



## SC To Hear Pleas Against CEC On Monday

New Delhi, Oct4

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a batch of petitions seeking the suspension of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and challenging decisions allegedly taken by him without the approval of the two election commissioners.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Justice V. Mohana will hear the petitions filed by Patna resident Rakesh Kumar Singh and advocate Shailendra Mani Tripathi. The pleas challenge decisions, guidelines and software changes allegedly made by the CEC without the concurrence of his colleagues.

Tripathi's petition, filed through advocate Chand Qureshi, seeks a declaration that such decisions are unconstitutional, beyond the CEC's powers and void if taken without the concurrence of the full Election Commission or contrary to its majority view.

He has also sought the initiation of criminal proceedings against Kumar and other officials for alleged breach of official duty. The court agreed on Tuesday to hear the petitions after the matter was mentioned before the CJ-led bench.

Singh's public interest litigation asks the court to determine whether the CEC has individually exercised powers that belong to the Election Commission as a whole and, if so, declare those actions unauthorised and take appropriate legal action.

"Direct that respondent No.3 (CEC) shall not exercise the functions of Chief Election Commissioner of India pending final hearing of the present petition; direct that during such period, the business of the Commission be transacted by the unanimous decision of respondent Nos. 4 (Sukhbir Singh Sandhu) and 5 (Vivek Joshi); and direct that any appointment to the resulting vacancy be made upon the recommendation of a Committee, including the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India," the plea stated.

## SLBC tunnel project moves beyond geological challenge: Uttam Kumar Reddy

Hyderabad, Oct 4 (IANS) Marking a decisive breakthrough in Telangana's Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel project, the excavation has moved beyond a major geological challenge, paving the way for additional equipment deployment and improved operational efficiency while maintaining rigorous safety standards, state Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy said on Sunday.

The minister held a marathon review with elected representatives and senior officials from the three districts of erstwhile Nalgonda on the implementation of key irrigation projects, including the SLBC tunnel.

The project is expected to deliver over 30 TMC of water to the region's parched upland areas, helping end the perennial scarcity they have faced.

The minister commended the efforts of officials and the workforce engaged in the arduous task. Successful passage through the precarious shear zone marked a significant advance in the project, he said.

Uttam Kumar Reddy pressed for the deployment of additional equipment, improved excavation cycles and close safety monitoring. He sought a credible, closely monitored programme to achieve the June 2028 water-delivery goal.

He directed officials and the contractor to build on the progress through the difficult geological stretch while safeguarding crews working more than 20 km inside the tunnel.

Eight workers were killed during the excavation of the tunnel in February, 2025.

The project team reported an advancement of about 700 metres over the preceding five to six months, comprising approximately 450 metres from the outlet and 250 metres from the inlet. This included carefully negotiated passage through the major shear zone, overcoming formidable geological, technical, and logistical



challenges.

The 43.968-km main tunnel was reported to be approximately 79 per cent complete, with about 9.1 km of excavation remaining.

Col. Parikshit Mehra, an Indian Army tunnel expert spearheading the tunnel operations, said that excavation at the inlet had deliberately been slowed during the initial months because of weak ground, rock bursts and the need to prevent another accident. The diversion around the point where the tunnel-boring machine had become stuck had taken the working face through particularly poor geological conditions.

To negotiate the unstable stretch, the team installed 140-mm seamless pipes to form an umbrella canopy, providing protective support ahead of excavation. Reinforced ribs, staged excavation, probe drilling, and additional support measures helped control risks as work advanced. Improving rock conditions were enabling a return to normal working conditions deep inside the tunnel.

Uttam Kumar Reddy pressed for sustained progress supported by timely equipment deployment. The project team reported a current combined advance of about eight metres a day, with a sustained rate of seven to seven-and-a-half metres daily. Progress had reached ten metres on one or two days.



## DRI seizes 15.59 kg amphetamine, cocaine and heroin in 3 operations; 5 held

New Delhi, Oct 4 (IANS) The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has seized cumulative quantity of 15.59 kg dangerous contraband drugs, amphetamine, cocaine and heroin, in three separate intelligence-led operations, the Finance Ministry said on Sunday.

Five persons have been arrested under the provisions of the NDPS Act, 1985.

The DRI, along with the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN), intercepted a Mahindra Thar suspected to be carrying Amphetamine at the Ujjain-Dewas Toll Plaza in Madhya Pradesh.

On being signalled to stop, the driver broke through the barricade and sped away.

The officers pursued the vehicle in a high-speed chase lasting approximately 1.5 hours, before successfully intercepting it near Bicholi Mardana, Indore. Detailed search of the vehicle led to the detection of an ingenious concealment inside the spare tyre mounted on the rear door of the Thar, according to the statement.

On opening the tyre, officers recovered 21 packets containing 7.116 kg (gross) of whitish-yellow crystalline substance, which tested positive for Amphetamine using the NDPS Field Test Kit. The Amphetamine, along

with the vehicle, was seized and all three occupants were arrested under the NDPS Act, 1985.

In another operation, the DRI intercepted an Indian passenger arriving from Doha at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Hyderabad, based on specific intelligence regarding smuggling of cocaine.

Examination of his cabin baggage revealed seven chocolate tubes, which appeared unusually heavier than their marked weight, said the statement.

On opening the tubes, officers found 207 light-yellow oval-shaped capsules ingeniously concealed along with the chocolates. Examination of the capsules revealed a white powdery substance which tested positive for Cocaine using the Narcotic Drug Detection Kit.

A total of 4.9 kg (gross) Cocaine was recovered and seized. The passenger was arrested under the provisions of the NDPS Act, 1985.

In the third operation, the DRI officers mounted co-ordinated surveillance near Phillaur on the outskirts of Jalandhar. After checking multiple vehicles near the bridge over the Sutlej river, the suspect was identified travelling as a passenger in a rental car-pooling taxi.



## Mass disenfranchisement of citizens intrinsically arbitrary: SC Judge Ujjal Bhuyan

Hyderabad, Oct 4 (IANS) Supreme Court judge Justice Ujjal Bhuyan on Sunday strongly criticised any process that leads to the wholesale exclusion of citizens from electoral rolls, terming it intrinsically arbitrary and a direct assault on the Constitution.

Speaking at the valedictory address of the 19th Justice Bodh Raj Sawhney Memorial Moot Court Competition at NALSAR University of Law, Justice Bhuyan said, "If any process results in disenfranchising millions and millions of Indian citizens, making them second-class citizens in their own country in the sense of being citizens without voting rights, such a process is intrinsically arbitrary. No amount of whataboutery can justify it."

He asserted that the Indian Constitution does not envisage two classes of citizens—one with voting rights and another without. Any such process, he emphasised, would violate Articles 326 (universal adult suffrage) and 14 (right to equality). "No authority can do it; no court can condone it. No one is above the Constitution," Justice Bhuyan declared.

He underlined that the right to vote is intertwined with India's long struggle for freedom and forms part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Article 326, he said, cannot be tinkered with at all.

Justice Bhuyan further observed that except in the case of a deceased voter, no name can be deleted from the electoral rolls without notice and a hearing.

Detaching the right to vote from citizenship, he remarked, would be "like taking out the soul from the body."

The remarks come amid ongoing controversies surrounding large-scale deletions under the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls and related petitions before the Supreme Court.

Justice Bhuyan's statements reinforce the constitutional protection of adult suffrage as a non-negotiable foundation of Indian democracy.

## Pune-Hyderabad IndiGo Flight Suffers Bird Hit, Lands Safely

Hyderabad Oct 4 (IANS): An IndiGo flight (6E 352) travelling from Pune to Shamshabad Airport suffered a bird hit on Sunday.

According to preliminary reports, the incident occurred while the flight was approaching Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Shamshabad. The aircraft landed safely at the airport.

Following the incident, airport authorities conducted a runway inspection as a precautionary measure.

The flight was scheduled to operate to Chandigarh after arriving in Hyderabad. However, the service was cancelled after the aircraft's front portion was found to have sustained minor damage in the bird strike.

Further details are awaited.

## Telangana schools to get 13-day Dasara vacation from October 10 to 22

Hyderabad: Oct 4 School students across Telangana will get a 13-day vacation for Dasara from October 10 to 22, with schools scheduled to reopen on October 23.

The School Education department has announced the vacation schedule for schools across managements. The holiday period will follow the ongoing Summative Assessment-1 examinations, which are scheduled to conclude on October 9.

The department has made a minor change to the examination schedule for Class IX students on October 9. The English examination will be held from 9.15 a.m. to 12.15 p.m.

Meanwhile, junior colleges will also begin their Dasara vacation on October 10. However, Intermediate students will have holidays until October 21, with colleges scheduled to reopen on October 22.



# Indian Chronicle

## English Daily

### Caste and merit – who gets to belong in India's elite institutions?

The death of Sahil Wakode, a second-year student at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, has once again forced a difficult question upon India's most celebrated institutions: what happens to students from historically marginalised communities after they cross the barriers that once kept them outside?

Sahil's family has alleged that he faced caste-based humiliation and harassment for months, raising questions about caste within elite institutions. For a marginalised student, entering an IIT can represent years of struggle and family sacrifice. For first-generation learners, it can transform an entire family's future. Yet admission does not automatically dismantle social hierarchies. Access can change without changing whether students feel they truly belong.

A student can enter an elite institution and still be questioned about whether they belong. Caste does not disappear when a student enters an elite institution; it can change its language. It may reappear through assumptions about intelligence, competence, and merit, including terms such as "quota student", jokes about reservation, and the expectation that reserved-category students must prove they deserve to be there. Institutional discrimination is often difficult to identify because it does not always take the form of an explicit rule or direct declaration of prejudice. It can operate through ordinary interactions, informal hierarchies, and repeated questioning of legitimacy. An accent can be read as a lack of sophistication; unfamiliarity with institutional culture as a lack of ability; and academic difficulty as evidence that a student never belonged.

Michael Sandel's The Tyranny of Merit offers an important way of understanding this problem. Sandel questions the assumption that success is entirely the result of talent and effort. He argues that meritocracy can produce "meritocratic hubris" among the successful and humiliation among those regarded as unsuccessful. The problem arises when merit becomes a moral judgement about worth. Once that happens, admission through reservation can be treated not as a constitutional mechanism addressing historical exclusion but as evidence that someone is less deserving. A marginalised student may have worked exceptionally hard to reach an IIT. Yet once inside, reservation can become a stigma. Their success can be attributed to reservation, while their failure is attributed to a lack of merit. Either way, their individual achievement is denied independent recognition. They are denied the ordinary status of being a student. Caste does not disappear when a student enters an elite institution; it can change its language, and reappear through assumptions about intelligence, competence, and merit—from 'quota student' slurs to jokes about reservation. In India, caste intensifies the problem because merit does not operate on an empty social field. Historical privileges can become invisible while achievement is presented as purely individual. Socially privileged students can appear simply "meritorious", while students entering through reservation can be treated as exceptions to merit. Unequal starting points disappear, while outcomes are presented as neutral measurements of ability. Merit can thus become a language of misrecognition, shifting the question from "How well is this student performing?" to "Does this student deserve to be here?"

### 'Shouldn't I own property?': Shivakumar responds to Kumaraswamy's scam charge



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar Tuesday hit back at Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel H D Kumaraswamy, calling him "very, very desperate" and accusing him of making allegations about his assets as he could not "tolerate the Congress government's popularity." Kumaraswamy said Shivakumar's fortune was linked to the alleged Nandi Infrastructure Corridor Enterprises (NICE) Road scam, and demanded the chief minister's resignation. Countering charges that his declared assets had risen from Rs 4 crore in 2003 to Rs 1,444 crore in 2023, Shivakumar dared Kumaraswamy to lodge a complaint with any agency, noting that the Election Commission, Enforcement Directorate, and Income Tax Department had already scrutinised his wealth. "Rs 1,440-odd crore is the net worth of my property now? Shouldn't I own property? I am a farmer's son who has businesses. When there is an opportunity to earn legally, we do it. What's wrong with it?" Shivakumar asked while speaking to reporters in Delhi, responding to the JD(S) leader's claim earlier in the day.

Shivakumar also challenged Kumaraswamy to approach the IT department. "I have declared everything," he said. The CM alleged that Kumaraswamy's associates themselves owned land along the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor Project. "Why have they bought land there?" he asked, likening Kumaraswamy's conduct to "a cat drinking milk with its eyes closed." Shivakumar said the appreciation of his assets was natural. "In the 1990s, I got a site during (former CM) Bangarappa's tenure for Rs 1 lakh. It is worth Rs 20 crore now," he said, adding that he owned "hundreds of properties" and had "every right to do business" and "the capacity to earn more." Rejecting the allegations, Shivakumar declared he was "not afraid of hollow threats and ED cases". "I have seen his drama, philosophy, blackmail and everything."

### 'You're not a court': Delhi HC stays order asking 80-year-old to plant 21 trees



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

In 1991, Gurmail Singh Bhatia planted a neem sapling outside his home in Delhi's Rohini. A retired Class I Union government officer, Bhatia, now 80, said he "nurtured" it for 35 years. But a storm uprooted it in May 2024 — and the tree became the centre of a dispute. The Delhi government's forest department found Bhatia responsible for illegally felling and pruning the tree and, in August this year, directed him to plant 20 tall saplings at a nearby location and one additional tree at the original site. Bhatia moved court through his advocate RK Ruhil. On Tuesday, the Delhi High Court lambasted the state government for passing such an order and stayed the deputy conservator of forest's direction. Justice Amit Mahajan orally inquired from the state, "How can you pass such an order? You're not a court." The court also said the Delhi Preservation of Trees (DPT) Act, under which the government order was issued, was "badly drafted". From a fallen tree to a complaint. On May 11, 2024, a severe dust storm and thunderstorm struck Delhi, with wind speeds reaching up to 77 km/h. The neem tree outside Bhatia's home was uprooted. Part of the tree was left hanging dangerously over live electric wires. Bhatia, in his plea filed in court, said he complained to the MCD's horticulture division seeking action. According to Bhatia, it took the MCD about

two months to attend to the site. The civic body cut the fallen tree into pieces and carried away the material along with about two-thirds of the stem. About one-third of the stem was left at the site, where, Bhatia said, it continues to rot. Bhatia, in his plea, contended that his estranged younger son, with whom he is already embroiled in a partition suit dispute, subsequently complained against him, alleging that he had illegally felled the tree. Following this, the forest department's tree officer initiated proceedings against Bhatia, issuing notice to appear before the officer in December 2024. 21 trees, and seven years of maintenance. On August 17 this year, the tree officer, holding Bhatia to be preliminarily in violation of the Delhi Preservation of Trees (DPT) Act, issued a series of directions. Bhatia was ordered to plant "20 tall saplings at a nearby location, along with the planting of one additional tree at the same site". The order specified that the saplings had to be native tree species, with a minimum height of six feet and a collar girth of at least 10 cm. He was also directed to ensure the "maintenance, watering, and complete survival" of all the saplings for seven years, including replacing any that died. Before the order was passed, Bhatia had told the forest department that, given his medical condition, it would "not be possible" for him to look after the proposed trees.

What the forest dept said. The deputy forest conservator defended the move in court, citing Section 31 of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act. This section empowers tree officers with quasi-judicial and legal powers, including summoning witnesses, issuing a search warrant under CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure) etc, and also empowering them to issue directions to persons to make alternate plantation. Section 24 of the Act further provides for imposition of penalty for violating any provisions of the Act, including violating order of the tree officer. The argument did not convince Justice Mahajan. He orally remarked, "You have no power... How can you ask someone to plant trees if they don't want to?... This is a badly drafted Act, I don't know who has drafted this Act." The High Court has sought a response from the Delhi government's forest department.

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### Apple Pay launches in India with Axis Bank credit cards



Apple Pay has launched in India, initially supporting eligible Axis Bank Visa and Mastercard credit cards on iPhone, iPad and Apple Watch. Users can make contactless payments at participating merchants, while Apple said Mac support would be introduced soon.

GNS News Agency, Oct 4

New Delhi: Tech giant Apple on Wednesday announced that Apple Pay is now available for users in India across iPhone, iPad, and Apple Watch, with support for Mac coming soon. Customers with Axis Bank-issued Visa and Mastercard credit cards can add their cards to Apple Pay and use them at thousands of in-store and online merchants across India, as well as anywhere that accepts NFC transactions, the company said in a statement. "India is home to a dynamic and digitally savvy population that continues to embrace a cashless future while expecting the highest standards of security and privacy, and we're so excited to bring Apple Pay to users in India today," said Jennifer Bailey, Apple's vice president of Apple Pay and Apple Wallet. The launch brings Apple customers an easy, secure, and private way to pay in stores, in apps, and on the web at retailers of all sizes — all without the need to type in PINs or use OTPs at checkout. Apple Pay makes everyday payments with a card

easy, secure, and private — from simply tapping to pay in stores without an extra app, PIN, or OTP to checking out online without repeatedly entering payment information, Bailey added. When customers use a card with Apple Pay, the actual card numbers are not stored on the device or on Apple servers, nor are they shared by Apple with the merchant. Instead, a unique Device Account Number is assigned, encrypted, and securely stored in the Secure Element, an industry-standard certified chip designed to store the payment information safely on the device, said Apple. Apple said it does not retain transaction information that can be tied back to the user. Their transactions stay between the user, the merchant, and their bank or card issuer. If a user's iPhone is lost or stolen, they can use the Find My app to quickly locate, lock, or suspend payments from that device. Customers can add a card directly to Apple Wallet via the latest version of the Axis Bank app. Alternatively, simply open the Wallet app on iPhone, tap the plus sign, and follow the steps to add an eligible card. Once a user adds a card to their Apple device, they can start using Apple Pay right away, said the company. Amitabh Chaudhry, MD and CEO, Axis Bank, said the introduction of Apple Pay advances this ambition, bringing greater choice and flexibility to our Credit Card customers, with support across the Mastercard and Visa networks. "As India's digital economy accelerates and consumers seek seamless and secure payment experiences, the introduction of Apple Pay for our Axis Bank-issued Mastercard credit card holders ushers in a new era of contactless commerce, giving Indian consumers greater confidence and peace of mind with every transaction," said Gautam Aggarwal, Mastercard's president of India and South Asia. The launch of Apple Pay in India marks an important milestone in the evolution of the country's digital payments journey, added Suresh Sethi, Visa's group country manager of India and South Asia. When using Apple Pay, users will continue to earn the rewards and benefits offered by their cards. At launch, Apple Pay will be accepted by millions of merchants across India, including at Apple Store locations. Apple Pay is available in more than 90 countries and regions and works with more than 11,000 bank and network partners worldwide.

### Body in freezer for 4 years: What are the rules for preserving dead bodies in India?



A 78-year-old man's body lay in a freezer at a Malad day care centre for nearly four years after his death in June 2022, police said. His daughter, who told police she was deeply attached to him, had obtained a death certificate and wanted to preserve his body, even exploring the possibility of taking it to the United States. The unusual case raises a larger question: What does Indian law allow when a family wants to preserve a dead body and for how long?

Q) Is there a fixed time limit for preserving bodies in India?

There is no single national law prescribing that every dead body must be cremated or buried within a specified number of days. Bodies may be kept temporarily in mortuaries while relatives complete arrangements, police investigations or post-mortems are carried out, or the remains are prepared for transportation. The legal framework comes from several laws dealing with registration of deaths, public health, municipal administration and transportation of human remains. Mumbai has a specific provision. Section 441 of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act says a person cannot retain a corpse on any premises, without burning, burying or otherwise lawfully disposing of it, for so long after death as to create a nuisance. The provision does not amount to a fixed number of days. Whether retention becomes unlawful therefore depends on the circumstances, including the condition of the body and the public health implications.

Q) How are bodies preserved?

Refrigeration is the simplest method. Lower temperatures slow the biological processes that cause decomposition. The National Disaster Management Authority's guidelines on management of dead bodies also recognise ice as a method of preservation, particularly where refrigeration is not available. For longer preservation, embalming may be used. In arterial embalming, preservative chemicals are introduced through a major blood vessel and into parts of the body. The NDMA guidelines describe chemical preservation using formalin-based solutions and say it can be used when bodies need to be preserved for longer periods, including when they have to be transported over long distances.

Embalming does not stop decomposition forever. It is a method of slowing it and is particularly important when human remains have to be transported. For bodies arriving in India from abroad, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare requires, among other documents, an embalming certificate, death certificate, and prescribed packaging.

Q) What is cryonics?

Cryonics is something quite different from keeping a body in a freezer. It refers to the experimental practice of cooling a legally dead person to extremely low temperatures, generally using liquid nitrogen, in the hope that future technology may one day make revival possible. The process involves specialised preparation and the use of cryoprotective chemicals intended to limit damage caused by ice formation before the remains are placed in long-term cryogenic storage. However, there is no demonstrated case of a cryopreserved human being revived. The US National Institute of Standards and Technology describes freezing an entire human body after death with the hope of restoring life later as cryonics, and notes that it is not an accepted scientific application of cryogenics. Therefore, a body kept in an ordinary freezer should not be described as having undergone cryonics. Ordinary freezing slows decomposition; cryonics is an experimental attempt at preserving the possibility of future revival.

Q) What if the family wants to take the body abroad?

There are specific procedures for transporting human remains internationally. The Ministry of Health's eCARE system requires documents including an embalming certificate, death certificate, and other clearances for human remains arriving in India. The remains have to be placed in prescribed, hermetically sealed packaging. The Aircraft Public Health Rules, 1954 also require prior permission from the competent authority of the destination country and the relevant Indian authority for sending human remains out of India.

### Gunners Soldierathon Hyderabad draws 6,610 runners

Hyderabad: The second edition of the Federal Bank Gunners Soldierathon Hyderabad, organised by Fitiistan – Ek Fit Bharat, witnessed an overwhelming participation of 6,610 runners at the Artillery Centre, Golconda. The event brought together Armed Forces personnel, veterans, families, fitness enthusiasts and citizens to celebrate fitness while honouring the courage, commitment and sacrifice of India's Gunners. The event marked the 200-year legacy of the Regiment of Artillery, bringing its rich history and traditions closer to the public through the spirit of sport, endurance and community participation. The Soldierathon allowed participants

to run together while paying tribute to generations of Gunners who have served the nation. The event was attended by Major General Srinivas, Brigadier Rahul Machhral, Shilpa Bhagat, Co-Founder, Fitiistan; Major Surendra Poonia, Co-Founder, Fitiistan and Manish Shah, Federal Bank. Adding star power to the event, popular actor Adivi Sesh was also part of the Gunners Soldierathon Hyderabad. Shilpa Bhagat said, "Seeing 6,610 runners come together to celebrate fitness while honouring the legacy of our Armed Forces makes this edition particularly meaningful."

## Student seeks CBI probe; Chancellor Mittal skips unrest query



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

A student on Tuesday moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court seeking a CBI probe into the violence and vandalism during protests at Lovely Professional University (LPU) in Phagwara, even as its founder-chancellor and BJP Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Mittal, making his first public appearance since the unrest, refused to comment on the incident, saying he would speak on it "separately". The PIL is likely to be heard by a Division Bench headed by Chief Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra on Wednesday. Mittal, who was in Phagwara to attend the party's 'Nasha Mukh Yatra' rally at Gandhi Chowk, was asked about the violence in which students allegedly vandalised property and blocked a stretch of the New Delhi-Amritsar highway following unverified claims that a female student had been raped on the university premises.

"I will speak on it separately, but today will entertain questions only about Nasha Mukh Yatra," he said. He also declined to comment on allegations levelled by former chief minister and Congress MP Singh Channi and Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia that the LPU was being targeted by the AAP government after Mittal left the party to join the BJP. Meanwhile, the PIL, filed by LPU BTech student Ravi Raj, seeks an independent investigation by the CBI into the violence, vandalism and alleged arson and looting on the campus. The plea claims that an unverified post circulated among students on the night of September 26 alleging that a student was raped. It says students subsequently gathered outside a girls' hostel and later blocked NH-44.

The petition further alleges that people carrying swords, rods and sickles and with their faces covered entered the campus, broke open gates, damaged CCTV cameras, looted shops and set parts of the university premises on fire. The petitioner has also sought action under relevant provisions of the IT Act over the circulation of misleading information and adequate security arrangements around the university. The High Court agreed to hear the PIL on Wednesday after it was mentioned before the Bench of Chief Justice Ashwani Kumar Mishra and Justice Rohit Kapoor.

Meanwhile, the university on Tuesday extended the suspension of offline classes till October 7 and rescheduled the mid-term tests for October 12-17, as students continued to leave the campus following Sunday's violence. In a communication to students, LPU said the decision was taken as a precaution amid the circulation of "misleading information and rumours". It said the situation remained stable and was being closely monitored, while assuring students that there would be no academic loss or dilution of the academic calendar. Online classes will be held on October 5, 6 and 7, with attendance compulsory. Doubt-clear-

## FM Sitharaman urges Qatari businesses to explore trade, investment opportunities Print strap



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

Doha: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman encouraged Qatari Businessmen Association (QBA) to actively explore trade and investment partnerships and further strengthen bilateral economic ties, according to an official statement. During the interaction, the Finance Minister discussed emerging economic opportunities in both nations. She addressed the QBA business roundtable in Doha and highlighted India's strong structural growth momentum, with real GDP growth accelerating to 7.8 per cent in the 1st quarter of FY26 and investment growing by 11.9 per cent amid global uncertainty, underscoring the resilience of the Indian economy. The recent upgrade by Japan Credit Rating (JCR) of India's long-term issuer rating from BBB+ to A- was also highlighted as a reflection of confidence in

ing sessions will be held online and offline on October 8 and 9, while students opting for offline sessions can return to campus on those dates. The university said the autumn term academic calendar would be extended wherever required and end-term practical examinations would be conducted after the theory examinations. Placement drives, however, will continue as scheduled.

LPU is also independently examining videos circulating on social media to establish the sequence of events and identify those responsible for specific acts of vandalism. Dean of Students Welfare Dr Saurabh Lakhanpal said, "The matter is under investigation. The various videos regarding the incidents are also being verified by the university at its own level to establish the facts." The university's exercise is separate from the police investigation, which is examining the wider circumstances surrounding the protest and violence. Police are also examining CCTV footage and videos to identify those involved in vandalism and damage to property. Additional Director General of Police Praveen Sinha said the investigation was under way and that those involved would be identified and action taken. The violence has left several shops inside the university's Uni Mall damaged, with shopkeepers claiming losses running into lakhs. One mobile phone shopkeeper said masked miscreants broke open his shop with iron rods and took away mobile phones, pen drives and memory cards. He also claimed that CCTV cameras were damaged and the DVR taken away. Another shopkeeper estimated his losses in lakhs, while a departmental-store worker said cosmetics and other goods were looted. Several purported videos showing masked individuals targeting shops have surfaced on social media. The university has said such footage is being independently verified, including when and where individual clips were recorded and whether they correspond to the incidents being claimed. Interestingly, a stationery shop on the campus remained untouched. The violence had erupted on Sunday after unverified reports circulated among students alleging that an outsider had sexually assaulted a female student on campus. The university denied the allegation, calling it baseless and fabricated, while police registered a case against an unidentified person and launched an investigation.

At Tuesday's BJP rally, former Phagwara mayor Arun Kholsa, speaking before Mittal arrived, alleged that the state government was behind the violence and claimed that "goons" were brought from outside to unleash mayhem on the LPU campus. Mittal, meanwhile, focused his speech on the BJP's 'Nasha Mukh Yatra', which is scheduled to conclude in Jalandhar on Wednesday in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Claiming that the yatra had received a large public response, Mittal alleged that the AAP government was "rattled" by it and had tried to disturb the campaign at several places. "The unnerved state government tried to disturb the 'yatra' at many places, but it failed in its designs. Rather, it continued to march ahead with a large number of Punjabis associating themselves with it every day," he said. Mittal also said Phagwara's "holy land" had inspired him to establish what he described as the largest university in the country. On drugs, he said the problem had assumed "alarming proportions" in Punjab and alleged that successive state governments had patronised drug smugglers. He appealed to Punjabis to vote the BJP to power in 2027, saying the party could eradicate the drug menace. On the law-and-order situation and Shah's rally, Mittal said he hoped the state government would not do anything to disturb the event and would respect the office of the Union Home Minister.

India's ongoing structural reforms, according to Finance Ministry.

India also recorded its highest-ever annual gross FDI inflow of \$94.53 billion in FY26, the highest in the past 15 years. Earlier, FM Sitharaman met Dr Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed, Qatar Minister of State for Foreign Trade. Dr Al-Sayed warmly recalled his visit to India in 2025 and observed that there was considerable scope for investment in India in several infrastructure sectors including ports, airports, highways and power, and opportunities for Indian companies to invest in Qatar in areas including food security, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, education, health and start-ups. The Finance Minister conveyed that India attaches high importance to enhancing trade and investment with Qatar, "noting the elevation of bilateral ties to a 'strategic partnership' during the State Visit of Amir of Qatar in February 2025". She highlighted trade and investment as important pillars for adding strategic dimensions to the relationship. The Finance Minister emphasised the importance of restoring normal trade between India and Qatar and other Gulf countries, including unimpeded maritime navigation and commerce through the Strait of Hormuz, according to the official statement. They also discussed the implementation of the \$10 billion Qatari investment commitment and establishment of a QIA office in India. They both expressed keen interest in completing the Bilateral Investment Treaty with Qatar, for which they decided on accelerated engagement, as well as the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations.

## Over 1.52 lakh Form 6 applications received

New Delhi: The Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi, said on Tuesday that since the publication of draft electoral rolls on August 31, over 1.52 lakh Forms 6 have been received for inclusion of names of new voters and 3,435 Forms 7 have been received for objections to inclusion or deletion of names. Sharing details of claims, objections, and other data collected till Monday, the CEO said 57,951 Forms 8 have been received from August 31 to September 28 for shifting of residence, correction of entries, replacement of EPIC cards, or marking of persons with disabilities.

The maximum number of 729 Forms 7 – meant for objections to inclusion or deletion of names – have been received in the South East District, followed by 382 in West District, 372 in South District and 356 in South West District. On the front of including young voters between August 31 and September 28, West Delhi received the maximum 18,752 Forms 6, followed by 15,946 in North West Delhi and 15,231 in South East Delhi, an official statement said. The maximum number of 7,390 Forms 8 were received from August 31 to September 28 in North East District. The next highest number of 6,293 Forms 8 – for objections to inclusion or deletion of names – were received from East



District, followed by 5,917 in West Delhi. Form 6 is for new voters, Form 6A for overseas electors, Form 7 for objections to proposed inclusion or deletion of names, and Form 8 for shifting of residence, correction of entries, replacement of EPIC cards, or marking of persons with disabilities, the statement said. Applications can be submitted offline by handing them over to the electoral registration officer, assistant electoral registration officer,

## 1965 war veteran details how IAF's Gnat became the 'Sabre Slayer'



The Indian Air Force has a long, storied history dating back to World War 2. But some of its finest moments came in 1965, when its pilots faced Pakistan's cutting-edge American jet, the feared F-86 Sabre. This war in the sky is the subject of Air Marshal Philip Rajkumar (Retd)'s latest book, The Sabre Slayers: The Air Battles of the 1965 War with Pakistan, co-authored with writer Kunal Verma. An air combat veteran and test pilot with a career going back to 1962, Air Marshal Rajkumar's various writings include The Tejas Story: The Light-Combat Aircraft Project, to name but one.

Being a city full of writers and readers, it is perhaps appropriate that the Air Marshal hails from Bengaluru. He said, "I am a born-and-bred Bangalorean. When I was six months old, my parents shifted to Bengaluru (from Davangere), and I pretty much spent most of my life in the city. Of my 40 years in the Indian Air Force, 20 were spent in Bengaluru because I was a test pilot and I was working with the Air Force test center and then the Tejas program.... You could say that Bengaluru's cosmopolitan culture had instilled in me a fondness for English literature." Air Marshal Rajkumar himself was first commissioned in 1962, starting his training at the then Air Force Flying College at Jodhpur on the HAL HT-2. He was selected for the fighter stream of pilots – with the first operational jet he flew being the 'Toofani' – the Indian name of the French fighter-bomber, 'Dassault Ouragan'. He was then posted to the airbase in Adampur, and remained there up to the outbreak of the war against Pakistan in 1965. At the time, he was flying the Mystere, a French jet that the IAF used mainly for attacks against ground targets.

Air Marshal Rajkumar recalled, "The Mysteres were all ground attack aircraft. During the 65 war, our main job was to support the army.... most of our work was in the Lahore sector. War broke out on the 1st of September when Pakistan attacked in the Chamb sector in Jammu. And the Indian Air Force was pressed into action because we were very hard-pressed at that time. For six days, the action was

limited to the Air Force units in Pathankot. And then, when the pressure became intolerable, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri ordered the Indian Army to attack across the international border on the 6th of September." Folland Gnat, which became nicknamed the 'Sabre Slayer'. The locally licence-made Folland Gnat, which became nicknamed the 'Sabre Slayer', on display in Finland. (Express photo/Special Arrangement) After several bases, including the one at Adampur, were raided by the Pakistan Air Force, a retaliatory attack was launched by the IAF against the airfields in Sargodha. This would be Rajkumar's first combat operation.

Recalling the day, he said, "As Field Marshal Manekshaw so famously said, 'If a man says he is not afraid to die, he is either a liar or a GURKHA. So, since I am neither a liar nor a GURKHA, I was scared. Of course, there is a lot of tension when you are going into operation. But the funny thing is, once you get into the cockpit, you get too involved in doing the mission, flying the aircraft, and so on – you put your fear away and concentrate on the mission.' The Sabre posed a major danger to Indian pilots at the time, having earned its reputation against Soviet jets during the Korean War, with a good turning rate and six machine guns. To make matters worse, around 20 of the approximately 100 Pakistani Sabres were armed with the newly invented Sidewinder guided missiles. A few Pakistani Starfighter jets also had these missiles. Explaining how this complicated the war, the Marshal said, "We had just received a small number of MiG-21s, which was about six or eight aircraft, and those were equipped with the first-generation K-13 Russian missile, which was actually a Russian copy of the Sidewinder. It was a very small number.... the problem is when you encounter a Sabre in the sky you don't know whether it is carrying a missile or not.... So you have to assume that every Sabre you see has the missile and therefore you have to plan your tactics accordingly."

An unlikely protagonist emerged against the Sabre from the Indian side – the locally licence-made Folland Gnat, which became nicknamed the 'Sabre Slayer'. According to the Air Marshal, the small, manoeuvrable jet had a high thrust-to-weight ratio, very good turning performance, and a very high rate of climb, making it a match for the Sabre in dogfights. Ironically, Air Marshal Rajkumar never got to fly the Gnat during the 1965 war, but only in later years as a test pilot. By this time, he had already gotten to fly the MiG 21 (at that time one of the top jets in the world) and thus was not as impressed as his colleagues who got to fly the Gnat in the pre-MiG years. Going forward, Air Marshal Rajkumar is contemplating writing a book on how Bengaluru, often thought of as a sleepy "pensioner's paradise", became India's aerospace capital.

## AAP looks towards its MLAs, MPs as Punjab goes to polls in 2027

As the Aam Aadmi Party declared donations of Rs 12.09 crore in 2025-26 show a 68 per cent decrease from Rs 38.10 crore in 2024-25, the AAP is looking towards its own MLAs and MPs to contribute to its coffers and make arrangements for funds as the 2027 Punjab Assembly election draws closer. Several AAP MLAs and MPs have been contributing Rs 10,000 per month from their salaries since 2017, when the party began expanding in Punjab, The Indian Express has learnt.

"In 2017, an arrangement was made to keep the party office running, and we have been paying since then. Of late, the party sent out messages that it would need funds. We do not know what the arrangement is now. How much can MLAs and MPs pay from their salaries, as many of them are already paying," said a party leader privy to the development. AAP has also lost one of its biggest contributors from Punjab in Rajinder Gupta, the former AAP Rajya Sabha MP, who joined the BJP in April. According to the Election Commission's party's contribution report: for 2025-26, Trident Ltd, founded by Gupta, contributed Rs 5 crore to AAP. The cheque was dated January 9, 2026, when Gupta was still with AAP. He was elected to the Rajya Sabha on an AAP ticket in October 2025. Trident's contribution alone accounted for more than 41 per cent of the AAP's total declared contributions for the year. Another AAP leader said the party would need money to contest the Assembly elections the next year. "The sources are drying up. Our money bag MP was poached. Now, we do not have anyone." The AAP donors' list shows party leaders' contributions. Punjab AAP president Aman Arora contrib-



uted Rs 1.20 lakh in 12 instalments of Rs 10,000 each in 2025-26. AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal made three contributions of Rs 10,000 each, while former Delhi chief minister Atishi contributed Rs 42,000 in 12 instalments of Rs 3,500 each.

The previous year's donors' data also has entries under the name Gurmeet Singh, with multiple contributions of Rs 10,000. These entries have been associated with Sangrur MP Gurmeet Singh Meht Hayer. The sharp fall in contributions came after a year when the party recorded a substantial rise in contributions. Its disclosed contributions increased from Rs 11.06 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 38.10 crore in 2024-25, before dropping to Rs 12.10 crore in 2025-26. In 2024-25, Prudent Electoral Trust was the biggest donor with a Rs 16.40 crore contribution. AAP state president Aman Arora and Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema were not available for comment despite repeated attempts.

## ICG, Gujarat ATS seize 526 kg drugs worth Rs 3,000 crore



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

Ahmedabad: The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and Gujarat's Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) have busted a major maritime narcotics smuggling attempt in the Arabian Sea, seizing 526 kilograms of high-grade contraband valued at over Rs 3,000 crore in international markets, officials have said. "In a swift and decisive maritime interdiction striking at the heart of transnational narco-terrorism networks, Bharatiya Tatrakshak, operating in seamless tactical synergy with the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), Gujarat, successfully neutralised a major maritime narcotics smuggling attempt in the Arabian Sea, west of Lakshadweep," the Indian Coast Guard said in a statement. Executing precise sea-air surveillance based on actionable intelligence, the Indian Coast Guard assets maintained "unyielding tracking before initiating hot pursuit, neutralising the target, and boarding a suspicious Iranian dhow" on September 25. "The high-seas operation resulted in the seizure of approximately 526 kilograms of high-grade contraband, comprising heroin and methamphetamine, valued at over Rs 3,000 crore in international markets, alongside the swift apprehension of five Pakistani nationals operating the vessel," officials said. The

ICG said that the intercepted dhow, crew, and seized contraband have been escorted under armed escort to Mumbai for joint interrogation and comprehensive multi-agency legal proceedings. "This operational success exemplifies Bharatiya Tatrakshak's unyielding maritime dominance, robust surveillance grid, and resolute commitment to maintaining zero tolerance against illicit activities within India's sovereign waters and extended maritime zones," the ICG said. By crippling the financial engine of hostile foreign syndicates and intercepting toxic synthetic substances before they reach mainland shores, this mission serves as a critical force multiplier to the Union Government's national vision of a Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan. Bharatiya Tatrakshak remains fully postured to defend the nation's sea borders, shield the country's youth from the scourge of drugs, and uphold absolute security across the maritime domain," it added.

## Woman allegedly beaten to death by husband in Ameerpet hotel

Hyderabad: A 34-year-old woman was allegedly beaten to death with a curtain rod by her husband inside a hotel room in Ameerpet on Monday night.

The victim, B Shireesha, from Nagasamudram village in Dharur mandal of Vikarabad district, was running an SBI Customer Service Point. She had divorced her husband in 2016 and later developed a relationship with A Srinivas (38) of Ogalapur in Peddemul mandal. Though their families opposed the relationship, the couple reportedly married at a temple. The couple checked into Gokul Pride Hotel on Dharam Karam Road on September 24 using the names 'Ganesh' and 'Durga'.

## Jaishankar meets UN chief Guterres, discusses ongoing conflicts



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

United Nations: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has met UN chief Antonio Guterres, and both the leaders discussed ongoing conflicts, including the situation in West Asia, and their impact on Global South countries. Jaishankar met Secretary-General Guterres at the UN headquarters on Tuesday as he wrapped up his engagements at the high-level UN General Assembly week. "Glad to meet @UN Secretary General

@antonioguterres today. Our discussions focused on ongoing conflicts and the need to mitigate their impact, especially on the Global South," Jaishankar said in a post on X. A readout of the meeting issued by the office of the Secretary-General said Guterres and Jaishankar discussed "multilateralism, India-UN cooperation, and geopolitical developments, including the war in Ukraine and the situation in the Middle East." The Secretary-General expressed appreciation for India's cooperation with the UN, it said. Delivering India's national statement at the General Debate Saturday, Jaishankar had voiced appreciation for Guterres's service as head of the world organisation as his tenure as the world's top diplomat comes to an end in December. "After a decade of service and dedication to the cause of multilateralism, we will soon bid farewell to Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. India deeply values his many contributions, in particular, his personal support for Mission LiFE," he had said. This was the final high-level UNGA week for Guterres, whose second five-year tenure as head of the United Nations ends in December 2026. He had visited India for the BRICS Leaders' Summit earlier this month. During a conversation at Asia Society, Jaishankar said he held meetings with about 85-90 counterparts through a "really very frantic week."

## Gold coins to mujra parties: CBI's allegations against Haryana IAS officers

Gold coins allegedly delivered to an IAS officer's bungalow. Hotel bills and parties allegedly paid for by a banker. Mujra performances where cash was allegedly showered on dancers. These are among the details that form part of the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) chargesheet in the Rs 504-crore IDFC First Bank fraud case, which allegedly involved the illegal diversion of government funds and a trail of favours for senior Haryana bureaucrats. According to the central agency, public servants, in connivance with officials of IDFC First Bank and AU Small Finance Bank, illegally diverted funds of eight Haryana government departments and public bodies from empanelled banks into selected branches of the two banks.

The CBI chargesheet filed on September 2 cites call records, WhatsApp chats, witness statements, and recovered conversations to map out alleged gratification networks involving senior IAS officers Vineet Garg, Mohammed Shayin and Pankaj Agarwal. The allegations range from two 50-gram gold coins allegedly delivered to Garg, to hotel bills allegedly settled for Shayin, and lavish mujra parties allegedly organised for Agarwal. The chargesheet also names Dr Saket Kumar, accusing him of influencing another senior officer in connection with the opening of government accounts with private banks. While Agarwal was arrested and suspended in June, Garg, Shayin and Kumar have not been arrested yet. Garg, Shayin, and Kumar did not respond to text messages or phone calls seeking their comments.

Gold coins delivered to a government bungalow. The CBI has charged Garg with allegedly accepting illegal gratification in the form of two 50-gram gold coins delivered to his residence through a man at the behest of Ribhav Rishi, a former branch manager of IDFC First Bank described as the "principal architect and mastermind of the fraud." According to the CBI, Amritpal, who allegedly worked as a carrier for Rishi, stated that about four or five days before Diwali in 2025, Rishi directed him to collect two gold coins of 50 grams each from Sawan Jewellers in Chandigarh's Sector-35, and deliver them to a government bungalow in Sector-7A, Chandigarh.

Accordingly, Amritpal said he travelled from his office to Sawan Jewellers, collected a packet with the gold coins from Arun Kumar, an employee, and proceeded to the bungalow. According to the CBI, Amritpal reached the bungalow at about 7-7.30 pm and called Rishi, who allegedly instructed him to come inside. Two to three police control room vehicles were allegedly parked nearby, with a security guard at the entrance. On Rishi's instructions, security personnel allowed Amritpal to enter the premises. As Rishi allegedly verified the contents of the packet, a thin person matching Garg's description walked out into the garden area, as per the chargesheet. Rishi and Amritpal allegedly greeted the person. "Ribhav Rishi handed over the contents of the packet to Vineet Garg," the CBI chargesheet states. Rishi allegedly gestured to Amritpal to leave, upon which he left. A technical analysis of the call detail records of Amritpal, Rishi, Garg, and accused Manish Jindal around 7 pm on October 16, 2025, corroborated their presence and movements, the CBI said. Paid hotel bills running into thousands. The CBI alleged that Shayin, the then MD of Haryana Power Generation Corporation Limited, obtained and accepted undue advantage from Rishi while serving as a public servant. A bill dated November 3, 2025, from Koyo Koyo Restaurant, located within Hyatt Centric in Chandigarh's Sector-17, records the guest name as Shayin and his mobile number, with a total amount of Rs 35,629 paid in cash. The CBI investigation claimed that the people accompanying Shayin were seated in the restaurant's outdoor area and that Rishi made the payment. According to the CBI, an assistant food and beverages manager at the hotel provided details of a party held at Corby's Restaurant on January 10, 2025, related to Shayin and his wife. The total expenditure was Rs 58,399, comprising a food bill of Rs 35,444 and a liquor bill of Rs 22,955, both paid in cash.

The assistant manager informed the CBI that after the party, Shayin was told that "everything was taken care of by Mr Ribhav Rishi". The party is further corroborated by a WhatsApp exchange in which the general manager of Hyatt Centric asked Shayin about the party, to which he replied that everything was good, the CBI said. Another hotel bill dated May 8, 2025, for Table No. 42, was issued in Shayin's name for Rs 73,073. The bill was initially paid in cash, and the investigation claimed that the corresponding cash was received from Rishi about seven to eight days later. Thus, the expenditure was incurred in Shayin's name and paid for by Rishi, the CBI said. IAS officer 'influenced' colleague to open private bank accounts. The CBI has accused Saket of "conspiring with the bankers and others to dishonestly misappropriate funds" of the Development and Panchayat Department under the Mukhya Mantri Gramin Awaz Yojana 2.0. The CBI has further alleged that he "influenced" another senior IAS officer, D K Behera, to open accounts with two private banks.

According to the CBI, Behera has categorically stated that "he was competent to open the account in the suitable bank, however, since Dr Saket Kumar has asked that the account should be opened with Axis Bank (for land compensation fund) and IDFC First Bank and AU Small Finance Bank (for infrastructure development fund), the file was processed accordingly, and he had sent the file to Kumar to take approval. The final authority had informed his wish so he did not have any further scope to change". The allegation



is that the matter was brought to Saket by Naresh Kumar, Superintendent in the RTI Wing, who had no official connection with the Mukhya Mantri Gramin Awaz Yojana scheme and was allegedly acting on behalf of Rishi. "The matter did not reach [Saket] Kumar through the (panchayat department) Directorate or through any official reference in the ordinary course," says the CBI. The CBI further alleges that Saket then personally called Behera and influenced him to open accounts with the two private banks. This was allegedly corroborated by Superintendent Manoj Kaushal, who said officials of both banks stated that they had come "through the reference of Saket Kumar" to collect the account-opening documents.

A recovered voice conversation between Naresh and Rishi records instructions attributed to "Saket Sir", including "raitana felne do, isko niptao, ye raita faila dega". The investigators interpreted these remarks as instructions to contain and suppress the fraud rather than report it. The investigation also allegedly found that Saket was a member of the 'Sukoon Group' WhatsApp chat along with officials of IDFC First Bank, "establishing his proximity with the accused bank officials". Mujra parties, lakhs showered in cash. The CBI investigation alleges that Agarwal, acting with bank officials including Rishi and Randhir Singh, facilitated the opening of the account and transfer of funds in violation of finance department guidelines. In return, Rishi and his associates allegedly provided him illegal gratification in the form of mujra or dance parties, liquor, luxury hotel stays and related expenses, which were allegedly borne almost entirely in cash by Rishi. The gratification allegedly extended to Agarwal is reflected in four instances during the period of the banking conspiracy, which included four dance parties organised and financed by Rishi at Jade Manor, Zirakpur, allegedly on Agarwal's demand. Agarwal allegedly attended the events.

At these parties, seven to eight women dancers were allegedly arranged from Delhi through Rishi's friend, while some other female artists were arranged by Varun. On each occasion, Rs 15 to Rs 20 lakh in cash, in denominations of Rs 20, Rs 50 and Rs 100, was allegedly showered on the dancers. According to the CBI, the expenditure of these parties, including dancers, artists, catering and liquor, was allegedly borne by Rishi, with payments made almost entirely in cash. Catering was allegedly provided by Manish Saini, manager, Foodlink F&B Limited, while liquor and cash were delivered by Rishi's employees.

Sydney: Is there life elsewhere, or is Earth unique in the universe? This is one of humanity's great unanswered questions. One way to approach this mystery is to investigate how life began here on Earth. Our research explores the conditions where a mixture of molecules somehow transformed from chemistry into biology. In a new study published in Scientific Reports, we shed new light on one possible step in this process: how a fragile sugar from outer space may have helped create the conditions for its own survival on Earth, where it eventually became the backbone of one of life's most important molecules.

Scientists think life arose from a complex mixture of water, minerals and carbon-containing molecules: the proverbial primordial soup. These mixtures may have been in oceans, lakes or hot springs. They would have been shaped by changing temperatures, flowing water, mineral surfaces and evaporation, creating conditions in which increasingly complex chemistry could develop. Researchers try to recreate these processes in laboratories, often using purified chemicals and carefully controlled mixtures. This situation helps isolate individual reactions and remove variables, but it can leave out important interactions in nature's "messy" chemistry. One molecule studied in these experiments is RNA. RNA plays a vital role in storing and using genetic information in modern organisms, and is thought to have been important in the origin and early evolution of life. However, RNA doesn't form easily. Its molecular backbone contains a fragile sugar called ribose. When heated, ribose can break down into brown goop, much as table sugar turns into caramel. One thing that can protect ribose molecules is the element boron. In the form of borate (a mol-

## 'Ketan Agarwal case watertight; technical, witness evidence establish chain': Pune Rural SP Sandeep Singh Gill



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

Pune Rural Superintendent of Police Sandeep Singh Gill, a 2016-batch IPS officer, discusses a wide range of subjects on policing challenges of a rapidly changing rural landscape, in this Town Hall with The Indian Express, Pune team. Gill, who taught English literature as a professor before joining the civil services, speaks about the Ketan Agarwal murder probe, the evidence that led police to suspect foul play, and broader crime trends in Pune Rural. He also discusses children's safety, the drug menace, threats faced by industrial clusters and the changing nature of crime. Here are excerpts. Not at all. Not that kind of pressure. But in such cases the real pressure is collecting the evidence to prove our case. When this case was detected, there was a lot of media coverage. So there is pressure to get everything right in the probe to take the case to a logical conclusion. But police machinery handles such cases and is trained for it. So you can not let these pressures affect the outcome.

Sunanda Mehta: This was one such rare case in which the family did not initially suspect anything, but the police did. Can you take us through how you came to detect the foul play?

It was as if two lines of thought were running parallel. Ketan's family had not simply accepted everything initially; there were events lined up, with the wedding due in a few months. At our end, we get the Daily Crime Report (DCR) at 6 am, listing all registered cases and accidental deaths. The June 19 DCR said someone had fallen from a fort wall while taking a photo. I felt sorry for him and his family, but there were few details, and such incidents had happened before. On June 20, during a police station visit, we discussed asking the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for more fencing and signage. We learnt the deceased was with his fiancée and they planned a pre-wedding shoot in Bali; his passport had gone missing while travelling from Pune to Mumbai. That was the first thing that stood out. They had missed their Bali flight on June 6. Within 12 days, he died. We considered the possibility of a third person being present at the fort and I instructed the police station in-charge to check the CCTV camera at the ASI ticket counter. The footage showed a third person who had followed Siya and Ketan. We detected suspected sign-language communication between Siya and this person. He was wearing a winter hoodie on a warm day, with headphones over the hoodie. This prompted us to probe further. By then, Ketan's family had also discussed their doubts and submitted an application to us. We began a technical probe, checking Call Detail Records, Internet Protocol Detail Records and other CCTVs. We could have simply asked the girl about the third person, but that would have alerted him and he could have destroyed the evidence. We then identified Chetan.

Sushant Kulkarni: The defence has argued that your case suffers from tunnel vision — that you did not look beyond the initial suspects. How do you counter that? We looked at and checked all other possibilities, including others who had visited the location and whether there were other links. But there was a deep conspiracy. A fake Instagram account was created solely to convince Ketan to come to the fort. They went on May 31; Ketan was asked again on June 4 but did not go. Then the Bali trip was sabotaged, followed by another visit on June 14, when an attempt was made. Finally, to convince Ketan to go on June 18, Siya's female friend's fake Instagram account was used. After that, the conspiracy was crystal clear.

Manoj More: When you questioned Siya for the first time, how was her demeanor, what was her reaction?

I feel they were prepared mentally. They had watched podcasts, movies, read some literature — on how not to be manipulated when being questioned by police. They had watched movies on murder. When you question a suspect for a few hours and then they go back to custody and have time to reflect. Survival instinct kicks in.

Anuradha Mascarenhas: In your probe, did you come across anything to suggest that Ketan had suspicions about the girl?

If you watch videos of their engagement, there is nothing

to suggest they had differences. If the intention is to eliminate someone, the perpetrator would ensure there is nothing suspicious. One would create an atmosphere of warmth, so that people on the other side overlook any suspicious acts. Accused had prepared for a couple of months, they had done research.

Sushant Kulkarni: There has been some discussion around the case that generalises the actions of the accused to a larger Gen Z population. Do you think that is fair?

You are right. It would not be fair to generalise the actions of a few individuals to an entire generation. These actions do have a complex socio-psychological backdrop. But we also have to be mindful about the heavy flow of information on our digital devices. There is the drawback of disorganised information and a lot of information is delivered to you out of context. Small bits of information that reach you online, like in reels, can make you miss the larger socio-cultural canvas.

Soham Shah: As part of the strategy, do the police try to turn them on each other?

That does not always work. The bigger challenge in interrogation is to engage the accused and read their behavior. Sunanda Mehta: As far as crime profile of Pune Rural is concerned, the cases of land encroachment or land related disputes remain a key concern?

Yes. Land related issues and crimes continue to be a challenge. It is predominant in belts where urbanisation and industrialisation is happening. And the land prices have skyrocketed. Very complex cases come up. Land records are updated, there are many gray areas.

Manoj More: How do you deal with Koyta Gangs, the gangs wielding machetes?

There is no particular gang named as Koyta Gang. But yes, in rural areas, property offences are higher. In many of these offences, local gangs or smaller groups of criminals use sharp edged weapons. In many cases these weapons are available for agriculture or domestic use. These weapons have been used in crimes of personal nature too. At the same time, use of illegal firearms is also on the rise. We are taking multipronged measures to curb these.

Anuradha Mascarenhas: Is the use of narcotic substances on the rise in rural areas?

Yes. Use of drugs remains a growing concern in rural areas. There are particular pockets which suffer the most and the rise has been concerning. In Pune Rural, this year, we have registered 10 cases of Mephedrone and other drugs in Shirur taluka alone. We also continuously engage with youth on awareness about drugs.

Sushant Kulkarni: The industries continue to be targeted by local gangs, antisocial elements for extortion. We have five industrial clusters of MIDC in Pune rural. This is a developmental issue. When capital flows in, people with feudal mindset and vested interests create obstacles. We have held meetings with the industry representatives. They shared various issues which included threats and extortion calls. We have told the industry that immediately after receiving such calls they should file a complaint. We have registered several and made arrests. Sometimes the industries delay filing cases. Sometimes they call their legal teams and the legal teams don't respond for long. We have also asked companies to take the local population into confidence and engage with them.

Sushant Kulkarni: There have been two cases of rape and murder of minor girls. Tell us about broader steps needed for the protection of children.

We have started a campaign named Saksham Surakshit Sankalp. There are government departments with a mandate to spread awareness about women and children. There are village level committees for this, there are Police Patils. We had been teaching the 'Good touch-Bad touch' concept where the focus was on the sensitisation of the vulnerable. But there is also a need to spread awareness about the rights of children. It is the collective responsibility of every family, every neighbourhood, community and village to spread awareness about rights and be vigilant.

Sunanda Mehta: What is the police doing to make sure that prosecution of the Ketan Agarwal case is water-tight?

We filed a 5000 page chargesheet on September 19, which was the 89th day since the arrest was made. A total of three people have been arrested in the case for murder and conspiracy for the murder. It is a strong and water-tight case. Chargesheet lays out the conspiracy clearly and with evidence. For example, why was there a fake Instagram account? This is not just one strong example of conspiracy but also an offence under IT Act. We have both circumstantial and direct evidence.

## How sugar from outer space became one of the backbones of life on Earth

ecule containing boron, oxygen and hydrogen), it binds to ribose and helps prevent it breaking down. Experiments investigating this effect often use simple combinations of purified ingredients. We and our colleagues have been trying to make these experiments more realistic, based on what we know about ancient rocks, minerals and fossils.

We also study modern environments we think may resemble the places where life began. One of these is a field of hot springs at Puga in India, high in the Himalayas. The waters at Puga contain so much boron that borate salt crusts crunch underfoot like snow. Even so, these waters contain only a few percent of the boron concentration used in some laboratory experiments based on purified ingredients. That's because minerals containing boron often dissolve poorly in water. Instead, they precipitate to form crystals — like the borate salt crusts at Puga — leaving less boron and other elements in the water for the chemical reactions thought to be involved in the origins of life. So could high concentrations of dissolved boron really have existed in those ancient environments? In a new study using real minerals, including borate crusts from Puga, we show that ribose itself may help explain how high concentrations of boron could have existed in fluids on Earth before life began. We found that ribose helps borate minerals dissolve and inhibits the formation of solid grains. This means more boron stays dissolved in the water and available for chemical reactions. This new research suggests a two-way relationship. Borate protects ribose from breakdown, while ribose helps keep borate dissolved and available. Four billion years ago, when life is thought to have first formed, Earth would have looked very different from today. There would have been little oxygen in the atmosphere and far more active volcanism, cre-

ating sparse volcanic landscapes and green, iron-rich oceans. A heavy rain of meteorites from the young Solar System would have bombarded the land. These meteorites would have delivered molecules to Earth from space, including water and carbon compounds. Researchers estimate around a million tonnes of carbon could have arrived each year during this early bombardment. The Murchison meteorite, which fell in Victoria in 1969, hints at what it may have looked like. Locals collecting fragments reported a strong kerosene-like smell from carbon-containing compounds within the meteorite. Scientists have since identified ribose among its contents, alongside other sugars. In the absence of microbes, carbon-containing molecules could accumulate wherever supply outpaced chemical breakdown. For example, evaporation in shallow lakes and pools could concentrate organic molecules from space into rich chemical soups. Much origin-of-life research examines how minerals helped the chemistry of these soups become more complex. Our study highlights how the soup in turn affected the minerals of early Earth. Some boron that would otherwise have formed mineral crusts and been buried, could instead have remained dissolved in primordial lakes and other waters. This could have changed the types of minerals formed at Earth's surface. Ribose itself was probably relatively rare. But other molecules, including ethylene glycol and glycerol, also bind borate. Their effects on natural mineral deposits need testing, while known interactions between sugars and other minerals suggest broader possibilities. More abundant elements in Earth's rocks, including silica and calcium, also interact with carbon molecules. This suggests carbon-containing primordial soups could have influenced how other minerals and rocks formed.

## ‘She fought for those who couldn’t’: Jailed DU student’s family waits for reunion



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

Before Akriti’s 25th birthday, her father, Arun Chaudhary, sat at their home in West Bengal’s Durgapur and wrote her a letter. “My dear daughter Soni, Happy birthday,” he wrote. “But this time, your birthday is very difficult for us. Everyone is at home, but our greatest joy, our Soni, is not with us. Today, I can’t even hug you and say Happy Birthday. There’s probably no greater pain for motu papa,” Chaudhary wrote. July 18 was her birthday. It also marked 99 days in police custody. Her friends read the letter aloud when they visited her in jail that day.

Akriti was arrested in connection with the Noida workers’ protest in April this year. She was named in 11 FIRs and the National Security Act (NSA) was invoked against her a month later. On Wednesday, the Allahabad High Court quashed her detention, describing the invocation of the stringent NSA as “arbitrary and vague”. While Akriti has been granted bail in five FIRs, six bail pleas are yet to be heard in the High Court. Chaudhary said that he trusted the judiciary. “I know how my daughter was shaping out to be. I might have not said this to her, but when I visited her in Delhi in February, she took me to a basti where she used to teach poor children. I felt extremely proud that my daughter has grown into someone very different from the society... but I had told her to be cautious” he said. A history graduate from Delhi University who recently enrolled in law, Akriti, her father said, felt strongly about others. “I used to send her Rs 14,000 a month. How is it possible to survive on this amount in Delhi? But she would say no to even an extra rupee. She used to take tuition classes to earn a little,” Chaudhary said. College senior and friend, Naureen Sabba, 26, said Akriti is an artist who used art to teach difficult subjects. “She used to do theatre and even produce and direct nukkad natak (street plays). On March 23, observed as Shaheed Diwas, she directed a play in Shahbad Dairy,” she told The Indian Express.

Sabba said the locality where she lives has many children of domestic workers who cannot afford CUET classes. “Akriti teaches them,” she said. She said she last met Akriti before leaving for her hometown on March 30. She remembered that day with a laugh. “Akriti had cooked mutton that day, though she is not a good chef. I still remember what she said: ‘Aap jaa rahe ho, aapko rescue karne toh nahi aana padega agar aapke mummy papa na aane de wapas Delhi (You’re going, will we have to come to rescue you in case your parents don’t allow you to come back to Delhi?)’.” Phone notification, some relief On Wednesday, Chaudhary, who had been in Allahabad tracking the case, had to leave for Durgapur due to a death in the family. His wife, and his son who lives in Chennai, were waiting anxiously as a hearing was scheduled. Around noon, his phone buzzed. It was a notification from their lawyer, Manik Gupta: “NSA has been revoked, penalty of Rs 5 lakh ordered.” The order has brought them some relief.

“Akriti’s mother has been very happy since yesterday. She used to say whenever I left for Noida, kisi tarah beti ko wapas leke aao (bring our daughter back somehow),” he said. Chaudhary said Akriti never showed she was stressed during their calls. “Everyone fights for themselves, but she fought for the ones who couldn’t fight for themselves, the poor, the hungry,” he added. The family wanted her to prepare for the Union Public Service Commission Examination in Delhi so she would not have to face financial struggles, “But she chose this life and we accepted it,” Chaudhary said. On Wednesday, her friends reached Kasna Jail, where Akriti is lodged, around 1 pm. They had brought sketchbooks and were waiting to see her face when she was told about the High Court ruling. They had been tracking the developments on their way.

Suraj, 27, who first met Akriti during the DU Students’ Union election campaign in 2023, said, “We first met other friends in jail. We told Aditya about the NSA being quashed. He was happy... then, when Akriti stood behind the mesh, he told her. She was very happy, and asked when Satyam’s hearing was due.” “She has not stopped doing what she used to do outside. Inside, she reads books and discusses them with women inmates who cannot read. She did not ever break down,” Suraj added. Aditya Anand, an NIT Jamshedpur graduate, and Satyam Verma, a former journalist from Lucknow, were also arrested in the case. The NSA was slapped against Satyam as well. Back in Durgapur, Akriti’s family said that once she is out, they will make her stay with them for at least 15 days. “We will take good care of her and hold her tight,” said her father. “No parent should stand outside the court and jail under the sun, waiting for a mere glance of their child through a mesh.”

## Anti-corruption panel searches former Kolkata mayor Firhad Hakim’s 2 firms



GNS News Agency, Oct 4

West Bengal’s Anti-Institutional Corruption Commission and police searched two private companies owned by former minister and former Kolkata mayor Firhad Hakim in New Alipore. Officials said the operation was part of an investigation into whether the assets of these companies—Hakim Polymaker Private Limited and Hakim Chemicals—were acquired through corruption and if institutional corruption was involved.

Firhad Hakim, popularly known as Bobby in political circles, is listed as the owner of both entities on their websites. Neither Hakim nor any of his family members were present during the searches at the offices in the Tollygunge Circular Road area. The Anti-Corruption Commission was established by the BJP government under

retired Justice Biswajit Basu to investigate allegations of institutional corruption that took place during Trinamool Congress rule. Although Hakim was re-elected on a Trinamool ticket from the Kolkata Port constituency in the recent Assembly elections, a political shift in the state led to his resignation as Kolkata mayor. He subsequently joined a rebel faction within the Trinamool Congress alongside leaders such as Ritabrata Banerjee.

Pointing to controversies from his tenures as the urban development minister and the Kolkata mayor, Hakim’s political rivals have questioned the “delay” in government action against him at a time many TMC leaders are facing various investigations. “There were a lot of allegations against Hakim as former mayor. Then he joined the ‘so-called Trinamool’. Since then, no action has been taken against him. They have arrested Trinamool members wherever they were located. Why wasn’t Firhad Hakim arrested? When he was the urban development Minister, I showed in the Assembly that Firhad Hakim had signed off on the plan approval for the collapsed house in Taratala. Yet no action was taken against him,” TMC veteran Saugata Roy said. Minister Agnimitra Paul also targeted Hakim over alleged lapses related to fire incidents and illegal constructions during his administrative tenures. “Amidst this mountain of allegations, minister Firhad Hakim, Mayor Firhad Hakim, was sitting at the helm during that time. So why shouldn’t you be held accountable? We have raised this exact question,” she said.

glish to be used in proceedings before the Supreme Court and High Courts. But Article 348(2) allows a State governor, with the President’s prior consent, to authorise the State’s official language in High Court proceedings.

Section 7 of the Official Languages Act, 1963, similarly allows the governor, again with prior presidential consent, to authorise an official language in addition to English for judgments, decrees and orders. An English translation must accompany a ruling delivered in the State language. Tamil Nadu’s Assembly unanimously passed a similar resolution on December 6, 2006, and forwarded it to the Union government. During the debate, lawmakers stressed that Tamil would supplement, rather than displace, English. The proposal did not advance. According to the present resolution, the Union law minister told the Rajya Sabha on February 22, 2018, that it had been referred to the Chief Justice of India and that the Supreme Court’s full court had declined it in a letter dated October 16, 2012. Vijay argued that rejection at one point could not close the question forever. Legal education, law books, dictionaries and translations of judgments in Tamil have expanded, he said, while digital courts, legal databases and technology-assisted translation have advanced. Artificial intelligence now makes it possible, he said, for speech in Tamil to be heard simultaneously in English. Vijay described Tamil as the world’s oldest language, still spoken vibrantly, with grammatical and literary riches spanning thousands of years and about nine crore speakers worldwide, including eight crore in India. The Union government recognised it as a classical language on October 12, 2004, based on its antiquity, continuous literary tradition, inscriptions and historical evidence. The resolution calls on the Union government to act immediately on a proposal forwarded by the governor under Article 348(2) and Section 7. Vijay asked members of every party to adopt it unanimously.

## A brawl, a bandh, and 2 FIRs: Why Karnataka court refused to stop police probe



Karnataka High Court Puttur photocopy shop The incident involved customers at a photocopy shop who were allegedly attacked by the owners for questioning damages to a birth certificate. (Image generated using AI) The Karnataka High Court has refused to halt investigations into police complaints filed over a dispute at a photocopy shop in the Dakshina Kannada district that escalated into a communal incident following the intervention of right-wing groups on August 21.

“Do productive work. What is wrong if harmony prevails? Nothing wrong. Living in harmony is the best way of living. Always. It generates peace,” a single judge bench of the Karnataka High Court observed. The incident involved customers at a photocopy shop who were allegedly attacked by the owners for questioning damages to a birth certificate. The brawl between the customers, a Muslim woman and her two siblings, and the Hindu shop owners escalated into a communal incident with groups like the Hindu Jagaran Vedike entering the fray. After the owners were arrested, the groups called a Puttur bandh on August 25 demanding the customers’ arrest.

The fight at the store The incident at Dream Destination Jana Seva Kendra, a photocopy store and travel agency in Puttur town, occurred on August 21 when homemaker Fathimath Miswan, 32, found that her child’s birth certificate, which she had given for lamination, had been returned damaged by the store staff. A verbal and physical fight ensued between Miswan and her brother, Mubaris, and the store owners, Anjana Pai and her son Sudarshan Pai, with Sudarshan allegedly assaulting Mubaris. The incident resulted in a complaint and a counter-complaint. The police

registered an attempt to murder case against the store owners, and booked the customers for intentional insult and criminal intimidation. Following the registration of the rival complaints, right-wing groups in Puttur demanded more serious action by the police against the customers. On August 23, the Puttur town police registered another FIR linked to the incident against Dinesh Panjiga, an activist of the Hindu Jagaran Vedike, for threatening on social media to stage protests for the arrest of the customers involved in the fight. Two of the cases reached the Karnataka High Court last week even as right-wing groups observed a Puttur bandh on August 25 and held protests on August 26 and August 31. While Anjana and Sudarshan questioned the invoking of the attempt to murder charge in the high court, Panjiga questioned the suo motu police FIR for his social media call for protests. What the two sides argued On September 1, state Special Public Prosecutor B N Jagadeesh argued in the high court that the incident “with regard to a document that was damaged in a Xerox shop... had nothing to do with any religion”. “The entire incident has been given a communal colour, and yesterday there was a protest and a bandh was called earlier. The FIR was registered after a preliminary inquiry was conducted and not prior to that,” he argued. The CCTV footage at the shop shows the incident, Jagadeesh said. “The accused has a prior history of assaults. He is not an innocent person. It has nothing to do with religion,” he added. The senior counsel for the store owners and the social media activist, Aruna Shyam, argued that police had not invoked the attempt to murder section against the customers but only invoked it in the complaint against the owners.

“The investigation is going one-sided,” Shyam argued while seeking the quashing of the attempt to murder charge against the store owners. On September 1, the Karnataka High Court refused to stop investigations in the cases over the store fight. “I deem it appropriate to allow investigations to go on in both cases,” Justice M Nagaprasanna said, disposing of the store owner’s challenge of the FIR. “The Xerox shop thing has created a lot of stir. It is not correct. Let there be an investigation in both cases,” the judge said. “When the matter was sub judice, why was a bandh called?” he observed. The high court, however, granted interim protection against arrest to Panjiga over the August 23 social media call for protests against Muslims over the incident.

## Ahmedabad blast death-row prisoner gets 7 days to move Supreme Court

Three convicts in the 2008 Ahmedabad serial blasts case—death-row prisoners Abbas Umar Sameja and Iqbal alias Ikrar Kasambhai Shaikh, and life convict Mohammad Safiq alias Dadabhai alias Thakur alias Rafiq alias Ali Ansari—have moved the Gujarat High Court for parole, with Sameja being granted seven days’ leave to prepare a Special Leave Petition before the Supreme Court on Wednesday. Justice Sanjeev J Thaker, in an order passed on September 2, allowed Sameja’s petition partly and directed that he be released for seven days with a police escort at the cost of the State. The court imposed conditions requiring him to furnish a personal bond of Rs 10,000, remain at a specified address in Bhuj—his son’s residence—during the entire period and surrender to the jail authorities immediately on expiry of the parole.



## From Faridkot to Vancouver, Canada’s celebrity Sikh cop recounts family’s journey



A Sikh policeman of Canada’s Vancouver Police Department, Sukhwinder Singh Sunger, also known as Suki, has become an internet sensation after participating in the Edinburgh Military Tattoo 2026 festival in Scotland in late August as a drum major. He tells The Indian Express that he hopes his fame helps immigrants integrate their culture with Canadian values.

Q: Where in Punjab does your family come from?

Sukhwinder Singh Sunger: On my dad’s side, there was immigration to Canada as early as 1914 through 1920. I have a passport-style photo of my grandfather, dated 1930 and taken in Vancouver. My grandmother would speak about Faridkot and Raunta village, so my understanding is that is where she was from. My mother’s family was from New Delhi. My dad was born and grew up in Mission, British Columbia, and later moved to Abbotsford, BC (both are about 45 minutes east of Vancouver). My dad’s family owned a raspberry farm. My mother immigrated in 1976, and my parents relocated to Victoria, British Columbia, after my older sister and I were born.

Q: Tell us about your childhood, education, and what made you join the Vancouver Police Department (VPD).

Sukhwinder Singh Sunger: I grew up in Victoria with my older and younger sister. It was during high school that I knew I wanted to pursue a career in policing. I attended college and studied criminal justice. After graduating, I began applying to various police departments throughout British Columbia and was hired by the Vancouver Police Department. I’ve had mainly operational assignments as a police officer working in patrol and a couple of investigative ones, including the General Investigation Unit and Major Crime Section. In 2012, I applied for and was successful in a transfer to the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan, Africa. I was deployed overseas with the UN from January 2012 to January 2013. I’m currently in the Traffic Enforcement Unit and ride a motorcycle as part of my duties.

Q: What made you join the pipes and drums ensemble in VPD?

Sukhwinder Singh Sunger: I was approached by the VPD Pipe Band leadership during a post-Remembrance

Day service in Vancouver on November 11, 2016. They simply asked if I had any experience with drumming and if I would like to join the VPD Pipe Band. I said that I had played the snare drum in elementary and high school and had taken private lessons on the dhol as a hobby. Further to that, as soon as they asked me, my mind was made up. This wasn’t about me; I was well aware that the band had never had a member who was a visible minority/person of colour and it would be an enormous opportunity for our community. The ability to see someone from their own background participating in a highly visible role.

Q: Did you have any formal training in music earlier?

Sukhwinder Singh Sunger: The band provided me with private tenor drumming lessons for a year, and I made my debut with the Pipe Band in December 2017. In 2025 our drum major retired, and a few of us put our names forward to fill the vacancy. In December 2025 I was elected by my peers in the band to a three-year term as drum major. My research suggests I am the 11th drum major in the VPD Pipe Band since its inception in 1914.

Q: What was the response you got in Edinburgh?

Sukhwinder Singh Sunger: Scottish residents and visitors were very happy and almost overcome to see a sardar in full highland dress. I could not walk anywhere without being asked to take photos or simply be told how much they loved my uniform and appearance. Normally I would find it difficult to stop as often as I had to, but the amount of joy and happiness people expressed when I stopped to chat or take a photo made it easy. I would smile at people and ask, “Do I have a choice?” They would tell me I didn’t. Many would tell me stories of a Sikh neighbour or friend and how generous and kind they were. Some would share stories of their family member serving in the military with Sikhs.

Q: How has the internet fame helped you, VPD, and Canada in diversity efforts?

Sukhwinder Singh Sunger: I’m a very private individual, so I don’t participate in social media. I can’t speak to any efforts in terms of diversity and am an ardent supporter of merit-based decision-making and selection.

Q: Given the rising hate for immigrants, how do you think the Edinburgh fame helps immigrants in Canada?

Sukhwinder Singh Sunger: I don’t know if short-lived internet fame has any bearing or influence on immigrants in Canada. Perhaps it may give immigrants motivation to, of course, bring their culture and beliefs but also make an effort to know the culture and societal norms of Canada and integrate them into their daily lives.

Q: What is the way ahead for you personally?

Sukhwinder Singh Sunger: I will continue my participation with the VPD Pipe Band and my regular duties as a Traffic Enforcement Officer. Like any skill, I will need to continue to practise my drill and study the music we play as a pipe band to ensure we are always performing at the highest level.

## ‘Tamil be given its entitled constitutional opportunity’: Vijay revives State’s bid to use it in High Court

Tamil in Madras High Court The resolution seeks procedures allowing petitions, documents and arguments to be submitted in Tamil; a system for judgments, decrees and court orders to be issued officially in Tamil; and training in legal Tamil and translation for judges, advocates and court employees. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay moved a government resolution in the Legislative Assembly on Thursday urging the Union government and the President to clear the use of Tamil as the primary language of the Madras High Court, alongside English. The move revives a demand the House endorsed 20 years ago. The resolution seeks procedures allowing petitions, documents and arguments to be submitted in Tamil; a system for judgments, decrees and court orders to be issued officially in Tamil; and training in legal Tamil and translation for judges, advocates and court employees. “This is not a demand to remove English,” Vijay told the Assembly. “It is a demand that Tamil be given the constitutional opportunity to which it is entitled.” The proposal turned a constitutional question into an argument about lived experience. A person may be physically present in a courtroom yet remain outside the meaning of what is unfolding if the words determining one’s life, land, family, employment, property or rights cannot be understood. “The language of justice being a language that the people can understand is a fundamental objective of democracy,” Vijay said. What the resolution says

Tamil is already the State’s official language under Section 2 of the Tamil Nadu Official Language Act, 1956. Sections 4-A and 4-B, introduced through amendments in 1976, legally permit evidence to be recorded and judgments, decrees and orders to be written in Tamil in civil and criminal courts subordinate to the High Court, as well as in tribunals, rent courts and revenue courts. The constitutional route for extending that use to the High Court is more complicated. Article 348(1) of the Constitution provides for En-

# Justice delayed yet again

## Maharashtra

Last week, a special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court acquitted all the seven accused, including BJP MP Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, in the 2008 Malegaon blasts case. Six people were killed and 95 injured in the bombing that had struck the Muslim-majority town in Maharashtra. The case, which was investigated by two different agencies, triggered accusations of 'safron terror'. All the accused were charged by the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) in 2008 of being 'Hindutva extremists'. The trial was controversial as Rohini Salian, the former special public prosecutor, had alleged in 2015 that the government had put pressure on her, through the NIA, to "go soft" on the accused. The case was initially probed by ATS chief Hemant Karkare, who was gunned down by terrorists during the November 26, 2008, terror attack on Mumbai. Eventually, it was handed over to the NIA.

While acquitting the seven accused, the court pointed out several lapses in the investigation and criticised the NIA for presenting 'inconclusive', 'unreliable', and 'legally inadmissible' evidence. It said that there were procedural lapses in the invocation of stringent laws such as the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. It added that the investigators had failed to link the motorcycle, allegedly used in the crime, to Ms. Thakur; that there were problems with witness statements; and that there was no proof that Lt Col Prasad Purohit (retired) or the right-wing outfit, Abhinav Bharat, was linked to the blast.

In the order, Special Judge A.K. Lahoti observed, "The testimony of prosecution witnesses is riddled with material inconsistencies and contradictions. Such discrepancies undermine the credibility of the prosecution's case and fall short of establishing the guilt of the accused beyond rea-

sonable doubt." While he said that terrorism has no religion, the Special Judge also added that a court cannot convict someone based on mere perception. Civil society members were critical of the verdict given the allegations that it was politically driven; and also since it came on the back of another verdict acquitting all the accused in another blast case. On July 21, the Bombay High Court acquitted all the 12 accused in the 2006 serial bomb blasts case. Seven explosions had ripped through Mumbai's local trains on the evening of July 11, 2006, killing 189 people and seriously injuring 824. The coordinated blasts had scarred the estimated 70 lakh people of Mumbai who use the local trains, often dubbed the city's lifeline, every day. Many victims feared taking the local train again. This case too was riddled with controversies. While the Maharashtra ATS, which had conducted the probe from the beginning, claimed that the attacks were the handiwork of the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Students' Islamic Movement of India, several other investigating agencies, including the NIA, claimed that the Indian Mujahideen had carried out the terror attacks. While acquitting the 12 accused, the High Court laid bare the inconsistencies, loopholes, and lapses in the probe by the Maharashtra ATS. It asked how key witness statements were recorded after an unexplained delay of 100 days. It questioned the trustworthiness and credibility of witnesses, highlighted deep flaws in both the investigation as well as prosecution, and demanded to know why the circumstantial evidence, such as call detail records, which the investigators had relied on so much, was inconclusive. It pointed out that the witness statements were delayed and inconsistent; that there were procedural lapses and coercion allegations about the confessions retrieved; that there was no proof of actual explosives used; and that the chain of custody of the recoveries was broken. The High Court also rapped the trial court for the conviction order. The judgments on two terror cases in India have left the victims, who have had to wait for nearly two decades for verdicts, without a sense of justice. The investigations raise serious questions about India's criminal justice system and specifically about the accountability of investigating agencies. Who are the agencies answerable to, for their contradictory claims and shoddy procedures, which have allowed extremist organisations to get away with such terrible crimes in Maharashtra? And when — if at all they do — will the victims of these blasts get a sense of closure?

# What the 1871 educational census shows about the divide in the pyall schools of Madras Presidency

The report on the 'Results of the Educational Census of Madras November 1871' throws some interesting light on the sharp divide in the pyall schools in the Madras Presidency. The Educational Census was meant to ascertain the exact state of education in Madras as shown by the number of schools, their standards of instruction and the number of their pupils. In that era, the pyall school was an important aspect not only in education but also in the social and religious life of people.

The author of the Education Census report tried to highlight the difference in payment for teachers in a school for the well-to-do and those in a school for the poor. "We will suppose the son of a respectable, good-caste writer to be sent for the first time to the nearest pyall school, the teacher of which will almost certainly be a Brahmin," the author writes. For this, a lucky day must first be chosen, and then the teacher comes to the new pupil's house together with all his scholars. "Before the boy is handed over to the master, pooja to Ganapati or Ganesa is performed by the family purohit, and then to Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, in the presence of the lad's father and male relations. Then presents are distributed to Brahmins, and fruits, sugar, etc to everybody present. The schoolmaster is placed sitting in a conspicuous part of the room, and is presented with flowers, sandal (chandanam), fruits, and a pair of cloths; one of which is twelve cubits long, and the other six cubits, the cost of both being about one-and-a-quarter rupees," notes the report.

The teacher then puts the cloths on, sits himself by the side of the proposed scholar, causes him to repeat a prayer to Ganesa, asking for wisdom and that his course of study may be fortunate and successful, and makes him repeat the whole of the alphabet three times. "Next, a flat vessel containing dry rice is brought in, and the teacher guides the finger of the pupil, so that he may write in the loose rice the names of the deity they serve, whether Vishnu or Siva. Then the ceremony concludes." All the school boys are presented with beaten rice, Bengal gram and sugar mixed together, a handful each; the monitor or senior boy, who acts as the teacher's assistant, receives also a few pice. "Now the boy proceeds in procession to the school, where



he is again made to repeat the alphabet three times. The procession then returns to his home, and they disperse for the day. With the next day commences the ordinary school career of the boy," says the report adding, the monthly school fee is decided between the teacher and the father. This sum varies with the means of the parent, "but never exceeds eight annas a month." In contrast, things were different in a pyall school for the children of the poor. "Here no entrance fee is offered, nor any monthly payment until the alphabet is fully mastered. Nor is the customary present made on commencement of a new book or chapter. A small payment is made each month of, say, one or two annas, and a tiny present every fourteenth day," according to the report.

The same ritual is performed at Dassera as in the more respectable school, but the gains of the master are smaller in proportion, and similarly for each festival throughout the year," it adds. "Combining all sources of income, the teacher of a respectable pyall school with about twenty-five pupils will receive from 75 to 725 per mensem, while his colleague labouring in a poor locality will not receive more than from 75 to 710," the report says. In Mussulman schools, no monthly fee was charged, and the teacher was entirely dependent on presents. Thus, whenever a new chapter of the Koran was commenced, the pupils were required to give from four annas to as many rupees, according to the wealth of the family. "At the commencement of every festival, as the Muharam, Shub-i-burat, Ramzan, Bukreed, etc the teacher also receives presents - not more than four annas or less than one fanam," it says.

# Ancient Tamil literature inspires new wedding format

On Tuesday evening, the Roja Muthiah Research Library, known for facilitating interesting discussions, hosted one by lawyer Supanki Kalanadan. The topic: a new wedding format involving Tamil indigenous practices. When you think of a quintessential Tamil wedding, what comes to mind? Does it involve a male priest and a trial by the fire? Supanki, an Eelam Tamil refugee whose family fled to Canada, said that she looked into some Tamil texts and attempted to re-conceptualise a format that involves practices from the Sangam literature and Tolkappiyam. In her style, there will be no sacrificial fire. They will also involve the use of the parai and conch, two instruments that are not traditionally used in weddings because they are often associated with the Scheduled Caste community and are played during death rituals. She added that Nature will be the central focus of worship with the five thinais or Tamil landscapes placed in the form of pictures on a stage including kurinji (mountains), mullai (forests), marutham (farmlands), neithal (coastal regions), and palai (dry lands). "One of the couples that got married were diasporic Eelam Tamil refugees who picked pictures from our land," she said. The wedding oath would be taken on the Thirukkural, one of the foremost classic Tamil language texts. "Besides pledging equality and taking care of one another, the oath is also one that commits to taking care of the environment and society," she said.

Supanki said that when she was younger, her Tamil identity was a central point of conversation at her household as her mother always believed they would go back to their hometown. However, she hated wearing a bindi to school and carrying Tamil meals to lunch as she was bullied. It was through the arts — dance and drama — that she found her way back to this identity. She would like many



other diasporic people to engage with their identities in a manner similar to hers. The wedding is one such way to connect with the roots, she feels. Uma Kasturi, an assistant professor at a private college in Chennai who attended the talk, asked the speaker about why she chose to retain and continue the usage of the thali despite having a conversation about new practices. "When Periyar's self-respect marriages and Buddhist weddings choose to do away with the thali, why should we continue to hold on to it? In the name of new marriages, are we bringing back oppressive traditions? Are we looking at it critically enough," she asked. Supanki suggested that one view the thread as a security amulet. "Nobody in the diaspora would get married if there was no thali involved. It is still an ongoing conversation," she said. Sai Sarvesh, a media student, also asked about the prevalence of caste and its role in marriages within the diasporic communities. Supanki said that it is not as prevalent in Canada as it is here. Supanki is hoping for many people to chime in with ideas on reimagining this concept of a Tamil wedding. "This is a work in progress," she said.

# The technocratic calculus of India's welfare state



With a billion Aadhaar enrollments, 1,206 schemes integrated into the Direct Benefit Transfer system, and 36 grievance portals across States/Union Territories, India's welfare orientation is transitioning into a technocratic calculus. The promise to deliver social welfare at scale, bypassing leaky pipelines and eliminating ghost beneficiaries, might have led to a 're-casting' that delivers 'efficiency' and 'coverage' at the cost of 'democratic norms' and 'political accountability'. An offloading of the emergence of a post-rights based welfare regime? Is the Indian digital welfare state headed towards a systemic impasse? What is the technocratic calculus behind all this? Recent game-theoretic work shows that technocratic rule thrives where parties are polarised. Evidently, our questions have changed. We have shifted from "who deserves support and why?" to "how do we minimise leakage and maximise coverage?" Our politicians across party lines have rationally offloaded hard-choices onto data-driven algorithms without questioning the complexities of constitutional values.

Contextualising Habermas's 'technocratic consciousness' and Foucault's 'governmentality', India's welfare architecture is increasingly shaped by measurable, auditable, and depoliticised rationality. Schemes such as E-SHRAM and PM KISAN embody a uni-directional, innovation-led logic that is streamlined, measurable, and intolerant of ambiguity or error. Conversely, we have deliberative calls for participatory planning and local feedback embodying the long forgotten core of democratic thinking resonating Giorgio Agamben's notion of homo sacer — a life stripped of political agency. Seemingly, welfare, in the contemporary context, has ceased to exist as a site of democratic deliberations. On a microscopic level, a rights-bearing citizen has been replaced by the auditable beneficiary. Thus, it calls for an urgent need for the state to revisit (in a Rancierean sense) whether it is curating who is visible, who can complain, and whose suffering is computable. Despite claims of a 'socialistic state', we observe a decade-low decline in India's social sector spending that has dwindled to 17% in 2024-25 from the 2014-24 average of 21%. Further, there are some interesting observations beyond plain statistics. Key social sector schemes have borne the brunt of such decline where minorities, labour, employment, nutrition and social security welfare saw a significant decline from 11% (in the pre-COVID-19 phase) to 3% (in post-COVID-19 phase). Parallely, social commentators often comment the Right to Information (RTI) regime to be in 'existential crisis' and further uncovering the cloak on RTI exposes a critical issue within the institution of dysfunctional information com-

missions. As of June 30, 2024, the number of pending cases crossed the four lakh tally across 29 Information Commission's (ICs), and eight CIC posts were vacant (annual report of CIC, 2023-24).

The Indian welfare regime must recover its capacity for reflexivity and situated knowledge, elements that are very peculiar to gram sabhas and frontline bureaucratic discretions. To draw Rancière's critique on democracy, we highlight one major impending concern, that "democracy depends on whose suffering is rendered visible and contestable, not merely computable". This concern is further highlighted in Justice D.Y Chandrachud's Aadhaar dissent (2018), that warned precisely against such decontextualisation of identity which served as a caution against reducing citizens to disembedded, machinic data who are devoid of care, context, or even constitutional assurance in some cases.

Another instance of algorithmic insulation Another worrisome trend is the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System's flattening of the federal hierarchies into ticket-tracking systems. Although it is a novel initiative resolving tickets and routing complaints across state agencies, empirical data show that lakhs of grievances were disposed of between 2022-24. But on a closer examination it might just be centralising the visibility but not the responsibility — a form of algorithmic insulation that renders political accountability increasingly elusive.

These observations are not to dismiss the value of such initiatives. Rather, they invite a deeper conversation on how welfare governance can evolve for a more resilient and responsive state. The government should now think along the lines of 'democratic antifragility' so that our systems built on perfect data and flawless infrastructure do not fail catastrophically under stress (consider Taleb's 'hyper-integrated systems').

We need to empower States to design context-sensitive regimes where federalism and welfare push for pluralism as a feature. Institutionalising community-driven impact audits (as reiterated by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty), by looping in the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan and Gram Panchayat Development Plans should be the core target. All States must be made capable to build platform cooperatives where self-help groups act as intermediaries; functionally, lessons can be learnt from Kerala's Kudumbashree. Civil society must be incentivised to invest in grass-roots political education and legal aid clinics in order to strengthen the community accountability mechanisms. Lastly, it is time we strengthen and codify our offline fall-back mechanisms, human feedback safeguards, and statutory bias audits by embedding the "right to explanation and appeal" — as proposed by the UN Human Rights for digital governance systems. Focus on the citizen We, as citizens of India, must realise that a welfare state stripped of democratic deliberations is a machine that works efficiently for everyone except those it is meant to help. For a Viksit Bharat we will have to reorient digitisation with democratic and anti-fragile principles so that citizens become partners in governance, and not mere entries in a ledger. Anmol Rattan Singh and Agastya Shukla are Co-founder and Programme Associate respectively at the PANJ Foundation, a Punjab-based policy research think tank

# Meet the woman behind one of India's most exclusive ikat sari brands

"A special sari for a special day," says Hyderabad-based Gajam Narmada, gently unfolding a handloom ikat silk sari in a striking cream, offset by a red border. Narmada, who runs Narmada Handlooms in Kothapet, has chosen this piece to wear on August 7, when she will receive the prestigious Sant Kabir National Handloom Award from President Droupadi Murmu in New Delhi. Recognised in the category for marketing handloom products, she also becomes the first woman from Telangana to be honoured with this distinction.

The Gajam family hails from the weaving community of Puttapaka in Telangana's Nalgonda district — a well-known hub for ikat. Narmada, who had only completed her intermediate education and had no prior experience in business, began her journey as a homemaker supporting her husband, Narendra. He had moved to Hyderabad in 1998 to set up a handloom sari business, and while he travelled for marketing, Narmada quietly managed the small venture from their home. It was her father-in-law, Chandraiah, a seasoned weaver, whose words helped her find her purpose and gradually grow into a businesswoman. "He once told me, 'Weaving will help us meet our daily needs, but if we build something of our own and work hard at it, we can create a future not just for ourselves, but for others too.'" Some of their popular designs are: Elephant, tree and bird in Narikunj design, paan patola, teliya rumal, peacock, forest and gollabhama.

Ikat fabrics for men, dupattas, lehengas and blouse pieces for women. In 2013, Narender established Narmada Handlooms, naming Narmada as the proprietor. While he travelled across Hyderabad and beyond to secure orders, she oversaw operations at home — liaising with weavers, managing stock, and nurturing the growing business. "Designers usually hand over patterns to weavers," Narmada, now 46, explains. "But we offered ideas based on what customers actually wanted and what was changing on the ground." Today, the enterprise supports a collective of 300 weavers from ten villages, including



Puttapaka, Chandur, Ghattuppal, Munugodu, Balemla, Narayanapuram, and Choutuppal. This strong network, built over two decades, is a testament to the Gajam family's long-standing relationship with their weaving community. Supporting livelihoods has been central to that trust. COVID was difficult for everyone," Narmada recalls. "But we stayed in touch with our weavers, reassuring them not to lose hope. We'd say, 'Weave and keep the sari ready, someone will surely buy it later.' If a weaver doesn't have work, how will their family survive?" She also encourages them to evolve with changing times, while maintaining consistent quality. The Gajams live in a two-storey complex in Kothapet, which houses both their residence and wholesale store. "I simply move between floors to switch roles," she laughs, on juggling life as both homemaker and entrepreneur. Around 60 saris are delivered to their unit daily by weavers, and nearly 100 go out to stores across India. "Our strength lies in exclusivity," Narmada says. They don't sell online, preferring instead to supply to premium retailers such as Singhania's, Kalanjali, Neeru's, Second Skin, Gaurang Shah, Radha Krishna, and Kankatala in Hyderabad. Their saris also find shelves in stores across nearly 15 cities nationwide. As she lives out her dream, Narmada's next goal is to take their collection to an international audience.

# Hyderabad's new organic store champions sustainable living

Chennai-based social enterprise Tula India is making its way to Hyderabad with a new venture, The Conscious Living Store (TCLS). Opening on August 1 in Kukatpally, the 350 sq. ft. store brings together organic groceries and handmade clothing, all in line with Tula's philosophy of sustainability — from farm to fabric, and with absolutely no plastic packaging. Run by engineer-turned-ecopreneurs Jahnvi and Rakesh Regella, the newly-wed couple say they are not the founders, but are simply "replicating what's already been beautifully done by Tula, with a little mentoring from Ananthoo sir," referring to Tula's co-founder.

Rakesh, who specialises in organic food, and Jahnvi, a designer with Tula, wanted to combine their interests but were not sure what kind of eco-friendly business to start. It was Ananthoo who suggested bringing the Tula concept to Hyderabad. "One of the biggest issues with organic stores is the plastic packaging. Even if the product is organic, we end up consuming microplastics from the packaging itself," says Jahnvi. That is why customers at TCLS are expected

to bring their own cloth bags and containers.

The store is split into two sections — organic groceries on one side and handspun, handmade clothing on the other. The food section stocks around 65 items, including several varieties of rice, millets, wheat, pulses, cold-pressed oils, sweeteners, spices, and a few toiletries. The clothing line features everyday wear for men, women, and children, including newborn sets, dhotis, and towels. Due to space constraints, the launch and workshops will be held at a nearby community hall. But the focus, Jahnvi says, goes beyond retail. "We want people to build conscious living into their daily habits, it should feel natural, not like a chore." The team plans to continue monthly talks and workshops at the store going forward. Uzamma, founder of Malkha Marketing Trust and Narsanna, founder of Aranya Agricultural Alternatives are to launch the store on August 1 at 11 am followed by talks and workshops by experts. For more details check out their social media pages.

# Should there be a ceiling on salaries of top management?



After Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) announced its decision to lay off 12,000 employees, Nasscom (National Association of Software and Service Companies) said that the tech industry is at an “inflection point” due to the increasing integration of AI and automation into core business operations. Meanwhile, the All India Professionals’ Congress (AIPC), in conjunction with IT employee unions and forums, is pursuing strategies to address the issue of layoffs in the IT sector. It plans to raise this matter in Parliament, advocating for a policy that would cap the pay disparity between top leadership and average employees. Should there be a ceiling on salaries of top management? Praveen Chakravarty and Sridhar Kundu discuss the question in a conversation moderated by A.M. Jigeesh. Edited excerpts:

TCS, the fourth largest employer in the country, is laying off about 12,000 senior employees from the company. In a statement on social media, the AIPC leadership spoke of the huge disparity in salaries in companies such as TCS. Can more jobs be saved by bringing about parity in salaries?

Praveen Chakravarty: AI will first be an attack on the massive pay disparity between the top management and average employee and bring enormous pressure to reduce that gap. With AI, we are realising that skills that what we thought were skills of the high end of the workforce are in fact automatable and being made redundant. AI is not taking away the jobs of barbers, gardeners, or plumbers. AI is saying, ‘If you are a hedge fund analyst, you are not needed’; ‘if you are the CEO of a company, you are redundant’. So, in this context, how can one possibly justify a 350-500 times ratio of CEO or top leadership pay to median employee pay in a company? In TCS, the CEO’s pay is about 325 times the salary of the median employee. And that is actually among the lowest in IT. In Infosys, the ratio is 850; in Wipro, it is 600. This ratio was perhaps 40-50 times in the 1960s and the 1970s.

Sridhar Kundu: The World Bank’s recent report said that inequality has come down in India. In India, we don’t have reliable income data. There are several agencies who put out some kind of data, but the authenticity of these data can be challenged. The Periodic Labour Force Survey report, published by the government, doesn’t highlight the wage gap across sectors. If you examine the microdata in detail, you will see that the inequality of wages as measured by standard deviation is higher for salaried employees compared to the self-employed. Wage inequality across sectors is persistent. The policy of minimising wage inequality via wage cut policy at the top level would reduce the average wage rate. Globally, the average wage rate in India is less compared to many developing countries such as China and the Philippines. In this context, I am pessimistic about the argument that a decrease in the wage gap can create employment opportunities in a sector. The upper limit wage fixation as a solution to inequality reduction and additional employment generation raises a few questions, though the truth behind this hypothesis is not clear to anyone. First, in a competitive labour market, can the private sector retain the quality labour force by fixing an upper wage limit? Second, can the government intervene by fixing a wage rate in the private sector? Third, is government intervention in fixing wages admissible by the private sector? Companies are arguing during layoffs that the skill sets of retrenched employees were becoming obsolete. Can someone save their job by enhancing their skill sets? Praveen Chakravarty: I don’t know why we still use phrases like skill enhancement. It is time to smell the coffee. This is not about skill enhancement. The so-called highest skills are the ones that have been automated and have been taken away. If anything, AI is telling us what the true essential services are; what we all refer to as ‘menial jobs’. AI is restoring dignity of labour. So I think the whole idea that skilled upgradation is the solution is completely flawed.

## World court’s advisory opinion boosts climate action

In light of the existential threat posed by climate change, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), also known as the World Court, delivered a landmark advisory opinion on the obligations of states concerning climate change. Advisory opinions, while not technically binding, are regarded as authoritative interpretations of international law by the World Court. They can influence the behaviour of states by generating international pressure. A notable example is the United Kingdom’s handover of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, which followed the advisory opinion on the matter.

States cannot ignore their duties The World Court unanimously ruled that states have legal obligations to protect the climate system and clarified the consequences for failing to meet these obligations. Recently, other international courts, such as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), have also recognised significant responsibilities for states in addressing climate change. This issue transcends politics; states cannot ignore their duties.

This advisory opinion is noteworthy in many aspects. First and foremost, the court has interpreted all climate treaties, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, in a seamless manner, along with the best available scientific consensus, to strengthen the operation of many of the treaty provisions. For example, the Paris Agreement aims to limit the increase in global average temperatures to “well below 2°C” and “pursue efforts” to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. However, the court used current scientific consensus as well as subsequent conference of parties (COP) decisions to hold that 1.5°C is the relevant threshold that states must work towards. Similarly, the Paris Agreement requires parties to prepare their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which outline the climate actions they plan to take. However, the court rejected the argument that states had unfettered discretion in preparing their NDCs and that NDCs did not create any legally binding obligations on states. It held that, due to their duty of due diligence and cooperation, states must ensure that their NDCs reflect their ‘highest possible’ ambition and must

As the chairman of the AIPC, I can tell you there are 2-3 very concrete policy suggestions or ideas that we are coming up with. We will take these to both the IT Minister and to the chairperson of SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India). One of them will be about the ratio of pay disparity. For example, should there be a ceiling on the ratio of pay? I’m not saying everybody should have equal pay. But is there excess? Let us say there can be a policy idea that for all publicly listed companies, the ratio should be around 40-50 times, not 800 times. Is this idea bizarre? Will it destroy corporate India, as is the concern? Will it destroy productivity? Let us take the most meritocratic professions in the world, which is sports. Do you know all sports leagues have a player cap ceiling? IPL (Indian Premier League) has a ceiling. Virat Kohli may be the best IPL player, but they don’t say he can get paid whatever he wants and that the market will provide it. The National Football League, the largest sports league in the world by revenue, has a ratio and pay cap ceiling. Sports leagues have their ceilings, and they have shown these have worked very well. Sports teams are still very competitive and their talent is thriving. So this notion that meritocracy and productivity will be impacted by a ceiling is somewhat exaggerated. The current ratio, going up to 800 times, is obscene, ugly, and abominable. So can I think, 50 times? Perhaps. Can that help save jobs? Yes. And this is a short-term solution while we figure out how we deal with labour market disruptions in the long run. Sridhar Kundu: When a sector grows, the growth of employment opportunities in that sector should follow the same direction. In India, the service sector has shown a substantial growth rate over the last few years. So, the lay-off in this sector is a little surprising. We may see this issue in a different context. India is a labour-surplus economy. Management of any organisation sees labour as a low-hanging fruit, and for any reason or sometimes none at all, it can fire labour with or without notice. For the service sector, there is a high substitution of technology for labour. Any adoption of new technology finds new reasons to lay off surplus labour. This may not be the complete picture for the present layoff, but it can be a possibility. Whatever may be the reason, if the labour layoff continues, it might impact growth in the long run.

Are there any policy suggestions to address this crisis?

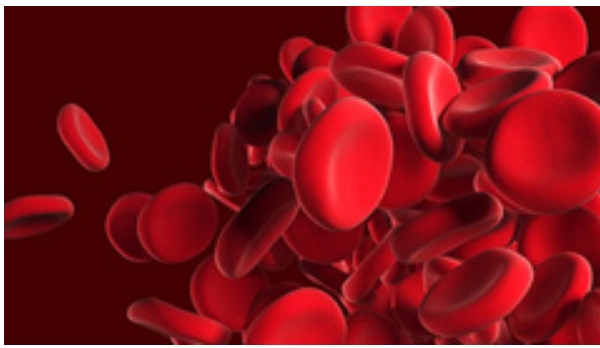
Sridhar Kundu: Government intervention is important. AI has an important role in the service sector. The sector employs technologically efficient and educated people. AI can be a challenge for them. So we have to see where the government can intervene. This labour cannot be absorbed into the agricultural sector because these people are not going to add value to current agricultural practices. They cannot be absorbed into government schemes such as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act) or any other kind of informal sector scheme. So, in that case, government intervention is quite important. Governments can improve self-employment activity. This has increased, according to Periodic Labour Force Surveys, so some kind of absorption of labour can take place in that category. Praveen Chakravarty: There are several employee forums and unions in the IT sector that have reached out to the AIPC. Several more have reached out after my comments about the TCS situation. So I see a distinct effort in the direction towards collectivisation, mobilisation, and collective bargaining powers in the IT sector.

Our job as the principal Opposition party, the Congress party, it is to speak up for justice for the affected employees. But we are not here to argue against layoffs or against a company’s need to retrench or to downsize depending on business situations. I want to be very clear about that. That is why I said this is far more nuanced. We are not an activist, Leftist organisation saying there can be no layoffs. Our nuanced approach is to look at the huge disparity in pay between the top leadership and the median employee in the service sector, specifically in the IT sector and in financial services. Second, we will be launching a series of stakeholder consultations regarding the draft proposal, which could include ideas such as what Bill Gates had talked about, say, a decade ago — a robot tax. Could there be tax that could be used as basic income or welfare for some of these affected employees? These are all just ideas at this point in time. Labour is a State subject, so while we will try and persuade the Union government to take this issue up, we are discussing this with Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on what to do as Hyderabad is a very big IT centre. We will soon speak to the Karnataka Chief Minister as well.

proactively take measures that are reasonably capable of meeting those NDCs.

The decision also has significant implications for the Global North-South divide and climate justice, with the court highlighting the importance of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC). Accordingly, the standard for assessing countries’ climate actions would depend on factors such as historical emissions, level of development, and current national circumstances. The court also explained the duties of co-operation and assistance, and clarified that developed countries have a legally binding obligation to provide financial resources and technology transfer to developing countries for both mitigation and adaptation. While the Paris Agreement does not specify a specific level of financial support, the court observed that this obligation must be interpreted in light of the overall temperature goal and subsequent agreements. Breach of this obligation can be assessed against a standard of good faith and due diligence. Notably, the court rejected the argument of some countries, including India, that the climate treaties constituted a self-contained regime and that the principles and rules of general international law and environmental law were inapplicable. The court identified obligations to mitigate climate change, including the duty of due diligence, the duty to prevent significant harm to the climate system, and the duty to cooperate in protecting the climate, stemming from various environmental treaties, the Law of the Sea Convention, and uncodified customary international law. The court also noted the adverse effects of climate change on various human rights, particularly the rights of especially vulnerable peoples, which must be taken into account by countries when taking climate action. In practice, this means that withdrawal from climate treaties, as the United States has done, does not exempt a country from its climate-related obligations. It also means that, in working toward a green transition, countries must ensure that human rights are not violated and that a just transition is achieved. The court dismissed the argument that countries cannot be held individually responsible for violating these obligations, because proving causation and attribution is difficult.

# Preventing bleeds before they happen: understanding prophylaxis in haemophilia care



The difference between India’s estimated and actual diagnosed cases points to a large number of undiagnosed haemophilia patients. Image used for representational purposes only. Haemophilia is an inherited, rare bleeding disorder in which the blood fails to clot due to a lack or deficiency of clotting factors, most often Factor VIII in Haemophilia A. That means even small injuries can cause excessive bleeding. But more seriously, spontaneous internal bleeding can occur, usually in joints and muscles, which is excruciatingly painful and can cause chronic permanent disability. A bleed can happen even in the brain, without any trauma, which can be very dangerous and even life threatening.

The difference between India’s estimated and actual diagnosed cases points to a large number of undiagnosed haemophilia patients. In India, the expected number of haemophilia cases is around 1 to 1.5 lakh, based on a prevalence of 1 in 10,000. In a population of 1.4 billion however, we have identified only about 29,000 patients: just 20% percent of estimated cases. This is due to lack of awareness, limited diagnostic facilities, and socio-economic barriers. It put patients at risk of bleeding after minor trauma or surgery, and makes them vulnerable to disabilities. Alarmingly, each untreated bleed is estimated to reduce life expectancy by around 16 days. Imagine how debilitating this could be in patients who have chronic bleeds, and a high annual bleed rate. Without early diagnosis, proactive care is a socio-economic challenge leading to school absenteeism, unemployment, and loss of productivity. Over the past few years, the landscape of haemophilia care has experienced a seismic shift. What started as a reaction to treating a painful bleed has now moved to proactively preventing bleeds entirely, with regular replacement therapy of the deficient clotting factors (prophylaxis). Today, care is moving towards more advanced approaches to rebalancing the body’s clotting system, and eventually, to restoring it altogether. This change redefines what is possible with haemophilia treatment. It takes us closer to a day when “zero bleeds” are not

only a goal, they are an achievable reality, allowing individuals with haemophilia to live freely, lead more active lifestyles and overall, have better quality of lives.

Understanding prophylaxis or regular replacement

Prophylaxis or regular replacement plays a revolutionary role in the treatment of haemophilia, specifically in enhancing patient outcomes and quality of life. In contrast to on-demand therapy, which is used to treat bleeds after they have happened, and already caused damage to the joint or muscle etc., in prophylactic treatment the aim is to give treatment to prevent a bleed from even happening. This strategy can use frequent clotting factor intravenous injections or the newer, non-factor products by a simpler injection in the skin (subcutaneous route injection). This is the only way to ensure good joint health and prevent deformity and disability. Prophylaxis or regular replacement is regarded internationally as the gold standard treatment for haemophilia. This preventive method has numerous advantages over on-demand therapy. These include: Prevents joint damage: Recurrent unpredictable bleeds, particularly into joints, are a symptom of untreated or inadequately treated haemophilia. On-demand treatment permits bleeds to develop and gives treatment only afterwards, which makes it too late to avoid damage in many cases. With prophylaxis, clotting factor levels are continuously maintained, significantly reducing or even eliminating joint bleeds, thus maintaining long-term mobility and limiting disability.

Enhances quality of life: Persons with haemophilia on regular replacement have fewer bleeds, less pain, and more independence in their daily activities. Children can go to school normally and engage in physical activities, whereas adults are able to keep up with work routines and social activities—something that is very difficult while under on-demand therapy as bleeding is unpredictable. Reduces burden on healthcare ecosystems: Prophylaxis reduces the number of spontaneous bleeds that need urgent care or hospitalisation. In the long term, this decreases healthcare demands both on patients and the system and reduces the overall cost of treatment when accounting for long-term complications. Approximately 90% of persons with haemophilia are on prophylaxis in developed nations, resulting in near-normal life expectancy and uninterrupted day to day functioning. However, on-demand therapy is still primarily prevalent in India. However, some States have started regular replacement in children less than 10 years old. Ensuring awareness and wider access to prophylaxis through policy advocacy, and public education is critical to ending the crisis of under-diagnosis and avoiding preventable disabilities, while allowing haemophilia patients to live life free of fear and pain.

## The Bihar migrant worker, a Scylla-Charybdis moment

In the ‘Odyssey’, a major epic in Greek mythology, King Odysseus had to navigate between the dangers of Scylla, a monster residing in a rock, and Charybdis, a monster embodying deadly whirlpools. In the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the Bihar electoral rolls initiated by the Election Commission of India (ECI), many migrant labour whose names have been dropped from the draft electoral roll are facing a similar predicament.

The term ‘ordinarily resident’ The electoral rolls are prepared by the ECI, as in the provisions of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950. Section 19 of the RP Act requires that a person must be ‘ordinarily resident’ in a constituency for inclusion in its electoral roll. The requirement of being ‘ordinarily resident’ for inclusion in the electoral roll is to ensure that the voter maintains real ties with the constituency that preserves representative accountability. It is also aimed at preventing fraudulent registrations. Section 20 provides the meaning of the term ‘ordinarily resident’. It specifies that a person shall not be deemed to be ‘ordinarily resident’ in a constituency only because he/she owns or possesses a dwelling house therein. However, a person temporarily absent from his/her place of residence shall continue to be ‘ordinarily resident’ therein. Section 20A was added in 2010 to enable Non-Resident Indians who have moved out of India even for the long term, to register and vote in the constituency in which their address given in the passport is located. The ECI has classified electors who were not found in their residence or did not submit the enumeration forms as part of the SIR process as ‘permanently shifted/not found’ and excluded them from the draft electoral roll. Article 19(1)(e) of the Constitution guarantees every citizen a fundamental right to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India. It follows that any citizen has the right to shift his/her vote to their new place of residence anywhere in India if they so desire. The



issue arises in respect of migrant labourers. The Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2020-21 estimated that around 11% of India’s population migrated due to employment-related reasons. This translates to close to 15 crore voters being migrant labour within or outside their States. Most labourers, short-term or long-term, migrate due to the lack of opportunities in their region. Many migrant construction and security workers also migrate alone (without family). They live in temporary shacks/residences at their place of work and move from one location to another, within a State or even in different States, as part of their work. They return to their home State at regular intervals and exercise their right to vote from the place where their families live and properties exist. The Gauhati High Court, in Election Commission of India & Anr vs Dr. Manmohan Singh & Ors (1999), indicated that the term ‘ordinarily resident’ shall mean a habitual resident of that place. It must be permanent in character and not temporary or casual. It must be a place where the person has the intention of dwelling there permanently. A reasonable man must accept him/her as a resident of that place. While migrant labourers may not be residing permanently in their native constituency, the philosophy behind being ‘ordinarily resident’ — in the opinion of the courts — is broadly fulfilled with respect to that residence for such migrant workers. Legality versus realpolitik

The ECI maintains that under the RP Act, migrants

who have shifted out of their native State/constituency can register as an elector in their new place of residence. Many migrants are anyway not keen to shift their vote. They may not have any document other than an Aadhaar card in their new place of residence (which is not in the list of eligible documents for fresh voter registration under the SIR process). Further, it can be challenged whether they fulfil the conditions of being ‘ordinarily resident’, as laid down by the courts, with respect to the new residence. Keeping those legal arguments aside, the political issues on the ground in the in-migration States that they reside in cannot be overlooked. Regional political parties in such States have already begun raising issues about the possible inclusion of migrants in the electoral roll of their States. They object to it on the ground that this would vitiate the democratic process since these migrant labourers are not permanent settlers in their States. They argue that migrants do not understand the political issues in their States and, hence, should not be allowed to vote in these elections. While it may be argued that migrants can be included in the rolls of in-migration States de jure, it could potentially result in their de facto disenfranchisement due to the social and political issues in their place of work. The Supreme Court of India should take these factors into consideration while passing its orders in the cases linked to the SIR.

In India we accept election results where almost

50% voters in many metropolises do not step out of their houses to vote in booths which are less than 500 metres from their residence. Most non-resident Indians, who have the right to vote, do not exercise their franchise as they are unable to come to their constituency on the day of elections. While these arguments can be made for the case of inclusion of migrant labourers in their original place of residence, it cannot be an alibi for the lack of their participation in elections. Steps such as ensuring strict enforcement of statutory holiday on the day of polling as well as the running of more special buses and trains can effectively increase the participation of migrants in the electoral process within a State. With respect to inter-State migrant voters, the ECI had developed a pilot of Multi-Constituency Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM) that could handle up to 72 constituencies. It had planned a demonstration of the same to recognised political parties in January 2023. However, this was short lived following concerns raised by political parties as well as administrative challenges. With the advent of newer technologies, robust and secure methods (acceptable to all stakeholders), for remote voting should be feasible. Until this happens, steps such as enabling more train and other transportation services as well as incentives for a few additional days of paid leave for travel can be explored to ensure more electoral participation by migrant voters. Parliament

# Koodalmanikyam temple row: Controversy over appointment of Ezhava youth for Kazhakam | Explained



The Koodalmanikyam Temple in Irinjalakuda, Kerala, dedicated to Lord Bharata and managed by the Cochin Devaswom Board, recently found itself at the centre of a caste-related controversy involving the appointment of a temple employee to the Kazhakam — a role involving the making of garlands and ceremonial arrangements for the temple rituals. The conflict arose after B.A. Balu, a member of the OBC Ezhava community, was appointed to the post through the Kerala Devaswom Recruitment Board (KDRB), prompting opposition from temple priests (Thanthis) who claimed the role was traditionally reserved for members of specific families with hereditary rights.

Who is B.A. Balu and how was he appointed?

B.A. Balu, from Aryanad in Thiruvananthapuram, secured the Kazhakam position after successfully clearing the KDRB's examination and interview process. His appointment followed due procedure under the rules governing temple recruitments in Kerala. However, his entry into the role was challenged on two grounds, caste identity and hereditary claims.

Why did the priests oppose his appointment?

Priests associated with the temple refused to perform rituals in protest against Mr. Balu's appointment. They argued that the Kazhakam duties, considered spiritually significant, had historically been performed by members of certain families and any deviation from this practice would violate long-standing traditions.

Was caste discrimination involved?

What followed was a stand-off between the temple's Tantrists, the Devaswom Board, political outfits, and social activists. Reformists and rights bodies argued that the opposition of temple priests was rooted in caste bias, as Mr. Balu belonged to a backward caste. The most revered offering at the Koodalmanikyam Temple is the lotus garland, traditionally used to adorn Lord Bharata. Until now, this sacred garland was crafted by individuals from upper-caste communities. The present unease among these sections, according to some social activists, stems from a fear that this long-held notion of 'caste purity' might be disrupted if the tradition becomes more inclusive. The matter triggered wide-

spread public outrage, with allegations that the objection was not solely about tradition but also reflected entrenched caste-based discrimination in religious institutions.

What actions did the authorities take?

In response to escalating tensions, the Devaswom authorities reassigned Balu to a clerical role in the temple office. Meanwhile, the Kerala State Human Rights Commission ordered a formal investigation into the allegations of caste discrimination. The State Government reiterated that appointments made under the existing legal framework must be honoured regardless of caste.

What happened next?

Amid protests Balu resigned from the position. His resignation, however, did not put the matter to rest. The next person on the KDRB rank list, K.S. Anurag, also from the Ezhava community, was asked to join in the same position. However, a senior member of the Thekke Varriam family moved the Kerala High Court, asserting their hereditary and spiritual right to the Kazhakam duties. In a submission in response to the above petition, the Thanthri of the temple told the High Court that his views were not sought, as required under the Koodalmanikyam Devaswom Act, before appointing a person for Kazhakam duty. The Court responded by staying the appointment of the new candidate until it considered the family's claim.

What is the government's stand?

The Kerala Government has maintained that appointments made through the Devaswom Recruitment Board are legally valid and should be implemented without discrimination. State Devaswom Minister V.N. Vasavan stated in the Assembly that denying jobs on the grounds of caste discrimination is a disgrace to the cultural society of Kerala. Minister for Higher Education and Social Justice R. Bindu condemned the priests' boycott, stating that it was unacceptable in a democratic society to prevent someone from working based on caste.

Why does this matter?

The controversy lays bare the contradictions between constitutional ideals of equality and temple practices rooted in hereditary privilege. It also calls into question how far institutions have progressed in ensuring representation for marginalised communities, especially within religious and cultural domains.

What lies ahead?

The Kerala High Court is expected to deliver a verdict on the validity of hereditary claims over temple positions, a ruling that could set a precedent for similar disputes across the State. The Kazhakam controversy is not merely about one appointment, but reflects broader societal debates, between modern constitutionalism and inherited ritual roles, within the sacred spaces of religious institutions.

## Why College Road's name has to be retained in Chennai



I am glad the story had a happy ending, as far as I and several heritage activists were concerned, though I am sure the actor Jaishankar's family members may have been disappointed that a lane, and not a main road, would be named after him. But to me, College Road was much larger as a name than any individual and had to be retained. And the blunder of doing away with it could not be by a government that professes to love Tamil. College Road does not take its name from Women's Christian College but from the College of Fort St. George, which functioned at what is today the Directorate of Public Instructions premises, between 1812 and 1854. The institution was founded chiefly to teach employees of the East India Company languages of South India — Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, apart from Persian and Sanskrit. One of its founders was Francis Whyte Ellis (1777-1819) who was a distinguished company servant who served as Collector of Madras. He was also a linguist.

Under Ellis and his colleagues, the college blossomed into something more than a mere teaching facility. It served as a centre where scholarly interest in the southern languages revived. Teaching was by native scholars — munshis, pandits, and pulavars. With the Company's resources, the

college became a place where manuscripts were collected and more importantly, books were printed. It was from here that the first dictionaries of all four southern languages came out, with the word meanings given in English. Some of the greatest names in Tamil language worked here. What was significant was that long before the modern universities, this was where Tamil and other language scholars worked together, irrespective of their caste and also religion. The institution was known as the Chennai Kalvi Sangam in Tamil and this name finds mention not only in books printed by the college but also in the writings of Dr. U.Ve. Swaminatha Iyer. His guru, Mahavidwan Meenakshisundaram Pillai was closely associated with some of the great names who taught at the college.

That was not all. When A.D. Campbell, a friend and fellow champion of the college, wrote a book on Telugu grammar, Ellis was asked to write the preface. It was here that he first penned his thoughts on how the southern languages possibly came from a non-Sanskritic origin. This is now celebrated as the Dravidian Proof. It forms the basis of many things including Tamil being a classical language, and it is often brandished as a weapon against 'Hindi imposition' and as a justification for Dravidian identity. The college may have closed in 1854 but clearly, its legacy lives on. That such an institution, commemorated by way of road name be wiped out by a decision of Corporation councillors was not acceptable. I took the liberty of appealing against it by tagging the Hon'ble CM of Tamil Nadu and the Worshipful Mayor of Chennai in a social media post. I did not expect it to develop into a campaign of sorts by evening. It shows how much the name was etched in public memory. By the next day, there was a clarification — it was College Lane that would be renamed and not the Road. I heaved a sigh of relief. There were some who felt that Jaishankar deserved to be commemorated by the road name. To them I say that the college was a far greater entity that two centuries later still has an impact on our lives.

## Eighty years on from Hiroshima

At 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945, a nuclear bomb exploded just above Hiroshima, instantly killing at least 70,000 people. Another 70,000 died of injuries and radiation sickness before the year ended. Three days later, a second weapon exploded over Nagasaki, killing 40,000 on the day. In the 80 years since, nuclear weapons have not been detonated again in anger even though the possessor states have swelled from one to nine, and the number and sophistication of the weapons has increased considerably. A norm of non-use appears to have been established. However, norms — shared expectations of behaviour — are not immutable. Recent developments including hostilities involving nuclear possessors, an undermining of the global rules-based and treaties-based order, and nuclear modernisation are putting the norm of non-use under immense strain.

Arguably, no one has worked more passionately to eliminate nuclear weapons entirely than the Hibakusha, the survivors of the atomic attacks. Their testimony created a powerful moral and ethical case against nuclear use, reminding us of the human consequences of — arguably for some — a demonstration of American resolve and technological prowess. Yet the respect that they are accorded today was hard won. Japan was under American occupation after the war, and information on the effects of the nuclear bombings was suppressed. According to one survivor from Nagasaki, shortly after the bombing, U.S. Brig Gen Thomas Farrell announced that all those affected by the attack had died and that there were no continuing effects of the bomb. Relief centres were shut down. An additional 50,000 people died by December without understanding what ailed them.

Knowledge about radiation sickness became widespread in Japan only after a fishing boat, Fukuryu Maru, was accidentally exposed to nuclear fallout. The U.S.'s 1954 thermonuclear test, codenamed Castle Bravo, ended up twice as powerful as estimated, spreading radioactive ash well beyond the officially designated warning zone and to the vessel floating 86 miles away from the test site. All crew members fell seriously ill from acute radiation poisoning. Thus it was that nine years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that Japan began to understand the nature of radiation sickness: the bomb killed not just by explosion, instantly, but painfully, over time. The survivors then grouped together as the Nihon Hidankyo and fanned the globe to educate people on the horrors of their experience. It is debatable whether the norm of non-use owes more to the moral and ethical case against nuclear use made by the Hibakusha or by the logic of nuclear deterrence. 'What deters' is a question that has occupied policymakers for decades. And while the total number of nuclear weapons has fallen from their Cold War peak, today's nukes are more sophisticated and designed for use in a range of situations. Much money and effort has been spent in developing more 'useable' nukes. It is difficult to know whether to worry more about a thermonuclear weapon that could destroy a city several times over, or to fear tactical weapons that are designed to target a specific location with deadly accuracy. For 80 years we have decided that nuclear weapons are beyond the pale: any nuclear use now would let the genie out of the bottle.

The norm of non-use Ultimately, the norm of non-use rests on a conscious decision to brand nuclear weapons as different. There is no legal basis for the circumscribing of their use. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) limits the spread of nukes; the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban



Treaty bans nuclear tests; neither prohibits use. (The 1917 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has not been signed by any nuclear possessor.) However, the NPT's exhortation to nuclear states to work towards total nuclear disarmament "in good faith" puts the weapons in a separate category. The International Court of Justice's 1996 advisory opinion on nuclear weapons constrains their use by stating that the use or threat of use "would generally be contrary" to humanitarian and other international law, even though the Court was unable to reach a clear decision on their legality. Together, these treaties shore up the norm of non-use, without legally proscribing them. Against this backdrop, recent nuclear threats bandied about by Russia over Ukraine have severely tested the special categorisation of nukes. Closer home, during Operation Sindoor, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that India "will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail". A "limited" operation appears to have escalated quickly to acquire a nuclear element. We are influenced by the Hibakusha's testimony today only because Fukuryu Maru's misfortune connected radiation sickness to nukes. It is also unlikely to be a coincidence that the Nihon Hidankyo were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024 for their disarmament efforts after the nuclear genie reared its head in Europe. They had been nominated multiple times, but it took almost 70 years for the survivors' efforts to be recognised. Eighty years after nuclear weapons were used in anger, we are in danger of slipping into complacency over nuclear use. It took the miscalculation of America's thermonuclear test for the truth about nuclear fallout to become widely understood. We should not wait for another misstep before the dangers of nuclear miscalculation are appreciated again.

## No ban on paracetamol, clarifies centre amid rumours

New Delhi: The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has not banned the commonly used paracetamol drug in India, Union Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Anupriya Patel said on Tuesday. In a reply in the Parliament, during the ongoing Monsoon session, Patel said that "the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has informed that the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation is not in receipt of information about rumours" of the regulatory body banning paracetamol.

Noting that "paracetamol is not banned in the country", Patel said that "various Fixed Dose Combinations, including such combinations of paracetamol with other drugs, have been banned in the country". Further, the MoS noted that the government has rolled out the free drugs service initiative under the National Health Mission.

"This aims to ensure availability of essential drugs and reduce out-of-pocket expenditure of patients visiting the public health facilities, including government hospitals and rural primary health centres," she added. For the provision of free essential medicines in public health facilities, the states are provided with financial support. Support is available for pro-

curement of drugs and strengthening or setting up of robust systems of procurement, quality assurance, supply chain management and warehousing, prescription audit and grievance redressal, and for the dissemination of standard treatment guidelines and establishment of the information-technology enabled platform named Drugs and Vaccine Distribution Management System (DVDMS), which is used for monitoring the actual status of procurement and availability of essential medicines. Patel said that the Ministry of Health has also recommended a facility-wise essential medicines list to be made available at public healthcare facilities, including government hospitals and rural primary health centres. "The recommended Essential Medicines List for Sub Health Centres, Primary Health Centres, Community Health Centres, Sub-District Hospitals and District Hospitals consists of 106, 172, 300, 318 and 381 drugs respectively, with flexibility to States to add more medicines," she noted. To ensure an uninterrupted supply chain of essential drugs in government hospitals and rural health facilities, the Medical Stores Organisation (MSO) / Government Medical Store Depots (GMSDs) has active rate contracts for 697 drug formulations.

## With a change in guard, what is next for Sri Lanka?

Parliament staff in Sri Lanka who had been hoping for days off this week have had their leave cancelled. There are dozens of security clearances to be arranged, desks to be assigned, a workshop on parliamentary procedure to be organised, an information desk to be staffed, and no hours to waste. It is an all-hands-on-deck situation. When your country chooses to elect 160-odd first-timers in a 225-member house, these are the breaks. For the first time, a visually-impaired person will take oath as a legislator. Parliament staff, used to producing materials in Sinhala, Tamil and English, will now have to make these available through audio.

These are extraordinary times in Sri Lanka. While the proportional electoral system has been in place since 1977, no single party had secured two-thirds of the seats in the 225-member house. The National People's Power (NPP), a centre-left outfit that has existed only since 2019 and had only three MPs in the last parliament, now has 159 — roughly 70 per cent of the legislature. Even the Rajapaksas, in their headiest years, soon after Mahinda Rajapaksa's government ended the 26-year civil war, had fallen short of this mandate. Back then, the Rajapaksas also had on their side the powerful Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists who, for decades, had essentially argued that while Tamils had Tamil Nadu and Muslims had the Arab world, this was the Sinhalese Buddhists' only homeland, and that minorities should live on sufferance.

The NPP freshers now flooding into parliament, meanwhile, defy collective description by the old, racially-charged metrics. There are dyed-in-the-wool Sinhalese leftists, a Tamil trade unionist and a school principal from the northern city of Jaffna, two women from the Malaiyaha Tamil community, a young Muslim MP hailing from the largely-Sinhalese deep south — all set to be led in the house by Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya, a woman with a PhD in social sciences, hailing from Colombo. This, in a nation that had largely been beset by elite and family rule since independence. That the political consciousness that brought this mass change proliferated in 2022's colossal protests, is almost inescapable. Though the protests had primarily been born of anti-Rajapaksa rage in the midst of a harrowing economic crisis, braided into the movement was a range of other progressive critiques. That political elites had worked in lockstep with the wealthy, to enrich both groups at the expense of regular people was one allegation. That sowing racial discord had been a long-time strategy to divide and rule ethnic groups that otherwise shared a common economic plight was another. Other questions bubbled: Why did Sri Lanka have so few women in parliament, though it boasted of having had the first elected female head of state in the world? Why was the clergy so influential?

It was easy to dismiss these ideas as mere progressive fantasies at odds with Sri Lanka's political culture. But there are now hard electoral results. Many of the most virulent Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists shrank even from contesting in the parliamentary elections, a mix of internal polling and a general reading of the room leading them to the conclusion that people would vote for their removal. Many who did contest, lost. This new parliament has the greatest proportion of women it has ever had (still paltry, at less than 15 per cent, but double the number in the last parliament). And NPP has outperformed the Tamil nationalist parties even in most minority-dominant regions, winning more seats in the Jaffna, Vanni, and Trincomalee districts than any other party. Partly, this is down to the traditional Tamil parties' waning influence while Sri Lanka's economic crisis depleted household purchasing power in regions that were already among the poorest. It also results from Tamils' willingness



This vote is an experiment in remaking the nation, just as it is a repudiation of establishment politics. Perhaps devolving power to minority provinces can co-exist with better living standards across the mostly-Sinhalese south

to give NPP a chance, though it has done little to improve their lives yet. In that, they and the southern populace that has turned to NPP en masse, are alike.

This vote is an experiment in remaking the nation, just as it is a repudiation of establishment politics. Perhaps devolving power to minority provinces can co-exist with better living standards across the mostly-Sinhalese south. Perhaps a party largely aligned with the south, but which seeks to replace corrupt elites, can improve quality of life for minorities too. Over the past few months, there has been far less of the usual electoral rhetoric that demonises minorities. These polls have reshaped the genre, however briefly. Early signs from the NPP are that the party understands it is merely the beneficiary of a political consciousness that centres accountability. "The people have given us this huge win because they've believed in us," spokesperson Tilvin Silva told journalists. "But if we don't hold on to the weight of that responsibility and we fail, then there is no one else to come to the rescue." Sri Lanka remains in the midst of an economic crisis. Child malnutrition has worsened over the past few years, while the new government and the IMF work out the details of the country's path back from debt defaults, and the bankruptcy it declared in 2022. Sri Lanka has voted for an alternate vision, but if IMF-imposed austerity continues to suppress economic freedom in the homes of regular people, where does the country turn next? The ethno-nationalists who have held sway for a century, have not been vanquished — merely driven back. In the north and east, citizens will also rightly expect land long-held by the military to be returned to them, and for expanded language rights to be the starting point of NPP's rule. Steps toward a nation less riven by ethnic divisions are only tentative and yet, for the moment, ethno-religious critique against the state and the socio-economic critique have dovetailed. This is an island that, in the late 1980s, had simultaneously had Tamil nationalists fighting for a separate state in the north and east, while socialists attempted violent revolution in the southern provinces. It's long been argued that equality of economic opportunity is key to producing social change in Sri Lanka. But previous liberal projects have largely refused to make economic rights a component of their calls for justice. A protest movement largely born of, and propelled by, the middle and lower-middle classes has created conditions necessary for what appears to be a more progressive, and pluralistic, government to sweep into office. If these are gains, economic wellbeing in homes across the island is critical to consolidating them.

## Clearing the air on Delhi's pollution crisis



Since 1984, when M.C. Mehta filed a public interest litigation petition, there has been a flurry of activity to combat air pollution beginning in October and then a long lull. A lot has been achieved, but the growing economy and population have outpaced these measures. This is not unique to Delhi. Los Angeles established its air pollution control programme in 1947 and currently remains among the worst in the U.S., both for PM 2.5 and ozone. The lesson is that urban toxicity is a 'wicked problem' where the problem itself is debated and requires long-term measures. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) began the process of taking a new look at an old problem by asking the government to list the causes of air pollution. However, the National Clean Air Programme, launched in 2019 with its "collaborative and participatory approach," focus on monitoring, set targets, emergency measures, and inclusion of international organisations, has made minimal impact.

The Supreme Court held the right to a clean environment and good health is an inherent part of the fundamental right to life and personal liberty. This is the context of judicial review moving from guiding government decisions to implementing them. The court has asked pertinent questions: despite compliance reports why results on the ground are negligible and what the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), set up in 2021, is doing? It has been dealing with the symptoms developing linear solutions and not responding to interdependent causes driven by rapid urbanisation. The challenge is to move away from coordination between discrete administrative units and enforcement, which is also the standard response of the Delhi government, to transformative action. The population of the city and the surrounding area significantly contributes to year-round toxicity because of vehicular emissions and traffic congestion. Driven by sunlight and low temperatures, a photochemical reaction combines hydrocarbons from the partially unburned exhaust of automobiles with nitrogen oxides, a combustion by-product, to form ozone. This concentration of particulate matter (PM 2.5) causes serious health problems. Dispersed sources in Delhi, Los Angeles, and Beijing, 60% of toxicity comes from vehicles. Another 20% comes from soil dust and less than 20% is from other sources. Stubble burning is temporary and official data show its share in Delhi's PM 2.5 was less than 1% on October 17,

prompting the Delhi government to set up committees for dust control.

The usual response to point sources of pollution — legislating new technology and enforcing stringent prosecution — does not work for dispersed sources, which have a strong societal component and few viable options. For example, 35 years ago, when new vehicle emission standards were being discussed, Rahul Bajaj argued that his foreign collaborator was not parting with technology and that he needed two years to develop his own. The government successfully explained the situation to Parliament and the court. Today, the farmers of Haryana and Punjab are in a worse situation. To conserve groundwater, they are required to delay sowing, reducing the time between harvesting and planting the next crop, and technological solutions have not worked. The Supreme Court is not adjudicating between the fundamental rights of the farmers and those of the residents of Delhi to implement a management plan. We have a case of goal displacement, with Haryana and Punjab being pushed to bear the burden of providing clean air to Delhi, even as Delhi itself is not being similarly prodded. Delhi is facing the classic bureaucratic response to a complex political problem. Cosmetic steps, unverified claims, statistical compliance, and shifting responsibility, were earlier noted by the NGT. This raises the question of whether the CAQM can discharge a political function for the needed hard choices.

A review of Beijing's approach to controlling air pollution by the United Nations Environment Programme provides useful lessons. The population sizes of both cities are comparable, and Delhi shares with Beijing, and other cities, the three stages of dealing with urban air pollution as a long-term task. It begins with end-of-pipe air pollution control, gradually moving to integrated measures targeting primary pollutants, with the government playing the main role. Later, the focus shifts to secondary pollutants, or particulate matter leading to toxic smog, primarily PM2.5, which requires a regional mechanism, our current stage. The similarity ends there. The UN review points to Beijing's techno-political management system, which builds public awareness to deal with toxicity. First, forecasting severe smog levels through warnings issued at least 24 hours in advance with over 1000 PM 2.5 sensors throughout the city to accurately monitor high-emission areas and periods. Second, Beijing has over 30,000 low-floor buses, five times the number operated by Delhi Transport Corporation. Third, both Beijing and Delhi, as transit centres with no peak-hour traffic, require additional measures to manage regional transportation. The Court should be mandating the Graded Response Action Plan and the preparation of a toxicity management plan for the national capital and surrounding areas with budgetary allocations and political endorsement rather than episodic prosecution of farmers or requiring smog towers. Mukul Sanwal served as policy adviser to the Executive Director of UNEP and later to the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC and was closely associated with Inter-Agency Relations in the Chief Executives Board of the UN

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These are extraordinary times in Sri Lanka. While the proportional electoral system has been in place since 1977, no single party had secured two-thirds of the seats in the 225-member house

has turned to NPP en masse, are alike.

This vote is an experiment in remaking the nation, just as it is a repudiation of establishment politics. Perhaps devolving power to minority provinces can co-exist with better living standards across the mostly-Sinhalese south. Perhaps a party largely aligned with the south, but which seeks to replace corrupt elites, can improve quality of life for minorities too. Over the past few months, there has been far less of the usual electoral rhetoric that demonises minorities. These polls have reshaped the genre, however briefly. Early signs from the NPP are that the party understands it is merely the beneficiary of a political consciousness that centres accountability. "The people have given us this huge win because they've believed in us," spokesperson Tilvin Silva told journalists. "But if we don't hold on to the weight of that responsibility and we fail, then there is no one else to come to the rescue." Sri Lanka remains in the midst of an economic crisis. Child malnutrition has worsened over the past few years, while the new government and the IMF work out the details of the country's path back from debt defaults, and the bankruptcy it declared in 2022. Sri Lanka has voted for an alternate vision, but if IMF-imposed austerity continues to suppress economic freedom in the homes of regular people, where does the country turn next? The ethno-nationalists who have held sway for a century, have not been vanquished — merely driven back. In the north and east, citizens will also rightly expect land long-held by the military to be returned to them, and for expanded language rights to be the starting point of NPP's rule. Steps toward a nation less riven by ethnic divisions are only tentative and yet, for the moment, ethno-religious critique against the state and the socio-economic critique have dovetailed. This is an island that, in the late 1980s, had simultaneously had Tamil nationalists fighting for a separate state in the north and east, while socialists attempted violent revolution in the southern provinces. It's long been argued that equality of economic opportunity is key to producing social change in Sri Lanka. But previous liberal projects have largely refused to make economic rights a component of their calls for justice. A protest movement largely born of, and propelled by, the middle and lower-middle classes has created conditions necessary for what appears to be a more progressive, and pluralistic, government to sweep into office. If these are gains, economic wellbeing in homes across the island is critical to consolidating them.

## GM crops can help fight hunger — depending on how they are farmed



The world's population is growing and more people need more food. But indiscriminately expanding agricultural land and practice is not desirable. Cutting forests to plant more crops will only push already-fragile ecosystems over the edge. Dousing fields with pesticides is similarly toxic and depletes soils and groundwater. The genetically modified (GM) crops provide a way out. In the 1990s, researchers found a way to modify a plant's genome and make specific changes that prevented insects from eating them. In the Bt cotton grown in India and Bt brinjal in Bangladesh, scientists added a gene from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* to the plants' genomes, making them produce a toxin that kills some insects. Weeds threaten farms but spraying herbicides to kill them may kill the crops as well. Now there are herbicide-tolerant (HT) GM crops immune to some weed-killing substances, helping farmers kill the weeds alone. Researchers can also modify crops to have higher yield and/or more nutrients, reducing the need to plant more crops.

The advent of GM crops has helped farmers practise sustainable methods while increasing food production. But depending on the kind of GM crops being grown, there are still broader, longer term effects. Frederik Noack, an economist at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada, and others delved into the scientific literature surrounding how farming GM crops may affect human health and the environment. Their review, published in *Science* in August, said there are negligible adverse health effects of actually consuming GM crops whereas the farming methods have complex effects. "What's complicated about GMs is you're not just adding a new genetic organism, you're also adding a whole suite of management changes that come along with it," Risa Sargent, an ecologist at UBC and one of the review's authors, said. "The evidence is that those management changes are the risk, not the genetics of the organism per se." The use of insecticide-resistant crops, like ones with the Bt toxin trait, has shown low levels of risk and resulted in farmers spraying less insecticides. "To me, this trait is one of the more positive stories about GM," said Devang Mehta, a plant biologist at KU Leuven in Belgium. "If you look at India ... you see a reduction in insecticide use. Farmers are getting less poisoned by those insecticides because they don't use those insecticides anymore." This is important because Indian farmers often lack specialised protective gear. Profit versus the environment in some cases, however, pests can develop resistance to the Bt toxin over time, leading to increased pesticide use. This can be countered by diversifying the kinds of Bt crops being planted, including areas where non-Bt crops are planted side-by-side, or by adding more genes to bolster the plant's resistance to pests.

"If we put in just a single resistance gene, you place a lot of pressure on the pathogen to overcome that gene, but if you create a stack of multiple resistance genes, it's much more difficult for the pathogen to overcome it," said Brande Wulff, a plant and food scientist at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), Saudi Arabia. The effects are more nuanced with HT crops, however. They are generally made to resist a specific broad-spectrum herbicide. The farmers benefit because they don't need to expend more labour and money to mechanically remove the weeds: they can just use the herbicide and not worry about their crops dying. This also reduces tilling, where farmers turn the soil over to kill some weeds before planting crops. Tilling can release carbon trapped in the soil, so no-till agriculture reduces carbon emissions to some extent. But only a few major companies are developing most of these HT crops in the U.S., so farmers don't have much say in which herbicide to use. "GM can be whatever you want it to be. But what it will be depends on who develops it," Noack said. "The benefit of [HT crops] for the company is that they also sell the herbicide. You can only use that specific herbicide." The most prominent one companies sell now is glyphosate. There is no straightforward answer to whether these for-profit companies always keep the environment in mind when they develop and sell their HT crop seeds and the accompanying herbicide.

## Behind air crisis: High baseline pollution, multiplicity of factors

New Delhi Both pollution and the political blame game around it have become toxic clichés in Delhi. What would it take to actually bring down pollution in Delhi to permissible levels? According to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) this would work out to an AQI (Air Quality Index) reading of up to 100. Building a quantitative correspondence between pollution levels and its causes requires the use of a modelling exercise. For Delhi, these estimates are given by the Decision Support System for Air Quality Management in Delhi (DSS). DSS calculates the contribution by feeding a model with data on different sources of pollution, such as the number of fires recorded in Punjab and Haryana, the air quality in Delhi's neighbouring districts, and other satellite-based indicators of pollution (and as we learnt on Tuesday, DSS also uses some off-the-wall measures, such as the number of weddings in Delhi, and assuming that fireworks will be used in each). These factors are then made to interact with meteorological factors such



as temperature, humidity, wind direction and speed to generate an estimate of air quality and the contribution of different factors.

If one were to believe the DSS numbers, what would it take to bring Delhi's pollution levels within NAAQS levels?

On November 17 (the AQI on the day was 441 and it is the latest data available from the DSS), even halving each source of pollution would not bring the AQI down to permissible standards, an HT analysis of DSS data shows. DSS has 29 sources

For every solution, a problem. According to the review, farmers adopting HT crops hasn't mitigated herbicide use; in some cases it has even led to an increase, especially of glyphosate. "Initially, people thought glyphosate would be less toxic because it decays pretty fast if it gets into the environment," said Noack. "Now, very recent studies are showing that it's actually really harmful for human health." A lot of the increased use is also driven by weeds rapidly developing resistance against the herbicides. The more farmers are driven to using a specific herbicide, including glyphosate, the more the weeds can become resistant. "It's a little bit similar to the antibiotic resistance in medicine, right? Where if you constantly use the same antibiotic, you have a big problem because the bacteria become resistant to that," Mehta said. "... if you use the same herbicide over and over in your field, you are building that problem slowly." To counter the weed's resistance to glyphosate, some GM crops have additional modifications that equip them to also resist dicamba, a broad-spectrum herbicide. However, dicamba is potentially more toxic to humans and good at spreading around. "If you are the neighbour of the farmer who uses that herbicide, and you don't plant GM crops, it just kills all of your crops," Noack said. "The general problem is each time we come up with a new pesticide, we'll create problems downstream." Somewhere in the middle, Scientists ascertain a pesticide's toxicity by testing its short-term effects on rats, although that doesn't reveal the full extent of its effects. "That's of course a very different question than to see what's the long-term impact on infant health," Noack added. "If it's causing cancer, we won't see that in the rat population because the rats won't live long enough to show that." "Industry wants the release right away. They've developed some new technology. They want to be able to sell it, which makes sense. That's the capitalistic driver of it," Sargent said. "But we can't just give pesticides to people and see what happens. Often it takes years and years of very careful science to tease out the impacts." Noack believes another reason resistance develops and spreads is if the farmers all plant the same crops and use the same herbicides. Crop rotation — where farmers plant different crops in the same area — can help reduce the reliance on agro-chemicals and lower resistance. Sargent suggested using evidence-based precautionary measures of pest management, which involve not excessively using herbicides to kill every weed in the field. "Let's say a complete ban on pesticides is one extreme, and probably our current agricultural system in many places is the other extreme. Somewhere in the middle is an approach such as ... or integrated pest management," she said. "The protocol is that there's a certain level of accepted weeds in a field that would be determined between a ... specialist and the farmer working together."

A very black and white way The few companies that make and sell HT crops have monopolised their production. It's prohibitively expensive to regulate GM crops (more than \$40 million for a single GM trait to be regulated and eventually commercialised), leaving most government institutions and smaller companies behind. Modern tools like CRISPR help scientists make targeted changes to a plant's genome, cutting the cost of development. People are also more accepting of GM when the plant doesn't have foreign genes. But the costs of regulation and ensuring nothing harmful enters the market is still too high for institutions that don't only work for profit. "I think the problem is that a lot of the regulations, including in India, are based on 'is it a GM or is it not a GM'. It's not about whether it's herbicide, insecticide or nutrition," said Mehta. "They don't care about the trait, they care only about the method, which is a very black and white way of doing things." The review also found more data is required to assess the true impact of GM on biodiversity. In some places, the number of insect pollinators has dropped but whether that's due to GM crops or to urbanisation, climate change, and/or other drivers of habitat loss is unclear. "We have very little longitudinal data on species trends for almost any species. For most insects, most amphibians, most mammals, how would you possibly go back and say, 'here are the clear effects on biodiversity' when we have almost no data?" Sargent asked.

Another confounding factor is that a lot of the research on GM and biodiversity is sponsored by industries, according to Sargent, which is muddying the waters. Mark Tester, a botanist at KAUST, said many of the potential environmental effects attributed to GM crop-farming are not unique to GM: they're just the natural consequences of agriculture. "You can think of it as a war between agriculture and nature, where we're trying to feed eight billion people," he said. "We're using the same amount of land that we were using for feeding six billion, which means we must increase production efficiencies by 30%."

neighbouring states (13.1%). Just stopping all transport in Delhi on the day would bring down AQI to 401 and just dousing all the fires in Punjab and Haryana would bring down the AQI to 411, both of which would still land Delhi in the "severe" category. In fact, even if all sources were halved, Delhi's AQI on November 17 would only be 323. To be sure, this analysis needs to be read with the fact that AQI levels show a diminishing relationship with rise in air pollution levels and therefore reducing pollution from very high to high levels would have muted impact on AQI reduction..

## RBI approves LIC's plan to acquire up to 9.99% stake in ICICI Bank



New Delhi: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has approved state-owned insurer Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) to acquire an aggregate holding of up to 9.99 per cent of the paid-up share capital or voting rights in ICICI Bank, the private lender said in a regulatory filing on Saturday.

ICICI Bank said it received a copy of the RBI's approval letter — dated September 4 — at 9:09 pm on the same day. The approval allows LIC to acquire the stake

within one year from the date of the RBI approval letter, failing which the approval will stand cancelled. However, the approval is subject to certain conditions, including compliance with applicable statutory and regulatory provisions, the bank said. Moreover, the central bank's nod does not mean LIC has immediately increased its holding in ICICI Bank to 9.99 per cent. Any acquisition will have to be undertaken in accordance with the conditions laid down by the central bank and other applicable regulatory norms, according to the private bank. In a separate development last month, RBI had approved LIC's application to acquire up to 9.99 per cent of HDFC Bank's paid-up share capital or voting rights. HDFC Bank had said LIC held 4.11 per cent of its total share capital as of August 14. The approval for ICICI Bank gives LIC flexibility to increase its holding in the private sector lender, subject to applicable regulatory and statutory requirements. Shares of LIC on Friday ended at Rs 415.25, a decrease of more than one per cent on the BSE. The stock has touched a 52-week high of Rs 468.30 and a 52-week low of Rs 361, according to the exchange. While ICICI Bank shares closed at Rs 1,423, down 0.14 per cent on the aforesaid exchange. The stock recorded a 52-week high of Rs 1,479.90 and a 52-week low of Rs 1,187.55.

## Air India fires pilot who failed dope test after it is flagged by accidents bureau

Shortly after the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) flagged the positive drug test of the pilot-in-command (PIC) of the Air India aircraft that was involved in a sudden altitude loss incident on August 4, the airline announced the termination of the pilot's employment with immediate effect on Friday. "Safety remains Air India's highest priority. The Pilot-in-Command of the Phuket-Delhi flight tested positive for a psychoactive substance. In line with Air India's zero-tolerance approach to violation of safety, fitness or regulatory requirements, the pilot's employment has been terminated with immediate effect," an Air India spokesperson said Friday evening. According to sources, the PIC had tested positive for marijuana.

Friday morning, the AAIB released its preliminary report on the investigation into the incident involving Air India's Airbus A320 aircraft VT-EXO, flying from Phuket to Delhi. While the investigation remains underway and the preliminary report hasn't identified any definitive likely cause, it focussed on a sudden and brief triple hydraulic failure and the 34-year-old PIC's positive drug test report. The AAIB also issued a recommendation to regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to take actions deemed fit to prevent abuse of psychoactive substances. Neither the airline nor the AAIB identified the PIC. According to the AAIB's preliminary report, the PIC has over 5,000 hours of total flying experience of over 5,000 hours, all of which are on the A320 aircraft type. "Detailed investigation regarding technical and other aspects are underway. In this case, it has been observed that the PIC was found non-negative for psycho-active substance in the confirmatory test. The confirmation of use of psycho-active substance is a serious concern and AAIB recommends appropriate actions by DGCA on priority. The preliminary report is published as per ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) guidelines. The investigation is under progress. The final report will be published in due course," the preliminary report said. But it did not say whether or not the purported use of drugs by the pilot-in-command was directly linked to the incident.

The DGCA is already in the process of holding stakeholder consultations to expand the scope of random testing of pilots for drug abuse. The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) has mooted a once-a-year random drug test of all pilots, up from the current norm of 10% pilots being tested per year, according to Civil Aviation Minister K Ramamohan Naidu. On August 14, The Indian Express had reported that an initial assessment of the digital flight data recorder (DFDR) data by Airbus had indicated that the aircraft experienced a temporary loss of all three hydraulic systems, which led to loss of key aircraft control surfaces for a few seconds. The AAIB preliminary report has not identified any underlying cause for the rarest-of-rare triple hydraulic failure, and clarity on this count is now expected only when the final investigation report is released. Conduct of the pilots has also been under scanner, particularly in view of the PIC's positive drug test report, which has now been confirmed by the AAIB. A key question in the investigation will be whether the hydraulic systems actually failed — and if yes, why — or was it a case of spurious signals. Airbus and French aircraft accident investigation body BEA are assisting the AAIB probe. On August 4, the aircraft encountered a sudden altitude drop at cruising altitude over Odisha, resulting in injuries to 20 passengers and four cabin crew members. The aircraft had 137 passengers, six cabin crew members, and two pilots on board. The incident also damaged the aircraft cabin including ceiling panels, overhead bins, and handrails, among others. A series of snags involving the aircraft's hydraulic systems and flight control surfaces have emerged as a key focus area for investigators. According to the preliminary report, some hydraulic components and samples of VT-



EXO have been collected for further analysis following the aircraft's inspection by Airbus technical experts.

Its maintenance records have also been collected by the AAIB from Air India for further scrutiny, and investigators also have the data from the plane's DFDR and cockpit voice recorder. Other pieces of evidence and records collected from the airline, airport authorities, and ATC are also being evaluated. The Airbus A320 aircraft has three independent hydraulic systems — coded green, blue, and yellow — built as a redundancy so that the loss of one such system doesn't result in total loss of hydraulic control. According to the preliminary report, the incident occurred while the aircraft was cruising at 36,000 feet at 09:32:43 am India time, when the aircraft's flight control system detected loss of green hydraulic system. About four seconds later, loss of blue and yellow hydraulic systems were detected, followed by the autopilot getting disengaged. Shortly thereafter, the stall warning triggered for two seconds.

"The Co-Pilot, who was the Pilot Flying (PF) responded and tried to control the prevailing situation. Subsequently, PIC took over the controls. Meanwhile, the aircraft encountered altitude upset. Initially, it gained 372 ft and fell by 292 ft from its assigned FL360 during the event," it stated. "At around 04:02:52 UTC (09:32:52 India time), the Blue hydraulic system was recovered, and a few seconds later, the Yellow hydraulic and the Green hydraulic systems were also recovered. Consequently, this led to the recovery of the Flight control (F/CTL) surfaces. Subsequently, the aircraft operation returned to its normal operating condition," the report stated.

The AAIB noted that since seatbelt signs were off at the time of the incident, some passengers and cabin crew members sustained injuries. "The flight crew assessed the cabin situation and took the decision of continuing the flight to its planned destination i.e. Delhi airport and did not divert to the nearest enroute airport. Later, the flight crew contacted ATC Delhi and sought medical priority. ATC responded accordingly and provided requisite assistance. At 05:30 UTC aircraft landed safely on runway 11 L at IGI airport, Delhi," the report stated. Following the release of the preliminary report, Air India said it continues to extend full cooperation to the investigation, including providing access to all relevant operational, maintenance and technical records. Friday morning, an Air India spokesperson said, "Our pilots undergo rigorous training, regular proficiency checks, medical examinations and other regulatory assessments in accordance with applicable national and international requirements. Following the incident, Air India has started voluntary testing of 100% of its pilots as a further step to reinforce its safety-first approach. The airline maintains zero tolerance for any breach of safety, fitness or regulatory requirements and will take appropriate action wherever warranted. Air India remains committed to implementing any recommendations arising from the investigation."

## How Gloria Steinem helped change the way women's health is researched



For much of the 20th century, medical research was conducted largely through a male lens. Women were often excluded from clinical studies, reproductive health was treated as a private matter, and illnesses disproportionately affecting women received comparatively little scientific attention. Gloria Steinem did not create the women's health movement, nor did she single-handedly transform medical research. But as one of feminism's most influential public voices, she helped make women's health a political issue and helped create the pressure for medicine and research institutions to change.

**Reproductive rights:** Health as a matter of autonomy Steinem's campaign for reproductive rights placed control over women's bodies at the heart of the feminist movement. She argued that access to contraception and abortion was not simply a social or moral question but fundamental to women's equality. That argument helped shift reproductive health from the private sphere into public policy. The growing political movement around reproductive autonomy also encouraged greater attention to contraception, pregnancy, fertility and the health consequences of reproductive decisions. For Steinem, the underlying principle was straightforward: women could not have genuine equality without control over their own bodies.

**Menstruation:** Breaking the silence Steinem brought another neglected subject into public conversation: menstruation. Her celebrated 1978 essay, "If Men Could Menstruate," used satire to expose the stigma surrounding periods and the cultural tendency to regard women's biology as embarrassing or inconvenient. The essay was more than a feminist joke. By making menstruation discussable, Steinem challenged the silence surrounding menstrual symptoms and disorders. That mattered because conditions associated with menstruation had often been normalised rather than investigated. Her broader message was that women's everyday physical experiences deserved to be taken seriously—and, ultimately, scientifically understood. The women's health movement gave political force to a common complaint: women were not always believed when they described pain.

It helped shift the lens to conditions such as endometriosis, a chronic condition in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the uterus, often caus-

ing severe menstrual and pelvic pain, inflammation, and sometimes infertility. Endometriosis can cause severe pelvic pain, infertility and other complications, yet diagnosis has historically been delayed and the disease remains incompletely understood. In fact, earlier this year, Steinem spearheaded conversations around it. By challenging the dismissal of women's bodily experiences, she helped establish the principle that women's pain should be investigated rather than simply endured. That cultural shift helped create an environment in which neglected conditions could become legitimate research priorities. Challenging the male model of medicine Perhaps Steinem's most important contribution was challenging the assumption that medical knowledge derived from men could simply be applied to women. By the 1970s and 1980s, women's health advocates were exposing the consequences of women's underrepresentation in research. The issue was not merely fairness: biological differences could affect symptoms, disease progression, drug responses and treatment outcomes. In 1986, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the US agency for biomedical and public-health research, introduced a policy encouraging the inclusion of women in clinical research. In 1990, it established the Office of Research on Women's Health, giving women's health a permanent institutional presence within the nation's leading biomedical research agency.

**The Women's Health Initiative** The new emphasis on women's health produced large-scale research. In 1991, the NIH launched the Women's Health Initiative, ultimately enrolling more than 150,000 postmenopausal women. The programme investigated major causes of illness and death among women, including cardiovascular disease, cancer and osteoporosis, while also examining the effects of hormone therapy and dietary interventions. Its scale was significant not simply because of the findings it produced, but because it demonstrated that women's health questions warranted major, long-term scientific investment.

The movement's influence eventually became embedded in federal policy. The 1993 NIH Revitalization Act required women and minorities to be included in NIH-supported clinical research and required researchers to examine whether treatments affected different populations differently. This represented a fundamental change. Women's participation in research was no longer merely encouraged as a matter of representation; it became part of the structure of federally funded clinical science. Steinem's most important contribution to women's health research was, therefore, indirect but profound. She helped turn women's experiences — from reproductive choices to menstruation and bodily pain — into subjects of public debate and demands for institutional accountability. Her enduring message was ultimately a scientific one as much as a political one: Women's experiences are evidence, women's health questions deserve investigation, and women's bodies cannot be understood adequately by treating men as the default patient.

## Living with Type 1 diabetes since age 7, he overcame limits to become a cyclist



During a recent visit to India, Dacal met Dr V Mohan, founder-chairman of Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, and spoke about the realities of living with the condition. During a recent visit to India, Dacal met Dr V Mohan, founder-chairman of Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, and spoke about the realities of living with the condition. When Brais Dacal was seven, he was told that his life would have to be different. Diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at that age, the Spanish cyclist remembers being advised to lead an easy life and avoid pushing himself too hard. For a child with dreams of sport, it could easily have become a sentence of limitation.

Instead, Dacal chose to test those limits. Years later, he would go on to become a professional cyclist, spending five seasons with Team Novo Nordisk, a team whose riders all live with diabetes. Although he no longer races professionally, Dacal remains one of the team's prominent ambassadors, travelling to speak about his experiences of competing at the highest level while managing Type 1 diabetes.

"I have always believed that I should own my diabetes, rather than let it own me," Dacal says. "Living with Type 1 diabetes has added an extra layer of discipline, anticipation and courage to my cycling career and to life in general." During a recent visit to India, Dacal met Dr V Mohan, founder-chairman of Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre, and spoke about the realities of living with the condition. For him, the message to children with Type 1 diabetes is straightforward: a diagnosis should not mean giving up on their ambitions. He encouraged them to continue pursuing their dreams — and, in his words, to strive to become champions. For Dr Mohan, that message is particularly powerful because children often need to see possibilities rather than simply hear about them. "We have several children who are living with Type 1 diabetes and have excelled in their fields," he says. "Hence, those living with the condition are often able to relate more closely to others who have undergone similar symptoms, challenges and emotions." That is where peer support becomes important, he says. Sharing experiences with others who understand the daily demands of the condition can provide reassurance and a sense of belonging, while reminding people with diabetes that they are not alone. For Dacal, however, managing diabetes has never been about simply overcoming a medical condition. It has been about learning to live with it — and planning for it — without allowing it to take over.

Professional cycling is demanding even for a healthy athlete. For someone living with Type 1 diabetes, a long, steady ride does not place the same demands on the body as a short, intense effort. Insulin requirements, food intake and blood glucose levels have to be considered before the cyclist even gets on the bike. "For example, long and steady rides will require different insulin and food intake than short and intense rides," Dacal says. His approach is methodical. He follows his doctor's advice, trains, records his blood sugar levels and keeps track of what he has done. Then he

studies the results and adjusts. "I keep learning through trial and error," he says. Preparation extends to what he carries on the bike. Extra food is essential to maintain carbohydrate intake during exercise and to deal with possible hypoglycaemia or low blood sugar levels. Insulin has to be available in case of hyperglycaemia or high blood sugar level. "The most important thing is to be prepared for anything that can happen," he says. The same philosophy applies when he travels. Different countries mean different foods, schedules and temperatures — variables that can complicate diabetes management. "Again, it is about planning ahead and prevention," Dacal says. "You need to learn about the foods you will find, plan your trips and always have a Plan B." His version of a Plan B is deliberately generous. "I carry enough supplies to cover a couple of end-of-the-world situations," he says. Dacal's years as a professional cyclist also taught him that elite sport cannot be separated from health. "An unhealthy athlete will never be a good athlete," he says. While managing Type 1 diabetes is only one part of the equation, eating well, recovering properly, avoiding illness and monitoring the body are equally important. The difference at the professional level is that pushing the body to its limits is deliberate. Training loads, weight loss and harder efforts are not left to chance. They are planned with coaches and medical professionals. "If we need to lose weight, we plan it along with the medical staff and the coaches. If we need to go harder, again, we plan it well. We don't do random," he says. For all the emphasis on pushing boundaries, Dacal is equally clear about the importance of knowing when to rest. "Working more does not translate into results if you are not effective and efficient, or if you do not take enough rest," he says. For an athlete managing Type 1 diabetes, listening to the body becomes even more critical. Today, Dacal's career has moved beyond racing. As the general manager of a large sports organisation, he spends much of his time travelling, managing people and juggling different responsibilities. His days are no longer structured entirely around training but the principles remain familiar: plan ahead, stay flexible and pay attention to what the body is saying. Dacal's visit to India also gave him an opportunity to reflect on the future of cycling in the country. He sees enormous potential in India's growing interest in professional cycling and hopes the sport will become increasingly visible on the international stage. "Without health, there is nothing you can do to perform, no matter what the discipline," he says.

## ECLGS 5.0 issues 6.73 lakh guarantees worth Rs 2.5 lakh crore

New Delhi: Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) 5.0 has issued 6,73,979 guarantees covering a guaranteed amount of Rs 2,50,024 crore, an official factsheet said on Saturday. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) accounted for 97.3 per cent of guarantees by number and 80.79 per cent of the total value. Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme 5.0, implemented by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company, provides targeted credit guarantees to Member Lending Institutions to extend additional working capital to eligible borrowers affected by external disruptions. It supports MSMEs, eligible non-MSME businesses and scheduled passenger airlines through government-backed guarantees.

## NSE IPO gets SEBI nod, may eye listing by September end

NSE dominates India's equity derivatives market and is the world's most active derivatives exchange by contracts traded. It also leads BSE in terms of revenues, market share, and liquidity. NSE dominates India's equity derivatives market and is the world's most active derivatives exchange by contracts traded. It also leads BSE in terms of revenues, market share, and liquidity. The decks have been cleared for what may be the country's biggest-ever listing, as the markets regulator has approved the estimated Rs 30,000 crore IPO of the National Stock Exchange (NSE), over two months after it filed the papers, and about a decade after it first tried to hit the primary market. The country's largest stock exchange may get listed as soon as this month, reports suggested. The approval clears a key regulatory hurdle for the exchange after it had first filed its IPO papers back in June. The price band for the issue is likely to be announced on September 15, with plans to list in the week starting September 21, Reuters reported, citing unnamed sources. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issued an observation letter with the green light to NSE on Friday. With the path now clear following almost a decade of regulatory roadblocks, the issue could end up as the country's biggest-ever IPO, surpassing Hyundai Motor India's Rs 27,870 crore issue in 2024. The unlisted market indicates a valuation of around Rs 5 lakh crore for the exchange. The valuation and the amount raised now depend on the price band of

the issue. Rival BSE had raised Rs 1,243.43 crore through its public issue back in 2017. The stock has since gained nearly 29 times from its listing price, becoming among the most lucrative stocks in the market. NSE dominates India's equity derivatives market and is the world's most active derivatives exchange by contracts traded. It also leads BSE in terms of revenues, market share, and liquidity. It will also be interesting to see if the regulator allows NSE's shares to trade on its own exchange through the "permitted-to-trade" route. What is the IPO structure? The issue will entirely be an offer for sale (OFS) of 14.89 crore shares, representing around 6% of the exchange's stake. Funds raised via OFS are pocketed by selling shareholders and are not utilised in a company's business. SBI will flood up to 2.48 crore shares in the OFS. MS Strategic (Mauritius) will sell up to 1.6 crore shares. Other major listed entities offloading some of their stakes include Bank of Baroda, General Insurance Company of India, and the New India Assurance Company. Shares of many of these companies have skyrocketed in the run-up to the issue. For example, shares of New India Assurance shot up over 18% on Friday. In fact, the stock has gained 34% over just a month. Having bought shares early on at an average cost of under a rupee, the IPO, which targets high valuations, is expected to unlock significant cash for the likes of SBI, Bank of Baroda, and the insurance companies.

## Lovlina enters Asian Games 75kg final, Kapil wins bronze

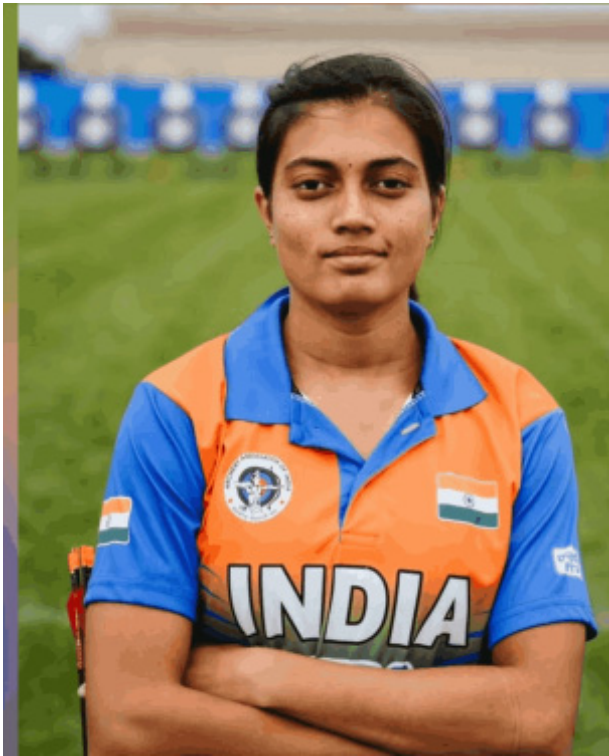


Nishoi: Lovlina Borgohain booked her place in the women's 75kg boxing final at the Asian Games 2026 after edging past Kazakhstan's Natalya Bogdanova in a closely fought semifinal, while Kapil Pokharia's campaign ended with a bronze medal following a 1-4 defeat to Uzbekistan's Turabek Khabibullaev in the men's 90kg last-four clash. Lovlina prevailed 3-2 on a split decision after recovering from a narrow deficit in the opening round. The Indian boxer will now fight for gold against China's Bao Ziyi. The semifinal began cautiously, with neither boxer willing to commit heavily. Bogdanova gradually increased her attacking intent while Lovlina remained patient, looking to counter rather than engage in prolonged exchanges. The Kazakh was rewarded by the judges with a 3-2 verdict in the opening round.

Lovlina responded emphatically in the second. She opened with a clean left hook and became more assertive as the round progressed. The exchanges grew more open, with both fighters finding their targets, but Lovlina's sharper combinations and greater initiative swayed all five judges in her favour. She took the second round 5-0, putting herself ahead heading into the final three minutes.

Bogdanova came out knowing she needed a strong finish and increased the pressure. A left hook briefly tested Lovlina, who answered with a counter. Rather than being drawn into a frantic exchange, the Indian used her experience to stay defensively disciplined and pick her moments. The Kazakh pushed hard until the final bell, but Lovlina managed to restrict the number of clean connections and protect her advantage. The judges eventually handed the Indian a 3-2 split decision. The victory gives Lovlina another opportunity to win the Asian Games title after she had to settle for silver at the previous edition. She also arrives in the final as the reigning Commonwealth Games silver medallist, having won the 75kg silver in Glasgow earlier this year. Kapil Pokharia was unable to make the men's 90kg final after losing 1-4 to reigning world champion Turabek Khabibullaev of Uzbekistan. Kapil made a bright start and found success with combinations during the opening round, but Turabek's speed, physicality and accuracy gradually shifted the contest in his favour. The Uzbek boxer was awarded the first round unanimously, leaving Kapil with ground to recover. The Indian continued to look for openings in the second round and landed several punches, but Turabek responded with a strong left hook and controlled much of the exchanges. The judges awarded the round 4-1 to the Uzbek, putting Kapil in a difficult position heading into the final round. Kapil continued to attack and attempted to force the pace, but Turabek remained the more effective boxer. The Uzbek eventually secured a 4-1 split-decision victory to advance to the final, while Kapil took home the bronze medal. Turabek entered the semifinal as the reigning world champion and had also won bronze at the previous Asian Games, although that medal came in the 80kg category. With Kapil's defeat, India's boxing action for the day came to an end. The country will have three boxers fighting for gold on October 2, Parveen Hooda, Lovlina Borgohain and Ankush Panghal. Kapil joins Priya Ghanghas and Narender among the Indian boxers who have secured bronze medals at the 2026 Asian Games.

## Chikitha, Sahil enter mixed compound final



Okazaki: Indian mixed compound team of Sahil Rajesh Jadhav and Chikitha Taniparthi entered the final with a 156-155 win over Thailand's Peerawat Rattanapongkiat and Kanoknapus Kaewchomphu here at Okazaki Chuo Sogo Park Multipurpose Square on Wednesday. The Indian duo

will take on the winner of the second semifinal between South Korea and China. This will be Chikitha's second gold medal match in the ongoing Games after featuring in the women's team gold medal win.

Chikitha and Rajesh started off with three 10s and a nine. Thailand had a dismal start with 9 and 8 before shooting two 10s, with India holding an early lead of 39-37 after End 1. In the End 2, a nine for Kanoknapus and 10 again from Peerawat. Chikitha and Sahil shoot 10 each, and India extends the lead to three. At the completion of End 2, India leads 77-75 after both Chikitha and Sahil shoot 9s. Thailand had a strong start to End 3 with perfect 10s but India showed no signs of slipping up as they maintained the lead 117-115. In the final end, the Thai pair began with perfect 10s. Chikitha, however, shot 9 as India's lead reduced by one. But Sahil found 10, and India leads 136-135.

India were under some pressure as Kanaknapus and Peerawat 10s each. But Chikitha hit the 10 before Sahil sealed the deal with another, finding the 10 to send India into the final with a 156-155 win. Chikitha is eyeing her second in Aichi-Nagoya, as she earlier teamed up with Prithika Pradeep and Jyothi Surekha Vennam to win the gold in the women's team event, beating China 238-234. India had won silver in the event in 2018 and bronze in 2014. This is India's seventh gold at the ongoing edition of the continental showpiece. Overall, India's medal tally currently stands at 53, including seven gold, 21 silver and 25 bronze medals. The Indian men's compound team will also be in action on Wednesday in the semifinal against South Korea. India enjoyed its most successful Asian Games archery campaign in Hangzhou 2023, winning a record nine medals — five gold, two silver and two bronze. The compound archers swept all five gold medals o

## HK Simha century and Aniketh Reddy five-for headline Hyderabad cricket matches



Hyderabad: A century by HK Simha (104, 168b, 16x4, 1x6) for Team A and a fine spell by Aniketh Reddy (five for 133) for Team B were the highlights of the senior multi-day match here on Tuesday. Senior men's multi-day matches: Team B 336 in 81 overs and 151/5 in 29 overs (Sai Vikas Reddy 54, Ruthik Yadav M 3/39) drew with Team A 484/10 in 103 overs (HK Simha 104, CV Milind 73, Tanay Thyagarajann 63, M Ruthik Yadav 30 not out, Karthikeya Kak 3/75, Aniketh Reddy 5/133). Bengal Under-23 team's tour of Hyderabad: Bengal 110 in 40.2 overs (Pranav Varma 5/37, Md Abdul Malik 3/28) and 130 in 26.1 overs (Milind Mondal 41, Nishanth Saranu 3/19, Muragan Abhishek 3/54) lost to Hyderabad 225 in 77.1 overs (Raghava Pattapu 34, R Sai Sharan 59, Pranav Varma 44, Jeet Thakur 5/75) and 19/1 in 4.2 overs.

Under-16 boys' multi-day selection matches: Team A 154 in 45.4 overs (C Siddhardha 55, G Advait Reddy 3/28, Ayaan Abdullah 3/19) vs Team C 125/0 in 35 overs (M Nishanth Reddy 50 batting, Parthiv Varma 61 batting). Team B 321 in 76.2 overs (Raghaav Narayan 65, J Jagathveer Raj Nayak 90, M Aryan 52, Akshay Goudi 30 not out, K Medhansh Reddy 3/58, K Dhanush Kumar 3/56) vs Team D 46/1 in 20 overs.

Team E 322/9 in 90 overs (Mokshit Jannu 33, G Rakesh Sekhar 105, M Kushant Neil Varma 84, P Lalith Aditya Reddy 4/37) vs Team G 34/0 in 6 overs. Team H 160 in 52.3 overs (Satvik Biradar 88, Naren Koka 3/20, P Vivan Reddy 5/36) vs Team F 111/4 in 25 overs (Omkareshwar 39). Team I 270 in 72.3 overs (Charan C 72, Harsh Gandra 44, Khade Tanishq 68, Aryan Rath 5/43, Krithik Subramaniam 3/19)

vs Team K 26/2 in 7.3 overs. Team J 305 in 88.4 overs (Ratesh Reddy 37, C Jaya Prakash Narayan 155, G Ashwin Kumar 32, Sai Tanishq C 3/50) vs Team L 42/0 in 10 overs (C Sai Tanishq 30 batting). Senior women's T20 Super League: Team C 128/6 in 20 overs (P Hansika Rao 41) lost to Team D 129/5 in 19.2 overs (E Meha Laxmi 30, Y Trisha Poojitha 41). Team A 103/3 in 20 overs (M Shivani Goud 40) lost to Team B 106/3 in 15.5 overs (Sandhya Gora 40, G Trisha 40). Under-15 girls' one-day league: Team-3 193/6 in 35 overs (P Shanvi 35, Sara Yadav 51 not out) lost to Team-1 194/4 in 24.3 overs (M Anwita Sonia 50, Aradhya Yadav 50). Team-22 156/7 in 35 overs (Divya Kethavath 42) beat Team-23 127 in 29.3 overs (Neha 40, Divya Kethavath 3/9, K Lasya Priya 4/18). Team-4 170/8 in 35 overs (V Nikeshini 52, R Devi Priya 46) lost to Team-2 171/7 in 34.2 overs (S Gayatri Durga 51). Team-8 180/4 in 35 overs (K Pavithra 51, Mona Sri C 3/30) beat Team-5 71 in 16.4 overs (E Jahanavi 3/13). Team-6 206/4 in 35 overs (N Nihitha Reddy 50, Aishwarya A Chauhan 30, M Sri Chaitra 37 not out, Cianna Anthony 3/25) beat Team-7 169/5 in 35 overs (Acha Yeshwika 51 not out, D Venya Patel 54 not out). Team-18 95/6 in 35 overs lost to Team-20 96/0 in 11.1 overs (A Shrivalli 50 not out). Team-24 123 in 26.4 overs (M Bruhati 34, Beera Nehasanvi 3/11) lost to Team-21 124/5 in 20.3 overs (K Viharika 33).

## Varun Goud hits 109 as HCA practice match ends in draw

Hyderabad: A Varun Goud cracked a century (109 retired hurt, 133b, 13x4, 2x6) for Team A against Team B in the HCA senior men's practice match here on Monday. The scores:

Senior men's practice match: Team B 336 in 81 overs (Aryan Krishna 31, CTL Rakshann Readdi 3/54, Tanay Tyagarajann 3/94) vs Team A 324/4 in 69 overs (Tanmay Agarwal 62, A Varun Goud 109 retired hurt, HK Simha 62 batting, CV Milind 70 batting).

## From hospital bed to Asian Games gold: Neeru Dhanda's journey



Ten days before she won a historic Asian Games gold medal, Neeru Dhanda was in a hospital bed, so ill that it was touch and go whether she would make it to Nagoya at all. For three-and-a-half weeks, the Indian trap shooter had not trained. During the national camp in New Delhi, she spent most of her time confined to her room. For five days, she did not eat anything, surviving only on water. By the time she reached Japan for the Asian Games, the 26-year-old had barely had the opportunity to prepare for the competition that would define her career.

And yet, on Tuesday, as rain lashed the shooting range in Urenocho, in rural Toyota, Dhanda stood atop the podium, having done what no Indian woman had managed before, and no Indian shooter irrespective of the gender had since 1978: win an individual gold medal in trap shooting at the Asian Games. She hit 28 of her 30 targets in the final, setting an Asian Games record and finishing ahead of China's Sun Yunong, who took silver with 26 hits. It was India's fifth gold medal at the Games and a landmark moment for a discipline in which the country had long struggled to reach the top of the podium.

The significance of Dhanda's triumph stretched well beyond India's medal tally. Not only had an Indian woman won this title at the Asian Games for the first time, it also brought an end to a decades-long wait for the country to claim the event's gold. A former kabaddi player, Neeru Dhanda made history as the first Indian woman to win trap shooting individual gold at the Asian Games. (PTI Photo) A former kabaddi player, Neeru Dhanda made history as the first Indian woman to win trap shooting individual gold at the Asian Games. (PTI Photo) The last Indian to win the trap gold was Randhir Singh, in 1978, as China and Kuwait dominated the event in the last 30 years. In the women's competition, introduced at the Asian Games in 1990, China won gold in every edition except 2010, when Japan's Yuki Nakayama claimed the title. Dhanda, who also topped the qualifying round, had broken that pattern, and did so after a preparation that had been anything but conventional. After picking up an infection during the camp, Dhanda said her 'condition was quite bad'. Her coach, Arjuna Award winner Mansher Singh, kept calling her during the illness and throughout her stay in Japan, ensuring she remained in the right mind space.

"Every day, he kept me motivated, saying, 'Nothing

happens, even if you don't train for four-five days, it doesn't make any difference. You are super, and you will remain a star,'" Dhanda said, adding that she also received messages of support from former MP Sports Minister Yashodhara Raju. Ten days before she won a historic Asian Games gold medal, Neeru Dhanda was in a hospital bed, so ill that it was touch and go whether she would make it to Nagoya at all. (PTI) Ten days before she won a historic Asian Games gold medal, Neeru Dhanda was in a hospital bed, so ill that it was touch and go whether she would make it to Nagoya at all. (PTI) Peter Wilson, India's trap shooting coach, was struck by the scale of her recovery. "That's what's incredible. Ten days ago she was in hospital for three days. She was really, really sick and it was touch and go whether she would come," Wilson said. "She has not trained for three-and-a-half weeks. She shot for two days here. She is very talented, but she puts a huge amount of work in. Put the work in and the results will come."

The illness had left Dhanda with little time to regain her form. But the confidence she had built over years of training, and the reassurance from Mansher, helped her approach the competition without dwelling on what she had missed. Dhanda's journey to the top had begun in Jind, after watching her cousin, and shotgun shooter, Lakshya Sheoran win silver in the trap event at the 2018 Asian Games. Sheoran's parents introduced her to the sport and five years ago, she moved to Bhopal to train at the Madhya Pradesh State Shooting Academy, where access to equipment and structured coaching helped her develop. The early promise has since translated into major international success. Dhanda, who won the Asian Championship gold last year, arrived in Japan after becoming the first Indian woman to win an individual trap gold at an ISSF World Cup in July. But the Asian Games presented a different challenge, particularly with her preparation disrupted by illness. On Tuesday, the weather offered little respite. Rain poured down on the shooting range in Urenocho, the drops striking the shooters' hands as they took aim. The conditions were familiar to Dhanda from competitions in India, particularly in Bhopal, where rain often interrupts training and trials. But the intensity of the downpour in Japan made it harder to maintain concentration. "The challenge here was that rain was coming from above, falling on the hands, you feel it, and the mind strays a bit from the process," she said.

Her response was to keep returning to the basics, reminding herself to stay focused even as the weather threatened to distract her. "Neeru, this will happen; even if a storm comes, don't look down on yourself, keep looking up, elevate your process, polish yourself," she recalled telling herself. That discipline was evident in the final. So precise was she that by the time the final shots were fired, she had established a clear advantage over Sun Yunong and secured the gold. The victory margin may suggest it was comfortable for the Indian. "(But) This was not easy. I made it look easy so that future juniors and other Indian players who are currently training in trap shooting, shotgun, and overall — meaning for the whole shooting team — can go on to win gold, thinking that if Neeru can do it, so can we," she said.

## Mortgaged harvester, COVID spent with broken bows

GNS News Agency, Oct 4

As the Indian mixed compound team of 21-year-old Chikitha Taniparthi and 25-year-old Sahil Jadhav won the gold with a shoot-off win over the Korean team of Park Jeongyun and Choi Yonghee in Asian Games in Japan on Wednesday and earned the LA Olympics quota for India for the event making its debut in Olympics, two families were keeping a tab on the results of the final with bated breath. While Chikitha Taniparthi's father once sold his family's rice harvester and took loans to get the bow and bear the training expenses, Jadhav's mother sold her jewellery to get him a new compound bow to support her son's dream.

With the pair bagging the historic berth to the LA Olympics, 51-year-old farmer Srinivas Rao along with his wife Sreelata Rao were cheering their daughter Taniparthi along with Jadhav, from their home in Sultanpur village in Peddapalli district in Telangana. "We stay in the small village of Sultanpur and only have our 2 acre farmland, where we grow rice. It was Chikitha, who played karate earning a black belt at a local academy, who read about an archer in a newspaper and wanted to pursue archery," her father recalled. A small but important detail in this story on Chikitha Taniparthi. Chikitha's first brush with sport was in martial arts. She learnt karate and went right up to black belt. How does it help in archery, you might ask.

Archery is a stationary sport. Prizes stillness. Demands extreme mental strength, concentration. There is a rhythm that elite sport demands — where your heart rate could be off the charts, but you need to nail that one trigger or arrow releasing movement, which still needs shoulder power. To get that balance right, many athletes train in martial arts — karate, judo, jiu jitsu, to achieve absolute mental poise / strength in that moment. Precision in imbalanced positions is the goal. It's why a Karate black belt can translate into an Asiad gold many many years later. It is mind training that becomes muscle memory. Saina Nehwal did it in badminton. But Chikitha has gone all the way to gold. "After her training for more than a year, I sold our rice harvester to get her a new bow as well as took loans from the village friends and others at a low interest to support her training. All in our family have been rice farmers and to see Chikitha win a gold medal as well as get the Olympics quota for India is a special feeling for us as well as the whole village," 51-year-old Rao told The Indian Express. Rao would take his daughter to a nearby town to train along with a local archer for a year and would also set targets made of card boxes and archery target cloth at the empty space behind their home to help his daughter practice. With the nearest big town being Karimnagar and the village seeing no archer or any sports shop, the father also recalls how they lost more than 1.5 lakhs in trying to get new equipment. "I would take her to the town to make Chikitha train with a local archer. And in her free time, she would shoot with the makeshift targets at the empty space besides our house. The first compound bow we tried to get, we lost the money amounting to Rs 1.5 lakh in fraud. After a year, I took a loan of Rs 3.5 lakh to get her a new bow and later when she won the sub-junior nationals, the Collector of our district got her a new bow from the government funds," he recalls. "Later, we decided to travel to Delhi to seek training and it was there that we met international archer Abhishek Verma, who supported Chikitha and mentored her and later she got selected for the SAI Centre in Sonapat," recalls Rao. For Sahil Jadhav, the initiation in archery began with a summer camp in Wai, Satara district in Maharashtra. Jadhav, whose father Rajesh Jadhav works as a service executive in a car company workshop, along with his wife Seema Jadhav later got the youngster en-



rolled at the academy under coach Pravin Sawant, who had coached the likes of world champions Aditi Swami and Ojas Deotale. The youngster would start competing in Indian rounds with the family getting him a wooden bow and later his mother selling her jewellery to get him a new compound bow. "It was at a summer camp under coach Bhieshe that Sahil first tried archery. We wanted him to try an individual sport and sent him to the camp. Later his interest developed but I told him that we will do whatever we can do to support him. We got him enrolled at Pravin Sawant sir's academy and my wife would sell her jewellery to get him a new compound bow a year later," shares father Rajesh Jadhav. While Jadhav would train at the academy initially trying Indian round archery before also trying his hand in recurve followed by coach Sawant deciding to put him in compound. Sahil Jadhav during the compound mixed team final, Wednesday. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko) The youngster would train for some years under Sawant before he was selected for the Sports Authority of India (SAI) National Centre of Excellence (NCOE), Eastern Centre in Kolkata. "Initially Sahil trained in wooden rounds before we tried putting him in recurve. But he would face troubles since his body did not make a T-Shape, a necessity in recurve and we decided to shift him to the compound. His upper back and shoulder muscles were strong and Sahil would pick up things in compound with ease and at a quick pace," shares Sawant. In 2020, Rajesh Jadhav lost his job and with his wife working as a teacher, it was a tough phase for the family. At that time, Sahil had not joined the Kolkata centre and Rajesh Jadhav took up a job in a nearby town at a much lower wage months later to support his son's dream. "During Covid-19, I lost my job. For 3-4 months, I was without a job and it was a tough phase for the family with only my wife earning a meagre salary from her job. Sometimes, we would see Sahil training with old arrows with the arrow bending during the shooting and I would get emotional seeing all that. When I got the job in another two months on a much lower wage, I told Sahil that whatever we could do, we will try and you just don't lose hope and keep practicing and training. Later, when he got selected in the SAI Centre at Kolkata, things got easier for us in terms of his training. "When he won the title in senior nationals in 2024 followed by his title in the World University Games in Germany last year, he would call them with his gold medal. "This medal is all due to his persistence amid the tough situation for the whole family," says Rajesh Jadhav. As for the Rao family, they know what their daughter will do post her arrival with the gold medal. "Chikitha shared that she wants to get a new rice harvester for the family."

## Sandra Huller couldn't recognize Tom Cruise in Digger look: 'Apologised for staring at him'



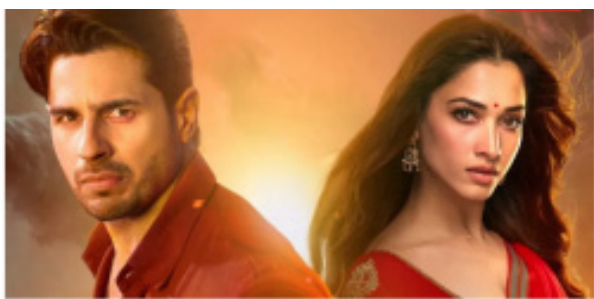
When the first look of Alejandro Inarritu's upcoming satire *Digger* dropped online, one could barely recognize that the titular character is no one but Tom Cruise under layers of prosthetic. The actor exchanged his face — which is worth a million dollars (literally) — for an overweight, 65-year-old oil tycoon with a thick, drawling Southern accent. Sandra Huller, who plays his half-sister and business partner Emma in the movie, confesses she couldn't place the star when she first met him. "I couldn't recognize him. I stared at him, and apologized that I'm staring, but couldn't help it. It was an awkward moment in a good way," Sandra tells **SCREEN** in an exclusive interview. "I met him the first time in costume. It took a long time until I saw his actual face. But you could still see his eyes. So, the connection could go through that small window," she adds. Michael Stuhlbarg, who plays the US Vice President in *Digger*, agrees that it wasn't just the costume and

the prosthetic that aided the transformation, but also Cruise's unpredictable interpretation of the larger-than-life character. "You never know what you're going to get with a character like what it was that we had to read. It was so much fun to see what he had to offer. It's always disarming and surprising. We grew accustomed to what he was offering more than what we expected. It was wonderful," he says. Jesse Plemons, who plays a mysterious character called Kenny in *Digger*, could see Tom navigate the various layers of *Digger* Rockwell in real time, as he shared screen space with him. "From the pure thrill of watching him work, it felt brand new. Everyone knows what an incredible actor he is, but we've never seen this character, this version of him. So, to get to watch him explore and find it was really good," says the actor. *Digger* is risky for Tom Cruise. John Goodman, veteran actor who essays the dictatorial US President in *Digger*, points out that one often forgets how "risky" the film was for Cruise, or still is. But he agrees that by having such a huge movie star attach his worth to a burning satire like this helps give it — and all the cast and crew associated with it — a much-needed impetus. No other movie star could get even the prosthetic department to optimize their potential and reduce the time in the makeup chair from six hours to less than an hour. "I think Tom is the most infectious person I've ever met without a disease," says Goodman, with a chuckle. "He's got so much heart that just rubs off on everybody. He wants everybody succeed and have as much fun as he's had. I think a lot of that is based on gratitude. A lot of us forget sometimes how lucky we are to be doing what we're doing," he adds. It's the love for movies and gratitude for being a movie star for decades that make Cruise switch from the blockbuster spy thriller franchise *Mission: Impossible* to a risky satire like *Digger*.

## Vvaan box office Day 5: Sidharth Malhotra's film earns Rs 57.95 cr worldwide, actor's 5th highest earner

Vvaan box office collection day 5: Sidharth Malhotra and Tamannaah's film closes in on Rs 60 crore worldwide. Vvaan box office collection day 5: Sidharth Malhotra and Tamannaah's film closes in on Rs 60 crore worldwide. Vvaan box office collection day 5: Deepak Kumar Mishra's action adventure fantasy film *The Vvaan*: Force of the Forrest witnessed a slight increase in its earnings on its first Tuesday, a day after registering a free fall on its first Monday. The marginal improvement could be attributed to the discounted ticket prices on Tuesday, as Sidharth Malhotra and Tamannaah-starrer has received largely negative reviews. The film has now earned Rs 53.45 crore gross and Rs 44.85 crore net at the domestic box office, and Rs 57.95 crore worldwide.

On Tuesday (day 5), Vvaan earned Rs 6 crore from 7162 screens, as compared to Rs 5.25 crore from 7012 screens on Monday (day 4). That was a steep decline from its highest-single day earnings of Rs 14.35 crore from 7135 screens on its first Sunday (day 3). Prior to that, it clocked in Rs 11.25 crore from 6887 screens on its first Saturday (day 2), a decent increase from its opening-day collection of Rs 8 crore from 6746 screens this past Friday. The major chunk of Vvaan's worldwide box office earnings has come from the domestic market. It added another Rs 50 lakh to its overseas collection on Tuesday, bumping up the total international earnings to Rs 4.50 crore. When added to the domestic gross collection, the total worldwide earnings of Vvaan after five days now stands at Rs 57.95 crore, as per Sacnilk. Given its current trajectory, Vvaan is most likely to surpass the Rs 60 crore mark at the worldwide box office today on its first Wednesday (day 6), as well as Rs 50 crore net domestically. It has a couple more days to make the most of its run before facing fresh competition this Friday, primarily from *Ajay Devgn* and *Tabu*-starrer crime thriller *Drishyam 3*, which is slated to release on October 2.



Vvaan has also ended Sidharth Malhotra's dry spell at the box office. It is now the actor's fifth highest grossing film ever in India, and is less than Rs 4 crore short of surpassing the lifetime domestic earnings of his 2019 action romance, *Milap Zaveri's* *Marjaavaan*, which collected Rs 48.04 crore. It has already surpassed the likes of Hasee Toh Phasee (Rs 37.36 crore), *Baar Baar Dekho* (Rs 31.24 crore), *Ittefaaq* (Rs 30.21 crore), *A Gentleman* (Rs 20.59 crore), and *Aiyaary* (Rs 17.01 crore). As far as this year's domestic box office is concerned, Vvaan has now edged past the collections of films like *The Kerala Story 2: Goes Beyond* (Rs 40.60 crore), *Sunny Deol*-starrer *Batwara 1947* (Rs 36.76 crore), *Lakshya* and *Ananya Panday*-starrer *Chand Mera Dil* (Rs 27.78 crore), and *Sriram Raghavan's* period war drama *Ikki* (Rs 28.38 crore). The next benchmarks for Vvaan are *Ayushmann Khurrana*-starrer romantic comedy *Pati Patni Aur Woh Do* (Rs 48.12 crore), *Varun Dhawan*-starrer rom-com *Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai* (Rs 50.46 crore), *Rani Mukerji*-starrer cop thriller *Mardaani 3* (Rs 53.06 crore), and *Alia Bhatt*-starrer action thriller *Alpha* (Rs 57.72 crore). Co-produced by Ekta Kapoor's *Balaji Motion Pictures* and *Arunabh Kumar's* *The Viral Fever*, Vvaan also stars *Sunil Grover* and *Maniesh Paul*.

## 'Ranvir Shorey hit Pooja Bhatt, I broke his car, ribs,' says Rahul Bhatt: 'I overreacted'

Back in 2002, Ranvir Shorey and Pooja Bhatt made headlines after the actor was allegedly involved in an altercation with the actress while living-in-together. Soon after, Pooja's brother Rahul Bhatt got involved in the matter and assaulted Ranvir in an attempt to protect his sister. Rahul was subsequently arrested and charged in connection with the incident. Now, more than two decades later, Rahul has admitted that he overreacted and regrets taking the law into his own hands, while praising Ranvir Shorey for the way he handled the aftermath.

In an interview with Siddharth Kannan, Rahul Bhatt recalled the incident and said, "There was an altercation between Ranvir Shorey and Pooja Bhatt. They had an argument, after which Ranvir hit her or something like that. I had to step in and when I did, my response was a bit exaggerated. I broke his car's glass. I broke one of his ribs. I did a wrong thing by taking the law in my hand. Subsequently, I paid the price for it. I was arrested. Charged."

He added, "I regret it. I shouldn't have overreacted. Back in those days, I said I would do it again. But in the case of Ranvir Shorey, I shouldn't have. He was very decent. In the compounding of the offence, he came forward and he said, 'Let bygones be bygones.' Nobody does something like that. People usually use such situations to extract money, but he didn't. He came and compounded the case, and the FIR was quashed. Until then, I had a criminal case pending. He was very decent in that. I respect him for that. Nobody else would have done it without a grudge." However, Rahul's statement is markedly different from what he said just a year ago in an interview with Hindi Rush. At the time, he said, "I was always the kind of person who wouldn't spare anybody who messed with my sister. I am well behaved with well behaved people, but I could be a horror to the wrong kind of people." He also admitted to assaulting Ranvir and said, "I did, and I will do it again. I am not afraid of anybody. If anybody hits my sister, no law and order can stop me. Only God can save them. I am still like that, my core personality hasn't changed." Ranvir Shorey has previously spoken about the incident, describing it as the biggest scandal of his life. He said the controversy forced him to leave India for a brief period and made him fear that his career was over.

Speaking about the episode inside the *Bigg Boss* house,



Ranvir said, "During the same time, I also encountered the biggest scandal of my life with another actress. As I was unable to cope, my brother asked me to come to the US with him for a while. I pursued a six-month acting course in the US and borrowed money from my brother. After returning from the US, I started shooting for *The Great Indian Comedy Show* in 2005. At that time, two of my long-shelved films were greenlit for release and hit theatres back-to-back within a week, and my work was loved by audiences. After those films, I finally felt my life was steady as an actor and that I had arrived." Ranvir has continued to speak about Mahesh Bhatt's role in the controversy and has previously accused the filmmaker of being manipulative. "Mahesh Bhatt used the respect I had for him against me very manipulatively. When I had a fight with Pooja, both Mahesh Bhatt and my father came to an understanding to finish the matter. The next day, they proceeded to print utter lies about me. And subsequently,

## Badshah thanks fans in a reel shortly after ex-wife Isha Rikhi's Bigg Boss 20 eviction



Rapper Badshah's ex-wife, Isha Rikhi, got evicted from *Salman Khan*-hosted *Bigg Boss 20* on Sunday night. Days after Isha's exit from the show, Badshah posted an emotional video on Instagram, thanking his fans for all their support. Given the timing between Isha's exit and Badshah's video, fans started speculating if Badshah's video was an indirect jibe at Isha. While Isha has been unwell ever since she got evicted, the Punjabi actress shared her experience from *Bigg Boss 20* with a note on social media. Shortly after Isha Rikhi was evicted from *Bigg Boss 20*, Badshah posted a video on Instagram. He said, "How are you guys? I just want to thank you for all the love, blessings, and the support. That's it, just taking this moment to show my gratitude that I have for all of you. Sorry, I have a sore throat. I am not well, but I love you."

While Isha has yet to interact with the media after her eviction, she also posted a note on Instagram describing her *Bigg Boss 20* experience. Isha wrote, "Three weeks inside the *Bigg Boss* house three weeks of so many emotions, experiences, challenges, laughter, tears, and memories I'll carry with me forever. Coming back has made me realise just how much your love and support mean to me. Thank you to every single person who stood by me, believed in me, cheered for me, and even to those who didn't support me. I'm grateful for every opinion, every message, and every person who was a part of this journey in some way. The last few weeks were not easy for me. I had my emotional breakdowns, moments where I struggled to express myself, and moments where I probably didn't come across the way I wanted to." "I know I may have disappointed some of you, and if I did, I'm genuinely sorry. I'm still processing everything, understanding myself better, and tak-

ing this whole experience as a learning. But one thing I want you all to know is that I felt your love, even when I couldn't express much myself. And that means more to me than I can put into words. Thank you for standing by me, for understanding me, and for continuing to support me. I'm truly, truly grateful," Isha further wrote.

Isha on her relationship with Badshah A week before entering *Bigg Boss 20*, Isha and Badshah issued a joint statement announcing their separation. While on the show, Isha claimed that she faced emotional, physical, and social cheating from Badshah. During a conversation with *Kanika Mann*, Isha had said, "When the relationship ends, it is then you realise that you were being played the whole time." When *Kanika* asked her what kind of cheating she had experienced, "Physical, emotional, or social?" Isha said, "All of them." She further added, "It is very toxic to be hanging in between. It is like I make you believe that you are my best friend. I am treating you like my best friend. Taking you to places like my best friend, but then you get to know that you were never really my best friend in the first place. What makes it different is that I am doing all this in a particular circle, in private, and not before the world. It is only a set of people I am introducing you to as my best friend." Isha had also hinted that her ex-husband had "too many best friends" and added, "They were all someone to chill with for a day or two, but the truth was that you never really wanted a best friend; you were just playing games." Ahead of entering the show, Badshah and Isha issued a joint statement saying, "I and Isha Rikhi have mutually decided to part ways and move forward on our separate paths. This decision has been made with mutual respect, and we request everyone to kindly respect our privacy during this time. This will be our only statement on the matter. We sincerely request that there be no further speculation or assumptions regarding our relationship."

Soon after this, Isha had also put out another statement regarding rumors around their marriage. She wrote on Instagram, "Many rumours are circulating about my marriage. Its shocking to hear and read the news reports appearing in certain quarters. I request certain sections of the media not to spread any rumours regarding my marriage or separation. I also urge the general public not to believe anything they read or hear unless the information comes directly from me or through my official social media handles. Thank you." During her conversation with *Kanika Mann* on the show, Isha also shared that Badshah was showing her a completely different picture and his friends did the same. "It was like you do want to stay but also your freedom. And want me to meet only certain people. But outside that group, I get to know that you were never really my best friend. You were simply showing me a whole different picture. And not just you, but also people around you were showing me the same picture, which never really existed. The picture was something else altogether." After *Bigg Boss 20*, Isha plans to reestablish her acting career. Talking about it, she had told *SCREEN*, "After *Nawaabzade*, I had different plans. God didn't do that, so I am back to square one. I plan to work a lot in Bollywood after *Bigg Boss 20*. There will be a lot of achievements; there is no looking back."

## Neem Karoli Baba film Rs 17 cr away from surpassing Border 2



*Hanuman Ansh* box office collection day 54: *Vishal Chaturvedi's* spiritual drama *Hanuman Ansh*, based on the life of *Neem Karoli Baba*, continued its dream run at the box office on Tuesday. After witnessing a steep fall on Monday, the film bounced back on its 54th day, recording a 37.8 per cent rise in its daily collection. According to *Sacnilk*, *Hanuman Ansh* earned Rs 3.10 crore net in India on Tuesday from 4,411 shows. Its total India net collection now stands at Rs 312.38 crore, while its domestic gross collection has reached Rs 360 crore. The film has earned another Rs 39 crore from overseas markets, taking its worldwide gross collection to Rs 408 crore.

Highest eighth-Tuesday collection The Tuesday recovery comes a day after *Hanuman Ansh* witnessed a sharp decline. The film earned Rs 2.25 crore net on Monday, down 73.9 per cent from the Rs 9 crore it collected on Sunday. The Rs 3.10 crore net collection also sets a record for the highest eighth-Tuesday collection, as per *Sacnilk*. The week-on-week comparison makes the performance more notable. On day 47 (last Tuesday), *Hanuman Ansh* had earned Rs 4.90 crore net from 7,702 shows. This Tuesday's Rs 3.10 crore came from only 4,411 shows, around 43 per cent fewer than the number of shows a week earlier. The film also recorded a substantial improvement in occupancy. The Hindi 2D version registered an overall occupancy of 29.11 per cent on Tuesday, compared with 17.24 per cent on Monday. Night shows did most of the heavy lifting, with occupancy rising from 22.08 per cent on Monday to 43.69 per cent on Tuesday. Evening shows also improved from 20.62 per cent to 33.85 per cent, while morning occupancy increased from 7 per cent to 10.31 per cent. What makes *Hanuman Ansh's* run particularly striking is that its turnaround from the third week came despite a steady stream of new theatrical releases. The film released in August and competed with *Awarapan 2*, *Batwara 1947* and *Toxic* in August. The film had to contend with *Mirzapur: The Movie* on September 4, *Akshay Kumar* and *Saif Ali Khan*-starrer *Haiwaan* on September 11, and *Meghna Gulzar's* *Daayra* and *Vibe* on September 18. *Nani*-starrer *The Paradise* arrived on September 24, followed by several releases on September 25, including *The Vvaan*: Force of the Forrest. Despite the crowded release calendar, *Hanuman Ansh* continued to maintain a presence at the box office. On Tuesday, Vvaan earned Rs 6 crore net in India from 7,162 screens on its fifth day, while *Hanuman Ansh* collected Rs 3.10 crore net from 4,411 shows on its 54th day. While Vvaan was still in its opening week, *Hanuman Ansh* had already completed 54 days in theatres and was still managing to collect more than Rs 3 crore in a single day. This makes the performance of *Hanuman Ansh* particularly noteworthy, especially considering the film is playing on substantially fewer shows than the newer release. The film will now face another major test with *Ajay Devgn* and *Tabu*-starrer crime thriller *Drishyam 3*, which is scheduled to release on October 2.

*Hanuman Ansh* opened to a modest Rs 10 lakh on day 1 and collected Rs 1.08 crore in its first week. Its second week brought in Rs 40 lakh before the film witnessed a major turnaround in week 3, when it collected Rs 10.40 crore. The momentum then accelerated considerably. The film earned Rs 61 crore in week 4 and reached its highest

weekly collection of Rs 90.25 crore in week 5. It followed that with Rs 80.25 crore in week 6 and Rs 44.80 crore in week 7. Week 8 began with Rs 3.35 crore on day 50, followed by Rs 6.50 crore on day 51 and Rs 9 crore on day 52. After dropping to Rs 2.25 crore on day 53, the film bounced back with Rs 3.10 crore on day 54. Can *Hanuman Ansh* beat *Border 2's* collection? *Hanuman Ansh* is now within striking distance of *Border 2* at the domestic box office. *Border 2*, starring *Sunny Deol*, *Varun Dhawan*, *Diljit Dosanjh* and *Ahan Shetty*, ended its theatrical run with Rs 329.43 crore net in India, according to *Sacnilk*. *Hanuman Ansh*, at Rs 312.38 crore, needs approximately Rs 17.05 crore more to surpass that figure. With the film still recording significant collections in its eighth week, the next few days will determine whether it can close the gap. Its immediate challenge will be continuing its momentum after *Drishyam 3's* release. *Hanuman Ansh* stars *Shobhinaw Satyaa* in the lead role and is based on the life and teachings of spiritual figure *Neem Karoli Baba*.

## Karan Johar's 'Koffee With Karan' ending after 22 years

Mumbai: Filmmaker-host *Karan Johar* on Wednesday announced that he is ending his popular celebrity chat show, "Koffee With Karan", with its upcoming ninth season, set to premiere on *JioHotstar* on October 14. Johar, who began the show in 2004 and invited a host of prominent celebrities from Hindi cinema over the course of 161 episodes in eight seasons, said the final season is his way of raising the mug one last time "with gratitude". "There are some journeys you don't plan to end, you simply know, somewhere deep within you, when it is time to let them go. 'Koffee With Karan' has been an extraordinary part of my life. It has given me friendships, memories, moments of complete madness, a lot of love and, yes, its fair share of controversy! But through all of it, what has remained constant is the audience." They have laughed with us, debated us, trolled us, celebrated us and, most importantly, kept coming back for another cup.