

SCIENCE

Trilobite fossils from upstate New York reveal extra set of legs

The Hindu Bureau

A new study finds that a trilobite species with exceptionally well-preserved fossils from upstate New York has an additional set of legs underneath its head. The research, led by the American Museum of Natural History and Nanjing University in China, suggests that having a fifth pair of head appendages might be more widespread among trilobites than once

thought. Published in the journal *Palaeontology*, the study helps researchers better understand how trilobite heads are segmented.

Trilobites are a group of extinct arthropods whose living relatives include lobsters and spiders. Like other arthropods, the bodies of trilobites are made up of many segments, with the head region comprised of several fused segments. As with other parts of the tri-

lobite body (the thorax and tail), these segments were associated with appendages, which ranged in function from sensing to feeding to locomotion.

Two ways

The segments in the trilobite head can be counted in two different ways: by looking at the grooves (called furrows) on the upper side of the trilobite fossil's hard exoskeleton, or by counting the pairs of

preserved antennae and legs on the underside of the fossil. The soft appendages of trilobites are rarely preserved, though, and when looking at the segments in the trilobite head, researchers regularly find a mismatch between these two methods.

In the new study, researchers examined newly recovered specimens of the exceptionally preserved trilobite *Triarthrus eatoni* from upstate New

York. These fossils, known for the gold shine of the pyrite replacement preserving them, show an additional, previously undescribed leg underneath the head.

Resolving mismatch

By making comparisons with another trilobite species, the exceptionally preserved *Olenoides serratus* from the Burgess Shale in British Columbia, the researchers propose a model

for how appendages were attached to the head in relation to the grooves in the exoskeleton.

This model resolves the apparent mismatch and indicates that the trilobite head included six segments: an anterior segment associated with the developmental origin of the eyes and five additional segments, associated with one pair of antennae and four pairs of walking legs, respectively.

SNAPSHOTS



Smallpox vaccine moderately effective in preventing Mpox

One dose of modified vaccinia Ankara-Bavarian Nordic (MVA-BN) smallpox vaccine is moderately effective in preventing Mpox infection, a study finds. No randomised clinical trials of vaccination against Mpox have been conducted. To find the real world effectiveness, researchers used a technique called target trial emulation. Over 3,200 vaccinated men were matched to an equal number of unvaccinated controls. The estimated vaccine effectiveness of one dose of MVA-BN against Mpox infection was found to be 58%.



Fish fossil shows evidence of Earth's evolutionary march

The discovery of an exceptionally well-preserved ancient primitive Devonian coelacanth fish in remote Western Australia has been linked to a period of heightened tectonic activity, or movement in the Earth's crust, according to the new study in *Nature Communications*. The new fossil from the Gogo Formation in Western Australia, named *Ngamugawi wirngarri*, also helps to fill in an important transition period in coelacanth history, between the primitive forms and other more 'anatomically-modern' forms.



Study finds ozone pollution reduces tropical forest growth

Ozone gas is reducing the growth of tropical forests – leaving an estimated 290 million tonnes of carbon uncaptured each year, new research shows. It calculates that ground-level ozone reduces new yearly growth in tropical forests by 5.1% on average. The effect is stronger in some regions. The researchers ran experiments to measure the ozone susceptibility of tropical tree species and incorporated the results into a computer model of global vegetation.

Diabetes drug may lower death rate in obese people: study

Excess body weight, especially abdominal obesity, is associated with health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease; various weight reduction methods have been tried over the years, most have not stood the test of time

Rajeev Jayadevan

Excess body weight, especially abdominal obesity, is associated with several health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease. Various weight reduction methods have been tried over the years, but most have not stood the test of time.

Recently, a class of drugs called GLP-1 agonists, originally used for diabetes, has gained attention for its role in weight loss. These drugs mimic the gut hormone GLP-1, which enhances insulin release and slows digestion, promoting a sense of fullness. Among these drugs, semaglutide has been in use for diabetes since 2017. In higher doses, it is now used as a weight-loss drug in Western countries. A study published recently in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* revealed promising results from its use in people without diabetes.

The SELECT trial, funded by the makers of semaglutide, included 17,604 obese or overweight participants with cardiovascular disease but no diabetes. They were randomised to receive weekly injections of either semaglutide or a placebo and were followed up for three years. The aim was to check for any reduction in deaths, heart attacks, and strokes, as the drug was known to reduce weight. During follow-up, 833 people (4.7%) died. Compared to the placebo group, participants who received semaglutide had lower death rates from all

Study raises a few important questions

Compared to the placebo group, participants who received semaglutide had lower death rates from all causes



Semaglutide is now used as a weight-loss drug in many developed countries

- A preliminary results published last year showed a 19% reduction in cardiovascular mortality in the semaglutide group
- An early reduction in deaths was found even before the participants lost weight. Health benefits of weight loss take longer to manifest
- The study showed unexpected reduction in COVID-19 deaths though the vaccination status of participants is not mentioned
- The use of loop diuretic drugs at the start of the trial was not the same among those who remained alive versus those who died
- Only 11.7% of participants who remained alive used loop diuretic drugs compared with 35.9% among those who died
- Loop diuretic medicines are commonly prescribed for advanced disease conditions of the heart, liver and kidney
- Many participants who died during the trial may have had more advanced heart disease from the outset

causes. The primary findings of the SELECT trial were published earlier in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in December 2023. A 19% reduction in cardiovascular mortality, heart attacks, and strokes in the semaglutide group was the highlight.

Reduced deaths

However, these results also raised questions. For example, why was there an early reduction in deaths – even before the participants lost weight? Typically, the health benefits of weight loss take longer to manifest. For instance, a Swedish bariatric surgery study by Sjöström et al., which also demonstrated reduced deaths from weight loss, had an average follow-up of 10.9 years. Following surgery, although weight loss occurred in the first year, death reduction only occurred much later.

Secondly, the SELECT study participants were

not diabetic, implying that the known anti-diabetic effects of GLP-1 agonists could not have accounted for the reduced deaths. Finally, there was an unexpected reduction in COVID-19 deaths. The paper did not mention participants' vaccination status. This leaves unanswered questions about how GLP-1 agonists might affect COVID-19 mortality.

When a clinical trial reports an unexpected benefit in the treatment arm compared to the placebo, two possibilities arise – either the treatment is genuinely better, or the placebo group had participants in worse health at the start of the trial. The surprising results from this study were the earlier-than-expected death reduction and the apparent effect on COVID-19 mortality. This warrants a closer look at whether the two groups had important differences

at baseline.

Large randomised trials like SELECT can minimise such discrepancies. Accordingly, there were no major baseline differences between the semaglutide and placebo groups in terms of age, gender, HbA1c, blood pressure, cholesterol level, BMI, or waist circumference

However, the supplementary tables comparing baseline parameters of those who died with those who remained alive have a striking difference in the use of loop diuretic medicines. Among those who remained alive, only 11.7% were using loop diuretic drugs at the start of the trial, compared to 35.9% among those who later died of cardiovascular causes. Loop diuretic medicines are commonly prescribed for advanced disease conditions of the heart, liver, and kidney, and their use could serve

as an indirect indicator of the severity of the participants' health. This suggests that many participants who died during the trial may have had more advanced heart disease from the outset.

Although randomisation generally ensures a balanced distribution of participants, some unevenness could still occur. The total number of people with heart failure was comparable in both groups, which included varying degrees of severity. However, the paper does not specify whether the placebo group had a higher proportion of individuals on loop diuretics, which could indicate more advanced heart failure. Such a discrepancy could have potentially contributed to higher death rates during follow-up. This might also explain the unexpected difference observed in COVID-19 deaths. It is also possible that properties of GLP-1 agonists other than weight loss and control of diabetes are involved here.

Research is essential for advancing medical knowledge. While unexpected findings are not uncommon, it is vital to explore all possible explanations before concluding. GLP-1 agonists are already recommended for people with diabetes, and this study suggests they may also benefit overweight and obese individuals without diabetes. These findings could impact medical practice, particularly if further studies confirm the results.

(Rajeev Jayadevan is Chairman, Research Cell, Kerala State IMA)

Poems express ideas better than prose



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE

D. Balasubramanian

UNICEF has declared March 21 of every year as World Poetry Day, with a chosen theme. It is devoted to supporting linguistic diversity using poetic expression. In 2022, the theme was 'environment'. Last year it was 'Always a poet, even in prose' and this year, the theme was 'Standing on the shoulders of giants'. Poetry is used to evoke emotions, create imagery, and convey ideas in a highly structured and imaginative manner. It has rhythm (using two or more syllables), metre (point of emphasis), and emotional resonance, where the emotion of the poet is felt

by the reader or singer and appeals to the heart and mind more effectively. It has a sense of economy, embellishment, and rhythm. It is often singable. Note for example our national anthem 'Jana Gana Mana', a poem by Rabindranath Tagore, which we all sing with gusto and pride. At the same time, many of us also remember, hear, and sing sad songs in our languages.

The World Poetry Day 2022 focussed on endangered languages, their poems, prose, and songs. Across the world, more than 7,000 languages are endangered. In India, according to UNESCO, 42 Indian languages (spoken by less than 10,000 people) are endangered. Since 2013, India has initiated a scheme for the protection and preservation of endangered languages in the



While natural and grammatical language is used in prose, poetic language is figurative and symbolic.

country. The site 'endangered languages in India' offers a list of these languages such as the Great Andamanese, Tibetic Balti, and the Asur of Jharkhand. The Society for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages (SPPEL) at Mysuru is actively engaged in the area.

World Poetry Day 2023 had the theme: Always a poet, even in prose. Shakespeare was an outstand-

ing example. Even his prose had a poetic lilt to it. Here are some examples: 'Brevity is the soul of wit'; and 'my words fly up, but my thoughts remain below'. Similar poems in Hindi, Urdu, and Tamil have been written by several scholars.

Why write a poem when we can use prose to express what we wish to have in mind? While the language used in prose is nat-

ural and grammatical, poetic language is figurative and symbolic. Oxford Scholastica Academy points out that poetry is a form of literary expression that uses language. As the Encyclopedia Britannica says, in poetry you carefully choose and arrange language for its meaning, sound, and rhythm. While reading or listening to poetry, the 'pleasure centre' in your brain is actively engaged in searching for symbolism and interpreting metaphors.

The site 'Scientists take on poetry' points out that the mathematician Ada Lovelace, the chemist Humphry Davy and the physicist James Maxwell wrote poems about their work in India, and S.S. Bhatnagar wrote poems in Hindi. C.V. Raman, though not a poet, was interested in the scientific basis of musical

sounds in violins and wrote "Experiments with mechanically played violins", which was published in the *Proceedings of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science* in 1920. He also studied the uniqueness of Indian drums. His analyses of the harmonic nature of the sounds of tabla and mridangam were the first scientific studies on Indian percussion. Likewise, the physicist S.N. Bose played the string instrument esraj. The naturalist Salim Ali (Birdman of India) wrote many books on the birds of India. The electronic engineer Rangarajan (with the pen name 'Sujatha') wrote excellent books and articles in Tamil, which are widely appreciated for his language skills. Should there not be more scientists who write poems and essays on music?



Question Corner

Risk factor

Can light pollution be a new risk factor for Alzheimer's?

Outdoor light at night could be a significant risk factor in Alzheimer's disease, according to a new study. Light pollution has already been associated with an increased risk of some disorders and diseases. Based on light intensity, researchers divided people into different groups. While the cause is unknown, higher nighttime light intensity was associated with a greater Alzheimer's disease prevalence than any other risk factor examined in the study for those under the age of 65, suggesting that younger

people may be more sensitive to the effects of light exposure at night. Exposure to light influences the body's natural sleep-wake pattern, called a circadian rhythm. Exposure to light at night can disrupt a person's circadian rhythm, which can make a person less resilient and more prone to disease. The research results are limited to a subset of the population and further testing is needed to better understand the connection between evening outdoor light and Alzheimer's disease.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

Will Mission Mausam improve weather forecasts?

What is on the anvil to make accurate predictions? What is the challenge with weather modification plans?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far:

On September 11, the Cabinet cleared a ₹2,000 crore programme called Mission Mausam to upgrade infrastructure used to make atmospheric observations. It will involve a major upgrade of instruments used by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting, and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.

What are its objectives?

The mission's focus is to improve atmospheric observations to enable better quality monsoon forecasts, improve alerts warning of deteriorating air quality, and warn of extreme weather events and cyclones. Critical elements of the mission include deploying 'next-generation radars' and satellite systems with advanced sensors and high-performance supercomputers, developing improved earth-system models, and a GIS-based automated Decision Support System for real-time data dissemination. The nodal agency involved in executing the mission is the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES). In the first tranche of the mission until 2026, the MoES hopes to procure and install up to 60 weather radars, 15 wind profilers, and 15 radiosondes. These instruments give regular updates on the changing parameters of wind speeds,

Meteorologists hope they are able to tweak the electrical characteristics of the cloud so that there are less lightning strikes that lethally traverse from sky to ground

atmospheric pressure, humidity, and temperature at various elevations of the atmosphere.

Is this the first time that a mission of this sort has been conceived?

No. The predecessor is the 'Monsoon Mission,' launched in 2012. Historically, the IMD has relied on statistical methods to forecast monsoons. Different weather parameters were permuted and combined in myriad ways to prepare forecasts about the likely performance of the monsoon in a particular year. These were extremely broad estimates; they almost never warned of the likelihood of droughts and also could not capture the wide regional diversity of the monsoon.

Droughts and floods co-exist and these weather models were usually inadequate at capturing that. The Monsoon Mission proposed a radical approach. Since 2004, meteorologists and climate scientists have been working on a different approach to forecasting that relies on high performance computing machines, or supercomputers. They sought to simulate the weather on a particular day and, via physics equations, make a map of how each day's weather would pan out over the next few days, weeks, and even months. These weather models, called dynamical models, are now the standard approach to weather forecasts and climate studies. This can give more accurate 'medium range' forecasts and often this is what consumers of weather information find useful. The Monsoon Mission eventually succeeded in developing a general-purpose dynamical model that can be tweaked to generate forecasts on multiple timescales – from daily forecasts to seasonal monsoon predictions.

Beyond the monsoon, such a model could be customised for heatwaves, cold waves, and local forecasts. It is also an expensive approach to forecasting and requires sophisticated computers, radars, wind profilers, and an array of data-gathering devices.

What is novel about this mission?

Improving dynamical models is an endless pursuit, limited only by money and intellectual curiosity. While the latest mission builds on its predecessor by getting more of such equipment, it has outlined a radical plan for "weather management." This means actively changing the weather using cloud seeding. The latter involves spraying clouds with appropriate chemicals to increase or decrease their water-carrying capacity. Plans are also afoot to control lightning. As statistics reveal, lightning strikes are the number one cause of nature-propelled deaths in India and were responsible for 2,821 or 35% of the 8,060 accidental deaths attributable to natural forces in 2022, according to the latest NCRB report.

Meteorologists say they hope one day to be able to tweak the electrical characteristics of the cloud so that there are less lightning strikes that lethally traverse from sky to ground. To this end, a large 'cloud chamber' - that simulates the interior of a cloud - will be set up at the IITM. To be sure, research into weather modification has a history stretching back to the 1950s and many experiments have been conducted in India, including spraying aerosols in certain regions of one cloud, and leaving out the others. However, the big challenge with weather modification is setting sharp boundaries. It is not unusual for seeded clouds to rain in places where they are not supposed to. Gleaning a better understanding of these processes is a major component of Mission Mausam.

What are the issues faced by EPFO pensioners?

Have some of the problems eased with the government announcing that 78 lakh beneficiaries can pick up their pension from any bank, any branch from January 2025? What are some of their other demands? Is a raise in the minimum pension amount likely? What are the difficulties?

T. Ramakrishnan

The story so far:

Nearly 78 lakh Provident Fund (PF) pensioners across the country under the Employees' Pension Scheme, 1995 (EPS-95) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will receive their pension through any bank, any branch from January 1, 2025. The Union Labour Ministry cleared the proposal earlier this month for a Centralised Pension Payment System (CPPS) as part of the EPFO's ongoing IT modernisation project, the Centralised IT Enabled System.

What contributed to the formulation of this new arrangement?

At present, if a pensioner decides to migrate, they have to seek the transfer of Pension Payment Orders (PPO) from one office to another. This has invariably resulted in complaints from pensioners about the delay in transfers, and subsequent payments. Moreover, pensioners can draw their monthly pension only through a group of three or four banks empanelled with the EPFO at every zone or region.

The new facility has been made possible in the wake of the implementation of the CPPS, which has been approved by the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment, according to the Minister and Chairperson of the EPFO's Central Board of Trustees, Mansukh Mandaviya, in a statement issued on September 4. In the next phase, CPPS will enable a smooth transition to an Aadhaar-based payment system. The pensioners will no longer need to visit the branch for any verification at the time of commencement of pension and the pension shall be immediately credited upon release, the government said. The EPFO expects a significant cost reduction in pension disbursement after

Trade unions and even Members of Parliament, cutting across party lines, have been urging the government to hike the minimum pension amount

moving to the new system.

Will the proposed arrangement make things easier for pensioners?

"On the face of it, we welcome the development even though we are waiting for the full details of the announcement. Everything depends upon implementation, during which we will come to know whether there are practical difficulties or not," said K.P. Babu, general secretary of the Chennai EPF Pensioners' Welfare Association and Organising secretary of the All India Co-ordination Committee of EPF Pensioners' Associations. However, he added that for all practical purposes, many pensioners, like any other group of bank customers, draw money through ATM cards, thanks to the core banking system.

Has the announcement satisfied pensioners?

To many pensioners, the Union Ministry's decision has been a disappointment, as they expected the government to provide them with a pleasant surprise, just as it has done for its government staff – a unified pension scheme which seeks to combine many features of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and the New Pension Scheme (NPS).

Trade unions and even Members of Parliament, cutting across party affiliations, have been urging the government to hike the minimum pension amount of ₹1,000. Late last month, a BJP MP from Gujarat, Shobhanaben M. Baraiya, wrote to the Minister saying, that approximately seven years ago, the request for hiking the minimum pension to ₹7,500 along with dearness allowance (DA) and medical allowance was "assured consideration." The Chennai EPF Pensioners' Welfare Association, the EPS-95 Retired Employees' Welfare Association, Mysuru, and the Provident Fund Pensioners' Association, Kochi, have been seeking ₹9,000 plus DA. The same demand was raised by trade unions during their pre-Budget consultation with Union Finance Minister.

What is the status of applications by PF pensioners and members for pension on higher wages?

PF members and pensioners are increasingly anxious over how their applications for pension on higher wages are being processed. Many of them had nursed the hope that they would get higher pension immediately after the Supreme Court's judgment in November 2022 which approved, as a matter of principle, the payment of pension on wages that exceeded the PF ceiling. However, a recent reply from the EPFO under the Right to Information Act showed that as of August 7, 2024, the number of applicants

who were issued PPOs was 8,401, which included two from those who retired before September 1, 2014. Besides, demand notices were sent to 89,235 other applicants, requiring them to transfer their share of arrears. Nearly 17.5 lakh applications had been submitted online, of which about 1.5 lakh were rejected.

What is the Union government's position?

As regards the hike in minimum pension, the Centre has been citing financial constraints, though it has been increasing its allocation annually for the EPS-95.

The government's contribution to the Pension Scheme is at the rate of 1.16% of the basic wages of employees, apart from providing budgetary support to ensure the minimum pension payment. The Pension Scheme is also getting funds through the transfer of 8.33% of the Provident Fund contributions by employers. An official document reveals that during 2022-23, the government's contribution was approximately ₹8,785 crore and it was ₹9,760 crore for 2023-24. For 2024-25, the bill would be ₹10,950 crore. Under these circumstances, it remains to be seen to what extent the Union government will increase the minimum pension amount.

On the issue of pension on higher wages, the EPFO was originally against it, as the body had contended that the EPS-95 was meant for economically weak workers, who had, proportionately, contributed more than the high wage earners. The "reverse subsidy" was an "anomaly," which was corrected by the modifications in 2014. Even now, its stand has been that it cannot be liberal in granting pension on higher wages as this would affect the sustainability of the Pension Fund. However, till now, the fund has not witnessed any cash flow problems, despite there being a projected actuarial deficit in the valuation. There has been a widespread complaint that the PF body has been "unrealistic" in seeking very old documents from pensioners, members, and employers.

What is the way forward?

Apart from increasing its contributions substantially to the EPS-95 and revising upwards the ceiling for PF contributions from ₹15,000 which was fixed 10 years ago, the Union government should implement the idea floated by former Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, during his Budget speech in February 2015, that an option be given to employees to invest in the EPF or the NPS, a move which will take care of the issue of returns on investment. This is not to overlook the fact that since 2015, the EPFO has been investing in exchange-traded funds (ETF), as notified by the Union Labour Ministry. The exclusion of the applicability of EPS-95 to those who joined after September 1, 2014, and earned more than the ceiling has to be removed, making pension eligible to all employees, regardless of the pay.



Benefit dispute: To many pensioners, the Union Ministry's decision has been a disappointment. GETTY IMAGES

What rights are queer couples fighting for?

Why is the advisory to allow the LGBTQIA+ community to open joint bank accounts a small step towards easing their daily lives? Why is the community kept out of succession, inheritance, alimony, and maintenance? What did the SC rule on same-sex marriage in October 2023?

Priscilla Jebaraj

The story so far:

A recent Finance Ministry advisory took a first step at easing some of the difficulties of daily life for queer couples who cannot legally marry. The clarification, along with a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) circular, made it clear to all commercial banks that people from the LGBTQIA+ community and those in queer relationships cannot be prevented from opening joint bank accounts and nominating their queer partners as their beneficiaries.

What are the problems queer people face when their unions are unrecognised?

Supriyo Chakraborty and his partner have been together for 12 years, but when one of them is in hospital or needs to take a medical decision, his partner does not have a legal right to weigh in. "We are scared. Right now, our parents are still alive, so we have managed. But we are getting older. What happens when they are no longer there? For these kinds of life and death decisions, the hospital looks for blood relatives or a legal spouse," he points out.

If caregiving rights are at the heart of the demand for legally recognised marriages,

A six-member panel of various departments has been set up to define the scope of entitlements to queer couples

funeral rites provide an even bleaker example. Earlier this year, a Kochi man named Jebin had to petition the Kerala High Court to be allowed to attend the funeral of his live-in partner Manu who died of injuries sustained in a fall. Manu's family had refused to accept his body and pay his medical bills as they did not approve of their relationship. The court ruled that Jebin could pay his final respects at the funeral, provided Manu's family did not object.

Beyond such grave matters, the mundane routines of daily life can all become harder for queer couples. They cannot obtain a ration card as a family; be nominated for the payment of gratuity, provident fund benefits, or insurance benefits as a dependent spouse; or receive tax benefits for payments made on behalf of the spouse. The laws of succession, inheritance, alimony, and maintenance do not take queer couples into account. Their communications are not protected by evidentiary privilege reserved for married couples, meaning they could be compelled to give evidence against each other in court. They cannot donate organs to each other. They cannot adopt a child together.

"In our country, it is marriage that gives a couple access to a bundle of legal rights. It is about so much more than social acceptance," says Mr. Chakraborty, explaining why he went to court to seek the right to same-sex marriage.

What did the Supreme Court say?

In its October 2023 judgment, the court refused to recognise same-sex marriage, saying that judicial review must steer clear of matters that fall in the legislative domain. However, it also noted that the Constitution protects the freedom of all persons including queer couples to enter into a union, adding that "the failure of the State to recognise the bouquet of entitlements which flow from a union would result in a disparate impact on queer couples who cannot marry under the current legal regime". It also noted the Union government's commitment to set up a committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary to define the scope of such entitlements. This six-member panel – which includes the Secretaries to the Ministries of Home Affairs,

Social Justice and Empowerment, Law and Justice, Women and Child Development, and Health and Family Development – was set up in April, held its first meeting in May, and began stakeholder consultations in July. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community have been encouraged to email the committee directly.

Apart from joint bank accounts, the court directed that the panel must consider how to enable partners in a queer relationship to be treated as a part of the same family for the purpose of a ration card. It also noted that "medical practitioners have a duty to consult family or next of kin or next friend, in the event patients who are terminally ill have not executed an Advance Directive. Parties in a union may be considered 'family' for this purpose." The court directed the panel to consider jail visitation rights and the right to access the body of the deceased partner and arrange the last rites, succession rights, financial and material benefits, and rights flowing from employment such as gratuity.

What kind of changes in rules are needed?

Even before last month's advisories from the Finance Ministry and the RBI, some banks claimed that their inclusive policies allowed queer couples to nominate each other as beneficiaries and open joint accounts over the last few years. Mr. Chakraborty dismisses such claims as a "marketing gimmick", noting that bank branch employees had not been given the sensitivity training to back up the policies proclaimed from their headquarters. "The local clerk simply trades in familiar stereotypes. But now that we have a government order, we can demand our rights. Legal backing is essential," he says.

Similar advisories from the insurance regulator, the State departments in charge of the Public Distribution System, medical boards' guidelines, and the Income Tax department may be sufficient for some benefits to be made accessible to queer couples. However, amendments to family and inheritance laws, the Juvenile Justice Act, and the Income Tax Act may need to be passed by Parliament and State legislatures to make deeper changes.

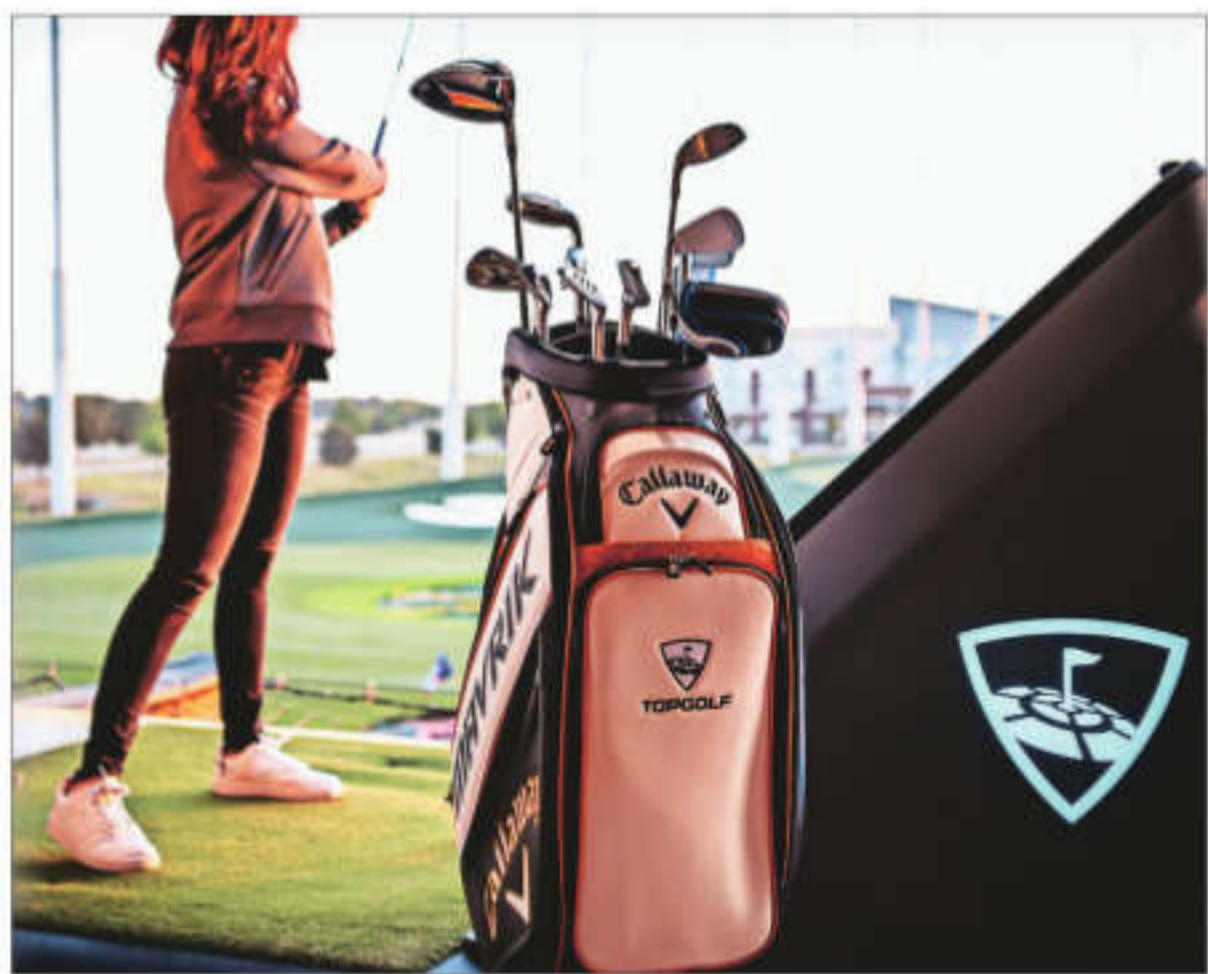
"We tried to get ourselves a bouquet of rights through the petition [to recognise same-sex marriages], but that did not work. So now, it is a longer slog to gain each of them one by one," says Mr. Chakraborty.



Rights overdue: The mundane routines of daily life can become harder for queer couples. FILE PHOTO

Opinion

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2024



Callaway to revert to golf equipment and lifestyle business, while Topgolf will focus on being a pure-play venue-based golf entertainment business

A mulligan for Topgolf?

Callaway, Topgolf might realign for future growth

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah

ONCE UPON A time, in a popular South Delhi market, there was a street food vendor with a loyal clientele. He differentiated himself from the competition not just by the quality of his product, but by quality of service: staying open till late in the night when the rest of the market would shut shop. Over the years, he bought and moved into a shop and diversified his business. There was a time when you could have a 'chaat', a lemonade, an ice cream, and a 'paan' at the same shop. With the exception of a roadside 'momo' stall that pulled in a steady stream of customers, this street-food vendor had garnered the lion's share of the F&B footfall to the market.

A couple of years back, visitors to the market found that the 'momo' vendor was nowhere to be found. Eventually they realised that the street food vendor had subsumed the 'momo' business and added the dumplings stand to his shop. On the face of it, this seemed like a good strategy, but things didn't quite work out like that. What the vendor failed to realise was that even though both 'chaat' and 'momos' are classified as 'street food', it was, in fact, a different clientele that each of these catered to. And clubbing the two products together under one roof appeared to dilute their respective brand equity. The demand for momos in particular began to fall and that had a cascading effect on the 'chaat' sales. The overall business suffered.

Earlier this year, the street food vendor bought a smaller hole-in-the-wall kind of outlet in the same market and moved the momo shop there. The last time I visited, it was business as usual at the 'chaat' shop that seemed to be reclaiming its popularity but things were still slow at the momo shop. Either way, the vendor told me, he'd managed to get his original business back on track. And he did not think it was a good time to invest more in the momo shop as it wasn't doing particularly well.

I was reminded of this — and couldn't resist the urge to serve it up as a rather long-winded analogy — when news came out earlier this month that Topgolf Callaway Brands Corporation's board had approved a split of the company into two independent entities. While Callaway will revert to its core business in golf equipment and lifestyle, Topgolf will focus on being a pure-play venue-based golf entertainment business.

Callaway is the global market leader in golf equipment sales and second (to Acushnet) in golf ball sales. Callaway's portfolio also includes Odyssey putters, Ogio accessories, Travis Mathew apparel, Jack Wolfskin apparel and equipment, and Toptracer — the popular ball-flight analytics and gaming technology brand. Topgolf entertainment has over a 100 venues — that combine driving ranges with entertainment and hospitality — around the world. At Topgolf, players accumulate points by striking microchipped golf balls at targets spread across a large outfield. The utilisation of Toptracer ball-tracking technology and the presence of hundreds of high-definition screens at the hitting bays introduce a diverse realm of gameplay options. The multiple dining outlets, bars and events have made Topgolf a one-of-a-kind experience hitherto missing in golf.

The news of the potential spin-off comes three years after Callaway Golf Company paid out \$2 billion to acquire Topgolf Entertainment Group creating the Topgolf Callaway Brands Company. Before the acquisition, Callaway held a 14% stake in Topgolf. "Over the last

decade plus, we have transformed Callaway into the No. 1 brand in golf equipment, while building a successful and complementary apparel and accessory business," said Chip Brewer, Topgolf Callaway Brands president and CEO in a recent statement. "We believe this business, on a stand-alone basis, will be well understood and valued by the market. Since our merger with Topgolf, we have made considerable investments in the Topgolf business that have dramatically expanded its scale, digital capabilities, and venue profitability. These investments, combined with the hard work of the Topgolf team, have allowed us to outperform our original growth and free cash flow expectations. Looking forward, we remain convinced that Topgolf is a high-quality, free cash flow generating business with a significant future value-creation opportunity," he said.

Brewer's statement came after Topgolf Callaway reported \$1.16 billion in revenues for Q2 of 2024. This is a -1.9% year-on-year decline following Q1's -2.0% decline indicating an underlying trend. The report has raised concerns among investors, revealing a worrying decline in same-venue sales at Topgolf that signal a drop in customer footfall. While the company attributes this partly to a broader economic slowdown and cautious consumer spending, a deeper analysis suggests the challenges may be more deeply rooted. Same venue sales for Topgolf fell 8% in Q2 year-on-year, even though revenue — fired by new venues — increased 5% year-on-year to \$494.4 million. The merger was expected to bring in new customers and add a stronger digital component to golfing, including microtransactions around personalised content in the future. Investors weren't convinced: Callaway shares dipped 19% following the announcement of the merger in October 2020. From the time of the merger in 2021, Topgolf Callaway's share price has dipped from \$28.60 to a 52-week low of \$9.24 earlier this week.

In response to these challenges, Topgolf Callaway has initiated a comprehensive strategic review of the Topgolf business. This review aims at revitalising same-venue sales growth and inorganic alternatives, including a potential spin-off of the Topgolf segment. CEO Brewer emphasised the company's commitment to "maximising long-term shareholder value" through this process, signalling a willingness to consider bold moves to address the current situation. The company's statement says that Callaway is considering spinning off at least 80.1% of Topgolf "to obtain the desired tax-free treatment of the spin-off for tax purposes and will also consider retaining a limited ownership in Topgolf for a period of time." Under this route Topgolf would have a cash balance of more than \$200 million while Callaway is expected to absorb all of the current joint entity's financial debt.

A spin-off might be exactly what the doctor ordered. It's a fair conjecture that investors interested in putting their money into a golf manufacturer may not be interested in investing in a golf entertainment and F&B business and vice versa. At the end of the day, Topgolf is a profitable business with a healthy top line and a long list of new and upcoming venues. "As we look forward, we remain convinced that Topgolf is a high-quality business with significant future opportunity," Brewer said. "It is transforming the game of golf, and we believe it will deliver substantial growth and financial returns over time." That may well turn out to be true. In fact Topgolf should come to India; there's a great deal of interest in golf, and with only a handful of driving ranges, it's likely that Topgolf won't have to worry about footfalls here.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



Manipur is trapped in a web of suspicion, deceit and ethnic conflict. It was never easy to maintain the peace and carry on a government in Manipur. It has become unimaginably worse thanks to the callousness of the central government and the incompetence of the state government, both run by the BJP. The Prime Minister of India has perhaps realised that his journey to Manipur, a state in the Union, will be as perilous as a journey to the dark side of the moon

LEAFING THROUGH PREVIOUS columns, I chided myself for not writing about Manipur more often. I last wrote on Manipur on July 30, 2023, and it is now over 13 months. It is unpardonable. As it is unpardonable for all Indians to have consigned Manipur to the deepest recesses of their collective consciousness.

When I wrote last year, the portents were ominous. I had said 'It is the beginning of ethnic cleansing'. I had said 'Today, from all reports that I have received or read, there is practically no Kuki-Zomi in the Imphal valley and there is no Meitei in the areas dominated by the Kuki-Zomi'. I had said that 'the chief minister and his ministers work out of their home offices and do not — or cannot — travel to the affected areas'. I had also said that 'None of the ethnic groups trust the Manipur police' and 'No one believes the official numbers of the casualties'.

Three In The Dock

Every word that I wrote has, regretably, come true. In a parliamentary democracy, one or more in authority must bear the responsibility for the tragic slide of Manipur. Here are the three men who are in authority —

Mr Narendra Modi, the prime minister: he seems to have taken a vow that, come what may, he will not visit the state of Manipur. His attitude seems to be 'let Manipur burn, I shall not step on Manipur's soil'. Since the start of his third term on June 9, 2024, the PM has found

hear him say that the Election Commission had not played fair and had done what Modi wanted. This, from a man whose mother ensured that a Chief Election Commissioner was nominated to the Rajya Sabha as soon as he retired and made a minister in the government she controlled. This, from a man whose family presided over rigged elections in the Kashmir Valley for decades. It is time for some history lessons for the man who, a recent poll reveals, is the people's choice for prime minister after Modi.

The second stupidest thing that Rahul Gandhi said on this visit was that Sikhs in India are no longer able to wear turbans or a 'kada'. The words were barely out of his mouth when a Canadian Khalistani leader went loudly and visibly public with a statement that basically said, 'we told you so'. What is it about foreign climes that make the heir to our most storied political dynasty nearly always spout nonsense when on foreign soil? Remember that on an earlier foreign excursion Rahul Gandhi declared that democracy had ceased to exist in India.

What annoys me deeply about this kind of reckless ranting is that India desperately needs a strong Opposition so that there are guardrails that prevent the delusional overconfidence Modi has exhibited often in the past ten years. The Prime Minister's autocratic style of governance and the offensive arrogance of some of his

ministers have unsettled even Modi's most ardent supporters. When he failed to get the Bharatiya Janata Party a full majority this time, you could almost hear a collective sigh of relief across the length and breadth of our ancient land. But this does not mean that Indian voters would have preferred to replace Modi with Rahul. He would do well to remember this. It might persuade him to stop behaving as if he has all the answers.

He may discover that caste is not the only reason why '90% of Indians' are not participants in India's journey towards prosperity. He rails against the absence of lower castes in positions of power without noticing that this is because they have not been given the tools to rise above poverty and deprivation. The most powerful of these tools is education. If lower caste children had access to good schools, they would compete easily with those who come from the upper castes. It is one of the mysteries of Indian politics that so many 'socialist' prime ministers never noticed the urgent need to build schools capable of providing real education instead of just basic literacy.

One of Modi's biggest failures is that he did too little to improve our lousy school system. If he had put as much energy into this as he did into Swachh Bharat, things could have changed immensely in the past ten years, when most of our biggest and least literate states have been run by BJP chief ministers. The situation is so



A curfew was imposed in Imphal following a clash between students and security forces during a student-led march to Raj Bhavan in the state capital

Manipur: Dark side of the moon?

the time to visit Italy (June 13-14), Russia (July 8-9), Austria (July 10), Poland (August 21-22), Ukraine (August 23-24), Brunei (September 3-4) and Singapore (September 4-5). His schedule for the remaining months of 2024 include visits to the United States, Laos, Samoa, Russia, Azerbaijan and Brazil. It is beyond contest that the PM has not visited Manipur not because of lack of time or energy but because he is determined to not visit the hapless state.

His refusal to visit Manipur is a measure of his stubbornness. We got glimpses of that during the Gujarat riots, the anti-CAA protests and the farmers' protests against the three farm laws, and when he instructed his ministers to oppose all adjournment motions — whatever the urgent matter — in both Houses of Parliament.

Mr Amit Shah, the Home Minister: his instructions cover every aspect of the governance of Manipur from appointment of senior officers in the state government to deployment of the security forces. He is the government of Manipur. Violence has escalated rapidly on his watch. The people of Manipur are not fighting each other with only guns and bombs. For the first time in independent India, *rockets* and weaponised *drones* have been used. In the past week, curfew has been imposed in two districts, schools and colleges have been closed,

internet has been suspended in five districts, and police are fighting students on the streets of Imphal. Two more battalions of the CRPF (2000 men and women) have been rushed to Manipur to strengthen the 26,000 personnel already deployed.

Mr N Biren Singh, the chief minister of Manipur: he is captive in a prison of his own making. He and his ministers are not able to go around even in the Imphal valley. He is hated by the Kuki-Zomi. The Meitei thought he would ensure their security but his complete failure has made him the most unpopular man in Manipur, including among the Meitei. There is no semblance of administration. His inept and partisan governance was the cause of the civil unrest, now he is the problem and the provocation to all sides. He should have resigned many months ago. His continuance reflects the imperious, never-admit-a-mistake attitude of Mr Modi and Mr Shah.

Divided *De Facto*

Manipur is, *de facto*, two states. The districts of Churachandpur, Pherzawl and Kangpokpi are fully controlled by the Kuki people, and Tengnoupal district (including the border town of Moreh) that has a mixed population of Kuki-Zomi and Naga is practically under the control of the Kuki-Zomi. The Kuki-Zomi run a separate administration. There are

no Meitei government employees in the Kuki-Zomi controlled area; they are ensconced in the districts of the valley. The Kuki-Zomi do not want to be part of a state where the Meitei are in a majority (40 MLAs in a House of 60 members). The Meitei want to preserve the identity and territorial integrity of Manipur. The level of enmity between the communities is high and deep.

There are no talks between any one — government and the ethnic groups or between the Meitei and the Kuki-Zomi. The Nagas have their own, historical grievances against the central and state governments, and they do not want to be embroiled in the Meitei vs Kuki-Zomi conflict.

No Light Anywhere

Manipur is trapped in a web of suspicion, deceit and ethnic conflict. It was never easy to maintain the peace and carry on a government in Manipur. It has become unimaginably worse thanks to the callousness of the central government and the incompetence of the state government, both run by the BJP. The Prime Minister of India has perhaps realised that his journey to Manipur, a state in the Union, will be as perilous as a journey to the dark side of the moon.

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These Assembly seats are a microcosm of politics in the state, where the more things change, the more they remain the same. Political dynasts, surname as the golden ticket, family bonding and splits, fickle loyalties and merit too, if other factors favour

CUES THAT STAND OUT IN HARYANA

JULANA

Vinesh Phogat versus the rest

DEEPENDER DESWAL

FROM being one of the most low-key Assembly segments, Julana in Jind district is now the cynosure of all eyes. The entry of wrestler Vinesh Phogat in the *dangal* of Haryana politics has spiced up the election atmosphere in this nondescript segment, tossed between the towns of Jind and Rohtak.



Vinesh Phogat



Amarjeet Dhandra

There's a reason the Congress has fielded Vinesh from Julana. She is from the Jat community of course and her husband, Somvir Rathee, is from Khera Bakhta village in Jind district, which is part of the Assembly segment. "Vinesh is *bahu* for the people of this constituency. We have seen her in an intense battle on the wrestling mat in the Olympics. We are also witness to her prolonged struggle against former Wrestling Federation of India president and BJP leader Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. She is a fighter. And we love her fighting spirit," says Rajpal Singh, a former sarpanch of Karso-la village in Jind district.

Up against Vinesh are Yogesh Kumar Bairagi of the BJP, Surender Lathar of the INLD, professional wrestler Kavita Dalal from AAP, besides sitting MLA Amarjeet Dhandra of the JJP. On the ground, though, these rivals seem to have been overshadowed by Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. Soon after the Congress fielded Vinesh, Brij Bhushan unleashed verbal volleys to target her. From taking political jibes like "her real motive is exposed" to making personal remarks, he has emerged as a key issue in her electoral battle in Julana.

While she has been countering him and brushing aside the allegations levelled by him, Vinesh says "this man could stoop even lower". For many of her supporters and wrestling fans — and there is no shortage of them here — the political fight is turning into one of prestige and honour. "He is not in the electoral fray but seems the only rival for Vinesh here. By ensuring her victory, we will take revenge for all the gibberish he has been saying," says Ravinder, a resident of Gatauli village.

Vinesh, however, maintains that she is not taking her political opponents lightly. "I learnt this from wrestling that we should not deem our rivals as being lightweight. Though I have been getting support and the love of people, I cannot lower my guard. I have been working hard. It's a new learning as well," she says. She also faces dissension within the Congress, as some leaders are upset over her sudden entry. Though two-time MLA Paminder Singh Dhull and most of the other aspirants joined the Phogat bandwagon when Rohtak MP Deepender Hooda came during the filing of her nomination papers, the probability of "bheetarghat" (internal sabotage) by the disgruntled aspirants is not ruled out.

Julana constituency has a total of 1.8 lakh voters — 46 per cent of them are Jats, 21 per cent belong to the Scheduled Castes, 18 per cent are OBCs, and 12 per cent Brahmins, besides others.



PHOTOS: TRIBUNE FILE AND AGENCIES

RANIA

Devi Lal clan, one against the other

ANIL KAKKAR

NO Assembly constituency exemplifies the twists and turns as well as the internal family dynamics of Haryana politics better than Rania in Sirsa district. Pitted against each other this time are members of the Devi Lal clan.

The Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) has fielded Arjun Chautala, the younger son of senior leader Abhay Chautala. He will be up against sitting MLA Ranjit Singh — former Deputy PM Devi Lal's son and the younger brother of Arjun's grandfather, former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala. The Minister of Power and Jails till recently, Ranjit Singh had won in 2019 from Rania as an Independent. He is contesting as an Independent again, though he had joined the BJP earlier this year.

As the BJP candidate, Ranjit Singh lost the Hisar Lok Sabha election to Congress' Jai Parkash. The poll saw even the Chautala *bahus* competing against each other — former Deputy CM Dushyant Singh Chautala's mother Naina Singh Chautala from the INLD offshoot Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), and her sister-in-law Sunaina Chautala as the INLD candidate.

Arjun had contested the Kurukshetra Lok Sabha seat in 2019 as an INLD candidate and finished fifth.

The JJP and Ranjit Singh have joined forces to contest the Rania and Dabwali seats. Ranjit Singh will support JJP's Digvijay Singh — Dushyant's brother — in Dabwali, and the JJP will assist Ranjit Singh in Rania.

Meanwhile, Aditya Sihag, the son of Om Prakash Chautala's youngest brother Jagdish Chander, who joined the BJP in 2014, is now the INLD-BSP alliance candidate from Dabwali. He will support the INLD in Rania.

On the last day of nominations, INLD and Gopal Kanda's Haryana Lokhit Party formed an alliance, potentially benefitting Arjun Chautala. In the 2019 Assembly elections, Gopal Kanda's brother Gobind Kanda contested against Ranjit Singh, securing 34,394 votes and finished second. Singh won the election with 53,825 votes in his kitty as an Independent candidate. The INLD-HLP-BSP alliance has made the contest tougher for Ranjit Singh, who is likely to face a formidable challenge.

Before 2019, Ranjit Singh contested twice from Rania on a Congress ticket but lost both times. In 2009, he lost to Krishan Kamboj, and in 2014 to Ram Chandar Kamboj. After being denied a ticket by the Congress in 2019, Ranjit Singh turned a rebel and won as an Independent.

The Congress has fielded journalist Sarva Mitra Kamboj and the BJP Shishpal Kamboj.



Arjun Chautala



Ranjit Singh

UCHANA KALAN

A whole new chapter of legacy contests

DEEPENDER DESWAL

THE high-profile Uchana Kalan constituency in Jind district is set to witness a keen contest between the fourth generations of two prominent political families of Haryana — former Deputy Chief Minister and sitting MLA Dushyant Chautala is pitted against former MP Brijendra Singh. The entry of BJP's Devender Atri, a Brahmin candidate and resident of Kahsoon village in the segment, has made it a triangular contest.

Facing anti-incumbency, it would be a challenging task for JJP leader Dushyant to retain his seat. The Congress has fielded former Union minister Birender Singh's son Brijendra Singh, who had won the Hisar Lok Sabha seat as a BJP candidate in 2019. The father-son duo shifted to the Congress before the recent Lok Sabha polls.

Dushyant had defeated Brijendra's mother Prem Lata, who was contesting on a BJP ticket, by 47,000 votes in the 2019 Assembly polls. Five years earlier, in 2014, Prem Lata, fielded by the BJP, had defeated Dushyant, then in the INLD, by about 7,000 votes.

The intense political rivalry between the families started in 2009 when former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala decided to contest from Uchana Kalan and defeated sitting MLA Birender Singh, then in the Congress, by 621 votes. Birender has represented Uchana Kalan in the Assembly five times.

Brijendra, who resigned from the IAS to take a plunge into politics, is the great-grandson of Sir Chhotu Ram, an iconic farmer leader of the pre-Independence era. Dushyant is the son of former MLA Ajay Chautala, grandson of Om Prakash Chautala and great-grandson of former Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal.

Dushyant is banking on his five years' work in the Uchana Kalan segment. "I have been able to do so much for the development of the constituency and for the entire state during my tenure as Deputy CM. People will ensure JJP's victory," he says.

Brijendra claims his real challenger is the BJP candidate. "Though I am happy he (Dushyant) has opted to contest from here, people are upset with him due to political backstabbing of the mandate after the 2019 Assembly poll results and allegations of corruption," he says.

Farmer activist Azad Palwan and a woman activist, Sikkim Nain, who have been raising issues related to farmers and the molestation of a student by the principal of a government school, have also joined the electoral fray as Independents.



Dushyant Chautala



Brijendra Singh

ATELI

Rao stronghold, third generation takes shot

SUMEDHA SHARMA

A SMALL town in Mahendergarh district, Ateli has attained centrestage in this election. The Assembly constituency in the Ahirwal region, with around two lakh voters, is witnessing the electoral debut of the third generation of the powerful Rao clan.

Fielded from the family stronghold by the BJP for the October 5 polls, Arti Rao is the daughter of six-time MP Rao Inderjit Singh and granddaughter of former Chief Minister Rao Birender Singh. The clan traces its roots to freedom fighter Rao Tula Ram.

For Arti, victory is far from assured. After the strong resistance to her candidature from within the party, her opponents are targeting her for being an outsider who is oblivious to the issues that the residents of the constituency face.

"The entire Ahirwal is my home," counters Arti, "those targeting me should know that Ateli is part of Ahirwal and Mahendergarh. While preparing for this debut for the last 10 years with the BJP, I have been the most active here not just as a politician, but a resident. I know this place like the back of my hand, its problems, its issues and its expectations."

Her grandfather Rao Birender Singh is known across political circles for coining the term *Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram*, referring to political representatives switching loyalties with alacrity.

Arti's father Rao Inderjit Singh has emerged as the tallest BJP leader in south Haryana, though there's a constant buzz that the saffron party has not done justice by allotting him a berth in the Union ministry that fails to measure up to his status.

To allegations of nepotism and being a poster girl of dynastic politics, Arti says, "I am a national shooter and like any other political leader, have spent a decade working as a party worker on the ground. I am proud of my family's legacy of serving people and lucky to take it forward, but that doesn't define me. None of those in the fray have toiled for this segment like I have."

In addition to battling the BJP government's anti-incumbency, she faces a strong opponent in Santosh Yadav, a former BJP MLA. The former Deputy Speaker in the Vidhan Sabha filed her nomination papers as an Independent candidate after being denied a ticket by the BJP from Ateli. It would be Yadav's fifth Assembly election and first as an Independent. She had emerged victorious in 2014 but lost in 2019.

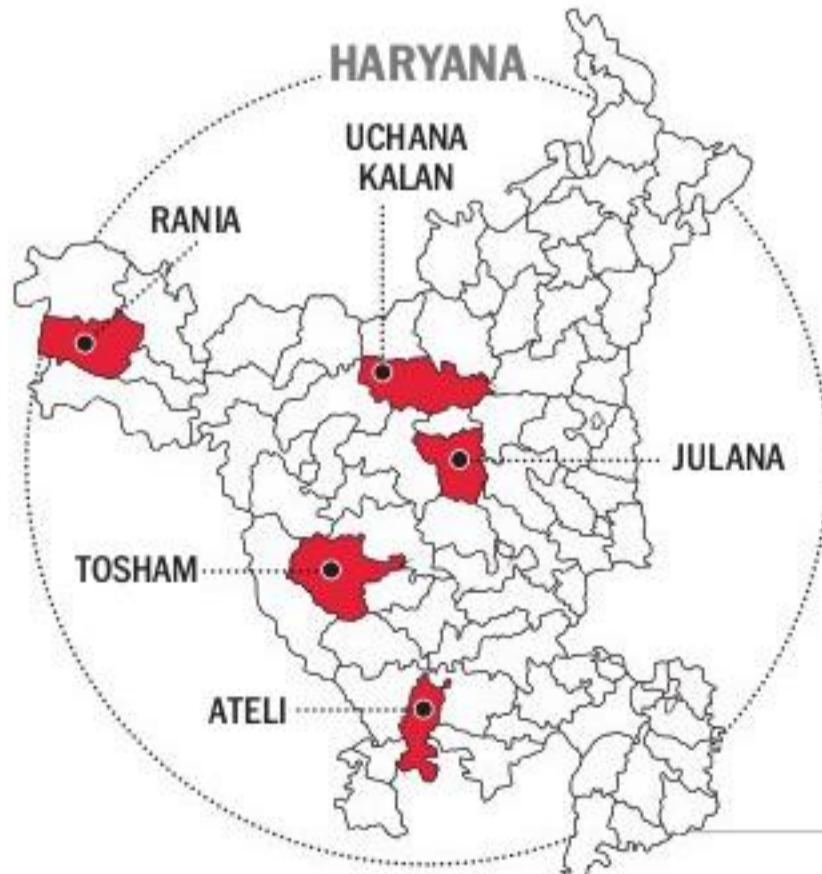
The Congress has fielded Anita Yadav (60), a three-time MLA and former Chief Parliamentary Secretary.



Arti Rao



Santosh Yadav



The grand rivalry of Bansi Lal's grandkids



Shruti Choudhry



Anirudh Chaudhry

TOSHAM

WITH both the BJP and the Congress fielding members of the family of former Chief Minister Bansi Lal, the Tosham Assembly segment in Bhiwani district has turned into a battle royale between estranged cousins.

BJP's Shruti Choudhry, Bansi Lal's grand-daughter and a former Congress MP, will face the challenge posed by his grandson, Anirudh Chaudhry of the Congress.

The two have joined the electoral fray in

the family stronghold for the first time. The contest has turned into a battle for supremacy within two factions of the Bansi Lal family to claim his political legacy.

Of the late Bansi Lal's two sons, Ranbir Mahendra and Surender Singh, Mahendra got politically estranged from his father. Surender always stood by him but died in a chopper crash in 2005.

Shruti's mother Kiran Choudhry (wife of the late Surender Singh) recently became a Rajya Sabha member of the BJP after she quit the Congress soon after the Lok Sabha polls. Kiran Choudhry is a four-time MLA from

Tosham, having won on a Congress ticket. "She is a determined and strong-willed woman who was calling the shots in Tosham when she was in the Congress. Anirudh, son of Ranbir Mahendra, has thrown in his hat with the backing of former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda. The winner of the contest will obviously claim to be the one who carries forward Bansi Lal's political legacy," says a political expert, adding that this is the reason that the tussle is going to be bitter.

Anirudh says everybody has the right to contest even though his cousin is the

main opponent. "I have no problem facing her. She is my sister and it will be a good contest," he says, adding that he had made a commitment to himself to follow in his grandfather's footsteps.

Kiran Choudhry, however, refuses to call it a contest between *bhai* and *behan*. "It should be called a contest between rivals," she stated in an interaction with the media recently. Shruti claims she would work to fulfil the aspirations of people and follow in Bansi Lal's footsteps.

Tosham has 2.2 lakh voters.

— Deepender Deswal

"Despite hanging up my racing wheels over a decade ago, I still get a buzz when we enter an Olympic and Paralympic year"
— Tanni Grey-Thompson



PARIS PARALYMPICS

PARA ATHLETES BASK IN GLORY AND GOLD

The accomplishments of para athletes at Paris Paralympics are not just sporting success but a story of grit and determination, a story of indomitable spirit that soars high despite hardships and challenges, writes **RISHABH MALIK**

The Paris 2024 Paralympics will go down as one of the most celebrated sporting moments in India's history. The Indian contingent's extraordinary performances were not just a display of athletic prowess but also a powerful reminder of human resilience, willpower, and the ability to triumph against all odds. From setting new records to inspiring millions, the Indian athletes left a remarkable imprint on the global stage. India's Paralympians wasted no time in making their presence felt at Paris 2024. In 12 days of competition India registered 29 medals includes 7 gold, 9 silver, and 13 bronze. India's medal count marked significant landmark and breakthroughs in Indian history of Paralympics. India's first medal in the Paralympics came in the 1972 Games, with Murlikant Petkar winning a gold medal in swimming. Up to the recent 2024 Games, India have won 60 medals across all Paralympic Games, with the most successful Paralympic campaign being the Paris 2024 Games with 29 medals.

Shooting has traditionally been one of India's strong suits in both the Olympic and Paralympic arenas. In Paris, India's para-shooters continued their stellar run from previous Games. Avani Lekhara, a name that had already become synonymous with Indian Paralympic shooting, won gold in the women's 10m air rifle standing SH1 category. Avani's calm demeanor and laser-focused concentration were on full display as she once again climbed to the top of the podium. This win made her a two-time Paralympic champion and reinforced her place among the world's elite shooters.

India's shooting success didn't end there. Manish Narwal, competing in the men's 10m air SH1 pistol event, clinched silver, narrowly missing out on gold. His performance was another testament to India's dominance in precision sports, along with Rubina Francis in the same women's 10m air pistol category clinched bronze in shooting.

India witnessed some historic milestone in the paralympics event, For the first time India won 17 medals in athletics, with Dharambir winning gold and Pranav Soorma taking silver in the men's club throw F51 event. Dharambir also established a new Asian record of 34.92 metres. Later, Praveen Kumar set an Asian record by winning the high jump T64 championship, giving India its sixth gold medal at the Paralympics.

Mariyappan Thangavelu became the first Indian to win medals at three successive Paralympic Games when he won a bronze in the T42 high jump event. He took home silver in Tokyo 2020 and gold in Rio 2016. With a personal best time, Preethi Pal won bronze in the women's 100-meter T35 competition. It was the first-ever medal for India in a Paralympic track event. Being the only athlete from India to win two medals at the Games, her bronze in the 200m made her the most successful competitor. India finished the



Paris 2024 track season with four medals overall. Among them was Deepthi Jeevanji, who won a bronze in the women's 400m T20 class to become the first intellectually disabled Indian athlete to earn a Paralympic medal. In archery, records were also broken. In the ranking round, armless archer Sheetal Devi in short time broke the world record before coming in second. However, she later joined up with Rakesh Kumar to win the compound mixed team qualifying event with a world record score. Together with Rakesh, Sheetal, at just 17 years old, won bronze in the mixed team event to become the youngest medalist from India ever. Eventually, Harvinder Singh became the first-ever Paralympic archery champion for India.

Another athlete who made headlines was Sumit Antil, the javelin thrower who had previously set a world record in Tokyo 2020. In Paris, Sumit not only defended his title but also shattered his own record, throwing an unbelievable 70 meters in the F64 category. His performance earned him his second consecutive Paralympic gold, establishing him as a global force in the sport.

Delhi boy Navdeep Singh genetically short in height 4ft tall

“
DELHI BOY NAVDEEP SINGH GENETICALLY SHORT IN HEIGHT 4FT TALL (DWARFISM) NAVDEEP WHO HAILS FROM HARYANA EMPLOYED AS INSPECTOR IN THE INCOME TAX DEPARTMENT. THE 23 YEAR OLD WON A HISTORIC GOLD IN DAY BEFORE THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF PARIS PARALYMPICS. FROM BEING BULLIED TO NATIONAL CHAMPION AT F41 JAVELIN THROW EVENT WHICH WAS A ASTONISHING TURN OF EVENT BEFORE THE PODIUM AFTER HE WAS CONFIRMED TO SILVER MEDAL HIS IRANIAN COMPETITOR GOT DISQUALIFIED BEFORE HIS THROW WHICH AUTOMATICALLY UPGRADED HIM TO GOLD MEDAL.
”

(Dwarfism) Navdeep who hails from Haryana employed as Inspector in the Income Tax Department. The 23 year old won a historic gold in day before the closing ceremony of Paris Paralympics. From being bullied to national champion at F41 Javelin throw event which was a astonishing turn of event before the podium after he was awarded to silver medal his Iranian competitor got disqualified before his throw which automatically upgraded him to gold medal. There are ups and downs, there are also descents, Suyash Jadhav, (Asian para games gold medallist) in the men's 50m butterfly (S7) fell short in the competition finished fifth in Heat 1 with time 33.47 although he didn't qualify for final but his fight against the strong contenders from the U.S. and Ukraine gave a solid remark of ginger to younger athletes. IAS officer Suhas Yathiraj came in Paris to achieve the previous best in Tokyo Paralympics 2020 but restricted to silver medal in SL4 badminton. After returning from Paris on Tuesday with India's best ever medal tally ever (29) and ranked 18th on team's tally athletes received grand welcome surrounded

by huge numbers of supporters greeted with showering of flowers on them. The Indian contingent met Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his residence on Thursday in New Delhi, where PM Modi interacted with all para-athletes of Indian contingent and congratulating the medal winners of Paris Paralympics 2024

Athletes shared their journeys and challenges to overcome the stereotypes of the society. Paralympic Gold Medallist Avani Lekhara gifted her signed jersey to PM Modi. Rewards were announced by Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya of 75 lakh to gold-medallists, 50 lakh to silver winners and 30 lakh to bronze-medallists in the games and pledges full support from Government for the LA 2028 campaign.

While the Paris 2024 Paralympics was a roaring success for India, it also showed the challenges that continue to plague the country's para-sporting ecosystem. Access to training, medical support, and sponsorships remains uneven, with athletes in rural areas particularly disadvantaged. A Movement, not just Medals Paris 2024 Paralympics should not be seen as an isolated success but as part of a larger movement towards inclusion, empowerment, and equality. India's Paralympians have shown that they are not defined by their disabilities but by their abilities. Their victories are symbolic of a changing India, one that is slowly

but surely starting to embrace diversity in all its forms.

As India commemorates this new chapter in athletic prowess, the effect of these players will continue to resonate, pushing the Government to provide greater support, recognition, and growth for para-sports. India's achievement at the Paralympics is more than simply a moment of glory; it is the start of a future in which the country's differently-abled athletes will continue to smash barriers, demonstrating that with spirit and drive, nothing is impossible.

Famous Columnist Akhileshwar Sahay stated in his article Khel Vaani India's Paralympic Rise: A Beacon for a More Inclusive Future

NEXT STOP: MISSION TOP FIVE AND MISSION INCLUSIVE REVOLUTION

It's time to jumpstart two missions to be accomplished in four years: Mission Top Five Rank at Los Angeles and Mission Inclusive Revolution to make India disabled-friendly. For the first mission, India must broaden its participation base across the 550 events—both in terms of events participated in and the number of sportspersons per event. No country has a larger pool of disabled individuals than India, with "55 to 90 million," according to a recent World Bank estimate. This demographic presents a potential goldmine of "Khojo-Paralympians" and a driving force for "Khelo Paralympics". The lowest-hanging fruit? Track and field events, where the investment per sportsperson is low and the potential return high. All Bharat needs to join the elite Top 5 club is 100 medals at the Los Angeles 2028 Paralympics. It's eminently doable, and the time starts now. Considering that in the last three years (2021-2024), between Tokyo and Paris, Indian Paralympians have amassed 48 medals, 100 medals in 2028 is not a far-fetched dream.





DUBLIN'S HIDDEN GEM

Discover a hidden gem in the Irish capital overlooking the water in the revitalised Silicone Docks. Here, a unique facet of Dublin unfolds, where the historic charm of the city seamlessly intertwines with modern vibrancy

BY AKANKSHA DEAN

Even for locals, this area feels distinctly refreshing, offering a different perspective of Dublin while ensuring that all of its iconic landmarks remain conveniently accessible. Embrace the fusion of old and Dublin's Docklands, affectionately dubbed the 'Silicon Docks,' serve as the European headquarters for tech giants like Facebook, Google, and Airbnb. At the heart of this dynamic district stands Anantara The Marker Hotel, a striking geometric marvel that has become its unofficial emblem. The name 'The Marker' pays homage to the Grand Canal's rich trading history. The canal, stretching 82 miles, was once adorned with cast iron markers indicating the distance to the journey's end. The hotel stands proudly at the site of the last of these markers. Situated on the south bank of the river Liffey, the hotel commands stunning views of Grand Canal Dock and the vibrant Grand Canal Square, featuring the striking Bord Gais Energy Theatre, designed by Daniel Libeskind. At night, the plaza comes alive, illuminated in captivating hues of red and green. This dynamic locale is at the heart of Dublin's thriving tech industry, with one area even dubbed 'Googletown'. Conveniently, the hotel is just a 20-minute drive from Dublin Airport and a mere 15-minute stroll to the city centre, making it an ideal base for exploring the capital's rich offerings.

MODERN ELEGANCE AWAITS

All the design elements at Anantara The Marker tell a story, much like the vibrant neighbourhood surrounding it. The Docklands continues to evolve as a thriving part of the city. As I step into The Marker, I'm immediately struck by its vibrant atmosphere that resonates throughout. The luminous lobby leads into colour-infused bedrooms, each exuding modern elegance. I notice young Dubliners gathering in the atrium for drinks, fostering a lively social scene that pulses with energy. On sunlit days, the rooftop bar becomes a buzzing hub, offering breath-taking views—a perfect retreat amid the city's bustle. Originally opened in 2013 and recently rebranded under Anantara in 2023 after an extensive renovation, this hotel stands as a beacon of modernity. Its striking chequerboard façade, inspired by the Cliffs of Moher, welcomes me into a mesmerizing 67-meter-long atrium with a cantilevered ceiling reminiscent of the Giant's Causeway, where public spaces, including a bar, lounge, and restaurant, invite relaxation and enjoyment. Embodying the Anantara philosophy, the hotel seamlessly integrates the brand's three core pillars—Indigenous, Expertise, and Authentic Luxury—throughout its offerings. Each of the 187 rooms and suites offers breath-taking views of the city, Grand Canal, Dublin Bay, or the mountains, enhanced by floor-to-ceiling windows. The accommodations are thoughtfully designed with ergonomic furnishings,



technology, and luxurious bathrooms for an indulgent experience. The Junior Corner Suite proved to be the perfect refuge for my stay. With ample space to work, unwind, or simply relax, I enjoyed the gentle sunlight streaming onto my Eames-style chair at the desk. A freshly brewed espresso awaited me, a delightful touch to start my day. I was pleasantly surprised to find a bar of Co Wexford's Bean and Goose chocolate by my bedside, boxy on the breakfast menu, and an 'Irish Wine Geese' section on the wine list. The fusion of striking architecture and local storytelling in this 187-bed haven feels refreshingly new. I balanced work and rejuvenation effortlessly. Prioritizing wellness, the award-winning spa provides an array of rejuvenating body treatments and massages, complemented by a 75-foot indoor infinity pool, a steam room, a eucalyptus-infused sauna, and a whirlpool tub. This was the perfect way to begin my mornings before venturing out. One of my favourite retreats was the chic rooftop bar and terrace, which



boasts breath-taking panoramic views. Each evening, I found myself captivated by the skyline, capturing the stunning sunsets that bathed the city in warm orange hues. At the heart of Marker's culinary journey is the vibrant new Forbes Street by Gareth Mullins. As a fan of Gareth's weekly cooking segment, I eagerly anticipated the experience. I began with exquisite Flaggy Shore oysters on crushed ice paired with a delightful Bloody Mary. Next, the marbled rib-eye, flawlessly seared, accompanied by zingy Chimichurri, house-cut chips, and a rocket salad, was a delight. For dessert, creatively

presented North County Dublin rhubarb, with smoked vanilla and crispy potatoes, encapsulated the essence of simple yet exceptional dining.

STORIES OF DUBLIN

Unlike the traditional luxury of the Merrion, Westbury, and Shelbourne, The Marker embraces bold architecture while ensuring substance accompanies its style. Anantara's mantra, 'Life is a journey,' resonates through its various activities like docklands walks and sea swimming. What truly distinguishes are its unforgettable bespoke experiences, meticulously designed to immerse visitors in the local culture and lifestyle. For food enthusiasts, the signature Spice Spoons journey with Executive Chef Gareth Mullins is a delightful highlight. Guests spend the day with Mullins exploring the charming fishing village of Howth, just 30 minutes from Dublin, and embark on a chartered fishing boat around Dublin Bay, where they might spot dolphins and seals. Afterward, a visit to Kish Fish, one of Ireland's

premier salmon smokehouses, precedes an enriching lesson in baking traditional Irish soda bread back at the hotel. Other curated experiences include Wild Swimming in a popular local spot under the guidance of an open-sea coach, an insightful deep dive into equine culture at the Irish National Stud and Gardens with a renowned horse trainer, and Afternoon Tea: Poetry and Places, which celebrates Ireland's literary heritage. For me, the highlight was the Docklands Storytelling Tour led by Derek Brennan, the hotel's Irish storyteller and guest experience manager. His captivating narratives weave together the rich history of the Docklands, bringing the area's past to life through his engaging tales, a connection forged since the hotel's inception in 2013.

SIP, STROLL, EXPLORE

A trip to Dublin is incomplete without exploring its rich offerings. A must-visit is EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum, conveniently located within walking distance of the hotel. This interactive museum delves into the history of the Irish

diaspora and emigration. Just around the corner lies The Ferryman Townhouse, a lively pub where locals warmly welcome visitors, eager to share a table and demonstrate the art of enjoying a pint in under ten seconds. For those with a sense of adventure, Grafton Street, The Temple Bar, and Trinity College Dublin are a leisurely 30-minute stroll away. Be sure to reserve an evening for the renowned Guinness Storehouse, where a guided tour reveals the brewing process, and guests can even create a 'stoutie,' a selfie on the frothy beer head. This fusion of modernity and community encapsulates the essence of Dublin's evolving urban landscape, making it a must-visit destination for locals and travellers alike.

Akanksha Dean is an independent food & travel writer, a chef and a catalyst and is the first Indian to have trained at Osteria Francescana, in Modena, Italy, rated as the world's best restaurant in the World's 50 Best Restaurants, in 2016 and 2018 and currently in the Best of The Best Category.

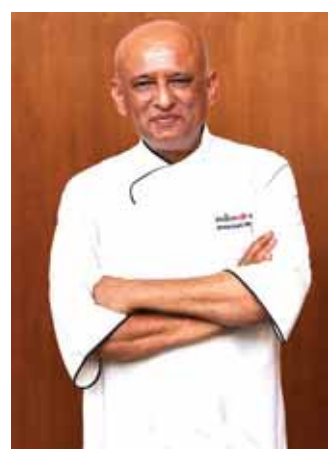
CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF INDIAN ACCENT

A Journey Through Taste and Tradition

Indian Accent's 15th anniversary marked a memorable evening, celebrating its rich legacy with a blend of nostalgic classics and inventive culinary creations, says SAKSHI PRIYA

As Indian Accent New Delhi celebrated its 15th anniversary, the occasion paid tribute to its remarkable culinary journey. With softly dimmed lighting and elegant candlelit tables, the ambiance set a warm and inviting tone for the evening. The sophisticated atmosphere, combined with a touch of nostalgia, created a perfect backdrop for a dining experience that was both refined and memorable. Walking into Indian Accent felt like stepping into a space where the charm of tradition and the excitement of modernity seamlessly merged, crafting an unforgettable experience. The evening featured a nostalgic look back at Indian Accent's inaugural tasting menu from 2009, allowing guests to revisit beloved classics that had been instrumental in shaping the restaurant's journey. Dishes like the Whole Wheat and Semolina Puchkas, Paneer Tikka Chaat and Khakra Mille Feuille served as a heartwarming reminder of the restaurant's evolution and enduring appeal. The journey began with Chef Shantanu Mehrotra at the helm, who crafted a menu that would soon become a

sensation. Reflecting on those early days, Chef Mehrotra recalls the excitement and challenges of the original menu. While some dishes met with mixed reviews, others quickly captured the hearts of diners. Today, Indian Accent is celebrated for its pivotal role in bringing modern Indian cuisine to the global stage. The celebration commenced with a sensory feast, beginning with the Blue Cheese Naan. This dish was a revelation, a delightful twist on a classic favourite. The crisp texture combined with the bold, creamy blue cheese offered a unique start to the evening. Paired with the Mushroom Shawarma, subtly spiced with garam masala, it was a comforting yet adventurous introduction that set the tone for the meal to come. The evening begins with a nod to the past through a selection of appetisers that have become icons of Indian Accent's innovative approach. The Whole Wheat and Semolina Puchkas provided a playful yet refined take on street food. The trio of waters - mint and coriander, tamarind and jaggery and buttermilk - offered a delightful balance of flavours, beautifully encapsulating Indian Accent's



approach to blending traditional elements with modern sophistication. Chef Shantanu Mehrotra's talent was unmistakable throughout the tasting menu. His creations, such as the Paneer Tikka Chaat and Khakra Mille Feuille, were perfect examples of his ability to blend textures and flavours in imaginative and delightful ways. The Beetroot and Peanut Tikki with Caper Wasabi Chutney was particularly memorable, showcasing his knack for transforming humble ingredients into something truly remarkable. The main courses continued to impress with their inventive twists on both classic and global flavours.



The Bharwan Mirch with Goat Cheese Mousse and Chilli Aam Papad Chutney was a revelation, blending bold flavours with finesse. The Paneer Lasagna with Smoked Aubergine and Goji Berry Makhni offered a creative and comforting take on a beloved classic. The Turkish Sultanas and CousCous Ki Tahiri with Anar Avocado Raita was a brilliant example of how global influences can be seamlessly integrated into modern Indian cuisine. The grand finale of the evening was nothing short of a dessert lover's dream come true. The Indian Accent Kulfi Sorbet was like a refreshing burst of icy goodness, cleansing the palate with a playful,

creamy touch. But hold on tight, things got even sweeter with the Kinnaur Apple Shakarpara Crumble. Imagine the crunch of perfectly baked apple crumble mingling with the smooth, homemade vanilla bean ice cream—every bite was a joyous celebration of texture and flavour. And just when you thought it couldn't get any better, the Coconut and Jaggery Brulee with Ruby Grapefruit Pops Amarula Ki Chuski arrived, turning dessert into an art form. The rich brulee, with its luscious coconut and jaggery notes, paired with zesty grapefruit pops and a hint of Amarula, was an explosion of taste that left us craving more. Complementing this sweet finale was the Daulat Ki Chaat, which emerged as a standout. Its saffron-infused elegance, adorned with almonds and a hint of sugar, was both a visual delight and a burst of refined flavours. This dish exemplified the restaurant's commitment to creative excellence and its ability to elevate even the most familiar flavours into something extraordinary. Each dessert was a playful, indulgent end to a meal that was nothing short of spectacular!

Reflecting on this milestone, it became clear that the 15th anniversary was not just a celebration of Indian Accent's rich history but also a vibrant showcase of its future. The event honoured the restaurant's legacy while highlighting its ongoing dedication to culinary excellence and innovation. Chef Shantanu Mehrotra's passion and creativity were evident in every dish, underscoring the restaurant's status as one of New Delhi's most cherished culinary destinations. Indian Accent's 15th anniversary celebration was a memorable reflection on its past, with a touch of nostalgia, while also offering a glimpse into its future. The evening was all about elegance, creativity and exceptional flavours. Chef Shantanu Mehrotra's innovative approach and remarkable talent shone through in every dish, proving that Indian Accent is more than just a restaurant - it's a symbol of innovation and sophistication in the culinary world. This anniversary wasn't just a milestone, it was a celebration of a remarkable journey filled with flavour, creativity and lasting excellence.



THE BEST COMEDY COMES FROM A SPECIFIC VIEW POINT, AND THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE INDIAN CULTURE HAS ITS OWN TAKE ON THE WORLD
— BRIAN QUINN



FROM WHEELS TO WINGS

The story of transport through time is showcased meticulously at the *Heritage Transport Museum* and is a nostalgic journey for the grownups and curious potent for the young, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

Nestled in the heart of Gurugram, the Heritage Transport Museum offers a vivid glimpse into India's rich transport history. It is not merely a museum but a living narrative of how India's transportation systems have evolved over the years. From early bullock carts to vintage cars, each display in the museum is a portal to a time when travel wasn't just about the destination but the experience itself. India's transport history offers a vivid reflection of the country's broader cultural and social transformations. The evolution of transportation—from traditional bullock carts and hand-pulled rickshaws to modern vehicles and advanced public transit—parallels significant societal, technological, and economic changes. Various modes of transport illustrate the evolution of cultural practices and daily life. For example, traditional transport methods like palanquins and bullock carts reveal historical social structures and regional customs, while the advent of motorized vehicles signifies a shift toward modernization and globalization. The Heritage Transport Museum is a treasure trove of historical gems, each piece providing a unique window into India's transport legacy. The Museum in Gurugram offers a fascinating glimpse into the evolution of transportation in India. As India's first comprehensive transport museum, it showcases a wide array of unique items that reflect the country's rich history in this sector. Among the standout exhibits is an extensive collection of vintage cars, including iconic models like the Ford Model T and the Rolls-Royce Phantom. Each vehicle tells a story, with plaques detailing their origins, ownership histories, and their journeys through India's roads. The museum also houses an impressive collection of two-wheelers, featuring everything from early Royal Enfield bikes to classic Vespa scooters. These vehicles capture the changing dynamics of transportation in India, from rural commutes to urban lifestyles. A particularly unique feature is the railway exhibit, which includes vintage carriages,

We hope to instil a respect for our heritage: Tarun Thakral

Tarun Thakral, the founder & managing trustee of Heritage Transport Museum is also the Executive Director at CJ International Hotels Ltd, New Delhi that owns and manages Le Meridien New Delhi. Tarun started his career in the Hospitality business in 1986. In 1990, he won the French Government scholarship to pursue MBA program in International Hospitality Management from 'Institut de Hotelier Management International', Paris. To pursue his hobby and passion in vintage and classic cars, in 1996 Tarun founded Heritage Transportation Trust (HTT) - a registered not-for-profit trust to promote the preservation of modes of transportation that have been used in India. As its Founder and Managing Trustee, HTT has developed India's first comprehensive Transport Museum, Heritage Transport Museum, which opened to visitors in December 2013. Since its opening Museum won many prestigious awards - The National Tourism Award for being the most innovative and unique tourism project in the country, the 2016 and 2018 Travellers Choice Award by TripAdvisor, International PATWA award for innovation at ITB, Germany, the BITB Tourism Excellence Award, SATTE Tourism award for innovation, and more. He talked to Gyaneshwar Dayal about his

passion and labour of love, The Heritage Transport Museum: **What inspired you to create the Heritage Transport Museum? Was there a specific moment or experience that ignited your passion for preserving India's transport history?** India did not have a comprehensive transport museum until the Heritage Transport Museum opened its doors to visitors. Given the presence of remarkable transport museums worldwide, I often wondered why India didn't have one of its own. As my personal collection of transport memorabilia expanded, managing it became increasingly difficult. We launched the Heritage Transport Museum in December 2013, and it remains India's sole transport museum to this day. **How did you go about collecting such an impressive and diverse array of transport artefacts? Were there any particularly challenging or memorable acquisitions?** In 1994, I purchased my first vintage car from Ramgarh Shekhawati, Rajasthan, which was in a state of disrepair. The process of restoring this vehicle over nearly a year brought me immense joy and ignited a passion for collecting and preserving vehicles from being scrapped. My collection soon grew to include cars, two-wheelers, bicycles, carriages, and carts. In 2002, I came across an advertisement from Indian



Railways about scrapping several 1930s railway saloons. I quickly contacted the Railway Board, expressing my interest in purchasing and preserving one of these saloons. Since the Railways had never before sold such items to private individuals, it took over a year of negotiations. Ultimately, I succeeded in acquiring and restoring the saloon, which now proudly stands at the museum on a recreated vintage railway platform. **What criteria do you use to select the items displayed in the museum?** The Heritage Transport Museum features a diverse array of transportation modes used for both private and public transport throughout history. Our aim is to display the full range of transportation, encompassing cars,

buses, two-wheelers, traditional transport methods, non-motorized vehicles, railways, trams, aviation, and maritime. We choose items based on their historical importance, popularity, and how they complement our existing collection. We also carefully evaluate how each object will engage and benefit our visitors. **What are the biggest challenges you've faced in preserving and restoring some of the older or more delicate items in the museum's collection?** Many items, especially those that are decades or even centuries old, face natural deterioration over time. Components can become fragile or worn, making the restoration process both meticulous and delicate. For vintage vehicles and machinery,

locating original or compatible parts can be extremely challenging, often necessitating custom fabrication or innovative solutions to replace missing or damaged components. Restoring complex items, such as early aviation or railway equipment, requires specialized knowledge and skills, and finding experts with the necessary experience can be difficult. **What are your future plans for the Heritage Transport Museum? Are there any upcoming exhibitions or expansions that visitors can look forward to?** We have several exciting initiatives in store for the Heritage Transport Museum to enrich its offerings and continue captivating our visitors. One of our key plans is to introduce an experience centre that will provide a unique, multisensory experience. We're also expanding our exhibitions to feature rare artefacts that showcase various aspects of transportation history. To keep up with the latest technological advancements, we aim to incorporate more interactive and immersive technologies, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and advanced simulation tools, to make the exploration of transport history even more engaging. **What drives your passion for curating and expanding the museum's collection? How do you stay motivated in continuing this labour of love?**

A deep passion for history, culture, and education, coupled with a strong commitment to preserving and sharing important stories and artefacts for future generations. The continual excitement and inspiration of discovering new ways to present these treasures and enhance the museum's narrative. The joys of seeing visitors engage with, learn from, and appreciate the museum's offerings. The profound personal fulfillment derived from working in a field I genuinely love and enjoy. And, of course, the pride in contributing to the museum's enduring legacy. **What kind of experience do you hope visitors take away from the museum? Is there a particular message or feeling you want them to leave with?** One of the greatest compliments we've received is being recognized as a world-class museum in India. Many visitors leave with a profound sense of nostalgia, feeling moved, inspired, and reflective. They depart with a deeper understanding of the evolution of transport, and the museum continues to ignite curiosity and further interest in its visitors. We hope to instil a respect for our heritage, encouraging visitors to think about ways to preserve it for future generations. For younger visitors, we aspire to inspire them to develop hobbies that bring them fulfilment and satisfaction.

signaling systems, and detailed replicas of early Indian trains. Visitors can explore the interior of these carriages and get a sense of the grandeur of rail travel during the colonial period. For aviation enthusiasts, the museum features models and artifacts from India's early civil aviation history, including scaled replicas of early Indian aircraft. Another intriguing exhibit is a full-size 1950s Piper J3C Cub aircraft, providing a rare close-up view of mid-20th-century aviation. One of the more immersive experiences is the display of

maritime memorabilia, with detailed models of ships and boats that were integral to India's naval history and trade routes. The museum's art and design installations also deserve mention, with sections devoted to the design evolution of vehicles, showcasing how aesthetics and functionality have shaped modern transport. Besides, the Museum has also a 3D virtual reality ride on a rickshaw over the China wall which is a big hit with the children and elders alike. The development of transportation also mirrors India's economic progress. The transition

from horse-drawn carriages to trains and automobiles highlights the country's industrial growth and enhanced connectivity, which has facilitated trade and mobility. Additionally, transportation innovations have been crucial in driving social change. The introduction of public transportation systems such as buses and metro rails has influenced urbanization, accessibility, and social integration, affecting how people live and work. The Heritage Transport Museum plays a crucial role in enriching our understanding of India's

history by preserving and showcasing these transportation milestones. Through its diverse collection of transport artifacts, the museum offers visitors insights into how transportation has both shaped and been shaped by the broader socio-cultural context. It effectively connects the past with the present, providing a tangible link to India's rich history and its ongoing evolution. The museum houses an impressive collection, thoughtfully curated to spark fascination. The assortment ranges from classic vintage cars to steam engines, traditional

bicycles, and even airplanes. Visitors can explore artifacts that depict the evolution of transport—some centuries old, others representative of the industrial age. There is also a segment dedicated to maritime history, complete with beautifully preserved models of ships, giving the experience an almost encyclopaedic richness. What truly sets the Heritage Transport Museum apart is the meticulous passion with which it has been curated. The layout of the museum is designed not just to showcase relics but to narrate stories. Interactive displays,

lifelike dioramas, and thematic galleries transport visitors into the very eras these machines were part of. Each exhibit is placed within a larger cultural and social context, enabling visitors to appreciate its significance beyond the mechanics. It's not just a collection of vehicles; it's a carefully woven tapestry of India's transport evolution, enhanced by attention to detail. For anyone with an interest in history, innovation, or transport, the Heritage Transport Museum is a must-visit, where every exhibit is a labour of love, offering a journey through time.

THE MONSOON'S WHISPER IN EVERY NOTE

Vidushi Sunanda Sharma's *Boondan Phuhaar* concert celebrated the monsoon with enchanting Indian classical music, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

There is something undeniably timeless and evocative about Indian classical music, especially when performed by an artist as deeply rooted in tradition as Vidushi Sunanda Sharma. On a beautiful evening at the Stein Auditorium in New Delhi, Sharma brought the monsoon season to life with her performance, 'Boondan Phuhaar.' The concert was not merely a display of musical mastery but a heartfelt celebration of nature, tradition and the human spirit. Sharma, a vocalist of the Banaras Gharana, captivated her audience with her soulful

voice that seemed to capture the very essence of the rainy season. Each note felt like a raindrop, each melody a breeze dancing through the trees. She was accompanied by a gifted ensemble, including Pt. Vinay Mishra on the harmonium, Pt. Mithilesh Kumar Jha on the tabla and U. Ghulam Ali on the sarangi, who together created an atmosphere that was almost spiritual. Their performance reminded everyone present of the unique power of live music to evoke deep emotions and transport listeners to another world. What stood out most was not just the technical excellence on display but the depth of



Photo: Pankaj Kumar

feeling in every note. There was a genuine joy and emotional connection to the monsoon season that resonated throughout the performance, making the audience feel the beauty and poignancy of the rains. In a world that often feels dominated by digital and impersonal entertainment, this concert was a poignant reminder of the impact of live music and its ability to make people feel truly alive. The evening was also a celebration of India's rich cultural heritage. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha's reflections on Varanasi's spirit and its deep-rooted connection to the classical

arts underscored the importance of preserving these traditions. Sunanda Sharma's commitment to her craft and her work with the Girija Darshan Trust, named after her revered Gurus, Smt. Girija Devi ji and Pt. Sudarshan Sharma, is commendable. Through her efforts to nurture young talent and provide a platform for established artists, she ensures that this exquisite form of music remains vibrant and relevant, not just a relic of the past. More than just a concert, 'Boondan Phuhaar' felt like a journey into the heart of the monsoon - a gentle escape from the rush of daily life.

The performance offered a rare chance to slow down, to be present and to savour the profound beauty of music that is so intricately connected to nature. Sunanda Sharma's devotion to her heritage and artistry was evident in every note, making the evening a memorable and moving experience. In an age where life often moves at a relentless pace, this event was a timely reminder of the importance of taking a moment to appreciate the simple, yet profound joys - a rain-soaked evening, a beautiful melody and a shared experience that brings people closer to the essence of life itself.

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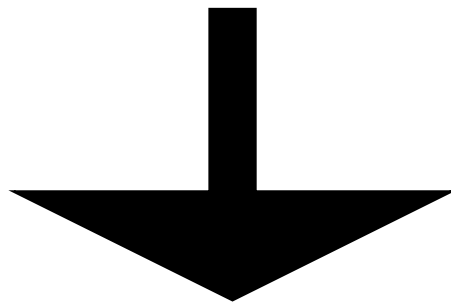
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