

**KARNATAKA'S BIG BATTLE**  
CM AND HIS DEPUTY GUN FOR EACH OTHER

**JOE BIDEN**  
WHEN THE PRESIDENT TRIPS

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# THE WEEK

JULY 14, 2024



## ROHIT SHARMA'S PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW**

**BCCI PRESIDENT  
ROGER BINNY**  
'HAVING TWO COACHES  
NOT A BAD IDEA'



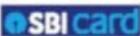
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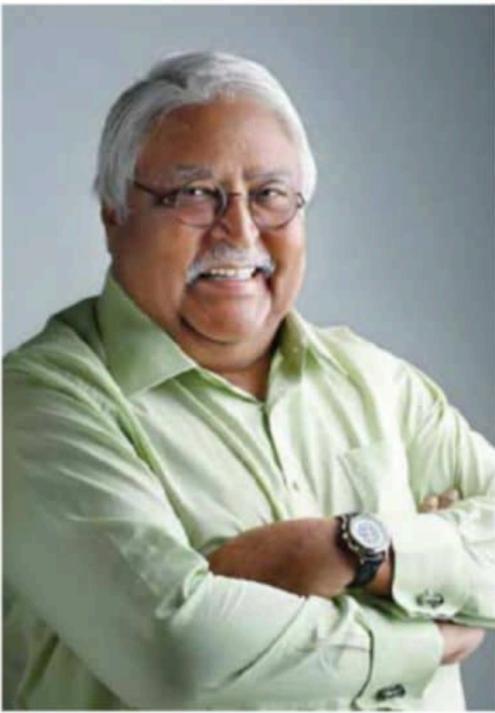
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**“HOW BEAUTIFUL IS** the rain!/ After the dust and heat,/ In the broad and fiery street, In the narrow lane,/ How beautiful is the rain!”

In the middle of last week, if Delhi residents had seen poet Longfellow, they would have given him a tongue lashing. I flew into Delhi with the monsoon winds and promptly got caught in the flood on Friday, June 28. And then, on Saturday, the storm clouds lifted, literally and figuratively. Team India ended the title drought in Bridgetown, Barbados, in a cliffhanger of a match.

How does victory taste? Like the sand on the pitch at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, perhaps. Don't look at me! Look at Rohit Sharma, who popped a pinch of the pitch into his mouth after winning the ICC T20 World Cup 2024. What happened on that pitch made him the third member of an exclusive club in India, the other two being captains Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Kapil Dev. What Rohit did to celebrate is uncommon, but it reflects the sea of emotions evoked by the game. And that is why the main article of this cover story is on Rohit, by veteran sportswriter Sharda Ugra.

Speaking of emotions, what a soulful tweet that was from journalist Deepal Trivedi, who was the first one to hold baby Jasprit Bumrah after he was born, as she was his mother Daljit's friend and their neighbour. She brought out so well the pathos and the triumph in Bumrah's journey, opening our eyes to his grit and resolve.

“My friend's husband passed away soon,” Trivedi wrote. “That whole month, I handled the kids. Read to them. The boy was never interested and started playing with his cheap stupid plastic ball. I also sometimes ate their biscuits because I was starving while babysitting. We starved, we struggled, we cried, we fought. But the

boy's struggles were worst. We could hardly afford him a packet of Amul Dairy or any milk. We were all busy struggling to meet ends as he grew up. His mother worked at least 18 hours a day.” And in our pages, Chief Subeditor Anirudh Madhavan bears witness to the extraordinary campaign of the Player of the T20 World Cup 2024.

And how can we forget the man who brought out his best when it mattered the most. Virat Kohli had a rather subdued tournament but he was up to the task in the final against the South Africans. Subeditor Bechu S. analyses how Kohli did a Kohli to help his team lift the trophy. We also have cricketer Shreevats Goswami, who has known Kohli since his Under-17 days, explaining what makes the man special.

You also get a glimpse of the future of Indian cricket in an exclusive interview with BCCI president Roger Binny by Chief Associate Editor & Director Riyad Mathew. My gratitude to Roger for finding time to talk to us from Barbados.

My wife Bina and I have sweet memories about Barbados, thanks to the cricketing colossus from Bridgetown. We had dinner with Sir Garfield Sobers when we were there for a Commonwealth Press Union event. He was humility personified during the dinner and the drive back; he shrugged off our praise when we drew his attention to the Garfield Sobers Roundabout when we drove past it.

This issue is not all cricket, though. You would be moved by Photo Editor Bhanu Prakash Chandra's article in the Untold Stories section. Sathya Shankar from Bellare in Dakshina Kannada district started his professional life as an autorickshaw driver. Today, his company, SG Group, has an annual turnover of ₹800 crore. He provides a wide range of products and services from automobile financing to Bindu Fizz Jeera Masala beverage.

Coming back to the World Cup coverage and the emotions involved, I was told that Kohli's daughter, Vamika, saw all the players crying on television and asked her mother, Anushka Sharma, whether there was someone to give them a hug. Sometimes, from the mouths of babies God summons truth. Just to remind us that, in a dark hour, a hug is far more precious than a World Cup. And that we should hold our 'huggers' close and value them. For that, thank you, Vamika. And, thank you, Rohit and Team India, for the Cup.

Philip Mathew,

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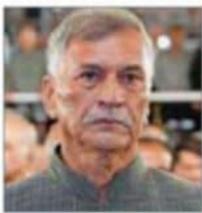
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COVER STORY

## LORD OF BARBADOS

In almost 50 years across 22 multi-format limited-over World Cups, Rohit Gurunath Sharma is only the third Indian captain, after Kapil Dev and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, to lift a trophy. Winning the T20 World Cup is Rohit's greatest triumph—of his game and personality and flowing from them, his leadership. It is the culmination of a career where promise and disappointment have walked alongside brilliance and struggle, writes journalist and author **Sharda Ugra**



PLUS

In an exclusive interview, BCCI president **Roger Binny** looks forward and talks about India's next head coach

Captain, coach and selectors are power centres that can make or mar the destiny of a team or players, so them being in sync is a huge advantage, writes THE WEEK's sports consultant **Ayaz Memon**

**Jasprit Bumrah** is operating at a level we have rarely seen in cricket before

As **Virat Kohli** bid adieu to T20 Internationals, a look at what makes him King Kohli

Kohli's flamboyance made him the star: **Shreevats Goswami**, who played with Kohli in the U-19 Cricket World Cup in 2008

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Karnataka Congress is a divided house, with **Siddaramaiah** and **D.K. Shivakumar** trying to get the better of each other



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There is a growing sense that the BJP does not speak for all Hindus, that many are deeply uncomfortable with its politics of hate.... **This is the trending sentiment Rahul Gandhi has latched on to.**

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SALIL BERA

**Kolkata is always home. This is where I will always come back.**  
—**Anasuya Sengupta**, best actress, Cannes Film Festival

## FOOD 66

Around 50 refugee chefs from **Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh** showcase their country's cuisine at a food festival in Chennai

COVER ILLUSTRATION **BINESH SREEDHARAN**

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# Can children with Scoliosis live a normal life?

Everyone wants to live their best and a healthy life. When we think of a healthy spine, the first word that likely comes to mind is 'straight', 'Don't hunch', 'straighten your back', and 'stand up tall' are just some of the common pieces of advice you might have heard from well-meaning family members as you were growing up.

It might therefore sound intuitive that those with an abnormal curvature of the spine – a condition known as scoliosis cannot have healthy, normal and active lives they would want to live.

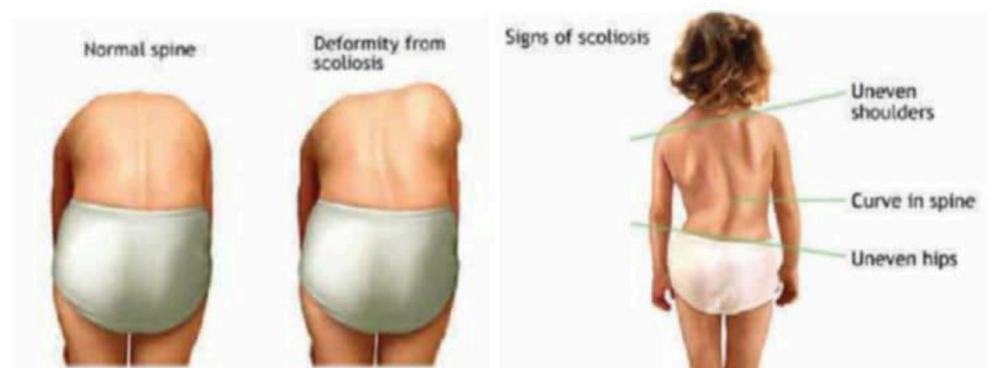
Scoliosis is a condition that affects the spine's shape, causing it to twist and bend sideways. It affects approximately 2-3% of teenagers and more prevalent in girls. In majority of cases the cause is not known, but think genes and hormones play a role. You are more likely to have scoliosis if your parent or sibling has it.

Scoliosis is generally a painless condition and not always noticeable. As the curve progresses, the child may lean to one side or have uneven shoulders or hips or rib cage and one side might stick out prominently.

Although mild scoliosis does not typically cause problems, but it affects children's self confidence and self image. In more severe cases, it can impact lung and heart function and disabling pain can affect quality of life. Mild forms may only require regular check-ups from a specialist. Some children and teens may need to wear a brace to keep the curve from getting worse. Physical therapy can help strengthen muscles. In some severe cases, surgery may be needed.

Early diagnosis is important and an appropriate management plan through a specialist can help prevent bigger spinal curves from forming and avoid more complex spine surgeries.

While scoliosis can be a debilitating condition that affects the child's quality of life, it is possible to live a normal lifestyle with scoliosis through guidance of an experienced specialist. Regular exercises, healthy eating habits, compliance to brace therapy and latest less invasive non-fusion surgical techniques all help children to live a full life they want.



## Dr V Muralidharan

MRCs, MCh (Ortho), FRCS, Fellow Spine Surg.  
Senior Consultant Spine Surgeon,  
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first-time MPs in the Lok Sabha. They will bring more development to the regions they represent. Let the victory of these young MPs inspire young people across the country. Young MPs don't have any executive powers if they are not ministers.

I request these young MPs not to fizzle out, and continue to remain politicians for life.

**Radha Pandey,**  
On email.

### Great talent

Kartik Aaryan is a great talent and he has a long way to go ('Chocolate boy levels up', June 30). Aaryan, who understands the nuances of acting, has come up the hard way without any backing. So, he is bound to do well. Aaryan's career trajectory is like Akshay Kumar's.

Aaryan's role in *Chandu Champion* will be talked about.

**Suresh Gowda,**  
On email.

### Selective criticism

Anuja Chauhan has strongly supported Arundhati Roy ('Schizomation', June 30). Yes, it is good to raise your voice against injustice. But, then, that should not be selective.

Only very few people see things in proper perspective without any ideological inclination. We never saw Roy raising her voice on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Roy questions the actions of our security forces, which

is not right. She does not believe in Kashmir being an integral part of India. Is it truth according to one's own volition? Truth never distinguishes between ideologies—left, right or centre.

**Jitendranath Guru,**  
On email.

It has become fashionable for some to support Roy in whatever she does. The government of the day has no problem with Roy. Every Indian respects Roy for all that she has achieved in life. And Roy can continue to criticise the government. But she should stop saying that Kashmir is not an integral part of India. It cannot be tolerated.

**Govind Suryanath,**  
On email.

### Popularise cricket in the US

Shashi Tharoor is a much-respected person ('Last Word', June 30). He has contacts across the world and was a senior official at the United Nations. He served as a peacekeeper and administrator at the highest levels and was the first Indian to have the maximum followers on social media. Tharoor has said that he has no plans to contest elections in 2029. So, may I request him to go back to the US, and popularise cricket there with his wisdom and eloquence.

**Nandakishore G.,**  
On email.

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## Mumbo jumbo in the Maldives

Political folklorists say, there's a charmed circle around every powerful person. Political gossipers would tell you stories about what many do to get into that circle, or to get others out. Several of our Panchatantra tales are about tricks played by people to get into the king's favour, or how the jealous would poison the king's ears against others.

Fathimath Shamnaz Ali's is one such. She had been politically close to Mohamed Muizzu when he was mayor of Male, and she a town council member. She followed Muizzu when he rode to power in the Maldives last year, and moved into the presidential mansion Muliaage.

Blame it on the flawed *vaastu* of Muliaage, Muizzu soon despatched her to the environment ministry. Pretty vital, we would think, considering that climate change is a lifeline matter for the Maldives as is the actual line of control for us Indians. Many of the isles will sink if the globe warms by a degree or two, the polar ice melts, and the sea rises.

But Shamnaz Ali thought she was being sent out to count the waves, and was desperate to get back into Muizzu's charmed circle. She engaged a sorcerer to bewitch him. Made of sterner stuff, Muizzu didn't fall for the spell; he got her arrested along with her sorcerer and his apprentices.

Sorcery is practised widely as *fanditha* (white and benign magic) and *sihuru* (black and invoking demons) in the Maldives. At times 'white' wizards are hired to 'dispel' the spells cast by the black. Politicians are known to hire, on the sly, persons who practise both. Sorcerers had a field day during the 2013 presidential poll, as *jyotishis* have during our elections, with one of the contestants, Abdulla Yameen, suspected to have been a firm believer in sorcery. He kept a 'charm circle' around him, and his presidential order to up-

root trees in a town square was believed to have been on the suspicion that the rival party had cast a spell on them to make him ill.

Yameen was even caught in a video discussing with a Lankan national Asela Wickramasinghe on how to cast a spell on his rival Mohammed Nasheed so as to make him go "temporarily crazy" or take his life. In the end, he decides against murder, saying, "but Asela, human life is so precious, so precious." The video, that came out in 2016 after Asela complained that he had not been paid for his services, has since been banned in the Maldives.

Yameen may have gone to jail on other charges, but sorcerers are still haunting the charmed woods on the

islands, blessing and cursing leaders and lesser folk. Four men, including two high-ranking civil servants, were arrested on Kulhudhuffushi isle for 'working magic' for the opposition in last year's presidential polls. Two months ago, a 60-year-old sorcerer was arrested from Sh. Funadhoo for having cast a black spell on the island's trees against the local MP-elect Mohamed Mamdhoo.

Coconuts, a favourite voodoo object, with spells written on them, were found near polling stations, purportedly to influence

swing voters. A suspect coconut was recently 'detained' on Guraidhoo island, until a 'white' magician arrived and judged it harmless. Police caught a man couriering five cursed coconuts after his wife found them hidden under the bed and raised a hue and cry.

The penal code does not have a specific provision against sorcery. A 1978 law allows *fanditha* under health ministry licence, but both *fanditha* and *sihuru* are considered taboo and un-Islamic. In December, 2015, the Islamic ministry issued a warning against black magic. That's still a cry in the enchanted wilderness.

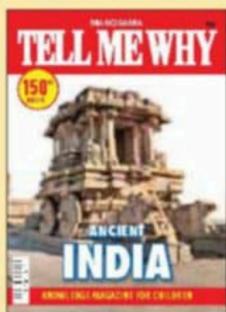




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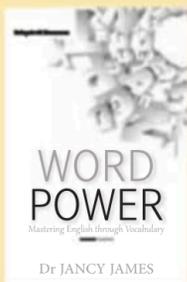
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THE BIG PICTURE

## **RIGHT AHEAD**

Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Rally party after casting her vote in the first round of the French parliamentary elections. Her party won a record number of votes, finishing on top. If the National Rally wins a majority in the final round on July 7, President Emmanuel Macron will have to appoint a prime minister from the party. The president's party finished third in the polls.

PHOTO BY AP

**POINT BLANK**



The BJP's hindutva is a very north Indian, upper caste, vegetarian hindutva. And that does not gel well with the people of Tamil Nadu. You have to understand that Tamils are the most orthodox Hindus in India. Per square kilometre, we have more temples than any other state in India. We break more coconuts than anybody else.

**Karti Chidambaram,**  
Congress leader

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Well done, Jay Shah. Your name is Jay Nostradamus Shah.

**Ravi Shastri,**  
former cricketer, on the BCCI secretary's prediction last year that India, under Rohit Sharma, would win the 2024 T20 World Cup

This [US] election is still a choice between someone who has fought for ordinary folks his entire life [Joe Biden] and someone who only cares about himself [Donald Trump]. Between someone who tells the truth—who knows right from wrong and will give it to the American people straight—and someone who lies through his teeth....

**Barack Obama,**  
former US president

Narendra Modi wants to dislodge the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister [Yogi Adityanath]. It is an open secret. The RSS, as per my understanding, won't let Modi have his way with Adityanath. In fact, the RSS will back Adityanath in its larger operations to do away with Modi.

**Lalu Prasad,**  
RJD supremo

I have a lot of experience on my side. I just need to be smarter, and I hope I get another medal for the country.

**P.V. Sindhu,**  
badminton player, on Paris 2024

Exercise is not just a routine for me but a celebration of what my body can achieve. The real path to fitness requires discipline and dedication. The allure of an easy solution... is tempting but genuine fitness can't be brought. It must be earned through hard work and commitment.

**Mallika Sherawat,**  
actor



AFP

**WORD PLAY**

**Hypertourism** is when tourists overcrowd renowned cities and towns during a particular time, thereby making lives difficult for the residents.

**MILESTONES**



PTI

**FASTEST DOUBLE CENTURY**

Indian cricketer Shafali Verma, 20, scored the fastest double century in women's Tests—she reached 200 in 194 balls against South Africa in Chennai. Verma is now the second Indian woman to score a double-century in the longest format of the game, after Mithali Raj.



**UPI RECORD**

The average daily transactions under Unified Payments Interface (UPI), used for online settlements, touched a record of 46.3 crore in June. In May, it had touched 45.3 crore. The UPI numbers in May were the highest in terms of value and proportion since the UPI came into being in 2016.



PTI

**VICE CHIEF**

Lieutenant General N.S. Raja Subramani took charge as the Army's vice chief. He was earlier the in-charge of the Army's Central Command. Subramani, who is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy and the Indian Military Academy, was commissioned into the Garhwal Rifles in 1985.



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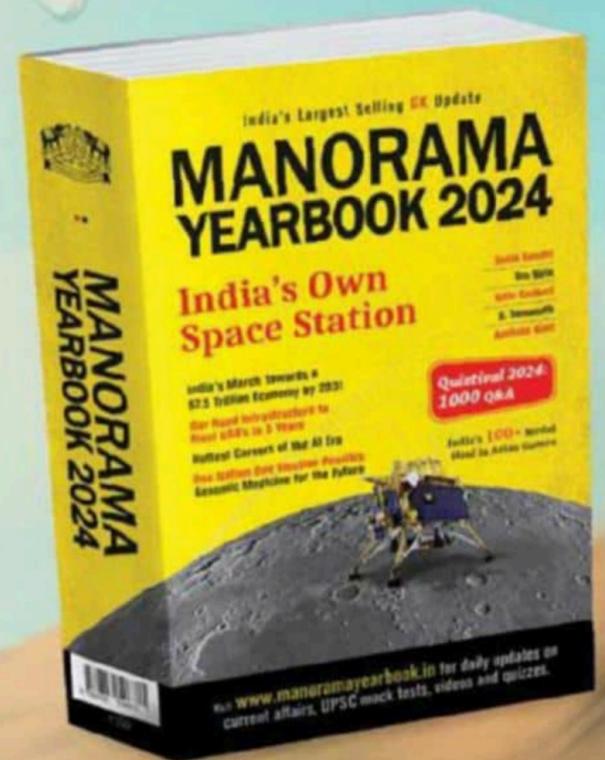
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# MANORAMA YEARBOOK 2024

## ALL PALS IN POLITICS

There are no forever friends or foes in politics. Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal follows this maxim to a T and is known to charm and strike friendships with political adversaries. When the Bharat Rashtra Samithi was in power in Telangana, he engaged in a friendly banter with the then information technology minister K.T. Rama Rao. Now, with the Congress in power in the state, the BJP leader has found a friend in Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy. He was recently invited to Reddy's residence in Hyderabad. The photo-op did raise eyebrows, but state Congress leaders were quick to clarify that it was all for the good of 'Centre-state relations.'



## BUMPY RIDE AHEAD

In less than a month, Bedi Ram, an MLA from BJP's ally, the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh, has gone from kicking roads to probably getting kicked out. This is the same lawmaker who had pounded a road in Ghazipur and chipped it off to show the poor quality of construction. Ram is now feeling the heat from all sides as his name has figured in the NEET paper leak case. Ram, who has been allegedly involved in other paper leak scandals, has offered his home and wealth if the allegations are proven true, but for now no one seems to be buying his story.

ILLUSTRATIONS JAIRAJ T.G.

## GELLING WITH GEN Z

Kerala has no shortage of motivational speakers and career gurus. Recently, at an event felicitating students who had scored well in their class 10 and 12 exams, Vadakara's new MP Shafi Parambil took on a life coach avatar. He exhorted students to chase their dreams with all their might, dropping references from Taylor Swift and BTS to Marvel's *The Avengers* and Basil Joseph's *Minnal Murali*. His speech passed the Gen Z's "vibe check". Youth Congress state president Rahul Mankootatthil later praised Parambil's speech, saying, "There is no better motivation out there!"



## RAI KA BAGH

### SPELL CHECK

Typos and spelling mistakes are no laughing matter. The Raika Dewasi community in Rajasthan would second that. The Raika Bagh railway station in Jodhpur was misspelt as 'Rai ka Bagh', which has hurt the community's sentiments. The forebears of the community had given land for the construction of the station and the Raikas have an emotional connect with the place. It has now become a political issue, with community representatives apprising Congress leader Sachin Pilot of the said error. Pilot has written to Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who hails from Jodhpur, stressing that the wrong spelling has changed the meaning of the name.

### NEW GOVERNMENT, NEW NORM

Modi 3.0 is steering clear of taking bureaucratic appointments to the last juncture. While there will be no suspense any more, there is surprise for sure. The appointment of Ravi Agarwal as chairman of Central Board of Direct Taxes, which came with an inbuilt extension order, surprised many a babu. The 1988 batch Indian Revenue Service officer was due to retire on September 30, but will now serve till June 30, 2025. His predecessor Nitin Gupta was given a last-minute extension of nine months when he was set to retire on September 30, last year.

# TWO OF A KIND

As Siddaramaiah and D.K. Shivakumar try to get the better of each other, Karnataka Congress is a divided house

BY PRATHIMA NANDAKUMAR

**T**he power tussle in Karnataka between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, who is also the president of the party in the state, seems to have reached a crescendo, with some ministers and party legislators openly demanding a change of guard in the government and the party.

The Siddaramaiah camp has revived its demand to appoint deputy chief ministers from other castes and a new state party chief citing the 'one man, one post' rule. The Shivakumar camp has called for the replacement of the chief minister, reminding the high command of the power sharing formula.

At the heart of the conflict is a 'secret pact' for power sharing mooted by the Congress high command in May 2023 to placate the top two contenders for the chief minister's post after the party wrested power from the BJP. After a thumping victory, 135 of 224 seats, a bitter battle broke out between the two leaders, forcing the party leadership to arrive at the

peace formula to end the stalemate. Accordingly, Siddaramaiah, a mass leader and Kuruba leader who holds sway over the AHINDA (minorities, dalits and backward classes) voters, became chief minister and Shivakumar, a Vokkaliga strongman, was appointed deputy chief minister. Shivakumar was also allowed to retain the state party chief's post.

The demand for multiple deputy chief ministers has been on since then, and it gained momentum prior to the Lok Sabha polls. Cooperation Minister K.N. Rajanna urged the party leadership to appoint one deputy chief minister each from Lingayats, dalits and the minorities. But the party leadership put the foot down and the factions were forced to put up a united front. After the Lok Sabha polls, however, the demand resurfaced. Shivakumar loyalists see this move as an effort to diminish his stature in the party. The strategy, they say, is to dissuade him from staking the claim to the top post by weakening his position in the party.

Rajanna recently said that appointing caste-wise deputy chief



## HOLDING FORT

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar during the birth anniversary celebration of Kempegowda in Bengaluru



## THE BATTLE HAS NOW SPREAD INTO OTHER REALMS WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS TAKING SIDES AND PITCHING FOR THEIR COMMUNITY LEADERS.

ministers would “give representation” to prominent communities and help the party gain their confidence. “The decision is left to the party’s central leadership,” he said. Home Minister G. Parameshwara, PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi and Minority Welfare Minister B.Z. Zameer Ahmed Khan have echoed him. Despite Shivakumar warning the leaders of disciplinary action, they have not stopped clamouring for deputy chief ministers.

Shivakumar, however, is no pushover. He earned the deputy chief minister’s post after leading the party to a thumping victory, say his supporters. “He has built the party from scratch,” said legislator Shivaganga Basavaraj. “He is responsible for the party coming to power in the state and winning nine seats to the Lok Sabha. The party is free to appoint as many deputy chief ministers as demanded once Shivakumar has been made the chief minister.”

The battle has now spread into other realms with religious leaders taking sides and pitching for their community leaders. Sri Chandrashekhara Natha Swamiji of Vishwa Vokkaliga Mahasamsthana Mutt, a prominent Vokkaliga seer, publicly urged Siddaramaiah to step down while sharing the dais with the chief minister and the deputy chief minister at the Kempegowda birth anniversary celebrations. “Everyone has enjoyed power and it is now time for D.K. Shivakumar to become the chief minister,” he said. “I urge Siddaramaiah to relinquish his post for Shivakumar.”

The seer’s statement evoked mixed reaction. “Will the pontiff give up his position for me?” asked Rajanna.

Seers veering to politics is nothing new in Karnataka. As mentioned by G.T. Devegowda, a legislator of the Janata Dal (Sec-



**SHIVAKUMAR IS HANDLING TWO BIG PORTFOLIOS—WATER RESOURCES AND BENGALURU DEVELOPMENT—AND IS WORKING ON BUILDING BRAND BENGALURU. THAT WOULD LEAVE HIM WITH LITTLE TIME TO FOCUS ON THE PARTY AFFAIRS.**

—G. Parameshwara  
Home minister

ular), a Kuruba seer had demanded that Siddaramaiah be made chief minister in 2019, when H.D. Kumaraswamy was heading the JD(S)-Congress coalition government. Also, Lingayat seers had rallied behind BJP veteran B.S. Yediyurappa when the party had decided to replace him as chief minister.

Balehonnur Rambhapuri Mutts' Veera Someshwara Shivacharya Swami and Srisaila Jagadguru Channa Siddarama Panditaradhya Swami, both Lingayat seers, have demanded a Lingayat chief minister or deputy chief minister in the event of a change in leadership.

AHINDA Karnataka president Prabhulinga Doddamani has threatened to stage a statewide protest if Siddaramaiah was forced out. "The Congress will not survive if

Siddaramaiah is removed. The party should not forget that it has won 135 seats because of the overwhelming support of the backward classes," he said.

R. Ashok, leader of the opposition in the assembly, said Siddaramaiah was exploiting the caste divisions to keep political control. Recalling the defeat of Parameshwara in Koratagere assembly constituency in 2013, Ashok said, "Like Parameshwara, [Shivakumar's brother] D.K. Suresh was defeated in Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency by Siddaramaiah to keep Shivakumar under check. The demand for three deputy chief ministers is just to counter Shivakumar."

Siddaramaiah is the only chief minister after S.M. Krishna (1999-



2004) to serve a full term in the state. During his first stint (2013-2018), he had resisted having a deputy to avoid a parallel power centre. In fact, his elevation to the post of the chief minister within seven years of his joining the Congress had not gone down well with many "original" Congressmen, especially Parameshwara, who was said to be the CM-in-waiting.

The Congress leaders in the state are a divided lot—both over replacing Siddaramaiah as chief minister and Shivakumar as party chief. While Siddaramaiah enjoys the support of a large number of legislators, Shivakumar's efforts to strengthen and energise the party have earned him the admiration of both party cadres and the high command.

The Congress had set a target of winning 20 seats in the state in the Lok Sabha elections, but it could win only nine. It is being used against



## SUCKER PUNCH

D.K. Suresh, Shivakumar's brother, lost from Bengaluru North in the Lok Sabha polls

Shivakumar by the rival faction, as the party fared poorly in the Vokkaliga heartland of the Old Mysore region. A bigger embarrassment was Suresh's defeat against NDA candidate Dr C.N. Manjunath in Bengaluru Rural, his home turf.

The alliance between the JD(S) and the BJP was clearly a spoiler for the Congress and Shivakumar has announced that a fact-finding committee would visit all districts to investigate the reasons for the setback. That, however, offers no respite for him from the humiliation of the party's poor show in his stronghold.

Shivakumar had managed to woo the Vokkaligas before the assembly elections, asking them to help a fellow Vokkaliga to occupy the chief minister's seat. However, the community seems to have shifted its loyalty back to the JD(S) in the Lok Sabha polls. The Congress won only two of 14 seats in south Karna-

taka. With Kumaraswamy emerging stronger after winning the Mandya Lok Sabha seat and bagging a cabinet berth in the Narendra Modi government, Shivakumar's prospects of emerging as the tallest Vokkaliga leader after former prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda have dimmed.

Shivakumar is now trying to reclaim his power by winning Chanapatna, the seat vacated by Kumaraswamy, in the bypolls. This would help him take control of the Ramanagara district in the Vokkaliga belt. He has been visiting the constituency and holding closed door meetings with Vokkaliga leaders and attending public events to announce development projects.

Amid the furore, both Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar rushed to Delhi and held separate meetings with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and apprised him of the situation. The high command, too,

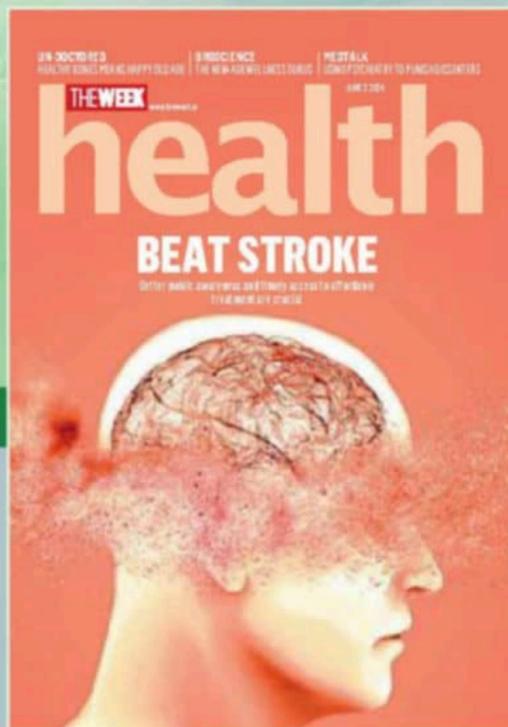
seems divided and is buying time to take a decision.

Party sources said Kharge, who is from Karnataka, is in favour of Shivakumar continuing as the party chief, as the party is bracing for the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike elections and taluk and zilla panchayat polls. However, the Siddaramaiah camp is trying to convince the leadership to appoint an AHINDA leader as party chief, citing the communities' unwavering support to the party in the elections. "We need a full-time party chief as there is a need to strengthen the party," said Parameshwara. "Shivakumar is handling two big portfolios—water resources and Bengaluru development—and is working on building Brand Bengaluru. That would leave him with little time to focus on the party affairs."

The Congress is likely to choose a Veerashaiva-Lingayat leader from north Karnataka if it wants to replace Shivakumar, as it would help it challenge the BJP's firm hold over the biggest community in the state. B.Y. Vijayendra, a Lingayat, heads the BJP's state unit.

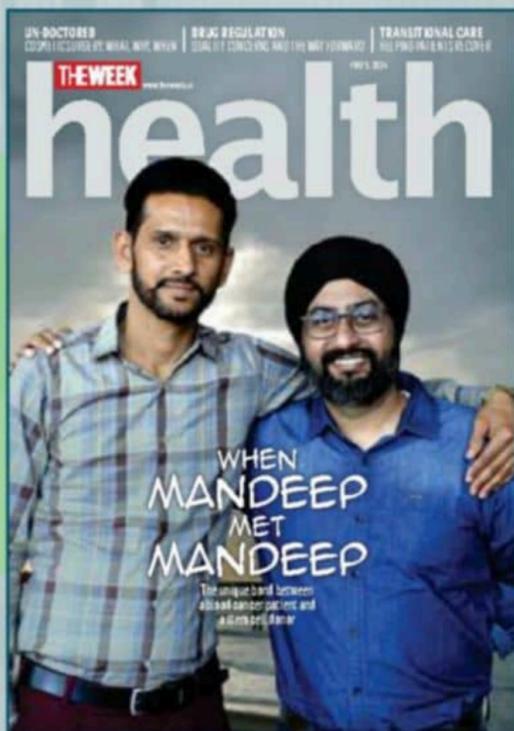
Shivakumar, however, is in no mood to take everything lying down. A day after confidential meetings with Kharge and Rahul Gandhi in Delhi, he convened a meeting of the party's office bearers in Bengaluru and made a strong statement. "How was the party before I took over as the party chief and how is it now? Sonia Gandhi gave me the reins of the party when the party was going through a crisis," he said. "Today, the party is strong and it is my responsibility to strengthen it further. I work hard for the party and no one can remove me. The party high command is watching everything." **1**

# When you are touched by our stories, so are our writers



**NIRMAL JOVIAL**

**W**hile working on the cover story on stroke care, I realised that inequality in access to health care is one of the most overlooked forms of inequality. Many lives, especially in rural areas, are lost to stroke simply because we lack a robust system capable of delivering the right care within the right time. This concern is amplified by the increasing number of young stroke patients. So much human potential is wasted owing to a condition whose ill-effects can be minimised if treated promptly!



*It was overwhelming to encapsulate the emotional journey of the two Mandeeps, unconnected by blood but connected by destiny. Cancer made its presence in the lives of both, although in different ways, and changed the course of their lives. How one Mandeep saved the other from the brink of death became my most loved story to work on. And, it gave me lessons in life I will carry with me forever.*



**POOJA BIRAIJA JAISWAL**



**PUJA AWASTHI**



*The initial idea behind our cover story on air pollution was to examine if its impacts went beyond the lungs. That 'if' was not just a resounding but an astounding 'yes'. Though recorded evidence is not aplenty, correlations of air pollution's ill effects on the entire human body are too alarming to ignore. From our mental health to our skin, every bit of the body bears the brunt of the air we breathe, besides a reduction in the quality and years of life. Through its impact on fertility and the foetus, this is a generational worry. The time to tackle it was yesterday, for tomorrow might be too late.*

# Broom and bust

Beset by legal woes, political setbacks and a leadership vacuum, the AAP faces a credibility crisis

BY MOHIT SHARMA

**W**hen newcomer Arvind Kejriwal defeated three-time chief minister Sheila Dikshit in her constituency of New Delhi in 2013, jubilant supporters took to the streets, hailing the moment when a common man got an opportunity to master electoral politics. Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party soon became the preeminent force in Delhi politics. In less than a decade, it extended its sway to one more state by winning the Punjab assembly elections in 2022, becoming the only regional party to be in power in two states. Growing footprint and ambitions in states like Goa, Assam, Haryana and Gujarat further catapulted the AAP into the non-BJP, non-Congress political space and raised the profile of its talismanic leader.

However, the arrest of Kejriwal by the CBI could not have come at a worse time for the party. After recording a below average performance in the Lok Sabha polls, the AAP was banking on the release of their leader from jail in the money laundering case of the Enforcement Directorate to go back to the drawing board. Despite dominating the Delhi assembly for a decade, the party failed to open its account in the capital, losing all seven Parliament seats to the BJP, third time in a row. The massive loss has dented the credibility of the AAP as a national player and of Kejriwal as a national leader.

The Punjab story, too, did not go as expected, as the AAP could win only three seats against the Congress's seven. While the party's vote share increased to 26 per cent, it had 42 per cent vote share and 92 seats in the 2022 assembly polls, which allowed it to form the government. The AAP's candidates in Assam, Haryana and Gujarat failed to open their account.

"With Kejriwal in jail and the AAP's ordinary performance in the Lok Sabha elections, these are very difficult times for the party and it may adversely impact its expansion plans," said Sanjay Kumar, professor and co-director of Lokniti at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. "The situation has posed a tough political challenge for the AAP, which faces assembly elections in Delhi next year."

Kejriwal has been on a legal roller coaster since June 21 when a Delhi court granted him bail in the ED case, only to be put on hold by the Delhi High Court a day later. Just as he was looking to secure bail from the Supreme Court, the CBI arrested him in the same case on June 26. It has opened a new battlefield for the AAP as Kejriwal faces corruption charges under the Prevention of Corruption Act. In 2022, when the CBI first registered a case under the Act in the liquor policy scam, it did not name Kejriwal as an accused. But the net has been widened with the CBI probing charges of corruption and bribe-taking by public servants, while the





**The CBI arrested Kejriwal on June 26. It has opened a new battlefield for the AAP as Kejriwal faces corruption charges under the Prevention of Corruption Act.**

**IN THE DOCK**  
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal being produced at a Delhi court by the CBI

ED is separately investigating the alleged money trail in the case.

The CBI is examining the role of the Delhi Group of Ministers (GoM), consisting of senior AAP leaders including former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, in tweaking the policy to allegedly benefit the “south liquor lobby”, referring to a group of influential persons from south India. The role of the chief minister’s office is also under a cloud as CBI sleuths are examining evidence against Kejriwal’s close aide Vijay Nair who was allegedly given the responsibility to coordinate the meetings with the “south group”. The CBI said the report prepared by the aides became the policy in which profit margins were increased from six per cent to 12 per cent.

Following allegations of irregularities, the new liquor policy was scrapped on August 1, 2022. The ED in its charge-

sheet named Kejriwal and the AAP as accused and claimed that the chief minister was involved in formulating the policy and demanded kickbacks to the tune of ₹100 crore. The ED also accused Kejriwal of utilising

₹45 crore of laundered money in the party’s Goa election campaign in 2022.

“It is a double whammy,” said M.L. Sharma, former CBI special director. “The PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) comes into play after the registration of a predicate offence by the police or the CBI. This means an accused is liable to be arrested twice by the two agencies. What follows can be a rather complicated and time consuming legal battle as a chargesheet has to be filed in the predicate offence and the arrested person can remain in jail due to the



PTI

**UNENDING FIGHT**

AAP leader Atishi and party workers stage a protest against Kejriwal's arrest

stringent provisions for grant of bail under PMLA.”

The AAP blamed the BJP for its legal woes. “When there was every possibility of the chief minister getting bail, the BJP went into panic mode and got him arrested by the CBI in a fake case,” it posted on X. Kejriwal is likely to remain in jail till July 12.

The BJP functionaries, on the other hand, said that actions of the politicians would shape the electorate’s opinion. “The aspirations of the electorate have changed and their maturity level has gone up,” said Binay Kumar Singh, senior research fellow at the Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation and BJP spokesperson, Jharkhand. “Until now dynastic politics and caste factors were dominant. But now the memory of the electorate does not fade away and they take cognisance of what politicians do. The voters do not forget their involvement in corruption.”

The fresh cycle that has begun with the CBI case has not only put on hold

the possibility of immediate relief to the chief minister, but has also upset the AAP’s plans to work really hard to salvage its image and political future. The signs are worrying, and so are the statistics, conceded AAP leaders. The party’s alliance with the Congress failed to make an impact just as Kejriwal’s campaign for the elections failed to attract sympathy votes during the interim bail period granted by the Supreme Court. “When the election results were announced on June 4, there was gloom among party workers,” said an AAP leader. “After the energetic campaign by Kejriwal, we were hoping to win at least two seats in Delhi and more than three in Punjab. But the results have impacted the morale of the party workforce.”

The combined vote share of the AAP and the Congress was about 43 per cent, much less than the BJP’s 54 per cent. “Even hardcore AAP supporters now believe that their stance of projecting themselves as an anti-graft crusaders was false and that they are like any other petty and

corrupt politicians,” said Singh.

Making matters worse, the rift between the AAP and the Congress, which was latent during the polls, is out in open. The grand old party, which registered an impressive performance by winning 99 seats in the Lok Sabha polls, has started distancing itself from the AAP. “Had we not contested the elections with them, our seats would have increased. Because of the excise scam, the Congress suffered a loss in the Lok Sabha elections,” said Abhishek Dutt, national secretary of the Congress.

Delhi’s water woes, too, failed to break the ice between the two parties. When AAP’s crisis manager and minister Atishi went on a fast, Dutt said it was the minister’s job to provide full facilities to the public. “There is no water in Delhi and they are doing dharna,” he said. And when it poured in Delhi, the AAP faced more flak from the Congress. “We have been warning the government about the monsoons, but in times of crisis, the Delhi government runs away,” said Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav.

The AAP is facing an uphill battle as it grapples with various legal challenges. At the moment, the party’s focus is less on political issues and more on its legal woes. Delhi voters have, meanwhile, conveyed to the AAP that Kejriwal’s popularity will be judged on merit by the work being done outside courtrooms. The big question is when Kejriwal will get out of jail and get on the streets again.

“The AAP is now left with no street fighters. Their style of politics includes protests and dharnas, which are getting thinner by the day,” said Kumar.

Kejriwal’s refusal to resign from the chief ministership has further complicated matters. If a chief minister governing from jail is a first, the consequences of continuing to do so for weeks on end could throw up more unpleasant outcomes. ❶



## Fear and the fearless pose

**#F**erozKhanKaPota was trending on X; so, naturally, I thought Fardeen Khan's son was making his Bollywood debut. Bit young to be launched was my initial thought, but then I figured he could be taking the Jaden Smith route. Anyway, I clicked on the hashtag, and much to my disappointment it turned out to be the same old right-wing ravings about the 'Muslim origins' and 'stupidities' of Rahul Gandhi. Disappointment, because I genuinely thought the BJP bots were smarter than this. Surely, they realise that the *pappufication* of Rahul—rather like wabi-sabi decor and Sabyasachi reds—is so last season? Like it or not, Rahul is no longer a lightweight, a dynast or a reluctant politician. He's sharp, he's smart, he's doing his homework—his speeches are fiery, his rebuttals instant and stinging. He has self-appointed fairy godmothers on YouTube and the independent media and his championing of the idea of India, as envisioned by our founding fathers, has caught the imagination of the nation.

It doesn't hurt that with his worked-out chest and silvery stubble he's giving what Gen Z likes to call DILDO (Dad I'd Like to Do.) Best of all, with his doubled numbers and as the official leader of opposition, he is looking at ease in Parliament, looking in fact, as if to the manner born (which of course he is). Seated in the front row, besides the portly, homespun Awadhesh Prasad—whose very presence in the house is a slap in the face of the BJP's brand of politics—he comes across as a total insider, relaxed, respectful and yet informal—a fourth generation parliamentarian, so much more at home in the new building than the men who commissioned it. These worthies on the other hand, look sullen, stiff and stuck-up—never a good look.

The Pappu tag worked ten years ago because it

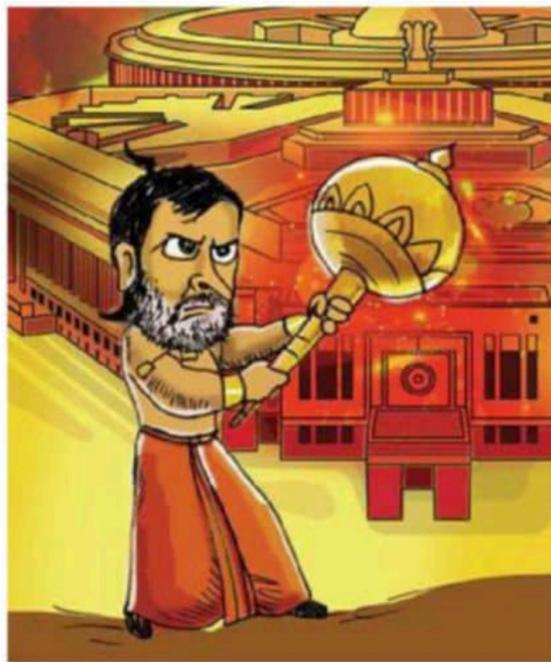
rang true, and '*bhaiy ki sarkar*' (a government that rules through fear) is a label that will stick because of the same reason. Narendra Modi and Amit Shah have ruled primarily through fear, a fear fostered by their brute majority and the stranglehold they had on the nation's institutions. Which is why re-baptising the Congress's symbol as a secular, non-violent *abhayamudra* or the fearless pose, and juxtapositioning it against the rule of fear is more than just a smart piece of speech-writing, it is product repositioning and brand relaunching at its best.

The standout line from Rahul's speech (addressed directly to Modi) was a defiant, ringing '*aap Hindu ho hi nahi*' [you are not Hindu]. Obviously he feels empowered enough to say this because (to quote Mahua Moitra) even Lord Ram himself has said, 'Not in my name' through the verdict in Ayodhya.

There is a growing sense that the BJP does not speak for all Hindus, that many are deeply uncomfortable with its politics of hate and prefer a gentler, deeply personal practice of Hinduism. This is the trending sentiment Rahul has latched on to, and this made up the meat of his speech. Modi interjected at this point (a

rare event, he prefers to ignore Rahul utterly, like Manipur, women wrestlers and Aryan Khan and so much else) and accused Rahul of calling all Hindus violent. But Rahul fact-checked that on the spot. Such fun!

I was wondering what to watch now that India has won the World Cup, but now I'm thinking that these battles over the soul of Hinduism in our more balanced Parliament may actually fill my entertainment void. My children did come around to try and change the channel but I just raised my hand and showed them the *abhayamudra*. Who knows, maybe hate and hindutva are also on their way to becoming so last season?



# Back to battle

While BJP has the edge in the assembly bypolls, the Trinamool hopes to ride the momentum from the Lok Sabha elections and keep the four seats

BY NILADRY SARKAR

**WEST BENGAL, WHICH** gave the Trinamool Congress a resounding victory in the Lok Sabha polls, stands poised for yet another electoral battle. The state will witness byelections in four assembly constituencies on July 10.

On the face of it, the bypolls may seem like an ordinary affair. However, the underlying equations, especially the ones going against the Trinamool, have made them interesting. The BJP had won three of the four seats—Raiganj, Ranaghat Dakshin and Bagdah—in the 2021 assembly elections. The byelections are being held after the BJP's sitting MLAs resigned and unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha polls on Trinamool tickets. Maniktala, the fourth seat, has been lying vacant since 2022 after the death of Trinamool MLA, Sadhan Pande.

Krishna Kalyani, who won from Raiganj on a BJP ticket, defected to the Trinamool in October 2021, but he kept serving as a legislator. He resigned the seat and contested the Lok Sabha polls from the Raiganj parliament seat, but lost to Kartick Paul of the BJP. It was a disastrous performance by Kalyani, who trailed

by over 45,000 votes in his own assembly segment. Despite the loss, Trinamool supremo Mamata Banerjee has reposed her trust in him, nominating him for the byelections. As he returns to Raiganj, his main rival is Manas Kumar Ghosh of the BJP, who defected from the Trinamool last year.

"I am 100 per cent confident about winning," said Kalyani. "During the Lok Sabha elections, there were many issues like Sandeshkhali, which worked against me. This time, I will beat the BJP with the same margin as their lead in the Lok Sabha polls."

Ghosh said the people of Raiganj had already shown his rival what he deserved. He accused Kalyani of being part of a land mafia. "The Trinamool candidate is arrogant and did not respect the people's mandate. He is a goon and people will defeat him again," he said.

Meanwhile, the Congress, as part of its alliance with the left front, has fielded Mohit Sengupta for the seat.

The Ranaghat Dakshin assembly constituency has a similar story to tell. Sitting BJP legislator Mukut Mani Adhikari, a prominent Matua leader,



switched over to the Trinamool and contested the Lok Sabha elections from the Ranaghat constituency. He lost to the BJP's Jagannath Sarkar by over 1.8 lakh votes, conceding a lead of around 35,000 votes in his own assembly segment. He, too, has been renominated by the Trinamool and he will take on the BJP's Manoj Kumar Biswas.

Adhikari said he lost the Lok Sabha polls because the Matua community supported the BJP. "This time, they will change their minds. They have understood that the BJP is only exploiting them in the name of citizenship," said Adhikari. Several parts of Ranaghat Dakshin are dominated by Matuas and other refugees



SALIL BERA

**SWITCH HIT**

Mukut Mani Adhikari, a prominent Matua leader, is the Trinamool candidate from Ranaghat Dakshin assembly constituency

from Bangladesh. As a result, the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act is an important factor. Biswas said Adhikari won last time because of the BJP. “He cannot win anything on his own. The Matuas will show him his place once again,” he said. The Congress-left alliance has fielded Arindam Biswas from the seat.

The Matuas are expected to play a deciding role in the Bagdah assembly constituency as well. Bagdah was vacated by Biswajit Das, who won the seat in 2021 on a BJP ticket. He joined the Trinamool soon after. In the Lok Sabha polls, he lost from Bongaon against the BJP’s Shantanu Thakur, by a margin of over 70,000 votes. The

Trinamool has put up Madhuparna Thakur, a young Matua candidate, for the bypolls. She is the daughter of Rajya Sabha MP Mamata Bala Thakur. Her father, the late Kapil Krishna Thakur, was a direct descendant of Harichand Thakur, the founder of the Matua sect.

The biggest challenge for the 25-year-old Madhuparna would be to overcome the influence of her cousin, Union Minister Shantanu Thakur, particularly because of his leadership role in the All India Matua Mahasangha, the most important socio-religious organisation of the community that now stands divided between the BJP and the Trinamool. The pro-Trinamool faction of the

organisation is led by Mamata Bala Thakur.

The Congress-left alliance will be represented in Bagdah by Gouraditya Biswas of the All India Forward Bloc.

Maniktala, an urban constituency with a substantial non-Bengali population, has thrown up a different kind of challenge for the Trinamool. It is part of the Kolkata Uttar Lok Sabha seat, won by the party’s Sudip Bandyopadhyay. In 2021, the Trinamool won Maniktala with a margin of over 20,000 votes. But that lead came down to about 3,000 votes in the Lok Sabha polls.

The Trinamool has entrusted former MLA Sadhan Pande’s wife, Supti, with the task of retaining Maniktala with an emphatic margin. Interestingly, she shares a long and close friendship with Mamata. The BJP has fielded Kalyan Chaubey, who heads the All India Football Federation. Chaubey had contested in 2021 as well. He aims to capitalise on the anti-Trinamool sentiment among the urban voters in West Bengal, a trend that emerged prominently in the Lok Sabha polls.

The CPI(M) has nominated Kolkata district committee member Rajib Majumder for Maniktala.

The BJP has made law and order an important issue in the byelections. While the Lok Sabha polls were relatively peaceful, several incidents of violence were reported after the declaration of results on June 4. Recently, many cases of lynchings have also been reported, leading to at least five deaths. In one such case, an associate of Trinamool MLA Hamidul Rahman was arrested as a prime suspect.

These developments give the BJP an edge. The question now is whether the Trinamool can surmount the challenges and maintain the momentum from the Lok Sabha polls or will the BJP manage to make use of the seemingly favourable underlying equations. ❶



**HITMAN'S HIGH**  
Rohit Sharma lays on the ground after India won the final of the T20 World Cup

# AI, CLASS ACT!



**Grace, power and clarity—Rohit Sharma's qualities make him, to borrow a Mumbai cricket term, the quintessential 'valli' player**

BY SHARDA UGRA

If you had to pick your Rohit Sharma moment from the thousands in the ICC T20 World Cup final, what would it be? Hoisting the World Cup trophy over his head, shouting joyously? Celebrating with his great teammate Virat Kohli, a tricolour draped around their shoulders while holding the Cup? The goofy slow-mo march-up to the podium in step with Suryakumar Yadav? Tricolour in one arm, medal around his neck, daughter on his shoulders, waving? Or even eating a bit of sand off the Kensington Oval pitch later, saying, “I wanted to have a piece of it with me.”

Or was it something more visceral? In the first flush of victory, Rohit dropped to his knees, arms aloft before falling face forward on to the grass, hitting the ground over and over again. Absorbing what he has achieved privately for a few seconds before his mates come piling on to him.

In almost fifty years across 22 multi-format, limited-over World Cups, Rohit Gurunath Sharma is only the third Indian captain to win a cricket World Cup. Seventeen years in an India career which has been a constant tug of war between achievement and adversity, he is now alongside Kapil Dev and Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

It is the greatest triumph of Rohit’s game and personality and, flowing from them, his leadership. It is the culmination of a career where promise and disappointment have walked alongside brilliance and struggle. It is the emphatic coming of age of his twisting, turning cricketing life.

Rohit turned 37 in April. It is easy to forget that 17 years ago, when India won the ICC’s first World T20 (the old name for the T20 World Cup) in 2007, he was there as well. It was months after his ODI debut in Ireland, and this Mumbai under-17 off-spinner turned beauty of a middle-order bat had itched for a game. When it came against South Africa on a spicy wicket, he hooked and pulled the fastest among them to a fifty. A few months later, Rohit was part of India’s CB series triumph in Australia, scoring 66 in the second final. He was marked

down by Ian Chappell as the next Sachin Tendulkar. This lazily elegant bat and electric fielder was a star in the making.

Except from then, Rohit’s career with India was marked by fitful success, injuries and strokes of plain bad luck. He was injured in a freak training accident on the eve of a Test debut in Nagpur in 2010. It was only in November 2017 that he could return to the Test team. During that period, the newly-mushrooming social media-verse gave him a pejorative nickname—“Talent”—mocking what

It is the greatest triumph of Rohit’s game and personality... It is the culmination of a career where promise and disappointment have walked alongside brilliance and struggle.



was considered wasted potential.

Between Rohit's debut in June 2007 and the 2024 World Cup final, India played 174 Tests, 407 ODIs and 226 T20Is. Rohit's personal tally is 59 Tests, 262 ODIs and 159 T20Is. Those missed games—115 Tests, 145 ODIs and 67 T20Is—the source of frustration, dejection and anguish.

Except, Rohit was to find himself in the Indian Premier League, winning the 2009 title with the Deccan Chargers as its middle-order rocket under the captaincy of Adam Gilchrist. After being passed over

by Mumbai Indians in the first IPL auction, seasoned Mumbai and BCCI official Ratanakar Shetty recalls Mumbai Indians captain Sachin Tendulkar wanting to “somehow” get this match-winner back home. In 2011, Rohit signed on with Mumbai Indians and reshaped himself and who he was to become to Indian cricket.

The year 2011 was to also mark Rohit's darkest hour and the start of his personal reboot after missing out on selection for the 2011 World Cup squad. “I figured out that it is just my battle and I shouldn't be expecting

#### DYNAMIC DUO

Rohit and Virat Kohli with the T20 World Cup trophy at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados



**WINNER'S ROAR**

Rohit, as Mumbai Indians captain, after winning the Champions League T20 Cup in 2013

Coupled with the gift of timing, Rohit appeared to be modelled after a batter like Aravinda de Silva. He can pull the back of length balls and mess with the bowlers' length.



anyone would come and help me," he told the *Indian Express*. "That I needed to figure it out on my own... create my own path from my own struggle."

His captaincy in the IPL, when he won Mumbai Indians its first of five titles in 2013, "was sending a message that he had the game to be a leader," says Shetty.

When Rohit first made his India debut, says an IPL coach, "that hook and the pull he had, I don't think many others had that at that time.... He always looked amazing in terms of quality."

He says Rohit's strength and adaptability in being able to switch games and gears lie in his grip. "He has a split grip, like [Jacques] Kallis, [Ricky] Ponting and Tendulkar had," he says. "That is his strength; it helps him manoeuvre the ball on the onside, offside... no restriction where he can hit a ball."

Coupled with the gift of timing, Rohit appeared to be modelled after a batter like Aravinda de Silva. He can pull the back of length balls and mess with the bowlers' length. "When you have that, the bowler is constantly trying to make the adjustment to bowl fuller and make half-volleys. Normal length for him was a pull shot and he always had that strength, and that differentiated him from the

rest," says the coach.

The search for a place in a crowded Indian middle-order across formats turned Rohit into opener—from 2009 in T20s and from 2011 in ODIs. The IPL coach laughs at the shift, calling it, "ridiculous" and said he was amused at hearing heated discussions around the search for a No 4 for ODI World Cups after 2011. "Because Rohit was the best No 4 in the world, that is where he batted. But he was not getting a chance in the middle order... When the breakthrough came in the opening slot, he jumped at it."

Making the switch, said the coach, was "not a big thing—because when you pass a threshold of mastery of batsmanship, then it is the matter of a few balls of adjustment... You just have to make the slight adjustment of opening. The odd ball will move a bit up front and you can manage that from there. Any quality [batter] will be able to do it. I mean, tomorrow you tell Virat [Kohli] to go and open in a Test match, I don't see an issue. Any top player who has passed the

threshold of the mastery of their craft, can do it.”

It is time to address the elephant and have it leave the room: of Rohit as the alter-Virat, with diametrically opposite personalities and career paths. When lined up against Kohli, Rohit is visibly not as streamlined, statistically not as prolific, particularly in Tests, and most certainly not easily slottable into any saleable or marketable brand bracket. But behind these obvious differences and Rohit’s loose-as-a-geese demeanour, lives an undeniable white-ball beast. With three ODI double centuries and five T20I centuries and the most monstrously-successful IPL captaincy alongside Dhoni.

In the list of India’s World Cup-winning captains, Rohit projects neither Kapil Dev’s all-round athletic superpowers nor Dhoni’s icy unflappable cool quotient. And he hates comparisons anyway. When asked to assess Suryakumar’s two-step catch off David Miller against Kapil’s 1983 dismissal of Viv Richards, Rohit protested, “Nahin yaar, leave what happened in 1983 where it belongs. It was a great catch.... Every moment that happens has its own charm, its own way. I am not a big comparison fan.”

It is only fair to respect that and look at Rohit, but not through what he appears on the outside—no sleek contours, all bumps and edges, comfort-fit girth, thinning hair, drawling, languorous speech—but to see him as the leader that he is.

The grace and power of his batting contain an awareness and clarity that carry through to his captaincy born of a fundamental core. Of the competitive Mumbai cricketer from its distant suburbs who wrestled on and off packed local trains with his giant kitbag looking for a game, a chance, an opportunity. Who has little time for its embroideries and its fusses, but remains forever invested in the contest.

The Mumbai cricket community looked after the teenage Rohit: his first coach Siddhesh Lad ensured that his

AFP



### PILLAR OF STRENGTH

Rohit with his wife, Ritika, after the final of the 2024 T20 World Cup

school fees were waived; and cricketing guru Vasoo Paranjape pushed to have him picked and played in the Mumbai under-17s, dragging junior national coach Pravin Amre into watching him in a local match. Amre made sure Rohit was given a cricket scholarship. He was picked for India’s squad for the 2006 Under-19 World Cup. Within a year he was playing for India. Within two came the IPL, and its unimagined wealth and mind-altering fame. But Rohit has remained, says Shetty, “good with people, respectful with whoever he deals with”. This equanimity is his calling card.

A former Mumbai cricketer trying to describe him accurately says, “He is what they call a *valli* cricketer” and laughs. We



AFP

have heard of the clichéd *khadoos* (grouchy) Mumbai cricketer who will not cede an inch and fight to the death, but *valli* is a new one. The clue lies in the meaning of the word—*valli* is Marathi for a climber plant, that grows in random directions, heading off looking for light, room, a spot to find a firm grip.

*Valli* is slang for the unpredictable, the eccentric, for those who could not care less about anything. Except what matters most to them. Light, space, the search for a grip. One who may appear laid-back and non-confrontational, but will front up in the heat of a fight. “Forget all the fluff, you know, just get stuck in and play the game,” says the former Mumbai cricketer and points out, “One of the keys of a good leader is that he draws performance from his players.”

Rohit’s style is to give his players the leeway to be themselves, but to reprimand when required. As Suryakumar said, “You feel that, in his presence, he wants you to go to the next level. He is pushing himself so much more. So that everyone is now feeling that we should

*Valli is slang for the unpredictable, the eccentric, for those who could not care less about anything. Except what matters most to them.*

do the same.” Before the World Cup final, he said, Rohit told the team, “I can’t climb this mountain alone. If I have to reach the peak, I will need everyone’s oxygen.”

What had already sent a message down the line was Rohit’s lifting his batting tempo and pace in T20 power play and carrying it into the 2024 World Cup. The IPL’s and Rohit’s seventeenth season had him score more than 400 runs at his highest-ever strike rate of 150. He has never had a better strike rate in any multi-nation event than he did at this World Cup—156.7.

After the crushing disappointment of defeat in the 2022 T20 World Cup semi-final against England, Rohit played in only three T20Is before the June 2024 World Cup.

But just like his friend and Mumbai Indians data analyst C.K.M. Dhananjai had told *The Cricket Monthly*, Rohit’s resurgence and renaissance in the public eye came from an understanding of his

own game. Dhnanjai said of 2019: “He knew exactly what was happening with his game. He was able to coach himself.... This is a trait I have seen in only the greatest of players. This ability to heal themselves or coach themselves out of a situation.... They know their game, they know their body, they know their reflexes.”

What is the message that Rohit’s game and body are sending him now? How will Mumbai Indians, who have already removed him from captaincy, handle this and him? In a nervy World Cup final, Rohit’s leadership extracted from Hardik Pandya, his replacement MI captain, a performance for the ages. The bad blood of the IPL sea-

### SKY IS THE LIMIT

Rohit Sharma hits a six in the India vs Australia match in the T20 World Cup on June 24; (left) Axar Patel, Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav and Jasprit Bumrah celebrate the dismissal of Jos Buttler of England in the semi-final of the tournament



GETTY IMAGES

son—Pandya being booed by crowds, Rohit fielding in the deep—evaporated at the World Cup. Rohit thought nothing of photobombing a Pandya post-match interview to plant a kiss on his allrounder’s cheek in front of a live global audience. Another first for an Indian World Cup-winning captain whom Sanjay Manjrekar calls, “a champion cricketer with a pure heart”.

How will this languidly developing Rohit epic develop? “What is the legacy he wants to leave behind in Test cricket” asks an Indian cricket insider. “If he thinks about it, Rohit can easily extend his career. But the question is how motivated is he? How much more do you want to play is entirely dependent on you.”

Many believe that Kohli could keep going for another five years. Is that something that Rohit would be keen on even doing?

Again, applying Kohli’s template to Rohit’s career is a mistake. The *valli* has its own motivations, and it is foolish to believe that it is not aware of where it wants to go.

At his post-victory press conference, Rohit talked of being “so desperate” to win this cup and not suffer defeat in a third straight ICC final in just over 12 months. But in the end, he said, he also believed in destiny. “I believe that what is written is going to happen, and I think this was written,” he said.

It was written that, after a career swinging between soaring and stumbling and soaring again, Rohit would be the captain to give India its second T20 World Cup after 17 years. But he reminds us that between what is written and what has to be experienced in order to read it, lies the mystery and the magic we get entangled in. Rohit quickly disentangles himself from the stars and clarifies, “Of course, before the match, you don’t know that this is what is written.” Then he grins his sunshine grin and describes what he sees without the noise, glitter, smoke and mirrors.

“*Yehi toh khel hai. Yehi game hai,*” he says. This is what sport is. This is the game.

Rohit Sharma should put those words on a T-shirt. Relaxed-fit, of course. **1**

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

ROGER BINNY  
BCCI president

# RAHUL'S CALM NATURE PLAYED A BIG ROLE

BY RIYAD MATHEW

**W**hen Roger Binny and his mates went into the 1983 World Cup, they did so, famously, as underdogs. The current Indian team, though, goes into each ICC tournament as a favourite, which makes failure even more heartbreaking.

Binny, now as BCCI president, had a close-up view when India broke the 11-year curse of not lifting an ICC trophy.

While there, Binny also caught up with old friends including Viv Richards and Clive Lloyd. “Sir Garfield Sobers is 89 and he still walks around to the matches. He sits and watches the whole day,” he said.

He also spoke about how the gentleman Richards had lost a bit of weight and muscle mass, but had remained fit at 72. “Viv was telling everybody around, you know, this is the team that did us in 83,” he said. The West Indies legend had also said that if the Men in Maroon faltered, he wanted India to win. And in fact, when he met Binny in Antigua, he said, “You’re on your way.”

India did make it all the way, but Binny knows the job is not done. Cricket in India never stops and the next item on his list is filling the position of head coach that Rahul Dravid leaves behind.

Hours before boarding a chartered flight to Delhi from Barbados—which has been hit by Hurricane Beryl—Binny spoke to THE WEEK about the World Cup, India’s success and about Gautam Gambhir as a candidate for the coach’s job. Excerpts from the interview:

**Q/ It had been 11 years since a World Cup win and India finally have the monkey off their back.**

**A/** The cricket these boys played was superb. The way they fought. We were in two very difficult positions. One against Pakistan. You know, they were sailing along in New York. And they should have won the game, actually. But somehow, we were able to turn around that game. And also in the final [against South Africa]. We were in the same situation in the final. We were [slipping] at one time. After the 15th over. The courage they showed and the fighting qualities were really good.

**Q/ India had lost every final since 2013. Finally, something has come**



GETTY IMAGES

**together. Would you attribute this to a single reason or multiple?**

**A/** There have to be multiple reasons. The main thing is that Rohit [Sharma] led from the front. And he and Rahul [Dravid] were able to get the team together. Which is very important. They did that in the 50-over World Cup in India, too. But here, at no stage of the game were they giving up. They played with so much passion. They had that in their mind, what happened last time.... Second, I think the wickets also were suitable for us. Our type of cricket. Slow. And the ball was spinning a little bit. We had the extra spinner with us. So that also contributed to the success.

**Q/ Did the calm nature of Dravid play a big role?**

**A/** Of course, it did. When the team was in a tense situation, he used to go in every break. After 10 overs, he used to go and have a pep talk and cool them down. So, definitely, his presence in the dressing room and on the field made a big impact.

**Gautam Gambhir has played in all three formats. He has played a lot of T20s, so I think that should be a plus point for him.**

**Q/ Now that Dravid is going out, have you guys found a replacement?**

**A/** We have not yet finalised it, but they have [shortlisted] two or three people. When we get back, we will think [about it]. They (the advisory committee) will decide finally. Because the committee has to meet us first. We will know when we get back.

**Q/ What are the names shortlisted? Of course, one is Gambhir...**

**A/** I know Gambhir is there because he is doing the rounds everywhere, in every newspaper. I don't know who the others are.

**Q/ W.V. Raman's name has also been mentioned. But you know,**

**Gambhir and Rahul are opposites. One ever-calm and the other ready for a fight. Is that a negative?**

**A/** It's basically how the coach handles the situations. And Gambhir has played in all three formats. He has played a lot of T20s, so I think that should be a plus point for him.

**Q/ Are you looking at a different red-ball and white-ball coach?**

**A/** That is not yet decided. But actually, that wouldn't be a bad idea. You know, if you can zero in on that, look at two different areas. But that has not yet been discussed. We have been so tied up with this World Cup that everything has been put on the back shelf for the moment. From tomorrow, we'll start again.

**Q/ Everyone is talking about the end of an era for Virat and Rohit. Perfect way to end their T20 careers?**

**A/** It's befitting; they both participated, they did well. And I think it's the right time for them to go. They have gone at the right time. They have had a fantastic run [and] we are going to miss them. [But] there are a lot of young cricketers who have to step in and put their hands up and take their places. When [Sachin] Tendulkar retired, nobody thought someone will fill his shoes. But then Virat came along and he did a fantastic job. I'm sure the IPL is throwing up a lot of young cricketers. So we should find someone who will be capable in the next few years.

**Q/ There are a lot of names, including the likes of Abhishek Sharma. But just on that, Roger, there is the complaint that India won the first T20 World Cup in 2007. After that the IPL started and India did not win another T20 World Cup till this one. Why do you think this is the case?**

**A/** I think we were close in many



**When [Sachin] Tendulkar retired, nobody thought someone will fill his shoes. But then Virat came along and he did a fantastic job. I'm sure the IPL is throwing up a lot of young cricketers.**

situations. But you know, [in] T20s, if you have one small bad session on the field, you're gone. Of course, the last one in Australia we lost by 10 wickets [in the 2022 semi-final against England]. But otherwise, you know, even in this tournament, we could have been knocked out if we had just one bad session. We were able to convert those sessions in our favour.

**Q/ Did you guys have a mental conditioning coach or was that aspect just left to Dravid and Rohit?**

**A/** They had someone coming in on occasion, whenever they wanted it. But I think all credit goes to these two, Rohit and Rahul. And they had the support of



PH

Kohli also, being a former captain and such a great player and leader. So that also played a big role in taking these guys up there.

**Q/ On the whole, what is your take on this World Cup, especially the US leg? The New York pitch came in for some criticism.**

**A/** It was a bit disappointing, the US leg, because the pitches were not up to the mark. They probably had a lot of difficulties because they couldn't prepare the pitches earlier because they had just gone through winter. And they had to wait for winter to finish before the grass was laid. But still, I think they were not ready for the World Cup, really. The venues were lacking in Florida and in New York. [When they] had a lot of rain, they didn't have enough covers for the grounds. We lost one game in Florida (India vs Canada). Luckily, it didn't have any effect on us, but you cannot lose

#### WINNERS ACROSS ERAS

Ravi Shastri feeds cake to Rishabh Pant at a party in the Caribbean to celebrate the 41st anniversary of the 1983 World Cup victory; Roger Binny and Sunil Gavaskar look on

World Cup games like that, due to weather. Pakistan probably went out because of that. It's not fair.

**Q/ What corrective measures should the ICC take going forward?**

**A/** They will have to improve. They have other centres that have been very active in local cricket. But I think they need to do a lot of grassroots development. I mean, just playing with all the expats in the team doesn't make sense. You know, they have to get the American kids to play the game and make it popular like baseball and basketball.

**Q/ Do you see that happening?**

**A/** It's a big challenge. They have to start right at the school level. And it's going to take time, but they have got to have the patience to wait. Otherwise, it's just going to be like what happened in Singapore, Malaysia or Hong Kong. I mean, they just didn't move from there. The Middle East is a fine example. It's all Indians and Pakistanis playing there. No local person is involved. So, the game is definitely not going to be supported even by the government.

**Q/ So, how does ICC spread cricket? What are your suggestions?**

**A/** We have ICC tournaments, like we have the Asia Cup and all that. We have ICC Americas play their own tournament. And ICC Asia plays their own tournament. So I think that's [an area where] a little more activity should take place. They should probably play in the junior categories, 16s and 19s. And then bring the best team that qualifies into the World Cup. Because there are too many teams that actually didn't fit the bill to play in the World Cup. It's not right. I think it takes away from the World Cup when you have teams who are not performing and records are being broken. So I think the ICC has got to look at that. They've got to have more development in their grassroots areas for these ICC teams. ●

# HONOUR ROLL

**SHIVAM DUBE**  
27 off 16  
in final

**VIRAT KOHLI**  
76 off 59  
in the final  
after a dry  
run

**JASPRIT BUMRAH**  
Player of the  
tournament; 15  
wickets at 4.17  
runs an over

**RAVINDRA JADEJA**  
Handy 17\* off 9  
in semi-final

**YUZVENDRA CHahal**

**HARDIK PANDYA**  
144 runs and  
11 wickets;  
3-20 in the final

**MOHAMMED SIRAJ**  
Only played 3  
matches; took  
1 wicket and was  
economical

**ROHIT SHARMA**  
257 runs at  
a strike rate  
of 156.7



**ARSHDEEP SINGH**

India's highest wicket taker—**17; 4-9** against the US

**YASHASVI JAISWAL**

**SANJU SAMSON**

**RISHAB PANT**

Crucial **42** against Pakistan; 14 dismissals behind the stumps, most in one edition

**KULDEEP YADAV**

**7** wickets at an average of **10.71** in Super 8; **3-19** in semi-final

**SURYAKUMAR YADAV**

**199** runs and the Miller catch

**AXAR PATEL**

**3-23** in semi-final; **47** off **31** in final

# CROWNING GLORY

## Kohli had to be Kohli to help India win the final

BY BECHU S.

**P**ride is often an adornment that kings don. But after his final war that ended in a great victory, this one, known for his impulsive valour, remained grounded.

His words: "This was an open secret. Not something that I wasn't going to announce even if we had lost... It's been difficult to hold [feelings] back and I think it's going to sink in later. It's an amazing day and I'm thankful..."

The king did weep, but wiped his tears as he sat down to send word to his queen. The cameras zoomed in in awe as he blew kisses at the phone screen, made silly faces at his kids and tried his best to listen to them from a packed stadium that was roaring his name, alongside victory chants.

"This man is setting the bar high for the companions, husbands and fathers out there," one netizen responded.

The chest-thumping, fist-pumping aggressor, India's master run-chaser, and the man who famously silenced rivals, their supporters and even those who "sit and speak from the box" felt a far cry from the man that night in Barbados. At 35, having finally completed white-ball cricket by claiming the one trophy that eluded him for 12 years, Virat Kohli looked grateful if not relieved.

For Rajkumar Sharma, his childhood coach, there was no "new" Kohli at the post-match presentation. "The aggression has been and always will be his strength," he told THE WEEK. "But outside the ground, he has always been humble. It was very good to see

him publicly saying that he is a God-fearing man and believes in destiny. He was always like that. As he has aged, he has become more mature."

The man may have remained unchanged, but his methods did, at least for the tournament. Unlike earlier, this time he would play the role of ferocious opener to suit the team strategy. "The captain and the senior members decide how you approach a particular tournament," said Sharma. "It should be one in which the team performance reaches the highest level. The team strategy demanded he play that way and he did."

Like captain Rohit Sharma, Kohli had not played T20Is since India's exit from the 2022 World Cup. But, they found a place in the squad for the three-match series against Afghanistan—India's last in the format before the World Cup—in January. The writing on the wall was clear.

But then came the IPL, which saw the rise of ruthless young turks like Abhishek Sharma and Nitish Reddy, followed by calls for the exclusion of "slow" seniors.

Yet, there Kohli was in the US. And he was swinging at every ball. It seemed like India needed him to be an Abhishek Sharma after all, only with more craft and experience. Do or die was the motto and, for the most part, he kept dying.

His dismissals against Ireland (one off five balls) and Pakistan (four off three) at the New York stadium came off aerial shots gone wrong—an occupational hazard for aggressive openers. He fell on the first ball against the US.

**MORE  
THAN GOLD**  
Kohli talks to his family  
after the final

REUTERS

When the arena switched to the Caribbean, he started off with a run-a-ball 24 against Afghanistan before making 37 from 28 against Bangladesh. Familiar foes Australia sent him back for a duck and a nine-ball nine against England in the semifinal did not help.

Kohli was not out of touch. The six he smoked off Reece Topley over mid-wicket in the semifinal was audacious. He hit three maximums against

Twelve years ago, Kohli was player of the match in his first T20 World Cup match. He ended his last the same way.

Bangladesh as well. Neither pitch was a batter's paradise.

The plan was simple. Someone like Kohli going all guns blazing could put any opposition on the back foot. If he fails, an array of hitters awaited to take his place. As long as there were balls to spare, India was in business. There was no need for a man to hang around to finish with a late flourish.

This "new" approach was tested in the IPL, where RCB won six games in a row to make it to the playoffs. In the first half of the tournament, where RCB lost six of its seven outings, Kohli was striking at 150. In the second phase, he upped it to 162.

However, on the night of the final in Barbados, Kohli had to get back into his element. India had made 23 in eight balls, but then lost three wickets in quick succession. Kohli, the survivor, had a decision to make. Keep going for it or stay on and hit out later. For the veteran of six T20 World Cups, the choice was obvious. His first big hit after the powerplay, a straight six off Kagiso Rabada, came in the 18th over. He finished with 76 off 59, which helped India post 176. He had played a Kohli knock and the rest was up to the bowlers. Jasprit Bumrah and co delivered, and there was a measured yet jubilant fist pump from Kohli as he saw Heinrich Klaasen depart.

Amid the emotional farewell after the match, Kohli was self-critical as well. The man who admires Cristiano Ronaldo, the mentality monster of the sporting world, confessed he wasn't always good in the middle. "It's hard to explain the emotions I felt after the game," he said. "I knew what kind of mindset I was in. I wasn't very confident in the last few games. I wasn't feeling really good out there."

But Kohli had held his nerve against South Africa and nothing else mattered. His captain and long-time comrade summarised it the best. "We all know what he has done for us," said Rohit Sharma. "I am very happy for him that he batted like he did in the final. At some point, everyone has to say goodbye to the game and Virat was very clear that this is what he wanted to do."

Twelve years ago, Kohli was player of the match in his first T20 World Cup match. He ended his last the same way. Eulogies and biographers can wait, though. Only this quest has ended, his saga wages on. **1**





**TEEN TITANS**  
Goswami (first from right) and Kohli (centre) were part of the U19 World Cup-winning team in 2008

# Kohli's flamboyance made him the star

BY SHREEVATS GOSWAMI

After every match in the U19 World Cup we used to visit a cafe where we would check Orkut to find out what people in India were saying about our performance.

I met Virat Kohli for the first time at the National Cricket Academy during a zonal under-17 tournament. I was representing East Zone and he was playing for North Zone. He was a flamboyant and fun-loving character who stood above the rest.

He never shied away from showing his intent, or cracking a joke. He does not hide anything; he is what everyone sees of him. And he remains the same. When we meet today, he interacts in the same manner. People say he has changed over the years. A 35-year-old man will not do the immature things that an 18-year-old boy once did. That is the law of life.

Young Virat loved eating and partying. During our Under-19 World Cup in Malaysia, we often went out and Virat used to lead the pack. We partied wildly after the win. In Malaysia, we saw Virat the fashionista. His dressing sense and how he carried himself was new for many of us. He liked good clothes and sunglasses.

But Virat's off-the-field behaviour did not get him in any kind of trouble or disciplinary issues. He was always sincere about his cricket. I remember that after every match in the Under-19 World Cup we used to visit a nearby cafe where we would check Orkut to find out what people in India were saying

about our performance.

The world saw Virat Kohli for the first time in the Under-19 World Cup but we got a glimpse of the legend at an early age. Many players around us were satisfied with good scores in a few matches. But Virat wanted to score runs in every game. He wanted a century in every match. Even a 90 would disappoint him.

The hunger in him was unparalleled.

The first step towards his journey of becoming a legend was his decision to follow a strict diet regime. No doubt he was talented, but there is a limit to what talent can achieve.

He realised the importance of fitness and sacrificed his taste buds. I know how much Virat loved eating. He loved chhole bhature and street food. For that person to say that he doesn't eat food for taste but for recharging his body with the right amount of protein and carbs is beyond my understanding.

Virat also worked hard to improve his skills as a cricketer. We all saw his struggles in England in the early days. His hunger for perfection drove him to success in England as well.

In his early days, his offside game was not strong enough. He relied heavily on the onside. That is why he was troubled in England. But he worked on his skills so much that his cover drive became not only one of his most productive shots but also a classic feature about him.

The mental strength that he has and the way he has conditioned himself is beyond anyone's imagination. His mental strength has taken him to a zone where only elite athletes can reach. And he loves big occasions. He always aspired to be the star of the show. Throughout his career, it helped him perform on big stage. Virat combined all these perfectly to be the most complete cricketer. His numbers will speak for him long after his retirement.

—As told to Niladry Sarkar

Goswami played with Kohli in the U-19 Cricket World Cup in 2008 and Royal Challengers Bangalore.

**F**ive years ago, an IIT Kanpur professor decoded the science behind Jasprit Bumrah's art. In a study he did on the bowler's action, aerospace engineer Sanjay Mittal found that "Bumrah's speed, seam position and rotational speed of 1,000rpm give only 0.1 spin ratio for the ball, hence putting it into reverse Magnus effect regime."

I won't even try to unpack that sentence, but it does signify that what Bumrah has been doing for years, and more specifically since his return from injury last year, is freakish enough to warrant deeper study by the world of science.

Now Bumrah himself might not understand the madness behind his method in scientific terms, but he did put on a display for the ages at this World Cup. In fact, were he an aspiring IIT student, professors like Mittal would have been proud of Bumrah's physics, maths and chemistry at this tournament.

Let's start with the physics. Through a quirk of his action, as Mittal explains in his study, Bumrah gets more dip on the ball. This simply means that the ball pitches before the spot the batter is expecting it to. This is just one of Bumrah's weapons. Another is his ability to essentially bowl off spin at pace. His off-cutters spin a lot and batters generally don't expect this from a fast bowler. See the dismissals of Travis Head and Phil Salt in this tournament.

Other bowlers could do this, too, but that is where accuracy comes in. Every bowler worth his salt knows where to pitch the ball. Actually doing it is the hard part. Bumrah has that down to a science. Physics, if you will.

And then come the biomechanics. As Australian analyst and writer Jarrod Kimber writes, "[Bumrah has the] ability to shorten the wicket. Because of his weird action, he delivers the ball closer to batters than most players. He is playing on a shorter wicket. In some cases, around half a metre closer at release point than other main bowlers. That is a huge advantage.

"His run up is also an advantage. Fast

# BOOM IN FULL BLOOM

Jasprit Bumrah is operating at a level we have rarely seen in cricket before

BY ANIRUDH MADHAVAN



INSTAGRAM@SANJANAGANESAN

**PACE ACE**  
Bumrah with wife, Sanjana, and son, Angad

bowling is too quick for our reflexes as humans, so the top players gather as much information as possible as the bowler is running in. Bumrah cuts that down by simply not having a long run up. Wasim Akram was another bowler who did this and caused chaos.”

All this physics leads to maths, i.e., the numbers. In a pool of mind-boggling numbers, this one stands out the most—of the 178 balls he bowled in the World Cup, 110 were dots. This is in the T20 format, mind you. His economy of 4.17 in this tournament would be more than acceptable in an ODI World Cup and some may even allow it in a Test match in the Bazball era.

But more important, Bumrah not only restricted runs, he also took wickets—15 of them, only two behind tournament leaders Fazalhaq Farooqi and Arshdeep Singh. And remember, not only does Bumrah take his own wickets, the pressure he builds up with his bowling allows others to get some scalps, too.

This World Cup performance was not unexpected. And this might not even be his most impressive series

since returning from injury. In this year’s IPL, which was the highest-scoring season in history, Bumrah went at 6.48 runs an over. This was a tournament where 270 was breached three times, and Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma got 125 runs in the first six overs in a game against Delhi Capitals.

Since his return from injury in August, after missing nearly a year of action, Bumrah has taken 78 wickets in 33 matches across formats at an average and strike rate of 15.47 and 24.5. His career average and strike rate are 21.10 and 33.4.

There was speculation about what level of Bumrah would emerge after the injury. Whether he would be able to match his already brilliant record. But not only did he do that, he is also currently on a run that has rarely been seen before. The numbers don’t lie.

Which brings us to the last subject—chemistry. And Sanjana Ganesan. The ICC digital media presenter, and wife to Bumrah, interviewed him a couple of times

during the World Cup, and lifted the veil of the super serious competitor on the field. In a clip of them talking after the India-Pakistan match in New York, she signs off by saying, “We’ll see you again very soon and congratulations on your second win.” To this, he replies, “We’ll see you in 30 minutes.” A laughing Ganesan comes back with a cheeky “What’s for dinner?” In the final, just after India had pulled off a narrow win, Bumrah sprinted into the arms of a waiting Ganesan, hugging her tightly as the team celebrated around them. He then took his

winner’s medal and put it around the neck of his infant son Angad, who seemed nonplussed with the crowd roaring for his father. It was another wholesome moment that showed fans a side to Bumrah not many have access to.

But chemistry isn’t only about banter with your partner. It is also about the relationship with the men you share the dressing room with. In the past few years, Bumrah has become a leader of the bowling group across formats. This means pulling them out of a rut, advising them on where to bowl and keeping the unit together as one to achieve the team’s goal.

A teary-eyed Mohammed Siraj, for whom Bumrah has played translator in the past, had this to say after the final: “I only believe in Jassi bhai. Jasprit Bumrah is the only game-changer.” Siraj, the most emotional of the Indian bunch, also gave him a placard saying, “Bumrah—best bowler on land, air and water”.

With this version of Jasprit Bumrah, India have found a hero who is possibly bordering on ‘legend’ territory. But, at the end of the day, Bumrah is and will remain a student of the game. And an A+ student at that. ●

# THE POWER OF THREE

How India shed its orthodox and limiting approach to find success

BY AYAZ MEMON

**M**eticulous planning and superb execution have rightly been touted as the reasons for India's magnificent victory in the T20 World Cup. However, this may not have been possible without captain Rohit Sharma, chief coach Rahul Dravid and chief selector Ajit Agarkar being on the same page in vision, strategy and processes.

The captain is key in this configuration as he is the prime decision maker on the field. But modern

cricket's demands of different formats and more frequent international matches have made the roles of chief coach and chief selector crucial, too.

A good rapport with the coach makes a captain's job easier. Virat Kohli and Anil Kumble, and before them Greg Chappell and Sourav Ganguly, looked like matches made in heaven, but the relationships inexplicably soured swiftly, and the team suffered.

In team selection in India, the captain and coach generally provide inputs, but these are not binding on the selection committee which can leave scope for discord, as shown by the strained relations between Kohli and chief selector Chetan Sharma in 2021. Some successful captain-coach combos like Kohli-Ravi Shastri did not get involved in selection matters beyond the perfunctory, focusing instead on getting the best out of the players given to them.

Captain, coach and selectors are power centres that can make or break the destiny of a team or players. Since these posts are usually held by people with long international experience, differences of opinion are inevitable and chances of conflict are high. In the case of Rohit, Dravid and Agarkar, individual egos did not get swiftly sublimated. While Dravid and Rohit had self-confessed admiration for each other, Agarkar, who had played with both (with Dravid for India



**BACK-END FORCE**  
Ajit Agarkar and  
Rahul Dravid

and Rohit for Mumbai), straddled the two easily. Mutual respect and trust between all three helped forge a healthy working relationship, which limited disagreements and instead enabled healthy discussions on how to take the common agenda forward.

Their seamless alignment covered all crucial aspects of the T20 World Cup campaign—formulating an unorthodox approach, looking for players who fit into this, giving these players specific roles and getting the support staff in tune with the demands that would arise.

India finished the tournament unbeaten. But it was a daunting assignment in the backdrop of not winning anything significant for almost a dozen years. This warranted sustained intensity, mental toughness and unlimited self-belief.

After the Champions Trophy triumph in 2013, India had had a barren run in ICC tournaments owing to the inability to perform well in the knock-out stages. Fixing this was the focus of Rohit and Dravid when they took over from Kohli and Shastri in 2021. Originally, their tenure was for three ICC tournaments: the T20 World Cup (2022), the World Test Championship (2023) and the ODI World Cup (2023). India reached the final of the WTC but lost to Australia. Agarkar joined them in mid-2023, pulling himself out of lucrative media commitments. India was by far the best team in the ODI World Cup, but choked again in the final against Australia. For all three, the 2024 T20 World Cup was the only remaining recourse to salvation.

In retrospect, losing the semi-final of the 2022 T20 World Cup was the turning point. Rohit was convinced that India's approach was too orthodox and limiting. White ball cricket, particularly the T20 format demanded unstinting dynamism and aggression. While his players were skilful, but the mindset had to change.

Convincing Dravid about this was not as hard as one might imagine. Though he excelled in traditional red ball cricket that demanded circumspection and technical excellence, his tenures as under-19 and India A coach and head of National Cricket Academy had opened his mind to the mental outlook of modern players. He still, though, unflinchingly believed in processes to achieve excellence on a sustained basis. This ensured Rohit's spirit of enterprise and aggression did not balloon into recklessness.

India's sizzling run in the ODI World Cup showcased the thought process behind the team management, the improvement in skill-sets and the self-belief in adopting this approach. But there were many hurdles and challenges to overcome before it paid dividends. Losing the ODI World Cup was so disappointing for Dravid that he resigned himself to walking into the sunset with dream unfulfilled. However, a phone call from Rohit, as he revealed later, restored his morale and reignited his ambition.

**India's sizzling run in the ODI World Cup showcased the thought process behind the team management, the improvement in skill-sets and the self-belief in adopting this approach.**

Rohit's own position at this point was somewhat shaky. Briefly, it appeared that he would lose the captaincy for the T20 World Cup, and perhaps even his place in the team along with Kohli, as they were rested in the home series against Afghanistan. But the BCCI moved in swiftly and announced Rohit as captain a few months in advance. This stymied any potentially disruptive development and allowed the captain and the coach put in motion their campaign strategy, along with Agarkar.

Selecting the team wasn't a cakewalk though. Kohli, under the microscope for a 'mellow' strike rate, made himself indispensable as an opener by scoring the most runs in the IPL at a healthy strike rate. Jasprit Bumrah was an undisputed pick. Not all selections were as simple.

Injured pace ace Mohammed Shami could not be part of the squad. Premier batsman K.L. Rahul had to make way for Shivam Dube after a tepid run in the IPL. Rinku Singh found place only in the reserves because the squad had five left-hand batsmen in Dube, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel.

The preponderance of left-hand batters and spinners (Jadeja, Patel and Kuldeep Yadav) did not find widespread acceptance among experts. There was also scepticism about rookie left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh, Pant (who had just returned after serious injury) and the out-of-form Hardik Pandya.

As it happened, they all delivered, particularly under pressure. India made only nominal changes in the Playing XI throughout the tournament and won all matches, illustrating the merit of the thought-process, selection strategy, resource-management, and on-field leadership that went into brilliant campaign which has opened up a new vista for Indian cricket. **1**



## EVMs have strengthened democracy

The recent Lok Sabha election was the largest democratic exercise in human history. Spanning seven phases over seven weeks, more than 642 million out of 969 million registered voters cast their votes. This massive turnout underscores India's profound commitment to democracy, a cornerstone of our civilisational ethos. It is safe to say that democracy is the national ideology of our great nation, with its vitality manifesting in each election cycle.

India, historically revered as a land of education and knowledge, has long embraced democratic principles. At a time when much of the world was governed by monarchies, India upheld a rich tradition of democracy that spanned thousands of years. This deep-rooted democratic spirit finds its origins in India's ancient traditions of sustainable development and spiritual democracy. Democracy was innate to our civilisation and that is why our nation is known to be the mother of democracy, being one of the oldest and the largest democracies of the world.

The 2024 election marked a significant milestone in our democratic journey. Conducted by the vigilant Election Commission of India (ECI), it not only reaffirmed our status as the world's largest democracy but also highlighted the logistical feat of organising polls for 100 crore eligible voters.

Despite initial scepticism, the EVMs have proven their reliability through rigorous testing and numerous court challenges, including Supreme Court mandates for all machines to include Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) units. These measures have bolstered public confidence in the electoral process, despite occasional criticism from defeated parties.

Since the introduction of EVMs, instances of electoral fraud and human errors have significantly reduced, along with other malpractices like booth

capturing and ballot stuffing, which were common in many parts of India. It is debatable whether a nascent party like the Trinamool Congress, led by Mamata Banerjee, would have won the historic West Bengal elections in 2011 against the CPI(M), which had ruled the state for decades and was known for electoral misdemeanours, without the fairness and security brought to the polling process by the EVMs.

For many years now the Congress has been blaming the EVMs when it lost any election, but laughingly the EVMs were given credibility when the party won an election. Such behaviour shows that winning is everything for some people and national interest is secondary.

Elon Musk's comment on the possibility of EVMs being hacked by humans or AI, in response to a report on alleged voting irregularities in Puerto Rico, has once again caused a stir among certain groups in India. The time is right for India to highlight one of its most underrated and successful indigenous innovations. At present, Namibia, Nepal, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Switzerland, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Venezuela,

besides the US, use some form of electronic voting.

India's EVMs are a testament to indigenous innovation. They boast over 275 safety protocols, including a single-use, encrypted chip and stringent transportation and storage SOPs. Designed without any capability to connect to networks, such as Wi-Fi or bluetooth, Indian EVMs are impervious to remote hacking or external interference, ensuring unparalleled security and reliability.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightly said, the poll result is a victory for the democratic world showcasing resilience, peaceful conduct of elections and smooth transfer of power. The election has raised the credibility of the EVMs as the result symbolises impartiality and transparency.



# THE WIZARD OF FIZZ

The incredible journey of  
**Sathya Shankar K.**—from  
driving an autorickshaw to  
building a ₹800 crore business

BY BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA



**A** seed of an idea is all you need for success. Sathya Shankar K. would know, for there is a teeny, tiny seed at the heart of his success story.

His life got a kick-start in 1984. All of 18, Shankar had applied for an autorickshaw driving licence. But it was more than just a driving licence; it was his licence to dream big. The third of four sons of a poor village priest in Bellare in Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada district, he had to drop out after class 12 for want of funds. With a driving licence in hand, he bought an autorickshaw on

loan under the Central government's self-employment scheme. That autorickshaw was only the beginning of his incredible journey.

Today, Shankar owns a company with an annual turnover of Rs800 crore. His SG Group, headquartered in Puttur in Dakshina Kannada, has several verticals—from Praveen Capital to Megha Fruit Processing Private Limited. It sells 55 products, from packaged drinking water to snacks. In the last four decades, he has experimented with various business models and tasted success with each. He took the adage 'experience is the best

**Once we reach an annual turnover of ₹1,000 crore, we will go public. After the IPO, we wish to provide jobs to nearly one lakh people.**

—Sathya Shankar K., SG Group



BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA

teacher' quite literally, using every business venture to level up.

From the beginning, Shankar has had a keen eye for business, even during his autorickshaw driving days. He paid off the loan in a year and traded the three-wheeler for an Ambassador car. The autorickshaw was limiting his dreams and rides—he could only drive around Dakshina Kannada district. But in the taxi, he could take tourists beyond district- and state-lines. It was then that he observed the product that every foreign tourist bought—packaged drinking water. It has become a prominent

product of his company.

In 1988, Shankar sold the faithful Ambassador after realising that selling spare parts of cars was more lucrative than driving one. Also, there was no such shop in or around Puttur. Once he set up the automobile shop, he observed another trade in demand—sale of vehicle tyres. A year later came the tyre outlet.

It was while running the automobile shop that he learnt the nuances of finance management. Customers would buy parts on credit and pay later in instalments. He used that experience to start an automobile

finance company. In 1994, he started Praveen Capital and lent money at a small interest. What set Praveen Capital apart was that it provided loans to buy second-hand vehicles, and not just new vehicles. Today, Praveen Capital contributes ₹240 crore to the group's total revenue.

Around 15 years after he first thought of the idea, Shankar started his packaged drinking water company in 2000. He chose Narimogeru near Puttur to set up the factory. He had his reasons—one, Puttur receives steady rainfall, ensuring a reliable supply of water; two, he wanted to



PHOTOS BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA

#### BUBBLING OVER

An assembly line manufacturing Bindu Fizz Jeera Masala at the group's Narimogeru plant near Puttur in Karnataka's Dakshina Kannada district; women employees with the Bindu bottled water at the Narimogeru plant

generate jobs for the villagers, many of whom were migrating to cities for jobs. He aptly named his company Bindu, meaning drop in Kannada.

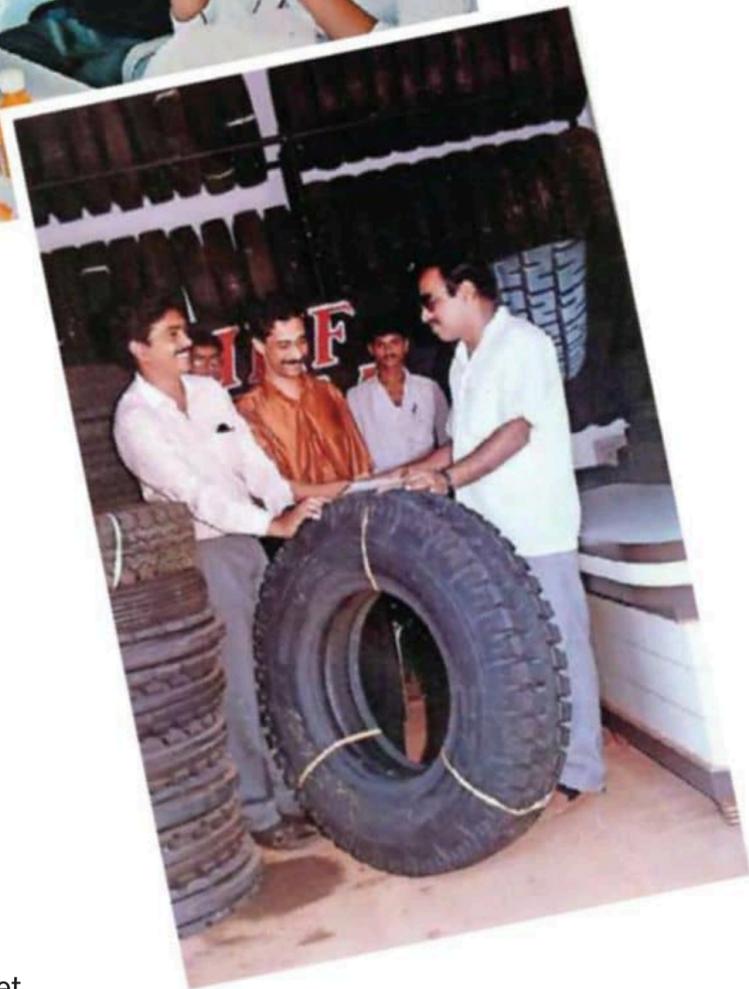
Two years later, Shankar came up with a uniquely flavoured carbonated drink. The idea for this, too, came on a trip, this time with friends to north India. There, he saw a shop selling soda, to which the seller added jeera powder and salt. "I told my friends if we could make the same drink with a twist, it would become a good product," says Shankar.

And thus was born Bindu Fizz Jeera Masala. It, however, did not find many takers initially. "We used to send 200 cases of the drink for sale, but 100 cases would come back unsold," says Shankar. But he was not one to lose hope. "People were bored of drinking Pepsi and Coke and they wanted something new," he says. "I knew that *jeera* masala would become a hit one day." Today, the flagship brand is a major source of revenue for the group. A product's popularity can be gauged from the

number of clones it spawns. But none of the clones were a patch on Bindu Fizz Jeera Masala as it was hard to replicate its secret recipe.

And, its popularity was organic—except for a few ads painted on walls bordering highways, its publicity was largely by word of mouth. Its unique flavour is its USP. Agrees Shreyas Gowda, 27, a budding photographer in Channapatna town in Karnataka, "It has a desi taste, very different from 7up or Coke, and goes well with non-vegetarian food that is cooked in typical rural style." He usually opts for a chilled Bindu Fizz Jeera Masala after a gruelling workday; it is refreshing and gives him a sugar rush, he adds.

Shankar's business model thrives on the desi touch. His company also has a ginger drink and a ko-kum-based drink; the latter is quite popular in coastal Karnataka and



#### DREAM VENTURES

(Clockwise from above) Sathya Shankar's automobile shop; Shankar and family with athlete Anju Bobby George and her husband Bobby; Shankar at his tyre outlet

Goa. In 2004, it launched a fruit juice brand named SipOn, which comes in mango, apple and pink guava flavours.

At its busy Narimogeru factory in Puttur, the production lines are busy churning out bottles of drinking water and a variety of drinks. Another unit inside the lush green campus is making snacks under its SnakUp brand, launched in 2009. Packed products are stacked on racks in the warehouse or being loaded into trucks. In 2017, the group set up a new manufacturing plant at Sangareddy in Telangana. Two more plants are coming up in Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. While the group largely caters to the south Indian market, its factory in Telangana supplies products to east India as well. But Shankar wants his products to reach across India. His revenue target for 2025 is ₹1,000 crore. "Once we

reach an annual turnover of ₹1,000 crore, we will go public with an IPO," he says. "We have 2,500 direct employees and 10,000 indirect employees. After the IPO, we wish to provide jobs to nearly one lakh people. We want to improve the family life of our employees."

Giving back to the community has been a core philosophy of the group. It has brought in a system to channelise rainwater to replenish the borewell near its Narimogeru factory in Puttur. Planting trees is another key initiative. The group is involved in philanthropy in and around Puttur. It has provided computers to schools in Nellyadi, constructed roads in many villages and promoted folk art in Dakshina Kannada district.

When he is not running the many businesses he owns, Shankar spends his time farming in Puttur. He, of course, loves to travel because that is

where he gets his business ideas. His family, too, is involved in business—from his wife, Ranjitha, to daughters Megha and Mahima and son, Manasvith.

Rajesh U.P., a close friend who has known Shankar since his spare-parts shop days, says, "Generally, in a family, one person will be simple and humble, but in Shankar's family all are simple and humble people." He adds that despite the success, Shankar has not changed in all these years. He treats his employees like family, which is one of the reasons behind his success, says Rajesh. And then, of course, there is his drive and discipline. Rajesh says that Shankar never misses his exercise routine—he walks and does yoga daily.

Shankar will be 60 this month, but he shows no signs of retiring. His spirit is as effervescent as his Bindu Fizz Jeera Masala. ❶



REUTERS

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**BACK TO BATTLE**  
President Joe Biden walks to deliver his remarks after the US Supreme Court ruling on presidential immunity, which has given the Donald Trump campaign a boost

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# A midsummer nightmare

**Biden's debate debacle forces Democrats  
to contemplate alternatives**

**BY LAVINA MELWANI/New York**

**T**

his was not going to be a joyful presidential debate by any measure, but neither were Americans expecting it to be the waking nightmare it turned out to be. The United States and the world had gathered around their television sets on the night of June 27 to watch two opponents whom they were not particularly excited about, but instead found themselves in a chilling scenario: President Joe Biden, usually feisty, statesman-like, and wise, was barely audible and unable to deflect his opponent's barrage of barbs; former president Donald Trump was in his element. He was confidently shooting from the hip—taunts, insults and lies about Biden's record and his own. Civility was dead, but more than that, the election itself seemed to be in death-throes. Was Biden just having a bad day and a bad cold? Or was



## FUMBLES AND STUMBLES

Biden's shaky, underwhelming debate performance has raised concerns about his health. Although the president is known to be gaffe-prone, such instances have increased recently:

After the debate debacle, aides revealed that Biden is “dependably engaged” only from 10am to 4pm. He is fatigued and can have verbal miscues outside that window

During a Juneteenth (June 19) concert at the White House, Biden was frozen for nearly 30 seconds, even as his guests, including Kamala Harris, danced around him

At an interview with *Time* in June, while speaking on Chinese tariffs, Biden referred to President Xi Jinping as Vladimir Putin

Special Counsel Robert Hur described Biden in February as a “well-meaning man with a poor memory”. Hur interviewed him extensively as part of his investigation into Biden's handling of classified documents

At a press conference to dispute Hur's findings in February, Biden confused Egypt with Mexico

In the same month, he referred to former German chancellor Angela Merkel as the late chancellor Helmut Kohl twice. He also confused French President Macron with former president Francois Mitterrand, who died in 1996

In a speech to first responders to commemorate 9/11 last September, Biden claimed that he was in New York on September 12, 2001. Biden visited Ground Zero only ten days later, on September 20

Last June, he tripped and fell on stage while attending the Air Force Academy graduation ceremony

The same month, he confused the ongoing Ukraine war with Iraq war

## STRAIGHT RECORD

Biden's latest official medical report suggests that he is healthy, active and robust

He suffers from obstructive sleep apnoea, atrial fibrillation (irregular heart rate), hyperlipidemia (high levels of fat), gastro-oesophageal reflux and seasonal allergies. But all conditions remain stable

Biden's gait remains stiff as he suffers from moderate to severe spondylosis, spinal arthritis and peripheral neuropathy

He suffered two brain aneurysms in 1988, which were treated successfully by surgeries. Dr Neal Kassell, who performed the surgery, said he did not suffer any brain damage that could come back and hurt him

age finally catching up?

Everyone from ordinary Americans to the world media, including *The New York Times*, jumped into the fray. The verdict of the *Times* editorial board was scathing: “At Thursday night’s debate, President Biden appeared the shadow of a great public servant. The greatest public service he can now perform is to announce that he will not continue to run for re-election.”

Media across the US and the world has been equally tough on Biden. But he recovered a day later and gave a strong performance in Pennsylvania. So, was it just an aberration or something which will worsen with the passing months? After all, Biden will be 86 at the end of his second term. And yet, age is just a number, and some older adults are still going strong into their 90s. Biden has had a long and illustrious career and has the gravitas and experience to pull off difficult decisions.

As California Governor Gavin Newsom wrote in a fundraising letter for the Democratic National Committee, “I was at the debate last night. I watched it. I tried to keep track of Trump’s lies as it went on and I ran out of paper. On the substance, Joe Biden won the debate last night. That’s what matters to me. Don’t look at 30 minutes. Look at the last three and a half years under Joe Biden. It’s been a masterclass: 15.6 million jobs created—eight times more than the last three Republican presidents combined.”

On the other side is Trump who has been the king of chaos with everyone left bruised and hurting, except for his special band of followers. The country is truly polarised between these two men. According to a latest survey by the Pew Research Center, voters are divided on so many issues. A quarter of Americans hold unfa-

When Biden was inaugurated four years ago, he had said that he planned to be a one-term president and pass on the mantle to a younger leadership. One does not know when or why his thinking changed.

decades. The survey found only 39 per cent of Americans view Trump favourably, while just 37 per cent have a positive opinion of Biden.

After Biden's performance in the debate, many voters are anxious to see him step down in favour of a candidate who has a winning chance against Trump, as the alternative is too dangerous to contemplate; Trump has clearly

is late in the game, but many voters think that an infusion of fresh blood into the Democratic campaign may yet save the day.

However, the decision rests solely with Biden. As political columnist David Lauter wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, "To be clear, no Democratic Party official or combination of officials has the authority to force Biden out. He won the party's primaries. The nomination is his to claim; he can renounce it, but only if he so chooses."

When Biden was inaugurated four years ago, he had said that he planned to be a one-term president and pass on the mantle to a younger leadership. One does not know when or why his thinking changed but it would have been best to have

favourable views of both Biden and Trump, making them the least-liked pair of major-party candidates in

shown that he wishes to rule like an autocrat and democracy will be dead in the world's oldest democracy. It

## WAITING IN THE WINGS

Who could replace Biden on the Democratic ticket?



**Kamala Harris, 59**

Natural choice as she is vice president. Strong support from Afro-American and women voters, but suffers from poor poll ratings



**Gavin Newsom, 56**

California governor: enjoys wide national profile, has instant name recognition and is an accomplished campaigner with a solid donor network. Could launch a campaign at short notice



**Josh Shapiro, 51**

Pennsylvania governor: keeps his focus on non-ideological issues, has the ability to work with Republicans. Shapiro is hugely popular in his state that is a must-win one in a close presidential race



**Michelle Obama, 60**

Former first lady: remains immensely popular, can win Afro-American and women votes. Will have the support of the much-vaunted Obama election machine. Staunch supporter of liberal, progressive causes



**Gretchen Whitmer, 52**

Michigan governor: charismatic and ambitious. Supports progressive policies such as gun control and abortion access. Her national profile grew during the pandemic



**JB Pritzker, 59**

Illinois governor: famous for anti-Trump tirades, is a caustic campaigner. Heir to the Hyatt hotels fortune with an estimated wealth of \$3.5 billion, he can self-fund his campaign



**Pete Buttigieg, 42**

Transportation secretary: was a contender in 2020. One of Biden cabinet's top communicators, he became famous nationally after dealing with public crises as transportation secretary

Other names doing the rounds include Senators Sherrod Brown (Ohio), Amy Klobuchar (Minnesota), Cory Booker (New Jersey), Raphael Warnock (Georgia) and Governors Wes Moore (Maryland) and Andy Beshear (Kentucky)

GRAPHICS  
SREEMANIKANDAN S.  
RESEARCH  
AJISH P. JOY



AP

**FIGHTING UGLY**

Donald Trump leaves a campaign rally in Chesapeake, Virginia, a day after the presidential debate

a succession plan with the many strong young Democrats in the party and remain as elder statesman and mentor.

According to Axios, “Dr Jill Biden (the first lady); his younger sister, Valerie Biden; and 85-year-old Ted Kaufman, the president’s longtime friend and constant adviser; plus a small band of White House advisers, are the only Biden deciders. This decades-long kitchen cabinet oper-

ates as an extended family, council of elders and governing oligarchy. These allies alone hold sway over decisions big and small in Biden’s life and presidency.”

It may have been a private decision, but after the debate debacle, it has become a public matter and all Americans have become vocal on who should run for president. Now whether he wants to or not, Biden may be compelled to write a different

ending to his White House story as voters discuss viable candidates.

So who are the possibilities? Vice President Kamala Harris has, at times, struggled to define her role at Biden’s side, and is regarded somewhat of a political liability. There are a handful of other good contenders, including governors Newsom

of California, Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan, J.B. Pritzker of Illinois and Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania. Other possibilities include Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Senators Cory Booker of New Jersey and Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota. There were also reports about former first lady Michelle Obama as a candidate, but after Biden’s debate disaster, Barack Obama issued a forceful statement supporting the president.

Many voters are also furious that Trump, as usual, has got away scot-free in spite of being a felon and having so many charges against him. Will his Teflon persona last?

As Biden told a rally in North Carolina after the debate: “I don’t walk as easy as I used to. I don’t speak as smoothly as I used to,” but, he added, “I would not be running again if I didn’t believe with all my heart and soul I can do this job.” To which he added, “I don’t debate as well as I used to. But I know how to tell the truth.”

Just two days after the debate,

**Vice President Kamala Harris has, at times, struggled to define her role at Biden’s side, and is regarded somewhat of a political liability.**

“

**I don't walk as easy as I used to. I don't speak as smoothly as I used to. But I would not be running again if I didn't believe with all my heart and soul I can do this job.**

**—Joe Biden**



Governor Phil Murphy of New Jersey hosted a private fund-raising dinner for the president at his home, raising \$3.7 million for the campaign. Calling Biden “America’s comeback kid” Murphy said: “It was acknowl-

edging that they had a tough night and also acknowledging that we’ve got to remember that this has been a heck of a run the past four years, and we’ve got to keep it going. They have to hit the gas pedal hard.”

Chintan Patel, director of Indian American Impact, a pro-Democratic group, and his team sent out an email to supporters about the two competing visions seen on the debate: “From protecting reproductive freedom and voting rights to fighting health care costs and the global climate crisis, the Biden-Harris administration is ready to act on the issues that matter

most to us. And as the fastest growing voter bloc in many states, Indian and South Asians have the power to decide who represents us and the future of our country.”

As this nail-biter of an election moves toward its unknowable finale, the world watches and waits. Americans are going about their daily lives, but the upcoming elections are never far from their minds, and a matter for stress and gloom. As the stand-up comedienne Zarna who is Indian and American piped up on social media, in ‘puja-mode’ to the music of *Kabhi Khushi, Kabhi Gham*, “Tonight’s a very difficult night for America and I’m inviting you all to pray for America.”

**—Lavina Melwani is a New York based writer and blogs at Lassi with Lavina.**

## Sporty elegance

**INFOCUS**

Luxury watch brand Longines is celebrating the 70th anniversary of one of its most popular collections, the Conquest, with several releases throughout this year. Spearheading this is the new summer collection that retains the elegance of the Conquest line, while boasting robustness for everyday use. To match the versatile lifestyle of men and women, the watches come in different sizes, colours, and materials.

There is a range of options to choose from. There are time and date models in 30mm, 34mm, and 38mm, and chronograph models in 42mm. The models sport bi-material cases (steel and 18K pink gold), bezels and dials

set with or without diamonds, and vibrant colours like sunray purple, white mother-of-pearl, sunray champagne, and more.



For the optimum legibility at night, the hour markers at 3, 9 and 12 o'clock, and hands, are coated with Super-LumiNova®. Comfortable stainless steel bracelets or coloured rubber straps complete the watches. All the timepieces are equipped with an exclusive Longines mechanical movement with a silicon balance-spring and new non-magnetic components.

Accompanying the launch is the brand’s new campaign ‘A Life in a Day’, with Longines’s ambassadors of elegance, actors Zhao Liying and Bae Suzy, and model Barbara Palvin, that showcases that elegance can be fun. The novelties gracing their wrists are the new 34mm steel Conquests in green, pink and blue dials.



## Biden biding his time

**C**on Man vs Old Man. That's how analysts described the first presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. Con Man, a congenital liar, did what he always does best—fibbing through every question. Old Man did what he is prone to, mumbling and fumbling to ignominy, for which he was clobbered by TV commentators. They pronounced that Democratic party members and donors are in “pain and panic,” wanting Biden to drop out of the presidential race. But no Democrat showed up in the TV studios to make this demand. No one was even named.

Left- and right-leaning experts said they received a tsunami of reactions from Democrats shocked by Biden's pathetic performance. Republican commentator Scott Jennings said he was swamped by messages from Democratic governors and officials worried by Biden's bungling. Why would Democrats bare their tormented souls to a Republican commentator? Perhaps, the Biden barrage was an AI driven mass and social media campaign. This has happened before.

No one disputes that Biden fared badly. Doubts about his cognitive decline reached a crescendo. Instantly, commentators pronounced Biden's political death sentence. But what are the chances of Biden being defeated in the presidential race because of this dismal debate? “Zero,” says historian Allan Lichtman emphatically, asserting “historically debate performances have no impact on election outcomes.” In 2004, John Kerry debated superbly, but lost to George W. Bush. Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama debated poorly, but won. Debates are watched only by a portion of the population. Most voters worry about real issues, not how nominees sound and look in debates. Former Trump supporter Anthony Scaramucci says, “Debates are popularity contests, but that's not where hiring decisions are made.”

*The New York Times*, among other media organ-

isations, urged Biden to “serve his nation” by withdrawing, arguing Democrats could then field a new candidate to defeat Trump—the “existential threat to democracy”. Biden claims he is the best candidate to do just that. Lichtman agrees. He says his “Keys to White House” model shows “more than any other Democrat, Biden has the best chance to defeat Trump”. His keys include incumbency, good economy and no-contest primaries. Lichtman has correctly predicted the US election results for four decades.

Away from the spotlight, Biden's debate debacle is a morality tale signifying important life lessons. Commentators blasted Biden, but none mentioned his speech impediment. People who stammer, stutter more when they are nervous or tired. It is remarkable that despite this disability, Biden rose to the highest office in a treacherously competitive political landscape. Maybe his voice was hoarse due to excessive preparations. Maybe aides coached him inadequately on his appearance, so cameras caught him blank-faced and open-mouthed several times.



Interrogation under a microscope for 90 minutes is hard, even harder to speak without crowds and teleprompters. It's easier for Trump who doesn't bother to remember facts.

Instead of feeling shamed and licking his wounds after the blistering criticism, Biden rebounded, like the boxer he is, saying, “When you get knocked down, you get back up.” The very next day, Biden gave a spirited performance at an election rally in North Carolina. The event was staged with chants and charts, but the crowd was good, teleprompters in place and Biden feisty, as he was in the State of the Union address four months ago. He crisscrossed the country that day to attend four major events, ending with a massively attended fundraiser gala in New York.

Still, many Americans wonder: “Con Man vs Old Man—is this the best we've got?”

Interview

Anasuya Sengupta

best actress, Cannes Film Festival

I don't  
think I  
ever left  
Kolkata

BY NILADRY SARKAR AND SALIL BERA



Anasuya Sengupta is still coming to terms with her historic achievement. The 37-year-old recently won the Un Certain Regard Prize for Best Actress at the Cannes Film Festival for her remarkable performance in Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's *The Shameless*. In the film, Sengupta portrays the lead character of Renuka, who escapes from a Delhi brothel after killing a cop.

Sengupta is still figuring out what the honour truly means for her. One thing is certain. The sudden international fame, she says, will not change what she essentially is—a *Kolkata meye* (daughter of Kolkata) whose athletic build belies the fact that she still relishes Kolkata biryani and mishti doi.

In an interview with THE WEEK, she looks back at her extraordinary journey—from playing a minor role in director Anjan Dutt's *Madly Bangalee* in 2009 to the red carpet in Cannes.

Excerpts:

**Q\ How do you describe your journey from Kolkata to Cannes?**

**A\** Growing up in a regular Bengali family in Kolkata, [I always had an] inclination for arts.... In Jadavpur University, I got active in the theatre scene. It was through [my college theatre group] Tin Can that five friends and I got cast in *Madly Bangalee*.

But I had started working behind the scenes as far back as 2008. I was the most junior person in the team of an Indo-Australian feature film called *The Waiting City*, where I had been the DA [director's assistant]. At that point, the 21-year-old me decided that [it was] enough ammo to move to Bombay.

I was the most junior person in the art department of Deepa Mehta's *Midnight's Children*. Very soon I also became production designer. I have been very lucky in working with not just people who I respect and admire, but

also people who I was able to forge excellent friendships with.

But I still really wanted to act. I wanted to find newer avenues to express myself. It was then that I started making illustrations. Soon I realised that I wanted to leave Bombay, which was frightening because you can't walk away after 10-12 years in the industry. But I relied on my gut. The growing community of artists in Goa gave me confidence to see life a little bit differently. I have been living in Goa for about four years now.

**Q\ How did you get to know Konstantin Bojanov and how did Renuka happen?**

**A\** That's a fun story. Konstantin and I had been Facebook friends for years because of mutual filmmaker friends from Kolkata. I was familiar with his name because he liked almost all of the art that I posted. In 2020, I found a message from him on Facebook Messenger, asking me to play the lead part in his film. It completely caught me off guard. I tried to convince him not to do this. But he insisted that I read the script and, thank God, I did.

**Q\ Renuka is a very political character. How similar are you to her?**

**A\** Both similar and dissimilar. Very dissimilar, in some ways. Renuka [has] a sense of freedom, a sense of hope; [she] stands up for herself and other people, especially women. Renuka is a lone wolf. [She] had a very difficult life, and hardship after hardship. I,



GETTY IMAGES



**IN FOCUS**  
A still from *The Shameless*, (below, from right) Sengupta, director Konstantin Bojanov and actor Omara Shetty at Cannes

on the other hand, have had an extremely supportive circle of friends and family.

But I also found common ground. Her revolutionary spirit spoke to me. It tied in with the kind of artist that I like to see myself as.

**Q\ You dedicated your award to marginalised communities across the world. Whom do you consider as marginalised in today's world?**

**A\** Any community or any group of people who are being denied their basic rights to exist the way they want. People who are being denied freedom, who are being oppressed by communities or other groups that are more powerful in number, influence or authority. I dedicated the award to queer communities all over the world and other marginalised communities.

**Q\ What was your experience in Bollywood as a production designer for 10 years?**

**A\** I lived in Bombay since I was 21, and [I have] done a range of work. I don't even know what would strictly be considered Bollywood or a little bit outside of Bollywood. I actually loved my entire production design career. What appealed to me the most, and what I learned the most, is that you cannot be a production designer without dozens of people. That, for me, has been

the most valuable lesson in my life—that you work with a range of people like makeup artists, artisans, *karigars*, carpenters, painters and electricians.

**Q\ You are based in Goa, but you still identify yourself as *Kolkatar meye*. Why did you leave Kolkata?**

**A\** I always say that I did not leave Kolkata. It was more like I went to another place, to another city. It is a big world, and I want to see more and learn more, and meet different kinds of people. [I don't want to] limit myself. That is important to me. [I went to] Bombay, and then I left Bombay, but I still don't see that as leaving Bombay. It was more like finding a newer pasture, finding a newer way

to think. [It was about] giving myself an environment where I can challenge myself differently. There are so many ways of thinking and looking at the world, and so many different lenses that we can have. So I don't think I ever left. I hopefully will keep growing and keep going places. But this [Kolkata] is always home. This is where I will always come back. My family is here.

**Q\ How many offers have you received after the award?**

**A\** It is just an exciting spell of reading and choosing now. Hopefully, you will know soon what the exciting stuff is. ❶

**There are so many ways of thinking and looking at the world.... I hopefully will keep growing and keep going places. But [Kolkata] is always home. This is where I will always come back.**

# HOME, SERVED HOT

Around 50 refugee chefs from Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh showcase their country's cuisine at a food festival in Chennai

BY LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

Rajeshwari Noyal, 46, arrived as a refugee on the shores of Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka in 1990, when the conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government was at its peak. The 14-year-old did not fully understand what was happening, except that all 11 members of her family would have to sail by boat to reach a safe zone. Other than their national ID cards and a few sets of clothes, her mother only packed around 15 *maida rotis* and *sambol*, a traditional side dish of Sri Lankan Tamil cuisine. The *maida rotis* were meant to stay fresh for at least four days. The *sambol* was prepared without coconut or tuna, its usual ingredients. But upon reaching Rameswaram, the family had to throw away all the food, because the high tide had made them soggy and inedible. Rajeshwari was so hungry she was even prepared to eat the soggy rotis. However, when they got off the boat, they were served *upma* by officers of the Indian coast guard. "That was the first time I ate it," she says. She was so hungry she did not even register the taste.

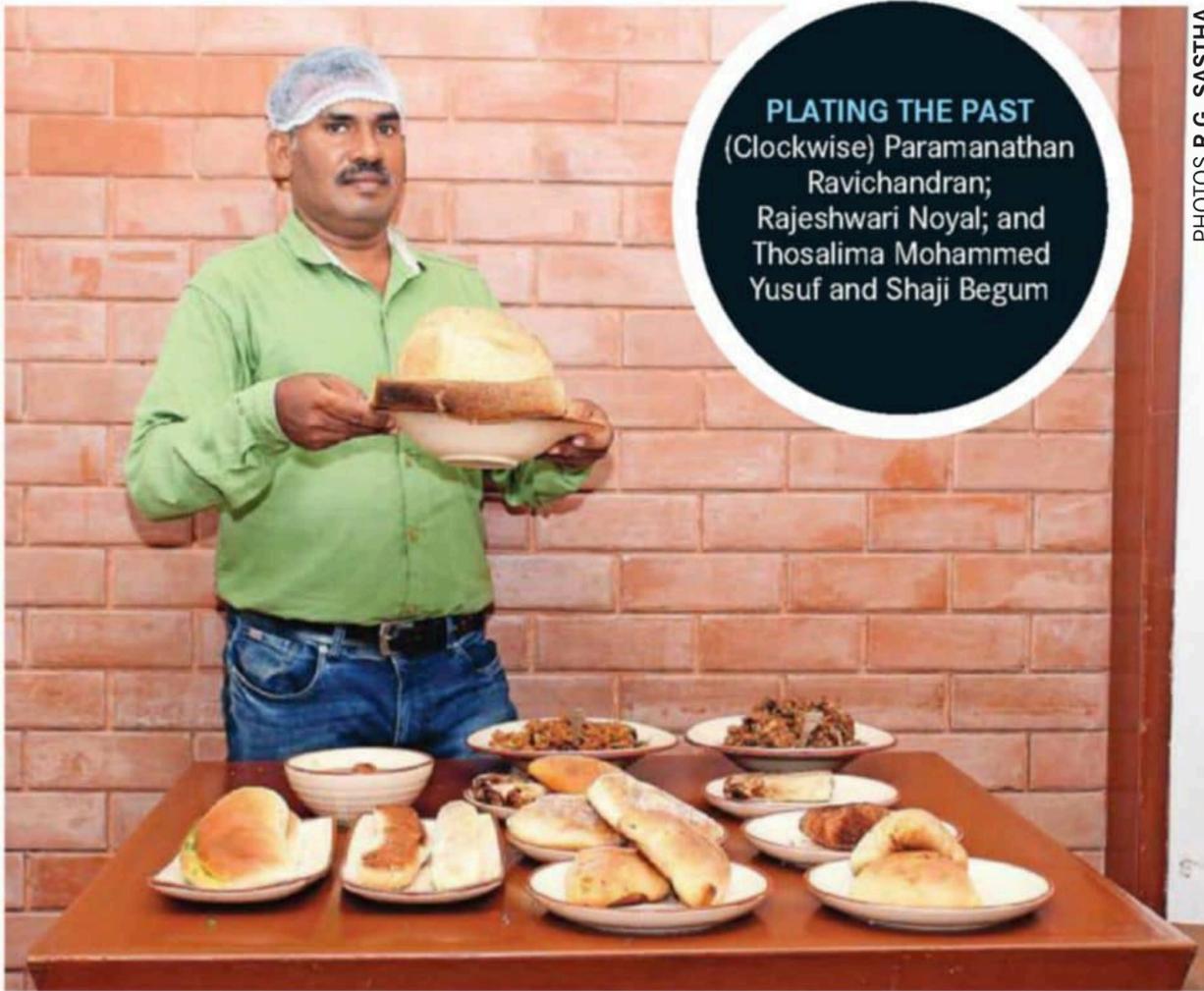
And now, 34 years later, Rajeshwari lives in a refugee camp in Chennai's Puzhal, and is one of the celebrated Sri Lankan refugee chefs there. She can cook Indian and Burmese delicacies, having learnt the latter from a Burmese colleague at a health centre in Chennai, where she used to work. Along with her neighbour Nilavani Kamleswaran, 50, she runs a small restaurant in the camp.



She and Nilavani are among the 50 or so chefs participating in the third edition of a refugee food festival organised by the UNHCR in Chennai from July 5 to 7. They will serve *appam*, *masi (tuna) sambol* and *katta (spicy) sambol*. The festival—Oorum Unavum (cities and food)—is aimed at improving the perception of refugees in their host country. Taking place at Annasalai in Chennai, it will feature the rich culinary traditions of Sri Lankan Tamils and Rohingya Muslims from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

"It is nice to bring people together around the question of immigration in a more positive way," says Prema Rajani Devendram, 46, a Sri Lankan

refugee from Jaffna who will prepare red rice *idiyappam*, *sothi* (a kind of watery gravy), coconut sambol, red rice *puttu* and chicken *pirattal* (another gravy) at the festival. Rajani, unlike Rajeshwari and Nilavani, is used to south Indian cuisine. She was first introduced to it in the 1980s by the personnel of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)—the military contingent sent from India to Sri Lanka to promote peace between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. Rajani's house was close to the IPKF camp in Jaffna. "We used to get chapati and soup packets, millets like ragi, lentils and rice from the soldiers," says Rajani, who now runs a food truck in Chennai. When she first



PHOTOS R.G. SASTHA



landed at Rameswaram as a refugee in 1999, the Indian cuisine tasted just like the food prepared at home. “The coast guard gave us chapati and biscuits. The only difference was that this chapati was not hot like the ones served by the IPKF,” she says with a smile.

Unlike the others, Paramanathan Ravichandran, 49, came to India from Sri Lanka on a tourist visa two years after the war in which he was

badly hurt. He runs a Sri Lankan bakery in Chennai, which serves *kothu roti*, veg and chicken rolls, and types of triangular buns called *kombuan*, *sangilivan* and fish van. He came to India after spending two years in the camps for the internally displaced in Sri Lanka, and started his business by selling rolls and tea at the Koyambedu market from 2am. Everyone there used to call him ‘Roll Ravi’. Later, in 2000, he regis-

tered with the refugee rehabilitation department and launched his own bakery with his savings.

While the Sri Lankan refugees can adapt to life in Tamil Nadu because of similar culture and language, it is much more difficult for the Rohingya Muslims like Thosalima Mohammed Yusuf, 28, who migrated from Bangladesh and has been living at a government-run camp in Chennai for the past 12 years. She says she is yet to adapt to Indian food and culture. There are over 18 families and 90 Rohingya Muslims living in the camp. “I am not particular about food, even when we have our own traditional cuisine,” she says in broken Hindi, adding that it does not matter when they do not have a country. Thosalima and her neighbour Shaji Begum, 22, will cook *dhoofida* (made with rice, coconut and jaggery) *faasfida* (a traditional vegetarian snack made with wheat flour, coconut and jaggery), *lapasu* (a salad prepared with green chilli, onion, cucumber, tomato and oil) and *sana* (another salad made with potato, onion, tomato and noodles). The two work as home chefs at the camp. “The men are mostly daily wage labourers. The women also go out to work sometimes. So we help them by taking orders from home,” says Thosalima.

She explains that Rohingya recipes mostly revolve around fish, vegetables, rice, milk and chilli. One of the mainstays is *gura fira*, a sweet rice pudding that is consumed in the morning before prayer and during religious festivals like Eid. But the most important Rohingya dish might be *durus kura*, a whole-fried chicken curry that is prepared on special occasions.

For Thosalima and the other refugee chefs, the food festival offers an opportunity to connect with other members of their community from across India. After all life, much like food, is meant to be shared. 🍲

# Captain planet

Alia Bhatt's debut children's book has many subtle lessons

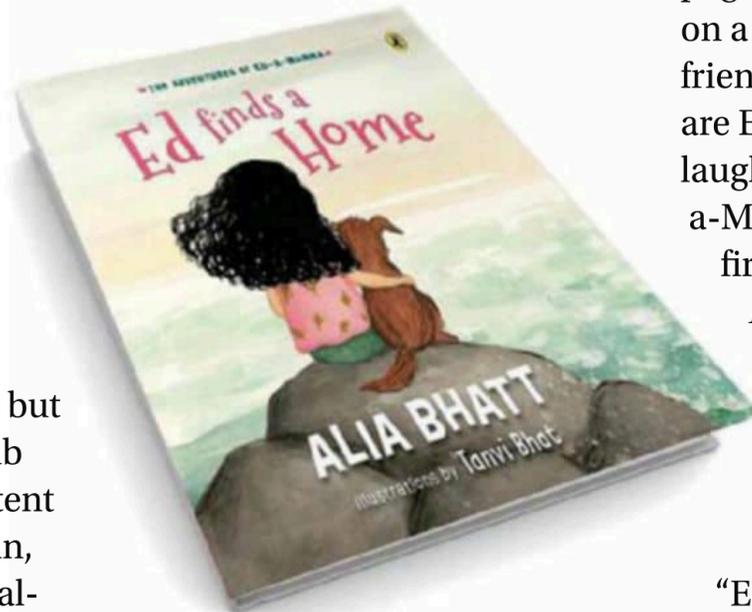
BY REYA MEHROTRA

Like good wine or a bright mind, children's literature has matured with time. Scheherazade is no longer weaving stories with a moral, she is telling those with a message. It might be one of gender equality, abuse, single parenting, racism, bullying or climate change, but writers no longer sugarcoat or dumb down the truth for children. The intent is that, in the kind of world we live in, they must be acclimatised to the realities of life. Sooner or later, ignorance has to be uncoupled from innocence.

This is not new. As early as the 1980s, children's writers were chipping away at tough topics. Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown's 1986 book *Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families* described to young readers why divorces happen and how to adapt to a new family. Virginia Ironside's 1996 book *The Huge Bag of Worries* dealt with mental health when it was still veiled by stigma. However, it is only in the last decade that such children's stories are becoming best-sellers, and the world is waking up to their allure.

Actor Alia Bhatt's debut children's book *Ed Finds a Home* fits this mould. She has strewn crumbs throughout her story, tutoring her young readers in environmentalism, sustainability, kindness and gender equality. (*Ed Finds a Home* is one of the first picture books in the country to be printed on FSC paper, sourced in a sustainable and environment-friendly manner.)

In the small brown house in which Bhatt's protagonist—a little girl cheekily named Alia—lives, it is her mother who works and her father who cooks,



**Ed Finds a Home**  
By Alia Bhatt  
Illustrations by Tanvi Bhat  
Published by Puffin Books,  
an imprint of Penguin  
Random House  
Price ₹299; pages 40

**Alia Bhatt has strewn crumbs throughout her story, tutoring her young readers in environmentalism, sustainability, kindness and gender equality.**

subverting conventional gender norms. Alia has a deep connection with nature. Her superpower enables her to talk with dogs and crows, and communicate her feelings to trees.

“Of course, we can (talk)! People just don't know how to listen,” says Ed, an abandoned dog that Alia finds. The easy-to-read book is a compelling page-turner for young readers. It ends on a paw-sitive note, with a budding friendship between Alia and Ed. “You are Ed, and now I am your mamma,” laughs Alia. “So together we are Ed-a-Mamma.” *Ed Finds a Home* is the first in the series *The Adventures of Ed-a-Mamma*. Incidentally, Ed-a-Mamma is the name of Bhatt's conscious clothing brand for children. Apart from books, the brand is also branching out into toys, baby care and more.

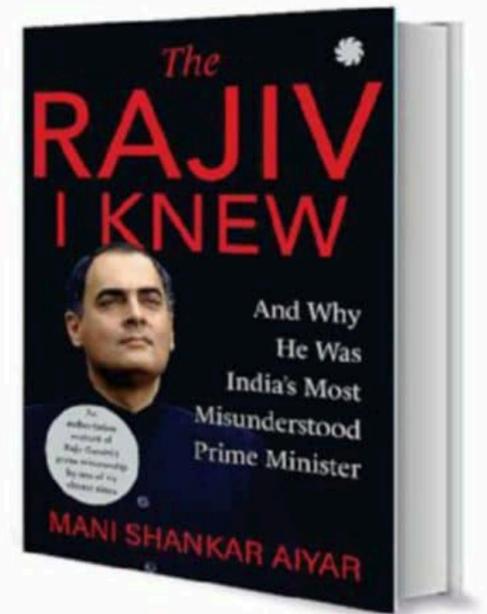
“Ed-a-Mamma was born with the intent to inspire children to fall in love with nature and create a generation of ‘mini-planeteers’ who feel responsible for protecting the environment. But I also believe that to protect, we must connect. That's why my first step was to encourage children to spend more time outdoors and explore the wonders of the natural world. And what better way to do this than through the power of storytelling,” says Bhatt about her debut book, which has been written by her along with Vivek Kamath and Shabnam Minwalla. The illustrations are by Tanvi Bhat.

Sohini Mitra, publisher (children's), at Penguin Random House India, says, “By weaving themes of friendship and sustainability together, the book not only entertains, but also educates children about the importance of caring for our planet and the creatures that inhabit it.”

As Alia and Ed set out to save the planet, one small step at a time, their adventures have just begun. But then, one small step for them might just be a giant leap for mankind. Who knows, we might soon be living in a planet salvaged by a little girl and her canine companion. And captained by their enterprising creator. 🐾



**FRIENDS AT WORK**  
Rajiv Gandhi and  
Mani Shankar Aiyar



**THE RAJIV I KNEW, AND  
WHY HE WAS INDIA'S MOST  
MISUNDERSTOOD PRIME  
MINISTER**

*Author: Mani Shankar Aiyar*

*Published by Juggernaut*

*Price: ₹548; pages: 323*

# Straight from the heart

Mani Shankar Aiyar's take on a prime minister he knew up close

BY N. SATHIYA MOORTHY

**T**he Lok Sabha election has rekindled interest in the Congress and the Nehru-Gandhi family, especially Rahul Gandhi, who has been enduring below-the-belt attacks for a decade and more. But critics of the family have left out Sanjay Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, who was an 'accidental' prime minister and a reluctant politician before that. Memories of that generation are coloured by the Bofors scandal and the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) disaster in Sri Lanka.

Mani Shankar Aiyar's latest book—*The Rajiv I Knew, And Why He Was India's Most Misunderstood Prime Minister*—is a personal note on the

prime minister, under whom he was a joint secretary. The book is lucidly written, and Aiyar's frankness in not wanting to claim ownership or first-hand knowledge of what he was not officially part of comes through in every page of the book.

According to Aiyar, Rajiv, who was at the centre of difficult developments, was not fully informed about the Bofors deal. Not just that, he was not briefed enough on the Shah Bano case, or, for that matter, on the overnight opening of the locks of the temple in Ayodhya—all of which showed him up as naive, and cost him and his party dear as the 1989 Lok Sabha poll result proved. For Ayodhya and Shah Bano, Aiyar puts the blame on

Rajiv's cousin Arun Nehru. And the IPKF disaster? General Krishnaswamy Sundarji was to be blamed, says Aiyar. Aiyar's arguments are simple—straight from the heart, and mostly convincing.

Aiyar gives credit to Rajiv for multiple peace accords that he had signed with political and militant groups in the north and the northeast. He praises Rajiv for giving Constitutional protection to the Panchayati Raj system, especially with 33 per cent reservation for women. In fact, it was Aiyar who drafted the amendments required and did much of the paperwork and propagation even while continuing as Rajiv's official speech-writer.

Aiyar also commends Rajiv's contributions to the cause of nuclear non-proliferation. Aiyar's book is worth a read, and possible re-read, especially if you were a fan of Rajiv when he was alive, or a critic, then, and since.

**The writer** is a policy analyst and political commentator.



## Taylor-made illusion

There is a lovely lady who frequents my gym and earns herself some nudge-nudge and wink-winks each time she passes by. “She looks like she’s going to a Taylor Swift concert,” say the other girls. The said lady has a penchant for a little shimmer, shine, sequins and colour in her gym wear—more often than not, all at once—while the rest of us mortals don more forgiving black.

She probably did end up going to Swift’s ‘The Eras Tour’, which has boosted the UK and Europe’s economy as much as the Euro Cup and the Olympics. As did Prince William, Emma Stone, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Salma Hayek, Stella McCartney and dad Paul McCartney, Tom Cruise, Hugh Grant, Katy Perry and Selena Gomez. It hardly matters whether I like Swift’s music or not (I don’t), she remains the most played singer on Spotify and is the only person ever to have won an album of the year Grammy four times. But what is it about her style that is so instantly recognisable and immediately dislikable?

Swift, most certainly by design, is a rather girly dresser. Blonde, blue-eyed and leggy, she’s a modern-day Barbie without the excessive pinks and ruffles. Swift’s signatures are her bangs and her red lips that make her seem as if she is your girl next door. But she’s made a sartorial style of wearing so much high-street fashion, in a bid to win some America’s sweetheart-stripes, that she has become the flag-bearer of a fast fashion-wearing billionaire.

Swift’s music is rather teen-like—about a young woman coming of age, dealing with love and heart-break—and is mostly autobiographical. Her fashion choices echo what an average white girl would wear in America. Most other female artistes in her league—Beyonce, Gomez and Jennifer Lopez—are women of colour. Their clothing choices are a

celebration of achieving success in a world where ethnicity becomes a calling card. Swift’s rejection of high fashion (in her daily life mostly; at concerts, she’s happy to wear shimmering itsy-bitsies from Versace, Roberto Cavalli and gang) is a rejection of her supposed privilege. Swift wants to show her young fans they can relate to her, she cannot be a sophisticate.

She dresses like her young fans do, and shops where they do, too. Zara, Urban Outfitters, and J Crew feature prominently in her wardrobe. She has worn luxury labels like Alaia and Prada, but dresses them down to make them look common.

An inelegant, quotidian aesthetic is integral to her public persona. It is otherwise unfathomable that a 34-year-old billionaire, possibly among the most famous women in the world, would not hire better stylists. The downside is she has become a symbol of fast fashion.

Swift has also been criticised for being an anti-environmentalist for using her private jet way too often, leading to 8,000 tons of carbon emissions in 2022. While she may be downplaying her wealth—unlike her other pop-star sisters—her lack of sensible dressing is disturbing. In

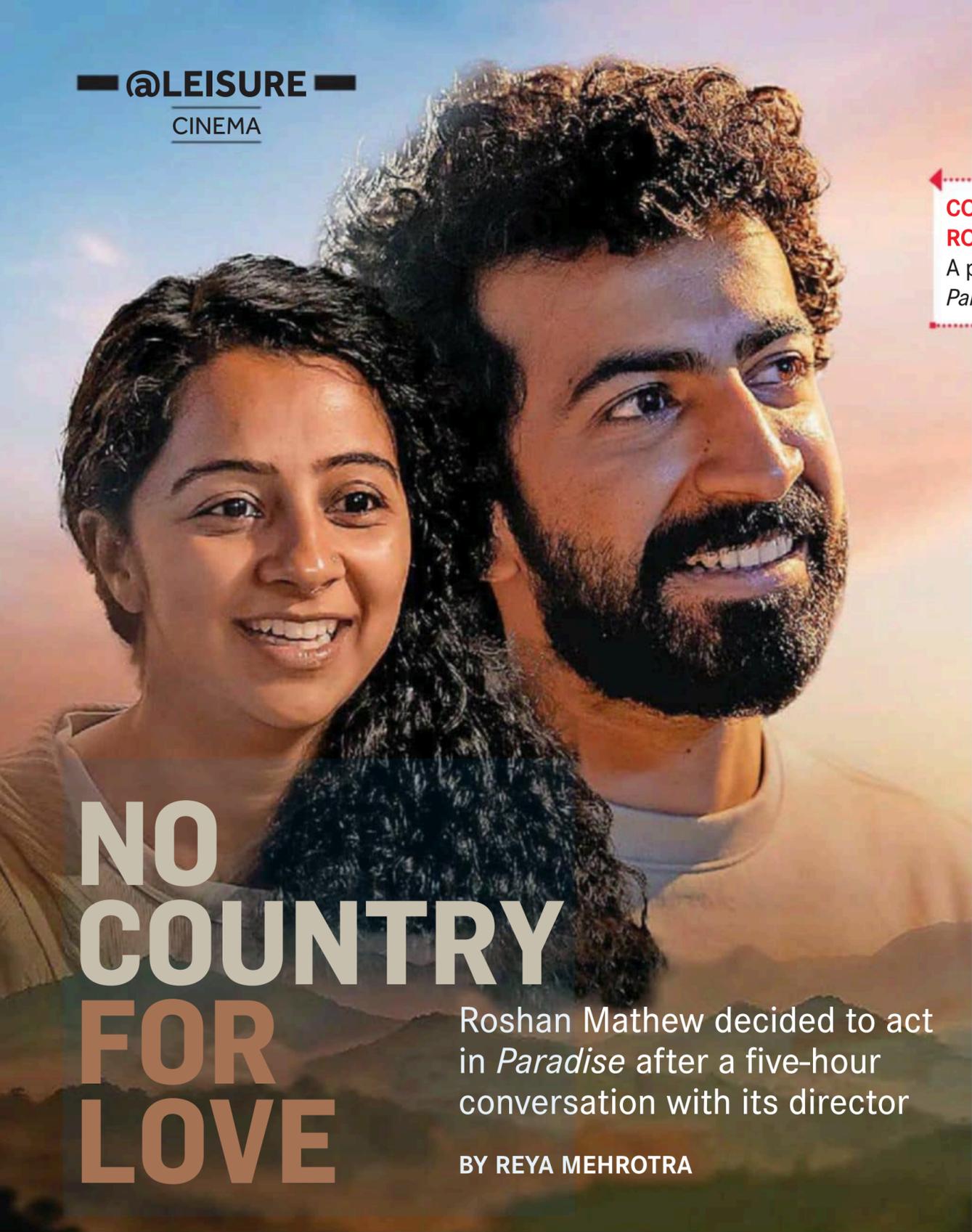
an attempt to be more responsible, Swift has been donating to several charities, especially food banks.

It is interesting to note that London’s Victoria & Albert Museum is displaying some of Swift’s personal items for the summer. It is a free exhibit, so one can’t even accuse the museum of cashing in on the touring singer’s hype. It will hopefully encourage younger patrons to come and see up-close Swift’s cowboy boots, dresses, costumes and awards.

But unfortunately for the sweet lady at the gym, and for the rest of the world, dressing like a flashy young teenager is no fashion role model to follow.



Taylor Swift during her Eras Tour in Dublin



# NO COUNTRY FOR LOVE

Roshan Mathew decided to act in *Paradise* after a five-hour conversation with its director

BY REYA MEHROTRA

**CONFLICTED  
ROMANCE**

A poster of *Paradise*

and produced by Newton Cinema—won the Kim Jiseok award at the Busan International Film Festival in South Korea and the Prix du Jury Lyceen at the Vesoul International Film Festival in France. It released in India on June 28 to much acclaim.

Referring to independent and non-commercial films like Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* (which won big at Cannes this year) and *Paradise* attracting audiences on OTT instead of theatres, Mathew says, "There is a certain responsibility to ensure that the diversity in cinema remains, and for that we must go to watch these films."

Mathew has worked in Malayalam, Hindi and Tamil films. His international project *Poacher* was produced by Alia Bhatt. He says that while Tamil and Telugu films are becoming pan-India hits, he is happy that Malayalam actors and films, too, are getting attention, especially after the pandemic. The actor is keen on trying different genres, especially those he has never explored before, like his upcoming film, *Ulajh*, a spy thriller co-starring Janhvi Kapoor. "I take up a project if the character excites me or if the people in it do, or if it is multilingual," he says. "It is high time we embrace all languages in cinema."

*Poacher* was his second collaboration with Alia Bhatt, after the comedy-thriller *Darlings* (2022), which starred her along with Mathew, Shefali Shah and Vijay Varma. "Who would not want to work with Alia?" he asks. "She is at the top of her game, doing some incredible work, and evolving as an artiste so beautifully. I was lucky to be able to work with her. Even now, if there is a discussion about a project with Alia, I get excited."

Mathew says he is agnostic of the medium he works in, whether it is OTT or the big screen. As an actor, all that matters to him is that he does his work well. ●

**I**n 2022, there was no food, fuel or electricity in Sri Lanka. Poor, hungry and destitute, the people became desperate. The economic crisis tipped into political instability and there were widespread protests. Once again Sri Lanka burned, but this time, with a fire from within. It is in this backdrop that Sri Lankan filmmaker Prasanna Vithanage set his film *Paradise*. After all, paradise is what the main characters—Kesav (Roshan Mathew) and Amrita (Darshana Rajendran)—were after when they travelled to Sri Lanka, unaware of the tensions simmering there. They did not know that when they planned to celebrate five years of marriage in a burning country, they risked their love going up in flames.

It was a five-hour chat with Vithanage that convinced actor Mathew to take up the film. "There is a certain sense of simplicity and minimalism in his filmmaking, which I admire," says Mathew. "I saw that in his films *With You*, *Without You*, *Gaadi* and *Paradise*. It was an illuminating experience to work with him."

Although Mathew was initially hesitant to do *Paradise* because his film *Choked* had followed a similar relationship trajectory, he got enthused after meeting and speaking with the filmmaker. Vithanage wanted the actors to go to Sri Lanka without any preconceived notions to experience the situation firsthand. In the film, the couple visits the country for its beauty and affordability.

*Paradise*—presented by filmmaker Mani Ratnam's Madras Talkies

## HIT MAKER

**Kani Kusruti** seems to be a lucky charm for filmmakers. After Payal Kapadia's film *All We Imagine As Light*, starring her, won big at Cannes, now it is the turn of Shuchi Talati's *Girls Will Be Girls*, which won the Grand Jury prize at the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles. *Girls Will Be Girls* is the coming-of-age tale of 16-year-old Mira (Preeti Panigrahi) and her turbulent relationship with her mother Anila (Kusruti). This is the third Grand Jury win for the film, after its triumph at the Transylvania International Film Festival in Romania and the Biarritz Film Festival in France.



## A BOUNTIFUL BEGINNING

*Kalki 2898 AD*, starring **Prabhas** as a bounty hunter, had a fantastic opening, collecting over ₹500 crore worldwide in its debut weekend.

It became the first Indian film to gross over \$11 million (around ₹90.2 crore) in its opening weekend in North America. The sci-fi thriller, directed by Nag Ashwin and co-starring Deepika Padukone and Amitabh Bachchan, has been receiving rave reviews for its special effects and visual spectacle. If all goes well, the film is expected to collect over ₹800 crore during its theatrical run.

AFP

REUTERS

## BACK TO THE ARENA

If you thought Russell Crowe's death in *Gladiator* was the end of it, you had it wrong. Twenty-four years later, director Ridley Scott is back with the sequel, featuring actor **Paul Mescal** as Lucius, the grown son of the noblewoman Lucilla (Connie Nielsen) in the first part. Apparently, she had sent Lucius to Africa after the events of *Gladiator* to shield him from Roman violence. But you could keep him away for only so long. After all, in the end, all roads lead to Rome.



SHUTTERSTOCK



AFP



GETTY IMAGES

## BORN AGAIN

You are only born once, but if you are **Sushmita Sen** you get to have two birthdays. On National Doctors' Day (July 1), the actor changed her birthday from November 19, 1975, to February 27, 2023, when she had a near-fatal heart attack. She did this to show appreciation for her medical team who saved her life with timely care. "Today is a day of gratitude," she said. "My doctors have given me a second chance at life, and I want to thank them from the top, middle, and bottom of my heart." Many celebs like Manisha Koirala participated with her in Sun Pharma's #SecondBirthDate initiative.

## LET THE GAMES BEGIN

**Jin**, the oldest member of the K-pop band BTS, is all set to be a torchbearer at the 2024 Paris Olympics, which begins on July 26. He will be one of the 10,000 torchbearers who will relay the torch across 400 towns and cities, including five overseas regions (French Guiana, Reunion Island, French Polynesia, Guadeloupe and Martinique). Jin has just returned from his compulsory military service in South Korea, while the other band members are still serving. They are expected to reunite as a band in 2025.

COMPILED BY ANJULY MATHAI



## Pants on Fire!

The recent presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump was a sorry spectacle that ended with two old men being childish about their golf handicaps. But Biden had at least one bright moment when he deployed a rare word—malarkey—to describe the torrent of misinformation unleashed by Trump. Biden couldn't quite keep up with that cascade as he was too busy waffling; fittingly, he stopped by at Waffle House on his way home after the debate.

I had to look up 'malarkey'. An American invention from the 1920s, it has synonyms aplenty: balderdash, baloney, blah, poppycock.... You get the point. The sheer amount of malarkey during that debate was described by one news platform as a "tsunami of falsity"; not surprisingly, fact-checkers are now having a field day spotting, categorising, grading the falsehoods and issuing corrections. Fact-checking, once an in-house job assigned to juniors and interns, is today a fast-growing pillar of modern journalism offering sky-high growth. The raw material that fuels this profession seems unlimited: a never-ending supply of falsehood, fake news, half-truths and biased reporting. All easily and instantly propagated over the internet and social media.

Among the several establishments committed to fact-checking in the interests of transparency and truth is the *The Washington Post*; its column "The Fact Checker", headed by senior editor Glenn Kessler, has been in the business for 15 years. An inaugural signatory to the code of the principles of the International Fact-Checking Network (yes, there is such a thing), it applies its "Pinocchio" test to distinguish fact from political fiction. One Pinocchio means a statement that is "mostly true" but with some "shading of the facts"; two Pinocchios imply significant omissions and exaggerations; three Pinocchios mean a claim is "mostly false" and four Pinocchios indicate a way-out whopper. An upside-down Pinocchio signifies a flip-

flop and a broad red tick is the rarely awarded Gepetto Checkmark for the "truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." If a claim repeatedly gets three or four Pinocchios, it becomes a Bottomless Pinocchio. The last category was introduced in 2018, when Trump was in full flow. Incidentally, *The Washington Post* recorded 30,573 untruths by Trump in his four-year term, averaging 21 falsehoods a day. A huge electronic board hanging over the *Post's* lobby in Washington DC enabled you to check the daily score.

PolitiFact, a Pulitzer Prize winning website, is another fact-checking powerhouse, with a Truth-o-Meter replacing the Pinocchio. Completely ridiculous claims show up as Pants on Fire on the Truth-o-Meter; Trump's claim that Biden had allowed millions of

people illegally into the country from jails and mental institutions was adjudged a Pants on Fire claim. PolitiFact also runs a Flip-o-Meter to measure consistency in statements. A full flop on this meter is the equivalent of an upside-down Pinocchio. It isn't just politicians who are under the scanner: PunditFact, a partner website, is constantly fact-checking talking heads. Snopes, another internet-based platform, calls itself the definitive source for "urban legends, folklore, myths, rumours,

and misinformation". They fact-checked Biden's statement that 158 or 159 presidential historians had voted Trump as the worst president in American history; the claim was judged as true, though the number of survey participants was actually 154; the top spot went, no surprises, to Abraham Lincoln.

So young boys who once dreamt of becoming railway engine drivers when they grew up should now aim to be fact-checkers. The best and brightest should of course go west like the IITians of yore, to the shining city on the hill where nothing is but what is not. But chances are that soon we will have enough malarkey of our own and they can all come back to Bengaluru.





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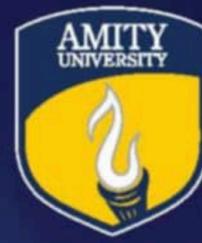
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