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TMC wins

Subrata Mukherjee defeated the BJP candidate, Loknath Chatterjee. Mukherjee had secured 70.50 per cent. However, this time, the lead margin and vote share have come down to 20,228 votes and 49.7 per cent respectively.

Meanwhile, the Congress came fourth in both the seats and its candidates lost their deposits.

TMC chairperson and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee thanked the people of both the constituencies for giving her party this mandate. "I sincerely thank the electors of the Asansol Parliamentary Constituency and the Ballygunge Assembly Constituency for giving decisive mandate to our party candidates. We consider this to be our people's warm Shubho Nababarsho gift to our Ma-Mati-Manush organisation. Salute to the voters for reposing faith in us, yet again," said Banerjee in tweets on Saturday.

Later she offered her prayers at Kalighat and wished for the well-being of the people of West Bengal. "We are grateful to the people for their love and blessings. This will inspire us to work more for them. Despite the conspiracy and smear campaigning by BJP, CPM and Congress, people have reposed their faith on us again. This is the first time we won the Asansol seat and in record margin. Thanks to the people of Asansol. I will appeal to the people not to respond to provocations," said Banerjee.

TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee tweeted, "Thank you ASANSOL & BALLYGUNGE for taking a step towards an INDIA that is free from the hate-mongers and the oppressors! With your blessings and love, we promise to deliver. Your well-being has always been our PRIORITY and it's only going to get better from here."

After his victory, Shatrughan Sinha said, "The credit for this victory goes to Mamata Banerjee, her party and the people of Asansol. It is because of the common man that I could take this challenge. I will work for the people with utmost honesty and sincerity."

BJP candidate Agnimitra Paul said, "Seeing this result, we should focus on 2024 Lok Sabha polls and start our preparation right now. Of course there will be violence from the TMC in every election, but we have to strengthen the organisation and reach out to the people as well. I accept the verdict of the people."

Later, she apologised to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for failing to win the Parliamentary seat. "Sorry @narendramodi Sir.. I tried my best but couldn't give you this seat.... My war is to save Democracy in West Bengal. Democracy has been murdered in West Bengal. My war is on Sir," she tweeted.

Following the defeat, BJP's tally of Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal came down to 17. The saffron camp had won 18 seats from Bengal in 2019. The TMC, meanwhile, won the Asansol seat for the first time since the party's formation in 1998.

Supriyo, after his electoral victory, said, "I dedicate this win to TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee. She brought me back into politics and allowed me to contest the bypoll from the prestigious Ballygunge constituency. This victory is also dedicated to the Maa, Mati, Manush and countless workers of the TMC. CPM and BJP indulged in smear campaign against me during campaign. This victory will come as a befitting reply to their politics. This is a poetic justice for me and also for our Asansol candidate Shatrughan Sinha."

CPM candidate Saira Shah Halim said the Left has become the prime Opposition to the TMC. "Our vote share has increased exponentially. People have proved that the Left is the only alternative to the TMC," said Halim.

BJP candidate Keya Ghosh said, "Definitely this is not the result which we expected. People have voted for the TMC and the CPM. We will definitely introspect why we got this kind of result."

Amidst sporadic incidents of violence, nearly 53 per cent polling was recorded in bypolls to Asansol Lok Sabha and Ballygunge Assembly constituencies on Tuesday.

The Asansol seat fell vacant after former Union minister Babul Supriyo resigned as the BJP Member of Parliament from the seat from where he won the election in 2014 and the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. He was made the TMC candidate from the Ballygunge Assembly constituency in Kolkata, which fell

vacant after the demise of former state minister and veteran party leader Subrata Mukherjee in November last year.

State BJP president Sukanta Majumdar said, "TMC is losing the minority votes which was evident in Ballygunge. This has gone to CPM and Congress. We will definitely look into this result."

Clash

situation is not disturbed in any part of Delhi. Rest of the officers shall also be on alert," read a message that went out to all senior officers of the Delhi Police.

Police said that during the yatra, an argument broke out between two communities. "Things escalated, and both sides started pelting stones at each other. They damaged public property and torched vehicles," a senior police officer said.

Senior officers rushed to the spot and additional forces were called in, said police. "Police tried to control the crowd during which several personnel were injured," an officer said.

On Saturday night, the area had been locked down, roads were barricaded, and police in riot gear had been deployed in large numbers. The roads were littered with glass shards, bricks, and stones. A burnt out shell of a scooter lay on the road.

Auto parts mechanic Akash Thakur (20), said he had parked his bike and was headed to join the Shobha Yatra that was passing through Block B, near Kushal Cinema, when the clashes broke out.

"I ran for my life. When I came back to where I had parked my bike, I found it was missing. We were celebrating peacefully," Thakur said.

Mastan (27), a resident of Block C, said he was out buying fruits at the time. He claimed that those in the rally raised slogans such as "Bharat mein rehna hoga toh Jai Shri Ram kehna hoga."

He also alleged that some people carrying saffron flags had tried to enter a mosque, and that the violence had escalated because the police presence in the area is usually thin.

"The stone pelting took place from both sides. We tried to stop the clashes, appealed for peace," Mastan said.

Cab driver Ajay Kumar (27) said he sustained injuries to his leg as he fled the violence. "I had come to check on my parents when I heard news of a clash. There was fierce stone-pelting, and while I managed to escape from the area, my Swift Dzire car was destroyed by the mob. How will I earn my living now?" he said.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal condemned the violence and appealed for calm. "The incident of stone pelting during a Shobha Yatra in Delhi's Jahangirpuri is condemnable. There should be strict action against those who are to blame. I appeal to everyone -- hold each other's hand and maintain peace," he tweeted.

Kejriwal said he had spoken to Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal. "He assured that all steps are being taken to ensure peace and that guilty will not be spared," the Chief Minister said.

In a press release, the L-C's office said: "L-G has condemned the incidents of violence and stone pelting in the National Capital as unfortunate and said that none behind these activities will be spared. He took stock of the situation along with CP, Delhi and has appealed to the people to maintain peace...and cooperate with the police in maintaining law and order..."

BJP leader Kapil Mishra said the incidents in Jahangirpuri should be treated as a terrorist attack. He alleged that the area was known to harbour "Bangladeshi infiltrators", and that people had been mobilised for the 2020 Delhi riots from the area. "They should be identified and their homes should be bulldozed," he said.

Manoj Tiwari, the BJP MP from North East Delhi, said, "There has been stone pelting in Delhi's Jahangirpuri on Hanuman Jayanti... This incident did not occur all of a sudden; it is a conspiracy. Police should immediately conduct a probe and take strictest action against the culprits. Though the situation is getting back to normal... there should be a thorough probe on who are the culprits, where the stones came from... Their houses should be checked for weapons, and their IDs. I can say with confidence that several incidents are taking place through a conspiracy. I would also request Chief Minister Kejriwal that this is not the

time to shirk responsibility, but to work collectively and step forward to punish the culprits. Please maintain harmony."

Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta said the violence was "not a coincidence but a huge conspiracy". "The culprits...should be punished and Delhi Police will definitely ensure that. I will speak to the Home Minister too. But the question arises that in several unauthorised colonies of Delhi -- whether it is Jahangirpuri or Jamuna Paar -- Bangladeshis and Rohingyas are staying illegally in large numbers and the Delhi government is giving them electricity and water connections. The Delhi government is answerable as to why they are providing protection to such people."

The Delhi Police Commissioner said on Twitter: "In today's incident in NW District, the situation is under control. Adequate additional force has been deployed in Jahangirpuri & other sensitive areas. Senior officers have been asked to remain in field and closely supervise the law & order situation & undertake patrolling. Strict action will be taken against rioters. Citizens are requested to not to pay heed to rumours and fake news on social media."

Sonia steps in

Congress -- in the past, he consistently denied any such plan.

The meeting gave two messages: Sonia, who had taken a back seat and was planning to relinquish charge once again this August-September, wants to put in place a mechanism to try and revive the party's fortunes; and, the Congress has finally accepted that it needs external help to find its feet again.

Some of the leaders said Kishor told the meeting he was ready to join the Congress without expectations and demands but wanted his road map implemented to help strengthen the party at the grassroots level.

Sources said he wants the Congress to concentrate on some 370 Lok Sabha constituencies, nuance its political messaging, revamp its communication apparatus and address certain organisational weaknesses. Apart from the Gandhis, the meeting was attended by senior leaders A K Antony, Mallikarjun Kharge, Digvijaya Singh, Arjun Maken, Mukul Wasnik, Jairam Ramesh, Ambika Soni and K C Venugopal. Barring Wasnik, none of the G-23 leaders were invited to the meeting.

Some of the Congress leaders said what Kishor said in his presentation were "Known facts" but agreed that the party needed a focused approach. "With graphs and all, he was telling us about where we have lost our votes... how we deteriorated over the years... region specific and state specific," one leader said.

Others were upset with the idea of bringing in Kishor. "A 137-year-old party of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel has been outsourced. This is the biggest insult that you can heap upon yourself, showing that you are incompetent and disliked by the people so you have to bring in somebody who purely works for money," one leader remarked.

The G-23 leaders were annoyed that none of them, barring Wasnik, had been called to the meeting. "So, all those gestures of reconciliation and promises of inclusive and collective thinking were a sham. It exposes the hypocrisy of the leadership. This (involvement of Kishor) may further deepen the divide and only time will tell whether it will be helpful or totally counter-productive," a leader said.

Venugopal said a decision on Kishor's suggestions, including on whether he will join the party, will be known in a week. "Prashant Kishor has made a detailed presentation for the 2024 election strategy. It needs some detailed discussion and the Congress president will set up a small group to discuss this entire presentation. That group will submit a report within a week's time for a final decision," he said.

Asked whether Kishor will join the party or will be its strategist, he said all details will be known within a week.

Kishor suggested that the party should contest alone in a few states where it is strong and has remained either in the first or second position in previous elections.

The meeting comes against the backdrop of feverish talk in the party -- and much opposition too -- on bringing in Kishor for election strategising. He has

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EXPRESS AUDIO

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Seek meaningful talks with India, peaceful ties: Shehbaz to Modi

Peaceful settlement of outstanding disputes including Jammu & Kashmir is indispensable. Pakistan's sacrifices in fighting terrorism are well-known. Let's secure peace and focus on socio-economic development of our people."

Modi's congratulatory tweet was similar to the letter he sent to Imran Khan in August 2018 when he became Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Congratulating Khan on his assumption of charge, Modi had expressed the hope that the smooth transition of government in Pakistan

would strengthen and cement the people's belief in democracy. He recalled their telephone conversation in which they spoke of their shared vision to bring peace, security and prosperity in the subcontinent to make it "free of terror and violence", and to focus on development. They had spoken in July 2018, days after it became clear that Khan looked set to be Prime Minister.

With Shehbaz Sharif taking charge, New Delhi is watching developments in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Lahore with "cautious optimism" for a headway in bilateral ties.

Top sources said the change in regime may offer a "diplomatic opening". According to sources in the strategic establishment, the implications may be far-reaching.

Emerging from the shadow of his elder brother Nawaz Sharif, Shehbaz, the PML-N president, is known to be close to the Pakistan Army -- he was Chief Minister of Pakistan's Punjab province. The Sharif family has been an advocate of

better ties with India. Officials pointed out that the core concerns of the two countries remain the same, and Shehbaz is well placed to resume the bilateral conversation.

Better trade ties with India could provide the much-needed boost to Pakistan's economy. Known to be focused on infrastructure projects -- construction of roads, bridges and flyovers and transport projects in Pakistan Punjab -- Shehbaz is keen to deliver before the next Pakistan elections in 2023.

lished," he said.

Ali Sabry

despite his own reservations, he decided to continue in his new assignment as a national duty.

"I thought I am not an economist, I am not familiar with this area. So I thought somebody who is more suited would be ideal to do the job. That's why I resigned. I waited three to four-five days, and in this crucial time, we appealed to anyone (to become the Finance Minister). But no one was coming forward. And then I thought at this given time, so many things are at stake, we need to protect the institutions, and we need somebody to govern. And talk to the IMF, talk to the Indian government, you need somebody to represent your country and your nation. So, with reluctance, I thought that I will take back my resignation, and do my level best," he said.

He resigned because "there was a lot of pressure" from his family members not to accept the appointment. "Also, a lot of people were talking about whether I was the right fit for this job. At the beginning, I thought it better to offer the job to someone else who is better."

But no one came forward. "This is not the time to just shy away from responsibility. You put your image and your personal glory and personal comfort on the side and do the job for the nation. It's the nation's call," he said.

The task is unenviable. Sri Lanka has a crippling dollar shortage and cannot import many of the essential goods that it needs for people's daily needs including milk, fuel, rice and medicines. As of April 12, the country had temporarily suspended repayment of all external debts, totalling about \$51 billion. And it has appealed to Sri Lankans living abroad to send remittances home to help the country tide over the crisis.

"It is a difficult task, most challenging because Sri Lanka has never had this kind of economic crisis since independence. I understand the importance of this to prevent it from deteriorating further, at least to arrest it until some proper decisions are made. So we need to firefight immediately, protect the vulnerable here and then find a way for the balance of payment crisis until normalcy returns," said Sabry, a friend of President Rajapaksa and, until recently, head of his personal legal team.

"It's not about me, it's about the country," he said. "We need to protect the institutions, the central bank, banking system, its credibility, its association with payment gateways, friendly relationships with international multilateral organisations, foreign countries. These need to be protected and salvaged, at least for the time being."

Being a lawyer, he said, what was helping him was his

state. Nearly 62.25 lakh -- almost 85 per cent -- consume up to 300 units per month. The government's subsidy bill on this account is expected to cross Rs 5,500 crore annually.

The free power bill for farmers amounts to Rs 6,000 crore per annum. The subsidy bill for 21.83 lakh domestic SC/BPL families comes to about Rs 4,000 crore. This group of beneficiaries pays only Rs 1.19 per unit of electricity up to a load of 7 KW.

Former Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi had cut power tariffs by Rs 3 per unit in November last year. He had said that 100 units of power would be charged at Rs 1.19 per unit for all domestic consumers. (It was Rs 4.19 per unit then). Thereafter, consumption between 100 and 300 units was billed at Rs 4 per unit instead of Rs 7. For more than 300 units, the charges were Rs 5.76 per unit as against the earlier rate of Rs 8.76 per unit.

In its first tariff order issued recently, the AAP government had retained these tariffs.

APMC mandis

country's cotton crop for 2021-22 by 8 lakh bales of 170 kg each. Its latest figure of 335.13 lakh quintals is also below the production of 353 lakh quintals for the previous cotton year (October-September).

In the case of wheat, the Centre is yet to revise downward its all-time-high output estimate of 111.32 million tonnes released on February 16.

Farmers like Rangani, Bhuvra, Gajera, and Bhandari have no doubt benefitted from high international prices following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The benchmark Cotlook 'A' Index price for cotton is currently at 159.90 cents a pound, up from 87 cents a year ago. Wheat prices at the Chicago Board of Trade exchange closed at \$10.96 per bushel (of 27.216 kg each) on Friday, compared to \$6.54 a year ago.

This links up with the farmers' second worry.

As global prices of agri-commodities have risen, so have the prices of diesel, fertilisers, and crop protection chemicals, which are all fossil fuel-based. State-owned oil companies have since March 21 cumulatively hiked retail prices of diesel by about Rs 10 per litre. On April 1, the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO) raised the price of di-ammonium phosphate from Rs 1,200 to Rs 1,350 for a 50-kg bag, and that of its popular '20:20:0:13' complex fertiliser from Rs 1,290 to Rs 1,400 per bag.

Prices of '10:26:26' and '12:32:16' complexes were also increased from Rs 1,440 and Rs 1,450 respectively to Rs 1,470 each per bag.

"The continued increases in fuel and nutrient prices make me nervous about the coming kharif planting season (from June). How much more will we

have to pay?," asks Hareesh Savaliya (51), who harvested 27 quintals of kapas from his 5-bigha holding in Kotda Sangani village, around 32 km from Rajkot city.

PM Modi

is an important formula for *Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat*," he said.

He said Ram kathas are organised in different parts of the country. "Be it in whatever language or dialect, the spirit of Ram katha binds, unites one in the devotion to the Lord. This is the strength of the Indian faith, our spirituality, our culture, our traditions. This is what, even in the troubled period of slavery, unified different sections, different classes to come together to resolve for the freedom of the nation... strengthened efforts".

"In spite of the changing circumstances over thousands of years, India has remained unshakeable and resolute. The flow of our faith and culture is of *sadbhav* (harmony), of *sambhav* (equality), of *samavesh* (inclusivity). Thus, when the time came for good to conquer evil, Lord Ram, in spite of being capable and able, took everyone along, unified everyone, people of all composition, small and large beings, took their help. And after bringing together all, he finished this task -- this is *Sabka Saath, Sabka Prayas*. His life is the best evidence of this, of which *Hanumanji* is an important part... We have to come together with this spirit, to achieve our resolve for the nation and to make it shine brighter," he said.

He said a "mini-Japan" was taking shape in the Saurashtra cities of Jamnagar, Rajkot and Morbi with specialised industrial hubs creating jobs. He praised the Kathiawad region for emerging as a power centre, with its tourism and pilgrimage centres.

Recalling his long association with Morbi, Modi said the Machchhu dam failure in August 1979 had led to flooding and deaths.

"When the earthquake came in Bhuj, Kutch (2001), the lessons learnt from the Morbi incident, the experience, came to use. The way Kutch has flourished after the earthquake goes to show how Gujarat has the strength to turn disasters into opportunities, as learnt from Morbi. Today, be it ceramics manufacturing, or clocks, Morbi has become an industrial hub for these. Before the Machchhu dam, all one could see in all four directions in Morbi were brick kilns and big chimneys. Today, it is said that on one side there is Rajkot, on the other side Jamnagar."

"Jamnagar's brass industry, Rajkot's engineering industry and Morbi's clock and ceramic industries have become like a triumvirate... seems like a new mini-Japan has been estab-

3 WEST BENGAL

BYPOLL RESULTS

TMC's winning run showcases Mamata's dominance in Bengal

ATRIMITRA
KOLKATA, APRIL 16

CONTINUING ITS winning streak in West Bengal politics, the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) Saturday swept the bypolls, retaining Kolkata's Ballygunge seat while wresting the Asansol parliamentary constituency from the BJP. The fresh election outcome again highlighted TMC supremacy and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's dominance in state politics, which has been continuing for over a decade now. The BJP is the principal Opposition party in Bengal, but the bypoll results indicated a further erosion in its support base in the state. The saffron party not only lost its Asansol constituency to the TMC — which clinched it for the first time ever — but its candidate also came third in Ballygunge seat and lost her deposit.

The poll results also saw a sharp rise in the Left's vote share in Ballygunge, where the CPM candidate became the runner-up. In Asansol, the CPM retained its vote share although its candidate came third. The Congress party was completely decimated, with its candidates losing their deposits in both these polls. While the Trinamool's candidate in Asansol, film actor-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha, bagged the seat with a margin of over 3 lakh votes, the party's nominee in Ballygunge, ex-Union minister Babul Supriyo, won the seat with about 20,000 votes, which was a sharp drop from the party's previous victory margin of about 75,000 votes.

In September last year, Supriyo had quit the BJP and joined the TMC, two months after he was removed from the Narendra Modi ministry as part of its major rejig. Subsequently, he also resigned as the BJP MP from Asansol, which he had won in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Mamata picked Supriyo as the party candidate



TMC chief Mamata Banerjee offers prayers at the Kalighat temple in Kolkata on Saturday. *Express*

from Ballygunge, which had fallen vacant with the demise of party veteran Subrata Mukherjee in November last year. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had got 51.15% votes in Asansol while the TMC and the CPI(M) had got 35.19% and 7.07% votes respectively. In the 2021 Assembly polls, in its seven Assembly segments, the TMC had garnered 46.21% votes as against the BJP's 41.89% and the CPI(M)'s 7.5% votes. In the current by-election to this seat, however, the TMC's vote percentage shot up to 56.5% while the BJP's dipped to 30%, with the CPI(M) managing to retain its vote base by getting 7.77% votes.

In Ballygunge, the TMC had secured 60.38% votes in the 2019 general election, with the BJP and the CPI(M) getting 26.59% and 5.28% votes respectively. In the 2021 state polls, the TMC garnered 70.6% votes while the BJP and the CPI(M) got 20.68% and 5.61% votes respectively. But, in the current bypoll, the TMC got about 50% votes in this seat as against the CPI(M)'s 31% and the BJP's 12% votes. The CPM candidate in Ballygunge, Saira Shah Halim, who got 30,971 votes as against Supriyo's 51,199 votes and BJP candidate Keya Ghosh's 13,220 votes, also led in the con-

stituency's two wards, even though in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) polls, held in December last year, the TMC had swept all its seven wards.

According to the TMC camp, there was a "negative campaign" against Supriyo in the bypoll as he switched to the party from the BJP and had a "perceived communal image". In 2018, when he was the BJP MP, Supriyo was accused of allegedly inciting violence in Asansol during the Ram Navami celebrations, in which the son of a local Imam was killed. Following the declaration of Supriyo as the TMC candidate from Ballygunge, the West Bengal Imams Association protested against the decision. With Ballygunge accounting for more than 30 per cent Muslim voters, there were indications that he might not fully get their support despite joining the TMC.

"Minority community did not forget that wound inflicted by Asansol riots... From the bypoll result, it is clear that a significant section of the minority community has not accepted Babul as part of our party yet. So, they voted against us and CPI(M)'s vote share increased there," said a senior TMC leader of South Kolkata. The Bengal Imam Association

also campaigned against Supriyo among Ballygunge's minority voters. Its president Md. Yayah said, "We are glad that voters of Ballygunge accepted our request and gave a message to TMC. The TMC should take note of it and introspect." Senior TMC leader and minister Firhad Hakim however said: "The results have again proved that we never do politics based on 30% or 70% people. We always reach out to 100% of the voters and do work for all and that ensured our success."

On her part, Saira Shah Halim claimed, "The CPI(M) has come back strongly with more than 30% vote share and it is proved that CPI(M) is the only opposition against TMC. This is clear that we are making a comeback (in state politics). It is a moral victory for me and my comrades, who fought so hard against ruthless state intimidation, communalism and other factors." Senior state BJP leader Dilip Ghosh blamed the party's losses to the "TMC-created fear psychosis". "In West Bengal, TMC created a fear psychosis among the voters. Even our voters also did not come out to vote," he alleged.

However, a section of BJP leaders admitted that the party's organisation has weakened in Asansol. A senior BJP leader said, "Our cadres did not come out on the day of polling to manage the polling process without which a party cannot win an election in West Bengal." The TMC's fresh triumph has come in the backdrop of a series of violent incidents reported from various places in the state in recent months, which

included the murder of student leader Anis Khan allegedly by a few police personnel, Bogtui village arson and killings, and several rape cases. In the 2021 Assembly polls, Mamata had spearheaded her party to a spectacular victory for the third consecutive time. The party had since then swept all the polls in the state.

After latest poll rout, knives out for BJP's state leadership

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, APRIL 16

THE BJP'S losing streak in West Bengal since the Assembly polls last year continued on Saturday as the party failed to win the Asansol Lok Sabha and Ballygunge Assembly bye-elections on Saturday. Not only did the party see the Asansol Lok Sabha seat slip away to the TMC, its candidate lost her deposit in the Ballygunge Assembly constituency as well. Soon after bypoll results were out, BJP MP Saumitra Khan trained his guns at the party's state leadership for the latest electoral debacle.

"When inexperienced politicians run a political party then this kind of result is expected. We are paying the price for it. This is what happens when you don't have experienced leaders running the party. We have a lot to learn from the Trinamool Congress. They have shown how best to do politics. We have to fight a lot. However, we cannot expect electoral results to go our way as long as there are inexperienced leaders in key party posts. They must bring back the expelled leaders back to our party," Khan said in a video message.

It was apparent from his statements that the party MP was training his guns at BJP state president Sukanta Majumdar and the party's state general secretary (organisation) Amitava Chakravorty. In January, the party had expelled several leaders, including senior members Jay Prakash Majumdar and Ritesh Tiwari, for speaking against the party. Majumdar later joined the TMC.

Reacting to the BJP MP's remarks, Majumdar said, "When I was with the BJP, I had said the same thing. Their inexperienced leaders cannot run the party and fight against a party like the TMC. To save the party,

2019 Lok Sabha Polls
Seats: 18 out of 42
Vote Share : 40.3%
2021 Assembly polls
Seats: 77 out of 294
Vote Share : 38%
Assembly bypolls
Seats: Zero
Vote share : 13.3%
Municipal corporations (total wards 226)
BJP: 12 out of 226
Vote share : 14.5%

BJP'S DIPPING VOTESHARE

Kolkata Municipal Corporation
Wards: 3 out of total 144
Vote share : 9%
108 municipalities
Won: Nil
Vote Share : 13%
West Bengal Bypolls
Seats: Zero
Vote Share : 21.6%

they must win back the confidence of its grassroots-level workers. The BJP leaders should revolt against the present state leadership and bring in new and experienced leaders."

Asked to comment on the party's dismal showing, the BJP state president said, "There are a lot of factors which contributed to this electoral result. We will definitely introspect. But it is true that a large number of people could not vote due to TMC's terror."

In Asansol, former Union minister turned TMC candidate Shatrughan Sinha won the Asansol seat by a massive margin of 3,03,209 votes, with BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul, the party's candidate in the bypoll, finishing a distant second. Sinha bagged 6,56,358 votes while Paul got 3,53,149 votes.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Babul Supriyo had defeated TMC candidate Moon Moon Sen by a margin of 1,97,637 votes, securing 51.56 per cent of the total votes polled. In 2014, Supriyo's victory margin was 70,480 votes.

In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Asansol was one of the two seats that the BJP won in West Bengal — the other being Darjeeling. While the BJP can-

didate in Darjeeling, SS Ahluwalia, received support from the party's then alliance partner Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM), the victory in Asansol in 2014 was, however, largely down to the BJP's own strength.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his campaign in Asansol in 2014, had said, "Parliament main mujhe Babul chahiye (I want Babul in the Parliament)."

In 2019, the BJP turned in a spectacular performance in West Bengal, winning 18 seats, including Asansol. Now with the TMC wrestling Asansol from it, the BJP's Lok Sabha tally from Bengal has dropped to 17.

Although the Ballygunge Assembly constituency has always been a TMC stronghold, BJP's Keya Ghosh finished third in the eventual tally and lost her deposit.

Ditching the saffron camp for the TMC helped Supriyo return to his winning ways as he won the prestigious Ballygunge constituency in south Kolkata by a margin of 20,228 votes. The CPM finished second while the BJP emerged as a distant third. Of the total votes polled, Supriyo bagged 51,199 while CPM candidate Saira Shah Halim obtained 30,971 votes.

Shatrughan back in limelight after big win in Asansol

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, APRIL 16

THREE YEARS after his parliamentary poll defeat in his home state Bihar, actor-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha emerged triumphant on Saturday in the Asansol Lok Sabha bypoll in neighbouring West Bengal, quashing the "outsider" tag accorded to him by the opposition BJP. Sinha (76) also helped the state's ruling Trinamool Congress break its jinx in the Lok Sabha seat where it had not tasted success so far, by ensuring a thumping victory by a margin of 3,03,209 votes.

The former Union minister garnered a massive 6,56,358 votes against BJP candidate Agnimitra Paul's 3,53,149, according to the Election Commission website.

The victory will not just pave way for Sinha to come out of the political wilderness that he had entered into following his defeat at Patna Sahib in 2019 Lok Sabha polls but also give the TMC an opportunity to distance itself from the 'Bengali sub-nationalism' plank, which is apparently proving to be a hindrance to its pan-India expansion plans.

Popularly called 'Shotgun' by fans for his straightforward dialogue deliveries in films, Sinha, who joined the TMC after his four-decade-long stint in BJP and

a brief innings in the Congress, had vowed to work for the development of people in the industrial town during his campaigns.

"I am no less a Bengali than any other Bengali. I am not an outsider. I have always adored the Bengali language and Bengali culture. Today's results are a testimony to it. I will work for the development of the people," Sinha, known for his signature dialogue 'Khamosh', told reporters.

Born in Patna in 1946, the popular Bollywood actor had joined the BJP in the late 80s when it was a party of two MPs and served as its star campaigner during the Vajpayee-Advani era. Sinha made his electoral debut with a loss in the 1992 bypoll from the New Delhi Lok Sabha constituency as another movie star and Congress candidate Rajesh Khanna pocketed the seat.

Despite the loss, he continued to grow as a leader in the saffron camp due to his perceived proximity to party veterans Atal Behari Vajpayee and LK Advani.

Sinha had been a Rajya Sabha MP for 12 years and a member of the Lok Sabha for 10 years, all as part of the BJP, the party he had once called his "first and last choice".

He was a Union minister during Vajpayee's tenure as the prime minister, holding important portfolios such as shipping and health & family welfare.

Left now sets sights on denting Trinamool's Muslim voteshare

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, APRIL 16

ADDING TO its gains from the recent municipal elections, where it not only finished second in terms of the overall vote-share but also won the Taherpur municipality in Nadia district, the Left Front has regained its lost footing on Bengal's political ground, to the extent that it can now realistically set sights on wresting a slice of the minority voteshare from the ruling Trinamool Congress.

Weakening the TMC's hold on the minority vote bank since the 2011 Assembly elections, the CPM's Ballygunge Assembly bypoll candidate, Saira Shah Halim, not only finished runner-up to winning TMC nominee Babul Supriyo but also fared well in the minority-dominated wards of the constituency. In an indication of the party making a fair impression on voters, especially the ones belonging to the minority community, in the prestigious Assembly seat which fell vacant following the demise of state minister Subrata Mukherjee last year, the CPM's core voteshare has soared.

Left leaders, including its candidate, attributed the significant uptick in its vote haul on the relentless agitation on bread and butter issues as well as those such as the death of Muslim student leader Anis Khan. Formerly with the CPM's stu-



Saira Shah Halim finished second in the Ballygunge Assembly bypoll. *File*

dent's wing SFI, Anis was found dead outside his home at Amta in Howrah district on the night of February 18.

A niece of actor Naseeruddin Shah and the daughter-in-law of former Bengal Assembly Speaker Hasim Abdul Halim, Saira is a social activist and a motivational speaker. Her husband and CPM leader Fuad Halim unsuccessfully contested the Ballygunge Assembly polls in 2011. She was one of prominent faces of the Left's movement against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and also dabbles in social work. As an activist, she has

worked extensively in the illiterate and downtrodden section of the minority community in the Ballygunge and Park Circus areas. His family alleged that four men, one of who was in police uniform, came looking for him on the night of the incident.

While the SIT, formed by the state government to probe the death, arrested two persons, a civic police volunteer and a homeguard, Anis's family claimed they didn't have faith in the state police and called for a CBI probe.

The Opposition, especially the Left, too, added to the chorus for a CBI probe, and even took out protests across the city to press for its demand.

The suspected arsoning of nine people at Bogtui village in Birbhum district, allegedly in retaliation to the murder of TMC panchayat leader Bhadu Sheikh, also raised questions on the role of the police and the brought the Opposition out on the streets again. With both the accused and the victims of Bogtui violence being Muslims, sources in the TMC said there are fears of a further corrosion of its minority voteshare in coming electoral battles.

According to a section of TMC leaders, the ruling party saw the Left wean away a significant chunk of its Muslim voteshare for the first time since 2011. A senior TMC leader said, "In 2021, the minority voters saw us as the only alternative to the BJP.

Almost 90 per cent of Muslim voters, including some CPM members, voted for us. However, the Ballygunge bypoll has brought us to the realisation that our hold on the minority vote-bank has weakened. We have some thinking to do in this regard." The Left has now set its sights on sharpening and intensifying its protests against the TMC government around issues such as the Bogtui violence, Anis's death and the alleged gangrape and murder of a minor girl in Nadia district, which has seen the Opposition railing against the Mamata regime on the issue of law and order.

The CPM, for starters, has planned to organise a rally to thank the voters of Ballygunge. "The TMC, BJP and even the Congress attacked our candidate in a manner which was unprecedented. They ran a misogynist campaign against our candidate. We failed to mobilise more people during the campaign. Had we done that, the outcome of this bypoll could well have been different," said CPM's West Bengal state secretary Md. Salim.

"There were some incidents in the Left Front regime because of which the CPI(M) minority voteshare weakened significantly. If our party and the government fails to win over the Muslim voters and if a similar incident (like Anis's death and Bogtui) were to happen again, the implications for us could be serious," the TMC leader said.

Change of stripes helps Supriyo return to winning ways

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA, APRIL 16

SINGER-TURNED POLITICIAN Babul Supriyo's life has been a roller coaster ride — from a city banker who rose to be a BJP Minister at the centre after a chance meeting with Baba Ramdev, he suddenly found himself out in the cold after losing an assembly election from Tollygunge last year by a huge margin of 50,000 votes.

However, Supriyo bounced back Saturday to win the prestigious Ballygunge constituency for his new party — the TMC — which he joined last September in a surprise move. Born in Uttarpara as Supriya Baral in 1970, he changed his name to Babul Supriyo while trying his luck as a playback singer after leaving his banking job. After a successful stint as a playback singer, Babul entered politics in 2014 getting a ticket to contest the Lok Sabha elections for the BJP from West Bengal on being recommended by Baba Ramdev, whom he met by chance during a flight.

Babul surprised everyone by defeating TMC's Dola Sen from the industrial town of Asansol and was made the Union minister of state for urban development.

Two years later, he was shifted to the ministry for heavy industries and public enterprises during a reshuffle in July 2016.

On a run of losses since 2021 Assembly polls

Since the Assembly polls last year, when the party won 77 seats, the BJP has failed to win a single election in West Bengal.

From being the main contender to the TMC, the saffron camp is now competing with the CPM to retain the second position.

In the February civic elections — the first big polls in the state since the Assembly polls, the party failed to win any of the 108 municipalities in the state. The Trinamool won 102 of these civic bodies, the CPI(M) won one (Taherpur municipality in Nadia district) and the newly launched Hamro Party won Darjeeling.

Of the total 2,171 wards across 108 municipalities, the BJP won only 63 compared to the Trinamool's 1,870. The party's vote share stood at 13 per cent, behind the Left's 14 per cent, marking a steep fall from its 40 per cent voteshare in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Besides, the party also suffered setbacks in the bypolls late last year while losing the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) elections and subsequent municipal elections.

For its next big test, the panchayat elections that are due next year, the BJP will have to put in a lot of work to galvanise its rank-and-file into action. With the Left regaining lost ground, the BJP now has the twin challenge of tackling both the Trinamool and the Left.

"People have lost their faith in the BJP. The Narendra Modi government has failed to deliver and has only left the voters disappointed. People have rejected them. The elections have proved that there is no alternative to the TMC in Bengal. People here have full faith in the leadership of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee," senior TMC leader Firhad Hakim said.



Babul Supriyo flashes the victory sign after winning the Ballygunge Assembly bypoll on Saturday. *Express*

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Supriyo's winning streak continued when he defeated TMC's Moon Moon Sen by a huge margin of 1,97 lakh votes. This time the Bollywood singer was named the Union minister of state for environment, forest and climate change. Supriyo was again pitted in April 2021, as the BJP candidate for the Tollygunge Assembly constituency, which has as its centrepiece the movie studios known as Tollywood, against three-time TMC MLA Aroop Biswas.

The two-time BJP MP had then promised he would end Aroop Biswas's "dictatorship" in Tollywood. However, this time round his streak of luck seemed to have run out. Supriyo lost by over 50,000 votes.



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the women we must know.
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SHAJU PHILIP
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
APRIL 16



The FIR calls Subair's death a "political murder". Four RSS-BJP

"The CPI(M) is appeasing both the SDPI and RSS, which they call social engineering," he said.

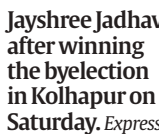


Snubbing Sahani, taking Bhumi-hars for granted cost BJP in Bochahan

The important aspect of Bochahan bypoll



This means the VIP seems to have cut away not just substantial Sahani votes but also some SC votes.




United MVA defeats BJP in Kolhapur

A FIRMLY united Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) proved too much for BJP to handle as Congress candidate Jayshree Jadhav emerged victorious in the Kolhapur North Assembly by-poll with a margin of over 19,000 votes, counting for which took place on Saturday.

After her victory, Jadhav said the people of Kolhapur have given the BJP a befitting reply for the kind of politics it has practised. "Kolhapur is a Shahu Nagari. It belongs to Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj where there is no place for casteism... people of Kolhapur have shown BJP its place. They have given the BJP a befitting reply....," she said.

"IMPORTANT"

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 AXIS BANK	<h1 style="text-align: center;">AXIS BANK LTD.</h1> <p style="text-align: center;">A. C. Market Building, 3rd Floor 1, Shakespear Sarani, Kolkata – 700071</p>	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> POSSSESSION NOTICE (For Immoveable Property) </div>
<p>(As per Appendix IV read with rule 8 (1) of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002).</p> <p>Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of the Axis Bank Ltd., under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred by section 13 (12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice calling upon the Borrower (s) / Guarantor (s) to repay the amount mentioned in the notice along with contractual rate of interest plus penal interest, charges, costs etc. within 60 days from the date of the said notice.</p> <p>The Borrower (s) / Guarantor (s), having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower (s) / Guarantor (s), in particular and the public, in general, that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13 (4) of the said Act read with rule 8 of the said Rules on the date mentioned herein after.</p> <p>The Borrower (s) / Guarantor (s), in particular, and the public, in general, are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Axis Bank Ltd., for an amount mentioned in the notice along with interest thereon and penal interest, charges, costs etc. from date of demand notice.</p> <p>The Borrower's attention is invited to the provisions of Sub Section (8) of Section 13 of the SARFAESI Act, 2002 in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.</p>		

Name & Address of Borrower / Guarantor	Description of the Immovable Property (Secured Assets)	A) Amount Due as of Notice date B) Date of Demand Notice C) Date of Possession
1. Mrs. Ajanta Majumdar D/O. Dipak Kumar Ghosh & W/o. Anirban Majumdar P-29 (9) Ruby Park, Flat No. F-3, 1st floor, South Hahlu, Kolkata - 700075	All that piece and parcel of one flat measuring about 790 Sq. ft. super built up area, a little more or less, on the 1st floor, on the South-Western side, Flat No. F-3, and one car parking space being No.1, measuring about 133.13 sq. ft. in the ground floor, on the Eastern side, of the building, together with proportionate share of land with all easement rights, proportionate rights, common facilities and amenities lying and situated at KMC Premises No. 9, Ruby Park (South), KMC, Ward No. 107, P. S. - Kasba, Kolkata - 700078.	A) Rs. 85,125.00 due on 15.12.2021 under Loan A/c. No. LPR03910206080 (this amount includes interest applied till 15.12.2021) B) 15.12.2021 C) 13.04.2022
2. Mr. Dipak Kumar Ghosh S/o. Anil Kumar Ghosh 11/55, Jheel Road, Newland, Santoshpur, Kolkata - 700075	All that the piece and parcel of the flat being Flat No. 28, on the 3rd floor, of the new Building in Block 'F', comprised in the Sugam Park Housing complex, at present in Premises No. 195, N. S. Road, Kolkata - 700103, measuring about 1186 Sq. Ft. of super built up area, together with undivided imparable proportionate share in the land comprised under the said building along with covered garage space of 130 Sq. Ft. being No. AF5C-57, now within the municipal limits of Rajpur Sonarpur Municipality, under Ward No. 24, P. S. - Sonarpur, South 24 Parganas. Boundaries : North – New Construction compound, South - Alskara compound, East- Parbly by N. S. Road, West- Sherwood compound.	A) Rs. 29,05,851.27 due on 15.12.2021 under Loan A/c. No. PHR000500553810 (this amount includes interest applied till 15.12.2021) C) 13.04.2022
1. Mr. Rihraj Hussain S/o. Amir Hussain 169, N. S. C. Bose Road Shirwood Estate South 24 Parganas Kolkata - 700103. Also at Sugam Park Housing Complex, Flat No.28 2nd Floor, 195, N. S. Road, Kolkata - 700103	All that the piece and parcel of the flat being Flat No. 28, on the 3rd floor, of the new Building in Block 'F', comprised in the Sugam Park Housing complex, at present in Premises No. 195, N. S. Road, Kolkata - 700103, measuring about 1186 Sq. Ft. of super built up area, together with undivided imparable proportionate share in the land comprised under the said building along with covered garage space of 130 Sq. Ft. being No. AF5C-57, now within the municipal limits of Rajpur Sonarpur Municipality, under Ward No. 24, P. S. - Sonarpur, South 24 Parganas. Boundaries : North – New Construction compound, South - Alskara compound, East- Parbly by N. S. Road, West- Sherwood compound.	A) Rs. 14,97,708.00 (Fourteen Lakhs Ninety Seven Thousand Seven Hundred Eighty) only under the Loan A/c. No. PHR00051696153 due on 19.04.2021 (this amount includes interest applied till 19.04.2021) B) 21.04.2021 C) 13.04.2022
1. Mr. Brijesh Jaiswal S/o Late Dinesh Jaiswal 178 Rajdanga Main Road 1st floor, Dervnah South, Kolkata - 700078.	All that a self-contained flat on the North West side of the 3rd floor, measuring about 100 Sq. Ft. built up area, together with the undivided share of land along with undivided interest in the common areas and facilities attached thereto within the limits of KMC, Ward No. 106, at premises No. 67, Parash Majumdar Road, P. S. - Kasba, formerly - Kasba, South 24 Parganas.	A) Rs. 20,19,738.00 (Rupees Twenty Lakhs Nineteen Thousand Seven Hundred Thirty Eight) only under Loan A/c. No. PHR000504691920 due on 15.09.2021 (this amount includes interest applied till 15.09.2021) B) 24.04.2021 C) 13.04.2022
1. Mr. Biswajit Biswas S/o. Girish Chandra Biswas	First Schedule (Description of Land) : All that piece and parcel of a plot of 'Bastuand' measuring about 2 Cottahs more or less, togethwirh mill stored building which is lying and situated in Mouza - Chandpur, J. L. No. 41, Parganas - Khaspur, Tuzi No. 329, comprised in Dag Nos. 572, 573 and 574 under Khatian No. 772, P. S. Jadavpur, District - South 24 Parganas, now within the limit of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, Premises No. 16, Russa Road South, Second Lane, Kolkata 700033, KMC Ward No. 94, Borouogh No. X, Assessee No. 210-94-13-00-170 of K. M. C. and Sub Registry Office at Alipore, District - South 24 Parganas.	A) Rs. 20,19,738.00 (Rupees Twenty Lakhs Nineteen Thousand Seven Hundred Thirty Eight) only under Loan A/c. No. PHR000504691920 due on 15.09.2021 (this amount includes interest applied till 15.09.2021) B) 24.04.2021 C) 13.04.2022
2. Mrs. Tanaya Chakraborty W/o. Biswajit Biswas Both are residing at Bhusanmanti, Dalkhola, Uttar Dinajpur, Pin-733201 Also at : Premises No. 67, 2nd Floor, Holding No. 104, Dayipayan Pally, P. S. - Belgharia Ward No. 28 District - North 24 Parganas, Pin - 700056.	Second Schedule (Description of mortgage plat) : All that a self-contained plat, with Moasic floor, being No. SEW5-S, on the 2nd floor, South-East side, measuring more or less 425 Sq. Ft. super built up area consisting with 1 bed room, 1 drawing cum kitchen, 1 toilet and 1 balcony which includes proportionate share of common passage and stair case along with proportionate undivided share of total land mentioned in the "A" Schedule, lying and situated at Mouza - Chandpur, J. L. No. 41, Parganas - Khaspur, Tuzi No. 329, comprised in Dag Nos. 572, 573 and 574 under Khatian No. 772, P. S. Jadavpur, District - South 24 Parganas, now within the limit of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation, Premises No. 16, Russa Road South, Second Lane, Kolkata - 700033, K. M. C. Ward No. 94, Assessee No. 210-94-13-00-522 of K.M.C. and Sub Registry Office at Alipore, District - South 24 Parganas.	A) Rs. 27,406.94 only under the Loan A/c. No. 916030014948951, due on 05.01.2022 (this amount includes interest applied till 01.05.2021) and Rs. 23,686.23 only under the Loan A/c. No. 916030014948944, due on 05.01.2022 (this amount includes interest applied till 01.05.2021) B) 05.01.2022 C) 16.04.2022
1. Mr. Lakshmi Prasad Nayak S/o. Bijoy Kumar Nayak	All that piece and parcel of land measuring about 6 Decimals, approx. situated under Moza - Matogda, J. L. No. 162, Khatian Nos. 2132 & 2133, Plot Nos. 934, 935 and 936, P. S. - Raipur & District - Bankura, together with the building constructed upon the said land.	A) Rs. 27,406.94 only under the Loan A/c. No. 916030014948951, due on 05.01.2022 (this amount includes interest applied till 01.05.2021) and Rs. 23,686.23 only under the Loan A/c. No. 916030014948944, due on 05.01.2022 (this amount includes interest applied till 01.05.2021) B) 05.01.2022 C) 16.04.2022
2. Mrs. Sumita Nayak W/o. Lakshmi Prasad Nayak Both are at : Village & P. O. Matogda, P. S. - Raipur, Near Kangsabati Irrigation Office, Matogda, District - Bankura Pin - 722134	All that piece and parcel of land measuring about 6 Decimals, approx. situated under Moza - Matogda, J. L. No. 162, Khatian Nos. 2132 & 2133, Plot Nos. 934, 935 and 936, P. S. - Raipur & District - Bankura, together with the building constructed upon the said land.	A) Rs. 27,406.94 only under the Loan A/c. No. 916030014948951, due on 05.01.2022 (this amount includes interest applied till 01.05.2021) and Rs. 23,686.23 only under the Loan A/c. No. 916030014948944, due on 05.01.2022 (this amount includes interest applied till 01.05.2021) B) 05.01.2022 C) 16.04.2022

Date : 17.04.2022

Place : Kolkata

Authorised Officer

Axis Bank Ltd.

GOVERNMENT OF UTTAR PRADESH
UTTAR PRADESH CORE ROAD NETWORK DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMME (UPCRNDP)
REQUEST FOR BIDS (RFB)
E-Procurement Notice
(Engineering, Procurement, Construction ("EPC") Contract
following Two-Envelope Bidding Process with e-Procurement)
NATIONAL OPEN COMPETITIVE PROCUREMENT

Date: 16 April 2022

- The Government of India has received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the Uttar Pradesh Core Road Network Development Project and intends to apply a part of the proceeds to cover eligible payments under the contract for construction of works as detailed below.
- Bidding will be conducted through national open competitive procurement using a Request for Bids (RFB) as specified in the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IFB Borrowers, July 2016, Revised August 2018" ("Procurement Regulations"), and is open to all Bidders as defined in the Procurement Regulations.
- The Governor of Uttar Pradesh through Chief Engineer, Externally Aided Projects (Roads), UPFWD (Implementing Agency) now invites online Bids from eligible Bidders for the construction of works as tabulated below:

Sl. No.	Name of work	Contract Package No.	Cost of Document (Rs.)	Period of Completion (Days)
1	2	3	4	5
1	Engineering Procurement and Construction Contract for Up-gradation and Maintenance of Raith - Garauba section of SH-42, from Km 74.550 to Km 104.360	UPCRNDP/ UPG/05/ 2022	500/- including GST	Construction Period – 730 + Maintenance Period – 1626

Interested bidders may obtain further information and inspect the bidding document at the address given below during office hours. Bidders are advised to note the clauses on eligibility (Section I Clause 4) and minimum qualification criteria (Section III – Evaluation and Qualification Criteria), to qualify for the award of the contract. In addition, please refer to paragraphs 3.14 and 3.15 of the "Procurement Regulations" setting forth the World Bank's policy on conflict of interest.

- The bidding document is available online at <http://tender.up.nic.in> under the organisation head "PWD – Externally Aided Project (World Bank Tenders)" [website] from 20-04-2022 to 20-06-2022 for a non-refundable fee as per column no 5 of the table above. This fee is to be paid online on website <http://tapsish.up.nic.in/Pay/WithoutReg.aspx> as per instructions given in BDS Clause 6.3. The bidders would be responsible for ensuring that any addenda available on the website is also downloaded and incorporated.
- For submission of the bid, the bidder is required to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the Certifying Authorities authorised by Government of India for issuing DSC. Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-procurement in this Project, may obtain the same from the website: <http://tender.up.nic.in> The Invitation for Bids under UPCRNDP is published on this website under the organisation head "PWD – Externally Aided Project (World Bank Tenders)". Any prospective bidder can log on to the website and view the invitation for Bids and can view the details of works for which bids are invited. The prospective bidder can submit bids online; however, the bidder is required to have enrolment/registration in the website and should have valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC), for signing and encryption issued by a Certifying Authority licensed under Controller of Certifying Authorities of India, in the form of smart card/tokens. The DSC can be obtained from any authorized certifying agencies. The bidder should register in the web site <http://tender.up.nic.in> in using therelevant option available.
- Bids comprise two Parts, namely the Technical Part and the Financial Part, and both parts must be submitted simultaneously online at <http://tender.up.nic.in> on or before 17:00hours on 20-06-2022 and the Technical Part of the bids will be publicly opened online at the address given below on the same day at 17:30hours. In the presence of the bidders' designated representatives and anyone who chooses to attend. The Financial Part shall remain unopened in the e-procurement system until the second public Bid opening for the financial part. Any bid or modifications to bid (including discount) received outside e-procurement system will not be considered. If the offer happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened on the next working day at the same time and venue. The electronic bidding system would not allow any late submission of bids.
- All bids must be accompanied by a Bid-Securing Declaration.
- A pre-bid meeting will be held on 02-05-2022 at 15:00hours at the office of Chief Engineer, Externally Aided Projects (Roads), UPFWD, Nirman Bhawan, 98, MG Marg, Lucknow-226 001 to clarify the issues and to answer questions on any matter that may be raised at that stage as stated in ITB Clause 7.4 of Instructions to Bidders of the bidding document. Bidders are advised to download the bidding document prior to the pre-bid meeting in order for bidders to have a good understanding of the scope of work under this contract for discussion and clarification at the pre-bid meeting.
- Other details can be seen in the bidding document. The Employer shall not be held liable for any delays due to system failure beyond its control. Even though the system will attempt to notify the bidders of any bid updates, the Employer shall not be liable for any information not received by the bidder. It is the bidders' responsibility to verify the website for the latest information related to this bid.
- The address(es) referred to above are:
 (a) Name & Designation of Officer: Chief Engineer, Externally Aided Projects (Roads), UPFWD,
 (b) Official Address: Nirman Bhawan, 98, MG Marg, Lucknow-226 001.
 (c) Email: eeapupwd@gmail.com
 (d) Telephone: (+91) 5223235495

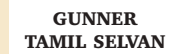
Chief Engineer (EAP)


SALUTE THE SOLDIER

27 APR 1964 TO APR 1994

Twenty eight years ago you made the supreme sacrifice for the honour of the Regt and Country while serving in the icy glacier of Siachen. Your heroic deeds epitomize valour and sacrifice that acts as a source of inspiration & strength to us.

CO & All Ranks 17 Para Fd Regt



 **OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER**
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BERTHAMPUR
(E-Mail: serwbpr2004@yahoo.com, Tel/Fax:- 0680-2404287)
No. RFP # 1411 /RWC/BAM/Dated. 13.04.2022
1st Corrigendum to Bid Identification No. Online Tender/50-2021-22/BPR
The partial modification of bridge works vide above identification has been made as follows:

1. Date of availability of tender: 20.04.2022 to 04.05.2022 upto 3.00 PM instead of 06.04.2022 to 20.04.2022.
2. Date of opening of Technical Bid: 05.05.2022 at 11.00 AM instead of 21.04.2022 at 11.00 AM
3. Date of opening of Financial Bid: Will be intimated later on.

All other contents will remain unchanged.

Sd/- P.K. Jena Chief Construction Engineer
R.W. Circle, Berhampur
OIPR- 25071/11/0008/2223



1. Type of the Work	: Bridge (BSY)
2. Class of Contractor	: As specified in the column-6 of the Annexure
3. Time of Completion	: As specified in the column-5 of the Annexure
4. Detail Projects	: As per Annexure attached
5. Estimated Cost	: As specified in the column-4 of the Annexure
6. Other details	:

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender on-line for bidding		Last Date & Time of Seeking Tender Clarification	Date & Time of opening of tender	
		From	To		Technical Bid	Financial Bid
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Sundargarh	RWCCSENG-06 of 2022-23	18.04.2022 11:00 AM	02.05.2022 5:00 PM	30.04.2022 5:00 PM	04.05.2022 11:00 AM	Will be intimated separately

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in

Sd/-
Chief Construction Engineer,
Rural Works Circle, Sundargarh
OIPR- 25133/11/0009/2223

GOVT. OF ODISHA
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF
ENGINEER, DRAINAGE CIRCLE, CUTTACK
GANDARPUR-753 003
E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE NO.-ACEDC-CTC-01/2022-23
email Id :- sedrainagecirclectc@gmail.com

1	Name of Works	: Renovation by Dredging of Basulei Nalla from RD 6.50 Km to 11.52 Km under DIP.
2	Total number of package.	: 1 no. individual package.
3	Amount put to Tender	: Rs. 6.58,24,694.
4	Bid Identification No.	: ACEDC-CT/JDD-JSPR - 01/2022-23
5	Period of completion	: 11(Eleven) Calendar months.
6	Availability of Tender On - Line.	: 19.04.2022, 16.30.00 Hours to 10.05.2022, 17.30.00 Hours.
7	Date of Opening of Technical Bid.	: 11.05.2022 at 10.00 hours in the O/o the Additional Chief Engineer Drainage Circle, Cuttack
8	Class of Contractor	: Special And Super Class.
9	Bid Security	: Bid Security Declaration
10	Cost of Tender paper	: Rs. 10,000/-
11	Procurement Officer	: Additional Chief Engineer Drainage Circle, Gandarpur Cuttack, -753003.

* Tender will be accepted If registered in the CDMS Portal .
Further details can be seen from the Govt, web site www.tendersorissa.gov.in. Addendum / Corrigendum/ Cancellation if any
required will be published only in Govt. web site www.tendersorissa.gov.in

Additional Chief Engineer
Drainage Circle, Cuttack
OIPR- 32174/11/0001/2223

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,
RWS&S DIVISION, KENDRAPARA**
At : Ichhapur, Post : Shree Baladevjew,
Email: eerwsskendrapara@gmail.com
Identification No. RWS/104/2021-2022
Letter No. 2741 / Dated. 31.03.2022
2nd Corrigendum

This corrigendum has been made for the NIT-104 invited online vide this office letter No. 1525 / Dated. 04.03.2022 with date for selling, closing, clarification and opening which was on dt. 02.04.2022 (selling date), 21.04.2022 (closing date), 04.04.2022 (clarification date) 22.04.2022 (opening date) as per 1st corrigendum has been amended and to be read as 24.04.2022, 12.05.2022, 25.04.2022 and 13.05.2022 respectively as follows.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (Approx.) Rs. In Lakhs	EMD to be deposited online	Class of Bidder	Cost of Tender Paper	Period of completion
1	Execution of New 70 LPCD RPWS Scheme to Derakeshpur, Mantripada and Nuhath on clubbed up mode under Derabish Block in the District of Kendrapara (J.M Funds)	₹ 268.27	Nil	"B" & "A"	₹ 10000	330 days
2	Execution of New 40 LPCD Retrofitting RPWS Scheme to Raghudeipur of Derabish Block and Gogua of Mahakalapada on clubbed up mode in the District of Kendrapara(J.M Funds)	₹ 322.02	Nil	"A" & "Special"	₹ 10000	360 days

Sd/- (Er. B.K.Nayak)
Executive Engineer
RWS&S Division, Kendrapara
OIPR- 25004/11/0009/2223

5 EXPRESS NETWORK

Maoists claim airstrike in Bastar jungles, forces deny

GARGIVERMA
RAIPUR, APRIL 16

CHHATTISGARH POLICE and the CRPF on Saturday denied conducting any airstrike in Bastar after Maoists released a press note with pictures and alleged that security forces conducted strikes in the jungles of South Bastar using drones.

The banned Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Friday alleged in a two-page press note that the security forces bombed Kottam, Rasam, Eeram, Sakiler, Madapa, Duled, Kannemarka, Potemangum and Bottam areas on the intervening night of Thursday and Friday.

Calling it a lie, Bastar Inspector General P Sundarraj said that these are part of Maoist conspiracy to distract and scare people.

When contacted, CRPF D-G Kuldeep Singh denied there was any operation carried out against Maoists. "No such operation has taken place," he said. "Also, we come in aide of the state police; state police lead operations."

The Maoist release, issued by Dandakaranya Zonal Committee's spokesperson Vikalp, alleged that more than 50 bombs were dropped within an hour, targeting them. No injuries were reported, it mentioned.

In April last year, DKZC had alleged a drone strike and released the picture of a fallen drone.

Bastar I-G Sundarraj said: "In Bastar, like the rest of country, security forces are involved in protecting life and property. The Maoists are trying to malign our image out of desperation at losing ground. Their leaders, all outsiders, are misusing tribal people. It is time people see their real, violent faces."

The CRPF said in a statement, "CRPF denies all allegations leveled of any attack on Maoists using drones. Maoists are losing support of the locals due to good governance, which is why they are spreading lies."

WITH ENS-DELHI INPUTS

CORRUPTION CASE

Court refuses to extend CBI custody of Anil Deshmukh

SADAF MODAK
MUMBAI, APRIL 16

A SPECIAL CBI court on Saturday refused to extend CBI custody of former Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh, stating that the grounds put up by the central agency were not good and satisfactory. The CBI, which had arrested Deshmukh on April 11, has sought to extend his custody by three days.

"In my view, sufficient CBI custody of accused Shri Anil Deshmukh has already been granted. Pertinently in earlier remand applications, the CBI had based their grounds for seeking custody as per the allegations about exercising influence over the transfer and posting of officials and considering the said grounds, CBI custody was granted. Therefore, in my view, since sufficient CBI custody was granted, the grounds for further custody... are not good and satisfactory," Special Judge D P Shingade said in his order.

Writers discuss tribals: Aloof? Perception 'unfounded'

ABHISHEK ANGAD
DUMKA, APRIL 16

IS THE Adivasi community uncouth; does it follow any religion; does it have a global vision, and why is the Santhal rebellion, which took before the 1857 Revolt, left out of mainstream history?

These were some of the questions that emerged during a discussion on 'Tribal Literature: Present and Future' during the inaugural State Library Literature Festival in Dumka district.

The event was centred around refurbishment of 'Rajkiya Bhramanshil Pustkalay (Library on Wheels)' built on a truck in 1958, which had travelled thousands of kilometres in remote areas of Jharkhand. Although not mobile anymore, it was refurbished by Odisha-

UK PM ARRIVES IN AHMEDABAD ON APRIL 21, TALKS WITH MODI APRIL 22

Johnson set to discuss ties with PM amid 'threats from autocratic States'

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

BRITISH PRIME Minister Boris Johnson will visit India next week, in the backdrop of Russian invasion of Ukraine that has led to some divergences in Delhi's and London's positions on the crisis.

Johnson, who arrives in Ahmedabad on April 21, is expected to announce major investment in key industries in both the UK and India, boosting jobs and growth at home, as well as new collaboration on cutting-edge science, health and technology.

In New Delhi, he will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 22 for bilateral talks "in the face of global economic challenges and threats from autocratic states", a British High Commission statement said.

The High Commission said that Johnson will visit India this week to "deepen our long-term partnership for peace and pros-



Johnson is expected to announce major investments

perity with a fellow leading democracy, in the face of global economic challenges and threats from autocratic states".

In Ahmedabad, Johnson will have a meeting with leading businesses and discuss the UK and India's "thriving commercial, trade and people links", the statement said. This will be the first time a UK Prime Minister visits Gujarat, India's fifth largest state and ancestral home of around half of the British-Indian population in the UK, it said.

Third time materialising?

BORIS JOHNSON was supposed to come to India for the Republic Day celebrations last year, but the trip was cancelled. He was thereafter expected to come to Delhi in April last year but that visit was



also cancelled due to the Delta wave of the pandemic. His visit comes in the backdrop of Russia's invasion on Ukraine and the two sides are expected to talk about Covid-19, Russia-Ukraine conflict and China.

Johnson, who will meet Modi the following day, will hold "in-depth talks on the UK and India's strategic defence, diplomatic and economic partnership, aimed at bolstering our close partnership and stepping up security co-operation in the Indo-Pacific", the British High Commission said.

The statement said he will use the visit to drive progress in the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations launched earlier this year — a deal with India is predicted to boost "our total

trade by up to £28 billion annually by 2035 and increase wages across the UK by up to £3 billion".

Speaking ahead of the visit, Johnson said: "As we face threats to our peace and prosperity from autocratic states, it is vital that democracies and friends stick together. India, as a major economic power and the world's largest democracy, is a highly valued strategic partner for the UK in these uncertain times.

"My visit to India will deliver on the things that really matter

Now special court's relief to Aakar Patel, order asking CBI to recall notice upheld

Way annouckout circular issued shows lack of understanding of relevant law: court

ANAND MOHAN J
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

A SPECIAL court on Saturday upheld a trial court's order asking CBI to withdraw a lookout circular (LOC) issued against former Amnesty International India chief Aakar Patel. The court noted that the LOC issued was based on "wrong interpretation and understanding of the law", and cautioned CBI by stating that its power to "investigate and prosecute is not an unbridled power".

In the order, Special Judge Santosh Snehi Mann also set aside the trial court's order asking the CBI director to issue Patel an apology. The CBI had issued the LOC in connection with a case registered against Amnesty International India in 2019 under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act. Patel headed the organisation at the time. Patel, due to travel to the US to deliver lectures at universi-



Aakar Patel

ties, was stopped twice from leaving the country.

Judge Mann has asked Patel to appear before a trial court and furnish a bond for his appearance and asked him not to leave the country without the trial court's permission.

The judge said that the "manner in which the LOC has been issued shows lack of understanding of the relevant law, and hence need for orientation of the officers (concerned) of CBI, not only sensitization but also to bring objectivity in the actions is not out of context". The court said, "LOC issued against the respondent is bad in law, hence cannot be sustained. Order of the trial court

quashing/setting aside the LOC does not suffer from any infirmity and is a well-reasoned order based on the principles of law."

The court, however, noted that a "balance should have been struck qua the prosecuting agency that the respondent accused may flee from the country, and fundamental right of the respondent accused to travel abroad, by putting conditions taking recourse to section 88 CrPC, which empowers the court to take bond for appearance". The judge said the court's observations are "not of the nature of exercising power of superintendence, they are out of concern and the petitioner (CBI) is expected to take them in right spirit".

It said CBI's power to "investigate and prosecute is not an unbridled power". The court said, "In glaring cases of excesses committed in actions, there may arise the need for fixing accountability. In the present case, LOC was issued on wrong interpretation and un-

derstanding of law, and not out of malice or ill will. Hence it is not a fit case to call for fixing the accountability for issuance of LOC."

On trial court's directions to the CBI director to tender a written apology and its general observations on monetary compensation, Judge Mann said that "it is a settled legal proposition that trial court can step in to compensate for police excesses and illegal actions of the State when fundamental rights are violated."

The CBI had argued that LOC was issued considering that Patel was an influential person and well-connected with entities outside India, because of which he may evade the law. On this, the court held this submission has "no force in law to support and sustain." "Subjective satisfaction of the IO to assess the situation for issuance of LOC must flow from the objective criteria," the order read.

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to the people of both our nations — from job creation and economic growth, to energy security and defence."

Last year, Modi and Johnson had agreed on a UK-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, announcing more than £530m in investment into the UK and committing to a deeper bilateral relationship across trade, health, climate, defence and security, and connecting our people. India was identified as a priority relationship for the UK in the 2021 Integrated Review and was invited by the UK as a guest to last year's G7 in Carbis Bay.

The UK is leveraging post-Brexit trade opportunities with India's growing economy to drive down prices in key commodities for consumers, open opportunities for UK businesses in areas such as green tech and services, and create high-wage, high-skill jobs, the High Commission's statement said.

10% discount for Sunny Leone fans at meat shop

KIRAN PARASHAR
BENGALURU, APRIL 16

A MEAT seller in Karnataka has announced a 10 per cent discount for fans of actor Sunny Leone.

Prasad K N, 27, has been running his meat shop — DK Chicken — in Mandya district, around 100 km from Bengaluru, for nearly two years. He says reading about the philanthropic work undertaken by Leone inspired him to offer the discount.

"Due to her past work in the porn industry, she is often looked at as a sex symbol. To know her, I looked into her life, which was really interesting and inspiring. I was surprised to see that she has done so much for society. From adopting a daughter to running a school and extending help during the pandemic, she has really been an inspiration," Prasad said. To avail the discount, customers have to show that they follow Leone on Instagram and Facebook, have at least her 10 photos on their phone,

'Pandemic may have increased learning poverty, help children adjust first'

AS OFFLINE classes resume in schools across the country, Central Square Foundation (CSF) founder **ASHISH DHAWAN**, who works closely with the Centre and many states on addressing foundational learning gaps, believes authorities should help children adjust before picking up textbooks.

Dhawan, who is also a founding member of the Ashoka University, is currently setting up Convergence Foundation, which will work across many areas in the social sector, including women empowerment and air pollution, by setting up organisations along the lines of CSF, which primarily works on school education.

He spoke to **SOURAV ROY BARMAN** on a variety of topics, including the government's NIPUN Bharat programme, which CSF helped develop and implement, foundational learning deficiencies deepened by the pandemic and higher education reforms announced by the UGC. Excerpts:

Before the pandemic, you had cited a World Bank report to say that 55% of India's 10-year-old children lack foundational learning skills, which is classified as learning poverty. What has been the impact of the pandemic?

The percentage may have risen to 65 per cent now. The question is how to bring it down to 20-30 per cent over the next decade? We know learning is breaking down early and we have to go to Class I, II, III. If you can't do basic math, addition, subtraction, then how do you do fractions in class IV or V? How do you do algebra in class V or VI? So



Ashish Dhawan

these are basic foundational skills that every child needs to master by the end of class II. The committee that drafted the National Education Policy (NEP) understood this and said in the report that this should be India's top priority in school education and should be pushed in mission mode. And then the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat programme was launched.

How does NIPUN Bharat work?

It will prioritise foundational learning in a large public system. So for classes I, I and III, the government has created a separate project, where it will pay for all the teaching-learning material, teacher professional development assessment. The Centre also sets goals and objectives and handles the monitoring aspect. The implementation is done by the states. The CSF has MoUs with 12 states. We have project management units that work at the state level. So it's a team of people who

13 Opp leaders issue joint statement against hate speech, communal violence

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

LEADERS OF 13 Opposition parties, including three Chief Ministers, on Saturday came together to speak out against recent incidents of communal violence and hate speech.

They argued that the "silence" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government against those "who propagated bigotry and incited and provoked society through words and actions was an eloquent testimony to the fact that such private armed mobs enjoyed the luxury of official patronage".

The joint statement was issued by Congress president Sonia Gandhi, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, her Tamil Nadu counterpart and DMK chief MK Stalin, Jharkhand Chief Minister and JMM chief Hemant Soren, RJD chief Tejashwi Yadav and NC chief Farooq Abdullah.

The other signatories included CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury, his CPI counterpart D Raja, Forward Bloc's Debabrata Biswas, RSP's Manoj Bhattacharya, Muslim League's P K Kunhalikutty and CPI(ML) Liberation's Dipanker Bhattacharya.

The statement came on a day Gandhi, in an article in *The Indian Express*, hit out at the government against the politics of polarisation.

"There is much talk from the Prime Minister of acknowledging India's multiple diversities. But the harsh reality is that under his ruling dispensation, the rich diversity that has defined and enriched our society for centuries is being manipulated to divide us and, worse, to harden and get more firmly entrenched," she said in the article.

In the statement urging people to maintain peace and harmony and demanding stringent punishment for perpetrators of communal violence, the Opposition leaders said: "We are extremely an-

guished at the manner in which issues related to food, dress, faith, festivals and language are being deliberately used by sections of the ruling establishment to polarise our society."

"We are extremely concerned with the growing incidents of hate speech in the country by people who appear to have official patronage and against whom no meaningful and strong action is being taken. We strongly condemn the recent outburst of communal violence witnessed across several states. We are deeply concerned, as reports indicate that there is a sinister pattern in the areas where these incidents have occurred. Incendiary hate speeches preceded the aggressive armed religious processions unleashing communal violence," the statement said.

The leaders pointed out that "social media and the audio-visual platforms are being misused with official patronage to spread hatred and prejudice," and questioned the silence of the Prime Minister in the matter.

The leaders vowed to "work together to strengthen the bonds of social harmony that have defined and enriched India for centuries" and "combat and confront the poisonous ideologies which are attempting to entrench divisiveness in society".

"We reiterate our firm conviction that our country will prosper only if it respects, accommodates and celebrates its many diversities in full measure. We appeal to all sections to maintain peace and foil the sinister objective of those who wish to sharpen communal polarisation. We call upon all our party units to independently and jointly work for peace and harmony," the statement added.

While Mamata's decision to be part of the joint statement is interesting, given her party's strained ties with the Congress, the absence of leaders of four parties — SP, BSP, AAP and Shiv Sena — stood out.

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THE EXPRESS
INTERVIEW

Should NIPUN be redesigned to address the specific needs

arising out of the interruption caused by the pandemic?

No, I don't think so. The NIPUN goals remain the same. Within NIPUN, each team needs to do some catching up. We will still do formative assessment, have a teacher guide with lesson plans, have a workbook, need reading material in the classroom and need a math kit to make it easier for kids to understand abstract concepts in complete form. So I don't think NIPUN needs to be redesigned, because it is a scheme for the next five years. Within NIPUN, the Centre has told the states to

The latest UDISE report has shown a sharp drop in private school enrolment and rise in government school enrolment. What does this indicate?

That is purely an economic thing. The temptation of English and accountability lure parents into sending their kids to private schools. And normally, you need income above a certain threshold to do it. So, if your income has been hit, that's the demand shock. Covid also had a supply shock, where schools were shut for so long and there was no revenue. They couldn't justify charging. They couldn't do zoom classes. As a result, parents were not willing to pay. So, many private schools even closed down.

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6 SUNDAY STORY



At the Galle Face in Colombo. Since April 9, thousands of Sri Lankans have gathered here demanding that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his family members step down. Reuters

GALLE STORM

Amid crippling shortages, collapse of the economy and a political impasse, protesters across Sri Lanka have come together under the rallying cry of “Go Gota Go”. NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN travels along the island country’s uneasy fault lines, from Colombo in the south to Jaffna in the north, to find that the protests may have served to paper over some of these cracks

GALLEFACE is Colombo’s show-piece sea front. China and India have cheek-by-jowl real estate here. The Taj Samudra is an old property, dwarfed by the towering Shangri-La of the Hong Kong chain of hotels. And next to it, India’s Larsen & Toubro is constructing an ITC hotel. Out in the water is the Chinese Port City project, coming up rapidly on reclaimed land.

Nearly seven decades ago, the Federal Party representing the country’s Tamils held a one-day *satyagraha* on the green next to the sea, opposite what was then the parliament building. It was a peaceful protest against the Sri Lankan government’s ‘Sinhala Only’ legislation that took away the official language status of Tamil. But the demonstration was broken up as mobs armed with sticks attacked the protesters, cracking skulls as the police looked away. The rest is history.

That same site is now the centre of another peaceful protest. Thousands of mostly young Sri Lankans have gathered here daily since April 9 demanding that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and other family members in office, including his brother Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, step down. The old parliament building now functions as the presidential secretariat.

On a patch of green between President Rajapaksa’s office and a soaring statue of S W R D Bandaranaike, the prime minister whose controversial language policy had brought Tamils out on the streets seven decades ago, a tent city of protesters has sprung up. Called ‘Gota Go Gama’ — named after the angry ‘Go Gota Go’ slogan resounding on the street these days — this symbolic village of resistance has come up against the Rajapaksa regime. Hundreds of people have been camping at the site, with the numbers swelling in the daytime.

The protests began in March as small candlelight vigils at traffic junctions in Colombo. The demonstrators were protesting long power cuts imposed by the government because it did not have enough dollars to buy the diesel needed to run the power plants.

Since the middle of last year, essential items have been in short supply as imports have been restricted and prices have skyrocketed. With supplies dwindling, shops have had to restrict purchases and even those with money found themselves shut out. Queues stretch outside fuel stations and government-run fair price shops, with people waiting three to four hours to fill their vehicles or plastic cans. Double lines of cars wait for petrol, with people discussing if it is better to return for a refill at quarter tank or empty.

The protests have grown, bringing out students, teachers, lawyers, doctors, nurses and other professionals and youth. The government has so far not cracked down.

Unarmed police regulate the traffic around the area which leads to Colombo’s main business district. Vehicles honk in solidarity with the protesters as they pass through.

What next? Beyond their assertion that the Rajapaksas must go, not many at the protest site know what the future holds in store for

them and their country.

“I know they are not going to resign just because we are asking them to go. But the pressure of the people is important. Our voices will be heard in Parliament and Parliament has to make its decisions based on that,” says 43-year-old Rebecca David, a rights activist who has been at the Galle Face protests from the start.

The government had declared a full-week holiday for the Sinhala and Tamil New Year on April 14, hoping people would stay indoors. But that had the opposite effect: New Year’s Day saw the maximum turnout at Galle Face, with the atmosphere festive and carnival-like.

“Now it looks like people won’t give up till they get a result. They want to see the President step down,” says David. “They want to see change.”

■ ■ ■

March 31 was a turning point for the Rajapaksas. That day, hundreds of people protesting the shortages marched to the President’s private home in the Colombo suburb of Mirihana Pangiriwatta. Many of them were middle-class residents of the area and were shouting slogans seeking the President’s resignation. “Prosperity for rulers while hardship for people” was one slogan. They attempted to break through the barricades and clashed with police, who had to use water cannons and tear gas. Police vehicles were torched.

Until then, President Rajapaksa believed that as the architect of the military victory against the LTTE, he and his brothers had earned enough goodwill from the people to see them through the crisis.

The protests had actually begun much earlier in the countryside, as farmers shouted themselves hoarse against the overnight switch to organic farming and the ban on chemical fertilisers — measures taken to save precious foreign exchange. But until the protests reached Colombo, the Rajapaksas were sanguine. But that day of violence outside his house served as a reality check for President Rajapaksa. He is now said to be sequestered in his high-security official residence in the Fort area of Colombo, while his elder brother, the Prime Minister, is in his official residence at Temple Trees.

A day after the incident, on April 1, the President imposed an emergency and the police imposed a curfew in the capital, its suburbs and several outlying areas. In defiance of the curfew, protesters marched through the streets, daring the police to arrest them. By April 5, both curfew and emergency had to be withdrawn. On the same day, the government appeared to have lost its majority. A group of 42 parliamentarians belonging to the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, an alliance partner of the Rajapaksas’ Sri Lanka Podujana Party, said they had withdrawn from the coalition.

But for those who believed this was a “regime change” moment for Sri Lanka, there was disappointment. No challengers have emerged from the Opposition to overturn Prime Minister Rajapaksa. President Rajapaksa, who got all his cabinet ministers to resign — Prime Minister Rajapaksa remained in office



— invited all Opposition parties and groups to form a national government to deal with the crisis. There were no takers for this either.

Meanwhile, the Rajapaksas are only too aware that there are few protests outside Colombo and its suburbs, and that if they wait it out, the weary protesters may head back home. The protesters know that too — that every moment of delay caused by the political impasse will only serve to strengthen the Rajapaksas’ resolve to cling on.

There is also suspicion that India’s \$2.4 bn financial assistance, while bringing much needed food and fuel to the country, is helping the Rajapaksas.

Most analysts trace the economic crisis to ill-advised tax cuts that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa ordered after his 2019 election. The cuts came into effect just before the pandemic, at a time when the 2019 Easter bombings had already gutted the tourism industry.

But some economists believe the problem began much earlier, in the years after the war ended in 2009. Armed with an IMF bailout, Mahinda Rajapaksa, then president, went on a borrowing spree for non-paying infrastructure projects.

As Sri Lanka now prepares for tough negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ahilan Kadirgamar, who teaches economics at Jaffna University, warns that those already crushed by the pandemic and the economic failures of the government would be the most affected by the conditions that the international lending agency is bound to impose.

“The people who have come out on the streets today due to economic hardships are affected by cuts to social welfare and public services. Working people are going to be most affected as IMF conditions lead to austerity measures and market pricing of goods and services,” predicts Kadirgamar.

■ ■ ■

One noticeable aspect of the street protests is the secular language of the participants. If

there is one refrain other than Go Gota Go, it is this: “The Rajapaksas divided Sri Lankans by race, language and religion. We will never allow anyone to do that again”.

Tamils and Muslims, two of Sri Lanka’s minorities that have long suffered othering by the majority Sinhala-Buddhists, are today among the protesters.

Jaffna parliamentarian M A Sumanthiran believes it is an important moment in Sri Lanka’s history of ethnic relations that the protesters are even taking up Tamil causes such as post-war justice and reconciliation, addressing war crimes, the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, among others.

However, the view from Jaffna is somewhat different. Here, there are no queues outside grocery shops or petrol pumps. However, fishermen, whose boats need diesel or kerosene, are among those hit by the shortages. At the Gurnagar jetty, fishermen have placed plastic cans in the queue, hoping supplies will arrive soon.

The times are tough, but the Tamils who have lived and survived the war years say they have known worse.

When the LTTE was in control of the peninsula, the government would send only limited quantities of petrol, diesel, kerosene and food rations by ship from Colombo, calculating that most people had fled, and the supplies would fall into the hands of the Tigers. There was no cooking gas either, as the government feared these would be used to make explosives. Ditto with batteries. Medicines were in short supply too. After the bombing of Chunnakam power station, the peninsula, which used to get a total of one hour of power supply from this thermal plant when the war began between the Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE, lost all access to electricity. A generation of Jaffna students grew up studying with the help of kerosene lamps or dynamo-powered bicycle lights. Even after all these years since the war ended, homes still has a wood stove.

“In Colombo, they feel the shortages more because of the shortage of fuel, gas and power cuts. Here, we don’t feel it that much because we are used to this kind of scarcity,” says Rakesh Kannan, a general practitioner in Sydney, Australia, who is visiting his family in Jaffna.

At the Nallur Kandasamy temple, where he was offering prayers on Tamil New Year’s day, Kannan points at the parking lot, where two-wheelers and bicycles outnumber cars to say that petrol shortages were not a Jaffna problem.

He recalls the shortages from his time as a student, including when he was an undergrad student at the Jaffna teaching hospital: “I studied with a kerosene lamp.”

While Colombo has long been accused of neglecting Jaffna’s post-war economic development, in the present crisis, the war-torn Northern Province city appears to have been protected by its food self-sufficiency — farmers grow rice and vegetables — and a stoicism developed through its own war-time experiences. “People are saying very proudly that we didn’t die of a power cut then,” says Sumanthiran. Plus, Jaffna benefits from dias-

pora remittances, though not to the same extent as during the war.

Rajan Hoole, founder of the Jaffna University Teachers’ Human Rights that stood up against the violence and repression of the Tamil Tigers, says Sri Lanka is now “paying the price for the original sin of the 1948 Citizenship Act”, which rendered stateless and disenfranchised the Malayaha Tamils or Indian Origin Tamils (ethnically different from the Tamils of northern and eastern Sri Lanka) who worked in the tea plantations and who made up around 11 per cent of the population at the time.

“Until the mid-1960s, this 11 per cent was earning 65 per cent of our foreign exchange. They were the mainstay of the free education and free health we enjoyed... It has caught up with us now,” says Hoole.

So far, there has been only one protest in Jaffna over the economic crisis. On social media, some in the Tamil community have mocked the Sinhalese outreach to minorities to join the “Sri Lankan” protests, asking why the majority community had displayed no such solidarity when the Tamils were suffering during the war years.

Despite this bitterness, says Sumanthiran, there is an acute awareness, especially among students, that this problem is as much a crisis for them as it is for the Sinhalese, that landless workers and the very poor among the Tamils would be hit the hardest.

Sumanthiran says the present crisis even offers an opportunity to address the Tamil question, through the abolition of the executive presidency, as some in the Opposition are demanding.

■ ■ ■

In many ways, it is ironic that the statue of SWRD Bandaranaike at Galle Face has become a beacon for the protesters. Google now throws up “Driving Directions” to the statue, with real-time information on how long it might take to reach the centre of the protests.

Bandaranaike, an Oxford-educated lawyer, was a founder-member of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, and among the earliest to mine Sinhala-Buddhist majoritarianism for political advancement. His advocacy of “Sinhala Only” set the country down a path that the Rajapaksas, who were members of the same party until 2015, rounded off to their advantage six decades later, by claiming to have restored Sinhala pride with the defeat of the LTTE.

In the years since, a new generation has come of age. They may not know much about Sri Lanka’s failures of the past, but they are in the midst of a massive breakdown now, and sense that majoritarianism does not have the answers.

Standing near the towering Bandaranaike statue, D M Dissanayake, a lawyer in his 40s, says, “The Rajapaksas were heroes for winning the war against LTTE. After the Easter Sunday attacks, people thought the Rajapaksas are the sole protectors of the Sinhalese... They were swayed by triumphalism. Now people’s eyes have opened.”

THE PROTESTERS

The protests have seen students, teachers, lawyers, doctors and nurses gathering at at Colombo’s Galle Front

SHEMODYA JAYASEKARA, 23
Under-graduate student at the University of Sabaragamuwa in south-central Sri Lanka; studying Food Business Management



It is her first day at the protests and she is accompanied by her parents. Her father works in the security division of Colombo Port, and her mother is a home-maker. “I came because the ruling leaders do not give us what we expect from them. The economy is in a crisis. We have money but food is not available. We have cooking gas for now, but we don’t know if we will get a refill. There are long queues,” she says, adding, “I hope to work in this country after I finish my studies, but I see so many undergrads without jobs. We have been at home for two years and our university has not resumed physical classes because there is no power.”

AQEEL AHAMAD, 22
Engineering student at Moratuwa University in suburban Colombo



“Everyone is affected by this government, by the family running this government. We want a democratic

country... a peaceful environment... not an atmosphere filled with communal and ethnic racism,” says Ahmad, who is accompanied by his father, a businessman. “One of my aunts in Kandy was affected in the riots of 2018 — her house and vehicles were torched. I face racism in public places, even in my college,” he adds.

Blaming the Rajapaksa family for “every problem in the country”, he hopes “people will vote next time for eligible candidates without being driven by ethnic, religious concerns or money”

DM DISSANAYAKE, IN HIS 40s
Lawyer



“Civil society activists and others had been warning people that if Rajapaksas come to power there will be an

economic crisis because they never had a proper economic plan. But Rajapaksas were heroes for winning the war against LTTE,” said Dissanayake. After the Easter Sunday attacks, he adds, “people thought the Rajapaksas are the sole protectors of the Sinhalese... They were swayed by triumphalism. Now people’s eyes have opened.”

M K RAGUNATHAN, 68
Retired as a consultant physician at a government hospital in Galle



“I have seen how politicians have divided this country using religion, language, caste. In the last two

years, the economy has deteriorated in a way that was not even seen during war years,” says Ragnathan, adding, “With so many protesting here, I didn’t think it was right for me to sit at home. I came here as a common man to volunteer my services as a doctor.”

REBECCA DAVID, 43
Rights activist



“The Rajapaksas are not going to resign just because we are asking. But the pressure is important. When we demand

here, our voice will be heard in Parliament,” says David, who has been part of the protests “since the beginning”. David and her group are also starting “Teach Out” sessions for protesters to inform them “the Constitution, the powers of the president” etc.

Urging India to “help the people, not the government”, she adds, “People suspect that the BJP government is helping our government because they are quite similar in many ways”.

Website: pchidambaram.in
Twitter @Pchidambaram IN

8 ECONOMY

NET PROFIT AT ₹10,055.2 CR FOR FOURTH QUARTER, ₹36,961.3 CR FOR FY22

HDFC Bank Q4 net up 22.8% on better asset quality, higher interest income

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 16

HDFC Bank on Saturday posted a net profit of Rs 10,055.2 crore on a standalone basis for the quarter ended March 2022 (Q4FY22), up 22.8 per cent against Rs 8,186.51 crore in the year-ago period.

Net interest income (NII), the difference between interest earned and interest expended, rose 10.2 per cent to Rs 18,872.7 crore in Q4 as against Rs 17,120.2 crore a year ago, with credit growth of nearly 21 per cent and 16.8 per cent rise in deposits on-year.

"Core net interest margin was at 4 per cent on total assets, and 4.2 per cent based on interest-earning assets," the bank said.

Advances rose 20.8 per cent to Rs 13.69 lakh crore in Q4FY22. Retail loans grew 15.2 per cent, commercial & rural banking loans by 30.4 per cent, and corporate & other wholesale loans by 17.4 per cent. Asset quality improved with non-performing assets (NPAs) at 1.17 per cent of advances as against 1.32 per cent a year ago.

"We continued to add new liability relationships at a robust pace of 2.4 million during the quarter," the lender said. It

NII RISES 10.2%

■ Net interest income (NII) rose 10.2% to ₹18,872.7 crore in Q4 as against ₹17,120.2 crore a year ago

recorded a 16.8 per cent growth in deposits at Rs 15.59 lakh crore as of March 2022, with CASA deposits rising 22 per cent and time deposits increasing 12.3 per cent.

Provisions and contingencies for the quarter ended March 31, 2022 were Rs 3,312.4 crore (con-

sisting of specific loan loss provisions of Rs 1,778.2 crore and general and other provisions of Rs 1,534.2 crore) as against total provisions of Rs 4,693.7 crore for the same quarter a year ago. Total provisions for the current quarter included contingent provisions of approximately Rs 1,000 crore.

The bank held floating provisions of Rs 1,451 crore and contingent provisions of Rs 9,685 crore as of March 2022. Total provisions (comprising specific, floating, contingent and general provisions) were 182 per cent of the gross non-performing loans. Net revenues (net interest income plus

other income) in Q4 grew 7.3 per cent to Rs 26,509.8 crore against Rs 24,714.1 crore a year ago.

For the full fiscal FY22, the bank posted a profit of Rs 36,961.3 crore, a growth of 18.8 per cent over the previous year, and net interest income at Rs 72,009.6 crore, up 11 per cent over a year ago. The bank's shares fell 1.90 per cent on the BSE to Rs 1,464.85 Thursday.

Meanwhile, as per a *PTI* report, HDFC Bank said it will raise up to Rs 50,000 crore in the next one year by issuing bonds. Further, its board has approved to re-appoint Renu Karnad as non-executive director on the board for five years.

'Debt recovery via insolvency cases at 31%; 47% cases liquidated'

Nearly half of 3,247 insolvency cases have been resolved via liquidation, and various resolution processes yielded debt recovery of 31%, an Icra report said



Report details: The data from the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) covers all cases since implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) five years ago till December 2021

Become supply hub, set ₹10L cr target: Goyal to plastics industry

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
MUMBAI, APRIL 16

COMMERCE MINISTER Piyush Goyal on Saturday asked the country's plastics sector to set a target to become a Rs 10 lakh-crore industry in the near future by expanding the domestic and export markets as well as by following import substitution.

Felicitating exporters at Exports Excellence Awards organised here by PLEXCONCIL, India's apex trade body of plastics exporters, Goyal said, "India's plastics industry's economic activity is worth Rs 3 lakh crore annually, out of which one-third is exported. There is a significant growth potential for the Indian

plastics industry to become the world's premium supply hub."

"It can target to take its economic activity to a Rs 10-lakh crore industry. This could be achieved through more exports and import substitution, which in turn will create immense job opportunities," he added.

Goyal praised the plastics sector for its performance on the exports front, as the industry achieved exports of \$13 billion in FY22 with a growth of 30 per cent and lauded the export target of \$25 billion it has set for 2025. "The plastics industry has done well on the exports and domestic fronts and contributed significantly during the pandemic, particularly in supporting the healthcare supplies to the country."

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

TWO-WHEEL EV maker Okinawa Autotech said it was recalling 3,215 units of its Praise Pro scooter to fix any issues related to batteries, in what is the first instance of a voluntary recall by an electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer in India.

"The batteries will be checked for loose connectors or any damage and be repaired free of charge at any of the Okinawa authorised dealerships pan India," Okinawa said in a statement.

"The electric 2W maker is

working closely with the dealer partners to ensure that the repair experience is as per the convenience of its customers, for which the vehicle owners will be contacted individually," it added.

The moves comes weeks after an Okinawa electric scooter burst into flames, claiming the lives of a man and his 13-year-old daughter. At the time, the company had claimed the fire in its electric two-wheeler was an "evident case of short circuit due to negligence in charging the vehicle". The company said it was waiting for the complete investigation to unfold.

Earlier this week, NITI Aayog

₹7.52 lakh cr

claims made by creditors on their borrowers; lenders could realise only Rs 2.5 lakh crore

Liquidation means lenders or financial firms face the maximum brunt of losses on their books

Various NCLTs admitted 4,946 bankruptcy cases till December 2021 — 3,247 applications so far closed, while 1,699 are still ongoing

Source: Icra Ratings/PTI

SECTOR WATCH CONSUMER INTERNET COS

Ban after complaints: Amid pushback by restaurants, Zomato defers quality policy

SOUAMYARENDRA BARIK
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

AFTER IT drew the ire of hoteliers over a proposed policy to ban restaurants based on customer complaints about food quality, Zomato is learnt to have decided to defer the plan until next month and has informed restaurants that it will seek feedback from them on how it can strengthen the policy before implementing it.

Zomato, in an email sent late Friday night to its restaurant partners, is learnt to have pushed the implementation of the policy from April 18 to May 3. Under the policy, called "Severe Food Quality" rules, Zomato proposed it would temporarily ban restaurants if consumers complained about their food quality. The platform had listed the presence of hazardous objects in food, serving non-vegetarian food instead of vegetarian, delivering the wrong type of meat, and rotten food as examples of severe food quality issues.

Zomato said it would get feedback from stakeholders on the policy. "We seek feedback from all our restaurant partners and would like to understand from you how this framework can be strengthened so it can be in the best interest of all stakeholders involved," Zomato is learnt to have said in the email.

"The disablement will be in consultation with the restaurant management and will only be applicable till necessary remedial actions are undertaken and verified through an Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)-approved hygiene and safety auditor," the email said.

On its part, the FSSAI welcomed Zomato's policy, say-



File

ing it would ensure customers receive good quality food.

FSSAI CEO Arun Singhal told *The Indian Express*, "We are encouraging all stakeholders to offer quality food and Zomato's penalty against multiple offenders could make sure that customers get food of the highest quality."

The FSSAI had earlier launched a hygiene rating for restaurants, cafes, dhabas etc, to make sure customers get good quality food at such outlets. The ratings, voluntary in nature, include several parameters and an inspection by local authorities or a third-party audit of a restaurant's premises and food offerings.

The National Restaurants Association of India (NRAI), which had criticised Zomato saying that the firm was overstepping with the policy, said it was set to have a conversation with the firm to resolve its issues with the policy. "While the intent of the policy is understandable, the implementation leaves a lot of grey areas and scope for misuse. Further the action of delisting is draconian. We have initiated dialogue with the Zomato Team and conveyed our views. They will be meeting with us next week to resolve this in a better, more inclusive way, keeping all stakeholders in mind," an NRAI spokesperson said.

Zomato did not reply to a request for comment. *Full report on* www.indianexpress.com

BRIEFLY

M&M stakes sale

New Delhi: Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) has agreed to sell over 34.75 lakh shares, constituting 22.81% of the paid-up capital, in Mahindra Sanyo Special Steel Pvt Ltd, to Japan's Sanyo Special Steel Co Ltd in a ₹212 crore deal.

Vedanta on PSU

New Delhi: Vedanta chairman Anil Agarwal called for further liberalisation of defence sector and corporatisation of defence PSUs. **PTI**

Activision probe

Bengaluru: Activision Blizzard is cooperating with federal investigations into trading by friends of its CEO shortly before the gaming company disclosed its sale to Microsoft Corp, it said in a filing on Friday. **REUTERS**

MARKET WATCH

HIGH PRICES HIT APRIL FUEL SALES

New Delhi: Fuel sales fell in the first half of April as a record rise in prices in a short 16-day period dented demand, preliminary industry data showed Saturday. Petrol sales fell almost 10% over the same period in the preceding month, while diesel demand slid 15.6%. **PTI**

INTERVIEW: VICE PRESIDENT & MANAGING DIRECTOR, INDIA, META

'Meta has not cracked all of metaverse; want to help others build compelling use-cases'



"I don't think we're a media company. I think we partner with other media companies, and hopefully they've seen value in leveraging our platforms"

AJIT MOHAN

META, WHICH renewed its identity from Facebook last October, will continue to work on building access to the proposed metaverse through devices that enable a more immersive version of the internet, AJIT MOHAN, Vice President and Managing Director, India, Meta told AASHISH ARYAN and PRANAV MUKUL in an interview. He also spoke about the future of internet advertising in the metaverse and the company's plans in the upcoming auction of broadcasting rights for the Indian Premier League. Edited excerpts:

Given that political ads comprise a small proportion of your revenue and the heat that they bring through allegations of the platform being biased, how does the cost-benefit work out?

I don't have a point of view on this, really. This is, globally, one of the calls that we took a while back. In the context of the role that we can play — just as businesses connect to consumers, we have discovered that our platforms are used to drive causes. We saw that one of the roles we played in the pandemic was to bring attention to the public health agenda. The code of the platform is that you can build communities and get a message across, and therefore I can imagine the utility from a campaign point of view as well. When you look at political ads as a percentage of total (revenues) both in India and globally, it becomes pretty apparent that the driver for us is not revenue.

Companies across the world have stepped up their metaverse investments. How does the future of advertising on internet change on Web 3.0 and the metaverse?

In a very short period of time, from when we articulated the idea of metaverse and the change of identity to Meta, there has been massive excitement from across industry and business leaders across the spectrum, and I've seen this excitement in India as well.

Leaders instinctively get the power of a more immersive internet, and what it means to move from 2D to 3D, not just from a consumer point of view — with use cases such as fitness and gaming — but also from enterprise perspective, if they can engage with these users in a more immersive manner. We have been pretty open in saying that we do not know all the answers at the moment.

Going back to the acquisition of Oculus in 2014, the company has been making hefty investments in AR (augmented reality) and VR (virtual reality) for a while now. We have no illusion that we are building the metaverse. We know that we are going to contribute to what will become metaverse and that different companies will create different spaces. It should be interoperable, a lot more than what mobile internet was. At the same time, we do not have any illusion that we have cracked all of it, either in terms of technology or how interoperability will work, or even what the different revenue streams will be. What we do know is that there is going to be a lot of work on access side on devices that enable more immersive version of the internet.

Governments and regulators are debating on formulating policies for cryptocurrencies and NFTs, and the metaverse? How important is it for these policies to be laid down as early as possible?

On the last version of the internet, a lot of these laws and policies had to be developed *post facto*. We saw this explosive growth and innovation which had a huge impact on global economy as well as the impact on the ability of people to connect in a seamless manner. But we also discovered that there were a lot of bad actors who could do great harm. Even in some of our own works — we have had a lot of fundamental product work

and policy changes over the last few years on the back of recognising that. We have the opportunity to learn from that as we think about how to design the different building blocks that will form the metaverse over the next 5-10 years. For example, we have been baking in privacy as a core design principle in to every product feature and it will translate quite well. We have to proactively work with stakeholders, including regulators around the world to make sure that we build these frameworks in a way that allows innovation but also absorbs the learnings of the last 20 years.

Would Meta be interested in buying rights to broadcast IPL?

One, I don't think we're a media company. I think we partner with other media companies, and hopefully they've seen value in leveraging our platforms. We ourselves don't see us as a media company. I don't think we will build particular use cases. We are thinking more along the lines that we can build frameworks and help with foundational tools on both the software and hardware side that will enable other developers to build compelling use cases for the metaverse.

The role that Meta has is fundamentally around building the toolkits, enabling other partners and developers, and therefore in this context, we don't have the intention to bid for IPL rights that are opening up in the next few weeks. It is the context of the role we see ourselves in, of building the metaverse, and not because we think IPL is not a fantastic property. I have seen the power of IPL in building (Disney+) Hotstar.

In terms of the Apple privacy changes, globally, there's a \$10-billion impact that Meta said it will see as a result of the new policy. For India, could you provide any qualitative or quantitative insights into what impact is being seen by Meta?

There are no numbers to share. What we've publicly announced over the last few weeks, and what's to come, we've clearly worked to make sure that some of the underreporting on web conversions that have come on the back of the Apple changes are addressed. That will continue. The only other thing to call out is that Apple or iOS is a very small share of the total devices in India.

Full interview on www.indianexpress.com

Catching fire over e-scooters, Okinawa recalls 3,215 units

SIMILAR INCIDENTS AMONG OTHER EV MAKERS

■ The moves comes weeks after an Okinawa electric scooter burst into flames, claiming the lives of a man and his 13-year-old daughter. At the time, it had claimed the fire was an "evident case of short circuit due to negligence in charging the vehicle"

■ Over the past few weeks, more than a dozen electric scooters have caught fire, including those manufactured by Ola Electric, Pure EV and Jitendra EV, aside from Okinawa. The companies have launched respective probes into the incidents

CEO Amitabh Kant had, during a media interview, urged manufacturers to voluntarily recall EV

batches involved in fire incidents. Okinawa — established in 2016 out of a manufacturing facil-

ity in Bhiwadi, Rajasthan — sold over 46,000 electric scooters in FY22, according to data from the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA). The company had a market share of 0.39 per cent. In March this year, the company sold over 8,000 e-scooters.

Over the past few weeks, more than a dozen electric scooters have caught fire, including those manufactured by Ola Electric, Pure EV and Jitendra EV, aside from Okinawa. The companies have launched respective investigations into the instances to ascertain the reasons behind the fires.

The Ministry of Road

Transport and Highways, meanwhile, too has ordered a probe into the incidents and roped in the Centre for Fire Explosive and Environment Safety (CFEES), a unit of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), to constitute an independent team and carry out an investigation into the incidents.

While conclusive reasons behind these incidents are yet to be made clear, industry experts said the rising temperatures in the country and manufacturing defects — both in hardware and software — could be possible causes behind the fires.

'Poison pill': Twitter plan to fight Musk's takeover bid

PRANAV MUKUL
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

A DAY after Tesla chief Elon Musk made a \$43-billion offer to buy Twitter, the microblogging platform's board has armed itself against a possible hostile takeover by taking recourse to what is called a "limited-duration shareholder rights plan", also referred to as a "poison pill".

Poison pill — nuclear option against a hostile takeover

This rights plan essentially allows existing shareholders to purchase freshly issued shares in a company at a discount to the trading price, effectively making any possible buyout plan extremely costly and prohibitive for the party planning a hostile takeover. In this case, the move will prevent anyone from having more than a 15 per cent stake in Twitter by allowing existing shareholders to buy additional shares at a discount.

The Twitter board detailed its defence plan to the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and put out a statement saying it was needed because of Mr Musk's "unsolicited, non-binding proposal to acquire Twitter".

In fact, Musk, who offered to buy Twitter for \$43 billion for \$54.20/share in cash for a 9.2 per cent stake in Twitter, seems to have been displaced as the largest shareholder in the platform.

US registered investment advisor Vanguard Group, on April 8, disclosed that it now owns 82.4 million shares of Twitter, which means 10.3 per cent of the company, according to the most recent publicly available filings with the US SEC. As per the filing, the asset manager increased its stake in the company at some point during the first quarter.

Another high-profile Twitter



Tesla CEO Elon Musk's \$43-bn offer for Twitter has been called "hostile". Reuters file

and long-term shareholders of Twitter, @Kingdom_KHC and I reject this offer."

A takeover bid is deemed as hostile when a company attempts to acquire another against the wishes of that company's management. In the Twitter case, the management is represented by the platform's executive board. The board has indicated it is viewing the Musk offer as "hostile".

Musk's plan

Musk has gone back and forth on this. His latest plan, according to him, is to buy Twitter outright and then taking it private "to restore its commitment" to what he calls "free speech." But his offer, which seemed to have gotten a clear thumbs down from investors, raises multiple questions, including whether he's serious in the first place and does he have the funds to do this.

His objective for this move to take over Twitter is also fuzzy, including his promise of ensuring

that it lives up to its potential as a "platform for free speech." Musk insisted last Thursday that his plan was triggered by the realisation that "having a public platform that is maximally trusted and broadly inclusive is extremely important to the future of civilization."

What stands in Musk's way

Since Musk does not have any presence in the social media space, his proposal to buy Twitter is unlikely to raise any antitrust flags. However, there are still question marks over how he would fund the \$43 billion purchase. *Bloomberg* columnist Matt Levine wrote in an opinion piece that funding the 9.2 per cent buy in Twitter would have been much easier given that Musk only just diluted Tesla stock worth nearly \$16 billion. However, to finance his purchase of the rest of Twitter's shares would mean tapping into his remaining \$55 billion worth of Tesla shares. *Full report on* www.indianexpress.com

THE SUNDAY EXPRESS MAGAZINE



POINT OF VIEW

The Creative Spark

Mumbai-based artist Atul Dodiya on turning to watercolours during the pandemic, the complexity of self-portraits and his new exhibition in Delhi

Rinku Ghosh

NAME: PRATHAM Sharma; Designation: Project Manager; Preferred pronoun: she/they; Preferred honorific: Ms, Mx." This is the email signature of an IBMer on the office intranet as part of a sensitivity drive that respects an employee's mind over body and validates self-worth. IBM is not the only workplace to break down male/female binaries of identity through language and perception. In the corporate sphere and outside of it, expressions of gender identities are being repurposed to become more inclusive and empathetic. The first step to this is the language one uses, for it determines the way one sees the world and oneself.

Language is key to connecting with marginalised groups such as the LGBTQIA+ as they break out of gender/sexual stereotypes and define themselves through a larger prism. Pronouns like "he" or "she" come with definitive expectations of how one should express one's identity. While this works for people who think in the way of the gender they have been assigned at birth, it is normative and limiting for people who are gender-neutral or still to figure out their identities. It has prompted them to move beyond conventional pronouns to non-binary ones such as "they".

"Our earliest form of communication was gestural, we pointed out things to each other. With the evolution of language, pronouns replaced this behaviour and became, among many things, representative of a personal point of view. Words like 'they' are deictic, which means their meaning can vary according to contexts, time and place. So, it is with pronouns that people are crafting their acceptance within the existing scheme of things and redefining a corporate culture that reflects the society of our time," says Rukmini Bhaya Nair, professor of Linguistics and English, IIT, Delhi.

Making variable pronouns a natural part of introductions in the social space takes the awkwardness away from a mixed gender group. Zainab Patel, head, Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), Pernod Ricard, India, a transgender herself, says, "Such a practice unboxes identity, encourages empathy and makes colleagues non-judgemental. Empathy is key to an organisation's cultural growth. As a man-



GETTY IMAGES

How Indian workplaces are slowly waking up to gender sensitivity

agement policy, it works because it shows that the company is willing to come down to everybody's comfort level. That's more important than hiring to ensure a diversity quota."

At the Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, executive director Keshav Suri, 37, has trained his team to approach guests neutrally. "We introduce ourselves with our preferred pronouns and also request guests to share theirs to minimise the risk of mis-gendering. A gender-neutral language, starting from inviting applications to the hiring process, allows people to choose for themselves and, at the same time, express their respect for other gender identities by not assuming. This builds confidence

in queer people as they get recognised for who they are and are able to bring their whole selves to work," he says. A compassionate language policy leads to ease of access. "Besides LGBTQIA+ communities, the group has staff from various marginal intersections of society, including people with disabilities and acid-attack survivors. "This has helped the team accept each other and grow," says Suri.

Patel, however, feels not just pronouns, but spoken language as a whole has to change to respect the sensitivities of gender, marginalised communities, races, and filter down to the shop floor. "We still use words like 'baniya' and 'bhangi' to label communities and profes-

sions; still use phrases like 'able-bodied men' for a job description instead of writing 'persons who can lift weights.' Language cannot be an extension of bias any longer, it has to value competency. Companies must learn interventions and work out anti-discriminatory policies, backed by a language policy, something like the Vishaka guidelines. Self-identification must come from within," says Patel.

The sensitivity brought on by an inclusive language policy has not only changed perspectives within corporations but built ecosystems. Prachi Rastogi, D&I leader, IBM, says "It has driven a more gender-sensitive intervention at all levels. For example, we have a pol-

icy of allowing our lactating mothers to travel with another caregiver at company expense. We have extended this facility to all genders. We extend insurance for affirmative surgeries and give our staff time to heal. We have gender-neutral bathrooms and conduct workshops on both female and male menopause. We have linked promotions and increments to behaviour that encourages diversity and have zero tolerance for violations. Culture must be an upstander, not a bystander. Only then will it enter homes, change mindsets."

Of course, modifying language to reflect a spectrum of gender identities in the corporate workspace is yet to result in a massive cultural

shift. In fact, linguists across the world are debating on "woke" culture and its appropriate representation in languages. "The notion of concealment vs revelation has come to the fore but the tension must go. Language cannot be given a cursory treatment. For example, will the English language tenets work in non-Western settings or among communities who are outside LGBTQIA+? Some of our own regional languages have genderless pronouns. Should we draw on them?" asks Nair.

Parmesh Shahani, author of *Queeristan: LGBTQ Inclusion in the Indian Workplace* (2020), is studying Indian languages to build a gender-neutral vocabulary in everyday life. "Historically, LGBTQIA+ have had a legitimate presence in our culture — the transworld has been peopled by *kinnaurs*, *hijras*, *jogappas* and they have influenced our languages. For example, the word 'aap' is respectful and totally gender-neutral. Bengali has a gender-neutral pronoun, 'shey'. The easiest way to bring regional languages to the fore is by incorporating them in the culture space," he says.

Adherence to a language policy may seem like a faddist corporate drill but the effects are showing. Suansh Khare, 30, an employee at a Delhi-based MNC, says, "I was hired for a mainstream position at 28. My ease at work convinced my folks that I could sail through the world." Mohul Sharma, food and beverage services associate at The Lalit, adds, "You exhale because you don't have to suppress who you are and get to show what you are worth beyond your gender identity."

Some languages are already creating new gender-neutral pronouns like the Swedish "hen". In Finnish, the third-person pronoun, 'hän' has become popular. The French dictionary *Le Robert* announced last year it had added the pronoun "iel" for its online edition after its researchers noticed its growing usage.

There could also be conscious tweaks within existing frameworks. In January 2019, Hanover became the first German city to use gender-neutral nouns in all official communication. United Airlines became the first airline to offer non-binary gender-booking options. Companies like Accenture are giving employees the option of listing preferred pronouns in their online directories and on conference name tags. New rules of engagement? Certainly. But, more importantly, it is also a way of building a culture of respect.

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Kashmir (6D) 47000 - 50000
Shimla Manali (6D/8D) 37000 - 48000
D'shala D'housie Palampur Pragpur (8D) 52K - 54K
Sikkim Gangtok (6D) 53000 - 55000
Coorg Mysore Bengaluru (7D) 43K - 45K
Munnar Periyar Kumarakom (7D) 38K - 40K
Maldives - Eriyadu Resort (4D) 80000
Mauritius - Maritim Resort (7D) 115000

YOLO Adventures (for 18-35 year olds)
Leh Nubra Pangong Hanle (10D) May 31-72000
Pahalgam Gulmarg Sonmarg Srinagar (10D) May 13-69K
Meghalaya Shillong Cherrapunjee (8D) May 28-70K

Short Trips
Amritsar with Farm Stay (4D) 29000 - 32000
Haridwar Rishikesh (4D) 32000 - 35000
Sarnath Varanasi (5D) 31000 - 35000
Statue of Unity+Narmada Tent City (3D) 26K-30K
Indore Ujjain Mandu (5D) 36000 - 38000

Young Explorers (for 8-18 year olds)
Shimla Manali (6D) May 28 - 40000

Women's Special Tours
Leh Kargil Nubra Pangong (9D) May 12 - 64000
Leh Ladakh Nubra Pangong (7D) May 1 - 52000
Kashmir (6D) May 11 - 49000
Shimla Manali (6D) May 11 - 39000
Amritsar with Attari Wagah Border (4D) May 9-28K
Nainital Mussoorie Corbett Park (9D) May 23-55K
Assam Arunachal Meghalaya(12D)May3 - 85K
Sikkim Darjeeling Gangtok Lachung (9D) May 5 - 68K
Jaipur Udaipur Pushkar (6D) May 8 - 32000
Kerala (6D) May 8 - 35000
Nepal Pokhara Chitwan (8D) May 18 - 60000
Dubai Abu Dhabi (6D) May 29 - 95000
Mauritius (7D) May 25 - 115000
Iceland (10D) June 19 - 325000
England Scotland (10D) Jun 22 - 250000

Couples Only (for middle-age couples)
Leh Kargil Nubra Pangong (9D) May 21 - 66000
Kashmir (8D) June 18 - 60000
Shimla Manali Manikaran (8D) May 24 - 48000

Road Trips-Bharat Jodo Paryatan Abhiyan
Leh Ladakh Manali (11D) Jun 10 - 76000
Leh Ladakh Manali Kashmir(15D) June 10 - 90K
Lahaul Spiti Chandrataal (12D) June 2 - 66000
Kashmir to Kanyakumari (40D) Nov 12 - 200000

Family Tours
All of Leh (13D) May 29 - 87000
Leh Nubra Pangong (7D/9D Kargil) 52000-68000
All of Kashmir (11D) June 12 - 73000
Kashmir (5D/6D/8D) 44000 - 63000
All of Himachal (15D) 84000 - 86000
Dalhousie D'shala Amritsar Shimla Manali (13D) 73K-75K
Dalhousie D'shala Amritsar (8D) 47K-50K
D'shala D'housie Palampur Pragpur (8D) 51K-52K
Shimla Manali (6D/8D) 37000 - 48000
Nainital Mussoorie Corbett Park (9D) 51K - 57K
Nainital Corbett Park (6D) 39000 - 42000
Varanasi Ayodhya Lucknow (8D) 46000
Sikkim Darjeeling Gangtok Lachung (9D) 68K - 70K
Sikkim Darjeeling Gangtok (7D) 59000 - 62000
Assam Arunachal Pradesh (10D) 72K - 75K
All of Meghalaya (8D) 64000 - 66000
Madhya Pradesh Magic (9D) 54K - 56K
Rajasthan (6D) 32000 - 34000
Gujarat+Statue of Unity (10D) 46000-50000
Coorg Mysore Bengaluru (7D) 44K - 46K
Kerala (6D) 35000 - 37000
Andaman (7D) 61000 - 63000

Seniors' Special Tours (golden age celebration for 55+)
Leh Ladakh Kargil (7D) June 27 - 53000
Kashmir (6D) May 13 - 49000
Shimla Manali (8D) May 2 - 46000
Dalhousie D'shala Amritsar (8D) May 2 - 48000
Nainital Mussoorie Corbett Park (9D) May 17 - 54K
Sikkim Darjeeling (7D) June 1 - 59000
Gujarat+Statue of Unity (10D) May 4 - 47000
Nepal Pokhara Chitwan (8D) May 11 - 62000
Mauritius (7D) May 18 - 115000

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Dubai with Burj Khalifa (4D) May 26 - 70000
England Scotland Ireland Wales (15D) Jul 20 - 335000
Mauritius-Maritim Resort (7D) May 11-115000
Maldives-Eriyadu Resort (4D) May10-80000
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Kolkata

DOWN IN JUNGLELAND



Ranjit Lal

Ranjit Lal is an author, environmentalist and bird watcher

Scenes from a Window


The best antidote to a hospital stay is a dose of avian tonic

MANY HOSPITALS around the world now include “pet therapy” as a part of the treatment and recovery process. Well-socialised dogs (and, maybe, cats), bunnies, guinea pigs and, perhaps, even a rude parakeet or two “visit” their patient clients regularly and raise their spirits, helping them recover more quickly.

I don't know if this line of treatment is being followed by hospitals in India but I do know that all I had to do was to stare outside the enormous plate-glass window of the hospital room I was in and the birds outside did the rest. It was a widescreen window, open to the sky (mercifully, blue) and, at the canopy level of trees growing across the road, bushes and hedges below, and bordering a little sunflower garden in the heart of south Delhi. Time at your disposal, you sit at the window and watch the goings-on. Within two days, you'd begin to notice patterns emerge: like us, the birds, too, had a routine. They were all *aam-janta* birds who, like *aam-janta* city-dwellers, went about their daily affairs — but with one big difference. None of them scowled or seemed surly; they seemed to be in the blithest of spirits, which rubbed off on you no matter how much of a hypochondriac you tried to be!

Every evening squadrons of rosy starlings would streak across the sky in tight bunches intent on destroying some distant target (a fruiting peepul, perhaps). Their cousins, the common mynas, would fly in smaller more disorganised rabbles, their squat silhouettes and propeller-like wings invariably reminding you of the wonderful Spitfire fighters of World War II. The big black kites skated past at window level, banking and swooping and occasionally engaging with each other.

A cluster of *papdi* trees attracted a clientele of green pigeons, who simply dived in and vanished in the canopy. You could hear the always grinning, somewhat foolish-looking brown-headed barbet calling even through the window glass — but they, too, simply vanished once they were permitted entry into what I had begun calling the “Papdi-Hotel”. Down below at the edge of the little sunflower garden, a pair of red-vented bulbuls was obviously bringing up a family in the middle of a bougainvillea



HEALING TOUCH

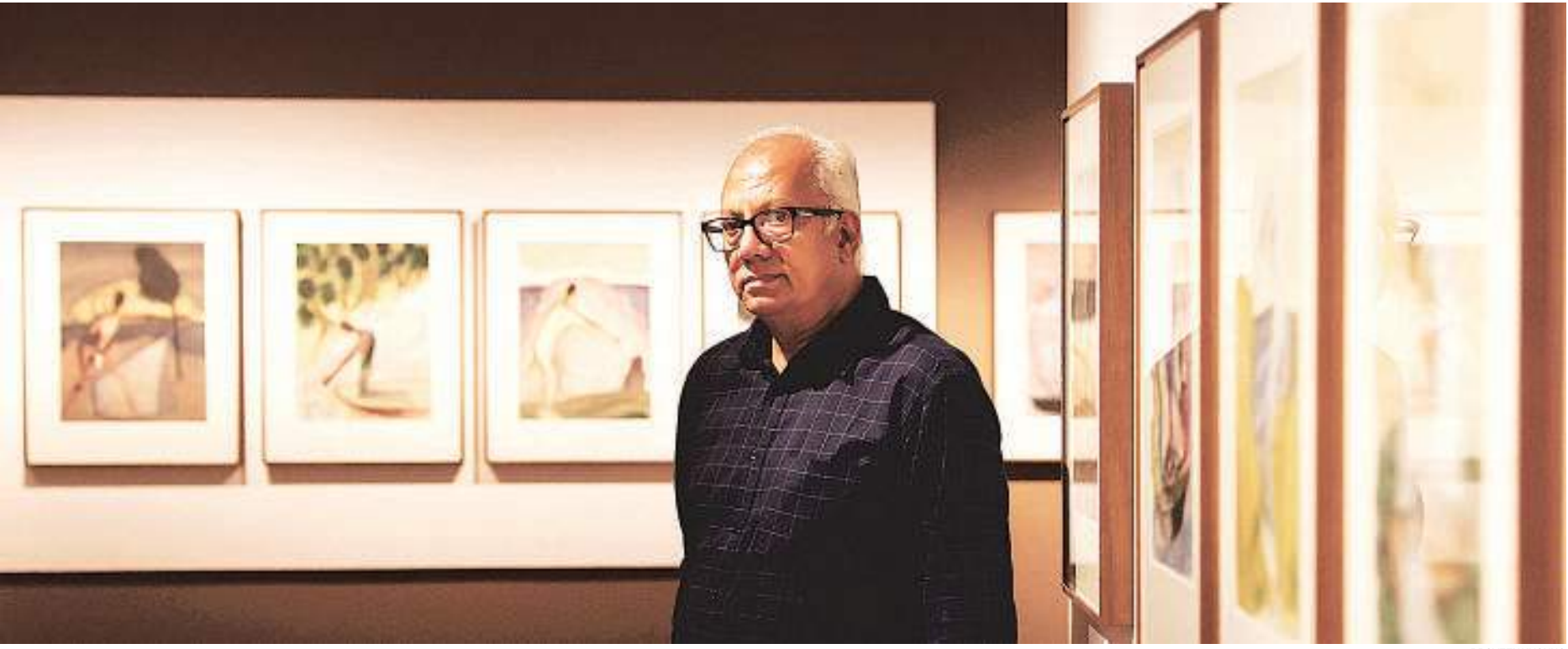
Rufous treepie

creeper nearby. Every now and then, one of the parents would alight nearby, look around hastily and dive into the creeper, only to emerge a little while later and whirr off. She (and probably her partner) was least bothered by the tremendous clanging racket emerging from her neighbours, who were constructing some monstrosity out of large flashy aluminium sheets (probably, something for the air-conditioning plant) by cutting and hammering them to shape.

The parakeets as always were the most wild and wanton: they streaked across the skies at random like bullet-headed missiles, screaming their heads off as they swerved and banked, showing off the hundreds of shades of emerald in their plumage. Watch a flock of parakeets for five minutes and you cannot help but smile. But yes, there was also the furtive and sinister. On my last morning, I noticed a pair of rufous treepies systematically clam-boring up the branches of a fish-tail palm tree growing alongside the building, searching with all the thoroughness of the Enforcement Directorate dispatched on orders of the highest dispensation. Now, treepies are known for their appetite for baby birds and eggs, so this was not promising. Much of the tree was hidden from me, so I couldn't figure out whether they had found a nest in the end — but the thoroughness of the search gave you chills.

One advantage of this kind of confined birding is that it forces you to observe. Most birders are content on ticking off species on their list and marching on: here you are stuck with one viewpoint all day. And this is when the patterns in the lives of birds begin to manifest themselves and you begin to think, hey, you know they're not living random vagabond lives. Extrapolate that to every other living creature on earth and you will realise that it's all one enormous living system working perfectly in harmony — not so much for the survival of the system itself as for that of each genetic component of it.

Then, shortly before being discharged, I watch a fluffy white, down feather float up to the window, rocking on the air currents, like a boat on a lake. It leans against the window for a long moment before drifting away into the wild blue yonder. Back home, I am awoken at 3 am by the peacocks next door — mewling and screaming — back from some karaoke orgy. As dawn filters in, the koels yodel their egg-dumping schemes to one another, and then, the bunch of babblers living across the wall break into their clamorous cacophony. Punctually, at sunrise, your personal red-whiskered bulbul alarm on the window bougainvillea begins its mellifluous wake-up call.



PRAVEEN KHANNA

‘Art doesn’t always lie in great subjects’

Mumbai-based artist Atul Dodiya, 63, on finding courage to paint self-portraits, creating a shrine for actor Rajesh Khanna and his new exhibition in Delhi

Vandana Kalra

Your exhibition at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in Delhi, ‘Walking with the Waves’, has small-scale watercolours painted during the pandemic. Did the pandemic affect the way you work?

When I first heard about COVID-19, it was still a distant virus in China. I did not really take it seriously till the lockdown was announced in India. Gradually, I realised that it would not be possible for me to regularly visit my studio, which is only 15 minutes from home. That is when I brought home some pigments and began to work on paper. It was completely free-flowing and unlike my usual practice, where I reference books, films and art I have engaged with. In this new suite of works, I tap a less busy but more innocent space inside me. One form led to another and, starting from March 22, 2020, to July, 2021, I would mostly complete one work every day. In the course of one-and-a-half years, I have made 366 paintings. The exhibition features 135 of them.

We see a lot of nature and some faceless figures in the exhibition. Tell us about them.

Perhaps, since I was not able to go to nature, I was bringing nature into my room, in my painting. We so often seek peace and comfort in nature; we travel to places to feel close to nature. For this set of works, I was not really taking direct inspiration from any source, but the application in some places did remind me of Bengal masters such as Rabindranath

Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Benode Behari Mukherjee, who were close to nature and often painted their surroundings in Santiniketan. I have chosen to keep the figures largely anonymous, with little clothing and no faces. There is a simplicity in the manner in which I worked on them, which reminds me of my favourite pre-Renaissance masters — the simplification of the figure, the clarity of the drawn line that you see in (Italian artists) Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca and Giotto, who have had a profound effect on my work. Art doesn't always lie in a great subject matter.

There is a figure of an artist with a brush in several watercolours. Is that you? You have previously painted self-portraits.

The watercolours have a figure with a brush and palette, and if you feel he is a painter, and that is me, then probably it is. A large canvas has an expectation and I did not want to impose any weight of reference, history or culture in these works. Picasso once said, each painting is a self-portrait because it depicts what one is thinking, even if it is still life. I also feel that self-portraits are difficult and require courage. There has to be a reason to do one. Some of the best self-portraits are by Rembrandt — the treatment of the skin in oil paint is remarkable and the way he depicted light on the face generates an emotion which he probably felt within. You recognise the likeness of a painter, but it is not the likeness which we are admiring in a self-portrait by Rembrandt. (Vincent) van Gogh or Paul Cézanne. The works are not illustrative or formal studies, but generate more complex



COURTESY: KIRAN NADAR MUSEUM OF ART

A NEW DIRECTION
(Top) Atul Dodiya at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art; a watercolour on display at the exhibition that is on till June 30

emotional parallels. When I saw the Hindi film *Baazigar* (1993) poster, I immediately wanted to do a self-portrait. I took pictures of myself with a toy gun, with glasses that reflected images of Bhupen Khakhar and David Hockney, my first inspirations.

I believe you also watched a lot of world cinema during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, we watched films by Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni, Satyajit Ray. Anju and I are big film buffs. We used to be part of several film clubs and attended film

festivals. Our daughter (Biraaj) recently introduced us to new names and new type of cinema, of filmmakers such as Wong Kar-wai, Chantal Akerman, Agnès Varda, of whom I was not aware of. While watching these, at times, I would take photographs of a paused scene and study it later to see if I could use any element in my paintings.

I have also rediscovered Radio Ceylon and listen to it from 6 to 8, every morning. If I hear a new song or something I like, I write it down. I now have a list of 200-300 in my diary.

In fact, during the pandemic I also worked on something radically different for a private commission at Rajesh Khanna's old house in Bandra. Aashirwad. I created *A Shrine for Rajesh Khanna* with shutter paintings and photographs of the actor, as a homage to the superstar. I rewatched several of his films, such as *Raaz* (1967), *Andaaz* (1971), *Anand* (1971) and *Amar Prem* (1972). At the same time, I was also working on another film project based on more serious cinema, such as Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* (1969), *Duvidha* (1973) and MS Sathyu's *Garm Hava* (1974).

The exhibition also has mythological works. Have you referred to mythology previously in your work? Are you wary of such depictions, given how there have been controversies in the past?

I have done a Mahalakshmi shutter, but this is probably the first. The works are based on stories of Krishna that I have heard. A historian, theorist or philosopher would tackle mythology differently, but, as an artist, I haven't really delved deep into the original source. At times, you lose the creative impulse if you focus on documentation. I have also done some oil paint on laminate and watercolours on the 10 avatars of Vishnu, which I haven't shown yet. There is certainly a tension that we see around religion now, so one is cautious of what one is painting. But I choose to do what I learnt from Tyeb Mehta. He painted what he wanted. So, he had Durga and Kali, but also the demon, Mahishasura.

To Ma'am, With Love

Remembering Mrs Hashmi, teacher, mentor inspiration

SLICE OF LIFE



Suvir Saran

Suvir Saran is a chef, author, educator and world traveller

SABIHA HASHMI was born on November 8, 1949, into a family of Indian freedom fighters and literary figures. She was married at 20 and had two sons who were classmates to my brother and me at Modern School, Vasant Vihar, Delhi, where Mrs Hashmi taught art to middle- and senior-school students. She passed away at her home in Bengaluru on April 5 at the young age of 72.

I first met Mrs Hashmi when I joined Modern School in fourth grade, full of restless energy and shame brought on by the awareness of my gay identity. She found something in me curious enough to allow me entry into her classrooms, where she instructed students senior to me. It was as if Mrs Hashmi knew I was hurting inside, was lost in myself, to myself, and to the world. And so she, who was herself an “other” in so many ways (a divorced woman in a conservative nation, a single mom, and an artist), found an opportunity to

be there for another who was an oddity, one who needed an anchor and role model, needed a haven where internal fears could find artistic expression and needed to feel safe from the harsh treatment kids inflict on those who don't fit in.

When I became a teen, Mrs Hashmi told me about how her family's lot in life changed from a place of comfort to abject poverty when her grandfather's furniture business was ruined during Partition. She and her siblings saw very hard days and the separation of their parents who worked jobs in different cities. Mrs Hashmi also told me about her own marriage and how challenging life can become in a difficult relationship and more challenging still when there are children involved. She taught me about dealing with hardships and showed me through her own experiences the importance of making tough choices and persevering despite all odds. Time after time I saw her take on the courage of a lion though her physical frame seemed more akin to that of a much smaller animal, like a rabbit.

As I came to the 11th grade, I chose to study the sciences. It was at Mrs Hashmi's behest that I presented the school and my family with my desire to take graphic arts and screen printing as well as my science courses — something unheard of. Mrs Hashmi let me know that she would battle teachers who didn't appreciate my unique gifts as a student, and thus allow me significant absenteeism from their classes as I fitted arts and music into my day. There were weeks in those last two years of school when I wasn't seen in any place other than Mrs Hashmi's art room or the music room, and there were nights I got home way past dinnertime, having stayed to finish yet another project. My fellow students envied her love for me and would tease me endlessly about being an extension of her being, and her pet. This was certainly something I didn't always appreciate, as her love came with strict rules of engagement, tough expectations, and high standards.

Mrs Hashmi motivated me, a boy who



SUVIR SARAN

WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE
Mrs Hashmi touched many lives with her peerless grace, dignity, and kindhearted tutelage

wasn't athletic, to climb rocks by saying that if I tried, she would let me show off my cooking skills to the others. I ended up climbing the rocks and then making French fries, and my classmates were suitably impressed. She would tell me what books to borrow from the library — (Alexander) Pushkin and (Fyodor) Dostoevsky were two authors I couldn't have read at 15 had it not been for her. At her prodding, I learned to read and write Urdu and took lessons in Hindi. She took me with her to plays and gallery openings; she would read my writing and poetry and return my efforts with reviews that had me striving to do better. In my end-of-school diary, where other teachers wrote flattering and congratulatory notes, she wrote, “Go jump in a well.” But the next morning she came with a most glorious recommendation letter for me to send to Sir JJ School of Art, Mumbai, where I was the only student from outside of Maharashtra to get into the commercial arts program in 1991. I've always maintained that everything good I have said, thought or done, I owe to her and her alone.

I heard of Mrs Hashmi's passing last week and shared the news in a WhatsApp message

with my mother. She replied, “You have lost your guru.” How astute my mother is! I am the youngest of my siblings, born to creature comforts and a family that is whole. By opening my eyes to the world around me, Mrs Hashmi taught me to be the eyes of those without sight, the agitator for those who can't fight back, and the voice for those who have been marginalised generationally, and thus, have neither vocabulary nor expression to even verbalise or show their suffering. Although she was stoic and reticent, I would sometimes see a childlike grin surface — but only if what was being discussed came from a place of honesty, circumspection, and consideration of the other.

Mrs Hashmi awakened humanity and empathy in me and many of my classmates and teachers. She modelled caring and nurturing, both of the self and for the other. She was selfless and powerful, of meagre means and rich vision, short with lofty ideals, a single mother of two with thousands of kids who looked up to her as their guide and mentor. Mrs Hashmi lives in the stories of our lives and is immortal for having blessed so many with her peerless grace, dignity, and kindhearted tutelage.

Amrith Lal

A NOTEBOOK in which his elder brother, KP Narayanan, had copied down Kumaran Asan's poems was renowned director KP Kumaran's first introduction, at age 10 or 12, to the poet who transformed Malayalam poetry in the last century. Asan has been with Kumaran since then. At 84, Kumaran has lost count of the number of times he's read the poet. With the passage of time, Asan has only grown taller in Kumaran's eyes, a grand renaissance figure whose life as a social activist and poet has few parallels in the history of modern Kerala.

Asan is arguably the most important Malayalam poet of the last century, and one of its greatest writers. *Gramavrikshathile Kuyil* (*The Koel On the Tree in the Village*), which was released in select theatres in Kerala last week, is Kumaran's tribute to Asan. Kumaran, who has been associated with almost every progressive cultural and political movement of his time, says the biopic is his attempt to capture the soul and spirit of a great social and cultural figure who was misunderstood and misrepresented many times during his short life. During a half-century long career, Kumaran directed films such as *Athithi* (1974), a landmark film for parallel cinema in Malayalam, *Rugmini* (1988, based on a short story by Madhavikutty), *Akasha Gopuram* (2008, inspired by Henrik Ibsen's play, *The Master Builder*, 1892), and a series of short films and documentaries. Film scholar CS Venkiteswaran says that unlike his contemporaries in parallel cinema, Kumaran uses elements of mainstream cinema, like songs, to create an engaging narrative style. *Kuyil* stands apart from his earlier films for its theme, treatment, unconventional cast (Carnatic musician Sreevalsan J Menon is brilliant as Asan), and the extensive use of poetry.

Kumaran Asan died at the age of 50 in 1924. His first major work — *Veenapoovu* (*The Fallen Flower*, 1907) — was published at age 34 and to great acclaim. Asan's life in letters as a published author was short. But in those 16 years, between the publication of *Veenapoovu* and his tragic death in a boat accident, Asan published close to a dozen masterly works — *Nalini* (1911), *Leela* (1914), *Sree Buddha Charitham*, *Prarodanam*, *Chinthavishtayaya Sita* (1919), *Karuna* (1923), *Chandalabhihshuki* (1922). These poems have a transcendental quality that distinguished them from the work of his contemporaries; their inner luminosity has not faded after so many years.

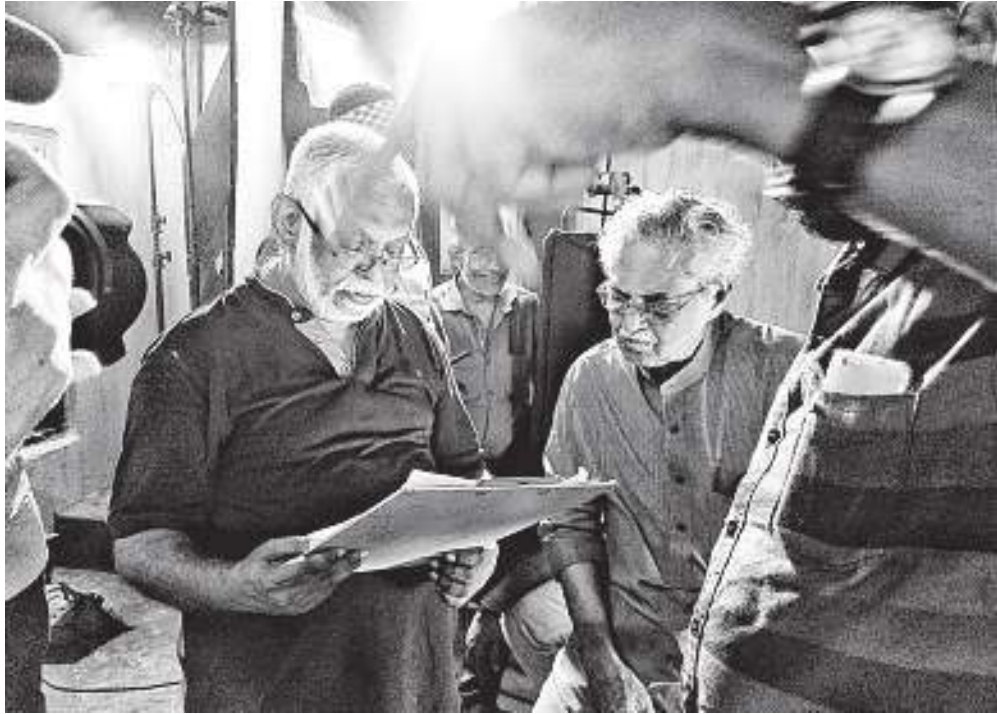
Kumaran's *Kuyil* focuses on the last seven-eight years of Asan's life — a hectic time: He was producing great poetry, had fallen in love with a much younger girl, whom he married at the age of 45, had become a father, and acquired wealth. He was now a widely respected community leader and nominated to Sri Moolam Praja Sabha, a popular assembly at the court of the Travancore king. He'd acquired a self-awareness and confidence about his poetic genius that he chose to reflect on the higher truths of life, primarily ethical questions and the tension between life and death, unlike his contemporaries who were caught in the whirlpool of here and now. Asan was deeply political, but his poetics framed politics in a broad framework of human emancipation and as an intense spiritual effort towards expanding human freedom.

Born in the Ezhava caste, deemed as backward in the erstwhile Travancore state and excluded from public office and employment, Asan knew all about social exclusion. He was the favourite disciple of Sree Narayana Guru, the poet-sage whose radical spiritual vision pro-



IN LETTER & SPIRIT

Director KP Kumaran's biopic on Kumaran Asan celebrates the life and work of an exceptional poet



THE LIVES THEY LIVE

(Clockwise from above) An artist's impression of Sreevalsan Menon as Asan; director KP Kumaran (right) with cinematographer KG Jayan on the set of *Gramavrikshathile Kuyil*; a still from the film

vided fuel for Kerala's transition from being a deeply casteist society in the 19th century to a relatively modern political community. Guru mentored Asan in his formative years and sent him out of Kerala to get educated. In *Kavyakala Kumaran Asaniloode*, a fine study of Asan and his poetics published in 1969, PK Balakrishnan writes that Narayana Guru was the land and sky where Asan's poetic genius flourished.

Not surprisingly, Asan wrote that the essence and eternal truth of this universe was love ("snehamanikhila saram oozhiyil"). In *Chandalabhihshuki*, the story of a Dalit woman's self-discovery and conversion to Buddhism, he offers a searing critique of the caste system: "Caste is the smoke of jealousy/ seething up in the dark covey of ignorant minds/ Filled up with lust for earthly pleasure/ And envy at the happiness of others./ It changes its hue with amazing rapidity/ Like the evening cloud, as anger/ Arrogance and rotten misanthropy/ And envy at the happiness of others/ Near relatives and antagonise classes/ And finally annihilate the whole world" (translated by PC Gangadharan). However, the long narrative poems *Chintavishtayaya Sita* and *Karuna* are widely considered his finest works. *Sita* is part monologue, in which the queen of Ayodhya, in exile in Valmiki's ashram, reflects on her life. Deeply philosophical, it gives Sita agency, who questions the deep patriarchy that underline Raghu's lineage and Raghava's court. An exquisite piece, it reveals a poet in absolute control of his craft and content. He blends philosophy, drama, love, anger, compassion in perfect proportion to deliver a cathartic experience of the human condition.

Kuyil opens with Narayana Guru's consecration of a temple in Aruvippuram in 1888, a landmark event in Kerala history that Guru described as the consecration of Ezhava Sivan when the Brahmin orthodoxy questioned his act. The biopic is not merely an exercise in marshalling facts; it is more of another artist trying to understand the outer and inner worlds Asan journeyed through during the most creative phase of his life. So, despite Asan's persona as a social figure, he is rarely seen among the crowds in *Kuyil*. The poet is mostly seen in a contemplative mood, with his dear wife, Bhanumathi, and close friends such as Sahodaran Ayyappan.

So, why Asan now? Kumaran believes that Asan, despite the voluminous literature on the poet, has not been understood fully or holistically by Malayalis. His life and work call for a new interpretation: Ours is a time of forgetting, forgetfulness is all pervasive in culture, history, Kumaran says. Political thought and political work blend seamlessly in Asan's life. At the insistence of Guru, Asan had become the founder secretary of SNDP Yogam in 1903, a communitarian outfit of the Ezhava community, after returning from his studies in Bangalore, Madras and Calcutta. Kumaran points out that Asan's writings in *Vivekodayam*, a magazine he edited, suggest that the poet was essentially a philosopher: He has a vision of emancipation that glows despite being in the shadow of Guru. It was Asan who brought a lot of clarity to the Malayali consciousness with his reflections on love, freedom, man-woman relations, the need to reject caste and so on, Kumaran says. Also, Kumaran was drawn to the storyteller in Asan — his major poems are well-constructed narratives. The movie takes its title from a poem Asan wrote in anguish when he was targeted by his rivals in the SNDP Yogam.

Asan needs to be re-read, recognised as a seminal figure of Kerala renaissance. *Gramavrikshathile Kuyil* is a remarkable effort at situating Kumaran Asan as a renaissance figure and a deeply contemplative poet. It should help the world beyond Kerala discover Asan, whose 150th birth anniversary falls in 2023.

A Day in the Life

Bengaluru musician Ricky Kej on winning his second Grammy alongside The Police drummer Stewart Copeland and being an environmental cheerleader

Suanshu Khurana

EARLIER THIS month, when Bengaluru-based music producer Ricky Kej got on the stage at Las Vegas' MGM Grand Marquee Ballroom to accept the Grammy in the Best New Age Album category, alongside The Police drummer Stewart Copeland, it was a moment "unrecognisable and unbelievable" to Kej despite having been up there in 2015 to receive his first Grammy for *Winds of Samsara*. Kej touched Copeland's feet, as a mark of respect for the age-old *guru-shishya parampara*, and accepted the hallowed gramophone for *Divine Tides* (Lahiri Music). "To collaborate with my childhood idol, somebody I admired my whole life, then to stand on the stage and share a Grammy with him — it was special," says Kej, 40.

In March of 1980, the legendary British new-wave rock band The Police came visiting Mumbai for what would be their only performance in the country — a charity concert, put together by the Parsi women of Time and Talent club. Lead vocalist and bassist Sting, Copeland and guitarist Andy Summers took the now-defunct Rang Bhavan open theatre in south Bombay's Dhobi Talao by storm. The talk-of-the-town gig was one of the most iconic moments in the history of rock concerts in India. Kej, who was born a year later, in North Carolina, the US, would go on to hear about the concert from his father. "In the '80s, my father was fascinated by great bands and had an enviable music

collection," says Kej, who fell in love with the band's punk-rock sound the moment he heard them and found Copeland's music to be particularly striking.

At the time, Copeland was quite discernible, given his fierce intensity on the cymbals. "I found something very poetic about Stewart's drumming... It was truly the backbone of the band and gave the songs of The Police so much emotion," says Kej. And so, posters of The Police and Copeland adorned the wall in Kej's bedroom in Bengaluru, where the family moved to when he was eight.

But Kej, who for years got busy making advertisement jingles, never factored in the possibility of a collaboration with an artiste he revered, much less the thought of winning a Grammy together.

As Kej grew as a musician after his first Grammy win, he was keen on doing a follow-up to the album but concerts and travel kept him from focussing on making music. And then, the pandemic hit. "The pandemic forced us all to stay indoors and that gave me the opportunity to create a new album. The more I created, the more I kept feeling the need for a collaborator. This had to be somebody who was not just a virtuoso musician but somebody who would help in the writing process, too. The first person who came to mind was Stewart Copeland. I wanted to overreach because he's somebody who's shaped my career, by my just listening to his music," he says.

It was his British friend and mentor Ralph



COURTESY RICKY KEJ MANAGEMENT

EVERY MOVE YOU MAKE

(Above) Ricky Kej; after the win with collaborator Stewart Copeland at the 64th Grammy Awards in Las Vegas



Simon, a music-publishing veteran, who got Kej and Copeland introduced. To Kej's astonishment Copeland agreed after listening to some of the album's music. *Divine Tides* is also an album that was entirely created online. In fact, Kej and Copeland met in person for the first time only seven days ahead of the 64th Grammy Awards. Over a year, the two kept sending Web files to each other, phone

calls, Zoom e-meets, remote recording sessions and Kej changing his sleep cycle to work with Copeland's Los Angeles timings. The result, after almost a year, is *Divine Tides* — the nine-song album that's an ode to the natural world, the resilience of its species. It stems from Kej's deep interest in environmental activism. Not only does he prefer public transport to cars and gets his carbon footprint audited every quarter, he's worked with the government of Andhra Pradesh to promote "zero-budget natural farming", a technique that avoids the use of chemicals and pesticides. He made a song *Jai Kisaan* (2020) with the tribal farmers of Andhra, and is a supporter and ambassador for a number of UN bodies.

Kej and Copeland have woven diverse soundscapes and elaborate ambient textures by incorporating scores of musicians into the mix. The haunting *Our Home* features Sangeeta Kaur, the Vietnamese-American vocalist who's won a Grammy of her own,

too, this year. *Himalayas* is an ode to the highest mountain range on Earth, with chants, Hindustani classical vocals, sitar interludes and myriad percussion sounds. *Gandhi*, a gentle ballad appreciating frogs, one of the oldest species on the planet, dwells on the Mahatma's quote: "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated". "The idea is that if you treat the voiceless well, that means that the moral compass of the country is in place," says Kej, who wanted to gently draw in people to the idea.

Kej grew up in a wooded area, amid creepy-crawlies. When his family would run away or step on them, it would bother Kej as a child. "I realised early on that there was a significance to each and every species in the ecosystem. Then there was music, which also came from nature — sounds of birds, wind, water, trees," he says.

Growing up in a Punjabi-Marwari family, glued to his father's diverse music collection that ranged from Michael Jackson, Bee Gees, Elvis Presley, Paul Simon, and a lot of African, European and Russian music, Kej decided early on to make music his life's path. But his doctor-father wasn't convinced. So, he joined the city's Oxford Dental College, in 1999, for a course in dental surgery. "I made a deal with my father that once I get the degree, my life would be my own," says Kej, who played with a couple of bands in college that led him to radio commercials. "In dental college, I began to take on jingle projects. I completed my degree a few years later but did not practise for even a day," says Kej, who made commercials for a number of brands, from foods and beverages companies to telecom, creating music for more than 3,500 commercials. "It was the best music education I could have got, working with diverse clients from all over the world," he says.

But he stopped making commercial music in 2013, having figured out that if these multinational brands used music as a powerful medium to sell products, it could very well convey messages that mattered to him. "Why not talk about subjects such as deforestation and gender inequality, which are close to my heart, through music?" he thought. Now plans to make music only to make a positive social impact, to make the world a better place "in my tiny capacity," says Kej.

THE SUNDAY EXPRESS, APRIL 17, 2022

12 THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Singapore Minister Lawrence Wong.

SINGAPORE

Lee says Finance Minister will be next PM

Singapore: Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Saturday that Finance Minister Lawrence Wong would succeed him as the city-state's leader. Wong was chosen as leader of the ruling People's Action Party's (PAP) so-called fourth generation team, according to an announcement on Thursday, paving the way for him to become Prime Minister. "The plan is for Lawrence to succeed me as PM, either before or after (if the PAP wins) the next general election. It is due in 2025 and will surely be a tough fight," Lee said in a social media post on Saturday. Lee, whose father Lee Kwan Yew was the island nation's independence leader, has been PM since 2004. **REUTERS**

AFGHANISTAN

Taliban summon Pak envoy to protest strikes

Kabul: Taliban authorities on Saturday summoned Pakistan's ambassador in Kabul to protest against military strikes inside Afghanistan by Pakistani forces, the Afghan foreign ministry said. A local Taliban official and residents said 36 people were killed in air strikes on Friday. A statement from Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Pakistan's Ambassador in Kabul had been summoned over the recent attacks in Khost and Kunar provinces and given a diplomatic demarche to deliver to Islamabad. **REUTERS**

FRANCE

Climate change activists block Paris square

Paris: Climate change activists forced the closure of a main square in central Paris on Saturday to protest against the environmental programmes put forward by France's remaining presidential candidates. The Extinction Rebellion had said on its website that it planned to block a major Parisian location to disrupt the electoral cycle and its "business as usual" attitude. Hundreds of people gathered in Paris' 9th district brandishing banners targeting the candidates, chanting slogans. **REUTERS**

ZELENSKY: MARIUPOL'S DEFENDERS CONTROL ONLY SMALL PART

Russia renews strikes on Kyiv

Firefighters work to extinguish fire after a Russian attack in Kharkiv on Saturday. *AP*ASSOCIATED PRESS
KYIV, APRIL 16

Russian forces resumed scattered attacks on Kyiv, western Ukraine and beyond Saturday in an explosive reminder to Ukrainians and their Western supporters that the whole country remains under threat despite Russia's pivot toward mounting a new offensive in the east.

Stung by the loss of its Black Sea flagship and indignant over what it alleged were Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory, Russia's military command had warned a day earlier of renewed attacks on Ukraine's capital and said it was targeting military sites.

Smoke rose early Saturday from eastern Kyiv as Mayor Vitali Klitschko reported a strike on the city's Darnytsky district. He said rescuers and paramedics

EXPLAINED
E Can Moskva warship be replaced?

NO, RUSSIA has two other ships of the same class, the Marshal Ustinov and the Varyag, which serve with Russia's Northern and Pacific fleets respectively. Turkey, which controls access to the Black Sea via the Bosphorus, will not let them enter at a time of war.

were at the scene, and information about possible deaths would be provided later. The mayor advised residents who fled the city earlier in the war not to return for their safety.

Kyiv was not the only target

Saturday. In eastern Ukraine, an explosion believed to be caused by a missile struck Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, according to firefighters and AP journalists at the scene.

The strike near an outdoor market along with residential and industrial buildings killed one person and wounded at least 18, according to rescue workers.

Meanwhile, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy acknowledged on Saturday that the Ukrainian forces still defending Mariupol control only a small part of the port city, and face a better-equipped force that is six times larger than their own. Zelenskyy described the area as "not a very large part" of the city. "Nevertheless, our guys are heroically defending," he said, speaking to Ukrainian media outlets. "We are grateful to them for that."

Boris Johnson barred from visiting Russia

RUSSIA IS barring Prime Minister Boris Johnson and other senior British officials from entering the country over their support for Ukraine, the Russian foreign ministry said on Saturday.

Britain has supplied Ukraine with new anti-ship missile systems, armoured vehicles and other military equipment. And Johnson made a surprise visit last week to Kyiv, where he promised to send more military equipment to Ukraine. "The Russophobic course of the British authorities, which aims to incite negative attitude toward our country, is detrimental to the well-being and interests of the British people," Russia's foreign ministry said. **NYT**

Putin, Saudi Prince discuss bilateral ties

Riyadh: Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman on Saturday. The Saudi Press Agency said the two discussed bilateral relations and "ways of enhancing them in all fields."

The Saudi readout of the call said the crown prince affirmed support for efforts that would lead to a political solution to the crisis in Ukraine. The kingdom recently announced \$10 million in humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees. The Kremlin's statement added the two also discussed the ongoing conflict in Yemen and their joint work on an oil output agreement. The oil pact has kept a cautious lid on production by major producers, supporting oil prices. **AP**

Billionaire vows to rebuild Mariupol

Kyiv: Ukraine's billionaire has pledged to help rebuild Mariupol, a place close to his heart where he owns two vast steelworks that he says will again compete globally. Rinat Akhmetov has seen his business empire shattered by eight years of fighting in Ukraine's east but remains defiant, sure that what he calls "our brave soldiers" will defend the Sea of Azov city reduced to a wasteland by seven weeks of bombardment. "Mariupol is a global tragedy and a global example of heroism," Akhmetov said. "My ambition is to return to Mariupol and implement our plans so that Mariupol-produced steel can compete in global markets as before." **REUTERS**

Sweden prepares for more clashes as far-right protests continue

ASSOCIATED PRESS
STOCKHOLM, APRIL 16

POLICE IN Sweden say they are preparing for new violent clashes following riots that erupted between demonstrators and counter-protesters in the central city of Orebro on Friday ahead of an anti-Islam far-right group's plan to burn a Quran there.

Kim Hild, spokeswoman for police in southern Sweden said that the police would not revoke permission for a planned demonstration by the Danish right-wing Stram Kurs party in the southern town of Landskrona on Saturday because the threshold for doing that is very high in Sweden, which values free speech.

Police said, however, that the rally would be moved to another undisclosed location, according to TT. Stram Kurs' leader Rasmus Paludan was also planning a Quran burning in Landskrona, the agency said. Hild said police were preparing for the demonstration and possible violence with extra resources "given what has happened in recent days" in the Nordic country.

DEPUTY SPEAKER RESIGNS

Former Pak PM Ashraf appointed as House Speaker

Raja Pervaiz Ashraf (right) takes oath as the 22nd Speaker of National Assembly. *Reuters*SAJJAD HUSSAIN
ISLAMABAD, APRIL 16

RAJA PERVAIZ ASHRAF, a former Pakistan premier, was on Saturday appointed the 22nd speaker of the country's National Assembly after he was elected unopposed.

Ashraf, 71, from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was administered the oath of office by PML-N's Ayaz Sadiq, who was initially chairing the session.

Meanwhile, Qasim Khan Suri resigned as deputy speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly on Saturday, less than an hour before a session of the House where voting on a no-trust motion against him was to take place for favouring Imran Khan.

Sharing a copy of his resignation on Twitter, Suri said his move signified his association with the vision of his party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), and democracy.

Ashraf, meanwhile, was the lone contender for the Speaker's position as no other candidate had submitted nomination papers against him. The office of the Speaker fell vacant after Asad Qaiser resigned on April 9 after failing to implement a decision by the Supreme Court to hold a no-confidence vote against ousted prime minister Imran Khan.

After taking the oath, Ashraf thanked his party leaders for deeming him worthy of the po-

Shehbaz's son Hamza is Punjab CM amid violence in House session

Lahore: Hamza Shehbaz, the son of Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, was elected as the new chief minister of Punjab on Saturday in a ruckus-marred election that saw Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party and its ally PML-Q boycott the crucial assembly session.

Scuffles broke out between the treasury and opposition leaders during the six-hour-long session in the Punjab Assembly. PTI-PMLQ coalition candidate Parvez Elahi sustained injuries, while Deputy Speaker Dost Muhammad Mazari, who was siding with the PMLN-PPP candidate Hamza, also got thrashed. Police arrested three PTI lawmakers on the charges of torturing Mazari. **PTI**

sition. He also thanked the prime minister Shehbaz Sharif and the members of the assembly. He said a "new tradition" had been initiated in parliamentary history, adding that the speaker was the custodian of the house. **PTI**

Chinese astronaut Ye Guangfu after landing at the Dongfeng site in northern China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region on Saturday. *AP*

Chinese astronauts land after six months on space station

Beijing: Three Chinese astronauts returned to Earth on Saturday after six months aboard their country's newest orbital station in the longest crewed mission to date for China's ambitious space program.

The Shenzhou 13 space capsule landed in the Gobi desert in the northern region of Inner Mongolia, shown live on state TV. During the mission, astronaut Wang Yaping carried out the first spacwalk by a Chinese woman. Wang and crewmates

Zhai Zhigang and Ye Guangfu beamed back physics lessons for high school students.

On Saturday, state TV showed images from inside the capsule as it traveled at 200 meters per second over Africa before entering the atmosphere.

The trio were the second crew aboard Tiangong, or Heavenly Palace. Its core module, Tianhe, was launched in April 2021. Plans call for completing construction this year by adding two more modules. **AP**

SAMIA SULUHU HASSAN BECAME THE ONLY WOMAN HEAD OF GOVT IN AFRICA WHEN HER PREDECESSOR SUDDENLY DIED

Tanzania's first woman President wants to bring nation in from the cold

ABDILATIF DAHIR
DODOMA, APRIL 16

SHORTLY BEFORE midnight on a spring night last year, Samia Suluhu Hassan, then Tanzania's first female vice-president, appeared on television to announce to a shocked nation that the President was dead.

President John Magufuli, an autocrat known as "The Bulldozer," had denied that Covid existed in his country, rejected Covid vaccines and died after a weeklong absence from public view amid unconfirmed reports that he had contracted the virus. His death catapulted Hassan,

62, to a historic position as Tanzania's first female President. Known as "Mama Samia," she is currently the only female head of government in Africa. On Friday, she met in Washington with a fellow path-breaker, Kamala Harris.

Since taking office, Hassan has set off on a different path than her predecessor: She encouraged Covid vaccinations by publicly taking the shot herself, lifted a ban on pregnant girls in schools and began to amend some Magufuli-era economic regulations to lure back investors.

But her first challenge, Hassan said in an interview last week at the state house in the capital, Dodoma, was to over-

come the notion that a woman could not lead Tanzania.

"Most of the people couldn't believe that we can have a woman President and she can deliver," Hassan said. "The challenge was to create a trust to the people that yes, I can do it."

She said other African female leaders—including Liberia's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Sahle-Work Zewde, the president (though not head of government) of Ethiopia—quickly came to her support, urging her in a virtual meeting to remain confident, seek counsel and listen to her inner voice.

"They all gave me courage that you can do it," said Hassan.

President Samia Suluhu Hassan o at Chamwino State House in the capital, Dodoma. *NYT*

Since ascending to power in March last year, Hassan has positioned herself as a unifying na-

tional figure willing to challenge the establishment and bent on bringing her country in from the

cold after five years of isolationism under Magufuli, who rarely traveled abroad.

Tanzania, a nation of 60 million people that borders eight other countries in eastern, central and southern Africa, was long seen as a bulwark of stability in a region torn by ethnic strife and civil war.

But Hassan, who is expected to run Por president in 2025, takes the helm of a polarised nation with a battered economy and growing unemployment, a slow pace of vaccine deployment and a growing clamor for constitutional overhauls.

In addition to meeting US officials during her trip to the

United States, she is also set to court investors, seek assistance in improving public health partnerships and promote Tanzania as a vibrant tourist destination.

In Washington, one issue Hassan is likely to face is the war in Ukraine. Tanzania was among the African nations that abstained from the United Nations vote condemning the war—a move Hassan said was in line with Tanzania's long-standing position of nonalignment.

Pushed on this, she said that in "Tanzania, we don't know why they are fighting," adding that Russia and Ukraine should sit down to talk. "The world has to convince Putin not to fight,"

she said.

Hassan, who is soft-spoken and comes across as reserved, said that as vice-president, it was "tough" working with Magufuli at times, and that she argued with him on several issues, including his Covid denialism.

As president, she said, her main priority was to revive the economy, build thousands of schools and health clinics, extend clean water and electricity to rural areas and complete key infrastructure projects—including a railway line and a major hydropower plant. She said more than 250 new businesses had already been registered in the country last year. **NYT**



BRIEFLY

India win jr Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Final Qualifying

New Delhi :India made history by winning the Junior Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Final Qualifying event with a 2-1 victory over Japan at the RK Khanna Stadium here on Saturday. Down 0-1 after Bhushan Haobam's 3-6 6-3 2-6 loss to Naoya Honda, seventh seed India bounced back to win the remaining single and doubles rubbers and claim the event. Rushil Khosla brought India level with a 6-3 3-6 6-0 win over Yuta Tomida and in the deciding doubles rubber the Indian duo outplayed their rivals 6-3 6-4.

PTI

Tsitsipas sets up semis clash with Zverev

Monte Carlo: Defending champion Stefanos Tsitsipas came out on top from a thrilling quarter-final clash with Diego Schwartzman, prevailing 6-2 6-7(3) 6-4 on Friday to set up a meeting with Alexander Zverev at the Monte Carlo Masters. The Greek third seed was 5-2 up in the second set but inexplicably lost the plot and trailed 4-0 in the decider before rediscovering his touch.He will take on Alexander Zverev for a place in Sunday's final after the German world number three claimed an epic 5-7 6-3 7-6(5) victory against Italian Jannik Sinner. Earlier, Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina reached his first Masters semi-final by beating American Taylor Fritz 2-6 6-4 6-3 and will take on Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov.

REUTERS

BAI trials: Sai continues winning streak

New Delhi: World No. 19 B Sai Praneeth continued his unbeaten run as he defeated Sourabh Verma in the stage 2 A men's singles group at BAI's selection trials for the upcoming major international team events here on Saturday. Praneeth, 2017 Singapore Open champion, saw off national champion Verma 21-14 15-21 21-13 in a thrilling match at the K. D. Jadhav Hall inside Indira Gandhi Stadium Complex. The Hyderabad shuttler will next take on Kiran George and Ansal Yadav, who also crossed the preliminary round and are clubbed in stage 2 A group, out of which the topper will play for rank 1 to 4 in a round-robin format.

PTI

IWL: Kerala bag 12-0 win vs Odisha

Bhubaneswar: Gokulam Kerala FC began their title defence in the top-tier Indian Women's League on a ruthless note, slamming a dozen goals past a hapless Odisha Police here on Saturday. Indian attacking midfielder Manisha Kalyan wreaked havoc in opposition's defence with five goals (17th, 26th, 33rd, 48th, 73rd minutes) as the Aditi Chauhan-led side struck six goals in each half. Substitute Elshaddai (61st, 86th) struck a double, while the other goalscorers for the Malabarians were Win Theingi Tun (25th), Dangmei Grace (37th), Ranjana Chanu (70th) and Karishma Shirvolkar (77th).

PTI

Giants, Rahul give Mumbai no respite

LSG captain KL Rahul's unbeaten hundred sets the tone for 18 run win over laggards MI who remain winless so far this season

SYNOPSIS: Rahul's classy ton sets up Super Giants' win, as MI go deeper in the mire

SHAMIK CHAKRABARTY
APRIL 16

SURYAKUMAR Yadav's dismissal off a Ravi Bishnoi long-hop typified Mumbai Indians' season so far. But as long as Kieron Pollard was there, there was life in MI. The big man tried his best, but gradually the asking rate climbed to 20-plus. Twenty-six runs were required off the final over and MI lost by 18 runs, chasing 200 for victory. Lucknow Super Giants won not only because KL Rahul led from the front and scored a mighty fine century, but collectively they played better cricket than their opponents to thoroughly deserve their victory. Super Giants went to eight points from six games, while after six straight defeats, MI's fall from the perch has been spectacular.

Rahul's classy ton

In the 16th over during Super Giants' innings, as Jasprit Bumrah came back for his final spell, the Brabourne Stadium DJ belted out: 'Boom, Boom Bumrah'. MI looked flat on the field and their fans were subdued.

In the MI dug-out, Sachin Tendulkar and Zaheer Khan were having a conversation. Of course, it's not known if the conversation between the two former India stalwarts, now part of the MI support staff, was about Rohit Sharma's use of Bumrah in this game. By then, Rahul was bossing and the MI skipper probably missed a trick by not using his best bowler against the Super Giants' skipper right at the beginning. Rahul's unbeaten century in his 100th IPL appearance was a result of keeping things simple and steadily growing into the game. In top fettle, his batting is very easy on the eye and 66 runs in boundaries and overboundaries, out of 103 not out off 60 balls, attested a fine conversion rate in terms of putting away loose deliveries. But MI barely attacked him upfront, when like most batsmen he was vulnerable.

Twice in this tournament, Rahul has got out to golden ducks and one of those was against Rajasthan Royals in the previous game. Sunil Gavaskar on air was imploring Rohit to start the proceedings with Bumrah: "Confront the man who got out twice in the first ball in this tournament with your best bowler." The MI skipper started off with the part-time off-spin of Tilak Varma instead. Rahul was very keen to get off the mark. He got a short delivery from the offie and pummeled a pull for a four. When Bumrah was eventually brought into the attack in the fourth over, both Rahul and Quinton de Kock had played themselves in.

The hallmark of Rahul's batting was the way he converted the hittable balls to optimum effect. MI bowlers, bar Bumrah, were generous enough to bowl an overdose of loose deliveries. Tymal Mills was the culprit-in-chief; offering width, bowling in the slot and not bowling to his field. His final over, 19th of the innings, was particularly poor. He bowled length outside off, bowled an ill-disguised slower delivery to Deepak Hooda to concede a six, missed his line completely to bowl a big wide and served a half-volley outside off to Rahul to give away another four. The last four took Rahul to his century. That 22-run-over ensured that MI would have to chase 200. Mills went for 54 runs without a wicket in his three overs. Used to Trent Boult's quality, this has been a serious let-down for the five-time champions.

Rahul was always looking to bat long and once he got into the groove, there was no stopping him. He took his singles and doubles well, allowing fours and sixes to take care of them-



KL Rahul's unbeaten century in his 100th IPL appearance was a result of keeping things simple and steadily growing into the game.

Sportzpics for IPL

IPL TABLE						
TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR	
GT	5	4	1	8	0.450	
LSG	6	4	2	8	0.296	
RCB	6	4	2	8	0.142	
RR	5	3	2	6	0.389	
PBKS	5	3	2	6	0.239	
KKR	6	3	3	6	0.223	
SRH	5	3	2	6	-0.196	
DC	5	2	3	4	0.219	
CSK	5	1	4	2	-0.745	
MI	6	0	6	0	-1.048	

selves. He also thrived on partnership batting – 52 runs (33 balls) with de Kock to start with followed by a 72-run (47 balls) association with Manish Pandey and a 43-run (21 balls) partnership with Hooda at the death. MI's ground fielding was average. Misfields came thick and fast. Super Giants' fielding, on the contrary, was excellent.

Deeper in the mire

In the end, after another batting failure from Rohit and one more disappointing knock from Ishan Kishan, it had become Surya-or-bust for MI. Rohit showed intent, when he regally clipped Avesh Khan over mid-wicket. But he got out a couple of balls later, trying to run one down to third man and getting a thin edge to wicketkeeper. Dewald Brevis came and readily took the attack to the opposition. Dushmantha Chameera bowled a peach to beat the youngster. Brevis' response was a stunning six over long-on. Back-to-back fours ensued before Brevis turned his attention to Avesh with consecutive boundaries. It was incredible hitting, but inexperience came to the fore. Brevis made room but mis-hit an Avesh full-toss straight to Hooda at extra-cover. The teenager got ahead of himself. Kishan seems to be bogged down by his Rs 15.25 crore price tag. It has made his batting cagey. After a laborious 17-ball 13, the southpaw dragged a Marcus Stoinis off-cutter on to the stumps. At 57/3, MI looked to Surya to get out of the woods. Over-reliance on individuals cost the team dear.

Brief scores: LSG199 for 4 (Rahul 103*, Pandey 38, Unadkat 2-32) beat MI (Suryakumar 37, Brevis 31, Avesh 3-30) by 18 runs

Blazing Karthik goes boom-boom, spells doom for Delhi Capitals

SYNOPSIS: Dinesh Karthik's 66 off 34 revived RCB from 92 for 5 to 189, which was enough to quell Delhi Capitals by 16 runs

ABHISHEK PUROHIT
APRIL 16

DINESH KARTHIK produced another turnaround for Royal Challengers Bangalore, and a chase of 190 was beyond Delhi Capitals despite David Warner's fifty as Josh Hazlewood came up with a three-wicket burst.

Maxwell v Kuldeep

This was DC's first game of the season at Wankhede Stadium. On the larger square outfield at the Brabourne, DY Patil and Maharashtra Cricket Association stadiums, Kuldeep Yadav had had more leeway to toss the ball up and slow it down. He'd collected 10 wickets in four games at an average of 12.4 and an economy-rate of 7.75. But the smaller Wankhede turf was going to be a bigger challenge.

When Kuldeep was brought on in the ninth over, Maxwell had worked himself into some rhythm. And DC captain Rishabh Pant had taken the risk of giving Kuldeep the end from which Maxwell could eye the shorter boundary with the slog. And right away, Maxwell looted 23 runs off the over; two sixes and a four were swung to deep midwicket. Kuldeep tried to make Maxwell hit to the longer side, bowling full and wide, and Maxwell obliged with a driven four to deep extra cover.

Before Kuldeep came on, RCB were struggling on 47 for 3 after eight overs. Maxwell's assault seemed to have switched the momentum in his side's favour. Wiser after the storm, Kuldeep now changed ends. And the first ball, which was floated up full, Maxwell tamely chipped to long-on, instead of going full-blooded for another maximum. He had been kept to 55 off 34, and Kuldeep had had his revenge.

DK v DC

There are few sides that will be able to more



Dinesh Karthik's unbeaten 66 for RCB comprised five fours and as many sixes.

Sportzpics for IPL

than double their score after losing half the side for 92 by the 12th over. But RCB have already been rescued time and again by Dinesh Karthik this season, and the veteran keeper-batsman answered his side's call for help once more.

Khaleel Ahmed, the DC left-arm seamer, hadn't been hit for a single six going into Saturday night's game. He was hit for two, both coming off Karthik's bat. For the second one, a slower length ball, he actually bent his knee as if he was facing a spinner and slog-swept cleanly. Heading into his last over, Mustafizur Rahman had given away just 20 runs. Batsmen had been unable to get underneath his full deliveries and had to be content with singles. But Karthik launched him wherever he pleased. There was a fine reverse-hit clear of short third man, and an authoritative swat that flew in the gap between mid-off and extra cover. Mustafizur went fuller to squeeze Karthik's swinging pace but that only made him hit



Kohli has a look at his own celebration

David Warner's wicket was the game-turning moment alright and just in case anyone missed the significance, Virat Kohli reminded them with his celebrations. Warner had been trapped lbw after he failed to connect with a reverse-slog and RCB had taken the decision upstairs for the review. The bowler Wanindu Hasaranga and Dinesh Karthik were so sure but on first replay the point of impact seemed a bit iffy and slowly the Bangalore players started to disperse from the huddle. They stopped again to check the mat-lines replay on the big screen and were joyous to

see the verdict fall in their offer. No one more than Kohli, of course. After an initial cry of fist pump and roar - just a warm up for him - he ran a detour, cut across the path of Warner, screaming his joy which as ever seemed tinged with anger, before he joined his team-mates. Warner, who was having a chat with the umpire about the replay, had a look at Kohli, turned to finish his conversation with the umpire and walked off. At the end of the over, as Kohli was crossing over, he had a look at himself on the big screen, roaring away.

EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER

Hot heads, calm minds and everything in between at the game

Wobbling Warner

Not quite David Warner the fielder's evening thus far. Two mis-fields yielded two fours as he kept diving over the ball. The first off an off drive from Faf du Plessis was admittedly not easy with Warner running to his left at mid-off but couldn't get his lunge-stop right. Next one was pretty straightforward one. He had just talked to the bowler Khaleel Ahmed and moved to mid-off when Virat Kohli drove not too far to his right. He got there in time but tumbled over it and had a wry smile. Apart from the misfields, he has been his usual busy stuff, with frequent chats to the bowlers and pressing the captain to place him at second slip for the new batsman Glenn Maxwell. Every now and then, he keeps counting the fielders too for some reason, and has the most chats with the bowlers more than anyone else on the field. He also asks the ball to be thrown to him as early as possible so that he can shine and pass on to the bowler. Once, when Prithvi Shaw was taking his time to pass the ball on, Warner raised his arm first, then shouted out, before taking a couple of steps forward towards Shaw.

Lalit at ease



sage from a legend. "But after that, it never felt that I am talking to a legend or sharing a dressing room with him. It felt like he's a companion, a friend. At times, he has been harsh too, but he stays very cool," he told Wisden India. "I've received a lot of nice inputs from him - last year, he told me four, five different things that have been helping me." Was one of the things how to fire a direct hit? He did a Ponting to take out Virat Kohli, who hadn't gone too far down the track before changing his mind to return to the crease. But by then Yadav had rushed to his right at backward point, swooped low, and fired a sideways throw ala Ponting to leave Kohli stranded.

When Lalit Yadav joined Delhi Capitals couple of years ago, he got a text from Ricky Ponting. "Hi Lalit, Ponting this side!" Yadav couldn't believe that he was the recipient of a message from a legend.



DK does what DK does

A slog sweep on a bent knee to a pacer was just the start before Dinesh Karthik decided to turn more innovative in the 17th over. He tried a reverse lap off Khaleel Ahmed two balls later but it dribbled off the toe end of the bat. Next over, first ball off Mustafizur Rahman, he shuffled outside off and tried to lap it to fine-leg but it flew off the edge to third man boundary instead. Rahman slipped in a slower cutter next ball and winced as DK reverse-slapped it over short third man for a one-bounce four. Next ball was smashed through extra cover and chants of DK DK began to echo around the arena. He obliged by lifting two sixes, one of which landed on the first tier over long-off. And when Shardul rebounded after a pulled six with an outside-off yorker. Pant, who gathered that ball, gestured to his bowler to stay calm, stay cool (he touched his head) & even mouthed 'cool cool'. DK was the real cool one, there though.

Covid caution: No handshakes, no hugs

Mumbai: No Delhi Capitals players will shake hands with any player from Royal Challengers Bangalore after the night game at the Wankhede on April 16. Not because there is any problem between the two teams but it's a BCCI mandate to the Delhi team after their physiotherapist Patrick Farhat and another support staff tested Covid positive on Friday. It is understood that the support staff tested positive is the masseur. The paper understands that the BCCI has issued a circular to the Delhi team requesting them to not shake hands & hug players from RCB after the game. The players from teams usually congregate for a chat after games before they disperse. The Delhi players have been advised to maintain social distancing through chats & use of masks have been recommended. The non-playing team members who will watch the game from the stands too have been requested to wear their face masks throughout the game, except eating or drinking. This is the second positive case during this season of IPL which is played in two cities of Maharashtra-Mumbai & Pune. Delhi players have tested negative & have been cleared to take part in the game on Saturday evening.

DEVENDRA PANDEY