



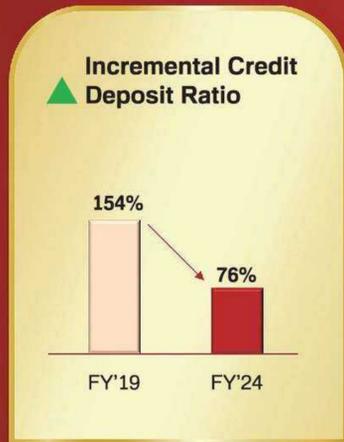
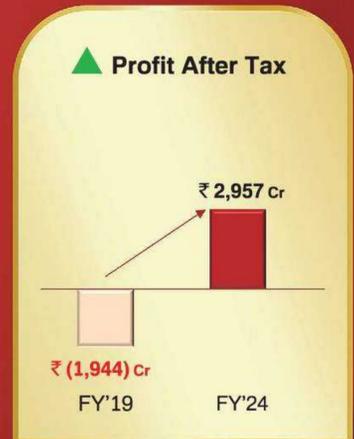
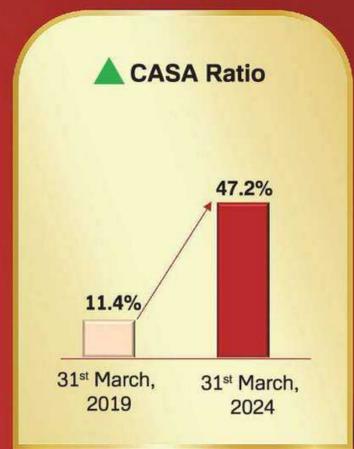
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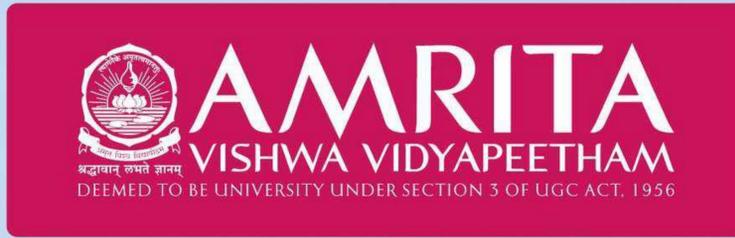


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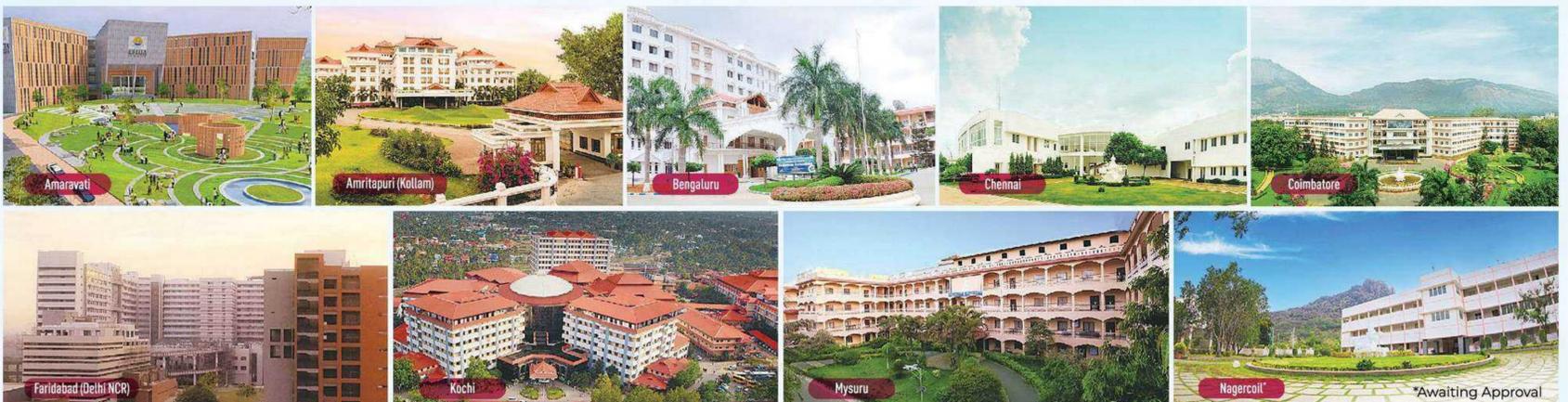


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Hindustan Times

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Heatwave grips country as polls enter key stage

Jayashree Nandi and Abhishek Jha
 letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: A heatwave to severe heatwave has taken hold over east and south peninsular India and will continue during the next five days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Sunday, a warning that covers a swathe of the country where elections are due in the next two phases.

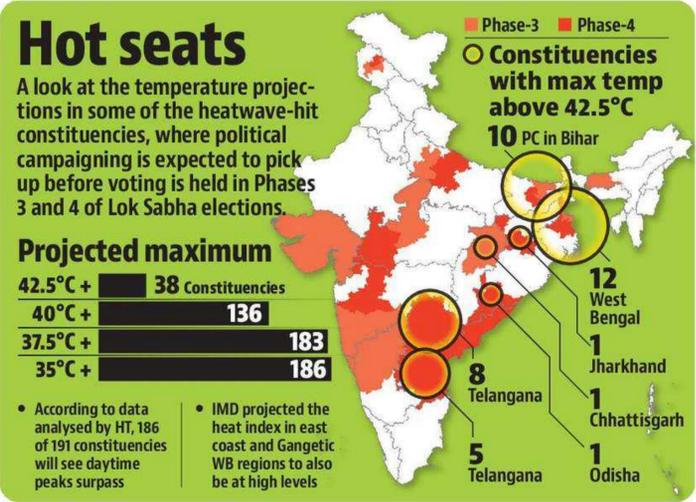
The warning identified Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha and Bihar, and some parts over Jharkhand that will face "heatwave or severe heatwave conditions". Pockets over Rayalaseema, interior Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana will have similarly hot weather.

An analysis by HT of projected maximum peaks from the US National Weather Service—one of the few resources to give such temperature projections—showed a whopping 186 of the 191 seats where polls are due in the next two phases will have peak temperatures above 35°C in the next five days.

Among these, 136 constituencies are projected to have peaks of above 40°C, which can bring dangerous levels of heat exposures and yet again deter people from voting at a time when turnouts have dropped.

"The heatwave to severe heatwave event over Odisha and Gangetic WB is very intense. We are not expecting any relief before May 1 after which there may be some thunderstorm activity. The heat episode over east India has been prolonged. Normally only 1-3 days of heat wave is expected in April," said

continued on P6



CAPITAL SET TO SEE A WARM END TO APRIL AS MERCURY NEARS 40°C MARK

NEW DELHI: Delhi is set to end April on a warm note with the maximum temperature likely to shoot up to 40 degrees Celsius (°C) by Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said.

Though there will be clear skies and no rain in the coming six days, IMD has predicted strong surface winds of 25-30km/hour, which will prevent the mercury from rising beyond 40°C.

FULL REPORT ON P3

Govt plans steps to aid farmers in climate crisis

Zia Haq
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NEW DELHI: The government has constituted two scientific panels to assemble an advanced countrywide agricultural weather information system and introduce tech-enabled assessment of crop yields to ward off impacts of extreme weather linked to climate crisis, officials said.

The committees anchored in the Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre in New Delhi comprise multidisciplinary

experts and representation from states to step up responses to the climate crisis, which have cut yields and farm incomes.

Agriculture employs half of the country's workforce and accounts for 18% of India's GDP. Climate scientists have consistently warned that severe heatwaves, changing rainfall patterns and flooding will threaten India's food security, especially its rice and wheat cropping systems, which are critical to feeding the world's most populous nation.

P12



Arvinder Singh Lovely
LOVELY STEPS DOWN AS DELHI CONGRESS CHIEF OVER AAP TIE-UP

Alok KN Mishra
 letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Arvinder Singh Lovely has resigned from his post, citing his opposition to the party's alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)—a development that has brought to the fore simmering internal conflicts within the Congress less than a month before the seven Lok Sabha seats in the Capital go to the polls.

Lovely, who sent a letter of resignation to Congress national president Mallikarjun Kharge on April 27, also cited differences with Congress general secretary Deepak Babaria, who is the party's Delhi in-charge.

Responding to Lovely's stepping down from his post, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said the move was expected, as the Congress-AAP alliance was "unnatural".

While Babaria said that the Congress high command has accepted Lovely's resignation, he did not comment on the impact the development may have on the party cadre as the Congress heads to the polls.

→P9



Luxury car, taxi collide in Dhaula Kuan



A Jaguar, which was being driven on the wrong side of the road, rammed into a cab near Dhaula Kuan, in New Delhi, on Sunday, critically injuring the three occupants of the cab. →P5 HT PHOTO

Modi: Inheritance tax is Cong's plan to loot

HT Correspondent
 letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday sharpened his attack on the issue of wealth redistribution, lashing out at the Congress for the condition of the country, saying that it was his duty to "awaken" people to the Opposition's efforts to "loot" wealth and likening it to Maoist ideology.

In an interview with News18, Modi expressed confidence about a victory in the ongoing general elections, said that his campaign had largely focussed on issues of development and welfare, alleged that the Congress tried to siphon away reservations for other backward classes (OBC), and added that the people of Karnataka were going to punish the Congress for unfulfilled promises by the state government.

"One of their leaders gave an



Prime Minister Narendra Modi

interview in America. He spoke about a 55% tax on property. I am talking about viraasat and they are about looting it and wealth redistribution. That is their history. What else will they do? It is my responsibility to tell people that this is what they plan to do," he said in the

ANI

interview. The PM was referring to comments two weeks ago by Indian Overseas Congress president Sam Pitroda, who said that the idea of an inheritance tax should be debated and discussed. The Congress has

continued on P13

One dead in clashes among Manipur village volunteers

Utpal Parashar
 letters@hindustantimes.com

GUWAHATI: One person was killed and three others were injured in a gunfight between armed groups in Kangpokpi district of strife-torn Manipur early on Sunday, officials said.

Dozens of gunmen attacked Koutruk in Imphal West district on Sunday morning from elevated hilltops of neighbouring Kangpokpi district prompting village volunteers deployed in the fringe village to retaliate, the police said.

The exchange of fire gradually spread to adjacent villages of Kadangband and Senjam Chirang, they said.

Koutruk village has been witness to intense gunfights between village volunteers of two warring communities since ethnic violence broke out on May 3 last year. It has been identified as one of the most vulnerable areas for gun attacks.

THE EXCHANGE OF FIRE GRADUALLY SPREAD TO ADJACENT VILLAGES OF KADANGBAND AND SENJAM CHIRANG, OFFICIALS SAID

The deceased was identified as Lammang Kippen (44), a Kuki village volunteer. There was no clarity on the identities of the three injured.

Denouncing the killing, the Kangpokpi district-based Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) has called for a 12-hour shutdown in the district.

The gunfight came a day after a sub-inspector and a head constable were killed in an attack on

a post of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in the state's Bishnupur district of strife-torn Manipur early on Saturday morning, in the first such targeting of a central force in almost a year.

Over a dozen unidentified attackers first hurled grenades at the CRPF post shortly after midnight, and followed it up with a barrage of bullets, in what officials said was a "pre-meditated attack".

Manipur has been in the throes of a violent conflict for nearly a year. What began as an ethnic conflict on May 3 last year between the majority Meiteis who reside in Imphal valley and the tribal Kukis, has grown into seemingly irreconcilable cleavages within Manipuri society. More than 220 people have been killed and 50,000 people displaced, while armed militia prowl the streets.

(With agency inputs)

Tornado flattens houses in Guangzhou



A strong tornado wreaked havoc through the city of Guangzhou, one of China's biggest economic hubs, on Saturday, killing five people and injuring 33.

Hindus worst affected by price rise and unemployment, says Tejashwi

Sunetra Choudhury
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NEW DELHI: Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav said Hindus are the most affected by issues of livelihood and development, which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led central government has failed to act on and which are key voter issues in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

"People are now fed up of



RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi and BJP's lies. They gave them 10 years but if you look at the ground reality, there was

no work done. So, local issues are more important and have been overpowering in this election," Tejashwi told HT in an interview. "I have been repeatedly saying that a majority of the population is Hindu, so the Hindus are most affected by issues like unemployment, poverty and inflation. We already knew that sooner or later, Modi ji would return to the same narrative of mandir-masjid, and Islam-Sanatani."

FULL INTERVIEW ON P10

Ph 2 turnout closer to 2014, lower than 2019

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: Voter turnout in the second phase of the general elections was around 66.7%, according to an official of the Election Commission — which is similar to the turnout in 2014 and lower than the 69.6% turnout in 2019.

Electors cast their ballots to choose 88 Lok Sabha members in 13 states and union territories in the second phase on April 26. The turnout was 66.1% in the first phase held on April 19.

Both these numbers are lower than the aggregate turnouts in these seats in 2019 — 69.6% for seats that went in the second phase and 69.4% for the ones that had polling in the first phase. However, the turnout in the constituencies that went to

ELECTORS CAST THEIR BALLOTS TO CHOOSE 88 LS MEMBERS IN 13 STATES AND UTs IN THE SECOND PHASE

polls in the second phase was the same as the voting, on aggregate, was in these seats during the 2014 general elections. To be sure, the grouping of constituencies that went to polls is not the same across the three elections.

Polling has now been held in 11 states and three Union territories. Of these, voting in Rajasthan, Manipur and Tripura took place in two phases, while in the other 11 states and UTs, voting was conducted in one phase. →P10

AKALIS WILL NOT FIELD AMRITPAL, NAME VALTOHA AS CANDIDATE

HT Correspondent
 letters@hindustantimes.com

CHANDIGARH: The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Sunday announced its candidate for the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha seat in Punjab, ending the speculation that the party might support jailed radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh, who is contesting from the constituency as an Independent.

In a post on X, the SAD announced the candidature of former MLA Virsa Singh Valtoha from the seat. "Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal today announced party's core committee member and former chief parliamentary secretary S. Virsa Singh Valtoha as the Akali Dal candidate for the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha constituency. With this announcement the party has fielded party candidates on all 14 seats of Punjab and Chandigarh," it said.



BJP, BJD are fighting together, says Rahul at poll rally in Odisha

CUTTACK: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday alleged that while Prime Minister Narendra Modi runs a government for billionaires from Delhi, chief minister Naveen Patnaik leads a dispensation that works for "select people" in Odisha.

Addressing an election rally in Salepur, Cuttack, Gandhi alleged that though the Biju Janata Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party were fighting the electoral battle against each other, in reality, they were working together.

"Call it a partnership or marriage, both BJD and BJP are together," he said.

Taking a dig at Patnaik, Gandhi said that though he was the chief minister, the BJD government in the state was being run by his aide VK Pandian.

In an apparent reference to the PM, Gandhi said, "Uncleji and Naveen-babu have given Odisha PAANN, meaning Pan-

AAP's campaign ad rejected for showing police in 'bad taste'

Aditi Agrawal
 letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The pre-certification committee in the office of the Delhi chief electoral officer (CEO) has rejected a campaign advertisement application of a song released by the AAP for "casting aspersions on the judiciary", "inciting violence", presenting the police "in bad taste", and criticising the ruling party on "the basis of unverified facts".

dian, Amit Shah, Narendra Modi, Naveen Patnaik. They have looted your wealth." →P3

Forest fire put out in several parts of U'khand, IAF relief operation continues for second day



A fire rages in the Ranibagh area of Nainital district.

HT Correspondent
 letters@hindustantimes.com
DEHRADUN: Uttarakhand reported eight new forest fires, the forest department said in its daily bulletin on Sunday, as a helicopter of the Indian Air Force continued firefighting operations for the second day bringing under control the blaze in several areas. Separately, the government cancelled the leaves of all forest

department officials till the situation was completely under control, and filed against 196 cases against "anti-social elements" for starting the fires, officials said.

Of the new fires, reported in the 24 hours till 4pm on Sunday, eight were in the Kumaon region, which has also seen the maximum damage due to the fires since November 1 last year. Of the over 735.8 hectares of forest land damaged in 606 fires since

November 1 last year, 242.3 hectares were damaged in the Garhwal region, 429.4 hectares in the Kumaon region and 64.02 hectares in the administrative wildlife regions, forest officials said.

In the Kumaon region, fires are raging at two to three places in Nainital district and at one place each in Champawat, Almora, Pithoragarh and Bageshwar,

continued on P6

{ MOHAN YADAV } MADHYA PRADESH CM

It was Modi ji's magic that worked in the assembly and it will work in Lok Sabha too

→Full interview on P11

14 PAKISTANIS ARRESTED BY NCB FOR SMUGGLING DRUGS INTO INDIA

AHMEDABAD: Indian security forces on Sunday arrested 14 Pakistani nationals off the Gujarat coast and seized 86kg of contraband drugs worth around ₹600 crore in their possession, officials said. To evade arrest, the Pakistani nationals tried to ram their boat over the Indian coast Guard vessel carrying officials of the Anti-Terrorist Squad and Narcotics Control Bureau, who opened fire on the Pakistani crew, they said, requesting anonymity.

P8

NUMBER THEORY

How demographically representative is the Bihar candidate mix?

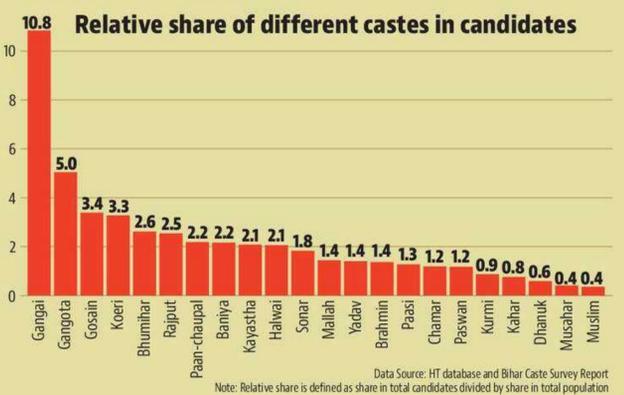
By Nishant Ranjan and Roshan Kishore

Bihar, which sends 40 MPs to the Lok Sabha, is set for a bipolar contest between the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) led Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). How socially representative is the candidature of these two blocks in Bihar? Thanks to the caste census results published by the Bihar government in October 2023, one can answer this question with much more clarity than for any other state in India. HT matched candidates and castes for all 80 candidates of the NDA and INDIA to do this analysis. This analysis has not taken into account caste-wise differences among Muslim candidates. Here is what the data shows.

1 Yadavs have the largest share in number of candidates from the two blocks

Among the 80 candidates of NDA and INDIA Blocks, 16 are Yadav. This makes them the single largest caste in the pool of candidates of the two major blocks. Koeri is the second largest caste with 11 candidates and they are followed by Rajput (7), Bhumihar (6) and Chamar and Dusadh (Paswan) with five candidates each.

Does this mean an overwhelming Yadav dominance in Bihar's politics? A comparison of the relative share of different castes in total candidates – share in candidates divided by share in total population – shows that Yadavs are not as over represented as the data would initially suggest. In terms of the relative share of candidates, they are ranked 13th among 22 castes who have at least one candidate from the two main blocks. In fact, the relative share of Yadav candidates is lower than that of three upper castes (Bhumihar, Rajput and Kayasth) and same as that of Brahmins. Data also shows that caste groups which comprise 25% of Bihar's population do not have a candidate from either of the two blocks in this election in Bihar.

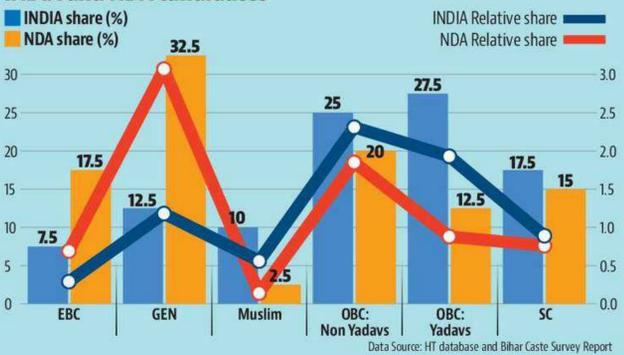


2 How do INDIA and NDA compare on the representation of broad caste groups?

This is an interesting question to ask because Bihar's politics has often been focused on this narrative. Bihar was among the first states in India to implement the Other Backward Class (OBC) quota with a sub-category for extremely backward castes (EBCs). Similarly, RJD's dominance in Bihar's politics has also created a Yadav versus non-Yadav divide in OBC politics with Nitish Kumar emerging as the pole of a conglomeration of numerically insignificant non-Yadav OBCs. The RJD, on the other hand, draws its core support from a Muslim-Yadav (MY) consolidation.

The data shows that the NDA has a bigger share of candidates from upper castes (Rajput, Bhumihar, Kayasth and Brahmin) and EBCs than the INDIA block. The INDIA block has a higher share of Yadavs, non-Yadav OBCs, Muslims and Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates than the NDA alliance. To be sure, the relative share of upper caste candidates is greater than one even for the INDIA block, which is approaching these elections with an aggressive Mandal politics rhetoric.

Share (%) and relative share of broad caste-groups in INDIA and NDA candidates



3 What is the caste-equation at the level of constituency-wise contests?

Have NDA and INDIA fielded candidates from same or different caste/caste-groups in a given constituency? The former would suggest a dominance of a particular caste in a given constituency while the latter might be an indication of efforts to exploit caste-based fault lines. Data shows that only seven out of the 40 PCs in the state will see a contest between candidates of the same caste. If one looks at caste groups, namely, upper castes, SC, EBC, Yadav, Non-Yadav OBCs and Muslims, the number of constituencies with a contest between same caste groups increases to 15. Only one PC in Bihar will see a contest between Muslim candidates of the NDA and INDIA blocks and two will see upper caste candidates against each other. This number is three for Yadav versus Yadav contests.

Caste group and caste wise classification of contests (Number of PCs)



{ BUSINESS } AFTER INDIA TRIP NIXED

Tesla's Musk makes surprise China visit



Tesla CEO Elon Musk on Sunday met Premier Li Qiang during an unannounced trip to China during which he is expected to meet officials to discuss the roll-out of its Full Self-Driving software, said people familiar with the matter. Li told Musk that Tesla's development in the country could be regarded as a successful example of US-China economic and trade cooperation. The visit comes during a volatile time for Tesla and only a week after a much anticipated visit to India was cancelled as he cited pressing issues at the automaker. The world's biggest seller of fully-electric cars announced this month it would cut more than 10% of its workforce globally, as slowing EV sales growth prompted a cost-saving drive. →P16

{ WORLD } RUSSIA CLAIMS FRESH GAINS

Situation on battlefield has worsened, warns Ukraine



Ukraine's top commander said on Sunday Kyiv's outnumbered troops had fallen back to new positions west of three villages on the eastern front where Russia has concentrated significant forces in several locations. The statement by Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi reflected Ukraine's deteriorating position in the east that Kyiv hopes it can stabilise once it takes delivery of US weapons under a \$61 billion aid package approved this week. "The situation at the front has worsened," he wrote on the Telegram app, describing the "most difficult" areas as west of occupied Maryinka and northwest of Avdiivka. Russia's defence ministry earlier on Sunday claimed its troops had captured the village of Novobakhmutivka in the eastern Donetsk region. →P15

{ MY INDIA } PRAJWAL REVANNA

FIR filed against JDS leader in assault case



A FIR alleging sexual harassment was lodged on Sunday against Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna and his father HD Revanna, an MLA representing Holenarasipur, based on a complaint by a woman who had worked at Revanna's house. She alleged she was sexually abused multiple times between 2019 and 2022. The complaint comes on a day when Karnataka government ordered the formation of a special investigation team (SIT) to probe a series of obscene videos circulating in Hassan district of Karnataka involving Prajwal Revanna of the Janata Dal (Secular) party, some of which appeared to depict sexual assault. Prajwal Revanna is the grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda. →P8

{ DEBATING ARTICLE 39(B) }

Why Constitution bench case is key for future of property rights

Abraham Thomas

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NEW DELHI: A nine-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court is currently deliberating on a crucial issue concerning the State's authority to acquire privately owned property of citizens, as outlined in Article 39(b) of the Constitution, in the interest of the greater common good.

This matter has been pending before the apex court since 1992, when the first batch of cases was filed. Over the years, it has traversed through different benches, progressing from a five-judge bench to a seven-judge bench before reaching the present nine-judge bench. However, it has recently garnered heightened attention, particularly in an election year, following a significant political discourse.

The catalyst for this renewed focus was a speech by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 21, wherein he accused the Congress party of advocating redistribution of common citizens' wealth if elected to power. This assertion was based on an earlier address by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on April 20, where he proposed conducting a comprehensive caste survey to determine the demographics and socio-economic status of various communities, including backward classes, SCs, STs, minorities, and others. Gandhi further outlined plans for subsequent distribution of wealth, job opportunities, and welfare schemes based on these findings.

While these political statements may seem disconnected from the ongoing legal proceedings, they have spurred public interest in the case being heard by the Supreme Court. Understanding the complexities of the issues under consideration, the associated controversies, and the diverse perspectives of stakeholders is essential to grasp the significance of this matter.

Understanding Article 39(b)

At the heart of the current controversy lies the interpretation of Article 39(b) of the Constitution. It is one of the directive principles of state policy (DPSP) which says, "the State shall direct its policy towards securing that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good".

Article 39(b) has existed from the time the Constitution came to be enacted. At that time, the right to property was a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(f). The right to property came to be deleted as a fundamental right by the Constitution (Forty-fourth Amendment) Act, 1978, and a modified version of this right was inserted in Article 300A which says that "no person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law".

The nine-judge bench headed by chief justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud, which is currently hearing the matter, has to determine whether the classification



The court bench which is currently hearing the matter has to determine whether the classification "material resources of community" includes private property within its fold. ARVIND YADAV/HT

"material resources of community" includes private property within its fold.

It is not the first time that the top court has been called upon to decide this issue. But the uncertainty in law has arisen due to a contentious interpretation by a seven-judge bench in State of Karnataka v Rangnatha Reddy (1977) that considered the application of Article 39(b) in the context of nationalisation of contract carriages. The majority view of four judges did not favour private property to fall under Article 39(b). However, the minority view pronounced by justice VR Krishna Iyer held to the contrary.

Justice Iyer said: "Material resources of the community in the context of reordering the national economy embraces all the national wealth, not merely natural resources, all the private and public sources of meeting material needs, not merely public possessions... To exclude ownership of private resources from the coils of Article 39(b) is to ciphersise its very purpose of redistribution the socialist way."

This minority view became the basis of a five-judge bench in Sanjeev Coke case (1982), where the issue of Article 39(b) arose in the context of nationalisation of coke oven plants and private property was held to be part of material resources of community. Later, in 1997 a nine-judge bench in Mafatlal Industries case underscored this conclusion when it said, "the material resources of the community are not confined to public resources but include all resources, natural and man-made, public and private owned".

To be sure, the laws relating to Article 39(b) that have travelled in the past to the top court have related to natural or public resources such as land, mines, forest, electricity, coke oven plants, sick textile industry, contract carriages, excise duty, natural gas, etc. However, this is perhaps the first time the court has been confronted with an issue on housing and building belonging to urban land-

lords, considered so germane to private citizens, in the present challenge under Article 39(b) heard by the nine judges.

The present controversy

The present bench of nine judges, also including justices Hrishikesh Roy, BV Nagarathna, Sudhanshu Dhulia, JB Pardiwala, Manoj Misra, Rajesh Bindal, SC Sharma and Augustine George Masih, has been called upon to reconcile the various judicial dictums on this question.

The occasion for the court to consider this issue has arisen in a challenge by property owners association of Mumbai to Chapter VIII-A of the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA) Act, introduced in 1986, which allows the state to acquire Mumbai's old, dilapidated buildings termed as "cessed properties" in favour of cooperative societies of occupiers. This amendment contained a declaration that the Act seeks to give effect to the state policy for securing the objective specified in Article 39(b) of the Constitution.

The state has claimed that "housing stock" is a material resource of the community and the reconstruction of the building is for the common good as the old buildings are unsafe. The MHADA authority is also before the court and has argued that the owners of the buildings have refused to effect repairs on account of the freezing of rents from September 1, 1940, due to which they get very little rent which is less than the taxes they have to pay on these properties.

However, the property owners have opposed the state's move by arguing that Article 39(b) cannot envisage private-owned property.

They have even challenged the Maharashtra Rent Control Act for fixing abysmally low standard rent.

What falls for the consideration before the nine judges can be gauged from the two reference orders in this case by which the matter was first sent by a five-judge bench to seven judges in 2001, and subsequently to a nine-judge bench in February 2002.

The order referring the matter to seven judges was passed by a bench of five judges that

said: "We are of the opinion that the views expressed in Sanjeev Coke case (1983) require reconsideration. Keeping in view the importance of the point in issue, namely, the interpretation of Article 39(b), it will be appropriate if these cases are heard by a larger bench of not less than seven judges."

While passing this order, the court was conscious that Sanjeev Coke case relied on the minority view penned by justice Iyer in the Rangnatha Reddy case.

Before the seven-judge bench, a similar issue arose as the Centre and Maharashtra government cited the Mafatlal case decided by a bench of nine-judges. The order sending the matter to nine judges said: "Having given due consideration, we are of the opinion that this interpretation of Article 39(b) requires to be reconsidered by a bench of nine judges; we have some difficulty in sharing the broad view that material resources of the community under Article 39(b) covers what is privately owned."

A related issue of Article 31C

While the reference order in the Maharashtra matter only seeks to settle the judicial dichotomy on Article 39(b), a related issue has arisen in the present proceedings with the bench willing to go into a related aspect of Article 31C of the Constitution.

This provision was introduced by the Constitution (Twenty-fifth Amendment) Act, 1971, giving a "safe harbour" or protective umbrella to any law giving effect to the policy of the state towards securing the principles of Article 39(b) and 39(c)

if it is inconsistent with or takes away any rights conferred by Articles 14 and 19 relating to equality and fundamental freedoms.

The core protection of this provision was upheld by the 13-judge bench landmark decision in Kesavananda Bharati case (1973), famous for laying down the basic structure doctrine. The court had untouched 31C protection to laws furthering the objective of Article 39(b) but struck down that part which barred judicial review of such laws.

Later, by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, the scope of protection offered under Article 31C was extended not only to Articles 39(b) and (c), but all directive principles of state policy (DPSP), meaning thereby that any law based on DPSP violating Articles 14 and 19 could not be challenged in courts.

In July 1980, a five-judge bench in Minerva Mills case, deciding a challenge to the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 struck down the amendments to Article 31C on the ground that it violates basic structure.

The judgment even cast a shadow on whether the unamended 31C, as upheld by the Kesavananda Bharati decision, will continue to operate.

On the day when the operative portion in Minerva Mills case was pronounced on May 9, 1980, the same day, another five-judge bench pronounced its operative judgment in Waman Rao case which dealt with a challenge to the Maharashtra Agricultural Lands (Ceiling and Holding) Act, 1961 that enjoyed the protection under the unamended 31C (as it existed prior to the 1976 amendment) and Article 31A.

The detailed judgment in Waman Rao came in November 1980 when the bench held the unamended 31C to be valid, making clear that Minerva case was limited to the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976. The bench in Waman Rao said, "If we are right in upholding the validity of Article 31-A on its own merits, it must follow logically that the unamended Article 31C is also valid."

Since this decision came after Minerva judgment, the judges distinguished the two cases and said that the "unamended portion of Article 31C is not like an unchartered sea" as it gives protection to a limited category of laws giving effect to clause (b) and (c) of Article 39. "These clauses of Article 39 contain directive principles which are vital to the well-being of the country and welfare of its people," it held.

The present nine-judge bench has to decide whether the unamended 31C continues to exist as argued by Maharashtra or the Minerva judgment has rendered it a "dead letter" as the property owners claim it to be.

In light of recent political statements suggesting the redistribution of wealth and resources, the Constitution bench's scrutiny of this issue gains more relevance. The court's interpretation is set to serve as a crucial guideline for achieving the delicate balance between individual property rights and the state's responsibility towards achieving socio-economic justice.

Lovely quits as Delhi's Cong chief over alliance with AAP

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NEW DELHI: Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Arvinder Singh Lovely has resigned from his post, citing his opposition to the party's alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)—a development that has brought to the fore simmering internal conflicts within the Congress less than a month before the seven Lok Sabha seats in the Capital go to the polls.

Lovely, who sent a letter of resignation to Congress national president Mallikarjun Kharge on April 27, also cited differences with Congress general secretary Deepak Babaria, who is the party's Delhi in-charge.

HT has seen a copy of the letter. Responding to Lovely stepping down from his post, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said the move was expected, as the Congress-AAP alliance was "unnatural".

The Congress and the AAP are contesting the general elections in multiple states as part of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc. The two parties in February finalised their seat-sharing agreement for the polls in Delhi, according to which, the AAP will contest from four



Arvinder Singh Lovely at his residence on Sunday. SANJEEV VERMA/HT

of the seven seats in the Capital, while the Congress as fielded candidates for the remaining three constituencies—Kanhaiya Kumar from North East, Udit Raj from North West, and JP Agrawal from Chandni Chowk.

In his letter to Kharge, Lovely said that the Delhi Congress unit was not told about the candidature of Raj and Kumar. "Out of these 3 seats, while rejecting the views of the PCC, all Observers and the Local Party Workers, the North-West Delhi and Northeast Delhi seats were given to 2 Candidates who were total strangers to the Delhi Congress and the Party Policies. It is the prerogative of the High Command to have a final say on the Party Candidates, however,

shockingly, once the decision in regards to the aforesaid 2 Candidates was made by the High Command, the PCC was not even intimated before the formal announcement so that I could at least take some remedial steps and pacify the local State Leaders thereby stalling any local party unrest," the letter stated.

"The candidate from North-East Delhi has also been giving media bytes... endorsed the false propaganda of AAP in regard to the supposed works done by them in the education, health, road and electricity sectors. Such ill-thought and factually incorrect statements have not gone down well with the local unit of the party who have an

inherent understanding that the alliance (with the AAP)... was in fact, a 'compromise' to improve the chances of victory for the party... The condition of schools, hospitals and public infrastructure in Delhi, under the AAP rule, has severely worsened as compared to the development work done under Late Sheila Dikshit Ji's Congress regime," Lovely wrote.

"As a consequence of the aforementioned situation, since I cannot protect the interests of the Party Workers, I see no reason to continue in the said post. Therefore, with great regret and an extremely leaden heart, I, Arvinder Singh Lovely, do hereby tender my resignation from the post of DPCC President," the letter stated.

"All unanimous decisions taken by the senior Delhi Congress leaders have been unilaterally vetoed by the AICC general secretary (Babaria)... (He) has not allowed me to make any senior appointments in the DPCC, including to appoint all block presidents in the city, even though over 150 blocks in Delhi do not presently have a block president," Lovely said.

Later addressing a press conference, Lovely denied all speculations that he may join the BJP.

"I have resigned from the post of the Delhi Congress president and not from the party. I

am not going to join any other party," he said.

To be sure, this is Lovely's second stint in the Congress—in April 2017, he quit the party and joined the BJP, before rejoining the Congress in February 2018.

Responding to the development, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said the AAP-Congress alliance was "unnatural". "The day Kanhaiya Kumar and Udit Raj were fielded as candidates, I had said that the Congress has destroyed itself," he said.

AAP minister Saurabh Bhadwaj said, "The Congress is our alliance partner and this is an internal matter of that party."

When contacted, Babaria said, "The Congress high command has accepted the resignation of Arvinder Singh Lovely."

Babaria, however, did not comment on queries about what impact Lovely's resignation will have on the party cadre, and on who will replace him as the PCC chief.

Lovely's resignation comes days after former Delhi minister and senior Delhi Congress leader Rajkumar Chauhan resigned from the party. A Congress functionary aware of the matter said that Chauhan, who was involved in an altercation with Babaria on Sunday, submitted his resignation on April 24.

24-yr-old man stabs wife to death in front of children in Bharat Nagar

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NEW DELHI: A 24-year-old man was arrested for allegedly murdering his wife by stabbing her in front of their children due to marital disputes in Bunkar Colony of Bharat Nagar on Saturday, police said.

The accused was identified as Mohammad Javed and his wife was identified as Afsana, 24. The stabbing took place at Afsana's parents' home, and her sister

was also present at the time of the incident, police said.

Deputy commissioner of police (northwest) Jitendra Kumar Meena said: "We arrested Javed, who is a tailor by profession, and booked him for murder under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code at the Bharat Nagar police station. Marital disputes between the couple is the reason behind the murder. Afsana was married to Javed for six years. For the past few months, she and her children had been

living with her parents."

In another instance, a man in his late 20s was stabbed to death, allegedly by his friend, at the former's rented home in Mahendra Park on Sunday afternoon. The attacker also suffered stab wounds, police said.

The deceased was identified as Zahid Ali and the alleged attacker as Ravi Kumar. Ali and Kumar got into a fight as Ali found Kumar and his girlfriend in a compromising position in his room, police said.

AAP song faces poll body heat

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NEW DELHI: The pre-certification committee in the office of the Delhi chief electoral officer (CEO) has rejected a campaign advertisement application of a song released by the Aam Aadmi Party for "casting aspersions on the judiciary", "inciting violence", and "presenting police in bad taste", and criticising the ruling party on "the basis of unverified facts".

The committee, in a letter dated April 27, advised the AAP to modify the two-minute song and video accordingly. During the model code of conduct, all political advertisements published via electronic media must be approved and certified by MCMC of the respective district or state, and the application must be made no later than three days prior to when the ad is to be broadcast.

The AAP song, launched on April 25, raises allegations of dictatorial governance, unemployment, inflation, and conspiracy targeting opposition leaders.

It is not clear why the pre-certification committee sent the letter two days after the song was released. HT has reached out to AAP for more details on when the song was submitted to the Delhi CEO for approval.

If the party chooses to appeal this, the plea must be sent to the state-level media certification and monitoring committee (MCMC), which is chaired by Delhi CEO P Krishnamurthy.

The media pre-certification committee found eight problematic parts in AAP's song and told the party that the phrase "jail ke jawab hum vote se denge" (we will answer jail terms with our votes) shows an "aggressive mob" holding incarcerated AAP

convener Arvind Kejriwal's photo showing him behind the bars, which "casts aspersions" on the judiciary.

The committee said that the submitted transcript "has not been signed by the applicant", and that the phrase "jail ka jawab hum vote se denge" running from 1:49 to 1:59 is "missing from the submitted transcript".

It said that the phrase "tanashaahi party ko hum chot denge" (we will hurt the dictatorial party), which shows images of a clash between police and protesters, "apparently incites violence". In its letter, it described this scene elsewhere as an "aggressive mob clashing with the police [that] shows criticism of the ruling party on the basis of unverified facts".

The phrase "gunda gardi ke khilaf vote denge" [we will vote against hooliganism] and "tanashaahi karme wali party ko hum chot denge" [we will hurt the dictatorial party] with the visuals of Manish Sisodia being escorted by police together "present the picture of police in bad taste", the committee ruled.

The phrase "awazein khilaf thi jo sabko jail me daal dia, bas unko hi bahar rakha jisme inko maal dia. Itna lalach, itna nafra, bhrastachari se mohabbat" (all those who criticised you were thrown in jail; only those who bribed you remained outside. So much greed, so much hatred, love for the corrupt) is "slandereous", it said.

It ruled that three phrases—"jail ke jawab mein hum vote denge", "gundagardi ke khilaf vote denge", and "tanashaahi party ko hum chot denge"—which appear multiple times in the song, violate paragraph 2.5(d) of the Election Commission of India guidelines dated August 24, 2023 on MCMC pre-certification and paid news.

'Does not violate model code': AAP on song 'ban'

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NEW DELHI: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi minister Atishi on Sunday said the "Election Commission of India (ECI) banned" its campaign song "Jail Ka Jawab, Vote Se Denge", adding "it is the first time in the history of our country" that "ECI has banned campaign song of any party to stop the campaign" in a press conference at the party headquarters.

The song in question, sung as a rap, was released by the AAP on Thursday. Written and sung by AAP's Timarpur MLA Dilip Pandey, the song raises allegations of dictatorial governance, unemployment, inflation, and conspiracy targeting opposition leaders, including Kejriwal.

In response, the office of the chief electoral officer, Delhi, said that reports of an ECI ban on the song were incorrect.

"The news is factually incorrect and misleading. It is informed that during the review and scrutiny of the advertisement submitted by the Aam Aadmi Party, the media pre-certification committee headed by the joint chief electoral officer, Delhi, made certain observations regarding the advertisement/creative with reference to various provisions/guidelines stipulated by ECI. The said creative/advertisement was returned along with the observations with the request to modify the contents of the creative



Delhi minister Atishi

as per the Advertising Codes prescribed under the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 and ECI guideline circulated vide letter dated August 24, 2023 and resubmit after modification, for the certification," the office of the Delhi chief electoral officer said.

Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21 in connection with the Delhi liquor policy case.

AAP claims he was jailed because the BJP didn't want him to campaign for the Lok Sabha elections.

"This is the same ECI which sees nothing when the BJP is making fun of the Model Code of Conduct on a daily basis. But if AAP leaders even breathe, they are served another notice. When the BJP misuses ED and CBI to put opposition leaders in jail during the Model Code of Conduct, ECI has no objection to it. But if the AAP even writes it in a song, ECI raises various objections," Atishi said.

"According to ECI, the song 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se Denge'

shows the ruling party (BJP) and investigation agencies in a bad light. You (ECI) would not change the head of the CBI, you would not change the ED's director or I-T's director during elections; you (ECI) would not do anything to stop the attack on the opposition. But, if someone mentions in their campaign that fraudulent arrests are being made, then ECI takes objection to it," Atishi said.

"It is right if the BJP exercises dictatorship, but if anyone propagates about that dictatorship then it is wrong. And the most interesting thing is that throughout the campaign song, there is no mention of the BJP, but ECI says that 'if you talk about dictatorship, this is a criticism of the ruling party.' That means ECI itself believes that the BJP is running a dictatorial rule in this country," Atishi said.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said: "AAP applied for approval of its campaign song on April 24 and the same forenoon, launched its election campaign song without the approval. When the officers concerned objected to it, citing violation of ECI's advertising code and directed them to modify its content, as always, AAP leader Atishi launched a scathing attack on the election authority. Strangely, the objection was raised by Delhi's chief electoral officer, but the AAP leader attacked the Election Commission of India for the objection."

Mercury to hover around 40°C in coming days, predicts IMD

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NEW DELHI: Delhi is set to end April on a warm note with the maximum temperature likely to shoot up to 40 degrees Celsius (°C) by Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said.

Though there will be clear skies and no rain in the coming six days, IMD has predicted strong surface winds of 25-30km/hour, which will prevent the mercury from rising beyond 40°C.

Delhi recorded a maximum temperature of 38.2°C on Sunday, which was a degree below normal. It was 38°C on Saturday. Delhi's maximum had crossed 40°C for the first time this year on Friday when it touched

STRONG SURFACE WINDS OF 25-30KMPH SPEED WILL KEEP DAY TEMPERATURE FROM SPIKING BEYOND 40°C, IMD OFFICIALS SAID

40.5°C. However, the city was hit by a thunderstorm on Friday evening.

IMD officials said the maximum dipped marginally after this spell of rain but is on the rise again. "It is likely to touch 40°C again by Monday and should hover around 38-40°C till May 4. It is not likely to rise higher than this as we will see strong surface winds of up to 30km/hour,

which will have a marginal cooling effect. Had winds been calm, it could have gone up to 41-42°C," said an official.

Delhi's minimum temperature was 23.5°C on Sunday, which was around normal for this time of the year. It was 22.7°C on Saturday. Forecasts show the minimum is likely to oscillate between 22 and 24°C till May 4. Delhi so far this month has recorded 7.5mm of rainfall. The normal monthly average for April is 16.3mm, meaning the month is likely to end in a deficit, similar to March.

Meanwhile, Delhi's air remained in the "moderate" category, recording a 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) reading of 175 (moderate) at 4pm on Sunday. It was 163 (moderate) on Saturday.

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Filing of nominations for 7 seats in Capital, Gurugram from today

Alok KN Mishra and Abhishek Behl

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NEW DELHI/GURUGRAM: The nomination process for all seven Lok Sabha seats of Delhi and the single Lok Sabha seat in neighbouring Gurugram will begin on Monday. The Election Commission of India (ECI) will issue notification for the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections and polling will take place on May 25.

Candidates can file their nominations with returning officers from 11am to 3pm, barring Sunday. The nominations will be scrutinised on May 7 and nominations can be withdrawn till May 9. Votes will be counted on June 4. As of February 1, 2024, the Capital has 14.7 million voters — nearly 8 million men, 6.7 million women and 1,176 third-gender people. In the past election, the city's voter turnout was 60.60%, below the national average of 67%.

The seven Lok Sabha constituencies in the Capital are New Delhi, South Delhi, East Delhi, West Delhi, Chandni Chowk, North West and North East Delhi. Of the seven, New Delhi, with 1.48 million electors, is the smallest constituency and West Delhi, with 2.49 million electors, is the largest.

The Gurugram seat has over 2,546,916, voters of whom 1,347,521 are male, 1,199,317 are female and 78 are transgenders.

Delhi's first two-sided polls since 2012

The Capital is set to witness a direct contest between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-Congress alliance and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This is the first time that the Capital will witness a direct contest between two political blocs since the AAP emerged as a political force in 2012, as all previous elections were triangular contests.

Delhi, Gurugram in sixth phase

Important dates

- Apr 29** Beginning of nomination
- May 6** Last date of nomination
- May 7** Scrutiny of nomination
- May 9** Last date of withdrawal
- May 25** Date of polling

Voters in Delhi
14,718,119

Voters in Gurugram
2,546,916

Rao Inderjit Singh Cong yet to announce
Gurgaon will also go to poll with Delhi on May 25

SEATS AND CANDIDATES

New Delhi: Bansuri Swaraj (BJP), Somnath Bharti (AAP)

South Delhi: Ramvir Singh Bidhuri (BJP), Sahi Ram Pahalwan (AAP)

East Delhi: Harsh Malhotra (BJP), Kuldeep Kumar (AAP)

West Delhi: Kamaljeet Sehrawat (BJP), Mahabal Mishra (AAP)

Chandni Chowk: Praveen Khandelwal (BJP), JP Aggarwal (Cong)

North East Delhi: Manoj Tiwari (BJP), Kanhaiya Kumar (Cong)

North West Delhi: Yogendra Chandolia (BJP), Udit Raj (Cong)

condition of infrastructure in unauthorised colonies is also a poll issue, among others.

Alleged irregularities in electoral bonds are a key plank of the AAP's campaign. The AAP will highlight developmental and welfare works, including free services and a promise of ₹1,000 per month of financial assistance to women. The BJP is seeking votes on developmental works undertaken by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre and will seek to highlight various infrastructure works in the Capital.

Gurugram seeks to improve voter turnout

Officials in Gurugram sought to highlight that senior citizens older than 85 years and persons with over 40% disability will be allowed to vote from home.

Deputy commissioner Nishant Yadav said on Sunday that there are 50,000 such voters in the city. "This facility for senior citizens and persons with disabilities is being provided for the first time as per directions of ECI. Block-level workers will visit the voters within five days of the notification of the election and get Form 12-D filled and submitted. It is the prerogative of the voters to opt for this facility; otherwise, they can visit the booths," said Yadav.

According to the district administration, 35,559 voters are older than 85 years in Gurugram constituency, while there are 15,231 voters who are defined as "persons with disability" by the government.

Meanwhile, sitting Gurugram MP and BJP candidate for the Lok Sabha seat, Rao Inderjit Singh, will file his nomination on Monday in the presence of Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini. Singh will address a rally at the Gurugram Club in Civil Lines before submitting his nomination.

As part of the AAP-Congress seat-sharing agreement, the AAP will contest four seats — New Delhi, South Delhi, West Delhi and East Delhi — and the Congress in North East Delhi, Chandni Chowk and North West Delhi.

An official at the Delhi electoral office said a notification will be issued in newspapers on Monday morning and filing of nomination will begin at 10am on Monday.

"Almost all basic preparations have been done for conducting the polls, including training polling officials, making necessary arrangements for ensuring peace by engaging required forces for conducting the polling, forming flying squads and constituting teams for statistics surveillance. Arrangements for voter facilitation are also being made," the official said.

BJP's candidate for the South Delhi Lok Sabha seat, Ramvir

Singh Bidhuri, said he will file his nomination on May 3. "Uttarakhand chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva, and other leaders will join me for the nomination," Bidhuri said.

BJP's North West Delhi candidate Yogendra Chandolia will file his nomination on Monday, New Delhi candidate Bansuri Swaraj on Tuesday and East Delhi candidate Harsh Malhotra on Wednesday, Sachdeva said.

The key issue in the Lok Sabha elections is the arrests of Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia for alleged corruption in the Delhi excise policy case. The AAP has centred its entire campaign on Kejriwal's arrest.

There have been confrontations between the AAP's state government and the BJP-led central government over a range of governance issues, such as water supply, sewer overflow and poor

'I'm a daughter of Mother India,' says Sunita Kejriwal

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NEW DELHI: Sunita Kejriwal, the wife of Delhi chief minister undertook her second roadshow ahead of the elections in the Tilak Nagar area of west Delhi and reiterated her appeal to "save democracy amid dictatorship".

Calling herself the daughter of "Bharat maa", Sunita Kejriwal urged voters to exercise their power to "save Bharat Mata and democracy". Sunita undertook a 52-minute roadshow in the Tilak Nagar belt through local markets with the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) West Delhi candidate Mahabal Mishra.

"A daughter of Bharat Maa (mother India) is pleading with you to save the country... save Bharat Mata... the country is heading towards *tanashahi* (dictatorship)... Realise the power of your vote. You must go out to vote on May 25," she said to the public.

She added the party has fielded Mishra from the area who has been a member of Parliament. "He has worked a lot and helps people. Vote from him and push the broom button... remove the dictatorship," she said.

She urged the crowd to chant the slogan "*tanashahi hataenge, loktantra bachaenge*" (we will remove dictatorship and save democracy) in her brief six-minute speech at Mall Road. The roadshow concluded around 7.15pm. Sunita Kejriwal campaigned in East Delhi on Saturday and will campaign in Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat in coming days, party officials said.



Sunita Kejriwal during the roadshow in West Delhi on Sunday.

SANCHIT KHANNA/HINDUSTAN TIMES

AAP workers moving with the entourage carried signboards saying "I love Kejriwal" along with cutouts of the chief minister in a blue shirt behind bars. The party lined up the market areas with blue-yellow balloons and rows of flaglets bearing the broom symbol. Speaking of her husband's incarceration, Sunita Kejriwal said that Kejriwal was "forcefully put in jail even though the agencies have no evidence".

"They say probe is going on. If the investigation goes on for ten years, would they keep him in jail for 10 years? This is their new system to keep people in jail till a case goes on," she added. She alleged that the chief minister was deprived of insulin and they had

to approach the court," she added as the crowd chanted "*Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se*."

Meanwhile, Delhi BJP vice-president Harish Khurana said that Sunita Kejriwal's roadshows have become sponsored shows with the same people participating in them. "The people of West Delhi did not participate in the roadshow. Whatever crowd was seen was managed from other areas. Most people in the crowd seemed to have been brought from Punjab," said Khurana.

Tihar cancels Sunita's meet with Kejriwal: AAP

AAP on Sunday alleged that Sunita Kejriwal's meeting with Arvind Kejriwal has been can-

celled by Tihar jail administration.

In an official statement on Sunday, AAP said that Sunita Kejriwal and Arvind Kejriwal were to meet on Monday.

"Tihar Jail administration has not yet given any reason for cancelling the visit. According to jail rules, two people can meet Kejriwal in jail at a time," AAP said.

"We did not disallow any meeting but there are rules. On April 29, Kejriwal will be meeting Atishi. On April 30, Bhagwant Mann will be coming. Both these meetings have been fixed. Only two meetings are allowed for a prisoner in a week. She (Sunita) can meet him next week," a senior Delhi Prisons official said.

COP ON SCOOTER DIES NEAR PRAGATI MAIDAN TUNNEL FOLLOWING CRASH

NEW DELHI: A sub-inspector of Delhi Police died after losing control of his scooter and ramming the divider near the Pragati Maidan tunnel on Saturday night.

The deceased was identified as NK Pavitharan, 52, who was posted with the east Delhi crime team. He was on his way to his home in IP Extension when the accident took place, police said.

"He lost balance of his scooter for unknown reasons and hit a divider close to the Pragati Maidan tunnel. There was no other vehicle near the spot. He was taken to a hospital where doctors declared him dead," an officer said.

Pavitharan is survived by a son, who works in Dubai. HT

Two boys — 13 and 11 — held for 8-year-old's rape, murder

PEEYUSH Khandelwal
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GHAZIABAD: The Ghaziabad Police on Sunday said it apprehended a 13-year-old boy who allegedly raped and murdered his eight-year-old cousin as she told his father she was molested by the suspect a month ago, in Masuri, Ghaziabad.

Police said they also apprehended the 11-year-old brother of the prime suspect for helping him dump and cover the victim's body in a nearby drain. The incident happened on April 20.

Deputy commissioner of police (rural) Vivek Chandra Yadav said during the investigation, it came to light the 13-year-old was beaten up by his father

when the victim complained to him about the molestation.

"To avenge this, the 13-year-old boy took her to an isolated storeroom nearby and raped her. The girl tried to shout but hit her with bricks in the head, during which she died. Then he called his younger brother and they took the body to the drain and covered it with bricks," DCP said.

Police said the girl went missing in the afternoon of April 20 and after an expansive search, her parents and locals found the body in a drain on April 21. "We lodged an FIR and initiated the investigation," said a police investigator.

"On April 21, the 11-year-old fabricated a story and got the body recovered from the drain.

He told his family that he met an unidentified 65-year-old man who told him that they should look for the body near the drain," DCP added.

The second officer said that the 13-year-old had left for his grandfather's house about 17km away by then, as was revealed by his brother.

"At the grandfather's house, the 13-year-old broke down and revealed the story. Both were taken into custody. The autopsy confirmed sexual assault," DCP added. Police said the 13-year-old boy was booked for murder and rape under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and provisions of the PoCSO Act while his brother was booked under section 201 of the IPC for destruction of evidence.

District cooling systems may help reduce high power consumption

Soumya Chatterjee
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NEW DELHI: Air conditioners in India were once deemed a luxury that only adorned the homes of the very rich. However, the country as a whole has recorded an alarming rise in moist-heat stress over the past two decades, making these cooling machines a necessity and a ubiquitous part of much of our urban landscape.

According to the Union government's India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) released in 2019, the country's space cooling demand is expected to rise by 11 times by 2038. The International Energy Agency predicts the space cooling sector from India alone will require more energy than Africa as a whole consumes at present, and will be responsible for 30% of all global emissions by 2050.

To meet this increased demand, experts from the sector are advocating wide scale adoption of district cooling systems (DCS). These centralised cooling systems provide chilled water to multiple buildings in an area through underground insulated pipes. Each building connected to the DCS has a heat exchanger unit that transfers the cooling energy from the circulated chilled water to the internal cooling system, and the process helps cut the indoor spaces.

After absorbing heat from the buildings, the now-warm water returns to the central plant through a separate network of pipes, known as the return flow. At the central plant, the water is re-chilled and recirculated back to the buildings. One such example of a DCS is at Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFF City) in Gandhinagar, which has been operational since 2015.

DCS may cut energy bills

Currently, 12.5% of India's households have a room air condi-



Currently, room air conditioners account for 38% of India's energy consumption.

HT ARCHIVE

tioner, but these machines account for 38% of India's energy consumption, according to the Union power ministry.

Advocates of DCS say the adoption of the system may cut India's power bill by 40%, and unlike conventional ACs — which release hot air into the immediate vicinity — a DCS does not impact the micro-climate. The risk of leakage of refrigerants of individual ACs is reduced in the centralised systems.

People aware of the matter said buildings in GIFF City part of DCS have succeeded in cutting their power demand by 30%.

Sandeep Kachhawa, a cooling and refrigeration expert at Alliance for an Energy-Efficient Economy (AEEE), said DCSs are still at a nascent stage in India. "DCSs work best when there is a minimum cooling load requirement of around 10,000 TR (tons of refrigeration), and in high-density mixed land use areas".

Even though the per TR cost of setting up a DCS is higher, the total installed capacity can be halved, he said.

"It makes huge sense to incorporate the necessary infrastructure for centralised cooling in the master planning stage itself for greenfield city development. It

requires a greater emphasis on planning and long-term vision," Kachhawa said. Soon, the proposed Hyderabad Pharma City and Chennai Fintech City will have similar DCSs. While a tender has already been awarded for the Hyderabad project, the Tamil Nadu Industrial Corporation is in the process of hiring a consultant to run DCS on a PPP model in the Chennai project.

There is one example of a residential complex in Hyderabad having their own DCS for 390 apartments and some common areas. There has been limited private adoption too, with the likes of DLF Cyber City, and the Delhi and Mumbai airports.

IIT Jammu assistant professor Satya Sekhar Bhogilla said DCSs can easily be integrated with renewable energy sources, such as solar. "Even though ICAP recognises DCSs as an opportunity, there is a lack of significant policy or incentives or mandates in place," he said.

Financing a major hurdle

Despite these known benefits, over the past decade, there has been no other government initiative to install such systems.

Niyati Gupta, senior program associate at WRI India-climate

programme, said financing is the major hurdle for the adoption of DCSs. She said in GIFF City too, the infrastructure is financed through a public-private partnership model.

Further, Gupta expanded on the idea that incentivising the private sector to "design-build-operate" would result in better management of DCSs. Apart from these challenges, she said professionals need upskilling for continuous monitoring of these systems and government intervention is required at the policy level to promote this technology.

HT spoke with officials in cities such as Rajkot, Coimbatore, Pune, and Thane, where UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme)-led initiative feasibility studies for DCS were conducted. However, the pilots took off in none of the cities.

Rajkot Smart City CEO Chetan Nandani said that there was a proposal for adopting a DCS in a greenfield development project under the Smart City programme, but the system has not been set up due to the high upfront costs involved.

An official at Thane Municipal Corporation said that as per the feasibility study, it was found that it was not possible to lay the underground piping infrastructure necessary for the DCS.

Sudheer Perla, Managing Director at Tabreed Asia (a joint venture between National Central Cooling Company PJSC or Tabreed UAE and World Bank's International Finance Corporation or IFC) said there still is a lag in recognising cooling as the single biggest driver for India's energy demand.

"When a master plan is being readied, cooling always comes as an afterthought and left at the discretion of end users to plan as opposed to how planning for water, electricity and sewage management is done," he said.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

GENERAL ELECTION TO HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE (LOK SABHA) – 2024, NCT OF DELHI

The general public and candidates are hereby informed that the Election Commission of India has designated the following Officers as Returning Officers for the seven Parliamentary Constituencies in the National Capital Territory of Delhi. The details of these Returning Officers along with the place for receiving the nomination papers are as under:

Number & Name of the Parliamentary Constituency	Name of Returning Officer	Designation	Office address (where nomination papers will be received/accepted and scrutiny to be conducted)	Land line & Fax No.	Mobile No.	E-mail
01 Chandni Chowk	Sh. Yash Chaudhary, IAS	District Election Officer/District Magistrate (North)	Office of District Magistrate (North) D.M Office Complex, G.T Road, Alipur, Delhi-110036	011-27203048	7837540106	dcnorth@nic.in
02 North East Delhi	Ms. Veditha Reddy, IAS	District Election Officer/District Magistrate (North East)	Office of District Magistrate (North East) D.M Office Complex (North East) K Block, Nand Nagri Delhi-110093	011-22122732	9999301391	dcne@nic.in
03 East Delhi	Sh. Amol Srivastava, IAS	District Election Officer/District Magistrate (East)	Office of District Magistrate (East) A-Block L.M. Bundh Shastri Nagar Delhi-110031	011-21210848 011-21210862	9319206018	dceast@nic.in
04 New Delhi	Ms. Isha Khosla, IAS	District Election Officer/District Magistrate (New Delhi)	Office of District Magistrate (New Delhi) 12/1 Jam Nagar House, Shahjahan Road, New Delhi-110011	011-23381080 011-23384621	9899193642	dcnd@nic.in
05 North West Delhi (SC)	Ms. Ankita Anand, IAS	District Election Officer/District Magistrate (North West)	Office of District Magistrate (North West) Kanjhawala, Delhi-110081	011-20896208	9718957535	dcnw@nic.in
06 West Delhi	Dr. Kinny Singh, IAS	District Election Officer/District Magistrate (West)	Office of District Magistrate (West) Room No. 303, 3rd Floor, Plot No. 3 Shivaji Place, Raja Garden, New Delhi-110027	011-25107118	9821028392	dcwest@nic.in
07 South Delhi	Sh. Mekala Chaitanya Prasad, IAS	District Election Officer/District Magistrate (South)	Office of District Magistrate (South) M.B Road, Saket, New Delhi-110068	011-29535025	7005636466	dcsouth@nic.in

Date and time for receiving nominations papers: 29.04.2024 to 06.05.2024 (except public holidays as per section 25 of the Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881), between 11.00 AM to 03.00 PM.

Sd/-
(Rajesh Kumar)
Spl. Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi

DIP/Shabdarth/Classified/0020/24-25

चुनाव का पर्व
DESH KA GARY
LOK SABHA ELECTION 2024

Last Mughal emperor's summer palace in dire need of restoration

Peeling plaster, ugly graffiti engraved on moss, empty alcohol bottles, garbage, and paan stains dominate the eyeline at palace

Anuradha Vellat
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NEW DELHI: Zafar Mahal, the summer palace of Mughal emperor-poet Bahadur Shah Zafar II, has seen better days. Once upon a time, red sandstone and marble work on the palace added to its glory; and festivities around the annual Phoolwalon ki Sair would begin from here.

But over 200 years later, the summer palace in Mehrauli stands in a decrepit state — plaster peeling off its walls, ugly graffiti engraved on moss, empty alcohol bottles, garbage, and paan stains dominate what is known as the city's last Mughal monument.

Last December, the marble jaali that encloses the graves was broken by vandals. And even now, all that pretends to protect Zafar Mahal from vandals is a few metres of concertina wire around it.

Though protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), little work has been done to restore it. Last April, a senior ASI official told HT that conservation work at Zafar Mahal was set to begin soon as the monument's condition is not up to mark.

During a spot visit this month, a year later, only concertina wire had been put up around the monument. "We hope to begin work this financial year. When it comes to conservation, priorities change, so it is difficult to give an exact time for when the work at Zafar Mahal will begin. Every circle of ASI is sanctioned funds each year. Zafar Mahal's condition was pointed out last year, as it has been this year. It is still on the agenda," said ASI's superintending archaeologist Praveen Singh.

Many legends

The three-storey structure was built in the 18th century by Mughal emperor Akbar Shah II and was restored by Zafar in the 19th century. The palace has accommodated many tales over the years. It was Zafar's desire to be buried next to the tomb of Sufi saint Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki, in Delhi — a city he loved greatly.



Although the structure is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India, little has been done to restore it to its former glory.

VIKIN KUMAR/HT PHOTOS



Garbage lies strewn around the crevices and walkways.



The structure is facing serious threat of vandalism, say experts.

Legend is that the grave there was left "empty" after Zafar was exiled to Burma (now Myanmar). Historians, however, flagged it as a false, romanticised tale. "In family enclosures like these, the area around the grave was paved with marble after a burial. To make space for another grave, the marble would be removed, and then repaved. No space would have been left empty. The story that his grave was left empty is manufactured," said historian Swarna Liddle, who wrote 14 Historic Walks of Delhi.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Zafar Mahal was of great cultural importance. "It was a space meant to be interconnected — Sufi saint Bakhtiar

Kaki's dargah, Moti Masjid built by another Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar I, and then Zafar Mahal," said Liddle.

One-man army

To get to Zafar Mahal, one traverses the tapered lanes of Mehrauli, anchored by houses plugged one after the other. The structure, located southwest of Qutub Complex, appears out of nowhere once you reach the chauraha, and is flanked by shops, a temple, and Kaki's dargah.

Both Qutub Minar and Zafar Mahal are ASI-protected monuments — the former is a ticketed monument, while the latter is not — yet their upkeep differs greatly. "Residents lament that

little effort has been made to restore the Mughal monument. "Officials come and go. In case a VIP visits, they spruce up the area around it. Sometimes, they put up a scaffolding and make it look like work has been undertaken. But I have not seen any change in the appearance of the monument... It continues to be neglected," said Om Prakash Saluja, 77, who runs a shop next to Zafar Mahal.

Aside from the urgent need for conservation, an equally acute problem that plagues its rapidly eroding insides is vandalism. Once the summer palace of the last Mughal emperor, it is now frequented by anti-social elements. This dissuades the locals from visiting this her-

itage site right next to them.

A security guard, who asked not to be identified, works here from 10am to 5pm, and fights a daily battle between protecting himself and protecting the monument.

"Many people visit daily but they are not here to look at the monument. They do not listen to me and climb the walls, throw bottles and smoke beedi. I can only ask them not to. They often come in groups. It is not always easy to be assertive," he said.

Apart from those who take refuge inside Zafar Mahal to smoke, drink, and vandalise, the palace is also a favourite with social media content creators. "These people come with their

bandobast (camera and equipment). I tell them they can do photography here, but they want to shoot an entire film. It is in writing that such things cannot be allowed without permission. But they think I am making up rules and speak to me rudely," said the guard.

Once he leaves at 5pm, the monument stands unguarded, and locked up.

But a smaller door can be maneuvered to create an opening that would fit one person at a time, allowing anyone to enter at any time.

Liddle stressed that the problem especially surfaces when such sites are surrounded by living communities. "Instead of looking at the population as a problem, the people in the neighbourhood can be made custodians of the historical site. This approach adds security. Right now, the structure is alienated from the neighbourhood it inhabits," said Liddle.

For Saluja, the shopkeeper next door, Zafar Mahal is home to his childhood memories. He arrived in Mehrauli in 1948 from Pakistan. "We spent a lot of time inside Zafar Mahal... I have grown old with it. When our homes would get stuffy, we would spend a breezy night on its verandahs. Now we find it unsafe. The wires are a recent addition, but this monument has been neglected for 25 years," said Saluja.



Wrecked remains of the Jaguar sedan.

HT PHOTO

Luxury car rams cab at Dhaula Kuan, 3 injured

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NEW DELHI: A luxury car that was being driven on the wrong carriageway in Dhaula Kuan rammed a cab head-on, grazed a second car, and then hit the divider before coming to a stop early on Sunday morning. Delhi Police officers said. The three occupants of the Swift Dzire cab were critically injured in the incident, they said, adding that the man driving the sedan has been arrested.

Police identified the arrested accused as Saurabh Pahwa, 23, a third-year student at JIMS, Rohini who was driving the Jaguar sedan. They said he was travelling with a woman at the time of the accident, but both fled the spot. Pahwa was arrested later on Sunday, but police said that while the woman has been identified, no action will be taken against her.

"We haven't taken legal action against her since she was not driving," a police officer involved in the probe said.

Police said Harjeet Singh, who was driving the cab, was one of the injured. They did not identify his passengers who were also hurt in the accident, but said that all three are undergoing treatment at the AIIMS trauma centre.

Giving details of the case, police — quoting eyewitnesses — said Pahwa was driving his Jaguar on the wrong carriageway at Dhaula Kuan at around 4.50am when he rammed head-on into the cab. He then grazed a second car — police did not release details of this vehicle — and hit the divider.

Dheeraj Gupta, an eyewitness to the incident, said the two people in the Jaguar fled the spot.

"I was sleeping on the side of the road when I heard a loud noise and woke up. I saw that two cars, which came from opposite directions, collided with each other. One of the cars then hit the divider. There were a man and a woman inside the car... The three people inside the cab were severely injured. We immediately called the police," Gupta said.

Deputy commissioner of police (southwest) Rohit Meena said the Delhi Cantt police station received a call about the incident at around 4.55am.

"The call was about an accident of three vehicles and we were told that three people were left injured. An investigating officer was rushed to the spot and he found that some people had helped the injured people and sent them to different hospitals," Meena said.

NGT: Share details of rainwater harvesting

NEW DELHI: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed all agencies concerned to share details of rainwater harvesting (RWH) systems in the city, along with details of officials appointed to maintain them. The tribunal said despite the previous orders issued in 2019 that said that no RWH should be set up near stormwater drains to avoid contamination, the direction is not being followed. The order also sought the number of such structures

built near stormwater drains. In its order dated April 24, a bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava said fresh reports filed by the Central Ground Water Authority, Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Delhi Pollution Control Committee and Delhi Development Authority "did not reflect disclosure of any material and relevant information" in regards to RWH across the city, seeking another report within three weeks. HTC

Police crack down on cellphone use while driving, 15K people fined this yr

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NEW DELHI: One-hundred and fifty people have been penalised every day this year so far for using phones while driving, the Delhi Traffic Police said on Sunday, adding that a total of 15,846 people were prosecuted till April 15.

According to the data shared by the traffic police, the number this year has increased as at least 60 people were penalised last year during the corresponding time from January 1 to April 15.

"As part of our proactive approach to enhancing road safety, we have initiated a targeted crackdown against individuals using phones while driving. The offenders are issued challans according to traffic regulations to deter such behaviour and promote responsible driving habits," said a senior police officer aware of the matter.

Last year, the number of people penalised for using phones was 6,369 till April 15. Officials said this implies there has been a surge of 149% in prosecution this year within the first three-and-a-half months.

According to traffic police statistics, the Punjabi Bagh traffic circle topped the list of 10 circles that reported the most number of challans against people caught using phones while driving this year. The circle reported 845 such challans and was followed by the Tilak Nagar and the Kalkaji traffic circles which reported 810 and 797 challans, respectively, against violators. The Najafgarh traffic circle

15,846
offenders prosecuted for using cellphone while driving this year, till April 15, police said.

149%
spike in number of such incidents recorded in the corresponding period last year, as only 6,369 offences were logged.

stood at the bottom of the list with 507 such challans. The other traffic circles between Kalkaji and Najafgarh were Nanngloi (772), Karol Bagh (675), Defence Colony (670), Sangam Vihar (662), Dwarka (556), and Safdarjung Enclave (522).

The officer quoted above said that in recent months, the Delhi Traffic Police observed a disturbing surge in the use of phones while driving.

Special commissioner of police (traffic zone-II) HGS Dhalwal said that apart from cracking down on violators, traffic police conducted a detailed analysis.

"By highlighting the regions with the highest frequency of such traffic violations, the study enables focused enforcement actions to increase road safety. Traffic police are actively engaging in public awareness campaigns to educate motorists about the dangers of using phones while driving," he said.



Performance Highlights Q4 & FY24 All-time high consolidated annual profit

Consolidated Results		(₹ In Crore)			
Particulars	Q4 FY24	Q4 FY23	FY24	FY23	
Total income	1,222	106	1,713	527	
Share of profits of associates	1,554	1,307	5,955	4,667	
Profit before tax	2,731	1,368	7,493	5,012	
Profit after tax	2,716	1,353	7,267	4,851	

Standalone Results		(₹ In Crore)			
Particulars	Q4 FY24	Q4 FY23	FY24	FY23	
Total income	1,258	96	3,176	1,937	
Profit before tax	1,219	59	3,021	1,779	
Profit after tax	1,204	45	2,896	1,712	
Investments (at cost)	12,559	10,542	12,559	10,542	
Investments (at market value)	2,10,707	1,32,034	2,10,707	1,32,034	

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This is an abridged representation of the audited financial results of Q4 and FY24 and is not for the purpose of legal compliance. As required by regulations, the results have been prepared as per Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS).



{ FROM PAGE 1 }

HEATWAVE

M Mohapatra, director general, IMD.

On Friday and Saturday, many areas had recorded maximum temperatures that had breached the 98th percentile (2% chance that temperatures will fall above this threshold for that time period). These were concentrated in Odisha and West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

Today, heatwave to severe heatwave conditions prevailed in many parts over Gangetic West Bengal, in some parts over Bihar and Odisha and in isolated pockets over Rayalaseema, and heatwave conditions in isolated pockets over sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Konkan & Goa and Telangana. Heat wave conditions have been prevailing over Odisha since 15th and over Gangetic West Bengal since 17th April," said an IMD update.

Nandyal, in Rayalaseema, was the hottest location in the country on Sunday with a peak temperature of 45.6°C, 4.6 degrees above what is normal for this time of the year, according to IMD.

Of the 186 parliamentary constituencies where the maximum will average at least 35°C in the days up to May 2, 136 will average a maximum of 40°C or higher. In fact, 15 constituencies are likely to average a maximum of 44-45°C from April 28 to May 2, HT's analysis of the Global Forecast System (GFS) of the US National Weather Service data suggested.

Temperatures do not necessarily need to surpass 40°C to be dangerous. The combination of humidity with heat is worse for human health since people cool down by sweating. One way this is measured is via wet-bulb temperature, which reflects the conditions someone will feel outdoors — once this measure passes 32°C, people are at extreme risk of adverse health effects. Another measure is the heat index, which too accounts for humidity in how the temperature affects a person, but this

reflects conditions in shade. According to IMD, many parts of the east coast and the peninsular south will record heat index of 40-50 degrees C, with some places even going up to 60°C, as per heat index forecasts provided by IMD.

Heat index combines air temperature and relative humidity for the public to accordingly take related precautions. The weather agency therefore issued red alerts for Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar and Jharkhand, warning that there is very high likelihood of developing heat-related illnesses in all ages. Extreme care will be needed for vulnerable people, it added.

In Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema and interior Karnataka, the agency issued an orange alert, which suggests those with vulnerabilities due to their age or other illnesses should avoid heat exposure.

These locations have been recording oppressive heat, with the spell being unusually warmer than usual. IMD data showed the variation from normal at in at least nine locations in Gangetic West Bengal to be between 6 to 8.6 degrees higher. Among these were Diamond Harbour, Panagarh and Midnapore, which recorded close to or over 43°C maximum temperatures.

In the first two phases, there has been a notable reduction in the aggregate turnout, with some regions recording big drops. Election commission officials on Sunday told HT that the second phase recorded an aggregate of 66.70%, which is a drop from 69.6% recorded overall in 2019 elections, although exactly the same as 66.7% recorded in 2014.

Experts said that the spell of heatwave will coincide with electioneering and voting will need careful consideration by authorities and political parties. "It is very necessary that organisers of election campaigns and voters, particularly the elderly and those suffering

from chronic diseases, take all precautions to keep themselves safe when they expose themselves to high heat during campaigns and while they go out to cast their votes. Religiously implementing the heatwave Do's and Don'ts advisories issued by the authorities on ground can make the biggest democratic exercise of world "heatwave safe," said Abhyanant Tiwari, lead at Climate Resilience and Health, NRDC India.

In the first phase, the turnout was a little over 66%, compared to 69.3% for the same seats (excluding the six seats in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, where boundaries have been redrawn in a delimitation exercise) in 2019, with analysts attributing the dip to reasons that range from the weather to voter apathy.

On Saturday, maximum temperatures ranged from 42 to 45 degrees Celsius in some parts of Odisha, Gangetic West Bengal, Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema and Telangana. Temperatures reached 40 to 42 degrees in many parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Interior Maharashtra, North Tamil Nadu, Marathwada and eastern Uttar Pradesh — 4 to 9 degrees above normal in many parts of Gangetic West Bengal and northern Odisha.

In northern regions, some rain and storms will continue. Rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds is likely to continue over the Western Himalayan Region and adjoining plains of North-west India on April 29, the IMD prediction said. Heavy rainfall with isolated thunderstorms and lightning is forecast over northeast India through April 30, becoming heavy to very heavy from May 1.

U'KHAND FOREST FIRES

Kumaon chief conservator of forest Prasanna Kumar Patro said.

The fire in the forests of Ladiyakata and Pines area on Nainital-Bhowali road have been extin-

guished with the help of the IAF helicopter that was deployed on Saturday, he said.

After the forest fire in Nainital reached dangerously close to the High Court Colony and the Air Force base containing sensitive equipment on Friday, an IAF helicopter was called in to help quell the flames. Following a review of the situation late on Saturday night, chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said that the fire in Nainital is gradually being brought under control.

"We have taken forest fire as a challenge. I have instructed concerned officials to take all possible steps to control the incidents of forest fires. I have instructed DM and other officials to work in coordination, active fire stations and take assistance from the local community," he said.

Patro said efforts are on to extinguish the flames at other places and they will be brought under control soon. He attributed the recent spike in forest fire incidents in Kumaon to increased dryness due to heat wave in the lower areas of Champawat and Nainital districts of Uttarakhand bordering Nepal. The official forest fire season starts on February 15 and ends on June 15. Experts have attributed this year's alarming spike to an exceptionally dry winter, followed by below normal spring rain.

"One of the main reasons for this is the major deficiency in winter rain or snow this year. Himalayas have faced a dry spell September onwards and that has not been compensated," Shekhar Pathak, historian and academic specialising in Uttarakhand's people's movements, told HT on Saturday.

Data HT analysed from Nasa's Fire Information for Resource Management System (FIRMS) showed that the number of fires detected between April 1 and 27 is 127% higher than the average number of blazes seen between 2012 and 2021. Meanwhile, efforts were stepped up to extinguish ongoing forest fires and prevent fresh incidents in the worst-affected areas of Nainital, Haldwani and Ramnagar forest divisions, forest officials said.

The flames have already been doused in many areas, including Marora and Khanana civil areas in Maniknath range of the Narendranagar forest division, they said. Apart from the IAF helicopter and Army personnel, Prantiya Rakshak Dal volunteers and homeguard personnel have also been roped in to help in the fire-fighting operations, Kumaon commissioner Deepak Rawat said.

Additional government vehicles, two each for the three forest divisions, have been provided to rush firefighting teams to the affected areas, Rawat said. Help from locals with the involvement of forest panchayat officials is also

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Summer's rare treat

On the season's roller wali ice-cream

{ PUBLIC INTEREST }

Sniff it, this strange vision in pink. The cool intense fragrances rushing out of it hint to apple and mango and possibly kiwi. This is actually fresh ice, infused with milk and with the flavours of many fruits. This mouth-watering treat is wrapped around a long cylindrical roller; much of this ice formed only minutes ago due to the continual rotation of the roller.

Roller wali ice-cream is rare; popping up randomly in the city, and only in the peak summer weeks. It was once sighted in Okhla, once on Mathura Road, and last year, a rare roller wali ice-cream cart was parked in Gurugram's Sadar Bazar, near the picturesque Muneem Street.

A roller wali ice-cream cart ideally needs two people for smooth operations, and this cart, here in Old Delhi, is being manned by Shahrukh and his younger brother Aamir. The proof of their ice-cream's fruity freshness is piled up in a plastic tray. A bunch of whole melons, apples, bananas and a few of the season's first mangoes are mutely waiting for their turn to be peeled, chopped and pulped for the ice-cream. Indeed, the smaller tray is heaped up with the peels of these fruit.

On getting an order, Shahrukh's nimble hands turn to the machine. Aamir is anyway spinning the machine's handle non-stop to keep its roller

running, so that the milk-soaked ice coated around the roller stays icy.

Unlike the industrial butterscotch crunch, nutty-buddy and chocolate chip of most ice-cream carts, this machine produces its ice-cream right in front of the customer's ravenous gaze. Shahrukh picks up a small bowl filled with fruit pulp, and tilts it over the rotating roller. A thin stream of the colourful pulp sluggishly falls on the roller, at once freezing on the roller's milky ice.

As Aamir continues to rotate the handle, Shahrukh next picks up the other bowl filled with chopped fruit. He brings it right under the rotating roller, where he keeps it still. Some of the fruit pieces in the bowl get stuck to the roller's pulpy sticky ice. Moments later, Shahrukh picks a knife, scraping out a thick layer of ice from the roller. The ice-cream is served. Its biting freshness jolts the senses.

The brothers are from Etawah, living temporarily in east Delhi's Rani Garden. They come to the Capital every summer and hawk the roller wali ice-cream along the city's lanes. Tonight they are in Jama Masjid's Motor Market, their back turned towards the illuminated mosque. With the monsoon's first rain, the brothers will return to their village to take care of their agricultural land, again becoming farmers.

Now two customers arrive on a scooter—see photo.



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HT Homage

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(29.04.2021)

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Wrong-side driving steers road fatalities

Between 1,500 and 2,000 are killed due to wrong-side driving every year in Delhi. Between 2017 and 2021, nearly 43,000 people were killed due to wrong-side driving across the country, with authorities struggling to rein in the practice

{ PART 3 }

Hemani Bhandari and Snehil Sinha

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: On July 11 last year, a private bus cruised confidently down the wrong side of the Meerut Expressway. It barreled down the expressway's wide corridors, in the face of onrushing traffic, for seven kilometres without reproach. The driver's flagrant journey came to an abrupt halt near Ghaziabad, when it rammed into an SUV that was headed towards Rajasthan, killing six of its occupants and critically wounding the other two.

Around the same time, on the opposite margin of the National Capital Region (NCR), a woman was killed and five others were injured when a car driving on the wrong side of the Dwarka Expressway rammed into their vehicle.



ROAD SAFETY

In another incident in October last year, a person riding a motorcycle died after being hit by a scooter coming from the wrong side in Mayur Vihar. The victim was thrown towards the median and was hit again by a bus, in the late night incident. Both vehicles that hit the rider fled the scene.

Between 2017 and 2021, nearly 43,000 people were killed due to wrong-side driving – a scourge that accounts for the second-most fatalities of all accidents on Indian roads, and one that authorities have struggled to snuff out.

The problem is just as acute in Delhi. According to the city's traffic police force, between 1,500 and 2,000 are killed due to wrong-side driving every year. This, despite the number of penalties for the violation increasing every year. In 2022, the Delhi traffic police issued 43,705 fines to wrong-side drivers. This jumped to 59,573 in

2023 and the force has already issued 24,887 fines this year.

At the heart of the problem, said experts and police officers, is a blatant disregard of the law, of public safety norms and the near-absence of the fear of prosecution.

The Delhi traffic police said most such cases have been reported from Gokulpuri, Shahdara, Khajuri, Dwarka, Vasant Kunj, Kalyanpuri, Kamla Market, Paharganj, Preet Vihar and Badarpur, adding that apart from these areas, e-rickshaws near most Metro stations also drive down the wrong side.

And when not fatal, traffic is a major civic nuisance.

Take Kashmere Gate, for instance – one of the busiest stretches in the city, with an interconnected metro station and a bus terminus that is victim to constant traffic congestion, largely due to e-rickshaws and auto-rickshaws snaking down the wrong side.

Several commuters are desperate to take shortcuts and it doesn't matter if the roads are broad, or narrow, or arterial stretches, said a traffic police officer who asked not to be named.

"A traffic police officer cannot be present at all places and people obviously take advantage of it. Officials on duty try their best to prosecute, but violators often flee," said the officer, adding that such violators not only endanger their own lives but lives of pedestrians and others driving on the right side of the road.

Stretching far and wide Uma Devi (43), a resident of Subhash Nagar in west Delhi fractured her right leg in May last year when she was hit by a scooter that rammed into her while driving down the wrong end of the street.

"Walking on these roads is scary... you are obviously not expecting people to travel down the wrong side and hit you. The only solution is stricter enforcement and heavy fines," she said.

Section 184 of the Motor Vehicles Act pertains to dangerous driving, including wrong-side driving and provides for a ₹5,000 fine for the first offence and ₹10,000 for a repeat offence. Police can also impound the vehicle if they deem fit.

Indeed, Delhi traffic police data shows that "dangerous driving" (a provision that includes driving against the direction of traffic)



People drive on the wrong side of the road amid heavy traffic on NH 24, near the Ghazipur tollbooth on Sunday.

RAJK RAJ/HT PHOTOS



A commuter is seen driving on the wrong side of the road to take a short cut to reach their destination, near NH 24 on Sunday.

flow was the second-most common traffic rule violated, after helmet-less riding.

Delhi's special commissioner of police (traffic) HGS Dhaliwal said wrong-way driving is one of the most common triggers for traffic jams and accidents, despite several interventions.

"To tackle this menace, the Delhi traffic police have taken several measures like increasing their presence on the roads to penalise wrong-side drivers, including imposing penalties on violators. We have also launched several campaigns about the dangers of wrong-side driving and the

penalty it can attract," he said.

The officer said that they have also installed barricades at important points as well as prominent signages indicating "No Entry" or "One Way" to deter drivers from entering roads from the wrong side.

He also said the traffic police has partnered with other stakeholders to identify areas prone to wrong-side driving and implemented targeted measures to combat this issue.

The possible solutions

Addressing the menace requires a multifaceted approach that combines robust enforcement measures with long-term infrastructure improvements and public awareness campaigns, said experts.

"Wrong-side driving is a cultural issue. When someone sees a shortcut that saves time, they take it, even if it's against the law, without thinking of the consequences. This is a traffic problem that cannot just be resolved by design changes. It needs strict and consistent enforcement at various

levels," said S Velmurugan, chief scientist and head of traffic engineering and safety division of Central Road Research Institute (CRRI).

In addition to punitive measures, he suggested investing in technology-driven solutions to enhance traffic management and enforcement capabilities. Automated surveillance systems, including CCTV cameras and traffic monitoring sensors, should be deployed to identify and deter wrong side driving, he added.

"It need not be a major expenditure. There are already surveillance cameras at multiple locations in Delhi. At about 150 places, there are also cameras that are used for traffic penalties. There are off-the-shelf IT solutions available that the enforcement agencies can use to increase penalties. Additionally, the Lok Adalats that usually waive off many of the traffic challans, should not give any relief in case of offences such as wrong side driving," said Velmurugan.

Experts add that efforts should also be made to improve road

EXPERTS SAY THAT DESIGN CHANGES WILL NOT HELP CURB THE PRACTICE AS IT'S CULTURAL. THEY SAID STRICT ENFORCEMENT IS THE ONLY WAY TO END THE MENACE

infrastructure and signage, by installing barricades, bollards or lane dividers to physically deter motorists from driving against the designated traffic flow.

"Violation of any traffic rule constitutes human error or driver's fault. However, from the perspective of road safety strategy, violations such as over speeding and driving on the wrong side do not constitute human error alone but it may be due to lack of education and enforcement. Moreover, the possible fault in road design may also be the reason of traffic rule violation, which opens the scope for road engineering measures to address problems which are prima facie, considered to be human error," said MoRTH's road accident report.

According to Velmurugan, some of the limited design interventions that can be made in Delhi to reduce driving on the wrong side, includes junction improvement at the major junctions by reducing their size and making them compact.

Other experts suggest adopting a "Safe Systems Approach" while designing roads and streets. This principle recognizes that humans will make mistakes, but crashes should not result in death or serious injuries.

"The Safe Systems Approach hinges on the principle of shared responsibility. Safety is not the responsibility of those using the infrastructure alone but also of those involved in the design and engineering, policymakers, and law enforcement officials. By adopting this approach, countries like Sweden have reduced road crashes by 55% in two decades. It is also estimated that one million deaths could be avoided annually if countries adopt this approach," said Pawan Mulukutla, Executive Program Director - Integrated Transport, Clean Air and Hydrogen at WRI India.

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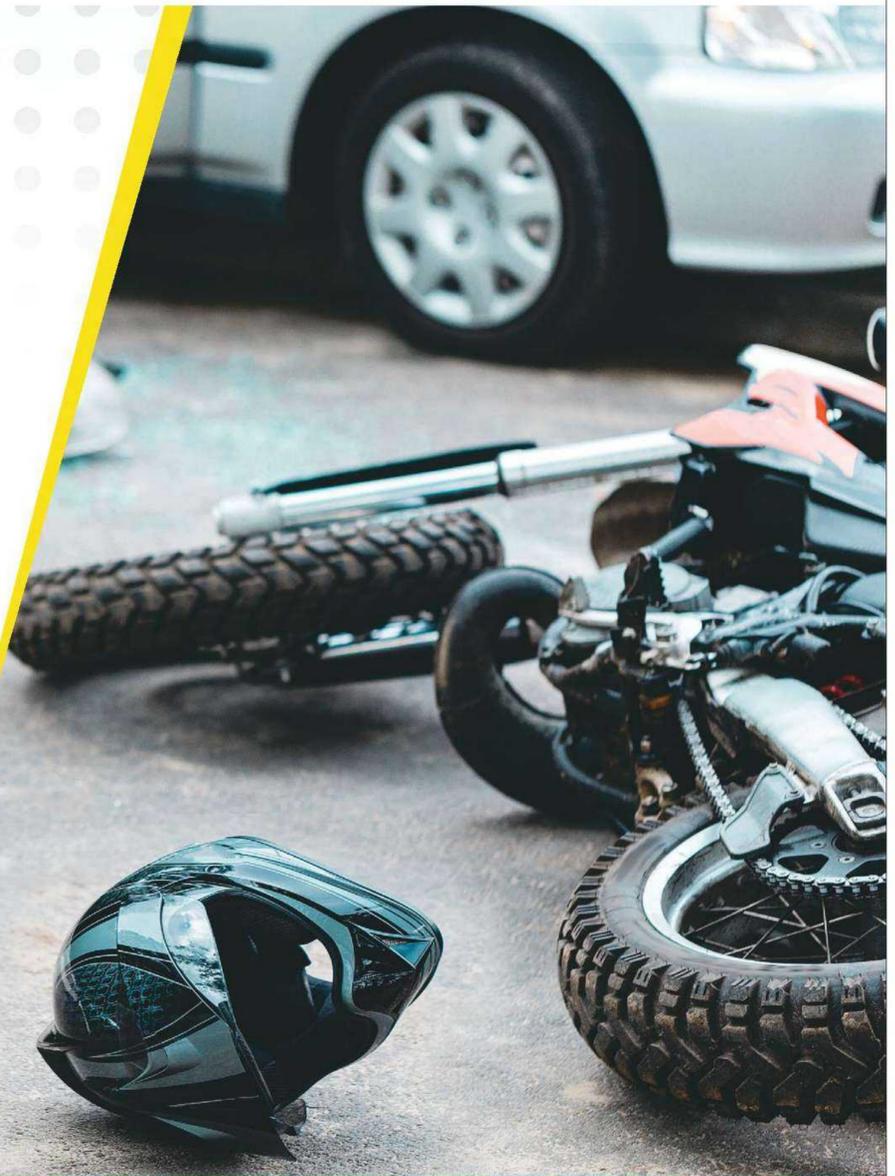
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14 Pak nationals held with drugs worth ₹600 cr off Gujarat coast

HT Correspondent
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AHMEDABAD: Indian security forces on Sunday arrested 14 Pakistani nationals off the Gujarat coast and seized 86 kg of contraband drugs worth around ₹600 crore in their possession, officials said.

To evade arrest, the Pakistani nationals tried to ram their boat over the Indian Coast Guard vessel carrying officials of the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) and Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), who opened fire on the Pakistani crew, they said, requesting anonymity. The agencies received intelligence that Pakistan-based drug trafficker Haji Aslam, alias Babu Baloch, was trying to smuggle mephedrone from Karachi port using a fishing trawler called Al-Raza between April 25 and 26, an ATS official said.

The trawler was to arrive closer to India's international maritime boundary line off the coast at Porbandar in Gujarat.

The drugs were planned to be transported to Tamil Nadu via an Indian boat, with final delivery to a cartel in Sri Lanka. The Pakistani boat, identified by the call sign 'Ali' via onboard radio, coordinated with an Indian boat assigned the password 'Haider'



The Indian Coast Guard seized narcotics from a Pakistani boat during an anti-narcotics operation, in Gujarat. INDIAN COAST GUARD-X

for the drug delivery, officials said. In the early morning on April 26, a team of Gujarat ATS, Indian Coast Guard and NCB reached around 180 nautical miles from Porbandar towards the maritime boundary, where they sighted a suspicious boat.

"The crew started disposing some of the drug packets in the sea on seeing the Indian security forces," the official said. "They attempted to ram the Indian security officials' vessel with their fishing boat."

"In response, the operations team fired, injuring one Pakistani crew member. The Indian officials soon boarded the Pakistani vessel and arrested the 14 members along with 78 packets of drugs, which contained about 86kg of contraband worth around ₹600 crore," he added.

The operation was an example of interagency coordination between the Indian Coast Guard, ATS and Narcotics Control Bureau, which collaborated to make the operation a success, the coast guard said in a statement. "The ships and aircraft of Indian Coast Guard were deployed on concurrent mis-

sions to effect the operation. ICG ship Rajratan, which had NCB and ATS officials embarked, positively identified the suspect boat. No amount of evasive manoeuvring tactics employed by the drug laden boat could save it from the swift and strong ICG ship Rajratan. Ship's specialist team embarked the suspect boat and after thorough checks, confirmed the presence of narcotics," it said.

The coordinated effort by the agencies has now led to 11 such successful enforcement operations in the past three years, it said. On April 26, the Gujarat ATS and NCB conducted a joint operation, arresting 13 individuals across Gujarat and Rajasthan for allegedly possessing mephedrone valued at ₹230 crore.

Following a tip-off received by the ATS, raids were conducted on April 26 as they suspected that Ahmedabad resident Manohar Enani and Kuldeep Singh Rajpurohit from Rajasthan had established mephedrone manufacturing units, officials said.

In March, the coast guard in a joint operation with Gujarat ATS and the anti-drugs agency apprehended a Pakistani boat with six

crew carrying narcotics worth ₹480 crore. The boat was seized about 350 km from Porbandar in the Arabian Sea in a sea-air coordinated operation involving ships and Dornier Aircraft.

The latest seizure was the 11th operation by the three agencies in three years, which led to the capture of around 600 kg of narcotics worth at least ₹3,700 crore, officials said.

Over the past two years, the narcotics bureau has collaborated with Indian Navy in three significant operations in the Indian Ocean. In February 2022, they confiscated 221 kg of methamphetamine from a ship off the Gujarat coast. Another notable seizure occurred in October 2022, when 200 kg of high-grade heroin was intercepted from a ship near the Kerala coast.

In May of previous year, the bureau intercepted a ship from Pakistan in Indian Ocean, seizing at least 2,500 kg of methamphetamine worth ₹2000 crore.

"Whenever (HD) Revanna's wife wasn't there, he used to call the women to the storeroom and touch them while giving them fruits. He used to remove saree pins and sexually assault women," she added.

Based on the complaint, police have registered a case under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including 354A (sexual harassment), 354D (stalking), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 509 (outraging modesty of a woman). The FIR has been transferred to the SIT, according to officials.

"The government has decided to set up a special investigation team to look into the case involving an obscene video of Prajwal Revanna," chief minister Siddaramaiah announced on Saturday. "There are reports of obscene video clips circulating in Hassan

district, suggesting possible instances of sexual assault against women."

The decision to initiate the probe was made based on a request from the women's commission, as stated by the Congress government. "The chairperson of the women's Commission had written to the government, requesting an SIT probe, and this decision has been made in response to their request," Siddaramaiah said.

The investigation will be headed by additional director general of police of criminal investigation department BK Singh. The Janata Dal (Secular) on Sunday welcomed the probe. "If there is any wrongdoing, there should be action. We welcome the investigation by the government. We are open to any kind of investigation," JD(S) core committee chairman GT Devegowda said at a press briefing on Sunday.

However, he ignored questions on why Prajwal had sought a court injunction last year against the airing of videos about him. Regarding demands for action against the MP by the party, Gowda said, "We will discuss the issue in the party forum and decide on the action."

"There is no question of forgiving any mistake," said former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy of the JD(S). "Uppu thindavanu neeru kudiya beku (whoever has consumed salt, will have to drink water)," Kumaraswamy is uncle to Prajwal Revanna.

Prajwal Revanna has left the country since the formation of the SIT, Karnataka home minister G Parameshwara said. "I was told that he has left the country.

{ BASED ON HOUSE HELP'S COMPLAINT } S.I.T. FORMED

Case against JD(S) MP, father for sexual abuse

Arun Dev
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BENGALURU: A first information report alleging sexual harassment was lodged on Sunday against Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna and his father HD Revanna, an MLA representing Holenarasipur in Karnataka, based on a complaint by a woman who had worked at Revanna's house. She alleged she was sexually abused multiple times between 2019 and 2022.

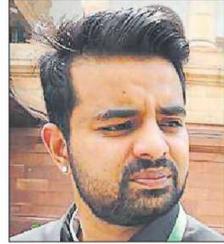
The complaint came as the Karnataka government ordered the formation of a special investigation team (SIT) to probe a series of obscene videos circulating in Hassan district of Karnataka involving Prajwal Revanna of the Janata Dal (Secular) party, some of which appeared to depict sexual assault. Prajwal Revanna is the grandson of former prime minister H D Deve Gowda.

"In the fourth month of my employment, Revanna began summoning me to his quarters," the woman said in her complaint. "In a household with six female staff members, apprehension gripped us whenever Prajwal Revanna returned home. Even male colleagues cautioned us..." The woman said that HD Revanna and Prajwal Revanna used to sexually assault women workers in their homes.

"Whenever (HD) Revanna's wife wasn't there, he used to call the women to the storeroom and touch them while giving them fruits. He used to remove saree pins and sexually assault women," she added.

Based on the complaint, police have registered a case under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including 354A (sexual harassment), 354D (stalking), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 509 (outraging modesty of a woman). The FIR has been transferred to the SIT, according to officials.

"The government has decided to set up a special investigation team to look into the case involving an obscene video of Prajwal Revanna," chief minister Siddaramaiah announced on Saturday. "There are reports of obscene video clips circulating in Hassan



Prajwal Revanna

It is left to the SIT hereafter," he said. "Once a government order is announced, it is left to the SIT to procure him back to India and investigate."

On Wednesday, Poornachandra Tejaswi MG, election agent of the Janata Dal (S) and Bharatiya Janata Party, had lodged an FIR alleging the videos were fake. In the complaint, he accused individuals including Naveen Gowda of circulating manipulated videos and images intended to defame Prajwal Revanna.

"Naveen Gowda and others altered videos and images and circulated them to voters in the Hassan Lok Sabha segment using pen drives, CDs and WhatsApp, aiming to tarnish Prajwal Revanna's reputation and disuade people from voting for him," the FIR alleged. It is unclear who Naveen Gowda is as the FIR only mentions the name and not who they are. Repeated attempts to contact Poornachandra Tejaswi for his remarks over the matter remained unanswered as his phone was switched off.

Meanwhile, BJP leaders said the party's leader from Karnataka's Hassan district had warned the state leadership about allegations that Prajwal Revanna was sexually abusing women months before his name was announced as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate for the Hassan parliamentary constituency.

"If we align with the JD(S) and if we nominate a JD(S) candidate in Hassan for the Lok Sabha elections, these videos can be used as a brahmastra (weapon) and we will be tainted as a party that aligned with the family of a rapist. This will be a big blow to the image of our party nationally," party leader Devaraje Gowda said in a letter asking state party chief B Y Vijayendra to bring this information to the attention of national leaders and convince them not to align with HD Revanna's family in Hassan district.

Through his election agent, Prajwal has lodged a complaint with the authorities that the videos are "doctored" and being circulated to tarnish his image ahead of the elections.

{ IN J&K DISTRICT }

Village guard shot dead by terrorists

Ravi Krishnan Khajuria
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JAMMU: A 48-year-old village defence guard (VDG) was killed in an encounter with terrorists in Udhampur district of Jammu & Kashmir on Sunday, police officials said.

The incident took place around 7.45 am in the upper reaches of Chochru Gala heights in Basantgarh area, when police launched a search operation following inputs about the possible presence of terrorists in the area. The deceased was identified as Mohammad Sharief.

"After receipt of inputs regarding movement of suspicious individuals late Saturday evening, J&K Police activated the security grid in Basantgarh police station limits. Today (Sunday) morning, a party of police picket Sang, carrying along with them VDG members, proceeded towards Chochru Gala heights where a face-off ensued with a group of hiding terrorists," a senior police officer said, seeking anonymity.

"One village defence guard member was injured in the initial exchange of fire. The injured VDG member Mohammad Sharief later succumbed to injuries. The operation to trackdown the terrorists is on," the officer added. The VDGs comprise local village volunteers. They were first active in the 1990s in several districts and played a significant role



Security personnel pay tribute to the deceased VDG member, in Udhampur district. PTI

in self defence, assisting forces in counter-terrorism operations and maintaining vigil in respective border villages. They remained inactive for several years thereafter. However, in January last year, they were reissued weapons by the administration and provided arms training by the CRPF after a twin terror attack in Dhangri in Rajouri district killed seven people. The officer quoted above said that the Special Operations Group of police along with the army and the CRPF were rushed to the area to strengthen the cordon and neutralise the terrorists. "The operation is going on," the officer said.

The incident came a week after a government employee, also a brother of a Territorial Army jawan, was shot dead in a targeted attack by terrorists in Rajouri on April 22, four days before the second phase of Lok Sabha elections in Jammu constituency.

Chhattisgarh may frame new surrender policy for Maoists

Prawesh Lama
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NEW DELHI: The Chhattisgarh government is likely to come up with a new surrender policy for Maoist insurgents who wish to give up arms, a senior government official said, asking not to be named.

"This could be the final amnesty scheme for those who are still in hiding and wish to surrender. The details of the scheme are still being worked out. It could be announced by the state government after the elections," the official added.

At least 800 insurgents had surrendered in the state in the last two years. At least 116 have surrendered this year. Officials expect the number to increase against the backdrop of the high number of anti-Maoist operations launched by security forces against LWE (left wing extremist) groups.

Addressing an election rally in Chhattisgarh on Monday, Union home minister Amit Shah asked LWE groups to surrender or be prepared because the Centre will eradicate Maoists within the next two years.

A second official who asked not to be named said that as part of scaling up the offensive against Maoist, highly trained COBRA teams, which were set to be deployed in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) have returned to Chhattisgarh.

Commando Battalions for Resolute Action (COBRA), of the



Nearly 800 insurgents have surrendered in the state in the last two years. At least 116 have surrendered this year.

Central Reserve Police Force was created in 2009 to take on Maoist. COBRA commandos are trained in jungle warfare and have been involved in many anti-Maoist operations over the years. Unlike other CRPF personnel, COBRA commandos are not deployed in law-and-order duties but are deployed only for specific missions in jungle terrain. "For logistical reasons they could not be posted in the valley. They completed training in Kupwara and were set to be used in Kashmir. That plan has been shelved for now. Additional COBRA teams will be brought to Chhattisgarh because the operations hereafter will involve working in the core areas of the state that have just been freed or are yet to be freed from Maoist hold," the second official said.

The official added that CRPF battalions posted in Bihar have also been brought to Chhattis-

gar because the state is free of Maoists. "In the last one month, the director generals of CRPF and BSF have already visited Chhattisgarh to analyse the situation and the resources need on the ground. There will be changes once the election process is over."

The offensive is part of the Centre's aim to end Maoism in two years—a target set by Union minister Amit Shah. There has been an upsurge in Maoist deaths during gunfights with security forces this year.

This has coincided with the BJP taking charge of the state government in December last year; 80 alleged Maoists have been killed in Chhattisgarh this year, which is higher than the combined Maoist deaths for 2022(30) and 2023(22). The Congress has accused the ruling BJP of fake encounters. Police have denied the allegations.

INDIAN WARSHIP RENDERS HELP TO VESSEL ATTACKED IN THE RED SEA

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: A mission deployed Indian destroyer INS Kochi intercepted Panama-flagged merchant vessel Andromeda Star, which came under a Houthi attack in the Red Sea on April 26, and the navy's explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) specialists boarded the MV for residual risk assessment, the navy said in a statement on Sunday.

An aerial recon by a helicopter was carried out to assess the situation before the EOD team was deployed on board the India-bound merchant vessel.

"A total of 30 crew members, including 22 Indian nationals, are reported to be safe and the vessel is continuing its scheduled transit to the next port," the statement said.

The swift action in the western Arabian Sea reiterates the navy's commitment and resolve to safeguard the seafarers transiting through the region, it added. Merchant vessels have faced a barrage of missile and drone attacks by the Houthis in and around Red Sea, and hijacking attempts by Somali pirates in the region.

{ POSSIBILITY OF HEATWAVE IN FEW PATCHES }

Two die in Kerala due to heat stress

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KANNUR/PALAKKAD/THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Two people died in Kerala on Sunday with officials suspecting the heat-stress to be the cause of death, with the southern state grappling with heatwave conditions.

While a 53-year-old man who was being treated at a private hospital in Kannur district for sunstroke died in the early hours of Sunday, a 90-year-old woman was found dead in a canal in Elappully village of Palakkad district on Sunday with burns resembling heatstroke, a health official said.

The man suffered from sunstroke while digging a well in the Pallur area near Chokli on April 26, the official said. He had symptoms of breathlessness and was taken to a primary health centre and later shifted to another hospital in Kannur. His condition worsened on Sunday morning and he died. Although there were no burn injuries on his body, he displayed symptoms concurrent with a sunstroke, the official said. The woman, report-

A 53-YR-OLD MAN AND A 90-YR-OLD WOMAN DIED IN KANNUR AND PALAKKAD RESPECTIVELY

edly suffering dementia, suffered a sunstroke after venturing out of her home. Her post-mortem examination revealed burn injuries which confirmed the sunstroke, the health official said.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and Kerala state disaster management authority, there's a possibility of a heatwave in certain areas in Kollam, Palakkad, and Thrissur districts.

"Maximum temperatures were very likely to be around 41°C in Palakkad, around 40°C in Kollam & Thrissur, around 38°C in Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Kozhikode & Kannur, and around 37°C in Alappuzha, Ernakulam, Malappuram & Kasaragod, and around 36°C in Thiruvananthapuram (3 to 5°C above normal) during April 28th to May 2nd, 2024," the weather agencies said.

MHA to deploy CISF personnel at all ED offices amid string of attacks

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NEW DELHI: The ministry of home affairs (MHA) is deploying the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) at all the offices of the Enforcement Directorate amid instances of attacks on the federal agency's teams and obstruction in its searches or investigations, people familiar with the matter said.

The ministry has already given a go-ahead for the central force's deployment at ED's offices in Kolkata, Ranchi, Raipur, Jaipur, Jalandhar, Kochi and Mumbai at a "no-cost basis" even as it figures out ways to manage the cost of deployment in other offices, the people added, asking not to be named.

CISF is the only central paramilitary force which is usually deployed at an establishment on "cost-reimbursement basis". "A proposal was received from the ED to provide CISF cover to all its offices. For now, the competent authority has given in-principle approval for deploying CISF at ED offices in Maharashtra, West Bengal, Punjab, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Kerala



The agency currently operates from 21 zonal and 18 sub-zonal offices across 40 cities.

and Chandigarh on no-cost basis," said one of the two, a home ministry official. This means that the expenses for CISF's deployment at ED offices will be borne by the Centre for now.

Based on threat assessment from intelligence agencies and ED's inputs, a regular deployment plan will be drawn up by CISF, the home ministry official added. The discussions are continuing regarding CISF cover at ED offices in other states as well. The agency currently operates from 21 zonal and 18 sub-zonal offices across 40 cities in five regions, west, east, central, south and north, allowing it to have

pan-India presence. A team of ED's Kolkata unit came under attack from a mob on January 5 this year, in which three officers were injured.

Earlier, in December last year, Tamil Nadu's Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) arrested an ED officer Ankit Tiwari for extortion and then raided the agency's sub-zonal office in Madurai.

The agency filed a complaint with the state police chief alleging that sensitive documents from its office were stolen.

Over the past decade, ED has registered an average of 500 cases every year under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), involving accused people from political parties and influential private citizens, according to officials. The agency has been criticised for targeting political opponents of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in opposition ruled states. However, ED officials argue that out of over 5,100 PMLA cases registered in last 10 years, only about 2-3% are related to politicians. The agency has attached properties worth ₹1.21 lakh crore and arrested 755 people in last 10 years, compared

₹5,086 crore worth attachments and made 29 arrests during the UPA's rule. "The ED conveyed to the government that the nature of cases being probed by it are of sensitive nature and any attack on its men, loss of evidence including statements of witnesses and accused, digital devices not only affect its probes but also impacts the morale of the investigators," said the second person cited above.

Asked for a timeline for complete CISF deployment at its offices, a senior ED officer said: "CISF will conduct a survey to ascertain the requirement of personnel at each office. The entire exercise may take a few months".

Currently, ED and even the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) teams are accompanied during raids by troops from central paramilitary forces such as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and CISF in several states including West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Jammu and Kashmir etc. The local police also accompanies ED teams in several states and Union territories where the BJP is in power.

17-yr-old held hostage, raped for 3 days in UP

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LAKHIMPUR KHERI: A 17-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a man who held her hostage for three days in Lakhimpur Kheri, police said on Saturday.

The accused, Aman (21), has been arrested and sent to jail, they said.

On April 21, the girl's mother filed a complaint with Dhauraha police in which she accused Aman of forcibly taking away her when she was on her way back home on April 19.

She alleged that the accused held her daughter captive at his home, raped and assaulted her,

police said. According to the FIR, the girl somehow got free from the captivity and returned home on April 21. Following this they moved to the police.

Initially, a case under Sections 343 (wrongful confinement), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 504 (intentional insult) of the IPC was lodged but after the girl returned home from captivity, section 376 (rape) and the Posco Act were added to the FIR, deputy SP Dhauraha PP Singh said.

The accused was arrested and sent to jail on Saturday, he said, adding that the matter is being investigated.

Actor Sahil Khan held in Mahadev betting app case

MUMBAI: The Mumbai cyber cell's SIT on Sunday arrested actor Sahil Khan in connection with the Mahadev betting app case, police said. The actor was apprehended in Chhattisgarh on Saturday after the Bombay high court rejected his pre-arrest bail plea, he said. Khan was brought to Mumbai, placed under arrest and produced in a court, the official said.

11-yr-old tribal girl raped by two in MP distt: Cops
ALIRAJPUR (MADHYA PRADESH): A 11-year-old tribal girl was allegedly raped by two boys in Alirajpur district of Madhya Pradesh, police said on Sunday. The incident took place when the girl was returning home from a wedding with two friends, and she stopped to attend nature's call in a field, Jobat SDOP Neeraj Namdeo said.

Drone from Pak recovered in Punjab district
TARN TARAN: In a joint operation, personnel of Border Security Forces (BSF) and Punjab Police recovered a drone adjacent to a village in Punjab's Tarn Taran district, officials said on Sunday. BSF Frontier Punjab, in a post on X, said, "During the search operation...troops successfully recovered one drone in broken condition from a farming field... in Tarn Taran district."



Performance Highlights Q4 & FY24

All-time high consolidated total income and profit for the year

BAJAJ FINSERV LIMITED	Consolidated Results						(₹ In Crore)
	Particulars	Q4 FY24	Q4 FY23	% Change	FY24	FY23	% Change
	Total income	32,042	23,625	36%	1,10,383	82,072	34%
	Profit before tax	5,527	4,540	22%	21,375	16,811	27%
	Profit after tax (attributable to owners of the Company)	2,119	1,769	20%	8,148	6,417	27%

BAJAJ FINANCE LIMITED	Consolidated Results						(₹ In Crore)
	Particulars	Q4 FY24	Q4 FY23	% Change	FY24	FY23	% Change
	Total income	14,932	11,368	31%	54,983	41,418	33%
	Profit after tax	3,825	3,158	21%	14,451	11,508	26%
	Net NPA	0.37%	0.34%		0.37%	0.34%	
	Return on average equity (annualised)	20.5%	23.9%		22.0%	23.5%	
	Assets under management	3,30,615	2,47,379	34%	3,30,615	2,47,379	34%

BAJAJ HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED	Standalone Results						(₹ In Crore)
	Particulars	Q4 FY24	Q4 FY23	% Change	FY24	FY23	% Change
	Total income	1,996	1,586	26%	7,618	5,665	34%
	Profit after tax	381	302	26%	1,731	1,258	38%
	Assets under management	91,370	69,228	32%	91,370	69,228	32%

BAJAJ ALLIANZ GENERAL INSURANCE CO. LTD.	Standalone Results						(₹ In Crore)
	Particulars	Q4 FY24	Q4 FY23	% Change	FY24	FY23	% Change
	Gross written premium	4,962	3,766	32%	20,630	15,487	33%
	Profit after tax	380	322	18%	1,550	1,348	15%
	Combined ratio	101.6%	97.3%		99.9%	100.5%	
	Return on average equity (annualised)	14.3%	13.7%		15.2%	15.0%	
	Assets under management	31,196	27,809	12%	31,196	27,809	12%

BAJAJ ALLIANZ LIFE INSURANCE CO. LTD.	Standalone Results						(₹ In Crore)
	Particulars	Q4 FY24	Q4 FY23	% Change	FY24	FY23	% Change
	Gross written premium	8,183	6,434	27%	23,043	19,462	18%
	New business premium	3,953	3,297	20%	11,494	10,738	7%
	Net new business value	480	415	16%	1,061	950	12%
	Shareholders' profit after tax	106	26	308%	563	390	44%
	Assets under management	1,09,829	90,584	21%	1,09,829	90,584	21%

Bajaj Finserv Limited | CIN: L65923PN2007PLC130075 | Website: www.aboutbajajfinserv.com/about-us
Bajaj Finance Limited | CIN: L65910MH1987PLC042961 | Website: www.bajajfinserv.in/finance
 Registered Office: C/o Bajaj Auto Limited Complex, Mumbai - Pune Road, Akurdi, Pune - 411 035
 Corporate Office: Bajaj Finserv Corporate Office, Off Pune - Ahmednagar Road, Viman Nagar, Pune - 411 014
Bajaj Housing Finance Limited | CIN: U65910PN2008PLC132228 | Website: www.bajajhousingfinance.in
 Registered Office: Mumbai-Pune Road, Akurdi, Pune 411 035 | Corporate Office: B2, Cerebrum IT Park, Kumar City, Kalyani Nagar, Pune 411 014
Bajaj Allianz General Insurance Company Limited | CIN: U66010PN2000PLC015329 and IRDA Registration No. 113 dated 2 May 2001
Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company Limited | CIN: U66010PN2001PLC015959 and IRDA Registration No. 116 dated 3 August 2001
 Registered and Corporate Office: Bajaj Allianz House, Airport Road, Yerwada, Pune - 411 006 | Website: www.bajajallianz.com
 Insurance is the subject matter of solicitation.

This is an abridged representation of the audited financial results of Q4 and FY24 and is not for the purpose of legal compliance.

As required by regulations, the results for Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Housing Finance Limited have been prepared as per Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS).

The results of Bajaj Allianz General and Life Insurance Company Limited are as per Indian GAAP.

SPOTLIGHT ELECTIONS 2024

Second phase turnout at 66.7%; Nagaland registers drastic drop

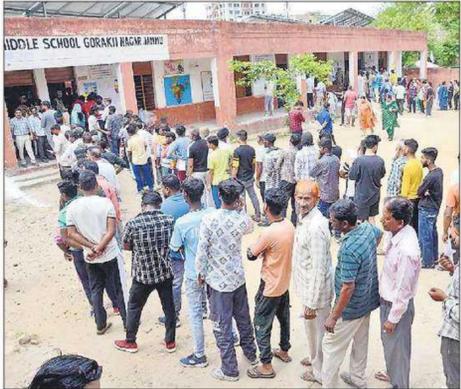
HT Correspondent
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: Voter turnout in the second phase of the general elections was around 66.7%, according to an official of the Election Commission (EC). Electors cast their ballots to choose 88 Lok Sabha members in 13 states and Union territories on April 26. The turnout was 66.1% in the first phase held on April 19.

Both these numbers are lower than the aggregate turnouts in these seats in 2019 — 69.6% for seats that went in the second phase and 69.4% for the ones that had polling in the first phase.

Polling has now been held in 23 states and three Union territories. Of these, voting in 11 states and Union territories took place in one phase, while in three states — Rajasthan, Manipur and Tripura — voting was conducted in two phases.

All 20 parliamentary constituencies in Kerala went to the polls on Friday. The southern state saw a 71.27% turnout, compared to 77.84% in the 2019 elections. The number of absolute voters fell by 5.1%, as about 19.35 million people of the 27.16 million



Voters wait in queues at a polling station in Jammu on Friday. AM

eligible electors voted. In 2019, about 20.4 million out of 26.21 million eligible had cast their votes.

In Nagaland, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Mizoram and Uttarakhand, which went to the polls on April 19 in the first phase, the decline in voter turnout matched a fall in the number of voters. Nagaland saw the most dramatic fall in both voter turnout and number of voters. It fell from 83% in 2019 to 57.72% in 2024, while the number of voters fell by 24.1% from a little more than a million to about 764,710.

No voter turnout data has been given for 19 put of 60 assembly segments in Nagaland's lone parliamentary seat on the Voter Turnout app of the poll watchdog. In Tamil Nadu, Arunachal Pradesh, which saw

In Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the voter turnout reduced from 65.12% in 2019 to 64.1%, while the number of voters fell by 3.5% from 207,398 to about 200,231. Mizoram saw a more significant fall in voter turnout, from 63.14% in 2019 to 56.87% in 2024. The number of voters fell by 2.1% from 500,347 to about 489,808. In Uttarakhand, voter turnout fell from 61.88% to 57.24%, while the number of voters fell by 1.84% from 4.86 million to 4.77 million.

Meghalaya was the only state which registered an increase in voter turnout. It went from 71.43% in 2019 to 76.6% in 2024. The number of people who voted increased by 24.4% from 1.37 million to about 1.7 million.

In the other five states and UTs that finished polling in a day during the first phase, all saw a decrease in voter turnout compared to 2019 but an increase in the number of voters since the number of eligible voters increased. Sikkim, which saw voter turnout fall from 81.41% in 2019 to 79.91% in 2024, saw a 5% increase in the actual number of voters from 353,415 in 2019 to about 371,140 in 2024.

voter turnout fall from 82.11% in 2019 to 77.7% in 2024, saw a 4.6% increase in voters from 659,766 to about 690,411. Lakshadweep saw voter turnout fall marginally from 85.21% to 84.16%, while the number of voters increased 3.4% from 47,026 to about 48,610.

Voter turnout in Puducherry fell from 81.25% to 78.9%, but the number of voters increased 1.9% from 790,895 to about 805,744.

Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, voter turnout decreased from 72.46% in 2019 to 69.72% in 2024, but the number of voters increased by 1.8% from 42.39 million to about 43.2 million.

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‘JD(U) losing ground, BJP has lost identity’

{ TEJASHWI YADAV } FORMER BIHAR DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER



NEW DELHI: RJD leader and former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav speaks to Sunetra Choudhury on a range of issues, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi's alleged failure to fulfil several promises, the BJP's Hindutva plank, the poll prospects of the INDIA bloc and its promise of a nationwide caste census. Edited excerpts:

In the first two phases of polling, there were a lot of concerns about the turnout in Bihar and many other states. What do you think?

The BJP is in depression. The first two phases have been very close. In Bihar especially, we are running a campaign on issues like livelihood, employment, education and health care. They (JD-U) talked about Bihar's special status. So, we remained focused on real issues. People are now fed up of (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi and BJP's lies. They gave them 10 years but if you look at the ground reality, there was no work done. So, local issues are more important and have been overpowering in this election.

But what about their trump card of Hindutva and some of the PM's speeches attacking the Congress, on reservation for Muslims? Do you think this can become a reason for your setback or damage?

I have been repeatedly saying that a majority of the population is Hindu, so the Hindus are most affected by issues like unemployment, poverty and inflation. We already knew that sooner or later, Modi ji would return to the same narrative of *mandir-masjid*, and *Islam-sanatani*. He is making an issue over eating fish.

The people don't expect a PM to go so low and talk about all these. The people expect a PM to speak about what he has done in 10 years, what's his new vision, and what he will do in the future. They haven't told us anything. We were expecting that he would talk about Hindu temples and mosques. The majority are suffering. The real issues are high inflation, poverty and unemployment, and the people are supporting this issue-centric narrative. You must have gone through surveys that highlight real public issues. The people have seen both the previous and the present BJP government.

The survey you talked about said many people are worried that they have no jobs, but when they talk about votes, they (BJP) are still 10 points ahead of you. Especially in Bihar, where arith-

metically, two parties (BJP and JD-U) are against you.

If you see the last elections, it didn't go on arithmetic. In 2020 also, they (BJP and JD-U) were on the same side and you can see the result. Then also the issues were the same — education, health and employment. We are still fighting on the same issues, but the capacity of the JD(U) or the BJP is not as per the last time.

We are the largest party in the state and continue to do well in terms of on-the-ground outreach and response. We are growing every passing day. All said and done, Mr Nitish Kumar was a junior partner in our joint government. The alliance agreed to give him the CM's post because of various factors, and the decision, as you may understand, did not rest on the number of JD(U) seats. In fact, the JD(U) seems to be losing ground. BJP partners have lost their identity and power historically. You may look at any regional party that has tied up with the BJP for proof.

BJP insiders acknowledge that you are popular but how does one get people to vote beyond caste?

Caste is a reality in Indian politics, but it is not the only reality. People assess the parties and leaders beyond the caste equations. Our first commitment is jobs and livelihood. It's not limited to any particular caste group. Plus, we have our track record to show. The people know that we have delivered well on our jobs and livelihood promises...

Isn't it an issue that the people vote for Modi's popularity in the Lok Sabha polls even if they vote for you in the assembly?

I would say the NDA is battling double anti-incumbency. People ask what this so-called double engine government has done for us in the last decade. This online generation is playing recordings of Modi's boastful speeches from 2014, 2015, 2019 and 2020, and asking him and his party about

the broken promises. I am unsure if the PM can come here and face questions from the people.

Has the buzz over the caste census gone down?

It was not supposed to create a buzz. Neither do we think it should cause a buzz. It's a serious and long-term policy measure to aid inclusive and sustainable social and economic justice policy programmes. I want to reiterate that it's not an election issue for us — it's a commitment to understand the changing and evolving society and being able to work for the betterment for all sections...

Was it announced too early? The BJP has appointed OBC CMs, etc..

As I said, it's not a strategic election-oriented decision. It's part of our long-term governance plan... We set the tone for the agenda. The others are merely reacting to it.

I heard you raising issues related to the Agnipath scheme. Do you think this can be a uniting factor?

The people are suffering and those from Bihar, a majority you know, are in the railways or the army... They know that in four years, half the time will be spent on training. What will they do after four years? There is no pension, no canteen, no status of martyr. They don't comply with this scheme. The people expect the Opposition to speak against the scheme. We will scrap it if we come to power.

Will they (BJP) succeed on the issue over wealth redistribution and inequality?

There is no issue. It is a useless issue. We should not pay much attention to it.

What is your assessment of INDIA bloc's performance?

I am very positive about our prospects. We have put together a very good performance in terms of planning and strategy. I would go so far as to say that we have put the NDA on the defensive, and it shows in their crude and polarising campaign. The people all across are looking for change.

How do you think Rohini Acharya (his sister fighting her first election) will fare?

She will do very well. She is getting a very good response. The Opposition leaders are attacking her because the graph of her popularity is rising swiftly.

{ KARNATAKA RALLIES }

Modi takes on Cong over explosion at cafe in B'loru

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BENGALURU: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday attacked the Karnataka government over the blast in a Bengaluru cafe last month, saying the incident took place after the Congress assumed power in the southern state.

"In Bengaluru, after they (Congress) assumed power, a bomb blast took place in a cafe and what they said was gas ka cylinder fata hai (a gas cylinder exploded)", Modi said while addressing a rally in the state's Uttara Kannada Lok Sabha constituency.

"...Those who have been named and have linkages with banned organisation Popular Front of India (PFI), in Wayanad, help are being taken from these organisations. The way the Congress has taken the help of PFI for the vote bank encourages them," he added.

At least nine people were injured in the explosion Rameshwaram Cafe at ITPL Road in Brookfield in Bengaluru on March 1. At least three people have been arrested in connection with the blast at the popular eatery.

To be sure, officials in the National Investigation Agency, that took over the probe on March 3, said the accused are part of a terror module linked to the Islamic State's Al Hind division that is active in parts of south India, and has not mentioned any links to the PFI.

The Congress has a track record of shedding tears on the killing of terrorists, Modi said. "You all must remember when such an incident took place in Delhi, a leader of Congress was shedding tears that why a terrorist was killed he added.

Modi also accused the ruling party in the state of appeasement politics.

"The Congress government in Karnataka has been all into

RALLY TRACKER

BJP

- Narendra Modi, Prime Minister Karnataka:** Uttara Kannada, Belgaum, Davanagere, Bellary
- Amit Shah, Union home minister Uttar Pradesh:** Etah, Mainpuri, Etawah
- Rajnath Singh, Defence minister Gujarat:** Bhavnagar, Anand
- J P Nadda, BJP chief Bengal:** Ranaghat, Murshidabad, Odisha: Berhampur

CONGRESS

- Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader Odisha:** Kendrapara, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu

SP

- Akhilesh Yadav, SP chief UP:** Sambhal

TMC

- Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal CM Bengal:** Maldaha Dakshin

appeasement politics. A mindset dangerous to Karnataka and the entire country is being promoted by the Congress. Crime and terror cannot be weighed on the scales of the vote bank, and cannot be seen through the perspective of the vote bank. But the Congress is neither ready nor willing to get rid of its cheap vote bank thinking," he said at another rally in Bellary.

He also claimed that the INDIA bloc has come up with a "formula" whereby the parties in the opposition alliance will get the prime minister's post for one year each if they come to power.

"With such a system, the good of the country cannot be expected," he said as he addressed another public meeting in Davangere.

"I have heard that the INDI Alliance has invented a new formula...if the country has to be given into someone's hands, will we think before giving it or not? Will you give it to anyone? We will think whether the person is able to handle the country or not, will the track record be analysed or not?" he said. There was no immediate reaction from the Congress on Modi's remarks.

With agency inputs

‘Sangh is in favour of reservation.’ Bhagwat amid political tussle

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NEW DELHI: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said the organisation has always been in support of reservation and advocated for its implementation, even as Congress leader Rahul Gandhi alleged that he had expressed opposition to quotas in the past.

"A video being circulated on social media says that the Sangh is against reservation. The Sangh offers its full support to all forms of reservations offered by the Constitution. The Sangh reiterates that whoever has been given reservations should continue to have them, as long as societal inequality exists," Bhagwat said while speaking at the inauguration of Vidya Bharati Vignana Kendra in Hyderabad.

With the help of technology and Artificial Intelligence, what did not happen can also be shown (as to have happened), he added.

Gandhi, however, alleged that the RSS chief had expressed his opposition to quotas in the past.

"RSS chief makes a statement that RSS is not against reservation. It was he (Mohan Bhagwat) who had made a statement that he was opposed to reservation," the Congress leader said while addressing an election rally at Daman in the Union Territory of Daman, Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

"Those who are against the reservation (policy) are joining their party (BJP). They welcome all those who are against reservation, and then he (Bhagwat) says he is not against reservation," he added.

Stating that the battle between the Congress and the RSS-BJP is an ideological one, Gandhi appealed to people to vote for "protecting" the Consti-



Mohan Bhagwat

tution.

Earlier, Telangana chief minister Revanth Reddy accused the RSS of opposing reservations.

"Back in the day, the RSS and its affiliate groups opposed the Mandal Commission and the idea of reservation," he said on Thursday.

Bhagwat's remarks on Sunday assume significance as in 2015, during an interview with Organiser, an RSS mouthpiece, he had proposed a review of the reservation policy.

The RSS chief had then contended that reservations were being used for political ends and suggested setting up of an apolitical committee to examine who needs the facility and for how long.

"We believe, form a committee of people genuinely concerned for the interest of the whole nation and committee for social equality, including some representatives from the society; they should decide which category requires reservation and for how long," he had said.

Last year, however, Bhagwat said: "We kept our own fellow human beings behind in the social system. We did not care for them, and it continued for 2000 years. Until we provide them equality, some special remedies have to be there, and reservations is one of them. Hence, reservations have to continue till there is such discrimination. We at the RSS give all support to the reservations provided in the Constitution."



Varun Gandhi

BUZZ OVER BJP LOOKING TO FIELD VARUN FROM RAE BARELI SEAT

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: Even as the Congress is yet to declare its candidates for Amethi and Rae Bareli parliamentary constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has kept its cards close to its chest about its Rae Bareli candidate, although there are reports that it has asked its Pilibhit lawmaker Varun Gandhi to contest from that seat.

The party leadership was keen to have Varun Gandhi take on the Congress candidate from the bastion of the Gandhi family, a functionary privy to the information said. A section of the Congress leaders want former party chief Rahul Gandhi and general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to contest from the seats.

The BJP has fielded Union women and child development minister Smriti Irani from Amethi, where she had defeated Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 general elections.

"But he (Varun) conveyed that he would not be keen on a fight which is more like a personality clash than a good electoral contest," the functionary quoted above said, declining to be named.

Meanwhile, Varun Gandhi said: "I have always believed that it is issues that must take precedence over personality contests. However, it would be unethical to speak about what was discussed privately."

Rahul launches sharp attack on Modi and Patnaik from Odisha

HT Correspondent
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BHUBANESWAR: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi runs a government for billionaires from Delhi, Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik leads a dispensation that works for "select people" in the state.

He also said that though the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) are fighting the elections against each other, in reality, the two parties are working together.

"Call it a partnership or marriage, both the BJD and the BJP are together," the former Congress chief told a rally in Cuttack's Salepur.

Taking a dig at Patnaik's close aide VK Pandian, Union home minister Amit Shah, Modi and Patnaik, Gandhi said: "Uncle-ji and Naveen-babu have given Odisha PAANN, meaning Pandian, Amit Shah, Narendra Modi, Naveen Patnaik. They have looted your wealth."

He added: "₹9 lakh crore was looted through the mining scam. ₹20,000 crore was looted through land grabs. The plantation scam was of ₹15,000 crore. As soon as the Congress government is formed here and in Delhi, we will start giving you back your money."

Continuing his attack on the chief minister, the Congress leader said: "While Naveen-babu has given you Pandian, I will tell you what the Congress will give you. If we come to power at the Centre, we will do five revolutionary works. We will make a list of all the poor families, and one woman from a family will be



Rahul Gandhi

selected and we will transfer ₹1 lakh annually to her bank account."

Pandian, a former private secretary to Patnaik, joined the BJD on November 27 last year, a little more than a month after he resigned from the Indian Administrative Services (IAS). The move came amid speculation that the influential former bureaucrat could emerge as the second most powerful leader within the party, and perhaps even Patnaik's successor as party chief in the future.

Odisha will vote in the Lok Sabha elections and assembly polls simultaneously in four phases, starting on May 13.

Cong names LS, state polls candidates

The Congress on Sunday released the names of two Lok Sabha candidates and eight nominees for the Assembly elections in Odisha.

According to the candidates list released by AICC's Central Election Committee, the party changed the contestant for the Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat. Former MP Nagendra Pradhan is made the new candidate in place of Dulal Chandra Pradhan. The party fielded former minister Suresh Mohapatra in the Cuttack Lok Sabha constituency.

{ NEW INITIATIVE }

BJP deploys women ‘vistaraks’ to expand outreach

Brinda Tulsian
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NEW DELHI: It was an idea that took shape during an informal chat between former Akhil Bharati Vidyarthi Parishad activists and now Bharatiya Janata Party leaders — Dharmendra Pradhan, Sunil Bansal and Vanathi Srivasan — during the campaigning for the 2022 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. Pradhan asked Srivasan how the Mahila Morcha (women's unit) could help the party win more seats.

The Tamil Nadu lawmaker knew exactly what she and her team could do. "I told them to allow my team to travel just like the pracharakas (campaigners) did," she recalled telling them.

"That women could hold different types of programmes that men couldn't and this would get us more voters."

The other two leaders agreed and 950 women spread across UP soon after to boost the prospects of the BJP. When the party won 255 out of 403 seats, increasing their vote share by 1.6 percentage points despite a formidable challenge posed by the Samajwadi Party (SP), the BJP realised that the idea of women pracharakas had legs.

These women called vistaraks are now working on their first general election and have grown in number to 3,434. Pracharakas travelling to states for mass outreach is an integral part of the BJP's strategy for any election. Limited only to men,

671 WOMEN FROM GUJARAT ARE AMONG THE NEW BATCH OF WOMEN SPENDING ANYWHERE FROM 15 DAYS TO THREE MONTHS IN VARIOUS AREAS

strangers' family, 671 women from Gujarat, 652 from Rajasthan and three from Manipur were among the new batch of women who are spending anywhere from 15 days to three months in various locations.

Kaynat Kazi is one such vistarak. She has been assigned to work in West Bengal's Malda district, a three-hour plane ride and a bus ride away from her home.

"All women vistaraks are going to different states where elections are coming up. I have been doing this for three years, but because of the general elections, we have increased the duration," Kazi said. The party takes care of her travel to the state, and staying with another party worker means she has

boarding and lodging. But there are other kinds of challenges to deal with.

"Sometimes, I am not even sure where am I going to stay at night," said Kazi, highlighting how it requires a certain degree of courage to take on this role. Families, and often the women's children, try to create obstacles, asking them why there was a need to take on such work.

It's such kinds of problems that made even the party sceptical, Srivasan said. But then, she was able to prove that it was worth it. For example, she said, women went on shorter 28-hour visits to places like Gujarat, organised temple devotees and conducted satyanarayan pujas. These were innovative ways of mobilising voters.

SPOTLIGHT ELECTIONS 2024

As Indians vote for the general elections, a look at how the ruling party has reoriented its strategy to cater to women

How BJP wins over women voters

The BJP has worked tirelessly to incorporate women into political spaces. This strategy, among others, has helped reverse the party's historical deficit with women

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India has experienced a decade of political churning. With the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014, India's conservative movement has found new wind in its sails. This rejuvenation has sparked a wave of cultural revivalism, reshaped party systems, altered caste equations, and prompted a shift toward mercantilist economic ideologies.

Adding to these winds of change, the past decade-and-a-half has witnessed a remarkable increase in women's political participation, which has led to a scramble among political parties to consolidate the "women's vote" with varying degrees of success. Most notably, the BJP has worked tirelessly to incorporate women into political spaces by propagating politics through the moral concept of *seva*, or selfless service. This strategy, among others, has helped reverse the party's historical deficit with women.

Reversal of fortune: Women's political engagement

Globally, the political sphere has largely been the domain of men, with women trailing in terms of electoral turnout, political candidacy, activism, and engagement. In "first-wave democracies" (1828-1926), where democratic expansion led to male but typically not female suffrage, women faced innumerable arduous battles to secure their right to vote; suffrage movements were thus a critical first step in women's mobilisation.

In contrast, universal adult franchise was enshrined in the Indian Constitution and ensured political equality for women from the moment of the country's independence in 1947. Yet lived experience has not always measured up to that promised equality. When it came to voting, for instance, women's turnout was significantly lower than men's. In the 1962 elections, the first election for which voter data were disaggregated by gender, only 47% of eligible women voters cast their ballots, in stark contrast to 63% men. Furthermore, even when women did vote, they were likely to be influenced by male family members. For instance, in the 1996 national elections, survey data revealed that 86% women heeded their families' advice when voting.

However, there are clear signs of cracks appearing in this gendered narrative. Historically women's voter turnout paralleled men's fluctuations, but a divergence occurred in 2009: women's participation increased even as men's decreased. Since then, women have continued to exercise their right to vote in increasing numbers, with the gender gap vanishing in the 2019 general elections.

Furthermore, the assumption that women simply vote in tandem with men is also coming under scrutiny. In the 2014 general elections, only 61% women said they followed their family's advice when making their voting decision — a sharp decline from the past. Similarly, in 2021, I surveyed 1,457 pairs of men and women living in the same household in Rajasthan and found that, although overall levels of support for the BJP and the Congress were comparable among men and women, there was notable diversity within households. Only 65% percent of women shared the same political allegiance as the men living in their households, indicating significant

cant intra-household heterogeneity.

BJP's emerging advantage among women

Much of this heightened engagement on the part of women has a partisan tilt. In recent state assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh (2022) and Madhya Pradesh (2023), exit polls conducted by Axis-MyIndia showed that the BJP received a larger share of votes from women than its opponents did. In Rajasthan, my research found that when women deviated from men in the political realm, women tended to lean toward the BJP.

In BJP-aligned households, 73% women reported that they were also aligned with the BJP. However, in Congress-aligned households, only 68% of women followed men's political preferences, with 25% aligning themselves with the rival BJP instead. Men's ability to consolidate the household vote diminished further when they did not exhibit a clear preference; in these homes, the BJP was again the biggest gainer — with 48% of women aligning themselves with the party.

Although the findings are tentative, there are strong indications that women's escalating political assertion poses a challenge for political parties in the Hindi heartland, especially those organised around caste lines. While caste has been the traditional lynchpin of the Indian

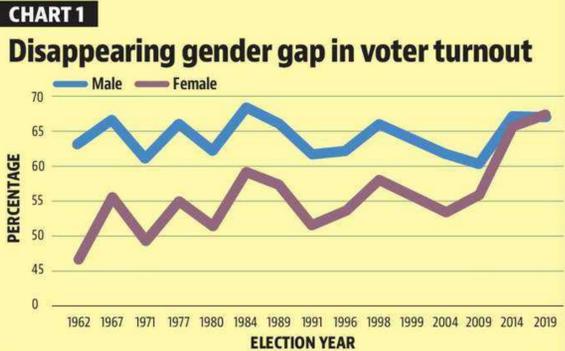
polity, the BJP is attempting to leverage gender as a vertical cleavage to counter traditional caste-based mobilisation. Indeed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's acknowledgment of this strategic approach was evident in a recent proclamation that for him, rather than traditional caste identities, women constituted one of the "biggest castes" alongside the poor, young, and farmers.

There are signs that this strategy is paying off. For instance, in the 2020 state assembly elections in Bihar, 99 of the 125 seats (79%) secured by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) were won in constituencies where women's voter turnout exceeded men's. The BJP's traction among women was also pronounced in Uttar Pradesh, as evidenced by community-specific, gender-disaggregated patterns from exit polls conducted by Axis-MyIndia in that state's 2022 assembly elections.

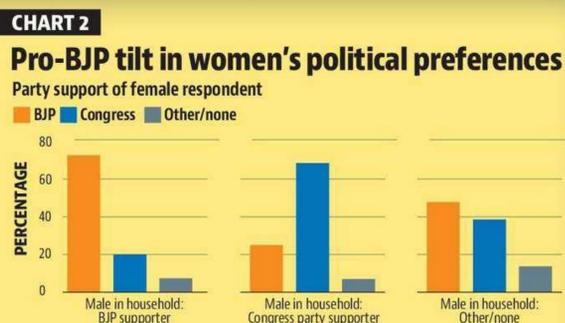
Among upper caste groups, the BJP's advantage over the Samajwadi Party (SP) aligns with expectations given that upper castes have long constituted a core element of the BJP's support base. Here too, the BJP gains more from women than men. Similarly, the BJP's disadvantage among Muslims and Yadavs — the latter forming the key base of the SP — is also unsurprising. But what is remarkable is the BJP's advantage over the SP among women belonging to smaller but electorally significant caste groups, such as Jats, Kurmis, non-Yadav Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and non-Jatav Scheduled Castes (SCs). Even among Jats, members of the Dalit community who have long supported the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the BJP has an advantage over the SP when it comes to women.

From turnout to active participation: Women within political parties

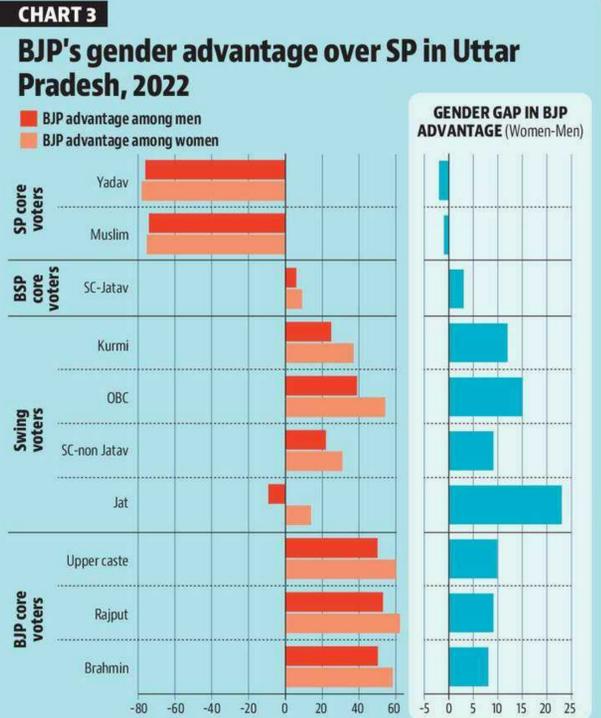
While the BJP has found some success in its attempts to mobilise women, other parties have not thrown in the towel. The preferred approach of nearly all parties, including the BJP, to solicit the women's vote has largely been through targeted "pro-women" policies. The list of such offerings includes the Janata Dal (United)'s implementation of prohibition in Bihar, the Trinamool Congress's *Karyashree* conditional cash transfer programme, and the BJP's *Ladli Behna* unconditional cash transfer (in Madhya Pradesh). Yet there is



Note: Voter turnout is calculated as the number of male/female voters divided by the number of male/female electors. Figure includes data from general elections held between 1962 and 2019. Source: Election Commission of India, <https://eci.gov.in>.



Abbreviations: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (Congress Party). Note: The bars represent the share of women who supported a given party under three conditions — when the male respondent supported the BJP, supported the Congress Party, or did not have a clear preference. Source: Author's survey of 1,457 households in Rajasthan, 2021.



Abbreviations: Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Samajwadi Party (SP), Scheduled Caste (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC). Note: The red bars represent the BJP's advantage over the SP among men, and the pink bars represent the BJP's advantage over the SP among women. The blue bars represent the BJP's gender advantage over the SP, defined as the BJP's advantage among women minus its advantage among men. Source: Axis MyIndia Exit Poll results, Uttar Pradesh 2022.

little evidence about the effectiveness of any one welfare programme since competing parties often make similar promises.

Moreover, parties face hurdles in communicating these policy platforms to women because of disparities in political knowledge, networks, and socialisation. Bridging this gap necessitates investing in a cadre of activists capable of engaging and mobilising women through personal contact. While this investment can reap dividends for all parties, it is particularly crucial for parties rooted in social movements such as the BJP, whose success relies on garnering broader support for its cultural and ideological objectives.

At the same time, gender mobilisation presents a challenge for parties whose organisations are typically populated by male activists. In particular, the sex-segregated nature of social interactions means that male activists are typically restricted to interacting with other men in public spaces or living rooms of homes. Women, on the other hand, as I was told — and observed first hand — several times, could access the *chulha* (private spaces) to speak with women voters. Thus, gender-based outreach requires parties to invest in recruiting women.

Against this backdrop, the BJP's inextricable association with Hindutva is often perceived as a masculine and muscular manifestation of religious nationalism, which may seem at odds with the party's emerging success in recruiting women. However, my analysis of survey data from Lokniti-CSDS suggests that women's affinity for the BJP transcends mere voting preferences. Despite Hindutva's association with masculine imagery, women who support the BJP exhibit levels of engagement in electoral activities comparable to or even surpassing those of women aligned with other political parties. In recent years, this trend has become increasingly pronounced, with the BJP outpacing its

rivals in mobilising female supporters. What, then, can explain the BJP's seemingly paradoxical success in recruiting women and engaging them in the public sphere?

Domesticating politics through seva

To understand why the BJP successfully mobilises women voters, one must acknowledge the barriers that women face in entering political life, which is viewed as dirty, immoral, and unsuitable for women. This perception is ingrained in patriarchal societies, where women are often tasked with upholding family honour and social status. Consequently, any deviation that women pursue from established norms may incur reputational or social costs for themselves and their families, prompting household heads to gatekeep women's political involvement.

But at the same time, when Indians are asked about what politics should be, a different narrative emerges — one centering on moral ideals rooted in the concept of *seva*, or selfless service. Here, *seva* not only connotes the material provision of goods and services but also embodies traits that citizens desire in their representatives — being accessible to constituents, empathising with them, and supporting them in their hour of need. This narrative reverses the lived hierarchy between citizens and politicians.

Drawing on these moral conceptions, the BJP, particularly since 2014, has strategically framed its political discourse around the principle of *seva*. Modi has appealed to voters' moral sensibilities, including by pronouncing himself as a *pradhan sevak* (prime servant), celebrating his birthday through a *seva saptah/pakh-wara* (service week/fortnight), and conducting coronavirus relief campaigns under the banner of *seva hi sangathan* (organisation is service) and *seva aur sam-arpan abhiyan* (service and dedication mission). Through these policies, the BJP is positioning itself as a crucial interface between state and society.

At the same time, *seva* is also a descriptively gendered norm portraying a hierarchical relationship characterised by women's caregiving duties within the home. Although *seva* is not innately gendered, women bear a disproportionate share of the physical and emotional labour of caregiving in India, rendering *seva* a feminine-identified trait. Indeed, an aptitude for service (*seva bhav*) is often used as an informal gauge of a woman's character.

And here, the BJP's emphasis on *seva* frames politics as role-congruent for women. Activists in the BJP mahila morcha, the party's women's wing, often described their motivations for joining politics in the norm-compliant terms of *seva*, portraying their own engagement and mobilisation efforts as social service. Their organisational outreach methods — organising medical camps, blood donation and cleanliness drives, and cultural and moral education — mirror the *seva* frame. Moreover, these activities are carefully aligned with local cultures and historically revered women figures, with the goal of creating an affective connection with communities and helping draw women into the fold. In my survey of 128 women activists in Rajasthan, BJP activists classified 51% of events they organised within the *seva* rubric, compared to 37% for the Congress.

Crucially, this norm-compliant framing helps portray politics as an extension of women's domestic roles and renders it acceptable to families that might otherwise be opposed to women's transitions into the public sphere. In a discrete choice experiment conducted in 2021 with 1,457 pairs of women and male gatekeepers in the same household, I found that women preferred norm-compliant *seva* as a means for political engagement compared to public meetings or norm-undermining protests.

Simultaneously, women's families and particularly men were also far more accepting of women's political participation when it was framed as *seva*. This was evident not only in the discrete choice experiment, where men were more

encouraging of women's political participation when partisan engagement was framed in norm-compliant terms, but also in qualitative interviews, where *seva* was presented as a channel to access the public sphere, a conduit for party recruitment, and a lever to obtain familial acquiescence by downplaying personal ambition.

The way forward

As women's political significance grows, parties are updating their engagement strategies. The BJP's 2024 campaign, for instance, is strategically aiming to integrate itself into preexisting nonpartisan women's mobilisation channels by announcing initiatives such as *lakhpati didi* to encourage women in self-help groups to grow their earnings. But will mobilisation lead to greater agency and representation? Much will depend on women's ability to advocate for their own interests, not to mention the responsiveness of their representatives. In an initial move toward addressing these concerns, the government last year passed legislation reserving one-third of state and national legislative seats for women.

Notwithstanding this progress, the BJP's tenure has been marked by contentious policies, including notifications that married women require their husbands' consent to keep their maiden names and an indefinite delay in the actual implementation of women's reservation across the country's legislatures. The outcome of these developments remains uncertain, but considering how parties should adapt to women's evolving roles — while accounting for domestic and social constraints that inhibit them — is critical for the prospects of political parties going forward.

(Anirvan Chowdhury is a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. In the weeks ahead, the Carnegie-IT 'India Elects 2024' series will analyse various dimensions of India's upcoming election battle.)

Akali Dal not to back Amritpal in poll battle, fields its candidate

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CHANDIGARH: The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Sunday announced its candidate for the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha seat in Punjab, ending the speculation that the party might support jailed radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh, who is contesting from the constituency as an Independent.

In a post on X, the SAD announced the candidature of former MLA Virsa Singh Valtoha from the seat.

"Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal today announced party's core committee member and former chief parliamentary secretary S. Virsa Singh Valtoha as the Akali Dal candidate for the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha constituency. With this announcement the party has fielded party candidates on all 14 seats of Punjab and Chandigarh," the post said.



Amritpal Singh

will fight the Lok Sabha elections from the Khadoor Sahib seat.

The development triggered speculation that the SAD might field him or support him as an Independent as it was yet to announce a candidate for the predominantly rural Sikh-dominated constituency with a strong 'Panthic' character.

"We are in touch with many Panthic candidates, including Amritpal," SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia had said on Wednesday.

The SAD made the shifting of Amritpal and his aides from Assam to Punjab one of the preconditions for re-stitching an alliance with the BJP but the talks failed.

Amritpal was arrested in April 2023 after a 37-day hunt amid a crackdown on his radical organisation, Waris Punjab De, which spearheaded the storming of a police station near Amritsar to secure the release of an arrested associate.

'Cong dreaming that it will do well in tribal region'

{ MOHAN YADAV } MADHYA PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

BHOPAL: Four months into becoming the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mohan Yadav finds himself leading the BJP into the Lok Sabha elections in the state. With the party targeting a clean sweep of all 29 seats, he tells Shrutika Tomar that the BJP is far from worried after the first two phases and that the voting percentages are dropping because of an alleged lack of enthusiasm from the Opposition. Excerpts:

You are facing a Lok Sabha election in a state where your party seeks to win all 29 seats, four months after you became the chief minister. Are you nervous?

What is there to be worried about? The leaders of the INDIA bloc should be worried. This time, even Chhindwara, which they won in 2019, will go out of their hands. This time, there will be a clean sweep. As far as I, or any other BJP worker is concerned, we are ready to face every situation.

After becoming the chief minister, you visited Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, and addressed a Yadav Mahasabha in Uttar Pradesh. Has the BJP found a Yadav face in you?

The BJP never does caste politics and for us, people of all castes and religions are the same. As far as going to other states is concerned, every member of the BJP works, and wherever the party orders, that is where we visit. The BJP is an organisation that always focuses on preparing new leadership and gives them a fair chance to prove their capability. The BJP is unlike the Congress that has a leadership crisis at the state and the national level. They made Mallikarjun Kharge the party president at this age because they had no option. They launch Rahul Gandhi, a man that does not know what politics is, every election.

Since the second phase, why has the BJP made the redistribution of wealth,



'mangalsutra', and alleged re-diversion of OBC quota to Muslims the key issues?

This should be answered by the Congress. Rahul Gandhi first talked about the economic survey and after that, his advisor and guru Sam Pitroda commented on redistribution of wealth, which was criticised thoroughly by voters. Gandhi then backtracked. In the BJP, if our guru says something, we put our hearts into fulfilling it but in the Congress, there is no respect for anyone.

The voting percentage has fallen in Madhya Pradesh in

the first two phases. Why are voters not coming out? The Congress says the BJP is losing ground.

That assessment is laughable. It is the Congress which is losing ground as their core voters and workers are disheartened and unenthusiastic. In the absence of a strong Opposition, they (people) are not taking any interest in polls.

But Congress leaders say they will win half the seats, and do very well in the tribal belt.

The Congressmen are day-dreaming and have little to do with reality. Who can stop them from dreaming? In the assembly elections, they claimed they would win 150, but didn't even win half of those. It was Modi ji's magic that worked in the assembly and his magic will work in the Lok Sabha too. I am giving you this guarantee that our tribal

brothers and sisters will give the Congress the most comprehensive reply.

Many Congress leaders have joined the BJP, and the Opposition has alleged that they were either lured or pressured by the government.

Have the BJP leaders who joined the Congress or any other party also been lured? These are all fabricated stories. Why would anyone stay in a party that has no policy, no vision, and where there is no respect. The Congress is a sinking ship on which nobody wants to stay a long time.

Will bulldozer justice continue in Madhya Pradesh?

I did not start it, but in extreme cases, we will teach criminals a lesson when it is legal to do so.



ELECTION INTERVIEW

Govt begins work on staving off climate crisis farm impact

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NEW DELHI: The government has constituted two scientific panels to assemble an advanced countrywide agricultural weather information system and introduce tech-enabled assessment of crop yields to ward off the impacts of extreme weather linked to climate change, officials said.



The committees comprise multidisciplinary experts and representation from several states. HT ARCHIVE

The committees anchored in the Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre in New Delhi comprise multidisciplinary experts and representation from states to step up responses to the climate crisis, which have cut yields and farm incomes.

Agriculture employs half of the country's workforce and accounts for 18% of India's GDP. Climate scientists have consistently warned that severe heatwaves, changing rainfall patterns and flooding will threaten India's food security, especially its rice and wheat cropping systems, which are critical to feeding the world's most populous nation.

Heatwaves have dealt blows to India's wheat output in recent years. In 2022 and 2023, spikes in temperatures, especially around harvest, have crimped yields of wheat. Two years ago, India recorded its hottest March on record, which shaved off 3 million tonne of the winter staple. Late surges in monsoon over the past three years have flooded several

patterns, proper yield estimates have become important from national food security point of view," said an official, declining to be named.

The government is switching to more advanced technologies to estimate crop output. "From this kharif (summer) season onwards, the ministry is trying out a programme called Yield Estimation System based on Technology (YES-Tech) to gather data on rice and wheat," a second official said, seeking anonymity. The programme relies on data collected by satellite and remote sensing to determine output. The YES-Tech programme for now is being aimed primarily to estimate crop losses to better implement the farm insurance scheme.

Rising temperatures have already made Indian agriculture more resource hungry. Farming now consumes up to 30% more water due to "high evaporative demand and crop duration due to forced maturity" in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan, according to studies by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).

Apple orchards in Himachal Pradesh are shifting to higher altitudes for lack of sufficient cold weather. "Temperature in apple-growing regions of Himachal Pradesh showed an increase, whereas precipitation showed a decrease in recent years in Lahaul and Spiti and Kinnaur," one of the ICAR studies said.

Risks to agriculture tend to be more acutely felt because they are most visible, studies have shown. The government's 2017-18 Economic Survey had calculated that extreme weather and drought, when rainfall loss is greater than 40% than the median, will cut farmer incomes by up to 14%.

The second panel will put in place faster calculation of yield losses due to extreme weather for quicker payouts of farm insurance under the flagship Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. Scientists are working on satellite data and technologies such as artificial intelligence for yield calculation. "With frequent turns in weather

states, destroying oilseeds and pulses, and delaying rice harvesting. Weather disruptions sent federally held wheat stocks to a 16-year low this month. Lower food stocks have prompted India to ban wheat, rice and onion exports, which are still in force, hurting farm incomes.

The first panel has the task of putting in place a string of high-tech, automatic weather stations to generate timely data and forecasts to help farmers and policymakers prepare better for changes in temperatures, drought and extreme rainfall events.

For India, the first of the four Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports in 2022 highlighted concrete evidence of a changing monsoon, rising seas, deadlier heat waves, intense storms, flooding and

{ GREENPIECE }

INDIA NEEDS TO UNDO THE LEGACY OF TOXIC FOOD

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NEW DELHI: Indian spice mixes and other foods have been banned in Singapore, Hong Kong and now, the European Union, due to the presence of Ethylene Oxide, a carcinogenic chemical. Ethylene Oxide is sprayed to control microbes and for food to last longer. In the EU, there's a permissible limit, found exceeded. Like the Azo dyes crisis, India is likely to fix what is as much a global economic problem as an image problem.

For Indians, the big question is: what exactly are we ourselves eating? Most of us buy big brand foods with a level of trust. But if we can export contaminated foods to the European Union, we clearly don't have much control over food safety here either.

For the current contaminant, the FSSAI, along with the relevant ministries, should introduce the Gamma Ray tech across India as replacement. To push adoption, farmers and food handlers need incentives, discounts and loans, as well as procurement pushes. We also need to invest in compliance.

India should spend the next five years undoing the legacy of decades of toxic food. Bangladesh has fixed its problem of lead in turmeric over 5 years, using data, technology, policy and feet on the ground.

We can do way more. Eating poison is not new to Indians, we have heavy metals in our food, pesticides in our drinks and toxic colours in our vegetables. Make this our dark past through a prioritisation of chemicals to attack, policies to do this, firm compliance and above all, political will. Let us eat safe and stay healthy.

Poverty and inequality debate resurfaces in election season

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NEW DELHI: As Indians heads to the poll this season, a new chapter is being written in a very old debate about poverty and inequality in India. This debate has been stirred up by the release of new data from a government-sponsored survey, which some have argued shows a massive decline in poverty in India.

Others believe that this data are not so unequivocal and point to a widening gap between top income-earners and ordinary Indians.

The economist Ma-treesh Ghatak spoke about the resurgent debate over poverty and inequality on last week's episode of Grand Tamasha, a weekly podcast on Indian politics and policy co-produced by HT and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Ghatak is a Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, where he has been the director of the Development Economics Group at the research centre, STICERD,

since 2005. He is a widely respected voice on India's economic development and has been especially focused, in recent years, on questions of growth, poverty, and inequality. Ghatak and host Milan Vaishnav discussed the government's recent consumption survey, contested claims that India has eliminated extreme poverty, and recent inequality trends.

"Inequality is a very charged topic and anytime you even utter the term, it's ideological," explained Ghatak.

"The left does not like inequality and the right thinks: 'Come on, Sachin Tendulkar, Shah Rukh Khan—they earn lots of money [due to] hard work and talent. What's your problem?'"

Ghatak says the more serious discussion amongst economists is about equality of opportunity. Here, Ghatak says, "it's not a matter of resenting somebody being rewarded for hard work or enterprise, it's more like—are we losing the future entrepreneurs, scientists, innovators [due to lack of

opportunity]? That I think is a very serious concern. No serious thinker on this, whether on the economic right or the economic left, would disagree." The trouble, Ghatak said, is answering the pragmatic question of what government should do about entrenched inequality "short of a radical redistribution program that I don't think even the Left parties have on their manifesto these days."

The economist also highlighted how India's data woes have made this debate unnecessarily complicated. Ghatak lamented the fact that the reliability and accessibility of data from official governmental sources have declined in recent years. He emphasized that India has boasted a long record of robust debates about poverty and inequality. Without adequate data, however, he argued the strength of those discussions has badly suffered.



GRAND TAMASHA

work problem?"

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{ UNNAO }

Six die in bus-truck collision in UP: Cops

Press Trust of India
letters@hindustantimes.com

UNNAO: At least six people were killed and over 20 others were injured Uttar Pradesh's Unnao on Sunday afternoon when a speeding truck collided head-on with a bus, ripping through one of its side, police officers aware of the matter said.

The bus driver fled the spot after the accident, while the truck driver has been arrested, they said.

The accident took place near Jamalpur village on the Hardoi-Unnao road in the Safipur police station area, they said.

Doctors at the community health centre in Safipur referred the injured people to the district hospital in Unnao and in Kanpur. Circle Officer Safipur Rishikant Shukla said, "Six people have died in the accident, while over 20 were injured."

Shukla also said the bus was carrying 35 passengers. Of the 20 injured persons, 11

have been sent to Kanpur, while nine have been taken to the district hospital in Unnao. Some passengers, who sustained minor injuries were discharged after first-aid treatment, the CO said. He added that efforts are on to ascertain the identity of the deceased.

Man, son killed in Hardoi
In a separate incident, a 65-year-old man and his son were killed and six members of the family injured when their car collided

with a tree in the Sawajipur area of Hardoi district in UP, police said on Sunday.

Six other family members injured in the accident were taken to the local community health centre, from where they were referred to the district hospital, they said. Additional superintendent of police Martand Prakash Singh said the bodies have been sent for post-mortem. The injured are undergoing treatment and the matter is being investigated, he said.

Bharati Chaturvedi is an environmentalist and writer. She is the founder and director of Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group.

WE CAN BE AT A BETTER PLACE BY PRIORITISING CHEMICALS TO ATTACK, POLICIES, AND ABOVE ALL, POLITICAL WILL

Sheikh bought arms in Bengal on licences from Nagaland, say cops

Tanmay Chatterjee
tanmay.chatterjee@hindustantimes.com

KOLKATA: Sheikh Shahjahan, the suspended Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader from Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district, bought three firearms from an authorized gun dealer in Kolkata between 2016 and 2019 against licences issued in Nagaland, police officers said after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recovered a cache of arms and ammunition from the home of another TMC leader's relative in Sandeshkhali on Friday.

After procuring the licences from Nagaland, Shahjahan bought a .32 bore Mauser pistol made in Germany, a .32 bore Smith and Wesson revolver made in the US and a 30.06 bore rifle made by the Indian Ord-



Sheikh Shahjahan

said on condition of anonymity. "Some of the firearms seized by the CBI belong to the prohibited bore category under the Indian Arms Act and civilians cannot own these. It is not clear whether the CBI found those. It, however, seized a receipt issued by the same gun shop for some ammunition Shahjahan bought," the officer added.

Abu Taleb Sheikh, owner of the house where the CBI made the seizures, could not be traced. "Shahjahan must have procured his licences through this racket," he added. The raid on Friday was conducted in connection with the January 5 mob attack on a team of Enforcement Directorate officials who went to Shahjahan's Sandeshkhali residence to question him in an alleged ration scam.

nance Factory in Ishapore in West Bengal, according to police records.

"Kolkata Police verified the unique identification number of these Nagaland licences from the Union home ministry's portal (National Database of Arms Licences, or NDAL) and permitted Shahjahan to purchase the weapons from the Kolkata dealer. Permission was also given to purchase ammunition for these weapons," a police officer with access to the records

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Registrar

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E-TENDER CORRIGENDUM NOTICE

Tender spec. no. 01/SE(C)/PTCUL/E-Tender/D.Dun/2023-24

Instructions of Bidders Clause no.-2.2 "Joint Venture Firms," Sub-Clause 2.2 (g) shall be amended as hereunder:-

2.2 (g) The lead partner of the Joint Venture firms should meet 100% of the Technical Qualifying Requirement (TQR) of the respective Tender & Financial Qualification Criteria the lead partner of JV firms should meet minimum 50% of financial qualification requirement (FQR) and collectively meet total financial qualification requirement of the respective tender.

All partners of JV firms should have the experience for activities of construction/manufacturing of items or equipments/supply of items or equipments or products, meant for transmission utilities only.

NIT Part B "Pre Qualifying Criteria", Sub-Section 'B' Financial Qualifying Requirement shall be amended as hereunder :-

B. Financial Qualifying Requirement

Point 1.0, 2.0 & 3.0 shall be same as mentioned in the NTT

Note:- In case of Joint Venture, the lead partner of JV firms should meet minimum 50% of financial qualification requirement (FQR) and collectively meet total financial qualification requirement of the respective tenders.

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E-Tender Corrigendum Notice

Tender spec. no. 62 & 63/SE(C)/O&M/E-Tender/PTCUL/D.Dun/2023-24

Instructions to Bidders Clause no.-2.2 "Joint Venture Firms", Sub-Clause 2.2 (g) shall be amended as hereunder:-

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पत्रांक सं. 437 **Date Extension Notice-03** दिनांक 27.04.2024

Due to unavoidable reasons, the Date of Submission & opening of the e-NIT No. 32/EE/PCM-DK/PN/2023-24 invited by the office of the Executive Engineer Project Civil Maintenance-Dakpathar is being extended as below:

Last Date & Time for submission of bids on e-portal Upto 17:00 hrs of 03.05.2024

Last Date & Time for Submission of hard Copies Upto 11:00 hrs of 04.05.2024

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Other Terms & Condition will remain same.

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{ IN KASHMIR }

Four tourists killed after vehicle plunges into gorge

Ashiq Hussain
letters@hindustantimes.com

SRINAGAR: Four tourists were killed while three were injured after the vehicle they were travelling in plunged into Sindh river near a village in the Sonamarg area of Jammu and Kashmir's Ganderbal district, police said on Sunday night.

All the passengers in the vehicle except the driver were tourists, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, said a police official. According to the police, search operation has been launched for one person feared missing after the accident.

A Taveraon the way from the tourist resort of Sonamarg to Srinagar slipped deep into Sindh Nallah at Gund Gagangeer on Leh-Srinagar highway, said officials familiar with the matter.

At least eight people were travelling in the vehicle "when it lost control and plunged straight into the deep flowing gorge", said the official quoted above.

"Four bodies have been recovered from the accident spot. The three people injured including the driver of the vehicle are undergoing treatment at



The accident took place near a village in Ganderbal district.

the hospital," said deputy commissioner, Ganderbal, Shyambir.

The accident prompted a quick response from the officials and rescue teams including police, army, traffic rural police, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) who managed to pull out the vehicle from the fast flowing stream.

The vehicle had completely submerged into the stream with only its window visible, said an official familiar with the matter.

A senior police officer of the district said that the driver had jumped out of the vehicle just

when it lost control and he was rescued by the local residents. "All the passengers in the vehicle except the driver were tourists, mostly from Uttar Pradesh," he said.

The senior police officer said that they were not yet sure of identities of the dead and injured as they are still compiling the details.

He said that the rescued people "were in extreme shock to give any information" and they suspect one more person of the group might be missing.

"Those rescued were in extreme shock. According to initial investigations, eight people were in the vehicle, though we are not sure. We managed to retrieve only four bodies, so we fear one might be missing who might have gone downstream with the water," the official said.

He said that the rains in the evening hampered the rescue operation but they have issued a lookout alert.

"From the place of the accident to Preng, some 25 km downstream, we have asked people of flood and irrigation and police to keep a watch," the senior officer said.

Delhi Police registers case over doctored videos of Amit Shah

HT Correspondent
htreporters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police on Sunday registered a case on the basis of a complaint filed by the Union ministry of home affairs (MHA) over alleged fake and doctored videos of home minister Amit Shah being circulated on social media. In the fake videos, Shah appeared to be advocating for the scrapping of reservations to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, at least two police officers aware of the matter said.

The officers said based on the complaint filed by MHA, an FIR was registered at the special cell police station under Indian Penal Code sections 153 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riots), 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc, and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony), 465 (punishment for forgery), 469 (forgery for purpose of harming reputation), 171G (false statement in connection with an election); and under section 66C (punishment



Union minister Amit Shah

for identity theft) of the Information Technology Act.

According to one of the officers, the FIR was filed on the complaint of an MHA official, who also shared a report containing details of the links and social media handles from which the doctored and fake videos were posted and spread.

"We will approach the social media companies concerned to seek details of such links and handles," the officer said.

The intelligence fusion and strategic operations, the anti-cybercrime unit of the special cell, will investigate the case, identify the social media handles through which the doctored videos of Shah were posted with intention to spread false propaganda, mislead people, and create unrest among Indians, and the second officer said.

18-YR-OLD HELD FROM JHARKHAND FOR DUPING DELHI MAN OF ₹7.32 LAKH

Karn Pratap Singh
karn.singh@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: An 18-year-old man of Jamtara in Jharkhand was held from his home town for allegedly defrauding a Vasant Kunj resident of over ₹7.32 lakh by impersonating a customer care executive of an airline, getting the victim to install a third-party screen-sharing app on his phone and siphoning off the funds to four different accounts last October, police said.

The suspect was arrested last week, following which he was linked with 13 more cybercrime complaints, police said. Six mobile phones, six SIM cards and documents related to mule bank accounts he was using to route the gains of the fraud — with ₹1 crore found transferred in the transaction history records — were seized from the accused, identified as Riyaz Ansari, police said.

"The professor said he wanted to cancel a flight ticket. He searched for the customer care number of the airlines on the internet and ended up dialling a number he found on a portal. The person who received his call introduced himself as an airline executive and tricked the professor," a police officer said.

{ FROM PAGE 1 }

INHERITANCE TAX

repeatedly distanced itself from the comments. The PM also pushed back on the idea of a caste census being used to redistribute wealth and social engineering, blaming the Congress for the condition of the country, and comparing this idea to Maoist ideology.

"People who consider themselves political experts should ask such people that if the conditions you describe are real, then you have been in power for 50-60 years. You gave birth to this. Why did you let it come to this? Secondly, X-ray means raiding every household, if any woman has hidden gold in utensils, even finding that and then redistributing it. This Maoist ideology has never helped the world," he said.

"This is an entirely 'urban Naxal' thought. This is why the Jamaat, which usually keeps writing, kept quiet about the manifesto even after 10 days, because it will help them. They kept quiet to protect them. It then becomes my responsibility to awaken the country to the fact that they are planning to loot you. The next part is Dr Manmohan Singh has said clearly who has the first right on the country's resources. They have clearly stated their intentions," he added.

Over the course of the past week's political campaign, Modi has repeatedly claimed that the Congress wants to redistribute both wealth and reservation benefits to Muslims, pointing to a 2006 speech by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who had said that the first right over the country's resources should go to minorities, particularly Muslims. To be sure, the Congress has said that the BJP is misrepresenting Singh's remark, and that the PM had only spoken of the need to empower the marginalised, including scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslims.

Modi also spoke at length about the campaign in Karnataka, a state where the BJP (which is in alliance with the Janata Dal Secular) is locked in a fierce battle with the Congress.

"The people of Karnataka are regretting that they have committed such a big mistake by electing them (Congress). Our public support has not gone down; in fact, it has increased. But, in such a short time, they still have unresolved issues like the post of CM. While the CM has taken oath, it has not been settled who it really is. If you look at the law-and-order situation, there are riots and murders

taking place; the economic condition is in a state of complete bankruptcy. They have made big promises, if this happens, you will get this, if that happens, you will get this. This means you are cheating the public," he said.

"When we said we will give Ayushman Bharat cards to these people, we will fulfil that, there will be no dishonesty. They cancelled the scheme for farmers, and there is no reason for it. Look at Bengaluru, which has a big role in increasing the country's education. Now, it has been turned into a tanker hub in no time. And there is a mafia involved there too. People are yearning for water... The deputy CM is asking for votes for his brother so that he can become CM; so everyone is playing games. There are games being played to remove someone from the seat. As far as the BJP is concerned, we are working with team spirit even if my team was defeated," he added.

The PM also referred to the controversy about the murder of the daughter of a Congress leader, who alleged that the killing was part of a love jihad controversy (a reference to a term used by right-wing groups to describe interfaith relationships).

"Nadda ji was attending a programme in Karnataka, when this incident took place. Who belongs to which party, or he belongs to the Congress; his daughter was murdered. These are not my values or mindsets. And it is a matter of human sentiment, and I believe that even in the midst of the election rush, what he did was the human thing to do," he said.

Modi referred to a set of previous incidents to underline his point.

"I don't remember which election it was. Rahul ji (Rahul Gandhi) faced some issues with his helicopter. I called him immediately to ask if he was in distress. I was the chief minister of Gujarat when, in Daman, a helicopter carrying Sonia ji (Sonia Gandhi), Ahmed Patel sahab crashed. I told them that I am sending an air ambulance, but Ahmed Patel sahab told me that they are all fine and not in any kind of emergency. Once Sonia ji went to Kashi for an election campaign and she fell ill, so I immediately sent people over to see what the matter is and, if required, send an aircraft to carry her. So, these are my principles and this is beyond politics. So, for me, whenever any problem arises in any family, this should be resolved by rising above politics," he added.

17 yrs after murder, man held in U'khand

GURUGRAM: Seventeen years after a murder over an altercation at a private school in Gurugram Sector 31, the prime suspect in the case was arrested from Bageshwar in Uttarakhand on Saturday, police said.

The accused, Kamal Singh Mehta, 48, allegedly assaulted his colleagues Nagendra Kumar and Rakshak Pal with an iron rod on the premises of the school on September 13, 2007. Kumar succumbed to the injuries. Police said Mehta worked as a bus conductor in the school and fought with the duo over a petty issue.

Investigators said that the officials were going through files of proclaimed offenders as the model code of conduct is in force,

when they found that Mehta was on the run for nearly 17 years.

Police said he fled Gurugram after the incident, hid in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, and returned to his home in Bageshwar, where he worked as a driver.

"Crime branch sleuths camped at his village for a week and tried to seek information from Mehta's family. They managed to get his contact number, and through the same, arrested him," an officer said.

Sandeep Kumar, Gurugram police PRO, said the Sector 40 crime branch unit headed by inspector Naveen Kumar brought him back to the city, and after questioning, he was lodged in judicial custody on Sunday. HT

AAP holds rally against Kejriwal arrest

HT Correspondent
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The youth wing of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) organised a walkathon, "Walk for Kejriwal", as part of the party's Lok Sabha campaign at Chittaranjan Park in south Delhi on Sunday morning, protesting against the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, people aware of the matter said.

The walkathon saw the participation of the AAP candidates from South and New Delhi seats — Somnath Bharti and Sahiram Pahalwan. Several Delhi cabinet ministers also took part in the walk with hundreds of party workers who sported yellow T-shirts displaying images of the jailed chief minister with the slogan, "Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se",



AAP leaders Saurabh Bharadwaj, Somnath Bharti and Atishi at the Walkathon at CR Park on Sunday.

written on them, they added. Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21 in connection with the investigation in the Delhi excise policy case. Senior AAP leader and cabinet

minister Atishi said that the people of Delhi have come to express their support for Kejriwal through the walkathon. "BJP thought that if they put Kejriwal in jail, then the AAP would not be able to campaign. But the

AAP is not campaigning, the people of Delhi are campaigning for the party and Kejriwal," she added.

Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said that party is running a campaign, "Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se", under which the walkathon was held near Deshbandhu College. "We are highlighting how all the sins of the corrupt are washed away after they join the BJP," he said.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that it is regrettable even after the Delhi high court's rebuke, Bharadwaj continues to indulge in political melodrama. "Both the walkathon and roadshow organised by the AAP in Delhi today were a flop show with no participation of local people," Kapoor added.

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{ OUR TAKE }

EVMs win the day in the court

SC rejecting a return to paper ballots should end the debate on the use of the machines in polls

The Supreme Court's order last week should set at rest the doubts raised about the sanctity of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and thereby, the integrity of the election process itself. The two-judge bench, ruling on a clutch of petitions that demanded 100% cross-verification of votes cast on EVMs with the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) or a return to the ballot paper system, said the machines are "simple, secure and user-friendly" and that a return to paper ballots would be tantamount to undoing many years of electoral reforms: The plea for returning to paper ballots is "foible and unsound" as well as "regressive", and the fears regarding tampering or data mismatches in the electoral process were "unfounded", the judges said.

Indian elections have been a work in progress since the first general elections in 1952. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has shepherded this mammoth process involving hundreds of millions of voters in a remarkable fashion. The deepening of a democratic culture in the country, technology, tweaks in ECI governance, tightening of the laws, even judicial directives, have, over the decades, contributed to the strengthening of the process. Among the major reforms, the introduction of EVMs marked a major departure in the conduct of elections. In the era of paper ballots, the counting of votes was a long-drawn-out process that often led to delays in the declaration of results. Drawing parallels with the experience of elections in liberal democracies in the West does not work because of the scale of the exercise and size of the electorates — for instance, the ECI has set up over a million booths across the country for nearly a billion voters. To suggest a reversal of this progress is, to put it mildly, foolhardy. Besides, the Court has given directives to address concerns regarding the security and functioning of the machines, of course, with caveats. That should address apprehensions regarding the sanctity of the election process.

Though the Court has unambiguously settled the matter in favour of EVMs, there is a need to reflect on the rising scepticism regarding the integrity of the election process. What took the form of a lack of faith in technology in the court is, in fact, a reflection of rising distrust, presumably among a small but expanding minority in society, in institutions, including ECI. The onus is on the venerable ECI to reaffirm its institutional independence and uphold its stellar legacy as the custodian of Indian elections. The ongoing elections provide it with enough opportunity.

Fight the rising tide of food insecurity

With food insecurity worsening, the Sustainable Development Goal of zero hunger by 2030 seems all but abandoned. The Food Security Information Network (FSIN)—an alliance of the United Nations (UN) and several development groups—reports that 282 million people around the world faced acute hunger in 2023, largely because of conflict and the climate crisis. That this was the fifth consecutive year of a rise in the numbers facing acute hunger is evidence of a deeply skewed food availability and access dynamic, given large surpluses in some economies and near-absolute deprivation in some regions.

Conflict has played a major role in the upswing of hunger since 2016-17. The FSIN report makes particular mention of the conflicts in Gaza and Sudan. Conflict becomes a multipronged attack on food security by pulling down food production in impacted areas, disrupting supply chains and fuelling desperation which, in turn, stokes further conflict. Now, the weaponisation of hunger by blocking aid and relief, as was seen in Gaza, has added another dimension.

Against this backdrop, and the portents of the climate crisis, nations must act in a concerted manner. First, warring parties must ensure unimpeded food supply to conflict-affected regions. Second, countries must make farm resilience a leading part of their adaptation efforts, with a focus on hardy crops, bio-fortification to lessen nutritional insecurity, and closing the production gap. To address the skewed dynamic of surplus and wastage in some economies and deprivation in others, tariff and non-tariff barriers for agri trade must be lowered for easier flow of food to destinations that need it. Only then can the zero-hunger aim be revived.

Back Make in India with testing in India

From high sugar in baby food to adulteration in *masalas*, regulatory agencies need to be alert and equipped to deal with the crisis

“People are fed by the food industry, which pays no attention to health ... and are treated by the health industry, which pays no attention to food,” was the caustic observation of American writer and environmentalist Wendell Berry. While this critiques the organised medical profession's inattention to nutrition and the role of the food industry, public health votaries recognise the importance of adequate and appropriate nutrition across the life course and are vigilant about the role of the food industry in enabling or endangering health through myriad products that reach our mouths from the market. Hence the outrage at recent reports that Nestlé was marketing a baby food cereal in India and many other developing countries with higher sugar content than the version it marketed in Europe. Around the same time, reports of regulatory agencies in Hong Kong and Singapore banning *masalas* marketed by two Indian manufacturers aroused alarm.

The report on Nestlé's baby food cereal (Cerelac) was released by Pub-

lic Eye, a Swiss NGO, which conducted the study in partnership with the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN). IBFAN has been watching Nestlé since they battled over the manner in which the transnational food company marketed breast milk substitutes. Indian and global health authorities recommend exclusive breast milk feeding for the first six months of life because of its ideal nutrient composition, immunity-boosting properties, and support for the growth of a healthy microbiome in the baby's gut, apart from promoting a close psychological bonding between mother and child. Commercial campaigns to promote breast milk substitutes have often undermined these health considerations.

Let's turn to the controversy over the nutrient composition of a baby cereal that the industry has been promoting. Is the industry turning a blind eye to health considerations while enhancing the addictive appeal of the baby cereal by increasing the sugar content? If so, why is it careful not to do so in Western Europe while it feels free to do so in developing countries, including India? Is it because there is considerable variance in the capacity of national regulatory agencies to lay down clearly defined rules, vigilantly monitor and enforce compliance, conduct independent testing, and initiate action against violators?

High sugar content in baby cere-

als, can lead to obesity, while increasing insulin resistance in muscles, fat and liver. This sets the stage for pre-diabetes, which can progress to diabetes. Since high sugar content instils addiction, the baby demands more cereal leading to high levels of total body fat and abdominal fat but with a poorly developed lean muscle mass. That dims the hope of a fit, healthy, and economically productive generation that can be the flag bearer of our future progress.

The *masala* mystery has a different storyline. Ethylene oxide, a chemical carcinogen, was reportedly found to be a contaminant of internationally marketed Indian *masalas* by regulatory agencies in Hong Kong and Singapore. Following their ban in these two countries, the media has also reported that this chemical had been detected in 527 Indian food products by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), between September 2020 and April 2024. This industrial chemical is mainly used as an intermediary in the manufacture of other chemicals. It is also used in the fumigation of spices. Human exposure to ethylene oxide can cause cancers like lymphoma and leukaemia. Residual presence of the chemical in packaged spice products or contamination during processing in premises where industrial chemicals are also produced/stored is probably the result of poor manufacturing practices, unlike the intentionally raised sugar con-



Our regulatory agencies need to be resourceful, vigilant, and impervious to industry influence or political pressures

tent of a baby cereal food product.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is reportedly attempting to obtain IBFAN's reports of the tests conducted on Indian and international versions of Cerelac. It is also collecting country-wide samples of the Indian *masala* brands that have been red-flagged by international regulators. These will, no doubt, be tested in competent Indian labs. It is good to see the agency reacting, but what measures were taken proactively in the past to check food products manufactured in India? Do our regulatory agencies have the required systems in place, with defined processes and needed resources? Why should we depend on revelations by foreign organisations or alerted by proscriptions by international regulators? When we make in India, should we not also test in India? Our regulatory agencies need to be resourceful, vigilant, and impervious to industry influence or political pressures. They must have technical strength internally and, when needed, must draw upon the expertise of other scientists who have no conflicts of interest. We must guard against agency capture through positioning of industry's

preferred pliable persons in the agency's leadership positions or heavily loading them into technical advisory committees that guide the agency. While such appointments are often political decisions, civil society voices must ensure that regulatory agencies remain committed to the protection of public health.

These concerns are not unique to India. In the past decade, some Western nations have witnessed evisceration of their regulatory agencies by libertarian political ideologies and industry's overpowering influence. Developing countries must be even more vigilant against the erosion of regulatory efficiency.

While commenting on *Food Politics*, a book by food industry critic Marion Nestlé (unconnected to the food giant), celebrity chef and author Julia Child cautions: “We learn how powerful, intrusive, influential and invasive big industry is and how alert we must constantly be to prevent it from influencing not only our own personal nutritional choices, but those of our government agencies.”

K Srinath Reddy is distinguished professor of public health, PHFL. The views expressed are personal



K Srinath Reddy

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



Bihar poser: Will caste trump all other factors?

I'm penning these words from Bihar, whose political dynamics are key to understanding India's intricate political landscape. Bihar's politics is a play full of twists and turns, where characters emerge unexpectedly and recede into the shadows without warning.

This is why the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) did not hesitate to support Nitish Kumar when he broke with the grand alliance and formed a government with the party ahead of the 2020 assembly elections. This alliance fought and won the 2020 elections, but after 24 months, Nitish returned to Lalu Prasad, breaking free from the “natural partnership” and returning to the “old family”.

Everyone knew then that the tide would turn again. Nitish Kumar, who had previously felt “suffocated” with the BJP, agreed to form a government with the party a few months before the Lok Sabha elections. He is now a member of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and has stated, “Now I will not go anywhere; I will stay here.”

The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and BJP also changed their tone on Nitish Kumar accordingly. Bihar is the only state in recent times where the chief minister (CM) has changed political partners four times. But why are the RJD and BJP collaborating with Nitish without learning from previous mistakes? The answer is simple. Among Bihar's approximately 76.4 million voters, 8-10% choose to be with Nitish in all situations.

The reason behind such loyalty to Nitish Kumar is that after becoming CM for the second time in 2005, he took several revolutionary initiatives. His government gave away bicycles to girls in every town and village. This brought girls out of their homes to pursue education and ushered in a shift

in society's lowest classes. He also envisioned schemes for providing water and electricity to every household.

Furthermore, through liquor prohibition in 2016, he won the hearts of underprivileged women in villages. The experiment has also been criticised, though, because of the loss of lives caused by the consumption of illicit liquor. Liquor smuggling is also commonplace now. The prohibition law was so harsh that people started calling it “devilish”. It was softened to some extent as opposition mounted, but is still as hard as a tortoiseshell.

The opponents of Nitish Kumar argue that his recent shift has done irreparable damage to his reputation. Some of his recent utterances have also led to a great outcry. The current election will be the most significant test of people's attitudes towards him.

It is necessary to mention Tejashwi Yadav here. He fought the 2020 elections with the Congress and the Communists. The RJD emerged as the largest party in the Bihar Assembly in that election. But five of his MLAs switched sides and the BJP became the largest party in the assembly with 85 MLAs.

Needless to say, the BJP plays political games carefully. The party knows when to be friendly and when to abandon someone. Its ties with the Paswans are an example. Ram Vilas Paswan died while campaigning for the 2020 election was underway, sparking a power struggle between his son, Chirag Paswan, and younger brother, Pashupati Kumar Paras. Five of the six members of Parliament of the Lok Janshakti Party supported Paras, who split the party and was appointed to the Cabinet. This stunned Chirag, who calls himself “Modi's Hanuman”. But prior to the current elections, the BJP pivoted back to Chirag, leaving Paras high and dry. Former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi is among those who have joined and left the NDA. He has been shifting sides throughout, which has been extremely beneficial for him.

The BJP has wisely balanced caste equations in the state. All its candidates intend to cross the river holding the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is the most popular leader here as well. But the INDIA bloc will give the NDA a tough fight. In the first phase of elections in Bihar, votes were polled for four seats. But voter turnout for the polls was 5% lower, just as in other states of the Hindi belt. This has made the NDA more alert.

The people of Bihar are undoubtedly politically sensitive, but they remain obstinate about voting on the basis of caste. In such a situation, will the NDA be able to work its magic in the state, just as it had done in 2014 and 2019? Or, will caste equations become the overriding factor? When viewed from the top, the land of Chanakya and Chandragupta appears to be filled with apathetic silence, but the same questions are resonating in the minds of every Biharis at this moment.

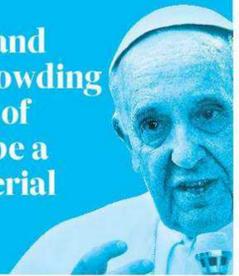
Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, *Hindustan Times*. The views expressed are personal



The people of Bihar are politically sensitive, but are obstinate about voting on caste lines

{ POPE FRANCIS } SOVEREIGN OF VATICAN CITY STATE

Prison is a harsh reality, and problems such as overcrowding ... give rise to a great deal of suffering. But it can also be a place of moral and material rebirth



Gaza's chilling effect on counter-terrorism

The world was on the edge as both Israel and Iran came close to war in the past few days. Iran responded with an aerial attack to avenge Israel's strike on a facility in Damascus, Syria, which killed one of its senior military officials. After a seemingly continued Israeli retaliation against Iranian military facilities, Tehran did not escalate further.

These tensions in West Asia, as the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas continues, are taking place amid multiple fissures in the global order. The United States (US), despite playing a critical role in the region, is both, not keen on being part of another long-drawn military competition, while simultaneously attempting to maintain its hegemonic power structure when the likes of China and Russia are playing spoiler. In the middle, the likes of Hamas, are doubling down on their political power and clout beyond just tactical assaults.

Qatar has hosted the political representation of Hamas since 2012, an office opened with the blessings of both the US and even Israel. Tel Aviv reportedly continued a level of cash flow to Gaza under Hamas control, despite concerns being raised. However, the Qatari leadership is now having second thoughts about continuing to host Hamas at a time when negotiations with the group spearheaded by Doha and Cairo seem to be at an impasse. Qatari prime minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani is reevaluating his mediation role after increasing criticism against the Gulf State. Simultaneously, the chairman of the political bureau of Hamas in Doha, Ismail Haniyeh, recently visited Turkey as rumours started to make rounds that the group was potentially looking for a new office space.

Hamas, proscribed as a terror organisation by the US since 1997, has managed to empower its political office by many folds since the October 7 terror strike against Israel. Utilising the fact that the group's military wing in Gaza still holds dozens of Israeli hostages captive, and not just piggybacking, but manipulating pro-Palestine narratives as pro-Hamas ones, these lines have been significantly blurred by a global pushback against Israeli military action in Gaza and the rising number of civilian casualties.

Hamas is not the first one to benefit from the empowerment of political narrative diluting the militant one, and more specifically, being platformed by the realpolitik of Doha. The Taliban in Afghanistan is now in its third year of

holding power in Kabul, and the deal which got them to walk in and take control, was signed with the US in Qatar in February 2020. The Taliban's political office in Doha arguably gained significant political clout while the group enacted its militant activities in Afghanistan unabated, mobilising successfully the old proverbial adage which says, “you have the watches, we have the time”. Hamas seems to be playing the same deck of cards. Political negotiation with a proscribed extremist group is not a new idea. Interestingly, the group's own appeal and politics often drive decision-making on what level they can be engaged with, if at all. Offhanded and reactionary engagement has dire consequences as well and it potentially legitimises both ideology and the polity.

In the post-9/11 and War on Terror (WoT) era, these have consequences. This WoT era, now on its deathbed after wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, allowed many countries to finally define their own terror threats and counter-terror requirements. Multilateralism led by US power came out with new tools to counter these threats and there was a sense of absolutism on disallowing terrorism and accompanying narratives space or attention. These new tools benefited many, including India.

While there is no doubt that despite the mistakes and ills made during the WoT period (such as the Iraq war), there were benefits as well which were more visible for countries that usually did not get space or attention on raising issues of terrorism. India has tried to hold this momentum together within its limited capacities by hosting a session of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee in 2022 and the subsequent release of the Delhi Declaration specifically concentrating on the use of emerging technologies by terror groups.

Global counter-terror narratives are backsliding, and this trend needs to be arrested as a compromise with a section of these groups becomes an acceptable way out. Political empowerment of certain ideologies is myopic deterrence without long-term thinking factored in. A better quality of thinking is required in countering terrorism that goes beyond a level of normalisation for concessionary policies and politics.

Kabir Taneja is fellow, Strategic Studies Programme, Observer Research Foundation. The views expressed are personal

After hundreds held, WH calls for peaceful protests

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WASHINGTON: The White House insisted on Sunday that pro-Palestinian protests that have rocked US universities in recent weeks must remain peaceful, after police arrested around 275 people on four separate campuses over the weekend.

"We certainly respect the right of peaceful protests," National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told ABC's "This Week."

But, he added, "we absolutely condemn the anti-Semitism language that we've heard of late and certainly condemn all the hate speech and the threats of violence out there." The wave of demonstrations began at Columbia University in New York but they have since spread rapidly across the country.

While peace has prevailed in many campuses, the number of protesters detained — at times by police in riot gear using chemical irritants and tasers — is rising fast.

They include 100 at Northeastern University in Boston, 80 at Washington University in St Louis, 72 at Arizona State University and 23 at Indiana University.

Among those arrested at Washington University was Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein, who faulted police for aggressive tactics she said provoked the sort of trouble they are meant to quell.

College administrators have struggled to find the best response, caught between the need to respect free-speech rights and the imperative of containing inflammatory and sometimes violently anti-Semitic calls by protesters.

At the University of Southern California, school officials late Saturday closed the main campus to the public after pro-Palestinian groups again set up an encampment that had been cleared earlier, the school announced on X.

With final exams coming in the next few weeks, some campuses — including the Humboldt

campus of California State Polytechnic University, have closed and instructed students to complete their classes online.

The activists behind the campus protests — not all of them students — are calling for a ceasefire in Israel's war with Hamas, and want colleges to sever ties with Israel.

College protesters seek amnesty
Meanwhile, the students' plight has become a central part of protests, with students and a growing number of faculty demanding their amnesty.

At issue is whether universities and law enforcement will clear the charges and withhold other consequences, or whether the suspensions and legal records will follow students into their adult lives. Terms of the suspensions vary from campus to campus.

At Columbia and its affiliated Barnard College for women, Alwan and dozens more were arrested April 18 and promptly barred from campus and classes, unable to attend in-person or virtually, and banned from dining halls.

Hamas attacked Israel on October 7 that left around 1,170 people dead, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. The Palestinian militants also took roughly 250 people hostage. Israel estimates 129 remain in Gaza, including 34 the military says are dead.

On the other hand, Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 34,454 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.



People protest in support of Palestinians in Gaza, near the White House in Washington, US, on Saturday. REUTERS

IRAQ DRAWS DIPLOMATIC CRITICISM OVER ANTI-LGBTQ+ LAW

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BAGHDAD: Human rights groups and diplomats criticised a law that was quietly passed by the Iraqi parliament over the weekend that would impose heavy prison sentences on gay and transgender people.

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement that the law passed on Saturday "threatens those most at risk in Iraqi society" and "can be used to hamper free-speech and expression." He also warned that the legislation could drive away foreign investment. British Foreign Secretary David Cameron called the law "dangerous and worrying."

Although homosexuality is taboo in the largely conservative Iraqi society, and political leaders have periodically launched anti-LGBTQ+ campaigns, Iraq did not previously have a law that explicitly criminalised it.

The law passed on Saturday with little notice as an amendment to the country's existing anti-prostitution law. It imposes a sentence of 10 to 15 years for same-sex relations and a prison term of one to three years for gender-transition surgeries and for "intentional practice of effeminacy." Moreover, organisations promoting "sexual deviancy" face at least seven years imprisonment and a \$7,600 fine.

HOLLYWOOD PRODUCER WEINSTEIN HOSPITALISED

Associated Press
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW YORK: Harvey Weinstein's lawyer said on Saturday that the onetime movie mogul has been hospitalised for a battery of tests after his return to New York City following an appeals court ruling nullifying his 2020 rape conviction.

Attorney Arthur Aidala said Weinstein was moved to Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan after his arrival on Friday to city jails. "They examined him and sent him to Bellevue. It seems like he needs a lot of help, physically. He's got a lot of problems. He's getting all kinds of tests. He's somewhat of a train wreck health wise," Aidala said.

On Thursday, the New York Court of Appeals overturned his conviction, citing the trial judge's allowance of irrelevant evidence seen and heard by jurors. His 23-year prison sentence was nullified, and a retrial was ordered.

Asia swelters: Schools shut, alerts issued amid heatwave



A family holding umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun in Manila on April 25. AFP

A wave of hot weather has blasted the region over the past week, sending the mercury as high as 45 degrees Celsius

Agence France-Presse
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MANILA: South and Southeast Asia braced for more extreme heat on Sunday as authorities across the region issued health warnings and residents fled to parks and air-conditioned malls for relief.

A wave of exceptionally hot weather has blasted the region over the past week, sending the mercury as high as 45 degrees Celsius and forcing thousands of schools to tell students to stay home. On Sunday, The Philippines announced the suspension of in-person classes at all public schools for two days after a record-shattering day of heat in the capital Manila.

In Thailand, where at least 30 people have died of heatstroke so far this year, the meteorological department warned of "severe conditions" after temperatures in a northern province exceeded 44.1C (111.4F) on Saturday.

And in Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Bangladesh, forecasters warned that temperatures could exceed 40C in the coming days as people endured searing heat and stifling humidity.

"I dare not go out in the daytime. I am worried we would get heatstroke," said a 39-year-old cashier in Myanmar's Yangon who gave her name as San Yin. She said she has been going to a park with her husband and four-year-old son at night to escape the heat of their fourth-floor apartment.

"This is the only spot we can stay to avoid the heat in our neighbourhood," she said.

Global temperatures hit record highs last year, and the United Nations weather and climate agency said on Tuesday that Asia was warming at a particularly rapid pace. Extensive scientific research

has found climate change is causing heat waves to become longer, more frequent and more intense.

Myanmar has recorded temperatures that are 3-4C higher than the April average, its weather monitor said last week.

And on Sunday, the national forecaster predicted temperatures in the central city of Mandalay could rise to 43C.

The ministry of water and meteorology in Cambodia warned that temperatures could also hit 43C in some parts of the country in the week ahead, while the health ministry advised people to monitor their health "during hot weather related to climate change".

Temperatures in Vietnam were also forecast to remain high during a five-day national holiday, with forecasts as high as 41C in the north.

Forecasters there said it would remain intensely hot until the end of April, with cooler conditions expected in May.

In Bangladesh, millions of students returned to schools that had been closed due to extreme temperatures, even though its weather bureau said on Sunday the heatwave would continue for at least the next three days.

"I went to the school with my 13-year-old daughter. She was happy her school was open. But I was tense," said Lucky Begum, whose daughter is enrolled at a state-run school in Dhaka.

"The heat is too much," she told AFP. "She already got heat rashes from sweating. I hope she does not get sick." The suspension of in-person classes in the Philippines came after Manila witnessed its highest temperature ever recorded, with jeepney drivers also planning a nationwide strike on Monday and Tuesday.

The temperature in the capital hit a record 38.8C on Saturday, with the heat index reaching 45C, data from the state weather forecaster showed. The heat index measures what a temperature feels like, taking into account humidity. Many schools in the Philippines have no air-conditioning, leaving students to swelter in crowded, poorly ventilated classrooms.

Pak foreign minister Ishaq Dar appointed as deputy prime minister

Press Trust of India
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ISLAMABAD: In a surprise move, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar was on Sunday appointed as the country's deputy prime minister.

Dar, 73, a chartered accountant and a veteran politician, belongs to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party. According to a notification issued by the Cabinet Division, the appointment was made by Prime Minister Sharif "with immediate effect and until further orders".

The announcement was made when both Prime Minister Sharif and Foreign Minister Dar were away in Saudi Arabia to attend a World Economic Forum's moot. It was clear what specific responsibilities Dar would perform as deputy prime minister as traditionally, all powers are concentrated in the prime minister, who is the head of the government.

Dar is considered close to former premier Nawaz Sharif due to matrimonial links between the two families, as his son is the son-in-law of the elder Sharif.

He has served as finance minister in two previous governments. He was considered the party's answer to all economic problems, serving as finance minister for the fourth and last time in the previous Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)



Muhammad Ishaq Dar PTI

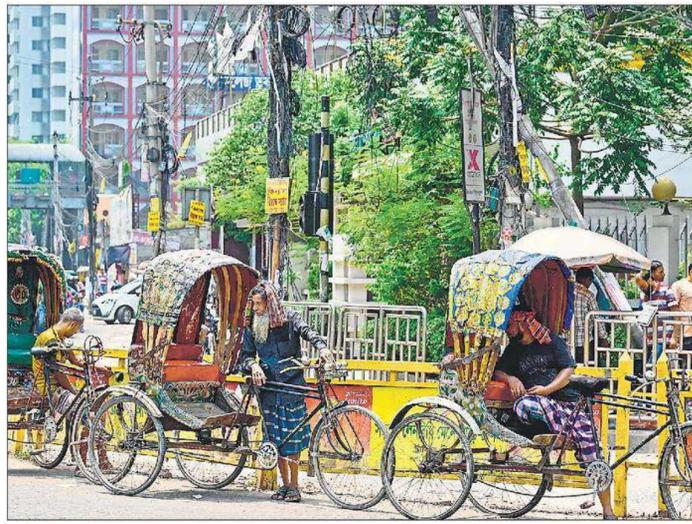
coalition government.

Despite being the party's go-to finance expert for decades, he was surprisingly made the foreign minister when Prime Minister Sharif shaped his cabinet in March.

Dar was tipped to be made chairman of the Senate, the upper House of the Parliament, but lost the race last month after the PML-N made a deal with the former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) to win its support for the coalition government.

The party agreed to give the president and chairman senate slot to the PPP, leaving Dar with no option but to settle for some other role in the government.

The PML-N and the PPP agreed on a power-sharing deal to form the coalition government even though the former prime minister Imran Khan-backed Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed independents won majority seats at the 266-member National Assembly.



Rickshaw pullers rest amid severe heatwave in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Friday. AFP

Ireland considers law amendment to return asylum seekers to UK amid border influx

Agence France-Presse
letters@hindustantimes.com

DUBLIN: Ireland is looking to amend the law to allow the return of asylum seekers to the United Kingdom, broadcaster RTE said on Sunday after an influx over the border with Northern Ireland.

Dublin's Minister of Justice Helen McEntee, who visits London on Monday, told a parliamentary committee this week that she estimates 80% of those applying for asylum in the republic came over the land border with Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told Sky News it was evidence that London's plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda is acting as a deterrent.

"What it shows, I think, is that the deterrent is... already having



Migrants run to board a smuggler's boat to cross the English Channel, on Gravelines beach, northern France, on Friday. AFP

an impact because people are worried about coming here," he said.

In response, a spokesperson for Ireland's Prime Minister

Simon Harris said the leader "does not comment on the migration policies of any other country but he is very clear about the importance of protect-

ing the integrity of the migration system in Ireland," RTE reported. "Ireland has a rules-based system that must always be applied firmly and fairly."

The spokesperson added that the Irish PM had asked his justice minister "to bring proposals to Cabinet next week to amend existing law regarding the designation of safe 'third countries' and allowing the return of inadmissible International Protection applicants to the UK".

McEntee is expected to discuss a new returns policy when she meets UK interior minister James Cleverly in London on Monday.

The UK's Rwanda bill passed final parliamentary approval last Monday after a prolonged debate. Sunak aims to deter asylum seekers from using small boats to enter the UK from northern Europe.

{ RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR } OLEKSANDR TARAN'S MOBILE ARTILLERY UNIT IS NOT PART OF UKRAINE'S MILITARY

Ukrainian 'Grandpa' leads over-60s unit fighting Russian forces for free



Members of 'Steppe Wolves' tactical group convert BM-21 Grad rocket system for use against Russian troops during Ukraine conflict in Zaporizhzhia region, on Saturday. REUTERS

Reuters
letters@hindustantimes.com

ZAPORIZHZHIA REGION: Oleksandr Taran's mobile artillery unit isn't officially part of Ukraine's military, but that hasn't stopped his men from destroying Russian targets on their own dime.

"We ... get by thanks to the pension fund," the 68-year-old commander - whose call sign is "Grandpa" - said with a chuckle. Taran's all-volunteer unit, the Steppe Wolves, is comprised of dozens of Ukrainian men mostly over 60 years old who are considered too old to be drafted but still want to fight.

Roving behind the front line with truck-mounted rocket launchers, they take orders from field commanders and work with other troops, contributing to the war effort despite lacking official support from the military.

The unit is funded by donations and stocked with faulty rounds they repair themselves as well as weapons captured from the enemy. Both are delivered to them by front-line troops.

When Reuters recently visited their base in the south-eastern Zaporizhzhia region, they were preparing 122mm Grad rocket rounds that were later fired by troops from another unit. "The commanders that provide us with targets are happy," said a 63-year-old fighter with the call sign "Zorro". "They give us more targets (and) help us with ammunition however they can."

Taran, the commander, said his unit has been attempting to officially join Ukraine's armed forces to directly receive ammunition - and salaries - but has been unsuccessful. The unit also includes younger men who have been ruled unfit to fight.

Willing and able

Over two years into Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine's mobilisation effort is struggling amid flagging enthusiasm.

Russian troops have been advancing in the east, and analysts say Ukraine's shortage of manpower needs to be addressed.

Some prominent Ukrainian and foreign supporters of the war effort have urged Zelensky to significantly reduce the mobilisation age.

Earlier this month, Zelensky approved new measures allowing the military to call up more troops and tighten punishment for evasion. He also reduced the mobilisation age from 27 to 25.

Taran, who has been fighting since Moscow launched its war in 2014, said coercion would be unlikely to replace genuine enthusiasm from a potential recruit.

Cholera cases rise to 26 on French island of Mayotte

MAMOUZOU: Mayotte, a French island in the Indian Ocean, said on Sunday that it is facing a cholera outbreak with 26 cases straining its medical resources. After reporting its first locally acquired cases on Friday, in addition to 10 imported cases in the past month, patient numbers doubled in 48 hours. Olivier Brahic, head of the ARS health authority, described the medical staffing situation at the main hospital as "highly critical." Cholera, an infectious disease, leads to severe diarrhoea, vomiting, muscle cramps, and spreads quickly under poor sanitary conditions. AFP

Italian PM Meloni says will stand in EU Parl elections

ROME: Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni plans to run in the upcoming European Parliament elections to bolster her far-right Brothers of Italy party's influence. Meloni's candidacy aims to leverage the party's national appeal at the EU level, although EU regulations mandate immediate resignation for winners holding ministerial positions. Meloni envisions replicating her party's success in Europe, aiming to unite right-wing forces against the left. At a party event in Pescara, she emphasised her government's achievements in combatting illegal immigration, supporting families, and upholding Christian values. AFP

WT20 selection: Picking the right pace allies for Bumrah

India's spearhead has been brilliant, but not the other seamers likely to be selected in T20 World Cup squad

Aditya Chaturvedi

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MUMBAI: Ten wickets. This was India's margin of defeat in the semi-finals of the 2022 T20 World Cup. It's the biggest loss they have suffered in a World Cup knockout game. They posted a below-par total of 168/6 against England at the Adelaide Oval, and then the inability to pick a single wicket resulted in a bitter memory for fans. Ominously, as we head towards the upcoming edition of the marquee event, India's bowling concerns remain. None bigger than the second pacer's slot.

A major advantage this time around, of course, is the presence of Jasprit Bumrah. The 30-year-old had missed the previous edition due to a back injury. But since his comeback, he has continued to establish himself as one of the finest bowlers of his generation. In the ongoing Indian Premier League, the gulf in class between Bumrah and the rest has been undeniable. In a tournament that's seen astonishing totals, he has maintained an economy rate of just 6.63 and is the leading wicket-taker.

As is evident from Mumbai Indians' struggles though, there is only so much Bumrah can do by himself through the course of a tournament. And as India's T20 World Cup squad awaits announcement, it wouldn't be unfair to say that the most worrying choice seems to be that of the second fast bowler. With Mohammed Shami unavailable due to injury, the situation right now is a far cry from what it was during last year's ODI World Cup where India's pace department put on a scintillating show.

The ones most likely to make the cut are Mohammed Siraj and Arshdeep Singh. Neither though has shown much promise so far in IPL 2024. While



Banking on bowlers to deliver

While this year's IPL has been hard on the bowlers, they will hope for a more even contest at the T20 World Cup

SPINNERS IN IPL 2024 WICKETS

YUZVENDRA CHAHAL, Rajasthan Royals

Wickets: 13

Matches: 9
Best: 3/11
Economy: 9.00
Average: 23.53

KULDEEP YADAV, Delhi Capitals

Wickets: 12

Matches: 7
Best: 4/55
Economy: 8.44
Average: 19.00

RAVI BISHNOI, Lucknow Super Giants

Wickets: 5

Matches: 9
Best: 2/25
Economy: 8.76
Average: 45.00

PACERS IN IPL 2024 WICKETS

JASPRIT BUMRAH, Mumbai Indians

Wickets: 14

Matches: 9
Best: 5/21
Economy: 6.63
Average: 17.07

MUKESH KUMAR, Delhi Capitals

Wickets: 13

Matches: 7
Best: 3/14
Economy: 11.05
Average: 21.69

ARSHDEEP SINGH, Punjab Kings

Wickets: 12

Matches: 9
Best: 4/29
Economy: 9.63
Average: 25.16

Siraj has picked six wickets in nine games at an economy of 9.50. Arshdeep has 12 wickets in nine games at 9.93. Siraj can be a handful on slightly faster pitches, but that's unlikely to be the case in the Caribbean and USA. Arshdeep, on the other hand, has an edge as a left-arm pacer and also the experience of having played in the last T20 World Cup. But the concern with both these bowlers is that they tend to get rattled when batters get stuck into them. India will need a calm head to operate alongside Bumrah in the death overs, and the question is will Siraj or Arshdeep be able to handle that pressure?

Then there are Avesh Khan, Mukesh Kumar and T Natarajan. In terms of dealing with the death overs, these three have perhaps shown more composure

in recent times. Avesh and Mukesh can hurry batters and find the blockhole consistently, but overall they've been erratic so far in IPL. Natarajan has a number of useful variations too at his disposal and has been the most economical of the lot. But whether or not he can stay injury-free is a key factor.

In a way, picking the second and third pacer is the safest decision Ajit Agarkar and his selection committee can make. When it comes to the opening batter's or wicket-keeper's slot, for instance, there could be a lot to debate.

But due to the lack of clear favourites in terms of fast bowlers, there really isn't much scope for a wrong choice. In such a scenario, going with an in-form bowler like Sandeep Sharma, who's bagged eight

wickets in four games at an economy of 7.13 in IPL 2024, could also be considered.

As far as the spinners are concerned, Ravindra Jadeja is likely to remain the first choice. The left-arm spinner has picked just four wickets in eight games in IPL 2024, but his ability with the bat and in the field makes him indispensable. For the second and third spinner's slots, it's going to be a toss-up between Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Ravi Bishnoi, Axar Patel and R Ashwin.

Chahal, who claimed 21 wickets in the IPL last year and 27 the year before that, has the most wickets among spinners this time as well. But his shortcomings with the bat and in the field are tough to look beyond, which is probably why he's never played a T20 World Cup

game. And while Bishnoi has featured consistently in T20Is over the past couple of years with decent returns, Ashwin brings experience and variety with his off-spin. If batting depth is the approach India lean towards, Axar will probably be the strongest choice. Although his skillset is similar to Jadeja's, his ability with the bat will offer great balance to the side.

Kuldeep is perhaps enjoying the brightest phase so far in his career and is the frontrunner to partner Jadeja at the World Cup. He's an attacking bowler and could provide those crucial breakthroughs in the middle overs. The left-arm wrist spinner is high on confidence after his success in Test cricket and has also delivered a couple of match-winning performances in the IPL this year.



CSK skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad on his way to 98 against SRH at Chepauk on Sunday.

Gaikwad leads CSK to big win over SRH

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MUMBAI: As is the case during qualifying before a Formula One race when drivers push the hardest in their final lap to improve grid position, India's T20 World Cup hopefuls are giving it their all in IPL 2024 with the selection meeting around the corner. After a match-winning effort by Sanju Samson the previous day, it was Ruturaj Gaikwad's turn to play a captain's knock as he powered Chennai Super Kings to a 78-run victory against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday.

Gaikwad missed out on a second successive century (98 off 54b), but along with Daryl Mitchell (52 off 32b) and Shivam Dube (39* off 20b), another player in the reckoning for a World Cup spot, he took CSK to a formidable 213/3 after being asked to bat first at Chepauk. Sunrisers were pegged back early by a three-wicket burst from Tushar Deshpande (4/27) and were bowled out for 134 in 18.5 overs.

With four victories in their first six games, CSK were on a roll before consecutive defeats against Lucknow Super Giants put them in a spot of bother. Their latest success has put them back in a promising position with SRH also a contender for the playoffs despite successive losses.

Ajinkya Rahane fell for

TODAY'S MATCH
KKR VS DC
WHERE: KOLKATA | WHEN: 7:30 PM

HEAD-TO-HEAD
15 DC WON
17 KKR WON
33 MATCHES PLAYED

PREVIOUS MATCH
KKR: Lost to PBKS by 8 wickets | DC: Beat MI by 10 runs

another low score at the top of the order but Gaikwad and Mitchell went on to add a 107-run partnership for the second wicket.

Mitchell, who was picked for ₹14 crore by CSK, hadn't found his best earlier in the season, but the New Zealand batter struck form after a slow start with some typically powerful shots down the ground.

Gaikwad, however, was the one who set the pace with sparkling strokeplay. The 27-year-old making it to the World Cup squad remains a long shot, but he's doing his reputation no harm by leading the way for the five-time champions. He hit 10 fours and three sixes and was dismissed in the final over.

The visitors did reasonably well to pull things back in the middle but CSK got the push they needed thanks to another belligerent knock by Dube. The

left-hander showed his incredible six-hitting prowess by going after Pat Cummins and T Natarajan before the CSK faithful got their money's worth with a cameo by MS Dhoni (5* off 2).

Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma, the most devastating opening pair this season, were expected to provide another strong start but it was Deshpande who stole the show with the new ball.

The right-arm pacer was hit for a couple of sixes by Head but fought back by removing the Australian left-hander and Anmolpreet Singh off consecutive deliveries. He followed that up by getting rid of Abhishek in his next over to put CSK firmly on top.

Brief scores: CSK 213/3 in 20 overs (R Gaikwad 98, D Mitchell 52). SRH 134 in 18.5 overs (A Markram 32, T Deshpande 4/27). CSK won by 78 runs.

Power-hitting Jacks, Kohli help Royal Challengers cruise past Gujarat



Virat Kohli (L) and Will Jacks celebrate RCB's win.

Rasesh Mandani

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MUMBAI: Virat Kohli proved a point by taming the spinners while Will Jacks powered to his most high-profile hundred as Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) gave another improved account of themselves, beating Gujarat Titans by nine wickets in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

RCB's third win of the tournament in 10 games in the Ahmedabad heat still couldn't lift them from the bottom of the points table. But it at least sent a message to their loyal fan base that they will continue to fight in their remaining games.

GT got 42 runs in their first six overs, 96 in the middle overs and 62 at the death to set up a 201-run

chase for RCB. These are what used to be par scores for every phase. They no longer are. The batters have given ample evidence of that in IPL 2024.

Jacks' astonishing power-hitting (100* - 41b, 5x4, 10x6) trumped Shikhar Khan's 58 (30b, 3x4, 5x6). RCB second lead Kohli (70* - 44b, 6x4, 3x6) and bettered Sai Sudharsan's 84 not out (49b, 8x4, 4x6) as the team made short work of GT's 200/3 in 16 overs.

RCB's acceleration was remarkable, in them being 98/1 after 10 overs and how they were able to smash 108 runs in the next six overs and win, with only one wicket down and with 24 balls to spare.

At the half-way stage of RCB's innings, Jacks, the big-hitter from

Team	P	Won	Lost	NRR	Pts
1 Rajasthan Royals	9	8	1	0.694	16
2 Kolkata Knight Riders	8	5	3	0.972	10
3 Chennai Super Kings	9	5	4	0.810	10
4 Sunrisers Hyderabad	9	5	4	0.075	10
5 Lucknow Super Giants	9	5	4	0.059	10
6 Delhi Capitals	10	5	5	-0.276	10
7 Gujarat Titans	10	4	6	-1.113	8
8 Punjab Kings	9	3	6	-0.187	6
9 Mumbai Indians	9	3	6	-0.261	6
10 Royal Challengers	10	3	7	-0.415	6

England, was batting on a run-a-ball 16. He was unable to connect a lot of his heaves against spin while Kohli was playing a commanding innings, taming GT's skilful spin trio of Rashid Khan,

Noor Ahmed and Sai Kishore. That's when Shubman Gill introduced pacer Mohit Sharma. Jacks made some room and deposited him for maximum over midwicket. The 25-year-old

said the confidence to hit big through the innings came from his first six against Noor in the 14th over. Jacks muscled 58 runs in the next two overs to take RCB home.

Mohit, attempting to recover from his mauling against Rishabh Pant in the previous match against Delhi Capitals, was again at the receiving end. Jacks dented Mohit's confidence further with two boundaries and three sixes in his over, spotting his slower balls early. Continuing his pyrotechnics, Jacks took to Rashid's leg-spin, hitting his googlies at will over mid-wicket into the stands, from an identical base at the crease.

Having turbo charged from 17 off 17 to 94 off 40, Jacks launched T20's most decorated leg-spinner

over cow corner for six to complete the hundred and RCB's win. Jacks was happy. Kohli was happier, for his team-mate and his own crafty spin-hitting — 61 of his 70 runs came against spinners at a strike-rate of 179.41. This after his middle-overs slow down against spin in the previous match against Sunrisers Hyderabad had come in for criticism though RCB won that game too.

"All the people who talk about strike rates and me not playing spin well are the ones who love talking about this stuff. For me, it's just about winning the game for the team," Kohli said. **Brief scores:** GT 200/3 (Sai Sudharsan 84*, Shikhar Khan 58). RCB 206/1 in 16 overs (W Jacks 100*, V Kohli 70*). RCB won by nine wickets.

HINDUSTAN TIMES MEDIA MARKETING INITIATIVE

Achieving financial success: Practical tips for everyday investors

People often say, 'I want to be rich.' But the real question is, 'Are you willing to do what it takes to get there?' Everybody dreams of becoming wealthy. It is the ultimate passport to financial freedom. But what exactly is wealth? Technically, wealth represents the value of all assets owned by a particular individual, community, or company. Net worth is the most common measure of wealth, determined by subtracting debts from the total market value of assets.

But wealth differs from income. It is not a continuous flow but a snapshot of assets at a particular time. Unlike income, which is variable, wealth measures the total value of assets accumulated at a given moment. While some of us have been blessed with legacy wealth, the rest must build it independently. So, how do you create wealth? Here are 8 mantras Ajay Lakhotia, Founder and CEO of StockGro recommends that investors could try!

- TIP 1: KEEP ASIDE 6 TIMES OF YOUR MONTHLY SALARY**
This builds a safety net, ensuring financial stability during unexpected events. Allocate these funds wisely, considering safe options like insurance or fixed deposits for accessibility and security. Essential for your financial health.
- TIP 2: PLACE 20-50% OF YOUR SALARY FOR INVESTMENTS**
Setting aside a portion of your salary for investments, ideally between 20% and 50%, is a prudent financial strategy. If risk isn't your thing, you can try traditional options like Fixed Deposits (FDs). They're safe but yield negative long-term returns when factoring in inflation. However, better alternatives exist.
 - Consider debt funds for a conservative approach or Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs) for gold investment with a 2.5% annual interest.



- Exchange-traded funds (ETFs) track indices or commodities, offering passive investment options.
- Mutual Funds and Equity Linked Savings Scheme (ELSS) funds, cater to various preferences.
- Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) allow participation in real estate ventures without direct ownership.
- Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) combine equity and debt, promoting infrastructure investment.
- Liquid funds offer stability with short-term, low-volatility investments.
- Private equity involves acquiring and managing companies before

- divesting them.
- Explore secondary market shares, but diversify to mitigate risks and optimise returns. You can understand this better by learning more about investing on simulated market platforms like StockGro.
- TIP 3: DIVERSIFY INVESTMENTS ACROSS LOW-CORRELATION ASSET CLASSES TO MINIMISE PORTFOLIO RISK**
Diversification spreads investments to reduce risk, similar to not putting all your eggs in one basket. It helps balance risk and reward, potentially increasing returns without added risk. A diversified portfolio can protect you during market volatility. While not foolproof, it can mitigate losses during rough periods.
- TIP 4: MAKE USE OF 80C AND 80D (DEDUCTIONS) TO SAVE ON TAXES**
You can reduce your taxes as an Indian resident by deductions from Sections 80C and 80D. Section 80C lets you save on taxes by investments in options like the Public Provident Fund (PPF), Equity Linked Savings Scheme (ELSS), National Savings Certificates (NSC), and life insurance premiums. Section 80D also helps you to save on taxes for health insurance premiums, securing your wealth and health.
- TIP 5: YOUNGSTERS SHOULD INVEST 70-80% OF THEIR INCOME**
For young investors starting their journey, consider allocating 70-80% of your income to investments. Tailor your asset allocation to your risk appetite:
 - Conservative: You prefer low-risk options like fixed deposits, gold, government bonds, or blue-chip stocks.
 - Aggressive: You are comfortable with high risks for potentially high rewards, such as crypto currencies and small-cap stocks.

- Risk-averse: You seek a balanced approach, combining debt instruments with higher-risk options like stocks and mutual funds. When young, balance aggression with risk management and asset diversification!
 - TIP 6: STRATEGIC FINANCIAL PLANNING FOR LIFE'S MILESTONES**
Set short and long-term financial goals like education, weddings, or travel. Allocate resources based on timelines and required amounts. Prioritise saving and budgeting to meet goals effectively.
 - TIP 7: LIMIT DEBT TO NO MORE THAN 10% OF YOUR INCOME**
Limit borrowing to avoid financial strain and long-term stability. Prioritise saving to minimise debt-related risks.
 - TIP 8: LIMIT LUXURY SPENDING**
Spend only 5-10% on luxuries to invest towards your long-term goals.
- THE BOTTOM LINE**
The best way to build wealth is to avoid get-rich-quick schemes and invest regularly yet patiently. The most important part is to get started - the sooner the better! Earn money, save it and invest it smartly!
- Disclaimer:** Ajay Lakhotia is Founder and CEO of StockGro. The views expressed are personal



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India's men archers topple Korea, win World Cup gold

The men's recurve team pulls off the unthinkable against Olympic champions in final in Shanghai

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MUMBAI: The Koreans aren't used to this in recurve archery. Neither are the Indians. But on a Sunday morning in Shanghai accompanied by steady drizzle, the Indian men's team dazzled. India won the men's recurve team gold at the Archery World Cup Stage 1 beating reigning Olympic champions South Korea 5-1 (57-57, 57-55, 55-53) in the final, a result that was not only stunning but also strengthens the qualification chances of the men's team for the Paris Olympics.

The trio of Dhiraj Bommadevara, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav did the near unthinkable against an archery nation that gobbles up World Cup medals for fun. And it was no ordinary Korean team—Kim Je-deok and Kim Woo-jin were part of their Tokyo Games winning team while Lee Woo-seok was among the troika that pocketed last year's Asian Games gold.

It is India's first World Cup men's team gold for 14 years. The last win, also in Shanghai, was achieved in 2010 by Rahul Banerjee, Jayanta Talukdar and Tarundeep Rai.

"This result gives us a big boost in the Olympic year," Dhiraj, the only Indian to earn a Paris Games quota in archery so far, said from Shanghai. "This medal feels good, especially with the amount of work we've been doing in the past couple of years, keeping just this Olympics in mind."

Given that the Indian men's team had missed out on several quota opportunities last year, there was plenty riding on this World Cup. They went past Indonesia 5-3 in the second round, Spain 5-1 in the quarter-finals and Italy 5-1 in the semis. Korea, who had blanked Taipei 6-0, are a



Tarundeep Rai (left), Dhiraj Bommadevara (centre) and Pravin Jadhav after winning on Sunday.

How India teams can qualify for Paris

ALREADY OVER	WHAT'S LEFT
<p>3 TEAMS Top three teams at the 2023 Worlds</p> <p>3 TEAMS Continental champions of Europe, Asia and the Americas</p> <p>1 TEAM Host nation (France)</p>	<p>3 TEAMS Top three finishers at the final qualification event in Antalya in June</p> <p>2 TEAMS The next highest ranked teams in the world as on June 24</p>

bridge too far too often for most teams.

Not on Sunday for the Indians who, as if the Korean obstacle wasn't stiff enough, had to do without the support of a coach (the Indian contingent was penalised at this event for a rule pertaining to the maximum number of officials in the field of play, according to World Archery).

"We came in with no real expectations as such. Our mind-set was to focus on ourselves and give our absolute best," Dhiraj said.

The Indians fired three 10s, including two Xs (inner 10s), in the first set that was split 1-1 after both teams scored 57 from their six shots. Challenged, the Koreans crumbled. The second set saw a couple of 8s from them while the

Indians delivered four 10s (three Xs) to bag it 57-55 and surge ahead. They took the momentum into the third set (55-53) where the Koreans couldn't find a 10 while the Indians remained solid, completing the mighty task for a memorable triumph.

The absence of the coach meant the Indian trio used the time between shots to talk a lot amongst themselves, which kept them composed in those damp conditions.

"We kept conversing a lot—a lot more than the Koreans—about the conditions and the need to shift our aim accordingly. That helped big time. This team shares a special bond, but today it was even greater," Dhiraj said. "This medal reminds us that we are on the right track. And this is just the

start."

Dhiraj's individual silver from the Asian Continental Qualifier Tournament last November remains the only Paris quota won by Indian archers. The men's team though now has a great chance of making the cut.

With the qualification system tweaked for Paris—earlier, two-thirds of the quotas were filled at the World Championships—there are two more spots on offer through world rankings and three more at the final qualification tournament (World Cup Stage 3 in Antalya, Turkey in June). Currently, the Indian men's team is ranked third, behind Korea (already qualified) and China. This World Cup gold should further earn India valuable points and solidify their ranking. Thus,

while securing the quota at the final World Cup event in June would be the primary goal, the ranking route too is a strong back-up for the men's team.

Deepika marks WC return with silver

If the men's team had a gold to savour, Deepika Kumari had a return to cherish. Back at the World Cup stage after two years, the ace archer brought home the women's recurve silver.

Missing from the international circuit last year after becoming a mother in late 2022, Deepika took down Koreans Jeon Hunyoung and Nam Suhyeon in the quarter-finals and semi-finals before Lim Si-yeon became a Korean too many. She defeated Deepika 6-0 in the final.

Cummings and Samad score as Bagan advance to ISL final

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KOLKATA: All the stadium emcee had to say was "Joy". "Mohun Bagan" roared 62,007 supporters, the shout soaring into the sky and bouncing back to the Salt Lake stadium. Sunday's 2-0 win for Mohun Bagan Super Giant against Odisha FC in the second leg of the semi-final meant Antonio Lopez Habas had done it again—come from behind to play another final of the Indian Super League (ISL). On Saturday, they will meet the winners of the Mumbai City FC-FC Goa semi-final here.

Habas has never lost an ISL second leg semi-final. In 2015, the 2-1 win wasn't enough to overturn a 0-3 verdict in the first leg against Chennaiyin FC. But in 2019-20, it was with ATK Mohun Bagan erasing a 0-1 defeat to Bengaluru FC to win 3-1 here. Then, they had gone all the way. An encore will make Habas the second coach, after Sergio Lobera, to do an ISL double. Mohun Bagan, remember, have won the league shield beating Mumbai City FC 2-1 in a must-win tie.

Sahal Abdul Samad will be



Sahal Abdul Samad scores Bagan's second goal on Sunday.

credited the second goal but it was Manvir Singh's industry that produced it. Heat-proof and tiredness-proof on a sticky, steamy evening, Singh hared on the right like the game had just begun and was not 90+3 minutes old. The cut-back hit Amrinder Singh, the head of Samad, a swing and a miss before he walked the ball in.

From helping the defence to running at defenders, right wing-back Singh encapsulated the desire and hunger the defending champions showed.

Roy Krishna still proved to be a threat but a combination of saves

from Vishal Kaith, Hector Yuste's goalline kick to deny Isak Vanla-ruatfela, crucial interceptions from Dipendu Biswas and Manvir Singh, bodies-on-the-line defending and the slice of luck needed to win such games proved enough.

Jason Cummings' 22nd minute goal was what the hosts, trailing 1-2 from Bhubaneswar, needed. That happened when Dimitri Petratos' stinger, after Thapa's crossfield ball to Petratos had set the move going, was deflected by Amrinder Singh into Cummings' path.

Young Indian women's team enters Uber Cup quarter-finals

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NEW DELHI: Indian women entered the quarter-final of the Uber Cup badminton team championships with a second straight victory, a facile 4-1 result over Singapore in Group A in Chengdu, China, on Sunday.

The young squad which defeated Canada 4-1 in the group opener on Saturday, rallied after world No.18 Yeo Jia Min beat Ashmita Chahal 21-15, 21-18 in 30 minutes, her fourth victory in as many meetings against the Indian.

National champions Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra restored parity by winning the doubles rubber 21-15, 21-16 against world No.570 Xiao En Heng and Yu Jia Jin before Isharani Baruah gave the Asian champions a 2-1



Anmol Kharb.

lead, beating world No.151 Insiyrah Khan 21-13, 21-16 in 31 minutes.

Former junior national champions Simran Singhi and Ritika Thaker, who had lost their doubles contest against Canada, then wrapped up the tie with a thumping 21-8, 21-11 win over world No.971 Yi Ting Elsa Lai and Michelle Zan.

Anmol Kharb maintained her unbeaten record in the third and final singles with a 21-15, 21-13 win

over Lee Xin Yi Megan.

"It was a very important match because winning this tie meant we would qualify for the quarter-finals. So, there was a bit of pressure. But the pressure was in a good way. We all are together and it was a great match," Mishra said.

"Even though Ashmita lost, she gave her best. We are happy about that and it was our turn to give our best. Yesterday was our first match. So we weren't that confident. Today we were more confident. The side courts have a little bit of drift. Our court was all right."

India next face China—the record 15-time champions also qualified for the last eight after beating Canada 5-0—in the last group clash on Tuesday. Though a dead rubber, the winner will top Group A.



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka (l) and Declan Rice celebrate after beating Tottenham 3-2 on Sunday.

Man City keep pressure on Arsenal with easy win

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LONDON: Manchester City overcame relegation-threatened Nottingham Forest 2-0 on Sunday to close to within one point of Premier League leaders Arsenal and keep the destiny of the title race in their own hands.

Mikel Arteta's team had thrown down the gauntlet earlier in the day, fending off a Tottenham fight-back to win 3-2, briefly moving four points clear of City. But the champions—chasing an unprecedented fourth straight English top-flight title—saw off a spirited Forest, with goals from Josko Gvardiol and Erling Haaland in either half.

Forest will rue missed chances, including two clear-cut opportunities for Chris Wood. City remain firm favourites to land yet another league title with four games remaining—one more than Arsenal. Third-placed Liverpool are four points behind City having played a game more and are realistically out of the title picture.

Forest, last month docked four points for breaches of Premier League financial rules, remain just one point outside the relegation zone with three games to go. Arsenal held on for a pulsating win in the north London derby. Arteta's side silenced the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium with a three-goal blast before half-time. Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg's own goal put Arsenal ahead before Bukayo

STANDINGS

TEAM	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Arsenal	35	25	5	5	57	80
Man City	34	24	7	3	50	79
Liverpool	35	22	9	4	41	75
Aston Villa	35	20	7	8	21	67
Tottenham	33	18	6	9	15	60

Saka and Kai Havertz netted to leave Arsenal in complete control. Cristian Romero and Son Heung-min struck for Tottenham after the interval to set up a nervous finish, but Arsenal clung on by their finger tips.

Spirited fightback
"I was praying (at the end)," Arteta said. "So many Spurs balls into our box. It was a very emotional game in a great atmosphere against a very good team."

After the despair of a damaging home defeat against Aston Villa and a Champions League quarter-final exit to Bayern Munich, the Gunners have bounced back impressively. Aware they have little margin for error with City chasing them, Arteta had called on his players to show their hunger for success and they responded.

Thrashing old foes Chelsea 5-0 on Tuesday was merely the appetiser ahead of the main course Arsenal served up for 3,000 of their jubilant fans packed into one corner of the stadium.

Arsenal famously won the league twice at Tottenham's old

White Hart Lane stadium, in 1971 and 2004.

The Gunners could not clinch silverware on enemy territory this time, but their fifth win in the last seven north London derbies kept them in the hunt to win the title for the first time in 20 years.

Defeat was a bitter blow for fifth-placed Tottenham, who are seven points behind fourth-placed Aston Villa with two games in hand to keep alive their fading hopes of qualifying for the Champions League.

"We allowed them way too easy access to our goal. It's unacceptable at this level and we paid a price for it against a very good team," Tottenham boss Ange Postecoglou said.

Arsenal emerged from a frantic start to snatch the lead in the 15th minute.

Saka's corner curled into the six-yard box, where Hojbjerg tried to head clear in front of Arsenal's Takehiro Tomiyasu but instead diverted the ball into his own net. Romero should have equalised when Arsenal keeper David Raya misjudged James Maddison's free-kick, allowing the defender to rise for a close-range header that he somehow guided against the post rather than into the empty net.

Micky van de Ven thought he had drawn Tottenham level when he slammed home after Pedro Porro's shot deflected into his path, but VAR intervened to rule the centre-back was marginally offside.

RENUKA STRIKES AS INDIA WOMEN BEAT BANGLADESH

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CHANDIGARH: Pacer Renuka Singh grabbed 3/18 to bowl India to a 44-run win in their first T20I against Bangladesh at Sylhet in the five-match series.

Singh made a fine comeback after she had gone without a wicket in her eight previous matches for RCB in the WPL. India scored 145/7 and restricted the hosts to 101/8.

The T20I series is seen as crucial build-up ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup to be held in Bangladesh in September-October. Opener Shafali Verma scored a 22-ball 31 to provide impetus and No.3 Yastika Bhatia scored 36 off 29. Kaur struck a 22-ball 30. Bangladesh lost the plot losing three wickets in powerplay. Renuka removed Dilara Akter (4) and Sobhana Mostary (6).
Brief scores: India 145/7 (S Verma 31, Y Bhatia 36, R Khan 3/23). B'desh 101/8 (N Sultana 51, R Singh 3/18). **India won by 44 runs.**

Maheshwari seals Olympic quota

NEW DELHI: Shooter Maheshwari Chauhan on Sunday sealed India's 21st quota place for the Paris Olympics by winning a silver medal in the women's skeet event on the concluding day of the ISSF Final Olympic Qualification Championship Shotgun in Doha.

Kirsten is Pak's white-ball coach

LAHORE: Pakistan on Sunday announced former South African opener Gary Kirsten and ex-Australian paceman Jason Gillespie as head coaches for different formats ahead of the T20 World Cup in June this year. Former India coach Kirsten will take over the white-ball teams while Gillespie will look after the Test side on a two-year contract.

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