

AAP OUSTED, CONG STUCK AT ZERO, VOTERS HAND OVER CAPITAL'S KEYS TO BJP AFTER 27 YEARS

Aam aadmi verdict: BJP for Delhi

5-fold jump in BJP seats: PM promises to build modern city



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president J P Nadda celebrate the victory at the party headquarters on Saturday. Praveen Khanna

Kejriwall crumbled: City falling apart, graft cloud, blame game...



The deserted AAP office in New Delhi on Saturday. Tashi Tobgyal

MALLICA JOSHI, JATIN ANAND, GAYATHRI MANI & SAMAN HUSAIN
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

BUSINESS AS USUAL
By UNNY

ENDING ITS 27-year exile from power in the national Capital and handing the ruling AAP a stunning defeat, the BJP swept the Delhi Assembly elections Saturday, bagging 48 of the 70 seats in the House.
The remaining 22 seats went to AAP while the Congress drew a blank for the third time in a
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

L-G vs CM: Now 'double engine' on parallel tracks?

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

ONE REFRAIN in the BJP's election campaign in states has been its rhetoric around the benefits of a "double engine" — the party in power in the state working with the NDA-ruled Centre. In Delhi, this rhetoric rings closer home to reality. Indeed, the BJP's electoral victory Saturday sets the stage for easing of the prolonged legal tussle over the state's "unique constitutional status" between the Centre and the former Aam Aadmi Party-led government. As it stands now, Article 239AA of the Constitution, keeps services, land, police and public order out of the control of the elected government. While the pre-eminence of the Lieutenant Governor (L-G) was accepted in land, police and
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

EXPLAINED

In 13 seats, Cong tally more than what AAP lost by

ANJISHNU DAS & LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

SEVERAL AAP stalwarts, including Arvind Kejriwal, lost by margins smaller than the votes secured by the Congress in their seats. In all, there were 13 such seats out of 70. Incidentally, the Congress failed to open its account in Delhi for the third time in a row.
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Kejriwal's New Delhi seat was one of 13 where the AAP defeat margin was less than the votes for Congress. ANI

MALLICA JOSHI & JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

IN APRIL 2024, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, his former deputy Manish Sisodia, former health minister Satyendar Jain, communications in-charge Vijay Nair and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh were in jail. The party's toughest electoral battle was just 10 months away. Saturday's results indicate the missing leadership had a more significant impact on the party than it let on.
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FULL COVERAGE
PAGES 8-13

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ऑनलाइन पंजीयन की प्रारंभ तिथि 12-02-2025 (आवासीय सेक्टर-11 एवं सेक्टर-23)

अन्तिम तिथि (आवासीय सेक्टर-23) 07-03-2025
अन्तिम तिथि (आवासीय सेक्टर-11) 17-03-2025

गीडा में आवासीय, व्यावसायिक एवं औद्योगिक भूखण्ड प्राप्त करने का स्वर्णिम अवसर

अंतिम तिथि (औद्योगिक एवं व्यावसायिक) 10-03-2025

- राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग गोरखपुर-लखनऊ एवं कुशीनगर-सोनौली के जंक्शन प्वाइंट पर स्थित।
- गोरखपुर पूर्वांचल लिंक-एक्सप्रेस वे से मात्र 3 किमी. की दूरी पर।
- प्रतिष्ठित शैक्षणिक संस्थान एवं व्यावसायिक प्रतिष्ठान से नजदीकी दूरी पर।
- महायोगी गोरखनाथ एयरपोर्ट व गोरखपुर रेलवे स्टेशन से 16 कि.मी. पर।
- गीडा द्वारा पूर्व विकसित योजनाओं के मध्य स्थित एवं आदर्श लोकेशन।

गीडा सेक्टर-11 आवासीय योजना के अन्तर्गत उपलब्ध भूखण्डों का विवरण

(रेरा परियोजना पंजीकरण संख्या UPRERAPRJ281199/09/2024)

क्र. सं.	भूखण्डों की श्रेणी	भूखण्डों का क्षेत्रफल (वर्ग मी.)	भूखण्डों की संख्या	दर प्रति वर्ग मी. (रु.में)	पंजीकरण घनराशि (रु.में)
1	ए	300	10	33,500	10,05,000
2	बी	250	39	33,500	8,37,500
3	सी	200	39	32,500	6,50,000
4	डी	180	80	32,500	5,85,000
5	ई	150	43	30,500	4,57,500
6	एफ	120	15	29,500	3,54,000
7	जी	90	16	28,000	2,52,000
	योग		242		

व्यावसायिक योजना के अन्तर्गत उपलब्ध भूखण्डों का विवरण

(व्यावसायिक योजना सेक्टर 11 रera परियोजना पंजीकरण संख्या UPRERAPRJ279685/11/2024)

क्र. सं.	भूखण्डों का आकार	सेक्टर-11	सेक्टर-13	सेक्टर-22	सेक्टर-23	भूखण्डों की कुल संख्या
1	0 से 15307 वर्ग मीटर तक	18	12	19	11	60
						कुल योग 60

गीडा सेक्टर-23 आवासीय योजना के अन्तर्गत उपलब्ध भूखण्डों का विवरण

क्र. सं.	भूखण्डों की श्रेणी	भूखण्डों का क्षेत्रफल (वर्ग मी.)	भूखण्डों की संख्या	दर प्रति वर्ग मी. (रु.में)	पंजीकरण घनराशि (रु.में)
1	ए	240-320	20	23,700	7,58,400
2	बी	135-240	06	23,700	5,68,800
3	सी	96-126	10	23,700	2,98,620
4	डी	54-84	18	20,100	1,68,840
	योग		54		

औद्योगिक भूखण्डों का विवरण

क्र. सं.	भूखण्डों का आकार	सेक्टर 13 सामान्य	सेक्टर 15 सामान्य	सेक्टर-26 सामान्य	सेक्टर 27 सामान्य	सेक्टर-28 सामान्य	प्लाटिक पार्क (प्लाटिक सम्बन्धित इकाईयों हेतु)	भूखण्डों की कुल संख्या	
1	0 से 1000 वर्ग मीटर तक	0	0	0	33	6	0	1	40
2	1001 वर्ग मीटर से 4000 वर्ग मीटर तक	8	3	6	1	10	7	24	59
3	4001 वर्ग मीटर से 20000 वर्ग मीटर तक	1	0	4	1	8	2	4	20
4	20001 वर्ग मीटर से अधिक	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
								कुल योग	120

आवेदन के नियम

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EXPRESS AUDIO

'My looks were mocked': Khushi Kapoor and Junaid Khan get real

In this episode of *Express Conversations*, we talk to the actors Khushi Kapoor and Junaid Khan as they open up about their journey on Loveyapa. They reveal secrets from behind-the-scenes and share what it's like working together

Flip side of a caste survey: Telangana govt feels the heat over numbers

NIKHILA HENRY
HYDERABAD, FEBRUARY 7

THIS WAS to be the golden hour of the Telangana Congress government, having successfully carried out a caste survey and tabled a statement on the report in the Assembly in quick succession. The neighbouring Karnataka Congress government, for example, is still to table a report despite having conducted a caste survey seven years ago, and despite being in power now for nearly two years in this stint.

Since the statement on the caste survey report was tabled in the Telangana Assembly Tuesday, however, the Revanth Reddy government has been facing attack from all sides, for allegedly "undercounting" the numbers of backward classes. Many of those attacking the government are influential backward class voices.

As per the statement on the caste survey tabled in the Assembly — the detailed report is still awaited — 56.33% of the state's 3.7 crore population belong to the backward classes, of which 10.08% comprise Muslim backward classes. Thus, the report puts the number of non-Muslim backward classes at 46.25% of the population.

The first to question this was prominent backward class face and BJP leader R Krishnaiah, who claimed that non-Muslim backward classes should account for over 50% of the state's population. BJP MLA Payal Shankar seconded this, with party leaders suggesting that the Congress government was trying to benefit Muslim backward classes at the expense of non-Muslim.

The Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) also took up the matter, claiming that the backward classes in the state should number 61% of the population overall. The BRS based this on the 'Samagra Kutumba Survey' or 'Comprehensive Household Survey' conducted by it when in power in 2014.

BRS working president K T Rama Rao said, "The Congress has undercounted the backward classes as it does not want to give benefits to this group."

The row is brewing even as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has cited the Telangana caste survey as a success story in his push for a nationwide caste census. Gandhi also talked about it in Parliament during the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address.

Additionally, the Telangana government's adoption of sub-categorisation within the quota for Scheduled Castes is proving tricky. Nationally, after the Supreme Court's go-ahead for the sub-categorisation, the Congress has stayed clear of this. While there is demand from



The Revanth Reddy government has been accused of 'undercounting' the backward classes

some SC quarters for sub-categorisation, including significantly the Madigas in Telangana, Dalit groups and leaders oppose it saying this would cause divisions between them and reduce their bargaining power.

Ironically, even the Madigas have raised a red flag over the Telangana survey numbers. The most prominent Madiga face, Manda Krishna Madiga, who has been leading a movement seeking a separate quota for the Madigas for years, and who is now aligned with the BJP, has said that while the Madigas account for 11% of the state's population, the government plans to give them 9% reservation within the overall SC quota of 15%.

"The government has not given the Madigas their rightful share within the SC category. What is being done is merely an eyewash," Manda Krishna said.

The Telangana sub-categorisation formula sets aside 1% quota for SCs categorised in Group I, 9% for SCs categorised in Group II (such as the Madigas), and 5% for SCs categorised in Group III.

Adding another angle to the debate, the AIMIM has questioned why the Revanth Reddy government had used the 2011 Census figures to decide sub-categorisation rather than on its own caste survey. AIMIM leader and MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi said: "Does this mean that the government does not believe in its own survey?"

The state government countered the BRS saying that its survey had been flawed. "This survey was not tabled in the House and hence has no legal validity," CM Reddy said in the Assembly.

A day later, at the end of a powerpoint presentation detailing the methodology of the caste survey, Uttam Reddy said: "The BJP and BRS are simply casting aspersions. We followed a sound methodology and covered 96.9% of the households in Telangana."

The Congress will be counting on support from its cadre in the backward classes as well as SCs to see the survey report through. The party's leaders representing these groups have issued statements hailing the state government's "social reform initiatives", with huge rallies held in Hyderabad in support of the sub-categorisation.

FROM PAGE ONE Five-fold jump in BJP seats: PM promises a modern city

row. AAP leader and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia were among the prominent leaders who lost. Of the AAP tally of 22 — down from 67 and 62 seats in 2015 and 2020 — most came from the reserved constituencies (8 out of 12) and Muslim-majority seats (6 out of 7).

Thanking the people of Delhi for reposing faith in the BJP, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing a gathering at the party headquarters hours after the verdict, said, "Delhi has liberated itself from a decade of AAPda (calamity)... Delhi's voters have shown the truth to those who, in their arrogance, believed that they owned Delhi. The verdict proves that there is no place in politics for shortcuts, lies and deceit. The people have short-circuited the politics of shortcuts... Even after getting 100% success in three Lok Sabha elections, our workers had the pain of not being able to serve Delhi fully. This desire, too, Delhi has fulfilled this time."

Listing what he called the failures of the AAP government in improving the delivery of basic services, Modi said, "Wherever NDA has got the mandate, we have brought new heights of development to that state. People are choosing our governments two-three times... Broken roads, garbage dumps and polluted air — these are the problems that people of Delhi have faced. We will build Delhi as a modern city. For the first time ever, the BJP will have a government in every state within NCR."

Promising that the pending CAG reports will be tabled and action will be taken against the corrupt, Modi said, "A party that was formed to 'rid' the country of corruption became completely corrupt. They deceived the people of Delhi. When the world was grappling with Covid, these people were building a Sheesh Mahal. I guarantee that the CAG report on Delhi will be placed. Each charge of corruption will be probed and those who have looted will have to return the loot. This is Modi's guarantee."

Earlier in the day, accepting defeat, Kejriwal in a video address, said, "We humbly accept whatever decision the people have made. The people's verdict is paramount. I wholeheartedly congratulate the BJP on this victory. I hope they fulfill all the expectations and aspirations with which people have given them this mandate."

● In 13 seats, Cong tally more than what AAP lost by

If Kejriwal lost from New Delhi, Manish Sisodia was defeated from Jangpura, Saurabh Bharadwaj from Greater Kailash, Somnath Bharti from Malviya Nagar and Durgesh Pathak from Rajinder Nagar, all seats where the Congress got more votes than the defeat margin of the AAP.

BJP's Parvesh Verma defeated Kejriwal — the AAP chief had won the New Delhi seat three times since 2013 — by 4,089 votes. The Congress candidate, Sandeep Dikshit, got 4,568 votes to finish third. In 2013, Kejriwal had defeated Dikshit's mother Sheila Dikshit to end her reign as CM.

Verma, a two-time MP who was briefly an MLA after winning the Mehrauli seat in 2013, is the son of a former Delhi CM, the late Sahib Singh Verma of the BJP.

● L-G vs CM: Now 'double engine' on parallel tracks?

public order, the issue of services continued to be a key area of conflict between the Centre and the state.

Two Constitution benches of the Supreme Court had twice, in 2017 and again in 2023, accepted the Delhi government's position over the Centre's view and held that the Delhi government has legislative and executive powers over administrative services in the national capital.

However, in May 2023, the Centre brought in an amendment to the GNCTD Act extending the L-G's powers to transfer and appoint bureaucrats posted to Delhi.

Under the new law, a body with the Chief Minister of Delhi, the Chief Secretary and the

Principal Home Secretary of the Delhi government would appoint bureaucrats. If this arrangement continues, it means the CM can, effectively, be vetoed by two senior bureaucrats on the issue of appointments and transfers of bureaucrats.

While this amendment is under challenge by the Delhi government, it is unlikely that a BJP-ruled state would pursue litigation against the Central government led by its own party. Even in a BJP's double-engine government, the Home Ministry, which controls the Delhi Police, will play a key role in the state's governance.

However, it is unlikely that the Centre will hobble its newly

elected government. A synergy between the L-G and the Chief Minister could ease everyday governance in the national capital.

In 2024, the Delhi government had moved the SC that the L-G had refused to release Rs 3,000 crore of funds for the Delhi Jal Board and the 'Farishtey Dilli Ke' scheme, facilitating free medical treatment for road accident victims at city hospitals. Even the issue of sending government school teachers abroad for training had run into controversy. In the multiple rounds of litigation, lawyers described AAP as "being in office but not in power" to the Court.

With the BJP's double-en-

dress, said, "We humbly accept whatever decision the people have made. The people's verdict is paramount. I wholeheartedly congratulate the BJP on this victory. I hope they fulfill all the expectations and aspirations with which people have given them this mandate."

The BJP vote share went up from 38.5% in 2020 to 45.6% this time, gaining 40 seats in the process. The AAP, meanwhile, went down to 43.5% from 53.5% in 2020. The Congress vote share went up by nearly two percentage points.

The "double engine government" was one of BJP's primary campaign pitches which, it promised, would work better in Delhi than in any other part of the country, with land, law and order, police and services under the Centre through the Lt Governor.

Over its decade-long tenure in the Delhi government, the AAP has been locked in a constant battle with the office of the Lt Governor. This intensified under the tenure of the present Lt Governor V K Saxena with enquiries being ordered into the Delhi excise policy scheme, the reconstruction of the official residence of Kejriwal when he was Chief Minister.

Satish Upadhyay, a former councillor, by 2,131 votes. Congress candidate Jitender Kumar Kochar secured 6,770 votes. Bharti, a practising lawyer, had been the sitting MLA from Malviya Nagar since 2013.

Deputy Speaker Rakhi Birla was another prominent AAP leader who lost after the Congress won more votes than the winning margin. A three-time Mangol Puri MLA, Birla was fielded from SC-reserved Madipur this time. She lost to BJP's Kailash Gangwal by 10,899 votes, while Congress candidate JP Panwar got 17,958 votes.

In Rajinder Nagar, Durgesh Pathak lost to BJP's Umang Bajaj by 1,231 votes. Congress candidate Vineet Yadav secured 4,015 votes here. Pathak, a member of the AAP's Political Affairs

Committee, first won the seat in a 2022 bypoll after party MLA Raghav Chadha was nominated to the Rajya Sabha.

AAP Sangam Vihar MLA Dinesh Mohaniya lost to BJP's Chandan Kumar Choudhary by just 344 votes, among the lowest margins. The Congress's Harsh Choudhary got 15,863 votes.

The other seats where AAP candidates lost in a similar manner were Badli, Chhatarpur, Mehrauli, Nangloi Jat, Timarpur, and Trilokpuri.

The results are set to exacerbate the hand-wringing within the INDIA bloc as many of its members had supported an alliance between the AAP and Congress, with the TMC and SP also campaigning for AAP candidates.

gine, issues of clearance for land for new projects or funds and approval of schemes becomes easier.

The Supreme Court's rulings on the governance of Delhi, in accordance with "the basic structure of federalism," was to accommodate the political diversity that Article 239AA envisages.

"The spirit and conscience of the Constitution should not be lost in grammar and the popular will of the people which has its legitimacy in a democratic set up cannot be allowed to lose its purpose in simple semantics," the Supreme Court had said in 2017. The new "popular will," will test the spirit of the court's words.

● Who will be Delhi CM? High stakes, many factors

in the city later that month.

So far, the discussions are learnt to have revolved around possibilities ranging from picking one of its seven Lok Sabha MPs from the Capital — six of the seven are first-time Parliamentarians — to choosing one of its new legislators with the highest victory margin, especially a woman leader, for the post.

In addition, sources said, the selection of "more than one deputy chief minister" was also a possibility.

"A BJP Lok Sabha MP could be the CM pick. East Delhi MP Harsh Malhotra, North East Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari and New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj seem to tick all the boxes required in this regard," a party source said.

With the BJP currently in the throes of a change at its helm, and, possibly, in its Delhi unit as well, a party source said if an MP is chosen as the Chief Minister, a "senior leader from the state unit" could be fielded for the bypoll from that seat.

While the BJP may be spoiled for choice when it comes to "giant killers", both in terms of gender as well as experience, caste and community — especially with regard to an OBC face — may also play a major role.

"While there are incoming MLAs like former West Delhi MP Parvesh Verma, who defeated Arvind Kejriwal and is understood to have been personally

chosen by the PM to take on the former Delhi CM, two former presidents of the party's state unit — Vijender Gupta, who won for the fourth consecutive term, with a margin of almost 38,000 votes, and Satish Upadhyay, whose winning margin is a little over 2,100, are also there," a senior leader said.

"Both these leaders have risen through the ranks of the party and have immense experience in administration since they have been MCD councillors. On the other hand, women candidates like Rekha Sharma, who won with a margin of almost 30,000 votes from Shalimar Bagh, and Shikha Rai, who defeated AAP Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj with just over 3,100 votes, cannot be ignored," the party leader added.

However, some party leaders cautioned that these are all just names that are being floated at the moment. "Several names will fly now as BJP won the polls with majority. But none of those names will become the CM face... As in Madhya Pradesh and Haryana, the CM candidate will be a surprise in Delhi too," a senior BJP leader said.

Sources said the party would assess its choice with regard to several parameters, including the vote share based on caste/sub-community, that contributed to the BJP's return to power after 27 years.

● Kejriwall crumbled: City falling apart, graft cloud, blame game...

While Jain was arrested in an alleged money laundering case, the rest were behind bars in the excise policy case being probed by the ED and CBI. All of them were released on bail between August and October.

Senior party leaders said that the stints in jail, so close to the elections, was among the key reasons for the AAP being unable to mount the kind of campaign it did in 2015 and 2020.

"While the leaders were in jail, the party was in limbo. This also led to disgruntlement among councillors, who were frustrated because the MCD functioning had collapsed under the AAP and no work was being done. There was no one to calm the tempers. This had an impact on how elections were contested months down the line," a senior leader said.

Apart from targeting the AAP leadership over the liquor policy, the other charge that the BJP repeatedly made against the party leadership was a more personal one. The Civil Lines house where former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal lived, allegedly renovated at a cost of nearly Rs 40 crore and called "Sheesh Mahal" by the BJP, was a constant in the speeches of all BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

The MCD win, a double-edged sword

Perhaps the biggest letdown for the people of Delhi was the AAP's performance in the municipal corporation. The AAP won in 2022, promising a cleaner city with world-class roads. It fell short on both accounts.

The MCD House was and remains in limbo. "The MCD victory hurt us instead of helping us. With the L-G and the BJP creating hurdles, the Standing Committee, which has all financial powers, was never formed and projects did not take off," said a leader.

Another AAP insider said, "There were rumblings within, and many councillors wanted to join the BJP. But, the BJP did not make any move except to ensure

work was stalled. Not a single fruitful discussion took place in the House, and that hurt the AAP more than anticipated."

During an Idea Exchange at The Indian Express office in November, when the then CM Atishi was asked about the AAP's lacklustre performance in running the MCD, she said, "The MCD that we inherited was definitely in a state of crisis. It was bankrupt. But, I strongly disagree that it's worse. If you remember during the BJP years, every three months there would be a sanitation workers' strike because they were not getting paid. For the first time in 20-25 years, their sanitation workers are getting paid on the first of every month. Yes, of course, there are challenges. But the people have elected us for a five-year tenure and we would be best judged at the end of the five years."

Erratic water supply and overflowing sewers that were never repaired because Rs 4,000 crore for the Delhi Jal Board was not released also hurt the party.

Constant tussle

An incessant tug-of-war with successive Lt Governors — the AAP saw three in its tenure — over issues ranging from government policy and procedure to control over the bureaucracy and implementation of government schemes meant the AAP's tenure was rife with conflict.

This issue was raised by everyone — from the local leadership of the BJP and the Congress to Prime Minister Modi and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi. Eventually, AAP's opposition was successful in communicating that the Delhi government's habit of blaming lack of development and non-delivery of promises on obstructionism were "excuses".

For the BJP, Prime Minister Modi led from the front to take on the AAP over its "negative politics", while the Congress relied on the achievements of its three successive governments in the Capital led by Sheila Dikshit. The Congress also posted pictures of infrastructural neglect from spots Gandhi visited to dent the AAP's image.

JAGPREET SINGH SANDHU
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 8

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has upheld an order dismissing a BSF constable from service for trespassing into the quarters of his colleague in 2014 with an intent to outrage the modesty of his wife.

While rejecting the plea of the former BSF constable, Jagpal

Sharma, the bench of Justice Vinod S Bhardwaj said that "the offence of forcible trespassing into the house with an intent of outraging the modesty of wife of a fellow service-man is definitely a case of serious abrasion".

The bench asserted that "such acts have to be dealt with gravity and pride and honour of women needs to be kept in high esteem. The incident cannot be said to be a minor abrasion, considering that

the petitioner has a record of disobedience and also using abusive language against the superiors and he having already been punished for such offences as well".

Sharma was appointed as a General Duty Constable with BSF in 1998 and served for approximately 16 years. Petty Security Force Court, constituted under the BSF Act, found him guilty in a case following a chargesheet by the Commandant of 32nd Battalion,

BSF, on February 17, 2014 for using criminal force on a woman with an intent to outrage her modesty and house trespass in J&K. He, thereafter, received an order on February 12, 2015 stating that his name was ordered to be struck-off from 32nd Battalion, BSF, from the same date.

The petitioner filed an application against the punishment order before the appellate authority — BSF Director-General — who re-

jected the plea on July 10, 2015.

The same year, Sharma approached the High Court seeking to quash the proceedings by the Petty Security Force Court and against the February 12 and July 10 orders of 2015. The HC disposed of the petition and directed the competent authority to pass a fresh order after considering facts of the case. Sharma approached the High Court again in 2023, wherein the court disposed of the

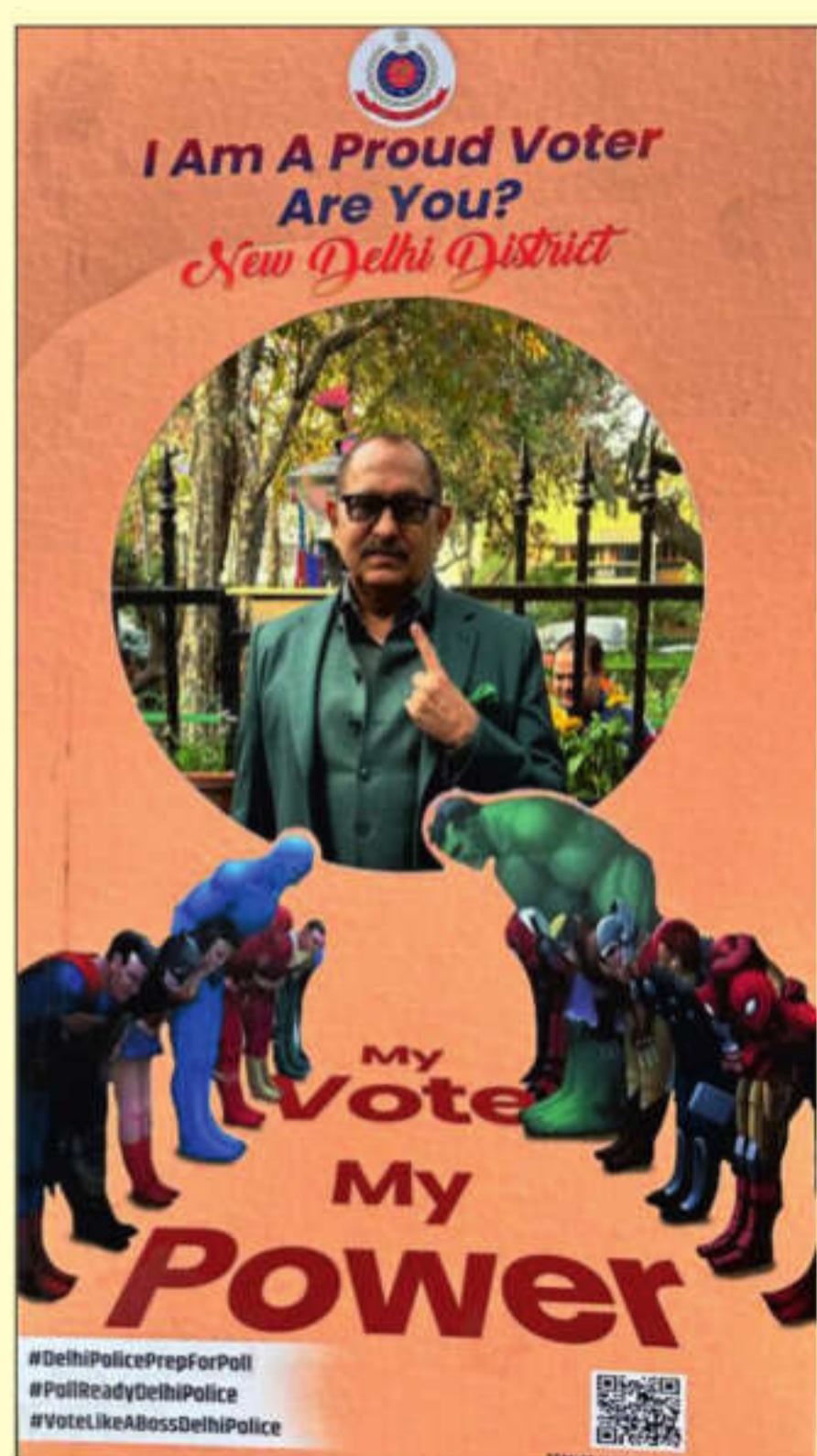
matter with liberty to the respondents to pass a fresh order. The respondents passed a fresh order rejecting the case of the petitioner.

The High Court noted that "the offence of forcible trespassing into the house with an intent of outraging the modesty of wife of a fellow service-man is definitely a case of serious abrasion and has seriously compromised the suitability of the petitioner to be retained in service."



अपने बच्चों के
उज्जवल एवं सुरक्षित भविष्य
तथा दिल्ली के विकास के लिए
चुनाव में अपने मताधिकार
का उपयोग करने के लिए

दिल्लीवासियों का हार्दिक धन्यवाद



Dr. P.N. Arora



All India Multispeciality Hospitals Ranking Survey 2024
Yashoda Super Speciality Hospitals, Kaushambi.



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IN GHAZIABAD AND NOIDA
UP



RANK
IN NORTH INDIA



RANK
IN ALL INDIA



YASHODA
MEDICITY
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YASHODA
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INFILTRATION BID

Firing between Army and militants at LoC

ARUN SHARMA
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 8

SUSPECTED MILITANTS hiding in forests inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) Saturday afternoon fired at Indian soldiers patrolling on their side of the Line of Control (LoC) in the border Rajouri district in Jammu, security sources said. According to sources, the attempted infiltration bid took place at 2 pm near a forward village in the Keri sector, when some militants believed to be hiding in a wooded area in PoK opened fire at a patrol team from the Indian Army, who retaliated.

There were no casualties on the Indian side, the sources said, adding that security was in-

creased in the area and searches are currently ongoing.

The alleged infiltration attempt comes at a time when Jammu has generally been seeing an increase in militant activity.

Significantly, the site of firing falls near Battal in Krishna Ghati sector of adjoining Poonch district where a number of militants had reportedly died in a landmine explosion on the morning of February 5. Although the security forces had no numbers on how many militants were killed in the explosion, sources claimed that five militants were previously seen lurking in the area.

According to sources, the explosion took place on a route used by militants to infiltrate into J&K from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Fire destroys over two-dozen shops in Kashmir's Sonamarg

Will do everything to support shopkeepers' recovery: CM

BASHAARAT MASOOD
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 8

A MASSIVE fire engulfed the main market area of the Sonamarg tourist resort on Saturday evening.

Several fire tenders were rushed to the market to control the blaze, which damaged over two dozen shops.

Sources say the fire appears to have started from a hotel in the market on Saturday evening and spread in no time. A detailed investigation, though, is pending. As the fire service department was informed, they rushed fire tenders from Sonamarg, Gund village and Kangan to douse the flames. As the blaze didn't come under con-



Several fire tenders were rushed to the spot. ANI

trol, more fire tenders were sent from Ganderbal and Srinagar.

Sources say the fire first spread across the second storey of the market and then to the ground floor. They say that 20 commer-

cial establishments were severely damaged on the first floor, while around a dozen shops on the ground floor were partially damaged.

CM Omar Abdullah expressed solidarity with those who lost their properties and assured full government support. "Deeply saddened by the devastating fire incident in the Sonamarg market. My office is in constant touch with the local administration to ensure all possible assistance reaches those in need. My thoughts and prayers are with the affected families and businesses. In this difficult time, we stand in solidarity with you and will do everything possible to support your recovery," he said.

Did 33 deportees take legal route to enter intermediate nations? Gujarat cops to probe

ADITIRAJA
VADODARA, FEBRUARY 8

IT SEEMS that the troubles for those in Gujarat deported from the United States earlier this week are not going to end any time soon. The Gujarat Police is set to investigate if the deportees used "irregular ways" to get visas to the intermediate countries from where they were supposed to finally land in the United States as illegal immigrants.

Of the 104 people deported from the US as "illegal aliens" after President Donald Trump took over earlier this week, 33 were from Gujarat, including families, couples and children, mostly from districts in the northern part of the state. The state police has asked the Superintendents of Police (SPs) of the home districts of the 33 US deportees to conduct a "detailed investigation" once the deportees have "recovered" from the "trauma" of detention, expulsion, and finally deportation in a US military aircraft.



Mediapersons surround a deportee as she walks out of the Ahmedabad airport earlier this week. Bhupendra Rana

the deportees hail have been asked to begin an investigation into the "means by which" the individuals travelled abroad.

"The deportees are too scattered across the state and not part of a single modus operandi or a single group that sneaked in together. They are people who crossed over to the US from different places at times. So, even if there is a case, it will not be a common one for all. Therefore, it will be simpler if the local district police probe the matter and register separate FIRs, if the need be," a senior Gujarat Police official said.

An officer from North Gujarat said that individual deportees will be asked to share documents on the basis of which they applied for visas to the intermediate countries.

He said, "We will record their detailed statements in the days to come... The main question for the probe is whether they used forged documents to acquire visas of the intermediate countries. While most of them have valid passports as the basic verification has already happened during deportation, the trail of documents used to reach their destination and the intermediate countries will be a subject of probe."

The officer further said that in several cases, agents tend to facilitate forged documents to acquire visas in intermediate countries. He said, "We have come across a couple of cases where the visa acquired was for long stay in two intermediate countries as the passage to the US border is not an instant process ... In these cases, the agents likely acquire forged offer letters for seeking temporary stay visas in these countries. While many of the deportees claim they went only in January, most of them had left India a few months ago and sneaked into the US only last month."

2017 GOA RAPE-MURDER

'Hope justice is delivered so we can start grieving' – 8 yrs on, Irish backpacker's mother awaits final court ruling

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA
PANAJI, FEBRUARY 8

IT HAS been nearly eight years since Irish backpacker Danielle McLaughlin was found raped and murdered near a beach in Goa. But her mother Andrea Brannigan is still waiting for closure.

With a court in Goa expected to deliver the ruling later this week, Brannigan hopes that justice would finally be delivered.

McLaughlin, 28, a dual British-

Irish citizen, had come to Goa with a friend for holiday in February 2017. A former student of Liverpool John Moores University, McLaughlin hailed from Buncrana in County Donegal in Ireland and had travelled to India on a British passport. Her body was found in a pool of blood without clothes and injuries on head and face in a field near Palolem beach in South Goa's Canacona in March 2017. The night before she had attended a Holi party near the beach. The Goa Police had charged a local,

Vikat Bhagat, whom McLaughlin befriended in Goa, with the murder.

A post-mortem had found that she died due to brain haemorrhage and constriction of the neck, and that she was raped before being murdered.

"Danielle would have turned 36 last week. She planned to train as a yoga teacher," Brannigan told *The Indian Express* over the phone from Ireland. "I'm anxious and nervous about the outcome. I have no say in the

final verdict. I hope justice is delivered...and her family and her friends can finally start grieving."

For Brannigan, the road to justice has been long, "after several delays and adjournments and a never-ending trial". With the ruling, she hopes for some closure.

"It has been quite difficult with so many court dates and the trial continuing for years. It (the verdict) will be a relief...it's been eight years since she was taken from us," she said.

Brannigan plans to travel to Goa this week for the ruling but dreads facing the murder accused in the courtroom. She also intends to visit the site where her daughter was killed with the hope that "it will help in providing closure and the grieving".

"I'm planning to reach Goa by Wednesday," she said.

Vikram Varma, the advocate representing McLaughlin's family, said, "We are expecting the judgment on February 13 (Thursday)".



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BANGALORE METRO RAIL CORPORATION LIMITED

PUBLIC NOTICE

Revised Fares of Namma Metro

Distance Zone (Kms.)	w.e.f 09/02/2025 (in Rs.)	
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4-6	30	
6-8	40	
8-10	50	
10-15	60	
15-20	70	
20-25	80	
25-30	90	
>30	90	
Day Passes		
Validity	Revised Fare (Rs.)	
One Day	300	
Three Days	600	
Five Days	800	
Group Tickets		
Group Size	Discount (%) on applicable fare for entering the same station & exiting from same station all together	Flat fare per person for entering from different stations & exit at the same station OR enter from same stations & exit at different stations
	Revised	Revised
25 to 99	15	No Discount
100 to 1000	20	Rs 60/-
>1000	25	Rs. 50/-

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> From Start of Revenue Services up to 08.00 am.
> From 12 noon to 4.00 pm.
> From 9.00 pm till closing of revenue services.

Sundays & National Holidays

> 10 % discount on all Sundays & National Holidays (January 26, August 15, October 02) uniformly throughout the day.

BRIDGE

There are times to take the finesse and there are times to eschew the finesse. Could you eschew it in last week's problem?
Dealer: West Vulnerable: North/South

NORTH

♠ K103
♥ 832
♦ 87542
♣ A3

SOUTH

♠ AQJ864
♥ A65
♦ AQ
♣ Q5

SOUTH WEST

pass pass
1S ♠ pass
4S ♠ pass

NORTH

pass pass
2S ♠ pass
pass pass

EAST

pass pass
pass pass
pass pass

West leads the heart four. Plan the play.

Declarer's best play is to establish dummy's fifth diamond for the tenth trick. This line will win whenever the diamonds divide three-three or four-two, or when the king is singleton. This is about an 87% chance. Taking the diamond finesse after winning the first round of trumps in dummy will usually succeed when that finesse wins or diamonds are three-three, but this is under 70%. The long-card establishment plan can be seen to be better without any complex complicated calculation.

The West hand: S-975 H-Q1074D-K10C-K876
The East hand: S-2H-KJ9D-J963C-K10942

To make sure that a club shift does not attack a dummy entry prematurely, South should win the first trick. Then, declarer should cash one high spade (if spades divided four-zero, the diamond establishment plan would have to be abandoned in favour of the diamond finesse). Then, South should continue with the ace and queen of diamonds. Upon regaining the lead, declarer uses two of dummy's black-suit entries to lead diamonds, ruffing in the closed hand high enough to avoid an overruff. After trumps have been drawn, declarer can use dummy's last black-suit entry (which may be the third trump) to cash the long diamond.

Dealer: South Vulnerable: North/South

NORTH

♠ 753
♥ Q98
♦ AKQ
♣ Q732

SOUTH

♠ AKQJ2
♥ J6
♦ J8632
♣ 4

SOUTH WEST

1S ♠ pass
3D ♦ pass
4S ♠ pass

NORTH

2NT pass
3S ♠ pass
pass pass

EAST

pass pass
pass pass
pass pass

West leads the spade nine, East overtakes with the spade ten, which you allow to hold, and continues with the spade king. How do you plan the play?

SUNDAY CROSSWORD 2516

QUICK CLUES

ACROSS

8. Lennon's widow (4)
9. Politically neutral (10)
10. Trinket (6)
11. Inflexible quality (8)
12. Arrive or approach (4)
13. Carpenter (10)
17. Helps (4)
18. Helps a felon (5)
19. Thug (4)
20. Arousing admiration (10)
22. Humbly submissive (4)
23. Supplements to a will (8)
27. Lasting 24 hours? (3-3)
28. Make easier (10)
29. Tall marsh grass (4)

DOWN

1. A temporary pause (10)
2. Hitler's propaganda chief (8)
3. In secrecy, covertly? (5,5)
4. ...about (lawyer's phrase) (2,2)
5. Obstruct (4)
6. Morocco seaport (6)
7. Kid (4)
14. Script symbols (5)
15. Sewage (10)
16. Cleared (10)
19. Speculators or betters (8)
21. Dried grape (6)
24. Neighbour of Yemen (4)
25. Get ... writing (2,2)
26. Increase dramatically (4)

CRYPTIC CLUES

ACROSS

8. It's made to measure (4)
9. Drug a man from the east if he be a politician (6,4)
10. Earnestly request from present-day group of twelve detailed direction (6)
11. Graduate leaves Roman church taking early leaders salt (8)
12. Copy cat! (4)
13. Try out when the England team goes to Australia, may be (10)
17. Some are taking a quantity of water (4)
18. See you in uniform, following war reporter (5)
19. Notices vociferous and controversial writer (4)
20. Arrives containing news

papers and pads (10)
22. Touched fabric (4)
23. Snub cold part of body? (8)
27. Heart of lung, and sort of cruel (6)
28. What destroyed wild leek planted by queen? (10)
29. Never coming from North Ayr resort (4)

19. Mother has two notes for the ruler in beleaguered Boer Town (8)
21. Beats the measures (6)
24. Scoundrel making one downtrodden? (4)
25. Welshman's making a stand (4)
26. For part of play, turn to the audience (4)

Solutions to 2515

QUICK CLUES Across: 8 Former, 9 Ill-fated, 10 Yoyo, 11 Sweetness, 12 To be, 13 Rehearsing, 17 Myna, 18 Bodes, 19 Also, 21 Threadbare, 23 Turn, 24 Cannelloni, 28 Goon, 29 Straggles, 30 Unions Down: 1 Monopoly, 2 Immoderate, 3 Proscribed, 4 Dime, 5 Plot, 6 Fawn, 7 Tehran, 14 Hydra, 15 Abstemious, 16 Start again, 20 Sunround, 22 Health, 25 Nest, 26 Logs, 27 Oxen

CRYPTIC CLUES Across: 8 Tagline, 9 Diaconal, 10 Hang, 11 El Salvador, 12 Beeb, 13 Ellen Terry, 17 Hewn, 18 Chill, 19 Romp, 21 On the shelf, 23 Rack, 24 Scotch mist, 28 Mobs, 29 Peamrain, 30 Re-edit Down: 1 Japanese, 2 King's bench, 3 References, 4 Ida's 5 Call, 6 Bora, 7 Favour, 14 Loire, 15 No left turn, 16 Ear-trumpet, 20 McCoubbin, 22 Niche, 25 Term, 26 Hoax, 27 Isn't

If it's your Birthday

Sunday February 9
There are strong, selfless trends in your stars, and you will prove how noble and uncomplaining you can be. If you resist your current planetary patterns, you may end up being exploited.

Monday February 10
You seem to have a good business sense and an uncanny ability to see the right way through the sort of financial maze which often confuses other people.

Tuesday February 11
You may have a good imagination, but when it comes to the facts you need help from those who have been here before and have more experience.

Wednesday February 12
Your hopes are high, but can they be met? The trick is to distinguish the unrealistic from those within your grasp if only you tried harder.

Thursday February 13
Work out firm targets for the coming year. It's one thing to make birthday resolutions, though. Will you actually stick to them?

Friday February 14
Pause for breath, look around you and see what you can do next. There seems to be a great deal on offer, but it could be another two to three days before you know exactly what.

Saturday February 15
You're in an idealistic mood. The last thing you want to do is waste your while on fripperies. Over the next year you will be using your time wisely.

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

You should have the astrological cards are stacked in your favour by a narrow margin. Your responses to unforeseen situations, though, are likely to be more emotional than expected. When faced with authority you should think clearly and slowly.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

You're in a complex mood this week. You can be quite secretive with your feelings, but at least you are honest in your actions. It's your deeper desires concerning home and family matters that seem better left alone for a little while longer.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

Your heart could take you far from home, seeking distant horizons. You may be travelling in pursuit of love this week. Your emotional life should be keeping you on the go, mainly because you're about to be hit by an inner restlessness.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

Sometimes you just have to wake up and seize the moment. Don't be slow in coming forward over the next few days. This is an ambitious moment and you will do yourself no favours if you hide your light under a bushel, or tuck yourself away in your Cancerian shell.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

Legal matters must be dealt with, and there are ethical concerns to look at, such as whether a course of action is right or wrong. You want to do the best by other people, much to your credit. It may be that you have never raised certain moral questions before, but that it is now time to do so. Be patient and the rewards will come to you.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

A romantic dream will be postponed, though not for long. Business matters will come to the fore and once they have done so, there will be no going back. There does seem to be a need for increased domestic spending, perhaps to satisfy a partner's demands.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

You'd like to have personal plans all your way, but partners may have the best ideas. Whatever your view on this matter, there seems to be no choice but to bend over backwards to please them at home, and make sure that their wishes are granted.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

There is no time like the present for fulfilling promises which have been forgotten. Pay back a debt of gratitude, perhaps one incurred months or even years ago. You will handle all personal complications with your usual Scorpionic skill - and set out to impress the people who matter most.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 23)

There may be some reason to doubt your most deeply-held opinions. This is good, for if you question certain fundamentals, you may realise why you've been doing something wrong, and so understand how to go about it better in the future.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Take it one step at a time and remember that you must walk before you can run. That seems to be the overall message from your stars, especially for those of you pursuing important goals at work. A new relationship may bring romantic tension, but also a possibility of slight confusion, and perhaps of an amusing muddle.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

Your mission should not be to secure agreement, but to bring people together and reach an understanding. Achieve this and you'll minimise the chances of bad feeling over the next few weeks. Financial fortunes improve next month, by the way.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

It's a fine time to get your act together. Business comes first and this isn't a moment for sentimentality, but for getting the job done. Thank goodness that someone is going to do it! There could be extra expenses, probably incurred by home and family.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Dates and periods are of interest only to the student of ____ history. - Peter Warlock (7)

XFAFI

□ □ □ □ □

LCTCHU

□ □ □ □ □

SPOIL

□ □ □ □ □

JLBUME

□ □ □ □ □

Answer: Dates and periods are of musical history. - Peter Warlock

SUDOKU 5861

Difficulty Level 5s

Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5860

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY

No.-JHS/Commercial-e-Auction/25/87 Date :-06.02.2025

E-Auction Notice

On Behalf of The President Of India, The Divisional Railway Manager, (Commercial) Jhansi invites e-auction as per categories given as under:-

Category: Advertisement **Catalogue No.:** JHS-ADV- MIX-06

Asset Details

1. Advertisement Under Miscellaneous Statics policy auction:-
● VEERANGANA LAXMIBAI JHANSI (VGLJ), BHIMSEN (BZM) RAYARU (RRU) Good Shed Canteen & Gwalior (GWL) Banking promotional KIOSK.
● Contract for Installation, maintenance and operation of Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging stations at 04 Railway stations: **BNDA, ORAI, KURJ, & LAR**
● Contract of Rail Coach Restaurant At **ORAI** Railway Station.

2. Contract Of Supply, Operation & Maintenance Of ATM at 04 Railway Stations Under ATM Policy: **VGLJ, KURJ, DAA, MBA**

3. Advertisement right through **RDN** Non-digital LED FLANGE media inside **MRA, LAR, KURJ, TKMG** station.

4. Advertisement right through **RDN** Non-digital media inside **MRPR, NEW, DAA** stations.

5. Advertisement right through **RDN** Digital media inside **CKTD, KURJ, BNDA & MBA** stations.

6. Advertisement right through Out of home in the circulating area of **DAA, DBA, MRA, MBA**, & at Railway Over bridges of **CKTD, ORAI, BZM & KURJ** stations.

7. Advertisement right through Vinyl Wrapping on Train exterior portion (below window) of the coaches of following Train No. (04 TRAINS) 01887/88, 01883/84, 04117/18, 22193/94

8. Advertisement right through Vinyl Wrapping on Train on exterior portion (Full Face) of the coaches of following Train No. (02 TRAIN) 11801/02, 22195/96 - 02199/20-22197/98

Auction Start : 20.02.2025 at 10:30 hrs
Auction End : 20.02.2025 at 17:10 hrs

Note: Prospective bidders are requested to visit e-Auction Leasing module on IREPS website (www.ireps.gov.in). The Lot-wise details are available therein under the above mentioned Catalogue Number. **262/25(DG)**

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E-Tender Enquiry No. 16/RE/MHP/2024-25
Dated 06/02/2025

Resident Engineer, MHP Division, PSPCL, Talwara, invites open press/ E-tender for Re-tubing and repair of 4 no. stator air coolers and 6 no. generator bearing oil coolers of Vertical Kaplan Turbine 19.5 MW, 167 RPM machines at PH-3&4 of MHP Talwara.

For detail NIT, please refer to www.pspcl.in or <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 08.02.2025 onwards.

Note: corrigendum & addendum, if any may be seen on official PSPCL website, www.pspcl.in Or <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

No. 41495/PB C-80/25

UJVN LIMITED

H.O.: "UJJWAL", Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006
Telephones: 0135-2763808, Fax- 0135- 2763508
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866. Website: www.ujvnl.com

TENDER NOTICE

पत्रांक सं. 94 दिनांक 07.02.2025

Office of the Executive Engineer (HQ), UJJWAL, Maharani Bagh, Dehradun, invites sealed tenders from interested parties. Brief summary of tender is given below:

Tender:-14/Executive Engineer(HQ)/2024-25
Name of work : Annual Operation, maintenance, cleaning and up-keep of UJVN Ltd transit accommodation at "UJJWAL", Dehradun
Estimated cost : 18.03,350.00 (Exclusive of GST)
Date of availability of bid document on website: 07.02.2025 upto 17.00 hrs
Last date for submission of tender: 10.03.2025 upto 16.00 hrs
For fuller & further details, kindly visit our website. The tender documents can be downloaded from the Nigam's website "www.ujvnl.com"

Executive Engineer (HQ)

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.

Regd. Office: PSEB H.O, The Mall, Patiala
(Corporate Identification Number (CIN): U40109PB2010SGC033813)
Contact No. 96461-18773

Tender Enquiry No. QQ-2360/PO-P

Chief Purchase Officer/ MM, Central Purchase Organization, PSPCL, 2nd floor, Multistory Building, The Mall, Patiala, invites E-Tender for Procurement of 26,000 Nos. 3-Phase, 11KV, 400 Amp, Single Throw, Single Break GO Switches as per PSPCL specification no. QQ-2360/ PSPCL/PO-P. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 08.02.2025 onwards.

NOTE: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

No. 41496/PB C-81/25

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.

Regd. Office: PSEB H.O, The Mall, Patiala
(Corporate Identification Number (CIN): U40109PB2010SGC033813)
Contact No. 96461-18773

Tender Enquiry No. QQ-2359/PO-P

Chief Purchase Officer/ MM, Central Purchase Organization, PSPCL, 2nd floor, Multistory Building, The Mall, Patiala, invites E-Tender for Procurement of 7,700 Nos. Male-Female contact sets for 11KV, 75 Amps GO switches against PSPCL Tender Enquiry QQ-2359/ PO-P. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 08.02.2025 onwards.

NOTE: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

No. 41497/PB C-82/25

Office of the Executive Engineer
Construction Division-2, P.W.D., Ghaziabad
No 378/4A-Camp Date-04.02.2025
Short Term E-Procurement Notice Inviting Tenders

1. On behalf of Governor of Uttar Pradesh invites Short Term online bids through e-tendering from the registered firm for Road works as per Column 7 below Category. The bid document may be uploaded from dated **11.02.2025 to 17.02.2025 up to 12:00 PM**. Technical bids will be opened on date **17.02.2025 at 12.30 PM**, by the Committee in the office of the Executive Engineer, Construction Division-2, PWD, Ghaziabad. Date of financial bid will be informed separately to the technically qualified contractors. In case of holiday or office closed the technical bid/financial bids will be opened on next working day in the same manners.

2.

Sl. No	DISTRICT	Name of Work	Estimated cost (Rs.in Lac)	Bid Security (Rs.in Lacs)	5 year maintenance- cost (Rs.in Lakh)	Cost of Tender	Category (Road)	Time of Completion	Maintenance Period
1		Reconstruction work on Surana PWD Road in Km. 11 to Khindora road	26.66	2.66	2.39	2000+ 300 + GST 18%	A-D	3 Month	5 years
2		Reconstruction work on Khimawati to bhandeda road	20.25	2.03	1.35	2000+ 300 + GST 18%	A-D	3 Month	5 years

3. Terms / conditions and details related to the tender can be seen in the office of Executive Engineer, Construction Division-2 PWD, Ghaziabad, Superintending Engineer, Bulandshahar Circle, PWD, Bulandshahar and Chief Engineer, Meerut Zone, PWD Meerut.

4. The terms / conditions and details related to the tender are available on the website <http://etender.up.nic.in> . 5. In PWD technical evaluation of tenders is to be done by Prahari Software URL for Prahari is <http://wms.uppwd.gov.in/Prahari/>

5. The category qualifications of contractors for the works of road signage will be according to the instructions given by the ENC (Development) and Head of Department's office memorandum no. 71Camp/CE(Hq-1)/2021date 15.06.2021

Assistant Engineer
C.D.-2, PWD,Gzb.

UPID-228487 Dt. 07.02.2025
www.upidadv.gov.in

Executive Engineer
C.D.-2, PWD Gzb.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
PWD(R&B) DIVISION VIJAYPUR

ABBREVIATED NOTICE INVITING TENDER
e-NIT No. 55 of 2024-25 Dated: 06-02-2025

For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir e-tenders are invited on percentage basis from approved and eligible Contractors registered with Union Territory of J&K, CPWD, Railways, MES and other State/Central Governments for each of the following works

S. No	Name of Work	Advertised Cost (Rs. in lacs)	Cost of document (in Rs.)	Earnest Money (in shape of CDR/FDR (In Rs.)	Time of completion	Class of Contractor
1	Const. of Central Referral Small Ruminant Hospital at Sheep Husbandry Complex Kartholi	146.81	3000/-	2 % of adv. Cost	12 months	"A"

Position of AAA :- Accorded
Position of T.S :- Sanctioned
Project Authority :- Under NABARD Loan Assistance Scheme

1	Date of Issue of Tender Notice	06-02-2025
2	Period of downloading of bidding documents	From 06-02-2025 to 19-02-2025 upto 1800 Hrs
3	Date, Time and place of pre-bid meeting	10-02-2025 at 1300 Hrs. in the Office of Executive Engineer PWD (R&B) Division Vijaypur.
4	Bid submission Start Date	06-02-2025 at 1800 Hrs
5	Bid Submission End Date	19-02-2025 upto 1800 Hrs
6	Date & time of opening of Technical Bids (Online)	20-02-2025 at 1400 Hrs in the Office of Executive Engineer PWD (R&B) division Vijaypur
7	Date & time of opening of Financial Bids (Online)	To be notified after technical bid evaluation is completed

The tender is available at website <http://jktenders.gov.in> all other terms & conditions can be seen on the above website.

No. PWD/V/6900-06
Dt. 06-02-2025

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
PWD (R&B) Division,
Vijaypur.

DIP/J-9920/24

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY
OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE

Dy. Chief Engineer (Const.), North-Western Railway, Bhiwani for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-Tenders under single packet system for the following works: 1. **Tender No.: NWR-CBNW-2R-2024-25** 2. **Name of work with its location:** Laying of ductile iron storm water pipe line for PHED AT ROB 32B(LC-51C) at KM 81/0-1 between Rewiri-Hisar section of Bikaner Division. 3. **Approx. cost of the work:** 10223671.78 4. **Bid Security (Earnest Money) to be deposited:** 201100.00 5. **Date for submission of e-Tender:** On 03.03.2025 upto 15.00 hrs. 6. **Details and particulars of website where e-tender can be seen & filled up:** www.ireps.gov.in 7. **Official email address:** dycecbnw@gmail.com **Note:-** 1. No manual tender will be accepted. 2. The Bid Security (Earnest Money) shall be deposited in cash through e- payment gateway or submitted as Bank Guarantee bond from a scheduled commercial bank of India or as mentioned in the tender documents. The bank guarantee bond should be issued in favour of FA & CAO/ Construction, North Western Railway Jaipur otherwise tender will not be considered. **173-AJ/25**

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File No. A-11014/06/2025-Admn

National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

5th Floor, Chanderlok Building, 36, Janpath, New Delhi - 110 001.

VACANCY NOTICE

NCPCR invites applications from eligible candidates for the following posts to be filled up by deputation on Foreign Service Terms:

1. Principal Private Secretary (05)
2. Assistant Director (01)

How to apply: Interested and eligible candidates may log on to <http://www.ncpcr.gov.in> for details. Applications must reach this office by 25.03.2025.

Sd/-
(Dharmendra Bhandari)
Cbc 46108/12/0005/2425 PPS, NCPCR

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Brij Kumar @ Shiva, S/o: Sh. Raju, R/o: C-147, Prem Nagar-II, Kirori, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 446/2019, U/s 356/379/34 IPC, P.S.: Prem Nagar, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Brij Kumar @ Shiva** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Brij Kumar @ Shiva** accused of case **FIR No. 446/2019, U/s 356/379/34 IPC, P.S.: Prem Nagar, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **20.03.2025**.

By Order
Sh. Navdeep Gupta
Judicial Magistrate First Class (North - West)
Rohini Court, Delhi

DP/1322/RD/2025 (Court Matter)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

See Section U/S 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Salman S/o Munna R/o 632, 2nd Floor, Rang Mahal, Chandni Mahal, Delhi** has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 429/2023 U/s 307/385/506/120B/34 IPC, P.S. Chandni Mahal, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Salman** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Salman** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Salman** of case **FIR No. 429/2023 U/s 307/385/506/120B/34 IPC, P.S. Chandni Mahal, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint/case on or before **09.04.2025**.

By Order
Ms. Sayesha Chadha
Judicial Magistrate First Class-08
Central District, Room No. 272
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

DP/1469/CD/2025(Court Matter)

Ex-minister’s daughter says Mumbai producer couple ‘scammed’ her of ₹4 crore on promise of role in movie

AISWARYA RAJ
DEHRADUN, FEBRUARY 8

THE DAUGHTER of Uttarakhand ex-chief minister and former Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank has accused a Mumbai-based production house of allegedly swindling her of ₹4 crore by offering a role in a movie.

In an FIR filed at Kotwali police station in Dehradun on Friday, Arushi Nishank, an actor and film producer, has alleged that Mansi and Varun Bagla of Mini Films Private Limited approached her at her Dehradun residence and offered her a role in an upcoming

movie. The production house previously produced the 2022 crime-thriller ‘Forensic’ starring Bollywood actors Vikrant Massey and Radhika Apte.

Convinced, she invested in the movie but was later “dropped”, the FIR states, adding that, on confronting them, she was “mocked” for her Garhwali background and “threatened”.

“They introduced themselves as directors of Mini Film Private Limited and stated that they were producing a film featuring actors Shanaya Kapoor and Vikrant Massey. They offered me a significant role in the film but said that I would only get this role if I invested Rs 5 crore in the project.



Arushi Nishank has appeared in a few music videos

They assured me that this investment would entitle my firm to a 20% profit share, estimated to be over Rs 15 crore,” she said.

The couple has been booked for extortion, cheating, forgery

and criminal intimidation, among other sections of BNS.

Responding to queries from The Indian Express, Varun Bagla said it was a “civil dispute and the allegations are false”. “Our lawyers are taking appropriate legal recourse for the same,” he said.

In her complaint, Arushi, who has appeared in music videos such as ‘Wafa Na Raas Aayee’ and ‘Teri Galiyon Se’, claims that the producers told her that if she was not satisfied with the role, her investment would be returned with an annual interest of 15%. The couple allegedly signed an agreement with her production house Himshree Films on October 9 and took ₹4 crore in three instalments,

promising to promote her on their social media pages.

“They demanded another instalment of Rs 2 crore from my firm without fulfilling their previous commitments. On February 5, I realised their fraud when I was informed through their representative that... another actress had been selected for my role,” Arushi said.

Arushi’s husband Abhinav Pant lodged her complaint because she was in Mumbai.

Dehradun SSP Ajai Singh said that the police were looking into it. “We will call parties concerned for their statements and if needed, police will go to Mumbai for evidence collection,” he said.

Manipur CM Biren Singh leaves for Delhi

Imphal: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh Saturday evening left for Delhi in a chartered flight, officials said. The purpose of his visit to the Capital is not known.

Earlier in the day, Singh convened a meeting with BJP-led ruling alliance MLAs at the CM Secretariat in connection with the Assembly session beginning on

February 10. The meeting was held in the wake of the Opposition Congress seeking to move a no-confidence motion against the Singh government.

[Regulation 52 (8), read with Regulation 52 (4) of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 (LODR Regulations)]													
S. No.	Particulars	Standalone						Consolidated					
		Quarter Ended			Nine Months Ended			Quarter Ended			Nine Months Ended		
		31.12.2024	30.09.2024	31.12.2023	31.12.2024	31.12.2023	31.03.2024	31.12.2024	30.09.2024	31.12.2023	31.12.2024	31.12.2023	31.03.2024
		(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Audited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Unaudited)	(Audited)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	Total Income from Operations	720.36	707.18	495.04	1685.66	1563.88	2012.09	720.85	707.28	495.15	1686.59	1564.39	2012.61
2	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	323.42	310.12	166.00	591.58	612.73	600.30	323.09	309.60	165.74	590.47	611.63	597.58
3	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	323.42	310.12	166.00	591.58	612.73	600.30	323.09	309.60	165.74	590.47	611.63	597.58
4	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	317.12	288.21	137.72	546.21	516.29	599.08	316.88	267.86	137.56	545.42	515.31	596.97
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	317.09	288.17	137.05	546.11	514.28	589.34	316.85	267.82	136.89	545.32	513.30	587.23
6	Paid up Equity Share Capital	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88	3665.88
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve)	7199.56	6882.47	7105.74	7199.56	7105.74	6880.80	7196.29	6879.37	7103.87	7196.29	7103.87	6878.11
8	Securities Premium Account	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
9	Net worth	10865.44	10548.35	10771.62	10865.44	10771.62	10548.68	10862.17	10545.25	10769.75	10862.17	10769.75	10543.99
10	Paid up Debt Capital/ Outstanding Debt	20717.95	19447.76	15628.48	20717.95	15628.48	16887.40	20781.14	19509.59	15657.48	20781.14	15657.48	16716.81
11	Outstanding Redeemable Preference Shares	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
12	Debt Equity Ratio	1.91	1.84	1.45	1.91	1.45	1.58	1.91	1.85	1.45	1.91	1.45	1.59
13	Earnings Per Share (of Rs. 1000/-each) (for continuing and discontinued operations) –												
1	Basic: (in Rs)	86.51	73.16	37.57	149.00	140.84	163.42	86.46	73.09	37.54	148.84	140.64	163.00
2	Diluted: (in Rs)	86.51	73.16	37.57	149.00	140.84	163.42	86.46	73.09	37.54	148.84	140.64	163.00
14	Capital Redemption Reserve	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
15	Debt Redemption Reserve	332.99	310.13	239.10	332.99	239.10	264.42	332.99	310.13	239.10	332.99	239.10	264.42
16	Debt Service Coverage Ratio	2.44	2.52	1.81	1.92	2.10	1.93	2.32	2.50	1.76	1.87	2.06	1.90
17	Interest Service Coverage Ratio	4.04	5.52	5.54	3.81	7.53	6.67	4.04	5.52	5.54	3.81	7.53	6.65
# - Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items adjusted in the Statement of Profit and Loss in accordance with Ind AS Rules / AS Rules, whichever is applicable.													
Notes:													
1. The above results have been approved by the Board of Directors at their meeting held on 07.02.2025.													
2. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly financial Results filed with the Stock Exchange(s) under Regulation 52 of the Listing Regulations. The full format of the Quarterly Financial Results is available on the websites of the stock exchange(s) and THDCIL (https://www.bseindia.com/xml-data/corpfiling/AttachLive/9c3163e8-6f50-426f-86ea-6c4cc2979fe9.pdf and https://nsearchives.nseindia.com/content/debt/WDM/TIL671_07022025190435_Financial_Statement.pdf)													
3. For the other line items referred in regulation 52(4) of the Listing Regulations, pertinent disclosures have been made to the stock exchange(s) (NSE and BSE) and can be accessed on the URL (https://www.bseindia.com/xml-data/corpfiling/AttachLive/9c3163e8-6f50-426f-86ea-6c4cc2979fe9.pdf and https://nsearchives.nseindia.com/content/debt/WDM/TIL671_07022025190435_Financial_Statement.pdf)													
Date: 07.02.2025 Place: Rishikesh													
For and on Behalf of Board of Directors Sipan Kumar Garg Director (Finance) DIN: 10746205													
Generating Power... Transmitting Prosperity...													

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WORLD BOOK FAIR
10 am to 9 pm
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Media Partner:

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Parking fee and other charges (if any) associated with the venue partner/civil administration will still be applicable.

पीएम श्री केंद्रीय विद्यालय, सेक्टर-24, नोएडा

पीएम श्री केंद्रीय विद्यालय सेक्टर-24 नोएडा में शैक्षिक सत्र 2025-26 के लिए अनुबंध के आधार पर निम्नलिखित पदों पर संविदात्मक शिक्षकों की नियुक्ति हेतु दिनांक 18.02.2025 (मंगलवार) को लिखित परीक्षा / साक्षात्कार के जरिये नाम सूची (पैनल) तैयार किया जाना है।

पंजीकरण का समय व स्थान	पद	विषय
प्रातः 08:00 बजे से 09:30 बजे	स्नातकोत्तर शिक्षक (PGT)	अंग्रेजी (English), हिंदी (Hindi), गणित (Maths), रसायन विज्ञान (Chemistry), भौतिकी (Physics), वाणिज्य (Commerce), कंप्यूटर विज्ञान (Computer Science), अर्थशास्त्र (Economics), इतिहास (History), जीव विज्ञान (Biology), भूगोल (Geography) तथा राजनीतिक विज्ञान (Political Science)
स्थान:	प्रशिक्षित सातक शिक्षक (TGT)	अंग्रेजी (English), हिंदी (Hindi), सामाजिक विज्ञान (Social Science), संस्कृत (Sanskrit), गणित (Maths) तथा विज्ञान (Science)
केंद्रीय विद्यालय सेक्टर-24 नोएडा	प्राथमिक शिक्षक (PRT)	-----
	अन्य (Others)	कंप्यूटर प्रशिक्षक (Computer Instructor), खेल-कूद कोच (Sports Coach), योग प्रशिक्षक (Yoga Teacher), नर्स (Nurse), कला और शिल्प शिक्षक (Art & Craft Teacher), विशेष शिक्षक (Special Educator), काउंसलर (Counsellor), Apparel & Embroidery शिक्षक, डॉक्टर (Doctor), संगीत शिक्षक (Music Teacher), सेटक डिफेंस गर्ल्स कोच / इंस्ट्रक्टर (Self Defence Girls Coach / Instructor)

पूर्ण तथा अन्य जानकारी हेतु विद्यालय की वेबसाइट <https://noidashift2.kvs.ac.in> देखें। इच्छुक आवेदक को दो पासपोर्ट फोटो, सभी मूल-प्रमाणपत्र एवं सभी प्रमाणपत्रों की एक छायाप्रति को ले कर आना आवश्यक है। विभिन्न पदों की पात्रता के लिए <https://kvsangathan.nic.in> देखें। सभी पद विशुद्ध संविदात्मक है व इन पदों के स्थायीकरण की कोई संभावना नहीं है।

नोट :- साक्षात्कार के लिए कोई भी भत्ता देय नहीं होगा।

प्राचार्य

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr. P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person(s) **Tosif S/o Abid, R/o: G.No.3, Kardam Puri, Delhi, P.ADD: Mekan No. 996, Nimat Kadri Masjid Chowk, Awala Tehsil PS. Awala, Distt. Bareilly, U.P** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in **FIR No. 281/2017, U/S: 356/379/411 IPC, PS: Welcome, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused person(s) **Tosif**, cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person(s) **Tosif**, has absconded (or is concealing him self to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person(s) **Tosif**, of **FIR No. 281/2017, U/S: 356/379/411 IPC, PS: Welcome, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **13.03.2025**.

By Order
Deepakshi Rana
Judicial Magistrate First Class-03
Shahdara Court No. 19
Karkardooma Court, Delhi

DP/1339/NE/2025
(Court Matter)

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT & PANCHAYATI RAJ

(An Organisation of the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India)
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad-500030

Recruitment on Deputation for Practitioners

National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR) an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India is the country's apex organization for undertaking Training and Research on various aspects of Rural Development. NIRD&PR, invites applications from the eligible candidates for the below mentioned posts on deputation basis.

Sl. No.	Name of the Post	Pay Matrix Level	Age limit	Number of Posts
1.	Professor	Level 14	56 years	8
2.	Associate Professor	Level 13 (A)	56 years	4
3.	Assistant Professor	Level 10	56 years	9

For eligibility criteria, online submission of application and other details please visit: <http://career.nirdpr.in/>
Last date for submission of online application is **03.03.2025**

Advt.No.38/2024
File No: NIRDPR/Admin/
Sec-4/2024/54
Comp.no. 17314

Sd/-
Assistant Director
Administration (Section-I)

TRAFFIC

CCL T20 CRICKET MATCH

09.02.2025

ADVISORY

1ST MATCH : 2:00 PM TO 06:00 PM

2ND MATCH : 06:30 PM TO 10:30 PM

RIDE METRO/FREE SHUTTLE BUS FOR HASSLE FREE JOURNEY

Free Parking : Mata Sundari Parking, Rajghat Power House Road, Under Velodrome Road

SECURITY INSTRUCTIONS: Spectators visiting the stadium are requested not to bring the following prohibited items:

Laptop

Camera

Helmet

Backpack

Eatables

Water Bottles

Power Bank

Lighter & Match Box

Knives & Arms

24 Hours Traffic Helpline: 011-25844444 / 1095

ARUN JAITLEY STADIUM, FIROZESHAN KOTLA GROUND, NEW DELHI

DIVERSION / RESTRICTION (AS AND WHEN REQUIRED)

There will be diversion of traffic for half and hour after conclusion of the match. No heavy vehicles and buses shall be allowed on Bahadurshah Zafar Marg, Delhi Gate to J.L.N. Marg, from Darya Ganj to Bahadurshah Zafar Marg and from Guru Nanak Chowk to Asaf Ali Road, People are requested to avoid following roads from 11:00 AM to 11:30 PM on the day when there are two matches on the match day respectively when the spectators would be coming to the stadium and congestion is expected.

Raj Ghat to JLN Marg.
Asaf Ali Road from Turkman Gate to Delhi Gate.
Bahadurshah Zafar Marg from ITO Chowk to Delhi Gate.

ENTRY TO THE STADIUM

(I) Gate Nos. 1, 3 & 6 are located on the southern side of the Stadium & entry to these enclosures are from Bahadurshah Zafar Marg.

(II) Gate No. 10, 14 & 15 are located on the Eastern side of the Stadium on the road and entry is from J.L.N. Marg Next to Ambedkar Stadium Bus Terminal.

(III) Gate Nos. 16 & 18 are located on the Western side of the Stadium & entry is from Bahadurshah Zafar Marg near Petrol Pump.

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Car parking label holders are advised to take Ring Road, J.L.N. Marg, Asaf Ali Road or Bahadurshah Zafar Marg, 'U' turn at Delhi Gate is allowed. Entry to parking lots P1, P2, & P3 shall be from Bahadurshah Zafar Marg only from near the Vikram Nagar Cut, Shaheed Park.

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BJP TALLY CLIMBS FROM 8 TO 48 SEATS, VOTE SHARE 45.56%

Capital comeback after 27 years

Middle-class frustration, poor infra & promises to continue AAP's welfare measures: Why the BJP swept Delhi

MALLICA JOSHI & JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE BJP'S "double engine" rolled into Delhi on Saturday, with the party winning 48 of the 70 Assembly seats that went to polls on February 5. While the AAP managed to bag only 22 seats, the Congress was not in the picture. The BJP's campaign, spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, broadly ran on one message: continuation of AAP's welfare schemes, with the added promise of "double-engine development" and a cracking down on "AAP's corruption". Here are five reasons why the BJP stormed to power:

FOCUS ON MIDDLE CLASS

The AAP was born out of the middle class's frustration with the political status quo. However, over the years, it has come to be increasingly seen by this class as a party that works only for the poor, with welfare schemes such as 200 units of free electricity and free bus travel for women.

Kejriwal did try to pivot to middle-class concerns in his speeches ahead of the election, but that seems to have been too little and possibly too late.

The BJP, meanwhile, wooed this voter segment assiduously through several outreach programmes including RWA meetings. The icing on the cake came through the massive tax cut announced by the government in the Union Budget. The definition of "middle class" varies, but according to a 2022 report by the People Research on India's Consumer Economy, this section makes up 67.16% of Delhi's population. The BJP appears to have managed to make deep inroads into this votebank.

'NO AAP SCHEMES WOULD BE STOPPED'

While the BJP, including the PM himself, had earlier derided welfare schemes as *revdis* (freebies), in Delhi, it was careful to emphasise that none of the ongoing schemes of the AAP government would be stopped if it came to power.

This was announced by Modi himself, giving it added weight

that helped counter AAP's claim that the poor would lose out on benefits if the BJP was voted in. The BJP's promise, therefore, was something of an 'AAP-plus' — welfare plus the ideas of Hindu *asmita* and national pride that the BJP is often associated with.

BAD ROADS, SEWERS

The major factor that contributed massively to AAP's unpopularity was the poor condition of the Capital's roads and sewers. Overflowing drains, pot-holed roads, and irregular garbage collection had angered voters across the national capital.

The fact that AAP is in power in the MCD as well meant it could not pass the buck to the BJP, saying the Centre, through the L-G, was not allowing it to work.

"We could not improve roads or ensure better garbage management... In gated colonies and middle- and upper middle-class areas, the poor condition of the roads has emerged as a significant issue," a senior AAP leader had told *The Indian Express* before the polls.

Another leader had acknowledged, "Poor roads, cleanliness and overflowing sewers are usually associated with unauthorised colonies but over the past two years, have become a pan-Delhi problem."

The explanation the AAP gave for poor roads and lack of civic work was that the L-G was holding up projects. Voters seem to have decided that a BJP government was likely to function more smoothly alongside a Centre-appointed L-G. This is in line with the BJP's promise of a "double-engine" government, where the governments at both Centre and UT-level work for New Delhi in tandem.

ANTI-INCUMBENCY

The AAP, which was formed in 2012, came to power in Delhi the following year, and has been in power continuously since 2015. That the AAP was aware of anti-incumbency was apparent from its candidate list. However, the last-minute changes were not enough to counter the unpopularity of some MLAs, seen as unavailable and inaccessible.



Delhi leaders hail party's victory. Praveen Khanna



Celebrations at the party headquarters after the BJP's win on Saturday. Praveen Khanna

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WHO IS PARVESH SAHIB SINGH?

Long before he dethroned Kejriwal, BJP supporters rooted for him as CM

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

"THE PARTY will decide after February 8... If they want to make me CM, I will heed their demands." Speaking to *The Indian Express* on the campaign trail in January, BJP's Parvesh Sahib Singh had this to say about his prospects. Having dethroned AAP supremo and three-time Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal from the New Delhi seat, Singh would fancy his chances for the top post.

New Delhi is incidentally the same seat from where Kejriwal defeated former CM Sheila Dikshit in 2013, ending her 15-year rule. The seat, which also saw Sheila's son Sandeep Dikshit in the fray from the Congress (he finished a distant third), has typically been a barometer of the rising and falling popularity of the ruling government.

In 2015, Kejriwal won the seat with 64.14% of the votes, and in 2020, he grabbed 61.1%.

The New Delhi contest was intense, with AAP making allegations of voter list tampering, distribution of freebies by the BJP during the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct, and voter suppression.

Singh, 47, had made several promises — making Yamuna a riverfront similar to the one at Sabarmati, giving houses to slum dwellers and providing them infrastructure, 50,000 government jobs, flyovers, and a pollution-free national capital.

Through the campaign, his



BJP MP Manoj Tiwari and New Delhi seat winner Parvesh Sahib Singh at party headquarters, Saturday. Praveen Khanna

supporters pitched him as a CM candidate. "*Delhi ka CM kaisa ho, Parvesh Verma jaisa ho*" is a chant that reverberated.

The two-time West Delhi MP and one-time Mehrauli MLA, who has been with the BJP for close to three decades, kickstarted his campaign in mid-January. Weeks before that, he started visiting various jhuggi jhopri clusters across New Delhi to ascertain the needs of the residents. "Many people in JJ clusters don't have free water and electricity... I would say this openly. Whoever is getting clean water and zero electricity bills, please vote for Kejriwal, and whoever isn't, please vote for BJP," he said on multiple occasions.

Of the 3 lakh JJ households, close to a fifth are in the New Delhi Lok Sabha constituency, which includes the New Delhi Vidhan Sabha seat along with nine others.

In December, the AAP accused Singh of giving Rs 1,100 to women to "buy their vote". In response, Singh said he was only helping them through his father's NGO.

Singh's campaign was also built around the Chief Minister's official residence at 6, Flag Staff Road, Civil Lines — termed by the Opposition as "Sheesh Mahal". A model of the "Sheesh Mahal" kept outside Singh's house over the past weeks attracted many visitors. "*Kya Kejriwal ka ghar sahi me aisa hai* (Do you think Kejriwal's house is really like this)," "Yes! I have seen it on the news," went a conversation between two women passing by his house.

"Kejriwal has done nothing for Delhi in the last 11 years... While you were dying of Covid, he was busy building a Sheesh Mahal for himself," Singh told his supporters.

INTERVIEW UNION MINISTER

'Whatever he (Kejriwal) has done, we'll not undo; city can't be dumpyard'

AS THE BJP makes a comeback in Delhi after nearly three decades with a record win, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas **HARDEEP SINGH PURI** talks about the incoming government's vision and the top priorities for the Capital in an interview with **JATIN ANAND**. Excerpts:

How do you view the historic mandate that's been handed to the BJP by Delhi's voters?

This (mandate) was not only expected but deserved... It may appear like an electoral win but it is more than that — it is a significant political development. It puts paid to the model of deceit and fraud that he (AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal) had come up with. Power subsidy is fine... give financial assistance to those who need it. But what about instances of inflated power bills that the deceit was being carried out through? Work towards providing better utilities to the people but you must make them viable. Getting him out, as the people of Delhi have done, was a necessity.

How will BJP ensure continuity of AAP's schemes?

The BJP will ensure seamless transition both in governance as well as these schemes. Whatever he (Kejriwal) has done, we will not undo any of it. But we'll ensure the corruption component that these schemes suffer from is cut out.

What will be among the top priorities for the BJP?

Over and above the schemes dedicated to women, the people of Delhi will get not just Rs 5 lakh



Union Minister Hardeep Puri

but Rs 10 lakh for medical treatment, and significant Central schemes like the PMAY will be implemented. We tried to ensure these schemes were put in place earlier, but it takes two to tango. He (Kejriwal) stalled them. A BJP government — both at the Centre and in Delhi — will change that.

What is BJP's vision?

The Capital of India, which is moving towards becoming the third-largest economy in the world, can't be allowed to look like a dumpyard. We have to rebuild Delhi. The Masterplan (for Delhi), which had been pending implementation under AAP, will finally be put in place. We'll clean the Yamuna and develop its riverfront like the Sabarmati. Delhi will look and become a world-class capital city worthy of a rising India.

Are you also one of the potential choices for CM post?

Don't pay heed to any speculation in this regard. It is a question of giving Delhi, where the party was not in power for almost three decades, a face for the coming five years... No one can simply stake a claim to this (post); the decision will be taken by the top leadership.

BJP's Delhi journey: From Metropolitan Council in '60s to staying out of power for 27 yrs

JATIN ANAND & DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

ALMOST SIX decades after the Delhi Metropolitan Council, which evolved into the Delhi Legislative Assembly over time, witnessed its precursor — the Bharatiya Jana Sangh — come to power in the country on its own for the first time, the BJP will enter the House with a majority government for the second time after a gap of almost 27 years.

Before the Delhi Assembly came into existence in 1993, the Capital had a Metropolitan Council that had the power to make recommendations, but not legislate, from 1966 onwards.

After the tenure of the interim council from 1966 to 1967 under the chairmanship of Jag Parvesh Chandra, the first Metropolitan Council from 1967 to 1972 saw a majority government of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, led by chairman L. K. Advani, who went on to become a top leader of the BJP and Deputy Prime Minister. This was followed by the Jana Sangh becoming a part of governments in several other Indian states.

"The Delhi Metropolitan Council, which gave the Jana Sangh the opportunity to form its first government with a *poom bahumat* (full majority), was dissolved in the year 1990. The BJP gave the Delhi Legislative Assembly its first Chief Minister in Madan Lal Khurana in the year 1993, followed by Sahib Singh Verma and then its first woman CM, Sushma Swaraj," said South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, who was part of the first Legislative Assembly.

After being hit by hawala allegations — over which Khurana tendered his resignation making way for Verma — but was later absolved, Swaraj would lead the party in the House before the BJP government was ousted over the issue of inflation in onion prices in the year 1998. The sons of both the former BJP CMs — Harish and Parvesh, who won from the Moti Nagar and New Delhi constituencies, respectively — will be among the 48 members of the incoming Assembly.

With the Congress's Sheila Dikshit being sworn in as Chief Minister, the BJP would remain on the margins of Delhi's governance for close to three decades.

"This is the first time in almost 27 years that the party, again with a full majority of its own, will get the opportunity to serve the people of the Capital at the Assembly level," Bidhuri, who served as Leader of Opposition in the House before being elected to the Lok Sabha last year, added.

Aspirations to freebies: Why Delhi results will have a national echo



Weekly insight into what's changing in national politics — and why

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

DELHI IS a city-state with limited powers for whoever runs its state government but the verdict on Saturday has the potential to influence national politics more than what Haryana and Maharashtra state polls did last year giving a fillip to the BJP after its unexpected setback in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Haryana and Maharashtra both showed the BJP's remarkable ability to bounce back — indeed, this has kept its allies on the party's right side and now

there is a buzz that a group from the Shiv Sena (UBT) may soon join the NDA. But Delhi's ripple effect travels beyond the BJP getting control of one more state.

The party has wrested Delhi after 27 long years of sustained political effort — first against Sheila Dikshit when she was in power for 15 years between 1998-2013, then from Arvind Kejriwal who defeated her in 2013 and swept Delhi in 2015 and 2020, even as Narendra Modi managed to win 7/7 seats in the Lok Sabha polls in 2019 and 2024 general elections.

People wanted Modi for India and Kejriwal for Delhi. This has now changed.

Delhi signals that despite the setback Modi suffered in 2024, his popularity remains intact. There was no other leader the BJP relied on in Delhi as it did on Modi, in what was a virtual referendum on AAP supremo Arvind

Kejriwal. Delhi is also a message to the international community — the representatives of world capitals, international media and the multiple agencies which have a presence here — that they will have to deal with a stronger rather than a weaker PM.

This comes when Trumpism poses new challenges to many countries, including India, with trade wars in the offing and images of illegal migrants being deported, shackled and chained.

The two-thirds majority that the BJP has notched up in Delhi — up from eight to 48 — with its vote share up by an impressive around 7 percentage points and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) losing 10 percentage points in its vote share shows a ground-level mood for change. Clearly, the party has the support of virtually all sections — and not just the middle-class which was disenchanted with the AAP, and

turned towards the BJP.

This, too, is bound to have a ripple effect for Delhi is not just a cosmopolitan hub but also a city of migrants: Punjabis who settled here after Partition and formed the mainstay of the BJP in the early years, Purvanchalis (around 30% today) who have come from UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, or communities like the Valmiki among the Dalits, or the Jats, or most importantly, the women who had solidly stood by AAP in the last two elections but now seem to have moved.

Delhi could be a trendsetter indicating that what matters to voters today, especially in cities, may not be just "freebies", important as they are for the poorer sections. As to the middle class, so also to the jhuggi jhopdi dwellers, other issues are getting greater traction: the right to breathe unpolluted air or the right to drink clean water, not to

have to spend hours navigating traffic snarls or travel over pot-holed roads day after day, or be surrounded by mounds of uncleared garbage and overflowing drains.

The verdict points to other shifts, too. Surely, Kejriwal's party had initiated reforms in schools and healthcare but the voters were asking for more than just the daily "*tu tu main main*" between the L-G and the state.

Many appear to have voted for BJP hoping that with the resources it is endowed with, and with power at its command at the Centre, it would be better placed to do this than Kejriwal's AAP.

The BJP's narrative after its Lok Sabha losses helped it to course-correct in Haryana and Maharashtra. In Delhi, the middle class seems to have bought the argument that "freebies" were doled to the poor at their

expense. Many were convinced that the "double engine" sarkar would be beneficial to them. Besides the organisational theft of the BJP, what also helped the party was the way the RSS came out in its support — as it had done in Haryana and Maharashtra.

Those associated with the Sangh talked about 50,000 "drawing room" meetings that RSS functionaries had with small groups of people to mobilise their support. The normal sympathy that might have come Kejriwal's way for the way his government was hobbled, with agencies putting him and his colleagues in jail for months before the elections, was missing.

The voters have become that much more transactional and pragmatic, aspirational and demanding. Even as caste and community have not disappeared as voting imperatives in

different parts of India, Delhi holds out lessons which other states can ill afford to ignore.

The Delhi outcome is bad news for the entire Opposition, for it gives new heart and new impetus to the BJP. It has shown up the fault lines in the INDIA bloc, of which the AAP and the Congress are a part. "*Aur lado*", J&K CM Omar Abdullah taunted both the parties.

Most regional parties in INDIA chose to support Kejriwal — and not the Congress — in Delhi, as the two parties fought separately. It is possible that both the AAP and the Congress, which has not moved beyond the princely figure of "0" seats it had notched up in the last two elections, might have fared better had they fought together. Clearly, Opposition parties have to refashion the INDIA alliance if they want to remain relevant. The Congress, whose vote share

rose about 2 percentage points to 6.34%, lost deposits in at least 60 seats but polled more votes than the AAP's margin of defeat in 13 constituencies.

The AAP's defeat poses existential challenges for a political startup which has so far had a dream run. What will be its impact on the AAP government in Punjab? Or on the cases against Kejriwal and his colleagues in the liquor scam? Will an attempt now be made to delist the AAP as a political entity as the ED has suggested?

AAP leaders will now be called to draw on all the reserves at their command to remain afloat, work the street to win back the confidence of the *aam aadmi* — and fight another day.

(Neerja Chowdhury, Contributing Editor, *The Indian Express*, has covered the last 11 Lok Sabha elections. She is the author of *How Prime Ministers Decide*)



PARTY'S TALLY DOWN FROM 62 TO 22, VOTE SHARE AT 43.57%

Tracing AAP's map in Capital, where the party is still standing

AAP largely won in seats having high population of Muslims, Dalits or working classes, slum-dwellers

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

OF THE 22 constituencies in Delhi that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has won, 14 are dominated by Dalits and Muslims. The geographical spread of the AAP's victories and that it continues to have almost 44% vote share show that the party largely retained its support base among the city's poor.

The party has registered an overwhelming performance in constituencies reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SCs), winning 8 of the 12 reserved seats. The BJP was able to win four SC-reserved seats despite fielding 14 Dalit candidates in the polls.

The AAP's performance in Muslim-dominated seats was just as impressive as the party won six of the seven constituencies where Muslims are a decisive factor. Like, Dalits, Muslims too found the AAP a stronger challenger to the BJP than the Congress.

The seven seats where Muslims play a decisive role are Matia Mahal (Aaley Mohammed Iqbal), Okhla (Amanatullah Khan), Babarpur (Gopal Rai),



AAP leader Manish Sisodia leaves party convenor Arvind Kejriwal's residence on Saturday. Tashi Tobgyal

Chandni Chowk (Punardeep Singh Sawhney), Ballimaran (Imran Hussain), Seelampur (Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad), and Mustafabad (Adeel Ahmad Khan). Only Mustafabad, where the BJP's Mohan Singh Bisht defeated Khan, was the exception.

The seat was lost largely on account of Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM fielding February 2020 Delhi-riots accused Tahir Hussain who polled 33,474 votes, helping the BJP win by 17,578 votes.

The geographical spread of the AAP's wins was largely limited to Central, Northeast, and South Delhi. While the AAP was

almost wiped out in West Delhi, winning just Tilak Nagar and Delhi Cantonment, in North Delhi, it won just Sultanpur Majra, Burari, and Kirari. In Central and Northeast Delhi, the party won 11 seats and the rest came from South Delhi.

In Central Delhi, AAP won Patel Nagar, Karol Bagh, Sadar Bazar, Ballimaran, Matia Mahal, and Chandni Chowk. In Northeast and East Delhi, it won Seelampur, Babarpur, Gokulpur, Seemapuri, and Kondli. In South Delhi, the AAP has won from Kalkaji, Okhla, Tughlaqabad, Badarpur, Deoli, and Ambedkar Nagar.

These constituencies either have a high population of Muslims and Dalits or large numbers of the working classes and poor living in slums. This, along with the 44% vote share, indicates that the AAP likely retained the support of the poor who were the principal beneficiaries of its government's various schemes ranging from free electricity and water to free bus rides for women and better facilities in government schools and hospitals.

This was also reflected on the ground before the elections when the poor appeared happy with the government's welfare schemes and reposed faith in Kejriwal. However, the middle class appeared disenchanted over the lack of governance and developmental projects in the city.

Along with Dalits and jhuggi jhopdi residents, Muslims, who account for about 13% of Delhi's 1.55 crore voters, played a key role in ensuring the AAP's sweep in 2015 and 2020, when the party bagged 67 and 62 seats out of 70, respectively.

How Dalits voted

Of the 12 SC-reserved seats, AAP won Ambedkar Nagar,

Sultanpur Majra, Patel Nagar, Karol Bagh, Kondli, Deoli, Seemapuri and Gokulpuri. The BJP won from the reserved seats of Trilokpuri (by 392 votes), Mangol Puri, Bawana, and Madipur.

The BJP fielded 14 Dalit candidates in the elections with the tickets of two non-reserved constituencies of Matia Mahal and Ballimaran also going to Dalits. But this gesture does not seem to have cut ice with the larger Dalit population, with the party losing both Matia Mahal and Ballimaran by huge margins.

Ground reports ahead of the polls suggested that Dalits were largely suspicious of the BJP and a section was also unhappy with the party over the issue of Constitution and the alleged threat the party poses to reservation. A majority of Delhi's Dalit population is Jatav who identify with B R Ambedkar and feels more strongly about the Constitution and reservation. In contrast, the AAP's schemes for the poor, a class to which most Dalits in the city belong, appeared to have become a universal hit among Dalits.

WITH INPUTS FROM
ASAD REHMAN



AAP leader Atishi arrives at party convenor Arvind Kejriwal's house on Saturday. Tashi Tobgyal

The rise and fall: As Kejriwal picks up the pieces, long road ahead — for him and party

MALLICA JOSHI

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2024, days after he was granted bail by the Supreme Court in the excise policy case, Arvind Kejriwal announced his decision to step down as the Delhi Chief Minister.

"I will not sit on the CM's seat till the people elect me and send me to the seat again. I will go among the people and ask them for votes. *Agar janta ko lagta hai Kejriwal imaanदार hai, toh mai CM ki seat mein jaa kar baithoonga, nahin to nahin baithoonga* (If the people think Kejriwal is honest, then I will sit on the CM's seat; otherwise, I will not)," he had said.

On February 8, Delhi denied him that chance. The New Delhi seat from where Kejriwal lost has given the Capital its CM since 1998 — first Sheila Dikshit and then Kejriwal. It has a small electorate of 1.09 lakh voters, is the seat literally of the country's power and also has a large slum population. This time, it also saw the maximum voter deletions — nearly 40,000.

Kejriwal first arrived on Delhi's political stage as part of the India Against Corruption movement whose face was Anna Hazare. The movement tapped into the discontent around the "inactive" UPA government at the Centre, as well as the BJP campaign of anti-corruption against it.

While the BJP led by Narendra Modi reaped the benefits of it at the Centre, in Delhi, the stage of the India Against Corruption protest, the gainer was Kejriwal. In 2013, stunning the Congress that had led Delhi for 15 years, he led the AAP to a 53% vote share in the Assembly elections, with Kejriwal himself defeating incumbent chief minister Sheila Dikshit from New Delhi.

By winning in 2015 again with 67 out of 70 seats, and in 2020 with 62, Kejriwal went where no party had gone before within years of formation. By winning Punjab too in 2022, the AAP became the only regional party to be in power in two states.

Kejriwal in defeat hence marks a completely new chapter for the party, as he has personally not suffered a loss since that 2013 win, barring when he stood against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Varanasi in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls. The 2014 election, though, was more symbolic than anything else.



We will not just be a constructive opposition but will also do social work, and help people in our personal capacity. We did not come into politics for power, we came to serve the people."

— ARVIND KEJRIWAL
AAM AADMI PARTY CHIEF

Even when AAP suffered setbacks in its bids to expand, New Delhi provided the cushion Kejriwal needed to stay in contention.

Now, not only has Kejriwal himself lost, but also former deputy CM Manish Sisodia, his No. 2 and the face of its education model — the AAP government's most successful initiative. A small consolation for the party was incumbent CM Atishi's victory against the BJP's Ramesh Bidhuri from Kalkaji.

Can the AAP survive the Delhi loss and bounce back is the test before the party — for its future not just in the Capital but also nationally — particularly given that it draws its oxygen from Kejriwal.

What may be crucial in this is the party's loose structure, not bound by an ideology — the AAP has often expressed pride in this, saying repeatedly that its only ideology is work. However, this also leaves the party vulnerable without the glue of power, compared to parties with a stronger worker base such as the BJP and Congress.

But the AAP has a good starting point as it still holds 43.55% of the vote share in the Capital, just 2.3% behind the BJP's. This is impressive given the anti-incumbency of 12 years against the AAP, 10 of those as virtually unchallenged. This translates to 22 seats in the Delhi Assembly, giving the Capital its first real

Opposition in a decade.

In their first reactions after the results, both Kejriwal and Atishi vowed to play the role of a constructive opposition that will not disappear from among the people. In a video message, Kejriwal thanked all AAP volunteers for "fighting a very good election", and said: "We did a lot of work in the last decade... We improved, we did a lot of work on improving water availability and the infrastructure... But we will not give up... We will not just be a constructive opposition but will also do social work, and help people in our personal capacity. We did not come into politics for power, we came to serve the people."

Sources in the party said the senior leadership would also focus more on Punjab, and other states — asserting that the Delhi loss won't curtail its national ambitions. "All is not lost. We still are a national party and are running a government in Punjab with a more than comfortable majority. The loss in Delhi is an opportunity to expand into other states and consolidate our positions there," a senior leader claimed.

However, any such aspiration depends on whether the AAP can withstand the second challenge — and perhaps the biggest — of keeping its flock together.

The pressure from the BJP is expected to be immense, and in

the run-up to the Delhi elections, four present and former ministers of the party had quit, with Kailash Gahlot being the biggest loss. The former finance and transport minister, Gahlot was among the winners on Saturday, emerging victorious from Bijwasan, a seat he contested from for the first time ever. The seat that he vacated — Najafgarh — was also won by the BJP.

Eight sitting MLAs who were denied tickets by the AAP in the run-up to the polls had also shifted to the BJP.

A party insider said they were not worried. "We do not expect party workers and leaders, who stayed with us through what was perhaps our most trying time, to leave at this time. The assurance and direction, however, has to come from the top. Already several people have met Arvind ji. A more structured discussion is expected in the coming two-three days," the insider said.



Labourers dismantle a stage set up by AAP outside the party office to watch election results on Saturday. Tashi Tobgyal

Atishi, Gopal Rai buck the trend, hold on to seats

DEVANSH MITTAL,
NEETIKA JHA &
NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

SATURDAY SAW several senior AAP leaders losing their seats, including party chief Arvind Kejriwal, his former deputy Manish Sisodia and former health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj. Former Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, former environment minister Gopal Rai, former food and civil supplies minister Imran Hussain as well as ex-labour and employment minister Mukesh Ahlawat were among those who

withstood the BJP onslaught.

The BJP dealt a huge blow to the AAP. From a tally of 62 in 2020, AAP came down to 22 this election. The BJP, on the other hand, which won 8 seats in 2020, gained 40 seats and jumped to 48 this time.

While Atishi scraped through in South East Delhi's Kalkaji with a margin of 3,521 votes, her victory margin decreased considerably from her 2020 battle when she won against BJP's Dharambir Singh by a margin of 11,393 votes from the same constituency. In her first electoral outing in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from East Delhi constituency, she had lost against BJP's Gautam

Gambhir.

Seen as a loyalist, Atishi was sworn in as a Chief Minister last September when Kejriwal stepped down from the post, passing over more senior leaders such as Kailash Gahlot and Gopal Rai. She was inducted into the Cabinet along with Saurabh Bharadwaj in 2023 when Manish Sisodia and AAP leader Satyender Jain resigned. A Rhodes Scholar who studied history at Oxford University and St Stephen's College, she had served as an advisor to Sisodia till 2018 and was part of the initiative to revamp government schools in Delhi.

Rai, meanwhile, secured his

third consecutive term from Babarpur by defeating BJP's Anil Kumar Vashisht by 18,994 votes. Rai, the Delhi convenor of the party and a member of the Political Affairs Committee, is a founding member of AAP.

Among the other AAP leaders who also bucked anti-incumbency this time are:

■ Imran Hussain won from Ballimaran by a margin of 29,823 votes.

■ Mukesh Ahlawat won from Sultanpur Majra by a margin of 17,126 votes.

■ Jarnail Singh from Tilak Nagar won by a margin of over 11,600 votes. In the last polls, he

won by a margin of 28,029 votes.

■ Sanjeev Jha from Burari won by a margin of over 16,000 votes, down from 88,000 last time.

■ Vishesh Ravi from Karol Bagh won by over 7,400 votes. During the 2020 elections, his winning margin was 31,760.

■ Som Dutt from Sadar Bazar won by a little over 6,300 votes. His winning margin in the last elections was over 25,600.

Among the AAP winners are four three-time MLAs — Amanatullah Khan from Okhla; Imran Hussain from Ballimaran; Ajay Dutt from Ambedkar Nagar and Gopal Rai from Babarpur.



AAP's Aaley Mohammad Iqbal addresses the media after winning the Matia Mahal seat, on Saturday. @AaleyIqbal/X

MAN OF THE MATCH

AAP's Aaley Iqbal records highest margin — from Matia Mahal seat

His father Shoaib Iqbal, the outgoing MLA from the seat, has won from the constituency six times, beginning in 1993

SAMAN HUSAIN
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

IN A high-stakes election that saw the AAP suffer major setbacks, one candidate stood out. Aaley Mohammad Iqbal (34) won from Matia Mahal constituency by a margin of 42,724 votes — the highest margin of victory in the entire election — securing 58,120 votes and defeating BJP's Deepti Indora.

With Aaley's landslide victory, his family's deep-rooted

hold over Matia Mahal remains unshaken. His father Shoaib Iqbal, the outgoing MLA from the seat, has won from the constituency six times, beginning in 1993. Shoaib had previously been part of the JD, JD(S), IJP, JD(U) and Congress, ensuring electoral win for every party he contested from.

In 2015, he was defeated by AAP's former minister Asim Ahmed Khan, who contested the 2025 election on a Congress ticket from the same seat. In 2020, shortly after joining the

AAP, Shoaib reclaimed the seat from Khan by winning with a margin of over 50,000 votes.

Aaley's candidature was not guaranteed initially. The AAP had named Shoaib, his father and the sitting MLA from the seat, as its candidate from the constituency.

However, Aaley had earlier told *The Indian Express* that an internal survey and discussions with party chief Arvind Kejriwal led to his candidature.

This had come amid Shoaib's intention to leave state politics

and to carve an identity at the national level. Reflecting on this decision, Aaley had said, "In the election survey, we both received favourable public reviews. My father has served as an MLA from this seat six times and now wants to step into national politics."

Although this was his first Assembly election, Aaley is no stranger to electoral battles.

His political journey began at 21, when he became the youngest councillor in Delhi after winning the 2012 Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) elections from Turkman Gate as a candidate from the Rashtriya Lok Dal.

After being re-elected in 2017 and then again in 2022 — both times with record-breaking margins — he was until recently serving as the Deputy Mayor. While winning the seat, he had managed to reach another historic milestone — becoming the first Muslim Deputy Mayor of Delhi since 1977.

His accessibility and hands-on approach to governance are behind his popularity among the masses, said party insiders. As a Deputy Mayor, he was known for personally addressing grievances — his office was a revolving door for residents seeking immediate resolutions to their problems. From morn-

ing till late afternoon, his office was known to be open to all. People visited him with their issues, and he had earned a reputation of being responsive to their problems.

Stepping into the role of the Matia Mahal MLA, Aaley said he will remain committed to his grassroots ethos.

"I thank the people of Matia Mahal for considering me worthy of this remarkable victory. My purpose now is to ensure that all incomplete tasks are finished on priority. As a councillor, I have stood up to people's expectations, and will continue to do so, just like my father," he added.



HOW URBAN & RURAL DELHI VOTED

In 18 rural seats, BJP ends decade of AAP sway

BJP won 13 of 18 rural seats, vote share was over 50% in six of them; of 52 urban seats, 35 went to the party

ANJISHNU DAS
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

AS THE BJP returns to power in Delhi after 27 years, it has also managed to end the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) dominance in the Capital's rural constituencies.

Of the 70 Assembly seats in Delhi, there are approximately 18 seats with sizeable rural populations. The BJP won 13 of them, with the AAP picking five. Of the

13, the BJP won six with a vote share exceeding 50%. The AAP was equally dominant in four of its five.

The BJP's rural dominance matched its performance in urban areas, where of the 52 seats, the BJP won 35. The AAP got 17.

Most of Delhi's rural seats are concentrated on the outskirts of Delhi, falling largely in the North West and South West districts. As far as population goes, the national capital is almost entirely urban, at 97.5% of its numbers as

per the 2011 Census.

In 2015, when it won 67 of Delhi's 70 seats, the AAP had swept all the 18 rural seats. It followed this up in 2020 by winning 17, as part of its 62-seat sweep of the Capital.

In 2013, when the AAP first entered the Delhi electoral race, and the Assembly was a hung contest, the BJP had won 13 of the rural seats, with two each going to the AAP and Congress, and one to an Independent.

While the BJP dominated ru-

ral seats this time, going by vote shares, the contest was much tighter. At 44.68%, the BJP got slightly lesser votes than its overall vote share, at 45.56%, while the AAP at 43.03% got almost the same votes as overall. The Congress had more votes here, at 7.01%, than its overall vote share.

In 2015, the AAP had a 56.23% vote share in rural seats, in comparison, far ahead of the BJP's at 31.07% and the Congress's at 7.86%. In 2020, the AAP declined

to 52.93%, while the BJP saw a rise to 37.93%. The Congress, though, fell further to 3.83%.

Among the notable contests in the rural seats this time were those in Bijwasan and the Scheduled Caste-reserved Madipur. In Bijwasan, the BJP's Kailash Gahlot emerged victorious ahead of the AAP's Surender Bhardwaj. Gahlot, a former Cabinet minister in the outgoing AAP government and two-time Najafgarh MLA, had quit to join the BJP three months ago.

In Madipur, the AAP's Deputy Speaker Rakhi Birla suffered defeat at the hands of the BJP's Kailash Gangwal. A three-time Mangol Puri MLA, Birla was felled from Madipur this time.

In urban seats, too, the vote share battle was close. The BJP secured 46.34% of the votes, more than its overall share, with the AAP close behind at 43.8%, at almost the same as its overall vote share. The Congress at 6.05% also got almost the same votes as its overall share.



The deserted Congress office on Saturday. Tashi Tobgyal

Cong blanked out in Delhi again, but sees some gains in AAP loss

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

IT SEEMS ironic and counterintuitive on a day that the Congress is staring at a humiliating fourth consecutive defeat in Delhi. However, the party is seeing a silver lining in the possible setback for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

The demise of the AAP, the Congress believes, is the only path to its revival in the long term in the national capital, which was once its citadel.

The flip side of it, of course, is the resentment within the INDIA bloc, many of whose members feel the Congress should have joined hands or aligned with the AAP to take on the BJP.

To this, the Congress has been arguing that it was the AAP which did not want an alliance with it, and that Arvind Kejriwal himself spelt that out clearly with the AAP first off the block announcing all its 70 candidates.

However, many INDIA bloc parties believe a victory for the BJP in Delhi, coming on the heels of its smashing wins in Haryana and Maharashtra, will help it overcome the Lok Sabha setback and weave a political narrative once again that it is electorally invincible and that Narendra Modi is still as popular as he was – a message which the Opposition alliance cannot afford. Especially since the Opposition has to take on the BJP in Bihar later this year and the all-important West Bengal next year.

The Congress, however, believes the party has to claw back in states to revive nationally. For Delhi, it feels, that means knocking out the AAP.

As per preliminary indications Saturday, the Congress hadn't taken much off the AAP vote share, barely adding to the 4.26% it got last time. Now, the party will be seeing whether its candidates polled more votes than the margin of victory in seats where the AAP has lost to the BJP.

Still, Congress insiders say, their decision to go on the offensive against the AAP was correct as it had sensed "anger building up against the AAP". Towards the end days of the Delhi campaign, all Congress top leaders including Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra attacked the AAP.

This calculation is also based

on the logic that the BJP has a captive vote bank in the Capital, with its vote share remaining more or less between 32% and 38% in the Assembly elections since 1993, and that it largely does not overlap with the Congress's.

In 2008, when the party won Delhi for the third consecutive time, its vote share was 40.31%, which plunged to 24.55% in 2013 and under 10% in 2015. In 2020, it managed to get just 4.26% vote share.

On the other hand, the AAP's vote share in 2013 was 29.49%, went up to 54.34% in 2015 and was 53.57% in 2020.

The BJP's was 33.07% in 2013, dipped a bit to 32.19% in 2015 but went up to 38.51% in 2020.

"This shows that the Congress support base has moved lock, stock and barrel to the AAP. So knocking out the AAP is key for our revival," a Congress leader said before the results.

The Congress calculation also is that unlike the BJP and Congress, which have a cadre base, a largely volunteer-driven party like the AAP – which was the product of a movement – would wither away once out of power. "We know the Muslims did not vote for us, a large section of our old support base still voted for the AAP and that only a small section may have come back to us this time. But the AAP will struggle to sustain once out of power," one leader said.

However, the Congress's hope that a double digit vote share may revive its fortunes in the INDIA bloc seemed to be getting belied Saturday morning. "If it happens, the allies will have to accommodate us and give us a decent number of seats," a leader had said before the results.

The immediate impact would be in Bihar, which goes to elections next. The Congress is already perceived as the weak link in the RJD-led Mahagathbandhan, and in the 2020 Assembly elections, was believed to have dragged down the alliance. If its prospects remain dismal in the Capital, allies won't cut it any slack in Bihar.

Still, there will be some sweet revenge in an AAP defeat. It was the Anna Hazare movement, of which Kejriwal was a part, which was instrumental in creating the strong anti-UPA mood that eventually led to the BJP victory in 2014. And the start of a Congress collapse that remains unchecked.

PEOPLE NO LONGER BELIEVE IN THE LIES AND DECEIT OF ARVIND KEJRIWAL, SAYS DELHI BJP CHIEF

'The BJP's vanvaas of 27 yrs has ended in Delhi': Celebrations at party office

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

DRUMS, DHOLS, music, chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Modi hain toh mumkin hain' — senior leaders Bajajant Panda and Virendra Sachdeva were seen dancing outside the BJP office in Delhi with party workers, as the party on Saturday won for a decisive victory in the Assembly election.

The counting of votes started at 8 am and by 10 am, BJP workers gathered in large numbers outside the party office with its orange and green-coloured flags bearing the lotus party symbol.

Workers also burst crackers and played music, besides taking out a celebratory bike rally. East Delhi BJP MP Harsh Malhotra, the first senior leader to arrive at the state party office, said, "We are very happy... The entire credit goes to Modi and his schemes. Credit also goes to BJP workers who have been working on the ground to make the party win."

Malhotra added that the people of Delhi will now realise that they were looted for 10 years. "They want a party that works for the people and the city's development," he said.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva stated, "(Arvind) Kejriwal said he will go among the people and will sit on the CM throne only when the people will give their mandate... Now the people have voted him out because he is corrupt."

"The BJP's vanvaas of 27 years has ended in Delhi," he added.

"AAPda has completed. The people of Delhi have shown their faith in the PM's vision for making Delhi a world class city. The people no longer believe in the lies and deceit of Arvind Kejriwal," said Sachdeva.



(Clockwise from top) Celebrations outside the home of BJP's Parvesh Sahib Singh following his win from the New Delhi seat; BJP's Kapil Mishra after his win from Karawal Nagar. Praveen Khanna, Tashi Tobgyal & X/@KapilMishra_JND

An empty Congress office mirrors its vote tally

UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

AS THE counting of votes for the Delhi Assembly elections continued on Saturday, dismay and celebrations erupted across the Capital. However, the Congress office at Rouse Avenue remained untouched by emotions as silence reigned.

In the absence of any party worker, save for a couple of caretakers, the Congress office

seemed a far cry from the centre of hustle and bustle it used to be during its heyday. Dogs cozily napped in the soft winter sunlight, children from the slum behind the office laughed and played, and a handful of reporters basked in the sun discussing the Assembly election results.

Apart from a few chairs for the journalists, there was hardly any preparation for the counting day at the office. No screens showed the vote count on different seats, and not a single TV



Congress's Sandeep Dikshit at a counting centre in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

screen beamed out the live results analysis. The only signs that an election had taken place recently were the blue and pink billboards of Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) chief Devendra Yadav around the office premises, promising to pay Rs 2,500 to women if the party is voted to power in Delhi.

At one point, one of the journalists present at the office seemed to break out of their sun-soaked reverie and ask, "What

are we doing here? Shall we go?" Another reporter waved him away saying, "Just take in the sun and watch the results."

As news trickled in of the BJP surging ahead during the counting of votes, the atmosphere in the office remained unchanged.

The two office caretakers sat down for lunch, unbothered by the results. The journalists continued their debates. The dogs kept sleeping, and children shrieked and ran, chasing tyres with sticks.

SILENCE AT AAP OFFICE

Outside Kejriwal residence: 'Never imagined he could lose in Delhi'

As the day progressed, AAP office's gates remained shut, with no ministers, senior leaders, MLAs in sight

UPASIKA SINGHAL & SAMAN HUSAIN
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

AS AAP's defeat became undeniable, leaders began making their way to party national convenor Arvind Kejriwal's residence on Firozeshah Road. One by one, cars pulled up, while a throng of journalists gathered near the gate.

In the afternoon, a man draped in a saffron BJP scarf arrived in front of Kejriwal's residence, carrying samosas and jalebis. He held them before him,

an offering laced with derision. "The way Kejriwal has spread muck in Delhi is why the lotus has bloomed today," he declared to the cameras before him.

Two figures stood apart. Dressed in blue and yellow, the AAP badges catching the dim sunlight of the evening, they watched in solemn silence. Khurshid Alam, an elderly man in a cardigan, said: "We never imagined Kejriwal could lose in Delhi."

His companion, Pramod Kumar Sharma, added: "I hate to say this, but the party lost because it abandoned its own workers.

They favored defectors over loyalists, and this is the price we have paid." His words were heavy with foreboding. "Mark my words, if they continue like this, Punjab will be next."

The scene outside the AAP office on Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla Marg was similar.

Before the counting for the Delhi Assembly polls began, AAP's Delhi spokesperson, Jasmine Shah, stepped outside to address the press. Exuding confidence, he said, "We believe the AAP is going to form the government with a huge majority."



A deserted AAP office in Delhi on Saturday evening. Tashi Tobgyal

However, as the day progressed, the party office's gates remained shut, with no ministers, senior leaders, MLAs, or even municipal councillors in sight.

Once the BJP's victory became more certain, at 11.27 am, a few of the party's Punjab leaders arrived, but they too chose to enter the party office without any comments on the voters' decision.

A pavilion draped in AAP's signature blue and yellow was set up outside the office, with a stage under it, mounted with a podium and rows of empty chairs. A massive screen displayed live voting trends, drawing the attention of a handful of party volunteers and media personnel. Some volunteers, clad in party scarves and the

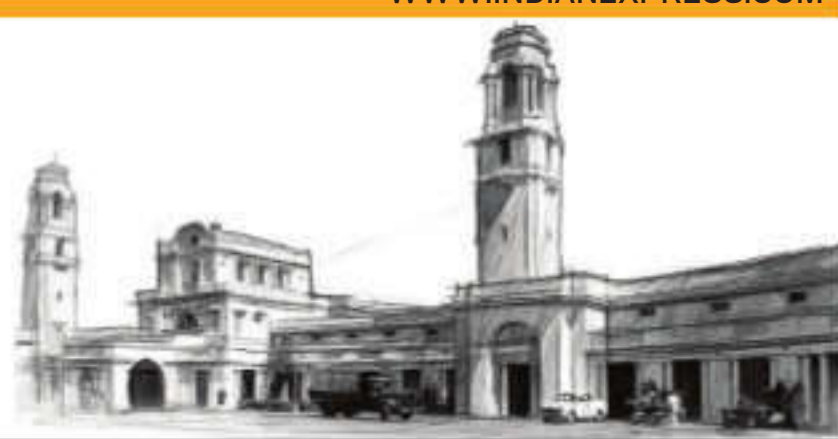
signature AAP cap, kept a watchful eye on the fluctuating numbers, hoping for a turnaround.

The battle for the New Delhi constituency, a key contest featuring AAP chief and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal against BJP's former MP Parvesh Sahib Singh had momentarily kept spirits alive.

As per Election Commission data, at 9.50 am, Kejriwal was leading after the second round of counting. A short-lived celebration ensued as party workers erupted in cheers, breaking into a dance to the party's campaign song, 'Phir Layenge Kejriwal.' However, each time the margins narrowed and the BJP regained its lead, a hush fell over the office.

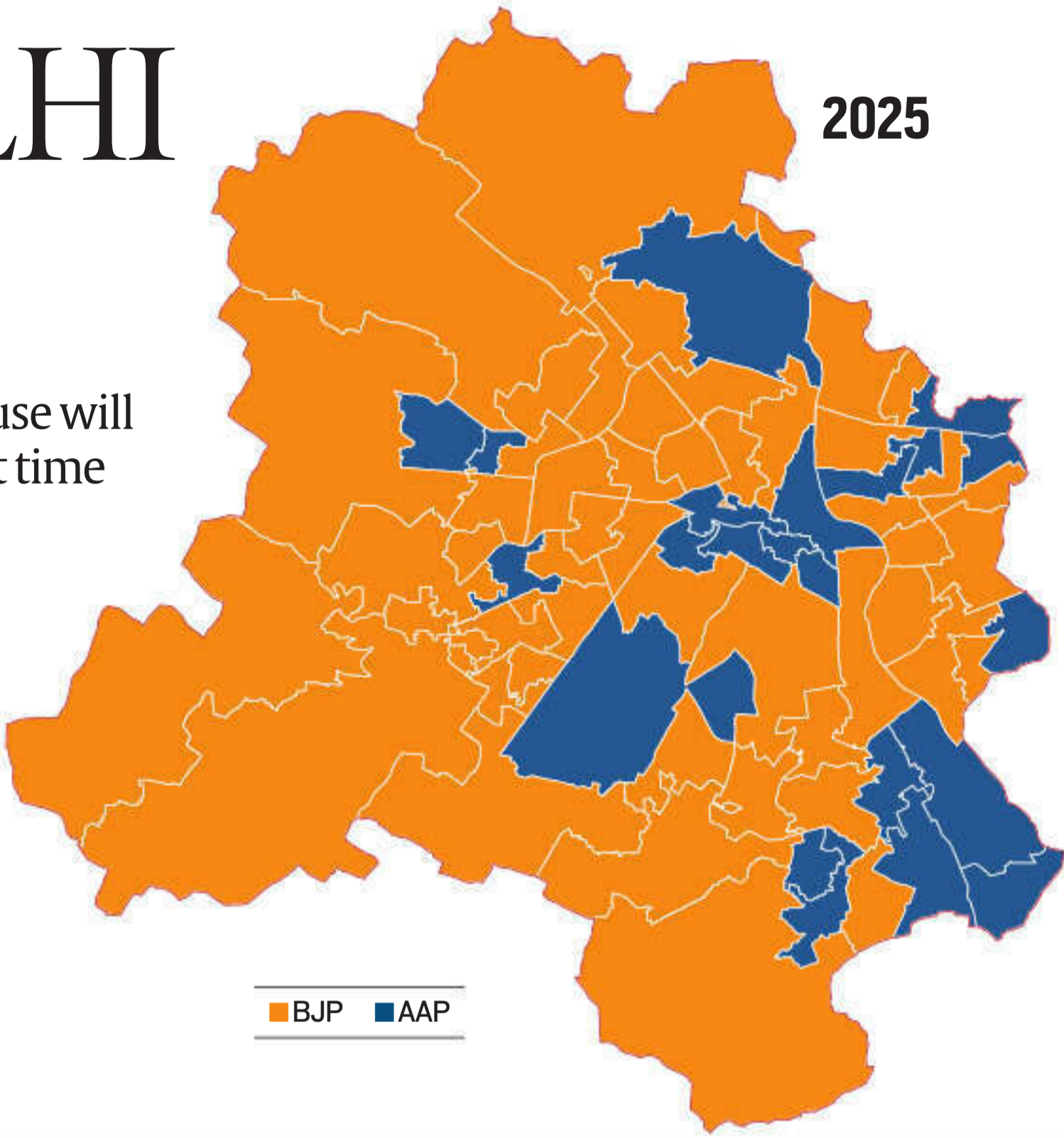
11 VERDICT 2025

DELHI ASSEMBLY ELECTION



THE NEW DELHI ASSEMBLY

Of the 70 legislators, 30 are first-timers; the House will have five women MLAs, three less than the last time



VOTE SHARE OVER THE YEARS

	AAP	BJP	CONG
1993	—	42.82%	34.48%
1998	—	34.02%	47.76%
2003	—	35.22%	48.13%
2008	—	36.34%	40.31%
2013	29.49%	33.07%	24.55%
2015	54.34%	32.19%	9.65%
2020	53.57%	38.51%	4.26%
2025	43.57%	45.56%	6.34%

Source: EC; AAP was founded in 2012

43,23,110

BJP has increased its total number of votes by more than 7 lakh

41,33,898

AAP's total number of votes has decreased by over 8 lakh

6,01,922

Congress didn't win any seat, but its votes have increased by over 2 lakh

53,738

Number of voters who picked NOTA this time was up by almost 10,000

HIGHEST MARGINS

- AALEY MOHAMMED IQBAL (AAP), Matia Mahal 42,724
- CHAUDHARY ZUBAIR AHMAD (AAP), Seelam Pur 42,477
- VIJENDER GUPTA (BJP), Rohini 37,816
- PREM CHAUHAN (AAP), Deoli 36,680
- RAVINDER INDRAJ SINGH (BJP), Bawana 31,475

LOWEST MARGINS

- CHANDAN KR CHOUDHARY (BJP), Sangam Vihar 344
- RAVI KANT (BJP), Trilokpuri 392
- TARVINDER SINGH MARWAH (BJP), Jangpura 675
- SURYA PRAKASH KHATRI (BJP), Timarpur 1,168
- UMANG BAJAJ (BJP), Rajinder Nagar 1,231

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

NEW DELHI Arvind Kejriwal AAP 25,999 2020: Arvind Kejriwal (AAP) 61.1%	KALKAJI Ramesh Bidhuri BJP 48,633 2020: Atishi (AAP) 52.28%	GREATER KAILASH Saurabh Bharadwaj AAP 46,406 2020: Saurabh Bharadwaj (AAP) 55.62%	BABARPUR Anil Kumar Vashisht BJP 57,198 2020: Gopal Rai (AAP) 59.39%	JANGPURA Manish Sisodia AAP 38,184 2020: Praveen Kumar (AAP) 50.88%	SHAKUR BASTI Satyendar Jain AAP 35,871 2020: Satyendar Jain (AAP) 51.6%	BALLIMARAN Kamal Bagri BJP 27,181 2020: Imran Hussain (AAP) 64.65%
MALVIYA NAGAR Somnath Bharti AAP 37,433 2020: Somnath Bharti (AAP) 57.97%	OKHLA Manish Chaudhary BJP 65,304 2020: Amanatullah Khan (AAP) 66.03%	NAJAFGARH Tarun Kumar AAP 72,699 2020: Kailash Gahlot (AAP) 49.86%	BAWANA Jai Bhagwan Upkar AAP 88,040 2020: Jai Bhagwan (AAP) 48.38%	BADLI Ajesh Yadav AAP 46,029 2020: Ajesh Yadav (AAP) 49.65%	MATIA MAHAL Deepti Indora BJP 15,396 2020: Shoah Iqbal (AAP) 75.96%	MEHRAULI Mahender Chaudhary AAP 46,567 2020: Naresh Yadav (AAP) 54.27%
MUSTAFABAD Adeel Ahmad Khan AAP 67,637 2020: Haji Yunus (AAP) 53.2%	RAJOURI GARDEN A Dhanwati Chandela A AAP 45,942 2020: A Dhanwati Chandela A (AAP) 55.7%	KARAWAL NAGAR Manoj Kumar Tyagi AAP 84,012 2020: Mohan S Bisht (BJP) 50.59%	PATPARGANJ Avadh Ojha AAP 45,988 2020: Manish Sisodia (AAP) 43.33%	ADARSH NAGAR Mukesh Kumar Goel AAP 41,028 2020: Pawan Sharma (AAP) 45.2%	AMBEDKAR NAGAR Khushi Ram Chunar BJP 42,055 2020: Ajay Dutt (AAP) 62.25%	BADARPUR Narayan Sharma BJP 87,103 2020: Ramvir Bidhuri (BJP) 47.05%
BIJWASAN Surender Bhardwaj AAP 53,675 2020: Bhupinder S Joon (AAP) 45.83%	BURARI Shailendra Kumar JDU 1,00,580 2020: Sanjeev Jha (AAP) 62.81%	CHANDNI CHOWK Satish Jain BJP 22,421 2020: Parlad Sawhney (AAP) 65.92%	CHHATARPUR Brahm Singh Tanwar AAP 74,230 2020: Kartar Tanwar (AAP) 49.13%	DELHI CANTT Bhuvan Tanwar BJP 20,162 2020: Virender Kadian (AAP) 49.13%	DEOLI Deepak Tanwar LJP(RV) 50,209 2020: Prakash Jarwal (AAP) 61.59%	DWARKA Vinay Mishra AAP 61,308 2020: Vinay Mishra (AAP) 52.08%
GANDHI NAGAR Naveen Chaudhary AAP 44,110 2020: Anil Kr Bajpai (BJP) 42.64%	GHONDA Gaurav Sharma AAP 53,929 2020: Ajay Mahawar (BJP) 57.55%	GOKALPUR Praveen Nimesh BJP 72,297 2020: Surendra Kumar (AAP) 53.22%	HARI NAGAR Surinder Kumar Setia AAP 43,547 2020: Raj Kumari Dhillon (AAP) 53.67%	JANAKPURI Parveen Kumar AAP 50,220 2020: Rajesh Rishi (AAP) 54.43%	KAROL BAGH Dushyant Gautam BJP 44,867 2020: Vishesh Ravi (AAP) 62.23%	KASTURBA NAGAR Abhishek Dutt INC 27,019 2020: Madan Lal (AAP) 40.45%
KIRARI Bajrang Shukla BJP 83,909 2020: Rituraj Govind (AAP) 49.77%	KONDLI Priyanka Gautam BJP 55,499 2020: Kuldeep Kumar (AAP) 53.11%	KRISHNA NAGAR Vikas Bagga CA AAP 56,424 2020: S K Bagga (AAP) 49.1%	LAXMI NAGAR B B Tyagi AAP 54,316 2020: Abhay Verma (BJP) 48.04%	MADIPUR Rakesh Birla AAP 41,120 2020: Girish Soni ((AAP) 56%	MANGOL PURI Rakesh Jatav AAP 55,752 2020: Rakhi Birla (AAP) 58.53%	MATIALA Sumesh Shokeen AAP 1,17,572 2020: Gulab Singh (AAP) 53.2%
MODEL TOWN Akhilesh Pati Tripathi AAP 38,693 2020: Akhilesh Tripathi(AAP) 52.58%	MOTI NAGAR Shivcharan Goel AAP 45,908 2020: Shivcharan Goel (AAP) 53.83 %	MUNDKA Jasbir Karala AAP 79,289 2020: Dharampal Lakra (AAP) 53.78%	NANGLOI JAT Raghuvinder Shokeen AAP 49,021 2020: Raghuvinder Shokeen (AAP) 49.2%	NARELA Sharad Kumar AAP 78,619 2020: Sharad Kumar (AAP) 52.06%	PALAM Joginder Solanki AAP 73,094 2020: Bhavna Gaur (AAP) 59.15%	PATEL NAGAR Raaj Kumar Anand BJP 53,463 2020: Raaj Kumar Anand (AAP) 60.81%
RK PURAM Pramila Tokas AAP 28,807 2020: Pramila Tokas (AAP) 52.45%	RAJINDER NAGAR Durgesh Pathak AAP 45,440 2020: Raghav Chadha (AAP) 57.06%	RITHALA Mohinder Goyal AAP 74,755 2020: Mohinder Goyal (AAP) 52.63%	ROHINI Pardeep Mittal AAP 32,549 2020: Vijender Gupta ((BJP) 53.67%	ROHTAS NAGAR Sarita Singh AAP 54,994 2020: Jitender Mahajan (BJP) 51.94%	SADAR BAZAR Manoj Kr Jindal BJP 49,870 2020: Som Dutt (AAP) 55.71 %	SANGAM VIHAR Dinesh Mohaniya AAP 53,705 2020: Dinesh Mohaniya (AAP) 64.58%
SEELAMPUR Anil Kr Sharma BJP 36,532 2020: Abdul Rehman (AAP) 56.05%	SEEMAPURI KU. Rinku BJP 55,985 2020: Rajendra Gautam (AAP) 65.82%	SHAHDARA Jitender Singh Shundy AAP 57,610 2020: Ram Niwas Goel (AAP) 49.53%	SHALIMAR BAGH Bandana Kumari AAP 38,605 2020: Bandana Kumari (AAP) 49.41%	SULTANPUR MAJRA Karam Singh Karma BJP 41,641 2020: Mukesh K Ahlawat (AAP) 66.51%	TILAK NAGAR Shveta Saini BJP 40,478 2020: Jarnail Singh (AAP) 62.2%	TIMARPUR Surinder Pal Singh AAP 54,773 2020: Dilip Pandey (AAP) 57.6%
TRI NAGAR Preeti Tomar AAP 43,177 2020: Preeti Tomar (AAP,) 52.38%	TRILOKPURI Anjana Parcha AAP 57,825 2020: Rohit Kumar (AAP) 52.36%	TUGHLAKABAD Rohtash Kumar BJP 47,444 2020: Sahi Ram (AAP) 54.51%	UTTAM NAGAR Posh Balyan AAP 73,873 2020: Naresh Balyan (AAP) 54.57%	VIKASPURI Mahinder Yadav AAP 1,22,688 2020: Mahinder Yadav (AAP) 55.95%	VISHWAS NAGAR Deepak Singhal AAP 47,099 2020: Om Prakash Sharma (BJP) 52.57%	WAZIRPUR Rajesh Gupta AAP 43,296 2020: Rajesh Gupta (AAP) 52.64%



MODI THANKS VOTERS, PROMISES TO REPAY 'DEBT' WITH 'DOUBLE-SPEED' DEVELOPMENT

Delhi liberated from decade of AAPda: PM



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the BJP headquarters on Saturday. Praveen Khanna

VIKAS PATHAK
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THANKING The voters after the Delhi Assembly poll verdict was out Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the Capital had liberated itself from “a decade of AAPda (calamity)” and promised the BJP’s “double-engine” government will repay the “debt” with “double-speed” development.

Attacking both AAP and Congress, partners in the Opposition INDIA bloc, the PM said the results in Delhi, as well as the by-poll in UP’s Milkipur, showed that the country preferred BJP’s “santushtikaran (satisfaction)” over “tushitikaran (appeasement)”.

Emphasising the symbolic value of the victory in the Capital, the PM underlined that Delhi was “not merely a city” but “mini India” and “a microcosm of the di-

versity of India”. “Today, Delhi has given a decisive mandate to the BJP. There is no class or regional pocket in Delhi where the lotus has not bloomed today,” he said.

The PM added, “Wherever I went, I told people that I am an MP from Purvanchal. Today, voters of Poorvanchal have given a new energy to this relationship. Apart from Delhi, the BJP has won a great victory even in Milkipur of Ayodhya today. The country is choosing the BJP’s santushtikaran (satisfaction) instead of tushitikaran (appeasement) today.”

Targeting the Congress as a party that “destroys its allies”, the PM said Delhi had proved that “the destruction of anyone who holds the Congress’s hand once is assured”.

“For 5-7 years they (Congress) tried to show they are Hindu in order to encroach on the votes of BJP. They stopped it some years ago, understanding that this is BJP’s turf. Now they

are trying to poach on the vote banks of their regional allies. Now INDI partners of the Congress have begun to understand that Congress wants to win back their vote banks... In Delhi this time, INDI allies tried to show the Congress its place, but they still could not save AAPda,” he said.

Further attacking Congress, which he said was “doing the politics of urban naxals”, he underlined that the party had “achieved a double hat-trick... by not opening its account in six elections in a row.” “I had said it is a parasitic party... It destroys its allies. It steals their agendas. And it wants to steal their vote banks,” he said.

“In UP, it is trying to steal the language and the votes of the SP and BSP. In Tamil Nadu, it has stolen the DMK’s language. In Bihar, too, it has stolen the political discourse of its ally RJD. Today, Delhi has also proved that

the destruction of anyone who holds the Congress’s hand once is assured.”

Attacking AAP’s style of politics, Modi said, “In Delhi, the politics of protests, struggle and administrative ambiguity led to great losses for the people. Today, you have rid Delhi of an impediment.”

Delhi has liberated itself from a decade of AAPda (calamity)... Delhi’s voters have shown the truth to those who, in their arrogance, believed that they owned Delhi. The verdict proves that there is no place in politics for shortcuts, lies and deceit. The people have short-circuited the politics of shortcuts... Even after getting 100% success in three Lok Sabha elections, our workers had the pain of not being able to serve Delhi fully. This desire, too, Delhi has fulfilled this time.”

Listing what he called the failures of the AAP government in improving the delivery of basic

services, Modi said, “Wherever NDA has got the mandate, we have brought new heights of development to that state. People are choosing our governments two-three times... Broken roads, garbage dumps and polluted air – these are the problems that people of Delhi have faced. We will build Delhi as a modern city. For the first time ever, the BJP will have a government in every state within NCR.”

He said: “Alongside development, the mandate of Delhi is also for virasat (heritage). The Yamuna is a centre of our faith... But these people made the Yamuna’s condition pathetic... I have taken a vow that we will make Yamuna ji the identity of Delhi.”

He said: “I guarantee that the CAG report on Delhi will be placed in Parliament. Each charge of corruption will be probed and those who have looted will have to return the loot. This is Modi’s guarantee.”

How BJP hit the right note, singing Modi tune

BJP projected Modi, tailored campaign for diverse groups and deployed heavyweight campaigners

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE BJP VICTORY in Delhi is another affirmation that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s image as an election winner remains undented.

The win comes on the back of big Assembly poll victories for the BJP in Maharashtra and Haryana, two states where it was seen as heading for a defeat. A return to power in Delhi after more than 27 years decisively shakes off the shadow cast on the BJP by the Lok Sabha results, less than a year ago.

The Delhi win is both a vote of confidence in the credibility of “Modi’s guarantees” at a time when all the parties – both national and regional – are vying with each other on welfare politics, and the PM’s promise of “good governance”.

Defeating the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) goes beyond Delhi for the BJP as the Arvind Kejriwal-led outfit challenged the latter’s dominance in the North. Not having the Capital under it even as it redefined politics across the country remained an eyesore for the BJP.

Having fended off the BJP in the state elections twice since the rise of Modi, Kejriwal also fashioned himself as an alternative to the PM. After the 2013 narrow win and the AAP-led government’s fall, Kejriwal had even taken on Modi from the Varanasi Lok Sabha seat in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

Determined to decimate the AAP, the BJP left no stone unturned in Delhi, with ample help from the Centre. The Kejriwal government was in constant conflict with the Lieutenant Governor, with the Centre fur-

ther tightening the screws since 2020 after the appointment of V K Saxena as LG.

In recent years, the Kejriwal government found its hands tied over many issues, with officials reporting directly to the LG, even as the top AAP leadership fought cases or found themselves in jail.

Towards the end of the Delhi election campaign, the Modi government constituted the Eighth Pay Commission and announced big tax exemptions for the middle class in the Union Budget – both measures that went down well with the BJP’s middle class base as well as government officials in the Capital’s large bureaucratic set-up.

As Modi sought votes in his own name and the BJP deployed the full weight of its star faces in the campaign, it appeared to outweigh the shortcomings in the Delhi unit. The local BJP was all along seen as having failed to emerge as a force against the AAP in Delhi, with its inability to project a chief minister face seen as a confirmation of this.

The AAP, in contrast, started out strong, getting off the ground early in announcing candidates and going door-to-door. It reinforced its message of welfare politics and promised to build on it, even as the BJP’s corruption charges against Kejriwal didn’t seem to stick.

The BJP ultimately fell back on the Modi card, confident that the PM himself remained popular. All seven of Delhi’s Lok Sabha seats went to the BJP for the third consecutive time in the general elections last year.

Apart from projecting Modi, the BJP tailored its campaign group-wise, given the diverse

linguistic, regional and social diversity of Delhi. The big rallies were limited to the top leaders while the party’s local leaders focused on small meetings, including drawing room ones.

For example, a team of BJP leaders led by national general secretary Tarun Chugh and former Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar conducted around 5,000 such small meetings in the last seven weeks before the voting.

The BJP’s manifesto shed the party’s hesitation when it came to freebies and took on AAP promises directly. Modi repeated several times that none of

Kejriwal’s popular schemes such as free bus rides for women, and power and water up to a certain limit, would be stopped if the BJP came to power.

There was no Hindutva rhetoric, as much a factor of what the party sensed on the ground as the fact that the AAP had shown it was as willing to go down that road.

Additionally, the BJP identified issues like air pollution, the contaminated Yamuna and the deteriorating quality of life as obvious failures of the 12-year AAP regime – striking a chord with the Capital’s substantial middle class that didn’t see these as figuring among the AAP’s concerns.

BJP leaders also cited their candidate selection as a success story, with senior leaders like Dushyant Gautam, Ramesh Bidhuri, Kapil Mishra, Parvesh Sahib Singh and generation next such as Harish Khurana and Ravinder Singh Negi being fielded. Many of them pulled off upset wins Saturday, with Bidhuri against incumbent CM Atishi and Parvesh Singh against Kejriwal.

WINNING BET

Meet BJP MLA Bisht, who won Muslim-dominated Mustafabad

UPASIKA SINGHAL
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE BJP’S move to “placate” one of its most experienced leaders, Mohan Singh Bisht, and field him from the Muslim-dominated seat of Mustafabad paid off on Saturday.

Bisht, who was the sitting Karawal Nagar MLA and was replaced there by Kapil Mishra, defeated Adeel Ahmad Khan of the AAP by 17,578 votes.

In the run-up to the elections, Mustafabad – which has a 39.5% Muslim population – grabbed the spotlight after the AIMIM fielded former Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor and 2020 Delhi riots accused Tahir Hussain from the seat. Mustafabad in North East Delhi was one of the worst-affected areas during the 2020 riots in which at least 53 people lost their lives.

Bisht was first elected as an MLA in 1998 from Karawal



Mohan Singh Bisht defeated Adeel Ahmad Khan of AAP by over 17,000 votes.

Nagar, a seat he retained till 2015. He lost the seat to Mishra in 2015, then fighting for AAP. Five years later, Bisht wrested Karawal Nagar back, defeating AAP’s Durgesh Pathak.

After being replaced by Mishra, Bisht termed the BJP’s decision as a “big mistake” even as internal surveys of the BJP

suggested that voters of Karawal Nagar preferred Mishra’s fire-brand Hindutva-cum-Purvanchali face.

With Bisht sulking, the BJP national leadership intervened and a day later, announced him as the candidate from Mustafabad, keeping in mind the significant Pahadi population.

“I was the MLA of Karawal Nagar from 1998 to 2008 when the Mustafabad constituency was formed. People here have come out on the streets in support of me (after the announcement)... There is also a lot of support from the party... I am sure that Mustafabad will be the first seat that the BJP will win,” Bisht told *The Indian Express* earlier.

Senior BJP leaders refer to Bisht as “accessible” and have lauded his efforts to voice local issues.

In 2020, a woman accused him of leading a mob during the riots and setting her shop on fire. However, no charge was filed against him.

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

DELHI HAS fallen finally and the INDIA bloc is at the crossroads again. The euphoria that was seen in the Opposition camp after the BJP’s Lok Sabha setback – already on the wane after the Haryana and Maharashtra results – is all but dissipated. The big question before the alliance Saturday was how to hit refresh.

As expected, the knives are out in the Opposition camp, with some in the INDIA bloc openly blaming the Congress. The official position of the Congress, which personally expects to gain in Delhi from the AAP’s defeat, was that it was not the party’s responsibility to help the AAP win.

The Delhi election results “reflect nothing more than a referendum on Arvind Kejriwal and the Aam Aadmi Party”, the Congress said, choosing largely to deflect the fact that its vote share crawled up to 6.34% this time. Incidentally, that was

nearly the same gap between the BJP and AAP.

This would hardly escape the attention of INDIA parties, particularly as the answer as to how to stop the BJP and the Narendra Modi bandwagon continues to escape them.

Slogans like “the Constitution is in danger” and that “institutions are being captured”, which the Congress led with, clearly did not excite the people.

Additionally, the Congress and AAP’s now-on, now-off partnership inspired little confidence among them, said a senior Congress leader. “Our top leaders addressed a public meeting in Delhi along with INDIA bloc leaders to protest against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal in March last year. We fought the Lok Sabha elections together. And now we are fighting against each other,” the leader said.

Even on Saturday, the confusion within the Congress over the AAP was evident. Many Congress leaders said in private that now that it had lost, the volunteer-

driven AAP would collapse and wither away, and presumably the Congress votes the AAP had taken would return to it.

Congress communication head Jairam Ramesh asserted there will be a Congress government in Delhi in 2030. Noting that the AAP had won decisively in Delhi even at the height of Modi’s popularity in 2015 and 2020, Ramesh said: “This shows that, rather than being vindication of the policies of the PM, this vote is a rejection of Arvind Kejriwal’s politics of deceit, deception, and vastly exaggerated claims of achievement.”

On the Congress’s own performance, Ramesh insisted: “The Congress was expecting to do better. It has, however, increased its vote share. It may not be in the Assembly but it is definitely a presence in Delhi.” Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also credited the party for paving the way for the AAP defeat.

Rahul Gandhi thanked the party’s workers and voters, and posted: “We humbly accept the

mandate of Delhi... This fight for the progress of Delhi and the rights of Delhiites – against pollution, inflation and corruption – will continue.”

However, many in the INDIA bloc were reluctant to cut the Congress any slack. Senior Samajwadi Party leader Ram Gopal Yadav, who told *The Indian Express* in an interview before the results that the Congress was behind the Opposition’s failure to dislodge the Modi government, said that the Centre put enough hurdles in the path of the AAP administration in Delhi to make it stumble. However, he asked, why was the Congress campaign targeted at the AAP.

“The attitude of the Congress was very bad. I can understand the Congress attacking the BJP and seeking votes. But they attacked Kejriwal more, thinking that they can come back once Kejriwal is knocked down,” Ram Gopal told *The Indian Express*.

CPI general secretary D Raja, who is generally more gentle on the Congress, said: “This result

clearly highlights that the RSS-BJP’s divisive agenda can only be effectively countered through a united, ideological and political front... It is a wake-up call for the constituents of the INDIA bloc, particularly the Congress – the largest party in the coalition – and other dominant regional parties.” To charges that it didn’t align with the AAP, the Congress has been arguing that it was the AAP which did not want an alliance with it. RJD’s Manoj Kumar Jha also raised similar points while arguing that the outcome in Delhi was “episodic” as the people may have yearned for change. With Bihar elections, where the INDIA unity under the RJD will be tested, up next, Jha said not much should be read into the Congress and AAP not joining hands.

Among the first INDIA bloc leaders to comment on the results was Jammu and Kashmir CM and National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah, who put out a cryptic post on X: “Aur lado aapas mein (Just keep on fighting)!!!!”

HOT SEATS

In 2020 riot-hit NE Delhi, BJP bags 3 seats, AAP 1; Kapil Mishra among winners

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE BJP on Saturday won three of the four constituencies in Northeast Delhi, which was the epicentre of riots five years ago.

The party won from Mustafabad and Karawal Nagar, where the BJP fielded five-time MLA Mohan Singh Bisht and Kapil Mishra, respectively, with Mishra defeating his AAP rival by 23,355 votes and Bisht defeating his AAP rival by 17,578 votes.

The BJP’s and AAP’s vote shares in Karawal Nagar were

53.39 per cent and 41.78 per cent, respectively.

On February 23, 2020, Mishra in his controversial speech gave an ultimatum threatening to remove those protesting on the road against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Jaffrabad.

The speech was blamed for being one of the triggers of the communal violence that ensued following clashes between supporters and opponents of the CAA. At least 53 people were killed and scores of others were injured in the riots.

Throughout the campaign,

the BJP steered clear from mentioning the riots, with the only reference coming from Union Home Minister Amit Shah towards the end of the campaign.

Targeting the AAP at back-to-back public meetings in Mustafabad and Karawal Nagar, Shah, on February 1, raked up the 2020 riots and accused the AAP of dragging the Capital through the violence.

Shah said: “After the formation of the BJP government in Delhi on February 8, all Rohingyas and Bangladeshis will be selectively expelled.”

Seeking to emphasise that it



Kapil Mishra defeated his AAP rival by 23,355 votes. File

The BJP mostly steered clear of mentioning the riots, with the only reference coming from Amit Shah towards the end of the campaign

was time to free Delhi from “AAP-da”, or disaster, Shah also sought blessings at the area’s Prachin Shiv Mandir and Hanuman Mandir after which he asked the people to rid Delhi of liquor mafia and “close down

the scamsters’ businesses” by rooting out “hardcore corrupt” individuals.

However, among the Muslim electorate in these areas, the arrests made following the 2020 violence and various cases linked to the riots were part of the discussion, especially following the entry of former AAP leader Tahir Hussain, who was in jail after being arrested in a UAPA case for his alleged involvement in the riots. This time, it was the AIMIM that fielded him.

Apart from Bisht and Mishra, sitting BJP MLA Ajay Mahawar won Ghonda by 26,058 votes.

His vote share was 56.96 per cent. His opponent AAP’s Gaurav Sharma bagged 38.41 per cent vote share.

Only Seelampur, among the riot-hit constituencies, was the exception. There, the AAP’s Chaudhary Zubair Ahmed won against the BJP by 42,477 votes. The son of Congress stalwart Chaudhary Mateen Ahmed, Zubair switched to the AAP following the announcement of the Delhi Assembly elections.

Ahmad received 59.21 per cent of the votes polls while Sharma got 27.38 per cent of the vote share.

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DELHI ASSEMBLY ELECTION



Delhi results set to cast long shadow on Punjab politics, admit AAP leaders

Some in AAP expect deeper Kejriwal role; Punjab Congress MP believes mid-term poll is likely

KANCHAN VASDEV,
MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA
& RAAKHI JAGGA
CHANDIGARH, LUDHIANA,
FEBRUARY 8

THE AAP's loss in the Delhi elections has raised questions about the impact in Punjab, with party leaders admitting there will be repercussions in the only state where the Arvind Kejriwal-led party remains in power.

"The AAP has similar big-ticket projects in both Delhi and Punjab, such as free power and mohalla clinics. Kejriwal's popularity in Delhi had created a similar effect in Punjab. How we do in Delhi certainly has an impact in Punjab," said an AAP leader in Punjab.

A few AAP leaders, requesting anonymity, said Kejriwal would now concentrate on Punjab. "They only have Punjab to showcase. They will spend more time and energy to make it an ideal state. Obviously there will be interference. It remains to be seen how much interference will be tolerated by (CM Bhagwant) Mann."

After Kejriwal walked out of



Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann arrives at AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal's residence in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

Tihar jail last year, Mann's officers on special duty were removed. At the time, the Punjab CM did not react. "Now, Kejriwal has lost his seat. Whether Mann allows him to interfere in Punjab remains to be seen," said a party leader.

A senior AAP leader said the party deviated from being a common man's party. "We will have to learn lessons. We have to be 'aam aadmis (common people)'. We cannot move around like VIPs. We are no more 'aam aadmi' in Punjab in public perception. People post videos of

Mann's convoys. We gave security to Kejriwal also. All that has boomeranged," he said.

Another senior leader said the blame for the party's poor performance in Punjabi-dominated constituencies would fall on the state unit. "This will show we were not performing here. We have people from Punjab who frequent Delhi. Do you think they do not talk? You have to see the state of our roads, the promises we have not kept like ₹1,000 per month for women. All this matters. The law and order situation

too has not been good recently. Had 300 units of free power mattered, we would not have lost 10 Lok Sabha seats out of 13."

In the Punjab Congress, the AAP's defeat has sparked a buzz about a revolt in the AAP and the possibility of a midterm election. State Congress leaders said the party would have to capitalise on the AAP's weakened position to regain ground in the state.

Senior Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa told *The Indian Express* that Kejriwal would now head to Punjab "to become CM of the state".

"In this context, it is important to refer to a statement made by the state president of AAP in Punjab, Aman Arora, a couple of days back who said a Hindu could also be the CM of Punjab and that the person occupying CM's office should be capable and should not be seen in the prism of Hindu or Sikh... the results in Delhi are an important indication of how the AAP leadership is paving the way for Kejriwal to occupy the CM's chair in Punjab. A Vidhan Sabha seat in Ludhiana is already vacant after the demise of the sitting AAP MLA and it will be convenient for

Kejriwal to fight a byelection," said Bajwa.

Bajwa predicted an internal power struggle in Punjab and that CM Mann and his supporters would be pitted against the Delhi leadership of the AAP. "There may be widespread defections amongst AAP MLAs in Punjab," Bajwa said.

Congress's Gurdaspur MP Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa said Punjab should prepare for a mid-term election as the AAP would disintegrate following its crushing defeat.

Congress insiders said the party should encourage defections from the AAP, especially if the Delhi loss leads to dissent within the party, and focus on rural and urban voters and address local issues such as agriculture, unemployment and drug abuse.

State BJP general secretary Anil Sarin said, "The AAP had its government in Delhi and Punjab and now that Delhi has been wrested by BJP, it will have the ripple effect in Punjab in 2027... otherwise also people of Punjab are fed up of governance of AAP in its three years of performance only. We will reach out to the masses to convert the vote share into seats."



BJP workers celebrate their victory in Delhi Assembly elections in Mumbai on Saturday. PTI

Why AAP's defeat in Delhi polls is setback for Uddhav Thackeray, Sharad Pawar

SHUBHANGI KHAPRE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 8

THE AAM Aadmi Party's defeat in the Delhi Assembly elections is a body blow to the Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) in Maharashtra which made their fight against the BJP a common cause with AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal.

The outcome of the Delhi Assembly elections has given the BJP reasons to celebrate in a big way not just in the Capital but also in Maharashtra.

While the AAP was never a major force in terms of electoral base in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) held hope in Kejriwal. It had a presence as Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray, NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar, and the AAP led by Arvind Kejriwal often came together through the INDIA bloc or otherwise to counter the BJP at the Centre and in the state.

Maharashtra link

In many ways, Kejriwal's connection with Maharashtra had its origins in the India Against Corruption crusade which gained momentum in 2011-12, and was led by social reformer Anna Hazare, a resident of Ralegaon in Pune district.

At the rally held in Delhi's Ramlila Maidan, those who played significant roles in the fight against corruption and pressing for the Lokpal Bill included Arvind Kejriwal, Shanti Bhushan, Prashant Bhushan, Kiran Bedi, Medha Patkar, Swami Agnivesh, Colonel Devinder Sehrawat, Harsh Mandar et al. It was in April 2011 when Hazare went on a hunger strike demanding the Lokpal Bill.

Anna Hazare and Kejriwal, who shared the platform and a cause 14 years ago, are no longer

on the same page. In fact, Hazare had given a clarion call to vote against the AAP in the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections.

As the BJP marched to victory pulling a hat-trick post Haryana, Maharashtra, and now Delhi, Hazare minced no words to attack Kejriwal. Hazare said, "A leader should always be selfless and upright. If you want to elicit people's support these are necessary qualities."

A helping hand

In Kejriwal, who after graduating from IIT Kharagpur, joined the Indian Revenue Services and then took to politics, these regional parties saw a committed leader who dared to speak against the BJP's central leadership. There are several instances where Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray joined hands with the AAP and vice versa in their political battle against the BJP.

When the BJP through its 'Operation Lotus' split the Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party, AAP leaders both at the Centre and Maharashtra were at the forefront of attacking the saffron party.

When the Centre promulgated an ordinance to create an authority for the transfer and postings of Group A officers through legislation, Kejriwal visited Matoshree to meet Uddhav Thackeray to seek his support and met Sharad Pawar. He appealed to all non-BJP parties to come forward and protest against the legislation arguing it was undermining the roles of elected state government.

When Kejriwal was arrested, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) pledged support and participated in the protest rally held in Delhi. During the Lok Sabha and

Maharashtra Assembly polls, Kejriwal participated in the INDIA bloc rally held at Shivaji Park and Bandra Kurla Complex, respectively, last year.

The Delhi Assembly results have upset the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the NCP (SP) which believe Kejriwal had to fight a battle on many fronts against the BJP.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said, "The BJP seems to have replicated its Maharashtra pattern in the Delhi Assembly elections. From subjecting AAP leader Kejriwal to harassment through Central agencies, getting all their prominent party leaders arrested and imprisoned to the bogus voter list," said Raut, adding the saffron party's formula is to first finish the leader who dares to rise against Modi-Shah.

After the setback in the Maharashtra Assembly polls, regional parties were hoping the BJP would withstand the BJP. Unfortunately, that has not happened as Kejriwal's party failed to retain power after 12 years of ruling in Delhi.

With local bodies elections, including those of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, scheduled to be held this year, Thackeray surely knows it's not going to be easy. The BMC polls will in every sense be a do-or-die battle for Thackeray who is struggling to reaffirm his political leadership and identity of the party in Mumbai and Maharashtra.

Senior BJP leader Sudhir Mungantiwar said, "The BJP is on a victory spree. After the success in Haryana and Maharashtra, we have made it in Delhi. And this clearly is an indication that people have trust in the party and in Narendra Modi and Amit Shah's leadership. We will win Bihar Assembly polls too."

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION DEPT'S ORDER



Security personnel outside the Delhi Secretariat on Saturday. Tashi Tobgyal

'No files to be taken outside Delhi Secretariat without permission'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

NO FILES, documents or computer hardware can be taken outside the Delhi Secretariat complex without prior permission of the General Administration Department (GAD) "to address security concerns and the safety of records", an official notification underlined Saturday as the Assembly election results were out and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) lost power in the Capital.

"It is, therefore, directed that necessary directions may be issued to the branch in-charges concerned under the depart-

ments or offices situated in Delhi Secretariat to ensure the safety of records, files, documents or electronic files/branches," read the order issued by the GAD following L-G VK Saxena's directions. The order also underlined that the rule is applicable for all the Secretariat officials and the Council of Ministers. Delhi Secretariat is the seat of the city government.

The order comes as the BJP registered a historic victory in the Assembly elections by securing a win in 48 of 70 seats. The party is set to return to power in the Capital after 27 years.

In its manifesto, the BJP had promised to adopt "zero toler-

ance" against the alleged widespread misgovernance and corruption of "AAP-DA" (disaster) and constitute a special investigation team to launch a probe into the "scams" related to Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), Mohalla clinics, excise policy, and the Delhi Jal Board, among others.

The party also promised that it would present the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) report — that allegedly highlights the lapses by the AAP — in the first session of the Assembly after the government takes charge, and "a public white paper of Delhi's misgovernance during the party's decade-long tenure.

Advice for AAP from its Goa chief: Pact with Cong only way ahead

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA
PANAJI, FEBRUARY 8

STRESSING THAT an alliance between the Aam Aadmi Party and the Congress is "the only way forward" in Goa, the party's state unit chief, Amit Palekar, told *The Indian Express* on Saturday that a tie-up with the grand old party may have helped to "some extent" in the Delhi Assembly election as well.

Hours after the AAP lost in the Capital, Palekar said: "Considering the margin of loss in some constituencies has been low, if the two parties (Congress and AAP) fought together, it would have helped... There was anti-incumbency and other factors as well. We underestimated some things. The result was unexpected".

AAP's dismal performance in Delhi elections comes as a jolt to the party in Goa, as it tries to forge an alliance with the Congress ahead of the assembly elections in 2027. In its first foray in Goa, AAP drew a blank in the 2017 assembly elections.

The party made inroads in Goa when it won the Benaulim zila panchayat seat in 2020. The 2022 state assembly polls saw the AAP expanding its footprint and winning two seats, Velim and Benaulim, in South Goa.

Palekar said the central leadership of both parties must realise the BJP wins by splitting the votes. "In Delhi polls, it seems the Congress played for BJP's



Goa AAP chief Amit Palekar

team...in a direct, indirect or whatever manner. The Congress...overlooking that the BJP is the biggest enemy of all of us. But we are looking at the 2027 elections (in Goa) differently. We are on good terms with their local leaders."

Dismissing any suggestion of the Delhi elections having "ripples" in Goa, Palekar said, "Goa is different... An alliance with the Congress is the only way ahead in Goa. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind, including the central leadership of both parties. We must face reality, not perceptions."

Palekar said the allegations of corruption against AAP for the Delhi excise policy did not impact its performance in Delhi polls. "The Supreme Court has categorically said there is no prima facie evidence or any link... In Goa, ministers from the BJP are facing serious allegations of corruption. People see through all this."

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said the people of Delhi rejected the "mismanagement, scam-laden model of AAP". "I congratulate all the candidates who won, who fought the elections and the BJP karyakartas who reached every corner of Delhi with the message of BJP..."

ASSEMBLY BYPOLLS: TAMIL NADU AND UTTAR PRADESH

Major Opp parties absent from Erode East bypoll, DMK steamrolls its way to victory

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 8

AS VOTE counting nears completion in the Erode East bypoll, the ruling DMK has reaffirmed its electoral dominance in the region. DMK candidate VC Chandhirakumar has secured 61,834 votes, placing him ahead of his closest rival, M K Seethalakshmi of the Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK), who received 13,466 votes so far.

The bypoll, necessitated by the demise of veteran Congress leader EVKS Elangovan, saw a voter turnout of 67.97 per cent, with 1,54,657 people casting their ballots. While 46 candidates were in the fray, the election turned into a two-cornered contest between the DMK and Tamil nationalist leader Seeman's NTK. The main oppositions, AIADMK and BJP, jointly boycotted the election, reshaping the expected

vote distribution.

The DMK's performance comes as no surprise. In the 2023 bypoll, Elangovan won with a margin of 66,233 votes, defeating AIADMK's K S Thenarassu, while NTK's Menaka Navaneethan secured 10,827 votes.

The absence of key oppositions led to speculation about potential vote transfer, particularly among the AIADMK-BJP voter base, which had collectively garnered 47,000 votes in the last LS election in Erode East assembly constituency.

Early indicators suggest while a segment of these votes may have shifted toward Seeman's NTK, a significant portion has likely benefitted the DMK. Of the 47,000 AIADMK-BJP votes, around 15,000 voters appear to have migrated to NTK, aligning with projections that Seeman's party could secure around 25,000 votes. Meanwhile, the DMK appears to have consoli-

dated the rest of the AIADMK-BJP votes with its existing voter base, fortifying its landslide victory.

For the NTK, led by Seeman, this election was viewed as an opportunity to capitalise on the absence of key opposition. One of the NTK's best performances to date remains its 24.5% vote share for Seeman in the 2021 Tamil Nadu Assembly polls from Thiruvotriyur, one of the few instances where the party secured its deposit. The party is unlikely to replicate it in Erode East.

As per current estimates, the NTK candidate is poised to secure 16-17% of the vote, a significant jump from its 2023 bypoll showing of 10,827 votes, but still falling short of a breakout moment. The trends indicate while the NTK gained votes, a relatively favourable political ground for the DMK and the aggressive state-

ments by Seeman against Periyar and Dravidian ideology recently seem to have left it struggling to

make deeper inroads.

While the DMK's success in the region reinforces its standing, the Congress, its key ally, may find itself increasingly dependent on its coalition partner. A senior Congress leader said the party's performance in the Delhi elections has further weakened its position in TN, "making us more dependent on DMK hereafter".

The byelection was also notable for its absence of high-profile campaigners, including Chief Minister M K Stalin and Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, as DMK was confident of an easy win.

The campaign was led by Housing Minister S Muthusamy and Erode MP K E Prakash.

The final figures are expected to confirm a landslide for DMK, a moderate boost for NTK, and a further consolidation of Tamil Nadu's electoral battle into a DMK versus BJP-AIADMK showdown in future contests.

BHUPENDRA PANDEY
LUCKNOW, FEBRUARY 8

THE BJP won the prestigious fight for the Milkipur Assembly seat, with its candidate Chandrabhanu Paswan trumping his Samajwadi Party (SP) rival Ajit Prasad by 61,710 votes in the bypoll results of which were declared Saturday.

The BJP staked it all for the bypoll, falling under the Faizabad Lok Sabha constituency. In the 2024 LS polls, the party lost from Faizabad, in a loss of face as the LS constituency includes Ayodhya. The SP candidate who won from Faizabad, Awadhesh Prasad, vacated Milkipur, necessitating the bypoll. Prasad's son Ajit was the SP candidate for the bypoll.

"We took the welfare programmes...of the double engine BJP government to the people of Milkipur. We will not leave any stone unturned for its development," Paswan said, following his



Senior BJP leaders, including both UP Deputy CMs, join the celebrations at the party headquarters in Lucknow, Saturday. PTI

victory. The BJP's victory indicates that while Muslims and Yadavs may have stayed with the SP, the Pasi community — to which Ajit and Paswan belong — and other Scheduled Caste (SC) communities rallied behind the BJP.

Paswan's efforts were also likely aided by the BJP's core

voter base of Brahmins (around 65,000) and Thakurs (around 18,000). Paswan's win is also a blow to Akhilesh's PDA (Pichhda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) pitch. Other Backward Classes (OBCs) appear to have supported the BJP.

Ajit's road was contentious with a section of people believ-

ing the SP nominating any other candidate would have made the fight closer while another section thinking the Faizabad MP had become "arrogant" after his LS win and "inaccessible".

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav Saturday said the Milkipur victory was a result of "misuse of election machinery". "This is a false victory... Their guilt and the fear of future defeat will keep them awake," he posted on X.

CM Yogi Adityanath visited the constituency more than eight times in the run-up to the polls and deputed nine ministers and 40 MLAs for the campaign.

While congratulating the party, PM Modi said the BJP's victory in Milkipur was unprecedented. "Uttar Pradesh is right next to Delhi, and at one time, its law and order situation was a major challenge... Yogi Adityanath led the campaign against encephalitis... he played a crucial role in bringing it under control."

Varsity at centre of NAAC bribery row loses accreditation for 5 years

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE KONERU Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF) in Andhra Pradesh, in the spotlight after the Central Bureau of Investigation arrested its office-bearers for allegedly bribing members of a National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) inspection team for a favourable grade, has been debarred from accreditation for five years. The Council made the announcement Saturday.

A deemed-to-be university, KLEF had secured the highest grade of A++ during NAAC's last assessment in 2018. The grade was two notches above the A grade it was awarded in 2013. The university was now up for re-assessment for which the council's inspection was underway.

A public autonomous body of the University Grants Commission, NAAC assesses and accredits higher education institutions in India. It assesses higher education institutions based on parameters like infrastructure, teaching and evaluation, and research and innova-

tion, and scores them in terms of a cumulative grade point average (CGPA).

NAAC grades are widely regarded as a marker of quality, with institutions prominently displaying them. According to UGC regulations, this is meant to "enable students and other stakeholders to make informed choices".

The CBI arrested 10 people, including KLEF's Vice-Chancellor G P Saradhi Varma, and two other office-bearers, along with six members and the chairperson of the NAAC inspection team earlier his month. The CBI's FIR in the case says that the institute was scheduled for an inspection from January 29 to 31 for its NAAC "re-accreditation" for the 2024-29 period.

Going by the FIR, Varma allegedly approached NAAC officials through L. Manjunatha Rao, former deputy advisor, NAAC, and M. Hanumanthappa, professor and director (IQAC-NAAC), Department of Computer Science and Applications, Bangalore University, "to explore ways and means for inclusion of known members in the formation of NAAC inspection team."

NAAC's Executive Committee

headed by Anil Sahasrabudde held an emergency meeting two days ago in which it was decided to debar KLEF from accreditation for five years.

"Firstly (sic), the Executive Committee of NAAC has decided that the current process of accreditation of involved University in the CBI case is summarily cancelled, and the University will be debarred for 5 years from applying for accreditation," the Council said in a press statement.

The press statement adds, "It is also decided that all the seven members of the Peer Team are debarred for lifetime in assessment or any other activities of NAAC with immediate effect. In addition, it is decided to review the recent visits to HELs by any of the seven members for which the results are not declared. The results of such HELs will be withheld, and the Standing Committee of NAAC may critically review before declaring the results. In addition, it is decided that the visits of (the) last one year will be carefully analysed and put up to EC for further necessary action."

The seven members of the

NAAC peer team who were arrested include Rajeev Sijariya, professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University; D. Gopal, dean of Bharath Institute of Law; Rajesh Singh Pawar, dean of Jagran Lakecity University; Manas Kumar Mishra, director of G L Bajaj Institute of Technology & Management; Gayathri Devaraja, professor at Davangere University; Bulu Maharana, professor at Sambalpur University; and Samarendra Nath Saha, vice-chancellor of Ramchandra Chandravansi University who was chairman of the inspection committee.

Sijariya, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University's Atal Bihari Vajpayee School of Management and Entrepreneurship (ABVSME), has been suspended by the university.

Granted deemed-to-be university status by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2009, KLEF was established as KL College of Engineering in 1980-81.

While the main campus is in Vaddeswaram, Guntur, it has two centres, one at Aziznagar in Telangana's Rangareddy district, and another at Medchal-Malkajigiri in Greater Hyderabad.

Microsoft executive and IIT-Madras alumnus to head India's top research funding agency

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE GOVERNMENT is learnt to have selected Shivkumar Kalyanaraman, a top Microsoft executive, to lead the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), the new institution created two years ago to promote and fund scientific research in the country, particu-

larly in universities.

Kalyanaraman, currently CTO, Energy Industry, Asia at Microsoft, will be the first CEO of the ANRF, which, for the time being, is headed by Secretary of Department of Science and Technology. ANRF was set up through an Act of Parliament in 2023, with two broad objectives — increasing the research base in the country, particularly in universities and colleges, and en-

suring greater availability of money for scientific research.

Scientific research, as of now, is confined mainly to the few centrally-funded research institutions such as the laboratories of CSIR, IITs, IISERs, TIFR or the Indian Institute of Science. Very little research happens in the universities. According to one estimate, just about 1% of the nearly 40,000 higher education institutions in the country — the

state universities and colleges — are currently engaged in active research.

Similarly, the funding for research and development has been stuck at about 0.7% of the GDP for several years now, though it has seen a substantial increase in absolute terms. This is well below the global average of about 1.8 per cent. Leading scientific countries invest well over 2% of their GDP on R&D.

For remarks on 'fighting Indian state', Rahul Gandhi faces FIR

SUJIT BISOI
BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 8

ODISHA'S JHARSUGUDA police Friday lodged an FIR against Congress leader and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi in connection with a speech he made last month, police sources said.

The FIR registered on February 7 is based on a complaint from one Rama Hari Pujhari, a resident of Sarabhal in Jharsuguda and a local functionary of the BJP. It pertains to a speech that Gandhi made at the inauguration of Congress's new headquarters at Kotla Road near Rouse Avenue District Court Complex in Central Delhi on January 15.

Gandhi accused the RSS and the BJP of "capturing every single institution" in the country, claiming that his party was not only fighting the BJP "but the Indian state itself".

Gandhi has been booked under Sections 152 (threatening India's sovereignty, unity and integrity) and Section 197 (1) (d) (which prohibits making or publishing false or misleading information that threatens India's security and unity) of the BNS.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Himansu Kumar Lal, IG (northern range), said he has received a complaint from BJP leaders and some other organisations on February 5.

Priyanka: Centre doing everything to weaken Constitution, democracy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WAYANAD, FEBRUARY 8

CONGRESS GENERAL secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday claimed that the country was going through a period where the government at the Centre was doing everything "to weaken the Constitution and democracy in India".

Priyanka, the Wayanad MP, was speaking at a booth level leaders meeting at Mananthavady assembly constituency here where she said that till date victims of the landslides that hit the high range district are facing housing troubles and have not received adequate compensation.

The Congress leader said that the central government "at least" declared the Wayanad landslides as "a disaster of severe nature due to our efforts in the Lok Sabha" and expressed hope that as a result more funds will be received for the rehabilitation of the victims.

She also referred to the various instances of loss of lives due to wild animal attacks in the district and said that the human-animal conflict was also leading to loss of livelihoods.

Priyanka said the last time she was here in Wayanad, the district administration said that it needed more funds to mitigate the human-animal conflicts and to ensure safety of the people.

"I said I will work with them and that together we will try to



Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi arrives in Kannur to attend booth-level meetings on Saturday. *PTI*

find as much funding as we can to help them to do the work they need to do and also find new types of solutions for the problem," she said.

The Wayanad MP said that she will also continue to address the other issues, like the needs of the tribals, lack of medical college in Mananthavady, night travel restrictions and boosting tourism in the district.

She also praised and thanked the booth-level leaders and workers for helping her win in the LS bypoll and urged them to be available for the people every day and not just during elections.

Later, she held booth-level meetings at Sulthan Bathery and Kalpetta assembly constituencies.

In the evening, she attended the festival at the Lourde Matha

Church at Pallikkunnu in Kalpetta, party sources said.

She lit a candle and prayed before leaving the church.

Priyanka had visited the church during her Lok Sabha bypoll campaign and at that time the church vicar had invited her to the festival, the sources said.

Priyanka arrived at Kannur airport in the morning and travelled to Wayanad by road.

On Sunday, she will hold meetings with booth-level leaders in Erand and Thiruvambadi assembly constituencies.

On Monday, she will hold meetings with booth-level leaders at Wandoor and Nilambur assembly constituencies and will also visit families of a few victims of wild animal attacks, the sources said.

AAP now, Cong then: In Delhi Assembly poll results, a 2013 parallel

AAP saw itself reduced to same parts where Cong did well in the 2013 polls

ASAD REHMAN
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE DELHI Assembly election results have thrown up a parallel from 2013 and it involves parties that were dislodged from power.

Like the Congress that found itself out of power after governing the national capital for over a decade, the AAP on Saturday saw itself reduced to more or less the same regions of Delhi where the Congress did well in the 2013 polls, the last time it managed to open its account in the capital.

In 2013, the Congress won a majority of its seats in Central and Northeast Delhi, two of the regions where the AAP did well this time along with South Delhi. Back then, the Congress won eight seats of which three were in northeast Delhi and two in central Delhi where Muslims and the economically backward form a sizeable population.

The 2013 election that saw the AAP make its debut saw a hung Assembly. It was the last time the capital saw a three-way fight, with the BJP securing 34.12% votes, the AAP getting 29.64%, and the Congress 24.67%. The BJP won 32 seats, and the AAP 28 seats, while the Congress eight. Mayawati's BSP won two seats.

The Assembly elections two years later saw the AAP winning 62 seats and the BJP eight with the Congress drawing a blank for the first time in Delhi and its vote share being reduced to 14.9%.

In 2020, the AAP won 67 seats and the BJP three seats with the Congress drawing a blank for the second time with its vote share falling to 4.26%.

Of the eight seats the Congress won in 2013, the AAP has this time won five.

In 2013, the Congress won Badli (north), Sultanpur Majra (north), Chandni Chowk (central), Ballimaran (Central), Okhla (southeast), Gandhi Nagar (northeast), Seelampur (northeast), and Mustafabad (northeast). Twelve years later, out of the eight, the AAP has won Sultanpur Majra, Chandni Chowk, Ballimaran, Okhla, and Seelampur. Barring Okhla, which is in southeast Delhi, four seats are in central and northeast Delhi. In these polls, the BJP has won Badli (north), Mustafabad (northeast), and Gandhi Nagar (northeast).

The northeast and central regions have a sizeable population of Muslims and those belonging to economically backward sections of society, a voter base that was once with the Congress and has now shifted to the AAP.



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THE AISLE



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AS FAR as I can recall, there has not been a more politically-driven budget. Nor has there been a budget that so miserably failed to seize the opportunity to reform and restructure the economy. The people were ready and the government failed them.

2025 MIRRORED 1991

Look at the situation in 2024: The BJP had been voted to power for the third time but with a warning. You will have sufficient numbers but not an absolute majority to form the government. You will not attempt to change the Constitution. You will govern by consensus. You will address the issues of unemployment, poverty and inequality, inflation, farmers' distress, and absent or broken infrastructure. It was the same situation that Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh faced in 1991. The Congress' PM-FM seized the opportunity and announced path-breaking reforms beginning on July 1, 1991 and completed the first tranche of reforms by August 15, 1991 (devaluation, trade reforms, financial sector reforms, taxation reforms and industrial policy).

After the 2024 election, the first budget of Mr Modi-Ms Sitharaman on July 23, 2024 was a damp squib. It had nothing to address the fundamental causes. The usual excuses were trotted out and there was a promise that the first *full* budget (whatever that meant) would address the issues. Meanwhile, the economy slowed down, wages were stagnant, inflation reigned and the RBI refused to budge, FDI

inflows declined, FIs pulled out investments, and business and businesspersons migrated to Singapore, Dubai and the U.S. The question on everybody's lips was 'Who will call out the government?'

SENSIBLE ADVICE

Thankfully, the Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) was frank and forthright in his preface to the Economic Survey (ES) 2024-25. His sensible advice was "Get out of the way" and "deregulate". There are 13 Chapters in the ES but I shall pick only four to illustrate what was the CEA's recommendation and what was the government's response (or non-response).

Chapter 1 (*State of the Economy*) underlined the causes of the slowdown and recommended deregulation and structural reforms at the grassroots level to improve competitiveness. The FM took the opposite route. She threw more money into current schemes and announced 7 Schemes, 8 Missions and 4 Funds. There was no specific proposal for deregulation; nor were any steps outlined to improve the competitiveness of any sector. She could only announce a High Level Committee for Regulatory Reforms to *review non-financial sector* regulations, implying that ? the financial sector will remain under government's control and no review will be made.

DENIAL, MORE DENIAL

Unemployment is the gravest challenge facing the country, especially families with unemployed children. In Chapter 12, *Employment and Skill Development*, the ES relied upon the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) that concluded that the unemployment rate had declined to 3.2 per cent in 2023-24. That would be considered *full employment* in economic theory. Realising the pitfall, the ES pointed out that we need to generate 78.5 lakh non-farm jobs every year until 2030 when the working age population will reach 96 crore. The proportion of regular/salaried jobs has declined and self-employment, including in own farms, has increased. Real wage per month in salaried employment for males has declined from Rs 12,665 to Rs 11,858 in the last 7 years. Real wages for self-employed workers have also declined. All evidence on the ground (especially the number of applications for even low-level jobs) contradicts the PLFS' conclusion. Does the FM agree with the PLFS and the ES? Her silence on the matter is denial of the truth. The reality is that while the GDP grows at a moderate pace, unemployment is growing, especially among youth and graduates, and job creation is at a standstill.

There is a whole chapter under the title *Deregulation Drives Growth* (Chapter 5). With the current investment rate of under 31 per cent and a growth rate of under 6.5 per cent, the ES pointed out that we could not become a developed country by 2047. The ES urged the government to "accelerate and amplify the deregulation agendaand work towards giving to people back their agency and enhancing the economic freedoms of individuals and organisations." The ES identified the regulatory constraints including factory regulations and inflated regulatory capacity. I can give examples of deregulation from 1991-96 such as the abolition of the office of CCI&E and turning FERA into FEMA. Similarly, the FM could have eliminated some offices and regulations. She shied away, and my guess is nothing will happen for a whole year.

ACHILLES' HEEL

Despite the high decibel Make in India campaign, India's manufacturing sector is tiny and not growing at a robust pace. Chapter 7, *Industry: All About Business Reforms* brings out the cold facts. Our share of global manufacturing is 2.8 per cent compared to 28.8 per cent of China. The manufacturing sector's share of GVA has declined from a high of 17.4 per cent in 2011-12 to 14.2 per cent in 2023-24. We import high-end machines required for manufacturing. On R&D we spend less than 1 per cent of GDP. The ES said the way forward is paved with deregulation, R&D and innovation, and improving skill levels of the workforce. The Budget's response was to launch Schemes and Missions.

Governance is in the present. There are challenges, there is a government, but governance is absent. The CEA is another voice in the wilderness.

inside
TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



SHAH TO THE RESCUE

The BJP appeared handicapped by a lethargic and late start in the Delhi Assembly election, besides poor selections. But in the last lap of the campaign, Amit Shah decided to take charge of the party's leaderless flock. Shah has previously distanced himself from Delhi politics and openly expressed his contempt for the state leadership for its lack of grassroots engagement. He addressed two to three rallies daily and both PM Modi and Yogi Adityanath pitched in with rallies. Shah even requisitioned NDA allies to campaign in pockets where people from their respective states resided. Delhi MP and MoS Harsh Malhotra was the points person for information on facts and figures of various constituencies. The mood in the BJP camp turned upbeat as the party hammered home its point that without the Central Government's support, the city would be rudderless. If this time the pollsters got it right, many seasoned Delhi reporters predicted wrongly. Historically, Delhi has always been a political minefield where heavy weight politicians have been dislodged by rank outsiders. Arvind Kejriwal came from nowhere to unseat three-time chief minister Sheila Dixit in her New Delhi bastion. Now Parvesh Verma, considered a misfit in Lutyens Delhi, has similarly turned the tables on Kejriwal. Half a century earlier, Delhi's Congress strongman Meher Chand Khanna was defeated by the Jana Sangh's fledgling politician, Manohar Lal Sondhi, in the New Delhi Lok Sabha seat.

On the
LOOSE

LEHER KALA

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THE SUPREME Court recently expressed displeasure at the culture of "VIP darshans" in temples, but declined to act on a plea seeking an end to the practice. The petitioner contended that special treatment is discriminatory towards devotees who can't afford VIP entry, thereby violating the principles of equality under Article 14 of the Constitution. Saying it was a policy matter for the government to act upon, Justices Sanjiv Khanna and SC Sharma clarified that "dismissal of the petition will not bar the appropriate authorities from taking action as they require". For some perspective, charging Rs 300 for VVIP and VIP darshan last year earned the Badrinath Kedarnath Temple Committee over Rs 1.5 crore in mere months.

Personally, I break out into hives when someone cuts me in a line or at a traffic light; I have yet to develop the equanimity necessary to survive in Delhi, to not let daily, trivial irritants raise my blood pressure. On a visit to the Golden Temple many years ago, I noticed, nobody in a serpentine queue reacted negatively to VIPs whizzing past. Those days, I doubt there was an extra charge but the great Indian "jugaad" system ensured the connected could worm their way forward. Clearly, the ordinary, devout Indian, bruised and battered by life, philosophically accepts that even in front of the deity, not everyone is equal. Class distinction in a house of worship runs contradictory to what every religion preaches, best articulated in the Biblical proverb, 'The rich and poor have this in common: The Lord made them both'.

The cynical view of paying to skip the line is that faith, too, ultimately depends on mundane realities — as long as the chore of waiting is taken care of — piety is possible. But someone truly pious wouldn't be disheartened by a queue. His wife's name is Posh, but footballer David Beckham waited 12 hours in line to pay his respects to the late Queen Elizabeth. Reason? His adoration was heartfelt. Beckham described it as a wonderful shared experience with fellow citizens to celebrate the amazing life of a beloved monarch. Similarly, it's not just the supernatural aura or the promise of solace inside temples that's attractive to worshippers. The atmosphere within, of idols, candles and hushed tones promotes human kinship, a feeling of belonging to a like-minded community. These are rare, surreal moments when we feel kindly towards strangers. A temple is a serious place built on meaningful grounds where, albeit briefly, everyone is united by sobering thoughts of our inherent fragility. Nothing good can come by creating artificial barriers between people based on their ability to pay.

Of course, in all aspects, life is heavily tiered. We pay extra for business class air tickets, excess baggage and lightning-fast deliveries. The long standing ethic of the queue, first-come, first-served is increasingly ignored — today's logic is you get what you pay for. Want more? Pay more. But where does this leave people of meagre means? Stuck, permanently, at the back of the line. Such is life. We may shrug our shoulders and say nothing is sacred anymore but turning worship into a commodity like any other diminishes its significance. It was the last, great, equaliser.

Perhaps, crowd management at historic temples requires innovative solutions and a fee structure but it's interesting to note newer temples eschew the paid model. Every Monday, half of Delhi descends to Bade Mandir in the Bhatti Mines area that came up in the 1990s. There is one queue and the rules are to maintain silence, quietly accept the *prasad* and on *langar* days, to share one *thali* with four unknowns. The spiritual ambience aside, it's awe inspiring for the grace with which people conduct themselves here. The mandate in Scripture, love thy stranger, occasionally feels true.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films

Fifth
COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

Twitter @tavleen_singh



This was no
election, but
a referendum

IN DELHI what we saw last week was not so much an election as a referendum of Arvind Kejriwal. It was not the Aam Aadmi Party that lost. He did because he had turned the political party he started into a personal appendage. And projected himself as a new kind of political leader who could save India from a cynical and corrupt political culture. This is probably why, when he last won Delhi with himself as a symbol of hope, he won nearly every seat in the assembly. He began to betray this hope almost immediately after.

Suddenly, this ordinary, little man who liked to dress and behave like the 'aam aadmi' he claimed to represent started showing signs of an ugly narcissism. Mug shots of him enlarged and painted in dazzling hues appeared on the backs of Delhi's buses and on hoardings across the city. And it was impossible to turn on the radio without hearing him expound on some new idea or scheme. These were mostly worthless ideas like his ludicrous and utterly useless 'odd-even' traffic plan to reduce vehicular pollution. But he made it sound as if he was doing something wondrous. And the western media gave him publicity that was truly undeserved.

Personally, I saw him as sly, sneaky and duplicitous even in those euphoric Anna Hazare days when he first became a public figure, as the man who was by the side of the one who was fasting to death to end corruption. But at election time, when I travelled into rural parts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, I realised that millions of ordinary Indians had invested their hopes and their faith in him. I will never forget a village in Bihar which was inspired to start its own campaign against corruption that was led by a man they called 'our Kejriwal'.

The first time I saw Kejriwal at close range was on the Assi Ghat in Benares where he sat looking gloomy under a banyan tree just outside my hotel on some kind of fast or protest. He had come to take on Narendra Modi. This I saw instantly as delusions of grandeur because here was a man whose only political experience was a few weeks as chief minister of Delhi and who was already hoping to become prime minister. Warning bells should have rung loudly then but the people of Delhi continued to invest their trust in him. They forgave him for abandoning them the first time and gave him two more chances.

When he won resoundingly five years ago, he promised them everything that they longed for. Clean air to breathe, clean water in the Yamuna, clean politicians and a clean slate on which to write a new chapter in this city that has nearly always been betrayed by its political leaders. He started off well. Schools improved so much that I constantly met people who said they had taken their children out of private schools because government schools were now so good. I have seen some myself in the New Delhi constituency, where I vote, and can vouch for this. I have also visited a few 'mohalla clinics' and found them clean and impressive. So, what went so wrong that when he was arrested and sent off to Tihar Jail, there was not a single protest in his support?

Ambition and narcissism are the two words that come to mind. He forgot about Delhi to try and refashion his image as a national leader. Suddenly, he wanted to win elections in Gujarat, Goa and everywhere. After he won Punjab, the ambition and narcissism soared to dangerous levels and the only people who seemed not to notice this were the sycophantic ministers who surrounded him. Ordinary voters noticed. When all his senior ministers ended up in jail, he appointed a sycophant so servile that she ruled in his name as if she were keeping the seat of Delhi warm for Ram himself.

Meanwhile, Delhi deteriorated and deteriorated. As a citizen of Delhi who has spent my childhood and nearly all my growing years here, it breaks my heart every time I see how poisonous the Yamuna's waters have become and how high those mountains of garbage that have replaced landfills. As someone who lives in a Delhi village, I cannot begin to describe adequately the filth that I step into every time I come out of my house. Squalid bazaars and filthy streets are everywhere and out of them rise shiny new samples of private investment like hotels and fine office blocks.

These are things you see in every Indian city, as I am often reminded by readers of this column. But it is only in Delhi that we had a man who portrayed himself as a leader so different that he brought with him the promise of an India in which the poorest and most humble of our citizens could hope that their voices would also be heard. When that leader built himself a magnificent new residence fitted with all the things that ordinary Indians cannot dream of in the one-room tenements that is the average Indian home, all hope was lost.

In last week's referendum, if there is one person who has lost completely, it is Kejriwal. What he has proved is that he is just like other politicians. And no symbol of hope, a new political culture or a new dream.

17 ECONOMY

WILL BE ‘WATCHFUL, ALERT, NIMBLE & AGILE’ ON LIQUIDITY: RBI GOVERNOR

FM: Expect durable recovery in private investment following rate cut, tax relief

AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

A DURABLE recovery is expected in private investment as the signs of a pickup in consumption-driven cycle are already visible on the back of the government’s income tax relief and the repo rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said after the post-Budget RBI Board meeting on Saturday. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra echoed the Finance Minister’s sentiment by stating that the repo rate cut delivered by the central bank should boost consumption.

Many in the private sector are already looking at reviewing capacity utilisation, as per anecdotal inputs, Sitharaman said. “The orders for fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) for the period April-June are already getting booked and the industry is clearly seeing the signs of a possible recovery of consumption. And, as a result, many of them are looking at reviewing their capacity utilisation itself. From these limited anecdotal inputs that you’re getting, you can safely see that the triggers for a consumption-driven cycle are very clearly being felt by those who have to make the investment decisions. So, I see it as a positive sign with yesterday’s (Friday’s) decision of the RBI (of a repo rate cut), I am sure together things can move in alignment and in the required traction that we need in this course,” she said.

Referring to the recent fiscal



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman arrives with Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra for the 613th Meeting of Central Board of Directors of the RBI in New Delhi on Saturday.

and monetary policy measures, Sitharaman said whether it is growth or inflation, both the policies are like “two tyres of a car” and by working together and in coordination, the economy will gain. “Whether it’s inflation or growth, particularly plugs for growth, it is appropriate for the RBI and the government to have coordination on this. Neither of them encroaches on each other’s territory, I don’t think that has existed in the last 10 years and I don’t see that existing even in the future.

There has been good coordination between the RBI and the government...in the coming days also, the RBI and the government will work in a well-coordinated fashion keeping our growth impulses in mind,” Sitharaman said.

Liquidity measures

When asked about the absence of deep liquidity infusion measures in the latest monetary policy, Malhotra listed out several steps taken by the RBI to support transient as well as durable liquid-

ity. He further said going forward, the RBI will be “very very watchful, alert, and very nimble and agile in whatever are the requirements of the banking system to provide liquidity, both transient, overnight, as well as more durable liquidity.”

The deficit in the banking system liquidity had widened to over Rs 3 lakh crore last month. The tightness in the liquidity was due to the RBI’s continued dollar sales to curb rupee depreciation, tax outflows, and muted government

spending. In order to address this, the RBI on January 27 announced measures to boost liquidity through USD/INR buy/sell swaps, open market operation (OMO) purchase auctions and a 56-day variable rate repo (VRR) auction.

“We have a number of instruments at our hands to control and manage liquidity. We will use them, we have the OMO, buy/sell swaps of forex, we have various other instruments, we have LAF, VRR, and we are using all of these measures to provide sufficient liquidity, so we need not be worried on that account,” Malhotra added.

Inflation, rupee depreciation

Malhotra said the RBI is alert to all pressures on inflation and the impact of rupee depreciation on imported inflation. “As per our calculations and estimates, a 5 per cent depreciation in the Indian rupee leads to about 30-35 basis points of inflation. That has been kept in mind (in RBI’s February monetary policy). We’ll be watchful on that account,” he said.

The RBI Governor said that most of the depreciation in the rupee is driven by the “global uncertainties, and the Trump-related tariff announcements”. “Hopefully, that should settle down and that will help us in the downward movement of inflation,” he said.

The Indian rupee has hit record lows over the last few days going past the level of 87 against the dollar due to foreign fund outflows and a stronger US dollar.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

FM says new I-T bill to be introduced in LS next week

ENSECONOMICBUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

THE NEW income-tax bill has been cleared in the Cabinet on Friday and will be introduced in Lok Sabha in the coming week, after which it will be referred to a parliamentary committee, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Saturday.

“Yesterday (Friday) the Cabinet cleared the new income tax bill proposal. I hope to have it introduced in the Lok Sabha in the coming week. Post that it will go to a committee, and as you know the processes, the committee gives its recommendation, it comes back and then the government through the Cabinet takes a call whether these amendments are to be taken in or some of them or more need to be added,” Sitharaman said.

Once the bill returns to the Parliament, then the government will take a call on its rollout date, she said. “It’s only after that it again

“Yesterday (Friday) the Cabinet cleared the new income tax bill proposal. I hope to have it introduced in the Lok Sabha in the coming week.”

— NIRMALA SITHARAMAN
FINANCE MINISTER

goes to the Parliament. So once the Parliament after that passes it, that is when we will decide when best to roll it out. Although you are asking me a question on when it will roll out, I still have three critical stages to pass through,” she said in response to a question on the implementation date for the new income-tax bill during a briefing following the Reserve Bank of India’s board meeting.

The new income-tax bill will replace the existing six-decade old Income-tax Act. The bill aims to simplify the language and implementation of the income tax

legislation for taxpayers.

On Thursday, Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey had said that the new income-tax bill will not have long sentences, provisos and explanations and will mark a different way of engagement with citizens, with no aim to put any new tax burden. The bill will include the recent changes in income tax rates, slabs and TDS (Tax Deducted at Source) provisions will also be reflected in it, he had said. In her Budget speech, Sitharaman had said that the government had earlier ushered in Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita replacing Bharatiya Danda Sanhita. “...and the new income-tax bill will carry forward the same spirit of “Nyaya”. The new bill will be clear and direct in text with close to half of the present law, in terms of both chapters and words. It will be simple to understand for taxpayers and tax administration, leading to tax certainty and reduced litigation,” she had said.

CRUDE WATCH

OIL PRICES POST WEEKLY DECLINE

Houston: Oil prices finished with daily gains on Friday but prices were down for the week. Brent crude futures settled at \$74.66 a barrel, up 37 cents, or 0.5% and fell more than 2% this week. US WTI crude finished at \$71.00 a barrel, up 39 cents, or 0.55%. **REUTERS**

Security, logistics, labour: Major hurdles facing ₹21K-cr transmission project linking Ladakh to Haryana

AGGAM WALIA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8

WITH WORK set to commence on a massive Rs 21,000 crore transmission project to evacuate power from one of the country’s largest planned renewable energy parks in Ladakh, there are three unprecedented challenges of the sort that no major project of this scale has had to tackle so far.

One is a demand by the state-owned executing agency for ensuring round-the-clock security for site personnel, then there is the need for sourcing skilled labour into Ladakh from other states to meet the 1,200-odd workforce requirement, and lastly, the need for a mega road infrastructure upgradation plan to transport over-dimensional heavy equipment to the project site near the China border.

Beyond this, there is a larger question of the viability of the link envisaged from the upper reaches of avalanche-prone Ladakh all the way down to Haryana, given all of the additional costs that need to be padded in. Approved for around Rs 8,300 crore in Central government assistance in 2023 under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy’s Green Energy Corridor (GEC) scheme, the strategic transmission link initially faced internal scrutiny over concerns around financial viability, documents obtained by *The Indian Express* reveal.

Meanwhile, tendering for the 13 gigawatt (GW) solar and wind hybrid park, to be developed by private players, is yet to begin as officials try to address concerns around nomadic herders relying on the identified land for livestock grazing. The park was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence day address just weeks after the June 2020 clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers near the Galwan river.

Once operational, the high-voltage direct current (HVDC) link will carry power over a distance of 480 kilometers, from the planned park in Leh district’s Pang — situated at an altitude of over 4,700 meters — to Kaithal in Haryana.

The transmission project was conceptualised after the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) was directed in August 2020 to prepare a detailed plan for establishing a 7.5 GW solar park in Ladakh in consultation with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI), documents reveal. By 2022, its scope grew to include 9 GW of solar, 4 GW of wind, and 12 GWh of battery storage. Alongside supplying power to the national grid at Kaithal, the hybrid park will also connect to the existing Ladakh grid and the Leh-Kargil-Alusteng line to ensure reliable power to Jammu and Kashmir.



Strategic considerations

In its detailed project report, Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd, which was handed over the transmission project, flagged security issues and the possibility of work interruptions. “The project sites of Pang are in close proximity to international border with China. This poses security threat for personnel and assets both during the construction period as well as post commissioning. Discussions may be required with armed forces in the region for appropriate security detailing of the project,” the report said.

It was decided to hand over the project to Power Grid, under the Ministry of Power, as opposed to conducting tariff-based competitive bidding (TBCB), after ministry officials cited strategic considerations. At an Empowered Technology Group meeting in March 2023, it was concluded that TBCB was unsuitable for this project as it could lead to misleading bid prices “due to extreme conditions of the project deployment area, hostile conditions, and lack of clear specifications of materials and devices for such extreme low temperatures.”

Technical, logistical challenges

Ladakh’s high solar irradiation and low temperatures are ideal for efficient solar PV generation, but its geography also presents unique challenges. With temperatures going as low as minus 45 degrees Celsius coupled with heavy snowfall, the transmission equipment will use specialty steel to withstand extreme weather. It will also be reinforced with special foundations and avalanche protection structures.

Because of extreme winters, the working season in Ladakh is restricted to the period between mid-April to mid-October, as that is when the access roads are also open for general traffic movement. With construction slated to begin in 2025-26, the project will take 3-4 full working seasons to complete.

According to the project report, the current transport route to Pang can only carry loads up to 55 metric tonnes (MT) against the requirement of 86 MT. Airlifting of

EXPLAINED
E Project hinges on 12 GWh of battery storage

THE FINANCIAL viability of the entire project hinges on the planned 12 GWh of battery storage at the Pang renewable energy park, which will enhance the transmission system’s capacity utilisation from 35 per cent to 76 per cent. Importantly, India currently has less than 1 GWh of grid-connected battery storage, with much of the supply chain dominated by China.

HVDC transformers to Leh airport was ruled out as infeasible. As a solution, Power Grid will coordinate with the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) “for development of road infrastructure including road widening, improvement of hairpin bends, gradient improvement, removal of protruded stones in hilly terrain and strengthening of bridges, construction of new bridges, etc.” documents show.

Among project risks, Power Grid has also identified the scarcity of skilled manpower locally as a significant challenge. It plans to bring required personnel from other states to Ladakh for the project. Roughly 1,200 people, 200 from Power Grid and the remaining deployed by other agencies, will be required for construction.

Financial viability

The project is approved to receive Rs 8,309 crore in grants from the central government, covering 40 per cent of the total estimated cost excluding interest. Power Grid has also been in discussions with Germany’s KfW for a line of credit of 600 million euros.

In a December 2022 Public Investment Board meeting, a senior advisor from NITI Aayog questioned the grant, pointing out that the net difference in the landed cost per unit of power at Kaithal with and without the grant is only Rs 0.33. “Considering this and taking into account high uncertainty, higher installation cost and huge dependence on forex component, there does not appear to have a need for grant,” they argued.

While finance ministry officials warned that the estimated cost does not account for potential delays, which could increase costs by 30-50 per cent, Power Grid officials reassured that any cost escalation in the transmission system would have a minimal impact on end consumers, as the transmission tariff accounts for only 12 per cent of the landed cost with the grant.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

BRIEFLY

Decide BCCI-Byu’s settlement in a week: NCLAT

New Delhi: Appellate tribunal NCLAT has directed NCLT to decide within a week over BCCI’s plea for settlement and withdrawal of insolvency matter against ed-tech firm Byju’s. A two-member bench comprising Justice Rakesh Kumar Jain and Jatindranath Swain on Friday directed the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) while disposing of the plea filed by Riju Ravendran against the previous order of the tribunal to reinstate Glas Trust and Aditya Birla Finance into the Committee of Creditors (CoC) of Byju’s. **PTI**

Oil India net profit drops 23% on lower oil prices

New Delhi: State-owned Oil India Ltd (OIL) reported a 23 per cent drop in its third-quarter net profit as the price of crude oil produced and sold fell. **PTI**

‘Meta prepares for layoffs on Monday’

REUTERS
NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 8

FACEBOOK OWNER Meta Platforms plans to carry out its expected company-wide layoffs next week while pushing ahead with the expedited hiring of machine learning engineers, it told staffers in internal memos seen by *Reuters* on Friday.

Notices will go out to employ-

ees losing their jobs starting at 5 a.m. local time Monday in most countries, including in the US, according to one of the posts, authored by Meta’s Head of People Janelle Gale.

Employees in Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands will be exempt from the cuts “due to local regulations,” while those in more than a dozen other countries across Europe, Asia and Africa will receive their notifications be-

tween February 11 and February 18, it said.

A Meta spokesperson declined to comment on the posts.

The company confirmed last month that it was planning to trim about 5 per cent of its “lowest performers” and backfill at least some of the positions. The Friday memo, in which Gale referred to the cuts as “performance terminations,” was first reported by *The Information*.

Sebi bans ‘She Wolf’ Asmita Patel from markets; impounds ₹53.67 cr

HITESH VYAS
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 8

THE SECURITIES and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has barred influencer Asmita Patel, who called herself as the ‘She Wolf of the stock market’, her husband Jitesh Jethalal Patel; their company Asmita Patel Global School of Trading Pvt Ltd (AGSTPL); and three others from accessing the securities markets for allegedly providing unregistered investment advisory services and research analyst activities.

The markets regulator, in its interim order, has directed that an amount of Rs 53.67 crore be

impounded from these six entities.

The other entities who have been banned by Sebi include Sagar Dhanjibhai, proprietor, King Traders; Suresh Parmashivam, proprietor, Gemini Enterprise; and Jigar Rameshbhai Dawada, proprietor, United Enterprises.

Who is Patel: ‘She Wolf of the stock market’?

Asmita Jitesh Patel is a director of Asmita Patel Global School of Trading Private Limited (AGSTPL), a Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra-based company that provides advisory services in securities market, share trading, mutual funds and commodities



Asmita Patel *facebook.com/asmitapatelofficial*

trading. The company also provides training to clients to manage wealth in the securities market.

“Born in a traditional Gujarati family, and embodying strong

values and ethics as a teacher, she (Asmita Patel) has won numerous awards, for her contribution to thousands of lives. With 17 years of trading experience, and 10+ years of teaching experience, Asmita Patel is a thought leader and an admired mentor,” according to the information available on the website of AGSTPL.

She referred to herself as the ‘She Wolf of the stock market’ and the ‘options queen’ and claimed to have mentored over one lakh students/investors/participants worldwide. She claimed to manage assets to the tune of Rs 140 crore using her proprietary system.

Asmita has a significant pres-

ence in the electronic media through the website of AGSTPL — asmitapatel.com. She has a strong follower base on various social media platforms — YouTube (5,26,000 subscribers), Instagram (2,90,000 followers), Facebook (73,000 followers), LinkedIn (1,900 followers), Twitter (4,200 followers).

Jitesh Patel is the husband of Asmita and is also a director of AGSTPL. King Traders, Gemini Enterprise and United Enterprises are proprietary firms. Based on the advice given by AGSTPL, some course participants allegedly paid the fees into the bank accounts of these three proprietary firms to enrol for var-



Donald Trump, US President

hit but suggested it would be a broad effort that could also help solve US budget problems.

“I’ll be announcing that, next week, reciprocal trade, so that we’re treated evenly with other countries,” Trump said. “We don’t want any more, any less.”

The move would fulfill Trump’s campaign promise to impose tariffs on American imports equal to rates that trading partners impose on American exports.

Trump made the announcement during a meeting with visiting Japanese Prime Minister

Shigeru Ishiba. He said auto tariffs remained on the table amid reports that the White House was weighing potential exemptions.

The new US president has long complained about the European Union’s 10 per cent tariffs on auto imports being much higher than the US car rate of 2.5 per cent. He frequently states that Europe “won’t take our cars” but ships millions west across the Atlantic every year.

of Rs 53,67,46,384/- being the total unlawful gain earned prima facie from the alleged unregistered investment advisory and research analyst business, shall be impounded jointly and severally from the Noticee no 1 to 6 (Asmita, Jitesh, AGSTPL and others) are restrained from buying, selling or dealing in securities, either directly or indirectly, in any manner whatsoever until further orders.”

The regulator has directed Asmita, Jitesh and AGSTPL to cease and desist from offering unregistered investment advisory and research analyst services from acting as or holding themselves out to be investment advisor/ research analyst. “An amount

18 The World

TOP OF THE WORLD



Prince Rahim Al-Hussaini carries the coffin of Aga Khan IV.

PORTUGAL

Aga Khan's funeral service held in Lisbon

Lisbon: The funeral of Aga Khan IV, the 49th hereditary imam of the Shiite Ismaili Muslims, took place in Lisbon on Saturday, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Spain's King Emeritus Juan Carlos were among the dignitaries who attended the private ceremony for His Highness Prince Karim Al-Hussaini at the Ismaili community centre. Portugal's President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and the mayor of Lisbon were also among the mourners. The Ismaili religious community said Prince Karim will be laid to rest during a private burial ceremony in Aswan, Egypt, on Sunday. His death was announced Tuesday by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the Ismaili religious community. The following day, 53-year-old Rahim Al-Hussaini was named as the Aga Khan V. **AP**

IRAN

Khamenei meets top Hamas leaders

Tehran: Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei met with acting Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya and two other leaders of the Palestinian group in Tehran on Saturday, Iranian state TV reported. "You defeated the Zionist regime [Israel], which was in fact America's defeat," Khamenei, whose country supports Hamas in its war with Israel, told the Palestinian delegation. They expressed gratitude for Iran's continued support. **AP**

PAKISTAN

'Black Day': PTI leaders arrested during protest

Islamabad: Several leaders of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) were arrested as the party on Saturday held rallies to mark February 8 as the 'Black Day' against the alleged rigging of general elections last year. The PTI has planned its main rally in Swabi, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the party is in power. It has also asked its workers and supporters to protest across the country. **PTI**

DANICA KIRKA

LONDON, FEBRUARY 8

LAILA SOUEIF is a mathematician, a university professor, a political activist.

But as she slumped in a folding chair outside the gates of the British prime minister's office on day 129 of a hunger strike, she was just a mother — a mom trying to win freedom for her son who has spent more than five years in an Egyptian prison, accused of "spreading false news" on social media.

Sacrificing her very self is the only way Soueif sees to focus at-

Hamas frees three hostages while Israel begins releasing Palestinians

REUTERS

GAZA, ERUSALEM, CAIRO, FEBRUARY 8

PALESTINIAN MILITANT group Hamas handed over three Israeli hostages on Saturday, whose gaunt appearance shocked Israelis, while Israel began freeing dozens of Palestinians in the latest stage of a ceasefire deal aimed at ending the 15-month war in Gaza.

Ohad Ben Ami and Eli Sharabi, both taken hostage from Kibbutz Be'er during the cross-border Hamas-led attack on October 7, 2023, and Or Levy, abducted that day from the Nova music festival, were led onto a Hamas podium by gunmen.

The three men all appeared thin, weak and pale, and in worse condition than the 18 hostages who had previously been freed under the truce agreed last month.

"He looked like a skeleton, it was awful to see," Ohad Ben Ami's mother-in-law, Michal Cohen, told Channel 13 News as she watched the Hamas-directed handover ceremony, which included the hostages answering questions posed by a masked man as militants armed with automatic rifles stood on each side.

In another show of force by Hamas, which has paraded fighters during previous releases, dozens of its militants deployed in central Gaza as it handed hostages over to the International Committee of the Red Cross. They were then driven in ICRC



Israeli captives, from left to right, Ohad Ben Ami, Eli Sharabi and Or Levy with Hamas fighters before being handed over to the Red Cross in Gaza Strip on Saturday. *Reuters*

vehicles to Israeli forces.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the sight of the frail hostages was shocking and would be addressed.

Israel's President Isaac Herzog described the release ceremony as cynical and vicious. "This is what a crime against humanity looks like," he said.

The Hostage Families Forum said the images of the three hostages evoked images of survivors of Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust.

"We have to get ALL THE HOSTAGES out of hell," it said.

Palestinians complain of ill-treatment

In exchange for the hostages' release, Israel is freeing 183 Palestinian prisoners, some convicted of involvement in attacks that killed dozens of people, as well as 111 detained in Gaza during the war.

In Ramallah, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, a bus carrying 42 freed Palestinian prisoners was

welcomed by a cheering crowd.

Among those freed was Eyad Abu Shkaideem, sentenced to 18 life terms in Israel for masterminding suicide attacks in revenge for Israel's 2004 assassinations of Hamas leaders.

"Today, I am reborn," Shkaideem told reporters upon arrival in Ramallah, as the crowd cheered. Many of the prisoners freed appeared in poor health and some complained of ill-treatment. "The occupation humiliated us for over a year," said Shkaideem.

China summons Panama ambassador for pulling out of BRI after Trump's threat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

BEIJING, FEBRUARY 8

CHINA HAS summoned Panama's ambassador to the country for pulling out of the multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), following US President Donald Trump's threat to take back the Panama Canal.

Assistant Foreign Minister Zhao Zhiyuan on Friday summoned ambassador Miguel Humberto Lecaro Barcenas over Panama's decision to not renew the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on cooperation with China on the BRI,

state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Panama recently announced the termination of the MOU on the BRI, to which the Chinese side expressed deep regret, Zhao said.

Under the framework of the BRI, pragmatic cooperation between China and Panama has rapidly developed across various sectors and achieved a series of fruitful results, bringing tangible benefits to Panama and its people, Zhao said.

The minister said more than 150 countries actively participate in the BRI, with achievements benefiting the people of various nations, including

Panama.

Under the BRI, a signature initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping, China has made huge investments in various countries around the world to build major infrastructure projects by extending loans. The BRI projects attracted criticism of being debt traps as many countries struggled to pay back Chinese loans.

"Any attempts to reverse the course on the BRI and go against the expectations of the Chinese and Panamanian people do not align with the vital interests of Panama," Zhao said.

He said China firmly opposes the United States wantonly undermining the China-Panama

relations and discrediting and undermining cooperation under the BRI through pressure and threats, Zhao said.

It is hoped that Panama will exclude external interference and make the right decision based on the overall situation of bilateral relations and the long-term interests of the two peoples, he said.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio during his visit to Panama had earlier warned Panama's President José Raúl Mulino that the US would take "measures necessary" if it did not take immediate steps to end China's influence and control over the Panama Canal.

Trump's talk of absorbing Canada is 'a real thing', says PM Trudeau

REUTERS

TORONTO, FEBRUARY 8

PRIME MINISTER Justin Trudeau on Friday said US President Donald Trump's talk about absorbing Canada "is a real thing" and is linked to the country's rich natural resources, a government source said.

Trudeau made the remarks during a closed-door session of business and labor leaders on how best to respond to Trump's threats of tariffs on Canadian imports.

His comments were first reported by the Toronto Star, which said they were mistakenly carried by a loudspeaker.



Canada Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. *File*

Trump has repeatedly suggested Canada would be better off if it agreed to become the 51st U.S. state.

"They're very aware of our resources, of what we have and

they very much want to be able to benefit from those," the Star quoted Trudeau as saying.

"But Mr. Trump has it in mind that one of the easiest ways of doing that is absorbing our country. And it is a real thing."

The government source confirmed that the Star's account of the remarks was accurate.

Canada, seeking to fend off U.S. measures, has stressed it is a trusted partner and a major supplier of oil, minerals and other natural resources.

In remarks open to reporters, Trudeau had earlier said Canada could face long-term political challenges with the United States even if it manages to avert Trump's threat of tariffs.

JUDGE BLOCKS ORDER FOR USAID STAFF LEAVES

Trump's aid freeze for life-saving programmes sparks global 'mayhem'

REUTERS

WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 8

IN GHANA and Kenya, insecticide and mosquito nets sit in warehouses because US officials haven't approved urgent anti-malaria campaigns.

In Haiti, a group treating HIV patients awaits US permission to dispense medicines that prevent mothers from giving the disease to their children.

In Myanmar, where famine looms and the US is the single largest aid donor, one humanitarian worker described the situation as "mayhem."

Nearly three weeks into US President Donald Trump's sweeping freeze on foreign aid, life-saving programs across the globe remain shut as humanitarian workers struggle to secure US government waivers meant to keep them open, dozens of aid workers and UN staff told Reuters.

After Trump announced the 90-day freeze on January 20, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio issued waivers for what he called "life-saving humanitarian assistance," which included "core life-saving medicine, medical services, food, shelter, and subsistence assistance."

But aid workers and UN officials said the waivers had sparked widespread confusion, along with fears that their U.S. funding would never be restored.

They said they couldn't restart work without first confirming with their U.S. counterparts whether specific programs qualified for exemption. This was proving nearly impossible, they said, due to a communication breakdown with U.S. officials, some of whom had been fired or barred from talking.

The breakdown appeared partly by design. On January 31, staff at the United States Agency for International Development, once the main delivery mechanism for American largesse,



A protester leaves flowers next to a USAID sign in Washington on Friday. *Reuters*

were told not to communicate externally about the waiver and what it may or may not include, according to a previously unreported recording of the meeting reviewed by Reuters.

The US State Department and White House did not respond to requests for comment.

The spiraling consequences of the aid freeze in developing countries underline the real-world harms from Trump's upending of decades-old US initiatives designed to build global alliances by making America the world's most generous superpower and largest single aid donor.

Aid workers had a list of urgent questions going unanswered. Among them: Which programs could continue? What qualifies as life-saving aid? Food? Shelter? Medicine? And how do they keep people from dying when almost every aid service has been shut at once?

With little guidance from U.S. officials, aid workers said their organizations erred on the side of caution and closed programs rather than incur expenses that the US government might not reimburse, the aid workers said. Some described how US partners — often people they had worked with for years — no longer answered their phones or emails.

Court stops forced leaves for USAID staff

A federal judge on Friday dealt President Donald Trump and billionaire ally Elon Musk their first big setback in their dismantling of the US Agency for International Development, ordering a temporary halt to plans to pull thousands of agency staffers off the job.

US District Judge Carl Nichols, a Trump appointee, also agreed to block an order that would have given the thousands of overseas USAID workers the administration wanted to place on abrupt administrative leave just 30 days to move families and households back to the US on government expense.

Both moves would have exposed the US workers and their spouses and children to unwarranted risk and expense, the judge said.

Nichols pointed to accounts from workers abroad that the Trump administration, in its rush to shut down the agency and its programs abroad, had cut some workers off from government emails and other communication systems they needed to reach the US government in case of a health or safety emergency.

Let's do a deal, says Zelenskyy, offers US rare earths for security

REUTERS

KYIV, FEBRUARY 8

UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT Volodymyr Zelenskyy pored over a once-classified map of vast deposits of rare earths and other critical minerals during an interview with Reuters on Friday, part of a push to appeal to Donald Trump's penchant for a deal.

The US president, whose administration is pressing for a rapid end to Ukraine's war with Russia, said on Monday he wanted Ukraine to supply the US with rare earths and other minerals in return for financially supporting its war effort.

"If we are talking about a deal, then let's do a deal, we are only for it," Zelenskyy said, emphasising Ukraine's need for security guarantees from its allies as part of any settlement.

Ukraine floated the idea of opening its critical minerals to



Ukrainian police officer evacuate people from the frontline towns and villages in Donetsk on Friday. *Reuters*

investment by allies last autumn, as it presented a "victory plan" that sought to put it in the strongest position for talks and force Moscow to the table.

Zelenskyy said less than 20% of Ukraine's mineral resources, including about half its rare earth deposits, were under Russian oc-

cupation.

Rare earths are important in the manufacture of high-performance magnets, electric motors and consumer electronics; Zelenskyy said Moscow could open those resources to its allies North Korea and Iran, both sworn US enemies.

Her son is not alone

Thousands of critics of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi have been locked up under dire conditions after unjust trials, human rights groups say.

Soueif's son also went on hunger strike during Egypt's hosting of the international climate conference COP27. His strike, which ended when he lost consciousness and was revived with fluids, drew attention to Egypt's heavy suppression of speech and political activity, but failed to secure his freedom.

Since 2013, el-Sissi's government has cracked down on dissidents and critics, jailing thou-

sands, virtually banning protests and monitoring social media.

Human Rights Watch estimated in 2019 that as many as 60,000 political prisoners are incarcerated in Egyptian prisons, but there have been no similar tallies in recent years. In 2019, el-Sissi told the U.S. news program '60 Minutes' that the country did "not have political prisoners or prisoners of opinion."

"What we are seeing under (el-Sissi's) government is that this kind of repression is endless," said Amr Magdi, a senior researcher in the Middle East and North Africa division at Human Rights Watch. "It's relentless." **AP**

ONE OF EGYPT'S MOST PROMINENT PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS, ABD EL-FATTAH HAS SPENT MOST OF THE PAST 14 YEARS BEHIND BARS

Mother of jailed Egypt activist seeks Britain's help in freeing him, one day of hunger at a time

attention on what she says is unjust imprisonment of her son, Alaa Abd el-Fattah.

"The great majority of mothers are prepared to die for their children; it just takes different forms," she said on Wednesday. "Most mothers, if their children are in actual danger, you're prepared to die."

One of Egypt's most prominent pro-democracy activists, Abd el-Fattah has spent most of the past 14 years behind bars since taking part in the 2011 uprising that toppled autocratic former President Hosni Mubarak.

His most recent crime was "liking" a Facebook post describ-

ing torture in Egyptian prisons. Abd el-Fattah has been in custody since September 2019, and was sentenced to five years in prison after a trial before an emergency security court.

But when his release date came up last September, Egyptian authorities refused to count the more than two years he had spent in pre-trial detention and ordered him held until Jan. 3, 2027.

Because Abd el-Fattah, 43, has both British and Egyptian citizenship, Soueif is calling on the U.K. government to put pressure on their counterparts in Cairo to release him.



Soueif's son also went on hunger strike during Egypt's hosting of the international climate conference COP27. *AP*

CHAMPS TROPHY

FIGHTING WORDS

Real task is not just winning CT, but beating India: Pak PM Sharif

PRIME MINISTER Shehbaz Sharif says the real task for Pakistan is not just winning the ICC Champions Trophy but also defeat arch-rivals India in Dubai on February 23.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the renovated and upgraded Gaddafi stadium on Friday night, Sharif said the players must give their best against India.

"We have a very good side and they have done well in recent times but the real task now is to not only win the Champions Trophy but also defeat our arch-rival, India in the upcoming match in Dubai. The entire nation stands behind them," Sharif said.

Pakistan and India have a history of cricket rivalry and generally the Indian team has held the advantage in ICC events since the 90s. Pakistan's last win in an ICC event against India came in 2021 when they won in Dubai in the T20 World Cup. But with India refusing to send their team to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy and given the recent tense relations between the two cricket boards, the February 23-match has that extra edge to it. Pakistan will enter the tournament as defending champions. It was last held in 2017 in England with Pakistan winning the final. PTI

WARNER BACKS OZ

Former opener backs Aus for CT success

FORMER AUSTRALIA opener David Warner has backed his country to do well in the Champions Trophy later this month despite losing several key players close to the tournament. Regular captain Pat Cummins, fellow quick Josh Hazlewood and all-rounder Mitch Marsh have been ruled out with injuries, while Marcus Stoinis withdrew himself after his shock decision to quit ODIs on Thursday. "Australia are very good in the World Cups and Champions Trophies and in tournament play. So, the Australian team knows how to win. They know how to succeed. It doesn't matter what players they play," Warner told a virtual press conference. REUTERS

Injury jeopardises Ferguson's CT

BARELY 11 DAYS before their Champions Trophy opener against Pakistan, New Zealand's leading pace bowler Lockie Ferguson has been rendered doubtful for the ODI tournament after suffering a hamstring injury during an ILT20 match in the UAE. "Lockie had a scan yesterday (Thursday) in the UAE," coach Gary Stead said to ICC. "We've got the images here and (we are) waiting for our radiologist to give us a report on the extent of it." PTI

INDIA VS ENGLAND

Captain's Conundrum

Rohit has to overcome his current technical deficiencies while also handling tactical curveballs like the Shreyas Iyer/left-hander situation

LALITH KALIDAS
CUTTACK, FEBRUARY 8

AFTER SWOOPING up tickets for another international cricket fixture, only 500 meters out across the road from their sandy cricket arena on the Mahanadi river bank, Ramesh and his team are wrapping up play when the question of watching a one-dayer at Cuttack's Barabati Stadium after six years is posed.

"Six years? No, no. We have hosted a lot more matches since then. 2019 was definitely not the last game," responds Ramesh. Smug-faced, he claims he has not "missed a single game" at the ground in 10 years.

The affable resistance to the fact that only a solitary T20I has been played at the venue since the last ODI here in 2019 is, of course, rooted in the pride of their home venue. The situation isn't entirely different inside the stadium, where a seasoned local media person, "Munna saab", echoes a similar sentiment. "Kya baat karrahe ho bhai? There have been so many international games here since then. The last one was in 2022 but this is not the first ODI since 2019," he said, refusing to acknowledge the record books.

India captain Rohit Sharma ran a similar strain of stubbornness earlier this week as he addressed concerns about his form before the first ODI in Nagpur. An unusually miffed Rohit would object to mixing formats, affirming this is "a different format, a different time."

But with his wrists and eyes failing him early, tempting him to a loose chip that was gulped down by the mid-wicket fielder for two runs at his hometown on Thursday, a tentative Rohit will know his downtime can only be flipped by a decisive score in the second ODI against England at the Barabati on Sunday afternoon.

Swanked by the Mahanadi delta waters from three directions, the Barabati's surroundings form a cruel metaphor for Rohit's distending concerns against the red, pink, and white balls within his last six competitive outings.

Form and the three formats may not have a solid binding like Rohit suggested, but a recurring pattern of dismissals in which he falls caught within the inner circle will play on the back of his mind.

Since the Wankhede Test against New Zealand last year, six of his 10 dismissals across conditions have occurred at the cost of trademark Rohit strokes - the flick and the pull - within the 30-yard marker. England pacer Saqib Mahmood dealt the latest blow with an inswinger that swerved past the leg-stump. Rohit's half-hearted chip, lacking conviction and power, landed straight in Liam Livingstone's hands, marking a third dismissal of the type at mid-wicket since November 2024.

Committing too early or reacting late to deliveries on length, Rohit's perils have also witnessed poorly-timed flicks or pulls edged to the slip cordon, mid-off, and mid-on fielders.

For a batter who had once remarked being "pumped up" at the prospect of facing the first ball, the lack of clarity may have prevented Rohit from taking guard against the opening delivery for the first time since August 2019 in the previous outing.

"If you look at it from Rohit's point of view, then obviously, it is frustrating for him," former India spinner R Ashwin reflected on Rohit on his YouTube channel.



Recurring dismissals to pull-flicks plague Rohit Sharma. Ravindra Jadeja (right, top), Gautam Gambhir and Varun Chakravarthi (bottom) during India's training session. Reuters

ROHIT'S RECENT PULL-FLICK DISMISSALS

IND V NZ 3RD TEST
Caught at mid-wicket for 11

IND V AUS - 4TH TEST
Leading edge to mid-on for 3

IND V AUS - 4TH TEST
Flick edged to slip for 9

RANJI TROPHY 1ST INNINGS VS J&K
Leading edge off pull to mid-off for 3

RANJI TROPHY 2ND INNINGS VS J&K
Attempted flick to mid-wicket for 28

IND V ENG 1ST ODI
Mistimed flick to mid-wicket for 2

"He thinks that he has done well in the format (ODI) and he'd like to continue that. It's a catch-22 situation. You can't stop these questions. When will they stop? When he performs," Ashwin added.

Kohli in, who's out?

While the batting conundrum persists, Rohit will also have to contain a minor spill-over from the leadership standpoint after Shreyas Iyer's earnest post-match chat in Nagpur. Iyer's admission that he would have been benched for Yashasvi Jaiswal had Virat Kohli not turned up injured for the first ODI raised eyebrows while offering another peek into the current management's firm emphasis on the left-right batting combination.

With Kohli recovering from his right

Since the Wankhede Test against New Zealand last year, six of his 10 dismissals across conditions have occurred at the cost of trademark Rohit strokes - the flick and the pull - within the 30-yard marker.

knee swelling and sweating it out before an unusually jam-packed crowd in the stands for Saturday's practice session, it will be interesting if Rohit and Co. continue with the Jaiswal strategy upfront at the expense of an in-form Iyer.

"The lefty-righty combination definitely has to be there but that's a decision for the head coach and captain to take," batting coach Sitanshu Kotak said with carefully constructed words on match eve.

Turning up for his first white-ball game in six months after a lowly red-ball stretch like Rohit, Kohli too would be raring to regain the spirits from his beloved 50-over format. Cuttack has offered similar jump-starts to ageing units in the past too. The 2017 clash between India and England at this venue proved decisive in reviving old warhorses Yuvraj Singh and MS Dhoni in the running for another Champions Trophy. As Yuvraj romped to his highest score (150), Dhoni, fresh from relinquishing captaincy, scored his final ODI ton that evening.

History throws up hope. But Rohit has a heightened challenge - "catch 22" as Ashwin puts it - in overcoming his current technical deficiencies while also handling tactical curveballs like the Shreyas Iyer/left-hander situation.

Kohli available for selection, says batting coach Kotak

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
FEBRUARY 8

INDIA BATTING coach Sitanshu Kotak on Saturday bore good news for the Indian team and its fans as he confirmed star batter **Virat Kohli** was fit and available for selection for the second ODI match against England at Cuttack on Sunday. "Virat Kohli is fit to play. He has come for practice and is good to go," Kotak said in the pre-match press conference ahead of the match.

Kohli had missed out of the 1st ODI in Nagpur due to a knee injury, skipper Rohit Sharma had said at the toss before the first of the three matches between India and England. "Virat Kohli was unavailable for selection for the 1st ODI due to a sore right knee," the BCCI had posted on the day of the match.

With Kohli available, it throws up a dilemma for the Indian team management on who will he will replace in the playing 11. In the last match, Shreyas Iyer, came in for Kohli at the last minute by his own admission, and made a rollicking 36-ball 59 that has made dropping him an almost unthinkable act.

"It is captain (Rohit Sharma) and coach's (Gautam Gambhir) call. I can't answer this," Kotak replied when he was asked on if Shreyas or Yashasvi Jaiswal will make way for Kohli. Combination questions apart,



Kohli too is in need of runs, and he will need a good outing here if he indeed makes a return. Kohli's form has been under scrutiny in recent months, especially after his struggles in Australia, where he repeatedly nicked deliveries to the slip cordon or wicketkeeper.

His last competitive outing - for Delhi in the Ranji Trophy - too was a low-yielding one, managing just six before getting bowled by Railways pacer Himanshu Sangwan. But One-day cricket is Kohli's staple format, and the 36-year-old needs just 94 runs to become the third batter to reach 14,000 runs in the format after Sachin Tendulkar (18,426) and Kumar Sangakkara (14,234) Having played 283 ODI innings, Kohli can also become the fastest to this milestone ahead of Tendulkar (350 innings) and Sangakkara (378).

Ramanathan-Myneni pair fails to defend title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
FEBRUARY 8

DEFENDING CHAMPIONS Ramkumar Ramanathan and Saketh Myneni of India had to be content with runners-up finish at the Chennai Open ATP Challenger doubles event after going down to Japan's Shintaro Mochizuki and Kaito Uesugi in in the title clash on Saturday.

The unseeded Japanese duo of Mochizuki and Uesugi broke the serve of Ramanathan and Myneni once in each set to emerger 6-4 6-4 winners in an one hour and seven minutes contest. This was the second ATP Challenger doubles title for Uesugi and Mochizuki, who won the Wimbledon boys singles crown in 2019. In the singles draw, unseeded Swede Elias Ymer stunned top seed Billy Harris of Great Britain in two hard-fought tiebreaks in their first clash on the pro circuit.

In a match that featured no breaks of serve and lasted for over two-and-a-half hours, the 28-year-old Ymer served 10 aces and saved all seven break points against his serve to win 7-6 7-6 and advance to Sunday's final. His opponent will be Frenchman Kyrian Jacquet, who ousted Czech Dalibor Svrčina 6-4 6-1 in the first semifinal.

Ymer will be gunning for his seventh ATP Challenger singles title, his first since winning in Pune in November 2018, while 23-year-old Jacquet will be hoping to win his second title on the ATP Challenger Tour.

Sunday's final showdown will be the first clash between Ymer and Jacquet on the pro tour.

MUMBAI OPEN

15-year-old Maaya shows promise of future despite semis loss

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
FEBRUARY 8

IT'S EASY to look at a scoreline of 3-6, 1-6 and conclude a tennis match was lopsided and not many positives to take for the one who ended on the losing side. But that'd not necessarily be true in Maaya Rajeshwaran Revathi's case.

The 15-year-old from Coimbatore lost against 5th seed Jill Teichmann in the last four of the L&T Mumbai Open 2025 WTA 125 at the CCI Club in Mumbai, but it will be remembered as a week where she shot to the limelight.

As a qualifying wild card who was un-ranked on the WTA circuit, Maaya was playing only her fifth professional event. In the main draw, she went on to defeat Iryna Shymanovich, former Top 50 player Zarina Diyas, and Japan's Mei Yamaguchi but the Swiss leftie Teichmann was a step too far.

"Today was not as good as I'd hoped it to be, but still happy with a good week," Maaya said in a brief on-court interview before walking off to a healthy round of applause.

There was appreciation from the opponent too. "The result might look easier than the match was, I am really happy with that win. It's a very good week for her. She's very young, and has a lot of power, she has a good future if she keeps working on her game, just a few things here and there. But a brilliant talent," Teichmann said.

Maaya trained at Rafael Nadal's academy in Mallorca at the end of last year, and ac-



Maaya Rajeshwaran trained at Rafael Nadal's academy last year, and according to WTA, has been offered a yearlong contract to train and will move to Spain. Mumbai Open

cording to WTA, the Indian youngster has been offered a yearlong contract to train there and will move to Spain this month.

She recalled watching the Spanish legend drain for his farewell event at the Davis Cup: "It's one of my most favorite memories. Even a man that's won so much, he's still got that hunger and that's really impressive."

Impressive fight

In the semifinals, Maaya started tentatively, losing serve twice and going down 0-4. But once she got her footing in the set, she started pushing Teichmann more frequently, with a sting in her groundstrokes that made the Swiss player work hard to stay in points. Maaya got on the board in the first set

MAAYA'S MUMBAI RUN

First qualifier: Defeated Nicole Fossa Huergo 6-3, 3-6, 6-0.
Second qualifier: Defeated Jessica Failla 7-6 (11-9), 1-6, 6-4.
Round of 32: Defeated Iryna Shymanovich 6-4, 6-1.
Round of 16: Won via walkover against Zarina Diyas 6-3, 3-2.
Quarter-finals: Defeated Mei Yamaguchi 6-4, 3-6, 6-2.
Semi-finals: Lost to Jill Teichmann 3-6, 1-6.

by breaking Teichmann's serve and then held serve for the first time too, to get the crowd going. The Indian youngster had a breakpoint in the seventh game to bring the set back in serve but Teichman forced a deuce.

Then came another breakpoint chance with what was till then the point of the night as Maaya nailed a backhand winner that had Teichmann scrambling at the baseline. Eventually though, Teichmann ground out a tough service hold to keep her advantage.

Maaya stayed alive in the first set with her best service game of the night yet, holding at 15, including a delicious drop shot winner from the baseline. It ensured that Teichmann would have to serve out the set, but the 27-year-old managed to do so with relative ease.

Despite some momentum towards the end of the first set, the second set didn't start well

Nidheesh casts a net around J&K

A fisherman’s son, Kerala fast bowler takes five-for to restrict the underdogs to 228 for 8 on Day 1

SHIVANI NAIK
PUNE, FEBRUARY 8

IT’S UNCLEAR why Jammu & Kashmir chose Pune’s misty MCA stadium as their preferred venue for the Ranji quarterfinals. But Mattakandathil Dineshan (MD) Nidheesh knew his ears pricked up when he heard Kerala would travel away from the usually preferred fast wickets or turners, aiming for the semifinal.

Nidheesh, the right-arm outswing specialist conjuring wicked angles, knew he was On. His time to strike, was now.

MCA’s serene field and spicy pitch have plenty of fans in both Ranji teams, notably their quicks. “This was like heaven for us!” Nidheesh would say after his 5-for 56 from 23 overs, regularly stubbed out flickers that J&K batsmen lit, while reaching 228/8 in 85 overs on Day 1.

It wasn’t just the 5 wickets and the fact that he put in 27 percent of the overs Kerala bowled, maintaining impressive stump-to-stump discipline with variations thrown in when least expected. It was the fact that he removed four dangerous J&K batsmen, right when they were threatening to let loose.

Seasoned opener Shubham Khajuria was looking extremely comfortable on 14 off 19 when Nidheesh rushed one onto him and had him evading to Sachin Baby at second slip.

Nidheesh named the strokemaking Yawer Hassan Khan his favourite snare. “He was starting to dominate our bowlers, reading pace and movement real well, building good momentum.” Nidheesh explained of the U23’s off-stump he sent flying with one that jagged sharply on 25 off 65. “I bowled in the right areas to him, and our set-up plan worked well,” he said as J&K faltered to 48/3, their safe tenacious approach cleaved open.

J&K wicketkeeper Kanhaiya Wadhawan was lured into an uppish drive for 48 ending a crucial 55 run partnership after 115 wicketless deliveries. Then, when Nasir Lone, batting at No 7 counter attacked for 44 off 97, Nidheesh struck again – right after an intentfully punched 4, getting an edge off a full-length yorker this time.

Kerala have backed their offies Jalaj Saxena (season’s lead wicket taker with 33, but wicketless on Day 1) and Aditya Sarwate (23 wickets) to get them wins. But Pune with its post-moisture eccentricity rewards quicks. “Initially there was nothing even when wet, but the bounce picked up progressively. I just bowled in right areas, not trying unnecessary things and was disciplined,” Nidheesh described the whimsy wizardry of the track.

He credited Kerala batsmen for bolstering his determination. “In the Kerala nets we bowl to Sachin Baby, Md Azharudeen, Jalaj bhaiyya and Shoun Roger. They are brilliant batters and to get them out in the nets is tough,” he said.

Determination in his veins

Nidheesh, who set up the MP win for Kerala, started cricket rather late at 17. He belonged to an impoverished fisher-community from Kanjiramattom of Emakulam, 35 km away from Kochi, and knew nothing of cricket till he watched S Sreesanth win the 2007 T20 World Cup, firing his imagination. “Sreesanth’s debut and World Cup magic spell inspired me. I come from a rural village, where even Kochi is far,” he recalled, adding he played a spot of football, but nothing serious.

Subsequent coaches have praised him for his ability to bowl long spells and keep learning – from Dav Whatmore to local mentors Sony Cheruvathur and MA Sunil. He sharpened his bowling brain working with Tinu

Yohannan, Sreesanth, Lasith Malinga, Shane Bond and admired Mustafizur, always craving a variety of tricks. “Last season Chandu Pandit Sir helped,” he recalls.

But the patience was honed when very young and far from cricket. His father was a clam shell harvester, and that typically is a tedious process with the whole family working hard,

though with limited returns. Harvesting involves diving and raking out 30-40 cms from lake beds, boiling the clams over fire, sieving them to separate shells from meat – and it courts toxicity as a professional hazard due to the state of shallow waters. Mining departments typically oversee the vocation, not fisheries.

Clams are not oysters, so the world wasn’t magnificently opening up for him. Nidheesh barely noticed anything outside raking up sea shallows – that included ignorance of cricket, hence the late start at 17. He needed to travel nearly 20 km to Tripunithura Palace Oval grounds to understand all the fuss and frenzy about cricket’s fast bowling.

He simplifies his community’s back-breaking existence. “Financial struggles were big. My dad was a fisherman and my mother sold fish, so it was daily wages. But they ensured they paid my first fees for a cricket camp,” he says, now happily immersed in the sport. On Saturday, he baited and netted J&K’s big fish, like a proper angler.

BRIEF SCORES: Jammu and Kashmir 228/8 in 86 overs (Kanhaiya Wadhawan 48, Lone Nasir Muzaffar 44, Sahil Lotra 35; Nidheesh MD 5/56)

RANJI TROPHY: QUARTERFINALS



SKY-FALL

Mumbai’ Surya Kumar Yadav was clean bowled by Haryana’s Sumit Kumar for 9 in the Ranji Trophy quarters in Kolkata. *PTI*

Primenewspapers search on telegram

GUJARAT VS SAURASHTRA

Skipper Chintan Gaja bowled a probing line to grab four wickets as Gujarat restricted Saurashtra to a lowly 216 to gain upper-hand. Brief scores: Saurashtra 216 (Chirag Jani 69, Arpit Vasavada 39*; Chintan Gaja 4/48) vs Gujarat 21/0

HARYANA VS MUMBAI

Shams Mulani and Tanush Kotian once again stood tall with a 165-run stand for the eighth wicket as Mumbai staged an impressive fightback to reach 278 for 8 against Haryana. Brief scores: Mumbai 278/8 (Shams Mulani 91, Tanush Kotian 85*; Anshul Kamboj 3/58)

VIDARBHA VS TAMIL NADU

Karun Nair scored an unbeaten century – his 22nd first-class hundred – to help Vidarbha reach 264 for six. Nair’s knock included 14 boundaries and one six. Brief scores: Vidarbha 264/6 in 89 overs (Karun Nair 100*; Danish Malewar 75; Vijay Shankar 2/50)

What is ‘khhauw-raas’, ‘Ba_kar batting’? J&K fan in Pune on joy of travelling for Ranji

SHIVANI NAIK
PUNE, FEBRUARY 8

FOR A cricket stadium that really tests fan-love by keeping its access-ways narrow and the stands uncovered, the neutral MCA stadium managed a godly crowd of around 100 for a Ranji game not involving Maharashtra.

Surprisingly most was partisan. Unsurprisingly, the teams were Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir, who always attract their domestic diaspora, dispersed across the country, and turn up to cheer their team. But a Baramulla cricket fan Sheikh Gulzar took passionate following to the next level, as he came all the way leaving behind 6-7 inches snow and chill at home, for a 32 degrees, dusty sunny Pune – only to follow his team’s progress. Ask him if it’s a surprise J&K topped the group. And he retorts, “We are a good hard-working team, not in quarters just by luck. Sabko haraayenge (We will beat everyone)” he says in soft-spoken bravado.

The textile merchant from Kashmir, has a cousin in Pune. But his immediate cricket connection is J&K all-rounder Aquib Nabi, his next door neighbour. Following his promising career, and taking in the heights of Parvez Rasool’s peak career, Sheikh always found himself excuses to travel around the country following his team. “Mumbai of course, but Jaipur, Chandigarh, Delhi in previous seasons and Jammu this one,” he recalls. “You can say I’m crazy about cricket since the day



J&K fan Sheikh Gulzar (L) with his family at the MCA Stadium. *Shivani Naik*

I started understanding the game.”

Ranji teams are accustomed to empty stadia, but Sheikh Gulzar is glad he’s in the midst of a crowd that is invested in state loyalties, even if he’s outnumbered by 50-odd Kerala supporters. The first day has seen J&K struggle to string together a big partnership but that is no deterrent to the Kashmiri hopeful of a fightback.

“Final jaa sakte hai kya...hum final laa sakte hai!” he declares, even as his family, a sister, brother-in-law and two cricket-mad children refuse to leave, even if lunch food stalls aren’t close by for fans. “I wish there was a canteen, but it’s fine. We’re here for the team. Following Ranji can’t be about luxury,” he notes, even as he hopes for a similar big stadium in Srinagar.

He gazes around the stadium and at the iconic hillock of MCA, and says, “Home is just like this, but the green expanse of the ground

is how all of J&K is. Green grass carpets, but natural. Switzerland feelka pad jaega uske saamne (... will pale)”.

He grew up a Ricky Ponting and MS Dhoni fan, and insists the whole family love cricket because there’s no better ‘spiritual experience’ he says. But funding these trips? “We work our asses off the whole year so that we can take this one month off for cricket. It’s our annual vacation. We have lots of talent back home, but the team needs fans supporting them everywhere,” he says.

He can literally cross the threshold and get autographs from the team, but he taught his children to earn autographs on the ground. “Ground pe autograph ka mazaa kuchh aur hi hai,” he says. His Pune trip, living in the city, has been about visiting malls and Dilli Darbar, as he leaves thoughts of elaborate waazwan meal for home. “It’s good to experience different flavours, see a different culture,” he says.

He does tip off about a different flavour of pitch-talk that one can expect when J&K bowl. The enunciation is tough in English, he says, but do watch out for “cha_kar bowling” and “Ba_kar batting” (roughly ‘lets go’) and “laagiye” - what wicketkeeper Kanhaiya Wadhawan is expected to yap when batters charge out the crease. But the best cue is “khhauw-raas” hissed with a menace – signalling a yorker, about to be unleashed, and imminently incoming. Sometimes even the Jammu folk in the team don’t get that code. The stumps do the singing. “And then the batsman knows.”

Manchester City survive huge FA Cup scare to beat Leyton

REUTERS
LONDON, FEBRUARY 8

PREMIER LEAGUE champions Manchester City survived a huge FA Cup fourth-round scare as Kevin De Bruyne came off the bench to secure a 2-1 win at third-tier Leyton Orient on Saturday. A wretched season for Pep Guardiola’s side looked like reaching a new low as Orient protected a 16th-minute lead given to them by Jamie Donley’s long-range wonder-strike that went in via the crossbar and the back of City keeper Stefan Ortega.

City huffed and puffed in response and were relieved when Abdulkodir Khusanov equalised in the 56th minute, deflecting in Rico Lewis’s shot. De Bruyne came on late in the game and City’s playmaker spared his side extra time when Jack Grealish played him in to score from close range in the 79th minute. Even then Orient almost equalised when skipper Dan Happe volleyed over a great chance at the death.

Some lament the FA Cup losing its romance in recent years but this old-school tie had it in bucket loads. A murky, drizzly lunchtime in an east London suburb lined with rows of Victorian terraced houses looked the perfect stage for Orient to ambush City’s slickers.

While City lived to fight another day, it was a mightily relieved Guardiola who applauded the home fans at fulltime -- the same ones who chanted “you’re getting sacked in the morning” to the serial trophy winner as his side were trailing. “We played a really good game, it was a typical FA Cup game – that’s why this competition is unbelievable,” Guardiola said. “We behaved really well and reacted with character.”

Orient, sixth in League One after a sensational run of form under Manchester United-supporting manager Richie Wellens, ran themselves into the ground. And Tottenham Hotspur loanee Donley’s goal – despite being credited to Ortega – will live long in the memory. “I know I hit the goal well. I knew it fell for me nicely. I saw him off his line and luckily it went in,” he said. “It would have been a lot nicer if we won,” Donley said.

Maguire heads late winner

Harry Maguire scored a controversial injury time winner as Manchester United came from behind to beat Leicester 2-1 and move into the last 16. United went behind to a Bobby De Cordova-Reid goal four minutes before halftime. Joshua Zirkzee equalized in the 68th minute and Maguire grabbed the late winner.

There was a heated debate over whether the England center half was in an offside position but there is no VAR in the FA Cup and the goal stood. “This (loss) wasn’t necessary,” an unhappy Leicester coach Ruud van Nistelrooy told broadcaster ITV. “This was half a meter (off-side). Then extra time, stay in the game, you never know what happens. We deserved to go into extra time and maybe penalties. Decisions like these in our level are hard to swallow.”

A wretched season for Pep Guardiola’s side looked like reaching a new low as Orient protected a 16th-minute lead given to them by Jamie Donley’s long-range wonder-strike that went in via the crossbar and the back of City keeper...

Winless in round robin, Gukesh still in quarters

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
FEBRUARY 8

CALL IT the curse of being a world champion! Gukesh Dommaraju went winless in nine qualifying round robin games at the Weissenhaus leg of the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour. Gukesh follows in the footsteps of his predecessor on the world champion’s throne, Ding Liren, who had also endured a winless event last year at Weissenhaus, when the event was just a standalone freestyle event and the Chinese grandmaster was still a world champion.

The 18-year-old world champion from Chennai, in fact, ended the rapid section of the event with a defeat to Magnus Carlsen. Despite playing out seven draws (and being handed two defeats by Alireza Firouzja and Carlsen), Gukesh has qualified for the quarter-finals after ending in eighth spot out of 10 contenders.

Gukesh’s opponent in the next round for now remains unclear. A new rule introduced at the event during the technical meeting was that the player who ends on top of the standings after the round robin section of the tournament, will get to pick his opponent in the quarter-finals. This means Firouzja, who was the table-topper, picks his quarter-final rival from between Hikaru Nakamura, Vincent Keymer, Nodirbek Abdusattarov and Gukesh. Then, second place finisher Javokhir Sindarov picks his quarters opponent from the three players left. Then Fabiano Caruana, who was no 3 in standings, picks his opponent. Whoever is left plays Carlsen in the quarters.

Seema’s discus story: Balancing baby, PhD & Oly dream

PRITISH RAJ
DEHRADUN, FEBRUARY 8

IN 2022, eleven months after giving birth to a baby boy, Seema stood inside the throwing circle of Bhim Stadium, Bhiwani, unable to release the disc. Fast forward to 2025, she decided the goal medal of women’s discus throw at the ongoing National Games on Saturday with her first throw of 52.58m. The 24-year-old from Haryana went on to clinch the gold medal in the event with a best throw of 52.70m.

While her movement of releasing the disc from the hand was smooth, the journey hasn’t been the same. Mother to a two-and-half-year-old son Rudra, Seema restarted her athletic journey after a hiatus of three years due to a knee injury, the pandemic and the arrival of her baby. At the moment, the discus thrower is juggling between her kid, sport, and a PhD degree. “I am happy with the medal but not happy with the throw as my target was to break the 24-year-old meet record of 55.45m,” Seema told *The Indian Express* after her medal-winning feat.

Seema has a personal best of 57.19m which she achieved last year at the Inter-State Championship in Panchkula. “The throwing circle was a little rough today and it became tough for athletes who use speed while releasing the discus,” her coach and husband Ravinder explained. When asked how she manages the responsibility of having a kid, being an athlete, and being an active PhD student, Seema laughed.

“Bas Ho jata hai sir ji (It just happens),” Seema and Ravinder both laughed. “We have hardly spent time with our son Rudra



Seema with her husband Ravinder after winning the National Games gold. *Pritish Raj*

It was very tough getting back to the field as I was unable to even release the discus properly. But I think the motivation and mentoring of my husband (Ravinder) helped me get back to my normal strength and then improve further.”

SEEMA

DISCUS THROWER, ON RETURNING TO THE SPORT AFTER GIVING BIRTH TO HER SON

as he spends time with his grandparents from both sides. Our families have been extremely supportive in our quest for sporting excellence,” Ravinder chimed in.

Currently training under the strict eyes of Ravinder, a former national-level discus thrower, Seema’s career took off after her return post-pregnancy.

“I played a lot of sports in my school days ranging from boxing, wrestling, to Kabaddi,” said Seema about the start of her sporting journey. “However, it was the discus throw that captured my imagination when my school teacher introduced me to it. Eventually, I started liking it and stuck to it,” explained Seema. Just as Seema was gaining momentum in her career with medals at the junior level, life threw a different challenge her way.

A serious knee injury, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, put her athletic

dreams on hold. Owing to the injury and the pandemic, the recently married couple of Ravinder and Seema planned a baby.

After her son was born, the athlete inside Seema started getting restless and within 11 months of the birth of Rudra, she returned to the field. “It was very tough getting back to the field as I was unable to even release the discus properly. But I think the motivation and mentoring of my husband (Ravinder) helped me get back to my normal strength and then improve further,” Seema recalled.

The wife and husband duo have set their eyes on the 2028 LA Olympic qualification but with smaller goals on the way. “The Olympic is the ultimate goal for me

but we can reach there only when we achieve the smaller goals of playing at the continental championships and events like the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games,” Seema laid out the goals set by them.

“Apart from the major competitions, one of my targets is breaking the national record in women’s discus throw,” she added further.

The national record in women’s discus throw belongs to Olympian Kamalpreet Kaur who threw 66.59m in 2021.

While her season has started with an underwhelming mark, Seema has ample time to improve and eye qualification in international events.

THE SUNDAY EXPRESS MAGAZINE

eye



POINT OF VIEW, PAGE 2

Dali Comes to Town

Christine Argillet, curator of the Pierre Argillet collection, on showing Salvador Dali in India and growing up with the surrealist painter



SCREEN, PAGE 3

Voices in the Head

Director Srijit Mukherji and actor Parambrata Chatterjee on their new movie and the state of Bengali cinema

Rinku Ghosh

ON THE face of it, Vipula V, 25, is a Gen Z achiever story that people cite examples of — self-made, self-starter, owner of an interior design firm in Bengaluru that's creating smart work and living spaces, surrounded and wanted by people. Yet, she felt lost in a crowd until she joined a group of like-minded professionals. "People think singles are only looking for dating and hook-ups through apps or at pubs. But what matters is real friendship. As school and college friends drift apart because of their individual priorities, weekends become empty. Now, thanks to my meetup group, I have found people with similar interests and I am learning new things, growing as a person, looking forward to my Saturdays," says Vipula, after a recent trek to Aadi Yogi in Chikkaballapur, Karnataka.

Vipula is among many young Indians who are pivoting their lives on meaningful relationships and lasting friendships over fickle and fragile love to overcome urban loneliness. They are choosing real world meetups to socialise and form their own communities of shared interests and ideas, far away from the superficial posing of a digital world.

"In the end, most of us have realised that love alone cannot be fulfilling. You still have to deal with situations on your own without the support of your significant others. And in that pursuit of self-development, you need a space to share your thoughts and feelings in the most honest way possible with people who get you. Where you are not afraid to be your real self or find the voice to be so. All people want is a tribe they can hang out with," says Sourabh Akash, co-founder of Oopar Club, a meetup platform that organises events in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, spanning arts, crafts, music, books, board games, dance and journaling workshops, peppered with some curated wellness and trekking sessions.

"Our survey showed that 46 per cent professionals were living from Monday to Friday, and sleeping and vegetating over weekends. At these meetups, not only do you find people with similar interests, you develop different skill sets as well. These are ideal spaces for introverts, who may not socialise on their own," says the 29-year-old IT engineer, who founded Oopar two years ago with his college friends Sagar Agarwal (sales) and Pragya Srivastava (product development), both 28.

In fact, this digital fatigue and aversion to casual dating has shown up in various data. Platforms like Tinder, Happn, Aisle and OkCupid have seen a significant decline in monthly active users between October 2022 and September 2023, according to data from Similarweb. Tinder, being the most popular, has seen a 20 per cent decrease in daily active users. This shift is palpable as most meetup groups have come up in the same period of time, be it Oopar, Let's Socialise or Mitramesh.

Nobody has transited this change better than 30-year-old Rushabh Shah, who runs a family business in Bengaluru and has been at several meetup events. "Friends are comfortable with yourharsh truths, your partner may not be. Romantic relationships become about performing to someone's expectations and role-playing. Nanoships, or single interactions forgotten after the moment, are more disturbing, disorienting than liberating. But friendship has different spaces and keeps you both rooted and free. There is the 3 am friend, the lunch walla friend. They cushion you better than a fragile relationship," he says.

Why Am I Alone?

Behind this boom lie the isolation of the Covid lockdowns and the work-from-home routines that followed. "That walled-in existence made us realise that people must experience people in all their fullness. And community relationships are stronger than individual relationships," says Ravinder Singh, author and founder of Let's Socialise, who began by hosting events at Malviya Nagar in Delhi, and now has a footprint in Mumbai, Bengaluru and even among NRI communities in London, Dubai and Toronto. Some of his members have now formed their own micro groups like those who go on themed holidays once a year. "They travelled to get a first-hand feel of Christmas in Kolkata, another did the offbeat circuit in Goa," he adds.

Urban isolation has also been the corollary of migration, with young people moving to other cities for jobs and starting out life on their own. Cut off from the anchorage of home and people they have grown up with, they find themselves at the deep end, awkward, intimidated, reticent. But at meetup groups, they find many more like them and find familiarity in numbers. Mitramesh founder Vasu Vashishth, 27, developed his platform after a one-and-a-half year research in cities across India, talking to young people at working hostels. "Everybody told me that after school and college, there's no platform for socialising and hanging out. Colleagues can never be your friends in a competitive place. Besides, you wouldn't want to see them in your private time and space," he says. He realised that doing one-off meetups, lasting two to three



ILLUSTRATION: SUVAJIT DEY

But such meetup groups are not only for the singles out there. For Megha Ajay, 27, an architect in Hyderabad, it became a space to keep her marriage healthy. Originally from Mysore, she met her husband at work. "Suddenly, we were working in the same space, we had common friends, all architects, and I was losing my perspective. Which is why we needed to give each other some space. Childhood friends and relatives have their own lives and it becomes difficult to navigate that friendship when you are adulting," says Megha, who has made new friends from diverse backgrounds and revived her passion for singing. She didn't sing in public after college, now she is rehearsing to record and release a song online. "Our marriage has strengthened because we have found our individual places to thrive," she adds. Sohini, too, feels that women often weave their lives around their boyfriends or husbands, relatives and friends when they should be looking beyond that. "Friendships are here to stay, boys and girls will come and go," she says.

A Safe Social Space

Safety is another feature that draws in members. Meetup hosts are particular about this with the likes of Mitramesh even offering drop services for women members after late evening events. Singh, who has not had a complaint till now, feels ticket prices are an automatic filter. He argues that the Rs 3,000 entry fee and the effort and courage needed to show up for real at a venue are deterrents for anybody who is purely seeking physical intimacy while hiding behind a screen.

Oopar Club takes care to ensure nobody feels vulnerable or lost. Organisers profile entrants by checking their LinkedIn profiles, calling them up to sense their intentions and insisting on KYC protocols. Mitramesh even has volunteers monitoring unusual behaviour during group activities. Of course, there's member feedback, too.

The Business of Socialisation

While the founders are passionate about reconnecting people in the real world, they have mastered the social entrepreneurship model. "Membership is subscription-based and for a fee of Rs 2,600 a year, you get access to our clubs and some events. Our premier events are ticketed and priced. Recently we got investors, too," says Sourabh.

Vasu, a portfolio manager who set up Mitramesh in July last year and currently has a 25,000-member community, explains that meetups work on the YouTube model, where the subscription base draws in both sponsors and advertisers. "Thousands of non-permanent members also attend our events across cities. The venue pays us to host our events because it gives them access to a new market. Brands sponsor events and there is targeted advertising within the platform. Besides, we run a tight operation and overheads are low," says Vasu, who is expanding his client base into Pune.

Does Love Have a Place?

In this universe of friendships, is there no space for love? Although that's not the intent, insist the three founders, if something organic develops between two people, they can pursue it privately. "So far only three couples have officialised their personal relationship but let's say, life is bigger," says Singh, who began writing romance novels after he lost his partner months before their wedding. He never lost faith in love but was hugely disappointed by the mismatch between the virtual and real on dating apps. "First own your authentic self. Without it, nothing works," he adds.

The idea of Let's Socialise germinated from the comments of Singh's fans on a thread he had posted. Many of them expressed how tongue-tied they were and shy to even talk about themselves, leave alone expressing their ideas or opinions. He encouraged them to start writing to each other on that thread itself. Once the thread grew longer, he realised there was potential for an offline experiment.

However, he does propose a reversal of fortunes. "Maybe apps should now think of another business model where it gets people to meet first after thorough checks and then uses digital tools to take future interactions forward. It's important to pick up the real vibe of a person, the way they smile, articulate their thoughts, the way they behave," says Singh.

Although meetup organisers have largely targeted the 20 to 40 age group, they are deeply aware about age-related loneliness. Singh has been trying to reach out to the 50-plus group of empty nesters and retirees on Facebook as most of them are not on Instagram, which is where most meetup platforms advertise their events. He is considering reaching out to them through RWAs, who organise several events for the elderly. Others are thinking of new formats like the "work-out challenge", "reading better challenge" or the "eating healthy together challenge." In fact, Singh is encouraging his young members to bring their parents and looking at more affordable venues for them. "Life still has a lot to give," says Vipula. "Who knows, a stranger could become your buddy."

THE URBAN TRIBE

While dating sites have lost their sheen, meetup platforms are the new convergence grounds, evolving as an antidote to loneliness

With youngsters moving to other cities for jobs, they feel uprooted. At meetup groups, they find many more like them and find familiarity in numbers

hours, negates the purpose of forging a friendly community. That's why he developed a format of long-term membership, so that professionals could meet regularly and develop a stronger confidence and bonds. "I want to be the best friend they never knew they needed. I want to promote a culture of growing and prospering together," says Vasu.

Mumbai girl Sohini Ganguly, 24, who is now a marketing professional in Noida, joined Mitramesh to find her feet in a new city, maintain a healthy work-life balance and carve her own identity without the reference points set by her family and society. "I was into speed-dating and was on every app once. I haven't felt the need to swipe my dating app in six months. Catfishing and superficiality are passé. Now I value real conversations with real people without the complexity of a relationship. If I ever form one, I will be better prepared because I am maturing as a person," she says. She loves karaoke nights and "jamming out" with her new circle of friends. She has also been able to build a network of lawyers, doc-

tors, corporates and CAs, widening her catchment area for business.

What she loves about meetups is that the hosts never let anybody sit idle or feel left out but draw them in organically. While Oopar club does "ice-breaker" games with a mix of 20 questions and dumb charades, where participants have to act out the answers for oth-

ers, Mitramesh has its volunteers blend in and make it easier for the newcomer to circulate. Sometimes groups are formed by a game of bingo, a game of chance where players match numbers assigned to them to numbers called out by a host. The players, who match numbers by row and house, form a winners' group. "The idea is to be seen," says Sourabh. That's encouragement for people to talk about whatever they are comfortable with, allowing for deeper engagement and a crossflow of ideas.

Rushabh admits that meetups have helped him emerge from his cocoon and transform himself enough to surprise his family. He has met people from different walks of life and is now able to conduct deep conversations about AI and electronics with as much ease as politics. He remembers how the hosts gave newcomers prompts that they had to express through Lego blocks. "Then we were asked to make a comic strip about a superhero addressing a social cause. You do more things together than alone. And my opinions were heard instead of being drowned out," he says.

On a Wing and a Petition

Vultures, Nature’s greatest scavengers and the best waste warriors of the planet, now have more than carrion to feed on — plastic

Rohini Nilekani

A WEDDING and a suggestion led to an unexpected rendezvous recently. It was an early morning in Bikaner, Rajasthan, when we set off to the Jorbeer Conservation Reserve. The experience was utopian and dystopian in equal measure.

Established more than 100 years ago by Maharaja Ganga Singh, then ruler of Bikaner, as a site suitable for discarding cattle carcasses, far from the palace community, Jorbeer continues to be a graveyard for thousands of animals — camels, goats and sheep, but specially for cows and bulls.

Ironically, in a country that has unwittingly killed most of its vultures, due to the indiscriminate use of diclofenac for cattle health, this 3,000-acre dumping ground is now host to visiting vultures from Siberia, Mongolia and other parts of Central Asia, Europe and the Himalayas.

In the space of an hour, we saw hundreds of them, including white-headed Egyptian vultures, glistening black cinereous vultures, Eurasian griffons, Himalayan griffons and more. Sometimes maligned as inauspicious, these bald-headed, strong-beaked scavengers have incredible eyesight, a keen sense of smell to tell edible, decomposed flesh from meat that is too rotten to eat, and enough acid in their digestive system to demolish the worst of bacteria.

Along with the powerfully beautiful vultures, there were other magnificent migratory raptors — imperial and steppe eagles, tawny eagles and greater spotted eagles. We even watched a lone white stork, one of Europe’s biggest and most recognisable birds, foraging on the ground.

What with all that, and species I don’t get to see in my hometown, Bangalore — the yellow-eyed pigeons and the white-eared bulbuls, the yellow-footed green pigeons and the red collared doves — I was a birder in paradise.

Until I tore my eyes away from my binoculars, to see plastic everywhere, as far as the head could turn. Years and years of untreated solid waste curled around trees, some buried below the sandy soil, thanks to gusty desert winds that cover up past sins.

The most heartbreaking scene was at the open wasteland, where cattle bones lay in the winter sun, feral dogs making a feast of the leftovers. All around the carcasses were remains of plastic bags. The huge birds hopped clumsily around ghostly white clumps, searching for flesh.

“Why do people come here to throw plastic, all the way from the city,” I asked our birding guide. The answer was shocking.



The writer is chairperson, Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, and author of *Samaaj, Sarkaar, Bazaar* — a citizen-first approach

ROHINI NILEKANI

What makes for a Symphony of Souls

My God lives in the eyes of the suffering, in the hands of the healers, in the hearts of the lovers

SLICE OF LIFE



Suvir Saran

Suvir Saran is a chef, author, educator and world traveller

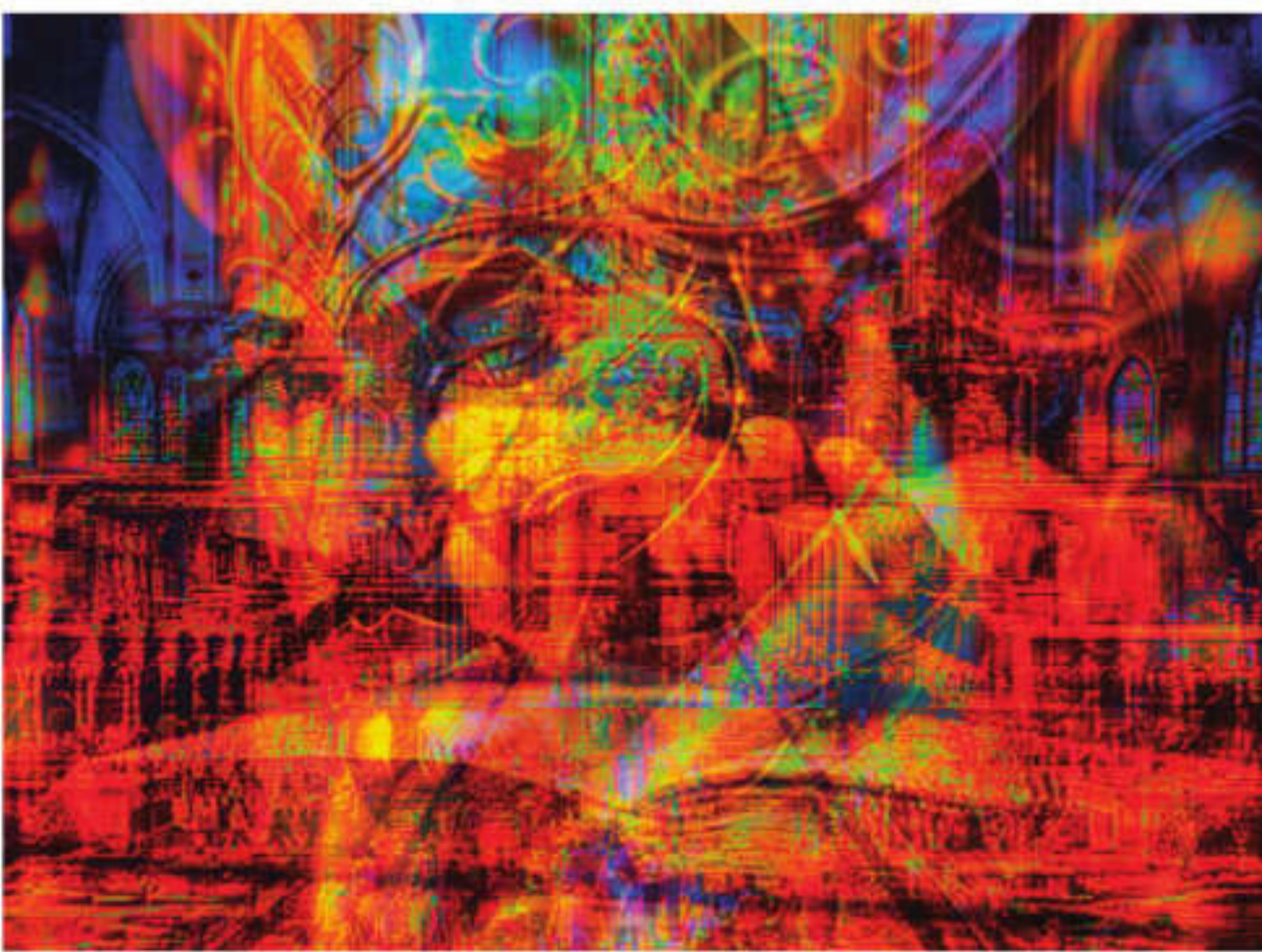
THERE ARE moments in life when the world of walls — the temples, the mosques, the synagogues, the rituals we cling to — falls away, and what remains is the boundless essence of the divine. It is an essence that cannot be confined to bricks or parchment, nor found in statues carved by trembling hands, nor captured in the ink of ancient texts. It is a whisper in the wind, a flicker of light in the soul, a luminous echo that reminds us that faith is not what we hold but what we give of ourselves.

I sat one evening with a young mentee, a boy aflame with ambition, desperate to become a doctor. His words that day, however, carried the heavy burden of judgment. He had quoted a verse from his holy book, calling a certain act “repressible”.

“What makes you think it is repressible?” I asked, not to confront but to coax, not to chastise but to challenge. “It is written,” he replied. I told him a story — not of reprimand but of revelation. I spoke of the Prophet, someone who transcended the times they lived in, someone who married a widowed

I believe Dali nicknamed you ‘The Little Infante’.

In 1963, we were spending our summer in Hotel Gabriel (in Paris), in front of Dali’s house, when we took part in a costumed dinner and my mother created this incredible ‘infante’ of a Velasquez-kind of dress by sewing the hotel bed cover to my dress, while having me wear my swimming buoy underneath. The next day Dali asked my father to take photographs with me and it was this charming moment that my father captured on his



SUVIR SARAN

WE ARE ONE

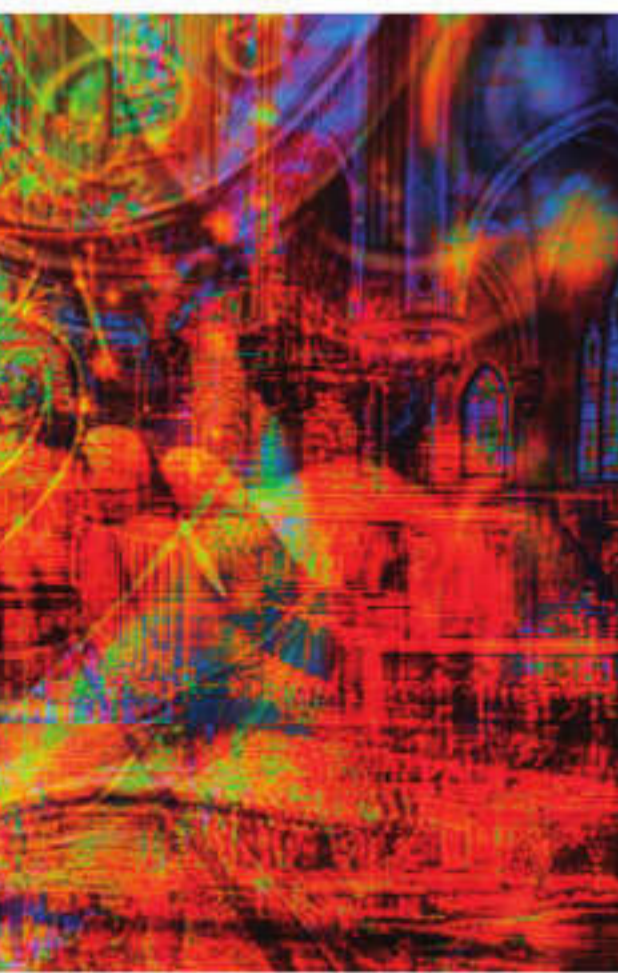
A family, a faith, a frame of reference — each can nurture us but can also narrow us

woman, a mother, a soul society had dismissed as lesser. It was an act of daring, of defiance, of devotion. It was faith not in words but in action, faith not as submission but as elevation. “If they lived today,” I said, “we would call them a feminist. For they saw not just a woman but her worth, not just her sorrow but her strength, not just her presence but her potential. And yet, we forget this story.

Rolleiflex camera. Later, each time I would see Dali, he would call me ‘La Petite Infante’.

Dali often placed different time periods and places together, bringing together different cultures. Does the collection reflect this?

Dali loved to bring bridges, correspondences between time and cultures. Nothing would make him happier than creating bonds via space and time. We can see these elements in the ‘Santiago of Compostella’ etching where Dali puts together hippy guitarists, but also a middle-age cellist with an elephant and a



Chinese character next to the famous Santiago of Compostela, a pilgrimage place. In many of the works presented here, you’ll see ‘yin-yang’ shapes, bringing the idea of love into the story.

You have previously described Dali as a workaholic who was always experimenting. Do you recall him in his studio?

Dali was always researching new techniques. In the traditional etching process, he would use roulettes, scissors, nails and all kinds of blunt tools. He would even use jewellers’ tools to be able to create tiny details,

strained. Or you can step out, shatter its boundaries, and connect with something infinite, something extraordinary.”

I told him that every square, every structure, has its limits. A family, a faith, a frame of reference — each can nurture us but each can also narrow us. To be truly faithful is to see the fractures, the flaws, the injustices of the world and act to heal them. To be truly devoted is to step beyond the comfort of confinement and into the wild, uncharted territory of compassion. “Faith,” I told him, “is not in the rituals we recite but in the lives we restore. It is not about the words we memorise but the wounds we mend. It is not about bowing our heads in reverence but about lifting others with our love.”

I quoted a line from a favourite ghazal: *Yeh tere mandir, yeh tere masjid, yeh but-parasti, yeh sajda-gaah... Agar inhi mein tere khuda ka ghar hai, toh phir us mein mera khuda nahin hai.* (These temples of yours, these mosques of yours, this idol worship, these places of prostration... If God resides only in these, then my God is not there). “

The poet’s words are a lament for a God too vast to be confined, too infinite to be caged by human constructs. “Faith,” I told him, “is not about where you bow but how you rise. It is not about finding God in stone but seeing them in the hearts of those who suffer, in the hands of those who heal, in the faces of those who love.”

I reminded him of the NCC anthem: *“Bikhre bikhre taare hain hum, lekin jhilmil ek hain.* (Scattered stars we are, but in our shimmering, we are one).” I told him that faith, like those stars, can often feel fractured, frag-

sometimes only visible with a magnifier. This personal way is called in French ‘La cuisine’, which means ‘The Kitchen’, referring to a large number of ingredients that each artist decides to use to create his own style. While working on the theme of Greek mythology, Dali found a magnificent dead octopus on the shore next to his house and decided to immerse the animal in acid to create a stunning Medusa, using the tentacles of the animal as the background of his work.

The exhibition is at Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, till February 13

mented, divided by borders and boundaries. But when we come together, when we let our light mingle and merge, we become something greater, something grander — a constellation, a universe, a symphony of souls.

“Hum sab Bharatiya hain,” I said. We are all Indian. We are all human. We are all one.

I spoke of the wounds inflicted in the name of faith — the wars, the hatred, the divisions that darken our shared history. But I also spoke of the light that faith, when lived with love, can bring: the feeding of the hungry, the sheltering of the homeless, the forgiveness of the unforgivable. These are the true acts of worship, the hymns that echo beyond temples, churches and mosques and rise to the heavens.

As I spoke, I saw a shift in him — a softening, a stillness, a spark of understanding. Perhaps, he would go on to become a doctor, not just of bodies but of souls. Perhaps, he would carry this lesson into his life, his relationships, his work. Perhaps, he would become a healer, not only of wounds but of divisions. And, perhaps, as we all take our own leaps of faith, we will find ourselves not in the confines of religion but in the expansiveness of humanity. For that, I believe, is the true *ibadat*. It is the prayer of the hands that serve, the hymn of the heart that forgives, the surrender of the soul that seeks not to conquer but to connect.

If God lives only in temples and mosques, then they are too small for me. My God lives in the eyes of the suffering, in the hands of the healers, in the hearts of the lovers. My God lives in the scattered stars, in the shimmering light, in the infinite oneness of all things.

‘Dali was fascinated by Indian myths’

Christine Argillet, curator of the Pierre Argillet collection, on exhibiting Salvador Dali’s works in India and her memories of the surrealist artist

Vandana Kalra

ONE OF the largest exhibitions of Salvador Dali’s works in the country, “Dali in India”, being presented by Bruno Art Group in Delhi, features over 200 works of the surrealist master from the collection of his confidante and publisher Pierre Argillet. In an email interview, his daughter Christine Argillet, based in Los Angeles and Paris, and curator of the collection, recalls the close bond the family shared with the Spanish artist, his constant experiments, and how a magnificent dead octopus became part of his work. Edited excerpts:

Several works of Dali from the collection have previously been exhibited. Can you share the curatorial vision for India?

The collection has been presented in major museums and art galleries all over the world, but Dali had always been fascinated by the Indian myths that have given birth to many of the Greek, Roman and European mythologies. For this reason, he had illustrated for my father the hippies movement by a series of 11 etchings in 1970. Dali wanted to bring a parallel between the fascination of Westerners for Indian spirituality, and of Indians for Western culture. For this reason, we found the opportunity to exhibit Dali in India extremely relevant.

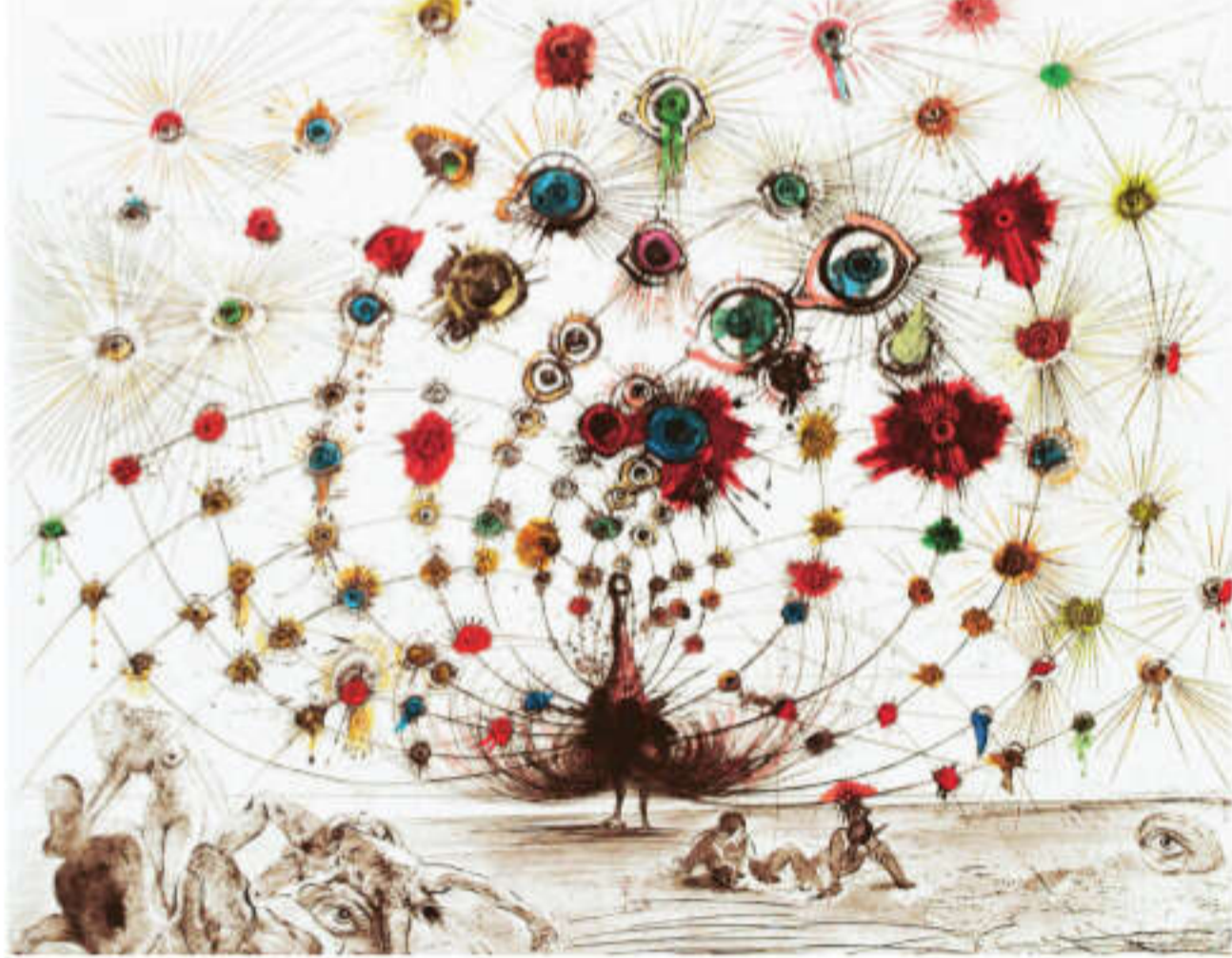
The exhibition spans several years of Dali’s oeuvre. Was there an attempt to include varied mediums and themes?

The exhibition mostly shows works from the ‘60s, which is the time when my father was most active as a publisher with Dali. So we have a majority of etchings, a few drawings and watercolours and a rare Aubusson hand-woven tapestry that we have chosen on the theme that talks about India. When my father and I went on a trip to India in 1969-70, he took about 500 photographs that he brought to Dali. It is at that time that Dali decided to work on the theme of hippies.

Your father and Dali shared a close association for almost 30 years. What are your early recollections of Dali?

I always remember Dali as a very humorous and elegant man, often having an eccentric and joyful way of being. He loved to play games, for instance, saying outlandish things to people who didn’t know him. They wouldn’t know if it was for real and would adopt a dismayed attitude, then Dali would follow up, with a very serious face. People would be lost between credulity and stupor.

On a more serious note, Dali loved to work with the golden ratio and he had often, on his studio easel, a geometric work that would serve a painting in process. He used to paint very rapidly, sometimes with a hairbrush, in a way that was fascinating. Meanwhile, he would be talking to my father on their common projects.



PHOTOS COURTESY: THE ARGILLET COLLECTION



BUILDING BRIDGES

(Clockwise from top) Salvador Dali pulling Christine Argillet’s hair; Christine Argillet today; Dali’s work — *Argus* ©: Prestel 116; a further 50 impressions of *Argus* were printed on Japanese paper and hand coloured

‘Alternate cinema can thrive only if mainstream films do well’

Director **SRIJIT MUKHERJI** and actor **PARAMBRATA CHATTERJEE** on their latest film, queer representation, and the state of Bengali cinema. The session was moderated by Premankur Biswas and Sayoni Aiyar

Premankur Biswas: Srijit, this is your 27th film and you have made eight web series too. You have also acted in films, mostly cameos, and all this has been in 14 years. How are you so prolific?

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: Everything I've done in life, I've done very wholeheartedly. I guess filmmaking and storytelling are not different. Also, I have a very efficient team.

Sayoni Aiyar: Many of us have wanted to quit college for cinema but you did the exact opposite. In 2009, you were well-entrenched in the industry but you gave it up for college. How did that happen?

PARAMBRATA CHATTERJEE: I have always wanted to be a filmmaker and not an actor. I started acting as a hobby and also as something that was earning me good pocket money. I was sure that I would quit that to pursue filmmaking, go to a film school but in 2001, when I was barely in my second year of college, my father passed away and I realised it was not the right time to quit. So I continued with it and became a household name on television. I was very happy for the first three to four years. There was a certain sense of stability and that started becoming a bit of a problem. I wanted to travel and study a bit more. I applied to universities in the UK. Thankfully, I got a full scholarship and I got to do what I wanted to.

Sayoni Aiyar: Srijit, tell us about the making of your new film *Shotyi Bole Shotyi Kichlu Nei...12 great actors, a supercast.*

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: Fourteen great actors, actually. Apart from the 12 we see in the trailer, we also have two great actors — Noor Aslam and Koushik Kar. In 2006, I adapted the original teleplay of *12 Angry Men* into a play called *Mindgame* in Bangalore. This text came to me through Basu Chatterjee's film *Ek Ruka Hua Faisla*. As a child, I stumbled on this incredible template and structure of storytelling where you have the interplay of 12 characters in a closed space. Recently, when I heard that *Ek Ruka Hua Faisla* was being remade in Bombay, I got in touch with the makers and said if you give us the rights, then we can adapt it in our way. That's how it got revived.

Premankur Biswas: Srijit, Basu Chatterjee's film was also an adaptation of a Sidney Lumet film. Both films had 12 angry men and from your trailer, I can make out there are two female members of the jury, which is very refreshing. Can you walk us through the decision?

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: The main challenge for

me was that it would have been quite anachronistic because post 1973, the jury system went out of work. I wanted to get into the mind space of lawmakers. There is no jury in this film. They are not jury members; they are family members, friends and acquaintances of the main guy who's going to come up with the verdict. I wanted to get into the mental and psychological space because primarily as a screenwriter, I have realised that there are actually a lot of voices in one's head.

Premankur Biswas: But that apart, representation is also important for us.

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: Absolutely. We needed representation from the other gender and hence the 12 angry men became 10 angry men and two very angry women.

Sayoni Aiyar: Anurag Kashyap recently used the word '*ghatiya*' when he was talking about Bangla cinema in comparison with other regional cinema. Why do you think commercial Bangla cinema is where it is today?

PARAMBRATA CHATTERJEE: I think that is because we stopped concentrating on commercial Bengali cinema. People perceive me as the poster boy of the alternate kind of Bengali cinema. But I have always believed that if mainstream cinema in a particular industry doesn't work, it's difficult to make any other kind of film. Our kind of cinema thrives on a bit of surplus. There was an alienation in 2011-12. While Bengali cinema was seeing a resurgence through filmmakers like Anjan Dutt, Srijit, Kaushik *da*, Kamal *da*, Kamalashwar Mukherjee, a lot of very important middle-road Bengali films were being made. Suddenly, the attention from making big mass entertainers was taken off and very carelessly made South remakes were dished out to the masses. I don't think the audience reacted to it well. A big chunk of West Bengal, if I may use the word RoB — the rest of Bengal — doesn't watch Bengali films. They don't care about Bengali films because they feel nobody cares about them.

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: In December, when a mass film called *Khadaan* starring Dev (Adhikari), one of Bengal's superstars, was releasing, I went full out promoting the film and people asked me why, this is not



SHASHI GHOSH

IN FOCUS

Srijit Mukherji (left) and Parambrata Chatterjee at Kolkata's first-ever edition of Screen Live

even your kind of cinema. I said my kind of cinema can only thrive if films like *Khadaan* are made and the size of the pie goes up.

Premankur Biswas: A prominent Tollywood commercial director once said that it's because of Srijit that our kind of cinema is not getting that attention. Do you feel *Bohurrupi* (2024), which also focuses on the rest of Bengal, is going to be the focus now or is the answer?

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: Definitely, that is the answer but I would not say focus. To that Tollywood director, I plead guilty. On the day of *Autograph*'s release, *Dui Prithibi*, another film, released with Jeet and Dev in the lead. Eventually, in terms of everlasting popularity, *Autograph* overtook *Dui Prithibi*. That ushered in an entirely new kind of Bengali cinema. But the commercial cinema didn't match up. That is not our fault. For the other kind of cinema, you had to come out of your lazy habit of re-making South Indian films frame by frame and give something original or indigenous like a *Kantara* or a *Pushpa*, where your folk myths and cultures are invoked.

Premankur Biswas: The trailer of your latest film touches upon several issues — sexual abuse and gender. Did you want to make it an issue-based film as they call it nowadays?

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: Questions and debates should follow films. The film is about a debate

that happens inside a person. In these debates, you have conflicting voices and through those voices, issues like child sexual abuse, gender and questions of language surface organically. Of course, issues of religion, communalism, secularism, homophobia and how they can percolate into even the most so-called emancipated mind of our times, come up, too. In the cinema hall, we do not do pamphlet distribution, we tell stories and out of the stories, if organically these issues emanate, that is where our job is done.

Premankur Biswas: In the film, Parambrata plays Rituparna Ghosh's character and it's probably a queer character. In this day and age of political correctness, did you worry about the reaction you'll get for not casting a queer person to play a queer character?

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: A person who is queer but not that great an actor as to match up to the rest of the cast would have been a problem. That would have been compromising. Given the financial health of the industry, Param, apart from being a great actor, is also commercially more feasible a face than Sujoy Chatterjee. But if he had to go by the original cast it was Ritu *da*, who again, was a great actor and commercially feasible, and by this sexual orientation, the correct choice.

Sayoni Aiyar: But what has been the feedback to the trailer and specifically to the queer character in the trailer?

SRIJIT MUKHERJI: Apart from one person who found it caricaturish, the rest of the feedback has been very promising. The word caricaturish means you have a heteronormative yardstick of the effeminate quotient in your mind. If you're going over that you're becoming

ing caricaturish, if you're going under, it's under-playing. This yardstick is very subjective. I have placed Shotto, my protagonist, somewhere in the middle of that spectrum.

PARAMBRATA CHATTERJEE: In this particular film, the narrative is not solely about this character; it's also about other prejudices and characters. If a film is entirely about a queer or conventionally/traditionally feminine character, then I would probably tone this one down a bit and make it more nuance-driven. But here you have to play a mix of nuance and popular perception because you only have a little more than two hours to drive home your point. So the sexual orientation bit of Shotto barely gets any time to be discussed. If I go digging deep into the nuances of his sexual orientation, then what Shotto represents in this motley crew of 12 people will not be communicated properly. In my understanding, it is a mix of nuance-driven portrayal and playing along the perception of the lowest common denominator from amongst the audiences.

Premankur Biswas: Param, can you talk about your journey, which has been more than a decade, in Bollywood and Bengali cinema and about leading ladies like Vidya Balan?

PARAMBRATA CHATTERJEE: After *Kahani* was released, everyone thought that I was going to pack my bags from here and move to Mumbai, which I did not do. *Kahani* happened as an accident. My actual stint with Bollywood started in 2019. Interestingly, it only expanded and became more frequent during the two phases of Covid because a lot of very potent OTT content was being made at that time. Yes, the trust has been lovely but I still am not based out of Bombay.

‘You need to acknowledge where you come from’

JUNAID KHAN and KHUSHI KAPOOR on their film *Loveyapa*, nepotism and coping with the unrealistic beauty standards of the industry.

The conversation was moderated by Jyoti Sharma Bawa and Sampada Sharma

Sampada Sharma: Bollywood has its ups and downs. *Baby John* and *Deva* did not do as well as expected. In that climate, how do you see *Loveyapa* getting a theatrical release?

JUNAID KHAN: As actors, we want more people to watch our films. But our producers and distributors understand the business better. If it was up to me, I'd be like, please watch it for free because I want everyone to watch it. But obviously, it's not practical in the real world. I like to defer to their better judgment on how to release a film.

KHUSHI KAPOOR: Ultimately, every film finds its space and its audience. I feel like we have had the privilege to be a part of such an amazing project.

Jyoti Sharma Bawa: Khushi, your father, Boney Kapoor is an old world producer. He is known for his generosity on sets. But at the same time, when a film like *Roop Ki Rani Choron Ka Raja* or *Maidaan* underperforms, how does he deal with this? Also, is he larger-than-life with you as well?

KHUSHI KAPOOR: My father is very passionate about his work and that's why he sees things on a larger-than-life scale. To me, he stands out more than anyone because he's willing to put in time, effort and money to make these movies.

He is the star of the house, the biggest diva. He played a role in *Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar* and didn't have many scenes in the film. He had to shoot in Delhi, and took 13

large suitcases along. I realised he had packed his entire wardrobe. He wore his own clothes on screen. When I visited him on set, he was dressed in the exact outfit he wears at home. I thought, 'Is he on a movie set, or is he just chilling at home?'

Sampada Sharma: In an interview, your sister Janhvi had spoken about how your mother never wanted you both to be in the movies. What made her say that?

KHUSHI KAPOOR: As a mother you don't want your children to go through any hardship. Being an actor can be mentally and physically taxing and she had started working since she was four. She wanted us to have a sheltered life.

Sampada Sharma: I want to go back to both your debut films. Khushi, yours was this Zoya Akhtar film on Netflix along with so many other people. Junaid, yours was a YRF film. Both huge films and political in nature. What made you choose them?

KHUSHI KAPOOR: Betty Cooper is an iconic character and I knew Zoya Akhtar was all heart. *The Archies* was the first audition I ever gave in my life. I didn't choose it because it had a political stance but because it was a sweet and wholesome film. I felt it was not a very serious film.

JUNAID KHAN: I liked the script. *Maharaj* is a sensitive film and Yash Raj is one of the biggest producers in the country. I trusted him to tell the story in a responsible way.



PRAVEEN KHANNA

REEL LIFE

Junaid Khan and Khushi Kapoor

Jyoti Sharma Bawa: Is there anything you would want to change in *The Archies* and the polarised reactions it received?

KHUSHI KAPOOR: Not everything is

made for everyone. *The Archies* was meant for a young audience and people who have come up to me and appreciated it are mostly under-16. So, marketing wise, it should have catered

to that audience. I don't regret it, I have learnt everything from that film and Zoya.

Jyoti Sharma Bawa: Was it harshly judged because it had star kids? Also, Vedang Raina really stood out in the film and he has no ties to a film family.

KHUSHI KAPOOR: Expectations are higher when you come from a certain back-

ground. We are here because we come from a place of privilege. We need to acknowledge where we come from, and appreciate our background. We work really hard too, but the main issue is when people in this position play it down by saying it is hard for everyone. Of course, everyone has to work hard in this profession, but you need to accept certain things, and I guess I can't control the way people perceive me.

Even before the first look of the film was released, there were certain impressions about the series. People will have an opinion no matter what you do.

Sampada Sharma: Khushi, you have spoken about unrealistic beauty standards. You have openly spoken about getting work done on yourself but kids who look up to you know you don't wake up like this and they know probably getting some work done is the

answer to looking like this. So how does that solve the problem of unrealistic beauty standards?

KHUSHI KAPOOR: It's a vicious cycle. When I was a young girl, I was made fun of for how I looked. I didn't look like my mother or sister. That takes a hit on your self-esteem as a very young child. I took a keen interest in vanity and wanting to look a certain way and I don't think that it is a bad thing, especially because I knew that these are the things people are pointing out. And I felt a certain way about it. In no way am I saying that this is something that everyone should do or needs to do at all. Of course, I haven't done the hundred things that people have said that I have done but it is a part of taking care of yourself. Sometimes you do skincare or facials or fillers if you want to. I don't think it should be something someone should be scrutinised for because it's a personal choice. You are not forcing

someone to do something or not condoning it in any way.

People had an issue with the way I looked when I was younger because I hadn't done anything and I was called certain names and then, after I came out and said 'yes, I changed the way I looked', people had an issue with it because I changed how I looked. So, I think, each to their own.

When Cancer Care Comes Closer Home

With the Budget pledging cancer day care centres at district hospitals, it's relief for patients, who have to rush to AIIMS, Delhi

Ankita Upadhyay

TWENTY-FOUR-YEAR OLD Abhishek Gautam from Agra is anxious about his mother's chemotherapy session at the AIIMS cancer day care centre in Delhi. He is awaiting his turn as 60 patients are either in the middle of therapy or waiting to get their infusions. Once he does get a slot, he will have to stay put for eight hours till the chemo gets over and doctors give a go-ahead for discharging his mother after assessing side effects. "Her chemo has to be administered every 21 days. For her comfort, we travel in a third AC train from Agra thrice, sometimes four times a month for consultations. The drugs are expensive too," says Abhishek, wondering how he could afford the time, money and effort for long-term treatment to save his mother's life.

Outside the six treatment rooms, the waiting area is full of hundreds of patients waiting for various diagnostic procedures and consultations, straining their ears for the announcement of their names and numbers. They have come from Nagpur, Darbhanga, Agra and Faridabad. "I wish the cancer day care centres would come up in district hospitals as announced in the Budget sooner. My mother has Stage III breast cancer. We have to leave at 6.30 am and reach AIIMS by 8.30 am so that we are inside the day care centre by 9 am and can list our names. However, we never get a slot before 11.30 am," says Sanjay Chauhan from Faridabad.

It is precisely to prevent this heavy patient burden on tertiary care hospitals in metropolitan cities, ease patient woes and improve access to essential cancer treatments at the district level that the government announced setting up cancer care centres at 759 district hospitals, pledging 200 of them by next year. As cancer cases continue to increase, these day-care centres — which will provide chemotherapy, essential medication, conduct biopsies and manage complications — will be

a godsend for patients in Tier II and Tier III cities, who will no longer have to travel to metros where treatment costs are significantly higher.

THE COST OF TRAVEL

In December, Abhishek took his mother for chemotherapy at NCI (National Cancer Institute), Jhajjar, after several rounds of rescheduled appointments. The family would take a train to Delhi and then a bus to Jhajjar. During the first and second chemo sessions, they missed their train back to Agra from Delhi and had to book a taxi instead. Then they put in a request for her third chemo session at AIIMS Delhi. "Apart from travel costs, her injection — Trastuzumab — costs Rs 7,500. That is not available at NCI Jhajjar and we had to procure it from outside. Sometimes my mother needs a bed as post-chemotherapy, she suffers from dizziness and vomiting," says Abhishek.

Sanjay says it is precisely because of overcrowding at AIIMS that he initially went to a private hospital for her therapy. Now that he has exhausted his private health insurance for surgical procedures worth Rs 9 lakh, he has chosen to get her chemotherapy done at AIIMS. "But the chemotherapy injection costs Rs 27,000, which I have to get from outside," he says.

WHY DISTRICT DAY CARE CENTRES CAN HELP IN EFFECTIVE OUTCOMES

Dr Atul Sharma, vice-chairman, Medical Oncology, Cancer Care/Oncology at Max Hospital in Delhi, has seen a deluge of patients coming for first-line chemotherapy during his stint at AIIMS Delhi. "Now with day care centres in district hospitals, the patient can get one round of chemotherapy there. Once the treatment protocol is set and should complications arise, subsequent therapy sessions can be given at the nearest urban centres," he says. This could cut down delays and queues.

As of now, there is no clarity on who will be providing the drugs, the Centre or State. "The drug provisioning will help a lot of pa-



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If the chemotherapy centre happens to be closer home, patients can save on out-of-pocket expenses

tients cut costs," he says.

Many district hospitals currently do not offer biopsy services, even for in-patients. In fact, some medical colleges do not provide any cancer treatment at all. "There is a need to address this gap so that we can offer these services at a day-care centre," says Dr Abhishek Shankar, an oncologist at AIIMS. Beyond infrastructure limitations, there may also be challenges related to patient trust and demand. "People travel to major centres like AIIMS Delhi because they trust they will receive proper care. For these district-level centres to succeed, the government will need to build trust in the system so that patients feel confident about getting themselves treated there instead of traveling to Delhi and Mumbai," he adds.

HOW DAY CARE CENTRES CAN CUT

OUT-OF-POCKET EXPENSES

Patients usually have chemotherapy cycles every two or three weeks. "Currently, patients have to repeatedly come for around six months to a tertiary care cancer centre for chemotherapy. If this centre happens to be closer to their homes, their out-of-pocket expenses will go down," says Dr Sharma. The cost multiplies because at least two family members have to accompany a patient and even arrange lodging in a city.

Dr Sharma says all that patients need to do now is go to the tertiary hospital, get a shot of chemotherapy there, then go back to their district hospital for the remaining sessions. At the end of the chemotherapy, they can do a follow-up visit to the tertiary centre. This would cut down the frequency of travel. "If the government is able to provide the kind of chemotherapy drugs available at big insti-



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CARE CENTRE BENEFITS

ACCESSIBILITY: Improve access to cancer care for people living in rural areas who may face challenges in reaching specialised cancer centers due to distance and cost

EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT: Facilitate early detection through screening and prompt treatment

BASIC CANCER SERVICES: Offer basic cancer treatment options like chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and palliative care, depending on their capacity and available expertise

REFERRAL SYSTEM: Refer complex cases requiring advanced treatments to Regional Cancer Centres (RCCs)

tutes like AIIMS, the patient can indeed save a lot of money and resources in procuring them," he says.

THREE THINGS REQUIRED FOR CANCER DAY CARE CENTRES IN DISTRICTS

According to Dr Sharma, the government should first and foremost appoint a physician with some basic knowledge about chemotherapy and cancer drugs. Second, the nursing staff should have some form of training to handle these drugs and prepare mixes for the patient. They should also be trained to deal with side effects of chemotherapy like excessive diarrhoea, vomiting and a fall in blood count. Third, the government should subsidise drug costs to enable access.

IS THERE ENOUGH CANCER AWARENESS?

While the government is expanding treatment infrastructure, Sanjay says that the government should simultaneously drive an awareness campaign on cancer along the lines of HIV and Covid. "My mother didn't tell me about her tumour. She hesitated. She also wasn't aware that this could lead to something serious. The government has generated awareness about mouth cancer but not done enough for breast cancer," he says.

ADVERTORIAL

The Nilgiris are also home to the Toda tribe, an indigenous community with a rich cultural heritage. Visitors can learn about the Toda's traditional way of life, their unique handicrafts, and their connection to the land. The Toda's distinctive barrel-shaped huts and intricate embroidery are a testament to their enduring cultural legacy.

Pair your freshly brewed Nilgiri tea with local delicacies like varkey biscuits from Ooty or homemade jams from Coonoor, enhancing the flavours with a touch of regional authenticity.

Tea Festivals and Events: Throughout the year, various tea festivals and events are held across India. One of the most popular tea festivals is the Assam Tea Festival, held annually in the heart of Assam. The event features tea-tasting sessions, cultural performances, and guided tours of the tea estates. Visitors can also participate in workshops on tea blending and brewing, gaining a deeper understanding of the art and science behind a perfect cup of tea.

In Darjeeling, the Darjeeling Tea and Tourism Festival is a major attraction. This festival showcases the best of Darjeeling tea, with events such as tea-tasting sessions, plantation tours, and cultural performances. The festival also includes a tea auction, where visitors can bid on some of the finest teas produced in the region.

The Nilgiris also host their own tea festival, known as the Nilgiri Tea Festival. This event highlights the region's tea culture and offers visitors a chance to explore the picturesque tea gardens. The festival provides a comprehensive experience of the Nilgiri tea heritage. Visitors can also enjoy gourmet meals featuring tea-infused dishes, adding a unique culinary dimension to the festival.

Tea tourism in India is not just about tasting different varieties of tea; it's about immersing oneself in the culture, history, and natural beauty of the tea-growing regions. So, whether you are a tea connoisseur or simply a curious traveller, I invite you to embark on this journey through India's tea gardens. Experience the rich heritage, the unique flavours, and the luxurious experiences that make tea tourism in India a true celebration of life!

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Tea Tourism in India

A Journey through India's Tea Gardens



discovering how a simple leaf transforms into the perfect cup.

For a deeper experience, stay in one of Assam's heritage tea bungalows. Set amid sprawling tea estates, these bungalows offer a blend of history and comfort. Guided tours of the plantations, home-cooked meals featuring local flavours, and quiet moments surrounded by green landscapes make for an unforgettable stay.

Assam's tea story begins with the Singpho tribe, who discovered wild tea plants in the region long before tea became a global commodity. Their traditional methods of tea preparation laid the foundation for Assam's thriving tea industry. Learning about the Singpho's culture and their connection to tea adds depth to the experience, showing how tea is not just a product but part of the land's identity.

The Charm of Darjeeling: Perched high in the foothills of the Himalayas, Darjeeling is often referred to as the 'Queen of the Hills.' The cool climate, high altitude, and misty air here create the perfect conditions for producing the delicate and floral notes that define Darjeeling tea.

As you explore the tea estates of Darjeeling, you will be greeted by breathtaking landscapes that seem to stretch endlessly - rolling carpets of verdant tea bushes cascading down hillsides, framed by the snow-dusted peaks in the background. The crisp

mountain air carries the subtle fragrance of fresh tea leaves mingling with the earthy scent of the Himalayan forests. Walking through these estates, you can witness the meticulous process of plucking the tender tea leaves, which are then carefully processed to create the world-famous Darjeeling tea.

One of the most luxurious experiences in Darjeeling is staying at a heritage tea resort. Imagine waking up to the sight of the sun rising over the Himalayas, enjoying a cup of freshly brewed Darjeeling tea on your private balcony, and taking leisurely walks through the tea gardens. The experience is heightened by the charm of colonial-era bungalows, complete with antique furnishings and cosy fireplaces that echo the region's rich history. Many of these resorts also offer guided tours of the tea estates, where you can learn about the history and intricacies of tea production.

A notable figure in Darjeeling's tea history is Dr. Campbell, a British civil surgeon who is credited with planting the first tea seeds in the region in the 1840s. His experiments with tea cultivation laid the foundation for what would become one of the most prestigious tea-producing regions in the world. Today, visitors can explore the Makibari Tea Estate, one of the oldest and most famous tea estates in Darjeeling, and learn about its rich heritage and sustainable farming practices.

Darjeeling tea is often referred to as

the 'Champagne of Teas' due to its unique muscatel flavour, which is a result of the specific climate and soil conditions of the region. Visitors can indulge in tea tasting sessions where expert tea sommeliers guide them through the subtle differences between the first flush, second flush, and autumnal teas, each offering a distinct flavour profile.

To complement the tea experience, savour local delicacies such as momo dumplings, thukpa, and traditional Nepali and Tibetan cuisine, which pair wonderfully with a steaming cup of Darjeeling tea. Each season brings a new charm to the region - from the fresh, vibrant greenery of spring to the golden hues of autumn, making every visit unique.

The Nilgiri Experience: The Nilgiri Hills, often referred to as the 'Blue Mountains,' are home to some of the most picturesque tea gardens in India. The tea produced here is known for its fragrant and brisk flavour, making it a favourite among tea connoisseurs.

Here, you will be enchanted by the serene and tranquil environment. The sight of tea bushes neatly arranged on the slopes, interspersed with tall eucalyptus trees, creates a mesmerising landscape. The crisp mountain air carries the faint, invigorating aroma of freshly plucked tea leaves mingling with the cool scent of eucalyptus. As you walk through the estates, the gentle rustle of leaves underfoot and the distant call of hill birds create a symphony unique to

these highlands. Visitors can take guided tours of the plantations, where they can learn about the tea-making process, from plucking the leaves to the final stages of production.

In the Nilgiris too, guests can enjoy personalised tours of the tea estates, indulge in gourmet meals featuring tea-infused dishes, and relax in the serene surroundings. The experience of staying in these bungalows, with their antique furnishings and cosy fireplaces, transports you back to a bygone era. Tea cultivation in the Nilgiris dates back to the British colonial era, with estates established in the 19th century. Many of these estates still retain their colonial charm, with bungalows that once housed British planters now serving as heritage stays.

One unique aspect of tea tourism in the Nilgiris is the opportunity to participate in tea blending workshops. These workshops allow visitors to create their own custom tea blends, guided by expert tea masters. It is a hands-on experience that provides a deeper appreciation for the art and science of tea blending. The Nilgiris are renowned for their unique frost teas, harvested during the coldest months, imparting a distinct, delicate flavour prized by tea aficionados worldwide. Additionally, the region produces a variety of teas including black, green, and white teas, each with its own distinctive profile influenced by the high-altitude climate.