

EVENT-GOLF



TEE IT UP

An unusually early summer did little to stop India Inc.'s movers and shakers from teeing it up at the 15th Business Today-Honda Pro-Am of Champions. SHARAD KOHLI

Amidst the plethora of corporate golf events, there's one that stands out, year after year. Everyone who is anyone in the upper echelons of India Incorporated hopes to play with the land's top professional golfers.

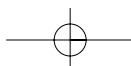
And, it was no different at the 15th BT-Honda Pro-Am that saw winners of the eastern, western and southern legs of the tournament congregate at

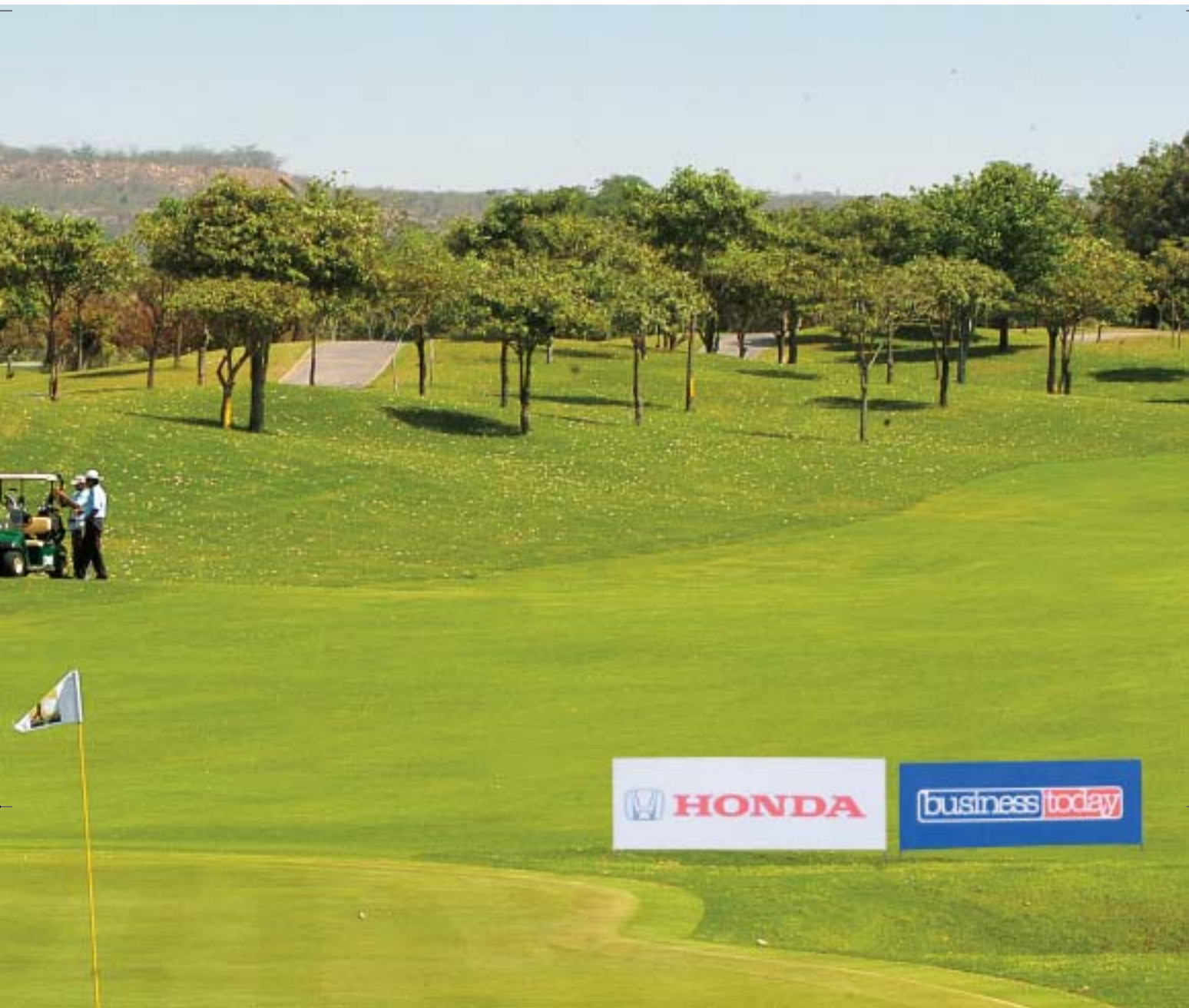
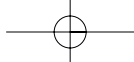
the Jack Nicklaus Signature course at the ITC Classic Golf Resort, an oasis nestled in the rocky Aravalli Range at Tauru, an hour-and-a-half drive from the national capital, on a bright and unusually hot morning on March 28 for the grand finale.

Every year, the four-leg tournament visits Bengaluru, Kolkata and Mumbai before moving to Delhi for the Finals. Winners of each of the legs congregate in the nation's political

centre to mix with the top corporate swingers from the National Capital Region. Throw in the best performers from the country's domestic pro circuit, and you have a brew that's as fizzy as the after-round drink.

And in the heat, that drink was a welcome thirst quencher once the golf was over. Delhi's denizens have been trying to figure out what on earth happened to the city's delectable spring season. Summer, this





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Ashok Kumar, the overall runner-up in the Pro category



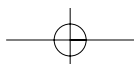
Professional golfer **Sujjan Singh** led a team of debutants

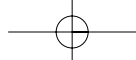


Vikram Kapoor of SAAB Travels, overall winner of BT Straightest Drive on Day 1



Shobhodip Pal of Hewlett Packard, winner of the Closest to Pin prize on Day 2





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1. **Tatsuya Natsume**, Director, Marketing, Honda SIEL Cars India with **Anirban Lahiri**, professional golfer, runner-up on day 2

2. **Anil Mehra**, Managing Director, India Today Group with **C. Muniyappa**, overall winner in the Pro category

3. **Jnaneswar Sen**, Vice President, Marketing, Honda SIEL Cars India with **Shekhar Agarwal**, overall winner of the Honda Almost Made It prize

4. **Lahiri**, the pro from the South, in action

5. A **Honda CRV** was up for grabs for a hole-in-one, but it went abegging



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time around, seems to have followed hot on the heels, literally, of a bracingly chilly winter. But, golfers being golfers, addicts of the game who'll find any excuse to play (come rain or shine), a blazing March sun was hardly going to put them off playing.

It certainly didn't put off R.C. Bhargava, Chairman, Maruti Suzuki Ltd., from teeing it up. Bhargava has taken part in the BT Pro-Am many a time. "It's a fun place to come to. I enjoy it," he says. "You meet people you otherwise don't normally come across." The bespectacled Bhargava tries to get in a round on weekends. "Time is a problem. I can only manage Sundays."

Asked whether a "golfing culture" exists in Maruti Suzuki, Bhargava says, "Well, there are a lot of Japanese in the organisation, and most of them play golf." Surely, if a CEO, or MD or chairman, displays a penchant for the game, it can rub off on employees—a gentle (or fiercely competitive) 18 (or nine) holes can help banish the pressures of the boardroom.

Chander Uday Singh, a senior Delhi-based advocate, and Rahul Maroli (Head, Operations, LeasePlan India Ltd.), also regulars at the annual corporate-professional get-together, would agree. Both try to fit in a few holes of golf every weekend. "I was earlier working out of Mumbai, and would play the Bombay Presidency GC, or Willingdon or the USI, on the weekends," says Singh. "But since shifting to Delhi, I'm neither here nor there! What with the traveling, I can't seem to find the time to tee it up."

However, its good riddance to the cliché that corporate honchos "network" on the golf course. They may very well meet up on the fairways and greens, often as part of a foursome or fourball, but very rarely are deals made amid perfectly struck irons or disheartening three-putts. That's a myth that probably deserves a hasty burial. "I am a doctor, so when I'm playing, people come up to me for free advice!" says former Air Force man, Dr. (Group Captain) G.S. Sabhikhi, now Director, Radiodiagnosis and Imaging, Super Religare Laboratories Ltd., who was debuting in the BT Pro-Am.

Networking, adds Chander Singh, may be a by-product of an encounter on the course. Agrees Maroli: "I've done business with people whom I have met on the golf course, which is a good place to make new acquaintances. But business has only come later, and not while playing."

So, an extension of the boardroom the golf course most certainly is not.

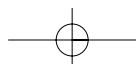
And because corporate golfers who play together are already well acquainted, there is, Singh emphasises, already a "comfort level" that won't allow "business" to enter the conversation. But there would, need-



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1. **Ashish Bagga**, CEO, India Today Group (L) giving away prizes to the winning team. The team comprised **Rahul Maroli** of LeasePlan, pro golfer **Ali Sher**, Supreme Court advocate **Chander Uday Singh** and **Ajay Dadwal** of Risk India

2. **Maninder Singh Grewal** (2nd from L), MD, Religare Technova and **B. Hariharan**, VP, Marketing, ITC Welcomgroup (2nd from R) giving away prizes to the runner-up team. The team comprised Max **Rajesh Sud** of New York Life, pro golfer **Raju Ali Mollah** and IT commissioner **H.S.B Gill**

3. Pro golfer **Jyoti Randhawa** gave tips to the corporate golfers



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less to say, be plenty of good-natured ribbing. "There's a lot of camaraderie amongst golfers," says Maroli.

Meanwhile, Asoka Iyer (Head, Group Advisory Services, Apollo Tyres), Kavi Arora (CEO, Religare Finvest Ltd.), and Harpreet Singh (Chief Operating Officer, Bharti Airtel Ltd.) were playing the BT Pro-Am for the first time, and each confessed to having a splendid time. "It was good fun playing with (pro partner) Sujjan Singh. I found him a really nice guy, and we chatted about golf," says Iyer, who looks to play "one-and-a-half" times every week. "Ours was a nice foursome, and overall it was a great experience," he adds.

Arora, who besides golf has played hockey and cricket, had the good fortune to be in the same quartet as Jyoti Randhawa (recently appointed brand ambassador of Religare). "Jyoti gave me a couple of tips which worked a treat. On some holes, I was actually out-driving him! Unfortunately, I just missed out on the 'longest drive' and 'closest to the pin' awards."

"Well-organised" are two words that always seem to be associated with the event, and Arora and Harpreet Singh were among many to praise the conduct of the BT Pro-Am. "I really enjoyed myself," raves Arora. "My fourball was great!" The tournament's concept, feels Harpreet Singh, is a good one. "Prize money on offer encourages the pros to play. Also, it is hosted at a top-class layout."

For the record, Ali Sher, legend of Indian golf, guided his team of Chander Uday Singh, Ajay Dadwal



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(MD, Corporate Risk India) and Rahul Maroli to victory in the team event. The two-time winner of the Indian Open finished with a two-day aggregate of nine-under 135. And Chinnaswamy Muniyappa, who so memorably won the Hero Honda Indian Open last year, constructed a superb title defense at the Classic. Muniyappa opened with a six-under-par 66 and signed off with a scorching 11-under 61, a round as blistering as the overhead atmospheric conditions, to win by a couple of shots.

The Kumars, Ashok and Mukesh, finished first and second runners up, while Anirban Lahiri, another talent from the south, and Bangladesh's Mohammed Siddikur Rahman competed the top five.

The winning teams from the three city legs and the Finals, as well as the individual winners, get to fly to Macao, where they can live it up, for three days and two nights, at The Venetian. The lucky few also get to tee it up at the Macao Golf & Country Club.

The successful running of this prestigious tournament would not be possible without the support of a select few: Honda SIEL Cars India is the title co-partner of the BT Pro-Am, and Religare and ITC WelcomGroup are the associate sponsors; the event's prize sponsor is Ethos Summit, while *Golf Digest India* is the "official magazine", and Cleveland Golf the "equipment partner"; The Venetian Macao is the "international destination partner", and Urban 18 the "SIM partner". Also partnering the BT Pro-Am is Beam Global. ©