

**BJP-RSS RELATIONS
WHY THEY ARE STRAINED**

**HATHRAS STAMPEDE
SHOCKING LAPSES**

**RAIL SAFETY WHAT'S
DELAYING KAVACH**

JULY 15, 2024 ₹100



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INDIA TODAY



THE HITMEN

**THE INSPIRING STORY OF HOW INDIA CAPTAIN ROHIT SHARMA
AND HIS TALENTED TEAM BECAME THE T20 WORLD CHAMPIONS**

PLUS YOUNGISTAN: INDIA'S NEXT GEN XI

DL (DS) -03/MP/2022-23-24; RNI NO. 28587/1975 REGISTERED NO. DL(ND)-11/6068/2024-25-26; LICENSED TO POST WPP NO. U(C)-88/2024-26; FARIDABAD/05/2023-25

There's nothing like a cricketing triumph to create a feeling of joy across the country. What the Men in Blue pulled off on June 29 was much more than just a thrilling T20 cliffhanger. World Cup glory doesn't come every other day. This is only India's fourth in over four decades, across the three competition formats in which the International Cricket Council (ICC) now hands out the gold medal. So, this one floats right to the top, joining an elite list that began on a magical day at Lord's in 1983. What makes it extra special is that this comes in the hyper-charged 20-over format, where top honours had eluded India for 17 long years after it won the debut Cup.

Test cricket retains its niche allure for purists, but the Twenty20 International (T20I) has supplanted its older 50-over sibling as the holy grail of modern cricket. And not just because of its mass appeal: played at an electric pace, and unforgiving of mistakes, it demands unremitting, focused execution of skill and strategy from a Playing Eleven. That's where the helmsmanship of Rohit Sharma soared, backed by the cool head of coach Rahul Dravid. What it broke was a mental prison that seemed to paralyse our spirits when it came to the big occasion in ICC World Cups. After Kapil's Devils showed for the first time that we could do it, we had done it only twice more. Those two iterations came in 2007 and 2011, the last one being in ODIs.

Many elements lend a historic depth to the occasion. The final in Barbados was the last time two of the modern game's giants would play a T20I. The exit of an all-time batting great like Virat Kohli and the supremely gifted Rohit from the top order marks the onset of a tricky transition. Rohit also leaves the stage as one of the only three India captains who scaled the cricketing Everest by defeating defeatism itself, and thus exorcises the ghost of the 2023 ODI WC final. His captaincy blended seemingly contrary ingredients into a perfect cocktail. Passionate, yet cool. Instinctual, but laser-sharp with method. Cheerful and full of boyish charm, but deceptively wise. That carried him through 62 T20s as captain, the eighth highest ever, without ever breaking into a sweat. Add his skippering of Mumbai Indians in 158 IPL matches, next only to M.S. Dhoni's 226, and you're talking tonnes of experience that India will now be lighter of.

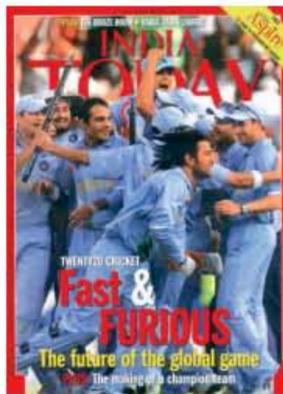
It's that ticking cricketing brain which steered India through a vital strategic makeover. Nikhil Naz, Consulting Editor, Sports, India Today, explains in our cover story how that reorientation led up to a World Cup, step by step. Each of those steps was difficult because 'Ro-Ko' (Rohit-Kohli), along with Dhoni, personified the older approach of percentage cricket. A mix of aggression and risk-aversion, it had one of the main batters drop anchor till the 'death' overs and go the whole slog only then. India had been trying to coax itself out of that mindset. The goal was 'total cricket': everyone playing to maximum all the time. Instead of the total being built around gladiatorial heroes scoring big, a series of 'multi-dimensional' players were to share the load. Individual scores would matter less than the team score at all stages. The whole would be greater if it was a sum of the parts—or so went the theory. But

India could never really pull it off earlier. When the big occasion arrived, they relapsed into habit. Now they have finally breathed life into the strategy—even if, paradoxically, it was a percentage Kohli knock that held up the final itself.

Of course, India could afford the luxury of all that experimentation with batting because of a certain presence in the bowling line-up. Jasprit Bumrah is the kind of gift that comes once in a blue moon, with a sublime ability to slice off scalps from an infinite variety of angles, and always with the precision of a ninja's sword. He got excellent cover fire from two southpaws: Arshdeep Singh, whose angled swing and pace made him the Cup's joint highest wicket-taker, and the tricksterism of Kuldeep Yadav. But Bumrah was the 'gun bowler' who won the war. Even when South Africa needed a mere 30 off 30, India were the favourites, because 12 out of the 30 balls belonged to him! A fast bowler as the reliable pole star—that's rare for India. But the Men in Blue found their way to the Cup around that top-class bowling unit. And at the right time for a batting great too. Dravid walks back with something he never had through his illustrious playing career: a World Cup for his cupboard.

Breaking a 13-year ICC World Cup jinx is a happy thought for India, but we cannot let such a long drought set in again. Especially because it never meant we were not good enough—rather, we tended to balk at the cusp of glory. Much more than a rampaging South Africa, it was that mind game against ourselves that we won this time. We must win it each time. An exciting future now beckons, and it will be built around generational change. In pole position to lead it is someone who

has come of age in the age of T20s: Hardik Pandya. "Enfant terrible, showboat, bad boy, call him what you may, but there's another descriptor he owns: the game-changer," writes Deputy Editor Suhani Singh of the 30-year-old who will take over from the 37-year-old Rohit. With him will be a bunch that can be world-beaters, individually and collectively, in both attitude and talent. Take Rishabh Pant, 26, whose will to endure needs no introduction beyond his comeback from a life-threatening car crash; Shubman Gill, at 24 quite the poster boy for Gen Z; or Suryakumar Yadav, a late-bloomer at 33 who will force cricket lexicographers to coin a bunch of new words for batting shots before he goes. Plus, his quick-thinking acrobatic catch in the final, which turned the match in India's favour, assures us that he belongs to the future. Inside, we profile all the likely superstars of the coming Youngistan. Bumrah is now 30, so any future plan must include the idea of taking special care of his load so he can last a good few years across formats. Also expected to come in is Gautam Gambhir, who's likely to be the same stainless steel as coach as he used to be with a blade in his hand. The world better watch out.



October 8, 2007

(Aroon Purie)



AFP

COVER STORY

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T20 WORLD CUP

THE HITMEN

The inspiring story of how India captain Rohit Sharma and his talented team became the T20 world champions

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E-MAIL to: letters.editor@intoday.com or log on to www.indiatoday.in



Volume 49-Number 29; For the week

July 9-15, 2024, published on every Friday

- Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100
- Subscriptions: For assistance contact, Customer Care, India Today Group, C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP) - 201301. email: wecare@intoday.com; Phone / Whatsapp: +91 8597 778 778 (Monday to Friday, 10 am - 6pm).
- Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP).
- Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.
- Impact Offices: 1201, 12th Floor, Tower 2 A, One Indiabulls Centre, (Jupiter Mills), S.B. Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013; Phone: 022 69193355; Fax: 66063226
- E-1, Ground Floor, Videocon Towers, Jhandewalan Extn, New Delhi.
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- Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited, 18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana) and at Rajhans Enterprises, 134, Industrial Town, 4th Main Road, Rajajinagar, Bengaluru-560044, (Karnataka).

Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

Editor: Raj Chengappa.

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AMRITA VISHWA VIDYAPEETHAM SECURES NO. 1 POSITION IN INDIA IN TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION IMPACT RANKINGS FOR FOURTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR.

The university is also listed among THE's top 100 educational institutions in the world.

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham continues to reign as the No. 1 institution in India according to the prestigious Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings for the fourth consecutive year. The university is also listed among THE's top 100 educational institutions in the world.

The 2024 Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings saw the participation of 2,152 higher education institutions from 125 countries/regions, culminating in an exhaustive assessment of universities' contributions to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their commitment to sustainability across key areas such as research, stewardship, outreach, and teaching.

In addition to securing the overall No. 1 position in India, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham has also excelled in various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) categories, including:

- SDG 4 (Quality Education) – Rank 3
- SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) – Rank 7
- SDG 5 (Gender Equality) – Rank 22
- SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) – Rank 62
- SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) – Rank 87
- SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) – Rank 87
- SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) – Rank 301 to 400

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham previously won the prestigious Times Higher Education (THE) Asia

Award 2024 for its Outstanding Contribution to Environmental Leadership. At the heart of this recognition is the groundbreaking initiative, Live-in-Labs®, an internship program in rural India. The students live in impoverished villages across the country to collaborate with the community and find sustainable solutions for the challenges the people face in their daily lives. Live-in-Labs® is based on a vision Amma shared with the United Nations Academic Impact Conference on Technology for Sustainable Development held in New York in 2015.

MORE ABOUT AMRITA'S WORK FURTHERING THE UN'S SDGs

SDG 4: Quality Education - Top 5 in the world

Amrita's all-encompassing SDG4 programs follow the vision of providing "Education for Life, not just Education for a living." In collaboration with the government ministries MoE, MeitY, MoTA and DST,

SDG 3: Good health & Well-being - Top 10 in the world

The Amrita School of Medicine, ranked 6th in NIRF rankings, created medical history in January 2015 by carrying out India's first hand transplant. This feat was quickly followed by another hand transplant surgery in April 2015 of a young Afghan soldier.

SDG 5: Gender Equality - Top 30 in the world

Amrita holds India's first ever UNESCO Chair on Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment. Amrita has pioneered programs like Amrita Self Reliance Education and Employment (SREE) and Sakshat

Amrita Vocational Education (S.A.V.E) to help unemployed and economically vulnerable women become self-reliant through the development of their technical and vocational skills.

SDG 6: Clean water & Sanitation - Top 100 in the world

Amrita has been awarded a UNESCO Chair for "Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation & Development." Through this Chair, the university develops a comprehensive framework for academic engagement to build sustainable communities.

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy - Top 100 in the world

Amrita University has undertaken a variety of projects to promote Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7), focusing on affordable and clean energy. These initiatives include installing solar-powered microgrids in remote villages, enhancing energy efficiency through innovative technologies, and fostering low-carbon economies by supporting startups.

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure - Top 100 in the world

ARIIA Rankings: Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham has emerged as the 4th best university in ARIIA Rankings 2020 in the Private or Self-Financed Universities category, out of 674 institutions.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals - Rank 301 to 400

Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham has been awarded the No. 1 Rank in the "Technical Institutions" category in the Swachhta Rankings 2017 and 2018, released by the Union Human Resource Development Ministry.



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HEMANT MISHRA



Presenting India Today Insight

For sharp analysis on topical issues by the editors of INDIA TODAY, log on to www.indiatoday.in/india-today-magazine-insight

STORY OF THE DAY

Why a political storm erupted over expunctions from Rahul Gandhi's Lok Sabha speech

By Kaushik Deka

The leader of the Opposition has remained defiant, saying, 'In Modi's world, the truth can be expunged, but not in reality' <https://shorturl.at/5fX9B>

SPOTLIGHT: GUJARAT NARCOTICS

As narcotics hauls rise, is 'Vibrant Gujarat' turning into 'Udta Gujarat'?

By Jumana Shah

The Opposition Congress's charge in the face of seizures is being contested by the BJP government as a sign of effective policing <https://shorturl.at/i36pm>



ANI

SPOTLIGHT: NEW ARMY CHIEF

As army chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi takes charge, what will be his top priorities?

By Pradip R. Sagar

Border tensions, force modernisation, inter-service jointness and revamp of the Agnipath recruitment scheme will be his critical challenges

<https://shorturl.at/QC6jg>

IN FOCUS: GEORGE KURIAN

Why George Kurian is critical to BJP's grand Kerala design

By Jeemon Jacob

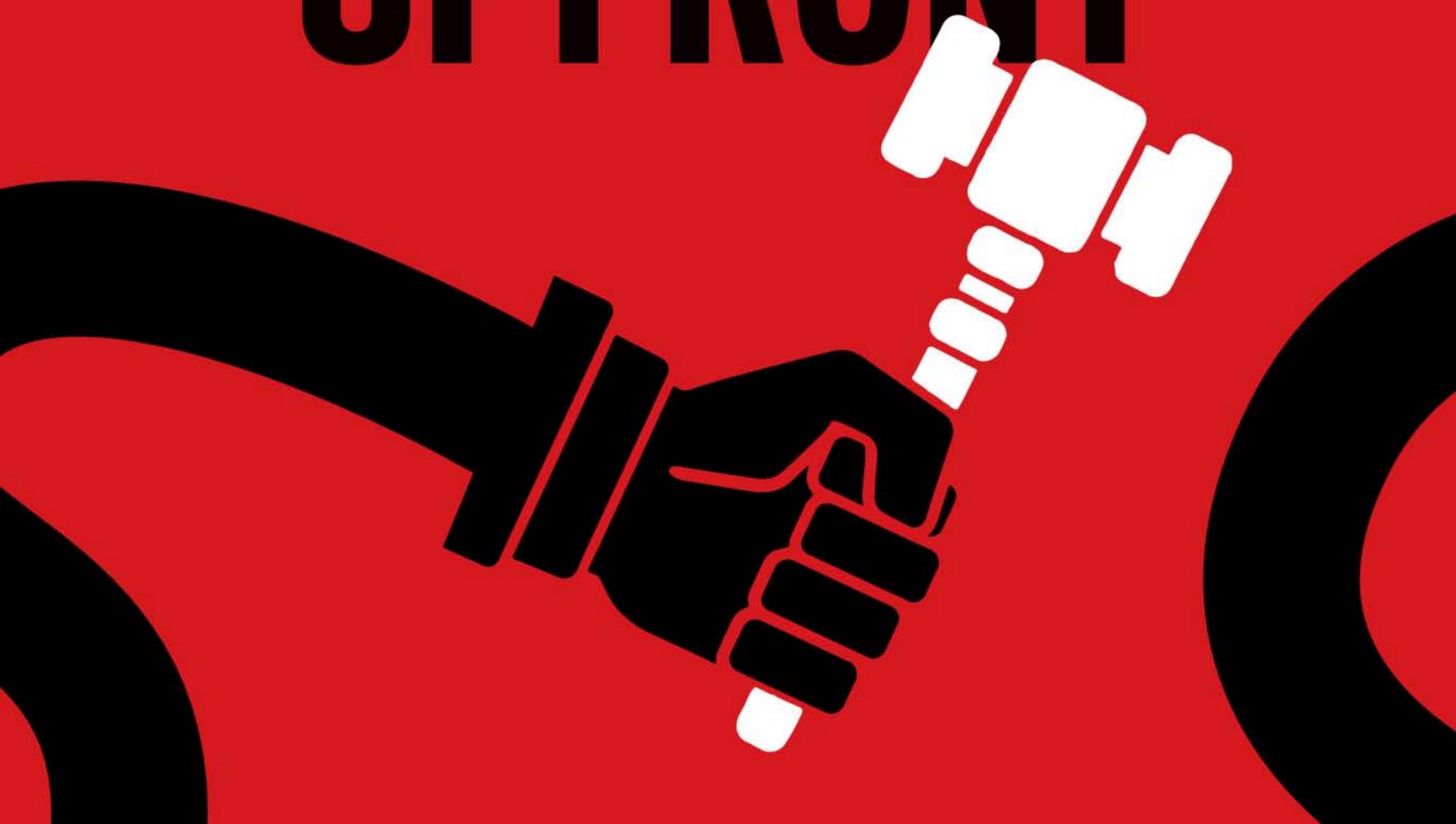
In an exclusive interaction, the Union minister tells INDIA TODAY why saffron ideology need not be anathema to the state's Christian minority <https://shorturl.at/FMPPrp>

FROM THE ARCHIVES (1998)

Sachin Tendulkar: Guts and Glory

By Rohit Brijnath and Peter Roebuck

Self-belief, will to win, respect for rivals—Tendulkar, who recently put out an emotional message for Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, has it all <https://shorturl.at/OlVrB>



NEW CRIMINAL LAWS

CODES OF CONTENTION

By Kaushik Deka

On July 1, India saw a momentous event in the history of its criminal justice system. After governing the country for over a century and a half, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860, the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of 1882 vintage—amended 1973—and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 faded into the past tense. They stand replaced by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA)

respectively, all three carrying a slew of innovations. Passed in Parliament last December amid strong protests from Opposition parties, these three laws arrive as an essay in wholesale legal reform, though not without a disputatious air surrounding their birth.

Union home minister Amit Shah claims that these new laws will ensure *nyay* (justice), unlike the British-era laws that prioritised *dand* (punishments). Incorporating provisions like zero FIR, online registration of police complaints, electronic summonses and mandatory videography of crime scenes for all serious offences, the government has positioned these laws

as victim-centric. A significant highlight is the dedicated sections addressing crimes against women, featuring enhanced severity of punishments.

While recognising the necessity for long overdue legal reform, critics have expressed unease over several contentious aspects of these laws, such as expanded police powers, vaguely defined offences like terrorism and potential impacts on civil liberties. Concerns have also been raised about the scope and duration of the consultation process for framing these laws, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. The rapid passage of these laws in Parliament, despite protests from the Opposi-

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

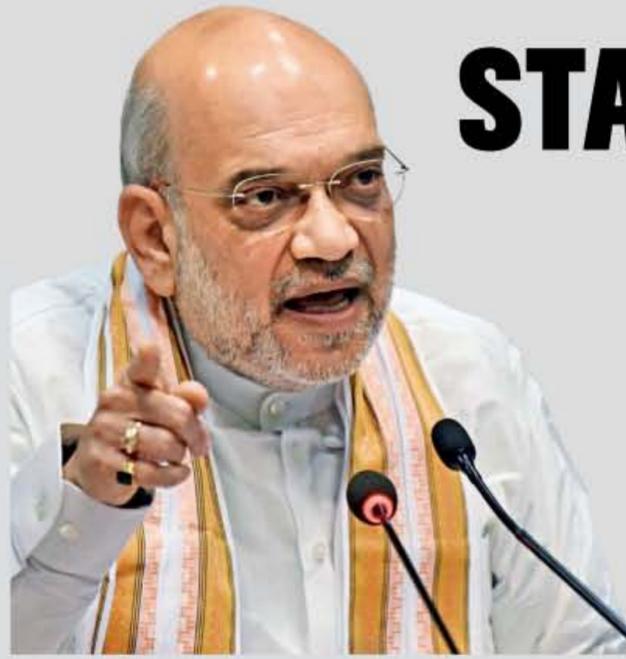
tion, has further created disquiet. Additionally, the drafting of these laws has been criticised for containing poor and ambiguous language.

For example, in January 2024, truck, bus, and fuel tanker drivers across India went on strike against Section 106(2) of the BNS, which prescribes a 10-year prison term and a fine for those causing the “death of any person by rash and negligent driving not amounting to culpable homicide and escaping without reporting it to a police officer or magistrate soon after the incident”. The strike ended following an assurance by Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla that the law will only be implemented after consultations with representatives of the All India Motor Transport Congress. The controversial clause has been kept in abeyance for now.

Ironically, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs had recommended redrafting this clause. The committee noted that the provision’s drafting does not clarify whether both actions—staying at the scene and reporting the incident—must be fulfilled. The committee also suggested that this clause violates Article 20(3) of the Constitution, which states that “no person accused of an offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself”.

Several representations have been made to the government in the interim to postpone the implementation of the new criminal laws alleging discrepancies in the provisions. The Bar Council of India intends to initiate discussions with the government to convey the legal fraternity’s concerns. It has urged all bar associations and senior advocates to identify and submit specific provisions they consider unconstitutional or detrimental to constitutional democracy. Based on these submissions, the council will set up a committee to recommend necessary amendments.

Ahead of the rollout, the government had conducted extensive preparations, including training initiatives and technological upgrades, to ensure the smooth nationwide implementation of the new laws. However, the gazette notification was issued on February 23, just a week after the Election Commission of India announced the dates for the 18th Lok Sabha election. Consequently, most stakeholders were occupied with the election process, leaving little time for the implementation of these new laws starting July 1. The success of the three new criminal laws will hinge on careful implementation, continuous dialogues with stakeholders and a willingness to address legitimate concerns. ■



Union home minister Amit Shah

STATUTORY ALERT

A look at the major changes introduced in the three new criminal laws: the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam

CONTROVERSIAL PROVISIONS



Section 124A of the IPC (sedition) is repealed, but Section 150 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) **broadens offences to acts endangering India’s sovereignty and integrity, potentially including past sedition cases**



Police custody for serious offences extends from 15 to 90 days, **raising concerns about police excesses and torture.** Union home minister clarifies that custody cannot be taken in one go for more than 15 days



Sexual intercourse obtained through deceitful promises, including of false marriage, is penalised with up to 10 years of imprisonment, which, **critics warn, could criminalise consensual relationships**



Terrorism definition now includes acts disturbing public order or destabilising the country, **raising risks of misuse**



SP-level officers can decide between **applying UAPA or BNS in terror-related cases without statutory criteria**



Trials in absentia could lead to **miscarriages of justice, similar to UAPA provisions**



Preliminary inquiry is required for cases with imprisonment terms of 3-7 years, **possibly delaying legitimate FIRs and giving police discretionary powers**



Legal aid from the point of arrest is removed, potentially jeopardising fair representation for the accused, especially marginalised individuals



The Hindi titles of new laws may violate Article 348 of the Constitution, requiring English in the Supreme Court and the high courts

NEW CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS



➤ New offences like **organised**

crime and petty organised crime are added. Organised crimes include human and drug trafficking and cybercrimes. Petty organised crimes include systematic theft and gambling



➤ **Snatching is distinct from theft,**

punishable by up to three years in jail



➤ **Mob lynching is now a distinct**

offence. Murder committed by a group of five or more persons on grounds of race, caste, sex, place of birth, language or other biases can result in punishments ranging from seven years to life imprisonment or even the death penalty



➤ Community service is introduced as **an alternative punishment for minor offences**

JUSTICE FOR THE VULNERABLE



➤ **Severe penalties, including death**

sentence, for crimes against women and children, such as trafficking and gang rape of minors



➤ **Statements of rape victims**

must be recorded by female officers and medical exams completed within seven days



➤ Offences against women **must have statements recorded by female magistrates,**

if possible, or in the presence of a woman



➤ **Statements of rape victims**

will be recorded through audio-video means



➤ **Victims of crimes against women are**

entitled to regular updates on case progress within 90 days



➤ **Women, persons below 15 years of**

age, those above 60, or with disabilities are exempt from appearance at police stations

FAST AND FAIR TRIALS



➤ **FIR, police report, charge**

sheet and other documents must be **provided to the accused and victims within 14 days**



➤ **Arrested individuals have the right to**

inform a chosen person immediately. Arrest details must be displayed at police stations and district headquarters



➤ **Mandatory witness protection**

schemes by state governments



➤ **Electronic records and**

digital evidence are admissible in court. Secondary evidence is expanded to include mechanically made copies and oral accounts by witnesses



➤ **Maximum of two adjournments are**

allowed in cases, judgments within 45 days post-trial; charges must be framed within 60 days of the first hearing



➤ **Summary trials—a simplified and fast**

process for quick dispensation of justice—are mandated for petty cases to reduce backlog



TECH SUPPORT

➤ **Incidents can be reported electronically without visiting** a police station

➤ **Zero FIR can be filed at any police station**



➤ **Forensic experts must visit crime scenes for serious offences,** with evidence collection videographed to prevent tampering

BACK IN POWER
Hemant Soren speaks
at a meeting of allies
in Ranchi on July 3



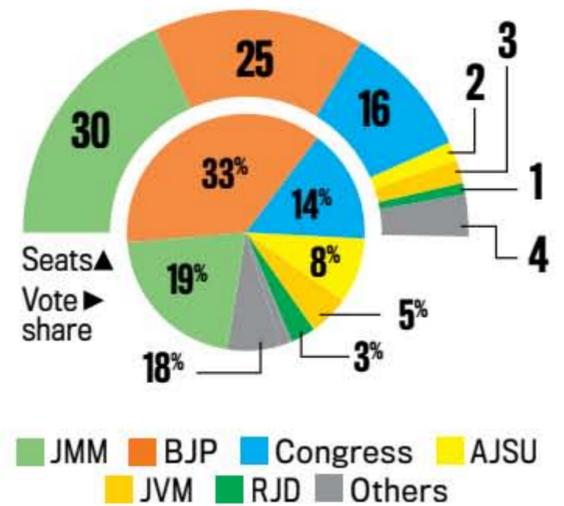
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THE TRIBAL FACTOR

BJP's poor show in the 28 ST-reserved seats helped JMM and its allies clinch the 2019 polls

Assembly Election **2019**

Total seats **81**



Vote share figures have been rounded off

JHARKHAND

SOREN QUEERS PITCH FOR BJP

By Amitabh Srivastava

On July 3, less than a week after walking out of Ranchi's Birsra Munda Central Jail, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) executive president Hemant Soren staked claim to form the government in Jharkhand for the third time. This was after fellow party leader Champai Soren resigned as chief minister, barely 152 days after he had ascended to the post. Earlier in the day, MLAs of the state's ruling alliance (which includes the JMM, Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal) had elected Hemant as their leader. With just months to go before the state election scheduled for later this year, Hemant's release from custody in a land scam and money-laundering case, and subsequent return

to power, has come as a shot in the arm for the JMM. But it has complicated the narrative for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had been projecting the arrest as a fallout of Hemant's corruption—an allegation the JMM and its allies have denied. On its part, the JMM has accused the BJP-led government at the Centre of targeting Opposition parties and being anti-tribal—as a Santhal and a CM who was targeted, Hemant offers himself as an exemplar of both.

The JMM leader had been incarcerated since January 31 (though he was allowed to attend his uncle's funeral in May), after being arrested by the Enforcement Directorate, which registered a case against him under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

Champai was sworn in as CM following Hemant's resignation from the post ahead of his arrest. On June 28, after nearly five months in custody, Hemant was released on bail by the Jharkhand High Court, which observed that there was "reason to believe" he was "not guilty of the offence as alleged". Much has happened in Jharkhand during Hemant's time in custody. While the

BIPOLAR FIGHT

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

Politics in Haryana has bordered on the bizarre this year. On March 12 came the inexplicable resignation of Manohar Lal Khattar, sans any warning, his exit as much of a surprise as his installation as chief minister in 2014. Soon after came the BJP's parting of ways with the Dushyant Chautala-led JJP (Jannayak Janta Party), ostensibly over seat-sharing for the Lok Sabha polls. Then, in May, three Independent MLAs withdrew support to the new Nayab Singh Saini government, leaving it hanging by a tenuous majority. The Lok Sabha result gave no clear indication either, with the state's 10 seats evenly split between the Congress and the BJP.

As Haryana now braces for a state election, each side is busy honing strategy to stake a claim on the 90-seat assembly. There is, of course, the weight of history—the state has never given any party more than two continuous terms. If the Bhupinder Singh Hooda-led Congress held the reins from 2004 to 2014, the Modi wave in 2014 swept the BJP to power for the next decade. This time, the BJP is battling both anti-incumbency and a resurgent Hooda and is having to go the extra mile in its bid to defy history.

Replacing Khattar was the first in the BJP's attempt at course correction, since he was the one seen to be the cause of Jat disaffection, first over quotas, then over farm laws, and finally over the dishonour its women wrestlers were subjected to. And also of its aggravation, with his ultra-combative pushback against agitations overshadowing all the good

With his OBC credentials, Saini is expected to shore up the BJP's non-Jat OBC support to make up for the losses in the Jat vote

BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won nine out of Jharkhand's 14 Lok Sabha (LS) seats in the recent general election, it lost all the five LS seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the state, bringing its tally down by three from the 12 it had won in the previous election in 2019. The JMM won three of these tribal seats and ally Congress the remaining two. Political observers interpreted the NDA's defeat in these seats as a sign of tribal resentment against the BJP over Hemant's arrest. That state of affairs is unlikely to be cured in the brief span left for the state election.

Meanwhile, Hemant, who couldn't campaign for his party and allies ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, has thrown himself body and soul into drumming up support for the upcoming

British. In his first public address after his release, Hemant positioned himself as a champion of tribal rights and a victim of political conspiracy, aiming to galvanise his support base in the state. On social media platform X, Hemant prominently displays a photo of himself alongside a statue of iconic tribal leader Birsa Munda, underlined with a single-word message: "Ulgulan" (great tumult)—a phrase synonymous with Munda's historic revolt against British rule over a century ago.

Tribals comprise 26 per cent of Jharkhand's population, according to the 2011 Census, with 28 of the state's 81 assembly seats reserved for STs. In the 2019 assembly polls, the BJP, then led by the state's only non-tribal chief minister Raghubar Das, had managed to secure only two of these seats,

Hemant Soren is positioning himself as a champion of tribal rights and a victim of political conspiracy

ing state election. Political observers note a heightened sense of urgency in his actions and rhetoric. Speaking at Bhognadih village in Sahibganj district, some 375 kilometres northeast of Ranchi, on June 30, the JMM leader claimed, "I've barely tasted freedom again, and already there's a new conspiracy against me. Truth cannot be silenced, nor can it be chained." Describing his imprisonment as part of a broader pattern of suppression of political dissent and social activism, Hemant invoked the spirit of "Hul Vidroh" (Hul in Santhali means struggle for deliverance, vidroh is Hindi for rebellion) against what he termed entrenched "feudal forces". Bhognadih, located within his assembly segment of Barhait, is the birthplace of Sidhu and Kanhu, leaders of the 1855 Santhal Rebellion against the

while the JMM-Congress-RJD alliance had clinched 25. Following its dismal performance in the ST reserved seats in the Lok Sabha election, the BJP has appointed party stalwart Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma as election in-charges for the upcoming Jharkhand assembly polls. The defeat of former chief minister Arjun Munda from Khunti in the general election may also benefit the BJP in a way, allowing him to focus on reviving the party's waning tribal support in Jharkhand. However, his complex relationship with current state BJP president Babulal Marandi may put a spanner in the works.

Hemant has asked party workers to put the "last nail in the BJP's coffin" and is hoping to return to power in the coming election. Now to see if the electorate obliges. ■



ANI



HINDUSTAN TIMES

PITCHED BATTLE (Left) Bhupinder Singh Hooda takes stock in Chandigarh; Khattar with CM Nayab Singh Saini

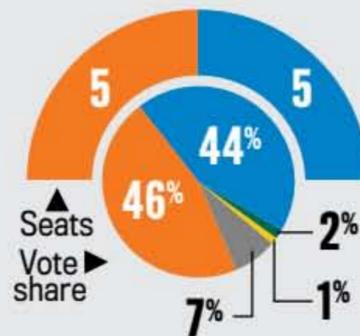
he'd done with his innovative crop pricing policies that benefitted all and the robust 8.1 per cent agricultural growth Haryana posted in FY24 consequently. The drop in fondness for the BJP among the Jats, an agrarian community that comprises 27 per cent of the populace and had hitherto been Modi enthusiasts, was fairly steep. A Lokniti-CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) post-poll survey estimated that 63 per cent of the Jats voted for the Congress compared to 2019, when nearly half the community went with the BJP. This left the BJP with only one of the five seats in Jat-dominated areas: Bhiwani-Mahendragarh. The rest swung the Congress way.

Enter Khattar acolyte Saini, whose native, agrarian, non-Jat OBC roots make him potentially a better fit for repair work than his mentor—a bachelor RSS *pracharak* from an urban Punjabi Khatri family, anything but an organically-harvested Haryana politician. With little hope of turning around the Jat vote before the polls in the absence of a Jat leader, the BJP is concentrating on consolidating the non-Jat OBC vote, which it is hoping Saini will help them achieve. That he will lead them into the assembly election was made clear by Union home minister Amit Shah in Panchkula on June 29. Saini is the first OBC chief minister of the state, barring the 241-day stint of Rao Birendra Singh in 1967, whose son, Union minister Rao Inderjit Singh, is

HOW PARTIES HAVE FARED IN HARYANA

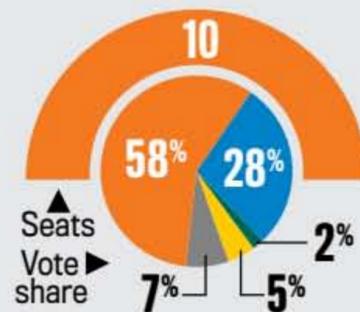
LOK SABHA 2024

(Total seats: 10)



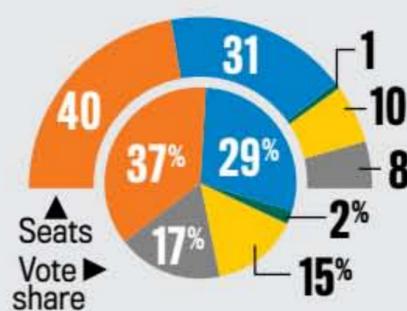
LOK SABHA 2019

(Total seats: 10)



ASSEMBLY 2019

(Total seats: 90)



Legend: BJP (Orange), CONG. (Blue), INLD (Green), JJP (Yellow), Others, Independents (Grey)

Vote share figures have been rounded off

now a claimant for Saini's job. Having won the Gurgaon seat, Inderjit believes he is the right man to help the BJP consolidate support in south Haryana, from where it got three of its five Lok Sabha seats—Faridabad, Gurgaon and Bhiwani-Mahendragarh—besides Kurukshetra and Karnal in the north. However, Shah's backing of Saini has put paid to Inderjit's hopes.

But Saini's task is still far from easy. It isn't just the Jat vote that deserted the BJP this time, the party's Dalit base took a hit too, declining from 58 per cent in 2019 to 24 per cent this time, according to the Lokniti-CSDS survey results. The Congress seems to have prised loose the BJP hold among even the caste elite, namely the Brahmins, Baniyas, Rajputs and Punjabi Khatri, shaving eight percentage points off the BJP's 74 per cent vote share, as well as among the Block B backward communities such as the Gujjars, Ahir-Yadavs et al, trimming its vote share from 73 per cent in 2019 to 44 per cent now, going by Lokniti-CSDS data. The contest in Haryana has become a bipolar one as the out-migration of the JJP, INLD and BSP vote all accrued to the Congress.

A resurgent Hooda is intent on building on this momentum. On a month-long statewide "workers' conference", he intends to tell constituents about the party's poll guarantees and rake up issues such as unemployment, inflation, farmers' protests, the Agnipath scheme as well as the Parivar Pehchan Patra where a family identity card made mandatory for college admissions created a nightmare for

students. Hooda has promised to scrap the last one if he comes to power.

But the Congress satrap is also staring at a lot of intra-party factionalism. Most of his rivals have already joined the BJP, including his former cabinet colleagues Kiran Chaudhary, Venod Sharma and Savitri Jindal. Others, like his cousin Chaudhary Birender Singh, may have returned to the Congress after spending a decade in the BJP, but are still sulking, as are Captain Ajay Yadav and Randeep Singh Surjewala. It has yet to be seen if the Congress high command gives him a free hand to run the campaign and select candidates.

Saini, meanwhile, has embarked on corrective measures with gusto. The ball has been set rolling for recruit-

A RESURGENT HOODA IS HOPING TO BUILD ON THE MOMENTUM OF THE LOK SABHA POLLS, WHERE THE CONGRESS WON 5 OUT OF 10 SEATS

ment to 50,000 state government jobs. Several social welfare schemes, like the Mukhyamantri Kisan Evam Khetihar Mazdoor Jeevan Suraksha Yojana, Dr B R Ambedkar Awas Navinikarn Yojana, Mukhyamantri Gramin Awas Yojana, are being fine-tuned. The bulk of their beneficiaries, Haryana BJP leaders say, are Dalits or OBCs.

Partymen have also been instructed to begin "Mission 100" (number of days to the assembly polls) and go on door-to-door outreach campaigns. Khattar has said his partymen will reach out to (Dalit) families "to expose Congress falsehoods" (of the BJP doing away with reservations if it came to power at the Centre) and "misrule" which saw "atrocities on Dalits". Khattar may have moved to the Union cabinet, but his imprint lingers. Saini will have to step out of his mentor's shadow, and fast. ■

A Wide Web of Deceit

By Rohit Parihar

At a time when leaks and lapses have disrupted four national competitive exams, putting the future of over 3.6 million students in jeopardy, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime in Rajasthan is grappling with a mammoth legacy problem on that front. Nearly every government job advertised and filled over the past decade has come under scrutiny for leaked question papers, dummy candidates, fake degrees and forged certificates. More and more skeletons are tumbling out of the closet as the probe picks up pace.

Ahead of the assembly election last year, the BJP had promised to crack the whip against all those indulging in unfair means in recruitment exams conducted during the then Ashok Gehlot-led Congress regime. Soon after coming to power in December,

Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma tasked Rajasthan Police's Special Operations Group (SOG) with carrying out a thorough investigation into all such cases. Last month, the state government ordered a review of the selection records of some 125,000 government employees recruited during Gehlot's tenure. But the June 23 arrest of a lynchpin—Tulsa Ram, 57, husband of an additional superintendent of police—exposed a deeper nexus stretching back to at least 2012, putting 18 examinations under a cloud for leaks alone.

A week later, the police confirmed the leak of the 2022 forest guard exam paper. It suspected similar issues with the Rajasthan Eligibility Exam for Teachers 2022 even as the district education officers of Banswara and Jalore were sacked for alleged supervisory negligence.

IN ACTION
CM Bhajan Lal Sharma has cracked the whip against irregularities in recruitments



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But with reports surfacing that hundreds have got jobs reserved for tribals—for which cut-offs are comparatively lower—using dummy candidates, the government is in a fix. Cancelling all such exams will mean also punishing many legitimate and deserving recruits. A more fine-tuned approach is being adopted to zero in on the guilty even as efforts are under way to develop fool-proof mechanisms for future examinations. Explaining this approach, V.K. Singh, additional director general of police (ADGP), SOG, says: “Whether the exams were cancelled due to a leak or not, we are identifying for prosecution as many candidates as possible who used leaked question papers or forged degrees, those involved in leaking the papers or posing as dummy candidates. The government aims to create a fear of law as the biggest deterrent.”

The SOG’s probe has led to the arrest of 35 trainee sub-inspectors (SIs) accused of benefitting from leaked papers, including the son of a deputy superintendent of police. “One shudders to imagine what kind of police officers they would have turned out to be with access to arms,” says ADGP Singh, who has recommended that the Rajasthan Public Service Commission and the Rajasthan Subordinate and Ministerial Services Selection Board verify documents of successful candidates before issuing appointment letters. This was after his team found thousands of suspect cases of fake university degrees and disability and sports certificates.

The irregularities extend beyond exam leaks. Private universities have been implicated for issuing backdated degrees to candidates who never attended courses. Such complaints have surfaced earlier as well, but little headway was ever made. Subir Kumar, principal secretary for higher and technical education, outlines new measures: “We are serious this time about curbing such practices in private universities. The government is empowered to have its administrator posted in private

universities that flout our norms and can even dissolve the institution.” While students and parents have been advised to verify whether the institutes are permitted to run the courses being offered, the 53 private universities in the state have been ordered to furnish details of courses and the number of students who are enrolled and have graduated since inception to prevent the issuance of backdated degrees. While all past and current details of admissions and availability of seats are to be uploaded on university websites, money transactions have to be carried out digitally.



THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS ORDERED A REVIEW OF THE SELECTION RECORDS OF SOME 125,000 EMPLOYEES RECRUITED DURING GEHLOT'S RULE

Even the sports department is developing a mechanism to verify certificates from educational institutions and sports bodies, so that only legitimate candidates can avail of extra marks or reservations. Investigations have revealed that about a thousand physical training instructors obtained jobs using fraudulent degrees and certificates last year. Similar vigilance has been advised for the issuance of disability certificates.

Amid these corrective measures, the SOG continues to investigate 2,000-plus complaints received via a dedicated helpline. While seven people were apprehended for issuing fake degrees from Mewar University in Chittorgarh, the arrest of Tulsa Ram and his nephew Pourav Kaler unearthed further details of a multi-examination paper leakage racket. The accused reportedly used Bluetooth devices hidden in footwear, buttons, collars, undergarments and even wigs to relay answers to examinees for substantial ‘fees’. Gang members included individuals who specialised in clearing various exams as dummy candidates, either through merit or unfair means. The alleged kingpin, Suresh Dhaka, who ran coaching academies, remains at large.

Tulsa Ram’s case exposed the depth of the rot. A former SI dismissed for irregularities, he opened coaching institutes in Jodhpur and Bikaner and now faces 14 criminal cases. Among others, he allegedly helped his nephew cheat on the SI exam in 2010 and was briefly arrested in 2014. His wife’s sister, who is a trainee SI accused in the paper leak case, is absconding. The SOG has also identified and arrested members of another gang led by Jagdish Bishnoi besides one Praveen Kumar Bishnoi, who resigned as a senior auditor in 2023 and is accused of solving question papers for various gangs. Meanwhile, Unique Bhambu, a trainee forest ranger who is the alleged key conspirator in multiple paper leaks, including for the recruitment of junior engineers in 2021, is absconding.

The implications of this systemic corruption are far-reaching. As ADGP Singh notes, “Anyone selected in a government job using illegal means, often by spending huge money, cannot be expected to be doing his job honestly later on.” Even as the government works to root out fraud and implement stricter controls, the challenge remains immense. In the meantime, the future of millions of government job aspirants and the integrity of Rajasthan’s public institutions hang in the balance. ■

FIRM STAND

A demolition taking place against illegal encroachers in Bolpur, Birbhum, June 27



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WEST BENGAL

MAMATA'S CLEAN-UP DRIVE

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

At last, after ruling the state for 13 years, Mamata Banerjee has come down heavily on that bane of Bengal's urban areas—illegal land encroachment, especially on government land. Driving this sudden crackdown and show of intent is perhaps the Trinamool Congress's below par performance in urban areas in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election. Poor civic amenities, with narrowing of roads and congestion of urban spaces, are said to have contributed to the TMC's poor show.

The chief minister has addressed three meetings and berated civic body chiefs, administrative officials and law enforcers for failing to provide basic civic amenities to people. Stunningly, she also criticised elected TMC representatives for allowing illegal encroachment in exchange of money.

"Encroachment is the biggest problem. Some people are allowing encroachments for money.... Wherever there is land, it is being encroached," Mamata said during the widely telecast June 24 meeting. She pulled up minister Sujit Bose, the Bidhannagar MLA, for allegedly allowing encroachments in his constituency. Mamata also subtly hinted that 'outsiders' are usurping land in Bengal, thereby altering its demography, and said her government

could not carry the burden of people from other states. The state government has sent detailed instructions to district magistrates to prevent illegal occupation of government land.

After the June 24 meeting, the administration launched a crackdown on illegal street vendors and land encroachments in Kolkata, its surrounding areas and in some districts. In Kolkata, TMC workers dismantled a party office allegedly built on encroached land; in Asansol, the municipality sent a notice to the RSS office for a similar reason.

As the Opposition BJP and CPI(M) raised serious objections, Mamata convened a meeting again on June 27, inviting members of hawkers' unions to have their say. Allowing a ceasefire of sorts for a month, Mamata asked the authorities to consider the situation

ACTION AGAINST ENCROACHMENT IS A RESPONSE TO TMC'S POOR LS POLL RESULTS IN URBAN AREAS

sympathetically, but said she would not tolerate illegal street vending.

The sudden call to arms against hawkers/ small shop-owners who have encroached on government land—that too by a bona fide champion of the marginalised—stems from concerning news for the TMC. On June 4, after the Lok Sabha election results were declared, Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC)—the TMC’s poll strategist—conveyed a message. While the TMC had wrested 29 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state, most of its support came from rural areas. In civic areas, the BJP got more votes than the TMC in at least 70 of the 128 urban bodies. Under the Kolkata Municipal Corporation itself, the BJP prevailed over the TMC in 44 of the 145 wards. What’s more, the saffron camp defeated the TMC in six of the nine wards that fall under Kolkata’s Bhabanipur assembly constituency, which Mamata herself represents.

According to TMC sources, Mamata has two objectives. Firstly, by publicly calling out law enforcers from her party for being “corrupt”, she is distancing herself from dishonest partymen. That’s meant to neutralise the Opposition’s charge of widespread corruption against the TMC that had clearly succeeded in fashioning a potent weapon out of anti-incumbency. Secondly, she is establishing an image that her administration will go to any length to secure the rights of the urban electorate. “The depletion in our urban support is significant. Almost half of our cabinet is from the Kolkata Dakshin parliamentary segment. Yet, we are behind the BJP in 20 of the 59 KMC wards here,” says a TMC source. “If we don’t make amends, we will suffer in the 2026 assembly polls.” He adds that the push behind the drive comes from Mamata’s nephew and TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

Abhishek reportedly believes that the party has had to bear the brunt of anti-incumbency because several government departments function

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RIGHT DIRECTION
Mamata Banerjee has asked district administrations to stop encroachment on government land

“Encroachment is the biggest problem. Some people are allowing this for money. Bengal’s identity is being altered because you are taking money”

MAMATA BANERJEE
Chief Minister, West Bengal

poorly. He wants Mamata to clean the Augean stables before the long-pending elections in two corporations and 13 municipalities are declared.

The jury is still out, though, on whether formal action would be taken against the TMC members whom Mamata accused of illegal practices. “The CM has admitted that her colleagues allow illegal encroachment through corrupt means. But will there be any action against them, like the crackdown on hawkers?” asks political analyst Subhamoy Maitra.

Sources in the administration say that fierce political resistance—a regular feature in Bengal whenever action has sought to be taken against illegal

encroachment—has been absent due to Mamata’s directive. But some officers say that the crackdown is an ‘eyewash’ and that the practice of installing illegal hawkers in exchange of money will return. During the June 24 meeting, Mamata came down heavily on Amrita Burman Roy, the sub-divisional officer of Howrah city, whom she accused of being a non-performer. Roy, who was appointed by the Election Commission, has been in office for two months; her seniors say she is a capable officer. “We are worried that if things go out of hand, administrative officers will be made scapegoats,” says a senior IAS officer.

Multiple civic bodies, including those of Kolkata and Howrah, are preparing operating procedures to remove illegal hawkers and rehabilitate legal ones. However, leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari of the BJP has accused Mamata herself of encroaching upon land near her Kolkata home to expand the office in her residence. “You are unhappy as BJP has won in various municipalities,” he said at a news conference. Pointing out that numerous people come to Kolkata and earn their livelihood as hawkers, he said, “I would urge Mamata Banerjee to...make a clear SoP, give them alternate livelihood and then remove their stalls. We will stand by these people.” ■



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

GLASSHOUSE

SPELLCHECK GONE ROGUE

All Punjab chief minister Bhagwant S. Mann wanted to do was to take a swing at his opponents, only to hit himself square in the face. Mocking the elite, Anglicised life-style of some of the state's political leaders, he wondered if they could even spell Chandigarh in Punjabi. He proceeded to do so himself, except that he mangled both the spelling and the pronunciation of the state capital. The joke soon turned on him, as BJP's Subhash Sharma reminded him of the wisdom of 'tol mol ke bol' or weighing words before speaking, and Congress's Pratap Bajwa wondered how someone could fail their own quiz. Akali Dal's Bikram Majithia couldn't resist raking up his past as standup comic, asking him to observe the fine line between "the state and stage". One routine that clearly bombed.



Secret Campaign

West Bengal BJP leader **Dilip Ghosh**, known for his media-friendly ways, has been avoiding journalists lately. Instead, he has been suspiciously busy crisscrossing the state, sparking a flurry of rumours. Party insiders are puzzled why Ghosh, who currently holds no electoral or organisational position in the BJP, is touring and meeting with party workers. Meanwhile, state BJP president Sukanta Majumdar has been inducted into the Union ministry. Could it be that Ghosh, Majumdar's predecessor, is eyeing a return to the chair?

POWER SHIFT

The centre of power is poised for a shift in Gujarat, as 71-year-old ex-bureaucrat **K. Kailashnathan** steps down as chief principal secretary to the chief minister. Often referred to as the 'super CM', KK had held this position since 2013, when he retired. He had first joined the Narendra Modi CMO in 2006, and had become the prime minister's trusted confidant in Gujarat, acting as a vital link between the state's political apparatus and its powerful bureaucracy. Now that he has exited, KK is likely to be succeeded by another set of ex-bureaucrats, Hasmukh Adhia and S.S. Rathore, who were appointed as advisors to the CM.



Saunik Boom

Maharashtra may be regarded as a progressive state and a pioneer in feminist movements but it has taken it decades to get its first woman chief secretary. **Sujata Saunik**, a 1987 batch IAS officer, will occupy that post after the superannuation of incumbent Dr Nitin Kareer. Incidentally, Sujata's husband, Manoj, was also the state chief secretary and, in fact, Kareer's predecessor. Talk about being a power couple!

EXPENSIVE BOAST

Even as the NDA government at the Centre faces the heat on NEET, its ally in Uttar Pradesh, the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP), is making things worse. Videos have surfaced of one of its first-time MLAs, **Bedi Ram**, from the Jakhania assembly seat, bragging

about his ability to "facilitate recruitment" to government positions in lieu of money. In the clips, Bedi can be heard claiming he can arrange "40 recruitments at a time". In another video, he appears to be mediating a financial dispute between two groups following the cancellation of an



exam. SBSP chief and UP minister O.P. Rajbhar met Union home minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda to offer an explanation, but insiders say it may not suffice.

Desi Cow Meets Brazilian Bull

By Jumana Shah

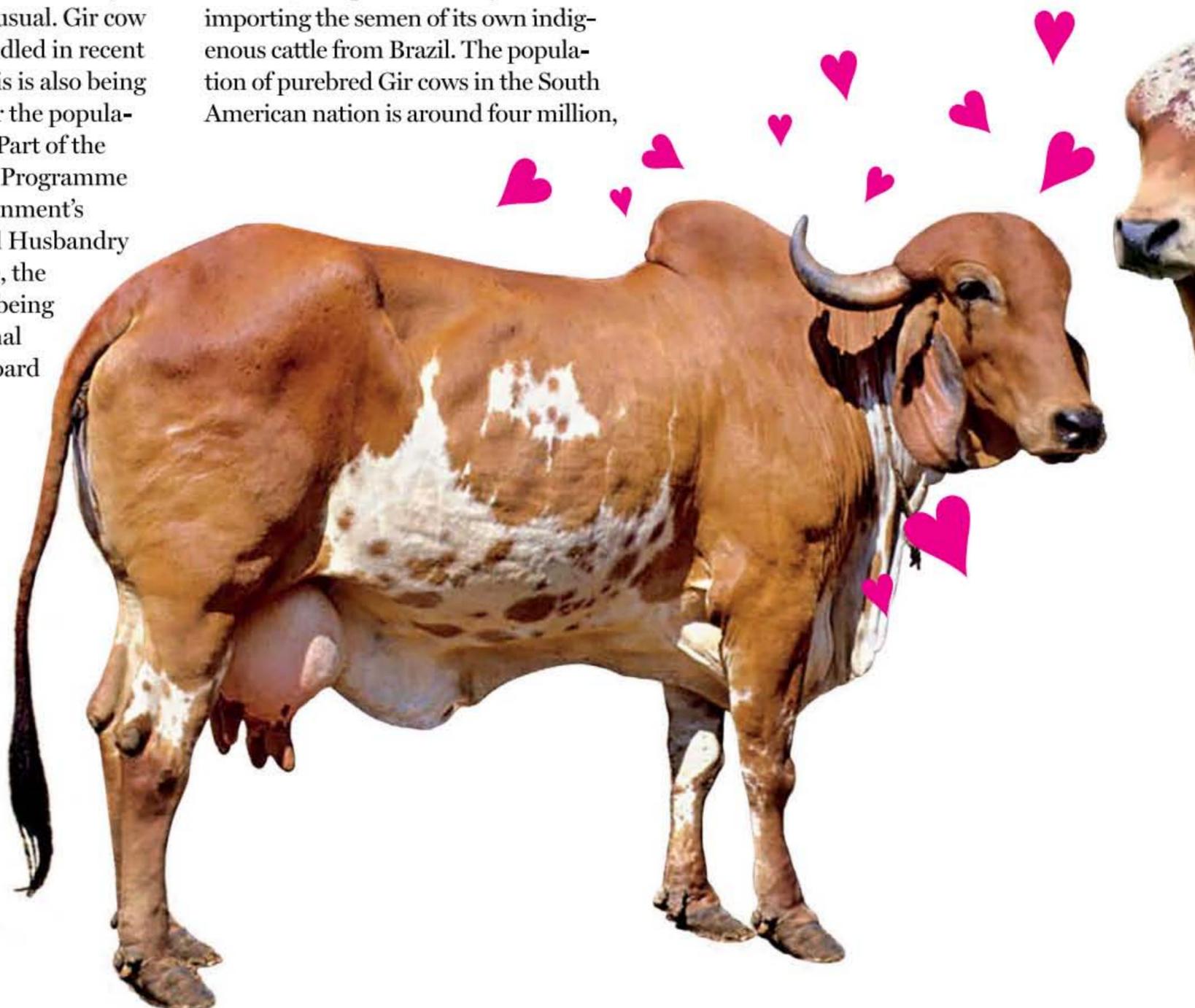
It is *ghar wapsi* in a frozen form. The Indian government's move to import 40,000 doses of purebred Gir bull semen from Brazil to artificially inseminate Gir cows in Gujarat is being seen as a gamechanger. The South American country had imported the Gir cow, famed for its high yield of milk, from as early as 1870. Now, the genetic return gift will also be offered to states where Gir cows are found, including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. It is hoped that the Brazilian Gir bull semen will lead to a progeny of Gir cows with milk productivity 5-8 times higher than usual. Gir cow populations have dwindled in recent decades in India, so this is also being seen as a way to bolster the population in its native land. Part of the Genetic Improvement Programme under the Union government's Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD), the Rs 6 crore initiative is being executed by the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).

"These semen straws are from four bulls in Brazil that are 'top performing'. Highly rated Gir cows here will be inseminated with them and their progeny should be super performers," says an official from Gujarat's animal husbandry department. According to

experts, the venture, if successful, could increase the average milk production of Gir cows to 20-30 litres per day over the next decade or so. Top 'performers' could even scale 60-70 litres a day, it is hoped. The semen straws have been bought from a private dairy farmer and certified by the government of Brazil. Though it has taken two years for the project to fructify, the DAHD will soon issue another global tender for the import of 250,000 semen straws of Gir bulls, of which 200,000 will be conventional semen and 50,000 sex-sorted semen [where the gender of the offspring is pre-selected].

Now, to explain the irony of India importing the semen of its own indigenous cattle from Brazil. The population of purebred Gir cows in the South American nation is around four million,

while in India it was estimated at 2.3 million in the 2019 livestock census. Brazil is believed to have 'preserved' the breed better than India because it started an intensive genetic improvement programme in 1976. A highly placed source at the NDDB explains, "Cattle which do not have the genetic makeup for high milk productivity are retired from the breeding process. In India, farmers do not stop breeding a cow if she generates less milk. Hence, the genetic improvement programme leading to higher milk production and



resilience to diseases does not have the multiplier effect in India, as it did in Brazil for 50 years. While a few of our top performing cattle can produce up to 20 litres of milk a day, our average remains 8-10 litres.” Naturally, genetic improvement through artificial insemination is more widespread in Brazil. According to Gujarat animal husbandry department director Dr Falguni Thakar, even artificial intelligence is used to govern about 40 per cent of cattle breeding.

The real spur for the import of high-quality Gir bull semen to bolster India’s milk production is a projected increase of consumption. India’s estimated consumption of milk/ milk products was 320 million litres a day in 2019 and it is projected to grow to 468 ML by 2030.

Production of milk can be increased through an increase in the number of cattle or increase in the productivity of the existing cattle. A large increase in numbers is insupportable—shrinking grazing land would drive stray cattle on to roads and farmlands. The second option can be achieved by better feeding/ management of existing cattle, but it cannot give results beyond the animal’s genetic makeup. This was why a largescale long-term genetic improvement programme—involving artificial insemination methods—was initiated by the NDDB in 2008.

Artificial insemination through frozen semen is a widely used technique where farmers approach a semen station to get their cow

inseminated. Typically, semen of bulls with superior genetic makeup—with progeny proven to have given higher milk output—is used. When inseminated with sex-sorted semen, there is a 90 per cent probability of birthing a female. With ever-increasing use of mechanised vehicles like tractors, the utility of bulls has fallen hugely. That way, sex-sorted semen resolves the issue of stray cattle.

Gir was not the only Indian breed cow to be sent to Brazil. The milch breed Red Sindhi, and draught breeds like Ongol and Nellore from Andhra Pradesh and Kankrej from Gujarat, have been bred in Brazil for long. It just so happens that Gir cows have better resistance to diseases and have higher average milk production than other breeds.

Since the early ’60s, India’s genetic improvement programme of cattle focused on the cross-breeding of such high milk-producing breeds like Holstein Friesian and Jersey with Indian cattle. Presently, crossbreeds contribute one-third of India’s bovine milk, whereas their population is 22 per cent of the total bovine population. Historically, this is what helped India achieve self-sufficiency in milk production. “The crossbred cattle will continue to contribute a significant share of milk production. Current genetic improvement programmes, apart from focusing on pure indigenous breeds, also seek to improve crossbred cattle,” a source at NDDB says. In recent years, the programme imported high-quality bulls and frozen embryos of quality breeds.

This project has courted controversy over the years. In 2019, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat questioned the government’s decision to float a tender for the import of 100,000 Gir bull semen. Saurashtra farmers had also raised concerns that the imported semen would be of other breeds crossbred with Gir cows and inseminating our indigenous cows with it would end up ruining the genetic pool, with the resultant progeny being too weak to survive Indian conditions. However, NDDB scientists have clarified that only semen of purebred Gir bulls is being imported. ■

Brazil now has four million purebred Gir cows; India has only 2.3 million. It has preserved the breed better than India



COVER STORY

T20 CHAMPIONS

THE



T20

ICC MEN'S T20

THE INSPIRING STORY OF HOW **INDIA CAPTAIN**
TALENTED TEAM BECAME THE T20 WO

TIMEN



←
THE CUP OF JOY
Team India celebrate with the trophy after winning the ICC men's T20 World Cup at Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados, June 29

WORLD CUP WEST INDIA USA 21

ROHIT SHARMA AND HIS ORLD CHAMPIONS

BY NIKHIL NAZ IN BARBADOS

Photographs by GETTY IMAGES Photo Montage by AMARJEET SINGH NAGI

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HOW DOES ONE DEAL WITH THAT ‘one bad day’? Forget it and move on, the manual says. Rohit Sharma did exactly that. Only, it took him about 223 days to bury the ghost of the Ahmedabad 2023 one-day World Cup final. “Last night was a bad dream, right? I think the final is tomorrow” is how the skipper would later recall that fateful November night. It was no surprise then that on June 29, 2024, he lay face down on the turf of Kensington Oval in Barbados, minutes after the T20 World Cup was won—in one of the most endearing images from India’s triumph—with his eyes closed, almost as if to force himself into another slumber and dream. “I started the game in 2007 winning the [T20] World Cup and to leave the game winning it, that’s a tailor-made situation for me,” he says. “Life has come full circle...it has been brilliant.”

But before lifting its fourth World Cup trophy across both formats, Team India had been caught napping on more than one crucial occasion. None was more critical than the semi-finals of the last edition of the T20 World Cup two years ago where they lay exposed before a rampaging England, the eventual champions. Losing by a margin of 10 wickets on a good batting track in Adelaide, it was evident that the Men in Blue were well behind the curve in T20 cricket. Something had to change.



ANI

Post the 2022 T20 World Cup exit, the holy trinity of Indian cricket—Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Rahul Dravid—found themselves in the firing line. Whilst no one, including them, spelt out Ro-Ko’s (Rohit-Kohli) imminent retirement from T20Is, it was understood that the 2024 edition was going to be their last bow. Dravid, on the other hand, extended his contract by another six months after the 50-over World Cup. Clearly, there was unfinished business to attend to. He would later explain, speaking right after the 2024 final, “This isn’t the journey of one month of the World Cup, this is a journey of two years. The construction of this team, the skills and players we wanted, the balance, all those efforts just culminated and came together on this beautiful afternoon in Barbados.”

It wasn’t the easiest of build-ups to this tournament for Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli either. A high-flying Hardik Pandya had been



← **GOODBYE, RO-KO**
The Indian tricolour draped over their shoulders, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma pose with the World Cup trophy. Both announced their retirement from T20 internationals

ROHIT REPEATEDLY RISKED HIS WICKET FOR RAPID STARTS. KOHLI ADOPTED A BRAND NEW APPROACH. FOR THE WORLD CUP, BOTH PUT THE TEAM'S INTEREST FIRST

annointed India's new T20 captain, whilst both Rohit and Virat found themselves out of the squad for close to 11 months: signs that suggested Indian cricket had decided to invest in youngsters in the game's shortest format. And whilst they did make a last-minute entry into the Indian squad—prompted by Rohit and Virat's form at the ODI World Cup last year—their task was cut out.

ELIMINATING THE FEAR OF FAILURE

At the core of India's plan to wrest back the T20 trophy after 17 years was to eliminate the fear of failure that had

crippled them on previous occasions. The pressure of winning a title, plus the tag of being favourites at every major cricket event, did seem to weigh heavy on their shoulders—as was evident from their under-par performances in key matches, whilst being in imperious form during the rest of the tournament. The first step towards sorting this out was to acknowledge that this 'fear of failure' did exist. A phrase hitherto used by experts and media to explain India's fallibility at the final hurdle, never had anyone in the team addressed it. But that changed too. During a media interaction at this World

Cup, Rohit Sharma was candid enough to accept that it did play a role in India's extended dry run at ICC trophies. There was a realisation that not replicating your A-game on crunch days was a problem that needed to be tackled head-on. India needed a new T20 blueprint.

THE T20 'TOTAL CRICKET'

The plan was simple—India had to play new-age T20 cricket. Indian cricket found itself in a conundrum similar to what was expressed memorably by the late Dutch footballing genius, Johan Cruyff: "Playing football is very simple, but playing simple football is the hardest thing there is." The idea of adapting to the new demands of T20 cricket—batting with intent and aggression no matter how many wickets down—wasn't new. "We want to keep playing our natural attacking game even if we are 30 for 3," Rohit Sharma had said after India's first-round exit at the 2022 Asia Cup in UAE. Yet, come the big occasion, and India sought refuge in the comfort of percentage cricket—a template they had pioneered during the 2013 Champions Trophy, and which served them well for years. The onus there would be on the top three—Rohit, Shikhar Dhawan and Virat mostly—to mix caution with aggression and take India to a healthy total whilst consuming the bulk of the overs.

But, like everything else, this too had a sell-by date, especially in T20 cricket, where the rest of the world had moved on to the 'throw caution to the wind' approach. And even though India's trademark template continued paying dividends in the one-day format, in T20s, it became dated quicker than a Suryakumar Yadav half-century. And much like Cruyff's revolutionary concept of 'total football', Indian cricket needed 'total cricket'.

Cruyff's 'total football' challenged the age-old football conventions—that defenders are there to save goals, midfielders to feed the attackers and strikers to score goals. Breaking down silos and espousing fluidity and inter-changing roles, total football maximised the utility of all 11 players, both while attacking and defending. It thus made it difficult for the opposition to plan against a team where players execute multiple functions. The Dutch maestro's idea also encouraged the concept that attack is the best form of defence—teams under him would look to score even when leading by a healthy margin, where other teams would safely park the bus. When extrapolated to cricket, Cruyff's approach would expect teams to a) field plenty of multi-dimensional players, and b) bat with aggression, irrespective of how the wickets column read.

The past few years saw T20 cricket go through a

SOMETHING AKIN TO CRUYFF'S TOTAL FOOTBALL IS NOW THE WINNING T20 APPROACH. LAGGARDS FOR LONG, INDIA FINALLY ADOPTED THIS TEMPLATE IN THE WORLD CUP

similar transformation, with most top teams such as Australia, England and West Indies quickly adapting to it. India, on the other hand, was imprisoned by its old, dry-as-dust strategy. For the winners of the inaugural edition of the T20 World Cup, playing total cricket would need a 360-degree change in approach. For starters, Indian cricket needed to free itself from the 'star player' phenomena. The focus had to shift towards runs in front of the team's name rather than obsess over runs in front of a player's name. And that's when the two biggest names in the Indian team, evidently, put their hands up.

GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

A leader must lead from the front—as clichéd as it sounds, its effectiveness cannot be overstated. When you expect the entire team to keep attacking irrespective of what it does to their individual tallies and averages, you needed the captain to show the way. And that's exactly what Rohit Sharma succeeded in doing. Blessed with a super-abundance of batting talent, the skipper was always ready to risk his wicket to give the team a rapid start. His ultra-aggressive approach could prove frustrating for fans, but it's this attitude that allowed him to play several match-defining innings at the 2024 World Cup. To say the skipper's mindset percolated down to the entire batting unit would be stating the obvious.

No one exemplified India's new batting template better than Virat Kohli. Even though the former captain did not have the kind of tournament he would have desired based on his own impossibly high standards, it took commitment of the highest order to keep in abeyance the art of accumulating runs by the ton even in the most uncertain format of the game and adopt a brand new approach for the sake of the team. It was evidence that the entire batting line-up was on the same page as far as adopting the new batting approach was concerned.



MOMENT TO SAVOUR
 Players lift Team India head coach Rahul Dravid after the win against South Africa in the T20 World Cup final. It was Dravid's last match as India coach

GETTY IMAGES

The core of the idea was that the batting unit as a whole needed to be greater than the sum of its parts. A team of eight batters needed to keep the foot on the pedal at all times to utilise all its resources in the batting phase. This would allow the team to set par-plus totals on every occasion rather than settle for just par totals, as was usual during the earlier, more conservative approach.

The India vs Bangladesh match during the Super-8 stage served up a great example. India amassed a very healthy 196 on a pitch where 180 looked par. Revealingly, the score was reached with only one half-century in their ranks; the rest of the batters chipped in with quick-fire 20s and 30s. Captain Rohit Sharma would later term it a 'perfect' match, giving us a clear insight into the change in the Indian approach.

This very template allowed India to notch a match-winning 171 on a tricky pitch in Guyana against England in the semi-final. Where most other teams would have aimed for a safe 150, the Men in Blue held fast to their new credo and put the defending champions on the back foot in the first half itself. This innate change in Team India did not escape the opposition. Asked about the difference between the current Indian team and the one brushed aside by England in the 2022 T20 World Cup semis, Matthew Mott, the England coach, replied, "They weren't sure what a good score [was], back in 2022.

THE INDIAN TEAM HIT THE RIGHT NOTES AND EMERGED CHAMPIONS, BUT COACH RAHUL DRAVID WAS AS SELF-EFFACING AS EVER. THE WIN IN THE CARIBBEAN WAS REDEMPTIVE FOR HIM TOO

Their approach now is to come hard at us, maximise their batting and score out of our reach."

Looking at it from a macro level, India's batting philosophy during the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 can best be summed up thus—runs in front of an individual's name don't matter, it's the total runs that count. In an interview to INDIA TODAY after the win, Suryakumar Yadav confirmed this by saying, "I have to put my game, my ego behind and put the team ahead. In games against the US, England, Australia, I needed to take a step back and bat according to what the team needs. When we need to bat with the tempo, I press the accelerator hard."

JACK OF ALL TRADES

The batting approach was sorted out, but for total cricket to take full shape, the selection and use of multi-dimensional players was the next piece in the puzzle. With a paucity of all-rounders in Indian cricket, the think-tank still found a way to accommodate four multi-dimensional players in its squad of 15. It was by no means an easy task, as some unpopular decisions had to be taken. Shivam Dube's ability to bowl an over or two—although he wasn't called up to bowl in the tournament—meant another in-form middle-order batter, Rinku Singh, missed out. Axar Patel and Ravindra Jadeja—even though they performed similar roles—were both ahead of the potent Kuldeep Yadav in the pecking order to make the playing XI, because of their all-round abilities. Then there was the backing that Hardik Pandya received from the team management in his role as the third seamer despite having a forgettable IPL. No other story epitomises India's gritty turnarounds in this World Cup better than Pandya's 360-degree turn in fortunes.

Once the personnel were identified, their optimum utilisation was the key to favourable results. That's something Dravid and Sharma plotted with immaculate care. The elastic flexibility (just like total football) in India's batting order remained a common theme throughout the tournament. To maximise the team's batting potential, batters were thrown into different situations based on the score, pitch conditions, juncture of the match and the bowlers in operation. In fact, the Indian captain didn't shy away from spelling out his tactics at the beginning of the World Cup. "Only the openers have a fixed batting spot, everyone else needs to be flexible in their batting position and adapt to the situation at hand," he said.

Therefore, throughout the World Cup, it was common to see an Indian batting order with a fluid middle. If you had Axar Patel walk into bat at No. 4 against Pakistan and chip in with a stable 20; the same player walked in to bat at No. 8 in the match with Afghanistan and got a quickfire 12. Hardik Pandya batted No. 5 in the semis and No. 8 in the final. Ravindra Jadeja batted above the power-hitter like Shivam Dube on a dicey pitch in Guyana, while Dube batted two spots above him on a belter of a pitch in Barbados. This flexibility allowed 'total cricket' to be in play: allowing for batters to utilise their strengths based on the conditions while disrupting opposition plans by surprising them with the man sent out in the middle.



GETTY IMAGES

SKY HIGH → Suryakumar Yadav sprints along the boundary to take a miraculous catch to dismiss David Miller of South Africa in the final over of the T20 World Cup final in Bridgetown, Barbados, June 29

THE SHOW-STOPPER!

In keeping with its norm-breaking ways in this World Cup, it was the bowling unit that emerged as the stronger part of India's campaign—a clean break from India's batting star-cast landing them trophies. For once, the age-old adage of 'batters win you matches but bowlers win you tournaments' played out to script for Team India.

One could sense the calm amidst the Indian faithful in the stadia every time the bowlers took to the field. In the final versus South Africa, just the knowledge that Jasprit Bumrah and Arshdeep Singh still had three of the last five overs to bowl convinced Suryakumar Yadav that India was still in the game. Even on occasions when one thought that the batting had fallen short of a failsafe total, fans kept faith in Bumrah and Co. to get the team past the finish line. The defence of a measly 119 in the win versus Pakistan in the group stages and the final, where 176 was guarded on a batting-friendly pitch, offer perfect examples. It was a complete role reversal from the past, where Indian batters had to compensate for bowlers' profligacy. Surely, this very confidence in the Indian bowlers would have afforded Indian batsmen the luxury of playing their fearless brand of cricket.

Like the batsmen, the blueprint for the bowlers had a similar shape—roles were defined, but flexibility was the key. Arshdeep, with his swing, was the man to pick wickets with the new ball and curtail runs in the death



CONTRARY TO LONG TRADITION, INDIA'S BOWLING UNIT EMERGED AS THE STRONGER SUIT OF THE CAMPAIGN. EACH BOWLER HAD A DEFINED ROLE, BUT FLEXIBILITY WAS THE KEY

overs; Kuldeep Yadav, whose loop, dip, turn and varying lines frequently had batsmen floundering, was tasked with picking wickets in a cluster; Hardik and Jadeja were reserved for neutralising the middle order; while Axar Patel was the floater who could be bowled at any stage of the match to upset the rhythm of the opposition. And above everyone else, there was Jasprit Bumrah, the show-stopper. Best thing since sliced bread.

Every time the 30-year-old pacer had the ball in his hand, Indian fans were seized by a quite unfamiliar confidence. Pakistan needed 40 off 36 balls, but India were deemed to have a chance of winning, because 12 of those 36 balls would be bowled by Bumrah. South Africa needed 30

off 30, but they clung on to a sliver of hope as 12 out of the 30 balls belonged to the pace spearhead. For Indian cricket, this was uncharted territory, where pundits and fans were reposing more confidence in Bumrah's magical abilities than Kohli, Rohit and SKY's sublime wielding of the willow. So pervasive was this feeling that the joke going around in the West Indies was that India were cheating: while Rohit and Co. got to bat their full quota of 20 overs, every other team that played against India only got 16 overs to bat, since Bumrah's four didn't yield anything.

The Gujarat-born pacer wasn't even the highest wicket-taker of the tournament, but such was his impact with the ball that he was the unanimous choice for the Player of the Tournament award. In fact, it wasn't so much the wickets as his frugality that induced jaw-dropping reactions—an economy of 4.17 in an era where eight-nine runs an over is the acceptable norm. The placard that Mohammed Siraj carried at the culmination of the finals in Barbados described it best: 'Bumrah is the best bowler on land, sea and air'.

CARRIBEAN REDEMPTION

As the Indian team hit all the right notes through their campaign to emerge as champions, the conductor of this orchestra chose to stay behind the scenes. Just as only Rahul Dravid could. Just as he had during his playing career. Even a well-meaning social media campaign urging the team to win the title for their coach failed to arouse his emotions. "I don't believe in doing it for somebody, it is against my values. Why does a mountaineer want to climb Mount Everest? Because it's there. Similarly, why do we want to win the World Cup? Because it's there," is how the coach reacted when asked to comment on the #DoItForDravid campaign.

He would eventually express himself—and let out an exultant cry while holding the World Cup trophy in his hand—but only when the job was done. At that moment, one couldn't help but think of the year 2007. It was the same Caribbean islands where India crashed to a first-round exit at the 50-over World Cup under Dravid's captaincy. At the time, the skipper couldn't help but shed a tear or two. It was to become one of the lowest points in Indian cricket and would eventually lead to Dravid giving up the captaincy.

"I was lucky that this bunch of boys made it possible for me to be able to win this trophy..." the Indian coach said on the sidelines after the win. "I am not a legacy person. I just feel glad that we gave it the best we could." When his team tossed him up the air in celebration, life seemed to have come a full circle for Rahul Dravid.

And so, under the Barbadian sun, all the different strands of planning, preparation and execution that went into India's commanding performances materialised in a sleek silver trophy and in soul-stirring, regenerative joy. ■

YOUNGISTS

AS VETERANS MOVE ON, THEIR TORCH OF BRILLIANCE IS PASSED TO THESE PLAYERS WHO EMBODY INDIA'S T20 HOPES

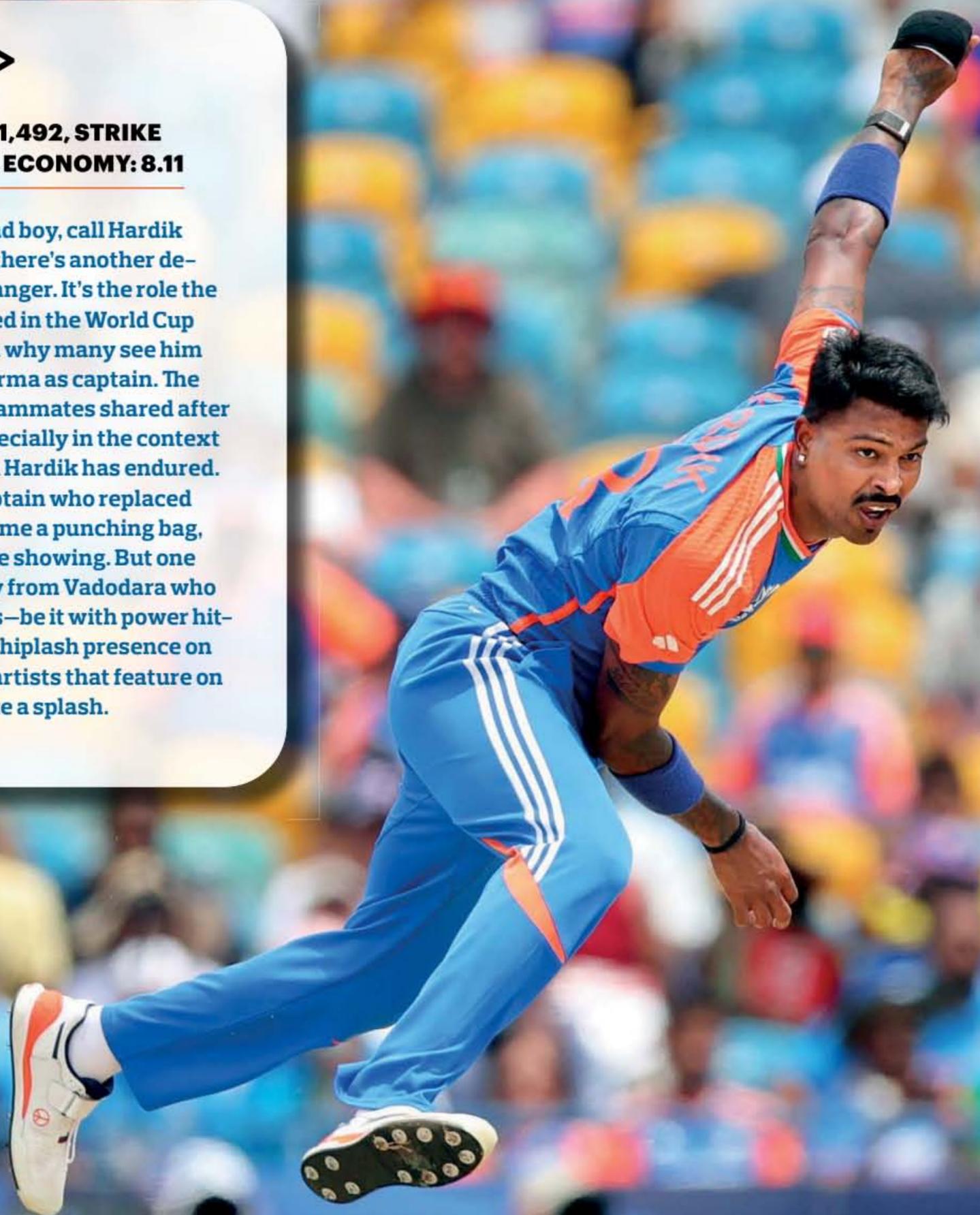
HARDIK PANDYA, 30 >

All-rounder

T20* MATCHES: 100, RUNS: 1,492, STRIKE RATE: 140.88; WICKETS: 84, ECONOMY: 8.11

Enfant terrible, showboat, bad boy, call Hardik Pandya what you may, but there's another descriptor he owns: the game-changer. It's the role the Team India vice-captain enacted in the World Cup final. His two final overs proved why many see him as the rightful heir to Rohit Sharma as captain. The hug the two Mumbai Indians teammates shared after the victory spoke volumes, especially in the context of the rough IPL 2024 campaign Hardik has endured. As the new Mumbai Indians captain who replaced the beloved Rohit, Pandya became a punching bag, blamed for the team's lacklustre showing. But one off season cannot daunt the boy from Vadodara who thrives in the face of challenges—be it with power hitting, attacking bowling or his whiplash presence on the field. Quite like the hip hop artists that feature on his playlist, Hardik lives to make a splash.

*T20 Internationals



TAN

BY RAHUL RAWAT AND SUHANI SINGH

TEAM INDIA'S 13-YEAR-LONG DRY SPELL

at World Cup tournaments was broken in the early hours of June 30. Amidst the jubilation came the news of Rohit Sharma, 37, and Virat Kohli, 35, signing off from T20Is. A day later, Ravindra Jadeja joined them. With the loss of two talismanic batters, questions arose as to who takes the baton from them. Team India has two years to find the balance of power and precision when they defend the title on home turf. The dynamic Hardik Pandya and the invincible Jasprit Bumrah are dead certs for their spots; Suryakumar Yadav's magical versatility and Rishabh Pant's hunger to succeed will make them hard to replace. Nonetheless, fresh blood will also be infused and the Indian Premier League will be the usual hunting ground for selectors. By no means is this list of 15 players a definitive one. Batsmen like Shreyas Iyer, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Tilak Varma, wicket-keeper batsmen K.L. Rahul and Ishan Kishan, and bowlers like Sai Kishore can all find a way in. The Cup is ours, and with an embarrassment of talent in Generation Next, it may well continue to be ours.



JASPRIT BUMRAH, 30

Fast Bowler

T20 MATCHES: 70

WICKETS: 89, ECONOMY: 6.27

A gift that keeps giving generously. A "national treasure". For the past few years, Bumrah has demonstrated why he is deemed one of the best fast bowlers in the world across all formats. Watching Bumrah bowl his perfectly, but variably, pitched deliveries is to see poetry in fluid motion. His ability to perplex hapless, doubting batsmen with a few seconds of sublime craft makes him one of the most feared bowlers. At the T20 World Cup, he made his presence felt each time he rolled his arm—his 110 dot balls (out of 178) throttled teams chasing India's totals. Conceding just 124 runs in eight matches in what is a batsman-friendly format—a nearly impossible feat—only Bumrah could have been the Player of the Tournament.

GETTY IMAGES



RISHABH PANT, 26

Wicketkeeper-batsman

T20s: 74, RUNS: 1,158

STRIKE RATE: 126.7

CATCHES: 40

The visuals of the wrecked, ashen car on December 31, 2022 left many dumbfounded. Lying in a pool of blood with his knee twisted out of shape and having hurt his wrist, forehead, ankle, toe and back, many wrote his epitaph as a Team India cricketer. Fourteen months later, Pant has scripted an awe-inspiring comeback, one which someday will lend itself to a documentary. Pant just had the IPL to prove that he hadn't lost his touch as a batsman and athleticism as a wicket-keeper. Captaining the Delhi Capitals, he delivered the works, both behind and in front of the stumps. With K.L. Rahul and rising star Dhruv Jurel vying for the coveted spot, Pant is aware that he has his work cut out. But here's someone who stared down death itself, ultimately doing his fair share towards winning the World Cup. That's a champion for you.



AXAR PATEL, 30

All-rounder

T20s: 60, RUNS: 453, STRIKE RATE: 143.3; WICKETS: 58, ECONOMY: 7.33

This T20 World Cup has proven one thing: Axar Patel is no longer a back-up player. For long, Axar remained in the shadows of Ravindra Jadeja, but now it's clear that he has taken on Jadeja's mantle. Every time the Indian team found itself in a spot, Rohit turned to Axar, and the all-rounder didn't disappoint. Coming up in the batting order, Axar played two crucial knocks—against Pakistan in a low-scoring thriller and the 47-run knock in the final. He featured in all matches and picked up wickets on every occasion except one. In a team where not many batters bowled, and not many bowlers batted, Axar is a rarity. His ability to bowl in the powerplay, when only two fielders are allowed outside the 30-yard circle, makes him a priceless resource. He has always been a fierce competitor, but this T20 World Cup has put him in a league of his own.



< SHUBMAN GILL, 24

Batsman

T20s: 14, RUNS: 335, SR: 147.57

The poster boy of cricket for Gen-Z in India, Gill may not have made the squad of 15 in this T20 World Cup, but on the evidence of those pulls, drives and punches off the back foot, there's no denying his lethal ball-striking abilities. With Rohit Sharma's leaving the T20I stage, Gill is a prime contender to fill that void. They are big shoes to fill, but Shubman has shown that he can negotiate the new ball and deliver a sumptuous start to the innings. His opening exploits with Gujarat Titans in the IPL in the team's inaugural season last year and in the 2023 Border-Gavaskar series are proof of his ability to both knock sixes and be 'the wall'. In an age where cricketers are valued as much for their game as for their marketable personality, Gill revels in the attention—being seen with celebs, dubbing the Hindi version of *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* and serving a dishy, sartorial masterclass through Instagram.

AFP

HARSHIT RANA, 22 >

Fast Bowler

IPL MATCHES: 20

WICKETS: 25, ECONOMY: 9.05

From a net bowler for Gujarat Titans, Harshit's fortunes changed dramatically when he donned the Kolkata Knight Riders jersey in this year's IPL. His defining moment came defending 13 runs in KKR's opening match, a performance he built upon to help secure the team's third IPL title. With 19 wickets, Harshit finished among the top five wicket-takers, boasting a better strike rate than even Jasprit Bumrah. Despite missing the T20 World Cup squad, Harshit soon earned his India call-up for the Zimbabwe tour.



AFP



DHRUV JUREL, 23 ^

Wicketkeeper-batsman

IPL MATCHES: 27, RUNS: 347

SR: 151.53; CATCHES: 12

It was on his idol M.S. Dhoni's home ground, Ranchi, that Jurel announced himself to the world. In the past two Tests against England, Jurel put in two steely knocks—90 and 39 not out—leading Sunil Gavaskar to call him the next M.S. Dhoni. "I try to imitate him, but it is very difficult," Jurel told INDIA TODAY at the 2024 India Today Conclave. Vice captain of the 2020 Under 19 World Cup team which finished runners-up, this son of a Kargil War veteran continues to make a fine impression in the IPL with Rajasthan Royals, both with the gloves and the bat.

B. SAI SUDHARSHAN, 22 v

Batsman

IPL MATCHES: 25

RUNS: 1,034, SR: 139.17

This Chennai-born southpaw has been marked for stardom by all who've witnessed his batting prowess. Sai's rise surpassed even Hardik Pandya's prediction, last year, of an India debut within two years. At 22, Sai donned the India colours in an ODI series against South Africa in December, notching two half centuries in three matches. Before his international debut, Sai's resume already boasted two IPL finals, prolific run-scoring for Tamil Nadu, India A appearances and an Emerging Asia Cup title with a century against Pakistan.



AN

ARSHDEEP SINGH, 25 >*Fast Bowler***T20s: 52, WICKETS: 79****ECONOMY: 8.39**

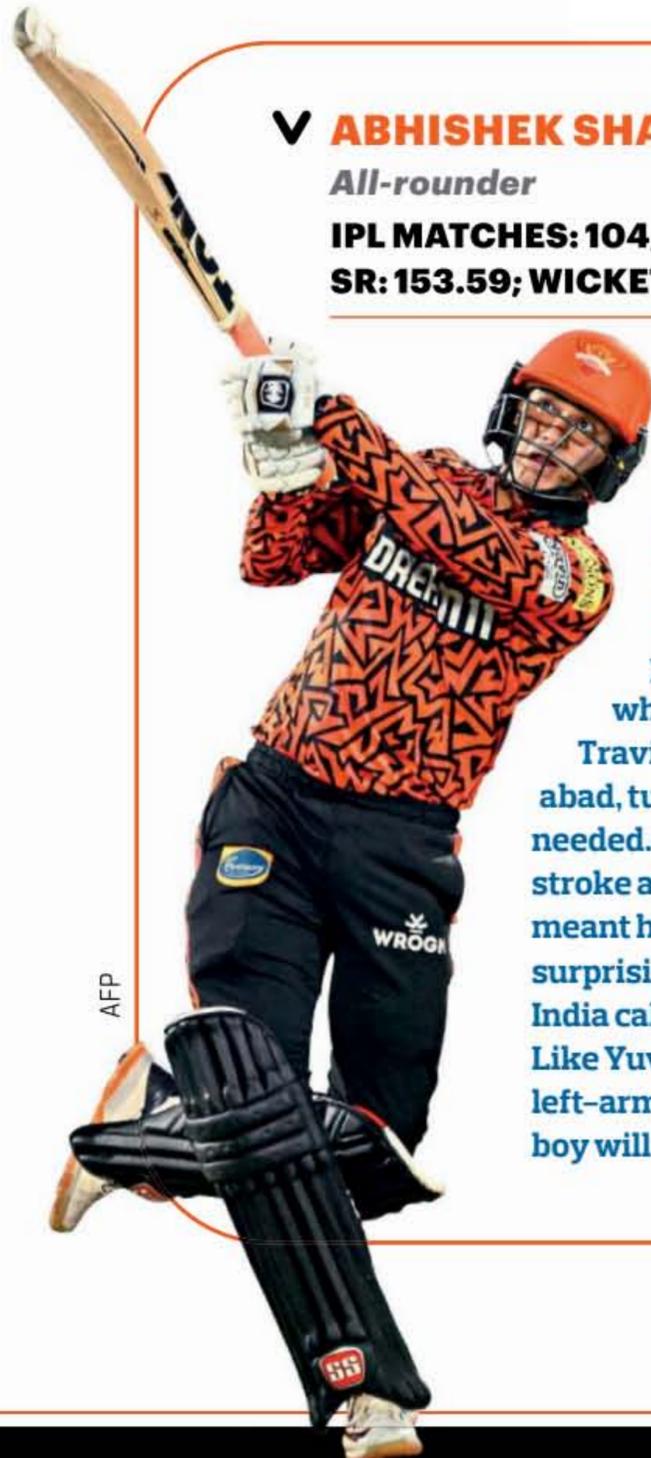
When India needed a pacer to share the new ball with Jasprit Bumrah in this T20 World Cup, they went in with the young left-armer Arshdeep over a more experienced Mohammed Siraj. Interestingly, this was Arshdeep's second ICC trophy with Rahul Dravid as coach. Back in 2018, the Punjab colt was part of the Indian team that won the Under-19 World Cup under Dravid's tutelage. So, the coach knew exactly what he was capable of. Arshdeep finished the tournament as the joint highest wicket-taker (17) and provided his team those crucial early breakthroughs. The journey may have just started for him, but even with a bowler of Bumrah's calibre operating from the other end, Arshdeep has managed to make his presence felt. It's all thanks to his ability to move the ball both ways.



GETTY IMAGES

ABHISHEK SHARMA, 23 v*All-rounder***IPL MATCHES: 104, RUNS: 2,671****SR: 153.59; WICKETS: 32, ECON: 7.11**

Not many can hit the ball as long and as clean as Abhishek Sharma. Mentored by Yuvraj Singh, Abhishek's bravado with the bat yearned for an amphitheatre, and the previous season of the IPL, where he opened with Australian Travis Head for Sunrisers Hyderabad, turned out to be the stage he needed. He matched Head stroke for stroke and his strike rate of over 200 meant he was Team India-ready. Not surprisingly, he has got his maiden India call-up for the tour of Zimbabwe. Like Yuvraj, Abhishek is also a handy left-arm spinner. Hopefully, the Punjab boy will achieve success like his idol.



AFP



AFP

RINKU SINGH, 26 ^*Batsman***T20s: 15, RUNS: 356, SR: 176.24**

When India's T20 World Cup squad was announced in April-end, Rinku Singh's non-selection became a talking point. After all, he had done enough in the last one year to merit a spot in the India XI. Those five consecutive sixes in an IPL game in 2023 meant the Internet was no longer flooded with stories of his struggle while growing up; his cricket took the centrestage and he did get into the Indian team before the T20 World Cup. While he missed the bus for the Caribbean, he is certain to be a regular in this Indian team. In 11 T20I innings, he has scored 356 runs at an average of 89 and a strike rate of over 176. The best part about his knocks was that he was unbeaten in seven of those 11 innings, finishing the task at hand.

YASHASVI JAISWAL, 22 v*Batsman***T20s: 17, RUNS: 502, SR: 161.93**

Arriving in Mumbai as a 10-year-old with no money or shelter, armed only with oodles of talent, Yashasvi's determination propelled him through myriad challenges. From the maidans of Mumbai to the 2020 Under-19 World Cup, where he emerged as the leading run-scorer, his ascent has been meteoric. His fearless batting in domestic circuits caught selectors' eyes, earning him the call-up across all formats for Team India...and he didn't disappoint. Though the young southpaw watched India's recent T20 World Cup success from the dugout, his time has

undoubtedly arrived. With Rohit and Virat stepping back from T20Is, the stage is set for this prodigy to lead India's batting charge.



AFP

SURYAKUMAR YADAV, 33

Batsman >

T20s: 68, RUNS: 2,340, SR: 167.74

The image of Suryakumar Yadav leaping in and out of the long-off fence to take a blinder in the last over of the T20 World Cup final has become instantly legendary—an audacious take worthy of someone who habitually takes risks. A 360-degree wielder of the willow, SKY can be a nightmare for bowlers. In T20s, India seemed to be behind the curve until SKY arrived to blast off all limits. Ev-

eryone had seen his marauding approach with the bat at astonishing strike rates, but the question was if he could replicate it in an ICC tournament. Before the 2024 T20 World Cup, SKY had appeared in three ICC events but didn't have much to show for all his enormous pedigree. A late bloomer in international cricket, SKY is making up for lost time. In this World Cup, he was India's second-highest run-scorer behind Rohit Sharma and, more importantly, he got those runs under pressure. He will be crucial to India's success in the next few years.



< **KULDEEP YADAV, 29**

Spinner

**T20s: 40, WICKETS: 69
ECONOMY: 6.77**

Kuldeep Yadav's career was at a crossroads, before Rohit Sharma took over the reins of the Indian team. A quality left-arm spinner, it was a mystery that Kuldeep was missing in action. However, he cemented his place in the team with some stellar performances. One of the best wrist-spinners in the world, Kuldeep rarely fails to deliver. There aren't many chinaman bowlers better than Kuldeep, whose control and guile can test the best in the business. Not just in T20Is, the Kanpur boy is now an automatic choice in every format. Team India unleashed Kuldeep in the Caribbean leg of the T20 World Cup, and he appeared in five games, finishing as India's third-highest wicket-taker with 10 scalps. With some seniors like Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja out of the mix in the shortest format, Kuldeep will lead India's spin attack and will be crucial to India's quest to defend the title in 2026.



RAVI BISHNOI, 23 ▾

Spinner

T20s: 24, WICKETS: 36, ECONOMY: 7.50

As per his Instagram post, "be yourself and let the world adjust themselves" is Ravi Bishnoi's motto. Pardon the plural, for his baffling googlies and leg-breaks mostly left batters in two minds—and unable to 'adjust themselves'. This has been the script since he notched 17 wickets in the 2020 Under-19 World Cup to finish on top and when he picked up 16 wickets as Lucknow Super Giants made it to the 2024 IPL playoffs. That was fulfilment for someone who along with his friends laboured hard to set up a cricket academy in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, and cycled 20 km twice a day to train there. In his maiden T20I, Bishnoi claimed two scalps against the West Indies, helped India win the game and won the Player of the Match. Further proof of his impact in the format: he was named in the ICC Men's T20I Team of the Year in 2023.



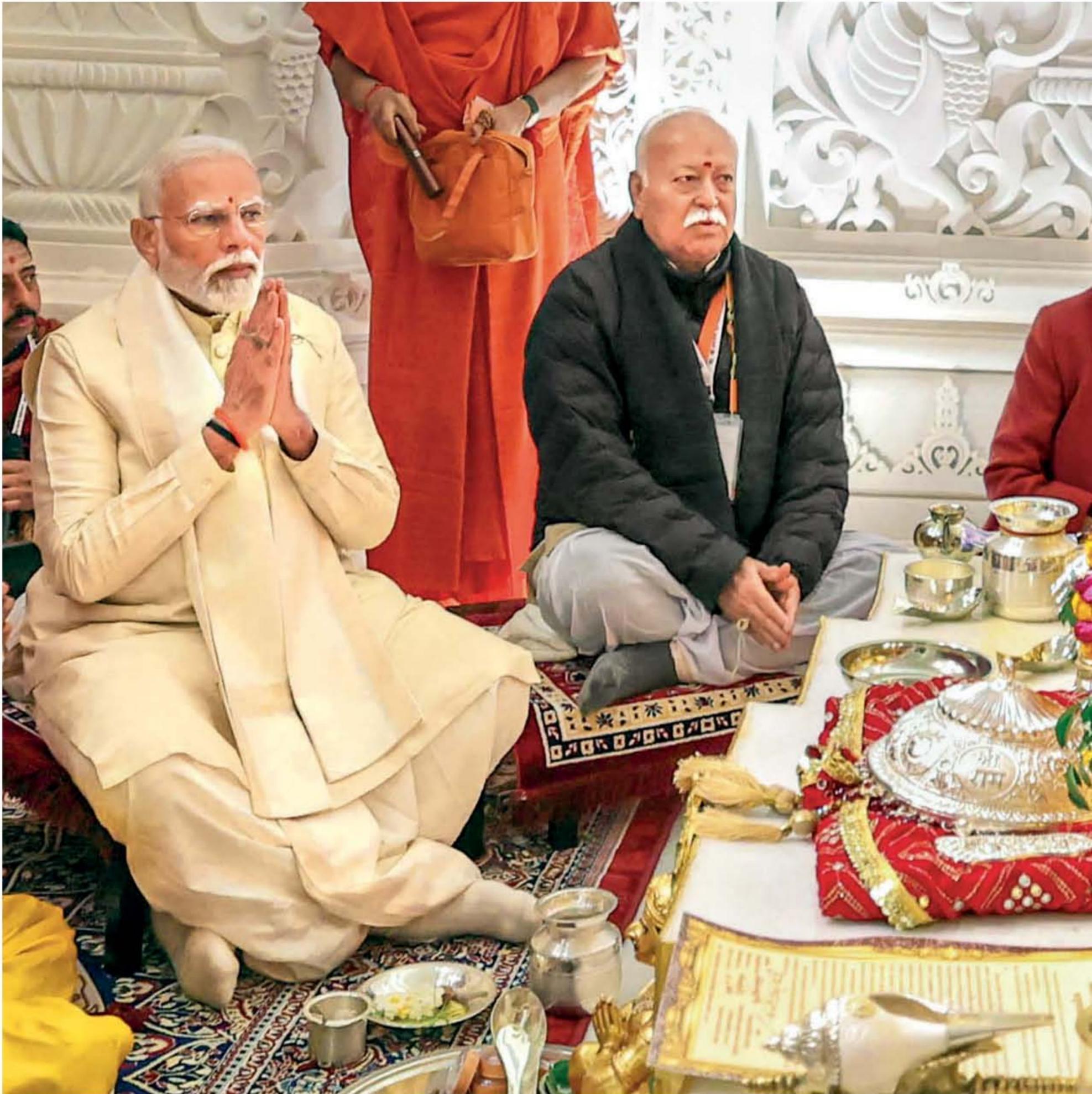
AFP

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THE BIG STORY • **BJP-RSS**

THE STRAINS

A FEW **ADMONITORY WORDS** FROM THE IDEOLOGICAL GURU SET TONGUES



ARE SHOWING

WAGGING, BUT THE RSS-BJP KNOW THE FUTURE LIES IN ACCOMMODATION

By ANILESH S. MAHAJAN

T

To those who weren't watching closely, it must have come as one of the more surprising after-effects of the Lok Sabha results. With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) down from 303 to 240 seats, and the Narendra Modi government undergoing a commensurate diminution of stature, it was thought natural that the rules of discourse would alter a bit. That, if not exactly open season, it would inaugurate a phase where the ruling dispensation finds itself rendered less teflon-coated against critique. But broadsides would have been par for the course had they come from the Opposition. Instead, expressions of disapproval started emanating from the upper echelons of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), whose ties to the BJP have of late resembled that of a neglected parent.

First, none other than sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat spoke in admonitory tones. More pointed takedowns followed, including from RSS veteran Indiresk Kumar. The unusual degree of openness in their words got them wide media play—and set off much speculation. From a distance, the BJP-RSS form a compounded pair that's often read by the public as one entity. Was it really possible that there could be filial discord between the two? Could there be smoke without fire? Now that the little spree of artillery shelling has ceased and a modicum of calm has been restored, insiders warn against reading too much into that brief surge in mercury levels. The long term, they say, is organically primed for equilibrium.

To be sure, it's not as if nothing happened—blanket denials will not serve to restore a sense of uninterrupted harmony. But the words deployed reveal the nature of disaffection, and point more towards a threat of peace breaking out, not unremitting hostilities. Addressing a Sangh gathering less than a week after the election results, Bhagwat counselled restraint in behaviour and said a “true sevak never develops *ahankaar*”—or an arrogant



PRAY TELL
PM Narendra Modi with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat during the consecration ceremony in Ayodhya, Jan. 22

form of egotism. Putting his finger on a raw nerve by referencing even Manipur to illustrate the collapse of social harmony, he said “decorum was not kept” in the harsh language of the poll campaign. “Consensus is our tradition,” Bhagwat said, adding that the Opposition must be thought of as the “*pratipaksh*” (those who hold another point of view, which must be respected) and not as a “*virodhi*” (opponent). The vocabulary, delivered in a tone of moral authority, was revealing. As if Bhagwat was subtly instating the RSS itself as the source of an alternate point of view—not an antagonist—and underlining the importance of dialogue and consensus-making. The call for building bridges was quite the opposite of a declaration of war—as some wishful thinking among the commentariat had it—but it did presuppose a chasm of some sort.

Any residual doubt about a strain in ties was removed when, within four days from that fully loaded speech, two more critical voices rang out from those quarters. Ratan Sharda, writing in RSS mouthpiece *Organiser*, called the alliance with the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party a strategic blunder that proved costly in Maharashtra—saying defectors were inducted at the expense of local leadership. The party was basking “in the glow reflected from Modiji’s aura” and “not listening to the voices on the street”, Sharda wrote. Senior pracharak Indiresk Kumar was even more caustic the next day. Again alluding to *ahankaar*, he said Lord Ram had punished the BJP’s arrogance by limiting it to 240 seats. Clearly, there had been some rupture in the Hindu Undivided Family of politics.

By itself, this is not unprecedented in that vast, complex enterprise where the exigencies of realpolitik

CLASH POINTS

WHERE THE VIEWS OF THE RSS AND ITS OTHER AFFILIATES HAVE BEEN AT ODDS WITH THAT OF THE BJP-PARTY AND GOVERNMENT

KEY APPOINTMENTS



RSS: More consultations needed while choosing CMs, ministers, other key officials

BJP: No stated position

ENTRY OF DEFACTORS



RSS: Okay with ‘inorganic’ growth of the BJP, but does not want ‘RSS haters’ and those with a tainted past to be allowed entry

BJP: The party claims it’s ‘conscious and cautious’ about whom to induct and is committed to the ideology

RIGHT TO EDUCATION



RSS: Legal parity for all schools, irrespective of whether they are managed by minorities or other groups

BJP: No stated position. In the past decade, there has been little progress

DISINVESTMENT



RSS: A consultative mechanism for adoption of equity sales, IPOs and FPOs to offload public sector undertakings

BJP: There is no straitjacket approach. Consultations and protocols followed on a case-to-case basis. While Air India’s was a strategic sale, LIC was listed in stock markets via IPO and banks opted for FPOs

LABOUR CODES



RSS: Fully backs the wage code and social security code. But has issues with the regulation of trade unions, their right to strike work, thresholds for contract labourers and the altered factory laws

BJP: Not yet implemented; consultations are still on

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS



RSS: Backed the new FTA regime, but has objections to several provisions like allowing government procurements and inclusion of non-trade issues in trade deliberations

BJP: FTAs are inked keeping the country’s interests and *aatmanirbharta* in mind

DIGITAL SELF-RELIANCE



RSS: All for it, in both content & services: e-commerce, social media, ITeS and data

BJP: A data protection law enacted, but it allows parking of data in servers outside the country, albeit with restrictions. The e-commerce policy is still a work in progress

FARM INCOME



RSS: Need to explore ways to increase farm income, including strengthening the MSP

BJP: The government is committed to explore all avenues to increase farm incomes

GENETICALLY MODIFIED CROPS



RSS: A big no. The RSS believes it’s neither good for the environment and health nor for the economy and the country’s food security

BJP: No stated position. But the government has gradually eased norms, like for imports



ANI

FORWARD MARCH
RSS volunteers at a camp in Bhopal, Jun. 12

AS THE RSS GETS SET TO CELEBRATE 100 YEARS OF EXISTENCE IN 2025, IT AIMS TO TAKE THE NUMBER OF SHAKHAS FROM 68,651 TO 100,000. HAVING A BJP GOVERNMENT AT THE CENTRE ALSO HELPS ITS ACCEPTABILITY IN SOCIETY GO UP

can often produce contrary responses. But ultimately, the primary guarantee of unified coexistence is the fact that, despite everything, the RSS top brass and the Modi regime are absolutely aligned on ideological objectives. There has never been any divergence there. According to veterans with access to both sides, the differences are confined to the “methodological” realm. Most of all, they insist, Nagpur is not interested in any change in the BJP’s top political leadership—and any speculation to the contrary is just wishful thinking from the Sangh’s critics.

Soon after such interpretations started spreading, several RSS leaders came out to impart calm on proceedings and halt the run of over-interpretation of the RSS chief’s speech. They duly disassociated with Indiresk Kumar’s remarks too. The RSS leadership understands that PM Modi, an erstwhile pracharak himself, is their best bet and his lieutenant Amit Shah indispensable to retention of power. And, for the RSS, power is a necessary tool for the spread of ideas. Even if ideology is an abstraction, it needs concrete spaces within which to flourish. In 2014-15, the RSS had a total of 51,330 daily shakhas in 33,333 venues across India. By 2022-23, that had risen to

68,651. The 12,847 *saptahik milans* it held weekly more than doubled to 26,877 in that same time. As it prepares to celebrate 100 years of its existence next year, the RSS aims to reach all the blocks in the country and take the number of shakhas to 100,000. It benefits from having a BJP government not just logistically, its visibility and acceptability in society goes up. It sees this as crucial in its attempts to counter antagonistic narratives, including from non-Hindu evangelists, as it expands into new communities itself.

The BJP, on its part, also knows that if the party has to expand to new geographies and demographics, it is imperative that the Sangh’s dedicated workforce paves the way. The mark of hubris had come most visibly in BJP chief J.P. Nadda’s statement in a campaign-time interview that the BJP had outgrown the RSS and could walk on its own, without any handholding. That rush of misplaced bravado was cured by the results, which brought home the chastening realisation that the BJP, under the singular overlordship of PM Modi, was hardly invincible. Especially in its aftermath, over the next six months, the BJP will be needing some serious

synchronised swimming with the RSS to preclude any chance of sinking further before the assembly polls in Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir. The BJP has already appointed election managers for these states; they have all been asked to take on board suggestions from the local RSS leadership.

Both sides also hope a more durable chapter of reconciliation is written as the party searches for a successor to Nadda, whose term is likely to end after a brief extension of status quo in the run-up to assembly polls. Consultations have already started with the RSS. The BJP top brass is keen on the names of pracharak-turned-BJP general secretary Sunil Bansal and former Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) president Vinod Tawde, both considered close to RSS sarkaryavah Dattatreya Hosabale. The RSS is looking forward to a seasoned hand taking over the baton from Nadda, one who can keep all foreheads free of wrinkles; the BJP is equally keen on an amicable settlement. Top officials of all parivar affiliates, including the BJP, will meet near Coimbatore for a *samanvay baithak*, or coordination meeting, in the last week of July. It is expected that most of the sticking points will be ironed out there. Looking further ahead, issues like the Universal Civil Code, One Nation One Election, the census (including the question of caste enumeration) and the fresh delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies will sorely need a mutual sync.

VOICES OF DISSENT

Samanvay. It’s a word Bhagwat likes to use often but whose dearth has often been felt of late. During Modi’s second term, especially, RSS leaders were miffed that their peers in the BJP—many grown from RSS ranks—didn’t take their feedback seriously. So far out of the decision-making circles were they that news of crucial appointments, like that of chief ministers and state unit chiefs, frequently came to them via scribes or media. Sharda’s *Organiser* piece had merely verbalised the displeasure many felt on the induction of turncoats, especially those with a history of corruption

or stated antipathy towards the RSS. What they found galling was how some of them even got crucial organisational responsibilities. A top RSS leader explains that the Sangh is not insensitive to the political party's tactical need for inorganic growth, but that does not quell the misgivings when moves on the political chessboard are too aberrational. "Being in government is one way of executing ideological commitments. But one should be aware of the price," he says.

And even affiliates can line up to insist on a fair price. On June 21, the student wing ABVP joined the Opposition's protests against the National Testing Agency (NTA) in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Maharashtra. Cities such as Bhopal, Hyderabad, Itanagar, Kanpur and Jhansi saw ABVP activists take to the streets and burn effigies—the student body's

economic sphere: SJM, BKS, BMS, Laghu Udyog Bharati, Grahak Panchayat etc.

Allowing one's own on the debating table is an effective political strategy that goes beyond courtesy, point out RSS insiders. In Modi 1.0 and even the first year of Modi 2.0, RSS affiliates had frequently occupied the oppositional space—that ideational plurality helped the BJP regime fine-tune and refine its policies, even make tactical retreats, as with the land acquisition ordinances, the labour codes or the "poorly negotiated" RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic

in fact, is nothing close to what was witnessed during and after the first NDA government, between then sarsanghchalak K.S. Sudarshan and Atal Bihari Vajpayee and, later, even L.K. Advani. RSS pracharaks like Dattopant Thengadi (then the patron of BMS, BKS and SJM) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Giriraj Kishore—rather than Opposition leaders—proved to be among the harshest critics of the BJP then. Invariably, the disputation owed to misalignment between the political growth gene and the ideological one. And the present passage has seen a decade of near-superpower status for the BJP within India's polity, so a touch of evolutionary pain was inevitable. It hardly leaves the RSS untouched—many top pracharaks were seen shedding their monastic vows of renunciation, so to speak, to turn themselves into full-time politicians. The considered opinion is that Bhagwat leans towards ideological purity while there are others in the Sangh hierarchy more in sync with a political vision.

Like with policy, political strategy too profits from accommodation. Leaders of RSS affiliates, for one, had worked with N. Chandrababu Naidu to convince the BJP leadership of the need for a pre-poll alliance in Andhra Pradesh. The Sangh's eyes were set, inter alia, on religious conversions, but with Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Punjab looming as remaining frontiers, it works to mutual advantage. The enabling factor is that, in Modi, the RSS still sees a rare convergence of ideology and political viability. So, the voicing of displeasure is perhaps not more than chastisement from a dotting teacher to a favourite pupil. An insider called it a "lover's tiff"—and nothing solves that like good conversations. ■



“THOSE WHO DID BHAKTI OF LORD RAM GRADUALLY BECAME ARROGANT. THAT PARTY WAS DECLARED THE BIGGEST PARTY, BUT WAS STOPPED AT 240 BY LORD RAM DUE TO ARROGANCE”

INDIRESK KUMAR, Senior pracharak and National Executive Member, RSS, in a remark he later sought to 'amend'

IN MODI, THE RSS STILL SEES A RARE CONVERGENCE OF IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL VIABILITY. SO, THE VOICING OF DISPLEASURE IS PERHAPS NOT MORE THAN CHASTISEMENT FROM A DOTING TEACHER TO A FAVOURITE PUPIL

first direct protest against the Centre in the past decade. What lends it extra significance is the fact that the ABVP is seen as steered by RSS officials closely aligned with the BJP. The cue has gone out to other affiliates—the labour union Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), the farmers' body Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM)—that had been consigned to near-oblivion when it came to policy-making. The signalling is working. On June 20, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman engaged in pre-budget consultations with a panel that included SJM national co-convenor Ashwani Mahajan. And on July 4, she conferred with all RSS affiliates active in the eco-

Partnership). In the end, it prevents too much space being ceded to the Opposition. But disquiet had been growing over the contempt shown during Modi 2.0 for its affiliates' views on policy, especially in the post-Covid phase. The absence of 'many voices' stung during the aggressive push for farm sector reforms—a Minimum Support Price (MSP) is among the issues where the BKS-SJM differ with the Centre, as also on GM crops.

PANGS OF POWER

Umbilically linked though they are, history has seen both structural and personality-based issues cropping up between the BJP-RSS during encounters with power. The present strain in ties,

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RAIL SAFETY ON A SLOW TRACK

DESPITE FREQUENT TRAGEDIES ON INDIA'S VAST RAIL NETWORK, INORDINATE DELAYS AND TECHNICAL CHALLENGES CONTINUE TO MAR THE ADOPTION OF KAVACH, INDIA'S HOMETGROWN TRAIN PROTECTION SYSTEM

By Avishek G. Dastidar

ON THE MORNING OF JUNE 17, A CONTAINER GOODS TRAIN RAMMED INTO THE STATION-ARY Kanchenjunga Express in West Bengal's Darjeeling district, resulting in the deaths of the goods train driver and nine passengers. Initial investigations reveal that the automatic signalling system of the stretch was undergoing maintenance, necessitating cautious travel at 10-15 kmph and mandatory stops at every red signal. The Kanchenjunga Express was waiting at a red signal when it was struck from behind.

Railways authorities have attributed the crash to "human error", blaming 46-year-old Anil Kumar, the deceased goods train driver, for failing to follow the safety protocols. This tragic incident once again underscores the critical need for the widespread installation of an automatic train protection (ATP) system—crucial for averting such collisions by automatically applying brakes when trains approach signals or each other at high speeds. Each incident has seen railways minister Ashwini Vaishnaw praise Kavach, the homegrown ATP solution, and urge his team to accelerate its deployment. Yet, progress remains painfully sluggish.

Over 300 people have been killed in train accidents in India since July 2022, when Vaishnaw told the Lok Sabha that Kavach had been



CRASH CURSE

The Kanchenjunga Express-goods train crash in Darjeeling district, Jun. 17

installed on 1,140 km of routes in the Secunderabad-based South Central Railway and the plan was to roll it out on 35,000-plus km of the network across India. “The way we took up electrification of the rail network, in mission mode, we will do that with the rollout of Kavach as well,” he said. However, as of July, Kavach stands implemented only on 1,465 km of the total route length of 68,000 km—a progress of just over 300 km in two years and still limited to the South Central Railway. Similarly, from 90 engines, Kavach is present in 144 engines now—less than 1 per cent of the total 15,200 engines.

Two of the accidents that have taken place in the past two years have been collisions, killing over 20 people. Ironically enough, one of them was in Vizianagaram in Andhra Pradesh, where Kavach is being tested. The other was in West Bengal, the latest one. However, Indian Railways has maintained that the tragic triple train crash near Balasore in Odisha last year, which claimed around 300 lives, was caused by wilful tampering of assets and sabotage, factors that Kavach would not have prevented.

Documents available with INDIA TODAY show that the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), the statutory body under the civil aviation ministry that probes train accidents, had recommended—in no uncertain terms—Ka-

vach, in some shape or form, to save lives, even in stretches not yet included in its rollout plan. The CRS investigation report on the October 2023 Vizianagaram collision recommended that the anti-collision features of Kavach be fitted in all locomotives, even in non-Kavach areas. “To use non-signalling-based anti-collision features of Kavach, it must invariably be fitted on each and every locomotive/ cab across Indian Railways even in non-Kavach territory,” the report said.

This is not a difficult job. The Kavach system has two parts. One is the telecom-based signal system that continuously keeps a tab on the movement of Kavach-enabled trains. This requires installing equipment along tracks, tele-

com towers near stations etc. The other is the hardware in the engine that can show the signals inside the driver’s cab and even automatically apply brakes in case it jumps the signal. While the first is a time-consuming job, the installation of the second is relatively easier. Even so, the process is taking an inordinate amount of time.

This slow progress points to issues beyond mere project complexities, argue those with decades of experience in the railway system. Following the CRS recommendation, sources say, there is agreement within the establishment about fitting all new locomotives with Kavach, even for non-Kavach stretches. “In case the ministry feels that the system has not matured enough to be foolproof yet,” says Sudhanshu Mani, former general manager of the Integral Coach Factory in Chennai, “why not simultaneously install the European Train Control System (ETCS) Level 2 on some important stretches until we have full confidence in Kavach and it fully matures?”

Kavach is not just any technology; it represents a significant leap for Indian Railways, marking a move towards sophisticated safety measures that have been standard in global rail systems since the 1980s. The journey towards Kavach began in earnest with the approval of the Train Collision Avoidance

TWO YEARS AGO, KAVACH WAS PRESENT IN 90 ENGINES. NOW, IT IS IN 144 ENGINES. THIS INDICATES ISSUES BEYOND MERE PROJECT COMPLEXITIES, ARGUE EXPERTS



System in 2016, followed by the achievement of the highest level of safety certification from independent international assessors in 2019. By 2020, Kavach was approved as the national ATP system. Despite setbacks like the Covid-19 pandemic, the system pushed the project forward. Funding has been sanctioned, and there is significant political support as well.

SO, WHAT'S TAKING TIME?

Indian Railways stresses that installing such a complex safety system takes time. "It involves installation of towers and laying of optical fibre cable alongside the entire track length, installation of Loco Kavach on each locomotive and Station Kavach at each station," says a railways ministry spokesperson. "It is extremely complex, particularly when it is to be installed on existing network in train-running conditions." But that may not be the complete picture.

Railways may have designed the system and is the owner of the tech, but Kavach components are manufactured by private companies. Currently, there are only three companies supplying the components: Medha Servo Drives, Kernex Microsystems and HBL Power Systems. Four more firms have been vying for the approval to be vendors: G.G. Tronics, Quadrant Future Tek, Areca Embedded Systems and the state-owned BHEL. But sources say movement has been slow. Japan's Kyosan, which supplies signalling systems to the railways, and Germany's Siemens, are also working on Kavach, officials say.

After the recent accident, Railway Board CEO and chairperson Jaya Varma Sinha said that vendors need to ramp up their production capacity for the rollout to happen all over India. However, achieving this is easier said than done, considering the involvement of multiple agencies and technical intricacies. The railways' technical research arm, the Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO), jointly holds the intellectual property with private players. As is the norm in railways, it is the RDSO that approves these products, their designs and efficacy. On top of that, the components need to have seamless

interoperability, which means that components need to be able to talk to each other even if they are manufactured by different companies. That requires rigorous, on-ground testing. Then there is the Centre of Excellence for Kavach. Housed at the Indian Railways Institute of Signal Engineering & Telecommunication in Secun-

derabad, this centre exists to train and develop the technology for Kavach. It remains in a constant loop throughout the implementation process, gathering feedback, participating in field trials, and so forth. However, the centre is hobbled by the fact that it serves primarily in an advisory capacity.

Those in the know say, on condi-

WHAT IS KAVACH?

An Automatic Train Protection system developed by the Research Design and Standards Organisation of the Ministry of Railways in collaboration with private companies

IT ENHANCES SAFETY BY...

- Preventing trains from jumping signals
- Averting collisions between trains on the same track
- Ensuring trains do not run on the wrong side
- Displaying signal information to loco pilots
- Sounding warning whistles at level crossings



KRISHNENDU HALDER

1,465 km

The length of railway route—over 2% of the total route length—on which Kavach has been implemented

₹44,640 cr.

The estimated cost of installing Kavach on India's total route length of 68,000 km and the entire fleet of 15,200-strong diesel and electric locomotives. (Rs 34,000 cr. for installation along the entire route length at Rs 50 lakh per route km and Rs 10,640 cr. for equipping all engines at Rs 70 lakh per unit)

WHY CAN'T IT BE SPEEDED UP?

- **Complex installation**
Installation requires extensive infrastructure, like setting up towers and laying cables, while accommodating ongoing train operations
- **Bureaucratic layers**
Involvement of multiple agencies—the RDSO, Centre of Excellence and Railway Board—in testing and approvals adds to delays
- **Limited manufacturing capacity:** Few approved manufacturers; components need interoperability testing, complicating production. Railways needs to onboard more players after testing
- **Technology maturity and resource constraints**
Concerns about system reliability until as late as 2020 and significant logistical challenges hinder rapid rollout

LAYED PROMISE

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

2012-13: INITIAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRIALS

Feb. 2012 Anil Kakodkar Committee recommends a Radio-based Train Control Automatic Train Protection System for Indian Railways

Jan. 2013 Railway Board Committee directs the development of a full-fledged, multi-vendor interoperable train control system for less busy routes. Initial R&D tenders are awarded for 250 km, field trials start on locomotives and freight trains

2014-15: EARLY IMPLEMENTATIONS AND R&D

Core R&D is extended to auto-signalling sections, successfully demonstrating Kavach on a 15-km stretch under South Central Railway in Telangana

2016-17: PROGRESS AND POLICY FUMBLE

Feb. 2016 Field trials begin on passenger trains

May 2017 Kavach Spec. (Ver. 3.2) is approved

Jul. 2017 Railway Board mandates European Train Control System Level 1 rollout on all Golden Quadrilateral-Golden Diagonal (GQ-GD) routes, creating policy confusion

2018-20: PRODUCT APPROVAL AND EXPANSION

2018 First Kavach product (Ver. 3.2) is approved

2019 Installation for 1,200 km on South Central Railway is issued to three OEMs, adding to 265 km already under trial. Total route length now: 1,465 km

2020 Railway Board corrects policy, mandating the implementation of Train Collision Avoidance System everywhere. Work on Ver. 4 begins

2021-2024: NEW NAME AND SOME PUSH

Jul. 2021 Train Collision Avoidance System is renamed 'Kavach'

2022 Union budget allocates funds for rapid implementation across 2,000 km. Contracts are signed for 3,000 km

Feb. 2024 Trial begins in Mathura-Palwal section, optical fibre cable on 4,055 km, equipment at 273 stations and in 301 locos, installation of 356 telecom towers, trackside equipment on 1,330 route km

tion of anonymity, that the process of involving the RDSO and obtaining its approval at each stage, while keeping an eye out for the Centre of Excellence, has often meant unforeseen delays. On top of this trinity of vendors, RDSO and the Centre of Excellence, there is the Railway Board, adding another layer of bureaucratic oversight.

Soon after the Darjeeling accident, Vaishnav reviewed the progress on the project and the ministry and, once again, stated that Kavach was to be taken up on "mission mode". Kavach has now reached its latest version (4.0) from the earlier 3.2, we are told. Those involved in the project, however, have a different take. "The

development of Version 4 is delayed by almost two years, because of multiplicity of feedback and accountability. Even now, Version 4 is not yet ready," says a senior official. Even the 1,465 km where Kavach stands installed was part of an overall trial approved years ago (see *The Journey So Far*).

A LONGER WAIT

This only means that platitudes aside, the wait for a collision-free train system might be longer than expected. The plan is to complete around 6,000 km in the next two years, says Jaya. "This year, we will complete 3,000 km. Then we are planning for another 3,000 km next year. We are asking our equipment suppliers to ramp up their production, and we are helping them in that. Because this needs to be proliferated across India, gradually."

The ministry has informed Parliament that Kavach tenders have been awarded for the Delhi-Mumbai and Delhi-Howrah corridors (approximately 3,000 route km) and preparatory works, including survey, Detailed Project Report and preparation of detailed estimate on another 6,000 route km, are going on. But the way things stand today, even that seems optimistic, experts say. "Around 15,000 engines need to have Kavach. That number is now some 150 after so many years. At this rate, the total rollout might not happen in our lifetime," says L.C. Trivedi, former general manager, East Central Railway.

Even at around 1,500 km per year, it would take Indian Railways several years to cover the entire network, according to Mohammad Jamshed, former member (traffic), Railway Board, who believes railways should rope in its PSUs to implement it faster and focus not just on high-density routes but on all routes. "Kavach is not the only remedy. Concerted measures towards improving safety, already under way, need to be reassigned topmost priority," he says. "In the 21st century, no developed transportation mode can be a high-risk endeavour." Developing indigenous technological capacity is a desirable goal, but safety should be the greater priority. Choosing to catch a train in India should not be a fraught journey. ■

A LITANY OF LAPSES

A CRUSH OF RELIGIOUS FERVOUR AROUND A GODMAN AND A POORLY ORGANISED JAMBOREE END UP CLAIMING 123 INNOCENT LIVES

By Prashant Srivastava in Hathras, UP



HAD BEEN 24 HOURS SINCE THE STAMPEDE AT A 'BHOLE BABA' satsang in Hathras. Subhash Lal, 42, a security guard from Morena in Madhya Pradesh, had spent hours at the district hospital looking for his mother, who had attended the religious gathering. He finally found her, among the several lifeless bodies at the hospital.

Dayu Dayal, 65, of Kapoora village in Hathras, was still searching for his daughter and her two children outside that hospital on the night of June 3, saying he was unable to get any information about them, either from the administration or the hospital's information desk. An estimated 123 people, nearly all of them women and children, had fallen victim to the tragedy that unfolded on July 2 in Phulrai village in the Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh. More than 250,000 people had converged on a venue—an uneven, empty ground surrounded by paddy fields, adjacent to the Hathras-Etah stretch of NH91—that was meant to accommodate no more than 80,000. This surge of people was the reason cited for the tragedy in the preliminary report the Sikandra Rao sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) submitted to the district magistrate (DM), which INDIA TODAY accessed. Incidentally, the SDM, who had granted permission for the *satsang*, was himself present at the venue when the incident took place.

The crush of religious fervour is nothing new in India. Faith is a panacea for all ills for millions of Indians, and it was no different for the largely poor and lower middle class devotees of the baba, mostly from the Jatav and Valmiki sections of Dalits. Hathras itself is a Scheduled Caste reserved constituency that has been with the BJP for the

A CRUEL END

Distraught kin outside the Trauma Centre at Sikandra Rao, July 2



past decade and which it won again even though it fielded a first-timer, Anoop Pradhan, this time. However, the baba's influence was not just limited to UP, but extended to a wider hinterland that included Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and MP.

HOW THE TRAGEDY UNFOLDED

There had been a light drizzle that day, but the skies had cleared by noon, when the devotees began pouring in. The godman himself arrived around 1 pm, dressed in white kurta-pyjama, delivered an hour-long sermon to a rapturous audience, and departed around 2 pm, the *satsang* evidently a success. It was seconds later that all hell broke loose as eager devotees apparently rushed to collect a bit of the baba's '*charan raj*' or the dust from his feet, clambering on to the slippery embankment of the road from where his convoy had just left. The baba's security was allegedly trying to push this swarm of devotees away, when some lost their footing, taking with



AP

WHO IS BHOLE BABA?

Born Suraj Pal Singh in a Dalit family of Bahadur Garh village in Etah district, he claims to have been a policeman who worked at the local intelligence unit when a 'divine encounter' led him to quit his job and embark on the path to spirituality. Moving into a mud hut in his native village, and grandly christening himself Narayan Sakar Hari, he began amassing a huge following with his simple discourses on spirituality. Bhole Baba is the name his followers have given to the 58-year-old godman.

Unlike *bhagwa-dhari* (saffron-clad) babas, he is attired in a white suit, often with a tie, or in a simple kurta-pyjama. He is often accompanied by his wife Premvati, who is addressed as Matashree.

Devotees are given some kind of holy water at his gatherings. "Whenever I have faced a problem, it gets resolved if I drink the water given by Bhole Baba," says Rekha Devi, 33. Raju Kumar, 35, a devotee from Mainpuri district, also likes it that the baba does not solicit "chadhava" or donations.



INDIA TODAY

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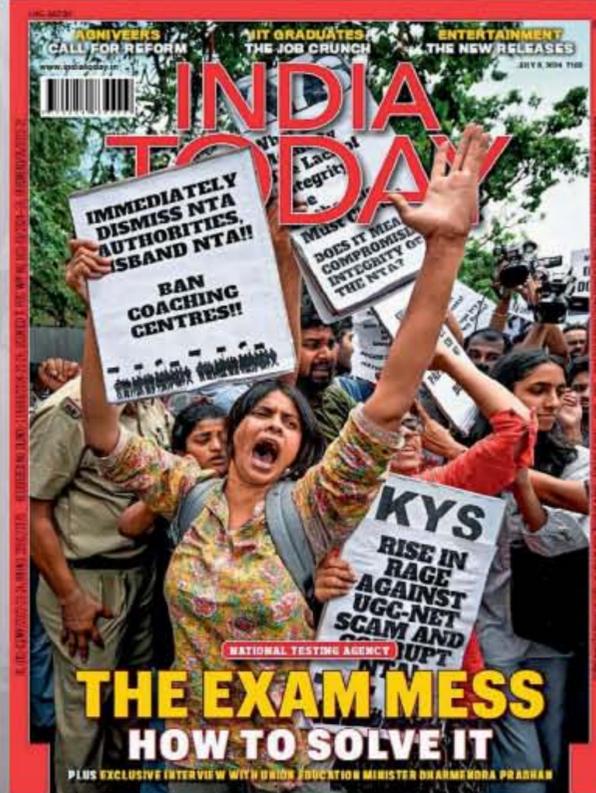
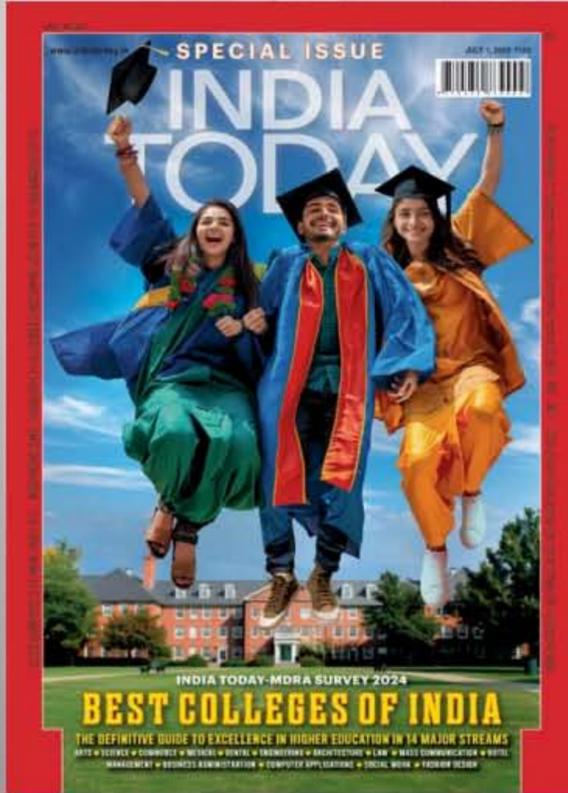


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REIMAGINING THE WAY WE WORK

Top HR executives discussed ways to align the workforce to the challenges of the digital era at the 'India Today HR Insights: The Future of Work' event held in Bengaluru on June 27

By Ajay Sukumaran

T

he world of business is getting increasingly complex, largely owing to technological disruptions.

Globally, organisations are re-examining how they run their businesses so that they can cater to the growing needs of the digital era. India has already entered this phase, and has an ambitious target of growing into a

\$1 trillion digital economy by 2028. The Centre has approved a Rs 10,000 crore artificial intelligence (AI) mission to set up cutting-edge, scalable AI computing infrastructure.

These developments will create new challenges in dealing with the workforce. It becomes necessary not only to hire and retain talent that can deal with the changing aspirations of customers, but to also tackle emerging issues on

the employee front—matters related to staff burnout, lack of appreciation, or employee development. The hybrid work pattern, where employees juggle between working remotely and being at the office, adds to the complexity.

The INDIA TODAY HR Insights in Bengaluru brought together some of the top human resources (HR) executives in the country for a brainstorming event on 'The Future of Work'.



Richard Lobo, Chief People Officer, Tech Mahindra

▼ SCALING AT SPEED: THRIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE THROUGH BETTER PEOPLE STRATEGIES

“Many of our processes are some 20–30 years old and we hang on to them for various reasons.... So I think we have to now rethink... the only way to go forward is to break some of these things. If we don't consciously break them, we won't move forward”

TAKEAWAYS

▶ India is poised to become one of the best sources of manpower, technical talent and innovation

▶ As businesses become more process-driven, it is essential to make workplaces more human. We need to discard old business processes that cause friction

▼ MEETING THE TALENT DEMAND

TAKEAWAYS

▶ Demand-supply gap for talent is an ongoing challenge

▶ At least 30 per cent of technical jobs cannot find the right fit, given the gap between the skills in demand and those on offer

“To fill the skill gap, we look for companies to set up their centres of excellence.... We find out from companies what they look for and train (students)...and design our own curriculum to match corporate expectations”



Dr John Bruce, Dean, Placements and Corporate Affairs, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology

▼ **MANAGING A HYBRID
WORKPLACE—CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES**

“We enabled all our people with technology, with the opportunity of going into different workplaces within the same location or a different location that probably was closer to where they lived”

DEEPA RAVINDER

Representative, Client Service, Cisco

“We see that a lot of people today are valuing flexibility as a clear expectation from their employers.... Employers who are not able to provide flexibility tend to score a little less on the attractiveness index”

ADITYA MISHRA

MD and CEO, CIEL HR

TAKEAWAYS

➤ For the younger generation, salary is not the only pull factor

➤ Aspirations are changing and they look for brands with purpose; eco-systems in which they can evolve

➤ In sectors like healthcare, supply of skilled professionals is limited compared to market demand

➤ Upskilling is key to retaining talent via training programmes for first-line managers and key position-holders

➤ Digital is an important focus area for upskilling/reskilling



“We always cultivate a culture of learning in the organisation. It’s very important for us. That’s how we mobilise and retain talent”

ASHUTOSH ANSHU

CHRO, Hitachi India





“ We look at ‘hunger’. An employee can always be upskilled. If a person has willingness, he or she will learn. [While hiring] we try to look at a level junior...if we are looking at X level, we try to find a person operating at X minus one level”

ASIT KUMAR
CHRO, Lendingkart

“ When it comes to technology intervention and skills required for the job, there has been a lot of strides in the last couple of years.... we have our own app for doctors and nurses...we are technologically far ahead of the game and have upskilled our people”

PREM ANAND K.
Head, Talent Acquisition, Narayana Health

“ Money is not the only pull for the new generation. Their aspirations are changing. They also see the brand’s purpose... purposeful brands have a lot of meaning for today’s generation”

SHAKSHAR GUHA
Senior General Manager HR and Head of Employee Relations, Wipro Consumer Care and Lighting



“ Now, most of the companies are moving to hybrid. It is a reality; we can’t avoid it”

ANIL KUMAR ETHANUR, Co-founder, Xpheno

“ After the pandemic...it just compelled us to think systematically about what flexibility means. We tried to make sure that employees retained the flexibility in a consistent manner to do their best work, while at the same time ensuring that the sense of corporate community that we built over the years was not diluted”

SHILPA VAID, CHRO, Diageo India

TAKEAWAYS

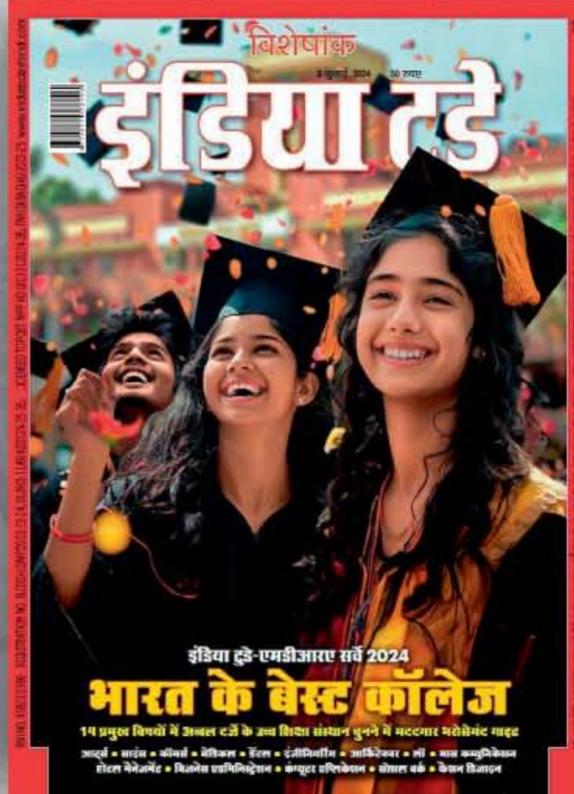
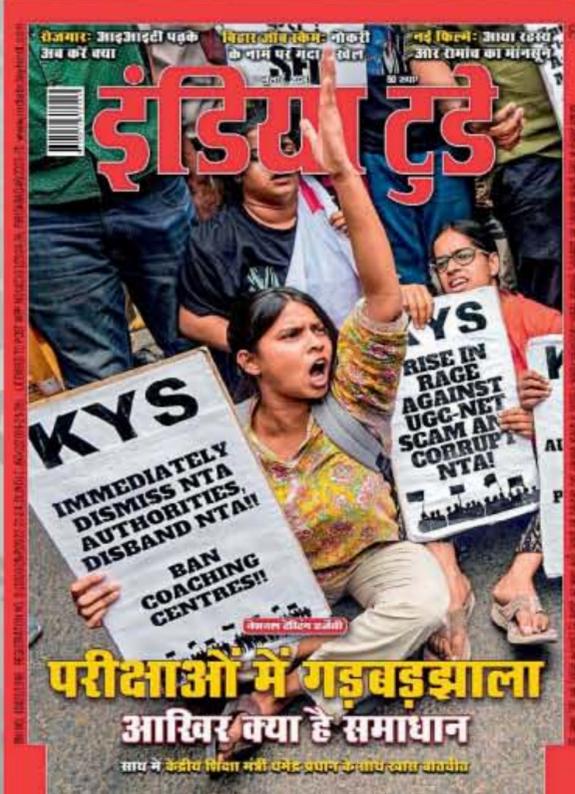
➤ Flexibility is high on the attractiveness index for employees

➤ Most companies typically recommend three days a week at the office

➤ For freshers/young managers, working with teams at the office provides a better learning curve

➤ Employers are concerned about culture dilution without on-site presence

➤ In hybrid jobs, making the best use of office time by active collaboration with colleagues is critical



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सबसे सटीक
जानकारी

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की धनराशि (दिल्ली से बाहर के चेक के लिए ₹ 50 रुपये अतिरिक्त जोड़ें, समान मूल्य के
चेक मान्य नहीं होंगे) के लिए बनवाया गया है.
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ALIA BHATT
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Federer is not about the tennis great's life story, says director **Asif Kapadia**, but about the emotional end of his career

DOCUMENTARY

GAME, SET AND WATCH

British-Indian director Asif Kapadia spoke to us about *Federer: Twelve Final Days*, which follows the last few days of the tennis great's career

W

LEISURE

When Roger Federer first won Wimbledon in 2003, he was a goofy Metallica-loving kid with a glorious game. It was the beauty of that game, the dashing ease of it, that the advertisers latched on to, that led to the creation of 'Roger Federer', the tennis champion who alighted from his soft-top Mercedes onto Centre Court, shucked off his cardigan and his Rolex and sliced some hapless plebeian opponent to ribbons, barely pausing to say "en garde".

The advertising narrative, the inanities of Nike, Rolex et al, reduced the brutal but fragile verve of Federer's game into shorthand for the plutocratic good life, the athlete-as-CEO. They took Federer's gift and somehow buffed and polished it until they achieved the most prosaic, the dullest of dull sheens.

So it's not director Asif Kapadia's fault that the new Amazon Prime documentary, *Federer: Twelve Final Days*, feels like just more buffing and like product placement for The Laver Cup, a quasi-exhibition match between Team Europe and Team World that is Federer's brainchild and partly run by his management company. Federer's image—the smooth, genial executive living a friction-free life—continues to generate millions of dollars, making him one of the world's 10 highest-earning athletes even now, nearly two

years after retirement and six years after he last won a Slam.

Kapadia's co-director is Joe Sabia, who is behind Vogue's 73 Questions series, one of those celebrity trifles that purports to be fun and irreverent while treating celebrity with a seriousness that borders on worship. Federer's own 73 Questions episode is amongst the most popular in the series' history. In keeping with the advertorial nature of this documentary, Anna Wintour, Vogue's desiccated grande dame, is described as Federer's 'greatest fan'.

Before the documentary was made available on Amazon Prime on June 20, I spoke to Kapadia on a Zoom call. I confessed to being surprised that Ka-

padia, who has made documentaries on the Formula 1 driver Ayrton Senna, the troubled pop star Amy Winehouse and Diego Maradona, would choose Federer as a subject. What could be the narrative arc in a film about the world's most well-adjusted superstar athlete?

Diego Maradona, the documentary Kapadia made in 2019, was, like its subject, kinetic and freewheeling, all madcap brilliance and Faustian tragedy. Kapadia, finding a huge amount of archival footage, focused on a small slice of Maradona's life, his time at Napoli, to illuminate the whole. *Federer: Twelve Final Days* does something similar, zeroing in on the eponymous days from his announcement of his re-

WHAT RESCUES FEDERER FROM TEDIUM IS THE PRESENCE OF NADAL, HIS ENTRY TIMED LATE FOR DRAMATIC EFFECT. HIS GRIEF OVER FEDERER'S RETIREMENT IS THE BEATING HEART OF THE DOCUMENTARY



tirement to his final match, a doubles in which he partnered Rafael Nadal, as a way to tell the story of his career.

Except, *Federer*, despite the “access” Kapadia’s co-director Sabia had to make what was supposedly intended to be a private film, never gets past the image of Federer as uber executive. The documentary, Kapadia says, is “consciously not an attempt to tell Federer’s life story”. It’s interesting, Kapadia insists, “because it isn’t the life story. He [Federer] is not ready for that yet. I think he will do it and I think he’s gonna have a lot to say, but this is just about the end of your career and the emotion that comes with the fact that it’s all over.” It explains the ponderously elegiac note the film strikes (and keeps striking).

What rescues *Federer* from tedium is the presence of Nadal, his entry timed relatively late in the film for dramatic effect. Without Nadal, the Federer story is one of uncomplicated superiority. As Andy Roddick put it, after being beaten by Federer—“I threw the kitchen sink at him, but he went to the bathroom and got his tub.” Nadal, for a time, was the only man who could beat Federer, including memorably on Federer’s own turf at Wimbledon in 2008, arguably the greatest tennis match ever. It forced Federer to deal, as he admits in the film, psychologically and emotionally with the fact of having a nemesis. In the end, both men rose above competition, proving that rivalries can be fierce yet tender. Nadal’s tearful grief over Federer’s retirement is the beating heart of the documentary.

Kapadia set out to make a “small film about a big guy”. But *Federer: Twelve Final Days* mistakes smallness for shallowness. There is so much about Federer that is extraordinary, so much that is engaging—instead of letting that balletic game do the talking though, Kapadia settles for a message from Federer Inc, for corporate gloss when what at least this Federer fan wanted was poetry. ■

—Shougat Dasgupta

OTT

TWISTS IN THE TALE

JioCinema’s cop drama *Gaanth Chapter 1: Jamnaa Paar* is a fictionalised account of the 2018 Burari deaths



Gaanth Chapter 1: *Jamnaa Paar* is the latest excursion into the 2018 ritualistic mass suicide of 11 members of a family in Northeast Delhi’s Burari area. Creator Soham Bhattacharya, with writers Anagh Mukherjee and Fahim Irshad, spins a cop drama out of the infamous incident, hedging bets on a simple question: was it suicide or murder?

Out on JioCinema in June, *Gaanth* follows Manav Vij as angry cop Gadar Singh, who is investigating the deaths, along with psychiatry intern Sakshi Murmu, whose savant syndrome allows her to cut through the clutter and see patterns in the crime everybody else is missing.

Gaanth is one of the better Delhi NCR-set cop dramas that have come on the heels of Sudip Sharma’s *Pataal Lok*. The visual and social world of *Gaanth* is oppressive. Gloomily lit frames communicate the complex web of politics and social codes that Gadar and Sakshi must untangle to get to the bottom of the mystery.

“My first impression of East Delhi and beyond, past the Yamuna floodplains, was a sense of violence,” Mukherjee recalls about his student days in the capital. His explorations of Delhi as a photographer lend material to the writing.

Irshad himself has had disturbing experiences in the region, which witnessed violent riots in 2020. “I remember

I was in Shahdara, looking for a place called Masjid wali gali,” says Irshad. “At a shop, a young man snarled at me saying this is Hindustan, where you have only Mandir wali gali, no Masjid wali gali. When I protested, they laughed.” This social context is embedded deeply in *Gaanth*, where among the primary players are a Hindu right-wing outfit.

Gaanth had a six-year journey from script to screen. Research included meeting psychiatric and forensic experts, cops who have worked on mass deaths, and residents of East Delhi.

“Interestingly, every single person had their own version of the 2018 mass deaths,” says Bhattacharya. “These overlapping subsets filled the gaps in our story. There was no one true narrative.” In fact, the writers had titled the show *Parallax*, as it communicated a *Rashomon*-style multi-perspective look at the crime.

Early episodes of *Gaanth* hinge on the occult angle, giving the series a quasi-supernatural flavour, which is pushed aside for a more grounded approach towards the end. “We didn’t want to just do true crime,” says Mukherjee. “We wanted to create a story with larger resonance.” The trio is tight-lipped about exactly what’s in store for *Gaanth Chapter 2*, but you can expect the story of another headline-grabbing crime in recent memory. ■

—Devarsi Ghosh

Early episodes of **GAANTH** hinge on the occult angle, which is later replaced by a grounded approach

Courtesy: LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA



Outsiders' world (Clockwise from right) 'Untitled' by F.N. Souza; 'To all the barricades...the rumour got you' by Vidha Saumya; 'Fisherman in Goa' by Bhupen Khakhar and 'Diaspore' by Aravani Art Project



ART

AN INDIAN RENAISSANCE

EVEN WITHOUT A NATIONAL PAVILION, THERE'S A SUBSTANTIAL PRESENCE OF INDIAN ART AT THE 60TH EDITION OF THE VENICE BIENNALE

T

The global art world's biggest and most prestigious event is currently underway in Italy. Helmed by Adriano Pedrosa, its first South American curator, the Venice Biennale's theme 'Foreigners Everywhere' speaks of our current times. It features 331 artists and collectives living in and between 80 countries. The biennale's primary focus is on artists who are themselves foreigners, immigrants or refugees—migration and decolonisation are key themes here. Given

these themes and India's burgeoning art scene, the absence of a national pavilion is a missed opportunity. Nonetheless, Indian artists, and some from the diaspora, are making their presence felt at the biennale.

At the docks of Arsenale, an imposing technicolour mural dominates one of the exhibition areas. Created by the Bengaluru-based collective Aravani Art Project, 'Diaspore' (2024) is a representation of trans bodies and nature. Using signature bright colours and multifaceted images, the mural shows the different possibilities trans people should have beyond the stereotypes perpetrated by society. The mural is part of the biennale's 'Nucleo Con-

temporaneo' section, which is divided into two parts, diaspora activism and gender disobedience. Also featured in this section is Bhupen Khakhar (on display in the Central Pavilion) whose paintings were among the first in India—way back in the 1980s—to delve into the societal taboos around homosexuality.

The biennale's 'Nucleo Storico' section focuses on Modernism in the Global South, gathering works from 20th-century Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Many of the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group (PAG) find representation here, such as S.H. Raza featured in the 'Abstractions' section. 'Of-frande'(1986) is emblematic

of his oeuvre with a distinct earthy colour palette reminiscent of the topography of Madhya Pradesh where he grew up. Another PAG co-founder, F.N. Souza, is in the 'Portraits' section with 'Untitled' (1956) depicting archetypes of priests or Catholic saints. Also featured here are Amrita Sher-Gil's 'Head of a Girl' (1937), B. Prabha's 'Waiting', Jamini Roy's untitled portrait of Lord Krishna holding a parrot and Ram Kumar's 'Women' (1953). Elsewhere in the city, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) has a retrospective show devoted to India's leading modernist painter, M.F. Husain.

A recurring element of the biennale is the use of



textiles. Amongst these is Monika Correa's 'No Moon Tonight' (1974), a plain vertical weave broken by meandering patterns that hint at an abstraction drawn from nature. Textiles also make an appearance in Vidha Saumya's works, which are a part of 'The Pleasures We Choose', a multifaceted collaboration presented by the Pavilion of Finland. Meanwhile, Eva Kot'átková's project at the Czech and Slovak Republic Pavilion was made in collaboration with (amongst others) multi-disciplinary artist Himali Singh Soin.

Indian artists are also well-represented in a number of shows timed to coincide with the biennale, such as Mumbai-born textile artist Areez Katki, whose work is at the 'Personal Structures' event, and Singaporean Indian Priyageetha Dia, whose deep-sea video on ancestral migration from India to the Malay Peninsula is part of 'The Spirits of Maritime Crossing' event. And finally, there's 'Cosmic Garden', an artistic collaboration between Madhvi and Manu Parekh and the Mumbai-based Chanakya School of Craft. Through a series of paintings, embroideries and sculptures, the artists explore Indian myths and Vedic philosophy while highlighting India's rich cultural traditions and crafts. The Venice Biennale is on till November 24. ■

—Prachi Joshi

GREEN WONDER

Sculptor **Ranjani Shettar's** works at The Barbican Conservatory in London take inspiration from the natural world

London's tropical oasis, The Barbican Conservatory, spread over 23,000 square feet, is currently filled with delicate, handcrafted sculptures by Ranjani Shettar. Titled 'Cloud songs on the horizon', it's the artist's first major institutional show in Europe, featuring five large-scale suspended sculptures, drawing inspiration from the complexity of nature. The show, commissioned in partnership with the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA), closes on July 28.

Shettar says, "The exhibition has gone through different seasons. The Barbican Conservatory isn't an outdoor space but resembles one because of the glass roof. The light changes, so does the weather and also people's moods, but the artwork remains the same." When the sculptor first visited the Conservatory in December 2022, she felt a "deep connection" with the surroundings that have 1,500

plant species. Less than a year later, she was ready to show her creations that blend industrial and natural materials.

Each of Shettar's sculptures are an extension of what she does in her studio in Karnataka's rural Malnad. Passionate about nature and ecology, she goes a step ahead in using natural materials, including wood, stainless steel, muslin, lacquer and techniques that are rooted in traditional craft. "A garden is natural, but sometimes it's not, because we cultivate it selectively. I had to take a creative approach to the visual depiction of my pieces, making sure they stand out without getting competitive with what's around," she says.

Shettar admits every creation had its challenges. Laying down certain ground rules, she says, "Colour is something that has to really work. Besides that, lighting is important and serves as an active element."

With the show having garnered appreciation in the UK, are there plans to bring it to India? "I don't know what the future holds. If there's an opportunity to showcase it in our country, I will certainly go ahead with it," says Shettar. ■

—Geetika Sachdev

Titled 'Cloud songs on the horizon', this is Shettar's first major institutional show in Europe



Photos courtesy: MAX COLSON, BARBICAN ART



Garden view (clockwise from below) Sculptor Ranjani Shettar and her works 'Moon dancers'; 'Cloud songs on the horizon' and 'In the thick of twilight'



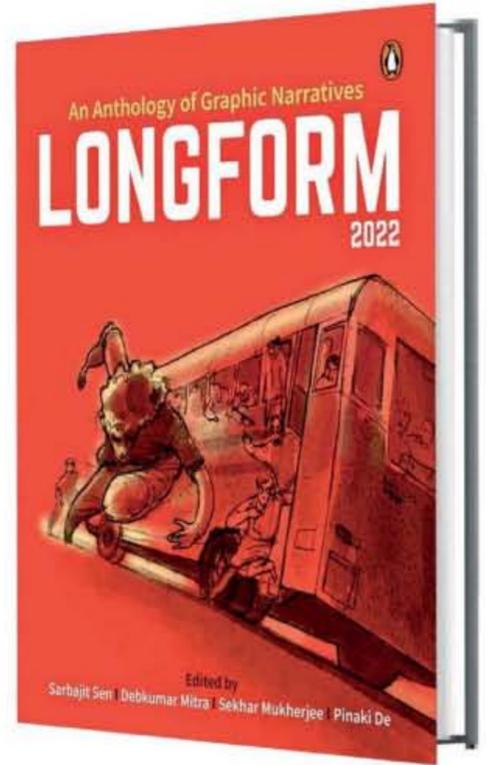
BOOKS

COMIC RELIEF

The **Comics Culture Collective** is trying to introduce Bengali comics to a larger audience

In JANUARY, DURING A WEEKLONG trip to Kolkata, I was pleasantly surprised to see the name of the park right opposite my hotel—Narayan Debnath Park, after the eponymous comics writer and artist. The late Debnath (1925-2022) was the creator of super-popular Bengali comic strips such as *Bantul the Great* and *Nonte Phonte*. Kolkata is arguably the only Indian metropolis that can honour comics creators this way. Which is why it was little surprise to see the sheer range and historical significance of the exhibits at *Comics in Bengal*, a recent month-long exhibition organised by the Kolkata Centre for Creativity, in association with the Comics Culture Collective.

Founded during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, the Comics Culture Collective consists of bibliophiles Biswadeb Gangopadhyay and Debasis Gupta alongside graphic designer and illustrator Pinaki De, cartoonist Rituparno Basu and collector-researcher Swagata Dutta Burman. De, who besides his comics work has created dozens of book covers for Penguin and HarperCollins down the years, teaches at the Raja Peary Mohan College in Uttarpara and is also a part of the Longform Collective, which edited/produced the English-language comics anthologies *Longform* (2018, HarperCollins) and *Longform*



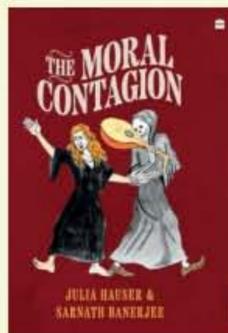
2022 (Penguin Random House India).

“Longform is more of a practitioner’s collective,” says De. “But I am also an academic and I wanted to be part of a group that catered to academic interests, the needs of scholars and researchers. During the pandemic, we first got together and started putting together old Bengali comics from the 1920s, ’30s and ’40s. I am coordinating our digitisation

BOOKS

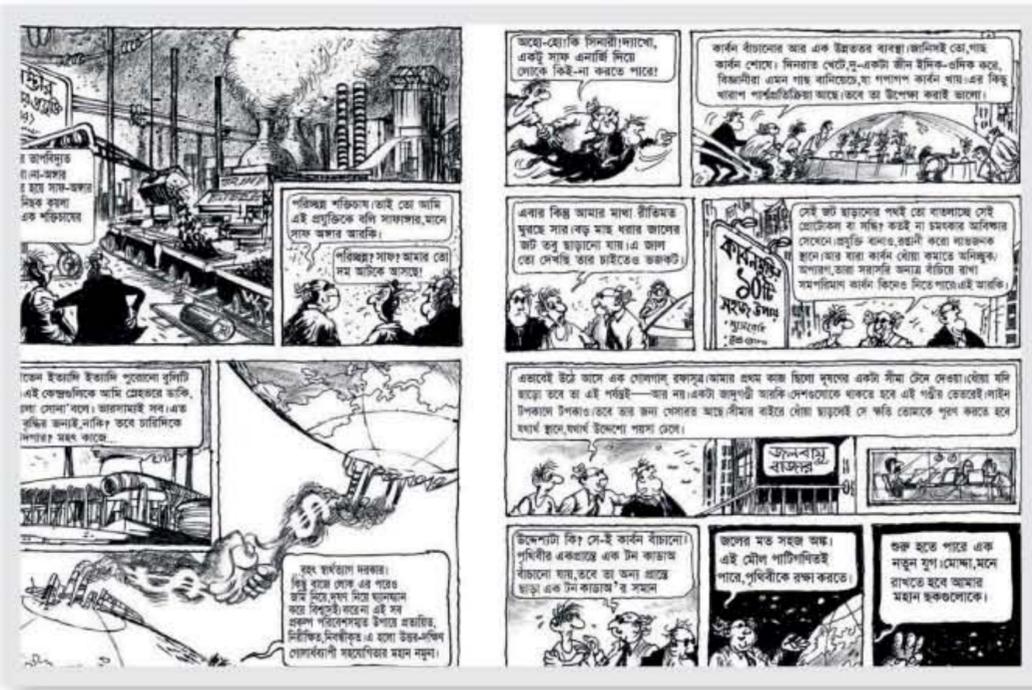
DRAWING DYSTOPIAS

Three recent **graphic novels** that grapple with ancient and modern ills plaguing us



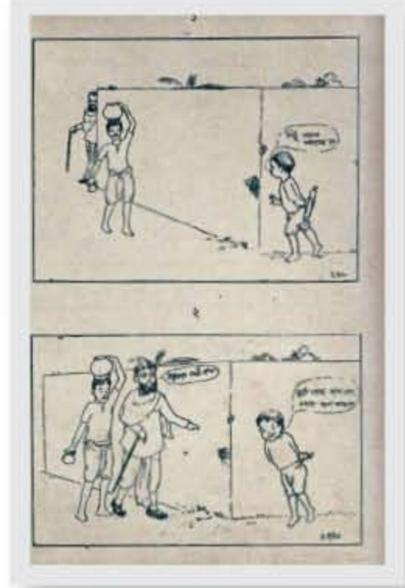
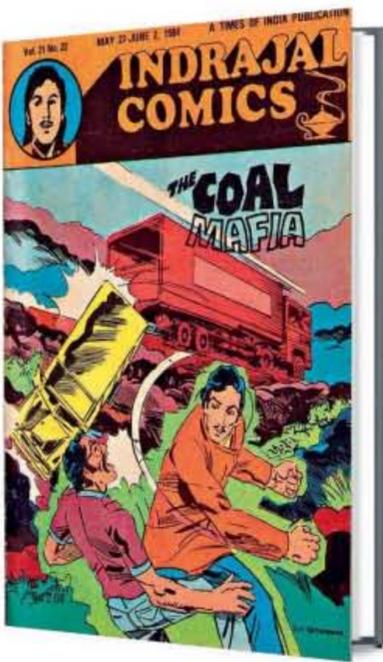
THE MORAL CONTAGION
by Julia Hauser and Sarnath Banerjee
HARPERCOLLINS
₹699;
140 pages

The Covid-19 pandemic may have top recall in our minds, but it is only the latest in an impressive line of plagues and pandemics that have oppressed humanity. This meticulously researched chronology of plagues by historian Julia Hauser is beautifully complemented by Sarnath Banerjee's illustrations in his distinctive style. “From sixth-century Constantinople and fourteenth century Europe to Islamic Spain, seventeenth-century London, eighteenth-century Aleppo, and Hong Kong, Bombay, San Francisco and South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the history of the plague is...the story of modern civilization” reads the jacket blurb. A morbidly fascinating book and a must-read—lest we forget.



COMIC EDUCATION

Clockwise from top: *Carbon Kotha*, 'Jamon kormo temni fol' by Sukhalata Rao, Indrajal Comics's *Bahadur*, Narayan Debnath and his cast of creations, *Longform 2022*



Part of the Collective's stash are Bengali translations of Hindi comics from the '70s and '80s, like Aabid Surti's *Bahadur*



efforts but, really, the credit goes to each member of the Collective who has devoted their time to this endeavour. And we have been overwhelmed with the response—the Kolkata Centre for Creativity saw record footfalls during our exhibition.”

According to De, there is an absence of reliable metadata around these comics, a situation the Comics Culture Collective is trying to amend. “When the metadata is incomplete or contradictory, it leads to errors by academics, which then become part of the record, which leads to further errors in the future,” he says.

The exhibits at *Comics in Bengal* covered the entire gamut of sequential art, including works from the 1920s onwards up until contemporary comics. In fact, some of the exhibits date back to the 1870s and can be considered precursors of modern-day comics—these are *patachitras*, terracotta panels and other examples of pre-modern sequential art. Sukhalata Rao (1886-1969), elder sister to Sukumar Ray and aunt to Satyajit, is considered one of the pioneers

of Bengali comics. Panels from her strip ‘*Jemon Kormo Temni Fol* (As you sow, so shall you reap)’ were a part of the exhibit.

Talking about these early days of Bengali comics, De says, “The political expression in these comics became more overt from the 1930s onwards; before that, in the '20s, there were mostly juvenile stories or things with a clearly-defined ‘moral.’”

An important part of the Collective's stash are Bengali translations of Hindi comics from the 1970s and '80s, like Aabid Surti's *Bahadur*, a popular vigilante series published by Indrajal Comics. Among contemporary works, Sarbajit Sen's *Carbon Kotha* (Carbon Chronicles), a nonfiction Bangla comic on climate change, has contemporary relevance. “We have planned a big, full-scale book collecting all these strips later this year,” says De. “We are currently in talks with some international publishers as well. Hopefully, soon we will be able to deliver an English-language version so that we can take Bengali comics to the world.”

—Aditya Mani Jha

DREAM MACHINE
AI and the Real World
by Appupen and Laurent Daudet
CONTEXT/WESTLAND
₹599;
160 pages

The creators of this comic—Appupen, who sprang on to the Indian comics scene in 2009 with *Moonward*, and Laurent Daudet, a Paris-based physics professor and co-founder of an AI start-up—address the most burning question of our times: Is AI a force for good, or does it threaten the future of humanity? The story centres around Hugo, founder of an AI start-up, who is about to sell his technology to a large digital conglomerate. But its true motives are suspect and Hugo is caught in a dilemma. It's somewhat didactic and the dialogue can be stilted at times, but that's a small price for a serious exploration of AI and its ramifications.

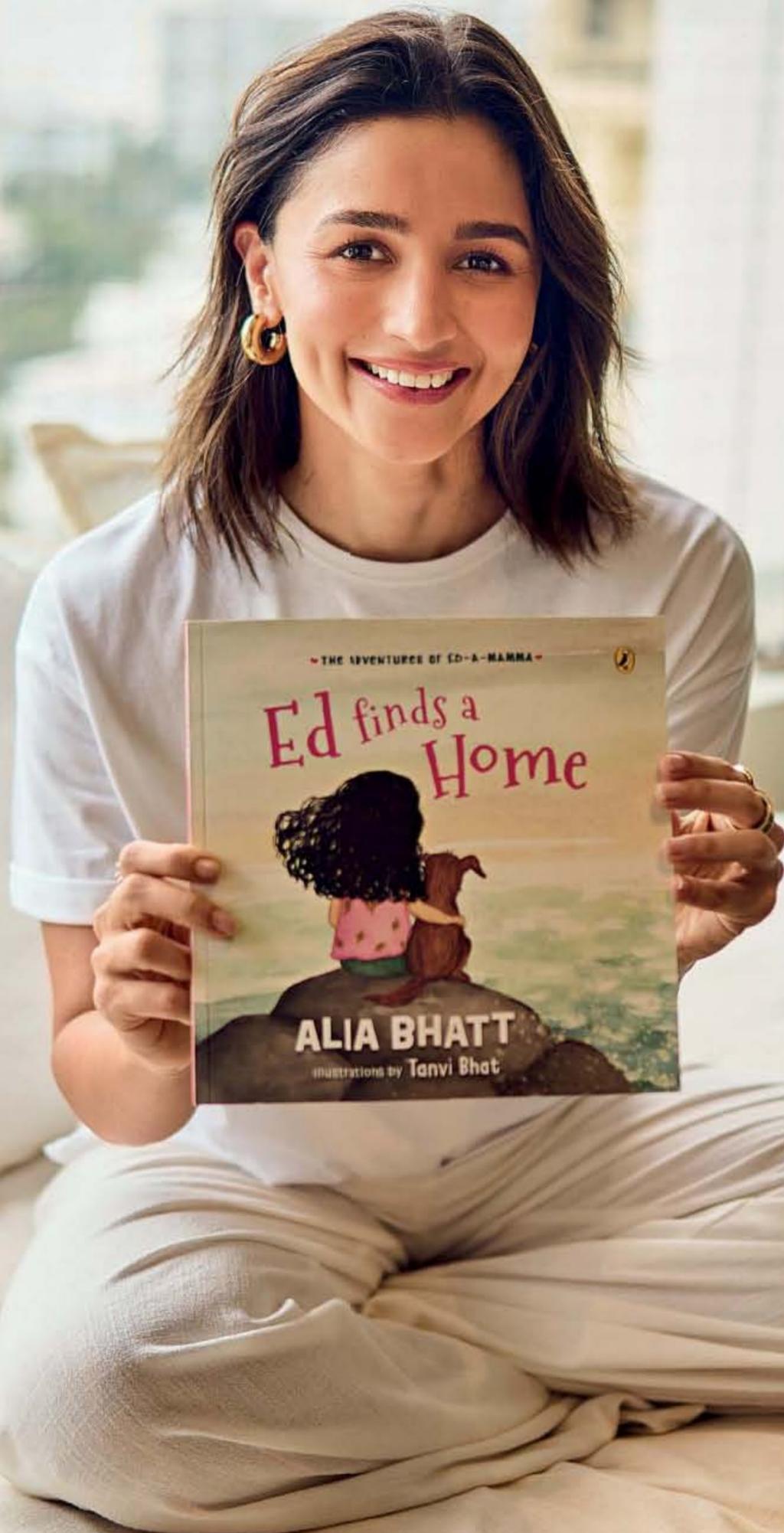
THE PIG FLIP
by Joshy Benedict
HARPERCOLLINS
₹499;
120 pages

Joshy Benedict's debut graphic novel—*The Pig Flip*—was acclaimed when it came out in Malayalam as *Pannimalath*. It's a graphic novel in the classic mould, taking sheer joy in the storytelling even as it grapples with its grim subject matter. The story revolves around spot flip, a card game a group of men meet on an abandoned island in rural Kerala at midnight to play. They gamble too and the protagonist Babycha becomes hopelessly addicted. He tries to wean himself off, but succumbs again. A moving tale of addiction and its social repercussions.

—Amit Dixit

Different Strokes

Alia Bhatt turns author with her first children's book, *Ed Finds a Home*



Q.
How did you find the time to write a book?

I've always considered myself a storyteller, and the idea for the books actually came before the brand [Ed-a-Mamma]. I've always wanted to write for children, creating a series of books that promote kindness towards one another, animals and nature. I brought in my co-storytellers, Vivek Kamath and Shabnam Minwalla, to help me put this idea on paper.

Q.
The main character is a little girl called Alia. So is it autobiographical?

When Shaheen and I were kids, we were always rescuing animals from the streets, much to my mom's dismay. Nevertheless, she always provided the best temporary home for them. This nurturing, kindness, and care are also evident in the family life of little Alia. Her journey isn't based on my life, but certain elements of my childhood have been incorporated into this story.

Q. **What is the single-most challenging thing about motherhood for you?**

Being an actor involves a lot of travel, long hours on set and work commitments, which sometimes conflict with my desire to be present for every milestone and moment in Raha's life. But I'm learning to prioritise and cherish every moment, both on screen and off.

Q.
What are you working on right now?

The second book! I have always envisioned Ed-a-Mamma as a universe of products for children, all rooted in storytelling. There's even an animation series in the works. On the movie front, I've got some exciting projects. *Jigra*, on which I'm also a co-producer, will be released on October 11. And I can't wait to get started on *Love & War*. It's truly an honour to work with and learn from Sanjay Sir again.

—with Amit Dixit