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Opposition Hopes Lakhimpur Kheri Tragedy Arrests BJP's Juggernaut

ASHISH CHANDRA, NISHIT NAVIN AND SANGAM



The Lakhimpur Kheri Tragedy is being exploited by the opposition who want to make it an election issue

Zee News

As the upcoming elections in Uttar Pradesh are being fought on caste, communal and law and order issues, the opposition senses an opportunity to arrest the influence of the BJP and get ready for the 2024 general elections. An analysis by INK Reporters

UTTAR PRADESH has been in turmoil for the past few weeks over the fallout of the Lakhimpur Kheri incident where a speeding car registered in the name of Ajay Mishra, Union Minister of Home Affairs, along with two other cars mowed down three farmers and a journalist who were at a protest site. His son, Ashish Mishra, was reportedly travelling with the convoy according to opposition parties. In retaliation, an angry mob lynched the driver and two others. This has set off a huge political controversy with the opposition raising a hue and cry.

Chief minister Yogi Adityanath swung into action not in diffus-

ing the tension, but in blocking all routes that lead to Lakhimpur Kheri. Priyanka Gandhi, the general secretary of the Uttar Pradesh Congress was not allowed to visit the site. She was detained by the police at the Sitapur-Lakhimpur border. Former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav who tried to protest outside his house was detained and put under house arrest.

Opposition parties demanded the immediate resignation or dismissal of Ajay Mishra and want a judicial inquiry into the case.

As no action was taken, the Supreme Court took suo moto cognisance of the case and questioned why no arrests were made. In a stinging remark, the court said that

the UP police did not seem to be serious in tackling the brutal crime. Very soon, Ashish Mishra was arrested by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of UP police as discrepancies appeared in his statement. Vivek Singh, a member of the BJP IT cell in UP, said, "There is no evidence to prove the involvement of Ashish Mishra in the violence. In fact, in his village of Banveerpur, anyone would testify that he was present at the dangal (wrestling) event on that day, where Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Maurya was the chief guest. This is a case of mistaken identity. The man seen coming out of the convoy is Sumit Jaiswal, Vice-President of BJP- Lakhimpur Kheri, who wore an orange shirt like Ashish Mishra on that day." However, a report by NDTV said that the GPS location of Ashish Mishra's phone indicat-

ed that he was near the crime scene. A major reason why Ajay Mishra has not been removed from the ministry is because of his Brahmin identity. Brahmins constitute as much as 12 percent of the population in UP and can be a major deciding factor in the coming assembly election.

It was the support of Brahmins that helped the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) gain power in 2007 and was a driving force behind BJP's thumping victory in 2017.

Delhi based political analyst Dr. Sajjan Kumar told INK: "Even in states where the Brahmin voters are less than five percent, they hold prestigious and influential positions in the socio-economic sphere. UP is no different. So, the larger population share, coupled with the socio-political and intellectual influence of the Brahmins,

make them crucial voters for political parties in UP.”

Since the 90s, Brahmins have been the core voters of the BJP. The removal would have upset the community especially in the Central UP region. With elections round the corner, it's a risk BJP cannot afford to take.

The role and presence of Jats is another significant factor that plays a major role in the political dynamics of the state. They constitute 8.6 percent of the population. In Western UP, they are a significant 17 percent having a direct influence on as many as 40 assembly seats.

According to a post-poll study of the 2012 Assembly election by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, BJP got just seven percent Jat votes. However, post the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013, this number went up to a whopping 77 percent showcasing the deep polarisation in western UP politics.

The farmer's agitation essentially led by Jats may result in BJP losing their support in the upcoming elections. This comes in the wake of Akhilesh Yadav announcing his party's alliance with Rashtriya Lok Dal for the upcoming elections. With this move, the Muslims and the Jats who had separated after the riots, may come together to back the alliance.

Rakesh Tikait, the national spokesperson of Bharatiya Kisan Union, emerged as the undisputed farmer

leader in the agitation against the three farm laws. His active role in quickly resolving the Lakhimpur Kheri incident has made many in the opposition party question his loyalty towards the cause.

According to Dr. Kumar, Tikait had two options before himself, either defuse the situation quickly by making realistic demands or make unrealistic demands and allow the situation to linger on. “Had Tikait chosen the second path, it could have changed the nature of protest from ‘farmer versus government’ to ‘Sikh vs Hindu’. This would have disturbed the social harmony not just within UP but nationwide and its implication would have been felt internationally considering the strong Sikh diaspora,” he added.

While some opposition parties are

accusing Tikait of taking “blood money” for the victim's families by demanding compensation, Dr. Kumar calls his decision “mature”.

Significance of UP Elections

While UP's significance in the Lok Sabha election is huge given its 80 Lok Sabha seats out of 543, the state also has an important role to play when it comes to deciding who becomes the next President of the country. In the presidential election, votes of both MPs and MLAs are counted. The vote of MLAs of each state depends on its respective population and number of seats.

UP, which has 403 MLAs which is the largest that any state has, can be a deciding factor. The presidential election is scheduled just after the UP election as the tenure of

President Ram Nath Kovind ends in July 2022.

Currently, the National Democratic Alliance led by BJP has 49.9% votes for the presidential election. However, this could dramatically change if the BJP loses a significant number of seats as it will have to persuade smaller parties for votes to elect the president they want.

The opposition senses a great opportunity here and are doing all it could to take on the BJP.

If BJP wins, it will also make up for their recent loss in West Bengal against Mamta Banerjee's All India Trinamool Congress.

If the opposition is able to stop the BJP's juggernaut in UP, it will be a huge psychological win and perhaps, the decline of BJP as an electoral force.



India Today

No Liquor for 45 Days!

DEBOMITA DE AND SURAMYA KAUSHIK

THE Government of Delhi's new excise policy will result in the closure of all private liquor shops in the capital till November 16. Once hotels, clubs, motels, restaurants, bars, and others get their new liquor licences, they would be allowed to operate from November 17 at licenced premises for a year. During relaxation periods of the Covid-19 pandemic, Delhi witnessed a rush at liquor stores, exposing the high number of unregistered outlets in the capital. Currently, 720 liquor stores are operating in Delhi of which 60% are owned by the government, with 40% privately owned. The government owns 88 country liquor stores and 372 English liquor stores. There are 260 privately owned stores.

Under the new policy, the city would be divided into 32 zones. Each zone will have ten wards, and each ward will have 27 liquor vendors. After privately owned liquor shops are licenced, Delhi is expected to have around 850 liquor

outlets.

In the 45-day transition period, only government-owned liquor shops will remain open and have been advised to stock up, anticipating an expected surge in the demand. The excise agency has un-

Whatshot



dertaken precautionary measures to check for illicit liquor entering the city from neighbouring states. Delhi generates a majority of its revenue from liquor stores. With the closure of private outlets, liquor sales in government shops will increase. Therefore, to attract buyers, private liquor stores will be authorised to provide discounts for promotions during the festival season.

The new policy promises a revamped experience in liquor stores in the city, wherein customers can walk in and hand-pick their favorite brands. Along with liquor, the shops will also be allowed to stock snacks and other eatables.

The new excise policy not only ensures better facilities for customers but also systemizes the large-scale business of liquor selling in the national capital that is largely illegal.

Over 1000 Contractual Government School Teachers Jobless in Delhi



Twitter

Teachers protesting in order to express their displeasure

MANSI VERMA AND SHRIYA HANDOO

OVER a thousand contractual school teachers in the capital have been rendered jobless since the last 17 months as both the North and South Delhi Municipal Corporations failed to renew their contracts. They received their last salary on May 8, 2020.

Their contracts were up for renewal in May 2021. Teachers told the INK that they went to the municipal offices numerous times to enquire about it only to be told to come in later. No specific reason was given for the non renewal of contracts and they were also not served termination notices.

Ironically, many of these teachers had helped in the distribution of ration during the pandemic and were considered frontline workers. Anil Shaukeen, who used to teach at a Lajpat Nagar school said, "I used to teach in the online mode even after our contracts lapsed.

Unofficially, we never stopped working. Neither are we counted as teachers anymore, nor are we remunerated for the same."

Another teacher, Tanu, who has taught for 11 years at the SDMC Primary Boys School, New Delhi, said, "We visited the Municipal Corporation of Delhi office to enquire about the status of our contracts, but they kept asking us to come later and kept extending the dates again and again."

"We are not counted as teachers anymore, nor are we remunerated."

-Anil Shaukeen,
Teacher

However, officials are treating the issue in a matter-of-fact way without considering how the pandemic has played havoc with thousands of households where many of these teachers were the sole breadwinners. One of them from

the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) died by suicide as he could not make ends meet after so many months of unemployment.

M M Mandal, Deputy Director, Education Department of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation, said, "We are not bound to

renew the contracts every year. Due to the pandemic, the schools have remained closed this year. So why is there a need to get these teachers on a contractual basis?"

However, Tanu who is also a representative from the Contractu-

al Teachers Welfare Association, Delhi, said, "Last time when we went to the Delhi Municipal Corporation Mayor's office, they assured us that our contracts would be renewed by October 7th. We are still waiting."

Saurabh Bhardwaj, AAP National Spokesperson, has publicly claimed for the past one-and-a-half years that the NDMC has not been providing education to primary school students and has therefore not renewed the contracts. It has now become a political hot potato. Praveen Shankar Kapoor, spokesperson of the Delhi BJP, blamed the Arvind Kejriwal government and said that the state government had stopped paying salaries of contractual teachers in May 2020, after which the NDMC had no option but to suspend their contracts.

The tragic story involving thousands of teachers and their struggling households snowballs into an uncertain future. As civic bodies and political parties play out their murky games, the wait seems to be unending for the traumatised teachers.

Marriage Can Wait, Childhood Cannot

ASMITA PANT AND DAMINI SOLANKI

THE Ashok Gehlot-led government received a lot of flak for the recent passage of the Rajasthan Compulsory Marriage Registration (Amendment) Bill, 2021 as the controversial bill mandates the registration of child marriages. The opposition suggests it would virtually legalise it. While many continue to oppose the bill as the government defends it, the larger question many activists are asking is why Indian society accepts child marriages.

Dreaming of becoming a teacher, Pooja from Alwar in Rajasthan wanted to appear for the Rajasthan Eligibility Examination for Teachers. But that remained another dream. “How do I prepare for my exams when I have a six-year-old to take care of apart from managing a house?”

Unlike many others, I was fortunate enough to complete my school education. I got married at 14 but convinced my father to let me complete my education,” she said.

Gauna is a ceremonious occasion associated with child marriages where the girl leaves her natal house years after marriage. “I had my gauna after I completed my education. I wanted to get a government job. I’m not able to prepare well because I spend most of my time looking after my child

and husband,” she said.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the number of child marriages in India witnessed a whopping rise of 50 percent in 2020 as compared to 2019.

In 2020, as many as 785 cases were registered under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. Karnataka led with the maximum cases followed by Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. In 2019, there were 523 cases while in 2018 there were 501 cases. Cases have been rising, not falling. In 2015, there were only 293 cases. The law considers it a child marriage if the girl is under 18 and the boy under 21.

Despite legal systems in place against child marriages, implementation has been obviously tardy. The practice is fairly common in rural India.

A native of Peepliya, Madhya Pradesh, 22-year-old Sangeeta Chawda is one of the many victims who suffered due to the evil practice. “I was 16 and my husband was 20 when we married. We were a poor family. I had three younger sisters. My father got me married at a young age as it was difficult to provide for the whole family,” said Sangeeta who has two sons aged five and two.

Recalling the reason behind her early marriage, Pooja says, “This

is a very common practice in villages. That’s how it is. My mother-in-law insisted that she would marry her elder son with my sister

Rajesh Singhi, the founder of Ibtada, an NGO working towards women empowerment for the last two decades, told INK: “Life as a

“My mother-in-law insisted that she would marry her elder son with my sister only if I was married to the younger one.”

-Pooja

only if I was married to the younger one. Hence despite my refusal, I was forced to give in to the demands of my elders.” Marrying sisters from the same family isn’t the only tradition. The elder sisters are often expected to give up their dreams and independence to secure the interest of the younger sisters.

“I wanted to study further but had to drop out after class ten as I got engaged. Being the eldest daughter in India is tough. I agreed to the marriage, thinking of my sisters, but when I contemplate it now, I feel my life would have

turned out to be good and different if I had gone to college,” Sangeeta said.

girl child in India is difficult. Most of the age-old conventions focus on suppressing the women rather than maintaining a balance in society as tradition principally should. Until and unless we decide to fight off these old practices, one at a time, we won’t be able to progress further.”

It seems it will take a long time for the NCRB statistics of the occurrence of child marriages to improve.



Ashok Gehlot has attracted flak for the bill as critics feel that it legalizes Child Marriage

Congress Gambles with Dalit Card in Punjab

NISHIT NAVIN AND SANGAM

TheQuint



The Congress is battling infighting in Punjab threatening to impact the coming Elections.

IN a surprising move, Charanjit Singh Channi, was recently appointed the Chief Minister of Punjab, replacing the two-time Chief Minister Captain Amrinder Singh. Channi, the former Minister of Technical Education and Training is the first-ever Dalit to head the state.

After the removal of Singh, names of stalwarts like Ambika Soni, Sunil Jhakar, and Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa were making the rounds as front-runners to the coveted post. However, Congress chose Channi who happens to be the first non-Jat Sikh to hold the office since Giani Zail Singh (1972-77).

Amit Bhatia, member of BJP IT cell said, “Congress has no issues or development agenda left, and so it is indulging in cheap tactics. The public knows that the grand old party is ideologically bankrupt. The Modi government’s welfare schemes like the Direct Benefit Transfer, Ujjawala Yojna and Swach Bharat Abhiyaan are enough to appeal to the subaltern castes.”

The Congress, which had traditionally avoided community-based identity politics, is now completely into it. For the same reason, it is importing and supporting regional leaders like Jignesh Mevani and Chandrashekhar Ravan. After the Dalit atrocities in Una, Hathras, and elsewhere in the recent past, Congress wants to challenge right-wing hegemony using these young leaders.

Dr. Kumar, points out, “The main limitation with these leaders is that they are only limited to their region, despite all media focus. They were inducted into Congress knowing that BJP is not the first choice of Dalits.”

“The BJP is not at all worried about Mevani’s induction. Patidars can do more harm to the saffron party in Gujarat than Dalits as the party has been traditionally dependent on this politically dominant community for its victory. Moreover, Mevani’s induction cannot mobilise Dalits across and beyond Gujarat,” he added.

Congress is also trying to expand its Dalit majority in UP. In the last

election, the Congress worked closely with Chandrashekhar Ravan, who supported the Saharanpur candidate of the Congress against BSP. It remains to be seen whether Ravan joins Congress officially or forms his political outfit and aligns with the Congress in upcoming state elections.

Interestingly, all these leaders are either left-leaning or from the left parties. To counter right-wing populism, the Congress leadership is adopting left-wing populism,

which dominated Indian politics in the ‘70s and ‘80s. With left parties diminishing from India, the Congress

is emerging as the neo left.

Punjab’s socio-political sphere has been dominated by the Jat Sikhs since its formation in 1966. Therefore, Channi’s appointment can be seen as a bold move by Congress. However, will this move help the party score a win in the 2022 assembly elections? It is a question that even analysts are debating.

“Dalits were never consolidated behind a party. Sikh Dalits do not relate to Hindu Dalits”

**-Dr. Sajjan Kumar,
Political Analyst**

India's SAFAR Gets International Recognition

ASHISH CHANDRA AND SNEHA MOTHEY

INDIA's first indigenous air quality forecasting framework, SAFAR, (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research) has got international acceptance. This framework was mandated under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) which was launched in 2019. One of the aims of NCAP is to expand the national air quality monitoring network.

SAFAR was designed and developed by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, a constituent of India's Ministry of Earth Sciences.

In a recently released research paper by ELSEVIER, SAFAR was peer reviewed under the title, 'India's maiden air quality forecasting framework for megacities of divergent environments: The SAFAR-project'. According to the latest reports, the SAFAR frame-

work which was operational in four cities (Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad) will now be expanded to 132 cities across the country with a population of over ten lakh. One of the major goals of NCAP is to reduce the concentration of PM 2.5 pollutants by 20-30 % in 122 selected cities by 2024.

The World Air Quality Report 2020 defines PM 2.5 as ambient airborne particulates that measure up to 2.5 microns in size. The report further calls PM 2.5 as one of the worst harmful pollutants to human health.

According to the ELSEVIER research paper, SAFAR acts as an early warning framework and can predict air quality three days in advance, and particularly the concentration of PM 2.5 helping the authorities warn the vulnerable population in a timely manner. This is critical as India is the third

world's worst air polluted country according to the World Air Quality Report 2020. The implication of this is shown in a recent study by Lancet, according to which 1.24 million people in India died due to air pollution in 2017.

In recognition of this scientific

achievement, Aditya Shivpuri, an environmentalist and founder of Hends Foundation says, "I appreciate the efforts and concern of our Government in saving the environment but I believe that they can do more".



Getty Images/AFP/S. Hussain
Getty Images

Timely Action by Kerala Prevents Nipah from Spreading

MEENAKSHI MAIDAS AND RIYA ASHOK MADAYI

WHEN the deadly Nipah virus was detected in Kerala last month, health officials in India panicked. But the state with its alert health apparatus swung to immediately contain it. When a 12-year-old was detected with the Nipah virus in a private hospital in Kozhikode, health officials in Kerala immediately put his village of Chathamangalam under strict surveillance to prevent it from spreading. Not a single case was reported after that. Unfortunately, the child died.

Dr. Chandni Sajeevan, Head of the Emergency Department at the Kozhikode Medical College, told INK: "Once the Nipah case was confirmed, three wards went into lockdown and no movement was allowed. After identification, preliminary meetings were held with the Health Minister to map out plans for observation. The people who came in close contact with the patient were kept in the Nipah Isolation Ward in the hospital for 21

days." As many as 87 people were quarantined and monitored.

As a part of the management plan, Kerala set up round-the-clock surveillance rooms and call centres to ensure that the Nipah virus is minutely monitored and does not spread.

Immediately after the Nipah case was reported, authorities launched an active case search in the family and the village. Also, areas that had a similar topography like Malappuram were also targeted for action. Meanwhile, New Delhi advised active contact tracing to be conducted that would cover the past 12 days before the first case was detected. Public health measures included strict quarantining of contacts, isolation of possible suspects, and lab testing of samples.

One of the main challenges faced by the doctors at the time of the outbreak was to identify whether symptoms of fever were related to Covid or Nipah. Two separate isolation wards for Covid and Nipah

were created and individual isolation was followed to stop further spread.

Nipah virus is a bat-borne virus that causes infection in humans and other animals and is dreaded as it has a high mortality rate.

It has been more than a month

since the first case of Nipah virus was reported this year and Kerala has not detected any further cases.

The Nipah virus struck Kerala when it was already grappling with the highest caseload of Covid-19 cases in India.



An empty Nipah ward in Kerala

Times of India

Over 2,400 Rhino Horns Destroyed in Assam

ANAND SINGHA, ASHISH CHANDRA AND YAGNOSENI DAS

NEARLY 2,479 horns of Rhinoceros were destroyed by the Assam government recently to demonstrate a stern message of how it would crack down on poaching and also how the horns had no medicinal value. It is largely believed that rhino horns have aphrodisiac properties and fetch millions of dollars in the international market with a kilo estimated to cost around 65,000 US dollars (approx. Rs. 50 lakh).

The horns were destroyed by setting it on fire in a symbolic way at Bokakhar near the Kaziranga National Park which is an UNESCO World Heritage Site in the presence of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and ten cabinet members.

A few years ago, the Indian rhinoceros were found in Pakistan, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. However, with constant degradation of natural habitat and poaching, they are now only spotted in India and Nepal. The poaching was triggered for the horns. People in China, Korea, Malaysia and India believe that the horns carry healing properties.

The ferocious intensity of the poaching resulted in the rhino population dwindling to just 75

in 1905. However, due to intense conservation efforts, their population shot up to 3,600. India has around 3000 of them.

Rathin Barman, Project lead at Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) in Assam, told INK: “Had India not done the conservation of rhinos, it would have faced the fate of Kenya where there are only two Northern White Rhinos alive. It is apparent that this species will go extinct as both are females. The rhino horns have no medicinal value. It is a myth spread widely in South Asian countries. Assam is the only state in India which houses the one-horned rhinoceros.”

Barman pointed out that Rhinos who are dehorned or mutilated could suffer from severe trauma and could suffer from impotence because of anxiety.

With Assam housing 85% of the entire Indian rhinoceros population, several measures have been taken by both the central and Assam state governments for their preservation and protection. Poachers can face upto ten years imprisonment for poaching and a ‘Special Rhino Protection Force’ (SRPF), constituted in 2019 for Kaziranga National Park.

Protection of Rhinos is critical as it is a keystone species which influences the ecosystem around it.

diversity as it spreads the seeds of fruits and other vegetables it eats as it moves around.

“The rhino horns have no medicinal value. It is a myth spread widely in South Asian countries.”

**-Rathin Barman,
Project Lead, CWRC**

A keystone species is an organism that helps define an entire ecosystem. Without a particular species, the ecosystem would function differently or even cease to exist. For example, research by Robert Paine, an American zoology professor showed how removal of the Pisaster Ochraceus Seastar from a tidal plain in the United States, had a huge effect on the ecosystem. Rhinos help to strengthen the bio-

Puja Mahajan, Associate Director of Education and Youth Outreach, PETA India, said, “One horned rhinos help maintain grasslands which act as feeding areas for small animals, and they also distribute seeds of plants they have eaten. Healthy alive-and-kicking wildlife means a healthy planet for animals, including us, to live.”

PNI news



Poor Farm Labourer in Jharkhand Emerges as an Inspiring Entrepreneur

RUPESH KUMAR

WHILE the Covid-19 pandemic jolted all of us like never before, some of us managed to resiliently battle our circumstances daring to look at adversities in the eye. Forty-year old Malti Devi, a daily wage farm labourer in Pindrajora village in Bokaro district of Jharkhand did just that. As she struggled to make ends meet, she noticed that villagers were struggling to pick up basic hardware as there was no shop in the area. She started a small shop called “Didi Hardware”. Within five months, she realised that there was no looking back on her new journey as an entrepreneur.

Five months ago, Malti was just another poorly paid labourer. She lost even that during the pandemic.

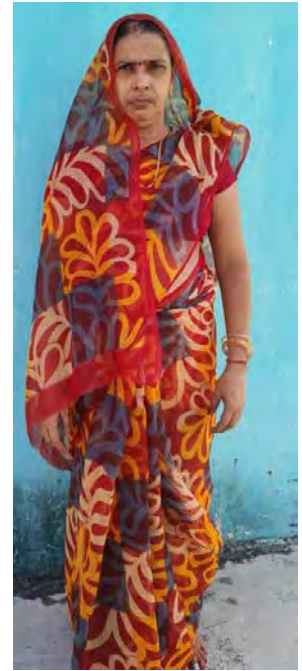
She told INK: “I was devastated. I tried my best to look for other potential sources of income but had no luck. Even as a daily wager, it was very difficult to sustain a family of eight because of my low income. But today, my condition is much better as my daily income is around Rs. 600-800 everyday.”

However, the transition was not easy. Fortunately, a government run micro-credit agency called Udaan Aajeevika Sakhi Mandal, pitched in to help. The Mandal put Malti in touch with officials from the Jharkhand State Livelihoods Promotion Society (JSLPS), an autonomous organisation under the Rural Development Department of Jharkhand. JSLPS works for the upliftment of economically backward villagers in rural areas.

Malti received a loan of Rs. 50,000 under the cash credit linkage scheme of JSLPS along with an additional loan of Rs. 5,000 from the Sakhi Mandal to set up the shop. Malti said, “I always dreamt of running a small business to smoothly manage my household expenditure, but never had enough savings.”

Santosh Singh, a JSLPS official says, “We want to wholeheartedly support individuals who have a viable business model. We analyse its potential and if feasible, try to extend the financial support and add wings to their dreams.”

Malti rightly points out that though the pandemic caused unprecedented grief and devastation all over the world, it also opened windows



Malti Devi: Scaling new heights

of opportunity to those willing to give a new definition to tenacity.

Growing Indoor Plants Booms During Pandemic

MEENAKSHI MAIDAS AND NAVAMAYA ACHARAYA

“YOU don’t need a psychologist if you are into plants,” says Mumbai-based Dipti Shinde, a professional at Tata Consultancy Services and a German language

tutor. Her passion for plants began after she started a kitchen garden. Slowly, her passion for nurturing varied indoor plants grew. Today, she has around 45 varieties of plants. During the tough times of

Plnts.com



the Covid-19 pandemic, she found solace in tending the plants. Seeing how plants calmed her, Dipti started devoting more time to her plants, gradually increasing her collection.

She is not the only one. The pandemic resulted in people chasing all kinds of hobbies ranging from baking at home to growing plants. Dipti treats her plants like children that need care and love. After a long day at work, Dipti looks forward to spending time with her plants.

Data from Google Trends indicated an increase in the shopping of indoor plants during the first wave of Covid-19 in India. Appu George, a nursery owner from Kochi saw his business boom during the initial months of the pandemic. “From May to September, there was a steady rise in the purchase of indoor plants, especially plants like aglaonema and snake plants known for their air-purifying qualities,” he said.

A 2015 study done by Virginia I. Lohr at the Horticulture Research Institute of the Washington State University found that plants reduced the dust in rooms by as

much as 20%.

Another study by Lohr in 1992 had shown the impacts of relative humidity on human health and well-being.

Dr. Nitin Mehra, a psychologist from Bengaluru pointed out to INK that growing houseplants leads to positive effects like reducing stress and anxiety, improving moods, prolonging attention, and boosting self-esteem. “I often converse with my patients about existential crises, but a few plants around you in the house can certainly calm you down,” he added.

While there was a general slack in the economy, nurseries were one of the businesses that had picked up as eager plant lovers shopped for it. Nursery owners realized that a lot of people picked plant-parenting as a hobby during the pandemic. They happily cashed the opportunity.

As mental health emerges as a major issue, it may be a worthwhile idea to grow plants at home not only diverting your mind from vexed problems and stress but also to enjoy watching them grow.

Instagram Reels: Harmless Entertainment or Escape Mechanism?

ASMITA PANT AND MANSI VERMA

DO you know that when you are on Instagram, there is an increase of dopamine in your brain which is responsible for inducing feelings of pleasure?

Everytime you experience the effects of dopamine, the brain craves for it more and more leading to addiction.

Findings by The Online Brain, an academic study by the World Psychiatric Association published in 2020, said that being on social media had the same impact on our brains similar to “age-related cognitive decline.”

Today, Instagram is one of the most widely used social media platforms weaning users from other activities. So, if you’re reading this, we’ve succeeded in tearing you away from that app as well.

In 2020, when the government of India imposed a ban on TikTok and other Chinese applications, Instagram attempted to exploit the opportunity to capture the market. It released a new feature called, Reels, on July 12. Manish Chopra, the Director and Head of Partnerships, Facebook India, proudly declared, “Reels are being received very well and a variety of public figures and creators from across India are starting to use the feature.”

Srishti Pandey, a student at the English and Foreign Languages

University, Lucknow, with a background in psychology, said, “My escapist attitude compels me to spend hours scrolling through Instagram reels, after a rough virtual day at college.” Despite being aware about the psychological reasons that attract her towards spending time on Instagram, Pandey feels helpless and succumbs to her temptations. “Initially it used to be two to three reels but gradually it ended up crossing half an hour of continuously watching reels in one sitting.”

Srishti isn’t alone. Statistics from the Influencer Marketing Hub suggest that the average time spent on Instagram in India has taken a leap of 3.5% since the introduction of Instagram reels.

Ojasvi Sharma, a fresh graduate working for Time Tec, a Jaipur based company, said, “I’ve had an Instagram account for years but I hardly used it. Ever since I came across reels though, I have been using Instagram more and more. Even though I don’t post or share anything, I frequently log in to my account to watch reels.”

The situation however, is much graver than what it appears to be. Reels are much more than just a source of entertainment and have turned into an escape mechanism, which can be alarming. Kiya Singh, a psychologist, explains, “People tend to find ways to distract

“People tend to find ways to distract themselves from thoughts that make them anxious, and reels have proved to be the best source for such distractions.”

–Kiya Singh,
Psychologist

themselves from thoughts that make them anxious, and reels have proved to be the best source for such distractions.”

She says that addiction to reels starts initially by watching a few for harmless entertainment and gradually it becomes an unconscious habit. “Instagram reels are never ending. You can keep scrolling for hours and hours and they won’t end. But what makes these reels enjoyable is the relatability quotient,” Singh added.

Rosemary KJ, a student from the University of Calicut, says, “I get an urge to keep checking reels and once I start it just goes on and on. Watching reels feels like a never ending process.”

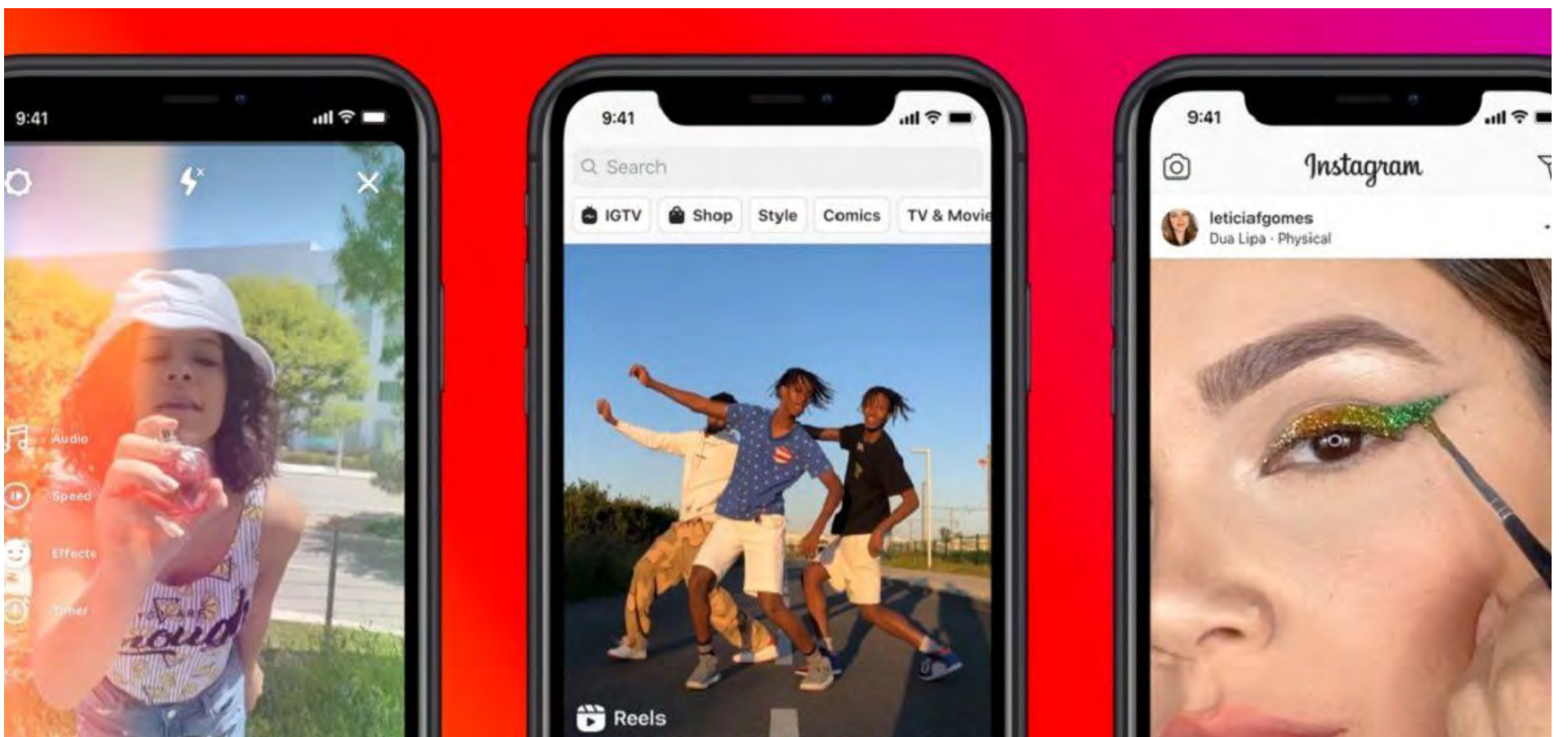
More often than not, reels are relatable and give the viewers a feeling that they are not alone. Mumbai

based Rujuta Thete, a content writer with Zee Entertainment Enterprises Limited, who finds watching reels a good way to pass time, said, “I like reels related to travel and food. They’re not only appealing to the eyes but also informative.”

Despite being sporadically informative, mindless scrolling through Instagram reels stops users from deep thinking that is so crucial to ensure that the brain evolves.

With an overwhelming exposure to social media in general and Instagram in particular, our brain absorbs a large amount of surface-level information leading to information overload. Showcasing both negative and positive traits, Instagram presents a choice for its users: Use it for harmless entertainment or as an escape mechanism.

Creative blog



Blindness Does Not Stop his Camera from Clicking

ANAND SINGHA AND SAMRAH ATTAR



As World Sight Day is celebrated this week, SAMRAH ATTAR and ANAND SINGHA recount the extraordinary story of PRANAV LAL, a visually challenged photographer who breathes life into his photos using unique software. This year, the theme for World Sight Day to focus global attention on blindness is: “Love Your Eyes”. YOU would not expect Pranav Lal who is visually challenged to click brilliant photographs. But, he does have a great collection of photos he has taken over the years. He amazes bystanders wherever he goes with his photography skills. How does this Delhi-based

32-year-old do it? How does he have an eye for photography when he cannot see what we can? How is he connecting to the visual and light aspects that are so fundamental to photography?

These questions do have answers. Way back in 2001, Lal stumbled on a software called Voice Vision. It fascinated him so much that he abandoned his career as a cyber security expert to become a photographer.

This software converts live camera images into a predetermined set of sounds for the photographer as soon as some image has to be photographed. What happens is that pictures are transformed into

stereo sounds by scanning them from left to right. If the object is bright, the sound would be louder. If it is at an elevation, the pitch of the sound would be higher.

Lal explains it in a matter of fact way as if it is the easiest thing in the world to accomplish: “With the help of this software, any blind man can perceive what is right in front of him. The software scans the object in front of the camera’s shutter and uses sound to demonstrate the shape of the object, the distance from the shutter, the colour and what exactly the object can be. This way I can imagine a fair idea of what I’m capturing.”

Sounds amazing. This software is today helping many of the visually challenged to click photographs and be a part of the world that we are used to. They see without seeing. Lal, who has been blind since birth, says: “I now am completely used to it and am fortunate that this came at a time in my life when I had the willpower to actually harness it. It gave me a vision in life, not just in terms of photography, but also perceiving the beauty of nature.”

Lal enjoys photographing landscapes and architecture because of the difference in light that both reflect. Water, in particular, provides

a lot of opportunities to experiment with reflections. It looks completely different depending on how the light strikes it.

Elaborating on his love for capturing landscapes, Lal says, “I mostly avoid capturing portraits because portraits are all about the expressions and the emotions on the person’s face, which the software is not competent enough to perceive. But I know one day we will be able to do that as well.”

The software taps into neuroscience in order to transform the sound into electrical impulses for the brain. The information is then modified into electrical waves, helping the blind who are trained to use this software to perceive the visual.

Being visually challenged has not stopped Lal from climbing uncharted heights. He also holds a masters degree in Business Management. He is presently a freelancer with multiple media organisations, and works on multiple commercial projects as a photographer. He has also written numerous short stories about his understanding of reality. Lal’s vision inspires many and there have been multiple occasions when people have walked up to him to express their disbelief that something so uncanny can also happen.



Lives of Honey Gatherers in Sunderbans at Risk with Rising Human-Wildlife **Conflict**

SOUVIK SAHA in Sunderbans with ANURAN SADHU AND VISHAL U

ON a hot summer day three months ago, Ronjit accompanied by brother Rajat Mandal travelled deep into the jungles of Sunderbans in West Bengal to gather honey, something they often did as professional honey gatherers. Suddenly, a tiger jumped out of nowhere on Ronjit tearing him apart. Rajat and others in the team tried to use a bamboo stick to frighten the tiger, but it swiftly carried away the body as they helplessly tried to save him. Recalls Ranjit tearfully: “He has a wife and two children.” recalls Rajat tearfully.

derbans as actual numbers could be much higher.

Though around 3,000 people are licenced to enter the forests to collect honey, thousands get in illegally as there are no other means of livelihood. They risk their lives to keep the kitchen fires burning.

For generations, poor fishermen and villagers of Sundarbans, the largest delta and mangrove forest in the world, have been collecting wild honey.

The delta comprises 102 islands in West Bengal, 54 of which are inhabited by humans. The majes-

across the river and entering the villages,” said Rajat, who is from Gosaba village in South 24 Parganas district. “I really hope the next generation benefits from education and is not forced to do this for a living,” he sighs.

It is not just the human-wildlife conflict due to tigers, snakes and crocodiles that haunt the honey hunters. Biting poverty due to lack of opportunities, frequent cyclones and poor disbursement of ration, add to the misery. Barun Mondal, a villager from Gosaba rues about how hopes are raised during elections and then conveniently forgot-

have both positive and negative interactions with many animals and not just tigers, so as such there isn't any specific solution to this human-wildlife conflict. The best bet is to be cautious while carrying out honey gathering. Another important thing is that tigers are not used to humans, nor are they their natural prey. Since the prey in Sundarbans is very limited and due to the swampy nature of the forest, tigers find it difficult to hunt. This is why they decide to target anything that moves, be it a human, a wild pig, or a monkey. This is how their ecosystem works. For tigers

India TV



Every year, over 100 people are mauled to death by tigers in India. West Bengal accounts for the highest number of tiger attacks in the country with around 40 people being killed in 2020, according to official figures. However, these figures do not reflect the extent of human-wildlife conflict in the Sun-

derbans as actual numbers could be much higher. Though around 3,000 people are licenced to enter the forests to collect honey – few legally and many illegally – and get attacked by tigers and crocodiles.

Tigers know no geographical boundaries. “There is always a huge threat of tigers swimming

ten. We are treated like animals,” he says angrily.

Rajat says that he is a honey gatherer not out of choice but risks his life as there are no jobs available. Ananda Banerjee, a winner of the Ramnath Goenka Award in Journalism and a passionate environmentalist, told INK, “Humans

humans are easy prey and show no hesitation to prey on them.”

Most of the increasing human-wildlife conflict in India can be considerably reduced if there is a planned strategy and understanding of animal behaviour and local circumstances.

Covid Changes the Face of Festivities

GUJARAT

Bouncing Back

DISHA PALKHIWALA AND SURABHI SRIVASTAVA

AS Navratri came to an end in Gujarat, many sighed a heave of relief as business picked up after two years. Last year, it was very muted due to the pandemic. Once again, the state lit up with festivities, dance, and music in every housing colony.

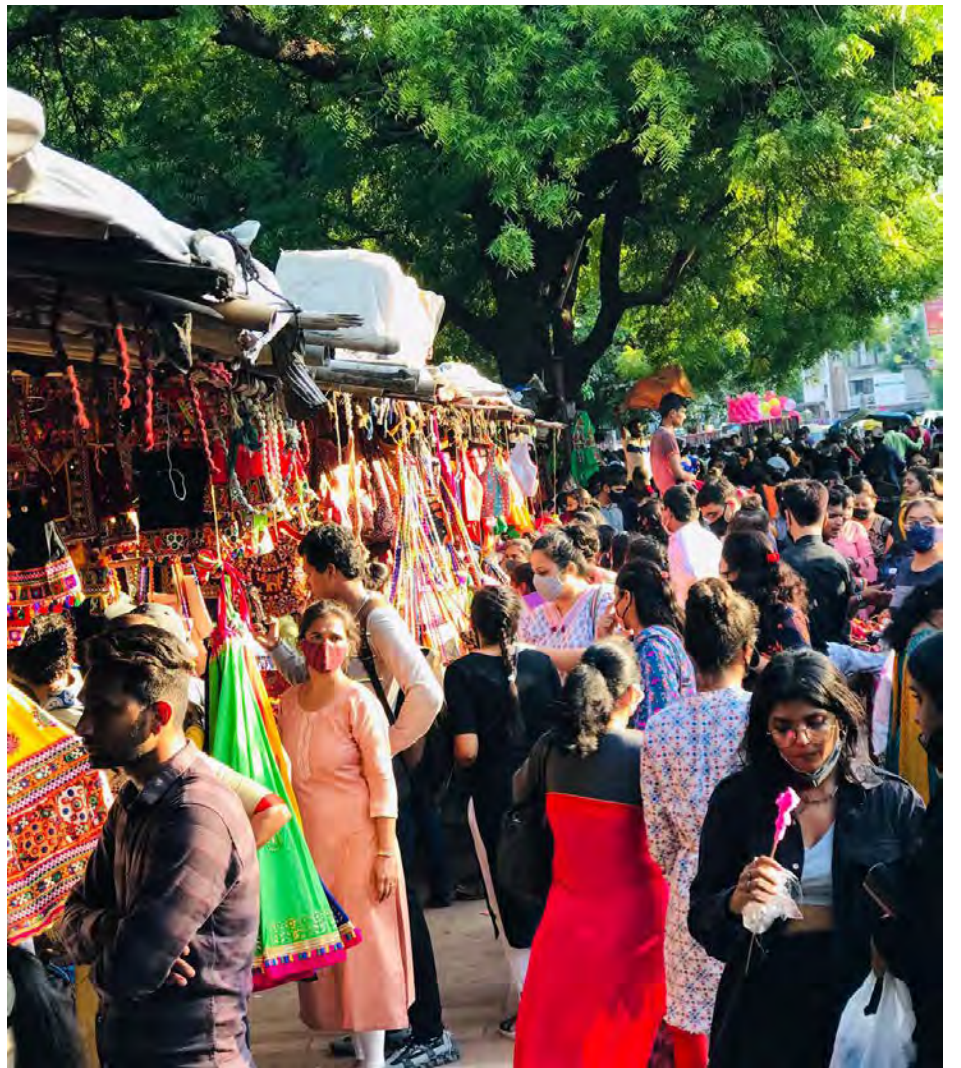
Navratri spurs an industry worth approximately Rs. 10,000 crores across the state providing livelihood to scores of decorators, jewelers, caterers, textile manufacturers, and small-scale entrepreneurs. In 2019, floods devastated the state muting Navratri celebrations. In 2020, 'Covid-19 wreaked havoc. So, this year as the pandemic waned, there was a new hope. Bhavik Vyas, a musician with Rhythm Entertainment and Events in Ahmedabad said, "The government had strictly prohibited gatherings in 2020 leading to nil revenue for several businesses. But, in 2021, we saw hopes of a revival."

Dancers who deck themselves in

exotic imitation jewellery were not shopping for the last two years. The Rajkot Imitation Jewellery Association claimed that purchasing power had steadily declined over the last two years resulting in lower demands.

Considering the emotional value attached to the festival, and with a steady decline in fresh Covid cases, the government had eased restrictions imposed on celebrations this year. Cities like Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Bhavnagar, Junagadh and Gandhinagar were allowed extended curfew timings. Naturally, businesses started breathing again.

Dilip Shah, a Chaniya Choli shop owner in Vadodara, pointed out that demand had shot up with orders coming in from other towns. It also spurred demand for skirts, kurtas, and other traditional attire. After a long time, the streets of Gujarat once again reverberated with energy and joy. There was a new hope in the air.



KARNATAKA

Muted Dasara Festivities

DIVYA SHREE AND PRADYUMNA KALAGI

South Tourism



THE Mysuru Dasara festivities in Mysuru that concluded on October 15, was a low-key affair as Covid restrictions were in force. Hotels and transportation services were the most affected as there were fewer visitors this year. Usually, there are around ten lakh visitors who come in from all over the world to watch the festivities

in front of the Mysore Palace. But, this month there were just around 400 participants in the cultural events and around 1,000 onlookers. The government restricted access to most activities and opted for live telecasts.

According to the Mysuru Hotel Owners' Association, the battered hospitality industry is expecting a 20 to 30% increase in visitor traffic

from this month as tourist attractions have reopened this year.

C. Narayana Gowda, head of the Mysuru Hotel Owners' Association, told INK: "The hotel business is suffering as a result of the lockdown, but we expected guests during Dasara. However, footfall has remained minimal till now."

Usually, Mysuru's over 100 hotels, restaurants, and hostels are

booked during Dasara but had limited bookings this year. Channaiah, a resort owner in Mysuru, said that hotels used to be completely booked for a month around this time last year, but bookings are just half as high this year. Last year he had just five reservations.

Naveen Kumar, head of the Mysuru Travel Board, said, "People prefer travelling by their own vehicles post-covid, as tourists are mostly from Bengaluru and Hassan. We did not witness tourists from any other state this year."

Manjunath, a local Taxi driver said, "I used to earn at least 1,500 Rs every day during Dasara. Now, I earn just Rs. 250. Nothing has changed this year."

According to locals, this was the first time the Dasara celebrations in the royal capital had been severely disrupted. With Mysuru being the state's second-worst-affected district after Bengaluru, this year's festivities have gone virtual and cultural events have been limited. This year, only 500 individuals are allowed to take part in the Jumbo Savari, a spectacular parade of elephants bringing deities' statues from Mysore Palace to Bannimantap Grounds.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

300 Deities Add Colour to International Kullu Dussehra's Rath Yatra

SURAMYA KAUSHIK

THE International Kullu Dussehra illuminates the valley with the presence of 300 deities at Dhalpur, Kullu. Beginning October 15 this year, one of Himachal's largest festival celebrations attracts thousands of devotees awaiting their deities year after year. As this is one of the most significant festivals, the government ensured numerous Covid-19 precautionary guidelines for the devotees and tourists to witness Lord Raghunath's Rath Yatra.

All the devotees from within the state were given unrestricted entry to the event, but tourists from other states were only allowed if they had a negative RT-PCR test report not older than 24 hours despite being fully vaccinated. To enforce these guidelines a special police team was posted at Bajaura, the entry point of Kullu, where documents were verified. Dussehra is one of the most prom-

significance as all deities are brought in their palkhis (palanquins) to pay obeisance to Lord Raghunath, making the event one-of-its-kind. The idols of the deities come from various parts of Himachal largely from Kullu and Mandi districts. They are brought with their devotees and then kept at the Dhalpur ground. Thousands of devotees pull Lord Raghunath's chariot. The whole idea of a large gathering pulling it was, however, a cause of major concern during the pandemic.

In 2020, the HP government decided to not organise the Kullu Dussehra fair, but as a mark of respect for the sentiments of devotees, seven deities were invited to mark their presence.

In 2021 though, devotees requested a full-fledged celebration as the arrival of the deities is believed to be an extremely pious event. This year shops and other businesses were not allowed to partici-

eagerly for Kullu Dussehra to put up our stalls. Last year, we couldn't do it and hoped to do it this year. However, the authorities again told us we would not be allowed to do so due to fears of a third wave. The government assured us that we would get a chance to open shops in the Mandi Shivratri festival in February next year if conditions improved," he added.

Respecting religious beliefs, the

government had accepted proposals of devotees to allow all the 300 deities to be brought in this year. However, all cultural events were cancelled in view of the pandemic. No space would be allotted for businessmen from outside the state to set up temporary shops during the celebration.

The festival is again gaining its importance as the pandemic dies down raising new hopes.

News18



WEST BENGAL

Economy is Looking for Revival

ANURAN SADHU AND SOUVIK SAHA

India Today



DURGA PUJA in West Bengal may be only for five days, but it provides jobs to over 1,00,000 people for nearly six months a year. Transactions worth over ₹4500 crores in Kolkata alone, and ₹15,000 crores in the entire state

are transacted.

With more than 10,000 pujas in the state and 1,000 more in other parts of India and overseas, the festival has emerged as a hub of activity sustaining a micro-economy, particularly in Kolkata.

The festival accounts for 2.58% of

West Bengal's GDP, according to a study carried out by the British Council. It sustains those setting up pandals, decorators, idol-makers, craftsmen, electricians, security personnel and priests. Idol makers and artists in Kolkata suffered great losses because of the

pandemic. When the second wave struck this year, they were further impacted as everyone lowered their budgets.

Mintu Pal, a renowned idol-maker from Kumartuli, Kolkata, said, "Before the pandemic, I made more than 35 Durga idols and some were exported. This year I am making only 18, exporting only two." Pal is worried.

Early this month, the West Bengal government announced a financial assistance package of Rs. 50,000 to every puja committee, with electricity provided at a 50 percent discount. These benefits, however, often don't trickle down to the idol-makers.

To keep the risk of a third wave at bay, the Calcutta High Court limited the gathering at puja pandals. Consequently, the government declared a relaxation in the ongoing night curfew during puja days. Masks were compulsory for all visitors at the pandals. Organizers had to arrange for the masks and sanitizers in-and-around the pan-

Times of India



A Glittering Night for the Brits



SHREYA GAUTAM

AFTER going virtual last year, award season lovers rejoiced as the 73rd Primetime Emmy Awards 2021 teleported everyone back to the red carpet. With the viewers favourites taking the gleaming golden trophy home, *The Crown*, *Ted Lasso* and *Mare of Easttown* snatched a whopping ten out of the 12 acting awards.

The Los Angeles event was a celebratory one for the British actors of England-set shows.

Netflix's original, *The Crown*, true to its name, started collecting its jewels and swept the show with 11 big wins. The drama, initially tied with *The Mandalorian* for the most-nominated drama series, leapt forward in the race to win all the major categories along with the writing and directing accolades, and the creative arts Emmys.

The Iron Lady turned golden as Gillian Anderson's phenomenal performance in *The Crown* as Margaret Thatcher won her the Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a drama series. Olivia Colman who played the Queen, bagged the award of Outstanding Actress. And lastly, Josh O'Connor who essayed Prince Charles claimed the golden laurel in the Outstanding Lead Actor.

On the comedy front, Apple TV+ original *Ted Lasso*, which was leading with 20 nominations, claimed four trophies including the Lead actress and actor and Supporting actress and actor. In the Outstanding Limited or Anthology Series, the immensely successful Netflix drama, *The Queen's Gambit*, won the prize but left the audience feeling a little bitter-sweet when the lead actress Anya Taylor-Joy lost the award to Kate Winslet for *Mare of Easttown*.

The unabashed joy of the actors was enough to make one's Sunday night, be it *Ted Lasso*'s Rebecca, Hannah Waddingham, screaming into the microphone before making a speech or Kate Winslet squealing with joy, "Yes! I am the winner!"

One thing that was

obvious was the powerful display of women who stood out with their outstanding performances.

Speaking of powerful women, Michaela Coel's well-deserved victory for *I May Destroy You* also made her the first Black woman to win an Emmy for writing for a limited series. As she dedicated the award to sexual assault survivors, the actress-writer pushed her fellow writers to write a tale that scares them, that makes them feel uncertain and that isn't comfortable.

While this year's nominees were most diverse to date, #Emmys-SoWhite was seen trending worldwide on Twitter as all the major acting awards were bagged by white performers.

But, on a positive note, American drag queen RuPaul did make a mark on Emmy history for most wins by a person of colour as RuPaul's *Drag Race* won the Outstanding Competition Program category for the fourth consecutive time.

With the Primetime Emmys wrapping up, came the nominations for International Emmy Awards with its 44 nominees across 11 categories and 24 countries.

India is holding its flag high in three major categories and all eyes

are on the artists.

Nawazuddin

Siddiqui is nominated for the Best Performance by an Actor category for his Netflix movie *Serious Men*.

In the comedy segment, Netflix comedy special *Vir Das: For India* has taken up a nomination.

Lastly, Sushmita Sen starrer *Aaraya* has been nominated in the Best Drama Series category.

Last year, India had bagged the Best Drama Series trophy with Richie Mehta's goosebumps-inducing *Delhi Crime*. What's in store for India this year? We'll only find out on November 22. Till, then, happy guessing.

Category	Winners
Outstanding Drama Series	<i>The Crown</i>
Outstanding Comedy Series	<i>Ted Lasso</i>
Outstanding Limited or Anthology Series	<i>The Queen's Gambit</i>
Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series	Olivia Colman (<i>The Crown</i>)
Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series	Josh O'Connor (<i>The Crown</i>)
Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series	Jean Smart (<i>Hacks</i>)
Outstanding Lead Actor in a Comedy Series	Jason Sudeikis (<i>Ted Lasso</i>)
Outstanding Lead Actress in a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie	Kate Winslet (<i>Mare of Easttown</i>)
Outstanding Lead Actor in a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie	Ewan McGregor (<i>Halston</i>)
Outstanding Directing for a Drama Series	Jessica Hobbs (<i>The Crown</i>)
Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series	Lucia Aniello (<i>Hacks</i>)
Outstanding Directing for a Limited or Anthology Series or Movie	Scott Frank (<i>The Queen's Gambit</i>)



India Set to Take on the World as IPL 2021 Draws to a Close

Oshi Saxena , Rupesh Kumar and Suramya Kaushik

THE second leg of the Indian Premier League 2021 was a rehearsal of sorts for the players of the Indian cricket team's World Cup Squad before the upcoming T20 World Cup.

With the second wave of COVID-19 having wreaked havoc in India in the months of April and May, the tournament had to be halted after 29 games.

In order to alleviate fears of contagion, the Board of Control for Cricket in India organised the second leg of the tournament in the United Arab Emirates, a decision that has helped the Indian squad to acclimatise itself with prevalent conditions and prepare for the upcoming World Cup.

With little time left for team India's T20 World Cup campaign, the second leg turned out to be a mixed bag. Some squad members did exceedingly well. Others struggled to maintain their form.

Although senior players such as skipper Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Ravichandran Ashwin, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Mohammad Shami amongst others were not able to deliver, the tournament turned out to be a dream run for certain other players.

KL Rahul had a successful tournament, having played some match-winning knocks, salvaging the Punjab Kings' pride.

Similarly, Indian spearhead Jasprit Bumrah also enjoyed success as he was in full form

and was able to turn around a few games for

Mumbai Indians. Both Varun Chakravathy and Ravindra Jadeja also delivered phenomenal performances and played a pivotal role in their team's success.

However, the biggest concern for the Indian team is Hardik Pandya's form and fitness. The latter showed a lacklustre performance in the tournament as he failed to make a mark with the bat and didn't bowl either, because of his fitness issues. As a result, selectors were forced to rope in Shardul Thakur.

Despite their excellent form, seasoned players such as Shikhar Dhawan, one of three batters to have scored more than 500 runs in this edition, and Yuzvendra Chahal, who has taken 18 wickets in fifteen games are surprisingly missing from the squad.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to happen in the UAE, with the same venues booked for the World Cup matches as the IPL, with Oman being the co-host.

In Round One, eight teams will play 12 matches which will be split across two groups of four each. The two groups will be further split between one of the venues in the UAE and Oman. Four teams from this lot comprising Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Netherlands, Scotland, Namibia, Oman, and Papua New Guinea will then move ahead to the Super 12, joining the top eight ranked T20 international teams.

The Super 12 phase, comprising 30 matches, is scheduled in the UAE and will start from October 24. At this stage, teams will be split across two groups of six each and will play at three venues in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah.

Following this, three playoff games, two semi-finals and the final will be played in UAE.

The UAE has been selected for the latter stages of the tournament to provide some relaxation to the pitches after the IPL.

The biggest advantage of these pitches will be taken by the spinners as IPL will wear them



Virat Kohli
@imv Kohli



I have been fortunate enough to not only represent India but also lead the Indian Cricket Team to my utmost capability. I thank everyone who has supported me in my journey as the Captain of the Indian Cricket Team. I couldn't have done it without them - the boys, the support staff, the selection committee, my coaches and each and every Indian who prayed for us to win.

Understanding workload is a very important thing and considering my immense workload over the last 8-9 years playing all 3 formats and captaining regularly for last 5-6 years, I feel I need to give myself space to be fully ready to lead the Indian Team in Test and ODI Cricket. I have given everything to the Team during my time as T20 Captain and I will continue to do so for the T20 Team as a batsman moving forward.

Of course, arriving at this decision took a lot of time. After a lot of contemplation and discussions with my close people, Ravi bhai and also Rohit, who have been an essential part of the leadership group, I've decided to step down as the T20 Captain after this T20 World Cup in Dubai in October. I have also spoken to the secretary Mr Jay Shah and the President of BCCI Mr Sourav Ganguly along with all the selectors about the same. I will continue to serve Indian Cricket and the Indian Team to the best of my ability.

out.

Nitin Bharadwaz, Senior Sports Journalist, India TV, told INK: "UAE conditions will massively benefit the spinners as they'll be worn out post IPL and will also get a bit dry.

Thus, it will benefit the ace spinners of the Indian cricket team but might cause trouble to the batters." In an interview with ESPNcricinfo, Mark Boucher, senior head coach, South Africa said, "It's going to be tough to bat on especially at the back end as we saw here in IPL."

India will be pushing to end its eight-year long drought of winning an ICC title as their campaign gets underway with a game against its arch-rival Pakistan on October 24. The team will be led by Virat Kohli, who announced last month that he would relinquish his T20 captaincy after the upcoming World Cup. The news left many flabbergasted because Virat's numbers as a skipper in T20s are top-notch.

Virat has had a stellar run as the skipper of the Indian T20 side, with his overall win percentage at 65.11. He has until now, led India in 45 T20Is, out of which India has

won 27 games and lost 14. Two games ended in a tie and two had no results.

However, bearing in mind how the Royal Challengers Bangalore's (RCB) campaign ended this year, he'll be under immense pressure to do well in the T20 World Cup.

RCB crashed out of the tournament by losing to Kolkata Knight Riders in the Eliminator. The loss turned out to be a bitter pill to swallow for Virat, who had announced to step down as the skipper of the team even before the start of the second leg.

Although Virat Kohli as a batsman notched up some staggering numbers as captain for RCB and amassed a total of 4,881 runs at an impressive average of 42.07, he couldn't deliver as a captain. RCB won 66 games and lost 70 matches out of the 140 games under Virat's captaincy, with an underwhelming win percentage of 48.52%.

With the T20 World Cup being his last assignment as the captain of the T20 squad, Virat is looking to finish on a high and end his search for a coveted ICC title, which until now, remains elusive.

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