

Law mandates EC’s decisions to be unanimous or by majority

New Delhi, Sept 23

Even as a media report claimed that two Election Commissioners had repeatedly objected to the poll panel's actions, including its electoral-roll revision exercise, the law governing its transaction of business mandates that its decisions be unanimous or by a majority.

The report claimed that Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi objected to the Election Commission's actions 14 times in 10 months on a range of issues, including changes to Form 6, the centralisation of ERONET controls in Delhi, voter-deletion appeals in West Bengal and the alleged exclusion of eligible voters from electoral rolls in Goa.

However, the law governing the EC's transaction of business leaves no room for a minority to prevail over the majority in the three-member poll body.

EC sources maintained that all decisions of the poll panel, including relating to the special intensive revision (SIR), had been unanimous and with the approval of both the Election Commissioners and the Chief Election Commissioner.

According to Section 18(1) of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, "The EC may, by unanimous decision, regulate the procedure for transaction of its business and also allocation of its business amongst the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners."

Section 18(2) states: "All business of the EC



shall, as far as possible, be transacted unanimously, and if the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and other Election Commissioners differ in opinion on any matter, such matter shall be decided according to the opinion of the majority."

Further, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in TN Seshan versus Union of India & others (1995) favoured collective decision-making as it ruled that the poll panel should strive for unanimity, but if opinions differed, the majority view should prevail.

The court also held that the CEC was neither an "emperor" nor a superior authority over other Election Commissioners and that the CEC acted as the Chairman, but all members shared equal decision-making powers.

30,000 police personnel deployed in Hyderabad for Ganesh immersion procession



Hyderabad, Sep 23

Around 30,000 police personnel have been deployed in Hyderabad as part of the massive security arrangements for the Ganesh immersion procession, scheduled to be conducted on Friday, Telangana Director General of Police C. V. Anand said on Wednesday.

He said with the 10-day Ganesh festival entering its final phase, immersion processions have already begun at several locations and larger numbers are expected over the next two days.

The police chief said 30,000 police personnel have been deployed for security, crowd management and traffic regulation during the immersion processions.

Commissioners of Police and Superintendents of Police across Hyderabad and the districts are personally monitoring the arrangements, he said.

DGP Anand was talking to media persons after visiting the Khairatabad Ganesh idol. He offered prayers, wishing peace, prosperity and well-being for the people of the State.

He appealed to devotees and organisers to ensure that the Ganesh immersion processions are conducted peacefully and safely.

Anand recalled his long association with the Khairatabad Ganesh celebrations, dating back to his tenure as Deputy Commissioner of Police, Central Zone.

He thanked the festival committee members, police personnel and officials of various government departments for their cooperation in conducting the celebrations.

The police are working in coordination with the GHMC, Electricity, Irrigation and other departments to facilitate the immersion processions.

Arrangements have been made at Hussain Sagar and other immersion points across the city, while cranes have been positioned at required locations along Tank Bund. Special measures have been taken along the procession routes to prevent theft and harassment of women. SHE Teams and Task Force personnel have been deployed, while the Traffic and Law and Order wings are working in coordination to manage the movement of vehicles and crowds. Anand reminded festival organisers and devotees of the Supreme Court guidelines governing the use of DJs and crackers during processions. He said excessive noise could cause inconvenience to the public, particularly children and senior citizens.

Bus Catches Fire, 38 Passengers Safe

Hyderabad:, Sept23

A private travel bus heading to Srisaillam caught fire near the Karmanghat Hanuman Temple in the early hours of Thursday.

According to a fire official, the bus was carrying 38 passengers when the incident occurred. All passengers were reported safe, and no casualties were reported.

The fire department received the call around 2:15 am. The blaze is suspected to have been caused by an electrical short circuit.



BJP appoints Sunil Bansal as in-charge for Telangana, Arvind Bhadoria for Andhra

Hyderabad, Sep 23

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has appointed Sunil Bansal and Arvind Bhadoria as the new in-charges for Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, respectively.

BJP National President Nitin Nabin appointed the new in-charges and co-in-charges for various states on Wednesday

Abhay Patil and Rekha Sharma have been appointed co-in-charges for Telangana, while Vanathi Srinivasan has been named as the co-in-charge for Andhra Pradesh.

Telangana BJP president N. Ramchander Rao conveyed his heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to Sunil Bansal on his appointment as in-charge for the party's state unit. He also congratulated Abhay Patil and Rekha Sharma on their appointment as co-in-charges.

"Under our National President Nitin Nabin ji, and with your leadership and guidance, we will work to further strengthen BJP across Telangana and strive towards forming a double-engine Sarkaar in the State under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji," he posted on X

Union Minister for Coal and Mines G. Kishan Reddy also conveyed his heartiest congratulations to BJP National General Secretary, Sunil Bansal, on his appointment as the BJP Telangana in-charge. He also congratulated the new co-in-charges for the party. "Look-



ing forward to your direction and guidance in further strengthening the BJP in Telangana," he wrote on X.

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, also took to X to congratulate the new in-charge and co-in-charges.

Wishing everyone great success in strengthening the organisation and taking the party further forward, he said. BJP's Andhra Pradesh unit President PVN Madhav congratulated and conveyed his best wishes to Arvind Bhadoria of Madhya Pradesh on being appointed as the new party in-charge for the state,

He also congratulated Vanathi Srinivasan from Tamil Nadu, who has been appointed as co-in-charge.

Madhav hoped that with their experience and guidance, BJP will be further strengthened in Andhra Pradesh.

Telangana HC seeks compliance report on Ganesh noise curbs

Hyderabad, Sep 23

The Telangana High Court has directed the state home department to file a compliance report on its earlier orders curbing loud sound systems during Ganesh festivities, after pulling up police for failing to enforce restrictions on night-time noise during idol immersions.

According to Deccan Chronicle, Justice NV Shravan Kumar was hearing a contempt case filed by Chinnolla Damodhar Reddy and M Srinivasa Reddy of Nirmal district, who alleged that the court's earlier directions on noise pollution were not being followed.

The judge noted that loud sound systems were still being played on roads at night while idols were being transported for immersion, disturbing the public, particularly elderly and ailing residents. The court observed that organisers appeared to be flouting the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, and said the matter needed immediate attention.



SI on Ganesh immersion duty succumbs after hit-and-run on NTR Marg in Hyderabad

A sub-inspector from Kothagudem Two Town police station, K. Venkanna, died after being knocked down by an unidentified motorcycle while on duty at NTR Marg. Though he initially thought his injuries were minor, he later developed complications in Warangal and succumbed during treatment at MGM Hospital. Geographic Reference Hyderabad: A 55-year-old Sub-Inspector of Police, who was on Ganesh

idol immersion duty at crane-2 on NTR Marg, died after he was allegedly knocked down by an unidentified motorcycle on Tuesday. The victim was identified as K. Venkanna, an SI attached to Kothagudem Two Town police station. According to police, Venkanna was on duty at NTR Marg when the unidentified motorcycle hit him and fled the spot. The sub-inspector lost his balance and fell on the road. A

EYE SECRETS Editorial

Diluting institutional autonomy may boomerang

Over the last decade, the NDA government has been displaying a dangerous propensity to dilute the autonomy of public institutions and move towards overcentralisation of powers. The latest targets are the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). Opening the doors to select private players may help in capacity building, but regulating their work through bureaucrats toeing the line of political masters raises disturbing questions. Scientists need autonomy to function to their full potential. No country can afford to sideline the vision of its scientific community. The reorganisation of the ICMR raises questions over the future of its autonomy. Instead of medical scientists and public health specialists guiding health research, the national health research agenda will now be set by a highly centralised National Health Research Stewardship Committee headed by the Principal Scientific Adviser and having bureaucrats as members. The Department of Health Research will act as the implementing agency, and the ICMR will be at the last tier as the in charge of “scientific and technical execution.” There has been a systematic attempt to place the decision-making powers in the hands of non-technical people, centralise decision-making, and undermine the autonomy of scientific agencies. All this could eventually lead to the hollowing out of expertise and talent in public-funded R&D bodies. In the case of ISRO, a recent policy shift to involve the private sector in many operations has raised the hackles of employees.

Representatives of nine employee bodies, comprising over 5,000 members, addressed a joint letter to ISRO chairman V Narayanan, seeking clarification about the organisation’s future role. The exodus of senior scientists has further deepened concerns over the future of the premier organisation. The government has pushed for the entry of private players into the space sector without a legally binding regulatory framework. Space activities involve a plethora of international obligations and regulations, ranging from allocation of orbital slots for satellites to liability and insurance in the case of accidents on Earth or in orbit. It is, therefore, important to have a proper regulatory system in place. ISRO first proposed a space law in 2015, and while deliberations were ongoing, the government announced a new space policy in 2023, under which IN-SPACe (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre) was formed. Its role is still unclear, and it is not backed by any statutory provisions. While its enabling role as a single-window point for startups is obvious, calling it a regulator is misleading. If private-sector facilitation is all that IN-SPACe is doing, then ISRO and its two commercial arms — Antrix Corporation and New Space India Limited — were better placed to do that, given their cumulative experience of interfacing with the private sector over the past four decades.

‘They forced us to use UPI, now they’re charging us’



Novelty Creations, a wedding store in Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi’s wedding hub, sells a wide range of lehengas, sherwanis and sarees starting at Rs 10,000. With the festive and wedding season approaching, proprietor Rohit Khanna was hoping for a good run of business. But the announcement of a 0.4% fee on UPI transactions above Rs 2,000 has taken some of the shine off those expectations. With most of his customers now paying by UPI, Khanna said the Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) will become an additional cost for his business. “All our products cost more than Rs 2,000 and everyone pays by UPI now. So, we’ll have to bear the charges. Along with the competition, a businessman’s primary obstacle to growth is the government,” he grumbled. From October 15, UPI transactions over Rs 2,000 will attract a fee of 0.4%, as announced by the National Payments Corporation of India. Ajay Kumar Mittal, proprietor of a Lucknowi Chikankari store, echoed Khanna’s complaint. “Initially, they forced us to shift to UPI. Now, 10 years later, they have levied charges. Some of the politicians say ‘0.4%’ is nothing. But in aggregate for small traders like us, it’s a huge number.” For Khanna, the new charge comes on top of rising costs. He said the growth in his business income over the years has been “severely disproportionate” to his expenses. “Our expenses are increasing every day. There’s inflation, personal income tax, then the GST and now this,” he said. While there have been murmurs about possibly switching back to cash transactions, Rakesh, a manager at another wedding garment store in the area, said that asking customers to make the switch is impractical. “No one carries cash around these days. And even if we ask our customers to get the money from ATMs, most of them don’t work in Chandni Chowk and there’s always a huge queue in front of the very few that do,” he said. Some said they are still hopeful of a change in the government’s stand on the matter in the course of the month till this directive takes effect.

FDA shuts Mumbai’s 108-year-old Olympia Coffee House canteen



Colaba’s 108-year-old Olympia Coffee House and the canteen at Nair Hospital were among 14 food establishments across Maharashtra whose licences have been suspended by Tukaram Mundhe-led Food and Drug Administration (FDA) during a festive-season food safety drive. The action against Olympia Coffee House followed a consumer complaint received through the FDA’s Safe Food Safe Maharashtra campaign.

An inspection on September 16 found a urinal in the food storage area, cockroach and fly infestation, meat blood residue inside a refrigerator, and food being handled directly on the floor. Inspectors also found unhygienic food preparation and utensil-washing facilities, unclean water, improper segregation of raw vegetarian and non-vegetarian food, and damaged wooden chop-

ping boards. Food handlers were not wearing appropriate protective clothing, the FDA said. Of the 35 food handlers, 34 had not undergone mandatory food-safety training, while water-testing reports and sanitation records were also unavailable. “The food licence of Olympia was suspended under Section 32(3) of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, read with Regulation 2.1.8(4) of the Food Safety and Standards (Licensing and Registration of Food Businesses) Regulations, 2011. During the suspension, the establishment has been directed to stop the purchase, preparation, storage, sale and distribution of food. Further action will be considered after the deficiencies are rectified and the premises pass re-inspection,” FDA officials said. The Nair Hospital canteen also faced immediate suspension after inspectors found serious food safety and hygiene violations. The FDA said the action was taken considering the health and safety of patients and visitors. In Chembur, the licence of Blink Commerce Private Limited, operating from Pestom Sagar Road, was suspended over violations of prescribed hygiene and health standards. Licences of Vishwas Sweets and Snacks and A-1 General & Dry Fruits in Ghatkopar West, Milan Punjab in Worli, and Sadguru Sweets in Malad East were also suspended. The FDA inspected 27 food establishments, issuing improvement notices to another 13. The drive also resulted in the seizure of 2,813 kg of milk and dairy products worth Rs 7.38 lakh across the state. Another 2,580.7 kg of food products and 12.5 litres of toddy, valued at Rs 4.66 lakh, were seized.

Opposition targets Mahayuti on BMC contract to firm linked to Mithi case



Day after The Indian Express reported that the BMC had awarded a Rs 14-crore trash-boom contract to a firm earlier disqualified over an FIR in the Mithi River desilting case, the Opposition targeted the Mahayuti government and questioned the civic body’s decision. NCP (SP) MLA Rohit Pawar alleged that the BJP had previously levelled corruption charges against the company while in the Opposition but was now allowing it to receive a BMC contract.

“The BJP leaders, who were leveling corruption charges against a certain company when they were not in power, have now awarded a Rs 14 crore contract to the

very same company by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). Accuse someone relentlessly until your throat goes dry, file cases once you come to power, and then hand out tenders to those same companies again for financial gain- this is the true modus operandi of BJP’s corruption,” Pawar said in a post on X. Referring to the Mithi desilting case, Pawar asked, “Under whose pressure was a Rs 14-crore contract again awarded to a company found involved in the Mithi River silt case? Will the Chief Minister conduct an inquiry into this, or will the company once again be given a free hand to indulge in corruption?” Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal said, “The BJP has started the business of looting Mumbai. First, they make corruption allegations, then join hands with those against whom they had made the allegations, and together exploit power and public money for financial gain. This has been the BJP’s way of functioning.” “The BJP has its eye on the financial management of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation. In the name of using the civic body’s deposits of around Rs 90,000 crore, an effort is under way to gradually exhaust them. Around Rs 30,000 crore has already been spent and now the remaining amount is being used up,” Sapkal said. “The BJP’s plan is to weaken Mumbai’s financial strength by exhausting all the deposits of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation...,” he alleged. The Opposition’s reactions followed the IE report that Virgo Specialities Pvt Ltd had earlier been disqualified from two BMC tenders under a clause barring contractors “who are blacklisted or against whom FIR has been filed”. The firm was subsequently declared technically eligible for the latest tender after arguing that the Mithi FIR was against its then director Jay Joshi, in his personal capacity, and not the company.

NDA ally to opposition: Parties woo Akash Anand, eyeing BSP vote base

From an NDA ally to opposition parties and leaders of the Bahujan movement, political formations in Uttar Pradesh are reaching out to Akash Anand, Mayawati’s nephew, days after she “freed him” of party responsibilities. The overtures come as parties continue to look at the Bahujan Samaj Party’s support base ahead of the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. Mayawati, however, has repeatedly ruled out electoral alliances. Nishad, Aazad make the first overtures. Sanjay Nishad, Nishad Party Chief and an NDA ally, is among those who have reached out to Anand.

Recalling the slogan, “Ambedkar ji ke sapne adhure, Kanshi Ram karenghe poore (Dr Ambedkar’s dreams remain unfulfilled; Kanshi Ram will fulfil them),” Nishad added: “I appeal to Akash Anand ji to come forward, join the mainstream with his team and fulfil Kanshi Ram’s dream.” Nishad’s appeal comes days after Azad Samaj Party chief and Nagina MP Chandrashekhar Aazad also said that Anand would be welcome in his party. “Brother Akash Anand wants to take the Bahujan mission forward. Even though he has used abusive words against me, if he wants to join the Azad Samaj Party, he is welcome. We will work together,” Azad said. Why Anand matters Mayawati announced on September 10 that Anand was being “completely freed” from the BSP, after his father-in-law Ashok Siddharth retired from active politics.

Anand had earlier been projected by Mayawati as her political successor and given important organisational responsibilities, but his position in the party subsequently went through several reversals. While some within the BSP expect that Anand could eventually be taken back by “Behenji”, the interest from other parties is also linked to the BSP’s core voter base. The party’s vote share in Uttar Pradesh has declined sharply over the past two Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. In the 2017 Assembly election, the party secured 22.23% of the vote and won 19 seats. Its vote share fell to 12.88% in 2022, when it won one seat. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the BSP polled around 19.43% of the vote in Uttar Pradesh and won 10 seats. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, its vote share declined to around 9.39% and it failed to win a single seat. While the BSP no longer has the legislative presence it once had, its support among sections of Dalit voters, particularly Jatavs, remains a factor that other parties are watching. Mayawati’s repeated refusal to enter electoral alliances has further complicated the calculations of parties seeking to expand their social coalitions in the state. Against this backdrop, the outreach to Anand gives political parties another channel through which to pursue the Bahujan political space associated with the BSP. Congress, SP keep doors open Speaking to Congress state president Ajay Rai said the party would con-



sider the possibility of working with anyone seeking to enter politics through democratic means.

“Mayawati ji is aligned with the BJP. Akash Anand had spoken against the BJP, and there is pressure from the BJP on her.

Telangana private engineering colleges face vigilance checks amid fee dues row

Hyderabad: In what appears to be ‘political retaliation’ for demanding their legit fee reimbursement dues to the tune of Rs 8,500 crore, the Telangana Congress government initiated vigilance inspections of private engineering colleges.

What began as a surprise visit by the vigilance team comprising 10-12 officers headed by an SP or DSP on Wednesday continued on Thursday as well, with several teams inspecting private engineering colleges across erstwhile 10 districts from morning until late evening. The move comes in the wake of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy’s recent statement in Assembly blaming some students for availing two scholarships and stating that vigilance inspections would be carried out. However, the inspections appear to have gone beyond the issue of fee reimbursement or scholarships that the colleges have been demanding.

Armed with a 67-point questionnaire, the vigilance teams are examining every aspect of college functioning — from permissions and admissions to student attendance, faculty, infrastructure, laboratories, results and utilisation of government funds. The teams are verifying whether colleges are functioning at the approved locations, whether or not all permitted courses are being offered, and whether or not AICTE approval documents for the past five years are available. In addition to examining

Public flogging of handcuffed men: Gujarat government issues notice to senior IPS officer



The Gujarat government informed the Gujarat High Court on Thursday (September 17) that a show-cause notice had been issued to an IPS officer who is accused of publicly flogging, humiliating, and parading handcuffed persons. This sets in motion disciplinary proceedings against the officer. Government Pleader G H Virk made the submission before a Division Bench of HC Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal and Justice D N Ray, which is hearing a public interest petition (PIL) about the alleged incident that took place in Surat on July 14.

The state informed the court that the Gujarat Director General of Police (DGP) had “concurred with the findings of a preliminary inquiry” by the Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime), Surat City. The report of the inquiry had been placed before the court in a sealed cover earlier. A month ago, the High Court had asked why the officer, Rajdeep Singh Nakum, who was Deputy Commissioner of Police in Surat city at the time of the incident, was still in his post. During a hearing on August 14, the court had verbally told the state that “the least you must do” was to transfer Nakum out of Surat. Videos of the alleged incident, which went viral on social media, purportedly showed Nakum and 15-20 other police officers parading four handcuffed men on the road and repeatedly assaulting them with lathis. The four men who were being beaten were identified as Ayaz Malek, Imran Khan, Rajik Shaikh, and Shahrukh Shah, all of whom had been booked in a rioting and attempt-to-murder case at the Salabatpura police station in Surat. Nakum had told The Indian Express in July that there were “criminal cases against the accused and they had created terror in their areas, so we paraded them in their own residential area so that people know that police are vigilant and such activities will not be tolerated”.

Virk submitted before the court on Thursday that the preliminary inquiry report had been placed before the state Home Department with the recommendation of the Inspector General of Police (Law and Order). His submissions were recorded in an oral order dictated in open court. The High Court directed the state to bring the progress of the disciplinary proceedings on record, and posted the matter for October 19. In its oral dictation of the order, the court said: “The Home Department upon examination of the material and the recommendation, and being of the prima facie view that the act of the officer concerned while functioning as in-charge DCP Zone 2 attracts Rule 3(b)(1) and Rule 3(2) of the All India Services (Conduct) Rules 1968, has initiated action by issuance of show-cause notice dated 14-9-2026 to the officer concerned wherein 15 days’ time has been granted to...furnish his explanation.” The proceedings before the HC stemmed from a letter addressed to Chief Justice Sunita Agarwal by advocate Utkarsh Dave July 14, seeking immediate judicial scrutiny of the videos circulating on social media that allegedly showed Nakum and the other police personnel, parading and beating the handcuffed men. Dave alleged that the accused were dragged by their hair, slapped and beaten in full public view under the supervision of senior police officers. The representation said the conduct of the police violated Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. It referred to the safeguards laid down by the Supreme Court in its landmark D K Basu v State of West Bengal (1997) judgment, as well as the Gujarat High Court’s earlier proceedings concerning the Kheda flogging incident of 2022.

At the August 14 hearing, the High Court had observed that the July 14 incident had taken place in a public place and videos had circulated widely — its occurrence could not, therefore, be denied. The inquiry would determine why the incident had occurred and its gravity, the court had said. The court formally took note of the preliminary inquiry report in its order of August 21, recording that it had perused the report, which was dated August 20, and had been submitted in a sealed cover along with the affidavit of the Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime), Surat City, who had conducted the inquiry. Thursday, responding to an oral query from the court, the state submitted that as per convention followed by the Home Department, a show-cause notice is issued even if the officer has already had an opportunity to give a statement during the preliminary inquiry. Not doing so could subsequently “become a ground for litigation”, the state said.



the University’s affiliation orders, details of any course discontinued or any reduction in sanctioned seats without approval are also being sought. The colleges have been instructed to furnish details of students receiving scholarships each year, their names and their presence in admission registers. This is being verified by the attendance recorded in the registers and biometrics. Further, the teams are cross-verifying attendance of students availing scholarships with records submitted to the university and checking whether or not any changes have been made to the attendance data. “The main focus of inspecting teams is on the college’s finances, scholarships and attendance. However, they are also verifying admissions, affiliation, infrastructure and laboratories.

12-year-old Saira Banu dreamed of marrying Dilip Kumar, 34: ‘Out of love, not duress’



There was an era when it was believed that the wedding of a female actor signalled her retirement from the movies. One could call it the social custom of the times, or, if they could be really blunt, they would call out the orthodox nature of our patriarchal society. Keeping this in mind, it is rather curious to see actor Saira Banu, and not because she defied social customs and had a long, fulfilling career that wasn't dependent on her marital status, but because she embraced her identity as 'Dilip Kumar's wife', and was actually quite proud of the relationship that she nurtured with her husband. Saira dedicated her life to being Dilip Kumar's partner, and left no stone unturned in supporting him, in sickness, health, and even at a time when he married someone else behind her back.

Saira fell in love when she met Dilip Kumar at the age of 12, he was 34Saira made her debut in the movies in 1961 with the superhit film Junglee. Even though she was the daughter of a famous film actor, Naseem Banu, being a star in the movies wasn't her childhood dream. During her innocent adolescent years, she had dreamed of marrying the superstar Dilip Kumar, who was 22 years older than her. This was a childish dream of a young girl who hadn't experienced the world. Even when she met Dilip Kumar as a 12-year-old, on the set of Mughal-E-Azam, the dream persisted and she actually believed that she had fallen in love with him. "While still a teenager, I wanted to be his wife," she once told Subhash K Jha in an interview.

Lo and behold, a decade later, she actually married him. What made him marry a girl who was 22 years younger than him is a discussion for another day, but Saira had one goal, and for her, this was it. He was a mature man who had been in and out of love a few times, lived through fame and success, had experienced all the luxuries money could buy, but she was a starry-eyed girl who could never forget that they had first met when he was dating his co-actor on K Asif's magnum opus.Such was her fascination for him that even years after their marriage, she saw him and her as characters of George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion. Him being the Professor, who

could mould her, and she being Eliza Doolittle, who could go through this transformation. She told Filmfare in 2024, "I always wanted to do it with Dilip saab and I wanted it to be my first movie with him. I would have loved to have played Eliza Doolittle to his Professor Henry Higgins." The first film they did together was the 1970 film, Gopi.

Saira accepted 'hostile atmosphere' at Dilip Kumar's homeSaira was 22 when she married 44-year-old Dilip, and she was ready to make any sacrifices needed to keep the marriage afloat. During those early years of marriage, she put up with some "hostile atmosphere" at his home that took a toll on her health. Dilip had warned her that his sisters were used to the fact that they enjoyed sole right on him, and would find it uncomfortable if he married anyone. "I went on to tell her that it was inevitable that 'Main saatve aasmaan ki hoor bhi laaoonga, toh usey accept nahin kar payegi meri family' (Even if I bring a celestial angel from the seventh heaven, my family will not be able to accept her)," he said in his autobiography Dilip Kumar: The Substance and the Shadow.

She faced "resentment" from his sisters and would sometimes return to her parents' home, which was across the road, when she had to get ready for early morning shoots. But through it all, she never complained to her husband, even after she fell ill because of the "emotional stress" that was being inflicted on her. A few years later, Saira and Dilip lost a baby in the eighth month of pregnancy. Years later, when she was asked about not having children, she said, "I don't miss having a child because saab is like a child at heart."

Saira accepted Dilip when he married another woman secretlyIn 1982, when Dilip got married to a woman named Asma Rehman, it came as a huge shock to Saira, and while she has never spoken about it herself, Dilip shared his version of the story wherein he said that he could never "forgive" himself for hurting Saira. Describing it as a "grave mistake", he admitted that he had previously promised Saira's family that he would never marry again. But, despite it all, she chose to stand by him.A few years later, Saira gave up her career, and she said that she did it because she wanted to be present for her husband. "Looking after saab, his life and his home comes naturally to me. He never asked me to give up my career. In fact, he encouraged me to continue acting after marriage. But after a while, my heart was not in my career. I just wanted to take care of saab," she told Jha in an earlier chat.

'Out of love, not duress'Saira saw herself as the chosen one, as in the same chat, she had said, "He could have married anyone, any woman he wanted. He chose me. I consider myself very fortunate." She even believed that one needed to have "some caliber" to be Dilip Kumar's wife, and perhaps, she had it, which is why he chose her.They were married for 55 years, and towards the end of his life in 2021, she was still being asked questions about being a devoted wife to a superstar husband.

Bobby Deol says he wants to break away from villain roles

New Delhi: Actor Bobby Deol on Saturday said he has been flooded with villainous roles but has been making a conscious effort to break away from the image by taking on diverse projects.Speaking on the sidelines of the Jagran Film Festival here, Bobby said it is quite natural that when an actor becomes successful in any character, they get stereotyped afterwards."If an actor becomes successful in a particular kind of role, they keep getting similar roles. That's what happens in the industry. And I try really hard to break out of that. I've just done a film called 'Bandar', which was very different," the 57-year-old actor told PTI."Bandar", which saw him play an ageing star who is accused of rape by his ex-girlfriend, was directed by filmmaker Anurag Kashyap. The movie was released in theatres in June and received positive reviews from the critics.

Bobby's other two projects of the year were "Alpha", starring Alia Bhatt and Sharvar, and "Jana Nayagan", in which he starred alongside Tamil Nadu CM C Joseph Vijay. And in both the movies, the actor essayed the role of the antagonist.The actor said whenever he gets the role of a villain, he tries to play the character in a different way."Even within antagonist roles, there are different kinds of antagonists, with different shades. So I enjoy playing those," he said."I'm also going to do a few web series that will be different," he added.His next project is



the Prime Video series "Teen Kauwe". The spy drama, which is currently in production, will also star Sidhant Gupta, Fatima Sana Shaikh and Pavail Gulati.Asked if there was any genre he would be uncomfortable exploring as an actor, Bobby said he doesn't "understand over-the-top comedy, slapstick comedy so much".I feel very uncomfortable doing that. And those kinds of movies, they have to be written really well. So that's a big chance you take when you do something like that," the actor added.The 2026 edition of the Jagran Film Festival will come to an end on August

Tom Cruise says Taylor Swift schooled him about football

Mumbai: Hollywood star Tom Cruise shared that pop icon Taylor Swift "schooled" him on football when they attended a Kansas City Chiefs game together, saying the singer now knows the sport well despite knowing "nothing about football" when she first met Travis Kelce.During an appearance on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, the Hollywood star, who came to promote his upcoming film "Digger", spoke about the viral image of him and Swift talking about football.

Fallon asked: "Now when the biggest movie star in the world is sitting next to the biggest artist in the world, what, what do you talk about?"Cruise said: "She was schooling me on football. For real. Like, she was bringing the football; first of all, she's a genius. I've been following her since she was a kid. Everybody there, all their friends, they're a beautiful couple, you know, and magical in their own right." "And everybody there in that booth, I haven't been to a football game since pre-COVID, you know, where I was working and everything. So to get to hang out there and have that moment, it was a lot of fun. Oh, she knows her stuff."

Fallon said that Swift told him that she didn't know much about football."She knew, she knew nothing about football when she met Travis. It was like her, it's like, what was it like playing against your brother, like tackling each other? I think Travis, I told Travis, he was very patient. She said, you know, he's so patient, kind of said, I'm sure he was. But now she's- I think everybody should be very

patient," Cruise said.He said: "But now she's telling you what's up and knowing the plays. She knows, she knows. She's just bringing it. She knows.Fallon said: "And then, and then outside of football, do you talk about music or movies?" Cruise added: "We talk about music and movies and she's funny. She's just, she's got such a great sense of humor. She is. A brilliant writer also, by the way."



The Worlds Inside a Song: Why Irshad Kamil's songs remind us of home



There is an almost monastic simplicity to the spacious, uncluttered room in Mumbai's Lokhandwala where 54-year-old poet and lyricist Irshad Kamil spends his days, and often nights, searching for words. Nearly nothing in the space suggests that one of contemporary Hindi cinema's most prolific lyricists, whose songs were recently heard in Main Vaapas Aaunga (2026), Dhurandhar (2025), Amar Singh Chamkila (2024), Saiyaara (2025), and whose earlier work includes some of Hindi cinema's most resonant and textured melodies in Rockstar (2011) Tamasha (2015) and Jab We Met (2007), works here.There is no imposing bookshelf here, not even for Ghalib, Dushyant Kumar, Sahir Ludhianvi, Faiz, Uday Prakash and Mohan Singh — poets Kamil keeps close and returns to. No shelf crowded with awards, no gallery of photographs with those from the film industry, just about nothing to distract him. But for all its austerity, with only a simple wooden desk, a Marshall speaker and an ordinary pencil with a small eraser fixed on its back, the room comes with one indulgence: a lush garden, a patch of earth amid Mumbai's concrete. It, perhaps, carries something of the landscape that Kamil grew up with in Punjab, allowing for his instinct to remain rooted in the places, people and cadences that have chiselled his writing over the last three decades.

"Some of the phrases that find their way into my songs are those that I have heard around me at various junctures in my life. Many songs come from the visuals one's memory holds," says Kamil. While he has written for many composers and directors, his writing seems to have found its fullest expression in his long-running collaboration with Imtiaz Ali. While it was earlier with Pritam, for the last few years, he has worked more with AR Rahman. Despite coming from very different geographies, it is intriguing how Ali, Rahman and Kamil inhabit the same emotional world. "There has been no better partnership of this sort in contemporary Hindi cinema. Irshad's metaphors from his Punjabi viraasat are unique," says filmmaker, lyricist and stand-up comedian Varun Grover.

The raw angst in Sadda Haq (Rockstar, 2011), for instance, drew from Punjab's kisaan aandolans of the '80s, when the rallying cry 'Sadda haq, aithe rakh' appeared on walls and Kamil saw it his way to school. The protest anthem was also heard during the recent Jantar Mantar protests, acquiring resonance among Gen Z. A wedding song in Love Aaj Kal (2009) came from a grandmother in his working-class neighbourhood in Malerkotla, where 'jhai', as everyone called her, was the superstar of sangeet nights, singing titillating lyrics. Kamil drew on her for Thoda thoda pyar. If for Amar Singh Chamkila, he returned to his youth in the insurgency-ridden Punjab of the '80s, Kamil's more recent work includes top-tier writing for Ali's Main Vaapas Aaunga, rooted in the Partition stories he grew up knowing through family and what he heard and read as the collective grief of the region.

What makes the Kamil-Rahman-Ali partnership wor

Probably what has allowed the Kamil-Rahman-Ali collaboration to run smoothly is that the trio does not have to deal with the tyranny of numbers or compulsion to chase a hit song, despite an industry increasingly governed by streams and reels. "Besides a mutual respect for each other's craft, there is also never any pressure to deliver a hit. Kaam karne mein maza aana chahiye. Ab uss kaam se maza lena ki khwahish mein kuch cheezein aisi ho jaati hain jo routine se alagh hoti hain. Perhaps that freedom is the secret," says Kamil. In the Partition saga, Kamil's Ishq Mastana draws from Kabir's famed line Haman hai ishq mastana. He chose it for the love story of a Sikh boy and a Muslim girl, not only because the 15th-century poet-saint straddled both Hindu and Muslim worlds without belonging to either but also because of Kabir's directness. "If I had used a line by another poet, it probably wouldn't have landed the same way. Also, the ease in it, aaj ki zubaan lagti hai and still has history in it gentle quiet love song, it is the last piece Kamil wrote for the film. The pain of two lovers separated by a newly drawn border, comes through; the language stays conversational, a hallmark of Kamil's writing. Jaise paani paas pyaase tere paas main / Jaise dil ke hain dilaase, tere paas main, writes Kamil. "This song was my last attempt to sum up the film. By that time, I believe I had understood their pain well."

Its tenderness and Rahman's simple, intimate melody have allowed the song to linger. In the social-media universe, seldom has a song found a life beyond a couple of weeks like this. "It is always more challenging to work with a great composition and much harder to fulfil it. Takkar ke lafz aane chahiye. Chahiye lafz bhi aa gaye, usi takkar ke emotional lafz aane chahiye..." says Kamil.Grover once heard Issaqbaazi by Kamil in the flop that was Zero (2018), and was confused with the line: Re sahiba padhaku thi, Mirza tha tain, Tabhi toh wo English thi, desi hoon main. Kamil told him it was a historical fact in the folk tragedy, Sahiba and Mirza. "I was amazed how something from history was so deftly transported in an item song," says Grover. "Irshad, for me, is immensely inspiring... That clarity has existed in my mind since Rockstar and Highway. Sooha saaha amma ka... how can anyone come up with that imagery, I wonder. It is brilliant," says Grover.Malerkotla, where it all beganTo understand Kamil, one has to begin with Malerkotla, the town in Punjab's Malwa region where he was born and

raised. Malerkotla carries a distinctive history. Its Muslim rulers had a long association with the Sikh community, famously through Nawab Sher Mohammad Khan's protest against the sentence handed to Guru Gobind Singh's two sons by the ruler of Sirhind. Khan argued that executing children was unjust. The boys were executed nevertheless, but the Sikh community held the Nawab's intervention in high regard. It became a story of solidarity that tied the two communities beyond their common language. To date, many Muslims frequent local gurdwaras, while community iftar meals are common during Ramzaan.When Partition tore through Punjab in 1947, Malerkotla remained relatively calm. Its Muslim population largely decided to not leave. Kamil's family, too, stayed back. It is this little town that Kamil identifies as home, this secular space that he absorbed before he could even think of it as an influence. "Koi khushi hamesha padi rehti hai vahan mitti mein dabi huyi (Some happiness always lies there, buried beneath the earth)," Kamil wrote of Malerkotla in his book Kaali Aurat Ka Khwaab (Vani Prakashan), which traces the stories behind his songs and the journey that led him to the 'Black Lady', his first Filmfare Award in 2010.He remains deeply connected to those streets, his friends, family, neighbours. "We have some farmland there, I work there when I go. Apni jaddon ki taraf jab aap vaapis ho jaate hain, shayad thode se aur hare ho jaate hain, thode aur zinda ho jaate hain (When you return to your roots, perhaps you become a little greener, a little more alive). It is also a great leveller. I am still that same boy for them, not a film lyricist," says Kamil.Irshad Kamil during his college days Irshad Kamil during his college days

The youngest of seven siblings, Kamil grew up in a modest home in a neighbourhood largely inhabited by masons, carpenters and painters. His father worked in the chemistry department at the local government college and his plan for his children was clear: an education, followed by a job and then raising a family. While poetry was appreciated, it was never a career option.Kamil studied at Sanatan Dharam Prem Pracharak High School, an all-boys school, that introduced him to theatre. After his Class 10 exams, he one day heard a ghazal programme titled Aabshaar on All India Radio's Urdu service and was drawn by the world it opened up. "I was captivated by the way two lines could hold something so much larger within them," says Kamil.

From love letters to film lyricsHis experiments with writing, however, were steeped in the ordinary anxieties of first love. Boys from the boys' school went to co-ed college, met girls and "began falling in love". Kamil began writing love letters for them, finding phrases that others were struggling to articulate.While Kamil was enrolled as a science student "because my parents wanted me to be an engineer", he found little affinity with the subjects. After failing to clear his Maths and Physics exams, he went to Shimla with his friends for a jaunt with Rs 500 before preparing for supplementary exams. He couldn't tell his parents, so he decided not to return. The eight months there became his training ground. He joined Himachal Theatre and did a few plays, including Tagore's Kabuliwala. He came back on the condition that he would study Hindi literature. He also began writing poetry for the college magazine — a start to his original writing.

Around this time, Kamil, who was born Mohammad Irshad, decided to course-correct another issue. Even though it is central to poetic customs, Kamil disliked his given name. "I thought a name needed to carry some weight, like Amitabh Bachchan," he says. His mother and he scoured a dictionary and zeroed in on Kamil (meaning complete). "It fit better," he says.After a Master's in Hindi followed by a diploma in journalism, Kamil did a PhD in contemporary Hindi poetry from Punjab University in Chandigarh. "Its open atmosphere was a period of mental adjustment," says Kamil. Since being a poet was not going to pay much and he did not want to teach, Kamil worked as a journalist, initially for The Tribune and then for Lokatta. One of his assignments was to interview director Lekh Tandon, who was shooting the show Daraar in the city. Tandon wanted a local writer as he was tired of waiting for the screenplay to reach him via courier from Mumbai. He turned to Kamal Tiwari, Chairman of Chandigarh Sangeet Natak Akademi, who recommended Kamil on the phone while he sat with Tandon in his hotel room for his interview. "Tandon saab turned to me and said, 'Kaka, tera na ki hai?' (Child, what is your name?) He got back to the phone and said, 'He is sitting right here'," recalls Kamil. He subsequently worked extensively on Tandon's screenplays and found much appreciation.

But as weekly, well-made shows turned into daily soaps, with quality dwindling and writers' credits lost, Kamil lost interest. He began writing Punjabi songs for friends and left his job, deciding to move to Mumbai with Rs 9,000. "Institutions will not teach you life. Only life will teach you life," says Kamil, who returned soon after as he couldn't take to Mumbai.It wasn't very long before Kamil collected some more courage and money and returned to Mumbai. The money got over again and so did the courage. With the last Rs 500, one could either return home or use it for food. Kamil returned home again. "These things are important. You don't value it if you haven't endured enough for it. Stories of struggle are not just stories. It is not about someone being hungry in Bombay. Dimaag mein kya chala hoga, haunsla kaise toota hoga? Kya usne apne hunar pe shaq kiya hoga? The way that inner turmoil can change a person, it cannot be expressed in words," says Kamil. He called a few composers and felt insulted when they would either not meet or were unavailable. One of his friends asked him to call composer Sandesh Shandilya, who agreed to meet and was impressed by Kamil's recitation.Around the same time, Ali was looking for a writer for his debut, Socha Na Tha (2005). Shandilya recommended Kamil. This would become a significant creative partnership. Kamil's words found an easy kinship with Ali's world of love, longing and the search for oneself. He finally won the Filmfare for Aji din chadheya (Love Aaj Kal, 2009) and Nadaan parindey (Rockstar, 2011). He has never won a National Award. However, the first song one heard from Kamil was Bhaage re man (Chameli, 2003), which put him on the music map of Hindi films.What has also really worked in Kamil's writing is a unique mix of Urdu, Hindi and often Punjabi. His command over all three has resulted in an authentic blend. Patakha guddi, Nagada nagada, Aji din chadheya are a few examples. "I disliked the use of bad Punjabi in Hindi songs that often meant nothing. I wanted respectful use of literary Punjabi. I also wanted to exalt the idea of love in songs," says Kamil.