



# Hindustan Times

## Phase-5 voting to lock fate of another 49 seats today

HT Correspondent

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**NEW DELHI:** Over 89.5 million people will vote across six states and two Union territories in the fifth of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections on Monday, sealing the political fate of 695 candidates, and among them several prominent leaders including Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, BJP leaders Rajnath Singh and Smriti Irani, and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah.

When the voting closes in 49 constituencies on Monday, 428 of the Lok Sabha's 543 seats will have gone to polls in the elections that began on April 19.

Among the seats going to polls, 13 are in Maharashtra, 14 in Uttar Pradesh including the politically decisive seats of Amethi and Rae Bareilly, seven in West Bengal, five in Bihar, three in Jharkhand, five in Odisha, one in Jammu and Kashmir, and the lone seat in Ladakh.

This round of elections is the smallest in its scope of the seven phases.

This phase will mark another landmark: voting in 24 of India's 36 states and Union territories will conclude on Monday. The focus will then



Election Commission officials with election material ahead of the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha polls, in Lucknow on Sunday. DEEPAK GUPTA/HT PHOTO

shift to the north-western states of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal and Delhi.

"The commission has called upon voters to turnout in greater numbers at polling stations and vote with responsibility and pride," the polling body said in a statement, although predictions of heatwaves and severe heatwaves at some of the constituencies could affect

voting.

Over 89.5 million people, including 42.6 million women and 5,409 third gender electors, are eligible to vote in this round and 947,000 polling officials have been deployed across 94,732 polling stations.

In this phase are 48 seats (not accounting for the one seat in Jammu and Kashmir where delimitation was held) where

the Congress had its weakest showing in 2019, winning only the Gandhi family stronghold of Rae Bareilly. The BJP and its allies won 41 seats and the rest were won by either Trinamool Congress (TMC) or Biju Janata Dal (BJD). In this poll season, TMC is part of the opposition INDIA bloc.

continued on →15

A SNAPSHOT OF PHASE 5 →P2

## The Manchester City Monopoly



Manchester City, inevitably, cruised to a 3-1 victory over West Ham on the season's final day on Sunday to secure a record-breaking fourth consecutive Premier League title. In a dream run, the footballing powerhouse has now won six of the last seven Premier League seasons. GETTY IMAGES

## BJP has launched 'Op Jhaadu' to jail AAP leaders, says Kejriwal

Paras Singh

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**NEW DELHI:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has set in motion a plan to "crush" the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), arrest all its senior leaders, seize its accounts and evict the party from its office, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Sunday, a day after Delhi Police arrested his longtime aide Bibhav Kumar following allegations that he assaulted party MP Swati Maliwal last week.

Kejriwal was addressing a gathering of AAP ministers, MLAs, MPs and senior party functionaries at the party's Rouse Avenue headquarters, ahead of an attempted protest march to the BJP headquarters, which Delhi Police stopped, citing prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Code of Crimi-

nal Procedure (CrPC). "The Prime Minister has decided to completely crush the AAP and the BJP has started 'Operation Jhaadu' so that the

**NEW DELHI:** AAP Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal, in a post on X on Sunday, criticised her party for taking out a march to protest the arrest of Bibhav Kumar, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal's aide.

Swati Maliwal posted on X in Hindi: "There was a time when we all came out to the

streets to get justice for Nirbhaya, are now shielding accused: Maliwal Today, after 12 years, we are out on the streets to save the accused who made the CCTV footage disappear and formatted the phone? I wish they had used this much force for Manish Sisodia ji. If he had been here, maybe this bad thing wouldn't have happened to me!" →P3

party does not grow and pose them a challenge. Through 'Operation Jhaadu', AAP's big leaders will be arrested; they are

continued on →8

## IRAN PRESIDENT RAISI MISSING AS HELICOPTER CRASHES IN HILLS

**DUBAI:** A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian crashed on Sunday as it was crossing mountain terrain in heavy fog, an Iranian official said, and rescuers were struggling to reach the site of the incident, with the lives of the two "at risk". →P7



## 17-YEAR-OLD BOY DRIVING DRUNK MOWS DOWN 2 PEOPLE NEAR PUB

**PUNE:** A 17-year-old boy was granted bail by a juvenile court on Sunday, hours after he allegedly hit a two-wheeler, killing two people on the spot, while driving a luxury car in an inebriated state, officials said. The speeding Porsche collided with one of the motorcycles in Kalyani Nagar area of Pune, following which its two riders fell off the vehicle and died on the spot, the FIR said. →P13

## ISRAELI AIR STRIKE ON GAZA HOSPITAL LEAVES AT LEAST 31 PEOPLE DEAD

**DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP):** An Israeli airstrike killed 31 people in Gaza and fighting with Hamas raged across the north on Sunday as Israel's leaders aired divisions over who should govern Gaza after the war. Palestinians reported more airstrikes and heavy fighting in northern Gaza, which has been largely isolated for months and where the World Food Programme says a famine is underway. →P7

### { CLIMATE CRISIS }

## Large shade-giving farmland trees have disappeared from heat-hit states: Study

Jayashree Nandi

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**NEW DELHI:** At a time when the impacts of the climate crisis are becoming severe, with most of India suffering from extreme heat, farmland trees with large crowns that provide cool shade have disappeared to an alarming extent, a new study has found. Of the 0.6 billion farmland

**OF THE 0.6 BILLION FARMLAND TREES MAPPED IN INDIA IN 2010-11, AROUND 11% DISAPPEARED BY '18**

trees mapped in India in 2010-11, around 11% had disappeared by 2018, according to research led by the department of geosciences

and natural resource management at the University of Copenhagen. These are trees with about 96 sqm crown cover.

The depletion is highest in Telangana, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, where extreme heat is more pronounced.

Moreover, from 2018-2022, over five million large farmland trees (about 67 sqm crown cover)

vanished, due partly to altered cultivation practices, where trees on farms are perceived as detrimental to crop yields.

"These observations are particularly unsettling given the current emphasis on agroforestry as a pivotal natural climate solution, playing a crucial role in both climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies," said the paper. →P12

# NUMBER THEORY

## Unravelling the nuts and bolts of LS polls' Phase 5

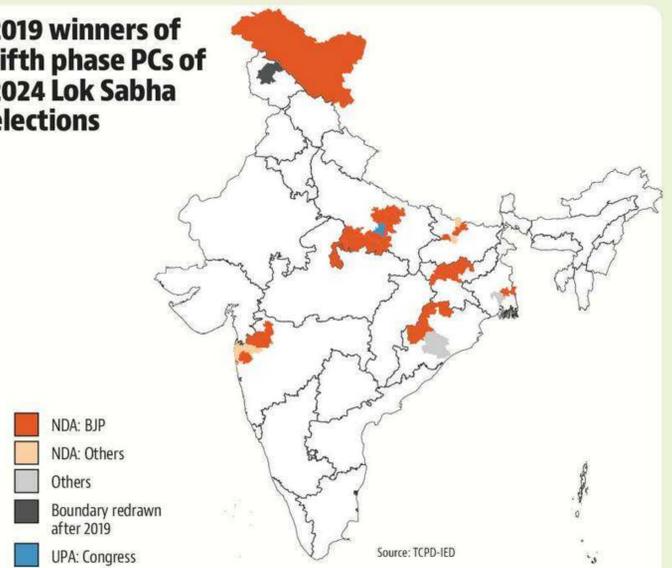
By Abhishek Jha

Forty-nine parliamentary constituencies (PCs) across six states and the Union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh will vote on Monday in the smallest of the seven phases of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This will conclude voting in overall 428 (including Surat, where no voting took place) of India's 543 PCs. At the state level, voting will be over in Maharashtra after today's polling. Overall, this will conclude voting in 24 of India's 36 states and UTs. In another four states — Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Jharkhand — the number of PCs that have finished voting will cross the halfway mark today. Here is a look at the past trends in the PCs voting today.

### 1 One of the most challenging PCs for the Congress since 2014

Past results are available for 48 of the 49 PCs voting today because the boundaries of Jammu and Kashmir PCs have been redrawn since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections in a delimitation exercise. Congress had won just one of these 48 PCs in 2019 (Rae Bareilly) and two in 2014 (Rae Bareilly and Amethi). Its allies had won no PC in either 2014 or 2019. This makes these 48 PCs one of the most challenging for the Congress. To be sure, the nearly nil tally of the Congress and allies in this phase does not mean that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and allies won everything else. Together, BJP and allies had won 41 of the 48 PCs in 2019 and 35 in 2014. The BJP on its own had won 32 and 27 PCs of in 2019 and 2014. Who won the remaining PCs? In both 2014 and 2019, all the remaining PCs were won by the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC). Neither of these two parties have a formal seat sharing arrangement with either the BJP or the Congress even in 2024. To be sure, these trends are partly a reflection of the fact that 35 of the 49 PCs voting today are in Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, all states that BJP and allies nearly swept in 2019. Another 12 PCs are in Odisha and West Bengal, where the BJP's challenge is the BJD and TMC rather than the Congress.

2019 winners of fifth phase PCs of 2024 Lok Sabha elections

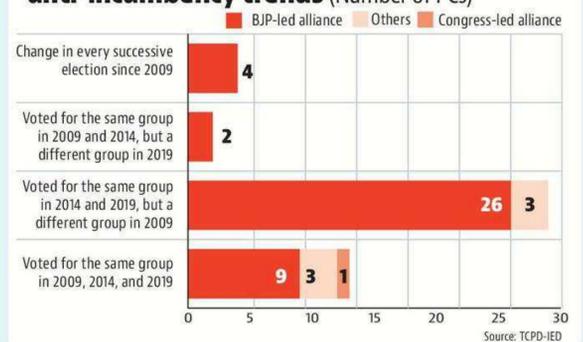


State	NDA:BJP	NDA:Others	Others	Redrawn	UPA:Congress	Grand Total
Bihar	3	2				5
Jammu & Kashmir				1		1
Ladakh						1
Jharkhand	3					3
Maharashtra	6	7				13
Orissa	3		2			5
Uttar Pradesh	13				1	14
West Bengal	3		4			7

### 2 Large share of incumbent parties was voted out in 2014 in these PCs, but not in 2019

While the BJP performed well in these PCs in 2014 and 2019, this was not the case in 2009. The BJP had won just five of these PCs in 2009 and its allies had won another four. This means that these PCs are a relatively recent stronghold of the BJP and allies. Therefore, the 48 PCs show high anti-incumbency in 2014 and low anti-incumbency in 2019 if parties are grouped as part of a BJP-led alliance, a Congress-led alliance, and others. 29 of the 48 PCs voted for the same group in 2014 and 2019, but voted for a different one in 2009. BJP and allies won 26 of these 29 PCs in 2019, while the others group won three. To be sure, 13 PCs were still won consistently by the same group since 2009, the earliest year up to which Lok Sabha elections can be tracked at PC-level. BJP and allies won nine of these PCs in 2019, others three, and the Congress has won Rae Bareilly consistently since 2009. Another six PCs have either changed their group in every successive election since 2009 or changed it in 2019 after voting for the same group in 2009 and 2014. All these six PCs were won by the BJP and allies in 2019.

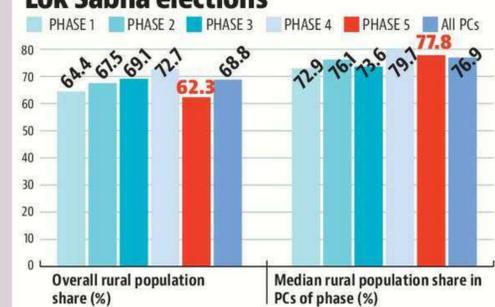
2019 winners in fifth phase PCs by anti-incumbency trends (Number of PCs)



### 3 Least rural phase on average, but only because of some big urban centres

According to 2011 census data aggregated to PC-level by How India Lives, the overall share of rural population in the PCs voting today is 62.3%, below the all-India average of 68.8% and the lowest among all the seven phases of the 2024 election. However, this is largely because Mumbai PCs are voting today, which are almost as populous as any other PC but completely urban. Other PCs in Maharashtra and West Bengal voting today are also more urban than the average Indian PC. However, at least half the PCs voting today are very rural. The median rural share in the PCs voting today is 77.8%, higher than the all-India level median of 76.9%.

Rural population by phases of 2024 Lok Sabha elections

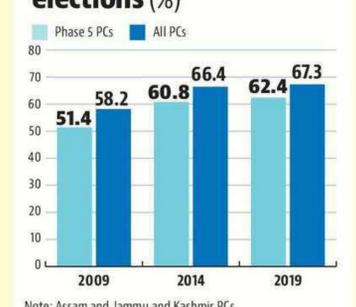


Note: Assam and Jammu and Kashmir PCs excluded because their boundaries have been redrawn since 2019. Source: HIL analysis of 2011 census data

### 4 These PCs have had very low turnout in the past three elections

Among the seven phases of this election, the fifth phase PCs have had the lowest turnout in all the past three Lok Sabha elections. To be sure, the turnout in these PCs has converged with the national average over time. The gap from the national average was 6.8 percentage points in 2009, which decreased to 5.6 percentage points and 4.9 percentage points in 2014 and 2019.

Turnout in Lok Sabha elections (%)



Note: Assam and Jammu and Kashmir PCs excluded because their boundaries have been redrawn since 2019. Source: TCPD-IED



# Hindustan Times

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Modi Sarkar**

**Will double the amount of  
Mudra Yojana to ₹20 lakh**

**Right Intent, Right Results**





Press the lotus button  Make BJP win

{ HT INTERVIEW }

## People of every caste and class voting for Modi: Shah

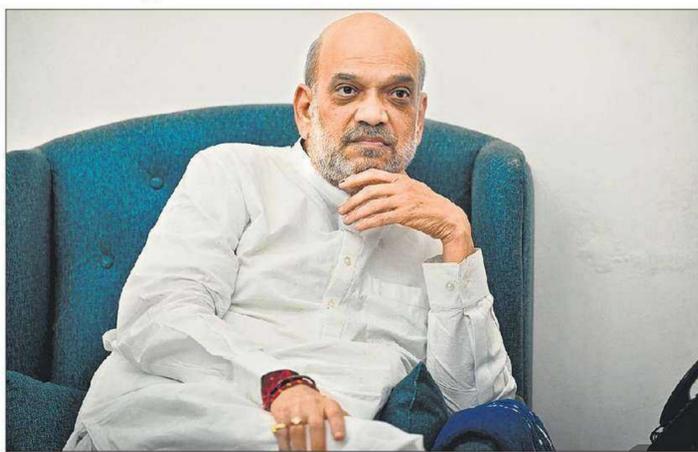
**HT Correspondent**  
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**NEW DELHI:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies will bag 400-plus seats in the ongoing elections as voters cutting across demographics are reposing faith in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, Union home minister Amit Shah said on Saturday.

People of every caste and class are voting for Modi, so much so that even supporters of other parties are sure that he will return as prime minister for a third term, Shah said in an interview with R Sukumar of Hindustan Times and Shashi Shekar of Hindustan at his residence in Delhi.

The BJP will retain most of its existing seats and add to its tally in hitherto less-penetrated geographies, he said.

"We will do exceptionally well in West Bengal and Odisha. In West Bengal, we will get 24 to 30 seats. We will form the government in Odisha (the assembly elections in the state are being conducted simultane-



SANCHIT KHANNA/HT PHOTO

ously), and win more than 17 Lok Sabha seats (of the 21)," Shah said. And across South India as a whole, the BJP would have the most seats, he added. The minister said apprehen-

sions pertaining to a marginally lower turnout this time were overplayed.

"I was worried (about the turnout figures) after the first phase, but by the time the third

phase of voting began, I discovered that the Opposition's voters were not showing up. They are deeply disappointed that the

continued on →15

FULL INTERVIEW →P11

## ARMY RESCUES 75 MANIPUR WOMEN CAUGHT IN CROSSFIRE

**Prawesh Lama**  
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**NEW DELHI:** The Army and Assam Rifles on Friday rescued 75 Meitei women under attack from Kuki militants, following a nearly two-hour long gunfight in the Wariocing area of Bishnupur district, officials said on Sunday. As the militants advanced, security forces blew a hooter to deter them, but they continued firing. Village volunteers returned the fire, resulting in a gunfight trapping the 75 unarmed women, the officials said. →P2

## GHAZIABAD MEN HELD FOR RAPING THEIR OWN SISTER

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**GHAZIABAD:** Ghaziabad police have arrested two men, aged 24 and 21, for allegedly raping their 14-year-old sister repeatedly over the past few months, officers said on Sunday. The incident came to light when the girl fell ill and doctors discovered that she was 22 weeks pregnant, said the officers. →P6

## Water reservoirs run alarmingly low: Data

**Zia Haq**  
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**NEW DELHI:** Hot weather and the knock-on effects of a poor monsoon in 2023 have pushed water storage in 150 centrally monitored reservoirs to their lowest level in five years, worsening water shortages in at least 16 states and shrinking hydro-power generation to a record low, official data showed on Sunday.

Storage in these nationally important water bodies — critical for drinking, irrigation and power generation — is now only one-fourth of their total capacity, having declined consecu-



The dire levels have worsened water shortages in 16 states. AP

tively for 32 weeks.

Parched conditions have triggered severe drinking water crises in cities such as Bengaluru,

Coimbatore, Chennai and Hyderabad. A prolonged dry spell has triggered Kerala's

continued on →8

## Monsoon hits Andaman Sea, 'red' alert for heat continues in Capital

**Jayashree Nandi**  
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**NEW DELHI:** A severe heatwave is expected to continue over northwest India and spread to central and east India over the next five days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned on

Sunday, even as the monsoon has advanced over the South Andaman Sea and Nicobar Islands.

The IMD has issued a "red" alert for all of northwest India for severe heat until at least May 23, implying that local agencies need to take action to prevent extreme heat-related emergencies. Maximum

temperatures on Saturday were in the range of 43-46°C in most of Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

"If people do not take precautionary measures, exposure to extreme heat can be fatal," said M Mohapatra, IMD director general. →FULL REPORT ON P2



HR software crafted for growing businesses

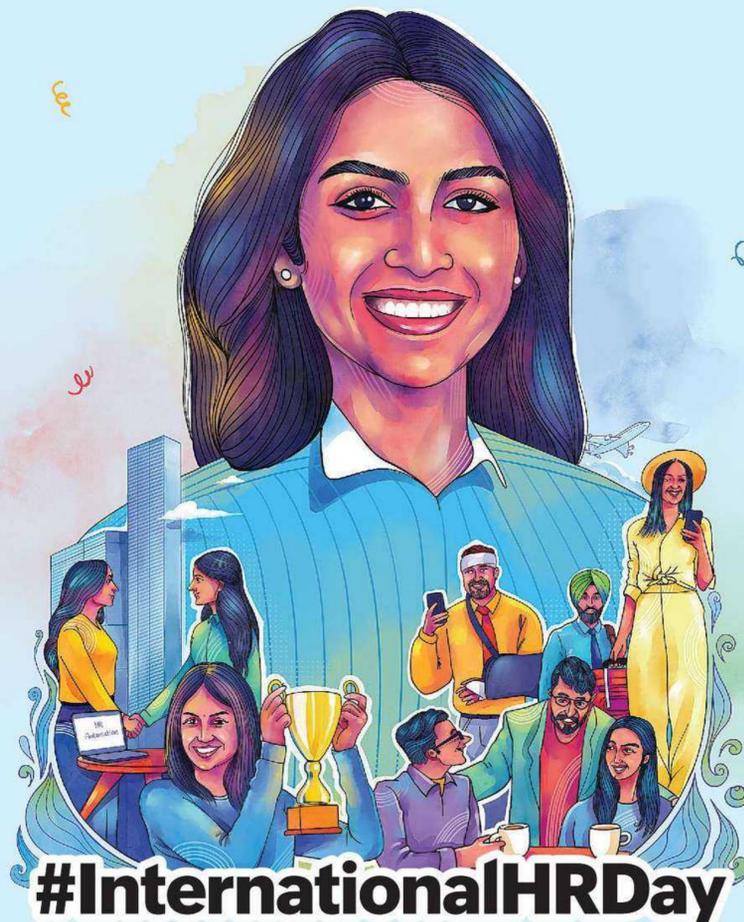
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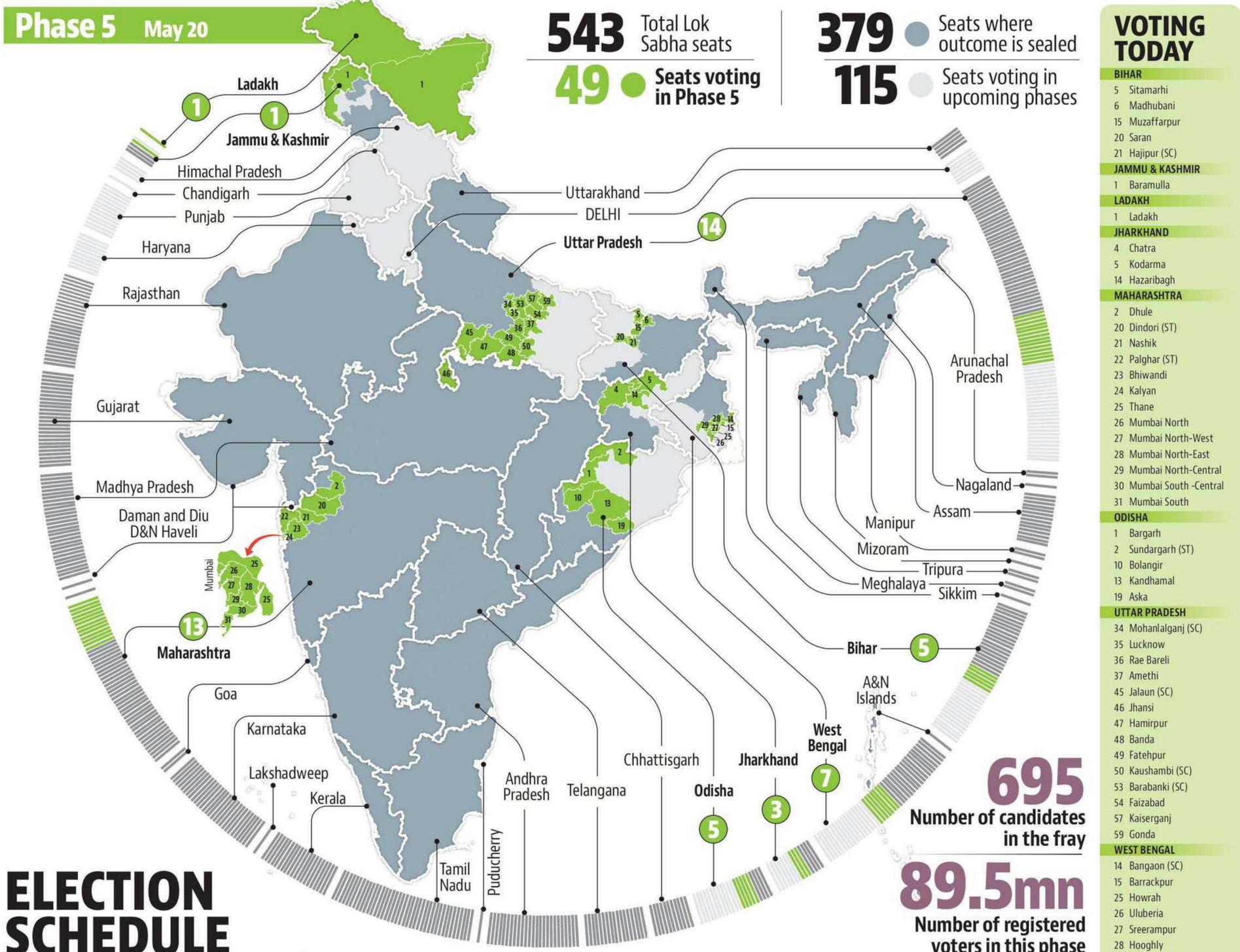


**#InternationalHRDay**

SPOTLIGHT ELECTIONS 2024

# STAGE SET FOR ROUND 5

A snapshot of the smallest phase of the Lok Sabha elections that will conclude voting in all of western India today



**VOTING TODAY**

**BIHAR**

- 5 Sitamarhi
- 6 Madhubani
- 15 Muzaffarpur
- 20 Saran
- 21 Hajipur (SC)

**JAMMU & KASHMIR**

- 1 Baramulla

**LADAKH**

- 1 Ladakh

**JHARKHAND**

- 4 Chatra
- 5 Kodarma
- 14 Hazaribagh

**MAHARASHTRA**

- 2 Dhule
- 20 Dindori (ST)
- 21 Nashik
- 22 Palghar (ST)
- 23 Bhiwandi
- 24 Kalyan
- 25 Thane
- 26 Mumbai North
- 27 Mumbai North-West
- 28 Mumbai North-East
- 29 Mumbai North-Central
- 30 Mumbai South-Central
- 31 Mumbai South

**ODISHA**

- 1 Bargarh
- 2 Sundargarh (ST)
- 10 Bolangir
- 13 Kandhamal
- 19 Aska

**UTTAR PRADESH**

- 34 Mohanlalganj (SC)
- 35 Lucknow
- 36 Rae Bareilly
- 37 Amethi
- 45 Jalaun (SC)
- 46 Jhansi
- 47 Hamirpur
- 48 Banda
- 49 Fatehpur
- 50 Kaushambi (SC)
- 53 Barabanki (SC)
- 54 Faizabad
- 57 Kaiserganj
- 59 Gonda

**WEST BENGAL**

- 14 Bangaon (SC)
- 15 Barrackpur
- 25 Howrah
- 26 Uluberia
- 27 Sreerampur
- 28 Hooghly
- 29 Arambag (SC)

## ELECTION SCHEDULE

**Phase 5 | May 20**

**49** Seats  
**8** States/UTs

Bihar (5), J&K (1), Jharkhand (3), Ladakh (1), Maharashtra (13), Odisha (5), Uttar Pradesh (14), West Bengal (7)

**2019 results**  
**41** NDA | **1** UPA | **6** Others | **1\*** Redrawn seats

**Phase 6 | May 25**

**58** Seats  
**8** States/UTs

Bihar (8), Delhi (7), Haryana (10), Jammu & Kashmir (1), Jharkhand (4), Odisha (6), Uttar Pradesh (14), West Bengal (8)

**2019 results**  
**45** NDA | **1** UPA | **12** Others

**Phase 7 | June 1**

**57** Seats  
**8** States/UTs

Bihar (8), Chandigarh (1), HP (4), J'hkhand (3), Odisha (6), Punjab (13), Uttar Pradesh (13), West Bengal (9)

**2019 results**  
**32** NDA | **9** UPA | **16** Others | **5\*** Redrawn seats

**Phase 1 April 19**

A&N (1), Arunachal Pradesh (2), Assam (5), Bihar (4), Chhattisgarh (1), Jammu & Kashmir (1), Lakshadweep (1), Madhya Pradesh (6), Maharashtra (5), Manipur (1), Meghalaya (2), Mizoram (1), Nagaland (1), Puducherry (1), Rajasthan (12), Sikkim (1), Tamil Nadu (39), Tripura (1), Uttar Pradesh (8), Uttarakhand (5), West Bengal (3)

**101\*** Seats  
**21** States/UTs

**2019 results**  
**41** NDA | **45** UPA | **10** Others | **6\*** Redrawn seats

\*A part of Manipur Outer voted in Ph-1, and the rest voted in Ph-2

**Phase 2 April 26**

Assam (5), Bihar (5), Chhattisgarh (3), Jammu & Kashmir (1), Karnataka (14), Kerala (20), Madhya Pradesh (6), Maharashtra (8), Manipur (1), Rajasthan (13), Tripura (1), Uttar Pradesh (8), West Bengal (3)

**88** Seats  
**13** States/UTs

**2019 results**  
**55** NDA | **24** UPA | **3** Others | **6\*** Redrawn seats

**Phase 3 May 7**

Assam (4), Bihar (5), Chhattisgarh (7), D&N Haveli, Daman and Diu (2), Goa (2), Gujarat (25), K'taka (14), Madhya Pradesh (9), Maharashtra (11), Uttar Pradesh (10), West Bengal (4)

**93** Seats  
**11** States/UTs

**2019 results**  
**77** NDA | **6** UPA | **5** Others | **5\*** Redrawn

Excludes Surat which was won by BJP uncontested

**Phase 4 May 13**

Andhra Pradesh (25), Bihar (5), Jammu & Kashmir (1), J'hkhand (3), Madhya Pradesh (8), Maharashtra (11), Odisha (4), Telangana (17), Uttar Pradesh (13), West Bengal (8)

**96** Seats  
**10** States/UTs

**2019 results**  
**46** NDA | **7** UPA | **42** Others | **1\*** Redrawn seats

**Turnout in previous phases**

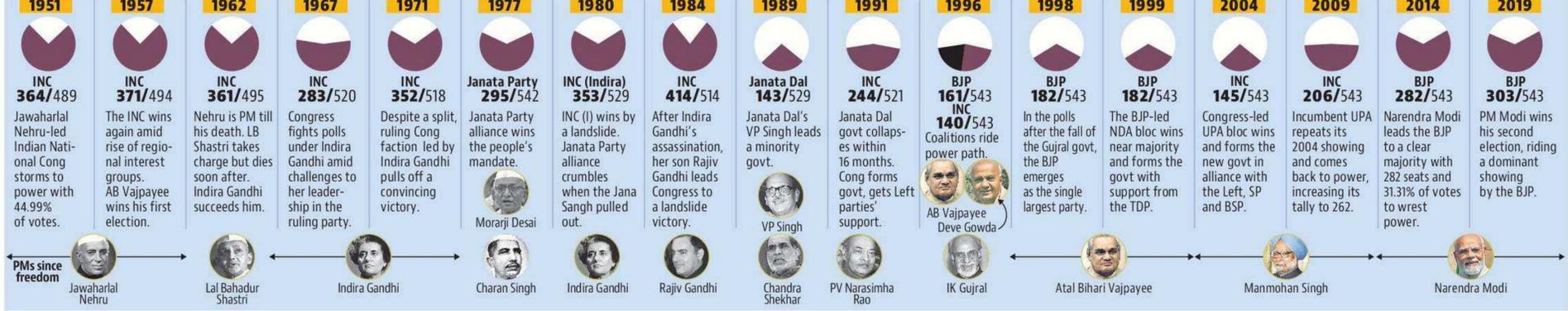
**PHASE 1**  
**66.14%** 2024  
**69.4%** 2019

**PHASE 2**  
**66.71%** 2024  
**69.6%** 2019

**PHASE 3**  
**65.68%** 2024  
**65.9%** 2019

**PHASE 4**  
**69.16%** 2024  
**69.5%** 2019

## INDIA'S 73-YEAR ELECTORAL JOURNEY (1951 to 2024)



# Capital sizzles at 44.4°C as parts of city log heatwave

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**NEW DELHI:** The Capital on Sunday sizzled under scorching daytime temperatures on the third day of "heatwave" to "severe heatwave" conditions prevailing over northern India — largely down to dry westerly winds and bright sunshine — clocking an uncomfortable seasonal high of 44 degrees Celsius (°C), four degrees above normal, at Safdarjung, representative of Delhi's weather.

The maximum at Safdarjung was only 0.5°C shy of officially being a day with a heatwave, a classification when the maximum temperature is over 40°C, and 4.5°C above normal or when the actual maximum temperature reaches 45°C or more for two consecutive days.

In some areas, the temperature surpassed the 47-degree mark in the Capital, including Najafgarh, southwest Delhi, which logged a maximum temperature of 47.8°C.

The temperature at Najafgarh was also the highest across the country, followed by Agra in UP and Mungeshpur in northwest Delhi which recorded a maximum of 47.7°C.

A "red alert" was also in place issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday for extreme weather conditions, which will continue to be in place until Tuesday.

"Heatwave conditions began engulfing parts of Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) on Friday and this was the third consecutive day of 'heatwave' to 'severe heatwave' conditions. There has been no change in the weather and dry westerly winds have been blowing from Rajasthan towards Delhi. We also have no cloud cover, leading to faster surface heating," said an IMD official, adding that similar highs are likely to prevail over the next

## Blistering heat in Delhi

IMD has issued a red alert for the city for Monday and Tuesday

3 STATIONS CROSS 47-DEGREE MARK

47.8°C  
NAJAFGARH

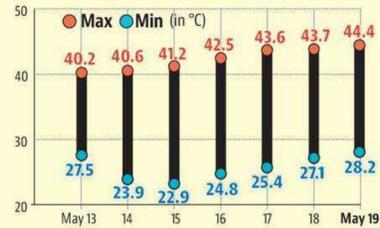
47.7°C  
MUNGESHPUR

47°C  
PITAMPURA



VIPIN KUMAR/ HT PHOTO

### DELHI OVER THE PAST WEEK



### WHY IS DELHI SO HOT?

- Dry, dusty westerly winds blowing from Rajasthan. The winds are also impacting Delhi's air quality, with AQI curtailed in the "poor" range
- No clouds, leading to the surface heating up faster

two days.

The intense heat, IMD has warned, may lead to severe illness among the vulnerable population and trigger heat strokes. "Extreme care is needed for vulnerable people and people are advised to avoid heat exposure and keep cool. Avoid dehydration and drink sufficient water, even if not thirsty," IMD said. In its bulletin on Sunday, IMD asked people to step out only if necessary during the day. Eleven weather stations in

NCR crossed the 45°C threshold, with three even crossing the 47°C mark, officials said. Gurugram recorded a maximum of 45.1°C, Faridabad 46.3°C, Noida 45.9°C and Ghaziabad 44.4°C, IMD data showed.

The hot days are also leading to warm nights and the minimum temperature was recorded at 28.2°C, two degrees above normal and the highest so far this year in Delhi. The previous high was 27.7°C on May 10. An "orange" alert is in place

for Wednesday and Thursday, indicating the heatwave spell is likely to continue for at least seven more days. IMD has three colour-coded alerts for weather events. The first, a "yellow alert" is issued to alert the public about a weather event. The second, an "orange alert", is issued to urge people to be prepared for an extreme weather event. The highest alert, a "red alert", is issued when an extreme weather event requires vigil and caution. Delhi's maximum is forecast

to hover around 44°C-45°C at Safdarjung till Thursday and may hover around 46°C-47°C elsewhere. The minimum will be between 28°C-29°C in the next four days, IMD said.

The dry, dusty westerly winds are also impacting Delhi's air quality and have managed to curtail it within the "poor" range. Sunday clocked a 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) reading of 243 (poor), slightly lower than Saturday's 263 (poor).

**IMD SAYS READING AT NAJAFGARH IS ACCURATE, BLAMES HEAT ISLAND EFFECT**

**Jasjev Gandhiok**  
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**NEW DELHI:** Increased concretisation and inadequate green cover have led the daytime temperatures to soar at Najafgarh in southwest Delhi, making it the hottest location compared to the rest of the country. On Sunday, the weather station logged a maximum of 47.8°C — effectively edging out conventionally hot regions in north India like Rajasthan, Gujarat and Haryana.

The Met department has attributed the intense weather conditions "urban heat island effect", when an area is significantly hotter than the surrounding areas due to a combination of factors like weak winds and secondary sources like "waste heat" generated due to energy consumption.

Officials at IMD clarified that the readings at Delhi stations were accurate. "There is no problem with the calibration of the station, as these are regularly checked. Readings have been high — over 44°C in most places in Delhi NCR.

Some locations can be hotter than others due to the urban heat island effect as there could be concretisation in the area," said an IMD official, on condition of anonymity.

Close behind Najafgarh was Agra in UP and Mungeshpur, in northwest Delhi, where a maximum of 47.7°C was recorded, followed by Datia in Madhya Pradesh (47.5°C). In Rajasthan, the hottest location was Ganganagar at 46.7°C; Surendranagar in Gujarat (45.3°C) and Bathinda (46.4°C) in Punjab.

RK Jenamani, senior scientist at IMD said it was wrong to compare urban stations with semi-urban or rural stations, as the surroundings may be fairly different.

"The density is less in terms of people and buildings in semi-urban or rural areas. In urban cities, particularly Delhi, we have a lot of concretisation and buildings, which is also one of the reasons why we are seeing such high readings," he said.

Mamta jaisi shuddh. Maa jaisi mamta.



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## Dwarka residents hold protest, seek protection of forest

**HT Correspondent**  
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**NEW DELHI:** A group of over 30 activists and locals staged a protest on Sunday outside the Dwarka Sector 21 Metro station, calling for authorities to stop the construction of the Bijwasan Rail Terminal through a 120-acre urban forest patch in the vicinity, and instead, calling for its immediate protection.

The redevelopment project, with a new terminal station built on 30,400 square metres, an air concourse across 12,500sqm and a circulating road network of 123,500sqm, is being executed by the Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA) since 2021.

Locals said the green area should be considered a "deemed

forest" according to a 1996 Supreme Court ruling, which said any area over 2.5 acres and having over 100 trees per acre needs to be considered a forest.

In February, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) gave its nod to the project, after stating the area was not a notified forest. "Six days after the judgment of the NGT, the Supreme Court asked for all deemed forests to be reinstated and considered as they were. This forest qualifies as a deemed forest and thus, needs to be saved," one of the protesters said, on condition of anonymity.

The protesters also sought to raise awareness among locals by highlighting the flora and fauna of the green area, which include nilgai, wild rabbits, and civet.

## Maliwal case: Police collect exhibits from CM residence

**HT Correspondent**  
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**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Police visited chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence on Sunday and collected exhibits from the spot where Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal was allegedly assaulted by the CM's aide Bibhav Kumar, officers aware of the development said.

Maliwal in her complaint to police has alleged that Kumar "slapped" her "at least seven to eight times" without any provocation and "brutally dragged" her while "kicking" her, forcing her to fall and hit her head on a table at the CM's residence on May 13. Kumar filed a counter, accusing Maliwal of forcefully entering the CM's premises and using abusive language.

An officer part of the investigation said that the exhibits included a digital video recorder (DVR) and relevant CCTV footage from the area. "DVR from some parts of the premises was taken earlier as well," the officer said. As a part of the probe, the CCTV footage obtained by Delhi Police over the last few days will now be checked with respect to allegations levelled by Maliwal,



Police leave CM Arvind Kejriwal's house with exhibits including a DVR and CCTV footage on Sunday.

and Kumar's side of the events.

Kumar was arrested from the chief minister's residence on Saturday evening and was produced before a Delhi court late in the evening, following which he was sent to seven-day police custody. In the remand application submitted to the court, police said a junior engineer working at the CM's house provided them with a video from the dining room in a pen drive, but when it was checked, the footage from the

relevant period was "blank".

Police said they will probe whether footage from the day of the incident was tampered with.

The Aam Aadmi Party, meanwhile, accused the police of "planting false news" at the behest of the Bharatiya Janata Party. "The BJP and Delhi Police have been planting false news in the media ever since this alleged incident took place. Delhi Police is only spreading such false news at the behest of the BJP... The

CCTV footage of the chief minister's residence has been taken away by Delhi Police along with the DVR machine. Now they're saying that the footage has disappeared," AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said.

Police also said that Kumar's employment was terminated on April 19, but he continued to work at the CM's residence. On Saturday, investigators said, when they reached the CM's residence, Kumar was present.

Officers also said that Kumar formatted his mobile phone — an iPhone — in Mumbai and he is also not cooperating. "His mobile is password protected and he is very evasive in his answers. This mobile along with Kumar will be taken to an expert in an attempt to retrieve the data," the officer said. "During this period (his police remand), Kumar may be taken to Mumbai as he formatted his phone there," a second officer said.

The first officer said that Kumar has a criminal record, booked in 2007 by the Noida Sector 20 police station. "The case was registered under section 353 of the IPC, which pertains to assault on a public servant," the officer said.

## AAP once sought justice for Nirbhaya, today supporting an accused: Maliwal

**Paras Singh**  
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**NEW DELHI:** Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal, in a post on X on Sunday criticised her party for taking out a march to protest the arrest of Bibhav Kumar, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide, who is alleged to have assaulted the parliamentarian at the CM's residence on May 13.

Swati Maliwal posted on X in Hindi: "There was a time when we all came out to the streets to get justice for Nirbhaya. Today, after 12 years, we are out on the streets to save the accused who made the CCTV footage disappear and formatted the phone? I wish they had used this much

force for Manish Sisodia ji. If he had been here, maybe this bad thing wouldn't have happened to me!"

Maliwal did not respond to calls or messages from HT, seeking comment.

The arrest of Bibhav Kumar, meanwhile, sparked a political furor in the Capital.

The AAP accused Delhi Police of "selectively leaking false information" regarding the case, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alleged that the AAP was upset due to Kumar's arrest as he was privy to "corruption scams" of the party.

In a press conference at the party headquarters, senior AAP functionary and Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj accused the BJP of spreading lies

through police, given that the Lok Sabha elections are around the corner.

Claiming police are "illegally leaking selective and fabricated information", Bharadwaj said Delhi Police first leaked the information about the PCR call and complaint, and later leaked the FIR pertaining to the case (under Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code), which was confidential.

The spokesperson for Delhi Police did not comment.

Meanwhile, Delhi BJP chief Virender Sachdeva, in a press conference, said Kejriwal wanted to send a "top lawyer to Rajya Sabha".

Sachdeva also hit back at allegations of the BJP having a hand in the incident. "Kejriwal

should first understand that Maliwal is a member of the AAP, and the place where the incident took place was the residence of chief minister Kejriwal himself... the assaulter is CM's associate and the incident was confirmed by AAP MP Sanjay Singh. Where is BJP in this matter?" he said.

AAP's alliance partner for the Delhi Lok Sabha polls Congress sought a thorough probe.

Senior Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit said: "According to legislation brought in by the AAP, victim's statement in incidents of sexual crime or violence against women would be taken as the truth and the onus will be on the accused to prove his innocence. Bibhav Kumar was arrested as per this law."

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# AAP, BJP hold rallies in Capital as campaigning enters final stretch



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal during a public meet in Badarpur; (right) Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami in Patel Nagar on Sunday.



HT PHOTOS

## Paras Singh and Jasveer Gandhiok

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**NEW DELHI:** The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stepped up their poll campaigns on Sunday — the last weekend before Delhi votes on May 25.

While the AAP battled for full statehood to Delhi and flagged the law-and-order situation in the city, the BJP targeted the AAP-Congress alliance in Delhi and pointed to the work carried out by the Union government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

## INDIA bloc set to win Lok Sabha polls: AAP

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said that people of Delhi should vote for the INDIA bloc to ensure "full statehood to Delhi", improve the law and order situation and ensure Delhi gets a lieutenant governor "who does not create obstacles" to public works, during a public address in Kalkaji, one of six public meetings he addressed in the South Delhi Lok Sabha constituency for AAP candidate Sahi Ram "Pahalwan".

Standing atop the roof of a

vehicle, and flanked by legislator Atishi and party candidate Sahi Ram, the Delhi chief minister said that the BJP and the Prime Minister were rattled as the INDIA bloc is set to win the polls.

"INDIA bloc is forming the government. AAP will be the part of this new government and our first work will be to get full statehood for Delhi... Law and order remains in bad shape. At police stations, personnel don't listen to anyone. After June 4, we will also rectify this... The LG of Delhi will be yours. We will bring an LG who will work for people and not stop their projects," Kejriwal said.

Pointing to the area MLA Atishi, the CM said the BJP wanted to jail Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj next. "What drama is this? Is this how countries are run?" he said.

"They are saying that I have to go back to jail on June 2. I will have to go to jail if you press lotus (BJP symbol), if you press 'Jhadu' (AAP symbol), I will not have to go to jail," he said.

At a poll meeting in Ambedkar Nagar, the AAP national convener said, "I have travelled across the country over the past few days and people are fed up with unemployment. But the PM

is thinking about whom to jail. They will arrest all AAP leaders. Have we chosen a PM or a 'thanedar'?" he said.

In a corner meeting at Badarpur, Kejriwal said, "I am a small man with a small party. Why did Modi ji send me to jail? My real fault is that I made good schools for your kids, I ensured good education for your kids. He wants to close down your schools by arresting Kejriwal. If I made 500 schools, he should make 5,000 schools. I ensured free health care through mohalla clinics... He should make 500,000 clinics, not by closing down our clinics."

"My fault is that I made bus travel free for women in Delhi. Just a day before yesterday, in a TV interview with PM Modi, a journalist said that Arvind Kejriwal is providing free bus travel facility to women in Delhi. On this, the PM said that this free travel is not right. There should not be free travel in buses. I thought in my mind that there is so much inflation, PM ji, it would have been great if you had made bus travel free for women in the entire country. But you want to stop it even for Delhi residents. This is not right... As long as Kejriwal is there, I will not let

anything happen to your free bus travel," he said.

Earlier, AAP candidate for the East Delhi Lok Sabha seat, Kuldeep Kumar, led a cycle rally as part of the 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' campaign. AAP volunteers took out a cycle rally, donning yellow T-shirts with the slogan. At Mayur Vihar Phase 2 area, Kumar appealed to voters to answer to Kejriwal's arrest by "voting against the dictatorship of BJP".

## BJP stalwarts canvass for party candidates

The BJP went all guns blazing on a hot Sunday evening, holding more than 20 roadshows and rallies across Delhi's seven Lok Sabha seats, ahead of polling day in the Capital on May 25.

The BJP called upon both present and former chief ministers of states — Pushkar Singh Dhami (Uttarakhand), Mohan Yadav (Madhya Pradesh) and Shivraj Singh Chouhan (former Madhya Pradesh CM) — to address roadshows across Delhi, with senior party leaders such as K Annamalai, Giriraj Singh, Virendra Sachdeva, and Arvinder Singh Lovely, amongst those present.

BJP president JP Nadra will take part in a roadshow in Malviya

Nagar on Monday, Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath will hold a public meet in Kondli, while Union minister Amit Shah will address a rally in Sangam Vihar.

Addressing public gatherings in support of BJP candidates Bansuri Swaraj (New Delhi), Praveen Khandelwal (Chandni Chowk), and Kamaljeet Sehrawat (West Delhi), Dhami said that the work carried out by the BJP over the last 10 years is unparalleled and cannot be matched by an alliance "formed on the basis of corruption".

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has worked extremely hard to elevate India to new heights. In the last 10 years, he has redefined development, transforming Delhi's skyline with projects like the redevelopment of Pragati Maidan, construction of Bharat Mandapam, the Eastern-Western Peripheral Road, the Urban Extension Road project, and Kartavya Path, among others," said Dhami, adding that the removal of Article 370 and the decision to build a temple for Lord Ram were amongst the other historic decisions taken.

Parliamentarian Navneet Rana, canvassing votes for BJP candidates Ramvir Singh Bidhudi

(South Delhi) and Harsh Malhotra (East Delhi), referred to the party's picks as grassroots leaders who need support against parties rooted in corruption.

"In 2014, Arvind Kejriwal claimed that the Congress, Sharad Pawar, Lalu Yadav were all corrupt. Yet today, for electoral gains, they (AAP) are joining hands with the same people because their sole aim is to thwart the development of the Modi government and create a state of lawlessness in the country," she said.

In support of BJP candidate from North East Delhi Manoj Tiwari were Union minister Giriraj Singh, Chouhan and party leader Madhavi Latha, who met people in Kamal Vihar and Sant Nagar (Burai).

In Mongolpuri, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva was with Yogendra Chandolia, the candidate from North West Delhi, a reserved seat. He said the central government did not treat Scheduled Castes and Tribes as vote banks, but is working for the true upliftment of Dalits. "This is being done so that everyone is a true partner in the country's development," Sachdeva said, alongside senior leaders Raj Kumar Chauhan and Arvinder Singh Lovely.

# Candidates target Ggm's urban voters

## Abhishek Behl

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Rao Inderjit Singh, Raj Babbar

**GURUGRAM:** Candidates of major political parties have begun canvassing in urban areas of Badshahpur and Gurugram assembly constituencies, which have an estimated 925,000 voters out of the total 2.5 million voters in the nine constituencies of the Gurgaon Lok Sabha seat. The Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) candidates on Sunday moved around the city to woo urban voters and they also outlined their plans to the people, who have been demanding better urban governance.

Gurugram will go to polls on May 25 in the sixth phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

Sitting Gurugram MP and BJP candidate Rao Inderjit Singh on Sunday campaigned in Kanhai Wazirabad, Sector 56, Sector 46 and other areas of Old Gurugram and he spoke about his plan for the city.

Singh said that his focus will be on ensuring the Metro system becomes operational, and the RRTS transport system from Delhi to Behror via Gurugram

is executed. "If the opposition wants to know where development should take place then they should take the Dwarka expressway, Mumbai-Delhi expressway and Sohna elevated road. We will ensure in the next five years that AIIMS in Rewari, Mata Sheetal Medical College and the Civil Hospital in Gurgaon are completed," he said in public meetings in the city.

Congress candidate, Raj Babbar, also held public meetings at Shikohpur, Dundaheera and other parts of the city. Babbar also released a Nyaypatra for Gurugram and shared it on X. Babbar promised that a special mobile number and application will be launched to ensure direct contact with the MP. "We are fighting to bring in change in Gurugram and I met people in Dundaheera and Shikohpur, who have assured to vote for Congress on May 25," he said.

# Fewer road fatalities so far this year: Police data

## HT Correspondent

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**NEW DELHI:** Delhi recorded a 6% decline in on-road fatalities from accidents between January 1 and May 15 this year, compared to the corresponding period in 2023, according to data shared by Delhi Police on Sunday. Ring Road, Outer Ring Road and GT Karnal Road accounted for most of the fatal accidents, according to police data.

As of May 15, 518 people died in 511 fatal crashes, which was down from 552 deaths from 544 crashes in the same period last year. "The concerted efforts of the Delhi traffic police have played a pivotal role in achieving this milestone. Rigorous enforcement of traffic rules, robust awareness campaigns and the implementation of innovative traffic management strategies have collectively contributed to this positive outcome," special commissioner of police (Traffic) HGS Dhaliwal said.

According to the data shared by police, Ring Road accounted for the highest number of fatal accidents, at 33, followed by Outer Ring Road, at 31, GT Karnal Road, at 27, Rohtak Road, at 19, NH 8, at 13, Mathura Road, at 10, Najafgarh Road, at 9, Kanjhawala Road, NH 24 and



Wazirabad Road, at 7, each.

A traffic police officer, on the condition of anonymity, said most accidents take place due to drink driving and speeding, especially at night. "Ring Road was listed as black spot even in 2021 because maximum road accidents and fatalities were reported here. We have taken remedial measures over the years," the officer said.

Dhawal Ashar, head of integrated transport at research organisation WRI India, said, "We need a more nuanced approach to speed management starting with speed assessment. We need to find out where speeding takes place and when.

... It is also critical to focus on effective street design to ensure safer speeds by incorporating traffic calming measures like speed humps, raised crossings and rumble strips along with ensuring clear traffic signage and road markings. Data shows that even a 5% reduction in speed can reduce fatal crashes by 30%."

A release by police said that Delhi traffic police has prioritised community engagement to "foster a culture of road safety".

"Educational programmes conducted in partnership with schools and colleges, and various stakeholders have been instrumental," it said.

# CHANDNI CHOWK TO BE A HERITAGE HUB: CONG PICK

## Aheli Das

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**NEW DELHI:** Congress candidate for the Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha seat Jai Prakash Aggarwal on Sunday said he would transform the area into a heritage hub, by highlighting heritage structures and promoting culinary specialties, in his "Vision 2029" manifesto for the constituency.

He was addressing a press conference at his old house in Kinari Bazaar.

The veteran politician will face off as the AAP-Congress candidate against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Praveen Khandelwal.

"Chandni Chowk will become a heritage hub... By developing the ghats and riverfront of Yamuna adjacent to Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency, a picturesque tourist spot will be created for tourists and local residents," the manifesto said.

GST was also prominently mentioned in the manifesto, a copy of which was seen by HT. He promised relief to small traders by reducing GST compliance, to introduce exemption to modify GST return, reduce of GST rates, and abolish 18% GST on health insurance.

Among other promises are pucca houses to slum dwellers, abolishing house tax in villages and resolving traffic issues.

# 1 killed as crane driver loses control of vehicle

## Debashish Karmakar

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**GURUGRAM:** A 50-year-old woman died after she was crushed by a crane at Hayatpur in Gurugram Sector 93 on Saturday, police said.

Investigators identified the deceased as Maina Devi, a resident of Kilachand Colony in Sector 10.

Police said the accident took place at about 11.50am, when the victim and her daughters Diksha, 20, and Yashasvi, 16, were walking on the side of the road when the crane, carrying a heavy transformer, veered off course and crushed her. An officer said that the crane then hit a tree and

flipped. "Due to the weight of the transformer, the driver may have lost control resulting in the accident," he said, adding that the driver was also injured in the incident but managed to flee from the spot.

Sandeep Kumar, Gurugram police public relations officer, said the crane was seized from the spot. "We are trying to trace its owner and arrest him," he said.

On Diksha's complaint, an FIR was registered against the operator under sections 279 (rash driving or riding on public way) and 304A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code at Sector 10 police station on Saturday night.

## { DECEASED SANITATION WORKERS }

# Pay ₹30L to families, HC tells city civic authorities

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi high court has directed the city authorities to pay ₹30 lakh compensation each to the families of three sanitation workers who died during manual scavenging in 2017. The court allowed the petition by the families seeking a higher ex gratia in accordance with a Supreme Court order in 2023 which increased the compensation payable to the dependents of the victims who lost their lives in manual scavenging to ₹30 lakh from the existing ₹10 lakh.

The families said in the petition that the workers died while cleaning a drain in Lajpat Nagar, adding that the deceased were

engaged by a Delhi Jal Board sub-contractor.

The petitioners said that after they died, a compensation of ₹10 lakh was awarded to the family members. "... the directions issued by the Supreme Court were expressly made applicable to all the statutory bodies including corporations, railways... it was directed that the compensation of ₹10 lakh that was given to the deceased workers be enhanced to ₹30 lakh," justice Sachin Datta said. "Any violation... would invite strict consequences" as envisaged in the apex court verdict, the court said.

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# 26-year-old lynched on suspicion of theft, 3 held

**Hemani Bhandari**  
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**NEW DELHI:** A 26-year-old man was allegedly beaten to death by a family in Uttam Nagar, west Delhi, on Saturday night over suspicion of theft, police said on Sunday, adding that three people were apprehended in the case including a 17-year-old boy.

The man's family alleged that his feet and hands were tied before he was beaten up, a bike was run over his genitals, and the accused also rubbed salt on his wounds.

A senior police officer said the preliminary probe revealed that the man was lynched by members of a family who allegedly sold illicit liquor in the area, adding that several suspects are at large, including some people who worked for the prime accused.

Deputy commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Ankit Singh identified the deceased as Karan Kumar, a resident of Shiv Vihar.

Karan was a labourer who



Karan Kumar

was currently unemployed, and had 10 criminal cases of theft registered against him.

Police said they arrested a 27-year-old woman, Maina Devi and a 30-year-old man, Rohit Kumar, and apprehended the minor boy who worked for them.

Police said their control room received a call around 8.30pm and the caller said her son was being beaten up by some people. "When police reached the spot, the control room van had shifted him to Safdarjung Hos-

pital where he was declared dead on arrival," Singh said.

Purported videos of the victim being beaten up surfaced on social media where Devi was heard accusing him of theft. Police said multiple people are visible in the video, including the woman's husband.

According to investigators, a theft was reported at Devi's residence in December last year and phones and cash, among other household items, were stolen. The family suspected that Karan was involved because of his criminal record and because someone accused him.

"Since then, they had been looking for him. However, he did not live in the area and returned only a few days ago. On Saturday night, the family spotted him in Shiv Vihar," the officer said.

The family then allegedly caught him and beat him up. "Preliminary probe revealed that they continued to beat him even as he ran to save himself.

We were also told that his feet were tied," the officer said.

"Devi's husband Rahul, (single name) was also involved in the murder. He is absconding and teams are looking," the officer said.

Meanwhile, Karan's mother Shakuntala Devi, 48, alleged that the accused beat her son with sticks and bricks. "They tied him up and beat him mercilessly with rods, sticks and bricks. They urinated on him and made him drink urine and ran a bike over his genitals," she said. She added that she made calls to the police.

Shakuntala said that she saw her son bleed profusely and was in a semi-conscious state.

"I called the police multiple times but they came late," she said.

Police denied the allegation that they came late to the scene. DCP Singh said police registered a case under sections 302 and 34 of the Indian Penal Code and formed multiple teams to nab the absconding suspects.

## 2 MINORS AMONG 4 TEENAGERS HELD FOR MURDER IN SEELAMPUR

**HT Correspondent**  
letters@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Police on Sunday arrested two men and apprehended two juveniles for the murder of a 20-year-old man at Seelampur, officers said. Police said the accused killed Md Iqbal, the victim, because he used to frequently scold them.

Police said Iqbal was found lying in a pool of blood near his house in Seelampur on Friday night. He was taken to hospital, where doctors declared him dead. "He was stabbed multiple times in the back and on both legs. Teams were formed to identify the accused," deputy commissioner of police (northeast) Joy Tirkey said.

Investigators said local residents said a group of teenagers had fought with the deceased a week before the murder. Police said they first picked up a 19-year-old Adil Ansari from New Seelampur. He works at a car wash workshop. "We found a knife from his possession. We then caught his 18-year-old friend from the same area. Another knife was seized," said Tirkey. Police said they apprehended two minors as well.



Police officers inspect the hotel in Noida Sector 104, where a 27-year-old woman died of asphyxiation. SUNIL GHOSH/HT PHOTO

## Fire breaks out at Noida hotel, 1 killed

**Arun Singh**  
arun.singh@hindustantimes.com

**NOIDA:** A 27-year-old woman died of asphyxiation after a massive fire broke out on the fourth floor of a hotel at Hazipur in Sector 104, Noida, police said on Sunday. The woman had checked into the hotel barely three hours before the fire with her boyfriend, who is undergoing treatment for asphyxiation in a hospital, police added.

According to the chief fire officer of Gautam Budh Nagar, Pradeep Kumar Chaubey, the hotel staff failed to alert the couple about the fire. The couple only became aware of the fire when smoke had filled their room on the sixth floor, said CFO Chaubey. There was also a half-hour gap between the outbreak of the fire and when it was reported to the fire control room, said officers.

It was not immediately known how the fire started, but police have registered a first information report against the hotel for causing death by negligence.

"The deceased woman's identity has been withheld at the family's request. She was a physiotherapist who lived in Noida. The man, Tarun Kumar, 26, a resident of Mayur Vihar Phase 1, Delhi, is currently undergoing treatment for asphyxiation at a local hospital and is reported to be stable," said a police officer aware of the matter.

The two were the only people in the hotel aside from the staff when the fire broke out, said police. "The fire broke out on the

fourth floor of the six-floor hotel at 5pm. Initially the hotel staff tried to douse the fire on their own. At 5.35pm, they informed the fire control room and 10 fire tenders were rushed to the scene. The blaze was brought under control with just one tender within 15 minutes," said chief fire officer Pradeep Kumar Chaubey.

According to police, the hotel was inaugurated on May 10 and did not have a fire no objection certificate (NOC), and had only temporary firefighting systems.

**Hotel staff did not try to save guests, allege police**

According to police, the woman and Kumar checked into the hotel at 1.30pm.

"The hotel staff did not inform the room occupants about the fire. They later informed firefighters that two guests were trapped. A team of firefighters managed to gain entry to the top floor from the terrace of an adjacent building to rescue them," said CFO Chaubey, adding that the two were rushed to a nearby hospital, where the woman died during treatment on Saturday night. "Based on a complaint from the deceased woman's brother, a case was registered against the unidentified accused and the hotel at the Sector 39 police station on Sunday under Section 304A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code," said Manish Kumar Mishra, additional commissioner of police (Noida).

HT tried to contact the hotel owner, Akash Sharma, several times but his mobile phone was switched off.

## MCD GETS NOD FOR PROJECTS WORTH ₹407 CR IN URBAN VILLAGES

**Paras Singh**  
letters@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is planning to undertake large-scale rural rejuvenation projects under the Gramodaya scheme over the next year for which ₹407 crore has been sanctioned, senior officials said.

Before the declaration of elections, work orders could be issued for only 5% of these cases as the model code of conduct came into force, an official said, adding that the remaining work will be taken up after June 2024.

A large chunk of these projects are related to road redevelopment, drainage and streetlight work in the villages of west Delhi, Najafgarh and Narela zones.

A senior MCD official said that earlier in January, senior officials from various departments stayed at Delhi villages to talk to all stakeholders and identify the development work that need to be carried out. "These projects were finalised based on the feedback from people. The funding for these projects is being provided by the Delhi Development Authority," the official added.

According to the documents seen by HT, MCD had proposed 381 such projects across various villages of Delhi with an estimated cost of ₹644.77 crore. "Out of these 381 projects, 349 have received sanction from DDA with a cumulative expenditure of ₹407.13 crore. Before the model code of conduct came into force, tenders had been called for 344 projects out of which 182 were opened and work order could be issued only in eight cases," he added.

The "Dilli Gramodaya Abhiyan" aims to develop infrastructure in urbanised villages and new urban areas, for which ₹960 crore was given to DDA last year.

## MCD PROPOSED THAT 381 SUCH PROJECTS ACROSS VARIOUS VILLAGES OF DELHI, OF WHICH 349 HAVE RECEIVED NOD FROM DDA

## Girl mauled to death by street dogs: Police

**Peeyush Khandelwal**  
peeyush.khandelwal@htlive.com

**GHAZIABAD:** A four-year-old girl was attacked and mauled to death by a pack of stray dogs at a brick kiln near Bhikkhanpur in Muradnagar town, Ghaziabad, on Saturday, police said on Sunday. Police said the girl, identified as Farheen (single name) was taken to a hospital in Delhi where she succumbed to critical injuries late on Saturday evening.

"The girl was admitted to a hospital in Delhi and she succumbed Saturday evening. She was injured badly by stray dogs during the incident. It is up to the civic agencies to trace and

check these strays," said Naresh Kumar, assistant commissioner of police, Muradnagar/Masuri circle.

HT reached out to Arun Dixit, sub-divisional magistrate (Sadar) who did not respond to queries seeking comments.

According to the girl's father, Mohammad Zarif, 32, she sustained deep injuries to her hands, legs, abdomen and neck and had bled profusely.

"On Wednesday afternoon, the girl had gone to meet my father-in-law. She was walking back home when a pack of 5-6 strays attacked her," Zarif said, adding that she was attacked for two to three minutes before a local went to her rescue.

## Gzb: Two brothers arrested for gang-raping their sister

**Peeyush Khandelwal**  
peeyush.khandelwal@htlive.com

**GHAZIABAD:** The Ghaziabad police on Sunday arrested two brothers aged 24 and 21 years on charges of repeatedly gang-raping their teenage sister over the past several months, officers aware of the case said.

Police said the incident came to light on May 17, when the girl, 14, fell sick. Her mother took her to ESI Hospital in Delhi, where doctors discovered that the girl was 22 weeks pregnant.

"The girl then broke down and told her mother that she was being repeatedly raped by her two brothers in their mother's

**POLICE SAID THE INCIDENT CAME TO LIGHT ON MAY 17, WHEN THE GIRL, 14, FELL SICK, AND HER MOTHER TOOK HER TO A HOSPITAL**

absence since December 2023," said assistant commissioner of police (Shalimar Garden police circle) Sidharth Gautam.

Police said that the siblings' father had died several years ago, and the mother is the only earning member of the family.

"After the mother came to

know of the girl's ordeal, she filed a police complaint against her two sons. They both do not earn... They had threatened the girl to not reveal the incidents to their mother," Gautam said.

Police said that based on the complaint filed by the mother on May 17, a first information report (FIR) was registered under Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 376d (gangrape) and provisions of the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences (PoCSO) Act at a police station that falls under the Shalimar Garden police circle.

"The two brothers were arrested from near Wazirabad Road on Sunday," Gautam said.

# Billboards: Cluttering urban eyeline, posing life threat

**Manoj Sharma**  
manoj.sharma@hindustantimes.com

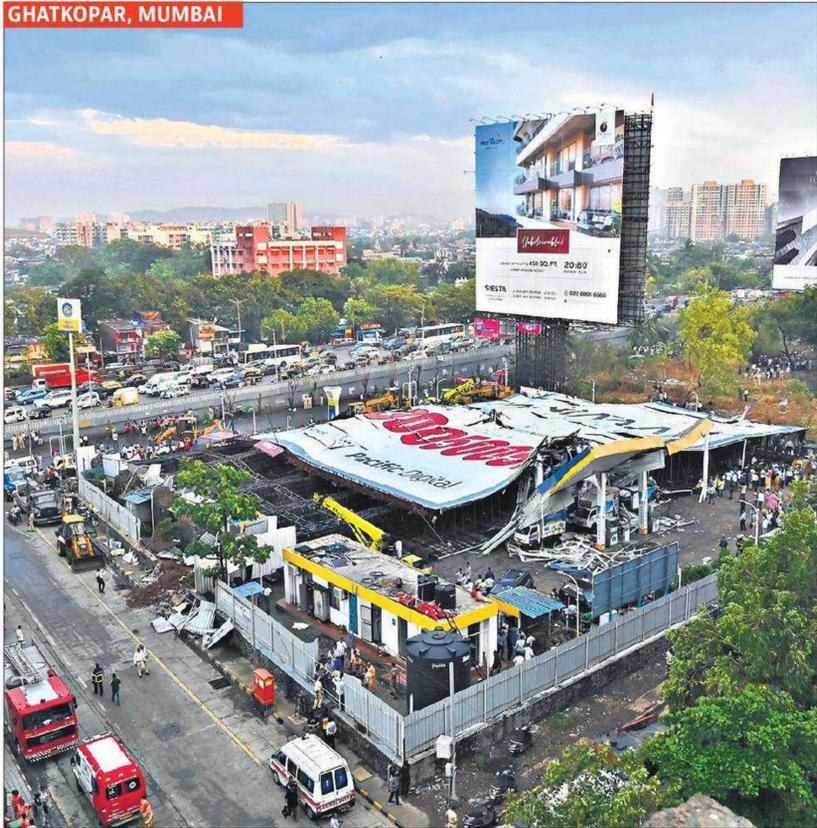
**NEW DELHI:** In his 2016 book *The Great Derangement*, author Amitav Ghosh issued a dire warning: "The thousands of billboards that encrust Mumbai" would turn into "deadly projectiles" in the event of a major storm. Such a scenario may have seemed improbable to many. Yet nearly a decade on, disaster struck on May 13 this year, when a colossal 120x120 foot advertising hoarding came crashing down during a Mumbai thunderstorm, claiming 16 lives.

The tragedy starkly exposed the perilous and unregulated nature of these towering structures, proving that Ghosh's grim prophecy is not so far-fetched after all. As the author himself posted on social media, "the recent storm was nowhere near as damaging as a major cyclone would be. Mumbai really needs to cut back drastically on billboards".

The proliferation of large billboards is not confined to Mumbai alone — reports of hoardings and billboards collapsing during rains and storms, causing damage and power outages, is common across the country. Despite complaints, little action has been taken to address these hazards.

Many perceive the surge in giant outdoor advertisements also as contributors to chaotic cityscapes. Pedestrians and motorists are bombarded with flashy ads, detracting from a city's charm and character, and giving it the feel of an overcrowded, suffocating marketplace. Experts caution against the visual pollution caused by these giant advertisements, an issue that has often been overlooked in Indian cities.

"They add more chaos to our already chaotic cities and obscure cityscapes," said Akash Hingorani, a Delhi-based architect and urban designer. "These advertisements often appear random, lacking any sense of artistic expression or consideration for safety. In many Western countries, billboards are designed with pedestrians in mind, but in Indian cities, they are primarily aimed at motorists, which explains their big size and high placements. Proper planning needs to account for the design, angle of placement, size, height, and the number of these ads to better integrate them with an urban



The spot in Ghatkopar, Mumbai, where a large hoarding came crashing down, killing 16 people. ANSHUMAN POYREKAR/HT



Hoardings and billboards collapsing during rains and storms, causing damage and power outages, is common across the country. HT PHOTOS

"For aesthetics, we consider the width of the road and the size of the boards. We permit only 20x10 ft boards on a road that is 100 feet wide, and 26x13 ft boards on roads wider than that. Besides, proper distance between them is also considered," said a Municipal Corporation Delhi (MCD) official.

"Whenever an advertising agency puts up a hoarding, we ask for a structural safety certificate. Besides, our team of 20 inspectors is always on streets enforcing regulations and removing illegal banners and hoardings that keep popping up. In the past couple of years, we have conducted drives in areas like Rohini, Vijay Nagar, Karol Bagh, Narela, among others to remove illegal hoardings. The situation has considerably improved," he added.

Around a decade ago, said the official, people would even install iron poles to place advertisements. "But we have now stopped that practice. These days a lot of these posters, banners, and hoardings are often put up by local politicians and businesses. It is not possible to send notices to everyone and take action; people need to have civic sense and keep the city clean," said the official.

**Mental cost of visual pollution**

Beyond aesthetics, visual pollution has a profound psychological effect on people. Mental health experts say the constant exposure to high-density advertising can lead to a sensory overload, where the brain becomes overwhelmed by the barrage of visual stimuli. This can cause stress, anxiety, and distraction, reducing overall quality of life. Studies have shown that environments with excessive visual clutter can make it difficult for people to focus and process information efficiently.

"Visual clutter from advertising can indeed lead to a multitude of problems, including stress, anxiety, aesthetic displeasure, attention overload, cognitive load, and even distractions that can contribute to accidents on the road," said Deepak Raheja, senior psychiatrist, Hope Care India, a Delhi-based psychiatric centre and mental wellness organisation.

"While it may not be practically possible to eliminate advertising completely, it's crucial to regulate and control it effectively."

environment."

**The advent of outdoor advertising**

Outdoor advertising has a long history in India, dating back to ancient times when messages were communicated through painted signs on walls, rocks, and other public spaces. The use of outdoor advertising in its modern form started in the late 19th century with the billboards and posters.

Western-style advertising was introduced during the British colonial period, and the first billboards appeared in major cities such as Kolkata and Mumbai, mainly promoting British goods and services.

After independence in 1947, outdoor advertising continued to develop in tandem with economic growth and urbanisation. Throughout the 20th century, a wide range of outdoor

advertising formats emerged, such as hoardings, transit advertising, and street furniture advertising.

The industry saw significant advancements in the early 21st century with the introduction of digital signage and LED displays.

"In the 1950s, large hoardings were primarily seen outside cinema halls in Delhi. A few commercial hoardings put up by consumer brands could also be found in select locations like Kamla Market near Ajmeri Gate, the outer circle of Connaught Place, and at Minto Bridge. Their numbers increased significantly in the 1980s," said Sydney Rebeiro, 82, former dean (culture) at Delhi University.

Today, outdoor advertising in India is a multi-billion-dollar industry, with both traditional and digital billboards playing a

significant role in brand promotion and marketing campaigns across the country. This has become a significant source of income for several municipal corporations, such as the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), which has in the past few years actively promoted outdoor advertising through its policies.

"The corporation earns about Rs 200 crore per year through licensing of billboards and hoardings," said a BMC official.

"The problem is that billboards, hoardings, and banners are often not included in the plan when urban spaces are designed. This results in a situation where the placement of advertisements is more about finding any available space. In malls, advertising space is often planned properly, integrating well with the architecture. This principle should be applied to

larger urban design," says Kapil Pandey, founder of VDIS, a company that specialises in signage design. "It is essential for civic architects and visual designers to work together when designing urban spaces."

**Reclaiming public spaces**

Several cities around the world have recognised the negative impact of unregulated outdoor advertising and have taken steps to mitigate visual pollution. In September 2006, São Paulo in Brazil passed the "Clean City Law", which banned all outdoor advertisements to reclaim public spaces. Paris has also implemented stringent regulations on billboard size and placement to preserve the city's historic beauty.

In the United States, cities like San Francisco and New York have implemented zoning laws and stricter permitting

processes to control the proliferation of outdoor ads. These measures include limits on the size and brightness of digital signs, restrictions on billboard placement near residential areas, and the creation of "ad-free zones" in certain parts of the city.

BMC is currently in the process of setting up a committee, of traffic police officials, civic officials, and experts from IIT Bombay, to formulate comprehensive guidelines on the regulatory, economic, and aesthetic aspects of outdoor advertising in the city. "The idea is to address concerns related to outdoor advertising, including light and visual pollution, and to maintain the city's character," the BMC official said.

In some cities such as Gurugram, residents fed up with official apathy have taken matters into their own hands. "The lkm

road stretch outside our apartment was inundated with posters, hoardings, and other advertisements, and the numbers were increasing day by day. These ads made our otherwise green and peaceful area feel like a commercial zone," said Pooja Anand, RWA president of Tulip Violet in Sector 69. "After civic authorities failed to respond to our requests, we decided to take action on our own. Today, whenever we see illegal posters or hoardings, we immediately remove them."

**Regulations and how to enforce them**

Though Delhi was one of India's first cities to have an outdoor advertising policy — established in 2008, and revised in 2017 — to enhance aesthetics, the Capital too has not been immune to visual clutter caused by billboards and hoardings.

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Humanities

### Purnea, Bihar



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2nd Topper of Bihar  
98% Class X



**Mansi Rathee**  
District Topper  
of Jhajar  
99% Class XII  
Humanities



**Aishwarya Gupta**  
District Topper  
of Gorakhpur  
98.6% Class X

### Agra, UP



**Madhul**  
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98.2% Class X

### Dakshineswar, Kolkata



**Pratyay Bhattacharya**  
2nd - City Rank  
98.8% Class XII  
Humanities



**Aryan Sinha**  
5th - City Rank  
98.2% Class XII  
Science

### Vasant Kunj, Delhi



**Prathmesh Saha**  
97.2% Class X



**Devina Saxena**  
97% Class XII

### Dakshineswar, Kolkata



**Dyuti Jana**  
98.6% Class X

### Gurgaon Sec 10, Haryana



**Kartik Agarwal**  
97.8% Class X



**Harshita**  
98% Class XII

### Jammu, J & K



**Chiragvir Singh Tandon**  
99% Class X



**Minerva Digra**  
97% Class XII

### Gurgaon Sec 48, Haryana



**Navya Agrawal**  
98.2% Class X



**Aashna Gulati**  
98.2% Class X



**Anoushka Agarwal**  
97.8% Class XII



**Aashi Chaudhary**  
97.6% Class X



**Arshita Sharma**  
98% Class XII

### Jhajar, Haryana



**Anuj**  
95.2% Class X



**Tannu**  
98.4% Class XII

### Model Town, New Delhi



**Annika Mathur**  
98.2% Class X



**Ridhima Sharma**  
97.8% Class XII



**Darsh Mishra**  
97.2% Class X

### Lucknow, UP



**Samridhi Singh**  
98% Class XII



**Manya Dhirawat**  
97.8% Class X

### Noida Sec 50, UP



**Rachita Joshi**  
98% Class XII



**Kanishk Jindal**  
98.2% Class X



**Akash Anand**  
98% Class XII



**Nehal Grover**  
98% Class XII

### Dwarka, New Delhi

### Kanpur, UP



**Aahvanit Tripathi**  
98.2% Class X



**Aanya Awasthi**  
96% Class XII



**Raunak Khandelwal**  
96% Class XII

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**Prakrati Verma**  
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**Rajasavie Gupta**  
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**Kaamya Dutt**  
98% Class XII

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97% Class XII

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**Ritika Dabas**  
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**Avika Kannaujia**  
97.8% Class X



**Shreyansh Mishra**  
95.6% Class XII

### Bhagalpur, Bihar



**Annu Jha**  
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### Gwalior, MP



**Arpit Garg**  
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**Paras Jain**  
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### Dharamshala, HP



**Varnika Thapa**  
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**Aadya Sondhi**  
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79.8% Class X



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**Ritik Dalal**  
94% Class X



**Drishti**  
83% Class XII



**Manveer**  
90% Class X



**Harman Kumar**  
81% Class XII



**Sarah Sharma**  
97.2% Class X



**Disha Kothari**  
96.4% Class XII

### Karkardooma, Delhi



**Nitin Chaudhary**  
95.6% Class X



**Ayan Mansoori**  
94.2% Class XII

### Kashipur, Uttarakhand



**Dev Dandotiya**  
92.3% Class X



**Kushagra Goyal**  
96.6% Class X

### Morena, MP



**Moksh Ahuja**  
97.6% Class XII

### Muzaffarnagar, UP



**Shreya Agarwal**  
95% Class X

### Nainital, Uttarakhand



**Garv Gupta**  
91% Class XII

### Noida Extension, UP



**Arshia Saroha**  
97.8% Class X

### Pali, Rajasthan



**Hitesh Kumar**  
82.06% Class XII

### Panipat, Haryana



**Advay Singla**  
95.6% Class X



**Aditi Singh**  
90.2% Class XII

### Paschim Vihar, Delhi



**Parmarth Kumar**  
93.8% Class X



**Zaina Ahmed**  
95.8% XII

### Patna, Bihar



**Aryan**  
96.6% Class X



**Prerna Singh**  
95.8% Class XII

### Purnea, Bihar



**Ayushi Ranjan**  
90.17 Class XII

### Raipur, Chhattisgarh



**Ananya Joshi**  
95.4% Class X



**Manthan Makhija**  
90% Class XII

### Rewari, Haryana



**Spandan**  
94.8% Class X



**Oman**  
75.2% Class XII

### Rohini Sec 9, Delhi



**Adityaraj**  
95.6% Class X



**Sara Sachedva**  
95.8% Class XII

### Rohini Sec 22, Delhi



**Arshiya Garg**  
97.4% Class X



**Vatsal Saria**  
96.4% Class XII

### Rohtak, Haryana



**Yaman**  
92.8% Class X



**Mahima**  
93.4% Class XII

### Rudrapur, Uttarakhand



**Karamjeet Kaur**  
97.8% Class X



**Vaibhavi Rawat**  
90% Class XII



**Manav Malhotra**  
90% Class XII

### Sarita Vihar, Delhi



**Avni Sinhar**  
95.4% Class X



**Aashvi Singh**  
96.6% Class XII

### Sirsa, Haryana



**Roopal**  
96.4% Class X



**Annavi**  
94.4% Class XII

### Sonepat, Haryana



**Vidhi Tomar**  
92.4% Class X



**Harsh Chauhan**  
93.4% Class XII

### Srinagar, J & K



**Sabeeb Fatima**  
95.8% Class X



**Syed Hamza Shah**  
87.4% Class XII

### Sultanpur, UP



**Priyanshi Singh**  
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### Surat, Gujarat



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{ FROM PAGE 1 }

## OP JHAADU

being arrested, and our bank accounts will be seized after the elections. Our party office will also be vacated and we will be brought to the streets," Kejriwal said during a 15-minute address.

Calling the protest a "political drama", Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said: "Arvind Kejriwal is himself out on bail. Their (AAP) entire character is criminal."

Maliwal's allegations have rocked the AAP, days before all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi and 13 seats in Punjab, the two provinces the party governs, go to the polls.

Delhi Police on Saturday took Kumar into custody from Kejriwal's residence at Flag-staff Road, and he was later remanded to five days' police custody.

His arrest came two days after Maliwal filed a police complaint against Kumar, alleging that he "slapped" her "at least seven to eight times" without any provocation and "brutally dragged" her while "kicking" her, forcing her to fall and hit her head on a table at the CM's residence on May 13. Kumar has filed a counter complaint, accusing Maliwal of forcefully entering the CM's premises and using abusive language.

Kejriwal said a string of AAP leaders have been arrested over the past two years "as part of the BJP's efforts to break the AAP".

"Yesterday (on Saturday), they arrested my PA (Bibhav). Now, they are saying they will arrest Raghav Chadha, Atishi, Kailash Gahlot... We have all gathered here and we want to tell the PM that we have all come together and we can all be arrested. We are not scared," he said.

"In the coming days, the AAP will become a challenge for the BJP in many states and nationally, and that is why they want to destroy the party before it grows," he said.

The Delhi CM went on to say that "false cases" were levied against AAP leaders and that no money has been recovered to prove graft. He said that ahead of the Punjab assembly elections in 2022, he was referred to as a "Khalistani terrorist".

"In the next 10-15 days, they will bring out many more such fictional allegations. They can fall to any depth," he added.

He appealed to AAP supporters to march peacefully towards the BJP office. "We will march calmly and peacefully. I will lead it... We will sit for half an hour wherever they stop us and they can arrest us.

If they don't arrest us, it will be their loss," he said.

Following his speech, AAP leaders, led by Kejriwal, marched towards the BJP office on DDU Marg but were stopped several metres ahead of their destination. The ITO Metro station's entry and exit were shut, even as Delhi Police and central security personnel were deployed in large numbers.

Traffic police also issued an advisory asking commuters to avoid the surrounding roads.

"In view of the protest by political party at DDU Marg, traffic will remain heavy at DDU Marg, IP Marg, Minto Road and Vikar Marg," it said.

A senior police officer said, "Multiple layers of barricading was done from the AAP office towards the BJP headquarters. We made an announcement about Section 144 (of CrPC) being imposed in the area."

"AAP leaders started their march from their office and were walking towards Rouse Avenue when they were stopped. They agreed to stop and sat on the ground," added the officer, who asked not to be named.

During the march, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh raised slogans of "Jai Ka Jawab Vote Se, Gundagardi Ka Jawab Vote Se", "Loktantra me Tanashahi Nahi Chalegi" and "Hitlersahi nahi chalegi".

He was flanked by other ministers and senior party functionaries, including Delhi minister Atishi. "They are afraid of our work. They are unable to provide facilities like us and that is why they want to crush the AAP. We will continue to struggle," she said.

At 1.05pm, Singh announced that workers should head back towards the party office. "As promised, we remained here for half an hour. Now we know that BJP cannot arrest us and have accepted defeat. They have run away," he said.

Attacking the party further, Sachdeva said, "After Nirbhaya, Kejriwal used to scream that actions should be taken against accused but in this case, he is protecting him."

"We all know that misbehaviour was done with Swati Maliwal. Sanjay Singh himself accepted this. They have also tried to destroy the proofs inside the CM residence just like a criminal. Swati Maliwal was beaten on instructions of chief minister. The accused's phone has been cleared and CCTV footage is missing. This was not a protest. This was a drama.

The then nascent AAP held several protests in the after-

math of the December gang-rape and murder that rocked the national capital. Maliwal was, at the time, at the helm of several of these protests.

BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad said, "Kejriwal did not resign even after being arrested. His party staff beat up the woman MP, why no action is being taken? What kind of model of Arvind Kejriwal is this? Is this dadagiri? The law will take its own course and everyday, their reality is coming to fore."

In an apparent reference to the protest, Swati Maliwal posted on X in Hindi: "There was a time when we all came out on the streets to get justice for Nirbhaya. Today, after 12 years, we are out on the streets to save the accused who made the CCTV footage disappear and formatted the phone? I wish they had used this much force for Manish Sisodia ji. If he had been here, maybe this bad thing wouldn't have happened to me!"

While many AAP workers were whisked away by the forces during the protest, police said no formal detentions were made.

## RESERVOIR LEVELS

worst drought in 40 years, according to the state government. In Hyderabad, Osmania University has ordered its hostels and messes shut due to "water and electricity shortage", according to a notice by the chief warden, which HT has reviewed.

The water level last week in the 150 reservoirs was a mere 25% of the total live capacity of 179 billion cubic metres (BCM) at 45.2 BCM, according to data from the Central Water Commission. In the corresponding period a year ago, the storage was 58 BCM.

Live capacity, a hydrological parameter, refers to the usable volume of water, in contrast to dead storage, which is the bottom-most zone of a water body.

Karnataka has been struggling with water shortage since February. Blistering temperatures, far exceeding 40°C, have dried up lakes and water bodies in south India. Several reservoirs in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are also on the verge of drying out, a Union water department official said.

Last week, the only reservoir in Bihar went dry or reached its dead-storage level, as did Uttarakhand's Nanak Sagar reservoir.

Levels in the Cauvery basin in Karnataka have been progressively dropping, prompting farmers to dig deeper wells. Parched conditions have shrivelled the state's short-duration

paddy crop. "In Kerala, there has been extensive damage to paddy, pepper, cardamom, vegetables, coffee and cocoa," said AK Roy of the state's horticulture board.

Lower water levels in reservoirs have impacted hydro-power generation in the country, which declined to a five-year low of 146 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh), according to data from Grid-India. As a result, hydro power's share in total power output fell to a record low of 8.3% during the year ended March 31.

The southwest monsoon, which delivers 70% of India's annual rainfall, was 6% deficient in 2023, while the north-east (winter) monsoon that drenches southern states was 13% short.

The poor rains had been stoked by last year's peaking El Nino weather pattern, whose effects ripple around the globe. El Nino is marked by an abnormal warming of the Pacific Ocean and brings dry weather to the Indian subcontinent.

To be sure, on April 15, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the monsoon this year would be above normal. The IMD said the rains will be a surplus 106%. According to the IMD's classification, monsoon showers are considered average or normal if they are between 96% and 104% of a 50-year average of 87cm (35 inches) for the four-month season.

In Bengaluru, the shortage, exacerbated by weak winter monsoon rains, has prompted residents and local authorities to ration water use, as households chase exorbitantly priced tanker supplies.

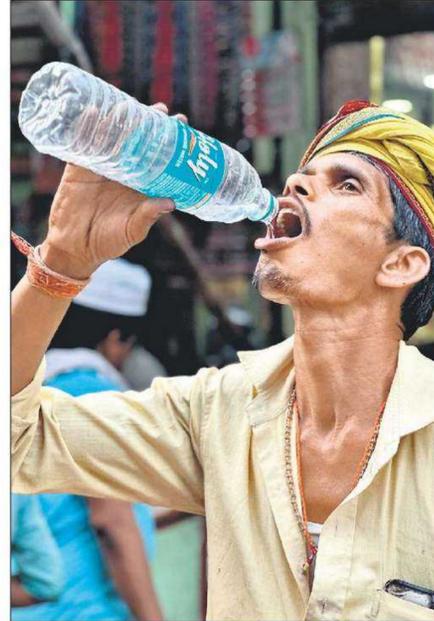
Even manufacturing and services firms have taken a hit. "Workers are not turning up and business has been impacted. We are desperately waiting for the summer monsoon to arrive," said Chethan Hegde of the Bengaluru chapter of the National Restaurants Association of India.

Although this year's monsoon is forecast to be robust, the ongoing dry spell could delay sowing of crops in the upcoming kharif or summer-sown season. "The problem is current moisture soil levels are totally depleted. Sufficient rains will be required to replenish soil moisture," a scientist at a state-run agriculture body said.

The June-September rain-bearing season is critical for Asia's third-largest economy as nearly half of the country's net-sown area heavily relies on the summer monsoon. Almost half the population depends on a farm-based income.

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## Voices from 40-plus degrees

Citizens during the extreme summer

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**Arif, kakri seller:** "I like extreme heat, they increase my sales."

**Virendra, construction labourer:** "Kaam to karna hee parega (one must keep working), but I regularly cool myself with the sherbet that I make daily (see right photo)."

**Jaipal, autorickshaw driver:** "It gets so hot between 12pm and two that my organs start to sizzle, but I have to be on the road... I try to be careful, drinking half-litre cold water after every half-hour."

**Farukh, pavement tailor:** "I have to manage my children's school fees, and my household expenses. So I continue to work on this pavement, this is the spot known to my regular customers. The silai machine gets burning hot as well... it cools down only in the evening."

**Sameer, kharbooja vendor:** "Aag aag ko marti hain (fire beats fire). So I frequently drink garmagarm chai. But cold drinks are no good. My body heats up minutes after having a cola bottle."

**Jamal, daily wage labourer:** "I have to be stationed here at Labour Chowk throughout the day to receive work (from contractors). It is very hot today, and yesterday was even hotter, but I was on this same spot as always, waiting for assignments I frequently walk to the mandir over there—it has free drinking water cooler for the public."

**Ravi, hawk of plastic tiaras:** "I cannot let the weather pause my life. I have to sell every single day."

**Ghulam Muhammed, Rafi, Nisaar, Shabeer, Abdur Rahman — labourers who jointly haul goods on carts:** "Upar wale ka saath hain (God is with us). Besides, our customers always give us cold water to drink."

**Suresh, phalsa seller:** "Kya kare, mazboori (what to do, it is helplessness)," (see left photo)

**Chhote, mango seller:** (He responds with a weary shrug, and stays silent.)

**Pappu, watermelon seller:** "These days I spend the midday hours sleeping under a tree, and set up the fruit stall only at four in the evening when the direct sun is gone."



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## 2 Haryana discom officials arrested for taking bribes

**GURUGRAM:** The anti-corruption bureau of the Haryana government arrested two Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam Limited (DHBVN) officials from Farrukhnagar while they were allegedly accepting bribes from a contractor and an affluent farmer for

issuing a new commercial energy connection and replacing a transformer, officials said.

ACB officials said that the arrested men were Anil Kumar and Rajbir Kumar, both junior engineers posted at DHBVN's Farrukhnagar office. **HTC**

## Man jumps from terrace to avoid arrest, dies

## HT Correspondent

htreporters@hindustantimes.com

**GURUGRAM:** A 45-year-old man, declared a proclaimed offender by courts in connection with three different cases in Nuh and Gurugram, died after he allegedly jumped from the terrace of his two-storey house in Sohna on Saturday evening to avoid being arrested during a raid, police said on Sunday.

Investigators identified the deceased as Nazar Mohammad. They said Mohammad was rushed to Medanta hospital by his family members but doctors declared him dead.

A senior official said that a

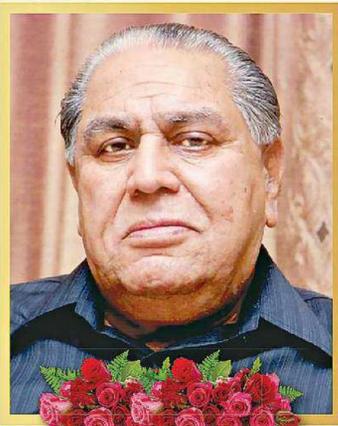
Nuh police team had reached Sohna and had carried out a raid at his home at about 5.45pm to arrest Mohammad when he jumped from the terrace of his house and died.

"He was a proclaimed offender by different courts in cases of Negotiable Instruments Act of which two were registered in Nuh and one in Sohna," the senior police official said.

Sandeep Kumar, Gurugram police public relations officer, said Mohammad was also booked in a case of domestic violence registered on the complaint of his wife. "An inquiry has been launched in connection with his death," he said.

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## SPOTLIGHT ELECTIONS 2024

## Understanding NDA, INDIA bloc's arithmetic in Phase 5

Nishant Ranjan

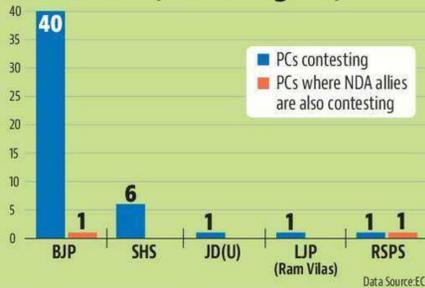
letters@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** Forty-nine parliamentary constituencies (PCs) are going to vote on Monday in the fifth phase of the current election cycle. This is also the smallest phase in terms of the number of PCs going to the polls. These 49 PCs are spread across eight states and Union territories. Among the two major alliance blocs — the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) spearheaded by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) — the INDIA bloc is again set to witness a higher proportion of intra-alliance conflicts. Most of these intra-alliance conflicts are expected to be notional, except in West Bengal, where the Trinamool Congress (TMC) failed to reach a seat-sharing arrangement with other INDIA parties — the Congress, Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPIM), and Communist Party of India (CPI).

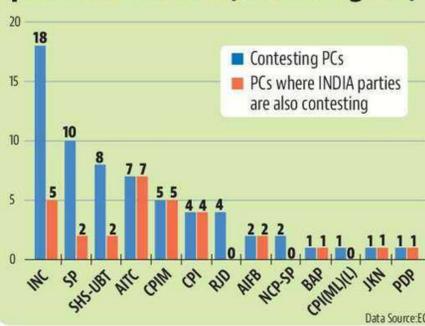
### What are the constituents of the NDA in the fifth phase?

Among the NDA parties, the BJP is contesting the highest number of 40 PCs. Shiv Sena is contesting 6 PCs, all in Maharashtra. Janata Dal (United), Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), and Rashtriya Samaj Paksha (RSPS) are contesting one PC each. None of the NDA parties are contesting Baranagar PC in Jammu and Kashmir. NDA alliance arithmetic seems perfectly seamless in the current phase, with only one intra-alliance contest with RSPS in Mohanlalgarh in Uttar Pra-

### NDA constituents in the fifth phase of elections (Contesting PCs)



### INDIA constituents in the fifth phase of elections (Contesting PCs)



des. The BJP had won Mohanlalgarh PC in Jammu and Kashmir. The BJP is contesting 81.6% of the total PCs going to the polls in the current phase. This is the second-highest percentage of PCs which BJP is contesting, the highest being in

the third phase when it contested 87.1% of the total PCs that went to the polls.

### What are the constituents of the INDIA bloc?

In sharp contrast to the NDA, the

INDIA bloc has fielded 64 candidates across the 49 PCs.

Thirteen parties from the INDIA bloc are in the fray in the current phase, each contesting at least one PC. Congress is contesting 18 PCs, the highest among the parties in the INDIA bloc. However, in terms of proportion, Congress is contesting the fewest PCs (36.7% of the total 49 PCs) so far in the election phases. It has contested 54.9%, 79.5%, 73.1%, and 63.5% of the PCs in the first four phases, respectively.

The Samajwadi Party (SP) and Shiv Sena - Uddhav Bal Thackeray (SHS-UBT) are the second and third biggest constituents, contesting 10 and 8 PCs, respectively. TMC is contesting all 7 PCs in West Bengal that are voting today. Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) is contesting all four of its PCs in Bihar.

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)-Sharadchandra Pawar faction is in the fray in two PCs in Maharashtra. Among the left parties, CPI(M) and CPI are contesting 5 and 4 PCs each, while another left ally, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation) - CPI(ML)(L), is contesting one PC in Jharkhand. All India Forward Bloc (AIFB) is also contesting two PCs, both in Maharashtra. The remaining parties are contesting one PC each.

### Where do INDIA members have intra-alliance conflicts?

There are 15 PCs in the current phase where INDIA parties are pitted against each other.

Seven of these PCs are in West Bengal, three in Maharashtra, two each in Uttar Pradesh and

Jharkhand, and one PC in Jammu and Kashmir. In West Bengal, TMC has fielded candidates in all 7 PCs, 5 against CPIM and 2 against Congress. In Uttar Pradesh, CPI has fielded its candidates in two PCs against SP. CPI has also fielded two candidates against Congress in Jharkhand.

In Maharashtra, AIFB has fielded two candidates, one each against Congress and SHS-UBT. Bharatiya Adivasi Party (BAP) has also fielded one candidate against SHS-UBT in Maharashtra. In Jammu and Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference and Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party candidates are pitted against each other.

### Who won 15 PCs with intra-alliance conflicts in 2019?

Out of these 15 PCs, only 14 are comparable due to the delimitation in Jammu and Kashmir post-2019. BJP won 9 of these PCs, while the then united Shiv Sena won one PC. TMC won the remaining 4 such PCs in 2019.

### elections on tapp



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### RALLY TRACKER

#### BJP

1 Narendra Modi, PM  
West Bengal: Medinipur, Bishnupur  
Jharkhand: Jamshedpur

2 Amit Shah, Union home minister  
Bihar: Bettiah

#### CONGRESS

Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader  
Uttar Pradesh: Phulpur, Prayagraj

#### SP

Akhilesh Yadav, SP chief  
Uttar Pradesh: Phulpur

#### TMC

Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal CM  
West Bengal: Purulia, Bankura



## 'TMC insulting Hindus': Modi sharpens attack

HT Correspondent

letters@hindustantimes.com

**KOLKATA:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday intensified his attack on the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal, alleging that the ruling party is "synonymous with terrorism, corruption, appeasement and nepotism".

Addressing back-to-back election rallies in four Lok Sabha constituencies that will go to polls in the sixth phase on May 25, Modi accused the TMC and chief minister Mamata Banerjee of "insulting the Hindu society and its faith" to "please their 'votabank'".

"In Bengal, TMC is synonymous with terrorism, corruption, appeasement and nepotism. To appease its vote bank, the TMC is insulting the Hindu society and its faith...", he alleged during a rally in Midnapore.

Alleging that "infiltrators are the vote bank of the TMC," he added: "They are disturbing the balance in population. Hindus have become a minority in many areas. Infiltrators are capturing lands of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe people..."

At a rally in Bankura district that comprises Bankura and Bishnupur LS seats, he alleged: "I am directly alleging that the chief minister is bad-mouthing our great organisations and maligning them under pressure from hardcore Muslim outfits to secure votes... The TMC government has crossed all limits in intimidation. ISKCON, Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are globally known for their service to people."

Modi's statement comes a day after Banerjee accused a section of monks from the three organisations of asking the voters to support BJP. "I have great respect for



TMC is synonymous with terrorism, corruption, appeasement and nepotism.

NARENDRA MODI, PM

### 'RAHUL'S MAOIST LANGUAGE HITTING INVESTMENTS IN CONG-LED STATES'

Vishal Kant

letters@hindustantimes.com

**RANCHI:** The language used by the Congress's "shehzada" will make any industrialist think 50 times before investing in the states ruled by his party, Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleged on Sunday, in an apparent jibe at party MP Rahul Gandhi and the Opposition's INDIA bloc.

"The language of Congress and their shehzada is that of the Maoists. Even the Maoists don't allow anyone to work in their area without taking levy... I have ensured that Maoism is rooted out, but it seems parties like the Congress and the JMM have now taken up their responsibilities," Modi said at a rally in Jamshedpur LS seat.

Attacking the INDIA bloc members, he added: "I challenge the chief ministers of states ruled by INDI allies. They should clarify whether they agree with the anti-industrialists and anti-investment language of the shehzada. Many investors say they don't want to invest in such states as their ideology is anti-industry..."

Modi's comments come a day after Gandhi challenged Modi for a debate. "I'm ready to debate with Modi whenever and wherever he wants, but I'm sure he won't come. The first question I would ask PM Modi is what is his relationship with Adani... The PM talks about the Congress getting tempo-loads of money from Adani-Ambani, but he doesn't dare to get it probed," Gandhi had said on Saturday.



### Kharge's posters defaced outside Bengal Cong HQ

**KOLKATA:** A day after he snubbed West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury for questioning TMC chief Mamata Banerjee's loyalty to the INDIA bloc, several posters and hoardings of Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge were defaced with ink in front of the party's state headquarters on Sunday. Unidentified people also wrote "agent of TMC" on Kharge's posters and hoardings. A Congress leader, however, said: "This is the handiwork of the TMC which works to create differences between senior Congress leaders and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury."

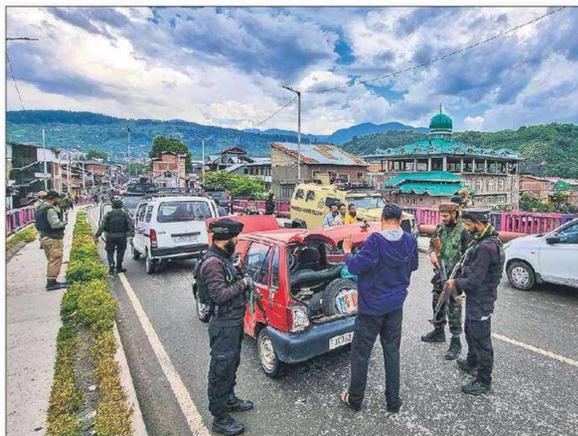
### Rahul, Akhilesh cut short joint rally in UP amid chaos

**PRAAYAGRAJ:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday had to leave a joint poll meeting in Phulpur area of Uttar Pradesh midway after their supporters broke through barricades, leading to a "stampede-like" situation. Deputy commissioner of police (Trans-Ganga) Abhishek Bharti said the mink at the dais was not working, and as a result the leaders could not address the gathering. "Chaos prevailed after the two leaders left the venue. There are no reports of any injuries to anyone in the incident." Failing to calm the crowd, Gandhi and Yadav left the stage, surrounded by their security staff.

### 2 more held over BJP worker's death in Odisha

**BERHAMPUR:** Two more persons were arrested on Sunday for their alleged involvement in pre-poll violence in Odisha's Khallikote in which one BJP worker was killed, police said. Manda, alias Sudarshan Pahan (20), of Srikushnasanpur and Papu Tarai (21) of Ramchandrapur were arrested over the incident that took place in Ganjam over the putting up of posters of candidates.

## Preparations on to ensure free and fair polling today



Security personnel (left) check a vehicle in Baramulla district of J&K; and polling officials wait under a tent after collecting EVMs and other election material in Rae Bareilly district of UP, on Sunday, a day before the fifth phase of polling for general elections across 8 states and Union territories.

## BJP raises Hindutva pitch in Puri, Kandhamal

Smriti Kak Ramchandran

letters@hindustantimes.com

**PURI/KANDHAMAL:** A student of political science at the Samanta Chandra Sekhar Autonomous College in Puri, Prakash Mohanty is not particularly interested in the ongoing Lok Sabha and assembly elections.

He knows a little about the parties in the fray and who the candidates are in Puri, but admitted that he has not invested time to understand issues such as welfare politics, freebies or the other poll promises made by the parties. He broadly sees the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) as the party that has been in power for longer than his 19 years, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the one that went on to "construct the Ram Mandir".

"It is important for our Hindu pride that the temple was constructed. Some BJP people visited our locality and talked to us about the temple, and how we must all be part of the celebration (consecration ceremony)," he said, adding that "we are happy that the temple was built".

A little distance from the college, Vipin Nayak, who owns two rickshaws, spoke at length about the temple in Ayodhya that he hopes to visit. He said the watching the consecration ceremony on TV filled "his heart with pride". Nayak has two saffron flags adorning both his rickshaws that he bought on loan from a cooperative bank. He does not own a house and is hopeful he might become a beneficiary of the PM Awas Yojana.

"People from the kamal (lotus) party who came to our neighbourhood gave us these flags, and



While the Kandhamal Lok Sabha seat in Odisha will go to polls in the fifth phase on Monday, Puri will vote on May 25.

some rice for the puja." "They explained why their party should win, because some people from outside want our faith and temples destroyed."

Across Puri, the home of Lord Jagannath, the deity and ruling lord of Odisha, saffron flags with Ram Temple and Lord Ram flutter. In its attempt to break into the BJD's bastion, the BJP has found in religion as a potent weapon.

"Our cadre went door-to-door explaining the importance of the consecration ceremony. It was the realisation of a dream that Hindus nurtured for 500 years, and a result of the BJP's struggle to pave the way for construction of the temple. If it becomes a reason for people to vote for us, then so be it," a state BJP functionary said, requesting anonymity. In Puri, which draws pilgrims



ON THE GROUND

from across India and is considered as the spiritual capital of the state, the BJP is pulling out all the stops from the BJD trying to seek credit for the revamp of the Jagannath Corridor.

The party's candidate, Sambit Patra, who unsuccessfully contested the election in 2019, blamed the state government for "mismanagement". "They need to answer why are three of the four doors to the temple locked? Why are devotees inconvenienced and why have they not addressed the concerns of the people whose livelihood has been affected by the redevelopment?" he asked.

Asked whether the BJD wants to compare the redevelopment work with the campaign for the construction of the Ram temple, he said, "Lord Jagannath has existed for thousands of years. The temple was not built by any

political party. He is the centre of every Odia person's sentiment and in the centre of universe. So, to say that there is a comparison between the Ayodhya temple construction and Jagannath mandir renovation would be wrong."

The temple has been dragged into the political slugfest between the two parties. Training their guns at the Naveen Patnaik government, BJP leaders have sought to know why the keys of the Ratna Bhandari (temple treasury) are missing. "How can the government claim that the keys are missing? It was last indexed in 1979. The law says that every 12 years it has to be updated," said Bhartruhari Mahtab, who has switched from the BJD to the BJP and is contesting from Cuttack LS seat.

The BJP's opponents, however, sniff a bid to sow seeds of discord in the eastern state. BJD spokesperson Lenin Mohanty accused the BJP of trying to create differences. "They are using the Ram temple as an election issue, but it will find no traction. While people have immoveable faith in Lord Jagannath; they revere Lord Ram as well. Everyone saw the consecration ceremony on television, the state government announced half a day's holiday." "What other proof do we need of being religious and respectful?"

BJD's LS candidate from Puri, Arup Patanaik, also dismissed the BJP's accusations of mismanagement and said the allegations against the chief minister will not yield results. "They keep saying all kinds of things. He would rather cede space than indulge in name calling. He is compassionate and empathic," Patanaik said. "How else do you think he's

stayed for so long?"

In Kandhamal district's Phulbani, the Ram temple has given the party an opening to gain a toehold to flag administrative and governance issues.

Sadashiv (uses only one name), a contractual employee at the power distribution company, said the state government has failed to fulfil promises from regularising jobs to providing quality health care. The BJP workers who had come to the village with the invitation for the consecration of the Ram temple appraised youngsters like him about the benefits of central government schemes that they are losing out on and the deficiencies of the state government.

"Schemes are not implemented on the ground. There are no good educational institutions here. We don't even have an ultrasound machine in the local hospital."

BJP's candidate from Kandhamal, Sukanta Panigrahi said the BJD has overlooked the needs of the people and turned a blind eye to conversion that are still happening. "The MP (Achyuta Samant) is the founder of the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT). He has bought acres of land for educational institutions to be run by a trust, but we see nothing of it on the ground. The tribal people whose land has been acquired get neither quality education nor health care. There are no jobs, no industry, no cold storage and despite a region rich in millets, no help for agriculturists," he said.

In the tribal-dominated seat, the issue of Ram temple and Hindu pride are as much a part of the poll narrative as the development agenda.

### { IN 49 CONSTITUENCIES }

## '118 of 162 candidates in Ph-5 sans LS experience'

Wrinda Tulsian

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**NEW DELHI:** The fifth phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections on Monday will see 49 constituencies, including several key battlegrounds, heading to polls in Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Ladakh, Kashmir, and Odisha.

Contesting for these 49 seats are 162 candidates from major political parties, according to data compiled by PRS Legislative Research, which shows that a large number of these — 118 — are contestants with no prior experience as a member of Lok Sabha.

The analysis is drawn from the non-profit's candidate profiles, for which it has picked contestants from major parties — a classification, to be sure, not explicitly defined but one that carries the names of most prominent contenders. In total, there are 695 candidates in the fray for the May 20 round of polling, the election commission said on May 8.

Out of the 162 candidates, 114 have no experience as an MP in either House. The broader INDIA alliance has 42 candidates with no prior experience as an MP, with all 10 Samajwadi Party candidates being new to central politics. The BJP has 40 candidates, with 17 vying to become LS members for the first time, while its broader National Democratic Alliance has 22 such contenders. In the case of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), only one of the 46 candidates has prior parliamentary experience. "Statistically, about 60% of MPs



49 constituencies are set to go to polls in the fifth phase.

enter the parliament for the first time," said Rahul Verma of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR). In the 13 seats going to polls in Maharashtra in this round, 33 out of 42 candidates from the major parties lack Lok Sabha experience. Key races include those in Kalyan, Mumbai North, Mumbai North Central, and Mumbai South.

In Uttar Pradesh's Amethi, Congress's Kishori Lal Sharma has not been in Parliament before. Sharma will take on BJP incumbent Smriti Irani.

In Odisha, fresh faces dominate the contests in Aska, Bargarh, and Bolangir, with only a few seasoned campaigners in the mix.

West Bengal's Hooghly and Howrah constituencies see a mix of newcomers and experienced candidates vying for supremacy. PRS Legislative is yet to put up candidate profiles for the seventh and the last phase. Its nomination process culminated on May 17. A comparison of the experience of contenders in the May 20 round of polls will be possible once the data is disclosed.

SPOTLIGHT  ELECTIONS 2024

{ AMIT SHAH } UNION HOME MINISTER

# 'We'll do exceptionally well in Bengal, Odisha; across the South, BJP will have highest seats'

**A**mit Shah, Union minister of home affairs and cooperatives, believes that the country's citizens are mature and vote carefully, dismissing the theory that the Opposition has managed to get across the narrative that the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) quest for 400-plus seats in the Lok Sabha is a means to do away with reservation benefits for backward castes and classes. People have accepted the BJP and the NDA's return to power, he adds, one reason why there's apathy among supporters of Opposition parties (and a dip in turnout). In an hour-long interview at his Delhi residence, Amit Shah spoke to **R Sukumar** of *Hindustan Times* and **Shashi Shekhar** of *Hindustan* on the elections and beyond. Edited excerpts:

**The Hindi belt has been your strength. During the first four phases, this region recorded a lower turnout than the rest of the country. Do you have any apprehensions because of this?**

I was worried after the first phase, but by the time the third phase of voting began, I discovered that the Opposition's voters were not showing up. They are deeply disappointed that the result is already in (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's favour; and they believe it is better to sit than go out (to vote) in the hot summer. This isn't good for democracy though. They should have cast their votes too, but because of widespread disillusionment among the INDIA bloc's voters, turnout has fallen. In states where you see high voting percentage (this time) like West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, the voting has always been high, and even there, there is some dip in turnout. If you do an analysis, you will find that there is a correlation between this dip and the areas where the Congress has traditionally had support.

**Initially, it appeared that your party was winning comfortably. But reports suggest that several foreign portfolio investors have found in their surveys that you are not winning as many seats as initially expected, resulting in them starting to sell (their holdings) in the market. What is your opinion on this?**

Foreign agencies can't do proper surveys in the country. There are numerous reasons why the stock market goes up and down. We are monitoring and fighting the elections at the grassroots level. I do not have a single rally after which I do not sit with 40-50 of our workers (to discuss what is happening). According to their feedback, there is nothing to worry about.

**This election is viewed as a referendum on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. What do you think?**

This is just wordplay. Both sides have settled on candidates for the post of Prime Minister.

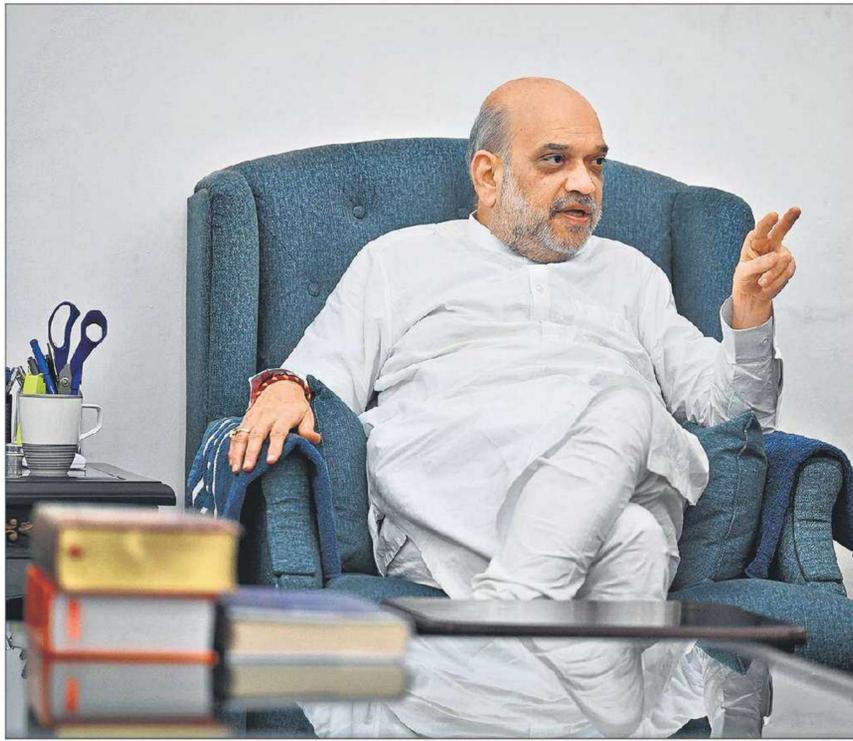
**Who's on the other side?**  
Only Rahul ji has been projected; no one has spoken for (Mallikarjun) Kharge ji. We are contesting elections under Modi ji's leadership, and he will become the Prime Minister for the third time.

**The BJP shattered caste barriers in both the 2014 and 2019 elections, consolidating its vote base. This time, it appears that caste-based mobilisation has resurfaced. What are your thoughts?**

I don't think so. Voting is taking place regardless of caste. Yadavs also voted for us in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

**You have struck alliances with the Rashtriya Lok Dal and Nitish Kumar (of the Janata Dal United) with caste equations in mind?**

Nitish ji is an old friend. Some people took him to the other side due to some misunderstandings. We did not strike a



SANCHIT KHANNA/HT PHOTO

partnership with the RLD because of caste. We wanted to ensure our party's outreach to a significant section of farmers, and therefore we allied with the RLD. It has nothing to do with electoral victory or defeat.

**What are your expectations in the southern states?**

We will be the largest party in Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu (taken together).

**What about Bengal and Odisha?**

We will do exceptionally well in Bengal and Odisha. In West Bengal, we will get 24 to 30 seats. We will form the government in Odisha (the assembly elections in the state are happening along with the Lok Sabha elections), and win more than 17 Lok Sabha seats.

**The Srinagar constituency registered a record turnout in the polls that are happening after the revocation of Article 370. Everyone was surprised by the number of people that turned up.**

We didn't contest there this time. The Jamaat-e-Islami and Hurriyat, which previously boycotted voting and refused to acknowledge India's Constitution, have supported the process this time. Both voted and stated that they were participating in the electoral process in accordance with the Indian Constitution. This is a significant development that has happened in Kashmir.

**When will assembly elections be held in Kashmir? Will you participate in it?**

The Supreme Court has established a time limit for assembly elections, which will be held in August or September. We will undoubtedly participate in the assembly elections and win seats.

**And statehood for J&K?**

As I have repeatedly mentioned, even in Parliament, after the elections are held, we will restore statehood.

**Inflation and unemployment have had a big impact on people. You are accused of having done no work on these issues. What is your response to this?**

You would have most likely heard about these problems even when you voted for the first time. The Narendra

## on left-wing extremism

**T**he battle against Left-Wing Extremism is in its final stage. The home ministry has a three-dimensional strategy to tackle Left-Wing Extremism: controlling extremists through better strategies; improved co-ordination between Centre and states; and public participation through development. Between 2004-14 and 2014-24 (March), there was a 53% reduction in incidents of violence, from 16,134 to 7,569.

There was a 72% reduction in deaths of security personnel (to 499) and a 68% reduction in deaths of

civilians (to 1,462). Success has been achieved in establishing camps in Maoist strongholds such as Barmasia and Chakarbandha in Bihar, and Boodha Pahar and Parsnath in Jharkhand, completely eliminating security vacuum there. Since 2019, 195 new camps have been opened, which have brought down the security vacuum in LWE-affected areas to near zero, barring a few areas. Already this year, 24 new camps have been opened, and plans are in place to open 44 more camps in a phase-wise manner according to the situation.

Modi government has done a lot of work in terms of jobs. When explaining the issue of employment, left-wing journalists treat only government jobs as employment. From this viewpoint, both of you are unemployed. We have an infrastructure budget of ₹11 lakh crore. That would have translated into some jobs. Someone will undoubtedly do the construction work. The speed of railway and road construction has doubled. The amount of (power) grids laid in the 70 years was equalled in the past 10 years. So, has employment not increased?

Along with this, we promoted the idea of self-employment. 470 million people have received Mudra Loans. We provided a loan of ₹27.75 lakh crore for this. I am pleased that of 470 million people who have Mudra Loans, 99.5% are not Non-Performing Assets (NPAs). About 8.5 million street vendors have been given Swamidhi Loans. We have seen the creation of 117,000 startups. In 2016-17, the unemployment rate was 6.1%, and it is projected to be 3.1% in 2023-24. Inflation was double-digit in 2013-14, but it has already dropped to 4.83%.

When Modi ji became the Prime Minister for the first time, the country had 22.2 million demat account holders. Today, this figure is 150.7 million.



Union home minister Amit Shah holds a roadshow as part of the BJP's Lok Sabha campaign.

## on the three new criminal laws

**O**ur endeavour is to deliver justice within three years and timelines have been added in 35 sections.

In addition, we have sharpened the focus on crimes against women and children; a new chapter on this has been introduced in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (which replaces the Indian Penal Code, 1860). We have also taken cognisance of new crimes, such as snatching. In today's technological era, it is very important to prevent snatching of mobile phones. Mob lynching has been defined for the first time. Terrorism has been defined in the law for the first time.

Also, the focus of the new criminal laws is justice, not punishment. It is justice that is in line with Indian legal philosophy. At the same time, the aim is also to build the world's most modern justice system. It is

flexible enough to accommodate any technology that will be developed in the next 50 years.

The new laws (they also include the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita which replaces the Criminal Procedure Code of 1898, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam Vidhayak which replaces the Indian Evidence Act of 1872) also provide for action against proclaimed offenders.

In cases where the punishment is 10 years or more, including life imprisonment and the death penalty, the offender can be declared a 'proclaimed offender'. And a new provision has been made for the attachment and seizure of property outside India. Our laws have now become more relevant and effective to stop the new methods adopted by criminals.

alliance has emerged. There were 5,155 PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) cases registered under our government. Politicians account for only 3% of that total. ₹350 crore cash was found in the home of one of their MPs; ₹51 crore was found in the home of Mamata Banerjee's minister, and ₹31 crore in the home of a staff member of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha minister Alamgir Alam. What's the answer to this? I ask in rallies whether anyone has ever seen so much money? Not one hand is raised. Even now, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has not suspended Alamgir, and Mamata Banerjee has not suspended Partha Chatterjee (the minister in question). Why?

**Some Opposition leaders who joined you also had cases against them; yet, they have neither been raided nor summoned.**

Their raid and summoning stages have ended. The charge sheets have been filed. After this, the agency has no authority, the court has to decide. Charge sheets have also been filed against Rahul and Chidambaram sahib (former Union home minister P Chidambaram). No action is being taken against them either. It will happen (in court) when their turn comes.

**The distribution of citizenship certificates in the midst of the elections has become controversial.**

Look, this is not fair. First, people criticise us for taking time to frame rules for CAA; then, when we do and issue citizenship certificates... The main question is not when the certificates are distributed, but whether they should be granted citizenship or not. I've explained CAA several times. As a result of this, no one will lose their citizenship in the country. These people (who are being given citizenship) came as refugees from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh; the minority population in these countries has shrunk. Here (in the absence of citizenship) they do not have the right to vote; they cannot be admitted to hospitals; they cannot obtain government jobs; and they have difficulties even in education. How will they live?

**You say the election is one-sided, yet you have raised the fear that Rahul Gandhi would enforce Sharia laws (in India) if the Opposition alliance wins. If they did not implement Sharia in 60 years; why will they do it now?**

Haven't done it in 60 years? This has been in place since 1939 here; what constitutes Muslim personal law? It is part of Sharia. On our part, we are now discussing adopting the Uniform Civil Code, which has already been implemented in Uttarakhand, and they, for their part, are claiming that they would

bring back personal law. If you wish to establish Muslim personal law, you must implement comprehensive Sharia. Those who commit treachery should be stoned to death, and those who rape should be publicly hanged. You should cut off the hands of the thief.

**Will you bring a central law on UCC?**

UCC is a significant social reform for which our country has waited years. The Uttarakhand government appointed a commission, chaired by a retired Supreme Court woman judge. Her report served as the foundation for the creation of this law. There should be social, religious, and legal scrutiny and debate about it. If it is implemented in one or two states, there will automatically be debate and legal scrutiny.

**The Opposition says that you are seeking votes in the name of the Ram Mandir?**

This would not have been an issue if they (the opposition) had attended the Ram Temple's pran-pratishtha (consecration) ceremony.

**They claim the Sangh called them, which was insulting. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said in an interview that they were invited by the BJP.**

The Shri Ram Janma bhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, not the BJP, invited them. The BJP has no role in it. She either does not have the information or is lying.

**The Prime Minister has said that he will distribute the money of the corrupt to the poor. Is there a roadmap for this?**

He did not say so. He has said that he will look into this possibility. A legal solution will need to be found. If there is no legislation, one will have to be created. I am telling it exactly as he has said it.

**What hope do you see in contesting elections alone in Punjab?**

The goal of contesting elections alone in Punjab is to reach every voter. Our workers are working hard to attain this goal; I am not claiming that we will be the number one party, but both our vote share and seats will increase because of the trust people have in Modi ji.

**There are allegations that the BJP will amend the Constitution; that the benefits of reservation will be taken away. What are your thoughts on this?**

We have enjoyed absolute majority for 10 years — we have a majority now; had a majority in 2014 — but we did not make such efforts, and we have no such intentions. We used the majority to remove Article 370, abolish triple talaq. We will use the majority to implement UCC. People are mature, they don't listen to such charges. People of every caste and class are voting to give Narendra Modi 400 seats.

**In the last 10 years, we have seen you in a variety of roles. BJP president, home minister, and minister for cooperatives. What do you see yourself doing in the BJP's third term?**

You're looking at all of them incorrectly. All three roles followed the Bharatiya Janata Party's plan. If there is a fourth role, it will be determined by the party. My job is only to carry out the party's instructions.



**READ:** Scan the QR code to read HT's interview with Prime Minister Narendra Modi

## on terrorism

**T**he Modi government has a "Zero Tolerance Policy" on terrorism and major terror incidents have reduced in number in the hinterland — from 43 in the 10 years of the United Progressive Alliance rule to 10 in our time, with the number of casualties of security forces and civilians reducing from 874 to 21.

Even in Kashmir, total incidents have come down from 7,217 in 2004-14 to 2,227 in 2014-24, with the number of total deaths coming down by 68% to 915 and the number of civilian deaths by 81% to 341. The big change in Kashmir is that we have one Constitution, one national flag and one Prime Minister now.

We have implemented 53 schemes involving ₹58,769 crore for the development of Jammu & Kashmir. There are now around 34,000 elected public representa-

tives in the UT. And in 2023, the tourist footfall touched 21.1 million.

We also amended the NIA Act, including new offences under the agency's jurisdiction and granting it extraterritorial jurisdiction. NIA has registered 567 cases so far, out of which 125 have resulted in convictions. We also came up with a comprehensive 25-point action plan to control terror funding. NIA has seized 400 properties related to terrorism. And all financial channels related to left-wing insurgent groups, organised crime gangs, and Khalistani terrorist groups are being curbed.

The UAPA has been amended, giving us the power to confiscate property acquired/related to terrorism and the power to declare person a terrorist. And since 2019, 57 people have been declared terrorists. And a total of 44 organisations, including four since 2019, have been banned.

# Monsoon advances to Nicobar but respite from heat unlikely

Jayashree Nandi

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**NEW DELHI:** A severe heatwave is expected to continue over northwest India and spread to central and east India over the next five days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned on Sunday, even as the monsoon has advanced over the South Andaman Sea and Nicobar Islands.

The IMD has issued a red warning for all of northwest India for severe heat until at least May 23, implying that local agencies need to take action to prevent extreme heat-related emergencies. Maximum temperatures on Saturday were in the range of 43-46 degrees Celsius in most places over Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh-Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

"If people do not take precautionary measures, exposure to extreme heat can be fatal, particularly exposure to sun," said M Mohapatra, director general of IMD. "Since 1970, there has been an increase in the duration, intensity and extent of heat waves over India, mainly an impact of climate change."

In Punjab, Bathinda was the hottest in the state on Sunday at 46.4 degrees Celsius. "This is very unusual. We never had to issue continuously five-to-seven-day red alert warnings in Punjab over the past few years," said AK Singh, director of IMD Chandigarh.

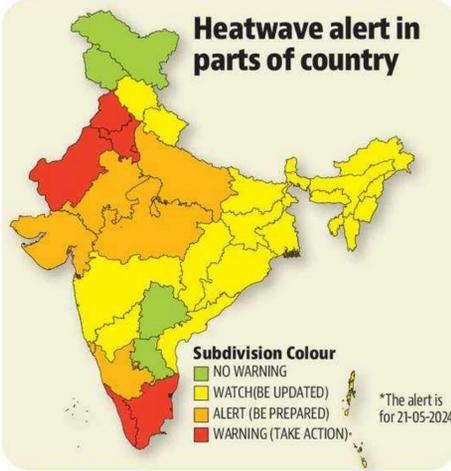
With the heatwave conditions coinciding with polling in some northern states, the IMD's forecast is a cause for concern. Delhi and Haryana will go to polls on May 25, while Punjab and Himachal Pradesh will vote on June 1, the last of the seven-phase exercise.

Polling will also be held in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, some of the other states in grip of hot weather conditions. Elections have already taken place in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.

Delhi's Najafgarh recorded the highest temperature in India at 47.8 degrees Celsius, followed by Mangeshpur at 47.7 degrees Celsius. Agra in Uttar Pradesh recorded a peak of 47.4 degrees Celsius, becoming the third hottest station.

Experts said Najafgarh's readings are largely a result of an urban heat island effect, which caused it to record a peak more than three degrees hotter than the maximum at Sardarjung, the base station for Delhi.

Haryana also sweltered under heat wave conditions, with Mewat recording the highest temperature in the state at



47.2 degrees Celsius.

On Sunday, Sri Ganganagar district of Rajasthan — often among the hottest — experienced scorching temperatures, with the mercury soaring to a staggering 46.3°C. The IMD said in the coming days, the weather in the state will remain mainly dry, and the maximum temperature is expected to increase by 1-2 degrees over the next 48 hours with possibility of an intense heat wave at isolated places in the Jodhpur, Bikaner and Shekhawati regions.

Several places in Himachal Pradesh recorded temperatures above 40 degrees with Una recording 44.4 degrees and Bilaspur 42.4 degrees C, six degrees above normal.

In Punjab, Bathinda recorded 46.4 degrees Celsius and Patiala 45.

The IMD has advised people to stay hydrated, remain in cool conditions, and seek help immediately if feeling unwell. The heat wave is a risk for livestock, water bodies, transport and power sectors.

Meanwhile, the monsoon has arrived over some parts of Maldives, South Bay of Bengal, Nicobar Islands and South Andaman Sea on Sunday, according to the IMD. The normal date for arrival of monsoon over the Andaman and Nicobar region is May 22.

A low-pressure area is likely to form over Southwest Bay of Bengal around May 22 and move initially north-eastwards, concentrating into a depression over central parts of Bay of Bengal around May 24.

Climate scientist Roxy Knoll wrote on X: "A low pressure system is going to develop in the south Bay of Bengal during 22-23 May. Will it evolve as

#CycloneRemal moving to the east coast? Ocean and atmospheric conditions are favourable in south Bay, with 2-3°C warmer sea surface temperatures and an MJO reaching there."

The monsoon will be crucial for the country's agriculture sector. Already, hot weather and the knock-on effects of a poor monsoon in 2023 have pushed water storage in 150 centrally monitored reservoirs to their lowest level in five years, worsening water shortages in at least 16 states and shrinking hydro-power generation to a record low, official data showed on Sunday.

Storage in these nationally important water bodies — critical for drinking, irrigation and power generation — is now only one-fourth of their total capacity, having declined consecutively for 32 weeks.

Parched conditions have triggered severe drinking water crises in cities such as Bengaluru, Coimbatore, Chennai and Hyderabad. A prolonged dry spell has triggered Kerala's worst drought in 40 years, according to the state government. In Hyderabad, Osmania University has ordered its hostels and messes shut due to "water and electricity shortage", according to a notice by the chief warden, which HT has reviewed.

The water level last week in the 150 reservoirs was a mere 25% of the total live capacity of 179 billion cubic metres (BCM) at 45.2 BCU, according to data from the Central Water Commission. In the corresponding period a year ago, the storage was 58 BCM.

(With inputs from HT correspondents across bureaus)

## Farmland trees that provide shade dwindle amid heat surge: Study

Jayashree Nandi

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**NEW DELHI:** At a time when the impacts of climate crisis are becoming severe, with most of India suffering from extreme heat, farmland trees with large crowns that provide cool shade have disappeared to an alarming extent, a new study has found.

Of the 0.6 billion farmland trees mapped in India in 2010-11, around 11% had disappeared by 2018, according to research led by the Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management at the University of Copenhagen. These are trees with about 96 sqm crown cover.

The depletion is the highest in Telangana, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, where extreme heat is more pronounced.

Moreover, during 2018-22, more than 5 million large farmland trees (about 67 sqm crown cover) have vanished, partly due to altered cultivation practices, where trees on farms are perceived as detrimental to crop yields.

"These observations are particularly unsettling given the current emphasis on agroforestry as a pivotal natural climate solution, playing a crucial role in both climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, in addition to being important for supporting agricultural livelihoods and improving biodiversity," said the paper published on May 15 in Nature Sustainability, a peer-reviewed journal.

According to a recent land cover map referred to by the authors, 56% of India is covered by farmland, and only 20% is covered by forest. While the separation of forests and tree plantations is not always clear, it is certain that these classifications exclude a large part



The depletion of farmland trees is the highest in Telangana, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, where extreme heat is more pronounced. HT PHOTO

of India's trees scattered within farmlands, in urban areas or grown as hedgerows, the authors said.

The farmland trees data used in the study included the RapidEye archive, which provides global coverage from micro satellites back to August 2008, and PlanetScope, which provides imagery starting 2017. These satellite groups provide an opportunity of repeated global coverage with images at a spatial resolution of 3-5 m, which allows the identification of individual trees, the paper said.

A potential driver of tree losses is climate change, with rapid increases in temperature in central and southern India, and unfavourable trends in rainfall and drought over the past decade, the paper underlined. But, climate change may not be the direct and main reason for the high loss of farmland trees.

"This is the first large-scale study that maps and monitors individual trees at the Indian sub-continental scale using imagery at 5 and 3 m resolution. The created datasets of the location of around 597 million individually distinct large trees in non-forest areas — farms, urban areas, and bare land can have many uses. The study methodology would certainly be of interest to the Forest Survey of India, which would presumably be looking at it carefully," said Chetan Agarwal, environment analyst.

"The recent report of a Supreme Court appointed Committee had clearly identified older/larger trees as having a higher ecological value. In this context the loss of large trees between 2010-2018 and 2018-22 is alarming and raises questions about the nature of agricultural intensification and its collateral damage in the form of intensified tree loss," Agarwal added.

{ AFTER 2-HOUR GUNFIGHT } INVOLVING ARMY, ASSAM RIFLES

## 75 women rescued from Kuki militants

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**NEW DELHI:** In a nearly two-hour gunfight, the Army and Assam Rifles rescued 75 Meitei women from an attack by Kuki militants on Friday night, according to officials familiar with the matter.

The women, unaware of the approaching militants, were Meira Paibis (women activists) standing guard at night in the Warjoring area of Bishnupur district, bordering the foothills of Kangpokpi district.

"At around 10:30 p.m., our night vision thermal cameras detected militant movement in the foothills, approaching the women guarding their villages on the road in the buffer zone," said an Assam Rifles official, adding that the militants had reached within 500 meters of the women.

This incident marks the first major gunfight in nearly three weeks, with the last reported killing in ethnic clashes occurring on April 28.

The ongoing ethnic hostilities have led Meiteis, primarily residing in the Imphal valley plains, and Kukis, predominantly living in the hills, to withdraw to their respective strongholds. Security forces have established buffer zones, camps, and posts on highways in border districts in response.

Ethnic tensions between the two sides boiled over on May 3, 2023, plunging Manipur into a state of lawlessness as the



The gunfight in progress.

divides grew into irreconcilable cleavages. At least 225 people have been killed and 50,000 people displaced, while armed militia prowls the streets.

Late on Friday, as militants advanced, security forces blew a hooter to deter them, but they continued firing towards the villages and women. Village volunteers from Meitei villages returned fire, resulting in a gunfight with the 75 unarmed women guards trapped in between, the official quoted above said.

Security forces mobilised and reached the ground amid the crossfire. They chased back armed groups in the valley, fired 81 mm mortars towards the foothills to deter them, and worked with village heads to create a safe route for the women.

"A team first chased back the armed groups in the valley. Another team started firing

81mm mortars towards the foothills. A third team went inside the by lanes of the Meitei villages and roped in village heads to prepare a safe route because armed groups on this side too could mistake security forces and fire at them," said the Assam Rifles officer, asking not to be named.

By 12:30 am, the forces managed to escort the 75 women to safety in Leimaram, with militants fleeing back to the hills by lam.

Several houses were damaged due to the gunfight. However, no injuries have been reported due to the exchange of fire.

Manipur police have not yet issued a statement. The Assam Rifles, in a statement on Sunday, said, "The Army and Assam Rifles safely led the rescue and evacuation of around 75 Meira Paibis during an attack by armed miscreants. The security forces repelled the misadventurism by bringing down heavy fire and saving lives of villagers in Uyoek. The Indian Army and Assam Rifles continue staying steadfast in their resolve to bring normalcy in Manipur and maintaining law & order."

An officer who supervised the operation noted that the women's proximity to the buffer zone at the foothills might have prompted the militants to launch a night attack. The area remains peaceful, with heavy security presence following the incident.

## Minor gang-raped in front of mother: Police

Mukesh Kumar Mishra

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**PATNA:** A 15-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped by three men in front of her mother inside a car in Patna, police said on Sunday, adding the survivor has been admitted to All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Bihar's capital city.

The incident took place in Naubatpur area late on Saturday and efforts are being made to arrest the suspects, two of whom are from Kankarbagh area, police said, citing the statement of the survivor's mother.

The two men called the woman to Dumri railway station on the pretext of providing her a job, police said. After the woman reached the spot with her minor daughter, the suspects asked them to get inside a vehicle, Scorpio, which already had one more man.

"As the woman and her daughter got into the vehicle, they started teasing the girl. When the mother objected, they assaulted them. The suspects gang-raped the minor inside the vehicle. When the woman and her daughter became unconscious, they threw them on the roadside near Sheikhpura bridge and fled," police said.

An emergency response vehicle spotted them and rushed them to hospital.

**TWO SUSPECTS CALLED A WOMAN TO DUMRI STATION ON THE PRETEXT OF PROVIDING HER A JOB. SHE WENT TO THE SPOT WITH HER DAUGHTER**

Deputy superintendent of police (DSP), Phulwarisharif, Deepak Kumar said that Naubatpur police received information through "Dial 112" on Saturday night that a woman and a child were lying unconscious near Sheikhpura Dam. "Police reached the spot and got them admitted to AIIMS," said the DSP.

"In her statement to the police, the woman said the two suspects belonged to Kankarbagh area and asked her to meet them near Dumri station, promising her to offer a job. The suspects thrashed them and also gang-raped the girl. We are interrogating some people and scrutinising CCTV footage from the area. Raids are on to track them down," the DSP added.

"It appears that all the suspects are also witnesses of a murder case in Gaya. However, the matter is still being investigated," Patna SSP Rajeev Mishra said.

## MAN TIED TO BIKE AND DRAGGED OVER COW SMUGGLING SUSPICION: POLICE

**GARHWA:** A 60-year-old man was allegedly stripped and dragged after being tied to a motorcycle by three people on suspicion of cow smuggling at Garhwa district in Jharkhand, police said. One person has been arrested in this connection, police added on Sunday.

The incident occurred near Amrora village, around 275km from Jharkhand's capital Ranchi, when the man, identified as Surswati Ram was on his way to Banshidhar Nagar Untari with his cattle on Friday afternoon, they added.

Banshidhar Nagar Untari sub-divisional police officer Satyendra Narayan Singh said that a first information report (FIR) has been lodged in this regard.

"According to the FIR, three people, identified as Rahul Dubey, Rajesh Dubey and Kashinath Bhuiyan, were on a motorcycle. They intercepted the old man and accused him of being involved in cow smuggling," Singh said.

They also stripped the old man and tied him to their motorcycle. "They dragged me to some distance and escaped after leaving me on the road," Ram stated in the FIR.

Singh said Kashinath Bhuiyan was arrested. PTT

## Former Raj minister seeks maintenance expenses from kin

Suresh Foujdar

letters@hindustantimes.com

**BHARATPUR:** Former Rajasthan minister Vishvendra Singh, a member of the erstwhile royal family of Bharatpur, has sought maintenance expenses as a senior citizen from his family and accused his wife and son of assaulting him, a charge refuted by them.

In his application filed before the Sub Divisional Officer's Tribunal in March this year, the 62-year-old Congress leader claimed he suffered from heart-related ailments. Despite contracting Covid-19 twice in 2021 and 2022, his wife Divya Singh and son Anirudh Singh failed to assist him or provide care, the three-time former Bharatpur MP alleged.

"I have filed an application for maintenance from my son and wife, who have taken possession of my ancestral palace, gold, and all property. They assaulted me and forcibly evicted me from the palace," Singh has claimed in the application, which surfaced on social media on Saturday evening. "We have a joint bank account in Delhi, held by my wife, son, and myself. They emptied the bank locker and transferred its contents to another locker using forged signatures attributed to me."

He alleged that the withdrawal from the bank locker occurred on April 23, while he was in Bharatpur.

"I have been living away from the palace for the past three years since they assaulted me and forced me out. All unique and ancient wealth and possessions remain under their control," the former minister claimed.



The 62-year-old Congress leader, Vishvendra Singh, is a member of the erstwhile royal family of Bharatpur.

Singh has moved the application under The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, demanding ₹5 lakh per month from his son and wife. Additionally, he has requested that ownership of the palace be transferred to him, along with all its assets, the application stated.

Refuting the allegations, Singh's wife and son accused him of selling off their ancestral properties. "I have been trying to secure our property, while he has sold everything. The family dispute escalated when he attempted to sell the Moti Mahal palace [sprawling over 100 acres], Anirudh Singh, my son, has been taking care of me," Divya Singh told reporters on Sunday.

Anirudh accused his father of trying to exert pressure on the sub-division magistrate. Dismissing his father's allegations as "false", he claimed that as a former minister three years ago, Singh "would have been well protected and any attack on him would have been unlikely".

## Sister of woman killed by stalker attempts to die by suicide: Police

Hirekop Rajan Samuel

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**BENGALURU:** The sister of a woman, who was killed by her stalker in Hubballi district of Karnataka, attempted to die by suicide, her family members said on Sunday, adding that the 18-year-old took the step as she believed that they won't get justice in the case.

On May 14, a 20-year-old woman was stabbed to death by 21-year-old Girish Savant after she rejected his marriage proposal. The accused fled from the spot but was caught on May 17 after he tried to attack another woman on board a train. He jumped from the moving train after other passengers tried to overpower him. He was arrested by the Hubballi Police and admitted to a hospital for treatment.

The 18-year-old on Saturday

**THE WOMAN WAS STABBED TO DEATH BY SAVANT AFTER SHE REJECTED HIS MARRIAGE PROPOSAL**

took part in a protest march that was held against her sister's killing. She returned home and then attempted to kill herself, the woman's grandmother said. "She was upset that her sister was not getting justice and her murderer was leading a comfortable life and was getting good treatment in a hospital," the woman's grandmother said.

Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner Renuka Sukumar said that the woman was admitted to the Karnataka Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) and her condition was stable.

"We are in continuous contact with the ICU staff, and they have assured us that she is recovering," the commissioner said. The parents of the two women were dead and they lived with their grandmother.

**Hubballi DCP suspended**

The deputy commissioner of police of Hubballi-Dharwad M Rajeev has been suspended in connection 20-year-old's murder case, people aware of the matter said on Sunday. A week before the murder, Anjali's grandmother had complained to the police that Savant was stalking her granddaughter but no action was taken.

(With agency inputs)

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## SC to hear plea against 3 new laws today

Press Trust of India

letters@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a petition challenging the enactment of three new laws that seek to overhaul India's penal codes claiming that they suffer from many "defects and discrepancies".

A vacation bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal is likely to hear the matter.

The Lok Sabha, on December 21 last year, passed three key legislations — the Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill.



A vacation bench of justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal is likely to hear the matter.

President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent to the bills on December 25.

These new laws — the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita

and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act — will replace the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc) and the Indian Evidence Act respectively.

Seeking a stay on the operation of the three new laws, the PIL filed by advocate Vishal Tiwari has said they were enacted without any parliamentary debate as most of the opposition members were under suspension.

The plea has sought directions from the court for the immediate constitution of an expert committee that will assess the viability of the three new criminal laws.

"The new criminal laws are far more draconian and estab-

lish a police state in reality and violate every provision of fundamental rights of the people of India. If the British laws were considered colonial and draconian, then the Indian laws stand now far more draconian as, in the British period, you could keep a person in police custody for a maximum of 15 days. Extending 15 days to 90 days and more is a shocking provision enabling police torture," the plea has said.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita encompasses offences, such as acts of secession, armed rebellion, subversive activities, separatist activities or endangering the sovereignty or unity of the country, in a new avatar of the sedition law.

## Patanjali product fails food safety test, 3 jailed

**PITHORAGARH:** A court in Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand has sentenced three people, including an assistant general manager of Patanjali Ayurved Ltd, to six-month imprisonment for violating food safety standards in making Patanjali Elai-chi Soanpapadi, which failed the food quality test.

The three were convicted under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. Ritesh Verma, assistant prosecution officer who pleaded in the case, said.

Pithoragarh chief judicial magistrate Sanjay Singh on Saturday sentenced Abhishek Kumar, assistant general manager at Patanjali Ayurved Ltd Unit-III, Herbal Park, Haridwar

and Ajay Joshi, assistant manager at Patanjali's authorised representative Kanhaiji Distributors Pvt Ltd located in Nainital's Ramnagar, to six months' imprisonment and slapped fines of ₹25,000 and ₹10,000 on them, respectively, Verma said.

A case was lodged in December 2020 after food samples collected from a shopkeeper, Liladhar Pathak, from Bering area in Pithoragarh on October 17, 2019, were found of substandard quality during testing at a government-run lab, the lawyer said.

Verma added the court also sentenced Pathak to six-month jail and imposed a ₹5,000 fine for selling the product. HT

# Twin terror attacks before polling put Valley on alert

HT Correspondent

letters@hindustantimes.com

**SRINAGAR:** The killing of a former village head and the attack on two tourists by terrorists triggered protests and widespread condemnation in Kashmir on Sunday, with officials saying that they have given forces a "free hand to crush" those trying to disrupt peace in the region.

The terror attacks came days ahead of voting in the two remaining seats in the Valley, which is blanketed in heavy security cover amid the first major electoral exercise in the region since revocation of Article 370.

On Saturday, a terrorist shot BJP worker and former sarpanch Aijaz Ahmad Sheikh at his residence in the Shopian district of south Kashmir. His wife Shabnam Kausar said that a man knocked on their door in the night and asked for Sheikh.

"The moment my husband confirmed his identity that he was Aijaz, the assailant fired seven to eight shots before fleeing," she said. Sheikh is survived by his mother, wife and three children, including a two-month-



People take part in the funeral procession of Aijaz Ahmad Sheikh in Shopian on Sunday.

old girl. BJP members held a protest outside the 'mini secretariat' in Shopian and accused the district administration of not providing adequate security to Sheikh.

"There has been a lapse on the administration's part. We had written to the deputy commissioner that Aijaz was getting threat calls but he ignored it," party spokesperson Altaf Thakur said.

In a separate attack on the same day, terrorists shot two

tourists from Jaipur, Tabrez Khan and his wife Farah Khan, in Anantnag, which is also in south Kashmir.

"They were going inside a hotel for dinner when two men came on a bike and opened fire," Tabrez's father Aslam Khan. The couple suffered bullet injuries in the attack and were rushed to a hospital, people aware of the matter said.

The Anantnag Lok Sabha seat in south Kashmir is scheduled to go to polls on May 25.

Condemning the attack, Jammu and Kashmir lieutenant governor Manoj Sinha said: "The government has given a free hand to the J&K Police and security forces to crush terrorists and their associates," he said.

National Conference (NC) vice president and former J&K chief minister Omar Abdullah, who is contesting Monday's Baramulla election, posted on X, "Very sorry to hear about the twin attacks in South Kashmir against tourists & a political worker of the BJP. I unequivocally condemn these deadly attacks."

Peoples Democratic Party president and former CM Mehbooba Mufti said, "The timing of these attacks given that the [Anantnag] election was delayed without any reason is a cause of concern. Especially keeping in mind normalcy claims touted by GOL."

The BJP, however, blamed Pakistan for orchestrating the attacks to derail the election process. "You know about the impressive turnout the first phase in Srinagar and tomorrow again there are elections, I think this is a conspiracy by Pakistan to derail the election process here," BJP leader Aijaz Hussain said.

## 3 NC WORKERS STABBED AT POLL RALLY IN POONCH

**MENDHAR/JAMMU:** Three National Conference (NC) workers were injured when unidentified people attacked them with knives at an election rally in Mendhar in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Sunday, officials said.

NC president Farooq Abdullah was present at the rally organised by the party in support of its Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat candidate Mian Altaf in Mendhar. The rally continued without any disruption.

Officials said there was a clash between two groups over some issue during the rally. Taking advantage of the melee, the attackers managed to escape, the officials said. Police have registered a case in connection with the incident and are trying to nab the culprits, they said.

Sohail Ahmad and Yaseer Ahmad, both residents of Harni, and Mohd Imran of Kasblari village, received stab injuries and were taken to a local hospital, the officials said. They said the condition of Sohail and Yaseer was stated to be serious and they were referred to Government Medical College Hospital, Rajouri, they added.

Senior NC leader Javed Ahmad Rana termed the incident a "security lapse" and demanded immediate arrest of the culprits. **PTI**

# Decoding the Indian economy and how it can break the mould

HT Correspondent

letters@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** *Breaking the Mold: India's Untraveled Path to Prosperity* is a big new book by economists Raghuram Rajan and Rohit Lamba. The book is both a critique of India's development model as well as a manifesto for reform. Most notably, it challenges the conventional wisdom that India's primary goal should be to transform the country into a blue-collar manufacturing powerhouse.

Lamba elaborated on his views in 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. Lamba is an economist at New York University-Abu Dhabi and has twice worked in the chief economic advisor's office in the ministry of finance. Rajan served both as chief economic advisor and governor of the Reserve Bank of India, before returning to his academic post at the University of Chicago.

Lamba told host Milan Vaishnav that India cannot duplicate China's development model, but it can leapfrog by focusing higher up the value chain.

"India has developed a comparative advantage in two kinds of services. One is direct services — think of education, telemedicine, financial services, consulting services and IT services. India is very clearly a global leader in these services for a variety of reasons like access to reasonably high-quality graduate engineers, the English language, and so on," he explained. But he noted that India

## EXPERTS DISCUSS MANUFACTURING VERSUS SERVICES DEBATE, INWARD ECONOMIC TURN, AND WHAT CAN UPGRADE HUMAN CAPITAL IN INDIA

also has an opportunity to move into services embedded within manufacturing.

"The distinction between manufacturing and services is disappearing or blurring. Think of the quintessential manufactured goods, which is Henry Ford's car. What we try to argue is that the car itself is becoming more like a mobile phone. If you see, for example, a major company that is manufacturing cars in China now is the same company that was earlier doing mobile phones. The Tesla car, for example, has 40 to 50 million lines of code written into it. So, what is manufacturing and what is services is also blurring."

Lamba cited the example of Lenskart, a prominent eyeglasses store in India, as an example of this way of thinking. "What is interesting is that Lenskart is not only selling glasses through its retail stores in many urban centres, it's also manufacturing them itself. There are lots of interesting examples of where services and manufacturers are kind of joined at the hip... India should recognize its strength in

this aspect," he argued. Lamba told host Vaishnav that India would need to heve to an inclusive brand of politics if it has a hope of fully realising the economic potential of its citizenry. "There's a view coming in now that the goal is not just to become a strong economy, it's to become a strong civilisational state," Lamba explained, saying that he has some sympathy with this statement

given that China too used to make similar arguments. "The point is that India, unlike China, arguably enjoys a tremendous amount of soft power in the world. The power of its example India has set [into place] even before it became rich," he cautioned.

only singular thing India has to do now is what Nitin Pai [of the Takshashila Institute in Bangalore] once said, which is to grow at 8% for 30 years continuously and then everything else will fall into place."

The two discuss what the critics get right about the Indian economy, why India cannot blindly follow the Chinese model, and how India can pivot "from brown to brain". Plus, Rohit and Milan discuss the manufacturing versus services debate, India's inward economic turn, and what India must do to upgrade its human capital.



### GRAND TAMASHA



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# Drunk teen in luxury car hits bike, 2 killed

Shrinivas Deshpande

shrinivas.deshpande@htlive.com

**PUNE:** Two people were killed after a speeding luxury car, being driven by a 17-year-old boy allegedly in inebriated state, hit their two-wheeler in Pune on Sunday, police said, adding the minor was detained and later granted bail by a juvenile court.

The accident took place around 2.30 am in Kalyani Nagar area when a group of friends after a party at a restaurant was returning home on their motorcycles. Near the Kalyani Nagar junction, a speeding Porsche collided with one of the motorcycles, following which its two riders fell from the vehicle and died on the spot, the first information report (FIR) registered at the



The mangled Porsche that was being driven by the minor. HT PHOTO

Yerawada police station said. HT has seen the FIR.

"We detained the minor driving the car and subjected him for medical examination to ascertain if he had consumed alcohol. The car dashed the two-wheeler from the rear and as a result the bike rider and pillion died on the spot," deputy commissioner of

police Vijay Kumar Magar said. Police said the blood samples of the minor have been sent for examination and the report was awaited.

"Case[s] against the father of the accused and the bar that served liquor to the juvenile/accused are being proceeded under sections 75 and 77 of Juvenile Justice Act," Pune police commissioner Amitesh Kumar said. "Police are investigating which bar he visited and consumed alcohol."

The Porsche being driven by the juvenile, the son of a real estate developer, was without a registration number, police said, adding he was on his way to his Brahma Sun City residence from Koregaon Park. The deceased have been identified as Anis Awadhya (24) and Ashwini Costa (24), both engineers and residents of Madhya Pradesh, the FIR said.

Anis worked as an engineer in a multinational company in Kalyani Nagar, and Ashwini had quit her job in the same company a few days ago. They were not wearing a helmet at the time of the accident, police said.

After knocking down the two, the car crashed into the roadside pavement railings, the FIR said. A video surfaced on social media wherein a group of people was seen thrashing the driver as he tried to come out of the crashed car. They later handed him over to the police.

After his detention, the minor was produced before a juvenile court, which granted him bail.

**JAWAHARLAL NEHRU PORT AUTHORITY**  
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On-line Tenders in single stage two cover system (Technical & Price Bids) and e-auction methodology are invited by Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA), Navi Mumbai from 21.05.2024 to 18.06.2024 from experienced and reputed firms fulfilling Minimum Qualifying Criteria (MQC) for "ALLOTMENT OF VACANT LAND PARCELS ON LONG TERM LEASE BASIS OF 30 YEARS AT JNPA". Tender fee is 23,600/- (non-refundable). Detailed Notice Inviting Tender and the tender document is available on JNPA website "www.jnport.gov.in" or <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.

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Dr. (Prof.) Rakesh Lodha, Paediatrics  
Dr. Nayer Jamshed, Emergency Medicine  
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I. NAVDEEP Kaur Marwah w/o Sh. Saumyjit Roy, R/o H.No. L-414, Jalvayu Towers, Sector 36, Gurgaon, Haryana 122011, have changed my minor daughter's name from Pari Roy to Kenisha Kaur Roy for all future purposes.

I. BASANT Lal Singh S/o Lal Singh R/o B-318 Gaur Homes Gurgaon, P.O. Govindpuram, Distt. Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201013 have changed my name to Basant Lal Singh for all future purposes.

I. ARCHANA W/o Basant Lal Singh R/o B-318 Gaur Homes Gurgaon, P.O. Govindpuram, Distt. Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201013 have changed my name to Archana Singh for all future purposes.

I. ANIL Chopra S/o Late Basant Lal R/o H.No. A-318, Chhattarpur Enclave, Phase-1, New Delhi-110074 declare that Anil Chopra & Anil Kumar Chopra both are one & same person, have changed my name to Anil Kumar for all future purposes.

I. ANITA Mendiratta D/o Shri Basant Lal Adakha R/o House NO.634, Sector-21D, Faridabad, Haryana-121001 have changed my name from Anita Mendiratta to Anita Mendiratta for all future purposes.

I. SANJAY Kumar, S/o. Ran Singh would declare my correct name is Sanjay Kumar Sanjay Chauhan was wrongly mentioned in my son Harsh's birth certificate and my correct name is Sanjay Kumar. Vide affidavit dated 13th May, 2024, Delhi

**CHANGE OF NAME**

I. KUBER Singh S/o Shri Kheem Singh Negi R/o H.No. 57/9, Gali No. 3, Vijay Park, Mayapuri, Delhi-110053, have changed my name to Kuber Singh Negi for all future purposes.

I. HEENA, W/o. Mohammad Tahir, R/o. House No.84, (26/7), Ghafoor Nagar, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi-110025 declare that my name has been wrongly mentioned in my Daughter's School record as Heena Kausar instead of Heena.

I. MIRA Das W/o. Sadananda Das R/o S-3, Plot No 412, Sector-5, Vaishali, Ghaziabad, U.P. have changed my name from Mira Das to Mira Rani Das for all purposes.

**LOST & FOUND**

I. SWATI Chawla W/o Rajesh Chawla R/o Flat No. 22 C, Plot No. 8, Sector-12, Dwarka, New Delhi Have Lost Original Property Documents (1) Allotment Letter (2) Possession Letter of Flat No. 22 C, Plot No. 8, Sector-12, Dwarka, New Delhi if Found Please Contact at Above Address or Mob. No. 905733741

**HAVE** lost the Original Plot Buyers Agreement for Plot No. M-98, Sushant City I, Jaipur between Gaarav Raina and M/s. Ansal Properties & Infrastructure Ltd. on January 4th 2024.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

It is to inform the general public at large that Vijay Mishra, S/o. Shri. Hari Shankar Mishra, R/o. Samanaha, Deoha, Karbhanga, Samraha Uperhar, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh-212007 and also at Plot no. 719, A Block Bharat Vihar, Kakrola, New Delhi-110078 was appointed by our client, M/s. GTM Builders & Promoters Private Limited as the Assistant Manager-Sales and Shiv Shankar Jha, R/o. WZ-135A, Plot no. 145A, Upper Ground Floor, Block-A, Uttam Nagar, Arya Samaj Road, New Delhi-110059 and also at A-135, 2nd Floor, Arya Samaj Road, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059 was appointed by our client, M/s. GTM Builders & Promoters Private Limited as a Consultant-Sales, both for the project "LD Grand 37-C" at Sector-37, Gurgaon, Haryana on 22.08.2023. It has been recently informed to our client that the said Vijay Mishra and Shiv Shankar Jha have collected moneys from some home buyers without intimation and knowledge to our client and has given false commitment to home buyers on behalf of our client. The said Vijay Mishra and Shiv Shankar Jha have committed financial fraud with the home buyers. Our client has terminated Vijay Mishra and Shiv Shankar Jha from their employment with immediate effect after coming to know the financial fraud committed by them against the home buyers. Our client has also lodged a criminal complaint against the said Vijay Mishra and Shiv Shankar Jha in the concerned police station. Our client is not liable or responsible in any way for any act or omission of Vijay Mishra and Shiv Shankar Jha and if anyone has any complaint, grievance, dispute etc. against Vijay Mishra and/or Shiv Shankar Jha, we on behalf of our client strongly recommend to take appropriate legal action against Vijay Mishra and/or Shiv Shankar Jha. Suresh Chandra Sharma (Adv.) Date: 15.05.2024

**TENDER NOTICE**

The Tender and Purchase Committee of the Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) Arun Jaitley Stadium, invites bids/ proposals for award of tender/ work/ RFP/ for Conceptualize, Plan, Design, Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of Passenger Lifts for General stands at West and East stand and Service Lifts at NCH and OCH including Shaft Construction and Lift Controllers for Automated Access Control to various floors, QR scanner & integration with ticketing System at Arun Jaitley Stadium New Delhi. Interested vendors of reputed may visit DDCA website for further details. Bid forms and other details can be obtained/download from the website of DDCA website: www.ddca.in

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For more details, please visit [www.recpdcl.in](http://www.recpdcl.in) or [rec.ewizard@in](mailto:rec.ewizard@in)

Date of Pre-bid meeting of the tender is 27.05.2024 at 12:00 Hrs through online

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E-Tender Notice No.: JHS-N-W-29-24 Dated: 16.05.2024

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CBC 10601/11/0019/2425

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON**

See Section 82(2)(ii) Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Nasruddin @ Vicky, S/o:** Sh. Balle Khan, R/o: Gali No. 08, Chouhan Banger, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 59/2014, U/s 380/411 IPC, P.S.: Jafraabad, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Nasruddin @ Vicky** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Nasruddin @ Vicky** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Nasruddin @ Vicky** accused of FIR No. 59/2014, U/s 380/411 IPC, P.S.: Jafraabad, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 09.07.2024.

By Order  
**Ms. Aayushi Saxena**  
Metropolitan Magistrate  
Room No. 48, Karkardooma Court, Delhi

DP/5858/NE/2024  
(Court Matter)

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON**

See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Suraj, S/o Tara, R/o Balwan Ki Jhuggi, BC-Block, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 21/2009, U/s 324/34 IPC, P.S. Shalimar Bagh, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Suraj** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Suraj** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant).

Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Suraj** accused of FIR No. 21/2009, U/s 324/34 IPC, P.S. Shalimar Bagh, Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 20.06.2024.

By Order  
**Ms. Divya Arora**  
Metropolitan Magistrate-04 (North-West)  
Room No. 112, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Rohini Court, Delhi

DP/5955/NW/2024

**PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON**

See Section 82 CrPC

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person **Ravi Kumar, S/o Late Sh. Fakir Chand, R/o H. No. C-516, Aman Vihar, Sultanpuri, Delhi** has committed the offence (or is suspected to have committed) in case FIR No. 85/2012, U/s 33/58 Delhi Excise ACT, P.S. Sultanpuri, outer Distt. Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Ravi Kumar** cannot be found, and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Ravi Kumar** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant);

Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Ravi Kumar** accused of FIR No. 85/2012, U/s 33/58 Delhi Excise ACT, P.S. Sultanpuri, outer Distt. Delhi is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before 04.07.2024.

By Order  
**Ms. Sanya Dalal**  
L.D.M.M. Room No. 102  
Rohini Court, Delhi

DP/5846/OD/2024

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# FACTS WITHOUT FILTER, NEWS WITHOUT BIAS

Year	Seats Won
2014	32
2019	26

**NUMBER THEORY**

**Poll math: Is Cong where Jan Sangh was in '60s-'70s?**

By Nitish Ranjan

India's electoral competition is witnessing a strange alignment with the three poles being the BJP-led NDA, an opposition grouping with the Congress as the biggest party, and a coalition of regional parties in the states of Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Punjab. To be sure, an alliance of the Congress and regional parties is not new. But what differentiates the current situation is the fact that the Congress once again has significantly declined. In a way, the Congress is trying to recapture what it has lost to ideologically different groups, including the opposition, Communist and Buddhist parties and the rise of the BJP and the rise of the regional parties. This is the first time the Congress has the dominant party in India's politics. Here are three charts which explain this in detail.

**1 The Congress was much smaller than its prospective allies in the 2014 and 2019 elections**

In the 1990s, the Congress had a lead in the states with its 1990s partners as 1990s were with a coalition of states. The BJP's rise in the 2010s and 2020s was a result of the Congress's decline in the states. The Congress's decline in the states is a result of the Congress's decline in the states. The Congress's decline in the states is a result of the Congress's decline in the states.

**2 The Jan Sangh was in an even weaker situation in its initial years...**

Jan Sangh was in an even weaker situation in its initial years. The Congress's decline in the states is a result of the Congress's decline in the states. The Congress's decline in the states is a result of the Congress's decline in the states.

**3 ... but ideology-agnostic opposition alliances managed to keep the Congress out of power in many states**

... but ideology-agnostic opposition alliances managed to keep the Congress out of power in many states. The Congress's decline in the states is a result of the Congress's decline in the states. The Congress's decline in the states is a result of the Congress's decline in the states.

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# Poll battles take personal turn in contest for Bengal

Joydeep Thakur  
letters@hindustantimes.com

**KOLKATA:** Bitter political rivalries especially during elections are not new to West Bengal, but when broken familial ties and family feuds turn into political rivalries, as is the case in at least three Lok Sabha constituencies in the eastern state, the contests become ever so fierce. In the ongoing polls, the state is witnessing a showdown between a three-term lawmaker and his former son-in-law, a bitter rivalry between a divorced couple, and a soured relationship-turned-political enmity between an uncle and his nephew.

"He has no identity. His only identity is that he is my former son-in-law. Because of that, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has given him a ticket from Serampore. He has no connection with the area, be it politically or socially. I face no challenge from him," Kalyan Banerjee, three-time Trinamool Congress (TMC) lawmaker and senior advocate of Calcutta high court, tells HT,

## FORMER COUPLE, LAWMAKER AND EX-SON-IN-LAW, AND UNCLE AND NEPHEW ARE SET TO TAKE ON EACH OTHER IN BENGAL

while speaking about his former son-in-law Kabir Shankar Bose. Banerjee will square off against BJP's Bose from Serampore Lok Sabha seat, which will vote in the fifth phase on May 20. Banerjee often referred to his daughter's ordeal in her marriage with Bose in rallies. Banerjee's daughter and Bose divorced in 2017.

"She (his daughter) had to face a tough challenge in life. I pray to god that no daughter faces such challenges," Banerjee said at a rally earlier this month. Bose, a Supreme Court lawyer, said he prefers to live in the present. "Everyone has a past... I cannot wipe away the past. But I am living in the present," Bose

said during his poll campaign last week. "It is just a matter of days before Narendra Modi becomes the prime minister again. Those who want to live in the past, let them do so. This is a political battle."

In Bishnupur, TMC's Sujata Mondal is facing a tough challenge from her ex-husband and two-time lawmaker Saumitra Khan, who is contesting on a BJP ticket. The constituency in Bankura district will go to polls in the sixth phase on May 25.

"It is an agni pariksha (a trial by fire) for me. But I am confident that I will win by a huge margin," Mondal said.

Saumitra Khan, a former Congress MLA, switched over to the TMC in 2013. He won the Bishnupur seat on a TMC ticket in 2014, two years before the couple got married. Khan, however, sided with the BJP in January 2019 and the party fielded him from Bishnupur in the general elections that year. Mondal shot to the limelight for single-handedly managing the poll campaign of Khan, who won by a

margin of over 78,000 votes. Their relation soured when Mondal joined the TMC in the run-up to the 2021 assembly polls, which she unsuccessfully contested from Arambagh. The couple got separated in 2022.

In Barrackpore, an industrial belt in North 24 Parganas district, the BJP has fielded sitting MP Arjun Singh, a strongman. Though the TMC has named stater minister Partha Bhowmik as its candidate, the party has made Sourav Singh, Arjun's nephew, as Bhowmik's chief polling agent.

This has turned the family rivalry into a political one, with Sourav vigorously campaigning against his uncle. Barrackpore, too, will vote in the sixth phase on May 25. "I have never seen a turncoat like Arjun Singh. The man who doesn't recognise his own nephew for power, how will he serve the people of his constituency?" Sourav claimed.

Arjun Singh told HT: "He is not my nephew. If he had been my nephew why would he campaign for any other party?"

## { FROM PAGE 1 }

### PHASE 5 OF ELECTIONS

In sharp focus will be the turnout, with the Election Commission expecting a rising trend to continue in the fifth phase. The turnout of 69.16% in the fourth phase was highest among the four phases with voting in first three phases being 66.14%, 66.71%, and 65.68%, respectively.

On the eve of polling, EC on Sunday pointed out that Mumbai, Thane and Lucknow have shown apathy towards voting in the past and asked city dwellers there to "erase the stigma by turning out in higher numbers".

Other prominent candidates include Union ministers Piyush Goyal (Mumbai North, Maharashtra), Sadhvi Niranjani Jyoti (Fatehpur, UP) and Shantanu Thakur (Bongaon, WB); LJP (Ram Vilas) leader Chirag Paswan (Hajipur, Bihar), Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde (Kalyan, Maharashtra), and BJP's Rajiv Pratap Rudy and RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya (both Saran, Bihar).

But all eyes will be on Rae Bareilly and Amethi. Rahul Gandhi, who has contested from Wayanad in Kerala, is also in the fight for Rae Bareilly, a Nehru-Gandhi family pocket borough represented by his mother Sonia Gandhi since 2004. The BJP has fielded UP minister Dinesh Pratap Singh.

In Amethi, Irani, who defeated Rahul Gandhi in 2019, is seeking a second term, while KL Sharma, an aide of the Gandhi family, has been fielded by the Congress.

In all, 144 candidates are in fray in 14 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. Senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh is eyeing a fourth term from Lucknow. He is up against the SP's MLA from Lucknow Central, Ravidas Mehrotra.

In the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat, which covers the temple town of Ayodhya, the electoral contest is mainly between incumbent BJP MP Lallu Singh, who is seeking a hat-trick, and Awadhesh Prasad, the SP MLA from Milkpur (SC) assembly constituency in Ayodhya.

In Kaiserganj, Karan Bhusan Singh has replaced his father and incumbent MP Brij Bhusan Sharan Singh as the BJP candidate after the former WFI chief was accused of sexu-

ally harassing wrestlers. Voting will also take place for the assembly bypolls to the Lucknow East assembly constituency.

In Maharashtra, where polling will be held in 13 Lok Sabha constituencies, including six in Mumbai, Piyush Goyal, Bharati Pawar (Dindori) and Kapil Patil (Bhiwandi) are among the key nominees of the BJP, which has also fielded prominent lawyer Ujjwal Nikam (Mumbai North Central).

Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde (Kalyan) and city Congress chief Varsha Gaikwad (Mumbai North Central) are also among the candidates in this phase, which is the last for the state in this election.

In Baramulla, besides former J&K chief minister Omar Abdullah, former separatist leader Sajad Lone, ex-MLA Sheikh Abdul Rashid, currently lodged in the Tihar jail, and the PDP's former Rajiva Sabha member Fayaz Ahmad Mir are among the 21 others contesting.

In Ladakh, Congress candidate Tsering Namgyal, BJP's Tashi Gyalson, and Independent candidate and NC rebel Haji Hanifa Jan are locked in a keen contest.

Security has been stepped up in West Bengal's seven constituencies which have a history of election-related violence, with over 57% of the polling stations identified as sensitive in this phase, the highest till now in this Lok Sabha election.

Over 60,000 personnel of central forces and around 30,000 personnel of the state police, have been deployed, which is more than in the four previous phases in the state, an official said.

BJP's Arjun Singh, who has been in and out of the BJP and the Trinamool Congress on four occasions in the last five years, is taking on West Bengal minister Partha Bhowmik in Barrackpore in a bid to retain the seat he won in 2019.

Actor Rachana Banerjee has been fielded by the TMC to stop actor and BJP candidate Lockett Chatterjee from winning a straight second term from Hooghly.

In Serampore, the TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee is fighting against the BJP's Kabir Shankar Bose.

Voting will take place in

Saran, Muzaffarpur, Hajipur, Sitamarhi and Madhubani Lok Sabha seats of Bihar, which are all with the NDA.

In Hajipur, the primary contest is between Chirag Paswan, whose late father Ram Vilas Paswan had won the seat eight times, and RJD's Shiv Chandra Ram, a former MLA and ex-minister in the state.

Former Union minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy's bid to score a hat-trick in Saran has been challenged by RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya.

Voting in three Jharkhand Lok Sabha constituencies — Chatra, Koderma and Hazaribag — and by-election in Gandee assembly seat, where Kalpana Soren, the wife of jailed former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, is contesting, will take place on Monday.

An interesting fight is expected in the Koderma Lok Sabha seat where Union Minister and BJP candidate Annapurna Devi is up against Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation nominee Vinod Singh, an MLA from Bagodar assembly constituency.

Voting for Lok Sabha and assembly seats will take place simultaneously in Odisha.

Chief minister Naveen Patnaik is contesting from two assembly segments — Hinjili under the Aska Lok Sabha seat in Ganjam district and Kantabanji under the Bolangir parliamentary constituency.

Apart from Patnaik, who is seeking a record sixth term at the helm of the eastern state, major contestants include around half a dozen Odisha ministers. BJP's sitting MPs Jugal Oram and Sangeeta Singh Deo, BJD MP Achyut Samant and former Indian Hockey captain Dilip Tirkey.

Odisha chief electoral officer Nikunja Dhal said a total of 7.9 million voters will exercise their franchise at 9,162 polling booths. More than 100 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) will be deployed including Aska Lok Sabha constituency where a BJP worker was hacked to death by BJD rivals early this week.

Director general of police Arun Kumar Sarangi said to ensure foolproof security during polling 655 mobile parties will be deployed during the elections and border check posts will be set up.

### VOTING FOR MODI

result is already in (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's favour; and they believe it is better to sit than go out (to vote) in the hot summer," he said.

"This isn't good for democracy though. They should have cast their votes too, but because of widespread disillusionment among the INDIA bloc's voters, turnout has fallen. In states where you see high voting percentages (this time) like West Bengal, Assam and Tripura, the voting has always been high, and even there, there is some dip in turnout. If you do an analysis you will find that there is a correlation between this dip and areas where the Congress has traditionally had support."

The impressive turnout in the Kashmir valley was a good sign in this context, the home minister said, adding that feedback from grassroots workers across the country was encouraging. "I do not have a single rally after which I do not sit with 40-50 of our workers (to discuss what is happening). According to their feedback, there is nothing to worry about."

Replying to a question whether the election was, in effect, a referendum on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the minister said, "This is just word-play. Both sides have settled on candidates for the post of Prime Minister. Only Rahul-Ji has been projected (on the other side); no one has spoken of (Mallikarjun) Kharage-Ji. We are contesting elections under Modi-Ji's leadership, and he will become Prime Minister for the third time."

Asked how big an impact issues such as inflation and unemployment would have, Shah said the same matters were brought up during the last election as well but they did not hurt the BJP's electoral prospects because voters understand how much work the Modi government has done in terms of creating jobs.

Shah brushed aside allegations that Enforcement Directorate (ED) action against Opposition leaders seems to get suspended if they join the BJP and no summons or raids happen thereafter.

"The raid and summoning stage has ended for them. The charge sheets have been filed. Following this, the agency has no authority. The court has to decide," he added. The next step "will happen (in court) when their turn comes," Shah said.

## { GREEN PIECE }

# US needs stronger EV policy

Bharati Chaturvedi  
letters@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** The US president, Joe Biden has imposed heavy duties on electric vehicles, solar panels etc coming from China into the United States. He hopes to protect American workers who have lost their jobs and to boost American manufacturing, which like many other manufacturing industries globally, has been dealt a heavy blow by China.

His political opponent in the forthcoming elections, former President Donald Trump, and other detractors say while this is important, it is 4 years too late.

I believe it an idea that should have been preceded by a series of actions in the previous 4 years. America is the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitter. It is its moral duty to urgently decarbonize. It was also clear even then that banning Chinese goods was

important but required building a solid base within America to replace it. This would need injecting American manufacturing with financial incentives, promoting it procuring from it.

Biden has merely banned these products and expects American manufacturing will somehow find a way to leap to take its place rapidly. While American manufacturing will replace the Chinese for sure, the planet and the global south might pay a price. First, even if the manufacturing takes off, there is a lag time and there will be greenhouse gases emitted.

Given the climate emergency, we cannot afford to wait even for a year and a half or two years, which would be the quickest that the gap is finally filled by American manufacturers. Secondly, even the most efficient business model cannot prevent a short term deficit. This means consumers might shift to less green options if they find there

are no green options in the market. This is a road block to the rapid, mass shifts the world requires from the United States.

Thirdly, there is no time left for Biden to roll out incentives for domestic manufacturing. He appears to have put the horse before the cart.

President Biden's step signals and inspires other economies to fight climate change without being in the clutches of the Chinese. It also signals that climate and workers rights can go together.

However, taking steps without adequate preparation could actually slowdown America's duty to the world. All of us might be collectively forced share burden of slow decarbonization. This is the key lesson for those trying to free themselves from the Chinese.

(The writer is the founder and director of Chintan Environmental Research and Action Groups)

## 3, INCLUDING 2 CHILDREN, KILLED IN COLLISION AT MAHA'S AKOLA

Press Trust of India  
letters@hindustantimes.com

**AKOLA:** Three persons, including two children, were killed on the spot and two seriously injured after two motorcycles collided in Maharashtra's Akola district on Sunday, the police said.

The incident took place around 3 pm on Telhara-Belkheh road.

The impact was so severe that the bikes were mangled, he said.

The police have identified the deceased as Khan Pathan (40), Umra Khatoon Ashiq Khan (8) and Khan Ashiq Khan (5).

The two injured persons have been taken to Akola city for treatment, a police officer aware of the case said.



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# OPINION

The  
**Hindustan Times**  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

## As Moscow gets close to Beijing

India needs to be on its toes to ensure that its defence ties with Russia are not compromised

Over the past four years, India has navigated multiple crises, ranging from Covid-19 to the military standoff with China and the fallout of conflicts, nuancing the country's position without compromising on core interests. In his interview with *Hindustan Times*, external affairs minister S Jaishankar spoke of the country — and the world — continuing to grapple with more than one crisis. He mentioned Ukraine, where the war is in the third year, and the possibility of the Israel-Hamas conflict intensifying. India has thus far managed to significantly expand its ties with the US while protecting its longstanding strategic interests with Russia. And it is aware of the ever-lengthening shadow of China, not just at the border but across the neighbourhood, including in the Maldives, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, where Beijing continues to buy influence to enable its pursuit of the pre-eminent position in the Indian Ocean.

It is in this context that New Delhi will be watching the burgeoning bonhomie between Moscow and Beijing. That Russian President Vladimir Putin chose China for his first trip after beginning another term reflects the strength of the ties between the two countries. This was Putin's 19th visit to Beijing as president, though he has opted not to travel to India for multilateral meetings or the annual summit. In a sense, this is understandable as China and Russia stand isolated and criticised by democratic societies for their actions against the rules-based order. For the US, China's growing economic and technology prowess is a challenge to its global supremacy. Washington has tried to contain Beijing through tariffs and sanctions, but it has also worked at engaging with it to ensure that a Russia-China axis, which may include powers such as Iran, does not cut into its influence. In this context, the Xi-Putin joint statement is interesting for the point it makes about a multipolar world of open alliances, driven by interests rather than ideological themes such as democracy or open markets. What must put India on guard is the veiled reference to groupings such as the Quad in not-so-positive terms.

The proximity between Moscow and Beijing is of particular interest to New Delhi because of its dependence on Russia for defence needs, a legacy issue it has tried to overcome by looking at new partners and by self-reliance in armaments. The West is wary of the bond between two aspiring hegemonies in the East, but India should equally be on its toes.

## Char Dham pilgrimage needs better oversight

Last week, the Uttarakhand government banned *VIP darshan* at the "char dhams" (four shrines at Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath) in the Himalayas in the wake of a huge influx of pilgrims. In the first six days since the pilgrimage season — which opens in May and lasts till late October-early November — began, 3.3 lakh people have visited these shrines. State authorities have said that over 2.6 million people have so far registered to undertake the pilgrimage, double the number of registrations at this time last year.

These mountain shrines, located in river valleys at altitudes above 10,000 feet, are not equipped to deal with such a large number of visitors. The 2013 floods that claimed about 6,000 lives and wreaked havoc in the Mandakini valley in Kedarnath revealed the dangers of overcrowding in this ecologically fragile region. The rise in religiosity and a push from the state to promote religious tourism has created an unmanageable situation that is disastrous for the local environment. These dhams are located near the sources of the Yamuna and the Ganga. The heavy footfall and the waste produced as a result have a direct impact on the health of these rivers. The promotion of religious tourism has resulted in a demand for wider roads, construction, and a steep rise in vehicles. The climate crisis has been disastrous for the Himalayas, as seen in the spike in landslides, flash floods and forest fires. Excessive human intervention will accentuate the crisis.

The char dhams were meant to be small *padavs* (stations), catering to a tiny stream of pilgrims who brave the inclement weather and risk the trek up the rugged mountain. While the pilgrim traffic may aid the local economy in the short run, these can't be scaled up to match religious centres such as Varanasi or Rameswaram. It is time the *yatra* is better regulated and mass tourism actively discouraged.

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



## Politicians need to stop vitiating the poll debate

Divisive and poisonous campaigning has long-term consequences. The Election Commission needs to step in

With the conclusion of the fourth phase of polling for the general elections, the results of nearly 70% of the constituencies lie sealed in electronic voting machines (EVMs). Against this backdrop, most people are likely to have observed a shift in the rhetoric of the nation's political figures leading up to the fifth phase on Monday: Bitterness in their discourse is peaking, with fresh claims and promises as attention turns to the remaining 30% of seats. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies are making big claims, of having won the elections already, and say that they are swiftly approaching the target of 400 seats set by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi. In response, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav addressed journalists in Lucknow last week, and claimed that it is the

BJP that has lost the elections and that the Opposition has seen a significant increase in its seats in all phases. Modi has talked about dedicating his third term to the country's quick advancement, but he has also targeted Pakistan. At a public meeting in Bihar, he said: "Ham Pakistan ko choodiyaa pahana denge (We will make Pakistan wear bangles)". Meanwhile, home minister Amit Shah has reiterated his determination to make PoK (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) part of India again.

This is the first time Modi and Shah have used such strong words in public fora. Previously, perhaps due to international pressure, such things were served up prudently in sugar-coated words.

Kharge, on behalf of the INDIA bloc, has promised to double free grain distribution (to 800 million people) to 10 kg and increase the job reservation limit beyond 50%. Are these possible? When I asked a senior Congressman about this, he used Brazil as an example. He claimed that "freebies" have had outstanding outcomes in Brazil, and argued that there is no harm in attempting similar experiments in India.

Mamata Banerjee, who took the lead from the Congress in West Ben-

gal, has also altered her tone. Until a few days ago, she had reduced the Congress to less than 40 seats at the national level. Now she argues that the INDIA bloc will get 300 seats nationwide and that her party, the Trinamool Congress, will support it from the outside to form a government.

What sort of game are they playing?

Meanwhile, divisive and poisonous terms such as temple, mosque, Hindu, Muslim, *kabristan-shamshan* (graveyard - cremation ground), Aurangzeb, colour, and caste are dominating the discourse, creating bitterness. Our politicians do not realise politics based on caste, religion, region, language, or sect, played consciously or otherwise, poisons the minds of future generations. What happened in Punjab in the 1970s and 1980s, and in Kashmir during the two decades that followed, are horrible examples of this. This lethal sequence must be stopped immediately.

I'm not questioning the Election Commission's motives or its machinery here, but why doesn't the Commission, which is supposed to be neutral, double down to prevent this? In a growing and healthy democracy, a variety of issues will arise that can't



Terms such as Hindu, Muslim, colour, and caste are dominating the discourse, creating bitterness among the people

APF

always be ignored.

There is another crucial question. How can some of our politicians speak so irresponsibly?

I want to tell such politicians a story. Last year, while I was tracking developments in Kashmir Valley in the wake of the repeal of Article 370, I met a man with a paralysed leg who was struggling to walk even with the help of a stick and his brother by his side. Terrorists had shot at his legs multiple times for voting in the district panchayat elections. He said the terrorists had warned residents of his village against voting, but he ignored the warning, thinking it was just bluster. The third day after he voted he faced the attack.

If you are wondering why terrorists had not killed him, it was because they intended to use him as a living example of what voting at elections "sponsored by India" entailed. But such elements have failed in the current elections, and the enthusiasm the Valley's inhabitants have shown in the fourth round is a slap in the face of terrorism spon-

sored from across the border. (Srinagar, which voted in the fourth phase, recorded a turnout of 36%, which is the highest since 1996, when 41% polling was reported. To put the figures in perspective, the polling in the 2019 general elections in the constituency was as low as 14.4%.)

Such cases are not exclusive to Kashmir. There are dozens of such people in the secluded areas of India's northeastern states and the Naxal-affected districts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Maharashtra. They have made great sacrifices to reinforce the foundations of democracy. I'd also like to remind you of the families of deceased personnel of the armed forces who never hesitated in sending their loved ones to sacrifice their lives to protect the country and its law and order. Who says our democracy can survive without such efforts? How come our politicians forget this so easily?

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

## In Odisha, progress up against pride in elections

The first of the four rounds of elections in Odisha ended on May 13 (the fourth phase of the general elections) and the second round will be held today. Far from Delhi and away from the mainstream noises, elections in this coastal state assume critical significance for two reasons. One, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) supremo Naveen Patnaik, who has been ruling the state for a record five terms, is facing the most critical elections of his very distinguished political career spanning three decades. Odisha, under his long tenure, has witnessed a dramatic rise — from being among the BIMARUOs (laggards) to becoming what noted economist and director general of the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) Poonam Gupta calls a "breakout state". But there are visible signs of anti-incumbency and clouds of doubt over his chosen successor. Second, there is an insurgent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) largely aided by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's popularity. The state BJP leaders are relying heavily on Modi's strong appeal to topple the BJD. What makes the BJP ambitious is the lacklustre presence of the once formidable Congress party.

With an electorate size of 3.29 crore, the state's 21 Lok Sabha and 147 Assembly seats are up for grabs. Although the mineral-rich state experienced huge political and economic upheavals in the 1990s — culminating in embarrassing helplessness during the super cyclone in 1999 — Patnaik's long stint that began in 2000 has provided political stability and an impressive economic transformation. A state that used to catch the national limelight often for wrong reasons, particularly with frequent hunger deaths and natural disasters, has made significant progress on most development indicators. Not only is the state producing sustained high growth under Patnaik's more than two-decade stint, but it is also among a handful of states to have achieved a revenue-surplus status. Significantly, under the Patnaik administration, Odisha has moved from being a natural-disaster vulnerable state to being one with a world-class disaster management model.

Patnaik was brought into Odisha politics in mid-1990s after the death of his father, the illustrious Biju Patnaik, and was seen as a novice who had never lived in the state and did not know its language let alone groomed for the role thrust on him. But, within no time, he deftly picked up political skills not only to outsmart competition from his rivals and BJD kingmakers alike, he transformed the party into an election-winning machine in less than a decade. What helped him to stay on the top of political narratives for so long are his low-profile attitude and a non-confrontational approach with successive central governments. Although he ended the BJD's alliance with the BJP over communal riots in the state's Kandhamal district, he was not shy of building a healthy relationship with the Modi government since 2014. This pragmatism not only helped his party and the state government avoid political machinations that other Opposition-ruled states have been subjected to by the ruling dispensation, but he was also able to extract major benefits for the state in political bargains with the Centre. The long bonhomie could be seen in the BJD supporting many controversial bills of the Modi government in the Rajya Sabha. Importantly, this strategy also helped him to

keep the state BJP leadership in check.

However, after the BJP achieved surprising success in the 2019 elections, with a record haul in the Lok Sabha (winning eight seats compared to one in 2014, and the vote share for the Lok Sabha jumping to 38.8% in 2019 from 32.4% in 2014), it saw a chance to further improve its previous tally. That's the precise reason why it nipped the alliance proposal from the BJD in the bud. Most key BJP leaders including Modi, Amit Shah, and Rajnath Singh have been making frequent trips to the state apart from launching broadsides against the BJD and Patnaik.

For all these years, the BJD ran an energetic campaign on the back of strong performance and Patnaik's famed political management skills. From constituency micro-survey to careful candidate selection to beat anti-incumbency, the BJD had created an enviable election model that promoted meritocracy and new ideas. It built a huge youth base and brilliantly tapped women voters through Self Help Groups (SHGs) schemes (under Mission Shakti). Come 2024, most of these tools look rusty. There are complaints of widespread abuse in the selection of candidates for Assembly and Lok Sabha tickets (inclusion of many turncoats and multiple members of the same families).

However, at the centre of the BJD's current turmoil is the issue of outsider versus Odia *ashmita* (Odia pride/self-respect). These issues have picked up largely due to the phenomenal rise of VK Pandian, Patnaik's former private secretary and someone who has been calling the shots in government and the party. With speculation growing over him becoming Patnaik's political successor, this Tamil-Nadu-born IAS officer has hugely polarised the election and state politics. In fact, much of the Opposition's core is not about the government's performances all these years, but over the issue of an outsider playing an outsized role (with even Modi calling for protecting Odisha from the outsider) while at the same time painting Patnaik as a helpless patriarch. The Opposition's strong and vitriolic attacks on Odia *ashmita* and Pandian's near control of the party and its campaigns have not gone down well with core supporters and candidates. While Patnaik and senior leaders are putting up a spirited defence and appealing to supporters not to get swayed by the criticism, there are palpable anxieties in the BJD camp.

The 2024 elections outcome has clear ramifications for Patnaik's 24-year legacy and the survival of the BJD as a strong regional outfit. A major hope for the BJD is Patnaik's continued goodwill among voters and the BJP's lack of a chief ministerial face who can match Patnaik's stature. Even though the Modi factor and the BJP's energetic campaign are likely to help the party to improve its existing tally in the Lok Sabha, winning the Assembly notwithstanding the Pandian factor would still be a tall order. This is because of split voting — the same voters who vote for the BJP in Lok Sabha are likely to vote for the BJD in assembly seats. The proof is that while the BJP secured a record eight Lok Sabha seats last time, when it came to the Assembly, it won just 23.

Niranjan Sahoo is senior fellow, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, and Durgamadh Mishra is editor, Odisha Pulse. The views expressed are personal

{ BENNY GANTZ } ISRAELI WAR CABINET MINISTER

If you put the national over personal, we will be partners in the struggle. But if you choose the path of fanatics ... we will be forced to quit the government

Addressing Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu on a post-war plan for Gaza



## What the rejig in Kremlin means for ties with Delhi

Within days of assuming the office of President of the Russian Federation for the fifth time, Vladimir Putin has made sweeping changes in the Kremlin's elite power structure. The headlines everywhere (India included), underscored the relegation of defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, to the post of secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council (elsewhere known as the National Security Advisor).

The change in the portfolio of Shoigu was not unanticipated. As early as the middle of 2022, within months of Russia's "special military operation in Ukraine", there was intense speculation that some heads would roll for the failure to achieve a swift victory. Later, in 2023, the head of the Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, publicly criticised Shoigu for the debacle in Ukraine, and called for his removal. By all accounts, Putin had stayed his hand then. After all, Shoigu had been at Putin's side since 2012 as defence minister, including during the critical takeover of Crimea in 2014, and the military intervention in Syria in 2015. Moreover, Shoigu had distinguished himself as minister, the emergency situations ministry, a post he had occupied from 1994 till 2012. It was widely believed that Putin and Shoigu enjoyed a good rapport — the two men had even vacationed together in the outdoors of Russia's Far East in 2021.

Recently, however, there were some straws in the wind about Shoigu's impending departure as defence minister. On April 24, Shoigu's trusted deputy, Timur Ivanov, was arrested on deepening the strategic partnership with India. Like Patrushev, he too is a familiar figure for the defence establishment in Delhi. Shoigu will also head the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FSVTS) responsible for Russia's defence engagements, including with India.

Meanwhile, Andrei Belousov's appointment as the new defence minister is indicative of the changing nature and unfolding scope of the battle of attrition in Ukraine. The outcome of the protracted war will depend on economic endurance more than anything else. In Belousov, Putin has roped in an economist-technocrat who might prove better at juggling with the resources needed to sustain the war without exacerbating the economic distress.

Interestingly, the new assignment given to

Patrushev relates to his original area of expertise. Patrushev graduated from the Leningrad Shipbuilding Institute in 1974 and had worked as an engineer in the institute's shipbuilding design bureau before the KGB recruited him.

Patrushev rose to the highest echelons of power as part of a conservative pushback in 2008. In 2007, Putin had publicly declared at the Munich Security Conference that Russia's quest for equality with the West was being consistently rebuffed and its red lines were not being respected. As a hardliner, Patrushev played a major part in the direction that Russia took after 2008, including Moscow's military interventions in Georgia in 2008, Crimea (2014), Syria (2015), and more recently, Ukraine (2022).

By giving him an official post in the Kremlin, albeit one of diminished stature, Putin has eased Patrushev's exit, letting him retain certain perks and privileges during the transition. Notably, Patrushev's son, Dmitry Patrushev, the minister of agriculture, has been promoted to deputy prime minister as part of the same reshuffle. This suggests a bargain between Patrushev and Putin as the former walks away into the sunset.

Patrushev will certainly be missed by the Indian establishment. He was a frequent and familiar high-level interlocutor for New Delhi: Over the years, he engaged several Indian national security advisors, starting with MK Narayanan and ending with the current incumbent, Ajit Doval. Shoigu can be expected to follow his predecessor's line on deepening the strategic partnership with India. Like Patrushev, he too is a familiar figure for the defence establishment in Delhi. Shoigu will also head the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FSVTS) responsible for Russia's defence engagements, including with India.

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The writer is the director general of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. The views expressed are personal



Sujan Chinoy

# Iran prez missing after suspected helicopter crash

Officials say lives of Raisi and foreign minister 'at risk' after helicopter reportedly has hard landing in wooded, hilly area

Reuters

letters@hindustantimes.com

TEHRAN: A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister crashed on Sunday as it was crossing mountain terrain in heavy fog, an Iranian official told Reuters, and rescuers were struggling to reach the site of the incident.

The official said the lives of Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian were "at risk following the helicopter crash", which happened on the way back from a visit to the border with Azerbaijan in Iran's northwest.

"We are still hopeful but information coming from the crash site is very concerning," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Iranian state media said bad weather was the cause of the crash and was complicating rescue efforts. The chief of staff of Iran's army ordered all the resources of the army and the elite Revolutionary Guard to be put to use in search and rescue operations.

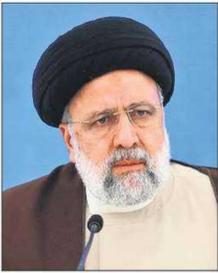
"It is dark and it has started raining, but the search continues. Rescue teams have reached the area... however, the rain has created mud, making the search difficult," a local reporter told state TV.

State TV had earlier stopped all its regular programming to show prayers being held for Raisi across the country and, in a corner of the screen, live coverage of rescue teams deployed on foot in the mountainous area in heavy fog.

The rescue teams were expected to reach the probable



The helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi takes off at the Iranian border with Azerbaijan, on Sunday.



Ebrahim Raisi.

site of the crash later on Sunday evening.

## Successor to Khamenei

The crash comes at a time of growing dissent within Iran over an array of political, social and economic crises.

Iran's clerical rulers face international pressure over Tehran's disputed nuclear programme and its deepening military ties with Russia during the war in Ukraine. Since Iran's ally Hamas attacked Israel on October 7 provoking Israel's assault on Gaza, conflagrations involving Iran-aligned groups have erupted throughout the Middle East.

Raisi, 63, was elected presi-

dent in 2021, and since taking office has ordered a tightening of morality laws, overseen a bloody crackdown on anti-government protests and pushed hard in nuclear talks with world powers.

In Iran's dual political system, split between the clerical establishment and the government, it is Raisi's 85-year-old mentor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, supreme leader since 1989, who has the final say on all major policies.

For years, Raisi has been seen as a strong contender to succeed Khamenei, who supports his main policies. Raisi's 2021 election victory consolidated power under hardliners, following eight years of pragmatist Hassan Rouhani's presidency and a nuclear deal with Washington.

However, Raisi's standing may have been dented by widespread protests against clerical rule and a failure to turn around Iran's economy, hamstrung by Western sanctions.

Raisi had been at the Azerbaijani border on Sunday to inaugurate the Qiz-Qalasi Dam, a joint project.

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, who said he had bid a "friendly farewell" to Raisi earlier in the day, offered assistance in the rescue.

# Sunak faces cabinet revolt over visa plans

HT Correspondent

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NEW DELHI: UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is facing a significant backlash from within his cabinet over plans to abolish a graduate visa scheme that currently allows overseas students to live and work in the country for up to two years post-graduation.

The proposal, pushed by some right-wing members of the Conservative Party, aims to tighten immigration control ahead of the upcoming general election, The Guardian reported.

Downing Street is reportedly considering restricting or ending the graduate visa scheme, which some party members argue could be exploited as a backdoor entry into the UK.

The pressure to act tough on immigration is heightened by the imminent release of the latest quarterly immigration figures, which are expected to show continued high numbers.

However, the proposal has met strong opposition from several key cabinet ministers, including Education Secretary Gillian Keegan, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, and Foreign Secretary David Cameron.

These ministers argue that scrapping the scheme could severely harm universities, local economies, and the UK's ability to attract international talent.

"Her job is to support the higher education sector, which benefits from international students coming to this country," a government insider said of Keegan's stance.

Similarly, sources indicated that Hunt opposes any move detrimental to the economy, including broad bans on international student visas.

Lord Cameron is also against limiting international student numbers, which could further damage relationships with overseas universities, especially following the UK's exit from the EU and the Erasmus programme.



Britain's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Sunak finds himself caught between the demands of right-wing party members and Conservative moderates concerned about the potential negative impact on the party's reputation and electoral prospects.

Pressure has mounted from potential future leadership contenders like former Home Secretary Suella Braverman and Tory MP Neil O'Brien, who co-au-

thored a report advocating for the abolition of the graduate visa route.

Earlier this year, the government introduced tighter regulations preventing international students from bringing family members unless enrolled in postgraduate research or government-funded scholarship courses. This change has already led to a decline in numbers. University leaders warn that further restrictions would be detrimental.

Dr. Michael Spence, president of University College London, described the move as "an extraordinary act of national self-harm," emphasising the £37 billion economic benefit that international students bring to the UK annually.

"A single cohort of international students brings £37bn of economic benefit to the UK and this is directly felt by local businesses and communities in towns and cities in every part of the country," he said, highlight-

ing the broader value of these students, who enrich the UK's cultural and intellectual landscape.

Surveys show public worry over fewer international students. According to Survation, 50% believe this leads to higher fees, reduced diversity, economic downturns, and fewer courses. Dr. Tim Bradshaw, chief executive of the Russell Group of universities, echoed these sentiments, stating that the British public appreciates the value of international students and largely opposes reducing their numbers. He warned that further curbs would misjudge public opinion and hinder economic growth. The government's independent Migration Advisory Committee recently reported "no evidence" of abuse of the graduate visa scheme, further questioning the necessity of such drastic measures.

There are also concerns about the potential impact on the government's levelling-up agenda.



Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico.

## SLOVAK PM'S HEALTH SERIOUS BUT PROGNOSIS POSITIVE AFTER GUNSHOTS

Associated Press

letters@hindustantimes.com

BANSKA: Slovakia's populist prime minister, Robert Fico, remained in serious condition on Sunday but has been given a positive prognosis four days after he was shot multiple times in an assassination attempt that has sent shockwaves across the deeply polarised European Union nation, the defence minister said.

"The worst of what we feared has passed, at least for the moment. But his condition remains serious," Robert Kalinak told reporters outside the hospital where Fico is being treated. "His condition is stable with a positive prognosis."

Kalinak added that the hospital treating the Slovak leader in Banská Bystrica, a former coal mining town of 16,000 situated 29 kilometres from where Fico was attacked, will continue to issue updates on his health status.

On Sunday afternoon, Kalinak revealed new details about the ongoing investigation saying there may have been a "third party" involved in "acting for the benefit of the perpetrator", in what was previously described by the authorities as a "lone wolf" attack. The official did not provide additional details.

"The situation is turning out to be even worse than we expected," Kalinak said. Milan Urbáni, deputy director of the hospital, told reporters, "based on the doctors' morning consultation, we can conclude that the patient is currently out of a life-threatening condition."

His condition remains very serious, and he needs a long time to rest to recover. We firmly believe that everything will go in a good direction."



Palestinians carry the body of a person killed in an Israeli strike on a house, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza Strip, on Saturday.

# Israeli airstrike kills 31 in central Gaza; Sullivan meets Netanyahu

Agence France-Presse

letters@hindustantimes.com

RAFAH: An Israeli strike killed 31 people in central Gaza on Sunday, the Palestinian territory's civil defence agency said, as US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan visited for talks on the conflict.

Israeli troops have moved in on the Gaza Strip's far-southern city of Rafah, which the army describes as the last Hamas stronghold and where the US says 800,000 civilians have been newly displaced by the fighting.

Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, said it was targeting Israeli forces stationed at Rafah crossing -- a vital conduit for humanitarian aid that is now closed -- with mortar shells.

Israel has also fought and bombed resurgent Hamas forces in northern and central areas of the coastal territory previously considered to be under army control, sparking US warnings that it could become mired in a lengthy counterinsurgency campaign.

In the latest aerial bombard-



Palestinians climb onto trucks to grab aid that was delivered into Gaza through a US-built pier, on Saturday.

ment overnight, Gaza's civil defence agency said an Israeli strike killed 31 people and wounded 20 in a home in the central Nuseirat refugee camp.

Israel's military, which on Sunday reported its aircraft had "struck dozens of terror targets" over the past 24 hours, said it was checking the reports.

Witness Yasser Abu Oula told AFP an entire residential com-

plex "was destroyed" and "there are still bodies under the rubble". Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to keep fighting Hamas in Gaza, following its October 7 attack that sparked the war, until the Iran-backed Islamist group is defeated and all remaining hostages are released.

But he has faced intense opposition and calls to announce a

plan for Gaza's post-war governance -- from top ally Washington and from mass street protests, and now also from members of his war cabinet.

Centrist politician Benny Gantz threatened on Saturday to quit the governing hard-right coalition unless Netanyahu approves a post-war "action plan" by June 8.

Amid the political turmoil, Sullivan was to meet his Israeli counterpart Tzachi Hanegbi and Netanyahu for talks on the brutal Gaza conflict and post-war scenarios, after earlier meeting Saudi de facto ruler Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the kingdom.

Gantz demanded steps to defeat Hamas, to bring home the hostages, and towards the formation of an "American, European, Arab and Palestinian administration that will manage civilian affairs in the Gaza Strip".

However, Netanyahu dismissed Gantz's comments as "washed-up words", saying they would lead to "a defeat for Israel" and "the establishment of a Palestinian state", which he fiercely opposes.

HT

## China to probe anti-dumping of EU, US chemicals

RIYADH: China's

commerce ministry on Sunday said it had launched an anti-dumping investigation into imports of an important engineering chemical from the European Union, the US, Taiwan and Japan. Beijing said it would probe imports of polyoxymethylene copolymer, a thermoplastic used in everything from phones, car parts, and medical equipment. The investigation will take a year.

## Dominican Republic voters head to prez polls

SANTO DOMINGO:

Dominican Republic voters headed to the polls on Sunday to elect the next president and parliament members, in a race seen as a referendum on popular incumbent and anti-corruption advocate, Luis Abinader. His tough stance on Haiti has boosted his support over his main opponents.

## Nepal PM confident in confidence vote

KATHMANDU: Nepal

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' has exuded confidence that he would win the trust vote in the House of Representatives on Monday, days after a coalition partner withdrew its support for his government. Prachanda, 69, a former guerrilla leader, belongs to Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre).

## IMRAN KHAN TOSHAKHANA CASE

# New allegations levelled against ex-Pakistan PM

Press Trust of India

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ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's accountability watchdog has levelled fresh corruption allegations against jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, accusing him of "illegally" possessing and selling 10 other precious gifts linked to the state gift repository when he was in power, media reports said on Sunday. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) launched an inquiry against the 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi over the alleged misuse of the Toshakhana -- the state gift repository. The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

The beleaguered former first couple has been convicted in earlier Toshakhana corruption cases as well. In January, Khan



Former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan.

and Bushra were sentenced to 14 years in jail each by an accountability court for alleged corruption in state gifts they got from the state repository. The sentence was later suspended by the Islamabad High Court.

The previous Toshakhana graft case was filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in the charges of hiring the sale of state gifts.

## REPEATED EPISODES OF DELUGE } THE TALIBAN-LED GOVERNMENT IS LEAST PREPARED TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

# Flash floods due to heavy rains in Afghanistan kill at least 84 people



Afghan men collect their belongings from their damaged homes after heavy flooding in Ghor province, on Saturday.

Associated Press

letters@hindustantimes.com

ISLAMABAD: More heavy rains in Afghanistan have triggered flash floods, raising the death toll to 84 in the country's north following weeks of devastating torrents that had already left hundreds dead and missing, a Taliban spokesman said on Sunday.

The new round of heavy rains and floods hit four districts in Faryab province on Saturday night, leaving 66 dead, five injured and eight missing.

Another person had died in floods on Friday, said Esmatullah Moradi, spokesman for the provincial governor in Faryab. Moradi said that around 1,500 houses were either completely or partially destroyed while hundreds of hectares of farmlands were washed away and more than 300 animals were killed. Afghanistan has been wit-

nessing unusually heavy seasonal rains.

In the hard-hit western province of Ghor, 50 people were reported dead from Friday's floods, according to Abdul Wahid Hamas, spokesman for the provincial governor.

The UN food agency said Ghor was the most affected by the floods.

Last week, the World Food Program reported that exceptionally heavy rains in Afghanistan have caused widespread devastation, resulting in the deaths of more than 300 people.

The relentless downpours have wreaked havoc across various regions, with the northern province of Baghlan being particularly hard hit.

In Baghlan alone, thousands of houses have been destroyed, displacing countless families and leaving them without shelter.

Survivors have also been left with no source of livelihood, WFP said, adding that most of Baghlan was inaccessible by trucks for aid delivery.

Taliban officials have warned the tolls would go up in regions impacted by flooding, as destroyed infrastructure hampered aid delivery and efforts to find the missing.

The latest disaster came on the heels of devastating floods that killed at least 70 people in April.

The waters also destroyed about 2,000 homes, three mosques and four schools in western Farah and Herat, and southern Zabul and Kandahar provinces. The rains came after a prolonged drought in Afghanistan, a country that has struggled with severe water shortages for months and is one of the least prepared nations to tackle climate change impacts.

# US man suspected of shooting his 6-month old son dies by suicide

Associated Press

letters@hindustantimes.com

SURPRISE: A man suspected of shooting his 6-month-old son multiple times after taking the boy and his mother hostage was found dead of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound in the rubble of a suburban Phoenix home that caught fire during a SWAT standoff, police said on Saturday. The boy was reported in critical but stable condition at a local hospital on Saturday, Surprise police said in a statement. They said earlier his injuries suffered the day before were not believed to be life-threatening.

Officers went to the home in the city of Surprise northwest of Phoenix in response to an emer-

gency call around 11:30 am (local time) on Friday from a woman who said she and her baby had been held captive there since 3 am by the child's father, police said.

The mother escaped with minor injuries and called 911 with a cellphone she said she borrowed from a nearby construction crew. Police heard gunfire from inside the house as they arrived, Surprise Police Sgt. Rick Hernandez said. They entered and found the baby with multiple gunshot wounds but did not see the father. They retrieved the child and retreated. The dead man, identified on Saturday as 51-year-old Todd Christopher Marchetti, had repeatedly refused to peacefully surrender.

# GST Council plans to hear gaming firms' grievances

Officials examining their request for relief from tax notices totalling ₹1.12 lakh cr

**Gireesh Chandra Prasad**  
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**NEW DELHI:** Online gaming companies received a big blow last year, when the government issued notices for over ₹1 lakh crore in tax from their earlier earnings. While the matter has ended up in the Supreme Court, the federal indirect taxes body GST (goods and services tax) Council now plans to consider the impact of the tax demand on the industry's viability, two people aware of the matter said.

Central and state GST officials are examining the grievances of online gaming companies and their request for relief from the tax notices issued for the period till October 2023, totalling over ₹1.12 lakh crore, a cross 71 cases, the people said on the condition of anonymity. Under GST laws, penalty can match the tax specified in the notice, which could increase the tax claim further.

"Officials are examining the plea made by online gaming companies about the tax notices. It will be considered by the GST



Under GST laws, penalty can match the tax specified in the notice, which could increase the tax claim further.

Council at its next meeting, which could either be at the end of June or early July," said one of the two persons cited above. The person said "some discussions" are going on, but declined to describe it as a "relief to the industry" yet.

Until last year, the law did not specify tax rates on online gaming, and companies used to pay 18% GST on the platform fee or commission (which ranges from 5-20% of the deposits). On 1 October 2023, the GST Council set 28% tax on the full face value of deposits, which was followed by tax demands on previous earnings by the gaming companies. While the companies have challenged it in court, finance ministry officials have earlier said that

the government's claim to money—actionable claim in tax parlance—was always 28% tax on the full deposit amount. Since the government holds this view, giving relief on the tax demand would require a strong rationale.

Queries emailed to a spokesperson for the finance ministry and the GST Secretariat on Thursday seeking comments remained unanswered till publishing.

An executive from a leading online gaming firm said the industry's complaint was about the tax notices for the pre-October 2023 period and not about the new regime, which they are complying with. The executive cited an industry plea before tax officials stating online gaming

companies are a platform, and there is no actionable claim, and that actionable claim can be at most between the players. The executive also said that GST has been "duly paid and returns were filed" and that the tax authority decided to take action after five years of GST implementation. "This will shut down the industry as the demands are higher than the revenues for the last five years," the executive said, requesting not to be named as the matter was sub-judice.

According to experts, online gaming platforms always believed that until 1 October, GST was neither payable on the entire bet value for games offered by them nor was the GST rate at 28%.

"The tax demand in some of the cases for the period prior to October 2023 is significantly higher than the revenues of these gaming companies. Besides, the government's revenue from this sector has gone up after the regime change in October 2023. In view of these circumstances, it may make sense to evolve a solution on the tax demands for the prior period that is a win-win for the industry and the government," said Abhishek Jain, partner and national head of indirect tax at KPMG in India.

# Telcos to save ₹3k cr in interest after SC order

**Gulveen Aulakh**  
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**NEW DELHI:** Telecom service providers, including Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea and Tata Communications, are set to save about ₹3,000 crore following a Supreme Court order released on Sunday.

The apex court has waived the interest levy on tax arising from its October 2023 ruling that said annual licence fees paid by telcos would be treated as capex, which are not tax deductible. The SC had overturned a 2013 Delhi HC ruling that had said licence fees comprised revenue expenditure and were not taxable.

While the tax will still have to be paid, the interest component on the tax has been waived by the top court in its latest order. That is significant, considering that the interest portion would have been higher than the tax demand, since the tax outgo on licence fee would be calculated since 1999, when the new telecom policy was issued, executives aware of the details said.

"We have given our thought-



The apex court has waived the interest levy on tax arising from its Oct 2023 ruling.

ful consideration to the submissions advanced at the Bar. We find that since the judgment of this Court is dated 16.10.2023, and having regard to the Telecom Policy, which commenced from the year 1999, the payment of interest for the period for which the tax demand is now to be met in respect of these cases stands waived," Justices B.V. and Ujjal Bhuyan said in the order seen by Mint.

"This is a very good judgement that would reduce interest liability substantially for the industry. A very welcome move and a huge respite," said Pra-

shant Singhal, EY's global telecom, media and technology leader for emerging markets.

According to estimates, the interest would have been in the range of ₹3,000-3,500 crore, which would not be payable now. Following the October 2023 order, telcos had made provisions against the higher tax outgo. Airtel had made an additional tax provision of ₹226.3 crore, Vodafone Idea provisioned ₹820 crore and Tata Communications provisioned around ₹200 crore, as per the telcos' quarterly reports.

"This is a welcome decision by the Hon'ble Supreme Court," said S.P. Kochhar, director general, Cellular Operators Association of India, which represents all carriers in the country.

The order also stated that the order shall not be cited as a precedent as it was passed on account of peculiar facts of the case and that appeals related to the matter in all fora including the HC, the income tax appellate tribunal and others would keep in mind this SC order, while disposing of the appeals.

# KUMAR, PAI TO EXIT BYJU'S PANEL AS LEGAL CASES MOUNT

**Gopika Gopakumar & Varun Sood**  
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**MUMBAI/NEW DELHI:** In another setback to embattled online tutor Byju's, Rajnish Kumar and T.V. Mohandas Pai do not intend to continue on the advisory panel of its parent company, Think & Learn Pvt. Ltd, after their one-year tenure ends on 30 June.

Two executives aware of the development said Kumar and Pai, who joined the company last year to advise founder Byju Raveendran following a series of board exits and financial woes, have communicated their decision to him.

Byju's had established the advisory panel naming Kumar, a former chairman of State Bank of India (SBI), and Pai, a former chief financial officer of Infosys Ltd, as members to assuage investors worried about the company's future as legal cases mounted against it.

One of the executives cited above said that Kumar and Pai are snapping ties following the company getting embroiled in litigation. Byju's is facing lawsuits both in India and in the US from its creditors and key shareholders, who want the founder ousted.

The advisory panel's three main focus areas were to get the company to disclose its audited financials and help Raveendran rebuild the team. Better communication with shareholders was the third part.

On each of these aspects, Byju's started well "but unfortunately, the company got embroiled in all kinds of litigation", said the executive.

A second executive, also speaking on the condition of anonymity, said in addition to the three areas, the advisory panel also worked with Raveendran to expand the board, change the composition of the board committee, and help Byju's settle debt with creditors.

An email sent to Byju's seeking comment, and text messages sent to Kumar and Pai remained unanswered till press time.

# Sanjiv Puri is new CII president

**HT Correspondent**  
letters@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** Sanjiv Puri, chairman and managing director of ITC Ltd, is the new president of the Confederation of Indian Industry, the business association said. He takes over from R Dinesh, chairman of TVS Supply Chain Solutions, after the lobby group's national council on Saturday elected office bearers for 2024-25.

EY India chairman Rajiv Memani has been elected as president for the year, and Tata Chemicals Ltd managing director & CEO R Mukundan is the new vice-president, CII said in a statement.

Besides leading cigarette maker ITC that also has interests in FMCG, hotels, packaging and agri business, Puri is also chairman of ITC Infotech India



Sanjiv Puri, chairman and managing director, ITC.

Ltd, its subsidiaries in the UK and the US, and Surya Nepal Private Ltd. He was conferred with the Distinguished Alumni Award of 2018 by the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.

Memani is a member of EY's global management body as chair of its global emerging markets committee. He is an advisor to large Indian companies, private equity funds and multinational organizations, principally advising them on

building confidence, mergers and acquisitions, technology and smart capital allocation strategies.

Mukundan is an alumnus of IIT Roorkee, fellow of the Indian Chemical Society and an alumnus of the Harvard Business School. During his 33 years career with the Tata Group, he has held responsibilities across the chemical, automotive and hospitality sectors.

CII is a non-government, not-for-profit, industry led organisation, with around 9,000 members from the private as well as public sectors, including small and medium enterprises and multinational corporations. It has 65 offices, including 10 centres of excellence, in India, and eight overseas offices, as well as institutional partnerships with 350 counterpart associations in 133 countries, it said.

## Is your bank charging extra interest on loans?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) recently warned banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) against resorting to "unfair practices" to extract extra interest on loans from borrowers. The RBI mentioned three unfair practices that banks need to stop—charging interest from the date of sanction in place of disbursement; in the case of disbursement or repayment of loans in a month, charging interest for the entire month rather than charging it only for the period for which the loan was outstanding; and collecting one or more instalments in advance but reckoning the full loan amount for charging interest.

Compiled by Shweta Singh  
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**ESWAR KUMAR,** chartered accountant, Chennai



**NAVEEN AGRAWAL,** finance professional, Gurgaon

**Home loan + home improvement loan sanctioned:** October 2023

Paid nearly **₹47,000** extra in interest since date of sanction

**Disbursement:** HOME loan 18 days later  
HOME improvement loan in December 2023

**Action taken**

- Flagged it to relationship manager (RM) verbally; was promised interest would be reversed.
- RM is transferred to other branch; Kumar doesn't have communication trail to show to the bank.
- Kumar plans to report the case to RBI.

**Home loan transfer case**

**ORIGINAL** lender (transferor) charged interest till funds from the transferee bank were not deposited.

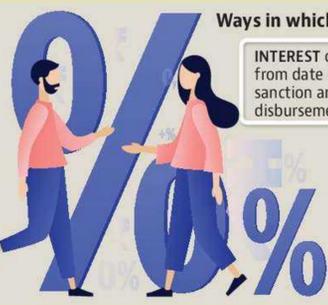
**TRANSFEREE** bank charged interest from the date of cheque and not when cheque was encashed by transferor bank

**Action taken**

- Raised with banks; both said charges are as per their standard procedure.
- Lodged complaint with RBI; yet to be resolved.

"The biggest mistake I committed was to not take this up with the bank via emails. I will now lodge a complaint with the RBI."

"The impact was around **₹3,000** only, but it's surprising to see different practices adopted by different banks."



**Ways in which you may pay extra interest**

**INTEREST** charged from date of sanction and not disbursement.

**INTEREST** charged from date of cheque and not when borrower receives it.

**IN** case of prepayment, interest on reduced principle reflects from subsequent month and not from the date of prepayment.

**AT** the time of loan transfer, both banks charge interest for the period when the loan is processed.

**BANK** takes advance EMI, which only comprises of principle, but doesn't reduce it from outstanding amount to calculate interest.

**IF** credit card bill is paid partially, interest is charged on full bill amount, applicable taxes and other fees.

Graphic: Pranay Bhardwaj/Mint

## 'GDP GROWTH RATE FOR FY24 LIKELY TO BE 7%'

**Press Trust of India**

feedback@livemint.com

**NEW DELHI:** India Ratings and Research expects the country's GDP growth rate for the March quarter at 6.7% and around 6.9-7% for the 2023-24 fiscal, its principal economist Sunil Kumar Sinha said.

The GDP numbers for the fourth quarter (January-March 2024) and the provisional estimates for the 2023-24 fiscal are scheduled to be released by the government on May 31.

The Indian economy grew 8.2% in the June quarter, 8.1% in the September quarter and 8.4% in the December quarter of 2023-24.

"We are expecting the fourth quarter growth to be 6.7% and the overall GDP growth for FY24 to be around 6.9-7%," Sinha told PTI Videos in an interview.

He said the growth rate in the first two quarters benefited from a low base, though the 8.4% growth rate in the third (October-December 2023) quarter was surprising. While the gross value added (GVA) was 6.5% in the third quarter, the GDP growth rate stood at 8.4%. This wedge is on account of higher taxes collected during the quarter.

## { THE CROSSWORDS }

### CRYPTIC CLUES

#### ACROSS

- Apprentices the boss sent out (8)
- Work in the music business (4)
- Beautiful French girl sounding alarm (5)
- Beginning a letter (7)
- Assuming responsibility and accepting payment (6,6)
- Missing sailor gets discharged (6)
- Oddly enough, result in a glossy appearance (6)
- Anticipating the collapse of store in subsidence (12)
- No object in bothering Melissa (7)
- An inspiration to entertain (5)
- Show that one has a horn to turn to? (4)
- Excite curiosity in street repairs (8)

#### DOWN

- Replacements for warships (4)
- Takes articles from a magazine? (7)
- Seers? (12)
- Double up for example in pain (6)
- Former holy man (5)
- Erroneously delivers a description of mirrors (8)
- Lacking consent to value white magic (7,5)
- Position of respect on the staff (4-4)
- Drastic cut in the monastic establishment (7)
- Hand down to father's next of kin (4,2)
- He was known for loving capital; nothing more (5)
- Inclination to be crooked (4)

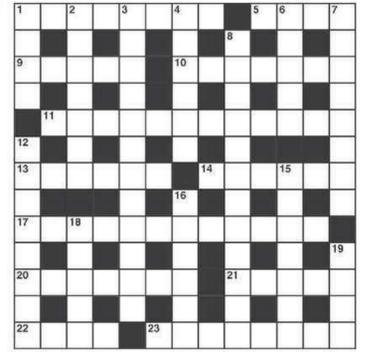
### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTIONS (16863)



#### QUICK



### PUZZLE 16864 © Gemini Crosswords 2018 All rights reserved



### QUICK CLUES

#### ACROSS

- Transitory (8)
- Reiterate (4)
- Dexterous (5)
- Enterprising (2-5)
- Rejecting any persuasion (4,2,6)
- An improvement (6)
- Container for arrows (6)
- Those in authority (6,4,2)
- Dulmy mistake (7)
- Make suitable (5)
- Nervously anxious (4)
- Off late (8)

#### DOWN

- Needless commotion (4)
- Plain (7)
- To dupe (4,3,1,4)
- Useless (2,4)
- A salad plant (5)
- Usual (8)
- Give arguments in favour (4,3,1,4)
- Blameworthy (8)
- Full of animation (7)
- Die of hunger (6)
- Extracted under pressure (5)
- Remain (4)

### { SUDOKU }

DIFFICULTY LEVEL ★★★



Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, column and each of the 9x9 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

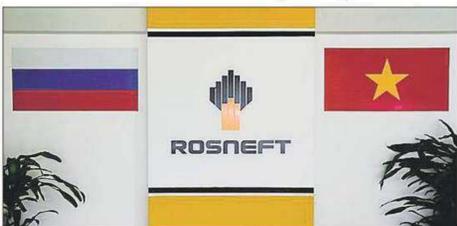
# As Russian discounts dry up, refiners seek better terms

**Utpal Bhaskar**  
utpal.b@livemint.com

**NEW DELHI:** With discounts on Russian crude oil dwindling, India, in a first such effort, has brought together state-owned and private oil refiners to jointly negotiate for higher discounts and better terms with Russian suppliers, including Russia's largest oil company Rosneft PJSC.

The government-led joint sourcing strategy involves leveraging India's position as the world's third-largest crude oil buyer to get better discounts on Russian oil, which have dropped to about \$3 per barrel from a high of \$10 earlier, said two people aware of the development.

The calibrated strategy—involving Indian Oil Corp. (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corp. Ltd (BPCL), Hindustan Petroleum



Indian refiners are looking to get Russian suppliers, including Rosneft, to continue supplying oil at better discounts.

Corp. Ltd (HPCL), Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL), and HPCL Mittal Energy Ltd (HMEL)—may help save on India's significant oil import bill, they said, requesting anonymity.

Russia, facing sanctions by the West over its Ukraine invasion, is now India's top supplier of crude oil. The discounts Russia offered on its oil saved India

billions of dollars. But those discounts have fallen in recent months.

"The discount on Russian oil is coming down. While the Russians are tough negotiators, we have an advantage as we are speaking to them as one," one of them said. "Our point is simple: If they don't offer more discounts to India as a market, then

we can look elsewhere. A lot of oil is flowing."

Energy security is key to India's national security. It imports more than 80% of the oil it needs, and is vulnerable to any increase in global prices, which can stoke inflation and widen the country's trade deficit.

Spokespersons for India's petroleum and natural gas ministry, IOC, BPCL, HPCL, HMEL, and RIL, did not reply to queries emailed Friday afternoon.

"Currently we do not have the information mentioned in your enquiry," a spokesperson for Rosneft said in an emailed response.

"However, we believe that the commodity price should be formed on market principles rather than determined by individual groups or organizations."

India has been calling for a global consensus on "responsible pricing", which assumes sig-

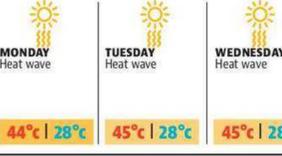
nificance as the influential Opec+ cartel, which includes Russia, has been limiting its crude supplies.

The Vienna-based Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' (Opec's) crude-oil production fell by 48,000 barrels a day to 26.575 million barrels a day in April, according to a WSJ report. Opec and its allies have extended their output cuts until the end of June, which many analysts expect could be stretched to the second half of 2024 to boost prices, the report added.

Data from India's ministry of commerce show the country imported crude worth \$46.48 billion from Russia in 2023-24, about 50% higher than the \$31.02 billion worth of crude imported from that country in FY23. India's share of imports from Russia was a third of its total oil import bill in value terms.

## { WEATHER }

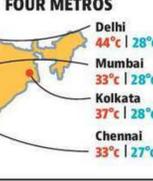
TEMPERATURE • HIGH • LOW



## ALMANAC

Today is 20th May 2024  
• 11 Dhul Qadah, 1445  
• 27 Vaishakha, Shukla  
Paksha, 12  
• Suman 2081  
Sunset: Monday at 07:08 p.m.  
Sunrise: Tuesday at 05:27 a.m.  
Moonset: Tuesday at 03:45 a.m.

## TEMPERATURE IN FOUR METROS



SPORT

# Abhishek propels SRH to victory and second spot

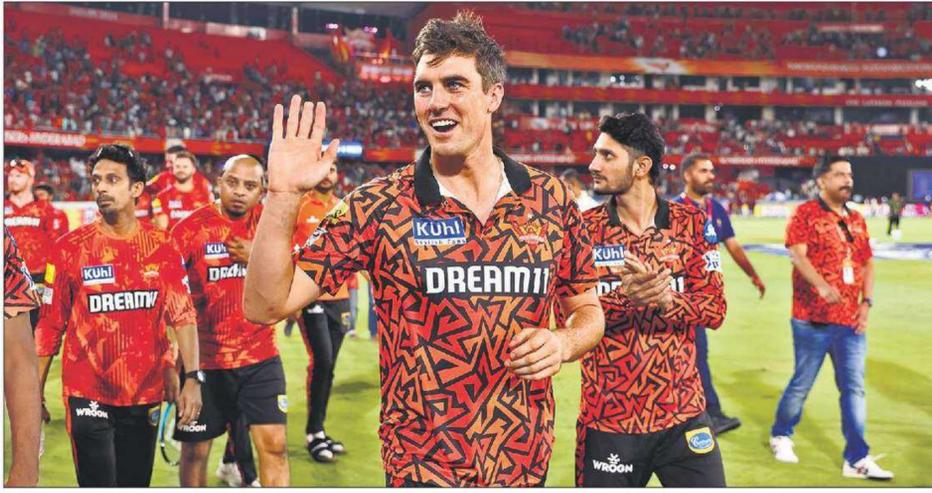
The left-hander hits 66 as Sunrisers chase down 215 vs Punjab; Rajasthan finish third after KKR clash is called off due to rain

**Somshuvra Laha**  
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**KOLKATA:** Rain in Guwahati washed out Rajasthan Royals' last IPL league match against table toppers Kolkata Knight Riders on Sunday, robbing the Royals of a chance to reclaim the second spot and consigning them to a five-match winless streak. KKR opted to bowl in a seven-overs-per-side match at a hurriedly taken toss after ground staff managed to prepare the turf for a very late start, but rain returned to dash Royals' hopes of an opportunity to bag a win.

Splitting points left Royals with 17 points, the same as Sunrisers Hyderabad, but Abhishek Sharma's 28-ball 66 ensured Hyderabad pipped Royals on net run rate after chasing Punjab Kings' 215 with five balls to spare at home earlier in the day. This means Kolkata Knight Riders—who are yet to realise the impact of English opener Phil Salt's World Cup departure with their final two league matches being abandoned—will square off with Sunrisers Hyderabad in the first Qualifier at Ahmedabad on Tuesday. Loser of that match will get another chance of reaching the final when they play the winners of Wednesday's Eliminator, featuring Royal Challengers Bengaluru—who have turned a corner after losing seven out of their first eight league matches—and Rajasthan Royals.

Sunday started with Sunrisers on 15 points, needing a win



SRH skipper Pat Cummins leads a lap of honour to thank the fans after their win over Punjab Kings in Hyderabad on Sunday.

against Punjab Kings and Rajasthan Royals to lose against KKR to cement their second position. They were nearly granted that wish. Bulk of the job was done by the batters as usual. Choosing to bat, Punjab Kings rode a 55-ball 97-run first-wicket partnership between Prabhshimran Singh and Atharva Taide to set up the innings before Rilee Rossouw ramped up the scoring with 49 off 24 balls. With Jitesh Sharma providing the finishing touches with a scintillating 15-ball 32, Punjab Kings could have been tempted into thinking they had put up enough.

Arsheep Singh then bolstered that belief by dismissing Travis Head first ball of Hyderabad's chase, getting the ball to seam and take the top of off-stump. In came Rahul Tripathi, who presented the full face of his bat to a full inswinger and send the ball screaming through

cover point for four. Another four, this time guided over the slip cordon before Tripathi clouted Rishi Dhawan into the stands and Sunrisers were well and truly away despite the early stutter.

Due a last bow at home before the action moves to Ahmedabad and Chennai, Sharma then started wowing the Hyderabad crowd with a stupendous show of clean striking. Two short balls given the right treatment by pulling them over fine-leg for sixes, Sharma then clattered a length delivery over deep third man boundary. Overall, Sharma hit six sixes along with five fours to put pressure back on the Punjab bowlers.

**Brief scores:** PBKS 214/5 (Prabhshimran Singh 71; T Natarajan 2/33). SRH 215/6 in 19.1 overs (Abhishek Sharma 66, H Klaasen 42). **SRH won by 4 wickets.**

IPL playoffs			
Qualifier 1	<b>KKR vs SRH</b>	<b>MAY 21, 7:30pm;</b>	<b>Ahmedabad</b>
Eliminator	<b>RCB vs RR</b>	<b>MAY 22, 7:30pm;</b>	<b>Ahmedabad</b>
Qualifier 2	Loser of Qualifier 1 vs Winner of Eliminator	<b>MAY 24, 7:30pm;</b>	<b>Chennai</b>

Team	P	Won	Lost	NRR	Pts
1 Kolkata Knight Riders (Q)	14	9	3	1.428	20
2 Sunrisers Hyderabad (Q)	14	8	5	0.414	17
3 Rajasthan Royals (Q)	14	8	5	0.273	17
4 Royal Challengers (Q)	14	7	7	0.459	14
5 Chennai Super Kings	14	7	7	0.392	14
6 Delhi Capitals	14	7	7	-0.377	14
7 Lucknow Super Giants	14	7	7	-0.667	14
8 Gujarat Titans	14	5	7	-1.063	12
9 Punjab Kings	14	5	9	-0.353	10
10 Mumbai Indians	14	4	10	-0.318	8

GT vs KKR, SRH vs GT, RR vs KKR were abandoned due to rain

# Ahead of Paris, Elavenil rediscovers confidence

**Rutvik Mehta**  
rutvik.mehta@htlive.com

**BHOPAL:** Elavenil Valarivan was beaming at the conclusion of shooting's Olympic selection trials here on Sunday, greeting and hugging people with a smile as big as her score on the day. Why wouldn't she, having just shot 254.3 in the last final (it is 0.3 points above the world record that wouldn't count as one) and finishing on top of a competitive women's 10m air rifle trials from where the top two are meant to be handed Paris Olympics spots.

There was, however, a bigger reason behind it. "I'm just enjoying the sport right now," she said. "There are no longer days where I'm not happy shooting." That, for the Tokyo Olympian who rode through Indian shooting's lowest ebb and has been through as much of a roller-coaster since, was the most pleasing takeaway from the month-long trials that has put her on the doorstep of her second Games appearance. Elavenil, 24, has rekindled her joy of shooting over the last few months, the kind she felt when she would win medals for fun as a rising teen.

While most of India's shooters who lived through the Tokyo nightmare in 2021 felt the high of winning medals at last year's Asian Games, Elavenil didn't even make it to the team. Around the same time, though, she pocketed a World Cup gold in Rio for her first individual World Cup medal in three years. She then won the National Championship in December and the Jakarta Asian Championships silver in January to medal at the tournament after five years (she won gold in 2019).

Through this period of misses and medals, Elavenil not only found the joy of entering the range again but also the desire to keep learning.

"It's been eight years now since I'm competing in this sport. And every day that I go into the range, there is something new that the game is teach-

## Paris calling

The top two finishers in these rifle and pistol trials are set for Paris Olympics spots, although squads will be finalised after NRAI's selection committee meet:

MEN	WOMEN
<b>10m air rifle</b> Sandeep Singh, Arjun Babuta	<b>10m air rifle</b> Elavenil Valarivan, Ramita Jindal
<b>50m rifle 3P</b> Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar, Swapnil Kusale	<b>50m rifle 3P</b> Sift Kaur Samra, Anjum Moudgil
<b>10m air pistol</b> Sarabjot Singh, Arjun Singh Cheema	<b>10m air pistol</b> Manu Bhaker, Rhythm Sangwan
<b>25m rapid fire</b> Anish, Vijayveer Sidhu	<b>25m sports pistol</b> Manu Bhaker, Esha Singh

ing me lately. There were times when I felt like I knew everything, that there is nothing more I could learn. But every single day since, I'm learning something new.

"The game took me to places where it made me happy, sad, frustrated...a lot of emotions were involved. For the past four months or so, I feel like I've been enjoying the game again. Even here, after being through so many emotions," Elavenil said.

The trials, for which she trained with a lot more intensity in Chennai, were an acid test to the influx of joy in her shooting. She had to overcome a poor first qualification round—she finished last—and fend off a tough fight from younger challengers in quota holder Tilottama Sen, 16, Asian Games bronze medalist Ramita Jindal and Asian Championships winner Nancy, both 20.

"For a long time, I wanted to make it to the team and be a better version of myself. I had been working on a lot of things. I'm glad things are turning around," Elavenil said.

Among the things she worked on post Tokyo was her mind, conditioning it to be more secure

with the help of her psychologist. She still looks back at those forgettable Games—she finished 16th and did not qualify for the 10m air rifle final—with a touch of fondness while carrying lessons from it. "Somewhere I feel that those learnings have played an important role in my consistency. One thing that Tokyo has taught me is to be mentally strong. That is playing a big part in my consistency," she said.

She has learnt to "push through" the bad phases; like brushing off the Asian Games non-selection by winning the Rio World Cup gold in September, days before Indian shooters' medal rush in Hangzhou began. That relatively low-key medal got her belief back on track, and the Nationals gold—beating Ramita who had won the Asian Games individual bronze and team silver—and Asian Championships silver added wheels to it.

"There are going to be ups and downs. It is about how you accept the downs and push through it," Elavenil said. "I knew somewhere deep down that I can do it again. It was about pushing through that phase."

**PACE NEWS | Hindustan Times MEDIA MARKETING INITIATIVE**

### Bal Bharati Public School, Pitampura Celebrates Annual Day & Prize Distribution Ceremony

Parents and educators felt immense pride as they watched energetic and well-synchronized acts, including the thought-provoking Nukkad Natak, 'From War to Peace.' The audience was spellbound by the captivating performances in 'Dashkandh - The Rise and Fall of Raavana'.

The Annual Report and Prize Distribution Ceremony celebrated the achievements of the school, staff, and students, making it a memorable and inspiring occasion.

This year, students from classes IX to XII also presented an exhibition, 'Pragyaan@The Awakening', featuring disciplines such as Maths, Science, Social Science, Entrepreneurship, and ATL. With over 400 participants and 75 exhibits, the exhibition highlighted the creativity, innovation, teamwork, and dedication of our students.

In all, the program was a cultural extravaganza, displaying a rare blend of talent, camaraderie, and hard work.

### Gyan Mandir Public School, Naraina Vihar Celebrates Annual Event 'Abhivyakti 2024'

plethora of offerings, comprising 31 captivating online and offline contests, lay a world of opportunity and expression. From the eloquent prose of literary pursuits to the harmonious cadence of musical endeavors, from the intricate brushstrokes of artistic expression to the strategic brilliance of intellectual challenges, Abhivyakti 2024 promised a feast for the senses and a stage for boundless creativity to flourish.

Principal addressed the gathering and emphasized upon sharing a common goal to shape the young impressionable minds in such a way that they pave their own path, become lifelong learners and visionary leaders of tomorrow. With gentle encouragement, she painted a picture of a future where learning never ends and leadership knows no bounds. The panel of judges comprised of highly experienced professionals in their respective fields. They were impressed with the impeccable performance of all the participants. Brimming with pride and joy, the winners received their well-deserved trophies and certificates. Amidst the spirited cheers and jubilant applause, Indraprastha International School, Dwarka triumphantly clinched the coveted rolling trophy.

Under the visionary guidance of honorable Chairman Prashant Khosla, Abhivyakti 2024 reached its crescendo, a culmination marked not just by achievements, but by the realization of a shared vision. With his unwavering commitment to excellence and innovation, Chairman Sir's leadership infused the event with purpose and direction, elevating it beyond mere competition to a platform where dreams took flight and aspirations found wings.

This celebrated event saw the convergence of around 2500 students from 117 esteemed schools, each adding his/her own unique hue to the canvas of competitions. Within the rich

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A. Gautam Gambhir | B. Dinesh Karthik

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**19<sup>th</sup> MAY ANSWER**  
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A. Travis Head

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