



lounge

SATURDAY, MAY 25 2024

THE MAGIC OF RUSKIN BOND

Author Ruskin Bond turned 90 on 19 May with a grand party in Mussoorie. His books have become a sanctuary for generations of Indians, an escape from the world. Sandip Roy describes him as "the man who brought magic to realism"

SEE PAGE 10



HOSPITAL CHAINS EYE BIG-BANG EXPANSION | PAGE 16

SUMMERTIME READING

RELAX WITH A BOOK AS THE TEMPERATURE SOARS. LOUNGE SUGGESTS BOOKS FROM ACROSS A RANGE OF GENRES, FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN, TO HELP YOU COOL OFF



THINK
The voice-over artists behind audio books

TASTE
Take a cue from chefs to spice things up

CULTURE
Let children plan the summer vacation

BUSINESS LOUNGE
Meet Tata Comm's MD and CEO

A NOTE FROM
THE EDITOR

SHALINI UMACHANDRAN

Summer reading
made easy

ISTOCKPHOTO



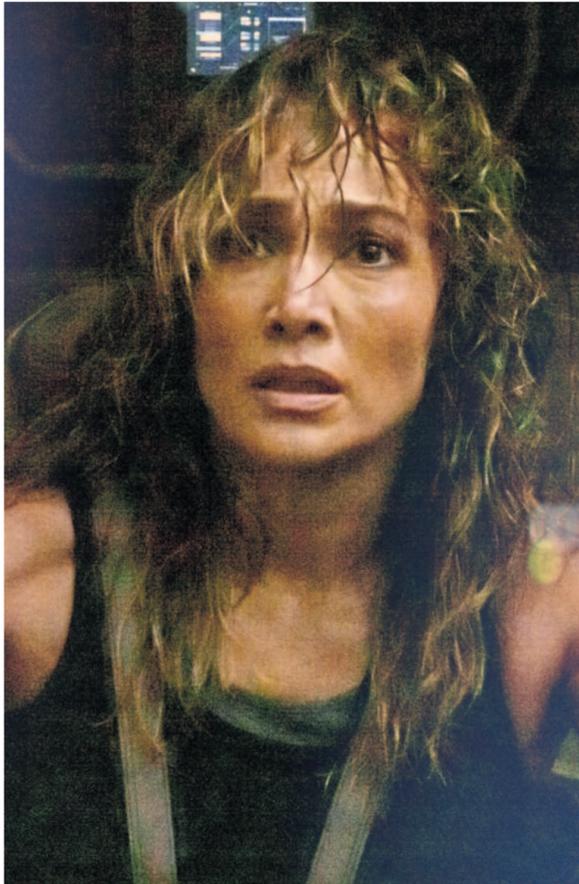
As a young reporter, I loved going down to the printing press, after I finished work, to watch the next day's newspapers swish past on massive presses. The print engineers were always quick to answer any questions about computer-to-plate printing, but until one actually gets one's hands dirty, it's hard to appreciate how much work goes into the production of each page of a book or a newspaper. Earlier this month, I tried my hand at typesetting at a workshop run by Chase the Key Letterpress Studio in Bengaluru, slotting metal letters one by one, upside down, into the composing stick, making sure the spacing was just right, that the tiny sentence wouldn't be garbled. It was absorbing, painstaking, analogue work that gave me a new appreciation for the speed and skill with which typesetters of past centuries produced books. We've all read that the invention of the printing press led to this frenzy of reading and a hunger for knowledge, transforming societies and their fortunes, but since most of us don't remember a time before we had printers at home, we often forget how hard it was—and can still be—to get one's hands on books.

The *Lounge* Summer Reading List for adults and children makes it easy for you to find the best books of the year so far, whether you read fiction, history, fantasy, adventure, poetry or self-help. While the pleasing tactility of books cannot ever be matched, there's no denying the convenience of e-readers and audiobooks, which remove all indecision about which book to carry on a trip—or just to the local coffee shop. Printing may be a painstaking job, but recording an audiobook is no easier, as voice-over artists tell *Lounge*.

We're also introducing a column, *Raising Parents*, by Avantika Bhuyan, who will share her wacky, weird and wonderful adventures of parenthood every month. She begins with that annual nightmare, planning the summer holiday, but has a tip—leave it to the kids. Having recently taken a holiday with a group that included (far too many) children aged 5-17, I cannot imagine doing that, but she seems to have mastered the art of letting go. And if letting go is your plan this weekend, relax with our pick of books, shows, films, food and more.

Write to the editor at shalini.umachandran@htlive.com
✉@shalinimb

NEW ON SCREENS

Kingsley Ben-Adir as Bob Marley, a young man caught
in a cycle of abuse, and other titles to watch

ATLAS

Scientist Atlas Shepherd (Jennifer Lopez) is sent to capture a renegade robot in this sci-fi film. She must put her mistrust of Artificial Intelligence aside when things don't go according to plan. Directed by Brad Peyton (*San Andreas*) and co-starring Sterling K. Brown, Mark Strong and Simu Liu. (Netflix)

BOB MARLEY: ONE LOVE

By the mid-1970s, Bob Marley is the king of reggae music and a mass hero in a country weighed down by poverty and violence. With Jamaica gearing up for a divisive election, he announces a peace concert, but is sent reeling after gunmen try to kill him. Marley decamps to England with his entourage. This film by Reinaldo Marcus Green—and script by Terence Winter, Frank E. Flowers, Zach Baylin and Green—is a touch too reverent but has a pleasing lead turn by British actor Kingsley Ben-Adir (*Peaky Blinders*, *High Fidelity*). Marley's wife Rita, a backup singer, is played as a teen by Nia Ashi, and in adulthood by Lashana Lynch. Other co-stars include James Norton, Tosin Cole, and Umi Myers. (BookMyShow Stream)



Compiled by Uday Bhatia

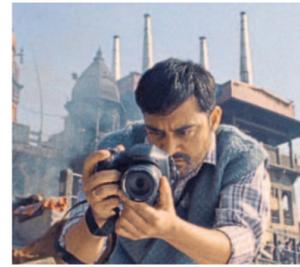
JAGGI

A young man is caught in a cycle of abuse after word of his impotency spreads in his high school and he's assumed to be gay. This film about toxic masculinity in rural Punjab is directed by Anmol Sidhu. Featuring Rannish Chaudhary as Jaggi. (MUBI)



BARAH BY BARAH

Sooraj is a photographer who takes portraits of the dead on the banks of the Ganga in Varanasi. As his livelihood is threatened by the march of technology, he must figure a way forward for himself and his family. This is the first feature by Gaurav Madan. (In theatres)

PLAN THE WEEK
AHEAD

ETHICAL CHOICE

The National Centre for the Performing Arts is hosting a new show, *Lungs*. This acclaimed play by Duncan Macmillan, which first premiered in 2022, has been directed by Quasar Thakore Padmsee. Starring Dilnaz Irani and Prashant Prakash, the poignant tale revolves around a couple contemplating the ethical and emotional complexities of bringing a child into a world fraught with conflict, climate change and a burgeoning population. Set in an Indian context to resonate with audiences here, who might be grappling with similar circumstances, the play brings together humour and drama. *At the Experimental Theatre, NCPA, Mumbai, till 26 May, with two shows on the weekend, at 4.30pm and 7.30pm.*



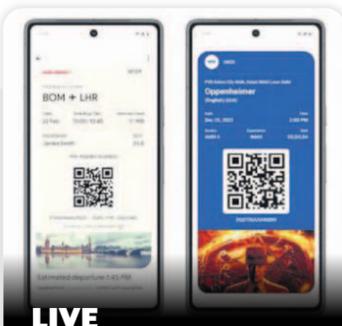
IMMERSIVE ARTWORK

An immersive show, *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*, was first shown at the National Museum of Australia. Developed in 2017, 100 artists were represented in this Aboriginal-led exhibition through art, sound, and multimedia. Now the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art and the Australian high commission have brought the digital component from this show to Delhi as part of the immersive installation, *Walking through a Songline*. Visual artist Sarah Kenderdine's immersive artwork, *Travelling Kungkarangkalpa*, is an integral part of the original exhibition. *At the KNMA Saket 26 May-30 June, 10.30am-6.30pm, after which it will travel to Bengaluru.*

—Compiled by Avantika Bhuyan

LOUNGE
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THE WEEKThe best stories from
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from the week gone by

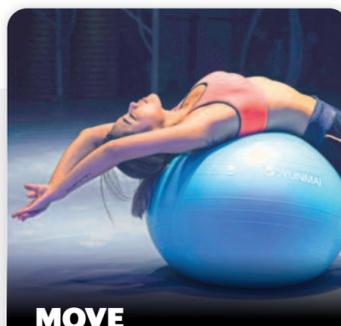
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LIVE

A convenience for
our digital lives

Consumer adoption of digital payments and digitisation has accelerated since the pandemic, transforming from a nice-to-have indulgence to being par for the course for most people. Considering India is primarily an Android market and that Google Pay is a massive success, it is surprising that it took Google nearly two years to launch Google Wallet in India. The app is finally available in India, and lets users store and access their boarding passes, loyalty and gift cards, event tickets, and similar things you need on your person at most times. **Abhishek Baxi** tries Google Wallet and finds that it is a well-designed app with a straightforward user experience, and provides a step-by-step guide to use it.



MOVE

How to pick the ideal
workout for yourself

A plethora of workout options are available today—from CrossFit and pilates to yoga and kickboxing—which could make it confusing for a beginner to choose the right format that is also budget-friendly and easy to follow. When choosing a fitness routine, keep in mind that it should have both strength training and cardio. Cardiovascular training improves heart and lung health, while strength training aims to enhance muscle strength and endurance. Both types of training offer unique health benefits and are mandatory for a healthy body. **Anupama Shivacharya** speaks to trainers, nutritionists and doctors to find out how to whittle down the list of options available and pick a workout that suits your needs.



DINE

Sip India's regional
summer drinks

From Gujarat's *variyaali sharbat* to Himachal's *palash ka sharbat*, India has a treasure trove of relatively unknown summer coolants simply waiting to be discovered. Made from easily available, seasonal produce, these drinks are quick to whip up at home and provide much needed refreshment in the middle of the day. **Raul Dias** explores the variety of cooling drinks made in different regions and by different communities across the country. From the popular curd and raw mango to the lesser-known sandalwood paste and rhododendron flowers, a variety of ingredients goes into these regional coolers. These cooling drinks from India's culinary landscape can make the summer heat more bearable.



VIEW

When the artist and
the artisan meet

At the Museum of Art and Photography (MAP) in Bengaluru is an intriguing exhibition—artist Meera Mukherjee's work is being shown alongside that of *dhokra* metal artist Jaidev Baghel. Though they are unlikely to have met, and were 26 years apart in age, the exhibition *Outside In* makes a connection between their shared metal casting approach using the lost wax method and the presence of common folk in their sculptures. Many of Baghel's works are representations of the men and women from the Madia community, who were the main patrons for Ghadwa sculptors like him. Mukherjee's, on the other hand, depict pure humanity, struggles and joys, writes **Anindo Sen**.



The man who taught us how to love clay



My teacher passed away the other day, the one I loved the most, who walked me patiently through W.H. Auden and into foreign worlds of verse. To love something is often to first wander through it with a guide. Someone to help you appreciate sculpture, or the nuances of a rock face, or journey deeper into a style of music. Something you never really fully grasped till you were properly introduced to it and then seized by it.

Maybe Hari Prasad Chaurasia led you into Hindustani classical music and Michael Jordan into the thin air of wonder. Maybe David Attenborough took you gently through nature and Carl Sagan set you off on your first voyages into space.

And maybe Rafael Nadal taught you how to love clay.

Maybe, of course, you knew this surface before, an affection built by Chris Evert's knife-throwing accuracy and the warm grin of Gustavo Kuerten. Maybe you were hypnotised by that low-pulse Viking called Bjorn Borg or tickled by the two-handed teenage intimidation of Monica Seles. Or just grinned at watching old serve-and-volleyers stumble as if trapped in quicksand.

Maybe you were suspicious. Maybe you thought Paris tedious, an over-long conversation on a laundry-challenging surface, leaving mud-caked players looking as the writer Michael Mewshaw perfectly put it: "Batter-fried". But then this no-sleeved deity of the dirt, sweat raining, forehand swirling, feet sliding, changed it all.

Slowly, across 20 years, vocabularies altered. People started talking funny. Stuff about point construction, topspin RPM (revolutions per minute), coal residue in the surface, the heaviness when it rained and, yes, that two-point programme. As in you win the point against Nadal in the 13th shot, and then discover, well, f*** this, it's not over, because he, this dusty samurai, has got



it back, again, and now you have to restart, and really what's the bloody point of it all.

Pause. A story. It's 2014 and Robby Ginepri—who tells this tale at his press conference—is practising with some pals and the draw is out and this conversation occurs.

"Do you want to know who you play?" they ask.

Ginepri said sure.

"Nadal".

Said Ginepri: "I don't think I made another ball the rest of that practice."

He loses 6-0, 6-3, 6-0 in the first round which is a perfectly acceptable score. Nadal's given 6-0 sets to Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic. In finals.

The first transcript I find of a Nadal

interview on clay is from 15 April 2003 in Monte Carlo. He's 16 and he's asked about school—"When I go back to classes, I'm a bit lost, but I'm still trying"—and no one knows the professor he'll turn into. We will one day stop looking at draws in Paris, it seems irrelevant, for when he plays, we understand we're attending not a contest but a concert. Soloist with accompanist. Recital in precise bloody-mindedness.

He's so unique that he defeats even television. The degree of difficulty of his spin—its bounce, its kick, its force—doesn't translate on screen. Only at the court, from side on, you can see he's the tennis equivalent of something Tysonian. "It's very, very difficult to play against him because balls are coming

Rafael Nadal in a practise session ahead of The French Open tennis tournament in Paris, on 21 May. AFP

Nadal played 98 matches across his 14 winning years and lost only 23 sets. Through four separate campaigns—2008, 2010, 2017, 2020—he didn't give up a single set

very high," says Nikoloz Basilashvili in 2017. He drowns 6-0, 6-1, 6-0.

Nadal every year is another model. A study in evolving engineering. A backhand slice is added, a serve is enhanced, a volley is polished so fine that Mark Woodforde applauds it. He looks like he's chasing a ball, but really he's hunting improvement. In his mind, he's never good enough.

It's this investment of his entire self into every shot which destroys rivals. How do you play the patron saint of suffering? In his 2011 book titled *RAFA: My Story*, coach "Uncle Toni" tells co-author John Carlin about what he says to his nephew on days when his body won't stop hurting. "I say to him, 'Look, you've got two roads to choose from: tell

yourself you've had enough and we leave, or be prepared to suffer and keep going'."

Nadal leaves nothing except other men in ruins.

And even those up there in tennis' rarefied air, who know pain, who've endured themselves, who live this ascetic life, they can't fully comprehend it. "He doesn't go away one point," says Ginepri in 2014. Three years later in Paris, Roberto Bautista Agut, a 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 victim, says, "He yields nothing". It's unclear if they're telling us or asking themselves how this can be.

Nadal made grinding gratifying, he made clay joyous as he slithered around his backhand with a street dancer's fast feet and attacked with a forehand which uncoiled like an irritated snake. Huhhh, he went. Jesus, we said. He played Federer and Djokovic 14 times in Paris and lost twice. He played 98 matches across his 14 winning years and lost only 23 sets. Through four separate campaigns—2008, 2010, 2017, 2020—he didn't give up a single set. Once, in 2008, he won nine 6-1 sets and three 6-0.

Who owned an arena like this? Who on a particular piece of athletic ground was so impossible to budge? He went so far that you needed to hurdle sports and cross continents to find a comparison. In 1994, in 27 seconds, involving nine pairs of hands, the French scored a winning rugby union try against the All Blacks with four minutes remaining at Eden Park in Auckland. No one has ever beaten the All Blacks at The Fortress ever since.

But that's a team with a revolving door of players on home ground, this is one man against the tide of generations in a foreign land. Horatius, that Roman from legend who defended a bridge, might have liked Nadal's steadfastness. Anyway now here we are, almost in Paris again, unready for his goodbye? No, actually, we're ready. Enough he's run for us. Enough, like with my teacher, he's given us. He won't win, we know, but maybe something will be lost in all of us.

Rohit Brijnath is an assistant sports editor at The Straits Times, Singapore, and a co-author of *Abhinav Bindra's book A Shot At History: My Obsessive Journey To Olympic Gold*. He posts @rohitbrijnath.

Medium Talk

More than small talk

Are you being defensive?

HEART OF THE MATTER

A fortnightly column about emotional well-being

If we consistently respond from a place of being defensive, others around us may stop giving us feedback

Sonali Gupta

All of us are guilty of reacting in defensive ways at some point in our relationships with our partner, friends and children. Very often we don't recognise our own behaviour, but others around us can sense and feel it. We don't really understand how and why defensiveness shows up. The good thing is we can learn to recognise it, catch ourselves when we are slipping into a space of defensiveness and substitute it with ways of communicating that allow for better dialogue.

When we perceive a remark as being critical of us or showing our shortcomings, we respond with defensiveness. This may show up in the form of sulking, shutting others out, anger or feeling victimised that nobody understands us. When we are being defensive, we deny the role we played in a conflict and sometimes offer the silent treatment.

The worry is that if we consistently respond from a place of defensiveness, others around us may stop giving us feedback. They may feel that they are walking on eggshells around us and as a result distance themselves, which in turn can impact intimacy.

Our defensiveness shows up as resistance to receiving feedback and in turn impacts our capacity to work around behaviours that may not be helpful, or be ineffective.

WORK IN PROGRESS

A 50-year-old man in a therapy session said that his wife over the years had been trying to give him feedback



Defensiveness may show up in the form of shutting others out.

ISTOCKPHOTO

about his behaviour when it came to parenting and his work. "But I always shut her down, I get angry or start blaming her and feel that she always supports other people and is never really supporting me. Now when I tried to do the same with you, I recognised that I'm being defensive and perceiving every feedback as an attempt at character assassination, rather than pausing and seeing where the other person is coming from."

When we are in denial about our own defensiveness, it can lead to rupture in relationships where others may stop giving us feedback. In friendships it can lead to slow drifting away, and in work setup, it can lead to stagnation and interfere with our efficiency and relationships with colleagues. Brené Brown in her book *Atlas of the Heart* says, "At its core, defensiveness is a way to protect our ego and a fragile self-esteem."

Given this understanding, every time someone tries to give us feedback,

if we perceive it as them talking about our shortcoming or imperfection, we are likely to react with defensiveness. The reality is that as human beings, we are a work in progress. So, when you find yourself moving towards defensiveness, no matter whether it's a learnt response, coming from a place of lack of control or a parenting style that felt insensitive, choose to pause.

TAKE A STEP BACK

A good strategy is to start recognising moments and situations where we react with defensiveness and then to gauge how our body feels in those moments. My sense is we begin to feel overwhelmed, scared, agitated, restless and anxious moments before our defensiveness kicks in. Take a step back and recognise what's emerging in you.

As we begin to name the feeling, we can also tame the feeling. It helps to take time out and sometimes tell the

other person that you are struggling to receive the information, and ask if you can come back to this later. I have found that slowing down my breathing, choosing to listen quietly with openness and yet knowing that I will process slowly, with an option to filter the feedback, also eases me up.

At the same time, learning to acknowledge where one may have overreacted, had an error in judgement, and taking responsibility helps us and can keep one's defensiveness in check. The key to taking responsibility for our actions is acknowledging what we could have done differently, what sits well with our values, and this doesn't mean taking complete blame for a situation either.

Sonali Gupta is a Mumbai-based clinical psychologist. She is the author of the book *Anxiety: Overcome It And Live Without Fear and has a YouTube channel, Mental Health with Sonali.*

Benepik elevates corporate gifting amidst rising spends

Benepik, a leader in rewards and loyalty, announced the launch of its tech-enabled corporate gifting hampers. Combining sophistication and thoughtful curation with technology, these offerings are set to transform the way businesses build and strengthen their relationships with clients, employees and channel partners.

Benepik, a leading rewards, engagement and loyalty gateway, has reported an aggressive growth over the last two years—working with more than 500 enterprise customers including those in sectors such as BFSI, pharma, FMCG, consumer appliances, market research, construction, EdTech, and the PSUs. As organisations increasingly seek meaningful ways in which to strengthen bonds with their stakeholders, the corporate gifting industry is projected to grow by a CAGR of 15% over the next few years.

Benepik offers a vast catalogue of over 50,000 options including gift cards, gadgets, electronic appliances, holidays and charity.

Benepik offers a vast catalogue of over 50,000 options including gift cards, gadgets, electronic appliances, holidays and charity. This ensures personalisation for every occasion,

Through its technology, businesses of all sizes can seamlessly manage their corporate gifting—from budget management to gift selection, delivery tracking and feedback, all while Benepik manages the entire process from procurement to personalisation and fulfilment.

Said Saurabh Jain, Founder Benepik, "Corporate gifting

when done right can bring smiles to the faces of your customers and employees. It is evolving from an annual custom to a relationship-building necessity, covering onboarding, service anniversaries and retirement. Categories such as maternity kits and wellness hampers are gaining popularity reflecting a fundamental shift in the gifting approach. While this strategy has proved to strengthen relationships and improve morale, it is largely 'broken' right now. We want to change the current approach of corporate gifting that is largely impersonal, slow, laborious, and immeasurable to a result-oriented approach."

Today, sustainable and eco-friendly packaging is emerging



Saurabh Jain, Founder, Benepik

as a preferred choice for companies in the corporate gifting space. Benepik has pledged to onboard emerging D2C brands in its gifting catalogue to contribute to the Indian startup ecosystem. Findings, in a survey conducted by Benepik among 2,000 employees across sectors, indicated that 87% of respondents want the freedom to choose their own gifts, while 74% indicated that such gifts not only boost motivation but also foster greater engagement and a heightened sense of belonging within the workplace.

Benepik surpassed ₹ 100 crore in revenue in FY 2023-24 and is aiming to grow five-fold in the next 2 years. It currently works with clients in India, Indonesia, the Middle East, USA, and Europe. It has the ability to deliver gifting solutions to clients across more than 100 countries.

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DARK KNIGHT

Lladro Batman Sculpture
Limited edition Batman sculpture by Eva Maria Cuerva made from matte porcelain that combines matte and glazed tones of black with touches of gold. Available on lladro.com; ₹2,85,500.

SUPER RED
Viscose Jersey Body Suit

Long-sleeved body-suit in red viscose jersey with a high-neck and sheer finish in black that lends an illusion of a dark sheen. Available on maisonmargiela.com; ₹84,274.



Source

A compendium of stylish objects inspired by superheroes



COMIC MODE

MC2 Saint Barth Jean Lighting Men's Swim Shorts
Multi-colour swim shorts made from recycled polyester featuring Batman comics print. Available on lyst.com; ₹18,819.



MARVEL BLUE

Roksanda Guiomar Cape-effect Off-the-Shoulder Crepe Midi Dress
Midi dress in vibrant blue crepe featuring a sweeping overlay with teal lining. Available on net-a-porter.com; ₹2,23,240.



STEEL KICKS

Nike Zoom LeBron 3 QS 'Superman' Sneakers
A 2019 retro release of basketball shoes designed exclusively for LeBron James in 2006 in colours inspired by Superman's suit. Available on farfetch.com; ₹24,648.

WAYNE'S CAPE
Men's Tailored Cape Coat in Black

Double-breasted cape coat in black Japanese wool barathea with asymmetric lapels. Available on alexanderqueen.com; ₹5,14,069.

SPIDEY SENSE

Web of Life Finger Ring
18-carat gold full finger ring featuring a spider in ruby and black diamonds on a web of gold dotted with white diamonds. Available on staurinofratelli.com; ₹7,18,637.



Compiled by
Mahalakshmi
Prabhakaran

LOUNGE LOVES

Things to watch, read, hear, do—and other curated experiences from the team



FUN PLASTICINE ODDITIES

A decade ago, Milan-based graphic designer Stefano Colferai decided to switch things up and work with his hands and experience more tactility. Today, Colferai is gaining visibility for his weird yet wonderful plasticine figurines. In some of his projects, the sculptures are protagonists in a still life scene—his work for *Hollywood Reporter* late last year featured a photograph of plasticine versions of American reality TV stars. Zanier expressions of the way he looks at daily life however, show up in the stop-motion sequences he makes with such models. "Feeling the breeze", with a boy in shorts standing directly in front of an electric fan, was cathartic to watch as I hunker down in this heat wave; and "Heavy head" in which the boy struggles like an overturned bug will make any over-thinker stop and laugh.

—Vangmayi Parakala



CHRISTIE DEMYSTIFIED

A while ago, I embarked on an exercise I call "The Agatha Christie Project" in my head. I re-read a Christie novel, watch available adaptations, and listen to the related episode on *All About Agatha*, a podcast dedicated to discussing every novel and short story written by the Queen of Crime. As far as Christie podcasts go, this is the definitive one, going into the minutest details of every mystery and ranking each novel for elements like plot mechanics, plot credibility, characterisation, setting and tone and how stuck in its time it is. It is a deep dive into Christie's world, including how her personal life crept into her work; for a murder mystery nerd and fan of Dame Agatha's prolific output, a treasure trove.

—Shrabonti Bagchi

REDISCOVERING A CLASSIC

Every watch enthusiast wants a Casio F-91W. The minimalist, functional watch sits nicely on your wrist for every purpose—be it a casual dinner or a high-priority meeting. Everyone from former US president Barack Obama to actor Ryan Reynolds (in the movie *Free Guy*) have worn it. Despite having two F-91Ws in my watch collection, I was on the lookout for another. I was lucky enough to find a rare model from the series—the F-91W-3—which has at least five colourways. Unlike the original blue F-91W-1, the F-91W-3 is a mix of dark green, orange and white colour schemes. The green outer border blends well with the orange alarm chronograph sign and button arrows. The retro watch is still a looker.

—Nitin Sreedhar



OWN A VILLA, IN YOUR DREAMS

Want to buy a three-bedroom house in Primrose Hill, London, just a few minutes away from Regent's Park? Shell out £4 million. Or do you fancy a Soho duplex condo, with exposed brick walls and 18 oversized windows showing views of a busy New York? Just for \$3.7 million, it could be yours. The Instagram algorithm has figured out my latest interest and stress-busting exercise: designing the interiors of lavish properties across the world and living inside them—all imaginary, of course. These days property dealer-turned-real-estate content creators keep showing up on my feed, showing me ready-to-move-into houses that offer luxuries like fireplace in a Mumbai villa, a sauna in a Dubai apartment, and a park-like kitchen garden in Tuscany. So what if I can't afford them—daydreaming doesn't cost a thing.

—Pooja Singh



STREAM OF STORIES

RAJA SEN

The greatest of all time



'Mad Max: Fury Road' is a visual tour de force.

Oh, what a day, what a lovely day."

What a lovely Thursday, to be precise. 23 May saw the release of George Miller's *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*, and before we witness this brand new apocalyptic explosion in theatres, it is a fine time to rewatch the film that came before it—not that any excuses are necessary. Nine years ago, Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* (streaming in India on Netflix) not only redefined action cinema but transcended the entire genre. It is a film unlike any film before it—which is ironic, considering it follows Miller's cult classics *Mad Max*, *The Road Warrior* and *Beyond Thunderdome*—and every single frame trembles with burning hot originality.

I begin with The Doof Warrior. An enigmatic masked man, he epitomises the film's heavy metal aesthetic. Perched atop a monstrous, mobile stage with a guitar that doubles as a flamethrower, he is a wordless icon. He's absurd as well as awe-inspiring, yet, against all odds, fits perfectly within the film's world. He embodies surrealism and theatricality, turning chase scenes into heavy metal opera. Bringing to life the bombastic score by Junkie XL, the Doof Warrior—unforgettably—demonstrates the film's embrace of maximalism and spectacle.

Mad Max: Fury Road is a two-hour chase that yanks the audience along for the ride without preamble or exposition. The viewer enters the film like a character in a video game, on their feet and racing before even knowing what they are bolting away from. The story arc is as spare as a tyre: escape from the clutches of tyranny, only to turn back and confront it head-on. This simplicity, however, is the film's strength—Miller crafts a narrative that is both epic and intimate, with every detail telling a story. It's the poetry of pursuit.

On the run is Tom Hardy's Max Rockatansky, a taciturn survivor haunted by his past, a brooding hero literally in the mould of Sergio Leone's "Man With No Name". He is the archetypal lone wanderer, shaped by harsh environments and personal codes of honour. When Max mutters, "My name is Max. My world is fire and blood," it's less an introduction and more a mission statement.

The Western parallels run deep: The desert in *Fury Road* becomes a character in its own right, shaping the narrative with its endless horizons and treacherous terrain, much like Monument Valley in John Ford's films. The Citadel in *Fury Road* mirrors the isolated frontier towns of Westerns, such as the ramshackle outpost in Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch*. Both settings serve as bastions of civilisation amidst chaos, where law and order are tenuous and contested by outsiders. Like the classic Westerns, *Fury Road* grapples with the conflict between civilisation and savagery.

Charlize Theron—in an incandescent performance—plays Imperator Furiosa, a fierce warrior with a profound sense of justice. She has made it her mission to free a grotesque tyrant's enslaved "wives" from captivity, and thus the narrative of resistance and empowerment resonates throughout her journey. Theron conveys Furiosa's pain and strength through minimal dialogue and intense physicality. Her declaration—"We are not things"—underscores her fight for liberation and equality. Her prosthetic arm symbolises both her vulnerability and her formidable resilience, making her a compelling and iconic figure in action cinema.

Fury Road tackles issues of autonomy, gender politics, and ecological collapse without once feeling didactic. How could it when it feels like a fever dream?

The film is a visual tour de force, a baroque tapestry of flame and fury. Cinematographer John Seale paints the wasteland in vibrant hues and high-contrast shadows, creating a world that is both hyperreal and hallucinatory. It revels in an otherworldly aesthetic, where the sky bleeds orange and the night pulses with deep blues. A storm sequence brings about a cataclysmic dance of elemental fury, where lightning and sand create a surreal, apocalyptic tableau.

Perhaps most importantly, things go boom—for real. The *Mad Max* series has always relied on practical effects, and *Fury Road* is a non-stop guitar solo, shredding and angry and showing off. This choice amplifies the visceral impact of the action, grounding the film's more fantastical elements in a physical reality that audiences can feel. Every explosion, every bit of the twisted metal carnage, feels visceral and breathtakingly dangerous. It's like watching a motorcyclist at a fairground spin around a wheel of death, a *maut ka kuan*—multiplied by a million. The "Polecats" sequence stands as the film's *pièce de résistance*: warriors on pendulous poles swing and sway above speeding vehicles, a dizzying, vertiginous spectacle that redefines what action cinema can achieve.

Miller was 70 when he made *Fury Road*, a symphony of chaos that is as much a feast for the eyes as it is a jolt to the senses. The desolate wasteland comes to life with a vividness that speaks to the director's background in medicine, an understanding of human fragility informing his depiction of a society on the brink. The vehicles, grotesque and majestic, are not merely props but extensions of their drivers' identities and psyches. Now, nearly a decade later, he is back with the origin story of *Furiosa*, played by Anya Taylor-Joy. All we can expect is an explosion.

Mad Max: Fury Road is the single greatest action movie of all time. In my eyes, it doesn't even come close. Calling that film "GOAT", in fact, feels entirely inadequate—it is rather a butcher, one that has slaughtered all existing goats. Every frame, every creative decision, every performance, is polished to shiny, magnificent perfection. George Miller's film gleams like chrome. Shine on, you crazy diamond.

Raja Sen is a screenwriter and critic. He has co-written *Chup*, a film about killing critics, and is now creating an absurd comedy series. He posts @rajasen.

STREAMING TIP OF THE WEEK

Miller's first *Mad Max* films—starring Mel Gibson—may not have the scale of *Fury Road* but are crammed with audacity and character. The 1979 *Mad Max* can be rented on Apple TV and Google, while *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* (1981) and *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) are on Amazon Prime.

When shame and judgement follow motherhood



CHEAP THRILLS
NISHA SUSAN

In the last week of April, a video of a hair-raising rescue in Chennai went viral. A seven-month-old baby dangling from a precarious sunshade on the first floor of an apartment building was rescued by neighbours, one of whom climbed up to the baby while others held a bedsheet as a safety net. The story had a happy ending—the baby was pronounced fit and fine by doctors.

If you saw the video, you too would have asked how did that baby get there? Apparently, its home was on the fourth floor and it slipped from the grasp of its mother. A terrifying thought. However, the baby's fall is not as uncommon as one would think. An acquaintance of mine, a woman in her 40s, a software engineer in Bengaluru has this story. As a one-year-old she somehow leaped over the first-floor balcony and landed on the footpath. The banana-seller on the street, saw it happen, and brought her upstairs to her family who hadn't noticed yet that she was missing. It had happened that quickly. A six-year-old was brought to my father's clinic after he fell from the second floor. He too was

fine. An acquaintance was putting socks on one of her twin pre-schoolers when he heard his school bus. He wriggled out of her grasp to look out of the window, fell and died. The primary task of parenting is keeping your child alive and it's never, ever easy.

This week the story of the Chennai baby acquired a tragic turn—the mother of the baby has died by suicide. News reports say that the family felt she was pushed to it after strangers online called her a negligent mother. A couple of news reports indicate crucial information—that the young woman, a techie, had been depressed since the birth of her second child. She was getting “online counselling”, says one report and had come to her parents' home in Coimbatore after the almost-tragedy in April. She died when her parents were not at home.

As hard as it is to keep your child alive, it is hard for mothers to stay alive too. When I was diagnosed, I asked my shrink, “Postpartum? So many months after childbirth?” My shrink pointed out kindly that I had spent those many months trying to get my Horlicks bottle-sized pre-term baby to a human form. I had enormous amounts of help. I cannot stress enough how much help I had. I was affluent. I had complete control over my finances. I had very unsentimental and helpful parents in the same city, a powerhouse visiting mother-in-law, a husband who was equally unsentimental and helpful. I had an



Motherhood is a public institution in India with everyone doling out advice. ISTOCKPHOTO

ultra-organised nanny. I had also had IVF, a high-risk pregnancy and too much time in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). When it was clear that the baby was fine, that was when my mind decided to go ta-ta-bye-bye.

Postpartum depression (PPD) can take many forms and mine took the form of wanting to lie in bed and do absolutely nothing, not even fold clothes—an activity I probably will be doing even on my actual deathbed. I

worried a lot about dropping the baby. I was prescribed drugs which I took with some scepticism. I lay about again—only now feeling like a bit of a fraud. This feeling, I didn't know then, is the hallmark of parenthood. A month later, I found myself wanting to clean the bedroom and that was the end of PPD for me.

When I think back about those early months after my first baby, what I remember most is the shock of no

longer being under the radar. As a mother, I was public property but property that the public didn't want. I think of how much I resented the invasiveness of the medical institutions. In the excellent hospital where I and my baby were kept alive, I also had to pretend to listen to patent nonsense about weight loss and breast-feeding. When I got out of hospital, opinions followed me around. I have never had trouble ignoring people yarning on but motherhood ushered me to blatant insincerity.

One day, I went to the park and sat on the swing with my baby and a man from the neighbourhood harassed me. I remember listening to his strange comments with disbelief. I thought to myself, “This hasn't happened to me since I was 25 and it's because he knows I am weighed down by this baby.” It reminded me of the first few months after being married and feeling that I no longer frightened people enough.

Perhaps the news reports are right that it was the online shaming that pushed the unfortunate young woman to her decision. We may never know. She joins the thousands of women who die every year by suicide in India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the second highest category of suicides occur among housewives (after daily wage workers). (The young woman who died has been described as a techie but it is unclear to me from the news reports

whether she was working at the time of her death.) The Million Death Study (MDS) on premature mortality, which ran from 1998 to 2014, points out that in India, women in the 15- to 29-year-old age group make up 56% of female suicides. Analysing the MDS findings, researcher Siddhesh Zadey concluded that the probability of death due to suicide increases by over 200 hundred-fold “for an Indian woman solely by virtue of being a housewife”. For a woman in India, being married or having ever been married increased chances of death by suicide.

Perhaps the online trolling forced that tragic decision but it may not have been. Under any circumstances, your baby slipping out of your grasp and nearly dying would be shattering. For women with PPD whose sadness and anxiety centre on the fragile life they have to keep alive, it would be a thousand nightmares playing out in the noonday sun. Even without postpartum depression, it is so incredibly hard for mothers in India to want to stay alive. Shame and judgement are your evil handmaidens as soon as you enter the public institution of motherhood in India. Everyone votes and unlike on *Bigg Boss*, they insist you stay in the house.

Nisha Susan is the author of *The Women Who Forgot To Invent Facebook* and *Other Stories*. She posts @chasingamb.

The pitch-perfect voice BEHIND THE BOOKS

As audiobooks gain listeners and subscribers, voice-over artists are finding themselves in demand. But AI is not far behind

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Even Ruskin Bond advocates for audiobooks. Just last weekend, when Audible India launched an audio version of his *All-Time Favourites for Children*, read by Anuj Datta, Bond told *PTI* that the format could be called “a stimulus, a catalyst for the whole art of reading”.

As true as this may be for children, many adults, too, listen to books so that they can multitask during a commute or while doing chores, and meet reading or learning goals. India is the third largest audiobook market in the world after the US and China, according to Statista. The country's audiobook market is expected to see a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10.5% between 2024-29, hitting a market volume of \$585.30 million (around ₹4,860 crore) by 2029. With this, the projected number of audiobook “readers” will be 416.4 million in five years.

“Audio is one of the oldest ways we have consumed stories, from our grandparents and parents (reading to us or narrating stories) to audiobooks now,” says Piyush Agarwal, a Bengaluru-based audiobook narrator who primarily voices Hindi titles. He has recorded *Nirmala* by Premchand, *Kashmirnama* by Ashok Kumar Pandey and *Barahvin Raat*, a Hindi translation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, among other books.

With the boom in demand for audiobooks, more narrators are needed to voice the books. Yet, few artists truly shine as audiobooks require diverse skills and the artist has to think like a storyteller. “VO (voice-over) artists often have a diverse mix of experiences across radio, ads, dubbing and singing,” says Arcopol Chaudhuri, executive editor of rights and new media at HarperCollins India. “Some additional strengths are crucial: impeccable pronunciation, a good understanding of the mood of the text, effective voice modulation skills and their fondness for reading.”

Voice-over artists say there has been a surge in audiobook production since the pandemic, going by the number of projects for which they are being signed up. “Long-format audio recording was not in vogue” before covid, says Pallavi Bharti, who voices both Hindi and English audiobooks. The Delhi-based artist, one of the most sought after voices in the market, has recorded, among other books, Shormista Mukherjee's *Cancer, You Picked the Wrong Girl*, Vauhini Vara's *The Immortal King Rao*, Sudha Murthy's *Here, There and Everywhere*, and the Hindi version of Chetan Bhagat's *The Girl in Room 105*.

A full-time voice-over artist, Bharti has worked on radio dramas, ad-films and jingles, all short-term projects though they paid well. The increase in audiobook projects has provided the luxury of being associated with one assignment for a few months at a stretch, allowing artists the joy of immersing themselves in a single narrative, sometimes developing dis-



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tinctly different pitches and cadences for the various characters.

In *Barahvin Raat*, for instance, Agarwal used his experience as a theatre actor and podcaster to create different personalities for each of Shakespeare's iconic characters, distinguishing them by a tremble in one voice or a sharp middle register for another. Similarly, Bharti adds personal touches—a sigh here, a stutter there—in her narration, while being careful never to change or add words. “With dialogue, I fumble like we do in everyday conversation. I pause, sigh and sneeze. It infuses drama, but naturally,” she says.

For some artists like Ranjit Madgavkar, former creative head at Radio Mirchi, the privilege of evoking, through their voice, the words of their favourite authors brings unparalleled joy. The main voice on Amitav Ghosh's *Smoke and Ashes*, *Nutmeg's Curse* and *The Living Mountain*, he says studying the author thoroughly helps while narrating non-fiction.

“I see (the authors') interviews, how they talk, how they pause—I become them,” he says. Since 2021, Madgavkar, who also dabbles in other entrepreneurial ventures, has voiced Dr Mukesh Batra's *The Nation's Homeopathy* and cricketer Wasim Akram's memoir *Sultan*,

among others. Other artists have different methods. While Bharti likes to discover the story as she records, Agarwal tries to breeze through the book to get its sense and chart out an emotional graph for the characters.

Casting the right voice to ensure “the right alchemy between an author's written narrative and the transportive listening experience for the audience is a meticulous process,” says Karen Appathurai Wiggins, vice-president and head of regional content, Asia-Pacific, at Audible. She adds that Audible “witnessed a notable 39% increase in paid member listening hours” in India in 2022, indicating a rising demand and popularity of paid audio content.

At KukuFM—which has 3 million paid active subscribers, and where audiobooks form 20% of their catalogue of 3,000 productions a year—content head Kunj Sanghvi notes that “audiences really build

(above, left) Piyush Agarwal; and Pallavi Bharti.



a relationship with the voice... and sometimes mistake them to be the author, too.”

This means the artists need to think like actors. For Mikhail Sen, a London-based actor who has voiced the *Detective Kamil Rahman* series by Ajay Chowdhury, narrating audiobooks is, in a way, more challenging than acting for the screen or stage. “There, you always have the visual elements or the rest of the cast to play off—there's a sharing of energy. In audiobooks, you're mostly the sole narrator, having to paint the entire picture through your voice,” says Sen, who played the part of Amit Chatterjee in Mira Nair's TV adaptation of author Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*.

Thinking like an actor also includes not disclosing their age for the fear of being typecast for specific projects. Additionally, “you need to really take care of your voice,” says Agarwal. This not only entails eating and drinking right, but also building up endurance to stay the course through recording. Unlike a short form project, where the script is 1,000-odd words, an audiobook involves getting through 300 pages or more of a book, about 20,000 to 50,000 words. Since this is done over a period of a few weeks to a couple of months, voice artists and producers like it to training for a marathon.

“From start to end, for many hours a day and over many days, your voice—and the

India is third largest audiobook market in the world after the US and China. With the boom in demand, more narrators are needed to voice the books

CHEFS CRACK THE MASALA CODE

With the quality of prominent masala brands under the scanner, leading chefs share how they pick, buy and use spices

Jahnabee Borah
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Indian spices have been feeling the heat. Hong Kong, Singapore and Nepal recently banned some varieties of MDH and Everest spices, claiming they contained more than the permissible limit of the pesticide ethylene oxide. It spurred the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to order a nationwide testing. According to news reports, it did not find traces of ethylene oxide in samples that it tested, yet the incident spotlights age-old concerns about adulteration of masalas.

There is a time-tested measure of purity of spices: Aroma followed by taste. Spices have essential oils which impart a pronounced aroma. "Don't judge turmeric or chilli powder by its colour. Smell and taste them," advises Yajush Malik, chef and co-founder of the restaurant Gallops in Mumbai. If any powdered or whole spice has a fading aroma or none at all, it is either spurious or past its expiration date. Most chefs are particular about where they source their spices from and how they make their blends, and even if they choose packaged spices, each has a favourite.

"For me, the *chaat* masala by MDH is the king of all masalas," says Himanshu Saini, corporate chef of the hospitality brand Passion F&B that runs Michelin-starred restaurants Tresind and Avatara. Chef Manish Mehrotra uses it too.

Using masalas right is both a skill and an art, and transforms the final taste of a dish. Saini shares his secret of "opening up" spinach-based dishes. He blends two parts cinnamon and three parts cumin, roasts this mix and grinds it. "Finish a spinach dish with this and taste the magic," he says. Similarly, asparagus with a pinch of aniseed is a match made in culinary heaven. Blending masalas can be learnt by understanding the science of flavour pairing. For starters, Saini recommends his all-time favourite book *The Flavour Thesaurus* by Niki Segnit.

Saini, a protégée of Mehrotra, trained with him at Indian Accent. On Indian Accent's new summer menu is a melt-in-the-mouth duck *khurchan* served like a taco. It has shredded, roasted, juicy duck meat topped with *kala chaat* masala that brings out smoky notes—a perfect pairing.

Mehrotra speaks of three distinct types of *chaat* masalas used in Delhi. There's *kala chaat* masala with higher quantities of roasted cumin and a bit of black pepper to impart a smoky flavour, *peela chaat* masala with dis-



tinctive citric notes, and the regular *chaat* masala. "If you visit Chandni Chowk, you will notice two food areas: one has the famous Parathewalli gali, *halwas* and *Natraj ke dahi bhalle*, which are run by Hindus, and the other side has Qureshi kebab, *Aslam butter chicken*, *Kareem's* and they are Muslim-owned. I have observed the *peela chaat* masala is sprinkled over kebabs and the *kala chaat* masala goes into *dahi bhalle* and *chaat*," he says. For Indian Accent, he sources the *kala chaat* masala from Old Delhi's Khari Baoli, believed to be the largest spice market in Asia.

Lalbaug in Mumbai is a similar burgeoning spice hub. It's the place from where restaurants source their spices, food walks are organised for tourists, and passionate foodies get their regular stash of masala.

Malik of Gallops buys his spices from there. Gallops' menu is a mix of Indian and continental fare with kebabs and a Malvani curry being among diner favourites. For these dishes, he has to go beyond Lalbaug to get the right blends. The spices for his kebabs come from the Lucknow-based brand Nawab's Secret, and for the Malvani curry, from a Malvani brand named Kelve Masale. "We buy powdered red chilli powder, turmeric and coriander from a brand called Ramdev in Gujarat. We have a B2B set-up and their



(top) Smell and taste spices before buying them; and 'pandhra rassa', flavoured with cardamom, by chef Himanshu Saini.

products are of exceptional quality."

Some chefs have gone on to launch their own spices. Nalini Moti Sadhu, who runs the Kashmiri restaurant Matamaal with branches in Noida, Gurugram and Pune, launched her spice brand Kanz and Muhul during the pandemic. When she started her restaurant in 2016, there was a dearth of good-quality Kashmiri masalas like *saunf* (fennel) powder, *saunth* (ginger) powder and the unique *tikki or vauer* masala. She bought two grinders and started making masala in-house. "Ninety per cent of Kashmiri food is about the masala. When my diners tasted our dishes, they enquired about the spices which drove us to launch a masala brand," she says. Another small-batch chef-oriented Indian spice brand is Cardoz Legacy, launched by chef Barkha Cardoz in memory of her late husband, Floyd Cardoz. As a hat tip to his origins, there are options like Goan masala and vindaloo masala.

While ready-to-mix blends are perfect for those who seek convenience, others like to make their own. One of the best explained recipes for *garam* masala is by chef Ranveer Brar on his eponymous YouTube channel. He breaks down *garam* masala into those that add body, and those with smoky or earthy notes, and lists the places known to produce the best-quality spice—coriander from Indore, bay leaves from Karnataka and mace from Kerala.

To retain the freshness and flavour, chefs recommend buying or making blends in small quantities and keeping them in airtight containers in a cool corner. If stored well, a little will go a long way.



TEA NANNY

Celebrating the power of tea

Aravinda Anantharamam

The fourth edition of International Tea Day was celebrated on 21 May. This year saw the launch of a new campaign #TeaPower by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's Intergovernmental Group (IGG) on tea. A couple of years ago, when the group met to discuss how tea could be promoted better, they zeroed in on health, something that tea already is associated with. But what aspect of health? And where did tea fit in?

"Tea and health is too broad," says Shabnam Weber of the Tea and Herbal Association of Canada and vice-chair of IGG. For the campaign, they sought a more defined reach and target. They chose to focus on the next generation of tea drinkers and with something that would appeal to them. "As an industry we have talked about health, but 20 year olds are not concerned with cardiovascular health or diabetes. We narrowed it down to topics that were going to be backed up by credible scientific evidence. That's how we honed in on hydration, flavonoids, sports and fitness," says Weber. And #TeaPower came into being.

Tea has always been tagged with health; it has underlined the premise on which tea has been marketed and sold. Tea's claim to health is that it's a botanical that contains (some) caffeine, flavonoids (said to support heart health) and polyphenols (that have antioxidant properties). There is some science to back these claims and as part of the campaign, the IGG has created a database of available studies related to tea and health at trello.com.

#TeaPower urges people to look at tea as a beverage that's light, hydrating, refreshing, and flavourful. Think of tea as an alternative to plain water, a flavoured option that hydrates just as well. Or as fortified water, given it's a source of polyphenols. To be clear, tea is not medicine but in the post-covid world, as we look at our well-being more carefully, it pairs well with physical activity, eating right, getting enough air and light, and sleep—a part of an active lifestyle.

Weber talks about how innovation in tea so far has been about how we sell it. But #TeaPower is urging us to include tea, as a beverage that you can steep and carry to work, to yoga, on a run, even when you are climbing mountains. "No sugar, no calories. That's the hook," she says. (Of course, she's talking about tea made with whole leaf, and not sweet, milky *chai*.)

And it comes with a welcome caffeine hit. At between 20-75mg of caffeine, it's less than coffee. Also, three-four cups a day will still keep caffeine levels well below the maximum levels of 300mg per day as per dietary standards. What you should know however, is that among tea styles, some like Assam black tea, gyokuro, matcha, and silver needle have higher concentrations of caffeine than say, a green tea or genmaicha.

Reach for tea as healthy hydration, an energy boost, a cup of calm. Skip the milk and sweetener and try more leafy teas.

Tea Nanny is a fortnightly series on the world of tea. Aravinda Anantharamam is a Bengaluru-based tea blogger and writer who reports on the tea industry. She posts @AravindaAnanth1

Counting nutrients and recipes with millets



DOUBLE TESTED

NANDITA IYER

I am amazed by the maddening diversity of food Karnataka has to offer.

North Karnataka, Dakshina Karnataka, Kodagu, Mangaluru, Udupi, Saraswat, and Navayath Muslim being some of the cuisines in the state. I have tasted, cooked and delved into recipes from almost all these regions and there is probably just one dish that has eluded my love.

It is *ragi mudde*.

The first time I had it, I almost choked. The *mudde* was probably too dense, or as newbie, I greedily took off too a large bite, or I didn't soak it in enough curry to soften it. I still stay away from this very popular millet-based dish from Karnataka.

On the other hand, there are a couple of *ragi* dishes from Karnataka that I can't have enough of—one being *ragi ambali*, which is a savoury beverage or porridge. The other is *ragi roti*. Unlike the thicker millet *bhakis* made in Maharashtra, these *rotis* from north Karnataka have aromatics like chillies, onions, coriander, dill leaves and other spices. These can also be made plain,

but as soft *rotis* that puff up on the *tava*, and remain soft for one-two days when kept wrapped in a muslin cloth.

The Dietary Guidelines for Indians by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) along with the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) released on 8 May gives a strong nudge to include millets as a part of one's daily diet. "My Plate for the Day", which was published in the guideline, is a visual guide to what a balanced diet looks like.

It recommends that half the cereal component in a day should be from whole grains like millets because they provide vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phytonutrients, fibre and bioactive compounds that improve gut health.

It also emphasises that all cereal or millet-based diets should be had with adequate pulses or beans for good quality protein and fibre. I'm glad they have clearly mentioned the addition of a protein source. A common myth circulated on social media is that millets are a great source of protein.

While they do have higher protein content than rice, as per the Indian Institute of Millets Research website, the protein in millets ranges from 7.5-13g per 100g of most raw or uncooked millets. One eats roughly 25-30g of raw millet per serving which becomes 75-90g of cooked millet (most cereals triple in weight when cooked). It has around 2-3g of protein. Look at millets as a whole grain or complex carbo-



(left) Mixed millet 'roti'; and 'ragi ambali'.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NANDITA IYER

hydrate and a source of dietary fibre and micronutrients, with some added protein and not as a protein source.

The Dietary Guidelines for Indians also advises eating a variety of millets as each has a different nutrient profile. For example, among millets, *ragi* has the highest amount of calcium, pearl millet is rich in iron and brown top millet has the highest dietary fibre.

A practical tip is to buy one-two kinds of millet in a month in small quantities and use them by rotation along with rice or any other grains, as they tend to go

rancid quickly. Soak before cooking for at least an hour for varieties like *kodo* and foxtail and do an overnight soak for pearl millet. Grinding soaked millets along with pulses and fermenting them to make *idlis* and *dosas* is also a good idea. Use the ratio of 1:2 with water for fluffy millets that go into salads and *upma* (foxtail, little and *kodo* millet work well for both), and 1:3 for a mashed soft consistency.

There's barely a dish I have not used millets in—salads made using a combination of millet (usually foxtail), beans,

veggies and greens along with a flavourful citrus dressing being my favourite. It speaks of the versatility of this grain and how it can be used in both traditional and modern dishes. Check out the beautifully produced *Millets Recipe Book* by United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation on their website, which has a bunch of recipes from chefs around the world.

RAGI AMBALI
(recipe from my book *The Great Indian Thali—Seasonal Vegetarian Wholesomeness*)

Serves 2

Ingredients
4 tbsp *ragi* flour
Half tsp salt
1 cup buttermilk
1 small onion, finely chopped
1-2 green chillies, finely chopped
1 sprig curry leaves

Method
In a small cup, make a slurry of *ragi* flour with half cup water. Bring 1 cup of water to boil in a pan. Add the slurry and salt with constant stirring. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes until the mixture thickens and the flour is cooked. Whisk in the buttermilk, onions, chillies, and curry leaves. This can be had hot or at room temperature. The porridge will thicken on cooling.

MIXED MILLET ROTI

Serves 2-3

Ingredients
1 cup mixed millet flour
Half cup finely chopped onions
Handful of chopped coriander
2-3 green chillies, finely chopped
Half tsp grated ginger
1 cup of mixed chopped greens (spinach, fenugreek, spring onions)
1 tsp salt
2 tsp white sesame seeds
1-2 tbsp *ghee* to cook

Method
Combine all the ingredients except *ghee* in a bowl. Use warm water to make a soft dough.

Pat out the dough on a parchment paper or an oiled banana leaf. Transfer the *roti* by inverting the paper or leaf on a hot lightly greased *tava*. Press down using a spatula and gently peel off the paper/leaf. Cook on a medium flame for 4-5 minutes on each side, using a tsp of *ghee* on each side. Serve hot with a cup of yogurt.

Double Tested is a fortnightly column on vegetarian cooking, highlighting a single ingredient prepared two ways. Nandita Iyer's latest book is The Great Indian Thali—Seasonal Vegetarian Wholesomeness (Roli Books). She posts @saffrontrail on Twitter and Instagram.

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Page-turners for summer

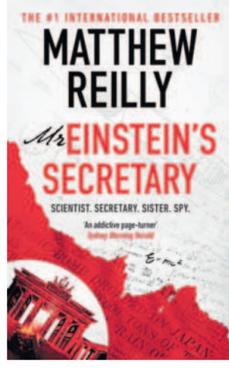
As temperatures soar to record-breaking highs across India, Lounge brings you books from a range of genres to help you cool off during these oppressive weeks

Somak Ghoshal

THE HEADINESS OF HISTORY

Matthew Reilly's latest spy thriller will titillate the minds of history nerds and science enthusiasts

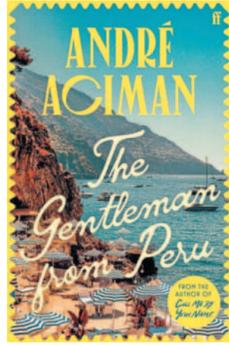
Imagine growing up in Berlin, through the two world wars, with Albert Einstein as your neighbour and mentor? Hanna Fischer, the daredevil protagonist of Matthew Reilly's new best-seller *Mr Einstein's Secretary*, has this bittersweet legacy thrust upon her. Born to a German father and an American mother, Hanna is gifted with an insatiable appetite for science. With the rise of the SS and Hitler's ascendancy, Hanna's parents are brutally murdered, in separate incidents, while her twin sister Norma is left at an asylum for the mentally challenged. While Einstein helps Hanna flee to America from Berlin under siege from the Nazis, the young girl has to make a life for herself in the foreign land. She trains as a secretary, works in corporate America, and eventually becomes Einstein's secretary for a while. Later, Hanna spends the war working as a secretary to Albert Speer and Martin Bormann, two of Hitler's most important henchmen, but actually being a double agent for America. Although Reilly takes liberties with historical facts and liberally splashes colour to liven up his story, there is never a dull moment. The best part: this breathless spy thriller will make you want to go back to the original sources for a deeper understanding of what exactly happened. (Hachette, ₹799)



WHAT'S NEW, MR ACIMAN?

André Aciman's latest novel mixes his luminous realist style with his interest in the otherworldly

André Aciman took a decade to achieve celebrity after his 2007 novel *Call Me By Your Name* was adapted for the screen by Luca Guadagnino in 2017. It led millions to his early work, such as the beautiful memoir *Out of Egypt* (1995). His novel *Enigma Variations* (2017), much superior to *Call Me By Your Name* to my mind, was critically acclaimed, too. Then something happened. *Find Me*, the sequel to *Call Me By Your Name*, felt like less a creature of Aciman's vivid imagination than that of his publisher's desire for a sequel to keep the cash registers ringing. Its plot was flimsy and the writing a tad too sentimental even for those who had wept copiously for Timothée Chalamet and Arnie Hammer in the movie. Now, *The Gentleman from Peru*, Aciman's latest, leaves the reader with a peculiar aftertaste. Undeniably, there is ample evidence of his narrative genius, but it also feels as though Aciman is trespassing into a territory of mysticism and occult that readers associate with writers like Paulo Coelho. Fittingly, the story is set in summer, on an island on Italy's Amalfi coast, where a group of American tourists are spending lazy days of hedonism—until the eponymous Peruvian gent arrives to spice up their lives. (Faber, ₹599)



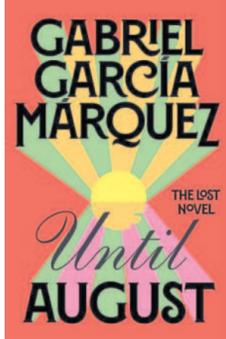
THE MASTER'S VOICE

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's 'lost novel' is a testimony to his storyteller's genius

Earlier this year, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's family, in collaboration with his long-time editor Cristóbal Pera and translator Anna McLean, published his "lost novel" *Until August* to mark his 97th birth anniversary. Marquez had planned to write a magnum opus of 600 pages, when he got waylaid by *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* (2005). *Until August*, imagined as a collection of short stories about the erotic adventures of a middle-aged woman, Anna Magdalena Bach, remained incomplete. In spite of some iffy reviews, we highly recommend this gem of a novella to immerse yourself in on a slow

afternoon, fortified by the gentle hum of the air-conditioning and a glass of chilled lemonade. This novella is not only a testament to a literary genius' last hurrah, it is also an example of the transformative power of editing. In the age of AI, when editors are being written off, Pera shows how poring over each word of a manuscript can stitch together an astonishing narrative of love and death, the two great themes that run through the finest works of Garcia Marquez.

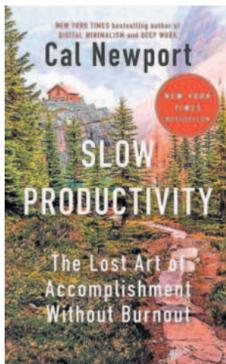
Every year Anna Magdalena Bach returns to the island where her mother is buried to leave a bouquet at her grave. On this annual pilgrimage, she lets her self shed the tired identity of mother and wife, and enjoy a one night stand. The prose is limpid, flushed with the humidity of late summer, and despite its leanness, conveys a sense of a whole life lived, yet also not lived fully. Some secrets, we learn, are taken to the grave unbeknownst to even those closest to the person. (Viking, ₹599)



SLOW AND STEADY

Cal Newport's latest book is a much-needed antidote to hustle culture and toxic productivity

Acclaimed author and computer science professor, best known for his theory of "deep work", Cal Newport has never been your assembly line self-help writer, even though his material tends to veer into that zone. Be it his approach to time management and productivity, or advocacy for digital minimalism and a world without emails, Newport has always arrived at his ideas through rigorous cognitive behavioural science, reporting, and a deep dive into historical trends. *Slow Productivity* is no differ-



ent. Its central thesis is brilliantly counter-intuitive: for us to be at our most productive, we need to embrace the first principles of working slowly—or, in other words, perpetual busyness doesn't equal productivity. The idea isn't radical or novel but Newport's analysis of it, based on scores of interviews with lapsed busy-bees and drawing on figures from history, is fresh and thought provoking. If you work at a job where your main duty seems to be sitting at meetings all day, if you take pride in your split-second response time to emails and messages, if stretching your work week into unseemly hours validates your self-worth and, most of all, if you are burnt out but don't know how to move out of this rut, this book may change your life. (Penguin Business, ₹599)

LOST ALONG THE WAY

Shortlisted for the International Booker Prize, Ia Genberg's haunting novel asks deep questions

Swedish writer Ia Genberg's novel *The Details*, translated into English by Kira Josselson, is a thing of beauty though, unlike John Keats' claim, it isn't a joy forever. The point of this short novel, in contrast, is to make us confront the people who have come into our lives and dropped off. They may be friends or lovers, who inspired such deep stirrings in our youthful hearts that we never imagined living without them. Even though our mature selves come to terms with these losses, do we ever completely stop loving the people who once meant so much to us?

Framed by this question, *The Details* is narrated by a woman who, in the throes of a fever, starts to remember her passionate, yet skewed, relationship with Johanna, now a famous broadcaster. As the memories come tumbling in, we get a glimpse of the high noon of their love and its brutally abrupt end. This episode segues into three further portraits: of Niki, Alejandro and Brigitte. Each comes with its share of baggage—unruly tempers bursting forth as they nurture sordid secrets, young men and women in search of meaning, desperately clinging to each other, only to cut themselves loose from those ties. Genberg clinically dissects these relationships from the vantage point of her distance from the past—a method that deeply moves you, but also leaves a residue of discomfort, as you think back on similar



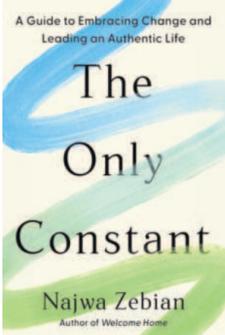
losses in your own life. (Wildfire, ₹599)

FINDING RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

Najwa Zebian grapples with the most uncomfortable truth of life—the need to embrace change

Lebanese-Canadian author, activist and educationist Najwa Zebian rose to prominence during the covid-19 pandemic with her "instapoetry", where she wrote about the defining challenges faced by immigrant youth like her in their adopted countries. She documented her personal struggles in *Welcome Home*, an account of defying her conservative family's wishes and choosing a life that felt authentic to her. *The Only Constant* extends this narrative by focusing on a specific aspect of Zebian's long journey of self-discovery: her challenges with navigating change, both positive and negative.

As with most books straddling self-help and memoir, *The Only Constant* has its fair share of platitudes: "If you allow yourself to be ruled by other people's acceptance of you, you'll never move forward". Yet, the book has its moments, especially when Zebian is able to weave in her personal narrative or stories of real people who have worked their way through tough change. Her condemnation of gaslighting, for instance, hits the spot: "We let things get to a point where it's not about what we want but about what we can no longer survive. While that's effective motivation, it sets a dangerous standard." (Hachette, ₹599)



IN SEARCH OF ETHICAL AI

A powerful graphic novel that demystifies the myths, mysteries and potential of machine learning

If you are hyped about the next development in AI and machine learning, *Dream Machine* by Appu-pen and Laurent Daudet will give you a reality check. At the heart of the story, illustrated by Appu-pen, is Hugo, the CEO of an AI company called KLAi. When Hugo receives a lucrative offer from global tech behemoth REAL.E, aiming to transform the landscape of gaming, AI and employment, he is understandably thrilled. Even though REAL.E's jaw-dropping deal to collaborate with KLAi comes with several strings attached, it promises to open new horizons of growth. When Hugo starts scratch-





PHOTOGRAPHS FROM ISTOCKPHOTO



from the colonial days, brought into the country by the British, now strewn around like relics. Their interactions with humans are fraught, at times erupt in violence, and these creatures also forge bonds with, and between, people.

Ashrafi's stories hold up a mirror to Bangladesh's present, where tensions of class, gender and ethnicity collide every day. The roots of these conflicts go back to ancient enmities built during the tumultuous days of the war. Some of the best stories in the volume centre on the lives of women and the youth of contemporary Bangladesh, each opening up new worlds of emotion. (Hachette, ₹399)

CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS

A luminous account of friendships and differences that blossomed around the fight for independence

Biographies of historical figures, especially if they have made significant contributions for the greater good, are easy to write. There are archival and traditional sources galore to refer to, and it's easier to create a focused narrative on a singular personality—even tempting to slide into hagiography. T.C.A. Raghavan eschews these short-cuts in *Circles of Freedom: Friendship, Love and Loyalty in the Indian National Struggle*. In the broadest sense, this book could have been a biography of Asaf Ali, activist, lawyer and the first Indian ambassador to the US, but Raghavan takes the complex, rewarding route of interweaving other lives into his narrative.

No one is an island, especially when it comes to driving revolutions, though history, especially Indian colonial history, is prone to creating cults of hero-worship. In contrast, Raghavan explores the intersections among the lives and ideologies of towering figures like Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu, Syud Hossain, Syed Mahmud and Aruna Asaf Ali. The result is a richly humane, informative and illuminating story of friendships forged, forsaken, and some recovered, during one of the most critical phases of India's history. Written with a flair for storytelling, substantiated by solid historical research, *Circles of Freedom* is not only an unusual book but also an urgent read for our times, when inter-religious marriage and the public perception of Islamic culture remain simmering issues. (Juggernaut, ₹799.)

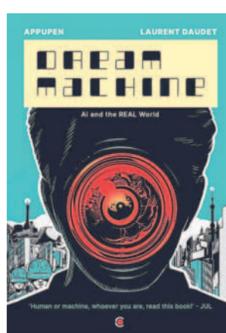
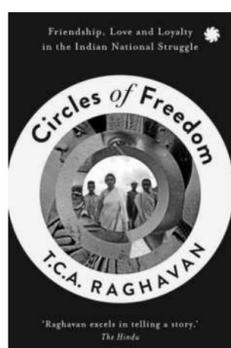
SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

A deeply reported narrative of the human costs of AI and emerging technology on modern societies

Madhumita Murgia's *Code Dependent: Living in the Shadow of AI* isn't just another book about the next big tech that Silicon Valley is incubating. It's not about a dystopian takeover by the robots leading to a next-level War of the Worlds either. Rather, shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Non-Fiction 2024, this book is about the potential for humans to exploit other humans by exerting insidious control over their behaviour through technology. In one of the most arresting scenes, early in the book, Murgia goes to Kenya to report on AI as a driver of employment. Inside a building run by a tech service centre, she encounters rows of young men who spend their days training driverless cars to navigate obstacles. The magic that unfolds in Silicon Valley is enabled by agents stewing in dingy offices in Nairobi, working for a fraction of the salary that Silicon Valley tech executives earn.

As Murgia shows, the future is already here, where AI and other emerging technologies are making crucial decisions about healthcare, education and human rights affecting communities across the world. The weaker the community, the more closely its subsistence will be at the mercy of tech. It opens up a rabbit hole into the workings of cheap labour, individual and state surveillance, and much more that eludes our ordinary cognition. (Macmillan, ₹699.)

Somak Ghoshal is a writer based in Delhi.



ing the surface of REAL.E's business model and its megalomaniac CEO's aspirations for world domination, shocking truths begin to emerge about data mining, compromising the privacy of citizens, and the creation of algorithmic monsters trained on biases and prejudices that wreak havoc on democracy.

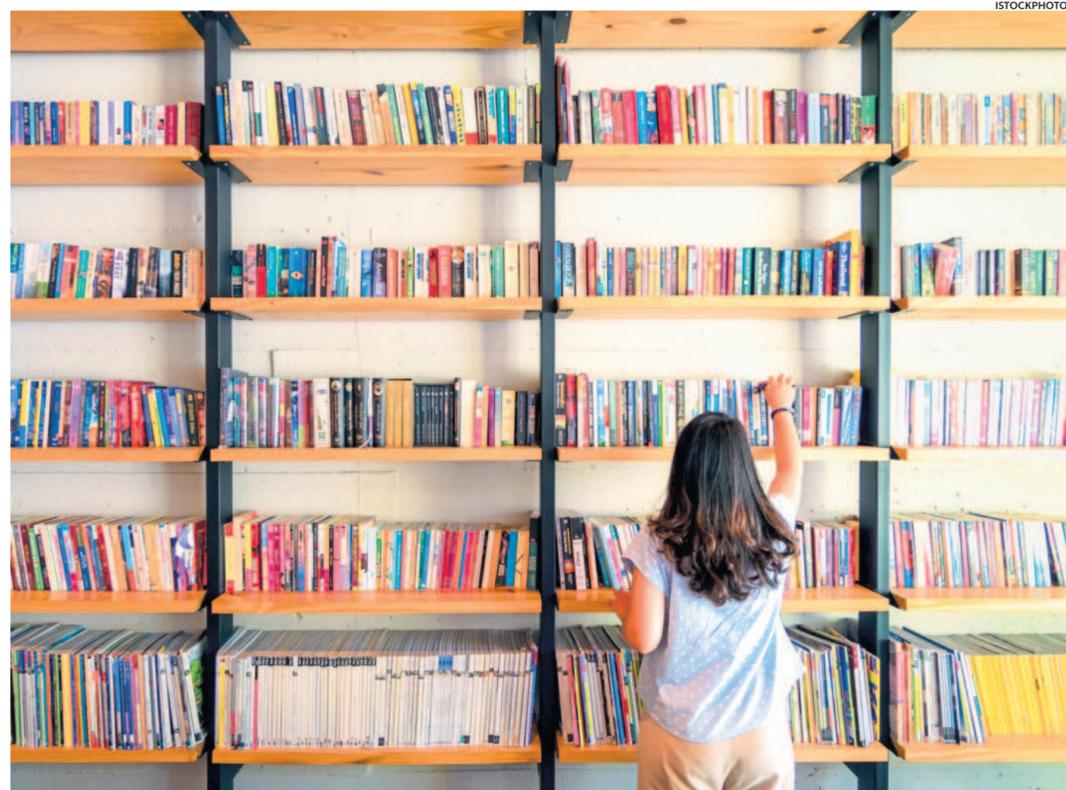
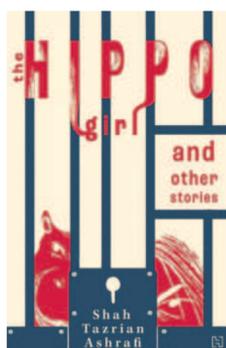
The more potent these tools, the more they are able to influence the outcomes of elections and perpetuate hate-mongering. Thankfully, nihilism isn't the be-all and end-all of the story. Hugo's final decision offers a silver lining, bolstered by the support of a small but dedicated community of scientists and researchers advocating ethical use of AI. Perhaps technophobia, tempered by a healthy dose of scepticism, isn't a bad thing at all. (Contxt, ₹599)

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Gripping stories that explore the aftermath of Bangladesh's War of Independence

Shah Tazrian Ashrafi is a new star on the firmament of English writing from the subcontinent. His debut collection, *The Hippo Girl and Other Stories*, bristles with primal energy, segueing into horrific scenes of cruelty and outbursts of uncontained violence.

Ashrafi follows an august line of writers, such as Selina Hossain or Akhtaruzzaman Elias, who have captured the devastations of Bangladesh's liberation war, in prose and poetry as well as in English and Bengali. The uniqueness of these stories come not just from revisiting the ravages of the past but also from observing their lingering impact on the present. Hippos, stately but strange presences, are ubiquitous in the stories, which are linked only tenuously. These animals are hangovers



Story books to keep your child company

From baffling mysteries and coming-of-age tales to compilations of rib-tickling poetry, a list of books to keep children engaged during the summer holidays

Avantika Bhuyan
avantika.bhuyan@htlive.com

Leadership lessons

(8+ years)
After *The Gutsy Girls of Science*, Ilina Singh has written another book on incredible women leaders, *The Gutsy Girls Who Led India*. She delves into history to pen 10 stories of fearless women warriors, including Rani Laxmibai, Abakka Chowta, Queen Didda, Velu Nachiar and Mai Bhago. It includes activities that nudge young readers to find their own leadership style. The chapter on Mai Bhago, who was the first female bodyguard to Guru Gobind Singh, for instance, has activity sheets on what it takes to be a team player—you could use images or words to describe something you achieved as a team. (HarperCollins, ₹399)



Witty poetry

(6+ years)
A box set of 10 books with poems by Ruskin Bond, Rabindranath Tagore, Jerry Pinto and Sukumar Ray, this delightful selection of poetry provides children a glimpse of different styles while giving free rein to their imagination. Each poem in *Birds, Ghosts, Laughter and Trees* is accompanied by vivid illustrations by Adrija Ghosh, David Yambem, Ekta Bharti and Pankaj Saikia, who add to the verse with their visual vocabulary. Especially delightful is *The Ghost* by Keki Daruwala, illustrated by Ekta Bharti, which lists different kinds of apparitions—a lady ghost bathing in a Mussoorie hotel, a *dhotti* just sailing by, a ghost rummaging through a litter. (Speaking Tiger/Talking Cub, ₹2,199)



Celebrating bonds

(5+ years)
"Be a jungle dancer... fierce like the monsoon rains, grounded like the palm tree in a storm, and determined like the lotus." Thatha and Thaye are teaching their granddaughter, Priya, the nuances of a traditional dance over a video call. Authored by Sathya Achia and illustrated by Janan Kabir, *Priya the*



Jungle Dancer reflects on the integral role that grandparents play in passing on intangible cultural heritage. The book is inspired by Achia's relationship with her Thatha and Thaye, who lived in Kodagu. (Adidev Press, ₹399)

A tale of royal folly

(8-12 years)
The Tiger King might be set in the past, in a kingdom called Pratibandapuram, but the story remains relevant today. Authored by Kalki and translated by Gowri Ramnarayan, the book follows the travails of a monarch with a title as inflated as his ego—His Highness Jamedar-General, Khiledar-Major, Sata Vyaghra Samhari, Maharajadhiraja Visva Bhuvana Samrat, Sir Jilani Jung Bahadur, who is destined to die in the jaws of a tiger. So, he embarks on a mission to kill every tiger in his path. A satire about what happens when people with power indulge their own whims instead of focusing on public welfare. (Aleph Book Company, ₹199)



On a journey with the sun

(All ages)
When the Sun Sets, authored-illustrated by Ogin Nayam, a visual artist from Arunachal Pradesh, is a wordless book of intricate imagery inspired by the artist's surroundings and cultural heritage. It tells the tale of what the sun does after she has set and takes the reader on a journey to her home, showing the reader the changing Arunachal landscape, the local flora and fauna, the traditional houses and more. An engaging book for story time for both children and adults. (Pratham Books, free to read at storyweaver.org.in)



A story of self-discovery

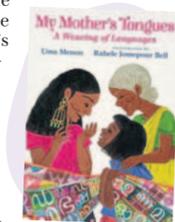
(12+ years)
Following a series of puzzling thefts in his neighbourhood, 14-year-old Neel sets out to crack the case in *A Higgledy Piggledy Growing Up* by Poile Sengupta. The extraordinary events that follow are both comic and endearing, as Neel navigates friendships, the many highs and lows of growing up, and the harsh reality of communal hatred both at school and beyond. (HarperCollins, ₹250)



A tapestry of languages

(4-8 years)
"The languages hop, like rabbits, from her tongue." In *My Mother's Tongues*, young Sumi marvels at the speed at which her mother switches between Malayalam and English while speaking with different people—from her mother to the cashier at the supermarket. Inspired by author Uma Menon's own experience

of hailing from a family of immigrants, the author traces the journey of Sumi's mother from Kerala to the US, and writes an ode to multilingualism. Illustrations by Rahele Jomepour Bell have the feel of woven fabric as they celebrate the tapestry of languages. (Penguin Random House, ₹1,550)



The heart of darkness

(10+ years)
Rajiv Eipe and C.G. Salamander continue to create vibrant worlds in the series, *Maithili and the Minotaur*, about a young girl who lives on the outskirts of magical wilderness and befriends monsters. In the latest and third graphic novel in the series, *Dolls of Despair*, Maithili has ominous visions of a boy who needs saving from a creature which had also taken her mother away. It takes readers to a cave of a thousand eyes and a black darkness, which resides not outside but within the hearts of Maithili, the Minotaur and their friends. (Puffin, ₹399)



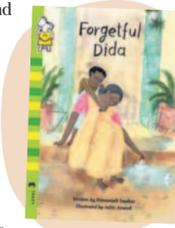
Celebrating dreamers

(6+ years)
The latest in Duckbill's *Dreamers* series, *The Boy Who Built a Secret Garden: Nek Chand*, by Lavanya Karthik, explains how self-taught artist Nek Chand transformed debris from demolition site into art at the Rock Garden in Chandigarh. The illustrated biography serves as perfect inspiration for young readers to find unique ways of overcoming the odds to create something imaginative. (Duckbill, ₹199)



Understanding ageing

(6-8 years)
It is hard for children to understand old age and the consequent slowing down, as full of energy and life as they are. *Forgetful Dida* by Himanjali Sankar, and illustrated by Aditi Anand, shows a child trying to understand Dida's "forgetting illness" while assuaging the mother's concerns. The story also highlights the natural empathy children are imbued with, and how they adapt to situations with a strength that belies their age. (Pratham Books, free to read at storyweaver.org.in)



Ruskin Bond: The grand old man of Indian letters

Writer Ruskin Bond recently turned 90. For readers, he remains an un-guilty pleasure, the man who brought magic to realism

Sandip Roy

The room on the roof is my sanctuary, my escape from the world. — The Room on the Roof, Ruskin Bond

It's been almost 70 years since *The Room on the Roof*, a coming-of-age story about Rusty, a lonely young Anglo-Indian boy, was first published. In those seven decades, its author Ruskin Bond has himself become a sort of sanctuary for generations of Indians, their place of escape from the world. It's a place of whistling night trains, whispering deodar trees and wistful ghosts. I grew up far away from all that in crowded noisy Kolkata. Yet if I had to imagine childhood as a place, it would feel a lot like a Ruskin Bond short story.

Bond just turned 90 on 19 May with a grand party in Mussoorie. He has lived in nearby Landour for over half a century. "The amazing part of Mr Bond's birthdays is that the whole town celebrates it," marvels Malavika Banerjee, the director of the Kolkata Literary Meet, who attended the celebrations. "Schoolchildren flock for a glimpse, the premier hotel hosts a party, and there is such a wave of good wishes that surround him."

In the photographs from that night, the cherubic Bond in a red sweater looks slightly bemused by all the attention. "He did perk up when he heard the band play *Autumn Leaves*," says Banerjee.

Banerjee has invited Bond to six consecutive literature festivals. And each appearance has been a thumping success. Banerjee, also a director of Gameplan, a sports management company, says, "We are used to a lot of adulation and crazy fans around cricketers. Mr Bond elicits the same response from all age groups. It's a challenge sometimes to manage the crowds."

I remember walking into the literary festival and seeing snaking queues of children (and quite a few adults) waiting patiently for Bond to sign their book. The man with the golden pen, obliged them all. One year, Bond, then in his mid-80s, was a little under the weather. He nursed a hot toddy but still gamely signed books, gave interviews and posed for selfies. He might just be the hardest working writer in the business. He still writes everyday though his eyesight isn't as good as it was.

In a world where writers routinely fall out of favour, our bond with Bond has been remarkably enduring. "Parents grew up on Ruskin Bond and they often pass on these books to their children. He is a household name and a publishing staple," says Bijal Vaccharajani, award-winning children's book author and editor with Pratham Books. Banerjee says it also helps that "even the most reluc-



tant reader has read him in curriculum" and every year a new batch of readers discover him.

"I sold his book for the first time in the year 2000 in Kolkata," says bookseller Mayura Misra, who now runs the Storyteller bookstore in Kolkata. "Now we host more than 60 book fairs in a year. You can imagine how many of his books we sell. We have an entire rack devoted to him in our bookstore." Each year there are new Bond books, sometimes fresh material, sometimes re-anthologised, sometimes repackaged. Bond is a gift that keeps on giving.

Yet come to think of it, there's no reason Ruskin Bond should have remained such an evergreen favourite in post-independence India. The son of English parents, he was sent to live with an aunt in the Channel Islands in the UK after India became independent.

"No sooner had I got there than I realised I was in the wrong place," Bond told me in 2019. "India was home. England felt so formal." He remembered arguing with an uncle, "a colonial type" who dissed independent India. But Bond had no money for the return fare. He worked odd

jobs, scrounged and saved. When his first novel was accepted for publication, he got an advance of £50 (around ₹5,300 now). "I came back by sea, it took three weeks and I have never regretted it," he said.

In hindsight what is most remarkable is he sustained himself as a full-time writer at a time when the English publishing industry in India was minuscule. He freelanced for magazines and newspapers. He also wrote some adult fiction until a story that was published in *Debonair* magazine in the 1970s got him and his publisher hauled to court on obscenity charges. "The case dragged on for two years until the judge said he'd enjoyed the story and gave us an honourable acquittal," recalled Bond. "But it was a bit of a bother. After that I thought I'd stick to children's stories."

But unlike many writers of children's fiction, Bond does not try to teach them moral lessons. The stories are simple, the language unfussy and even his crocodiles are friendly. His books are often like the promise of a lazy summer holiday. Nothing dramatic might happen but we look forward to them unfolding all the same.

Yet the stories are deeply rooted in the India in which he lives. "As a young person who grew up on a diet of Enid Blyton books, Ruskin Bond's writing transported me to the Indian mountains," says Vachharajani.

Unlike many writers of children's fiction, Ruskin Bond does not try to teach them moral lessons. HINDUSTAN TIMES

If Blyton existed in a kind of Neverland for us Indians, Bond exists in Everland. "I think that sense of place, the gentle humour and that respect for nature is something I admire a lot," says Vaccharajani. Bond's work, she says, is suffused with what ecologists now call soliphilia—a sense of interconnectedness. The tug of the mountains, the chirp of the cicadas, the stories of mountain people, all come together effortlessly in his prose.

Of course one eventually grows out of Ruskin Bond and the publishing ecosystem rightly has made room for many other kinds of writers with other life experiences. I have not read Bond in years. Neither have I read an Enid Blyton in decades. But while I am a little embarrassed about my childhood love for Blyton's world of scones, potted meat sandwiches and children who ran away to live in hollow trees in the wood, I feel nothing but affection for Bond. He remains an un-guilty pleasure, the man who brought magic to realism.

That's what makes him timeless because times might change but we still all know that kooky aunt, the oddball school

teacher, or a little boy who loves a cherry tree he plants. "I think young people always like reading about eccentric adults or schoolmasters making a fool of themselves," chuckled Bond. But he also remains curious about the world while many writers of his vintage find themselves cynical and tired. As a lonely boy he made friends with his grandmother's tenant, a disabled old lady who would feed him biscuits. "But she gave me stories as well," remembered Bond. Bond isn't just a storyteller, he remains a story collector.

Unfortunately there is a tendency to pickle Bond in a sort of simple syrup of nostalgia. But he is more complicated than that. Years ago, while guest editing a special issue of *Trikone*, the oldest South Asian magazine for LGBTQ+ issues, I wrote to Bond on a whim asking if he might have something to contribute. I never expected a response, but weeks later, a handwritten letter arrived from Ivy Cottage in Landour. Bond graciously suggested a short story of his that might be appropriate for the issue and congratulated us for putting the magazine together. He had no qualms about being in a magazine like *Trikone*.

"I fell in love with all sorts of people," he later said with a smile. "Some of the characters I've written about are based on real people."

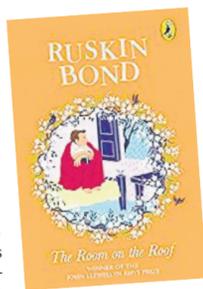
"He writes simply but there are layers of sorrow and joy," says Banerjee. In *The Eyes Have It*, two visually impaired strangers encounter each other never knowing they are blind. In the *Night Train at Deoli*, the young girl selling baskets at the station simply disappears. Bond tells disarming stories like the time he thought a young woman was interested in him but then discovered she just wanted to improve her English. He recounts these brief encounter stories with a chuckle but there is an unmistakable undercurrent of wistfulness that lingers with the

reader. "I often seek solitude because it's different from loneliness," he told me. "Loneliness is imposed on you. Solitude you choose for yourself."

At 90, Ruskin Bond is the grand old man of Indian letters, or perhaps a Great Uncle Rusty. He's won many awards, including recently the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship. He's such a legend, he's even been mistaken for Rudyard Kipling. "A mother and son came and asked me when will you write another Mowgli story," he remembered. "I said not in this incarnation but thank you."

That's quintessential Ruskin Bond. Unlike James Bond's martini, our Bond is neither shaken, nor stirred, just ever twinkling.

Sandip Roy is a writer, journalist and radio host. He posts @sandipr



In a world where writers routinely fall out of favour, our bond with Ruskin Bond has been remarkably enduring. He is a household name and a publishing staple

Taking the sloe liqueur lane in rural Dartmoor

The sloe gin story starts in hedgerows of the British countryside, and ends in a liqueur that is the perfect winter drink

Teja Lele

Plonking my suitcase on the luggage rack in the luxuriously appointed room, I rush to the picture window overlooking the Edwardian garden and woodland. The view seems like something from an 18th century painting of the English countryside.

A small decanter and a jar of truffle popcorn lure me back to the seating area. I pour a measure into the crystal wine glass and take a sip. It's warming and rich, a delicate balance of tart and sweet. A small tag reveals the antecedents of the dark reddish-purplish liquid: Sloe gin.

It may seem like gin by any other name, but sloe gin is technically a liqueur. The traditional British drink is made by steeping ripe sloe berries in gin for several months, and adding sugar, resulting in a flavour comparable to cranberries, tart cherries and currants.

The history of sloe gin goes back centuries, with its roots deeply entrenched in rural England. Foragers routinely hunted for the small, deep-purple berries, a distant cousin of the plum, in hedgerows and woodlands. Every family had its own rec-



ipe, passed down through generations.

"British country life is all about the harvesting and homemade ethos, and sloe gin-making is popular in the south-west of England and across more 'set in their traditional ways' areas of the UK," says Mark Lakeman, the founder of Experience South West Tours, a company that offers bespoke tours across south-west England.

We are at Bovey Castle, in the midst of the lush valleys of Dartmoor National Park. The large mansion was built in 1907 in the Jacobean style. The moors—wide expanses of heather and gorse-clad terrain—are punctuated by granite tors,

which offer lovely views and a glimpse into the region's geological history.

I am keen to explore the many in-house activities synonymous with rural English life: fly fishing, archery, clay pigeon shooting, falconry, off-roading, and cider and sloe gin-making. At the candle-lit long barn, with its traditional apple press and gin infusion station, Lakeman introduces us to the history of sloe gin.

Sloes are the fruit of a shrubby tree called blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*). "Blackthorn trees were an intrinsic part of hedge laying and boundary marking throughout the 1700s, with land owners

planting these sharp spiky bushes to discourage access," Lakeman says. The infused gin, most likely the result of experiments in farm kitchens, quickly became a cheap cross-over harvest opportunity with the fruits being used in cooking, making sauces and sloe gin.

"Sloe gin was traditionally consumed before hunts. The warming alcohol prepared riders for the bitter cold on the moor and relaxed muscles to ensure a softer landing should they fall," Lakeman says. The liqueur was consumed after a toast by the hunt master and before the sounding of the horn to signal the hunt's



(left) Bovey Castle; and sloe gin has been seeing a revival.

departure.

The fruits are harvested in autumn at first frost, which naturally splits the berry skins, allowing the fruit juices to infuse, and it is left to steep with gin and sugar. The liqueur is ready to be sipped around Christmas. The making of sloe gin is wrapped in folklore. "The Fae (fairies) are said to protect the blackthorn trees and their fruit. To disturb the Fae is not wise, which is why picking post first frost is the best time—the Fae don't like cold frosts," Lakeman says.

In the candlelit barn, the berries are macerated and left to steep. It takes two to three months for the flavours to infuse, but leaving it for longer can result in spectacular flavours. Dean Gunston, general manager at Bovey Castle, says making sloe gin is a prolonged process as it takes time

to infuse. "However, guests have plenty of samples to try. Returning guests can sample their crafted gins that we place in their rooms when they arrive," he says.

Making this type of gin is all about "life in the sloe lane". It needs quite a bit of patience but is extremely rewarding, giving you a taste with overtones of mystery, much like alchemy and witchcraft. "Sloe gin sessions are a unique way to spend time with friends and family, and the best way to unwind after a full day of activities and walks in the fresh air," Gunston says.

The birth of the liqueur may have been a happy accident, but with people interested in foraging and preserving, sloe gin has seen a revival. Producers like Plymouth, Sipsmith and 6 o'clock offer artisan-made sloe gin. The craft spirit has become a favourite with mixologists, who pair it with bubbly mixers that elevate the berry tones in drinks like Sloe Gin Fizz, Sloe Gin Negroni, Sloe Gin Royale, Sloe Gin Genie and Charlie Chaplin.

As Amy Stewart writes in *The Drunken Botanist*, her book on plants that create the world's best drinks, "It took a renewed interest in wild, local, seasonal fruit to bring the sloe back from obscurity."

The rich, rounded flavour is enhanced by the warming traces of spices or resonant flavours of other fruit. Days later, as I uncork a bottle, I think back to the truth of Irish poet Seamus Heaney's evocative poem, *Sloe Gin*: "When I unscrudded it, I smelled the disturbed, tart stillness of a bush, rising through the pantry."

Teja Lele writes on travel and lifestyle.



News and other battles: Watching Ravish Kumar

'While We Watched' is a documentary portrait of the journalist that paints a bleak picture of TV news in India today

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You have to make your voice strong enough." Ravish Kumar's daughter is assessing his singing, and she isn't impressed. It's a light-hearted scene in Vinay Shukla's documentary on the journalist and newscaster, though the words carry a larger resonance. Kumar's voice—dry, measured, yet also impassioned—was a staple of night-time news in India not that long ago. Since then, he has retired from TV but not from the news: he does his trademark reports on YouTube now.

While We Watched, which premiered at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival and won International Competition at DocPoint Helsinki 2023, follows Kumar between 2018 and 2020 at NDTV, a time when the channel and he were under fire from the government. It's a vérité document, rough around the edges, rather different from Shukla's previous documentary, *An Insignificant Man* (co-directed with Khushboo Ranka; 2016), which tracked the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party. The buoyancy of that film is replaced by bleakness and pessimism, with Kumar targeted by right-wing trolls and seeing one colleague after another depart. We spoke to Shukla over a video call about the process of filming, the fall of primetime news, and the online release of the film (on MUBI this weekend). Edited excerpts:

Was it a challenge to get Kumar to come on board?

He didn't take too much convincing. But your relationship is tentative throughout. Very often people use the word trust, but I don't think trust applies fully.

It takes time. On certain days you have phenomenal access and on other days you have none. Every day is a dance. Some days you know you shouldn't be shooting what you're seeing. When I met Ravish, he said, you convince the NDTV management, then we'll talk. NDTV had never given anyone permission; they were a legacy news network who'd never allow a camera to roam freely on their floor. Full credit to them, though, they gave me access very quickly. I went to Ravish and told him, they agreed, what do you say? From there onwards, there was some figuring out before we could start: who all are involved, how much time...

We see Kumar interact with his colleagues, family and strangers, but he isn't interviewed by you.

It's not a format I like. There are some people who do great interviews. I haven't mastered that art yet.



'While We Watched', by Vinay Shukla (above), follows journalist Ravish Kumar between 2018 and 2020 at NDTV.

I grew up the quiet one amongst my friends and family. I think I've taken that to my films: get in a room, get access, then sit quietly, try and allow my camera and audience to observe what I am observing. My ambition is to make the audience feel everything I am feeling. I don't have anything against the interview format—my craft just didn't develop in that direction.

The film reminded me of the paranoid thrillers of 1970s New Hollywood, films like 'Three Days of the Condor' and 'All The President's Men', in how it pits a lone seeker against mysterious sinister forces.

The newsroom drama is such a classic genre, people hunched around a desk, trying to figure which way society should be heading. The films that I really like are the ones that make you uncomfortable about journalism. I didn't want to make a film that makes you think it's a noble profession every day. It's mutated into something very different today.

I loved the Jake Gyllenhaal film *Nightcrawler*. There was a madness to Jake in that. I loved *Uncut Gems* too. (Makes a jackhammer sound) It felt like this when I was watching. And a lot of people have told me that *While We Watched* reminded them of *Uncut Gems*. I like films that make you a little shifty about the protagonist. Some of the people have seen my film and said, I'm not sure if Ravish was in a good place, or doing the right thing. I wanted to build discomfort in the film.

An 'Insignificant Man' was a buoyant film, full of resolve and energy. 'While We Watched', on the other hand, is bleak almost from start to end.

I agree. I take that as a compliment. I

remember talking to my team in the NDTV parking lot one day, saying, "This institution is falling apart, we're seeing the demise of dreams." So far in my life I had only seen things come together. I realised the film was going to be about standing witness to loss. This film is like *Titanic*, except it isn't about Jack and Rose, it's about the musicians who stayed back and played their violins.

Kumar says in the film that it's difficult not to be personally affected by the stories one reports. How personally did you approach your material?

The larger storytelling choices are always guided by your cinematic ambitions, tastes and personal ethics. Honestly, your personal involvement is more on some days. On most other days, you're too caught up in getting the craft right. I might be in this emotional situation, people quitting...but the filmmaker in me is like, I need to shoot this cake cutting really well.

There's a fascinating scene where Kumar is arguing with an abusive caller, then starts singing 'Saare Jahan Se Accha'. It feels in that moment that there's a part of him that can't break his connection with the viewer, no matter how critical they are.

It completely took us by surprise. In the film it's a one-and-a-half-minute scene, but it played out for a couple of hours in front of us. After a point you're wondering, 'While We Watched' premiered at the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival and won International Competition at DocPoint Helsinki 2023

is he doing okay, are you shooting somebody's breakdown? Never forget that Ravish started out at NDTV as the guy who used to sort mail. He'd deliver letters at the reporters' desks. He has risen through the ranks following a certain ethic, talking to people, engaging in dialogue. I may choose to switch off. But his thing is, if I stop taking phone calls, I won't get my stories. That's why he makes a great character. He's on that call, he sings. **The soundtrack is mostly diegetic—electronic pings, buzzes, beeps. There's a moment where we see the reflection of the sound recordist. Was there a desire not to smooth things over?**

Did the final shape of the film appear over time?

The sound design is that way because for me that's the rhythm of journalism. It's a lot of WhatsApp sounds, a lot of notifications. The audience is always looking for an experience. If the experience is not being broken, the audience is very forgiving.

A lot of the screenings have been outside India. Was the audience surprised at the portrait of Indian TV news?

People were surprised, but you know what's more surprising? People here were equally surprised. The number of people who have switched off from what's happening on TV is phenomenal. *Logon ne dekha hi band diya hai*. So when they experience this over 90 minutes, they're like, oh god I didn't realise.

People abroad were like, things are bad here but not this bad. Unfortunately, that's the reputation Indian news is getting the world over.

You fought for a theatrical release for 'An Insignificant Man'. Was there a push to try and get this film into cinemas?

Let me say, I'm very happy at the reception the film has received. I have received congratulatory messages from owners of many studios. But the fact of the matter is I haven't received a contract. All the big shots in the industry have spoken to me with love, but there have been no offers (to release the film). Even before I say anything, they are like, we can't do anything. It's all done very politely. With *An Insignificant Man* we had a theatrical partner. I knew I couldn't bring this one out by myself in India.

Let the kids take charge of the vacation

Planning a holiday teaches a child a host of skills, from finding engaging activities to budgeting

ISTOCKPHOTO



For children, a vacation is about finding meaningful and engaging activities

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It was the winter break of 2019-20, and we had just reached Dubai for a holiday. I was looking forward to four days of eating, sleeping and wandering about aimlessly. My daughter, though, had other plans. Nearly eight then, she had heard from a classmate about the adrenaline-packed dune safari the friend had taken with her family a year earlier. And we simply had to go for it. When we reached the location, we saw people zipping across the dunes on quad bikes. I caught my daughter looking at me expectantly. She wanted me to take her on a quad bike ride. Now, those who know me are well-aware I am a quiet being who likes quiet holidays and likes to go about them as quietly as possible. I tip-toe around any sort of high-adventure activities like a person would around a team of fleeces in the monsoon.

RAISING PARENTS

Art and culture ideas to inspire both children and adults

I couldn't believe that my own flesh and blood would ask me—a person, who despite taking driving lessons several times, is still petrified to take the car out, afraid that a group of cyclists would crash into her—to drive over a dune, zipping through lines of frenzied quad bikers. After receiving a mini-lecture from my mother about growing up and behaving like a parent, I faced the inevitable and sat on the quad bike.

Many things happened within those few minutes—the brakes didn't work, I nearly crashed into someone—but the most surprising bit was that I was no longer afraid. It might sound clichéd, but it was exhilarating to have the wind in the hair (and sand in the mouth), zipping through waves of dunes, with an ecstatic daughter squealing with delight throughout. As the biking trip ended and the dune safari started, initially, I worried through every jump and turn that the vehicle took: "Is my daughter okay?", "Is she going to throw up?", "Is she dizzy?" But I was worrying needlessly—she thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

That trip was the first of many when my daughter took charge of planning activities for a holiday. Since then, we have competed to race up a mountain covered in inches of snow, sledged down a hill, tried picnics by the river, visited immersive art experiences, found unique culinary experiences that combine music and food, and more. There is also a list ready for future holidays: visit the D23 Expo in the US, which is the ultimate exposition for Disney fans, try dumpling folding and pasta rolling, learn Ikebana, and go for a coffee tour through the Baba Budangiri hills in the Western Ghats.

All these years of having her take charge of trips have taught me a couple of things, the most important being that kids are not fragile. It is the parents who, loaded with concerns and anxieties, project their own fragility on them. We are constantly asking ourselves: Is this good for them? Will they be able to handle it? What if this activity is just money wasted and no one enjoys the holiday?

Children, on the other hand, are extremely resilient, and when they take charge of a situation, they start to feel empowered from a younger age. Even if the activity turns out to be a damp squib, they learn to plan better next time, paying better attention to details. I have closely observed my daughter's process of holiday planning: it starts from something she has heard from a friend, or maybe an activity/book/art that she is interested in at that moment. That is then followed by research about how her own interests would intersect with travel experiences.

Then the activities are planned out to the last detail, from how one would travel from the hotel to the destination, how to buy transportation passes, the restaurants closest to our hotel, and more. My role in this entire exercise is to see if the activity is age-appropriate, safe and suited to the budget.

For children, aged 8-15, a vacation is no longer about just visiting an interesting destination, but about finding meaningful activities that the entire family can engage with. "This generation will grow up to be travellers, who can get the most value out of their trips. When we were kids, we would go wherever our parents would take us, and soak in the values that they were imparting through the holiday. Today, kids know exactly what value they want to get out of travel. They are exposed to a lot more ideas through the Internet and through peer interactions," says Prachi Kagzi, who runs Little Passports India, which organises personalised trips for kids aged 3-15, when accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

She started the company in 2015 to offer signature mom/dad-kid trips, but during the pandemic, started personalised tours for private groups. She often gets requests for trips for an entire class of children or for a group of cousins. Wildlife trips have emerged as the most popular kind. Her son, Arsh, 12, has been an integral part in the planning of the Little Passport trips. Based on his feedback, Kagzi can gauge if the itineraries are age-appropriate and engaging. Arsh plays an active role in planning the family holidays as well.

When he was 10, he wanted to go to a destination where he could get a scuba diving certification. "He had learnt that 10 was the minimum age to get such a certification, so we headed to one such destination that summer," says Kagzi. In the process of planning the holiday, Arsh also learnt to be mindful. For instance, when he was 8, he wanted to see the great migration in Africa. Kagzi explained in detail that this natural event took place only between July and August, and since a holiday to Africa is among the most expensive trips out there, the family might have to forego the summer holiday to accommodate the later one. "He has learnt to be conscious in the process," says Kagzi.

Even finer things, like budgeting the activities according to the currency rate of the country you are visiting, helps children understand the value of money. But most importantly, they spread this infectious child-like imaginative energy like fairy dust all around, making us adults feel spirited again.

Let the kids take charge of the holiday planning, even if you are not going anywhere in the break. Instead of beating yourself up that they might be disappointed, let them treat the vacation as a blank canvas and be as creative as possible.

And now as the offspring bounces into the room, telling me I might have to zipline somewhere high up in the mountains this year, I roll my eyes. But deep inside, the child in me, who lies dormant for most part of the year, is excited at the prospect of something new.

Amur Lakshminarayanan

THE COM-TECH MAN

The MD and CEO of Tata Communications on putting sustainability and AI at the core of the company, connecting businesses worldwide, and being a slave to his calendar

Arun Janardhan

It was early 2020, and Amur Lakshminarayanan had just moved from Japan to Mumbai as the managing director and chief executive officer of Tata Communications, having joined the division a few months earlier. In the middle of finding his feet in a new role, Lakshminarayanan was staying at a hotel while his residence was being done up and the family's belongings were being shipped. He had a whole bunch of travel lined up, and the family decided to move in, whether the house was ready or not—it had a dining table, a sofa and one bed.

Within a week of moving, the covid-19 lockdown was announced, leaving Lakshminarayanan and his wife Sharmila to adapt—in a new home, in a new but not unknown city, without furniture or help. "My wife jokingly says, in all my career, even when my children were growing up in the UK, she never saw so much of me," Lakshminarayanan, 63, says with a smile. But working from home was less of a challenge than managing a company that required boots on the ground. "People don't realise," he says, "that communications is a critical national infrastructure. Our engineers still had to go out to the streets and do their job."

For Lakshminarayanan, used to moving frequently and living in different countries, this unexpected start to his new role driven by the pandemic was just another problem that needed to be worked out. "You are just able to move on quickly," he says about the impact that constant traveling and moving have had on him.

In 2022-23, the company delivered over 20,000 live events with remote production services, channelling multiple camera feeds

Flexibility is a desirable trait in any leader, and essential for his role at Tata Communications, a digital enterprise solutions provider with a portfolio that includes cloud, cybersecurity, mobility and IoT (internet of things), besides media and entertainment. It operates a subsea fibre (internet) network that carries around 30% of the world's internet routes while its IoT network in India claims to be the world's largest network of its kind.

The company, which started life as the public sector Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd (VSNL) in 1986 before being acquired by the Tata Group in 2002, connects businesses worldwide to 80% of the world's cloud giants and four out of five mobile subscribers worldwide. "We can run a complete ring around the world," says Lakshminarayanan, "and our network carries a third of all the world's internet."

In 2022-23, the company delivered over 20,000 live events with remote production services, channelling multiple camera feeds. This includes about 120,000 hours of live broadcast across 3,000 television channels reaching over two billion sports fans, for disciplines such as Formula 1 racing, Formula E, and World Rally Championships among others.

"We are trying to shift, which is why internally the mantra is that anybody who says we are a telco (tele-communications company) gets a slap on the wrist. We are not a telco anymore, we are trying to become a com-tech (communications-technology) company," he says.

If that distinction (how a modern version of VSNL is not a telecom company) is difficult to understand, Lakshminarayanan is quick to acknowledge it. He uses the ride-hailing app Uber to draw an analogy. "You can't imagine an Uber app working without a map application, right? So the map is fundamental to how Uber works. So we are not the Uber, but we are that map for the enterprise."

Last year, Tata Communications acquired US-based video production and distribution company The Switch Enterprises LLC for end-to-end video production and transmission of high-quality, high-speed, and more immersive live video-experiences. The need for that came from the changing face of modern-day broadcast of live sporting events, for which they cater to clients such as MotoGP, Star India, Vista Worldwide, SailGP among others. What used to take a Boeing-full of equipment, a data centre, trucks with big satellites for producing at the facility and then broadcasting, has shifted to remote production. So feeds from hundreds of cameras go to a remote produc-

tion—in the case of F1 to London—and from there get distributed to different countries. Over 500 million viewers watch it, in real time, in a matter of milliseconds.

"You can't have a blackscreen moment, a blip... It needs to be fail-proof. We are there three days in advance, planning the whole thing, making sure every last mile connectivity works," he says. "All enterprises are going to operate in this hyper-connected world. Everything is going to be real time, frictionless collaboration between an ecosystem of companies," says Lakshminarayanan.

The slim, light-eyed Lakshminarayanan, dressed in a striped shirt with cufflinks, is seated in his office cabin in Bandra-Kurla Complex, Mumbai. The room has a minimalistic décor, grey walls, white furniture and white blinds on windows overlooking the Mithi river, a contrast in black due to years of abuse from the city's pollutants. The minimalism in the work space could be a by-product of the five years Lakshminarayanan spent in Japan, one of his favourite places from all the travel across the globe.

He grew up in Tiruchirappalli or Trichy in Tamil Nadu, among the last batch of students who went through the pre-university, PUC, system. His father was a practising civil lawyer, part of an extended family that included two brothers, a sister, uncles and their families. The house was a revolving door of people—relatives, his father's clients. Lakshminarayanan says he started focusing on academics only when he went into second year PUC,

which led him to the Birla Institute of Technology (BITS), Pilani. Five years "just went in a jiffy" giving him a different exposure to life and besides formal education, taught him a lot of soft skills. While he studied mechanical engineering, the most sought after discipline of the time, computers were beginning to become prominent. In 1983, when Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) selected four candidates from campus interviews, Lakshminarayanan was one of them.

He stayed with the group for the next 40-plus years, his last role as the managing director and chief operating officer of TCS Japan. He was heading a joint venture between Japanese Mitsubishi Corporation and TCS, with the latter getting a controlling stake, since 2014, when the then chief executive officer of TCS, N. Chandrasekaran, called with an offer to move to Tata Communications in Mumbai.

In a way, life has come full circle because he started his career in Mumbai, sharing a place near King's Circle with two others that was probably a quarter of the size of his current office. Then there were a series of projects in the US, Hong Kong, Australia, the UK, besides Mumbai and Chennai, which made it difficult to stay in touch with his roots. But the constant shuffle also kept him interested in work, besides dealing with eclectic clients like a gun manufacturer in India and commuting to work on a boat in Sydney.

"The early years, it would be one year, one project, a new client. You almost start afresh with a new thing that you learn. So

Illustration by Priya Kuriyan



We are not a telco anymore, we are trying to become a com-tech (communications-technology) company.

Recent shows watched

'Lincoln Lawyer', 'Delhi Crime'

How he relaxes

Oil pastel painting

Last book read

Marshall Goldsmith's 'The Earned Life'

it feels like a new job every year," he says. "One thing that TCS taught me is how to continuously learn and mutate."

When he joined Tata Communications, a company with a weak balance sheet that had been partly government controlled, he needed to understand what he was getting into. Lakshminarayanan's initial research, which included conversations with a banker, showed that a minute of downtime or any blip in connectivity cost banks \$6,000 (around ₹5 lakh now) every time. But through the year, they paid approximately \$15,000 only for the connectivity link.

"It was the irony," he says. "One of the things running through my mind coming afresh to the company was the data, the economics of it. Everybody used to say the data growth is huge. Why were we, as a company carrying the data, not making money? It was just odd. Again, somewhat provokingly, I used to say, we are the pipe and we don't care whether we carry potable water or sewage water."

The company's new strategy, led by Lakshminarayanan, was unveiled four years ago when the pandemic broke, putting sustainability and Artificial Intelligence (AI) at the core. Last year, Tata Communications crept through a 10% growth. Lakshminarayanan says, "We put that final tick on, saying, that's done. What's next?"

According to company statements, Tata Communications has recorded 11 successive quarters of net profit, and Ebitda (earnings before interest, taxes, deprecia-

tion and amortisation), margins have gone up to 24-25% from 14-15% per cent. Return on capital employed (RoCE), which was 8.3% in 2019, is now at 28%. The stock has gone up by nearly 200%, at ₹1,947, since Lakshminarayanan took charge.

While in the recent past, 70% of Tata Communications' revenue came from core connectivity solutions and the balance from digital platforms, now about 40% comes from digital solutions and 60% from core connectivity, marking its change from a telco to a digital ecosystem enabler.

The answer to Lakshminarayanan's "what's next" comes from the firm's increasing relevance in global markets, to take US revenues to \$1 billion in the next three years while doubling data revenue by 2027. His own personal "next" includes further exploration of philosophy (studying Vedanta, the Bhagavad Gita), which he started during the pandemic, and maybe playing more golf when he retires, which is not for another two years at least.

He admits to being a slave to his calendar, so much so that his wife used to call his assistant to block his dates for the children's school events.

He says he doesn't have a leadership motto. "I feel you just play the cards you're dealt with. That's a constant philosophy I had and make the most of what you have in opportunities, developing people around you."

Arun Janardhan is a Mumbai-based journalist who covers sports, business leaders and lifestyle. He tweets @iArunJ.



MINT SHORTS

NTPC posts profit rise on sturdy power demand in fourth quarter

Bengaluru: National Power Thermal Corp (NTPC) reported higher fourth-quarter profit on Friday, fuelled by strong domestic power demand. Consolidated net profit for the country's top power producer grew 27% to ₹6,169 crore in the three months to 31 March. A rise in earnings comes as India witnessed heightened temperatures in the quarter, leading to a surge in electricity demand as a need for cooling appliances grew. **REUTERS**



Nirmala Sitharaman, Union finance minister. **PTI**

'Stable food prices, steady rain to shield economy'

FROM PAGE 16

steady US economy have aided India's exports in April... This can benefit India's manufacturing firms as part of the China Plus One strategy," it added.

In 2023-24, India's merchandise exports stood at \$437.06 billion, down from \$451.07 billion during the previous fiscal. During the same period, goods imports fell to \$677.24 billion from \$715.97 billion.

India's trade performance in 2024 was influenced by global events: Houthi attacks on ships on the Red Sea that led raised freight costs and disrupted supply chains; expensive crude oil on account of the continuing Russia-Ukraine war; US-China trade tensions leading to more expensive value chains; and the EU's proposed Carbon Tax and Forest regulations, think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said in a recent report.

In its latest economic review, the finance ministry said the ongoing recovery in the hotel and tourism industry, increased credit flow to transport and real estate segments, policy support and robust investments in physical and digital infrastructure and logistics will help the services sector.

Meanwhile, the finance ministry said the harvest for the Rabi Marketing Season for 2024-25 will temper the prices of agricultural produce like wheat and chana, which along with the prediction of a normal Southwest Monsoon augurs well for food production and easing of price pressures.

"The positive indications in the farm sector should help India firewall against any adverse pressures that may arise from geopolitical tensions and global commodity prices," the economic review said.

"Likewise, the strong macro-economic buffers of India should help the real sectors of the economy navigate the external headwinds smoothly and continue the growth momentum of the previous year," it added.

Retail inflation eased slightly to 4.83% in April.

Tata Power seeks up to \$1 billion loan for clean energy projects



Power generation firm Tata Power Co. is planning to raise as much as \$1 billion-equivalent for clean energy projects, in what could be the country's largest local currency loan this year. The unit of Tata Group is in talks with lenders including SBI, IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank and ICICI Bank for the loan, people familiar with the matter said. The proceeds of the loan will be used to fund the company's investment of \$1.6 billion announced in August to develop some clean energy projects, the people said. **BLOOMBERG**

Air India appoints Sanjay Sharma as CFO with effect from 10 June

New Delhi: Air India on Friday announced the appointment of Sanjay Sharma as the chief financial officer (CFO) with effect from 10 June. Sharma will succeed Vinod Hejmadi, who is retiring after more than three decades with Air India. In a release, the airline said Sharma has more than 30 years of experience in the corporate finance, investment banking and real estate sectors. **PTI**

India records over 16,000 cases of heatstroke since 1 March



New Delhi: India has so far recorded 60 heat-related deaths, as soaring temperatures scorch large swathes of the country. Since 1 March, 32 people have died due to heatstroke and 28 from suspected heatstroke, with the latest two suspected deaths reported in Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan's Kota on 22 May, government data showed. Meanwhile, the country has seen 16,344 suspected heatstroke cases since 1 March this year. **PRIYANKA SHARMA**

Aditya Birla Group crosses \$100 bn mark in market capitalization

New Delhi: The combined market capitalization of the Aditya Birla Group firms has crossed the \$100 billion mark (₹8,51,460.25 crore) on Friday. The group firms—UltraTech Cement, Grasim, Hindalco, Aditya Birla Capital, Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC, Vodafone Idea, Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail, TCNS Clothing, Aditya Birla Money, Century Textiles, Century Enka and Pilani Investment—have a combined market valuation of ₹8,51,460.25 crore on the BSE. **PTI**

AI anchors to helm DD Kisan relaunch on 26 May

New Delhi: In a first for an Indian government channel, Door-darshan is all set to unveil two artificial intelligence (AI) news anchors for its farmer-focused channel DD Kisan on 26 May. Named AI Krishi and AI Bhoomi, the virtual anchors will front a relaunch of the channel after nine years on air, showcasing a new look and updated content aimed at the country's agricultural community, according to agriculture ministry. **PTI**

GCCs tapping Indians like never before

FROM PAGE 16

the country's GDP. These outposts employ some 3.2m workers, reckons Wismatic. Many Indian graduates jump at the opportunity to work at one. Students hired by the country's outsourcing giants typically earn less than \$10,000 a year. Moving to a GCC can triple that. Most foreign firms setting up these offices also plan for premium buildings with cafés and other amenities. Lululemon provides its Indian workers with a space, and time, for exercise, an uncommon perk in Indian workplaces.

The activities of GCCs are increasingly varied. Lululemon's workers in India pore over sales data and tell branches in Dubai to stock more bright yellows, pinks and greens, and ones in New York to stock more blacks and greys. Although design is done in Canada, the company's GCC is



GCCs employ some 3.2 mn workers. **MINT**

involved in everything from setting prices to managing supply chains. Wells Fargo's teams in Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad support the bank's operations in areas ranging from lending to managing investment portfolios.

More than 85 foreign semiconductor companies, including Intel and Nvidia, now conduct design work in Bangalore.

Tech giants such as Alphabet, Amazon and Microsoft also have R&D centres in the city, as do Boeing, an aircraft manufacturer, and Walmart, a retail giant. Mercedes-Benz, a German carmaker, employs nearly 6,000 workers at its R&D centre in Bangalore, its largest such operation outside Germany. Over the past four years its team in India has produced 32 patents.

In 2010 American multinationals spent \$1.7bn on R&D activities in India, according to America's Bureau of Economic Analysis. By 2021, the latest year available, that figure had surged to \$5.5bn. Growing geopolitical tension with the West means that China, India's principal rival hub for low-cost R&D, has lost some of its appeal. On May 16th it was reported that Microsoft had asked hundreds of employees working on advanced technologies such as machine learning and

cloud computing in the country to relocate.

All this has helped turbocharge India's services exports, which hit \$338bn last year, or nearly 10% of GDP, up from \$53bn in 2005, reckons Goldman Sachs, a bank. The country now accounts for 4.6% of global services exports, up from roughly 2% in 2005. India's goods exports, by contrast, account for just 1.8% of the global total, up from 1% in 2005.

India's government has been busily trying to tilt that balance towards manufacturing, by modernising the country's infrastructure and doling out subsidies to foreign firms that produce there. Plenty of other countries are vying to steal China's title as the world's factory. None, however, has as good a shot as India at becoming the world's office.

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JLR set to assemble flagship Range Rover SUVs in India

Range Rover SUVs will be ready for delivery by end-May, and Range Rover Sport, mid-August

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For the first time in over half a century, Jaguar Land Rover Automotive Plc (JLR), the British arm of Tata Motors, will assemble its flagship luxury sports utility vehicles Range Rover and Range Rover Sport outside the UK, choosing India.

This shift underscores JLR's commitment to local manufacturing and tapping into India's growing luxury car market, a top company executive said in an interview on the sidelines of the inauguration of Range Rover House in Alibaug, Maharashtra, the first experimental centre of the brand in India.

A new assembly line for the Range Rover and Range Rover Sport will be set up in Tata Motors' manufacturing facility in Pune, Maharashtra, with a production capacity of 10,000 units annually in two shifts, said Rajan Amba, JLR's managing director and CEO of Jaguar Land Rover India.

By end-May, India-assembled Range Rovers will be available for delivery, while the Range Rover Sport will hit the market by the middle of August, Amba said.

The move is expected to reduce prices by a significant 18%-22%, while still keeping them in the ₹1.5 crore and above category. "We believe custom-



The move is expected to reduce the prices of Range Rover and Range Rover Sport by 18-22%, while still keeping them in the ₹1.5 crore and above category.

ers who were hesitant will make that leap, and it should add to the growth in Range Rover and Range Rover Sport," said Amba.

"This is the first time that these flag-

the premium end," he said.

The local assembly aims to attract a new set of buyers and expand the brand's footprint in India.

"We can produce world-class quality in India—and that's the reason we can produce the Range Rover and Range Rover Sport here as well. The team in Pune ensures really high quality. With the local manufacturing opportunity here, we can really play into the opportunity (of customers seeking premium, customised products)," said Lennard Hoornik, chief commercial officer, JLR.

India's luxury car market, led by Ger-

man carmakers Mercedes-Benz, BMW, and Audi, collectively sells close to 50,000 units annually. Mercedes-Benz holds nearly half the share of this market. However, JLR, a more niche luxury carmaker with higher average prices, is poised to capitalize on the growing ₹1.5 crore-and-above category.

For instance, Mercedes-Benz derives a quarter of its sales from top-end vehicles priced over ₹1.5 crore. JLR anticipates the Indian luxury car market to double to 100,000 units in the next five years. "So, there is a lot of headroom to grow. We are seeing a slightly younger trend of customers—even if they are not the buyers, they are influencing the purchase decisions," Amba noted.

"We are putting the products in a price band that hopefully compels people sitting on the fence to buy. Over the next one year, we also hope to bring down waiting periods, which go up to 12 months."

Jaguar Land Rover has witnessed robust growth. "Our sales grew 82% last year, 90% in terms of revenue, 160% for Range Rover, and 70% for the Range Rover Sport brand. The repositioning we have done with the Reimagine strategy and modern luxury is bearing fruit," said Amba.

JLR reported Rs 4,000 crore in revenue from the Indian market in FY24, with total sales at 4,500 units, a tad shy of the 2018 record of 4,596 vehicles.

The British carmaker expects to surpass luxury market growth in FY25, and Amba is optimistic about maintaining a strong order book.

GOING LOCAL

THE move underscores Jaguar Land Rover's commitment to local manufacturing

A new assembly line for Range Rover and Range Rover Sport will be set up in Tata Motors' Pune facility

THE local assembly aims to attract a new set of buyers and expand the brand's footprint in India

Hospital chains eye big-bang expansion

FROM PAGE 16

tional specialty hospital group, which currently has 5,500 beds across in more than 21 hospitals across in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana. The group plans to increase its capacity to more than 10,000 beds in the next five years, the company's chairman and MD Anil Krishna said.

"We as a country have a shortage of beds and with the population growing, there is a huge demand-supply gap," said Krishna. "But the economy is strengthening, and the middle class is also growing rapidly; so, there is a change in dietary habits leading to an increased need for healthcare." Krishna expects spending on healthcare to continue to increase over the next decade or so.

Then, CK Birla Hospitals is expanding in the Delhi National Capital Region over the next 12-18 months. "We are looking to expand beyond Delhi NCR as well, and this investment would be about ₹1,000 crore," Akshat Seth, vice-chairman of CK Birla Healthcare said. "We also have an expansion planned at our Jaipur hospital. After all this,



Analysts attributed the explosion in capex for building hospitals to, among other things, rising insurance penetration. **HT**

we could have more than 1,500 beds in the country." It currently has around 1,200 beds.

Bengaluru-based Aster DM Healthcare, which has 19 hospitals across five states, is looking to invest more than ₹2,000 crore to double its bed capacity to 10,000 over the next three years through acquisitions and organic growth, chief executive Nitish Shetty recently told Mint. The company plans to expand in the

The biggest investment is expected from Max Healthcare. The company plans to invest around ₹5,000 cr

North and West, especially in Uttar Pradesh.

The biggest investment is expected from Delhi-based hospital chain Max Healthcare. The company plans to invest around ₹5,000 crore to double its capacity across its network of hospitals by adding 4,200 beds in the next four to five years, a company spokesperson said. The group currently has 4,000 beds and plans to raise it to 8,200.

The company recently

announced it will invest ₹2,500 crore, part of the five-year plan, to develop a new 500-bed hospital, and to expand the capacity of the recently acquired Max Super Specialty Hospital in Lucknow. It has 19 healthcare facilities, with eight hospitals and four medical centres located in Delhi NCR, and the rest across six other cities.

Manipal Hospitals, which recently acquired a majority stake in Kolkata-based healthcare group Medica Synergie for an estimated ₹1,400 crore, has said it will increase its presence across the country through a mix of organic and inorganic expansion. The acquisition will see Manipal Hospitals increase its bed count from 9,500 currently to more than 10,500.

The group is keen to augment its footprint in key regions such as Kerala, Hyderabad, Vizag, Pune, and Delhi NCR. It did not disclose the allocated capital expenditure (capex) for these expansions.

Meanwhile, Jagat Pharma, an Ayurvedic healthcare group, plans to invest Rs 100 crore to expand to cities such as Pune, Bangalore and Chennai, a spokesperson of the company said.

Google makes \$350 mn investment in Flipkart

FROM PAGE 16

erage artificial intelligence, machine learning and analytics capabilities on Azure—such as the Cortana Intelligence Suite and Power BI—to optimize its data for innovative merchandising, advertising, marketing and customer service.

As per various reports, Flipkart is in various discussions to move its domicile to India from Singapore to list in the public markets. Walmart's CEO Kathryn J. McLay also emphasised that the company is "looking and exploring when will be the right time to IPO" in a post-earnings call with analysts last week. "Their business has grown, we've seen Mynta (Flipkart's subsidiary) get to Ebitda positive for the last two quarters. We've seen a growth in some premiumization and all of that is lifting the profile of the Flipkart business," McLay said, adding that they are on the track to a growth trajectory. Ebitda refers to earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization.

The investment from Google comes at a time when the company has been making efforts to relaunch its quick commerce vehicle as a part of its larger ambitions to sell everything and stay relevant.

While Flipkart has historically not been a fast delivery company with most deliveries taking over two days, McLay said it has made same-day delivery available to millions more customers as it expanded the offering to 20 cities. Flipkart has tried quick commerce earlier, with Nearby in 2015 and Flipkart Quick in 2020, but both had to be shut down for various reasons.

Flipkart's slow delivery system is due to its focus on bigger warehouses instead of fragmented ones. However, its rival Amazon has more fragmented warehouses, which helps it deliver within 24 hours. Flipkart reported revenue of ₹55,823 crore in 2022-23, compared to ₹50,992 crore in 2021-22; and losses widened to ₹4,897 crore from ₹3,413 crore in the same period.

Your next pair of spectacles may be skin-friendly, unbreakable

FROM PAGE 16

Queries related to spokespersons of the consumer affairs ministry and the BIS remained unanswered till press time.

"Frames made from new materials must undergo a clinical evaluation in accordance with appropriate international standards. This ensures that any new material introduced in the market does not pose unforeseen risks to consumers," the second person said.

"This kind of initiative by the government is truly commendable. With the rapid growth of optical shops everywhere, there is a shortage of trained personnel to prescribe glasses. The drawbacks of prescribing non-compliant glasses cannot be overlooked, especially in children, as they can lead to a condition called 'amblyopia,'" said Dr. Rituraj Baruah, princi-

pal consultant, ophthalmology at Max Healthcare.

In the context of India's trade, the introduction of these standards is timely. According to commerce ministry data, India's trade in ophthalmic goods has soared in the recent past. Exports of ophthalmic goods from India rose a steep 80.3% from \$181.5 million in 2021-22 to \$327.2 million in 2023-24. Major export destinations for ophthalmic goods include France, Germany, Oman, UK, US, Canada, UAE, China, Poland and Russia.

"This surge underscores India's rising capabilities in manufacturing high-quality ophthalmic products that meet global standards. The

Ophthalmic goods imports have seen major growth, from \$306.1 mn in FY22 to \$561.7 mn in FY24, up 83.5%

increase reflects not only the advancements in technology and innovation within the sector but also a growing recognition of Indian products in the international market," said Ajay Srivastava, the founder of Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). GTRI is an independent and non-profit organization focused on conducting research and analysis on global trade policies and practices.

Ophthalmic goods imports have also seen substantial growth, up from \$306.1 million in 2021-22 to \$561.7 million in 2023-24, up 83.5%. This significant rise in imports highlights a burgeoning domestic market demand for advanced ophthalmic goods.

NP Singh to step down as MD and CEO of Sony India

Gaurav Laghate & Lata Jha
MUMBAI/NEW DELHI



NP Singh, MD and CEO of Sony Pictures Networks India. HT

On 1 April 2024, in an internal newsletter to employees, N.P. Singh, MD and CEO of Sony Pictures Networks India (SPNI), reflected on the company's resilience during FY24 and anticipated challenges in FY25. "Heading into FY25, we are gearing up for a challenging year but are ready with our creative spirit and strong resolve. Our goal is sharp: to captivate audiences and boost our subscriber base and revenue through impactful content. We are channelling investments into new shows, including those on SonyLIV. Our strategy emphasizes driving organic growth and amplifying our market presence through strategic partnerships."

After 25 years at SPNI, Singh will step down as soon as the company finds a replacement

On Friday, Singh, in another letter to the employees, announced his decision to step down from his role as MD and CEO, citing significant milestones achieved and a desire to focus on social change and advisory roles. "I am now ready to focus on social change and shift from operational roles to advisory ones," he wrote.

After 44 years in the industry, including 25 years at SPNI in various leadership roles, Singh will step down as soon as the company finds a suitable replacement. He stated that the company has begun a structured succession planning process to find his successor. "Finding the right fit is our top priority," he wrote.

Singh, 65, first joined Sony Entertainment Television (later renamed as Multi Screen Media, SPNI, and finally Culver Max Entertainment) as its chief financial officer in June 1999, under CEO Kunal Dasgupta. In 2004, he was elevated to the role of COO, and finally, in 2014, he was promoted as CEO.

Known in the entertainment industry as an affable, yet spotlight-shy executive, Singh was always bottom-line driven, earning him the nickname "CFO in a CEO role" from rivals—a moniker he took as a compliment. During various interviews, Singh always emphasised "growing profitably" and generating "reasonable returns" for shareholders.

In his letter to employees, Singh reiterated his commitment to Sony and its success. "During my time here, we have established industry benchmarks, expanded our reach, and achieved many noteworthy accomplishments. I am dedicated to ensuring our legacy of success continues and grows under the new leadership," gaurav.laghate@livemint.com

HUL's board advances with ESG, cybersecurity mastery

The shift is designed to ensure top executives are equipped to drive growth, retain talent

Devina Sengupta & Suneera Tandon
MUMBAI

India's largest packaged consumer goods company Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) is upgrading skills and competencies of its top leadership, the board of directors, to keep pace with evolving market demands. The company is now requiring its board members to gain proficiency in areas such as cybersecurity, data governance and environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria.

This shift is designed to ensure the board is well-equipped to drive growth and improve talent retention capabilities. "In the last few years, the external environment in which the company operates in, and the regulatory framework governing it have undergone significant changes.

"With an ever-increasing focus on cyber security, artificial intelligence, ESG, risk management, the skills, capabilities required of directors in the context of business for efficient functioning of the board has also evolved," said the company in its annual report for 2023-24. "In view of this, the board of directors based on recommendation of the Nomination and Remuneration Committee has approved and adopted the revised Board Skill Matrix of the company on 26 February," the report added. HUL will be officially adopting new required skill sets for its board members. While earlier, key skills were essential for the board, this time it has assessed the extent of the skills required for its directors.

According to the skill-set statistics cited in the report, while 92% of its board had leadership experience, only 33% were aware about driving cybersecurity, data governance and information technology initiatives.

The entire board was aware of and skilled in need for having a "business



The skills/capabilities required for directors have evolved, said the company in its annual report for 2023-2024. REUTERS

with a purpose", while 75% had "experience of overseeing large and complex business operations requiring proven administrative and managerial skills".

The company board currently comprises Nitin Paranjpe, Rohit Jawa, Leo Puri, Kalpana Morparia, Tarun Bajaj,

and managing director, as well as the management committee.

In April, the firm appointed B.P. Biddappa to its management committee as executive director of human resources, and chief people, transformation, and sustainability officer for South Asia.

TALENT REVAMP

THE board of directors revised Board Skill Matrix of the company on 26 February 2024

IT was found that barely 33% of the board members were aware about cybersecurity, IT, etc

HUL'S portfolio comprises over 50 brands, spanning 16 fast-moving goods categories

ACCORDING to the statistics, 92% of its board members had leadership skills and experience.

and Neelam Dhawan, among others.

HUL's portfolio comprises over 50 brands, spanning 16 fast-moving consumer goods categories. In FY24, the company posted a turnover of ₹59,579 crore. Its governance structure is multi-tiered, comprising board of directors, board committees, the chief execu-

tive and managing director, as well as the management committee.

Biddappa will lead the company's people agenda for South Asia, besides driving transformation initiatives in business, organization and sustainability. This initiative coincided with India's growing importance as a market for the parent firm, Unilever, and rising visibility of local talent in its India operations.

Adani Ports to replace Wipro in BSE Sensex from 24 June

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Autam Adani-owned Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) will replace IT major Wipro in the 30-share BSE Sensex from 24 June, according to an official announcement on Friday.

This marks the first inclusion of any Adani Group firm in Sensex. The group has 10 listed firms with a combined market valuation surpassing ₹17 lakh crore.

Notably, both APSEZ and Wipro are constituents of NSE's Nifty index. Moreover, the group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises is also a part of the 50-share Nifty.

The changes will be effective from 24 June 2024, Asia Index, a joint venture between S&P Dow Jones Indices and BSE, said in a statement adding that the replacement is a part of periodic review.

In addition, Tata Group company Trent Ltd will enter S&P BSE Sensex 50, while Divi's Laboratories will be dropped from the index. Apart from these, changes have been announced in S&P BSE 100, S&P BSE Bankex and S&P BSE Sensex Next 50. In S&P BSE 100 index, REC, HDFC Asset Management Company, Canara Bank, Cummins India and Punjab National Bank (PNB) will be included, while Page Industries, SBI Cards and Payment Services, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Company, Jubilant Food Works and Zee Entertainment Enterprises (ZEEL) will move out.

Frequent top star movies could spark viewer fatigue

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A number of top actors have multiple releases lined up in quick succession, raising questions on the wisdom of the practice as the overkill may turn audiences away, especially since many of their films have bombed in the recent past.

Akshay Kumar and Ajay Devgn, whose movies *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*, *Maidaan* and *Mission Raniganj* failed at the box office, have several more coming up this year. Trade experts say while frequent releases may not matter if the movies are well-made and compelling, some actors may have spread themselves too thin and diluted brand equity.

After the pandemic, 10 movies starring Kumar have arrived in theatres, including three (*Selfie*, *OMG 2* and *Mission*



Akshay Kumar has seen 10 films arrive in theatres post the pandemic. AKSHAY KUMAR/X

Raniganj) in 2023 and one (*Bade Miyan Chote Miyan*) in 2024.

Four more Kumar films are releasing this year—*Sarfira* in June, and *Khel Khel Mein*, *Sky Force* and *Welcome to the Jungle* between September and December.

Meanwhile, Devgn, who has appeared in *Shaistaan* and *Maidaan* this year, has titles like *Auron Mein Kahan*

helped projects move forward, but there could be some viewer fatigue when releases are so frequent. "Especially if you are delivering one dud after another, it may make sense to recalibrate and come back after six months with something fresh," a studio executive said.

He said that though the fault is not entirely that of actors since a lot of movies were delayed because of the covid pandemic and released in quick succession, it is crucial to pace things out.

"The big impact of films flopping one after the other is not on the actors per se, who've often taken their remuneration in advance but on the producer or studio who incurs the losses alone. Also, sometimes, there is pressure from OTT platforms to release the film in theatres

because it is scheduled to stream within a particular quarter," the executive said on condition of anonymity.

Film producer, trade and exhibition expert Girish Johar said the frequency of releases is not as important as whether the project is put together meticulously and the story comes with

some merit. Even in Kumar's case, his satirical comedy *OMG 2* found draw in theatres when released last year. "Audiences are very impatient now and can see through films. They can see if a

film has been made for the heck of it, also thanks to the conversation on social media," Johar pointed out. Further, the fact that cinemas haven't been able to reduce prices to help some of these films gain better traction shows that the overall business is in doldrums, Johar added.

A lot of movies were delayed because of covid and released in quick succession, but it is crucial to pace things out

Procurement of wheat at 26.3 mt

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Wheat procurement for the Rabi marketing season 2024-25 has surpassed last year's total, reaching 26.3 million tonnes, with significant contributions from Punjab and Haryana.

According to the ministry of food and public distribution, the government aims to procure 30-32 million tonnes of wheat for the ongoing marketing year, and is in a "comfortable position" with the central pool stock. In the 2023-24 Rabi season, the government had procured 26.2 million tonnes of wheat, falling short of the target of 34.15 million tonnes.

Approximately 26.24 million tonnes of Rabi crops, including winter grains, have already been procured for the central pool, benefitting 2.23 million farmers, the ministry said in a statement. So far, the government has disbursed ₹59,715 crore towards minimum support price.

Leading procuring states include Punjab (4.24 million tonnes), Haryana (7.15 million tonnes), Madhya Pradesh (4.78 million tonnes), Rajasthan (9.66,000 tonnes), and Uttar Pradesh (9.07,000 tonnes).

While wheat procurement typically spans April to March, this year, it started in early March for most states following the Centre's decision to allow purchases upon crop arrivals. Rice procurement is progressing smoothly. Around 72.84 million tonnes of paddy, which is equivalent to 48.91 million tonnes of rice, was directly procured from 9.82 million farmers with MSP expenditure of ₹1.6 trillion.

"Exceeding 60 million tonnes, the combined stock of wheat and rice in the central pool assures the government of a comfortable position to fulfil the country's foodgrain requirements under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and other welfare schemes, as well as for market interventions," said Rajesh Sharma, an agriculture expert.

AI boom propels Nvidia's Huang past Walmart heirs

Bloomberg
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Another blowout quarter from chipmaker Nvidia Corp. catapulted co-founder Jensen Huang's fortune past each individual member of the Waltons, America's richest family.

Huang's net worth jumped to \$91.3 billion Thursday, bumping him up three spots on the Bloomberg Billionaires Index to become the 17th-richest person in the world. Nearly all his wealth is in Nvidia stock, which rose 9.3% after a bullish sales forecast that reinforced

the company's status as the biggest beneficiary of artificial intelligence-related spending.

Huang is now richer than the three wealthiest members of Walmart Inc.'s founding family, including Jim Walton, 75, who has a net worth of \$86.5 billion and co-manages Walton Enterprises, which together with another family holding company controls about half of the world's largest retailer. His brother Rob Walton, 79, has a net worth of \$84.6 billion and was chairman of Walmart for 23 years following his father's death. Their younger sister Alice Walton, 74, has a net

worth of \$83.8 billion. Combined, the Walton family's fortune is nearly \$300 billion, making them the second-richest clan in the world after the Al Nahyans, Abu Dhabi's ruling family. Nvidia has been the primary beneficiary of the artificial intelligence boom with its so-called AI accelerator chips, sending its sales soaring and its market value above \$2.5 trillion. Huang, 61, stoked the excitement by talking about the dawning of a new era. "This is the beginning of a new industrial revolution," he told Bloomberg News in an interview, echoing one of his favourite themes. "This is really exciting."

Walmart also reported stronger-than-expected first-quarter earnings earlier this month and boosted its annual sales and profit forecasts, pushing its market value over \$500 billion for the first

Nvidia has been the primary beneficiary of the AI boom with its chips sending its sales soaring

time. Shares of Walmart are up 23% this year.

But its growth lags Nvidia's momentum. The chipmaker's stock is the third-best performer among members of the S&P 500 Index this year, surging 110% as the company rides the waves of persistently strong AI computing spending.

Huang, in his signature black leather jacket, has become a celebrity in the AI era. His company started as a provider of graphics cards for computer gamers. But he recognized that Nvidia's chips were well-suited to developing AI software and that helped open a new market.

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Hindalco profit jumps 32% in March quarter

Strong margins, volumes in aluminium, copper businesses drive profits

Naman Suri

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NEW DELHI

Hindalco Industries, the flagship company of the Aditya Birla group, on Friday reported a 32% year-on-year (y-o-y) jump in its consolidated net profit to ₹3,174 crore for the quarter ended March, driven by strong margins and volumes across aluminium and copper businesses.

The base metals major's revenue from operations for the quarter was flat y-o-y at ₹55,994 crore. Hindalco's earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization or Ebitda stood at ₹7,201 crore for Q4FY24, up 24%, driven by lower input costs and higher volumes.

The demand for copper and aluminium going ahead remains very strong in India, said Satish Pai, managing director, Hindalco Industries.

"I think that we can get to the monsoon where we don't have supply disruptions, so, our cost of production is under control and if the commodity prices remain favourable, we should have another good year," Pai said in a statement.

Consolidated net debt to Ebitda stood at 1.21 times as of 31 March 2024 against 1.39 times in the corresponding period a year ago.

"We continue to maintain a strong balance sheet and solid liquidity even after repaying ₹5,195 crore of debt in Hindalco India business during the year. This positions us well to stay on our growth track and drive our future organic growth plans with prudent capital allocation," he said.

The company has allocated a capital expenditure of ₹6,000 crore for FY25.

"This year we don't have plans to



The company has allocated a capital expenditure of ₹6,000 crore for FY25.

make repayments... we would rather spend the cash on the growth capex, we have planned - the alumina refinery, copper recycling, and aluminium batter foil," Pai said. "We are also completing the expansion of the FRP (flat-rolled project) in Lapanga in Odisha, which is to be commissioned in December," he added.

Copper revenue for the quarter rose 20% y-o-y to ₹13,424 crore. Robust operations and strong sales volumes in the copper business helped the company register a record Ebitda of ₹776 crore, up 30%. The aluminium upstream business Ebitda stood at ₹2,709 crore with margins of 32%, supported by higher volumes and cost optimization.

"The copper business has grown to become the 2nd largest in the world for copper rods (excluding China). It achieved

its best-ever performance with sales crossing 500,000 tonnes for the first time, and an all-time high Ebitda for the quarter and the year," added Pai.

During the fourth quarter, the company's cost of raw materials stood at ₹32,758 crore, down marginally.

The company's IPO-bound overseas subsidiary, Novelis, reported a revenue of ₹33,859 crore, down 6.4% from ₹36,176 crore a year ago due to lower average aluminium prices. Ebitda per tonne for the subsidiary stood at \$540, up by 25%.

Hindalco said the Novelis' Bay Minette, US project is on track and is expected to be completed by the second half of the calendar year 2026.

The company's consolidated revenue from operations during the fiscal year 2024 fell 3.24% year-on-year to ₹215,962 crore, while profit stood at ₹10,155 crore, up marginally.

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24%
Rise in Q4FY24
Ebitda driven by
lower input costs

एनटीपीसी NTPC

Sustainable Excellence in Power Generation

Extract of the Audited Financial Results for the Quarter and Year ended 31 March, 2024 (₹ crore)

Sl. No.	Particulars	Standalone				Consolidated			
		Quarter ended 31.03.2024 (Audited)#	Quarter ended 31.03.2023 (Audited)#	Year ended 31.03.2024 (Audited)	Year ended 31.03.2023 (Audited)	Quarter ended 31.03.2024 (Audited)#	Quarter ended 31.03.2023 (Audited)#	Year ended 31.03.2024 (Audited)	Year ended 31.03.2023 (Audited)
1.	Total income from operations	42532.18	41317.86	161985.03	163769.77	47622.06	44253.17	178500.88	176207.18
2.	Net profit before tax (before exceptional items)	6807.16	6855.62	22710.62	24067.09	8375.12	6026.30	27141.45	24330.59
3.	Net profit before tax (after exceptional items)	7641.71	6855.62	23545.17	24067.09	8375.12	6026.30	27141.45	24330.59
4.	Profit after tax	5556.43	5672.32	18079.39	17196.73	6490.05	4871.55	21332.45	17121.35
5.	Profit after tax attributable to owners of the parent company					6168.73	4860.67	20811.89	16912.55
6.	Profit after tax attributable to non-controlling interest					321.32	10.88	520.56	208.80
7.	Total comprehensive income after tax	5513.15	5583.41	18094.65	17121.03	6443.83	4734.62	21307.84	16918.35
8.	Paid-up equity share capital (Face value of share ₹ 10/- each)	9696.67	9696.67	9696.67	9696.67	9696.67	9696.67	9696.67	9696.67
9.	Other equity excluding revaluation reserve as per balance sheet	140188.35	129193.21	140188.35	129193.21	151012.60	137326.50	151012.60	137326.50
10.	Net worth*	148771.01	138069.76	148771.01	138069.76	159689.61	146280.48	159689.61	146280.48
11.	Paid up debt capital	185218.62	186284.84	185218.62	186284.84	235040.30	221092.37	235040.30	221092.37
12.	Debt redemption reserve	3219.38	5014.61	3219.38	5014.61	4134.34	5851.65	4134.34	5851.65
13.	Earnings per equity share (of ₹ 10/- each) - (not annualised) (including net movement in regulatory deferral account balances) Basic and Diluted (in ₹)	5.73	5.85	18.64	17.73	6.36	5.01	21.46	17.44
14.	Earnings per equity share (of ₹ 10/- each) - (not annualised) (excluding net movement in regulatory deferral account balances) Basic and Diluted (in ₹)	5.70	5.48	17.48	18.34	6.58	4.71	20.43	17.87

* Excluding Fly ash utilization reserve and items of other comprehensive income.
Figures of last quarter are the balancing figures between audited figures in respect of the full financial year and the published year to date figures upto the third quarter of the current/previous financial year.

Notes:
1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of financial results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 and 52 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, as amended. The full formats of the financial results of the Company are available on the investor section of our website: <https://www.ntpc.co.in> and under Corporate Section of BSE Limited and National Stock Exchange of India Limited at <https://www.bseindia.com> & <https://www.nseindia.com>
2. Previous periods figures have been reclassified wherever considered necessary.

For and on behalf of Board of Directors of NTPC Limited
Sd/-
(Jaikumar Srinivasan)
Director (Finance)
DIN:01220828

एनटीपीसी NTPC Limited
(A Govt. of India Enterprise)

Regd. Office: NTPC Bhawan, SCOPE Complex, 7 Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 110003, CIN: L40101DL1975GOI007966, Website: www.ntpc.co.in

Leading the Power Sector

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Registered Office: Plot-167, Floor 1, Ready Money Mansion, Dr. Annie Besant Road, Worli, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, 400018
Website: www.maxindia.com

EXTRACT OF STATEMENT OF AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2024
(Rs. in Crores)

Sl No.	Particulars	Standalone			Consolidated		
		Quarter ended 31.03.2024 (Unaudited)	Quarter ended 31.03.2023 (Unaudited)	Year ended 31.03.2024 (Audited)	Quarter ended 31.03.2024 (Unaudited)	Quarter ended 31.03.2023 (Unaudited)	Year ended 31.03.2024 (Audited)
1.	Total income from operations (net)	7.74	8.60	32.26	49.66	60.17	194.74
2.	Net Profit/(loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	(1.18)	1.25	1.76	(20.33)	1.45	(49.05)
3.	Net Profit/(loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	(8.58)	1.25	1.64	(20.31)	1.45	(49.03)
4.	Net Profit/(loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	(8.24)	0.87	1.23	(21.57)	(4.18)	(56.38)
5.	Total comprehensive income for the period (Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	(8.28)	0.82	1.15	(21.40)	(4.01)	(56.55)
6.	Paid-up equity share capital (Face Value Rs. 10 Per Share)	43.17	43.03	43.17	43.17	43.03	43.17
7.	Reserves excluding revaluation reserve as per balance sheet of previous accounting year	-	-	820.82	-	-	449.17
8.	Earnings per share (of Rs. 10 each) (not annualised for the quarter)						
a)	Basic (Rs.)	(1.90)	0.18	0.29	(5.00)	(0.88)	(13.08)
b)	Diluted (Rs.)	(1.89)	0.18	0.28	(5.00)	(0.88)	(13.08)

Note:
The above is an extract of the detailed format of audited financial results for the quarter and year ended March 31, 2024 filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulation 2015. The full format of audited financial results for the quarter and year ended March 31, 2024 are available on the Stock Exchange websites (www.nseindia.com and www.bseindia.com) and on the Company's website (www.maxindia.com).

By Order of the Board
Rajit Mehta
Managing Director
DIN : 01604819

Date: May 24, 2024
Place: Gurugram

Bhilwara Spinners Limited
CIN: L117115 RJ 1980 PCL008217
Regd. Off.: 26, Industrial Area, Bhilwara - 311 001 (Rajasthan)

AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 2024
(Rs. in Lacs)

Particulars	Quarter ended		Year ended
	31.03.2024	31.03.2023	31.03.2023
Total income from Operation (net)	148.31	940.24	97.02
Other Income	7.64	14.94	65.83
Exceptional Items	68.17	150.33	285.81
Net Profit (+)/Loss(-) from Ordinary Activities	1.07	59.18	31.58
Net Profit (+)/Loss(-) after Exceptional income & tax	57.00	173.29	261.12
Paid-up equity share capital (Face Value of the Share Rs. 10/- per share)	905.36	905.36	676
Reserve excluding Revaluation Reserves as per balance sheet of previous accounting year	-	-	2018.23
Earning per share from Ordinary Activities	0.01	0.65	0.47
Earning per share After Exceptional income & Tax	0.63	1.91	3.86
Diluted EPS before & after Extraordinary items for the period, for the year to date and for the previous year (not annualised)	0.78	2.36	3.86

Note:
The above is an extract of the detailed format of financial result for the quarter/year ended 31st March 2024 filed with the Stock Exchange under regulation 33 of SEBI (Listing and Disclosures Requirements) Regulations 2015. The full format of the financial results are available on the stock Exchanges websites www.bseindia.com and company's website www.bhilspin.com.

By order of the Board
Ashok Kumar Kothari
Director
DIN-00132801

Date : 23rd May, 2024
Place : Bhilwara (Rajasthan)

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU KRISHI VISHWA VIDYALAYA, JABALPUR (M.P.)-482004
email : registrarjnkvv@gmail.com (Phone (O) 0761-2681778)

No. Acd/II/A-11(B)/2024-25/1022 Dated : 22 May, 2024
FIRST ADMISSION NOTICE

Applications on plain paper are invited from Non Resident India NRI/NRI Sponsored candidates for admission to B.Sc. (Hons) Agriculture / Horticulture / Forestry and B.Tech. (Agril.Engg.) degree programmes for the session 2024-2025 under NRI / NRI SPONSORED quota. Intending NRI / NRI SPONSORED candidates may apply along with NRI Certificate (Format 10-A) and NRI Sponsored Certificate (Format 10-B) and relevant documents in original with copies (2 sets) such as Marks-sheet, NRI / NRI Sponsored residential proof, NRI / NRI Sponsored Passport and Bank Account, NRI Sponsorship Letter up to 19th June, 2024 (5.00 pm) details are available at website www.jnkvv.org

IPRO/Reg./Acd/II/NRI/2024/39 REGISTRAR

indiamart
INDIAMART INTERMESH LIMITED
CIN: L74899DL1999PLC101534
Regd. Office: 1st Floor, 29- Daryaganj, Netaji Subhash Marg, New Delhi- 110002
Corp. Office: 6th Floor, Tower 2, Assotech Business Cresterra, Plot No. 22, Sector-135, Noida- 201305, U.P.
Website: www.indiamart.com; Email: cs@indiamart.com; Ph. No: 011-45608941

NOTICE - 25th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & E-VOTING INFORMATION

NOTICE is hereby given that the Twenty Fifth (25th) Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Members of Indiamart InterMESH Limited ("Company") will be held on Thursday, June 20, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. IST, through Video Conferencing ("VC")/Other Audio Video Means ("OAVM") facility, without the physical presence of the Members at the meeting, in compliance with all applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 and the Rules made thereunder and SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 and various circulars issued from time to time to transact the businesses as set out in the Notice of the AGM.

Members participating through VC/OAVM shall be reckoned for the purpose of quorum under Section 103 of the Companies Act, 2013. The facility for appointment of proxies by the Members will not be available since this AGM is being held through VC/OAVM.

In compliance with the applicable statutory compliances, the dissemination of the Notice of the AGM along with the Annual Report for FY 2023-24 ("Annual Report") have been completed on Friday, May 24, 2024 through electronic mode to those Members whose email ids are registered with the Company/ Registrar and Transfer Agent ("RTA") and Depository Participants ("DP").

The aforesaid documents are also available on the Company's website at <http://investor.indiamart.com>, websites of the Stock Exchanges i.e. BSE Limited at www.bseindia.com and National Stock Exchange of India Limited at www.nseindia.com and on the website of National Securities Depository Limited ("NSDL") at www.evoting.nsdl.com.

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 108 of the Act read with Rule 20 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014, as amended from time to time, and Regulation 44 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 ("Listing Regulations"), the Company is providing the remote e-Voting facility before the AGM and e-Voting facility at the AGM to its Members, through e-Voting services of NSDL, to exercise their right to vote on all the resolutions proposed to be transacted at the AGM by electronic means. In this regard, Members are hereby informed that:

- a) The details of remote e-Voting period are as follows:
- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Cut-Off Date | Thursday, June 13, 2024 |
| Commencement of e-voting | Saturday, June 15, 2024 (09:00 a.m. IST) |
| End of e-voting | Wednesday, June 19, 2024 (5:00 p.m. IST) |
- A person whose name is recorded in the register of members or in the register of beneficial owners maintained by the depositories as on the cut-off date shall only be entitled to vote through remote e-Voting/ e-Voting at the AGM.
- The remote e-Voting facility shall be disabled by NSDL thereafter and shall not be allowed beyond the aforesaid date and time. Once the vote on a resolution is casted by a member, the member shall not be allowed to change it subsequently. During this period, Members holding shares may cast their vote by remote e-Voting before the AGM.
- b) The voting rights of Members shall be in proportion to their shares in the paid up equity share capital of the Company as on the cut-off date. A person who is not a Member as on the cut-off date should treat this Notice of AGM for information purpose only.
- c) Any person, who acquires equity shares and becomes a member of the Company after the date of electronic dispatch of the Notice of AGM and holding shares as on the cut-off date, may send a request to evoting@nsdl.com for procuring user id and password for e-Voting. However, if a person is already registered with NSDL for remote e-Voting then existing user ID and password can be used for casting the vote.
- d) The Members who have cast their vote by remote e-Voting prior to the AGM may also attend/ participate in the AGM through VC/OAVM but shall not be entitled to cast their vote again through e-Voting at the AGM.
- e) Members whose email ids are already registered with the Company/RTA/DP, may follow the instructions for remote e-Voting as well as e-Voting at AGM as provided in the Notice of AGM.
- f) In case members have not registered/updated their email address for receiving Annual Reports and other communications through electronic mode and/or not register/update their bank account mandate and KYC for receipt of dividend, please register/update the details in your demat account, as per the process advised by your respective DP.
- g) In case of any queries, you may refer the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the members who need assistance before or during the AGM and e-voting user manual for Members available on the website www.evoting.nsdl.com under the 'Downloads Section'. You can also contact NSDL on toll free number 022 - 4886 7000 or Ms. Pallavi Mhatre, Senior Manager, NSDL, at designated e-mail IDs: evoting@nsdl.com, who will address the grievances related to electronic voting.
- h) The Results shall be declared within two working days of the conclusion of the AGM and the same, along with the consolidated Scrutinizer's Report, shall be placed on the website of the Company https://investor.indiamart.com/AGM_EGM.aspx under the head of 'Investor Relations' and on the website of NSDL at www.evoting.nsdl.com after the declaration of result by the Chairman of the meeting or a person authorized by him in writing. The results shall, simultaneously, be forwarded to National Stock Exchange of India Limited and BSE Limited which shall place the results on their website.
- i) Detailed process and manner of remote e-Voting, e-Voting at the AGM and instructions for attending the AGM through VC/OAVM is being provided in the Notice of the AGM.

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For IndiaMART InterMESH Limited Sd/-
Manoj Bhargava
Company Secretary & Compliance Officer
Place: Noida
Dated : May 24, 2024

Saturday, May 25, 2024

mint

livemint.com



N.P. Singh to step down as MD & CEO of Sony India ▶ P14



JLR to assemble flagship Range Rovers in India ▶ P13

SENSEX **75,410.38** ↓ 7.66 NIFTY **22,957.1** ↓ 10.55 DOLLAR **₹83.10** ↑ ₹0.18 EURO **₹89.99** ↑ ₹0.33 OIL **\$80.39** ↓ \$0.39 POUND **₹105.61** ↓ ₹0.36

Hospital firms prep big-bang expansion

Rising occupancies, insurance spur need for more hospitals

Naman Suri
naman.suri@livemint.com
NEW DELHI

MEDICAL MOVES

Increase in population and lifestyle diseases drive demand for beds. Large cities may be the main beneficiaries of the expansion plans.

Hospital	Bed-capacity expansion plan	Amount to be invested (₹ cr)
Max Healthcare	4,200	5,000
Apollo Hospitals	2,000	3,000
Aster DM	5,000	2,000
Medicover Hospitals	5,000	2,000
Manipal Hospital	1,000	1,400
CK Birla Hospital	300	1,000
Paras Hospitals	300*	250
Total	17,800	14,650

*Plans to go from over 2,000 to 3,500 by 2025

Source: Mint research

SARVESH KUMAR SHARMA/MINT

India's creaking healthcare infrastructure is set to receive a healthy boost of capex from private hospitals. In their first meaningful expansion since the pandemic outbreak, leading hospital chains have firmed up plans to cumulatively invest more than ₹14,600 crore over the next three to five years, adding about 17,800 beds nationwide.

Manipal Hospitals, Aster DM Healthcare, Apollo Hospitals and Max Healthcare, among several others, are working to add more beds in the coming years to meet the rising demand for healthcare.

"[Healthcare] is a fragmented sector," said Dilip Jose, managing director and chief executive of Bengaluru-based Manipal Hospitals. There is a lot of opportunity to grow and consolidate, and we just want to continue our growth momentum."

Analysts attributed the scramble for new hospitals to, among other things, rising insurance penetration following the pandemic, and especially the government's PM Jan Arogya Yojana, which aims to offer free health insurance to 550 million citizens.

Mehul Sheth, deputy vice president, institutional research

(pharma and healthcare) at HDFC Securities, said, "There are multiple reasons for bed capacity expansion, such as increasing cases of non-communicable diseases, insurance penetration, and also because the utilization levels for some hospital chains are reaching optimal levels of 75-80% (for example, Max Healthcare is running at 75-76% occupancy)."

Analysts expect large cities to be the main beneficiaries of the expansion plans. "Metros are expected to

remain focal points for this capacity expansion," said Mythri Macherla, assistant vice-president and sector head at rating agency Icmr. "Cities such as Delhi NCR, Mumbai and Bengaluru are expected to witness sizeable bed additions in the next few years."

Among the biggest upcoming investments of roughly ₹2,000 crore would be from Medicover Hospitals, a Sweden-based multina-

TURN TO PAGE 13

Stable food prices, steady rain to shield economy: FinMin

Rhik Kundu
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NEW DELHI

The Union finance ministry on Friday exuded confidence about India's economic resilience, at a time of global conflicts and commodity price spikes. Positive indications in the farm sector like the prediction of a normal monsoon and stabilizing food prices will help the country "firewall against any adverse pressures" from such external factors in the coming months, the ministry's monthly economic review said.

The April review by the ministry's department of economic affairs said while a normal monsoon will stabilize food prices, strong macroeconomic buffers will help the economy navigate external headwinds smoothly and continue the growth momentum of the previous fiscal year (2023-24).

According to government estimates, India is expected to report a GDP (gross domestic product) growth of at least 7.6% during 2023-24, which would be the fastest in any major global economy. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expects the Indian economy to register 7% growth in 2024-25.

The South Asian country's robust economic performance



The Centre expects GDP growth of at least 7.6% during FY24. MINT

comes amid a slowdown in the global economy, on the back of a high-interest rate regime in advanced economies and various geopolitical conflicts, which have impacted energy prices and trade.

"The crux of the foregoing discussion is that the industrial and service sectors of the Indian economy are performing well, backed by brisk domestic demand and partially by tentative external demand," the review said, adding domestic manufacturing is likely to receive stronger external support in the upcoming months.

"Modestly improved economic activity and consumer sentiment in Europe and a

TURN TO PAGE 13

Flipkart gets \$350 million cash transfer from Google

Priyamvada C
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BENGALURU

Google LLC has made a \$350-million investment in Flipkart but will not get a seat on its board, a person aware of the matter said, adding the transaction valued Flipkart at \$36 billion.

The Bengaluru-based e-commerce giant formally acknowledged the investment but did not disclose the amount proposed to be invested by Google. "As part of the latest funding round led by Walmart, Flipkart today announced that it will be adding Google as a minority investor, subject to receipt of regulatory and other customary approvals by both parties," the e-commerce retailer said in a statement on Friday.

Walmart-owned Flipkart further said Google's proposed investment and its cloud collaboration will help Flipkart expand its business and advance the modernization of its digital infrastructure.

This is Flipkart's second association with a big-tech giant. In 2017, it partnered with Microsoft to adopt Azure as its exclusive public cloud computing platform. At the time, Microsoft had said Flipkart will lev-

TURN TO PAGE 13

DON'T MISS



ESG to AI, HUL's directors will need to change with times

Consumer goods company Hindustan Unilever Ltd is overhauling the skills and capabilities required of its top leadership—the board of directors—to keep pace with the changing times and be aligned to the demands of the consumer. ▶P14

Adani Ports to replace Wipro in BSE Sensex from 24 June

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) will replace Wipro in the 30-share BSE Sensex from 24 June, marking the Adani group's entry into the 30-share index. Two Adani group companies are already in the Nifty50-APSEZ and Adani Enterprises. ▶P14

Hindalco profit jumps 32% in Q4 on strong margins, volumes

Hindalco Industries, flagship company of the Aditya Birla Group, reported a 32% y-o-y jump in its consolidated net profit to ₹3,174 crore for the quarter ended March, driven by strong margins and volumes across aluminium and copper businesses. ▶P15

Wheat procurement surpasses last year's figures, hits 26.3 mt

Wheat procurement for the Rabi marketing season 2024-25 has surpassed last year's total, reaching 26.3 million tonnes, with big contributions from Punjab and Haryana. Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and UP are the other lead procuring states. ▶P14



By ensuring higher quality and durability, the norms aim to provide consumers with safer and more reliable eyewear options. ISTOCKPHOTO

Your next specs may be easy on skin, break-proof

Dhirendra Kumar
dhirendra.kumar@livemint.com
NEW DELHI

Broken and deformed spectacles? Fancy frames itching your skin? Fret not, for stringent standards to manufacture eyewear are on the way, aiming to enhance consumer safety and eye health.

The new standards, on par with international guidelines, will include strict test methods to make unglazed spectacle frames, two people aware of the matter said. Frames must withstand deformation and lens dislodgement under specified test conditions, ensuring mechanical stability in daily use. They must be resistant to perspiration, show no spotting, colour change, corrosion, or surface degradation after exposure.

The distance between the tips of the sides must remain within specified limits even when tested with fitted lenses, the people said on the condition of anonymity. Manufacturers must also minimize the risk of harmful substances leaching from the frame.

Frames must retain dimensions even at elevated temperatures. They should also be designed or treated in a way

that prevents them from catching fire easily and, if they do ignite, the fire should not sustain itself once the initial flame or source of ignition is taken away.

"One of the critical aspects of the new standards is the regulation of nickel release from metal parts of the frame. Parts that come into direct and prolonged contact with the skin must not release more than 0.5 microgrammes per square centimetre per week of nickel," one of the two people said. "It is crucial in preventing allergic reactions and ensuring the long-term comfort of the wearer as excessive nickel release can cause allergic reactions and skin irritation. By limiting nickel release, the standards aim to protect consumers from potential health issues and ensure safer, more comfortable eyewear," the person said.

By ensuring higher quality and durability, the measures aim to provide consumers with safer and more reliable eyewear options. The standards, expected by the end of the month, will be introduced by Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), which reports to the department of consumer affairs.

TURN TO PAGE 13

Election Bites

The times when ECI junked your votes

By Eshani Malik
eshani.malik@partner.hindustantimes.com

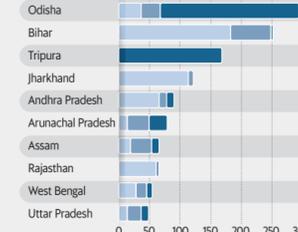
Earlier this month, the Election Commission of India (ECI) ordered repolling at a polling station in Gujarat's Dahod Lok Sabha constituency. A man was found live-streaming while voting, after which the poll booth deemed the votes that had already been cast as worthless. The digital era may throw up new reasons for repolls, but the phenomenon isn't new. In the last three Lok Sabha polls, 1,474 polling stations across 223 seats saw repolling. Odisha saw 294 such cases, but 226 of them were in 2019 alone, of which 182 were in a single constituency (Aska). Among larger states, Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab stood out with 10 or fewer repolls.

India has seen nearly 1,500 repolls in the last three Lok Sabha elections

Year	Constituencies*	Polling stations
2009	133	633
2014	97	301
2019	65	540

The state-wise trends are heavily influenced by one-off instances

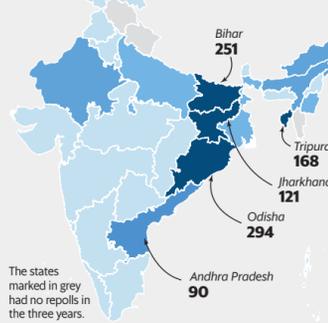
Year-wise break-up of states with the highest number of repolls, 2009-2019



The data is for the elections held in 2009, 2014 and 2019, and excludes by-elections. The data for the ongoing polls is not yet available. *This adds up to 295, but these comprised only 223 distinct constituencies that saw repolls at least once in the three years. For more analysis of election data, visit <https://www.livemint.com/topic/in-charts>.

Odisha, Bihar, Tripura have seen the most repolls since 2009

The number of polling stations that saw repolling in the last three Lok Sabha elections, by state



The states marked in grey had no repolls in the three years.

SARVESH KUMAR SHARMA/MINT

How an FPI mood change fuelled stocks on Thursday

Ram Sahgal
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MUMBAI

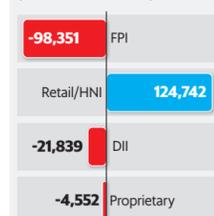
With barely a fortnight left for the Lok Sabha election results on 4 June, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have significantly toned down their bearish sentiment in Indian markets.

On Thursday, FPIs more than halved their cumulative net short positions on index futures contracts by 121,415 contracts to 98,351 contracts, from 219,766 a day earlier. Along with their purchase of a provisional ₹4,670.95 crore of shares, this short-covering was a key reason why the markets tested a fresh high of 22,993.60 on Thursday.

"Markets don't fall on pessimism," Deepak Sheny, founder of Capitalmind, a Sebi-registered portfolio manager, commented about the short-covering by FPIs. Markets typically fall when there

Sentiment shift

Net cumulative open positions in index futures as of 23 May (number of contracts)



Source: NSE

PRANAY BHARDWAJ/MINT

are huge longs in system, and not so many shorts. Sheny added that the March quarter results had been "really decent" and he expects the market momentum to continue. Aggregate net profit of 1,874 companies grew 26.4% year-on-year to ₹3.74 trillion in the final quarter of 2023-24.

According to U.R. Bhat, co-founder, Alphaniti Fintech, FPIs had "probably thought it

expedient to tone down bearishness ahead of the election outcome, with five phases of polling having concluded." He expects sharp movements in markets after 1 June when the exit poll results start rolling in.

On Friday, markets closed on a flat note, with Nifty down by 0.05% at 22,957.10. Bank Nifty, however, was an outperformer, closing 0.42% higher at 48,971.65.

Gautam Duggad, research head-institutional equities at Motilal Oswal believes market momentum would continue as long as "there were no negative surprises on 4 June."

Rohit Srivastava, founder of IndiaCharts, said market momentum would hinge on FPIs covering their remaining shorts and initiating fresh longs on the market.

The ones with contra positions to the FPIs on index futures are retail and HNI investors, whose cumulative net long or bullish positions stood at 124,742 contracts.

Global firms are tapping India's workers like never before

The Economist

Lululemon, a CANADIAN maker of yoga outfits, does not have many things in common with Rolls-Royce, a British engine manufacturer. One thing they do share, along with scores of other foreign companies, is space in the sprawling Embassy Manyata Business Park in Bangalore. Hundreds of others, among them Maersk, a Danish shipping firm, Samsung, a South Korean electronics giant, and Wells Fargo, an American bank, have offices within a few miles. Many more of these white-collar outposts can be

found in cities including Chennai, Pune and Hyderabad.

Back in the 1990s global firms such as General Electric, a once-mighty conglomerate, began to rely on Indian workers to perform tedious tasks such as filling in forms and patching software for mainframe computers. Over time much of that drudgery was absorbed by Indian outsourcing firms such as Infosys, TCS and Wipro. Now foreign firms have begun to think bigger about the types of white-collar jobs that can be done by India's cheap but well-educated workers. Many have set up "global capability centres" (GCCs) to offshore tasks from data analysis to research and development (R&D), helping fuel a new wave of services-



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led growth for India.

It has long been easier to offshore white-collar work to India than the blue-collar variety. Spreadsheets and emails

do not need to travel along the country's congested roads or otherwise rely on its shoddy infrastructure. (GCCs generally have dependable internet con-

nections, a luxury not always enjoyed in India.) Labour laws covering matters such as redundancies and—crucially for global firms—working hours are less restrictive for the country's white-collar workers, too.

More recently, technologies such as cloud computing and video conferencing have made it less cumbersome to tap India's vast pool of brainy workers. Having learned how to supervise employees remotely through the covid-19 pandemic, plenty of bosses will have now pondered whether some roles could be done from farther afield.

All that helps explain why the number of GCCs operating in India has ballooned from

700 in 2010 to 1,580 last year, according to NASSCOM, an industry body (see chart). A new centre now opens roughly every week, two-fifths of them in and around Bangalore. India's GCCs generated a combined \$46bn in revenues last year, estimates NASSCOM.

Even that may vastly underestimate their activity. Many multinational companies do not share the financial details of their GCCs, which means calculating their economic contribution involves a good deal of guesswork. Wizmatic, a consultancy based in Pune, thinks the revenues of Indian GCCs could be as high as \$120bn, a sum equal to roughly 3.5% of

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