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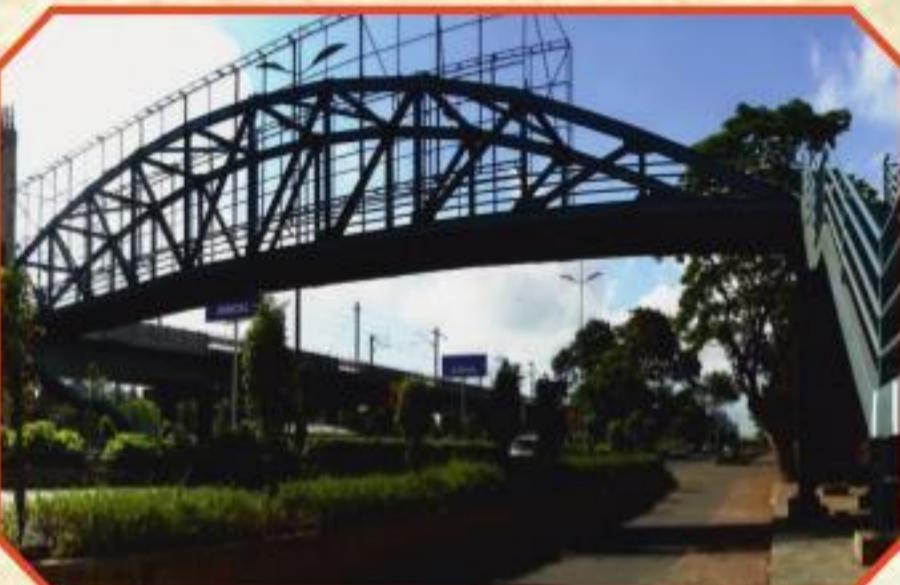
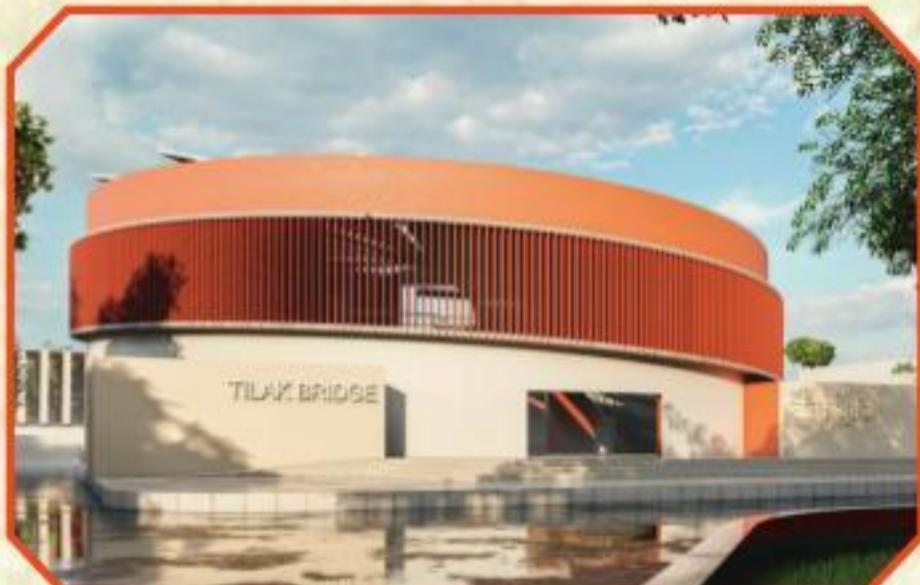




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By

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister

26 February, 2024 | 11:00 AM onwards

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Why has Assam decided to repeal its Muslim Marriage Act?

SUKRITA BARUAH

GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 25

ASSAM HAS decided to repeal the Assam Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act of 1935, it was announced on Friday evening following a Cabinet meeting. In the meeting, the Cabinet approved the 'Assam Repealing Ordinance 2024', which will repeal the 89-year-old Act.

What is the Act for?

Enacted in 1935, the Act lays down the process to register Muslim marriages and divorces. A 2010 amendment replaced the word 'voluntary' in the original Act with 'compulsory', making registration of Muslim marriages and divorces compulsory in the state of Assam.

The Act authorises the state to grant licences to "any person, being a Muslim" to register marriages and divorces, with Muslim registrars deemed to be public servants. The Act is in line with Muslim personal law.

Why does Assam want to repeal it?

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma called this decision "another significant step towards prohibiting child marriages in Assam", stating that the Act allows marriage registration even if the bride and groom have not reached the legal marriageable age of 18 and 21, respectively.

A note on the Cabinet meeting referred to it as an "obsolete pre-Independence Act of the British for the then Province." It also stated that the registration machinery in the Act is "informal", thus "leaving a lot of scope for non-compliance of extant norms".

Advocate Nekibur Zaman, who was part of a state government-appointed committee to examine the legality of a law to ban polygamy, stated that the Act essentially governs nikah and talaq in the state, for which the authority is a government-registered kazi. "Many kazis misuse the power, and often enable the marrying of minors, and divorce without grounds," he claimed, calling it an "outdated Act."

This decision also comes a fortnight after BJP-ruled Uttarakhand became the first state in the country to introduce a Uniform Civil Code. Assam's BJP government has been clear that it intends to do the same soon, and while announcing the Cabinet's decision, minister Jayanta Malla Baruah claimed repealing the Act was a significant step towards this end. He also said that after the Act's re-

peal, Muslims will have to register marriages under the Special Marriage Act.

A district judge who did not wish to be named told The Indian Express that "as part of that process [to introduce a UCC], the state government will also have to repeal the acts that will be in contravention to it."

**EXPLAINED
POLICY**
Why did the state link this decision to its crackdown on child marriages?

Last year, the Assam government had launched an unprecedented punitive crackdown against child marriages, arresting more than 4,000 and prosecuting most of them under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The government has resolved to "eradicate" child marriage by 2026.

The provision of the Act that the CM said

allows child marriage is regarding the process of making a marriage application to the registrar. It states: "...provided that if the bride and groom, or both, be minors, application shall be made on their behalf by their respective lawful guardians..."

Under Muslim personal law, the marriage of a bride who has attained puberty is considered valid. Puberty is presumed, in the absence of evidence, at 15 years of age.

Zunaid Khalid, an advocate and the president of Assam Milat Foundation, said child marriages could have been prevented without repealing the entire Act. "If the government is serious about checking child marriage, it could have amended the portion in contention, and specified that only marriages of brides and grooms of legally marriageable age can be registered under [the Act]. The fallout of complete repeal of the Act is likely to just

be more unregistered marriages."

Advocate Aman Wadud, also a member of the Congress party, echoed similar concerns, saying that the Act allows for a simple and decentralised marriage registration process, with 94 kazis spread across the state.

"Now, if the simple process under the Muslim Marriage Act is to be replaced with the Special Marriage Act – for which the nodal office is the District Commissioner's office, entails a one-month notice period, more robust documentation, and which is a complicated process for poor, illiterate people – the outcome is likely to simply be reduced registration," he said.

He further added that "in the absence of authorised kazis, the field would be wide open for unregistered kazis."

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EXPLAINED TECH

CHANGES IN ELECTRICITY RULES: BOOST TO ROOFTOP SOLAR POWER

AGGAM WALIA

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25



Solar PV systems up to 10 kw capacity will be accepted without a technical feasibility study. File

THE MINISTRY of Power has notified amendments to the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020, to accelerate the installation of rooftop solar projects and to introduce new provisions related to connections in residential societies.

The amendments, which were notified on February 22, have eased rules around the requirement of a technical feasibility report for rooftop solar projects and allow residential societies to opt for individual connections or a single point connection through a vote. Now, electricity distribution companies (DISCOMs) will also be required to install an additional meter to verify consumer complaints regarding inaccurate meter readings.

The amendments have reduced the timeline for getting a new electricity connection and require DISCOMs to provide for a separate connection for an electric vehicle (EV) charging point, if requested by a consumer. This is the fourth time the rules have been amended since the original notification in 2020.

About rooftop solar projects

Earlier, DISCOMs were required to conduct a feasibility study for rooftop solar projects within 20 days after an application was filed and intimate the outcome to the applicant. The latest amendments have reduced the time period to 15 days. Moreover, if the study is not completed within 15 days, "it shall be presumed that the proposal is technically feasible".

In other words, DISCOMs are no longer required to complete a technical feasibility study before accepting an application to begin the installation of solar panels. The rules also note that solar PV systems up to a capacity of 10 kilowatt shall be deemed accepted without requiring a technical feasibility study.

The rules define a residential association as one "comprising all the property owners within a Co-operative Group Housing Society, Multistoried Building, Residential Colony, or a similar body registered with the State Government".

New connections swifter

The amended rules have reduced the time period for obtaining a new electricity connection or modifying an existing one in metropolitan areas from seven to three days, in other municipal areas from 15 to seven days, and in rural areas from 30 to 15 days. In rural areas with hilly terrain, however, the time period will continue to remain 30 days.

Also, the costs of strengthening distribution infrastructure for rooftop solar projects with a capacity of up to 5 kilowatt will be borne by DISCOMs.

The amendments come after Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana on February 15. The new government scheme will provide households a subsidy of up to 40

per cent to install solar panels on their roofs. The government expects the scheme to benefit 1 crore households and help it save around Rs 75,000 crore per year in electricity costs.

Empowering consumers

The latest amendments include new rules to let consumers in a residential society opt for individual connections or a single point connection "by means of a transparent ballot to be held by the distribution licensee". As per the rules, individual connections will be given to each house or flat owners provided that more than 50 per cent of the owners opt for it.

If the owners opt for a single point connection, then the association overseeing a residential society will be responsible for metering, billing, and collection of the amount due on a no-profit-no-loss basis.

In the case of individual connections, the DISCOM will be responsible for those tasks.

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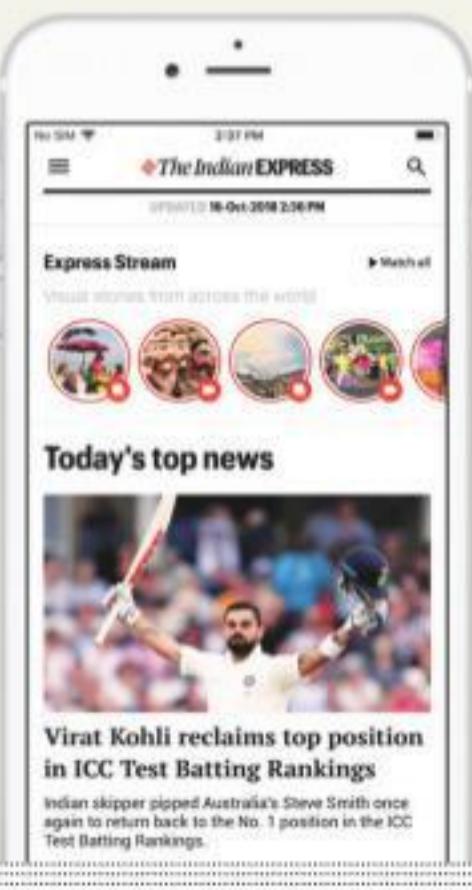
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As per the rules, individual connections will be given to each



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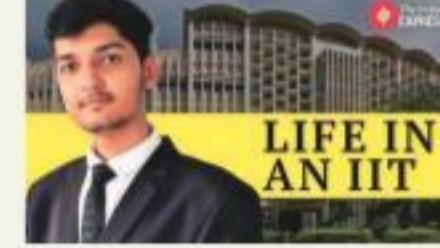
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KABHI HAAN KABHI NAA AT 30: SHAH RUKH KHAN'S SUNIL COULD HAVE BEEN THE VILLAIN OF THIS LOVE STORY, BUT SRK MADE HIM AN EARNEST LOST LOVER

On the 30th anniversary of Shah Rukh Khan-starrer Kabhi Haan Kabhi Naa, here's looking back at the life of Sunil who could have been the villain of the story but instead got sympathy from us.

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Game Time: The 'Koi Nahi' phase of Indian badminton

This week on Game Time we discuss the significance of India winning the Badminton Asia Team Championships title for the first time, and why it is now in the 'Koi Nahi' phase

Month into Nitish's new NDA stint, JDU rakes up Bihar special status demand again

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, FEBRUARY 25

DESPITE HIS frequent political flip-flops, Chief Minister and JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar is out to remind everyone that there is one thing he has stood by steadfastly – demand of "special category" status for Bihar from the Centre.

On February 23, the CM watched approvingly from the Treasury benches of the Assembly as Energy Minister and senior JD(U) leader Bijendra Prasad Yadav raised the demand on behalf of the new NDA government.

A month ago, Nitish, then a part of Opposition INDIA bloc, was raking up the same demand – which he has been making for over a decade – at the birth centenary of socialist icon and former CM Karpoori Thakur in Patna.

Energy Minister told the House: "I take the opportunity to request the Prime Minister to consider a special economic package for Bihar. We have achieved a lot from our limited resources, and have immense potential to produce energy from air, water and solar sources. If we get a boost from the Centre, we will be able to pull more people out of poverty."

It was the first time the JD(U) revived a special category demand for Bihar since returning to the NDA fold nearly a month ago.

A senior JD(U) leader said, "The Centre has to find a way for Bihar,

which is at the cusp of industrial growth. If we get the special economic status, we can provide tax waivers to industries investing in the state. It is true that we have not been able to get the special category status either from the UPA government or the NDA government because of rules not allowing it. But a special economic package can still be given to Bihar. Like Gujarat, we too can then create special economic zones."

Asked if the JD(U) keeps this demand alive to it from the political arsenal when nothing else works, the leader said: "Not at all... It is not about the JD(U) but the state government, and our ally BJP is on same page with us on matters of development."

Bihar Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary of the BJP, however, said: "The state has been getting additional funds from the Centre. Our budget size has also increased."

Another state BJP leader said: "The JD(U)'s demand for a special economic package may be looked into. Our government will take this up with the concerned Union ministry at an opportune time."

Under the special category status, the Centre split the funding of centrally-sponsored schemes with the state at a ratio of 90:10, respectively, which is much more favourable for the latter than the usual 60:40 or 80:20 splits available to other states.

NSSO consumer survey indicates poverty down to 5 per cent: NITI CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, FEB 25

THE LATEST consumer expenditure survey indicates that poverty has come down to 5 per cent in the country and people are becoming prosperous both in rural and urban areas, NITI Aayog CEO B VR Subrahmanyam said Sunday.

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, released data on household consumption expenditure for the year 2022-23 on Saturday which shows per capita monthly household expenditure more than doubled in 2022-23 as compared to 2011-12.

"This long-awaited consumer expenditure survey has brought out many things. With data on household consumption, we can assess what is the status of poverty in the country and how successful the poverty alleviation measures have been," Subrah-

manyam told reporters. "The survey findings indicate that poverty in India is below five per cent now. I am convinced with the data."

He said that for the purpose of the survey, people were kept in 20 different categories and the data showed that the average per capita monthly expenditure for all categories stood at Rs 3,773 in rural areas and Rs 6,459 in urban areas. The average per capita monthly expenditure of 0-5 per cent fractile class is pegged at Rs 1,373 in rural areas and Rs 2,001 in urban areas.

"If we take the poverty line and inflate it with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to today's rate, we see that the average consumption of the lowest fractile, the 0-5 per cent, is about the same. This means poverty in the country is there in the 0-5 per cent group only," the NITI Aayog CEO said.

"This is my assessment. But economists will analyse it and come out with absolutely correct numbers," he said.

YSRCP MP quits, fires 'Mahmud of Ghazni' barb at Jagan in parting shot

SREENIVAS JANYALA
HYDERABAD, FEBRUARY 25

FOLLOWING SEVERAL run-ins with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, the party's rebel MP from Narasapuram, Kanumuru Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, has finally quit the party.

In a letter to Jagan on Saturday, the first-time MP referred to him as Mahmud of Ghazni, and wrote, "Your multiple and steady efforts like Mohammad Gajni to get me dislodged from my parliament-

tary membership haven't yielded till date your desired result. However, every time you made an attempt, I also have equally made laudable, positive and even more powerful efforts working for my constituency and its holistic development... for the last 3.5 years despite your hostility and malicious brutal acts to physically eliminate me." He is the fourth party Lok Sabha MP to quit since January. Others are Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu (Narasarao), Vallabhaneni Balashetty (Machilipatnam) and Sanjeev Kumar (Kurnool).

FROM PAGE ONE

FULL REPORTS ON
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Indians spending more on milk, fruits and veg

calories to those rich in proteins and micronutrients.

The data from the HCES, conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), shows the share of food in the average monthly per capita consumption expenditure (MPCE) dipped to 46.4% in 2022-23 for rural India, from 52.9% in 2011-12, 53.1% in 2004-05, and 59.4% in 1999-2000.

A similar, but not as sharp, drop was recorded for urban India too – from 48.1% in 1999-2000, to 40.5% in 2004-05, 42.6% in 2011-12, and 39.2% in 2022-23.

'Inferior' to 'superior'

Households spending relatively less on food with rising incomes over time shouldn't surprise. What's interesting, though, is the kind of food items on which they are spending more or less. The accompanying tables indicate five things:

■ One, the share of cereals and pulses within overall food consumption expenditure has reduced, both in rural and urban areas.

■ Two, the share of spending on milk has increased, so much so as to overtake that on cereals and pulses combined – i.e. food-

grains – in 2022-23.

■ Three, the same goes for fruits and vegetables, foods high in micronutrients (vitamins and minerals). The average rural as well as urban Indian has, for the first time in 2022-23, spent more on fruits and vegetables than on foodgrains. The spending on vegetables alone exceeded that on cereals, and likewise for fruits vis-a-vis pulses.

■ Four, a growing share of the consumer rupee is also going to eggs, fish and meat. When combined with the rising and falling shares of milk and pulses respectively, it suggests a clear preference among Indian consumers for animal proteins over plant proteins.

■ Five, Indians are spending more, as a percentage of their total expenditure, on processed foods, beverages and purchased cooked meals.

All the five trends are consistent with the so-called Engel Curve hypothesis. Named after the 19th century German statistician Ernst Engel, it broadly states that as incomes grow, households spend a smaller proportion of that on food. Even within food, they would buy more of "superior" and less of

"inferior" items.

In this case, cereals, sugar and pulses are "inferior", while milk, egg, fish, meat, fruits and vegetables, beverages and processed foods are "superior".

The HCES data for 2022-23, however, pertains only to the nominal value of monthly per capita consumption expenditure on various food and non-food items. The NSSO factsheet released on Saturday does not contain details of their actual quantities consumed in kilograms or litres. Whether households are spending more on milk, egg and beverages due to higher inflation, or increased quantities consumed of these items, will be known when the detailed survey report comes out.

Policy takeaways

The HCES is a valuable data source of what Indian households are consuming and how much. It also provides a basis for estimating the demand for various foods and making projections for the future. That, in turn, enables more informed policymaking. Thus, if consumption of milk, fish, poultry products, and fruits and vegetables is rising much more than cereals and

sugar, shouldn't the focus be on promoting production of the former as opposed to the latter?

It links up with the second point: NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand has estimated the average annual output growth rate during 2005-06 to 2020-21 for the fruits and vegetables, livestock and fisheries sectors at 4.5%, 5.4% and 7.1% respectively, way above the 1.9% for cereals and other non-horticultural crops.

The growth of the former sectors has notably been market-led and demand-driven. The benefits of minimum support prices (MSP) have, on the other hand, flowed largely to non-horticultural crops – especially rice, wheat, sugarcane, cotton and a few pulses and oilseeds. The demand for making MSP payable by law is also coming mainly from farmers of these crops.

Dairy, poultry and horticulture crops are currently not covered under MSP. Nor are their farmers as vociferous – at least for now – in voicing the demand for "legalising MSP". The reason for it may have to do with more assured market demand for their produce, as reflected in the HCES data.

Monthly spend of farm families below rural average

₹583, while the overall average of rural households was ₹559. In 2011-12, the MPCE of agricultural households was ₹1,436, a little more than the average rural spending of ₹1,430.

Like the households "self-employed in agriculture", the MPCE of casual labourers and regular wage earners engaged in agriculture was lower than the rural average, according to the HCES 2022-23. The average MPCE of households with "regular wage/salaried earning in agriculture" was ₹3,597, while that of households with "regular wage/salaried earning in non-agriculture" was ₹4,533. Similarly, the average MPCE of households engaged in "casual labour in agriculture" was ₹3,273, as compared to ₹3,315 for "casual labour in non-agriculture".

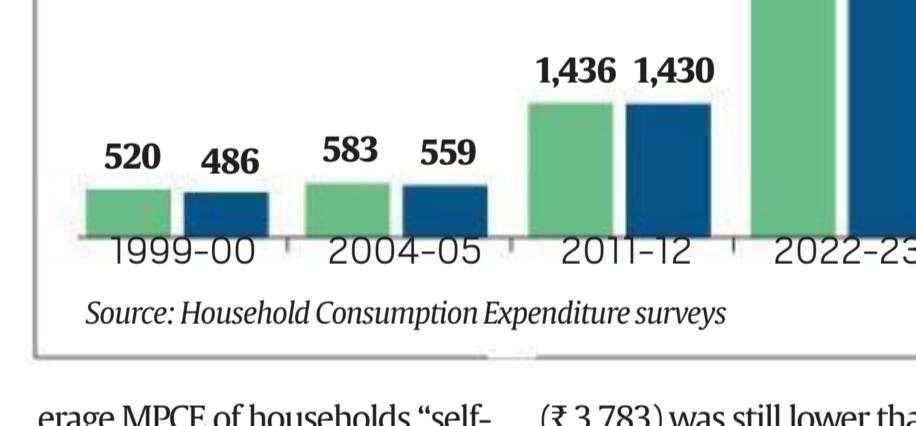
The average MPCE for casual labour in agriculture and self-employed in agriculture are at the tail end. And the latter, for the first time, is lower than the rural household average of ₹3,773. This implies that the latter has not kept pace with other groups. It is, therefore, an opportunity to take a deep dive into data and come out with a suitable policy instrument," Rama Kamaraju, a former senior consultant with NITI Aayog, said.

According to an economist, one of the possible reasons could be the diversification of the rural economy, with non-agricultural activities gaining prominence.

Citing another possible reason, another economist said some of the migrant labourers who returned to their villages during Covid-19 may have stayed back and taken up agriculture, increasing the total number of those "self-employed in agriculture". The av-

CONSUMPTION IN RURAL AREAS

Average monthly per capita expenditure (₹) in rural areas



(₹ 3,783) was still lower than the overall average for rural households (₹ 3,860).

The latest survey report also shows that in rural areas, Scheduled Tribes (STs) reported the lowest MPCE at ₹3,016, while it was ₹3,474 for Scheduled Castes (SCs), ₹3,848 for Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and ₹4,392 for others.

In urban areas, SCs reported the lowest MPCE at ₹3,507, followed by ₹3,414 for STs, ₹6,177 for OBCs, and ₹7,333 for others. Overall, the average MPCE was ₹3,773 for rural households, and ₹6,459 for urban households.

While the HCES is held in a gap of five years, the government did not release the survey results of its 75th round for July 2017-June 2018, saying there was a significant variation in the levels in consumption pattern as well as in the direction of change. The survey that was leaked had shown a decline in consumption expenditure. The HCES collects information on consumption of goods and services by households. The new survey results come after over 10 years.

The average MPCE with imputation for agricultural households

lowed to enter."

In her post, Kaul also alleged that after landing in Bengaluru from London, she was made to wait several hours at immigration and kept in a holding cell with restricted movement for 24 hours. She alleged that she was denied easy access to food and water and had to make dozens of calls to the airport for basic things such as a pillow and blanket, "which they refused to provide".

When contacted, Mahadevappa told *The Indian Express* that he was not aware of the development. "I have no idea. I was busy organising the event," he said. Apart from Congress leaders, several MPs were part of Sunday's closing ceremony. The Chief Minister's

Office did not comment on the development.

When contacted, Kaul, who has an OCI (Overseas Citizenship of India) card, told *The Indian Express* she was invited as an "esteemed delegate" to attend the two-day conference and wasn't supposed to speak at any panel discussion. She landed early Friday morning and was sent back on the next direct flight on Saturday morning. She alleged that she remained detained at the airport during that time.

"I was formally informed that I was being sent back on instructions from Delhi, but they didn't disclose the name of the entity that instructed them, and this wasn't provided to me in writing. Furthermore, I wasn't given a rea-

son for my deportation. All I received was a letter addressed to the airlines, requesting them to take me back to the UK, as I wasn't allowed to enter the country. The immigration officials kept asking if I was the one who keeps criticising the RSS, and that, to me, was flabbergasting," she said.

"This is not how a democracy works. This is not China, and I demanded reasons, but it fell on deaf ears. I have been to India before on multiple occasions for personal visits. This is the first time this has happened to me – coincidentally, when I was on a planned official trip for a conference organised in a state ruled by the Opposition party. It's tragic what's happening to the rule of law in India," she said.

The MHA spokesperson did not respond to queries from The

Express on Kaul's deportation. MHA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal did not respond to calls and a text message on the issue.

The Karnataka BJP, meanwhile, accused the Congress of disgracing the Indian Constitution by inviting a Pakistani sympathiser who wants to break India.

"At the expense of Karnataka taxpayers, Congress government is channelling funds to terrorist sympathisers, urban Naxals, anti-nationalists, riots-accused to destabilise India ahead of elections. Thanks to our security agencies, one such anti-India element was caught suspiciously entering India and detained at the airport," the BJP state unit posted online.

Indian Express on Kaul's deportation. MHA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal did not respond to calls and a text message on the issue.

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"At the expense of Karnataka taxpayers, Congress government is channelling funds to terrorist sympathisers, urban Naxals, anti-national



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7 MAR

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12 MAR

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15 MAR

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11 जून

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21 फरवरी

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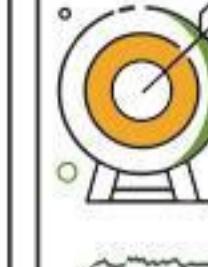
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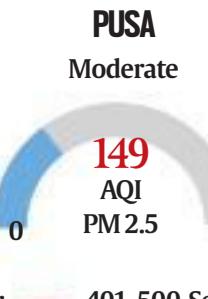
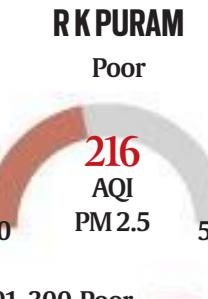
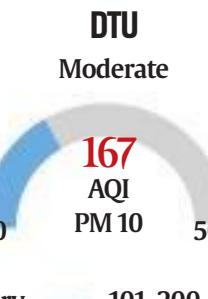
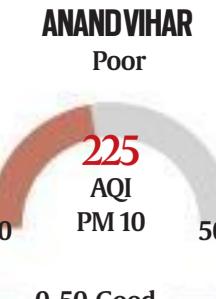
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S K Y W A T C H
FORECAST: February 26
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Possibility of drizzle towards night at one or two places

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AAP vs BJP: AHEAD OF LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

INDIA bloc will be safety net for all: CM to voters

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

DELHI CHIEF Minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday appealed to the people to vote for the INDIA bloc and make it win all seven seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"If you make us win, no L-G (Lieutenant Governor of Delhi) will dare to stop any scheme or work. INDIA alliance will become the safety net for you all," said Kejriwal, addressing a gathering at the AAP headquarters in Delhi on Sunday.

"You people call me son and brother, and consider me as part of your family, but I do not know why you go and vote for BJP in LS polls... I am not joking. If this time you people make the INDIA alliance win the seven seats, it will become a safety net... The L-G will not have the guts to stop the scheme because we will raise our voice in the Parliament... You make us win this time and see, no L-G would dare to stop the good works..." said Kejriwal.

Kejriwal, who has visited Govindpuri area and met the residents regarding the water bill issues, said that he assured them that the Delhi government has been working to fix incorrect bills generated based on fake readings during the Covid-19 pandemic. "Some have got Rs 1-lakh bills, others Rs 4.20-lakh bills... What will a normal middle-class man eat and drink if he gets this much bill in a month... If the BJP would have been in power, they would have cut all your water connec-



CM Arvind Kejriwal addresses party members during their protest over water bill issues, in Delhi on Sunday. Tashi Tobgyal

tions... But it will not happen here, till your son (Kejriwal) is alive... If you think your bill is reasonable, pay it, but if you think it is inflated unnecessarily, don't pay your bill... Kejriwal is here. We will not let these BJP people do *gundagardhi* (rowdyism)," said Kejriwal.

Kejriwal said to resolve this problem, the Delhi government brought a 'one-time settlement' scheme. "Because correcting water bills of 10 lakh consumers is not a possible or easy task... So, we brought this bill... 55 per cent of the total consumers would get relief with a zero-bill... What is wrong with it? This is your right. It is a government policy – free electricity and free water, and you people should avail this facility," he said, adding the Delhi Jal Board passed the scheme, and it was to be sent for cabinet approval, but BJP stopped it via the L-G.

"Bureaucrats were threatened to stop this scheme... Senior officers were crying... When ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj called the officers and asked them why they were not approving the scheme, they said that they were

under pressure and being threatened by BJP that if they move the scheme for cabinet approval, they will also end up like Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain – in jail. The ED-CBI will file false cases against them and put them in jail," said the Chief Minister.

Reacting to this, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva termed Kejriwal a "master in the art of misleading people", alleging that he had faked up the issue to divert people's attention from the "corruption sagas" of the AAP-led government. "As he is mired in corruption allegations with people raising questions, Kejriwal started raising issues related to the people – getting excessive water bills, misusing the extended budget session of the Delhi Assembly... This problem has been caused by the installation of wrong air flow meters by the DJB, so it will be better if the DJB, as a 'one-time settlement', issues zero bills to all disputed residential consumers... Bills have to be settled by the Delhi government where he is already in power, but not doing anything administratively to help people."

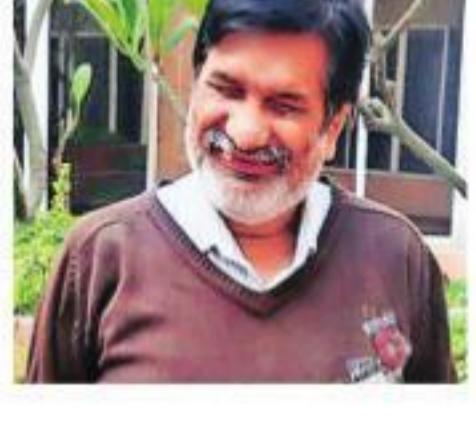
The eligibility criteria of the scheme is such that most of the Delhi residents would not be eligible for availing its benefits... In hospitals like GB Pant Hospital, almost half of the total surgeries are on patients from states wherein the scheme is operational, like the BJP-ruled states of



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A house for Ms Atreja: Disabled DU teacher's fight for accommodation



Teachers Sonu Yadav, Sharmishtha Atreja and Ram Murti Sharma. Express

L-G writes to CM for 'failing' to implement Ayushman Bharat scheme in Capital

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

QUESTIONING WHAT he termed was the AAP-led Delhi government's "intransience" on the matter, Delhi L-G V K Saxena on Sunday wrote to CM Arvind Kejriwal, urging him to implement the central government's Ayushman Bharat health scheme in the Capital soon.

Saxena said he had received requests from several disadvantaged groups, complaining that "they were not able to avail the benefits of the scheme, which has a health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family a year – for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation; recalling file related to it; and asking the CM to implement it at the earliest "for providing the benefit to the poorest of the poor."

Responding to this, Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj accused "mounting concerns" over the scheme's efficacy, and accused Saxena of being "disconnected from ground realities", while referring to a CAG report, citing revelations related to ineligible beneficiaries reaping its benefits.

"The eligibility criteria of the scheme is such that most of the Delhi residents would not be eligible for availing its benefits... In hospitals like GB Pant Hospital, almost half of the total surgeries are on patients from states wherein the scheme is operational, like the BJP-ruled states of



L-G V K SAXENA

UP and Haryana. It is very sad to see that though the L-G is boasting about the scheme, there is practically no success on the ground..."

Saxena wrote in his letter to the CM, "My Secretariat is constantly in receipt of requests and applications for financial aid for health purposes, almost entirely from the economically weakest sections... who are not able to avail of secondary and tertiary health services because of lack of a ration card or a voter ID in Delhi, and because they do not have the Ayushman registration either." He, while disposing the file, questioned why the Delhi government, despite having given in-principle approval for its implementation back in 2018, and even having announced it in its budget in 2020, had "inexplicably stalled it for merely political reasons" and deprived "lakhs of poor migrants in the city" of health services under it.

FULL REPORT ON

www.indianexpress.com

2021, but with a rider. In the communication, the Provost stated: "...it may be noted that this allotment is conditional with respect to the fact that you shall vacate... as and when it is needed... failing which you shall be penalized..."

Other teachers at DU have had similar long waits for accommodation. Ram Murti Sharma, Assistant Professor at Department of Education, began teaching in 2018, and till 2023, lived in a rented house in Priyadarshini Vihar. "I had been applying regularly since 2019. They allotted a house in 2023, but that's a type 2 (accommodation) when my entitlement is type 3. My wife is partially sighted. We need arrangements that will allow us to navigate on our own," said Sharma, 56, who is visually impaired.

tion for persons with disability. "If we feel that someone is very needy, we give accommodation, but on a compassionate basis. There is no rule," he said.

Other teachers at DU have had similar long waits for accommodation. Ram Murti Sharma, Assistant Professor at Department of Education, began teaching in 2018, and till 2023, lived in a rented house in Priyadarshini Vihar. "I had been applying regularly since 2019. They allotted a house in 2023, but that's a type 2 (accommodation) when my entitlement is type 3. My wife is partially sighted. We need arrangements that will allow us to navigate on our own," said Sharma, 56, who is visually impaired.

Sonu Yadav, 38, Assistant Professor, Department of History, began applying for accommodation from 2014-15, but has not met with much success,

forcing the visually impaired man to travel from Gurgaon. "It's not easy. But my parents are with me," he said.

Support from parents is one thing that Atreja, too, is grateful for; she is, at present, staying on the hostel premises with her parents. "If my parents were not there with me, I wouldn't have been able to do this... they left everything to shift in with me..." she said.

Her new house in Maurice Nagar will allow Atreja to walk to her department with a little help. "There is one intersection to cross, and then a pavement which is slightly accessible... If it takes 5 mins for somebody to walk down to Maurice Nagar, it might take me 40 mins," she said.

Atreja said it is high time that the varsity makes the campus accessible. "Yellow tactile paths (on pavements) may be leading into a gutter or a tree or a hawker. It's

not just about the tactile path, but about a barrier-free environment," she said, asking, "Why did I have to go to court to give me options? When we talk about equitable spaces for persons with disability, Delhi University should have been the first one (to provide such spaces)."

FORMER DEPUTY CM BAIL DENIED, SC RAP TO AGENCIES, CUSTODY PAROLE

A year on, how legal battle has played out for Sisodia

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

EXACTLY a year ago, on February 26, 2023, Delhi's former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia was arrested by the CBI, and by the ED a month later, in the Excise Policy case.

While the CBI is examining the criminal aspect of the case, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is probing the alleged money laundering angle. As the senior AAP leader completes a year behind bars, The Indian Express takes a look at the status of the cases against him:

Rouse Avenue Court: Bail denied in 2 cases

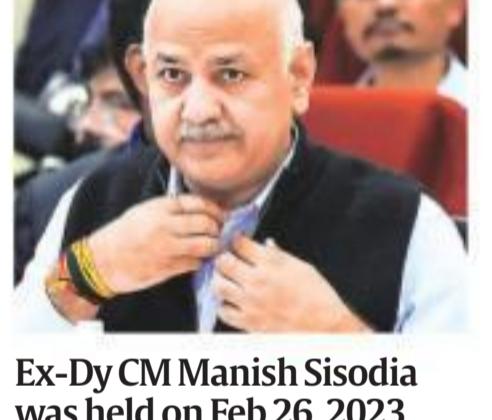
Special Judge MK Nagpal first dismissed Sisodia's bail application in the CBI case in March last year. In April, the court denied his bail in the ED case.

Delhi High Court: Bail denied in both cases

On May 30 last year, the High Court rejected Sisodia's bail plea in the CBI case. Later, his bail in the money laundering case was also denied.

Supreme Court: Pulled up ED, but denied bail

In July, seeking bail in the ED case, Sisodia told the apex court the agency had not traced any



Ex-Dy CM Manish Sisodia was held on Feb 26, 2023.

proceeds of crime to him. The SC also warned the agency that the "case will fall flat" after "two questions in the cross-examination". The court, on more than one occasion, told the two agencies that they cannot keep Sisodia "in jail indefinitely".

Yet, less than a month later, on October 30, it denied bail to Sisodia. On December 14, the SC also dismissed his petition to review its bail verdict. The court said the one "clear ground" in the PMLA case that was "tentatively supported by material and evidence" was the Rs 338 crore "excess profit" earned by the wholesaler due to changes made in the policy. The SC directed the agency to conclude the trial within six to eight months.

Four months on, charges have not been framed in the case. In the most recent hearing, the counsel of various accused in the case complained that a few

documents provided to them via the CBI were not opening on their computers. The court granted them a week's time to go to the CBI office to view the documents. The CBI also submitted a status report in a sealed cover in the court.

Custody parole

In November last year, Sisodia was allowed to go to his residence to meet his wife Seema – who is suffering from multiple sclerosis. In February this year, the court allowed Sisodia to meet his wife once a week while in custody.

Present status

After the SC's directive to the agencies, Sisodia, in January, moved a Delhi court seeking regular bail in both the CBI and ED cases. The trial court, however, extended the AAP leader's judicial custody till March 12 and deferred, till March 2, a decision on whether it will take up Sisodia's "regular bail application".

Other cases

In March 2023, the CBI registered an FIR against seven people, including Sisodia, under the Prevention of Corruption Act in connection with a snooping case related to the ruling AAP's alleged "Feedback Unit". Besides, there are three defamation cases against Sisodia.

Said a jail official, "He complies with all the jail rules as per the manual... his diet is the same as the other inmates... the barracks open at 6 am when inmates are allowed to move inside and each head is counted. After this, some biscuits, tea, and porridge is given to the inmates at 8

am... like other prisoners, he, too, is served a lunch consisting of chappati, vegetables and lentils at 11 am." The barracks remain shut between 12pm and 3pm. "But even when the barracks open, Sisodia mostly stays put inside his cell... either reading the newspaper or a book," said a jail official.

Apart from prescribed medicines, Sisodia consults the medical officers at the jail's in-house hospital, said the official without revealing the names of the medicines or the medical reasons for which he has been consuming them. "There has not been any major grievance on his part throughout his stay inside Tihar... he was also allowed to carry the Bhagavad Gita when he was first lodged here and it is still in his possession," added the official.

Sisodia currently shares ward number 9 with around six inmates, none of whom is a dreaded criminal or gangster, the official clarified, adding that this allows Sisodia to practise his Vipassana (a form of meditation) inside the cell on a regular basis. During his stay inside the jail, Sisodia has also written multiple letters where he has either emphasised on education or targeted the PM over his educational qualifications.

A jail official said, "Like every inmate, Sisodia too has the right to write letters from jail which are sent out via the postal network..."

Organised by the Delhi BJP Minority Morcha, Arjuna award-winning international Kho Kho player Nasreen Sheikh attended the event, with Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva praising her for "making the country proud". "Ms Nasreen Sheikh... has made India proud... Whether it is the Prime Minister's housing scheme or others... the Muslim community, especially the marginalised ones, have been benefited across the country, but it is regrettable that the Delhi government did not implement them, causing harm to... all the communities..." said Sachdeva during the event.

station of Gurgaon, the administrative headquarters of the district, consists of public offices, the dwellings of European residents, the Sadar bazar, and the settlement of Jacombara, which was laid out by a former Deputy Commissioner, Jacomb, in 1861, for the accommodation of government servants. "The place was first occupied by some troops of cavalry, who were posted to watch the army of the Begum Samru (HH Sombre) of Sirdhana, whose principal cantonment was at the village of Jharsa," the Gazetteer says that the

old railway road, Ritika Soun (27), a museum enthusiast and guide for the walk, said that the image of Gurgaon as just a corporate hub needs to be reimagined. "Once people are aware of the historical importance of this region, they will come together. People will find their roots and attempt to restore and protect them..." she said.

Roslyn (54), who has been living in Gurgaon for 40 years, heard about the walk from her church, The Church of Epiphany, which was also one of the spots of the event. "I have been to several historically important cities, but when I heard about Gurgaon, I was surprised," the artist said.

DOES GURGAON HAVE ANY HISTORY?

A heritage walk in 'concrete jungle' leaves residents awestruck

AISWARYA RAJ
GURGAON, FEBRUARY 25

WHEN GURGAON resident Rupam, 52, told his daughter about a heritage walk in Gurgaon's Civil Lines, he was met with a reaction of surprise. "Does Gurgaon have any history?" the girl asked him.

As INTACH and Haryana government-run cultural society Kalagram organised a heritage walk on the lanes of Old Gurgaon – covering Mohiy Park, Kaman Sarai, John Hall and the Church of Epiphany – the refrain from the small group that attended the



<p



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CASE LODGED AGAINST WOMAN WHO 'FED' DOGS

Toddler mauled to death by stray dogs in Central Delhi

UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

A TODDLER was allegedly mauled to death by a pack of stray dogs in central Delhi's Tughlaq Lane on Saturday. The victim, one-and-a-half-year-old Divyanshi, was near Dhoobi Ghat's gates in the evening when a pack of five dogs attacked her and dragged her 100 metres away, said her family members.

The victim's father, Rahul Kanodia, said he was on his way back from work when he received the news that his daughter had been severely injured in the attack.

A case under IPC section pertaining to causing death by negligence has been lodged in the case, said DCP (New Delhi) Devesh Mahla, adding the incident took place around 8 pm.

The case has been lodged against a woman who allegedly did not feed the stray dogs. No arrests have been made yet in the case.



At a protest over the incident on Sunday. Tashi Tobgyal

Kanodia, meanwhile, is in shock after the incident.

"A passerby on a bicycle saw that the dogs were playing with something in the corner of the street. When he took a closer look, he saw that it was my child," said Kanodia. "He informed my cousin who rushed her to the

hospital. But my child could not survive. How could she?" asked the father.

Divyanshi was declared dead on arrival at Safdarjung Hospital. She is survived by her parents, two older siblings, and her grandparents.

Local residents said the girl

had wandered off from her home, situated on the Dhoobi Ghat premises, when the dogs attacked her.

A neighbour, Praveen Kumar, said though other children were also playing in the surroundings, the victim's cries for help could not be heard because of loud music coming from a party nearby.

Kumar alleged that the dogs in the neighbourhood had been a nuisance to the residents for a long time, adding they had attacked a woman on Friday as well. Kumar said the residents of the locality had often complained to the woman who would feed the stray dogs about the "aggressive behaviour" of the animals.

Meanwhile, the victim's body was handed over to the family for funeral services on Sunday evening. Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi also visited the family. "There can be no greater sorrow than this for parents... I have instructed the officers to submit the inquiry report as soon as possible," Oberoi wrote on X.

Indian Army havildar to Class 12 student: First Gurgaon Marathon draws hundreds

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GURGAON, FEBRUARY 25

AT THE inaugural edition of the Gurgaon Marathon on Sunday morning, the city buzzed with runners from across the globe.

With around 45 registrations, the marathon was flagged off by CM Manohar Lal Khattar in the presence of Gurgaon Marathon brand ambassador cricketer Shikhar Dhawan.

With the theme "Run for Zero Hunger", the marathon saw participation from school and university students, the youth, and elders in addition to athletes hailing from Britain and Ethiopia.

The winner of the full marathon along a 42-km route from Leisure Valley Park to Huda City Centre metro station to



At the event on Sunday. Express

Bakhtawar Chowk to Indra Colony and back was Ajay Kumar who received a Rs 1.50 lakh cash prize.

From Shamli in Uttar Pradesh and deployed in Punjab as an Indian Army havildar, Kumar said this was his third marathon this year. "I participated in

Ranchi and Gaya marathons and so far, the Gurgaon one seemed better," he said. Kumar said he has participated in the 5,000 and 10,000-metre categories in the championships of services.

Kiran, a professional athlete from Gohana in Sonipat who is employed with the Railways,

bagged the first position in the women's category. "I have participated in national championships in the 10,000-metre category... This was my first marathon and it felt good," she said.

CM Khattar said that the significant turnout for the marathon reflected the emerging brand image of the Millennium City adding that a similar event would be held in Faridabad on March 3. Stressing on Haryana's sporting heritage, the CM added that such events help foster a healthy lifestyle.

Yash Nagar, who bagged third place in the 10 km category, said, "I'm a class 12 student and my exams are taking place right now. I asked my parents not to enroll my name in the marathon but they want me to pursue sports seriously."

BRIEFLY

Police remove barrier at Singhu, Tikri borders

New Delhi: As the farmers halted their proposed march towards the national capital, the Delhi police on Sunday arranged a pathway for the commuters by removing a portion of blocks at the Singhu and Tikri borders. "We are removing a portion of the barrier from Point-A to Point-B for the commuters. The deployment of police and paramilitary forces will ensure strict vigil round the clock. Force deployment will stay in place. Vehicle movement will not be allowed for now," a senior police officer said.

Lajpat Nagar: 3 rescued from house fire

New Delhi: Three people were rescued after a major fire broke out in a house in southeast Delhi's Lajpat Nagar area in the early hours of Sunday, officials said. The Delhi Fire Services (DFS) officials said they received a call about the blaze, which broke out on the first floor of the house, at 1.57 am. PTI

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Scheme for early detection, prevention of breast cancer

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GURGAON, FEBRUARY 25



Haryana CM Khattar

HARYANA CHIEF Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Sunday inaugurated the Savera programme — aimed at early detection and prevention of breast cancer — which was initiated by the Medanta Foundation in collaboration with the Health Department in Gurgaon.

Under the scheme, visually impaired people will conduct screening for breast cancer, said the CM, highlighting that "they have natural tactile sensitivity". "The importance of this ability has been understood, tested, and used

by people associated with the medical world. Visually impaired people can detect breast cancer up to half a centimetre, whereas a normal doctor can detect it up to one centimetre, after examination," he said.

In its initial phase, the programme will be launched at Civil Hospital in Sector 10, the polyclinic in Sector 31, and PHC in Wazirabad. The CM said that breast cancer is one of cancer types that mainly occur in women residing in cities. He said that about 90,000 women across the country lose their lives due to breast cancer, on a daily basis.

The Savera scheme will leverage the assistance of visually impaired women for breast cancer screening, he said, also mentioning the establishment of National Cancer Institute at AIIMS in Jhajjar district, which has been equipped with 1,000 beds.

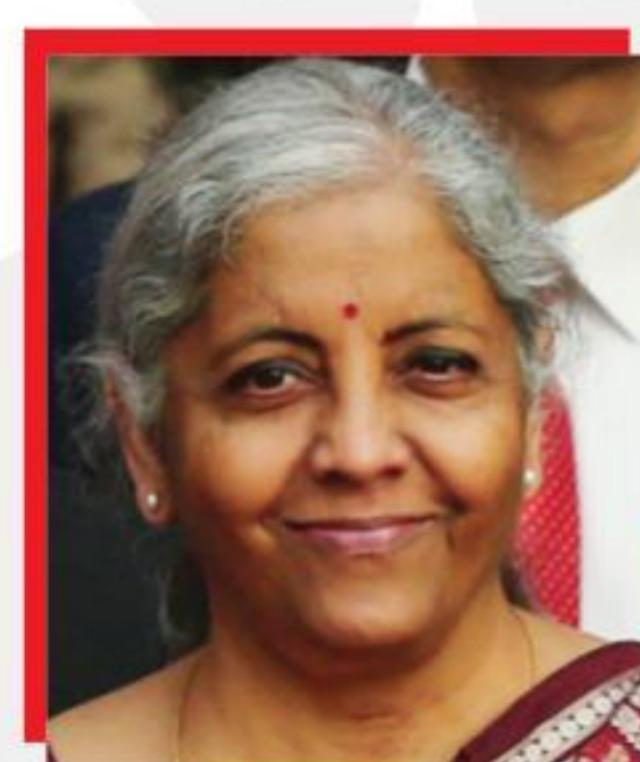
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CORRIGENDUM FOR PURCHASE OF POWER UNDER LONG TERM PROCUREMENT AGAINST TENDER SPECIFICATION NO. 12/CE(COMM)/UPCL-12/LTPP/2023

It is to inform that some amendment/modifications have been made by UPCL in tender specification No. 12/CE(COMM)/UPCL-12/LTPP/2023 and the detailed amendment/modifications can be read/studied completely in official website of UPCL i.e. www.upcl.org and website of MSTC India Limited i.e. www.mstccommerce.com

All other terms and conditions shall remain unchanged.

No.: 111/EE(CM)/UPCL-2 Dt. 24.02.2024

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BEFORE THE STATE CONSUMER REDRESSAL COMMISSION, MADURAI

C.M.P. 874/2023 In C.C.No. /2023

In
C.C.No. /2023

M/s.VRL Logistics Limited
Through its Manager,
Madurai and Others

... Petitioner / Appellants

M/s.Jay Mahaveera Fabric,
Through its Authorized Signatory,
1070/5, SHIV Sakti Market,
Kucha Natwa, Chandni Chowk,
Delhi - 110006.

-VS-

... Respondent / Respondent Party.

Notice

It is here by submitted that the above named petitioner / appellant has Preferred an appeal against the order made by the District Consumer Redressal Commission, Madurai Consumer Complaint No.142/2021 with delay condonation petition and the delay condonation petition has been numbered as C.M.P 874 / 2023 and in the C.M.P your presence is required. You may appear either in person or through your counsel before the State Consumer Redressal Commission, Madurai on 14.03.2024 at 10.30 A.M without fail, failing which necessary orders will be passed against you.

C. Marimuthu H. Muthuramasubramanian
A. Hamsarajan, Advocates for Appellant
Madurai (TamilNadu) Mob: 9841392944

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Principal
Tuljaram Chaturchand College,
Baramati
Secretary
Anekan Education Society
Baramati

GOVT & POLITICS



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



DEAR VOTER...

IN AN age when most political leaders use pre-recorded calls, WhatsApp messages and social media to connect with their constituents, Dr Sanjeev Balyan, the Union Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, is going old school. Balyan, seeking a third term from his Muzaffarnagar Lok Sabha constituency, has written letters in bulk and sent it to people such as village heads, soldiers and security personnel. He has written about his work between 2014 and 2024 – including the construction of roads and a cow sanctuary.

HERE, THERE, WHERE?

BSP'S JAUNPUR MP Shyam Singh Yadav Sunday joined Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Agra. But his supporters wanted to know which party he was backing – the Congress or the SP. There are two reasons for the confusion. First, Yadav is eager to contest the Lok Sabha elections from Jaunpur, but that seat has gone to the SP under its seat-sharing pact with the Congress. Second, Jaunpur is adjacent to Varanasi, through which Rahul's yatra had passed last week. Yadav, however, did not participate in that leg of the yatra. Instead he joined the Agra route where SP chief Akhilesh Yadav turned up. On Sunday, BSP chief Mayawati Sunday hinted she may deny tickets to those wandering "here and there" to suit their own interests.

BSP's Ritesh Pandey joins BJP, Maya tells other MPs: Introspect



Ritesh Pandey with BJP leaders in New Delhi, Sunday. PTI

LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

BSP MP from Ambedkar Nagar in Uttar Pradesh Ritesh Pandey Sunday resigned from the party, alleging neglect by the leadership, and joined the BJP.

Just a couple of hours before joining BJP in New Delhi, Pandey posted his resignation letter to BSP chief Mayawati on X, in which he wrote that despite several attempts made by him, the party leadership did not communicate with him.

"For a long time, I have not been called to (BSP) party meetings... I made numerous efforts to contact and meet you... but got no results... I continuously met the public and workers... I have reached a conclusion the party does not need my service and presence," Pandey wrote.

Soon after Pandey's resignation, BSP president Mayawati asked party MPs to introspect

whether they followed the guidelines given to them in the interest of the party. "Along with the party... there is also a movement dedicated to the mission of... Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar... the BSP MPs must introspect whether they took proper care of the people in their area... is it possible to give tickets to most of the Lok Sabha MPs, especially when they are seen wandering," she said, hinting that she may deny tickets to several BSP MPs. After joining the BJP in the presence of UP in-charge Bajayant Jay Panda, UP president Bhupendra Singh and UP Deputy CM Brajesh Pathak, Pandey, a Brahmin leader, said that he would work hard to ensure that the NDA wins more than 400 seats in Lok Sabha elections.

He said that despite being a member of the Opposition, BJP governments accepted his requests for projects in Ambedkar Nagar. BJP sources said the party mayfield Pandey from Ambedkar Nagar in the Lok Sabha polls.

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER CONSTRUCTION DIVISION (E/M)
U.P. JAL NIGAM (URBAN)
GHAZIABAD**

Letter No.: 462/Vividh-7/30
Date: 23.02.2024

SHORT TERM E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender for "Dismantling of old starters (LRS) with underground cable etc and SITC of Slip ring variable liquid rotor/resistor starter 7.2KV for torque/current control startup of 7.2KV slip ring VT pump set having compatibility with VCB's in auto/manual mode including Supply & laying of XLPE insulated aluminum armored cable size 1x3Cx400 Sqmm along with retrofitting and associated works, all materials required for testing and commissioning of the LRS at 50 Cusec Ganga Jal WTP Pratap Vihar, Ghaziabad." is invited by U.P. Jal Nigam (Urban) that shall be downloaded and uploaded at e-procurement website <http://etender.up.nic.in> from 27-02-2024 at 15:00 hrs. onwards to 04-03-2024 at 17:00 hrs. E-tender shall be open on 05-03-2024 at 12:00 hrs. onwards at office of the Executive Engineer, Construction Division (E/M) U.P. Jal Nigam (Urban), Ghaziabad. The cost of tender document is 2,000+18% GST. All other conditions shall be as per NIT and tender document.

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER CONSTRUCTION DIVISION (E/M)
U.P. JAL NIGAM (URBAN)
GHAZIABAD**

Letter No.: 461/Vividh-7/29
Date: 22.02.2024

SHORT TERM E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender for "Restoration and renovation of dirty backwash sump well pumps with re-arrangement of delivery and common header pipe lines with retrofiting and construction works as required and SITC of non clog sewerage submersible bottom suction pump sets, including delivery common header pipe lines of larger size, fittings, LT feeder Panels, APFC Panels and cables etc. as well as dismantling of old electrical fittings with appurtenants works complete in all respect with 1 yr MRO (maintenance, repair & operation) at 100 Cusec Ganga Jal WTP Siddharath Vihar, Ghaziabad." is invited by U.P. Jal Nigam (Urban) that shall be downloaded and uploaded at e-procurement website <http://etender.up.nic.in> from 26-02-2024 at 15:00 hrs. onwards to 03-03-2024 at 17:00 hrs. E-tender shall be open on 04-03-2024 at 12:00 hrs. onwards at office of the Executive Engineer, Construction Division (E/M) U.P. Jal Nigam (Urban), Ghaziabad. The cost of tender document is 3,000+18% GST. All other conditions shall be as per NIT and tender document.

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER CONSTRUCTION DIVISION (E/M)
U.P. JAL NIGAM (URBAN)
GHAZIABAD**

Letter No.: 460/Vividh-7/28
Date: 22.02.2024

SHORT TERM E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender for "Restoration and renovation of dirty backwash sump well pumps with re-arrangement of delivery and common header pipe lines with retrofiting and construction works as required and SITC of non clog sewerage submersible bottom suction pump sets, including delivery common header pipe lines of larger size, fittings, LT feeder Panels, APFC Panels and cables etc. as well as dismantling of old electrical fittings with appurtenants works complete in all respect with 1 yr MRO (maintenance, repair & operation) at 4 MLD waste water recycling unit as part of 50 Cusec Ganga Jal WTP Pratap Vihar, Ghaziabad." is invited by U.P. Jal Nigam (Urban) that shall be downloaded and uploaded at e-procurement website <http://etender.up.nic.in> from 26-02-2024 at 15:00 hrs. onwards to 03-03-2024 at 17:00 hrs. E-tender shall be open on 04-03-2024 at 12:00 hrs. onwards at office of the Executive Engineer, Construction Division (E/M) U.P. Jal Nigam (Urban), Ghaziabad. The cost of tender document is 5,000+18% GST. All other conditions shall be as per NIT and tender document.

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS),
PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT,
ASSAM, GUWAHATI-03**

No. CE/DEV/TB/741/2023-24/15

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites Bids on behalf of Governor of Assam for 1 (One) no of Package for Construction of Roads and Bridge projects under SOPD-G for the year 2023-24 in Golaghat District of Assam amounting to Rs. 2.41 Crores (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam. Details may be seen from 27.02.2024 at website www.assamtenders.gov.in. Amendment /Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website www.assamtenders.gov.in. The schemes are not yet sanctioned by the competent authority. In the event of non-sanction of the schemes, the bids may be cancelled and no claim what so ever on this account shall be entertained from the bidders.

Note: - N.I.T Value is inclusive of GST (12%), Labour cess (1%) etc.

Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari Guwahati-3.

JANASANYOG/CF/5912/23/26-FEB-24

INAUGURATES BRIDGE, OFFERS PRAYERS UNDER WATER

Cong's full strength used for betterment of one family: PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
AHMEDABAD, FEBRUARY 25

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Sunday targeted the opposition Congress, saying it lacked the "niyat (intention)" and "nisha (sincerity)" to provide facilities to the people, and that its entire strength was used to ensure the betterment of just one family.

He was addressing a public meeting in Dwarka in Devbhumi Dwarka district after inaugurating and laying foundation stones of projects worth ₹4,100 crore, including the Sudarshan Setu, India's longest cable-stayed bridge between Okha and Beyt Dwarka built at a cost of ₹978 crore.

Referring to the Sudarshan Setu project, Modi said he laid the foundation stone six years ago and has now inaugurated it.

Calling it an engineering marvel, he said, "I as the then Gujarat CM used to repeatedly write to the then Congress government (about the necessity of the bridge). But they never paid attention to it. The good fortune of building this bridge was in my destiny."

He then targeted the Congress.



PM Narendra Modi after inaugurating the Sudarshan Setu. ANI

"Those who ruled the country for a long time, they did not have the will power and lacked the intention or sincerity to provide facilities to the common people. The entire strength of Congress gets employed for the betterment of one family. When they want the progress of one family, how will they remember building the country? All their efforts were in the direction of how to run the government for five years and how to conceal scams. And that is

why in the 10 years before 2014, they (Congress) could only make India 11th rank economy. When the economy was so small, it lacked the ability to fulfill the big dreams of a big country."

"Whatever little budget was left for infrastructure, they used to loot it through scams. When time came to improve telecom infrastructure, Congress did the 2G scam. When the opportunity arrived to modernise sports infrastructure, the Congress did the

Commonwealth (Games) scam. When the matter of strengthening the defence infrastructure arrived, the Congress did helicopter and submarine scam," he alleged. "The Congress can only betray every need of the country."

Modi said the government under his leadership in the past 10 years stopped all scams.

In the morning, Modi offered prayers at Dwarkadish Temple in Dwarka. He also went scuba diving off the Panchkui beach coast and performed prayers as he witnessed the ancient Dwarka Nagari of Lord Krishna, which is submerged in the waters. He sat cross-legged on the sea bed, folded his hands in prayer and waved peacock feathers before offering them to Lord Krishna.

In his address in Dwarka, he said, "I spent those moments which will stay with me forever. I went into the deep sea and saw ancient Dwarka ji. Archaeologists have written a lot about submerged Dwarka... While I was seeing Dwarkaji inside the sea, I was experiencing the same grandeur and divinity. I also offered peacock feathers there while remembering Lord Krishna."



Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde with his deputies Devendra Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar in Mumbai on Sunday. Ganesh Shirsekar

Don't cross limits: CM Shinde says Jarange speaking language of Opp

Warning after Maratha activist claims Fadnavis trying to 'eliminate' him

VALLABH OZARKAR & MANOJ MORE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 25



Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange Patil

and was honest with his cause (of Maratha reservation). But now he is constantly changing his demands... he is speaking the language of Opposition leaders Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray," Shinde said.

Alleging that Union Minister Narayan Rane has taken away some of his associates from Beed and Jalna, Jarange Patil said, "Through them, they are trying to defame me... It is Devendra Fadnavis who is behind this conspiracy... Fadnavis thinks he is a Brahmin and, therefore, he can defeat the Marathas."

Fadnavis said that Jarange is speaking the language of NCP-SP leader Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena UBI chief Uddhav Thackeray. "The government knows who has given the script and will expose the mastermind behind the conspiracy... Manoj Jarange Patil has stopped taking IV fluids."

He said that Fadnavis is working overtime to defeat the Maratha community.

Shinde said the activist's language has changed to that of the Opposition's. "Initially, Jarange Patil made genuine demands

"But if the law is not followed, police will have to take appropriate action," Fadnavis added.

SAYS MANN KI BAAT TO REMAIN SUSPENDED FOR NEXT THREE MONTHS

Modi hints at model code from March

LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

HINTING THAT the model code of conduct for the general elections may come into effect in March, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said during his monthly Mann Ki Baat address Sunday that the 18th Lok Sabha will symbolise the aspirations of the country's youth.

In the 110th episode of his radio programme, Modi referred to the Election Commission's ongoing campaign "Mera Pehla Vote – Desh Ke Liye", which aims to urge first-time voters to exercise their franchise in large numbers.

"After turning 18, you are getting a chance to elect members of

PM inaugurates five AIIMS, unveils development projects worth ₹48k cr

Rajkot: India should aspire for healthcare services like the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in its march to become a \$3-trillion economy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Sunday as he virtually inaugurated five AIIMS hospitals.

The Prime Minister unveiled or laid foundation stones of projects worth ₹48,000 crore

proud of its youth power.

Appealing to first-time voters to turn up in polling booths in record numbers, he said, "The atmosphere of Lok Sabha elections is all-pervasive and as witnessed last time (2019), there is a possibility that the code of conduct might also be in place in March."

Speaking about his radio programme, he said, "Mann Ki Baat is all about the collective strength of the country, achievements of the country... But still following political ethics, for the next three months during the Lok Sabha elections, Mann Ki Baat will not be broadcast. Next time Mann Ki Baat will begin with the auspicious number 111. What can be better than that?"

Speaking about his radio programme, he said, "Mann Ki Baat is all about the collective strength of the country, achievements of the country... But still following political ethics, for the next three months during the Lok Sabha elections, Mann Ki Baat will not be broadcast. Next time Mann Ki Baat will begin with the auspicious number 111. What can be better than that?"

He said that Fadnavis is working overtime to defeat the Maratha community.

Shinde said the activist's language has changed to that of the Opposition's. "Initially, Jarange Patil made genuine demands

to break the deadlock. The SP agreed to leave 17 seats, including Rampur and Varanasi, for the Congress and said that the SP won in the 2019 polls. The SP, which initially agreed to part with 11 seats, later revised its offer to 17.

In what seemed like a repeat of 2017, the SP announced its candidate in Varanasi and in-charge in Amroha, both of which were promised to the Congress.

The talks gained momentum only when Akhilesh, who had already announced candidates for 31 seats, refused to join the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Raebareli as seat-sharing had not been finalised.

Like in 2017, Priyanka intervened and spoke to Akhilesh over the phone last Wednesday

Leaders of both parties said there was a major difference between 2017 and 2024. "We formed the alliance this time while taking lessons from the past. This alliance has the people as the leadership, which will ensure its victory," said Congress spokesperson Surendra Rajput. His SP counterpart Rajendra Chaudhary said unlike in 2017, this time there was "complete understanding".

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

As 'UP ke ladke' reunite, a look back at their failed 2017 tie-up

LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

SEVEN YEARS after they joined forces, the "UP ke ladke" (boys from UP) Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi reunited in Agra Sunday during the Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. Flanked by Rahul and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the presence of Samajwadi Party (SP) chief at the event brought back memories of 2017 when they campaigned from a vehicle for the Assembly polls.

He said that despite being a member of the Opposition, BJP governments accepted his requests for projects in Ambedkar Nagar. BJP sources said the party mayfield Pandey from Ambedkar Nagar in the Lok Sabha polls.

of the alliance on Friday has been similar. In the 2017 polls, the SP won only 47 seats, a drastic fall from the 224 it won when it stormed to

EXPRESS NETWORK

Five held over
'honour' killing
of TN youth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 25

IN A CASE of suspected 'honour' killing, a 26-year old man was hacked to death here by his brother-in-law and four other accomplices, police said on Sunday. All the five accused persons have been arrested, they said.

The victim, G Praveen, was surrounded by his wife's elder brother Dinesh and his friends near a bar at suburban Pallikaranai on Saturday night. The five-member gang inflicted serious injuries on Praveen using machetes and later fled the spot.

Police personnel rushed Praveen to the Chromepet Government Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries.

A preliminary probe by the police revealed that Praveen was an accused in a murder case in 2022 and that he married a woman in November 2023 against the wishes of her family members.

Praveen and his wife belong to different communities.

A special police team arrested all the five men at Mambakkam on the outskirts of the city today morning. Further investigation is on, police said.

Shahjahan on the run, Abhishek says 'court has tied cops hands'

ENS & PTI
KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 25



TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee in Diamond Harbour on Sunday. PTI

REFERRING TO the Calcutta High Court decision to stay the joint SIT probe into the January 5 attack on ED officials allegedly by supporters of Shahjahan Sheikh in Sandeshkhali, TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee Sunday said his party was not shielding the local Zilla Parishad member and instead blamed the judiciary.

Speaking in Kolkata Sunday, he said, "If the High Court ties the state administration's hands, what can be done? After the January 5 incident, wherein it was claimed that ED officers were attacked, the central agency filed a complaint. The High Court ordered that a SIT, comprising representatives of state police and central agencies, be formed. Around 10-12 days later, the ED appealed for a stay in the HC. Accordingly, the plea was accepted. This means that they wanted that there should be no investigation, arrest, summons, or interrogation."

"Did Mamata Banerjee do this? No. It was done by the Calcutta HC. The hearing for the case is on March 6," said Banerjee and questioned if the stay order was to ensure that "BJP could seize footage of the incident".

The ED officials were attacked on January 5. Sheikh had been on the run since then.

He countered Opposition parties' claims that the TMC was shielding Sheikh and criticised the BJP for trying to "stoke a fire" in Bengal and "create unrest".

"I want to put this on record –

we have any contact details of others to whom we can reach out to. We are helpless," Ashwin told *The Indian Express* between long pauses.

According to him, Hemil last spoke to him on February 20, a day before he was killed. Hemil told him he was fine but did not reveal the exact nature of his job. The family only knew he worked as a "helper" in Russia. It was only later that they found out that Hemil had been "inducted into the war zone" on the Ukraine border.

Ashwin said the news of Hemil's death reached them on February 23. "Someone who identified himself as Imran, a resident of Hyderabad, whose brother was also with Hemil, called us on Friday (February 23) at 6 pm and informed us about his death in a missile attack in the war zone," he said.

"He shared details of the incident and we were totally

"shocked. We had a talk with Hemil on the night of February 20 and he was all fine. When we asked him about what kind of work he was doing, he did not reveal much," Ashwin said.

A family source said Hemil left studies after Class 12 and started a small embroidery business with his cousins. According to his father, Hemil later came in



Hemil Mangukiya died in a missile strike on February 21

contact with agents through a website who were offering jobs like "helpers and labourers" in Russia.

"Hemil made his passport

and told us about the job with a monthly salary of ₹2 lakh. He was told to do helper work in Russia. He left for Russia on December 14, 2023 and remained in contact with us regularly," said his father.

"We allowed him to go and work abroad so that we would not face financial constraints. He also wanted to earn more money so that he would save it for his marriage and also start his own business in Surat. He also asked me not to worry about money and assured me that he will take care of all the family responsibilities," Ashwin said.

"We have come to know that after working for a few days, he was told to sign a document written in Russian language and later he was inducted into the

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He said a Congress MP says North India and South India should be divided into two pieces, and the party remains silent. "What has happened to the party once led by Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, and Mahatma Gandhi? It does not even distance itself from the statement. How can you say this country will be divided into two pieces? No one has the courage to divide this country into two pieces because today BJP government of Narendra Modi is in power."

Shah was referring to Karnataka Congress MP D K Suresh's comments in February. He had said people of South India might have to demand a separate country if "the injustice of not providing the rightful share of taxes (to the southern states) continued".

"In 10 years, they (Congress) committed scams and corruption of ₹12 lakh crore", while the BJP kept fulfilling every promise made to the people of India, he said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah offers prayers at the Matangeshwar Mahadev temple in Khajuraho, Sunday. ANI

ment, and corruption... Today, the country is moving towards true democracy," he said, adding, "Today, there are two blocs standing, like the two warring camps in the Mahabharat war."

Shah said, "One is the BJP led by Modi, a party like a patriotic band, and the other is a coalition of family-run parties. Who is this INDIA coalition? Who is this arrogant coalition? They are proud of their families, they do not believe that the son of a poor tea seller in

the country can become the PM."

Asking the gathering in Bhopal to "analyse the seven families" part of the INDIA bloc, Shah said, "Sonia Gandhi wants her son to become the PM, Sharad Pawar wants his daughter to become the CM, Mamata Banerjee wants her nephew to become the CM, Lalu wants his son to become the CM, Stalin also wants his son to become the CM, and Mulayam Singh's son wants to become the CM again. In a way, they are work-

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FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

WAYS OF SPENDING

Release of consumption expenditure survey after long gap is important step towards filling data vacuum in country

THE NATIONAL SAMPLE Survey Office conducts large-scale surveys on household consumption expenditure in the country, typically once every five years. These surveys not only inform about changes in household consumption expenditure patterns, but they also form the basis of poverty and inequality estimation. They are also used for drawing up the weighting diagram for the compilation of price indices used to measure retail inflation and for deriving other macroeconomic indicators. The results of the 2017-18 survey were not released by the government on grounds of issues of data quality — its leaked reports had shown a decline in consumption expenditure. This had meant that till now the last survey data available was for 2011-12. It is thus welcome news that the government has released the broad results of the consumption survey carried out in 2022-23.

The latest survey shows that, in rural areas, household consumption expenditure has risen from Rs 1,430 in 2011-12 to Rs 3,773 in 2022-23, and in urban areas from Rs 2,630 to Rs 6,459. At 2011-12 prices, this translates to an increase of 3.1 per cent per year in rural areas, and 2.7 per cent in urban areas. The disaggregated data throws up several interesting trends. As household incomes have continued to grow, expenditure on food has continued to fall. In rural areas, the share of food in the spending basket has declined from 52.9 per cent in 2011-12 to 46.4 per cent in 2022-23, while in urban areas it has fallen from 42.6 per cent to 39.2 per cent. The dip in the case of cereals has been even more dramatic — from 10.7 per cent to 4.9 per cent in rural areas, and from 6.6 per cent to 3.6 per cent in urban areas. Households are now allocating a greater share for nutritional items such as eggs, fish and meat, milk and fruits, as well as on beverages, refreshments and processed foods. In fact, spending on beverages and processed food is now more than that on cereals and pulses combined. And milk and milk products are now the second highest item in the consumption basket. A greater share of spending is also now being directed towards education, health and conveyance and on consumer durables and services. As household incomes rise and expenditure on essential items falls, discretionary spending will rise further.

With the release of the detailed survey data, it will now be possible to arrive at an understanding of the trends in poverty and inequality in India over the past decade or so — a period marked by considerable changes in the economy. This survey data will also help in updating the consumer price index, which is a valuable input for monetary policy. For instance, the consumer price index currently assigns a weight of 12.35 per cent to cereals in rural areas. But cereals now account for only 4.89 per cent of the household consumption basket. The release of this survey also marks an important step towards filling the data vacuum in the country. The next government should take this forward, initiate the much delayed census exercise and take steps to strengthen the country's statistical system.

AN OPEN BOOK

CBSE's experiment with examination format should spur conversations on making education reform more effective

EXAMINATIONS SHOULD BE seen as a part of the overall academic assessment of students. The Indian examination system, however, especially from senior secondary school onwards, was designed as an elimination process in the early years of the last century — it's a product of times when higher education avenues were far fewer and jobs even scarcer. With minor tweaks, this system continues even today. The toll taken by such elimination tests on the mental health of students is well-documented. In 2022, for instance, an NCERT survey revealed that around 80 per cent students in grades 9 to 12 suffer from exam-related anxiety. The Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) decision to conduct a pilot study to test the feasibility of open book exams (OBE) for Classes 9 to 12 is, therefore, immensely welcome. The pilot will reportedly be conducted in November-December for select subjects.

OBE experiments were conducted as early as the 1930s in institutions such as Rabindranath Tagore's Visva Bharati. However, such examinations are today held only in select higher education institutions. In India's school system, OBE is a relatively new concept. The CBSE did allow students of Classes 9 and 11 to refer to study material during annual tests in 2014. The examination authority, however, discontinued the practice three years later because of its "inability to cultivate critical faculties" amongst students. The Board's new move fits in with the paradigm shift envisaged by NEP 2020 — though the policy does not explicitly mention OBEs, it lays store on transitioning from rote-based information gathering to competency-based learning and developing analytical skills.

The OBE pilot is also in line with the NEP's emphasis on making learning processes more student- and teacher-centric. The scheme will require pedagogical changes and demand more creativity from teachers. Their role will not be restricted to being mere transmitters of information in textbooks. Instruction will, instead, be more about mentoring and facilitating the young, all of whom may not learn at the same pace. The assessment of the analytical abilities of students could also become a test of their writing and language skills. Educators will have a big role in making sure that this does not aggravate older forms of inequality and work against NEP's inclusivity-centred approach. For this, they will also need to read answer scripts more carefully and empathetically. Periodic upscaling of teachers' skills is, in fact, one of NEP's emphasis areas. The CBSE has also said that it will take feedback from teachers after the first round of the OBEs. In the coming months and years, the examination body and other education planners should hold more conversations to fine-tune this reform and make it more effective.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

AMIDST "INFORMED GUESSES" that the coming parliamentary election will be easy for the BJP, one would have expected spirited efforts by the Opposition to mobilise the electorate and corner the ruling party on key developments such as the Supreme Court ruling on electoral bonds or the farmers' agitation. Instead, what we witness is an aggressive BJP poaching the Opposition, in north and south, and openly waging a war against farmers.

This stark asymmetry between the approaches of the ruling party and the Opposition cannot be understood merely in the framework of anti-democratic manoeuvres of the ruling party — they are given in a polity that tilts towards upholding sub-democratic politics as democracy. This asymmetry also needs to be understood in the context of the political failure of the Opposition. A very different, more mature and silent coalition-making would be needed for such a change.

The coalition that smartly christened itself as INDIA and momentarily upset the BJP by its naming game, has been on the verge of collapse even before elections are announced. One of its founders, the JD(U), has crossed over to the BJP yet again while others are busy cutting Congress to size. Any political party would naturally want to retain its base and expand territorially. Therefore, seat sharing was bound to be a stumbling block in the way of an Opposition alliance. But the central political failure has been not to understand the long-term threat to their existence — in the process, ensuring a loss in the short term as well. This political failure is a common trait of Congress and its INDIA partners.

As for Congress, even after a decade of decimation, it still houses enough self-seekers who do not mind joining the BJP. In a party system dominated disproportionately by one player, this is not surprising. What should nevertheless surprise us is the helplessness of Congress in not bringing in enough fresh blood during the past decade and allowing the dead wood to masquerade as its assets. Without consolidating itself internally, the party went on to waste its energies on building the Opposition alliance.

Opposition failure to understand long-term threat to its existence ensures a loss in short term as well

Congress and its allies forget that it is not enough for them to individually bag more seats but they also need to ensure that the strength of the BJP is reduced. For that to happen, there are two preconditions. One, that they do not aspire at this moment to expand at each other's cost and that they keep the BJP in check in their respective areas of strength. In this, Congress seems to be the weak link.

A casual look at the outcome of the 2019 elections is instructive: There are a little less than 150 Lok Sabha seats where Congress continues to be the main challenger to the BJP. This includes the central-northern-western states of MP, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, HP, Rajasthan and Gujarat; it also includes Assam in the east and Karnataka (and Goa) in the south. Over time, smaller players are emerging in some of these states: the BSP and AAP have been trying to expand in some; but the bulk of the responsibility to halt the BJP will have to be with Congress in these states.

The nominal existence of most other parties means that the coalition game has a marginal relevance here. The crucial question is whether Congress will improve its own performance. The results of 2019 are dismal from this point of view — out of the 144 seats here, Congress could win only a paltry eight. The reason lies in the huge surge in favour of the BJP. Although Congress was the "challenger" in these states, except in Assam, it trailed the BJP by 10 percentage points at best (Chhattisgarh and Goa) to more than 30 per cent at worst (Gujarat, Himachal, Uttarakhand). So, one would have expected that in the past five years, Congress made an all-out effort to expand in states where it continues to matter but is being driven into a corner. To its credit, it has wrested back Himachal Pradesh. It has won Karnataka, but without reducing the vote share of the BJP. Its losses in the recently held Assembly elections in MP and Chhattisgarh do not inspire the confidence that it would bounce back.

The inability of Congress to challenge the BJP in these more or less bipolar states invites new players to stake their claims. This poses a tough dilemma for the anti-BJP coali-

tion. On the one hand, Congress would want a field clear of any other contestants so that it can hope to garner anti-BJP votes. But on the other hand, smaller parties in the coalition may believe that they have a better chance in some pockets and would want Congress to be magnanimous.

Among the other states where Congress continued to have a sizeable presence till very recently, it has regained a foothold in Telangana. It is not clear whether it has organisationally rejuvenated itself sufficiently in Andhra Pradesh. In Maharashtra, the overall fragmentation of the polity apart, Congress has not taken advantage of the chaos. So, looking at the political battlegrounds, Congress continues to be a poor challenger where at the moment it is the only party that can take on the BJP. Instead, Congress keeps fighting the TMC in West Bengal over the latter's arrogance, keeps cribbing against the SP in UP where it ceded ground in the late '80s that is still to regain even partially. At the same time, it is a moot question if state-level players will be able to half the BJP without any help from friendly parties.

This is not to say that these parties' concerns about their self-interest and expansion are not genuine. They will need to balance those interests with the need to work with each other. Right now, their expansion hinges on their ability to preserve themselves and their self-preservation is dependent on preservation of a minimal democratic framework — robust institutions and respect for rule of law are those basic pillars. Those opposed to the BJP must understand that these two conditions alone will allow them to function freely but they must respect these conditions themselves.

Today, in India's most severe democratic crisis, electoral defeats won't count as political failure of the Opposition, but ignoring the tension between their larger ambition to expand and the responsibility to preserve democracy will surely be counted as a signal political failure.

The writer, based at Pune, taught political science

This is not to say that these parties' concerns about their self-interest and expansion are not genuine. They will need to balance those interests with the need to work with each other. Right now, their expansion hinges on their ability to preserve themselves and their self-preservation is dependent on preservation of a minimal democratic framework — robust institutions and respect for rule of law are those basic pillars. Those opposed to the BJP must understand that these two conditions alone will allow them to function freely but they must respect these conditions themselves.



SHUBHRA GUPTA

IT IS OCTOBER 2019, in the small Chinese city of Pingyao, Kumar Shahani's first feature *Maya Darpan* is being screened as part of a film festival. To rediscover one of the classics of Indian art-house cinema in an obscure Chinese city seems oddly appropriate: Shahani's work has always had a strong international following, while keeping in thrall his fiercely loyal band of Indian devotees who went on to experiment with form, colour and sound, taking their cues from the master.

I miss part of the restored screening, as I come late to the festival venue after a delayed flight. Shahani, in his thatch of snowy hair and ready smile, turns out to be surprisingly easy to talk to, dispelling notions about auteurs being austere. He tells me not to worry, because the print wasn't great, and I make up for the truncated viewing as we spend time between screenings over cups of tepid coffee (the brews in the surrounding cafes are uniformly terrible), listening to him first formally, followed by a much more structured conversation with film historian Ashish Rajadhyaksha.

During that expansive two-hour chat, Shahani takes us through a lifetime of being a student of cinema, his stint at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) where he and compatriot Mani Kaul gravitated towards the filmmaking aesthetic of Ritwik Ghatak — both became Ghatak's best-known disciples — and his never-ending struggle to stay true to his art. He spoke of his apprenticeship under Robert Bresson, whose style of formalism could be seen in his (Shahani's) work. He was also impacted by Roberto

SENSE OF AN ENDING

Kumar Shahani's films encapsulated the best of Indian New Wave cinema

Rossellini, the Italian neo-realist filmmaker, but appreciating these European masters did not mean borrowing; a nod to these influences could be seen in his own distinctive style, making it a hallmark of this pioneer of the Indian New Wave.

His passing, at 83, brings with it a sense of an ending. Of the passionate young votaries who embraced, without wavering even slightly, the art-for-art's-sake credo. Of voices which were imbued by the past and present, aware of the cataclysmic events which were shaping ideologies. Of being citizens of the world while delving deeply into Indian traditions of literature and music.

At FTII, under Ghatak, whose iconoclasm left an indelible stamp on his students, Shahani learnt the art of storytelling without the crutches of plot-lines; it was pure cinema, where sound and images were fused to propel an idea, or a thought. In *Maya Darpan* (1972), a rigorous examination of old-style feudalism and modern industrialisation, you can see this construction come together in what was then completely novel in the Indian filmmaking context.

At FTII, under Ghatak, whose iconoclasm left an indelible stamp on his students, Shahani learnt the art of storytelling without the crutches of plot-lines; it was pure cinema, where sound and images were fused to propel an idea, or a thought. In *Maya Darpan* (1972), a rigorous examination of old-style feudalism and modern industrialisation, you can see this construction come together in what was then completely novel in the Indian filmmaking context.

The opening credits in Hindi, wrought as simply as chalk-on-board, starting with the Film Finance Corporation (which was subsequently renamed National Film Development Corporation of India), give you an idea of the range of artistes who got together for this film: Flute maestro Hariprasad Chaurasia, the Mayurbhanj Chhau dance troupe, Bansi Chandragupta as art director, Bhaskar Chandavarkar as music director, Vani Jayaram

as singer, KK Mahajan as cinematographer, Nirmal Verma as writer; the melding of classical music and dance in cinema was a strong feature of Shahani's (and Kaul's) work.

It took Shahani 12 years to make his next film *Tarang* (1984), featuring a starry slate of Amol Palekar, Smita Patil, Shreeram Lagoo and Girish Karnad, which interrogates class struggles within a business family, run by a patriarch whose fortunes start to dwindle. It is a more conventional "plot" than *Maya Darpan*, and there are songs in the film, too, but there's no change in the minimalist approach to storytelling. For all its attempted stary bells and whistles, *Tarang* is very much a Kumar Shahani film.

He went on to make a handful of other well-regarded films, including *Khayal Gatha* (1989), *Kasba* (1990), and *Char Adhay* (1997). Aside from making films, he was also a writer (his essays on film theory and his own practice are part of a Tulika publication) and a teacher, travelling around the world, giving lectures.

During that Pingyao conversation, Shahani touched upon how the inexplicably hurtful dismissiveness of Satyajit Ray had cost him a delay in funding after his first film. It begs the question, if there hadn't been a lag, and if Shahani had made his films faster, would there have been more of his oeuvre to celebrate today? He spoke of films he had been long working on, which were still incomplete. And now, will always be.

shubhra.gupta@expressindia.com



FEBRUARY 26, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

PRESIDENT'S REQUEST

PRESIDENT ZAIL SINGH invited Bharatiya Janata Party chief A B Vajpayee and asked him to withdraw his party's call for a bandh in Delhi as it would complicate an already bitter situation. Home Minister PC Sethi too visited the residence of Vajpayee to impress upon him that the opposition should not press for a discussion on an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha.

NO MERGER SO FAR

LOK DAL PRESIDENT Charan Singh said that the unity of the non-Communist and demo-

cratic opposition parties born out of a merger was the historical necessity of present times. He said the people wanted it and were waiting for the day when opposition parties would give a unified fight to the ruling party. However, all his efforts at such a merger so far had failed.

A WORSENING CRISIS

EXTREMIST ACTIVITY CONTINUED unabated in the state as four persons of a particular community were shot dead in two separate incidents of violence in Amritsar district during the past 24 hours. In one incident near Sohian Kalan village, Pawan

Kumar, son of a temple priest was shot dead by three unidentified Sikhs youths. In another incident near Bhilowal, three dead bodies were found near the fields.

INDO-PAK TALKS

FOREIGN SECRETARIES OF India and Pakistan — Maharaja Krishna Rasgotra and Niaz A Naik — are meeting early next week to find ways to stop the worsening of relations between the two countries. Naik is arriving in Udaipur to participate in the meeting of the South Asian Regional Cooperation. The SARC meeting will last two to three days. Naik will stay back for talks with Rasgotra.

THE IDEAS PAGE

In poll year, a data question

A framework that empowers people to exercise agency over their personal data is essential to correct asymmetries which would otherwise seriously undermine people's power in a democracy



NAMRATA MAHESHWARI

THE BIG DATA economy – powered by massive datasets and unprecedented levels of personal information – has fundamentally altered how a country conducts elections, and how people vote. The benefits to companies and political parties are as clear as the harms to people's privacy.

With greater access to data, comes greater power to influence. Candidates contesting elections can bolster their campaigns through micro-targeting. They can choose from a range of engagement options like bulk SMS, audio call, social media. Voters are in the dark about such databases of personal information and their ability to consent to the collection and disclosure of data, and control how it is used, is out of the question.

The network effect is at the core of social media as we know it. It signifies the increase in the purported benefits to each user with the addition of more users. For instance, you are likely to join a platform that has a larger user-base to connect with more people and access more content. Such platforms will probably have better interactive features, and curation of services, shaped by analysis of a larger pool of users' data. Enhanced collection of personal information makes business sense for social media platforms. Currently, it is practically impossible for an individual to know what information about them is being collected, discerned and used, and why.

With personal data, platforms can create astonishingly detailed profiles of users including not only relatively more discernible attributes like age, gender, location, but also the non-obvious ones such as likes, dislikes, ideological leanings and habits. Such data can then be monetised – by platforms or other entities scouring the data on platforms – by selling it or using it to offer services such as personalised ads and micro-targeting. For instance, after the 2016 presidential election in the US, consulting firm Cambridge Analytica claimed that it had 5,000 data points on each user, gleaned from millions of Facebook profiles, which it used to profile voters, micro-target ads and influence behaviour.

Political parties benefit from digital networks, including both social media and dedicated party-based apps with detailed information about supporters. These are useful for benevolent purposes like increasing awareness about their work and goals, and more insidious reasons such as targeting tailored content to influence groups on the basis of demographics and political leanings discerned from online activities.

But where does this leave the people, whose privacy is invaded and whose data is used in opaque ways for commercial and political interests?

India's data protection act has not yet come into force. Its critical flaws include absence of limitations on government's powers to access data, lack of independence for the data protection board and absence of important actionable rights for individuals, such as the right to compensation. The imminent rules to guide the implementation of the act are an opportunity to mitigate the damage, and meaningfully protect privacy. Without the rules, there is still no data privacy framework – a particularly damaging situation as the country gears for elections. So they need to be implemented soon.



CR Sasikumar

The limbo between the law being passed and enforced seems to have disadvantaged one stakeholder group in particular – the people. For instance, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Information Commissioner reportedly withheld information requested under the Right to Information Act, citing the Data Protection Act, which is in fact not in force. There is no Data Protection Board before which individuals can seek redress. Such instances exacerbate the harm to people's privacy and right to information that the law must in fact serve to eliminate. The rules must prioritise the impact on people, who are at the centre of the information and data ecosystem but often get the short end of the stick.

The necessity for speed, however, ought not stamp out an inclusive and receptive consultation process. The Data Protection Act, which was rushed through Parliament without any debate, fails to incorporate the feedback of several stakeholders on effective protection of people's rights and autonomy. It also seems to fall short of the best international regulatory practices. In the absence of meaningful amendments to the law – which, to be sure, should be the goal – the rules must apply correctives. Consultations must be a sustained process with opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement.

The rules must provide for the independence of the Data Protection Board especially on how its members are appointed, and ensure strict checks and safeguards on the executive's powers in this regard, even though this can fundamentally and reliably only be ensured through legislative changes. On data collection, storage and disclosure, the rules should mandate adherence with the principles of necessity, proportionality, purpose limitation and data minimisation. This would help prevent burdening individuals disproportionately with the responsibility of protecting their rights under the pretext of consent. Sensitive data must be explicitly identified and must include financial, health-related, biometric, racial, ethnic, or

genetic information, as well as official identifiers like Aadhaar and driving license numbers. Heightened security standards must apply to this data, and strict restrictions must be placed on their use, even by authorities. Algorithmic transparency from platforms is essential to scrutinise how personal data is used to decide who sees what online. Redressal mechanisms must be accessible and strengthened through enhanced actionable rights. And data protection impact assessments must be designed to prioritise rights, ensure transparency and enable public scrutiny.

Control over data is a key lever in the power structures of today's information-driven world. A framework that empowers people to exercise agency over their personal data is, therefore, essential to correct power asymmetries which would otherwise seriously undermine people's power in a democracy. A political party's approach to people's privacy, right to information, more broadly people's role and position in the big data ecosystem, is reflective of its approach to constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms. As the country gears up for elections, this must be a metric on which the commitments of political parties in their manifestos and campaigns are judged. Digitisation is here to stay, but its benefits must not obliterate the need to develop inclusive and rights-based models that will be beneficial in the long run.

Challenges to privacy are pervasive. But an election time in a democracy amplifies these challenges and the potential damage to people's rights as political and business interests intensify, impacting not only individuals, but the state of the democracy as a whole. A people-centric data protection regime that finally readjusts the balance that has so far tilted in favour of data fiduciaries in the private sector and government, is the key to unlocking the full potential of Digital India.

The writer is Senior Policy Counsel at Access Now

Security forces
kill 3 Maoists in
Chhattisgarh
encounter

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
RAIPUR, FEBRUARY 25

SECURITY FORCES killed three Maoists during an operation in the Abujhmad area of Chhattisgarh's Kanker district on Sunday morning.

The encounter took place at around 8 am in southern Abujhmad, near a hill deep inside the forest ahead of Koylibeda village. Abujhmad is an unsurveyed area that is larger than the state of Goa, and has been a Maoist stronghold.

A joint team of District Reserve Guards (DRG), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and Border Security Force (BSF) personnel ventured into the forest area after getting some intelligence inputs, officials said. Soon after, the encounter began.

During the encounter, three Maoists, all men, were shot dead, officials said. "We have recovered three indigenously made weapons from them. Efforts are on to ascertain their identity," said Kanker district superintendent of police Kalyan Elesela.

A new police camp has recently come up around 15 kilometres from the encounter spot. Police sources said a number of police camps have been established recently in Kanker, and that anti-Naxal operations have been stepped up.

Rahul yatra enters Rajasthan, will resume on March 2 from Dholpur

PARUL KULSHRESTHA
DHOLPUR, FEBRUARY 25



Rahul Gandhi, former CM Ashok Gehlot and other party leaders in Dholpur on Sunday. Express

THE CITY of Dholpur on Sunday was adorned with tricolour balloons and posters of Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as the Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra rolled into Rajasthan and made a stop at the city – for a few minutes.

More than 6,000 people had gathered at a ground in Dholpur since 3 pm, waiting for Rahul Gandhi to arrive with the yatra, which had earlier in the day made a halt at Agra. It was at 6.10 pm that Rahul finally reached the Dholpur venue, and 6.19 pm when he addressed the crowd. By 6.21, he wrapped up his speech and said his goodbye.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and top Rajasthan Congress leaders Sachin Pilot and Ashok Gehlot also spoke at the venue, along with Rajasthan Congress president Govind Singh Datasara.

By 6.30 pm, the event had wound down and the crowd began to disperse. The Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will now be on hold until March 2, when it will start again from Dholpur and head to Madhya Pradesh.

The yatra will take a break from February 26 to March 1 to enable Rahul deliver two special lectures at his alma mater, Cambridge University, and attend important meetings in New

Delhi, the Congress had earlier said.

In his two-minute address, Rahul Gandhi said, "Last year, we took out the Bharat Jodo Yatra to unite the country, and this year, from east to west, this Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is being taken out to fight against the injustice happening to the people of this country."

"There is social and economic injustice. Injustice towards women, children, farmers, and labourers... We promise you all that once the BJP is defeated, things will change for the better," he said. He then thanked the crowd and left for the airport at

Agra.

Priyanka, who spoke before Rahul, said the country was in a dark period in which big businessmen are taking over every aspect of government. "In the farmers' movement, farmers are being attacked by the Central government. At every step of life, people are facing injustice and problems. Hence, we organised this yatra to unite people and fight against this injustice," she said.

Sachin Pilot got an enthusiastic ovation from the youth in the crowd as he took the stage. He said that in the last 10 years, the BJP has not done anything to

benefit people. He also accused the ruling party of being behind the suspension of several MPs from Parliament, and of passing laws without making proper consultations.

"BJP is not a party that will benefit the public, but one that harasses innocents as we can see at farmers' protests. With this yatra, we are trying to unite the public, which has been facing the problem of divisive politics for so long," said Pilot.

Former chief minister Ashok Gehlot, in his address, stressed on the need for unity against divisive politics.

Months after Pannun case, US team to visit India for security talks

New Delhi to raise Khalistani issue, consular attack

MAHENDER SINGH
MANRAL
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

MONTHS AFTER US federal prosecutors accused an Indian citizen and an unnamed Indian official of being involved in a foiled plot to assassinate Khalistan separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun on American soil, it has been learnt that a government delegation of the United States, headed by Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Kristie Canegallo is scheduled to visit India next week for the Homeland Security Dialogue (HSD) with officials of Union Home Ministry.

India has prepared several presentations to discuss a range of issues, which include asylum status used by criminals, pro-Khalistani elements to carry out terrorist activities in India, assistance to arrest the attacker of the Indian Consulate in San Francisco, the extradition status of Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana,

terror fugitives, and on terror financial investigations with them, a source said.

A senior official with the Ministry of Home Affairs said they have made all preparations and the heads of Narcotics Bureau, National Investigation Agency, Central Bureau of Investigation, and Internal Security will be part of the HSD.

"After Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director Christopher A Wray's visit in December, this is the first official meeting of a US government delegation, which is coming to meet the Central government this year. Top officials of both the nations will attend the HSD. Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla will head the Indian delegation and all senior officials of other sectors have been asked to attend the HSD on February 28," the source said.

The India-US Homeland Security Dialogue was introduced in 2010 as a mechanism to a sequel to the signing of the India-US Counterterrorism Initiative. The first HSD was held in May 2011. During Wray's meeting at NIA headquarters last year, wide-ranging discussions were held on a host of issues, including activities of terrorist-organised criminal networks and ongoing Probe in the US regarding the attack on Indian Consulate in San Francisco.

ply chain security, law enforcement investigative cooperation, local and state law enforcement engagements, child sexual exploitation, human trafficking, trade and economic security, cyber security, and proposal for electronic travel document.

A source said anything related to Pannun is not on the agenda. During Wray's visit, a presentation was made on Pannun, but there was no discussion on him. "Both the nations will discuss to enhance bilateral cooperation in all the key areas," the source said.

The India-US Homeland Security Dialogue was introduced in 2010 as a mechanism to a sequel to the signing of the India-US Counterterrorism Initiative. The first HSD was held in May 2011. During Wray's meeting at NIA headquarters last year, wide-ranging discussions were held on a host of issues, including activities of terrorist-organised criminal networks and ongoing Probe in the US regarding the attack on Indian Consulate in San Francisco.

Court reopens 2022 bribery case against Siddaramaiah

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, FEBRUARY 25

A SPECIAL court for elected representatives Wednesday ordered the Lokayukta police to reopen and investigate a 2022 bribery case against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Rejecting the closure report by the Lokayukta police, Judge Santhosh Gajanan Bhat directed them to conduct a fresh probe into the case and file a report within the six months while posting the matter for hearing next on August 22.

"The investigating agency, without looking into any other manner about the question whether any corrupt practices indulged or not, had furnished the closure report/final report, on the basis of the self serving statement of accused No.1 (Siddaramaiah) which is not proper in the eyes of law," the court added.

BJP leader N R Ramesh had lodged a complaint in November 2022, accusing Siddaramaiah of accepting a bribe of Rs 1.3 crore from his acquaintance L Vivekananda in 2015. Ramesh alleged that Vivekananda paid the bribe to secure his appointment as a steward and committee member at the Bangalore Turf Club. Siddaramaiah was CM in 2015 in his first term.

However, Siddaramaiah maintained the sum was a loan, which was disclosed in his election affidavit. Ramesh alleged that Vivekananda's stewardship at the club constituted a "kick-back" and accused Siddaramaiah of violating the Income Tax Act.

When Siddaramaiah came back as CM in 2023, the Lokayukta Police submitted a closure report, which was challenged by Ramesh.



Firefighters try to douse the blaze in Kaushambi on Sunday. PTI

4 killed in UP firecracker factory fire

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 25

AT LEAST four persons were killed and eight injured in a fire that broke out following an explosion at a firecracker factory in Uttar Pradesh's Kaushambi district on Sunday, officials said.

Several fire brigade teams and ambulances rushed to the spot soon after and started relief and rescue work. Additional DGP

(Prayagraj) Bhanu Bhaskar confirmed that four people were killed in the blaze. "We will release more details soon," said the ADG. Another police officer said that one of the deceased was identified as Shiv Narayan, 30, who worked in the factory.

The cause of the explosion is yet to be ascertained.

Goods train covers 80 km from J&K to Punjab without driver, probe on

ARUN SHARMA
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 25

IN A peculiar incident, a fully loaded goods train on Sunday morning moved "on its own" from Kathua railway station in Jammu and Kashmir and covered a distance of nearly 80 km until it was stopped in Punjab.

The Railways have ordered an enquiry into the matter, said Division Traffic Manager Pradeep Srivastava, adding that

suitable action will be taken once responsibility is fixed.

Sources said that the goods train with 53 bogies was standing at the Kathua railway station waiting for the signal to move towards Punjab. However, around 7.05 am, the train started rolling down on its own towards Punjab and before anybody could act, it gained speed between 60-70 kmph, leaving everybody at Kathua railway station stunned as there was no driver in it, sources said.

As a result, the train started rolling towards Punjab since the track slopes towards the Pathankote side.

The Railway staff at Ucchi Bassi railway station stopped the train around 8 am by placing wooden blocks on the tracks and reducing its speed.

No damage was reported in the incident, sources said.

Sources said it is possible that the person concerned did not pull the brakes before exiting the cabin.

As a result, the train started rolling towards Punjab since the track slopes towards the Pathankote side.

The Railway staff at Ucchi Bassi railway station stopped the train around 8 am by placing wooden blocks on the tracks and reducing its speed.

No damage was reported in the incident, sources said.

3-MEMBER PANEL PROBE INTO ALLEGATIONS OF RAPE SURVIVOR

Magistrate accused of molestation put on 'compulsory waiting' for posting

DEBRAJ DEB
AGARTALA, FEBRUARY 25

AFTER A rape survivor in Tripura's Dhalai district alleged on February 16 that a magistrate molested her in his chamber when she went to record her statement under Section 164 of the CrPC, the judicial officer was transferred to the state high court and kept on "compulsory waiting" for future posting.

A notification by Tripura High Court Registrar General said the charge of the said court would remain with Kamalpur Sub-Divisional Judicial Magistrate-

cum-Civil Judge Madhumita Biswas until further orders.

In a written statement, the complainant said that she went to the chamber of a first-class magistrate on February 16 to get her statement recorded when he molested her. "I was summoned to record my statement under Section 164 (5) as a victim in the chamber of the first class judicial magistrate.

After I reached there, the judicial magistrate asked me to go in his chamber alone and asked the woman police personnel to stay outside. The judge closed the door behind me and asked me to narrate what happened to me. I gave statements on the rape on me

"when he asked me to stand up and groped me and sexually assaulted me," she had said in an affidavit submitted to the office of the Additional District and Sessions Judge of Kamalpur.

Apart from charges of molesting her, the rape survivor also accused the magistrate of "digitally raping her" and alleged that he told her it was part of the court's procedure.

The woman's husband filed a complaint with the Kamalpur Bar Association.

A three-member panel headed by the District and Sessions Judge was formed to investigate the incident.

After Haldwani violence, Uttarakhand to bring Bill to recover damage in protests

AVANEESH MISHRA
DEHRADUN, FEBRUARY 25

THE UTTARAKHAND government is expected to introduce a Bill for the recovery of the cost of any damage incurred to public or private property during protests from those responsible for the disturbance, sources said.

The Uttarakhand Public and Private Property Damage Recovery Bill is likely to be introduced in the state Assembly during the Budget session that starts on Monday.

According to sources, a tribunal chaired by a retired district

judge will be established to adjudicate on compensation for the damage to property resulting from protests. Those found to be

responsible for the disturbance will, under the Bill, be liable to pay the compensation.

The move follows the violence in Nainital district's Haldwani on February 8, which was triggered by an anti-encroachment drive that led to the demolition of a mosque and a madrasa in the Banbhoolpura area. Angered by the demolition of the structures, which authorities said stood on government land, people resorted to pelting stones and burning cars, and the local police station was surrounded by a mob. Chief Minister Pushkar Dhami had later announced that the cost of damaged property would be recov-

ered by those involved in the violence. After the incident, the district administration asked media persons whose vehicles were damaged in the Banbhoolpura area during the violence to inform them so that the cost of the damage could be recovered from the accused.

The district administration also attached the property of several accused. The main accused in the case, Abdul Malik, has also been served a notice by the Haldwani Municipal Corporation asking him to deposit Rs 2.44 crore to cover the damage caused to government property during the violence.

The district administration has also issued notices to the accused to appear before the court on February 28.

Sources said that the bill is

likely to be introduced in the

Assembly on March 1.

Source: Debraj Deb

Debraj Deb is a lawyer and

activist based in Agartala.

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With surgical strikes in 2016 and the air strike in 2019, India had a better answer for terrorism in the sub-conventional space. Our policy has evolved with a few new inventions in dealing with terrorism

Shubhajit Roy: There are two revelations in the book. One concerns the 1999-2004 period, when you were in the PMO and had been part of conversations with the then Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and then National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra. The second one was about your tenure as high commissioner in Islamabad, which was cut short. How different have these two regimes been in their approach to Pakistan?

Between 1999 and 2004, I was, maybe, a fly on the wall, and more recently was one of the actors. There hasn't been a dramatic shift but an organic evolution of a policy. The dominant theme in the Vajpayee years was dealing with terrorism. In 1998 we had gone nuclear and Vajpayee was deeply conscious of that nuclear responsibility. At that time it wasn't really clear to us what Pakistan's red lines were. So that was a factor in the policy-making on Pakistan.

Yet terrorism was a huge challenge. 9/11, the Kandahar hijack and the December 13 attack on the Parliament had happened. That dilemma of how to deal with terrorism was what the Modi government faced as soon as it took over in 2014. Modi wanted to do exactly what Vajpayee wanted, which is to untie the knot. In his initial two years, Modi met his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif five times. And yet, the deal breaker in both cases was terrorism like it was with Kargil and the attack on Parliament. But with surgical strikes in 2016 and air strike in 2019, we had a better answer for terrorism in the sub-conventional space. In this space, the debate was about could we escalate it to conventional warfare? We have evolved with a few new inventions in dealing with terrorism.

Shubhajit Roy: Many would argue that the hardline approach may have put India in a box...

Well, I would argue that there's a smart way out of that dilemma. Because, "no talks with terror" is ambiguous. There could be a two-track policy. On terrorism, now the benchmark is that a Pulwama gets a Balakot or a Balakot-plus kind of response from India, right? And it will be incumbent on any future government to factor this in. But that doesn't preclude engagement. In my book, I advocate a two-track policy of being tough on terror – delegitimising and countering terrorism accompanied by a calibrated and flexible engagement. Pakistan has been incoherent in the last few years with its political crises. If we had a conversation, who would we have it with? But if it becomes more coherent with an election, possibly have a same-page government, then it is time for India to engage. It should not have a policy of strategic neglect of Pakistan but engage with it. There is a way out. It's a combination of being tough on terror, being willing to use kinetic means of responding to terror, but at the same time, being flexible about engagement.

Shubhajit Roy: Your comments on the elections in Pakistan and the Army being in saddle.

The Army has certainly been challenged. There are multiple ways of framing this election. At one level, it was a contest between the old and the new Pakistan. The old Pakistan was run by the Army with civilians trying to curry favour with it. The new Pakistan is young, aspirational with 50 percent of the population under the age of 30 and united under a mascot called Imran Khan. This new constituency has expressed itself in the ballot box. So the outcome was completely predictable.

But the process was surprising because the Army goofed up enough to let it be known that the people's will was in a completely different direction. It was kind of two-thirds, a major wave in favour of Imran Khan. The election template was the same for a long time – Civilian politicians out of favour put in jail, quietly going away, then doing a deal and coming back. The Army's latest favourite horse was made to win with pre-election engineering, election engineering, post-election engineering. Two things changed in Pakistan from 2018. One was the economic crisis arising from accumulated sins of the past, with 37 percent inflation. The second was a political crisis that arose with the US exit from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Tehreek-e-Taliban posing a security threat. The Army's Project Imran became so successful that when the project was divorced from Imran, the people weren't willing to divorce him. He was already charismatic and popular. So the two-thirds majority anti-Army wave coalesced with a strong protest vote and popular disaffection. Then there was a sympathetic wave since Imran was in jail. For the Army, Imran should have disappeared. But he didn't despite the large-scale rigging.

Even Zulfiqar Bhutto had rigged elections in 1977 but there was a lot of protest



WHY AJAY BISARIA

Ajay Bisaria was the High Commissioner to Pakistan from 2017 to August 2019 and was expelled after the abrogation of Article 370. A seasoned hand in understanding the geopolitics of the neighbourhood, he has shed new light on the Balakot strikes and how they changed the dynamic of the Indo-Pakistan relationship in his

new book, *Anger Management*. Bisaria has had a distinguished diplomatic career spanning 35 years when he front-ended some of India's key economic and security relationships. He also served as Indian High Commissioner to Canada from 2020 to 2022. He dealt with India's Eurasia policy, including with Russia, Ukraine and Central Asia.



The Army's Project Imran became so successful that when the project was divorced from Imran, the people weren't willing to divorce him. So the two-thirds majority anti-Army wave coalesced with a strong protest vote

'India should engage with Pakistan to consolidate gains in curbing terrorism'

Former diplomat Ajay Bisaria on what the new regime in Pakistan means for India, Imran Khan and how India should be calibrating its terms of engagement. The session was moderated by Diplomatic Editor Shubhajit Roy



Former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan Ajay Bisaria at the Noida office of *The Indian Express*. Renuka Puri

and disaffection on the streets, and he declared martial law. General Zia ul-Haq took over, Bhutto was hanged and Haq took a decade to conduct elections he had promised in 90 days. In the 1970s, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman won from jail, exactly like Imran Khan, in east Pakistan and led to the creation of Bangladesh.

This scenario is what the Army fears, a breakup of the country because of the Pashtun and Baloch movements. If the Army takes over, Pakistan would lose its equity with the West, including IMF loans. So the Army could go for a hybrid government. It had one with Imran and with Shehzad Sharif for 16 months. Going forward, it will hope that this government goes the usual Purana Pakistan route, outsourcing foreign and security policy to the Army, doing what it's told and fixing the economy.

Shubhajit Roy: What happens to the future of Imran Khan and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) because there are still 93 candidates backed by him?

The Independents have done an alliance with a smaller party, the Sunni Ittehad Council, hoping somehow to get proportionate representation but they still don't make the numbers. They will hope that if there's disaffection, the Army would get Imran back in play if it wants to rotate its civilian leadership. This group is a political troublemaker in this hybrid situation.

Rakesh Sinha: If this Army-backed coalition in Pakistan stabilises a little, do you see India reaching out?

There is reason for cautious optimism on that front. Many objective factors favour a rapprochement. One, it is the Sharifs in control and not Imran who was too anti-India. Two, elections are being held in both countries and have been historically a reason for a fresh look at the relationship. Three, the ceasefire of 2021 has held. Four, we haven't had spectacular acts of terrorism. The new Pakistan government will have to internally resolve its issue of not talking to India until Article 370 is reversed. That is their problem. As for sending in high commissioners, I don't see that happening before India's elections. There could be some positivity, but this is a time for some quiet conversations. It is in India's interest to pursue the gains we've had on the reduction in terrorism front by doing that. Particularly, it would be important for India to see that anything that comes from the civilians is triangulated with the Army.

Shubhajit Roy: In your book, you mention about how Pakistan's ISI passed on intelligence to India through you, which turned out to be correct.

Asim Munir was the ISI chief then.

Well, the jury is out on Asim Munir (now Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan). He hasn't put his cards on the table although a Munir doctrine was published. But institutionally, the Army sees the merit in the doctrine of its former chief Qamar Bajwa in making good with Pakistan's neighbours and focussing on geo-economics, given its economic collapse. We saw some of these conversations in the leaks that came out after Bajwa retired. One of them was about serious conversation and proposals on freezing the Kashmir issue for 20 years and talking about trade. The onus is equally on Pakistan to resolve its problem because Imran had painted it in a corner by saying linking talks to reversal of Article 370.

Shubhajit Roy: What brief did Prime Minister Modi give you before you went to Pakistan? Also you were asked to use "local creativity" while having conversations with the Pakistan Army.

Modi didn't hesitate much, he just said, *Bharat hamesha shaanti ke liye khada hai*. That India stands for peace, and we expect peace in return. This was 2017. Despite the lows in the relationship, there was always room for thinking and openness in the political leadership to look at diplomatic options. "Local creativity" meant I didn't have the mandate to photographically talk to the Army. But I had the option of using proxies and talking to different people who were connected to officials in having those conversations. So that is what I did.

Shubhajit Roy: How was your first meeting with Imran Khan, four days after he was elected Prime Minister?

I had a very positive meeting. I presented a bat signed by the Indian cricket team. He had not got a full majority of 134 seats and he told me, "I wish I had 20 more

seats." He felt the Press in India had been very unkind to him till I told him that he was seeing electronic media and some of his friends had written positive things about him. He believed we were very close to solving the Kashmir problem. I told him that the deal breaker in this relationship was terrorism and when something like Mumbai happens, you couldn't be speaking. He said, "that's true," at which point one of his colleagues interrupted him and said, "no, but India also does all kinds of things." But I found his overall approach to be reasonable at that point. After he took over, he got multiple briefings and he was given various lines. After the revocation of Article 370, there was conversation that Pakistan should do what it did in 1947, infiltrate people across the border. Imran had to step in, saying it wouldn't be a good idea.

Amitabh Sinha: What does India expect to gain from a re-engagement with Pakistan? Does the Kashmir issue need a resolution in partnership with Pakistan, short of PoK, of course, and has Balakot changed everything?

Strategic neglect of a country with which you had four wars and which has mounted so much terrorism is bad policy. It's also strategic complacency. That's not good policy. And the parallel I would make is what Israel did with Hamas, a strategic neglect. There's a lesson to be learnt there. The purpose of any engagement would be to consolidate the gains or the limited gains we've had on terrorism and strengthen the ceasefire and security along the border.

Balakot signified a major paradigm shift because it implied airstrikes together with the surgical strikes were India's both capacity and intent to operate in the sub-conventional space for a punitive or pre-emptive action. It has entered their calculus and would be an important factor.



Having made his point on Ukraine, Putin is now looking for a way out. India should step in as a peacemaker, as a non-European, non-Western power that can help with a solution that has equities on both sides

Also, at least with Article 370, Indian policy makers accept that our Kashmir and Pakistan policy should be separate. So Pakistan is part of foreign policy in which, just like with China, we could discuss issues of territory but not make it a party to our internal conversation with Kashmir. So a conversation between the Centre and the people of Kashmir is like a dialogue between the Centre and other states.

Sandeep Dwivedi: How is sports important for the relationship between the two countries? Can we keep sports outside the ambit?

Sadly no when exported terrorism is involved. But sports diplomacy has been a very important tool of the people-to-people diplomacy. Bilateral diplomacy has often ridden on the back of cricket diplomacy. But we should recognise its limits. However, when the relationship gets better, trade and cricket are low-hanging fruits.

Sandeep Dwivedi: Virat Kohli has a huge appeal across Pakistan as was the case with Imran Khan in India earlier. How do you explain this?

Because cricket is a subcontinental religion and everything else falls before that. During one of the Iftar parties he had hosted, Imran Khan told me that he thought Virat Kohli was clearly the best cricketer in the world and he would rate him much higher than Tendulkar. Because, he said, Kohli turned losing matches into winning ones, and that is not what often happened in the case of Tendulkar. Even Dhoni has a huge following in Pakistan.

Aakash Joshi: It's a difficult time for Shehzad Sharif to be Prime Minister of Pakistan with your major coalition partner, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) saying we're not going to take any of the responsibility of decision-making but extend outside support.

Shehzad Sharif has a crown of thorns but he seems to be the only one willing to wear it. He did run a hybrid 2.0 government. His strongest point is that the Army is shoring him up. Not having the PPP in governance is a sign, in the political power-sharing deal, that it has got a constitutional post, maybe the President and the Senate Chair and so on. This may be pointing towards a rotational prime ministership.

The unspoken deal might be that three years you run the show, two years, PPP's Bilawal Bhutto as PM may run the show. The Nawaz Sharif factor will be important. It will be a sort of Sonia Gandhi being the chairperson of UPA and Manmohan Singh being the PM. Nawaz Sharif might be more of a risk-taker on India, given the warm

chemistry he had with India's leaders. **Rakesh Sinha:** Is there a new hard line that India has drawn on Khalistan, which has impacted the bilateral relationship with Canada or is there a broader democracy vs India debate?

It's a bit of both because the Khalistan issue has been with us for years and decades. Mrs Indira Gandhi had written to Pierre Trudeau, father of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in 1983, that it was dangerous if he didn't take action against the man who was later responsible for blowing up Air India's Kanishka. Khalistan has been a problem since. But what has been a problem for India now is its escalation to the political level and to the level of Justin Trudeau. So, if you make a comparison on how this issue was dealt with in the US and other places, yes, we have a security issue which our security experts should deal with. But it doesn't prejudice the overall political relationship. However, if it gets escalated at the level of the PM, then India has a problem.

PVaidyanathan Iyer: These days there are narratives equating dissenters as anti-nationals and supporters of Pakistan. How difficult does it then become for India or Pakistan to hold talks at a zero reference level? Second, how much flexibility does a leader of both countries have so that they get a momentum of their own going?

The narrative comes from fringe voices which don't really impact bilateral relations. Look at India's relationship with Bangladesh, which again is an Islamic nation, but is based on \$18 billion of trade, \$8 billion of investment and huge connectivity. Both have resolved issues like sharing river water and marking land and maritime boundaries with so much ease.

On your second question, leadership is an important factor but so are structural factors. For instance, in 1971, US interests in Afghanistan impacted relations. But if you see the flawed choices Pakistan has made, they are the result of seemingly ill-considered decisions of its leaders. If Gen Pervez Musharraf hadn't decided on the misadventure in Kargil, along with precisely four Army colleagues, the Lahore Bus initiative could have reached fruition and led to a different story.

Shubhajit Roy: What's President Vladimir Putin playing at right now in the conflict with Ukraine?

Having made his point, Putin is looking for a way out. India should step forward as a peacemaker, as a non-European, non-Western power that can help with a solution that has equities on both sides.

RIL, AFFILIATES TO OWN OVER 61% IN MERGED ENTITY

Reliance, Disney sign pact to merge media business: Report

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 25

IN A mega deal in the entertainment segment, Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and Walt Disney Co have signed a binding agreement to merge their media operations in India, according to a Bloomberg report.

As per the agreement, the media unit of Reliance and its affiliates are expected to own at least 61 per cent in the merged entity, with Disney holding the rest.

Disney reportedly agreed to sell 60 per cent of its Indian business to Viacom 18 at a valuation of \$3.9 billion (Rs 33,000 crore). Viacom 18 is owned by RIL Chairman Mukesh Ambani.

There were reports earlier this month that Disney had



Walt Disney CEO Iger said on an earnings call in November that the company was "considering options". File

agreed to sell 60 per cent of its Indian business to Viacom 18.

The deal is expected to be a significant move in the Indian media and entertainment industry.

Last month, Japan's Sony dropped its merger plan with Zee Entertainment Limited due

to disagreements regarding the leadership of the proposed merged media entity.

In the line of fire from activist shareholder Nelson Peltz for poor succession planning, Disney recently appointed two new directors – Morgan Stanley

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) James Gorman and former group chief executive at Sky Sir Jeremy Darroch, late November. In the same month, Walt Disney CEO Iger said on an earnings call in November that the company was "considering options" but that it would like to stay on in India and try and "strengthen our hand, improve the bottom line". This is Disney's third entry into India. The first in 1993 was through an alliance with KK Modi's Group. Then it bought into Ronnie Screwvala's UTV but that too did not go as per script.

Investor enthusiasm for Disney's India business started depleting in 2022 after the company lost the online rights to stream the popular IPL tournament from 2023-2027 even as it successfully won broadcast TV rights.

GANESH MOHAN, Chief Executive Officer, Bajaj Finserv Asset Management, says when the interest rates correct in the United States (US), yield will become an important concern for foreign investors, which will then start looking at the Indian markets a lot more. "Whatever the US does, pressure will be higher on the RBI to do a similar action."

In an interview to HITESH VYAS and GEORGE MATHEW, Mohan, who also worked as Partner and MD of Boston Consulting Group, says the risk adjusted returns that investors could get in liquid funds or even in any kind of debt funds, could be higher than savings accounts of banks. Edited excerpts:

On the equity side, there is a perception that most of the good companies are already overvalued. What is your view on it?

I would say that perception is probably true only in parts. If you look at the market across large-cap, mid-cap and small-cap, there has been a certain run-up in the mid and small-cap categories. Even then, I wouldn't say it has gotten into bubble territory yet.

If I look at the ratio of small-cap to Nifty, it's probably about 20 per cent above the long-term average. In the large-cap space, we are in the fair value territory. A lot of good quality large-caps have seen a time correction for two years and so, prices of many of them have been more or less at the same price level for the last couple of years. Their earnings have grown 20-25 per cent on a yearly basis, which means that their valuations have come to attractive levels. That's why we have launched large and mid-cap funds with the philosophy to invest in companies that have a moat around them. We believe that opportunities still exist in the market.

As part of the solution, India has asked for measures like amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap. Developed nations are of the view that such programmes distort global trade prices of food grains.

*Joint Support Initiatives (JSIs) or plurilateral agreements India opposes this move being pushed for certain nations. For example, India is strongly opposing efforts of a group of countries led by China to push a proposal on investment facilitation for development agreement at the WTO. The country has maintained that this agenda falls outside the mandate of the global trade body.

Interest rates are likely to fall provided the RBI manages to



bring the inflation down to the 4 per cent target. In that scenario, what should debt market investors do?

There are a couple of factors that will play an important role. First, the spread between the rates in the US and the RBI is at historical lows. So, whatever the US does, pressure will be higher on the RBI to do a similar action. Second,

India's inclusion in the global bond indices will help bring in at least \$50 to \$60 billion of flows. These flows will come in the 10-year g-seg, which is the most liquid fixed-income security. Today, if you look at the yield curve, there is not much gap between the five-year and the 10-year rate. This, ideally, should not be the case as there has to be a certain reward for taking longer tenure risks.

So, we believe that the three to five years space is a very interesting one for investors to be looking at from a fixed-income perspective. When the 10-year corrects with all that money coming in and with the US rates correcting, there will be a lot of pressure on the 10-year g-seg rate.

Obviously, the three and five-year g-seg rates would also see correction. With that kind of tenure horizon, we believe there is a significant mark-to-market opportunity for investors. Of course, the taxation structure has changed, so they will have to probably be cognizant of that and take that into account.

How do you see the domestic economy going forward?

a conservative estimate, investors are losing probably close to about Rs 50,000 crore in interest.

What is your outlook for the market for 2024?

The market has many different parts. From a perspective of large, mid and small caps, we have seen that some parts of the market have certainly run up. They are not in bubble territory yet and the momentum is still very positive. Large caps are pretty much in a fair value zone, given where earnings are and the price-to-earnings ratio. The small cap category is so large that you will find pockets of value even there. So, we see that the market is certainly at a fair value with positive momentum at this point of time.

Near-term risks do always exist. It may come from any different source - geopolitics uncertainty or political events. We believe that most of the risks come from external sources. Domestic risks are not that significant. The biggest risk was the election, which I believe that nobody in the market is pricing that. So, we see that the market is pricing that there will be a regime change. The momentum and sentiment can change very quickly but in the long-term, we are very positive in the India story.

You are a recent entrant into the mutual fund space. How has your experience been so far?

It has been six months and our experience has been fantastic. This is the first time that the group has entered into this business. For us, the decision was whether to start organically or buy a company. There were quite a few opportunities in the market and we looked at all of those. Of course, an inorganic gives you a lot of ready-made - a team, track record, an AUM and distributor relationships. But we decided not

to do that because when you buy a company, you also buy the way how it is operating, its investment strategies and its processes. We didn't want to come in with something that we were just checking a box with. As Bajaj Finserv, we try to do something in a unique and differentiated way. So we decided to go the organic route. **FULL INTERVIEW ON**

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WTO Meet: India to push for permanent solution to public stock holding of grains

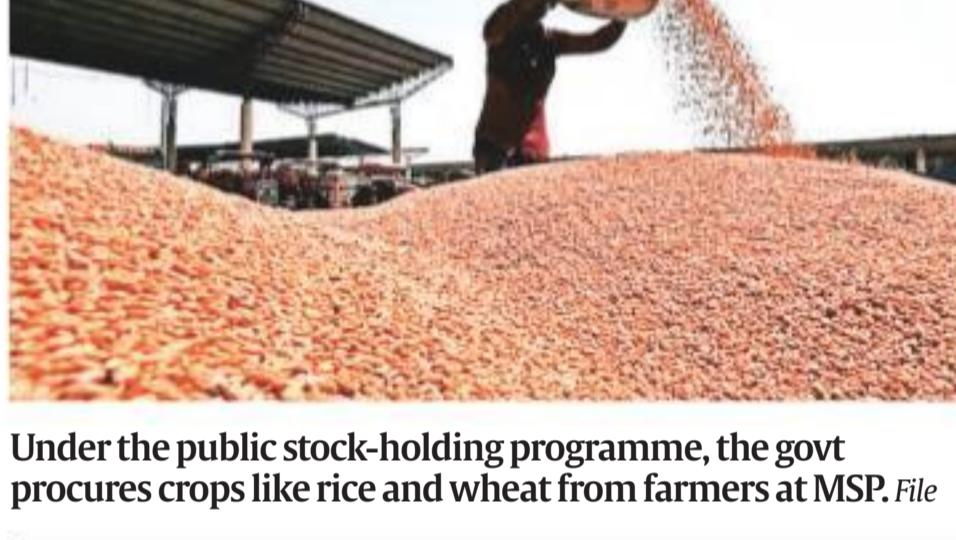
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

INDIA WILL strongly oppose a China-led proposal for an investment facilitation pact besides pressing for finding a permanent solution to public stock holding of grains for food security and protection of the interests of fishermen at the WTO ministerial meeting beginning Tuesday.

The Indian delegation is led by Commerce & Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. The four-day 13th ministerial conference (MC13) will start on February 26 in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Trade ministers of 164 member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) are meeting against the backdrop of the uncertain global economic situation due to the Red Sea crisis, the Ukraine-Russia war and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The key issue of India's interests at the meeting relates to



Under the public stock-holding programme, the govt procures crops like rice and wheat from farmers at MSP. File

finding a permanent solution for its minimum support price (MSP) issue for food security, agricultural reforms, fisheries subsidies, e-commerce moratorium on import duties, dispute settlement, and WTO reforms.

*Food security issues

The public stock-holding (PSH) programme is a policy tool under which the government procures crops like rice and wheat from farmers at MSP, and

stores and distributes foodgrains to the poor. India stresses the need for PSH for its large, vulnerable population and wants a permanent solution from the MC13. Food procurement, stockholding, and distribution are crucial to India's food security strategy.

MSP is normally higher than the prevailing market rates and sells these at a low price to ensure food security for over 800 million beneficiaries. However,

the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture limits the ability of a government to purchase food at MSP. Under global trade norms, a WTO member country's food subsidy bill should not breach the limit of 10 per cent of the value of production based on the reference price of 1986-88.

As part of the solution, India has asked for measures like amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap. Developed nations are of the view that such programmes distort global trade prices of food grains.

*Joint Support Initiatives (JSIs) or plurilateral agreements India opposes this move being pushed for certain nations. For example, India is strongly opposing efforts of a group of countries led by China to push a proposal on investment facilitation for development agreement at the WTO. The country has maintained that this agenda falls outside the mandate of the global trade body.

As we start seeing the interest rates correct in the US, yield will become an important concern for FIIs, which will then start looking at the Indian markets a lot more. They have been retreating, but at some point, they would come back and invest in large and well-established companies.

Interest rates are likely to fall provided the RBI manages to

lot more innovation. The railroad has been built very well. A lot of infra push has been happening from the government side. The private sector needs to start coming in, but that will happen over a period of time.

The country also has a very big advantage of demographic dividend. Along with the economic growth, we see that the AUM growth in mutual funds is also very rapid. So, we see a very good period for the mutual fund industry coming up in the next six to seven years. I think from a growth perspective, I don't see a better market than India at this point in time.

The flow of bank deposits into mutual funds has increased. Where do you see this in the next five years?

I think that will accelerate. We

feel that mutual funds are a very good alternative to savings accounts in the market. Based on past category performance, the risk adjusted returns that investors can get in liquid funds or even in any kind of debt funds, could be higher than savings accounts. Today, there is about Rs 24 lakh crore sitting in retail current accounts and savings accounts. At

www.indianexpress.com

Qatar plans new gas output boost amid global price collapse

REUTERS

BENGALURU, FEBRUARY 25

QATAR WILL further raise gas production despite a steep drop in global gas prices, pushing ahead with plans to extract more of the resource amidst fierce competition with rivals such as the United States (US).

QatarEnergy chief Saad al-Kaabi announced on Sunday a new expansion of its liquefied natural gas production that will add a further 16 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) to existing ex-

pansion plans, bringing total capacity to 142 mtpa.

The Qatari announcement comes as US gas prices trade near an all-time low if adjusted to inflation after a decade of meteoric rises in output which made the US one of the top oil and gas exporters.

"We see that Europe is going to need gas for a very, very long time. But the growth in Asia is definitely going to be bigger than the growth in Europe, basically driven by population growth."

With this added boost, the overall expansion of the North Field from 77 mtpa currently to

142 mtpa by 2030 represents an increase of 85 per cent in production. Qatar is among the world's top exporters of LNG, competition for which had ramped up since the beginning of the war in Ukraine in February 2022.

Despite the price drop all major gas producers including the US, Australia and Russia want to further increase output betting on further demand growth and worries that their gas might not be needed decades from now if energy transition makes green energy cheaper.

This latest expansion may not be the last for the Gulf energy giant as Kaabi said appraisal of Qatari gas reservoirs would continue and production would be further expanded if there is a market need.

State-owned QatarEnergy has already signed a string of supply deals with European and Asian partners in its massive North Field expansion project, which was expected - prior to Sunday's announcement - to begin producing 126 million mtpa of LNG per annum by 2027, from the current 77 mtpa.

This came following a net investment of over Rs 19,836 crore in January, making it the highest monthly inflow in more than six years. This was the highest inflow since June 2017, when they invested Rs 25,685 crore.

"With introduction of India in global bond indices this year, Indian debt inflows should get steady flows going ahead. Also, further front-loading before actual inclusion in June this year is also expected. This is also in line with long-term aim to deepen our underdeveloped debt-markets," Kislay Upadhyay, smallcase Manager & Founder Fidelfolio, said.

On the other hand, foreign investors pulled out Rs 424 crore so far this month, sharply down from Rs 25,744 crore in January. The resilience of the market is preventing FPIs from selling aggressively despite attractive bond yields in the US, V.K. Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Making similar statement, Bharat Dhawan, Managing Partner at Mazar in India, said the Indian market continues to capture international interest, signifying not only the resilience of the economy but also the trust global investors place in its growth trajectory.

In terms of sectors, FPI sell-off was significant in the banking sector, as it saw lower-than-expected results in terms of net interest margins due to competition in deposit mobilization, smallcase's Upadhyay said.

Overall, the total FPI flows for 2023 stood at Rs 1.71 lakh crore in equities and Rs 68,663 crore in the debt markets. Together, they infused Rs 2.4 lakh crore into the capital market.

The flow in Indian equities came following a worst net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore in 2022 on aggressive rate hikes by the central banks globally. Before the outflow, FPIs invested money in the last three years.

HITESH VYAS

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 25

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) has asked the National Payment Council of India (NPCI) to examine the request of One97 Communications' (OCL), which owns Paytm, to become a Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP) for continued Unified Payments Interface operation of the Paytm application. A TPAP approval is mandatory to provide UPI-based payment transactions to customers.

Currently, all UPI transactions on the Paytm app are being routed through Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), an associate company of OCL, which is registered as TPAP. As the RBI has asked the PPBL to shut its operations by March 15, 2024, there will be no TPAP registration for the Paytm app to be able to provide UPI-based payment services.

What is a TPAP?

A Third-Party Application Provider is an entity that provides the UPI compliant app(s) to the end-user customers to facilitate

UPI-based payment transactions. These applications could be mobile wallets, merchant apps, or any other platform that utilises UPI for payments. NPCI, the umbrella organisation for operating retail payments and settlement systems in India, owns and operates the UPI platform.

TPAPs leverage the UPI infrastructure provided by NPCI and work with payment service providers (PSPs) and banks to facilitate transactions. They are responsible for ensuring that their applications adhere to security standards and compliance guidelines set by NPCI.

What has RBI said?

Last month, the RBI barred Paytm Payments Bank from accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer account, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags and NCNC card after February 29, 2024, in the wake of persistent non-compliances. The deadline was later extended by 15 more days to March 15.

As the Paytm Payments Bank cannot accept further credits into

its customer accounts and wallets after March 15, the RBI, on February 23, announced some steps to ensure seamless digital payments by UPI customers using '@Paytm' handle operated by the Paytm app.

It directed NPCI to examine the request of OCL to become a TPAP for the UPI channel for continued UPI operation of the Paytm app.

What happens if OCL gets TPAP approval?

For Paytm, TPAP approval from NPCI is a must to continue to provide UPI-based payment transactions facility to customers.

The RBI said in case NPCI grants TPAP status to OCL, '@Paytm' handles will have to be migrated in a seamless manner from Paytm Payments Bank to a set of newly identified banks to avoid any disruption.

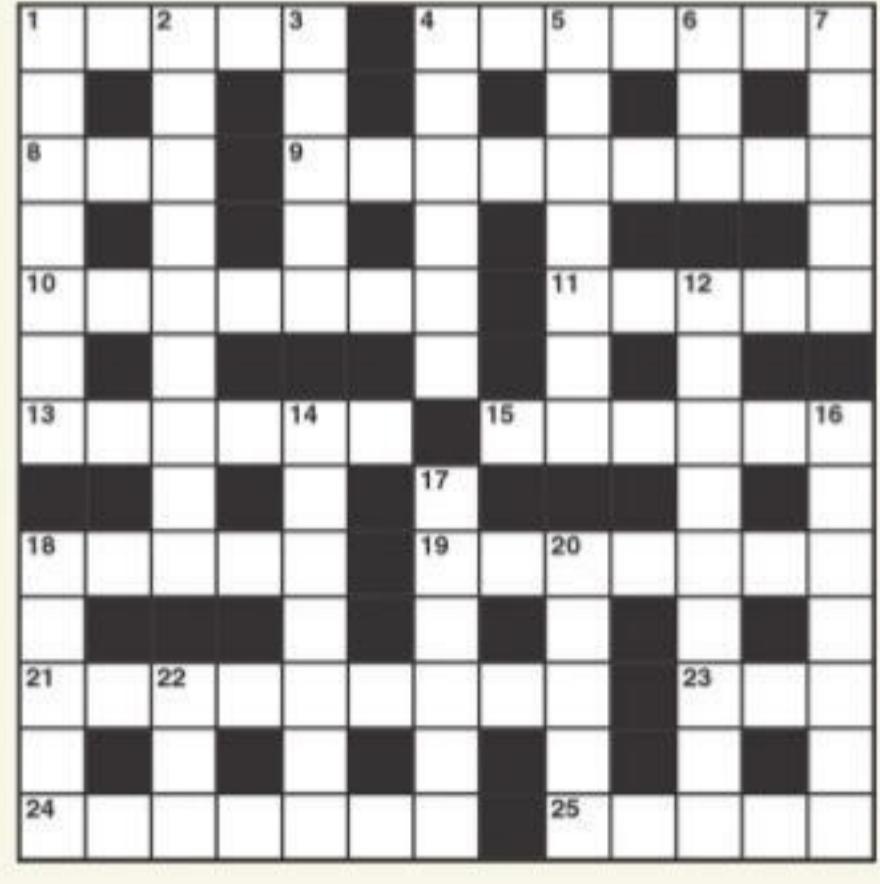
OCL will not be allowed to add new users until all the existing users are migrated satisfactorily to a new handle, the regulator said.

"For seamless migration of '@Paytm' handle to other banks,

NPCI may facilitate certification of 4-5 banks as PSP banks with demonstrated capabilities to process high volume UPI transactions," the RBI said. This is to minimise concentration risk in the UPI system by having multiple payment app providers. As per NPCI regulations, large TPAPs have to mandatorily participate in UPI through a multibank model only.

However, the RBI clarified that the migration of UPI handles is applicable only to those

CROSSWORD 5297



ACROSS

- Not so many we infer (5)
- You may take work home from it (7)
- Still up to date? (3)
- A list of articles in not very bad shape (9)
- Speech might indicate where one's home is (7)
- He's put in little work yet has expectations (5)
- The first French composer to take to the road (6)
- Feel in form like a cat (6)
- Pound piece (5)
- Fair weather saint? (7)
- An item in a lifeless form (9)
- Again show anger (3)
- How time flies (7)
- It has to go back on the tenth (5)

Down

- Get away with experience in aerial display (7)
- Taken back though retired (9)
- Lift up beams as stated (5)
- Being mean is pointless so now become generous (6)
- Has been changed in spirit (7)
- Fuss made by a dog losing its tail (3)
- They reel up and down in play (2-3)
- Bill is brought to heel by what things cost (5,4)
- They provide cover for the pupils (7)
- Irrational former wife changes meter (7)
- Fights for food left over (6)
- Think nothing long (5)
- A keyhole affair (5)
- Woman starting a dancing school (3)

Solutions Crossword 5296 Across: 1Cinderella, 8Wilde, 9Comment, 10Remarks, 11Sady, 12Tenths, 14Amulet, 17Rabbit, 19Tomato, 21Lash out, 22Genie, 23Solicitude Down: 2Iomen, 3Dread, 4Recess, 5Lump sum, 6Ahead, 7Stay-at-home, 8Work to rule, 13Hair oil, 15Learned, 16Static, 18Basis, 20Right

JUMBLE WORDS

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

The _____ is not easily removed. - Ernest J. Gaines (4,2,4)

NRAAE



AOSUFM



WYORR



SALUTE THE SOLDIER



INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP)

26 February 2024

ITBP salutes its braveheart Constable Roshan Lal of 7th Battalion, who made supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on this day in Indian Mission of Afghanistan in 2010.

Resident of : Village: Denthia, Distt- Chamba, Himachal Pradesh

SUDOKU 5484

Difficulty Level 2s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.



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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5483



ANSWER: The mark of fear is not easily removed. - Ernest J. Gaines

SOLUTION: ARENA WORRY FAMOUS FLINNY

CENTRAL RAILWAY CORRIGENDUM

Tender No.: CAOC23 of 2023 (Open Tender) Closing Date/Time: 08.03.2024 at 11:00 hrs.; Name of Work: Construction of 3rd line between Juharpur (Exc.) Km. 751.10 to Dharakot (Incl.) km. 831.80 (Excluding Station Yards of Kalakhar, Pola Patthar and Dhadramohar station) overall length 75.318 Km. on Itarsi-Nagpur Section of Central railway. Item Modified: Tender Closing Date Time: Existing Value: 21.02.2024 at 11:00 hrs. Modified Value: 08.03.2024 at 11:00 hrs. 937 DOWNLOAD UTS APP FOR TICKET

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER (ROADS), PUBLIC WORKS ROADS DEPARTMENT, ASSAM, GUWAHATI-03

No. CE/DEV/MMNPPNA/192/2023-24/08

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER(REF-BID)

The Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3 invites Bids on behalf of Governor of Assam for 1 (One) no. of Package for Construction of Roads and Bridge projects under MMNPPNA for the year 2023-24 in JORHAT District of Assam amounting to **Rs. 3.05 Crores** (approx.) including GST etc. from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam.

Details may be seen from 26.02.2024 at website www.assamtenders.gov.in. Amendment /Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours. The contractor/bidder must be registered with the Electronic Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website www.assamtenders.gov.in.

The schemes are not yet sanctioned by the competent authority. In the event of non-sanction of the schemes, the bids may be cancelled and no claim whatsoever on this account shall be entertained from the bidders.

Note: - N.I.T Value is inclusive of GST (12%), Labour cess (1%) etc.

Chief Engineer (Roads), PWRD, Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3.

Classifieds

PERSONAL

I, Vijay Kumar S/O Bhim Sain, R/o Near Mother Dairy, 973/974, Chittaranjan Park, South Delhi Delhi- 110019, Declare that name of Mine has been wrongly written as Vijay Kumar Setia in my minor Son Manan Setia, aged about 17 Years, in his 10th Class Certificate. The actual name of Mine is Vijay Kumar, which may be amended accordingly.

0070890804-1

I, PRAVEEN KUMAR AGARWALL, S/O MAHESH KUMAR AGARWAL, R/O B 902, AGARWAL HEIGHT, RAJ NAGAR EXTENSION, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH-201017. Have changed my name to PRAVEEN KUMAR For all future purposes.

0070890837-1

I, Monika D/O Ravindra Singh, W/O Sandeep Kumar R/O Flat No-5, Plot No-16, Brothers Apartment CGHS, IP, Extension, Laxmi Nagar (East Delhi), Delhi- 110092. have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Monika Singh

0070890837-1

I, Luvnoor Dahiya W/O Prayrit Dahiya, R/o 30-B, Malikpur Village, North West Delhi, Dr. Mukharjee Nagar, North West Delhi, Delhi- 110009 I have changed the name of my minor daughter Eram Dahiya aged about 1 Month and She shall hereafter be known as Era Dahiya

0070890835-1

I, ANJALI KAR BHESANIA, D/O AMAR DEV SINGH, R/O A-104, HEX-TAX COMMUNE APARTMENTS, SECTOR-43, GURGAON, HARYANA-122009 Have changed my name to ANJALI BHESANIA for all future purposes.

0070890838-1

PUBLIC NOTICE
The general public is hereby informed that my clients Rabis Khan S/o Mr. Salim Khan and his wife namely Mrs. Mobina Khan W/o Rabis Khan both residing at H. No. 106, 3rd Floor, Meera Enclave, Chakubdi, West Delhi, India-110037. It is severly disclosed that son of Khan S/o Mr. Rohit Khan and his wife Alina Khan @ Jyoti Yadav W/o Sarfai Khan both residing at J-1367, 1st floor, Rajput Garden, New Delhi-110027 from all their movable and immovable properties from the date of publication of this notice due to harassment and bad behavior by them towards my clients. They are also declared as liable/less due to them. My client shall have no liability in any manner in the future towards the above said persons.

BURH ZAKI (Advocate)
ENRL. No. D/9693/2022
Ch. No. 169, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-11004

LOST & FOUND
1. Anjali Khanna W/o Late Shri Kuldeep Khanna, R/o E-10, First Floor Kirti Nagar, New Delhi-110015 have lost:
1. Sale deed dated 05/08/1964 done by Salig Ram in favour of Agya Ram registered as Document No. 7284, Book No. 1, Volume No. 1135 Pages-19 to 21 for entire property E-10, Kirti Nagar Delhi-110015.
2. Will dated 01/01/1998 executed by Roshan Lal Khanna in favour of his three sons Kuldeep Khanna, Naresh Khanna and Rakesh Khanna for entire property E-10, Kirti Nagar Delhi-110015.
3. Relinquishment deed dated 22/05/2000 executed by Karuna Sethi registered as Document No. 4928, in favour of Kuldeep Khanna, Naresh Khanna and Rakesh Khanna for her respective share in entire property E-10, Kirti Nagar, New Delhi-110015.
If anyone found pls contact above address or call : 9811053530.

indianexpress.com

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



DAY TODAY

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)
You cannot help but ring the changes in the romantic arena. What you need in terms of affection, and who you want it from, will be different now from what it was this time last year. Remember that other people may not yet be ready to come up with the goods.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)
There are increasing signs of social stress. This is not a bad thing, I hasten to add, for the planets are perfectly placed to give that additional determination to get your own way. Or, do you really want to do your best for others?

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)
It's difficult to make precise delineations of your sign at the moment, because while most of you are still being wound up like a coiled spring, others are just about to explode. Exciting times indeed. All the stars ask is that you avoid unnecessary risks.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)
If you acknowledge that partners have the advantage, you will avoid the temptation to try and take over, and will steer clear of a minor humiliation. Far better to get on with your own personal affairs in the knowledge that, with the right degree of co-operation, this could be a marvellous time.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)
If you have been storing your feelings up, please relax and tell someone exactly how they feel about them. I know you are naturally reserved, but you must understand that you are in danger of letting a golden opportunity slip by. Keep an eye open for passing offers.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)
If charm is called for, don't sit on the fence while life passes you by. Get out there now, smile sweetly, bat your eyelids and make sure that other people give in to your every whim. If there's any one rule in astrology this week, it's that the higher your hopes, the richer your achievements.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)
It's strange the way the planets gradually assemble for the great celestial performances of the year. Right now, Venus, planet of love, a major player on the cosmic stage, is about to intervene in your affairs in a big way. It could even introduce new people.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)
Both personal and joint financial issues are relatively free from astrological pressures at the moment, at least as far as your solar chart is concerned. One reading of this situation is that you may reshape and redirect your investments, savings and income for the better.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)
In many ways this is an ideal day for reflection. You are going through quite a puritanical phase, though naturally in your own utterly unique manner. The point is that you feel a need to be true to your spiritual ideals. That's not always easy, but at least you can try your best.

BY PETER VIDAL

TAURUS (April 21 - May 21)
You should say what needs to be said now, while you still have time. This is not to say that if you leave it till the end of the week it will be too late, only that right now you don't actually have to know what you're talking about, which is rather convenient.

gemini (May 22 - June 21)
A snap decision may be vital if you are to take full advantage of prosperous financial possibilities. The relevant celestial influences overlap very briefly, so your sense of timing will have to be impeccable if you are to snap up a bargain. Stick to your high standards, though.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)
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gemini (May 22 - June 21)
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cancer (June 22 - July 23)
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taurus (April 21 - May 21)
Both personal and joint financial issues are relatively free from astrological pressures at the moment, at least as far as your solar chart is concerned. One reading of this situation

MEHULI, ANISH, GANGA WIN NAT'L TRIALS
Bhopal: India's Paris Olympic quota holders enjoyed a favourable outing in the first finals of the national rifle-pistol selection trials 3 and 4, with West Bengal's Mehuli Ghosh and Haryana's Anish Bhanwala ending up winners here on Sunday. PTI

Ashwin up-Roots England

India 152 runs away from series win ahead of knife-edged Day 4, but English spinners will be keen to get a venomous word in on a whimsical pitch

SANDIP G
 RANCHI, FEBRUARY 25

THE THIRD day ended like the first and second. In twilight, the game in a delicious balance, neither England's nor India's, replete still with the prospect of turning either way. On the fourth day, India could complete a famous come-from-behind series win. Or England could level the see-sawing series and make the final Test in Dharamsala meaningful.

In isolation this was India's day—Dhruv Jurel led a fightback that reduced the deficit to 46 runs, Ravi Ashwin and Co. wrapped up England's second innings for 145, and India's openers shaved off 40 runs from the series-winning target of 192. India fought back from the brink, England failed to twist the knife, but there could yet be twirls and turns that could make a gripping fourth day.

The signs were promising for India. Rohit Sharma and Yashasvi Jaiswal—their presence significant in India's pursuit—batted with stressless freedom, defending stoutly, punishing the loose balls and exchanging strikes. But the chase would be no straightforward exercise. New wrinkles are bursting; older ones are widening and deepening. "It's rapidly deteriorating and we are looking to have a crack in the morning," Shoaib Bashir said. The overnight moisture would quicken the surface a tad; rolling (India used a light roller) would leave its impact. Not to forget the pitch is already a difficult one to bat on. Uneven bounce is getting more pronounced. A good-length delivery reached Dhruv Jurel nearly on the second bounce, or as a yorker would. There is turn too, both slow and sharp. From some spots, the ball turned slowly; from an adjacent one, it would growl past the outside edge. The odd one leapt off. Run-making would require incredible skill, a tough mind and fortitude. England spinners will throw all their wiles and heart into the game, Bashir promised; the fielders would exhaust all their physical and vocal energy, in the last-gasp effort to keep the series alive. Ben Stokes would plan and plot. The chase would not be for those with faint hearts.

Turn of English spinners next

Whether England's spinners could match their India counterparts would probably define the game, and by a natural extension, the series. Round One in this Test belonged to England spinners. But India's spinners recovered admirably well, bowled with more aggression, accuracy and intensity. Ashwin bowled like a man seized by the spirit of his former captain Virat Kohli. None more illustrative than the Joe Root dismissal episode. He hit India's first-innings nemesis on the pads with a flat, full ball, from around the stumps. The umpire refused his pleas. Rohit Sharma seemed mildly interested in reviewing. But Ashwin pestered him into reviewing, and as it turned the ball was indeed hitting the stumps. Ashwin jumped, as high as he could, roared, as loud as he could, and hit the air, as hard as he could. The wicket—England at 65 for 3—was a knockout blow. For Root, centurion in first innings, was England's best man to shut India out of the game.

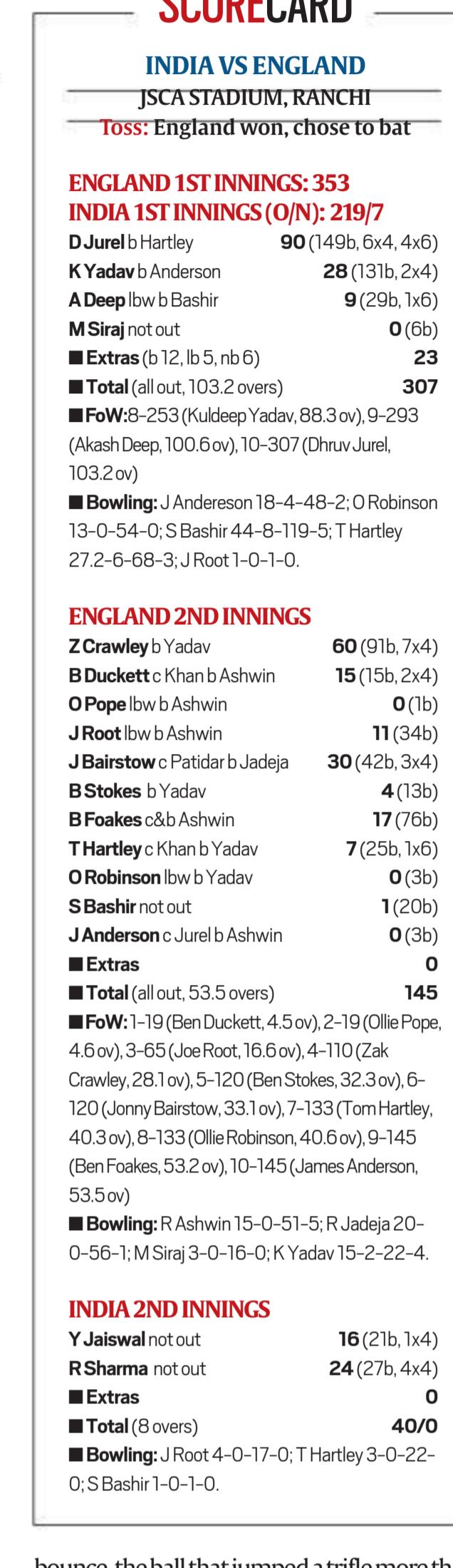
The off-spinner had earlier nipped out Ben Duckett and Ollie Pope off successive balls. With the new ball, he bowled both with the standard and parallel. The drifting-in-standard-seamed version devoured Duckett. Drift beat him first, then the bounce the new ball generated. The ball climbed to take the inside edge from the upper half of his bat. Spooked by low

NUMBER PLATE

35

With his 35th five-wicket haul, R Ashwin equalled Anil Kumble's record for most fifers for India in Test cricket. They are behind Richard Hadlee (36), Shane Warne (37), and Muthiah Muralidaran (67).

SCORECARD	
INDIA VS ENGLAND	
JSCA STADIUM, RANCHI	
Toss: England won; chose to bat	
ENGLAND 1ST INNINGS: 353	
INDIA 1ST INNINGS (O/N): 219/7	
D Jurel b Hartley	90 (149b, 6x4, 4x6)
K Yadav b Anderson	28 (131b, 2x4)
A Deep lbw b Bashir	9 (29b, 1x6)
M Siraj not out	0 (6b)
■ Extras (b12, lb5, nb6)	23
■ Total (all out, 103.2 overs)	307
■ FoW: 8-253 (Kuldeep Yadav, 88.3 ov); 9-293 (Akash Deep, 100.6 ov); 10-307 (Dhruv Jurel, 103.2 ov)	
■ Bowling: J Anderson 18-4-48-2; O Robinson 13-0-54-0; S Bashir 44-8-119-5; T Hartley 27.2-6-68-3; J Root 1-0-1-0.	
ENGLAND 2ND INNINGS	
Z Crawley b Yadav	60 (91b, 7x4)
B Duckett c Khan b Ashwin	15 (15b, 2x4)
O Pope lbw b Ashwin	0 (1b)
J Root lbw b Ashwin	11 (34b)
J Bairstow c Patidar b Jadeja	30 (42b, 3x4)
B Stokes b Yadav	4 (13b)
B Foakes c&b Ashwin	17 (7b6)
T Hartley c Khan b Yadav	7 (25b, 1x6)
O Robinson lbw b Yadav	0 (3b)
S Bashir not out	1 (20b)
J Anderson c Jurel b Ashwin	0 (3b)
■ Extras	0
■ Total (all out, 53.5 overs)	145
■ FoW: 1-19 (Ben Duckett, 4.5 ov); 2-19 (Ollie Pope, 4.6 ov); 3-65 (Joe Root, 16.6 ov); 4-110 (Zak Crawley, 28.1 ov); 5-120 (Ben Stokes, 32.3 ov); 6-120 (Jonny Bairstow, 33.1 ov); 7-133 (Tom Hartley, 40.3 ov); 8-133 (Ollie Robinson, 40.6 ov); 9-145 (Ben Foakes, 53.2 ov); 10-145 (James Anderson, 53.5 ov)	
■ Bowling: R Ashwin 15-0-51-5; R Jadeja 20-0-56-1; M Siraj 3-0-16-0; K Yadav 15-2-22-4.	
INDIA 2ND INNINGS	
Y Jaiswal not out	16 (21b, 1x4)
R Sharma not out	24 (27b, 4x4)
■ Extras	0
■ Total (8 overs)	40/0
■ Bowling: J Root 4-0-17-0; T Hartley 3-0-22-0; S Bashir 1-0-1-0.	



Ashwin (R) led India's spin-led comeback on Sunday, taking five wickets, including the crucial one of Joe Root.

Sportzpics/BCCI

Rearguard rampage of the Agra aggressor

SANDIP G
 RANCHI, FEBRUARY 25

FROM THE slips, Joe Root rushed to embrace him; from mid-on, Ben Stokes strolled to commiserate him. Even the fiery Ollie Robinson tapped his shoulder. The Ranchi crowd, 10,000-odd, applauded him. Dhruv Jurel, falling for a priceless 90, walked back gently, soaking in the applause, waving his bat to all corners of the ground, discontent that he missed his hundred but content that he had pulled his team out of trouble.

A new hero has risen, in the land of one of its greatest heroes. Son of a Kargil war veteran, with a heart for battle himself.

Some fans waved the MS Dhoni-7 jersey at him. Some kept chanting the former captain and the homeboy's name. Jurel needn't be reminded that this was Dhoni's hometown. He could not have but noticed the towering stands named after his hero.

Dhoni was his idol—as he still is for a generation—and in his hometown, he produced a Dhoni-like knock in essence. In his nonchalance, in the cold assessment of the situation, in the raw calmness he exuded, in his serendipitous adaptability and problem-solving faculty, he bore irrepressible similarities with Dhoni. He is different to Dhoni as batsman—he is more compact and orthodox, the movements more fluent and in straight lines.

He walked out into a mess, as Dhoni has countless times. India were five down, 192 runs adrift of levelling England's first-innings total, just Ravi Ashwin and the bowlers to follow him. The situation didn't flinch him—he calmly absorbed the pressure in the first 11 eleven balls, before he lofted Shoaib Bashir over mid-on. That was his initial approach, until he was left with just the bowlers, whereupon he displayed mature aggression, which offered a wonderful insight into his batting.

He wouldn't wantonly attack, but do so only when he knew he could play his percentage strokes, the drives (he gloriously straight-drove Ollie Robinson), the pulls and slogsm. Among India's batsmen, he alone used dexterous feet. To disrupt Shoaib Bashir's length, he stepped out and carved him over long-off. The off-spinner, who had sliced through India's top-order, would pose significantly less trouble to him.

Unlike batsmen of his age, the 23-year-old resisted the urge of adrenaline. He calmly waited for the loose ball to arrive. Tom Hartley bowled a short ball, he pulled. He trusted Kuldeep Yadav's defenses, the pair adding 76 runs. When Yadav departed, India were still 96 runs behind. He acted with the maturity of a seasoned lower-order firefighter. Dhoni's advice to him during IPL



Dhruv Jurel hit 90 on Sunday. Sportzpics

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might have buzzed between his ears: "He told me it's a thankless job, there's more failures than success, so don't think much. You expect the worst and prepare accordingly."

Two other aspects of his batting stood out—the nimbleness of foot-work and the shepherding of Akash Deep. His strides are short but decisive, he freely moved back and forth, played sufficiently close to the body and always got in line with the ball.

After watching Deep waft agriculturally at a ball, he told the debutant to calm down. To ease his pressure, he hoarded most of the strike until Akash teethed in. The flexibility of the feet perhaps owes to his wicket-keeping. His technique is more orthodox than Dhoni. He is thinner and more mobile, depending on short steps than big movements. He is more in the Wriddhiman Saha mould—though not as elastic when keeping.

Post his half-century, brought with a single through mid-on, in the direction of the MS Dhoni Pavilion, he shifted through the gears. He targeted Bashir, smearing him for three of his four sixes, with an unfettered bat-swing. He did so without dropping a bead of sweat or cracking a nerve. An irony that he perished playing a defensive stroke to Hartley.

It didn't matter; his ninety whittled down England's lead to 46. It's replete with meaning too. It means Rishabh Pant cannot breeze back into the side; it means KS Bharat could see the curtain dropping on his international career; it means the decision to follow his own voice and not his father's, who wanted him to join the National Defence Academy is vindicated; it means the money his Kargil War veteran father had to borrow to buy cricket gear was not wasted; it means he could put Agra onto India's cricket map as Dhoni did Ranchi; it means India have discovered a new hero. A hero who emerged in the land of one of its greatest heroes.

Not worried about century, desperate to lift trophy: Jurel

Ranchi: Dhruv Jurel made his Kargil War veteran father proud with an invaluable 90 in just his second Test on a dicey surface.

Had he scored 10 more runs, it would have been ever more memorable. But he has no regrets.

"I am not worried too much about the century. This is my debut series. I am desperate to lift the trophy, to play Test cricket was one big dream for me."

"All I thought was about what the team needed. How much time I can spend in the middle and score runs, and how much it will help the team," he said.

"The wicket had low bounce, so I had to play straight," he added.

When keeping wicket, he made a slight adjustment. Whereas in Rajkot, his gloves were semi-open in his crouch, he fully spread them here, so that he could deal better with the low bounce and inconsistent spin.

Jurel had pored over clips of the England bowlers to study the channels they bowl and the areas they hit.

"I believe in visualisation. Whatever match or series, I look at who will bowl and how I will play them. I play out the scenarios," he elaborated. ENS

PARA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bhagat matches Lin Dan's record of 5 titles; defeats arch rival in final

SHIVANI NAIK
 FEBRUARY 25

Pramod Bhagat rallied from a set down to win a mammoth 100 minute battle against Englishman Daniel Bethell 21-20, 21-20, 21-14 at the Para World Championships in Thailand.

The para legend, in the process, equalled Lin Dan's mark of 5 world titles amongst able-bodied champs, and became the first para shuttler to secure 3 consecutive wins, in SL3 category with the longest para Worlds final. The versatile Suhas Lalithakere Yathiraj picked his first World title in SL4, with a straight sets 21-18, 21-18 win over Indonesian Freddy Setiawan.

In SH6 category, the pugnacious Krishna Nagar got the day's finest win over Chinese Lin Naili, taking the title 22-20, 22-20, his fourth Worlds medal, and a precious gold. India finished with 3 gold, 4 silver and 11 bronze, a total of 18 medals across categories.

'Toughest physically and mentally'

Bhagat, the Odisha shuttler who also won

2 bronze in men's Doubles with Sukant Kadam and mixed doubles with Manisha Ramadas, took his career tally to 14 World Championship medals, which includes 6 gold, 3 silver, 5 bronze in all categories.

The 35-year-old completed a winning span of 15 years of gold medals, won in 2009, 2015, 2019, 2022 and 2024.

Bhagat had lost to Bethell 8 of the last 9 times, and there were questions over whether his global domination of big events was coming to a close. "I have managed to equal my idol Lin Dan's record of 5 world championships and second being having been able to retain 3 consecutive world championships," he said.

"This match with Bethell would be my toughest both mentally and physically. I have not been playing well against Bethell past few months and this was my time to prove doubters wrong. The match was exhaustive and Bethell played brilliantly but somehow, I managed to pull out a win," he described.

Bhagat started the match strongly with early flurry of points, but the southpaw Englishman made a commendable come-



Pramod Bhagat won a fifth singles worlds title on Sunday. File

back to take the opener 21-14. Both finalists defended stubbornly as rallies got longer.

Bethell's chest-level smashes had been troubling Bhagat in the past few matches, but he used his backhand deception on straight

pushes expertly to push back the Englishman. Drawing out errors he levelled the set score for 21-15.

Bhagat varied his pace significantly in the third, and stole a lead over Bethell in the de-

cider and got a tight net dribble winner to claim the match.

Krishna dedicates title to mother

Krishna Nagar, India's brand new para World champion in SH6 category, lost an anchor of his life, his mother, six months after his Tokyo Paralympic triumph in 2021. Grief cast a shadow on his gold, and he plunged into negativity, that ate away at his confidence on the badminton court.

But the sport and support of his friends means the Jaipur pro has rediscovered his winning stomp. It gave Krishna his first para World title at Thailand, from three Championships, one among India's three gold, as he continued to bombard Chinese Lin Naili in the 22-20, 22-20 final at Thailand on Sunday. The SH6 category is for those that are short-statured and suffer from dwarfism.

One of the standout features of Krishna's game has been his jump smashes. But his serve had gone missing post his mother's demise. "There were too many hurdles af-

ter her passing away. She was my everything. But then my mental situation worsened after her death. I sunk into darkness," he recalls.

<p

Warrier rises above conditions

In conditions tailor-made for spinners, pacer plays his part as Tamil Nadu show holders Saurashtra the door

VENKATA KRISHNAB

COIMBATORE, FEBRUARY 25

 AS THE final Saurashtra wicket fell at 5.10 PM, the celebration in the Tamil Nadu came was muted. They had earned a place in the Ranji Trophy semi-finals for the first time in seven years, and had got there defeating the defending champions and the most consistent red-ball team in the last five years, Saurashtra, by an innings and 33 runs inside three days.

But, this is a side that is definitely not content with this achievement. With each passing game, the hunger only seems to grow. They will face heavyweights Mumbai or Baroda in the semi-finals later this week, but whoever it is, they ought to take this Tamil Nadu side - that is without a Ranji title since 1987-88 - seriously.

Having started Day 3 with a lead of 117, Tamil Nadu took it to 155 in the first session on Sunday at the SNR College grounds. On a two-paced pitch with variable bounce - certain balls kept low, and some jumped off the rough patches - even with Cheteshwar Pujara in their ranks, it was always going to be a tall order for Saurashtra.

And as expected, Pujara, who was offered a life on 2 with Vimal Kumar dropping him at short-leg off R Sai Kishore's bowling, fought a lone battle.

Sticking to his successful method, Pujara quietly went about tiring the Tamil Nadu attack, taking 170 balls for his 46. He hit five boundaries, but took 164 deliveries to get the other 26 runs, showing the sort of patience and grind that is missing on the domestic circuit.

But even as Pujara dead-batted ball after ball, with the odd one missing his outside edge, the Tamil Nadu bowlers didn't relent. They kept it tight, bowling mostly in the line of the stumps with a flat trajectory, with fielders placed in his scoring areas, thus denying him easy runs.

It was fitting that Sai Kishore - Player of the Match - removed Pujara as part of his four-wicket haul in the innings to go with his five in the first. The tall left-arm spinner now has 47



With the win over Saurashtra, Tamil Nadu have entered their first semifinal in seven years.

wickets - the most by any bowler in the Elite group this season, with fellow left-arm spinner S Ajith Ram sitting with 41 wickets.

Although it was yet another match where the two left-arm spinners came to the forefront, it is hard to overlook the vital role played by pacer Sandeep Warrier. On slow pitches that they have opted to have at home, Warrier has been their unsung hero for Tamil Nadu. Operating with the new ball in tandem with M Mohammed,

with the old ball it is Warrier that the two spinners turn to when they need control at the other end. Without any movement and in unhelpful conditions, Warrier has bowled his heart out, often finding breakthroughs with the old ball, generating lift and a bit of reverse-swing. The 23 wickets he has so far is a reward for the hard work he has put in with the team's bowling coach Lakshmi Path Balaji.

Starting the slide

Having picked two wickets in the first innings at crucial junctures in the first innings, on Sunday it was Warrier who started Saurashtra's slide with twin blows with the new ball. He trapped Harvik Desai with one that nipped back in and off the first ball of the second session, sent Sheldon Jackson's middle-stump for a walk. Once he had provided the opening, the two spinners took over.

"The only thing Bala bhai (Balaji) has been telling me is to take the pitch out of the equation. When you do that, most of the time, it is you battling against yourself. So that is what I've been trying to do and it has helped me. If you think the pitch is slow and there is no bounce, you will feel low about it. You may not give 100 percent and become defensive. But when you take the pitch out of the equation, the only intent is to get wickets. Skill-wise, I cannot replicate Balaji, but the mental aspect and the ability to bowl long spells I can definitely replicate," Warrier said.

With Warrier finding the right notes, bowling - which was Tamil Nadu's worry in the past, is now winning them games. The one on

Sunday is their third innings win and so far they have taken the maximum possible 140 wickets in the 14 innings they have bowled in this Ranji campaign.

"This is a process that started two years ago when all of us came together. Last year, we took 130 wickets in seven matches. This time, we have gone a step further. Last season, despite picking up momentum, we couldn't make it to the knockouts, but we have carried the same form into this season. It is all about sharing the responsibility and with Mohammad and Ajith Ram around, we are more rounded. Tactically as well, we have been planning a lot and executing as well," Warrier said.

Last season, when they defeated Saurashtra in their last league match, Tamil Nadu were packing their bags and bidding adieu to the Ranji season. This season, they are waiting to find out if they have to pack their bags for Mumbai or stay put in Coimbatore and face Baroda in the semi-finals.

BRIEF SCORES: Saurashtra 183 & 122 (Pujara 46; Sai Kishore 4/27, Sandeep Warrier 3/18) lost to Tamil Nadu 338 by an innings and 33 runs

Solanki, Rawat slam tons, but Mumbai bag crucial lead

DEVENDRA PANDEY

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 25

IN HIS pep talks inside a closed dressing room before the game, Baroda captain Vishnu Solanki had stressed the importance of playing the quarter-finals and what it means to be up against Mumbai in their backyard. In one line he tried to sum up the importance: "I told everyone in the dressing room that agar apni kabiliyat dikhani hai toh yeh match mein kuch karna padega" (Scoring against Mumbai meant showcasing true capability).

Baroda certainly came close to achieving this on the day at BKC grounds, and it looked like they would overhaul Mumbai's first innings total of 384 when they started at 270/4. After all, overnight batsman Shaswat Rawat was looking dangerous and Solanki was choosing his strokes wisely.

The drooping shoulders of Mumbai fielders said it all as Rawat cruised to score a decent hundred, finishing with 124. Solanki was seen telling his young batsmen to hang on and not let this one get away after Rawat's departure.

Baroda had earlier managed to post a crucial 174 run stand for the third wicket and their ship had steadied. Rawat, who had moved from Uttarakhand and pursued his cricketing career in Baroda, was scoring his first big runs against Mumbai.

All his hard work looked to be paying off - from renting a house in Vadodara, to trying to play junior cricket there. He had a good run this Ranji season and had come up with scores of 207, 105 and 93 before this game. Baroda was banking on him to pass this knock-out test. On the third day, he resumed on 69 and doubled solid in his stroke play. He was never in two minds while going for any shot. Mumbai though waited for one error from Rawat. And despite looking fluent, he went on to chase one wide ball, to hand over a straight sharp catch at first slip to Prithvi Shaw off Tushar Deshpande. Till then the two Baroda batsmen had been slowly taking the game away from Mumbai, as in the first session they managed to remain unbeaten.

Solanki later revealed how the partnership would have taken them to a safe zone. "The way our partnership was going, we thought we would take it further and we will get there," he explained.

However, Mumbai bowlers didn't let the plan succeed despite the captain standing firm on the other side for his 136. He lost partners at successive intervals.

None showed the grit and urge to hang



Baroda skipper Vishnu Solanki led from the front, scoring a 291-ball 138 in his team's first innings.

I had told everyone we will play with a straight bat and we can reach the total but we lost our momentum once we lost Rawat's wicket.

-VISHNU SOLANKI
BARODA SKIPPER

around to ensure they supported Solanki, who had completed his ninth hundred of his first-class career. Baroda fell short by 36 runs eventually with left-arm spinner Shams Mulani finishing with four for 121.

Solanki is still hopeful and he admits the team lost momentum once Rawat was out. He adds, "I had told everyone we will play with a straight bat and we can reach the total but we lost our momentum once we lost Rawat's wicket. It's a big game and we will fight tomorrow. There are still two days left and anything can happen." In reply, Mumbai had lost opener Bhupen Lalwani as left-arm spinner Bhagav Bhatt got him in the slips. At stumps, Mumbai were 21 for 1 with Hardik Tamor and Mohit Avasthi batting on 12 and 3 respectively and the team lead stretching to 57 runs. For Mumbai, the first session on the fourth day will certainly be challenging and they will look to play out safe.

BRIEF SCORES: Mumbai 384 & 21 for 1 vs Baroda 348 (Solanki 136, Rawat 124, Mulani 4 for 121); Vidarbha: 460 & 50/0 in 14 overs lead Karnataka: 286 in 90.3 overs (Nikin 82, Samarth 59; Yash 3/48, Aditya 3/50) by 224 runs; MP 234 & 107 in 40.5 overs (Himanshu 43; Nithish 4/28) lead Andhra: 172 and 95/4 in 44 overs (Vihari 43*) by 75 runs

Manpreet leads India's attacking surge against Irish

RAHUL PANDEY

FEBRUARY 25

IT CAN be difficult to find polar opposites in a five-team tournament, with a small sample size of games to judge sides. But the contrast between Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Giants last year in the Women's Premier League had indeed been north and south. One finished as winners with a near-perfect record.

The other had a woeful campaign, winning as many games as their contemporaries had lost in the league stage: two. A year and another go at the auction table later, little seems to have changed as the defending champions rammed right through the Giants in a five-wicket cruise.

If Gujarat looked toothless, Mumbai played the assertive brand of cricket which won them the trophy last year. Harmanpreet Kaur once again scored a heap of runs, a welcome sign after her poor run in the Indian outfit against England and Australia. On a night where most batters succumbed to hold fort, the Indian captain made most of the luxury of time in the chase of 127, scrapping 40 less than a run a ball before closing the game with a six.

The foundation of Mumbai's second win in a row had been laid by their bowlers.



Mumbai Indians skipper Harmanpreet Kaur scored a 41-ball 46. PTI

Another has been their enviable roster of overseas players.

All four in their playing XI on Sunday can bowl, so the skipper went on an eight-over streak with them. A move that proved fruit-

ful as the quartet ended up sharing all nine of Gujarat's wickets between them.

Shabnim Ismail has replaced Issy Wong in MI's eleven this season - a "tough call", as described by head coach Charlotte Edwards

- and has taken little time to click. Known for her fiery pace and bounce, on a wicket that was conducive to both, the South African speedster would quiz Gujarat batters with her slower ones.

No better than the one with which she removed skipper Beth Mooney - a pre-empted ramp shot from the Australian only carrying as far as the keeper, thanks to an off-cutter.

If Ismail put the pressure on Gujarat in the powerplay, it was Amelia Kerr who took over once the field was spread. If the dismissal of the captain was telling, the clean-up of her deputy was the most defining picture of the innings. Unable to read a googly from Kerr, Sneha Rana stood frozen in her front-foot defensive stance as the ball snuck between her bat and pad to crash into the middle stump.

Baffling start

The signs of a calamitous outing for Gujarat were there from the toss. Skipper Beth Mooney's announcement of her opening partner as Veda Krishnamurthy - a middle-order batter, who had never opened in her 76-game T20I career - was baffling. Laura Wolvaardt was left out and Phoebe Litchfield, who had a memorable tour of India recently, was picked in the middle order.

Veda would last all of two deliveries in

the middle after Ismail sent her packing in the first over.

Slutting Litchfield in at three felt like a natural makeup for the initial blunder. But Gujarat threw in another curveball with Harleen Deol walking in ahead of her - a decision they'd come to rue only two overs later. A second leg before wicket induced by Ismail. By the time Litchfield finally arrived to join Mooney in the middle, Gujarat were 11/2.

There was hope of a recovery for a minute though. Mooney would try her luck in the first over of spin. At the slightest hint of air on a delivery outside off, came a sliced cut only marginally away from the reach of the point fielder.

Next ball, a dab that went even closer to Harmanpreet Kaur at first slip on its way to another four.

Then Litchfield went for an inventive re-

verse sweep to make it three in the over. But any glimmer of hope Gujarat had got then was quickly vanquished. The run rate pressure still loomed large and a slower one from Nat Sciver-Brunt got the better of Litchfield and Gujarat were back to chasing games by their fingertips. As they had for most of last year.

BRIEF SCORES: Gujarat Giants 126-9 in 20 overs (T Kanwar 28; A Kerr 4-17, S Ismail 3-18) lost to Mumbai Indians 129-5 in 18.1 overs (Harmanpreet 46*, A Kerr 31)

32-year-old Sobhana: Years of toil and one over of magic

VENKATA KRISHNAB

COIMBATORE, FEBRUARY 25

WHEN ASHA Sobhana got the ball in the 17th over, she found the M Chinnaswamy Stadium atmosphere to be 'electric'. It was the sort of ambience she had craved all her life.

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Smriti Mandhana only wanted Sobhana to get least one of Shweta Sehwari and Grace Harris as UP Warriorz were in total control in pursuit of 158. With seven wickets in hand, they needed only 32 runs in the final four overs. This is supposed to be a stroll.

But this was Chinnaswamy Stadium. The chants of 'RCB, RCB' were deafening. Sobhana was even thinking about her parents, who had recharged their DTH connection only to watch her play. She didn't want to let anyone down on the night.

India seamer Renuka Singh still had an over left. There was Georgia Wareham as well. But it was Sobhana that Smriti turned to. At 32, she had been around for years in domestic cricket.

Yet, there was still something unknown about her. When she was in Class VII and returned home one day at 7 pm after attending trials, Sobhana had found the house



RCB's Asha Sobhana (left) claimed an impressive 5-22 against UP Warriorz. BCCI

empty. Her parents had gone to file a missing person complaint at the police station.

Since then, she had moved teams on the domestic circuit, starting her career with Kerala in 2007-08 season before moving to Railways and then to Pondicherry two sea-

sons ago.

Her path to the Women's Premier League was filled with ups and downs, like many other girls who have had to break barriers to get this far. Growing up in Thiruvananthapuram, she attended train-

ing sessions only because her coaches offered her bus fare. Sobhana started bowling by rolling empty milk packets over waste paper. And on the domestic circuit, barring the 2022-23 season, she has been among the wicketkeepers regularly.

She wasn't a certain starter in the inaugural edition last year. Yet, the RCB team management saw something in her. She picked up only five wickets in five matches, at an economy rate of over 8. But, when this edition came, it was evident they were going to put their faith in her.

Getting better

After catching attention last year, Sobhana had gone back to work on her game. Former India spinner Laxman Sivaramakrishnan was so impressed with what he saw that he volunteered to coach her for free. And this January, she would spend three days with Sivaramakrishnan in Chennai. "She is a quick learner and has a strong personality. All that we had to do was make small technical adjustments, which would make her more effective," Sivaramakrishnan tells The Indian Express.

It would begin with altering her action a bit, then concentrating on transfer of weight, finding the right balance and wrist position and ensuring she bowled at the right speed.

"She had a more open-chested action, so we worked on making it a bit side-on. It allows you to have a better transfer of weight, from back leg to the front. Then there will be perfect synchronisation. When all these are in place, you will definitely become more effective," adds Sivaramakrishnan.

With the tweaked action, Sobhana went about her business with her usual confidence. The one striking aspect that Sivaramakrishnan had noticed in her from day 1 was that she wasn't afraid to flight the ball. Like all good leg-spinners, she was forcing batters to drive.

Off the second ball of the 17th over on Saturday, she got Sehwari. Off the fourth, with Harris looking for big hits, she slowed it further as the ball hit the off-stump. And off the final ball with Kiran Navgire on strike, she gave enough air, drawing the batter forward to have her stumped. Three blows in one over and Warriorz never recovered.

"Our conversations have mostly been on giving more flight and drawing batters forward. When she does that, she will be effective. She is beginning to get more drift, but it's taking the ball on the leg-stump and beyond. So she has to adjust her line and start it outside off, and the drift will take it to the middle- and-leg-stump line," Sivaramakrishnan says.