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CSE 2023 : Top 10 Rankers Selected from NEXT IAS

AIR 10



ADITYA SRIVASTAVA
AIR-1 : CSE 2023

Courses Joined at NEXT IAS :

- GS Mains Advance Course
- Essay Guidance Program
- GS Mains Test Series
- Optional Test Series (EE.)
- Interview Guidance Program

AIR 2



Animesh Pradhan
Interview Guidance Program

AIR 5



Ruhani
GS Mains Advance Course, Economics Advance Course, Essay Guidance Program, GS Mains Test Series & IGP

AIR 6



Srishti Dabas
Interview Guidance Program

AIR 9



Nausheen
Essay Guidance Programme, GS Mains Test Series

5 In Top 10 | **17** In Top 25 | **34** In Top 50 | **66** In Top 100 | **633+** Selections From all courses

Course details of all the selected candidates are uploaded on our website.

GS FOUNDATION COURSE : CSE 2025 & 2026

1 Year/2 Year Courses

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Old Rajinder Nagar			Mukherjee Nagar	23 rd May	10 th June	30 th May	3 rd June
20 th May	3 rd June	6 th June	27 th May	5:30 PM to 8:30 PM	5:00 PM to 8:00 PM	5:30 PM to 8:30 PM	6:00 PM - 9:00 PM
11:30 AM - 2:30 PM	6:00 PM - 9:00 PM	8:00 AM - 11:00 AM	6:00 PM - 9:00 PM		20 th June		8:00 AM - 11:00 AM
13 th June	17 th June	24 th June			8:00 AM - 11:00 AM		
11:30 AM - 2:30 PM	8:00 AM - 11:00 AM	6:00 PM - 9:00 PM					

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दिल्ली : मुखर्जी नगर	प्रयागराज	जयपुर	लाइव ऑनलाइन बैच
23 मई 2024	18 जून 2024	3 जून 2024	16 मई 2024
10 जून 2024	10 जून 2024	23 मई 2024	18 जून 2024
सायं 6:00 - 9:00 बजे	सुबह 11:30 - 2:30 बजे	सुबह 8:00 - 11:00 बजे	सुबह 8:00 - 11:00 बजे
			सायं 6:00 - 9:00 बजे
			सुबह 11:30 - 2:30 बजे



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Commencing from 25th June

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Commencing from 25th June

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- GS Test Series commencing from 25th June
- Optional Test Series commencing from 27th June



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THE WORLD

TOP OF THE WORLD



Former Pakistan PM Imran Khan. Reuters

PAKISTAN
New allegations of corruption against Imran

Islamabad: Pakistan's accountability watchdog has levelled fresh corruption allegations against jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, accusing him of "illegally" possessing and selling seven high-value watches and 10 other precious gifts linked to the state gift repository when he was in power. The National Accountability Bureau launched a probe against the 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder and his wife Bushra Bibi over the alleged misuse of the Toshakhana, *The Express Tribune* reported. The former first couple has been convicted in earlier Toshakhana corruption cases as well. **PTI**

AFGHANISTAN
Death toll from flash floods in north rises to 84

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 Sunday. The new round of heavy rains and floods hit four districts in Faryab province Saturday night, leaving 66 dead, five injured and eight missing. Another people had died in floods on Friday, said Esmatullah Moradi, spokesman for the provincial governor in Faryab. **AP**

SLOVAKIA
PM condition serious, but outlook positive

Bratislava: The suspect in an assassination attempt on Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico may not have been just a "lone wolf" as previously believed, the interior minister said on Sunday. Fico is no longer in immediate danger but is still in a serious condition after being hit by four bullets on Wednesday. One factor suggesting the involvement of other persons was that the suspect's internet communications were deleted two hours after the assassination attempt, but not by the suspect and most likely not by his wife, said Interior Minister Matus Sutas. **REUTERS**

CONGO
DRC Army says it stopped an attempted coup

Kinshasa: The Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) armed forces repelled an attempted coup d'etat involving Congolese and foreign fighters on Sunday morning, a DRC army spokesman said. "The attempt involved foreigners and Congolese," said Sylvain Ekenge. Tina Salama, a spokeswoman for President Felix Tshisekedi, confirmed that the presidential palace had been attacked but the army had retaken control. **REUTERS**

Sunak faces Cabinet revolt over plan to scrap key visa route for Indian students

ADITI KHANNA
LONDON, MAY 19



Sunak faces opposition from his ministers over the move.

PRIME MINISTER Rishi Sunak is considering restrictions to the UK's post-study visa which allows graduates to stay on and work for up to two years after their degree course as part of efforts to curb soaring legal migration figures despite strong opposition from some of his ministers, a report said Sunday.

According to *The Observer* newspaper, Sunak is facing a Cabinet revolt over plans to scrap the Graduate Route scheme, the definitive factor for choosing UK universities among Indian students — who have topped the tally of these post-study visas since it was launched in 2021.

Downing Street is said to be considering "further restricting or even ending" the route despite the independent Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) declaring it

was not being abused and that it should continue as it helps UK universities make up for financial losses on the domestic front.

"Sunak is now finding himself caught between the demands of right-wingers with one eye on the Tory leadership and Conservative moderates who fear the consequences of a lurch to the right on the party's reputation and election chances," says the newspaper, quoting sources

EXPLAINED
Behind plan to scrap Graduate Route

THE GRADUATE Route visa, a key migration route taken by Indians, allows graduates to stay on in the UK and work for up to two years after their degree. An independent panel has also said it is not being abused. But with elections round the corner, the Sunak government sees curbing high legal and illegal migration as a priority. Quarterly immigration data is due next week and more clampdowns are expected.

close to ministers who oppose scrapping the visa.

Sunak's Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan, Chancellor Jeremy Hunt and Foreign Secretary David Cameron are among those in the Cabinet said to be leading a revolt over the issue. It comes as university and business chiefs have warned that any curtailment of the post-study offer would make the UK less attractive to overseas stu-

dents, including Indians.

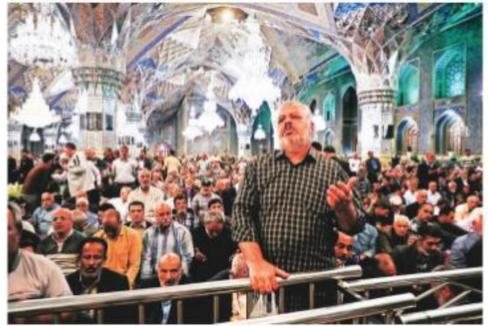
"Studying at university is one of our biggest export successes. Attracting international students boosts local economies and losing competitiveness would put support for undergraduate teaching and innovation at risk," said John Foster, Chief Policy and Campaigns Officer for the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

Universities UK (UUK), the leading representative body for

UK universities, has also called upon the government to end the "toxic" uncertainty caused by the government's decision to review the visa route.

MAC Chair Professor Brian Bell, who concluded the rapid review into the scheme earlier this week, has said that "our evidence suggests that it's the Indian students that will be most affected by any restriction on the Graduate Route". The influential panel which advises the UK government on migration found that Indians accounted for 89,200 visas between 2021 and 2023 or 42 per cent of the overall grants, and the visa was stated as the "overwhelming decision point" for their choice of a higher education destination.

"The uncertainty caused by the review has been chaotic. We urge the government to accept the MAC's findings," said Vignesh Karthik from the National Indian Students and Alumni Union. **PTI**



PRAYERS FOR THE PRESIDENT People pray for Raisi at the Imam Reza Shrine in the holy city of Mashhad on Sunday. AP

Ebrahim Raisi: Hardliner seen as successor to supreme leader

ASSOCIATED PRESS
DUBAI, MAY 19

IRAN'S HARD-LINE President Ebrahim Raisi has long been seen as a protégé of Iran's supreme leader and a potential successor for his position within the country's Shiite theocracy.

News of his helicopter making what state media described as a "hard landing" on Sunday immediately brought new attention to the leader, who already faces sanctions from the U.S. and other nations over his involvement in the mass execution of prisoners in 1988.

Raisi, 63, previously ran Iran's judiciary. He ran unsuccessfully for president in 2017 against Hassan Rouhani, the relatively moderate cleric who as president reached Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

In 2021, Raisi ran again in an election that saw all of his potentially prominent opponents barred for running under Iran's vetting system. He swept nearly 62% of the 28.9 million votes, the lowest turnout by percentage in the Islamic Republic's history. Millions stayed home and others voided ballots.

Raisi was defiant when asked at a news conference after his election about the 1988 executions, which saw sham retrials of political prisoners, militants and others that would become known as "death commissions" at the end of the bloody Iran-Iraq war.

After Iran's then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini accepted a UN-brokered cease-fire, members of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, heavily armed by Saddam Hussein, stormed across the Iranian border from Iraq in a surprise attack.

Iran blunted their assault.

The trials began around that time, with defendants asked to identify themselves. Those who responded "mujahedeen" were sent to their deaths, while others were questioned about their willingness to "clear minefields for the army of the Islamic Republic," according to a 1990 Amnesty International report. International rights groups estimate that as many as 5,000 people were executed. Raisi served on the commissions.

The US Treasury in 2019 sanctioned Raisi "for his administrative oversight over the executions of individuals who were juveniles at the time of their crime and the torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners in Iran, including amputations." It also mentioned his involvement in the 1988 executions.

Iran is run by its 85-year-old supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But as president, Raisi supported the country's enrichment of uranium up to near-weapons-grade levels, as well as it hampering international inspectors as part of its confrontation with the West.

Raisi also supported attacking Israel in a massive assault in April that saw over 300 drones and missiles fired at the country in response for a suspected Israeli attack that killed Iranian generals at the country's embassy compound in Damascus, Syria.

He also supported the country's security services as they cracked down on all dissent, including in the aftermath of the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini and the nationwide protests that followed. The months-long security crackdown killed over 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained.

Gaza airstrike kills 27 as US NSA meets Netanyahu

Fighting rages amid rift among Israel leaders on governing post-war Gaza

SAMY MAGDY & JOSEPH KRAUSS
DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), MAY 19



A residential building at Nuseirat refugee camp. AP

AN ISRAELI airstrike killed 27 people in central Gaza, mostly women and children, and fighting with Hamas raged across the north on Sunday as Israel's leaders aired divisions over who should govern Gaza after the war, now in its eighth month.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces criticism from the two other members of his War Cabinet, with his main political rival, Benny Gantz, threatening to leave the government if a plan is not created by June 8 that includes an international administration for postwar Gaza.

US national security adviser Jake Sullivan Sunday met Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders to discuss an ambitious US plan for Saudi Arabia to recognise Israel and help the Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza in exchange for a path to statehood.

Netanyahu has rejected those proposals, saying Israel will keep open-ended security control over Gaza and partner

with local Palestinians unaffiliated with Hamas or the Western-backed Palestinian Authority. Gantz's ultimatum expressed support for normalising ties with Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, but he also said "we will not allow any outside power, friendly or hostile, to impose a Palestinian state".

The airstrike in Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza killed 27 people, including 10 women and seven children, according to records at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in nearby Deir al-Balah, which received the bodies.

A separate strike on a Nuseirat street killed five people, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent emergency service. In Deir al-Balah, a strike killed Zahed al-Houli, a senior officer in the

U.S., SAUDI DISCUSS 'SEMI-FINAL' DEAL

Dubai: The US national security adviser met Sunday with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to discuss what the kingdom called "semi-final" version of a security pact between the two countries. The semi-final version of the draft strategic agreements included "a two-state solution that meets the aspirations of the Palestinian people" and "the situation in Gaza and the need to stop the war there and facilitate... humanitarian aid," it said. **AP**

Hamas-run police, and another man, according to the hospital.

Palestinians reported more airstrikes and heavy fighting in northern Gaza. **AP**

Gaza a 'humanitarian crisis': Biden's college speech

REUTERS
ATLANTA, MAY 19

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden delivered the commencement address at Morehouse College on Sunday, receiving applause and cheers but also spurring some students to turn their backs to Biden as his backing of Israel in its war with Hamas riles college

graduations across the country.

Biden's address at Morehouse College, a historically Black men's college in Atlanta whose alumni includes civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr, is part of an election-year platform to repair bonds with young Black men and address the anger over his position on Israel.

"It's a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, that's why I've called for an

immediate ceasefire," Biden said to applause. "I know it angers and frustrates many of you including in my family," he said.

Biden was largely uninterrupted by protests that have shut down graduations elsewhere.

Biden's speech came at a time campaign officials have flagged signs of diminished enthusiasm for him among younger Black men.

Sexual identity, shootouts and songs: Emilia Perez finds the sweet spot



Emilia Perez cast members Adriana Paz, Karla Sofia Gascon, Zoe Saldana and Selena Gomez in Cannes on Sunday. Reuters

SHUBHRA GUPTA
CANNES, MAY 19

IT'S HARD to make a musical with any kind of meaning these days. It either dies under the weight of its own conceit or becomes much too lightweight. But Jacques Audiard manages to find the sweet spot between intention and execution with *Emilia Perez*, an absorbing film which never loses sight of its story amid the song and dance. And there are plenty in this

film about a fearsome mobster, coasting on his ill-gotten millions from his drug business and looking to undergo a radical transformation. He may have enough cash to buy everything but his deepest desire is to become who he has always wanted to be — a woman. And what he wants, he gets, but he can't do it on his own.

Zoe Saldana is outstanding as Rita Castro, the poorly paid lawyer who becomes an associate of the mob boss. He gives her an offer she can't refuse, in true *Godfather* style, and from then on she is committed to do whatever it takes to turn Juan Del Monte into Emilia Perez. Money, a lot of it, is a powerful lubricant.

But neither the newly minted Emilia, played beautifully by the real-life transgender person Karla Sofia Gascon, nor Rita can reckon what love can do. No one bothered to give Del Monte's wife Jessi (Selena



Emilia Perez cast members Adriana Paz, Karla Sofia Gascon, Zoe Saldana and Selena Gomez in Cannes on Sunday. Reuters

Gomez) the memo, so she is the only one not in the know. When she confronts the woman who used to be her husband, after months of being in the dark, her reaction is of deep dismay. Deception, once the cover blows off, is a dark alley.

Mixing crime and music can be tricky. But Audiard, no stranger to the Cannes competition (*A Prophet*, *Dheepan*), does enough with the combination to elevate it from a standard crime drama. The songs and dances are there for just enough time and never al-

lowed to overpower the narrative, though I kept waiting for Gomez to break out. Here, she plays an unhappy abandoned wife but stays subdued, perhaps because the other two have the more outlined roles. But she does get to make up for it with gun-toting scenes featuring a few sawn-off fingers and lots of blood. After all, what's a mob without rattling guns and shootouts?

Or maybe we have all been getting a lot of Gomez, a social media superstar and the owner of a popular make-up brand, and we identify with that version of her so much that it superimposes itself on any or all parts she may get in the movies. Her real crime podcaster in *Only Murders in the Building* could also have something to do with it, of course. Every time she turns up in her furs, asking plaintively about her missing husband, you flash back to the series whose fourth season

is round the corner.

Mainstream Indian films, with their thick spread of song and dance, can be also termed musicals, but a film like this reminds you of the rare desi outing that uses music to further and embellish the narrative. One such is Amol Palekar's *Thodasa Roomani Ho Jaayen* (1990), a lovely rom-com starring Nana Patekar, Anita Kanwar and Vikram Gokhale which never gets old.

Meanwhile, *Emilia Perez* is a spirited, fancy-dancy thing, a good pick-me-up in the middle of the festival.

members who got to experience a few minutes of weightlessness as the Blue Origin capsule skimmed space and landed 10 minutes later.

According to Blue Origin, Andhra Pradesh-born Thotakura is a pilot and aviator "who learned how to fly before he could drive". He co-founded US-based Preserve Life Corp, a global centre for applied health. **AGENCIES**

But the heavier pain is inflicted by the lack of empathy in Adi's parents. It's not like they don't want to understand, rather they have no tools to do so. Often, the deliberate pace draws things to a near standstill, but it also allows the film to come as close to life as cinema can.

PRAYERS HELD: STATE TV Chopper 'crash' in Iran: President Raisi is missing, search ops on

Was accompanied by Foreign Minister; 'hard landing' due to fog, says govt



Iranian state TV aired footage of President Ebrahim Raisi (left) on a visit to the country's northeast on Sunday before the helicopter incident. AP

JON GAMBRELL
DUBAI, MAY 19

A HELICOPTER carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, the country's foreign minister and other officials apparently crashed in the mountainous northwest reaches of Iran on Sunday, sparking a massive rescue operation in a fog-shrouded forest as the public was urged to pray.

The likely crash came as Iran, under Raisi and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, launched an unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel last month

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

EXPLAINED Hard-liner, Khamenei 'successor'

A HARD-LINE religious cleric, Ebrahim Raisi, 63, is seen by many as a strong contender to succeed Ayatollah Khamenei, who endorsed his main policies. Raisi has overseen a strategy to expand Iran's influence — from backing proxies in West Asia to expediting the nuclear program. He also oversaw a bloody crackdown on anti-government protests.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



DECISION 2024



● In Sirsa, Kumari Selja banks on farm rage and unemployment; Tanwar plays Modi card

PAGES 6, 7

RAE BARELI, AMETHI AMONG 14 UTTAR PRADESH SEATS THAT GO TO POLLS

Phase 5: Voting in 49 LS constituencies today



'Collective role in shaping India's future'

All of us have a role to play in nation building. Electing the leaders who will represent us is an important contribution of citizens in a democracy. By participating in elections, we all play a collective role in shaping the future of our country. This is what drives me to vote during elections. What can be more exciting than being part of the world's largest election process and to elect the players who will represent their constituency? To play in a stadium filled with India jerseys is such a grand experience. Imagine the thrill of seeing crores of Indians flaunting the ink on their fingers. It will be a sight to behold and the true mark of our success as a democracy!



The Bandra-Worli Sea Link displays a message in Marathi — "20th May is polling day, do cast your vote" — in Mumbai on Sunday. Ganesh Shirsekar

With 13 constituencies voting in this phase, polling to end in Maharashtra

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

AS THE BJP and Opposition parties sharpen their campaign rhetoric — with Prime Minister Narendra Modi bringing the Ram Temple repeatedly into focus and the INDIA bloc parties keeping the Constitution and reservation as their main talking points — 49 constituencies across eight states and Union Territories will vote in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Monday.

As many as 35 Assembly constituencies of Odisha are also going to polls in this phase.

The stakes are significant for the BJP and its allies in this phase, which has the least number of constituencies going to vote. Of the 49 seats, the BJP alone had won 32 in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The undivided Shiv Sena, which was with the BJP then, had won seven and the JD(U) and IJP one each. So, the then NDA had won 41 of these 49 seats.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

'Crossed limits': Modi after Mamata claims 'a few monks' helping BJP

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, MAY 19

TARGETING WEST Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for claiming that some members of Bharat Sevashram Sangha and Ramkrishna Mission were helping the BJP in the elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Sunday the TMC had "crossed all limits" this time. He said the Chief Minister was "openly threatening" the two socio-religious organisations to

"appease" the TMC's vote bank. Speaking at an election meeting in West Bengal's Purulia, where he shared the stage with Bharat Sevashram Sangha monk Swami Nityasudhananda among others, Modi said: "Chunav mein Bengal ke logon ko darane, dhamkane, hinsa karane wali TMC sarkar ne iss baar sari hadein paar kar di hain" (The TMC government, which has been threatening and unleashing violence on the people of Bengal during the elections, has crossed all limits this time)." CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Yash Dayal's comeback: From trolls and taunts to RCB's final-over hero

PRATYUSHAJ
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

AT YASH Dayal's home in Prayagraj, no one was watching Saturday's crucial RCB vs CSK tie, the do-or-die game between IPL's two most popular sides. Since last year, the family had been wary of tuning in to IPL's high-pressure matches involving their son, the 26-year-old RCB pacer who mostly gets to bowl in the all-important final over.

Back in 2023, KKR's Rinku Singh had hit Yash for five successive sixes — the thrashing would give him and his family a life-long



Yash Dayal celebrates after a wicket against CSK on Saturday. Sportspics

trauma. Yash would be the target of trolls and meme-makers. All that changed on Saturday. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

J&K attacks: BJP ex-sarpanch was asked for ID before being killed

Family of Jaipur couple injured in another attack: 'Their 5-yr-old twins hid under a table to escape, still in shock'

BASHAARAT MASOOD & PARUL KULSHRESTHA
SRINAGAR, JAIPUR, MAY 19

EVEN AS a large number of people turned up Sunday for the funeral of a former sarpanch associated with the BJP who was shot dead by militants at his home in Shopian, family members of a tourist couple from Jaipur, who were injured in a separate attack in Pahalgam, continued to pray for their recovery after both underwent surgeries. Officials said while the con-



The funeral of ex-sarpanch Aijaz Ahmad Sheikh, Sunday, a day after he was killed in Shopian. Shuaib Masoodi

dition of the husband remains critical, his wife is stable but under observation. The couple's 5-year-old twins escaped unhurt in the attack but were in a state of shock, their family members said in Jaipur.

The couple — Tabrez and wife Farah — were moved from the Government Medical College in Anantnag to Army's 92 base hospital in Badamiyagh Cantonment, Srinagar, Sunday.

Relatives of former sarpanch Aijaz Ahmad Sheikh, a resident of Herpora village in Shopian, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Kejriwal aide Bibhav also charged with destroying evidence

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

A DAY after Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide, Bibhav Kumar, was arrested for allegedly assaulting AAP's Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal, the Delhi Police has added the charge of destruction of evidence (IPC Section 201) in the FIR against him.

Kumar, who was arrested on Saturday while his anticipatory bail plea was being heard, has already been booked under sections pertaining to assault, criminal intimidation and outraging a woman's modesty. A Delhi court sent him to five days police



Bibhav Kumar has been sent to 5-day police custody late on Saturday. In its remand application, the Delhi Police alleged that a pen drive that was provided to them, which was supposed to contain the CCTV footage from May 13, when the alleged assault took place at Kejriwal's residence, was empty. Police also alleged that Kumar had formatted his phone before being arrested. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Kejriwal: PM has launched Op Jhaadu to crush AAP

GAYATHRI MANI
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

DELHI CHIEF Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of launching "Operation Jhaadu" (broom, AAP's poll symbol) to "crush" his party by arresting its leaders, seizing bank accounts and evicting the party from its headquarters. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal with other AAP leaders at a protest in New Delhi on Sunday. Abhinav Saha

IDEA EXCHANGE

'Clotting due to Covid is perhaps 100 times more than clotting caused by a vaccine'

SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN
CHAIRPERSON,
MS SWAMINATHAN RESEARCH FOUNDATION
PAGE 12

'Indian films have their own ethos, quality... but it is not well understood in the West'

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

ALAKA SAHANI
MUMBAI, MAY 19

SEVERAL years ago, as a student at Pune's Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Payal Kapadia, 38, started scripting the initial drafts of *All We Imagine As Light* as her diploma project. "At that time, my grandmother had a big fall and the normally feisty lady was bound to her bed. She hired a nurse to help her in this



Payal Kapadia's film is set to premiere at Cannes, May 23; (right) a still from her *All We Imagine as Light*



difficult state as she lived alone, except when I stayed with her. Spending time with them, I got

interested in these women who come from different states to Mumbai to work," says Kapadia. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

New opportunities for youths

THIS IS MODI'S GUARANTEE

Will double the amount of Mudra Yojana to ₹20 lakh

Will create millions of employment opportunities in high-value services, start-ups, tourism and sports through manufacturing, infrastructure and investment

Will ensure scholarships to meritorious students from deprived sections and expand employment opportunities

Will make government recruitment transparent

Right Intent, Right Results

Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar

Press the lotus button Make BJP win

FROM PAGE ONE FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Iran President missing as his chopper 'crashes'

and has enriched uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels. Iran has also faced years of mass protests against its Shiite theocracy over an ailing economy and women's rights — making the moment that much more sensitive for Tehran and the future of the country as the Israel-Hamas war inflames the wider Middle East.

coming from the crash site is very concerning," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Neither IRNA nor state TV offered any information on Raisi's condition in the hours afterward. However, hardliners urged the public to pray for him. State TV later aired images of the faithful praying at Imam Reza Shrine in the city of Mashhad, one of Shiite Islam's holiest sites, as well as in Qom and other locations across the country. State television's main channel aired the prayers non-stop.

"The esteemed President and company were on their way back aboard some helicopters and one of the helicopters was forced to make a hard landing due to the bad weather and fog," Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi said in comments aired on state TV.

"Various rescue teams are on their way to the region but because of the poor weather and foggy conditions it might take time for them to reach the helicopter," he said.

"The region is a bit (rugged) and it's difficult to make contact," he added. "We are waiting for rescue teams to reach the landing site and give us more information."

IRNA called the area a "forest" and the region is known to be

mountainous as well. State TV aired images of SUVs racing through a wooded area and said they were being hampered by poor weather conditions, including heavy rain and wind. A rescue helicopter tried to reach the area where authorities believe Raisi's helicopter was, but it couldn't land due to the heavy mist, emergency services spokesman Babak Yektaparast told IRNA.

Long after the sun set, Iranian government spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi acknowledged that "we are experiencing difficult and complicated conditions" in the search. "It is the right of the people and the media to be aware of the latest news about the President's helicopter accident, but considering the coordinates of the incident site and the weather conditions, there is 'no' new news whatsoever until now," he wrote on the social platform X. "In these moments, patience, prayer and trust in relief groups are the way forward."

Raisi had been on the border with Azerbaijan early Sunday to inaugurate a dam with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev. The dam is the third one that the two nations built on the Aras River. The visit came despite chilly relations between the two

nations, including over a gun attack on Azerbaijan's Embassy in Tehran in 2023, and Azerbaijan's diplomatic relations with Israel, which Iran's Shiite theocracy views as its main enemy in the region.

Iran flies a variety of helicopters in the country, but international sanctions make it difficult to obtain parts for them. Its military air fleet also largely dates back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

IRNA published images it described as Raisi taking off in what resembled a Bell 412 helicopter, with a blue-and-white paint scheme previously seen in published photographs. Raisi, 63, is a hardliner who formerly led the country's judiciary. He is viewed as a protégé of Khamenei and some analysts have suggested he could replace the 85-year-old leader after his death or resignation from the role.

Raisi won Iran's 2021 presidential election, a vote that saw the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. Raisi is sanctioned by the US in part over his involvement in the mass execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988 at the end of the bloody Iran-Iraq war.

Under Raisi, Iran now enriches

uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels and hampers international inspections. Iran has armed Russia in its war on Ukraine, as well as launched a massive drone-and-missile attack on Israel amid its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. It also has continued arming proxy groups in the Mideast, like Yemen's Houthi rebels and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, mass protests in the country have raged for years. The most recent involved the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who had been earlier detained over allegedly not wearing a hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities. The months-long security crackdown that followed the demonstrations killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained. In March, a United Nations investigative panel found that Iran was responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death.

US President Joe Biden was briefed by aides on the Iran crash, but administration officials have not learned much more than what is being reported publicly by Iran state media, said a senior administration official, who was not authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. AP

Phase 5: Voting in 49 LS constituencies today

The Congress had won just one seat — Sonia Gandhi in Raebareilly — while its allies had bagged five (four by the Trinamool Congress and one by National Conference). The BJP had won two seats.

With the fifth phase, the election exercise would be over in 25 states and Union territories, covering 428 of the total 543 Lok Sabha constituencies.

In 2019, the seats going to polls in the fifth phase had recorded an overall voter turnout of 61.82 per cent. While the first three phases recorded a dip in turnout since the last time, the turnout in 96 constituencies in the fourth phase was 69.16% — slightly higher than the 68.8 per cent turnout in these seats in 2019.

In the first phase on April 19, when 102 constituencies went to polls, the final turnout was 66.14 per cent, down from around 69.29 per cent in 2019. In the second phase on April 26, in which 88 seats voted, the final turnout was 66.71 per cent, down from 69.43 per cent in 2019. In the third phase on May 7, across 93 constituencies, the final turnout was 65.68 per cent as compared to 66.58 per cent in 2019.

With just two more phases left after Monday, both the BJP and the Opposition have sharpened their attacks. Campaigning in West Bengal on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the ruling Trinamool Congress of insulting the faith of Hindus to appease its vote bank and asserted that infiltrators are "perilous" to West Bengal since they are "disturbing" the demography of the state.

In Uttar Pradesh, Home Minister Amit Shah claimed the Opposition leaders did not attend the consecration ceremony of the

Ram temple in Ayodhya as they were afraid of losing their vote bank.

Meanwhile, addressing a rally in Prayagraj with Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said: "The fight is to save the Constitution. The BJP and RSS are attacking it, and I want to tell them that no power can tear and throw the Constitution away."

This round of polls is key for the Congress as it is trying to regain the Amethi constituency from the BJP and retain Raebareilly, where Rahul is in the fray. In Amethi, Union Minister Smriti Irani is aiming for a second straight win.

Of the 49 seats, 14 are in Uttar Pradesh. Besides Amethi and Raebareilly, these include Faizabad, Lucknow, Mohanlalganj, Kaiserganj, Barabanki, Hamirpur, Banda, Fatehpur, Jhansi, Jalaun, Kaushambi and Gonda. The BJP had won 13 of these seats in 2019.

In Lucknow, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is in the fray for the third time. The other ministers in the fray are Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti from Fatehpur, Kaushal Kishore from Mohanlalganj and Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma from Jalaun.

The one seat which remained in discussions since the elections were announced is Kaiserganj where the BJP replaced sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh — who has been accused of sexual harassment — with his son Karan. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah did not campaign in Kaiserganj.

In Maharashtra, 13 constituencies are going to polls. The election exercise will be over in the state with this phase. Of the 13 seats, six are in Mumbai.

The constituencies of

Mumbai North West, Mumbai South and Mumbai South Central saw a direct battle between the Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT). In 2019, the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance had won these three seats, along with Mumbai North East, Mumbai North Central, and Mumbai North.

In Mumbai North, a seat that it won the last two times, the BJP has fielded Union Minister Piyush Goyal who is making his Lok Sabha poll debut. Up against him is Mumbai Congress vice-president Bhushan Patil. Mumbai North Central will see another high-voltage clash between former public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikkam, who has handled high-profile cases such as the trial of Ajmal Kasab, and Mumbai Congress chief Varsha Gaikwad.

Apart from UP and Maharashtra, seven seats in West Bengal, five seats in Odisha and Bihar, three in Jharkhand and one each in J&K and Ladakh will go to polls on Monday. Of the five seats in Bihar, Saran is witnessing a high-profile contest between RJD debutant Rohini Acharya, the daughter of party chief Lalu Prasad, and former Union Minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy, the BJP's sitting MP who has won the constituency several times.

In J&K, the lone seat of Baramulla which will vote tomorrow will decide the electoral fate of National Conference leader Omar Abdullah. Pitted against him are separatist-turned-politician and former minister Sajad Lone, who heads the People's Conference, and jailed Awami Ittehad Party leader and former MLA Abdul Rashid Sheikh alias Engineer Rashid.

'Crossed limits': PM targets Mamata

"Aaj desh aur duniya mein ISKCON, Ramakrishna Mission, jo Swami Vivekananda ji ne banaya tha, aur Bharat Sevashram Sangha seva aur sadachar ke liye jaane jate hain... Lekin aaj Bengal ki Mukhyamantri ISKCON walo ko, Ramakrishna Mission walo ko, Bharat Sevashram ke sanyasyon ko khule tar par dhakna rahi hain, khule manch se chetavni de rahi hain... Itni himmat, sirf apne vote bank ko khush karne ke liye (ISKCON, Ramakrishna Mission, which was founded by Swami Vivekananda, and Bharat Sevashram Sangha, are known for their service and morality across the world. But the West Bengal Chief Minister is openly threatening them from a public platform... Such audacity, just to please their vote bank)," he said.

was targeting the monks because she is "under pressure from Muslim fundamentalists." "These organisations have brought glory to Bengal, but the CM of the state claims they are ruining Bengal. Under pressure from Muslim fundamentalists, she has publicly insulted our faith," he said.

This came a day after Banerjee said at a rally in Hooghly. "There is a maharaj in Baharampur — I have been hearing about him for a long time. Kartik Maharaj (a Bharat Sevashram Sangha monk) says he will not allow any TMC agent in the polling booth. I do not consider him a saint because he is directly involved in politics and is ruining the country. I used to respect Bharat Sevashram Sangha a lot. It has been on my list of respected organisations for a long time."

She also mentioned the Ramakrishna Mission, claiming that its members were receiving "instructions from Delhi." "Some monks of Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are working under the influence of BJP leaders in Delhi. Those who are looking after temples are doing a great spiritual job, but not

everyone. This is not done. We respect the monks," she said.

Bharat Sevashram Sangha's chief secretary Swami Vishwanathananda rejected the Chief Minister's allegations. "We never indulge in election campaigning nor do we issue instructions to talk about elections. We have several branches. Now, if anyone has said anything, then it is his personal matter. We are looking into it," he said. The Bharat Sevashram Sangha is a religious and spiritual organisation founded in 1917 by Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavananda Maharaj.

A senior monk from the Ramakrishna Mission — a spiritual and philanthropic organisation founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897 — said the group was engaged in spreading "the eternal values of religion and spiritualism among people." "To my knowledge, neither the mission nor any monk of our order had asked anyone to vote for any particular party. Thousands of visitors from all walks of life come to our premises to pray and meditate. Everyone is the same for us," he said.

Ex-sarpanch asked for ID, killed

said gunmen barged into his house Saturday night and fired at him. "We heard some gunshots but stayed inside out of fear," said a relative. "A few minutes later, his wife came wailing. She said Ajaz has been shot at. Sometime later, the Army and police arrived and we took him to hospital. The doctors said that he was dead."

Police sources said the gunmen asked Sheikh for his identity and then opened fire from point blank range. "He was hit by eight bullets," said a police officer. "The bullets hit him in his chest and abdomen. They (attackers) had come with an intention to kill."

On Sunday morning, as Sheikh's body arrived in his village, hundreds of people came out to attend his last rites. The villagers praised Sheikh's work as a sarpanch. Elected sarpanch five years ago, his term ended in January this year. Associated with the BJP, a video of Sheikh praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi for development efforts had gone viral recently.

The attack on him came barely 15 minutes after unidentified gunmen in a two-wheeler fired at Tabrez and Farah in Pahalgam.

At their home in Pathanon ka Chowk in Jaipur, Tabrez's father Aslam Khan said both his sons along with their families and 50 others from the locality were on a 10-day trip to Kashmir.

He said he was having dinner Saturday night when his elder son called to inform about the attack on Tabrez and Farah around 8.30 pm. "The family was returning to the hotel at night. Tabrez and Farah along with their children were walking behind when suddenly terrorists on a bike started shooting. A bullet ran through my son's eye and nose while Farah received a bullet on her shoulder," said Aslam.

"The children were shocked and hid under a table nearby. Others in the group also hid in a shelter. When the shooting stopped, they came out to help the two. After around 30 minutes, the military arrived and they were

taken to hospital."

Aslam said the couple's daughter is so shocked that she has stopped speaking. The tourist group is now trying to return to Jaipur.

Tabrez's mother Majida has not had any food since Saturday night after getting to know of the attack. A relative said Farah and Tabrez have been married for 15 years. The twins were born five years ago after previous complications.

Farah's mother Afzal Bano said she is praying for her daughter and son-in-law. "If anything happens to them, who will look after the children? I cannot imagine what the children must have gone through."

She said she had a word with our daughter Sunday morning before she underwent a surgery. "She was crying," said Bano.

Farah's father Shaukat Khan appealed to the state government to help at least two persons from the family to visit Kashmir to take care of the children.

He said they want all of them to return to Jaipur. "We cannot keep an eye on the progress of their health from Jaipur. If they arrive home, we can take care of them. We cannot tell you how thankful we are that they have not lost their life," he said.

Condemning the twin attacks, Lt Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday said the government has given a free hand to J&K Police and security forces to "crush terrorists and their associates". "I am deeply shocked at the terrorist attack and the brutal killing of former sarpanch Ajaz Ahmad Sheikh. He was an exemplary grassroots leader and will be remembered for his selfless service to the people. ... The heinous attack on tourists at Pahalgam is also distressing," he said.

Elections in South Kashmir for the Anantnag-Rajouri seat will be held on May 25. ADGP (Law and Order) Vijay Kumar and CRPF IG Ganender Verma visited Pahalgam and Shopian, respectively, to review the security situation.

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Yash Dayal comeback

RCB managed a grand comeback by knocking out CSK and snatching a play-off spot. CSK needed 17 runs to make it to the playoffs in the final over but Yash conceded just seven. The left-arm pacer would get hugs and high-fives from team mates but he also got his long-awaited redemption.

Father Chandarpal did watch his son's moment of triumph live as he couldn't resist the urge to switch on the TV before the final over. But for a moment, the Dayals regretted breaking the rule. Off Yash's first ball, CSK's last action hero M S Dhoni hit a huge six. Speaking to The Indian Express a day after the game, Chandarpal said, "I blamed myself for ruining another match for my son. Dhoni can still tear apart any bowler... I just folded my hands and started praying. 'God, please support my son today. It should not happen again.' It felt good the way he held his nerve after the first ball. I enjoyed the winning moment."

Yash had done the impossible, he had restricted two of the game's best finishers, Dhoni and Ravindra Jadeja. RCB captain Faf du Plessis acknowledged the effort of the UP pacer, saying it was Yash who deserved the Man of the Match award and not him. Rinku, Yash's tormentor from the last season, would post 'God's plan baby' on his Insta for Yash, along with a salute emoji.

Chandarpal recalled the tough times Yash and the family went through after those five sixes by Rinku. "In one of the WhatsApp groups, a person I know shared a meme, mocking Yash for conceding five sixes and I still remember what he wrote with the picture 'Prayagraj Express ki kahaani shuru hone se pehle hi khatam ho gayi.'"

"It never stopped, we as a family literally quit all WhatsApp groups, barring our family one. Even when RCB picked him in the auction for Rs 5 crore, I remember someone saying 'Paise naale mei baha aaye Bangalore wale' (The franchise threw the money in the drain)". We live in a world where even if you switch off from social media, you will end up seeing all kinds of stuff," he said.

"Everyone wrote him off. And today I am receiving a number of congratulatory calls and messages. Still, no one is talking about his hard work, grind and the way he tackled the pressure. The slower bouncer he has developed, the other variations he has learnt in the last year. The way he has bowled at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, where even an edge goes for a six. But it's fine because in one year, we as a family realised cricket really is a funny game," said Chandarpal.

He revealed when RCB were at the bottom of the table, the franchise made sure that every cricketer had a family member with them to take their minds away from the cricket field. Yash called his elder sister Shuchi, a dietician, who has been the cricketer's pillar of strength since childhood. "The moment she joined the team hotel, RCB started winning... She had to return because of her work." After his heroics, Yash told his father to come watch him play in the Eliminator on May 22. "I will book my tickets for Ahmedabad," Chandarpal said.

'Ethos of Indian films not well understood in West'

more material, I realised that I wanted to write a film that would be longer than the 20 minutes of the diploma project," she says. The film now spans 115 minutes.

The film's selection came as a surprise to Kapadia. "Receiving this news felt so amazing. Later, I saw all the filmmakers who will be there (in the competition section). I was honoured to be in the company of so many people whose work I admire," she says. To win the Palme d'Or — the top honour of the festival — she will compete with a host of biggies including Ali Abbasi, Andrea Arnold, David Cronenberg, Francis Ford Coppola, Jia Zhang-Ke, Paolo Sorrentino, Sean Baker and Yorgos Lanthimos.

This is the FTII alumna's third time at Cannes after her short Afternoon Clouds featured in the Cinefondation section in 2017 and A Night of Knowing Nothing won the Oeil d'Or (Golden Eye) Award for Best Documentary Film there in 2021. Even with two successful outings at the French Riviera, Kapadia believes "every film is a different experience". "You spend weeks, you spend time on each project that you totally forget this part of the process (festival participation). Suddenly, you have to

shift gears — from spending all your time in a post-production studio in pajamas, you have to clean up and try to look presentable," Kapadia says.

In All We Imagine As Light, her first narrative feature, Kapadia follows the lives of two nurses from Kerala — Prabha (Kani Kusruti) and Anu (Divyaprabha) — colleagues at a Mumbai hospital and roommates. When Prabha receives an unexpected gift from her estranged husband, her life is disrupted. In the space-crunch city, her younger roommate Anu struggles to find a spot to be intimate with her boyfriend. When they take a trip to a coastal town, their lives undergo a change.

"The story is about the city and the people who come to work in Mumbai. They have families back home. But they find new families in friends and colleagues in the city... As I grew older, I have started relying more on friendships. They are my support system too," recalls Kapadia.

Making the film, however, took time as she had to raise finances for it. "I also took the time to write and rewrite," she says, adding that she worked with script and dialogue writers from Kerala as she does not speak

Malayalam.

Commenting on the 30-year gap since an Indian movie (Shaji Karun's Swaham, in 1994) was selected for the 'competition section', Kapadia says: "Indian films have their own ethos and performative quality that we are used to. But it is not well understood in the West. We have our own ecosystem for films in every state that caters to the specific audience there. Which is why so many filmmakers rightly don't feel the need for Western validation. Having said that, I also believe that even in our country it's good to be open to different ways of storytelling which could be inspired from other countries."

On discussions swirling these days on whether one really needs to attend film schools to become a director, Kapadia says: "I love structure though not everyone needs it. For me, going to a school was important. It really depends on the kind of person you are and what works for you..."

Kapadia, who is leaving for France Monday evening, is raring to meet all the filmmakers she loves. "I studied their films when I was a student. I would love to go and tell them how crazy we were about them... Oh, I feel so excited."

Kejriwal aide Bibhav Kumar

Police said a junior rank officer, who had no access to the area where CCTV cameras were installed, alleged that the video footage that he found was "blank" for the relevant period. The Investigating Officer had given notice to the accused to provide the CCTV footage, it said.

The prosecution said Kumar needed to be taken to Mumbai to ascertain all the facts regarding the formatting of his cellphone and retrieving the "deleted" data.

"The fact of not finding the video footage in pen drive provided by the junior officer to the IO during the course of investigation and formatting of the mobile phone by the accused speaks volumes," noted the Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Gaurav Goyal.

In its order, the court said Maliwal's allegations in the FIR were corroborated in her statement recorded in front of a magistrate. "Further, it is again corroborated by the MLC (medico-legal case) of the victim/complainant."

Kumar's lawyers argued that he was arrested without notice. The court, however, noted that there was sufficient ground to arrest him without notice. The court allowed Kumar to meet his lawyers, Mohd Irshad and Karan

Sharma, and his wife for half-hour daily.

In her complaint, on the basis of which the Delhi Police registered a complaint against Kumar, Maliwal alleged that she slapped her seven-eight times, "kicked on the chest, stomach and pelvis area", and threatened that she would be killed. She said the incident occurred on May 13 when she had gone to meet Kejriwal at his official residence. The report of her medical examination, conducted Thursday night, said she suffered bruises on her left thigh and right cheek, below the eye.

Meanwhile, a Delhi Police team, led by Additional DCP (North) Anjitha Cheppala, collected the digital video recorder of the CCTVs at Kejriwal's residence.

Alleging that the police were working on the BJP's directions, senior AAP leader and Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said: "CCTV cameras installed to check entry and exit inside the security area are under PWD, and Delhi Police took all the CCTV footage on Saturday. Today, the Delhi Police has also taken the CCTV footage from inside the CM's residence, nothing has been deleted or tampered with."

SECOND DAY OF HEATWAVE



A boy enjoying a bath in Yamuna river in New Delhi on Sunday. Gajendra Yadav

47.8°C: Country's highest temp seen in Delhi; schools ordered shut in Gzb

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

DELHI'S NAJAFGARH recorded a temperature of 47.8 degrees Celsius on Sunday as a severe heat wave persisted in northwest India for the second day in a row. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) officials, this was the highest temperature recorded in the country this year, followed by 47.7 degrees Celsius in Agra. To be sure, Najafgarh has an automatic weather station, unlike Delhi's base observatory at Safdarjung, where the maximum temperature was recorded as 44.4 degrees Celsius, four degrees above normal. The minimum temperature, at 28.2 degrees Celsius, was two degrees above normal.

While most schools in the region are shut for summer vacations, Ghaziabad District Magistrate Indra Vikram Singh ordered all schools up to Class 8

WEATHER OBSERVATION

Station Name	Max Temp	Min Temp
Safdarjung	44.4	28.2
Ayanagar	46.4	28.3
Gurgaon	45.1	28.3
Faridabad	46.3	29.2
Najafgarh	47.8	29.9
NOIDA*	45.9	28.7
Pitampura	47.0	28.7
Pusa	46.5	28.7

The temp in Najafgarh was the highest in the country on Sunday

in the district to remain shut. The maximum temperature in Ghaziabad on Sunday was 44.4 degrees Celsius.

IMD has issued a red alert in the city on Monday as well as

Tuesday due to severe heat wave conditions in the city.

The rise in temperature in Delhi has been consistent, with Saturday seeing a maximum of 43.6 degrees Celsius. On Friday, it was recorded as 42.5 degrees Celsius. Both the figures are from Safdarjung Observatory.

IMD officials said no respite from the heat was expected this week, attributing the rise in temperature to the lack of rain coupled with dry winds. The maximum temperature is expected to be 44 degrees on Monday and 45 degrees on Tuesday. Hot surface winds at speeds of 25-35 kilometres per hour have been forecast on Monday.

IMD also issued a seven-day forecast, urging people to ensure "extreme care for vulnerable people" due to the heat wave. It said there was a very high likelihood of developing heat-related illness and heat stroke in people of all ages, and a significant health concern for vulnerable individuals.

HOTEL DID NOT HAVE NO-OBJECTION CERTIFICATE: FIRE DEPARTMENT

Woman dies, her friend hospitalised as newly opened hotel in Noida catches fire

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NOIDA, MAY 19

A 27-YEAR-OLD woman, a physiotherapist, died of burn injuries and asphyxiation after a hotel in Noida where she was staying with a friend caught fire on Saturday evening. Officials said the incident took place on the sixth floor of Moon Hotel and Banquet Hall, a newly opened hotel, in Sector-104, Noida.

The deceased has been identified as Palak Kumari, a resident of Sector-46 in Noida. Her friend, an engineer, 26-year-old Navneet Sharma, a resident of Mayur Vihar Phase-1, New Delhi, is undergoing treatment at the hospital. Both were admitted to the hospital by police after they fainted following inhalation of a lot of smoke, officers said.

Fire officials said that the hotel did not have a No-Objection Certificate (NOC) from the de-



Smoke billows out of the top floor of the hotel in Sec-104.

partment, adding the couple were the only two guests at the hotel at the time of the accident.

"This is a new hotel. The operator had taken it on lease from the owner on May 10. Maintenance and renovation work was going on in the building. Meanwhile, a fire broke out while an AC was being fixed. We got the information about the in-

cident at 5.35 pm. The fire broke out on the fourth floor and the smoke had reached the sixth floor. A total of 10 fire tenders were rushed to the spot and the fire was completely doused with the help of only one fire tender," said Pradeep Choubey, Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Gautam

RECENT CASES

APR 5: 19 people, including 16 children, had a narrow escape after a fire broke out at an orphanage in Sec-26

FEB 25: Four persons suffered burn injuries after a house in Mamura village in Noida caught fire

JUL 13, 2023: 5 persons were injured after a fire broke out on the third floor of the Galaxy Plaza of Gaur City Mall in Greater Noida

Buddha Nagar.

Praveen Kumar Singh, ACP-1, Noida, said that an FIR has been registered against the hotel

management.

Police said Kumari and Sharma were planning to get married, adding their parents were engaged in finalising their match.

"On the basis of the complaint from the woman's family, an FIR under IPC section 304-A (Causing death by negligence) has been registered against the management of the hotel. We are checking the records of the owner of the building as well as the person who took it on lease. Following this, the person found responsible for the mishap will be named in the FIR," said Singh.

On April 5, 19 people, including 16 children, had a narrow escape after a fire broke out at an orphanage in Sector-26.

Before that, on February 25, at least four people suffered burn injuries after a house in Mamura village in Noida caught fire.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU PORT AUTHORITY
(PORT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT)

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How a death at an upscale locality led police to the case of a date gone awry

DHEERAJ MISHRA
GHAZIABAD, MAY 19

WHEN POLICEMEN arrived at an apartment in DLF Ankur Vihar in Ghaziabad on May 8, they were hit by a stench. Inside, they found a man's body. His wrists and feet were tied and he was gagged with his own shirt. He had been strangled.

Nobody knew the man. A resident had called the police because the smell had made it unbearable for neighbours. The flat, police learnt, belonged to a woman and had been vacant ever since she moved to Delhi.

The story behind the murder started to unfold, police said, when they asked the flat owner to come in. She identified the dead man as Sakendra, police said. She had given him the keys to the flat to "do some repairs and clean the place". He did all sorts of jobs, she told police. He was a daily wage labourer, at times a rookie carpenter, and even a mason.

"Once we started to crack the case, the details were unusual." DCP (Rural) Ghaziabad Vivek Chandra Yadav told *The Indian Express*. "... the two men had a sexual encounter after meeting on a dating app. The accused murdered the other man as he believed the latter had recorded a video..."

Police then scanned Sakendra's call detail records and found his phone had been switched off for six days. His last call was on May 2. When they traced this call, it led them to Faem, a 38-year-old daily wage labourer in Delhi. Simultaneously, police scanned CCTV footage of a camera installed in a building opposite the vacant flat at DLF Ankur. "Footage showed Sakendra and another man, Faem, entering the flat building on May 2..." a police officer privy to the probe said.

The officer said investigators initially suspected "personal enmity" as the motive for the murder and picked up Faem from Delhi's Shahdara. "During questioning, he claimed he murdered Sakendra," a police officer said. Police also raided his room in Jafrabad and recovered Sakendra's phone.

Faem, police said, had met Sakendra on a dating app called BlueD. He had been using the app for two months and connected with Sakendra a week before the murder, they said.

A resident of Sambhal, Faem had moved to Delhi for work six years ago. He told police he and his wife were estranged and two months ago, she left him and took their three children. Police claimed Faem wanted to hide his identity on the app and had procured a new number using a friend's ID. Sakendra, 45, came to Delhi from his village in Bihar's Motihari eight years ago for work. He too was married with four grown-up children. His wife, police said, had left him years ago. He was living in a rented room near Shahdara.

"The two men decided to meet (on May 2). Sakendra invited Faem to the flat," police said. CCTV footage, police said, revealed that after they arrived around noon, Faem came out at 3 pm and returned with some eatables. After a few hours, he went out again and never returned. Sakendra didn't come out at all," police said.

When they questioned Faem, police claimed he told them "Sakendra wanted him to spend more time... but he wanted to leave... To force Faem to change his mind, Sakendra told him he had recorded videos... and would make them public if he didn't listen."

"Faem was furious... he overpowered Sakendra and strangled him with his shirt..." police claimed. He has been sent to judicial custody.

UPSIDA UTTAR PRADESH STATE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
UPSIDC Complex: A-1/4, Lakhapur, Kanpur-208024

Notice for Public Objections/Suggestion on layout Plan of I.A. Site-C, Surajpur, Gautambudha Nagar by which Industrial Plot No. B-23, B-22 (part & D-6 to D-9 has been Sub-Divided and created a Seven new plot B-23 (Area 5627.59 Sq.mtr), B-22 Part Area 5752.50 Sq. M, D-6 Area 2659.96 Sq.m, D-6/1, Area 1504.90 Sq.m, D-7 Area 1500.81 Sq.m, D-8 Area 1497.59 Sq.m, & D-9 Area 1494.14 Sq.m.

The layout plan of I.A. Site-C, Surajpur, of the UPSIDA situated in Distt. Gautambudha Nagar has been prepared. A copy thereof will be available of inspection at the REGIONAL MANAGER, UPSIDA, Administrative Building, EPIP Industrial Area Surajpur-5, Kasna Greater Noida (Gautambudha Nagar) between 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM on all working days till the date mentioned in Para 3 hereafter as well as website www.onlineupsida.com

Objections/Suggestions are hereby invited with respect to the draft amended layout plan. Objection and Suggestions shall be sent in writing to office of REGIONAL MANAGER, UPSIDA, Administrative Building, EPIP Industrial Area Surajpur-5, Kasna Greater Noida (Gautambudha Nagar), within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice mentioning subject as "Regarding public Objections/Suggestions on Draft partial Amendment in layout plan for I.A. Surajpur, Site-C, Distt. Gautambudha Nagar". Any person making the Suggestions or Objections should also give his/her full name & address, Email id and contact number.

Regional Manager
U.P. State Industrial Development Authority
Email-rmsurajpur@upsida.co.in

केनरा बैंक Canara Bank
HO: 112, J C Road, Bengaluru - 560 002 | www.canarabank.com

NOTICE OF 22nd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING THROUGH VC/OAVM

Pursuant to the extant guidelines of MCA and GoI, Notice is hereby given that Bank is conducting its 22nd AGM through Video Conferencing / Other Audio-Visual Mode, hereinafter called as "e-AGM" on Friday, the 28th June 2024 at 10.30 AM IST, to transact the business that will be set forth in the Notice of the Meeting. The Head Office of the Bank shall be the deemed venue of the meeting.

CUT-OFF DATE / RECORD DATE:
The cut-off Date for reckoning Shareholders Rights for Dividend is Monday, the 17th June 2024, and cut-off date for e-voting and to participate in AGM through VC/OAVM is Friday, the 21st June 2024. Shareholders holding shares either in physical form or dematerialized form as on cut-off dates are eligible to cast their vote electronically (Remote e-Voting) on the respective agenda items, which will be set forth in the Notice of the Meeting.

The Electronic copies of the Notice of the AGM and Annual Report 2023-24 will be sent to all the shareholders whose e-mail addresses are registered with the Bank / Depository Participants(s). Shareholders holding shares in dematerialized mode and whose email ids are not registered are requested to register their email addresses and mobile numbers with their relevant depositories through their depository participants. Shareholders holding shares in physical mode are requested to demat their holdings / furnish their email addresses and mobile numbers with the Bank's Registrar and Share Transfer Agents at:

KFin Technologies Limited
Unit - Canara Bank, Selenium Tower B, Plot 31-32, Gachibowli
Financial District, Nanakramguda, Hyderabad - 500 032
Phone: 1800 309 4001 (toll free)
E-mail ID - einward.ris@kfinetech.com

Further, Shareholders may temporarily get their email id registered by clicking the link <https://ris.kfinetech.com/clientservices/mobileereg/mobileemailreg.aspx>. The Notice of 22nd AGM and Annual Report 2023-24 will also be made available on Bank's Website www.canarabank.com and on the website of Stock Exchanges. Shareholders will have an opportunity to cast their vote remotely on the business as set forth in the Notice of the AGM through electronic voting system. The manner of voting remotely for shareholders holding shares in dematerialized mode, physical mode and for shareholders who have not registered their email addresses will be provided in the Notice to the shareholders. The details will also be made available on the website of the Bank.

Shareholders are requested to visit www.canarabank.com to obtain such details. Shareholders may please note that in terms of aforementioned, the Bank will not be sending physical copies of AGM Notice and Annual Report to the Shareholders.

By Order of the Board of Directors
K. Satyanarayana Raju
Managing Director & CEO

Date: 20.05.2024
Place: Bengaluru

3 rules to remember when using AEPS* to make payments
(*AEPS - Aadhaar Enabled Payment System)

Be aware of these rules and prevent yourself from frauds

- Rule 1:** Verify credentials of the Business Correspondent/Operator by asking for an ID proof
- Rule 2:** Check if any additional paper/transparent film, etc. is attached to the fingerprint scanning device
- Rule 3:** Insist on a transaction slip and check details for every AEPS transaction, even failed transactions

Remember, if an SMS is received that a transaction has been made without your authorisation, report it to your bank immediately.

RBI Kehta Hai... Jaankaar Baniye, Satark Rahiye!

For more details, visit <https://rbikehtahai.rbi.org.in/aeeps>
For feedback, write to rbikehtahai@rbi.org.in

Issued in public interest by **भारतीय रिज़र्व बैंक RESERVE BANK OF INDIA**
www.rbi.org.in

और सभी न्यूज़ पेपर मैगजीन प्राप्त करने के लिए सर्वप्रथम इस टेलीग्राम ग्रुप को ज्वाइन करें नीचे दिए लकि पर क्लिक करके ज्वाइन टेलीग्राम

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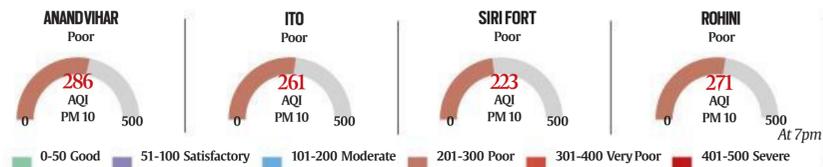
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HD EDITORIALS

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8.Economic Times, 9.Times of India, 10.Indian Express,
11.Financial Express, 12.Telangana Today, 13.New Indian
Express, 14.Pioneer, 15.The States Man, 16.The Tribune,
17.Free Press, 18.Avenue Mail, 19.Millenium Post, 20.Morning
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SKY WATCH
 May 20
 Mainly clear sky. Heat wave conditions with severe heat wave at isolated places. Strong surface winds during the day.
MAX: 44 **MIN: 28**
 3.6°C above normal | 1.5°C above normal

BALLOTIN



BJP's Shivraj Chouhan during a roadshow last week. PTI

Maliwal row: Shivraj invokes Mahabharata

New Delhi: With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stepping up its attack on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) over the alleged assault of Delhi Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal, former Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan likened the "insult" meted out to her to Draupadi, and the AAP to the mythical Kauravas. Accusing the AAP of having turned into 'Arrogant Aadmi Party', Chouhan said the party's "arrogance" was such that when a woman visits Kejriwal's home, he does not hesitate to behave rudely with her. He said that this is the same land where the insult of one Draupadi destroyed the entire clan of Kauravas. ENS



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal addresses supporters in Delhi on Sunday. PTI

Six events a day: Kejriwal holds 'Nukkad Sabhas'

New Delhi: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal addressed six 'Nukkad Sabhas' in South Delhi on Sunday. In the last leg of the poll campaign - Delhi votes on May 25 - Kejriwal, who is out on interim bail, has been holding multiple public rallies in different parts of the city. He is campaigning for both AAP and Congress candidates as the two parties are in alliance. During Sunday's meetings, he claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had opposed free bus travel for women. "As long as I am alive, free bus travel for women will continue," he said. ENS

ANKITA UPADHYAY NEW DELHI, MAY 19

IN THE last 10 years, Lok Sabha members elected from Delhi's seven constituencies have not utilised Rs 100 crore from their entitled Rs 311.5 crore funds under the Members of Parliament Local Area Development (MPLAD) scheme. The Parliamentarians were unable to avail Rs 81 crore from the central government while they failed to spend Rs 19.75 crore that was dispersed by the government.

The MPLADS is a scheme that was set up by the Centre in 1993 to enable MPs to recommend developmental works for creation of assets and amenities in sectors such as drinking water, primary education, public health, sanitation and roads. Each MP is entitled to Rs 5 crore annually, released in two equal instalments. This means that the MPs have Rs 25 crore at their disposal, which are to be spent over five years. However, the period of 2019-2024 saw the entitlement of the MPs reducing from Rs 25 crore to Rs 17 crore due to Covid pandemic.

During the last 10 years, every MP representing the seven Delhi constituencies has been from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

How does the scheme work?

An official responsible for the functioning of MPLAD funds said that, in principle, the MPs are entitled to get Rs 5 crore per year. However, they have to approach the district administration and provide them with information about the projects they want to pursue under the MPLAD scheme. The district administration then approaches the Ministry of Statistics and Programme to execute the recommended projects so that the funds under the scheme are released.

The MPLAD funds are released by the central government only after the Parliamentarian send their demands. Once that is done, the funds are allocated to the district administration to execute the works. Each MP has an exclusive account with the ministry where they can keep track of the progress of the work on their MPLAD-funded project. The MPs also have to provide a monthly progress report (MPR) of the project, failing which the money is not released. If the MP recommends work and the district administration is not able to complete it, the money remains unutilised and is transferred to the next financial year.

How have Delhi MPs fared in the last 10 yrs?

In the 16th Lok Sabha elected in 2014, the total entitlement for seven MPs in Delhi was Rs 187.5 crore, out of which they received Rs 185 crore while Rs 2.5 crore



Chandni Chowk MP Harsh Vardhan recommended 364 projects but only 98 were completed. Archive

remained unreleased. Out of the amount that they received, the MPs were not able to spend Rs 16.82 crore on any project.

In the 17th Lok Sabha, elected in 2019, the entitlement was Rs 124 crore out of which the MPs managed to get only Rs 45.5 crore while Rs 78.5 crore remained unreleased. Out of the amount that they received, the MPs could not spend Rs 2.93 crore on any of the projects.

The MPs received only Rs 17 crore from 2019-2024 due to the Covid pandemic and the fund disbursement remained suspended from April 6, 2020 to November 9, 2021; no funds were allocated to the scheme for financial year 2020-21. For the remaining period between November 10, 2021 and March 31, 2022, Rs 2 crore was allocated under the scheme to each MP.

Data shows that a majority of the works recommended by the MPs in the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-2024) remained incomplete and the total entitlement stayed unutilised. While the MPs were entitled to get Rs 124 crore, they only received Rs 45.5 crore. The reason given by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme on its website shows that the monthly progress report of the projects were not provided by the MPs and thus, the pending amount wasn't released. Out of Rs 45.5 crore, Rs 2.93 crore wasn't spent. Thus, several projects were left incomplete.

For instance, Chandni Chowk MP Harsh Vardhan recommended 364 projects but only 98 were completed, according to data from *sansad.in*. Despite this, Harsh Vardhan had the highest number of works recommended and projects completed. The North West Delhi MP, Hans Raj Hans, followed him with 154 recommended projects out of which 47 projects were completed. (Details shown in graph)

The least number of works recommended and works completed were by East Delhi MP Gautam Gambhir (2019-2024). He recommended 48 works and only 12 were completed. North East Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari also had only 12 works completed out of the total 70 recommended works. Tiwari is the

only candidate in Delhi who has been given ticket by the BJP again to contest from Northeast Delhi.

An official involved in the implementation of the MPLAD scheme said that an MP's initiation and active participation is required so that they propose developmental projects, ensure that the funds are released and then actively monitor the projects so that they are completed. Otherwise, the money isn't disbursed, the official added.

"The rule says that you have to propose your set of demands to the Centre's Ministry of Finance (Department of Expenditure) for the set projects, without which money will not be disbursed," the official said.

As per the details available on MPLADS.GOV.IN, a majority of projects that were proposed by BJP MPs in 2024 remained unutilised. Some of these projects included installation of CCTV cameras, development of public parks, multi-gym equipment, playground, and sports grounds.

Guidelines say that the minimum amount sanctioned under the MPLAD scheme for any individual work will normally be not less than Rs 2.5 lakh. However, if the implementing district authority is of the considered view that the work of lesser amount will be beneficial to the public at large, it may sanction the same for reasons to be clearly recorded in the sanction letter.

When asked about unutilised funds, a senior BJP leader from the party's national unit alleged that the figures had not been updated due to the lack of initiative from government agencies concerned in Delhi.

"Each MP's office has the exact details of the fund utilisation over the last 10 years; this was supposed to be supplied to be updated on the portal but has not been done," the leader added.

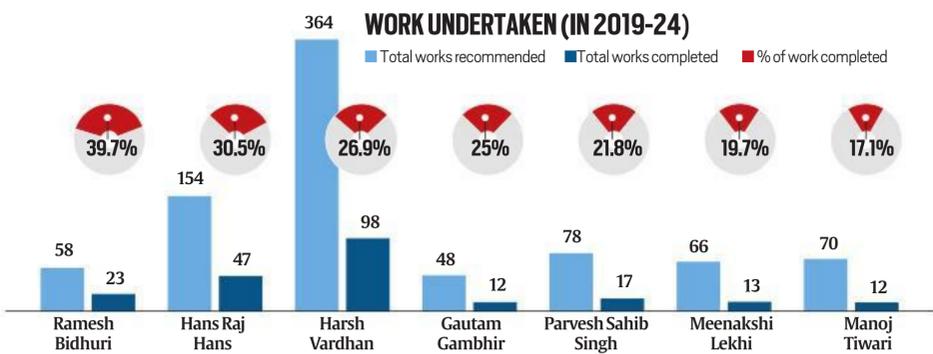
MPLADS funds can be used for creation of immovable public assets on government-owned land, and movable public assets for government-owned and government-controlled institutions only, i.e. the Central, State/UT and local governments, including government-aided institutions.

MPLADS funds released to the district administration by the Union government do not lapse and are carried forward to the next financial year or the next MP from a constituency.

HARDLOOK

Rs 100 cr — a 3rd of MPLAD funds still unutilised

HOW DELHI MPs PERFORMED



16TH LOK SABHA (2014 - 2019)

MP Name	Constituency	Total Entitlement	Total release by Gol	Total release Pending	Unsanctioned Balance	Unspent Balance
Dr Harsh Vardhan	Chandni Chowk	Rs 25 cr	Rs 25 cr	0	Rs 0.30 cr	Rs 1.09 cr
Dr Udit Raj	Northwest Delhi (SC)	Rs 37.50 cr	Rs 37.50 cr	0	Rs 0.11 cr	Rs 2.70 cr
Maheish Girri	East Delhi	Rs 25 cr	Rs 25 cr	0	-Rs 0.13 cr	Rs 1.83 cr
Manoj Tiwari	Northeast Delhi	Rs 25 cr	Rs 25 cr	0	Rs 0.10 cr	Rs 1.44 cr
Parvesh Sahib Singh	West Delhi	Rs 25 cr	Rs 25 cr	0	Rs 0.18 cr	Rs 2.69 cr
Ramesh Bidhuri	South Delhi	Rs 25 cr	Rs 25 cr	0	Rs 0.28 cr	Rs 3.79 cr
Meenakshi Lekhi	New Delhi	Rs 25 cr	Rs 22.50 cr	Rs 2.50 cr	Rs 1.46 cr	Rs 3.28 cr

17TH LOK SABHA (2019 - 2024)

MP Name	Constituency	Total Entitlement	Total release by Gol	Total release Pending	Unsanctioned Balance	Unspent Balance
Dr Harsh Vardhan	Chandni Chowk	Rs 22 cr	Rs 7.50 cr	Rs 14.50 cr	Rs -13.22 cr	Rs 0.16 cr
Hans Raj Hans	Northwest Delhi (SC)	Rs 17.00 cr	Rs 5.00 cr	Rs 12 cr	Rs -8.53 cr	0
Gautam Gambhir	East Delhi	Rs 17 cr	Rs 7 cr	Rs 10 cr	-Rs -8.56 cr	Rs 0.01 cr
Manoj Tiwari	Northeast Delhi	Rs 17 cr	Rs 7 cr	Rs 10 cr	Rs -6.43 cr	Rs 0.52 cr
Parvesh Sahib Singh	West Delhi	Rs 17 cr	Rs 5 cr	Rs 12 cr	Rs -11.71 cr	Rs 0.69 cr
Ramesh Bidhuri	South Delhi	Rs 17 cr	Rs 7 cr	Rs 10 cr	Rs -9.77 cr	Rs 1.55 cr
Meenakshi Lekhi	New Delhi	Rs 17 cr	Rs 7 cr	Rs 10 cr	Rs -9.78 cr	0

REPORT CARD FOR 2014-19

Region	MP Name	Attendance	Questions asked	Debates participated in
WEST DELHI	PARVESH SAHIB SINGH	97%	207	27
	UDIT RAJ	98%	350	134
SOUTH DELHI	RAMESH BIDHURI	93%	188	101
	MEENAKSHI LEKHI	95%	435	151
EAST DELHI	MAHEISH GIRRI	93%	447	59
	MANOJ TIWARI	80%	258	9
CHANDNI CHOWK	HARSH VARDHAN	NA	0	62

REPORT CARD FOR 2019-24

Region	MP Name	Attendance	Questions asked	Debates participated in
WEST DELHI	PARVESH SAHIB SINGH	95%	268	46
	HANS RAJ HANS	39%	15	4
SOUTH DELHI	RAMESH BIDHURI	94%	188	91
	MEENAKSHI LEKHI	89%	133	82
EAST DELHI	GAUTAM GAMBHIR	61%	97	4
	MANOJ TIWARI	85%	395	33
CHANDNI CHOWK	HARSH VARDHAN	96%	0	69



TO PROTEST ARREST OF KEJRIWAL'S AIDE BIBHAV KUMAR

'No permission sought': Over 100 policemen thwart AAP march towards BJP headquarters

ARNABJIT SUR NEW DELHI, MAY 19

OVER 100 Delhi Police officers and several teams of paramilitary personnel were deployed on Sunday near the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) office at ITO's DDU Marg in view of the party's planned 'Jail Bharo' protest march to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) headquarters against the arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar on charges of assaulting AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal. The protesters were not allowed to proceed towards the BJP office by police, said officials.

Elaborate security arrangements were made outside the BJP headquarters ahead of Sunday's demonstration. With heavy barricading being in place around the AAP office as well as along the road leading up to the Rouse Avenue Court, senior officers including Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Harsh Vardhan and Additional DCP (Central)



CM Arvind Kejriwal and senior AAP leaders at a press conference in Delhi on Sunday; Police officers and paramilitary personnel stand guard during AAP's protest march. Abhinav Saha

Sachin Sharma, who were present at the site, warned protesters not to march to the BJP's Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg office. Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc) - which prohibits gathering of four or more persons - was also in place. Police buses were stationed at the spot, a precautionary measure, in case protesters tried to remove/breach barricades and had to be detained, said officials. DCP Vardhan said that the AAP

"had not obtained" a written permission for the demonstration.

Maliwal alleged that Kumar assaulted her on May 13 when she had gone to the CM's house to meet him. Kumar was arrested on Saturday and produced in a court, which remanded him to a five-day police custody. Many AAP leaders, meanwhile, claimed that Maliwal's allegation was a "conspiracy by the BJP to trap Kejriwal". On Sunday, scores of leaders,

workers, and supporters of the AAP took part in the protest march from the AAP office. However, none from the Congress were in attendance. Senior AAP leaders Atishi, Gopal Rai, Saurabh Bharadwaj, and Raghav Chadha among others marched towards the BJP headquarters on Sunday, as the protesters raised slogans. Delhi transport minister Kailash Gahlot said: "Investigation is underway... the truth will come out soon. The Maliwal case won't



be a hurdle for us. We are campaigning (for the Lok Sabha polls). We are confident that we will win all the seven seats (in Delhi)."

Fifty-six-year-old Chand Masti, an AAP worker from Matiala, said: "I have been associated with the party since the anti-corruption movement (in 2011)... What happened to Kejriwal's PA Bibhav Kumar is unjust and baseless. The matter is still sub-judice, and... Swati Maliwal's allegations have not been proven yet."

AAP leader Durgesh Pathak, meanwhile, criticised the Centre and the Delhi Police. "Why arrest AAP leaders one by one? Why don't you arrest all of us?... I just hope the probe is impartial."

Around 1 pm, the protesters moved towards the BJP office, but were stopped near the Rouse Avenue Court by the Delhi Police.

MCD's Deputy Mayor Aale Mohammad Iqbal said: "We were not allowed to march towards the BJP headquarters. We are here just to support Kejriwal ji. After the ED and the CBI, now the Delhi Police is targeting AAP leaders..."

ON PREMATURE TERMINATION

Guest teachers: 'Not a vote bank... so no regularisation in 10 years'

VIDHEESHA KUNTAMALLA NEW DELHI, MAY 19

"DAS SAAL hogaye inko wada kiye hue... Abhi tak ek bhi guest teacher ko inhone regular nahi kiya (It has been 10 years since the Delhi government has promised us... Not a single guest teacher has been regularised)," said a 37-year-old guest teacher whose contract ended just a week ago. Inflation is the same for every citizen, the guest teacher added.

Last week, the All India Guest Teachers' Association (AIGTA) wrote to the Directorate of Education (DoE), stating: "Issuing an order to render the guest teachers unemployed by prematurely terminating their contracts in this manner is unfair. The guest teachers are expressing anger over the fact that their contract was extended till June 30 and then they were terminated prematurely on May 10... the guest teachers are feeling humiliated. Such orders seem to lower the prestige of the Education Department, while

raising questions over the... coordination and intentions of the Department officials... Why should they be paid less if they are putting in the same efforts as that of a permanent teacher?"

The daily remuneration of a post graduate teacher (PGT) teacher and a trained graduate teacher (TGT) ranges between Rs 1,403 and Rs 1,445. Our salary has not been increased within at least six years, said a guest teacher at a government school. While the AAP has time and again promised to regularise the positions of guest teachers in Delhi government schools, many believe that this would not happen as they are not the "vote bank" of the party. "The fight for regularisation has been continuing for quite some time now. They (the Delhi government) do not take the issue of guest lecturers seriously as they believe that most of us don't vote here, in Delhi. Most of us come from neighbouring states... maybe that's why our issues are not given importance... as we are not part of the vote bank this election (Lok Sabha),"

said a guest teacher who has been teaching in Delhi government schools for the past decade. Echoing the same concerns, Arun Dedha, AIGTA president and a guest teacher, said: "We will raise this issue during the Vidhan Sabha elections... we feel like this issue might not get as much attention during the Lok Sabha polls."

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, several guest teachers who have been working at Delhi government schools for more than five years shared the situation on ground. "Imagine a middle-class person running their house without salary for two months. This year, not only have the contracts been terminated, but there is no Mission Buniyaad for guest teachers to be paid on a daily basis. Many of us are facing difficulties in running our families... This is the fate of nearly 16,000 guest teachers at present," said Dedha, who has also been a guest teacher at a government school in Delhi's Trilokpuri for nearly 11 years now.

Despite several appeals, the government did not provide a comment on the matter.

5 GOVT & POLITICS



SPECIAL CAMPAIGN

IN 2014, the BJP had its 'Chai pe charcha' campaign to reach out to ordinary voters. This time, some Union ministers are trying to reach out to a 'special' category of citizens with the 'dinner pe charcha' initiative. On Sunday, Union Minister Hardeep Puri and MoS Rajeev Chandrasekhar hosted around 250 guests at Puri's residence as a part of the BJP's 'Vishesh Sampark Abhiyan'. Among the guests were retired defence services chiefs, retired high court judges, ex-bureaucrats, and former diplomats. It is learnt that the minister briefed the guests on the work done by the Modi government in the past 10 years and the party's vision for 2047.

TAKING STOCK

LATE LAST month, a delegation from South Africa visited India and toured the Gandhi Sagar wildlife sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh to assess preparations for the introduction of cheetahs as a part of the second phase of Project Cheetah. After evaluating the fencing for enclosures and prey base augmentation at the sanctuary, the delegation travelled to Jamnagar, Gujarat, to visit the Vantara animal rescue facility being run by Anant Ambani. It is learnt the South Africans were keen to see the facility, especially the upkeep of animals imported from their country.

CULTURE, BRAND

WITH JUST a few weeks to go for the formation of the new government, the Ministry of Culture organised a daylong brainstorming session themed around pitching Indian culture as a brand. The session held earlier this week at Bharat Mandapam, which was closed to media and general public, saw the ministry hosting the who's who of Indian cultural and literary landscape. The aim was to gather views on how Indian culture can be integrated into products and services, and also used to leverage the country's soft power in diplomacy and global relations. According to those who attended the event, an interesting thought was to evolve a tagline for Indian culture, for which various options were offered for consideration by the ministry.

Shah: Cong, RJD skipped temple event due to 'Ghushpathiye' vote bank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA BETTIAH (BIHAR), MAY 19



Union Home Minister Amit Shah

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah Sunday accused Congress and RJD leaders of not attending the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya due to their "Ghushpathiye" (infiltrator) vote bank.

Addressing an election rally at Bettiah in West Champaran district in support of BJP's Sanjay Jaiswal, who is seeking re-election from Paschim Champaran Lok Sabha constituency, Shah said, "Congress and RJD were against the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya from the very beginning. Invitations for the ceremony were sent to them, but they did not come because of their 'Ghushpathiye' vote bank."

Shah accused Congress and RJD leaders of being scared that attending the ceremony would offend their vote bank.

The Home Minister asserted, "After completion of the four phases of Lok Sabha elections, I can tell you the result. Modi ji has already crossed the winning mark of 270 seats. Lalu ji's party RJD will not get even four seats and Rahul Baba's party Congress

won't even manage 40. The INDIA bloc will face a humiliating defeat in this election." Shah accused the Congress and its alliance partners of spreading lies that the NDA intends to end reservations if it returns to power for a third term.

"In fact, the Congress and RJD are trying to rob the SCs, STs and OBCs of their quotas and divert those to the Muslims. Lalu ji talks about giving cent per cent reservation to Muslims. The NDA under the leadership of Modi ji will not allow this to happen. Lalu Prasad has joined hands with the Congress in his attempt to make his son the CM," Shah added.

Shah criticised the opposition for raising fears about Pakistan's atomic power, saying, "Congress leader Manishankar Aiyar and ally Farooq Abdullah tried to scare us by saying that we cannot take back PoK because Pakistan has atom bombs. PoK belongs to India. It will remain so. We will claim it back."

Two injured in clash at Farooq rally in Mendhar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE MENDHAR, MAY 19

TWO PEOPLE were injured in an alleged clash between two rival groups at the rally of National Conference president and Jammu and Kashmir former chief minister Dr Farooq Abdullah at Government Degree College ground in Mendhar on Sunday. During the clash, a person allegedly stabbed two people belonging to the rival group with a sharp-edged weapon. Both sides had an old enmity between them, sources said.

The incident took place when Abdullah was addressing the election rally, seeking votes for

party candidate Mian Altaf for the Anantnag LS constituency which is going to polls on May 25. However, Farooq continued with his speech as no one on the stage could get a whiff of the clash taking place behind the last row of the audience. As people in the last rows turned to the clashing groups to intervene, Farooq thought that they were leaving the venue and asked them to sit. NC's Jammu province president Rattan Lal Gupta, who was present at the event, said he didn't notice any clash.

Both the injured were admitted to the Government Medical College in Rajouri. The condition of one of the persons was critical, doctors said.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav in Phulpur on Sunday. PTI

JOINT RALLY IN PHULPUR

'Stampede-like' situation, Rahul & Akhilesh leave without speech

MAULSHREE SETH LUCKNOW, MAY 19

SAMAJWADI PARTY (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had to leave their joint rally in the Phulpur Lok Sabha constituency without an address as the unruly crowd led to a "stampede-like" situation not just on the ground but on the dais as well, police said Sunday.

Both leaders were to address a rally in support of SP candidate Amar Nath Maurya but sections of the crowd became unruly even before the leaders arrived. They allegedly broke the barricades on seeing the leaders and tried to climb on the dais.

People at the spot said that many tried to shake hands with the leaders, give them flowers and get photographs clicked with them, the wiring of the microphone broke. This forced

Rahul and Akhilesh to leave without speaking. AICC General Secretary, Avinash Pande said: "The atmosphere was electrifying. The energy was so high, which is a positive indication that so much has changed as we move further in phases. Seeing both the leaders, people breaking the barricading came near the dais."

He said, "There was very little police force to manage the crowd that informed that it was deployed in the rally of (Home Minister) Amit Shah, which was also taking place there. Nonetheless, we take it in a positive way people are emotionally connecting with both the leaders and want to reach them."

There were two joint rallies of Akhilesh and Rahul scheduled in Uttar Pradesh — Phulpur and Prayagraj. The first rally was in

Phulpur, where both the leaders reached around 2 pm. Amid the crowd trying to reach the dais, both the leaders sat on the dais for around 20 minutes waiting for the crowd to settle but later decided to just wave at the crowd, raising joined hands along with the candidate and leave.

While Congress leader Rahul Gandhi left first, Akhilesh Yadav tried to shake hands with supporters and accept flowers before leaving.

Both leaders faced a similar situation after they reached Prayagraj to address the meeting in support of Congress candidate, former SP leader Ujjwal Raman Singh. The crowd here also broke the barricades and reached near the dais after arrival of Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav despite repeated requests from the dais asking the Congress and SP supporters to move back.

This time, both Akhilesh and Rahul addressed the crowd.

"I know that your anger and excitement has increased but this anger and excitement has to be maintained till voting... We have just come from Phulpur, where there was similar excitement," said Akhilesh. He said the election is between those who want to finish the constitution and those who want to save it.

Akhilesh assured the youth that they "would get respect along with jobs". Unemployment and exam paper leaks are major issues in Prayagraj as well as neighboring Phulpur.

Later, Congress leader Rahul talked about that the fight is "about the constitution", alleging that BJP-RSS were targeting it. With youngsters trying to shake hands him, Rahul focused on telling the crowd about the financial benefits promised by Congress in its manifesto.

FIR in UP over video of boy voting 8 times

MANISH SAHU LUCKNOW, MAY 19

AN FIR was registered against an unidentified person at Naya Gaon town of Etah district in Uttar Pradesh for the alleged violation of the model code of conduct and other offences, on the basis of a video wherein an unidentified boy was seen claiming to have cast vote eight times.

In the video, the boy is seen counting each time he presses the button on the EVM.

Etah officials said they have identified the polling booth.

Police said they are still in the process of identifying the person seen in the video, which was widely shared on social media.

"Based on a complaint filed by Sub-Divisional Magistrate P Tripathi, we have registered an FIR against an unidentified person. As part of our investigation, we will try to locate the person, who appears to be a minor, seen in the video," Naya Gaon SHO Ritesh Thakur said.

The FIR was registered at Naya Gaon police station under IPC sections 171-F (punishment for undue influence or personation at an election), 419 (cheating by person-

ation), along with sections of the Representation of the People Act. The Information Technology Act has also been invoked.

Etah Additional District Magistrate Satya Prakash said they identified the polling booth and recommended suspension of polling officials, besides departmental action against the sector magistrate.

Naya Gaon is a part of the Aligarh Assembly constituency, which falls within the Farrukhabad Lok Sabha constituency that went to polls on May 13. Farrukhabad's incumbent MP Mukesh Rajput of the BJP was

pitted against Naval Kishore Shukya of the Samajwadi Party.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav posted the video on X and wrote: "If the EC feels this is wrong, they should definitely take some action..."

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi shared Akhilesh's post on X, writing in Hindi: "Seeing its defeat, the BJP wants to defy the mandate by putting pressure on the government machinery to rob democracy. Congress expects all officials performing election duties to not forget their constitutional responsibilities in the face of pressure..."

In Haryana's Bhiwani-Mahendragarh, will Modi factor swing race towards the BJP?

VARINDER BHATIA BHIWANI, MAHENDRAGARH, MAY 19



In the constituency's Akoda village on Sunday. Kamleshwar Singh

A FARMER, a former serviceman, and a taxi operator — all Hindus — along with another Muslim farmer are engaged in a game of cards in Akoda village along the Mahendragarh-Hisar highway in Haryana even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, barely 120 km away in Gohana, invokes "Vote Jihad" at a rally on Saturday. Amid the surrounding high-octane, "divisive" campaign, the men remain united by their love for cards though each has a reason for his differing political affiliation.

Tejpal, the farmer who belongs to the Jat community, says people want a change and claims the Congress's Rao Dan Singh is likely to give sitting BJP MP Dharambir Singh Chaudhary a run for his money this time despite Tosham MLA Kiran Choudhry's supporters not enthusiastically working over the denial of a ticket to her daughter and former MP Shruti. Taxi operator Pandit Budhram, whose vehicles

have been hired by Dan Singh's supporters, is confident about the Congressman's victory and Sadiq Khan, the farmer, echoes his view.

Tosham is one of the nine Assembly segments that falls under the Bhiwani-Mahendragarh Lok Sabha seat. The BJP holds five (Loharu, Bhiwani, Ateli, Narnaul and Nangal Chaudhry) while two (Tosham and Mahendragarh) are held by the Congress. The Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) of Dushyant Chautala, which parted ways with the BJP and has extended support to the Congress,

represents Badhra while Dadri is represented by Independent MLA Sombir Sangwan who is now backing the Congress.

On the other hand, ex-serviceman Dharambir, a Jat, is vocal in his support for the BJP and cites the "Modi factor" for his choice. "I have served in Siachen, Srinagar, Leh, Nagaland, Sikkim, Palampur and other places. Earlier, every bullet fired was accounted for but that is not the case now with Modi at the helm. Why should we not vote for such a man who has backed the Army and has wanted to give the

enemy a befitting reply?" the former Army Naik asks. Several others are not in favour of the sitting MP but say they will vote for the BJP to ensure a third term for Modi.

Meanwhile, Khan disagrees and says the few Muslim families in the village of Beejna never felt uncomfortable earlier but over the years things have changed. "We feel we do not belong here, especially due to the speeches that BJP leaders make," he says. A few kilometres away in Buchowas village, Babloo Singh says unemployment is a major issue. "I have two sons who are educated but unemployed. National issues are important but we need to think about our families and children too. Unless we grow with the country and our children are not forced to run roadside tea stalls, we cannot determine the growth that the BJP leaders are trying to tell us," he says.

Local issues

Despite Chief Minister Nayab Saini's claim that his government had ensured the availability of

Kharge's posters defaced in front of Bengal Cong office after his Adhir snub

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KOLKATA, MAY 19



Kharge had said Chowdhury is no one to decide if Mamata would be part of INDIA bloc

A DAY after he snubbed West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury for questioning TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's loyalty to the INDIA bloc, several posters and hoardings of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge were defaced with ink in front of the party's state headquarters here on Sunday.

Unidentified persons also wrote "agent of Trinamool Congress" on Kharge's posters and hoardings.

Sources in the Congress said that Chowdhury, who is in his home constituency of Baharampur, expressed displeasure over the incident and asked party workers to lodge a police complaint, which was registered, and the defaced posters were also removed.

"The incident might have happened on Saturday night. This is the handiwork of the TMC which wants to create differences between senior Congress leaders and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury," a party leader alleged.

Kharge had on Saturday snubbed Chowdhury while responding to a query on Mamata Banerjee's comment that if the INDIA bloc forms the government, she would support it from outside, and Chowdhury's remark that she cannot be trusted and that she might go with the BJP.

"Mamata Banerjee is with the alliance. She has recently said that she will join the govern-

ment. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will not take the decision. The decision will be taken by me and the high command and those who don't agree will go out," Kharge had said.

He had also asserted that Chowdhury is no one to decide if Banerjee would be part of the INDIA bloc in the event of the anti-BJP alliance coming to power after the Lok Sabha polls.

Chowdhury, while reacting to Kharge's comments, had said, referring to the TMC supremo, "I cannot speak in favour of someone who wants to finish me and our party in Bengal politically. This is a battle for every Congress worker. I have spoken on their behalf. I don't want the state Congress to be used for her (Banerjee's) personal agenda and then finish the organisation."

The TMC is contesting the Lok Sabha elections alone in the state, while the Congress and the Left are jointly fighting the polls.

On Sunday, Chowdhury, while speaking to reporters at his Baharampur party office, reiterated that the Congress state unit would continue fighting against the TMC.

Woman says molested by 2 central force jawans in Howrah, cops file case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, MAY 19

A WOMAN alleged that she was molested by two personnel of a central paramilitary force in West Bengal's Howrah district on Sunday.

Speaking to media persons on Sunday in Howrah, the woman said, "I was out for morning walk, when the two central force jawans made advances. When I objected, one of them touched me inappropriately. He also molested me... I immediately raised an alarm and locals nearby rushed to the spot. I am living in fear now. Strong punishment must be given to the jawans who molested me."

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) criticised the central forces over the incident. Addressing a press conference in Kolkata, state minister and senior TMC leader Shashi Panja said:

"The incident took place on a day when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on a visit to the state where he spoke about the safety and security of women. The central force personnel, who are expected to ensure the safety and security of voters, are acting as predators and not protectors."

"The police have registered an FIR based on a written complaint by the woman against the two jawans. We have already taken up the issue with the Election Commission of India (ECI)," Panja said.

The incident comes a day before polling is scheduled to be held in seven seats in the state in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

The TMC also wrote to the police observer on central forces about the incident and urged the ECI to take necessary action to ensure women's safety. The BJP, meanwhile, called for an impartial investigation into the case.

Rajasthan ex-minister moves court, alleges torture by wife, son

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA JAIPUR, MAY 19

FORMER RAJASTHAN minister and member of the erstwhile royal family of Bharatpur Vishvendra Singh has moved court against his wife and son, alleging that they tortured him, did not give him enough food and eventually "expelled" him from his house.

In his application filed in a subdivisional magistrate's court, Vishvendra Singh also sought maintenance expenses from his wife Divya Singh and son Anirudh Singh. "For the past few years, my wife and son have initiated a revolt against me. They assaulted me, burned my documents and clothes and subjected me to verbal abuse while also withholding food," Vishvendra Singh alleged in his application.

Divya Singh, a former Bharatpur MP, and her son accused Vishvendra Singh of selling ancestral properties and tarnishing their image.

6 DECISION 2024



LS POLLS PHASE 5: 49 SEATS IN 8 STATES, UTs VOTE TODAY

In 2019, BJP was far ahead with 32 seats, Congress bagged only Rae Bareilly

Among the major parties, the BJP has the most candidates with criminal cases at 19, or 48% of all its nominees

ANJISHNU DAS
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

WITH 49 SEATS across 8 states and Union Territories voting in the Lok Sabha polls in the fifth phase on Monday, a total of 428 seats will have completed polling, leaving 115 seats in the remaining two phases. At the end of this phase, Maharashtra will have completed polling with its last 13 seats.

In 2019, the parties constituting the Opposition INDIA bloc and the ruling NDA won six and 34 of

these 49 seats. The BJP won 32 of these seats, with the Congress far behind at 1: its traditional Rae Bareilly seat in UP. Of the nine remaining seats, seven were won by the undivided Shiv Sena and two by the Biju Janata Dal (BJD).

In terms of vote share, the parties that constitute NDA received 42.85% of the votes compared to the 28.83% vote share of the INDIA bloc parties (excluding the votes of the Shiv Sena and NCP, both of which were united at the time).

In 2014, the NDA won 29 seats and the INDIA bloc parties 10.

CANDIDATE BREAKDOWN

227 (33%)
CROREPATI CANDIDATES

48
AVERAGE AGE

82 (12%)
WOMEN CANDIDATES

₹3.56 cr
AVERAGE ASSETS

23% (159 candidates)
Share of candidates with criminal cases. There are 122 candidates with serious cases

Candidates who are graduates and above 349
Share of graduates 50.2%

After Phase 5, a total of 608 women will have contested across all the phases so far.
In 2014, 7 women won from the

Phase 5 seats and in 2019, 11 women won.
At 8, the BJP has the most women candidates in Phase 5.

PARTY-WISE CANDIDATES WITH CRIMINAL CASES

BJP	19 (48%)
BSP	8 (17%)
Cong	8 (44%)
SP	5 (50%)
VBA	4 (40%)
Shiv Sena (UBT)	3 (38%)
TMC	3 (43%)
Shiv Sena	3 (50%)

Maharashtra has the most candidates with criminal cases at 62, followed by Uttar Pradesh at 29, West Bengal at 21, Jharkhand at 18 and Bihar at 15

PARTY-WISE CROREPATI CANDIDATES

BJP	36 (90%)
BSP	20 (43%)
Cong	15 (83%)
SP	10 (100%)
Shiv Sena (UBT)	7 (88%)
VBA	7 (70%)
Shiv Sena	6 (100%)
TMC	6 (86%)

5 CONTESTS TO WATCH OUT FOR

- BARAMULLA, J&K:** Former CM Omar Abdullah (NC) vs People's Conference chief Sajad Gani Lone vs former Rajya Sabha member Mir Mohammad Fayaz (PDP)
- AMETHI, UP:** Union minister and sitting MP Smriti Irani (BJP) vs Gandhi family aid Khishori Lal Sharma (Cong)
- RAEBARELI, UP:** Rahul Gandhi (Cong) vs MLC Dinesh Pratap Singh (BJP)
- HOOGLY, WEST BENGAL:** Actor-politician and sitting MP Locket Chatterjee (BJP) vs actor and first-time candidate Rachna Banerjee (TMC) vs Manadip Ghosh (CPM)
- MUMBAI NORTH, MAHARASHTRA:** Union minister and Leader of Rajya Sabha Piyush Goyal (BJP) vs Congress Mumbai vice president Bhushan Patil

PHASE 5 SEATS: RESULTS IN 2019

NDA: 34 INDIA: 6 OTHERS: 9 (Undivided Shiv Sena 7, BJD 2)

In 2014, the NDA won 29 of these seats, the INDIA bloc parties 10 seats and other parties the remaining 10

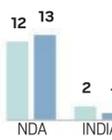
KEY BATTLEGROUND

UTTAR PRADESH

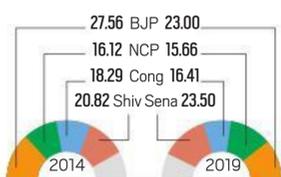
Vote share in %



Seats won: 2014 12, 2019 13



MAHARASHTRA



Total seats: 48
Total electors: 9.14 crore
First-time voters: 12.87 lakh



Women in the fray

Maharashtra has the most women candidates at 39, followed by West Bengal at 14 and Uttar Pradesh at 13. There are no women candidates in 11 of 49 Phase 5 seats

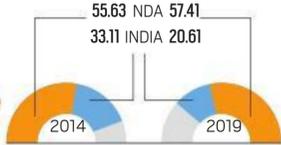
Criminal cases

In 26, or 53%, of the seats in Phase 5, there are at least three candidates with criminal cases. Nashik in Maharashtra and Chatra in Jharkhand seats have the most such candidates at 10 and 9, respectively.

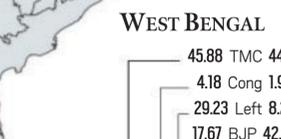
695 CANDIDATES IN THE FRAY ON MONDAY.

The BSP has fielded the most candidates at 46, followed by the BJP at 40, the Congress at 18. With the final 13 seats in Maharashtra voting today, the state has the most candidates at 264, followed by 144 in 14 UP seats and 88 in 7 Bengal seats.

BIHAR



Total seats: 39 (5 in Phase 5)



Total seats: 42 (7 in Phase 5)

RICHEST CANDIDATES

ANURAG SHARMA (BJP), contesting from Uttar Pradesh's Jhansi
Assets: ₹202.08 cr

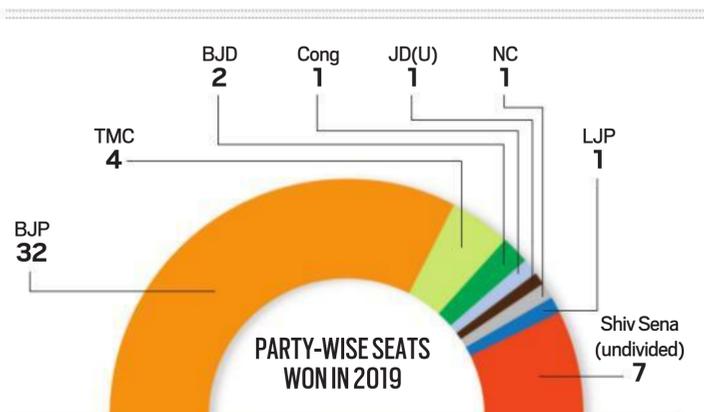
NILESH BHAGWAN SAMBARE (Ind), contesting from Maharashtra's Bhiwandi
Assets: ₹116.1 cr

PIYUSH GOYAL (BJP), contesting from Maharashtra's Mumbai North
Assets: ₹110.95 cr

YOUNGEST AND OLDEST

YOUNGEST: 5 candidates aged 25, including an Independent and one from the SP

OLDEST: ZUNJAR MHASUJI AVHAD, 82-year-old contesting in Nashik, Maharashtra



OTHER MAJOR STATES GOING TO POLLS

- JHARKHAND: 3 SEATS** (Chatra, Hazaribagh, Kodarma)
- JAMMU AND KASHMIR: 1 SEAT** (Baramulla)
- ODISHA: 5 SEATS** (Aska, Bargarh, Bolangir, Kandhamal, Sundargarh)
- LADAKH: 1 SEAT**

Source: Election Commission, ADP

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INDIANEXPRESS.COM/ELECTIONS



KEY PLAYERS
'OUTSIDE SUPPORT TO INDIA': MAMATA BANERJEE'S SIGNAL TO WHOM?

5 QUESTIONS

DAGGUBATI PURANDESWARI, RAJAHMUNDRY: VOTED ON MAY 13; BJP ANDHRA PRADESH CHIEF AND FORMER TWO-TIME MP

'After gruelling campaign daily, all I could think about was sleep'

How did your typical campaign day start?
It started early. Before I hit the road, I did my puja and pranayam. After that, it became hectic as I had to travel from place to place. But I made it a point to follow my morning routine as it prepared me for the day ahead.



Given the intense heat, did you pack something to keep you hydrated and refreshed?
Just water. I made it a point to keep hydrated and regularly had water. Apart from that I had nothing special to beat the heat.

I carried my phone all the time to keep myself updated about happenings, especially during campaigning when I did not get the time to go through and follow the news regularly.

What are the five things you carried in your bag?
As I said, water. And my comb (laughs). You can see what travelling in the heat does to me.

How did you wind down after a hectic day of campaigning?
There was no need to wind down as the campaign was gruelling. I was very tired by the time I got home. As soon as I reached home, I hit the bed. All I could think when I got home was sleeping. It was that tiring.

How often did you use your phone during the campaign?

Of total drugs seized, 30% from Gujarat: EC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
AHMEDABAD, MAY 19

POLL SEIZURES

Total drug seizures, India: ₹3,959 crore
Drugs seized in Gujarat: ₹1,188 crore
Share of drugs in total seizures: 45%
Share of drugs seized in Gujarat: 35%

AMID THE Lok Sabha polls, nearly one-third of the total value of drugs seized by the Election Commission (EC) across the country have been in Gujarat, data released by the poll panel says. Drug seizures — with a total value of Rs 3,958.85 crore — topped the EC's crackdown on inducements between March 1 and May 18. This amounts to nearly 45% of the total worth of seized items at Rs 8,889 crore.

Of the Rs 3,958.85 crore, Rs 1,187.8 crore, or nearly 30%, was seized from Gujarat alone. "Enhanced vigil against inducements, including drugs, has resulted in big seizure actions and continuous surge. Drug seizures have been the highest," EC stated.

As per the EC, three major operations resulted in drug seizures worth Rs 602 crore, Rs 230 crore and Rs 60 crore during the said period. "Gujarat ATS, Narcotics Control Bureau and the Indian Coast Guard, in joint operations, have made three high-value seizures of drugs in just three days amounting to Rs 892 crore," the commission stated Saturday.

In the largest operation, a joint force identified and intercepted a suspected fishing boat that was carrying 14 crew members — all Pakistan nationals — on Indian waters, 180 nautical miles off the coast of Porbandar, Gujarat.

and Narcotics Control Bureau (Operations), New Delhi recovered 78 boxes of contraband, suspected to be heroin... worth nearly Rs 602 crore," the statement said. In another operation, Gujarat ATS received inputs that various units in Rajasthan and Gujarat are involved in the illicit manufacturing of psychotropic substances.

"Joint teams of Gujarat ATS and NCB (Operations) Delhi conducted simultaneous raids at Amreli and Gandhinagar in Gujarat, Sirohi and Jodhpur in Rajasthan on April 27, and seized illicit manufacturing units involved in the production of mephedrone. Ten individuals have so far been detained. The value of the seized mephedrone has been estimated to be around Rs 230 crore," the EC said.

In the third operation, the Gujarat ATC, Indian Coast Guard and NCB jointly seized 173 kg hashish worth Rs 60.5 crore on April 29.

"The joint team of Gujarat ATS

KEY SEATS

In Sirsa, Selja banks on farm rage, unemployment, Tanwar plays Modi card

VARINDER BHATIA
SIRSA, FATEHABAD, MAY 19

THE SIRSA Lok Sabha constituency in Haryana is witnessing a fierce contest between two former state Congress chiefs, Kumari Selja and Ashok Tanwar.

Both Selja and Tanwar have represented Sirsa as the Congress MPs in the past. Tanwar had been the Congress nominee since 2009, having won in 2009 and lost in 2014 and 2019. This year, while Tanwar is fighting on a BJP ticket, Selja, who had cut her teeth in electoral politics by winning Sirsa in 1991 and 1996, is back in the constituency, representing the Congress, having Ambala in 2019. The electoral battle in Sirsa

seems to be evenly poised, with BJP MLAs representing two of its nine Assembly segments — Fatehabad and Ratia. The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), which represents Narwana and Tohana, recently cut ties with the BJP-led state government, although its two MLAs in Sirsa are supporting the BJP, along with the Haryana Lokhit Party's Sirsa MLA, while Rania's Independent MLA has joined the BJP. The Congress represents two Assembly segments, Kalanwali and Dabwali, while Ellenabad is represented by the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD).

Both Selja and Tanwar are campaigning vigorously, with each addressing about 20-25 rallies daily. While Tanwar, who is relying on his old connection to the

seat backed by the BJP's massive cadre and logistical support, Selja is contesting on her own strength while facing Congress infighting in Haryana, whose 10 Lok Sabha seats vote on May 25.

These days Tanwar, who had early in his campaign faced farmer protests in Sirsa and Fatehabad districts, is campaigning with a bus full of Haryana Police personnel ahead of his SUV motorcade. The police bus reaches the venue of his public meeting before his arrival to prevent any protests.

Accompanied by the BJP's former state chief and current Rajya Sabha MP Subhash Barala, Tanwar in his campaign is citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for the nation and other BJP pledges and slogans, including the



Both Selja (left) and Tanwar were Congress state chiefs. Express



abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, "Sabka saath sabka vikas" and Ram Mandir.

In contrast, Selja is leading her own campaign. Accompanied by her supporters and those of Tosham MLA Kiran Choudhry and

Rajya Sabha MP Randeep Surjewala, Selja begins her day at 7.30 am and ends by midnight.

"Did you all get the Rs 15 lakh PM Modi promised? How many in your village got government jobs? How many of you got

houses? Aren't you facing the brunt of this price rise, the LPG cylinder the government promised for Rs 400 that is now available at Rs 1,100? Enough of the BJP's fake promises. The time has come for all of you to vote for Congress. We need to collectively save the Constitution to save ourselves, our future generations," Selja tells voters.

"Farmers were expecting prosperity, youths wanted jobs, poor wanted facilities, but none of them got anything... The PM is working only for the interest of a few capitalists," Selja alleges.

"In 2019, the government had assured farmers it would double their income... Bullets were fired at them when they sought justice. Over 700 died in the struggle

against the three farm laws. Is this what this government calls 'acche din'?" she says.

In 2019, the BJP had won all 10 seats by huge margins. Selja, however, says, "This time, there is no Balakot (strike). People have started questioning the BJP on its promises. Congress has always supported a people's agenda and not Hindu-Muslim polarisation and the politics of mangalsutra the PM is playing," Selja claims.

Tanwar is seeking votes in Modi's name. On the "party-hopper" charge against him, Tanwar says, "People are telling me that I got very late in quitting (Congress). Woh khaa piyo logon ki party hai (It is a party of the corrupt)." Tanwar left the AAP to join the BJP in January this year. He even had a

stint with the Trinamool Congress.

Comparing the BJP and Congress agendas, Tanwar says, "In every Haryana village, people have got jobs on merit. All such families who have got their livelihood due to the government's transparent recruitment policies are today supporting us and the BJP. The Congress can neither compete with us on national or local issues." He adds, "Narendra Modi is our leader and people love him. They know he is the one who can improve their lives and take our nation to new heights."

Selja begs to differ. "Rahul Gandhi's Yatra were an unprecedented example of how a leader should connect with the people. Not even the PM, has ever had that kind of connect," she says.

7 DECISION 2024



BALLOTIN

'Mic' symbol for Amritpal Singh in polls

Chandigarh: All 328 candidates contesting Punjab's 13 LS seats have been allotted poll symbols, CEO Sibin C said Sunday. Amritpal Singh, the Waris Punjab De chief detained under the National Security Act and lodged in Assam's Dibrugarh Jail, was allotted the symbol "mic" (microphone) to contest the Khadoor Sahib seat as an independent candidate. Sarabjeet Singh Khalsa, contesting from the Faridkot (reserve) constituency as an Independent, has been given poll symbol of 'Ganna Kisan' (sugarcane farmer). Khalsa is son of Beant Singh, one of the assassins of PM Indira Gandhi. **ENS**

Jhargram BJP MP joins Trinamool

Kolkata: Jhargram BJP MP Kunar Hembram joined TMC in the presence of party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee Sunday. Hembram said he will work for the development of the state under the leadership of TMC chief Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek. BJP state spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said, "His departure will not affect the BJP in any way." **ENS**

EC removes Purulia SP

Kolkata: Hours after PM Narendra Modi's rally in Purulia Sunday, EC Sunday removed SP Abhijit Bandyopadhyay from the post, an official said, adding he has been relieved from all election-related duties. The EC removed SDPO of Contai, Dibakar Das, along with the OC of Bharathi Nagar and Patashpur police stations. **PTI**

Sena battle for Mumbai last up as poll race set to conclude in Maharashtra

In 3 of 6 Mumbai seats, direct fight between Shinde, Uddhav parties

SHUBHANGI KHAPRE
MUMBAI, MAY 19

"MUMBAI AMCHI, nahi konachya bapachi. (Mumbai belongs to us, not to anybody's father)."

The slogan once associated with the undivided Shiv Sena led by Bal Thackeray has been echoing louder in the city as the two Senas led by CM Eknath Shinde and former CM Uddhav Thackeray get ready to battle it out in Mumbai that votes Monday. For the two Sena parties, the right to lay claim to the legacy of Bal Thackeray is at stake.

Of six parliamentary seats in Mumbai, Mumbai North West, Mumbai South, and Mumbai South Central will see a direct fight between Shiv Sena led by Shinde and Uddhav's Shiv Sena (UBT). In 2019, BJP-Shiv Sena alliance won these 3 along with Mumbai North East, Mumbai North Central, and Mumbai North.

The battle lines

With voting in Mumbai and 7 other seats, the LS elections will conclude in Maharashtra Monday.

In Mumbai North, a seat that it has won the last two times, the BJP has fielded Union Minister Piyush Goyal who is making his LS poll debut. Up against him is Mumbai Congress vice-president Bhushan Patil.

Mumbai North Central will see another high-voltage clash between former public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikkam, who has handled high-profile cases such as the trial of Ajmal Kasab, will take on Mumbai Congress chief Varsha Gaikwad. Meanwhile, in Mumbai North East, MLA Mihir Kotecha of the BJP is facing the constituency's former MP Sanjay Dina Patil of the Shiv Sena (UBT). Apart from Goyal and



Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray. *File*

Nikam's contests, all eyes will be on the other three constituencies. In Mumbai North West, it is a direct contest between former state minister Ravindra Waikar of Shiv Sena and Uddhav's candidate Amol Kiritkar. In Mumbai South, the Sena has chosen to go with first-time MLA Yamini Jadhav, who is married to former BMC standing committee chairperson Yashwant Jadhav while Sena (UBT) has renominated two-time sitting MP Arvind Sawant. In Mumbai South Central, 2-time sitting MP Rahul Shevale has been renominated by Shiv Sena. He will face off against former RS MP Anil Desai.

The campaign

Uddhav Thackeray actively reached out to the Muslims, estimated to constitute about 16-20% of the city's population.

The Shiv Sena (UBT)'s focus in the four constituencies where it is in the fray was on areas with sizable Muslim population such as Govandi, Anushakti Nagar, Mankhurd, Mahim, Kurla, Bandra East and West, Byculla, Khetwadi, Jogeshwari East and West, Dindoshi, Oshiwara, Masjid Bunder, and Umarkhadi.

This drew a strong reaction from Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis of the BJP who told *The Indian Express* in a recent interview, "The kind of appeasement of minorities, the Muslim community, that Uddhav Thackeray is doing, even the Congress never did such appeasement."

But for some Muslim voters, Uddhav has managed to strike a chord. "In Uddhav Thackeray, we see a moderate leader. He is reassuring. Not like the BJP which has shunned Muslims," said Mohammad Noor, a resident of Prem Nagar in Jogeshwari East.

While for the MVA the support of Marathis, Muslims, and Dalits is crucial, the ruling Mahayuti alliance is banking on north Indians and Gujaratis. Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath has campaigned in Mumbai to consolidate north Indian voters. The Narendra Modi factor is also something that the ruling alliance is banking on. Modi who addressed a rally in Shivaji Park on Friday said Mumbai was "crucial to the BJP's developmental pitch of Viksit Bharat".

But beyond the national issues, infrastructure and other local issues such as slum redevelopment and healthcare also figured among campaign talking points. Fadnis told *The Indian Express*, "We delivered results. Our focus was development. When individuals travel through Atal Setu, Coastal Road, or the metro, he or she looks at the work done."

Meanwhile, the "neglect of Mumbai and Maharashtra" was a prominent theme in MVA alliance's campaign. Former CM Pritviraj Chavan of Congress spoke of the "relocation of industrial projects" such as Vedanta Foxconn to Gujarat, adding it would be an issue for Mumbaiers and "have an impact on polls".

Anger of farmers pose a test for BJP in state's onion belt

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI, MAY 19

MAHARASHTRA'S ONION belt that includes Nashik, Dindori, Dhule, and some of the fastest-growing urban centres in the state has seven LS seats that will go to the polls Monday along with the six seats in Mumbai.

These areas near Mumbai, which have traditionally been seen as strongholds of the undivided Shiv Sena, present the Shiv Sena led by CM Eknath Shinde and Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT) their first electoral test since the party's split in 2022.

This time, the BJP is in the fray in four while the Shiv Sena will contest three seats. Shiv Sena (UBT) will fight four seats while the NCP (SP) and the Congress will have candidates in two and one seat, respectively.

Of these 7 seats, two Senas are in direct contest with each other in Thane, Kalyan and Nashik, all of which were won by undivided Sena in 2019. While Thane is the CM's home turf, his son Shrikant is in the fray from Kalyan and will take on Vaishali Darekar-Rane of the Shiv Sena (UBT).

The BJP is facing a backlash in the onion belt, which has recently witnessed angry reactions from farmers over the Centre's non-committal export policy. A youth aligned with the NCP (SP) resorted to sloganeering at PM Narendra Modi's rally in Nashik.

Dhule: Subhash Bhamre (BJP) vs Shobha Bachhav (Congress). Bhamre is seeking his third straight victory from BJP stronghold while Bachhav is seemingly putting up a good fight.

Dindori: Bharati Pawar (BJP) vs Bhaskar Bhagre (NCP-SP). Union Minister Pawar is up against a grassroots worker of the



CM Eknath Shinde's son Shrikant and Vaishali Darekar-Rane of Shiv Sena (UBT) in Kalyan. *File*

NCP (SP), Bhaskar Bhagre. **Nashik:** Hemant Godse (Shiv Sena) vs Rajabhau Vaze (Sena-UBT) vs Shantigiri Maharaj (Independent).

The ruling alliance announced its candidate Sena's Godse on last day of filing of nominations, who will face former MLA Vaze.

Palghar: Bharti Kamdi (Sena-UBT) vs Hemant Savra (BJP) vs Rajesh Patil (BVA).

Former Palghar Zilla Parishad president Kamdi will be up against BJP's Sarva, son of former minister Vishnu Sarva.

Bhiwandi: Kapil Patil (BJP) vs Suresh alias Balyamama Mhatre (NCP-SP) vs Nilesh Sambre (Independent).

The seat is seeing a keen battle as Patil looks to ward off infighting within the BJP as the Opposition is seen to be sorting out differences with Congress.

Kalyan: Shrikant Shinde (Shiv Sena) vs Vaishali Darekar-Rane (Sena-UBT).

While Shrikant says he will easily win the seat, he faces opposition from a section of the BJP, especially after old rivalries surfaced and ended up with a shooting incident inside a police station.

Thane: Rajan Vichare (SS-UBT) vs Naresh Mhaske (SS).

Vichare who picked Uddhav camp during split faces Thane mayor Naresh Mhaske of Sena.



(Clockwise from above) Rahul Gandhi (Rae Bareilly), Rajnath Singh (Lucknow) and Smriti Irani (Amethi). *File*



From Rajnath, Smriti to Rahul, battle of bigwigs in UP today

BHUPENDRA PANDEY
LUCKNOW, MAY 19

WITH voting in fifth phase on Monday, the focus is on the 14 constituencies in the crucial battleground of Uttar Pradesh.

There are 14 candidates in the fray, including bigwigs such as Union Ministers Smriti Irani (Amethi) and Rajnath Singh (Lucknow), and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi (Rae Bareilly), Faizabad, which shot into the limelight after the Ram Temple consecration as Ayodhya falls under it, will also go to the polls and will see BJP's Lallu Singh attempt to retain the constituency for a third straight term.

Other seats that go to polls include Mohanlalganj, Barabanki, Kaiserganj, Hamirpur, Banda, Fatehpur, Jhansi, Jalaun, Kaushambi, and Gonda. The BJP won 13 seats, losing only Rae Bareilly.

Among the seats that will be closely watched are Kaiserganj, where BJP dropped incumbent MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh who has faced sexual harassment allegations, and Rae Bareilly, where Rahul Gandhi is in the fray after his mother Sonia Gandhi chose to move to the Rajya Sabha.

Both the BJP and INDIA bloc aggressively campaigned in the state, with Modi holding four rallies a day while Rahul and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav held at least

two joint rallies daily in the run-up to the fifth phase.

Apart from Irani and Rajnath, the poll fate of three more Union ministers - Sadhvi Niranjani Jyoti (Fatehpur), Kaushal Kishore (Mohanlalganj), and Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma (Jalaun) - will be decided in the fifth phase.

Modi intensified his campaign in the state after he filed his nomination in Varanasi on May 14 but skipped Amethi and Rae Bareilly, where Shah and Adityanath held

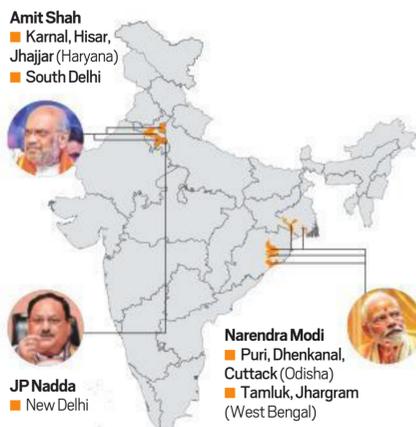
fort for the party. Over the last week, campaigning in Rae Bareilly hit a crescendo with the NDA and INDIA bloc mobilising thousands of their supporters. AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi stayed put in the seat since May 6. Rahul visited Rae Bareilly thrice.

In Amethi, Irani faces long-time Gandhi family confidant K.L. Sharma, who has managed the poll campaigns of the family in Amethi and Rae Bareilly since 1984. In Faizabad, Lallu Singh will be up against SP's 9-time MLA Awadhesh Prasad and Sachchidanand Pandey of BSP.

All BJP MLAs and office-bearers in Lucknow have been drumming up support for Rajnath, who will face Lucknow East MLA Ravidas Mehrotra of SP and Sarvar Malik of BSP. In Fatehpur, Niranjani Jyoti is likely to face a tough fight from senior SP leader Naresh Uttam Patel.

THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Who will be where: Monday, May 20



Confusion overshadows BJP's 'CAA success' in Bengal's Matua land

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
BANGAON, MAY 19

AS WEST Bengal's Bongaon LS seat held by Union MoS Santanu Thakur votes Monday, locals remain confused over CAA, which is no longer a dominant factor in Bongaon, having a significant refugee population. About 13.3 lakh people of total 19 lakh voters belong to the Matua community.

While BJP claims the CAA has given refugees, especially from the Matua community, an identity, the TMC claims those applying for citizenship under the CAA would "land up in detention camps, like what happened in Assam".

Thakur is contesting again on a BJP ticket in the hopes of retaining the seat and has campaigned heavily on the CAA, highlighting it

as a BJP achievement, fulfilling a long-standing demand of refugee communities. "The CAA has become a reality due to the efforts of the Narendra Modi government. It has given people dignity and fulfilled their long-standing dream," Thakur had said at a rally.

However, since its rules were framed in March, there is a sense of fear among residents in Bongaon in North 24 Parganas district and especially in Thakurnagar, where the headquarters of All-India Matua Mahasangha, the apex body of Matuas, is located.

Priya Bhakta, 30, who runs a shop opposite the 'Thakurbari', the Mahasangha headquarters, said none of her family members have applied for citizenship. "There is no talk about the CAA in our households. We no longer have any interest. One party asks



Thakurbari in Bongaon constituency. *Partha Paul*

us to appeal for citizenship while another party warns us not to do so. We are confused," Bhakta said. Several others *The Indian Express* interacted with shared similar opinions on the CAA.

BANGAON LOK SABHA SEAT	
2019 LOK SABHA	
BJP	48.85%
TMC	40.92%
CPIM	6.40%
INC	1.61%
2015 LS BYPOLL	
TMC	43.27%
CPIM	26.30%
BJP	24.17%
INC	2.33%

Ayan Baidya, 28, a Bongaon resident, said Matuas want to be considered Indian citizens having previously cast their votes.

"Our family came here in 1952 from Bangladesh. Some people also came here in 1990. There is no clarity on who should apply for citizenship. I had voted last time as I have a voter ID and Aadhaar. Then why am I not a citizen?" Baidya said. The TMC has fielded Biswajit Das, a former MLA from Bagdah which falls under the Bongaon seat. Das was with the TMC from 2009-19 before winning the 2021 Assembly polls on a BJP ticket. However, after the results were announced, he returned to the TMC.

"The PM was elected on Matua votes. If they are not citizens of this country, then how did they take part in the electoral process? The CAA is nothing but a gimmick," Das said during his campaign. The Congress candidate Pratap Biswas, however, has

steered clear of the contentious citizenship law. In Gaighata area, Krishnapada Paik, an autodriver, said Thakur has done little for Bongaon besides talking about the CAA. "In terms of development, TMC is ahead. But when it comes to CAA sentiments, BJP is ahead," he said.

Krishna Chandra Ghosh, another local, said, "We wanted to apply for citizenship but are reluctant as some leaders are saying that we will end up in detention camps. We are scared." About 23 km from Gaighata, in Petrapole - the border checkpoint between India and Bangladesh - the CAA does not appear to resonate among voters. "It is meant for refugees. People here talk about other issues such as jobs and inflation," said Tarun Das, a resident.

In UP exam hub, contrasting views of youth on paper leaks as poll issue

ASAD REHMAN
PRAYAGRAJ, MAY 19

THE KATRA area of Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh is lined with libraries and coaching centres. In the searing heat, hundreds of students line up at tea stalls, bookstores, or juice kiosks, their backpacks straining under the weight of books.

These students have travelled from across Uttar Pradesh to prepare for competitive examinations, with the hope of securing a government job. But for many among them, their hopes and dreams have been dashed by paper leaks, the most recent in February when the UP Police constable recruitment exam question paper allegedly got leaked and was circulated on social media the same day. A total of 48 lakh candidates had registered for the exam to fill 60,244 constable positions. The UP government ordered a retest but the date has not been announced yet.

In February 2023, the question paper for the Review Officer

and Assistant Review Officer preliminary examination got leaked, resulting in its cancellation.

Paper leaks have become one of the poll issues that Opposition leaders such as Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav have raised while campaigning, hoping to strike a chord with the youth. The Congress in its manifesto has promised fast-track courts to adjudicate cases related to question paper leaks and provide monetary compensation to victims. In February, The Indian Express published an investigation after going through 41 documented instances of leaks in the last five years in recruitment exams across 15 states - their governments cutting across party lines.

In the busy lanes of Katra, *The Indian Express* tracked down 10 aspirants who had appeared for the constable recruitment exam to ask if question paper leaks were an election issue for them. While some said no, others said it was the government's job to ensure free and fair examinations and could cost the BJP in the polls.

Anshu Maurya (19)
Hometown: Handia, Prayagraj (30 km from Prayagraj city)

Category: OBC
Father's occupation: Farmer
Qualification: 10+2
Preparing for exams: 1.5 years

Anshu said paper leaks were not an election issue and the state or central government could not be blamed for the "greed of a few". "How can I blame the government when the examination was held with so much security? I feel Opposition leaders such as Akhilesh and Rahul Gandhi are fooling us," he said.

Khurana Yadav (18)
Hometown: Kaushambi city

Category: OBC
Father: UP Police constable
Qualification: 10+2
Preparing for exams: 6 months

For Khurana, a Samajwadi Party (SP) supporter, paper leaks are a law-and-order issue that has nothing to do with elections.

"What can the government do? Had some minister been involved in leaking the papers, then it would have been their fault. But the papers are leaked by the shiksha (education) mafia, and the officer," he said.

Sachin Yadav (24)
Hometown: Pratapgarh

Category: OBC
Father: Deceased (was an autorickshaw driver in Mumbai)
Qualification: Graduate
Preparing for exams: 2 years

Sachin said the BJP would suffer in the elections because of paper leaks and unemployment. "I don't see how youths are going to vote for the BJP when they are all unemployed. I can tell you that the youth in UP will vote based on unemployment and paper leaks and the BJP will lose several seats because of this," he said.

Sashendra Kumar Saroj (27)
Hometown: Sultanpur

Category: Scheduled Caste

Father: Farmer
Qualification: Allahabad University graduate
Preparing for exams: 8 years

Sashendra said he was not sure if paper leaks were an election issue, adding that his vote would go to the party that would provide him and hundreds of others like him jobs. "I am scared that my whole life will be spent here in Allahabad. I have left home because I want a government job. For me, the only election issue is unemployment," he said.

Ankit Tripathi (25)
Hometown: Kaushambi

Category: General
Father: UP police Sub-Inspector
Qualification: Post-graduate in Hindi Literature
Preparing for exams: 3 years

"How can leaking papers be associated with the government? It is an issue of corrupt officers. I think the BJP governments at the Centre and the state

have made India a world power and I will vote based on that," he said.

Rahul Kumar Yadav (21)
Hometown: Handia, Prayagraj

Category: OBC
Father: Farmer
Qualification: Graduate
Preparing for exams: 2 years

Rahul said had the constable recruitment examination not been cancelled despite the leak, it would be an election issue. "I don't think paper leaks have become an election issue this time. One, because the government cancelled the examination and announced that it would be rescheduled... I agree with Rahul Gandhi when he says that there should be a law against paper leaks. That is the only way to stop it," he said.

Shivanshu Yadav (22)
Hometown: Ghazipur

Category: OBC
Father: Farmer

Qualification: Graduate
Preparing for exams: 3 years

"It is an issue related to our society and corruption. We shouldn't let it affect the election. Paper leaks happen under all governments, including when the SP was in power, and I don't think we should let this affect this election," he said.

Brijesh Pal (24)
Hometown: Azamgarh

Category: OBC
Father: Farmer
Qualification: Graduate
Preparing for exams: 3 years

According to Brijesh, the INDIA alliance will benefit from the issue, especially in UP. "First of all, it takes years for vacancies to open up. Then, when they come, examination dates are announced and examinations are held. But eventually, the examination is cancelled because the paper is leaked. Who is responsible for this? It has to be the government," he said.

Brijraj Singh (22)
Hometown: Mahoba

Category: General
Father: Farmer
Qualification: Graduate
Preparing for exams: 1 year

While Brijraj criticised the Narendra Modi government for failing to tackle unemployment and price rise, he said, "My vote is for Modi. He has done so much on the international scale."

Jitendra Yadav (20)
Hometown: Kaushambi

Category: OBC
Father: Farmer
Qualification: 10+2
Preparing for exams: For 1 year

Jitendra blamed the BJP government at the Centre and UP for failing to stop the leaks and reducing government job vacancies. "I think Rahul Gandhi is a good leader. The BJP keeps raising issues related to religion which has great appeal for illiterate people in the country. But for people like us, employment is the only election issue," he said.



WORDLY WISE
 NOBODY MAKES A GREATER MISTAKE THAN HE WHO
 DOES NOTHING BECAUSE HE COULD DO
 ONLY A LITTLE. — EDMUND BURKE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

PUTIN & XI

Delhi has reasons to worry that Putin's support for China in Indo-Pacific could undermine India's efforts in the region

THE 43RD MEETING between the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, and the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, last week in Beijing underlines the growing anti-Western convergence of strategic interests between two of the world's longest serving leaders. The expansive agenda outlined by the two leaders demands that Delhi carefully recalibrates its own great power relations and compensates wherever necessary to blunt the negative consequences of the Sino-Russian entente. Since he took charge of Russia in 2000, Putin has made a sustained effort to boost ties with China even as he explored a *modus vivendi* with the West. At the turn of the 2000s, a rising China was celebrating its special ties to the United States and Europe but found it useful to develop strong ties with Russia. Since his ascent to the top in Beijing, Xi Jinping has challenged the US primacy in Asia and doubled down on a strong partnership with Russia.

As their contradictions with the US began to deepen over the last decade, both Putin and Xi have elevated their bilateral collaboration into a comprehensive strategic partnership. On the eve of his invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Putin travelled to Beijing to proclaim an "alliance without limits". Since then, Putin and Xi have surprised the Western observers who had been arguing that Russia and China can't get too close to each other given the range of their competing regional geopolitical interests and the intensity of their stakes in economic engagement with the West. Yet, Putin and Xi have shown that they can put their divergences aside in building a new axis rooted in their shared interest in challenging the West. The latest summit has highlighted their efforts at political coordination and mutual support on their respective national priorities — Ukraine for Russia and Taiwan for China. Putin and Xi also denounced the US interventions in Europe and its effort to build new coalitions like the Quadrilateral Forum (in which India is a member along with Australia, Japan and the US). Putin and Xi also underlined their commitment to build a "multipolar world". They reaffirmed their ambition to counter American hegemony over the domain of international finance. If America has been pressing China to limit its cooperation with Russia, the usually wooden Xi thumbed his nose against Washington with a rare hug to Putin.

Delhi, like many Western chancelleries, had been betting on the thesis that Moscow and Beijing would not collaborate beyond a point. In a corollary to this thesis, Delhi has been hoping that Putin will not ignore India's concerns in drawing too close to a China that has emerged as India's principal external challenge. The time has come for Delhi to reexamine its Russia thesis and its corollary. Moscow today is more dependent than ever before on Beijing, especially since Putin burned its bridges with the West in invading Ukraine. There is no doubt that China is the senior partner in the relationship with Russia. Delhi has strong reasons to worry that Putin's support for China's positions in the Indo-Pacific, would undermine India's effort to build a 'multipolar Asia' and magnify India's security vulnerabilities in relation to China.

TWO SELF GOALS

Congress President Kharge's snub to Adhir, TMC's positioning games — INDIA bloc needs to remember the voter is watching

CONGRESS PRESIDENT MALLIKARJUN Kharge's public put-down of the West Bengal veteran of many political and electoral battles, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury — who, apart from being one of the few Congress leaders in West Bengal who still commands popular support, was leader of the Congress in the outgoing Lok Sabha — is a reminder of the party's infamous and imperious high command culture. While commenting on the relationship between Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress with the INDIA bloc, Kharge said that Chowdhury was "no one to make decisions" on the matter, which is up to the "high command". This was in response to Chowdhury saying, earlier, that Banerjee — who has chosen not to be part of INDIA in West Bengal, as a result of which the TMC is fighting alone in all the state's seats — is an "opportunistic leader" who is "hand in glove with BJP".

If Kharge's unseemly snub to a party colleague points to a Congress syndrome, Banerjee's changing positioning vis a vis the joint Opposition alliance points to an unresolved problem of the INDIA bloc in a high stakes battle against the BJP. From being a "founder member" of INDIA, the TMC all but left the alliance when it could not come to a seat-sharing arrangement in Bengal with the Congress and Left Front. Banerjee said last week that the TMC would provide "outside support" if a non-BJP government is formed at the Centre. A day later, she amended that to say that the TMC was "a part of INDIA". By all accounts, the bruising acrimony and violence that scars the ground-level competition in West Bengal, and parties' different political calculations — while the TMC is fighting to retain its dominance, it is a battle for survival for Congress and the Left — has made an Opposition alliance in the state all but impossible. But Bengal only illustrates a problem that the INDIA front faces nationally — the difficult navigation of conflicting interests internally. In the process, all too often, there is a risk of losing sight of the fact that the alliance is people-facing.

INDIA leaders should know that questions of "outside support" or joining the government only arise after June 4, if at all. For now, in the poll arena, many voters are asking: Who and what is the alternative to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the dominant BJP? The answer need not be one person, or one party. The Opposition could make the argument that it has several capable leaders. But it first needs to look less like a grouping that is so caught up with its internal jostling that it has forgotten that an election is on — and the voters are watching.

FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



SYED ATA HASNAIN

IF YOU STAND back and view the contrasts emerging from the post-election scenario in Pakistan and the ongoing electoral exercise in India, it proves helpful in drawing conclusions. More so if you leave aside everything else and just focus on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) where the first of the five phases of the general election ended a few days ago. The 38 per cent turnout of the Srinagar electorate was a definite surge from the abysmal 14.4 per cent in 2019. In 1996, it was 41 per cent, pointing to the downward spiral of terrorist and separatist violence after the initial spurt in 1989-90; in fact, the graph of foreign terrorists from Afghanistan had reached a low that year before rising sharply because of the presence of terrorists, mainly from Pakistan.

The Srinagar constituency comprises many of the known badlands of Budgam, Pulwama and Shopian where radical influence prevented electoral participation. From grenade blasts to the kidnapping of political workers, all kinds of deterrence were used to stop people from voting. This was particularly true for the parliamentary polls. In the case of assembly elections, panchayat and municipal polls, the reluctance to vote was always much lower, given its association with local issues and development. From 2008 onwards, however, it was in these very areas that stone-throwing became a popular pastime. Separatist sentiments brought hordes onto the streets to express their pushback against India. There is a sea change now, with tourism, the inflow of investment funds, rising youth aspirations and not even a single call for a "bandh". In the five years since the amendment to Article 370, a whole new chapter has begun in J&K.

Can it be sustained? Hopefully, the Srinagar narrative will play out in other constituencies, too. With Uri, Tangdhar, Machil and other areas which have traditionally been pro-India and returned figures of 70 per cent and more turnout in the past, Kashmir may well have an average 50

A story of J&K and PoK

Reading an upswing in voting in Kashmir and protests across the LOC

Hopefully, the Srinagar narrative will play out in other constituencies, too. With Uri, Tangdhar, Machil and other areas which have traditionally been pro-India and returned figures of 70 per cent and more turnout in the past, Kashmir may well have an average 50 per cent voter turnout for the first time in years. There has been no threat of violence or intimidation either. With Jammu expectedly bringing in good figures, democracy would be the winner, cementing a process begun long ago but given shape, substance, leadership and polish from August 5, 2019, onwards.

per cent voter turnout for the first time in years. There has been no threat of violence or intimidation either. With Jammu expectedly bringing in good figures, democracy would be the winner, cementing a process begun long ago but given shape, substance, leadership and polish from August 5, 2019, onwards.

Not everyone will agree with the deductions that good voting figures signal support for India. However, by not fielding its candidates in the Valley constituencies, the BJP, in many ways, has also signalled its willingness to work with some or all of the local parties, expressing a level of trust in them. The real test will, of course, be the assembly polls which could take place before the end of September. That said, I can hardly recall an incident-free parliamentary election in the Valley before this.

Poll time was one occasion when certain elements used to have a field day, targeting booths and people. The Army would invariably be chasing terrorists in south Kashmir. All these did not occur this time as the people exercised their franchise. That is the element of change, although one interpretation continues to harp on the notion that a large turnout is actually a push-back — it signifies a vote against abrogation. But this is not in keeping with local strategies exercised in the past.

There is change also occurring just across the LoC, in PoK. Economic stress can bring out the worst in a nation and Pakistan may consider itself fortunate that its weak civil society has, thus far, neither questioned the obviously rigged polls that led to the setting up of a government of convenience for the Pakistan Army, nor come out on the streets to protest the mismanagement of the national economy.

Protests in PoK that have broken out a few days ago, however, indicate a spark. As the past has shown, all "spring movements" invariably commence with a spark — recall the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in December 2010 which triggered Tunisia's

Jasmine Revolution. In PoK, the exorbitant electricity bills for a region which provides much of it to the national grid, and the skyrocketing price of wheat flour have hit the common man like never before. In a region where there are many families divided by the border, modern-day social media and communication lead to frequent information exchange. The stark difference in the quality of lives, the degree of freedom symbolised by the free and fair electoral exercise underway in J&K, opportunities due to rising figures of tourism, investments, and a quiet "feel good" factor that the people of J&K enjoy, have the potential of creating a storm in PoK, due to inevitable comparisons. The Pakistan government's relationship with PoK has always been uneasy and discriminatory. A temporary reprieve may have been achieved with some fire-fighting measures by the current government but it does not take long for a subjugated populace to erupt once it realises that a highly negative future looms for the people. The emotions are even stronger if a sunshine situation exists among the same people, separated artificially.

It may be unwise to speak of the obvious at this juncture. However, most pragmatists in India who know J&K well, have always expressed the belief that the dream of integrating J&K and PoK would eventually happen through the socio-economic route when the people of PoK themselves demand it. For the last few years, many luminaries in India have expressed a sentiment to see an integrated J&K, which includes PoK. Some years ago, I wrote that this would eventually happen but a peaceful re-integration based on the strength of India's democratic and developmental approach would obviously be the best option. Can the current electoral exercise and the assembly elections thereafter be the harbinger of the "PoK Spring"?

The writer is a former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps



KINJAL SAMPAT

THE RECENT BACK and forth over an order demanding timely payments to MSMEs has once again revealed the gaps in knowledge about the structure as well as the everyday functioning of these enterprises. A government order, clearly in the interest of MSMEs, has led to unforeseen repercussions, marginalising smaller enterprises in the short term. In this context, the importance of a systematic understanding of enterprises that fall within the MSME ambit cannot be overemphasised. A parliamentary panel was looking into separating the category of micro-enterprises from the larger MSME umbrella. For now, the standing committee has recommended a regular revision of the definition every five years.

In 2020, the definition of micro-enterprises was changed to include all under an annual turnover of Rs 5 crore as micro-enterprises, higher than the previous limit of Rs 50 lakh. This was meant to discourage firms from reporting lower revenues to retain the benefits and incentives extended to micro enterprises by the state. The new definition, however, masks a significant skew in the distribution.

According to the National Sample Survey Organisations (NSSO) Unorganised Enterprise Survey 2016, 95 per cent of the enterprises surveyed reported revenues under Rs 50 lakh per annum. Of them, 89 per cent reported an annual revenue of under Rs 12 lakh. In the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), more than 66 per cent of the enterprises reported an annual revenue of less than Rs 50 lakh, and of them, 45 per cent re-

THE CURSE OF SMALLNESS

Definition of MSMEs doesn't do justice to enterprises that have the lowest revenues

Notionally, for every nine informal workers, there is one formal worker in enterprises clocking annual revenues below Rs 12 lakh per annum. This ratio drops to a little under half for enterprises clocking revenue between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 1 crore per annum. Those at the top end of the micro-enterprise definition have one formal worker for every two informal workers. Inadvertently overlooking enterprises that have low revenues invisibilises their workers.

ported annual revenues of Rs 12 lakh. While it is common knowledge that more than 98 per cent of the MSMEs are "micro" in size, within this category, those reporting annual revenue of Rs 50 lakh and less (Category 1) vastly outnumber those reporting annual revenue of Rs 50 lakh to Rs 5 crore (Category 2). In the enterprise survey, only 2 per cent of the firms reported their revenue to be above Rs 50 lakh per annum. In the ASI, about 30 per cent of the enterprises reported their yearly revenue as above Rs 50 lakh per annum. Even in Prowess, a dataset exclusively for those firms that publish their annual reports thereby implying a greater degree of formality, only 40 per cent of enterprises in the category of below Rs 5 crore, reported a yearly revenue of less than Rs 50 lakh in 2016. No matter which way one dissects, all three measures of central tendency — mean, median and mode — tend to cluster at the extreme right quadrant of the micro category.

Since 2016, we do not have systematic data on enterprises that are not registered under the Factories Act and thereby captured under the ASI. The Udyam registration data categorises enterprises as micro, small and medium without revealing their annual revenue. But, as per the 2022 GST data, about 63 per cent of firms belong to the category of under Rs 50 lakh, and 30 per cent of total enterprises in the micro category belong to the under Rs 10 lakh annual revenue segment. The GST data corroborates the rightward skewness.

Units falling within a category ought to be more similar rather than dissimilar when

compared to units lying outside of the said category. In 2016, as per NSSO's 73rd round, less than two in 10 enterprises in Category 1 borrowed capital for their operations, whereas twice as many enterprises falling in Category 2 operated with borrowed capital. The median borrowings of enterprises in Category 1 was about Rs 0.57 crore a year whereas the median borrowings in Category 2 were about Rs 8 crore.

The formality of the workers employed shares a direct relationship with the size of the enterprise. As the size of the revenue increases so does the number of formal workers to informal workers. Notionally, for every nine informal workers there is one formal worker in enterprises clocking annual revenues below Rs 12 lakh per annum. This ratio drops to a little under half for enterprises clocking revenue between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 1 crore. Those at the top end of the micro-enterprise category have one formal worker for every two informal workers. Inadvertently overlooking enterprises that have low revenues invisibilises their workers.

The weakened understanding of how the largest category of enterprises operate in our economy makes it difficult to design effective interventions. Reviewing the category of micro-enterprises and further classifying enterprises within it is needed to reduce the opacity created by new definitions and the lack of systematic data.

The writer is senior researcher, Indian Institute of Human Settlements (IIHS), Bengaluru

MAY 20, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

20 DIE IN ARSON

TWENTY PEOPLE WERE burnt alive when a mob set fire to a house on the outskirts of Bhiwandi town as the second day of violence in Bombay and in neighbouring Thane district claimed 57 lives, taking the toll to 67. The arson, looting and killings continued unabated in Bhiwandi and other areas despite the presence of the Army and paramilitary forces. All of the arson victims had taken shelter in the building following violence in the town. The police shot dead a man at the scene of the carnage.

robbed a bank in the Amritsar district, while the police claimed success in solving some cases of terrorist crime in the state. A Nihang was shot dead in Bhatinda. A relative has been arrested and a case registered. The Ferozepur police have arrested 16 persons during the last fortnight and 16 cases have been registered under the Arms Act.

ASIAD HOMES UNSOLD

THE SALE OF Asian Games Village flats may be bogged down in litigation, as the contractors who had built these flats have requested the Lt-Governor, P G Gava, to stay the sale and allotment of these flats till their pending bills were cleared. In a letter to the Lt-Governor, the DDA Builders Association

has urged for an urgent interview to put the facts before him. The association general secretary, R K Bahl, said the pending bills had not been cleared in a majority of cases on the plea of "bad quality".

THE MISSING MANGOES

THE DELICIOUS DUSSERI mangoes of Uttar Pradesh seem to be turning "sour" for both the politicians and the horticultural scientists. While the mango crop failure has become a major poll issue in the Malhabad by-election, scientists are still not sure as to what caused the loss of fruit. The unprecedented fruit drop immediately after flowering in February is being attributed to a sudden fall in temperature.



PUNJAB LAW & ORDER

TERRORISTS FIRED AT a police patrol and

9 THE IDEAS PAGE

House is the key

Providing workers housing could help empower labour force and unlock the country's manufacturing ambitions



SANDEEP BEDI AND NARAYAN RAMACHANDRAN

THERE IS A Hindi proverb, "Chhoti chabi bada tala khol sakti hai" (a small key can open a big lock). This may hold some lessons when it comes to big-picture thinking on a particular reform agenda that has recently captured policymakers' attention: Transforming India's manufacturing sector.

The ambitions are clear — to grow India's economy to \$10 trillion by 2035, and with it, grow manufacturing's share from 15 per cent of GDP to 25 per cent. The goal of this shift is to increase the employment elasticity of growth, which is to provide greater employment per unit of output. This implies a four-fold growth in manufacturing.

With the serendipitous opportunity offered by China post-Covid, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has not spared any effort. Everyday, we see announcements related to Production Linked Incentives (PLIs) and Make in India, particularly for focus sectors like electronics and semiconductors.

Before the country went to elections, the government had asked all ministries to prepare a 100-day plan so that it may hit the road running. States are not far behind in engaging on this, rolling out the red carpet to large-scale manufacturers like Foxconn, Micron, and Tata, and creating critical mass in specific industries like the rapidly emerging assembly and packaging industry in Sriperumbudur and the Electric Vehicle hub at Hosur. There is increasing talk of football-field-sized mega factories dotting the industrial landscape across India, the first few of which have already been established.

Amidst the fervent debates over fiscal incentives and land-related policies, there exists a narrative often overlooked. Picture this: A young factory worker, his hands calloused from years of labour, his dreams weighed down by the relentless grind of productivity quotas. This worker is not merely a cog in the machinery of industry; he personifies the essence of the third factor of production — labour. While attention is lavished upon capital and land, his plight remains shrouded in the shadows of neglect. The key to unlocking India's manufacturing prowess lies not only in setting the right policies but also in the empowerment of its workforce.

One way to enable this empowerment is through safe, on-premises or factory-adjacent workers' accommodation. This will range from housing for managers and supervisory personnel to dormitories for entry-level workers. It has the power to address other aspects related to skilling, productivity, and attrition as well.

Speaking recently to *The Economist*, Josh Foulger, a pioneer in setting up assembly and packaging plants for many multinational firms said, "Women only or women majority factories can create a virtuous cycle of both worker and women's empowerment." Recognising



CR Sasikumar

the importance of this, Apple, which manufactures its iPhones directly through Foxconn International in India, has committed in principle to putting up 78,000 units for its assembly workers.

Currently, most of India's factories are sourcing their workforce from ad hoc accommodation in cities and peripheral areas. This arrangement is fraught with challenges: Our study of select factories around Bengaluru showed that workers travel by bus for approximately two hours each way to the factory. This has a cost as well as a productivity problem — costing more than Rs 5,000 per worker per month, and leaving workers exhausted even before they begin their shift.

There are lessons to be learnt from other countries that have solved this issue, each in their own way. China is famous for its *in situ* housing for workers, including mega-factories like the Foxconn one in Guangzhou, which has dormitories for over 3,00,000 workers. Clearly, scale is important, but too big a scale may also pose some challenges like they did for China during Covid. It is critical to recognise what can work in a democracy like India and ensure that the right conditions are enabled. Korean parallels may be more suitable for us, with their stringent labour laws and worker-friendly policies.

In post-Independence India, we have examples both among public sector undertakings like Bhilai, as well as in the private sector (Tata Steel Jamshedpur) where housing and community were a central aspect to the establishment of large-scale factories. The circumstances today are different and there are more choices in the operating mechanics, but the central idea is still the same: Addressing the issue of workers' accommodation is crucial, in both a practical and moral sense, to our desire to ignite large-scale manufacturing in India.

Are there specific policy implications of adding workers' accommodation to the policy framework for manufacturing? Yes.

Amidst the fervent debates over fiscal incentives and land-related policies, there exists a narrative often overlooked. Picture this: A young factory worker, his hands calloused from years of labour, his dreams weighed down by the relentless grind of productivity quotas. This worker is not merely a cog in the machinery of industry; he personifies the essence of the third factor of production — labour. While attention is lavished upon capital and land, his plight remains shrouded in the shadows of neglect. The key to unlocking India's manufacturing prowess lies not only in setting the right policies but also in the empowerment of its workforce.

First, land allotment must extend beyond factory construction to include workers' accommodation. This will require tweaks in industrial land allocation regulation at the state level, including flexibility in the operating arrangements for this enabling infrastructure — built either by the state government, or run by the company itself, and, better still, by specialised institutions that focus on creating and/or managing workers' housing assets. This is already happening in student housing — with investors and operators having emerged over the past decade because the market opportunity and unit economics are attractive.

Second, the recognition that this is not just a state government issue. The Union government's role is to catalyse this enabling infrastructure by offering the right tax incentives like GST reduction and other fiscal incentives for investments into workers' accommodation. Priority sector tagging for the construction finance of this infrastructure, and collaborative financing through vehicles like the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) for credible projects in this space will add further impetus.

Even after these steps are taken, it will require leadership from private sector entities to establish top-notch workers' accommodation. Economic factors will steer this enlightened self-interest: Reduced transportation expenses, heightened productivity, enhanced training capabilities, mitigation in workforce attrition, and lower carbon footprint.

This triangular leadership between the Centre, state and the private sector firms can help deliver on this important agenda. The "chhoti chabi" of workers' accommodation could well be the key that unlocks the *bada tala* of India's manufacturing ambitions. It deserves to be a part of the 100-day plan for the new government.

Bedi is CEO and Ramachandran is an advisory board member of Janaadhar

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"More needs to be done to strengthen sanctions and deny Mr. Putin the resources to carry on the war. Like so many wars throughout history, this one has turned into a contest of smarts and stamina, which Ukraine and the West cannot afford to lose." — THE WASHINGTON POST

BJP's many layered appeal

After a focus on consolidating its Hindutva voter base, its campaign is addressing a new constituency



HILAL AHMED

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's comments that he does not do "Hindu-Muslim" because of his enduring commitment to the "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vishwas" policy and that he has a great faith in the truest form of secularism has provoked an interesting debate. A section of political commentators has argued that these comments reflect Modi's emotional side and his caring attitude towards all sections of society, including Muslims. According to the critical view, on the other hand, the statements made by the PM in this interview are entirely contradictory to what he has said in a series of electoral speeches. This criticism draws its legitimacy from the fact that the second-level BJP leadership has been defending the Prime Minister's previous controversial remarks. They do not hesitate to describe the Opposition, especially the Congress party, as an anti-Hindu entity.

The scope of this media-driven debate on BJP's Muslim outreach should be expanded to analyse the possible electoral implications of Modi's recent statements. For that reason, the BJP's 2024 electoral campaign must be seen in its entirety: The promises made in the Sankalp Patra (manifesto), the identification of core voters and the strategic ways to mobilise them in favour of BJP candidates at the constituency level. The campaign has been organised in such a way that each facet of it continues to revolve around the figure of Modi. For instance, electoral promises given in the Sankalp Patra are described as "Modi ki Guarantee"; the identified voters are called "Modi ka Parivar"; and Modi is recognised as the chief campaigner in virtually every state.

It is worth noting here that the Sankalp Patra gives more emphasis to Modi-centric welfare and underplays the Hindutva agenda. Yet, it remains silent on the question of Muslim backwardness. Even the slogan "Sabka Saath..." is used very carefully to avoid any reference to Muslim communities. This strategic omission is interesting. For almost three years, the BJP has been actively campaigning to emphasise the plight of Pasmanda Muslims. In fact, a strong impression was created that the party would use the Pasmanda outreach to expand its electoral support, especially in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

The BJP establishment became over-conscious just before the first phase of the election. Instead of highlighting Modi's welfare or "guarantees", the party leadership decided to take up the Congress manifesto as a reference point. The manifesto was criticised for promoting separatism and Muslim appeasement. It was asserted that Congress will restructure the affirmative action framework to provide reservation to Muslims on religious grounds. The entire campaign of the BJP eventually became Muslim-centric. The Prime Minister's interview, in this sense, certainly goes against this style of electioneering.

The writer is associate professor, CSDS

A mob on campus

US university protests show what happens when a minority dictates the agenda



BALBIR PUNJ

ONE CAN'T AGREE with Bhaskar Chakravorti ('Don't write off campuses', IE, May 1) more, when he says "While we can legitimately worry about the state of American universities, I have confidence in their resilience."

There is little doubt that US universities, inspired by ideas of pluralism, liberty and democracy (as opposed to a Left-fascist paradigm) will soon bounce back to their former glory. The fabled institutions have survived much worse in the past, particularly after the Vietnam War in the 1960s, and eventually emerged unscathed as centres of academic excellence and free thinking. However, the last line of the article — "With a Trump return, campus protestors will have much more to protest about" — reveals the trigger responsible for the present crisis. It is this trigger that has thrown several American and European universities into chaos and ignited sporadic bushfires that continue to singe several parts of the world, including India.

Donald Trump's return to the US presidency is possible only if the American electorate approves of him and his policies. He would, of course, be perfectly within his rights to act on the mandate received. If he doesn't, he would be rightly accused of cheating his mandate. His critics and detractors too have a right to criticise or censure him, as per their understanding of the issues involved. That's what democracy is all about.

However, the problem arises when a small, organised and determined minority tries to hijack the mandate and seeks to disenfranchise the majority through strong-arm tactics. This reduces democratic processes to

a farce. For want of a better monicker, this toxic minority can be termed "wokes", an expression used by the US House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson in the present context.

This vocal minority usually draws heavily from the archaic leftist lexicon to build its narratives and suffers from a sense of entitlement. It takes a stand on an issue of public importance and holds a gun to the establishment's head. Its war cry is submit or perish. Its toolkit includes prolonged sit-ins, selective violence, mob action, disruption of the normal life of other citizens, intimidation and bullying — all under the guise of "peaceful protest".

In such circumstances, the state, pushed to a corner, resorts to coercion to contain the anarchic situation. The agitators then play the victim card. That's what happened in India during the anti-CAA, NRC and farmers' protests, and it is happening in the US now.

The current protests in the US and Europe were started by students against the American government's support of Israel in its war against Hamas, a dreaded terror outfit. To begin with, the ostensible demand was that colleges cut their financial ties to Israel and divest from companies that are "enabling" the deadly Gaza conflict. Soon, the pro-Palestinian demonstrations and sit-ins were reeking of anti-semitism. Scores of Jewish students have said on camera that they are feeling insecure and are afraid to enter campuses.

"We are Hamas" is reportedly a chant and placards saying "Al-Qassam's next targets" have been spotted. Al-Qassam is the armed wing of Hamas. Footage of loud threats that the October 7 attacks on Israel will be re-

peated, not once, not twice, not a hundred but ten thousand times, has gone viral.

What does the ongoing mayhem on the American university campus mean in practice? Four things.

One, shorn of hyperbole, the agitators — students and non-students — are seeking to encroach on the realm of both the elected government and universities. The mob, accountable to no one, wants to appropriate the universities' right to manage their finances. It's also seeking to hijack US foreign policy, which is essentially the domain of the US president and legislature, both democratically elected.

Two, the American establishment will likely give in to this blackmail. The National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said President Joe Biden believes students occupying an academic building is "absolutely the wrong approach," and "not an example of peaceful protest". Trump is even more harsh on the protestors. According to media reports, he said, "To every college president, I say remove the encampments immediately... vanquish the radicals and take back our campuses for all of the normal students who want a safe place from which to learn."

The ruthless crackdown on the agitators matches the American establishment's words. In less than two weeks, thousands of students have been arrested, suspended, put on probation and, in some cases, expelled from the institutions they were enrolled in.

Some of the videos (in circulation on social media) of the demonstration are graphic, revealing brutal police action against the agitating students and even senior faculty

members. Among those arrested at Washington University was presidential hopeful, Jill Stein, of the Green Party, who accused the police of resorting to aggressive tactics that provoked the sort of trouble they are meant to quell.

Three, the American establishment has double standards. When India faced similar sponsored protests against CAA, NRC and the blockade of national highways for months together in the name of "farmers protests", the US was pontificating to India on respecting dissent and democratic norms. That too when India had hardly used any force against the agitators. In contrast, the US police has used excessive force, even in dealing with many of the student groups, who were peaceful, and merely squatting on the university lawns.

Four, in the new emerging multi-polar world, wokes too are a powerful pole, capable of paralysing functioning democracies and rendering legislatures redundant. There are loaded moneybags to fund such dubious operations to refashion nations and societies as per their playbook, sans any public mandate, accountability and legitimacy.

There are serious allegations in the American media that many outsiders have infiltrated the students' protests, and the usual suspect, George Soros, at least partly funds the messy show. This scenario would surely resonate with many in India who have suffered Shaheen Bagh and months-long stand-off at the Singhu border.

Punj is the author of the recently published, *Tryst with Ayodhya: Decolonisation of India*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A SIMPLE TAX

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Ease the compliance' (IE, May 18). Revenues from GST crossed the Rs 2 lakh crore mark for the first time in April. The Finance Minister has termed last month's revenues a "landmark", attributing them to a strong economy and efficient collections. This should put to rest the Centre's concerns from a few years ago that returns from the GST regime, now 82 months old, had been underwhelming. For the next government, the easy part would be to upgrade revenue targets in the annual budget. The more critical imperative is to plan and execute the expansion of the GST net, and expedite the long-awaited reboot of its complex rate structure to make it a simple tax for consumers and investors.

Khokan Das, Kolkata

DAMAGING RHETORIC

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'PoK will be in India within 6 months of Modi as PM again: Yogi' (IE, May 19). Indian ruling party leaders who have a habit of using volatile foreign policy issues to score domestic brownie points don't realise that our nuclear-armed neighbours might take these theatrics seriously. It bears repeating that within a year of Home Minister Amit Shah's statement on

Aksai Chin in 2019, the Chinese army was making aggressive moves into the territory. We have, time and again, allowed rhetoric to subvert diplomacy.

SS Paul, Nadia

THE VOTERS' CHOICE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Please choose wisely' (IE, May 18). The article emphasises the importance of choosing the right candidate for a better future. It argues that the BJP's track record of governance in the last 10 years has been great enough to merit another term. Why then are BJP spokespersons, including the prime minister, playing the Hindu-Muslim card in their campaigns? There is evident anti-incumbency — Choose wisely, indeed.

Arun Francis, New Delhi

TO DO BETTER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Crash in Ghatkopar' (IE, May 18). That it took the death of 18 innocents to wake up the BMC is a thing of shame. This bill-board is not an exception. Very few hoardings in Mumbai are legal. The MCD in Delhi and other civic bodies in other cities should also review bill-boards in their respective cities to make sure they are up to code.

Bal Govind, Noida

Forest guard shot dead by poachers in Sunderbans, FIR registered

ATRI MITRA
KOLKATA, MAY 19

A FOREST GUARD was shot dead by poachers during patrolling at Netadhopani camp, Sunderban, on Saturday evening, police said on Sunday. Police identified the deceased as Amalendu Halder (59), who hailed from Raidighi, Sundarban.

Sources in the forest department said that on Saturday evening, a team of forest guards was patrolling near Netadhopani camp. Around 10 pm, they spotted a group of poachers trying to kill deer in the forest area. When they tried to accost the poachers, the group opened fire at the forest guards and Halder was injured. Police said that some of the poachers also attacked Halder with a sharp weapon before fleeing.

The forest department said in a statement, "On May 18, around 10 pm, a team of forest personnel who were patrolling on a boat in Gosaba 1 compartment, came across a group of 10-15 poachers, who were apparently from Bangladesh. The team confronted them. However, the poachers attacked the forest staff..."

The statement added, "The staff jumped into water to save themselves. Three of them survived the attack but one forest guard, Amalendu Halder, died. Halder's body was found in Morabani khal, Gosaba 1 compartment, near the site of the incident. He had suffered head injuries. An FIR has been registered. Massive mobilisation of forest department staff has been done to apprehend the culprits, who are thought to be in Indian waters. Senior officers are in the field."

2 killed as car hits bike: Minor driver told to write essay on mishap by court

CHANDAN HAYGUNDE
PUNE, MAY 19

A SPEEDING luxury car without number plates knocked down a motorcycle, killing two youngsters at Kalyani Nagar junction in Yerwada in the early hours of Sunday.

Police identified the deceased as Aneesh Awadhya (24) and Ashwini Koshta (24), both IT engineers hailing from Madhya Pradesh and currently residing in Pune. Awadhya's friend Akib Mulla (24) lodged a complaint with the Yerwada police station, based on which an FIR was registered.

Police detained a minor boy, aged 17 and a half years, who was allegedly driving the car. A probe was underway to confirm whether he was driving under the influence of alcohol. His blood samples were taken for medical examination. Police sources said the accused is from a prominent Pune realtor's family.

Amitesh Kumar, Commissioner of Pune city police, said the accused in this case was a minor and booked for culpable homicide as per provisions of Section 304 of the Indian Penal Code. Police have also involved other sections of the IPC and the Motor Vehicle Act against him.

"The father of the accused and the bar which served liquor to the juvenile/accused are being proceeded against under Section 75 and 77 of the Juvenile Justice Act," the police commissioner said.

A probe revealed the accused boy had recently passed his Class 12 exams and had gone out for a party with his friends. They went to a bar and a pub in Mundhwa area, where he was



The car involved in the accident in Yerwada Sunday. Express

suspected to have consumed liquor. After this, he headed home in his car.

Police said the boy was driving the Porsche at a high speed. He allegedly lost control and the car rammmed a motorcycle at Kalyani Nagar junction around 2.30 am, killing Aneesh and his friend Ashwini, who was riding pillion. Sources said that local residents thrashed the driver.

After receiving information, a police team arrived at the spot and detained the driver. Police said Aneesh, a resident of the Airport area, and Ashwini, who stayed in Kharadi, were out for a party with their friends in Kalyani Nagar when the accident took place.

A senior police officer said the two victims had been working at an IT company in Pune, but Ashwini was looking for a new job. After the party, the two headed home on a motorcycle, but were hit by the Porsche car.

Police said they have confirmed that the pubs the deceased and accused visited had closed in time at 1.30 pm. However, it is illegal for minors to be served alcohol. Police said a probe was on to find out details of the Porsche car and why it had

no number plates.

Police produced the accused boy before the holiday court in Pune Sunday.

Police sought his custody and permission to try the accused as an adult, but the court refused and granted bail to the accused, said additional commissioner of police Manoj Patil.

Defence lawyer advocate Prashan Patil said the court granted bail to his client (the minor boy) under certain conditions. When asked about it, Patil said the court told the accused to "work with traffic police of Yerwada for 15 days" and "write an essay on accident".

As per the bail conditions, the accused has been directed to undergo treatment from a doctor that can help him quit drinking and "take psychiatric counselling" and submit the report to the court, advocate Patil said.

"We have complete faith in the investigation and shall continue to cooperate with the police. My client is duty bound to follow the stringent conditions of the court. We shall continue to attend the proceedings and wait for the outcome of the investigation," said advocate Patil.

Residents say accident result of extended pub timings

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS
PUNE, MAY 19

RESIDENTS OF Kalyani Nagar and Koregaon Park pointed out that over the last 2 years or so, they have repeatedly raised the problem of pubs and restaurants in these areas operating for extended hours but to no avail.

The lack of concrete action against them, they said, had resulted in the horrific death of Anis Dudiya and Ashwini Costa, who were mowed down by a luxury car Sunday morning.

On Sunday evening, residents of Kalyani Nagar organised a candle light vigil in memory of the deceased. Aditya Patil, a resident of Kalyani Nagar, said the accident was a direct result of the "pub culture" that had become a nuisance in the area.

"Prior to the pandemic, pubs and other commercial establishments used to adhere to decent timings, but given the economic losses they faced, it was decided to extend timings. But for residents this has created troubles," he said.

Due to the extended hours, the pubs operate till 1.30 am. Then the revellers "play loud music, shout, honk - often people who are returning late from work have been heckled by them", he said.

Rohan Desai, a resident, said they have raised concerns about this with their local mohalla committee and with the police.

Green credits: Govt nod to 12 projects, 24 under consideration

NIKHIL GHANEKAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 19

THE CENTRE has approved 12 greening projects under the Green Credit Program (GCP), which was notified last year as a market-based mechanism designed to incentivize voluntary environmental actions across diverse sectors, officials aware of the development said.

Estimates of 24 plans submitted by different state forest departments are under consideration, the officials said.

The government has been pushing the public-sector undertakings (PSUs) to take a lead in registering for the programme, especially in mining heavy states, and is developing guidelines for third-party verification of projects under the scheme, sources added.

The GCP, notified on October 13, 2023, seeks voluntary participation in "environmental positive actions" such as afforestation, water conservation, waste management among others from PSUs, private industries, non-profits and individuals. The GCP's governance framework is supported by an inter-ministerial Steering Committee, and The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun, which serves as GCP administrator, responsible for programme implementation, management, monitoring, and operation.

Those investing in these initiatives will earn green credits in return which they can trade on a

EXPLAINED Verification mechanism

THE INDIAN Council of Forestry Research and Education is working on evolving a mechanism for third-party verification of greening projects. The council is looking at a timeline of another month to finalise a draft on third-party verification and if stakeholders who register under the scheme could be included in the monitoring panel.

platform. The greening activities will happen on degraded land parcels and state forest departments have identified over 10,000 hectares of degraded land so far.

Over the past few months, the Environment Ministry has held meetings with the PSUs to push for registration under the initiative, with a special focus initially on states such as Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, where large forested areas have been diverted for mining.

Those interested in undertaking plantations have to first register on a government portal and the state departments then identify plots. A plantation plan and cost estimate are submitted to ICFRE, which clears final proposal. ICFRE is working on evolving

a mechanism for third-party verification of greening projects, sources from the government body said. "We are looking at a timeline of another month to finalise a draft on third-party verification. We are also deliberating on whether stakeholders who register under the scheme should be included in the monitoring committee," the source said.

Under the green credit rules, the ICFRE can deem an entity a 'designated agency' to carry out verification of activities executed under the programme. Discussions are also underway on evolving a definite mechanism on linking the green credits to the compensatory afforestation compliance of industries, a senior government official said.

The GCP has provided for exchanging the credits meeting compliance of compensatory afforestation. This refers to the legally mandated afforestation that industries and government agencies have to undertake on non-forest land equivalent to the size of forests that are felled.

Speaking on registration seen under the GCP so far, senior forest department officials from Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh said that PSUs such as the NTPC have registered for the greening programme in all three states. Other PSUs which have registered in these states include Western Coalfields Ltd and Power Grid Corporation of India in Maharashtra, South Eastern Coalfields Ltd and Indian Oil in Chhattisgarh and Coal India in MP.

DGP suspended five days after murder of woman in Hubballi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
HUBBALLI, MAY 19

THE DEPUTY Commissioner of Police of Hubballi-Dharwad M Rajeev has been suspended in connection with the Anjali Ambigera murder case, top police sources said on Sunday.

Anjali (20) was stabbed to death on May 15 allegedly by her neighbour Girish Sawant (23) for declining his love proposal.

This incident came close on the heels of the Neha Hiremath murder case. Neha (23), the daughter of a Congress councillor, was stabbed to death by her former classmate Fayaz Khodunaik on her college campus in Hubballi on April 18.

Rajeev was the DCP of Law and Order of Hubballi-Dharwad city.

A week before the murder, Anjali's mother had complained to the police against Girish, alleg-

ing that he was pestering her, but no action was taken.

Cracking the whip, the Commissioner of Police of Hubballi-Dharwad suspended the DCP.

Following the tense atmosphere prevailing in the city over the incident, Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) R Hitendra on Sunday met the family members of the Neha Hiremath and Anjali Ambigera.

Meanwhile, Anjali's sister Yashoda Ambigera attempted suicide, their grandmother Gangamma Ambigera has said. Speaking to reporters on Sunday, Gangamma said Yashoda consumed phenyl as she was missing her sister.

"Yashodha was upset that her sister was not getting justice and her murderer was leading a comfortable life and is getting good treatment in a hospital. So, she consumed it (phenyl). She is okay now," Gangamma said.

Top court to hear plea against new penal laws today

New Delhi: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear 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 Bills - the Bharatiya Nyaya (Second) Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha (Second) Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya (Second) Bill. President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent on December 25.

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. It sought court directions for constitution of an expert committee that will assess viability of the new laws.

"The new criminal laws are far more draconian and establish a police state in reality," the plea has said. PTI



PAYING TRIBUTE

President Droupadi Murmu pays tribute to former President Neelam Sanjiva Reddy on his birth anniversary, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Sunday. ANI

Kerala man held over role in human trafficking for organ harvesting

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 19

ERNAKULAM RURAL police in Kerala have arrested a person in connection with an international human trafficking racket for organ harvesting.

Police said the suspect, Sabith Nasar, 30, a native of Valapad in Thrissur, was taken into custody

from Kochi international airport Saturday when he was returning from Iran via Kuwait. Police said they have found some evidence from his phone.

He was detained by the officials of the Bureau of Immigration on suspicion that he was part of a racket engaged in trafficking gullible persons for harvesting organs for transplantation. He was later arrested under section IPC

370 (human trafficking) and section 19 (commercial dealings with human organs) of Transplantation of Human Organs Act.

Ernakulam rural SP Vaibhav Saxena said police have started a probe. "Prima facie we understand people have been lured by making them believe that donating organs after accepting remuneration was legal... We have digital evidence," said the SP.

Teacher booked for thrashing boy in UP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BALLIA, MAY 19

A TEACHER of a private school here has been booked for allegedly thrashing a Class 10 student, leading to partial loss of hearing, the police said on Sunday.

The incident took place on

May 13 in the school under the Ubhaon police station limits, they added.

The father of the 14-year-old student lodged a complaint alleging his son was beaten up by his maths teacher Raghavendra after he found the boy talking during class. Vipin Singh, SHO of Ubhaon police station said,

The complainant added that his son's right eardrum has burst due to the injury.

Based on the complaint, a case under sections 323 (voluntarily causing hurt) and 325 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt) of the IPC was registered against the accused teacher Saturday, the police said.

Jharkhand's lone CPI (ML) candidate eyes RJD votes to upset BJP

ABHISHEK ANGAD
KODARMA, MAY 19

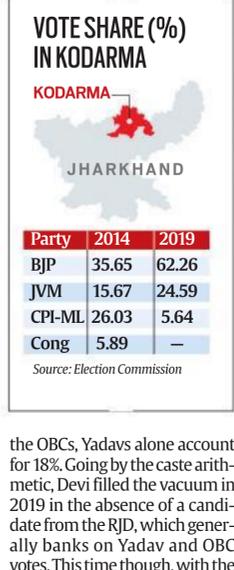
"HAMARA NAAM kis liye suna hai? Jhooth bolne wala nahin, na? Hum logon ke liye bhid jaane wale hain, chaha sarkar koi rahe, CM, PM koi rahe (Why have you heard my name? Not for telling lies, right? I fight for the people irrespective of the government and whoever is the CM or PM)."

This is the main election plank of 46-year-old Vinod Singh, the CPI (M-L) Liberation candidate, a Rajput, in the Kodarma LS constituency that votes on Monday. The sitting MLA from the Bagodar Assembly seat in Kodarma, Singh has cultivated a reputation for "raising the issues of the poor and marginalised classes" in Jharkhand Assembly. Before his win in Bagodar poll in 2019, he lost in 2014, with his

previous wins here coming in 2009 and 2005.

Singh entered electoral politics after his father and firebrand CPI (ML) Liberation leader Mahendra Singh was killed allegedly by Maoists in 2005. "Probably I would have been a professor. My father never wanted me to join electoral politics, but my three sisters and I were politically aware. His death did not surprise me, since he had irked the power centres for fighting for the poor," Singh said of his father, who represented Bagodar twice as MLA.

In this Lok Sabha contest, he is hoping to convince voters in the five other Assembly segments in Kodarma in his fight against BJP heavyweight Annapurna Devi, the sitting Kodarma MP and a Union MoS for Education. Sources in the party say that almost 45% of the constituency's population belongs to OBC communities. Of



the OBCs, Yadavs alone account for 18%. Going by the caste arithmetic, Devi filled the vacuum in 2019 in the absence of a candidate from the RJD, which generally banks on Yadav and OBC votes. This time though, with the

Countering PM Narendra Modi's "mangalsutra" comment, Yadav says the 5 lakh jobs his former government generated in Bihar helped many get married. "Iska matlab hua ki hum mangalsutra diye hain (This means we have given mangalsutra)," he says to loud cheers from the crowd, especially women.

Once the rally ends, Singh readily obliges the selfie requests. An hour and a half later, Singh reaches the nearby Nayi Tand village. He says though he is visiting the village for the first time, people there know about his work.

Despite being in the coalition government with jailed former CM Hemant Soren's JMM, Singh has cornered Soren several times in the Assembly with questions on hunger-related deaths, alleged police repression, compensation for the deaths of migrant labourers, and joblessness, among other issues. In 2013, after Singh was jailed for three days in a case of mistaken identity, he made it a

point to raise the issue of the condition of prison inmates in the Assembly. In 2022, Singh was chosen as the best legislator by the Jharkhand Assembly.

"One of the biggest problems in the area is the death of migrant labourers in other states and countries," Singh says, adding, "In the last 15 days of my campaign, 15 people have died and I have been coordinating with the families and the authorities... I elected, I will fight for them."

A common sentiment among Dalit voters Singh speaks to is the fear that the Constitution, their icon's contribution to the country, is under threat from the Modi government, besides the usual problems of poor infrastructure and inadequate amenities. At 9.30 pm, Singh heads to Simaria village for his last rally of the day. Addressing the crowd in the local dialect, Singh says as the BJP boasts about "abki baar, 400 paar", locals aren't even earning Rs 400 a day.

In MP, Dalit couple 'tied to pole, beaten, garlanded with shoes'

ANAND MOHAN J
BHOPAL, MAY 19

AN ELDERLY Dalit couple were allegedly tied to a pole, beaten up, and garlanded with shoes by several men at a village in Madhya Pradesh's Ashok Nagar district Friday.

According to police, the couple's son had been involved in a sexual harassment case a few months ago. They said that angry members of the victim's family were suspected to be behind the couple's assault.

Sub-divisional police officer (Mungaoli) Sanam B Khan told *The Indian Express*, "The couple's son was involved in a molestation incident a few months ago and a case was registered against him. The woman's family members were angry over the incident and assaulted the couple. We are investigating the allegations raised by the couple. An FIR has been registered against 10 persons."

Police said the couple had left their village, Kilora under Mungaoli police station limits, after the harassment incident, and had returned only Friday. Upon their return, the accused tied the 65-year-old man and his 60-year-old wife

to a pole, beat them up and made them wear garlands of shoes, the couple alleged.

Speaking to reporters at the local district hospital, the man said, "We had gone out of the village to do labour work. But when we returned to our home, around 10-12 people barged into our house, beat us up and tied us with ropes and took us to their house."

"There they tied us to a pole, first beat us up, and then made us wear a garland of shoes and slippers... Later, the information about the incident was given to the police after which the police came and rescued us," the man said.

The couple alleged that the accused "also destroyed" the crops they had sown in their 5-6 bigha land. "Apart from this, they also broke the lock and completely vandalised whatever belongings were kept in the house," the man alleged.

Following a complaint by the woman, police Saturday lodged a case against 10 persons under IPC sections 147 (rioting), 149 (unlawful assembly), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 294 (obscene act) and 506 (criminal intimidation) as well as provisions of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Southwest monsoon makes onset over Nicobar islands: IMD

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOCHI, MAY 19

THE SOUTHWEST monsoon has advanced into southern Bay of Bengal, Nicobar islands, south Andaman Sea on Sunday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The monsoon has made an on-time advance also over Maldives and Comorin areas, the Met department added. In 2023, the Southwest monsoon onset over the South Andaman Sea was realised on May 19. The IMD follows certain criteria at the time of considering monsoon advancement and onset. As per IMD, the strength of westerly winds measured in the lower tropospheric levels (upto 3 km) increased and was about 20 knots.

The southwesterly winds prevailed up to the height of 4.5 km above the mean sea level over the

region. There was an increase in cloudiness and the Outgoing Longwave Radiation (OLR) over the area was less than 200 watts per sq metre.

"There has been widespread rainfall over the Nicobar Islands during the past 24 hours. Considering all the above satisfied conditions, Southwest Monsoon has advanced into some parts of Maldives and Comorin area, some parts of South Bay of Bengal, Nicobar Islands and South Andaman Sea," the IMD said.

The IMD has forecast that the monsoon will advance over Kerala on May 31.

According to the rainfall prediction, India's seasonal rainfall is expected to be 106 per cent of the Log Period Average (880mm for 1971 - 2020 average).

The Met department has issued a 'yellow' warning over Andaman Nicobar islands till May 22.

Cereal saviours: Punjab-Haryana and India's food security

HARISH DAMODARAN
 NEW DELHI, MAY 19

THE EL Niño-induced decline in agricultural output has underscored the importance of Punjab and Haryana to India's food security.

The two states have together accounted for 75.5% of the total wheat procured for the central foodgrain pool in the current marketing season. Government agencies have so far bought 25.5 million tonnes (mt) of the 2023-24 winter-sown crop harvested from late-March. Of that, 12.2 mt has come from Punjab and Haryana. Their combined share is the highest since the 75.8% of 2015-16.

Situation in wheat...

Till the mid-2000s, Punjab and Haryana contributed 90% or more of the wheat in the public distribution system (PDS) and other government programmes. By the early 2010s, as the cultivation of high-yielding varieties spread to other states and those governments too established infrastructure to buy grain at minimum support prices (MSP), this share fell to around 65%.

In the bumper production years of 2019-20 and 2020-21, when wheat procurement hit record levels of 39-43.3 mt, the share of Punjab and Haryana fell to a little over 50%. Madhya

Pradesh emerged as the No. 1 wheat procurer in 2019-20, overtaking Punjab (Table 1).

But this has changed in the last three years, in which production has suffered due to climate shocks. Unseasonal heat in March 2022 and heavy rain in March 2023 hit the crop in its final grain-formation and filling stage.

An unusually warm November-December 2023 has impacted wheat yields this year, particularly in central India. The delayed arrival of winter, attributed to El Niño, resulted in premature initiation of flowering, and the crop's vegetative growth phase was cut short. The effect was felt most in MP, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and parts of Rajasthan, where sowing happens early, from the last week of October to the first week of November.

Not surprisingly, wheat procurement from MP has crashed from 12.8-12.9 mt in 2019-20 and 2020-21 to hardly 4.6 mt this time. UP and Rajasthan too, have posted steep drops from their 2020-21 highs. On the other hand, Punjab and Haryana have weathered the climate shocks better, because winters are longer there, and sowing begins in early to mid-November.

UP and Bihar, where sowing extends to mid-December, too have reported good production due to near-normal temperatures in March. But much of the produce from these

states has been bought by private players paying more than the Centre's MSP of Rs 2,275 per quintal.

Punjab and Haryana have been the saviour at a time when wheat stocks in government godowns, at 7,502 mt on April 1, were the lowest since the 5,803 mt on the same date in 2008. The stocks were barely above the minimum operational-cum-strategic reserve of 7,46 mt necessary at the start of the marketing season.

...And in rice

Government procurement of rice was traditionally concentrated in Punjab and Haryana, and the Godavari-Krishna and Kaveri deltas of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. But with new states — Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and UP — becoming major contributors (Table 2), the combined share of Punjab and Haryana in total procurement has fallen from 43-44% in the early 2000s to an average of 28.8% in the four years ended 2022-23.

But the current crop year has seen that ratio rise to 32.9% (some procurement is left in Telangana, AP, and TN). Assured access to irrigation has mitigated the impact of last year's patchy monsoon, courtesy of El Niño. This isn't the case in states such as Telangana, where farmers planted less area under *rabi* (winter-

spring) paddy, and also struggled to irrigate the crop owing to depleted groundwater reserves.

Policy implications

Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 813.5 million people are entitled to 5 kg of wheat or rice per month at highly subsidised rates. Since January 2023, this grain is being provided for free to all NFSA beneficiaries. It is unlikely that the government that takes over next month will dispense with this scheme. The Congress has, in fact, promised to double the monthly quota to 10 kg for "poor" persons.

The NFSA, along with other welfare schemes (midday meals for schoolchildren, allocations for *anganwadi* care centres, etc) and open market sale operations (to cool down prices in inflationary episodes), require 60-65 mt of grain to be procured annually by state agencies. In most years, this requirement is comfortably covered. In 2020-21, total rice and wheat procurement crossed 103.5 mt.

It is in the rare bad monsoon or climate shock year that Punjab and Haryana prove their worth. Given their average per-hectare wheat and paddy yields of 4.8 tonnes and 6.5 tonnes respectively — way more than the corresponding all-India levels of 3.5 tonnes and 4.1 tonnes — the two states will continue to matter for national food security even with some desirable acreage shifts to other crops.

TABLE 1

WHEAT PROCUREMENT FOR CENTRAL POOL (LAKH TONNES)

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Punjab	127.14	132.22	96.45	121.17	122.31
Haryana	74.00	84.93	41.86	63.17	70.32
MP	129.42	128.16	46.04	70.97	45.66
UP	35.77	56.41	3.36	2.20	8.47
Rajasthan	22.25	23.40	0.10	4.38	8.35
TOTAL*	389.93	433.44	187.92	262.02	255.24

TABLE 2

RICE PROCUREMENT FOR CENTRAL POOL (LAKH TONNES)

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Punjab	108.76	135.89	125.48	122.01	124.14
Haryana	43.07	37.89	37.06	39.77	39.42
Telangana	74.54	94.53	73.94	88.35	43.87
AP	55.33	56.66	44.61	27.55	18.82
Chhattisgarh	50.53	47.62	61.65	58.65	97.10
TOTAL*	518.26	601.71	575.88	568.66	497.24

*Includes other states; Figures are for crop year (July-June) and for 2023-24 till May 15. Source: Department of Food and Public Distribution.

EXPLAINED HISTORY

EXTINCT NILE BRANCH HELPED BUILD EGYPT'S PYRAMIDS: STUDY

ARJUN SENGUPTA
 NEW DELHI, MAY 19

SCHOLARS HAVE long wondered how ancient Egyptians moved multi-tonne heavy stone blocks across the Sahara Desert to build their pyramids. While contemporaneous literary sources have suggested the use of barges on the Nile, most pyramids today lie several kilometres from the river.

A study, published in the journal *Communications Earth and Environment* on May 16, has identified segments of a major extinct branch of the Nile, which ran right adjacent to the pyramids and could have been used to move men and heavy material around.

River-power

Most of Egypt's pyramids can be found in a 50 km, north-south stretch of desert between Giza and the village of Lisht. While Egyptologists have long suspected that the Nile might once have been closer to the pyramids, the latest study provides the first conclusive proof to that effect.

A team led by geomorphologist Eman Ghoneim used radar satellite imagery, historical maps, geophysical surveys, and sediment coring — a technique used by archaeologists to recover evidence from samples — to map the river branch, which was likely buried thousands of years ago by sandstorms and a major drought.

"Locating the actual [river] branch and having the data that shows there was a waterway that could be used for the transportation of heavier blocks, equipment, people, everything, really helps us explain pyramid construction," Suzanne Ostine, one of the studies co-authors, told the BBC.

The branch ran for 64 km, was 200-700 m wide, and 2-8 m deep. The study revealed that several of the pyramids' cause-



The Great Pyramid of Giza. Shameen Alauddin

ways led to the inlets connected to the channel, which the researchers posited could have acted as riverine harbours.

Ancient marvels

While the research explains the high pyramid density between Giza and Lisht in the inhospitable Sahara desert, it does not make the construction of pyramids any less impressive.

After all, moving stones to the site of the pyramid is just one part of the construction process. Thousands of workers then had to put them in precise locations, which, researchers believe, was done via large ramps greased with water or wet clay, sledges, sturdy ropes, and levers.

Even conceptualising the structures required advanced understanding of mathematics and architecture. For instance, each side of Giza's Great pyramid has a precise and consistent gradient of 52 degrees — a testament to both the planning of the architects, and the execution of the workers.

These workers lived in massive, highly organised settlements right next to the pyramids. The remains of bakeries and piles of animal bones show that not only were workers well fed for their labour, the whole endeavour was controlled by a strong central authority.

JAY MAZOOMDAAR
 NEW DELHI, MAY 19

THE SUPREME Court has ordered the Rajasthan government to shutter 68 mines operating within a 1-kilometre periphery of the critical tiger habitat (CTH) of the Sariska reserve. The order, passed on May 15, is the latest of many attempts by the country's top court since the 1990s to halt the mining of marble, dolomite, and limestone in Sariska in violation of laws. Both the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and Environment Protection Act, 1986 prohibit quarrying in and around a tiger reserve.

In the 1990s

In May 2005, the SC ordered the CBI to investigate the disappearance of tigers from the reserve in the Aravalli roughly halfway between Delhi and Jaipur. That was almost a decade and a half after the court first took up the issue of illegal mining in Sariska.

In October 1991, in a PIL filed by a local NGO, the SC issued an interim order that "no mining operation of any nature shall be carried on in the protected area" of Sariska, and set up a fact-finding committee under the chairmanship of Justice M L Jain, a retired judge of the High Court.

Based on a "traced map provided by the Forest Department," the Jain Committee found in 1992 that the protected areas covered "about 800 sq km". In April 1993, the SC ordered the closure of 262 mines within that area.

In the 2000s

Ten years later, the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the SC submitted a damning report on mining around the Jamua Ramgarh Sanctuary which is part of the Sariska tiger reserve. The following year, the NGO Goa Foundation approached the SC with a complaint about a similar situation in Goa.

In September 2005, the SC laid down rules for issuing temporary mining permits in forest areas. In August 2006, it said, "as an interim measure, one-kilometre safety zone shall be maintained subject to the orders that may be made...regarding Jamua Ramgarh Sanctuary".

But the mines were back in business in 2008 after the Rajasthan government claimed that the sanctuary boundary had been demarcated, and allowed quarries out-



A quarry in operation in the core area of the Sariska tiger reserve. Jay Mazoomdaar

side the 100-metre periphery of the sanctuary. The state stuck to the 100-metre regulation in its draft Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) notification for Sariska in 2011.

Meanwhile, in January 2002, the Indian (now National) Board for Wildlife had proposed to notify areas within 10 km of national parks and sanctuaries as ESZs. But after several state governments expressed concerns, the Board had asked them, in May 2005, to identify suitable areas and submit proposals for site-specific ESZs.

After many states failed to respond, the SC intervened in December 2006. The court warned that if the states failed to respond within four weeks, it might have to consider the original plan of ESZs of 10-km width.

In the 2010s

In September 2012, the CEC submitted a report on ESZs that went beyond Sariska. In January 2013, it followed up with a supplementary note on the "inordinate delay" in notifying the safety zones.

The SC put its foot down in April 2014. Its judgment in the Goa Foundation case underlined that the August 2006 order "has not been varied subsequently nor any orders made regarding Jamua Ramgarh", and that "the order...saying that there will be no mining activity within one-kilometre safety zone...has to be enforced".

But it took another four years for the SC to act on its 2006 order. In December 2018, not-

ing that 21 of the country's 662 national parks and sanctuaries were yet to submit ESZ proposals even 12 years after the deadline had passed, the court ordered that 10-km belts around them be declared ESZs.

In the 2020s

After the 2003 CEC report, several miners joined the case concerning Sariska's Jamua Ramgarh sanctuary. The apex court finally ruled on the matter in June 2022. It ordered ESZs of a minimum width of 1 km for all national parks and sanctuaries, but limited it to 500 metres for Jamua Ramgarh sanctuary as a "special case" with some leniency.

After multiple objections to this one-size-fits-all approach, however, the SC modified the 2022 order in April 2023. The modified order left the specifics of ESZs to the Centre and the state, and focused on mining — prohibiting it within 1 km of national parks and sanctuaries.

On May 15, the SC criticised the Rajasthan government for misinterpreting this order as being not applicable to tiger reserves. The court clarified that the 2023 direction applied to tiger reserves which "stand on a higher pedestal".

Background of problem

Local people in Sariska have repeatedly demanded the demarcation of forest boundaries on the ground. Villagers have alleged that soft boundaries allow illegal mines to operate legally on paper by showing their locations outside the reserve. Also, to make up

EXPLAINED CONSERVATION

Illegal mining in Sariska

SC has been trying to stop illegal mining in and around Sariska tiger reserve since 1991. It has been thwarted for reasons that include uncertainty about the reserve's borders. A new order presents another opportunity

for the areas lost to such concessions, revenue villages are alleged to have been arbitrarily included in the tiger reserve, impinging on the rights of residents.

A decade after Sariska became a tiger reserve in 1978, Rajasthan issued mining leases inside the reserve to many who had obtained no-objection certificates (NOCs) from the then field director of Sariska, even though he did not have any authority to issue such NOCs.

In 1993, Rajasthan's proposal to compensate for these illegal mines by adding 5 sq km of revenue land to the reserve was rejected by the SC. But the 'swap' happened anyway, according to two retired forest officials who have served in the Alwar district.

Uncertain boundaries

The area statement records submitted to the SC in 1993 did not tally with the accompanying map. The discrepancies were so glaring that the surveyor was constrained to add a face-saver on the map: "Prepared by me as per the direction of FD (Forest Department), PT (Project Tiger), Sariska."

In 1999, the Sariska management claimed to have lost several land records. The forest bosses in Jaipur then borrowed the said records from the Revenue Department, which in 2003 claimed these documents were never returned.

In August 2008, when Rajasthan approached the Survey of India to undertake the demarcation work in Sariska, the then state forest head wrote in a letter that "the exact boundary, including the location of pillars, is not known". Survey of India backed out of the job because Rajasthan failed to provide reliable maps and records.

In the absence of demarcated boundaries, Sariska's Tiger Conservation Plan could not be finalised until 2014-15 when the state finally prepared a map for "management purposes" with a disclaimer against its legal authenticity.

Another opportunity

A senior official in the Rajasthan Forest Department said the latest SC order was yet another opportunity to thwart illegal mining in the state. "Whatever mistakes were made in the past can be set right by demarcating the no-go zones around Sariska and also other mining-affected reserves of the state," he said. The case comes up again in July.

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Consistent, coordinated: Evolution & essentials of India's climate policy

EXPERT EXPLAINS

J R BHATT

THE 1990s were a time of great change in India and the world, which led to the forging of new policies in many areas, including on the environment. The Rio Summit of 1992 saw the emergence of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity and Forest Principles. After Rio, the divisions of climate change and biodiversity in India's then Ministry of Environment and Forests came to life slowly and steadily.

Over-exploitation of resources by the developed world

Climate change is a result of excessive, un-

sustainable production and consumption patterns of the developed countries.

A recent study (Hickel et al, 'National responsibility for the ecological breakdown: a fair-shares assessment of resource use, 1970-2017', *Lancet Planetary Health* 2022; 6: e242-49) argues that between 1970 and 2017, developed countries, with only 16% of the world population, used 74% of excess resources over their fair share. In the same period, 58 countries including India, representing 3.6 billion people, stayed within their sustainability limits. Amid this stark contrast, what is India's climate policy?

Five major determinants of India's climate policy

India's climate policy is based on five major determinants: geography, population, impacts, worldview, and actions.

GEOGRAPHY

The Indian landmass has an area of 3.28

million sq km, accounting for 2.4% of the world's geographical land surface area and 4% of the world's freshwater resources. India is the world's seventh largest country. It is one of the 17 mega-biodiverse countries, having four biodiversity hotspots, 10 bio-geographic zones, and 22 agro-biodiversity hotspots.

India experiences six different seasons, and its civilisation and economy have developed in harmony with this seasonal cycle. In recent decades, climate change has disrupted this harmony by blurring the distinction between seasons, which has led to increased unpredictability and negative consequences for nature and society.

POPULATION

India's 1.4 billion people account for almost one-sixth of humanity. It is home to 7-8% of the recorded species of the world. The human-to-land ratio is very low in India at 0.0021 sq km, and to survive with this limitation, we need understanding and an

integrated management of land and water.

IMPACTS

The Global Climate Risk Index 2020 puts India as the fifth most affected country by extreme weather events. A 2018 World Bank report predicted that rising temperatures and changing monsoon rainfall patterns could cost India 2.8% of its gross domestic product.

WORLDVIEW

India's worldview is shaped by that of its ancestors — of living in harmony and consonance with nature. Gandhi's ideals of trusteeship and the ability of the Earth to provide enough for everyone's needs and not anyone's greed represents a continuous strain of thought since time immemorial.

ACTIONS

India's actions are shaped by science, based on evidence. Despite having historical cumulative emissions of less than 4% (1850-

2019), and 1.9 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) per capita emissions, India has taken strong climate actions. This is unlike developed countries, which show enthusiasm for climate action for everyone but themselves.

The evolution of India's climate policy

India's climate policy is informed by inclusive growth for all-round economic and social development, eradication of poverty, declining carbon budget, adherence to UNFCCC's foundational principles, and climate-friendly lifestyles. Its climate policy has been clear, consistent, and coordinated.

India has been clear that climate change is the result of overexploitation of natural resources by developed countries. The country has been a strong voice of the Global South and the main force behind the 'common but differentiated responsibility and respective capability' (CBDR-RC) principle.

It has now added two more 'Cs' to its cli-

mate policy, that of confidence and convenient action. India has reflected confidence in building global institutions like the International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, and the Global Biofuels Alliance.

Development and environment are two sides of the same coin and must be taken together for all-round holistic development. Unless the world truly believes in the Indian ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* — One Earth, One World and One Future — we will be unable to solve climate change.

India's model of sustainable development must act as a rallying cry for developing countries to counter the narratives presented by the developed world, bringing science and evidence to the forefront of policy making.

Dr J R Bhatt was formerly Scientist, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. He tweets at @JRBhatt60. Views are personal.



SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN

CHAIRPERSON, MS SWAMINATHAN RESEARCH FOUNDATION

WHY SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN

As former chief scientist of WHO, Dr Soumya Swaminathan was the public face of science and research during the pandemic, demystifying COVID-19. Now, as chairperson of the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, she is closely working on the impact of climate change on every aspect of our lives, particularly health. Her biography, *At The Wheel of Research*, documents her journey to make science the pillar of our public health



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

ON COVID IMPACT

COVID DAMAGES NOT JUST THE LUNGS BUT THE CARDIOVASCULAR, BRAIN AND NERVOUS SYSTEMS. EVEN IF YOU RECOVER, YOUR RISK OF DEVELOPING A CARDIOVASCULAR EVENT, DIABETES AND A NEUROLOGICAL ILLNESS GOES UP

Rinku Ghosh: There is collective anxiety over the safety of Covid vaccines, what with AstraZeneca's submission in court that in rare cases, its vaccine resulted in blood clotting. Considering that the same vaccine was used as Covishield in India, what kind of risks are we looking at?

I'm very worried that this is going to have a negative impact on people, their beliefs and confidence in vaccines. When a vaccine is developed, it is tested several times over for its efficacy and safety. If a vaccine or drug is new, regulatory agencies conduct a post-marketing surveillance or a phase IV study. This is to capture rare side effects which might have been missed in clinical trials. For example, clinical trials for Covid vaccines had 30,000 to 40,000 participants. But when you give it to millions of people, then there may be rare things which you can pick up. This is why pharmacovigilance or post-marketing surveillance is important. Vaccines began to be administered by December 2020 as Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca were approved in different countries. By March 2021, we had already heard about these thrombotic events, or Thrombotic Thrombocytopenic Purpura (TTP). At WHO, we were looking very closely at the data, which was coming out of high-income countries with good pharmacovigilance systems. These very rare side effects were mentioned in different reports from different countries, maybe somewhere in the range of four to eight per million vaccines. Every regulatory agency, including the WHO, looked at the safety profile again, assessed the risk-benefit ratio and concluded that the benefits far outweighed the risks. If you vaccinated a million individuals, the number of lives that you would save because of Covid was much more than these side effects. That has remained the same. So there has been no major change in our knowledge about this side effect since.

Second, Covid itself damages the lungs, the cardiovascular, brain and nervous systems and triggers clotting. All of us, who have suffered from Covid, now have a higher risk, may be by two to three times, of suffering health conditions related to these systems than ever before. If you have already had other risks — say diabetes or hypertension — then Covid is an add-on risk. The clotting due to Covid is many times, perhaps even a hundred times, more than the clotting due to the vaccine.

The third aspect is that the case revolves around the compensation that's being claimed by people who have had these severe side effects. At WHO, when we set up COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access), we had already thought about setting up a no-fault compensation system globally. We took an insurance policy for hundreds of millions of people worldwide in low and middle-income countries, who would be receiving different vaccines. Till the time I was at WHO, there had been no claims. I'm not sure if there has been any claim in the past year.

Besides, these side effects occur within a few weeks of taking the vaccine. So people who've taken the vaccine in 2021 or 2022 need not worry today about a clotting disorder. They will not get it because of the vaccine. They could get it because of Covid or an underlying condition that got exacerbated.

Rinku Ghosh: Is communicating science to the masses a big challenge because we lack scientific temperament?

Vaccine hesitancy or anti-science is not directly linked with the level of education. Countries with high vaccine hesitancy generally have high levels of education — western Europe and US. Comparatively India has very small pockets of vaccine hesitancy but those were overcome by officials talking to the communities and so on.

Science is about doing experiments repeatedly because the truth could change when somebody finds something contradictory. That's why there's a need for constant scrutiny. Usually, it's a collective effort — scientists around the world working in a particular discipline will have their own arguments. But during Covid, all of this was playing out in the public domain. So the layman saw scientists arguing and disagreeing, which is a normal scientific practice, but thought they couldn't make up their mind and deduced something was wrong. The anti-vax and anti-science groups took advantage of this gap in understanding. This is the first pandemic that we've had in the social media age. There will be more "infodemics" and we have to teach our children to sift facts. As public health people, we need to give, not hide information.

Nobody can deny that any drug or vaccine could have side effects. Even the polio vaccine has had side effects but that hasn't stopped the polio eradication programme. As scientists, we have to communicate in a way that makes information more acceptable. We have to be willing to constantly answer the same questions. Scientists cannot be patronising.

Rinku Ghosh: What are the big takeaways of COVID-19 and have we internalised them enough?

I can tell you the lessons from my perspective. How many governments and people have internalised them and are acting on them is a good question. We can see the push and pull in the negotiations of a global pandemic treaty to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to actually put down on paper the lessons we've learnt and what needs to be

‘Clotting due to Covid is perhaps 100 times more than clotting caused by a vaccine’

Former WHO chief scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan on countering misinformation on vaccines, decentralising public health systems at the micro level, improving food labelling and tackling environmental pollution. The session was moderated by Rinku Ghosh, Senior Associate Editor

done in the future.

First, a pandemic is a global issue and needs a global effort, solidarity and cooperation on surveillance, sharing data and R&D. Second is the issue of financing for which the World Bank has set up a fund. About \$ 2 billion has come in as contribution and the bank has already finished one round of grants. We have to invest in science, be it to tackle climate change or for pathogen X. The third is investing in public health. Countries which had focussed more on public health infrastructure and primary healthcare actually did much better in terms of lowering deaths than first world countries. The US is a good example where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) pub-

ON FOOD SAFETY AND REGULATION

STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT FRONT OF PACK LABELLING HAS HELPED IN SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION OF ADVERSE HEALTH OUTCOMES LIKE HEART ATTACKS. AS SOON AS YOU SEE A RED STAR ON A PACKET, YOU KNOW IT HAS HIGH FAT, SUGAR AND SALT

lic health budget had been cut year after year. So it couldn't do very simple things like contact tracing or scaling up surveillance. In contrast, poorer countries in Africa with a strong cadre of community health workers were able to do much better. Thailand is a prime example of a Southeast Asian country with excellent primary health care services. It was the first country outside China to locate the virus, put in place containment measures and use technology like South Korea did to test almost

its entire population. The fourth is countering misinformation and the fifth is strengthening frontline workers. We need to pick up outbreaks quickly and you need an empowered team at the district level that immediately goes to the hotspot, investigates, reports, collects the data and acts on it. Decentralisation of data-based decision-making is the key.

Amitabh Sinha: How did the pandemic go away, what explains the negligible numbers now?

In a majority of countries, 60-70 per cent of the population has been vaccinated. Besides, people acquired immunity through natural infection. So a large part of the world today has cell-mediated as well as antibody-based immunity. And therefore, the virus is no longer able to extract the damage that it did in the early part. But the virus is still mutating and spreading. We're still getting infected but we're not falling sick because our cell immunity kicks in and protects us. May be after four or five years that immunity will wane and we will all need boosters. Or a small infection may actually be boosting our immunity. We need regular studies on our levels of immunity.

Amitabh Sinha: Although we experienced the worst pandemic, none of the political parties has mentioned healthcare in manifestoes. Your take?

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros

Ghebreyesus had predicted that we would go through this cycle of panic and neglect. We would panic in the middle of something terrible and ease away when we got a little comfortable. I'm afraid that's happening all over the world. Other priorities have come up now, be it conflicts, trade wars, economic issues. There is no focus on health. I was happy that this time, during the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings, the bank president, Ajay Banga, talked about a liveable planet, a sustainable lifestyle, health and nutrition. I think from the perspective of politicians, it is more rewarding to invest in a facility, which is very visible, because you can get credit from the local population.

Preventive healthcare is completely invisible. It's about making the right policies, laws and implementing them, dealing with lobbies and doing hard work behind the scenes. We have to implement the Rules on the Clinical Establishment Act. That's why private hospitals continue to exploit the patient. And out-of-pocket expenditure in India — though it has come down from 60 per cent to 45 per cent — is still extremely high. I will again quote the example of Thailand, where the government actually invested in an organisation for health promotion and disease prevention. It is funded by taxes on tobacco, alcohol, sugar and unhealthy items.

Harish Damodaran: The remit of public health has traditionally been confined to

communicable diseases like TB, malaria and viral infection. Now we are seeing lifestyle or non-communicable diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular conditions affecting the poor and lower middle-classes alike. Can we bring these under the public health umbrella?

Yes, public health is not just about communicable diseases. The WHO's SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) target 3.4 aims to reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment by 2030. These are increasing rapidly in developing countries because of unhealthy diets and air pollution. The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) data has shown that

ON CONTROLLING AIR POLLUTION

YOU HAVE TO MAKE A COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT, THEN THE GOVT WILL PROVIDE IT. WE'RE STILL INCENTIVISING CARS. WE WANT THREE CAR PARKS WITH EACH APARTMENT. IN GENEVA, I DIDN'T HAVE A CAR. I HAD A BICYCLE, WALKED OR TOOK THE BUS

only a small fraction of the population is actually consuming a healthy diet. Some of it can be attributed to behavioural change as a recent household expenditure survey showed that 10 per cent of household expenditure, both in urban and rural areas, is now being spent on processed and ready-to-eat foods. That's huge. Maybe, it has to do with convenience but it has also got to do with believing misleading advertisements that tell you these are healthy when actually they are not. A lot of public education

drives have to be done on nutrition. A lot of policy and regulatory work needs to be done. We need to focus on agriculture and ensure we produce more nutritious food rather than focus on just rice and wheat. Dietary diversity has to improve. Big changes cannot be done without government intervention, certainly with regard to air quality and pollution.

My interest today is in looking at these determinants of health. Covid taught me to look upstream. We need an inter-sectoral and a holistic view of health, not a narrow one. It's a joke now that the Ministry of Health should perhaps be called the Ministry of Sickness and Disease, because its current focus is on managing a sick population. But the Ministry of Health also needs to be a steward and an advocate for good health across other ministries.

Rinku Ghosh: Recently, there was a row on added sugars in baby food and contaminants in spices. What would you say are the challenges of regulating food in India?

The primary focus of regulators in India has to be on public health and safety. For example, ban advertisements which have misleading information. Make sure that there is front of pack labelling on food, which is a simple traffic light system and has been adopted by many countries. As soon as you pick up a packet and see a red star on it, you're alerted that the package has been classified as unhealthy because it has high fat, sugar and salt. You don't even have to be literate to understand the potential dangers. Studies have shown how such labelling

has helped in significantly reducing serious health outcomes like heart attacks. Strict labelling also compels the food industry into making healthier products.

As for contamination, lead poisoning is a huge public health risk in India. One of the sources is adulterated turmeric, which contains lead chromate to give it a bright yellow colour. A recent study across 10 cities showed that the average lead levels in children were far higher than the WHO cut-off. There is lead in our environment, coming from recycling batteries and paint.

This is affecting the cognitive development of children. *The Economist*, in fact, had an article saying that if you get rid of lead, then your IQ levels improve.

Regulation and advertising are going to be important in dealing with the private sector. This is why we talk about commercial determinants of health, which are now as important as the social and environmental ones.

ON MISINFORMATION

AS SCIENTISTS, WE HAVE TO COMMUNICATE IN A WAY THAT MAKES INFORMATION MORE ACCEPTABLE. WE HAVE TO BE OPEN TO QUESTIONING AND WILLING TO ANSWER THE SAME QUESTIONS. SCIENTISTS CANNOT BE PATRONISING

Anuradha Mascarenhas: How prepared are we for dengue outbreaks today? What about tuberculosis?

Dengue is the fastest-growing infection globally as the vector has adapted itself extremely well to living in cities. Genetic manipulation with *Wolbachia* bacteria can manipulate mosquito populations and reduce disease transmission. This has been tried in some countries. You have to breed and release a lot of mosquitoes with the *Wolbachia* to control dengue. A small place like Singapore probably can do it but it may be very difficult to do it across India. May be some cities could.

We're very close to eliminating diseases like filariasis and kala-azar. As regards TB, the national prevalence survey indicates wide variations between states. The biggest risk factor for TB is under-nutrition with almost 50 per cent of cases being attributed to it. We have to think out of the box, use more technology and data-driven approaches. Statewise approaches will be different. In terms of financial resources, it's going to require a multi-disciplinary approach.

Ankita Upadhyay: Are we doing enough to tackle air pollution, which comes at an enormous health cost?

In large parts of the country, the AQI (air quality index) is way above the WHO cut-off and even way above the Indian cut-off for PM 2.5, which is 40 µg/m3. The more we learn about the health effects of air pollution, the more frightening it is. Setting up inflammatory cascades, pollution is impacting our brain, triggering early dementia. It's impacting the heart and lungs. Data shows that women exposed to pollution, particularly in the first and third trimester, have premature babies.

We do not need more data, we now need multi-sectoral action. By moving to clean energy, we can achieve net zero goals while reducing air pollution. We need to reduce the number of vehicles on the road and use public transport, cycle or walk. The Chief Technology Officer of the Transport for London told me that obesity rates in the city are much lower than those in other districts because people use public transport. In London, people are incentivised not to own cars. So if you want an apartment in the heart of London, they now have what are called ultra-low emission zones, which means you cannot own a car. You have to make a commitment to public transport, then the government has to provide it. It works both ways. In India, we're still incentivising cars. We want three car parks with each apartment. In Geneva, I didn't have a car. I had a bicycle, I used to walk, take the train or bus.

Rinku Ghosh: Are you playing the violin and which is your favourite Beatles song?

No, I am not playing and have to restart practice. I listen to Hindustani music, old songs and jazz. I am a hiker and trekker and recently visited Kashmir. And my favourite Beatles song is probably *Michelle*.

13 ECONOMY

MARKET WATCH
MCAP OF 8 MOST VALUED FIRMS RISE
 Eight of the top-10 most valued firms added Rs 1,47,935.19 crore in market valuation last week, with Life Insurance Corporation of India and Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest gainers. Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 1,341.47 points or 1.84 per cent. **PTI**

BRIEFLY

'Commerce min discusses SOPs for FTAs'

New Delhi: The Commerce Ministry has held detailed discussions with senior officials of different departments and trade experts on formulating standard operating procedures (SOP) for negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs), an official said. To discuss the various aspects of these agreements, the Commerce Ministry organised a two-day 'Chintan Shivir' on FTA strategy and SOPs for trade negotiations on May 16-17. Suggestions that came up during the discussions included comprehensive consultations with public and private sector players and sharing details of the proposed FTAs with the line ministries, the official said. **PTI**

Kumar, Pai to step down from Byju's advisory role

Bengaluru: Troubled edtech firm Byju's on Sunday said that its two advisory board members, Rajnish Kumar, and Mohandas Pai have decided not to renew their contract this year. The contract between the two advisory board members and Byju's is slated to expire at the end of June. The development comes at a time when the company is embroiled in several legal battles with its investors. As a result it has not been able to access \$200 million raised through rights issue in February. **FE**

Tata Motors group hikes outlay for FY25

New Delhi: Tata Motors group has raised its investment outlay for FY25 to Rs 43,000 crore for new products and technologies, with its British arm Jaguar Land Rover absorbing the maximum share, according to a senior company official. In FY24, Tata Motors group had given a guidance of 3 billion pound investment for Jaguar Land Rover (about Rs 30,000 crore) and Rs 8,000 crore for Tata Motors — a total of about Rs 38,000 crore. "Investment by JLR ended at 3.3 billion pounds (more than Rs 33,000 crore), and Tata Motors did more than Rs 8,200 crore. So, the total we ended was at about Rs 41,200 crore investment in FY24," Tata Motors Group CFO PB Balaji said in an earnings conference. **PTI**

'US reconsiders capital hike for big banks'

Bengaluru: The Federal Reserve and two other US regulators are moving toward a new plan that would significantly reduce a nearly 20 per cent mandated increase in capital for the country's biggest banks following lobbying efforts by CEOs like JPMorgan Chase's Jamie Dimon, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on Sunday. Top officials from all three agencies involved in the pending capital rules—the Federal Reserve, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and Office of the Comptroller of the Currency—are still discussing substantive and technical revisions and there is no guarantee that an agreement will be reached, WSJ reported. **REUTERS**

HEAVY WITHDRAWAL DURING MAY 1-17 ON POLL UNCERTAINTIES

Foreign portfolio investors sell ₹28,242 cr of equities in May

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
 MUMBAI, MAY 19

FOREIGN PORTFOLIO investors (FPIs) sold Rs 28,242 crore, or \$3.38 billion of Indian equities so far in May, making it the highest sell off since January 2023.

Heavy selling by overseas investors in May so far is due to the uncertainties related to the ongoing general elections and as FPIs are withdrawing their funds from the Indian market and investing in the Chinese market for valuation comfort.

In January last year, FPIs of-flooded Rs 28,852 crore of domestic shares, according to data provided by National Securities Depository Ltd (NSDL). In the calendar year 2024 (up to May 17) FPIs sold Rs 26,020 crore worth of local shares.

In the cash market, foreign investors sold Rs 35,532 crore through May 17, which was almost matched by DII (domestic institutional investors) buying of Rs 33,973 crore during this period.

"The main trigger for the FI selling has been the outperformance of the Hong Kong index Hang Seng which shot up by



EXPLAINED
E Valuation: FPIs moving to Chinese mks

WHILE UNCERTAINTIES related to the ongoing general elections has triggered heavy selling by overseas investors in May so far, foreign portfolio investors are also withdrawing their funds from the Indian market and investing in the Chinese market for valuation comfort. FPIs are moving money from expensive markets like India to cheap markets like Hong Kong where the Hang Seng index has shot up by 19.33 per cent during the last one month. In the debt market in India, FPIs net bought Rs 45,087 crore on a net basis and in the debt-VRR (Voluntary Retention Route), they purchased Rs 7,040 crore so far in 2024.

19.33 per cent during the last one month. FPIs are moving money from expensive markets like India to cheap markets like Hong Kong where the PE is around 10 compared to around 20 PE in India," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

Uncertainty surrounding the election outcome also has contributed to heightened volatility in the Indian market. The recent spike in the fear gauge VIX indicates a high level of uncertainty in the market, he said.

India VIX, an indicator of the market's expectation of volatility over the near term, has

crossed the 21-mark in the current month.

"This shift in FPIs' behavior is not a random occurrence. It is a direct response to the ongoing geopolitical crisis in the Middle East, relative valuation discomfort, and the strength of US bond yields," said Vipul Bhowar, Director, Listed Investments, Waterfield Advisors.

According to Vijayakumar, going forward, there is likely to be a dramatic change in FPI equity flows in response to election results. Political stability will attract huge inflows.

In the debt market, FPIs net bought Rs 45,087 crore on a net basis and in the debt-VRR

(Voluntary Retention Route), they purchased Rs 7,040 crore so far in 2024, NSDL data showed.

IN EQUITIES

MFs invest ₹1.3L cr in 2024 so far

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
 NEW DELHI, MAY 19

MUTUAL FUNDS (MFs) showed strong confidence in Indian equities this year, injecting around Rs 1.3 lakh crore, driven mainly by significant retail investor interest and the robust performance of the stock market.

Mutual funds, which manage long-term wealth for domestic investors, prioritise the Indian market's underlying growth potential and are less rattled by short-term events like elections, which allows them to keep investing in equities, Tradejini COO Trivish D said.

Additionally, the growing interest in systematic investment plans (SIPs) on the back of astonishing compounding stories by influencers and industry veterans has perked investors, who otherwise wish to stay away from the markets, to start participating through these mutual funds, he added. According to the data from the Securities and Exchange Board

₹26,038 CR IN FIRST FORTNIGHT OF MAY

■ As per data from the Sebi, MFs invested Rs 26,038 crore in the first fortnight of the ongoing month and Rs 20,155 crore in April

of India (Sebi), MFs invested Rs 26,038 crore in the first fortnight of the ongoing month and Rs 20,155 crore in April. Moreover, the highest MF buying for 2024 was experienced in March, as they put in a net of Rs 44,233 crore.

Also, they invested Rs 14,295 crore in February and Rs 23,010 crore in January. With the latest deployment, mutual funds investment in equities reached around Rs 1.3 lakh crore in 2024 (till May 16), the data showed.

This is a great sign for the Indian markets, symbolising the falling dependency on foreign

money and the strengthening of retail individuals and DIIs, including mutual funds, to keep markets afloat. This steady flow from mutual funds and other domestic institutional investors (DIIs) has supported the equity markets over the past few years.

Notwithstanding occasional challenges, the Indian stock markets have generally shown a positive trajectory, thus catching investors' interest. Equity has been one of the best-performing asset classes in recent years, and consequently receiving robust flows from domestic investors like mutual funds, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

For domestic investors, local markets are the most accessible investment option, which is why they continue to invest in them, he added.

"The Indian market's fundamentals remain robust. The GDP is projected to grow at a steady rate of 7 per cent for FY25, and the fis-

cal deficit has decreased to 5.8 per cent, the lowest level in five years.

"Additionally, the steady increase in SIP contributions, which reached a new peak of Rs 20,371 crore in April 2024, indicates that investors are becoming more disciplined and confident in the market," Feroze Azeez, Deputy CEO, Anand Rathi Wealth Ltd, said.

Sectorally, mutual funds hold maximum exposure to financial services, followed by IT and pharmaceuticals. Additionally, mutual funds have been increasing their allocation to pharmaceutical, power, construction projects and automobiles in the last one year.

Interestingly, mutual funds' ownership in NSE-listed companies reached an all-time high of 8.92 per cent in three months ended March 2024, propelled by net inflows of Rs 81,539 crore during the quarter. In comparison, the holding of mutual funds was 8.81 per cent in the quarter ended December 2023, according to primeinfobase.com, an initiative of Prime Database.

'GDP growth likely to be 6.7% in Q4; 7% in FY24'

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



In the first quarter, the GVA and GDP growth was 8.2%, while in the second quarter, the GVA was 7.7% and GDP 8.1%. GDP is the total value of goods and services produced in a given period. GVA is GDP minus net taxes (gross tax collection minus subsidy)

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

8.2% Rate at which Indian economy grew in the June quarter

8.4% growth registered in the December quarter of 2023-24

8.1% growth in the September quarter

7% GDP growth projected for 2023-24 by the Reserve Bank of India in its monetary policy review in April

■ "We are expecting the fourth quarter growth to be 6.7 per cent and the overall GDP growth for FY24 to be around 6.9-7 per cent," Ind-RA principal economist Sunil Kumar Sinha said.

■ "When we analyse the data, then what is visible is the wedge between the GVA and GDP. A large impetus to Q3 GDP has come from higher

tax collection, but this phenomenon is unlikely to be repeated in the fourth quarter. The wedge between GDP and GVA is unlikely to be repeated in Q4," Sinha said

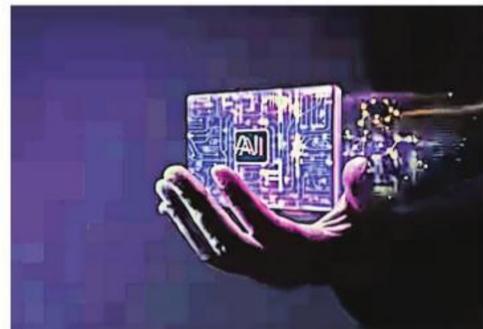
■ While the gross value added (GVA) was 6.5% in the third quarter, the GDP growth rate stood at 8.4%. This wedge is on account of higher taxes collected during the quarter

Source: India Ratings and Research/PTI

AI-GORITHM DIGITAL ASSISTANTS

The 'Her' moment: OpenAI's GPT-4o and Google's Project Astra make real-life strides

For years, digital assistants on phones and computers have felt utilitarian and impersonal. With OpenAI and Google's recent announcements, that could change



SOUMYARENDRA BARIK
 NEW DELHI, MAY 19

"Well, you seem like a person, but you're just a voice in a computer."

"I can understand how the limited perspective of an un-artificial mind would perceive it that way. You'll get used to it."

Theodore Twombly fell in love with a digital assistant Samantha in the 2013 hit 'Her'. The lifelike assistant, voiced by Scarlett Johansson, displayed a sense of humour, intelligence, and empathy that made her seem human to Theodore (played by Joaquin Phoenix).

But last week, when OpenAI showcased the new strides it took with its new GPT-4o (the o standing for 'omni'), it signalled that such artificial intelligence (AI)-based assistants are no longer merely the stuff of science fiction films and literature.

And a day later, when Google showed the progress it has made on its virtual assistant, it marked a tangible direction that AI could take for end users — to create lifelike assistants that can be helpful for a number of real-life scenarios, from giving suggestions on how one can comb their hair by looking at their picture, to empathising with them.

Siri and Alexa never really managed to cement their place as useful digital assistants, primarily due to their inability to pick up on the nuances of conversation. But Google and OpenAI's new announcements could change what it means to be a virtual help altogether.

For a large part of the population which is facing a loneliness crisis, it remains to be seen the shape and place such assistants occupy in people's lives. And of course, questions about the lens with which they're made, with the assistants' voicings in demos being that of women (lending to the idea of

how technologies developed in patriarchal societies are likely to view women) are some things which would need to be contended with as such assistants reach the phones and computers of more people in the coming years.

But that aside, OpenAI says that its new model accepts as input any combination of text, audio, image, and video and generates any combination of text, audio, and image outputs. It can respond to audio inputs in as little as 232 milliseconds, with an average of 320 milliseconds, which the company says is similar to human response time in a conversation.

"...we trained a single new model end-to-end across text, vision, and audio, meaning that all inputs and outputs are processed by the same neural network. Because GPT-4o is our first model combining all of these modalities, we are still just scratching the surface of exploring what the model can do and its limitations," OpenAI said in a blog post.

In a demo video released by OpenAI, its assistant responded almost instantly to the questions, it could sing too, and offer tips on how a person could comb their hair before they went for an interview by looking at their face through the phone's front camera.

Two different paths

At Google I/O, the company's annual developer conference, the company showed that unlike common perception it had not fallen behind OpenAI in the AI race. The company showed a very early version of what it hopes could become a universal smartphone assistant.

Google is calling it Project Astra, and it is a real-time, multimodal AI assistant that can see the world, remember where one has left a thing and even answer if a computer code is correct by looking at it through

the phone's camera. In a demo video shared by Google, an Astra user in Google's London office asks the system to identify a part of a speaker, find their missing glasses, review code, and more. It all works practically in real time and in a very conversational way.

There are, however, some fundamental differences in the approach that OpenAI and Google have taken. OpenAI's assistant displayed a wide range of emotions and tonalities in its voicing — from slight giggles, to subdued whispers depending on what was being asked of it. In contrast, Google's assistant was more straight-forward, there is no range of emotional diversity in its voice.

Early days

While the developments feel fascinating because of how tangible they feel, it is still early days for the technology and it is not without its share of limitations and challenges.

OpenAI, for instance, said that GPT-4o is still in the early stages of exploring the potential of unified multimodal interaction, meaning certain features like audio outputs are initially accessible in a limited form only, with preset voices.

The company said that further development and updates are necessary to fully realise its potential in handling complex multimodal tasks seamlessly.

"GPT-4o has also undergone extensive external red teaming with 70+ external experts in domains such as social psychology, bias and fairness, and misinformation to identify risks that are introduced or amplified by the newly added modalities. We used these learnings to build out our safety interventions in order to improve the safety of interacting with GPT-4o. We will continue to mitigate new risks as they're discovered," OpenAI said.

PROFIT-BOOKING MAY COME ONCE PRICE BREACHED: EXPERTS

Silver closes in on ₹1L/kg

RAJESH BHAYANI
 MUMBAI, MAY 19

THE PRICE of silver in India is fast approaching Rs 1 lakh/kg — a price that the white metal has never seen before.

On Friday, the July futures on the MCX, the price closed at Rs 91,149/kg — over 20 per cent jump from April. In the wholesale market in Mumbai, silver was trading at Rs 89-90,000/kg on Saturday.

Even globally, silver prices have been on the boil. It increased 6.5 per cent on Friday, closing at \$31.49 per ounce — the highest since February 2013. In 2011, silver reached its all-time high level of \$48.7 per ounce, although this was short-lived. Clearly, there are more legs to this rally.

According to the data provided by Nirmal Bang Securities, the open interest data from CFTC in international silver futures is at its highest level since September 2022.

The net open positions on the international commodity exchange for silver has increased by 69 per cent from 24,632 contracts in September 2022 to 41,621 contracts as of May 14, as per the latest available weekly data. Over the past two months, bullish positions have almost doubled, while short positions have decreased

CLOSED AT ₹91,149/KG ON THE MCX ON FRIDAY

■ On Friday, the July futures on the MCX, the price closed at Rs 91,149/kg — over 20% jump from April. In the wholesale market in Mumbai, silver was trading at Rs 89-90,000/kg on Saturday

■ A notable aspect of the rally is the fall in the gold-silver ratio below 80, reaching 78.6 on Friday night. This is the lowest since July 2023. The decline in the ratio indicates the relative strength of silver compared to gold

fall. History does not always repeat itself, but investors should be cautious now."

Another notable aspect of the rally is the fall in the gold-silver ratio below 80, reaching 78.6 on Friday night. This is the lowest it has been since July 2023. The decline in the ratio indicates the relative strength of silver compared to gold, and a decreasing ratio is considered favourable for silver investors.

Ajay Kedia, director of Kedia Advisory, stated that "the momentum in the market is strong as indicated by the falling ratio, and domestic silver prices are expected to surpass Rs 1 lakh/kg, and within a year, they could even rise to Rs 1.25 lakh/kg."

However, on the other side are traders and investors in India who are waiting for the psychological level of Rs 1 lakh/kg to sell the silver they are holding.

Chirag Sheth, principal consultant at Metal Focus, a global bullion research firm, mentioned that "Indian investors have purchased more than 17,500 tonnes of silver bars and coins in the last ten years, and they may look for profit-taking opportunities if price reaches Rs 1 lakh/kg. However, all that depends upon how market moves ahead and barring some profit taking, some may decide to hold on for a longer time as well." **FE**

ITC's Sanjiv Puri takes charge as CII president

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
 NEW DELHI, MAY 19

SANJIV PURI, Chairman and Managing Director of ITC, has assumed office as the president of the Confederation of Indian Industry for 2024-25, the chamber said on Sunday.

He takes over from R Dinesh, Chairman of TVS Supply Chain Solutions. Puri heads ITC Ltd, a conglomerate with businesses in FMCG, hotels, paperboards & packaging, agribusiness, and IT.

He is also the Chairman of ITC Infotech India Ltd, its subsidiaries in the UK and US, and Surya Nepal Private Ltd.

Rajiv Memani takes over as President-Designate of CII for 2024-25. He is Chairman of the India region of EY (Ernst & Young), a leading global professional services organisation. He is also a member of EY's global management body as the Chair of its Global Emerging Markets Committee. Tata Chemicals Limited Managing Director and CEO R Mukundan takes over as



Sanjiv Puri (Left), Chairman and Managing Director of ITC, has assumed office as the president of CII for 2024-25. Rajiv Memani (Right), Chairman of the India region of EY, has taken over as president-designate. *Company Websites*



the vice president of Confederation of Indian Industry for 2024-25.

"He is a distinguished alumnus of IIT, Roorkee, a Fellow of Indian Chemical Society and an alumnus of Harvard Business School. Mukundan, during his 33-year career with Tata Group, has held various responsibilities across the chemical, automotive and hospitality sectors of the Tata Group," the Confederation of Indian Industry stated.

RAIN PLAYS SPOILSPORT

Persistent rain forced a washout in the final league stage match between RR and KKR at the Barsapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati. Relentless rain had delayed the start of the final league stage match by nearly three-and-a-half hours. The match was later abandoned shortly after a toss took place for a seven-over game. **ENS**

IPL SNIPPETS

STANDINGS

Team	M	W	L	T	PTS	NRR
KKR	14	9	3	0	20	1.428
SRH	14	8	5	0	17	0.414
RR	14	8	5	0	17	0.273
RCB	14	7	7	0	14	0.459
CSK	14	7	7	0	14	0.392
DC	14	7	7	0	14	-0.377
LSG	14	7	7	0	14	-0.667
GT	14	5	7	0	12	-1.063
PK	14	5	9	0	10	-0.353
MI	14	4	8	0	8	-0.318

Winning just one out of seven home games hurt us: Bangar

Punjab Kings head coach Sanjay Bangar on Sunday rued that winning just one out of their seven home matches had played a role in their below-par Indian Premier League season as they finished ninth out of 10 teams in the highly-competitive T20 tournament. Punjab Kings lost by four wickets to Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Sunday to finish their league engagement on 10 points from 14 matches. "We could not adapt to the home conditions. We won four out of the seven away matches but out of the seven home matches we just managed to win one. So, if a team has to progress in a tournament, certainly that is a worrying aspect," Bangar said at the post-match press conference. **PTI**

Don't see him wanting to end on this note: Rayudu on Dhoni

Former India batter Ambati Rayudu doesn't feel MS Dhoni has played his last match in the IPL and wants the BCCI to continue with the contentious impact player rule as it could help the long-serving legend to keep going in top-flight cricket. Speaking on Star Sports Cricket Live, Rayudu said, "I don't think this is his last game. I just don't see him wanting to end on this note." Even as the RCB players broke into wild celebrations, Dhoni shook hands with the opposition's reserves and support staff before quietly disappearing into the dressing room. Rayudu said, "He looked a little frustrated, even when he got out. That's very unlike MS Dhoni, he just wanted to qualify and finish on a high. But you never know with MS Dhoni, he might come back next year." Rayudu, who played under Dhoni at CSK, brought the BCCI into the picture. "... With the impact player role as well, it gives him the opportunity to be able to come in those last few overs and truly make that impact. "BCCI better not remove the impact player role because we still want to see MS Dhoni play. So, it's up to BCCI now. Do we want to see MS Dhoni play or not." **PTI**

Sunrisers put chasing demons to bed

Sharma stars in facile 200-plus chase as Punjab lose by four wickets despite Prabhsimran's heroics

SYNOPSIS

Abhishek Sharma's blitz in the Powerplay, with Rahul Tripathi's support, followed by smart batting from Nitish Reddy and Heinrich Klaassen helps Sunrisers Hyderabad end league stage on a high

TANISHQ VADDI
HYDERABAD, MAY 19

Abhishek-led Powerplay

THROUGHOUT their campaign, SRH has looked like a near-perfect team batting first, but have often crumbled chasing totals. The hunt for 215 started in similar fashion when Arshdeep Singh bowled a peach of a delivery to get rid of Travis Head. But then comeback man Rahul Tripathi and Abhishek Sharma tucked into Punjab bowlers. Abhishek, with his sublime bat-swing, slammed six sixes taking his tally to 41 sixes for the season, the most thus far.

Punjab tried to restrict the partnership with slower ones, but it didn't work. By the time Harshal Patel got Tripathi, the damage had already been done.

Range-hitting

In between overs, Nitish Reddy's swing made contact with the ball, it went flying into the stands. The young all-rounder found an excellent blend between attack and defence which made sure SRH maintained the momentum even after the Powerplay.

Nitish's partner in the middle phase, Heinrich Klaassen walked out to a loud cheer from the crowd and didn't disappoint. The South African seemed intent on testing his six-hitting ability. As soon as a spinner came on, Klaassen transferred his weight onto the backfoot and targeted the long-on region.

After a while, it was controlled aggression as the South African took the hosts close before getting bowled trying a scoop shot against Harpreet Brar. But Sanvir Singh hit the boundary to seal SRH's fifth home win of the season.

Prabhsimran tees off

The Punjab opener has threatened to play a blistering innings throughout the season. Prabhsimran and Atharva Taide stitched a 97-run opening partnership to put SRH under pressure.



Abhishek Sharma slammed six sixes, taking his tally to 41 sixes for the season, the most thus far. **PTI**

THE LINE-UP

QUALIFIER 1

KKR vs SRH
Tuesday, May 21, 7:30 pm; Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad

ELIMINATOR: Rajasthan Royals vs Royal Challengers Bengaluru

Wednesday, May 22, 7:30pm; Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad

QUALIFIER 2

Loser of Q1 vs Winner of Eliminator
Friday, May 24; MA Chidambaram Stadium; Chennai

FINAL

Winner of Q1 vs Winner of Q2
Sunday, May 26, 7:30pm; MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai

While the left-handed Taide relied more on timing, Prabhsimran cleared his left leg to access the leg side. Anything pitched up was hit through the mid-wicket

region and from time to time, he played a couple of cheeky scoops. On a wicket which was not providing any movement, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and

Pat Cummins were either too full or too short. It was T Natarajan who got the first breakthrough, getting Taide in the 10th over. However, Rilee Rossouw, the only overseas Punjab player in the XI, played his part. His timely cameo gave further impetus to the innings.

However, SRH got lucky when Prabhsimran tried to heave a ball from Vijayakanth Vijayakanth on the leg-side and the ball hit the foot and looped in the air to brush the glove before 'keeper Klaassen grabbed it. Captain for the day, Jitesh Sharma provided the finishing touch with a 15-ball 32 to help Punjab get to 214.

Brief scores: Punjab Kings 214/5 in 20 overs (Prabhsimran 71, Rossouw 49, Taide 46; Natarajan 2/33) lost to Sunrisers Hyderabad 215/6 in 19.5 overs (Abhishek 66, Klaassen 42) by 4 wickets

How Dhoni's last-over 110m six gave RCB the upper hand

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MAY 19

ROYAL CHALLENGERS Bengaluru pulled a rabbit out of the hat on Saturday by sneaking into the IPL playoffs with a 27-run victory over the Chennai Super Kings at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. And, in a strange way, RCB veteran Dinesh Karthik believes that Mahendra Singh Dhoni had a role to play in RCB securing playoffs spot.

"The best thing to happen today was Dhoni hitting that six outside the ground," Karthik told his RCB teammates in a fun debrief after the RCB vs CSK game.

Dinesh Karthik was, in fact, referring to Dhoni hitting the first ball of Yash Dayal's 20th over for a massive 110m six.

As it turned out, it was a sixer that inadvertently turned around the ship for RCB. CSK needed to get just 17 runs off the last over, which was bowled by Dayal. If they had managed that, CSK would have made it to the Playoffs even with a loss against RCB.

The first ball from Dayal went perfectly as per CSK's plan. Dhoni, who was gifted a full toss on his pads, sent the ball into orbit. The ball travelled 110 metres as per the broadcasters and eventually landed on the roof. But the enormity of the hit led to the ball being changed.

Karthik explained how the six had helped them. "We got a new ball, which was much better to bowl with"

Karthik also gently ribbed Dayal for bowling a juicy full-toss to Dhoni in the first



place. "Yash, that was good bowling. You have a doubt, always bowl a high, hip-high, full-toss, on leg stump. Wherever he is, it's

The best thing to happen today was Dhoni hitting that six outside the ground. We got a new ball, which was much better to bowl with. "Yash, that was good bowling. You have a doubt, always bowl a high, hip-high, full-toss, on leg stump. Wherever he is, it's a good mantra to follow when the ball is wet."

DINESH KARTHIK
RCB WICKETKEEPER

a good mantra to follow when the ball is wet," he smiled.

After the ball was changed, Dayal got

Dhoni out on the next ball itself with a back-of-the-hand slower ball, which caught Dhoni guard and the batter ended up edging the ball with the toe end. Swapnil Singh accepted the catch at deep backward square leg.

Eventually, CSK could manage only one run off their last four balls, when they needed just 11 runs to qualify.

"We all know how proud our franchisee is and how our fans are. I think we gave them a treat to watch. Also, you've got to understand the gravity of this game. If you do take head-to-head, I think CSK-RCB has been one of the most marquee games of this tournament for many, many years now. And it's only fair to say, I think, there have been many close games, but they have found a way sometimes to just get ahead of us," Karthik said.

EXECUTING PLANS

Dayal, using smart variations, redeems himself by dismissing Dhoni

VENKATA KRISHNA B
BENGALURU, MAY 19

AS MS Dhoni deposited the first ball of the last over for a 110m monster six, Yash Dayal's had flashbacks of April 9, 2023. With Kolkata Knight Riders needing 29 off the last over, he had conceded five consecutive sixes to Rinku Singh even as his family were watching him from the stands at Ahmedabad. Here at Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday, in what was Royal Challengers Bengaluru's biggest game of the season, Dayal overcame emotions and nerves to concede just 7 runs and put his side in the play-offs.

With Chennai Super Kings requiring 17 runs off the final over to make the play-offs, Royal Challengers Bengaluru were under pressure. Chennai were making a comeback out of nowhere. Apart from a wet ball to factor in - which saw Lockie Ferguson bowl two above the waist full-tosses - Dayal had to defend it against arguably the best finisher the world has seen.

Dhoni may be turning 43 in a couple of months and he isn't as agile anymore, but right through the season, he has been hitting the sixes, long and big. The first ball turned into a full-toss on the leg-stump which went over fine-leg.

Dayal had very little scope for another mistake now. For the first time on the night, silence gripped Chinnaswamy as Dayal ran

in to bowl the second.

"Last time (against KKR), whatever happened to me, there were a lot of nerves. But now ever since I came to the RCB set-up, I've been putting in a lot of hard work behind the scenes. And I was able to deliver in the matches as well. And after Dhoni hit the six, I was just thinking about delivering two good deliveries and how to execute my plan. And I didn't see any of the senior players coming in to offer advice and they were relaxed. It showed that they had the confidence in me. So I was able to execute the plan," said Dayal, who began the night by removing Daryl Mitchell in his first over.

Off the next ball, Dayal brought out the back of the hand slower ball - which is not just easy to execute, but hard to score off as well - and Dhoni was through the shot early. As Swapnil Singh completed the catch at square-leg, Dayal let out a roar. But between the first and the second ball, a whole lot was running through his head.

"After the first ball went for six, subconsciously you start thinking about KKR game. So I stopped looking at the scoreboard and was just thinking about execution. Obviously, with all the noise around, the mind was diverting. But as a player, you look forward to these moments and it is what you train for. Emotions were running high, but in the middle, you have to keep all of it aside and just follow the process that has been working all along. So I was focussing on executing my plan," Dayal added.



Yash Dayal brought out the back-of-the-hand slower ball to snare MS Dhoni - which is not easy to execute. **PTI**

That one over against KKR last year had given him a lot of stress. But on Monday night, he wasn't going to repeat the mistakes. Back then he was devoid of varia-

tions. But here, he went back to the slower deliveries that has been working for him all season. In a bowling attack that has hardly looked inspiring, Dayal has been the

lone exception for RCB. With 15 wickets, he is the lone RCB bowler in the top-20 wicket-takers list this season. And he showed why in the remaining four deliveries of the final over.

He greeted Shardul Thakur - a very capable hitter - with a 106 kmph slow-ball bouncer. The equation was getting steep. Off the fourth ball, he delivered a cutter that found Thakur's edge and gave him a single that brought Ravindra Jadeja to strike. 10 was needed off the last two deliveries. In the last year's IPL final, from a similar position, Jadeja had won it for Chennai.

In the 17th over, with 63 needed off the last four overs to qualify, it was in Dayal's over that Jadeja hit a boundary and a six to keep Chennai's hopes alive.

But Dayal wasn't going to give an inch this time in the final over. Fully aware of Jadeja's hitting arc, Dayal bowled the fifth delivery full and wide of the off-stump as the batsman swung and missed.

As Dinesh Karthik collected it and Chinnaswamy erupted for the nth time on the night, Dayal was already off on a celebratory run, exchanging hugs with the wicketkeeper. Off the last ball, he repeated the same line and length as Jadeja missed it again.

Dayal was off like a footballer's extended run after scoring a screamer.

The whole of Chinnaswamy was on its feet as Bengaluru celebrated a famous win way into Saturday night.

Bengaluru residents hit the streets with music and crackers

Soon after RCB's victory over CSK that sealed them a spot in the play-offs, Bengaluru residents came out on the streets and celebrated the moment. In a now-viral video shared by the official handle of RCB on X, residents can be seen blocking the roads, burning crackers and dancing on the streets. The two-minute-long video opens with Bengaluru cops managing the crowd as fans continue to cheer for the team and wave RCB's flags. "This was at 1:30 am tonight... This is what makes it all the more special. We have the best fans in the world and we're so proud of it." The video garnered over 7,21,000 views and several reactions on X. A user, reacting to the video, wrote, "Thank you admin for posting this. You owned all those ranting against RCB fans today." Another fan commented, "Team came here at this stage of qualifying just because of these fans, fans love is really incredible!" **ENS**

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MAY 19

ROHIT SHARMA has lashed out at broadcasters Star Sports for airing his conversations for "views and engagement" despite him requesting them not to do so. The angry India captain posted his comments on X, formerly known as Twitter, on Sunday afternoon.

"The lives of cricketers have become so intrusive that cameras are now recording every step and conversation we are having in privacy with our friends and colleagues, at training or on match days," Rohit said in a tweet on Sunday after Mumbai Indians ended its IPL 2024 campaign.

"Despite asking Star Sports to not record my conversation, it was and was also then played on air, which is a breach of privacy. The need to get exclusive content and focused only on views and engagement will one day break the trust between the fans, cricketers and cricket," Rohit added.

In recent times, two clips with Rohit's comments have become public. The first showed the India captain having a chat at Eden Gardens with his one-time Mumbai Ranji Trophy teammate Abhishek Nayar. The clip was first aired by a franchise's social media handle.

But after realising that Rohit was possibly speaking about personal stuff that he wouldn't want to be made public, the video was then hastily deleted. But by then, the damage was done. Many social media accounts had picked up the clip and aired it themselves.

'Audio band karo'

After this, Rohit was seen in another clip where he was chatting with friends in the stands at the Wankhede Stadium. In this one, Rohit can be heard telling the cameraperson shooting him not to record his audio.

"Bhai, audio band karo, haan? Ek audio ne mera waat laga diya (Please switch off the audio, one audio recording has ruined me)," he can be seen pleading with the cameraperson with folded hands.

What seems to have angered Rohit was that even that clip was aired with just one part muted in the middle.



4D City

Manchester City create history with unprecedented fourth Premier League title in a row

REUTERS
MANCHESTER, MAY 19

MANCHESTER CITY won an unprecedented fourth straight English top flight title with a 3-1 win over West Ham United on Sunday to pip rivals Arsenal on the final day of a thrilling Premier League season, sending fans onto the pitch in a sea of blue.

Two glorious early goals from league player of the season Phil Foden created a party atmosphere in the sunshine at the Etihad Stadium, before a stunning bicycle kick from West Ham's Mohammed Kudus before halftime briefly unnerved the hosts.

But victory never looked in doubt and Rodri sealed the points with a low shot just before the hour from outside the area, giving Pep Guardiola's side a sixth title in seven years.

City now have the chance of winning the double when they face Manchester United in the FA Cup final next Saturday.

Fans danced in their seats, belting out "Champions again!" and "Are you watching Arsenal?" before pouring onto the pitch and setting off blue flares when the final whistle sounded.

In one of the closest title races in Premier League history, Mikel Arteta's Arsenal chased them valiantly and could have taken the championship had City dropped points.

But the Londoners' 2-1 win in their home game against Everton was in vain, leaving them two points behind.

Brilliant Foden

Foden's already brilliant season got even better when he arched the ball into the top corner in the second minute then capped a fine team move to sweep home the second in the 18th.

"It's so hard to put into words what we've done today," Foden said. "No team has ever done it. You see what it means to the fans and it means to us. Working all year for this moment."

"I thought today we just looked confident and just played our football and in the end it paid off."

The midfielder has scored 19 league goals this season and has won six Premier League titles at just 23, making him one of England's best hopes for this year's Euros in Germany.

At the final whistle, blue-clad fans defied stewards to rush onto the pitch. The players hugged each other and, once again, later danced in triumph together in their dressing room.

City's latest title was won with 91 points,



Manchester City's Phil Foden celebrates the title triumph with his teammates. Reuters



to Arsenal's 89. On Sunday, they even had the luxury of seeing 27-goal league Golden Boot winner Erling Haaland fluff two close-range chances.

Final flourish

After trailing Liverpool and Arsenal for large periods of the season, City came good in the run-in - as is their custom - winning nine league matches in a row.

Their latest Premier League title followed a crushing Champions League quarter-final defeat on penalties by their Spanish rivals Real Madrid. Last year, City won the treble of Champions League, FA Cup and Premier

NUMBER PLATE

4

An unprecedented fourth straight Premier League title for Man City. A sixth in seven seasons to further emphasise dominance.

17 Number of trophies for City manager Pep Guardiola in eight years at the club - that could rise to 18 if City beats Man United in the FA Cup.

League. Guardiola donned a City top, waving to fans and high-fiving staff, as he walked up to receive his medal, followed by the players who lapped up the fans' adoration one-by-one.

"It feels as amazing as the first one," said midfielder Kevin De Bruyne. "We worked so hard for it. It's been a top battle with Arsenal and Liverpool this year. To again be doing something historic is amazing."

"This is one of my most special. I had a tough year, to be out for six months, but to come back."

Bernardo Silva added: "The achievement is unbelievable. Four in a row. We're so, so proud, and so, so happy."

Guardiola is the fourth manager to win six or more English top-flight titles, along with record holder Alex Ferguson (13), George Ramsay and Bob Paisley (both six).

Despite the deserved plaudits earned by City, for many fans of other clubs their dominance is tarnished by Premier League charges over alleged breaches of financial rules during the ownership of billionaire Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

City deny any wrongdoing and are contesting the charges.

City were unstoppable, irrepressible in title race

SANDIPG
MAY 19

WHEN THE final whistle blew, as the stewards formed a human barricade to deny the ecstatic Manchester City fans from spilling onto the ground, as their talisman of the season, Phil Foden, soaked in the hugs of his teammates, Pep Guardiola quietly rushed into the tunnel, with an ascetic detachment from celebrations. Maybe, he had exhausted his emotions, he was leaping and high-fiving when City scored each of their three goals that kept tension and suspense at bay, he had flung a water bottle in angst when his team conceded a goal, a sumptuous scissor kick that could swell the fame of Mohammed Kudus, or violently slapping his fists to suggest that Tomas Soucek goal was off the arm. And it was chalked off.

Guardiola had run his emotions, just as the team had run their emotions too. Maybe, deep inside he, and his men, knew they would march to the title; that all the noise from outside of drama and nerves, was just noise. Maybe, he views feats of history with coldness. A man who likes the journey and process rather than destination and results. But when he begins to count the treasure chest of feats he has achieved—the trebles with Barcelona and Manchester City, the gospel of tika taka, the most radical football philosophy of this century, the intellectualization of the managing art, the most efficient proponent of false nines and inverted full-backs, the best manager of this century perhaps, the 21st century Cruyff—the most recent could be the most magnificent too. The moment he sealed his legacy in English football.

To win four titles in a row anywhere in the world is difficult, but not unprecedented—Guardiola himself was part of the Barcelona side that won all four seasons from 1990-1994, Bayern Munich have claimed 11 on the spin—but in England it has been an elusive shore. A raft of legends have only watched it from afar, the title slipping through their palms.

The day his City was crowned champions for the tenth time in their history, and the sixth in seven years of Guardiola, he was symbolically coronated as one of the finest managers. The only questions that remain are if he is the finest ever the league has seen, or his side the most dominant side in the league's history.

Such questions have no clear answers. But he and his team (rather teams) have recast the league in their image, and infused it with their ideals and beliefs. Every team wants to play

like City—the league has embraced the possession style, the precedence of technique over physique and flair, and the obsession with the ball. Every manager wants to be like Pep Guardiola; every manager is rushing to their academy to fish out their own Phil Foden, the boy from Stockport down the road to Etihad adjudged the player of the season and whose blood and thunder brace sewed the historic moment for them; the scouts are scanning the La Liga for their next Rodri, the defensive midfielder with the passing vision of a playmaker and the striking finesse of a striker.

Both were the most towering figures of the season. Not just because they scored in the title-decider, but because they sustained their impact throughout the season. Foden netted 19 goals and conjured eight assists; Rodri belted eight himself and plotted nine goals. His attacking output was better than the men who are paid to conjure attacks, the stalwarts Kevin de Bruyne and Bernardo Silva. And all this without compromising on his defensive duties. Little wonder that City has never lost a game whenever he has started, and little coincidence that City's worst phase came when he was sitting out due to suspensions or injuries.

His versatility was all the more valuable in a season where Guardiola veered further away from his idealism. This was perhaps the most physical Guardiola side, the tallest and perhaps the most direct. It lacked the counter-punching vigour of last season or the passing purity of the classical Guardiola sides. The triumph was a statement of their steely resolve rather than a doctrine of style or beauty. They did not blow their prime contenders away this season, but stuttered and scraped past them. A goal against Arsenal was elusive in both legs; nerves were shred in both games against Tottenham Hotspur, and didn't beat Liverpool and Chelsea. But they still wreaked goalmouth havoc, scored goals when it mattered, stitched an undefeated run of 23 games.

The lone quibble could be that they were less fluent and beauteous than his other avatars of Guardiola's City, more machine-like. Fewer cutbacks, more goals from outside the box, more dribbling (Jeremy Doku would have struggled to get into most Guardiola teams of the past) and ball-carrying than passing and possessing, more frenzied, a less aesthetic version. If you had not seen Guardiola on the touchline, you wouldn't believe it's a team he has coached. Yet, they were unstoppable and irrepressible and that is the English premier league reality of our times. And the rest of the teams are merely living through it.

Satwik-Chirag react to early wake-up call to saunter their way to title

SHIVANI NAIK
MAY 19

THE TRICK to winning comfortably ultimately might be to never get too comfortable, for Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty.

So in what was destined to be a stroll in the park at the Thailand Open Super 500 final, the Indians managed to get themselves in a few tangles against the 4th best Chinese pairing of Chen Bo Yang and Liu Yi, ranked World No 29. But at the stroke of the 15th point, they'd had enough of the mock drill, and quickly raced to a 21-15, 21-15 title victory in 46 minutes.

But Shetty, the meticulous mental jotter of all low-key vicissitudes, would bring up that early shake-up they were forced into. In the opening set, Satwik-Chirag went from 5-1 up to 7-10 down. "At one point we led 5-1 but then we went down 7-10. It was a wake-up call that we needed to get back. They fought but they were not able to come back. We were always leading," he would say.

For a large part of their careers and ahead of every big title they've won, Satwik-Chirag have needed these wake-up trings to get their act together. The Chinese flatter game on the day where they struck good, deep lengths to midcourt, were micro-triggers, though it was never in doubt that the Indians would saunter past to their second Thailand title, the site of their first major tournament victory five years ago. But the jolt was necessary to keep them on their toes.

There's a film dating back to before this duo were born, a full-length movie of brilliant buffoonery before memes got mainstreamed and humour was sold short as clips, called Andaz Apna Apna. It had 'Tilu ko roz subeh dande dene hai' (Tilu must be caned daily), a reference to daily dosage of striking one of the lead characters on his head at regular intervals, so he would regain lost memory.

Satwik-Chirag haven't forgotten winning since they first picked that breakthrough title in Bangkok in 2019. But they tend to often need the rug to be slightly tugged from under their feet, so they don't forget to get cracking on court. Sometimes, tournament final losses are a punch to the gut before they collect themselves. At other times, little-known Chinese steal a micro-lead at start of a game to get them to be alert. The Tilu-treatment tends to work.

The upcoming Chinese are uncharacteristically sluggish, in that they've gone from



Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty beat Chinese pairing of Chen Bo Yang and Liu Yi 21-15, 21-15 to win their second title this season. BWF/BadmintonPhoto

World No 42 to World No 23 in this last year of dawdling on the circuit, and not stepped up. But they have one wicked weapon—their control over the low, flat game as Chen and Liu conjured fast exchanges with pushes that travelled quickly to midcourt. It often caught Shetty awkwardly in the ribs, testing his forehand defense as he had to squat low.

The Chinese also seemed to be aping Shetty's swivel serve and Satwik's lobs to the back, and resembled potential sparring simulators of the Indian game, for the top Chinese pair of Liang-Wang ahead of Paris. But there was little in their attack to truly trouble the Indians.

Still, Satwik tried a few disguised serves, and beautifully cut pace on his midcourt shots, leaving the Chinese short on reach as the shuttle dipped. When needed both Indians pulled out the big smashes, burying them middle of the court, but it was one of those finals where they were barely tested.

Chirag sent returns long a few times and promptly checked his aggression in the next rally to restore leads. And he was largely responsible for the smooth gear-switch from Point 15 onwards to race to the finish. He didn't need to be at his best, so he wasn't. But the Indians always looked in control.

"Good match. I knew they would keep on

playing fast, fast. If we relax they will keep on fighting till the last point. But it was the best match of the tournament (for us). We kept everything calm, under control," Satwik would tell BWF.

The regular title celebrating headlines will keep them chuffed. But Shetty admitted they wouldn't be lulled into complacency on this home stretch before Paris. "Not just us. All athletes want to go out there and get that trophy (Olympic medal)," he told the media later.

The Chinese fourth string was the toughest match they faced this week, and the Indians managed to make it look clinical and simple, not going into a decider the whole week and not crossing the 40-minute mark till the final. But with none of the top pairings standing in their way, this might be the easiest title Satwik-Chirag won.

A tiny wrangling over the early lead though, was a timely reminder of past reverses, and mid-match melts, in a year where they made four finals but didn't quite win a Super 1000 title. In the next ranking update, and with none of the top pairings playing this last week, they will reclaim the world No 1 ranking, reestablishing themselves as the best currently in a wildly fluctuating men's doubles field. But it is important that the wake-up calls won't be going away anytime soon.






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