

Kapil Mishra disqualified under anti-defection law

Rebel leader says he will move HC against Speaker's order

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI
Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel on Friday disqualified rebel AAP MLA Kapil Mishra under the anti-defection law.



Kapil Mishra

Mr. Goel said the Karawal Nagar MLA's campaigning for the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the recent Lok Sabha election indicated that he had "given up the membership of his original political party".

Two more MLAs
Delhi government sources told *The Hindu* that two more rebel MLAs - Anil Kumar Bajpai and Devender Sehrawat - are likely to be disqualified by next week as proceedings related to the disqualification of the Gandhi Nagar and Bijwasan legislators, respectively, were completed on August 1.

As per an order issued by Mr. Goel, Mr. Mishra's disqualification takes effect from January 27 this year, when he shared the dais with Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari and the then Union Minister Vijay Goel against AAP.

Mr. Mishra, who will not

be allowed to attend the Monsoon Session of the Delhi Assembly scheduled later this month on account of losing his membership, said he would move the city High Court against the decision on August 5.

Karawal Nagar seat

According to AAP sources, the party is likely to field long-time Arvind Kejriwal aide Durgesh Pathak from Karawal Nagar in the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls.

"His [Mr. Mishra's] various tweets, press conference, campaign etc. in favour of Modi and the BJP leave no one in doubt that the respondent [Mr. Mishra] has voluntarily given up the membership of his original political party," the order stated.

"Whether he has formally resigned from AAP or taken the membership of the BJP formally is immaterial for a decision on his disqualification under Para 2 (1) (a) of the Tenth Schedule," it added.

Mr. Mishra termed the Speaker's order "illegal" and "undemocratic" arguing that sharing the dais with leaders from other political parties could not be construed as an anti-party activity. "I will challenge this order on Monday...as far as sharing the dais with leaders of other political parties is concerned even Kejriwal has shared the stage with several political leaders in the past...by this logic, even he should be disqualified," Mr. Mishra said.

'Patriot vs tukde-tukde'

"I am ready to sacrifice this MLA's post for campaigning for Modi not just once but 100 times. On one side there is a patriot on the other side is tukde-tukde gang - I stood with whole Delhi. I ran the 'all seven [Lok Sabha] seats for Modi' campaign recently, and [now] will run 'all 60 seats for Modi' in Assembly polls," he tweeted.

Monsoon session to begin from August 22

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The monsoon session of the Delhi Assembly will commence on August 22 and conclude on August 26, the Delhi government said on Friday.

The decision was taken on Friday at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

The session, if not extended by the government, will have three sittings with Saturday and Sunday falling on August 24 and August 25 respectively.

Part II of 8th session

"The Delhi Cabinet approved the convening of the second part of the VIIth session of the Legislative Assembly of National Capital Territory of Delhi from August 22-26," a government statement read.

An official said that during the session, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) legislators are likely to discuss and praise the government's recent moves on regularisation of unauthorised colonies, proposed free travel for women in buses and metro, and its decision to waive electricity charges of consumers using up to 200 units, among others.

'Will corner govt.'

On its part, the BJP Opposition will attempt to corner the government on the same issues, especially on alleged corruption in the education sector as well as across various government departments, said Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta.

"The Opposition will corner the government on the issue of gross corruption across various departments and issues related to public interest," he added.

CM office receives 'death threat' emails

No text in message but subject line reads 'kill, kill, kill'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's office received emails with death threats on two occasions last week.

Delhi Police Special Cyber Cell has been tasked with the investigation, said officials.

A senior officer said the emails were received from an anonymous ID on July 25 and then again on July 30.

It did not contain any text but only had 'kill, kill, kill' in the subject line.

The police received a formal complaint in the matter after which a non-cognisable report was registered under Section 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code.

"Permission to investigate the case has been obtained from the court and investiga-

tion has begun. Details of the ID have been sought from the service provider," the officer added.

In January 2019, Mr. Kejriwal received a death threat call in which the caller named a man saying that he is planning to kill him.

A week before the call, Mr. Kejriwal received an email threatening that his daughter would be abducted.

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Labourer mowed down by speeding truck; manhunt on for driver

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI A 55-year-old labourer was mowed down by a speeding truck in north-west Delhi's

Azadpur on Thursday night, the police said on Friday. A senior officer said Moolchand from UP's Azamgarh was waiting to load a truck in

Mandi when the incident happened. "A PCR call was received around 12 a.m. regarding the accident. Moolchand was rushed to a nearby hospi-

tal where he was declared brought dead," the officer said. Preliminary enquiry revealed that the offending vehicle sped off after the

incident. A case on charges of rash driving and causing death due to negligence has been registered.

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that an unidentified dead body of male Namely: Unknown S/o Unknown, R/o: Unknown, Age: approx 30 years, Height: 5'7", Complexion: Shallow, Face: Oval, Wearing: Brown colour T-shirt and blue colour payjama, who was found dead at Safdarjung Hospital, Delhi. In this regard a case DD No. 26A dated 26.07.2019 has been registered at P.S. Safdarjung Enclave, Delhi.



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Murder convict on the run for over a year arrested

He had killed a man in Nangloi in 2006

HEMANI BHANDARI NEW DELHI

A 34-year-old murder convict, who had jumped parole and was on the run for the past one and half years, has been arrested, the police said on Friday.

A senior officer said Arvind Kumar from Bihar's Madhubani was nabbed on Wednesday following a tip-off. "On Wednesday, at 11.45 p.m., information was received at Najafgarh police station that a man who had jumped parole was coming to meet someone. A trap was laid and he was held," the officer said.

He added that Arvind was arrested on charges of murder in 2006 and was convicted in 2011 by a Delhi court. He was released on parole in 2016 wherein he said his mother needed treatment but two weeks later, when he was due to return, he jumped parole, the officer said.

In April 2006, a man's body was found in Nangloi after which a mur-

der case was registered. "During investigation, it was found that Arvind, then 22-years-old, had killed him. He was employed as a house help and the owner had a fight with a neighbour over water. A few days later, the fight happened again and the man was stabbed to death by Arvind who was arrested four days after the crime," the officer said. After the trial, Rohini court convicted him and awarded him life imprisonment with a fine of ₹10,000.

Pistol recovered On Wednesday, after his arrest, the police claimed to have recovered a country-made pistol along with one live cartridge in his possession. He had bought the weapon from Utam Pradesh's Muradabad.

"Arvind is being interrogated about where he was for the past year and a half. Other criminal involvements are also being looked into," the officer said.

Editor of paper founded by M.J. Akbar defends him

Scribe says she has no personal knowledge of sexual misconduct

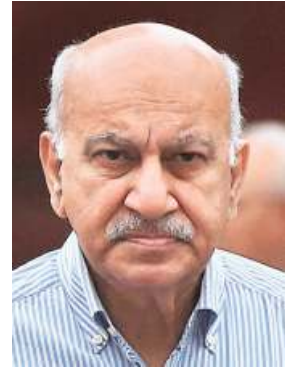
STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Editor of The Sunday Guardian Joyeeta Basu, who appeared before a court here on Friday in support of a criminal defamation case filed by M.J. Akbar, said she had "no personal knowledge" of the alleged sexual misconduct claimed by Priya Ramani against the former Union Minister.

At the height of the #MeToo movement last year, Ms. Ramani accused Mr. Akbar of sexual harassment during his previous role as a newspaper editor. Following Ms. Ramani's accusation, about a dozen former colleagues of Mr. Akbar also came out with different allegations against him.

Days before he resigned from his post of Minister of State for External Affairs in October last, Mr. Akbar filed a criminal defamation case against

Ms. Ramani citing her open letter published in a magazine and her tweets



Former Union Minister M.J. Akbar.

naming him.

'Perfect gentleman'

Ms. Basu, who has worked with Mr. Akbar for about 15 years beginning with The Asian Age in 1998, said, "he was a perfect gentleman" to her.

After her stint at The Asian Age, Ms. Basu said she worked at a fortnightly political magazine Covert and then at The Sunday Guardian, both founded by Mr. Akbar.

She said he was a "tough

He [M.J. Akbar] was a tough taskmaster in office... everyone held him in high esteem. Due to Priya Ramani's malicious tweet, the reputation of Mr. Akbar was destroyed and irreparably harmed

Joyeeta Basu Editor, Sunday Guardian

taskmaster in office" and everyone in office held him in "high esteem". She said due to Ms. Ramani's "malicious" tweet, "the reputation of Mr. Akbar was permanently destroyed and irreparably harmed".

During the day's hearing, the court concluded the cross-examination of Ms. Basu and another witness Manzar Ali, who is Mr. Akbar's personal assistant.

The court has posted the next hearing in the case for August 23.

AAP govt. supports removal of cap on autorickshaws plying in Capital

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The Delhi government supported the Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority's suggestion of removing the cap on the number of autorickshaws plying in the city, during a hearing in the Supreme Court on Friday.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government told the court that it agreed with the EPCA's report that the present cap of one lakh autos in Delhi may be removed provided that the vehicles are "BS-VI CNG/petrol/LPG etc (positive ignition based technology) or battery operated". The Delhi Transport Depart-

ment told the Bench that it would file an affidavit on the issue by August 13.

The SC was hearing a plea filed by Bajaj Auto seeking removal of the cap on the number of autorickshaws.

In its report, the EPCA stated that as CNG fuel is available in Delhi and in most districts of

NCR, the registration of BS-VI CNG fuelled three-wheelers may start immediately and the cap on registration numbers may be lifted.

Separate plea

During a hearing on a separate plea on Friday, the apex court clarified its May 10, 2016, order

which had led to confusion that the Transport Department was not registering CNG or petrol-run vehicles as cabs.

It said that vehicles, which operate on CNG or petrol, can be registered by the Transport Department as cabs with all-India tourist permit and will be eligible to ply in Delhi-NCR.

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Haryana Prapari CORRIGENDUM NOTICE table with columns for SR. No., Name of Department, Old Reference/NIT No., Nature of Corrigendum, Website of the Board Corp./Auth, and Nodal Officer/Contact Details/Email. Includes various notices regarding tender extensions and corrections.

The registry test of citizenship

The chaos surrounding the National Register of Citizens is yet another example of Assam's long and difficult relationship with migrants. **Rahul Karmakar** reports on the many fault lines in the State that complicate the process

The sword did not get Ayesha 36 years ago but the judicial pen that launched the National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise just might. Ayesha was five months old on February 18, 1983, when hundreds of people armed with machetes, spears, and guns descended on her village, Matiparbat, an hour after midnight. Matiparbat was the last of 14 villages, beginning with Nellie on National Highway 37, that a mob had laid siege to that night. Official records say the 1983 Nellie massacre claimed the lives of 2,191 people, mostly women and children. Survivors claim the figure would be no less than 6,000.

Matiparbat is about 8 km north-west of Nellie, now almost a small town 70 km east of Guwahati. Nellie, earlier in Nagaon district, is now in Morigaon district. "They set fire to the houses and chased our people with all kinds of weapons. I had nowhere to run but escaped by pretending to be dead. I smeared blood from the body of a woman and lay still next to it," says Iman Ali, 65.

The screams stopped two hours later and Ali mustered the courage to look around for survivors. He found his wife Manowara Begum and daughter, Ayesha, emerging from Basundhari Beel, a 2 km-long wetland beside which Matiparbat is located. Five other members of his extended family and a few neighbours lay dead, some with their heads smashed, some with their throats slit, some with bullet marks.

"The mob did not spare those who hid amid the water hyacinths in the beel. My wife had her nostrils above the water level while holding our baby's face up just enough to let her breathe. She controlled her urge to scream but it was a miracle that the baby did not cry as some members of the mob kept spearing the beel and slashing the water hyacinths around them," Ali says.

Ali believes Ayesha, a mother now, will need more than a miracle to be included in the final list of the Supreme Court-monitored NRC with an August 31 deadline for publication. "Convincing the authorities about the citizenship documents we possess is tougher than appeasing God," he says. Ayesha is one of the six members in Ali's family belonging to the list of 40.07 lakh people excluded from the draft NRC published on July 30, 2018. Ali's younger daughter Hazara Bibi too is among the excluded. A barely literate farmer, Ali fails to understand why the same set of documents that established his citizenship did not work for his daughters.

At Basundhari, another of the 14 villages attacked on that fateful day, Azeemuddin lost seven members of his family, including his wife, sister, and daughter. On June 26, when an additional list of 1.02 lakh people found ineligible for inclusion in the NRC was published, he felt history was repeating itself with a non-violent but a "deadlier" twist. Azeemuddin, now 64, relocated to Nellie soon after the carnage although Nellie is closer to where the assailants had allegedly come from — the hills across NH37. Most of his kin stayed back to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives. "We are a large family of 93. Just seven of us were included in the draft NRC only to be put in the new reject list. This is as if the clock has turned back to those horrific days. This time, not to kill us but erase our existence as Indians."

'Already a dead man'

There is no debate over why the Nellie bloodbath happened. The violence was seen as the fallout of the government's decision to hold the election to the 126-member State Assembly in 1983 during the peak of the Assam Agitation seeking the ejection of illegal immigrants. Organisations such as the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) that spearheaded the agitation saw the "forced election" as then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's bid to legitimise "millions of immigrants from Bangladesh" as voters.

The turnout at the controversial election was 32% and most of the voters were believed to have been Bengal-origin Muslims, usually referred to by the pejorative 'Miya' for distinguishing them from the "acceptable" Assamese Muslims. Another set of migrants, the Bengal-origin Hindus, living within a 10 km radius of Nellie, did not feel the heat in 1983. "We knew something bad was going to happen when, ahead of the 1983 election, groups of people kept visiting our area telling us not to vote. Given the situation, we thought it best to stay away from the polling booths," says 83-year-old Pradip Das of Ganesh Valley.

The Hindus-only Ganesh Valley was established in 1951 to settle 80 families who had fled present-day Bangladesh in August 1947. The colony now has about 170 houses, the increase attributed to the descendants of the refugees. Ganesh Valley is about 2 km beyond the Nellie market on the southern flank of NH37, almost opposite Shilchang Ward No. 1 on the highway's northern flank from where the Muslim areas start along a road — much of it submerged under waist-deep water — arcing westward to Matiparbat. Houses of a dozen Gorkha



"The agitation, some say, may continue in a different form if the National Register of Citizens turns out to be flawed." NRC officials verify documents as security personnel stand guard at a NRC centre in Morigaon district of Assam on August 2, 2019. (Below): Girin Biswas of Soru Matiparbat with his family. Biswas is among four in a family of six to have been excluded from the NRC. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR / RAHUL KARMAKAR



am not a suspected foreigner. In 2018, the High Court cleared my case but my family and I were excluded from the NRC. This was all because my name Surja Lal Das was entered as Surja Kumar Das in the voters' list of 1995 and I have been voting since with 'Kumar' as my middle name," he says. A fortnight ago, Das, his wife, and daughter spent a week in the Morigaon district jail allegedly for trying to cheat his way through to the NRC. "People say I will have to spend a longer time in jail after August 31. I will probably not survive there, but then I am already a dead man," he says.

No house unaffected

The family of Jhab Biswas is among the fortunate in Ganesh Valley to be included in the NRC. More than 40% of people in his area have missed out; they might be re-included or continue to be excluded after the exercise to update the list is concluded, says Biswas.

"One understands that everything boils down to the possession of documents, although some admissible documents have not passed the test mainly because of the attitude of some NRC officials. How else do you explain the fact that there's at least one member in almost every family in villages of Bengal-origin Hindus and Muslims in the rejection list?" says Suleiman Ahmed Kasimi, the Maulana of Nellie's Masjid-e-Umar.

In Matiparbat village, a person or two in each of some 700 houses are not on the draft NRC besides the families of 40 people who have been marked as D-voters or suspected foreigners. Between the Hindu villages of Soru Matiparbat and Borkhal, 27 families have little hope of making it to the NRC because of cases pending in the Foreigners' Tribunal I in the district headquarters, Morigaon. There are an average of two persons in each of the 420 houses in these two villages on the NRC rejection list.

Soru Matiparbat's Girin Biswas is among four in a family of six to have been excluded from the NRC. He had received a notice from the Foreigners' Tribunal on October 13, 2016, asking him to appear before it to prove his citizen-

ship. It was then that the marginal farmer began digging up documents, most of which were shredded by rats. A certified copy signed by A.C. Bhuyan, the Electoral Registration Officer of Nagaon district (from which Morigaon was carved out in 1989), says Biswas's grandfather Mehlah Biswas figured in the voters' list of 1965. The problem, he discovered, was in the name of his father who was listed as Kristo in the voters' list, Kisto in the NRC legacy data he had downloaded from a service centre for application, and Krishna in the notice that the Foreigners' Tribunal had served him. Even his name in the notice was Girindra, not Girin. "My lawyer says we had a favourable judgment four months ago. But we have not received the copy," he says.

Ganesh Biswas, a 30-year-old assistant teacher at the State-run Borkhal Anushchita Jati Prathamik Vidyalaya (SC primary school), is the only one excluded from the NRC in his family. All other members, who drew their lineage from his grandfather Ganga Charan Namasudra, were included, but he was not. "My father Dhiren Biswas was the youngest of four siblings. The others sailed through because they had voted before 1971, but I was stuck. I got tired of explaining that Namasudra is the name of a lower caste to which the Biswases belong. I hope my claim is accepted," he says.

The NRC updating process is that of enlisting the names of people or descendants of people whose names appear in any of the electoral rolls up to 1971, the NRC of 1951 or any of the other stipulated documents such as land and tenancy records, citizenship certificate, refugee registration certificate, and permanent residential certificate. The exercise is being done as per the Assam Accord of 1985 that ended the Assam Agitation of 1979-85. The accord prescribes the midnight of March 24, 1971, as the cut-off date for detecting foreigners or illegal immigrants.

"We want an error-free NRC. But it appears only people of Bengal origin, Hindus or Muslims, are being targeted and there is an attempt to disregard

documents in a bid to convey that most of them have entered Assam after 1971. And there seems to be a policy to target people who came between 1966 and 1971 too," says Utpal Dey, a leader of the All Assam Bengali Youth Students' Federation. The All Assam Minority Students' Union agrees, but feels the Muslims would be worse off if the Bharatiya Janata Party pushes the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill to let non-Muslim immigrants who entered India till December 31, 2014, to stay.

Dey says the Bill is a sham, and if it materialises, will require a beneficiary to first declare himself/herself as a foreigner and then get proof that he/she has been a victim of religious persecution in the country escaped from. Former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, who was president of the AASU during the Assam Agitation, says a global campaign has been on to malign the Assamese people by painting the Bengali-speaking people in the State as victims of some kind of purge programme.

"I had suggested to the government that verification of citizenship is necessary only in the case of those who speak Bengali because Assam has borne the brunt of several waves of migration from present-day Bangladesh, first because of the British who brought them for agriculture, clerical jobs and petty trade. Partition of India and developments leading to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 brought more people to put pressure on the land," he said after the draft NRC was published in 2018.

There was no logical reason to verify the people who speak Hindi or variants and the people from Nepal and Bhutan who are fewer in number than those from Bangladesh and who are bound by treaties with India, Mahanta says. Two cases in point are that of BJP leaders — Rajasthan-origin Pawan Kumar Rath and Gujarat-origin Shantanu Naik, both of southern Assam's Silchar — who have been excluded from the NRC.

A majority of those in the two NRC-excluded lists speak Bengali. Many are Nepali-speaking, some originally from the Hindi-speaking States and a few belong to indigenous communities who are expected to get in by virtue of being 'original inhabitants', a category many have contested by arguing that Assam has become home for several streams of migrants over time. One such community comprise the tea plantation workers or 'tea tribes' that the Supreme Court recognised as 'original inhabitants'.

Colonial legacy

The perception of the outsider as a cultural threat and a usurper of land and its resources began in Assam towards the end of the 19th century when people from other parts of British India, specifically Bengal, came in waves to work in the paddy fields, tea plantations and the timber industry. In 1920, the British rulers introduced the Line System to segregate the indigenous people from settlers taking up shrinking tracts of vacant or

The NRC appears to be an unfinished business of the Assam agitation. It is just that the proverbial pen has taken over the job of the sword — to be a mightier eliminator of foreigners.

SULEIMAN AHMED KASIMI
Maulana of Nellie's Masjid-e-Umar

forest lands. But what fuelled the fears that the indigenous communities would be marginalised by the settlers was British civil servant C.S. Mullan's observation in 1931. "Probably the most important event in the province during the last 25 years, likely to alter permanently the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilisation, has been the invasion of a vast horde of land-hungry Bengali immigrants, mostly Muslims from the districts of eastern Bengal," he wrote after conducting the 1931 census. Inadvertently, or otherwise, he gave a religious identity to the migrant threat.

Assam's former Director General of Police Harekrishna Deka, also a poet, blames the British for sowing the seeds of distrust between the Assamese and Bengali people. "Apart from encouraging continuous migration of people from Bengal, they added Sylhet, a populous district of undivided Bengal, to Assam in 1874. This led to the Bengalis becoming the majority until Partition," he says. Sylhet went to Pakistan in 1947, but its addition to Assam increased the insecurity that the Assamese felt when the British introduced Bengali as the language of official correspondence, in court and for education, until the Baptist missionaries intervened to give Assamese its rightful place in 1873. If that were not enough, Basanta Kumar Das, an elected leader from the Bengali-dominated Barak Valley, demanded a change in Assam's name in the 1930s. The distrust of Bengalis, Deka points out, coincided with the friction between Muslim migrants from eastern Bengal and nationalist Assamese, particularly after the Muslim League had in the 1940s made serious efforts to include Assam in Pakistan.

Large-scale migrations into Assam, as indicated by the Census of 1961 and 1971, worked on the psyche of the indigenous people culminating in the anti-foreigners agitation. "The NRC appears to be an unfinished business of the sword — to be a mightier eliminator of foreigners," Maulana Kasimi says. Current AASU general secretary Lurinjyoti Gogoi says "vested interests" are trying to derail the NRC process. "All we want is an error-free NRC," he says.

The agitation, some say, may continue in a different form if the NRC turns out to be flawed. This is a possibility given the fact that politics in Assam revolves around the issue of immigrants, illegal or otherwise, who usually call the shots during elections.



FILM REVIEWS

It's all about loving your family

Hobbs & Shaw is one of the most Bollywood of films that hasn't even been made in Mumbai

NAMRATA JOSHI

Hollywood has done it all when it comes to action and special effects, or so you'd think. And then comes yet another film that renders the fights and fistcuffs, and stunts and chases ridiculously over the top and redefines the meaning of an adrenaline rush in unimaginable ways. All you have to do is consume the impossible unquestioningly, with lots and lots of cheese over popcorn.

The plot (what's that?) doesn't matter; the narrative meanders along, not just when it comes to the story itself getting thin and needlessly stretched but also in terms of the geographical locations it has to span. The film borders on the silly, but thankfully doesn't take itself seriously at all and is unapologetic in its almost cartoon-like feel. Tom and Jerry for Hobbs and Shaw anyone?

The spin off of *Fast and Furious* series has agents Luke Hobbs (Dwayne Johnson) and Deckard Shaw (Jason Statham), who otherwise can't see eye to eye, reluctantly join hands to save the world from the deadly virus Snowflake and the villainy of Brixton Lore (Idris Elba). All kinds of improbable technological marvels happen on the side. Besides the cyber-genetically enhanced Brixton, there's Shaw's sister and MI6 agent Hattie (Vanessa Kirby), who injects Snowflake into herself, and becomes a carrier to save the rest of the humanity. Now what to do with her and the virus? Neutralise her to stop global contamination or wrench it out using



Gravity-defying action David Leitch's film borders on the silly, but thankfully doesn't take itself seriously at all • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

an extraction device which lies in a factory in Ukraine.

There are eye-popping, gravity-defying action set-pieces that pile on. Brixton walking vertically down the high-rise with a much-prized Hattie for company, the mind-bending chase on London's streets and, to cap it all, an insane helicopter versus cars/Jeeps face-off in the climax. *Hobbs & Shaw* sets a new gold standard for our own Rohit Shetty, of the smashing cars fame, to emulate.

But, the film belongs as much to Karan Johar as it does to Shetty. It is a complete masala package. Along with action there is comedy, romance and emotion as well. It's one of the most Bollywood-esque Hollywood films I have seen, that hasn't been made in Mumbai. And that has to do with the fact that *Hobbs & Shaw* eventually is all about loving your fa-

mily. The Shaw siblings huddling together, Hobbs reuniting with the extended family in Samoa and more so with his estranged brother Jonah – the only one who can repair the smashed virus extraction device and in turn mend the family's dynamics. Eventually, it is about coming home after spending a lifetime running away from it.

There is an assortment of characters on the side in this wholesome package. A mysterious woman in Russia who supplies information and arms, the scientist who created Snowflake and starry cameos by the likes of Ryan Reynolds, Kevin Hart and Helen Mirren.

Eventually it's the trio of Nietzsche-quoting Johnson, deadpan Statham and lightning-quick Kirby that holds things in good stead, sparing off and squabbling with each other in just the right measure, making the silly

Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs and Shaw

DIRECTOR: David Leitch
STARRING: Dwayne Johnson, Jason Statham, Idris Elba, Vanessa Kirby
STORYLINE: The spin off of the *Fast & Furious* series has agents Luke Hobbs and Deckard Shaw, who otherwise can't see eye to eye, reluctantly join hands to save the world from the deadly virus, Snowflake, and the villainy of Brixton Lore.

sublime. Johnson and Kirby also have a little romantic banter sparkling on the side. In all the masti, masala, mindlessness and mayhem, it's Elba who gets a bit sidelined. One would have wanted to see more than his mere "Black Superman" side; a complexity to his menace as well.

Love and transitions

Ash Is Purest White, an intimate story of romance and betrayal, is framed against an epic backdrop of radical, socio-economic changes in China

NAMRATA JOSHI

Somewhere in the middle of the film, observing a dormant volcano from a distance, 'jianghu' crime syndicate gangster Bin (Fan Liao) and his girlfriend Qiao (Tao Zhao) talk about how the ash of the volcano is the purest; having burnt at that high a temperature, it gets refined. It becomes a metaphor for Qiao's own journey in life – how intense travails, betrayals and losses burnish and strengthen her. Like an inner distillation of sorts to find herself.

Qiao, who is devoted to Bin, ends up serving a five-year-long sentence for his sake and comes back to realise that everyone, including Bin and China itself, have changed and moved on. The film then comes full circle for Qiao who starts off as a typical gangster's moll but eventually becomes the boss of the gambling den. From always being his pretty arm candy, she turns into the support that a vulnerable Bin is left seeking as time passes by.

In scene after scene Jia Zhangke frames the petite and fragile Tao Zhao as a lone female presence in the mercurial male world of smoke-filled gambling dens, street violence and shooting guns. Zhangke offers an interesting feminist twist to what has essentially been considered a male genre. Even as men talk of brotherhood and loyalty in the gang, it's Qiao who looms large.

The personal in Zhangke's work can't be seen independent of the nation's history. Qiao's intimate story of rebuilding her own life after a five-year pause in the prison is set against a sweeping, epic backdrop of the radical, socio-economic changes in China. The intimations of them were in the air when she was still out and some



Of elegant mobsters The film offers a feminist twist on what's essentially been a male genre • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

have happened during her confinement. There is the future of coal mines and its workers at stake in Datong with Qiao's father symbolising an old order getting lost. "We must fight the capitalists until the end," he says on a microphone. But is anyone listening? The not-so-picturesque, modern landscape tells its own story of supposed progress and rough transitions – the ugly power-plants, the shiny train sta-

tions, the high rises, an under-construction sports stadium. And, above all the Three Gorges dam submerging Fengjie, forcing people to be evacuated. The theme of migration and resettlement due to supposed reforms and development echoes loud for us here in India as well.

Ash Is Purest White is essentially Qiao and Bin's story

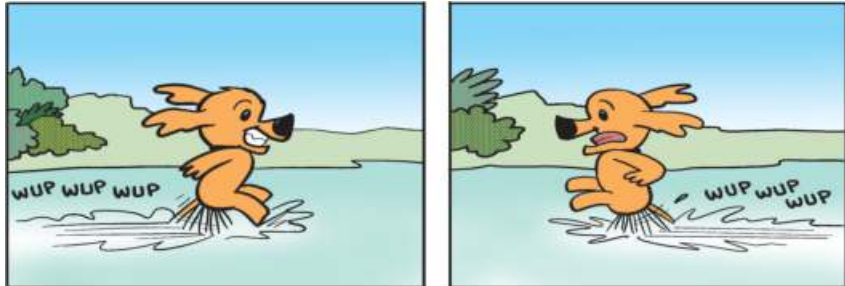
Ash Is Purest White (Chinese with English subtitles)

DIRECTOR: Jia Zhangke
STARRING: Tao Zhao, Fan Liao
STORYLINE: Qiao, devoted to mob boss Bin, ends up serving a sentence for his sake and comes back to realise that everyone, including Bin and the nation itself, have changed and moved on.
RUN TIME: 138.30 minutes



but Zhangke creates some quirky characters along the way, bordering on the funny. The elegant mobster who loves animal documentaries and ballroom dancing; the sex-obsessed motorcyclist who gets conned by Qiao; or the ardent UFO believer with whom she finds a moment of intimacy on a train ride. But it's Fan 'Bin' Liao, and more so Tao Zhao who owns *Ash Is Purest White*. Her Qiao is luminous and admirable in her pride and self respect. A compelling personification of changes and continuities.

POOCH CAFE



PEANUTS



HAGAR THE HORRIBLE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



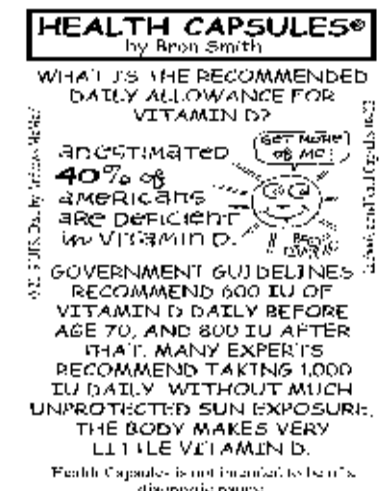
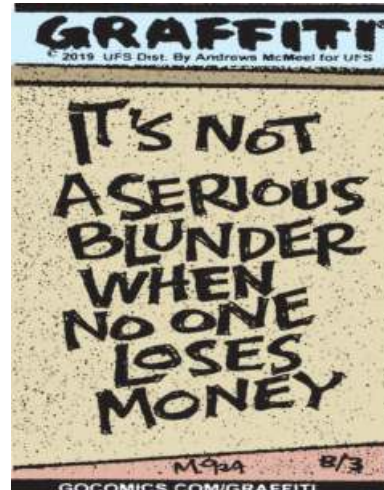
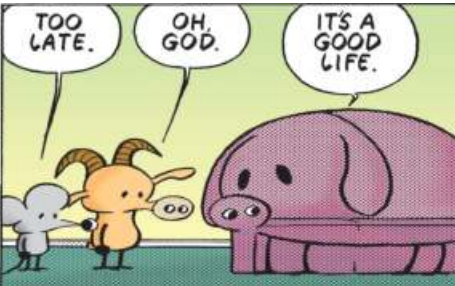
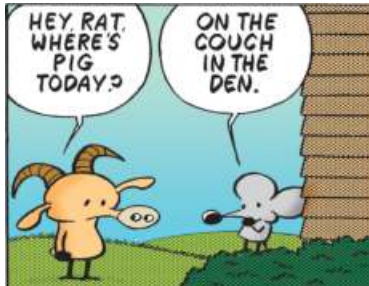
TIGER



WUMO



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE



THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13139

Table with 23 numbered squares for a crossword puzzle.

- 7 Clothing (4)
- 10 Not smart (4-6)
- 12 Use new ideas (8)
- 13 Used a blue pencil (8)
- 16 Bitterness – organ of the body (6)
- 18 Welsh national emblem (4)
- 19 Restore to good health (4)

Solution will appear in *The Hindu* dated August 5, 2019.
Solution No. 13138

- Across**
- 1 End piece written for a piece of music (4)
- 3 Strikebreaker (8)
- 8 Note written as a reminder (4)
- 9 Roller-shaped object (8)
- 11 Dreamy – our UN goals (anag) (10)
- 14 Rough-and-tumble (6)
- 15 Alteration (6)
- 17 Fine and translucent (10)
- 20 Ordinary shares (8)
- 21 Just – blond (4)
- 22 Working dough (8)
- 23 Vendetta (4)
- Down**
- 1 Finished (8)
- 2 Portray as evil (8)
- 4 Strata (6)
- 5 Lapidgros from Mexico (10)
- 6 Eye covers (4)

A crossword puzzle grid with words filled in, including DEAD AND BURIED, BEAN MINISTER, ATTENDANCE, QUEBEC CATERERS, DISCURSIVE, RIGOROUS ROOK, DERMATOLOGIST.

