

**50 YEARS AFTER INDIA WENT NUCLEAR  
SHOULD WE CHANGE OUR NUCLEAR DOCTRINE?**

JOURNALISM WITH A HUMAN TOUCH | [www.theweek.in](http://www.theweek.in) | TheWeekMag | TheWeekLive | ₹80

**PROTECTING  
OUR VIPs**  
HOW THE SPG HAS  
CHANGED DURING  
THE MODI ERA

**SIDHARTHA MALLYA**  
LIFE LESSONS FOR KIDS

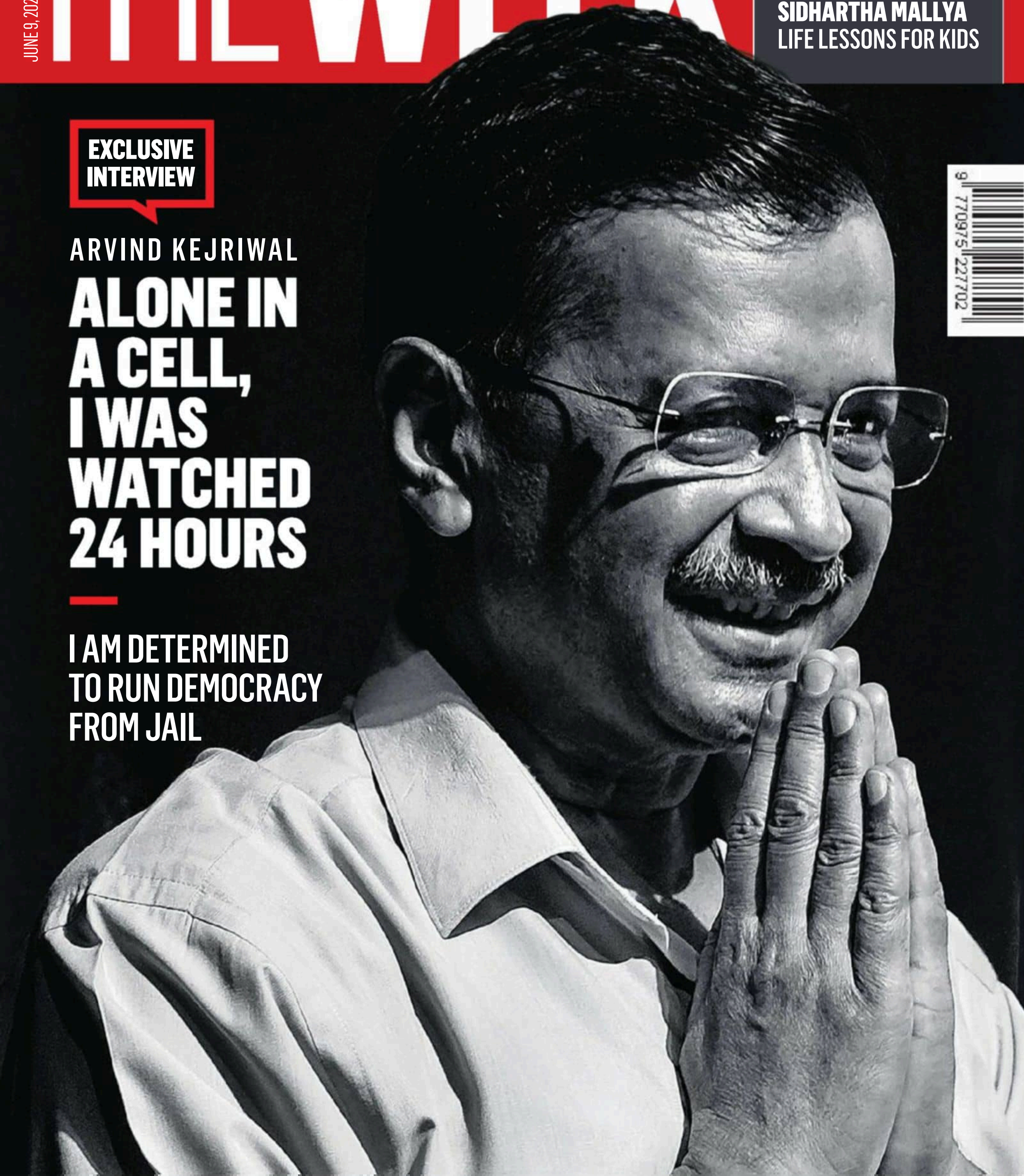
JUNE 9, 2024

# THE WEEK

**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW**

ARVIND KEJRIWAL  
**ALONE IN  
A CELL,  
I WAS  
WATCHED  
24 HOURS**

**I AM DETERMINED  
TO RUN DEMOCRACY  
FROM JAIL**







Since 1983

Dr. Vishwanath Karad

**MIT WORLD PEACE  
UNIVERSITY** | PUNE

TECHNOLOGY, RESEARCH, SOCIAL INNOVATION & PARTNERSHIPS

# EDUCATION FOR A CHANGING FUTURE



**MIT-WPU  
AT A  
GLANCE**

**40**  
Years of  
Legacy

**20,000+**  
Students on  
Campus

**100,000**  
Global Alumni  
Network

**₹ 51.36 LPA**  
University Highest  
package

**1600+**  
Industry  
Partnerships

**Explore Our  
150+  
New-Age  
Courses**

- B.Tech | M.Tech
- Integrated B.Tech
- B.Com | M.Com
- B.Pharm | M. Pharm
- LL.B. | BA LL.B.

- BBA LL.B.
- BCS | MCS
- BFA | MFA
- B.Sc. | M.Sc.
- B.Des | M.Des

- BA | MA
- B.Ed | M.Ed
- BBA | MBA
- BCA | MCA
- Ph.D

& many more...

More than 2500+ students to get upto 50 Cr\* merit-based scholarship

**A UNIVERSITY FOR LIFE TRANSFORMATION**

📍 MIT-WPU, Kothrud, Pune

✉ admissions@mitwpu.edu.in

☎ +91 020-71177137

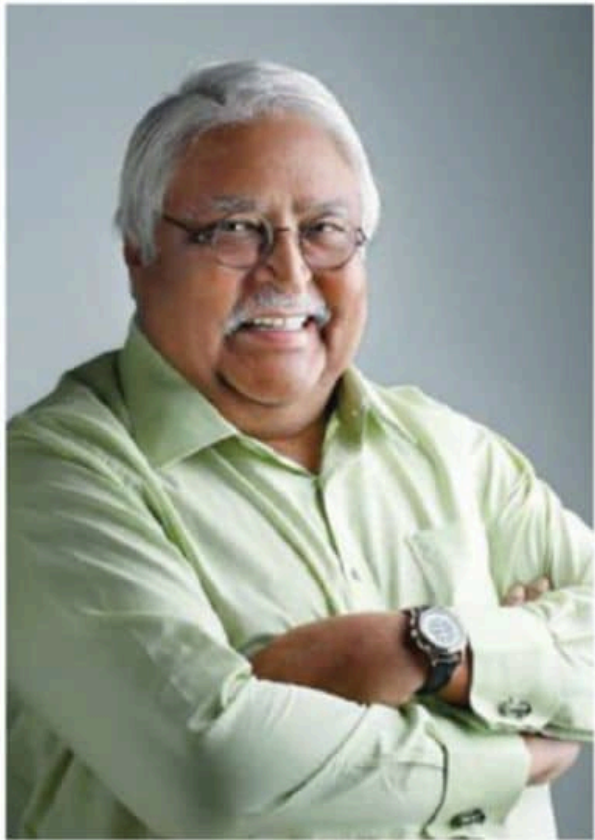
🌐 www.mitwpu.edu.in

☎ +91 98814-92848

SCAN TO  
APPLY







**A QUESTION OFTEN** thrown to me around election time is this: ‘Why did THE WEEK stop its election surveys?’ Well, I’ll let former UK prime minister Harold Wilson answer it: “A week is a long time in politics.” With the Indian electorate being spread over such a vast geography and as general elections are held in phases, it is tough to gather, interpret, package and deliver data to our readers before other variables come into play. Events on the ground often overtake the collected data, making it irrelevant. So, why go through the pain with nothing to show for it?

Instead, we focused on providing reportage from the ground to readers. We brought you exclusive interviews, mood pieces, analyses and much more. It was honest, boots-on-the-ground journalism. Journalism with a Human Touch. My congratulations to all our reporters and photojournalists, and the staff on the print and online desks. This issue marks the last of our covers for the general election campaign season. And, I thank Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for taking the time to speak to THE WEEK’s readers exclusively, from the heart. He spoke frankly to Senior Assistant Editor Soni

Mishra about his time in solitary confinement and the general elections. He says that Central agencies have together launched 250 cases against the AAP, of which 130 have ended in acquittals.

Campaign season also brings to the fore the security risks that candidates go through, and who can forget the tragedy that hit us 33 years ago in Sriperumbudur. Deputy Chief of Bureau Namrata Biji Ahuja takes you up close to what constitutes VIP security in India, the different grades and the different books of security protocol. While Senior Assistant Editor Pratul Sharma writes about bureaucrat-turned-candidates, Correspondent Niladry Sarkar winds up our coverage from West Bengal.

It is not all politics, of course. On the sports coverage front, our Consultant (Sports) Ayaz Memon pens the curtain-raiser for the T20 World Cup, as the sport moves to baseball country. In @leisure, there is Special Correspondent Anjuly Mathai’s chat with Sidhartha Mallya about his latest book—for children. And then there is the Cannes roundup by Senior Correspondent Reya Mehrotra.

The cover feature on the 1974 nuclear test is a comprehensive read—by a galaxy of guest writers—anchored by articles from Senior Special Correspondent Sanjib Kr Baruah and Resident Editor R. Prasannan.

I remember vividly the moment I came to know about the 1998 tests. I was in Moscow for an International Press Institute conference. Later, Bina and I joined a cruise on the Volga arranged for delegates. As the cruise was on, IPI director emeritus Johann P. Fritz walked over, broke the news of Pokhran II and shook my hand. There were handshakes all around and, obviously, I was excited to see what was coming. But by the time I returned to India, the storm was on us with the US, Canada and Japan imposing sanctions, and China and Pakistan saying expected things.

Twenty-six years later, the world looks so different.

Philip Mathew.



# contents

FOR THE WEEK JUNE 3 - JUNE 9



JOSEKUTTY PANACKAL

30

## COVER STORY

### ‘PMO WAS WATCHING LIVE-STREAM OF MY JAIL CELL’

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is out on bail in a liquor policy case that kept him in jail during the crucial election season. Now out, the AAP convener hit the ground running, and went straight into electioneering.

In the midst of a punishing campaign schedule, Kejriwal talks to **THE WEEK** in a detailed interview, **opening up about his time in jail, how every effort was made to break him, and his confidence that the INDIA bloc would defeat the BJP and win more than 300 seats.**

## 16 UNTOLD STORIES

How India’s valiant security personnel act as human shields to protect important political leaders and visiting dignitaries

## 42 CRICKET

Strengths and concerns of top teams at the T20 World Cup



PTI





## 46 COVER FEATURE

50  
YEARS OF  
POKHRAN  
TEST

PIB

- ◆ Fifty years after Pokhran I, India needs to update its nuclear doctrine
- ◆ **Interview: Dr R. Chidambaram**, former principal scientific adviser to the government
- ◆ India's nuclear capability is the result of its unrelenting pursuit against all odds, writes **Anil Kakodkar**, former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission
- ◆ Pokhran tests launched India's march towards being a participant in the global nuclear order, writes **M.K. Narayanan**, former national security adviser
- ◆ How India protected its ability to move ahead with its nuclear weapons programme despite not signing the NPT, writes **D.B. Venkatesh Varma**, former ambassador to Russia and Spain
- ◆ India has operationalised a credible deterrent that the nation should be proud of, writes **Air Marshal Rajesh Kumar (retd)**

## ELECTIONS 2024 BATTLEGROUND

### 22 WEST BENGAL

Trinamool Congress hopes to retain its hold in the nine constituencies in southern Bengal that go to the polls on June 1

#### INTERVIEW

**Monk Kartik Maharaj** says **Mamata fears he could be a contender**

## ELECTIONS 2024

### 28 BUREAUCRAT CANDIDATES

Meet the bureaucrats who have taken a dip in political waters

## COLUMNS

### 10 POWERDRIVE

R. Prasannan

### 21 MANI-FESTO

Mani Shankar Aiyar

### 71 DETOUR

Shobhaa De

### 74 LAST WORD

Barkha Dutt

**Street vendors and shopkeepers spoke**

**often of 'sannata hai (everything is still)', when I asked about how their businesses were doing. Yet, they did not suggest that they would vote differently than before.**



## CINEMA

68



REUTERS

**I reach out to directors, but generally don't even get a chance to audition, says actor Kani Kusruti of *All We Imagine As Light***

COVER PHOTO PTI  
COVER DESIGN BINESH SREEDHARAN

Printed at Malayala Manorama Press, Kottayam, and M P Printers, Noida, and published from Manorama Buildings, Panampilly Nagar, Kochi-682 036, by **Jacob Mathew**, on behalf of the Malayala Manorama Company Private Ltd., Kottayam-686 001. Editor **Philip Mathew**, Manorama Buildings, Panampilly Nagar, Kochi-682 036

• Focus/Infocus features are paid marketing/PR initiatives





## East needs to shine

States in eastern India such as Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal are not as developed as the rest of the country, and it is for all to see ('Thunder in the east', May 26). The region, though abundant in natural resources, is plagued by poverty. The blame for all that should go to successive state governments.

There is an urgent need to unleash the untapped potential of eastern states to ensure the growth of the region. More than the Lok Sabha MPs from the region, it is the respective state governments that have to wake up.

Nitish Kumar and Naveen Patnaik have ruled Bihar and Odisha for far too long. Now they have to leave. Kumar's party will be in an existential crisis after June 4. He has lost his credibility forever.

**Tigin Thomas,**  
On email.

The BJD in Odisha and the JD(U) in Bihar are not doing enough for the common man. The BJP will surely improve its tally in Odisha and West Bengal. States like Odisha

and Jharkhand have rich natural resources. There is so much more development that can come to these states if there is proper governance and

leaders who are honest and humble. Let us not forget that eastern India is a crucial chapter in the country's pursuit for sustainable development.

**Ranjith Mathur,**  
On email.

The BJP could sweep West Bengal this time around. There is palpable anger against Mamata Banerjee and her government. Polarisation will not help her. The downward spiral of the Trinamool Congress has just started. Also, there will be a BJP government in West Bengal in 2026. By engaging in violence, the Trinamool Congress is attempting to hide its inefficiency.

**Alakananda Saxena,**  
On email.

JMM leader Kalpana Soren comes across as a confident person with good leadership qualities. Despite being a novice in politics, she has demonstrated her abilities, like good communication skills, which is crucial for politicians.

Kalpana seems like a mature person. She is the daughter of an Army officer, and her credentials will help her wade through

uncharted territory.

**Praveen Thimmaiah,**  
On email.

## Modi is popular in Kerala

I was surprised to read the comments by Rita John that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not popular in Kerala ('Letters', May 26). Modi is liked by a vast section of the society in Kerala. It is wrong to project that he is hated by all in Kerala. Only some in the state have a deep dislike towards Modi. No matter what he does, they will always complain about him and ridicule him.

**Ramanan U.G.,**  
On email.

## Haryana needs Congress government

Over the last few years, the BJP-led government in Haryana took the people of Haryana for granted, and it is time for them to face the music ('Bitter harvest', May 26). Political winds are blowing against the BJP, and the Congress needs to be given a chance to form the government. It is not fair on the part of the BJP to rule every state by hook or crook. Its leaders should also learn to sit in the opposition.

## HOW TO REACH US

### SUBSCRIPTIONS/CUSTOMER CARE

For all subscription related inquiries please write, email or fax to Senior Manager, Circulation, Manorama Buildings, PB No. 4278, Panampilly Nagar, Kochi - 682036. Kerala  
**Email:** [subscribe@theweek.in](mailto:subscribe@theweek.in)  
**Toll free no.:** 18001035981  
**Cochin:** 0484-4447507

### CIRCULATION

**Bengaluru:** 080-22247735/22247736  
**Bhopal:** 0755-2988036  
**Chandigarh:** 0172-2724699  
**Chennai:** 044-66918530/31  
**Coimbatore:** 0422-2241911/2245470  
**Delhi:** 011-23739740  
**Hyderabad:** 040-23314168/23324692

### Kolkata:

033-24198171/24198444  
**Kottayam:** 0481-2563646  
**Lucknow:** 0522-2341576  
**Mumbai:** 022-62965985  
**Patna:** 0612-2233809  
**Jaipur:** 0141-2368360/4005808  
**Thiruvananthapuram:** 0471-2328198

### BUREAU

**Bengaluru:** 080-22867345, 22867050  
**Kolkata:** 033-24556995, 24198344, ext.216  
**Chennai:** 044-66918500  
**Delhi:** 011-23354920  
**Hyderabad:** 040-23314168, 23324692  
**Mumbai:** 022-22074604, 22004358  
**Bhopal:** 0755-2431001  
**Lucknow:** 0522-2701725

### ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

Manorama Buildings, P.B. No. 26, Kottayam 686001, Kerala, India.  
**Tel:** 0481-2563646  
**REGIONAL CO-ORDINATING OFFICE**  
Tej Building, 1st Floor, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002.  
**Tel:** 011-23354920, 23354921, 23359541, 23355801, 23356537  
**Fax:** 43541354

### EDITORIAL

Manorama Buildings, P.B. No. 4278, Panampilly Nagar, Kochi 682036, Kerala, India.  
**editor@theweek.in**  
**http://www.theweek.in**  
**+91 484-4447888**  
**+91 484-2315745**

**Advertising:** +91 98953 95097  
**Email:** [magazineads@mm.co.in](mailto:magazineads@mm.co.in)



Scan to subscribe





## Is frequent urination bothering you?

A novel day-care procedure, Urolift, helps improve quality of life.

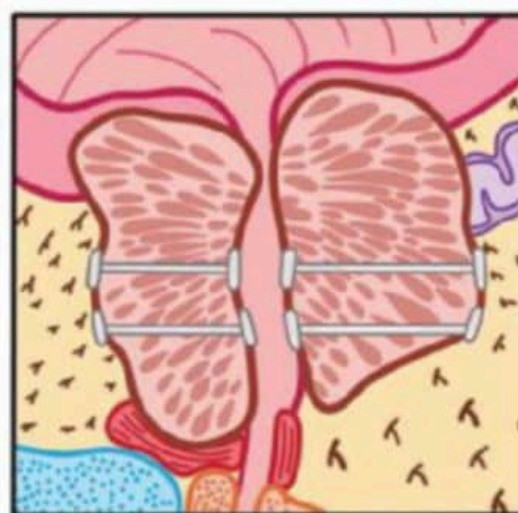
Urinary symptoms are one of the most frequently encountered problems in men of all age groups. This is especially troublesome with aging men. The most common cause of this issue is a mild to severe blockage in the flow of urine by an enlarged prostate gland. This is commonly referred as Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH) and **causes symptoms like frequent urination, urgent need to urinate, weak or slow urinary stream, difficulty emptying bladder completely** etc

This is treated with medications and a proportion of men require surgery to improve the flow of urine. Surgery is usually done through the urine passage (endoscopic surgery) and very rarely some patients may require open or robotic surgery.

Traditionally, the endoscopic surgery involves using electric current to core the prostate gland to create the pathway. Of late, LASER is also being used for the same purpose. However, the procedure does have possible side effects. This includes reblockage, (strictures), dry ejaculation and at times, erectile dysfunction.

**Urolift** is a modern technique which overcomes many of the above side effects. The procedure is done through the endoscopic route as a day care or an overnight stay procedure. In this procedure, the obstructing prostatic tissue is pinned to the sides using implants. These implants are inert and do not cause any side effects. The procedure does not involve coring the prostate and does not involve damaging the bladder neck and hence side effects

found in the traditional treatment are not seen in this procedure.



*Image showing implants being used to pin prostatic tissues to the sides to improve urine flow*

However, careful patient selection is essential to give optimum results for this procedure. Hence a consultation with your doctor is essential.



### Dr. N. Ragavan

MBBS, MS, FRCSEd, MD (Uro-Oncology), FRCS (Urol)  
Senior PGCTLCP  
Fellow in Robotics and Laparoscopy (Germany)  
Senior Consultant Urological Surgeon & Uro-Oncologist  
(Robotics and Laparoscopy)  
Apollo Hospitals, Thousand Lights, Chennai



### Dr. Sandeep Bafna

MS, DNB Urology, MRCS- Edinburgh  
Consultant Genito Urinary Reconstructive Surgeon  
Apollo Hospitals, Thousand Lights, Chennai

### Apollo Hospitals

21, Greams Lane, Off Greams Road, Thousand Lights, Chennai - 600 006  
Ph: 044 4040 1066 | E : [infochennai@apollohospitals.com](mailto:infochennai@apollohospitals.com)



In the coming years, there will be similar trouble for the BJP in Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh. Even though nationally no party can challenge the BJP at the moment, assembly elections are fought on different issues. In many states, the BJP is facing resistance and fatigue, along with strong and capable opposition leaders.

Pankaj Tripathy,  
On email.

Protests in the US

It is unclear if the anti-war protests in the US are attracting widespread public support ('Angry, young America', May 26). The US today is not directly involved in any war. It is clear that powerful Jewish billionaires, who control American politics, industry and the media, are not happy with the anti-semitism displayed by students in prestigious universities in Pennsylvania or Massachusetts. Many of them have even threatened to stop funding major universities where the protests are strong.

It can't be denied, however, that students across the world are terrified by the death and destruction in Gaza.

Kangayam R. Narasimhan,  
On email.

Let us exploit it

I agree with Amitabh Kant that popular Indian chefs and restaurants are spread worldwide, and are

helping connect people through our intangible heritage and culture ('Last word', May 26). However, to improve footfall, we need to give more impetus to food tourism within our country. Rajasthan, Kerala, and Goa are promoting food tourism and helping tourists explore local cuisine. However, not much is known about the delicious fare in eastern India. A state like Haryana is also not promoting food tourism. Let us fully exploit our national cuisine potential, backed by our master chefs.

R.D. Singh,  
On email.

I agree with Kant that Indian cuisine has experienced a remarkable surge in popularity on the global culinary stage. Indian cuisine has always been considered among the best in the world. One does not get bored of Indian food, because of the variety. Indian food focuses heavily on health, which is really good. It is an amalgamation of tastes and textures.

Suresh Gowda,  
On email.

Error

In the 2024 Best Universities Survey report (May 26), Mangalayatan University, Jabalpur, has been erroneously reported as Mangalayatan University, Aligarh. Survey agency Hansa Research apologises for its error.

Editor

THEWEEK

Editor	Philip Mathew
Chief Associate Editor & Director	Riyad Mathew
Editor-in-Charge	V.S. Jayaschandran
Chief News Editor	Stanley Thomas
Senior News Editor	Lukose Mathew
News Editor	Mathew T. George
Senior Assistant News Editors	Maijo Abraham, Ajish P. Joy
Deputy News Editors	Susamma Joy Kurian, Navin J. Antony
Resident Editor, Delhi	R. Prasannan
Chief of Bureau, Mumbai	Dnyanesh V. Jathar
Deputy Chief of Bureau, Delhi	Namrata Biji Ahuja
Senior Assistant Editors, Delhi	Soni Mishra, K. Sunil Thomas, Pratul Sharma
Consultant, Sports	Ayaz Memon
Lifestyle Editor	Namrata Zakaria
Chief Subeditors	Anirudh Madhavan, Anirudha Karindalam
Senior Subeditor	Karthik Ravindranath
Subeditor	Diya Mathew

SENIOR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

Delhi: Sanjib Kr Baruah  
Srinagar: Tariq Ahmad Bhat  
Lucknow: Puja Awasthi  
Chennai: Lakshmi Subramanian  
Bengaluru: Prathima Nandakumar  
Mumbai: Nachiket Kelkar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

Kochi: Anjuly Mathai  
Hyderabad: Rahul Devulapalli  
Delhi: Mohit Sharma

Senior Photo Editor: Sanjoy Ghosh

Photo Editors  
Bhanu Prakash Chandra, Salil Bera  
Deputy Photo Editor  
Sanjay Ahlawat  
Chief Photographer  
Mumbai: Amey Suhas Mansabdar  
Photographer  
Delhi: Kritajna Naik K.  
Chief Picture Coordinator  
Bimal Nath C.  
Senior Researcher: Rani G.S.  
Photo Researcher: Jomy M. Joseph

PRINCIPAL CORRESPONDENTS

Bengaluru: Abhinav Singh  
Mumbai: Pooja Biraia Jaiswal

SENIOR CORRESPONDENTS

Delhi: Reya Mehrotra  
Thiruvananthapuram: Nirmal Jovial

CORRESPONDENT

Kolkata: Niladry Sarkar

CHIEF REPORTER

UAE: Mintu P. Jacob, Dubai

Art Editor: Jayakrishnan M.T.

Senior Assistant  
Art Editor: Binesh Sreedharan  
Senior Infographic  
Designer: Sreemanikandan S.  
Illustrator: B. Bhaskaran  
Senior Layout Artist: B. Manojkumar  
Designers: Deni Lal, Job P.K., Rajesh A.S.  
Graphic Designer: Syam Krishnan  
Artists: Sumesh C.N., Sujesh K., Ajeesh Kumar M., Jairaj T.G.

THEWEEK.IN

New Media Coordinator	Sarath Ramesh Kuniyl
Senior Subeditors	Jose K. George, Vinod V.K., Vignesh Vijayakumar, Meera Suresh, Anuja Susan Varghese, Sachin Jose, Bechu S.
Subeditor	Anugraha Mariam Sabu
Senior Researcher	Saju C. Daniel
Senior Web Designer	Rahul J. Mohan
Video Editors	Vishnudas K.S., Ujwal P.P.
Assistant Video Editor	Uthara Dinesh
Senior SEO Analyst	Deepu R.
Executive Director	George Jacob
Vice President, Marketing, Advertising Sales	Varghese Chandy
Chief General Manager, Circulation	Cinu Mathews
Chief General Manager, Sales	Hari M. Varrier
MUMBAI	Shree Kumar Menon
Resident Chief General Manager	
BENGALURU	Ranjit Kurien
Regional Chief General Manager	
NEW DELHI	
Chief Marketing Officer (North) & Head, Special Projects	R. Rajmohan
CHENNAI	
Regional Head	John Sudhir Abraham





# TAMIL NADU AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY

Coimbatore – 641 003.



## Post Graduate Admission Notification for academic year 2024-25

**Last date for submission of application 06.06.2024**

The School of Post Graduate Studies at Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India offers Masters programme in 33 disciplines and Doctoral programme in 28 disciplines across 11 campuses. The students who have already completed their Undergraduate in agriculture and allied courses can apply for Masters programme and those who have completed M.Sc. in Agriculture or Horticulture and M. Tech in Agricultural Engineering can apply for doctoral programs by uploading the required documents as provided in the information brochure. Students who are in the final year can upload their previous semester marksheets issued by their competent authorities. The student seeking admission for Post Graduate programmes in agriculture for Annamalai University can also apply through TNAU online portal.

The Last date for submission for post graduate application through online portal (<https://admissionsatpgschool.tnau.ac.in/>) on 06.06.2024. The entrance examination for admission to the Post Graduate programmes for TNAU and Annamalai University on 23.06.2024.

Any queries relating to the admissions process should be addressed to  
**E-mail: [pgadmission@tnau.ac.in](mailto:pgadmission@tnau.ac.in) | Mobile: 94890 56710**

**Dr. N. Senthil**

Dean (SPGS) & Chairman (PG Admissions)  
School of Post Graduate Studies,  
Coimbatore.





## Spivak's speech; not fair, lady!

When Horatio Bottomley, MP, called in to see Lord Cholmondeley, he told the butler, "I wish to speak to Lord Cholmond-ley."

The butler, without batting an eyelid, corrected, "Lord Chum-ley, sir."

"Oh, all right," said Bottomley, who would be a journalist, a journeyman and be jailed for fraud. "Tell him that Mr Bumley would like to speak to him."

No scene from a P.G. Wodehouse story this, but a real-life encounter that took place in pre-war or inter-war England when old notions of social class and pronunciation were beginning to be challenged. By then Thomas Hardy of the Victorian world had woven a woeful tragedy in Wessex around the d'Urberville family, labelling the wealthy branch as d'Urber-ville, and the one to which the miserable Tess belonged as Durbeyfield. Wodehouse of a newer world had made Bertie a simple Wooster instead of a Worcester, and George Bernard Shaw, who would notoriously pronounce 'ghoti' as 'fish', had staged *Pygmalion*, which was all about pronunciation and social class.

Missed the play? No regrets. Its more delightful filmy version *My Fair Lady*, starring Rex Harrison and the ever-dear Audrey Hepburn, is still available for downloads and a few LoLs.

Missed the plot? I guess many of you have, in all this talk about social class and pronunciation. All right, let's get the speech right.

How you speak may no longer determine your class, but pronunciation purists continue to haunt the groves of academe. On 'elite' campuses, where pronunciation is believed to mirror scholarship, Chumley-Bumley encounters are still being witnessed, giving mirth to most of us but mortification to its many victims.

One such victim is the poor desi sociology scholar

Anshul Kumar of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, who had the temerity to mispronounce the name of the black civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois in the majestic presence of Columbia University professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak, who was taking questions from the audience after her lecture, cut him down saying the name should be pronounced 'do-boys' since "he is an Englishman, not French".

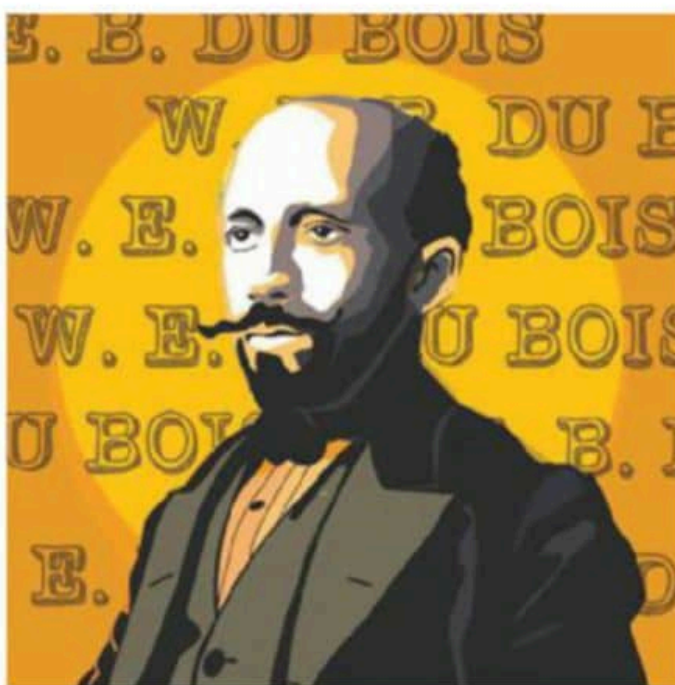
As a sociologist, Kumar would have read the 19th century French missionary Abbe Dubois's *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*. The abbe had called himself 'dub-va', but hadn't bothered when the people of Tamilagam called him Dodda Saami. And do pronunciations matter, as long as you have conveyed what you wanted to?

So Kumar went on with his question calling Du Bois 'dub-va', but Spivak wouldn't budge. She insisted that Kumar pronounce the name right, and then only would she entertain a question from him. At which Kumar did a Chumley-Bumley act on Spivak, or what Eliza Doolittle did at the Royal Ascot. He uttered a few uncivil words, made his exit, and trolled Spivak tagging her influential work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* which

critiques the silencing of marginalised voices by patriarchal and imperial forces.

Kumar's post ignited a debate on social media, setting the groves of academe on fire. Writer Meena Kandasamy, who recounted a similar mortifying encounter with Spivak, argued that correcting pronunciation should be done gracefully, without public humiliation. "To snub someone over their pronunciation, in a hall filled to the brim with people, shows insecurity, pettiness..." she wrote. Many defended Spivak, saying she was right in insisting on proper pronunciation.

What do we, the billion subalterns, do? Watch *My Fair Lady* and *The King's Speech*, go to bed every night with a copy of Daniel Jones, and hope to get upper-classified some day.





## POINT BLANK

REUTERS



I have said repeatedly and people still don't believe me. I am an academic, my business is not kissing babies. I have a family and a wife, who does not want me to enter politics for a good reason. So rather than enter politics what I would like to do is help guide where I can.

**Raghuram Rajan,**  
former RBI governor

This election is existential. I mean, if we don't make the right decision in this election in our country, we may never have another actual election.... And if we no longer have another actual election, we will be governed by a small minority of right-wing forces that are well-organised and well-funded, and are getting exactly what they want in terms of turning the clock back on women.

**Hillary Clinton,**  
former US secretary of state, on the US elections later this year

When I got up, I was not sure if I would be alive. But God was very kind to save me. I could not go to the airport because I was nervous about facing people in a wheelchair. I could not even brush my teeth for six to seven months. I suffered unbearable pain.

**Rishabh Pant,**  
cricketer, on his near-fatal car crash in December 2022

Uttar Pradesh is preparing to bid farewell to the BJP, and I am eagerly waiting for the moment. Good days will start from June 4.

**Akhilesh Yadav,**  
Samajwadi Party leader

Being able to inspire people is a byproduct of trying to survive [cancer]. When you put your fear out there, it liberates you. It also helped me fall in love with my job all over again.

**Sonali Bendre,**  
actor



PTI

## WORD PLAY

**Bed rotting** is a popular trend, which means staying in bed alone doing stuff that needs very little effort such as scrolling social media or watching movies or shows. It is pioneered by Gen Z social media users.

## MILESTONES



PTI

### PROUD MOMENT

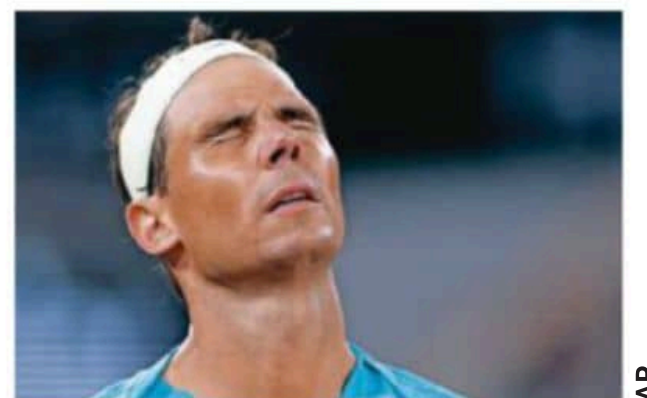
Kaamya Karthikeyan, 16, became India's youngest and the world's second youngest to summit Mount Everest (from the Nepal side). A class 12 student from Mumbai, Kaamya summited Mount Everest along with her father, Commander S. Karthikeyan of the Indian Navy.



SHUTTERSTOCK

### HEAVY DUTY

Scientists have calculated the energy needed to carry a baby in pregnancy. Researchers at Monash University in Australia found that human pregnancy requires nearly 50,000 calories through approximately nine months, which is significantly more than previous estimates.



AP

### PARTING SHOT

Rafael Nadal lost in the first round of the French Open for the first time. It was only the fourth loss in 116 matches at the Roland Garros for the 14-time champion. Nadal has indicated that 2024 will be his last season, but was noncommittal about retirement after the loss.





## ERROR HORROR

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's gaffes at election rallies have not gone unnoticed. At one of the rallies, he said, "May Narendra Modi become chief minister again." At an earlier one, he said the NDA would win 4,000 seats. The bloopers have triggered conspiracy theories: some think Nitish could be considering switching sides once again, as the gaffes are hurting the BJP. And he is likely to be held accountable if the NDA fails to repeat its 2019 performance, when it won 39 of 40 seats.

## CHIEF SURPRISE

The race to the top post in the Army has suddenly become interesting with the Union government extending the tenure of General Manoj Pande by a month, till June 30. Three officers are in the fray to succeed General Pande. The two leading ones—Vice Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi and Southern Army Commander Lieutenant General Ajai Kumar Singh—are joined by Central Army Commander Lieutenant General N.S. Raja Subramani, throwing the seniority principle aside for now. With the top two contenders racing against time, the government runs the risk of the chief and the vice chief retiring on the same day. No one needs to teach this government how to spring a surprise.

ILLUSTRATIONS JAIRAJ T.G.



# VIT Founder & Chancellor Dr. G. Viswanathan received the State University of New York honorary doctorate



**F**ounder and Chancellor of Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) Dr. G. Viswanathan received the State University of New York (SUNY) Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree during Binghamton University's convocation ceremony in the USA recently.

The honorary doctorate was conferred on Dr. G. Viswanathan by Binghamton University President Harvey Stenger.

Dr. G. Viswanathan has been conferred the honorary doctorate for his contributions to international higher education.

"Chancellor Viswanathan has been a pioneer for expanding access to higher education in India and partnering with institutions around the world," Binghamton University President Harvey Stenger said.

Binghamton University Provost Donald Hall, Dean Prof. Srihari Krishnaswamy, the Member of Assembly Ms. Donna A. Luppardo, the Member of

**"India should lead the world in education and VIT should lead India."**

**Dr. G. Viswanathan**  
Founder & Chancellor  
VIT

Senate Ms. Leaa Webb, VIT Vice Presidents Mr. Sankar Viswanathan, Dr. Sekar Viswanathan and Dr. G. V. Selvam, Assistant Vice President Ms. Kadhambari S. Viswanathan and Dr. R. Seenivasan, Director, International Relations, VIT were also present during the convocation ceremony.

Meanwhile, a felicitation function for Dr. G. Viswanathan was organised in Washington DC, USA, in which dignitaries including Mr. Kannan Srinivasan, Senator, Member, Virginia House of Delegates, Dr. P. Karunakaran, Head, Education Wing, Embassy of India,

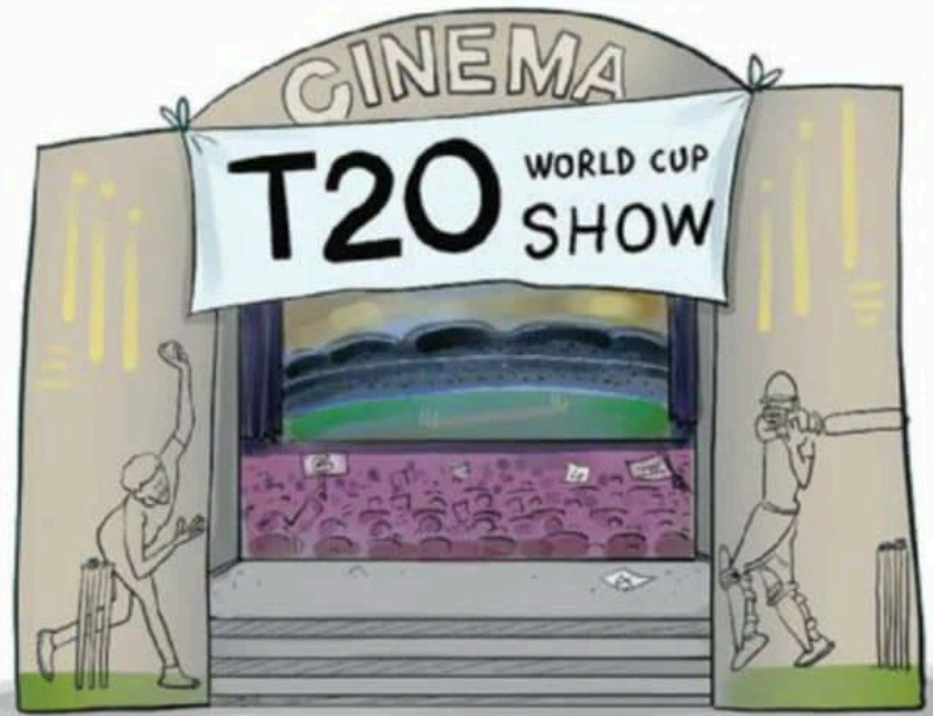
Washington DC, Mr. Bala Swaminathan, President, Federation of Tamil Sangams in North America (FETNA), Mr. Balagan Arumugasamy, Former President Federation of Tamil Sangams in North America (FETNA), Dr. Veera Venugopal, President, Tamil Nadu Foundation, Dr. Prabu David, Provost, Rochester Institute of Technology, Dr. Jeyachandran, Former Senior Professor, Montclair State University, New Jersey, Dr. Sridevi Sarma, Vice Dean, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, Dr. Paneer Selvam, Senior Professor, University of Arkansas, Dr. V. Raju, Provost, VIT Bangalore and Mrs. Indirani Radhakrishnan, Advisor, VIT Alumni Association, North America and office bearers of VIT Alumni Association North American chapters also took part in the function.

It may be pointed out that VIT Founder and Chancellor Dr. G. Viswanathan was conferred honorary doctorate by West Virginia University, USA in 2009.



## LOST IN THE ACT

Trinamool Congress candidate from Dum Dum, Saugata Roy, donned an unexpected role in the aftermath of cyclone Remal. Armed with a bamboo stick, he was seen clearing manholes clogged in the rain, while his loyal assistants accompanied him with umbrellas. Roy also showcased his crane-operating skills. West Bengal's opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari made a jibe at the three-time MP, saying "poor script and weak actor" exposed the inadequate drainage system in his constituency.



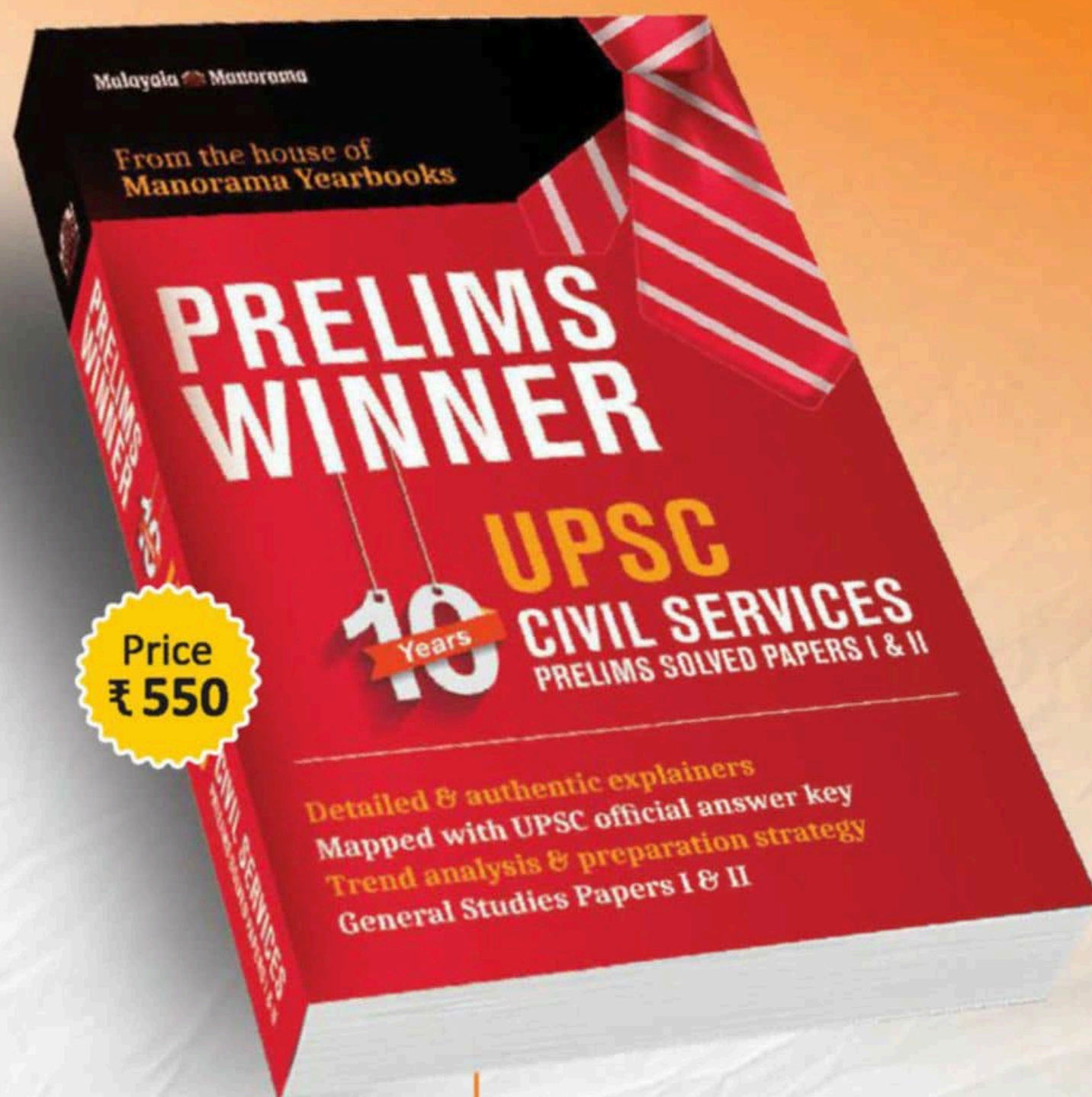
## SAVED BY CRICKET

For Bollywood, 2024 has so far been flop central, with big budget spectacles like Akshay Kumar's *Bade Miyan Chote Miyan* and Ajay Devgn's *Maidaan* turning out to be absolute disasters. It has obviously made theatre owners a scared lot. Close on the heels of some multiplexes shutting down some of their halls and the likes of PVR Inox resorting to screening anything from Ram Mandir opening ceremony to Taylor Swift concerts, Cinepolis has decided to hitch its wagon to cricket. It has tied up with Star Sports to beam the upcoming T20 World Cup. If Indians are crazy over cinema and cricket, one can make up for the other, right?

## KEYBOARD WARRIORS

Former Thiruvananthapuram mayor V.K. Prasanth, now an MLA from one of the constituencies in the capital city, is known for sharing posts about cinema and cricket, alongside his political activities. Recently, he asked for reviews of the latest Mammootty-starrer *Turbo*. Soon the comment section was flooded with remarks from pro-BJP profiles, criticising the inundation of low-lying areas in Thiruvananthapuram caused by heavy rains. A BJP leader said the film was "not as good as the water-logging in the city". In response, Prasanth posted about watching *Turbo*. He told a local television channel that some people were spreading rumours about both the city and the film, and attending the screening was his reply to them.





**776 PAGES • MAGAZINE SIZE**

# PRELIMS WINNER

**UPSC CIVIL SERVICES  
PRELIMS SOLVED PAPERS I & II**

- Features previous years' questions (PYQs) from the past 11 years (2013-2023).
- Aligned with the official answer key of UPSC and provides detailed explainers for each question.
- Content is categorised by subject and topic.
- Covers the latest developments and revisions in UPSC exams.
- Also features a trend analysis of previous years' exams.

**ISBN 9789359593807**



mimci6184986@fbt

**For door delivery of the book, please call 8281765432**

**FREE SHIPPING**

**Scan this QR Code for payment and share the reference number @ 8281765432**

**Distribution : Manorama agents/unit offices, www.manoramabooks.com, Amazon, flipkart (search using ISBN)**

**For more details; contact:** Bangalore: 22247735, Chennai: 04466918525, New Delhi: 011 23354920, 23354921, Mumbai: 022 – 24900844, 62965900, Hyderabad: 040-23322970, 23314168, Kolkata: 9656843600, Patna: 0612 2233809, Lucknow: 0522 2341576, Chandigarh: 0172 2724699, Bhopal: 0755 2988036, Jaipur (Rajasthan): 94616 28972, Coimbatore: 2241911, 2245470, Pune: 9881477305, Ahmedabad: 9898231881, Kottayam: 2587396, 9495080006, Kozhikode: 9495244614, Kochi: 9495080004, Thiruvananthapuram: 9446220919, Palakkad: 9495173551, Kannur: 9495375514, Kollam: 9447857627, Thrissur: 9495080002, Malappuram: 9447857663, Pathanamthitta: 9447857441, Alappuzha: 8281559553.



# GO THROUGH ME FIRST...

How India's valiant human shields protect important political leaders and visiting dignitaries

BY NAMRATA BIJI AHUJA

**W**hen Narendra Modi took oath as prime minister for the first time on May 26, 2014, hundreds of foreign and Indian dignitaries had gathered for the event at the Rashtrapati Bhavan's forecourt. Pakistan prime minister Nawaz Sharif was visibly uneasy and was sweating profusely in the Delhi heat. His aides looked around for a bottle of water, but water bottles had been prohibited as per the security arrangements. An Indian security officer noticed Sharif's discomfort, walked up to him quietly and handed over a bottle of water he had stashed away in his coat pocket.

The summer sun is blazing once again, and with the country's next

prime minister set to take oath in June, the atmosphere is no different for the personnel on VVIP and VIP security duty.

"In the Indian context, VVIPs are the prime minister, president [and vice president], and visiting heads of state," said retired IPS officer D.P. Sinha, who was secretary (security) in the cabinet secretariat and special director of the Intelligence Bureau. "There are other categories of VIPs who are provided security. The security officers are their body covers. It does not mean just taking a bullet. Threats must be detected and preempted."

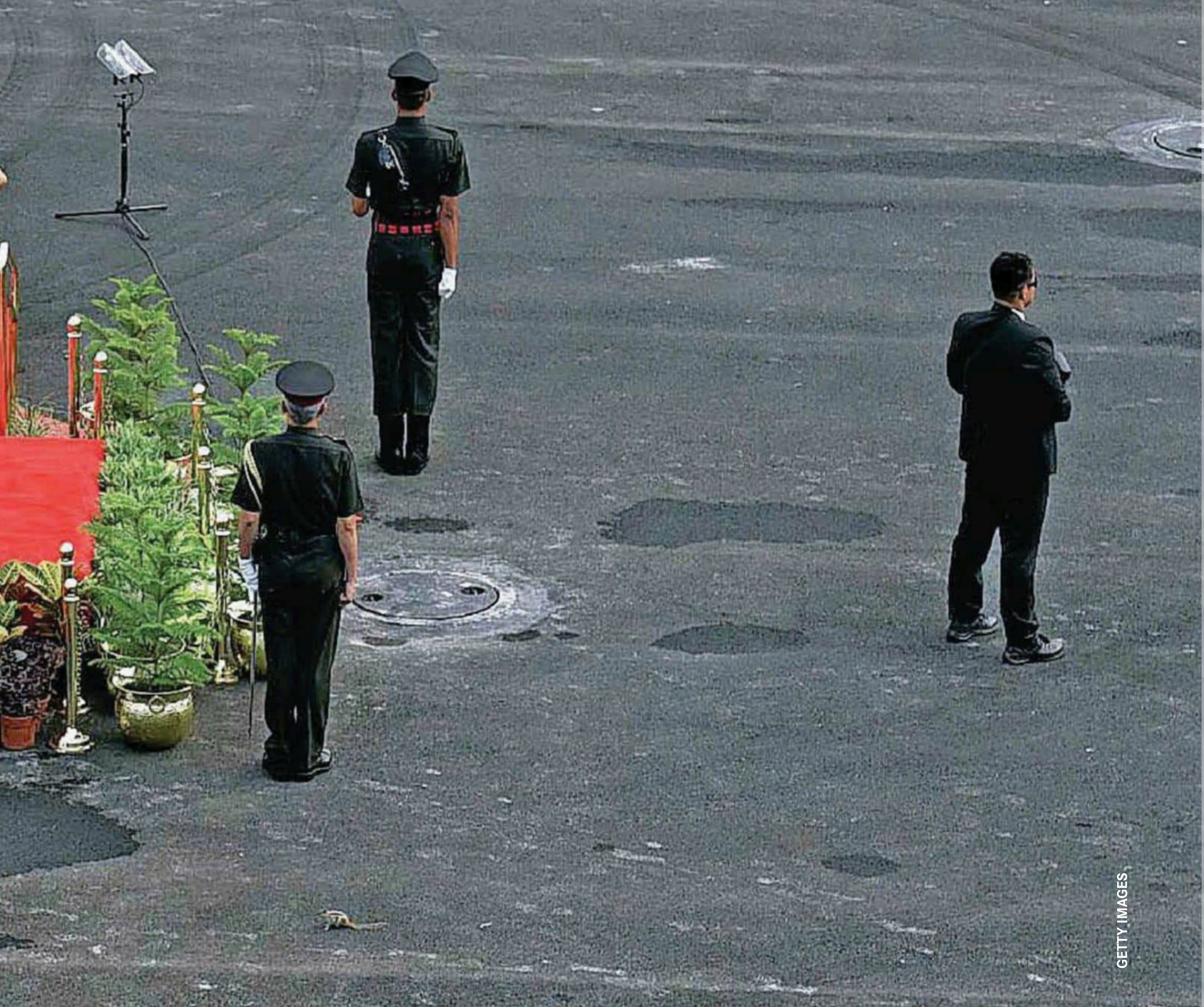
In 2014, after Modi landed in New Delhi on May 17, then chief of the Special Protection Group, K. Durga

Prasad, briefed him about security concerns. While Prasad himself would not leave the side of outgoing prime minister Manmohan Singh (the SPG chief shadows the sitting prime minister till he demits office), he offered Modi an SPG team.

"Modi refused the offer," said a person in the know, requesting anonymity. "He wanted his old security detail when he took oath." So, in his moment of glory, standing behind him were the Gujarat Police officers and National Security Guard commandos who had protected him as chief minister of Gujarat. "It was thoughtful of the prime minister," said the person.

Modi was driven to the Rashtrapati Bhavan in a Scorpio by his old detail





GETTY IMAGES

and, after the swearing-in, he left in an SPG vehicle. In between, apart from Sharif, the security officers helped former Union minister Arun Jaitley's son, who had fainted in the heat and they whisked away actor Salman Khan from autograph seekers. An officer said that Khan literally sprinted.

Most importantly, the ceremony was smooth. "Coordination is the key since security is a layered arrangement," said a former security officer. "Each incident is taken note of by the nodal officers." These notes add to the "institutional memory" of the VIP security wing under the Union home ministry—when an officer who was part of the swearing-in ceremony for successive prime ministers moved

on to his next assignment, he tore off the handwritten notes and maps from his notepad and shared them with his successor.

In India, the idea of providing security to political leaders was born after Naxalism became a threat in the 1960s. The SPG was formed in 1985, after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The Union home ministry codified the protocols for protection in the "Blue Book" and "Yellow Book". The names come from the colour of the covers of the books, slightly larger than pocket books, which were used to first write down the procedures, said former IB special director Yashovardhan Azad.

"The Blue Book explains the full drill and detail of protecting a VVIP



### SHADOW WARRIORS

A view of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's security detail

or VIP," said Praveen Dixit, former director general of police, Maharashtra. "It minutely details procedures for each and every scenario. It is updated regularly to keep track of new threats and challenges."

The IB, which gathers domestic intelligence, naturally became the go-to agency for security of critical establishments and VIPs. State governments follow the Central government's protocol with minor deviations here and there.

Under Modi, the SPG has had to



change the way it worked. Former premiers such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh were known to consult their security detail before breaking protocol. But, Modi is more of a risk-taker. “Vajpayee or Singh also travelled less, especially towards the latter half of their tenures,” said an officer who oversaw security arrangements for the former two. “They did not campaign so much. Now, the election campaign exposure of the SPG is much more.”

The personnel closest to the prime minister constitute the close protection team (CPT). They act as human shields. But, Modi did not want many security men seen around him. As a result, the CPT for Modi mostly remains at a distance. “Manmohan Singh was a septuagenarian and officers had to move close to him to watch his step. But with a relatively younger Modi, there was no such danger (of stumbling) and the SPG did not mind keeping its men at a distance,” said another security officer in the know.

The last decade has brought new experiences and newer challenges, too, for the SPG, the NSG, and the multiple paramilitary and state police forces protecting VIPs. This is especially true during election campaigns when politicians take chances with their security. “The basic rule of VIP security is to avert danger in three steps—espionage, subversion and sabotage,” said Sinha. “This holds true for both critical establishments and individuals.” Jammers were introduced to block mobile signals when the security establishment realised that mobile phones could be used to trigger improvised explosive devices. Artificial intelligence poses a new kind of threat. The deep fake video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah this year demonstrated the importance of securing VVIPs and VIPs in digital spaces.

This election season Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagan Mohan

Reddy was hurt in the face when someone threw a stone at him. He was campaigning at night and all the lights were turned to him so that he could be seen by the crowd. But, this meant that security officers could not see the stone that came flying towards him. Officers admit it is a lesson learnt. “We must have areas around the politicians lit up,” said an officer. “If the lights were on people, a bold step like throwing a stone might not have happened.”

There are few politicians who worry about their personal security as much as the men and women tasked with protecting them. Former Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalithaa, however, erred on the side of caution. She always wore a cape, said an officer who protected her, “and no one could tell whether there was a bulletproof jacket underneath.”

Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati, too, likes impeccable cover, but when her security officer was caught on camera wiping dust off her sandals to protect her from slipping, she felt the controversy was avoidable. However, her reliance on

**“The basic rule of VIP security is to avert danger in three steps—espionage, subversion and sabotage. This holds true for both critical establishments and individuals.”**

—D.P. Sinha,  
 former special director, IB



personal security staff was such that she expected them to be aware of her political likes and dislikes. For instance, in 2002, she bumped into a young Akhilesh Yadav and his wife, Dimple, on a flight to Delhi. The couple greeted her, but she failed to recognise Dimple. Later, she scolded her personal security officer for not telling her that the young woman was Akhilesh’s wife. She was upset that she had not blessed the new daughter-in-law of Mulayam Singh Yadav’s family.

Twenty-two years later, the dynamics of both politics and VIP security have changed. Mayawati has been relegated to a distant third in Uttar Pradesh after Akhilesh joined hands with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. The two leaders recently had to leave the stage without delivering their speeches, after a stampede-like situation at a joint rally. “It is not a personal choice,” said Dixit. “The people’s representatives have a





#### FLOWERS NOT ALLOWED

SPG officers with  
Rahul Gandhi in  
2018

JOSEKUTTY PANACKAL

responsibility to adhere to the advice of the security staff as miscreants can take advantage of a melee and launch an attack. There cannot be any shortcuts, whether you like it or not.”

There have been enough reminders of this. “When the SPG cover of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was removed [by the V.P. Singh government], even the advance security liaison was not conducted,” said Sinha. “We saw what happened in Sriperumbudur.” Rajiv and 15 others were killed, including superintendent of police T.K.S. Mohammed Iqbal, who had tried to stop the suicide bomber from entering the security cordon.

M.A. Ganapathy, former director general, NSG, said that IEDs became a weapon of choice for terrorist and insurgent outfits because of their low cost and low risk. In the times to come, he said, drones with explosive payloads would be a serious threat, and security agencies need to be well

equipped and trained to meet the challenge.

Apart from threats, uneasy Centre-state relations are a challenge for the officers on VIP duty. “VIP security becomes challenging if there is federal mistrust,” said an officer, pointing to problems in states like West Bengal and Punjab. In Punjab in January 2022, Modi was stuck in traffic for 20 minutes. “The advance security liaison for the prime minister mandates the superintendent of police and the district magistrate to assist the three agencies—the Punjab Police, the SPG and the IB—in every step laid out in the Blue Book,” said Dixit, who was one of 27 ex-IPS officers who wrote to the president demanding immediate action against errant officers.

However, there are also positive tales of officers going out of their way to protect VIPs. In 2014, the BJP sent Amit Shah as election in-charge to Uttar Pradesh for the Lok Sabha

polls. He was a state protectee and Manmohan Singh was in power in Delhi. The VIP security wing sensed that Shah was facing a high threat. It took the courage of one officer to recommend that he be made a central protectee. A few eyebrows were raised, but Shah was granted Z+ security. Shah was yet to become his party’s president.

There have also been notable lapses. In 2013, the IB dispatched hundreds of inputs to states where Modi held rallies. A few landed at the desk of the Bihar Police, which warned that Indian Mujahideen modules could make trouble during his Patna visit. The intelligence was correct and serial blasts rocked Modi’s political rally at Gandhi Maidan. Modi was safe, but red-faced central and state security officers traded charges. How to deal with overlapping jurisdictions when VIPs travel is also in the Blue Book, as then home secretary Anil Goswami pointed out when he intervened to resolve the situation.

Despite security lapses drawing criticism from the political class every now and then, VIP security duty is a coveted job. “It gives exposure, long urban tenures and an opportunity to travel and interact with political leaders around the world,” said an officer.

Manmohan Singh was known for taking care of families of officers posted with him. “There was always a personal touch,” recalled an officer. Vajpayee chatted a lot with his personal security staff and gave them sweets during festivals. “He gave gifts for family members and knew their names,” said an officer. “It was like a big family.”

In 2019, the Modi government withdrew SPG cover of Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and gave them protection by the Central Reserve Police Force. The transition was smooth, said an officer, and that the 28-year familiarity between the family and the security





# SECURITY DETAILS

## VVIPs IN INDIA

President

Vice President

Prime Minister

Foreign heads of state

## BY THE BOOKS

### BLUE BOOK

Security protocol for the president, vice president, prime minister and family members residing with them

Lists micro and macro steps to be taken to protect them and protocols for exigencies

### YELLOW BOOK

Security categorisation and arrangement protocols for protected individuals, and responsibilities of security agencies and the state police

The Union home ministry, in coordination with different intelligence agencies, issues guidelines from time to time

## THE PRESIDENT'S PROTECTION

A dedicated unit of the Delhi Police protects the president and the Rashtrapati Bhavan

## THE SPECIAL PROTECTION GROUP

The SPG guards the prime minister and his/her immediate family. It was formed in 1985

The SPG Act came into force on June 2, 1988; its provisions work in tandem with those in the Blue Book

After the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, the Act was amended to extend cover to former prime ministers and immediate family

This provision was reversed with an amendment in 2019

The SPG also provides security for the prime minister's office and communication systems, during foreign tours and also takes care of issues pertaining to the prime minister's health and well-being

## OTHER PROTECTEES

Classified as positional and threat-based security

Threat-based security can be extended to citizens who are not public servants, too, on the basis of threat perception analysis by intelligence agencies

Both types of security cover have four categories:

### Z+

Around 40 guards, in shifts

Pilot and escort vehicles

### Z

Around 30 guards, in shifts

Escort vehicle

### Y

Around 20 guards. When an escort vehicle is added, it is called Y+

All Union ministers get a minimum of Y category security and a maximum of Z+

### X

One security guard

## SOME Z+ PROTECTEES

Amit Shah, Union home minister

Rajnath Singh, defence minister

Manmohan Singh, former prime minister

L.K. Advani, former deputy prime minister

Senior opposition leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh chief minister

N. Chandrababu Naidu, former Andhra Pradesh chief minister

Mayawati, former Uttar Pradesh chief minister

## THE PROTECTORS

Personnel are drawn from central paramilitary forces, such as the Central Reserve Police Force and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, and the National Security Guard (Black Cats)

State police departments make arrangements for guarding chief ministers, ministers and MLAs as per threat perception analysis done at the state level

officers remained intact, unaffected by political exchanges over the SPG's withdrawal.

However, VIP duty did become slightly uncomfortable when private persons started demanding VIP cover. "A few years ago, there was debate," said an officer. "It was finally decided that only those private persons facing a high degree of threat can be provided central or state protection and that a fee would be charged from them."

The government has rationalised such requests and is gradually removing the elite NSG from VIP duty to focus on counterterrorism. The VIP lists are also revised from time to time.

The best takeaway for security officers in recent years came after the visit of former US president Barack Obama for the Republic Day in 2015. This was the first ever foreign visit of a US president where he would be under the open sky at an event attended by thousands for considerably long hours. The two-way advance security liaison met the demanding requirements of the US Secret Service and representatives of 40 government departments. Unusually, the Secret Service agents even walked the entire route of the Republic Day parade to get a feel of the place and its spread. And, on January 26, when Obama watched the parade, an unprecedented blanket of security facilitated the warmth and camaraderie between the two heads of state.

On May 15, then joint director (VIP security) at the Union home ministry got a note signed by Obama. "I want you to know your dedication was an important part of the progress we made," Obama wrote in the letter sent by the White House.

Two days later, Indian VIP security officers noted with joy as Obama walked under the open skies in Cuba, enjoying the rain, holding just an umbrella. ❶

TEXT NAMRATA BIJI AHUJA





# Why BJP is not contesting in Kashmir

Union Home Minister Amit Shah claims “there is no greater testament to the removal of Article 370” than the high polling percentages in the Kashmir valley. Then why is the BJP not contesting any of the three seats in the valley?

The fact is that the reading down of Article 370—the principal boast of the BJP—is the key issue in all three constituencies where the main contenders—the National Conference (NC) of the Abdullahs and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) of the Muftis—are fighting it out. Article 370 is seen as the symbol of the “identity” and “dignity” of the Valley inhabitants, as the feisty daughter of Mehbooba, Iltija, who is making her political debut, keeps emphasising. It is also seen as the guarantor of the “rights” of the Kashmiri people. Most importantly, it is seen by Kashmir’s mainstream nationalist parties as their principal shield against the separatists. The National Conference’s candidate for Srinagar, Aga Ruhullah Mehdi, a prominent Shia cleric, affirms, “For us... Article 370 was a pro-mainstream and pro-democracy argument.” That is why all candidates of the principal parties contesting, irrespective of their other differences, are committed to advocating the restoration of Article 370, however hollowed out it had become. But the BJP, for all the empty boasts of the lieutenant governor, the home minister, and the prime minister about “restoring normalcy” by diminishing insurgency and street protests, bringing in lakhs of tourists, and undertaking massive infrastructure works, is hiding behind the skirts of their “proxies”: Sajjad Lone’s People’s Conference, Altaf Bukhari’s Apni Party, and Ghulam Nabi Azad’s Democratic Progressive Azad Party, at least the latter two of which are set to lose their deposits.

The problem with the BJP is that it does not understand at all the psyche of the people of Kashmir and Ladakh and not even of the people of Jammu. Their

focus is on hindutva and what they choose to call “development”, but they do not recognise that “man does not live by bread alone”.

In any case, long before the outrage on August 5, 2019, J&K was far ahead of most states, especially the bastions of the BJP—Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh—on every indicator of economic and human development (such as education and health), and Central budgetary support to the state. Such largesse had not “bought” the Kashmiris either before 2019 or after, because while they are all, of course, seeking peace and personal security and getting better-off,

like human beings everywhere, they also seek, like human beings everywhere, honour and respect, and value above all else their “identity”, “dignity” and “rights”. Instead of bringing balm to such wounds, the BJP has turned J&K into “an open-air prison” to instill an atmosphere of fear.

They have also resorted to the colonial practice of “divide and rule”, most nakedly evidenced in their delimitation commission

irrationally joining Anantnag, the fortress of the Mufti family, to Poonch-Rajouri in Jammu over the formidable Pir Panjal range. In my view, this violates the principle of “geographic continuity” which is enshrined in clause 3 of the Delimitation Act. But, worse, the BJP have “deepened the ethnic divide” of Pahari from Gujjar and Bakerwal by granting Paharis ST status on the very eve of the election in the face of strident Gujjar-Bakerwal protests. The National Conference has retaliated by naming Mian Altaf Ahmed, a spiritual leader revered by the Gujjars, who has thrice been an MLA and whose father and grandfather have both been elected to the state assembly, as the candidate to oppose Mehbooba. She has deplored such “peer-mureed” politics, but can she successfully oppose it?

Again, the BJP is nowhere in the picture, the final proof of their politics in J&K over Article 370 having failed.





It feels like an eternity since the elections to the 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha began on April 19. But the anticipation and anxiety over what lies ahead on June 4—the day of the results—is still palpable in West Bengal.

This sentiment is particularly pronounced in the nine constituencies in southern Bengal that will go to polls on June 1. These are the urban constituencies of Dum Dum, Kolkata Uttar, Kolkata Dakshin and Jadavpur, rural seats of Mathurapur and Joynagar and those that have a mix of both—Diamond Harbour, Barasat and Basirhat.

While the BJP started out as the favourite initially, the Trinamool Congress has an edge in the last phase of the polls. Trinamool had won all the seats in 2019 and almost all assembly segments within them in 2021. Three of the Lok Sabha seats fall in South 24 Parganas district—Mathurapur, Diamond Harbour and Joynagar.

Mathurapur—reserved for the scheduled castes and with 35.57 per cent of Muslims—has become a Trinamool stronghold in the last decade. The Mamata Banerjee-led party has been increasing its winning margin ever since it first won the seat from the CPI(M) in 2009. However, its three-time MP Choudhury Mohan Jatua will be sitting it out this time because of poor health. In his place, the Trinamool has fielded Bapi Haldar against the BJP's Ashok Purkait.

Neighbouring Diamond Harbour is a prestige seat for Trinamool, as Mamata's nephew Abhishek is seeking a third term. There was a rumour that the Indian Secular Front MLA Nawsad Siddiqui could contest against him, which could have split the 39 per cent Muslim vote. But with Siddiqui stepping back and the CPI(M) and BJP fielding weak candidates, the Trinamool has an edge.

Joynagar, too, has 35 per cent Muslims. Trinamool's Pratima Mondal has been its MP since 2014. The

# SOUTH WREST

**As nine constituencies in southern Bengal go to the polls on June 1, the Trinamool Congress hopes to retain its hold**

**BY NILADRY SARKAR**

Trinamool has also held all the seven assembly segments in Joynagar since 2016. The BJP has again fielded Ashok Kandary, who had lost by more than 3 lakh votes in 2019.

What could cause a dent in the Trinamool's Muslim base in South 24 Parganas is the Calcutta High Court's order to cancel all Other Backward Classes certificates issued by the state government since 2010. The order is likely to affect Muslims. At a rally in Mathurapur, Mamata challenged the High Court's decision, calling it a conspiracy during polls.

But women hold the key in South 24 Parganas, as they outnumber male voters. Mamata has cultivated this vote bank since her railway minister days. Initiatives like special local trains for women were a hit, as are the state government's welfare programmes for women.

However, Mamata's criticism of monks associated with religious organisations helping the BJP has added a communal colour. Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have accused the Trinamool of being anti-Hindu.

"The strategy of both the parties has been to make Bengal's elections a bipolar affair to ensure the third front's vote reduces," said Subhamoy Maitra, professor at the Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

Biswanath Chakraborty, professor of political science at Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata, said that all constituencies, except Barasat, Dum Dum and Jadavpur, would see a polarised election. The three constituencies are seeing a left resurgence and therefore are less likely to vote on communal lines.

Dum Dum is seeing a three-cornered fight. Trinamool's Sougata Ray has represented Dum Dum since 2009. He is pitted against the BJP's Shilbhadra Dutta and INDIA bloc's CPI(M) candidate Sujana Chakraborty. "The BJP and the Trinamool want to [make this about] Hindu-Muslim, so that they can say the fight is between them. We want to change this," Chakraborty told THE WEEK. "We are telling people that this election is about protecting the Indian Constitution and the secular nature of our country."

But Mamata is in no mood to give up Dum Dum—she held multiple rallies and road shows for Ray.

Meanwhile, All India Forward Bloc's Sanjib Chatterjee is challenging the status quo in Barasat, where the fight is primarily between Trinamool's Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar and the BJP's Swapan Majumder. Barasat has remained with the Trinamool since 2004, with Ghosh Dastidar winning it since 2009. Given that Muslims constitute over 25 per cent of the population and scheduled castes over 21 per cent, with a significant Matua presence, Barasat was poised for a repeat of the 2019 bipolar contest. With a robust campaign targeting the BJP on issues like unemployment, inflation and privatisation, and the Trinamool on corruption and scams, Chatterjee is seen as a formidable challenger. The





SALIL BERA

**POWER WALK**  
Mamata Banerjee  
campaigning for Kakoli  
Ghosh Dastidar (in blue  
sari) in Barasat

key question is which candidate's vote share will be impacted.

In Jadavpur, the CPI(M) has fielded its young turk Srijan Bhattacharyya to take on the Trinamool's Sayani Ghosh and the BJP's Anirban Ganguly. Muslims form over 35 per cent of the population and scheduled castes over 30 per cent. The Trinamool won it in 2019 with a margin of almost three lakh votes. The BJP had gained 15.14 per cent voteshare, whereas the CPI(M) lost 15.05. Given Bhattacharyya's enthusiastic campaign and representation of a new left, the CPI(M) is hopeful of regaining the voteshare

it lost to the BJP. Ghosh hopes for the same, as it would ensure that Trinamool retains Jadavpur.

Kolkata Dakshin is another Trinamool bastion. Its Mala Roy is hoping to get a second term, with a win against the BJP's Debasree Chaudhuri and the CPI(M)'s Saira Shah Halim.

In Kolkata Uttar, the Trinamool and the BJP are locked in a tense battle. The Trinamool has fielded veteran parliamentarian Sudip Bandyopadhyay. His opponent is Tapas Roy, a Trinamool-turned-BJP leader. Experts believe Bandyopadhyay, 73,

could be sabotaged by his own partymen. "In Kolkata Uttar, Trinamool could defeat Trinamool," said political analyst Chakraborty. "Several local councillors and leaders, including Kunal Ghosh, have been speaking against Bandyopadhyay."

"Why will people even vote for him? His health is not good and he is not visible in his constituency. His own party workers will not vote for him," Roy, a five-time MLA, told THE WEEK while meeting a Trinamool leader in his office. He accused Bandyopadhyay of being a BJP person and held him responsible for the Enforcement Directorate raid at his house over alleged irregularities in civic body recruitments.

At the confluence of river deltas, Basirhat—with 25.82 per cent Muslims and 21.82 per cent scheduled castes—shares both land and water border with Bangladesh. The region has witnessed recurring communal tensions. Sandeshkhali is one of the assembly segments in Basirhat, which has been represented by the Trinamool since 2009. Given the allegations of sexual exploitation, land grab and violence against Trinamool leaders leading to a mass movement by women in Sandeshkhali, it appeared Basirhat was up for a change.

In 2019, Trinamool's Nusrat Jahan won with a margin of over three lakh votes. Political analyst Chakraborty said Trinamool's winning margin might come down to a lakh this time. The Trinamool has fielded Sk Nurul Islam, who was the MP between 2009 and 2014. The BJP has fielded Rekha Patra, one of the women protesters of the Sandeshkhali movement.

"There is no Sandeshkhali movement," Nurul Islam told THE WEEK. "The entire country has now seen the videos of how the BJP conspired to defame Bengal and our women with ₹2,000. I am 100 per cent confident of winning. I will do it with the help of our mothers and sisters." ❶



INTERVIEW

**KARTIK MAHARAJ**, head, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Beldanga branch

# MAMATA FEARS THAT I WILL TAKE HINDU VOTES TO BJP

BY NILADRY SARKAR

**E**veryone was surprised when Mamata Banerjee accused Kartik Maharaj, a monk associated with the Bharat Sevashram Sangha, of not allowing Trinamool Congress's agents to sit in some polling booths during the Lok Sabha elections and of inciting communal violence in Murshidabad.

Kartik Maharaj, formally Swami Pradiptananda, heads the Bharat Sevashram Sangha's branch in Beldanga in Murshidabad. The socioreligious charitable organisation founded by Acharya Swami Pranavanandaji in 1917 educates disadvantaged children, provides health care services, conducts tribal welfare and rural development programmes, and spreads spiritual awareness.

Pradiptananda joined the Bharat Sevashram Sangha as a teenager. As the chief of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha's Beldanga branch, he runs 12 schools, a hostel for tribal children and a hospital. He has been a flag-bearer of aggressive hindutva in Bengal and has a close relationship with the RSS and the Vishva Hindu Parishad. In an interview, he explains why Mamata attacked him and why he wants Hindus to take up arms. Excerpts:

**Q/ Why did Mamata Banerjee suddenly attack you?**

**A/** It was not sudden. It was calculated. We organised India's first Lokkho Kanthe Gita Path [one lakh people reading the Gita] in Kolkata and I was the president [of the organising committee]. The response was huge, and more than a lakh people registered. She was against it. We invited her to the event. We invited the prime minister as well.

I also organised two kumbh melas in Nadia district. I have organised several protests as well. One at the Raj Bhavan against [Trinamool leader] Mahua Moitra for insulting

our gods and goddesses. Another was against putting the Trinamool flag in the hands of a Durga idol. [BJP leader] Suvendu Adhikari was also present at the protest.

Also, when MLA Humayun Kabir said, 'We [Muslims] are 70 per cent [in Murshidabad district] and there are 30 per cent Hindus, so we can kill and throw them in the Bhagirathi,' I called for a protest. (Kabir, Trinamool leader and Bharatpur MLA, said if he could not throw BJP supporters into the Bhagirathi in two hours, he would leave politics). Thousands of people of Baharampur [in Murshidabad], especially the youth, walked with me.

There I asked why he had not been asked to apologise. For these reasons Mamata Banerjee attacked me. She thinks that given my identity and the respect I command among Hindus, I could be a contender in West Bengal. She fears that because of Kartik Maharaj Hindu votes would go to the BJP, which is true.

**Q/ Did you force Trinamool agents out of any booth in Baharampur during the polling?**

**A/** It is laughable that Mamata said that. She is a chief minister. The police is under her control. If any person in any booth complained against me, then she could have sent the police. She didn't do that because it is a lie.

**Q/ Mamata has accused you of inciting riots in Rejinagar in**



SALIL BERA



**Murshidabad during the election.**

**A/** I have been staying in the Murshidabad district for 40 years. The police must have had notes about me if I were a rioter. If I was a communal person, the social work that I have been doing irrespective of caste, class, religion and political parties would have been affected, and Muslims would have complained against me. If the chief minister has reports against me, she can arrest me.

**Q/ You have worked with the Trinamool as well, especially with Suwendu Adhikari, who is now a BJP leader. Do you share a rapport with other Trinamool leaders?**

**A/** Suwendu Adhikari still visits my ashram. Trinamool's Shaoni Singha Roy [former Murshidabad MLA] visits. Apurba Sarkar [Trinamool MLA from Kandi] is associated with me and visits the ashram.

**Q/ Do you have association with any**

**other political leaders?**

**A/** The Congress's Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is a visitor. He has given donation to the ashram from his MPLAD fund. Adhikari, when he was with the Trinamool and minister of irrigation, had given money. Sukanta Majumdar and Dilip Ghosh have also visited. During the time of the CPI(M), Benoy Chowdhury allotted 10 bigha land adjacent to the ashram.

**Q/ You often praise Prime Minister Narendra Modi. What do you like about him?**

**A/** We have got a prime minister who had only water for 11 days during the inauguration of the Ram Mandir [in Ayodhya]. He slept on the floor like a *tapaswi*. He is like Rajarshi Janak. Someone can call him a 420 (referring to Mamata's statement against Modi ki guarantee) and may want to arrest him. But it is embarrassing that a chief minister can say this about the prime minister. That is her education and mentality. I am an Indian monk and I like those who contribute to India's welfare, tradition and religion.

**Q/ There are videos of many of your provocative speeches. You have called Hindus to pick up arms against a minority community. Don't you think these speeches hurt your image as a monk and social worker?**

**A/** I have not said anything like that. The speech is there on YouTube, please see it. I said that [Hindu] idols were being destroyed at several places. An idol of Buri Maa was broken in Beldanga [in Murshidabad]. I asked, 'Would you remain silent if they break our idols? As a son what would you do if your mother is attacked? If we are not hypocrites, we must behead those who destroy the idols we worship like our mothers.'

**Q/ Are you associated with the RSS or any of its offshoots?**

**A/** Bharat Sevashram Sangha is for *Bharatiya* tradition and *Bharatiya* religion. Some events of the RSS take place here, such as training programmes where school teachers participate. They hire our hall. There is also Vishva Hindu Parishad. It is normal that Hindu organisations come to me. 🇮🇳





# TALKING POINT

**By voting in large numbers, the people of Kashmir have expressed their readiness to resolve pressing issues peacefully**

BY TARIQ BHAT

**T**he Lok Sabha elections marked the first major political exercise in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 and the reorganisation of the state into two Union territories. The elections got over with the sixth phase of polling on May 25. In Kashmir, the turnout went up to 58 per cent, surpassing the previous highest of 49 per cent in 2014.

“It is the highest turnout for these five constituencies in the last 40 years,” said chief electoral officer P.K. Pole. It marks the end of the election boycott in Kashmir since the eruption of militancy in the late 1980s, paving the way for greater participation of people and separatist groups in the assembly elections later this year.

The three constituencies in Kashmir—Srinagar, Baramulla and Anantnag-Rajouri—saw a record turnout. Srinagar, known for poll boycotts, recorded 38 per cent, the highest in 25 years. In Baramulla, 59 per cent of voters cast their ballots, beating 46.65 per cent in 1996.

In 2019, when Rajouri and Poonch were not part of the Anantnag Lok Sabha constituency, voter participation stood at a mere 8.9 per cent. The Delimitation Commission expanded the constituency’s boundaries across the Pir Panjal to include Jammu’s Rajouri and Poonch, in 2022. These areas are largely inhabited by the Pahari community, tribal Gujjars and Bakerwals. On May 25, voter turnout

here climbed up to 54.3 per cent.

The surge in turnout can be attributed to several factors. There has been a political void because of the absence of a representative government following the collapse of the PDP-BJP alliance in June 2018. Second, there is a strong feeling of disempowerment among the people following the revocation of Article 370. Finally, the influence of separatist groups advocating for election boycott has waned.

Across Kashmir, many people said Article 370 was a significant reason for them to vote. At Fateh Kadal in downtown Srinagar, a young voter said he voted for the first time to express his opposition to the abrogation of Article 370. “By nullifying Article 370, they attacked our identity,” he said. “Now our future is not safe. Anybody from outside can apply for jobs in Kashmir.”

A few kilometres away at Batamallu, Bilal Ahmed, a shopkeeper, said he was voting for the first time in his life. “I am 45 and I voted for the first time to show my anger against the abrogation of Article 370 and the imposition of new laws,” he said. “I also urged my mother to vote, and she did, after several decades.”

Apart from the issue of Article 370, voters are also worried about inflation, unemployment and the lack of political agency to seek redressal of their problems. For Mushtaq Ahmed, 48, a farmer from Khan Sahib in Budgam, which is part of the Srinagar

BILAL BHADUR

## CHANGING TIMES

Women queue up to vote in Budgam



Lok Sabha constituency, the need for a bridge over the stream in his village, apart from high electricity tariffs and employment for educated youth seemed bigger motivations to vote. “This is the second time I am casting my vote,” he said. In the neighbouring village of Gurwait, Farhana Jan said she voted so that government schemes for young women reached her village, too. “Right now, there is no one we can approach for help,” she said.

As the focus shifted to the Baramulla constituency on May 20, Sopore, a separatist stronghold known for its history of boycotting elections, experienced a significant shift, with voter turnout exceeding 44 per cent, a ten-fold increase compared with the 2019 elections.

Some people expressed their motivation to vote as a means to advocate for the release of incarcerated individuals. Several young voters voiced





**Across Kashmir, many people said the abrogation of Article 370 was a significant reason for them to vote.**

their support for Awami Ittehad Party leader Engineer Rashid, who was running for office from jail. Rashid was arrested by the National Investigation Agency in 2019 on charges of money-laundering. His two sons, Asrar Rashid and Abrar Rashid, led an emotionally charged campaign on his behalf, eliciting sympathy from many, particularly the youth.

Voting in Anantnag-Rajouri, the last of the five Lok Sabha constituencies, was held on May 25. Showkat Ahmed Ganie, a voter from Mattan, expressed concerns over the revocation of Article 370, highlighting its impact on the identity of the people. "It is the second time in my life I have come to vote. The first time I voted was in 1987," he said.

At Damhal Hanji Pora in Kulgam, Yasmin Ganai said Kashmiris did not have anyone to discuss their problems with. "There is growing unemployment and youth are falling

prey to drug addiction. We want our MPs and government so that we can talk to them about our problems," she said. Friends Fayaz Ahmed and Muhammad Akram said issues related to livelihood and security were their main motivations. "I am getting a huge power bill that I can't afford to pay," said Ahmed. "There is the issue of security also. When someone is arrested, we have no one to turn to for help."

What made this election even more distinct was the participation of separatists, like Mukhtar Waza. A member of the Hurriyat Conference, Waza said he voted to strengthen democracy. "The Hurriyat Conference believes in peace. All issues are resolved in Parliament and assembly and by holding talks across a table," he said.

The development comes in the wake of members of the banned Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), one of Kashmir's

prominent socio-religious organisations, actively participating in the electoral process. The JeI expressed its willingness to contest the forthcoming assembly polls if the Centre lifts the ban on the organisation. "At present, the Jamaat is a banned outfit and cannot participate in elections. We cannot even participate in social activities," said senior JeI leader Ghulam Qadir Wani who voted in his hometown Pulwama in south Kashmir. "We are talking to the Central government. We want to get this ban lifted so that we can play our role in society." ❶

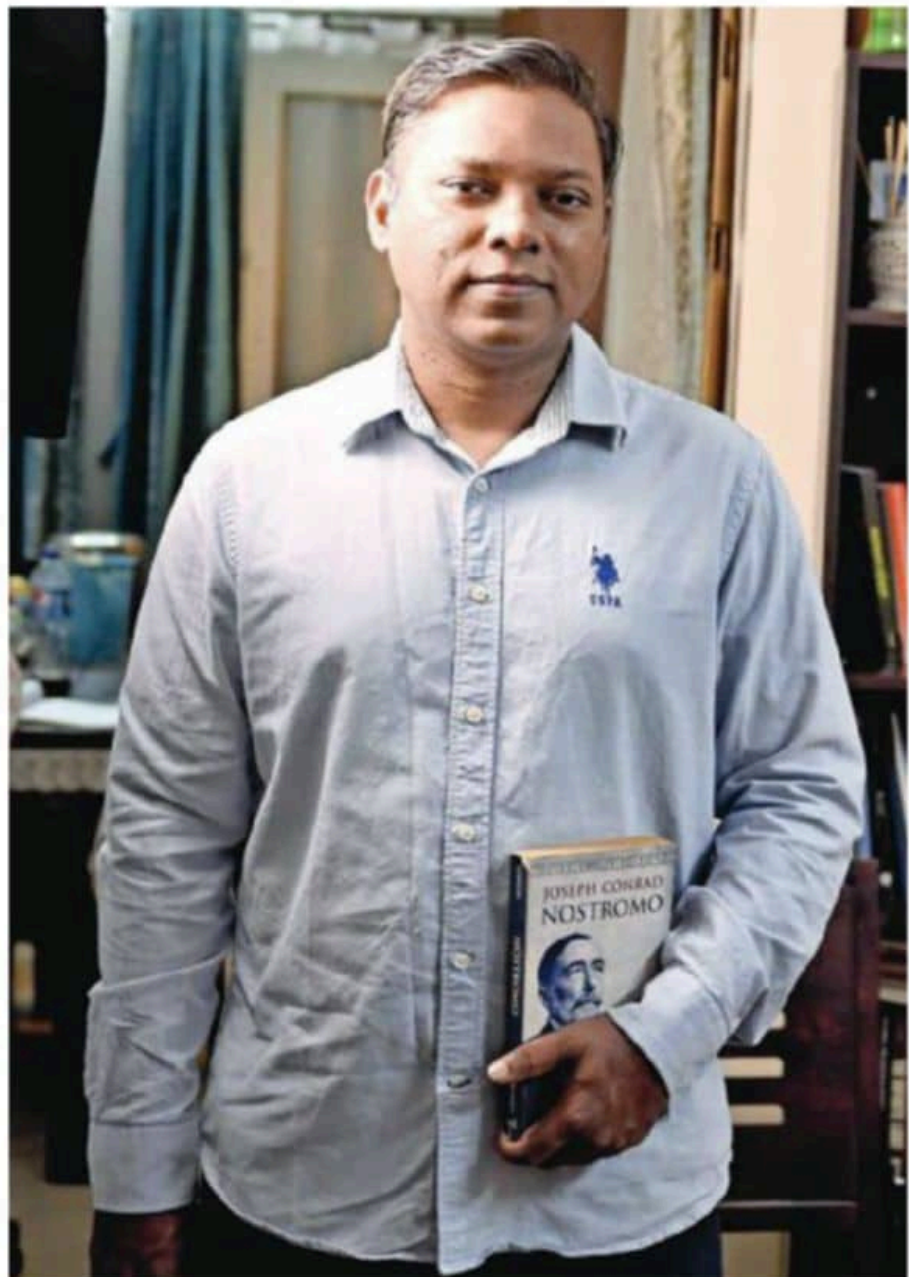


# BABU BOOM

Meet bureaucrats who took the political plunge

BY PRATUL SHARMA

BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA



KRITAJNA NAIK

Sasikanth Senthil

**T**aranjit Singh Sandhu comes from an illustrious lineage. His grandfather Teja Singh Samundri was a prominent figure in the gurdwara reform movement, and his father, Bishan Singh, was an eminent educationist from Amritsar. A Stephanian, Sandhu spent 36 years as a career diplomat, the last four as the US ambassador. He is now contesting from Amritsar on a BJP ticket.

Unlike Arun Jaitley and Hardeep Puri, who lost the 2014 and 2019 polls from Amritsar despite the Modi wave, apparently owing to their “outsider” tag, Sandhu ticks all the boxes. He leverages his family’s past, his Jat Sikh caste and Punjab’s Majha accent to present himself as a son of the soil.

“When I joined the services, I didn’t have any plans to join politics,” said Sandhu. “I was inspired and encouraged to join after my retirement. I have worked 10 years with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. My focus is very clear: the situation in Amritsar is grave. Somebody needs to be a good

bridge for the Centre’s schemes to come to Amritsar and attract global investments.”

Sandhu is among many former civil servants cutting their teeth in politics. While he completed his tenure before joining the BJP, many others this season have left the services midway to prepare for this challenging role.

Take, for instance, former IAS officer Parampal Kaur Sidhu, who resigned just days ahead of being given a BJP ticket from Bathinda. She is pitted against sitting MP and Akali Dal leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal.

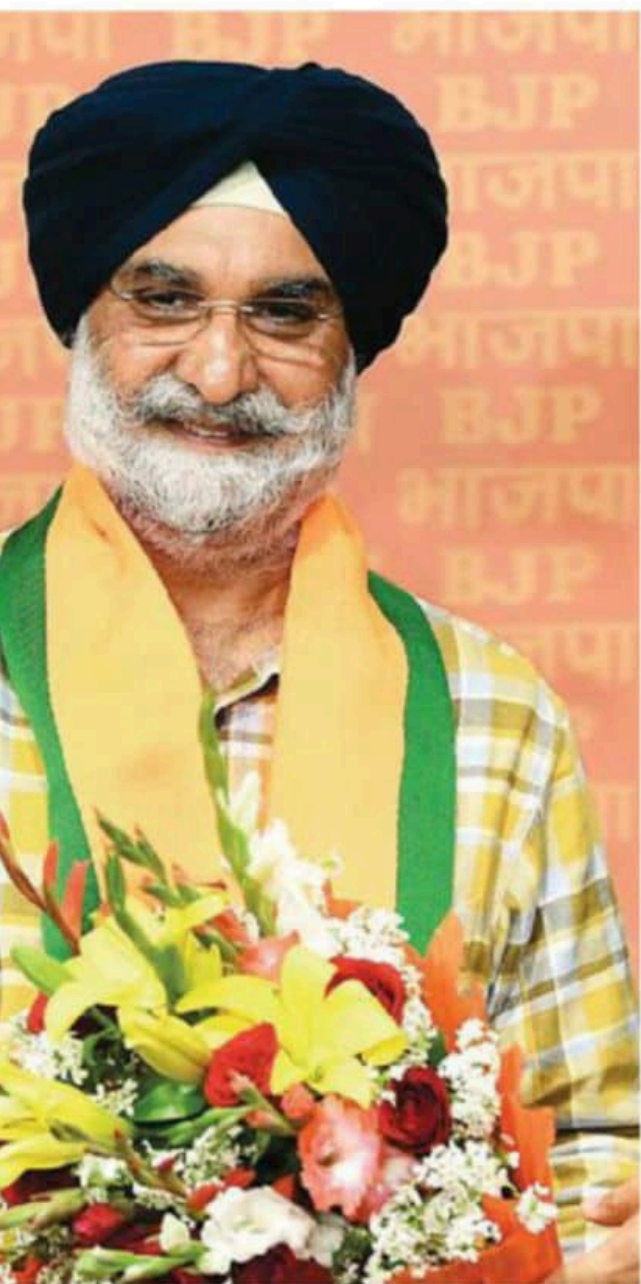
Former IPS officer K. Annamalai left the services in 2019. This Lok Sabha polls, he contested from Coimbatore on a BJP ticket. As BJP’s Tamil Nadu unit chief, he helped the saffron party gain a foothold in the Dravidian terrain.

While Modi’s leadership inspired Annamalai, fellow Tamilian Sasikanth Senthil left the civil services, citing the “majoritarian” policies of the government, to take on a political

role. He was part of the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests and other movements. He later joined the Congress and managed its war room in Delhi till he was asked to contest the Lok Sabha polls from Tiruvallur, his native place. He was chairman of the party’s Karnataka war room and was instrumental in setting up war rooms in Rajasthan and Telangana during the assembly polls in 2023. “I managed 10 elections from the other side (as a civil servant) and five from this side. It has been a rewarding experience,” said Senthil.

Another notable figure is Tamilian IAS officer V.K. Pandian of the Odisha cadre, who helmed Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik’s campaign during the simultaneous assembly and Lok Sabha polls in the state. Despite the opposition targeting his Tamil roots, Pandian—with his two decades experience as a civil servant in Odisha, including 12 years with Patnaik—has earned his stripes. Well-versed in Odia and married to an Odia IAS officer, Pandian aims to seamlessly





Taranjit Singh Sandhu



V.K. Pandian

SANJAY AHLAWAT

transition into his new role.

He is not the only babu-turned-neta in Odisha. Sitting MP and former IAS officer Aparajita Sarangi is seeking another term from Bhubaneswar on a BJP ticket. While she hails from Bihar, she is married to an IAS officer from Odisha and prides herself as the daughter-in-law of the state. In Puri, the BJD has fielded former Mumbai Police commissioner Arup Patnaik, who had lost to Sarangi in 2019.

Former Assam-cadre IPS officer Anand Mishra, known for his work in anti-insurgency and anti-mafia operations, quit the services to do “public service” and hoped to contest on a BJP ticket. When that did not materialise, he jumped into the fray as an independent candidate from Bihar’s Buxar. The seat, earlier held by minister of state Ashwini Choubey, was given to Mithilesh Tiwari by the BJP. With Mishra and Tiwari both being Brahmins, it will be a tough fight.

Another independent candidate is Maithili Sharan Gupt, who retired as special director general of Madhya

Pradesh police. She contested from Bhopal with a promise to ensure a crime-free India, where FIRs will be registered online, chargesheets in 15 days, and justice delivered in 30 days.

In Bengal, the Trinamool Congress has fielded former IPS officer Prasun Banerjee from the Malda North seat. Banerjee wears several hats, including that of an actor and writer.

In Karnataka, meanwhile, the Congress has fielded former IAS officer G. Kumar Naik from Raichur, the district he served as a deputy commissioner.

Uttar Pradesh is another favourite hunting ground for bureaucrats. In the last assembly polls, two former IPS officers, Rajeshwar Singh and Asim Arun, were elected, and the latter is a minister in Yogi Adityanath’s cabinet. This Lok Sabha polls, the BJP has fielded Saket Mishra, who could have been an IPS officer but became an investment banker, from Shravasti. Saket is the son of Nripendra Mishra, former principal secretary to Modi and the chairman of the Ram

Temple construction committee. Saket was earlier nominated to the upper house in the state.

So what lures these bureaucrats to politics? “In services, we are bound by the service rules and cannot be political,” said Senthil. “I feel the country is going through an ideological battle, and people who understand it need to raise their voice if something is not right, hence the political plunge by some.” Pandian argued that politics gave him much more freedom to reach out to people.

However, shouldn’t there be a cooling-off period before bureaucrats take up political assignments?

“There is no law against civil servants contesting elections and joining politics,” said former Union secretary Anil Swarup, who has penned books like *Encounters with Politicians* and *Ethical Dilemmas of a Civil Servant*. “The tragedy is that some of them do so even before quitting the services and become political. It would be ideal if there was a cooling-off period.”

Senthil disagreed, saying that everyone has the right to join politics and do public service in a democracy. “If there is quid pro quo, then it is problematic,” he said. “Do you stop any other professional from doing public service? Is there a waiting period for a doctor or a lawyer?”

Agreed Sandhu and Pandian. “Whoever has commitment and values to contribute to society in a democratic process, either through bureaucratic processes, politics, NGOs, or social services, should be free to do so,” said Pandian.

But do bureaucrats make better politicians or ministers?

Senthil said he has much more respect for politicians who have risen through the ranks. “They are much more grounded,” he said. “They are way more intelligent and knowledgeable. We may have some edge in understanding theory, but that’s about it. It then boils down to individuals.” ①



# If the BJP is to put dem then I am

**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW**

**ARVIND KEJRIWAL,**  
DELHI CHIEF MINISTER AND  
AAM AADMI PARTY NATIONAL CONVENER

**BY SONI MISHRA**

PHOTO REUTERS; IMAGING BINESH SREEDHARAN





# determined democracy in jail, determined to run democracy from jail

**O**n May 11, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal arrived at the Aam Aadmi Party's office in the national capital to a roaring welcome by party leaders and workers. Just the previous evening, he had walked out of Tihar Jail after the Supreme Court granted him interim bail for 21 days in a case relating to his government's now scrapped liquor policy. The party workers applauded each and every line he uttered that day. His speech, a no-holds-barred attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party, set the tone for his campaign for the Lok Sabha elections.

During the speech, a party worker said, "*kal shaam aandhi aayi thi*" (there was a storm last evening). Kejriwal could not hear him properly. Party workers then repeated the line in a chorus. He smiled broadly. A severe thunderstorm had hit Delhi the previous evening, the strong winds uprooting trees and causing flight delays and

cancellations. But, the storm they were referring to was Kejriwal.

That very day, Kejriwal hit the ground running—out of jail, straight into electioneering. He has been at his aggressive best during his campaign, unflinching in his attack on Modi and the BJP.

Amid the punishing campaign schedule, Kejriwal gave a detailed interview to THE WEEK. He exuded confidence that the INDIA bloc would form the next government by winning more than 300 seats. He said that while the focus of the INDIA parties was on issues such as unemployment and price rise, Modi had not even uttered these words.

Kejriwal spoke in detail about his time in jail, saying he was housed alone in a cell and that all his movements were monitored 24x7 through CCTV feed. He claimed the prime minister's office, too, monitored the live stream. He said every attempt was made to break him psychologically and emotionally.

He described the AAP as the most persecuted



political party in India's history, and claimed that the sole purpose of the excise policy case was to arrest all the party leaders and crush the party.

On the allegations made by party colleague Swati Maliwal, MP, that she was beaten up by his aide Bibhav Kumar in the chief minister's residence, he said it would not be appropriate for him to comment since the matter was sub judice. But, he said he expected the police to carry out a fair investigation.

About the scenario post June 4, he said he harboured no interest in becoming prime minister. Excerpts:

**Q/ Is INDIA bloc forming the next government?**

**A/** INDIA alliance will win for three reasons. One, for the first time, we are seeing that the *aam aadmi* (common man) is saying PM Modi has become a *tanashah* (dictator). Opposition parties have been saying this, but in the run up to the elections, the country saw two elected chief ministers being arrested in fake cases, the Congress party's accounts were frozen, Uddhav ji's and Pawar ji's parties were broken up and their names and party symbols stolen. People are witnessing democracy being systematically destroyed by the BJP. They have realised that if the BJP is not stopped, they will arrest all opposition leaders: Mamata didi, Stalin sahab, Tejashwi Yadav, Uddhav Thackeray, Sharad Pawar, Rahul Gandhi. We will become a one nation, one leader system.

Second, there is a widespread sentiment that the prime minister has no answers to issues afflicting the masses. Two issues on top of the mind for people are inflation and unemployment. The INDIA alliance has announced several programmes that directly address these concerns. But the prime minister does not even utter these words. He

**INDIA UNITED**

INDIA bloc leaders at an event in Mumbai; Kejriwal says the alliance will win 300 seats



says Sharad Pawar is a *bhatakti aatma* (wandering soul), Uddhav Thackeray is a *nakli santaan* (fake heir), the Congress will steal your *mangalsutra*, your buffalo, etc. He recently claimed he did not have a biological birth but has descended from God. How can people trust such a person?

Third, the BJP is not fighting as a single cohesive unit. The BJP and the RSS are not campaigning together. [BJP president] Nadda ji has said he does not need the RSS. There is an ugly succession battle going on in the BJP right now. Next year, PM Modi will retire since he turns 75, and [Union Home Minister] Amit Shah will take his place. No other BJP leader is happy with this, so they are being sidelined one by one, like Vasundhara Raje, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Manohar Lal Khattar. Next, Yogi Adityanath will be removed as chief minister in a couple of months. Everyone knows this.

**Q/ How many seats is the INDIA group winning?**

**A/** I am optimistic about the alliance securing around 300 seats and forming a stable government. The BJP will be reduced to under 220 seats.

**Q/ Could the sentiment of the Congress-AAP tie-up percolate down to the party workers?**

**A/** We formed an alliance in Delhi, Haryana, Gujarat, Goa and Chandigarh. In Delhi, there were differences initially but the leaders in both our teams have done an excellent job to align our cadre and run a coordinated campaign. Over the last two weeks, I have campaigned across the seven seats of Delhi and witnessed an upsurge of support for our alliance. If you had asked me a few months ago, I would have said maybe we will win one or two seats. But, after I came out on interim bail and campaigned, I saw just how angry people are against the BJP for jailing me in a false case. The





alliance was able to harness this collective feeling on the ground.

**Q/ Why did we not see you and Congress leaders campaign together in Delhi?**

**A/** It was unintentional. I campaigned for Congress candidates in Delhi, and their leaders campaigned for our candidates. I could not campaign with senior Congress leaders because of scheduling conflicts. I had only 20 days to campaign and I had to travel across the nation. But our campaigns were coordinated at the top.

**Q/ Would this alliance continue in the assembly elections in Delhi?**

**A/** Our current focus is only on saving our country from dictatorship and forming the INDIA alliance government on June 4.

**Q/ Your party colleague Swati Maliwal has alleged that she was beaten up inside the chief**

**minister's residence by your aide Bibhav Kumar, and that you were in the house at the time. Your comments.**

**A/** Since the matter is currently sub judice and under investigation, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on it. I was not present at the scene. There are two versions that have come out—one of Swati Maliwal and the other of Bibhav Kumar. I expect the police to carry out a fair investigation of both these versions and determine the truth.

**Q/ You were in jail for almost two months. Could you share what the time in jail was like?**

**A/** My time in jail was challenging. Every attempt was made to psychologically and emotionally break me. I was housed alone in a cell, without any inmates around me. The entire barrack was emptied out so that I could not interact with anyone. All my movements, including what time I ate, what I read, and what time I woke up to

go to the bathroom, was recorded by CCTVs inside my cell. You can imagine how it is like when someone is watching you constantly for 24 hours. The prison officials would tell me there were 13 officers who were viewing live streams of my jail cell, including [at] the PMO. They thought I will break, I will feel humiliated and my resolve to continue fighting will end. But, I turned to the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayan and Indian history for inspiration. I read about how Bhagat Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru and others spent several years in jail with no hope of ever seeing justice being done. They were fighting to free India, I am fighting to save India.

The jail administration did not even afford me the courtesy of meeting with my wife or Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann in person. We would meet from across a physical barrier and talk on the phone. No political prisoner ever in Tihar Jail had to suffer this humiliation. The jail manual permits



physical meetings for those with good behaviour, but I was denied this basic courtesy.

**Q/ What were your major concerns when you were in jail?**

**A/** My only concern was for the people of Delhi and ensuring the programmes of my government continued smoothly. Look, I am a three-time elected chief minister, voted in with over 55 per cent of the votes. I have taken an oath on the Constitution to serve the people of Delhi and fulfil my promises to them. Just because the BJP cannot defeat me in elections, they decided to arrest me in a false case without any evidence or any court pronouncing me guilty. They thought I would resign and our government would fall. But they were wrong. If the BJP is determined to put democracy in jail, then I am determined to run democracy from jail.

**Q/ Your party colleagues and family said you were not provided proper health care, and you were not given insulin.**

**A/** Yes, they did not allow me to take insulin for 15 days which was most bizarre. I have been a severe diabetic for the last 20 years and have been taking 54 units of insulin daily for the last 10 years. Once my sugar levels crossed 300 inside the prison, I begged them for insulin, but was repeatedly told: 'We are monitoring, we will decide.' It was only after the party made a big issue out of it and we moved the courts that I was allowed insulin. I do not understand what their intention may have been.

**Q/ The Enforcement Directorate claimed in court that you consumed mangoes to spike your sugar level.**

**A/** Such pathetic attempts to malign me have only created more anger against the BJP. My diet was pre-

SHUTTERSTOCK



approved and no changes were made to it. My wife sent me *aloo puri* one day as *prashad* for Navratri, and they made that a big issue. It is very sad that the BJP has fallen to such a low level in their discourse.

**Q/ The AAP calls the interim bail a victory of truth. But the courts are still hearing the excise policy case and have not yet given a clean-chit to the AAP leaders named in the case.**

**A/** While granting me interim bail, the honourable Supreme Court upheld my right to campaign in the elections. It also questioned the timing of my arrest and how it came right after the Lok Sabha elections were announced, even though the probe into the case [has been] going on for one and a half years. We are confident that eventually truth will triumph. The entire nation knows the reality of the Delhi liquor case. Not a single piece of evidence or rupee has been recovered. Recently, even PM Modi admitted in an interview that they have no evidence or recovery of money in this case because I am an '*anubhavi chor*'

(experienced thief). I was shocked the prime minister is openly admitting it.

Is this how the justice system should work? Earlier, if there was an FIR against someone, investigation would first happen, charge-sheet would be filed, trial would be conducted and once someone was declared guilty, only then would they be arrested. But the Modi government has amended the PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) to give the ED extraordinary powers to arrest political opponents like me immediately after filing the FIR. Investigation, trial and conviction can happen after 10 or 20 years.

**Q/ A question often asked is why you did not resign as chief minister after your arrest.**

**A/** Since 2014, the BJP has tried every trick in its playbook to destroy the AAP, but people have reposed faith in our '*kaam ki rajneeti*' (politics of getting work done) and rejected the BJP's politics of hate and division. Now, the BJP has accepted they cannot defeat the AAP in elections in Delhi, so they are trying to capture power by jailing me





## WELFARE STATE

A mohalla clinic; Kejriwal says the AAP gave the country a new governance model

## OUR INTEGRITY GIVES US THE COURAGE TO FIGHT THE DICTATORSHIP AND REJECT THE BJP'S WASHING MACHINE POLITICS.

As an MLA I can become a minister and chief minister. Since I have been jailed without trial or conviction, we will approach the court to provide me with the resources to function from jail. I must be permitted to carry out my constitutional duties. Questions of ethics should be asked of the BJP for imprisoning an

elected chief minister without trial or conviction. It is tantamount to imprisoning democracy.

**Q/ Some of your Rajya Sabha members were absent when your party hit the streets to protest against your arrest.**

**A/** The BJP is spreading these rumours only because it has no other electoral issue left. I can make a list of 30 BJP leaders—L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Vasundhara Raje, etc—who did not ask for votes for the BJP in this election. All our leaders are performing their duties and if some of them are busy elsewhere, it is an internal matter of our party.

in a false case. If I resign, tomorrow they will arrest Mamata *didi*, Stalin *sahab*, Bhagwant Mann in false cases, too, and demand their resignations. Is this how a democracy functions? This is pure *goondagardi* (hooliganism). This happens only in dictatorships.

**Q/ Issues of ethics as well as practicality have been raised though.**

**A/** The Constitution places no bar on me continuing as chief minister. Someone went to the Supreme Court seeking my removal as chief minister, but they were told the court cannot do that. I have not been convicted of any crime, so I can fight and become an MLA.

**Q/ Your critics say you have come a long way from your NGO days and that power has corrupted you.**

**A/** My biggest certificate of honesty has come from the intense persecution the AAP has faced in its 10 years of existence. We might very well be the most persecuted political party in Indian history. All the Central government agencies combined have launched more than 250 cases against our leaders. Over 130 of these cases have completed trial in courts, all resulting in acquittals. In many cases, the courts have cleared us while reprimanding the agencies. Had I been corrupt, I would have joined the BJP like countless others under pressure from the ED and the CBI. Our integrity gives us the courage to fight the dictatorship and reject the BJP's washing machine politics. Our journey has given the country a new governance model where world-class government schools, clinics, hospitals, free and 24x7 power supply, and free buses for women are being demanded by all Indians now. That is why we have emerged as India's fastest growing party despite all odds and became a national party within 10 years.

**Q/ Your interim bail gets over on June 1. How do you view your imminent return to jail?**

**A/** Being jailed by the BJP because I stood up to save the country from dictatorship is part of my political struggle. I am prepared to endure the consequences of challenging the BJP. If our freedom fighters could endure jail for decades to ensure our country's freedom, I am willing to endure it for a few months to save our democracy. Sooner or later, I am certain truth will triumph and all of us—me, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain—will come out.

**Q/ Are you worried you could be**



**in jail for a long time? Assembly polls in Delhi are not far off.**

**A/** Let them keep me in jail and see how Delhi responds. We will win all 70 seats.

**Q/ PM Modi says he has acted against the corrupt and will double down on action against the corrupt.**

**A/** People have begun to openly laugh at such claims now. PM Modi goes to Maharashtra, says Ajit Pawar has done a ₹70,000 crore scam, and the next day he makes him his government's deputy chief minister. He says Ashok Chavan swindled money of widows of Army jawans, but next day he gives him a ticket to the Rajya Sabha. There are several such products of the BJP's washing machine politics. PM Modi's singular achievement in the last 10 years has been to collect the most corrupt individuals across the country and get them to join the BJP. Now, the details of the ₹8,000 crore electoral bond scam have also come out.

**Q/ The AAP has been named as an accused in the excise policy case.**

**A/** Like I said, the ED's sole intention in this fake investigation was to frame the AAP, arrest its top leaders and crush the party. The BJP sees the AAP as the biggest threat and has deployed the ED and the CBI to ensure the AAP is finished before it grows too large. I can only tell the BJP and PM Modi this: You can go to any extent to crush Kejriwal, but you will not be able to crush the idea of the AAP. The AAP is no longer a party of four people, it resides in the hearts of crores of people across the country. You can finish off one Kejriwal, but the country will produce 100 more Kejriwals.

**Q/ You said PM Modi is seeking votes to make Amit Shah the prime minister because he will retire at 75. The BJP says Modi**

**will continue to be the prime minister.**

**A/** I am going only by what Modi ji had said when he retired other tall BJP leaders like L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Anandiben Patel and Sumitra Mahajan. I am certain Modi ji will follow his own rule, and not say that he cooked up this rule only to retire Advani, Joshi and others. Besides, ever since I said this, Modi ji has not come out and denied it. Only the leaders in his coterie have denied it.

**Q/ Sunita Kejriwal stepped in while you were in jail. Will we see her playing a more active role politically, and contest elections?**

**A/** My wife has been my pillar of support. I am very fortunate to have a life partner like her. She has stood by me through thick and thin. Back in 2000, when I decided to leave my IRS job and work in the slums of Sundar Nagari for 10 years, she supported me. One can only imagine what she must have felt when her husband quit a secure government job. Similarly, when they put me behind bars, she bravely stepped up as a family member. She would visit me in jail, and I would inquire about the well-being of the people of Delhi. I would then give her messages that she would communicate outside. She was my link to the world outside. She has no interest in fighting elections or being active in public life.

**Q/ What will be the priority areas for the INDIA bloc if it were to come to power?**

**A/** The first priority will be to undo the damage done by the current authoritarian regime to our democracy. Today, every institution that protects our democracy has been compromised. The Election Commission, the ED, the CBI, the IT [department], the Comptroller and Auditor General, etc, all dance to



the tune of only one party, one leader. Even the media and the judiciary are under a lot of pressure. Our first step will be to replace this rule by fear with the rule of law, and restore the primacy of the Constitution. Next, we will draw up a list of our collective development priorities and start working on them, starting with inflation and unemployment.

**Q/ You announced 10 guarantees. Have you discussed them with your allies?**

**A/** Our 10 guarantees are a roadmap for building a strong and modern India, where every person has opportunities to prosper and live a dignified life. We have promised 24-hour power supply, good education, free health care that is not dependent on insurance schemes, freedom to the Indian Army to retrieve Indian territory occupied by China, scrapping the Agniveer scheme that has hurt the morale of our armed forces, fixing MSP (minimum support price) for crops according to the Swaminathan Commission report, two crore jobs annually, ease





**SUNITA (IN PIC) WAS MY LINK TO THE WORLD OUTSIDE. SHE HAS NO INTEREST IN FIGHTING ELECTIONS OR BEING ACTIVE IN PUBLIC LIFE.**

KRITAJNA NAIK

of doing business for traders, full statehood for Delhi, and destroying the BJP's washing machine. I am certain all INDIA alliance partners share these priorities. The AAP is a strong pillar of the alliance and it is my guarantee that when INDIA alliance forms the government on June 4, we will collectively deliver upon these guarantees.

**Q/ Full statehood for Delhi gains significance in the backdrop of the confrontation between the lieutenant governor and your government.**

**A/** Yes, full statehood is one of our 10 guarantees and the topmost demand of the 2.5 crore people of Delhi. They are tired of an unelected individual calling the shots over their lives, while their elected chief minister is rendered powerless. I am sure all INDIA alliance partners will support us on this.

**Q/ Your political opponents have questioned the financial viability of the schemes promised by the INDIA bloc.**

**A/** They are least qualified to talk about fiscal prudence. Over the last 10 years, the Modi government has pushed the country into a spiral of debt. The total debt on the country after 67 years of independence in 2014 was ₹55 lakh crore. In just 10 years, the Modi government added ₹150 crore debt to bring it to ₹205 lakh crore. They accuse us of distributing revdis to the poor and middle classes, but they have been distributing halwa to their billionaire friends by writing off loans worth ₹15 lakh crore and announcing corporate tax cuts worth ₹25,000 crore every year. In contrast, my government in Delhi has the distinction of running a surplus budget for the last nine years while providing many amenities. So, I know what I am promising.

**Q/ Would the electoral bonds scheme be probed?**

**A/** I have no doubt that the electoral bonds scheme is the biggest scam in Indian history. In fact, it is not one scam, it is a scam of scams—every donation of the ₹8,000 crore

amassed by the BJP through electoral bonds has happened against a quid pro quo. One category of scams is '*Chanda do, ED-CBI se bail pao*' (donate, get bail from the ED-CBI). Over Rs2,700 crore of electoral bonds were given by

companies that are facing CBI, ED or IT probes. Another category is '*Chanda do, dhandalo*' (donate, get business). Thousands of crores have been donated by companies that received government contracts. The BJP institutionalised corruption through the scheme. When the INDIA government is formed on June 4, the first corruption investigation that will be launched is against the electoral bond scam.

**Q/ Are you amenable to former Congress president Rahul Gandhi becoming prime minister?**

**A/** The focus of all INDIA alliance partners at this stage is to win the elections and save the country from dictatorship. Who will be the prime minister is a question we will discuss internally after the results. We are a country of 140 crore people. I am sure we will choose a strong prime minister to lead the nation.

**Q/ Are you open to being considered for the prime minister's post? Would the AAP join the government?**

**A/** I have no interest in becoming the prime minister. We are a very small party fighting only on 22 seats. Our only goal is to save the country from sliding into a dictatorship. Whether the AAP will be inside or outside the government is a matter we will decide after June 4. 🗳️



# Leader with a difference

ARVIND KEJRIWAL'S RETURN TO JAIL APPEARS IMMINENT. BUT HIS BLISTERING POLL CAMPAIGN MAY HAVE BRIGHTENED INDIA BLOC'S PROSPECTS

BY SONI MISHRA AND MOHIT SHARMA





**THE SUN IS SETTING** as the roadshow of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in Ludhiana slowly makes its way towards the culmination point. It is still intensely hot, but there is a huge crowd, eager to catch a glimpse of Kejriwal. The yellow and blue flags of the Aam Aadmi Party jostle for space as people wave at the AAP leader and many of them hold aloft their mobile phones to take pictures and record videos.

Kejriwal is in a black SUV, accompanied by the AAP candidate from Ludhiana, Ashok Parashar

Pappi. He is standing up in the vehicle, looking out of the sunroof. A loudspeaker announces his arrival, playing the song *Mera Rang De Basanti Chola*, which is associated with Bhagat Singh. Kejriwal has often mentioned that the freedom fighter is among his idols. At regular intervals, a voice tells the public in Punjabi that “your favourite leader, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, is in your midst”.

Someone from the crowd hands Kejriwal a framed portrait of Bhagat Singh, which he holds above his

head. A while later, a mace is handed to Pappi, to be given to Kejriwal. The AAP leader’s devotion to Lord Hanuman is well known, and the mace is the deity’s main weapon. As the roadshow approaches its destination, Kejriwal climbs out of the sunroof and stands on top of the vehicle. The mace is handed to him. He holds it aloft and launches into slogans, starting with “Bharat Mata Ki Jai” and following it up with cries of “Inquilab Zindabad”, “Vande Mataram”, “Jo Bole So Nihal”, “Jai Bajrang Bali” and ends with “Jai Shri Ram”.

Then in his typical, unpretentious manner of engaging with people, he says, “I missed you all when I was in jail. Did you miss me?” When the people say yes, he teasingly says, “I hope you are not lying.” He then shouts out, “I love you”, and blows a kiss to the crowd.

“They put me in jail. Do I look like a thief to you? Do I look corrupt?” he asks. He then accuses Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union government of targeting him because they are afraid of the work done by the AAP governments in Delhi and Punjab. “Modi ji is afraid of our work. We gave you free electricity. We have set up mohalla clinics for you. We are in the process of improving the school infrastructure,” he says.

The AAP’s main rival in Punjab is the Congress. However, the focus of Kejriwal’s attack is Modi and the BJP. “I have come to ask you to give the AAP all 13 seats in Punjab. We have to unseat Modi who did not allow farmers from Punjab to go to Delhi. He got nails punched into the highway and blocked the roads with bulldozers so that you could not enter Delhi. We will not tolerate this kind of *tanashahi* (dictatorship),” he says.

Kejriwal’s charm offensive as a campaigner is not a new phenomenon. He is the AAP’s biggest draw



#### ESCAPE TO VICTORY

Arvind Kejriwal campaigns with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann after getting bail from the Supreme Court

REUTERS



primarily because of his ability to engage with the people. He talks to them in a language that is uncomplicated and he comes across as somebody they can relate to. And the schemes of the AAP governments in Delhi and Punjab are projected as 'Kejriwal's guarantees'.

It was exactly this connect of Kejriwal with the people which the party's poll campaign had missed after he was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21 in connection with the alleged scam in the now-scrapped excise policy of the Delhi government. The arrest took place just a few days after the Election Commission had announced the schedule of the Lok Sabha elections. On May 10, the Supreme Court granted Kejriwal interim bail till June 1, allowing him to campaign.

The 55-year-old leader, after spending close to two months in jail, has made the most of the reprieve he got from the apex court. According to his party colleagues, his presence has made a huge difference. Second-rung leaders had held the fort in his absence, balancing organisational responsibilities with campaigning. Kejriwal's wife, Sunita, had stepped into the public sphere for the first time to be the link between her husband and the outside world. She became the party's lead campaigner in Kejriwal's absence.

"The interim bail had a huge uplifting effect not just on the AAP's campaign, but also on the INDIA bloc overall. The narrative of the INDIA parties that the Modi government has upset the level-playing field by targeting opposition leaders has found validation with the Supreme Court questioning the timing of the arrest. It is a moral victory for us," says senior AAP leader Jasmine Shah.

Setting the tone for his vigorous campaign, Kejriwal was unsparing

in his attack on Modi a day after his release. Addressing workers at the party headquarters, he accused the prime minister of following a 'One Nation, One Leader' agenda. He attempted to set the cat among the pigeons by asking who will replace Modi when he turns 75, referring to purported retirement age set by the BJP. He followed the scathing attack on Modi with his 10 guarantees of free electricity, quality education, Mohalla clinics for every locality, simplifying GST, freeing land occupied by China, full statehood for Delhi, minimum support price for farmers, two crore jobs annually, breaking BJP's 'washing machine' and scrapping the Agnipath scheme.

Kejriwal has held roadshows and public meetings, first in Delhi and Haryana and later in Punjab. He held a joint news conference with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh

Yadav in Lucknow, and travelled to Mumbai and Jamshedpur to campaign for INDIA bloc candidates. The focus of Kejriwal's campaign has been his fight against tanashahi (dictatorship), and he claims that if Modi comes back to power, the Constitution will be in peril and there could be no more elections. According to AAP leaders, the tanashahi narrative has resonated with the people and it takes forward the 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se (reply to jail with votes)' campaign the party had launched after Kejriwal's arrest.

According to an AAP leader, Kejriwal flung himself headlong into the elections after coming out of jail. "When we met him, our first concern was his health and well-being because he had lost weight. But he promptly changed the topic, asking us about the election roadmap, and a rough calendar of his campaign in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab was



REUTERS





### ON THE BACKFOOT

Police officers escort Kejriwal as he leaves the court after a hearing while in ED custody

drawn up,” says the leader.

Also, the strategy has been to not play the victim card. Rather Kejriwal wants his arrest to be seen as a political struggle against ‘dictatorship’. The arrest and its aftermath has brought many challenges for the AAP, but it has also provided it with an opportunity to turn the entire focus of the campaign on Kejriwal.

AAP leaders feel that after the arrest, the sympathies of the shifting voter in Delhi, who would vote for Kejriwal in the assembly elections and the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, were with him. The reason for this, according to them, is that a majority of Delhi’s voters are beneficiaries of the AAP government’s schemes. They say the dictatorship argument has resonated with these voters.

Kejriwal attended nearly 30 events including roadshows, rallies and public meetings in Delhi, campaigning for AAP and Congress

candidates. There were teething troubles though, in the effort to get the workers of the two parties, bitter rivals otherwise, to work together. And there was also the challenge of making supporters of the AAP vote for the Congress and vice-versa.

“The workers automatically started feeling energetic after he joined the election campaign. Everyone wanted to see him and talk to him. They were also concerned about his health,” says Kuldeep Kumar, the AAP candidate from East Delhi constituency.

According to Abhay Kumar Dubey, professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, the AAP-Congress alliance appears to have worked well in Delhi. “This is the first time the saffron party had to face an alliance in Delhi. This could result in consolidation of anti-BJP votes,” he says.

The BJP had to go back to the drawing board and change the contours of its campaign. From seeking votes on the basis of the Modi government’s welfare schemes and Modi’s image as a leader who has delivered on his promises, the party’s campaign shifted to targeting Kejriwal and the AAP on the issue of corruption.

“The Supreme Court made it very clear that Kejriwal can go neither to the chief minister’s office nor to Delhi secretariat. He cannot talk to any officials or witnesses about the scam. It is a matter of huge shame that the elected chief minister of Delhi has, on a bail of ₹50,000, come out for a specified period of time,” says BJP leader Manoj Tiwari, who contested from North East Delhi.

Apart from Delhi, Kejriwal needs to address the challenge in Punjab, where the AAP is in power since 2022. It is contesting all 13 seats in the state on its own. The Congress, the AAP’s alliance partner in Delhi, is its main rival in Punjab.

The multi-cornered polls in Punjab are a test of the Bhagwant Mann government’s popularity. In 2019, the Congress had won eight seats and the AAP one, while the BJP and the Akali Dal had won two seats each. On May 26, a day after Delhi voted, Kejriwal shifted his campaign to Punjab, where the polls will be held in the last phase on June 1. He participated in at least three public events in a day, including roadshows and town hall meetings.

Kejriwal’s interim bail was in the news for the wrong reasons, too. His long-time party colleague and Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal made the shocking allegation that she was beaten up by his aide Bibhav Kumar at the chief minister’s residence. It gave the BJP ammunition to attack Kejriwal and his party, even as Maliwal openly criticised her party for not standing by her. The AAP says the controversy was orchestrated by the BJP for political gain.

“If we look carefully at the alleged incident, a very shocking thing comes to light. The Delhi Police, which comes under the BJP-ruled Centre, has acted as an interested party from the very beginning,” says Delhi cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj. “Thousands of calls are made to the numbers 100 and 112 everyday. But immediately after Maliwal called 112, the news was shared with the media.”

The chief minister has demanded an impartial investigation and said it would not be fair for him to take sides since there were two versions of what had happened.

Kejriwal’s return to jail is imminent, with the Supreme Court refusing to list his bail extension plea. But with his 20 days of blistering campaign, he has set the political temperature soaring. And he may have made a big difference to the INDIA bloc’s poll prospects. **1**



# HIT LIST

## Strengths and weaknesses of top teams at the T20 World Cup

BY AYAZ MEMON

**W**hile cricket arrived in the US along with migrants from England, and the first 'international' match on American soil—Canada versus US—was played in 1844, the country has since snubbed cricket, forging its own distinct sporting culture through baseball, basketball and American football.

Spreading cricket to the Americas has been a long-standing desire of the International Cricket Council. Primarily for monetary reasons, but also to expand the horizons of cricket. Though immigrants brought cricket with them to America, it was only after those from the subcontinent, particularly India, reached a critical population mass and had substantive disposable income, that cricket in the US got a fillip.

Whether the US turns out to be the El Dorado for cricket will depend on how this tournament pans out, and more particularly on how India fares. A fine show by India, perchance a title win, would create a more dazzling aura for cricket that would not only hook Indian-Americans further, but also spread the

gospel of cricket to people from various other countries in the melting pot that is the US.

On the field, India face the challenge of living up to the reputation of being the most powerful cricketing nation, not just in the corridors of power, but also on the field of play. In 2007, when the T20 World Cup started, India were surprise winners. Since then, they have not won the title. In fact, since 2013, India have not won any ICC Trophy. For Rohit Sharma and his team, correcting that record should be top priority.

### INDIA

An abundance of talent, honed in the IPL and other domestic tournaments, has not quite worked to India's advantage. Barring 2014, when they lost to Sri Lanka, India have failed to make the final of the T20 World Cup since the inaugural edition.

**Strengths:** Rohit Sharma leads a team rich in skill, experience and youthful energy. Virat Kohli and Jasprit Bumrah were in sublime form in the recent IPL. Rishabh Pant's return from injury gives the team an



### RARING TO GO

The Indian team trains in New York; (right) David Warner and Mitch Marsh in a warm-up match against Namibia



COURTESY CRICKET.COM.AU

X factor.

**Concerns:** The form of some key players has been dicey, namely of the captain himself and star all-rounder Hardik Pandya. Also, there is absence of quality, in-form pace bowlers to support Bumrah.





## AUSTRALIA

Pat Cummins, who led his country to the World Test Championship and ODI World Cup titles, yields the T20I captaincy to all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, whose career has had a massive second wind in the

past year or so.

The reason to relieve Cummins of the captaincy was to ease the pressure on the magnificent fast bowler, allowing him more bandwidth to excel only as a player.

**Strengths:** Explosive top order

with David Warner in decent nick. Presence of quality all-rounders in Cameron Green, Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis. Cummins, along with longstanding fellow pacemen Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, form arguably the most potent fast-bowling attack in the tournament.

**Concerns:** Spin department somewhat shallow despite Ashton Agar's return. Maxwell's form since the ODI World Cup has been too mercurial for comfort.

## ENGLAND

The defending champions have retained the core group that helped them win the title in 2022, with one significant absentee—Ben Stokes. The brilliant all-rounder has opted out, ostensibly to work himself into prime fitness for bowling. But the loss is made up to some extent by pace ace Jofra Archer, who returns after a prolonged period of injuries.

**Strengths:** Jos Buttler, arguably the best T20 batter, has several stroke players to support him, like Phil Salt, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Duckett and Harry Brook. Another plus is the seasoned spin duo of Moeen Ali and Adil Rashid, and a plethora of all-rounders.

**Concerns:** Sam Curran and Liam Livingstone were lukewarm in the IPL. England could miss a strong finisher while batting, and could see a lack of support for the main bowlers, pace or spin.

## PAKISTAN

They slumped into deep trouble after a disastrous ODI World Cup campaign. Babar Azam was sacked as captain, several players were chopped and changed, and some key members were injured. In the past few weeks, though, the turmoil appears to have settled. As the saying goes, in Pakistan cricket, anything is possible. So Babar Azam is back at the helm, and Mohammad Amir, who had said bye-bye to internation-



al cricket, revoked his decision and has been welcomed back. On paper, the team is oozing talent, but which Pakistan will turn up on match day remains the million-dollar question.

**Strengths:** Pace bowling, what with Shaheen Afridi showing superb form recently, Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah recovering from injury and a skilful Amir in the mix.

**Concerns:** Batting heavily dependent on Babar, Mohammad Rizwan and Fakhar Zaman. Spin all-rounders Shadab Khan and Imad Wasim, who could be crucial on slow pitches, have had on-off careers. Most importantly, Babar's influence as captain.

## WEST INDIES

Despite the last-minute withdrawal of seasoned all-rounder Jason Holder through injury, and match-winner Sunil Narine declining to return to international cricket, the West Indies are serious contenders for the title. Playing on home pitches is a huge advantage, of course, but it is not just that. Most of the players have been in top form recently.

**Strengths:** The presence of all-rounders like Andre Russell, Romario Shepherd and Roston Chase. Shamar Joseph, Sherfane Rutherford, and a clutch of devastating power-hitters like Nicholas Pooran, Rovman Powell and Shimron Hetmyer make the team sizzingly hot.

**Concerns:** Spin department somewhat suspect, heavily dependent on Akeal Hosein. Tendency to play full throttle at all times can backfire. Too many ex-captains can lead to confusion in the ranks.

## NEW ZEALAND

The Kiwis are chasing a title in white-ball cricket that has eluded them since forever. On paper, they look a team to challenge the best. The squad is perhaps shorn of mega stars barring captain Kane Williamson, but there is heft and depth that, with a little luck, can see them through till the end.

**Babar Azam is back at the helm and Mohammad Amir is back from retirement. On paper, the team is oozing talent, but which Pakistan turns up on match day remains the million-dollar question.**

**Strengths:** Well-settled team, led by a calm and composed Williamson. Batting is explosive and runs deep. Trent Boult, Tim Southee and Lockie Ferguson make a pace trio that can put the best batters to the test.

**Concerns:** Mitchell Santner and Ish Sodhi have to be in top form on these pitches. Also, the team has to overcome the mental block of losing finals.

## SOUTH AFRICA

In Aiden Markram, they have a fine, aggressive batter and a captain with a steady hand. Quinton de Kock can be destructive at the top, Heinrich Klaasen in the middle, and Markram has the ability and temperament to play the fulcrum. If the other batters and all-rounders pitch in and give the bowlers enough runs to defend, South Africa could upset the calculations of better-ranked teams.

**Strengths:** Dynamite batting if de Kock, Klaasen and Markram click. Kagiso Rabada is a serious pace threat anywhere, and firebrand Gerald Coetzee and Marco Jansen

can provide splendid pace support. Experienced, skilful spinners in Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi. Brilliant fielding side.

**Concerns:** Batting vulnerable if the big three do not click. South Africans have been notoriously fickle and fallible under pressure.

## SRI LANKA

Often akin to a game of Russian roulette, the Sri Lankan captaincy for this tournament has fallen on leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga. The squad includes former captains like Angelo Mathews, Dasun Shanaka and Kusal Mendis, which can be a boon or bane, depending on how Hasaranga handles the dressing-room dynamics.

At their best, Sri Lanka have been an incandescent side, lighting up arenas with individual and collective brilliance. At their worst, they have been lacklustre, tepid and defeatist.

**Strengths:** Sparkling batting top







## READY FOR THE BIG STAGE

Babar Azam and Jos Buttler in the recent Pakistan-England T20I series

order, with veteran Angelo Mathews as the pivot. Hasaranga is a proven match-winner, and the bowling attack includes the impressive Maheesh Theekshana and Matheesha Pathirana.

**Concerns:** Players do not often show enough ambition, or sustain their performance throughout a tournament.

## BANGLADESH

The big complaint against Bangladesh is of spot-jogging, making very little progress since getting officially recognised by the ICC almost a quarter century back. This tournament affords a splendid opportunity to correct this impression.

Over the years, Bangladesh have produced some exciting and wonderful players. But controversies, power struggles between players and authorities, and players themselves have gathered more headlines than performances. Najmul Hossain

Shanto, appointed captain in all formats recently, has an onerous task, but also an opportunity to turn things around. For that he has the twin challenge to find top form himself and also to hold the team together.

**Strengths:** The return of champion all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, pace ace Mustafizur Rahman showing fine form in the IPL, and the talented Mahedi Hasan and Taskin Ahmed recovering from injury in time could all help Shanto reshape Bangladesh's image in international cricket.

**Concerns:** Batting remains fickle. Players like Litton Das and Soumya Sarkar are effervescent stroke players, but terribly inconsistent. Also, they have a poor track record of playing as a team.

## AFGHANISTAN

After their giant-killing performances in last year's ODI World Cup, Afghanistan start this tournament as the

dark horses. The shorter the format, more level the playing field between teams. What makes the hardy Afghans dangerous is their robust grit, determination and desire to make an impact. Captain Rashid Khan is widely considered as the best spinner in T20 cricket. Over the past seven-eight years, Afghanistan has also started producing fast bowlers and batters who can hold their own against the best.

**Strengths:** Never-say-die spirit, great intensity on the field, and deep ambition. Rashid, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad and Mohammad Nabi make a formidable spin foursome who could revel on slow pitches.

**Concerns:** Not enough depth of international experience for most players. The batting is top heavy and hence vulnerable, and there is not enough depth in pace bowling. ❶



# Who's afraid of a new nuclear doctrine?

It has been 50 years since Pokhran I. With its capabilities increasing and global power equations changing, does India need to look at reviewing its nuclear doctrine?

BY SANJIB Kr BARUAH

**F**or India, May 18 has been a date of destiny.

It was on May 18, 1498, that Vasco da Gama spotted the Kerala coast after a long, turbulent voyage. The Portuguese seafarer and his crew were the first Europeans to land in India, and their arrival ultimately paved the way for British rule.

Exactly 526 years later, at 8:05am on May 18, 1974, tremors shook the Indian Army's Pokhran testing range in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer district, which borders Pakistan. It was Buddha Purnima and India had tested a nuclear bomb. It was an underground test, making India the first country to test its first nuclear bomb below the ground. All other nuclear powers had first conducted overground tests before exploding bombs underground.

The Pokhran operation was code-named 'Smiling Buddha'. That day, India announced its nuclear capability to the world, changing the course of its strategic and military history. After the test, Raja Ramanna, who was director of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), told prime minister Indira Gandhi: "The Buddha has smiled".

"Smiling Buddha marked India's entry into the exclusive nuclear club," former Indian Air Force chief R.K.S. Bhadauria told THE WEEK. "Since then, India's nuclear strategy and capability, premised on the principles of credibility, no-first-use [policy] and minimum credible deterrence, has evolved significantly in a very calibrated manner."

The 1974 test demonstrated that the Indian establishment had the capability to keep secrets. None of the 'listening' systems and surveillance and intelligence networks of the US or the Soviet Union had information on India's preparations.

It was also a test of safety regulations. Rajagopala Chidambaram, considered to be an architect of India's nuclear capability, told THE WEEK: "Ramanna, the main guiding force behind Pokhran II, asked if anybody on site got hurt when the explosions took place. Someone replied that only a crow [was hurt]; it was flying near the site when the mound blew up and hit it."

It was unlike what had happened in Los Alamos, New Mexico, in 1945, when J. Robert Oppenheimer witnessed the destructive potential of a nuclear bomb and whispered a verse from the Bhagavad Gita: "Now, I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

With the Pokhran test, the idea of weaponising India's nuclear knowhow gathered traction. The armed forces were roped in—starting with the Air Force, and then the Army and the Navy.

"Operation Shakti (Pokhran II, 1998) demonstrated India's advanced nuclear capabilities and its ability to design and detonate thermonuclear weapons, pivotal in establishing India's stature as a credible nuclear weapons power," said Bhadauria. "Punitive retaliation capability, should deterrence fail, has grown significantly and adequately over the last 50 years with materially advanced development of a triad comprising land-based







missiles, submarine-launched missiles and air-delivered weapons. Our doctrine prioritises strategic stability and caution over aggression or coercion, despite the challenges of regional security dynamics.”

In 2003, less than five years after Pokhran II, the Strategic Forces Command (SFC) was formed to manage the country’s tactical and strategic nuclear weapons. Now, it is widely accepted that India has the nuclear bomb in all its versions, including indigenous delivery platforms that will deliver the warhead on target. Details of the nuclear arsenal remain a closely guarded secret, though. In 2016, the SFC was added to the list of organisations that were exempted from the purview of the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

“Countries are secretive about their nuclear inventories and capabilities because ambiguity is one of the components of nuclear deterrence. It is a mind game,” Admiral Karambir Singh, former Indian Navy chief, told THE WEEK.

The weaponisation programme has been progressing at a blistering pace. On March 11, 2024, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) announced the successful launch of Mission Divyastra from Dr Abdul Kalam Island off the Odisha coast. Mission Divyastra involved the flight-testing of the intercontinental ballistic missile Agni V with the complex ‘multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle’ (MIRV) technology.

Agni V can carry six to 12 nuclear warheads that can zero in on targets that are hundreds of kilometres apart. Before March 11, Indian missiles had only Pakistan within their range. Now, with a range of 5,000 to 8,000km, the nuclear-capable Agni V has Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong within reach.

On April 4, the government said the SFC and the DRDO had successfully flight-tested a new-generation

ballistic missile called Agni-Prime. It was one of the very few instances when the work of the usually secretive SFC was being made public.

On April 18, DRDO announced that it had flight-tested a home-made missile off the Odisha coast. Sources told THE WEEK that the missile was an upgraded version of Nirbhay, which has an operational range of about 1,000km and is capa-

ble of flying at tree-top heights (less than 50 metres). Weighing around 1,500kg, a single Nirbhay missile can be loaded with a 450kg conventional or a 12-kilotonne nuclear warhead. For perspective, the Hiroshima bomb was of about 15 kilotonnes.

“India’s nuclear strategy, which has traditionally focused on Pakistan,



#### GROUND ZERO

Prime minister Indira Gandhi examines a piece of rock at the Pokhran test site on December 22, 1974. Near Gandhi are Union minister K.C. Pant (left) and Homi Sethna, then chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission



The 1974 test demonstrated that the Indian establishment had the capability to keep secrets. None of the 'listening' systems and intelligence networks of the US or the Soviet Union had information on India's preparations.



now appears to place increased emphasis on China, and Beijing is now in range of Indian missiles,” said the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) in its July 2022 report.

At the moment, five countries—the US, the UK, Russia, France and China—are generally considered nuclear-weapon states, while India, Pakistan and North Korea have conducted nuclear tests and possess nuclear weapons. Israel, despite being a nuclear-weapon state, has maintained a policy of deliberate ambiguity.

According to the prestigious think-tank Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the nine nuclear countries together held “about 12,512 nuclear weapons, of which 9,576 were considered to be potentially operationally available”. An estimated 3,844 of these warheads were deployed with operational forces, including around 2,000 that were kept in a state of high operational alert.

“India is estimated to have produced approximately 700kg of weapons-grade plutonium, sufficient for 138 to 213 nuclear warheads,” said the FAS report. “However, not all material has been converted into nuclear warheads. Based on available information... we estimate that India has produced 160 nuclear warheads. It will need more warheads to arm the new missiles that it is currently developing.”

These numbers do not serve much strategic purpose. For instance, the Ohio-class submarines of the US Navy, when all are fully loaded, can carry up to 280 nuclear warheads. But because of stipulations imposed by the Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START), the submarines carry much reduced numbers. If the Ohio-class submarines were a country, they would have ranked fifth in the list of countries with the most nuclear weapons!

To make a nuclear weapon, there are two key necessities—availability of fissile material (plutonium and highly enriched uranium) and availability of warheads. Another key ingredient is the delivery platform—the nuclear missile or the aircraft that will carry the nuclear weapon.

“We estimate that India currently operates eight different nuclear-capable systems: two aircraft, four land-based ballistic missiles, and two sea-based ballistic missiles,” said the FAS report. “At least four more systems are in development, most of which are thought to be nearing completion.”

These eight systems make up India's nuclear triad. The report may be alluding to Mirage-2000 and Rafale fighter aircraft, the short-range Prithvi-II (350km) and Agni-I (700km), the medium-range Agni-II (more than 2,000km) and the intermediate-range Agni-III



(3,500km). The sea-based ballistic missiles may be the ship-launched Dhanush (400km) and the submarine-launched K-15 missile (700km).

“Which aircraft would carry nukes is an evolving issue,” a source in the security establishment said. “These are not water-tight compartments. The roles of the delivery systems keep on changing. For example, the Air Force’s deep-penetration Jaguar aircraft is capable of carrying nuclear weapons, but it is in the process of being phased out. And newer aircraft are taking over.”

On November 5, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted: “India’s pride, nuclear submarine INS Arihant, successfully completed its first deterrence patrol!”

The undersea part of the triad is

expected to be of primary focus in the near future. Bigger, wider and made-at-home nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines will be armed with the still-in-development K-4 and K-5 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), which are believed to have a range of about 3,500km and 5,000km.

“On the nuclear delivery front, adequate effort is being put in,” said Admiral Singh. “We have longer range missiles in the K5 that can be launched from our next set of SSBNs. MIRVs are now the norm and is part of the arsenal.”

The significant aspect about India’s nuclear weapons programme is that the fissile material and the warhead are both homemade. It does not have to depend on a foreign source.

Moreover, most nuclear weapon states with a declared ‘no-first-use’ policy—like India—keep their nuclear weapons in a de-mated condition, with components in the hands of different agencies except for higher operational areas.

“But at times of need, they can be mated really fast to cater to the needs of the situation,” said the security establishment.

In 2014, the BJP’s poll manifesto stated two aims—to revise and update India’s nuclear programme and to maintain a credible minimum deterrent. The strongest articulation of revisiting the no-first-use policy came from Manohar Parrikar, who became defence minister when the BJP came to power. On November 10, 2016, Parrikar said, “If a writ-

# NUCLEAR FORCES

AS OF JAN 2023

## WARHEAD STOCKPILE



Note: All figures are approximate and are estimates based on public information and contain some uncertainties

GRAPHICS SREEMANIKANDAN S./RESEARCH SANJIB Kr BARUAH



ten-down strategy exists, or you take a stand on a nuclear aspect, I think you are actually giving away your strength in nuclear. People say India has no-first-use nuclear concept. Why should I bind myself? I should say that I am a responsible nuclear power, and I will not use it irresponsibly.”

The defence ministry later distanced itself from Parrikar’s position, saying it was the minister’s personal opinion and not the ministry’s stated position. And then, on August 16, 2019, on the occasion of the death anniversary of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, defence minister Rajnath Singh tweeted: “Pokhran is the area which witnessed Atal ji’s firm resolve to make India a nuclear power and yet remain firmly committed to the doctrine of ‘no first use’. India has strictly adhered to this doctrine. What happens in future depends on the circumstances.” It was when Vajpayee was the PM that the government decided to adopt the no-first-use policy just after Pokhran II in 1998.

Said Prof Kumar Sanjay Singh of Delhi University, who specialises in Cold War politics: “In the post World War-II era, nuclear weapons are increasingly being viewed as a deterrent against invasion by superior military powers. This explains the nuclear programmes of the countries of the global south.”

According to Lt Gen (retd) Raj Shukla, a strategy specialist, India needs to keep up with the changes in the global nuclear domain. “The US has revisited its nuclear posture in significant ways,” he said. “China has virtually transformed its nuclear profile, implementing concepts like launch-on-warning and precision targeting. It has grown its silos and improved its warhead sophistication.”

Shukla said India needed to completely review its nuclear “concepts and postures”. He said, “We need to look afresh at the nature of our triad and response options. We also need to incorporate other

related developments in a futuristic scenario. For example, our nuclear policy should factor in things like how is it going to impact India if Iran goes nuclear.”

Is the world, or specifically south Asia, about to witness another arms race? “The immediate and superficial answer is yes,” said Sanjay Singh. “Witness how Pakistan is attempting to redress

the technological asymmetry with Indian military by importing weapon systems from China. But the possibility [of an arms race] is slim, principally because of the delimiting clauses of the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement. Indian diplomacy is averse to transcending them. Hence, it has preferred to leverage itself as a strategic ally of the US-led west to check the Chinese influence.”



#### TIME OF TRIUMPH

Prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visits the Pokhran II test site in 1998



# Indira's bang

How Indira Gandhi secured the borders, ended food import, before going for the test

BY R. PRASANNAN

**W**hen she came to power in 1966, Indira Gandhi found India strategically boxed in.

To the west and east were two wings of US-armed Pakistan, which had slapped a costly war on India a few months earlier. To the north was the Chinese dragon that had snatched away huge chunks of territory in the 1962 war. In the south, Sri Lanka was indifferent and often flirting with the western powers who were arming Pakistan. Further south in the deep ocean, the British and the Americans were talking of building a military base in Diego Garcia. In short, India saw only hostile elements on all sides—in the west, east, north and south. The Soviets were friendly, but were cold and distant.

Indira took three steps to break out of the box. The first was taken in the course of pursuing the second. The third came three years later. We will look at them one by one.

By mid-1971, it was clear that India and Pakistan were drifting towards a war over Pakistan's handling of its eastern wing. The military regime based in the west had held an election but, advised by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party, it refused to acknowledge that the east-based Awami League of Mujibur Rahman had won the majority seats in parliament. The

east revolted, the military regime sent troops to quell the unrest, and refugees poured into India in millions.

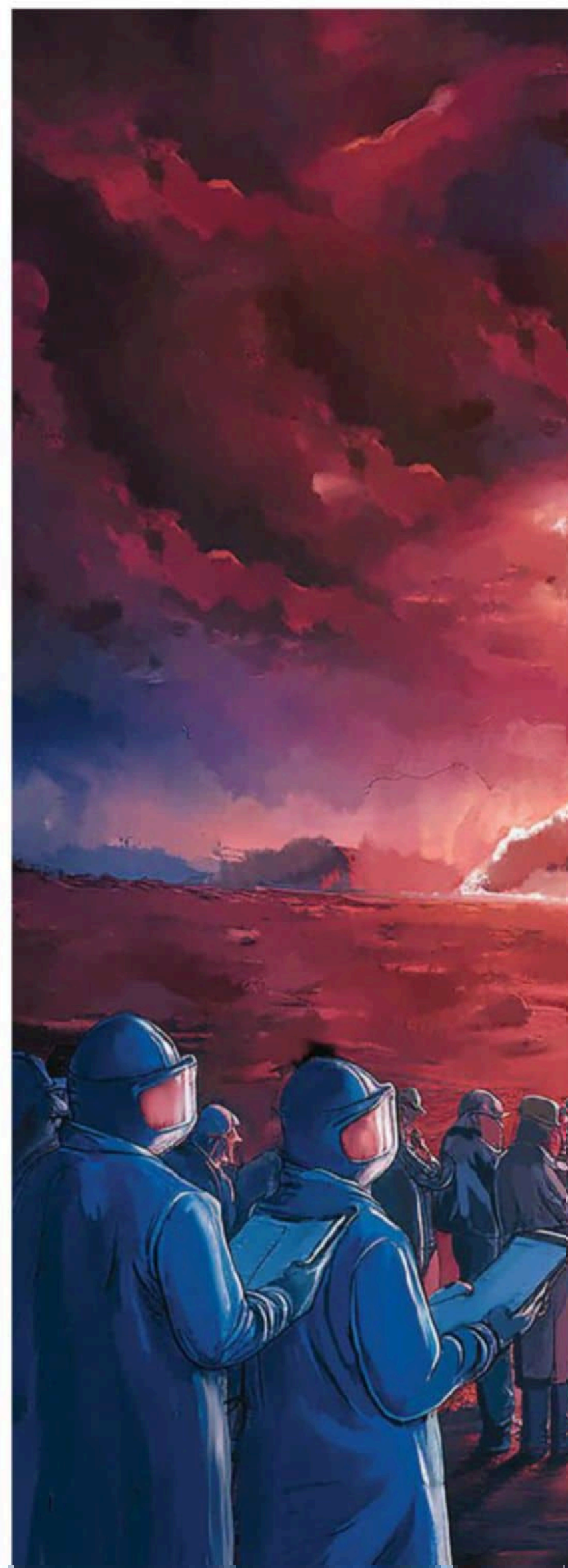
As war clouds gathered over the horizon, Indira grabbed a two-year-old offer of a loose friendship treaty from the USSR, and signed it in August 1971. As war with Pakistan broke out in December, and American warships steamed into the Bay of Bengal ostensibly to aid Pakistan, she invoked the treaty to get Moscow to tail them with nuclear submarines. Anyway, in 13 days, she won the war, and eliminated the threat from the east.

India thus got a strategic friend, and also secured the east. In the west, Pakistan continued to remain hostile, but enfeebled. In short, the

In 1972, having triumphed over Pakistan, Indira gave the go-ahead to her scientists—just 75 of them knew—to work towards a test. The Army leadership was kept informed. The project was headed by Raja Ramanna, and its physics worked on by R. Chidambaram.

east and west were now secure.

Next she began looking at the oceanic south, where the Lankans had refuelled Pakistani military planes and from where the American fleet had come steaming in. She soon stitched up a deal with the Lankans, conceded the islet of Katchatheevu to them, but ensured landing rights for Indian fishermen there. Soviet submarines slowly began leaving signatures in the southern oceans, signalling to the west that the Indian





Ocean would not be an Anglo-American lake any longer. India could no longer be threatened from the south.

Thus having secured three of India's frontiers, Indira started looking for a big techno-strategic breakout. The atom offered the potential.

India's atom story had begun even before independence, thanks to Homi J. Bhabha and his good friend Jawaharlal Nehru who worshipped

science. It is said Bhabha was the one who prevailed on Nehru to prevent the secession of the princely state of Travancore, which had the world's second largest deposit of the strategic mineral thorium.

With state patronage and Tata funds, Bhabha set up the early nuclear labs in Bombay where they researched on the bomb and non-bomb aspects of atomic physics. As the British and the French, too, made bombs and joined the nuclear club,

till then membered by the US and the USSR, Bhabha and his team pursued the technology, but refrained from weaponising it as the political advice was against making bombs.

But in 1964, when the Chinese tested the bomb, Bhabha thought that India, too, had to test one. By then, Nehru was dead and Shastri was the prime minister. Much as Bhabha and Co talked, Shastri was dead against going nuclear. So frustrated was Bhabha that he openly declared in an All India Radio address in October 1964 that, if given the go-ahead, he and his men could make the bomb in 18 months. But the Shastri government refused.

By now, the big powers decided that they could not allow India or any more countries to make the bomb. In 1965, they negotiated and came out with the non-proliferation treaty by which they would keep their bombs and make more of them, but all other countries would forswear the weapon. India, calling upon the big bomb-owning five to give up their weapons, objected to what it called nuclear apartheid.

Meanwhile, Shastri won the 1965 war against Pakistan, and was invited to talks with Pakistan in Tashkent where he died unexpectedly. Indira succeeded him as prime minister, but the very day she was being sworn in—24 January 1966—Bhabha was killed in a plane crash in Switzerland.

Many feared, India's nuclear programme also would go for a toss with that plane crash.

But by then, Bhabha had put the nuclear programme on a robust foundation, having trained many of its finest scientists like Homi Sethna, Raja Ramanna and P.K. Iyengar in cutting-edge technologies. While Sethna worked on developing weapons-grade plutonium, Ramanna worked on the actual nuclear device, Iyengar developed plutonium reactors, the kind of which he had seen in the USSR.



ILLUSTRATION DENI LAL



Yet, India couldn't go nuclear for fear of sanctions from the west from where India was importing most of its food. By the early 1970s, Indira had made much progress in making India self-sufficient in food production through the green revolution. In 1972, having triumphed over Pakistan, Indira gave the go-ahead to her scientists—just 75 of them knew—to work towards a test. The Army leadership was kept informed.

The project was headed by Ramanna, and its physics worked on by R. Chidambaram, whom Ramanna selected because he knew his physics and also “knew how to keep his mouth shut”. When asked by colleagues on the eve of the test on May 18, 1974, if it would work, Chidambaram would reply that if it didn't, the laws of physics were wrong. Exactly 24 years later, as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, he would preside over the five tests with which India would declare that it was making bombs. Yet, as Ramanna had expected of him in 1974, he would keep his mouth shut even when the public went to give credit to others.

Now, what was it that was tested in 1974? Officially it was called a peaceful test of a nuclear device that was designed to yield 10 kilotons, but yielded about 8 to 10. That was about two-thirds of the yield of the bomb that was dropped in Hiroshima.

The 1974 test cocked a nuke at the big five who thought they ruled the universe. India got away with it admirably as the subsequent years showed. With the launch of Aryabhata the very next year, India declared it was coming on to the world stage seeking a big role. ❶



## INTERVIEW

DR R. CHIDAMBARAM,  
former principal scientific adviser to the government

# Spied on none, stole from none

BY SANJIB Kr BARUAH

A senior scientist during the Pokhran test in 1974 and chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission during the tests in 1998, Dr Rajagopala Chidambaram has been a key figure in the Indian nuclear journey. During both the tests, he led the design of the nuclear devices and the execution of the tests. Chidambaram, 88, still retains the fascination he always had for science. He continues to be engaged in research at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre. He spoke to THE WEEK about the Pokhran tests, proliferation concerns and about global warming and climate change. Excerpts:

**Q/ With new age domains like Artificial Intelligence and high tech weapon systems, are nuclear weapons passé?**

**A/** In the nuclear domain, you can use AI and other techniques only for protection when you move from one place to another. The thing about AI is a question of what you want it to do. Can you allow a machine to rule, a machine to learn and to perform tasks? But who teaches a machine? It is the human. So human beings will always be superior.

**Q/ Does nuclear energy have a role in the fight against global warming and climate change?**

**A/** Climate change is caused by greenhouse gas emissions which prevent the infrared radiation from going out, and that is what leads to global warming. And as far as global warming is concerned, one of the worst things is the burning of fossil fuels. If you want to reduce the burning of fossil fuels, then one of the options is renewable energy, like solar energy. But solar energy is intermittent. You will have to store it, for which you need storage systems. In this context, nuclear energy becomes very important. It is sustainable and regular in its supply of electricity.

**Q/ Are there proliferation concerns?**

**A/** Soon after India's nuclear tests in 1998, two American authors, C.E. Paine and M.G. McKinzie, published an article titled “Does the US science-based stockpile stewardship program pose a proliferation threat?” They showed a Venn diagram indicating the sharing of nuclear weapons knowledge. Each country represented a circle. The intersection of the circles indicated sharing of knowledge either openly or secretly, or through spying and stealing.

Since the Manhattan project, the UK was closely involved in nuclear activities with the US. So the American circle includes within it a smaller circle, which is the UK circle. And the circle of Russia and China intersect. China and Pakistan intersect. The US and France intersect. France and





ILLUSTRATION DENI LAL

As we were walking, the key popped out and fell into the sand. Dastidar got very nervous.

Israel and four-five other countries intersect, and so on. But in that diagram, you find India standing alone without any intersections. It indicated that India spied on nobody, India stole from nobody. It was not needed because India had all the knowledge that was required.

An interesting fact in that diagram is the intersection of the US and Russian circles. And on that I don't want to comment. I don't want to get into the politics of it. You work it out.

Indians are, by nature, responsible people and India has always been a very mature country as far as its politics is concerned. And our political leadership is a very responsible leadership. That aside, the safety and reliability factor of India's nuclear arsenal is very strictly adhered to. Everything has been taken care of.

Fifty years is a long time. But those were very interesting times. We had a brilliant electrical engineer called S.N. Seshadri. We were laying the cables in the Pokhran nuclear site from the control room to where the devices were to be exploded. And Seshadri

was going around in a truck inspecting the cables. The truck driver said he had to go as it was lunch time. Seshadri told him that he would take over. That was the kind of drive we had. Unfortunately we lost Seshadri very early. There were minor things, but nothing serious.

Just after the 1974 tests, Dr Raja Ramanna, the main guiding force behind Pokhran I, asked if anybody got hurt in the explosion. Someone said it was only a crow that was flying near the nuclear site when the mound blew up and hit it.

Before the 1974 test, I was walking around in the sand with BARC group director P.R. Dastidar, who had the key to activate the switches on the cables. Only Dastidar was authorised to operate the key after receiving the requisite clearances. As we were walking, the key popped out and fell into the sand. Dastidar got very nervous. I asked him to stay calm and not to move. I then drew a circle around the two of us so as to localise the place where the key fell. And then we found it!

What is remarkable about the Indian nuclear tests is that we did not get anything, including plutonium, from any other country. Plutonium is a very difficult metal to produce. We built plutonium plants and used that plutonium in the bomb.

**Q/ Pokhran I was called Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE). What does that mean? What differentiates a PNE from a test from which weapons can be made?**

**A/** In 1969, US president Dwight Eisenhower wanted to start a programme called "swords into ploughshares". The idea was to state that nuclear explosions can also be used for peaceful purposes. So Ramanna sent me to the US to watch the Rulison experiment in Colorado. Suppose you want to cut a canal. You have to explode a lot of chemical explosives to cut through. But one nuclear explosion can create a huge crater wherein it becomes much easier to cut the canals. Dr Ramanna had asked me to look out for its application in India. ❶



# Shock and awe

India's comprehensive capability in the nuclear domain is the result of its autonomous pursuit of the atomic programme against all odds



BY ANIL KAKODKAR

World War II stopped Dr Homi J. Bhabha, the father of India's nuclear programme, from returning to the UK and continuing his research there. So he stayed back in India and that became a turning point for Indian science, especially atomic energy. Though perhaps it was a golden era of Indian science, going by the pathbreaking contributions by the likes of

C.V. Raman, S.N. Bose, Meghnad Saha, J.C. Bose and others, it was Bhabha, a cosmic ray physicist, who ushered in an era of mission mode programmes. He used his proximity with the Tata family and prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru to create an India-specific vision in atomic energy, space and electronics.

That was also the time when the development of nuclear weapons and a new geopolitics seemed to emerge. Bhabha ensured that the political leadership appreciated the ramifications of this emerging development from an Indian perspective, fully cognisant of the potential strengths of Indian scientific community. He did not want them to simply drift with the rest of the world.

While developments in China at that time did spark a debate on policy options for India, it was really the Bangladesh war that triggered the peaceful nuclear explosion experiment in May 1974. Underground nuclear explosions for peaceful applications were being pursued by some countries and discussed in conferences at the International Atomic Energy Agency. After India's Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE), however, the term and the related programmes disappeared from the scene. India came under an intense technology denial regime. The Americans discontinued the

contracted fuel supplies to Tarapur, while the Canadians withdrew from the collaborative programme to build two PHWR (pressurised heavy-water reactor) units in Rajasthan.

Pokhran I was clearly well within India's legal rights. The external technology denial regime disrupted and considerably delayed India's nuclear power development, but it did not deter our self-reliant pursuit of a nuclear programme. On the other hand, it strengthened it. Today's comprehensive nuclear capability of the country is clearly due to India's autonomous pursuit of the programme against all odds.

Even as it went ahead with research on all dimensions of nuclear technology, India continued to advocate universal non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament. It wisely considered the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) as discriminatory and stayed away from it. However, the world moved towards perpetuating the discriminatory NPT quite in contrast with the expectation that was em-



bedded within the treaty. Such external factors, including the deteriorating security situation around India, compelled Delhi towards exercising the nuclear weapons deployment option. The arrival of the final draft of the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) was the final push for India to conduct the tests in May 1998 and emerge as a nuclear weapons state.

I was fortunate to be a part of both, the 1974 PNE and the 1998 weapons tests. I have experienced experts from advanced countries giving us unsolicited advice against pursuing nuclear reactor development or other complex nuclear technologies, citing our resource constraints. It was only after demonstrating superior Indian capability in relevant areas that such things stopped.





ILLUSTRATION DENI LAL

We used to take a jeep to our workplace, negotiating a long distance through the desert. One day, the fan belt of the jeep gave way. We used fibres from nearby bushes to make a makeshift fan belt and negotiated the remaining distance.

I remember an incident which happened during the preparations for the PNE. We used to take a jeep to our workplace, negotiating a long distance through the desert. One day, around half way through, the fan belt of the jeep gave way. The day's work would have been lost had we waited for a replacement. We used fibres from nearby bushes to make a makeshift fan belt and negotiated the remaining distance. Seeing ropes being made in villages during my childhood came in handy.

The need for nuclear power to support India's development was well recognised by Bhabha, including the need to harness India's thorium resources—the largest in the world. He, therefore, designed a three-stage nuclear development programme, be-

ginning with our modest uranium resources which have a small fissile component, progressively enlarging the fissile resource by converting fertile uranium and thorium in fast reactors and ending up with a large capacity thorium-based power production, commensurate with India's energy needs. We mastered the PHWR technology for the first stage and fast breeder reactor technology for the second stage. While further reactor and fuel cycle technology development has to continue, accelerated large-scale deployment should be based on the technology already mastered. In parallel with the three-stage programme development, one could also advance thorium deployment, taking advantage of the larger

PHWR capacity realisable now and the need to shrink spent-fuel inventory to reduce the backend fuel cycle cost.

Humanity is facing a much bigger existential threat today in the form of climate change. While there has been a right emphasis on accelerated renewable energy deployment and on ensuring a clean energy transition leading to global net zero emissions by the middle of this century, a large country like India would be forced to perpetuate its development deficit in the absence of large-scale nuclear power deployment. A developed India would need more than three and a half times the energy that renewable sources can produce. Hence, there is an urgent need to take up accelerated nuclear power deployment.

As France added 63 GWe between 1979 and 2000 and China added 43 GWe to 45 GWe between 2002 and 2019, India should be able to put in place a comparable or faster accelerated nuclear power deployment plan between now and 2070, our net zero deadline. This would at least alleviate the development deficit confronting us to some extent, if not bridge it. Timely action in this regard is crucial just as it was in the nuclear weapons case.

**Kakodkar** was chairman of Atomic Energy Commission and director of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre.



# Power point

The Pokhran tests launched India's march towards being a full partner and participant in the global nuclear order



BY M.K. NARAYANAN

India's Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE) in Pokhran marked the beginning of its seminal journey towards becoming a nuclear weapons state. It was a giant stride in so far as India's nuclear journey was concerned, achieved against heavy odds.

Several names figure in the gallery of fame of India's nuclear journey, but physicist Homi Bhabha's stands out. He was the one who convinced prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru to take the nuclear plunge, despite the odds.

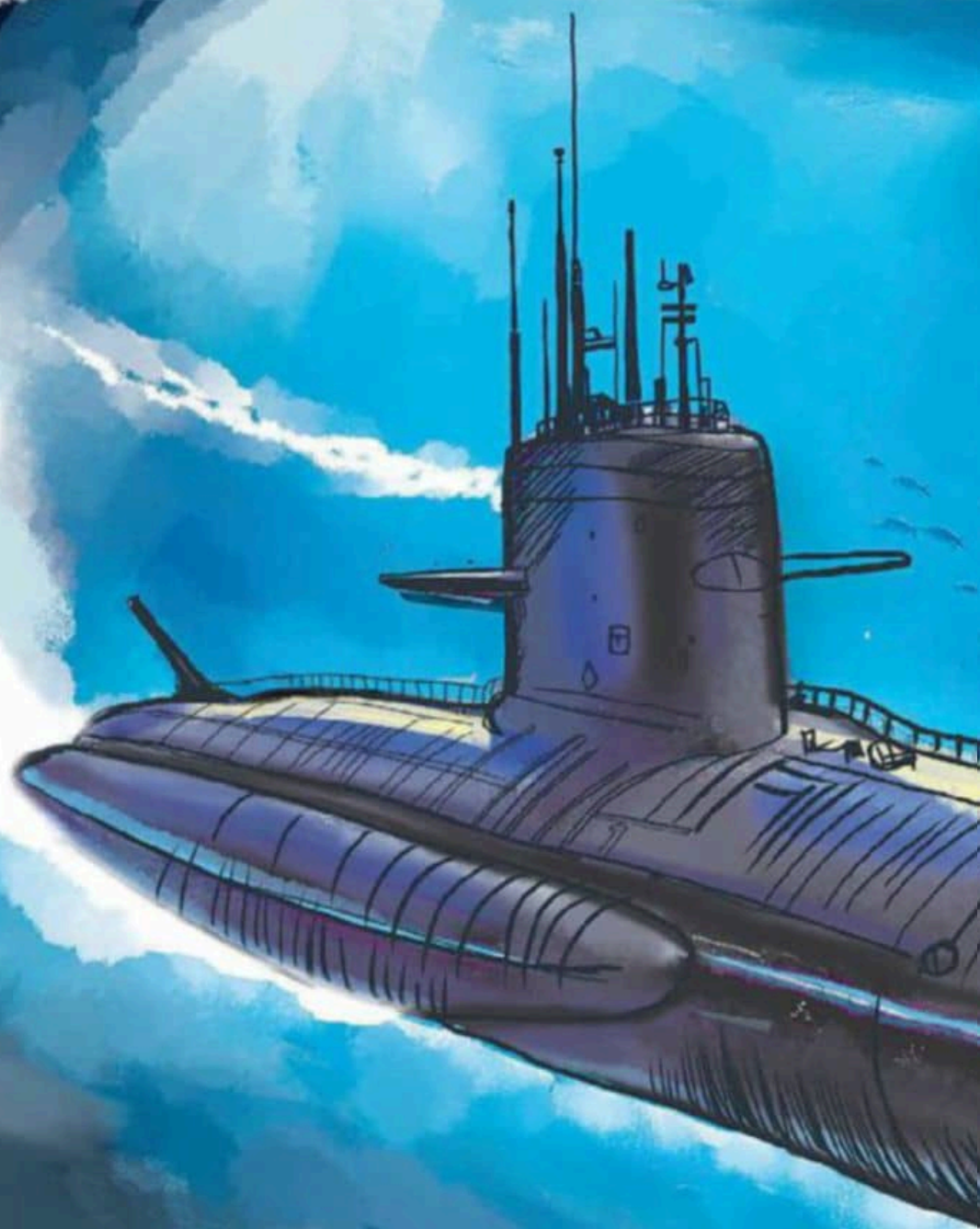
The Pokhran test took place against the backdrop of intense hostility towards India by several world powers. India had, by then, decisively defeated Pakistan in a war, where it had the backing of much of the west and, implicitly China. The war led to its dismemberment and the birth of a new state, Bangladesh. Undertaking a nuclear test at a time like that, hence, was an extremely bold decision by India's leaders. Many countries were also intent on punishing India for disrupting the so-called established nuclear order. Undeterred, India had proceeded to carry out an underground test in May 1974. PNE experiments were not frowned upon by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) at the time. Yet, India faced the ire of both the IAEA and much of the world. The immediate fallout was disruption of low-enriched uranium fuel supplies for the US-supplied boiling water reactors in Tarapur.

By the late 1990s, the security situation in India's neighbourhood had deteriorated further to an extent that India was compelled to carry out a fresh round of nuclear tests in 1998. The international ramifications proved extremely severe. India had already been excluded from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), and having also refused to sign the Comprehen-

sive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a set of additional sanctions were imposed on India, forcing the country to face a situation similar to nuclear apartheid.

Having tested a nuclear weapon device, India then proceeded to frame a well-honed nuclear doctrine. It was unique in the sense that it enshrined the doctrine of 'No First Use' of nuclear weapons against other states, including nuclear armed ones. The doctrine underscored that India would retaliate with a nuclear strike, only in the event of use of nuclear or large scale chemical or biological weapons against it. This aspect remains an axiom of faith for India's political and strategic establishment to this day. It encapsulates the concept of necessity and proportionality.

ILLUSTRATION DENI LAL





India's nuclear doctrine stands in marked contrast to that of Pakistan's. Islamabad's nuclear doctrine mentions 'Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD)', designed to prevent conventional conflict at any level in response to aggression against it. In

India's riposte to Pakistan lies in its sea-based nuclear weapons' capability, including (i) its nuclear-powered submarine (Arihant), which is capable of firing nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, and (ii) a second sea-based second strike capability.

effect, while Pakistan's first response in such cases may be conventional, it would resort to the use of nuclear weapons.

Any discussion on nuclear matters involves a comparison with numbers and capabilities of potential enemies.

From India's perspective, the number of nuclear warheads possessed by Pakistan principally—and implicitly by China—constitutes the level of threat that India faces from a potential nuclear strike. China possesses a huge nuclear arsenal which could, in theory, be used against India. In reality, however, China's target is principally the US, the UK, France and NATO.

Most estimates about the nuclear arsenals of India and Pakistan

give Islamabad a marginal edge in terms of warheads. Both countries supposedly have between 150 to 160 warheads. In addition, both countries have fissile material stocks to produce many more warheads, and the numbers appear to be growing.

Numbers, however, rarely tell the whole story. China's huge lead over India in terms of nuclear warheads (the estimate is that it is above 300) constitute, at best, 'coercive leverage', rather than a real threat. Beyond numbers, there are other aspects that need consideration in estimating the nature and content of the nuclear threat. While India and Pakistan have roughly equal numbers of warheads, there is the matter of delivery systems. Both countries have a mixture of medium and long range delivery systems, but Pakistan's systems are solely directed against India, even as India professedly has both

Pakistan and China in its sights.

Again, Pakistan's short range missile system Nasr, and longer range Shaheen-3, Hatf-6 ballistic missile, do pose a clear and present danger for India. India's riposte, however, lies in its sea-based nuclear weapons' capability, including (i) its nuclear-powered submarine (Arihant), which is capable of firing nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, and (ii) a second sea-based second strike capability which is getting ready very shortly.

Beyond numbers and variations in delivery systems, geographic dispersion, as also possessing missiles of the right range, are critical. Against Pakistan, India has a clear advantage on both counts given the size of its territory and allied aspects. While the sizes of nuclear arsenals of both countries are perceived as roughly equal, and each country is believed to have fissile material stocks sufficient to produce more weapons, a great deal would depend on the applicable methodology, including which weapons are ready to use at the shortest possible time. These are important in calculating readiness to launch a nuclear strike.

The nuclear debate continues. What is, however, highly satisfying for India is that following complex diplomatic negotiations during 2005-2008 and thereafter, India is now an acknowledged nuclear weapons power. It is currently a member of the NSG and has joined the mainstream as a full partner and participant in the global nuclear order. India currently has bilateral nuclear arrangements with over a dozen countries, including all the nuclear powers, with the exception of China.

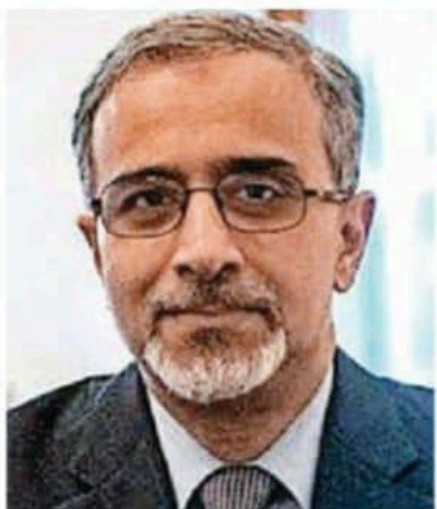
**The author** is former director of Intelligence Bureau, former national security adviser and former governor of West Bengal.



# Breaking nuclear apartheid

How India protected its ability to move ahead with the nuclear weapons programme despite not signing the NPT

BY D.B. VENKATESH VARMA



As India marks the 50th anniversary of Pokhran I, we remember that India's journey towards becoming a nuclear power in a hierarchical world has not been an easy one. Finding a place worthy of respect in the nuclear order meant finding the right balance between power and principle and finding the optimal alignment between the three dimensions of state power—political,

technological and diplomatic.

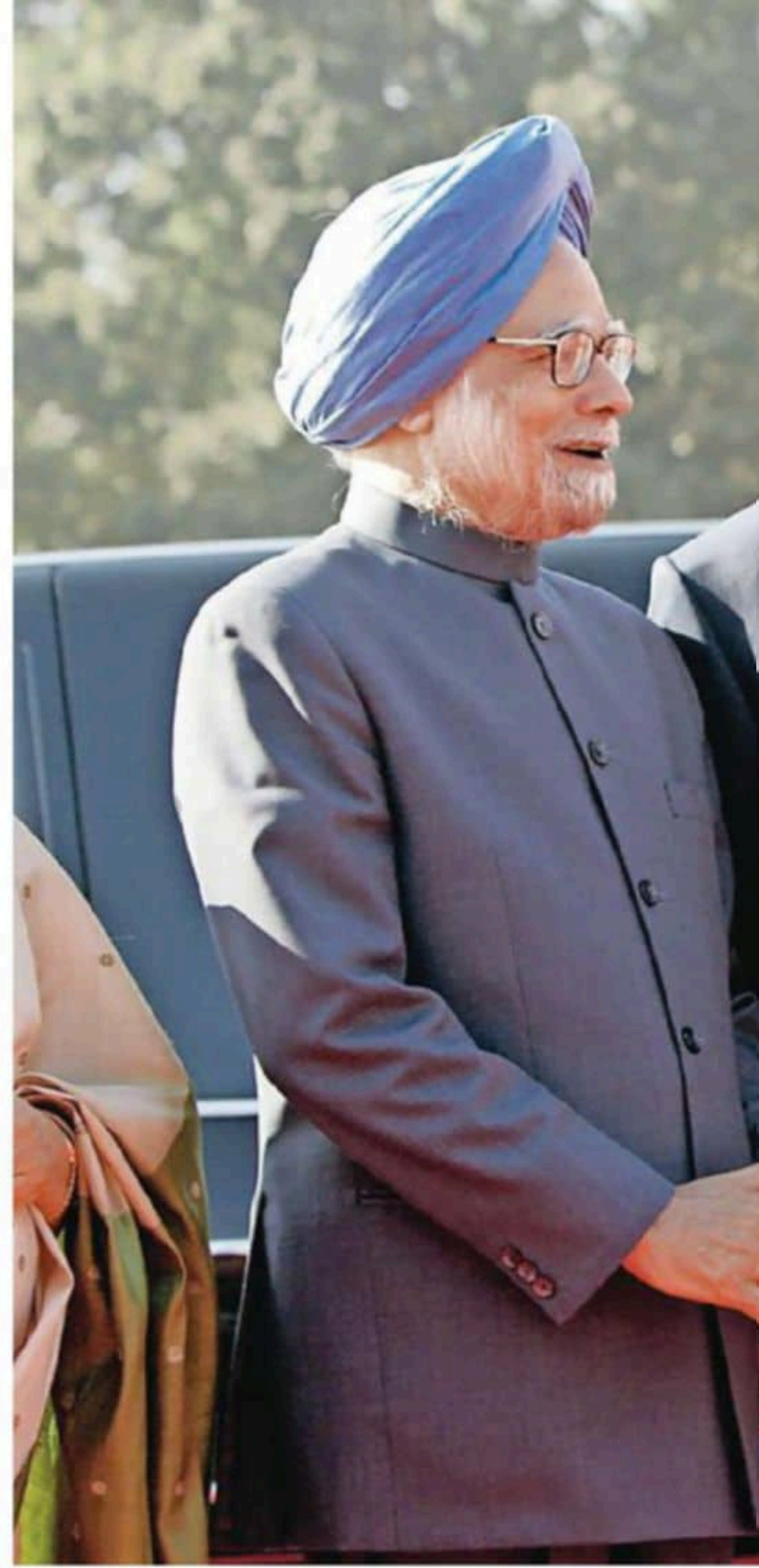
The dawn of the nuclear age preceded independent India's ability to shape its contours. India's calls for nuclear disarmament, cessation of nuclear testing and the arms race—articulated strongly by prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru since the early 1950s—barely had an impact on the efforts of the nuclear powers to shape the nuclear order in their own image. When the draft of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was finalised in 1967, India's interests were largely ignored. Even though India had acquired by then the ability to reprocess plutonium, the lack of other technological requirements to make a bomb and the fact that the country had not tested a nuclear device weakened its campaign to have its interests protected in the treaty.

Fortunately, prime minister Indira Gandhi took the decision not to sign the NPT. The first Pokhran nuclear test on May 18, 1974, was a major milestone.

Indira Gandhi deserves credit for taking the plunge, which previous prime ministers had avoided. The successful test demonstrated that technologically India's nuclear capabilities had matured, backed by a political decision that overcame numerous organisational, ideological and moral considerations that had held India back.

If the expectation was that the first Pokhran test had finally resolved the political and technological challenges for India to emerge as a full-fledged nuclear power, it turned out to

India succeeded because of the persistence of our prime ministers, diligent efforts of our nuclear scientists, talent of our diplomats and the faith of our people that India should never accept a place of subordination in the global order.



be wrong. The United States led the other nuclear powers in establishing the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 1977, which steadily tightened the nuclear noose around India. The global space for India's diplomacy was further restricted by geopolitics—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan put Pakistan squarely in the US camp, which turned a blind eye to its clandestine nuclear proliferation programme. China extended substantial aid for Pakistan's nuclear weapon and missile programmes.

The end of the Cold War made the diplomatic situation even more precarious for India. In 1992, the NSG imposed full scope safeguards as a condition for nuclear supplies. The indefinite extension of the NPT put the final nail in the coffin of Indian expectations that there would be progress on nuclear disarmament, which had earli-





## EXCLUSIVE CLUB

US president George W. Bush with prime minister Manmohan Singh and president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam at the Rashtrapati Bhavan during his visit to India in March 2006

protected its strategic programme and its ability to move ahead on the nuclear weapons programme despite not signing the NPT. It also removed the albatross hanging around the neck of India's bilateral ties with the US, facilitating its rapid expansion. The chains of India's nuclear bondage were finally broken. Indian diplomacy was put to its most severe test, and it came out with flying colours. This was India's finest diplomatic hour.

In the past decade, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's nuclear doctrine has been further strengthened through a triad and ASAT (anti-satellite weapon) capabilities. Today, India is seen as a responsible nuclear power with nuclear cooperation agreements with over a dozen countries. Our civil nuclear programme is posed for a major boost in power production in the coming decade.

This journey, over the past five decades, has been hard and daunting. But we succeeded because of the persistence of successive prime ministers, the diligent efforts of generations of our nuclear scientists, the talent of our diplomats and the faith of our people that India should never accept a place of subordination in the global order. As we celebrate Pokhran I, there are lessons that we must remember. In the global arena, more often than not, a country's place in the hierarchical order is not given, but taken. India's principles will be taken seriously only when it is backed by adequate power.

---

**Varma** was ambassador to Russia, Spain and the Conference on Disarmament. He was part of India's negotiating team for the Civil Nuclear Initiative.

er been articulated in the 1988 Action Plan on Disarmament of prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. The conclusion of the CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) and the prospects of an early treaty to ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons threatened to put India in a very tight corner. Under prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's leadership, India was able to play a weak diplomatic hand brilliantly.

The Pokhran II tests in 1998 under prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, could not have come a moment too soon for India to breakout of a possibly permanent nuclear encirclement. Technologically, the tests proved India's advanced capabilities, including in thermonuclear weapons. Politically, India finally rid itself of ideological hesitations to declare itself openly as a nuclear power. However, the international reaction from the US and its allies posed a new diplomatic challenge.

The diplomatic engagement with the international order went through various phases—the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott talks and later the NSSP (Next Steps in Strategic Partnership) with the US. With demonstrated Indian nuclear capabilities, its firm resolve despite international opposition to pursue a credible minimum nuclear deterrent programme, its readiness to engage internationally and changing geopolitics finally compelled the US to change its policy on India's nuclear programme from roll-back to some form of accommodation.

The process that took this forward was the Civil Nuclear Initiative (2004-2008) under the leadership of prime minister Manmohan Singh. Given the complexity of the issues involved, this was one of the most significant diplomatic exercises undertaken by independent India and perhaps also one of the most successful.

The end result was that India



# Ready to roll

Following the Pokhran tests, India has operationalised a credible deterrent that the nation should be proud of



BY AIR MARSHAL RAJESH KUMAR (RETD)

**O**n May 18, 1974, India conducted a Peaceful Nuclear Explosion at Pokhran. Almost a quarter century later, it conducted five nuclear tests of advanced weapon designs, once again at the Pokhran range, catapulting the country into the nuclear club with the ability to weaponise and maintain a nuclear arsenal.

The process of weaponisation and operationalisation was not smooth. Because of the need to maintain secrecy and also because of the long gap between the first and the second tests, the military was kept out of the loop for a long time. Even before the 1998 tests, General K. Sundarji (retd), former Army chief, had written that the “really big secret is that India has no coherent nuclear weapon policy and worse still, she does not have an institutionalised system for analysing and throwing up policy options in this regard”.

Despite the obvious disadvantage in keeping the programme outside the military, India had to move fast to operationalise its nuclear deterrent as pressure was building up from various quarters. Post the tests, India faced sanctions and there was pressure to roll back the nuclear programme and sign the CTBT (Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty). The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1172 condemning the tests. India stood firm and released its Draft Nuclear Doctrine (DND) in August 1999, showcasing itself as a responsible nuclear power.

The objective of putting the nuclear doctrine in the public domain was four fold. It signalled India’s resolve to retain its nuclear weapons programme despite

international condemnation of its tests. Second, it projected India as a ‘responsible’ nuclear state that had voluntarily placed its nuclear cards on the table. Third, as a political declaration of intent directed at potential adversaries, it established India’s overall deterrence posture.

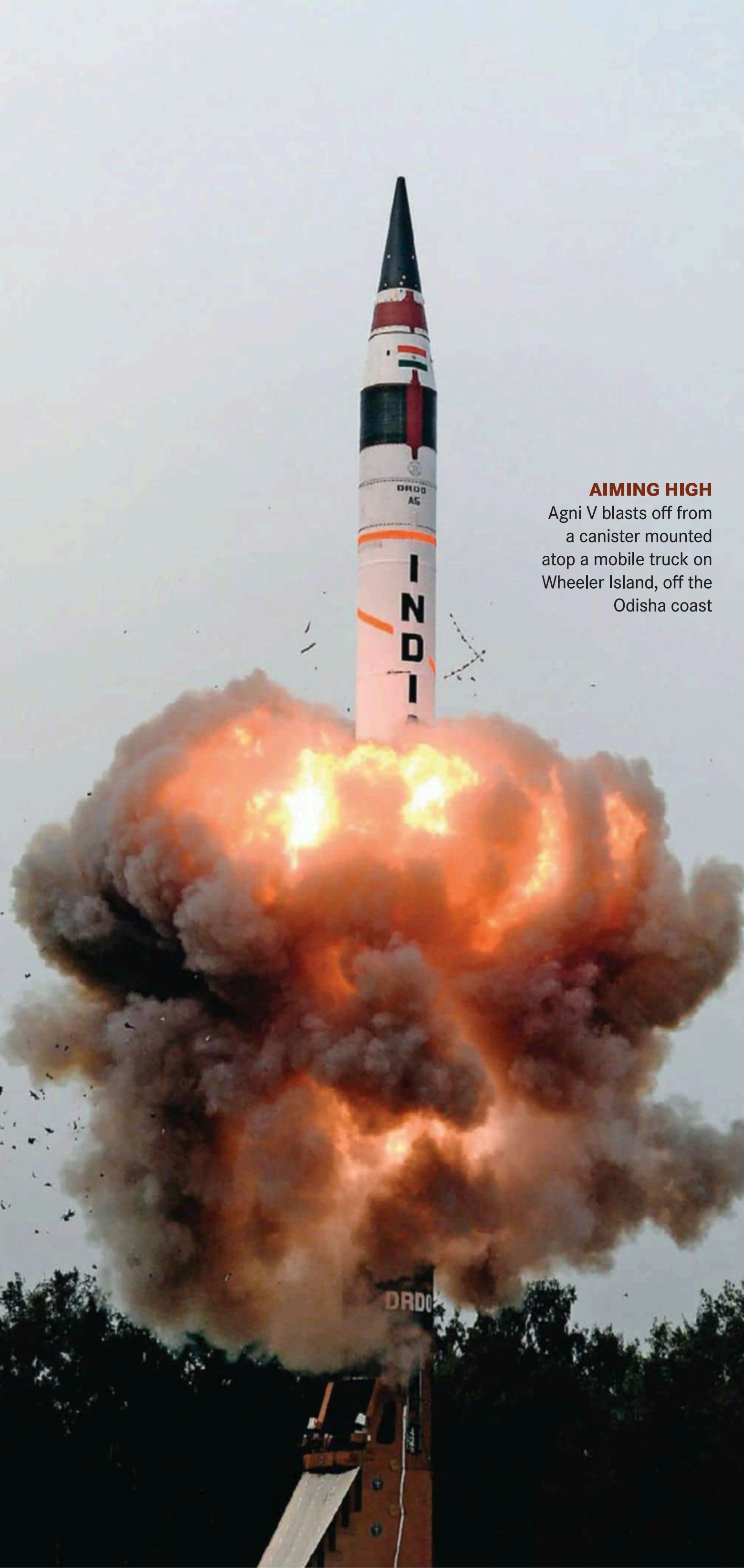
The expanding Chinese arsenal combined with the development and deployment of Beijing’s ballistic missile defence may force India to adjust the number of its warheads to retain an assured second strike capability.

Finally, it demonstrated to the public that the government is committed to safeguarding national security and is able to provide guidance to officials who would be expected to act in the event of a crisis. The draft doctrine was followed by a press note on the operationalisation of the nuclear doctrine issued on January 4, 2003, the same day India’s Strategic Forces Command (SFC) was created.

India’s nuclear doctrine rests on three major pillars—credible minimum deterrent, no first use and massive retaliation in case of attack by nuclear weapons. In order to have a credible nuclear deterrent, a force structure that can ensure a second strike capability needed to be developed. The task was not easy, but was taken up in earnest. The current force structure has evolved from the guidance in the draft doctrine which states that “India’s nuclear forces will be effective, enduring, diverse, flexible and responsive to the requirements in accordance with the concept of minimum credible deterrence. These forces will be based on a triad of aircraft, mobile land-based missiles and sea-based assets in keeping with the objectives outlined above. Survivability of the forces will be enhanced by a combination of multiple redundant systems, mobility, dispersion and deception.”

As soon as the SFC was formed, a command and control structure was created along with the physical handing over of necessary assets. The first arm to operationalise was the air arm followed quickly by the land-based missile forces that began with the Prithvi II missiles followed by the Agni series. The sea-based deterrent was created with Dhanush missiles on surface platforms that were supplemented with the underwater arm led by INS Arihant. While operationalising its nuclear delivery vehicles and





#### AIMING HIGH

Agni V blasts off from a canister mounted atop a mobile truck on Wheeler Island, off the Odisha coast

warheads, India has had to contend with an aggressive Pakistani nuclear doctrine. Pakistan claims that its nuclear weapons are solely aimed at India and has vigorously expanded its warhead count vis-à-vis India and has developed tactical nuclear weapons. It claims to have “full spectrum deterrence” and has ruled out ‘no-first-use’ policy.

There is also the expansion of China’s nuclear arsenal, as Beijing is locked in a nuclear arms race with the US. These factors are putting pressure on India’s desire to have an arsenal it describes as a minimum credible deterrent. While India has so far resisted the temptation to match Pakistan warhead for warhead, the expanding Chinese arsenal combined with the development and deployment of China’s ballistic missile defence may force India to adjust the number of its warheads to retain an assured second strike capability.

The new technical developments in the last couple of years that have led to the canisterised Agni P and Agni V missiles are a step in the right direction. These missiles are more amenable to enhanced mobility and faster response times and are inherently more survivable. The launching of INS Arihant also strengthens the sea-based deterrent. India needs to quickly operationalise a longer-range sea-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) as well as develop an air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM) to further bolster its nuclear arsenal.

Following the Pokhran tests, India has operationalised a credible deterrent that the nation should be justifiably proud of. As newer threats and technologies abound among our adversaries, the ability to keep our nuclear deterrent relevant is well within the reach of our homegrown solutions.

**The author** was head of the Strategic Forces Command.

AFP





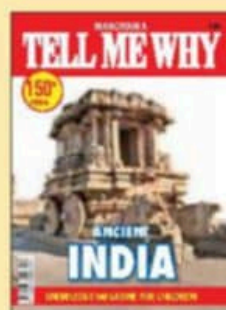
# SUBSCRIBE TO THE WEEK. SAVE UP TO 73%



Amazon.in Email Gift Card



US Polo  
Wheeler Bag



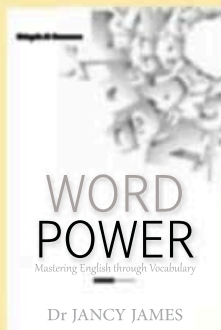
Tell Me Why  
Magazine for  
Children



Wildcraft  
Backpack



Scan to subscribe



Word Power



Domino's  
Email Gift Card



THE WEEK  
Travel Bag

Yes! I would like to subscribe to THE WEEK.

Term	No. of issues	News-stand Price	You Pay Only*	Mega Savings	Your Free Prize
<input type="checkbox"/> 5 years	260	₹ 20,800/-	₹ 6,000/-	₹ 14,800/-	<input type="checkbox"/> Rs 1500 Amazon.in Email Gift Card <b>OR</b> <input type="checkbox"/> US Polo Wheeler Bag <b>Best Offer</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> 3 years	156	₹ 12,480/-	₹ 4,500/-	₹ 7,980/-	<input type="checkbox"/> Rs 1000 Amazon.in Email Gift Card <b>OR</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 3 year subscription of Tell Me Why <b>OR</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Wildcraft Backpack
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 year	52	₹ 4,160/-	₹ 1,600/-	₹ 2,560/-	<input type="checkbox"/> Word Power <b>OR</b> <input type="checkbox"/> THE WEEK Travel Bag <b>OR</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Rs 500 Domino's Email Gift Card <b>OR</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Rs 500 Amazon.in Email Gift Card <b>OR</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year subscription of Tell Me Why
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 year	52	₹ 4,160/-	₹ 1,100/-	₹ 3,060/-	No Gift

Name: Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Office \_\_\_\_\_

Land Mark \_\_\_\_\_ City/District: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ PIN (essential): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (Mobile) \_\_\_\_\_ (Res) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

(Email id and Mobile number will help us to serve you better)

**To receive Amazon.in email gift card, email id & mobile number are mandatory.**

**If prize is not mentioned for 5, 3 and 1 year subscriptions, US Polo Wheeler Bag, Wildcraft Backpack and The Week Travel Bag will be sent respectively.**

Cheque/DD No.: \_\_\_\_\_ dated: \_\_\_\_\_ for [ ] ₹ 6000 [ ] ₹ 4500 [ ] ₹ 1600 [ ] ₹ 1100 **favouring THE WEEK**

Bank Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to inform any changes in the postal address/contact numbers to which the publication is sent, as and when any such changes happen, and also to receive any details regarding the subscription. THE WEEK magazine/Malayala Manorama group of publications may also contact the email-id/contact numbers given by you for information/upgradation of THE WEEK magazine/Malayala Manorama group of publications and offer promotions. In case you are not interested to receive any such information please tick the box ☐

For terms and conditions please refer [www.theweek.in](http://www.theweek.in) \*On a cover price of ₹ 80/- **This offer is valid till 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.**

website: [theweek.in](http://theweek.in) [facebook.com/theweekmag](https://www.facebook.com/theweekmag) [google.com/+TheWeekMag](https://www.google.com/+TheWeekMag) [@theweeklive](https://www.x.com/theweeklive)

**Fill In, enclose your payment and send to THE WEEK, Manorama Buildings, P.O.Box No.4278, Panampilly Nagar, Kochi - 682036, Kerala, India.**

TW/422/GDO/09-06-2024

**To subscribe, visit [www.theweek.in/subscribe](http://www.theweek.in/subscribe) or call 18001035981 (Toll free)**



## Sid for kids

As a child, Sidhartha Mallya wished he had someone in his life to tell him what he wants to convey in his latest children's book, *Sad Glad*

BY ANJULY MATHAI

PHOTO COURTESY INSTAGRAM@SIDMALLYA



**I**n a way, Sidhartha Mallya's new book, *Sad Glad*, is a microcosm of his own life. It is about a boy called Sid who wakes up one morning feeling different. He can't understand why. The sky outside is dark and gloomy, much like what he feels inside. Finally, his dog Duke has to talk him through what he is feeling, explain to him that some days might be bad, but other days will be better, and that "all these feelings complete our life". In the end, the sun comes out, and Sid feels better.

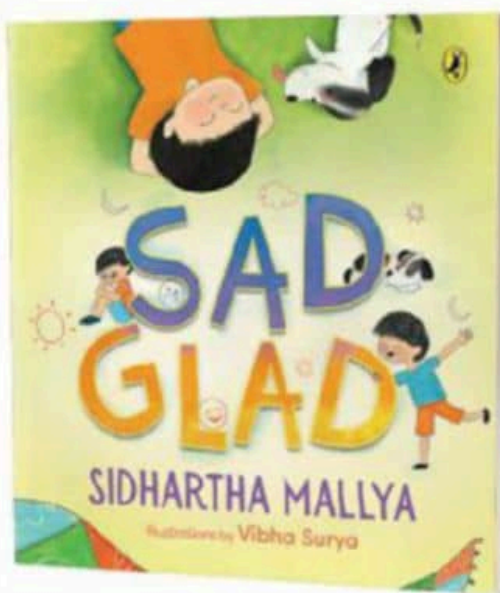
There was a phase in his life when Mallya felt much like Sid in the book. It happened after his parents' divorce when he was nine years old, as he describes in his previous book, *If I'm Honest*. Before that he was an active happy child, playing Bingo with everyone in his father's office—former liquor baron Vijay Mallya—when his father would ensure that he always won; playing pranks like locking his dad's secretary in the office and running away with the key; pretending to be imaginary characters, his favourite being Raphael from the Ninja Turtles. "I remember being given a Raphael costume and taking a couple of forks from the kitchen (because they resembled his three-pronged weapon called a Sai) and running around the house stabbing things, particularly the ornamental pillows, pretending they were the bad guys," he writes in *If I'm Honest*.

All that changed with the divorce. He remembers being introduced to his dad's new family—his stepmom, two half-sisters and stepbrother and stepsister (his stepmother's two children from her previous marriage). It was a lot to take in for a nine-year-old boy, but having been an only child for so long, he was excited to be part of a large family. When he returned home to his mother, he felt an emptiness that he had never felt before. "I often joke that I went on

that trip as an only child and came back as a lonely child," he writes.

Once the monster of loneliness reared its head, it grew inside him well into his teens, along with a deep longing for belonging. Much like Sid in *Sad Glad* (which has been beautifully illustrated by Vibha Surya), he "would wake up in the mornings feeling lost and empty". He felt like he did not have a purpose in life and was experiencing "a continuous low mood and sadness". It all came to a head one day when he just broke down, letting out years of bottled-up pain. He shouted at the mirror, "Why are you feeling this way? You shouldn't be feeling like this. Stop it, stop it, stop it." And that's when he knew he needed to seek professional help.

The beauty of *If I'm Honest* is, true to its name, its heart-wrenching honesty. Mallya is far from the spoilt rich brat that many assumed him to be. He does not hold anything back, from the pain of being insulted after his father's legal troubles began (he was told that his family should die and he should go to jail); to the anger he took out on his mother; to being



**SAD GLAD**

By **Sidhartha Mallya**

Illustrations by **Vibha Surya**

Published by **Puffin Books**  
(an imprint of Penguin  
Random House India)

Price ₹299



drunk "75 per cent of the time" in university; to compulsively calling his friends in a panic after hard nights of partying to ask whether he had done something wrong.

In *Sad Glad*, he wants children to know what he wishes he had known when he was young: that being human means dealing with a kaleidoscope of emotions, none of which is to be rejected, but to be received with the understanding that they are all a part of life. "What I realised was that we would be better equipped



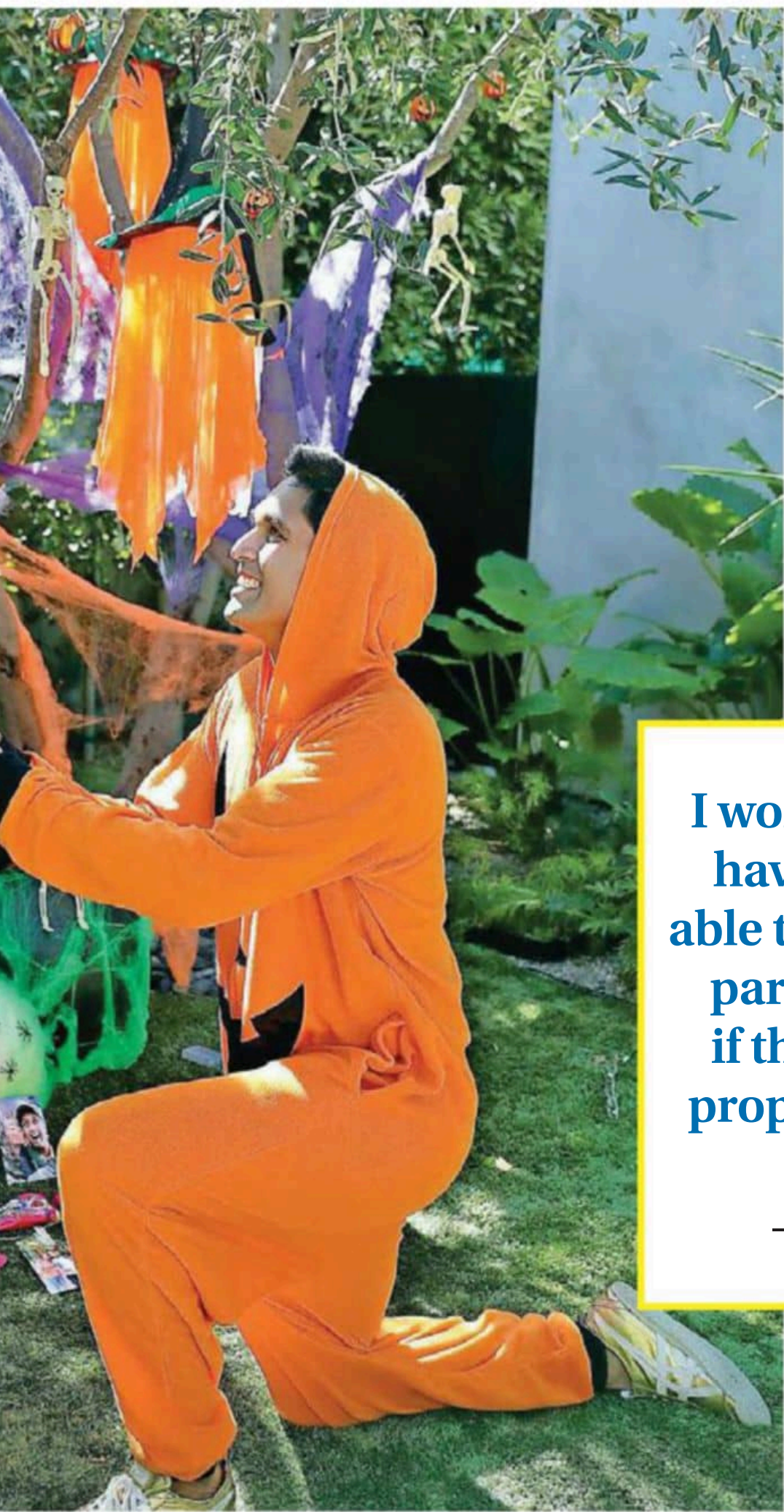


PHOTO COURTESY INSTAGRAM@SIDMALLYA



#### GOOD TIMES

Sidhartha with dad Vijay on the latter's birthday; (extreme left) Sid proposing to fiancée Jasmine on Halloween

**I wonder if I would have been better able to deal with [my parents'] divorce if there had been proper discussions around it.**

—Sidhartha Mallya

to deal with a lot of things that we go through as adults if we had been taught about them from a younger age," he tells THE WEEK over Zoom from Los Angeles, where he currently lives. "That, for me, was really the motivation for doing a kid's book, not necessarily to teach them about the complex issues surrounding mental health, but at least to make them aware of these things, so that when they grow older, they know how to navigate them better. I think for me, such a book would certainly have

been a great help [while growing up]." He relates this to his parents' divorce. "I wonder if I would have been better able to deal with the divorce if there had been proper discussions around it," he says.

Mallya, despite his privileged upbringing, has not had it easy in life. But much like Sid, in his life, too, the sun came out in the end. He describes working with his therapist and starting his "self-work" journey in 2016. Today, teaching acting at the Anthony Gilardi Acting Studio in LA,

waiting for the release of his next film with actor Tom Welling (who essayed the role of Clark Kent in *Smallville*, a show that Mallya grew up watching), and promoting *Sad Glad*, which was ranked #1 on the Nielsen Bookscan India Chart in the children's category, Mallya is content. But there is another reason why life looks sunny right now: a curly haired beauty called Jasmine, his fiancée (the two are tying the knot in June). They went to the same acting studio, but had not met until he returned from his shoot in Rome. "Now she is everything to me," he says. "I feel like I have known her for multiple lifetimes. She completes me and offers me things that I did not even know I wanted."

He says love came at a time when he was least expecting it. Before he met Jasmine, he was coming to terms with the fact that he might be alone for the rest of his life. "And that was ok," he says. "I had become comfortable with myself and my own company. And that's when Jasmine came into my life. It is when you don't look for them that most good things happen."

But he was ready for her only because he had found peace within himself. Now he wants to have lots of children, and he wants them to experience the security that he never had in his childhood. ❶



INTERVIEW

Kani Kusruti, actor

I don't think  
things will  
change because  
of the win

BY REYA MEHROTRA



When independent filmmaker Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* scripted history by winning the Grand Prix at the 77th Cannes Film Festival, it was not just a proud moment for the film's team, but also a triumph for the collective aspirations of women across the country. Echoing this sentiment, Kani Kusruti, who plays a nurse in the film, tells THE WEEK, "I feel all women in India are part of this victory". But will the win translate into actual change on the ground for women? Kusruti is doubtful. Still, this has never stopped her from taking up unconventional roles that explore the complexity of being a woman, like the IAS officer Kaveri in *Maharani* or the divisional forest officer Dina in *Poacher*. This commitment to the truth extends to her life as well. Whether it was dropping her surname as a protest against social hierarchy or speaking out against injustice during the #MeToo movement, boldness, for her, has never been a choice.

**Q/ Tell us about your experience at Cannes. Were you expecting to win?**

**A/** It was really nice but hectic. It was also strange in the way we had to dress up and follow protocols. But overall, it was a beautiful experience and everybody was really warm. I wasn't expecting to win, but after the premiere and the following day when we walked the red carpet, [seeing] the way people responded to the film, it felt like we had already won. The film resonated with the people who watched it, so it felt like a different victory. I feel all the women in India are a part of this victory and deserve to share this prize.

**Q/ Tell us about the film crew's dance on the red carpet that went viral.**

**A/** The dance was spontaneous. In the film, there is a scene where the characters of Chhaya [Kadam] and Divya [Prabha] dance to a song. So Payal selected that song to play when we walked the red carpet. We were just really happy to be there and the

song made us feel confident and carefree, so we began dancing.

**Q/ What went behind planning your look for Cannes? You also showed your support for Palestine with a watermelon clutch.**

**A/** I did not want to spend too much time planning my look and going back and forth with it. I also did not want to collaborate with designers, but wanted something that I could afford, buy and re-wear. I like a lot of designers, but cannot afford them. So I opted for my friend's designs at Salt Studio. I told her I wanted to show solidarity with Palestine and was thinking of watermelon embroidery, so she came up with the idea of a watermelon clutch instead. (Watermelon is a symbol of Palestine's protest against Israeli occupation of its territories.) I liked the idea because it was poetic.

**Q/ You have always stood your ground, whether by dropping your surname or by supporting the**





**A lot of people have reached out to me from different parts of India, but most of them are women. It's been a beautiful sharing of happiness.**

AFP

**Q/ Will you be open to working in Hindi films?**

**A/** My Hindi is quite bad. I have to learn all my dialogues and still speak with a Kerala accent. If I get a chance, I feel it will be limited to certain characters and stories, but if it is a good script, I would not mind. I would love to work with the likes of Dibakar Banerjee and Sriram Raghavan.

**Q/ What does this win mean for the Indian film industry and for independent filmmakers?**

**A/** I hope this win means we will believe more in the vision of new and independent filmmakers and support them. I truly wish that kind of change happens. Things will not change overnight, but I hope this adds to speeding [things] up. Kerala has had such support, but I wish for the whole country to have it.

**Q/ Tell us about your role in the film.**

**A/** Payal wanted me to play the younger nurse played by Divya when she spoke to me about my role six to seven years ago. But the film kept getting postponed and by the time it was finally made, I had reached an age where I could not play her. I don't look up to my character because she is very conservative and rigid, but there is a certain transition that happens in her journey. The fact that she allows herself to be bold is what I find positive in the character.

**Q/ What do you think led to the win?**

**A/** When I read Payal's script, it really touched me. It was extremely poetic and subtle; one can easily connect to it. When she directed the film, she managed to translate her feelings into it. I felt she was truly deserving of the prize. I don't know about the win, but to be selected in this category itself is prestigious. (*All We Imagine As Light* is the first film from India in over 30 years to be selected in the Main Competition section at Cannes.) **1**



**CLASS ACT**

Kani (left) in a still from *All We Imagine As Light*

**#MeToo movement. How did this impact your career and how will this win change things?**

**A/** I don't know if it is about standing my ground or not. Sometimes I think it is the way I look and that people have certain expectations from me. I don't think things will change because the film won; I really have no answers. The situation is that I reach out to directors, but generally don't even get a chance to audition.

**Q/ How has the response from the industry been after the win?**

**A/** A lot of people have reached out to me from different parts of India, but most of them are women. It's been a beautiful sharing of happiness. Everyone wants to know the journey of an independent filmmaker, how did they find funding, and and the support they got, but I don't know how many would have seen this vision prior to the win.





To order, scan  
the QR Code.

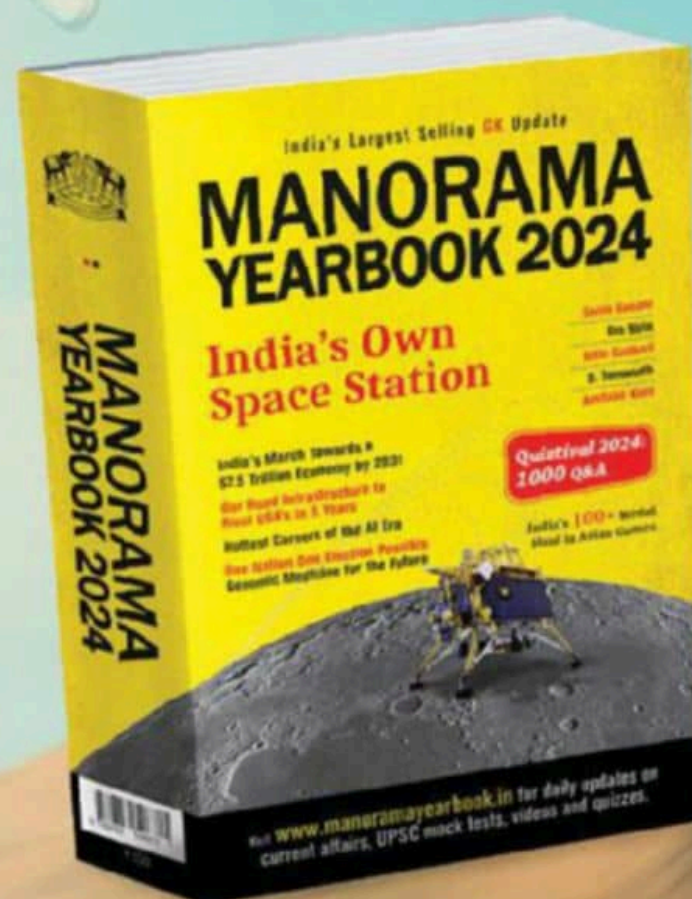
# Outsmart the Competition

Presenting Manorama Yearbook 2024.  
The complete guide to in-depth knowledge,  
insightful topics, current affairs  
and more that will help you to  
crack any competitive exam with ease.

Available in all leading bookstalls  
and with Manorama agents

INDIA'S LARGEST SELLING  
GK UPDATE

Visit [www.manoramayearbook.in](http://www.manoramayearbook.in) for daily updates on current affairs,  
UPSC mock tests, videos and quizzes.



## MANORAMA YEARBOOK 2024





## Reckless in Pune

**M**y home is not too far from Kalyani Nagar, the scene of the ghastly accident in Pune, when an underage brat, in a swanky Porsche, at 200 kmph, flung two young techies 15 feet in the air, killing the young woman on the spot, while her male friend succumbed to grievous injuries later. Kalyani Nagar is a posh area with several upmarket restaurants, bars, clubs and pubs, frequented by techies who love to party over weekends after putting in long hours at demanding jobs. Most are ambitious out-of-towners, happy to let their hair down in a new city miles away from home. I have frequented these places myself, and keenly observed the scene, especially after midnight, when the roar of Ferraris, Porsches and Aston Martins, racing across the Kalyani Nagar bridge, often drowns out the high-decibel tracks being blasted by DJs as young things dance the night away fuelled by exotic cocktails... and stronger substances. If there is an age limit, it is recklessly disregarded by owners of these glittering waterholes as arrogant, super-entitled underage monsters stagger in nonchalantly.

The juvenile in Pune had spent ₹70,000 in two bars that fateful evening. Petty change for someone like him, son of controversial real estate developer Vishal Agarwal, and grandson of Surendra Agarwal, a notorious businessman, with links to underworld dons. Both are under police detention, while the juvenile delinquent is in a children's observation centre for 14 days.

As a person who loves Pune, none of this is shocking. It has become the 'Pune way of life', after rapacious builders with strong political backers grabbed tracts of prime land and built gleaming towers, boasting of unimaginably luxurious amenities. Builders and netas ruthlessly conspired to ruin what was once a cultured and refined city known for its high standards of education, and its

impeccable legacy of freedom fighters, thinkers and intellectual stalwarts. Today's Pune is like a den of thieves, with uneducated, ridiculously wealthy builders who think it is cool to allow teenage children to run around in cars that cost ₹2 crore and more. So what if one Porsche gets totalled in a careless accident? There are five more equally expensive cars in the garage, just for the enjoyment of kids who like speed.

In this case, the matters are far more serious, with attempts to intimidate and bribe the family driver into accepting responsibility for the crime. The brat's friends have, however, admitted



The Porsche that hit two young techies in Pune

to the police it was their friend at the wheel of the killer car, while the father and grandfather were busy offering allurements to all and sundry, including two doctors who threw away the brat's blood sample into a dustbin and substituted it with a 'clean' one. Both docs have been arrested after public outrage and political

pressure escalated. Irony: the brat was too drunk to realise he was beaten up by an enraged crowd who summoned the cops.

Friends who live in Pune say the clubs and pubs are pretty empty following the tragedy, as owners wonder how to get back to business without flouting laws. Surely, it is not all that tough? Live streaming of entry and exit points is being considered. But why not do it the way the rest of the world imposes age limits—insist on legit ID cards and enforce the rule strictly.

This case is not just about an out of control car being driven by a drunk juvenile who hit and killed innocents after bingeing with buddies. It is a ghastly reflection of how vitiated Pune's social atmosphere has become after the city was captured by the likes of the Agarwal family. Stricter laws are but one way to control those who think they are above justice. Wake up, Pune! And pay up.





GETTY IMAGES

PTI

## ACTIVIST BRANDO

The first look of a Marlon Brando biopic—starring **Billy Zane** as the legendary actor—is out, and fans are marvelling at Zane's likeness to Brando in the poster. The film, *Waltzing with Brando*, is directed by Bill Fishman and focuses on how he built the world's first fully ecological retreat in Tahiti. "Back then no one would touch causes," said Zane. "He championed civil rights, he marched with Dr Martin Luther King.... What no one knows about is what he did for the environment as an activist...."

## CALL HER BADASS

**Ananya Panday** is here to stay and slay. In her OTT series debut, *Call Me Bae*, she plays an heiress who has been disinherited. Forced to fall back on her smarts, *Call Me Bae* is a rags-to-riches story in reverse, with Panday discovering that you really don't need gold to glitter in life. The eight-part series, directed by Collin D'Cunha, also features Vir Das, Varun Sood and Mini Mathur. And when you can have Dharma as your producer, who needs Dior?





## PEN FIGHT

**Junaid Khan**, Aamir Khan's son, is set to make his debut in June with the Netflix film *Maharaj*. Co-starring Jaideep Ahlawat, Sharwari Wagh and Shalini Pandey, the film is set in the 1800s and narrates how a journalist goes "toe-to-toe with this spotless figure of the community in a bid to uncover a series of incidents that shake the very foundation of society". He has also completed the shoot of his second film with Sai Pallavi, and is now gearing for his third with Khushi Kapoor.

## STRUMMING HER PAIN

The lives of a whole generation have been sound-tracked by **Celine Dion's** songs, and now we get to see her up close and personal. A new documentary on Dion, 56, releases on Amazon Prime Video on June 25. *I Am: Celine Dion* is not only about the glitzy concerts and the adoring crowds. It is also about her battle with Stiff Person Syndrome (SPS), a rare neurological condition she was diagnosed with in 2022. "I'm working hard every day," she says in the trailer. "But I have to admit, it's been a struggle." The film is directed by Oscar-nominated filmmaker Irene Taylor.

## GARBED IN GARBAGE

South Korean girl band Blackpink's **Lisa** made a bold statement on sustainability at the 2024 Monaco Grand Prix by wearing trash—literally. She wore a custom-made dress made out of 1,800 pieces of trash. Eighty per cent of the dress was made out of used water bottle lids and 20 per cent out of food containers. Going by how popular her look was, trash just might be the next big runway trend, so don't bin those bottles yet.

COMPILED BY **ANJULY MATHAI**





# My study of a zero wave election

In the last mile of 2024 Lok Sabha general elections, two completely divergent narratives have emerged about who is ahead and best placed to form the next government. Though they are not the only individuals on either side of the trenches to have made these arguments, we can, for the purpose of shorthand, call it the Prashant Kishor and Yogendra Yadav schools of thought.

I was the first to interview Kishor. We met in Patna, where the political consultant-turned-politician—his party Jan Suraj will contest the next assembly elections—set the cat among the proverbial pigeons with his remarks. While there was a lot of focus on his prediction that the BJP will be back, “by the same or slightly more”, intriguingly there has not been as much debate on his description in the same interview, of the prime minister being, in his words, “a brand in decline”. Likening it to “a century with six dropped catches” Kishor has blamed the opposition for “poor fielding”. He forecasts a “weakened prime minister” whose main resistance will come from the general public in what he is sure will be Modi’s third term.

Yadav, a supporter of the INDIA alliance, has an entirely different sense of what happens next. In a conversation with me, he underlined that he was not talking about a ‘1977-style’ mass wave of anger against the incumbent government, but “a return to normal politics” where a phase by phase decline, combined with the dip in turn out numbers, has now painted a likelihood of the “BJP, maybe even the NDA, slipping below the majority mark”.

Is there a space between these two predictive arguments that we know to be true?

I won’t hazard any guess on numbers. But here are some observations from my road trip traversing

the distance between Kanniyakumari and Kashmir—covering 12 states and 12,000km over 40 plus days.

Modi remains the dominant political brand across India. There is more incumbency against local MPs of the BJP than against the prime minister. Whatever the eventual outcome, there has been a spirited fight in this election.

The election feels more competitive than anyone would have forecast at the beginning of the campaign. Modi’s own voters want him to dial down religious rhetoric and Hindu-Muslim barbs. The biggest applause for Modi comes on matters of internal security, abrogation of Article 370, infrastructure and India’s stature in the world.

One thing voters want Modi to do differently (apart from toning down religious politics) is to focus more on jobs.

There is no palpable anger, but in many places, there is despondency and disquiet—small street vendors and shopkeepers spoke often of “*sannaata hai*” (everything is still) when I asked about how their businesses were doing. Yet, they did not suggest that they would vote differently than before. Young men are agitated about jobs. The four

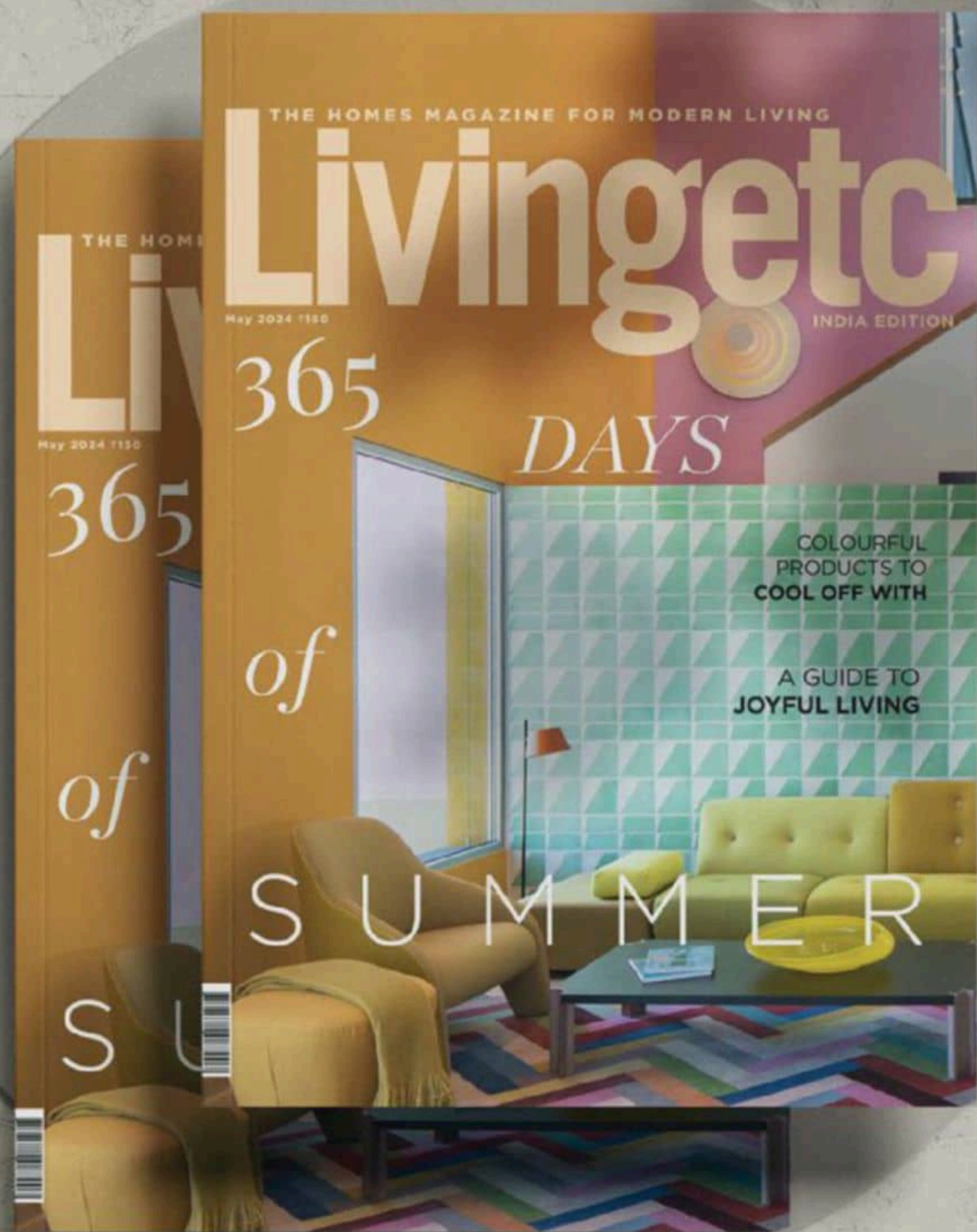
year cap on Agniveer, the new military recruitment scheme, is a genuine issue of angst in states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Haryana.

There is no single emotive issue that defines the election. The Ram temple, while welcomed by millions of devout Indians, does not come up in political conversation. These are disparate, seemingly unconnected observations in what’s being called ‘a zero wave’ election.

For the rest, we must have the humility to say the following three words—we don’t know—and wait patiently till June 4.







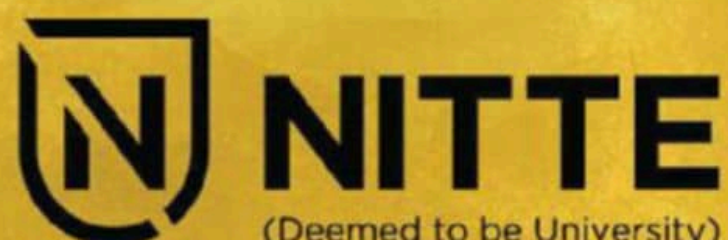
**ON STANDS NOW**

GRAB YOUR COPY TODAY



@livingetcind






(Deemed to be University)

Where there is space for every dream

**nirf**  
RANKED 65<sup>TH</sup>  
NIRF 2023

  
GRADE 'A+'  
BY NAAC



# YOUR FUTURE BEGINS AT NITTE

**ADMISSIONS  
OPEN**

[apply.nitte.edu.in](http://apply.nitte.edu.in)

+91 95131 88844

Medicine | Dentistry | Engineering | Architecture | Pharmacy | Nursing  
Physiotherapy | Speech & Hearing | Anaesthesia & OT | Medical Imaging | Medical  
Laboratory | Respiratory Therapy | Renal Dialysis | Radiation Therapy | Biomedical  
Science | Hotel Management | Culinary Arts | Media & Communication | Public  
Health | Hospital Administration | BCA | BCom | BBA | BSc | MBA | MCA