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PM'S FIRST REFERENCE TO SANDESHKHALI STING VIDEOS SINCE THEY SURFACED A FORTNIGHT AGO

TMC blaming women to save its goons: Modi

'Mothers & Sisters Will Give Them A Fitting Reply'

Rohit Khanna, Falguni Banerjee & Sujoy Khanra | TNN

Kolkata/Purulia/Kharagpur: PM Narendra Modi on Sunday responded to the Sandeshkhali videos — for the first time since the first of the series surfaced a fortnight ago.

"Trinamool is trying to put the blame on Sandeshkhali women to save Sheikh Shahjahan and his men," the PM said during a campaign speech in Purulia, referring to the video that showed BJP Sandeshkhali Block-II chief Gangadhar Koyal purporting to admit that "the entire Sandeshkhali movement was (state assembly opposition leader) Suvenudhikari's brainchild" and that the "women (complainants) did whatever they were



PM Modi in Kharagpur on Sunday

told to do". "In a bid to save Shahjahan, TMC's men are now trying to point fingers at the women of Sandeshkhali and blame them," Modi said. "They are even raising questions about their character. The language being used by them is unacceptable. Mothers and sisters of Sandeshkhali will give them a fitting reply in the polls." The PM also attacked Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee

'Nation needs a strong PM and govt'

The country needed a strong Prime Minister and govt, PM Modi said in Bishnupur on Sunday. "Keep the country in mind when you cast your vote," he said, adding: "Wherever I go from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, I can hear echoes of another Modi govt this time." P 6

for her Saturday's reference to "a few monks, not everyone", where she accused them of working against TMC and for BJP. "Not all monks are the same. There is a maharaj in Behrampur I have been hearing about him for a long time... Kartik Maharaj. The person who says he will not allow any TMC agent in the polling booth," Banerjee had said in a rally in Hooghly.

'Action against corrupt', P 6

Why did PM stay silent for 15 days, asks TMC

BJP A Party Of Liars, Abhishek Hits Back

Dwaipayan Ghosh & Sujoy Khanra | TNN

Kolkata/Keshpur: TMC on Sunday accused PM Modi of "zipping up" for a fortnight on Sandeshkhali because he was aware the charges were lies.

"The PM has stopped talking about the Modi 420 Guarantee. In the last fortnight, he also zipped his mouth on Sandeshkhali after the video surfaced," said Derek O'Brien, Trinamool's leader in Rajya Sabha, adding, "Modi and his minions insult Bengal, degrade the dignity of women, choke the state of funds, and are migratory birds who only visit at election time."

Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, while addressing a rally in West Midnapore's Keshpur, said BJP was a "party of liars",



TMC's Abhishek Banerjee hands a party flag to outgoing BJP MP Kunar Hembram, who joined TMC

who had been exposed by the Sandeshkhali incident. "They are all liars, from head to toe, completely deceitful. Haven't you seen what they did in Sandeshkhali, how they humiliated women? BJP's mandal president Gangadhar Koyal claims that for 2,000 rupees, women were made to falsely make rape allegations, just to trap Trinamool," he said. Trinamool said it had acted against the accused in Sandeshkhali, going beyond party

Jhargram's outgoing BJP MP joins TMC

Outgoing Jhargram BJP MP Kunar Hembram joined TMC on Sunday in the presence of party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, an hour before PM Modi was scheduled to address a rally in Kharagpur, 42km away. Hembram had been denied a re-nomination by BJP, prompting him to distance himself from the party. P 6

affiliation. "TMC has expelled the accused [Sk Shahjahan and others] for six years. But BJP's Sandeshkhali video exposed BJP's conspiracy to malign Bengal, concocted by Bengal LoP Suvenudhikari. They bribed and forced women to sign a blank paper and file false rape charges. It is BJP that shelters molesters like Brij Bhushan Singh and Prajwal Revanna," the party said.

'Insults Bengal's greats', P 6

SEVEN BENGAL SEATS VOTE TODAY

BONGAON

- Main contestants: Shantanu Thakur (BJP), Biswajit Das (TMC)
- Voters: 18.3 lakh
- Seat held by: Shantanu Thakur (BJP)

BARRACKPORE

- Main contestants: Partha Bhowmick (TMC), Arjun Singh (BJP)
- Voters: 15 lakh
- Seat held by: Arjun Singh (BJP)

SERAMPORE

- Main contestants: Kalyan Banerjee (TMC), Kabir Shankar Bose (BJP)
- Voters: 19.2 lakh
- Seat held by: Kalyan Banerjee (TMC)

HOOGHLY

- Main contestants: Rachna Banerjee (TMC), Locket Chatterjee (BJP)
- Voters: 18.5 lakh
- Seat held by: Locket Chatterjee (BJP)

ARAMBAG

- Main contestants: Mitali Bag (TMC), Arup Kanti Digar (BJP)
- Voters: 18.8 lakh
- Seat held by: Aparupa Poddar (TMC)

HOWRAH

- Main contestants: Prasun Banerjee (TMC), Rathin Chakraborty (BJP)
- Voters: 17.6 lakh
- Seat held by: Prasun Banerjee (TMC)

ULUBERIA

- Main contestants: Sajda Ahmed (TMC), Arun Uday Pal Chaudhary (BJP)
- Voters: 17.4 lakh
- Seat held by: Sajda Ahmed (TMC)

Iran Prez Raisi 'at risk' after copter crash

A helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister crashed on Sunday as it was crossing mountain terrain in heavy fog, an Iranian official said.

The official said Raisi and foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian were "at risk following the helicopter crash". "We are still hopeful but information coming from the crash site is very concerning." Turkey is sending 32 rescue specialists to help Iran. On X, PM Modi said, "Deeply concerned by reports regarding President Raisi's helicopter flight today. We stand in solidarity with the Iranian people in this hour of distress, & pray for well being of the President and his entourage." P 14

Woman accuses BSF jawan of molesting her

A day before Uluberia goes to polls, residents of Kulgachhia chased down a BSF jawan and handed him over to police after he allegedly molested a woman out on her morning walk on Sunday. Trinamool has moved EC, urging it to ensure women's safety during the election. Following the woman's complaint, cops have sent notice to the chief of the BSF's unit and asked him to join the investigation. The woman, in her complaint, said she was out on a walk around 6am on a deserted village road, when two BSF jawans in uniform made objectionable verbal and physical gestures at her. She protested but a jawan forcibly hugged and kissed her, she said. Villagers rushed to the spot and caught hold of him. The other jawan fled. P 4

BJP running Op Jhaadu to jail all AAP netas: Kejriwal

New Delhi: Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday alleged that BJP was running "Operation Jhaadu", aiming to arrest all top functionaries of his party to eliminate AAP, as it saw them as a challenge.

Cops ready 50 questions for Bibhav Kumar, P 12
AAP taking to streets to save accused: Malwal, P 12

Kejriwal was addressing party workers before leading a protest march to BJP headquarters following the arrest of his aide, Bibhav Kumar, in the Swati Malwal assault case. Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha, who had been missing in action for months due to an eye surgery that even led

Ink on Kharge poster outside state Cong office

A day after AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and Pradesh Congress chief Adhir Chowdhury crossed swords over chief minister Mamata Banerjee's role in INDIA bloc, Kharge's poster in front of the Pradesh Congress office at Bidhan Bhavan was found smeared with ink. Party workers later washed it off with milk. Chowdhury, who was in Behrampur, asked Congress functionaries in Kolkata to file an FIR. This was later done at Entally PS. Kharge had said Banerjee was "very much a part of INDIA bloc". Chowdhury had responded that he could not be expected to appease someone who wanted to decimate the party in Bengal. P 6

Teen seen voting for BJP 8 times in video, detained

Lucknow: A viral video showing the 17-year-old son of a gram pradhan purportedly voting eight times at a polling station in UP's Farrukhabad constituency on May 13 led the authorities to file an FIR and detain him late on Sunday, initiate disciplinary proceedings against officials managing the booth, and recommend a reop.

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi, and Congress's X handle were among those who shared the two-minute, 19-second video showing the offender flashing different ID cards at intervals and appearing to press the EVM button in front of BJP candidate Mukesh Rajput's photo and the lotus symbol. He is seen wearing two shirts in the video of multiple

AP-born Gopi 1st Indian to go to space as tourist

Andhra Pradesh-born Gopi Thotakura made history on Sunday as he became the first Indian citizen to enter space as a tourist. He was part of the crew for Blue Origin's NS-25 mission, reports Surendra Singh.

Gopi, an entrepreneur and a pilot, flew to space with Ed Dwight (90), now the oldest man to go to space, and four others. Although he became the first Indian citizen to go to space as a tourist, Gopi is officially the second astronaut from the country after Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma, who flew as a professional cosmonaut to space on board Soyuz T-11 on April 3, 1984, as part of the Soviet programme. P 14

MUTUAL FUN
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WEATHER
Max 36.6°C (+0.8) Min 28.5°C (+1.8). Sunrise: Tue 4.54am. Sunset: Mon 6.12pm. Partly cloudy sky with rain/thundershower very likely towards afternoon/evening. Max & min temp may be around 37°C & 29°C. Max humidity 81% min 48% Rain: Trace

Porsche runs over 2, minor at wheel

Two young software engineers, both aged 24, died after a Porsche Taycan, driven by the 17-year-old son of a builder, hit their motorcycle near a pub in an upscale neighbourhood in Pune on Sunday. The driver was detained and Juvenile Justice Board released him later with conditions. P 8

IPL last 4: It's KKR vs SRH, RR vs RCB

IPL 2024 league toppers KKR will play second-placed SRH in the first qualifier while RR and RCB will meet in the eliminator after the final league game between KKR and RR was washed out. P 17

Bengal records 36 cases of newest Cov variant

FLIRT: 'NO NEED TO WORRY... YET'

WHAT IS KP.2?

- It's an offshoot of omicron's JN.1 variant
- Known to cause mild symptoms
- Has high transmission rate

States with double-digit KP.2 cases

Maharashtra	146
Bengal	36
Gujarat	23
Rajasthan	21
Odisha	17
Uttarakhand	16
Goa	12

Across India: 286

Kolkata: Thirty-six samples have tested positive to the newest Covid variant — KP.2 — in genomic sequencing performed in the last few weeks. An offshoot of Omicron, this variant is the driving force behind an uptick in cases in several states across the country. Health officials said KP.2 is replacing the JN.1 variant, and has been found in about 50% of samples being sequenced. As of now, there was only a slight increase in Covid numbers, but there was no reason to panic, as the current strain was causing only mild symptoms, they added. The 36 KP.2-positives were among 286 such across India, with Maharashtra having the biggest share. Sources in the health department said almost all samples sequenced at the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics, Kalyani, were from Kolkata. "KP.2 is a descendant of the omicron variant JN.1, which has been in circulation in Bengal for more than four months," said a state health official. "While this offshoot is gradually replacing its parent JN.1, there is no reason to worry, as it causes only mild disease," he added. Microbiologist Bhaskar Narayan Chaudhuri of Peerless Hospital said KP.2 belonged to the FLIRT group of SARS-CoV-2 — including KP.2, JN.1.7 and any other variant starting with KP or JN — which appear to have independently picked up the same set of mutations. "This is called convergent evolution," Chaudhuri said. "This variant is known to evade immunity conferred by previous infections or vaccinations, but it causes only mild symptoms. Covid has now turned into just another viral respiratory infection — milder than influenza and adenovirus infections, not to speak bacterial infections, which are much more severe, compared to Covid now," he added. "No imminent alarm", P 5

Pawar: MVA will win at least 50% of Maha seats

Sharad Pawar, in an exclusive interview to TOI, said: "I think Modi's opinion (opposition netas focused on setting up their children) is wrong; it is not a crime to follow in your parents' footsteps." On FULL Q&A: P 12

the PM's prediction of NDA winning 400 seats, he said: "I am doubtful if BJP will reach the majority figure in view of severe discontent against NDA." "In my opinion, MVA will win at least 50% of the seats in Maharashtra." P 5

B'desh pirates kill Sundarbans guard

A 59-year-old forest guard was hacked to death on Saturday night after he was attacked, allegedly by alleged Bangladeshi pirates, inside Sundarbans Tiger Reserve. Amalendu Halder was posted at the Netidhapani camp. Three other forest workers escaped by jumping into the river. P 5

Raj tourist loses eye in J&K attack

Sunny Khan, a Rajasthan tourist who was attacked by terrorists near Pahalgam on Saturday, has lost vision in an eye and risks partial vision loss in the other. He is in ICU. His wife, Farah, is also critical. P 8



DIDI'S PHONE CAMPAIGN TO WOO HIGH-RISE VOTERS IN HOWRAH, KOLKATA | 4

SCIENCE CITY MUSEUM RECTIFIES GENDER BIAS, SHOWCASES WOMEN SCIENTISTS | 5



'No fixed rate', parking mafia fleece motorists in central Kol

Charge ₹20 Per Hour For Small Cars, ₹30 Per Hour For Sedans, SUVs

Dwaipayan Ghosh & Sarthak Ganguly | TNN

Kolkata: There seems to be no respite from parking mafia in central Kolkata even in the poll season. Several motorists have alleged they are being fleeced by a section of parking attendants around Exide crossing and Shakespeare Sarani. These attendants reportedly demand arbitrary fees. The official parking rate for cars is Rs 10 per hour in the KMC area.

This weekend, a motorist who has launched a crusade against parking extortion for the past several months lodged another complaint against a parking attendant and ensured the latter was removed from duty pending inquiry.

Srinjoy Sen (28), a travel agent from Tollygunge Swiss Park, complained on Saturday that he had been charged excess parking fees near Rotary Sadan on Chowringhee Road.

NIGHTMARE IN OFFICE PARA



Motorists have complained about parking extortion on Chowringhee Road, as well as on Rawdon Street (in pic)

ad. He claimed that when he protested, he was verbally abused and the attendants reportedly kept banging on his car. He said he was charged Rs 200 for nine hours.

On Sunday, TOI visited the area on Chowringhee Road and found the attendants in blue uniform were taking Rs

20 per hour for small cars and Rs 30 per hour for sedans and SUVs.

Ram Yadav, a businessman from Garia, parked his sedan near Rotary Sadan for two hours. "The attendant asked for Rs 60. When I asked if the rate was hiked, he told me they did not have any fixed rate.

"I have no qualms in paying a higher parking fee. But that has to be approved by the administration. The attendants use two-wheelers to block parking space and then remove them once you agree to pay more

Srinjoy Sen | MOTORIST

"We take ₹20 from those who come to any programme at Rotary Sadan. Those who park for at least nine hours are charged ₹20 per hour. For others, it is ₹30 per hour

Sanjay Sardar | PARKING ATTENDANT ON CHOWRINGHEE ROAD

not have it. The parking rate rises further at night," Banerjee said.

Sanjay Sardar, one of the attendants on Chowringhee Road, said: "We take Rs 20 from those who come to any programme at Rotary Sadan. Those who park for at least nine hours are charged Rs 20 per hour. For others, it is Rs 30 per hour." The attendant claimed they had not been given a rate chart, so there was no fixed parking rate in the area.

A similar allegation of exorbitant parking charge has been made by Sen about Rawdon Street.

The Shakespeare Sarani police said they have received Sen's complaint and examination of this can be turned into an FIR and extortion sections slapped. As of now, a GD has been made. "As with Sen's other complaints, we have sent them to KMC with a recommendation to take action on the parking attendant," said an officer.

Raj Bhavan staffers fail to turn up at PS, cops send 2nd notice

Dwaipayan Ghosh @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: The three Raj Bhavan employees summoned by cops to Hare Street police station on Sunday did not turn up to face the interrogators. The notice was served under CrPc 41(A) and cops said that not responding to it amounted to facing legal action. By evening, the cops issued a second notice asking them to present themselves before police next Tuesday. The police said they are also keeping all legal options open.

The cops said they were yet to get any communication — either written or verbal — till the time this report was filed on Sunday evening. Though reports indicated that at least one of the three accused have left Kolkata, cops have refused to either confirm or deny the same.

The notice under Section 41A of the CrPc would require a person to appear before

CASE FILE

> **FIR** | Against three Raj Bhavan staffers — an officer on special duty, a lady staffer in pantry and a Group D staffer

> **Sections slapped** | 341 IPC (wrongful restraint) and 166 IPC (a public servant disobeying law)

> **Notices** | Cops issued 41A CrPc notices because arrests aren't usually the norm under these sections

cops at a specified place and time. Offences such as theft, cheating, forgery, assault, or other offences with a maximum punishment of seven years of imprisonment fall under this provision.

On Thursday, cops had registered an FIR against three Raj Bhavan staffers for "wrongful restraint" of the junior staff member who had brought charges of physical

harassment against governor CV Ananda Bose on May 2.

Kolkata Police had filed an FIR against officer on special duty S S Rajput and contractual employees Kusum Chetri (on pantry duty) and Sant Lal for allegedly wrongfully restraining the contractual employee, who accused the governor of molesting her, under sections 341 (wrongful restraint) and 166 (public servant disobeying law). Unlike the governor, Raj Bhavan staffers do not enjoy any constitutional immunity.

The FIR was lodged after the woman recorded her statement in connection with the molestation case before a magistrate. Cops said the names of all FIR-accused had appeared in the complaint.

A CCTV grab showing an accused woman carrying a bag belonging to the complainant has helped cops firm up their evidence, for which they need to record the employees' statements.

JU girl's harassment complaint against classmate

Dwaipayan Ghosh @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: A first-year UG student from Jadavpur University has lodged a police complaint claiming that a classmate and another man were harassing her and demanding sexual favours. The complaint was lodged through email last week.

The cops have contacted the girl and have started a preliminary inquiry.

'THREATENED TO LEAK MY PICS'

According to the complainant, this was her second complaint against the JU student, the first one registered on April 10. "We had met in Aug 2023 and were in a relationship for over three months. But when he began abusing me in public, I lodged a police complaint against him," she said.

However, she claimed the accused continued the cons-

tant abuse and harassment. The accused also contacted a man from Minakhan, with whom the complainant had been in a relationship earlier. "The JU student contacted him through social media to get access to intimate and personal details about me. Together, they started blackmailing and harassing me, saying that they will leak personal pictures and videos of me on public platforms and to my family members in order to harm my reputation," the girl alleged. She added that the accused from Minakhan also asked for sexual favours to stop the harassment.

"When I refused, he kept blackmailing me. The JU student repeatedly aided him in these activities... I constantly fear for my personal and social security. I am scared and am pleading for necessary intervention by police," the complainant said.

DC (Jadavpur) Bidisha Kalita said they were helping the complainant.

Threefold hike in flight fares to Darj and Sikkim

Subhro Niyogi @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: As schools shut down for summer vacation and people scramble to cooler climes to spend their holidays, flight fares to Bagdogra in north Bengal and Pakyong in Sikkim have gone through the roof. There is also a good demand for travel to Bhutan.

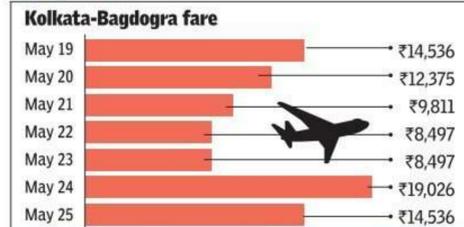
On Saturday, the fare to Bagdogra touched nearly Rs 15,000 while that to Pakyong, where only one flight operates, was over Rs 20,000. That is three times the usual fare in these sectors.

Fares to Bagdogra do dip to around Rs 9,000 during the week but again move northward to touch nearly Rs 20,000 on Friday, May 24. Fares on the flight to Kolkata from Bagdogra are equally steep, hovering around Rs 16,000 during the next weekend.

On the Kolkata-Pakyong route, where SpiceJet operates the lone flight, the fare is around Rs 20,100 on Saturday. On Sunday, it dips to Rs 12,000 and stays around the mark during the weekdays before shooting up to Rs 14,000 next Saturday. Airline officials said the fares would continue to rise as peak travel days approached.

Tour and travel operators said the spike in air fares to Bagdogra and Pakyong had

SKYWARD BOUND



been fuelled due to the increasing number of travellers wanting to take a break from the hot and sultry weather. "There will be a huge rush over the weekend now that schools have closed for the summer. We expect another rush in June, after the polls are over in Kolkata," said Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) national executive member Anil Punjabi.

With Monday as a holiday in the district, on account of elections, there are a few travellers from Howrah who are

combining the extended weekend with a couple of additional days' leave to take a vacation in the Hills.

Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) chairman (east) Manav Soni said there is a good demand for holidaying in Bhutan. "Return fares on the sector are hovering around Rs 30,000 per person," he added. Soni also said the keenness to go to cooler places has also witnessed a jump in travel to international destinations like Georgia and Azerbaijan.

10%-20% lupus patients are below 18, say doctors

Aaheli Chowdhury

Kolkata: Lupus or Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE), an autoimmune disorder which is considered to be an adult disease, is now being increasingly detected among children, claim city-based doctors. Doctors apprehend that around eight in 10 children are developing the chronic renal diseases linked to Lupus due to delay in its detection and treatment.

Lupus is a condition, in which the body's immune cells start attacking its own cells and organs instead of fighting foreign infections. "Out of all those affected with SLE, over 10% to 20% were children under 18," said Sanjukta Poddar, an assistant professor, during a meet on lupus, organized by the Institute of Child Health (ICH) Kolkata last week.

The children's hospital has more than 100 patients registered with it. Many were detected with severe conditions, involving organs like the brain and the kidney.

"Early diagnosis is the key as this will ensure timely medical attention. With proper treatment, most patients can lead a normal life," said Priyanka Pal, professor and paediatric rheumatology head at ICH.

Early detection helped Apoorva Sengupta (23), who has been surviving with lupus for a

WHAT'S LUPUS?

What's Lupus?	Symptoms
> An autoimmune disease with multisystem involvement	> Skin rashes, swollen and achy joints, high fever, chest pain while breathing deep
> Immune system attacks its own cells and organs	> It can affect the brain, kidneys and the heart
> Affects females more than males	

decade now. A master chess player, she was detected with severe lupus that had involved her brain when she was only 13 years old.

"Due to my health, I had to initially quit several hobbies and dreams. But now I am living a normal life and am pursuing my passions and interests," said Sengupta.

While men are also affected, doctors said the rate of prevalence of lupus among women is higher and that could be due to hormonal issues.

"In addition to kidney damage, this disease can cause heart attack, skin issues, nerve damage and miscarriage in pregnancy cases. There is a need to talk about this disease to raise awareness," said Alakes Kumar Kole of SSKM Hospital.

Met spies week-long rain from today

Aheli Banerjee @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: A cyclonic circulation near the Bengal coast is likely to bring relief to Kolkata after a week-long spell of hot and humid weather. The weathermen have predicted a rainy week, which will start with thunders-

and Tuesday, before fizzling out by weekend," said Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) scientist, H R Biswas.

While the cyclonic circulation lies at 3.1 km above mean sea level over Gangetic West Bengal, a second system in the Bay of Bengal, a low-

pressure area, is likely to take shape by next Wednesday.

While the two systems are unrelated and unlikely to converge, the low-pressure is likely to develop further into a depression moving closer to the Bengal coastline by May 24.

Monday is likely to be partly cloudy.

SUNNY SIDE UP



Dressed up for a Sunday outing, girls beat the heat with umbrellas at Maidan

NKDA plans multi-speciality hosp on health centre plot

Suman Chakraborti @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: Residents of New Town have been demanding an affordable multi-speciality hospital in the township for a long time and, taking that into account, the New Town Kolkata Development Authority (NKDA) is mulling a plan to utilize a plot sanctioned for an urban community health centre (UCHC) in Action Area I for the same. The authorities are likely to set up an 8-10-storey multi-speciality hospital on the plot.

However, NKDA's plans are subject to approval from the state govt.

NKDA has taken an initiative to take the plan forward and officials have recently discussed the matter with senior members of the health department and urban development department. At present, there is an urban primary health centre (UPHC) beside the proposed location for the multi-speciality hospital.

"Even though a number of private hospitals are coming up, we have been receiving feedback from several New Town residents that there was a lack of a govt-run hospital in the township and the private hospitals that are coming up were not multi-speciality hospitals. Keeping this in mind, we plan to develop a multi-speciality hospital in the public sector," said an NKDA official.

NKDA authorities plan to have a multi-storied building structure for the hospital

10-STOREY BLDG WITH PARKING LOT

> Proposed location is on the land sanctioned for an UCHC beside an existing UPHC in Action Area I

> Due to the growing population, residents have been demanding an affordable multi-speciality hospital in the township

> At present, there are a number of private hospitals

coming up in New Town but effectively, there is no multi-speciality hospital

> The plan is to have a basement and car parking space on the premises of the proposed multi-speciality hospital. The building is likely to have at least 8 to 10 stories

> Currently, there are three UPHCs in New Town



The multi-speciality hospital may come up on this plot

After first dengue cases following last week's rain, civic bodies off VIP Road take guard

Suman Chakraborti @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: Civic authorities of areas off VIP Road have decided to intensify their dengue-control drives after two fresh cases — one each from Bidhannagar Municipal Corporation (BMC) ward 1 and 3 of Rajarhat Gopalpur — and a few from adjacent South Dum Dum were reported following the showers last week.

BMC officials said civic teams were visiting localities prone to water accumulation and spraying larvicide in the drains and road-side corners. The civic authorities were also conducting weekly clean-up of ponds. "Dengue control drives, including cleaning

CASES REPORTED IN BMC, SOUTH DUM DUM

BMC area	South Dum Dum
2024: 3 cases so far	2023: 1,000 dengue cases and eight dengue deaths recorded
2023: Around 3,940 dengue cases recorded, the second highest in recent times	
2022: 2 dengue deaths, 4,222 cases, highest since 2017	
Area under NKDA	
2023: 348 dengue cases	

recorded in New Town, over double the figures in 2022

2022: The number of dengue affected-persons stood at 151

2021: Only 49 persons were affected in New Town

2023: 1,000 dengue cases and eight dengue deaths recorded



Two new dengue cases in BMC area

Kolkata: Two persons from

company by the police, have been entering abandoned or locked buildings to clean the premises.

The New Town Kolkata Development Authority (NKDA) has co-opted a Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) entomologist and a KMC health advisor as NKDA honorary entomologist and honorary advisor of health to oversee and supervise mosquito-control drives.

NKDA has also got an officer from the state urban development agency (SUDA), who has been placed to assist NKDA in the mosquito-control measures. "The idea is to increase operational manpower to strengthen the vector-borne disease-control drive," an official said.

and larvicide spraying, have been going on round the year," said BMC MMIC (health), Banibrata Banerjee.

A dengue case was reported in Jan and the two recent cases have taken the total to three in BMC so far this year.

In 2023, BMC area had recorded around 3,940 dengue cases, the second highest in recent times. In 2022, the area under BMC had witnessed 4,222 dengue cases, the highest since 2017. Officials said that a special clean-up drive

on govt premises will be taken up soon and door-to-door visits would start from June. South Dum Dum was severely hit by dengue last year with eight deaths and around 1,000 cases. For the last few years, the civic authorities, ac-

In remembrance

यद्यदाचरति श्रेष्ठस्तत्तदेवेतरो जनः।
स यत्प्रमाणं कुरुते लोकस्तदनुवर्तते ॥

Whatever action a great man performs, common men follow.
And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.

- The Bhagavad Gita 3.21



Padma Bhushan Shri Narayanan Vaghul

August 4, 1936 – May 18, 2024

Former Chairman, ICICI Bank

A dharma yogi, institution builder, guru, visionary, author, philanthropist,
and doyen of Indian industry.

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BATTLEGROUND INDIA | APRIL 19-JUNE 4, 2024

Barrackpore holds its breath ahead of no-holds-barred fight

EC Deploys 65 Cos Central Forces, 3.5k State Cops

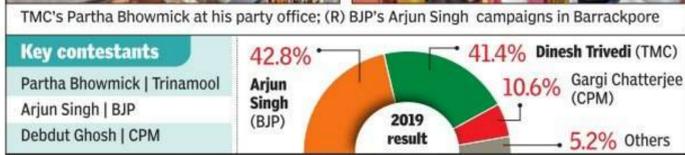
Krishnendu Bandyopadhyay & Sanjib Chakraborty | TNN

Kolkata: Barrackpore finds itself on edge the day before a high-stakes election, with an uneasy calm suggesting a potential storm ahead. In response to the palpable tension in this industrial belt, the EC has deployed over 11,000 personnel, including 65 companies of central forces and 3,500 state police personnel.

The Saturday night bomb attack in Amdanga, an assembly segment within this constituency, only underlined the fragile tranquillity here.

Goons reportedly hurled at least five bombs at the house of BJP leader Mohammad Abu Hena, damaging the window panes. Around 1.30 am, a group of five to six youths arrived on two bikes and attack-

VOTE SHARE IN 2019 LS ELECTION



ed Hena's house in Beraberia-Harpara, Amdanga. They fled immediately after the attack. Hena, a close aide of Arjun Singh, said: "All the window panes at the front side of my house were shattered and we narrowly escaped the attack."

Anisur Rahman, a local Trinamool leader, said: "BJP's two rival groups hurled bombs at each other, resulting in the damage to his hou-

se. None of our supporters were involved."

Regarding the incident, both candidates pointed fingers at each other, accusing their opponents of employing age-old tactics to intimidate voters. Despite these allegations, both are confident that voters will thwart such attempts.

"I have not even an iota of doubt about my victory," said

BJP's Arjun Singh during a marathon meeting with his vote workers.

Partha Bhowmick, state minister and Trinamool candidate, who was on a whirlwind tour across his constituency to have adda with booth workers, said: "People have decided to vote against BJP. The huge turnout will turn the tables."

Both have meticulously

calculated the positives and negatives of voter support and strategically deployed cadres across the booths and beyond. Bhowmick's benefits from the backing of MLAs in six assembly segments were constantly challenged by Arjun Singh's tactical prowess even on Sunday as both realigned their respective voting machinery.

Singh, who initially became an MLA from Bhatpara on a Trinamool ticket and was later elected to the Lok Sabha, has been known for his frequent flip-flops. This has not gone down well with the people, making this a tough contest. Bhowmick, on the other hand, has tirelessly canvassed the constituency.

In 2021, Bhowmick won Naihati assembly seat by a margin of 77,753 votes. When asked if he is worried about securing votes even in his own area, he said, "I am extremely lucky to have never been deprived of people's blessings." Singh said: "I will win by over 1,00,000 votes this time." In 2019, Singh defeated heavyweight TMC candidate Dinesh Trivedi by over 14,000 votes.

CAA test for voters today as Bongaon goes to polls

Tamaghna Banerjee & Sanjib Chakraborty | TNN

Bongaon: Ahead of the polls on Monday, Bongaon LS constituency in North 24 Parganas has turned out to be a crucial battleground for BJP to demonstrate the effectiveness of its key agenda of implementing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in resonating with voters.

The Matua refugee community, which forms a significant portion of the electorate, may play a decisive role because of the sheer size of the community, constituting 70% of the constituency's population and the fact that they continue to have the refugee status despite having voter and Aadhaar cards.

The constituency, located along the Bangladesh border, has witnessed substantial migration over the years and has been the focus of election battle fought over CAA for three consecutive Lok Sabha polls. Trinamool Congress, which won the seat in 2009 and 2014, also places great importance on this constituency due to the party and CM Mamata Banerjee's resolute opposition to CAA.



TMC's Biswajit Das (L) & BJP's Shantanu Thakur during campaigns

Since 2014, BJP has positioned itself as the champion of the Matuas' aspirations for recognition and security. It managed to pass the CAA in 2019 and notified the rules just before the election this year.

However, despite initial celebrations in Thakurnagar, Gaighata and other places, confusion has set in among the Matua community regarding the complexities of the application process, which demands proof of residency in Bangladesh.

Sukhen Sarkar (72) of Bhardua village in Gaighata told TOI: "I had come to this country with my parents after 1971 with nothing but a pair of clothes. How can we get proof of residency and birth?" As a re-

sult, majority of Matuas are hesitant to apply.

The Matuas, followers of a Vaishnavite Namasudra sect, began migrating to Bengal during the Partition and later, in significant numbers, after the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War.

"CAA is a hoax which will ultimately lead to NRC and will turn an existing citizen into foreigner. The CM has made it very clear that we are already citizens of India," said TMC candidate Biswajit Das.

Union minister Shantanu Thakur said AITC's campaign against CAA was baseless. Asked about the confusion regarding the process, he said: "People can give self-declaration in absence of any document."

In Howrah TMC bastions, BJP banks on Ram temple emotions

Dwaipayan Ghosh@timesgroup.com

Howrah: As BJP attempts to dent one of the citadels of Trinamool Congress in south Bengal, Howrah is all set to witness a poll battle between a set of hopefuls from the saffron brigade, who are hoping to cash in on the Ram Mandir emotion, and a battle-hardened TMC organization that has delivered each time the party needed them to do so.

At Howrah (Sadar), which will yet again be voting largely on civic issues, TMC had swept all seven assembly seats three years ago. The



Trinamool candidate Prasun Banerjee during a poll campaign in Howrah

zeable section of those who travelled from this constituency. It also has around 25% Hindi-speaking voters," said a party organizer. TMC, initially disturbed by infighting, has this time aligned together calling it a mandate for Didi even as its candidate, ex-Indian football team captain and Arjuna awardee, Prasun Banerjee, is seeking his fourth successive term.

The fact that even CM Mamata Banerjee connected with voters from high-rises directly over phone

on the last day of campaign just goes on to show that the party does not leave anything to chance. "We faced some setbacks in last LS polls in North Howrah and Bally. We regained them in the assembly polls," he said.

In Uluberia, TMC starts the race well ahead. In 2021, it had bagged all seven seats with a staggering vote share of 50% while the BJP secured 38%. The TMC, since then, has bolstered its position with solid booth management.

TMC looks to retain edge in tough battle for Hooghly's 3 Lok Sabha seats

Poulami Roy Banerjee & Sarthak Ganguly | TNN

Kolkata: Hooghly's three Lok Sabha seats — Serampore, Hooghly and Arambag — are poised for a tough battle, with Trinamool Congress hoping to hold on to its stronghold. In the 2019 Lok Sabha, Trinamool had won Serampore and Arambag but lost Hooghly.

Trinamool's Hooghly candidate Rachna Banerjee, who has been on the road campaigning since March 16, is confident. "I have given my 100%. Now I leave it to the people and God," she said, back in Kolkata to meet her son after 20 days. Banerjee said her confidence stems from the fact that people have showered her with affection and blessings.

Visiting interior villages from early morning and rushing to places from where complaints are filed have been a routine for BJP candidate Locket Chatterjee. "Makeup (in reference to Banerjee) will not work to attract votes, connection to people and development

CLOSE CONTEST

 Kalyan Banerjee	 Rachna Banerjee
 Locket Chatterjee	 Dipsita Dhar

HOOGHLY TMC Rachna Banerjee BJP Locket Chatterjee CPM Monodip Ghosh 2019 Winner BJP (46%)
SERAMPORE TMC Kalyan Banerjee CPM Dipsita Dhar BJP Kabir Shankar Bose 2019 Winner TMC (45.5%)
ARAMBAG TMC Mitali Bag CPM Biplal Kumar Moitra BJP Arup Kanti Digar 2019 Winner TMC (44.1%)

work can only attract people. I am 100% confident about my win."

On Sunday, Serampore's Trinamool candidate Kalyan Banerjee met the party workers to get fe-

edbacks. Banerjee said, "I am confident that two candidates from different parties will fight for the second and the third position." Left candidate Dipsita Dhar rus-

hed to protect party workers where they were attacked and spent her day with local leaders to set strategy for Monday's poll. "I am feeling more confident now from the day when I started my campaign. I received positive feedback and blessings from the people, even from opposing party workers," she said.

Both the contestants in Arambag, with a tinge of nervousness, exuded confidence. Trinamool's Mitali Bag, a resident of Dattpur in Hazipur, said: "I have campaigned for over two months and tomorrow is the day when all my efforts will be put to test. I have requested all villagers to step out and cast their votes without any fear."

BJP candidate Arup Kanti Digar started his day by offering prayer at Kamarpukur Ramakrishna Math. "I am tracking all the booths and there is little nervousness as we saw a neck-to-neck fight during campaigning. But we have faith in people and asked them to press any button of their choice without being intimidated," said Digar.

EC transfers Purulia SP, Contai SDPO six days before election

Debashis Konar@timesgroup.com

Kolkata: The Election Commission (EC) has transferred SP of Purulia, Avijit Banerjee, six days before the polls in the district on May 25. Similarly, the SDPO of Contai in East Midnapore, Dibakar Das, along with the officers in charge of Bhupatinagar and Patashpur were also transferred.

The EC had earlier received complaints against these officers and directed that the new replacements should take charge by Monday. These officers were asked to be given posts not related to election.

An official said the EC found that the SP of Purulia had played a partisan role and it also previously received similar complaints when he was the SP of Dia-

mond Harbour. He was transferred to ensure free and fair polls in Purulia, added the official. However, Trinamool has questioned that if this be the reason, why was he transferred less than a week before the polls in Purulia.

Even the polls in East Midnapore are scheduled on May 25, making the transfers in the district significant just

2 OCs ALSO SHIFTED

ahead of the election. The SDPO of Contai is going to be replaced, and the OC of Bhupatinagar police station under his jurisdiction is also being shifted.

There were complaints that Gopal Pathak, OC of Bhupatinagar, had acted in a biased manner and issued summons to National Investigation Agency

(NIA) officers who were in Bhupatinagar in early April, probing a 2022 blast. The NIA team was attacked during their raid. Allegations were made that the NIA officers had molested a woman during the raid, leading to a case being initiated. The NIA had to appeal to the high court against the purported actions of the police.

Pathak had also reportedly tried to arrest a BJP leader from a party office, which irked the BJP leadership, prompting them to lodge a complaint against him for acting on behalf of the Trinamool.

Rajiv Kundu, OC of Patashpur, has also been transferred. There were allegations that he was close to the Trinamool Congress, leading to complaints being lodged against him by BJP.

Border trade at Petrapole stays shut for 5 days

Debashis Konar@timesgroup.com

Kolkata: The border trade has been staying shut for five days as both Epar Bangla and Opar Bangla will vote this week. While the Bongaon Lok Sabha polling is on Monday, the Jessore upa-zilla polls are scheduled on Tuesday. There will be no truck movement on Wednesday as it is a holiday in Bangladesh, said Hafizul Islam, a joint commissioner of the Bangladesh govt.

North 24 Parganas DM Sharad Dwivedi has imposed

POLLS ON BOTH SIDES

a prohibitory order under Section 144 (2) CrPC and restricted movement along the international border from Friday 6pm. However, there is a relaxation of norms for medical emergencies and only perishable items are allowed.

As border gates have been shut down, none from Bangladesh can come to rig the polls, said Kartick Chakraborty, secretary of the Petrapole C&F Agents Welfare Association.

Kamlesh Saini, manager of the Land Port Authority of India at Petrapole, said that an average, 6,000 to 8,000 passengers, 400 trucks from India and 150-200 from Bangladesh cross the Petrapole border. But as a result of elections and a holiday in Bangladesh on Wednesday, the truck movement will resume only on Thursday.

Didi's phone campaign to woo high-rise voters

Tamaghna Banerjee & Sudipto Das | TNN

Kolkata: CM Mamata Banerjee is reaching out to voters residing in high-rises of Kolkata and Howrah over phone calls. Apart from seeking votes, she is asking them to approach the party representatives for any assistance.

The move has been part of an outreach campaign by Trinamool Congress to tap the voters who usually don't attend public rallies or street corner meetings.

As part of the campaign, senior party functionaries are seeking appointments with residents' welfare associations for a meet-and-greet opportunity inside the gated communities. After a brief conversation, the functionaries are calling CM Mamata Banerjee and are putting her on loudspeaker as she addresses the residents.

On Saturday morning — the last day of campaigning for the fifth phase — Kolkata mayor Firhad Hakim visited Vivek Vihar complex at Shibpur along with senior leaders Arup Roy, Nandita Chowdhury, Gautam Chowdhury and Rana Chatopadhyay to campaign for Prasun Banerjee. At the meeting, held at the community centre from 10.30am, Hakim called up the CM who spoke to the residents.

"They said our representatives are always with you in any kind of need. Hope you will support us," one of



We kicked off this move from Howrah and will replicate the same in Kolkata, Bidhannagar and New Town
A TMC neta

The move has been part of an outreach campaign to tap the voters who usually don't attend public rallies

senior party functionary. Party officials said while usual campaign tactics like door-to-door visits and miking are also being done in multiple neighbourhoods, for the high-rises, the campaign play is limited to personal interactions within the premises without any slogan or party flags.

"It has been observed that BJP gains an edge by securing votes from high-rise housing complexes. The party leadership is taking various steps to bring those votes back to the Trinamool fold," a party functionary said.

Incidentally, Trinamool had used similar campaign tactics during the 2021 Bhowanipore bypoll elections as well while campaigning for chief minister Mamata Banerjee when she had won by a huge margin of 58,000 plus votes.

BSF jawan on election duty 'hugs & kisses' morning walker in Uluberia

Rupak Banerjee | TNN

Howrah: A day before Uluberia goes to polls, Kulgachhia locals chased down a BSF jawan and handed him over to police after he molested a woman on her morning walk on Sunday. Trinamool Congress has moved EC, urging the poll body to ensure women's safety during the election.

Following the woman's complaint, cops have sent a notice to the chief of the BSF's unit and asked him to join the investigation. Information has also been sent to the EC by police. Howrah Rural Police superintendent Swati Bhargalia said: "All legal formalities have been completed after informing the EC. We have started a probe."

In her complaint, the woman stated

All legal formalities have been completed after informing the EC. We have started a probe and the accused will be questioned

Swati Bhargalia | HOWRAH RURAL POLICE SUPERINTENDENT

that she was out for a walk around 6 am. The village road was deserted and two BSF jawans in uniform allegedly made objectionable gestures at her and gave her an indecent proposal. As she protested, the accused jawan forcibly hugged and kissed her. After the woman raised an alarm, the villagers rushed to the spot

and caught hold of him. The other jawan managed to escape.

An investigation officer said, "A case has been registered under IPC sections 341 (wrongful restraint), 354 (outraging a woman's modesty) and 506 (criminal intimidation)."

"The person concerned has been removed and necessary investigation has been initiated," said a senior BSF officer.

State woman and child development minister Sashi Panja said: "This is unacceptable. The central force jawans had the audacity to physically abuse a woman in broad daylight. We demand the strongest possible action. This is part of a calculated attempt to defame Bengal and terrorise women. If anyone—even those in uniform—think they can get away after such heinous acts, no they cannot."

Sundarbans forest guard hacked to death by 'Bangladeshi pirates'

3 Others Jump Into River To Escape

Krishnendu Mukherjee & Monotosh Chakraborty | TNN

Kolkata: A 59-year-old forest guard, on the verge of retirement, was hacked to death while three other forest workers escaped by jumping in river inside Sundarbans Tiger Reserve (STR) on Saturday night after an attack by alleged Bangladeshi pirates. A murder case has been started under IPC 302. Victim Amalendu Halder, a Raidighi resident, was posted at Netidhapani camp.

Sources said such an incident has not occurred in the tiger reserve area in recent times. In 2019, a group of foresters was assaulted by villagers

RECENT INCIDENTS

- > Dec 2023 | Six Bangla fishermen held from Indian waters
- > Feb 2024 | Five Bangla fishermen held from STR with critically endangered guitarfish
- > 2019 | Foresters attacked during tiger poaching probe in a S 24 Pdns div village



in South 24 Parganas division while probing a tiger poaching case. Last Dec, forest department had arrested six Bangladeshi fishermen, who had entered the Indian waters.

Saturday's incident has also highlighted acute staff shortage in STR, where the current strength of forest guards is 36, in contrast to the sanctioned strength of 110.

Chief wildlife warden Debal Roy said the incident took

place around 10 pm when four forest personnel from Netidhapani were patrolling Gosaba 1 compartment on a small boat. The team encountered 10-15 robbers, believed to be from Bangladesh.

"The intruders attacked our staffers, forcing them to jump in the water. While three survived, Halder lost his life. His body was found in Morabani Khal, with injuries on head," Roy added. An FIR has been

registered and a massive mobilization of staff is underway to nab the perpetrators, who are believed to be in Indian waters, according to Roy.

Foresters and cops said there was no bullet injury. Canning SDPO Ram Kumar Mondal said: "From the injury, it seems he was hit by a heavy weapon like axe on head."

Pradeep Vyas, ex-chief wildlife warden, said intrusions by Bangladeshi pirates

typically increase during April-May, coinciding with the honey collection period. "The location appears to be within the core area, towards the forests of National Park East and West ranges. These pirates often venture from Talpatti island in Bangladesh Sundarbans, from where they can access any part of the tiger reserve here," he said, adding that the killing suggests involvement of Bangladeshi pirates rather than local villagers.

A source said even the sanctioned strength of 110 is insufficient given the responsibilities related to patrolling, joint forest management and tourism. "Firearms are only provided to forest guards, with a group of four typically including only one or two guards, while the rest are daily labourers, who are not usually armed. This leaves them vulnerable," the source added. He said ideally, a patrolling group should cover 35-40 sq km, but given the current strength, each guard is responsible for over 70 sq km (STR is spread over 2,585 sq km).

Lake walkers' protest sports academy plan

Suman Chakraborty | @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: The Rabindra Sarobar morning walkers' group held a silent demonstration protest outside gate number 8 on Sunday morning to protest against the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority's decision to rent out a piece of land of the lake premises to a private organisation for developing a sports academy.

Last week, Sabuj Mancha, a platform of organisations and individuals concerned for the environment had organised a citizens' meeting where a resolution was taken that they would continue with their protest until the decision of renting out the land is cancelled and withdrawn.

The NGO has also submitted a letter to urban development minister and KMDA chairman Firhad Hakim on their demands.

KMDA, the custodian Rabindra Sarobar, said that the authorities were aware of the matter and was deliberating the issue.

There is no imminent Cov alarm, say doctors

Sumati Yengkhom | @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: The KP2 variant of the Covid virus, which has caused 36 positives in Bengal so far, is known to have a high transmission rate.

It could well bring about another surge after the last one in Dec 2023 and Jan 2024, said experts, although state officials insisted the current numbers did not constitute a significant surge, with only about 30 active cases across the state. Most hospitals across the city do not have any positive in-patients.

Infectious diseases specialist Yogiraj Ray said any RNA virus attaining a strain was qu-

Health experts said there was a high possibility of many more KP.2 infections, because it is election season. But few, if any, were getting tested because of the mildness of the symptoms

ite normal. "There is no point pressing the panic button unless there is an increase in the number of severe infections and hypoxic patients (patients with low oxygen). I am not seeing such an increase," said Ray, an associate professor at IPGMER.

Health experts said there was a high possibility of many more KP.2 infections, because it is election season. But few, if any, were getting tested because of the mildness of the symptoms.

"Till now, KP.2 has neither shown a wide spread nor severe disease in detected cases. In my opinion, there is no imminent alarm," said immunologist Dipayan Ganguly, of CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Biology Kolkata.

Science City museum rectifies gender bias, showcases women scientists

Eshna Bhattacharya & Aaheli Chowdhury

Kolkata: Science City has done a course correction to rectify a gender bias at science centres across the country by showcasing 10 remarkable women of science whose achievements are no less than their illustrious male counterparts who have been in the spotlight thus far.

The National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) that manages all science centres in the country unveiled busts of 10 pioneering women scientists — Kadambini Bose Ganguly, the country's first practising woman physician; particle physicist Bibha Chowdhuri; organic chemist Asima Chatterjee; botanist Janaki Ammal; sociologist and anthropologist Irawati Karve; biomedical researcher Kamal Jayasing Ranadive; physicist and meteorologist Anna Mani; scientist and academic Rajeshwari Chatterjee; botanist Archana Sharma; and organic chemist Darshan Ranganathan — at Science City during the International Museum Expo that it hosted over the weekend.

"India has had several distinguished women scientists. But the busts of scientists at all science centres in the country, including Science City and Birla Industrial & Technological Museum in Kolkata, are those of men. We wished to correct this gender bias and recognise the women who have done pioneering work in science. The start has been made in Kolkata that has been home to some of the leading women scientists. Also, Science City is India's first science centre. We hope the stories of these remarkable women will motivate girls

WOMEN WHO MADE INDIA PROUD

- > **Kadambini Bose Ganguly:** India's first practising lady doctor
- > **Janaki Ammal:** Indian botanist known for her studies on plant breeding, genetics and cytogenetics
- > **Irawati Karve:** India's first woman sociologist
- > **Bibha Chowdhuri:** Indian particle physicist known for her investigations into cosmic rays
- > **Asima Chatterjee:** First woman to get Doctorate of Science from an Indian university
- > **Kamal Jayasing Ranadive:** Established India's first tissue culture research laboratory in Mumbai in the 1960s
- > **Anna Mani:** Indian physicist and meteorologist



Installed busts of women scientists

- > **Rajeshwari Chatterjee:** The first woman engineer from Karnataka
- > **Archana Sharma:** Renowned Indian botanist, cytogeneticist, cell biologist, and cytotoxicologist
- > **Darshan Ranganathan:** Organic chemist known for her work in bio-organic chemistry

who visit in as many numbers as boys to take up science and technology," said NCSM director general A D Chaudhuri.

Beyond the busts, a mural of the 10 scientists has also been set up at Science City. "The mural of the 10 scientists has been done in Kalighat style painting, which is one of the traditional art forms originating from West Bengal itself, to celebrate their contributions to expanding science in India," says Science City director Anurag Kumar.

At Science City, busts of eight men scientists — physicists Homi J Bhabha; physicist and astronomer Vikram Sarabhai; polymath Meghnad Saha; theoretical physicist and mathematician S

N Bose; physicist C V Raman; polymath J C Bose; mathematician S Ramanujan; and paleobotanist Birbal Sahani — were installed in the garden in 2008. Now they will rub shoulders with the women that many of them have known and admired during their lifetime.

Science City is also celebrating 'nari shakti' through an eight-minute film of Durga Puja that is one of India's most celebrated festivals and recently added to UNESCO's Intangible Heritage List. "We have created a film that tells the whole story of Durga Puja, its history, and rituals. This will be screened at the Digital Panorama in Science City," said Kumar.

Elephant dies of electrocution

Pinak Priya Bhattacharya | TNN

Alipurduar: An adult male elephant was reportedly electrocuted to death after it got entangled in iron wires, which were used for fencing a betel nut grove, at Islamabad village of the Madarihat range of Jaldapara National Park on Sunday morning.

The land owner and his family members

were missing after the incident.

Forest department officials suspect that the elephant might have entered the village on Saturday night and come in contact with the electrified wire, which claimed his life. Novojit De, assistant wildlife warden (AWLF) said, "The preliminary autopsy report confirms that the elephant died from electrocution. A search for the landowner has begun."

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Bizman loses ₹1 cr to 'I-T return' fraudsters

Dwaipayan Ghosh | @timesgroup.com

Kolkata: A businessman from south Kolkata, who paid above Rs 1 crore in taxes since 2020, was shocked when he received an IT appreciation note that showed he had paid Rs 9.9 lakh as IT returns between 2020 and 2023.

He realized that just Rs 9.7 lakh was paid as income tax on his behalf even though he was provided fake documents indicating payments above Rs 1 crore by his office employees after they claimed to have deposited the same. He approached cops and the case was taken up by the anti-cheating section of detective department.

The police have now arrested a self-declared "accountant-cum-tax consultant" from his Dargah Road residence around 5.15 am on Saturday. The accused — Asif Salam alias Asif Alam — was entrusted with filing the IT returns by the businessman.

"The accountant of the complainant entered into a criminal conspiracy along with other associates and induced the complainant to confer him the tasks of tax related matter. Being induced by such assurance the complainant has paid Rs 1.07 crore for filing income tax returns between April 2020 and July 2023. The complainant discovered that the person paid only Rs 9.9 lakh to the income tax department on behalf of the complainant. The accused person then provided several forged documents to the complainant claiming all dues had been cleared. Thus, the complainant incurred a wrongful loss of Rs 9,67,677 that caused wrongful gain to the accused person by committed this offence," said additional CP (I) Murlidhar Sharma.

3 injured in building collapse

Kolkata: Three persons were injured when a portion of a first floor roof of an old building suddenly collapsed at Raja Dinendra Street in Kolkata Municipal Corporation ward 28 and borough III area around 5.40 am on Sunday. The three, a 15-year-old, a 40-year-old person and a 37-year-old woman, escaped with minor injuries and were treated and discharged from NRS Medical College and Hospital.

KMC officials said that an inspection will be carried out to assess the condition of the building and necessary measures will be taken. TNN

MILK'S WHOLESOME NUTRIENTS MAKES IT NATURE'S ENERGY DRINK

Amul Milk
AMUL DOODH PEETA HAI INDIA

GENERAL ELECTIONS TO LOK SABHA, 2024
IMPORTANT NOTICE

In the General Elections to Lok Sabha 2024, votes are being taken through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs & VVPAT) today i.e. **20th May, 2024 (Monday)** in 7 Parliamentary Constituencies.

The Schedule of Poll for Phase 5 is as follows :

No. & Name of Parliamentary Constituency	Voting Date & Timing
14 - Bangaon (SC), 15 - Barrackpur, 25 - Howrah, 26 - Uluberia, 27 - Sreerampur, 28 - Hooghly, 29 - Arambag (SC)	20 th May, 2024 (Monday) 7 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Under instructions of Election Commission of India, all the electors shall produce Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) for the identifications. If any elector is unable to show the EPIC, any one of the 12 identification original documents with photographs mentioned below shall be shown for identification.

Alternative Photo Identity Documents

1. Aadhar card
2. MNREGA Job Card
3. Passbooks with photograph issued by Bank / Post Office
4. Health Insurance Smart Card issued under the scheme of Ministry of Labour
5. Driving license
6. PAN Card
7. Smart Card issued by RGI under NPR
8. Indian Passport
9. Pension Document with photograph
10. Service Identity Cards with photograph issued to employees by Central/ State Govt/ Public Limited Companies
11. Official Identity Cards issued to MPs/MLAs/MLCs
12. Unique Disability ID (UDID) card, M/o Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India

Voter Helpline 1950 | **Voter Helpline App** | **SMS for information on voters' list**

Issued in public interest by Chief Electoral Officer, West Bengal

ICA-DB68(9)/2024

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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,
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FAROOQ ABDULLAH SEEKS PROBE INTO J&K TWIN TERROR ATTACKS, ASKS PAK TO 'STOP TERRORISM'

CENTRE WITHHOLDING BENGAL FUNDS FOR NOT DISPLAYING PM'S FACE ON RATION SHOPS, SAYS JAIRAM RAMESH



Wrong implant inserted during arm surgery: Kerala man

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kozhikode: Another allegation of medical negligence surfaced at Govt Medical College in Kerala's Kozhikode after the relatives of a youth alleged a wrong implant was inserted during a surgery of his fractured arm on Saturday.

On May 16, a four-year-old girl scheduled to undergo surgery for removal of an additional finger in her hand was instead operated on her tongue.

The Kochi youth who had the surgery fractured his forearm and dislocated a joint in an accident on May 12. His mother said one end of an inserted wire was protruding from his arm, arousing suspicion.

Medical college authorities refuted the allegation of a wrong implant and negligence. "A plate was fixed on the broken forearm and a K-wire was inserted to the dislocated joint. The end of K-wire was left protruding and will be removed after four weeks," said Dr Jacob Mathew, head of orthopaedic department. Police have lodged a case.

MP Dalit couple thrashed after row over son

Bhopal: A Dalit couple was paraded with garlands of shoes, tied to a pillar and thrashed by members of an influential family in a village of MP's Ashoknagar district on Friday. Police rescued the couple but no arrests have been made yet.

Karan Singh (46) and wife Betibai (40) returned to Kilora in Mungaoli region after three months on Friday. They had been away fearing harassment by a strongman. The dispute started after the couple's son was accused of molesting a woman from the influential family. **TNN**

Outgoing BJP MP joins TMC in Abhishek's presence

'Oppose Imposition Of Hindutva On Tribal Identity'

Sujoy Khanra | TNN

Jhargram: Outgoing Jhargram BJP MP Kunar Hembram joined Trinamool on Sunday in TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee's presence, an hour before PM Narendra Modi was scheduled to address a rally in Kharagpur, barely 42km away.

Hembram had been denied a renomination by BJP, prompting him to distance himself from the party — and politics in general — since March. On Sunday, however, he opposed BJP's "imposition of Hindutva on tribal identity" and said he would actively campaign for Trinamool candidates.



TMC's Abhishek Banerjee hands the party flag to outgoing BJP MP Kunar Hembram at a rally in Jhargram on Sunday

Banerjee, who inducted Hembram into the Trinamool fold, said: "Jhargram played a pivotal role in ensuring that Mamata Banerjee came back to office for a third time in 2021. The people have given us all four seats from here. In 2019, BJP won this seat by 11,700 votes. Their candidate Kunar Hembram himself is saying now that after being with BJP for 5 years, he has realised that they are 'Jana Jati Birodhi' and 'Adivasi Birodhi'."

Hembram said his decision was not sudden but well-considered. Saying Trinamool had done more work in Jhargram than BJP, the outgoing MP added that he had no personal ambitions but only a desire to collaborate with TMC candidates. The induction breathed new life into Trinamool's campaign in Jhargram. Banerjee said: "It is an individual's personal choice which religion or faith they want to follow and which God they want to worship. As a citizen

of a free country, every person has the right to decide this for themselves. However, BJP has said that if they come back to office this time, they will implement UCC. If this happens, then the most affected will be the Tappishili community as they will remove the entire reservation system."

"Today, Jhargram has an ST candidate because of reservation. BJP wants to change the Constitution," he added.

"Centre and the PM only believe in politics of change and not of development... The most affected (by UCC) will be the people of Jhargram and we will not let this happen. We believe in unity in diversity. Among Adivasis, there are some Santhal, some Bhumij, some Oraon, etc. We believe in diverse faiths. We believe that central govt cannot decide which faith or tradition people should follow — it is the people's decision," Banerjee said.

Keep in mind that nation needs strong govt, PM: Modi

Rohit Khanna & Falguni Banerjee | TNN

Kolkata/Bishnupur: The country needed a strong Prime Minister and a strong govt, PM Narendra Modi told a campaign rally in Bishnupur on Sunday, asking people to keep that in mind in the polling booth.

"The country needs a strong govt and a strong PM. Someone who can reply to the forces that are trying to weaken the country. Keep the country in mind when you cast your vote," he said, adding: "We have to build a strong govt this time too. Wherever I go from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, I can hear echoes of another Modi govt this time."

Criticising Congress govt for "making the poor



PM Narendra Modi campaigns in Kharagpur on Sunday

poorer", Modi bracketed the party with Trinamool and Left Front for "committing the same sin". "The poor only got slogans from them, and they made the poor states poorer. Bengal is a glaring example of that. People have migrated from this state in search of jobs," he said. The PM also accused

Congress of trying to implement reservation on religious lines. "In Karnataka they have given reservations for the SC, ST and OBC communities to Muslims. Trinamool is working hand in glove with them," he said. "TMC, Congress and Left Front might look different to you, but they are not. INDI alliance was created to pursue their agenda," the PM added.

Modi also took a dig at dynastic politics, saying he had to leave "nothing for bhai or bhatija". "I will, instead, leave a developed country in inheritance for the women and men in backward areas like Bankura. Those who try to feel the pulse of people while sitting in AC rooms in Delhi should come here to witness the people's response," the PM said.

Ink smeared on Kharge poster outside Pradesh Cong office

Rohit Khanna@timesgroup.com

Kolkata: A day after AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and Pradesh Congress chief Adhir Chowdhury crossed swords over CM Mamata Banerjee's role in INDIA bloc, ink was smeared on the poster of Kharge in front of the Pradesh Congress office at Bidhan Bhawan on Sunday.

Party workers washed the ink off with milk. Chowdhury, who was in Behrampur, when informed of the incident, asked Congress functionaries in Kolkata to file an FIR. This was done at Entally police station. Kharge had said Baner-



Kharge defaced in the poster; (R) a Pradesh Congress worker cleans it

jee was "very much a part of INDIA bloc". When it was pointed out that Chowdhury's views were not aligned with state Congress brass, the national president said it was the party high command that would take final decisions on alliances.

Chowdhury had responded that he could not be expected to appease someone

3-time BJD MLA & ex-minister joins Odisha BJP

Bhubaneswar:

Three-time MLA from Nimapara and former Odisha minister Samir Ranjan Dash quit BJD on Sunday and joined BJP after he was denied a ticket for assembly polls, reports Debarata Mohapatra. Two sitting MPs and seven MLAs of BJD resigned ahead of polls this time and joined BJP.

Dash represented Nimapara in the assembly in 2009, 2014 and 2019. "I switched loyalty to BJP after being neglected by BJD. BJD leadership lost its confidence in me. After losing their trust, it is not proper for me to stay in the party," Dash said. On April 17, BJD named BJP turncoat Dillip Kumar Nayak as its Nimapara candidate.

Cops raze illegal constructions of 4 accused of cow slaughter

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Indore: Police on Sunday razed illegal constructions belonging to four men accused of cow slaughter in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas.

"Early Sunday, a farmer in Khetakhedi village found his cows missing. He saw people packing something into sacks nearby. When he approached them, some fled and a few threatened him. He saw remains of his two cows in sacks and alerted villagers," ASP Jayveer Singh Bhadoria said.

Villagers, along with right-wing activists, caught a 'suspect', Aamin, and thrashed him. They then blocked roads.

Man assaulted for 'cattle smuggling'

One person was arrested on charge of thrashing a 60-year-old man on suspicion of cattle smuggling in Jharkhand on Sunday, police said, reports Sanjay Sahay. It is alleged Saraswati Ram was also stripped and dragged from a motorcycle.

"Illegal constructions of Aamin, Aman alias Shetty, Shahrulkh, and Wasim have been demolished. The first three were implicated in cow slaughter on Saturday. Wasim was involved in a similar case on May 12," the ASP added.

Stampede-like situation as Akhilesh, Rahul leave rally without speaking

Kapil Dixit@timesgroup.com

Prayagraj: Chaos prevailed for over an hour at a joint rally of INDIA bloc — attended by Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi — at Padilla in Phulpur on Sunday. The SP chief left the venue without addressing the crowd after he found the microphones not working, leaving SP supporters in a frenzy. They damaged the barricading and created a ruckus which caused injuries to three persons.

"As soon as SP national president Akhilesh Yadav left the dais after he failed to address the rally, party supporters went berserk and jumped in front of the dais," an eyewitness said.

The SP national president had arrived at the dais



Police personnel try to control the gathering during Rahul Gandhi and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's rally in UP's Prayagraj district on Sunday

around 1.25pm and left the spot at 1.55pm.

Later on Sunday evening, Akhilesh posted in Hindi on X: "It wasn't just barricades that were broken. Records of victory margins would also be broken in the elections for Phulpur and Allahabad Lok Sabha seats."

In a video clip shared on the official social media han-

Stampede-like situation as Akhilesh, Rahul leave rally without speaking

Kapil Dixit@timesgroup.com

dles of both SP and Congress, people on the stage could be heard asking supporters to move back. The appeals made from the stage failed to have any effect on the crowd.

The joint rally was organised in favour of Amarnath Maurya who is contesting on an SP ticket from the Phulpur Lok Sabha seat.

Continued from P 1

PM Narendra Modi on Sunday said CM Mamata Banerjee's statement "has infuriated people across India." "TMC has been insulting Hindu society and its faith continuously. Saints had pleaded with her to refrain from such politics. That angered the CM and she crossed every limit while insulting the saints," Modi said on Sunday at a rally in Kharagpur, accusing Banerjee of trying to appease "Muslim hardliners".

Accusing Trinamool of "playing a dangerous game" and trying to change the state's demographics, Modi said "infiltrators have changed demographic patterns" in parts of Bengal, and that "Hindus have be-

come a minority" there. "I will not allow them to do that. Time has come to give them a befitting reply," the PM said.

On Sunday, Modi promised "more stringent action" against the corrupt after June 4. "In 2019, I promised you to put every corrupt person behind bars. In 2024, I as-

Dance of Democracy

sure you that none of them can come out of jail. *Action aro tibra hobe* (action against them will be more intense) after June 4. They forced you to sell your homes, Modi will make them sell their bungalows and cars," he said, alleging that

TMC men were even asking for Rs 2,000 for each tap water connection under the Jal Jeevan Mission in Purulia.

Modi, who addressed two rallies in Jhargram area on Sunday, alleged "sub-human treatment" of tribals and Dalits in Bengal. "They don't care about you as you are not their vote bank. They don't even treat you as human beings. Modi worships those who have been neglected by them for ages," he said, addressing a rally in Bishnupur.

Modi also referred to Centre providing documents to 300 persons under Citizenship Amendment Act. "It will happen in Bengal, too. People have their faith in Modi's guarantee because we worked hard. TMC, Congress and Left cannot do anything as long as Modi is alive," he said.

TMC: BJP insults Bengal's greats

Continued from P 1

A day after CM Mamata Banerjee's outburst against "a few monks, not everyone", whom she accused of working against Trinamool and for BJP, TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee said his party believed "in the saffron religion of Swamiji (Vivekananda), not in the saffron of Yogi Adityanath."

Abhishek also went all out in his attempt to establish that BJP had denigrated Bengal's greats. "BJP has disrespected Bengal's intellectuals. Under Amit Shah's leadership, they broke a statue of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar on the streets of Kolkata. They belittled Rammo-han Roy and called Swami Vivekananda an ignorant leftist product," he said, adding, "Bengal has shown the way to the nation."

Trinamool also rebutted some claims made by PM Modi on Sunday. Expressing strong objection to the charge that "infiltrators were TMC's vote bank," the

party said: "We do not believe in vote-bank politics. The Lakshmir Bhandar scheme benefits over 2 crore women. Kanyasree — which got a UN award — covers 85 lakh girls and Khadya Sathi covers 10 crore people of Bengal."

Trinamool also attacked Modi on CAA, claiming that hundreds of Bengali Hindus had committed suicide in the last six years because of citizenship-related harass-

REBUTS PM CLAIMS

ment. The party said out of 40 lakh people whose citizenship was under threat, 28 lakh were Bengali Hindus, 10 lakh Bengali Muslims and only 2 lakh from states other than Bengal and Assam.

The party also said corruption charges against TMC were without evidence, alleging that BJP was the world's largest washing machine. "The party selectively targets opposition parties through ED and CBI. Ninety-five percent cases are against the opposition, with only a 0.4% conviction rate," it said.

Probe ordered as Rohit gives 'proof' of Beed booth capture

Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar: After NCP (SCP) candidate from Beed, Bajrang Sonawane, alleged booth capturing in some places during voting for the Lok Sabha seat on May 13, district collector and returning officer Deepa Mudhol Munde ordered an inquiry on Sunday, reports Prasad Joshi.

Rohit Pawar, the party's MLA from Karjat Jamkhed, on Saturday produced three videos and an audio clip to support the charges. Sonawane demanded a re-poll.

Pawar said on X, "Will Parli witness goonda raj instead of democracy in future? If this continues, Maharashtra will be soon reduced to UP. Will EC stop all this or will it remain a mute spectator?" He demanded an impartial probe into the alleged incidents of booth capturing instead of merely registering offences of MCC violation. Munde said there was no clarity on location in the videos.

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On behalf of Konkan Railway Corporation Ltd., Dy. Chief Engineer (works), Ratnagiri, invites **Open Tender in Single Packet** bid system through E-Tendering on IREPS portal from eligible contractors for the following work: **Name of Work:** Construction of a Foot Over Bridge (3m wide, for 4 line station) including approach ramp at Railway Km 283/8-9 in Vaibhavwadi Road Station over Konkan Railway route in Maharashtra State. **Tender Notice No.:** KR/RN/DYCEW/FOB/VW/03/24. **Total Estimated Cost:** ₹ 1.41 crores excluding GST. **Bidding start date:** 20.05.2024, **Closing Date/Time:** 10.06.2024 up to 15:00 hrs for submission of online Offers/Bids. **Completion period:** Nine months including monsoon. Manual offers shall not be accepted. Please visit <https://ireps.gov.in> website for details/participation and Corrigendum/addendum will be hosted in this website only.

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NIT No. : IACS/CIVIL/833/2024-25/07 Date : 14.05.2024

Sealed item tenders invited for work of "Annual Maintenance Contract for Fume Hood & allied laboratory furniture, equipment, duct etc. at different laboratories of Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Jadavpur, Kolkata-700032". The estimated cost is ₹ 12,00,000.00 p.a. Tender will be issued from 21.05.2024 to 07.06.2024. For details may visit website www.iacs.res.in Registrar

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No: KSMSC/DRUGS/RETND/SBC/SCD/PoC-1/01/2023-24 Dated: 18.05.2024

TENDER NOTIFICATION

Ref: 1. Tender Notification No: KSMSC/ DRUGS/ RETND/ SBC/SCD/PoC-1/01/2023-24, Dated: 18.05.2024. (IND-0114)

Nationwide Tender is invited through e-Tendering system under KTPP Act 1999 and Rules 2000 for the following tender:

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Details regarding EMD, Terms and Conditions and other information are available in the Tender Document, which can be downloaded from the website <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> from 18.05.2024. The eligible tenderers shall submit their e-tenders under e-procurement platform for above mentioned tenders. Further information if any may be obtained from this office.

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Deeply mourned by

S. KRISHNA RAJU (S.K. RAJU)
ANUBHAV BHATTACHARYA
SPANDHAN BHATTACHARYA
TARU VIKRAM
UMA GANGULY

GOURI MAJUMDER "NANI"
(20.04.1930 to 09.05.2024)
Doting Mother, Grandmother, Great home maker, Sangstress, Artist.

YOU SHALL FOREVER BE IN OUR HEARTS

Debasish, Pooja, Raya and a host of relatives & well wishers.

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Child among 3 hurt as pole falls on train

Raipur: Three passengers, including a child, were injured when a track-side pole collapsed and struck the 18030 Shalimar-Lok-manya Tilak Express near Raipur on Sunday morning.

The accident was caused by "unauthorized" drilling by Chhattisgarh State Electricity Board (CSEB) near the railway line, said officials.

The train was passing through Urkura station, around 10km from Raipur, when the pole fell on the train, smashing a window of an AC coach and injuring three passengers. Shalimar Express was held up at Raipur for an hour after the incident. **TNN**

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Rewari, Haryana

3 pilgrims die, Char Dham toll 29 in 9 days

Tanmayee Tyagi & Abhyudaya Kotnala | TNN

Dehradun: At least 29 people died, mainly due to heart-related complications, at high-altitude shrines in the past nine days since the Char Dham yatra began on May 10.

The toll surged after three pilgrims lost their lives in the yatra on Saturday, including one in Badrinath and two in Yamunotri. Among the victims is Shashi Kant, a 49-year-old pilgrim from Surat, who died due to cardiac arrest during his visit to Badrinath, bringing the total deaths at the shrine to four.

Two more devotees lost their lives while visiting the Yamunotri shrine. Police said 53-year-old Kamlesh Bhai Patel from Gujarat fell ill on his way to Yamunotri and was declared dead.

Rohini Dalvi (54) from Pune passed away in hospital after falling sick in her hotel in Uttarakashi. With this, the toll at the shrine has reached 11.

According to Dr B S Rawat, chief medical officer, Uttarakashi, 11 people have died in Yamunotri and 2 in Gangotri shrine.

Wheat buy may miss target, but set to cross 2023 mark

Punjab, Haryana Recorded Higher Purchases, MP 33% Down

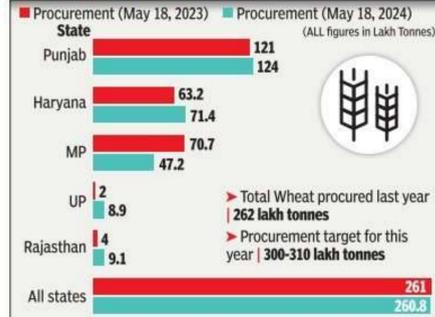
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New Delhi: Wheat procurement by govt agencies this year is set to cross last year's figure of 262 lakh tonnes in the next couple of days, but is likely to be much less than the estimate. As on Saturday, purchase of the foodgrain was around 261 lakh tonnes and daily arrival now is about 70,000-80,000 tonnes.

Madhya Pradesh, where govt purchase has been nearly 33% less than the procurement last year, has extended the procurement period to May 31. However, Punjab and Haryana recorded higher purchases than last year of 124 lakh tonnes and 71.4 lakh tonnes respectively.

Food Corporation of India (FCI) officials said they were confident of total procurement touching 270 lakh tonnes against earlier estimate of 300-310 lakh tonnes, which was arrived at after consultation with states.

75% OF TOTAL FROM PUNJAB & HRY



"The current level of procurement and the stock that we have will be more than enough to meet the food security requirement of providing free foodgrain to 80 crore poor under the PM Garib Kalyan Yojna and other welfare schemes. We will also have good stock for

market intervention to check prices, if need arises," said a govt official. TOI has learnt that govt agencies are trying to figure out the reason behind less procurement in MP. The state won't be able to achieve the initial target of 80 lakh tonnes.

Though there has been a more than four-fold jump in wheat procurement in UP and 2.5 times in Rajasthan, their contribution to the central pool is hardly 18 lakh tonnes. Govt had expected procurement of around 50 lakh tonnes of wheat from UP, Rajasthan and Bihar. Officials said the procurement period in UP is likely to be extended till June so that more farmers can get the benefit of MSP.

Sources said with the current level of procurement, there is hardly any scope for govt to lift the restriction on wheat export this year. It also remains to be seen whether the Centre will restore the wheat-rice ratio as it was before May 2022. Govt had changed the policy to allocate more rice instead of wheat following a drastic reduction in foodgrain procurement in 2022 due to lower production and record exports that year.

Tourist hurt in J&K terror hit loses eye, wife battles for life

Ashish.Mehta@timesgroup.com

Jaipur: Sunny Khan, a 38-year-old resident of Jaipur has lost vision in one eye and faces the risk of partial vision loss in the other. He is currently battling for his life in the ICU of a military hospital in south Kashmir's Anantnag. His wife Farah Khan is also in critical condition.

The couple, along with 50 members of their extended family, had gone on a holiday to Kashmir on May 20, intending to return on May 20. But their vacation took a tragic turn when terrorists attacked them Saturday evening while they were heading to a resort in Pahalgam for dinner.

"Some people removed their blankets and started shooting. A bullet pierced my brother's eye. My sister-in-law has a shoulder wound," Sunny's elder brother Parvez Khan, 39, recounted Sunday the horror that unfolded before his eyes the previous night. "Oh, we're so happy coming to Kashmir!" he exclaimed with grief and sar-



The son of BJP neta Aijaz Ahmad Sheikh, who was killed in a terrorist attack, is carried by a relative to the last rites of the former sarpanch in Shopian

casms from Anantnag.

His brother is in ventilator support. "My brother's one eye has been removed, and the other is being operated upon," said Parvez. "What has my brother done, or our family? Why was he targeted?" he asked.

The attack is seen as an attempt to sabotage Lok Sabha elections in J&K, where Anantnag-Rajouri constituency votes on May 25. This was the third terrorist attack on non-natives in J&K this election season.

Man held for molesting 14-yr-old in Sandeshkhali

Sanjib Chakraborty | TNN

Sandeshkhali: A 28-year-old man was arrested on Sunday for allegedly molesting a 14-year-old at her house in Sandeshkhali on the intervening night of Friday and Saturday. The accused, identified as Indrajit Shaw, is the son of a Trinamool worker in Sandeshkhali's Bermajura area.

According to the complaint lodged by the family of the class 8 student, the crime took place around 1.30 am on Saturday. "My granddaughter was sleeping in her room. The youth broke in through a bamboo fence behind our house and barged in. She woke up when he grabbed hold of her face. We were sleeping in the adjoining room when we heard her screaming. We rushed in and saw him fleeing," the girl's grandmother said.

On Saturday, the family lodged a complaint at a CBI camp set up in a building near Dhamakhali Ferry Ghat. According to sources, CBI officials forwarded the complaint by email to Basirhat SP after which Shaw was arrested by police. "He was booked under the POCSO Act. He was produced in a Basirhat court on Sunday," a senior district police officer said. He was remanded in police custody for five days.

The accused's father, however, denied the allegations. "My son was in his room on Friday night... He was falsely implicated as we are Trinamool activists," he said.

Governor seeks Dhuppuri report

Kolkata: Bengal governor CV Ananda Bose has asked Bengal govt for a report on the law and order incidents in Dhuppuri on the night of May 16-17. The governor invoked provision of Article 167 (b) of the Constitution in seeking the report. On Saturday, BJP MP Locket Chatterjee posted photos on X claiming they were of a place of worship in Dhuppuri and said religious places had been vandalised. Cops, however, did not confirm the claims. Police imposed Section 144 in Dhuppuri and suspended internet services. TNN

Tourists heading to HP hills run into heatwave

Shimla: Tourists heading to the hill state of Himachal Pradesh to escape the scorching heat of the plains are disappointed to find a heatwave prevailing in parts of the state.

These conditions are likely to continue in isolated pockets of Una, Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Solan, Sirmour, Kangra and



The conditions are likely to continue for the next 4-5 days

Shimla for the next 4-5 days. There is also a possi-

bility of severe heatwave in these districts.

According to Indian Meteorological Centre, Shimla, the average maximum temperature in the state is likely to increase by 2-3 degrees in this period. The average minimum temperature for mid hills, low hills, and plains of the state is likely to go

up by 2-3 degrees and will remain above normal, whereas the minimum temperature for high hill areas is likely to decrease by 1-2 degrees. Tourist spots like Shimla, Manali, Dharamshala, Narkanda, and Kufri, which are witnessing a tourist influx, are reeling under sizzling heat these days. TNN

Pune builder's 17-yr-old son rams Porsche into bike, 2 techies killed

Gitesh.Shelke@timesgroup.com

Pune: Two young software engineers died after a Porsche Taycan, driven by the 17-year-old son of a prominent builder, hit their motorcycle near a pub in the upscale neighbourhood of Kalyaninagar in Pune around 2.30am Sunday.

The driver was detained and Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) released him later with conditions. Police identified the deceased as Anesh Awadhia, 24, and Ashwini Koshta, 24, both from Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh. They had studied at a Pune engineering college before joining a software company.

According to police, the accident occurred when Awadhia was dropping Koshta home. The Porsche struck their bike from behind, dragging Koshta for 50ft. The vehicle also hit a parked car



The mangled remains of the car. It also hit a car and a two-wheeler before coming to a stop

and a two-wheeler before coming to a stop.

Anesh's friend Aqib Ramzan Mulla, 23, witnessed the accident and filed a complaint. Mulla, along with passersby, chased the Porsche, which had its airbags deployed, hindering the driver's visibility. People pulled the driver and his two friends — classmates from a prominent

Pune school — out, thrashed them, and wrecked the car before police detained the trio.

DCP Vijay Dagar said: "Preliminary investigation revealed that the driver and his friends were returning home from a pub in Mundhwa. We have collected the driver's blood samples to check for alcohol."

DCP (crime) Amol Zende said the FIR includes a charge against the driver's father for allowing his underage son to drive. A case was also registered against the pub for serving liquor to minors.

Lawyers Prashant Patil and Abid Mulani, representing the minor said: "JJB ordered our client's release on bail with conditions, including working with a traffic constable, attending counselling, writing an essay on accidents, and painting traffic awareness boards."

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I, Dilip Kumar Biswas, S/o Birinchi Pada Biswas, residing at Gora Bazar, Zamindari Para, Berhampore, 742101, declare that both Dilip Kumar Biswas and Dilip Biswas are the same person. Henceforth, I will be known as Dilip Kumar Biswas for all purposes.

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GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Bid ref. no. WBMSC/LIT-277/2024,
Dated - 16/05/2024

"Supply and Delivery of Electrical Maintenance materials at Ghatal SS, Paschim Medinipur. Last date of submission of bid (online) - 30.05.2024 up to 3.00 PM. The tender document can be downloaded from the website www.w.b.m.s.c.e.o.w.i.n & www.wbtenders.gov.in or after 18.05.2024 at 5.00 PM. Clarification requests, if any may be sent to cpee@wbmsc.gov.in Sd/- Managing Director, WBMSC, Special Commissioner H&FW to the Govt. of West Bengal ICA-179721/2024

WESTERN RAILWAY - RAJKOT DIVISION

AUGMENTATION / IMPROVEMENT OF FREIGHT WAGON MAINTENANCE GATI SHAKTI UNIT

E-Tender Notification No : 02 of 2024-25 Date 14-05-2024 E-Tender Notification No.02/2025/GS/URJT Name of Work : Augmentation / Improvement of Freight Wagon Maintenance at Hapa - Rajkot. Approximate NIT Cost : ₹ 23,33,16,546.94/- Date & Time of Closing of Tender : 17-06-2024 at 15:00 hrs Office Address : Chief Project Manager, Gati Shakti Unit, Junction Road, Opposite Kothi Compound, Rajkot - 360001 Website : www.irps.gov.in

WESTERN RAILWAY - RAJKOT DIVISION

SUPPLYING & LOADING OF BALLAST

E-Tender Notification No. 05 of 2024-25 Date 14/05/2024 - Tender No : DRM-RJT-2024-25-E-06 Name of Work : Rajkot Division: Supplying and loading of 105000 Cum ballast into wagons at Wankaner. Approximate NIT Cost : ₹ 9,85,09,360.95 Earnest Money : ₹ 6,42,600.00 Date & Time of Opening of Tender : 04/06/2024 15:00 Hrs Office Address : District Railway Manager (Engg), Western Railway, Kothi Compound, Rajkot, Gujarat - 360001 Website : www.irps.gov.in

GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Bid ref. no. WBMSC/LIT-284/2024,
Dated - 16/05/2024

Day to day repair, preventive maintenance, operation by providing High skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled Manpower for Electrical installations, Lift, HVAC, Fire Detection & protection system round the clock at Swasthya Sathi Building & outside premises of total Swasthya Sathi Building of Swasthya Bhawan Campus for the period of 2(two) years. Last date of submission of bid (online) - 10.06.2024. The tender document can be downloaded from www.wbmsc.gov.in and www.wbtenders.gov.in or after 20.05.2024 at 01.00 P.M. Clarification requests, if any may be sent to cpee@wbmsc.gov.in Sd/- Managing Director, WBMSC, Special Commissioner H&FW to the Govt. of West Bengal ICA-179721/2024

CHITTARANJAN LOCOMOTIVE WORKS

CORRIGENDUM

No. PCMM/CLW/HWH/E-Procurement/CORRIGENDUM/24/10 Dated: 17.05.2024. The following Corrigendum of E-Tender's is for supply of materials for manufacture of Electric Locomotive. The prospective likely suppliers are requested to look up the website www.irps.gov.in for detailed instructions. These are E-Tenders only electronic offer bids shall be accepted. Sl. No.; Tender Notice no.; Tender No.; Tender Opening Date is as follows: [01]; Sl. No. 119 of PCMM/CLW/HWH/E-Procurement/24/25 Dated: 24/04/2024; 25245073; Tender Opening Date is to be read as "30/05/2024" instead of existing entry; [02]; Sl. No. 112 of PCMM/CLW/HWH/E-Procurement/24/24 Dated: 19/04/2024; 25245054; Tender Opening Date is to be read as "27/05/2024" instead of existing entry; [03]; Sl. No. 111 of PCMM/CLW/HWH/E-Procurement/24/24 Dated: 19/04/2024; 29245027; Tender Opening Date is to be read as "23/05/2024" instead of existing entry; [04]; Sl. No. 110 of PCMM/CLW/HWH/E-Procurement/24/24 Dated: 19/04/2024; 29245028; Tender Opening Date is to be read as "29/05/2024" instead of existing entry; [05]; Sl. No. 106 of PCMM/CLW/HWH/E-Procurement/24/24 Dated: 19/04/2024; 29245023; Tender Opening Date is to be read as "28/05/2024" instead of existing entry; [06]; Sl. No. 48 of PCMM/CLW/HWH/E-Procurement/24/15 Dated: 08/03/2024; 29245019; Tender Opening Date is to be read as "07/05/2024" instead of existing entry; [07]; Sl. No. 108 of PCMM/CLW/HWH/E-Procurement/24/23 Dated: 16/04/2024; 29245030; Tender Opening Date is to be read as "23/05/2024" instead of existing entry; PR8/424 PCMM/CLW/HWH

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The bitter truth of quickie gate-cane weddings in Marathwada's sugar belt

Contractor-matchmakers arrange underage marriages, especially during droughts, so that newly weds can be used as cheap labour in fields, mills

Mohua.Das@timesgroup.com

It was a big fat affair when the Thorat family in Maharashtra's Beed district decided to get their youngest daughter Manisha married in a departure from the unceremonious weddings of their five older daughters.

Unlike her sisters who were wedded at 15, Manisha tied the knot at 18, a milestone for a family where marriages had become a quickie clandestine affair before the couple was ushered into sugarcane fields as a newly-minted 'koyta', a Marathi word for the 'sickle' used for hacking crops which holds deeper meaning in drought-prone districts of Marathwada. It's a term for couples hired as a single labour unit to work as seasonal cane cutters in Maharashtra and Karnataka by 'mukadams', who play the dual role of a contractor and matchmaker.

The practice colloquially called 'gate-cane' weddings, seems to have various origins. Some attribute it to the tradition of marriages solemnised at the gates of sugar mills or just be-

REETIKA SUBRAMANIAN, ACADEMIC

Everyone knew such weddings were happening. Yet, they were unsure of what to do since earnings from these marriages were part of their economy

fore the harvest. Others link it to halting a sugarcane cart at the factory gate.

Regardless, the 'koyta padhhati' or couple arrangement is seen by the sugarcane industry as a quick solution to its labour needs. For cane cutters, the lump sum advance called 'uchal' of Rs 1 lakh for each koyta is an amount seldom matched by other jobs in the region.

However, this 'shortcut' marriage-based labour setup has fueled child marriages. Families feel pressured to marry off their adolescent daughters rather than leaving them behind as they go for cane cutting, whereas boys' families try to boost their earnings by expanding their koyta workforce.

In a rare instance, Manisha, found a protector in her elder sister Jyoti. "I've experienced the scars of being married off at 15, followed by backbreaking work even while pregnant. My sons were born premature," says Jyoti. Now 26, she's determined to shield Manisha from a similar fate or that of their mother's, who underwent unwarranted hysterectomy.



BITTER PILL: Police intercept an underage wedding in Beed. (Right) Jyoti Thorat, now 26, was married off at 15. She had to work even when she was pregnant

to my — common among Maharashtra's female sugarcane cutters.

However, despite efforts by village authorities to crack down on child marriages by roping in priests, tent owners, music bands, decorators, caterers and card printers, these gate-cane weddings remain difficult to detect or prevent.

In a recently published paper titled 'Gate-Cane: (Un)tying the knots between climate, cane, and early marriage in rural India', Reetika Subramanian, a Gates-Cambridge scholar at the University of Cambridge Centre for Gender Studies and founder of the 'Climate Brides' podcast, documents the phenomenon of 'gate-cane weddings' in Marathwada and how it affects young girls.

"I looked at links between cyclical droughts, labour arrangements in the sugarcane industry and the well-oiled machinery which is producing early marriages and younger wives," explains Subramanian who researched three districts of Beed in Marathwada, trailing the sugarcane-cutting season between September 2020 and 2021.

"Everyone knew 'gate-cane' weddings were happening in their region," recounts Subramanian after attending meetings of the child marriage prohibition committees convened by the Beed district collectorate. "Yet, they were unsure of what they could do since earnings from these marriages were part of their economy."

A mix of motivations drive the gate-cane weddings with multiple members often joining as separate koytas from the same household. "The lure is the hefty advance that each koyta receives, especially after a dry season where local livelihoods are scarce. This money helps them manage their households, arrange weddings, and cover medical



expenses," says Raju Sathe, a co-ordinator with Sankalp Manav Vikas Sanstha, working with marginal farmers in many districts.

"Plus, these weddings are low-budget, costing around Rs 10,000, compared to traditional weddings that can hit Rs 2.5 lakh," adds Sathe, explaining why they're often termed 'one-day match' or 'jhatpat shaadi'. Limited schooling options beyond class eight is another factor, he says.

Subramanian agrees that the age range of those wedded into the gate-cane system are usually girls between 14 to 17 years, coinciding with the end of their entitlement to free and compulsory education under the RTE Act. "It's a clear trajectory into the workforce. According to the sarpanch of Danemoha village in Dharur, about 75% of marriages are child marriages," she says. While most underage teenagers being married off into the koyta system are girls, around 25% are boys, points out Sathe.

While the koyta system helps these families with quick cash, it also traps them in debt. "These advances are upfront but come with interest, which these mukadams and sugar mills keep reaping until the money is recovered. If the debt remains unpaid, they're called back to work the next day. This prompts many to marry off their teens to form new koytas for a fresh advance," explains Sathe. Mukadams often broker such marriages and even cover expenses, as they receive a commission for every new koyta they recruit, adds Beed activist Tatwashi Kamble.



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BATTLEGROUND INDIA | APRIL 19-JUNE 4, 2024

Personal touch, spunk and spontaneity: How Priyanka lifted Amethi-Rae Bareilly campaign

Shalvee.Sharda@timesgroup.com

Rae Bareilly/Amethi: Recently, when Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi reached Bachrawan in Rae Bareilly for addressing an evening election gathering, the time window given by the police for the meeting had expired. That meant she couldn't use the public address system. Under the star campaigner got the venue's noisy genset shut down, sat atop her SUV and spoke extempore without a mike, with the crowd providing illumination with mobile-phone torches. Videos of the address rapidly went viral (see pic on right).

Several election analysts have noted that they are seeing a more spontaneous and articulate Priyanka in these elections. This was evident in her intensive campaign in Rae Bareilly and Amethi, where she was canvassing for brother Rahul and Gandhi family's close associate Kishori Lal Sharma. "Her campaign incorporated a fair dose of randomness and unpredictability. She stopped anywhere and walked up to anyone who welcomed her for



Congress workers say Priyanka Gandhi has energised the local party cadre after taking charge of campaigning in Rae Bareilly and Amethi

an interaction," said a Congress spokesperson.

Most palpably, her taking charge of the campaign energised Congress workers in the twin constituencies. In her maiden address to party workers, Priyanka said they had to pull up their socks and be ready to work 20 hours a day.

Those working with Priyanka said 'Didi' (as she is affectionately called) led by example. "She began her day with a quick strategy meet and hit the road by 10.30am, returning as late as 11pm," a

team member said. "After returning, she convened meetings to finalise the next day's schedule and retired only after midnight," he added. Her speeches generally began with warm greetings and an apology if she had reached the venue late. "Mera abhivadan swekar kijiye aap sab aur maaf kijiyege thodi si vilamb ke liye. Aapko dhoop mein baithna pada (Please accept my greetings, and apologies for coming late and making you wait in the sun)," she said, at times mentioning the reason for the delay.

Her poll pitch has been sharp and she has been quick to respond to barbs and issues raised by the saffron camp. But more than these, Priyanka's personal touch has added to the enthusiasm of local people and workers. "The respect Priyanka shows to Sharma — who was dubbed as her 'peon' by some BJP leaders — has also been appreciated," said a Congress supporter. "Kishori Bhaiya ne aap sabka bahut khayal rakha hai itne saal. Wo aapke aur humare rishtey ka pul hain. Is baar pratyashi ban ke aaye

hain. Hum sab ko mil ke inki jeet sunishchit karni hai (All these years, brother Kishori has acted as a bridge between you and the party leadership. He is the candidate this time and we have to ensure his victory)," Priyanka said during a public meeting.

Often in her speeches, Priyanka has swiftly changed gears to aggressively attack BJP, PM Modi and the party's candidates before softening her tone again to explain to the people the importance of their vote. In a public meeting, she called Amethi

and Rae Bareilly "her family" and, with teary eyes, narrated how Amethi helped her recover from the tragic death of her father as she went from village to village to build the Congress organisation in 1999 for her mother's first election.

At a meeting in Kamalganj, when a woman talked about the problem of stray cattle while another recalled how she benefited from the self-help group network evolved during Rahul's tenure as Amethi MP, Priyanka seized the moment to target the saffron camp. "The BJP played politics and got the SHG scheme closed."

During a 'nukkad sabha' in Naseerabad, a youth walked up to Priyanka and pointed to a statue of former PM Rajiv Gandhi, urging her to offer floral tributes. Priyanka descended from the stage and almost ran to the statue, with the crowd following her.

"She's running on pure resolve. She barely eats through the day. Foxnuts and 'nimbu pani' are her staple. At times, she prefers a 'parantha aachaar' roll and eats in between public meetings," said a Congress functionary.

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Shinde banks on connect in ground zero of battle for Balasaheb legacy

Manoj Badgeri | TNN

Thane: Supporters of the erstwhile undivided Shiv Sena may still be in two minds as to which faction to favour with their vote. However, in Thane on Mumbai's outskirts, it is not unusual to find Shiv Sainiks who take part in rallies taken out by both factions.

"Deep inside, Sainiks know what is right and wrong for them and will express it through their vote on June 4," says an old-timer. Whether to stick with Uddhav Thackeray or shift allegiance to CM Eknath Shinde is a dilemma that is central to these LS polls in Maharashtra. In all, there are 13 seats where the two Senas are pitted against each other. And, as the polls in Maharashtra enter the final leg, Thane — a citadel of the undivided Shiv Sena and a rapidly growing urban cluster — is likely to see a close fight on May 20.

Two of the district's three LS seats — Kalyan and Thane — are represented by Sena MPs: Kalyan by CM's son Dr Shrikant Shinde and Thane by Uddhav's nominee Rajan Vichare. Control over the region will be seen as passing to the rightful claimant to the legacy of the late Anand Dighe, Sena stalwart who grew the party in the district under Balasaheb Thackeray's leadership. In recent years, Dighe has been deified through a Marathi film that portrays him as a messiah of the underprivileged.

For CM Shinde, who was mentored by Dighe and has spent most of his three-decade-long career nurturing the constituency as his hometown, winning Thane has enormous significance. Apart from helping him retain his salience in state and national politics, it will give him the political left to tackle the upcoming assembly polls in October. Shinde has fielded former mayor and close aide Naresh Mhaske as the Mahayuti candidate



IT'S ALL ABOUT MAKING THE RIGHT MOVES

from Thane. With the local civic body (which has no elected corporators currently) and at least two assembly segments in Thane city with Shinde's Sena, Mhaske has the upper hand, though support from BJP, which has an equally strong base here, is crucial.

Indeed, the district was largely a BJP stronghold till it was wrested by Shiv Sena in assembly and local-body polls. Using a blend of Hindu-tva and regional pride, stalwarts such as Dighe and Shinde have held it for nearly 25 years, with the exception of 2009. Of course, it has helped that BJP has not produced a leader of stature in the state for several years now.

The district is predominantly an Agri-Koli and Marathi bastion, but is gradually turning cosmopolitan as the industrial and services sectors expand, bringing in a migrant workforce. In all, the Thane region comprises over 18 assembly segments, eight civic bodies and several gram panchayats.

"The fight here will show who inherits the legacy of Balasaheb and Dighe. The Thackerays want to avenge the 'betrayal' by Shinde in Thane, the city where the party won its first civic polls, while Shinde has to justify his rebellion and retain his dominance to strengthen his standing with the BJP brass," said an observer.

Shinde is banking on vote transfer from BJP. In Thane alone, BJP has four MLAs with three more in Kalyan. So, while the Shinde faction has held sway in some of the now-dissolved local bodies, MLAs working under the guidance of the state leadership retain clout in disbursing aid and commissioning public works.

During seat-sharing talks, the CM was able to persuade deputy CM Devendra Fadnis and BJP's central leadership that there was no way his party could concede Thane (they kept Kalyan too where the CM's son is the sitting MP). BJP cadre were expected to fall in line,

but there is simmering discontent.

"Supporters of MLA Geeta Jain from Mira Bhayander and former BJP MLA Ganesh Naik are miffed," said a BJP supporter. There's also the case of BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad firing on Sena Kalyan unit chief Mahesh Gaikwad inside a police station. "That's still on the minds of our karyakartas," he added. Gaikwad is in judicial custody. Shinde's Thane nominee Mhaske has sought to build bridges and reach out to workers acquainted with him since his days as a youth activist. However, he has a formidable opponent in Rajan Vichare, a two-time MP and Thackeray supporter. There is a sympathy wave for the Thackerays and they are harping on the loyalty factor faced with the organisational might of the Mahayuti.

"A prominent part of our campaign is to convey how the traitors deserted the Thackerays in a time of need, which would never have been tolerated by Dighe saheb," said a Thackeray loyalist. However, sources close to Shinde say he has managed Thane district well for nearly two decades and strengthened his bonds with the public and netas alike. His access to PM Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah is seen as a plus.

"He may not speak much, but his loyalists know he has a plan for everything, including fixing issues raised by the opposition," says a supporter who is impressed with Shinde's interactions over chai and vada pav with grassroots workers.

Shinde occasionally talks about his humble origin as a first-generation migrant from western Maharashtra who drove auto-rickshaws for a living. In his trademark spotless white attire, rubbing shoulders with Modi and Shah at rallies, Shinde has been making an emotional pitch: "You've supported me all these years. I expect this support even now," he says.

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Nashik: In the heart of the country's 'onion bowl', Lasalgaon, Ganesh Kokane produces more than 200 quintals of the kitchen staple every year. Auctioning them for Rs 2,500-Rs 3,000 per quintal at APMC mandi would cover his expenses and, in good times, even fetch him a good profit. However, last Nov, unseasonal rains wreaked havoc as the crop was ready for harvest. All he could salvage from his 25 acres was a meagre 25 quintals.

Then, before Kokane could recover from the blow, the Centre announced a ban on export of onions in the first week of Dec. "I was forced to sell off my stock for Rs 1,000 a quintal. It was a double whammy," Ganesh said. But his ordeal had just begun.

As moneylenders turned up the heat on Kokane, he was forced to find other sources of income. He finally ended up as a labourer at the APMC. "I blame the Union govt for my plight. Even though it lifted the embargo later on, it did not help improve the wholesale prices," he said. Now, he earns a paltry Rs 40 for unloading onions from farmers' tractors and loading them on to traders' vehicles. He handles about 10-15 vehicles daily.

Kokane's is not an isolated case. Distress and anger are palpable among nearly 8 lakh voters who are directly or indirectly associated with onion cultivation in the Dindori LS seat, which comprises six assembly segments — Nandgaon, Kalwan, Yeola, Chandwad, Niphad, and Dindori. Voting here is on May 20.

At the receiving end of the ire is BJP candidate and Union minister Bharati Pawar, who is under immense pressure to retain the seat that the saffron party has held since 2009.

Shiv Sena MLA from Nandgaon, Suhas Kande, said Mahayuti bigwigs are working overtime to contain farmers' resentment. "But in no way will (Bhaskar) Bhagare's victory help stabilise prices. Organisationally, Mahayuti is strong and that alone will ensure Bharati Pawar's victory."

BJP hopes onions won't leave it weepy in Dindori

CONSTITUENCY WATCH

Dindori Maharashtra VOTES ON May 20



2024 FACE-OFF

Mahayuti | Bharati Pawar (BJP)
Maha Vikas Aghadi | Bhaskar Bhagare (NCP-SCP)



2019 LS POLL PERFORMANCE

Winner Bharati Pawar (BJP) Votes 5.7 lakh
Runner-up Dhanraj Mahale (NCP) 3.7 lakh

Bhagare, a schoolteacher, is the NCP (SCP) nominee. Party insiders say their chief Sharad Pawar picked him for his clean image and popularity.

A BJP politician, who did not want to be named, said farmers snub them when they visit villages for campaigning. "To placate them, we are highlighting the multiple schemes run by the Centre, including the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi that provides Rs 6,000 annually to marginal farmers."

In April, residents of Malwadi put up a board requesting the current MP not to visit their village. "Before the ban came into effect, we were getting Rs 2,500-Rs 3,000 per quintal. Now, prices have dropped while fertilisers and petrol have become dearer," said Ganesh Ahire of Nandgaon taluk.

While accepting that Bharati Pawar faces the ire of onion growers, a state Cabinet minister said: "The unseasonal rain severely hit the crop in Dindori. Had the Centre not banned exports, there would've been huge shortages in the country. That would've complicated matters for NDA, especially in urban areas."

What has further queered the pitch for BJP is CPI(M) nominee Je-

eva Pandu Gavit's withdrawal from the race. CPI(M) had fielded Gavit in 2019, too and he had got more than one lakh votes. Anticipating that Gavit might repeat his performance and take away anti-BJP votes, Sharad Pawar convinced the CPI(M) brass to pull him from the race.

Bharati Pawar, however, claims the opposition is misleading farmers. "When Sharad Pawar was the Union agriculture minister under UPA, prices of onion had dropped drastically several times. But since this is election season, the opposition is raking up the issue," she said.

BJP had poached Bharati Pawar from NCP before the 2019 elections, giving her the ticket instead of the then MP Harisandra Chavan.

Bhagare, a political greenhorn, faced the setback of four party MLAs switching to deputy CM Ajit Pawar's NCP camp. But he hopes farmers' ire will see anti-BJP voters rally around him. "Given the anger among onion growers, my opponent's defeat is certain. Though our MLAs have deserted us, we are counting on Sharad Pawar's popularity among the farmers," Bhagare said at a campaign rally.

Revival instinct: 'Little Europe' clings to last vestiges of its heritage

Zeeshan Jawed & Faiguni Banerjee | TNN

Kolkata: Much before the British founded Calcutta (now Kolkata), "Little Europe" had already started taking shape in pockets of Gang-gang Bengal.

The first European colony in Bengal was established by the Portuguese in Bandel on the Ganges riverbank in the early 16th century. The Dutch followed in Chinsurah, the French in Chandernagore (formerly Chandernagore), the British in Calcutta and, finally, the Danes in Serampore.

These former colonial enclaves, which are now part of the Serampore and Hooghly parliamentary constituencies, will vote today. The approximately 20 lakh electors in these seats want their representatives and both state and central govt to revive tourism, restore the architectural relics, preserve their heritage and renew trade and commerce.

The towns, roughly 60km north of Kolkata, started flourishing in trade and commerce and witnessed an influx of capital, becoming home to some of the biggest riverine ports. The foreign rulers also brought in their cuisine, culture and architecture and constructed churches and mansions.

With Kolkata acquiring more significance under the British in the 18th century, the "Little Europe" settlements were relegated to the background as their magnificent architectural heritage began crumbling and their cuisine disappeared and trade dwindled.

"These places have been reduced to being mofussil (suburban) towns that are bursting at the seams. The state of infrastructure is abysmal, the drainage system is a mess and unplanned real estate development has affected the quality of living," said Soumen Banerjee, a former English professor at Serampore College, which was built in 1827.

BOULEVARDS OF BROKEN DREAMS

Portuguese settlement Bandel	Dutch settlement Chinsurah	French settlement Chandernagore	British settlement Calcutta	Danish settlement Serampore
1571	1635	1673	1686	1755

Labels in images: Chandannagar Strand, Serampore College, Bandel Church.

The locals feel the areas have great potential for tourism by virtue of their tangible and intangible heritage.

"These towns have been holding on to traces of their European heritage in public spaces, buildings and culture. The colonial architecture, cultural practices and memories in "Little Europe" are now at risk due to rapid urbanisation. They need urgent conservation measures and a solid revival plan," said Susmita Mukherjee, who runs a cafe in Bandel.

West Bengal Tourism is promoting these areas along the Hooghly and showcasing the settlements of European traders around its banks.

To preserve and document the heritage, UK and India have jointly funded The Hugli River of Cultures Project.

A team of academic researchers, who reside in and around Chandannagar, and partner teams from the University of Liverpool

and the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, are collaborating on the project.

"Several monuments, including churches and public spaces, have already been restored. The number of tourists visiting these places has also risen," said an official of the tourism department.

Restoration of The Denmark Tavern, using traditional construction techniques and materials, has not only drawn tourists and spurred public interest but also rekindled hopes for the restoration of other heritage monuments in a way that benefits the local economy. The tavern, dating back to the 1780s, served as a hang-out offering drinks, books and recreational activities to European visitors.

"The restoration of the Danish tavern can be used as an example for other places of historical importance," said Anirban Ghosh, who conducts heritage walks in various areas of "Little Europe".

1 B.Sc (Honours) Food science & nutrition management

4 years,
8 semesters
NEP CURRICULUM



Visit to ICDS Centre, Kolkata

Trip to Jaipur Dairy, Rajasthan

Why the course?

Multi-skilling as a nutritionist with a background in dietetics, culinary science and institutional management together with public health & nutrition.

What is the career scope?

Demand for nutritionists and dietitians is snowballing with growing health awareness and lifestyle changes.

Why JDBI?

It is the only college that supports 'all' domains of nutrition under one single course including cookery, and provides experiential learning and practical exposure with dedicated state-of-the-art laboratories under trained full-time faculty.

2 B.Sc (Honours) Textiles and fashion technology

4 years,
8 semesters
NEP CURRICULUM



Graduating Fashion Show, 2024

Why the course?

Multi-skilling both as a textile designer and a fashion designer with a solid foundation in textile science, that is required by the dynamic textile industry.

What is the career scope?

Textiles is one of the booming sectors which holds the promise of lucrative career options as designers, merchandiser & entrepreneurs.

Why JDBI?

The only college that provides experiential learning in 'all' the domains of textiles under one single course, including fashion design, textile design, garment construction and textile technology. State-of-the-art laboratories, excursions and field trips are USP of this course at JDBI.

3 B.Sc (Honours) Interior designing

4 years,
8 semesters
NEP CURRICULUM



Award by Society & Interiors

Trip to Jantar Mantar, Rajasthan

Why the course?

Opportunity to integrate artistic inclination to a more satisfying practical application and option to work from home.

What is the career scope?

The scope of interior designing in India is rapidly expanding with the flourishing real estate sector and a growing emphasis on design aesthetics.

Why JDBI?

The only honours degree course in Interior Design (not a diploma) from a globally reputed university with hand-on practical training and skilling in all domains of interior design including wood work, carpentry, pottery, vastu and other allied fields is offered.

4 B.Sc (Honours) Human development

4 years,
8 semesters
NEP CURRICULUM



Visit to Ek-tara, an NGO

Visit to Bal Ashram, Rajasthan

Why the course?

Multi-skilling in the field of child care, pre-school education, gerontology, psychological counselling and public health.

What is the career scope?

Demand for counsellors is greater than the need for other mental healthcare practitioners in the current times. Also with rapidly increasing number of pre-schools, the demand of pre-school educators is on the rise.

Why JDBI?

The only college that supports 'all' domains of human development and prepares students for multiple career opportunities as a counsellor, preschool educator and health project officer under one single course. Regular field visits to NGOs are the USP of this course at JDBI.

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Will financial capital beat voter apathy & keep date with polls?

Will Seek To Boost Turnout, Which Crossed 50% Only Thrice Since 1991

Reeba.Zachariah
@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: Today, Mumbai's corporate honchos will trade their suits for sneakers as queue up to vote.

Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani and Tata Sons chairman N Chandrababu Naidu will cast their votes at Villa Theresa High School on Peddar Road, while Mahindra Group boss Anand Mahindra will exercise his franchise at Walsingham School in Malabar Hill.

Section 135 B of the Representation of the People Act mandates businesses and establishments in the voting area declare a paid holiday on voting day. Essential services, including hospitals and electricity providers, have implemented flexible schedules to ensure that both civic duties and critical services are maintained.

"To facilitate casting of votes on Monday, functional heads may allow employees to either report late or leave



Poll officials carrying EVMs and other material head for duty on the eve of the 5th phase of the Lok Sabha elections, in Leh on Sunday

early up to a maximum duration of three hours if their duty timings are between 7am and 5pm," read the memo of a news media outlet.

At air conditioning and commercial refrigeration major Blue Star, "employees in customer service and those attending to emergency operations will be given compensatory off," said the company's MD B Thiagarajan.

In a city notorious for voter apathy, authorities have been going all out to boost the turn-

out and bring it closer to the 2019 Lok Sabha polls' national average of 67%. Mumbai's overall voting percentage has risen over 50% only three times since 1991. In 2019 polls, the six Lok Sabha constituencies in Mumbai recorded a voter turnout of 55%. However, debates have emerged in certain quarters on whether providing an election holiday results in higher voter turnout.

"Employees are vital for success in any organisation and for the nation. Enabling them to vote without work commitments can be a significant catalyst for increasing voter turnout," said Home-sy's head of people's process Neha Mishra.

However, the fact that election day in Mumbai is on a Monday, the first day of the corporate week, may dampen enthusiasm due to the pressure of meeting various deadlines. Blackstone-backed Aadhar Housing Finance MD Rishi Anand said: "While voting is not obligatory, a day off will definitely encourage voters to cast their ballot." vote but not force them to do so. "If they do vote, it will help in deciding who will be the people's representative to run the country on our behalf."

Meanwhile, on a lighter note, the National Restaurant Association of India's Mumbai chapter is offering a "democracy discount" on Monday and Tuesday, providing a 20% reduction on dine-in bills to those who cast their votes. An inked finger will be mandatory to avail the offer.

TMC-BJP war of words over eco stats, 'guarantees'

Dwaipayan Ghosh & Rohit Khanna | TNN

Kolkata: Amit Mitra, former Bengal finance minister and currently principal chief adviser to the CM, on Sunday attacked guarantees provided by PM Narendra Modi, claiming none had been fulfilled.

"Around 83% of jobless people in the country are young men and women... and two-thirds of educated young men and women are unemployed," Mitra said.

Claiming NDA govt's Skill India programme for preparing skilled manpower had not borne the desired fruit, he alleged only around 4% of the country's youth were getting vocational training. Mitra also claimed that "household net financial savings" in the country had reached the lowest point in 50 years. Claiming that guaranteed minimum support price was not being given to farmers for their produce, Mitra said "30 farmers die by suicide every day".

Mitra's allegations came on a day BJP's Balurghat MLA Ashok Lahiri claimed that Bengal — which ranked among the top three states in terms of per capita income during the 60s — was one of the backbenchers now.

Mitra claimed the country's external debt had increased 100% in the last 10 years. "It has risen from Rs 3,65,000 crore 10 years back to Rs 7,48,000 crore in FY 2022-23," he said. He added that no less than 35,000 people, mostly entrepreneurs, had settled outside India between 2017



Mitra said 83% unemployed people in India were young

and 2022.

The former state finance minister said hate speeches and communal slurs had also increased by 45% in the country, even in Parliament.

Bengal's GSDP was Rs 17 lakh crore in 2023-24, less than half of Maharashtra's, Lahiri said, quoting figures from a recently released publication from a public policy research outfit backed by BJP. "The state is lagging on aspects like roads, drinking water, irrigation, health infrastructure and education. More than half of pregnant mothers don't get to have folic acid and iron tablets for 100 days. Almost one-third of kids below five years are underweight as they don't get proper nutrition. Lack of development and corruption have given rise to violence in the state," Lahiri said.

Vinay Sahasrabudhe, national executive member of BJP, said the debt burden of the state had risen by 236% during Trinamool's tenure, increasing from Rs 1.87 lakh crore in 2010-11 to Rs 6.33 lakh crore in 2023-24. "Almost 20% of people are living below poverty line till 2022-23 and unemployment in the 15-59 age group is 5.3%," he said.

PM vows return of seized bribe money to poor in J'khand

B Sridhar@timesgroup.com

Ghatshila (Jamshedpur): PM Narendra Modi announced Sunday that the bribe money seized in Jharkhand will be returned to its rightful owners, with legal advice being sought on the process.

"The ill-gotten money will not be kept in govt treasury. It will be given back to the poor who were looted by Congress-JMM-RJD functionaries," he said in Moubhandar; Ghatshila. Modi criticised INDIA bloc parties for the state's lack of development.

He claimed that Congress failed to work for the poor and marginalised during its 60 years in office. "The mindset of Congress is such that their functionaries consider the country their personal property," he said.

Without taking his name, the PM accused Rahul Gandhi of adopting Maoist tactics, saying: "Like Naxalites who don't let investors work without paying extortion, Congress's shehzada is doing the same... His language is anti-corporate. Investors who come to meet me say they will not invest in Congress-governed states as the party's ideology is anti-corporate."

Modi questioned whether INDIA bloc parties in Maharashtra agree with the Congress MP's views on corporates and investors. Modi criticised JMM, noting that a Hemant Soren is jailed for land grabbing, including attempts to seize military land. He ac-

Shah: It's Ram Bhakts vs those who fired at them

Lucknow: Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday said people will have to choose between 'Ram bhakts' who ensured completion of Ram temple in Ayodhya and those who were responsible for opening fire on 'kar sevaks', report Shalabh & Kapil Dixit.

Addressing rallies in Prayagraj and Machhlishahr constituencies, Shah said those talking about "bringing back triple talaq and Article 370, putting lock on Ram temple and quashing CAA should not be allowed to form govt". "After four phases of polling, BJP has already achieved the figure to form a majority govt and is heading towards its target of 400 seats," said Shah.

Training his guns at Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and SP president Akhilesh Yadav, Shah said voters should hold them accountable for minority appeasement. "Congress remained in office for 70 years but could not construct Ram temple in Ayodhya. SP govt was responsible for firing on 'kar sevaks' during the temple movement," Shah said. Lauding Yogi govt in UP, Shah said the CM eradicated mafia raj in state.

cused RJD functionaries of acquiring land from job seekers in exchange for employment. "Do they qualify to be trusted by the people?" he asked.

'Over 50% of BJP, Cong candidates have ₹5cr+ assets'

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New Delhi: More than 50% of the 768 candidates fielded by BJP and Congress in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections have assets worth more than Rs 5 crore each and a little over 27% are from 'dynastic' backgrounds, according to a study conducted by a not-for-profit organisation.

Prajatantra Foundation's study has revealed that 'financial status' and 'dynastic background' are the two most prevalent "gate-

keeping" factors when in selecting candidates. Beyond dynastic politics, the most common pathways for candidates are party organisational politics (15.4%), local politics (12.2%), and student politics (9.5%).

"Of the 27.6% of dynastic candidates, 71.2% are second-generation politicians... the sons, daughters, nieces, or nephews of current politicians. Another 25% are first-generation dynasts, meaning they are siblings or spouses of cur-

rent politicians. Approximately 3% of dynastic candidates come from multi-generational political families, underscoring the deep-rooted legacy and continuity of political power within certain families in India," the study said.

The report highlights how Karnataka, Bihar and Maharashtra have the highest percentage of dynastic candidates among larger states and Haryana leads among smaller states. As per the report, the two parties have given only

13.4% of tickets to women candidates, and over 50% of them have dynastic backgrounds.

The study, which has collated information on 10 parameters from candidates' affidavits, their teams, stringer networks and news reports, mentions that money is the most prevalent gatekeeping barrier. It said around 81% candidates have assets worth Rs 1 crore or more. "This is closely followed by individuals with criminal antecedents, who constitute 38.8% of the candidates."

'Modi has lost confidence; MVA will win at least 50% of Maha seats'

Undeterred by the unprecedented rebellion, Sharad Pawar embarked on a new mission, he relaunched himself, forming a new party with a handful of supporters and is determined to show miracles in the Lok Sabha polls. In an interview with TOI's Prafulla Marpakwar, he spoke on the formation of INDIA bloc, its priorities and the future of MVA comprising Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP) & Congress. Excerpts from the interview:

PM Modi says opposition leaders are more focused on setting up their children...

■ I think Modi's opinion is wrong; it is not a crime to follow your parents' footsteps. Many doctors feel that their son or daughter should take up the medical profession, similar is the case with politicians too. All will depend on his/her professional competence, if he has ability, he will shine in life; all will depend on the capacity and professionalism of the individual.

PM Modi says BJP will get a historic mandate...

■ Modi's opinion appears to be unrealistic. Ever since the Lok Sabha elections were declared, he has given a slogan, 'Abki baar, 400 paar' (This time, more than 400 seats). I do not know on what basis he has arrived at a figure of 400, which is very difficult to achieve. I am doubtful if BJP will reach the majority figure in view of severe discontent against NDA across the country. In all southern states, NDA's performance will be dismal. In addition, it will be a disappointing situation for BJP in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and UP among several other states.

Are you sure that the INDIA bloc will form govt. In that event who will be the Prime Minister?

■ We, in the INDIA bloc, at the end of four phases of polling, are confident that it should not be difficult for the INDIA bloc to dislodge the Modi-led NDA govt. With regard to our prime ministerial candidate, it will be decided in the meeting of newly-elected MPs. A few decades ago, when Morarji Desai was elected as Prime Minister, a decision was taken in the meeting of the MPs. Then Jai Prakash Narayan had taken a lead in the formation of the new govt.

What will be your priorities?

■ Our top priority will be to provide a stable govt, draft a comprehensive action plan for providing remunerative price for agriculture produce, tackle unemployment, and halt farmer suicides and spiralling prices of essential commodities. Above all, halt gross abuse of central agencies. Investigations by ED and CBI is a matter of concern for people from different walks of life.

PM Modi is frequently ad-



TOI INTERVIEW

dressing election rallies in Maharashtra...

■ I think Modi is the first Prime Minister who is concentrating on Maharashtra. It appears that he has lost confidence, therefore, has chosen Maharashtra for extensive campaigning. In the past, PMs like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi would address just one or two election rallies.

What will be the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra?

■ In my opinion, the performance of Maha Vikas Aghadi will be impressive, it will win at least 50% of the seats. I was stunned and surprised by the language used by the PM during his campaign in Maharashtra. Shockingly, he called me Bhakti Aatma (wandering soul) and described Shiv Sena (UBT) as fake. Such lan-

guage is not expected from a PM; he has lowered the dignity of the post. I am not disturbed by the PM's comment. In the past too, social worker Anna Hazare and former BMC official G R Khairnar had levelled serious charges against me, now no one knows the whereabouts of these two persons.

Several legislators have quit NCP and Shiv Sena. Will it have an impact on the election outcome?

■ In my opinion, even if legislators have joined hands with Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde, grassroot-level workers are still with the original parties. I have seen in most of my meetings, there is a massive presence of members of the younger generations. Similar is the case with Shiv Sainiks, they are still loyal to Uddhav Thackeray.

For a long time, you were a voter in Baramati, you shifted to Mumbai, and now again, your vote is in Baramati...

■ It's a fact that my name was in Baramati parliamentary constituency. When I took a lot of interest in the cricket association, I was told that if you are a permanent resident of Mumbai, then only you can contest the election to the association. After one attains the age of 70, one is not eligible to contest the election, then I decided to shift my name from Mumbai to Baramati, my home town.

Plan to lock AAP offices, freeze accounts: Kejriwal

► Continued from P 1

Arvind Kejriwal told the cadre to be prepared to face bigger challenges ahead. "The top leaders of our party, all ministers, MLAs, MPs, councillors and office-bearers are present here. Why did we have to gather here today? Because the Prime Minister has made up his mind to completely destroy and crush Aam Aadmi Party, for which he has started an operation called 'Operation Jhaadu'," he said.

The Delhi CM said that Modi feared AAP, as its work was being discussed all over the country, and it could be a challenge for BJP at the national level and in many states.

Kejriwal said every senior functionary of AAP had gone through a trial by fire. "They arrested me, Sanjay Singh, Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain. Yesterday, they even arrested my PA, Raghav Chadha has just come back; now they



Kejriwal and AAP functionaries marched towards BJP HQ and sat on the road as police barricades prevented them from approaching

are saying that he will also be arrested. They are saying that Atishi, Saurabh Bharadwaj and Kailash Gahlot will also be arrested soon," he said.

He said that in the coming days, the party office would be locked. "ED's lawyer has already given a statement in court that AAP's bank accounts will be frozen immediately after the elections," the CM said.

After the speech, Kejriwal led a march towards BJP's headquarters and sat on the road as police barri-

acades prevented them from reaching the office. There was heavy police presence on Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg.

RS MP Sanjay Singh, ministers Gopal Rai and Kailash Gahlot, and other senior functionaries were present. After staging a protest for around half an hour, they left.

Singh said, "As per his promise, Kejriwal himself came with other functionaries of the party to get arrested, but they (BJP) left the ground and ran away."

'AAP out on streets to save accused'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: As AAP functionaries marched to BJP's headquarters in Delhi to protest against the arrest of chief minister's aide, Bibhav Kumar, in an assault case, Rajya Sabha MP Swati Malwal accused her party of talking to the streets to "save the accused".

"There was a time when we all used to come out on the streets to get justice for Nirbhaya, Swati Malwal said. Had he been here, maybe things wouldn't have been so bad for me," she added. Sisodia is in jail over corruption allegations in the now-shelved Delhi liquor policy.



There was a time when we all used to come out on the streets to get justice for Nirbhaya, Swati Malwal said

Meanwhile, Congress functionary Sandeep Dikshit said only a probe would

reveal what exactly happened between Malwal and Kumar. "When the Nirbhaya incident happened, AAP hit the streets and said if anything wrong happened with a woman, the accused must prove his innocence," he told a news agency. "We had then said that such a law is not correct," Dikshit added, noting that fingers were pointed at the then CM, Sheila Dikshit, leading to the creation of the law.

"So, such a law was made and, now, when a woman says that something wrong happened with her, action is taken assuming that she is right. Bibhav Kumar was arrested as per this rule... it is a rule made by AAP only," he stated.

In Bundelkhand, the fields are thirsty for water, people for change

Vishwa.Mohan@timesgroup.com

Banda/Hamirpur: Six of the seven districts in the poll-bound Bundelkhand region of UP, spread over four parliamentary constituencies, come in the top 100 riskiest districts in the country in terms of their vulnerability to climate change and future hazards, and this is reflected on the ground in depressed agricultural activities, water scarcity and land degradation in all four Lok Sabha seats that will go to poll on Monday.

Out of 109 'very high risk' districts in the country, 22 fall in UP and six of them — Hamirpur, Banda, Chitrakoot, Mahoba, Jalaun and Jhansi — are in the Bundelkhand region, according to the vulnera-

bility assessment done by Indian Council of Agricultural Research. The list shows Hamirpur as the riskiest in UP followed by Banda. Nation-wide, Hamirpur is the ninth riskiest whereas Banda is at number 20 due to constant rise in minimum temperatures, extensive degraded land and high drought proneness.

The situation, that has affected farming operations, has already led to rural unemployment and migration. Though free ration and annual income support under PM-Kisan schemes are a help, farmers in the region desperately look for permanent irrigation facilities like what their counterparts in western UP have. Such facilities and other adaptation



Jal Saheli, a group of women water warriors, protesting for rejuvenation of the Gorari river in Simrawari area of the district

measures will help them face the challenges of climate change in future.

"We cannot survive without irrigation facilities. Underground water is depleting quite fast. We use diesel pump sets for irrigation. But the high price of diesel and high

cost of deep boring make farming expensive," said Ashok Singh of Banda tehsil. Other villagers have similar concerns, saying their district needs industries so that more and more people get jobs.

Though the Centre has approved the Ken-Betwa river

linking project that will provide permanent irrigation facilities to 2.6 lakh hectares of land spread over Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur districts of UP, it will take at least eight years for the project to get completed. The project envisages transfer of surplus water from Ken river to Betwa river through a 230-km concrete link canal.

"Betwa river is flowing through our district but we don't get its benefit due to lack of irrigation canal network like what western Uttar Pradesh has. We hope to get such a network once the Ken-Betwa river link project is completed but all people will leave villages by then," said Vinay Kumar Ahirwar of Nirni village in Hamirpur district.

Villagers in Lalitpur district of Jhansi parliamentary constituency have similar concerns. Jitendra Rajput of Kandhari Kalan village in Lalitpur district said, "Our village will also benefit from Ken-Betwa river link project, but no one knows when it will happen as nothing has been done so far on this project in my district."

Meanwhile, farmers in his and other villages of the district are using diesel pump sets for irrigation. "It is quite expensive and villagers have to depend on local moneylenders to meet their farm input cost every season. Annual income support of Rs 6,000 under PM-Kisan scheme is, however, a big help," said Rajput, who has five acres of land.

Rahul & Akhilesh share video of 'loot'

► Continued from P 1

The underage voter's father told TOI that some polling agents took his son to a nearby booth before the start of voting "to participate in the EVM machine inspection/ randomisation".

"My son pressed the ballot unit several times, shot the video and later shared it." SP chief Akhilesh shared the video at 4.05pm on Sunday from his official X handle with a post, "If Election Commission feels this is wrong, then it must take some action, otherwise... BJP's booth committee is actually a loot committee."

Rahul wrote, "Seeing its defeat, BJP wants to loot democracy by pressuring the government machinery to deny the mandate. Congress expects from all the officers performing election duty that they should not forget their constitutional responsibility under the pressure of power. Otherwise, as soon as the Indian government is formed, such action will be taken that anyone will think 10 times before insulting the oath of the Constitution."

The Etah district administration said it acted after "taking serious cognisance of the tweet posted by Akhilesh Yadav".

Most U-5 deaths in India now occur in early & post-neonatal periods: Study

From 33.5 In '93, Deaths Dipped To 6.9/1k Kids In '21

Durgesh Nandan Jha
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Majority of deaths among children under the age of five in India are now occurring during early neonatal period (first 7 days) and post-neonatal period (29 days to 11 months), a new study published in JAMA Network Open claimed. The study is based on analysis of over 2.3 lakh deaths of under-5 children documented in five rounds of National Family Health

A stagnation or worsening for certain states and UTs was observed from 2016 to 2021 for early neonatal, late neonatal, post-neonatal mortality; if this continues, these states and UTs will not meet United Nations Sustainable Development Goal targets, the study said

Survey (NFHS), the results of which were released in 1993, 1999, 2006, 2016 and 2021. According to the study, deaths among children experienced the most substantial decrease between 1993 and 2021, from 33.5 to 6.9 deaths per 1,000, accompanied by a substantial reduction in inter-state inequalities. The researchers subdivided child mortality rates into four early-life periods:

early-neonatal (first 7 days), late-neonatal (8-28 days), post neonatal (29 days to 11 months), and child (12-59 months). They found that while early neonatal (from 33.5 to 20.3 deaths per 1,000), late neonatal (from 14.1 to 4.1 deaths per 1,000), and post neonatal (from 31.0 to 10.8 deaths per 1,000) mortality decreased, inter-state inequalities remained notable. "Mortality burden shift-

ed over time, and it is now concentrated during the early-neonatal (48.3% of total deaths in children younger than 5 years) and post-neonatal (25.6%) periods," the researchers point out. "A stagnation or worsening for certain states and UTs was observed from 2016 to 2021 for early-neonatal, late-neonatal, and post neonatal mortality. If this pattern continues, these states and UTs will not meet United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets related to child survival," they added. SDGs of UN include reducing mortality in the first 5 years to 25 deaths per 1,000 live births and the first 28 days to 12 deaths per 1,000 live births by 2030.

Close shave for I79 on board as AI Exp aircraft catches fire

Joy Sengupta & Nithya Mandyam | TNN



The flight to Kochi returned to Bengaluru for an emergency landing after a fire was noticed in an engine after take-off

Pune/Bengaluru: An engine of an Air India Express plane flying from Pune to Kochi caught fire around 10 minutes after it took off from Bengaluru following a scheduled stop-over late Saturday evening, forcing a return and emergency evacuation of its 179 fliers, who were then stranded in the Karnataka capital for nearly 13 hours. The flight, IX-1132, had six crew members.

This was Air India's second fire scare. On May 17, one of its Bengaluru-bound planes had returned to Delhi after a fire warning from its auxiliary power unit. That flight had around 175 passengers. Speaking about Saturday's events, an Air India Express spokesperson told TOI that "the crew accomplished the evacuation with no injuries to any guests." "A thorough investigation with the regulator shall be accomplished to establish the (fire) cause," the official

said. A spokesperson for Bangalore International Airport Ltd (BIAL) said "a full-scale emergency was declared and the fire promptly extinguished upon landing". Sources said that apart from the airline's investigation, the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) would conduct a probe. "We took off (from Bengaluru) at 10.50pm. Around 11pm, we noticed fire in the engine from the windows. The flight then turned back and landed in Bengaluru at 11.15pm," said Piyano Thomas, adding they had take-off from Pune at 8.20pm instead of 7.40pm.

Jharkhand labourers shot at in Imphal, one dead

Kangkan Kalita
@timesgroup.com

Guwahati: Unidentified assailants killed a 41-year-old migrant labourer from Jharkhand and wounded two fellow workers from the same state in a shooting around 8pm on Saturday in Imphal, marking the first instance of an attack on people from outside the north-east region since ethnic conflict erupted in Manipur in May last year.

The body of the deceased, identified as Ram Hangsada, is kept at the morgue of Regional Institute of Medical Sciences in Imphal. Bittu Murmu, 22, and Mitalan Soren, 50, are recuperating at Raj Medicity in Imphal East, police said Sunday. "The trio came from Godda district in Jharkhand," an officer said. Real estate developers had hired them. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, said the officer.

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Auction Centre Address & Loan Nos: BAGULA (BAG - No. 925, Ground Floor, Khatian No. 11 (Kree), Hanskhali Road, Bagula - 741502, Contact no: 9332366809) 2060499, 2044196, 2044199, 2044225, 2033521, 2008497, 2046892, 2047167, 2063432, 2048936. DUTTAPULIA (DPA - Duttapulia More Ranaghat Road, Dhantala, Duttapulia - 741504, Contact no: 8697982156) 2007566. KALIKAPUR (HOW - Building No354, Purbanchal, Kalikapur, Opposite Of Sbi Kalikapur - 700078, Contact no: 9333473008) 2047118. KOLKATA-BAGUIATI (KOB - Dc 2/13, First Floor, Shastribagan, Baguiati, Deshbandhunagar, Baguiati, Kolkata - 700059, Contact no: 9333473010) 2091279, 2027461.

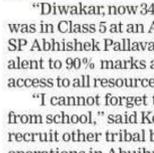
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Chhattisgarh Maoist swaps AK-47 for pen, clears Class 10 exam

Partha Behera@timesgroup.com

Raipur: Plucked from his classroom by Maoists at age 16, handed a rifle and dragged through jungles of Abujmahar, Libaru Korram aka Naxal Diwakar always yearned to return to school. He did.

And, has now cleared his Class 10 examination. Hailed as a hero by fellow surrendered cadres, Korram proudly shows a worn printout of his marks. "I was taught to fire AK-47, SLR, Insas, and .303 rifles. I'd much rather wield a pen," Korram, who carried a bounty of Rs 1.4 lakh, told TOI. His journey is inspiring school dropouts in Maoist-affected villages to return to education. Korram has now set his sights on passing Class 12, and helping his wife, Lakshmi, an ex-Maoist, clear her Class 10 exam.



"Diwakar, now 34, was taken by Maoists when he was in Class 5 at an Abujmahar school," Kawardha SP Abhishek Pallava said. "Diwakar's 35% is equivalent to 90% marks achieved by students who have access to all resources." "I cannot forget the day Maoists took me away from school," said Korram. He was initially used to recruit other tribal boys and after 2017, was part of operations in Abujmahar and Narayanpur. "After surrendering, he had no interest in joining police force, but favoured a position in education or health department," said the SP. He tried twice but failed both times. Not one to give up, he tried again, and passed this time. Inspired by Diwakar, six Maoists had surrendered with him. Four of them took the open examination, and cleared some subjects.

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MP nursing college probe: CBI inspector held

Bhopal: CBI has arrested one of its own inspectors for allegedly accepting bribe during the probe into irregularities in Madhya Pradesh's nursing colleges. Four persons, including the inspector stationed at Bhopal's Anti-Corruption Branch, have been arrested on charges of bribery. This arrest comes as a setback to investigation into widespread irregularities in MP's nursing colleges, say officials.

Sources said there could have been as many as 13 arrests across the state, including the four in Bhopal, but it couldn't be confirmed immediately. A special team from Delhi apprehended the inspector along with the director of a nursing college, his wife and a middleman allegedly involved in facilitating the bribe. Sources say the CBI inspector was caught red-handed accepting the bribe money. TNN

DEAR WEEKLY LOTTERY

₹1 CRORE WON BY MURSHIDABAD RESIDENT

Mr. RIPON SK from MURSHIDABAD, WEST BENGAL has won Rs. 1 Crore as first prize in Dear Weekly

Lottery in the draw held on 07.03.2024. His winning ticket number is 78H 24748. He has submitted his prize-winning ticket along with the prize claim form to the Nodal Officer, Nagaland State Lotteries located at Kolkata. "Financial condition has been playing an important role in anyone's life which is even more crucial for middle class people. Earning money to take care of routine expenditure has become difficult. Dear Lottery has helped me at this juncture with a prize money of One Crore rupees," said the winner.

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Notice is hereby given to that M/S Vitality Abasan Private Limited and M/S Basukinath Projects Private Limited, both the Companies Office at 14 Indian Exchange Place, 2nd Floor, P. O. - G.P.O., P.S. - Hare Street, Kol - 700001, jointly purchased a land, measuring 5.5 Dec. of R.S. & L.R. Dag No. 2097, L.R. KH No. 2337 & 2338 at Mouza - Barbaria, J.L. No. 8, P.S. - Duttapukur (formerly Barasat), Paschim Khlikapur G.P., 24 pgs (N), by virtue of a Deed of Conveyance, being no. 10937/2023, registered before A.R.A. - II, Calcutta from Ranjit Kumar Ghosh & Chinmoy Ghosh both S/o - Lt. Bishnupada Ghosh, of - Sadarpur, Jagannathpur, P.S. - Duttapukur, Kol - 700126, through their constituted Attorney Kutubuddin alias Kutubuddin Mondal S/o - Ali Box Mondal, of Sonakhari, Jagannathpur, P.S. - Duttapukur, Kol - 700126, vide Power of Attorney, vide no. 1379/2023, registered before D.S.R - II, North 24 Parganas and thereafter said Companies applied for mutation before the B.L. & L.R.O. Barasat - I, 24 pgs (N), vide Mutation Case No. MN/2024/1502/10318, if any one has claim or objection against the said Mutation Case then contact Advocate Mijanur Rahaman, M. No. 9830211686, E-mail: mijanur.advocate@gmail.com within 30 days from the Publication of this Notice.

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SPLITSVILLE FOR BENNIFER? RUMOURS RIFE COUPLE WHO GOT MARRIED IN 2022 ARE LIVING SEPARATELY

SEAN DIDDY APOLOGISES AFTER '16 CCTV CLIP OF HIM ATTACKING FORMER GF GOES VIRAL, SAYS 'MY BEHAVIOUR IS INEXCUSABLE'



Helicopter carrying Iran prez crashes, search is under way

Raisi Onboard Chopper With Foreign Minister, Says Official; Iranian State Media Says Bad Weather Cause Of Accident & It Is Complicating Rescue Bid

Dubai: A helicopter carrying Iranian Prez Ebrahim Raisi and his foreign minister crashed on Sunday as it was crossing mountain terrain in heavy fog, an Iranian official told Reuters, and rescuers were struggling to reach the site of the incident.

The official said the lives of Raisi and foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian were "at risk following the helicopter crash", which happened on the way back from a visit to the border with Azerbaijan in Iran's northwest. "We are still hopeful but information coming from the crash site is very concerning," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Raisi had met with Azerbaijan Prez Ilham Aliyev earlier on Sunday. At the time of the crash, a delegation of ministers was travelling with him in a convoy of three helicopters, state media reported, adding that the two other aircraft had reached their destinations. Raisi had been at the Azerbaijani border to inaugurate the Qiz-Qalasi Dam, a joint project. Aliyev, who said he had bid a "friendly farewell" to Raisi earlier in the day, offered assistance in the rescue.

Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who holds ultimate power in the Islamic Republic, sought to reassure Iranians, saying there would



Rescue team reaches Iran's East Azerbaijan province. 'It is dark and it has started raining, but the search continues. Rescue teams have reached the area ... however, the rain has created mud, making the search difficult,' a local reporter told state TV

be no disruption to state affairs.

Iranian state media said bad weather was the cause of the crash and was complicating rescue efforts. The chief of staff of Iran's army ordered all the resources of the army and the elite Revolutionary Guard to be put to use in search and rescue operations.

ting prayers, and clerics at two of Iran's major Shia shrines in Qum and Mashhad led public services. Videos posted to Instagram by the Iranian Red Crescent Society showed rescue teams trekking through fog and difficult terrain in search of the crash site.

Neighbouring countries expressed concern and offered assistance in any rescue. The White House said US Prez Joe Biden had been briefed on reports about the crash. The EU offered emergency satellite mapping technology to help Iran with the search.

The crash comes at a time of growing dissent within Iran over an array of political, social and economic crises. Iran's clerical rulers face international pressure over Tehran's disputed nuclear programme and its deepening military ties with Russia during the war in Ukraine. Since Iran's ally Hamas attacked Israel on Oct 7, provoking Israel's assault on Gaza, conflagrations involving Iran-aligned groups have erupted throughout West Asia.

Raisi, 63, was elected prez in 2021. Iran's law stipulates that if the president dies, power is transferred to the first vice president and an election must be called within six months. The first vice president is Mohammad Mokhber, a conservative politician. REUTERS/ANNT

Modi expresses concern, says stand in solidarity with Iranians

PM Narendra Modi expressed solidarity with the people of Iran as he said he was deeply concerned by reports regarding Iranian Prez Ebrahim Raisi's helicopter flight that crashed in Iran's East Azerbaijan province.

"We stand in solidarity with the Iranian people in this hour of distress, and pray for the well-being of the president and his entourage," he said in a post on X late on Sunday, amid fears that Raisi may not have survived the crash.

Modi had last met Raisi on the margins of the Brics summit in Johannesburg in Aug 2023

Modi had last met Raisi on the margins of the Brics summit in Johannesburg in Aug 2023. The two leaders had discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation in various fields, including trade and investment, connectivity, energy and counter-terrorism. Iran, along with five other countries, had joined the group in that summit. Raisi had congratulated Modi on the success of Chandrayaan mission and thanked him for India's support for Iran's Brics membership.

In line with the ongoing high-level exchanges, which aided India's delicately balanced approach to the Israel-Hamas conflict, foreign minister S Jaishankar had travelled to Iran in Jan for talks with his counterpart Amir Abdollahian, who too was in the same chopper as Raisi.

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 monthlong crackdown killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained. In March, a UN investigative panel found that Iran was responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death after her arrest for not wearing a hijab to the liking of authorities. AP

Iran ultimately is run by its 85-year-old supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But as prez, Raisi supported the country's enrichment of uranium

other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners in Iran, including amputations." It also mentioned his involvement in the 1988 executions.

en" were sent to their deaths, while others were questioned about their willingness to "clear minefields for the army," according to a 1990 Amnesty International report. 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

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Andhra-born is first Indian to go to space as a tourist

Surendra Singh @timesgroup.com

India-born Gopi Thotakura made history on Sunday evening as he became the first Indian to venture into space as a tourist. He was part of the elite crew for Blue Origin's New Shepard-25 (NS-25) mission, which took off from the company's West Texas launch site in the US around 8:05 pm (IST), an hour late from its scheduled launch time of 9:35 am (local US time).

Born in Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh), Gopi, an entrepreneur and a pilot, journeyed to the edge of space beyond the Earth's atmosphere along with five others. He is officially the second astronaut from the country after Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma, who flew as a professional cosmonaut to space on board Soyuz T-11 on April 3, 1994, as part of the Soviet Interkosmos programme. Astronauts Kalpana Chawla, Sunita Williams, Raja Chari, and Sirisha Bandla were all US citizens of Indian origin who also went to space as professional astronauts.

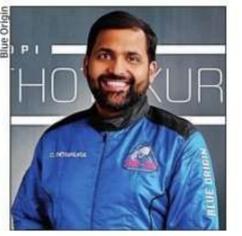
TOI had earlier reported on Gopi's probable entry to the elite astronaut club.

Following takeoff, the NS-25 vehicle reached beyond the boundary of space smoothly. The rocket and capsule then returned to Earth, with the rocket landing upright a few minutes after takeoff. The capsule successfully touched down, using two of its three parachutes, roughly 15 minutes after takeoff.

Introducing the Indian space tourist, a Blue Origin statement said, "Gopi Thotakura is a lifelong pilot and aviator who learned how to fly before he could drive. He flies jets commercially, in addition to piloting



A screen grab shows the Mission NS-25, with the New Shepard 4 rocket & crew capsule, taking off from Texas's Van Horn on Sunday



Gopi Thotakura is a pilot and aviator. He flies jets commercially, in addition to piloting bush, aerobatic, and seaplanes

60 yrs on, America's 1st Black astronaut candidate finally goes to space at 90

America's first Black astronaut candidate finally rocketed into space 60 years later, flying with Jeff Bezos' rocket company on Sunday. Ed Dwight was an air force pilot when President John F Kennedy championed him as a candidate for NASA's early astronaut corps. But he wasn't picked for the 1963 class. Dwight, now 90, got to experience a few minutes of weightlessness with five other passengers aboard the Blue Origin capsule as it skimmed space. Launch officials said all of the astronauts were well shortly after the capsule parachuted down after a flight of roughly 10 minutes. The brief flight from West Texas made Dwight the new record-holder for oldest person in space — nearly two months older than "Star Trek" actor William Shatner was when he went up in 2021. Dwight was among the potential astronauts the air force recommended to NASA. But he wasn't chosen for the 1963 class, which included eventual Gemini and Apollo astronauts, including Apollo 11's Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins. NASA didn't select Black astronauts until 1978, and Guion Bluford became the first African American in space in 1983. Three years earlier, the Soviets launched the first Black astronaut, Arnaldo Tamayo Mendez, a Cuban of African descent. AP

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bush, aerobatic, and seaplanes. Gopi is a co-founder of Preserve Life Corp, a global center for holistic wellness and applied health." He studied for a BSc in aeronautical science at Embury-Riddle Aeronautical University, US. Gopi has worked in medical air evacuation services in India in the past.

This flight is Blue Origin's first tourist mission on New Shepard since Aug 2022. The company was forced to halt flights of the rocket after a New Shepard vehicle suffered an engine failure mid-flight during an uncrewed mission in Sep 2022. This mission was the seventh human flight for the New Shepard programme and the 25th in its history. In all, New Shepard has flown 31 humans, the company said.

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Khamenei protege, hardline prez, sanctioned by US

Dubai: Hard-line Prez Ebrahim Raisi has long been seen as a protege to Iran's supreme leader and a potential successor for his position within the country's Shia 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 US 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 presidency in 2017 against Hassan Rouhani, the moderate cleric who as prez 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 Iran-Iraq war. After Iran's then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini accepted a UN-brokered ceasefire, 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 "mujahede-

en" were sent to their deaths, while others were questioned about their willingness to "clear minefields for the army," according to a 1990 Amnesty International report. 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.

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'Slovak PM's attacker likely not a lone wolf'

The suspect in an assassination attempt on Slovak PM Robert Fico may not have been just a "lone wolf" as previously believed, the interior minister said on Sunday. Deputy PM Robert Kalinak said earlier on Sunday that Fico's life was no longer in immediate danger, although his condition was still too serious for him to be moved to a hospital in the capital Bratislava.

Interior minister Matus Sutaj Estok said an investigation team had been set up, which would also look into whether the suspect acted as part of

a group of people that had been encouraging each other to carry out an assassination. One factor suggesting the involvement of others 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, Estok said. "This indicated the crime may have been committed by a certain group of people."

The Slovak Specialised Criminal Court ruled on Saturday that the suspect, identified by prosecutors as Juraj C., would remain in custody after being charged with attempted murder. Local news media say the suspect is a 71-year-old former security guard at a shopping mall and the author of three collections of poetry.

Estok said on Thursday the suspect was angered by the govt's Ukraine policy. Fico's govt has ended military support for Ukraine and taken a more pro-Russian line on the conflict. The govt has said he became radicalised after Fico ally Peter Pellegrini won a presidential election last month, and that he had told police about his dissatisfaction with the govt's reforms of the prosecution service and public media. AP

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US & Iran held indirect talks in Oman: Report

Washington: Senior US and Iranian officials held talks through intermediaries in Oman this past week, the first such conversations since Iran launched a retaliatory attack on Israel with hundreds of missiles and drones last month, according to a person familiar with the recent meetings.

Brett McGurk, the top White House official on West Asia policy, and Abram Paley, the deputy special envoy for Iran, attended the talks in Oman.

The goal was to try to get Iran, which supplies weapons and training to militias across West Asia, to move to rein in its partners. Since the Israel-Hamas war broke out, several Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria have stepped up attacks on US troops, raising fears of a wider war. The most powerful of the regional militias, Lebanon-based Hezbollah, has been exchanging fire with the Israeli military in northern Israel and southern Le-



Brett McGurk (above), the top White House official on West Asia policy, and Abram Paley, the deputy special envoy for Iran, attended the talks in Oman

banon. However, US intelligence officials assess that neither Hezbollah nor Iran wants to engage in a wider war.

The US has had no diplomatic relations with Iran since 1979, and discussions are often conducted through intermediaries and back channels.

The format of the talks in Oman was similar to ones held in Jan: The Americans sat in one room while their Iranian counterparts sat in another, and Omani officials shuttled between the rooms. NYT

Israel's war cabinet is in turmoil, but Bibi 'secure'

Benny Gantz, facing the cameras with gravity on Saturday told PM Benjamin Netanyahu to shift course on the Gaza war or he'd quit the three-man war cabinet. Israel, he said, needs "a govt that will win the people's trust."

Coming days after the other war cabinet member, defence minister Yoav Gallant, bitterly accused Netanyahu of failing to have a postwar plan, it seemed that Netanyahu was being isolated by his two senior generals, both former top generals, and Israel was headed toward political crisis.

But analysts on Sunday said Netanyahu's coalition, 64 parliamentary seats out of 120, remains secure. Even if Gantz carries out his threat to resign by June 8 — not a certainty — little is likely to change in the short to medium term, they said. The war cabinet might collapse but

Netanyahu would continue to govern with his far-right partners. "Gantz's chances of overthrowing the govt are slim," said Mazal Mualem, who's written a recent political biography of Netanyahu. "There is almost no chance that members of Netanyahu's Likud party will rebel against him, given the political cost. The second way is through massive public protest. But public sentiment isn't there. Gantz's move was a mistake."

All that said, if five Likud legislators do rebel or if Ultra-Orthodox partners walk out over court-enforced efforts to draft their young men, Netanyahu would be in trouble and may result in polls. His extremist partners could push him to adopt policies that would lead to massive anti-govt stir and objections from the US, either of which could lead to change. BLOOMBERG

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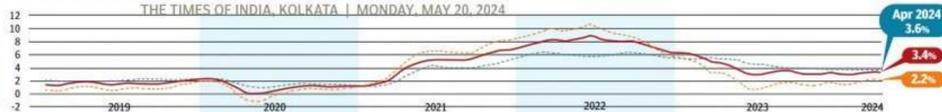
US Inflation Momentum Slows But Housing, Services Stay Hot

► Inflation in US urban areas, indicated by Consumer Price Index-U, rose at 0.3% in April, shedding momentum from 0.4% in March

► Energy costs went up by 1.1% in April, mainly due to a 2.8% rise in gasoline prices

► Food prices stayed the same in April, but groceries at home got slightly cheaper by 0.2%

CPI for urban consumers in the US (YoY change)



► Other goods and services, excluding food and energy, saw a 0.3% increase in prices, mostly driven by higher housing costs

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Statista

MUTUAL FUN by HSBC Mutual Fund



An Investor Education & Awareness Initiative by HSBC Mutual Fund



Mutual Fund investments are subject to market risks, read all scheme related documents carefully.

Visit <https://grp.hsbc/KYC> w.r.t. one-time Know Your Customer (KYC) process, complaints redressal process including SEBI SCORES (<https://www.scores.gov.in>). Investors should only deal with Registered Mutual Funds, to be verified on SEBI website under Intermediaries/Market Infrastructure Institutions (<https://www.sebi.gov.in/intermediaries.html>). Investors may refer to the section on Investor Education on the website of HSBC Mutual Fund for the details on all Investor Education and Awareness Initiatives undertaken by HSBC Mutual Fund.

CL 1364

Banking sector net crosses ₹3L cr for first time in FY24

Private Lenders' Net Jumps 42% Over Public Sector Banks' 34%

Mayur.Shetty@timesgroup.com

Mumbai: For the first time, the banking sector's net profit crossed Rs 3 lakh crore in FY24. The net profit of listed public and private sector banks rose 39% to Rs 3.1 lakh crore from Rs 2.2 lakh crore in FY23.

While public sector banks generated a record Rs 1.4 lakh crore in net profit during the year — an increase of 34% over the year-ago period — private sector banks increased their net by 42% to nearly Rs 1.7 lakh crore compared to Rs 1.2 lakh crore a year ago. As a result, the earnings gap between the two sectors has widened.

To put things in perspective, Rs 3 lakh crore is approximately the total quarterly profits of all listed companies in the first three

Amt Equals To Net Of All Listed Cos In 3 Of 4 Qtrs

► Public sector banks generated a record ₹1.4L cr in net profit in FY24, but private sector banks grew even faster. As a result, the earnings gap between the two sectors has widened

► PSUs would have had a higher net profit in FY24 if not for a one-time provision that several banks had to make towards pensions

Banking sector (profit in ₹L cr)



► To put things in perspective, Rs 3 lakh crore is approximately the total quarterly profits of all listed companies in the first three quarters of the fiscal

quarters of the fiscal. In fact, banks' profits are much higher than those of IT services, which have been the most profitable group in recent years — listed IT services companies reported a net profit of nearly Rs 1.1 lakh crore for FY24.

In the preceding years, public sector banks had narrowed their profit gap with private banks as they cleaned up their balance sheets and increased earnings. In fact, the net profit of public sector banks has more than quadrupled in the last three years.

Public sector banks would have had a higher net profit in FY24 if not for a one-time provision that several banks had to make towards pensions. However, because the pension provisions were lower than expected, it led to a gain in their shares. Some public sector banks like Bank of Baroda also took a hit due to provisions for their exposure to Go Air, although the loan is collateralised.

On a consolidated basis, Reliance Industries still has the highest annual profit of Rs 79,020 crore. However, on a standalone basis, its profit was flat at Rs 42,042 crore in FY24. Of the top 10 listed companies, TCS reported a net profit of Rs 43,559 crore for FY24, Indian Oil (Rs 39,618 crore), ONGC (Rs 38,828 crore) and Infosys (Rs 27,234 crore).

Kumar, Pai not to renew advisory role with Byju's

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Former SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar and former CFO of Infosys Mohandas Pai are stepping down from Byju's advisory council.

In a statement on Sunday, the troubled edtech firm said that company and advisory board members Kumar and Pai have mutually decided not to renew the contractual agreement scheduled to end on June 30, 2024.



Rajnish Kumar (L) and Mohandas Pai (R)

Byju's had constituted the council last year to assuage investor concerns following a series of financial and corporate governance lapses at the firm. The council was tasked with advising and mentoring Byju's board and CEO Byju Raveendran.

"Our engagement with the company as advisors was always on a fixed term basis for a year. Based on our discussions with the founders, it was mutually decided that the tenure of the advisory council should not be extended. Though the formal engagement concludes, the founders and the company can always approach us for any advice," Kumar and Pai said in a joint statement.

Govt concerned over telcos' service quality

To Tighten Norms, Strengthen Parameters, Ensure Fewer Call Drops, Better Net Speed

Pankaj.Doyal@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: 5G may be touted as one of the fastest-growing mobile offerings in India, but poor quality of services has raised concerns within govt, which has now decided to tighten the quality norms to ensure reduction in call drops and better internet speed.

"We are concerned on the issue of quality of services and are now looking at ways to strengthen the parameters that go into assessing mobile services quality," a top official with the telecom ministry told TOI.

Govt wants to "revisit parameters" that are assigned towards service quality, amid complaints that consumers are not getting promised services, despite India leaping into 5G, supposedly one of the world's most advanced mobile technologies.

As telecom ecosystem matures with abundant supply of spectrum and data adoption shooting up, quality of services continues to remain a nagging issue, often vitiating customer experience.

There have been complaints by customers and consumer groups about deteriorating services, even as telcos such as Reliance Jio, Airtel and Vodafone Idea argue that current quality parameters

are sufficient and should not be "burdened" by new norms.

Trai has the mandate on quality of services and its new chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti has listed it among his priority areas. Expressing concerns over frequency of call drops and slow internet speeds, Lahoti has said that

networks, the stringent performance benchmarks should be earmarked for them.

Telecom companies, however, argue that excessive regulations might not work. Jio said that introducing "overregulation and unnecessary stringent benchmarks and financial disin-

TRAI WANTS BETTER QUALITY

► Govt wants to revisit parameters amid complaints that consumers are not getting promised services, despite 5G

regulation and better implementation of standards to ensure better customer quality



► New Trai chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti wants stringent

regulation and better implementation of standards to ensure better customer quality

Trai had last year issued a consultation paper for review of quality of services standards where it acknowledged serious issues on network quality. Currently, Trai measures quality of services on a quarterly basis, giving average reports spread over large licensed service areas (LSAs).

This, officers feel, fails to factor in dark spots with poor network coverage as overall results are an average of network throughout LSA.

Sources said as 4G and 5G networks provide much wider coverage across the country compared to 2G and 3G

incentives" will impact the ease of doing business principle. "Furthermore, from our experience, we understand that the most complaints are about when the customer will get 5G and nearly none about the quality of experience on 5G. Evidently, there is no valid ground for making such massive changes in a regulation," Jio said in a representation to Trai.

Airtel said there are sufficient number of drive tests to measure network performance, and more stringent norms may not be needed. It blamed "other external factors" behind poor network quality. Also, it blamed growing usage of OTTs for some consumer experience disturbances.

BUSINESS DIGEST

Motovolt's e-scooter M7 in Bengal

Motovolt Mobility, a leading innovator in the EV industry, has started delivering e-scooter M7 in Bengal and would start delivering it nationwide, shortly. M7 is designed to be a mode of transport suitable for both personal and light cargo use. IIMM-BCC&I workshop on e-waste management: Indian Institute of Materials Management (IIMM), Kolkata along with Bengal Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCC&I), organised a workshop on e-waste management on May 17. Rajesh Kumar, member secretary of West Bengal Pollution Control Board, was the chief guest. BCC&I assistant director Sambhit Dasgupta, IIMM secretary Sanjay Gupta and Sudipto Basu, chairman, MDP & consultancy services of IIMM, were present.

Grip Invest report on investor demographics

Grip Invest revealed a strong generational shift in investor demographics in its recent report titled "Gripping The Boom: Millennials In Fractional Investing". The report centres on the transformative power of fractionalisation, a 150-year-old investing concept reimagined for the digital age. Realme's GT 6T in India soon: smartphone service provider Realme announced that its upcoming device, the all-new GT 6T, will launch in India soon. The GT 6T empowers users to explore and stay seamlessly connected.

Why alarm bells over F&O trading by retail investors?

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

MNirmala Sitharaman and CEA V Anantha Nageswaran recently flagged the growing risk of futures & options (F&O) trading for retail traders. Why are policymakers cautioning retail investors on F&O, also called derivatives trading? Here is an explainer:

What's F&O trading? Futures and options are two derivative instruments where a trader buys or sells a contract on an underlying asset at a pre-determined price. As the name suggests, derivatives are financial products that derive their value from other underlyings like stocks, bonds, commodities etc.

What are futures and options? Futures are derivative contracts that give the buyer the right to buy a specific asset on a specific date at a specific price from a seller, unless that contract is sold off to someone else or closed. On the other hand, an options contract gives the buyer the right to buy or sell a specific asset at a specific price on or before the last date of the contract (called date of expiry). In options contracts, the buyer has the right but not an obligation to buy or sell the specific asset. An options seller has the obligation to deliver the assets to

the buyer but no right to deny selling that.

When you buy an airline ticket...

A train or a flight ticket gives the passenger (the buyer) the right to travel on a specific date but no obligation to do the same. At the last moment, the passenger could cancel the ticket or abandon the travel plan. On the other hand, the railways or the airline (the seller) has an obligation to provide the passenger the service on the specific day and the time for which the ticket was bought. The seller has an obligation to provide the service

TOI Explains

ce but has no right to cancel the ticket unless under extreme circumstances. So we use options in our lives, but some options are not traded on an exchange.

Why is govt concerned about F&O trading by retail investors?

F&O trading is being used primarily as a speculative tool to make a quick buck in the stock market. But the reality is that most retail investors are losing money. In Jan 2023, Sebi came out with a study that showed 89% of the people in the F&O space were losing money. That means only one in 10 people made money. But F&O trading volumes

are rising at a pace that surprises market veterans.

How has F&O trading turnover grown in recent years?

According to NSE, between March 2020 (i.e. just before the pandemic started) and March 2024, its monthly derivatives turnover has grown 30 times: From Rs 247.5 lakh crore to Rs 7,218 lakh crore. On the BSE, from a turnover of about Rs 1 lakh crore in March 2020, the total turnover in the segment reached a high of Rs 1,519 lakh crore — a jump of over 1,500 times. Compared to turnover in the cash segment of the market, F&O turnover is hundreds of times more.

Is increase in turnover the only concern?

No. The huge spurt in volumes has also brought in a large number of fake and fraud operators in the market. Using various social media platforms, they induce people into F&O trading by showing and promising very high and unreasonable profits. They often use pictures and videos of celebrities and top business leaders to induce investors to fall into their net. At times, they also use screenshots of huge profits (called fake profit & loss or P&L screenshots) to prove their expertise to attract retail investors to trade according to their recommendations.

Veggies, pulses face heatwave price pressures

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New Delhi: The heatwave sweeping some parts of the country is expected to add to the price pressures for vegetables and pulses, which have been on the boil for some time now.

Rising demand and tight supplies have seen prices of vegetables soar in recent months, with potato, tomato, onions, ginger and garlic rising sharply and making food costlier for households. Several states in the east, north and southern parts of the country have witnessed heatwave conditions, with temperatures in some places hovering above 45 degrees centigrade. Vegetable inflation has

SUPPLY-SIDE WOES



emerged as the most volatile component, thanks to erratic weather conditions such as

heatwaves, patchy and uneven rains, and pest attacks which have hurt supplies and

pushed up prices.

While overall retail inflation slowed to an 11-month low of 4.8% in April, prices of vegetables and pulses remained stubborn. For example, garlic and ginger prices inflation have ruled in triple digits in March and in April, garlic inflation was at an annual 110.1%, while ginger was at 54.6%. Potato inflation was at 53.6%, onion at 36.6% and tomato at 41.8%.

Turning to pulses, inflation for arhar and tur was at 31.4%, urad at 14.3%, gram split at 13.6% and gram whole at 14.6%, data for April showed. Even chicken inflation in April was in double digits at nearly 14%.

"The demand for dal and vegetables is continuously rising while supplies are sluggish. Prices of veggies are particularly impacted due to adverse weather that shrinks supplies. The heatwave will hit it further," said Ashok Gulati, Infosys chair professor at economic think tank Icrier. "The solution for days is to invest in R&D to augment their productivity and reward them for being more nutritious and benign to the environment (soil, water, greenhouse gas emissions). Liberalise their imports in the short run," said Gulati. RBI has said a record rabi wheat production would help temper price pressure and replenish the buffer stocks.

TOI **Borrow Against MF Units For Short-Term Fund Requirements**

IN THE CLASSROOM

Money is sometimes needed for short tenures like 2-3 months or up to a year. One option is to redeem your mutual funds to the extent of money required; financial planners suggest borrowing against your funds for such short-term needs.

How Can One Get A Loan Against MF Units?
A loan against your equity or hybrid mutual fund units can be taken from a bank or a non-banking finance company. The interest rate could be in the range of 9-11% based on the loan amount and tenure. Once you pledge your MF units, they are marked as under lien, which means you cannot sell or switch the units. Financial planners recommend borrowing against equity-oriented mutual funds and not against liquid or debt-oriented funds.

Invesco Mutual Fund

An investor education and awareness initiative

For Know Your Customer (KYC) guidelines along with the documentary requirements and procedure for change of address, phone number, bank details, etc., please visit the Education and Guidance section on www.invescomutualfund.com. Investor should deal with only SEBI registered Mutual Funds, details of which can be verified under "Intermediaries/Market Infrastructure Institutions" on <https://www.sebi.gov.in/index.html>. For any grievance / complaint, please call us on 1800-209-0007 or write to us at mservices@invesco.com. Alternatively, complaints can be registered on the SEBI SCORES Portal at <https://scores.gov.in>

Mutual Fund investments are subject to market risks, read all scheme related documents carefully.

What's The Pro Of Borrowing Against MFs?
Loan against MFs gives you the option of receiving immediate liquidity against the fund units that you own. It is like an overdraft facility for short-term monetary requirements, with a relatively shorter tenure compared to other loans. It can be used judiciously by people looking to leverage their otherwise idle mutual fund investments, and also raise capital quickly for short-term financing needs. You need not sell your mutual fund units, hence your financial plan remains intact and neither is your ownership of fund units divested after pledging them for a loan. However, do not use this money to buy stocks or equity mutual funds. This is because in the near term, volatility can be high and you could end up making a mark-to-market loss while also paying the interest on the loan.

How Does One Apply For A Loan?
There are many NBFCs that offer loans through their websites in a paperless format or with small paperwork. Some portals offer loans quickly if you hold units in demat form and have prior approval.

How To Remove The Lien On MFs?

After the loan is repaid by the borrower, the financier can ask for a removal of the lien and send a request letter to the fund house. The lender can also request for partial removal of the lien, in which case, the lien on some of the units will be removed, making them "free" units. This will happen only when the lender receives part payments.

What Happens In Case Of Default?

In case the borrower defaults in making payment, the lender can enforce the lien i.e. send a signed request for redemption of the units and claim the proceeds.

—PRASHANT MAHESH

CONTRAPUNTO

We have to free half of the human race, the women, so that they can help to free the other half

-EMMELINE PANKHURST

Don't Play This Game

Poll rhetoric that weaponises women victims is a new low

Women voters outnumbered men in the May 13 phase of elections in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Bengal. In Lok Sabha election 2019 the gap between male and female turnout ended – women voted at higher rates than men for the first time. Of course, far fewer women are registered as electors, but fact is for political parties, women are in focus – in election campaigns and in policy initiatives. These have included BJP and Modi's extensively ramped up outreach to women voters, JDU's prohibition policy, Odisha's umbrella policy that included 'changing attitudes', and Bengal's enhanced compensation for grassroots women govt workers.

But such focus has a dark underbelly. No Lok Sabha election has seen the weaponising of violence-against-women to this extent. The Swati Maliwal case is only the latest in a string of high-profile cases where political brass, even a constitutional authority, and/or their associates, have been accused of physical violence and sexual assault. Such allegations should mean swift investigation and closure, whether Sandeshkhali or Hassan Lok Sabha candidate Prajwal Revanna's videos, or allegations against Bengal governor Ananda Bose.

On Swati Maliwal's FIR, her alleged abuser has been arrested. Yet, politicians will not allow the Rajya Sabha MP the space she requires to de-traumatise but have embarked on making the case a trial by election. Maliwal's status and position helped her seek police help and demand justice. What victims in other cases have faced is an invisibilisation of their trauma, yet at the same time, a greater fear of their identities made public. Several victims in Prajwal Revanna's case have had to flee their villages and hamlets, their privacy destroyed without a stab at justice. A special court has finally issued an arrest warrant against Prajwal, who is still at large outside the country.

The political sluffest started before poll season – to last year's video from Manipur that shook the nation into demanding central action into the months-long violence and killings. At the party-level, the response was to accuse Rajasthan and Bengal of being "more unsafe for women". Cut to election season, and allegations that erupted of sexual abuse by politicians in Bengal's Sandeshkhali drove campaign speeches.

The political tit-for-tat rhetoric, playing 'protector', on survivors is reprehensible. It is a new dehumanising of victims, and highlights mostly the decay in investigative institutions and alignment of police with political powers – victims be damned.

UNCUET

NTA's exam prep still leaves much to be desired. Too many students are paying the price

In its inaugural year the CUET-UG exam stretched up to Aug 30, one painful glitch after another. In 2023, it wrapped up by July 5, snags remained but were dramatically reduced. So when NTA released the May 15-24 schedule for this year, its brevity represented a larger promise of a much pleasanter exam experience. But halfway through, this promise has already proved false for too many students.

Delhi doldrums | All the candidates appearing at test centres across Delhi got a rude jolt on the eve of the very first exam day, with the scheduled tests postponed to May 29 "due to unavoidable reasons". Subsequent exam days have also seen complaints galore. These range from malfunctioning biometric systems to unsanitary washrooms, broken fans, and over-casual invigilation.

Kanpur woes | Also sitting for exams on May 29 will be the unfortunate students from a Kanpur exam centre, who were handed the wrong question papers. Students from an Indore centre have similarly complained that they were given the Chemistry paper in English, despite having selected the Hindi option. Poor preparations for the hot weather have also been reported from places other than Delhi, such as Lucknow.

Meghalaya murmurs | From Meghalaya there are reports of a stampee-like situation because of poor coordination between NTA and a Shillong test centre. While this listing can go on, the point is surely already clear: The quality control of test centres that was the biggest challenge in 2022, still leaves much to be desired. Note that only the pen-and-paper exams have taken place so far. When the computer-based tests commence tomorrow, the tech challenge will come into play. And NTA must rise to it. The agency must deliver fairplay for all the 13 lakh students who have registered for CUET-UG across 380 cities.

Ebony in India

On foreign spouses, desi parents and rough relations

Bikram Vohra



They just celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary. Was it just the other day in 1979 my friend 'trunk called' from Houston (only three minutes) and said, hey I'm getting hitched tomorrow, no one knows, coming home next week, be at the airport, this might be rough. I said, why rough, good on you. He said remember Ebony, I married her. I said, oh, okay, oops, whatever, she is lovely. The night before the flight he called home and told them he had got married and was arriving Monday with her. Shocked parents reeled for a while, mummy went into woe is me, dad was stoic and grandma said at least the children would be fair, chalo that was a plus point.

Except, Ebony (Ebs to her friends and admirers) is an Afro-American, like burnished coal, stunningly beautiful, a nuclear physicist to boot, even more breathtaking than current supermodel Nyakim Gatwech.

With me being the only one privy to this bridal information, we all trooped up to Palam airport just after midnight. His family was there en masse, nervously excited about meeting their American bahu. Garlands were held in hands trembling with anticipation and a few relatives and neighbours had also fetched up, buoyed by a mix of curiosity, envy and conjecture, what would this phoren bride be like...blonde and blue eyes...hmmmm.

The flight landed and weary passengers staggered out in post Immigration & Customs clumps. Then I saw him and her. Somewhere Eb had been tutored that the Indian way of greeting was to prostrate yourself in front of your in-laws. Which she now proceeded to do on the cold airport floor under the Arrivals sign.

Not that it mattered. The fam went into fibrillation, the neighbours grinned with glee, no blue eyes here and relatives pretended all was well as they exchanged triumphant glances, this was a winner in the social stakes, how the mighty had fallen, send children abroad, yahi hotha hai.

The entourage reached home, mummy leapt into bed with palpitations, daddy, always so liberal, froze into a 'how could you do this to us' posture and sundry rishiedars commiserated about today's youngsters and their values as tension zinged through the house. No fair babies here.

The couple moved to a hotel the next morning. He called me and said bring the car, we must get out of here. We drove away with Eb wondering what she had done to invite such wrath. They never came back. But they have three adult kids and a great marriage. You think Sam Pitroda was racist. Look within and ask what are we if not...then what.

VOCAL DALITS, SILENT MUSLIMS

Notes and whispers from travels in UP in poll season • Yogi's made UP better • Strong opposition is necessary • MPs don't inspire • Who'll lead Dalits?

Anand.Soodas@timesgroup.com



Life confuses Amit Sharma. Elections too. Not very long ago he had three taxis in Ghaziabad, with all-India permits. Then, during Covid, he lost two of his cars. Back at square one, he said, "I'll need to work my heart out to retrieve the vehicles I had to let go." Ferrying passengers in the middle of the poll season in UP, where voting in its 80 constituencies is spread over seven phases, he was amused elections could throw up such tough choices.

400 one too many? | Articulating a sentiment often heard while travelling across UP, Sharma said he agonised over weeks whether he should vote for the dispensation in office or look for a formidable

POLLITICS
Special Series on Elections

rival, "just to strengthen the opposition". Administrations, he said, should be on their toes to do their best work for citizens.

"And that can happen when numbers in Parliament aren't so utterly skewed. Too much concentration of power leads to misuse. *Badhiya virodhi dal toh bilkul chahiye* (A robust opposition is absolutely necessary)." In Shahjahanpur, trader Pulkit Garg said he'd feel "uncomfortable" if BJP did go on to win "400 seats as promised". His vote for the saffron party, he is quick to clarify: "Just that it's not good for democracy."

Missing Behenji | Mayawati's 'absence' from the political arena suddenly seems to have hit home among large sections of Dalits in the state. In these elections more than any other, SC voters are feeling the vacuum. Whether Nagina with a sizeable Dalit presence or Hathras, where the killing of a young woman and the quick disposal of her remains in 2020 had shaken the country, members across its various sub-groups spoke of a strong BSP with longing.

Vociferous in their calls for 'leaders' and organisations who would clearly prioritise the cause of the downtrodden, they hoped for Behenji's resurgence and Chandrasekhar Azad's rise. They often mentioned words like 'identity' and 'existence'. "It'd have been an

easier decision for many among us to take," said Sanoj Nigam, a teacher, in Muzaffarnagar. Asked if he, too, was afraid the Constitution could be tweaked by a party that manages to get an overwhelming majority post these elections, he answered, "I personally don't think so, but in debates with my friends and relatives, it does come up quite a bit. There is some apprehension, for sure. INDIA played this well."

They then went on to say how they follow political news and developments on social media but restrain themselves as much as possible from speaking out. "It takes nothing for things to flare up. We've never profited from a polarised election. We're silent, we're afraid and we're careful. But I feel there will be greater voting by us this time. We've chosen candidates and parties with some care. Votes won't be split unnecessarily. Not just in UP, I think that's the guiding thought elsewhere too. Let's see..."

India shining | The new Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has filled many Hindu hearts with pride and joy. As have reports of the "disappearance of stone-pelters" in Kashmir. UCC and CAA were hardly mentioned at *chaupals* and street corner addas during exchanges and altercations, but India's "growing stature" in the globe was in discussion.

However, even the staunchest of some BJP supporters complained that a bunch of the party's MPs had become lazy and stopped nursing their constituencies. "All they keep doing is Modi-Modi," hotelier Samrat Gupta said in Bareilly. "And they now talk about UP's improving law and order situation. Shouldn't that be left to Yogi Adityanath as the CM to brag about? MPs hardly broach local issues. A lot of people are extremely upset with them for ignoring their seats. Elections can't be about the Centre alone."

Building roads | In catchment areas for army jobs – large swathes in UP – Agniveer has been a sore point. Young people also spoke about paper leaks and joblessness. And yes, roads. Everyone wanted shiny thoroughfares. In fact, in Farukhabad one of the biggest grouses against the sitting MP was that he'd done little on that front. A persistent remonstrance was: "Look at districts like Mainpuri. We demand an expressway to take us where the prosperous regions have gone."

It may be premature to say Congress is on a certain comeback trail in UP, having frittered away opportunities, lost comrades – or sat in sullen silence as they jumped ship – in the past decade and more, but the frequency with which it was mentioned as an alternative, especially by Dalits and Muslims, was somewhat striking. There is, of course, vast ground to cover. But it's something the Gandhi siblings would perhaps do well to build on.

UP votes today (14 seats) in the fifth of its 7-phase polls



Chait Crowe

Agniveer has been a sore point. Young people also spoke about paper leaks and joblessness...It's premature to say Congress is on comeback trail, given how it frittered away opportunities the last decade, but it found frequent mention as an alternative, especially by Dalits and Muslims

Silence speaks | At a bustling workshop in Meerut's Ghatnagar, a group of young Muslim men asked to see my 'press card' before replying to a few questions. "Sorry," one of them apologised. "We need to know who we're talking to."

Flying For Democracy: IAF & Voting

Air force works closely with EC to transport election manpower and equipment for every polling booth. There are challenges aplenty. These are also overcome away from public limelight

Manmohan Bahadur



Indian armed forces have a halo of being protectors of the nation – which they surely are. However, there is also a not too publicised side of their work, as nation-builders. The foundation of our Republic is our secular democratic base, and holding of free and fair elections is the cornerstone of nation-building. With the ongoing general elections to the 18th Lok Sabha too, as in the past, vital aid is being provided by the Indian air force.

Foundational airlifts | IAF started its life in free India through its emergency airlift of army troops to Srinagar valley on October 27, 1947, to save Kashmir from Pakistani raiders. This is how the map of India was stabilised into the form we see to date.

There was also the year-long airlift to the besieged Poonch garrison, with IAF Dakotas landing (including at night) on a makeshift *kutchra* runway to supply food and armament to the civilians and army troops. IAF's decades-long air dropping supply missions in the outlying border areas of Northeast (where road connectivity was non-existent) fulfilled one additional vital need of the populace – that of an emotional connect with the 'mainland'.

Of course, in the four wars thrust on us, the offensive element of IAF came to the fore.

The work relationship with EC | What the man on the street is not conversant with is the fact that no national poll can be completed without the involvement of IAF. As the 2024 elections move toward the concluding phases, the role of IAF continues to be discussed only in dribbles in media. But it is crucial and here is how it happens.

• Election Commission of India holds meetings with air headquarters, represented by Assistant Chief of Air Staff looking after operations of transport aircraft and helicopters – ACAS (T&H), many months before elections start.

• Initially, it's just an outline of ECI requirements that are spelt out, region-wise and state-wise. As time progresses, these meetings increase in frequency, with details of election manpower and equipment that have to be transported for every district and polling booth.



• Also added on is the humongous requirement of movement of police and central para-military personnel, which could be from one end of the country to another – literally anywhere to anywhere.

• So, one is talking of heavy lift aircraft like C-17 and Il-76 for troop transportation down to the complete helicopter inventory of Mi17, ALH Dhruv and the Chetak/Cheetah fleet for the last-mile carriage of EC poll parties to inaccessible and insurgent-prone areas.

• And these requirements change if the law and

order situation deteriorates or someone in a polling party falls sick and requires replacement.

The massive 2024 exercise | While the air warriors on the flightline ensure timely task completion through their flying, in the Directorate of ACAS (T&H) there is never a dull moment and the ACAS's cell phone never stops ringing. I write this from the experience of holding the ACAS position in 2009 when elections were held in five phases – this year there are seven!

In just the first phase this year, according to EC, IAF flew 439 sorties, the highest being in Maharashtra where 850 officials for 206 polling booths in the Naxal-affected areas were deployed (and brought back). Similarly, 1,000 personnel were positioned in 156 polling stations in the violence-affected Bastar area.

The flying effort required to transport troops by transport aircraft would be huge too. Going by past data available in media one can easily expect around 1,000 hours of helicopter flying – and transport aircraft flying hours in hundreds by the time the elections get over on June 1.

Thereafter, the task of de-induction of police forces back to their bases by heavy lift transport aircraft would start.

Your duty, their duty | Are there hiccups in the three-month period of electioneering? Of course there are, but have you ever heard of polling not taking place at a remote polling booth at 14,000ft in the Ladakh hills due to non-deployment of a polling party?

So, as you look at your inked finger signifying completion of your duty of electing your govt, spare a thought for the men and women in blue who have done their part in this endeavour of nation-building.

Air Vice Marshal Bahadur (ret'd) served as Assistant Chief of Air Staff

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



We need the tonic of wildness...At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplored, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, untraversed and unfathomed by us...

Henry D Thoreau

Romancing Honeybees That Give Us Life

Narayani Ganesh

When the bee population dies out, it will spell the end of life on earth, conclude scientific researchers who are ringing alarm bells to conserve and respect bees. Hence, we have a special World Bee Day, and this year's theme is 'Bee Engaged with Youth'. The idea is to get young people involved in creating awareness of the importance of bees as a species that is integral to the continuation of our ecosystem, and for our very survival.

What comes to mind is the charming depiction of Kamadev's bow and arrows – Madhuyasti Dhanush, the bow, is made of sugarcane; the arrows are fragrant flowers, and the bowstring is composed of bees. His vehicle is the parrot. As the counterpart of Cupid in Hindu mythology, Kamadev – known as Manmada, one who agitates the mind and as Madana, one who intoxicates –

symbolises love and romance. Perhaps bees in this case indicate fertility, vital for propagation of life and desire, the seed of creation. Kama is the son of Vishnu and Lakshmi, and his consort is Rati. In other puranic references, he is the manasaputra – mind-born son – of the god of creation, Brahma.

When Shiva was in deep meditation, the young, handsome Kama was sent to distract him. When he shot his love arrow, a disturbed Shiva opened his third eye, reducing Kama to ashes. The story goes that Kama was reborn on earth as the eldest son of Krishna and Rukmini, as Pradyumna.

Kama, which means erotic desire in Sanskrit, is the reason why life comes into being. The Rig Veda describes creation of the universe as arising out of divine desire, intense heat, resulting

in a situation similar to the scientific theory of the big bang and this was followed by formation of celestial bodies and germination of life. In mythology, the bee is seen as the sacred bridge between the natural world and the underworld.

Bees are pollinators; they feed on honey in flowers, and when they rub their legs together, the pollen sticks to them and is carried forth to other places, enabling propagation of species. The Smithsonian describes the process thus: "Pollination is an essential part of plant reproduction.

Pollen from a flower's anthers, that is, the male part of the plant, rubs or drops onto a pollinator who carries this to another flower, where the pollen sticks to the stigma, the female part. The fertilised flower later yields fruits and seeds."

Not only do bees act as pollinators,

propagating life, they store the collected honey in their hives which beekeepers harvest for human consumption. The virtues of honey as healing agent have been well-known since ancient times. The shelf life of pure honey is almost infinite. Tombs of pharaohs have been discovered to contain pure honey in sealed jars that are unspoiled and edible even after centuries.

It is no surprise, therefore, that bees have been venerated as life-givers in some stories they are seen as creators. In others, as sustainers. Other pollinators like butterflies, beetles, moths and hummingbirds have not gained the primacy given to bees as ace pollinators, as their reach and extent of work far exceeds those of others. Hence the oft-heard saying, 'Busy as a bee' – the hardworking species that ensures life goes on.

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HOW THEY ENDED

TEAM	M	W	L	NRR	PTS
KKR	14	9	3	1.428	20
SRH	14	8	5	0.414	17
RR	14	8	5	0.273	17
RCB	14	7	7	0.459	14
CSK	14	7	7	0.392	14
DC	14	7	7	-0.377	14
LSG	14	7	7	-0.667	14
GT	14	5	7	-1.063	12
PBKS	14	5	9	-0.353	10
MI	14	4	10	-0.318	8

SCORECARD

PBKS: A Taide c Sanvir b Natarajan 46, Prabhsimran c Klaasen b Vijaykanth 71, R Rossouw c Samad b Cummins 49, S Singh run out 2, J Sharma not out 32, A Sharma c Sanvir b Natarajan 2, Shivam Singh not out 2; **Extras:** 10 (lb-5, w-4, nb-1); **Total: 214/5; FoW:** 1-97, 2-151, 3-174, 4-181, 5-187; **Bowling:** B Kumar 4-0-36-0, P Cummins 4-0-36-1, T Natarajan 4-0-33-2, V Vijaykanth 4-0-37-1, S Ahmed 1-0-13-0, N Reddy 3-0-54-0
SRH: T Head b Arshdeep 1, Abhishek c Shivam b Shashank 66, R Tripathi c Arshdeep b Harshal 33, N Reddy c Shivam b Harshal 37, H Klaasen b Brar 42, S Ahmed c Shashank b Harshal 3, A Samad not out 11, S Singh not out 6; **Extras:** 17 (lb-6, w-10, nb-1); **Total: 215/6 in 19.1 overs; FoW:** 1-0, 2-72, 3-129, 4-176, 5-197, 6-208; **Bowling:** Arshdeep 4-0-37-2, R Dhawan 3-0-35-0, H Patel 4-0-49-2, R Chahar 4-0-43-0, H Brar 3-0-36-1, Shashank 1-0-5-1, A Taide 0.1-0-4-0.

SUNRISERS RISE TO NO.2

Abhishek's 28-Ball 66 Helps SRH Overhaul Punjab's 214/5 And End League Phase On A High

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Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma continued his marauding form with a quickfire 28-ball 66 (5x4, 6x6) as Sunrisers Hyderabad defeated Punjab Kings by four wickets to brighten their prospects of a top-two finish in the standings.

The victory at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket stadium took SRH to 17 points and the second spot on Sunday. However, the outcome of the match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals will confirm their final position in the table.

Chasing Punjab Kings' 214/5, thanks largely to Prabhsimran Singh's 71 (45b, 7x4, 4x6), Abhishek added 72 runs for the second wicket with Rahul Tripathi (33 off 18b) and 57 runs with Nitish Kumar (37 off 25b) for the third wicket as the hosts finished at 215/6 with five deliveries to spare.

That after Sunrisers lost their in-form opener Travis Head to the very first ball, as he was cleaned up by Arshdeep Singh. But Tripathi and Abhishek plundered 72 runs in just 30 balls. Though Tripathi departed in the sixth over, caught by Arsh-



MAKING A POINT: Abhishek Sharma on Sunday

deep, the hosts had to then powered to 84/2 in the powerplay. Abhishek continued his aggressive approach despite losing two partners. He hit Harshal Patel for consecutive boundaries to reach his half-century in 21 deliveries and then lofted Harpreet Brar for consecutive sixes to take Hyderabad to 129/2 at the halfway mark. However, he perished to the first ball of Shashank Singh's next over.

Nitish and Heinrich Klaasen then kept the hosts on course. Both hit sixes off Brar and Rahul Chahar to bring down the required run rate to just over six by the 13th over. With 39 required from 37 deliveries, Nitish departed after adding 47 for

the fourth wicket. With eight runs needed for victory, Klaasen (42 off 26b) too fell, cleaned up by Brar. But Abdul Samad hit Atharva straight down the ground for a boundary to take his side to victory.

Earlier, openers Prabhsimran and Atharva Taide (46 off 27b) added 97 runs for the opening wicket in nine overs, 61 of them in the first six, after Punjab elected to bat. Natarajan got rid of Taide in the 10th over, but Prabhsimran reached his half-century in 34 balls.

Rilee Rossouw and Prabhsimran hit Nitish for 20 runs in the 12th over before the latter departed after adding 54 runs for the second wicket. Rossouw then smashed Nitish for a six and a four before a mixup with Shashank Singh resulted in the latter's run out. Cummins then removed Rossouw (49) and Natarajan got rid of Ashutosh Sharma in the next.

BEST OF THE LEAGUE

ORANGE CAP



RUNS 708 VIRAT KOHLI (RCB)

R Gaikwad (CSK)	583
T Head (SRH)	533
R Parag (RR)	531
S Sudharsan (GT)	527

PURPLE CAP



WICKETS 24 HARSHAL PATEL (PBKS)

J Bumrah (MI)	20
Arshdeep (PBKS)	19
V Chakravarthy (KKR)	18
T Deshpande (CSK)	17

Rain washes out RR-KKR match

Guwahati: Persistent rain on Sunday forced the last IPL league match between Rajasthan Royals and Kolkata Knight Riders to be abandoned. The match was reduced to a seven-over contest but it started raining again after the toss. The result meant Rajasthan Royals finished third.

A ball sails out of the stadium, takes with it a million ghosts

After Nightmare A Year Ago, Yash Dayal Holds Nerve In Final Over To Deny Dhoni, Jadeja

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Bengaluru: On Saturday night, Chennai Super Kings needed 17 runs off the final over to deny Royal Challengers Bengaluru the lone slot up for grabs in the playoffs. Faf du Plessis tossed the ball to pacer Yash Dayal. The bowler from UP delivered a low full toss to MS Dhoni, which the CSK maestro sent out of the park.

Dayal watched the ball disappear and one could not help but think about the last over bowled by the pacer for Gujarat Titans against Kolkata Knight Riders last season. KKR's Rinku Singh had hammered Dayal in the last over, smashing five consecutive match-winning maximums. Face buried in a towel, Dayal was a picture of despair. That infamous over haunted Dayal for a long time. The UP bowler wouldn't play a game in the season after that, with GT eventually releasing him. It got so bad that mother, Radha even took ill seeing her son's demotivated state.

Picked by RCB at the auction, on Saturday, at their home ground, following Dhoni's 110-metre effort, for a fleeting moment those ghosts may have resurfaced for the 26-year-old.

"When I got hit off that ball, I subconsciously went back to that place (match against KKR). But I have done well in the past, I have done well after that, so all that was running through my mind was to deliver a good ball. I didn't want to look at the scoreboard or the result. I just wanted



REDEMPTION: Yash Dayal on Saturday

to bowl well. I was confident of executing well," Dayal would say later.

A ball lost, a ball replaced, Dayal knew he had a new weapon to counter Dhoni with. The new ball stuck on the wicket and the slower deliveries gripped. Dhoni then top-edged a slower one for Swapnil Singh to pouch at deep backward square, sending the packed stadium into a tizzy.

For Dayal, it was personal redemption unfolding as he bowled slower deliveries and gave away just one run in the next four to seal RCB's win.

"God's plan baby," an ecstatic, and somewhat relieved, Rinku would post on social media. The young Dayal himself would worry about his mother: "Kaisa feel kar rahi ho (How are you feeling mom?)," would be his first words to his mother on a video call. After what happened to me last time, there was nervousness," he would say. "Since coming to this RCB set-up, I have practised a lot and have delivered in matches. All that was going through my mind was to deliver two balls well. Even if I didn't execute it well, there were seniors right behind me. That helped me a lot."

Dayal revealed that it was Dinesh Karthik and Du Plessis who took the call for him to bowl the last over.

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DHONI SWANSONG PUSHED BACK IN PLAYLIST?

Legend Has Told CSK He Will Need Some Time Before Taking Final Call

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Chennai: It hardly happens that a 110-metre six that goes out of the ground becomes counterproductive for the batting side. But that's exactly what happened for MS Dhoni and Chennai Super Kings at Bengaluru's Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday when the legend hit left-arm pacer Yash Dayal for a massive six in the first ball of the last over.

"The ball was lost and had to be replaced. Dayal got a drier ball and suddenly hitting became difficult," a senior CSK official told TOI. What it meant was that Dhoni couldn't connect the all-important second six of the over and fulfil his promise to his fans of playing his last IPL match at Chepauk.

The 42-year-old was devastated after the loss and was one of the first to leave the city for Ranchi on Sunday morning. But there lingers a belief in the CSK camp that Saturday's loss against Royal Challengers Bengaluru might not have been Dhoni's last. "Dhoni has not told anybody in CSK that he is quitting. He has told the management that he will wait for a

couple of months before taking a final call," a source close to the development said.

What is giving CSK management hope is that Dhoni will keep his promise of playing his last game at Chepauk, is his batting and wicketkeeping form. Even on Saturday, he scored 25 at a strike-rate of close to 200 which was better than the likes of Ravindra Jadeja or Shivam Dube -- the designated hitters of the team. Dhoni also batted for four overs and was comfortable in his running between the wickets -- the torn calf that he was playing with gradually healing along the course of the tournament. "He did not feel any discomfort in his running between the wickets and that is a plus," the source said.

There is a big auction coming up next year and teams may be allowed to retain a maximum of five players. There are four CSK players -- Ruturaj Gaikwad, Jadeja, Dube and Matheesha Pathirana -- who are sure-fire retainments. In that case, Dhoni may well opt for the lowest retention slot without blocking too much money for new players to be bought from the auction table.



MS DHONI

'Impact sub' rule may play a role

In addition, Dhoni may wait to see if the 'impact sub' rule is abolished by the BCCI for the next IPL. This rule allows Dhoni the flexibility of playing the extra batter while keeping himself for the last two overs, when he doesn't have to do too much running. If BCCI

does away with the rule, it may not be too viable for a team to have a batter exclusively for only 12 balls. His franchise appears to have left the decision to him. "We will wait for Dhoni's communication. He always has the best interests of the team in mind, let's see what happens," the CSK official said.

Rohit lashes out at Star for breaching players' privacy

New Delhi: India skipper Rohit Sharma on Sunday lashed out at the IPL broadcasters for "breaching" cricketers' privacy by recording their conversations with friends and colleagues at training and on match days and then telecasting the contents.

Rohit expressed his disappointment after a video involving him and Kolkata Knight Riders assistant coach Abhishek Nayar, in which the former is seen contemplating his future at the Mumbai Indians, went viral. "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 posted on X.

He added, "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. Let better sense prevail." PTI



Max claims dramatic win at Imola

Imola (Italy): Three-time world champion and series leader Max Verstappen returned to winning ways on Sunday when he resisted a late charge by Lando Norris to take a dramatic victory for Red Bull at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix. After being beaten in Miami the Dutchman resisted him to come home 0.725 seconds ahead of the Briton who mounted a rousing final attack in vain. Charles Leclerc finished third for Ferrari ahead of Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren. AFP

RESULTS: 1. Max Verstappen (Red Bull); 2. Lando Norris (McLaren); 3. Charles Leclerc (Ferrari); 4. Oscar Piastri (McLaren); 5. Carlos Sainz Jr. (Ferrari); 6. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes); 7. George Russell (Mercedes); 8. Sergio Perez (Red Bull); 9. Lance Stroll (Aston Martin); 10. Yuki Tsunoda (RB); 11. Nico Hulkenberg (Haas); 12. Kevin Magnussen (Haas); 13. Daniel Ricciardo (RB); 14. Esteban Ocon (Alpine); 15. Zhou Guanyu (Sauber); 16. Pierre Gasly (Alpine); 17. Logan Sargeant (Williams); 18. Valtteri Bottas (Sauber); 19. Fernando Alonso (Aston Martin). DNF: Alexander Albon (Williams).

ISL likely to scrap Asian player rule, increase salary cap

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Panaji: Indian Super League (ISL) clubs have been told there will possibly be changes to the coach and player selection guidelines, with the Asian player signing now no longer a mandatory requirement.

ISL clubs, and even those in the I-League, Indian football's second-tier league, are allowed to sign five international players, besides one from a member association of the Asian Football Confederation, which includes Australia. A maximum of four of these foreign players are allowed to be on the field of play at any given point of time.

From next season, however, ISL is planning to do away with the 'Asian quota', following a change in the AFC club competition guidelines.

The possible change to the Asian player rule will come as welcome news for Indian clubs who rue they are forced to sign players who do not offer value for money.

Among ISL clubs, champions Mohun Bagan Super Giant, Mumbai City, East Bengal, FC Goa, Kerala Blasters and Bengaluru FC have Asian players contracted for next season.

Besides doing away with the Asian quota, ISL is also keen to increase the salary cap from Rs 16.5 crore to Rs 18 crore, with two players -- either domestic or international -- from each club outside the salary cap.

Pep's Team Seals 4th EPL Title In A Row As Arsenal Endure Another Near-Miss

FOURMIDABLE CITY IN HISTORY BOOKS

Manchester: Manchester City created English football history on Sunday, overcoming West Ham 3-1 to win their fourth straight Premier League title and break Arsenal's hearts as Jurgen Klopp made an emotional Liverpool exit.

Phil Foden scored two early goals at an expectant Etihad to put his side on the brink of the title before Mohammed Kudus pulled one back with a spectacular overhead kick. But Rodri struck just before the hour to restore City's two-goal cushion and the home side rarely looked troubled as they coasted to the win.

Arsenal started the day two points behind their rivals and praying for a miracle to deny City their coronation, knowing that a win against Everton would not be enough if the champions won on home turf. The Gunners, without a Premier League title since 2004, came from a goal down to beat Everton 2-1 but had to content themselves with second in the table for a second straight season.

City, who have now won six titles in seven years, stand alone as the only English team to have won four straight top-flight titles, eclipsing the achievements of the great Liverpool and Manchester United teams of the past.

"It is so hard to put into words what we've done today," Foden told Sky Sports. "No team has ever done it (won four in a row). We have put ourselves into the history books. You see what it means to the fans and to us players working all year for this moment. A special

moment to share it with the fans." Elsewhere, Luton's relegation was confirmed with a 4-2 loss at home to Fulham. They will join Burnley and Sheffield United in the Championship next season.

Spurs and Chelsea earn place in Europe: Tottenham Hotspur beat Sheffield United 3-0 away at Bramall Lane to cement fifth place and qualify for the Europa League.

Chelsea finished sixth with 2-1 win over Bournemouth and will play in the Europa League if Manchester City win the FA Cup final or the Europa Conference League if Manchester United with the Wembley showpiece.

Manchester United finished outside the European positions in eighth place. United could still get into the Europa League by beating Manchester City in the FA Cup on Saturday. AGENCIES

FINAL-DAY RESULTS
Arsenal 2 (Tomiyasu 43, Havertz 89) Everton 1 (Gueye 40); Brentford 2 (Janfelt 48, Wissa 70) Newcastle 4 (Barnes 21, Murphy 36, Isak 38, Guimarães 77); Brighton 0 Manchester United 2 (Dalot 73, Hojlund 88); Burnley 1 (Cullen 27) Nottingham Forest 2 (Wood 2, 14); Chelsea 2 (Caicedo 17, Sterling 48) Bournemouth 1 (Badiashile 49-og); Crystal Palace 5 (Mateta 9, 39, 63, Eze 54, 69) Aston Villa 0; Liverpool 2 (Mac Allister 34, Quansah 40) Wolves 0; Luton 2 (Morris 45+1-pen, Doughty 55) Fulham 4 (Traore 43, Jimenez 45+3, 49, Wilson 68); Manchester City 3 (Foden 2, 18, Rodri 59) West Ham 1 (Kudus 42); Sheffield United 0 Tottenham 3 (Kulusevski 14, 65, Porro 59).



Manchester City players celebrate after winning the Premier League title on Sunday

Liverpool deliver victory in Klopp's 'last dance'

Liverpool: In many ways, it was business as usual for Jurgen Klopp. He touched the "This is Anfield" sign in the tunnel on the way out to the pitch. He patrolled the middle of the field with his hands behind his back during the warm-ups, watching his own team -- and then, with that trademark glare, his opponents.

He waved to fans behind the Liverpool dugout and tapped his heart just before kickoff, before soaking in the pre-match rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone."



Jurgen Klopp on Sunday

"This morning I woke up," Klopp said before the final match in charge of Liverpool, "and I was completely in game mode."

This, of course, was no normal

day for Klopp. The 2-0 win over Wolverhampton at Anfield doubled as a tribute to a coach who led Liverpool to seven major trophies and forged such a connection with the city that he has been compared to Bill Shankly -- the club's legendary manager from 1959-74.

"People are calling it The Last Dance. So let's dance," he told Sky Sports before the match began -- and Liverpool obliged by strolling to one final victory for Klopp thanks to goals by Alexis Mac Allister and Jarell Quansah. AP

GALLERY



Action during Red Bull Four 2 Score national championship final between New Delhi's Avengers and Goa's Lincoln FC at St Paul Cathedral complex on Sunday. Avengers won via tie-breaker and will represent India at the World Final in Leipzig in August

Aravindh takes sole lead

Indian Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram defeated local star AR Saleh Salem to emerge as the sole leader on 4.5 points after the end of the fifth round of the Sharjah Masters chess tournament on Sunday.

Tvesa rises to T-21: Indian golfer Tvesa Malik carded a five-under 67 that carried her from the cut line to tied 21st at the end of the third round of the Amundi German Masters near Berlin on Saturday. Austrian Emma Spitz (66) and Alexandra Forsterling (69) shared the lead on seven-under going into the final round.

Nishad wins silver: Pal silver at World Para: The Indian team picked up its first medals in the World Para Athletics Championships with high jumper Nishad Kumar and 200m runner Preethi Pal winning a silver and bronze respectively at Kobe, Japan on Sunday.

Manu emerges most successful shooter: Olympian Manu Bhaker emerged as the most successful shooter in the Olympic Selection Trials (OST) Rifle/Pistol, winning the women's 10m air pistol trial 4 on the concluding day of the exercise in Bhopal on Sunday.

Biles on a roll: Simone Biles looks ready for Paris. The gymnastics superstar began her bid for a third Olympic team looking as dominant as ever at the US Classic on Saturday, posting an all-around score of 59.500, nearly two points clear of runner-up Shilese Jones.

Schauffele, Morikawa in final-round showdown

Louisville (USA): Xander Schauffele and Collin Morikawa share the PGA Championship lead entering the final round on Sunday at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky where a wild finish awaits with seven players within four strokes of the leaders.

Schauffele and Morikawa are both 15 under on the week and one shot clear of Sahithi Theegala, who is seeking his second PGA Tour win in his 90th start.

Former British Open champion Shane Lowry, whose electric 62 on Saturday matched the lowest round in major history, is a further shot back in a share of fourth place with LIV Golf's Bryson DeChambeau and Norway's Viktor Hovland.

According to Elias Sports Bureau, 12 of the last 13 PGA Championships were won by a player

who was leading or within two shots of the 54-hole lead, the lone exception coming in 2022 when Justin Thomas came back from seven shots.

Englishman Justin Rose, who has recorded five consecutive top-15 finishes at the PGA Championship, is three shots back of the leaders and sharing seventh place with Robert MacIntyre.

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

South Africa's Dean Burmester was alone in ninth place and four back of the co-leaders.

Olympic champion Schauffele, who held the solo lead after the first two rounds, is seeking his first major triumph while fellow American Morikawa is seeking a third after winning the 2020 PGA Championship and 2021 British Open.

Northern Irishman Rory McIlroy, who has been stuck at four majors since his 2014 PGA Championship triumph at Valhalla, will do all he can to snap his drought when he sets out seven shots back of the co-leaders.

Jordan Spieth, who breathed life into his bid to complete the career Grand Slam of golf's four majors this week with a 67 on Saturday to reach eight under on the week, will be a further group behind.

World number one Scottie Scheffler will head out eight shots back of the co-leaders after losing ground during a third round played a day after being arrested on four counts, including second-degree assault of a police officer.

Defending champion Brooks Koepka, who arrived at Valhalla looking to become the PGA Championship's first repeat winner since



American-Indian Sahithi Theegala was in sole third spot, one shot behind the leaders, after the third round

he successfully defended the title in 2019, went out with the early starters a distant 11 shots back of the lead. REUTERS

Usyk becomes undisputed champ

Riyadh: Oleksandr Usyk beat Tyson Fury by split decision to win the world's first undisputed heavyweight championship in 25 years on Sunday, an unprecedented feat in boxing's four-belt era.

Britain's Fury, who was undecided about triggering the rematch

clause, was the early aggressor but Usyk gradually took charge and the "Gypsy King" was saved by the bell in the ninth round before slumping to his first career defeat. Ukraine's Usyk, who remains undefeated, joins the likes of Muhammad Ali, Joe Louis and Mike Tyson as undisputed heavyweight champion, the first since boxing recognised four major belts in the



Oleksandr Usyk after his win over Tyson Fury in Riyadh on Saturday

2000s. With the win, the former undisputed cruiserweight champion can legitimately claim to be the best of this heavyweight era, although a rematch expected in October could provide another twist.

"It is a big opportunity for me, for my family, for my country," said

Usyk, 37, who briefly served as a soldier after the Russian invasion. "It's a great day," he said, adding that he was "ready for a rematch".

Fury called it a "fantastic fight with Oleksandr" but claimed that sympathy for Ukraine's ongoing war with Russia swung the judges.

"I believe I won that fight, I believe he won a few of the rounds, but I won the majority of them," he said. "You know his country is at war, so people are siding with the country at war but make no mistake, I won that fight in my opinion and I will be back."

Fury, however, said he would discuss the potential rematch, loosely scheduled for October, with his wife and children. "I'll have a holiday, go home, put it to the wife and kids, I'll see what I want to do," he told reporters. AFP

Zverev wins sixth Masters title

Rome: Alexander Zverev won his second Rome Open title after beating Nicolas Jarry 6-4, 7-5 in Sunday's final.

World number five Zverev comfortably won his sixth Masters title in the last major tournament before the French Open, which gets underway next weekend.

The 27-year-old succeeded in his 11th Masters final which equalled Boris Becker's record for the most by a German since the series began in 1990.

Earlier, Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini gave Italian fans something to cheer after beating Coco Gauff and Erin Routliffe 6-3, 4-6, 10-8 to the women's doubles title. AFP

Satwik-Chirag duo wins Thailand Open

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

champions.

Despite being 26 rungs behind the world No. 3 Indians, the Chinese fought well in the first game. The Indians fell four points behind at one stage (6-10) before recovering to secure a 14-12 lead.

"We know that they play very fast and we couldn't relax. This is the best match we played throughout the tournament. The good thing is we were calm and in control," Satwik added.

The Indians were too good



Satwik Chirag Rankireddy (left) & Chirag Shetty in Bangkok on Sunday

world stage with the Thailand Open victory in 2019 and this is the second title of the year for the duo after the French Open Super-750 in March.

"This is a lucky venue for us. Our journey started here in 2019 and we went on to win many tournaments. Hopefully, this victory will help us do well in big tournaments and also Olympics," Satwik said.

This is the ninth BWF Tour title for the duo and their fourth Super-500 crown. They have also won two Super-750 and one Super-1000 titles. They are the only Indians to win Asian Games gold and were also the Asian

in the second game. They led 11-6 and 15-11, but the Chinese fought back and made it 15-16. Both teams played a fast-paced game and the Indians collected the next five points. The main advantage for the Satwik-Chirag duo was their smashing prowess. Satwik won the 20th point with three straight smashes. Lu returned two but not the third. Chirag secured the winning point with another smash winner. The duo will skip next week's Malaysia Super-500 but will compete in the Singapore Super-750 later this month. Their focus is to get in shape before the Olympics in July.

THE TIMES

INCLUSIVE OF CALCUTTA TIMES & EDUCATION TIMES |

23 States

would have concluded polling in the ongoing general elections for the 18th Lok Sabha after today

UP, Bihar & Bengal are big states where voting will continue after the fifth & smallest phase. National capital Delhi votes next



MAX CITY, MAHA YUDH

It's the grand finale of the Maharashtra grudge match as the subplot in the NDA vs INDIA contest becomes the main theme. In and around India's commercial capital, the two Senas square off in the most bitter & personal of fights in these Lok Sabha elections. The other big face-offs are in UP & Bengal

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN PHASE 5

NDA

TO DEFEND: 39 seats, including 13 out of 14 in UP, 11 out of 13 in Maharashtra (excluding 2 Sena candidates who are with Uddhav group), all 5 in Bihar, all 3 in Jharkhand, 3 out of 5 in Odisha, 3 out of 7 in West Bengal and lone seat in Ladakh.

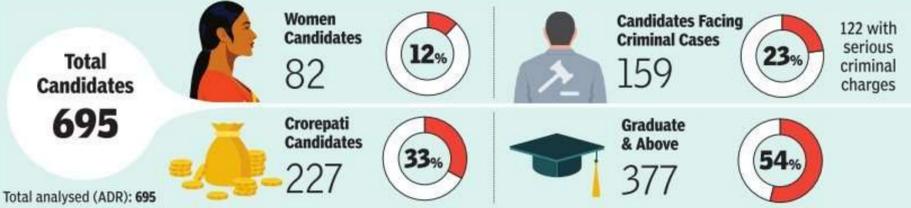
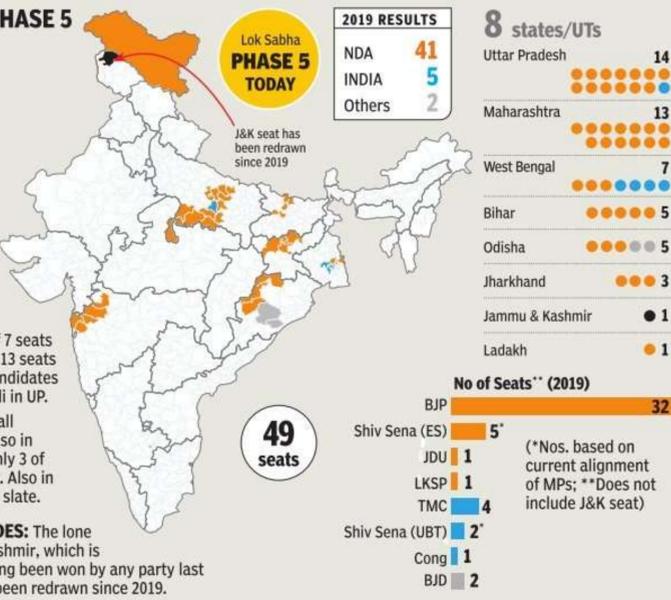
CAN LOOK FOR GAINS IN: Bengal, where it lost 4 of 7 seats polling today last time, and in Odisha.

INDIA

TO DEFEND: 7 seats, including 4 of 7 seats polling today in West Bengal, 2 of 13 seats in Maharashtra (adding 2 Sena candidates with Uddhav group) and Rae Bareilly in UP.

CAN LOOK FOR GAINS IN: Almost all the states in this round, but more so in Maharashtra, where it had won only 3 of the 13 seats that go to polls today. Also in Bihar, where it starts with a clean slate.

WHAT THIS BREAK-UP EXCLUDES: The lone seat polling today in Jammu & Kashmir, which is not possible to categorise as having been won by any party last time since seat boundaries have been redrawn since 2019.



HIGH-STAKES BATTLES TO WATCH TODAY

Maharashtra: This Lok Sabha election's most complex political arena sees its final act today with a high-voltage Sena vs Sena showdown, a fight that's as much about political relevance as it is about Balasaheb's legacy and prestige for the two protagonists — Uddhav Thackeray and the man who unseated him as CM, Eknath Shinde. Of the 13 remaining seats in the state polling today, six are in India's commercial capital, Mumbai, the Sena bastion where Uddhav is looking for voters' stamp of condemnation of the "betrayal" he accuses Shinde of leading to the party splitting in two. The Shinde group is part of Mahayuti (BJP) and Uddhav's Sena UBT with MVA (Sharad Pawar's NCP and Congress). Four of the seats are in the wider Mumbai Metropolitan Region, which includes Shinde's home turf Thane. Here, Shinde is seeking endorsement of his rebellion. BJP, which did very well here in 2019, will see an advantage, but with two Senas and two NCPs in the mix, it's a new playing field for all parties.



Uttar Pradesh: The state that votes in all seven phases moves into one of its biggest two rounds today — the next one in Phase 6 — as 14 seats in Awadh, including capital Lucknow, and the entire Bundelkhand (Jalaun, Jhansi, Hamirpur and Banda) go to polls today. In 2019, BJP swept these seats except Rae Bareilly. This time, with the Gandhi bastion at the centre, INDIA bloc (Cong & Samajwadi Party) is eyeing a revival here. Other high-profile seats are Faizabad, which includes Ayodhya, and controversial former wrestling federation chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's stronghold Kaiserganj. Also keep an eye on Mohanlalganj and Fatehpur from where two Union ministers — Kaushal Kishore and Sadhvi Niranjani Jyoti, respectively — are contesting.



A LOOK AT UNION MINISTERS & OTHER HEAVYWEIGHTS IN THE FRAY

Lucknow

2019 WINNER: **BJP (Rajnath Singh)**

KEY CONTENDERS: **Rajnath Singh (BJP), Ravidas Mehrotra (SP)**

Defence minister Rajnath Singh inherited the legacy of Vajpayee in 2014 — after a brief interlude — and is looking for a hat-trick. Vajpayee won the seat on the trot between 1991 and 2004. His Man Friday in Lucknow, Lalji Tandon, won it in 2009, carrying the proverbial 'khadau' of Vajpayee. After making his LS debut from Ghaziabad in 2009, Rajnath shifted to the state capital to step into the giant shoes of his mentor. Even two decades after Vajpayee stepped out of active politics, Rajnath doesn't miss any opportunity to invoke his legacy. He has brought in a slew of projects to the city for sprucing up infrastructure and creating jobs. SP's Ravidas Mehrotra is an MLA and street fighter, a socialist who first became legislator in 1989. His challenge, however, seems feeble in front of Rajnath's heavy election machinery.



Rae Bareilly

2019 WINNER: **Cong (Sonia Gandhi)**

KEY CONTENDERS: **Rahul Gandhi (Cong), Dinesh Pratap Singh (BJP), Thakur Prasad Yadav (BSP)**

After a long wait, Rahul Gandhi chose his mother's seat as his second contest, alongside Wayanad. He narrowly lost from neighbouring Amethi — another family bastion — against BJP's Smriti Irani in 2019. Between the two, Rae Bareilly is considered the 'safer' seat. Rae Bareilly first elected Rahul's grandfather Feroze Gandhi to Lok Sabha in 1952. His grandmother Indira Gandhi represented it between 1967 and 1985, barring the 1977 loss to Raj Narayan, while his mother Sonia was MP from 2004 to 2019. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and other INDIA bloc allies have campaigned for Rahul as Congress looks for an improved performance in UP, which is key to Parliament numbers. BJP's Dinesh Pratap Singh, Congress MLC between 2009 and 2018 and Sonia's pointsman, jumped ship after a dispute and instantly became BJP's candidate in 2019. He brought down Sonia's victory margin from 3 lakh to 1.7 lakh and is once again banking on BJP's machinery, welfare schemes and his local clout.



Mumbai North

2019 WINNER: **BJP (Gopal Shetty)**

KEY CONTENDERS: **Piyush Goyal (BJP), Bhushan Patil (Shiv Sena UBT)**

A Rajya Sabha member so far, Union commerce and industries minister Piyush Goyal is making his LS debut from Mumbai, the city he grew up in. With its significant Gujarati and middle-class Maharashtrian population, this seat is a BJP stronghold and was nurtured by the party for years before actor Govinda delivered a shock defeat to Ram Naik in 2004. In 2019, Urmila Matondkar contested from here for Congress but was comprehensively beaten by Gopal Shetty. This time, Congress has given the seat to Uddhav's Sena, which has fielded the relatively low-profile Bhushan Patil. Sena will be hoping to garner Marathi, Muslim and Christian votes, and is banking on the sympathy factor over the killing of its former corporator Abhishek Ghosalkar on FB Live earlier this year. However, this is one seat where the state's political middle does not cast a shadow like it does elsewhere because of BJP's grassroots strength.



Baramulla

2019 WINNER: **NC (Mohd Akbar Lone)**

KEY CONTENDERS: **Omar Abdullah (NC), Sajjad Lone (People's Conference)**

Omar Abdullah, who has shifted to this north Kashmir seat from the south (Srinagar), says he is taking on "BJP and the Centre", who are using all their resources here despite not fielding a candidate in the Valley. The former CM is battling for restoration of full statehood to J&K and has called the nullification of Article 370 an "existential challenge". He says opponent Lone is the "B-team of BJP" while the latter calls Omar a dynast, an "outsider" and a "tourist" in Baramulla. Into this mix comes Sheikh Abdul Rasheed aka Engineer Rashid of Awami Ittehad Party, who is contesting the polls from Tihar jail, where he has been incarcerated since Aug 2019 on terror funding charges. A former aide of Lone, Rashid is a worry for him and PDP candidate Fayaz Mir as he polled over 1 lakh votes in the last LS election and is expected to cut into their share.



Amethi

2019 WINNER: **BJP (Smriti Irani)**

KEY CONTENDERS: **Smriti Irani (BJP), KL Sharma (Cong)**

It's not quite the grudge match of 2019, but still seems to be going down to the last over. With Rahul Gandhi contesting from Rae Bareilly, Congress sprung a surprise by fielding KL Sharma, who has been the Gandhis' Man Friday in the twin constituencies for four decades, from Amethi. Sharma came to Amethi as a member of Rajiv Gandhi's youth brigade in 1983. Rajiv, who won a bypoll following the demise of his brother Sanjay Gandhi, held the seat till his death in 1991. Sonia Gandhi made her Lok Sabha debut from here in 1999. She shifted to Rae Bareilly in 2004, handing Amethi to Rahul, who won the seat thrice before the shock defeat to Smriti Irani in 2019. In the current campaign, Smriti has repeatedly called Rahul a "deserter" but the Congress narrative is that the family loyalist is more than capable of defeating her.



Hajipur

2019 WINNER: **LJP (Pashupati Kumar Paras)**

KEY CONTENDERS: **Chirag Paswan (LJP-Ram Vilas), Shiv Chandra Ram (RJD)**

Socialist bastion Hajipur is one of Bihar's six Lok Sabha constituencies reserved for SCs. Ram Vilas Paswan represented this seat eight times in his career and lost just twice — in 1984 and 2009. In recent years, the poll narrative in Hajipur has centred around who is the claimant to Paswan's legacy, son Chirag Paswan or brother Pashupati Kumar Paras, who won from here in 2019 after Paswan offered the seat to him. BJP has decided to fully back Chirag, allotting five seats in Bihar to Chirag's faction and none to the Paras camp. Paswan's party LJP split in 2021. For Chirag then, this is as deep a prestige battle as it gets. PM Modi has campaigned for him, but the battle is an uphill one, with RJD holding three of the six assembly segments and Congress one; ally BJP has the other two.



SEE FLAP INSIDE FOR OTHER BIG BOUTS

BIG BOUTS OF PHASE 5

MUMBAI SOUTH

2019 WINNER: **Shiv Sena** (Arvind Sawant)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Arvind Sawant** (Shiv Sena UBT), **Yamini Jadhav** (Shiv Sena)

Incumbent Arvind Sawant, who stayed with Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena, is hoping for a third term from this constituency. After a delayed nomination from the ruling coalition, Byculla MLA Yamini Jadhav didn't get to hit the ground early, but she's banking on the Modi factor. This SoBo constituency has a mixed population — Malabar Hill social elite, Gujarati-Marwari business families, middle-class Maharashtrians, people of Mumbai's old mill district 'Girangaon' and minorities. Another challenge for Jadhav is money laundering allegations raised against her and her husband Yashwant, who is an ex-BMC standing committee chief, made not too long ago by BJP.



Sawant



MUMBAI NORTH CENTRAL

2019 WINNER: **BJP** (Poonam Mahajan)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Ujjwal Nikam** (BJP), **Varsha Gaikwad** (Cong)

The special public prosecutor for 26/11 trial, Ujjwal Nikam, has been nominated by BJP in place of sitting MP Poonam Mahajan. Nikam, who formally joined the saffron party in April, faces a tough battle in this constituency. His rival is four-time Congress MLA and the party's Mumbai chief Varsha Gaikwad, a legislator from neighbouring Dharavi assembly seat. North Central, which stretches from Bandra to Santacruz and Kurla, has a cosmopolitan mix that includes Maharashtrians, North Indians, East Indian Christians, Muslims and Parsis. There was a demand within the local Congress to field a minority candidate, but that wasn't met. Gaikwad has the advantage of experience in election campaigning as well as the support of Shiv Sena (UBT) whose leader Uddhav Thackeray has his residence here. Nikam, the man who prosecuted Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab, also has BJP's ground network backing him.



Gaikwad

NASHIK

2019 WINNER: **Shiv Sena** (Hemant Godse)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Hemant Godse** (Shiv Sena), **Rajabhau Waje** (Shiv Sena UBT), **Shantigiri Maharaj** (Ind)

Hemant Godse, who has been winning from Nashik from 2014, is now locked in battle with his former party colleague and UBT Sena nominee Rajabhau Waje, former Sinnar MLA. Getting a nomination for this prestigious seat wasn't smooth sailing for Godse, who had to fend off Mahayuti partners, BJP and NCP, which were both keen to contest from here. A prominent face in the ring was NCP minister Chhagan Bhujbal, who claimed that BJP's central leadership had proposed his name. Godse now has to ensure that parties in the governing coalition act in cohesion. He will also hope that people in the onion growers' belt respond positively to the Centre's recent withdrawal of export ban. Waje will rely on Sena supporters backing Thackeray and discontent among farmers. Complicating matters for both is Shantigiri Maharaj, a seer who has a sizeable following in Nashik.



Godse

THANE

2019 WINNER: **Shiv Sena** (Rajan Vichare)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Naresh Mhaske** (Shiv Sena), **Rajan Vichare** (Shiv Sena UBT)

Mahayuti announced its candidate for this seat, which covers Thane city and parts of Navi Mumbai, late as Sena and BJP were both eyeing it. Angered after Sena was handed the nomination, Navi Mumbai strongman Ganesh Naik's supporters followed up with a spate of resignations. Though the rift was resolved in days, it's yet to be seen if there's any long-term impact of the tussle. The coalition's eventual pick, Naresh Mhaske, had to make up for lost time while Sena UBT's Rajan Vichare had a headstart as the constituency's sitting MP. What may still work from Mhaske — the former mayor of Thane — is that he's fighting from CM Eknath Shinde's home turf. In this direct Sena vs Sena fight, a win is a must for both parties who want to establish their claim that they are the real Shiv Sena.

HOOGHLY

2019 WINNER: **BJP** (Locket Chatterjee)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Locket Chatterjee** (BJP), **Rachana Banerjee** (TMC), **Manadip Ghosh** (CPI-M)

Two Tollywood faces square off here, among the handful in these Lok Sabha elections in which both contestants are women. In Trinamool colours is actor Rachana Banerjee while BJP has once again fielded incumbent Locket Chatterjee in a constituency that witnessed the rise of Mamata Banerjee as a force against three decades of CPM rule with the Singur agitation against Tata's Nano factory. After BJP's 2019 Lok Sabha win, Trinamool Congress clawed its way back in the 2021 state assembly polls and the 2023 panchayat polls, largely negating gains made by BJP. Though a debutante, Rachana is a household name in the state, courtesy her hugely successful TV show, 'Didi No. 1' and Trinamool has thrown its might behind her to wrest the constituency back.



Locket

SARAN

2019 WINNER: **BJP** (Rajiv Pratap Rudy)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Rohini Acharya Yadav** (RJD), **Rajiv Pratap Rudy** (BJP)

Famous as the birthplace of socialist leader Jayprakash Narayan, this constituency has been with BJP for the past decade. This time, though, the contest may not be a cakewalk for BJP's Rajiv Pratap Rudy, former Union MoS for skill development. He is up against Lalu Yadav's daughter Rohini Acharya, who first came into spotlight after donating her kidney to the RJD patriarch in Dec 2022. Lalu, who was elected from Chhapra (later Saran) in 1977 on a Janata Party ticket as the youngest parliamentarian at 29, represented this seat four times. After being disqualified from contesting elections following his conviction in the fodder scam, he fielded his wife Rabri Devi in 2014 and his *samdhi* Chandrika Rai in 2019, but both lost. Four assembly segments of the seat are currently represented by RJD and two by BJP.



Rohini

BONGAON

2019 WINNER: **BJP** (Shantanu Das)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Shantanu Thakur** (BJP), **Biswajit Das** (TMC)

In this Matua heartland, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) promise set the agenda in 2019 LS polls, handing BJP a win. Two years later, in the 2021 assembly poll that TMC swept, Bongaon remained firmly with BJP, handing the party wins in six of the seven assembly segments. Five years on, CAA remains at the core of the campaign here. The difference — it was a promise in 2019 and is a reality now. And yet, there is anxiety about the test that every applicant must pass. TMC has pitted a BJP turncoat MLA, Biswajit Das against the incumbent Shantanu Thakur, junior Union minister and descendant of Matua guru Harichand Thakur. TMC, earlier this year, nominated Shantanu's aunt Mamata Bala Thakur as a Rajya Sabha MP.



Lallu

FAIZABAD

2019 WINNER: **BJP** (Lallu Singh)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Lallu Singh** (BJP), **Awadhesh Prasad** (SP), **Sachidanand Pandey** (BSP)

In this constituency that includes Ayodhya, two-time BJP MP Lallu Singh is banking on the euphoria of Ram temple along with govt's 'vikas' theme, to score a hat-trick. A Thakur and an accused in the Babri demolition case, Singh was a five-time MLA from Ayodhya assembly seat between 1991 and 2007. He is pitted against Awadhesh Prasad of SP and Sachidanand Pandey of BSP. A Dalit and former minister in SP govt, Prasad is a nine-time MLA from erstwhile Sohawal and now Milkipur. SP has experimented by fielding a Dalit to cash in on the substantial presence of SC voters here. The entry of former IPS officer Arvind Sen, son of three-time Faizabad MP Mitrasen Yadav, as CPI candidate has made this contest interesting. Mitrasen had won the seat in 1989 for CPI, in 1998 (for SP) and 2004 (BSP).



Lallu

KAISERGANJ

2019 WINNER: **BJP** (Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh)
KEY CONTENDERS: **Karan Bhushan Singh** (BJP), **Ram Bhagat Mishra** (SP), **Narendra Pandey** (BSP)

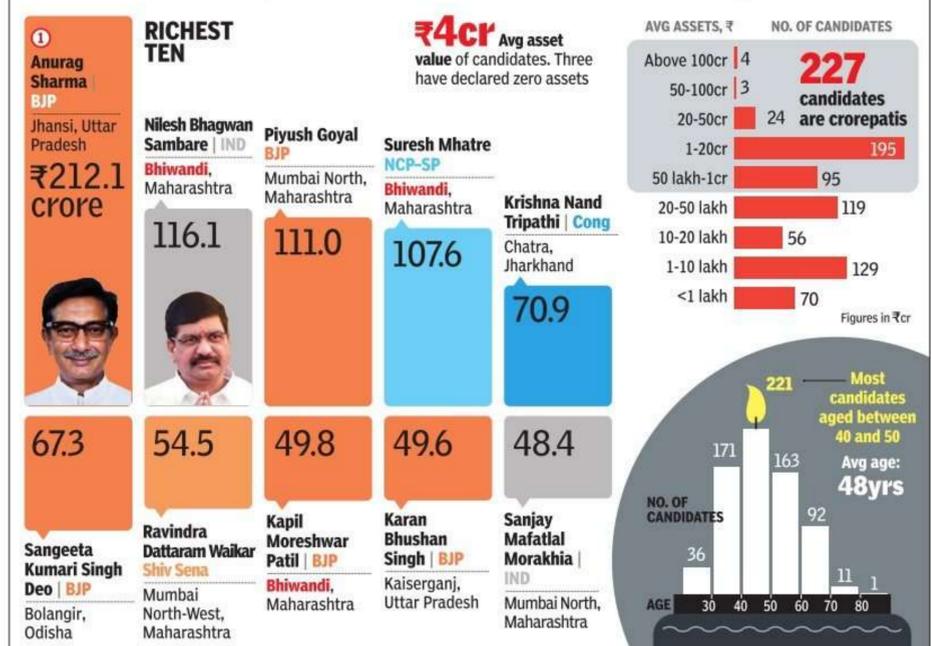
Carved out of five assembly seats of Bahraich and Gonda, this constituency was in the news till the last day of nomination due to its association with six-time MP and former wrestling federation president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who was accused of sexual harassment by several women wrestlers. After days of suspense, BJP decided to go with his younger son Karan. Singh's elder son Prateek is already an MLA from Gonda. Singh, who won thrice from Kaiserganj (2009, 2014 and 2019), and from Gonda (1991, 1999) and Balrampur (2004), wields considerable influence. A law graduate, Karan is a national-level double trap shooter and was named president of UP Wrestling Association. He takes on SP candidate, lawyer Ram Bhagat Mishra, and BSP's Narendra Pandey, who hopes to cash in on the presence of Brahmin voters here.



Karan

3 OF 10 RICHEST NETAS IN PHASE-5 FRAY FIGHTING FOR ONE MAHA SEAT

Only 49 seats across eight states and UTs are set to vote on May 20, the fifth and smallest phase of 2024 LS elections. Of the 695 candidates whose affidavits were analysed by Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), 227 were crorepatis. And three of the 10 richest candidates are contesting in Bhiwandi



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