



# lounge

SATURDAY, JULY 6 2024

## BHARTI KHER'S NEW SOLO

Artist Bharti Kher's most extensive exhibition yet in the UK—*Bharti Kher: Alchemies*—represents different approaches and periods of her career, highlighting her ongoing engagement with the notions of identity and gender.

SEE PAGE 11



SOVEREIGN FUNDS FLOCK TO INDIA AMID FII, PE CAUTION | PAGE 16

# CHANGE IS BREWING

WITH EXPERIMENTS ON TO EXTRACT NUTRIENTS FROM TEA AND TURN IT INTO AN ALTERNATIVE TO CHAMPAGNE, TEA IS NOW MORE THAN AN EVERYDAY DRINK



SOURCE  
Ideas to observe  
Plastic Free July

TASTE  
*Hold the sugar  
in that cocktail*

SPORTS  
Anjum Moudgil  
takes aim for Paris

BUSINESS LOUNGE  
*Meet Minimalist's  
Mohit Yadav*

A NOTE FROM  
THE EDITOR

SHALINI UMACHANDRAN

Reading the  
tea leaves

ISTOCKPHOTO



There are all kinds of indices in the world of commodities—but it's unlikely you've heard of the Teabag Index. Essentially a way to study how quickly or slowly plant matter decomposes over time, researchers at Umeå University in Sweden came up with the index nearly a decade ago during—you'll guess this one—a tea break. They got citizen scientists around the world to bury teabags (three Rooibos, two green) in all sorts of conditions—parks, meadows, farms, deserts, under permafrost, even underwater. They've now collected individual data about how the tea decomposed from 36,000 teabags buried all over the world and published the findings a few days ago. It helps them track soil health in different parts of the world, information that can help with everything from agriculture and conservation to understanding carbon cycles. It does seem fun—contribute to the cause of science and then celebrate with a cup of tea. It's also an experiment that points to the versatility of tea, which is what our cover story is about this week.

There's a lot happening around tea—tea lovers are fermenting and flavouring it, bakers are baking with it, mixologists are crafting cocktails with it, wine sommeliers are bottling it, and management bros are trying to isolate its nutritional properties so you can be more efficient about getting the best of it. That last one seems to contradict the idea of taking a break with a relaxing brew, but there's no doubt that tea producers are trying to elevate tea as well as the drinking experience. Mumbai and Hyderabad have exclusive tea bars, which are definitely on my list of places to visit when I travel to the cities next—even if I don't drink tea. It's a drink that means many things to different people, which is what tea producers are cheerfully betting on. And so, we recommend pouring yourself a nice cup and settling down with *Lounge* to read all about film, fashion, books, food, art and sports.

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✉@shalinimb

## NEW ON SCREENS

Eddie Murphy returns as Axel Foley, Guddu takes charge in 'Mirzapur', and other titles to watch



## BEVERLY HILLS COP: AXEL F

A franchise resurrection you may not have seen coming. The last *Beverly Hills Cop* film was made a full 30 years ago. This new action comedy is a sequel, not a reboot, with Eddie Murphy back as lieutenant Axel Foley, who teams up with his daughter (Taylor Paige). Also starring Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Kevin Bacon and some familiar faces from the old films. Directed by Mark Molloy. (Netflix)

## DESPICABLE ME 4

By this point you know what you'll get with a *Despicable Me* movie: slapstick, sight gags, crowd-pleasing Minion antics, some family bonding, and more slapstick. This fourth entry in the series has reformed supervillain Gru (voiced by Steve Carrell) with his hands full taking care of the boisterous Gru Jr, and battling the threat of criminal kingpin and old foe Maxime Le Mal (Will Ferrell), who's escaped from prison. Directed by Chris Renaud, who helmed the first and second films in the series, and featuring the voices of Pierre Coffin, Joey King, Miranda Cosgrove, Sofia Vergara, Steve Coogan and Stephen Colbert. (In theatres)



Compiled by Uday Bhatia

## MIRZAPUR

One of the most popular Indian streaming series returns for a third season. With Kaleen Bhaiyaa (Pankaj Tripathi) on the run, Guddu (Ali Fazal) is now the big gun in Purvanchal. The rest of the ensemble includes Rasika Dugal, Vijay Varma, Harshita Gaur. (Amazon Prime)



## FURIOSA: A MAD MAX SAGA

George Miller's action film comes to streaming. It's a prequel to *Fury Road*, and a different beast. Furiosa (played by Ayla Browne and Anya Taylor-Joy) is kidnapped by warlord Dementus (Chris Hemsworth). We see her grow into a warrior over the course of the film. (BookMyShow Stream, rental)

PLAN THE WEEK  
AHEAD

## RECORDING THE PRESENT

A new show will open this weekend at Method Kala Ghoda in Mumbai.

Titled, *The Future Will Remember*, the exhibition is by American artist-activist Alexis Rose, who lives in Oaxaca, Mexico, and works in conservation ecology and transformative justice. On the upper level of the gallery, Rose is presenting three tapestries with over 800 gofundme campaign QR codes that represent individuals and families in Gaza, seeking funds to survive or escape to safety. Bricks engraved with names of those who lost their lives in the Israel-Hamas conflict will also be on display.

The exhibition will be on view from 7 July-12 August at Method Kala Ghoda, Mumbai, 11am-8pm (closed on Monday and Tuesday).



## CLASSIC YET MODERN

Restobar Sly Granny has unveiled a new menu at its Delhi outpost. The selection of dishes, put together by chef Anubhav Moza, serves European classics with contemporary flourishes. Some of the highlights include shish tawook broccolini, Greek vegetable medley and candied pumpkin, and spiced pumpkin steak and a creamy tahini, among other dishes. Those who like seafood can opt for the herb-crusted salmon served with crème fraîche, pan-tossed vegetables and a beurre blanc sauce. Round off your meal with a classic tiramisu made with mascarpone-soaked sponge.

At Sly Granny, Khan Market, New Delhi.

—Compiled by Avantika Bhuyan

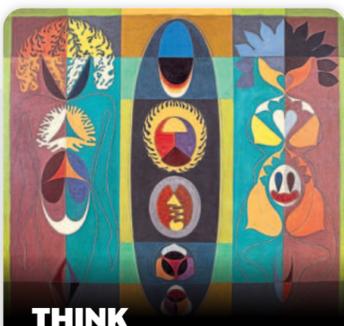
LOUNGE  
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THE WEEK

The best of **Mintlounge.in** from the week gone by and what to look forward to in the one ahead



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THINK

Spotlight on the art  
of Madras Movement

In the 1960s in Chennai, a group of artists came together to create a vocabulary that drew from their local and indigenous roots. They eschewed more westernised forms of art and created their own modernist imagery, yet the Madras Art Movement is not as well-known as other art movements. Its practitioners—K.C.S. Paniker, K.M. Adimoolam, V. Viswanadhan, Ravi Pooviah, S. Nandagopal and Arnawaz Vasudev, among others—even created a one-of-a-kind artists' village, Cholamandal. An exhibition, *Madras Modern*, places this movement in the national context, writes **Avantika Bhuyan**. It runs till 6 July in Delhi, offering a rare glimpse into India's influential indigenous art movement that's often overlooked.



WEAR

Can you wear shorts  
to the office?

Nine-to-five as office wear may be a bit of a challenge for everyone but we're also really glad that dress-down Fridays—that terrible tech-bro trend of the early 2000s—is long dead. While showing a little leg at the office is no longer off limits, can you really wear shorts to work? **Manish Mishra** answers the question, speaking to workplace consultants and fashion designers. Shorts are rarely acceptable in formal settings, but fashion houses, like Gucci, have recently styled shorts with camp collar shirts and long coats for a somewhat professional look. High-waisted shorts paired with a structured shirt, the right accessories, polished shoes and a blazer could work. In other words, it's about how you style it.



LIVE

Apple Vision Pro: the  
future of reality

**Shouvik Das** recently spent an hour trying out the not-so-new Apple Vision Pro (launched last June but not yet available in India) mixed reality headset and came away with plenty of insights into the next generation of personal computing. Apart from adding layers of interactivity to the experience, it has no handheld controls, which means everything is done with gestures with hands. That anyone might use this helmet-like device everyday feels farcical today, but in the long run, it's likely that devices like this could replace other gadgets as we know them today. The headset may currently be a novelty that appeals only to early adopters, but, in time, there is scope for it to become an everyday product.



READ

The supersleuths of  
the food world

For chefs and food writers, memory is a strong driver of creativity. Whether it's a fleeting impression of a dish eaten once as a child or the steady nostalgia of trying to recreate a family staple without the benefit of a written recipe, memory plays an important role not just in how we cook but also how we enjoy food. Foods that people eat can also be a marker of culture, conflict and community. **Pankaja Srinivasan**, who recently read the *Kamogawa Food Detectives*, a book about a father and daughter, Nagare and Koishi, who recreate forgotten foods from impressions and run a diner and agency, set off to find out from chefs and food writers what dish they'd want recreated if they met a pair of food detectives.



# Daisy Hildyard's two-body problem

## RE READINGS

A monthly column on backlisted books that have much to offer in contemporary times

The author's 'The Second Body' shows that nothing drives home the reality of climate change as personal tragedy

Somak Ghoshal

In the blazing summer of 2024, when temperatures were hovering around 50 degrees Celsius and air-conditioning units in the National Capital Region were blowing up in flames, I discovered *The Second Body*, an odd gem of a book by the science historian, Daisy Hildyard, which was published in 2017.

I read it in a day, in a state of feverish excitement, savouring one of those rare encounters with an author who dares to strip away the film of familiarity from their readers' eye, forcing them to see what has remained long unseen.

A curious mix of cultural history, investigative journalism and philosophical analysis, it's hard to classify *The Second Body*. At its broadest, this slim volume is a critique of the ills that humanity continues to inflict on the biosphere, which encapsulates all life on the planet. It follows in the footsteps of a hallowed line of writers, starting with the American scientist Rachel Carson in the 1960s, who have held up a mirror to the perils of the Anthropocene Age.

Yet Hildyard brings more than her scholarship to her work. As the final chapter of *The Second Body* reveals, the book is an outcome of a devastating personal experience—of the author and her family losing their home, and everything else in it, in a flash flood in North Yorkshire in England.

Nothing drives home the reality of cli-



Hildyard's family lost their home to floods.

mate change until it is experienced as individual tragedy. All the best scientific minds could keep making foolproof cases on the impact of human action on all lives across the globe. But until the water supply runs out in our neighbourhood, or the birds begin to drop dead on our terraces scorched by the sun, climate science feels abstract and intangible to most of us.

At its core, *The Second Body* is an attempt to actualise the irony of this double bind. It all starts with Hildyard rescuing an injured pigeon in her kitchen one day and immediately thinking that she could have just as easily wrung its neck and eaten it herself. But, as she writes, "I could see its mind in its body," and that moment of intimacy sparks a thought,

The author embraces doubt and opens herself to the unfathomable mysteries of existence. It pushes us to see for ourselves who we are, and where we are headed

which changes everything.

Over the next few days, Hildyard begins to notice animals she hadn't "really noticed" before—they hadn't "felt as real" as "her" pigeon. As a human, the dominant life form in the Anthropocene, it's easy for her to lapse into the possessive pronoun, even as she feels a shift in her perspective. But, to her credit, Hildyard pursues the hard path of logic, breaking down fallacies step by step, only to realise that "there are different ways to exist in a body." Be it freak storms, changes in seasonal patterns, or the extinction of species—every catastrophe that has befallen the earth is a direct consequence "of actions performed by your body," she tells the reader. Your decision to consume what you do,

create the carbon footprint that you leave, and cause the emissions that your actions result in are directly related to global events. It may seem incredulous but as the Butterfly Effect states, the fluttering of the wings of a butterfly can cause a typhoon. Or, as Hildyard reminds us, "You...have a second body which has its impact on foreign countries and on whales."

The idea isn't entirely original. As early as 1962, Carson's *Silent Spring* used an ingenious narrative technique of zooming in and zooming out to highlight the impact of humanity's reckless actions on the natural world. She went on to argue, for instance, that the killing of sagebrush, considered a nuisance in rural America in her time, by indiscriminate spraying of toxic herbicides could lead to the death of cattle that graze on land containing the residue of these poisons. Decades later, Hildyard notes the same phenomenon in a different language: "The geography of wildlife exploitation maps pretty much directly on to the geography of human exploitation."

In the first three sections of the book, Hildyard sets out to explore this map of exploitation through four characters, each occupying a specific position vis-à-vis their second bodies. There is Richard, a butcher in Yorkshire, who sees pigs not so much as animals but as boiled ham. As Hildyard notes after meeting him at work, "The meat was too far down the production line to be readily identifiable as a part of an animal's body." Gina, an environmental criminologist, understands her relationship with the animal world in terms of trafficked leopards and minks. Luis, a biologist, is obsessed with the Big Questions of life, while Nadezha, who studies fungi, wants to go back to the first principles and define what it means to be an animal.

Each of these interviews produce meandering reports, touching on a wide array of topics, from the latest developments in scientific thinking to 17th-century modes of being in the world, espe-

cially as articulated by Shakespeare through the characters of King Lear and Hamlet. The essays are richly ruminative, with jagged insights, and not exactly cohesive as in a tight-knit philosophical treatise. But Hildyard's project is not about giving an existing idea structural polish or crafting an infallible thesis to defeat its precedents.

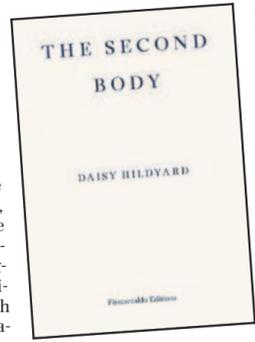
*The Second Body* shines the brightest when the author embraces doubt and opens herself to the unfathomable mysteries of existence. It pushes us to see for ourselves who we are, what we do, and where we are headed. In Hildyard's case, the final turn of the screw comes as a nasty shock, with the loss of everything in the flood. It's not as though she and her husband were unheeding of the warnings—but they had become inured to the possibility of actual destruction after a series of false alarms.

Hildyard and her family were away when the river finally gave way and the water level reached the ceiling of their house. By the time they came back, the tide had receded, but also taken with it all traces of their former life.

In a striking reaction to the situation, Hildyard decides to use the compensation given by the state to go away to a Mediterranean island with her husband and daughter, instead of buying things and rehabilitating the family. It's her penance of sorts for the sheer materiality of her first body, a desire to redeem her second body from the reactions it has caused around the world, including the hellish flood that destroyed her home.

At the end of the great deluge, there was life again. But who knows what's awaiting us on the other end of melting polar ice and infernal summers? All we can do is to remember that our bodies are not merely interconnected with other bodies. We, humans, permeate the biosphere. "Your body is infecting the world," as Hildyard says, "you leak."

Somak Ghoshal is a writer based in Delhi.



## Medium Talk More than small talk

# Make room for joy in life

## HEART OF THE MATTER

A fortnightly column about emotional well-being

To reclaim the joy you experienced as a child, recognise that you have the inner resources to cope with anxiety too

Sonali Gupta

A 37-year-old male client tells me that he sometimes wonders if he's forgotten what joy feels like. "I saw a movie this weekend with my daughter, and there was a dialogue that made me realise that with age, my experiences of joy and happiness seem to be fewer and I barely recollect moments when I felt joy. *Inside Out 2* was hard hitting and a reminder that I have lost my capacity for joy."

This is a theme that often makes it to therapy sessions.

In fact, very often when clients in therapy are experiencing joyous moments or sessions where all that they talk about is how things have been good and life has been going well, towards the end of the session they start getting anxious that maybe something will come up that will make them sad. It's strange but it's something all of us can relate to. Even when we are experiencing joy, anxiety slips in.

Children, on the other hand, have this capacity to savour and find numerous moments when they are in awe, wonder and joy. I remember a client telling me that what she grew up hearing over and over as a child has impacted how she perceives joy as an adult. Her grandmother would say "if you laugh too much, or talk about your joy, something sad or bad will happen soon enough so learn not to show all that you feel".

It made me wonder whether our idea of joy has been shaped by conditioning, or being told not to talk about it or not being allowed to enjoy ourselves.

What does it take for us to reclaim joy, awe and wonder in our day-to-day lives? Often I remind myself that as adults and emerging adults, we can choose and possi-



We can choose and possibly increase our capacity to experience joy.

bly increase our capacity to experience joy. Choosing to remember this is the key, which can be hard given how complex our adult life is.

For me, personal moments of joy are when I feel a certain lightness and a sense of being fully present. At the same time, it is difficult to describe that feeling and put it into words. As I often say, joy is felt deeply yet so hard to convey to others. I often associate it with a sense of contentment, deep presence, gratitude for what's around and an all-encompassing sense of compassion. Those moments feel like peak experiences, when one is in sync with oneself yet feels a deep sense of connection with everything and everyone around.

In therapy, I ask clients to describe their personal experiences of joy. While our emotional states, including happiness, awe and surprise, can look and feel similar to joy, an awareness of how these show up for us in terms of feelings, sensations and behaviours allows us to savour them and cultivate an attitude of mindfulness about our emotions.

At an individual level, clients have talked about experiencing immense joy at

the birth of a child, while spending time in nature, having a spiritual experience, or on the completion of a creative project.

We can experience joy at an individual as well as a collective level. For instance, India winning the T20 World Cup final is collective joy. So many friends and clients talked about this collective joy. Some people got emotional while talking about the win because of the intensity of what they were feeling.

A huge part of embracing joy in adulthood lies in the recognition that given the twists and turns that come with life, we need to make space for both joy and anxiety. At the same time, recognise that when we experience joy, we can give ourselves permission to enjoy it and trust that when difficulties arise or anxiety makes its presence felt, we will have the inner resources to cope with it. So, make room for joy in your life and if you can, allow yourself to park your anxiety for the time being.

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

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H.E. Sh. Shiv Pratap Shukla Ji

Hon'ble Governor of Himachal Pradesh and Chancellor of Jaypee University of Information Technology

## SALIENT FEATURES

- Academic MOUs with reputed Foreign Universities with 8th semester studies there under Student Exchange program
- University has a Technology Incubation & Entrepreneur Development Cell supported by Govt. of Himachal Pradesh under CM Startup/Innovation Projects/New Industries Scheme
- Academic curriculum supported by NPTEL, Virtual Lab, e-Yantra Lab, Spoken Tutorial
- 32 patents granted, 38 patents published
- World class green & smart campus spread over 25 acres of lush green pollution free environment with excellent weather
- Well-furnished hostels (Single/Double occupancy)
- Wi-Fi Enabled Campus, 24X7 Water and Power Supply, Centralized heating facility, Bus and Laundry facilities
- NCC Senior wing for boys and girls
- Vibrant JUIT youth Club
- Facilities of Outdoor and Indoor Games under National Level Coaches, Five fully equipped Gymnasiums
- Shimla (25 Km) and Chandigarh (90 Km) by Road; Airport near campus: Shimla (27 Km)
- JUIT is NIRF ranked and NAAC accredited
- JUIT is ranked by Times Higher Education (THE) and also by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World Rankings

# Source

A compendium of stylish objects made from upcycled fabric

## HYBRID YARN

**Prada Short-sleeved Re-Nylon shirt**  
Loden green-hued shirt in oversized fit made from regenerated nylon yarn. Available on [prada.com](https://prada.com); ₹2,06,359.



## TIN-TINTED

**Regenerated Buttons Statement Necklace**  
Gold tone necklace with moon-engraved logo made from recycled tin and brass. Available on [marineserre.com](https://marineserre.com); ₹59,735.



## ORGANIC RED

**Sleeveless Feather Midi Dress**  
Midi dress in lipstick red made from Nona Source deadstock fabric. Available on [stellamccartney.com](https://stellamccartney.com); ₹4,09,376.



## POWER RUN

**Condor 3 Engineered-Mesh Area White Gradient**  
Running shoes from Veja's SS'24 collection combine technology with bio-sourced materials. Available on [veja-store.com](https://veja-store.com); ₹16,710.



## FANCY& FIBRE RICH

**Cara Jacket Turquoise**  
The Cara Jacket crafted from 100% luxurious Italian soft hemp cloth features a wrap closure and flap welt pockets. Available on [tove-studio.com](https://tove-studio.com); ₹1,19,500.



## BEAD BLUE

**Amethyste Handbag**  
Handbag in shades of purple and blue made from upcycled denim with recycled stones and PVC beads. Available on [kevingermanier.com](https://kevingermanier.com); ₹73,888.



STREAM OF STORIES

RAJA SEN

## Great British watch-off



A still from 'Inside No. 9'.

As a rule of thumb, British television is often better than American television. Their comedies are more fearlessly irreverent, the dramas are darker and more morally complex, and they push the envelope more radically than most. And while once in a while a *Fleabag* breaks out and conquers the world, there's an embarrassment of riches to be unearthed on BBC's iPlayer, a streaming service to love. However, for international viewers, the iPlayer has long been viewable only by using a VPN and pretending you're in England—until now.

Amazon Prime Video in India now offers a specific "BBC Player" bundle that adds a bunch of BBC shows to your existing subscription. It's nowhere near as deep as the full iPlayer catalogue, but it's a significant start, and ever since I subscribed, I've been heading to Amazon a lot more often than its rivals. Here are some shows available in that section that I would recommend immediately.

### INSIDE NO. 9

Crafted by Reece Shearsmith and Steve Pemberton, it stands as one of television's smartest and strangest offerings. Each episode is a self-contained narrative, set within a distinct No.9 address, showcasing a dazzling array of genres and styles. This anthology series thrives on its unpredictability and masterful storytelling, with plotlines ranging from darkly comic to poignantly tragic.

One standout episode, *The Twelve Days of Christine*, presents a heartbreaking exploration of memory and loss, unravelling through a non-linear sequence that keeps viewers on edge until its poignant conclusion. In *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, the plot intricately weaves a deadly game of cryptic crosswords, blending intellectual challenge with a sinister twist. The genius of *Inside No. 9* lies in its ability to subvert expectations. A *Quiet Night In* unfolds with minimal dialogue, relying on visual gags and physical comedy to deliver its darkly humorous tale. Meanwhile *Dead Line*, a Halloween special, blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, making it an immersive and chilling experience.

Each episode is a meticulously crafted gem, inviting viewers into a world where nothing is ever as it seems. With its sharp wit, dazzlingly inventive plots, and stellar performances, *Inside No. 9* is a must-watch for anyone hungry for something genuinely different.

### 'ALLO 'ALLO!

Listen very carefully, I shall type this only once. A uniquely odd and delightful British comedy, this 1980s show—created by David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd—is about a philandering café owner trying to survive the German occupation of France during World War 2. René Artois, played by Gordon Kaye, has a café beset by both Nazis and the Resistance, and he tries, uproariously, to maintain a self-preserving balance. It's goofy, but consistently hilarious, and frequently genius: French-accented English works as French while clipped British-accented English works as English within the same scene. Brilliant.

### STREAMING TIOF OF THE WEEK

Sticking with the great British theme, Netflix has a fine bunch of British shows already on board, notably *Sex Education*, *Derry Girls*, *Black Mirror*, *Crashing*, *Cunk on Earth* and *Peaky Blinders*.

### WOLF HALL

*Wolf Hall* is a tour de force of historical drama, illuminating the Machiavellian brilliance of Thomas Cromwell, based on Hilary Mantel's acclaimed novel of the same name. Mark Rylance's subtle, riveting performance captures Cromwell's cunning intellect and steely resolve. The series masterfully balances intimate character studies with grand historical events, painting the Tudor court in shades of shadow and light. The dialogue crackles with wit and tension, while the cinematography's chiaroscuro echoes the era's moral complexity. *Wolf Hall* is a riveting chess game of power, ambition, and survival, faithfully bringing Mantel's intricate, richly textured narrative to life.

### EXTRAS

*Extras*, created by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant—whose other series, the iconic *The Office* is also streaming on the BBC section—is a superb satire of fame and the desperate pursuit of recognition.

The show brilliantly integrates A-list cameos, like Kate Winslet dedicatedly working in order to win an Oscar, Sir Ian McKellen absurdly explaining how acting involves pretending, and the late great David Bowie serenading Gervais with a scathing improvised song. Celebrities are cleverly folded into the narrative, playing exaggerated versions of themselves that lampoon Hollywood's vanity and absurdity.

Gervais's portrayal of Andy, a small-time actor navigating the treacherous waters of showbiz, is both cringeworthy and endearing. *Extras* is a masterclass in blending biting wit with poignant moments, highlighting the frequently pathetic—yet relatable—quest for fame and respect.

### FATHER BROWN

*Father Brown*, created by creators Rachel Flowerday and Tahsin Guner, marries the charm of cosy mysteries with cerebral storytelling. Unlike many a British series, this one runs long—the 11th season came out in January—and there is even a popular spinoff series, *Sister Boniface*.

Over the years, *Father Brown* has evolved by introducing darker, more complex plots and richer character backstories, adding depth without losing its quintessential simplicity. Mark Williams is perfect as the eponymous sleuth-priest; his gentle demeanour masks razor-sharp intellect, making him an endearing yet formidable figure. The protagonist's unique blend of empathy and shrewdness, coupled with his unwavering moral compass, crafts a detective unlike any other.

*Father Brown* enjoys a truly timeless appeal, all while suggesting that good souls can crack the darkest cases. God, after all, is in the details.

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

## LOUNGE LOVES

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



### SUDDENLY SOMETHING

A single from the Delhi-based rock band Peter Cat Recording Co.'s new album *Beta* is a beautiful, sensitive, irreverent ode to grief. *Suddenly*, which dropped last week, is about band frontman Suryakant Sawhney's father, who died when he was a teenager, and about coping with profound loss. The music video, directed by Sawhney and his partner Surabhi Tandon, was shot in Goa, and its languid, slo-mo visuals of a boat making its way through the backwaters are intercut with a close-up of Sawhney's mother's face, registering her reactions to the song when she hears it for the first time. I hadn't heard much of Peter Cat's music before, but have heard *Suddenly* on loop ever since; there is something compelling about its lo-fi beats and unadorned lyrics. The full album releases on 9 August.

—Shrabonti Bagchi



### STRAP IT ON

Although it is a bit of a norm for dive watches to come on stainless steel bracelets, when people actually wear them in the sea, they tend to swap out the bracelet for either a Nato strap or a tropic rubber. In fact, the latter has been a mainstay for divers both recreational and technical since the 1960s, primarily because rubber—and especially FKM rubber—is a supple, hardy and corrosion-resistant material from which to craft a watch strap. And because such straps are vented, tropic straps are especially useful in extremely humid environments. I've got four such straps now, from a variety of companies, in a variety of colours. Great to look at, cheap and extremely comfortable.

—Bibek Bhattacharya

### PEATED TO PERFECTION

Whiskies and single malts are not my drinks of choice. They are a bit too heavy for muggy Mumbai summers and rains. But earlier this week, I tasted a homegrown, mildly peated single malt that changed my mind. It could easily be my drink of choice on a rain-soaked evening. Crazy Cock Dhua has aromas of bacon and tastes of ripe fruit that whet the appetite for more. It is made by Maharashtra's Southseas Distilleries and is available in Goa, Maharashtra and Haryana for now. Although a dram like this calls for a bonfire, it will pair well with roasted *butta* (corn), a mainstay during the rains in the city. With a well-rounded body and long finish, I prefer to have it without ice to absorb every flavour note.

—Jahnabee Borah



### ASWEET VISIT

A recent visit to Srinagar saw me at Jee Enn Bakery, located in Regal Chowk, at noon. It came highly recommended from a dear colleague, who suggested I try the coconut macaroons and pineapple pastry. Even though it was a weekday, the bakery—one of the oldest and best known in Srinagar—was crammed with both locals and tourists. Biscuits, cookies, breads and pastries were simply flying off the shelves. The experience was made sweeter by members of the staff, especially Rafiq bhai, who made sure I sampled the highlights of the menu. From pillowy eclairs to walnut fudge, I tried a little of this and a little of that, and it all tasted delicious. The highlight, of course, was the coconut macaroon, which was soft, chewy and toasty. If in Srinagar, make sure to head to Jee Enn Bakery not just for the goodies but for the warmth of its staff as well.

—Avantika Bhuyan

# Counting sheep in ruffled times

A sleep coach will accompany the Indian Olympic team. As work, relationships and health all feel increasingly insecure, sleep has become a natural casualty for everyone



CULT FRICTION  
SANDIP ROY

The Indian Olympic team will travel to Paris sleeper class. Or rather they will get a master-class in sleeping. For the first time ever, a sleep expert is going to accompany the team. Dr Monika Sharma's job will be to try and ensure the athletes get a good night's rest. The Indian Olympic Association is planning to provide them with sleeping pods.

Sleep is apparently an Olympic-sized problem these days. Javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra spent many nights tossing and turning before his gold-medal event at the Tokyo games in 2021. Shooter Abhinav Bindra didn't sleep at all the night before his big day in Rio. Dr Sharma tells the *Indian Express* "ignorance about sleep is quite profound" among athletes. Though both Bindra and Chopra won golds, in an intensely competitive forum where everyone is looking for an edge, "getting optimum sleep and restorative sleep definitely gives them that edge."

Sharma is couching this in terms of removing the chance that lack of sleep might cost India a medal.

But even those of us not chasing an Olympic medal know a thing or two about poor sleep. I was the kind of boy who fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. Now I am the man who often wakes up with a jolt in the middle of night and frets and fumes listening to the city asleep around him. Every night I go to bed wondering what kind of night it will be. Every night of restless sleep feels like a minor victory.

I understand it is part of growing older. But there's something deeper going on. *The Sleep Survey 2024* conducted by ResMed, a medical device

company, surveyed 17 countries. It concluded that only 27% of Indians reported a good night's sleep each week. A 2019 study by fitness band maker Fitbit concluded after analysing the data from Fitbit users that Indians were the second most sleep-deprived, among all the countries they surveyed, with Japan heading the list. And their REM (rapid eye movement) sleep time was among the lowest in the world.

I know this only too well. Worried about my sleep, I got one of the fitness bands that would help monitor it. It ended up adding to my stress. It felt like I was taking a sleeping test every night. Even if I woke up refreshed and happy, it was never good enough for the nit-picking fitness band. "Try going to bed earlier," it would scold me. My deep sleep time was invariably too low. "Don't strain yourself too much, keep good mood, make reasonable arrangements for work and rest time, and do more exercise to keep fit," it chirpily advised me. I wanted to smack it.

The first time sleeplessness really hit me, I was recovering from jet lag. Every night, no matter what time I went to bed, I would bolt awake somewhere between 2 and 3 in the morning. At some point I thought some mechanism had just broken inside me and I would never get my sleep back. Going to sleep without worrying about it felt like the ultimate luxury.

Now my social media shows me endless ads for pillows, sleep yoga sessions, chewable melatonin tablets and herbal supplements. I had no idea there was an entire cottage industry around getting to sleep and staying asleep. I started measuring my caffeine intake with a tooth comb, watched endless videos of the 4-7-8 breathing relaxation exercise, carefully rearranged my bed for optimal sleeping comfort and tried to give myself a cut-off time with digital devices. But sleep proved to be an elusive creature, sneakingly evading all the traps and temptations I had laid out for it.

When I was a child, no one really read me bedtime stories. My parents would



Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Princess and the Pea' has become the fairytale of our lives.

ISTOCKPHOTO

turn off the main light and turn on a bedside lamp. My father would sit and read the paper by the light of the lamp, half-listening to my mother as she filled him in about the day in a low voice. I would lie in bed looking at the strange deformed shadows the bedside lamp cast on the ceiling. My favourite sleep ritual was to pull the covers over me, hug my bolster pillow or *paash-baalish*, and make up little stories in my head. I would imagine that under that *paash-baalish* was a secret world where my toys and I could have a picnic. There was something Enid Blyton-ish about the whole affair but it worked like a charm. I would be asleep long before I managed to come up with a full menu for the picnic. Years later someone told me that

the biggest sleep-aid I had back then was not my imaginary picnics, but a sense of security about the real world around me. There was comfort in hearing the low voices of my parents, in knowing that I would wake up to them the next day. The murmur of their voices was the white noise lulling me to sleep.

As adults we struggle to find that security in a world which seems increasingly on edge. Work, relationships and our own health all feel increasingly insecure. Sleep is but a natural casualty. "A ruffled mind is a ruffled pillow," the author Charlotte Bronte is reputed to have said. We live in very ruffled times indeed.

When I would wake up with a start in the dead of night at first it would make me anxious. Now I try to make peace

with it. Sometimes I stand on the balcony looking at the empty street in an entirely different light, the streetlights almost forlorn and ghostly. I recognise the street dogs out on patrol. The rats come out of holes and scurry around looking for food. A sudden noise somewhere sets off a caving frenzy among unseen crows. I see the vegetable vendor doggedly pushing a cart of cabbages and tomatoes to set up for the next day. Sometimes a drunk staggers down the street jabbing at his phone probably trying to book an Uber. The young men who work at the cheap restaurant across the street wash dishes late into the night and finally relax, sprawled around the front steps, immersed in the flickering light of videos on their phones. There is

a rhythm here too, a soundscape that rustles to life once all the shops are shut and the buses and trams fall silent.

When I think back to childhood stories, the problem seems to have always been too much sleep as opposed to too little. Kumbhakarna, Rip van Winkle and Sleeping Beauty all had sleep disorders but none of them were afflicted by insomnia. Even the Bengali fairytales I read had princesses who kept falling asleep and needed some prince with a golden wand to wake them. Too much sleep was scary in those fairytales. Rip van Winkle woke up after 20 years to find that his wife was long dead and the American revolution had happened. Sleeping Beauty pricked her finger on a spinning wheel and didn't wake up for a century. The story never satisfactorily told me whether she searched for the friends and family she had when she fell asleep or was happy enough with the prince who woke her up.

Sleep is a pivotal part of these stories but also a dangerous twist in the tale. Even shorter stints of sleep felt dangerous like Goldilocks who fell asleep after eating her porridge, only to wake up to three angry bears glaring at her. Snow White bit the poisoned apple and fell into a death-like slumber much to the sorrow of the seven dwarves who put her in a glass casket. That a handsome prince came and kissed the supposed corpse and brought her back to life only made the whole story more creepy.

Sleep could be a perilous undertaking in those stories, a dangerous time when you let down your guard but sleeplessness was never the problem except for that one lonely princess who could not sleep because of the pea hidden under several mattresses. Now that has become the fairytale of our lives. But in our version we don't win a prince at the end of it. We don't even want one. Just a good night's sleep would be prize enough.

*Cult Friction* is a fortnightly column on issues we keep rubbing up against. Sandip Roy is a writer, journalist and radio host. He posts @sandipr

# A CHRONICLE OF POLICE RAIDS FORETOLD

In this excerpt from his new book, Ajaz Ashraf recounts the moments that changed the lives of three activists

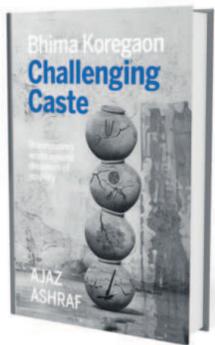
Ajaz Ashraf

**W**e tend to recall vividly the moment life changes tack. And so Minal will never forget that on 17 April, at 6.30 am, she left her house at Misal Layout, in Nagpur, for a walk in nearby Dayanand Park with her friends. She will remember that her children were still asleep and her husband, Surendra Gadling, the Nagpur-based lawyer, was in the toilet. She will remember that a little after the group of friends entered the park, the phone of one rang.

She slowed walking to take the call, which lasted less than a minute. "Minal," she called out, and took her aside. "There are police at your house."

Minal will always remember her first thought: oh, a dead body must have been found at the house under construction on the adjacent plot. Murder? She had heard of many such cases. Then the friend said her husband was driving down to pick them up. Her heart began to beat faster: why were the police at her house?

The friend, her husband and Minal reached her house in no time. She was stunned: there were policemen deployed all around the colony. It took a few minutes for Minal to persuade the constable at the gate to let her in. At the three-storied residence of the Gadlings, Minal and Surendra live on the first floor, the second floor serves as Gadling's office and the ground floor is where Gadling's brother resides. She bounded up the stairs to find a search was underway in full swing on the



**Bhima Koregaon: Challenging Caste:**  
By Ajaz Ashraf,  
AuthorsUpFront,  
496 pages, ₹795

second floor. Minal asked, "Why are they searching our house?" Surendra Gadling replied, "I don't know."

She came down to the first floor to wake up the children. Posted there was a lady constable, whom Minal asked, "What is the search in connection with?" The constable said, "I don't know."

Once the police team was done with Gadling's office, they came down to the first floor. Before the two terrified children, they rummaged through the cupboards and almirahs, looked under mattresses and poked the divan to check whether a document had been secreted there. The search on the ground floor was cursory. After five to six hours of having a free run of the house, the police took away Gadling's mobile phone, laptop and his collection of CDs, some of which contained photos and videos of family occasions.

"The funny thing is that Surendra would rarely use the laptop, for he types with just one finger," Minal said to me. She didn't know then that the laptop would alter her and Surendra's life in fundamental ways.

A crowd had collected outside the Gad-

ling's residence, a mix of friends and curious onlookers. They told her what they had seen on the TV: the raid was connected to the Bhima Koregaon violence. "I am embarrassed to confess that I barely knew about the historical significance of Bhima Koregaon until then," Minal said. Sure, she had heard of the violence at Bhima Koregaon, but it was later, because of an interview of actor and folk singer Vira Sathidar, that she became aware of why the Victory Pillar of Bhima Koregaon arouses Dalit political emotions.

Over the next two months, as she worried over what lay in store for her family, often reminded about the police threats to fix her husband, Minal was politicised.

Politicised Harshali Potdar already was when the police came calling at Room No. 707 on the seventh floor of Wing A, Saranath Towers, a Slum Rehabilitation Authority construction at Govandi, Mumbai. Born to a middle-class Brahmin family, Potdar graduated in 2009. After a year or so in an NGO [non-governmental organisation], she figured out she did not want to work in that sector — or, for that matter, with any of the corporates either. She had, by then, gravitated towards Maharashtra's flourishing anti-caste movement, to the shock of family elders. There were fiery arguments, at home, with snide remarks thrown in. Potdar preferred to leave home rather than compromise on beliefs dear to her, although her family subsequently chose to reconcile with her.

In 2011, she joined the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences, took a temporary withdrawal a year later, went to Gadchiroli district to research the area where big businesses exploit forest and mineral resources, and ultra-left groups and the State have been in conflict for long. In 2013, she returned to Mumbai, completed her master's, and joined the Republican Panthers Caste Annihilation Movement, because they spoke of how class, caste and gender created overlapping systems of discrimination, exclusion and oppression.

In just four years, Potdar became a person of interest for the State.



Protests in front of Babasaheb Ambedkar statue following violence in Koregaon Bhima in Pune, in 2018.

SANKET WANKHADE/HINDUSTAN TIMES

Once the police team was done with Gadling's office, they came down to the first floor. Before the two terrified children, they rummaged through the cupboards

On 17 April, at 6 am, Potdar was asleep in Room No. 707, which comprises a hall, a kitchen and a washroom. Asleep in the same hall was Vineet Vichare, a party activist. Room No. 707 was the office of the Republican Panthers; it also doubled as the residence of Sudhir Dhawale, who edited the bimonthly *Vidrohi* from here. With such meagre resources the party strove to alter India's socio-political structure.

Potdar would not know how many times the doorbell rang before she woke up. Bleary-eyed and groggy, she walked to the door and opened it. Her life, too, changed course.

A police team stood outside. They instantly switched on the lights to video-record the search, as an officer showed her the order authorising him to raid Room No. 707. She was dazed. The officer nudged her aside and barged in, with other constables following him. Reflexively, she dialled Sudhir Dhawale and informed him about the raid. Next, she started to call the Republican Panthers Caste Annihilation Movement's lawyer, but even before she could speak to him the officer barked, "Give me the phone"—and promptly snatched it from her. Amid the ruckus, Vineet Vichare was able to call an organisation's activist. "Come soon, police raid" was all he could mutter before his

phone was also seized.

They spread out in the hall, without closing the front door, as if the police wanted to make a spectacle of the raid. "Where are your laptops?" the officer asked. He demanded that they tell him the passwords of electronic devices. She relented after a round of heated arguments. She was asked where Sudhir Dhawale was. He was, at that precise moment, undergoing a minor neck surgery at a hospital. They asked for his laptop. "Dhawale does not own one," Potdar told the officer. There were no further questions regarding Dhawale. ...

In the corridor, curious onlookers gathered, including party activists alerted by Vichare's SOS call. ... Ultimately, after a stay of five to six hours, the police left — having confiscated laptops, phones, CDs, pen drives, and books, leaving behind Room No. 707 in complete disarray.

Potdar said the 17 April raid warned them of the repression to follow. ... "Once you decide to take them on, you have to be prepared for anything. Not for nothing do we use the term new Peshwai for them," she said.

Excerpted from *Bhima Koregaon: Challenging Caste* by Ajaz Ashraf with permission from the author and publisher AuthorsUpFront.

# HOLD THE SUGAR IN THAT COCKTAIL

Finding a truly sugar-free cocktail can be a challenge in bars, though mixologists are beginning to use sugar substitutes

Barry Rodgers

My best friend and I had a ritual when visiting bars. We would order a cocktail, take a few sips to appreciate the flavour fully, and then deconstruct the cocktail. This ritual came to an end last year when my friend was diagnosed with diabetes, and I found out I was pre-diabetic. While I still enjoy the occasional cocktail with a request to the bartender to reduce the sugar content, my friend has stopped drinking alcohol. This is partly a lifestyle choice but also a necessity as he has trouble trying to get a mixologist to make a cocktail without sugar.

"I have not been to a cocktail bar in India that has sugarless cocktails on the menu. While some do use stevia and monk fruit, two popular sugar substitutes, no bars I've had a drink at use allulose, which is a sugar alternative that tastes more like real sugar than anything else I've tried," says Bhaskar Sen, an investment banker from Kolkata. He tries to stick with martinis, Vespers and Old-Fashioneds, which can be made with low or no added sugar. If one were to go by strict medical advice, one should avoid alcohol altogether, but this is not always practical, especially if you enjoy a drink. Type 1 or Type 2 diabetics could consider vodka soda with a splash of lime, gin and tonic with diet tonic water, wine spritzer with club soda, or Bloody Mary with low-sodium tomato juice and spices, suggests Dr Sonali Kagne, consultant, endocrinology at the Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital in Mumbai.

"Using stevia or monk fruit sweetener is recommended, as well as adding fresh fruit or herbs for natural sweetness and flavour. And remember, moderation is key. The American Diabetes Association recommends up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men with T1 or T2 diabetes," she says.

So why isn't allulose popular as a sweetening agent? Delhi-based endocrinologist Dr Ashok Mani says it could be because stevia is around 250-400 times sweeter than regular sugar, and allulose only about 60%, which means more of it is needed to match the sweetness of traditional sugar. Last year in May, the World Health Organisation (WHO) advised against using non-sugar sweeteners, like allulose, in a new set of guidelines for weight control. In fact, WHO opines that long-term use of non-sugar sweeteners could increase the risk of T2 dia-



Some bars use natural alternatives to sugar; and (below) Orchard Bliss at The Johri.

betes and cardiovascular disease.

To meet this demand, a few bars are exploring recipes to craft low or no-sugar cocktails. In fact, some like Sidecar in Delhi, are highlighting sweetness measures and ABV percentages on their cocktail menus, enhancing consumers' understanding of their beverages. Vikram Achanta, co-founder of 30 Best Bars India and founder of Tulleho, a drinks training and consulting firm, says in Amritsar, there's The Bagh that uses monk fruit sugar instead of processed sugar in their cocktails. "When in Goa, visit Circle. They have a unique drink, 'Timur Berry,' which is a refreshing blend of Timur berries, stevia, gin or vodka, soda water, orange, and house bitters," he says.

## NOT SO SWEET

The demand for sugar-free drinks in India is definitely on the rise, feels Pan-



kaj Balachandran, brand director at Short Story Spirits, a sub-brand from Third Eye Distillery, which also produces Stranger & Sons gin. "In the next five years, more bartenders and consumers will likely become more conscious of what goes into their drinks," he says. "People are gradually starting to ask questions about calories, the type of spirits used, and whether any sugars are added."

At the bar PCO, New Delhi, patrons asking for sugar-free cocktails have several options, depending on the base spirit they want. For those who want gin or vodka, there's their signature Veviver Martini made without any sugar using vetiver distillate or other variations on the classic Vesper.

The Johri in Jaipur has three sugar-free cocktails. "The Seeker is saffron-infused gin with dry vermouth and peated malt; the Vesper Martini is a classic vodka and gin-based cocktail with extra dry vermouth, and Raika is a drink named after a nomadic community of Rajasthan known for its camel products; our take on a martini with camel feta cheese with vodka and dry vermouth," says bar manager Mrinalini Rana.

For Rutwik Kamat, owner of Frida Cantina (a Mexican cantina and bar that opened its doors in 2021) in Goa's Panjim, enjoying a night out with friends sipping on a few cocktails is his idea of a fun time. However, finding a sugar-free cocktail has been an uphill climb. The Goa native, who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes 15 years ago, believes when it comes to alcohol, sticking to a glass of wine or beer is a safer bet for maintaining stable blood sugar levels compared

to cocktails that often contain added sugars or sweet mixers.

Kamat started Frida Cantina, aiming to offer patrons sugar-free or low-calorie cocktails. He included this in the bartenders' and wait staff's training programme to inform customers about these options. Since then, Kamat has been surprised by the orders for sugar-free cocktails. "Composition is crucial. By adjusting the ratios of stevia and sucralose, we closely mimic the sweetness of traditional sugars in our cocktails," he says.

There's a growing preference for drinks categorised as "spirit-forward", which don't include processed sugar or sugar syrup. Many spirits naturally contain some sweetness. For example, classic cocktails like the martini or Manhattan mix whisky with vermouth, which contributes sweetness from its wine base.

"Many bars now aim to avoid using artificial sugars as the base for syrups. Instead of using added sugar to flavour cocktails, we're moving towards the sugars present in other ingredients. For instance, if we want to add sweetness from vanilla, we infuse the vanilla directly with the spirit, avoiding the need to add sugar separately. This approach preserves the natural flavours without introducing additional sugars into the cocktail," says Balachandran.

According to WHO, there are about 77 million people above 18 who have diabetes (type 2), and around 25 million who are pre-diabetic (or borderline diabetic) in India. Perhaps it's time for bars to offer inclusive menus considering the dietary restrictions of their patrons.

Barry Rodgers is a lifestyle journalist based in Mumbai.



(above) Chef Shraddha Tayade; and O'Pedro's tender coconut 'kismur'.

## BACK OF THE HOUSE

# Placing the spotlight on the sous chef

Shraddha Tayade, senior sous chef at O'Pedro, enjoys studying guests to learn what they want

Jahnabee Borah

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In the restaurant drama *The Bear*, the protagonist's assistant—and the kitchen's anchor—is the sous chef Sydney "Syd" Adamu. She helps plan menus, runs a tight ship and shines with her unwavering determination to create better dishes. Chef Shraddha Tayade reminds one of Syd. Tayade is the senior sous chef at Mumbai's O'Pedro. She likes to study her guests, oversees orders and creates menus with her boss, Hussain Shahzad, the executive chef at Hunger Inc., the parent company of the restaurant.

"Even as a child, I was enthusiastic about cooking," says the 33-year-old. Her interest was fuelled by her father's love for making and enjoying food. As we were speaking, a coconut stuffed with a flattened rice-like preparation was placed on the table. It was her twist on the traditional Goan Portuguese shrimp-based side dish, *kismur*. She had reimagined it as a vegetarian dish with tender coconut, streaked with sweet and sour tamarind glaze and speckled with crispy curry leaves. Her eyes light up as she talks of it. One of the motivating factors to make a seafood-free version was that her parents are vegetarian. The ingredient that sparked her imagination was tender coconut. She attempted *kismur* by pairing it with soft onions, chillies and Goan *garum* masala. Hussain added some battered tender coconut bits for an addictive crunch and served it in a coconut shell. After two months of trial and error, it became a hot-seller. "This is my first dish on the menu of a restaurant. It boosted my confidence to create more," says the chef.

Tayade loves Indian food, but her career began in a French kitchen in 2011, when the French creperie Suzette opened in Nariman Point. It was the first of its kind and she was hired as commis 3, an entry-level position in professional kitchens. The commis 3 assists chefs and their job involves swiftly and efficiently doing basics, like peeling onions, slicing mushrooms and cleaning meat.

"At Suzette, I began to harbour the dream of leading a kitchen by observing my head chef Karishma Dalal," she says. Now, Dalal is the chef and owner of the popular salad bar The Bombay Salad Co. and the café Bokka in Mumbai. She noticed Tayade's potential. In 2015, when Hunger Inc. was hiring for The Bombay Canteen, Dalal recommended her. "For the first time, I was exposed to the diversity of Indian regional food," she says. She was like a sponge, training under head chef Thomas Zacharias, sous chef Shahzad and the iconic Floyd Cardoz, and was in charge of the blancher. "At that time, we had *meen pollichathu* (Kerala style fish steamed in banana leaf), and it was my favourite. I couldn't get enough of cooking it," she says. The fish had to be blanched, and she worked for weeks to perfect it, burning a few *handis* in the process. In 2017, when O'Pedro opened and chef Shahzad led the kitchen, he asked her to move there.

The shift to O'Pedro was pivotal. She climbed the ranks to be a senior sous chef who oversees each dish, from colour to plating and freshness of the garnish before it reaches diners. The high point of her career is she leads the kitchen team too, fulfilling the dream that was seeded more than a decade ago.

*Back of the House* is a series featuring restaurant and bar staff who work behind the scenes to add to the dining experience.



# Add a pop of colour and texture with frozen peas



DOUBLE  
TESTED

NANDITA  
IYER

I have written about fresh green peas earlier in this column, so why this one on frozen peas? Fresh peas are labour-intensive and fair-weather friends; frozen peas are convenient, year-round kitchen saviours, while also working as ice packs for a nagging headache or a child's injured knee. If you associate frozen veggies with the words, "lazy", "unhealthy", "not fresh", allow me to convince you otherwise.

It is not lazy but clever. Using a highly seasonal versatile vegetable all year round, gives me convenience. In fact, I rue that in the US they seem to sell every single Indian vegetable frozen, from bitter melon to raw jackfruit. We are yet to see that kind of convenience in India, where peas, corn and mixed vegetables are the only three items in the frozen veg section.

Unhealthy? It's healthy to eat vegetables rather than not eat vegetables, and having ready-to-cook frozen veggies makes it easier to add a serving of vegetables to any quick meal.

The other most common reason against frozen peas (or any other fro-

zen veg) is the perception of "lack of freshness". Some people argue fresh vegetables are superior because they are perceived as fresher. However, frozen vegetables are often frozen shortly after harvesting, which locks in their nutrients. Counter this by emphasising that frozen vegetables can actually be fresher than some "fresh" vegetables that have been sitting on shelves for days.

When fresh peas are in season, I make sure I buy a few kilos, shell them and freeze them in re-sealable plastic bags. You can also blanch the peas, dry them thoroughly on kitchen towels and then freeze them in smaller batches.

For one, have nothing against frozen vegetables. In fact, I am grateful to Clarence Birdseye who first started marketing frozen peas in Chester, New York, in 1952. His innovations in food freezing and preservation laid the foundation for the frozen food industry as we know it today.

I am also grateful to Nigella Lawson for making cooking with a bag of frozen peas look glamorous and it is for this reason food writer Nigel Slater has anointed her with the title "the queen of the frozen pea". Be it her pesto pea soup or chicken and peas tray bake, frozen peas occupy pride of place in uncomplicated family recipes.

Like potatoes, I find peas are a great solution to stretch a vegetable dish to feed more people. Dishes made with cabbage, cauliflower, carrot, spinach,



Frozen peas can be used in a range of dishes, from soups to patties.

fenugreek (*methi*), brinjal (try adding peas to *baingan bharta* next time), beans or even potatoes taste (and look) good with a smattering of peas in them. Of course, *matar* and *paneer* are meant for each other, be it in the tomato-onion gravy or with *methi* leaves in a cashew-onion gravy. Adding cooked and mashed frozen peas to mashed avocados is a neat trick when you are running short of ripe avocados. Frozen peas can also be added to your fruit and veg smoothie ingredients.

Fresh peas taste sweeter with a tender texture compared to frozen peas, which

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM ISTOCKPHOTO



also tend to taste a bit starchier. Here are some of my tips I follow to make frozen peas taste better.

► Boil them in water for 3-4 minutes in an open pan. Adding just a pinch of baking soda to the boiling water makes the green of the peas pop while also softening the skin, making the peas taste tender and juicier.

► While frozen peas can be added directly to any simmering gravy, cooking them separately and then adding gives them a better texture in the final dish.

► When adding to pasta, tip frozen peas

into the pot in the last 3-4 minutes of cooking the pasta so you get both cooked and ready to toss into the sauce at the same time.

## GARLICKY PEAS AND SPRING ONION SOUP

Serves 2-4

### Ingredients

1 tbsp olive oil or butter  
4-5 cloves garlic, thinly sliced  
1 small onion, thinly sliced  
Half-cup chopped spring onion greens  
1 cup frozen peas  
1 veg stock cube  
Half cup milk  
Salt  
Coarsely crushed black pepper

### Method

In a sauce pan, heat olive oil. Fry the garlic for a few seconds. Add the onions and spring onions along with a pinch of salt. Sauté on a medium flame for 4-5 minutes.

Mix in the frozen peas, stock cube and one and a half cups of water. Bring it to a simmer. Lower the flame and simmer for 4-5 minutes until the peas are soft.

Blend along with milk. Return to the pan and bring to a gentle simmer. Turn off the flame. Serve into bowls and garnish with black pepper powder.

## PEAS ALMOND PATTIES

Makes 8

### Ingredients

1 cup frozen peas  
Quarter cup almonds  
1 large boiled potato, grated  
Half tsp grated ginger  
1-2 green chillies, finely chopped  
2-3 tbsp bread crumbs (panko or homemade from stale bread)  
1 tsp salt  
Half tsp black pepper powder  
2-3 tbsp finely chopped coriander leaves  
2-3 tbsp oil to pan-fry

### Method

Cook the frozen peas in a pot of water for 3 minutes. Pass through a sieve and drain excess water thoroughly. Mop dry with a clean towel if needed.

Crush almonds in a mixer to a coarse powder.

In a large bowl, combine all the ingredients, except the oil. Divide into 8 balls and shape into patties. Refrigerate for 30 minutes to an hour.

Heat a pan and brush with oil. Cook patties on each side for 6-7 minutes until crisp and golden, using some extra oil as needed.

Serve hot with mint chutney.

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



COURTESY INSTAGRAM  
Anjum Moudgil training for the 50m 3p.

# Anjum Moudgil takes aim for Paris

Once the World No.1 in 50m 3p rifle shooting, Moudgil has overcome setbacks to qualify for Paris Olympics

Deepti Patwardhan

**W**hen Anjum Moudgil was knocked down last year, not for the first time in her sport, she decided to rise above, literally. An Olympian and a former World No.1, the rifle shooter was relegated to the sidelines, due to her form, while the Indian team competed at the 2023 World Championships and the deferred 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China. It was a body blow, but rather than wallow in regret about missed opportunities, she made way for new experiences and tried her hand at paragliding.

"It was very emotional journey in those months," says Moudgil. "I was just trying too hard to make it to the team. I used that time, not being in the team, to do my training, work on myself. I took a break from shooting."

In October, Moudgil, who is also an avid painter, spent time in Manali learning paragliding. It was just the reset Moudgil was looking for; she returned to shooting with a clear target in her sights: the 2024 Paris Olympics.

With the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) tweaking its selection policy for the Olympics, Moudgil still had a shot at making the cut even though she had been unable to win a quota place. According to the new policy, the NRAI would hold a series of four selection trials before the Games to send the best possi-

## EYES ON THE PRIZE

**TARGET:** The target is placed 50m far from the shooter's stand and is divided into 10 rings. The 10th (central) ring has a diameter of 10.4mm and is smaller than a Euro cent coin

**QUALIFICATION:** 3x40 shots (40 shots in each position) in 2 hours, 45 minutes. Top 8 qualify for the final.

**FINAL KNEELING:** 3 series of 5 shots, 200 seconds each; Changeover time 7 minutes

**PRONE:** 3 series of 5 shots, 150 seconds each; Changeover time of 9 minutes

**STANDING:** 2 series of 5, 250 seconds each

She also ascended to World No.1 in 50m 3p in July 2022. Though a series of poor results grounded her, Moudgil believes her comeback began with the National Games in Goa from 25 October-9 November 2023.

A technical sport like shooting can be all-consuming, especially Moudgil's pet event, the 50m 3p, where players have to shoot in three positions—kneeling, prone and standing, in that order.

The target is placed outdoors, at a distance of 50m from the shooters' stand, while the athletes are indoors aiming at the centre (10th) ring that is smaller than a Euro cent coin. Since the target's difficulty is determined by weather conditions, it is the most demanding discipline in shooting, lasting over three hours, and is rightly called the "marathon". Strength, endurance, balance, flexibility—athletes are tested on all of these parameters in 50m 3p.

"When I was a junior, everyone used to say the standing part is the most difficult one," says Moudgil. "I made a point that I have to be the best in it. My standing position became my stronger position. Almost every shooter in the world goes through this, where you are struggling in one position and have to put in more work in that."

With the Olympics just a few weeks away, Moudgil and the Indian team are now fine-tuning for the mega-event. After a break, they will resume their training at Volmerange-Les-Mines in France on 15 July, before heading to Paris. This will mark the end of a three-year Olympic cycle that had begun with disappointment in Tokyo. The Indian shooting contingent had gone to the Tokyo Olympics with great expectations but were unable to deliver a medal.

"I don't think any of us are carrying baggage from Tokyo," she says. "That is as much Moudgil, the Indian shooting team, and the country, can hope for."

Deepti Patwardhan is a sportswriter based in Mumbai.

blesquad to Paris.

Though Moudgil, 30, started slowly in the first round, she topped the second and third rounds and ended with a second placed finish in the fourth and final selection trial in May, to seal her Paris berth. Moudgil and Sift Kaur Samra will represent India in Women's 50m Rifle 3 Positions event at the Paris Games, which begin on 26 July.

It will be a second Olympics for Moudgil, who was also part of the Indian contingent for the Tokyo Olympics. After the disappointment of Tokyo, where she finished 15th in the 50m 3p and 18th in the 10m air rifle, and was thus knocked out before the final, Moudgil seemed to have bounced back. In 2022, she won a silver medal at the Baku World Cup and a bronze at the Changwon World Cup.

# AROUND THE WORLD IN 110 DAYS

Vedangi Kulkarni is on a quest to become the fastest woman to circumnavigate the world on a bicycle

Shail Desai

**I**n 2019, Vedangi Kulkarni circumnavigated the world on a bicycle. She finished the 29,000km distance on Christmas eve in 159 days. At 19 years, she was the youngest woman to pull off the feat. Yet, she felt that she could have been a lot faster.

During the ride, she suffered a bout of food poisoning in Australia, a grizzly bear chase in Canada and a mugging incident in Spain that left her concussed. By the time she finished, there was a sense of delight and pride on realising what she had achieved, but she still felt something was missing.

So, she simply decided to do it all over again.

"Six years ago, I was just a teenager and my reasons for doing it were very different. My relationship with adventure has grown in a positive way over the last few years. I started having more fun with it. Then again, I don't think you can ever be ready to do something of this sort. I just felt it was time to have another go," Kulkarni, 25, says.

On 8 July, she will get her ride underway from Rambha near Chilika Lake in Odisha. She'll ride up the coast to Siliguri or Guwahati, then fly out to Mongolia and ride across the country, before heading over to Australia and New Zealand. From here, she'll travel to Peru and onward to Bolivia. Then it's off to Europe, starting at Portugal and travelling north to Sweden, then turning south-east to travel through Estonia, Latvia and Belarus. After a short ride across Oman, the final leg will bring her to Koteswar in Kutch from where she'll go south towards Kanyakumari, and finally back along the east coast to her starting point in Rambha.

"The original route was a lot simpler, but my visa for the US and Canada didn't happen. So I had to work out a new one, though a lot of decisions will be made during the ride," she says.

Since last year, Kulkarni has been participated in a number of endurance efforts that have readied her for the circumnavigation attempt. She's finished gruelling mountain biking races such as the Strathpuffer, a 24-hour endurance event in the highlands of Scotland in peak winter, and the Megavalanche in France, a 23km downhill endurance race with an elevation loss of 2,600m.

She also took on a cross-country skiing expedition of 185km in four days in Sweden and an endurance run that featured distances of 43km and 37km on consecutive days. In June, she set the fastest time for a female rider on the Manali-Leh route that runs across five high passes.

"The Manali to Leh ride was special. I had worked hard for it over a short period of time. Though I didn't get the record by a big margin, it made me realise that when I put my heart in it, things do work out," she says.

Kulkarni, who hails from Pune, has



Vedangi Kulkarni will be setting out on her second circumnavigation attempt.

been based out of Inverness in Scotland for the past few years. She's been working with British coach Jon Fearn and her mentor back home, Sumit Patil. Each day started with meditation and yoga, as she looked to put in around 20-25 hours of training in a week.

A lot of her outdoor rides were based on time rather than distance, where she would set off on mixed terrain for 6-8 hours. On the indoor trainer, she specifically focussed on fixing her weaker areas.

"For instance, I love pedalling up long climbs, but I don't necessarily do it at a very fast pace. So I put in short, hard sessions on the trainer to address it, which at times broke me. I pushed me both physically and mentally, so there was a sense of accomplishment when I finished it well. The data too returned good numbers, so I knew this structured approach was working for me," she recalls.

At the gym, she focused on functional upper body workouts, a lot of core sessions and specific work on the quads and glutes to engage them while riding. She says that her neighbours were often left aghast when they found her dragging a tyre behind her for hours, the workout intensified over time with the addition of

a weighted backpack to build strength. All along, she monitored her heart rate to ensure that it didn't cross a certain threshold.

She made effective use of a fitness band to keep track of her effort and recovery, before planning her training the following day. For recovery and to build resistance against cold, she would simply take a dip in the freezing lakes around home.

"Through the last few months, I've been running around for fundraising or to attend to other things. But I managed my workouts with whatever I had available around me. So from lifestyle choices like taking the stairs, to waking up in the middle of the night and finishing a core workout, or multiple hill repetitions during a cycling event where I was a spectator, I've done it all. And it's made me realise that there are many ways to achieve your goals, as long as you want to make it happen," she says.

The current record for the fastest circumnavigation by a woman is Scotland's Jenny Graham: 124 days. Kulkarni has 110 days on her mind. Her plan is to ride an average of 270-300km each day, with an early start and end. The clock never stops, which means that her transit time while flying is a cause for concern. But it simply means she'll have to push harder on certain legs of the tour.

For all those days, she'll have the company of strangers and their kindness on the road. And her trusted bicycle that carries words of encouragement from her family and friends. The one that resonates most with her reads, "The farther I go, the stronger I get". It all starts with that first push next week.

Shail Desai is a Mumbai-based freelance writer.

The current record for the fastest circumnavigation by a woman is 124 days. Kulkarni has 110 days on her mind. Her plan is to ride an average of 270-300km each day

# Why Bryson DeChambeau is anything but boring

Ridiculed for his unorthodox style, the US Open champion and golf's enfant terrible can't be ignored

Meraj Shah

"I don't play boring golf..." said Bryson DeChambeau when asked about why he hit a driver on the last hole of the US Open (13-16 June). On the other side of the world, members of a tony golf club in the suburbs of Delhi, watching the live broadcast, cringed when they heard him say that. "Boring golf?" repeated one and shook his head... (most golfers would consider that phrase an oxymoron).

It's the kind of comment you hear from people who don't play, or know much about golf. And it's precisely the kind of off-the-cuff remark—one that is easily misconstrued—that DeChambeau makes ever so often. No one can accuse the two-time US Open Champion of being boring—on or off the golf course.

But DeChambeau wasn't insinuating that his peers played an unimaginative brand of golf. He was merely emphasising that, for him, playing to the gallery came

first, sometimes at his own peril. At the US Open it nearly cost him the championship: Instead of playing safe on the last hole, DeChambeau hit an errant driver and then needed not one, but two miracle shots to extricate himself—first when his drive lodged the ball on a root under a tree and then from a bunker—and win. You can argue with DeChambeau's strategy, but not with his ambition: to play golf to the highest standard, and to make sure that it's riveting to watch.

This mindset is rare in professional golf nowadays. In their heyday, Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer always made time to mingle with fans, conduct golf instruction workshops, and speak about the game at forums. They considered public outreach and growth of the game a part of their roles as golf's biggest stars.

It's courtesy of their efforts, and of their peers, that the game is as popular around the world as it is lucrative for the players. Playing professionals today can take a lot of that for granted. While it's unfair to apply the same standards, there is a sense of entitlement in a number of the top players today. That hubris does the game no favours.

In all honesty, DeChambeau has always had us "old-school", or "traditional"—take your pick—fans of what Jack Nicklaus referred to as a "gentle game", on the back



Bryson DeChambeau during the 124th US Open in Pinehurst, North Carolina, US.

foot. What with his brutish drives, robotic putting action, and a seemingly unsophisticated way of playing the game—that caters to the fans more than a game plan—DeChambeau doesn't conform to our somewhat hallowed—some would say hackneyed—notions about the game.

The man has ditched regular golf equipment: he plays with unique same-length clubs that no one else uses. Meanwhile, his technique—no one can charge

him with possessing an elegant golf swing—is something he's created on his own in tandem with a beefed-up physique that allows him to make that swing.

When he emerged after the three-month covid layoff in 2020, DeChambeau had transformed from a lanky kid to an American football linebacker. His violent new action dispatched the golf ball into long-drive territory whilst being surprisingly accurate. But he was still regarded as

something of an oddity—the Bryson DeChambeau show got a lot of laughs.

Then he won the 2020 US Open and something changed in DeChambeau's public persona. He began winning over critics with his on-course demeanour, his candour in acknowledging—quite publicly—mistakes he'd made in the past, and commendable shows of sportsmanship in defeat and humility in victory.

In 2021, DeChambeau started uploading videos on YouTube. Now the PGA Tour has been exhorting players for years to do more on social media, going as far as to initiate a "Player Impact Programme" that pays millions of dollars to those players who take the initiative. And yet only a handful of young players make the effort.

DeChambeau, on the other hand, continued to make videos for YouTube even after he left the PGA Tour to go join the Saudi LIV Golf Tour. Two years down the line that channel hosts the most entertaining golf content out there. And it's strikingly egalitarian and inclusive: Golf influencers share space with golf's biggest stars and no subject is taboo—the very antithesis to golf's elitist image. With over a million followers, this channel has generated interest in the game within a whole new audience. Clearly, DeChambeau doesn't play boring golf.

When an interviewer at the 2024 US

Open presser asked DeChambeau whether any of his peers have come around wanting to learn more about his swing technique, and the equipment he uses (oversize grips and graphite shafts), he replied: "...I'm always an open book. Even to any of the players, and for the most part, people are doing their own things. They have their own contracts with their own equipment companies. And that's more power to them and whatever they're comfortable with. I'm certainly comfortable with what I'm using right now," he said.

There was a time that DeChambeau was considered a "mad scientist", by his peers and fans alike. Today, though, it's more likely that other players have not tried aping his technique simply because they're not sure of their abilities to pull it off. Meanwhile, the tables have turned: The outlier is now a two-time US Open champion. You don't win the "toughest test in golf", twice unless you've got serious mettle.

DeChambeau will still have his detractors, but at the very least he'll make them question their reasons, their biases, and their prejudices. DeChambeau holds up a mirror to more than a few of us. And every sport gains most from those that face it the best.

Meraj Shah is a Delhi-based writer, golfer and television producer.

# Everyone's cup of tea

With experiments on to extract nutrients from tea, turn it into an alternative to champagne, bottle it, or infuse its flavours into cocktails, tea is now more than an everyday drink

Aravinda Anantharaman

**W**hat's common to this group of four: a green cupcake, a (full) champagne flute, a brown, wobbly panna cotta, and a dainty cup of golden red English Breakfast? It's tea. But, how can that be?

For too long, we have looked at tea as a shot of energy or as a calming beverage. True, tea is that. But, fun things are stirring in the world of tea. Like the green tea powder matcha finding prolific use in cooking and baking, including in cupcakes. Or sparkling tea, completely at ease on any fine dining menu. Tea is now more than a hot, enjoyable drink that comes calling mid-morning and late afternoon.

I got interested in tea when I started looking for better black tea and more leafy Assams. I tasted white teas, which both delighted and surprised me. It has since been a journey of discovering one tea at a time. Sometimes tea assumes a cultural context, as with the boiled, sweet and milky *chai* drunk in most parts of the country or the fragrant *kahwa* of Kashmir, which are inextricably linked to place and people, and sometimes it's about a seasonal exception, such as a spring or autumn tea. Sometimes, it's the planter or blender's excitement in how a tea has come out, either in a good harvest or in the final cup, that makes a tea special. As I write this, my phone pings with a tea friend's message about a new line of flavoured teas listing bubblegum as one of the flavours. Not long ago, I'd have baulked at the idea of it, claiming loyalty only to *Camellia sinensis*, the tea plant. Now, I am curious if the bubblegum tea has a green tea base and whether it will work better hot or cold. I still prefer tea without much else added to it, but the more time I spend drinking, learning and writing about tea, it seems to me that change is inevitable and not all of it is necessarily a bad thing.

## IN THE SPIRIT OF THINGS

In March, the husband-wife duo of Vidya, 33, and Poorna Tej Valluru, 40, opened the Chit Chat Chai tea bar at Hyderabad's Banjara Hills. Tea-based mocktails make up a big part of their menu because they wanted to offer new ways to consume tea. "Tea shouldn't be just green, black, *chai*," says Poorna. Fascinated by how whiskies and wines are processed, he'd like tea to find its place among them, as part of the finer life. In 2015, Vidya signed up for a certification with the International Tea Masters Association training as a tea sommelier and master blender with Parag Hatibarua, while Poorna followed a few years later in 2020 with a course in bartending and mixology from the European Bartending School, Mumbai. It was, an unexpected career choice given that both were in the technology sector. Between them, tea is a constant experiment leading to new brews and new flavours that change with the seasons.

At their café, customers come for *chai* but are shown that tea is a herb with a variety of flavours. They offer tea in cold brews, as fruit infusions and botanical blends, as flavoured *chai*. "I was fascinated with the larger-than-life tea aspect. When you say tea, it's soothing, calming, rejuvenating. On the other side, it was about daily grind and *chai* to get you running. There was a story missing—on tea as part of the finer things in life. That's where we started our journey," says Poorna.

The summer special is a hibiscus mango pop, made with a black tea base and home-brewed shrubs and syrups.

In Delhi's Sidecar cocktail bar, Yangdup Lama, a Darjeeling native, a second flush loyalist and India's foremost bartender and mixologist, has his own take on tea. "There are two ways to look at tea," he says. "As tea and as something more than tea." Tea is not new to cocktails and mocktails but is enjoying a renewed interest as mixologists seek more herbs and botanicals to infuse new flavours into cocktails. When you think of tea as an herb, as a replacement for water, as adding another layer of flavour, and of the various tea styles that could complement various spirits, the flavour possibilities it offers are considerable.

In 2021, Rudra Chatterjee, managing director of Bengal-based Luxmi Tea, and Lama decided to combine their Darjeeling connection and collaborate for a short campaign. With teas from Chatterjee's Makaibari gardens—not far from Gayabari where Lama grew up—Lama created six cocktails. The first was called A Summer Solstice, gin infused with Makaibari's summer solstice tea, with rhododendron (another hat tip to these hills) blanc vermouth, lemon peel oils and edible flowers. The six cocktails, with names like Darjeeling Mail (Makaibari second flush, Bourbon whisky, London Essence Co. ginger ale, orange essential oils) and Agony of the Leaves (gin, Makaibari Darjoolong, lime acid, palm sugar),



Flavoured and herbal teas continue to attract new tea drinkers.

were on Sidecar's menu for half a year, showing another side of tea.

Lama is eager to bring more tea to the bar. "The flavour of tea, the tannic dryness and the aroma works well with spirits in cocktails in different formats," says Lama, adding that there are teas that work well with aged spirits like whisky, rum and cognac while others work best with spirits like gin and vodka. "Also flavoured teas make some amazing cocktails. Tall, nice and easy drinks like alcoholic ice teas."

Let's not forget craft gin, which is doing its part to promote tea. Gin's natural affinity for botanicals more than embraces *Camellia sinensis*. Just look at this list of home-grown craft gins: Amrut Distilleries' Nilgiris (Nilgiri tea), Jin Jiji's Darjeeling (FTGFOP1

black tea from Jungpana), Raincheck Earth's Cherrapunji (Assam Black), Spaceman Spirits' Samsara Vale of Paradise (Kashmiri green tea), Radico Khaitan's Jaisalmer (Darjeeling green tea), Adventurist Spirits' Tamras (Nilgiri tea). A G&T may well stand for gin and tea if we can keep this going.

As to why gin and tea pair well, Nikhil Varma, who created the Nilgiris gin for Amrut distilleries, says, "Distilled gin is made entirely using botanicals of all kinds from spices, herbs, flowers to berries and tea leaves are extremely intricate and nuanced in their flavour profile. Depending on the varietal or type of tea and distilled with the right combination of base botanicals, the tea accentuates a complex layer of flavours that benefits the aroma and taste of the gin, when sipped as is or mixed in a cocktail."

According to Lama, "Tea probably gives gin a nice greenish tannic character and also adds a strong value to the story. Tea brings provenance to the gin."

Tea is starting to present itself in a form and style that's right up there with fine wine. I first spoke to award-winning sommelier Jacob Kocemba of Copenhagen Sparkling Tea Company in 2020 and have since regularly checked in to see when these sparkling teas will arrive in India. Kocemba said they are bringing it to India soon. Sparkling tea—a blend of more than a dozen different organic tea types, ranging from white to black, bottled with white wine or grape juice and other natural aromatics—is now slotted into the wine list.

Back in 2009, Kocemba, who worked as a wine sommelier at a restaurant in Denmark, was asked to create a drink to pair with a new dessert. Finding nothing suitable in his cellar of 1,700 wines, he turned to the shelf that held tea. Today, his Copenhagen Sparkling Tea Company is seven years old and offers six sparkling teas, both non-alcoholic and low-alcohol; some with as many as 13 different teas. The flavours of tea are extracted at different temperatures and at different time intervals. "Like champagne," says Kocemba, on how tea is used in sparkling tea. Marketed as the alternative to champagne, bottled and served like champagne, they do make tea look very good.

Tea cocktails, mocktails and sparkling tea are still "craft" and "small batch" but the day is not far off that you can walk into a bar and ask for



something with tea.

## #TEAPOWER

In the run-up to the International Tea Day on 21 May, a new campaign called #TeaPower was conceptualised by the Intergovernmental Group on Tea (IGG), a global group that's part of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

Tasked with promoting the beverage, the group felt that tea and health were a natural fit, especially in the post-covid world where staying healthy and self-care have assumed more importance. For a younger audience who may well be tomorrow's tea drinkers, wellness is a big priority. #TeaPower was about placing tea within the space of sports and wellness to change how people perceive the drink. With its natural anti-oxidants and flavonoids, tea is simply flavoured and fortified water. When we strip away the milk, sweetener and spices, what we have is tea with its inherent goodness, and with just enough caffeine to boost its appeal.

Says Shabnam Weber of the Tea and Herbs Association of Canada, and vice-chair of the IGG, "I exercise in order to keep my body strong, to prevent getting sick. That's where we need to bring tea. Tea is not medicine. It's about the nutrients and sunlight and walking and yoga that I put into my day. No sugar, no calories. That's how we should start positioning tea. That's the hook."

(above) Tea tray at Burma Burma; and (left) tea finds its place in mixology for its sheer range of flavours.

When you think of tea as an herb...and of the various tea styles that could complement various spirits, the flavour possibilities it offers are considerable

**YANGDUP LAMA**  
BARTENDER & MIXOLOGIST



OLOHKOOLSI



COURTESY CHIT CHAT CHAI

(above) The tea bar at Chit Chat Chai in Hyderabad; and (below) Blueberry herbal tea by Luxmi Tea.

bars opening in Delhi and Bengaluru and the drink being included in beverage menus.

I ask Ankit Gupta, co-founder of the restaurant Burma Burma, why he offers a fine tea bar and bubble tea. "Fine tea and bubble tea attract different audiences, but there's a lot of crossover. Tea lovers enjoy fine tea for its subtle flavours and rich history, while bubble tea draws a younger, adventurous crowd looking for something trendy and new. Interestingly, traditional tea fans are also becoming more interested in bubble tea."

Matcha is a Japanese tea that caught the world's attention about two decades ago as a healthy beverage with a nice caffeine kick. In making matcha, the leaf is processed and powdered so that one ingests the leaf, as opposed to steeping and discarding them. While ceremonial-grade matcha in Japan is still in use in a formal tea ceremony, outside Japan culinary grade matcha is extensively used in cooking and baking. With a pronounced umami flavour and a striking green colour, it's a versatile tea. But perhaps the version that everyone has tried at least once is the matcha latte, popularised by Starbucks, and available conveniently as a to-go option.

The popularity of kombucha also grew with its purported health benefits, when a young American, George Thomas Dave, who now runs GT's Living Foods, began selling this cultured tea in health stores in the US in 1995. By 1999 he was selling a range of flavours in Whole Foods stores across California. Today, kombucha has a devoted following all over the world with many swearing by its gut health benefits. It spawned a band of home booch (a portmanteau of hooch and kombucha) brewers, who enjoy it as a hobby. It's also available in ready-to-drink bottled options, which again, makes it convenient and accessible.

And lastly, chai is our contribution to classic teas of the world. Whatever our peeve may be about the world calling it a chai latte, it did put it on café menus. Like the matcha latte, it was Starbucks that helped popularise chai as chai latte in the late 1990s. It may taste and feel different from the chai we drink at home or on our streets but it makes it an easy take-away option, like coffee. Now, with more milk options, like soy and almond, chai too lends itself to variations once never imagined.

Not just in India, these teas have a following in the Western world too. Sharon Hall of the UK Tea and Infusions Association (UKTIA) says, "Latte versions of chai, Earl Grey and matcha, made with a higher



COURTESY LUXMI ESTATES

technology and innovation in tea Abhijeet Hazarika, who has been working in tea extraction since 2019. The company has set out to reimagine the steps in tea processing. These trials have been ongoing for four years now and they are seeing success in extracting polyphenols from tea.

"A lot of polyphenols are lost in the current method of tea production. The aim is to preserve the antioxidants and to ensure that the same quantity of the polyphenols are present in each batch of manufacture," says Hazarika.

He compares their experiment to soya, "once just animal feed that has since transformed into soya oil, soya chunks, soya meal, for its nutritional value", and millet, "which transformed from a poor man's food to the top end of nutrition" as inspiration to look at tea anew. "We thought why not change how we look at tea," he says.

Since tea begins to lose nutrients once it's plucked and processed, the extraction is done from the leaf itself. What it means is that tea could become a natural source of phytochemicals, like L-theanine, known for mental wellness-inducing properties, theaflavin, with antioxidant properties, and even caffeine. They could be used to fortify snacks and even water. "Tea in the long term will not hold appeal as a beverage alone and needs to reinvent itself," says Hazarika. He believes that tea will have a higher appeal in the health and wellness space than as a beverage.

#### BACK IN THE CUP

And what of tea itself? Tea as we have known it will remain, of course. Made and sold as a beverage—the second most popular drink after water, as is often remarked—it isn't going away. Neither is the small segment we call speciality tea, made up of all the various styles of black, white, green, oolong, pu'erh and aged. Brands need to reinvent to appeal to new and younger tea drinkers. Sparsh Agarwal, who runs the tea brand, Dorje Teas, calls it a "generational fatigue", that young folks want something that speaks to them and not just what their parents consumed.

And this is a global story: In Japan, Ian Chun, who runs Yunomi Tea to promote small farmer teas, says that for young people tea is part of the culture "in the way kimono is". Otherwise, the tea of choice is bottled—quick and easy. "I believe, and what I am exploring now, is a redefinition of 'Japanese tea' to include tea blended with other Japanese ingredients. Like *genmaicha*, which is green tea flavoured with toasted rice, I think we can create a new tradition to create new interest in the Japanese tea industry", he says on why he started Yunomi.

Vincent Liu, who has been sourcing tea in China in the past three years for a US-based subscription service MyTeaPal Club, says, "The commercial market had an impact on how young people think about tea. The market is upgrading itself. You have to innovate to survive in the commercial market. Competition and cultural trends have caused more people to gain interest in tea." He talks about Chinese contemporary tea brands and cafes like Chagee and TeaStone, that have borrowed from tradition but speak to a Gen Z or millennial customer. They are modern and stylish stores. If Chagee specifies the tea—Da hang pao or tie guan yin—that has gone into the ready-to-drink bottled tea, TeaStone's sleek decor shows how Eastern aesthetics and modern needs can sit alongside each other in an open bar that serves tea made to order, brewed hot or cold.

In the UK, Hall says, UKTIA's research has identified that most people think the best cup of tea is the one they make themselves. "A new lexicon is needed to ensure consumers can order tea just how they like it out of home. The industry also needs to explore how tea can be more fun, bespoke and interesting to make the out-of-home experience more enjoyable for consumers," says Hall.

It's a long list of asks—that tea remain a friendly and comforting beverage but not boring, good for you yet tasty, accessible but also bespoke, high quality yet affordable, convenient but also special. The good news is that the versatile tea can happily check all those contradictions, offering something for everyone.

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Can tea become the beverage to reach out for to hydrate? As a more flavourful option to water, and better than a carbonated drink? It can be iced or hot, blended or flavoured, shaken or steeped. Can it become the bottle of choice to reach for on a run, after a workout? Yes, for when you look at tea without all the added indulgences, it's a beverage that's good for you. While brewed tea is not a replacement for water, it contributes to the daily required intake of hydration well.

There is a growing segment of ready-to-drink iced teas, although most come as sweetened options. Choose brands that use good quality tea. Companies like Goodricke offer a retail range. A brand that champions sugar-free bottled tea options is TeaFit. Of course, you can also brew your own with fruity iced tea blends offered by brands like Vahdam and Karma Kettle. Steep a cold brew overnight and you have your very own tea-to-go.

#### GATEWAY TO TEA

I heard the phrase "gateway teas" more than once when I asked tea folks about flavoured teas. A gateway to the world of tea. As tea brands have realised, flavoured teas are a great way to get people to try new teas. Familiar flavours like mint and green tea or chamomile green tea, an all-time chart-topper, offer a friendly invitation to get adventurous with tea. Tea producers who've turned to retail give it grudging love because flavoured tea brings customers and sales in a way their speciality tea have not.

Purists have long dismissed flavoured teas as a lesser tea because it doesn't celebrate the tea. No matter what views one has, the thing is that in most markets, flavoured teas are sought after.

Rudra Chatterjee, whose company owns some legacy estates and who recently launched 19 new additions to their flavoured range, says, "While our heritage lies in classic black teas, we're witnessing a shift in India—a renewed appreciation for flavoured/functional teas. We're embracing this trend by incorporating the finest organic spices, herbs, and botanicals into our blends. It's about honouring tradition while offering exciting new flavour profiles that resonate with a modern India."

One of the most ardent defenders of flavoured tea is William Dietz, author of *Spill the Tea: Unveiling the Mysteries of Blended, Flavoured and Herbal Teas* (2023). "Fruity blends can convert habitual juice drinkers, and a caramel-coffee-flavoured black tea might sway the most dedicated coffee lover. As a tea enthusiast, I'm always eager to introduce people to tea, and flavoured tea helps bridge the gap and make tea relatable," he tells *Lounge*.

The thing with flavoured tea is that the trade-off is quality because the flavours command a greater share of attention. So, choose brands that champion tea; many tea brands offer a range of flavoured teas, blended in-house. Some like Dorje Teas and Tea Trunk invite you to choose your blend from a list of options such as spice and floral. Another point to note is that there are two ways to flavour tea, natural and artificial, based on the source. Both share a chemical structure. Says Dietz, "Neither is better or

worse than the other. There are no concrete answers to the debate between natural and artificial flavours. It is worth mentioning that flavouring ends up in trace amounts in your cup of tea, around 0.001%."

#### CULT CLASSICS

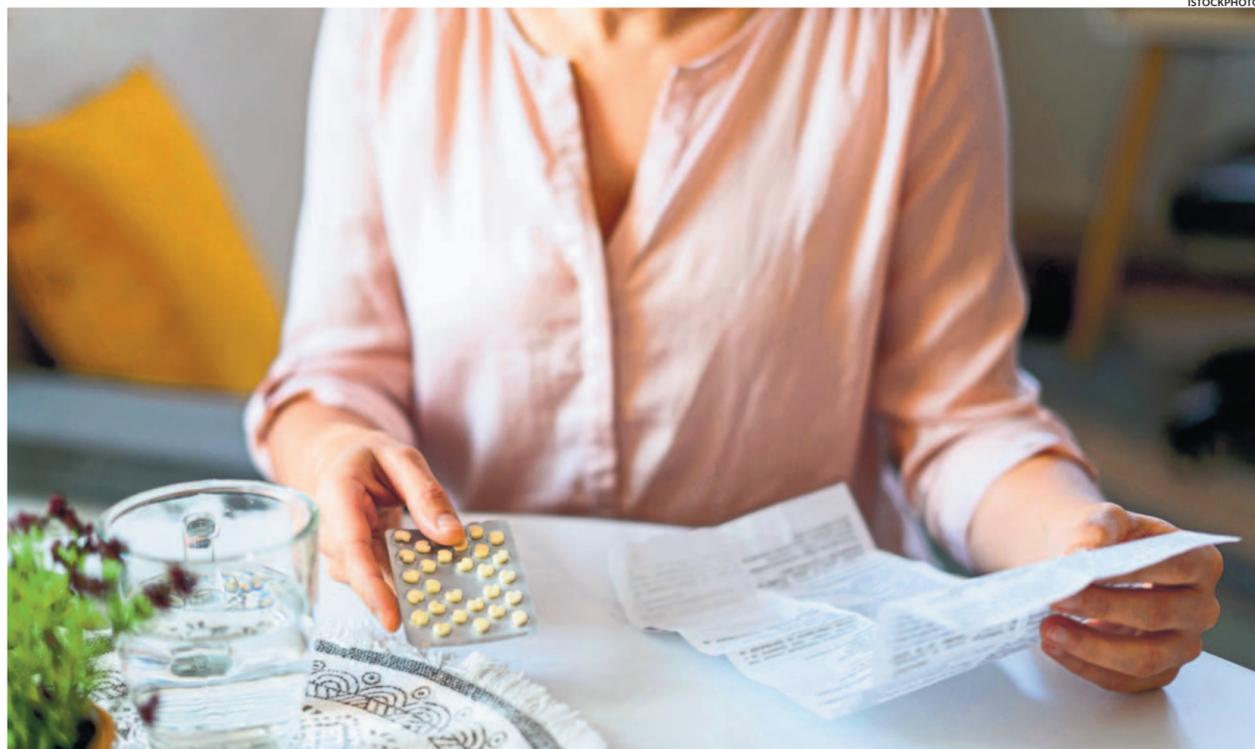
Even among teas, some have achieved cult status. Looking back over the last two decades, the tea popularity chart has bubble tea, matcha, kombucha and chai. They are not new creations, but they rank high in popularity even today, perhaps more popular than they were a decade ago. While at first they may have found novelty appeal, that they are still trending says something for them.

Boba or bubble tea is thought to be a Taiwanese innovation. The original recipe includes sweet and milky black tea with chewy tapioca balls and shaved ice, making for a creamy, smooth, cool and fun drink that you could carry to go. In Taiwan, it started trending in the 1980s. It's fun, it's a drink to enjoy out of home, and it comes in so many flavours—three reasons why it's still finding takers, and has become increasingly popular in India as well, with boba tea



COURTESY BURMA BURMA

The tea bar at Burma Burma in Fort, Mumbai



Apart from oral medication, hormones can also be delivered in the form of transdermal patches and cream; and (below) Dr Mary Claire Haver, whose book 'The New Menopause' busts many myths regarding MHT.

# An old bias is hurting women in menopause

Despite a global mindset shift in favour of hormone therapy for menopause, in India adoption is still low

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**B**engaluru-based Preeta Dutta, a 50-year-old interior design stylist, is hoping she is finally in menopause, defined by doctors as starting one year after a person's last period. Having struggled through a tough perimenopause, a transitional period during which stark hormonal changes, including withdrawal of oestrogen, occur, Dutta feels angry about the way several doctors dismissed and diminished her symptoms. "I started perimenopause around 45, and had hot flushes, panic attacks and fluctuating blood pressure. I was started on blood pressure medication. After some time, I started having heart palpitations, for which I did the round of cardiologists, neurologists and other specialists, till my GP said I was essentially having anxiety and panic attacks, and all my individual symptoms could be related to menopause," says Dutta.

It felt like all the pieces of a puzzle finally falling into place. "Why didn't all these specialists I saw connect the dots?" asks Dutta, who is now better and off BP medication after controlling inflammation through diet changes, supplementation and exercise. Though she feels it is too late for her to start Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) or Menopausal Hormone Therapy (MHT) as it is now referred to by the medical community, she is willing to try a functional medicine-led hormone reset. "If 10 years earlier someone had told me about HRT, I would have taken it," she says.

An HRT prescription—medication to replace oestrogen and progesterone, which drop as one approaches menopause—is less than common, even in Indian metros, for women suffering through years of debilitating perimenopausal symptoms, and an old bias is responsible for it.

Dr Nandita Palshetkar, a Mumbai-based obstetrician and gynaecologist recalls a time when menopausal symptoms were treated widely with HRT in India and globally. "Doctors were giving it left, right and centre," says Dr Palshetkar, who is a former president of the Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI). "Then this study came and halted everyone in their tracks," she says, referring to a report by the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), a project funded by the US National Institutes of Health focused on menopause and its treatment.

In 2002, WHI released preliminary findings from a study undertaken to determine whether HRT protected women from heart disease and whether it increased the risk of breast cancer. The findings indicated that combined oestro-

gen and progestogen therapy showed elevated risks of breast cancer, heart disease, stroke and blood clots among the participating women, and the study was halted.

Later, meta-studies and clarifications repudiated many of the WHI findings, but a culture of over-cautiousness had set in—and continues to be an influential factor in the clinical treatment of menopause.

"Those women who need MHT should be given it," says Dr Paleshetkar. "Women who suffer from frequent hot flushes, night sweats, anxiety, body aches and insomnia, for whom other methods of treatment such as lifestyle management and supplementation have not helped, they should definitely consider HRT. It's not fair that women spend so many years leading a sub-optimal life," she adds.

Doubts about the study arose within a few years of its publication. "The average age of participants was 63, and only 3.5% of the women were 50-54 years old, the age when women usually make a decision regarding initiation of MHT," notes a 2010 statement by the Endocrine Society of the US. It also had other flaws, such as the type of hormones prescribed to women during the study. In response to the findings of the WHI trial, MHT usage declined by approximately 80%, notes the society. "The pendulum is now swinging back as a result of more careful assessment of the use of MHT shortly after menopause."

Dr Palshetkar has a different view: "It's not that doctors don't want to prescribe it, it's often patients who are reluctant. Better awareness is needed."

However, anecdotal evidence suggests even women who actively seek it may find it tough to get a doctor to prescribe it or give convincing reasons as to why it's not suitable for them. At least six women spoken to for this story who saw a doctor for menopause relief said one of three things: their doctors never recommended it; it was suggested by a doctor but they were reluctant to try it; or they asked about it and were discouraged.

Monika Manchanda, a Bengaluru-based co-founder of a health-tech startup, is aware of the controversies regarding HRT and changing attitudes towards MHT in some countries. A couple of years ago, the 47-year-old started experiencing peri-meno-

pausal symptoms such as unpredictable periods, heavy bleeding, night sweats, insomnia, mood swings and brain fog. "I would be in the middle of a presentation and lose my strand of thought. I had not felt like this ever before," she says.

She started looking into symptoms and causes, and her research threw up the work of doctors like US-based Mary Claire Haver. These are menopause specialists who have taken to social media to talk about the widespread ignorance regarding menopause even within the medical community. They evangelise the benefits of hormone therapy.

"If you go to Indian doctors, there are two standard responses: 'this happens in menopause, you have to put up with it', and 'lose weight'. How can you be told, casually, to just suck it up?" asks Manchanda. Having access to medical professionals at her workplace, she

became convinced that she would benefit from hormone therapy, but has not yet found a doctor who will prescribe it. A friend, who lives in Malaysia, is undergoing MHT, and Manchanda has started looking at the option of travelling there to seek treatment. "I have done video calls with her doctor, and am seriously considering visiting her to start HRT," she says.

In her book *The New Menopause*, published in April, Dr Haver writes: "You deserve modern menopause care. The categorical denial, dismissal and refusal to discuss therapeutic options, including hormone replacement therapy, has no place in 2024."

The new way of thinking about menopause, backed by studies, is that it affects every organ system of the

body, she writes.

Bengaluru-based menopause care specialist Dr Aruna Muralidhar agrees with Dr Haver's views. "Approaching menopause with the seriousness it deserves is especially relevant in India, where the average age for menopause is 46-48," she says. This is lower than the global average age at which women achieve menopause—48.8—and considerably lower than the 50-52 average for Caucasian women. Dr Muralidhar, who practised in the UK before moving to India a decade ago, says that in her opinion, "Indians gynaecologists are not as open to HRT as those in the UK and the US."

She does caution that HRT is not a one-prescription-fits-all solution. "Doctors have to consider the patient's medical history and lifestyle. Treatment of menopausal symptoms starts with basic awareness, lifestyle changes, nutrition and supplements, exercise and meditation. But lack of awareness or experience in prescribing HRT may make some doctors step back from prescribing hormones," says Dr Muralidhar.

Attitudes are changing, but slowly. Since 2021, the Indian Menopause Society (IMS) has been conducting an exam to certify doctors as menopause practitioners, called Credentialed IMS Menopause Practitioners (CIMP). It also publishes an annual list of doctors who have cleared the exam, along with their location, on its website ([indiamenopausesociety.org/CIMP-applications.html](http://indiamenopausesociety.org/CIMP-applications.html)), and the number has been growing.

Dr Archana Dwivedi, who heads the Vadodara chapter of IMS and is on its website committee, agrees that the WHI study "created a scare" among doctors and patients for many years. "But the guidelines have changed and with the advent of better quality, bio-mimicking oestrogen and progesterone, people have started accepting that MHT is a good thing to offer to their patients because quality of life is important," says Dr Dwivedi over WhatsApp voice notes in response to questions shared over email.

"Longevity has increased, women are now living up to 90 years, and we cannot live a compromised life. MHT is a gold standard therapy, and I would appeal to doctors to not let their patients suffer if they are eligible to receive it," she says, only prescribing caution for those over 55 with comorbidities. "The earlier you start the better," she says,

adding that it is a myth that oestrogen therapy causes cardiac disease and obesity.

"In fact studies have shown that it plays a role in managing Type-2 diabetes and obesity if given at the proper time, as well as bone health, mental health—all these things improve." With the availability of transdermal patches and sprays, "MHT is here to stay," she says.

MHT is a gold standard therapy, and I would appeal to doctors to not let their patients suffer if they are eligible to receive it.

DR ARCHANA DWIVEDI  
MEMBER, INDIAN  
MENOPAUSE SOCIETY



COURTESY INSTAGRAM

## The fastest Indian at the Comrades

This is how Dev Chaudhari set a new record at the Comrades ultra marathon in South Africa



Comrades Marathon in May 2015.

ISTOCKPHOTO

Shail Desai

**O**n most days, Dev Chaudhari, 27, rises before the sun to put in a few hours of training. He then goes to work at his brother's medical store in Pusad near Yavatmal in Maharashtra. After a quick lunch, he gets some rest or catches up on his master of business administration (MBA) studies, before setting off for the evening workout.

On his way back, he visits the fields his family owns to tend to crops. The evening is spent at the shop once again until closing hours. By the time he's home, there's just enough time to tuck into a late dinner before hitting the sack.

It's a packed routine that allows little time for leisure. But it's those predawn hours that he thrives on, where he's treading mile after mile, flourishing in his own company as he looks to attain new highs in the world of ultra running.

One such moment came at the Comrades Marathon (85.9km) in South Africa in June, where Chaudhari clocked 7 hours, 4 minutes, the fastest time by an Indian runner. The previous mark on the "Up Run"—it is held every alternate year where the course runs from Durban to Pietermaritzburg—was another Indian runner Sandeep Kumar's 7 hours, 30 minutes. Chaudhari even bettered the "Down Run" timing (from Pietermaritzburg to Durban) of 7 hours, 26 minutes held by runner Kartik Joshi.

"I wanted to lower the previous time by a good margin, since I knew it would be difficult for me to travel to this race regularly. The target was to go sub-7 hours, but a few things didn't fall in place," Chaudhari, says.

He got interested in running in 2017, when he would wake up to watch his seniors train, as they looked to clear the fitness test for joining the police force. When a few of them egged Chaudhari on to run with them, he turned out to be a natural.

The distances were knocked off with ease: In just two months, he graduated from 5km to a half marathon. And at his first marathon in 2019, his potential was evident when he completed the run in under three hours. After the covid-19 pandemic, he landed an invitation to run on trails, and in turn, he soon had his first opportunity to attempt an ultra marathon.

"Ultra running is a different world. I had to not only work on my endurance and strength, but had to change little things such as my sleep cycle before a race, since a lot of runs extend into the night. On the whole, I enjoyed running for these extended periods of time and observing how my body was reacting to the effort I was putting in," he says.

The Comrades was on his to-do list for 2023. He put in some hard miles while training for it, but eventually fell short of funds and was left disappointed. This time around, a fellow runner and well-wisher, Rajendra Shirke, informed Chaudhari that he was paying his entry fee (around ₹ 21,000) for the race. He found another sponsor for travel, while digging into his savings for other expenses. Running shoe brand Brooks came on board last year to sponsor his gear. "The salary from my part-time job (at the medical store) and the prize money from previous races sorted out my race expenses," says Chaudhari.

While training, Chaudhari logged a weekly average mileage of 180-195km. He covered about 25-30km each day, splitting it between easy-paced long runs, tempo runs and interval training sessions. For the latter, which he did twice a week, he preferred repetitions over longer distances between 3-5km. Besides strength training sessions at the gym, he also pulled out time for a 3km swim at a dam nearby.

Sundays were usually reserved for long runs. Three such efforts in the run-up to the Comrades made him realise that he was ready for the challenge, the record well within his reach if all went as per plan. In April, he ran 40km in a personal best time of 2 hours, 42 minutes. The following month, he ran 50km in 3 hours, 20 minutes, and another 60km—that had an elevation gain of 800m—in 4 hours, 4 minutes.

"During these runs, I didn't focus much on hydration or nutrition to see how the body reacts. It was quite hot at the time and it really tested my abilities. I managed it quite well and was satisfied with my preparation," he says.

After arriving in South Africa, he did short runs to get a feel of the local conditions. All along, he loaded on the carbohydrates, while spending a lot of time simply resting. "I don't get much time to just put my feet up and relax back home, so this was a great chance to do just that," he says.

The only thing on his mind at the start line was to stick to his race plan. Though he admits there was also the pressure of expectations. "A lot of Indian runners were talking about how I would perform. I didn't want to disappoint those who had faith in my abilities. So where I usually tend to start pushing right at the start in pursuit of the runner ahead, I had to practise restraint this time around and watch a few get past me," he says.

While running the Comrades, once beyond the 6km mark, Chaudhari picked up the pace to average between 3.30-4.30 minutes per kilometre. His trail running experience made him feel at ease on the climbs and he ensured his hydration was on point. The 6 hour, 30 minute target was on track until he hit the 67km mark. It's when he saw a lot of elite runners dropping out of the race and a few others struggling to make progress.

"It played on my mind because I'm not a professional runner and this was my first international race. The body felt good, but I decided to slow down and take on a conservative approach," he recalls.

Over the next 13km, Chaudhari dropped the pace and only picked it up once he realised he had a relatively flat final section before the finish. It cost him his target but he was all smiles as he received a silver medal (handed out to male finishers who clock between 6 hours and 7 hours, 29 minutes) for his efforts.

"I'm happy to have achieved something significant and really hope that there's another Indian who can break this record soon," he says.

Shail Desai is a Mumbai-based freelance writer.

# Bharti Kher, always an alchemist at heart



PHOTO © BEN SYMON/COURTESY BHARTI KHER AND PERROTIN.

Bharti Kher's most extensive exhibition yet in the UK represents different approaches and periods of her career

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At Yorkshire Sculpture Park—an international centre for modern and contemporary sculpture in England—Bharti Kher's *Ancestor* (2022) looms high. This mother figure with heads of 23 children emerging from her body puts the female form front and centre. The artist had been commissioned to make this 18ft-tall painted bronze work, to be placed at the southeast entrance of New York's Central Park—it was displayed there from 8 September 2022 to 27 August 2023—after she had been recovering from long covid. Thus to her, this figure ended up becoming a symbol of nurturing and refuge, while the multiple heads embodied pluralism and multiculturalism. Kher, who lives between the UK and India, has described the female form in this sculpture as a keeper of memories, and "a vessel for you to travel into the future, a guide to search and honour our past histories".



And now *Ancestor* forms part of a major solo exhibition, *Bharti Kher: Alchemies*—her most extensive UK museum presenta-

tion so far—which represents different approaches and periods of her career. The works on showcase, created between 2000-24, highlight her ongoing engagement with the notions of identity and gender, particularly the female body and its experience. "She presents the woman as mother, sex worker, monster, warrior, and deity, often hybridised with animals or as avatars of the goddess. Her mythical characters blur the boundaries between humankind, nature and narrative, revealing expansive potential and new meaning," states the exhibition note.

On display, both in the Underground Gallery and outdoors, the sculptures show Kher's process as she transforms material such as *bindis*, plaster, sari, bronze, glass bricks, salvaged material, fur and wax into a universe of hybrid creatures. She often goes about research in a meticulous, almost scientist-like manner, bringing this together in works of art that throb and pulsate with life. The artist states in an interview that if she likes a material, she finds out how it functions, and then creates sample after sample. "That's really half the fun. And out of the sampling emerge work, bits, objects, and that's how things are assembled with different components. Mannequins are cast in rubber to make moulds but I can also cast in paper or cement or plaster or resin. Material creates the work and vice versa," she elaborates.

Found objects run like a leitmotif in Kher's practice, with the artist separating them from their original function and creating new meaning around them. In the Underground Gallery at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, one can see *The deafroom* (2001-12) made with cuboids after melting



PHOTO © GUILLAUME ZIC/COURTESY BHARTI KHER, HAUSER & WIRTH, NATURE MORTE, PERROTIN AND PUBLIC ART FUND

10 tonnes of glass bangles. Created in response to the 2002 Gujarat riots, the work was a statement about the violence against women at the time and the subsequent silencing of female voices. Then there is *The hot winds that blow from the west* (2011), also a monolithic cube made from old radiators shipped by Kher from the US to India. "We think of winds as harbingers of change, carrying voices of transformation. From where I sit, the winds blowing nowadays from the West are no longer as strong or reliable as they were. Other voices are changing the landscape now and political uncertainties have put the world in flux, economic actions of global markets are more and more causing ecological ramifications elsewhere, feeling evermore precarious," the artist had stated earlier in an interview.

'Ancestor' (detail, 2022). © Bharti Kher. (Collection of the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi)

Found objects run like a leitmotif in Kher's practice, with the artist separating them from their original function and creating new meaning around them



COURTESY BHARTI KHER

'A poem for night creatures', 2020. © Bharti Kher.

*Bharti Kher: Alchemies*—supported by the Henry Moore Foundation, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art and the RMZ Foundation, among others—includes four outdoor bronze sculptures such as the new work, *Djinn* (2024). *The Guardian*, in its article, dated 27 June, describes the sculpture as a small boy being a tree. "He has a head of bananas and he stands, 5m tall, on a hill at the northernmost point of the park where the sun will light him as it sets and rises and the seasons will alter his patina," states the piece.

Whenever Kher's works are displayed outdoors, they acquire newer layers of meaning through interaction with the viewers, the play of light and the backdrop. "The viewer completes the artwork and I love that people come so close, are able to touch and interact with them. To put large works in nature is the ultimate test. You can't compete with nature ever, but you can co-exist," says Kher.

For her, the body itself serves as a site for storytelling, and she has often talked about the skin memories of the materials that she chooses. The final room in the Underground Gallery showcases both the vulnerability and strength of the female form through *Six Women* (2012-14). This powerful work features plaster casts of sex workers from Kolkata, with the material carrying the essence of these women. "I build narratives, put things on top of each other, attach objects on to works that take you away or lead you in another direction," explains Kher. There is also an animated part of the work that she enjoys, "when the work is its own thing". "Objects and people are all the same in art. The stories and our perceptions are all levelled out in the field as pure experience," she adds. "There is

also transfer, the skin becomes a holder of narratives—it is a transfer layer that can hold that meaning," she adds.

In the same space as *Six Women*, the viewer can also see the *Virus* series—featuring a spiral of *bindis* on the wall—which began in 2010 and will be concluded in 2039. "(It) is a vortex. It's a peephole. It's an entrance. It's an exit. It's a womb, it's the abyss," Kher states in her artist note. The other works that form a part of the show include her hybrid forms such as the *Intermediaries* series and *Strange Attractor* (2021)—part-ape and part-woman, "harnessing primal, shamanistic energy". In her note, Kher describes her hybrids as "mythical urban goddesses, creatures who came out of the contradictions of femininity or the idea of womanhood" and are, "part truth, and part fiction. Part me, and part you". For her, *Intermediaries* is a celebration of the weirdness in us and the contradictions in our lives. They embody the reality of our hybridity and the constructed binaries of nationality, religion, class, colour and sex.

Her engagement with the "in-between spaces" that they inhabit—has evolved over time. She continues to imagine crevices between identities in multiple ways. "We imitate the shape of the divine to mirror ourselves so that we may feel less insignificant in the greater order of things. In fact, we are so small and our lives are a microcosm in the blip of the churning universe. And yet the way to live the unfaithfulness of it is to celebrate the wonder of it all," says Kher.

The exhibition is on view at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK, till 27 April, 2025

## The violence in 'Kill' is anything but empty

Nikhil Nagesh Bhat's 'Kill', now playing in theatres, is a dark, brutal action film that's unlike anything in Indian cinema

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Watching *Kill* was a draining physical experience. Sometimes I found myself sitting weirdly, legs tangled, heart racing. Whenever the film paused for breath, I was reminded to catch mine. My nerves were shot 45 minutes in—and then it really gets stressful. All around me there were groans, gasps, murmurs of protest, the sound of an audience that couldn't deal with what was happening onscreen but couldn't look away either.

There were other sounds too. It was these, more than the violent events of the film, which made this a profoundly disturbing screening. But I'll come to that later.

For about 20 minutes, you could mistake *Kill* for a Bollywood film. Tullika (Tanya Manikata) has been pressured into an engagement by her father, the powerful Baldeo Singh Thakur (Harsh Chhaya). She goes through with it, but intends to marry her love, army commando Amrit (Lakshya). On the train back home, Amrit turns up to surprise her. There's a marriage proposal, a little banter.

How quickly, mercilessly, the film snuffs out this fantasy. It's gone the second a family of dacoits board the train. If they'd picked a different part of the train, things might not have escalated. Or if their leader

Beni (Ashish Vidyarthi) and his son Fani (Raghav Juyal) hadn't realised they're travelling with Baldeo Singh and his family, whose ransom would be worth a lot more than the wallets and jewellery they'd planned to loot. But they begin near where Amrit and his army buddy Viresh (Abhishek Chauhan) are sitting, and pretty soon the two commandos are smashing dacoit heads.

Director Nikhil Nagesh Bhat dispenses with that most Indian of action staples, the hero entry scene (there's a quick zoom on Lakshya instead). It's a smart idea, keeping us guessing about Amrit's capabilities until the fighting starts. Turns out he's deadly efficient, lightning quick, tough like a bison. The goons keep coming, some of them armed, two with a significant size advantage over Amrit. Viresh is badly injured, and there's the looming vulnerability of Tullika and her family. It's not even half time and already it feels like five action films' worth of broken bones and grisly deaths.

From the time it premiered at last year's Toronto Film Festival, *Kill* was promoted as the most violent Indian film ever made. It is that, by some distance. Faces are smashed to pulp, torsos slashed open, bodies slammed sickeningly into hard surfaces. It would be easy to accuse *Kill* of setting itself up as an endurance test. But it goes beyond that. A genuinely upsetting darkness settles over the film by the half-way mark. There's a moment when you realise Amrit's been holding himself back; it's both exhilarating and sickening. His kills after that are different—less efficient, more cruelly drawn out.

*Kill* has been billed as "*Raid* on a train", a feisty claim, considering how highly regarded Gareth Evans' 2011 film is. Yet, the action in *The Raid*, brutal as it was, has



Lakshya in 'Kill'.

an exhilaration and showmanship that's deliberately absent from Bhat's film. The pitiless tone of *Kill* is closer to something like Timo Tjahjanto's *The Night Comes For Us*. Se-yeong Oh brings his experience of working on Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer*—another film set on a train—to the close-quarters combat here (he shares action director duties with Parvez Sheikh, whom he worked with on *War*). It's a tremendous feat of sustained action choreography, never pretty or showy but maintaining a cold clarity throughout.

In August last year, a Railway Protection Force officer on a Mumbai-Jaipur train shot dead three Muslim passengers

and a Hindu constable. This hate crime occurred after the film was completed, but the memory hovers over it, especially when a young Muslim man, Arif, is murdered (the man's family later helps Amrit, saying, "If only we'd acted sooner that time..."). *Kill* isn't a political film, yet its gut-churning violence feels in step with a time when videos of lynching and flogging shot by the perpetrators play on prime time news and circulate on WhatsApp. It's almost a cliché—despite Juyal's chillingly funny turn—to have a certain profile of north Indian male as clannish, misogynist villains. But I did find it intriguing how little patriotic hay the film makes of the fact

that its "*rakshak*" ("protector", which Fani spins as "*raakshas*", "demon") is a soldier. Not one flag is fluttered; Amrit never alludes to duty or national pride. It may not seem like much, but this flies in the face of most recent Indian action cinema.

The violence is shocking in and of itself, but is made even harder by the emotional-ity it's wrapped up in. Lakshya doesn't speak much, but you can see Amrit's changing mental state—fury, panic, despair, derangement—writ on his face. And though the dacoits are wholly unsympathetic, the film still treats their losses as significant; their anguish at each new corpse is genuine. *Kill*'s violence will

seem extreme and off-putting to some, but it forces the audience to deal with the actuality of violence in a way I've hardly ever seen done. Which brings me back to the audience at my screening.

*Kill* isn't a hell-yeah action film. There's no slo-mo, no release, no breathing room. The screen is a mess of flailing limbs and bloodied bodies. Distressing things happen to good people. Nevertheless, throughout the film, people in the hall kept trying to cheer. As Amrit started to really lean into his kills, the whoops and whistles became louder.

I'm not saying viewers shouldn't want Amrit to bash Fani's face in. But there's something disturbing in seeing a crowd enjoy a level of violence that's clearly dialled up to induce discomfort. The film never infantilises its brutality—everyone on the train apart from the soldiers and the dacoits looks utterly horrified. But Indian audiences expect to have their violence mediated by heroism or fantasy. At one point Amrit shoves a Zippo can into a dacoit's mouth and lights it on fire. As his screams filled the hall, I heard people laugh—which was scarier than what I'd just watched.

"This willing dissociation of response from violent spectacle has a downside... we become inured to actual violence when it excites us; we forget that there's pain and death, we become connoisseurs of spectacle," American critic David Denby wrote in 2012. *Kill* holds a mirror to actual violence, it's full of pain and death, yet people were willing it to be a spectacle. I wonder if they'd see any difference between this and when Ranbir Kapoor goes on a murder spree in *Animal*. The day someone mashes up scenes from *Kill* with *Arjan Vailly*, you'll know the point has truly been missed.

Mohit Yadav

# SKIN IN THE GAME

The co-founder of skincare brand Minimalist on being a serial entrepreneur, creating products for a niche market, and why he loves working with his brother

Illustration by Priya Kuriyan

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**M**ohit Yadav, 40, co-founder of Minimalist skincare, is talking about what motivated him to get into entrepreneurship. We are on a video call, and when he confesses that he became an entrepreneur just so he could live and work with his brother, it has the unexpected effect of my mind conjuring up images from the 1999 family drama about filial love *Hum Saath Saath Hain*.

"Growing up, I never had any ambition to pursue entrepreneurship. One didn't even know what such a life entailed. It's just that when Credit Suisse, the investment bank I was working with (as assistant vice-president) at the time (2006) asked me to move to Hong Kong or London, I knew I didn't want to stay away from my (younger) brother (Rahul)," says Yadav, while laughing at my Sooraj Barjatya analogy. "There's only a two-year age gap between us, so we grew up together. We studied together, played together and became close friends," he says, reminiscing about growing up in Jaipur, Rajasthan, with his brother, sister and parents.

Today, this sibling revelry has the Yadav brothers at the helm of Minimalist, a science-backed D2C skincare brand, which claims to be driven by the values of transparency and authenticity. Started in 2020, the chemical-forward brand has 50 products in various categories, from skin and body care, hair care and lip care to the just launched baby care. With affordability as a guiding pillar for a price-sensitive market like India, their products are priced from ₹279-₹1,899. The brand has managed to stand steady amid competition from similar brands such as Dr. Sheth's, The Derma Co., Dot & Key and Deconstruct. Headquartered in Jaipur, the 572-employees-strong company's projected revenue for 2024 is ₹350 crore.

Started in 2020, the chemical-forward brand has 50 products in various categories, from skin and body care, to hair care and baby care

Going by the entrepreneurial streak of the brothers—Yadav is a chartered accountant and Rahul is a chemical engineer from IIT Roorkee—since 2008, there might be something to this filial bond after all.

The duo's first attempt at entrepreneurship was an online T-shirt store, Scopia Fashions, launched in June 2008, for which they raised funds from Snapdeal's Kunal Bahl. In 2011, they rebranded as MangoStreet, an online kids garment brand, which was acquired in 2012 by now-shuttered baby care e-commerce platform Hushbabies. "Running Scopia and MangoStreet taught us how the entire startup ecosystem works," says Yadav. Their entrepreneurial gig continued when the brothers met Amit Jain, co-founder and CEO of CarDekho, who like them is based in Jaipur, in 2013.

"CarDekho was just starting out and we both became a part of that venture," recalls Yadav, who joined the startup as vice-president. After two years in India, it was when he moved to Indonesia as CEO to run automobile portal Oto.com (a joint venture between CarDekho.com and Emtek, an Indonesian media company) that the distance from the family hit. "It struck me that I'd moved to Jaipur all those years ago to spend time with family, and yet, here I was in Indonesia, away from them. That was when I decided to move back to Jaipur to start a new venture with my brother," he says.

In 2018, the brothers started Freewill, a tech-enabled personalised hair care brand with backing from Sequoia Capital's (now Peak XV) accelerator programme, Surge. The venture faced scalability issues. However, the learnings acquired from this stint proved helpful in setting up Minimalist, their most successful startup idea yet. In addition to their own experience, especially Rahul's chemistry background and knowledge of chemical formulations, they had the backing of investors. The venture, once again, raised a seed funding of \$2 million (around ₹17 crore now) in 2020 from Surge and in July 2021, they raised ₹10 crore in Series A funding, led by Peak XV Partners with participation from Unilever Ventures.



When you grow up seeing hardships, you tend not to have a fear of failure. An essential quality when you are starting a venture.

The idea to start Minimalist, Yadav says, came from a void they'd sensed in the Indian skincare industry for brands that made products for specific problems. "Looking from the outside in, the skincare industry in India seemed to be dominated by large companies with big R&D facilities. But the thing with large FMCG players in this space is that they are always trying to create a product that will appeal to all one billion people in the country. There were barely any companies that were product-focused and catered to specific problems that a smaller segment, of say, 100 million people had," he says. A question that drove the two was "Can we solve these customers' problems—like acne, pigmentation or ageing—by bringing products they actually need?"

As for what compelled them to opt for the "transparent" path, Yadav's answer is "the lack of honesty in communication" by brands, citing recent examples of baby foods and health drinks for children being found to have excessive sugar and artificial flavouring. "The laws may permit some of these ingredients but is it right for a company to claim it's a health drink? No." At one point in the conversation, Yadav shares that they were also inspired by international brands such as The Ordinary that are science-forward and follow a philosophy of ingredient transparency.

Minimalist's stance of "being transparent" is reflected in their catch phrase "Hide Nothing" and in their product labels that carry information ranging from the percentage of ingredients to the

suppliers of their ingredients. The results of the clinical trials done with the products are detailed on every product page on the website.

The brand launched in October 2020, during peak pandemic, which could have made it a non-starter, but therein lies the plot twist. With time available on their hands, self-care became a priority for people, with a move towards educating themselves about ingredients as well.

If people were paying cursory attention to labels before, they were now taking pains to read up about what they were putting into their skin. There was also caution around stepping out of home to shop at brick and mortar stores. Minimalist's moves to #hidenothing and being an internet-first company paid off. Within eight months of the launch, the brand reported ₹21 crore in revenues in 2021 before shooting to ₹108 crore in 2022. In 2023, Minimalist's reported revenue was ₹184 crore, a 70.37% increase from the previous year.

These numbers have industry watchers interested in the brand because they have managed to be profitable every year, which is significant when you consider how cluttered the space is with multinationals, Indian FMCGs, and beauty and skincare brands jostling for attention from the same customer. Another significant turn the company has taken in the four years of its existence is going international. Starting with the UAE in 2021, Minimalist is now available in seven markets: the US, UK, UAE, Malaysia,

#### Last book read

'Shoe Dog: A Memoir by the Creator of Nike' by Phil Knight

#### Favourite vacation spot

Goa in India, Bali in Indonesia and the European countryside

#### CEOs he admires

Steve Jobs and Ratan Tata

Nepal, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.

"I think one of the reasons why we've grown so fast is because our initial customers spread the word about us. Word of mouth continues to get us new customers even today," says Yadav, while admitting to being surprised by how readily the brand was accepted by consumers. Yadav believes that it's the way he and Rahul as "outsiders" treated the business that's helped them succeed.

"We just put our heads down to come up with formulations that would solve the issues—whether pigmentation or fine lines—using the best quality ingredients," he says, and then proceeds to describe the essence of the company more concisely as, "We are a solutions-oriented company".

Quiz Yadav about who makes the formulations and he credits it to their team. "A large part of our team, especially formulators, comes from a pharmaceutical background and all of them possess the knowledge required to understand how different actives and molecules interact with each other and come up with effective formulations. We also have employees with a background in cosmetic science, who ensure our products are aesthetically right too," he explains.

I ask Yadav about an incident that almost shadowed the launch of Minimalist. Everything about their product packaging including the text, the labelling and even the shape of the bottles their serums came in seemed to mimic popular international brands such as The Ordinary. Skin and fashion influencers critiqued the

style. Minimalist, however, has continued with the same package design.

"In the initial stage of the launch, this reaction was challenging because we'd put in a lot of effort in terms of creating our products. We were also trying to create a space of our own in terms of how people perceived us," Yadav confesses, recalling that incident.

What was the motivation behind the brand's new pivot to baby care? "This decision largely came from our own experiences," says the father to a 12-year-old. "While there's a lot happening in the country with regard to skin and hair care, there's very little innovation happening in baby care. You don't get any fragrance-free options here," says Yadav. The line was launched in June and currently includes four fragrance-free products: a cleanser, a massage oil, a lotion and an ointment for skin irritation and diaper rash.

Winding down, it is time to revisit his childhood. Were there any lessons from that time that continue to guide him? Yadav says, "Rahul and I grew up seeing our parents waking up by 5-6am and working till 10pm every day to ensure that their kids could get the education they never got. When you grow up seeing hardships like we have, you tend not to have a fear of failure. An essential quality when you are starting a venture knowing that there are 99% chances it will fail. It's what's kept my brother and me going through all our ventures—we know that we'll survive the failures."



**MINT SHORTS**

**PV retail sales dip 7% in June as heatwave curtails showroom visits**

**New Delhi:** Passenger vehicle retail sales in India witnessed a 7% on-year decline in June as severe heatwave conditions resulted in 15% less showroom walk-ins, industry body FADA said on Friday. Overall passenger vehicle registrations stood at 281,566 units last month, as compared to 302,000 units in June 2023. Two-wheeler registrations rose 5% year-on-year to 13,75,889 units in June. **PTI**

**Biocon to raise ₹4,000-4,500 cr via Indian bond market**



Biocon Biologics Ltd is considering raising ₹4,000 crore to ₹4,500 crore from India's local-currency bond market in a few months, according to people in the know. The firm is in discussions with banks for the issuance, they said, asking not to be named because the details are private. "We would not like to comment on any rumours or market speculation," the firm's spokesperson said by email. **BLOOMBERG**

**Retail prices of tomatoes in Delhi surge to ₹70-80 per kg**

**New Delhi:** Retail prices of tomatoes in Delhi have surged to around ₹70-80 per kg on lower supply due to recent heatwave conditions. Mother Dairy, a leading supplier of fruits and vegetables in Delhi-NCR, is selling tomatoes at ₹75 per kg through its retail 'Safal' stores. The local vendors are selling at ₹70-80 per kg. Online marketplaces Otipy and Blinkit are selling tomatoes at ₹80 per kg. **BLOOMBERG**

**HDFC Bank mulls loan portfolio sale amid credit growth scrutiny**



HDFC Bank Ltd is mulling the sale of a loans portfolio, according to people familiar with the matter, amid heightened regulatory scrutiny on the nation's lenders as their credit growth surges. India's biggest private sector bank has approached public sector lenders, non-banking finance firms as well as some insurance firms and asset managers about participating in the sale, said the people. **BLOOMBERG**

**Coffee Day Enterprises' total default at ₹434 crore in Q1 FY25**

**New Delhi:** Coffee Day Enterprises Ltd (CDEL) has reported a total default of ₹433.91 crore on payments of interest and repayment of principal amount on loans from banks, financial institutions, and unlisted debt securities as NCDs and NCRPS for the quarter ended 30 June 2024. CDEL, which is pairing its debts through asset resolution, said in a regulatory update that "the delay in debt servicing is due to liquidity crisis." **PTI**

**DPIIT ropes in NCAER for logistics cost framework**

**New Delhi:** The department for promotion of industry and internal Trade (DPIIT) has turned to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), a think tank, to help assess logistics costs for 2023-24. The Centre aim to cut logistics costs that ranged from 7.8%-8.9% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021-22, as per an official statement released by the commerce ministry on Friday. As per the agreement, NCAER will conduct a comprehensive study for the assessment of logistics costs and submit its report within a year. **DHIRENDRA KUMAR**

**Rural India may get 20 million more homes in budget via PMAY**

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than the nearly 8% annual economic growth.

Consumption growth has remained weak since the pandemic. Private consumption is recovering, with growth tracking at 4% in the March quarter, as against 1.5% a year ago, but it is just catching up with the pre-pandemic trend and remains below the pre-pandemic average of 6.3% in 2019. Rural India's monthly per capita household consumption, adjusted for inflation, rose over 40% between FY12 and FY23, statistics ministry data showed, though it remains lower than urban consumption. Without adjusting for inflation, the figures stood at ₹6,459 for urban households and ₹3,773 for rural households in FY23, compared to ₹2,630 and ₹1,430 respectively in FY12.

"A good monsoon will take care of some portion of rural distress because the biggest contributor to the income of rural India remains agriculture, though non-agri is inching up," said Devendra Pant, chief economist at India Ratings & Research.

"One of the reasons for rural consumption being lower than urban consumption is when we are looking at consumption, you are looking at it more from the point of view of what people are consuming, and 800 million people getting free food grain leading to some disparity. When we look especially at rural consumption and FMCG growth in rural areas, there is weakness. As far as the budget

**Marico sees modest Q1 volume growth**

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**F**ast-moving consumer goods maker Marico on Friday said its domestic business posted a "modest uptick" in volume growth in the first quarter on a sequential basis and expects gross margin to expand year-on-year.

The overall demand trends in the first quarter continued to exhibit gradual improvement on the expected lines, said Marico, which owns brands such as Saffola, Parachute, Hair & Care, Nihar and Livon, among others. The firm recorded volume growth post adjustments in distributor stock levels and a certain degree of wholesale channel destocking to ensure smoother direct reach expansion, said Marico.

Key brands such as "Parachute Coconut Oil posted low single-digit volume growth in this quarter, but is likely to pick up visibly through the rest of the year given the consistently healthy trends in off-take growth," said Marico.

While Saffola delivered mid-single-digit volume growth amidst marked stability in input and consumer pricing. However, its "value-added hair oils had a soft start to the year due to competitive headwinds persisting in the bottom of the pyramid segment, while the mid and premium segments fared relatively better".

**Satellite firm SES eyes India arm; DTH costs likely to fall**

Currently, Isro leases SES bandwidth which is offered to clients in one-year contracts

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**L**uxembourg-based SES, which has a joint venture with Jio Platforms in India, has applied for a satellite bandwidth provider licence to set up a local arm, two executives with direct knowledge of the development said.

The European firm's entry is expected to bring costs down for domestic direct-to-home (DTH) TV players, who have to lease satellite bandwidth through the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro).

The licence, being processed by the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (In-Space), will allow SES to offer satellite capacity directly to its DTH and very small aperture terminal (VSAT) satellite broadcasting clients, including Bharti Airtel Ltd and satellite bandwidth service provider Hughes Communications India.

"At present, Isro would lease out satellite bandwidth through its commercial arm, NewSpace India Ltd (NSIL), which used to then offer the capacity to clients via one-year contracts. This gave us less room for commercial independence, which will now change," one of the two executives said.

NSIL offers the satellite capacity at a 5% markup, according to industry stakeholders.



India's DTH TV market, led by Airtel, Dish TV, Sun Direct and Tata Play, clocked \$1.33 billion in revenue in FY23; however, the market is shrinking.

India's direct-to-home (DTH) satellite TV market saw its four top service providers—Airtel, Dish TV, Sun Direct and Tata Play—clock \$1.33 billion in revenue in 2022-23, according to company

fell by 3.1 million to 63.5 million in 2023, showed data published by the Indian telecom regulator, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, on 23 April. The 2023-24 revenue, as a result, is expected to see a decline.

Nevertheless, industry stakeholders believe the market is strong and SES's entry is likely to rationalize satellite bandwidth leasing costs.

Prashant Kumar Singh, emerging markets leader for tech, media and telecom at consultancy firm EY Global, said that while a full 20% rationalization may not play out, there will still be some cost reduction that can bring down the cost

While this could cut satellite bandwidth leasing costs by nearly 20%, most industry stakeholders say it is too early to determine if the same would pass down to consumers.

A senior executive at one of India's top DTH firms said on the condition of anonymity that instead of a direct shift in the cost of DTH transmissions, "there could be more immersive and interactive satellite broadcast services that generate value-added revenue for service providers".

DTH RELIEF		
<b>NSIL</b> offers satellite capacity at a 5% markup, as per industry stakeholders	<b>THE</b> number of paid DTH subscribers fell by 3.1 million to 63.5 million in 2023, as per Trai	<b>STAKEHOLDERS</b> believe the mkt is strong and SES's entry is likely to bring rationalization

**The UK poll verdict and India**

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**Free Trade Agreement**  
Free trade talks have been ongoing for the past two years, aiming for a mutual tariff relaxation on a range of goods. India could face pressure on climate-related issues in these talks. India has reportedly sought relaxations on the carbon tax that the UK plans to implement, arguing it could take away much of the concessions agreed upon in the Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

**Mobility & immigration**  
Tory and Labour agree on the need to restrict immigration. India wants temporary visas for its service sector workers under the FTA. Many Indian students who travel to study in the UK also look forward to working there for a certain period to pay off student loans. There have been periodic threats from the British government to revoke this facility. With mobility and migration being a "political hot potato" in the UK, India should brace for some tough bargaining on this count.

**Kashmir issue**  
New Delhi has been traditionally wary of the Labour Party's position on Kashmir. A major cause for this is the pres-



Many Indian students who travel to study in the UK also want to work there for a certain period to pay off student loans.

ence of a large Pakistani diaspora in the UK, which has traditionally voted en masse for Labour. It is against this backdrop that former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn slammed India's revocation of Article 370 of India's constitution in 2019.

Incidentally, 2024 marks 40 years since Indian diplomat Ravindra Mhatre, serving as assistant commissioner at India's consulate in Birmingham, was kidnapped and killed by terrorists seeking secession of Kashmir from India.

**Khalistan controversy**  
In March 2023, the Indian High Commission in London

was attacked by a group which also took down India's national flag. India registered a strong protest and the UK police arrested one person, according to news reports.

**Future**  
The problem areas notwithstanding, there is much that India and the UK can do together. One is in the area of defence where India is looking to transform itself into a military hardware exporting nation.

*Elizabeth Roche is associate professor, Jindal Global University, Haryana.*  
For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com

**'Influencers naming stocks are advisors'**

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said. When asked whether Sebi should add more specifications in its circular whenever it is released, Shah responded that Sebi will have to deal with this issue on a case-specific basis. "Technically, no regulation, however verbose, is enough, and sometimes few words also suffice," the lawyer said.

Sharan Hegde, co-founder of I% Club, a financial awareness and education platform, said that not mentioning specific names may affect the social media content of the majority of influencers.

"As stated by Sebi, if mentioning any stock or the name of a mutual fund by its specific name, if that constitutes financial advice in a YouTube video or in an Instagram video, then 95% of the influencers will not be able to create content, because most influencers talk about fixed stocks or about their trading strategies," said Hegde. This would be a major blow to spreading finan-

cial awareness because talking about the performance of a particular company in hindsight is education, said Hegde, who has over 5.6 million followers on YouTube and Instagram combined.

Sebi defined finfluencers first in its consultation paper of August 2023 as people who provide information on financial topics such as stock investment, personal finance, banking, insurance and real estate through social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and X. The consultation paper outlined the difficulties in balancing the spread of financial awareness and ensuring influencers do not dish out misleading advice. The paper sought public comments seeking suggestions to regulate the association between registered intermediaries with finfluencers in the space of financial literacy and business.

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**Sovereign funds eye India as FII, PE stay wary**

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home state of Gujarat. Sovereign funds are also steadily increasing their exposure to private companies in India.

Last year, ADIA invested as part of a \$400-million investment round in eyewear-maker Lenskart. It also invested in renewable energy firm Greenko Group and Reliance Retail Ltd, bringing \$21.6 billion into India over the last five years ending FY23, shows data from Venture Intelligence.

GIC pumped in \$16.7 billion between 2019 and 2023, with electric-scooter company Ather Energy Pvt. Ltd, Greenko, software firm Atlan, and Sterlite Power among its key investments.

Mubadala Investment Company, another Abu Dhabi-based sovereign fund, and Qatar Investment Authority, among others, have also been pumping in billions of dollars into the Indian market, data show.

"Indian founders have learnt the value of investors who have lower cost of capital and a longer holding time horizon as compared to PE/VC investors," said Kashyap Chanchani, co-founder and managing partner of investment bank The Rainmaker Group. "On the other hand, the sovereign funds are seeing more opportunities in the private markets, which favours their risk-reward trade-off than anytime before."

Bankers and industry experts say India is currently in a sweet spot for these deep-pocketed investors, and they see the inflow increasing steadily over the next 5-7 years.

"India being one of the largest and fastest-growing economies offers a promising growth story and is becoming a natural choice for investment for sovereign wealth funds," said Neha Agarwal, managing director and head of equity capital markets at JM Financial. Political stability and many path-breaking reforms in the last decade have helped in attracting a large pool of capital from sovereign wealth funds in the secondary markets, she added. *neha.shah@livemint.com*

**Demand fuels concierge services mkt**

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from Dubai overnight or how we jump the queue to procure the sought-after Birkin bag or how we can get an extra table put at a Michelin-starred restaurant. That's the trade secret. We are a global brand and have a large network across the world," said Quintessentially Lifestyle's chief executive officer (CEO) Mishti Bose, adding business has doubled since the pre-pandemic period.

The Birkin bag from French luxury company Hermès is made in limited numbers with controlled distribution, priced ₹20 lakh and above.

Manoj Adlakha, former senior vice-president and head of international marketing at American Express, launched Red Beryl, a concierge service in August. Adlakha said the growing number of billionaires in India will continue to drive luxury consumption. "There is a huge inflow of disposable



The Birkin bag from French luxury company Hermès is made in limited numbers with controlled distribution.

wealth coming from the stock markets and real estate portfolios. India's luxury market is currently estimated at \$30 billion and is expected to grow fourfold to \$128 billion by 2028. The number of dollar-billionaires in India, which reached 130 by the end of 2023, is projected to double by 2028," Adlakha said.

Red Beryl charges an annual subscription apart from a join-

ing fee of about ₹8 lakh. It focuses on travel and personalized services such as organizing tickets for major events and curating exclusive dining experiences. The company focuses on the super-rich between the ages of 40 and 60, typically the second-generation of wealthy families and successful professionals. Last month, his company procured a Ferrari 250 GTO manufactured in 1962

from the US for a client, a lawyer-collector in Delhi who has a fancy car collection.

Beyond securing coveted items and experiences, concierge services place extra attention on the personal touch. Bhargav of Indulge Global said his company flew back a client from Bali to India who suffered a heart attack. His company charges an annual fee of ₹1 lakh, lower than its rivals, rivals to build longer-term relationships.

In India, luxury clients seek holidays, along with visa and passport services, during summer and winter breaks.

By July, spending shifts to travel, with patrons attending global sporting events like Wimbledon. Retail shopping peaks around the festival and holiday season.

An overall boom in luxury spending is evident, with Indians now willing to spend far more on themselves than before the pandemic.

## JSW Energy plans ₹15,000 cr capex to drive growth

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JSW Energy CMD Sajjan Jindal

JSW Group subsidiary JSW Energy Ltd on Friday announced plans for a capital expenditure of ₹15,000 crore in the current financial year (FY25).

Addressing the shareholders at its annual general meeting, chairman and managing director Sajjan Jindal said the company is also looking for acquisitions in the power sector. He reiterated the company's plans to invest ₹1.15 trillion to achieve its target of 20 GW renewable energy capacity and 40 GWh of battery storage capacity under its 'Strategy 2.0'.

"Our plan is to spend approximately ₹15,000 crore in the current fiscal 2025. Additionally, your company is also actively scouting for acquisition opportunities in the power sector," he said.

Jindal said JSW Energy is on track to commissioning ongoing projects for power generation, battery storage and green hydrogen production. "The growth capital secured through the recently completed QIP strategically positions us to accelerate the execution of our returns accretive growth plans," he said.

In April, the company announced that it has successfully raised ₹5,000 crore through qualified institutional placements to accelerate its growth plans.

Currently, its total installed capacity is around 7.3 GW across thermal, hydro, solar and wind.

With additional renewable

project bids of another 4 GW through auctions, JSW Energy's current locked-in generation capacity has increased to 13.9 GW.

"Your company has also secured energy storage projects of 3.4 giga watt hour which are currently in developmental stage. This was achieved on the back of strong underlying growth in power demand, a robust bidding environment, the company's superior execution capabilities and the strength of its balance sheet," the CMD said.

Currently about 2.6 GW of capacity is under construction, and by the end of the fiscal, the installed capacity is expected to reach 10 GW installed.

Last month, JSW Neo Energy Ltd, a subsidiary of JSW Energy Ltd, signed power purchase agreements for 1,025 MW renewable power with Solar Energy Corp. of India Ltd and 300 MW with Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Ltd.

"A large part of our growth and value is going to come from providing our customers complete energy solutions," Jindal said.

**Addressing shareholders, CMD Sajjan Jindal said the company is also looking for acquisitions in the power sector**

## Domestic investors drive market; FII flows may revive

DII inflows reflect a growing household affinity for market investments over past 2-3 years

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Foreign institutional investor (FII) flows are poised for a potential rebound in the second half of this calendar year, even as the stock market's momentum largely hinges on the actions of domestic institutional investors (DIIs) and the proposals in the upcoming Budget.

FII net sold ₹146.29 crore worth of equities between 1 January and 2 July, while DIIs were net buyers, pouring in a staggering ₹2.40 trillion during this period.

The S&P BSE Sensex has risen 10% in 2024 so far, whereas the Nifty 50 gained nearly 12%.

Strong DII flows, which began post-demonetization in 2016, have intensified over the past few years due to a broader investor base rather than just a shift from physical assets like gold and real estate to financial investments.

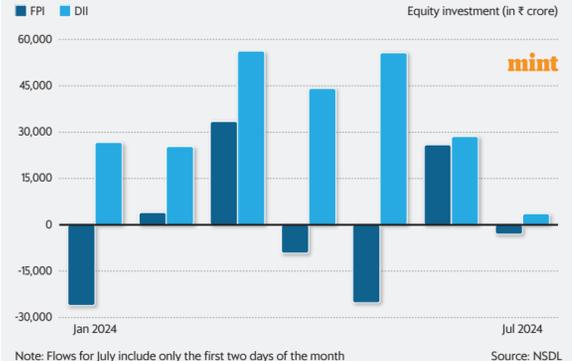
These flows have been underpinned by mutual funds (especially systematic investment plans), direct equity investments, and contributions to insurance and pension funds, along with strong market performance.

Jay Kothari, global head - international business, DSP Asset Managers, said, "The average flows of DIIs since 2016 is -\$14 billion per annum (last three years average is \$26 billion) vs FPI (foreign portfolio investment) flows at -\$5.4 billion, and that highlights the strength of domestic flows."

He believes this trend is structural rather than cyclical—domestic flows are unlikely to drop dramatically despite volatility. Also, investors now buy on dips, whereas 8-10 years dips would have caused them to exit in

### Market drivers

While DII flows have remained strong, FPI participation is likely to pick up



Note: Flows for July include only the first two days of the month

Source: NSDL

PRANAY BHARDWAJ/MINT

panic, he noted.

Some proposals in the upcoming Budget might influence market flows—if, for instance, the government decides to tweak capital gains tax that currently favours equity investments.

"We think changes in long-term capital gains is possibly the only key negative that the investors may be worried about, as far as the budget is concerned," said Saion Mukherjee, managing director & head of equity research, India, Nomura.

He believes an adverse change can have a short-term impact on flows and markets.

The Budget, though, is likely to continue to focus on investment-led growth and macro-stability, he said.

Mukherjee added that the view among investors is largely "constructive" going into the Budget.

DII flows are bolstered by sustained high inflows from household savings,

reflecting a growing household affinity for market investments over the past 2-3 years.

In the context of generally low household net financial savings, this indicates a higher allocation to risk assets and a positive sentiment among households.

"This could be tested if there is a serious and sustained market correction, or if other financial investments become more attractive either due to taxation or deposit interest rates going up," said Sunil Tirumalai, research analyst, EM & India equity strategy, UBS Securities.

Overall, DII flows are expected to remain dominant.

For FIIs, the election was a high-risk event given high expectations and valuations. The positive outcome suggests policy continuity and a favourable outlook for FII flows into India.

Foreigners are pouring money into

India at the cost of China, Brazil, Taiwan, and South Korea, said a report by Elara Securities (India) dated 21 June.

"India-dedicated flows continue to maintain strong trend post-election results with another inflow of \$842mn this week after \$2.4bn in the prior 2 weeks. 26% of inflows are from the US (largely exchange traded funds), 21% from Japan, 18% from Luxembourg and 15% from Ireland. Inflows also coming from S. Korea (5%) since the past 3 weeks," it said.

In addition, a fall in interest rates globally and uncertainty around the upcoming US elections will make India a relatively attractive investment destination, Mukherjee said.

"Financial year to date, FII flows are negative at -\$3 billion and foreign holding in Indian equities at 16% are much below historical levels of 19-20% and most emerging market funds are underweight in their portfolio."

However, he sees high valuation as a key deterrent. If valuations remain high and domestic flows are robust, FIIs may limit participation.

Jefferies India in an 18 June report reveals that discussions with over 50 investors during a recent US roadshow suggest FPI flows into India could improve in the second half of 2024 as clarity on government policies emerge post-Budget.

Additionally, a potential US Fed rate cut later in the year could be a major trigger for higher FII inflows to India.

"For FIIs, the Indian market seems quite expensive given the level of earnings growth offered by Indian companies: In our analysis, for the same growth and ROEs as elsewhere, Indian companies have a 75% premium. This premium used to be sub-40% pre-covid," said Tirumalai of UBS Securities.

Foreigners are pouring money into

## Aluminium, steel utensils now need ISI mark

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In a move to enhance kitchen safety, quality and efficiency, the government has brought all stainless steel and aluminium utensils under a Quality Control Order (QCO).

With the order, all utensils made of stainless steel or aluminium will need to have the ISI mark, indicating conformity with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). According to the QCO issued by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), non-compliance with QCO norms will be a punishable offence.

"Recently, the BIS created new standards for essential kitchen items. These standards ensure that all kitchen utensils meet high-quality and safety requirements," the consumer affairs ministry said in a statement.

"The goal is to maintain cultural diversity in cooking while ensuring better product performance and consumer safety," it said.

"Stainless steel utensils are popular in kitchens worldwide as they are durable, versatile, and look sleek. Also, stainless steel is known for being resistant to rust and very strong as it is made from a mix of steel, chromium, and other metals like nickel, molybdenum, and manganese," the statement said. As per the BIS standards, the manufacturers will have to ensure safe composition of materials and uniformity and practicality in design.

"Additionally, steel utensils will have to pass various tests, including the staining test, mechanical shock test, thermal shock test," it said.

## India's electricity generation up 15% in May

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India produced 15.06% more electricity in May than a year ago to meet a record demand due to a severe heatwave.

Total power generation stood at 167.55 billion units in the month compared to 145.61 billion units a year ago, according to the Central Electricity Authority's (CEA) monthly report. Thermal power, generated from mostly coal- and gas-based plants, contributed 127.87 billion units, 14.67% higher than last year.

Power demand touched a record high of 250GW on 30 May as a prolonged heatwave across North India kept electricity demand elevated in May and most of June. The peak power demand is projected to reach 260GW in 2024-25.

The peak demand is currently hovering at around 200GW as the onset of the South-West monsoon has brought the temperature down across the country.

The peak power demand on Thursday was 207.18 GW, according to data from the Grid Controller of India Ltd.

The power ministry has directed domestic coal-based plants to blend 6% imported coal till September to ensure uninterrupted power supply. However, hydropower generation is expected to rise during the monsoon.

In May, electricity generation from large hydro projects rose 9.92% to 11.62 billion units.

## Rebel Foods to invest ₹200 cr in cloud kitchens, stores

Suneera Tandon & Ranjani Raghavan

MUMBAI

Rebel Foods, the operator of cloud kitchens under the Faasos, Behrouz Biryani, Mandarin Oak and Oven Story brands, is set to invest ₹100 crore to ₹200 crore to open more such facilities and expand its food court format EatSure as dining out makes a comeback after the pandemic.

"In the next one-and-a-half years, we expect to add 100 stores. A lot of new store expansion will happen under the EatSure format," said Sagar Kochhar, co-founder of Rebel Foods.

The move comes as Mumbai-based Rebel Foods eyes a stock market listing in FY26. It signals the company's offline expansion as the euphoria over cloud kitchens that picked up during the pandemic gives way to in-store dining.

On average, the cost of



India's food services market is set to almost double to ₹9 trillion by the end of the decade, as per a report.

establishing one EatSure store, including integration of a cloud kitchen, ranges from ₹1 crore to ₹2 crore. The company said it doesn't need to raise funds for the expansion -- it did not elaborate.

Rebel operates over 450 cloud kitchens across 75 cities in India, West Asia, North Africa, Indonesia and the UK. It runs 150 outlets for fast-food chain Wendy's in India. Its food

kitchens will also be used to service online orders, he said. The popularity of cloud kitchens jumped during the pandemic, growing 40% every year from 2019 to 2023.

Later, consumers returned to eating out, driven by the availability of more options and a general uptick in socializing.

Kochhar said the company is trying to capitalize on the return-to-offline formats.

India's food services market is set to almost double to ₹9 trillion by the end of the decade from ₹5.5 trillion on the back of an expanding customer base, growing consumption, and a jump in the number of new eateries, according to a report released by Bain & Company and food aggregator Swiggy on Wednesday.

Additionally, online food

delivery is expected to expand faster at a compounded annual growth rate of 18%, contributing 20% to the overall food services market by 2030, up from 8% currently. While delivery growth rates will outstrip those of dining in over the mid to long term, companies in the business of cloud kitchens also face high take-rates or commissions on account of aggregators.

"In that sense, diversifying into offline restaurants makes sense," said Karan Taurani, senior VP at Elara Securities.

"Although dining-in recovery is not going to be very sharp, delivery growth rates in India will outperform over the medium to long term, but adding up your dining-in also leads to higher operating leverage and drives better profitability," suneera.t@htlive.com

**Rebel operates over 450 cloud kitchens across 75 cities in India, Middle East, North Africa, Indonesia, the UK**

## 6% increase in veg thali costs in June

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June saw a sharp increase in the cost of home-cooked meals, or thalis, in India, driven by higher prices of vegetables and broiler chicken. This points to volatility in food prices, which, in turn, could impact household budgets.

The cost of a typical vegetarian meal surged to ₹29.4 per plate in June, marking a 6% increase from the previous month, according to rating agency Crisil. By contrast, the cost of a non-vegetarian meal rose more modestly to ₹58 per plate, reflecting a 4% sequential rise.

Year-on-year, the cost of a vegetarian meal increased by 10%, while the non-vegetarian meal became 4% cheaper.

A typical vegetarian meal includes roti, vegetables (onion, tomato, potato), rice, dal, curd and salad. The non-vegetarian version replaces dal with chicken curry. Despite fluctuating commodity prices, the proportion of ingredients used to calculate

these prices remains constant.

The average cost of preparing a meal at home is calculated on input prices prevailing across north, south, east, and west India. The monthly change in thali prices serves as a measure of the impact of food inflation on household expenditure. Crisil attributed the increase in vegetarian thali costs to a sharp rise in vegetable prices, with potato, onion, and tomato prices increasing by 9%, 15%, and 29%, respectively, due to lower arrivals caused by adverse weather conditions. Year-on-year, the cost of the vegetarian thali rose significantly, driven by a surge in the prices of tomatoes (30%), onions (46%), and potatoes (59%),

**The cost of a non-vegetarian meal rose more modestly to ₹58 per plate, reflecting a 4% sequential rise**

largely due to a low base from the previous fiscal year.

"The cost of the home-cooked vegetarian thali has been on the rise since November 2023 due to rising prices of vegetables. Tomatoes, onions and potatoes have been the key contributors to this rise," said Pushan Sharma, director, research, Crisil Market Intelligence and Analytics.

## Bajaj Auto launches world's first CNG motorcycle

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Seeking to disrupt the stagnant entry-level motorcycle segment in India, Bajaj Auto Ltd on Friday launched the world's first CNG motorcycle, the Freedom,

priced between ₹95,000 and ₹110,000, while urging the government to cut the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on two-wheelers from 28% to 12%.

A 125cc petrol engine powers the Freedom and carries a 2kg CNG tank and a 2-litre petrol tank but can run entirely on

CNG alone. The company claims a 102 km per kg mileage on CNG and 65 km per litre in petrol mode.

With CNG priced at ₹76.6 per kg compared to petrol at ₹94.72 per litre in Delhi, the bike's running cost is half that of a comparable 125cc motorcycle.

"High running cost is a major pain point for the commuter segment and we believe this is a game changer product," said Rajiv Bajaj, managing director, Bajaj Auto Ltd. "We did not ask for subsidies for this from the government as it is unsustainable. But the government should

review GST for clean fuels. In Asean markets that have much higher per capita income, GST (on two wheelers) is between 8-14%. What is the rational for 28% GST in India?"

"We have done our bit and kept the price at less than ₹1 lakh. My plea is for the government to do its bit and reduce GST to 12%," he added.

125cc, are priced between ₹75,000 and ₹90,000. This segment remains crucial, accounting for nearly three of every four motorcycles sold in the country.

Overall, the two-wheeler market leader Hero MotoCorp dominates the segment with over 55% share, while Bajaj holds 16.2% share.

However, the segment has yet to return to the peak levels of 2018-19, when over 10 million commuter bikes were sold.

**The world's first CNG motorcycle, the Freedom, is priced between ₹95,000 and ₹1,10,000**



# New foreign firms in India show an infra tilt

7 foreign firms and 4 central govt cos among those registered in June

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Seven foreign firms and four central government companies are among more than 15,300 businesses registered in the country in June, showed data from the ministry of corporate affairs.

The foreign businesses registered for starting operations here are producers of heavy machinery for various industries, makers of construction and earth moving equipment and providers of engineering and testing services, while the central government companies registered in June are in the business of power transmission, showing that the infrastructure sector is attracting new investors.

UK's Auger Torque Europe Ltd, one of the foreign businesses which registered for commencing India operations, makes earth drill and attachments and is part of Germany's Kinshofer Group that makes attachments for truck cranes and excavators, according to information available from the company's website.

Japan's Kawada Industries, Inc. another foreign business registered with the Registrar of Companies (RoC) in June, is part of the KTI Kawada Group, which is into building, maintaining and preserving infrastructure and into developing humanoid robots, as per information publicly available from the company. Institut Fuer Oekologie, Technik and Innovation GmbH, a third company that has registered in June in India, is into providing testing and certification services for different industries.

Japan's Tomoe Engineering Co. Ltd., another foreign company registered in India in June is into producing machinery, equipment and chemicals.

Bangladesh-based Sonali Bank Plc., a Russian heavy machinery producer and a



The central government companies registered in June are in the business of power transmission, showing that the infrastructure sector is attracting new investors.

UAE based energy company are also among the new foreign entities registered for India operations, official data showed.

Emails sent to the companies on Thursday seeking comments for the story remained unanswered at the time of publishing.

Engineering services companies and

households and the government stood at above ₹58 trillion in FY24, showing a near 9% annual growth, according to provisional estimates by the statistics ministry.

Experts confirmed that there is a significant rise in overseas companies entering the Indian engineering and construction sector.

"This trend aligns with the Indian government's increased focus on infrastructure development, driven by its ambitious capital expenditure plans.

"This creates a fertile ground for foreign firms with expertise in areas like high-speed rail, airport infrastructure, and advanced construction technologies. Some of these foreign firms specialize in design engineering services which are critical in these projects," explained Vikash Thakur, Entity Setup and Management at Nextdigm, a business and professional services company. S

## INFRASTRUCTURE FOCUS

**THE** foreign cos registered are producers of heavy machinery, construction cos, etc

**ENGINEERING** firms and equipment makers are increasingly showing interest in India

**INVESTMENTS** in machinery/buildings by firms, households and the govt stood above ₹58 tn in FY24

equipment makers are increasingly showing interest in doing business in India at a time the government is giving a strong impetus to building infrastructure with enhanced capital expenditure through central and state budgets.

Investments in fixed assets like plant, machinery and buildings by companies,

# BAA pilot training set to take off in India

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As Indian airlines place large orders for aircraft, pilot training academies of the world are looking to tap this demand. BAA, a major European pilot training academy, aims to secure a 20-30% of the pilot creation capacity in India over the next 5-10 years.

"We are looking at a 10-year strategic plan here and given that for the upcoming five years an average of 1,800-2,000 new pilots will be needed per year, we are aiming to have 20-30% of that number, so that comes to 500 pilots to be prepared based on the Indian carriers plans," Marijus Ravoitis, chief executive officer, BAA Training Aviation Academy, told Mint.

The recent order of 470 aircraft by Air India in February 2023, 500 aircraft by IndiGo and another 150 by Akasa Air have piqued the interest of global aviation players and made their presence in this market crucial.

"It was one of the elements in making the decision because



Marijus Ravoitis, chief executive officer, BAA Training Aviation Academy.

we are basing on the how the market is growing right so it will require a number of pilots between 12 and 15 per aircraft," Ravoitis said.

While the company has been engaged in providing type rating (a certification for a particular kind of aircraft such as A320 or B737) to pilots enrolled at Akasa Air, Air India, and Air India Express, the aircraft orders led BAA to set up a consultancy centre in Gurugram in Oct 2023.

It has plans to open two more such centres in Mumbai and

half of the capacity or 500 intake capacity to India.

"We are also talking to different airlines in India to expand the partnership to do it from scratch on the initial pilot training," Ravoitis said.

Under the current framework for BAA, the company invites aspiring pilot cadets who have completed 10+2 schooling—after an assessment programme.

Post selection, BAA company offers a 24-month training for ₹1.16 crore to aspiring youngsters. This includes training across Spain, Lithuania, Vietnam.

"Today, already there is a pilot shortage and it's more sensitive when it comes to highly qualified pilot. Our aim is to do the training on time within 24 months. This includes four months in India, 18 months in Spain, and two months for type rating in Europe or Vietnam," Ravoitis said, adding that BAA will only look at the possibility of inducting a simulator in India for its training after looking at its growth over the next 5-10 years of its presence in India.

# Final Jica loan tranche for Mumbai Metro

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The Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) has issued the fifth and final tranche of its ₹4,474-crore development loan for the Mumbai Metro Line 3 Project, the agency said on Friday.

Line 3, the last remaining part of the Mumbai Metro project, will connect several landmarks, educational institutions and business centres.

Earlier this week the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation (MMRC) revealed the revised

project cost for the under-ground Metro Line 3 as Rs 37,275.50 crore. Jica has hiked its total assistance from ₹1,235 crore to ₹21,280 crore.

"The project aims to cope with the increase in traffic demand in Mumbai by expanding the mass rapid transportation system, promoting regional economic development, and improving the urban environment through the mitigation of traffic jams and the reduction of pollution

caused by motor vehicles," Jica said.

"This project aligns with the government of India's priority to enhance urban mobility and

promote sustainable development in major metropolitan areas. By improving public transportation infrastructure, it aims to reduce traffic congestion, decrease air pollution, and boost economic productivity in Mumbai, India's financial capital."

When the line is opera-

tional, the journey from the domestic airport station to Cuffe Parade station (the southernmost station on the line) will take about 45 minutes—a journey that can take more than two hours by car during peak hours.

Saito Mitsunori, the chief representative of Jica's India office said the inauguration ceremony for Phase I is likely to be held in the second quarter of FY25.

"MMRC has been making commendable efforts and there has been steady and satisfactory progress despite several challenges," Mitsunori added.

**Line 3, the last remaining part of Mumbai Metro project, will connect several major landmarks of the city**

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**M.P. BUILDING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LTD.**  
(Govt. of M.P. Undertaking)  
16-A, Arera Hills, Bhopal-462011 (M.P.), Ph. : 0755-4853295, 4853297  
Website : mpbdc.gov.in, CIN : U45400MP2022SGC060277  
No. : 6736/MPBDC/858/HR/2024 Bhopal, Date : 05.07.2024

Madhya Pradesh Building Development Corporation Ltd. is a wholly Govt. owned company incorporated under the Companies Act 2013 and has its registered office at 16-A, Arera Hills, Bhopal. To meet the manpower requirement, MPBDC invites applications for following 03 indicative posts from eligible candidates :-

S.N.	Name of Post & Salary	Source	No. of Post
1.	General Manager (Tech.) Rs. 1,23,100 + CPI or Last Pay (-) Pension	Deputation/Contract	UR-01
2.	General Manager (Arch.) Rs. 1,23,100 + CPI or Last Pay (-) Pension	Deputation/Contract	UR-01
3.	Dy. General Manager (Design) Rs. 79,900 + CPI or Last Pay (-) Pension	Deputation/Contract	UR-01

**General Terms and Conditions :**

- Application should be submitted through [www.mponline.gov.in](http://www.mponline.gov.in) only.
- All conditions regarding required eligibility criteria, last date for submission of application and all details are mentioned on the Rule Books, which are showing on [www.mpbdc.mp.gov.in](http://www.mpbdc.mp.gov.in)
- For Sn. 1-3, the selection will be made on the basis of merit only. Deputation/Contract basis initially for One year, which can be extended, based upon satisfactory performance and mutual consent as per the requirements of the MPBDC.
- MD, MPBDC reserves the right to increase or decrease the positions (No. of post, based on actual position of required) advertised and to fill/not fill them from the merit/waiting list. MPBDC reserves the right not to declare any waiting list.
- MD, MPBDC will have full right to accept or reject any or all applications without assigning any reason thereof.
- The last date for submission of application and all details are mentioned on the Rule Books, which are also showing on [www.mpbdc.mp.gov.in](http://www.mpbdc.mp.gov.in)

(Approved by Managing Director)  
M.P. Madhyam/115257/2024 **CHIEF GENERAL MANAGER (HR & ADMIN.)**

**ग्रेटर नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण**  
प्लॉट नं. 01, नालेज पार्क-IV, ग्रेटर नोएडा, गौतम बुद्ध नगर, उत्तर प्रदेश-201308  
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पत्रांक : वरिष्ठ/ई-निविदा सेल/2024/518ए दिनांक : 04 जुलाई, 2024

**ई-निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना**

महाप्रबंधक (अभियन्तण) ग्रेटर नोएडा औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण द्वारा मुख्य कार्यपालक अधिकारी, ग्रेटर नोएडा की ओर से ई-निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना संख्या - वरिष्ठ/ई-निविदा सेल/2024/518 दिनांक 04.07.2024 के माध्यम से उल्लेखित क्रम संख्या-01 से 18 तक के कार्य को ई-निविदाये आमंत्रित की जाती है। समस्त नियम व शर्तें ग्रेटर नोएडा प्राधिकरण की वेबसाइट : [www.greaternoidaauthority.in](http://www.greaternoidaauthority.in) पर ई-निविदा लिंक एवं ई-पोर्टल <https://etender.up.nic.in> पर उपलब्ध हैं। किसी परिवर्तन, संशोधन व अतिरिक्त सूचनाओं के लिए उक्त वेबसाइट देखते रहें।

क्र.सं.	कार्य का नाम/वर्क सॉर्किल	अनुमानित लागत
1.	ग्राम पाली में शिव मन्दिर के पास पंचायत घर का अवशेष कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-6)	₹. 11.40 लाख
2.	ग्राम पल्ला के बारातघर में इन्टरलॉकिंग टाइल्स शेड एवं मरम्मत का कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-6)	₹. 11.93 लाख
3.	ग्राम क्यामपुर की कृषक आबादी मूखण्डों में सी.सी. रोड की स्थियरिंग एवं सीवर व ड्रेन का निर्माण कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-8)	₹. 31.58 लाख
4.	ग्राम बादलपुर में सरकारी आई.टी.आई. में स्टाफ हाउस तथा सी.सी. रोड का नवीनीकरण एवं गार्ड रूम तथा फूटपाथ का निर्माण कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-1)	₹. 46.22 लाख
5.	ग्राम मलकपुर, बेगमपुर, लखनावली एवं गुर्जरपुर का बारात घरों की मरम्मत एवं नवीनीकरण का कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-4)	₹. 63.77 लाख
6.	ग्राम थियाना बुजुर्ग एवं शाहदरी में तीन वर्ष का अनुसंधान कार्य एवं आर.सी.सी. पुलिया का निर्माण कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-1)	₹. 66.08 लाख
7.	ग्राम जैतपुर-वैसपुर में 6 प्रतिशत आबादी मूखण्ड (अवशेष कार्य) का विकास कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-6)	₹. 98.62 लाख
8.	ग्राम पाली (पॉकेट-सी एवं डी) में 6 प्रतिशत आबादी मूखण्ड का (अवशेष कार्य) विकास कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-6)	₹. 131.87 लाख

**विद्युतीकरण का कार्य**

- ग्रेटर नोएडा में सेक्टर-गामा-1, 2 एवं डेल्टा-1, 2 के सामुदायिक मवन के आन्तरिक विद्युतीकरण का निर्माण कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-ईएण्डएम-2)
- ग्रेटर नोएडा में सेक्टर-अल्फा-1 एवं अल्फा-2 के सामुदायिक मवन के आन्तरिक विद्युतीकरण का कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-ईएण्डएम-2)
- ग्राम बोडाकी में बारात घर, सामुदायिक केन्द्र एवं प्राथमिक और उच्च प्राथमिक विद्यालय खेल मैदान शमशान घाट और कब्रिस्तान में आन्तरिक विद्युतीकरण और स्ट्रीट लाइट/हाई मास्ट लगाने का कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-ईएण्डएम-2)
- ग्राम घरखरा में 6 प्रतिशत आबादी मूखण्डों का विद्युतीकरण का कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-ईएण्डएम-2)
- सेक्टर-ईकोटेक-11 में 11 के.वी. ओवर हैड लाइन का (अवशेष कार्य) निर्माण कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-ईएण्डएम-2)
- ग्रेटर नोएडा प्राधिकरण बिल्डिंग के पी-4 के टावर-2 के द्वितीय, तृतीय, चतुर्थ तल एवं पांचवीं तल पर आन्तरिक विद्युतीकरण का कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-ईएण्डएम-2)
- ग्राम कासना (एम-ब्लॉक एवं पुलिस थाने के पास) में 6 प्रतिशत किसान आबादी का विद्युतीकरण का कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-ईएण्डएम-3)

**जलापूर्ति एवं सीवर का कार्य**

- सेक्टर-12ए में गंगाजल कैम्पस आर-17 की सड़क, ड्रेन, रेन वाटर हार्वेस्टिंग, टॉयलेट, गार्ड रूम, बाउंड्रीवॉल का निर्माण कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-जल)
- सेक्टर-18 में गंगाजल कैम्पस आर-18 की सड़क, ड्रेन, रेन वाटर हार्वेस्टिंग, गार्ड रूम एवं बाउंड्रीवॉल का निर्माण का कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-जल)

**तालाब का कार्य**

- ग्राम रिडोरी (खसरा नं.-227, 229 एवं 52) में 02 नग तालाबों का विकास कार्य। (वर्क सॉर्किल-7)

क्रम सं. - 01 से 18 पर अंतिम कार्य दिनांक - 09.07.2024 से 19.07.2024 को 5:00 बजे तक अपलोड किया जा सकता है। प्राप्त ई-निविदाओं को प्री-क्वालिफिकेशन दिनांक 22.07.2024 को 11:00 बजे खोली जाएगी।  
वरिष्ठ प्रबंधक (ई-निविदा सेल)

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**CENTRAL RAILWAY**  
Nagpur Division

**E-TENDER NOTICE**

OPEN TENDER NOTICE No. DRMWGP-59-2024-01 Dt. 03/07/2024

Name of work: Proposed miscellaneous P-way work to track and scattered removal for maintenance of track under SSE (P-way) Chandrapur section under ADEN Ballarshah sub-division (2-years).

Approximate cost: Rs. 1726300.95/-  
Earnest Money: Rs. 236300.00/- Date & time of closing of tender 25/07/2024 at 15:00 hrs. Details on Railway's website [www.treps.gov.in](http://www.treps.gov.in)

SUN (138) Divisional Railway Manager (Works)  
DOWNLOAD UTS APP FOR TICKETS

**INDRAPRASTHA GAS LIMITED**  
(A Joint Venture of GAIL (India) Ltd., BPLCL & Govt. of NCT of Delhi)  
Corporate Identity Number (CIN)-L23201DL1998PLC097614

**EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)**

"Approx. 1700-2000 sqm land is required for Purchase/long lease on Bawal Road in Village Patuha Bawal for setting up of a city gate station in Bawal region of Rewari District Haryana. Other details are available on [www.iglonline.net](http://www.iglonline.net) website. Interested property owners/authorized representative may go through the detail available on website and submit their proposals in hard copy to HOD (C&P and Stores), IGL Bhawan, Plot No.-4, Community Centre, Sector-9, R.K. Puram, New Delhi-110022 latest by 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024 (upto 14:30 hours) as per the instructions mentions in "other details" on IGL website [www.iglonline.net](http://www.iglonline.net). Shortlisted proposals will be contacted separately for further process".

HR AR KE KAAM DESH KE NAAM

**जयपुर जिला दुग्ध उत्पादक सहकारी संघ लि.**  
गांधी नगर रेलवे स्टेशन के पास, जयपुर-302015, ई-मेल/फोन: 0141-2713665-69  
E-Mail: [jaipurdairy@jaipurdairy.com](mailto:jaipurdairy@jaipurdairy.com) website: [www.jaipurdairy.com](http://www.jaipurdairy.com)

जयपुर दुग्ध संघ द्वारा Design, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of 105 TR Capacity Ammonia SKID based package chiller system at Jaipur Dairy के कार्य हेतु निर्धारित प्रपत्र की शर्तों के अनुसार ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। ई-निविदा की दिनांक एवं अन्य विस्तृत विवरण वेबसाइट [sppo.rajasthan.gov.in](http://sppo.rajasthan.gov.in), [eproc.rajasthan.gov.in](http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in) एवं [www.jaipurdairy.com](http://www.jaipurdairy.com) पर भी उपलब्ध है। NIB Code: CDF2425A0158 प्रबन्ध संचालक

**DELHI METRO RAIL CORPORATION LTD.**  
(A Joint Venture of Govt. of India & Govt. of NCT of Delhi)

**NOTIFICATION**

It is informed to the General Public that as per the permission of the Joint Commissioner of Police, Licensing letter no. 231-33/JOINT CP/Lic(Expl). Dated 14.06.2024 blasting will be done at Kishangarh Cross over site, DC-09 contract of DMRC, New Delhi 110070 from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM on 06.07.2024.

This process will continue daily for next 6 months. Project Manager-5C DMRC, Dhuala Kaun  
Advertisement No. - DMRC/941/2024

**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**  
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (U.P.)  
Website: [www.noidaauthorityonline.in](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.in)

**Selection of Internal Auditor for NOIDA**

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (NOIDA) invites RFP for Selection of Internal Auditor for NOIDA.

Job No. 02/CFAO/Internal Auditor/2024-25

Uploading of Bid	Dt. 06.07.2024
Pre-bid Meeting	Dt. 12.07.2024 at 15:00 hrs. at Noida Authority CFAO Office
Last date of bid Submission	Dt. 05.08.2024 at 18:00 hrs.
Opening of Technical Bid	Dt. 06.08.2024 at 11:00 hrs.

Interested eligible bidders can submit the RFP along with the mentioned documents. RFP can be downloaded from the website [www.noidaauthorityonline.in](http://www.noidaauthorityonline.in) & <https://etender.up.nic.in>. last date of bid submission is Dt. 05.08.2024 at 18:00 hrs.

Chief Finance and Accounts Officer, Noida

**CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA**

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FIRST VOICE. LAST WORD.

Saturday, July 6, 2024

# mint

livemint.com



Local investors drive market, FII flows may revive ▶ P14



JSW Energy plans ₹15,000 cr capex to drive growth ▶ P14

SENSEX 79,996.63 ↓ 53.04 NIFTY 24,323.85 ↑ 21.7 DOLLAR ₹83.49 ↑ ₹0.01 EURO ₹90.39 ↓ ₹0.23 OIL \$87.92 ↑ \$0.58 POUND ₹106.78 ↓ ₹0.32

## Sovereign funds flock to India amid FII, PE caution

Indian bonds' entry into global debt indexes may tempt sovereign funds further

Sneha Shah & Mayur Bhalerao  
MUMBAI

Some of the world's largest sovereign wealth funds, including Singapore's GIC Holdings Pte. Ltd, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, and Kuwait Investment Authority, have significantly increased their investments in Indian stocks and startups the past few years.

These three funds held a collective ₹5 trillion, or nearly \$60 billion, in Indian stocks as of 31 March, show data compiled by *Mint*. Of that, about ₹2.57 trillion (about \$30 billion) was invested over the previous three financial years (2021-22 to 2023-24).

Sovereign funds are doubling down on India at a time when global private equity firms, venture capital funds and other growth-stage investors are taking a measured approach to backing domestic companies.

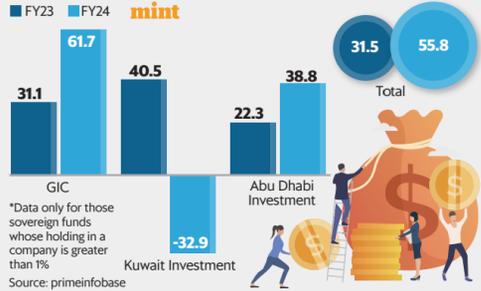
Their growing interest in Indian markets also comes amid a tapering of foreign institutional investment (FII) in the country, although analysts expect FII flows to rebound in the second half of this year. FIIs net sold ₹146.29 crore worth of equities between 1 January and 2 July.

The recent inclusion of Indian sovereign bonds in JPMorgan

### WEALTH EFFECT

The three funds held a collective ₹5 trillion, or nearly \$60 billion, in Indian stocks as of 31 March.

Year-on-year change (%) in sovereign wealth funds' investment in India\*



### DOUBLING DOWN

GIC, the most bullish, holds ₹2.5 trillion in Indian companies. ADIA is reportedly setting up a \$4-5 bn fund to invest in India. India as a bright spot among EMs is attracting these funds.

Chase & Co.'s global debt indexes is also expected to boost the country's appeal to sovereign funds.

Earlier this week, ADIA, the largest sovereign wealth fund in the United Arab Emirates, invested as part of the anchor round in Emcare Pharmaceuticals Ltd's initial public offering. It is also looking to team up with private equity firm Blackstone to acquire a controlling stake

in Haldiram Snacks Food Pvt. Ltd, as *Mint* reported earlier.

ADIA also pumped in ₹1,400 crore in growth-stage beauty and personal care startup Purple last week, and is set to invest ₹2,001 crore in four residential projects of real estate developer Prestige Group along with Kotak AIF.

The Singapore government's GIC is the most aggressive among the

three sovereign funds, holding as much as ₹2.5 trillion in Indian stocks. It has invested in high-profile domestic stocks including HDFC Bank Ltd, Reliance Industries Ltd, ICICI Bank Ltd, Bajaj Finance Ltd, and Larsen & Toubro Ltd.

The Kuwait Investment Authority, or KIA, and Norway's Norges Bank hold more than ₹1.5 trillion in Indian stocks, as per PrimeData. This data captures stakes of more than 1% held by these firms.

Experts say India is a natural ally for several sovereign wealth funds and the only bright spot among emerging markets.

"India is a high-growth market that these firms are keen to invest in. We have seen that they have increased their deployment rate over the last 3-4 years and this is likely to continue going forward," said V. Jayasankar, managing director at Kotak Investment Banking.

Sovereign funds are equally evaluating investment opportunities across public and private deals, he added. ADIA is reportedly setting up a \$4-5 billion fund to invest in India through Gujarat International Finance Tec-City, or GIFTCity, a tax-neutral finance hub in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

TURN TO PAGE 13

## Name stocks, and you're an advisor, not educator: Sebi

Pratishtha Bagai & Neha Joshi  
MUMBAI

Financial influencers are going to be hit harder than expected, with the market regulator clarifying that naming stocks on their social media channels will mark them out as individuals that regulated entities must avoid.

"You open your mouth and utter a single name (of securities), you stop being an educator and start being an advisor," Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch said in response to a query.

On 27 June, Sebi barred regulated entities such as stock brokers from associating with those providing advice or recommendations, or making claims on the performance of any security; however, those engaged in investor education, and do not advise, recommend, or make claims on share performance are exempted.

*Mint* had reached out to Buch on the sidelines of an event seeking clarification on how the regulator will identify an investment educator from an influencer. The Sebi move aimed to ensure market integrity by entrusting regulated entities to ensure that people associated with them do not indulge in prohibited activities.



Sebi chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch. P11

Apart from financial educators, Sebi also excluded digital platforms with mechanisms to take preventive and corrective action from its latest move.

Explaining Buch's statement, Chirag Shah, senior securities lawyer, said that whatever Sebi says or prescribes will always be open to interpretation.

"What the Sebi chief may have meant is that an educator may use examples or cite company names to explain some topic and that should not lead to their losing immunity. But uttering names with recommendations suggestive of buying or selling would be considered as influencing--there is a very narrow difference", Shah

TURN TO PAGE 13

### DON'T MISS



Satellite firm SES plans to set up India arm; DTH costs likely to fall

Luxembourg-based SES, which has a joint venture with Jio Platforms in India, has applied for a satellite bandwidth provider licence to set up a local arm, two executives with direct knowledge of the development said. >P13

6% increase in veg thali costs in June amid rising vegetable prices

June saw a notable increase in the cost of home-cooked meals, or thali, in India, driven by higher prices of vegetables and broiler chicken. This highlights the volatility in food prices, which could, in turn, impact household budgets. >P14

Rebel Foods to invest ₹200 cr in cloud kitchens, stores

Rebel Foods, the operator of cloud kitchens under the Faasos, Behrouz Biryani, Mandarin Oak and Oven Story brands, is set to invest ₹100 crore to ₹200 crore to open more such facilities and expand its food court format EatSure. >P14

Now, ISI mark must for stainless steel, aluminium utensils

In a move to enhance kitchen safety, quality and efficiency, the government has brought all stainless steel and aluminium utensils under a Quality Control Order (QCO). With this, all utensils made of stainless steel or aluminium will need to have the ISI mark. >P14



Economists and industry stakeholders have urged the Union government to ramp up allocations for rural schemes. MINT

## Rural India may get 20 mn more homes in budget

Puja Das  
puja.das@livemint.com  
NEW DELHI

The Union budget may propose building 20 million more rural houses over the next five years under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) Gramin, a top official said. This will be over and above the 10 June Cabinet decision to build 30 million homes for urban and rural poor under PMAY.

All houses constructed under PMAY come with basic amenities including toilets and access to cooking gas, electricity and piped water by integrating with other government schemes. The plan, which comes in the backdrop of rural economic distress due to high food inflation and stagnant farmers' income, follows an electoral setback for the ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), even as crucial state assembly elections loom.

News agency Reuters on Wednesday reported that India plans to increase state subsidies on rural housing in the upcoming federal budget by as much as 50% from the previous year to more than \$6.5 billion.

ministry has proposed to aid construction of another 20 million houses under Awas Yojana (rural) in the next five years. A Cabinet note is being drafted and if approved by the Cabinet, it is likely to be announced in the full budget for FY25," the official cited above said on condition of anonymity. The official did not disclose the funds required for the programme.

The proposal indicates the government's strategy to bolster rural infrastructure, including improvement to village roads and the implementation of job programmes aimed at helping millions of youths trapped in the agriculture sector amid scarce opportunities in manufacturing.

Queries sent to spokespeople and secretaries of the rural development ministry and Cabinet secretariat remained unanswered at press time.

Economists and industry stakeholders have urged the Union government to ramp up allocations for rural schemes and provide a boost for housing programmes to stimulate consumer demand, since private consumption has been growing at a significantly lower rate

TURN TO PAGE 13

## Indian banks rise up the global rankings

By Mayur Bhalerao  
mayur.bhalerao@livemint.com

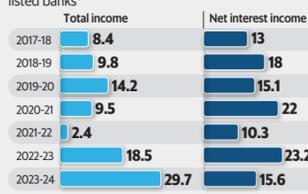
It's been a year since the mega merger of the HDFC twins, and Indian banks have boosted their global presence further in this period. The top 20 globally by market value has three Indian names—HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, and State Bank of India (SBI)—and each has improved its rank in past year. The top 100 has five Indian names, whose share in the combined market value of this elite set is also rising every year.

Meanwhile, the banking index continues to trail the benchmark Nifty, but industry experts are optimistic about the future of Indian banks, with private banks flexing their financial muscle.

mint

Growth in topline numbers reflects the industry's strength

Year-on-year change (%) in indicators, for all listed banks\*

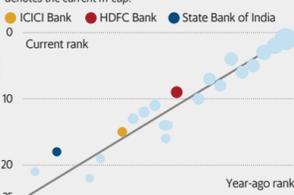


\*Based on the aggregate data of private and public sector banks for the past seven years; data for 2023-24 is unaudited.

All three Indian banks in global top 20 have improved their ranks over past year

Top 20 banks globally, by market capitalization, and how their ranks have changed since a year ago

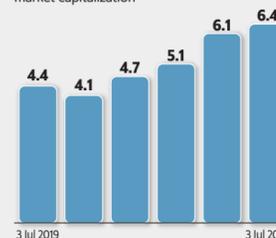
Each dot represents a bank. The ones above the diagonal line have seen an improvement in their rank. The size of the circle denotes the current m-cap.



Latest data as of 3 July 2024. There was a merger of HDFC Ltd and HDFC Bank in July 2023.

The surge of Indian banks' market value signals a rise on global stage

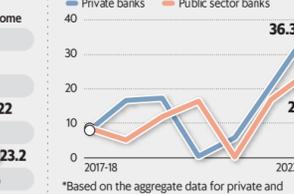
Indian banks' share (%) in global top 100 by market capitalization



\*The five Indian banks that are part of the global top 100 list are: HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Axis Bank.

Private banks have led revenue growth in the past few years

Year-on-year change (%) in total income



\*Based on the aggregate data for private and public sector banks whose data for the past seven years was available; data for 2023-24 is unaudited.

Despite the rapid rise, banking stocks have lagged the headline index

Daily index values



Rebased to 3 July 2019 = 100

SARVESH KUMAR SHARMA/MINT

## Fancy bags to fine dining, concierge services will get you all

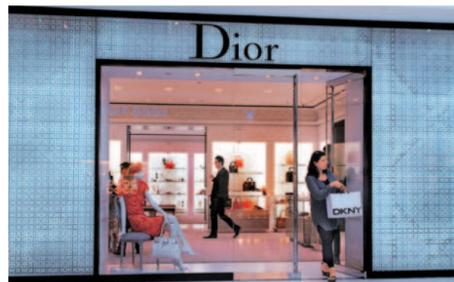
Varuni Khosla  
varuni.k@livemint.com  
NEW DELHI

Want to lay your hands on a Birkin bag but can't wait? Eager to be at the Wimbledon but didn't book early? Need a curated dining experience at a swanky Japanese restaurant? Concierge services are here to spoil India's super-rich, ensuring no luxury is beyond their reach.

As India's ultra-rich population swells, the demand for bespoke luxury concierge services is soaring as well. Their task: Serving high-end, personalized experiences for the well-heeled.

Karan Bhangay, founder of Indulge Global, a Goa-based bespoke concierge service, recently catered to a unique request: A Hyderabad-based builder required the services of Bhangay's golden retriever Gulzar to entertain children during an extended family vacation in Goa. Half a dozen children under 10 needed not just the complementary services of the faithful retriever, but also had a swimming session planned with the four-legged friend. Later, freshly baked goods were delivered to them from Babka Goa, a high-end bakery in Anjuna.

"We'd like to call ourselves a 'considered' concierge service



The luxury concierge market has subscription-based revenue models, with firms charging substantial fees for services. MINT

that pretty much brings in end-to-end solutions for everything our clients want. While sometimes these are paid-for services,

sometimes they are obscure and vague and every now and then, as easy as sending across our chief happiness

officer, Gulzar, to parties," said Bhangay, who claims to have over 1,000 high net-worth clients.

Indulge Global is among half a dozen of India's bigger concierge companies serving India's growing population of the super-rich. Their services range from organizing luxury stays and buying precious jewellery to facilitating unique experiences like swordsmanship lessons in Japan. The rise in demand for such services mirrors the growth of India's ultra-rich population, which is projected to triple within four years, according to industry estimates.

The luxury concierge mar-

ket frequently has subscription-based revenue models, with companies charging substantial fees for their services. These firms also work with hotels around the world and offer mobility services like private jets and yachts, providing comprehensive luxury experiences.

UK-founded Quintessentially Lifestyle, which levies membership fees of ₹3.5-35.0 lakh annually, claims to have several thousand ultra high net-worth individual (UHNWI) memberships in India.

"Don't ask us how we get a special confectionery cake

TURN TO PAGE 13

## What UK's Labour win means for us

Elizabeth Roche  
feedback@livemint.com  
NEW DELHI

Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer is set to become the next occupant of No. 10 Downing Street, after the UK's Conservative Party faced its worst electoral defeat in decades. With a Labour government set to take charge after 14 years of Conservative rule, what will it mean for India? *Mint* looks at the ways the India-UK relationship could evolve.

Historical context

Historically, Indians have viewed the Labour Party favourably, stemming from prime minister Clement Atlee's tenure when India gained independence in 1947. However, the 1997 visit of Queen Elizabeth II to India and Pakistan was overshadowed by the then British foreign secretary Robin Cook's remarks offering to mediate on the Kashmir issue. New Delhi was understandably upset. Again, in 2008, then



Britain's Labour Party leader Keir Starmer. AFP

Labour foreign secretary David Miliband urged New Delhi to resolve the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan to stop terrorist attacks.

Currently, the Indian community in the UK numbers 1.6 million. It is seen as educated, affluent, and politically active. India is also the second largest investor in the UK. The UK, on its part, looks at India as a major market, especially after its exit from the European Union.

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