that enabled the flow of water between upstream and downstream lakes were encroached or filled up. The few remaining lakes, which were once seasonal, have become perennial — perennially filled with sewage water and garbage dumped from homes, hospitals, and business establishments.

As the city urbanised, the need for water increased — but the supply was marked by inequity. The affluent layouts and apartment complexes in the city's core were connected through the municipal piped water system. In the peripheral areas that did not have access to municipal water, the water tankers filled the gap. At the same time, both in the centre of the city and the periphery, the slums and layouts where the poor lived struggled to get sufficient water even for basic needs such as drinking, cooking and sanitation. Thus, the right to water, a fundamental human right, has been denied to a large population of urban poor.

Meanwhile, it is the mandate of the government to provide safe and sufficient water to all. With the local water bodies lost to a rapidly urbanising Bengaluru, water for the city has been brought in from the Cauvery

As the city urbanised, the need for water increased — but the supply was marked by inequity. The affluent layouts and apartment complexes in the city's core were connected through the municipal piped water system. In the peripheral areas that did not have access to municipal water, the water tankers filled the gap. At the same time, both in the centre of the city and the periphery, the slums and layouts where the poor lived struggled to get sufficient water even for basic needs such as drinking, cooking and sanitation. Thus, the right to water, a fundamental human right, has been denied to a large population of urban poor.

river more than a hundred kilometres away. Supplementing this is water from the Arkavathy river, and water pumped from government-owned borewells. Laws, guidelines, and schemes related to rainwater harvesting, sinking private borewells and treatment of sewage water have been introduced over the years with the objective of conserving water. The responsibility of the government and the citizens when it comes to water is thus laid out, to some extent. However, the failure in dealing with the responsibility is evident in the extreme water scarcity Bengaluru is facing today.

It is time for the city and its residents to reflect on the three Rs.

First, reworking our relationship with water. This will require that the city and its residents reconnect with water in ways the generations earlier did — making the remnant lakes, ponds, and wells central to the social and cultural lives of the city, and wherever possible also to support the livelihoods of those who continue to depend on these water bodies, such as fishers, grazers, and foragers. Second, addressing the inequity in access to water. We cannot have a section of the city's population using water to fill their swimming pools while another section, a considerable majority at that, struggles to get safe and sufficient water even for their basic needs. Water is a shared resource, a right of every resident of the city — not just of the affluent. Third, if water is a right, then each of us needs to be responsible for its sustainable use. The city and its residents need to be conscious of where every drop of water comes from, how and how much water is used, how much can be recycled and what is the best use of sewage water.

Today, Bengaluru's association with water seems to be caught in an endless cycle of dealing with scarcity and flooding. There is water scarcity now. Once the monsoon starts, the fear of flooding will grip the city. Bengaluru needs to move away from this continuous negative, and stress-inducing, association with water by committing to the three Rs — building our lost relationship with the many meanings of water; ensuring equal right to water for all; and being responsible for every single drop of water we use.

The writer is faculty at Azim Premji University



ARUN PRAKASH

ADMIRAL LAXMINARAYAN RAMDAS, PVSM, AVSM, VrC, VSM, former chief of the naval staff, sailed into the sunset on March 15. He had lived a life in keeping with his high principles, beliefs and convictions, and many admirers mourn his demise. Born in the Tamil-Brahmin neighbourhood of Matunga, Mumbai, Adm Ramdas (fondly known as "Ramu" in the navy) grew up and received his education in Delhi. Consequently, he could startle guests by switching from chaste Tamil to rustic Punjabi with felicity. Having served with distinction at every rung of the naval hierarchy, in India and abroad, he became the first Indian-trained officer (of the first course of the Joint Services Wing), to reach the apex of the Indian Navy in 1990.

In 1992, when I received orders to report to New Delhi as naval assistant to the chief of naval staff, I was shocked. The general consensus was also that the CNS had taken a risky call in picking a naval aviator with zero staff-experience as his aide. But, as I was to discover, decisiveness and a sound instinct were characteristic of Adm Ramdas. For me, this tenure in the proximity of a demanding and

War hero and pacifist

Admiral Ramdas helmed Indian Navy at a critical juncture, championed social causes

cerebral chief proved to be a hugely educational experience. The 1990s were an eventful decade. No sooner had the USSR disintegrated than US promptly made overtures for military-to-military cooperation with India. While the other services hesitated, Adm Ramdas decided that it was time for the Indian Navy (IN) to shed its insularity and initiated the first ever Indo-US naval drills in May 1992. This was the first "Exercise Malabar," whose 26th edition took place in 2023.

Malabar was shortly followed by an invitation to visit Washington. Accompanying him to interactions with the US Navy Chief, the Chairman Joint Chiefs, as well as politicians and diplomats, it was obvious to me that his intellectual depth, knowledge of international affairs and suave demeanour had won Adm Ramdas much respect and many friends, in the Pentagon as well as in Foggy Bottom.

His vision of an outward-looking Indian Navy encompassed the novel idea of an "Indian Ocean panchayat," which he mooted in many forums, but which did not, then, find favour with the diplomatic establishment. It was two years after his retirement that this

concept bore fruit; first, in the form of "Exercise Milan," which saw a gathering of five navies in Port Blair, and later as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2008.

At home, the economic crisis had imposed severe budgetary constraints on the navy's operations, as well as logistics support and maintenance resources. Urging the fleets and dockyards to improvise, Adm Ramdas coined a slogan for the navy, "Much more, with much less," which inspired us to tighten our collective belts, and find innovative ways of maintaining the navy's operational tempo.

Parents of three bright daughters, the Admiral and his wife were strong advocates of gender equality and opportunities for women, causes not frequently espoused then. In November 1992, they were proud witnesses as the Indian Navy became the first amongst Indian armed forces to commission 22 women officers in Goa.

A veteran of the 1971 war, in which he was decorated for gallantry, Adm Ramdas remained an ardent votary of nuclear restraint as well as peace and harmony in the Subcontinent. I recall his profound anguish as

news of the demolition of the Babri Masjid trickled in on December 6, 1992, and he sought an urgent meeting with then prime minister P V Narasimha Rao to convey his concerns about the maintenance of communal harmony in the country.

On doffing his uniform, Adm Ramdas made a brief foray into party politics as an anti-corruption campaigner and then retired to his rural retreat in Alibaug, Maharashtra, to serve social causes. His enduring concerns about the armed forces remained focussed on what he perceived as creeping politicisation, and the dangers of possible contagion with the communal virus.

Having ably helmed the navy at a critical juncture, when India was coming to terms with the post-Cold War era and coping with an economic crisis, he transitioned smoothly into civilian life, as a doughty crusader for social causes and for his strongly-held political beliefs. His passing leaves a void, not only for the naval fraternity, but also for his many admirers and acolytes in national life.

The writer is a retired chief of naval staff

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The world cannot continue to remain silent and watch the complete annihilation of the Palestinian people. Israel has been able to create the narrative that criticising [it] should be considered *ipso facto* antisemitic. It's time for the Western countries to take meaningful action to end Israel's aggression." — THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Towards a less divided polity

One Nation One Election will encourage cooperative federalism, with national and state parties and governments working in alignment



ABHINAV PRAKASH

THE HIGH-LEVEL COMMITTEE on One Nation One Election (ONOE), headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, submitted its report on simultaneous polls to President Droupadi Murmu on March 14. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also often talked about the need to synchronise the national and state elections to strengthen both the democratic structure and governance in India. In fact, in the initial decades after Independence, elections to the House of People and state legislative assemblies were simultaneous. However, over the course of time, dissolution of the Houses before the expiry of the tenure — both in the case of the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies (Under Articles 83 and 172 of the Constitution of India) and imposition of President's Rule under Article 356 — disrupted the cycle.

Elections in the states and the Centre fell out of step, and successive governments made no systematic attempt to change the situation. Consequently, the present situation has evolved, and every year, several state elections are being conducted. It seems that Indian democracy has become a perpetual election cycle and elections have become an end unto themselves. This has several consequences for governance, financial resources, and democracy itself.

Given the size of India and its burgeoning population, even state elections are costly affairs involving elaborate logistic and security measures. Significant resources are directed towards conducting elections, which can be better utilised if elections are consolidated in a single process. The state of Uttar Pradesh had elections in 2022, involving massive deployment of administrative and security machinery. Now, in 2024, the same process will be repeated, this time for the Lok Sabha election. Simultaneous elections would have enabled efficient and economical utilisation of the resources apart from ensuring that the administration is more focused on governance than just managing elections every two years.

ONOE would also give political parties, especially those in the government, breathing space to focus on long-term policies instead of short-term populist measures. One of the major threats to the democratic process and ethos is electoral corruption. Of late, several parties have been promising freebies and populist measures instead of their governance track record during elections to manipulate voters. Simultaneous elections will curtail the scope for such irresponsible politics, which is already putting an unbearable strain on state resources and impeding growth prospects.

ONOE will also reduce election fatigue among voters, thus increasing active participation in the electoral process and ensuring higher voter turnout. The quality of a democracy depends on the discourse within it.

Frequent polls and the highly competi-

tive nature of Indian elections unfortunately lead to negative campaigning based on caste, religion and regional polarisation by several political actors. The issues of policy and governance often get sidelined, with attempts being made to charge up the electorate with emotional appeals and false propaganda. One can hope that simultaneous elections will reduce divisiveness and compel political parties and various actors to discuss their long-term vision and agenda for the betterment of their constituencies.

Any policy change or systemic reform invariably leads to some sections of society losing out on their privileges. Frequent elections act as a deterrent for political parties to form a consensus to undertake such an overhaul, even if they all agree on the importance of it. ONOE will enable the government to enact bold policy measures to address critical issues like pollution, and climate change and reforms like labour laws and agricultural laws, which might create short-term pain for long-term gain.

One of the many constraints on economic growth in India is the policy arbitrariness, inconsistency and socialist populism adopted by several sections of the political class to win elections. ONOE promotes stability in the government, which will improve governance and the climate for business, boosting investor confidence. Opponents of ONOE argue that it will undermine federalism. But simultaneous elections were the norm in the initial decades of independence with no demonstrable damage to federalism. In fact, simultaneous elections may encourage a more cooperative federalism with national and state parties and governments working in close and synchronised alignment. It has greater potential for governments at different levels to collaborate more closely on policy implementation, as they would be elected at the same time and possibly for the same duration. It can lead to a more integrated approach to addressing national and state issues.

The concerns about regional issues getting overshadowed by national issues are also misplaced. First, Indian voters have demonstrated time and again that they can distinguish between national, state and local elections, even if they are conducted simultaneously or at short intervals. Secondly, the reverse may also be true — parties may be forced to prioritise regional issues and concerns along with national issues. The result could be a more balanced political discourse as no political party, be it regional or national, can afford to be indifferent to national or regional issues.

One of the most important recommendations of the Kovind panel is that elections to municipalities and panchayats should be synchronised with the elections to the House of the People and state legislative assemblies and should be conducted within 100 days of national and state elections. It has the potential to finally systematise, revitalise and empower local governance, something which has eluded the third tier of the government. It will truly strengthen the grassroots democracy and empower the citizenry like never before. The report will undoubtedly serve as the basis of future discussions on the issue of One Nation, One Election.

The writer is national vice-president, BJP youth wing

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GUARANTEES ABOUND

THIS REFERS TO the 'Freeze frame' by E P Unny (IE, March 18). The political parties contesting the Lok Sabha elections 2024 seem to be first in the history of the country to employ guarantees as a major incentive for voters. After free electricity, water, WiFi, ration and transport, declaration of cash incentives are the latest competition among parties. Women have been promised amounts ranging from Rs 1,000 to one lakh. Guarantees seem as unpredictable as the monsoons. This is because all parties are notorious for making promises and not being able to fulfil them.

Subhash Vaid, New Delhi

ALL EYES ON ECI

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Lok in Lok Sabha' (IE, March 18). The ruling BJP and PM Narendra Modi will be seeking a third term based on his government's track record over the past 10 years. For the Opposition, it's a "do or die" battle after its defeat in the last two elections. Since 2019, India has witnessed rapid and massive changes, the good and the bad. Given the circumstances, the ECI has a difficult job in ensuring that the poll process is not only fair but also seen as such. In the conflict between the claim to a right to privacy by donors and the voter's right to information, the ECI's ambiguity is unwarranted. The ECI must know that all eyes are on it when it comes to assessing the biggest democratic exercise in the world. It's crucial that it contemplates its role in the process.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

3 more held for assault on foreign students at Gujarat Univ

RITUSHARMA, HARSH CHOWDHARY & ADITI RAJA
AHMEDABAD, VADODARA,
MARCH 18

THREE MORE persons were arrested on Monday in connection with the assault on foreign students offering namaz at their hostel on Gujarat University campus, taking the total number of arrests to five.

Police identified the three arrested persons as Narapura resident Kshitij Kamlesh Pandey (22), Ghatodia resident Jitendra Ghanshyam Patel (31) and Memnagar resident Sahil Arunbhai Dudhiuva (21). While Pandey lives at a paying guest accommodation and is originally from Gandhidham, Patel is an AC repairman, the police said in a statement. They have been remanded for three days.

The accused were part of a mob of 20-25 people who barged into the university's international boys' hostel Saturday night and allegedly assaulted five

foreign students for offering namaz during Ramzan. The police had nabbed two other accused — Hitesh Rakhubhai Mewada and Bharat Damodarbhaji Patel — Sunday.

According to a senior police officer, the incident turned violent when a foreign student allegedly slapped a local protesting against the namaz being offered in the hostel.

"There had been protests against the foreign students offering namaz multiple times since Ramzan commenced. We have learnt that some local students had already raised objections to the foreign students offering namaz at the platform in the A-block (hostel) courtyard, which also has an inscription in Arabic," a top official told *The Indian Express*.

"There had been a verbal altercation between the foreign students and some locals earlier during which one of the local students got told off by the foreign students... The local students appear to have established



The new hostel facility for foreign students at Gujarat University. *Nirmal Harindran*

contact with some others, who are not residents of the campus, to intervene in the matter," the officer said.

"On Saturday evening, when the protestors arrived on the campus, one of the Afghan students slapped one of the locals, who was questioning the security guard about the students offering namaz in the open... That is where the matter turned violent as the protestors reacted by

assaulting the students and vandalising their vehicles and belongings."

Gujarat University V-C Prof Neerja Gupta, who has decided to impose a 10 pm "curfew" on the foreign students given that elections have been announced and they have exams, also said that the attack was a "backlash" after a foreign student slapped a local. She said the university decided to shift the foreign students out of the GU

hostel block because they were in trauma and were "scared". Gupta said the foreign students ought to have been "mentored in a better way" for cultural assimilation. "It's not a question of religious practice, it might be a cultural practice. For example, they eat non-veg. Gujarat is primarily a vegetarian society. We have to tell them you can't leave leftovers in the flush... So there might be (issues) of cultural sensitivity, there might be religious sensitivity. And because these are foreign students, they come into notice very quickly," Gupta told *The Indian Express*.

Recounting the events of Saturday night, a 20-year-old student from Ivory Coast said "the mob entered the premises and started abusing his fellow hostel mates". "I tried to intervene, but a stone hit my hand, and another hit my back. I ran to my room to protect myself, but the mob entered our rooms, destroyed everything, and stole Rs 6,000 from me. We don't know them, we couldn't recognise a single face from the mob. We have not done

anything wrong or provoked them in any way. I still don't understand why they attacked us."

Another student from Malawi shared a similar ordeal. "We were in our rooms, busy with our work, when we heard noise outside. The mob was attacking. Stones came flying into our rooms, and I was scared for my life. We are students. It is the government's duty to keep us safe," said the final-year student of computer science and engineering.

According to another student, he saw his "friends jumping from the first floor to save themselves from the violent mob". "We understand there are violent people everywhere. But actions by individuals make everyone look bad," another student remarked.

A Mozambique student expressed concerns over being labelled anti-nationals. "I don't know what their motive was, but I read a post labelling us anti-nationals. If people here see us with hatred, I don't think I am safe here," he said. (*Harsh Chowdhary is an intern with The Indian Express*)

Don't seal premises over 60% Kannada signage rule: HC

Rule *prima facie* untenable, says court

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, MARCH 18

IN AN interim order while admitting a writ petition filed by the Retailers Association of India, the Karnataka HC asked the state government not to take "precipitative action" like shutting down business establishments for failure to implement a 60 per cent Kannada signage rule prescribed under a newly passed law in the state.

A single judge bench of the High Court observed that the rule prescribing the shut down of an enterprise for not having 60 per cent of its signage in Kannada is *prima facie untenable*, and said that the matter would require consideration after calling for objections from the state.

"Learned Advocate General would also submit that the intention of the state is not to seal down any business undertakings and to enforce 60 per cent of the boards to be in Kannada. The matter would require consideration and for the purpose of consideration would require the statement of objections by the State, as the Act is called in question. Therefore, the state shall not insist on the contents of the circular dated 28.02.2024 only in regard to sealing down of the premises," Justice M Nagaprassana observed.

In February this year, the Karnataka legislature passed the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development (Amendment) Act, 2024 to ensure that all signages in the state have a 60 per cent Kannada component. The move followed protests by pro-Kannada organisations in Bengaluru against the use of 100 per cent English signages by commercial establishments.

With the retailers expressing difficulty in the implementation of the Kannada signage rule in the time prescribed by the state, Advocate General Shashi Kiran Shetty assured the court that the new law was yet to come into force through a notification.

"Till the clarification is issued, no precipitative action shall be taken against the petitioners, only if the Act has not come into force," the HC said while emphasising that if the law has come into force, then the state must not insist on closing premises for non-compliance.

Indian student dies in US, probe rules out foul play

YOSHITA SINGH
NEW YORK, MARCH 18

AN INDIAN student died in Boston and initial investigation has ruled out any foul play, officials said Monday.

"Deeply saddened to learn about the unfortunate demise of Mr. Abhijeet Paruchuru, an Indian student in Boston," the Consulate General of India in New York said in a post on X.

Paruchuru's parents are based in Connecticut and are in direct touch with detectives.

Initial investigations ruled out foul play, the consulate said.

The consulate said it "rendered assistance in documentation and transportation of his mortal re-

A circular was subsequently issued on February 28, 2024 by the state in furtherance of the new law with an indication that "if 60 per cent of the boards are not in Kannada, those business establishments or undertakings would be sealed down".

"This, *prima facie*, is untenable," the Karnataka HC said in preliminary observations on Monday after the Retailers Association of India and seven retail firms — Titan, PVR Inox, Arvind Lifestyles, Infinite Retail, Aditya Birla, H&M and Hardcastle Restaurants — approached the HC over the circular.

The Retailers Association has argued that prior to the amendment of the Kannada Language Comprehensive Amendment Act the law only stated that signboards must have Kannada letters and did not specify 60 per cent condition.

The HC observed that the "unamended provision mandated 50 per cent of the boards in all commercial establishments and business undertakings to be in Kannada language, which was increased to 60 per cent by the amendment, the tenability or otherwise of the legislation required to be considered".

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Since the beginning of 2024, there have been at least half a dozen deaths of Indian and Indian-origin students in the US.

The attacks prompted the Indian Embassy in Washington and its consulates to hold a virtual interaction with Indian students from across the US, discussing ways to stay connected with the larger diaspora. PTI

ED raids 10 places in Delhi-NCR fake cancer drugs case

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate said Monday it has attached a plot and a farmhouse in Delhi worth more than Rs 16 crore belonging to Shravna Gupta, a former managing director of realty major Emaar MGF, in connection with the ongoing money laundering investigation into the Rs 3,600-crore VVIP choppers purchase scam.

"A chargesheet was filed against the businessman in this case. Extradition proceedings against him are underway after he fled the country in November 2019," an ED spokesperson said.

"Gupta received proceeds of crime in companies such as Natlife

ED raids 10 places in Delhi-NCR fake cancer drugs case

New Delhi: Multiple ED teams Monday conducted searches at 10 locations in Delhi-NCR and seized Rs 65 lakh in cash as part of a money laundering investigation linked to a Delhi Police case on the production and distribution of fake cancer medications.

The recent breakthrough by the Delhi Police's Crime Branch led to arrest of 12 people in connection with illicit medicine trade. Following this, the ED initiated a money laundering inquiry.

According to the ED, kickbacks amounting to Euro 70 million were paid by AgustaWestland for influencing the deal of supply of 12 VVIP choppers in its favour. ENS

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New Delhi: Multiple ED teams Monday conducted searches at 10 locations in Delhi-NCR and seized Rs 65 lakh in cash as part of a money laundering investigation linked to a Delhi Police case on the production and distribution of fake cancer medications.

The recent breakthrough by the Delhi Police's Crime Branch led to arrest of 12 people in connection with illicit medicine trade. Following this, the ED initiated a money laundering inquiry.

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Kolkata: Under-construction building collapses, at least nine persons killed

Mamata visits site, asks authorities to take action against those responsible; rescue efforts continue

SWEETY KUMARI & RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
KOLKATA, MARCH 18

HOURS AFTER a five-storey under-construction building collapsed in the congested Garden Reach area of Kolkata, killing at least nine people, rescuers on Monday used gas cutters to reach out to others still feared trapped under the rubble.

According to officials, disaster management group personnel also gave water and oxygen to those stuck under the building, which collapsed late on Sunday.

The deceased include Sana Begum and Hasina Khatun, Ramjan Ali, Nasimuddin and Abdulla. The Kolkata police and disaster management groups said at least 13 were rescued from the collapsed building.

"We have been working since late last night. Those trapped inside will be rescued," said Vineet Goyal, Commissioner, Kolkata Police, who oversaw the rescue operations. As rescuers reached out to them with water and oxygen, disaster management group personnel with gas cutters



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visits the Garden Reach area where the "illegal" building collapsed on Sunday night, in Kolkata on Monday. Express

moved through the rubble to rescue those trapped inside. A huge contingent of police personnel have been deployed in the area, along with fire services personnel, disaster management groups, and ambulances.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who recently received a head injury, visited the spot and said the building was illegally constructed and has asked authorities to take action against the responsible.

"This is a congested area. Such areas have developed over the years. A section

of promoters (builders), not all, should keep in mind that poor people live around their construction site. I have asked the mayor (Firhad Hakim), and he said the building had no legal permission. I have asked the authorities to take action against the builder," she said.

"The administration stands by the families who have lost their near ones and those who are injured. I have asked the administration to see about the (reconstruction) of houses which were damaged. Those who are

still (trapped) will be rescued soon," she said.

Mayor Firhad Hakim, who along with minister Sujit Bose oversaw the rescue operations since Sunday night, said those trapped would be rescued soon. "More bodies may be inside. We will give Rs 5 lakh to the families of those dead and Rs 1 lakh to those who were injured. Thirteen people were rescued. Those injured have been admitted to a local hospital," said Hakim.

"It was an illegal building. I have asked the police to take action against the builders," added Hakim.

According to residents, concrete chunks started falling off the under-construction building after midnight, and later the entire structure collapsed, with parts of it falling on neighbouring residences in the densely populated area. The building collapsed on at least seven houses around the site, where residents had been sleeping. They said the building had been under construction for the last six months. They also alleged that the building lacked proper permission from Kolkata Municipal Corporation and the police.

In a post on X late Sunday, Suvenu Adhikari, BJP MLA and leader of the Opposition, wrote: "A 5 storey building (illegally constructed) has collapsed at Hazari Mollah Bagan; Garden Reach; Metiabruz, KMC Ward No. 134. This particular area falls under the so called 'citadel' of Hon'ble Mayor of Kolkata and Municipal Affairs Minister. I urge @chief_west, Secretary @HomeBengal, @CPKolkata to immediately involve the West Bengal State Disaster Management Team for immediate Rescue & Relief."

Meanwhile, Governor C V Ananda Bose visited the spot and took stock of the situation at the rescue site on Monday. He also visited the family members of the injured persons at a local hospital.

Bose said he would appeal to the Chief Minister to form a task force to check the rampant illegal constructions in the area.

"The supervising authority did not perform its duties properly. Accidents are not always accidental, it is also human failure. The government can stop this illegal construction if it wants," he said.

Bose said he would hold a meeting with experts over the issue.

other courts.

The plea said that in the instant case, only the trial was transferred (to Maharashtra) under "extraordinary circumstances" by way of judicial intervention and it is a fact apparent on the face of record that in the transfer petition concerned, the issue of remission was not the matter in issue.

"Hence, it is not just and fair to presume that vide the said transfer order, appropriate government as per section 432(7) CrPC also stood changed to being that of the transferee state," it said.

The review plea filed by Ramesh Rupabhai Chandana said the top court erred while passing the impugned order and overruling judgment dated May 13, 2022, passed by another bench of the apex court.

The Gujarat government and two of the 11 convicts have already filed a petition seeking a review of the January 8 verdict in which remission orders of all of them were cancelled and they were asked to surrender.

Listing reasons for seeking a review of the verdict, the plea said the SC bench erred in its finding "on the ground that the remission order passed by the competent authority cannot be challenged on factual grounds, inter alia, the nature of the crime, impact on society and society's cry for justice after the conviction and sentence has attained finality in the eyes of law."

It said that overruling of the judgment dated May 13, 2022, passed by a coordinate of this court, which allowed the Gujarat government to grant remission as per the 1992 policy, the impugned order of January 8 was in contravention of the doctrine of Comity of Courts.

The doctrine of Comity of Courts refers to courts respecting the laws and decisions of

SC grants bail to UP MLA Abbas Ansari in 2019 arms licence case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

THE SUPREME Court on Monday granted bail to Uttar Pradesh MLA Abbas Ansari in connection with an arms licence case registered at Lucknow in October 2019.

A bench comprising Justices B R Gavai and Sandeep Mehta passed the order while hearing Abbas Ansari's plea challenging the Allahabad High Court order rejecting his bail application in the case. Abbas Ansari, the son of gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari, had moved the SC against the November 20 last year order of the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad HC.

An FIR was lodged against the MLA from Mau constituency on October 12, 2019 for alleged irregularities in obtaining arms licence and buying guns.

Teacher shot by constable in UP; protesters stop evaluation work

Muzaffarnagar: A teacher was shot by an Uttar Pradesh Police head constable following an altercation in the Civil Lines area here, an official said on Monday. Angry teachers from different colleges held a protest blocking the circular road.

They demanded strict action against the accused and began a boycott of evaluation work of Uttar Pradesh Board exam answer sheets.

The deceased — Dharmendra Kumar — was part of a team of the education department from Varanasi that had brought UP Board examination answer sheets to the local SD Inter college, Superintendent of Police (City) Satyanarain Parjapat said. PTI

GATE 2024 toppers: AIR 1 Raja Majhi left ISRO job to teach

DEEKSHA TERI
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18



Raja Majhi

HAILING FROM a small district in West Bengal, Raja Majhi achieved AIR 1 in Electronics and Communication Engineering stream of the recently released Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE) 2024 result.

After securing 84.67 (raw marks) and 1000 GATE score, he is now hoping to secure a seat in IISc Bangalore or IIT Bombay.

Majhi, the son of a Mathematics teacher, has always dreamt of being a teacher like his father, and he has decided to not quit his lecturer job even after achieving the top rank in GATE 2024. "I will take a study leave from the institute I am teaching... but I plan to go back to teaching in the same college... My motive behind pursuing an MTech is to uplift myself," he said.

The 29-year-old first appeared for GATE in 2016 after graduating from Jadavpur University and secured AIR 7. But as he was also placed at Indian Oil, he decided to take up the job — a decision he regrets now. "I thought getting a job would be the ideal for my profession, but I quickly realised that I was unable to use my skills in that job and I felt stuck. Since teaching was my first passion, I decided to quit my job and take up teaching. Though I had an offer from ISRO, I decided to become a lecturer in a West Bengal college," he said.

Raja prepared for GATE 2024 while working a full time job. He dedicated 7-8 hours a week for GATE preparation with a few additional hours on weekends. "I took online classes from PhysicsWallah, but made my own notes. I also made short notes at the end of every chapter. This helped me save time during my



IT'S HOLI-DAY(S)

Students play Holi at the end of their exams, in a school in Patiala on Monday. PTI

Before final order, EC sent 2 letters to state for BMC chief's transfer

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

THE ELECTION Commission of India (ECI) on Monday told Maharashtra Chief Secretary to immediately transfer commissioner of the Brihammumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), Iqbal Singh Chahal, from his present post and all Additional Municipal Commissioners and Deputy Municipal Commissioners who have served more than three years in the present posting and are posted in their home district in Maharashtra.

The ECI is also learnt to have conveyed its displeasure for not transferring the municipal commissioners and additional municipal commissioners of (BMC) despite two letters.

While the ECI has sought the compliance report in the matter by 5 pm on March 19, the state government has not yet come



Iqbal Singh Chahal

out with a transfer order of the officials concerned.

The ECI letter stated that on December 21, 2023, it wrote to the state government and it was conveyed that no officer connected directly with elections shall be allowed to continue in the present district (revenue district) of posting, or posted in home district or completed three years or completing three years before June 30, 2024.

"Under Para 5 (ii) of this letter, it has been clarified that these instructions shall also cover the officer deputed in municipal corporations ie municipal commissioners/additional and deputy commissioners are also

covered under the transfer/posting policy," the letter from ECI said.

It added, "The Government of Maharashtra did not comply with the order and instead vide its letter No. AEO-1023/C.R.523/2023/X dated 15/01/2024 sought clarification if these instructions are also applicable to the divisional commissioners, municipal commissioners, additional commissioners, chief executive officer of zila parshads, etc."

On February 22, 2024, the ECI clarified that municipal commissioners and additional municipal commissioner are covered under para 5.2 of ECI instruction dated 21/12/2023. It was also clarified that divisional commissioners and chief executive officers of zila parshad are also covered under commission transfer/posting instruction in case they are supervisory officers in the direct chain of command of the election related officers/employees.

Kumar has been at the centre of many controversies, with several Opposition leaders in West Bengal pointing to his alleged links with the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC). Ahead of the 2016 Assembly polls, Opposition leaders alleged that Kumar, the Kolkata Police commissioner at the time, was tapping their phones and acting



ATRI MITRA
KOLKATA, MARCH 18

IN A reshuffle ahead of the Lok Sabha polls on Monday, the Election Commission (EC) moved West Bengal's Director General of Police (DGP) Rajeev Kumar to the state's Information and Technology department and appointed him its secretary.

Vivek Sahay, a 1988-batch IPS officer, serving as the Director General and Commandant General (Home Guards) has taken over as the state police chief. Sahay was previously in charge of security control of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and was suspended in March 2021 ahead of that year's Assembly election after the CM injured her leg while campaigning in Nandigram.

At about three years later, the Opposition reiterated its accusation. In February 2019, the CBI raided Kumar's house in connection with the Sarada chit fund case. In an unprecedented move, Mamata Banerjee sat on a dharna at Kolkata's Esplanade. After about 70-odd hours, Banerjee ended her dharna after the Supreme Court directed that no coercive steps, including ar-

rest, should be taken against Kumar. The court directed Kumar to "faithfully cooperate" with the investigating agency.

Last December, when Kumar, who was serving as the secretary of the state IT department, was appointed the state's DGP, the officer's alleged closeness to the TMC dispensation was again in the spotlight. His removal as the state police chief has once also stirred a political row.

CPI(M) state secretary Mohammad Salim alleged that Kumar was "busy hiding the illegal work of the ruling party" and that he had "guarded" Sheikh Shahjahan, the now-arrested TMC strongman accused of sexually harassing women in Sandeshkali in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district.

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya said Kumar's removal was in line with EC's duty to "conduct elections in a free and fair atmosphere".

In response, the TMC alleged that the BJP was "controlling" the EC. "The BJP has taken control of the EC like other Central agencies. This decision reflects that," said TMC leader Kunal Ghosh.

FULL REPORT
www.indianexpress.com

'Cheap maal' and 'feel of Europe': How accused sold the Russia dream

JAY MAZOOMDAAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

"CHHE HAZAAR mein Russian mile na mile, Russian visa zaroor mil jayega (You may or may not get a Russian for Rs 6,000, but you will get a Russian visa for sure)!"

This is the punchline of the promotional video that starts with a young client lamenting about inflation: "Jo cheez chhe hazaar ki thi aaj woh 10,000 mein mil rahi hai, no problem (We are experts in Russian visa... we will get it done even if you come to us after visa refusal)," claims another video, posted by OSD Bros

Travels & Visa Services on February 23 to announce the shifting of its Delhi office from Laxmi Nagar to Janakpuri.

The "sabzi mandi" being referred to is Russia. And the video, laced with sexual innuendo, was posted on YouTube by OSD Bros Travels & Visa Services Pvt Ltd — a month before the CBI came calling.

Today, the company is among four being investigated by the agency for misusing student visas to allegedly push Indians into Russia's war against Ukraine. "Hum Russia visa mein expert hai... apka visa agar refuse bhi hu hai, no problem (We are experts in Russian visa... we will get it done even if you come to us after visa refusal)," claims another video, posted by OSD Bros

Travels & Visa Services on February 23 to announce the shifting of its Delhi office from Laxmi Nagar to Janakpuri. The new office of OSD Bros in Delhi's Janakpuri. Express

Pradesh. And the assurance was emphatic: "Aisa possible nahiin hai ki aapko Russia na ja mein... Europe kafeel kaafi aayega achha"

khaasa (It's not possible that you don't like Russia... it will feel quite like Europe.)"

On Wednesday, The Indian Express visited the company's new office, which was rented on March 1 in Janakpuri's Western Mall, and found it locked. A security guard said the walls were done up in the first week of March but nobody has turned up since then to open the office.

According to official records, OSD Bros Travels & Visa Services was set up by two brothers, Deepak and Rakesh Pandey, in 2016. Subsequently, the company opened branches in Delhi, Puducherry, Ahmedabad and Thailand. The CBI FIR filed on March 6 named the company and Rakesh Pandey, one of the two di-

rectors. The Pandey could not be reached for comment as multiple numbers listed on the company's website and social media accounts were switched off.

In the FIR, the CBI named four companies and 15 individuals accused of allegedly trafficking Indian nationals to Russia on the pretext of getting education and jobs with the promise of a better life, and charging huge amounts from them illegally.

"It has also been informed that these agents/ human traffickers are duping Indian students/ citizens for admission in dubious private universities in Russia instead of Govt/ public known universities by offering them free discounted Visa extensions, fee structure, etc.," it said.

On Tuesday, The Indian Express reported that Suyash Mukut, director of another such company, 24X7 RAS Overseas Foundation, and a prime accused in the case, is the son of a BJP corporator in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh. Mukut's other company office did not exist at its registered address in Delhi.

Earlier, on March 9, The Indian Express reported how Faisal Abdul Mutallib Khan, director of Baba Vlogs Overseas Recruitment Solutions Pvt Ltd and another accused in the case, posted promotional videos on YouTube, luring Indian youth with a special Russian government card that would help them secure Schengen visas and even permanent residency.

Classifieds

PERSONAL

We,Ovais Alam and Hina Parveen,R/O/H.No.48,1st-Floor,Pocket-2,Jasola,New Friends-Colony,South-East-Delhi-110025,inform that we have changed our child's name,from Mohammad Ibaad Ovais to Suleman Ovais,for all,future purpose.

0040720645-7

I,megha bisht,D/o-Surendra Singh Bisht,Address: flat, no.B3, rcp-326/p,appointment b-block,raj nagar-2 palam-colony,Delhi 110077,changed my name to Meggie bisht.

0040720654-8

I,Vinod S/o Mr.Chhote Lal/R.O/House-No-F-224, Shakurpur J.I.Colony Anandvas, New Delhi-110034 have changed my name to Mr. Vinod Beniwal, permanently.

0040720696-4

I,VIRENDRA KUMAR/VIRENDRA SINGHAL,S/O JAI PRAKASH,R/O-08,ALKA PURAM ASHOK-COLONY MEERUT-ROAD,HAPUR,U.P.-245101,changed my name to VIRENDRA KUMAR SINGHAL,for all future purposes.

0040720696-1

I,VINOD KUMAR S/O KNAHAIYA LAL,R/O 55,AVTAR ENCLAVE,2ND FLOOR SANT NIRANKARI P.S.PRASHANT VIHAR,DELHI-110063,HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO VINOD KUMAR KHANDELWAL.

0040720654-5

I,Sushil S/O Som Nath R/O,Kacha Koyal depot,Tara Singh Park,Ashok Nagar,Tilak Nagar,New Delhi-110018,have changed my name to Sushil Kumar,for all Purposes.

0040720645-6

I,Sunil Kumar,S/o Baljit Singh,R/o-308/5 Modal Town Bahadurgarh,Distt.Jhajjar Haryana-124507,inform that Sunil Kumar and Sunil Kumar Chhillar both are same-person.

0040720675-8

I,Sumit Kaur Kohli,D/o Inderjeet Singh Kohli R/o QP-62, 2nd-Floor Pitampura-Delhi-110034,have changed my name to Manpreet Kohli

0040720661-4

I,Suman Lata Verma W/O shiv mohan Verma R/O C-3/26 yumuna vihar delhi 110053,have changed my name to Suman verma.

0040720654-9

I,Srinivasan Padmasani D/o,Athur Venkatachari Srinivasan R/o,B-18,2nd-Floor, Adharsh-Arya Apartments, Plot-No.39A, Sector-6, Dwarka,New Delhi-110075,have changed my-name to Padmasani Srinivasan.

0040720696-5

I,Shweta Chourasia,W/o Ramkishan Chourasia, R/o,C/505,Eco-Village-2 SuperTech,Greater-Noida West,Gautam Budh-Nagar,U.P.201009,have changed my name to Shweta Nawariya,permanently.

0040720645-8

I,Shristi D/o-Sunil Kumar, Address-C-1002, Mohammadmupr-central govt-flat New Delhi-110066, changed my name to Shristi Singh

0040720654-7

I,Satish Kumar Sudan,s/o Rajkumar Sudan,R/o K-1,Jhule Bal-Para,West Patel Nagar,Delhi-110008,have changed my name to Satish Sudan,for all,future purposes.

0040720675-9

I,Saroj W/o Vijay R/o A-66/D, K.H.No.36/12, Jain Colony Barwala Delhi-110039 have changed my name to Pooja Ahmad.

0040720661-3

I,Sarif Ahmed,S/o Abdul Samad,R/o-D-394 Gali-No-14,Brijpuri,Delhi-110094,have changed my name to Sharif Ahmad.

0040720645-6

I,SONIA W/O VIJAY KUMAR R/O KHASRANO.865/2, NARELA ROAD,ALIPUR,DELHI-110036.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM SONAM SINGH TO SONAM,VIDE-AFFIDAVIT IN- DL5931550864957W DATED- 16/03/2024,BEFORE NCT-DELHI.

0040720669-9

I,SARFARAZ,S/o,LADDAN,H.NO-347,GALI NO-10,NEW KARDAM,PURI GOKAL PUR, NORTH EAST DELHI-110094,changed my name to SARFARAZ KHAN,for all,future purposes.

0040720645-2

I,SAKSHI BANSAL,W/O RASHABH GUPTA R/O-A-49,SWASTHYA- VIHAR NIRMAN VIHAR DELHI-110092 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO SAKSHI GUPTA.

0040720645-5

I,Rooro Devi W/o Hari Chand R/o-366 Gali Robin Cinema Subzi Mandi Ghanta Ghar Delhi-110007,have changed my name to Nuro Devi

0040720661-6

I,Reyassuddin Ahmad/Reyassuddin Ahmed,H/o-S/o-Late Ali Ahmed,House.no-N-167A First-floor,Abul-Fazal Enclave Part-1 Thokar-no.5,Jamia-Nagar, New-Delhi-110025,have changed my name to Reyassuddin Ahmed Permanently.

0040720690-3

I,Rajiv Kumar Singh S/o Vijay Singh R/o F-257A,Gali No.15,Adarsh Enclave Phase-6 Aya,Nagar Extension,Aya Nagar Delhi-110047,change my name to Rajiv Singh.

0040720661-5

I,KM SWETA POONIA (Aadarsh-579479321682),D/O DHARAM PAL SINGH, R/O-PLOT.NO.13-A, CHAUHAN ENCLAE, NAJAFGARH, NEW DELHI-110043, inform that KM SWETA POONIA and KM SWETA POONIYANA, both names are same person. My correct name is KM SWETA POONIA.

0040720464-4

I,Rafeeq Ahmad W/o Mohammad Yousef,R/o H.No.86, Vill.Murshadpur, Hapur,Uttar Pradesh-245101 have changed my name to Nahid Parveen,for all purposes.

0040720696-2

I,QAMAR SULTANA,W/O SHARIF AHMED,R/O-C-55/108, GALI-NO.7,KASHMIRI BUILING,CHAUHAN BANGER,SEELAMPUR, DELHI-110053,have change my nametrom QAMAR JAHAN to QAMAR SULTANA for all,future purposes.

0040720675-2

I,NO-13759079X,EX Hav Shakeer Ahmad Ganai, R/O- Reshi Nagar, Shopian. In my service record name of my daughter has been wrongly mentioned as Miss Attaul Qadoos instead of Sanah. It needs correction. Objections be filled to Records JAK Rif/Zila Saini welfare Officer Batamaloo Srinagar within seven days.

0020474192-1

I,Nitin Negi S/o Vinod,R/o 203, 3,Basal Enclave,Basai (50),Gurgaon(Haryana)-122006,have changed my name to Nitin.

0040720645-9

I,Naveen Kumar Sherawat S/O,Zile Singh R/o. 32-A/1,Chirag Delhi Malviya Nagar Delhi-110025 have changed my name to Faiz Ahmed Permanently.

0040720688-1

I,Muhmmmed Aqil / Mohd Aqil,S/O.Mohammed Asghar,H.No-A-225B,Gali-No-1, 1/2,Phase-1,Baghirathi Vihar,Delhi-110094,have changed my name to Mohammed Aqil.

0040720654-3

I,Nand Lal Anand S/o Balak Ram R/o D-88, Sector-36, Noida(U.P) have changed my name to Nand Lal for all future purposes.

0040720624-2

I,Mohammed Abdullah S/O,Mohd Aqil R/O, H.No-A-225B,Gali No-1, 1/2,Phase-1,Baghirathi Vihar,Delhi-110094,have changed my name to Mohd Abdullah.

0040720654-2

I,Mohit Kumar Verma,S/o Ravi Parkash Verma,R/o 2/23,Yudhisther-Gali,Vishwas Nagar,Shahdara,Delhi-110032,have changed my minor Daughter's name,from Mehar to Meher Verma,permanently.

0040720654-1

I,Mohammed Abdulla S/O,Mohd Aqil R/O, H.No-A-225B,Gali No-1, 1/2,Phase-1,Baghirathi Vihar,Delhi-110094,have changed my name to Mohd Abdulla.

0040720688-4

I,Deepthi,W/o Avinash Kumar,R/o-C-338,First Floor,Yojna Vihar,Delhi-110092,have changed my name to Deepthi Arora.Deepthi and Deepthi Arora is one and the same-person.

0040720675-4

I,Charles T/S/o John Thomas,House,no.480,Block - 20 DDA Flats Dakhshin Puri Extension,New Delhi-110062,Have changed my name to Charles Thomas Permanently

0040720688-3

I,MohanaValli Srinivasan D/o,Athur Venkatachari Srinivasan R/o-B-18,2nd-Floor, Adharsh-Arya Apartments, Plot-No.39A, Sector-6, Dwarka,New Delhi-110075,that my father's name is wrongly-written in my Passport No.M8477751 as Athur Venkatachari Srinivasan Srinivasan instead of his correct-name Athur Venkatachari Srinivasan.

0040720696-6

I,Mahesh Sharma,F/o Aditya Sharma,R/o-X/1030,Gali.No.4.5,New-Chand Mohalla,Gandhi Nagar,Delhi-110031,have changed the name of my-Minor Son Aditya Sharma Age-17years and he shall hereafter be known as Aditya Singh.

0040720675-5

I,Madhu Gupta,W/O Vijay Kumar Gupta,R/o, Ward-No-15,House-No.5-Shakti-Nagar. Udhampur J&K-182101,have changed my name to Vijay,Rani all purposes.

0040720654-4

I,MOHINDER SINGH MAKKAR S/HUKUM SINGH R/O H.NO.588,NEAR BATRA HOSPITAL,SECTOR-11,HUDA,PANIPAT,HARYANA-132103.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO MOHINDER SINGH.

0040720661-2

I,LAKSHMI DEVI,mother of,Deepak Kumar Singh,residing at,village Majhiwallia-PO Ubhaon Distt Ballia,UP-227115,have changed my name from Lakshmi Devi to Manbhawati,vide-Affidavit Dated-08.03.2024,at New-Delhi.

0040720661-10

I,Kalpana Kumari Patra,W/o Ashok Kumar Patra,R/o F-1446,7th-Avenue,Gaur City-1, GH 01,Sec-4,Greater-Noida West,Gautam Budh-Nagar,Uttar Pradesh 201306,have changed my name to Kalpana Kumari Nayak,permanently.

0040720645-10

I,KANCHAN HARVEY,D/O HARBANS LAL KUMAR,R/O-TB-503 UNITECH ESCAPE SEC-50,NIRVANA COUNTRY, GURGAON HARYANA-122018.HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO KANCHAN KUMAR.

0040720675-3

I,Reyassuddin Ahmad/Reyassuddin Ahmed,H/o-S/o-Late Ali Ahmed,House.no-N-167A First-floor,Abul-Fazal Enclave Part-1 Thokar-no.5,Jamia-Nagar, New-Delhi-110025,have changed my name to Reyassuddin Ahmed Permanently.

0040720690-3

I,Mohd Haris Shamsi,S/o-Mohammad Amil Shamsi,R/o-856,Sheesh Mahal,Bahadur Garh Road,Azad Market, Delhi-110006,have changed my name to Mohammd Haris Shamsi,for future purposes.

0040720686-6

I,JYOTIW/O VINOD KUMAR KHANDELWAL R/O A/2/1102 ND FLOOR,PASCHIM VIHAR DELHI-110063,HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO JYOTI KHANDELWAL.

0040720654-6

I,IJYOTI W/O RAHUL KUMAR,SHAFI MOHAMMAD DURRANI S/O RUSTAM KHAN R/O H.NO. 24D,POCKET-A, DD, NEW JAFRABAD SHAHDARA HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO SHAFI MOHAMMAD DURRANI FOR ALL PURPOSES IN FUTURE.

I, Sammar Nizam W/o Nesar Khan R/o B-43, J-4/81, KH NO.-37/F,Flat No.-L, S/L, Khirki Extension, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi-110017 have changed my name to Samar Khanam for all Future purposes.

0040720622-1

I,AMIT KHATRI alias AAMIT KHATRI s/o JOGENDER SINGH r/o R-61, Gali No.-15B, SWATANTAR Nagar, Narela, Delhi-110040 have changed my name to AMIT KHATRI permanently.

0040720611-1

I, SUSHIL KUMAR BHAMBHU S/O Khushi Ram R/O House No.24P Sector-17A, Gurgaon Haryana -122001 have changed my name to Sushil Kumar for all future purposes.

0040720680-1

I, Anita bhambu W/O Sushil Kumar House No.24P Sector-17A, Gurgaon Haryana -122001 have changed my name to Anita to for all future purposes.

0040720627-1

I, DIVYA AGGARWAL alias Divya Gupta D/o Sh. Pradeep Aggarwal W/o Sh. Bipul Gupta R/o C-3/132, Janak Puri, West Delhi, Delhi-110058 have changed my name to Divya Aggarwal only for all purposes.

0040720544-4

I, Varsha Bakre W/O Mohit Bakre R/o J-308 Stellar One Sector-1, Greater Noida West Gautam Buddha Nagar U.P. 201306 have changed my Name to Varsha Mohit Bakre for all Future Purposes.

0070894897-1

I, Rakesh Rani W/O MUND RAJ R/O 271, RUMAL WALI GALLI, NEAR GUJAR CHOCK, RAM PURA, TRI NAGAR, DELHI-110025 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO RAKESH KHARI FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSES.

0070894871-1

I, Kapil Kishor S/O U.R. Rakesh Rani W/O MUND RAJ R/O 271, RUMAL WALI GALLI, NEAR GUJAR CHOCK, RAM PURA, TRI NAGAR, DELHI-110025 HAVE CHANGED MY NAME TO RAKESH KHARI FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSES.

0040720645-1

I, Pushpendra Singh JADON S/o SURENDRA SINGH R/O C-56/2, KHASRA NO.1154, HIDEN VIHAR, GALI NO.17, SECTOR-49, NOIDA, U.P.-201301, have changed my name to PUSHPENDRA SINGH

0070894845-1

SENSEX: 72,748.42 ▲ 104.99 (0.14%) NIFTY: 22,055.70 ▲ 32.35 (0.15%) NIKKEI: 39,740.44 ▲ 1,032.80 HANG SENG: 16,737.12 ▲ 16.23 FTSE: 7,728.46 ▲ 1.04 DAX: 17,925.80 ▲ 10.85

₹66,140

₹82.90

\$84.93

₹77,000

Note: Gold, silver rates at Delhi spot market, gold per 10g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) as of March 15

International market data till 1900 IST

PART OF GOVT'S PUSH TO IMPROVE INDIA'S GLOBAL RANKING IN INNOVATION: SINGH

Consultation on deep tech policy in final stages, says DPIIT Secy

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Secretary RK Singh. File

A POLICY for start-ups in the deep tech space is in the final stages of inter-ministerial consultations and it could be released soon, said Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Secretary RK Singh.

Deep tech refers to advanced technologies, a lot of which may still be under development but have the potential to trigger disruptive changes in the future. Singh was addressing a gathering at the Startup Mahakumbh event Monday.

Thousands of start-ups and investors in areas such as artificial intelligence and software-as-a-service, agritech, business-to-business and manufacturing, climate tech, deeptech, direct-to-consumer, gaming and esports, fintech, and incubators and accelerators are expected to participate in the event.

The event is being jointly organised by industry bodies Assocham, Nasscom, Bootstrap Incubation and Advisory Foundation, TiE and Indian Venture and Alternate Capital Association (IVCA). It is also supported by the DPIIT, MeitY Startup Hub (MSH) and Invest India.

During her Interim Budget speech earlier this year, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced a Rs 1 lakh crore fund to provide long-term, low-

cost or zero-interest loans for research and development. She had also promised to launch a new scheme to strengthen deep-tech capabilities in the defence sector.

Debjani Ghosh, president of IT industry lobby group Nasscom, said that India should prioritise the potential opportunities of artificial intelligence (AI) with the right guardrails, rather than being pessimistic about the technology.

"I think what India has to do differently is, while the rest of the world is going around in circles figuring out the risks, the fear narrative rules the west, India has to be different and stand up and talk about the opportunity narrative of AI, with the right oversights," Ghosh said.

Former Niti Aayog CEO and India's G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant called India's start-ups a "national asset" that have grown to

be collectively worth \$350 billion in the last eight years. He said that while India is currently home to the third biggest start-up ecosystem in the world, the next big challenge is to take it to the top spot in the next five years.

At a press briefing before the event, DPIIT Secretary Singh had said that the government's aim was to improve India's global ranking in terms of innovation.

"India ranks at 40 in terms of innovation and our goal is to move up from this. Our aim is to make Startup Mahakumbh not just a big event but also an annual event, which can further propel the growth of the Indian startup ecosystem. The event aims to unite innovators nationwide and transform it into the largest global event of its kind," Singh said at the briefing.

2023 was a challenging year for Indian start-ups. They raised a

total of \$8.3 billion – the lowest they have raised since 2016 when there were much fewer of these firms. Indian start-ups also saw a decline of 72 per cent in the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of funding in the last three years – a signal that the venture capital-fuelled boom that followed the Covid-19 pandemic has ended. In 2022, the country added 23 unicorns, which is the term used to describe private businesses with a valuation of over \$1 billion. In 2023, only two firms could attain that status. More than 20,000 people working at various start-ups lost their jobs in 2023.

2024 could see founders focus more on essential metrics such as increased profitability and reduced cash burn. But investors believe that the funding ecosystem may not get the same traction as in 2021.

With that trend, start-up founders and investors have started calling for support from India's big legacy conglomerates to fund upcoming businesses in the country.

At the press briefing, Info Edge India's Sanjeev Bikhchandani said that while money from venture capital firms or angel investors was only a part of funding source for start-ups, "there's a huge scope for private sector companies to invest from their balance sheets into startups".

As start-ups look for a diverse set of sources for funding, Info Edge India's Bikhchandani said

India needs a higher contribution of investment from corporates and business conglomerates in new ventures.

"Venture capital funds or angel investors are only one part of sources of funds for startups... there's a huge scope for private sector companies to invest from their balance sheets into startups. Typically they would do it in their own strategic areas... but I think India could do with more of that," Bikhchandani said. "There is some participation and support (from larger corporates) this time in Startup Mahakumbh. Hopefully, in future years there will be more."

Zomato's co-founder and CEO Deepinder Goyal also underlined a similar sentiment. "I think established businesses need to nurture startups... and I don't think we have that kind of a culture yet... Larger businesses also need to start funding startups but not with an intention to own them but with an intention to help them become bigger," he said.

Investors seem bullish about the country's start-up journey despite a blip in the last two years. Peak XV Managing Director Rajan Anandan claimed that close to \$20 billion of private capital is lying uninvested and is committed for investment in Indian start-ups. He added that the investment run rate in Indian start-ups before 2021 and 2022, was about \$8-10 billion, which increased to \$60 billion in the two years.

But does generative AI offer something substantive compared to the technology most cars have today?

If you take it in the Indian context, you could have a driver who may not speak English whereas someone else does. Voice interaction with the car has been around for a very long period of time, but that is mostly codified in terms of the commands that you can give and receive. It does not lend itself to natural language processing. That's where we see a large amount of applications coming in, where with a large language model you can use local languages.

For example, if the car has a fault and is going to break down at some point, the generative AI application working in the background can prompt the driver to do a lot of things ahead of time – like direct them to the nearest service station, or even guide them on what they should be doing like driving slower, or changing gears at a particular time to avoid the breakdown... The model can also fetch data from the owner's manual on what they can

do to address the cause of a breakdown.

We have also done an application where there's a monitoring of the battery of an EV. Typically, the battery has a BMS (battery management system) which controls the cooling and the power balancing, but with generative AI, we are also able to predict failure in the pack in a specific module or in a specific cell – and then, there could be self-healing applications which can be built, or the model could direct the technician in a particular service station to be able to either replace the battery, or do some connection, which will enable the battery to work better.

Many regional languages, even though old, have little footprint on the Internet, making it harder to build a model which is good at generating responses in them. How can the Indian context be made better in generative AI?

Creating large language models from scratch today is a very complicated process. One way to do it is that you take an existing model and fine tune the parameters. So the way we have done it is we have created our own framework. You also do not want to expose customer data to these models. We have built our framework and it is only codified and encrypted data that is passed to the open source model. If you see ChatGPT and Llama, they are fairly good with Hindi, and maybe

I have a slightly differing view. India has a lot of data scientists, and a lot of western companies also have their captive research centres here. For us, as an application company, what is more important than data science is how we leverage LLMs... It is not that talent is not a challenge, so what we typically do is hire a lot of experts who build grounds-up training modules for people who get into our technology stack.

Experts we have spoken to have said that India could also struggle in finding the right talent for generative AI. When you're hiring for these roles, what are the challenges you face?

New regional languages, even though old, have little footprint on the Internet, making it harder to build a model which is good at generating responses in them. How can the Indian context be made better in generative AI?

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Govt mooting exempting certain M&A deals from CCI

New Delhi: The government has proposed exempting intra-group

transactions and certain other

mergers and acquisitions from

the requirement of Competition

Commission (CCI) approval, a

move that is likely to help in re-

ducing the regulatory burden on

the watchdog.

Draft rules to exempt certain

categories of combinations from

the CCI approval requirement

have been issued. PTI

Tata Steel to shut coke ovens unit in the UK

Mumbai: TATA STEEL UK has de-

cided to cease operations of the

coke ovens at the Port Talbot plant,

in Wales, following a deterioration

of operational stability.

Tata Steel UK will increase im-

ports of coke to offset the impact

of the coke oven closures, the

company said in an exchange fil-

ing. Tata Steel had previously

stated that many of its heavy-end

assets in Port Talbot are at their

end-of-life capability. Tata Steel is

at an advanced stage of consulta-

tions with trade unions in the UK

on its proposal for the planned re-

structuring and subsequent transi-

tion to sustainable low-CO2

steelmaking, it said. ENS

BRIEFLY

FM Sitharaman meets ADB VP

New Delhi: FM Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday met Asian Development Bank's new Vice-President (market solutions) Bhargav Dasgupta and discussed ways to further the development agenda. "They also discussed harnessing ADB's convening power to crowd in other public and private sector investments," the finance minister said in a post. PTI

IL&FS moves NCLAT

New Delhi: The board of debt-ridden IL&FS has moved an application before the NCLAT to restrain 11 public sector lenders from initiating proceedings to declare its group companies as "wilful defaulters". PTI

Tata Sons plans to offload 0.65% stake in TCS for nearly ₹9,400 crore

**ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MARCH 18**

TATA SONS, the holding company of the Tata group, is planning to sell 2.34 crore shares of tech major Tata Consultancy Services Ltd (TCS) at a floor price Rs 4,001 per share through block deals to raise up to ₹1,129 billion (around Rs 9,362 crore), according to the term sheet for the sale.

The reported price is a discount of 3.46 per cent to Monday's closing price of Rs 4,144.75 on the BSE. The 2.34 crore shares represent 0.65 per cent equity of TCS. At a market capitalisation of Rs 14,99 lakh crore, TCS is India's second most-valued listed company after Reliance Industries.

As of December 2023, promoters held a 72.41 per cent share

in TCS, of which Tata Sons held 72.38 per cent stake, while the rest is held by another Tata company. Citigroup and JPMorgan are the joint bookrunners of the proposed share sale. BAT plc of the UK sold part of its stake worth Rs 16,775 crore (around \$2.027 billion) in ITC Ltd last week. It sold 43.68 crore shares in ITC to institutional investors by way of an accelerated bookbuild process.

After the sale, BAT still owns 25.5 per cent stake in ITC. Total revenue of Tata Sons, the unlisted holding company of major Tata group companies, on a stand-alone basis rose to Rs 35,058 crore in FY2023 as against Rs 24,132.97 crore in the previous year, a rise of 47 per cent. The company's profit for the year also rose to Rs 22,132.38 crore for the year from Rs 17,171.21 crore a year ago, a growth of 28.89 per cent.

Alphabet shares rose 5 per cent in premarket US trading, while Apple was up 0.5 per cent.

It is unlikely that any deal would be announced until June, when Apple plans to hold its annual conference of developers. The 18 major states – Uttar

Prasanta Sahu
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

EXPENDITURE by state governments on asset creation may have risen more than a third on year in the first ten months of the current financial year, compared with a 7% rise in the year-ago period. A review of the finances of 18 large states by FE showed that their capex in April-January this fiscal was up a solid 37% on year.

This augurs well for overall public capex and the economy as a whole. It shows states have only quickly reversed the slump in capital expenditure witnessed in FY21, but also have consolidated the trend.

The development also bears out the notion that the withdrawal of GST compensation hasn't dented the states' revenues or spending power much. Release of interest-free loans and quick tax transfers by the Centre also helped.

While tax revenues of states remained reasonably strong, many of them also have raised the borrowing levels to augment capex.

The 18 major states – Uttar

and the iPhone maker also recently held talks with ChatGPT-maker OpenAI about using its model, according to the report.

Apple, Alphabet-owned Google and OpenAI did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment.

A potential deal between the firms could help Google expand the use of its AI services to over 2 billion active Apple devices. File

would be announced until June, when Apple plans to hold its annual conference of developers.

The firms have a years-long

partnership that makes Google the default search engine on Apple's Safari web browser, and a genAI tie-up may help the Alphabet unit navigate fears that services like ChatGPT could threaten its search dominance.

But the agreement could also invite sharper scrutiny from US regulators, who have sued Google on grounds that it unlawfully stifled competition by paying billions of dollars to Apple to maintain its monopoly in search.

"This strategic partnership is a missing piece in the Apple strategy and combines forces with Google for Gemini to power some of the AI features Apple is bringing to market," said Daniel Ives, an analyst at Wedbush.

Tata Steel UK will increase imports of coke to offset the impact of the coke oven closures, the company said in an exchange filing. Tata Steel had previously stated that many of its heavy-end assets in Port Talbot are at their end-of-life capability. Tata Steel is at an advanced stage of consultations with trade unions in the UK on its proposal for the planned restructuring and subsequent transition to sustainable low-CO2 steelmaking, it said. ENS

Kannada. Other regional languages not so much... There is a Bhashini LLM that is being built, so we are exploring that. There is still some way to go for all Indian languages.

Monetisation is an area that consumer end AI companies have not figured out yet. Do you think business to business (B2B) is a better avenue for revenue generation, B2C may take time?

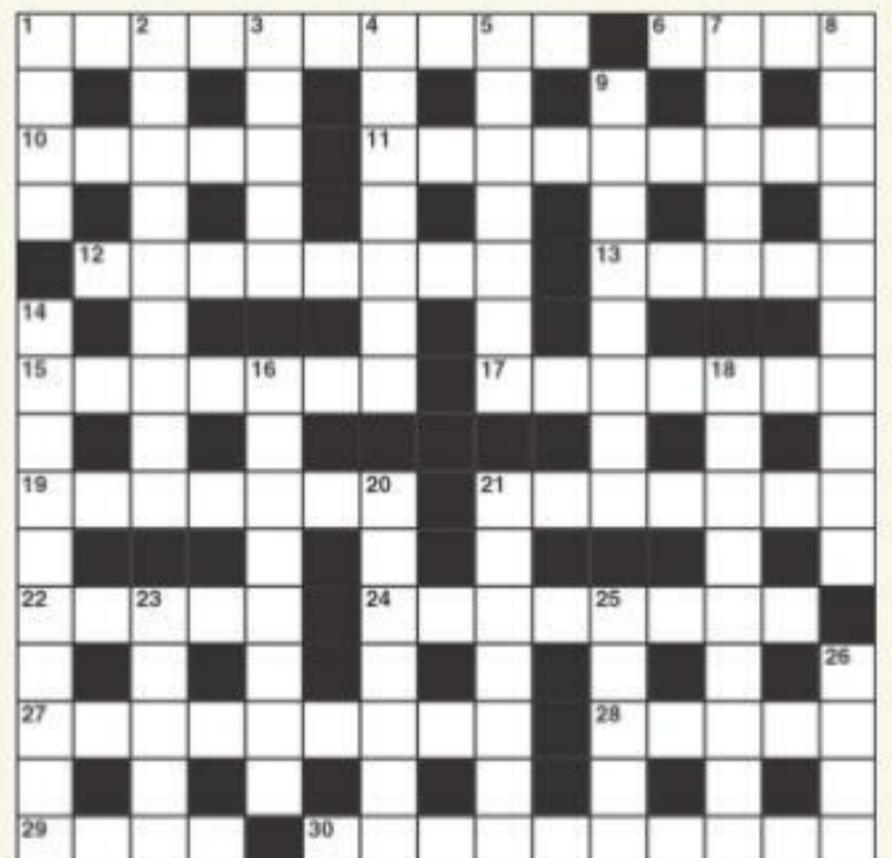
At this moment in time, it's the B2B segment where the monetisation in generative AI is happening for service providers like us to create applications. For the likes of those who provide these open source models, they work with us because like I said, we don't want to expose the customer data to the internet, so they offer an enterprise version of their LLM. So that's the business model that will work in the near term. Monetisation in B2C application is further down the road, and I don't see that happening for the next couple of years.

One big benefit that some western generative AI firms may have over Indian companies is access to computing capacity. Do you see this as a hamstring?

While generative AI is today dominated by a large set of the western offerings like ChatGPT and Llama, you can see the Chinese have already launched their own LLM.

In India, the Bhashini LLM is coming up. Infrastructure is no longer a hurdle... The challenge is building a foundational model because it takes time to build an algorithm from scratch, it also requires a lot of data science work. So, I don't see that changing in the near future, we'll still have to use models from Google, Microsoft etc.

CROSSWORD 5316



ACROSS

- Unsuspected faults that weaken one's standing (4,2,4)
- Record finish of race (4)
- Pest possibly slain in the garden (5)
- It gives time for music (9)
- Express dissatisfaction with a break in service (8)
- It's not clear it's changing in my case (5)
- Slipped away unusually pleased (7)
- Not a subject put on in advance (7)
- To look one's years requires nobility (7)
- Intervenes in measure to confront crime (5,2)
- Teacher's pet almost (5)
- One way of saying one doesn't like it? (8)
- Not a protracted romance? (9)
- Spin a yarn (5)
- Shocking swimmers (4)
- It makes a topping sweet (5,5)

Solutions Crossword 5315 Across: 1Attuned, 5Moses, 8Important, 9Age, 10Eked, 12Strike up, 14Ration, 15Bazaar, 17Pomander, 18Nemo, 21Ego, 22On the mend, 24Sweet, 25Rooster Down: 1Alice 2Tip, 3Nero, 4Death, 5Mythical, 6Stage name, 7Sleeper, 11Extempore, 13Point out, 14Repress, 16Debt, 19Order, 20Veto, 23Eat

DOWN

- Refuse to eat quickly (4)
- Vanish with girl quietly so to speak (9)
- Deck or dock (5)
- Order the ambitious officer hopes to get (7)
- Not many can provide a word of opposite meaning (7)
- Little matters as Tom found out (5)
- Extremely slender for example; that's about all (10)
- A hundred men come in prepared to start (8)
- A sober habit (10)
- Painless treatment for animals (8)
- Engaged in renovation or doing nothing about it (9)
- A commodity extensively used (7)
- She has visited an unlicensed drinking establishment (7)
- Joiner's instrument giving angles that aren't right (5)
- Grounds worth seeing one hears (5)
- Highlight in the theatrical world (4)
- It makes a topping sweet (5,5)

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 quiz.
Friends are the ___ God never gave us. - Mencius (8)

CHLII EGITLN
BELSS AEELBG

Answers: Friends are the ___ God never gave us. - Mencius (8)

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & I Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



SUDOKU 5506

Difficulty Level 3s

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.

6		5						
5	9	1	4					
	2							
9	5	7	1	2				
1		9						
2	4	1	7	3				
		4						
1	7	2	8					
8			6					

Difficulty Level

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5505

8	9	6	5	2	7	1	3	4
4	5	7	1	8	3	2	9	6
3	1	2	6	9	4	8	7	5
6	3	1	2	5	8	7	4	9
7	8	4	3	1	9	6	5	2
5	2	9	7	4	6	3	8	1
1	7	3	9	6	5	4	2	8
9	6	8	4	7	2	5	1	3
2	4	5	8	3	1	9	6	7

DAY TODAY

BY PETER VIDAL

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

When friends fall out, you're always the one who seems to get upset. Your planetary influences are becoming kinder and something will happen to restore your faith in human nature. You'll be experiencing social changes soon, and you may be surprised to be proved wrong on a major matter.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23) The Moon's helpful influence will assist you in your efforts back on the rails. You must take the initiative. If you're still feeling stressed at the weekend, it could be because you are not allowing yourself to let up. Relax when you can.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

There's still a great deal on your plate and recent family changes are settling down. Don't be too unkind if a partner seems to have completely missed the point. After all, it's not long ago that you were also guilty of a misunderstanding.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)

There's definitely something bothering you at the moment, you're just not sure what it is. There's an air of mystery, and skeletons which have been in the cupboard for too long are threatening to come out. And, when they do, you will have to improvise.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Routine chores are piling up and need to be tackled without delay. This is a process you must be aware of if you are to make the most of your many talents and avoid being distracted by trivia. Professional challenges are looming, but you'll soon be able to break free with one bound.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

Listen to people who are in a position to help you, especially to advise you on certain decisions which will have to be taken quite soon. In fact, it's clear that a family member has been partly responsible for your present, peculiar predicament. Maybe they can show you the way out.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

After recent difficulties and delays you may not have yet woken up to the fact that you're closer to achieving a major ambition than seemed likely a short while ago. News which you have been longing for will arrive before long, so please hang on in there.

NORTHERN RAILWAY CORRIDUM

Ref: Tender Notice No. 100/2023-2024 dated 08.03.2024 S. No. 04
Tender Number 10240052 Opening date 08.04.2024.
In reference to above opening date of tender has been extended from 08.04.2024 to 15.04.2024. All other terms and conditions remain unchanged.
The corrigendum has been published on website www.ireps.gov.in.
Note: This is the First Corrigendum in above referred tender. Date : 15.03.2024 872/2024

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Name of work and its location : 30-Elect-69-T-2023-24-E3
Electrical work in connection with Repairing, Operation & CAMC of addressable Fire Alarm System at Rail Bhawan for three years.

Approx cost of the works : Rs. 59.88 lacs

Address of the office : Sr. Civil Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.

Bid Security : Rs. 1,19,800.00

Date & time of submission of tender : 12.04.2024, 12.00 Hrs.

Opening of tender : 12.04.2024, 12.00 Hrs.

Website & notice board : www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi. 870/2024

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE



NORTHERN RAILWAY CORRIDUM TO TENDER NOTICE

Reference Tender Notice No. 2021-Museum-SouvenirShop dated 23/02/2024 for the work of "OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SOUVENIR SHOP OF NATIONAL RAIL MUSEUM" advertised in newspapers on 24 February, 2024. The last date for bidding is extended from 18/03/2024 15:00 hrs to 25/03/2024 15:00 hrs. Tender is available on www.ireps.gov.in website.

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

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

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Rakesh, S/o Mehtab Singh R/o Premises Near Pole No.JPFA 516, Naveen Place, Jaffarpur, New Delhi-110043** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in Ct. Case/48/2021 u/s 135 Indian Electricity Act, P.S. Baba Haridas Nagar, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Rakesh** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Rakesh** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Rakesh** of Ct. Case/48/2021 u/s 135 Indian Electricity Act, P.S. Baba Haridas Nagar, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 13.05.2024. By Order, Vinod Kumar Meena Additional District & Sessions Judge (South-West), Special Court (Electricity), Court No.609, Dwarka Courts, New Delhi

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY E-Procurement Tender Notice 02/2024 dated 14.03.2024

Tender no : 13245148 Qty : 10 Nos EMD (Rs) : 1.77,00/- Description : Anti-Smog gun per attached specifications Tender Opening Date : 11.04.2024

Note : The complete information of above E-Procurement Tender are available on IREPS website i.e <http://www.ireps.gov.in> (2) Bids other than in the form of E-Bids shall not be accepted against above Tender. For this purpose, Vendors are required to get themselves registered with IREPS website along with class III digital signature certificates issued by CCA under IT Act-2000. (3) Rates entered into Financial rate page and duly signed digitally shall only be considered. Rates and any other financial entity in any other form/letter head if attached by vendor shall be straight away ignored and shall not be considered. (4) Documents being attached should be signed on their body. (5) Allocation for "Cost of Drawing" is Z-650 and for "Earnest Money deposit (EMD)" is Deposit Misc, stores- 00844517. In case of any difficulty helpdesk available on the IREPS website may be approached. 499/24(AN)

No. 3/175/DEO/Tree Cutting/AF Stn Faridabad 56 ASP/FMS: 7712 Dated: 15.03.2024

E-AUCTION NOTICE
The Defence Estates Officer, Delhi Circle, Delhi Cantt invites online bids through E-Auction from interested & eligible contractor/bidders/firms, etc. for Disposal of different kinds of 620 Nos of dry standing/fallen trees located at 56 ASP, Air Force Station Faridabad.

The terms & condition of e-auction, details of trees and other requisite details will be available at <https://e-auction.gov.in> from 19.03.2024 at 10:00 hrs. The e-auction will start on 15.04.2024 at 12:30 hrs and end on same day at 14:00 hrs.

Note: Trees shall be shown on site on 26.03.2024 at 11:00 hrs. on production of valid identity proof.

Sd/- (Kapil Goyal, IDES) Defence Estates Officer, Delhi Circle, Delhi Cantt

Ph.: 011-24366838, 24366841 Website : <http://cbe.nic.in> E-Mail ID: cic@cbe.gov.in Fax: 011-24368639 DP/3191/ON/2024

Ph.: 011-27282350, 27280435, 7065036323

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

See Section U/S 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **(1) Mohd. Zaki S/o Gaffar (2) Shamim S/o Mohd. Zaki both R/o H.No. 1235, Rakab Ganj, Ganj Meer Khan, Delhi** have Committed (or are suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 125/2016 U/S 288/337/338/34 IPC, P.S. **Chandni Mahal, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **(1) Mohd. Zaki (2) Shamim** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **(1) Mohd. Zaki (2) Shamim** have absconded (or are concealing themselves to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **(1) Mohd. Zaki (2) Shamim** of case FIR No. 125/2016 U/S 288/337/338/34 IPC, P.S. **Chandni Mahal, Delhi** are required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 25.04.2024.

By Order

Ms. Meena Chauhan

Ld. Metropolitan Magistrate-08, Central Room No. 272

Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

DP/3113/CD/2024(Court Matter)

SEARCH FOR MISSING

ANJALI

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing girl but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing girl. Please inform to the following.

Ph.: 011-24366838, 24366841 Website : <http://cbe.nic.in> Ph.: 011-27282350, 27280435, 7065036323

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BRIEFLY

Substitute Tanzid clinches series for Ban

Chattogram: Concussion substitute Tanzid Hasan hammered 84 off 81 balls to help Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka by four wickets in the third one-day international and seal a 2-1 victory in the series on Monday. Opting to bat first, Sri Lanka posted 235 all out in exactly 50 overs courtesy of Janith Liyanage's 101 off 102 balls for his maiden century. Soumya Sarkar, who felt neck stiffness and complained of a headache and vision difficulties after his head hit the ground while saving a boundary, was substituted by Tanzid and the replacement proved his worth with an innings laced with nine fours and four sixes. **AP**

BRIEF SCORES: Sri Lanka 235 all out (Liyanage 101; Ahmed 3/42) lost to Bangladesh 237/6 (Tanzid 84; Lahiru 4/48) by four wickets.

Akhil, Anish win gold at Polish Grand Prix

New Delhi: Paris Olympics quota winners Akhil Sheoran and Anish Bhanwala won a gold medal each as Indian shooters ended their Polish Grand Prix campaign with six medals. Sheoran won gold in the men's 50m rifle 3-positions Match 2 with a record score of 468.4. Patrik Jany of the Czech Republic was 2.2 points behind at second spot at the Grand Prix Wroclawia & Dolnogrojska. Both the scores were higher than the existing world record of 466.1, held by Jany's countryman Jiri Privratsky. Bhanwala won gold in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol at the Jozef Zapadzki Grand Prix held simultaneously. **PTI**

Pep focused on 'final' against Arsenal

Manchester: Manchester City are still in the running to pick up two trophies at Wembley this season but manager Pep Guardiola said all his focus is on their Premier League clash with title rivals Arsenal at the end of the month, a match he described as a "final". City face Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-finals next month, as well as Real Madrid in the quarter-finals of the Champions League, which has its title decider at Wembley this season. Guardiola, however, said he was not looking past their next league fixture against Mikel Arteta's side on March 31. "One step at a time," he told City's website. "We have a final against Arsenal. I don't want to think too much in the future right now. It's been an intense period." **REUTERS**

Félix scores as Barca beat Atletico 3-0

Madrid: Atletico Madrid fans burned a João Félix jersey before their team's match against Barcelona. They also vandalized a plaque with his name and insulted the player outside the Metropolitano Stadium. But when the match started, it didn't take long for the Portugal forward to answer those fans on the field. Félix struck against his former club again on Sunday, scoring the opening goal in Barcelona's 3-0 win over Atletico Madrid in the Spanish league. **AP**

No awkwardness with Rohit, says Hardik

MI skipper opens up on his relationship with Rohit, his fitness, and why he won't be focusing on T20 World Cup but on IPL

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, MARCH 18

EVER SINCE it was announced he will replace Rohit Sharma as Mumbai Indians' captain, Hardik Pandya has found himself a target from Rohit's and Mumbai Indians' fans. The reactions from a few Mumbai Indians players like Suryakumar Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah at the time of announcement stirred the pot as they were perceived to be displeased at the move. Rohit's wife too stirred it further by her reactions on social media now and then - like when she denounced what Mark Boucher, Mumbai Indians' coach, said recently about how the replacement process was done.

And so, Hardik Pandya's first media interaction as Mumbai Indians' captain on Monday was a much-awaited event. As expected the questions about him replacing Rohit came pretty soon in the piece.

Obviously well-prepared for the line of questioning, Pandya didn't show any annoyance or showed any agitation. The all-rounder said that he respects fans' and that he can only control the controllable. "I don't focus on what I can't control. At the same time, I am very grateful to fans. They have every right to say what they say. I respect their opinion. At the same time, we will focus on doing well," Pandya said in a measured tone.

He was asked again whether it will be an awkward situation to have Sharma play under him just as a player and Pandya assured there won't be any such ill feeling.

"There won't be any confusion. He [Rohit] is still the India captain. What this team has achieved was achieved under his belt. I am just carrying it forward."

"I have played all my cricket with MI with Rohit as captain, so I am sure he will always be around to help me out," he added.

Hardik was asked whether he had got the opportunity to speak to Sharma.

"Yes and no," Hardik replied. "Rohit has been travelling non-stop (with the Indian team). I will definitely catch up with him when he joins the squad."



Hardik Pandya at his first media interaction as Mumbai Indians captain. **PTI**

Pandya was part of two successful stints as captain with Gujarat Titans, first clinching the title in its maiden season and finishing second last year.

Hardik was traded in an all-cash deal with the Titans and a few months ago, he was announced as the captain for the IPL 2024 season.

"This IPL, I will play as an all-rounder and finish as many games as possible and enjoy the position I have always loved," Pandya said.

Pandya talked about how a "freak injury" derailed his participation in the ICC ODI World Cup last October. "It was a freak injury and had nothing to do with my previous injuries. We tried to push too hard for a return during the World Cup. I have no issues with my body and intend to play all matches," Hardik said.

Leaving controversies aside, the MI will be pleased that their ace seamer Jasprit Bumrah will be available the entire season going ahead. Last year, they missed the services of Bumrah which cost them dearly.

Hardik shared his excitement at having the leading striker bowler back in the fray.

"Jassi [Jasprit] has been our no. 1 bowler and he has been a champion cricketer. Last year, they did miss him. Excited to have him back full throttle and him guiding the youngsters in the camp," he added.

Mumbai Indians will be playing its first game against Pandya's old team Gujarat Titans on March 24. However, there is no clarity when injured Suryakumar Yadav

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game against Pandya's old team Gujarat Titans on March 24. However, there is no

clarity when injured Suryakumar Yadav

Rahul declared fit for IPL, to join up with LSG

KL RAHUL has been declared fit for the 2024 season of the Indian Premier League, scheduled to start on Friday.



The Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) skipper was awarded the fitness certificate by the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru and will join the team in the next two days. LSG will open their campaign against Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur on Sunday.

It is understood that the medical team of the BCCI has advised Rahul not to keep wickets in the initial stages of the tournament, and play as a specialist batsman.

"He is fit and can join the IPL franchise in the coming days. He suffered pain in the quadriceps and got an injection too.

"He went through his rehabilitation and the NCA has now declared him fit. However, he has been advised not to take on the wicket-keeping role immediately," a source in the Indian board said.

Rahul complained of pain in the right

quadriceps after the Hyderabad Test and was later ruled out of the remainder of the home series against England which got over recently.

The BCCI had initially claimed that Rahul had reached 90 percent match fitness and was progressing well under the supervision of the BCCI Medical Team.

But they later decided to consult a specialist in England and Rahul travelled abroad to get an expert opinion.

Meanwhile, on Sunday, Shreyas Iyer, who had missed out the last two days of Mumbai's Ranji Trophy finals citing back issues, had also been declared fit to play the IPL but with a rider. The Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) captain, who joined the IPL franchise, has been advised that he can't lung too much while playing the forward defense as this could aggravate his injury.

The Indian Express understands that Iyer visited a spine specialist in Mumbai after consultation with the National Cricket Academy (NCA) Bangalore and the doctor has declared him fit to play with the precaution that he needs to be cautious while stretching his leg.

DEVENDRA PANDEY

lot of empathy and taking care of each other. That's very important to me," Pandya said.

For a player, who has featured in 92 IPL matches for MI between 2015 and 2021, he said he is not approaching the season with the T20 World Cup in mind.

"I am a firm believer that you should be playing for the team that you are playing for. Everyone can have goals and targets for playing for the national team.

"But we should be honest and I will tell my boys to deliver our best for Mumbai Indians. In that way, if someone gets a call-up for the Indian team, I would be happy," Pandya said, claiming he will have no fitness issues and expects to be playing all games.

Aaron joins MRF academy after ending first-class career

LALITH KALIDAS
MARCH 18

VARUN AARON, a pace bowler who never delivered on his promise during his nine-Test career, has gone into coaching after playing his last First-class game.

After eight back stress breakdowns and three foot fractures during his nearly-15-year First-Class career, Aaron, who still clocks high 140kph, will team up with the legendary Glenn McGrath at the MRF Pace Foundation in Chennai.

It's a comeback of sorts having started as a tearaway quick at the institute as a teenager.

"I have been at the MRF foundation for the past 15 years, more in the capacity of a player. Considering I was going to call time on one format, the company MD (Rahul Mammen Mappillai) and I had a chat last year. I suggested that we upgrade our facilities and start a hunt for raw fast bowlers, which we did recently to feed 140-plus pacers into the system," Aaron says.

The MRF Ace of Pace talent hunt pro-



Varun Aaron will team up with the legendary Glenn McGrath at the MRF Pace Foundation in Chennai. **File**

gramme held trials for nearly 2,500 pacers across four cities, following which three bowlers were inducted into the academy

earlier this month.

Delving into sports science

Fascinated by the mechanics behind his art, Aaron is also delving into the techniques as a sports science student at the Sri Ramachandra University in Chennai. "I want to be a sports scientist. I have a huge interest in the subject and just the way the body moves, and how fast bowlers can avoid injuries," he says.

A High-Performance Centre is Aaron's initiative for the foundation. "Rahul Mammen has the vision to make the Pace Foundation the world's premier fast bowling academy, which prompted him to accept my proposal. It's going to be the first high-performance cricketing facility of its kind in India. We're going to launch it in mid-April.

"We have imported some unbelievable equipment from all over the world. We are working with people from the top institutions in India to monitor the players' sleep, workload, etc," Aaron adds.

The 34-year-old understands the curse of injuries more than most. While his career has run in parallel with India's pace riches across

formats, Aaron looks at the next generation without hard feelings.

"There are no regrets. I would not be content with whatever I've achieved. I still haven't retired from cricket, I am still bowling well. So you never know what the future holds.

"I have had a lot of injuries. I don't want fast bowlers making the mistakes I made. I want to pass on my knowledge to push their levels despite injuries and help them breach the 150kph mark."

Aaron admits that the MRF Foundation has not been able to generate genuine Test bowlers over the last decade - the right-arm quick being the last academy regular to represent India in red-ball cricket. "It's a bit sad that there has been no fast bowler after me, like in every organization that might have been in a transitional phase. But with Ramji (Srinivasan) as strength and conditioning coach, myself and Glenn coming together, we will take the Pace Foundation to the next level. I'm certain the results will be there to be seen within two years," he stresses.

Top of off

Aaron's bouncer would break through

Stuart Broad's grille, leaving the England player with a bloodied nose and a whirlpool of nightmares during the Manchester Test of 2014. The following year in Bengaluru, he would dismiss Hashim Amla by hitting the top of his off-stump.

While the Singhbhum Express emphasises on expanding a fast bowler's repertoire with "accessories like the knuckleball", Aaron pins the 'top of off' as his foremost project with raw aspirants.

"You cannot be a good fast bowler if you can't hit the top of off at maximum effort. Once you secure that, everything else follows. Say you're playing in the Ranji Trophy. You can't bowl 30 overs of slow balls, right?" he asks.

His final outing in whites for Jharkhand will attest to his love for the art.

"My last first-class game was on a dead pitch. I picked up five (wickets). We won our first significant game of the season, beating Rajasthan. I feel only somebody with genuine pace can sometimes take the wicket out of the equation and deliver for the team. And when you've been gifted with the talent of bowling fast, which not everybody has, you have to maximize it as long as you're playing."

ON A FRESH PITCH

Yusuf's new innings: How politics re-labels and brackets national stars

SANDEEP DWIVEDI

THIS WAS early 2000 in Baroda. It was the time a middle-aged muezzin, connected to the city's famous Jama Masjid, was living probably the busiest period of his life. The mosque was his place of work and worship. It was also his home. His family of five had a designated room inside the holy complex, situated in Baroda's crowded Mandvi area.

Between giving prayer-calls, the muezzin would sweep the long corridors of the ancient structure. To make ends meet, he would also sell iittar on the steps of the masjid, work at a chemical factory and at times, even ferry passengers on a three-wheeler auto-rickshaw.

The deeply-religious man, though, would also pedal to drop his two sons to a cricket ground. The elder one would ride pillion, the younger would sit on the bar that connected the seat to the handle. With the kids carrying two huge cricket kits too, this was one of the many balancing acts the father with a meagre income would be expected to pull off all day.

Those many bicycle rides would put the brothers on the road that would take them to the Indian cricket team. They would become national heroes and now one of them has thrown his hat in the ring to be a parliamentarian.

This is the story of Baroda's Pathan brothers - Yusuf and Irfan - and their father Mehboob Khan, who believes that it was



Yusuf Pathan, Trinamool Congress (TMC) candidate for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, during a rally in Kolkata. **PTI**

the beast called politics that in one stroke can see a national India star bracketed as a 'Muslim Candidate'.

Standard operating procedure

This has happened in the past too. Mohammad Azharuddin and Mohammad Kaif - both fighting on Congress tickets - made their foray into politics from

Moradabad and Phulpur, two regions with high percentage of Muslim voters. Neither constituency can be spotted on the map of Indian cricket but politics has its own calculations, rules and landscapes.

Adjusting to the political terrain, with the overwhelming communal and caste references, is the biggest challenge for sportspersons at the hustings. Yusuf would soon realise this.

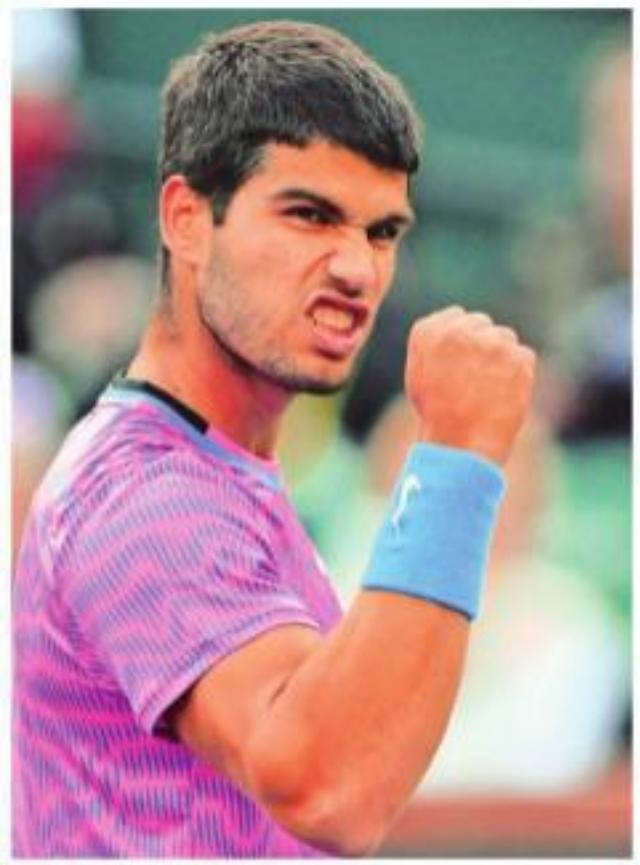
The Pathans learnt the cricketing ropes in Baroda, a cosmopolitan city known for its cultural diversity. Proximity to the country's financial capital Mumbai, the convergence of students from different states because of the MS University made this a melting pot of sorts. Further flavours were added by oil companies that set base here.

A cricket field in Baroda, like most of India, was ultra-inclusive. It broadly worked on meritocracy. It was their talent and hard work that got the sons of a muezzin from Mandvi the early breaks. Irfan was 16 and Yusuf 18 when they got picked for Baroda's Ranji Trophy team.

Irfan was playing Tests while still a teenager. Yusuf's big break was slightly delayed. Baroda coach Balwinder Singh Sandhu predicted that Yusuf would play the World Cup one day. He went on to win one. Potential was spotted, potential was rewarded and potential delivered too. Their chain was pure, it wasn't corroded by any bias. The most important entry on the CV was runs and wickets, not the second name.

There have been several instances of national team players watching each other's back. They also fiercely protect their sacred sporting space where there is hardly any discrimination. When everyone wears the team jersey, they sign up to be equals. So when Mohammed Siraj was racially abused in Australia, the India team stopped the game and addressed the issue.

And when Mohammed Shami was targeted by communal trolls, it was the game's biggest star who took a stand. "Attacking someone over their religion is the most pathetic thing that a human being can do. They have no understanding of how much effort we put on the field. They have no understanding of



Alcaraz showed no ill-effects from an injury that forced him to pull out of last month's Rio Open. USA TODAY Sports

Alcaraz wins first title since Wimbledon at Indian Wells

REUTERS
INDIAN WELLS, MARCH 18

CARLOS ALCARAZ overcame a sluggish start and finished with a flourish to successfully defend his Indian Wells crown with a 7-6(5) 6-1 win over Daniil Medvedev in the final on Sunday. The win ends a title drought for the world number two that stretched back to last summer's Wimbledon and makes him the first man to defend a championship in the California desert since Novak Djokovic won three straight between 2014-2016.

Alcaraz showed no ill effects from the ankle injury that forced him to withdraw from last month's Rio Open but said it was on his mind coming into the event.

"Winning this tournament means a lot to me because the week before it began I had a lot of doubts about my ankle," Alcaraz said.

"But once I stepped on the court for the first round it started to feel better and as I said after every match, I was feeling better and better. Really, really happy to be able to win this tournament again."

In a rematch of last year's final, Alcaraz started slow, spraying errors around the court to fall 3-0 down but raised his level to get back on serve and eventually force a tiebreak.

In the closely fought breaker, Alcaraz pounded a forehand that his Russian opponent could not redirect safely in bounds to hand Alcaraz the first set.

The Spaniard romped through the second set, raising his arms in the air and letting out a roar when Medvedev missed another forehand wide on match point.

Second seed Alcaraz smacked 25 winners to Medvedev's 11 and was especially effective against his opponent's second serves.

"I enjoy playing these kind of matches with you," Alcaraz told Medvedev during the trophy ceremony. "Hopefully more finals ahead." Medvedev, who briefly lost his temper with some fans in the Alcaraz-friendly crowd in the second set, was gracious in defeat.

"I'd like to congratulate Carlos," Medvedev said during the trophy ceremony.

"It's definitely your court, you like it here. Congrats to you and your team. You are doing a great job so continue this way and hopefully one day you can let me play a little bit better here," he said.

"Amazing job today and amazing job throughout the two weeks."

It was an eventful stay in the California desert for the 20-year-old Alcaraz.

The two-time major champion was stung on the forehead when a swarm of bees invaded the court on Thursday, kept his number two ranking by ending Jannik Sinner's 19-match winning streak in the semis and slayed the big-serving fourth seed Medvedev in the final.

'Fasting for God', fighting for team: Diallo's late winner stuns Liverpool

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MARCH 18

MANCHESTER UNITED'S Amad Diallo scored with the last kick of the match to help Manchester United beat Liverpool 4-3 at Old Trafford. The 21-year-old was later sent off after he got the second yellow card for removing his shirt in celebration. Amad admits that he "forgot" about the first yellow, with emotion taking over. He must serve a suspension, in the Premier League against Brentford on March 30.

The youngster also admitted that he scored the winner on an empty stomach as he is observing fast in the holy month of Ramzan.

"It's not easy when you are fasting but you need to believe in yourself," he told the broadcasters after the match. "I fast for god. I am fasting and I want to fight for the team if I am on the pitch. So thank god for this moment," he added.

A couple of weeks ago, the Manchester United winger had deleted his social media accounts to focus on the holy month. "I deactivated my social media for a month just to focus on Ramadan, it's a holy month for me

WINNING FORMULA

How Challengers became believers

RCB captain Smriti Mandhana conquered her doubts after a nightmare first season as the franchise ended its long title drought

VINAYAK MOHANARANGAN
NEW DELHI, MARCH 18

SMRITI MANDHANA was asked after Royal Challengers Bangalore qualified for the playoffs of Women's Premier League, what her biggest learnings from the two contrasting seasons were. She took a moment, smiled, and said: "I'll think a lot more deep about this when we finish the tournament." She did go on to speak more about her struggles last year, mainly with the bat. "In four-five years of international cricket something of that sort hadn't happened and for me to face that was something which changed me a lot. I don't know what has changed but something deep inside me has definitely."

A few days later, Smriti Mandhana returned to the press conference room. This time, the trophy was next to her as she became the first RCB captain to lift silverware. Es sala, the cup was finally theirs. And Mandhana, as promised, opened up a bit more. What changed, after all?

"One thing I've learned is to believe in myself. I thought that was something that I lacked. Last year, for example, if something went wrong, I would doubt myself," Mandhana said after RCB defeated Delhi Capitals for a famous triumph. "That was a real conversation internally that I need to keep trusting myself. That was the biggest learning for me."

It shined through on the night as RCB turned things around after a rough start. Delhi were flying in the powerplay, driven by The Shafali Verma Show. They raced to 61/0 after the powerplay and a strong batting lineup looked set for a big score. But RCB regathered and opted for the strategic time-out. Mandhana's face didn't betray any frustration as she walked into a team huddle.

"Even today, six overs 60. We planned a few things which didn't go our way. A few field sets didn't go our way. But the only thing that stayed constant was the belief I had. I did not panic. I was really calm," Mandhana recalled about that moment.

"That was great. I could have a great conversation with the bowlers because the Indian batters were coming. So I spoke to them about bowling certain balls and seeing what they do. Eventually, those wickets came."

The match, quite literally, turned. Sophie Molineux's three-wicket over triggered a massive Delhi collapse, Shreyanka Patil sent back the dangerous Meg Lanning soon after, and 64/0 became 113 all out.

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Smriti Mandhana said a key to their campaign this year was how the management trusted her despite last season's failures. Sportzpics

RCB's recruitment in focus

The turnaround also brought RCB's recruitment to the fore. Patil and Asha Sobhana impressed in patches last year despite their overall bowling troubles. The franchise re-aliased the need to add experience to the spin

bowling department. Sophie Molineux and Georgia Wareham were drafted in, two of Australia's top spinners. While Wareham, the leg-spinner was a more obvious choice, they went left field with Molineux, who hadn't played international cricket since 2021, due

to various injury setbacks.

"We've been following her for a while," Mandhana said. "I remember her bowling against us in a one-day series in Australia which we nearly won (2021). I think she was the difference between the sides, the way she bowled in the last four-five overs and her performance always stuck with me somehow." Molineux went on to be the player of the final.

Mandhana said a key to their campaign this year was how the management trusted her despite last season's failings to rebuild. On paper, they had assembled a good squad last year, but the results didn't follow. A poor start couldn't be arrested quickly enough. But in the off-season, there was no panic. "A lot of hard work went behind the scenes, not only from my side but the entire management. For them to show their faith in all of us was just amazing. You know, the only conversation they had was 'this is your team, make it the way you want to,'" she said.

One of the key changes was to bring in Luke Williams as head coach, and Mandhana spoke highly of the influence he had in the dressing room. In the videos RCB posted, it was evident that Williams quickly struck a rapport. His emotional words after a heart-breaking one-run loss against DC was a fine rallying call to a team that looked shell-shocked.

Review process

"The experience of last year's campaign and having 12 months to plan, review and look at the different aspects of how the team should be has been helpful," Williams said. "Smriti has been fundamental in that planning ahead of this tournament and has been very strong in bringing that calmness to the group, which has been really important by Smriti in being the leader on and off the field."

For an international star, Mandhana is still awfully shy of the spotlight. Her awkwardness in team celebrations is the stuff of social media legend. When the trophy was kept next to her at the press conference, she quipped now she'd shed her shyness. "First thing I did was I went to the dressing room and sat. It's hard to celebrate the way others do. I don't know, there's some defect," she joked shortly after.

Her batting definitely improved after a horror first season, as she finished with 300 runs, with some memorable knocks in Bengaluru. But it is as the captain that Mandhana changed significantly in two years. The awkwardness remains, but a leader has been born.

RCB DOMINATE AWARD-WINNERS' LIST

■ While Delhi Capitals dominated most of the individual stats during the course of the season, rather fittingly, Royal Challengers Bangalore players walked away with the big awards after sneaking ahead on the night of the final. It was a rather apt reflection of the season, as DC were the best side during the league phase but RCB ended up with the title. Elyse Perry and Shreyanka Patil climbed to the top of the runs and wickets charts respectively with their performances in the title clash.

■ The player of the tournament award went to UP Warriorz's Deepi Sharma, who also had the Orange Cap at one point and became the first Indian bowler to pick up a hat-trick in WPL. Shafali Verma topped the six-hitting charts for the second year running, and this time she was way ahead of the pack, hitting 20 maximums. Incidentally, 7 of the top 10 six-hitters this year were Indians, with Richa Ghosh and Smriti Mandhana following Shafali on 10 each.

REPORT CARD

SHREYANKA PATIL (RCB)

■ PURPLE CAP FOR MOST WICKETS,

■ EMERGING PLAYER OF THE YEAR

ELLYSE PERRY (RCB)

ORANGE CAP FOR MOST RUNS

DEEPTI SHARMA (UPW)

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER

SHAFALI VERMA (DC)

MOST SIXES

GEORGIA WAREHAM (RCB)

BEST STRIKE RATE WITH THE BAT

SAJANA SAJEEVAN (MI)

BEST CATCH

RCB

FAIRPLAY AWARD

Brij Bhushan's close aide Sanjay regains control of WFI

MIHIR VASAVDA
MARCH 18

and the 'successful completion' of the selection trials for the Paris Olympics qualification tournaments.

"Consequent upon the aforementioned developments, there is no further need for running the activities of the WFI through an Adhoc Committee," an IOA Order, also copied to the Secretary, Sports Ministry, read.

The IOA's decision comes with two conditions, similar to what the UWW demanded. The first, it added in its order, is that the WFI must appoint a safeguarding committee/officer at the earliest to address concerns of abuse and harassment... The second, the IOA said, is to conduct the elections of the Athletes Commission, thus rendering the earlier election of London Olympics bronze medallist Yogeshwar Dutt as its chairman null and void.

Relief for Sanjay

While saying he would meet the demands of the IOA and UWW, Sanjay told *The Indian Express*: "This comes as a relief for me, personally. Now, I can focus on wrestling affairs and see what can be done



Sanjay Singh was elected WFI president, succeeding Brij Bhushan, in December last year. PTI

to ensure we can win a medal at the Paris Olympics."

The decision means the WFI will once again be in complete control of administration and management of the day-to-day wrestling activities in the country. Sanjay was elected as WFI president, succeeding

Brij Bhushan, in December last year.

The story so far

However, three days after his election, the government 'abstained' him and the newly-elected committee from performing their duties, alleging that the WFI affairs were being conducted from Brij Bhushan's premises in New Delhi "wherein sexual harassment of players has been alleged" and he "appears to be in complete control".

Sanjay denied Brij Bhushan had any influence on the WFI's working and said the federation office has been moved out from his official residence. In the immediate future, Sanjay will have to address a few topics that will be of significance with regard to the team selection for the Paris Olympics.

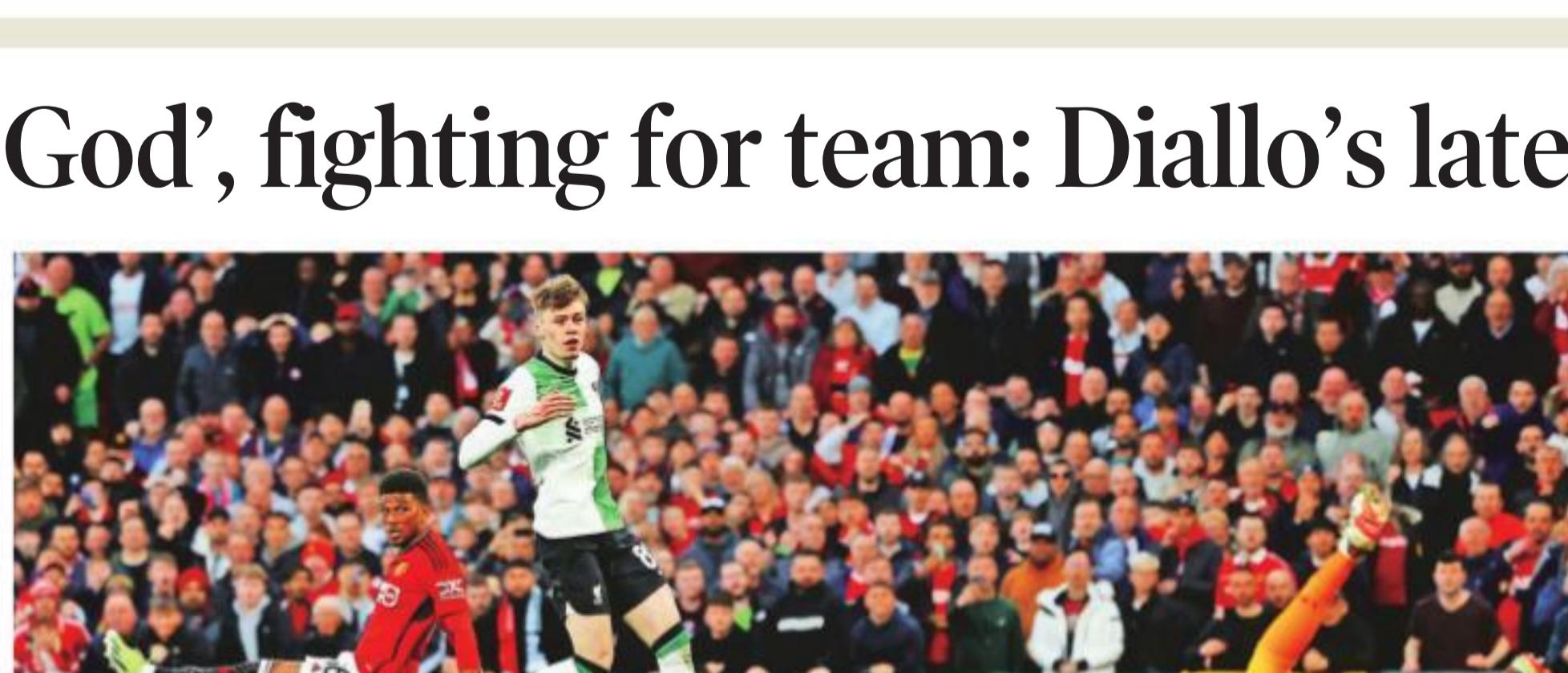
Vinesh's selection in the 50 kg weight class for the Asian and World Olympic qualifiers has been challenged by fellow wrestlers in that category. When asked about his views on the controversy that erupted after Vinesh competed in two weight classes, Sanjay said, without elaborating: "We have sent everything from our side to the UWW. They will

take whatever decision has to be taken."

Sanjay added that doors are not shut on the two Tokyo Olympics medalists, silver-winner Ravi Dahiya and Bajrang, who won bronze, after their below-par show at the selection trials earlier this month. "They should keep preparing. The road is open for every athlete. They have to show their strengths on the mat." The road to Paris for Bajrang, Ravi, Antim Panghal - the only Indian wrestler who has so far won an Olympic quota - and others will depend on the selection policy that the WFI finalises.

As per the ad-hoc committee's rules, no one - including the quota winner - was guaranteed a spot in the Olympics-bound contingent. Every wrestler, they said, would have to appear in final selection trials, which were scheduled to be held in May-June.

Sanjay said they would 'look at the rules formed by the ad-hoc committee'. "But we will consult our selection committee. We will conduct our AGM and executive committee meeting (on March 29), when the issue of whether to have selection trials for the Paris Olympics will be discussed," he said.



Manchester United winger Amad Diallo (left) had deleted his social media accounts to focus on the holy month. Reuters

and social media is a place where there are bad things to see during fasting. Stop the hatred, there's nothing wrong with what I did," he explained his decision.

With the season hanging in the balance, Erik ten Hag's team produced one of the

most important wins of his tenure to beat Liverpool after extra time in a thrilling FA Cup quarterfinal match on Sunday.

"Listen to the noise, you can tell what a big game it is, a huge occasion," said Marcus Rashford, who missed a golden chance to win it at the end of regulation, but leveled

the game at 3-3 in extra time. "I had to score that chance at the end ... but we got the job done and we have to get something out of this season." Time will tell just how significant a result this will be for Ten Hag, who has faced mounting speculation about his posi-

tion in the face of a troubled campaign and restructuring at the club.

The FA Cup represents his last chance of silverware this season, while Champions League qualification is in doubt with United sixth in the Premier League. Emotions changed drastically inside Old Trafford, however, when Antony leveled the game in the 87th. That set up a white-knuckle ride through to the first minute of stoppage time in extra time, with big chances missed and momentum swinging one way and then another until Amad's winner.

Ten Hag hopes it can be a turning point for his team.

"Every team needs its moment into a season and we never had that moment," the United manager said. "This could be that moment where the team believe and (has) energy that we can do amazing things. I think when you can beat Liverpool the way we did, then you can beat any opponent. It's up to us to take that point." Twice-time FA Cup winner United was later drawn against second-tier Coventry in the semifinals and defending champion Manchester City will play Chelsea, which beat Leicester 4-2 earlier Sunday. Both matches will take place at Wembley.